



Chapter 2.5: "Between Friends"

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Note: The events in this story take place between the previously published Chapter #2 ("Oderint dum Metuat") and Chapter #3 ("Actus Humanus, Actus Hominis").

When the United Federation of Planets established the Memory Alpha outpost, no one anticipated that it would become the Federation's chief repository of information; not just historical information, but cultural and scientific. Twenty years after its construction, the outpost had grown so much, with so many requests coming in at all hours of the day, Commodore Mira Romaine, the base's commanding officer, had to establish a third duty shift to cover the evening requests or processing of searches begun during the day.

Still, many of the crew of Memory Alpha didn't want to work that third duty shift; working the night shift seemed to give everyone the creeps. A lot of it was the history of the outpost. People swore they heard the ghosts of the people who were killed by the Zetarians so long ago, still creeping around. After a few weeks of listening to officers complain about the spirits, the Commodore made the shift a volunteer one. Most of the crew volunteered when they had to; Bruce Space volunteered nearly all the time.

Lieutenant Commander Bruce J. Space often spent the late hours reading. The request load tended to be lighter and the data processing didn't need to be monitored as hard. Bruce liked the night shift. Since Memory Alpha was a library, he could read the works of hundreds of cultures. He was doing just that, delving deep into a tome titled '*Comparative Alien Religion*' when his terminal lit up. The computer said, "Priority One Communication, Lieutenant Commander Bruce J. Space."

Bruce set down the book, and pulled off his reading glasses. Fascinated by the fact that he, personally, was getting a Priority One at 0130 hours, he tapped a couple of keys and replied. "Accept message, Security Clearance: Space-Echo-Six." As the message connected, he noted that the point of origin was the Epsilon Mynos system. That was a bit of a backwater, he thought to himself.

The computer cycled and the face of his old classmate, Doctor Vindi S'Raazh, now assigned as the Chief Medical Officer of the *U.S.S. Grissom*, looked back at him. Bruce asked, "Oh God... How come is it that everyone from our graduating class at the Academy calls me up whenever they have an historical question?"

Vindi replied, "Um, gee. It's because you lived through it and have a near photographic memory."

"Yeah, yeah. I didn't live *everywhere* all that time. Like I said, people rarely call me for a social visit. That happens at class reunions. What can I do for you, Vindi?"

"I actually do have an historical question I need you to work through."

"Caesar crossed the Rubicon in 49 BCE."

"That's not—"

"The *RMS Titanic* sank on April 14, 1912."

"Bruce..."

"Jonathan Archer was elected to the presidency of the Federation in 2170 and has since been considered one of the greatest Federation presidents since, with an entire planetary system named—"

"Bruce!" Vindi interrupted.

"Well, jeez, jump down my throat will you?" Bruce replied.

"It's just at times you can be so... annoying with everything you know."

"And once upon a time, you said that quality was endearing," Bruce smiled, "What's your question?"

"What do you know about terraforming projects?"

"I'm an historian, Vindi, not a scientist, but generally speaking, terraforming ideas first got their start in science-fiction novels of the past. The first solid theories on the subject weren't put forth until the mid-twentieth century. Successes for humans in terraforming didn't happen until well after World War III with the settlement of Tycho City on Earth's moon and the Martian Colonies. After that, it's been touch and go. Why do you ask?"

"Well... it's complicated..."

"I'll bet. Rumors are flying. Requests for terraforming data have jumped 300 percent in the last week. Our terraforming database has been copied so many times that I've lost count. I'd be willing to bet your captain's got one. Starfleet's been trying to hush it up, but the more you hush it up, the worse it gets."

"I remember back at the Academy. We *started* a few rumors like that," Vindi smiled, "You were something back then."

"I still am. I just bring it out on special occasions."

There was a silence for a long minute and then Vindi said, "I probably should get going. I really shouldn't have called. Captain Esteban is going to be pissed if he finds out I broke radio silence. I didn't think I'd get much more than I've got, but it was worth a shot. And I knew you would help me and not give me a run-around." Bruce smiled to himself. He suspected there was more going on between J.T. Esteban and Vindi than the official Captain and CMO relationship, but he knew Vindi long enough and well enough not to pursue this.

"You were easy to give a run-around to and shoot," Bruce continued, smiling, "As I proved to you in those combat missions in the simulator back at the Academy."

Bruce had spent many years as an enlisted man in Starfleet. It wasn't until 2263 that he finally decided to quit screwing around and do something with his knowledge, heading into Starfleet Academy. He'd been sitting at a table in the Student Union, doing what he'd just been doing a few minutes ago—reading a book—trying to work out the difference in some kind of anatomical confusion.

Vindi was walking through and must've read the look of anguish on Bruce's face, because she swooped in to the rescue. Bruce had not only passed that quiz, but the rest of the class, thanks to her assistance. They'd become quick friends since; their group of friends quickly gaining a reputation for closeness, pranks, oddities. They melded together in ways that other humans and aliens had a hard time understanding. They'd always attributed it to just having commonality; doing what the Federation did best.

"Gods," Vindi replied, "The rapier wit. How come we never slept together?"

"You know the answer to that one, Vindi. My heart belonged to another. And you were pretty besotted with Hikaru Sulu at the time. ."

"Do you remember when we'd all go to that place in San Francisco while we were at the Academy? The... what did you call it? The karaoke place?"

"Sure. You, me, Pike, Tobey, McNamara, a few others. Good times, good music, old music, good drinks. Wake up the next morning with a hangover or wondering what the hell happened. Not regretting it though."

"Yet, we all passed with flying colors."

"Not really. I remember those all-nighters that we had to pull just so you could save my ass in basic xenobiology class."

"Well you saved mine in Federation history. The least I could do was to return the favor."

They chatted a bit more about life after the Academy when they were serving shipboard assignments. Most of the time they had been like ships passing in the night, but then Vindi said, "You remember that mission to Ventrys Gamma, when you were serving on the *Enterprise*?"

"Sure, and you were on the *Corsair* at the time. It was one of the biggest planetary disasters the Federation had ever seen: no infrastructure, the government collapsed, and to top it all off, a famine coupled with several natural disasters. Five starships called in to help—and only two in range with any kind of equipment to handle it. Captain Kirk kept us there almost a month. Of course, it was nice to serve with you, Bruce."

"And actually do something productive. I could actually put your tutoring to work."

"Yeah, yet you took the lead in saving their historical and cultural heritage. You built that archive they have. I even think they named it after you. Thousands of years' worth of history would have been lost if you hadn't stepped in."

"All because I didn't want the Ventrys to lose something as precious as their heritage in a disaster that damn near destroyed the planet."

"Remind you of someone you know?"

"Yeah. My own species; almost wiping ourselves out of existence in World War III." Bruce paused, becoming serious. "Vindi, you're one of my best friends. And now you're calling me about this terraforming thing. You should know I thought it was a bad idea and I'm really hoping that the

rumors aren't true. These people are trying to play God and it's going to blow up in their faces one day."

"But what if it did work, Bruce? What if we learned from our mistakes? What if we can make a better future for people living under terrible conditions with this process?" Vindi was equally serious.

"By who's standards, Vindi? The ethics of this whole thing are staggering. You remember when we watched that really old *Frankenstein* movie? When, after the creation of the monster, Frankenstein says, 'In the name of God, now I know what it feels like to be God.'? That's what bothers me so much about some of these rumors that I'm hearing. That there might well be something that makes an instant planet."

Another long pause. Vindi said, "You're probably right, Bruce, but..."

"I know, Vindi. You're an eternal optimist. When you've been around as long as I have and seen so many who have tried to play God, it does make one a bit jaded. But maybe this time, I'm the one who's wrong. Maybe this time they got it right."

Vindi's smile returned, "Maybe this is the reason I called you... Just to talk to an old friend."

"Are you calling me old, Vindi?" Bruce smiled back.

"Shut up!" she laughed, "But between friends, Bruce, how come you're still pushing books? I thought you were headed for the command track?"

"I..."

"Take the advice of an old friend, Bruce. You liked being in command back at the Academy; you liked it on the *Corsair*. You did it well and you got commendations for it. You told me tons of times that you'd watched all these captains command their ships and that's what you really wanted to do with your career. So go and do it."

Bruce glanced aside for a moment, looking at the book with his reading glasses sitting in the biding between the pages; taking in his friend's words, "You really think I should go for a command?"

"Well I don't think you'd make captain out of the starting gate, but there's that new *Excelsior* ship to consider. Or taking a cruise on an *Oberth*-Class..."

"A *science* vessel? Screw you!"

They laughed together. Vindi said, "Of course, I can imagine the look on your girlfriend's face when you tell her that you're going back for command."

"What girlfriend?"

"What?" Vindi's blue eyes bugged a moment, "Don't tell me you two broke up? There was nothing that could come between you; including you almost getting killed a couple of times on Ventrys."

"To which your former captain came to my rescue, sending my guardian Andorian to save me each time. And relax; she's not my girlfriend anymore. She's my fiancée."

"Are you joking? Since when are you thinking about getting married?"

"Probably about the same time that you are."

Vindi's smile was brilliant, "Congratulations, Bruce. So when does Lieutenant Dana Harvey become Dana Space?"

"Sometime. Like you, no rush. Maybe after things get settled in the command track. That, or we'll just elope on Risa."

"Or a weekend in Vegas," Vindi quipped.

"That too."

Vindi said, "I don't know what it is about you, Space. You just seem to make things better."

"I take your blues away?"

She laughed again heartily, "Think about it, Bruce. You can always take the books with you."

"I will, Vindi. It's been good to talk to you. Take care and stay safe out there. Give Muggle a cuddle for me."

"You take care too, Bruce."

Vindi waved goodbye. Bruce waved back and closed the comm line. He thought about erasing the log so that no one would get in trouble for a call that technically wasn't supposed to be made. Instead, he buried the call under a bunch of others. He picked up the book again, but his reading glasses hadn't even made it on when the thoughts started rolling over in his mind. Maybe a walk through the library would help.



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<http://www.howlingmoon.us/id2.html>