

At What Cost?

(a Star Trek: The Next Generation fan fiction)

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Chapter 1

“Well, there’s another sector mapped, Captain,” Commander Northwood said with a sigh. “It’s times like this that you almost wish something exciting would happen, but then you remember what that tends to involve.”

Captain Elliott laughed. “I know. I wonder if it’s the starship that attracts that sort of thing; more precisely, the specific name of the starship? I mean, historically look at all the trouble our previous ship got into. *Enterprise* has a history of being right at the forefront of trouble.”

“I hope it’s not the name,” he replied with a semi-serious chuckle. “Our ship’s named *Challenger*, remember?” He pointed at the dedication plaque, which read, *In memory of those who have gone before, who paved the way, Star Fleet dedicates this ship and her mission.*

Kendra thought for a moment. “Hmm, good point. Be that as it may, what’s next on our good-will tour of empty space?”

Her first officer looked up from the science station and said, “Our next stop appears to be unusual for this region. It seems to have an M class planet, if the readings are correct.”

“‘If the readings are correct’? I take it there’s something unusual about that region?”

“This data is at best imprecise, Captain. The entire Oneiros system appears to be in the midst of a low-level ion cloud. Its effect upon the system should be fascinating to discover.”

Kendra Elliott thought for a moment, nodded, and then said with a smile, “Oneiros. That sounds vaguely rude.”

“No, Captain, you are thinking of the Onan system,” First Officer T’Mir replied.

In her head, Kendra heard the giggling no one else would ever hear. *Stop that, T’Mir!* she laughed back. *It’s not good for crew’s morale to hear their captain giggling like a maniac.*

“Ma’am?” asked a particularly puzzled ensign at helm.

With a chuckle, Captain Elliott responded, “Look up the definition of the word ‘Onanism’, Ensign Horn. You’ll get it then, I expect.” *And don’t you even start on that one, T’Mir*, she giggled mentally.

Would I do that, Kendra? came T’Mir’s mental response. Kendra’s response was to envision her in a skin-tight red dress, holding a pitchfork, with horns and a tail. *As you would say, my love - ‘Damn, that looks good!’ I may create that costume for use during the ship’s next costume party. Think you’d like that, Kendra?* She giggled at Kendra’s particularly positive response.

Kendra turned and looked at her first officer and said, “So, T’Mir, any ideas as to what effect the ion cloud may have upon us, or the inhabitants of any planets supporting life in that system?”

“At the currently detected level, there will be no danger to the crew or passengers. We will even be capable of beaming to the planet, if we so choose.”

“Well, let’s get a bit more information about this place. Send a probe into the system. It should get there enough ahead of us to send us at least some useful info.”

“Like how much wood a woodchuck would chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?” Commander Northwood asked with a laugh as he sent the probe speeding on its way. “Or more importantly, what chucking is, and how you do it.”

“Jon, you’re a nut,” Kendra laughed.

“Yeah, but you love me for it,” he responded with a grin.

She shook her head with a sigh, trying to finally stifle her laughter, but not being very successful at it.

An hour later, data began streaming in from the probe. T’Mir reported, “The ion radiation is higher than we expected, Captain, but not within dangerous range for anyone aboard this ship. It will necessitate a certain amount of care used with our transporters, but that is also not a worry. The planet is in fact an M class planet, and looks as if it lives up to the name it was given.” She tapped her panel a few times, and images from the probe came onto the main viewscreen.

“Damn! Looks like you could call the place Eden, if that name weren’t already taken!” Jon said.

“True,” T’Mir replied. “Its appearance does seem aesthetically pleasing. As for further information from the probe, it is currently unable to detect the source of the ionic radiation, but perhaps...hmm, fascinating.”

Captain Elliott quirked an eyebrow upward. “Is that a genetic thing for Vulcans, T’Mir? Or just an oddity of those in Starfleet?”

“Captain?” came the puzzled response. *It’s genetic, of course,* came the mental reply.

“Never mind. What was so intriguing?”

“There is an absolutely null area, according to the probe. Nothing registers along any of the bands the probe can detect. The section of space in question is roughly the same volume as that of the Spacedock that orbits Earth.”

“Well, I suppose we should plan to examine this non-space when we get there. Any indication of sentient life on the planet, T’Mir?” As she asked, further images came onto the screen, which showed evidence of towns and small cities. “Never mind,” she laughed.

“Their technology is far enough along that they appear to have space stations in orbit, and also appear to be, for lack of a better term, terraforming one of the other planets in the system.” T’Mir paused, and her eyebrows threatened to climb under her lustrous black hair. “Captain, I think you’ll want to hear this.” She tapped her panel again.

“...probe. Repeating: greetings to the vessel that sent this probe. You are welcome to visit our system. We await your arrival. We will await an answer via this probe. Repeating: gree...” T’Mir killed the audio.

“Shall we respond? The probe is capable of broadcasting, obviously, so a response is possible.”

Kendra nodded. “Open hailing frequencies, T’Mir.” After hearing a particularly sexy ‘sounding’ *Hailing frequencies open, Captain,* she continued. “This is Captain Kendra Elliott of the Federation starship *U.S.S. Challenger*. We hear your invitation, and look forward to meeting you upon arrival to your system.” Looking at T’Mir, who held up four fingers on one hand, and three on the

other, she added, “We will be there in approximately four hours. Captain Elliott out.”

“We look forward to the meeting as well, Captain. Until then.”

She looked around the bridge. “Well, people, it looks as if our visit will definitely not go unnoticed. Jon, better get us going Warp 3 if we’re going to get there on time.”

The ship jumped hungrily into warp-space.