

## **Sector 001: Xala Var**

### **USS Otomo 49125.0 2372**

**I meet Captain Xala Var in her ready room, just off the Bridge of the USS Otomo Which is currently moored in Spacedock in Earth orbit. The Otomo is a brand new ship, one of Starfleets new Akira class cruisers. Back in 2366 Captain Var was commanding officer of the much older USS Benrik, which she commanded until it's decommissioning last year.**

**She is quite tall for a Trill with close cropped greying black hair and sits with a strong posture and adjusts her position slightly as we start talking.**

Not used to this chair, apparently I wasn't allowed to bring mine across from the Ben when it was scrapped. As nice as this shiny new ship is it's the Benrik we're here to discuss. Gods I loved that old bucket. If you're not aware it was a Teegarden class light cruiser built in twenty three oh two. One of my previous hosts, Maziri, was a Starfleet engineer who worked on what would become the Teegarden class almost a century before. She was a good ship but a very old one.

I'd been in command for about ten years at that point. I was the Fifth and ultimately last captain. We'd spent the decade mostly doing supply runs between the new coreward colonies and Starbases, occasionally trying to scare off any opportunist. By the sixties the Benrik was almost like a freighter that could shoot back.

Given where we'd spent the most of the last decade it was rather improbable that we were where we were. We were heading to Utopia Planitia for some desperately needed maintenance and some shore leave for the crew on Earth. I wondered if we'd finally get the decommissioning order.

I figured something was wrong when we got ordered to Earth. The all points generic message was a little unnerving, usually it was some Admiral or some Lieutenant working for them. We got the message when we were out by Delta Pavonis and by the time our ageing engines got there the space around Earth was crowded. The Benrik looked at odds next to newer ships, even at one point saw the Fearless' prototype the Kaneda.

Another fleet wide message saying an unknown ship belonging to a race called the Borg. Now what happened with Picard and the Enterprise as J2t was hardly classified but like a damn fool I hadn't read the reports. I was more interested in reading up on things I needed to run the Ben like Starfleet's dealings with the Thari or the technical specs of a Tzenkethi raider. Well now I was in a blizzard without a map as my Andorian XO would put it. So I started reading over Picard's logs from J25. Do you know how old I am? How old Var, my symbiont is?

**I must admit I don't.**

It's on its fourteenth host. It's been joined for nearly five centuries. It's seen everything from the first extraplanetary mission to joining the federation. It's been a spy, a politician. I can

remember being killed multiple times and this isn't the first time I can remember being a Starfleet captain. I've also met Jean-Luc Picard, I knew what he is like as an officer and I knew what the Enterprise was capable of. So to read what happened at J25 and to see it took the intervention of what was essentially a god! Well then the idea of one of these ships heading towards Earth put a chill in my soul.

Meanwhile we, as a fleet, were told to send a report of our readiness and stand by. Just stand by. Which is what we did. Several of my officers asked me what was going on. I must admit I felt as helpless as they did but you couldn't say that but I knew just waiting wouldn't do any good. I set about trying to keep as many of my crew busy as possible. I set all teams doing maintenance, drills, stock taking of med supplies. Whatever was going on I knew it was big and we needed to be ready for it. It also had the advantage of the crew being so angry at what I'd assigned them as to be too busy to worry! [She laughs]

When the president announced that a diplomatic route would be tried I didn't believe it for a second and I got the feeling the people of Earth wouldn't either. The fact that I was on the Benrik was maybe because of the President cutting back on Starfleet. It should've been replaced years ago. The fact that even we were called to Earth when we were ancient and in desperate need of repair and maintenance showed how little Starfleet believed her too.

So we just waited. After a while we heard on fleet traffic that forty ships were heading out of system towards Wolf 359. Now I'm not religious, few Trill are these days, especially given they usually worshipped the symbionts as holy. Still my symbiont remembers being religious, turning to gods and holy spirits in times of need. This whole situation and being in the dark put me on edge. So there in my cramped ready room on the Benrik I found myself praying for those forty ships and then, for the rest of us.

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We were confused, to say the least. Several ships had left the system in various directions. Paris One had left with several other ships. One or two ships left for Vulcan or Andor. A small convoy I later found out was headed to several continuity of government points further out in case these Borg didn't stop at Earth and why would they. We received no orders to evacuate civilians and more than one of my officers chafed at this inaction. Lar, a Bolian Lieutenant of mine insisted we do something and later I had a similar conversation with Lieutenant Choi, a human who was my navigator. I told them both the same thing. I hypothesised we could fit an extra two hundred people onto the Benrik in addition to her seventy seven crew, three hundred if you packed them shoulder to shoulder in the cargo bay. With perhaps a little more anger than I meant, I asked them both which 300 people out of the billions on Earth they would pick. Who would they decide deserved to be saved more? They didn't have an answer and it seemed to deflate their anger or redirect it towards me which I could live with. I felt for

them though. I felt impotent against this incoming thread. I had been in Starfleet for twenty five years and had hundreds of years of experience which I had studied and fought hard for but it didn't mean a damned thing.

I sent off a few relatively innocuous messages to my mothers and my sister. While two peas in a pod as children we had drifted apart since my joining and apparent personality change. I didn't say anything about the Borg, I just sent reminders how much I loved them and truthfully if not with much hope, how I hoped to see them all again. This postponed the restlessness for all of fifteen minutes. Trying to calm my thoughts didn't work as I kept looking out the tiny window of my tiny ready room and seeing other ships, a cluster of us at the Earth-Luna L1 and a cloud of ships around Earth in the distance, busy even for Earth.

One or two other crew members came to me or approached me with questions or concerns. Once while visiting engineering I was approached by a rather excitable Trill ensign, newly graduated and the youngest officer on board. He wasn't joined but was interested in joining in the future. When we'd first met he'd barraged me with questions about Toza and Jodess, two of my more famous predecessors, the latter being a key figure in our first contact with the Caitians. I could see him trying and failing to put on a brave face at his station. Lying out my ass I reassured him that I'd faced down worse, giving examples from my centuries of memories, playing up the bravado and wisdom some unjoined folks expect from joined Trill.

Joined Trill have the rare experience of having experienced dying. In fact several of the deaths I have experience of were ones I was expecting whether through old age, Stak-Chandra Disease or in one case, several centuries back my second host died of cancer. This is an experience perhaps only shared by people cryogenically frozen or put in stasis after death as some races used to. As a host you gain solace in knowing your memories will live on in another host but what I was facing, dying in battle? I wasn't even assured of that. Time was joined Trill were protected like sacred artefacts (infact time was they were sacred but I digress). I was hardly in a hurry to die but I feared my symbiont's death even more. I thought of Solan Idis, who was an engineer of one for the ships that had headed to Warp 359. Idis and Var had been friends for over a century across most of Idis' six hosts ever since we served together in the pre Federation Trill Navy. The thought that the friendship might end with Solan and I chilled my soul.

**(Authors note: Lt Cmdr Solan Idis was killed in the battle on board the USS Buran )**

Sorry you asked for my experiences of the Borg incursion, not musings on Trill Mortality

**It's fine. It's all good, you talk about however you felt**

Eventually the orders came from the Musashi, which was where Tom Henry had put his flag. Whatever had gone down at Wolf 359 had failed and we were to standby for orders.

As time went on We had multiple crew members report to sickbay or department heads report they were down crewmembers due to stress. This was both understandable but frustrating. I think my crew thought I was cold for not doing more to reassure people but what the hell could I do? I sympathised of course but I didn't want to lie to people!

**[She pauses, gathering her thoughts. ]**

We waited at a point on the inner edge of the inner Oort Cloud with the Musahi and the group dubbed "Sol Force A" The Benrik was dwarfed and outclassed by newer or bigger ships. We held in position tucked between the Cucamonga, a Cali class support ship and a Miranda I forget the name of. I got a private message from Sh'len, the CO of the Cucamonga who I'd attended the Academy with. It was a traditional Andorian wish of good fortune before a battle. The sentiment was right but it seemed almost like a joke with my little rusty boat and his engineering support ship.

We watched on sensors as the Borg entered the system at high speed and began to intercept. The ships of group A jumped to warp as we watched the cube drop out of warp and made their way past the sol defence League without breaking their stride. Between us and the Cube was the Enterprise which engaged the cube right in Earth orbit. I wondered if Captain Riker had a plan, I couldn't see him just throwing one ship at the cube. Maybe it was a revenge thing for losing Picard. Meanwhile I could feel the Benrik shake as we gunned the engines as much as we could to keep up with the newer ships and reach Earth orbit as soon as possible.

Then it was over. The cube exploded, I'd later find out the Enterprise had managed to convince it to self destruct. The bridge broke out in cheers. My first officer, a human, said a polite prayer of thanks, I didn't even know he was religious. My operations officer broke down in tears.

Within minutes we had new orders. The Musahi was commanding salvage operations to prevent the cube from falling to Earth. I barked orders to my officers. We didn't have time yet to reflect on what had happened or how we'd all been preparing for death and had nothing to do. More than once I admonished some of my crew for not getting on with their jobs. I know some of the crew hated me for being "a real hard-ass" as one human had put it. I'd rather their emotions be aimed at me than at what had just happened. Maybe that makes me a bad officer, but at that moment we had a job to do.