

## *Arrival, Redux*

"Captain Devlin," Commander Senior Grade Updike, the ship's Executive Officer began as he stepped into the Ready Room and took his usual seat in front of the Commanding Officer's desk, "I have good news in regards to our unexpected 'guest'..."

Captain Arcadia Devlin felt herself tense up. She had all but forgotten about the agent. "Well, Commander Updike? Are we to be rid of him?"

"Well, to be exact, we aren't," Updike replied with an ever so slight hint of amusement.

"Oh?" she stated in her cold, but formal business tone though his response had really caught her off-guard.

"It seems that Starfleet has decided to allow him to remain. His background data all checks out -- especially the part about him as an undercover agent. For the time being, his story here will remain one of a defector. And to make the transition as smooth as possible, they opted to keep him in an environment he knows -- namely a starship."

Arcadia absently scratched her ear. "And since we already had him here, we were volunteered?"

"I would assume so, Captain Devlin." Updike capped off his response with a smile.

Arcadia didn't like what she heard. This whole setup sounded just like that -- a setup, but why? She realized that had no choice. She leaned back in her chair and audibly sighed.

"Have Mister Roscoe report to personnel. I'm sure they will find something to keep him occupied and earn his keep." She quickly sat up and picked up her datapadd to scan it. "Next item, Commander Argent's problem with staffing requirements."

Updike thought for a moment before he cautiously tendered an idea.

"Captain, the *Stellar Wind* was never meant to have a fighter squadron -- albeit it is a *small* squadron -- on board the ship. We don't have a ready supply of extra personnel to fill in if a pilot or specialist is injured or killed. Therefore, my suggestion is to, if I might mix my metaphors is to kill two birds with one stone. Since it will take weeks for replacements to come on board, in the

meantime, we should hold tryouts for anyone interested in becoming a pilot or mission specialist and at the same time identify possible replacements."

As much as Arcadia wanted to dismiss his comments, he did have a point.

"Your plan has merit," she nodded as she considered his suggestion. "As someone at HQ deemed it necessary to drop squadrons into the laps of unsuspecting commanding officers, it would have been nice if they had adequately staffed such bequests. Have Mister Argent meet with us tomorrow morning so we may discuss it. In fact, I want to meet with the Chiefs of Engineering and Security. Whether they like it or not, the fighters are here to stay and we need to staff them adequately," she informed the XO as she mulled over her decision the other week to assist the squadron. "Anything else?"

"No, Sir," Updike all but beamed as he stood up to walk out the office. "That will be *quite* sufficient."

Arcadia cautiously observed her Executive Officer slink out of her office. "I don't doubt it," she mumbled under her breath.

Updike returned to his office and called Lt. Bill Rasman, Internal Security Officer who was in charge of the 'defector' ordered him to escort their guest to Personnel. Personnel informed them that they'd work on finding Roscoe a spot but it would take a few days.

In the meantime, it was suggested that Roscoe amuse himself while he was in confinement and that's exactly what Roscoe did by reading all about the *Stellar Wind*, her crew and her personnel. Roscoe spent considerable time researching all there was in the databanks about the '*Wind*'; though, as he would later put it, he was nearly knocked off his chair when he read who was also stuck here.

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The morning briefing wasn't quite going the way that Captain Devlin had envisioned it would. She allowed her eyes to sweep the two men in her Ready Room as she slowly tapped her fingers on her desk.

"General Tryouts? You must be joking! Please tell me you are joking," the Squadron Commander all but begged.

The Captain finally stopped drumming her fingers long enough to narrow her eyes in his direction. "And why not, Mister Argent?" Captain Devlin informed him as they sat around her desk. She sat back in her chair with her hands folded on the table as she allowed her eyes to bore into his soul. "Considering your staff problem and your lack of qualified personnel, I think Commander

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Senior Grade Updike's suggestion is well worth your consideration... *Lieutenant Commander.*"

Argent inwardly groaned as he mulled over their proposal. *The emphasis on my rank told me that I wasn't going to win this one -- or make any headway. This was it. Take it or leave it. Well, I could just leave it and... No, I could not. My deficiency on Mission Specialists was now a seriously acute problem and needed to be addressed.*

"But mainly for Mission Specialists, right?" Argent finally replied. He needed more pilots like he needed the Berillian Plague.

"Absolutely! After all, you have needs to be met and we are here to see that they are indeed met!" Updike shot back underscored with an absolutely evil grin.

If his tone were any more unctuous, Argent would have begun looking for an oil slick pooling underneath his chair. Updike was clearly enjoying this just a bit too much.

"Very well. I'll setup a crash course and a flight evaluation program for temporary mission specialists," Argent finally told them. *Just remember -- it's just another job and you gotta be friends with the tug jockeys... Smile...*

"And pilots!" Updike's smile threatened to go super nova at any moment now.

*...As they slide the knife into your gut... "Yes, and pilots...." The grunt that followed my comment was quite intentional and I really didn't care how they interpreted it.*

"Excellent. Now that we are in agreement, let us commence," Captain Devlin purposely advised them. "Mr. Updike, if you would write up the announcement? I am sure Mr. Argent will provide you with any data you will need." With that she gave them one last look before she issued a quiet, "Gentlemen, unless there is something else to discuss, you are both dismissed."

Argent was all too glad to get the hell out of her office. In his almost twenty years in the Fighter Corps, the only thing this could match was when that abominable jerk of a man Vin Furniere thought it would be fun to shut the Corps down entirely -- and almost succeeded.

"I'm so glad you are agreeable to all this, Commander. I am sure it will prove most enlightening to both you and the crew," Updike opted to interject as he and Argent both stepped out of Captain Devlin's office.

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*And twist it a bit.* Argent mulled over a number of rejoinders but opted for a simple, "What-ever, you say, Sir."

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### SHIP WIDE MESSAGE

Attention All Hands! The Fighter Squad Wants You!

There is a shortage of personnel for the Ship's Fightercraft Squadron and therefore, by the order of Captain Arcadia Miskinn-Warda Devlin, open tryouts for anyone wanting to join the Squadron will be held during the coming week under the supervision of Senior Pilot LCR Kyle D. Argent. Tryouts for the positions of Pilot and Mission Specialist will be held:

PILOTS -- Crew members with backgrounds in small craft management, astrogation, flight experience, or virtually any type of craft management are preferred. Pilots are given hazardous duty pay, which currently is twice the normal rate.

MISSION SPECIALISTS -- Crew members with backgrounds in navigation, tactical or communication, are preferred.

The tryout schedule for the various departments will be posted shortly. Please direct any inquiries and applications to LtCdr Argent.

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Squadron Commander Kyle Argent stood quietly in the command center of the Fighter Tryout Simulator. It was hard for him to get over just how revolting this whole idea truly was as he continued to observe the screens that monitored Updike's Test Flight. A slight smile creased his features when Updike impacted the nacelle of the ship and insured that Starfleet would be one Ship of the Line short a full complement that day. *Should have zig'd when you zag'd.*

Updike Continued on to the Slalom section of the test as Argent watched him promptly impact two holo-pylons. With assist from some fleet finger work on Argent's end, Updike's attempt to fire his photon missiles resulted in another fireball where his craft should have been. It was a one-in-a-billion defect, but someone had to be number one billion...

"Ooops," Argent wryly commented to no one in particular, taking some joy in ruining yet another one of Updike's many photo opportunities. Argent watched as a smiling Updike left the Hangar Deck with reporter Louise in tow. He decided there and then what the topic of the next day's briefing would be.

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"Gentlemen," Argent began the morning briefing in a lower key than usual. "I have asked you to assemble here for an important reason," he continued. "Gentlemen -- I would like to present to you -- the enemy."

The flight personnel scanned in the general direction Argent was pointing to get a glimpse of this unknown 'Enemy' -- and were somewhat shocked to find out it was CdrSG Updike, the ship's Executive Officer. A general buzz began to swell as the flight personnel murmured wondering just how sane Old Man was.

Argent sensed the growing confusion by seizing the initiative and continuing, "What you are witnessing on this ship is not an officer at work, but a politician. As you are new to Starfleet, you may not have been exposed to the likes of them. So this too becomes a part of your training: be forever vigilant about those who will tell you that they serve and represent you. As officers, you are expected to show enough judgment to recognize those who are sincere in their words and those who aren't, but never, *ever* trust them blindly. This is a lesson we of the Fighter Corps have had to learn the hard way."

Everyone nodded silently. Senator Vin Furniere's antics were known far and wide and provided lessons that no pilot would ever be allowed to forget.

"We have on board a politician who is feeding a wonderfully contrived line of bullshit to an audience who is willing to eat it up with a spoon. You, gentleman, are officers of Starfleet and Pilots of the Fighter Corps and, as a rule, I have never known Pilots of the Corps to eat shit."

The delivery of this admonishment, along with its subtle insult to their friends the tug jockeys drew a round of laughter. Even Argent allowed himself a smile.

"Tomorrow this man might be Fleet Admiral or President of the Federation. But if you know your enemy and know his tactics, then you will realize that the enigma that is one's enemy is no more. Do you understand?"

"Yessir!" the chorus echoed.

"Dismissed!" Argent said with what must have been a smile of self-satisfaction - though no one that knew Argent would call it a smile as he headed off to his office then start the cycle of try outs all over again.

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Kyle Argent leaned back in his chair. He'd just spent yet another day in the seemingly endless round of those idiotic fighter tryouts. His fragile hold on sanity took another battering, but as usual, he managed to hold it together again. Suddenly the doors slid open and he heard someone entered the hangar

bay. He took a quick peak at his chronometer and sighed. *Well, there still is 15 minutes to go. One more I guess.*

"Commander Argent, I hope we aren't too late," asked Lt. Bill Rasman, Internal Security Officer.

"Oh no, not at all..." Argent wearily replied as he picked up a datapadd. "Name of the prospective trainee?" he asked, his voice devoid of emotion.

"Roscoe, Gareth Mykel," Bill replied, in a business-like voice.

Argent dropped his datapadd as he felt his face blanch. *This had to be a joke.* He coiled out of his chair in one swift move and much to his surprise, found that, indeed, he was now standing face-to-face with Gareth Mykel Roscoe.

Bill noted that Commander Argent was obviously surprised to see the prisoner and their subsequent discussion was like watching a Ping-Pong match, only Rasman wasn't sure who won.

"*You!*" Roscoe exclaimed.

"*You... you... you're dead!*" Argent replied, with a sense of surprise that was almost impossible to describe.

Bill couldn't contain his curiosity any longer and asked the obvious question. "Do you two know each other?"

The pair looked at Bill, then back to each other, mutually opting to ignore Bill's question.

"You are dead! I saw you die eight years ago myself," Argent put forth as he started to regain his composure.

"Surely you heard of the 'defector' who recently requested asylum?" Roscoe casually tossed off.

Argent nodded silently. "*You?*" he finally blurted out. He still couldn't quite believe it and turned to Rasman for any information he could add.

"Starfleet HQ has assigned him to this ship for now, and since you are low on personnel, it apparently seemed a natural assuming Mr. Roscoe could pass muster," Bill cautiously informed him, rapidly wishing he were somewhere else.

"A tryout, then?" Argent paused, feeling some of his confidence returning. "Very well. We can take care of the formalities later, I suppose. Are you familiar with a Nighthawk class fightercraft?" *The Roscoe I knew before he disappeared and*

*was declared dead was one of the most frighteningly crazy pilots I ever had the displeasure of knowing.*

"I'm sure I can manage," Roscoe casually tossed off.

*Well, there goes that.* "What we have here is a standard introductory session to operating the craft, which includes basic warp flight drill, an obstacle course and concluding in a tactical encounter."

"What difficulty level?" Roscoe grunted as he was fitting himself into the helmet Argent had provided for him with, while simply ignoring the flight suit usually mandated as well.

"Level 1 initially with progressive difficulty depending on the pilot," Argent began in a monotone having given this briefing too many times these past few days.

Roscoe snorted. "That's nice for kids in a holo-arcade. Give me something a little bit more ... gratifying, would you? Say ... level 20 to start?"

A grim sense of satisfaction suddenly overcame Argent -- level 20. That was the big time. "With pleasure, Mr. Roscoe -- with pleasure!" As Kyle personally led Roscoe off towards the flight simulator, he saw Bill Rasman hastily depart appearing decidedly relieved.

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Argent purposely pushed any thought of Roscoe's sudden appearance from the dead out of his mind for several days until he couldn't avoid thinking about it any longer and requested that Roscoe show up at his office. He decided not to make an issue out of Roscoe's lack of punctuality upon his arrival.

If Roscoe was nervous about this meeting -- which he wasn't -- then Argent was far worse off.

Argent greeted him with a "*Sit!*" and motioned to the nearest chair that Roscoe readily took. Argent rose to pour himself a glass of tea, promptly tossing the usual condiments into it.

"I might be off, but am I wrong in presuming that coffee is your beverage of choice?" Argent asked.

*You just gotta wonder where they make people this stiff!* "Last time I checked," Roscoe replied cautiously.

"With no sugar, no milk and no anything, correct?"

Roscoe nodded as Argent put a cup of the dark brew in front of him and took the seat across the desk.

"Your test scores were exceptional," Argent started, finally getting down to business. "And it's a pretty fair bet to say that you could get flight certified here in a matter of hours. However... "

"Yes?" Roscoe was definitely all ears.

"The reality is that I have a full complement of pilots and then some."

Roscoe noticed that Argent winced as if it was a subject he didn't care to talk about.

"But I do have a definitive shortage of Mission Specialists," Argent finally concluded.

*Me! A shotgun rider? Let's try this one again, shall we?* Roscoe refused to accept any of this foolish talk. But unfortunately, one look at Argent immediately told him that he intended to take a similar position. The last time Roscoe saw someone argue with Kyle Argent, the person in question found himself with a new assignment.

"We could do an elaborate song and dance here, but I'm going to give you the facts," Argent began. "Fact: you are assigned to this ship, for better or for worse. Fact: according to your file, you have a security clearance that is abysmal when compared to that of any of the children in the ship's nursery."

After that last retort, Roscoe knew his fate was sealed. It's hard arguing with security clearance. Some things will *never* changed.

"Fact: If you don't want to be a Mission Specialist. Then the only other positions you qualify for are janitor or cook. So how badly do you want to fly?"

Roscoe let Argent have his moment of glory before neutrally acknowledging his tirade. *Who the hell would want to be a cook, anyway? What action do they see?*

Noting acceptance, Argent went on to give him some basic instructions for getting his walk around the block and meet the folks, as it were. When he was finished, he got up and Roscoe did likewise. Argent led Roscoe out of his office to meet Virgil who would give him the cook's tour.

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"...And this is the duty lounge, where pilots and mission specialists stay while on active duty shifts." Virgil Taylor, Senior Ground Technician, Nighthawks concluded his little tour around the hangar bay. Lt. Roscoe appeared rather bored by all of it through out, only displaying mild interest when they inspected the fighter craft themselves.

Virgil motioned him to enter the lounge and take a look around. Pilots Masterson and Overlake seemed to be the only ones present at the time and both were engulfed in heated exchange.

"Hero my ass. Just what's he done to deserve the title?"

It took little imagination for Virgil to figure out just whom Ensign Overlake was talking about.

"*Oh, bull!*" Ensign Masterson angrily retorted.

Lt. Roscoe pulled up a chair and sat down. Virgil noticed that this discussion had obviously caught his fancy and he was rather interested in hearing more. Lt. Roscoe shook his head slightly, while flashing a wolfish smile. It appeared that he had heard those kinds of words before.

"Have you seen Argent's flight record?" Masterson breathlessly began. "He has more hours of combat logged than anyone else flying in the Fighter Corps today! He has more kills than anyone else still flying today! Try and argue with that!"

Overlake smiled. "If he really is this hot-shot pilot, then why hasn't he gone after those unknown ships that have been attacking us lately?"

"What are you implying, Red?" Virgil interjected as this discussion was getting a bit ugly.

"He's old. Maybe he was good, maybe even great a while back -- but now he is old and time has caught up with him and surpassed him. Maybe it's time for him to step aside and let those who can really get the job done take over," Red declared with some finality.

Virgil didn't really know who wanted to hit Overlake first -- Masterson or himself. Red was only a Pilot Trainee who appeared incredibly full of himself to those in the room. Masterson seemed ready to take a swipe at him when Lt. Roscoe finally spoke up.

"Far be it from me to interject a comment here, gentlemen," he began with a subtle smile, "I really haven't had much time with Kyle Argent lately, but there is one thing I did note about him that might be of interest to you all..."

"And what would that be?" Overlake sneered; wondering just whom the hell this guy was anyway.

"As pilots in training it is required that you must complete level 10 of you basic fighter familiarization simulation, correct?"

"Yeah, I finished level 10 a couple of days ago, so what?" Masterson tossed back.

"Well," Roscoe continued "I myself passed level 20 a few days back without much effort." This comment made Overlake and Masterson sit up straight and pay attention. Level 20 was something they could only dream of. They looked to Roscoe and then back to each other both wondering who the hell this guy was.

"And all Argent had to say was 'not bad' to a run that I thought was pretty damn perfect. So I wondered -- just what gives this man the balls not to fall in awe of me for just tearing through Level 20?"

Overlake took the bait. "So just what was it then?"

Roscoe gave him his best scoundrel's smile, while stood up and quickly entering a few commands into the nearby data terminal as Red and Skye gathered around.

"It always pays to do one's research, gentlemen."

Masterson and Overlake blanched at the sight of the screen. Virgil moved in closer to see just what it was that Lt. Roscoe had dug up during his confinement to quarters when he first came on board the ship.

*"Basic Fighter Familiarization Simulation. Personal Records, LtCdr Kyle D. Argent..."*

"Level 42?" Overlake exclaimed, with a voice that was sheer astonishment.

"And look at the readouts... he flies that course daily and with seemingly few problems. After that I knew my performance was rather substandard compared to his."

Roscoe casually strolled back to his chair and sat down again.

"So... Ensign... Overland, is it not?" Roscoe read his name from the ID plate on Overlake's flight suit. "With Argent being an 'old man' and all -- do you honestly think you would stand a chance against him in battle? He could have me for

lunch in just about any craft, no matter how piss poor it is -- he is *that* good. And *I'm* good enough to snuff you out of space with damn near anything myself. So, honestly -- do you think he is what you say he is? How did you put it... washed up?"

Masterson beamed his usual broad grin. He was obviously enjoying the direction this discussion had suddenly taken.

"Just who the hell are you anyway?" Overlake growled feeling a bit annoyed at having been shown up by this stranger.

"Lieutenant Gareth Mykel Roscoe. As per order of Commander Argent I am currently on assignment as a Mission Specialist with this Squadron," Roscoe replied evenly, hoping that it would be enough to back the somewhat disgruntled Ensign up a bit.

"And he is your new shotgun rider Overlake," Virgil chimed in as he twisted the knife and took the cocky Overlake down another peg.

Skye erupted in laughter and damn near fell off his chair, but finally stood up and patted Overlake on his back. "*Smoooooth* going, Red!" he chortled as he walked off to get some more coffee.

"I'm sorry... I didn't know... you..." Overlake stammered.

"Don't sweat for now. But Roscoe's Rule Number One: don't doubt your superior officers unless otherwise necessary. And then just kill them, unless you want to have them come back and haunt you over and over."

"Ummm... Ok, Sir," Overlake stammered back, regaining some composure ever so slowly. "And what is Rule Number Two?"

"Roscoe is *always* right," he replied as he turned to where Ensign Masterson was pouring himself a cup of coffee. "Hey! Ensign Coffeecan! Pour me a cup too! And make it industrial strength? I want it strong enough to melt my cup, got that?"

"Uh... Yes, Sir!" Skye responded, obviously flustered.

Virgil was amazed to see how scared both pilots were acting around Roscoe. He waltzed in, took control of the conversation and now seemed to have taken control of the young pilots as well. Roscoe reclined in his chair, as Masterson brought his cup of coffee and casually lifted his feet onto the table.

"Hmmm. Nice fighters you kids got here. Any of you kids sneak someone up there and do what comes naturally?"

Both Masterson and Overlake chuckled; Virgil smiled, as this was a subject all three of them were obviously more comfortable discussing.

"I don't think so, Sir!" Masterson stated, still smiling.

"Well, it would be something, wouldn't it? Lets face it, I doubt you could get much done up there, but..."

"Oh, quite to the contrary, Mister Roscoe," Argent's voice chimed in, his tone as smooth as silk. All heads snapped around to face their Squadron Commander. "It is not a question *if* you could get anything done up there, but one of just how many positions you can accomplish. Carry on, gentlemen."

And on that note, Argent grabbed his customary cup of tea and retreated to his office, leaving all of them dumbfounded and with jaws that were tickling the floor -- all except Roscoe, who first broke out in a wide grin that finally erupted into full laughter.

Virgil just stood there and watched him leave. "The Old Man never ceases to amaze me."

"Oh, you'll find that Kyle's quite the character when he wants to be," Roscoe added.

Virgil was going to ask him a personal question when Skye interrupted them. "Roscoe, there's a small Squadron get together tonight." Skye smiled and looked to Red who smiled back. "Lots of pretty ladies..."

"Oh, really? What time is this shindig?" Roscoe asked, obviously interested in what he was hearing.

"Starts at nineteen hundred hours," Skye replied.

"I'll be there, you can count on it." Roscoe turned to Virgil who was hovering over him. "Virg, is there anything else you need to show me?"

"Just a few more things, Roscoe. You'll have plenty of time to get ready for tonight."

"Thanks, kid. See you boys later," Roscoe told them as he and Virgil left the lounge.

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Lieutenant Commander Argent was busy when Sabrina Sharron, Chief of Food Services came out of the fighter simulation. He didn't look up but started to call the next victim when he noted the time. There was quite a bit of time before the next session-- she hadn't been in there very long. She must have done pretty poorly he thought. He looked up to apologize when he saw her face. He changed his mind and activated a fast playing replay of her run. The results were more than a bit startling.

She had decided on the solo mission and was both pilot and gunner. As soon as she called out, "Ready, activate simulation," the action had started.

He saw her gun the engine as she left the hanger and do what must have been a 4 gee half loop till the fighter was traveling up side down over the top of the saucer. As her ship cleared the bow, it dove for the warp launch point at what must have been full throttle. It disappeared into warp with a woosh as fast as anyone had done so far. Kyle looked up to see her quietly reading a padd, as cool as Romulan turnip.

When he looked back at the speeded up display, he saw that she was almost done with the slalom and the computer had the run at maximum difficulty. The targets were exploding before a fighter could normally acquire them as targets but he figured the last one would get her since it fired back. Instead, she must have realized that her timing was wrong to destroy it because the fighter feinted quickly to the top of the course and then rolled 90 degrees and dropped to the bottom and port side before the target could fire. She cork screwed past the target out of the course and headed straight up for the warp jump to the next section before he could blink. But just before entering warp she showed one more trick and tumbled the fighter 360 degrees to fire an array of 4 missiles at the last target when half way around. The target blew as she entered warp.

Kyle didn't look up this time and was rewarded with the rare sight of a ship coming out of warp in a controlled yaw and pitch. The reason for that became obvious when the fighter took off to the right and up almost instantly barely avoiding the blast from a surprised Klingon. Kyle thought for a minute that Sabrina must have known what was in the simulation but if that had been true she would have gone down to come up under the Klingon instead of right. As it was she had to reverse course, all the while dodging enemy fire before she could bring her phasers to fire. Of course, by that time the Klingon had already been destroyed by the torpedoes she had fired while reversing course. Kyle slowed the playback and heard a war hoop from the speakers as the fighter spun randomly in joyous abandon before straightening to end the simulation.

Kyle looked up to find Sabrina sitting on the edge of the disk.

"Did I pass?" she asked with a straight face knowing the answer all along.

"How the hell did you learn to fly like that?" he asked.

"Ever heard of the Indy 500K?"

"Yeah, the New Indy asteroid race..."

"It was a hobby!"

"That explains some of your flight ability, but not all of it. You must have been doing three things at once and the race doesn't teach that."

"Well, when Captain B'rand--" she started.

"Who?" Kyle interrupted.

"The previous 'Wind CO. He was a little less orthodox than some. When he discovered my interest in flying, he taught me a few tricks."

"I never met B'rand. What tricks?"

"You might meet him yet... First, to do several things at once as you said. So I handle the stick with one hand, the computer and firing setups with the other and control the rest verbally. It's not hard, it only takes practice..."

Kyle could sense that she was not quite done and prompted her, "And...?"

"Well, probably the most important thing and the hardest to master was to think three dimensionally. The person who treats all directions as equal instead of thinking from a flat surface has a tremendous edge."

Kyle stood up to shake her hand. "The Fighter Corps is not as much fun as many think, but welcome aboard."

"*What!* I'm not interested in the Fighter Corps. I just wanted to fly a fast ship again." She headed out the door and touching her finger to her forehead said, "Thanks for the fun Commander. Let me know when you have a better game set up. Be seeing you."

*After having spent days wading through the stupid, the drunk, the inane or the incompetent, the god-forsaken fighter tryouts had finally netted someone worth admitting to the Corps.*

*And then she says no.*

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Roscoe arrived to the party early, which was fortunate since all the nuggets, specialists, and support crew were already there. The food was plentiful, the drinks flowed like rain and the ladies, well, and there were more than he could ask for. Roscoe sipped his scotch and surveyed the scene once again. He stopped on a dime when he spotted the most gorgeous blonde he'd ever seen standing in the corner, chatting with Manfred.

"Hey, Skye," Roscoe asked as he pointed to the corner of the room. "Who's the babe?"

Skye squinted in the direction that Roscoe indicated before he felt a frown cross his face. "Oh, that's Simone. Some of the guys around her call her the ship's slut. She's a bit fickle. Goes through men as if that's her primary goal in life."

*Oh, really?* Thought Roscoe, but he just told Skye, "Thanks for the info, Skye."

Roscoe stood at the bar and considered the fact that it had been a long, long time. He looked at Manfred and decided he wasn't much of a threat, so Roscoe decided to go over and see if he could strike up a conversation with Simone.

Simone was becoming increasingly bored with Manfred as he prattled on about being a pilot. Simone was only interested in one thing and it wasn't his cockpit.

"Simone Templar?" Roscoe interrupted.

Manfred frowned at the interruption but when Simone pointedly turned away from him, he opted to walk away on his own steam rather than be booted out.

"*Oui*. And who would you be, *monsieur*?" she sniffed in her pretty French accent as she began to take inventory.

"Gareth Roscoe." Roscoe paused taking a good look at Simone. "Let me be perfectly blunt, I've heard you're just the one to give me a hand with horizontal calisthenics. Are you interested?"

Simone looked at him checking very carefully him over again as if he were a prized steer and decided she liked what she saw.

"Why not?" she purred.

"How do you like that?" commented Manfred as he watched Simone and Roscoe leave the party.

"What did you expect, Fred?" replied Skye as he downed another drink.

"I didn't expect Simone to embarrass me like that."

Skye looked to his friend and shook his head. "You know what Simone is like, Fred. Just give it a rest."

Before Manfred could respond, Richard Wentworth walked over and joined them.

"Why the long face?" he asked.

"Simone dumped Fred for that new shotgun rider, Richard."

"No great loss, Fred. Trust me, she's no good and the sooner you realize it, the better off you'd be. In fact--"

Virgil's arrival cut him off. "Hi Virgil," responded Richard. "I was just telling Fred here that Simone's poison."

Virgil's heart started beating heavily and he started sweating as he thought about Simone. Virgil was in love with her. He knew what kind of woman she was, but he didn't care. He loved her -- but he also knew that he couldn't exactly tell the rest of them.

"What happened?" Virgil asked as he quickly downed his drink.

"Just don't!" pleaded Manfred. "Enough about Simone. How about us?"

"Yeah, us!" echoed Richard as he took a swig of beer.

"Say, I understand that it is traditional that we take a nickname for the squadron," Manfred mused aloud. "Any ideas?"

"Well, it should probably have 'wind' in it, as an homage to *the Stellar Wind*," Virgil put forth.

"Good idea, Virgil." Richard thought for a while and then rattled off, "How about Midnight Wind, Star Wind, Wind Shadow or Night Wind?"

Manfred looked at the group and grinned. "How about Passing the Wind?" he barely got the sentence out before he cracked up at his own joke. Both Skye and Richard just stared at him as if he were a serious moron.

"I suppose you thought that was funny, Fred?" Virgil was indignant and he had to hold himself back from telling Fred what he *really* thought. "I can just



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imagine what the Captain would say when we suggest that. Never mind, can you imagine telling the Old Man?"

Skye had walked over just in time to hear Manfred's so-called witty suggestion. Skye frowned and stared at Manfred wondering what planet he was from. Richard told Skye his suggestions. Skye thought for a while.

"Naw... just keep thinking," he finally concluded.

Richard scowled at him. "OK, bright boy, you think of something!"

Skye looked at the assembled group. "I certainly will and I'll have something decent by our Commissioning Ceremony."

\* \* \*

Roscoe rose early and was just putting his pants on when Simone finally woke. "That was nice. Not bad at all," he commented. He finally finished fixing his tunic, "Well, gotta be on duty in a bit. Talk you to later..."

Simone adjusted the covers as she felt a chill, "Call me...?"

Roscoe paused to look at Simone carefully, "Sure..." And then he added after a contemplative pause, "...Whatever." He then gathered the rest of his things and left her room noting that it had felt good to give the pipes a thorough cleaning again.

\*

Next: *Best Intentions*

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