

Her fingers soared across the computer board, intent on their work. Athena Arcadian, physical therapist and newly appointed assistant chief medical officer aboard the starship *Arcturus*, was taking on most of chief medical officer Kyri Morgaan's administrative duties. Work was piled high on her desk.

There came a buzz at the door. She looked up for a moment, saying, "Come."

Arcadian returned her attention to her work until she heard a voice request, "Can we talk?"

At first she did not even move. After several seconds she finally swiveled her chair to face the person standing next to her.

Major A. Carey Copeland had made his decision to come and talk to Arcadian only moments ago – with the commodore's permission, of course. He still could not help feeling the anger from what had happened only a few days earlier. But now that he was here, he might as well be civil.

"If you're busy, I'll come back," Copeland stated.

It had only been a few days since the duo's little joy-ride in a stolen fightercraft and Copeland had spent those days in the brig while Arcadian had spent them confined to her quarters. Both were told by the commodore that the only thing they would be allowed to do for the next few days were their normal duties. Of course Arcadian had protested. The skatsball games were coming up! She needed to practice with the team! They had only practiced a few weeks so far, and never against an opponent. This would not do! Arcadian knew that they would be facing the best competition in the inter-fleet league in the next two days, so she argued her point to Johnson. She also explained that Copeland had joined the team, and would need to practice and learn how the other players reacted. Johnson realized that one of the teams the *Arcturus* would play was the *USS Wasp*. Johnson had a rivalry going with the *Wasp*'s commander, Captain Pickett; the two officers having clashed in competition numerous times and each relished betting against the other. As a result, he gave the pair permission to practice, issuing a stern warning against future trouble. For the past three days Copeland and Athena had been performing their duties and practicing with the team in between confinement.

Today was the first day that each of them felt physically normal. They had been experiencing the discomfort of a hangover since their joy-ride, thanks in part to the starship's chief medical officer. Their little adventure had cost them much. Each was still angry at the other, both were on the Commodore's trouble list, and both were creating lives of misery for their subordinates.

Arcadian continued to think about what had happened. She was a little surprised that Copeland had even taken the time to come see her. She knew he was still angry at her for not telling him about her personal relationship with the commodore. Arcadian thought everyone on board knew, and besides, it was Copeland's idea to go for the ride. However, Copeland believed that the reason for their seemingly strict punishment was because of this personal relationship. If Arcadian had not been involved with Johnson, Copeland figured, they both would have fared better. Arcadian had argued with the Marine officer that this was untrue, but Copeland would not hear of it. Now was the first time the two had talked in days. Copeland continued to wait.

"Sorry. I didn't mean to drift, but I've had a great deal of work to get done," Arcadian explained. Copeland shrugged.

"I know what it's like," the stout Tamurilian responded. "But what I came here to talk to you about was the game." The tension began to ease and both relaxed as Copeland continued. "Don't get me wrong, I'm not worried about them, I'm worried about myself."

Arcadian could not help but smirk.

"Yeah, well I'm also worried about you," she remarked. "You can NOT... I repeat, NOT get into trouble in this game."

Copeland looked at Arcadian with innocent eyes, but what he was thinking was entirely different. Arcadian picked up on it.

"And don't give me those eyes, because you know what I'm talking about!"

Copeland lowered his head and mumbled, "I'll try, but you know who we're playing and its going to be tough."

Arcadian nodded. They were up against the two toughest teams in the sector plus the dirtiest team in the league in just the first three games of their season.

“I know we face *Starbase 22* and the *USS Confederation*,” she said. “Both went to the championships last year; the *Confederation* taking second and the *Starbase* team taking first in the fleet! And if that is not bad enough, we have to play the *USS Wasp*, the dirtiest team in the fleet.”

Copeland sighed. He was thinking of the problems he would face during this game with the *Wasp*, knowing his temper might get the better of him.

“But that’s not all,” Arcadian added. Copeland waited. There was something in Arcadian’s voice that he did not like, but he would have to wait to find out what she meant, for at that moment, there was another buzz at her door.

“Come,” Arcadian said. The doors swished open and Dr. Kyri Morgaan entered. Morgaan opened her mouth to speak, then seemed a little surprised. She knew Arcadian and Copeland were not on good terms at the moment and that both were supposed to be confined to their duties.

“I apologize for the interruption,” the Capellan female said.

“No problem, Morgan,” Arcadian said with a smile. “Anything wrong?”

Morgaan shook her head before replying, “No. I just wanted to inform you that I received a transmission from the starbase stating that your conditioning equipment was waiting to be picked up.”

Arcadian’s eyes lit up. Copeland noticed and could not help but ask.

“Conditioning equipment?”

Arcadian nodded as she said, “Yeah, I’m finally getting the proper equipment to help the crew with their therapy. In fact it will be a great asset to everyone who enjoys this particular type of physical activity.”

Copeland agreed. He had on many occasions wanted to work out, but the gym aboard the starship lacked sufficient equipment.

“That’s great! Now I can whip my Marines into real shape!”

“Well, I’m in the process of redoing the whole works,” Arcadian remarked before turning her attention back to her superior. “Thanks, Morgan!”

Morgaan left the room shaking her head. She knew Arcadian was Centauri, yet there were times when she acted extremely Terran.

“This is great!” Arcadian said as the door closed again, excited about the arrival of her new equipment. But Copeland was more interested in hearing the rest of what she had intended to say earlier.

“Yeah it is great,” he remarked. “But what were you going to say before we were interrupted?”

“Oh. Sorry. Well, what I was going to tell you was that, I’m going to be sought after a great deal when we play the *Wasp*.”

Copeland was puzzled. Arcadian could see it in his eyes, so she explained further.

“The captain of the *Wasp* team is an officer named of Jake Collins. Jake and I have had our share of conflicts on the skatball court. At one point during our Academy days, we competed for the same position. I won.”

Arcadian paused for a moment. Copeland was listening intently and prompted her to continue.

“From that day forward, he declared war on me. Now every time we meet on the court, it’s a battle – not a game!”

Copeland nodded in understanding. He was concerned, but he knew that Arcadian could take care of herself – hopefully.

“Also I hear he has a buddy who enjoys injuring other players. I think his name is Vance Carter, and...”

Arcadian noticed Copeland react at the mention of the name.

“You know him?” she asked.

Copeland nodded as he explained that he and Carter had had their share of conflict during Marine officer training. Carter had, in fact, been thrown in the brig for causing so many fights. Copeland had no love for the man and considered him to be lower than a parasite, and had told him so on several occasions. From the day both had entered officer training until the day they graduated, both hated each other’s guts. Carter had even threatened Copeland on the day they had graduated. Copeland could still remember his exact words. “Copeland, don’t ever cross my path again.” The Tamurilian had taken the remark in good humor at the time, but he knew that Carter had

meant it. Now he was definitely worried about fighting during the match. Arcadian must have seen the change in Copeland's expression, because she voiced her concern.

"Copeland, don't tell me this guy means trouble!"

"More than you'd like to know," he replied. "It's pretty much the same situation you have going with Collins."

Arcadian laid her head on the desk, shaking it vigorously.

"No, don't tell me that!" she pleaded. "I know I can contain myself. Can you?" She looked up to see Copeland smiling.

"Sure, I'll do the best I can," he replied. But Arcadian knew that smile could mean many things.

"All right. I'll have to trust you. But one wrong move and I take you out of the game!"

Copeland was about to protest, but Arcadian held up her hand.

"Just do me this favor and be good for once. The Commodore and a couple of admirals are going to be watching. Meanwhile, I have to get back to work. I'll see you at practice at 1700 hours. We'll talk about this to the whole team."

Copeland nodded before heading toward the door.

"Oh, one more thing," Arcadian said. Copeland turned back around to face her. "Think about who we are playing and who is backup. And another thing... I really did not want to bring this up, but did you have a hangover for the last two days?"

Copeland scowled. He just wanted to forget the last two days.

"I have felt awful the last two days. Usually I'm okay the next morning." Arcadian nodded as if she had suspected as much.

"I was just wondering because I felt terrible for the last few days as well, and I don't usually get hangovers that bad." There was puzzlement on Arcadian's face as Copeland finally left her office.

When the major returned to his own office, he found assistant chief security officer David Maddox and Marine Corporal Solak discussing some problems they were having with their phaser rifles. Maddox was well known to Copeland, but Solak was a relative newcomer. A full Vulcan, Corporal Solak towered over Maddox. He also towered over Copeland, but then, who did not?

The pair's conversation stopped immediately as Copeland entered the room. Both watched in expectation. They both knew the major had gone to talk to Lt Arcadian about the skatsball games, and wanted to know what he had learned. They waited as Copeland sat at his desk but made no comment. The silence continued for several more seconds before Copeland finally looked up.

"Well? What are you two looking at?"

Both shook their heads. Maddox finally mustered the courage to ask about the meeting.

"How did it go, sir?"

Copeland looked up from his work. "Fine," he replied. "But we're gonna have a tough game."

"Indeed," Solak commented.

Copeland did not look up a second time. "We'll talk about it at practice, 1700 hours. Meanwhile what's this about problems with our phaser rifles?"

Space, the Final Frontier...

These are the voyages of the starship *Arcturus*!

Star Trek: Arcturus

"Win One for the Skipper" by Diane Ripollone

At 1500 hours, Commodore Eric W. Johnson was on the bridge, seated in his command chair as the next watch shift arrived. He watched as his crew efficiently relieved the watch. He wondered to himself if the scheduled award ceremony was deserved by the crew. After the incident with Arcadian and Copeland, the worst among several separate incidents that occurred during or in relation to the recent Deck 7 party, and the fact his assistant chief science officer was confined to sickbay for some mysterious reason, he really did not think that a ceremony was in order. But then again, he could not deprive the members of the crew who deserved it. Oh well. He had fixed Copeland and Arcadian by ordering Dr. Morgaan to induce two day hangovers in the both of them. He could still remember the anger and concern he had felt upon hearing that Copeland had taken his paramour out in a Wasp without authorization. While drunk, no less! It was over, but he would continue to be angry. He was also concerned about Copeland asking for permission to see Arcadian in spite of both being confined for their transgressions. He did not need a fight on his hands. He knew however that Arcadian would act accordingly. Copeland had already felt Johnson's wrath once. Surely he would not go for two in a row? Johnson was more concerned with how friendly Arcadian had become with many of the male crew. Her good nature and Centaurian objectivity made her an excellent problem solver. Still he did not have to like all the attention she was receiving.

The commodore's introspection was interrupted by helmsman Korath Stryker.

"Final course correction has been made, Commodore."

"How long till we reach *Starbase 22*, Mister Stryker?"

"Exactly 17 hours from this mark, sir," Stryker reported.

Johnson nodded. Ah well, he might as well relax after watch, then maybe go and watch the ship's skatsball team practice in the hanger bay. He knew what they were up against at *Starbase 22*. He just hoped the team members would remain cool about it. Especially Copeland. Copeland, the pain in the...

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Athena Arcadian was finishing her examination on a patient. "Now don't forget to exercise that knee, the muscles are still weak and we have to get them back to normal." The crewman nodded.

"Thank you, ma'am. It feels better already." And to prove it, he jumped down from the examination table and left. Arcadian finished her notations in the crewman's medical file before following the crewmen out of sickbay. In the corridor of the medical section, she ran into the Deltan science specialist Iona Hanlon, her old cabinmate before Arcadian had received her promotion. Concern crossed Arcadian's face.

"What are you doing here?" she asked the Deltan.

"I came to see how everything is going," Hanlon said, quickly dispelling Arcadian's concern. "And you?"

"Everything is fine except for the trouble I'm in," she replied as she turned to head toward her office, Hanlon following close behind.

"I heard. I also heard that you and Copeland were not exactly on the best of terms right now. How does that bode for your upcoming skatsball games?"

"Yeah, we were pretty mad at each other, but he did come to see me this morning about the game."

As the pair entered Arcadian's office, the physical therapist sat down behind her desk and activated the computer terminal. "Don't mind me," she said. "I just have to get this information in the computer before I forget."

Hanlon nodded and sat in the seat opposite Arcadian.

"Well at least he is talking to you. But why is he so angry? He was, after all, the one who suggested the ride in the first place."

"I know, but he's not mad about the joy ride," Arcadian explained. "He's mad that I didn't tell him that Eric... that Commodore Johnson and I have a... relationship."

Hanlon now understood.

"So he thinks the Commodore gave him a harsher punishment than he would have given anyone else because you were involved?"

“Bingo!” Arcadian said with an exaggerated gesture. She knew Hanlon would figure it out quickly. Hanlon, however, was puzzled. She should have been used to Arcadian’s habitual use of old Earth English idioms, but she still did not understand all of the expressions.

“What does ‘Bingo’ mean?” Hanlon asked.

Arcadian could not help but be amused. She had picked up a lot of her expressions from her visit to Earth and the old novels she enjoyed. Sometimes she could get carried away.

“In this instance it means you are correct. Copeland believes that our punishment might have been less harsh if Eric and I weren’t having a relationship.”

“Well, at least the Commodore is letting you practice for the skatsball games” Hanlon responded.

Arcadian looked up from the computer monitor where she had been entering data.

“The only reason he is letting us practice is because the captain of the *Wasp* is a rival of his and he wants us to win as much as we want to win just so he can throw it back in Captain Pickett’s face.”

“So I heard on the bridge the other morning,” Hanlon remarked. “I overheard him tell Commander Kira something about the *Wasp* and how nice it would be to defeat their team.”

Arcadian deactivated her computer and leaned back, relaxing in her chair.

“Yeah, well the Commodore has his reasons for his decisions,” she remarked. “As for Kira, she is not too happy with me either. I think if she had the chance she would scratch my eyes out.”

“I think she is a little jealous,” Hanlon commented.

“She has nothing to be jealous about. Copeland and I are teammates, nothing more! We have nothing else going on,” protested Arcadian.

Hanlon nodded. She knew where Arcadian’s affections lay, but she did not want to intrude on her personal affairs. Hanlon changed the subject instead.

“How is your new position working out?”

Arcadian laughed. Hanlon would never let her live her promotion down. The Deltan loved to tease her about it too much.

“Fine, if you like doing double the work and having more patients then you know what to do with. But what about you? When are you going to finish your officer training?”

“Well, soon I trust, but you can never tell...”

Hanlon was interrupted by a buzz at Arcadian’s door. The physical therapist looked toward the door and said, “Come.” The door opened to reveal one of the starship’s medical technicians.

“Sorry to intrude, ma’am. Your next patient is in sickbay. Crewman Alexander from communications.”

“Thank you. Tell him I’ll be there in a few minutes.”

The med tech left and Arcadian rose from her chair.

“Sorry, Iona. I have to get back to work.”

“I understand,” Hanlon said as she too got up. Besides, I’m meeting some of the other enlisted crew for dinner in the mess anyway. I’m sorry you cannot join us.”

Arcadian shrugged, but Hanlon actually was sorry. She missed her old roommate, as did her pet Morenan tree bear.

“You must come and visit George one day,” Hanlon remarked as the pair left the office. “He misses you.”

Arcadian laughed. “I will,” she replied. “And don’t you forget to come to the games tomorrow. We need all the cheerleaders we can get.”

Hanlon again looked puzzled. What was a cheerleader? What purpose did one serve? Then, as the pair entered sickbay and walked past several crew members in the waiting area, the Deltan noticed the expressions on the male faces and sighed inwardly. It would always be like this as long as she served in Starfleet. Until she knew the male, her pheromones would be uncontrollable.

Arcadian, who had entered sickbay behind Hanlon, noticed everything that was happening and laughed quietly to herself. She would make a bet with anyone that Hanlon could affect even a Klingon!

“I’d better go,” Arcadian said. “I need to finish with my duties here and then I still have to get suited up for practice. I’ll see you later.”

Hanlon offered her salutations again, then left sickbay. Heading toward the nearest turbolift, she quickly made her way to one of the crew's mess halls. The mess hall was crowded, most of the Beta shift crew coming in for their meals. Hanlon immediately walked over to the table where Samuk, Jedvega, and Kalin Kale were seated.

Kalin Kale was another newcomer to the *Arcturus*. Arcadian had taken an immediate liking to the new helmsman, and why not? He was friendly, unpretentious, and – most important – he was a fellow native of Alpha Centauri. The junior helmsman had presented a problem, however, when he had experienced a severe sneezing fit while working next to his superior officer, a Caitian-like felinoid.

This time, Hanlon ignored the looks she received from some of the male crew members as she passed.

“Hello. Mind if I join you?” asked Hanlon.

“As you wish,” said Jedvega, a human-looking half-Vulcan female.

Hanlon seated herself next to the Vulcan Samuk. She already knew both Samuk and Kale so she immediately placed control on her pheromones. Jedvega was the first to ask where Hanlon had been.

“I was visiting Lieutenant Arcadian” the Deltan answered.

Samuk looked up for a moment and asked, “She is still confined to her quarters?”

Hanlon nodded, then said, “Yes, but the Commodore has allowed her to practice for the upcoming skatsball tournament.”

Kale's eyes widened momentarily and he said, “That reminds me... I have to relieve Stryker on the helm so he can make the practice. If you'll excuse me...?”

Kale got up from his seat with a wave to everyone and left the mess hall. Meanwhile, Jedvega continued to talk to Hanlon about the events of the past several days, while Samuk added his own comments every once in a while. All three were of the same opinion as Copeland; that the Commodore had given out harsher punishments simply because Arcadian was involved.

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Back in sickbay, Arcadian continued with her duties until 1600 hours. Then, after performing a turn-over with the night staff, she left the medical department and made her way down to the *Arcturus*' hanger deck. As the doors opened, Arcadian could hear Cygnian engineer Briana Lithir directing her crew in the assembly of the skatsball court. Arcadian watched as the engineers finally fixed the last of the force field poles in place and Lithir gave the final orders. The court immediately activated and Arcadian's face lit up. Ahh, home sweet home. Nothing like the exhilaration of maneuvering around on a skatsboard!

Lithir walked over to Arcadian's side once she finally noticed the physical therapist. “Does everything look all right to you?” she inquired.

“Yes, thank you,” Arcadian replied with a smile. “Especially since you were here directing the whole set up.”

Lithir was pleased. “I know how important this practice is to the team,” she remarked. Everyone on board knew!

“Yeah, well we're going to need everyone cheering us on.”

Lithir nodded, then said, “I have to get back to work in engineering. If you will excuse me?” Lithir then headed through the doors where Arcadian had been standing.

Arcadian walked over to a set of benches that had been placed along one side of the court, where some of her team members were already checking their equipment and skatsboards.

“Everyone ready for a good practice?” she asked. They all nodded enthusiastically.

Some of the team members were still arriving, so Arcadian warmed up a little as she waited. She looked over all her players – known in the game as Squids. Galen DuLoc was there. So were Xavier, Logan Whitehorse, Solak, David Maddox, and Copeland. The rest – a total of twenty players – arrived in the next few minutes. And even though she had twenty team members, she wanted only the best for these upcoming games, which worried her because her best skatsball player still had not...

Arcadian breathed a sigh of relief. The doors opened again and none other than Setton To'Lock Arbelo rushed in, still pulling his skatsball uniform on over his head.

Arbelo was a strange character, to say the least. A product of multiple races, his ancestry included Vulcan, Terran and – to the disgust of assistant chief science officer Bael V'aahst-Ohrne' Dagon – Efrosian! The newly appointed assistant chief of communications was one of the few players aboard *Arcturus* who had previous skatsball experience, having played in amateur leagues before joining Starfleet. Arcadian would need that advantage today!

As Arcadian contemplated the day's strategy, Copeland – her co-captain – walked up to her.

"I was going over the players we should use in my head," he said. "Our ten best are the most likely candidates, with the five top players playing most of the time."

Arcadian nodded. She had been thinking the same thing.

"You're right. We need to win at least two games if we want to stay in the top ten of this sector. This is the primary team I want to put together: You, me, Maddox, Xavier, and either Solak or Galen DuLac."

"That's pretty good," Copeland agreed. "But when we play the *Wasp*, we're going to need some bulk on the field."

"I agree. So I was thinking we'll throw Stryker and either Whitehorse or Arbelo in as our back-up players when we get to that point." Copeland nodded. This was similar to what he had contemplated.

Arcadian then turned to face all the team members sitting on the bench. "All right everyone," she said. "I have some things to discuss with you." Once she was sure she had everyone's attention, she continued. "As everyone knows, we are going up against what are reputed to be two of the best teams in the Fleet and one of the dirtiest. Now I know these are the first few games of our season, but if we come out strong then we can at least show other teams we're not a joke. Major Copeland and I have an idea of who we will be using, but I need every player ready to step in there and play their best! Remember, one of our first opponents is the team from the *Wasp*. Everything I've heard says this team enjoys fighting and playing dirty. I have one request: do not start anything."

Now everyone, including Arcadian, looked at Copeland.

"I've already been warned!" Copeland protested.

"All right," Arcadian continued. "Now that we all know what to expect from our competition, let's get some practice in!"

Arcadian walked over to where her skatsboard was sitting in a rack. Like all the other players, she pulled it out and inspected it. When she was ready, Arcadian put on her helmet and signaled to the crew member manning the force field controls in the booth overlooking the hanger bay. Within seconds, a doorway-sized opening in the forcefield opened, revealing the inside of the court. Arcadian activated her board and tossed it through the opening and onto the playing field, where it floated up for a moment before settling into a hovering position about thirty centimeters above the deck. She jumped onto the board and it took off, responding to her weight on its sensors.

The skatsboard was a marvel of the 23rd century ingenuity. Its built-in sensors allowed a player to maneuver it simply by shifting his or her weight, like the snowboards of three hundred years earlier. At the front of the board was a strap where a player could anchor one foot to the board. This allowed the players to perform loops and other amazing maneuvers the snowboarders of the 20th century could only have dreamed of. The speed of the board depended upon a small sensor on the side of the board. The player sliding their free foot forward along this sensor caused speed to increase, backward to decrease. However, this would sometimes cause accidents as some players would increase their speed too much and lose control of their board. Arcadian rarely used the speed sensor, preferring to rely on her own skills instead.

The rest of the players joined her until the whole forcefield dome was filled with players executing different skills with their boards. Some of these skills ended with the player in a prone position on the floor, but no harm was done thanks to the levitation field, and that player would simply try again – hopefully in a more humble manner.

During the practice, Copeland and Arcadian worked with some of the individual players in the handling of the game stick, which looked much like an old lacrosse stick. Some showed a great deal of skill in this, especially Xavier and his three arms; the Edoan needing no instruction on the handling of a stick.

After completing a series of drills, the team began to scrimmage. Arcadian acted as caller so she could watch and help the players avoid or correct errors. At times she would stop play to explain some moves. She was so engrossed in the practice session that she did not see Commodore Johnson enter the hangar deck and seat himself on the bench.

Johnson watched with interest as the players used their bodies and sticks to dislodge the ball from their opponent's control and make drives toward their own goal. But he watched with special interest the one player directing the others. Before coming to the hangar deck, Johnson had stopped in sickbay just to see if Arcadian was still there. He wanted to talk to her about some of the things that had occurred, but she had already left. Dr. Morgaan had been on hand, however, so he had a conversation with her instead.

The Capellan chief medical officer was happy with Arcadian's work overall. The new lieutenant now had double the work load, considering she was dealing with both patients and administrative duties. She had also voiced her opinion that, with some more experience, Arcadian would be a good choice to become chief medical officer, allowing Morgaan more time to concentrate on her tasks as the starship's chief surgeon. Johnson had been happy to hear this, but he had also come down to check on the condition of the Efrosian, Bael. Morgaan had suspicions about the cause of his condition and wanted to let Johnson in on what she had determined.

The Commodore's thoughts were interrupted by the noise of the force field opening to let a several of the players exit while others who had waited on the bench entered for their own practice. One of these coming off the court was Maddox, who during his time in command of the *Arcturus* the Commodore had come to know and like.

Coming out behind Maddox were Xavier and Arbelo. Johnson watched as all three removed their helmets. Sweat poured from their heads and both Maddox and Arbelo's hair was matted to their scalps as each was handed a drink high in electrolytes by the medical personnel on hand. Arbelo was the first to comment.

"WOW, what a workout! Athena sure know how to put us through our paces!" The other two nodded in agreement. Then, as they headed toward the bench to sit and rest for a few minutes, they noticed Commodore Johnson sitting nearby and watching them. All three snapped to attention.

"As you were," Johnson ordered good-naturedly. "Having a good workout?"

"Yes, we are, sir," Maddox answered for the trio. "Lieutenant Arcadian, is really working us hard tonight. But then, we all know why."

Johnson nodded. Then his attention was caught by a group of crew members standing just inside the doorway – Samuk, Hanlon, and Jedvega. If his memory served him correctly, Samuk and Hanlon were both assigned to the science department, while Jedvega had just recently been transferred over to medical. He noticed all three staring at the game field. Sometimes the Deltan would smile, catching the attention of all the male crew members in the vicinity. Eventually the three made their way over to where the commodore was seated, coming to attention as they greeted him.

"Good evening, sir," Samuk said. "It looks as if the team is coming along very well and working hard."

"I think the players would agree with you about the working hard part," Johnson replied before turning his attention back on the practice.

Arcadian had now taken a position within the playing field while Copeland had taken over as caller. Arcadian displayed the skills she had obtained from playing skatsball as much as she did, outmaneuvering a defenseman by performing a full loop around him. With one hand holding onto her board, she took her shot in the last turn and scored. Arcadian's opponent simply floated on his board, shaking his head with both disgust and amusement. Arcadian came back around and stopped to talk with him about what had happened and what he could have done to prevent her from scoring with such a maneuver. Johnson watched the interaction from the sideline until he heard his name being called.

"Excuse me, Commodore Johnson?"

Johnson turned to see one of his young human engineers approach.

"Yes, Crewman?"

"The bridge just called down here looking for you," the crew member stated. "Apparently there is a message for you from *Starbase 22*."

Johnson nodded, saying, "Inform the bridge I'm on my way." He then got up from the bench and exited the hangar deck, heading for the nearest turbolift.

As the door closed behind Johnson, it was Jedvega who spoke first.

"I wonder what is erroneous now?"

"Probably routine," Samuk replied. "I would not worry unnecessarily."

Everyone hoped the Vulcan was right. Some of the crew were still on edge from their last incident with unknown vessels.

Meanwhile, on the practice court, Arcadian was still working her team hard. She could feel the sweat plastering her hair inside her helmet. She had noticed the commodore leave but was too busy with the players to be concerned at the moment. Her best players were now out on the field, and these would make up the team they would put up against *Starbase 22*: Xavier, Maddox, and Solak. Still, she was unsure of Solak, so she would have Arbelo standing by to switch with him, since she knew that Arbelo had more experience on a skatsball field.

Practice continued for another hour or so. Finally, at just past 1900 hours, Arcadian decided to call it a night. The players slowly shuffled off the field, each exhausted not only from the practice, but from the heat the force fields generated from being on for so long, an average skattsball game usually lasting no more than an hour. They had no sooner left the field when it was turned off and the engineering staff began to take it apart, just in case the hanger bay was needed for some other reason – like the unanticipated launch or recovery of a shuttlecraft.

Everyone seated themselves and drank the electrolyte drinks supplied for them, Arcadian noticed that Xavier was a little hunched over, as if in pain. Wondering why, she walked over to him.

"Xavier, are you OK? Did you hurt something?"

The Edoan looked up at her. "Just a little sore from my duties, ma'am," he replied.

There was puzzlement in Arcadian's expression. His duties? Xavier enlightened her.

"I was given extra duty, scrubbing the deck with a toothbrush because of my part in the Deck 7 party."

Oh boy! Arcadian thought Johnson had given out some extreme punishments.

"Don't feel bad," she said. "Copeland and I are in hot water too."

Xavier nodded, but he was in too much discomfort at the moment to ask what the medical officer's comment meant. Arcadian simply gave him an encouraging smile, then turned to talk to the rest of the players.

Following practice and the post-practice debrief, Arcadian headed to her quarters and grabbed a much-needed sonic shower. It was about 2000 hours when she finally got to sleep, and she would need the rest. She had a long day ahead of her – and a tough one.

* * *

"Standard Orbit, Mister DuLac," Johnson ordered.

"Aye, my Lord," the Avalonian responded.

Everyone on board the *Arcturus* was anticipating the day's events. They had just entered orbit over *Starbase 22*, where it was 0800 hours. On the main viewer they could see the *USS Confederation* and the *USS Wasp* holding position over the starbase as well.

Johnson turned to the officer at communications. "Mister Arbelo, contact *Starbase 22* and give my greetings to Commodore Ross and ask them for further instructions."

"Aye, sir," responded Arbelo. It only took a few moments for the *Arcturus* to receive an answer. Arbelo turned in his chair to face Johnson, his hand holding the earpiece in his semi-pointed right ear, and said, "Starbase is responding, visual communication, sir."

"Patch it through," ordered Johnson.

The main viewscreen at the front of the bridge changed to a view of an office, with Commodore Alexander Ross appearing at the center of the image. Ross was human, about 40 years of age with silver hair and blue eyes.

"Welcome to *Starbase 22*, *Arcturus*. We have been preparing for your arrival. How is everything, Eric?"

"Fine, Lex. We are a little banged up from our last incident, but my crew has done a fine job on repairs," responded Johnson.

Ross nodded. He had been briefed by one of the resident admirals about the recent incident the *Arcturus* had been involved in, defending itself from attack by unknown alien starships. “Well, I hope your crew is ready for the day’s events. Your skatsball team can begin beaming down with their equipment whenever you’re ready. We’ll send you coordinates so they can beam directly to their team locker room. I will expect your arrival later. Commodore Ross, out.”

Johnson acknowledged, then activated the intercom on the arm of his command chair and gave the order for the coordinates they were receiving to be relayed to the transporter room. He also excused Arbelo and DuLac from their watches to allow them to join their teammates, replacements immediately filling the open stations.

“Transporter room to bridge,” announced the voice of the transporter chief several minutes later. “Request permission to begin beaming all of the skatsball team members down to the starbase.”

“Permission granted,” Johnson replied before leaning back in his chair. The games were not scheduled to start for another hour, so he considered getting dressed in his dress uniform and beaming down to meet the admirals.

* * *

The *Arcturus* skatsball team materialized in the room that would be their designated locker room for the duration of the tournament at *Starbase 22*. The room was bare except for shelves and lockers in which to hang their uniforms and place their equipment. There was also a food dispenser along the wall opposite the entrance. The locker room would usually be used during the times when a team was not on the court playing, and with four teams at the base, Team *Arcturus* would be spending almost half their time in the locker room.

It took a few minutes for the whole team to beam down, with their equipment arriving a few minutes afterward. Arcadian materialized with Copeland in the first group, along with Maddox and two medical personnel. She had just started checking her skatsball board when the captain of the starbase team entered the locker room. He was Vulcan, and he stood at least 1.9 meters in height, towering over Arcadian.

“Welcome to *Starbase 22*,” he said. “My name is Lieutenant Saruk.”

He looked around the room at the team from the *Arcturus*, his attention finally turning to Arcadian. He noticed the gold sash on her skatsball uniform, which contained a number of stripes indicating that she was a veteran to the game, impressed that one so young could be so accomplished. She in turn responded to him in Vulcan, beginning to converse in his native language – a skill she had learned from her father. Saruk, of course, did not show any reaction to this, merely continuing the conversation with ease. After he left, Copeland – who had been standing a few meters away but was still unable to understand most of what was said – came over to Arcadian.

“What did he say to you?” he asked.

Arcadian turned to face Copeland and replied, “I want to tell everyone together.”

A little frustrated, Copeland nodded and returned his attention to inspecting his own board.

Just as Arcadian was finished with checking over her board and confirming everything was in working order, Commodore Johnson stepped into the locker room.

“Attention on deck!” someone shouted. Everyone quickly stood at attention.

Johnson looked around the room. Team *Arcturus* was wearing matching blue uniforms. Some of the players wore the symbolic gold sash, indicating more experience in the game, including Arcadian and Arbelo.

“As you were,” Johnson ordered. “I just came down to wish you all good luck. “I hope that you all will play in true Starfleet style.” He looked at each team member as he spoke, his eyes coming to a stop on Copeland. He then turned to leave, but stopped in front of Arcadian. Their eyes met and the words he spoke were just above a whisper.

“Be careful!”

Arcadian nodded and smiled. Johnson then left the locker room, only to find Admiral Bryan Ackermann standing there waiting. Johnson immediately snapped to attention and said, “Sir!”

Bryan Ackermann was one of the youngest admirals in Starfleet. He had risen quickly through the ranks due to hard work and discipline. Johnson and Ackermann had met three years earlier while both served at Starfleet Command, and they had quickly become good friends.

“All right, that’s enough,” Ackermann said with a smile. “You know how I hate formalities.”

Johnson laughed but said nothing. Both men then turned towards the doors of the base’s recreation area. Within seconds they were in the domed area where a skatsball field had been set up. The first game scheduled for the day between the *Confederation* and the *Wasp* was just beginning. Stadium-style seats were set up on either side of the playing field, and large viewscreens attached to the ceiling of the dome allowed the audience to see all the action clearly no matter how far away they sat.

Ackermann motioned toward seats that had been set aside for the flag and command grade officers, which were positioned mid-field five rows up from where the judges were seated. The pair sat down and Johnson watched the game for a few minutes before beginning a conversation.

“I’m glad you communicated ahead of time,” he said to the admiral. “I really wasn’t informed otherwise that you would be joining the *Arcturus*.”

“Well I really didn’t know either, until the last minute. I decided I needed a little time away from Starfleet HQ and figured your ship would be the best place to spend that time,” Ackermann answered.

“Well, I’m glad you decided...” Johnson paused because the team from the *Wasp* had scored. “I’m glad you decided on my ship.” He looked up at the viewer above the field to see that the score was 2 – 2. Johnson’s thoughts then turned to the games ahead. “Well, I hope our team wins at least one. Most of the crew are new to this game with just a few exceptions.”

“Don’t you have Arcadian?” Ackermann asked. “I’ve heard she’s an excellent skatsball player.”

Ackermann was not watching the game as he made his remark. He was looking at Johnson’s face for a reaction instead. He knew about Johnson’s relationship with the Centauri, for Johnson himself had informed him. He had also met Athena Arcadian when she had been enrolled in Starfleet Academy.

Johnson had continued to watch the game, but he knew that his friend could read the expression on his face, so he laughed. “You always know my soft spots,” he said to the admiral. “Yes, Arcadian is running the team, but...”

Johnson did not get to finish his sentence as a roar went through the crowd. There was a fight going on between some of the players on the field.

Ackermann shook his head. As he had suspected, the *Wasp* team had started the whole thing. He could see the incident as they re-played it on the viewers. He also knew that particular team was on the verge of getting kicked out of the league. Ackermann watched as the callers broke up the fight and escorted the players involved off the field, then shifted his attention to Admiral Kraft, one of the game judges, who was talking to one of the players from the *Wasp*. Ackermann knew that it was not pleasantries he was exchanging with this particular player.

“You know Pickett is going to be fuming right about now,” he commented.

Johnson nodded, then said, “You mentioned in your transmissions that Pickett was here at the starbase for some kind of official business with you and Admiral Kraft.” Johnson would not ask what that business was. He knew Ackermann would tell him if he could, and just hoped by mentioning it he could turn their conversation in that direction.

“All I can divulge right now is that he wants two of his crew off his ship,” Ackermann remarked vaguely.

Even though Ackermann could not tell Johnson who those two crew members were, the commodore suspected they were somehow involved in the fight had that just taken place on the game field. Captain Pickett was a good man, but some of the members of his ship’s skatsball team were known to be causing havoc on his ship. He suspected that these two crewmen Ackermann alluded to – whoever they were – were the ones behind it, and Pickett had requested to speak to the two highest ranking Starfleet officers in the sector. Admiral Kraft – who was already assigned to *Starbase 22* – and Ackermann – who had arrived on the base aboard the *USS Confederation* to meet the *Arcturus* – were the senior officers present, and had given the *Wasp* permission to make a stop at the starbase under the pretense of participating in the scheduled skatsball tournament. Pickett and the two crew members in question had already met with both admirals the previous day. The outcome of the meeting was an agreement that Pickett would give his crew members one more opportunity to prove themselves: the *Wasp*’s participation in the skatsball competition. Ackermann had not thought it a good idea to begin with, but he had gone along with Admiral Kraft’s suggestion. Now he knew that Admiral Kraft must also be having second thoughts.

After nearly a minute, the game resumed and the crowd returned to cheering for their favored team. Meanwhile, in the *Arcturus*' locker room, Team *Arcturus* was making their final preparations. Arcadian gathered the team around so she could discuss their strategy, address any questions, and tell them all what the captain of the Starbase team had told her.

"Okay, guys," she said. "We're next up on the field. We're scheduled to play against the team from *Starbase 22*. Those guys should be a bunch of pushovers! Later today we face the *Confederation*. Our final game will be against the team from the *Wasp*."

"At least they saved the worst for last," Copeland commented.

Arcadian had been thinking the same thing. She explained, "Well, word is that the *Wasp* has two warnings against them already from violations during their other games. Let's hope they get their third – and final – before we even face them so we won't have to worry."

"If the *Wasp* gets disqualified from the tournament, we win by default!" Arbelo remarked with a grin. A few of his teammates looked a little disappointed.

"We can deal with that situation if it occurs," Arcadian stated. "In the meantime, this is the team for the first game; Copeland, myself, Maddox, Arbelo, and Xavier. Their our primary players, but I want Solak, DuLac, and Stryker ready to step in at any time for change-ups."

All of the players nodded. Arcadian then turned to the Amerind Marine corpsman Logan Whitehorse.

"Whitehorse, you be ready for the last game. We're going to need your bulk, and I'm sure most of us are going to be tired by then."

Whitehorse smiled and in a deep voice fitting of his size he said, "I'll be ready."

* * *

Back in the starbase recreation area, the game between the *Confederation* and the *Wasp* had ended. The *Confederation* had beaten the *Wasp* by one goal, and this did not please the *Wasp* players in the least, but they still had two more games left. As the *Wasp* team was leaving the field and the *Arcturus* team entered, several of the *Arcturus*' off-duty crew began to drift in, all of them taking seats in one area of the temporary stadium and forming a small cheering section for their team. Johnson noticed this and smiled. Maybe this shipload of misfits were shaping into a crew after all, he thought to himself. Ackermann noticed the smile on Johnson's face and followed his gaze, also noticing the *Arcturus* crew gathering in the stands.

"I see your crew is getting ready for the big game," Ackermann commented.

"Yes. I think they are as excited as the team is. I just hope the *Wasp* crew doesn't start trouble."

Johnson was worried as well. He knew that if the *Wasp* did start trouble, Copeland and several other of his crew would not back down. He sighed and Ackermann could see the worry displayed on Johnson's face.

"I don't think your team would start anything," the admiral commented. "But I know they would finish it." He smiled after his last remark, and watched as Johnson looked at him with surprise on his face.

"Well, we can only hope for at least one win today."

* * *

Arcadian and Copeland had just emerged from the locker room, heading toward the playing field, when they both heard a voice from behind them say, "I think we're going to have fun with these guys." Arcadian was the first to turn around to see who it was who had spoken. She was not surprised to recognize Jake Collins. Not a very handsome man, his face showed years of battles with other Starfleet personnel.

"I thought you were on a prison colony, Collins," Arcadian remarked before clarifying. "Not as a guard... As a prisoner."

Collins' face turned furious, and he began to move towards the young doctor. However, he did not get very far as two of the starbase security guards posted nearby had heard the comments and immediately stepped toward the players. Collins stopped where he was standing and glared at Arcadian with an evil smile. He then looked over

her uniform, noticing the championship patches on her shoulders. Memories of his Academy days returned and his smile disappeared.

“You know, I definitely cannot wait for this game. I’ve been waiting a long time for this opportunity.”

As Collins spoke, another man moved up beside him. Copeland easily recognized Vance Carter. When Carter noticed Copeland standing next to Arcadian, his face took on a bitter look.

“Copeland! I told you once... Never cross my path! I guess today will be the day of reckoning.”

Copeland’s face took on a stern and determined look as he replied, “Carter, why don’t you crawl under the rock you came from?” The remark prompted a cuss from Carter’s lips, but he could not do anything more than stare at Copeland. The two security guards had remained where they were between the two teams.

Both teams continued to stare each other down until the starbase head of security stepped in to see what was holding up Team *Arcturus*.

“All right you guys, back to your locker room,” he said to the crew from the *Wasp*. “*Arcturus*, get your butts out there! Your game is next.”

All twenty players from the *Arcturus* marched out into the rec area, stepping over to their team bench. As they appeared on the field, a roar of cheers rose up in the crowd. When they turned to see where the noise was coming from, they found most of their shipmates seated behind their bench. The *Arcturus* must have been operating on a skeleton crew for so many of their shipmates to be present! Arcadian smiled. This was just what her team needed to see; some spirit from their shipmates to wake these guys up.

Arcadian looked around at the audience, finally locating Johnson – and to her surprise Admiral Ackermann – in the fifth row behind the judges. Ackermann raised his hand in acknowledgment when he noticed her looking in his direction, while Johnson simply smiled. Arcadian turned back to her team and began to name the first players that would enter the field. She also gave instructions to the replacements.

Finally, a buzzer was sounded to initiate a short practice session. The *Arcturus*, as the visiting team, would be first to practice. The forcefield opened and Arcadian threw her board toward the deck before jumping onto the board and soaring to the top of the dome. Within seconds, her team was also executing drills and taking shots on goal. After several minutes, the buzzer sounded for a second time, notifying the *Arcturus* team to leave the field and let the team from *Starbase 22* practice and warm-up briefly. Ten minutes later, both primary teams were on the field and the game began.

Almost a combination of ice hockey, lacrosse, soccer, and to an extent polo – all played on flying boards no bigger than a 20th century skateboard – skatsball was a fast-paced and exciting team sport. The face-off was won by the *Arcturus* but the starbase team got the ball back in their control fairly quickly. The game continued in a fast and even pace, both teams controlling the ball for various periods, but as the first period ended the game was scoreless. The trend continued into the second period, the *Arcturus* continuing to keep up with the starbase team, until the last two minutes of the period when the starbase team’s Center managed to get the ball past Galen DuLac. There was no one else between DuLac and the goal to stop him after that, and the starbase Center scored easily.

Between each period, the teams received a ten minute break to rest, grab a drink, dry off slightly with a towel, and take care of any minor bumps and bruises that may have occurred during gameplay. During the break between the second and third periods, Arcadian gathered her team together to talk.

“Okay, guys, relax. We’ll get it back.” She turned to the young Avalonian. “Galen!”

DuLac looked over from his seat. His face wore an expression of misery.

“Don’t be upset,” Arcadian said. “It’s your first real game. Everyone gets beaten. Just...”

Arcadian had to think of a way to express what she wanted to say in terms the boy, raised in a medieval-style society, would understand so he could get his head back in the game. Finally she settled on, “Just restore your honor by playing good.” She hoped this would work. Sure enough, DuLac stood up and bowed in her direction.

“I shall perform my best, M’lady.”

All the other players began to smile, just what they needed at this point. A few minutes later the buzzer sounded and the teams returned to the playing field.

During the third period the *Arcturus* did ‘get it back,’ with a goal scored by Maddox, his play executed perfectly. Xavier had passed over the center line with the ball but the opposing player covering him did an excellent

job of disrupting his board. Realizing this, he spotted Maddox alone along the side of the field and passed to him. Maddox was not alone for long as the starbase team converged on him, but he immediately outmaneuvered all the opposing players and scored to tie the game with only three minutes left in the period. Everyone in the stands from the *Arcturus*, including the players on the bench, went wild. Maddox was crowded with congratulations from all his teammates.

Eventually the clock ran out in the third period with no further scores, which meant overtime. Arcadian used the unexpected rest period to gather all her players together and give them a proper pep talk.

“We can win this, guys!” she said. “If we win this game, it will put the other two teams we still have to face on edge! We need to do this!” The players all agreed. “Let’s go with Copeland, Maddox, Arbelo, Xavier, and myself.”

It was another ten minutes of rough and active play. Both teams seemed to have an advantage over the other from time to time, but when the final buzzer sounded, neither team had scored. The game was declared a tie, and to Team *Arcturus* – the newest and least experienced team in the Starfleet league – this was as good as a win!

Team *Starbase 22* immediately joined the *Arcturus* crew in the center of the field to shake hands. Some expressed their surprise and respect for the *Arcturus* team’s abilities. They now knew they had some excellent competition playing in their sector.

The congratulations ended, both teams filed off the field and walked to their prospective locker rooms. In the *Arcturus*’ room, the players showed uncontrollable excitement once the doors had closed. They had actually tied the Fleet champs with only one week of practice! Arcadian and Copeland were the last to enter the room. Copeland moved to sit down in an open seat at one side while Team Captain Arcadian tried to settle the team down and remind them they still had two more games ahead of them.

“All right, everyone! Let’s quiet down...”

The players settle slightly and began to move to their seats.

“I say this for everyone; You all played a good game.” A cheer rose up among the team. Arcadian held up her hand to quiet them again. “But we’ve got to keep this game in perspective. Let’s not get overconfident! We still have to play the Confederation and then the Wasp.” Most of the players understood what she meant. Arcadian did not want the team going out and making stupid mistakes in the next game. She continued, “We have to remember that we could have won, we had several opportunities – especially during the overtime – to score a decisive winning goal. Now we have to win the next two games in order to make good standings in the sector.”

Arcadian waited for what she had said to sink in. Several of the smiles her teammates had been showing slowly disappeared.

“What I want you do now is relax, eat something, and think about the plans for the next game. We have at least an hour, probably closer to two before we go up against the *Confederation*. Stay loose. We can’t afford any injuries.”

The players began to move around and get comfortable. Some stripped off the upper part of their skjatsball uniform, toweling themselves off. Others made use of the food dispenser in the room to deliver a small snack. Meanwhile Arcadian moved to the side of the room and sat down next to Copeland.

“You think we can beat the *Confederation*?” Copeland asked her.

“I think if we play like we did against the last team, we can take both games,” Arcadian replied. “*Starbase 22* is the best team in the league.”

“You seem pretty confident,” Copeland remarked.

“Aren’t you?” Arcadian asked in return.

* * *

Right after the game ended and their team left the field, Johnson and Admiral Ackermann left their seats, heading to an officer’s lounge to find something to eat. Immediately a steward came to take their lunch order, after which Ackermann motioned Johnson to a seat. The lounge had a long couch with a glass table in front, and on both sides of the couch were two comfortable chairs similar to recliners. Johnson seated himself one end of the couch.

“Do you want a drink?” the admiral asked. “I know you don’t normally like to drink alcohol, but how about brandy to celebrate.”

“Brandy will do fine,” Johnson replied.

Ackermann motioned to one of the stewards for the drinks. Not long after, the steward returned carrying two snifters containing a tan liquid. Holding the serving tray low, each officer took one of the glasses.

“Your team looked very good out there today,” Ackermann said before taking a sip of his drink.

Johnson nodded before saying, “Yes, but we still have two other games to play.”

Ackermann leaned back in his chair, letting out a long breath of air and started to relax, his glass sitting on the arm of the chair in one hand.

“I think they will do all right,” he said. “They seemed to show some excellent skills. Especially Athena.”

The admiral took another sip from his glass, but peered over the edge to see what Johnson’s reaction to his comment would be. Johnson was merely amused, knowing Ackermann was needling him again.

“Yes, she is an excellent player,” was all he said.

Ackermann smiled. “You know, every time I say her name you have this twinkle in your eye.” Johnson laughed.

“Sometimes I think you enjoy needling me about her.”

“But of course!” Ackermann admitted. “An admiral’s life can be boring at times, only flying a desk instead of standing on the bridge of a starship. That’s why I requested a visit on your ship. My normal daily routine gets tiresome at times.”

Johnson now looked over the rim of his own glass, noticing the sorrow that appeared on Ackermann’s face momentarily, but the look quickly disappeared.

“You know you’re welcome aboard anytime,” he said.

Ackermann smiled, but he knew he was only staying aboard the *Arcturus* for a brief period of time. Most starship captains felt having an admiral on board was similar to having an extra bag of cargo, only with more pressure.

“I’m only staying for a short time. I’m considering this a vacation. Fortunately one I don’t need to take leave for. In the meantime, let’s catch up on a few things...”

* * *

It was 1500 hours when the *Arcturus* and *Confederation* finally faced off against each other. Johnson and Ackermann had returned to their seats just as both teams were emerging from their locker rooms. For this game, however, they had company. Admiral Kraft, who was not involved in being a judge for this particular matchup, seated himself next to Admiral Ackermann while Commodore Ross had taken over as judge.

Johnson looked over toward the area of the stands where his crew had gathered earlier and noticed while some of the cheering section remained the same, some of the crew were gone – replaced by those who had only just gotten off duty aboard the *Arcturus*. Among the new arrivals were Dr. Kyri Morgaan, H’Lar, Kalin Kale, Samuk, Iona Hanlon, Jedvega, and even Briana Lithir. He was surprised that engineer Lithir had come – she must have been extremely conflicted to be able to tear herself away from her beloved engine room. Johnson then turned his attention back to the field where Team *Arcturus* had just finished their practice session and the game was about to begin.

Higher in the stands, Jedvega leaned over to see the Commodore seating near the two admirals.

“Who are they?” she asked, pointing in the direction of the three high-ranking officers.

Samuk looked where Jedvega was pointing before saying, “That is Admiral Ackermann and Admiral Kraft.”

“Why is Commodore Johnson sitting with them and not with his own crew?” Jedvega asked.

Samuk did not get a chance to offer an answer as the buzzer sounded and the skatsball game began. Within minutes of the first period starting, Arcadian scored the first goal of the game. She had received a pass from

Copeland at center line and had looped over the *Confederation's* defensive man while taking the shot at the goal. The *Arcturus* crew went wild.

Copeland was smiling as the two teams moved back toward the center of the field.

“Nice pass, huh?” he said to Arcadian. The Centaurian woman laughed at the Tamurilian man’s conceit.

As the first period ended several minutes later, the *Arcturus* had a 1 – 0 lead. This led several of the *Arcturus* players to grow overconfident and the *Confederation* scored to tie the game in the second period, the *Confederation's* offensive player outmaneuvering Copeland and causing him to fall off his own skatsboard. Copeland was not happy about this turn of events.

The score remained tied until five minutes remaining in the third and final period. Arcadian had been covering the *Confederation* team’s Center when he received a pass from his wing. He immediately took off toward the *Arcturus* goal, Arcadian following in hot pursuit. She knew the Center was the best shooter on his team and that she could not allow him the opportunity to shoot the ball. She maneuvered herself above the opposing player, and when she thought the timing was right, she swooped in with an angular motion, crossing the Center’s path. At the same time, she swung her own stick and hit his cage. The player was not ready for this move and the ball dislodged. Before any *Confederation* player could reach the ball, Xavier swooped down on his board and passed the ball to Arbelo, who had deduced what Arcadian was planning to do and waited at the center line. Arbelo began his forward motion, noticing one of the *Confederation's* defensive players leaving Dulac and heading in his direction. He waited until the player was within a few meters and snapped the ball to DuLac, who immediately shot toward the goal and scored, breaking the tie.

All of the *Arcturus* crew stood up in their seats cheering. The noise was almost deafening. DuLac was knocked from his board by his teammates, while Arcadian stood at one side watching. She felt great. But there were still five minutes left in the period. She knew Team *Arcturus* had to run out the clock, or it would mean another overtime. She gave her team a moment to celebrate their score with DuLac, then flew past, reminding them they had a game to win still. Once play resumed, the *Confederation* tried their best, but Team *Arcturus* blocked their every move, preventing them from getting any closer to the goal than the center line. Finally the counter clicked down to zero and the buzzer sounded. The *Arcturus* had won the game! Both teams met in the center of the dome and shook hands before leaving the playing field. As they returned to their locker room, the *Arcturus* team was pumped and ready for the *Wasp*.

Once inside the locker room, with the doors closed behind them, Arcadian calmed the players down.

“Remember, we have another game, and this one will be the worst! I need you all at your best. And keep yourselves calm.”

Arcadian looked over toward the chronometer on the wall. She knew their match against the *Wasp* was the last game scheduled for the day, and would start in just a few minutes, and hoped the adrenalin rush from their victory would be enough to keep her team going.

“All right, Whitehorse and Stryker, be ready to go in on a moment’s notice.” Both players acknowledged their orders. “Everyone else, grab a quick drink and get ready to go out there again. We’ll show the *Wasp* team who’s going to have fun with whom.”

* * *

Commodore Johnson, who had sat on the edge of his seat throughout the game between his crew and the *Confederation*, had slapped his knee in delight when DuLac scored. His crew was showing amazing skills and he was proud of them, especially Arcadian. He longed to go down and join in her celebration, but he knew that today this was her show. Now he waited for the last game, hoping nothing untoward would happen, but he had a bad feeling.

“Your team seems to be doing excellent today, Commodore,” a voice said from next to Johnson. The commodore looked over to find Captain Pickett standing in the aisle. He smiled pleasantly at his fellow starship commander.

“Yes, they are doing a good job,” he replied.

Johnson studied Pickett's face. The man had aged somewhat since their last encounter. He now had silver hairs at his temples and lines etching his face. Pickett moved into the row of seats and sat down next to Admiral Kraft.

"I hope they are ready for the *Wasp*," he said casually.

Johnson smiled, but his eyes were steel. "They're ready," he said, his eyes looking back at the playing field. "Let's just hope Team *Wasp* plays fair for once."

Pickett's face betrayed the strain he was under due to his team's conduct. Ackermann, seeing this, thought it would be a good time to change the subject. He addressed Kraft, saying, "Admiral, are you one of the judges for this game?"

Kraft shook his head as he said, "No. Commodore Ross will be judging this game with two other officers from the starbase. I get to be a spectator for the rest of the day."

Before the game even started, Arcadian had decided to have a talk with the callers and Judge. She walked to the Judges' box and waited until the Commodore acknowledged her presence.

"Can I help you, Mister Arcadian?"

"Yes, sir. I just wanted to make sure you are aware that there are two players from the *Wasp* in this next game who have a grudge against two other players from the *Arcturus*", she answered.

The Commodore showed no reaction other than to say, "I will keep an eye on the game, but you know the rules. A player must have three warnings during the game before I can dismiss them from play."

Arcadian nodded, saying, "I understand." She then rejoined her teammates at the bench. She had not liked the Commodore's answer. Playing strictly by the rules would give Collins all the time in the world to hurt one of her players, but she could not dwell on it for long. The game was about to begin.

When face off time came, Arcadian faced her old adversary.

"You'd better watch your back, Arcadian," Collins warned.

Arcadian looked into her opponent's eyes but ignored the comment. She was determined to simply burn him as much as possible this game.

Copeland, meanwhile, was having the same problem in another area of the game field. It was getting progressively harder for the Marine to contain his anger as Carter taunted him just loudly enough for Copeland and no one else to hear.

The skatball game started with the *Arcturus* winning the faceoff, but the *Wasp* continued to apply pressure as much as possible. Every time Collins saw the caller watching other players, he would push, shove, or even hit Arcadian. As the game progressed, Copeland was not faring any better as Carter copied Collins' moves. Arcadian saw this going on and tried to keep Copeland's concentration on the game instead of Carter by talking to him through the game. She just hoped Copeland would continue to stay calm.

It was ten minutes into the first period when Arbelo scored the first goal, but not without the *Wasp* defenseman un-boarding him after he scored. Arbelo held his temper as he picked himself up off the deck. Arcadian immediately rushed over to his side to talk to him while the caller called a penalty against the *Wasp*. Un-boarding an opposing player was an illegal move, and this resulted in the *Arcturus* being one man up. They had two minutes to try to score on this advantage before the defenseman was allowed back in the game. Arcadian had the upper hand and managed to score for the second time. Collins was none too happy about this, as she had burned him in front of the goal by ducking his hitter and maneuvering under him. Arcadian smiled as she passed him.

"What's wrong, Jake? Can't take it anymore?" she taunted him, then turned and flew off before he could answer. As the teams positioned for the next faceoff, Copeland moved his board next to Arcadian.

"I'm getting very impatient and mad," he complained.

Arcadian glanced at him, saying, "Do you want to be taken out? We cannot afford a fight."

Copeland shook his head. "No, but..." Arcadian understood the stout Marine's feelings. She had almost lost her temper a few times already herself.

"Try to stay calm, okay? We have about five minutes left this period."

Copeland nodded.

The first period ended several minutes later with the *Arcturus* ahead by two goals. Arcadian hoped her team would hold this lead. Most of the players were unhappy with the way the *Wasp* players were taking cheap shots at them.

“Look everyone, just stay calm,” she implored. Some of the players began to speak but Arcadian held up her hand to stop them. “I know it’s hard. I’m just about ready to start playing by their rules too. But we can’t do that. Remember, we are a clean team. Don’t play dirty like the *Wasp* crew! I’m not saying don’t protect yourselves. Hit back if you must, but don’t do anything dirty. Understood?” Everyone nodded.

A few minutes later, the buzzer sounded, signaling the start of the second period. This time Arcadian put Whitehorse and Stryker into play, keeping Maddox up on the front line. Throughout the whole second period there were no problems. The *Wasp* continued to play dirty, but everyone held their own and neither team scored. There were a few minor penalties, but there were no fights. Arcadian did not like it. It was too calm and she sensed trouble!

In the stands, Johnson was also on edge. He too sensed the calm before the storm. Ackermann noticed this and leaned toward him to speak.

“Are you worried?” the admiral asked, but he did not need an answer. He could see it in Johnson’s eyes. “Don’t be. I think your people are handling themselves well.”

“I know they are, but what about the *Wasp*? Can they handle themselves?” Johnson asked.

Ackermann leaned back in his seat. He hoped that the *Wasp* was not planning anything.

Across the aisle, Iona Hanlon and Morgaan were discussing the same subject.

“I think Athena is going to have her hands full next period,” Hanlon remarked.

Morgaan nodded. “I think you are right. It seems everything is calm right now, but...” Morgaan sensed the tension in the air between the two teams.

Within minutes, the buzzer sounded to start the third period. Both teams positioned themselves on the game field and the game resumed. Everything seemed to be going fine until halfway through the period. That is when everything happened. Copeland had control of the ball and he could not shake Vance Carter. Noticing Arcadian was alone, Copeland made a perfect pass. When Arcadian received the ball she moved into an offensive position, keeping her eyes on the players in front of her. She did not see Carter and Collins converge on her in a coordinated attack. Maddox tried to yell a warning, but Arcadian did not react quickly enough.

The first thing Arcadian felt was a stick hit the back of her knees, causing her feet to fly forward. At the same time she received two hard blows – one on each side – to her ribs. She felt the breath explode from her body and she collapsed to the deck below in a heap. She heard a commotion going on around her but did not move. The first voice she heard was DuLac’s.

“My Lady, canst thou hear me? Art thee well?”

Arcadian opened her eyes for a few seconds but she did not want to move. She knew she had hurt something very badly.

Johnson had watched helplessly from the stands. When Arcadian was hit he felt his stomach fall to his feet. Catching movement out of the corner of his eye, he saw Morgaan was already on her way down the aisle to the field. He jumped from his seat to follow, as did Ackermann., who paused to face the other starship commanderm his expression angry.

“Pickett, you tell your two men they are out of the game,” Ackermann said between clenched teeth. “They were warned before this game even started. Now they have to face the consequences of their actions!”

As Ackermann confronted Captain Pickett, Johnson was already down the bottom of the aisle and making his way to the edge of the field.

On the field, Arcadian could hear Copeland yelling something. She turned her head slightly to see the Marine fighting with Jake Collins while Maddox was having it out with Vance Carter. “Oh boy!” she thought to herself before closing her eyes to shut out the chaos that was occurring on the field.

“Athena! Athena, can you hear me?” It was Dr. Morgaan.

“Yeah, Morgan, I can hear you. I’m fine,” Arcadian replied.

She tried to move, to sit up slightly, but excruciating pain shot through her ribs when she tried to breathe.

“OH!” she cried.

Morgaan immediately helped Arcadian to her feet. She watched intently, but Arcadian could not seem to lift her head up all the way. “What hurts?” the doctor asked.

Ignoring Morgaan, Arcadian slowly moved toward the Judge’s box. Commodore Ross looked over at her as she approached.

“Are you all right?” he asked. Arcadian nodded. “Your two team members have five minutes penalty apiece for fighting,” the commodore informed her.

“My team members have 5 minute penalties!?!” she asked incredulously, sending another wave of pain through her ribs. “What about them?” she yelled, pointing at Collins and Carter. She was mad. Even the callers saw it. Her eyes blazed.

“They have a fifteen minute penalty each,” Ross answered calmly.

“WHAT!? Fifteen minutes? They should be thrown out!!” She could not contain herself anymore. Collins, who had been standing near the opening in the forcefield, began to taunt her.

“What’s wrong, Arcadian?” he said. “Can’t take a little hit?”

Collins’ taunting did nothing to help the situation, and Arcadian turned toward him.

“Jake, go suck on a Horta!!” she taunted back.

Collins immediately turned red and began to move toward Arcadian, who did not back down and started moving toward her adversary as well. The two callers saw what was coming and hurried to get between the two players as Collins and Arcadian continued to yell at each other. Finally Commodore Ross had had enough.

“Arcadian, if you don’t get back to your bench, you will be given a five minute penalty as well! And as for you...” He pointed at Collins. “You will be thrown out of the game!!!”

Arcadian turned on her heel and faced the Commodore, but he was talking to Admirals Ackermann and Kraft and Captain Pickett. Ross nodded a couple of times as the two admirals spoke, then turned to the *Wasp* bench, where Collins and Carter had returned with wide grins on their faces.

“There has been a revision to my prior ruling,” the commodore said. “Collins and Carter, you’re both out of the game!”

Collins jumped up off the bench. He could not believe what he had just heard. Then when he saw the two admirals standing at the judges table along with his own captain and realized why. He turned toward Arcadian and Dr. Morgaan and shouted, “Arcadian, I’ll get you for this!!” Arcadian simply smiled, offering him a mock salute, then with Morgaan’s help she hobbled to the bench. Her ribs continued to ache badly.

As she sat down on the bench, she noticed several players from both teams still out on the field, including Copeland who was still having a shouting session with Carter.

“Copeland!!!” Athena yelled. “SHUT!! UP!!!”

Copeland stopped abruptly, turning to look at Arcadian in shock. Then he noticed she was angry. Very angry! He had never seen her like this before, and he knew the only thing he could do was rejoin his team at the bench where DuLac and Stryker were already standing near Arcadian and Commodore Johnson was approaching the bench.

“*Arcturus*, you have one minute to get a team on the field,” the caller remarked, pausing briefly near their bench. Arcadian looked around at who was available.

“Stryker, Whitehorse, DuLac, Arbelo, and Xavier; out on the field,” she ordered, her voice sounding weak. “Do not let them score! Understood?”

The five named players all nodded and assumed their positions on the field. Johnson watched Arcadian as the players grabbed their boards and headed onto the playing field and saw her flinch in pain.

“Morgaan, take Mister Arcadian to get checked out,” he ordered.

Arcadian raised her head and looked at Johnson.

“I’m sorry, sir, but I have a game to finish!” she said resolutely.

Johnson’s face turned stone-like. Silence hung in the air for several seconds, but Arcadian stood her ground. She was going back in this game whether he liked it or not.

“I gave an order,” Johnson said. “Are you disobeying it, Mister Arcadian?”

Arcadian stood up to face her commanding officer. Pain shot through her side as she did, but she ignored it.

“Sir, I’m already confined to my quarters. I am not going to leave this game! I can’t leave this game now! This is it!”

Johnson looked closely at Arcadian’s face. If it had been any other crew member he would have asserted his authority. A sigh left his lips.

“I will let you play on one condition,” he compromised. “You let Morgaan check you out first.”

“Fine, but I’m playing even if Morgaan says not to.” She knew Morgaan could stop her from playing, and she was not going to let that happen.

Morgaan, who had been right next to Arcadian and listened to the entire exchange, could not believe that Arcadian had actually stood up to the commodore, but she also knew that once the skatsball team captain set her mind to something, she would stick to it, whatever the consequences.

Morgaan had experienced this since Athena came into the Medical division.

For the moment she waited. Johnson and Arcadian were face to face. Finally the Commodore nodded his head reluctantly. Morgaan immediately called over a medical technician. Retrieving a medical scanner from the portable medikit, she began her examination of the skatsball player. Arcadian looked at the indications, having been trained how to operate the scanner and knowing what the indications meant. Morgaan finished and handed the scanner back to the tech, then looked at Johnson and said, “Everything is all right, although her heart rate is up. I suspect she has two bruised ribs, but no internal injuries.”

Arcadian smiled and said, “I could have told you that.”

Johnson was not smiling. Concern marked his eyes.

“Do you think, if she continued to play, she could cause major injuries?” he asked.

Morgaan was about to answer when the caller signaled to the *Arcturus* bench. “Penalties are finished.”

Arcadian nodded to the caller, then turned to her own bench. “Copeland, relieve Xavier. Maddox, go in for DuLac.”

Both players immediately entered the field. Arcadian then stood up and buttoned her mouth protector on her helmet. Johnson grasped her arm as she started to move toward the field.

“Morgaan didn’t answer my question,” he said. “I want to know. If you go back in there, can you cause yourself more damage?”

“She can if she doesn’t protect those ribs,” Morgaan replied. “They’ll break easily if anyone hits them, and that could cause further internal injuries.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll protect them,” Arcadian assured. “I’m playing!”

Arcadian moved too quickly for Johnson to stop her. Johnson stood at opening in the forcefield. He wanted to get her back on the bench, but he knew anything he did to make that happen would cause a scene, which would not look good in front of everyone watching the game. He settled for muttering under his breath before turning to Morgaan.

“How badly can she hurt herself?” he asked, worry making his face.

The ship’s doctor knew Arcadian was taking a risk, but she also knew that the young woman could take care of herself.

“I believe she will be careful. She knows the extent of her injury and what her limitations are.”

There was only five minutes left in the period when Arcadian re-joined the game. Shortly after she entered the playing field, Whitehorse dislodged the ball from one of the *Wasp* players. Seeing Arcadian all alone at the center line, he passed to her. Catching the ball in her stick, she cradled it and began moving forward toward the *Wasp* goal. One of the opposing players converged on her, using his hitter on her, but she ignored him. Her determination was too great for anyone to interfere.

In order to get rid of the opposing player she forced her board to stop in mid air. The *Wasp* player, not expecting the maneuver, flew right by her. She was now perfectly positioned for the shot.

She could hear Collins on the sideline shouting at his players to do anything they could to stop Arcadian; hit her, block her, jump on top of her if they had to! Several game officials had to hold him back to prevent him from running out on the field himself.

Arcadian flipped her stick before any of the *Wasp* players could reach her. The ball entered the goal, prompting the buzzer to sound and the crowds on the sidelines to jump up and cheer. The *Arcturus* was up by three goals and on the verge of a shutout.

Both Arcadian and Copeland flew along the edge of the field past the *Wasp* bench, together performing a mock salute at Collins and Carter. Both men would have jumped right through the forcefield if they could to get at the pair. As they returned to the center of the field for the next faceoff, Copeland smiled at Arcadian.

“You know something? I’m enjoying this game,” Copeland remarked. Arcadian laughed, sending a sharp pain through her torso.

As play resumed, and with only a minute left to play, the *Arcturus* team started taking things slow. They knew that they had won the game. All they needed to do was let the clock to run out. However, their plan was not to come to fruition. As Arcadian positioned herself near the top the dome, she noticed movement near the *Wasp*’s entrance through the forcefield. Quickly counting the number of players on the field, she realized Collins and Carter had somehow gotten onto the field unnoticed and Collins was heading directly at her. She took a quick look around to find Carter facing off directly against Copeland. It appeared the *Wasp* players were pairing off directly against *Arcturus* players. This was going to be WAR!

Collins slowed and stopped right in front of Arcadian. “I’m going to make you regret you ever saw me again,” he said.

Arcadian simply smiled, causing Collins to grow angrier. Without warning, he took the first swing. It landed on Arcadian’s ribs, causing her to wince and almost fall off her board, which at more than six meters in the air would have been devastating to her already existing injuries. She defended herself using her own game stick. After several dodges and parries, she finally saw an opening and dislodged Collins’ stick from his hands. Not expecting the move, Collins simply started at Arcadian, giving her time to swing her own stick, hitting him once in the stomach, then in the head. Collins lost his helmet and fell off his board to the deck below. Arcadian followed him down on her board, then jumped off and confronted Collins just as looked up at her. She took one last shot for the game; a punch with everything she could muster behind it. It landed squarely on Collins’ nose, causing him to fall back and yell in pain.

Before Arcadian could do anything more, two starbase security guards were grabbing her arms and dragging her away. Seconds later she heard a thud a few meters away. Looking over she saw Vance Carter laying on his back, his face bruised and bloody and Copeland jumping down from his board, smiling.

Arcadian looked around the entire playing field. Whitehorse had two *Wasp* players in head locks and was coaching Xavier, who was boxing with a third player. His third arm gave Xavier an advantage. And in one corner of the field, Maddox was delivering the last of his own punches to the solar plexus of another *Wasp* player. His foe landed face down on the deck as Stryker finished his own man and starbase security guards escorted him to the player entrance. By the time control was restored, most of the *Wasp* players were either lying on the deck or being helped off the field. In spite of the pain, Arcadian smiled as she turned to Copeland.

The Marine held out his hand as he said, “I hope we can do this again sometime.” He had watched Arcadian throughout the three games and found that he liked her style. In spite of the fact that offering a handshake was considered an insult to most Centauri, Arcadian knew Copeland’s gesture was one of peace. She returned his gesture.

“We will,” she replied.

By the time the teams were led off the field under guard, most of the spectators had left, though some of the *Arcturus* crew remained behind to help celebrate the win. All of the *Arcturus* team sat on the bench. Everyone felt tired and sore – several more than others. It had been a long day. Arcadian had just sat down with her team when Commodore Johnson returned. Everyone stood at attention. “Here it comes,” they thought.

Johnson paced back and forth once in front of the players. He had watched the last minute of the game in horror. However, he had been both mad and proud at the same time. Mad that his crew had given in to their baser instincts and fought. Proud that they had played as a team and beaten the *Wasp*.

"I am not at all pleased with the conduct shown here today," he remarked.

Arcadian could not let this happen. "We didn't start this, sir. We had no other choice but to protect ourselves!" she pointed out.

Copeland joined in, saying, "She's right, Commodore, sir. We had no other alternative."

Johnson retained watched as all the players agreed. They all moved to stand behind Arcadian, literally backing her up. The Commodore was amused by their actions, actually trying to protect her from his perceived wrath. When he took command of *Arcturus* he had hoped for a crew that was as loyal to him and each other as they were showing now.

"I'm not going to hand out any disciplinary actions," he assured. "I know that the *Wasp* started it – two players in particular – and you finished it." He paused as some laughter erupted among the players. "I am very proud of this crew today," he added. "However, that does not make fighting the correct action."

The players understood, but Johnson caught a smirk briefly appearing on Arcadian's face. He was about to comment when they all heard yelling coming from the field and turned to see what was happening.

Near the middle of the field, Jake Collins and Vance Carter had a security detachment surrounding them, and Admirals Kraft and Ackermann, Captain Pickett, and Commodore Ross were facing them. Kraft was the man they heard yelling at this point.

"...Both of you are a disgrace to the uniform! You can both consider yourselves under arrest and you will be held for disciplinary action! I cannot believe you acted the way you did today! You ignored every warning given to you! Your conduct – not only on this field but on board your own ship – is the worst I have ever seen in my entire Starfleet career!" The admiral then took a breath and turned toward the men's commanding officer.

"Captain Pickett."

"Sir?" Pickett responded.

"What should be done with these men?"

"You can have them as far as I'm concerned, sir," Pickett responded, looking at the two crew members with disgust.

"Why don't we just throw them in the brig?" Ackermann suggested. "We can transport them to Starfleet Command for a proper disciplinary hearing later."

Kraft addressed the security detail as he ordered, "Get them out of my sight!"

As Collins and Carter were led away, the senior officers continued to talk among themselves for almost a minute more. Finally, as they broke up, Admiral Ackermann made his way over to the *Arcturus* team. They had all stiffened to attention at his approach.

"At ease," he ordered. "First, just for the record, I thought your fighting was uncalled for." He paused for a moment before adding, "Second, off the record, you did an excellent job." This brought smiles to everyone on the team. Ackermann then turned to Johnson.

"I'll see you at the awards banquet."

Johnson nodded and Ackermann left. Johnson then turned back to his team.

"Get cleaned up. We have a banquet to attend tonight." He turned to go, then paused and turned back, looking directly at Arcadian and Copeland. "One more thing... No TROUBLE!! Athena, I'll see you later."

As Johnson finally left, Morgaan moved up beside Arcadian.

"Mister Arcadian," she said.

"Yes, Doctor?"

"Report to sickbay immediately."

Arcadian nodded and started to move out of the rec area with the help of Arbelo and DuLac until Morgaan spoke again.

"Athena." Arcadian paused and looked back at the Capellan doctor. "Good game."

Arcadian smiled, then resumed her painful walk toward the starbase transporter room, Copeland and Maddox moving up beside them.

Arcadian looked at Copeland. Her ribs hurt, and she – like the rest of her team – was tired. Copeland looked over at Arcadian, and when their eyes met they could not contain themselves. In spite of how much it hurt they began to laugh, everyone around them joining in. What a day! They had won two games and tied the best team in the fleet! The future looked bright for the *Arcturus* skatsball team!

The End