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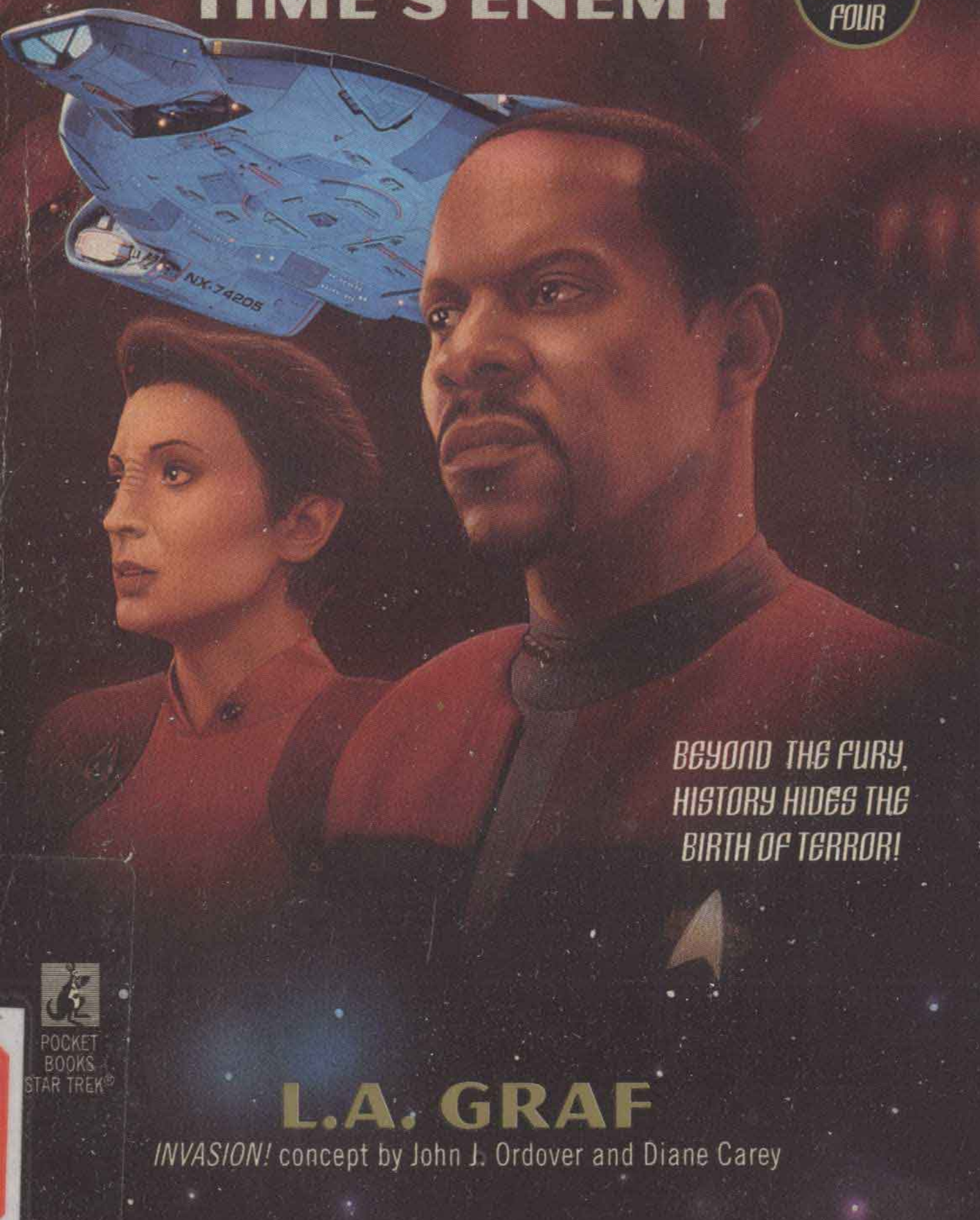
STAR TREK

DEEP SPACE NINE®

INVASION!

TIME'S ENEMY

BOOK
THREE OF
FOUR



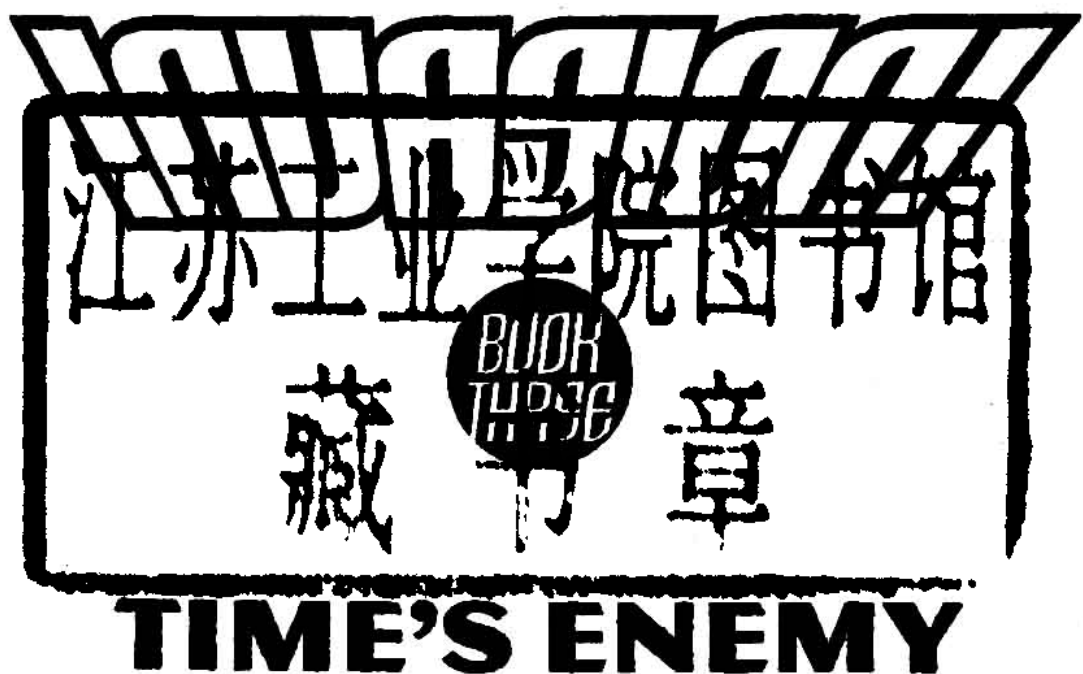
*BEYOND THE FURY,
HISTORY HIDES THE
BIRTH OF TERROR!*

L.A. GRAF

INVASION! concept by John J. Ordovery and Diane Carey


POCKET
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STAR TREK®

STAR TREK DEEP SPACE NINE®



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POCKET BOOKS

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INVASION!

"Drop cloak!"

Captain Benjamin Sisko said as the three alien ships on the viewscreen swung in on the attack. The toneless curtness of Sisko's voice told Dax just how grim the situation must be. "Divert all power to shields and weapons."

"Damage to forward shield generators," O'Brien's voice reported. "Diverting power from rear shields to compensate."

"Return fire!" Sisko leapt from his command chair and went to join Dax at the helm. "Starting evasive maneuvers, program delta!"

Alien phaser fire washed the Defiant's bridge in a fierce white light. . . .

Star Trek: The Next Generation

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <i>Kahless</i> | #14 <i>Extiles</i> |
| <i>Star Trek Generations</i> | #15 <i>Fortune's Light</i> |
| <i>All Good Things</i> | #16 <i>Contamination</i> |
| <i>Q-Squared</i> | #17 <i>Boogeymen</i> |
| <i>Dark Mirror</i> | #18 <i>Q-in-Law</i> |
| <i>Descent</i> | #19 <i>Perchance to Dream</i> |
| <i>The Devil's Heart</i> | #20 <i>Spartacus</i> |
| <i>Imzadi</i> | #21 <i>Chains of Command</i> |
| <i>Relics</i> | #22 <i>Imbalance</i> |
| <i>Reunion</i> | #23 <i>War Drums</i> |
| <i>Unification</i> | #24 <i>Nightshade</i> |
| <i>Metamorphosis</i> | #25 <i>Grounded</i> |
| <i>Vendetta</i> | #26 <i>The Romulan Prize</i> |
| <i>Encounter at Farpoint</i> | #27 <i>Guises of the Mind</i> |
| | #28 <i>Here There Be Dragons</i> |
| #1 <i>Ghost Ship</i> | #29 <i>Sins of Commission</i> |
| #2 <i>The Peacekeepers</i> | #30 <i>Debtors' Planet</i> |
| #3 <i>The Children of Hamlin</i> | #31 <i>Foreign Foes</i> |
| #4 <i>Survivors</i> | #32 <i>Requiem</i> |
| #5 <i>Strike Zone</i> | #33 <i>Balance of Power</i> |
| #6 <i>Power Hungry</i> | #34 <i>Blaze of Glory</i> |
| #7 <i>Masks</i> | #35 <i>Romulan Stratagem</i> |
| #8 <i>The Captains' Honor</i> | #36 <i>Into the Nebula</i> |
| #9 <i>A Call to Darkness</i> | #37 <i>The Last Stand</i> |
| #10 <i>A Rock and a Hard Place</i> | #38 <i>Dragon's Honor</i> |
| #11 <i>Gulliver's Fugitives</i> | #39 <i>Rogue Saucer</i> |
| #12 <i>Doomsday World</i> | #40 <i>Possession</i> |
| #13 <i>The Eyes of the Beholders</i> | #41 <i>Invasion 2: The Soldiers of Fear</i> |

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine

- | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>Warped</i> | #8 <i>Antimatter</i> |
| <i>The Search</i> | #9 <i>Proud Helios</i> |
| | #10 <i>Valhalla</i> |
| #1 <i>Emissary</i> | #11 <i>Devil in the Sky</i> |
| #2 <i>The Siege</i> | #12 <i>The Laertian Gamble</i> |
| #3 <i>Bloodletter</i> | #13 <i>Station Rage</i> |
| #4 <i>The Big Game</i> | #14 <i>The Long Night</i> |
| #5 <i>Fallen Heroes</i> | #15 <i>Objective: Bajor</i> |
| #6 <i>Betrayal</i> | #16 <i>Invasion 3: Time's Enemy</i> |
| #7 <i>Warchild</i> | |

Star Trek: Voyager

- #1 *Caretaker*
- #2 *The Escape*
- #3 *Ragnarok*
- #4 *Violations*
- #5 *Incident at Arbuk*
- #6 *The Murdered Sun*
- #7 *Ghost of a Chance*
- #8 *Cybersong*

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Before

Out here where sunlight was a faraway glimmer in the blackness of space, ice lasted a long time. Dark masses of it littered a wide orbital ring, all that remained of the spinning nebula that had birthed this planet-rich system. The cold outer dark sheltered each fragment in safety, unless some chance grazing of neighbors ejected one of them into the unyielding pull of solar gravity. Then the mass of dirty ice would begin its long journey toward the distant sun, past the captured ninth planet, past the four gas giants, past the ring of rocky fragments that memorialized a planet never born. By that point it would have begun to glow, brushed into brilliance by the gathering heat of the sun's nuclear furnace. When it passed the cold red desert planet and approached the cloud-feathered planet that harbored life, it would be brighter than any star. Its flare would pierce that planet's blue sky, stirring brief wonder from the primitive tribes who hunted and gathered and scratched at the earth with sticks to grow their food. In a few days, the comet's borrowed light would fade, and the tumbling ice would start its long journey back to the outer dark.

One fragment had escaped that fate, although it shouldn't have. It carried a burden of steel and empty space, buried just deep enough in its icy heart to send it spinning back into the cloud of fellow comets after its near-collision with another. For centuries afterward, it danced an erratic path through the

L. A. GRAF

ice-littered darkness before it settled into a stable orbit in the shadow of the tiny ninth planet. More centuries passed while dim fires glowed on the night side of the bluish globe that harbored life. The fires slowly brightened and spread, leaping across its vast oceans. They brightened faster after that, merging to form huge networks of light that outlined every coast and lake and river. Then the fires leaped into the ocean of space. Out to the planet's single moon at first, then later to its cold, red neighbor, then to the moons of the gas giants, and finally out beyond all of them to the stars. In all those long centuries, nothing disturbed the comet and its anomalous burden. No one saw the tiny, wavering light that lived inside.

Until a fierce blast of phaser fire ripped the icy shroud open, and exposed what lay within.

CHAPTER

1

"IT LOOKS LIKE they're preparing for an invasion," Jadzia Dax said.

Sisko grunted, gazing out at the expanse of dark-cruled cometary ice that formed the natural hull of Starbase One. Above the curving ice horizon, the blackness of Earth's Oort cloud should have glittered with bright stars and the barely brighter glow of the distant sun. Instead, what it glittered with were the docking lights of a dozen short-range attack ships—older and more angular versions of the *Defiant*—as well as the looming bulk of two Galaxy-class starships, the *Mukaikubo* and the *Breedlove*. One glance had told Sisko that such a gathering of force couldn't have been the random result of ship refittings and shore leaves. Starfleet was preparing for a major encounter with someone. He just wished he knew who.

"I thought we came here to deal with a *nonmilitary* emergency." In the sweep of transparent aluminum windows, Sisko could see Julian Bashir's dark reflection glance up from the chair he'd sprawled in after a glance at the view. Beyond the doctor, the huge conference room was as empty as it had been ten minutes ago when they'd first been escorted into it. "Otherwise, wouldn't Admiral Hayman have asked us to come in the *Defiant* instead of a high-speed courier?"

Sisko snorted. "Admirals never *ask* anything, Doctor.

And they never tell you any more than you need to know to carry out their orders efficiently.”

“Especially this admiral,” Dax added, an unexpected note of humor creeping into her voice. Sisko raised an eyebrow at her, then heard a gravelly snort and the simultaneous hiss of the conference-room door opening. He swung around to see a rangy, long-boned figure in ordinary Starfleet coveralls crossing the room toward them. Dax surprised her by promptly stepping forward, hands outstretched in welcome.

“How have you been, Judith?”

“Promoted.” The silver-haired woman’s angular face lit with something approaching a sparkle. “It almost makes up for getting this old.” She clasped Dax’s hands warmly for a moment, then turned her attention to Sisko. “So this is the Benjamin Sisko Curzon told me so much about. It’s a pleasure to finally meet you, Captain.”

Sisko slanted a wary glance at his Science Officer. “Um—likewise, I’m sure. Dax?”

The Trill cleared her throat. “Benjamin, allow me to introduce you to Rear Admiral Judith Hayman. She and I—well, she and Curzon, actually—got to know each other on Vulcan during the Klingon peace negotiations several years ago. Judith, this is Captain Benjamin Sisko of *Deep Space Nine*, and our station’s chief medical officer, Dr. Julian Bashir.”

“Admiral.” Bashir nodded crisply.

“Our orders said this was a Priority One Emergency,” Sisko said. “I assume that means whatever you brought us here to do is urgent.”

Hayman’s strong face lost its smile. “Possibly,” she said. “Although perhaps not urgent in the way we usually think of it.”

Sisko scowled. “Forgive my bluntness, Admiral, but I’ve been dragged from my command station without explanation, ordered not to use my own ship under any circumstances, brought to the oldest and least useful starbase in the Federation—” He made a gesture of reined-in impatience at the bleak cometary landscape outside the windows. “—and you’re telling me you’re not sure how *urgent* this problem is?”

“No one is sure, Captain. That’s part of the reason we brought you here.” The admiral’s voice chilled into something between grimness and exasperation. “What we *are* sure of is that we could be facing potential disaster.” She reached into the front pocket of her coveralls and tossed two ordinary-looking data chips onto the conference table. “The first thing I need you and your medical officer to do is review these data records.”

“Data records,” Sisko repeated, trying for the noncommittal tone he’d perfected over years of trying to deal with the equally high-handed and inexplicable behavior of Kai Winn.

“Admiral, forgive us, but we assumed this actually *was* an emergency.” Julian Bashir broke in with such polite bafflement that Sisko guessed he must be emulating Garak’s unctuous demeanor. “If so, we could have reviewed your data records ten hours ago. All you had to do was send them to *Deep Space Nine* through subspace channels.”

“Too dangerous, even using our most secure codes.” The bleak certainty in Hayman’s voice made Sisko blink in surprise. “And if you were listening, young man, you’d have noticed that I said this was the *first* thing I needed you to do. Now, would you please sit down, Captain?”

Sisko took the place she indicated at one of the conference table’s inset data stations, then waited while she settled Bashir at the station on the opposite side. He noticed she made no attempt to seat Dax, although there were other empty stations available.

“This review procedure is not a standard one,” Hayman said, without further preliminaries. “As a control on the validity of some data we’ve recently received, we’re going to ask you to examine ship’s logs and medical records without knowing their origin. We’d like your analysis of them. Computer, start data-review programs Sisko-One and Bashir-One.”

Sisko’s monitor flashed to life, not with pictures but with a thick ribbon of multilayered symbols and abbreviated words, slowly scrolling from left to right. He stared at it for a long, blank moment before a whisper of memory turned it familiar instead of alien. One of the things Starfleet Acade-

my asked cadets to do was determine the last three days of a starship's voyage when its main computer memory had failed. The solution was to reconstruct computer records from each of the ship's individual system buffers—records that looked exactly like these.

"These are multiple logs of buffer output from individual ship systems, written in standard Starfleet machine code," he said. Dax made an interested noise and came to stand behind him. "It looks like someone downloaded the last commands given to life-support, shields, helm, and phaser-bank control. There's another system here, too, but I can't identify it."

"Photon-torpedo control?" Dax suggested, leaning over his shoulder to scrutinize it.

"I don't think so. It might be a sensor buffer." Sisko scanned the lines of code intently while they scrolled by. He could recognize more of the symbols now, although most of the abbreviations on the fifth line still baffled him. "There's no sign of navigations, either—the command buffers in those systems may have been destroyed by whatever took out the ship's main computer." Sisko grunted as four of the five logs recorded wild fluctuations and then degenerated into solid black lines. "And there goes everything else. Whatever hit this ship crippled it beyond repair."

Dax nodded. "It looks like some kind of EM pulse took out all of the ship's circuits—everything lost power except for life-support, and that had to switch to auxiliary circuits." She glanced up at the admiral. "Is that all the record we have, Admiral? Just those few minutes?"

"It's all the record we *trust*," Hayman said enigmatically. "There are some visual bridge logs that I'll show you in a minute, but those could have been tampered with. We're fairly sure the buffer outputs weren't." She glanced up at Bashir, whose usual restless energy had focused down to a silent intensity of concentration on his own data screen. "The medical logs we found were much more extensive. You have time to review the buffer outputs again, if you'd like."

"Please," Sisko and Dax said in unison.

"Computer, repeat data program Sisko-One."

Machine code crawled across the screen again, and this time Sisko stopped trying to identify the individual symbols

in it. He vaguely remembered one of his Academy professors saying that reconstructing a starship's movements from the individual buffer outputs of its systems was a lot like reading a symphony score. The trick was not to analyze each line individually, but to get a sense of how all of them were functioning in tandem.

"This ship was in a battle," he said at last. "But I think it was trying to escape, not fight. The phaser banks all show discharge immediately after power fluctuations are recorded for the shields."

"Defensive action," Dax agreed, and pointed at the screen. "And look at how much power they had to divert from life-support to keep the shields going. Whatever was after them was big."

"They're trying some evasive actions now—" Sisko broke off, seeing something he'd missed the first time in that mysterious fifth line of code. Something that froze his stomach. It was the same Romulan symbol that appeared on his command board every time the cloaking device was engaged on the *Defiant*.

"This was a cloaked Starfleet vessel!" He swung around to fix the admiral with a fierce look. "My understanding was that only the *Defiant* had been sanctioned to carry a Romulan cloaking device!"

Hayman met his stare without a ripple showing in her calm competence. "I can assure you that Starfleet isn't running any unauthorized cloaking devices. Watch the log again, Captain Sisko."

He swung back to his monitor. "Computer, rerun data program Sisko-One at one-quarter speed," he said. The five concurrent logs crawled across the screen in slow motion, and this time Sisko focused on the coordinated interactions between the helm and the phaser banks. If he had any hope of identifying the class and generation of this starship, it would be from the tactical maneuvers it could perform.

"Time the helm changes versus the phaser bursts," Dax suggested from behind him in an unusually quiet voice. Sisko wondered if she was beginning to harbor the same ominous suspicion he was.

"I know." For the past hundred years, the speed of helm shift versus the speed of phaser refocus had been the basic

determining factor of battle tactics. Sisko's gaze flickered from top line to third, counting off milliseconds by the ticks along the edge of the data record. The phaser refocus rates he found were startlingly fast, but far more chilling was the almost instantaneous response of this starship's helm in its tactical runs. There was only one ship he knew of that had the kind of overpowered warp engines needed to bring it so dangerously close to the edge of survivable maneuvers. And there was only one commander who had used his spare time to perfect the art of skimming along the edge of that envelope, the way the logs told him this ship's commander had done.

This time when Sisko swung around to confront Judith Hayman, his concern had condensed into cold, sure knowledge. "Where did you find these records, Admiral?"

She shook her head. "Your analysis first, Captain. I need your unbiased opinion before I answer any questions or show you the visual logs. Otherwise, we'll never know for sure if this data can be trusted."

Sisko blew out a breath, trying to find words for conclusions he wasn't even sure he believed. "This ship—it wasn't just cloaked like the *Defiant*. It actually *was* the *Defiant*." He heard Dax's indrawn breath. "And when it was destroyed in battle, the man commanding it was me."

"Captain Sisko would let me."

It occurred to Kira that if she had a strip of latinum for every time someone had said that to her in the last forty-eight hours, she could probably buy this station and every slaving Ferengi troll on board. Not that the prospect of owning a dozen wrinkled, bat-eared larcenists filled her with any particular glee. But at least Ferengi were predictable, and they didn't act all affronted every time you refused to jump at their comm calls or told them their problems were trivial. After all, they were Ferengi—any aspect of their lives not directly related to money was trivial, and they did everything in their power to keep things that way.

Humans, on the other hand, thought the galaxy revolved around their wants and worries, and tended to get their fragile little egos bruised when you implied that they might be wrong. With that in mind, Kira had spent the better part

of her first day in command—a good two or three hours, at least—placating, compromising, making every sympathetic noise Dax had ever taught her, in the theory that a little stroking (no matter how insincere) was all the crew needed to carry them through the captain's absence. Somewhere around lunchtime, though, she'd elbowed that damned leather sphere off Sisko's desk for the fourth damned time, and the fifth trivial work-schedule dispute let himself into the office while she was under the desk patting about for it, and the sixth subspace call from Bajor—or Starfleet, or some other damned place—started chirping for immediate attention, and it became suddenly, vitally important that she conduct the EV inspection of weapons sail two herself. She fled Ops with the ball still lost in the wilds of Sisko's office furniture, hopeful that shuffling the whining crewman off to Personnel and playing ten minutes of yes-man with a Bajoran minister would buy her enough time to get safely suited up and out into vacuum. O'Brien, bless his soul, only stammered a little with surprise when she plucked the repair order from his hands on her way to the turbolift.

Next time, she'd just have to leave the station without the environmental suit. It would make everything so much easier.

“Well?” Quark hadn't quite progressed to petulance yet, but there was something about having a Ferengi voice whining right in your ear that made even an overlarge radiation hardsuit seem small and strangling. “I'm telling you, this is exactly the sort of thing Sisko would endorse with all his heart.”

Kira couldn't help blowing a disgusted snort, although it blasted an irritating film of steam across the inside of her suit's faceplate. She locked the magnetic soles of her boots onto the skin of the sail while she waited for the hardsuit's atmosphere adjusters to clear out the excess humidity. “Quark, Captain Sisko won't even let you in Ops.” Which was why he'd wasted no time weaseling onto a comm channel Kira couldn't escape, no doubt. “I don't know why he lets you stay on the station at all.”

She could just make out his squat Ferengi silhouette scuttling back and forth in the observation port above his bar. “Because the captain has a fine sense of the market, for

a hu-man. But not so fine a sense of how to extract profit from opportunity.” Kira flexed her feet, breaking contact with the station and letting the momentum of that slight movement swing her around to the front of the sail’s arc, out of Quark’s line of sight. *I really am out here to do work*, she told herself as she passed a diagnostic scanner slowly down the length of one seam. The fact that she enjoyed a certain cruel satisfaction every time Quark grumbled with frustration and ran down the corridor to the next unobstructed window was really just a perk.

“I’m still picking up some residual leakage,” she reported to O’Brien. The rad counter on the far right of her helmet display barely hovered at the bottom of its range, and she scowled around a renewed twist of annoyance. “Not enough to warrant lugging out this twice-damned hardsuit, but . . .”

“Sorry, Major—Starfleet regulations.” His blunt Irish brogue managed to sound honestly sympathetic for all that Kira suspected he never much considered resenting Starfleet protocol. “Anytime you send personnel to inspect a first-stage radiation hazard, you’ve got to send them in ISHA-approved protective gear.”

“And in my case, that means a hardsuit built to fit a guy like Sisko.”

“Well, they are sort of one-size-fits-all.”

Kira stopped herself just before she snorted again and fogged her faceplate. “One size fits all humans over two meters tall.”

“Yes, ma’am,” O’Brien admitted. “Something like that.”

“Major, I really don’t think you’re giving my proposal the attention that courtesy requires.”

Kira pulled herself hand-over-hand down the outside of the sail, dreaming wistfully of pushing off toward the wormhole and letting it whisk her far away from even the slightest whiff of Ferengi. “O’Brien, isn’t there some way you can cut Quark out of this channel?”

“Not without cutting you off from the station, too, ma’am. Sorry.”

She wondered whether she should tell him how much that concept appealed to her.

“It’s just that Captain Sisko doesn’t appreciate the *spiritual* importance of recreation the way—”

"No, Quark!"

The squeak of pained indignation in her ear couldn't have been more poignant if someone had gone fishing for the barkeep's nonexistent heart with a spoon. "Major, you have my word that everyone will stay to my back three Dabo rooms."

"That's what you promised the *last* time you organized a gambling tournament." She planted her feet again with a *clang* that she felt through her suit but couldn't hear, and pushed open the access door to the inner sail with as much violence as the microgravity would allow. "Instead, the Bajoran Trade Commission wrote up a four-page complaint about increased shoplifting on the Promenade, and Morn filed sexual-harassment charges against no less than six of your players."

The ragged puffing of another sprint along the Promenade balcony was followed by distinctive slap of Quark plastering himself to yet another window. "But *this* year—" Kira could just imagine the sweet-sour smell of his snaggle-toothed grin. "—I've hired an Elasian cohort to serve as exclusive door guards."

"*No!*" Kira watched her radiation gauge soar to an almost alarming level, and punched one fist against the interior lighting panel to brighten the room. "Now, which word of that didn't you understand?"

"Most likely the declarative negative. It's a recurrent problem with the Ferengi, I'm afraid." Even if Kira hadn't recognized the security officer's gruff sarcasm, the growl of naked animosity in Quark's muttering would have told her it was Odo who had walked in on the Ferengi's noxious attempts at charm. "Apparently the Ferengi don't have a word in their language for 'no.'"

Quark sniffed with what Kira suspected was supposed to be indignation, somehow managing to sound both obsequious and offended at the same time. "That's not true," the Ferengi countered. "We have several, depending on how much negotiation it will take to change your mind."

"Tell me you're taking the whole tournament to the Gamma Quadrant," Kira suggested.

"And never coming back," the constable added.

"—then I might consider giving you permission to use