

Star Trek: The Cantabrian Expeditions
Gravity
Part of *Star Trek: Pendragon Other Knights* Anthology
By Scott Fack

He said we were on a different track. Or maybe this was the way things were supposed to happen, and he was wrong. Either way, Fate seemed to gently steer things back in the right direction. People who were supposed to meet did. If one was meant to be born, fall in love, break up, or die, one followed through. Things unfolded as they should.

The first time I heard the whispering, I thought I'd gone mad, that Starfleet would strip my commission from me, and I'd be sitting in a cell staring at the same four padded walls for a very long time. But all the 24th century technology and its wonderful abilities, thank God, determined I wasn't mad, that I'd merely expanded my abilities by chance, a rare fluke of my genetic code being manipulated all those years ago by an ancient race called the M'Tar, influenced by the collapsing Bajoran wormhole's radiation.

But the whispering grew louder, nagged me about an unavoidable fate no matter what reality I lived in. At some sort of base level, things always pretty much turned out the same, so why would this be different? He was right, of course. Fate sometimes needed a little help to get things rolling in the right direction. And, if we didn't get things rolling, the Federation would be in for a pretty rude awakening.

Captain Daniel Radke walked the Promenade, his hand gliding over the railing as he stared out at the stars, ships dotted in standard formation against the mainly black canvas. Of course, this Promenade was slightly different from the original Deep Space 9's Promenade. Quark upgraded a few areas of his bar he hadn't been happy with. Some of the stores were different, the memories too fresh for others to return. *And some hadn't made it back, dying in that fight... God, how long ago had it been? Seven years? Wow.*

The smell of charred flesh and burned out conduits gathered in the back of his nose, the sour memories of a fierce battle that was – how could he put it? – a waste of Starfleet's resources. The whole

civil war had been a giant diversion from where they should have been, and, even years later, they were still rebuilding, still struggling to get back on their feet. But the Federation President had it right. After the dark days of isolationism after the war, the Federation was finally starting to walk again.

Problem is, I'm too impatient to want to learn to walk again. I'd rather run, break into a sprint and see what's out there.

He noticed a face in the distance, a Starfleet officer he felt he should know, but didn't quite. And then it dawned on him, as he approached the captain. *This is the man he talked about.*

With a spring in his step, his heart racing slightly, Captain Radke approached the officer whose face was in profile to him as he stared out the large portholes towards the Denorios Belt. *Pull away from the crowd. Screw what they say; start running.*

"Captain," Radke said as he approached; his mouth nearly continued saying the captain's name, but his mind halted him in time. He stopped at the officer's side, joining him in gazing out at a *Pendragon*-class starship sail by and the asteroids tumbling in random directions. Well, the larger rocks, anyway. It was difficult to see the field as it was so far away, but... the larger ones reflected the Bajoran sun as they twisted and twirled along their merry little way. He just *imagined* all that tumbling and twisting and twirling and...

"You were at the ceremony," the other officer said. "Amazing how they replaced DS9."

"It's only one of many things they need to rebuild and replace, Captain." Daniel Radke smiled, extending a hand. "I'm Captain Daniel Radke, by the way. Of the *Cuxhaven*."

The other officer took his hand and shook it. Radke nearly mouthed his response. "Captain Noah Wrightson of the *Cantabrian*. You were at the Battle of Deep Space 9, weren't you?"

Radke laughed uneasily. "Yes, but there were lots of ships there. How did you know?"

Wrightson smiled, his grey eyes sparkling. "You beat the living daylights out of Captain de Gaillimhe and his ship." His eyebrows raised. "I never really liked that guy."

The *Cuxhaven*'s commanding officer frowned slightly, leaning up against the bulkhead next to the porthole. "Well, he *was* picking off escape pods from the station, babbling something about a changeling threat could be in one of them. I told him to stop giving into his lust for blood." He sighed. "And, I know a lot about Liam. I dated him at the Academy." Before the New Zealander could say anything more, Radke put his hands up. "It ended badly. End of story about Liam de Gaillimhe."

“Back to the war then. You and your crew faced a great risk to save those people.” Wrightson gestured for Radke to join him walking, and the two started to retrace the path the latter had taken a few moments ago.

The *Cantabrian*'s captain gestured with his hands while he talked, going this way and that with them, while the *Cuxhaven*'s captain planted his hands behind his back. “I mean, didn't your ship suffer some pretty major damage facing the *Aotearoa* and getting caught in the aftermath of the wormhole collapsing?”

“We did, but it was worth it, with the people we saved. They say the *Ambassador*-class can handle about a thousand people maximum aboard, but I think we doubled that limit. It wasn't comfortable but...” Radke looked over at Wrightson and noticed how familiar his face looked, how used to his New Zealand accent he was. He and his voice stopped, with Wrightson halting and turning a few steps away from him.

“Captain?”

“I'm sorry, Captain Wrightson...”

“Noah.” He smiled. “Call me Noah.”

“...Noah.” Radke pointed at himself. “Daniel.” His cheeks were hot, and he felt he could be blushing. “Have we met before?”

Wrightson frowned. “Not that I can remember. Why?”

“You seem so familiar to me. Like we should know each other a lot better than we actually do.” Radke shrugged as he rejoined Wrightson, and the two started to walk again. “I must be thinking of someone else.”

“Must be.” The *Cantabrian*'s commanding officer nodded over towards Quark's. “You ever been in there?”

“When it was open on the old DS9.” Radke smiled. “Some of my crewmates and I used to hang out there, play a little bit of dabo and have a few drinks, while we were waiting for reassignment.” His eyes grew dimmer. “Wow, that was years ago. Right at the start of the war.”

A cheeky smile grew over Wrightson's face. “Would you care to join me for a drink?”

The *Cuxhaven*'s captain cocked his head slightly, his mouth upturned on the left side, as his eyes returned to the here and now. “Sure. Sure, I'd love to.”



He laid on his bed, wishing the room would slow down in its spin. *Romulan ale. Does it every freakin...*

“Daniel.” The voice sounded distant.

Great. I'm fighting off nausea, spinning rooms, fatigue and he has to get on the transdimensional pipeline.

“Daniel.” The voice was more persistent.

Daniel Radke kicked himself up off the bed, stumbling to the bathroom. One hand rested next to the mirror, the other on top of the basin, and he focused on the mirror.

“Daniel.” An image started to take form in the mirror, replacing his own. As it rippled like water disturbed by a rock, the background behind the image replaced, showing a different cabin aboard a different starship.

The person in the mirror was another him.

“I’m a little ineb... ineb... drunk at the moment. Could you call back later?” He felt a bit of sick rising in his stomach, up his esophagus.

“*You know how fickle this is, with moons and planets and whatever needing to be aligned,*” the him from another reality replied. His doppelganger wore a blue uniform with commander’s pips on it – a detail he’d not noticed before – his attention drawn to it by his double fiddling with the collar.

“You’re... I’m... We’re *such* drama queens. You’re only a commander?”

“*In this reality, yes. I’m still a counselor, although some of my colleagues have run into duplicates of me in other realities where I’m a captain, or where...*”

“God, am I that long winded? Ten words or less.”

The alternate Radke gave him a frown, his eyebrows creasing in the middle of his face. “*You’re drunk.*”

“No thanks to you.” Radke’s finger smacked the mirror’s surface. “*You* told me to go meet him.”

“*Who? Noah?*” The counterpart folded his arms.

“Ooh, defensive position.” Off his alternate’s glare: “Yes, Noah. But I don’t know why I was meant to meet him. He looks familiar. Not a bad looking guy, either...”

“Listen. You need to convince him, and John, and whoever will listen that the M’Tar are back.”

“What?” Radke scoffed. “The M’Tar? Didn’t we cork them back in their little Domain-thingy or whatever they called it back in...” He squinted. “Uh, 2367? God. 12 years ago! Why is everyone reminding me of how old I’m getting lately?”

“That didn’t stop them. It only slowed them down.” His alternate’s face grew grim, the sparkle lost from his eyes, as he approached the mirror closer, the light illuminating his hair like a halo, his eye sockets growing dark with shadow. *“Listen. This is very important. The M’Tar influenced several races here in this reality. Well, in most realities we’ve come across. And after your reality had a civil war...”*

Radke clutched the basin as he attempted to remain steady. “Hey. If that chroniton radiation made me able to talk to other Daniel Radkes in other realities, how can *you* do it?”

His alternate’s face grew pink, and he sighed. *“Listen to me. Stop changing the subject! In at least two other timelines I’ve encountered, the M’Tar influenced a race called the Mybr’an. They’re located near the Typhon Expanse.”*

“Which expanse?”

“Get a PADD. Write this all down. It’s important.”

His head pulsed. He rubbed his temples as the alarm clock rang out. Not as if he’d slept a good wink last night.

His feet swung out onto the coldish floor as he sat up in bed, still rubbing his temples. *Why do they still serve Romulan...*

One eye opened and fell upon the PADD, a headline on it flashing. As the other eye opened, his left hand snatched the PADD as his right hand smacked the alarm clock into silent mode.

As his eyes scanned the PADD, his stomach dropped, his skin paled and his hands went numb.



The observation lounge on the *Advantage* looked similar to those aboard most *Sovereign*-class starships, although, he figured, this would probably be the second largest gathering of captain-or-higher ranked Starfleet officers in one room since DS9's ceremony and subsequent functions a few days ago.

Admiral John Greene sat at the table's head, his hands folded, his glance far away as if deep in thought. With her arms folded, Captain Kari Eriksson, her dark hair slicked back, stood behind him, her green eyes jutting from person to person. To Greene's left, Captain Anne Tedesco, still beaming from her recent wedding to Steve, reviewed the information on her PADD. To her left sat Captain Wrightson, uneasy at being the only person who didn't really know anyone else at the table, a stranger amongst friends. Captain Hahn Jun-Seok tapped his fingers on the tabletop, sitting to Greene's right, while Captain Rafe Mahler ran his pointing finger over the edge of the PADD, then looked to the other end of the table, his blue eyes scanning Captain Daniel Radke.

"Thanks, everyone, for coming." Radke's knuckles were white as he held a PADD in his hands. "I have some disturbing information I've received from a confidential source..."

Eriksson sighed. "Not this other reality you? You gathered us here because of *that*?" She turned to glance at Anne. "He does this every time."

John Greene, the senior most officer, raised his hand, and Eriksson fell quiet. "His source has been right about other things before. You know that Kari. Let's hear him out."

Radke nodded, a strained smile on his face, and he continued. "My source – which has been verified as being real by at least seven leading Federation doctors and scientists, thank you – has led me to believe the M'Tar are back, and better armed than before."

"The... M'Tar?" Captain Wrightson looked uneasily at his PADD, trying to find any information on the M'Tar he could. He glanced around the room at the others, sorely aware he was out of the loop.

The *Prospect-A*'s Anne Tedesco leaned over to Wrightson, her hand pushing his PADD to rest on the table. "An ancient race, now living in a layer of subspace known as the M'Tar Domain, bent on taking over the universe. We thought we'd sealed them in there good and tight 12 years ago."

Wrightson returned his attention to Radke. "Ah. Okay. Obviously not."

Eriksson spoke up again, clearing her throat first. Her tone was softer. "I didn't mean to imply this other you was a figment of your imagination, Daniel. It's just..." She scanned the ceiling,

then looked back at him. “How do we know this other you isn’t working for the M’Tar? Building up our trust in him before lulling us into a trap?”

Anne looked to Kari, then John. “She has a very valid point.”

The three turned their attention to Daniel. “I trust him. Since he’s in my head, and I’m in his, when we communicate, I can sense whether he’s being deceptive or not. He’s being honest.”

Admiral Greene locked eyes with Radke for a few seconds before he nodded for the *Cuxhaven*’s commanding officer to continue.

“He – the me from another reality – believes the M’Tar have infiltrated a reptilian race near the Typhon Expanse known as the Myhr’an.”

Hahn frowned. “The Myhr’an. They have been very aggressive toward other races in the vicinity over the past 7 or 8 years, and have grown their territory threefold in that time.” The Korean commanding officer of the *Seoul* bit his lip before continuing. “It could be possible.”

“What does this have to do with us?” The *Winterthur*’s Captain Mahler leaned back in his chair before leaning forward, resting his arms on the table. “I mean we’re in the middle of rebuilding the Federation. We can’t face another war.”

“If the M’Tar threat grows,” Admiral Greene said with certainty, a calm yet stern authority in his voice, “we face a war we won’t be able to win.” He slid his chair back and stood, pacing around the table towards Radke’s position. “We’ve fought them before and have seen how devious they are, how far they will go to achieve their objectives.”

Greene stopped next to Radke, waving a PADD as he spoke. “I’ve reviewed the data. There’s some seriously strong evidence to back-up Daniel’s, for lack of a better word, doppelganger’s allegations.” He tossed the PADD lightly, and it clacked as it hit the tabletop and slid a few centimeters. “The information I’m about to share with you is top secret, so it shouldn’t be divulged to other sources. Starfleet has already sent the *Waka*, the *Hastings* and the *Whakatane* to the area, and all three have gone missing, declared lost officially, but we’re secretly certain the ships have been destroyed. The information they did gather was disturbing. Stories of entire populations of colonies taken to internment camps, their bodies being used for some purpose or another. Whispers of people disappearing in the night, returning as different people. Experimentation with subspace technologies, such as portals to subspace domains, subspace rifts, et cetera. So…” The admiral looked to Radke, then

the others in the room. “We have orders from Starfleet Command to send a fleet to the Myhr’an border in order to assess the allegations.”

“And if we find the allegations are true? What then?” Anne Tedesco leaned on her right elbow on the table’s top.

“It could lead to a war. A war to eliminate the M’Tar threat and liberate the Myhr’an, if possible.”

An uneasy silence fell over the room. No one looked at anyone else for a few moments.

Radke cleared his throat. “I also have to report that, according to my source, in at least three other realities he’s aware of, his own included, the Myhr’an race have been driven to the brink of extinction by the M’Tar, replacing their race with M’Tar clones.” He turned to Greene. “Some of those stories our ships reported could be true.”

“So,” The *Hope*’s commanding officer Kari Eriksson said as she pushed herself away from the wall. “We may already be too late to save the Myhr’an.”

“But just on time to save ourselves and the rest of the quadrant,” Wrightson chimed in, completing Eriksson’s line of thinking.

Admiral Greene folded his arms. “Any other questions?”

Another silence filled the room.

“Good. We’ll depart from DS9 at 0800 tomorrow morning. Dismissed.”

As the commanding officers of Starfleet starships rose to leave the room, John Greene rested his hand on Radke’s shoulder. The latter turned. “Sir?”

“Daniel, I’m afraid Starfleet has only allowed us six ships in the initial task force.” The admiral moved to the viewports, looking out at the rest of the *Advantage* behind the observation lounge. “I had to choose a ship to leave behind...”

“That’s fine.” Radke swallowed hard before continuing. “I understand.”

Greene turned and smiled at the *Cuxhaven*’s commanding officer. “I said a *ship* to leave behind. I want you to accompany us.” He approached the captain. “Years ago, Amila Thon told us we all needed to be there to defeat the M’Tar. And I’m not leaving you behind.”



Captain Daniel Radke stepped onto the *Cantabrian's* bridge and was astonished at the hustle and bustle of the *Excelsior*-class starship's nerve center.

He dodged an ensign here and a lieutenant there, making his way down the steps between the counselor's and tactical stations, to the command circle. Captain Noah Wrightson, PADD in hand, nodded to another officer as he handed the PADD back to him. "Thank you, Lieutenant Commander Lawless."

He turned, a warm smile growing over his face, as he saw Radke. "Captain," Wrightson said as he rested a hand on Radke's arm. "Welcome aboard. Thanks for joining us. As I'm the captain with the least amount of experience with the M'Tar, we'll need as much help as we can get."

Radke's face flushed as the ops station at the bridge's front sounded. Their attention turned to Lawless, now at the ops station. "Sir," the Maori second officer stated. "We're being hailed by Admiral Greene aboard the *Advantage*. We're to get underway."

Wrightson gestured towards a chair next to the one he took in front of the tactical station. The *Cuxhaven's* former commanding officer perched uneasily on the secondary seat. The *Cantabrian's* captain didn't notice.

"Commander Fernandes: Signal DS9 and inform them we're ready for departure."

"*So you've told him everything?*" The form in the mirror had one eyebrow raised.

"No, not *everything*." Captain Radke pulled the uniform top off as he paced around the bathroom. "He'll think I'm some sort of psycho. 'Hi. Did you know my alternate reality self, the idea of which really freaks you out, or so my Spidey-sense tells me, says in three out of four alternate realities he's experienced, we're together as a couple?'"

"*Actually, I've only seen...*"

"Yeah, yeah, no need to be a detail freak. I was just picking random numbers out of my head."

The door chime interrupted his sentence. Eyes wide, he looked at his doppelganger in the mirror. The double shrugged. "*Maybe it's him?*"

Radke raised his pointing finger at his reflection. "Hold that thought." He leaned around the corner, his hand resting on the doorframe. "Come in!"

The door hissed open, and Noah Wrightson walked in, his profile darkening as the door hissed shut again. His eyes darted around the cabin before falling upon Radke's face. He smiled. "Beware of Romans bearing gifts." Lifting a hand, he held a bottle of Saurian brandy, his smile widening even more. "This isn't a bad time, is it?"

Radke moved out from the washroom, his uniform jacket still dangling on the pointing finger on his other hand. "No, not at all. Come in." He threw the jacket onto his bed in the separate bedroom before walking to a drawer in the living area. Sliding it open, his hands pulled out two tumblers, setting them down on a table.

Wrightson glanced around the room. "Wow, they did a good job on the refits of the guest quarters, didn't they?" He planted the bottle down on the table before moving towards the viewports, the stars streaking by.

The *Cuxhaven's* former commanding officer pulled the cork out of the bottle, then poured two glasses. "They are very comfortable, I have to admit." He put the bottle back down. His hands picked up the full tumblers, one in each hand, as he moved into the living area, joining Captain Wrightson, handing him a drink.

"Thank you," Wrightson said as he took a glass. His lips sipped at it before returning it down. "So, explain to me more about this M'Tar thing. Captain Tedesco was saying something about a... time traveler?"

Radke smiled. "Amila Thon. Admiral Greene, his current first officer George Serigos, and a few others encountered her and her ship in the aftermath of the Battle of Wolf 359. She said as long as we were together, we could defeat the M'Tar. Compared us to a sort of chess board."

Wrightson took another sip. "So who's what?" A smile crept across his face.

The *Cuxhaven's* former captain laughed. "I'd like to think we're all knights. Knights of the Roundtable, on a journey to slay the dragon." He lifted his tumbler to Wrightson. "To new journeys, old friends and new faces in the battle, Noah."

"To the battle, Daniel." Wrightson lifted his glass. "And to us."

"Yes." Radke felt the butterflies rise in his stomach: a feeling he hadn't felt since... well, since Jason all those years ago. A smile replaced his concerned look. "To us."



And that was the beginning of Fate bringing us all together again. Things returned to the way they should be, as they were meant to be. Me and Noah. Our friends facing the M'Tar. Back on our journey again, the path to force the ancient evil out of our quadrant, our galaxy, our universe forever.

That night Noah and I kissed. I wasn't sure what the Starfleet protocol on that was, one captain kissing another, as fraternization regulations ranged from ship to ship, and the rules were relaxed again once we weren't at war with one another. Although I must admit kissing was a lot better than blasting a hole in another Starfleet ship's hull.

I wanted that moment to last forever, the moment where his lips met mine and he rested his hand in the small of my back, my hands on his waist and chest.

But happiness was short, something to catch, like a butterfly, admire then set free.

Commander Antonio Fernandes stepped down into the command circle, approaching Captains Noah Wrightson and Daniel Radke. "Sir, the *Prospect* reports detecting possible Myhr'an movement on our perimeter."

"Possible?" Wrightson squinted at Fernandes.

"Sensor readings are not very accurate for some reason." Tony looked worried, crossing his arms as he responded off of Wrightson's glare.

"Lieutenant Commander Lawless: are we having problems with our sensors?"

The second officer at ops checked over his readings, then shook his head. "We are. The *Hope*, *Winterthur*: the entire group's reporting the same problem." Standing, he looked at the *Cantabrian's* commanding and first officers as another officer took his place at his station. "I'll head down to engineering to run level 3 diagnostic. In the meantime, I'll see if we can come up with a workable solution."

Wrightson nodded at Brendon Lawless, the latter nodding back then dashing up the three stairs to the aft turbolift.



She sighed and folded her arms in front of her. “*You mean we can’t read their ships until we’re virtually on top of them?*” Anne Tedesco’s face was slightly red, her eyes wide.

“*I’m afraid our engineers aboard the Winterthur concur with the Cantabrian’s analysis.*” Rafe Mahler leaned towards his monitor, several stray gray hairs more apparent in his dark black hair.

“*Commander Greene and I are working on a solution,*” Kari Eriksson assured. She nodded at a colleague as he handed her a PADD. She reviewed it, then handed it back to him.

Admiral John Greene stood on his bridge, his first officer Commander Serigos at his side. “*Keep working on it. We don’t need to give them any more advantage than they already have.*”

“*That’s for sure,*” Captain Hahn Jun-Seok piped in.

Captain Noah Wrightson approached the viewscreen, the five other captain’s split into five columns ahead of him. Daniel Radke stood behind him, tapping a PADD with the latest information coming in from all the other ships. The latter had wanted to ask if John Greene’s comment was a pun on the name of his ship, but this was too serious of a time to be joking.

“Our team here is working on the problem too. Commander Fernandes will keep us all in the loop of any developments we make here, or vice versa.” The *Cantabrian’s* commanding officer rested his hands on his hips.

“*Good plan. Until then...*”

A beeping noise on all open channels and the *Cantabrian’s* bridge interrupted Admiral Greene.

“Report.” came from both the viewscreen and Captain Noah Wrightson almost all virtually at the same time.

Lawless spoke up first. “Sensors are clearing up. Sir, I’m reading a massive fleet approaching Rhaandaran.” He turned to look at Wrightson. “It’s the Myhr’an.”

“*They’re making a first strike against the Federation...*” Anne Tedesco’s voice sounded cold, distant.

“*All ships, adjust course to Rhaandaran, maximum warp. Red alert.*” Wrinkles grew more apparent in Admiral Greene’s face. “*We’ll keep each other apprised over secure channels. Advantage out.*”

With that, the viewscreen returned to stars streaking past, with three starships ahead of the *Cantabrian*.

Wrightson moved quickly to his station, Radke sitting down beside him. “All hands, this is the captain speaking. We’ve detected a Myhr’an fleet approaching Rhaandaran; the *Cantabrian’s* on an intercept course. Look sharp, people. We need to protect Federation civilians against any danger first and foremost.” The commanding officer punched a button on his chair’s armrest. “Red alert. Battle stations.”

The bridge darkened, the glow from stations softly illuminating the officers sitting at them. A red strobe flashed on and off, bathing the room in a blood-like glow as it flashed on.

Captain Daniel Radke turned the status display monitor between his and Wrightson’s seat towards him. Punching in a few commands, ship’s sensor data streamed onto the screen, but the information blurred as his reflection grew alive again.

“They never struck Rhaandaran in any of the realities we’ve encountered. Are you ready?” His doppelganger had his blue duty shirt partially unzipped at the collar.

Radke nodded.

“I’ll warn you, they look pretty tough but they don’t have souls, those clones. They’re lifeless, poor carbon copies of the originals, lacking that spark...” The other Radke leaned forwards.

“Approaching Rhaandaran,” the Vulcan flight controller reported in a calm and monotone voice.

“Drop us out of warp.” Wrightson rose from his seat, tugging his uniform top down. Walking towards the viewscreen, he could see the planet Rhaandaran, its blue-gray surface shimmering against the amassing fleet of dark grey ships. “Magnify.”

The viewscreen image changed. At least twenty shark-like ships swam on the screen, with a larger version static in the middle. Behind them all, a large, squid-like ship, its arms on the lower section extending outwards, rotated slowly to face the planet.

Silence ruled the bridge.

“There’ll be a large ship, one that looks like a squid – it’s a planet killer. They’ve had time to perfect it, to make it better, to iron out the problems, but it still can fall just as hard. It’s weakest when it prepares to fire; the rest of the systems are vulnerable.” The doppelganger leaned forward, the urge in his voice growing stronger. *“The other large ship, one that looks like a bigger version of the smaller ships, controls the clones’ communication with the M’Tar. Disable it, and you disable the fleet. You need to act...”*

Noah Wrightson spun the monitor around to face him. Daniel Radke had grown so enraptured by his double's voice, he'd not even seen Wrightson return. The former *Cuxhaven* captain looked at the viewscreen, his stomach dropping as he saw the size of the enemy fleet.

Without turning to the captain, words tumbled from his mouth. "The super battle cruiser. It controls the clones. The planet killer is large but vulnerable as it prepares to fire."

Captain Wrightson didn't say a thing. Daniel looked at him, his eyes distant before they returned to the here and now. Looking at each other, the *Cantabrian's* commanding officer stated, "Helm: Take us in. Tactical: Clear a path through the smaller ships to the planet killer. Ops: Signal the information Captain Radke's just given me to the rest of the fleet."

A round of "ayes" came.

The ship shook as the first barrage hit. Radke steadied himself by grabbing the armrests of his seat, returning his attention to the viewscreen.

"The *Winterthur* has taken damage to their saucer section. The *Seoul* is covering them," Lawless reported from his station. "Minimal damage to the *Cantabrian*."

"Shields at 92%."

The viewscreen showed several Myhr'an battle cruisers converging on their position, their weapon ports glowing an angry red.

Wrightson punched a few commands on the display monitor. "Tactical: Target these ships at these co-ordinates. Helm: Evasive maneuvers."

Phaser and photon torpedo fire jumped on screen in a chaotic pattern, striking one Myhr'an vessel several times until its shields collapsed, the hull glowing orange before another hit blew out the hull, the ship sent spinning away on an awkward angle.

Another ship appeared onscreen, its disruptors flaring. The barrage pounded the *Cantabrian*, the ship groaning in protest. An explosion tore open the conn, the Vulcan at the station thudding to the deck, his head arched backwards, his lifeless eyes staring at Radke, sparks showering over his body.

"Direct hit! Hull breaches on decks 2 through 4, sections 3 through 5." Lawless's hands dashed over his console, his attention focused on his station.

"Shields at 78%. Sir, they're coming around for another pass..."

“Fire all weapons.”

Radke rose from his chair, the ship shaking and jolting from different explosions surrounding the *Cantabrian*. Knocking him to the floor, he crawled to the Vulcan’s body, his hand reaching until it found the flight controller’s neck. *No pulse*. His eyes found Captain Wrightson’s.

The captain nodded. Radke scrambled to the conn. The *Cuxhaven*’s former commanding officer tapped frantically at the parts of the station not damaged. “Adjusting speed and heading.”

“Firing weapons,” the tactical officer confirmed.

A Myhr’an nacelle spun uncontrollably from the top right hand corner to the lower left hand corner of the viewscreen as the *Cantabrian* shook violently. Two other Myhr’an battle cruisers streaked past the *Cantabrian*, seemingly ignoring the ship.

Sweat formed on Lawless’s soot-smudged forehead. “The *Prospect*, *Hope* and *Advantage* are drawing the Myhr’an away from us.”

More sparks flew from various stations, with someone moaning at the bridge’s aft section. As Radke concentrated on his station, someone behind him said, “Bridge to Sickbay: We need medics up here. We’ve got wounded, several heavy.”

“The *Advantage*, *Prospect* and *Hope* report they’ve inflicted heavy damage on the Myhr’an fleet. The *Winterthur* and *Seoul* are joining them.” A soot-covered Lawless turned to the commanding officer. “Sir, the Myhr’an ships are engaging them.”

Radke looked up at the viewscreen. The Myhr’an super battle cruiser was looming larger in the foreground, the Myhr’an planet killer dwarfing it but still aligning in the background, its large arms extending outwards as it turned toward Rhaandaran.

He glanced over his shoulder at the dead Vulcan, then to Captain Noah Wrightson standing between the stations, attempting to steady himself as the Myhr’an super battle cruiser opened fire on them.

The *Cantabrian*’s commanding officer held Radke’s gaze as the latter punched in various coordinates to evade fire. Daniel Radke returned his gaze temporarily to the conn, then back up at the stoic man at the command circle’s center. “Your orders, Captain?”

Even though a light haze filled the bridge, a fire making the red on his tunic appear almost hell-like, Wrightson’s eyes glimmered with hope. “It’s time for us to slay the dragon. Take us in.”