

Come Fly With Me!

INTERDECK PERSONEL MEMO

FROM: Lieutenant Commander Kyle Argent, Senior Pilot

TO: Captain Arcadia M W Devlin, CO

As the Commanding Officer of the ship, I would like to cordially invite you to tour the Hangar Bay and the new Fighter Simulator installed on your ship as well as enjoy a cup of tea or any beverage of your choosing... at 1730 this evening if possible.

Captain Devlin was in her Ready Room attempting to juggle personnel requests -- a job normally that of the Executive Officer -- however, Updike was much too busy these days being a Senator and posing for any and all 'photo-ops'.

"Commander Th'Dor, thank you for coming so quickly. Have you gone over the material that Captain B'rand sent with the sphere?" Th'Dor nodded his assent. "Excellent... but... what?" she asked him noting the look of concern on his face.

"The repairs that JT suggested for the '*Wind*' are taking longer to accomplish. If I could have some help..." he stopped and looked directly at her.

"I assume you may have a problem securing the personnel?" she asked. He confirmed her suspicions by giving her a list of people he needed to repair the ship.

"I shall take care of it," she informed him as she rose from her seat. As the Captain walked the Commander to the door, she considered how she was to wrestle away Ensign Taylor when he was busy assisting LtCdr Argent. All of this nonsense could have been avoided if someone in a pay grade above her had just taken the time to requisition the support staff along with the Nighthawks that were unceremoniously dumped on the *Stellar Wind* not too long ago. While the fighters included some financial allocation, however other than a few pilots and mission specialists, the '*Wind*' was expected to supply the other support personnel. This was causing unexpected problems as far as staffing was concerned. However, since the Squadron Leader had invited the Captain on a sim flight, she used the time she had as she made her way to the meet him at his office to consider how to best approach him on the matter.

She arrived at LtCdr Argent's tiny office in short order and found his door open. She walked in and found him knee-deep in iso-chips apparently finishing up a report. He quickly spotted her and began to get up to greet her when she indicated that he was not to bother. He spent the next few seconds finishing up the project and stepped around his desk to give her a proper greeting.

"Captain, please forgive me. I--"

She held up her hand to cut him off. "Mister Argent, there is no need to apologise. It is I who should offer the apology since I walked into your office without so much as a by your leave."

He paused for a moment not quite expecting her humor. Rather than engaging in some meaningless light heartened banter with her, he opted to engage the pre-programmed speech he'd used with other commanding officers before taking them out.

"Captain Devlin, thank you for accepting my invitation. Everything is ready for the demonstration, so if you follow me, Sir, we can get started."

"Thank you. I am looking forward to this," she replied not knowing quite what she was getting into.

"...And this ship," continued Kyle Argent as they walked through the flight deck, "is my own personal Nighthawk fighter, the *Iron Gauntlet*."

Arcadia looked at his ship and then looked back to the other 'Wind fighters completely amazed at how complex the machines were. Her personal experience with actual fighter craft was limited though she previously had encountered pilots under less than desirable circumstances, so she unexpectedly found herself eager to learn about them from such an able tutor.

"Now that you've seen the fighters, Sir, we can take them out for a simulated spin around the block, but first, you need to change," he told her as he handed her a jumpsuit. After she put on her suit, Argent continued the tour.

"This is a special training fighter used to 'break in' new recruits. This fighter has two seats in the cockpit area rather than one up front and one in the back as the others have. I'm using this one so I can give you a 'hands on' demonstration of the fighter's capabilities. You'll be able to take over the controls and fly her yourself."

"Really?" she told him as she climbed into the cockpit. As soon as he ensured that both of them were strapped in, he asked her if she was ready. At her acknowledgement, he began the sim flight.

While she really enjoyed the feeling of being airborne and appreciated the sheer joy of flying through space, she noted unfortunately, her stomach was having none of it.

As the flight commenced, LtCdr Argent also noted that Captain Devlin was being remarkably brave next to him. The last time he went through this with a commanding officer, he had the pleasant stench of vomit in his nostrils for the duration of the flight. He decided there and then not to perform anything fancy that might bring on a return engagement of free-flowing bodily fluids.

He clicked open the intercom to talk to her in an effort to distract her from her stomach. Her stomach obviously wasn't taking all this too well as evidenced by her facial complexion, which despite the fact she had dark skin, he noted was slowly becoming paler by the moment.

"Different from flying in a starship, isn't it?"

"Indeed... It most certainly is..." she responded with a trace of uneasiness in her voice. Argent opted to be kind to her and fumbled in the armpocket of his jacket until he found his emergency supply of Xolobinox tablets and handed them to her.

"Here, Sir. Take two and it should take care of your stomach right away..."

She seemed grateful for his offer if somewhat annoyed that he didn't think to give them to her earlier -- or maybe she expected a glass of water to wash them down? Argent flew on and initiated the Warp jump computation program.

"Once your stomach settles, we'll make a Warp jump. You might want to watch the readout screen in front of you displays the status of the computations..." He noted that the Captain was doing better as she was watching the readouts.

"The Nighthawk contacts the '*Wind* to get its coordinates?" she asked.

"Yes. The craft doesn't have the sophisticated computer hardware to calculate the proper equations. It does have sensor and long range communication equipment that allows it contact a Federation installation as far as away as 2000 light-years to perform the computations and then have them fed into the system. It does help that we are this close to a starship, of course..." he replied, giving her the standard rundown of Fighter Warp Navigation.

"There. We now have the equations fed into the computer and are ready to proceed. Is your stomach reasonably settled to allow us to proceed?" Argent asked. *If not, he thought, we would end this sim flight immediately.*

"I'm feeling much better now. I'm ready to proceed," she replied evenly.

Her voice sounded calm, if not confident. He gave the computer the go ahead command and leaned back.

The Captain seemed surprised by this. "You don't pilot the craft during Warp entry?" she asked as the fighter maneuvered into the proper position by itself.

"No. The computer does everything during warp enter and exit. Brace yourself, the entry process is quite unse--" Suddenly, they entered into the bright streaming ribbons of lights that were stars. Try as he might -- and even after thousands of warp entries and exits -- he would never completely get used to this phenomenon of fighter life. He shook his head to clear the cobwebs and promptly checked in with the Captain to see how badly she was shaken up.

"Captain, are you OK?"

"Yes!" she exclaimed. "That... was most extraordinary! I've never experienced a warp entry quite like it!" she responded, in an almost blissful tone of voice.

Figures I would wind up getting a natural warper sitting next to me -- so much for my 'Fighter Pilot Extraordinaire' status, he considered but told her aloud. "Captain, you can now take the controls now, if you so choose, Sir," he stated mostly to distract himself from his own shortcomings.

"Excellent! What shall I do?" she asked excitedly.

"Take the stick and make some gradual movements -- nothing too fancy. I'll be able to correct any incautious movements from my station," he replied. But to his surprise, she smoothly handled the controls and soon was able to execute a few basic twists and turns. Argent leaned back in his cockpit seat and crossed his arms. *Quite impressive for a tug jockey,* he wryly considered.

As with all exhilarating adventures, this one was coming to an end as Kyle instructed Arcadia to land onto a nearby planet. She was surprised that he allowed her to land the craft, as they were both a bit shaken from the sim flight. She came away with the experience with considerably more admiration for pilots, as it can be a very unsettling experience to actually be in a cockpit at the controls.

They alit the craft to find a lone house sitting in an expanse of rolling fields of grass, some hills, trees and small forest pockets all around. Arcadia turned to the west and saw the peak of a mountain that Kyle later identified as that of Mt. Hood, and to the east she could see what little is left of Mt. St. Helens. She finally asked him where we were.

"The Pacific Northwest of North America -- my home," he replied wistfully as they entered the house.

It was a lovely home, very large, well furnished but very comfortable. He lit a fire and brewed a cup of shoo shong tea for them to drink as they relaxed after the flight.

Kyle Argent considered the fact that he never brought someone to his little holographic 'home' away from home. But then the Captain had indicated she was a tea drinker, as well -- and he knew of no other place where he could find a decent cup of rare and exotic tea that his own retreat, holographic or not. Not to mention, it had been a while since he had generated the image.

While he brewed the tea the Captain went poking around his living room and promptly found his guitar.

"Is it true about you playing the guitar?" she asked.

Kyle thought that she had taken the time to read his personnel files by now -- that much was certain. Rather than evading the issue, he opted for the direct response.

"Yes, but, if you could, let's keep it a secret, OK?"

The Captain gave him a nod and flashed a quick smile. *So, she could smile!* Kyle continued staring at her for a moment and then finally returned to brewing up the tea. He was in the process of taking the cups and saucers to a table in the living room when she did something to make him regret ever bringing her here.

"Is this your sister?" she asked while holding up a picture frame that was on his desk.

Kyle was thunderstruck! He had completely forgotten about the picture.

"N-no..." he stammered. "That's... not my sister..." he turned his back to her and decided to pour the tea. He contemplated not telling her but he then decided that it was time to stop running.

"Reesa... she was my wife," he told her quietly with his back still facing her.

"Your wife?" She put the picture down and crossed over to him, replying softly. "Your records indicated that you were not married..."

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He looked up at her concerned face. "I know. She died before my very eyes several years ago."

"I see." She walked over to the fireplace, her ease and sense of pleasantry all but evaporated at the obvious display of his discomfort.

Kyle again was near the point of breaking again. But as with all the other times in the last decade he could not afford to do so now -- not in front of his captain. He decided that he would have to put his best face forward again and push the memories of Reesa away yet again.

He finally noticed the Captain had walked back to the desk and was looking carefully the picture. "I understand," she began softly with the same hurt that he now experienced. "More than you shall ever realise. My husband died under my medical care during the 'One-Year War'."

Kyle said nothing, as he was shocked by her admission and honestly. He didn't know what to say, so he quickly handed her a cup of tea and they both retreated into their own personal grief.

As much as Arcadia wanted time to grieve, she still had a ship to run. "So how do we get back now?" she asked ending the silence that had grown between them.

"Simple," the pilot responded. "Computer -- terminate simulation."

With that, the house, the fighter and the planet -- everything -- ceased to exist and they were again in the starkness of the Holodeck. Kyle led her to the entrance of the Holodeck and asked if she had enjoyed herself.

Captain Devlin forced a smile his way that she hope appeared genuine. "Very much so, Mister Argent. Thank you." She had to admit to herself later that she lied, but she was sure that he understood as he also replied that he also enjoyed the afternoon.

As she walked back to her Ready Room, she carefully considered what she had learned about the new Squadron Commander. All she could conclude from her musings was that she felt that she was left with more questions about the new Pilot than answers.

* * *

Squadron Commander LtCdr Kyle Argent woke up that evening and sat bolt upright in his bed. His sheets were soaked and his body drenched with sweat. He ran his hand through his matted hair and ultimately buried his face in the palms of his hands.

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The nightmare was back to be relived yet again.

Why did he not remove Reesa's picture? Why had he brought the Captain to his place anyway? He knew from the very moment that she brought up the question about Reesa, that the nightmares would be back-- as they always came back -- to haunt him... to hurt him.

And yet... the Captain seemed to understand him, his pain. She had suffered a loss as well as she said. He really needed to pull *her* dossier and read it sometime soon.

Could he trust her, though? He simply would have to trust her then -- and hope things would turn out all right.

But those thoughts faded fast as the vivid memories of his wife, her death and his constant reliving of the event again began to re-assert themselves in his mind -- taking over, dominating -- and ultimately breaking him again.

Kyle slumped into a chair and began to weep bitter tears as he had done so many times since that fateful day....

* * *

Captain Arcadia Devlin woke up that evening after having relived Desmond's death yet again. She turned on the light and stared at the sword that was on her wall. It was one of the few items of his that she still kept around other than the picture on her desk. She walked over the desk and picked up the picture. She gently stroked it and then held it close to her naked bosom as she cried. She cried for the pain she still felt even after all these years. She cried because she knew that Desmond would never touch her again. But most of all, Arcadia cried because of the pain she caused when she asked LtCdr Argent who that was in the picture she had picked up in his holographic home. *I am so, so sorry Commander Argent, that I caused you such pain. Please forgive me?*

She put Desmond's picture back on her desk and returned to bed hoping she could sleep and perhaps, forget her pain yet again.

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Next: *Teamwork!*

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