

STAR TREK® CORPS OF ENGINEERS



TROUBLESHOOTING

Robert Greenberger

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STAR TREK™

CORPS OF ENGINEERS

#2

Troubleshooting

Robert Greenberger

Based upon *Star Trek*™
and *Star Trek: The Next Generation*™
Created by Gene Roddenberry
and *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*™
Created by Rick Berman & Michael Piller



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CHAPTER

Now

“Priority signal coming from Deep Space 10,” Anthony Shabalala told Captain David Gold from the tactical station.

“On screen,” he said, trying to avoid the sinking feeling in his solar plexus. Had they waited long to peer through the months of smoke and actually find a fire, and if so, was it controllable?

Commander Kesh-Mara appeared on the bridge’s main screen, his eyes narrowed to slits, his flattened nose flaring. *“Captain, the environmental control system has shut itself down and we can’t get it to restart. With emergency filtration and oxygen supplies, the station has at best twenty hours of usable air.”*

Gold looked at Sonya Gomez, his first officer, who had a stricken look on her face. She, in turn, exchanged glances with the second officer, Mor glasch Tev. He was already calling up station specs to a screen by his station. The captain could see from his peripheral vision that Wong had been setting course in advance, proving once more he had a good crew.

“Cause?”

“We don’t know. This could be what the other problems were softening us up for. Maybe it’s unrelated. All I know for certain is I need help.”

“We’re on our way, Commander,” Gold said, mustering more emphasis than he had in his previous conversations with the station’s commandant. As the screen winked off, he saw Wong turn, an expectant expression on his face.

“Execute, maximum warp. Gomez, assemble your people; let’s get ourselves ready for this.”

“Maximum warp, aye,” Wong replied. “ETA six hours, fourteen minutes.”

That gave the crew about fourteen hours to fix the problem before things got dicey. Fortunately, his crew seemed to work best under time constraints.

Less than ten minutes later, Gold took his seat at the head of the conference table in the observation lounge. Most of his team had one or two padds before them and someone had seen to it a schematic of the station was on the wall screen.

“Where are we?” he asked, looking at Nancy Conlon, the *da Vinci*’s chief engineer, and the other officer who had taken a keen interest in the station from the beginning.

“I’ve got the telemetry coming in from Tegor in real time,” Conlon said, glancing at the padd in his

left hand. "It's just as Commander Kesh-Mara said: They have a system-wide failure, never seen anything like it."

"Nor have I," Tev added. "This is a new level of trouble."

"Gomez, does this add a significant piece to your puzzle?"

"I don't know, sir," Gomez said, staring at her padd and not the captain. This certainly had gotten his crew's attention and Gold wondered if they had waited too long to take the station's problem seriously enough. "It could be related, it could be unrelated. We need to see for ourselves. Every other problem was minor and easily corrected. This one threatens every life on the station."

"What is the complement?"

"Six hundred forty-seven," Tev said.

"Sir, the other problems could have been tests of the station and its crew," Corsi suggested.

"I concur," Gomez added.

"What's going on in the spacelanes near the station?"

Gomez paused a moment to check something on a padd, exchanged confirming looks with Corsi and said, "Normal traffic. Long-range station sensors show nothing of a threatening nature."

"Whoever did this may be waiting until the station is abandoned before arriving," Corsi said.

"Can the station be evacuated in the time remaining?" Dr. Elizabeth Lense asked. Gold looked over at her, noting she was clearly showing these days. He was still amazed over the notion of Lense being pregnant, thrilled for her and her choice to keep the child despite the fact that it was conceived in another universe. Once more, he congratulated himself on also bringing aboard qualified help for the doctor, early enough for Sarjenka to get acclimated to the ship and crew before Lense was physically unfit for duty.

"Computer specs say yes, reality says maybe," Corsi said. "They need eight or so hours to fully evacuate personnel after shutting down all systems. In a real emergency, they could be gone in minutes. Specs say there's enough life craft for a thousand people, so capacity is not an issue."

"Assemble your tools, prep your teams, and then get some rest," Gold ordered. "Our first order of business will be to restore the air. In case of deprivation issues, sickbay has to be ready. Gomez, fixing the system is for you and Tev."

Conlon gestured, catching the captain's attention. "I've crawled through some of those systems already, sir. I'd like to stay involved."

"Makes sense to me," Gomez quickly concurred.

"I have no objection," Tev said, which Gold viewed as progress. Six months ago, he would have had several objections.

“Done,” Gold ordered. “Corsi, once order is restored, you get to figure out if sabotage is a real imagined threat.”

“I’m starting to think real,” she said.

Gold’s features hardened and his voice dropped. “Me, too.”

In sickbay, Lense hurried in and began opening cabinet doors, looking for specific medicines. She was worried about having to replicate any of the oxygen compounds she’d need for the station staff. So preoccupied was she in her efforts, she started when she heard the high tones of Sarjenka’s voice.

“Can I be of assistance?”

Over her right shoulder, Lense glared at the young Dreman. She still resented Gold for bringing aboard another doctor without so much as a discussion. Hell, she resented many things these days and frequently reordered the priority of annoyance in her head. Right now, she needed to push those distractions aside and be ready. After all, why prove the captain right?

“Actually, Sarjenka, you could be of some use. Check the DS10 manifest and let’s make sure we’re aware of all atmospheric concerns.”

“Very good, Doctor,” the tall, thin, reddish-skinned woman said and turned away. As she started to call up information, the Dreman looked over her shoulder and asked, “I get the impression you’ve been to the station.”

“A few times,” Lense said, her tone indicating the memory didn’t please her. “A wild-goose chase.”

“I’m sorry?”

“An old Earth phrase, Sarjenka. It means we were there looking for something that didn’t exist. Now we may be proven wrong.”

“What’s happened there before?”

Nine Months Ago

“Captain, we’re receiving new orders from Starfleet Command,” Gomez said as Gold entered the bridge. He gave her a questioning glance as she completed reviewing the orders on the padd in her right hand. Gomez looked up, ready to report, when she saw the questioning gaze linger. For a moment she was perplexed until she realized it must be the bright yellow towel draped over her shoulders.

“I was working out when we got word,” she said by way of explanation.

“That’s new, isn’t it?” he asked gently.

She gave him a sheepish smile and shrugged. “Let’s just say that after visiting Ferenginar, I figured I needed to lose a kilo or two.”

He didn't reply but she spotted a twinkle in his eyes before they narrowed, now questioning the padd in her hand.

"We're being asked to go take a look at Deep Space 10."

"That place just got christened," Anthony Shabalala, the tactical officer, noted.

Gold grunted noncommittally.

Gomez added, "They have some sort of technical glitch and because the teams that built it have scattered, we're being asked to pay them a visit."

"Must be some glitch," Shabalala said.

"I'll presume that because it just went online glitches are to be expected," Gold said. Gomez handed him the padd and dabbed at dripping strands of black hair with the towel. The captain frowned at the information.

"It's all minor from what I can tell. Better get it over with. Plot course and engage at warp three," Gold said. Wong nodded in the affirmative, fingers already at work on the control station.

Moments later, the bridge received a comm signal from Chief Engineer Nancy Conlon. "*Commander Gomez, request permission to beam down with the team.*"

Gold and Gomez exchanged glances. "Well, it's nice to see the grapevine is working at peak efficiency," he began. "I'd like to know why."

"*Have you read anything about the station?*"

"To be honest, I don't think I've heard of the place until today," the captain admitted.

"*It's supposed to be the future, a blend of Federation and Cardassian systems that makes it unique.*"

"I thought that was Deep Space 9, which I've seen and have to admit, wasn't impressed by," Gold said.

"*That was a supreme kludge,*" Conlon said, and her enthusiasm over the speaker brought smiles to the captain and first officer. "*This place supposedly can process information faster than any place the other side of the Daystrom Institute. More than that, it has the latest in networking, sensor grids, and even holodeck technology.*"

"So everything is bright and shiny; I get that."

"*This may be my one chance to really see it,*" Conlon said.

Gomez shrugged. "I have no objection. Nancy could use some more field experience, anyhow." As the chief engineer of a ship full of them, Conlon didn't always get the chance to get involved in the problem solving that the main S.C.E. team did.

“All right, then, Gomez, you can break the news to Stevens that he’s been drydocked,” Gold said.

Conlon and Tev beamed down to the space station along with Gomez. As soon as the transporter beam released them, Gomez saw Nancy begin looking around, craning her neck. The station had that look being brand-new; nothing marred its polished floors or walls, the lighting strong. *Bright and shiny indeed*, Gomez thought. She noted the gleaming ebony wall paneling complete with computer accents was now narrower than previous designs and the designers had added an attractive green border on both edges. The entire station felt built for comfort first, work second, and that was the reverse of her experience in the service.

Kesh-Mara, a Grazerite, approached the party and welcomed them to the station. To Gomez, it was hard to read his expression given his lack of eyebrows and relatively smooth features. From his body language, he was definitely proud of the station.

“Welcome, welcome,” he repeated after Gomez introduced her team.

“What seems to be the problem?” she asked.

Kesh-Mara looked at his feet a moment and then answered. “It’s the damndest thing. We blew out an entire bank of EPS circuits without any record of a power surge.”

Conlon frowned at that, drawing a look from Gomez.

“Ever hear of that?”

Gomez admitted she had not, which got her curious. “I suppose we should go have a look for ourselves. Nancy and I can take care of that. Tev, stick around and see what more you can learn from Mr. Kesh-Mara.”

The second officer’s eyes grew wide in surprise but he kept silent. Gomez still wasn’t sure what to make of the Tellarite, who had been aboard only a few weeks and seemed a know-it-all, which he probably was but didn’t have to demonstrate it with regularity. She pondered that as Conlon accompanied her and a guide to the station’s core.

“I read that they used state-of-the-art circuitry plus some experimental stuff,” Conlon said.

“Is ‘stuff’ a technical term I missed at the Academy?”

“Nope. The ‘stuff’ is similar to bioneural gel packs they started rolling out on the larger starships. Supposed to boost long-range sensor efficiency, which something like this would need.”

“You really are a geek at heart, you know that,” Gomez kidded her counterpart.

“You bet, Commander Kettle,” Conlon quipped.

“Well, they stuck this near the Tallarian border to keep an eye on the Cardassian rebuilding, trying to cut down on piracy and black market goods.” In fact, Gomez noted she was behind in her security briefings on the region, something she didn’t think she’d need to know before the assignment came.

through. Goes to show you need to read *everything* Command sends out.

A moment later, they stood before a lengthy stretch of corridor that was missing several wall panels, exposing the inner workings of the station. Conlon immediately pulled out her tricorder and started taking readings. Gomez preferred to look with her own eyes first, make her own observations before getting the just-the-facts readouts. Scorch marks still could be seen on the piping above and below where the EPS circuits originally sat. The charred, twisted remains of the EPS circuits themselves were a mess of fused wiring and isolar chips. With a sniff, she could still catch a whiff of the initial explosion, trapped and preserved behind the panels. To her, it seemed a familiar and unremarkable odor.

She grinned.

Conlon looked up from her tricorder and saw the smile.

“This I can handle.”

“Blown circuits?”

“After running naked through the rain on Ferenginar, showing Tev more of me than a subordinate should ever see, this is a dream.”

“What do you make of him?”

“Brilliant. His expertise will certainly be an asset,” Gomez replied, reaching inside to get a feel for the wreckage.

“You don’t find him...well, annoying?”

Gomez paused a moment. Then she grinned again. “I didn’t say that, Nancy. Now, what do you find?”

“Nothing out of the ordinary. No trace elements that are out of place, no sign of tampering...”

“Which their security guy told Corsi,” Gomez said, indicating the conversation held en route to the station.

“Good. Could have been a bad set of circuits. Happens.”

“Still damn odd,” Conlon said. She reached to feel the same areas where Gomez already conducted her own inspection. There were ragged edges and a few smudges rubbed off on her fingers. There was absolutely nothing suspicious, just a bad glitch.

“Where’s the station’s chief engineer?” Gomez asked the guide, an Andorian whose name she had forgotten.

“Overseeing the arrival of the replacement EPS circuits,” he said.

“Well, he can replace this. There’s really nothing for us to do here,” Gomez said.

Minutes later, the pair found Tev and Kesh-Mara in the latter's plush office. They declined refreshments and reported their lack of information.

"Well, they did rush things a bit," Kesh-Mara admitted, his voice surprisingly soft.

Gomez said, "Before Starfleet puts anything into operation, be it a starship or a starbase, they test everything within a micron of specs. Wouldn't something like this have been discovered?"

"It's only our largest problem, Commander," Kesh-Mara said. "We've had numerous minor glitches, too. It's getting tiresome, to be honest. More for the repair teams than me, but this goes beyond a shakedown period."

"Starfleet borrowed certain design and manufacturing techniques pioneered by the Cardassians in the building of their Nor space stations," Tev said, interrupting the commandant's next comment. Gomez shot him a look of disapproval while Conlon showed interest in his comment. "Deep Space 1 is the largest example of that and this all may be the result of a steeper than expected learning curve."

"Could it be that simple?" Conlon asked Gomez.

"Wouldn't that be nice," she replied.

CHAPTER

Now

“That was just the first visit?”

Lense gave Sarjenka an unhappy look and nodded. “We were there a few more times and each seemed like such a waste.”

“And now...”

“And now...” Lense echoed. She watched as Sarjenka finished pulling the data from the computer and began reviewing it. *Good, let the kid do the scut work*, she thought. Turning, Lense was ready to go back to her more comfortable office chair.

“Wait a second, where is the blood infuser?”

“In the cabinet to your left,” the Dreman replied.

“I keep it by the door, in that cabinet,” Lense said harshly, gesturing in a vague direction. Sarjenka saw that it could mean one of two cabinets and shook her head, not comprehending the doctor’s hostility.

“We won’t need it now, but I want it back in its place,” Lense ordered and walked out of the room.

“Of course, Doctor,” Sarjenka said.

Lense hoped that when she opened the cabinet, there’d be a spot where a blood infuser would neatly fit.

Sarjenka had already managed to start making friends among the crew, something Lense herself struggled with despite living aboard the *da Vinci* for more than a year now. And that length of time had suddenly grown a lot more finite, as her right hand absently stroked her swelling abdomen.

“She hates me,” Sarjenka said as Conlon walked in the cabin. The engineer noted that Sarjenka had finally finished putting her things in order, despite a promise to do so days earlier. Everything the woman did indicated she wasn’t ready to really live on the ship.

“Now what?” Conlon prompted, avoiding meeting her eyes. Instead, she made a show of folding her uniform top as she changed into her sleeping attire.

“Now it seems I can’t do inventory to her liking.”

Conlon slipped out of her pants, again folding them neatly and hanging them in the closet the

shared. "And how does she like it?"

"Is that the point?" Sarjenka did not seem to be getting the point of hanging up the clothes.

"Well, I know how I like the tools to be stored in engineering and it's not quite as directed in the manual. I find myself fighting with Fabe about where we keep the common tools. I suspect Captain Scott would approve since it's my engine room, but he's as unique as they come." Conlon seated herself on the edge of her bunk, brushing her hair.

Sarjenka's face fell. "I know it's her space and she's allowed to have things her way, but she never explains her way to me. My people aren't mind readers."

"Well, that's good to know," Conlon said with a smile.

Sarjenka didn't return the smile and just sat on her bed. "I spent the rest of the shift reviewing information about DS10."

"Amazing place, isn't it?" Conlon asked, enthusiasm in her voice.

"If you say so; you're the engineer."

"I practically had to beg to stay involved when we went back a second time. It's got cutting-edge stuff you'd never see on a ship."

"Could those cutting-edge things be causing the atmospheric problems?"

"I doubt it," the engineer replied. "They've been cursed." Conlon put the brush down, ready to get some rest before the mission began in earnest. "Sarj, did you ask Lense to explain her ways?"

"No. She's the superior officer and I assumed she would show me around. Dantas has been more helpful and I outrank *her*!"

Conlon wrapped her arms around a raised knee and collected her thoughts. She wanted the whining to end and make the conversation productive. If they were going to live together, she had to live by her own words.

"Sarj, because she's your commanding officer, if you suspect she has her own ways, you should be asking. There are forty-three of us on this ship, and if we don't make an effort to get along, meet each other halfway whenever possible, there will be fights in the corridors every hour. And you'll have no time to get mad at Lense, because you'll be setting bones."

She sat silently for a few moments and Conlon had not yet learned to read her more subtle expressions or body language. That would come in time, she hoped. Finally Sarjenka let out a small smile. "I got top marks in bone knitting," she said.

Conlon broke into a grin. There might be hope for the kid yet.

A few hours later, Conlon made sure Sarjenka was dressed and ready for a meal before they had to

work. Dr. Sarjenka certainly knew the value of rest and Chief Engineer Conlon knew the equal value of fuel. ~~The mess was a hive of activity as many of the alpha shift crew were clearly looking for the same quick meal. Haznedl and Wong were on their way out as the roommates walked in, exchanging quick nods.~~

Sarjenka was already at the food slots while Conlon scanned the room for friendly faces. Well, not that there were unfriendly ones, but the ones she wanted to enjoy before things went to hell, which was to be expected on these missions. She hurried over and ordered her own meal before joining the doctor at a table that was already accommodating Bart Faulwell and Tev. *What an odd friendship*, she thought, not for the first time. Mentally shrugging it off, she headed in that direction.

“Morning,” Faulwell said cheerfully. Of all the crew, the slightly older man was the one who usually put newcomers at ease. Conlon nodded, already grabbing her spoon and digging into her steaming bowl of what she liked to refer to as “mush.”

“So, Sarjenka, what’s our chief engineer like first thing in the morning?” he asked amiably, lingering over a cup of tea.

“Firing on all plasma injectors,” Sarjenka said, clearly making an effort. It earned her a smile from Faulwell and an odd look from Tev.

“I take it you’re not as quick to alertness,” Bart continued.

“Not without a few cc’s of cordrazine,” Sarjenka said around a mouthful of toast. “I manage.”

“I was explaining to Bartholomew what I suspect to be the problem on the station,” Tev said abruptly changing the subject back to himself. Conlon figured she would just smile and nod; it seemed to work for most of the crew.

He looked for a prompt from around the table but, seeing none, went on anyway. “The system flaws must all be related to a miswiring of the ODN network. I suspect it happened during construction and with each error it has multiplied, stressing the systems until it caused a cascading failure.”

Conlon dropped her spoonful of mush with a loud “splooch” sound. “The whole network? Even matrix and relay? Wouldn’t that cause more than one problem, catastrophic as the current one is?”

“That’s a distinct possibility,” Tev agreed.

“But we have the one problem,” Conlon said.

“It might not be the whole network, simply one of the matrices,” the Tellarite argued.

“Tegor would have found it on inspection long before now,” she said hotly, trying not to let the know-it-all second officer get to her.

“I never had the opportunity to work with him,” he said, raising his voice for emphasis.

He’d be getting his chance, Conlon considered, as her mind drifted back to the last time she had

worked with the station's chief of operations.

Six Months Ago

Conlon was just putting away her tools, having tweaked the matter injectors because she was bored when her combadge signaled. She tapped it with one hand while placing the hyperspanner in its locker.

"Lieutenant, I have the chief engineer at Deep Space 10 asking to speak with you," Shabalala said from the bridge.

Conlon frowned. She had been on the station two months ago and hadn't even met the engineer. The visit was so brief and inconsequential that she was mystified as to what he might want. Standing and brushing off some dust, she walked to her master console and said, "Pipe it down here, Tony."

Moments later, the dark features of an Icorian stared at her. He was dusky skinned, leaning toward the purples and grays, with white streaks in his close-cropped hair. He looked anything but happy.

"This is Nancy Conlon."

"I know. I asked for you. Tegor."

Well, isn't he a friendly one? "How can I help?"

"More glitches."

"What sort?"

"All minor, to be honest. Programming errors, misapplied chips, but it's a higher percentage than Kesh-Mara is happy with."

"Something your size is bound to have things go a little wonky the first few months, right?"

"This seems to go beyond that."

"Is there anything you can't fix?"

He visibly stiffened on the screen, which impressed her since he seemed stiff to begin with. *"My team was handpicked by me, and nothing has proven beyond our capabilities. However, the errors persist. We've got one of the contractors coming back for a look and I've been asked to invite you to join us."* He didn't want her there, that much was clear from his tone, but orders were orders. She understood that, too.

"Understood, Tegor." She could tell his pride was wounded and would need to work gingerly around him. "I'll talk to Captain Gold and be in touch when we're en route."

Kesh-Mara once again greeted the away team from the *da Vinci*, which consisted of Nancy along with Sonya Gomez and Fabian Stevens. The Grazerite smiled as readily as before, but this time it seemed forced. Standing beside the commandant was Tegor, short and stocky and looking as happy to see

them as he was when extending the invitation. Nearby stood someone not in uniform, but in something brown, stiff, and uncomfortable looking. Nancy recognized her as a Bajoran but something was off about her.

“Kesla Randu, contractor, may the Prophets be with you,” she said, shooting out a well-manicured hand. Gomez took the hand and shook it once. She quickly introduced the rest of her team and Kesla repeated the greeting to each one, her smile revealing brilliant white teeth.

“Sorry to bring you back, Commander,” Kesh-Mara said finally. “But these problems seem to be continuing so there has to be a reason.”

“I agree,” Sonya said amiably. “And I like having us do something a little more in keeping with our mission.”

“Oh?”

“We just finished putting a bad businessman out of action. A little too much high finance and finagling for my taste. We’re looking forward to this.”

“You handled Rod Portlyn,” Randu said excitedly, finally joining the conversation. “I heard about that from the Federation News Service specials. Nice work. Really.”

“Just another day at the office,” Sonya said, looking slightly embarrassed by the attention.

“Shall we get started, then?” Tegor said, clearly not one for chitchat.

“By all means,” Nancy replied. She hefted her toolbox and gestured with it for the station’s chief engineer to lead them on. Kesla Randu followed, keeping her own counsel.

“Any theories?” Sonya asked her fellow commander.

“None. I don’t want to suspect the worst from people. This is a new station, using some new techniques in its construction, as your man said on your last visit. Any time you try something new the unforeseen happens.”

“A fellow optimist, I see,” Fabian said with a laugh.

Kesh-Mara exhaled. “I try.”

Tegor took them several decks below and deeper within the bowels of the station than they had seen before. Nancy stared in happy fascination to see how some of the new circuit patterns were working and the way the modified gel packs were housed and monitored. She had enough leave saved that she thought she could tolerate Tegor, and he, she’d use a week’s time and poke around the station. Engineering was more than her job, but a passion, and here was a chance to indulge it a bit.

She glanced at Tegor, who seemed positively grim, and decided against requesting any leave.

As they walked, they would stop and he would gesture at something. The first time they stopped, I

pointed to a doorway. “These doors refused to open for one hour and seventeen minutes,” he said. ~~“Manual override didn’t work. Neither did rerouting the command sequences. Brute strength was useless, which pleased our security people.”~~

“What fixed it?” Sonya asked.

“Two of my people had to pull out every bolt and had to literally rebuild the door frame.”

Randu blinked at that, uncertainty in her eyes. Nancy figured the construction rep was worried that the door was her concern. When Tegor didn’t look her way, she visibly exhaled, causing Nancy to roll her eyes.

Every now and then Tegor paused as Sonya took a scan or Randu measured something and entered notes onto a padd. Nancy noted he wasn’t much for conversation or elaboration, probably one of those engineers who were very good with warp cores and unable to hold an extended conversation with real people. She encountered way too many of those types while studying at Starfleet Academy. Fortunately, they mostly wound up doing research, where they seemed happiest.

“Have any of these incidents been life threatening?”

“No, Ms. Kesla.”

Fabian grinned. “Well, that’s something, isn’t it?”

“Yes, Mr. Stevens.”

“What happened here?” Sonya asked.

“Isolinear chips glitched, rerouting wastewater away from the recyclers.”

“How does that happen?”

“I think that’s why we’re all looking around.”

And so it went. Nancy figured Tegor and Tev would get along just swell. She was getting to know the second officer somewhat better but still thought someone needed to take him down a peg or two. Still, he let her work her way, which kept the peace for now.

Two hours later, there was still no real sense of a common thread linking the problems. Nancy was beginning to think it might be a contractor problem and that Tev, Lord help her, was right, and they maybe rushed with the unfamiliar.

As they finally returned to the commandant’s office, Kesla Randu excused herself to contact her firm. Once she left, Nancy leaned into Sonya and said softly, “I figured it out.”

“What? The problem?”

“No, Kesla. She’s the first happy-looking Bajoran I’ve ever seen. Everyone else has been so somber.”

Sonya nodded and then broke into a smile when she saw her shipmate P8 Blue talking with Kesla Mara. ~~The structural engineer was introduced to Tegor, who only nodded at her. Kesla, walking back from her call, was friendlier and genuinely interested in talking with the Nasat. No doubt the Bajoran woman had never spoken with Pattie's species before.~~

“What did you learn?”

“The station is fine,” Pattie said in her clicking voice. “The exterior is also fine. This list of problems has not threatened the integrity of the station.”

“Good,” Tegor said.

“Everything is within the design specs,” Pattie added.

“Well, of course,” the Bajoran said proudly. “Maybe we’ve seen the last of these problems.”

“Famous last words,” Nancy whispered to Sonya, who nodded.

CHAPTER

Now

“Approaching Deep Space 10,” Wong said.

“You beat the estimate,” Gold said admiringly.

“All part of the service,” he replied.

“Station keeping, please.” He turned to his first officer. “What’s the plan, Gomez?”

“Nancy and I will poke around and see what’s wrong, fix it, and let everyone take a deep breath.”

“And when that doesn’t work the first time?” he asked wryly.

“Then I have Domenica coordinate with their security chief, send Pattie in search of something structural, and we get serious.”

“As opposed to the first time you and Conlon tampered with their systems.”

“Pretty much.”

“Get started. I can only imagine the panic they’re feeling. In fact, let’s skip part one, and get serious the first time.”

Gomez nodded once and gestured to Tev, who silently watched the banter, clearly not amused. Gomez didn’t much care, given that banter was something humans perfected, while Tellarites were better at the craft of arguing. Together, they left the bridge and collected a variety of tools before heading to the transporter. Already awaiting them were P8 Blue, Corsi, Lense, and someone else behind the tall security chief. As the bodies shifted, Gomez saw it was Lauoc Saon, the much more compactly built Bajoran security guard. She hadn’t gotten to know him well, but saw that Corsi had given him high ratings so that was good enough for her.

Lense began handing out rebreathers, which the engineer appreciated. As they affixed the device to their uniforms, Gomez addressed her team.

“Okay, team, here’s the protocol. It’s *their* station but they called *us* in to fix the problem. Elizabeth, you’re with Nancy and me to check the source of the problem. Pattie, until we need you, keep alert. Tev, you monitor everything from the control room. Let’s get the job done and let them have the station back in one piece. We tell them everything we’re doing and also share whatever we find along the way. We’re all Starfleet here so let’s not get caught up in boundary issues—it’ll just waste time and needlessly piss someone off.”

The heads nodded or bobbed in agreement as they took the platform. Laura Poynter was ready to execute the order but paused to wish them luck before engaging the transporter.

Moments later, the team had rematerialized on the station and Gomez could already tell how foul the air was getting. Lauoc was slipping the clear plastic mask of the rebreather over his wrinkled nose. Lense had begun scanning with her tricorder and Gomez spotted Kesh-Mara and Tegor approaching. Neither looked happy, which was no surprise.

“We have implemented emergency conditions, keeping people closer together, feeding fresh air to fewer portions of the station,” Tegor said brusquely.

“As the captain recommended,” Gomez said approvingly.

“Actually, as Commander Kesh-Mara ordered,” the Icorian said.

Gomez held her breath to avoid saying something and then choked as she stifled a cough brought on by the stale air. She quickly introduced her team and then asked the commandant to have Corsi meet with the station security chief. With a nod of her head, she indicated that she was getting to work. Everyone knew his or her role so they hurried off and as they did, Gomez mulled over whether or not she'd find an actual gremlin causing the havoc.

Five Months Ago

“Plasma manifolds just don't shut down on their own,” Kesh-Mara complained from the viewscreen. In his cabin, David Gold looked at the bewildered expression on the Grazerite's face.

“No, they don't.”

“Replicators also don't suddenly delete personal menu options.”

“Uh-huh.”

“And don't start me on the waste reclamation issue.”

“I won't.” His smile didn't get one in return. Obviously Kesh-Mara was having more than his share of problems. Anything new will have its share of shakedown issues, but Kesh-Mara was certainly right, this had gone on longer than it should have. “Does Tegor have any new theories?”

“Nothing repeatable over an open comm system.”

“Understood. Is he able to repair everything?”

“He's got an excellent team under him. In fact, I have a fix-it wiz named Ajit Ross who would be a credit to your team. He's tackled most of these and everything he's touched has stayed fixed.”

Gold was somewhat amused at the praise since most commanders think they have people good enough for the S.C.E., but just because they can fix a starship or starbase doesn't always mean they have what it takes for the sheer variety of problems his people handled. He was proud of his own team.

and for a moment he wasn't sure when was the last time he had said that out loud. His veterans like Stevens and Blue knew the opinion, but the many newcomers over the last year might not be aware of his feelings. Something for later.

"...and I want you to consider this seriously."

"I'm sorry, can you say that again?" He hadn't realized he wasn't listening to the command anymore.

"I said, Captain, after six months I think this is more than manufacturing defects. I suspect someone is out to distract us from our job."

"Sabotage?"

"Can you rule it out?"

"No. What about your security chief?"

"He has no solid evidence but agrees the sheer volume is starting to look suspicious. Can you come back for a more extended look?"

"We have a currently scheduled mission; let me see what I can do," Gold said noncommittally. He signed off from Kesh-Mara and asked Gomez to join him in his cabin.

Minutes later, Gomez walked in and was invited to sit. She had an expectant look on her face and Gold quickly filled her in on the conversation.

"Sabotage?"

"On the surface, it sounds pretty drastic," Gold admitted.

"Sir, sabotage would disable the entire station at a critical time. These are, well, just a large number of glitches. I suspect the contractors were hurried, given the amount of rebuilding still going on across the Federation."

"Could be."

Gomez's eyes widened at the comment. She shook her thick, black hair in disbelief. "You're not coming around to his way of thinking?"

"No, not quite. I am, though, thinking we need something simple to investigate after the morass of a quagmire on Mariposa."

"If it *is* sabotage, then it could be dangerous."

"I thought I've seen it all," Gold said quietly. "My instincts say these are all too random to be something intentional but there's no overt threat. Let's complete the mission to Bundinal and see what happens."

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