

The intimidating spear point shape of the Imperial Wrath turned away from the now dormant black hole. Accompanying her was a huge fleet of automated supply ships. They contained almost a month's supplies for the fleet. In one of the ships, in a bay of droids something moved. In the darkness of the cargo hold two red dots of light illuminated the darkness. They swept across the dormant forms of protocol and boiler droids, coming to rest on a control panel. Easing its way through the tightly packed forms the other droids TY-32 reached for the panel. The door slid aside, revealing an empty room. The droid took the controls of the ship. Working quickly it began it's task. It began to upload the exabytes of data carried within it's shell into the ship's computer. Then it began the final process. The transmission only lasted for a few minutes. The imperial wrath's computer executing it's own program hard wired into the system. The emperor, during the design of modern KDY ships, had arranged for an agent to be responsible for the basic design of the computers. There was a back door built in. The agent had, of course met with an unfortunate accident, but not before telling the emperor how the system worked. The computer did not report the breach of the control systems to its operators. Instead, once the transmission ended, it rotated a light Turbolaser and vaporised the ship.

The USS Enterprise looked nothing like the Imperial Wrath. It was not designed with intimidation in mind. Although it was technically a fighting ship, it's main function was as a vessel of exploration. On the bridge Captain Picard eased back into his chair, he looked at the screen ahead of him, The star lines slowly moving by at a stately warp two point five. He decided that it was as good a time as any to record an entry in the Captain's log. Pressing the record button on the armrest he began to speak. "Captain's log, Star-date Eleventy-leven and eighty six point negative nine." He stopped. Surely he hadn't actually said that? He looked up. Commander Data turned towards him, saying "Captain, there is no such star-date." From the armrest came the computer's voice. "Well? Hurry up, I do have better things to do." Picard looked down in confusion. "What?" he asked. "I am very busy, get on with it you useless article." Replied the computer. Picard found that his jaw had dropped. He looked up, the entire bridge staff were staring at him in confusion. "What is going on here?" he asked. "Surely you remember me captain? Spelt the same way backwards as forwards." It tailed off. Suddenly the explanation dawned on Picard. One letter. "Q"

he stated. Abruptly he disappeared in a flash of light. He opened his eyes. He was in a large room. The walls were made of granite blocks. There were several exits. "Q" he said aloud, "return me to my ship" "I do not think so captain" floated the voice from above him. Picard looked up. Standing above him, on the ceiling was the familiar form of the entity that called itself Q.

"What do you want this time Q?" he shouted. Q appeared behind him. "Do I need an excuse to rescue you from those reprobates that call themselves your crew?"

"Return me to my ship immediately." Picard stated.

"I will take you back to your flying bucket soon enough, but first I have something to show you."

The being swept his arm out in an expansive gesture, indicating a corridor. Picard looked at him, and then began to walk into the corridor. Following it into another room he looked down a flight of steps. On the far end he could see the planet earth. An unimaginably vast ship passed overhead. The ship took almost three minutes to pass, the room shook, pieces of the stonework falling around them. A montage of images flew across Picard's vision. Apes killing each other, early warfare with chariots and spears, and finally the detonation of the first nuclear weapon, from the perspectives of both the pilot and a victim.

"The Past." Q intoned

Again images bombarded Picard's mind. This time images of conflicts with the Borg, the Cardassians, the Klingons and the Romulans.

"The Present." Said Q.

Finally Picard was drawn back to the vast ship, it's gloss black armour gleaming in the light from Sol.

"And That which is yet to come." Q said.

A green beam lanced out of the ship. It hit the planet below. The entire globe seemed to shudder, Before beginning to fly apart, so very slowly massive meteors were shot out of the surface. Huge gouts of magma assailed the void before beginning to crash down under their mass.

The image sped up showing the devastated planet's orbit irrevocably changed.

The sphere of liberated magma began to grow closer to it's star with every orbit.

"I've seen enough" Picard snapped in anger.

"Have you really, Ebenezer Picard?" Q looked at him searchingly.

"Considering how much you claim to despise us, you do enjoy quoting our literature." He goaded

"Oh, Captive, bound and double ironed," Cried Q, with obvious relish. "Not to know that ages of incessant labour, by immortal Q, for this galaxy must pass into eternity before the good of which it is susceptible is at all developed." With that Picard was back on the bridge of the Enterprise.

Cortsweien also leaned back in his chair. His crew working efficiently. The Delphus was cruising under no power at the fringes of the Risa System. Intelligence had discovered a large amount of cargo passed through that area, and his ship had been dispatched to investigate.

So far they had discovered nothing of any major interest. He was considering the possibility that there may be nothing at all on this planet other than constant hedonism. He made a point to file this planet for his next shore leave once it was conquered.

The man at the sensor station interrupted him from formulating his plans. He looked up, "Repeat that." He instructed. "We are detecting an incoming vessel sir." The operator repeated. "How long until it arrives?" Cortsweien asked. "Half an hour sir." He responded.

"Report it to the Persecutor." Cortsweien ordered.

The guards threw Kira back into the cell. She hit the ground hard, but managed to roll into a standing position. Fortunately, she reflected later that, the disadvantage of their torture was that there were no long-term effects. Standing quickly and turning she saw the door swipe down. Sitting on the metal bunk she looked at the door. It was almost as thick as she was. Whoever these people were, they were not underestimating her. She cursed inwardly.

She tried to recall the layout of the cellblock. There were several lifts at the far end, past the guard post there were two other corridors of cells leading away from that room, and at one end there was a junction, probably leading to the other corridors.

Firstly however she had to discover a method of escaping her cell. She looked around. Then she looked up. There was a grille a few inches below the ceiling. Standing up she touched it with the back of her hand. There was a slight shock and she withdrew her hand sharply, probably nerve induction again. It was unlikely they would let a prisoner have a means of suicide.

She began to formulate a plan.

Koloth sat at his terminal, reviewing the new designs he had found, as he had suspected, in the secret memory core of the ship. Several types of vessel there dwarfed anything ever built before. There were full schematics and notes for the executor class command ship. Opening another file he

casually glanced over it.

The more he read the more powerful the ship became. It was a Behemoth. Dwarfing in size everything but the, now destroyed Death Star. It was labelled the Imperium Class. Alongside were size comparisons. An Executor would easily fit into it's docking bay.

The legend gave it a length of hundreds of kilometres. Koloth wondered how long it would take to build in this backward environment.

"Q" Riker said, "What does he want?"

"I have no idea, he seems to be putting us to the test again."

"Why does he do this? So many times? We have always succeeded."

"It seems he wants to know our breaking point. Regardless I think that something worse than before will happen."

"Nothing could be worse than the borg."

Data's voice came through the Comm-links "Captain, we are approaching the Risa system, ETA five minutes."

"We are on our way." Said Picard, rising from his chair. Looking at Riker he added. I have no idea what Q wanted, we should expect the worst.

On the bridge of the Delphus the communications officer watched two lines of text scroll across his display. He turned to Cortsweien, saying; "Message from the persecutor Sir, they will be arriving for a capture in approximately twenty minutes." The commander turned. "We are to delay them, they recommend minimum weapons settings." Cortsweien nodded.

The Enterprise dropped from warp speed. Behind it another vessel began to approach the fragile looking vessel. On the bridge of the Enterprise the sensor officer turned from her console.

"Captain we are detecting and unidentified ship four thousand kilometres off the stern and closing"

"Should we raise our shields captain?" asked Worf

"No, that could be misinterpreted."

The klingon officer rolled his eyes at the pacifism.

Aboard the Delphus the other commander was similarly perplexed. "Why have they not raised their shields?" he thought. The communications operator turned to the commander. "They are attempting to hail us." He said

"Let them eat static." Said Cortsweien, pausing before ordering; "Fire

across their hull, let's get them interested."

A bolt of green light narrowly missed the Enterprise. On the bridge Worf raised the shields without being asked. "Fire aft torpedoes" shouted Riker.

A fusillade of blue orbs launched themselves at the Delphus. Their

detonations having little effect.

Cortsweien was rocked in his seat. Turning to the pilot he shouted. "Full sublight, now!" The engines of the corvette accelerated the ship below and away from the starfleet vessel.

On the bridge of the Enterprise the captain leaned forwards. "Pursuit course" he ordered. The enterprise pitched down and accelerated. "Fire main phasers" he added.

The continuous red beam of the particle weapons hit the Delphus' shields. The turbolaser turrets fired at lowered power settings into the pursuing ship. On the bridge of the Enterprise a console exploded, burning an unfortunate crewman.

At the same time, in cellblock four of the Imperial Wrath, Two guards opened the door to Kira's cell. The first one was unarmed; the second held a pistol in his hand. She brought the thin bar she had detached from the ceiling around whipping his shoulder with it. Ducking quickly and turning the bar was under his arm.

She spun him around, the stun blast from his companion hitting him. Somewhere in the background an alarm sounded. She charged into the other man, grabbing his weapon arm. The startled guard pulled his arm back. Kira pulled his head down and kned him in the groin, tipping him into the cell. She hit the controls for the door, and it swished down.

She ran along the walkway, turning a corner away from the view of the control room. She could hear shouts from the far end of the corridor.

Cortsweien watched the pursing ship on the screen. It was still firing at them. "How long until the Persecutor arrives?" He asked. The communications controller replied "One minute." He watched the ship.

Admiral Narra listened intently to the report from the detention area, before looking up at Koloth. "Shall she be killed sir?" The Dark Jedi looked back at him. In a voice that sounded like a cold wind he replied; "No, I have an excellent use for prisoners, and besides, I am still interested in the possibilities of the cloaking technology, Tell the guards that I shall be down shortly." He turned and headed for the turbolift at the side of the bridge.

"Captain, Another vessel just appeared." Said the sensor officer.

"Description and range?" asked Picard.

"The vessel is over four kilometres in length, range, seventy thousand meters."

The deck shook. "They've locked a tractor beam onto us!" someone screamed. The screen began to fill with the gaping maw of the huge ship.