

The Ansha Tales, Episode 1, I Just Flew In From The Danger Zone And Boy Are My Arms Tired.

The transporters hummed to life and five shimmering shapes materialized on the platform. In back, Ensign Francis "Frankie" Kowalski, Human male and Tactical specialist, and Ensign Sabrok, Vulcan male and Science officer. Middle row, LT Insha zh'Shale, Andorian Female (zhen) and Helmsman, LTJG Samantha Tanner Human and Navigation, and LT Della Easting, Human and Communication. In front, and easily the shortest standing at four feet seven inches, LT Ansha Bast Wind-People.

Ansha was wearing the leather Sierra suit from a previous command and a retro pair of aviator sunglasses as she proceeded to walk with a swagger off the platform. Being a sentient, humanoid-shaped, fungal colony, she found it wise to ensure she surrounded herself with regulated temperature and humidity when traveling on starships, and since this was a surprise opportunity to get flight time and work on a large vessel command endorsement, no flight suit was ordered for her at her new position in security on Deep Space 13. A trip on the USS Atlantis, an old Excelsior class and legend in its own right, called and she answered it.

These crewman with the exception of Lt zh'Shale and Lt Wind-People had no combat experience, but from their body language, one might think they were now the cocky veterans, only the veterans know the difference in the walk of one who has lived through ten battles verses a crew that survived one brief skirmish with two Terran Frigates.

Ansha though, was proud for different reasons. She had served as a bridge watch officer in combat on an escort. But there was a lingering 'what-if' in the background that always haunted her. What if she hadn't changed her track in Starfleet from Tactical to Operations after the Cadet Cruise and the advice of just one instructor who said she lacked a commanding presence and was being held up by her classmates alone. What if she hadn't listened to that nagging voice that kept saying she didn't deserve Cadet Captain because the instructor made the appointment based, not on merit, but instead that he had a thing for green women with black hair. What if she had stuck with Tactical.

Being on an escort, bridge watch and thereby command of the vessel came easy for her. In truth she was on watch during the least demanding times with instructions to call the CO or First Officer at the first sign of danger. She only once had to face down one Klingon destroyer. No shots fired though. Just insults over comms, which was a battle she lost in stinging humiliation.

But then there she was, years later, the third chance, being given the reins by a supportive senior officer, of one of the grand old ships, the Atlantis, and not only facing hostilities in the captain's chair, but helping to complete a vital mission, and bringing the ship and crew home safely, thereby proving, to herself, that the naysayers, and that nagging voice on inner doubt are wrong. She is worthy of one day being a Captain herself. That elevated her in ways visible and not visible.

Her step had a swagger in it. She felt empowered. She was for that moment, a giant. She was filled with confidence. She felt sexy with that confidence. This was, as her species would say, a sublime experience.

Eventually, one by one, the crew, her crew, would pass her by with their longer gaits. They would high-five as they did. She did not run to keep up, for she was much too cool for that.

As they pass by a window facing the docking area, Kowalski stops and turns to the right. His eyes grow wide, as he grabs Insha, who reacts similarly grabbing Samantha, who grabs Della, who grabs Sabrok who reacts with only an eyebrow raise. Ansha, who was lagging behind with short legs, asked, "Why is everyone..." only to have her head grabbed, hand on each side, by Insha who directs her attention to the right.

Ansha's eyes grew wide as her mouth went agape.

"Whoa," she said.

"I know," Samantha said, swooning.

"She is so sexy," Kowalski said.

"The curves...", Della said drifting off.

"Fascinating," Sabrok said.

"I wonder what a Reliant Class Escort is doing here?" Insha inquired with indignation.

The team gazed with admiration at the purpose built warship.

"Which one is that?" Ansha asked.

"The... U.S.S. Cassowary. NCC-98337, second refit," Kowalski answered in a hypnotic daze.

"Top speed, warp factor 9.982," added Insha, not quite as in the moment but still impressed to see a Defiant class escort in person. "Sustainable for 12 hours, with a cruising speed of warp 6."

"Power unit is rated at 1500 Cochrans," added Sabrok, coldly.

"She has ablative armor and a mark five deflector shield," added Ansha.

"Dual impulse engine fusion reactors," said Insha.

"Four pulse phaser cannons, with two phaser arrays," Kowalski stated.

"Two Mark V torpedo launchers capable of sustaining salvos with only a two second reset," added Ansha.

"Looks like a duck," Samantha said tilting her head to the left. Everyone else tilted their heads to the left then agreed. "They should call it the USS Daffy, not the Castle Weary or whatever."

"Oy vey," Della sighed. "Here we go."

"Cassowary," Ansha replied. "It's a predatory bird species from Earth."

"Like a duck?" Samantha asked in all sincerity.

Before Ansha could answer, Insha, sensing this would be pointless without holovids that Samantha, being more visceral, could see, interrupted and simply said, "Yeah, Sam, like a duck."

Samantha seemed satisfied with this doing the that-is-adorable-nose-wrinkle she so often did. Then Della's thick Brooklyn accent broke the moment.

"Lemme tell ya," Della began, "my gramps used to tell me stories about those ships. He was kvell over 'em when they came out, as if it was his own baby that he carried for nine months and had a 4 day labor like my Aunt Miriam." She cleared her throat and continued, "Ya see, before he met my grandma, he was at Wolf 359."

"Oh my, Della! Did he survive!?" Samantha asked, very concerned. Everyone else slowly turned to Samantha in disbelief at what they just heard her ask, except Sabrok who merely raised an eyebrow, then to Della who then answered..

"Y-Yeah," Della said, "He did, Sam." Others, except Sabrok and Ansha, rolled their eyes out of Samantha Tanner's view.

"Oh, that's good," Samantha replied, placing a hand on Della's shoulder and nodding.

Della just smiled at her and said patronizingly, "Bless your cotton-socks, bubula." Della thought for a moment, "Anyway, where was I? Oh yeah, Grandpa used to tell me how pissed him and all the other officers were at Starfleet Command. There were all these threats and there's UFP going, 'Ah we don't give off the wrong impression', who of course is pulling the strings but those UFP morons and gramps was talking about how mishuga they all were."

"Their pacifist leanings, though logical in light of the stated mission and climate prior to the Borg Incursion," Sabrok replied, "did leave Starfleet less prepared for events in the last few decades."

"Yeah," Kowalski said excitedly. "They needed a shot of kick-ass." He squinted and nodded as he looked at Sabrok in reply, who simply replied, "Indeed they did, Ensign Kowalski".

"I for one," Ansha said, still gazing in lust at the ship, "Would love-love to command one of those, and have all of you on the bridge with me." She looked up at the crew and smiled.

"Yeah, right," Insha said. "As if we'd ever get on a ship like that. Besides, Ansha, you're Ops."

"Well aren't you just a Debbie Downer," Della replied to Insha. "Gah 'head, crush a young girl's dreams."

"I could do it," Ansha said, gaining a measure of enthusiasm. "I...I have been considering enrolling in the Starfleet Academy annex here at the station, and changing to Tactical. I could be a ship's commander-commander once I finish. I just know-know we could do it. We would be great-great. We would be on par with any team that served-served on the Enterprise."

"Ansha," Insha said with a consoling smile. "I know we would be great-great, but let's be honest here. Starfleet gives command of those ships to the best of the best, and we are a long way from that. Not that we suck, but... You know, the Kirks, Picards, and Siskos of Starfleet get that assignment. It's always the superstars, not the newbies five years out of the Academy."

"Starfleet has their head up their ass... or heads up their asses," Kowalski replied, trying to maintain Ansha's enthusiasm. He looks to Sabrok for correction or confirmation as to 'ass' in the plural or singular.

"Heads up their asses, Ensign Kowalski," Sabrok tells him.

"Thanks, bro," Kowalski replied with a thumbs up to Sabrok who coldly acknowledged the gratitude with a nod. He went on to clarify. "For years it's been these old dudes, mighty... yes, experienced... yeah, true galactic butt-kickers... fuck yeah, but, ya know... there's room for more heroes in Starfleet, and maybe they oughta give our posse a shot with pint-sized Picasso of pain in charge!"

"But they won't and you all know it," Insha replied. "Cutting edge ships like that go to the people that have made Starfleet look strong, or whatever the zeitgeist requires. We'd be lucky if we get the Shitworth."

"Ugh," Samantha said in disgust. "Don't remind me, I was on the Whitworth for my cadet cruise. I couldn't get that poop smell out of my hair for two weeks."

"It's just an uphill battle unless you know somebody or are related to somebody," Insha finished.

Della looked up at Insha who was taller and shook her head and began the walk to the turbo lift.

"I'm not saying...," Insha stammered, "Guys, wait... guys... I..."

One by one the remaining crew members, crestfallen, left and continued into the station. Ansha finally turned and left Insha standing by the window. Insha turned and followed Ansha, checking her pace to keep speed with Ansha's shorter legs.

"You do not have to walk-walk with me, Insha," Ansha said in a flatly. "I'm fine-fine. I'm still proud-proud of what we did."

"Look, Ansha," Insha began, "I didn't mean we couldn't one day be great enough to command our own Defiant, or Valiant or whatever the top of the line is. I was just saying..."

Ansha paused, turned, and looked up at the Andorian.

"I know what you are saying-saying," Ansha said, "and you are right-right. I know you are not trying being mean-mean," Ansha smiled, turned, and continued walking to crew birthing. "It is true-true. They would not trust-trust a cutting edge vessel like that to just any crew."

"Right! That's what I mean, Ansha," Insha said excitedly while trying to walk with the much shorter woman and hunch over to her level. "I think we can be great in any ship they give us. It doesn't have to be a Defiant class. It might as well be that old Excelsior crate we came off of. We'll make it work."

"Yes-yes, " Ansha said, smiling and looking forward. "You are right-right. It is not the ship, it is the crew."

"Exactly, zhi," Insha said standing up from her awkward hunch while addressing the shorter Ansha. "We just need more time in the saddle. More flight time and more drill. More chances to show what we can do."

"Besides," Ansha followed up with, "I am a long-long way from that. This was a special-special situation. I am in the Security department, not Tactical. I asked Lieutenant Commander Wong, since I had stood bridge watch on an escort, if I could get experience with a cruiser, and he said yes."

"So, you gonna do it?" Insha asked.

The two approached the hatch to the turbolift and stopped to face each other.

"Restrike for Tactical? I want-want to but now I'm not so sure," Ansha said. "This feeling of doubt is a sublime experience but I do not like it."

"Why? It wasn't because of what I said, was it."

"No-no. Just that... Insha, do you really think-think I am," Ansha paused. "good enough?"

The Andorian knelt to look her diminutive friend in the eye with a smile. "I think you are great. In the last few hours you made the decisions that alerted the rest of the convoy, routed out Terran ships that could have surprised us and caused more damage had we not been at red alert. Zhi, you have the makings of a great commander, and a great leader, and one day, I will be proud to be your helmsman."

Insha stood back up and continued, "Now sign up for the first course. Stop waffling on 'what if' and start saying 'when.'"

"Alright," Ansha said, suddenly standing up to what seemed to be an inch taller. "I will. I will, and *when* I am a ship's commander, I will gladly want-want you there, zhi."

"That's my little green powerhouse," Insha said. "Now, I was thinking about getting a drink. Want to join me?"

"No-no, I am sorry-sorry, Insha," Ansha replied, "but I desire-desire to be in my room, bare-ass naked, with the humidity on one hundred percent, heat on 27 degrees, and the most drippy and melodramatic holo-vid playing on the entertainment system."

"Oh, a bodice-ripper."

"Oh yes-yes, maybe more than one while I gorge-gorge on stale bread rolls. Besides, Wong told me to write the AAR."

"That slack bastard. Oh well, I'm afraid my company would be no competition for that, sweetheart," Insha replied in surrender. "Well, then, I'll be seeing you. Hopefully, on the deck of that ship again."

Ansha nodded, and began to turn to the turbo lift, but paused and turned to Insha.

"Tuesday," Ansha said, "Gamma plus one, Holodeck. How about we drill-drill some command and control scenarios?"

Insha grinned broadly. "Aye-aye, Captain Wind-People. Defiant bridge?"

"No-no, not necessary. We will use-use the Atlantis' bridge. Something we have a better chance of using in the near future."

"Be there or be square," Insha said with a wink.

The two went their separate ways.