

Arrival

On the Deck of the USS Ingram, NCC-2001

"Alpha leader, you are cleared for takeoff..."

"Copy that, Ingram tower. Initiating launch procedure."

With that, Lt. Commander Kyle Argent advanced the throttle of his fightercraft to its most forward position. The huge engines behind him now were howling all throughout the hangar area of the ship, causing vibrations that could be felt two decks up.

With a push of the button and within a fraction of a second, full thrust was applied and the small spacecraft proceeded to instantly clear the hangar bay. Argent had done this maybe a thousand times, but still never really liked the sensation of being crushed into his seat. Inertial dampeners in fightercraft were slightly slower than the ones found on other spacecraft. But already they were doing their job and he was proceeding to his warp-point at full sublight speed.

"Alpha Leader, warp-point in 26 seconds at current speed. Sad to see go, Sir. Hope to have you back real soon..." Ingram Tower replied.

"Roger that, Tower. Just make sure I have a ship to come back to when the time comes, ok?" Argent responded in his emotionless voice that usually left one wondering whether he was joking or being serious.

"Copy that, Alpha Leader. This is where we get off. Good luck, Sir. Ingram out."

Argent silently acknowledged the last communique from "his" ship that now was fading fast from the viewfinders of his aft scanners and turned off his communication array all-together. He wouldn't need to communicate with anyone for another day or so. Momentarily he began the process that would eventually take him into Warp speed.

Argent relaxed as much as he felt the somewhat cramped cockpit would let him and his tall frame. Time to run things through his mind one more time.

Why he was going where he was, was still a mystery to him. He had finally gotten command of a whole fighter group off of one of the escort carriers (or "Space Control Ships" as the Tug Jockeys liked to call them) and then this..."Temporary Reassignment for Special duty"? *What the hell was that supposed to mean?*

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But being reassigned to a *science* ship of all things! He dreaded the very thought of being around nothing but your standard lot of Tug Jockeys and Academic geniuses who hoped to discover the next member of the Federation or alien race with technology far beyond anything available in this corner of space.

Argent had spent most of his time in grade aboard Carrier vessels or other Spacecraft that seemed to have a strong militaristic presence. He had often experienced the disdain many members of Starfleet seemed to exhibit towards him and others who seemed to represent the more blatantly militaristic aspect of Starfleet.

The more he considered it, the more puzzling it all seemed to him. The brunt of his mission was to help establish a fighter squadron aboard his new (and hopefully temporary) station and instruct them in basic flight procedure.

Any freshly minted flight Lieutenant could have done this job! Why re-assign a veteran pilot, who had just been put in charge of *three* fighter wings? It just didn't make sense at all.

Granted, the *USS Ingram* would be tied up at *Space Station Equity* for another eight months or so, so it wasn't like he was going to miss anything. But still...

Something just wasn't right here.

Argent had thought about tapping into his ample network of connections to higher authorities within Starfleet and having his orders rescinded, but ultimately opted not to. His connections and channels of communication to various high-ranking officials were the source of much grief to some of his commanding officers. Some of whom found themselves woken up in the middle of the night only to be dressed down by an Admiral for sticking their nose in areas where they didn't belong. Argent was generally the happiest when he could do his job with a certain amount of autonomy with his superiors leaving him alone. The CO's who abided by this rule seemed to usually get along famously with him, the others... well, it wasn't his fault that Captain Tasker now was commanding Pilot tug at the 'fleet scrap yards....

He considered probing into just why he was getting transferred. Maybe someone he had managed to displease in the past had risen to a position of authority and now was anxious to get even with him...?

Any which way, he did not feel like wasting a favor or two with some of his "friends" just to find out why this all was happening. Things have a way of

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resolving themselves eventually -- better to hang in there and keep your aces up your sleeve until it really counts.

With plenty of questions and not much in the way of answers, he finally dozed off into a dreamless slumber.

* * *

USS Stellar Wind, 1501A

Argent began to pick up the locator beacon of his destination. He switched his communication frequency to that of the local host at Hornblower Station and quietly continued his approach.

His sensors now were able to do a full readout and the appropriate ship data. He decided now it was a good time to hail his new ship.

"Stellar Wind Control, this is flight 71618, requesting permission to land."

"Ummm.... Who is this?" Communications Officer Lt. Terry Cassidy asked, clearly unaware of who was using his outside communication frequency.

Argent took the response to his request with an annoyed frown. He was not going to be nice. *"This is the first of Romulan invasion force. If you care to surrender now and open your hangar bay doors, we might just spare you personally..."* It wasn't his most original ploy, but for the while being it would suffice.

Terry did what any other officer of his grade normally would not do in his position. He panicked -- completely and totally. His exclamation of "Oh my no! Not *again!*" however was sufficiently loud to draw the attention of the duty officer (and everyone else on the bridge, for that matter). The Duty Officer moved in from behind and calmly asked what was wrong as Terry shrieked, "The Romulans! They're back...!"

Assistant Chief of Engineering Lt. Ian Comprehensible swiftly pushed the obviously confused communications officer aside and studied the communications log astutely to find out just what would have set off Lt. Cassidy to start with this nonsense. "Mr. LaSalle, could I have an Aft Tactical view, please?"

The Tactical officer complied swiftly. The display screen changed and the only item displayed besides the *Stellar Wind* and its ID code was another Starfleet vessel, encoded 71618, and described as a "Nighthawk ASSFV."

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Ian frowned. He knew his Federation Starships well, but a Nighthawk class didn't even ring a cymbal. "Computer, display information of Federation vessel 'Nighthawk ASSFV'."

"Nighthawk - code name for the Advanced Space Superiority Fighter Vessel 186. A one or two seat fighter with two main Phaser 1 emplacements as well as two Gatling style Phaser 3 mounts..."

Ian interrupted the computer. "A Fighter? Here? What the f--" He bit his tongue. He quickly activated the communication console, "Fightercraft, please identify yourself!"

Argent had silently been imagining just what might be taking place aboard the ship right now. "This is flight 71618, asking for permission to land. Would you kindly open your Hangar bay doors, please?" Argent replied with just the right amount of sarcasm in his voice.

Lt. Comprehensible had immediately run a check on "Flight 71618" and to his surprise had found proof that his flight plan did indeed terminate aboard his ship.

"Well," Ian said to no one in particular, "Might as well go along here. If only to give that stupid fighter jock a piece of his mind..." He turned to the tactical officer, "LaSalle, open Shuttlebay doors, lock on tractor beam and bring him in."

As soon as he saw the Hangar doors move, Argent brought his fighter around and began his final approach, as he had done many times.

Suddenly his craft began to shudder and vibrate as if multiple phaser had hit it at once. The engines began to howl and roar, as they were about to overload. Argent swiftly initiated a pre-shut down of the engine core, letting the run idle while he once again activated the communication circuit.

"*Stellar Wind*, release your Tractor Beam *now!*" he all but yelled into the receiver.

"*But...*" was the first thing he heard back, just as his internal diagnostic sensors let go with familiar hiss and white sparks that usually accompanied a electric circuit board frying out.

He was in no mood to talk. "No but! *Just do it!*"

And surely enough, within but a second, the Beam was released and the systems aboard the craft returned to their normal levels.

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"At least they seem to have good response times..." Argent sighed to himself.

He resumed his approach and brought his craft into the Hangar Bay with skilled ease, managing to taxi his craft out of the way of the main landing pad - something that rookie flyers generally weren't recommended to do.

Argent turned on his flight recorder circuit, recorded his flight termination time, gave the system-wide shutdown command and raised the canopy.

All though most beings, humans or not, tend to be sore and stiff after being seated in much of the same position for longer periods of time, the fighter corps always stressed the importance of doing everything to keep one's body alert even during extended flight. It sometimes was the only way to survive a possible crash landing or an ejection into space.

As he stood up in his now open cockpit, he surveyed the Hangar. It was small, but then this was to be expected. It was also deserted, which he thought was somewhat careless. He knew there would be no one ready here with a "stair pole" so he could make a "regulation dismount," so he did what most fighters did anyway -- he stepped out onto the shoulder of the wing and jump to the ground.

Picking himself up from the floor -- for all he his training, he wasn't *that* limber after 28 hours in flight -- he started to remove his helmet and gloves. And that was about as far he got, when the entrance doors hissed open and a most irate officer, as denoted by his glowing red facial complexion, began making his way towards him.

Argent didn't have to try hard to figure out *who* this was coming towards him.

"Sir, you are the pilot of flight 71618?" Lt. Ian Comprehensible, the duty officer asked, still flushed with anger.

"Yes," Argent replied evenly.

"How *dare* you come on this ship, not identifying yourself, then misidentifying yourself and demanding that we open our Shuttle bay and ordering *my* officers around. Also breaking standard landing procedure - not to mention numerous other violations that..."

Argent decided to let him ramble a bit. He had earned himself at least that much. It was time to act. His eyes transfixed in a cold stare and his finger pointed sharply at the duty officer's chest.

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"First off, *Lieutenant*," Argent emphasized the rank for the junior officer, "I identified myself, as my flight recorder will show twice -- which once more then necessary. Second off, as long as there is a fighter aboard this ship this is the Hangar bay and around me you will kindly refer to it as such. Third, as with every ship with fighter complement, there should be a flight traffic controller on duty all day and all night. I see none. As the Senior Officer on duty, it is *your* responsibility to make sure there is one. Would you like me to report you for dereliction of duty? Do you think that you are incapable of the job your commanding officer assigned you to do?"

Lt Ian Comprehensible was somewhat in shock. He was used to be undisputedly in charge during these hours and thought to be doing a good job. But now this fighter jockey... this *Lieutenant Commander* of a fighter jockey was dressing him down like a fresh ensign... and it was working, too. With his eyes fixed at him in a stare that seemed to practically scream submission and doing his best not to tremble in front of the towering pilot, Ian conceded quietly.

"No, sir. I beg your pardon, sir, but we just aren't used to fighters aboard the '*Wind*'. And we hadn't been told of your arrival. I will of course arrange for a practice drill so that this situation will not occur again. And I will personally recommend that a Tower Chief be on shift in the Shut... err... Hangar Bay during all shifts. Maybe I did come on to strong just now, and for that I apologize..."

My, my... Argent thought wryly, there is a decent Admiral in that boy yet...

Suddenly, the pilot's eyes broke their fixed stare at the junior officer, which relieved Ian to no end, as he thought they were like cold diamonds, ready to just rip right through him. The tension filled atmosphere also seemed to evaporate almost at once, as a slight smile came across the senior officer's face.

"Very good, Lieutenant.... What was your name?"

"Lieutenant Ian Comprehensible sir," he replied with one last slight flurry of fear.

"It is the mark of a good officer, Lt. Comprehensible, that he knows when he has erred in his judgment and is still willing to correct it, accepting the blame while also offering a concise solution strategy of how to set things straight. Apology accepted."

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Ian let go of his breath. As frighteningly intimidating as the tall pilot seemed to be, he also seemed to be able to remove the tension he could apply with equal speed. There and then, he decided to give the Pilot a wide berth during his stay aboard the *'Wind*.

"Now, Lieutenant, for the formalities. Permission to come aboard?"

Ian was wise not to make any issue of this, although it managed to instill the distinct impression in him that this man wasn't here for a short visit.

"Uh... permission granted, err..." Ian and paused to look at his insignias, "Lieutenant Commander... uh... your name, sir?"

"Argent, Kyle D."

Ian swiftly cleared the list of complaints he had noted on his datapadd and quickly logged Argent's arrival.

"Now, could you show me to my quarters please?"

"Certainly, sir," Lt Comprehensible was faking confidence as best as he could, "I will send someone down on the double to show you to a vacant senior officers quarter."

With that he turned on his heels and made for nearest exit, glad to be going that way.

Argent silently turned back to his craft and opened the small personal cargo hatch, removing two bags of his essential belongings plus Mac. The rest would arrive sometime soon. "Stupid tug jockeys," he mumbled aloud.

This was going to be a long, long assignment...

* * *

The excitement on the bridge was unmistakable. The bridge crew knew that they would be starting on a new mission and this was the first time that they all had a chance to really work together. All eyes watched as Captain Arcadia Devlin, Commanding Officer of the *Stellar Wind* stepped off the turbolift down the stairs towards 'The Big Chair' a nickname that all bridge officers called the captain's chair. Her entrance did not surprise the bridge crew as they had suspected that she would give the final departure orders herself. The Executive Officer had also noted her presence when the 'lift doors opened and smoothly rose from the captain's chair to his own.

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Arcadia stopped in front of the captain's chair and stared at it for a few moments. For the first time since she became CO, she really believed that she belonged in that chair.

CdrSG Updike left her to her thoughts for a few moments and then broke her reverie as she sat down, "Captain, we are ready for departure."

"Very good, Mr. Updike." Turning her chair towards Lt. Simone Templar at the communication's console, "Mr. Templar, please inform Hornblower Station that we are ready to depart."

"Aye sir," came the response and then a short pause, "Captain, Hornblower station reports we may proceed."

Turning back towards the front viewscreen, she took a deep breath, "Mr. Thornton, please take us out of orbit and set course for the Nahum system."

"Aye sir," replied Aaron Thornton at the helm.

Ensuring that all was going smoothly and deciding that all was in order, Arcadia rose from the command chair, "You have the con, Mr. Updike."

Franklin Updike nodded and smoothly rose from his XO's chair to the command chair as she walked towards the turbolift.

All eyes again watched as the captain departed the bridge. Once the 'lift doors closed, they all went back to the business at hand -- getting the *Wind* to her new assignment.

Arcadia wasn't back in her Ready Room more than a few moments when calm dissolved into chaos.

"What the bloody hell!" she yelled out as the holodiscs went flying about the room and her to the deck. When she finally was able to get back in her chair, she summoned the bridge.

"Bridge, this is the Captain. What the hell is going on down there? *Bridge!*" She pounded the comlink until it was obvious to her that she would receive no answer. No sensor needed to inform her that the gravity was less than 100% -- her stomach kept up its constant feedback. Once she overcame her nausea, she slowly made her way from the Ready Room down to the Bridge.

She staggered on the bridge fighting the assault on her ears and the nausea just in time to see CdrSG Updike assist Simone off the deck. She took a quick scan of the bridge and determined that there were no serious injuries.

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"*Report!*" she bellowed over the din as she walked carefully down to the captain's chair. The ship was out of control and she could almost hear her seams buckling. The *Stellar Wind* was making noises that she didn't realise a ship could make. Vaegans have acute hearing in the uppermost range of Terran hearing, so it is likely that the others don't hear what she did.

CdrSG Updike came to her side, sitting down on the chair to her right, "Captain, it appears that the Irrelevant drive has failed. Engineering is determining the source of its problem as we speak."

Arcadia nodded her understanding as she took complete stock of the situation. Despite the noise and the obvious discomfort, the bridge crew was experiencing they are doing a splendid job.

Just as quickly as it began, the ship stopped complaining and became as docile as a newborn kitten. She spun around in her chair, "Damage reports, Mr. Templar?"

"They are just coming in, sir." Simone stopped as she listened intently to the incoming reports, "No serious damage but sick bay reports a number of people complaining of nausea. Now that the ship is stabilized, they're sending someone up here to administer medication."

Right on cue, a doctor walked off the turbo lift and began to pass out anti-nausea medication. "I believe you shall find this medication to be most helpful." Arcadia was about to refuse, when the physician countered, "Doctor's orders, Captain."

"Thank you, Doctor," she replied before drinking the pale liquid, "Please see to the others." She finished drinking her medication as CSG Updike came back to his chair.

"Captain," he began as he sat down, "I've checked all the damage reports and as Lieutenant Templar reported, no major damage."

Still holding the ampoule in her hand, Franklin's sudden silence forced her to look to him. He continued, "However, the warp engines are off-line and we don't exactly know our exact location."

She sat up straight in her chair. "We don't know where we are?" She looked to the navigator, who nodded in agreement. She sat back in her chair and looked back to Updike, "When will engines be back on-line?"

Franklin looked back to his datapadd, "The Chief just reported in, but--"

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Exasperated, she informed the bridge, "I realise that all is in disarray, but we do have a mission to complete. Please inform the Chief Engineer to get those engines back on line immediately!" Arcadia rose from her chair only to be hit with a sudden wave of dizziness. Despite her discomfort, she continued her way to the turbolift. Before she entered to lift back to her office, she turned to Updike in a more controlled voice, "Please keep me informed of all progress." Steadying herself, she then turned and boarded the lift.

* * *

After his little "Adventure" with the nightshift the other day and the unexpected problems with the ship's engines, things finally settled into a something resembling a normal routine. Kyle Argent was impressed with the efficiency of the officers that this ship was staffed with. Sure enough, every time he walked into the hangar bay, he found a duty officer in the con tower (including once at 0200). Argent inspected the other fighter craft that were recently delivered to this ship. They are all Nighthawk-G's as his own (*minus 250 flight hours, of course*) with the latest upgrade specs. One even had a system check of 99.98% proficiency! Give the Engineers some credit for good workmanship.

His afternoon was filled with fun and joy behind a computer console as he began the task of installing all the simulator software on the ships' Holodeck units. He was glad this ship has some... although the smaller shipboard ones are a far cry from the huge ones at the academy.... And in the evening, he would have his obligatory "*Hello, who are you and what the hell are you doing on my ship?*" chat with the CO.

* * *

"Mister Argent, please come in."

Captain Arcadia Devlin stood to greet the new Squadron Commander as she pointed to a chair, which he cautiously took.

"Commander Argent," she told him as she sat down in her chair, "Welcome aboard. Most of our new personnel usually arrive on ship without much fanfare." Arcadia paused and looked at her newest member of the '*Wind*' and continued, "I'm not entirely sure that the *Stellar Wind* really *requires* a Squadron of fighters and pilots, however--," she paused and glanced again at the orders on her terminal, "I have my orders."

She continued to tell LtCdr Kyle Argent, what she expected from any officer on the '*Wind*' but was briefly interrupted by a call from the Bridge.

"Captain," Lt Thornton began, "We have now entered the Nahum system."

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"Excellent," Captain Devlin replied, "Have sciences begin long-range scanning."

"Aye sir."

She finished her recitation and when she was done, she asked him if he had any questions (she didn't expect any and he chose not to disappoint her). At that point, there was no more to say to each other and she dismissed him from her office.

Kyle was pleased to see that she seemed to run a tight ship through with cool professionalism, which is to her credit. She at least didn't try to tell him how he should run things, which gives her a leg up on some. He supposed that after he finish the software setup and got all his personnel on-line, he would invite her to tour a simulator or even fly shotgun through a basic flight sim and then invite her for a cup of tea. He wanted to keep up on the social graces for appearance sake, despite his personal wishes to do the contrary.

Before he could even accomplish all this, he needed to track down the personnel officer and see about requisitioning some personnel proficient in small craft maintenance. He had to replace the three fried circuits on his craft today, and wasn't too happy about having to waste two hours on it.

At least all this work did serve to take his mind off of the one biting question on the back of his mind: what the *hell* was he here for?

He stopped and considered. He was beginning to think Starfleet had decided to make his life miserable.

It was going to be a *really* long assignment.

* * *

Captain Devlin was just finishing up the reading the Science Department reports on the planets when her yeoman escorted reporter Louise Upperton into her office. The captain offered her a chair and refreshments. As Arcadia walked over to the replicator, she decided that she would approach this interview as any other -- with great caution. She briefly considered how much she regretted that her psi abilities weren't more developed. She could certainly use them at this moment.

"Thank you Captain," Louise replied as she gave her the tea she requested. Arcadia sat down behind her desk also with a cup of tea and waited for her to begin.

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"Were you surprised at being named the captain of this ship," she began.

Captain Devlin answered her question, leaving out the actual details of the Captain B'rand's mysterious disappearance, but she could honestly say that she was surprised. She asked more questions that are technical about commanding such a large ship and Arcadia admitted to herself that she was quite impressed with the knowledge she displayed. She obviously did her homework.

"Tell me Captain, what do you think about President Feather?"

Arcadia frowned as she thought for a moment, "Quite frankly, Ms Upperton, I haven't followed politics very closely since my husband died. He was interested in politics and would keep me informed. After he died and I went into Administration, I simply didn't have time to keep up."

"I see," she replied. She looked down at her notes and continued asking me questions for close to an hour until her yeoman came in to remind Arcadia of a pending appointment.

Captain Devlin stood up and shook Ms Upperton's hand and her yeoman escorted her out of her Ready Room.

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Next: *Nighthawks and Shadows*

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