

THE COURT MARTIAL OF THE *RENEGAT* RENEGADES

Kristine Kathryn Rusch

Kristine Kathryn Rusch ended up surprising herself when she wrote *The Court Martial of the Renegat Renegades*. She hadn't expected to commit to a novel, particularly when she was working on a long novel arc in her Fey fantasy series. The first two books in that new arc, *The Kirilli Matter* and *Barkson's Journey*, will appear in 2023. She's also writing a lot of short fiction, particularly mystery. Her story "Grief Spam" just appeared in *The Best Mystery Stories of the Year 2022*, edited by Sara Paretsky (one of Kris's idols). To find out more about Kris's work, go to kriswrites.com.

Synopsis of Part One

When the Renegat, an SC-class vessel, limped through its final foldspace journey to arrive at an about-to-be closed sector base, the ship brought mysteries with it. Its crew had departed from the Fleet one hundred years in the past. They'd lost time, and they'd lost half of their crew members . . . to what, exactly?

Captain Kim Dauber of the Aiszargs concentrated on rescuing the survivors ("The Rescue of the Renegat" Asimov's, January/ February 2018), but she learned some troubling facts along the way. The original captain of the Renegat was killed by members of his own crew.

So she took that crew to Starbase Sigma, where the commanders of the Fleet decided to try the Renegat crew for mutiny. All 193 surviving members of the crew are to be tried as a unit. The Fleet brings in an outside prosecutor with an amazing win record, Danitra Carbone, and the Old Man who leads the local office assigns Lucinda Arias as second chair.

The survivors hire Eun Ae Mukasey to represent them. She doesn't have the stellar

win record that Carbone has, but Mukasey cares about her clients and has heart. Her clients had worked hard to return to the Fleet; if they were mutineers, she figures, they would have stayed away.

Carbone has that same theory. She also knows that six of the defendants had fought alongside the Renegat's captain to keep him in power. Against orders, she decides to make a deal with the six. She wants them out of the case, because, she tells Arias, "they will force us to lose." Carbone starts with Jorja Lakinas, who had sustained serious injuries while defending the captain. But Lakinas refuses to testify against her companions, saying they rescued her.

Carbone's actions take her off the case. The Old Man, who has a record as impressive as Carbone's, takes over the case . . . and gives it to Arias. He'll help, of course, because he too is a big name, but the case is all hers.

The meeting with Carbone inspires Lakinas to hire an attorney to help her get good medical care. The attorney believes she can trade information for care, without testifying. But he's wrong; the prosecutor's office will not take that deal . . . unless Lakinas testifies. She has information on what happened to the missing crewmembers, and her attorney believes she will share it.

Mukasey has found a witness of her own. Admiral Bella Gão has been a judge since her retirement. She was the one who put the crew together on the Renegat. She hired the captain. She has a story to tell.

As a judge, Gão has the power to block the summons to testify. She considers it. But she knows some things about the Renegat that have made her feel guilty for decades. She has recordings from the missing crewmembers. She owes them.

Gão will tell Mukasey why her clients were chosen to crew that ship, and what the expectations were. Gão will also tell Mukasey what changes the loss of the Renegat had wrought throughout the Fleet. The decision as to whether or not to use those recordings will be Mukasey's.

It's not just the defendants on trial. The Fleet is too. And Gão believes all of this needs to be revealed in a very public show trial—no matter what the result.

This, the most important trial in the history of the Fleet, will not only determine the fate of 193 people; it will also set up the Fleet's command hierarchy for decades to come.

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PART TWO

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Trials were like sporting events. Eventually, time just ran out. Only unlike a sporting event, where the time ran out at the end, in a trial, the time ran out before the trial started. The research had to be finished or abandoned by the trial's beginning because the activity in court would become too all-consuming for the level of research that prepping for something this big usually took.

Arias always found the lack of time frustrating. Particularly when she knew she had to argue much of the case. Arguing the case meant she couldn't skimp too much on sleep. She didn't dare lose her train of thought.

She had to be interesting throughout the trial, because the twelve judges thought they had heard everything before. They would look away or begin tapping on a screen built into the long bench before them, maybe already writing notes for their eventual contribution to the opinion.

Arias used to play sports when she was younger, and she had always been acutely

aware that if she added a half an hour or subtracted an hour, the score would be different, and often a different team would win.

It was the same with research. She not only needed to know almost everything, but she needed all of that everything at her fingertips. Or, more accurately, in the file folders inside her mind. The tablets she brought to court had everything, even the unsorted research. She just had to know what fact she needed when and where, and how to insert it—with full logic and clarity—into her part of the case.

Usually, she could do that, but usually, she wasn't handling 193 defendants and a case that spanned decades—quite literally. The Old Man was a great help, particularly in organizing the facts and planning the opening arguments, but he had been out of the field so long that organizing the details wasn't his strong suit.

Neither of them wanted to bring in an assistant for the research, because the assistant wouldn't have known what was important and what wasn't.

Once Arias figured out what was important, she had a program sort all the information into her preferred format. She did use assistants, but mostly to double-check the transcriptions of the interviews done with the defendants, some by the rescuers when the *Renegat* appeared, and some by the media, before the court locked the defendants down.

There, the assistants could be helpful—and were. They found and logged hundreds of inconsistencies, and when Arias asked for those inconsistencies to be sorted by type and location, they did that as well. One assistant even flagged what she considered to be large inconsistencies and small ones.

The case had been assigned the largest courtroom in the judicial module of Starbase Sigma. The judicial wing was crammed in the very center of a tower. The uppermost and lowermost floors of the judicial module were the only parts of the tower that had any windows at all. Those windows overlooked the uglier parts of the docking ring on the lower end and the maintenance tubes for one of the more upscale areas on the upper side.

Because of the windows, though, judges had commandeered that part of the tower for office and conference room space.

The rest of the tower had no windows at all, because, the logic went, the courtrooms didn't need windows. No one wanted defendants or worse, judges, to be staring out the window instead of paying attention to whatever was going on in court.

This courtroom could seat fifty spectators. It could be modified to have twenty or more lawyers and defendants at the defense and prosecution tables.

And, of course, it had that large curved bench that seated all the judges. The curve was sharp, so that the judges on either end almost faced each other. Lawyers had to interact in the middle of that curve, so that everyone could see what was going on.

The very size of this courtroom made Arias nervous. She couldn't keep her eye on everyone here. She couldn't watch reactions, and sometimes, from the prosecutor's table, she couldn't even see what was happening with the judges themselves.

She not only wanted to know if she had lost the judges with her arguments, she also wanted to know if the defense attorneys had as well.

This case was even worse, because there would be no spectators inside the court. Those fifty seats would be used by fifty defendants. They would rotate out—different defendants each day. The rest of the time, they would watch from a room in their tower, sitting as a group with some court minions keeping the group from discussing the case, as they watched their fate together.

It was a bad situation. Arias had argued that the defendants should watch individually from their rooms and be recorded while doing so, but the judges in a unanimous ruling had determined that watching individually did not replicate the courtroom experience and therefore it violated some law or practice or custom.

Arias really didn't care what got violated. Once she knew her motion had been denied, she had turned her attention to other things.

During the early part of this morning, her attention had been on her clothing. She needed to make sure the judges saw her, and not in a bad way. She finally chose a slate gray suit that suggested a uniform. It had red piping and she wore comfortable red and gray shoes to accent the piping. No make-up, no extra color in her hair. No frills at all, because she had learned that frills made the judges take lawyers less seriously.

The Old Man wore a crisp black formal coat that went to his knees, almost like a dress. His pants matched, and he had shined his shoes, something she had never seen before. His silver hair was trim, and he actually looked like he had gotten some sleep.

He had not accompanied her into the courtroom. He had arrived early as was his custom, and did some kind of private dress rehearsal in the large empty space.

It was not empty now. The defense attorney, Eun Ae Mukasey, wore an ivory tunic with gold trim over a pair of gold pants. Her shoes had platforms on the bottom and looked extremely uncomfortable. But she was one of those women who made uncomfortable shoes her own. She had her black hair pulled away from her face, accenting her features—and her clear lack of sleep.

The fifty defendants were already here as well and were remarkably quiet. A few of them looked terrified. The rest sat at attention, as if being good listeners would count for something. Maybe it would.

All of them wore their uniforms. The design was one Arias had only seen in the historic displays during her school days. Flared pants legs, tight collars—although many had the buttons loose, because so many had gained weight. Yusef Kabac had a seat behind the defense table, and he wore his uniform jacket like a sweater. His meaty arms barely fit into it, and it was clear that the jacket would never close over his massive stomach.

At least he had trimmed his beard, and he looked like he'd bathed. The first time Arias had seen him, he hadn't looked clean at all.

Raina Serpell was here as well, and that couldn't have been a coincidence. She was the one who had taken point on all legal matters, just like she had been the one to captain the *Renegat* to bring them home. Arias had thought that the defendants were picked at random for their days in court, but the presence of Serpell and Kabac belied that assumption.

Not that it mattered. Arias wouldn't be speaking to them. She was going to talk to the judges. They were the only ones she had to convince of her entire case.

She wasn't nervous. She was ready, almost bouncing with too much energy. The Old Man was going to speak first. He needed to give information that she and the Old Man both assumed the judges *thought* they knew. Judges were often impatient with hearing information like that, but everyone needed to work off the same set of facts.

The Old Man was good at doing these kinds of openings, and he didn't care if the judges got angry at him. Half of them probably were anyway. After that, he would hand the bulk of the case over to Arias, and he wanted her to be as well received as possible.

So did she. She was relieved that he was starting, not because she doubted her ability to mount the same argument, but because he had a talent for making complex things sound simple.

Besides, everyone assumed this was his case; he needed to make it seem like he was the one taking point, even when he was not.

She tried very hard not to look at the door to the judges' chambers. She was ready to start.

She hoped they were, too.

Mukasey was always nervous just before a trial. She never felt like she had prepared enough, and on a case this big, she knew she hadn't prepared enough. There would be questions she couldn't answer, accusations she couldn't fight.

What she had to do was remain confident about her presentation. She had to remind the judges just what an unusual situation this was. Her main point? The *Renegat* renegades had returned. They could have remained anywhere else along their journey. But they returned home.

Mutineers would not have done that.

She resisted the urge to turn around and smile at the fifty defendants who were in the room. She had already given them a pep talk as well as rules for courtroom decorum. She had broadcast those rules to the remainder of the 193 defendants, so that they wouldn't make any mistakes either.

She had been informed that the group room in their tower would be considered part of the courtroom, which was why she was paying an assistant to be in the room, and to record from a different angle. She was terrified that these defendants would make some kind of mistake, something that would open a door for the prosecution.

But, as she told herself before every case, she couldn't control the people around her. She could only control herself.

And she had to do that, because this might very well be the biggest case of her life.

The judges before her were an even mix of intellectuals, long-time Fleet officers, and former lawyers. The chief judge for this case, Marcus Kanberra, had sat in the center chair on one of her earlier cases. He had gone out of his way to be fair, which was exactly what she needed here.

She tugged at her tunic, then fiddled with the bracelet she wore on her left wrist. She had worn that bracelet on every case she had ever tried, and usually the feel of it against her skin kept her calm. Not this time.

Nothing was going to keep her calm. She was going to have to flow with the nervous energy and use it to her advantage.

She shot a glance at the prosecution table. They looked as understaffed as she was, although she knew that wasn't true. They had associates who had done some of the legwork. She had run into them.

She had a bit of help, most of it from interns and law students who wanted extra hours. She had brought in a few associates, but only on tasks that she felt they couldn't screw up.

Chief Judge Kanberra gaveled the court into order, and launched into his usual spiel about courtroom behavior, procedures, lunch breaks, and other administration items. Mukasey paid attention only because she knew he would add a few details to deal with the unbelievable number of defendants.

But he had given the courtroom instructions to both sides to approve or reject two days ago, and neither side had any complaints. So she listened only to make certain he hadn't left out anything or added anything without her realizing it.

The instructions took twenty minutes. By then, Judge Chiara Ioannide, who was one of the newest judges on the bench, seemed to be nodding off. Her colleague, Ati Velsia, elbowed her. Ioannide started.

That wasn't a good way to start the case, with at least one judge already bored with the proceedings. As if on cue, Chief Judge Kanberra turned to the prosecution table.

"Are you ready to begin?" he asked.

"We are, sir." The Old Man stood. Apparently he didn't need more of an invitation.

Mukasey leaned back in her chair, holding a tablet in one hand for notes. She had never seen the Old Man work although she had heard he was brilliant.

He didn't start that way.

"Your Honors," he said, "I know we have all followed the media reports of the miraculous return of the *Renegat*, through dozens of foldspace trips, much hardship, an attack when they stopped for food, and a mission that had gone awry. However, we all got the story piecemeal, so I would like to make sure we are working off the same set of facts."

Ioannide shook her head once, as if she couldn't believe this was how the case was going to begin.

At least two judges, Théodolphe Bastien and Dev Jatrana, looked pointedly at Mukasey, expecting her to object. She saw no point in doing so. The Old Man was right; they needed to start with the same set of facts. She would contradict some of them—or testimony would—but fighting at this stage made very little difference.

The Old Man was a good storyteller. He started with the arrival of the *Renegat* as the Fleet was shutting down Sector Base Z. Had they arrived a few days later, no one would have rescued the ship. The defendants would have died not too far from their destination.

After telling that part—the rescue, the loss of some of the crew members and a heroic member of the *Aizsargs* who refused to give up—the Old Man asked if he could be a bit more informal and sit on his table.

Chief Judge Kanberra let him. The Old Man actually leaned on the table sideways, so that he could see the defense table, the judges, and most of the defendants.

If Mukasey had no knowledge of the case, she would have thought that he was the defense attorney. He sounded sympathetic to the *Renegat* crew. He believed that the distance they had traveled against all odds, the fact that they had made it home only to find that home no longer existed, made them capture the hearts of anyone who had been following the news of the *Renegat*.

"The facts that are in dispute," he said, "are not the ones I just recited. What happened on the *Renegat's* long journey and how this group of 193 people returned home, instead of the remainder of the nearly five hundred who had left on that fateful mission, are what we need to determine here. Because we will prove that the defendants are not heroes. They are mutineers who, among other things, murdered the ship's captain and abandoned their mission. Their return was not because they wanted to return to the Fleet, but because they were so incompetent they did not know how to go anywhere else. They fought and were terrified of each other. It was nearly impossible for them to act as a group, so they fled back to what they knew, hoping that they would receive sympathy for their journey and no one would notice the price others paid for the return of the *Renegat*."

She could have objected. In fact, a few of the judges clearly expected her to. But she didn't.

He had the right to propose his theory of the case, even if it sounded strangely weak and vague. From what she knew about the Old Man, he was never weak or vague, not in his arguments. Either he was hiding something, or they really didn't care about this early information.

"The *Renegat* left the Fleet on an unusual mission," the Old Man said, "one that took them in a direction the Fleet rarely goes—backward. They were to investigate information that came from an ancient Scrapheap. Someone had marauded it—years ago. But they were to determine if the marauders took anything of value, meaning the Ready Vessels, and if the marauders had, then the Fleet had to decide what to do about it."

Mukasey clutched her tablet tightly. That was one way to describe the mission.

“But the *Renegat* never fulfilled its mission. Instead, there was chaos and confusion from the start. They did reach the Scrapheap, and returned home almost immediately thereafter, having determined nothing.” The Old Man looked at the defendants as if he had nothing but contempt for them.

A few looked away, even though Mukasey had told them to maintain eye contact at all times.

“The media reports don’t talk about the fact that every aspect of the *Renegat’s* mission was a failure, from the internal conflicts to their inability to complete the mission to the loss of the ship upon return. Not to mention an inexplicable loss of hundreds of crewmembers. What, exactly, happened to all of them?”

The Old Man continued to look at the defendants, as if he expected them to answer. More heads went down. But Raina Serpell continued to meet his gaze.

Serpell almost looked defiant. Maybe Mukasey had been wrong in her advice. Maybe they should have been a bit more humble.

“Heroes, misfits, incompetents.” The Old Man directed each word at the defendants. “Such nice descriptions of mutineers and murderers.”

More judges looked at Mukasey. But she didn’t interrupt his rhythm. Let him have his say. She would have hers shortly.

“The so-called *Renegat* renegades are famous throughout the Fleet.” The Old Man stood up. “That is why we need to expose the truth of what they’ve done and punish them for it. All of our ships travel to parts unknown, often by themselves. The ships have to function well. The chain of command must remain unbroken, even in the face of commands that the rank and file do not like or understand. The only way the Fleet can function is with crews that work together toward a common goal.”

The Old Man walked up to the bench, and made a point of looking at the judges. Mukasey always felt awkward when she did that.

“Yeah, they went through hell,” the Old Man said, punctuating each sentence with a look at a different judge. “They were on a difficult mission with a difficult captain. Many of us have gone through hell as well. Many of us had disagreements with our leaders. We did not kill them and run home, expecting to lie our way to retirement. Some wag in the media suggested that these *Renegat* survivors are the very best of us.”

The Old Man let out a slight chuckle.

“Their propaganda is working. Because they are anything but the best of us. They are the worst of us, and they must be made an example of.”

Then he bowed his head, thanked the judges for their time, and returned to his seat. Lucinda Arias didn’t pat him on the shoulder or even smile at him. She had her head bent as she went to work.

During this speech, though, no judge had looked away. Even Ioannide now seemed wide-awake and interested.

Mukasey’s stomach knotted. She knew only one solution to her nerves.

She stood up, and formally introduced herself to the court, just like the Old Man had done at the beginning of his opening statement.

Then she said, “Your Honors, we’re not here to label anyone. Mr. Yglesias seems to think we care about what the media calls my clients. We don’t care about labels. My clients are by definition defendants in this case, and they are survivors of a horrific journey. They managed to return to the Fleet against all odds, and now Mr. Yglesias wants to punish them for that.”

She slid around the desk and walked toward the bench. Her platform shoes made her taller, so that she could see each judge clearly. She could also see which judges were tapping notes into their tablets and which had their hands folded as they listened to the arguments.

“This mission was doomed from the start. The evidence will show that the Fleet

felt an obligation to investigate that ancient Scrapheap, but doubted that investigation would be worthwhile. So they outfitted a Security Class vessel, which was not designed for that kind of travel, filled it with crewmembers who had no family and no real reputation—the kind of people who would not be missed if they disappeared or died—and sent them the longest distance a Fleet ship has ever traveled on its own.”

The judges were watching her closely. She couldn't remember a time when she'd ever had the attention of all twelve judges in a tribunal.

“Unbeknownst to the crew, this ship was not supposed to come back. It was supposed to go to the Scrapheap, discover what had happened, and send that information back. What happened to the ship and her crew afterward was irrelevant.”

She paused for effect.

“Most of you have worked in command,” she said quietly. “You know that ships sometimes get sent on a mission like this, one they're not expected to survive. Those ships are usually well equipped and properly staffed. This ship was on a mission no one thought could succeed, but the rules stated that incursions into Scrapheaps needed to be investigated. So, they sent this single ship, unprepared and poorly maintained, to investigate. A lot went wrong, and, as you will see, most of it could have been both predicted and prevented.”

She looked at the defendants. They were all watching her now, most rigidly holding still, so that they could hide the emotions they were feeling, but a few looked both sad and terrified, and a handful seemed surprised.

“The most unexpected thing,” she said as she turned back to the judges, “was how terrifyingly bad at his job Captain Preemas was. And this entire ship, poorly prepared and improperly staffed, had no recourse. They were on their own in ways that no ship of the Fleet ever should be. They were ill served, and yet they still did their best.”

Then she paused again for effect, aware that she was not the orator that the Old Man was. Still, she had the judges' attention.

“They didn't come back because they were incompetent. They didn't come back to lie to the Fleet. They came back because the Fleet is their home. They struggled against incredible odds, and they managed to return, just like they were supposed to.”

Judge Jatrana nodded, then caught himself. Mukasey didn't want to take that as a hopeful sign, but she did anyway.

She moved a little closer to the bench.

“I'm not suggesting they're heroes,” Mukasey said. “I'm simply saying this: If they had believed they had done something wrong, they could have remained in that Scrapheap with the rest of the crew.”

She took a well-timed breath, so that it didn't quite sound like a dramatic pause. But she wanted that bit of information to go in. She would repeat it a lot, but the first time was always the most important.

“Or,” she said, “they could have stopped anywhere along the way. There were old Fleet sector bases at some of the *Renegat's* foldspace checkpoints. The crew would have been able to find places to live or even ships to work on. They didn't choose that. They chose to come here, hoping they'd arrive ninety-nine years in our past, one year in their future. It didn't turn out that way.”

She let the sadness she felt about that show on her face.

“These are not master criminals or selfish people. They're people who did their best in an unprecedented situation. They should not be jailed for what they've done. They should be repatriated. They should be helped into this future they find themselves in. They should be welcomed home.”

She nodded, just like the Old Man had, and returned to her seat. Her body was shaking ever so slightly, and she was having trouble catching her breath.

She had done it, and she had done well enough against the Old Man.

Now the real work of the trial began. The evidence, the organization, the massive job of keeping the prosecution off-course.

She was ready for that. She did better with that than with all other aspects of being in court.

She was going to give this trial her all. She had to. 193 people depended on her—and she didn't want to disappoint a single one of them.

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The initial presentation of the case went faster than Arias expected. Maybe her expectations had been shaped by the sheer number of defendants, or maybe it was the mass of information, but either way, she had thought it would take a lot longer to get through some of this material.

One thing that didn't conform to her expectations were the judges. In previous cases, the judges had always asked too many questions. They had interrupted the flow or taken the questioning in a different direction.

In previous trials, she had had judges completely derail some of her witnesses or disqualify them after a few questions.

That hadn't happened here. There also hadn't been a lot of objections where she thought there would be.

She had established the history of the Scrapheap, the fact that it was so far distant from where the Fleet was now that there had been no records of it before it notified the Fleet of a breach. She showed the chain of command, used records to prove that Preemas had been chosen as captain over several other candidates, and also entered into the record all 193 agreements that the defendants had sworn to before embarking on the *Renegat*.

She hadn't even bothered to read any of those records aloud because everyone in this courtroom—except maybe Mukasey—had attested to those kinds of agreements before accepting their postings. It was standard, and what Arias wanted to prove using those agreements was that this trip, despite its strange destination, was handled just like any other journey by any other ship of the Fleet.

Then she and the Old Man showed the dramatic footage of the *Renegat's* rescue. They had edited the images because the rescue had taken place over hours, and they didn't have hours. So they showed the highlights, from different angles than those usually shown in the media. She also had footage of the final life raft, leaving the *Renegat* with the last few survivors on board as well as Raul Zarges, who had defied orders to save his own life to take the remaining survivors on the last raft.

The *Renegat* had been cleared, the life raft had floated away from it—and then the heartbreaking explosion, the loss of the *Renegat* and the last few survivors and Raul Zarges, whom his entire crew loved.

Arias and the Old Man had fought over including that footage, and she had won. She felt she needed it. Members of the *Aizsargs* were going to testify about the crew of the *Renegat*, and before they did, she had to make sure the judges—and everyone else following this show trial—knew that the *Aizsargs* had put everything on the line to save the crew of the *Renegat*.

The *Aizsargs* had been called back to Starbase Sigma just so several members of the crew could testify. Arias would call others to establish that the materials from the *Renegat's* bridge were downloaded onto the *Aizsargs* and were complete. She would have some of the rescuers discuss what they had found in that dark and nearly destroyed ship.

But first, she called Captain Kim Dauber of the *Aizsargs* to testify.

The witness box in this courtroom was in the very center of the half circle. The box rose when needed, and sank when it wasn't in use. The witnesses faced the judges, not the gallery, but the gallery could see the images of the witnesses in real time displayed on the back of the witness chair.

Because of the placement of the defense and prosecution tables, anyone seated could see both the display and the witness. Arias always made sure she stood during testimony so that she could see the actual witness and not the display. Sometimes, she lost little bits of information—micro-expressions or a subtle hand gesture—on the display.

Before trials even started, she asked for permission to stand at the end of the table, next to the most junior judge, so that she could watch everything.

The judges didn't care where she stood as long as she didn't make noise when someone else was examining or cross-examining the witness.

She also could not give small signals to her own witnesses under cross examination. Not that she would ever have done that.

The Old Man didn't care about perspective. He remained at the prosecution table when the clerk of the court called Captain Dauber to the witness stand.

Those small moments in court always had a lot of ceremony—the witness called, the witness box either rising or tuning to the new occupant, that moment when the gallery would turn, sometimes as a unit, to see who the new witness was.

In this case, the entire gallery—all fifty of them—knew Captain Dauber. She had been the unlucky soul to inform them that they were a hundred years in their future. That couldn't be a good memory, even though they had survived against all odds.

Of course, it had been more than a year since they had seen Captain Dauber, and a lot had happened in between. They also met Dauber in the middle of a rescue, not the crisp and trim woman who had arrived in court.

She wore her dress uniform, hat tucked under one arm, her black hair stiff and styled against her skull. Every part of her looked in control.

She walked with perfect military bearing to the witness chair, where she had sat many times before. She set her hat on her knee, went through the formalities, which included her name, her service history, and a reminder that her position required her to tell the truth.

She answered each question, which had come from the clerk not Arias, firmly and precisely. Dauber spoke clearly. The judges didn't have to lean in to hear her.

Arias took Dauber through the rescue, drawing out personal details, such as the entire bridge crew's shock at the type of vessel they were seeing, how they handled the realization that the ship was not an upgraded SC-class vessel, but an older one, and one that they didn't immediately have records on.

Arias didn't linger on the process the *Aizsargs* had used to identify the *Renegat*, although it fascinated her every time she heard it.

Instead, she focused on the loss of personnel, dealing with the disoriented survivors, and the conversations that Dauber had with them as they headed toward Starbase Sigma.

Finally, Arias got to the heart of the testimony.

"You're the one who recommended that the crew of the *Renegat* be charged with mutiny, am I right?"

She knew she wasn't right, but she wanted this on record in a specific way. She had explained that to Dauber when they discussed the testimony.

"No," Dauber said. "I did not recommend any charges at all. I had asked for an investigation of the *Renegat's* crew."

There. Now it would be harder for Mukasey to say that Dauber had an agenda,

that Dauber *wanted* to go after the *Renegat's* crew because they had cost her a valued member of her own crew.

"Isn't an investigation standard procedure when a ship blows up?" Arias asked.

"Yes," Dauber said, "which is why we worked so hard to save the crew and the ship's records."

"You saved all but four of the crew," Arias said, "in tight circumstances without any warning."

"Yes." Dauber's voice had grown soft. Arias knew that the loss of the four was a sore point for Dauber, almost as sore as losing Raul Zarges.

"Were you able to save any information?" she asked.

"We pulled all the information we could find from the *Renegat's* systems. We have procedures for that, and we did the best we could."

"There are gaps in the information pulled from the *Renegat*," Arias said.

"Not from our efforts," Dauber said. "Those gaps are in the *Renegat's* files."

"You saw that from the beginning?" Arias asked.

"We knew that some of the ship's recent history had been scrubbed," Dauber said.

"Is that why you asked for a broader investigation?" Arias asked.

"I didn't ask for a broader investigation," Dauber said. "I recommended a very specific investigation. I wanted an investigation into the relationships of the crew. Most specifically, I wanted to know how a linguist ended up in charge of a security class vessel on a very important mission."

"You're referring to Raina Serpell?" Arias asked. Serpell was not in the court on this day, so Arias couldn't see her face. Arias had a hunch that Serpell did not know until this moment that Dauber hadn't trusted her.

Arias had asked the associate who was monitoring the defendants in the other location to keep a close eye on them during this testimony. It was the beginning of a lot of crucial statements. This was where the actual case against the *Renegat* renegeads began.

"Yes, I'm referring to Raina Serpell," Dauber said. "She identified herself as the person in charge. So did Yusef Kabac, but no one else corroborated that."

"Kabac the engineer," Arias said.

"He had been demoted as an engineer by Nadim Crowe when he was chief engineer," Dauber said. "However, on the journey back, Kabac was the only remaining engineer on the ship."

"The *only* remaining engineer?" Arias asked. "What did you think when you learned that?"

"I was stunned," Dauber said. "I had no idea how a ship could lose all of its engineers."

"And that aroused your suspicion?" Arias asked.

"That, and the fact that *all* of the senior staff was no longer on the ship. Not just Captain Preemas, who was killed, but anyone who could logically take his place." Dauber's hand touched the hat on her lap. That movement was the only sign of distress that she showed.

Arias knew, from their previous discussions, that the absence of the *Renegat's* senior staff didn't just strike Dauber as unusual. It worried her greatly.

"There had been a battle for control of the ship," Arias said. "We will get to some of the details of that later. Did you know about the battle at the time?"

"Vaguely," Dauber said.

"So you might have assumed that the senior staff was no longer on the ship after that rebellion against Captain Preemas." Arias was not going to use the word "mutiny" again while questioning Dauber. Not yet, anyway.

"I don't assume anything," Dauber said. "We are a rescue vessel. We gather information and give it to the Fleet. What we learn has to be as thorough as possible,

because sometimes our efforts are the only ones possible. That's what happened with the *Renegat*. We pulled the records, and then the ship blew up."

"Do you know the cause of the explosion?" Arias asked.

"I don't, no, not exactly," Dauber said. "It seemed to be a problem with the *anacapa* drive. There was nothing my people could do to stop the explosion in the time we had."

"You tried?" Arias asked.

Dauber looked pained. "We always try. Sometimes we can solve problems. Here we could not."

Arias took a breath, letting that sink in. Then she said, "This ship clearly went through a lot. It seems logical that they would lose people along the way, particularly considering all they saw. What made you think this was different?"

Dauber's fingers moved on the side of her hat, just slightly, but enough to show the anger that wasn't on her face. She was furious about the loss of the senior staff, and the way that the *Renegat* renegades behaved in the aftermath of their arrival. The *Renegat* renegades gave interviews, and they went through the protocols as if they expected to be lauded for returning, not for any behavior they displayed on the mission itself.

"The type of people lost," Dauber said. "We learned that Preemas had shifted his crew around to different positions, so someone might have started as bridge crew but became a chef, to cite just one example. That meant there were a lot of experienced people on that ship, not just in obvious positions, like bridge crew or engineering, but in other positions as well. *None* of those people made it back here. Not a single one."

Her fingers gripped the edge of her hat. Her voice held just a bit of the controlled fury that Arias knew was inside her.

"Perhaps," Arias said, anticipating Mukasey's questions, "the difficulties went across various departments in the ship, so it took out the people who were in charge."

Dauber shook her head. "I checked before I talked with Raina Serpell the very last time," she said. "There was a skirmish on the way back, but the only person who died was Serpell's wife India Romano. Everyone else survived."

Dauber made that point as if it were important. Arias hadn't thought about that before. Serpell's wife died as well? And their marriage had been in trouble, because Romano had joined the *Renegat* without telling Serpell. Serpell had to follow, to keep the marriage alive.

Arias made a mental note of that, not sure what she would do with it. Maybe if Mukasey were foolish enough to put Serpell in the witness chair, then Arias would press that point.

But before she could move to the next point, Judge Ati Velsia leaned forward. She was an older woman with dark intelligent eyes, and a take-no-prisoners manner. She had been paying close attention to every detail of this case, unlike a few of her colleagues.

"You make that point about the wife, Romano, as if we should read something into it, Captain," Judge Velsia said. "Do you want us to?"

Arias took a quiet deep breath to keep herself calm. She did not look at the Old Man, although she wanted to. She didn't want this case to go sideways. It was too important and it had too many pieces.

"The death of Serpell's wife disturbs me, Your Honor," Dauber said. "There were reports from the other crewmembers that Serpell and her wife no longer got along, and a few suggested to me that there was a power struggle between the two of them over the way that Serpell was running the ship."

"Do you have proof of this?" Judge Dev Jatrana asked. He had continually glanced at Mukasey and to Arias, those glances looking not just empathetic, but like silent commands: *Are you going to object? Did you notice what the prosecution is doing here?*

"Please clarify for me, Your Honor," Dauber said with the aplomb of someone who had been through this kind of situation many times. "Which part are you concerned about?"

"That Serpell and Romano fought for control of the ship." Judge Jatrana asked.

"Your Honor, I have the testimony of others, given to me as we brought the survivors to Starbase Sigma. That kind of information is often used in court in lieu of evidence, especially when a ship has been destroyed."

"I'm aware of the law," Judge Jatrana said stiffly, as if she had offended him.

Arias was glad that she didn't have to remind him that there were permutations to witness testimony, particularly in the case of a destroyed ship.

Jatrana leaned back, signaling the end to his questioning.

Arias waited half a beat before continuing.

"So," Arias said as she brought the case back on track, "only one person died after the *Renegat* left the Scrapheap."

"Yes," Dauber said.

"The loss of the senior staff occurred at the Scrapheap, is that correct?" Arias asked.

"At or near it," Dauber said.

"At the same time as the death of Captain Preemas?" Arias asked.

"Objection." Mukasey stood. "Captain Dauber was not on the ship. She would have no knowledge of this."

"Captain, where does your knowledge come from?" Chief Judge Kanberra asked. There was a tone in his voice: he was annoyed at the objection.

"I studied the logs, sir, and the death records, and I interviewed the survivors," Dauber said in that same just-the-facts voice she'd been using.

"You may proceed," Chief Judge Kanberra said.

Mukasey sat down slowly, as if she hadn't liked his answer.

"There was a lot of loss about the same time as the death of Captain Preemas," Dauber said. "The media ended up calling that moment the Battle for the *Renegat*, and I think that might be apt. As in any battle, a number of people died."

"But not all of the people you've mentioned, is that correct?" Arias asked.

"Most of the senior staff survived the Battle for the *Renegat*," Dauber said. "According to some of the statements I got, the senior staff left the *Renegat* voluntarily to remain at the Scrapheap."

"And what did the other statements say?" Arias asked.

"That they had no idea why the senior staff left," Dauber said.

"You pulled records off the ship. Do the records show that the senior staff wanted to stay behind at the Scrapheap?" Arias asked.

"No." Dauber let the word hang, just like Arias had initially wanted her to.

There was a stirring in the courtroom, mostly among the judges. Arias did not look. She kept her gaze on Dauber.

"What do the records show?" Arias asked.

"Nothing," Dauber said. "They've been scrubbed."

"Scrubbed? Not erased in the crisis?" Arias asked.

"Scrubbed," Dauber said.

"I object," Mukasey said. "There's no way that another ship's captain can know that."

"Most ship captains do not know the situation on other ships," Arias said. She had been expecting that objection. "But Captain Dauber's remit, on a DV Class vessel tasked with rescuing other ships and helping close down sectors, gives her an expertise in handling strange computer systems. She has learned how to recognize when information was deleted due to circumstances such as a faulty system that could lead to ship failure, or when information was deleted by a human actor."

"Is that so, Captain Dauber?" Chief Judge Kanberra asked.

"Yes, Your Honor. Human error can sometimes be repaired quickly. Faulty systems take more work." Dauber had folded her hands behind her hat. She was calmer now.

"You said 'human error,'" Chief Judge Kanberra said. "Is that what you think the deletion of the information on the *Renegat* was?"

"I do not think that the deletion of information was human error," Dauber said. "I believe it was deliberate."

"What leads you to that conclusion?" Chief Judge Kanberra asked.

"The scrubbing took place over many days and in many systems. It only covered the time period after the *Renegat* reached the Scrapheap until shortly after the *Renegat's* departure. The scrubbing was done either by someone incompetent or someone who did not know how to scrub properly. There should have been echoes of the scrubbed information throughout the back-up systems."

"Should have been, Captain?" Chief Judge Kanberra asked.

Arias kept her expression neutral. She had worried about bringing this information in. It was speculative, and usually judges didn't like that.

But she hadn't brought it forward. The Chief Judge himself had done so, and without thinking about the nature of the evidence.

Or perhaps he had thought of it. Chief Judge Kanberra was a canny man. If he continued to play the case this way, then she would know what side of the case he leaned to. Right now, it seemed like he leaned toward her.

She didn't dare get cocky about it, though.

"Yes, Your Honor, 'should have been,'" Dauber said. "We were only able to download the primary systems in the time we had. We were not able to touch all of the back-ups. Normally, we would have investigated material off of them, and we would have found the echoes, given the kind of scrubbing that was done."

"Is there nowhere else these back-up files would be?" Chief Judge Kanberra asked.

Arias felt a small thread of surprise. She would not have thought to ask that question.

"Normally, Your Honor, there might have been back-ups on nearby ships, since sometimes, especially in extremis, ships are programmed to send their files to nearby Fleet ships to avoid complete loss. But the *Renegat* had arrived directly from fold-space, and, to my knowledge, had had no contact with any other ship from the Fleet during that time."

"Except your ship," Chief Judge Kanberra said.

"We looked," Captain Dauber answered. "There was no automated back-up done in the time we were near the *Renegat*."

"Isn't that a failure on your part?" Chief Judge Kanberra asked.

Arias winced internally. So maybe that was where he was going, blaming Captain Dauber.

"No, Your Honor," Captain Dauber said. She did not seem at all perturbed by Chief Judge Kanberra's question. Maybe she had encountered questions like this before. Or maybe she knew what the judge was about. "The back-up is always enabled by the failing ship. It's part of any ship of the Fleet's emergency protocol."

"Even a ship as old as the *Renegat*?" Chief Judge Kanberra asked.

"Yes," Dauber said. "I checked when we had no back-up copy. This back-up method has been a part of the Fleet for at least a couple of centuries, maybe longer."

She couldn't be more specific than a couple of centuries because the Fleet didn't always keep track of history like that. Arias mentally applauded Dauber. She was doing even better than Arias had hoped she would.

"Was that automated back-up system deliberately taken off-line?" Chief Judge Kanberra asked.

"I don't know, Your Honor," Dauber said. "I'm not sure there is a way to know. My guess is no, it was not deliberate. Given the way the information was scrubbed, I don't believe that anyone in the remaining crew of the *Renegat* knew about these redundant systems."

Chief Judge Kanberra frowned at her, as if he didn't like that answer.

Apparently, Dauber noticed it and risked one more thought.

"To be frank, Your Honor," she said, with enough time between the phrase and whatever she was going to say next to allow him to interrupt. He did not. "The *Renegat* was in terrible shape when we found her. Many of her systems had failed. I think it's logical to assume that the back-up protocols were off-line for many systems, and that some of them had been off-line for some time."

"In your opinion," Chief Judge Kanberra said, "that is because the *Renegat* no longer had engineers?"

Had Arias asked that question, Mukasey would have objected. But the chief judge had asked. Mukasey had to be careful about how she was going to handle her response to this line of questioning.

"The defendants had almost no experience with the practical methods of running a ship," Dauber said. "I found evidence in the data that the *help* systems and the autopilot systems were accessed many times, mostly as a teaching tool."

Three of the judges lowered their heads, not in disgust, but to hide expressions of amazement.

Amazement. Arias understood that reaction. It was amazing that the *Renegat* had returned, given how many problems it had faced—not just the mutiny or the loss of the senior staff, but an attack on the way back and a completely incompetent crew.

"Did those help systems tell them how to scrub data?" Chief Judge Kanberra asked.

"I don't know," Dauber said. "It's not in modern help files. It's not something we ever want crews to do."

The logic of that seemed to catch several of the judges. They nodded, even though they weren't supposed to react to evidence.

"There is one other thing, Your Honor," Dauber said. Arias's breath caught. She had no idea what Dauber was going to say, and that made her nervous.

Chief Judge Kanberra glanced at Arias, as if he wondered whether or not he'd been set up.

She let some of the nerves cross her face.

That seemed to make a decision for him. "All right," he said. "What is this one more thing?"

"There are no bridge records from the *Renegat* after the battle that occurred near the planet Amnthro. None. Someone shut off all the systems that recorded every move crewmembers made, the orders that were given, and everything the ship encountered."

Arias had planned to introduce that information later, when she tried to cram the information about the scrubbing. She had planned to bring that up after Mukasey's cross-examination of Dauber.

The fact that it came up now meant Arias would have to change her strategy a bit, but she could do that.

"No records," Chief Judge Kanberra repeated. "Because they were scrubbed?"

"Some of the records around the time of the battle were scrubbed," Dauber said. "Shortly after the battle, though, the system had been deliberately taken off-line."

"So you're telling me that two different incidents that the *Renegat* was involved in inspired someone to scrub the records?"

"Yes, Your Honor," Dauber said.

"And then deliberately shut down another system?" he asked, sounding surprised.

"Yes, Your Honor," Dauber said.

"How do you know this was deliberate?" he asked.

"Because, Your Honor," she said, "we have the records. The system is designed to let us know why it isn't functioning."

"Huh," Chief Judge Kanberra said, as if he didn't know what to do with that information. His gaze met Arias's.

"I think I've dominated the questioning long enough," he said to her. "Take us back to the questions you needed to ask."

"Thank you, Your Honor," Arias said.

She felt a bit off balance. Part of her mind started working on how to reintroduce that information. But she also had to mentally delete several other questions, since the answers he had pulled out of Dauber had already answered those questions sideways anyhow.

Arias walked from one side of the witness chair to the other, not for any reason except to reassert dominance, to remind everyone that this was her questioning now.

"Captain Dauber," Arias said. "You recommended that this starbase investigate the crew of the *Renegat*."

"Yes," Dauber said.

"Let me be sure I have this right." Arias had launched into the practiced part of the testimony. "You recommended it because you learned about Captain Preemas."

"Yes," Dauber said.

"The entire senior staff had left the ship so far from the Fleet that they might never be able to return." Arias knew that she was asserting information not in evidence yet, but if no one challenged this, then she never had to.

"Yes," Dauber said.

"And," Arias said, "the evidence of what happened at that Scrapheap had been scrubbed inexpertly from the system."

"Yes," Dauber said, "and from the period around the battle near Amnthra."

Good for her, bringing that back around.

"Aside from the things you listed," Arias said, "is there anything else that made you recommend the investigation of the *Renegat*?"

"Yes," Dauber said, which made Arias's heart beat just a bit faster even though she had known that was how Dauber would answer. "I simply did not trust anyone I met from the *Renegat*."

Arias waited half a beat, expecting Mukasey to object. But Mukasey was apparently smart enough to realize that Dauber's opinion was not something she could object to, not before the tribunal. Maybe if they had used civilians, which the Fleet rarely did.

"That seems very subjective to me," Arias said. If Mukasey wasn't going to make the argument, then Arias would do so.

"It's not," Dauber said. "There are two reasons why I didn't trust any of them. The first comes from the fact that when I asked what happened to the senior staff, I got two answers, and only two. From 193 people. Based on interviews I've done in past crises, I should have received dozens of different answers from different perspectives."

Arias did not ask the follow-up question, *Do you think they were coached?* because she knew that Mukasey would object to that. Arias had to trust that the judges understood Dauber's point.

"The other reason?" Arias asked.

"The other reason, and the reason I finally decided to make my recommendations, was the interview that I did with Raina Serpell."

Arias turned to the bench. "Your Honors, we have the interview ready to play. I would like to enter all of it into evidence, with a flag on the portion we are going to play."

“So ordered,” Chief Judge Kanberra said.

Arias nodded at the Old Man. He held one of their tablets. He handed it to her. She set it on the arm of the witness chair.

“May I?” Dauber asked.

Arias barely managed not to give her a look of surprise. Dauber had something planned, and Arias could either shut it down—and maybe discredit her own witness—or she could let it play out.

Dauber had been through as many or more trials as Arias had. Arias had to trust her.

“Certainly,” Arias said, and tilted the tablet toward her.

Dauber activated the holo.

The holo had been recorded in a meeting room on the *Aizsargs*. Arias used Dauber to set up the location and the date of the interview.

Much of the room was not in the holo. The recordings were done so that the only thing that appeared with clarity was the table where Serpell and Arias sat.

That table was small, and looked like it was on the ground in the courtroom, rather than part of a holo. A thinner Raina Serpell with stress lines on her face sat at the table, some pastries to her right, and a mug of steaming tea to her left.

It looked like she had touched neither.

Dauber fast-forwarded the recording until she found a spot slightly before the spot that Arias had flagged.

Somewhere during the recording, Dauber had shown up, sat down, and proceeded to talk with Serpell. They were discussing something and gesturing at each other.

The Dauber in the holo was not wearing her dress uniform. Her hair was slightly mussed, and she looked exhausted. This was shortly after the rescue, and the hard work that Dauber had been doing showed in her face but not in her posture. It was as rigid as it was on the stand.

Dauber finally found the moment she'd been searching for. The holo stopped fast-forwarding, as the holo-Dauber was talking.

“We got as much of the Renegat’s records as we could,” holo-Dauber said. “At first, we were looking for anacapa anomalies, but we’re finding a lot of other questions.”

Holo-Serpell swallowed visibly. Her eyes widened as if the statement shocked her.

“We got a lot of material, but the bridge records disappear in the most crucial time,” holo-Dauber said. “They stopped just as the Renegat was heading to that planet that your system identified as Amnthra. What happened?”

Arias tried not to step back. So this was what Dauber wanted to show. The lead into the snippet that Arias had planned. Arias had planned to play the lie, but Dauber wanted the set-up.

Apparently she didn't think the lie would be enough for this panel.

Arias had to trust her.

Holo-Serpell squirmed, literally. It was clear that the simple question made her very uncomfortable.

“Um,” holo-Serpell said, “they were probably destroyed during the battle. We took a lot of hits.”

Holo-Dauber shook her head slightly, clearly not believing Serpell.

“Fleet ships are designed with a lot of redundant systems, particularly when it comes to keeping track of what happens to the ship herself,” holo-Dauber said. “I’m sure we’ll find other information, but what we have at the moment suggests that someone went back and erased all the information from that battle forward. Why would anyone do that?”

Holo-Serpell continued to squirm. She blinked hard, as if she considered crying and was stopping herself. Her hands shook, and so did her voice as she started to speak.

"It was just really hard. I . . . listened to the crew. They wanted more supplies, and we shouldn't have done that. Once the weapons on that planet started firing on us, I hit every single control panel I could think of to defend us. None of us knew how the weapons system worked or what to do with the shields. So I poked around and got lucky. I probably deleted the records or did something wrong right then."

Arias shut the holo right there. The images froze. She wanted the two of them to remain in that slightly antagonistic tableau, just for drama's sake.

She had planned on showing only that part where Serpell had blamed the crew for her own errors, and then the lie about the "accidental" deletion.

But Dauber had been right. The entire excerpt was better.

"What bothered you about this exchange?" Arias asked.

"It's all a lie," Dauber said.

"Objection," Mukasey said, as she stood. "Captain Dauber was not on the ship at that time. There is no way she could know what the truth was."

Chief Judge Kanberra looked tired. He had once served on ships, and Mukasey had not. That made a big difference.

"Overruled," he said. "Continue, Captain."

Only it was Arias who spoke next.

"How do you know it was a lie?" she asked.

"Because there is no way that someone 'poking around' could accidentally scrub the bridge records *while* they were activating weapons and shields. The systems aren't just different, they are housed in a different part of the ship."

"Even on an SC-Class vessel that old?" Arias asked.

"Especially on a vessel that old," Dauber said. "The systems that kept track of everything the ship was doing were housed on a different level, with separate controls."

"So whoever shut these down," Arias said, "had to know that."

"Yes," Dauber said.

Arias shut down the holo. The table, the steaming mug, the two women who looked like they were about to come to blows, vanished.

"Thank you," Arias said.

She returned to her seat, still feeling a little unbalanced. She wasn't quite sure how that had gone.

Mukasey stood up. She looked slightly angry, as if the rulings against her had set her off.

"Isn't it possible that Raina Serpell believed she had shut down those systems when she was 'poking around'?" Mukasey asked.

"Her body language suggests otherwise," Dauber said.

Arias folded her hands on the desk, focusing on them so that she wouldn't smile at Dauber's answer.

"But isn't it possible?" Mukasey asked.

"Someone knew," Dauber said.

"But maybe not Serpell," Mukasey said.

She was testifying now, but Arias would let it hang. Apparently, the Old Man agreed with her, because he didn't object either.

"I suppose there's a slight chance of that," Dauber said.

"Which would make what she said to you not a lie, right?" Mukasey said.

"I have received a lot of training in interview techniques," Dauber said. "In that interview, she repeatedly lied to me."

"But maybe not about the loss of data," Mukasey said.

"I think you would have to ask her," Dauber said.

She clearly wasn't going to budge. Mukasey glared at her, knowing that she had lost this exchange.

“Thank you,” Mukasey said and walked toward her seat.

Arias had expected her to continue to press about the lies, about the subjectivity of the word “trust.” Arias probably would have.

Although Mukasey was a good and cautious lawyer. She knew she would have to fight this witness, whom the chief judge believed, and Mukasey clearly believed that would work against her.

“I have nothing more,” Mukasey said.

“Redirect?” Chief Judge Kanberra said.

“I’d like to reserve the redirect,” Arias said. There was more to that holo, and she might just use it if she needed it.

“Then we are adjourned for the day,” Chief Judge Kanberra asked, and gaveled the session closed.

* * *

20

Long day. Arias and the Old Man returned to the office. It was dark, but that didn’t mean anything. Sometimes, an attorney shut off the lights just before settling on the couch.

Arias grabbed an extra tablet. Hers was starting to fritz. But she didn’t want to fix it until she had moved the rest of her case notes, holos, and information onto something new.

At this stage in a trial, she was paranoid. She didn’t want anyone else to see what she was doing, and she was afraid that the defense might send someone to steal a tablet and call the theft an accident.

Someone had hacked into the prosecution’s automated back-ups during one of her first major trials. The defense had always claimed they hadn’t done so, but that defense attorney had a lot of specialized information that seemed suspicious to Arias.

Ever since then, she had been too cautious, at least in the Old Man’s words. He had his personal notes on his tablet, but everything else for this case was on hers—not because she had taken over, but because the Old Man hated having her nag him.

The Old Man opened the door to his office and tossed his tablet on the desk. He grabbed the suit jacket he’d worn two days before, and flung it over his arm.

Then he saw her glaring at him and sighed.

“No one can understand my notes,” he said. “They’re in—”

Then he stopped himself and sighed again.

“Never mind.” He grabbed the tablet, stuck it in a drawer, and punched the automated lock. “Satisfied?”

Not really. Those locks weren’t solid. But this was a small victory, and right now, as tired as she was, she’d take it.

“Yeah,” she said. “I’d offer to buy you a drink, but I think any alcohol would just put me to sleep.”

He chuckled. “I stopped drinking during trials years ago.”

She wasn’t sure she’d known that. She adjusted the strap for her own bag on her shoulder and then followed him out of his office. She didn’t even want to check hers.

They threaded their way through the maze of desks and old couches in the bullpen. Arias didn’t see anyone sleeping on any of the couches, but she wasn’t really looking. It wasn’t that far to her apartment, but it felt like she had a journey as long as the one the *Renegat* had taken.

“There you are!”

The voice, strident and unmistakable, belonged to Anyi Etamè, one of the junior

prosecutors helping with the case. She weaved her way through the tables, waving a closed fist.

"You have to see this!"

"Who does?" Arias asked. She was so tired. She didn't want to see anything, and she hoped against hope that Etamè was talking to someone else.

"You both. Can we go to the office?" Without waiting for an answer Etamè walked around them and headed back to the Old Man's office. He hadn't locked the door.

Etamè flicked on a light as if the room was hers. She treated everything that way. Some of it was age: she had gotten her degree only a few years ago, but she was at least twice as old as most of the regular prosecutors. Law was her fifth career.

She wore flowing caftans that were always fresh and crisp, no matter what time of day Arias saw her.

Arias had picked Etamè as one of the people to watch the defendants, primarily because Etamè had an amazing talent. She could become motionless. People noticed her at first, particularly if she spoke, because of that forceful, nasal voice, but if she remained silent, they forgot she was around.

Both Arias and the Old Man followed her into the office. The Old Man seemed less perturbed by the invasion than Arias would be.

He entered last and pulled the door closed.

Etamè shoved some tablets and clothing and mugs away from the corner of the desk. The Old Man didn't seem to mind. Arias wanted to tell Etamè to stop that.

"You hit something," Etamè said. "That testimony today? It struck a nerve."

Suddenly, Arias was awake. Dauber's testimony had been the only testimony all day long.

"What part?" Arias asked.

"The interview," Etamè said. "Watch this."

She set the tiny tablet she had in her fist down on the edge of the desk, then tapped the top of the tablet. A holo of the overflow room appeared in miniature, making everyone look like tiny dolls sitting in tiny chairs.

Etamè used her fingers to enlarge, and then enlarge some more, until the image only showed a pint-sized Serpell watching the testimony.

Arias heard her voice, then Chief Judge Kanberra, and finally Dauber, setting up the interview.

Serpell didn't move through most of that, but when the interview started, she squirmed. Her face changed color as she watched herself lie to Captain Dauber well over a year ago.

Then Serpell put her head down, and she didn't move as everything wrapped up. Kabac, Gajra Blaquer, and Declan Connolly approached her after Chief Judge Kanberra gavelled down the day's session, and it was clear that the others looked furious.

Kabac in particular loomed over Serpell as if he wanted to strike her somehow.

Then something happened, and he shook his head.

"What was that?" the Old Man asked.

Etamè reversed it. Serpell's voice, very faint, came through with a *Not now*. When the others didn't move, she repeated it, and they left.

She remained in the same position for a long time. Then she stood, her legs wobbling. She looked like someone who had just heard terrible news—like the death of a lover or the fact that they were going to prison.

Which she would be, if Arias had her way.

"Ha!" the Old Man said. "We got her! She's worried now."

So was Arias.

"Yeah, she is," Arias said. "And that 'not now' bothers me. Does it mean they've been meeting throughout this trial?"

Contrary to orders. Not that orders seemed to matter for this bunch.

"I haven't seen or heard anything," Etamè said, "but I haven't been watching them after hours. You want me to stick around?"

Arias looked at the Old Man. She wanted that to be his call, not hers.

"No," he said. "They have the right to meet without us."

"Even if they're discussing the strategies for their crime?" Etamè asked.

Arias spoke before the Old Man gave Etamè his famed *You haven't thought this through, have you?* lecture. Arias didn't need to hear that again.

"They don't control the trial," she said. "Even if they want to change the strategies, they have to work with Mukasey, and I doubt she'll change mid-trial."

"Yeah, that's what I thought," Etamè said, with a sideways glance at the Old Man. Apparently, she had thought it through then, and just wanted some confirmation. "All right. All I know is that Raina Serpell's reaction puts us on the right course."

Arias suppressed a surge of irritation. Of course they were on the right course. The key was convincing the judges of that.

The Old Man went to the door and held it open. Etamè left, and then he closed the door.

"We can change strategies right here," he said, "and go after the ringleaders. We have more than enough evidence to convict them when you combine the data and Dauber's testimony."

"Serpell maybe," Arias said.

"And others. Kabac, who did know the systems well enough to scrub them, but haphazardly, which seems to be how he did his job." The Old Man nodded, as if convincing himself. "And at least a dozen others."

"That's not enough," Arias said. "We leave the rest unprosecuted, and they'll make martyrs out of the ones who are. After all, those folks got them back here."

"Fat lot of good that did them," the Old Man said.

"That bothers you?" Arias asked. "The fact that they returned when they could have gone anywhere else?"

"No," he said. "They're not adventurers, not a one of them. This was a last ditch effort to save their careers, not a trip they wanted to take. People like that, they don't think outside the box. Some of them aren't even aware of the box."

Arias smiled at him. He did not smile back. She let her smile fade.

"I don't want to change strategies," she said.

"Good," he said. "Because I want to be done with this case, and changing strategies would mean that we would have to reschedule everything."

He stretched, yawned, and then pulled the door open.

"Go home," he said to her. "Stay away from these couches. I want you fresh in the morning."

She barked out a laugh. "I won't be fresh for a long time," she said. "But I promise to sleep. I'll be as clear-headed as I can."

"Good," he said, "because we have a lot of trial to go."

* * *

The prosecution's case continued. Data, more data, people to establish how the data was used. People to discuss the psychology of the defendants. Other people talking about Fleet life one hundred years ago.

Mukasey was constantly taking notes, staying up late at night and revising her strategy. The one favor that the prosecution had done for her had been to show the

judges just how extreme the situation was, just how hard it was for this entire group to survive the trip *to* the Scrapheap, let alone the trip back.

Mukasey would use that. She would use a lot of it.

But, after nearly a week of daylong testimony, she could see the judges getting tired. They had already made up their minds.

She would have to change their minds. And that would be a tall order. But she had retired Admiral Gão to help with that.

Mukasey decided to start with her, since the mission had started with Gão. That would change the narrative quite a bit.

The prosecution rested on the ninth day of the trial, and Mukasey began her case bright and early in the morning on the tenth day. She didn't sleep much the night before, changing and revising her plan.

She wasn't as good an orator as the Old Man. The real key for her case was to let the judges know that her perspective was different. If she droned on or if she threw too much data at them, she would lose them.

The judges would appreciate the brevity. Everyone involved in this trial would.

That morning, the courtroom was bathed in fake sunlight. The lighting changed daily, just like it did on the rest of the starbase. Too many people locked themselves in rooms and got no real light at all.

She wished the lights were dimmer, though, since she would probably be showing some holos by the end of the day. She supposed she could ask the court clerk to get the lighting changed, but she didn't want to call attention to it.

She just needed to focus and do her job.

She nearly lost her focus when she entered and saw the fifty defendants already in their seats. Someone had brought them early, and, worse, they had included Yusef Kabac. He sat in the front row like the creepy slug he was, arms crossed over his chest, his ill-fitting clothing looking even more inappropriate than usual.

He had had visible reactions to a lot of the testimony in the past ten days, even approaching Raina Serpell after Captain Dauber's testimony. It had seemed to Mukasey's assistant that Kabac wanted to discuss the testimony with Serpell, who had been visibly shaken by watching footage of herself talking to the captain on the *Aizsargs*.

Kabac and his terrible attitude was not what Mukasey needed this morning. The judges weren't in yet, but the prosecutors were. They had their heads together and were talking about something—or maybe talking about nothing and just trying to unnerve her.

That conversation might have done so, if she didn't have Kabac to worry about.

She thought about how she would handle this and then decided she wouldn't. She left the courtroom through a side door, searching for the clerk.

The clerk was a small man who struck her as unusually fussy. He made sure that everything was in its place before the day's events started, and he would occasionally hold up the judges if something was awry.

Mukasey had not spoken to him throughout this entire trial. The prosecutors had made some requests of him, but she hadn't.

That changed today.

He was standing before the door leading into the judges' wing, looking at a tablet of his own.

Mukasey didn't excuse herself or say his name to draw his attention. She just waited until he saw her.

"Yes?" he drawled.

"I was wondering if you could do me a favor," she said.

"I don't do favors," he said.

She bit back a response. She had simply used the sentence to be polite.

“I was wondering if it would be possible to have the first row of defendants move to the last row, and have the last row up front.”

“Whyever would I do that?” the clerk asked, his eyes narrowed.

She had gone through the options in her head before she had talked to him, trying to come up with an excuse without mentioning Kabac. On her way to find the clerk, she had finally decided to appeal to his fussy nature.

“I thought I would be polite,” she said. “I’m going to move them around anyway, with or without your help. But it’s your courtroom, and I didn’t want to step on any toes. If you don’t want to make the switch, I’m happy to talk with them.”

And then she turned her back on him. She hadn’t even started to walk away when he said, “Wait. I’ll do it.”

Then he sighed heavily, stood, and disappeared through one of the side doors that led into the gigantic courtroom.

Now no one would know why the groups were switched around, which was good. She didn’t need to antagonize Kabac any further. They already disliked each other. She didn’t want to make that worse.

By the time she made it back into the courtroom, the shuffle was complete. Kabac sat in the far back corner, arms crossed over his increasingly massive stomach. His eyes glared over his bushy beard.

Mukasey turned her back on him and the rest of the defendants. Yes, she was arguing for their futures, but she couldn’t think about that any longer. She needed to concentrate on her part of the case . . . and they weren’t going to like much of what she was going to say.

She was standing when the door to the judges’ chambers opened. She sat down hurriedly, nearly losing her balance because the chair had turned away from her. Falling off her chair would have been a great way to start the day.

She touched her bracelet to center herself. She hadn’t fallen, and all would be well.

The judges filed in. Every single one of the judges looked at her pointedly as they entered the courtroom.

She couldn’t tell if the looks came from the fact they had discussed her or because she was on deck this morning or because they were warning her to wrap up the case quickly.

All of the judges adjusted their own tablets as they sat down, then folded their hands and looked over the courtroom expectantly. It seemed to her that they were keeping track of which defendants appeared when, something she hadn’t planned on, and something that she didn’t much like.

But she couldn’t control everything—just her part of the case, and she was ready to start that.

Chief Judge Kanberra launched into his morning speech, mostly directed at the defendants, reminding them they did not have the right to speak in this court. Only Mukasey could speak for them.

Then he nodded at her, and she smiled back, hoping she didn’t look as nervous as she felt.

She thanked him and called her first witness—Judge Bella Gão. Normally, Mukasey didn’t think of Bella Gão as an active judge, just as a retired admiral. But she wanted Gão’s credentials up front, so that the other judges would give her testimony extra weight.

The back door to the courtroom opened, and Gão entered. She was a tiny woman whose perfect posture made her seem younger than she was. Her hair was clipped short and cupped her cheeks. Her gaze remained on the other judges, and her expression was impassive.

She wore her admiral’s uniform, with its silver and black retirement bars making

her shoulders seem wider. Silver and black meant that she had served with distinction and retired with honors.

The uniform seemed a bit loose, and it was nearly eighty years out of date, making it a great choice to illustrate some of the points she was going to have to make.

Gão sat in the witness chair and looked around, as if she was trying to orient herself in the cockpit of a new ship. Clearly, she hadn't been in the witness chair in these courtrooms on Starbase Sigma. She had only seen the chairs from above.

Mukasey walked carefully over to the chair, so that she didn't upstage Gão. Gão had made an amazing entrance. Mukasey didn't want to spoil it.

When Mukasey reached Gão's side, she smiled. Gão nodded without a smile, making her seem even more formidable—or maybe just as judicial as the others on the bench.

"Please state your name and rank at retirement," Mukasey said. They hadn't had much practice. Gão had said she didn't like listening to practiced testimony as a judge, so she refused to do much.

She had twice told Mukasey to trust her.

Mukasey had had no real choice but to do so.

"Admiral Bella Gão, Retired," Gão said.

"You have moved to a new position, is that true?" Mukasey asked.

"I am now a judge in the Fleet system," Gão said.

"You turned down your most recent assignment. May I ask why?" Mukasey asked.

"Because I was assigned this case," Gão said. Murmurs echoed through the courtroom.

Mukasey had to use every bit of control she had to make sure she did not look at the defendants or the judges.

Gão made that somewhat easy by not taking a breath, even as the people in the courtroom reacted.

Instead, she continued, "I turned the case down because it would create an ethical burden for me. I am privy to information my colleagues are not. So I cited conflict of interest, which is how you found me."

"Yes it is," Mukasey said. "Why did you not contact me or the prosecution directly?"

"Because the *Renegat's* entire mission needed to be investigated," Gão said.

"And you think a legal case will be investigation enough?" Mukasey asked.

"It is perhaps the only remaining option," Gão said.

In some respects, she was the perfect witness. She did not elaborate. But Mukasey wanted her to elaborate.

"Why do you think the entire mission needed to be investigated?" Mukasey said.

"Because it was mishandled from the start," Gão said.

"How do you know this?" Mukasey asked.

"Because I was the person who was in charge of the *Renegat's* mission," Gão said.

More gasps, but none from the prosecution table. They seemed calm. They were expecting this. The gasps had come from the defendants.

The judges seemed to have themselves under control. For the first time in days, they looked interested.

"I was a vice-admiral at the time," Gão said, "and I was not allowed to turn down this assignment."

"You tried?" Mukasey asked.

"I not only tried," Gão said, "I also tried to have the mission scuttled."

"Why?" Mukasey asked.

"Because it was set up wrong," Gão said. "May I explain?"

"Please," Mukasey said. "Unless, of course, there are other objections."

The Old Man leaned back, his hands folded like the judges' hands. Arias watched, eyes hooded.

The defendants had moved a lot. They were sitting at attention. Mukasey almost looked at Kabac, but managed to stop herself in time.

"No objections," Chief Judge Kanberra said. "Proceed."

Gão nodded at him.

"At the time the *Renegat* was launched, I was the vice-admiral in charge of Scrapheaps," Gão said. "When I received notice from a Scrapheap that we had never heard of before, one that did not exist in our records, that it had been invaded and ships had been stolen, I went to my superiors to ask what they wanted done."

"This included Admiral Shannon Hallock, did it not?" Mukasey asked.

Gão glared at Mukasey. Apparently Gão did not like the interruption. "It did," Gão said, a bit begrudgingly. "I shall get to her in a minute."

She turned her attention back to the judges. She was talking to them, and them only.

"In those days, normal procedure when notified of an unauthorized break-in at a Scrapheap was that we would send at least two DV-class vessels to investigate. Back then, we housed Ready Vessels in the Scrapheaps, behind layers of security so that no one could access those vessels without authorization."

Then she paused and looked at the panel. "I trust my colleagues know about Ready Vessels and Scrapheaps?"

Eight judges did. The rest did not.

So Gão launched into an explanation of Ready Vessels, how, at the time, the Fleet had assumed they would travel backward to fight wars against cultures that threatened them. The Ready Vessels were brand-new warships, staged for a fight.

Only in the entire existence of the Fleet, no Ready Vessel was ever used as intended.

"It is because of the *Renegat*," Gão said, "that I was able to change the policy on Ready Vessels. We no longer house them in Scrapheaps."

The judges nodded, and Mukasey did not ask for an elaboration, even though she normally would have.

"I did not want to send *any* ships back to that Scrapheap," Gão said. "The journey was dangerous and the incursion happened years before. If someone had planned to threaten us with Ready Vessels, they would have done so already."

"Why did no one listen to you?" Mukasey asked.

Gão shot her an irritated look. "They listened to me. The problem was Admiral Hallock. She wanted to shut down all Scrapheaps and send ships back to destroy them."

Yet another collective gasp. This time, even the Old Man looked surprised.

"She wanted evidence from this mission to prove that Scrapheaps are untenable. She believed all out-of-date ships should be destroyed," Gão said.

"I don't understand," Mukasey asked, just like she had the first time she discussed this with Gão. "How would this mission accomplish that?"

"She wanted to know how devastating the incursion was into that ancient Scrapheap. The fact that we had forgotten it added fuel to her fire," Gão said. Then she trained her gaze directly on Chief Judge Kanberra. "The other admirals did not want to risk DV-Class vessels, so we figured out what kind of ship would be needed to travel that distance."

This time, the chief judge moved. He leaned forward.

"It seems to me," he said, "that an SC-class vessel is ill-suited for this trip."

"It is," Gão said. "At the time, SC-class ships were designed to work in pairs. This ship had to go alone."

"Why is that?" Judge Bastien asked.

"Because no one thought it would return," Gão said.

"*What?*" Mukasey recognized that voice. It belonged to Kabac.

The Chief Judge banged his gavel. "Quiet," he said.

Someone grunted, almost angrily. Mukasey had a hunch she knew who that someone was.

Gão didn't seem to notice the interruption or the gaveling. Maybe being a judge had given her the ability to ignore other things in the courtroom.

And then she spoke without being prompted.

"I was to staff the ship with the idea in mind that the chances of return were very slim, maybe none," Gão said. Her brutal words resounded in the nearly silent courtroom.

Mukasey knew this was where the difficulties were going to come.

"I was told to use people who wouldn't be missed," Gão said. "They needed to be good at their jobs, I was told, but without family or even close friends. I worried that they couldn't work together, if that was the case, but I was overruled."

More stirring.

"To be frank," Gão said. "I received a long list of possible crewmembers. Most refused the trip."

"We were ordered to go!" a woman shouted.

Chief Judge Kanberra banged his gavel again. "*Quiet!*"

"Yes," Gão said in response to the woman, "you were ordered to go, because we couldn't fill the ship otherwise."

Then Gão looked directly at the judges, her eyes glistening.

"I cannot tell you how much I regret this incident in my career." Her voice was soft. "I did try to abort the mission, when it became clear that all of those foldspace trips were creating a time lag."

She brought that up earlier than they had planned. Mukasey decided to let Gão take the lead.

"You did?" Mukasey asked.

"Yes," Gão said. "First, let me tell you about Captain Preemas."

Oh, good. She remembered the set-up. Maybe she was better at catching the judges than Mukasey thought, because the judges were leaning in, interest on all of their faces.

"Ivan Preemas had more write-ups than many of the other possible captains for the *Renegat*," Gão said. "However, each write-up ended with the fact that he was a creative and talented captain. His attitude was terrible and he had trouble following orders, but he was a strong leader."

She took a breath, then settled back. Now, the courtroom was quiet.

"I met with him. He was rude and dismissive and angry. I did not like him, but he told me in no uncertain terms that he wanted the job. He pointed out that we needed a strong leader because the ship would be so very far from the Fleet. We needed someone who could handle the situation."

She made eye contact with all of the judges individually before continuing.

"After meeting with him, I went to Admiral Hallock again and asked to cancel the mission. This was, to the best of my recollection, the third or fourth time I made that request. I was denied again."

"So the *Renegat* had to leave?" Mukasey asked.

"Yes," Gão said. "I was heartened by one thing: Nadim Crowe had chosen his own engineering team. They were good. They fit the criteria, as did Crowe, but they were a talented bunch, with a handful of exceptions."

Mukasey let that hang, because she didn't want to draw attention to Kabac right now. She would if she had to, to show that he didn't get along with Crowe, but she didn't want to establish that Kabac was trouble from the start.

Gão looked down at her hands. "For a while, Captain Preemas and Nadim Crowe worked together. That fell apart, though, over time."

"Do you know why?" Mukasey asked.

"The trip had become dangerous. The time lags that I mentioned are a sign that a ship is not just traveling through space, but that it's also traveling in time. I was worried that the ship might not reach the Scrapheap and still be in our time period." Gão shook her head, clearly distressed.

"I finally spoke to Captain Preemas about this," she said. "Our foldspace communications at that point had a long enough lag to make the conversation frustrating—"

"Do you recall how long the lag was?" Judge Velsia asked. It took a moment for Mukasey to understand why Velsia was asking. She had served on ships that routinely traveled through foldspace. She understood the calculations.

"Not without looking it up," Gão said. "It was minutes, maybe ten, maybe fifteen, using a communication *anacapa* drive on the *Renegat* itself. I was afraid we would lose them and not be able to communicate."

"Isn't that what happened?" Judge Velsia asked.

"Not exactly," Gão said. "When the *Renegat* returned, the one thing I did learn was that someone had sabotaged the communications *anacapa*. But I'm getting ahead of myself."

And she was ahead. There was so much to tell, and no real way to encapsulate it.

"Someone?" Judge Velsia asked. "You don't know who?"

"I do know who," Gão said. "It was Captain Preemas himself."

The judges leaned back in surprise. Arias dropped her head slightly, as if she hadn't known that. The Old Man continued to sit rigidly in place.

"In my last conversation with Captain Preemas," Gão said, "I ordered him to abandon the mission and to return to the Fleet immediately. He argued with me."

Gão looked at Mukasey. "Is it possible to show them this, rather than have me explain it?"

Gão knew that Mukasey had recordings of all of Gão's conversations with the *Renegat*. And Mukasey was ready for this one. She had asked that they set it up this way. It was better for the judges to hear directly from Preemas and to see what was going on.

"Yes," Mukasey said. "Let me get ready."

She hurried to her table, because they were getting close to the lunch break and she wanted to end with this.

She brought the tablet that had the holo recordings on them. She opened the file marked *Preemas*.

"Your Honors," she said as she sat that tablet on the arm of the witness chair. "This material has been altered. We have speeded up the time lag in between both sides of the conversation. You will see each side waiting, but you will not have to sit through about ten minutes of lag each time someone speaks. I can give you the unchanged files as well."

"Please do," Judge Velsia said before the chief judge could speak.

"All right," Mukasey said. "Here we go."

She started the holo recording.

A much younger Gão stood in an alcove in the engineering section of her ship, the *Správa*. Mukasey mentally kicked herself. She had forgotten to set up the reason that Gão was in that tight alcove. It was because communications had already become nearly impossible.

Captain Preemas sat in the dark at a desk. He was hard to see, a ghost of a man, which Mukasey found creepy every single time she watched this, especially since she knew how he was going to die.

Light came up in his area. He was wearing his uniform, but his hair was getting unruly. His bright green eyes shone with intelligence and what Mukasey took to be fury.

Mukasey skipped a lot of the information holo-Gão discussed with Preemas about

the Scrapheap. Mukasey had a hunch that the judges would listen to the entire conversation anyway, and there was no need to add that into this very long day.

Instead, she began with the discussion of foldspace.

It was clear that holo-Gão had been talking before this excerpt, but Mukasey didn't try to set up this part of the conversation. Instead, she let holo-Gão talk.

"The time lags disturb me, Captain Preemas," holo-Gão said. *"They're getting worse, not better, and we don't know what's causing them. There is a possibility that they're being caused by actual time displacement. You might have lost minutes as you traveled through foldspace. My concern is that the Renegat will lose days next, then months, and then years. That will do us no good, Captain. We will have sent you back, you will have lost time, and we won't be able to communicate any longer. This entire mission is predicated on the fact that you have to find out what's going on at that Scrapheap and let us know what, if anything, that something is. It doesn't appear you can do that."*

It was also clear to everyone in the courtroom that holo-Gão had been right. Everything she said in that single discussion had come to pass. What Mukasey hadn't said was that the *Renegat* had only made four foldspace trips when Gão had had this conversation with Preemas. The *Renegat* would make many more trips after this.

The other thing Mukasey didn't mention, because she didn't have to, was the fact that Preemas had been getting angrier and angrier as holo-Gão talked.

"So, Captain Preemas," holo-Gão said, *"rather than continue on this mission, I am ordering you to bring the Renegat back to the Fleet. We will deal with the Scrapheap in some other way."*

"Oh my God," one of the female defendants said.

"What the—?" another said.

And someone started sobbing, quite loudly.

This time, Chief Judge Kanberra looked at all of them with compassion. Apparently, they hadn't known that they could have gone home, long before their nightmare had gotten worse.

"I need you to acknowledge that order," holo-Gão had said. *"I will be sending the official order at the end of this communique."*

Captain Preemas's skin had become mottled. He looked furious. For a moment, it seemed like he wouldn't answer her at all. This section always made Mukasey very tense, even though she knew what the man had done.

"Beg pardon, ma'am." He hadn't sounded like a man who was asking for forgiveness. He sounded as furious as he looked. *"But I'm the officer on the ground. I'm not seeing the problems that you are. My crew now works well together. I have gotten rid of most of the dead weight. They remain at Sector Base Z for someone else to waste time with."*

"What?" someone asked. "The dead weight? Those people—"

"Shush," someone else whispered.

Their conversation could not drown out Preemas's voice. *"I moved others to different positions more suited to their skills. The ship now runs the way a ship should run."* He raised his chin. *"I think we are more than suited to this mission. I would ask you to rescind that order, ma'am. We deserve a chance to finish this mission."*

"Ooooooh," one of the first voices said. They sounded relieved. Apparently that person believed that Gão had listened to Preemas.

"I appreciate your candor, Captain Preemas," holo-Gão was saying. *"I am glad you alleviated some of my concerns about your crew. However, you did not address the time lag. You will have to travel through foldspace four more times just to return to us. That's all the risk I'm willing to take. We are seeing an actual problem here, not a theoretical one, and therefore, I am aborting this mission."*

"What?" That was more than one voice. Several people were speaking at once, shouting, "No!" and "This can't be true!"

Finally Chief Judge Kanberra brought his gavel down hard.

"If you can't be quiet," he said, "I will toss you all from this room."

The voices faded, although several people were doubled over. Sobs echoed faintly in the chamber. Apparently Kanberra wasn't going to worry about the criers.

Preemas had been shifting his weight. He had been so angry it was still palpable, all these years later.

"I don't understand your concern now, Vice-Admiral," he said angrily. "You were willing to send us to our deaths to garner some information for Admiral Hallock. And now you're telling me you're concerned about our lives? Forgive me if I don't believe you."

Holo-Gão had not reacted to his insubordination. Her face had been remarkably impassive.

The current Gão was shaking her head slightly, apparently still unable to understand what that man had done.

Preemas's voice grew more strident. "You're telling me that you don't believe you'll get the information from us, so we should return. It's the information you value, not our lives. Don't make this about us. Here's the truth, Vice-Admiral. You didn't think the mission would fail before we got to the Scrapheap. As long as it looked like we'd get there and you could find out what the hell happened a century ago or whenever that breach occurred, you were fine with losing an entire ship full of misfits. But now that it's become clear that you might lose the ship without garnering a bit of information, you want us to return. Failure is failure only when the mission doesn't get accomplished, not when the crew dies. Am I right, Vice-Admiral?"

Holo-Gão's only reaction had been a small one. She lifted her chin, giving her an air of complete authority and power.

"You have your orders, Captain Preemas," she had said. "Abort this mission."

The sobbing grew louder. The courtroom door banged. Mukasey looked at the defendants. At least three had fled, with more on the way, tears streaming down their faces.

She had known this would be a difficult day for them. She had been convinced of it. She had thought they would have trouble being described as failures and misfits.

She had not expected them to be so upset that Preemas had ignored the order to head back to the Fleet.

On the holo, Captain Preemas straightened. He tilted his head slightly.

"All right, Vice-Admiral," he had said. "Consider your mission aborted."

And then his image winked out.

Holo-Gão stood perfectly still, as if she hadn't expected that reaction from him.

Mukasey shut off the holo and turned to the current Gão.

"What happened next?" Mukasey asked.

"From my perspective," Gão said, "nothing. I didn't hear from them for a long time. Somewhere along the way, I realized that Captain Preemas had said he was going to abort the mission, but he wasn't going to come back to the Fleet."

"What do you think that meant?" Mukasey asked.

"I didn't know at the time," Gão said. "I still don't know."

"Do you think he was stealing the ship?" Mukasey asked. She tried not to sound too eager. That was one of her most important questions.

"Yes," Gão said. "He had orders to return. He refused those orders. That made him a rogue operator. Had he been in the same sector, we would have brought security and more on him. He would have been arrested."

"But you couldn't do that because he was so far away," Mukasey said.

"That's correct," Gão said.

"Couldn't you have sent some ships after him?" Mukasey said.

"No," Gão said. "Remember, this mission was designed for loss. We were not going to put more ships and personnel into it."

Her words hung in the half-empty courtroom. Then Chief Judge Kanberra brought his gavel down, hard, making Mukasey jump. She hadn't expected it.

"This is as good a place to break for lunch as any," he said. "We have much to think about."

And then he stood. The other judges did, too. They filed out one by one.

Mukasey let out a breath.

"I'll see you after lunch," she said to Gão.

"Yes," Gão said quietly. "You most certainly will."

* * *

22

"Well, that was a lovely defense," the Old Man said as he was striding toward his favorite restaurant in the justice wing. The restaurant didn't have a lot of privacy, which was one reason the Old Man liked it. It prevented long discussions over lunch.

This time, he seemed serious. He spoke of Mukasey's case with admiration, which wasn't quite where Arias had expected him to go.

She had to scurry to keep up with him. Other courts were letting out at the same time, and she envied those lawyers. They were dealing with mundane matters—a stabbing or a theft. She had the fate of 193 people and the future of the entire mutiny charge on her shoulders.

"Now we know how her case will play out," the Old Man said when Arias reached his side. "She will argue that they were trying to follow the Admiral's orders, and they were just trying to go home."

"It might work, too," Arias said, a bit breathlessly. This sprint toward the restaurant always taxed her heart. "I'm not sure I can argue the other side."

"Even with the evidence in your favor?" the Old Man asked.

"We have to cross-examine Admiral Gao carefully," Arias said.

"We're not cross-examining her," the Old Man said. "We're going to ask a few questions and then rebut her testimony. You'll reserve cross."

Arias looked at him. *That* was new. He was throwing surprises at her.

He saw her look, smiled, and winked. Then they reached the brown doors that led into the restaurant. He opened one and swept his hand, indicating that she should go in first.

The minute she walked inside, this conversation ended.

She planted herself in front of the door. "You're going to explain this to me before the afternoon session, right?"

"No need," he said. "You'll see." And then he tilted his head toward the interior. "You going in?"

Of course she was going in. The tantalizing scents of garlic and ginger mixed with just a bit of soy made her stomach growl.

"If I'm blind," she said, "you're handling this."

"I know," he said, and followed her inside.

* * *

23

The line in the courtroom cafeteria was long, but Mukasey didn't have to go through it. The line existed only for people who did not work in the court—jurors, witnesses, observers. That included all fifty of that day's defendants from the Renegat.

Visitors with a pass got at least one free meal, and they usually used it at lunch.

The courtroom staff, like Mukasey, sat at a table, had their identification scanned, and the food they had ordered before they left their offices that morning just showed up.

Mukasey got a turkey sandwich with cranberry and cream cheese, a small piece of apple pie, and an entire carafe of coffee. Thank goodness the judges held a break every hour or two, because she would need it with all of the caffeine she was downing.

She was reviewing her notes for the afternoon when the food arrived. Someone or something had added chips of an indeterminate kind. Brown and curly and smelling faintly of onion. She set them aside and picked up the sandwich, trying to figure out whether or not she should let Gão talk about Nadim Crowe.

The morning had gone well. Mukasey didn't want to screw that up. But someone would probably bring up Nadim Crowe, and Gão might just mention—

“What the hell do you think you're doing?” a man yelled from across the cafeteria.

She closed her eyes for a moment, wishing she had taken the turkey sandwich to go. She could have found a nice private room off one of the courtrooms to eat in peace. Because every single time she came to this cafeteria, someone lost their collective sanity about something. People were under a lot of stress here, and it showed in every single fiber of their being.

“Hey, you! Mukasey! Don't play dumb. You look at me!”

She started when the shouter mentioned her name. That was a first. She turned toward the voice.

Kabac was striding toward her, hands clenched in fists. His face was red, and his eyes looked like they were going to bug out of his head.

“You're ruining this case! What the hell are you thinking, making us sound like incompetent boobs. We got the *Renegat* home. We—”

“Shut up,” she said as she stood. “If you want to talk to me as your attorney we will go into a meeting room. Otherwise, you are ruining privilege by talking to me here.”

“Like it matters.” His voice was lower now, but he was still talking much too loud. “You just lost our case.”

“You will come over here and talk to me like a human being,” she said, “or I will call security and have you banned from this courtroom.”

“You don't deserve to be talked to like a human being,” Kabac said. He was shaking. He shoved up his sleeves as if he was going to use his hands for something.

Maybe something like beating her.

Her heart rate increased. She'd had clients threaten her, but none of them actually looked like they could carry it out.

Kabac did.

Suddenly, court security was there. Two large people in the standard brown uniforms grabbed Kabac and clapped him in restraints. She didn't even have to call them.

“Hey!” he shouted. “Heeeeey! You don't have the right to do this! Hey!”

He struggled, trying to break free.

“I understand he's your client,” said a third person, a square-jawed woman with her hair cropped short. She wore a brown uniform as well. “Is he in custody somewhere?”

“Yes.” Mukasey was proud of the fact that her voice was calm. “He's restricted to Tower Six. He's only here today as a defendant in a case. No one in our courtroom thought these defendants would be violent.”

Although everyone involved in this case should have thought of that. Everyone. Because these 193 defendants were part of the battle for the *Renegat*, which killed and injured a lot of people.

“What do you want me to do with him?” the woman asked.

“Nothing!” Kabac yelled. “I have the right to talk to my attorney. I have the right to tell her what an idiot she's being. Talk about being an incompetent—”

One of the guards holding him shook him. "Shut the hell up."

Apparently they had done more than shake him—maybe tugged on his restraints—because he moaned and turned his head quickly from side to side, as if seeing the guards would make them less powerful.

"If he stays violent," Mukasey said, "you can treat him like any other violent defendant."

"Hey!" Kabac yelled as he tried to shake off the guards.

"Otherwise, take him to Tower Six. He has the right to watch these proceedings. Maybe work with the staff there to let him have his right to witness his accusers, but keep him away from the other defendants."

"All right then," the woman said. She turned and snapped her fingers at the guards. They jerked Kabac, trying to get him to move.

His gaze was on Mukasey, though.

"You want me out of here because you screwed up the case so bad that you don't want anyone to point it out. You are worse than worthless. You—"

"I said shut up," one of the guards said, "or we will shut you up."

"You have no right," Kabac said to the guards.

"That's where you're wrong," the woman said. "There are different regulations governing the court wing. You have violated at least three of them, and if you don't settle down, we will shut you down."

Apparently that got through to Kabac, because he stopped yelling. But he continued to stare at Mukasey as if he wanted to harm her.

The guards dragged him out.

The cafeteria was silent. Everyone was staring at Mukasey.

So she wasn't going to let herself shake. She wasn't going to let herself be upset about anything.

At least not visibly. And maybe not in reality.

She had a case to finish, not that Kabac had helped their cause. She had no idea how many court employees or bailiffs or security guards were in here, how many of the judges' clerks.

The judges never ate in this cafeteria, although many of them ordered up a meal from here and often had a clerk bring it to them. This guaranteed that someone would tell at least one of the judges about Kabac's outburst—how irrational he was and how potentially violent.

Those kinds of things weren't supposed to influence a judge, but judges were human. No matter how hard the judge tried, that incident would factor into their decisions.

Mukasey sat down slowly. She had to finish her meal, not just for show, but because it would be a very long afternoon. She wouldn't be able to eat. She needed to be fortified.

She needed to be ready.

She needed to decide if she wanted to bring up Nadim Crowe. And if she did, she needed to figure out how to handle him.

Because his actions both helped and hurt her clients. If she could control the help part and minimize the hurt, she would win.

But that would take a lot of finesse on her part, and she wasn't even sure Admiral Gao would help with that.

* * *

The courtroom was strange from the witness chair. Bella G o was back in the chair, still astonished to be looking up at her colleagues on the bench. Sitting slightly below

them did make them seem all-powerful. And the witness chair was raised a bit, so she sat higher than the lawyers did and certainly higher than the gallery.

Everyone had settled into their post-lunch discomfort. Some might doze if she wasn't interesting. Others might fiddle with the tech before them—at least the judges.

She had felt guilty about the *Renegat* for decades. She needed to get a few things off her chest before she finally passed away, and not just a random confession. She needed those things on a record—or, in this case, on what would probably become *the* record.

The defense attorney, Eun Ae Mukasey, stood rigidly beside the witness chair. Mukasey had argued before Gão before. Mukasey was a good enough attorney, maybe the best who would take a case like this. She wasn't great, but Gão was certain that the greats had turned this one down.

It smelled, and not just because Yusef Kabac had spent the morning shouting his dismay.

The more Gão heard about the case, the more she disliked the survivors. They seemed like a shifty bunch, but, she supposed, that was most likely her fault. She had chosen unlikeables, after all.

The afternoon part of the case started. Chief Judge Kanberra gave more instructions, mostly about remaining silent, no matter how shocking the testimony. That comment would have been directed at Kabac, but he was nowhere to be seen. Maybe Mukasey had ordered him back to his room or placed him in the off-site with the other survivors.

The remainder of the survivors looked a little different from the holos she had approved before the *Renegat* left, but not that different. The fact that Gão recognized them all and could name them all individually after decades showed her level of guilt.

She obsessed about that ship, and that was the one thing she would not discuss.

After Chief Judge Kanberra finished his second discourse of the day, Mukasey was finally free to continue her case. She turned to Gão.

"I have one other topic to bring up with you," she said, "and this is only to put to rest some rumors."

Gão nodded, even though she wasn't sure which rumors Mukasey referred to. Ever since the *Renegat* had returned, there were a thousand rumors about a thousand different things, many of them impossible to prove.

"I want to talk with you about Nadim Crowe," Mukasey said.

"All right." Gão's breath caught, and she hoped that didn't turn up in her voice. Crowe still broke her heart.

"Before the conversation we saw with Captain Preemas," Mukasey said, "I understand you spoke to Nadim Crowe, who was then First Officer, is that correct?"

"Yes," Gão said. "He contacted me about the problems the *Renegat* was having with the *anacapa* drives."

"Why didn't Captain Preemas contact you?" Mukasey asked.

No one objected, and someone should have. Mukasey had phrased the question wrong.

"I do not know," Gão said primly. There was a risk for a sitting judge to answer questions. She had to follow the same rules that she usually enforced. "That would call for speculation."

"Did Nadim Crowe tell you why he contacted you?" Mukasey asked.

There it was. A question Gão could answer.

"Yes," Gão said. "The time lags concerned him, the problems with the communications *anacapa* drives concerned him, and he couldn't get through to Captain Preemas. He sent me data and asked that our experts here at the Fleet check the results. He believed that the time lags would get worse, and the *Renegat* could get

lost in time. He asked that if the experts agreed with him, would I order the *Renegat* to return?"

"Judging by your conversation with Captain Preemas, the experts agreed with Nadim Crowe," Mukasey said.

"Yes," Gão said.

There was murmuring behind her. Even though she didn't like most of the survivors, she felt empathy toward them. It seemed this was the first time they had been told that their leaders had disagreed about whether or not to return to the Fleet in their time period. All that loss had to be hurting them, even if they had had no family to come back to.

"Why did you trust Nadim Crowe?" Mukasey asked. "He had destroyed an entire Scrapheap when he was in school by being reckless."

"Yes, he did," Gão said, "and he spent the rest of his career paying for it. He was a brilliant man, particularly on engineering issues. There was no one better to head to that ancient Scrapheap than Nadim Crowe."

"So why wasn't he sent back as captain?" Mukasey asked.

"Because his designation was chief engineer, which is where he should have stayed." Gão straightened. The chair was suddenly uncomfortable. "The *Renegat* made an unscheduled stop at Sector Base Z and took on new crewmembers, letting some go. At that point, Captain Preemas changed many job designations, without my permission."

"You chastised him for that, did you not?" Mukasey asked.

"It was yet another point where I would have aborted the mission had I found out in a timely manner," Gão said. "But Captain Preemas made sure I didn't get the information until he had gone through foldspace. He knew that we wouldn't use the resources to recover the *Renegat*."

"He sounds difficult," Mukasey said.

"He was insubordinate repeatedly," Gão said. "I should have trusted my instincts and told Admiral Hallock that there was no one qualified to captain the *Renegat*."

"What would she have done if you had said that?" Mukasey asked. Then she caught herself before Gão could remind her that that question was speculation too. "Or rather, what were you worried that she would do?"

"I worried that she would either put someone else in charge of this mission or that she would bring in a captain who did not fit the criteria," Gão said.

"Meaning a captain with a family or highly credentialed, someone the Fleet didn't dare lose on a frivolous mission," Mukasey said.

Gão did not like that characterization. "Those are your words."

"What are yours?"

"I looked at every captain who fit the criteria," Gão said. "Ivan Preemas was the only one who had even a remote chance of getting that crew to the Scrapheap and bringing them back alive."

"He got them to the Scrapheap, did he not?" Mukasey asked.

"I don't know that for certain," Gão said. "Someone did."

She wasn't going to speculate in court, no matter how many times she had speculated in the silence of her apartment.

Mukasey finally seemed to realize that.

"Captain Preemas made Nadim Crowe first officer," Mukasey said. "That sounds like he trusted Crowe."

"I don't know," Gão said.

"But you trusted Crowe," Mukasey said.

"Yes."

"And when Nadim Crowe told you that the ship was having trouble, you confirmed

the data he sent, and then ordered Captain Preemas to abort the mission, an order he disobeyed.”

“Yes.”

“And then what happened?” Mukasey asked, being maddeningly vague.

“On the *Renegat*?” Gão asked. “I don’t know.”

“In your office?” Mukasey asked.

“I had a hunch that Captain Preemas was not going to follow my instruction, based on his past behavior. I needed to talk with him again about the time lag. He did not answer my hails.” Gão worked hard at keeping her voice neutral.

“He didn’t answer or the messages didn’t get through?” Mukasey asked.

“I don’t know,” Gão said. “At the time, I thought he was being insubordinate. Nadim Crowe had told me that I had to get back to him quickly before they went into fold-space again, so I had my staff attempt to contact Crowe by backtracing the channel he had used, and going through that.”

“Did you reach him?” Mukasey asked.

Some of Gão’s colleagues were leaning forward, clearly interested. So much for the post-lunch doze.

“No,” Gão said. “We were never able to hail the *Renegat* again.”

“My god,” someone said audibly.

Kanberra looked at the defendants. “One more outburst and I will send you all out of the courtroom. Is that clear?”

Apparently, they nodded or gave some form of assent, because he waved a hand at Mukasey.

“Proceed,” he said.

“But you heard from Nadim Crowe again, didn’t you?” Mukasey asked.

“Yes.” Gão heard the sadness in her own voice.

“When was that?” Mukasey asked.

“A message he sent in that time period reached me five years after the *Renegat* disappeared,” Gão said.

“Can you explain how that happened?” Mukasey asked.

“Technically no,” Gão said. “That is not my area of expertise. But it is not unusual for ships that have foldspace lag to have time lag as well. You’d need an expert to testify why five years and not shorter or longer. The salient point is this: by the time the message reached me, it was much too late for me to do anything.”

“At that point did you know about the Battle for the *Renegat*?”

“No,” Gão said. “All I knew was that the *Renegat* had been missing for five years.”

“Do you know when Crowe sent the message?” Mukasey asked.

“According to the way he was experiencing time, he sent the message one month after my final conversation with Captain Preemas,” Gão said.

“What did Nadim Crowe need to tell you?” Mukasey asked.

Gão did her best not to glare at Mukasey. They had discussed this. Gão did not want to parrot Crowe’s words. She wanted Crowe to speak for himself.

“It would be better if I showed you what he said,” Gão said. She didn’t want to watch it again—she never wanted to watch it again—but she had to. Because someone might ask her about it.

Mukasey turned to the judges. “We would like to show you the recording. I would like to enter it into evidence.”

“So ordered,” Chief Judge Kanberra said.

Gão took a deep breath. She had a different tablet with Nadim Crowe’s message cued up.

She started the holo, and resisted the urge to close her eyes.

She needed to watch this, one last time.

A hologram of Nadim Crowe stood in the center of the courtroom. He was a tall rangy man with a foreboding face. Behind him, equipment glinted and glistened. He clearly wasn't on the bridge of the *Renegat* or in the captain's ready room.

Arias had seen a tiny version of this recording, but seeing it live in the courtroom was much more powerful. It was as if Crowe had shown up from the dead to give testimony.

From her place at the prosecutor's table, she could see some of the judges through the image, faint and attentive. It was almost as if she saw ghosts bleeding through the image of a ghost.

"*Vice-Admiral.*" Crowe's voice was raspy and deep. He looked exhausted. "*The situation on the Renegat has become dire. I waited to hear from you after our last contact and heard nothing. I consulted with Captain Preemas, who told me that you had convinced him to forge on to the Scrapheap.*"

A couple of the judges leaned back. To Arias's surprise, the defendants behind her were silent. No one was sobbing like they had that morning.

Crowe was saying, "*Later, I discovered that he had completely disabled our fold-space communications channel. If you have been trying to reach us, and cannot, that is why. In the meantime, he continued to tell me about the various conversations that you have had with him, conversations that I know could not and did not happen. . . .*"

Now there was a faint response. Just one little "oh," from behind Arias.

Crowe held up his arm. He was black and blue.

"*I am no longer in the command structure, although officially I am. I found out when, against my advice, Captain Preemas sent this ship into foldspace. He did so without warning any of us.*"

This time, Arias did look at the defendants behind her. A few were nodding. A couple were rubbing knees or ribs. Phantom pain, probably, from injuries sustained at that time.

"*The foldspace journeys have become more and more violent. I'm afraid the ship will shake apart in one of them. A number of us were injured this time.*"

Crowe went on to describe many of the injuries, as well as the other ways that Preemas had become more reckless instead of less.

"*Vice-Admiral Gão, I humbly request that you relieve Captain Preemas of duty. I ask that you do so by patching into our entire communications system shipwide. I would prefer not to do that myself, so that I will be less compromised than I already am.*"

One of the judges glanced at the Old Man, to see his reaction. The Old Man and Arias knew about this, of course, and they were prepared. All that mattered now was how the judges reacted to this whole thing.

Still, this was hard to watch.

Crowe said, "*If you do not want me to run the ship, that is fine. You have a few other candidates who might be able to do a good job. I will assist whoever you choose.*"

He shifted. He would have been a good witness had he come back with the crew. Of course, if he had come back, things might have been different.

And really, he was a witness. Maybe the best one in the entire trial.

Arias tried not to look away as he said the part she worried about the most.

"*I am contacting you because I believe in the Fleet, in her rules and regulations, and in the proper way of doing things,*" he said.

That wasn't just the right thing to say. It was also completely sincere, and Arias couldn't cross-examine him.

Nor could she argue with his next points, about the fact that Captain Preemas was

sabotaging the mission and that the ship might not survive. That so many people, from Gão to Crowe to others on the crew, knew that the *Renegat* was suffering time lag, meant that there was a serious survival issue at hand, an issue some might have assumed would be justification for the Battle of the *Renegat*.

“I suspect you tried to send me the rest of the information that I requested and that it did not arrive because of the captain’s perfidy.”

Arias suppressed a sigh. *Perfidy* was a heck of a word, probably deliberately chosen. It was clear, just from this single recording, that Nadim Crowe was a deliberate man.

“I am assuming that you also believe the communications anacapa might be causing some of our lag. I have no idea if the lag remains, because of what Captain Preemas did. We are also two trips through foldspace past our last contact, so our data gathering isn’t as clear as I would like it. That’s why I am sending you this message on all channels that I possibly can, in as many ways as I can. It’s not worth even trying to talk at the moment.”

His voice shook a little. He sounded like a cautious man driven to the end of his rope. He also sounded like a man who didn’t want to admit he was terrified.

“Vice-Admiral,” he said, *“I hope you see fit to follow my advice. Please do let me know if I am overstepping.”*

Of course he was overstepping. He was asking that the crew somehow demote a sitting captain. He was asking for Gão to help with that, but that might not have been enough.

“I hope you consider my proposal,” he said. *“I hope to hear from you soon. Thank you for your time.”*

And then his image winked out, his voice—deep and a bit strained—echoing in the courtroom.

“Is that the end of the recording?” Judge Ioannide asked. She sounded suspicious.

“Yes.” Gão was the one who answered.

“Did you get any more messages from this Crowe?” Judge Ioannide asked. Arias couldn’t read her, except to see that the judge was upset.

“No,” Gão said.

“Was this before or after the mutiny?” Chief Judge Kanberra asked.

“I’ll answer that,” Mukasey said. “We put together a timeline. This was before.”

She had saved Gão from answering a question that she had no knowledge of.

Chief Judge Kanberra nodded. No one else spoke, so Mukasey turned to Gão.

“What happened to Nadim Crowe?” she asked.

“Officially, I have no idea,” Gão said.

“Unofficially?” Mukasey asked.

“I am not the person to ask,” Gão said.

Nadim Crowe had not returned with the *Renegat*, one way or another. Everyone in the room knew that.

Mukasey turned toward the judges.

“That’s all I have for this witness,” she said, and returned to her seat.

“Mr. Yglesias?” the Chief Judge asked. “Do you or Ms. Arias have any questions for this witness?”

“Many, Your Honor,” the Old Man said, without standing up. “But we would like to reserve them. We would like to call a rebuttal witness first.”

Gão started. She seemed surprised that she could be rebutted.

“That’s unusual,” the Chief Judge said.

“This is an unusual case,” the Old Man said.

The Chief Judge seemed to consider for a moment, and then he nodded.

“All right,” he said. “We need a chair for Judge Gão. She needs to listen to rebuttal testimony if there are going to be questions for her afterward.”

Then he leaned forward a bit and smiled at Gão.

"You're dismissed for the moment," he said.

She smiled back at him, and for the first time, her lovely skin wrinkled. "Thank you, Your Honor."

She gathered her things, stood a bit unsteadily, and let one of the clerks help her to a chair someone had found.

She sat down, then frowned at Mukasey, as if asking what was coming next.

Mukasey gave an almost imperceptible shrug.

No one on that side knew what was next. Because the Old Man and Arias had buried the information in their discovery packet.

They had listed every single one of the 193 defendants as possible witnesses.

But they felt they only needed one.

Jorja Lakinias.

So Arias called her to the stand.

* * *

26

Mukasey was on her feet before she even realized she had stood up.

"I object! They have to go through me to get approval for one of my clients to testify, and no one spoke to me about it at all."

The judges all looked distressed as well.

"Mr. Yglesias," Chief Judge Kanberra snapped, "what are you thinking?"

"Ms. Lakinias is represented by Oscar Vaas, Your Honor, at least to my knowledge," the Old Man said calmly.

Mukasey clenched her fists. "No one informed me about the change in counsel." And she had expressly told her clients not to do that, because it would screw up her case, and it was. It was.

She made herself breathe. She was trying not to be furious, even though she was furious.

"Is Mr. Vaas here?" Chief Judge Kanberra peered into the gallery as if it was darker than the rest of the courtroom.

A man stood up just behind the prosecutor's table. Mukasey recognized him, but hadn't known his name until now. She'd seen him around the courts because he had been hard to miss. With his green eyes, tight curls and general air of intelligence, he had always been hard to ignore.

"I'm Oscar Vaas, Your Honors," Vaas said, speaking very precisely. "I represent Jorja Lakinias on financial and health matters."

"I want to remind you right now, Mr. Vaas, that you're speaking to the court as an officer of the court. If you lie or misrepresent in any way, you will be up on charges and possibly disbarred. Do you understand?"

"Fully, Your Honor," Vaas said calmly, as if he had expected that.

Mukasey was mentally kicking herself. She should have fought harder to placate that woman.

"Health and financial matters, eh?" Chief Judge Kanberra said, as if he was musing over something. "Are you aware of this, Ms. Mukasey?"

"Of her representation, no," Mukasey said. "I do not want one of my clients testifying."

"Then you're fired!" A voice yelled from the back.

Mukasey turned, as did the rest of the court. Jorja Lakinias sat near her cart, her body hunched. It seemed like she looked even more damaged than she had when Mukasey first met her.

Of course she did. Lakinas wanted something.

“Are you Jorja Lakinas?” Chief Judge Kanberra asked.

“Yes,” Lakinas said, “and I’m firing her.”

Lakinas used her good hand to point at Mukasey.

“You should have done so before this case got underway, Ms. Lakinas,” Chief Judge Kanberra said.

“I’m sorry, Your Honor,” she said, not sounding sorry at all. “I thought when I hired a new attorney, the old one would be notified.”

“Only when they’re working on the same case,” Chief Judge Kanberra said. “Perhaps this is on you, Mr. Vaas. You should have informed her of the conflict.”

“I told her I would not work on her defense here,” Vaas said.

Mukasey was very confused. Her cheeks burned. She didn’t need to be sandbagged like this.

“Then what are you doing here?” she asked.

“My thoughts exactly, counselor,” Chief Judge Kanberra said. “But do allow me to express them.”

There was amusement in his tone, which irritated her. Nothing about this was amusing. Nothing at all.

“I’m sorry, Your Honor,” she said.

“My client wants treatment for her injuries, the treatment she is owed as a member of the Fleet,” Vaas said. “So I went to the office of the prosecutor and talked with them. They wanted information in exchange. She decided to give them information which is, apparently, pertinent here.”

“That’s sideways and sneaky,” Chief Judge Kanberra said. “You should have notified the court, Mr. Yglesias, Ms. Arias.”

Yglesias spread his hands. “We did, Your Honor. She is on the witness list.”

“No, she’s not.” Mukasey had been over and over and over the list. If she had seen Lakinas’s name, she would have prepared.

“I don’t see her on this list,” Judge Ioannide said, somewhat accusingly.

“She’s not listed by name,” the Old Man said. “She’s in Ms. Mukasey’s list as one of the 193.”

Mukasey started to slam her fist on her desk and barely stopped herself. Son of a bitch, she had been sandbagged. Badly.

“All right then,” Chief Judge Kanberra said. “Under these somewhat odd circumstances, I will allow the testimony without delay. Since she was one of your clients, Ms. Mukasey, you will not need time to prepare. You should know what she knows.”

“That’s a hell of an assumption, Your Honor,” Mukasey said, then mentally kicked herself. She shouldn’t have been that rude.

“I realize you just got caught in one of Mr. Yglesias’s traps, Ms. Mukasey, but that does not entitle you to disrespect this court,” Chief Judge Kanberra said firmly.

“Yes, Your Honor,” Mukasey said. She’d learned long ago not to apologize for a terrible wrong, because if she did so, that might call more attention to it.

The Chief Judge wasn’t even thinking of her any longer. He had just directed his clerk to call Lakinas to the stand.

Mukasey remained standing. Jorja Lakinas was exaggerating her symptoms. She moved slowly, her body hunched, and she looked like she was in pain.

And, to be fair, she was in very bad shape. But not this bad.

Mukasey made herself sit slowly before anyone noticed that she had been standing when she shouldn’t have been.

She couldn’t mention that Lakinas was exaggerating her injuries. She didn’t dare mention that at all.

This entire testimony was filled with landmines. And contrary to what Chief Judge Kanberra had assumed, Mukasey had no idea what information Lakinas had.

Arias was handling this testimony. She carefully led Lakinas through the preliminaries, her full name, her rather ugly career, the fact that she had been on the *Renegat* from the beginning, which meant she had been chosen by Admiral Gão.

Mukasey was making notes, mostly because she had no idea where this was going.

"How did you get so badly injured?" Arias asked Lakinas.

"I fought beside Captain Preemas and nearly died," Lakinas said.

"You were fighting *with* Captain Preemas," Arias said. "Against the mutineers?"

"Objection," Mukasey said with more force than necessary.

Arias held up a hand. "My mistake. Against . . . who, exactly?"

"The force Nadim Crowe put together," Lakinas said. "He wanted the ship. He *took* it, really."

"How did he do that?" Arias asked. There had already been some testimony on this. Apparently the prosecution didn't think there had been enough.

"He barricaded himself and his friends in engineering, then shut off all of the access to the ship's controls. Only he could operate them." Lakinas still sounded mad about that.

"What did you do at that point?" Arias asked.

"Captain Preemas asked me and a few others to help him get weapons. We did. Then we went down to engineering. We were going to break in."

"With force?" Arias asked.

"No." Lakinas's voice was tight. "I was supposed to access the door commands from the corridor, but Crowe had even shut that down."

"Then what did you do?"

"I—We—tried to break down the door by using the back end of our weapons as battering rams."

"Did that work?" Arias asked.

"No," Lakinas said. Mukasey was right; Lakinas was still furious. She was glaring at the others in the courtroom.

"So what happened next?" Arias asked.

"Someone—India Romano, I think—"

"Raina Serpell's wife?" Arias asked.

"Yes," Lakinas said.

"She fought for Captain Preemas?" Arias asked.

"Yes," Lakinas said.

"And later died under mysterious conditions on the trip home?" Arias asked.

"Objection!" Mukasey shouted. "Where is this coming from?"

"Withdrawn," Arias said. She hadn't looked away from Lakinas, which angered Mukasey even more. "What did India Romano do?"

"She shouted 'fire!' or 'shoot it down' or something like that, and we did and . . ." Lakinas stopped. For the first time, her strident voice hitched.

Mukasey held her breath. She knew this part.

". . . and . . ." Lakinas took a deep voice. ". . . we were stupid. It was a killing box. The shots ricocheted off the doors, the walls. Crowe didn't have to fire a shot."

"And that's where you were injured?" Arias asked.

"I nearly died," Lakinas said.

"That's why you're here, right? To get treatment for those injuries?"

"Yes," Lakinas said. "I didn't get real treatment *ever*. No one on the *Renegat* helped me because I fought with Captain Preemas. They stopped the bleeding and kept me from dying and put me in the brig."

"And when you were rescued from the *Renegat*?" Arias said.

"I was put in with the rest of the . . . what do they call us? Renegades? And no one would give me medical help then either. They told me that we would learn what I was entitled to after the trial."

"Which trial?" Arias asked.

"This one," Lakinas spit out the words. "They wanted to know if I got Fleet medical care as a member of the Fleet or if I got minimal care as a criminal."

Then she glared at the judges.

"I am *not* a criminal. I fought for my captain," Lakinas said.

"Did you believe in his cause?" Arias asked.

Lakinas sat back, as if she hadn't expected that question. Then she said, "It doesn't matter what I believe. He's my captain. Someone was trying to take over his ship. He needed help stopping it."

"Let's be clear," Arias said. "You've been offered medical care in exchange for this testimony, is that correct?"

"Yes," Lakinas said. "Whether or not I get lumped in with the rest of these people and even if they're found guilty, I'm still getting the treatment I deserve as a member of the Fleet. *That's* why I decided to talk today. Because I can't be in this kind of pain any longer."

Mukasey swore under her breath. This was her fault. She should have taken care of Lakinas. Maybe a few others as well. And she probably should have pulled the troublemakers like Kabac out of the way.

"The information you have is about Nadim Crowe, isn't it?" Arias asked.

Mukasey started. This couldn't be good.

"Yes," Lakinas said. "And I brought my journals as back-up. I kept a video journal when it became clear that no one was going to take care of me. They got pulled off the ship with all of the other data when we were rescued."

"*Objection!*" Mukasey said with as much force as she could. "I have not received any notice of these journals."

The Old Man gave her a sideways look and said, before the Chief Judge could say anything, "It's in all the documentation from the ship, Your Honors. She's had these journals just like the rest of us. It's not our duty to tell her where to look in the evidence."

There was so much evidence. More than a year of data, and she didn't know how to search it all. She also knew that the prosecution hadn't looked at all of it either.

The difference was that Lakinas had pointed them to the data and not her.

"Overruled," Chief Judge Kanberra said. He gave Mukasey a warning look, as if she had performed badly for her clients.

She hadn't. She had done everything she could within reason.

But she felt sick. She still had no idea what had happened to Crowe aside from the vague comments her stupid clients had made to her, but clearly that wasn't enough. Something bad had happened to him; she had known that all along, but she hadn't known what.

Clearly, the prosecution did.

"What happened to Nadim Crowe?" Arias asked.

"We left him behind," Lakinas said.

"What does that mean?" Arias asked.

"I mean deliberately. He and his engineers and the people he thought were competent were looking for a ship that was in good enough shape to handle all of us—"

"Where?" Arias asked.

"In that damn Scrapheap," Lakinas said. "We found it, and it was a disaster, but we were there. We had some repairs to do on the *Renegat*, and they were done enough, I guess. Because when Nadim Crowe took his favorites to that ship in the Scrapheap, the ship they were going to fix, we left them behind."

Someone moaned. Maybe it was even Mukasey. She had always suspected something like this.

"You left them behind? How?" Arias asked.

"The *Renegat* went into foldspace and left them," Lakinas said.

"Deliberately?" Arias asked.

"Yes," Lakinas asked.

"Without food or water?" Arias asked.

"They had some. I heard that discussed. They had like a month's worth. People were laughing about it, saying that Crowe was so talented he could conjure up a working ship and get somewhere with food before his ran out."

The entire courtroom was silent.

"What do you think happened to them?" Arias asked.

Mukasey made herself object. "Speculation," she added.

"I'll allow it," Chief Judge Kanberra said, just like she expected him to.

"Oh, they died," Lakinas said. "What else could have happened?"

Arias let the assumption hang. Mukasey clenched her fists. There was no proof of murder, and yet the chief judge had just allowed everyone to assume it.

Arias stopped beside Lakinas. "You're convinced this was deliberate. What made you think that? Did someone tell you? Were you part of the decision?"

"Me?" Lakinas laughed. "I was still in custody at that point, although in my quarters because I was so ill."

"Then how do you know they left Crowe and his team behind on purpose?" Arias asked.

"Because they confessed on video," Lakinas said. "They wanted Crowe to know what they did. I have the recording."

Mukasey felt her heart sink. Her clients must have thought this was gone with the ship.

Chief Judge Kanberra looked at her, as if he expected her to object.

She sighed. "Objection, Your Honor."

He nodded.

They both knew exactly how this was going to go. The information had been buried in the data somewhere.

"We disclosed this," Arias said. "It is not our fault that Ms. Mukasey does not take a thorough approach to the evidence."

"That was a cheap shot, Your Honors," Mukasey said. "They know I have a small firm, and they know that I'm being paid a small fee per client. It is not enough to—"

"We understand, Ms. Mukasey." Chief Judge Kanberra gave her a small sympathetic smile. "We also know that Mr. Yglesias's office is famous for following the letter but not the spirit of the rules."

"Your Honor!" Arias said.

He looked at Arias. "You have an objection, Ms. Arias?"

She clearly caught herself before going further. "No, Your Honor."

Mukasey felt a small mean joy inside her. At least *she* had Chief Judge Kanberra's sympathy, not Arias.

Fat lot of good it would do, though. This testimony was devastating.

"I'm sorry to tell you, Ms. Mukasey," Chief Judge Kanberra said, "but the objection is overruled."

She was not surprised. No one was. She really had no reason to object, nothing to really fight with.

"In that case," Arias said, "let's see this recording."

Lakinas put one of the small tablets on the arm of the witness chair. "This is the message they sent to Nadim Crowe as they went into foldspace."

"They," Arias said.

Lakinas nodded. "I sure as hell wasn't consulted."

She made it sound like she would have advised against it. She poked her forefinger hard onto the tablet, and a hologram snaked its way into existence.

A thinner Yusef Kabac appeared in the center of the courtroom. His eyes glistened manically. He was smiling. Mukasey had never seen him smile with such joy.

"We're heading back," holo-Kabac said. "We don't want to stay here, and you're going to make us. No one on this ship now will be court martialed. We'll be fine."

Mukasey sank lower in her chair. She hadn't thought this could get worse, but it just did. Not only did Kabac cite the reason for leaving, but he also indicated that the entire crew had discussed court martials for the overthrow of Captain Preemas.

Then Mukasey sat up. That might be the key. She might still have a case after all.

"Did anyone ask to return to the Scrapheap to rescue Crowe and the others left behind?" Arias asked.

"Not to my knowledge," Lakinas said. "But someone could have. I wasn't around the crew much."

"Did you ask?" Arias asked.

"I wasn't involved in the decision making. They thought I was the criminal."

"But they set you free, right?" Arias asked.

"Eventually," Lakinas said. "Not that it mattered. I had to stay in my quarters because I was so sick. I really wasn't any kind of threat to anyone."

Arias nodded once. "Thank you," she said. Then she turned to Mukasey. "Your witness."

Mukasey set her emotions aside. She had to. Otherwise her fury and frustration would destroy what was left of this case.

She made herself stand, and walked over to the witness chair. Lakinas looked at her with shining eyes, almost as if she was pleased she had gotten the better of Mukasey.

Mukasey decided not to care what Lakinas was thinking. "What did Yusef Kabac mean about court martialing someone?"

Lakinas paused for a moment before responding, as if she thought maybe this was a trick question. Then she said, "There were people who weren't involved in what you're all calling the Battle for the *Renegat*. They were doing their jobs somewhere else."

"Who are those people?" Mukasey asked.

"I'm not naming them all," Lakinas said. "But you have a lot of them as clients."

"So when the conversation turned to court martial," Mukasey asked, "did everyone believe that the entire crew would be court martialed?"

"I have no idea what everyone believed," Lakinas said.

"What did you overhear?" Mukasey asked, knowing she was treading on thin ground. The answers could go against her just as easily as they could go in her favor.

"A lot of the crew were angry that we were in this mess. A lot of them blamed Nadim Crowe for getting violent."

"Did you?" Mukasey asked.

"He tried to take over the ship," Lakinas said. "What do you think?"

"What I think doesn't matter," Mukasey said. "What you think does. Did you blame Nadim Crowe for the violence?"

"I think there were better ways to handle the conflict he had with Captain Preemas," Lakinas said.

"Did you hear Admiral Gão's testimony?" Mukasey asked.

"What part?" Lakinas asked.

"There were two parts in particular," Mukasey said. "The part where Captain Preemas ignored Admiral Gão's order to return to the Fleet—"

"Yeah, I heard that. She doesn't understand. Most of us knew it was our last

chance to prove ourselves. We weren't going to go home." Lakinas's injured hand was shaking. Her voice was, too.

"So Captain Preemas consulted with all of you about whether or not to turn around?" Mukasey asked.

"Not with me," she said. "I have no idea who he talked to. But I don't care. He was right to continue the mission. We'd already gone through a lot at that point."

Mukasey was not going to ask what "gone through a lot" meant. She didn't want to lose this thread by going off on a tangent.

"All right," she said. "Did you also hear the testimony from the admiral about her plans for Nadim Crowe? Did you see his holo where he asked her to step in and make him captain?"

"Yeah," Lakinas said. "So?"

"So it sounds like he and Captain Preemas could no longer agree on anything," Mukasey said.

"Then Crowe should've stood down. It wasn't his ship," Lakinas said.

"Did others on the crew feel that way?" Mukasey asked.

"I didn't do a poll," Lakinas said.

"In your experience," Mukasey said.

"My experience was pretty limited." She ran a hand over her body, as if to remind everyone just how injured she was.

Mukasey was losing the thread, whether she wanted to or not. "What I'm trying to get at here," she said, "is why Yusef Kabac believed the court martial issue was resolved when Crowe and all the others were left behind at the Scrapheap."

"Oh, that," Lakinas said. Apparently, she hadn't understood where Mukasey had been going with the questions. "That's easy. Everyone who actively fought on the side of Nadim Crowe was on that ship that got left behind."

A couple of the judges smiled ever so faintly. Apparently, they liked what they had just heard.

"So really, those who got left behind could have been considered mutineers, right?" Mukasey asked. "They were criminals, and since there was no way to deal with them, they got abandoned instead."

"Objection," the Old Man said. "If she wasn't testifying, I would say she's leading the witness."

"Except that she's your witness," Chief Judge Kanberra said.

"And her former client," the Old Man said.

"I'll rephrase," Mukasey said. "Did you consider them mutineers?"

"I considered every single fucking one of them my goddamn enemy," Lakinas said with such force that Mukasey almost stepped backward. "They guaranteed that I'd be like this for the rest of my life. Nothing the Fleet can or will do will make me whole again. It's too damn late."

Mukasey couldn't improve on that.

"Nothing further," she said, and returned to her seat.

As soon as she sat down, Arias popped up.

"Redirect, Your Honor," she said.

"Make it short," Chief Judge Kanberra said. "It's been a long day."

Arias smiled at him, even though she probably wanted to strangle him. Mukasey would have in that circumstance.

Arias walked to Lakinas. "When Captain Preemas died, who ended up running the ship?"

Lakinas raised her head ever so slightly. "Nadim Crowe."

"Doesn't that make sense?" Arias asked. "The captain was killed. The first officer took over."

“The first officer caused the captain’s death,” Lakinas said.

“Not according to your testimony,” Arias said. “The fact that you all shot your weapons in what you called a killing box caused the captain’s death.”

Lakinas didn’t respond to that.

“By Fleet regulations,” Arias said, “the first officer becomes captain when the real captain dies. Did Captain Preemas demote Nadim Crowe before the battle?”

Lakinas looked sullen. “Not to my knowledge.”

“It’s not in the records either,” Arias said. “Which means that Crowe was the acting captain of the *Renegat*, and he knew it, right? He acted on it. He was running the ship, correct?”

“Yes,” Lakinas said tightly.

“And you know this for a fact, right?” Arias asked.

“Yes,” Lakinas said, even more tightly.

“How do you know this as a fact?” Arias asked.

“Because,” Lakinas said, looking down, “he told me that, as acting captain, he wasn’t going to let me out of the brig. He said I could get the medical attention I needed where I was.”

Her lip curled downward.

“That was a lie,” she said.

“You hated him?” Arias asked.

“We all hated him,” Lakinas said.

“Except for the people who went with him to the Scrapheap to get materials to fix the *Renegat*,” Arias said.

“I don’t know,” Lakinas said. “I never talked to them.”

“Why not?” Arias asked.

“Because they were Crowe’s people,” Lakinas said.

“And the only people with actual experience in running a ship like the *Renegat*, am I right?” Arias asked.

Lakinas shrugged one shoulder. “I suppose. I didn’t investigate everyone’s records.”

Mukasey didn’t like any of that. It made her nervous, and she wasn’t exactly sure what Arias was going to do with it all. Especially since Arias antagonized her own witness.

“I have nothing further for this witness, Your Honor,” Arias said. “But before we break for the evening, I would like to have my cross-examination of Admiral Gão. It will be brief.”

“It better be,” Chief Judge Kanberra said, although he didn’t sound or look tired any longer. He seemed interested all over again.

The clerk recalled Admiral Gão to the stand. She walked as slowly toward it as Lakinas had when she left it. Except the ancient retired admiral seemed a lot more agile than the younger Lakinas.

“You’re still under oath,” Chief Judge Kanberra said to Gão.

She opened her mouth to say something, then apparently thought better of it, and just nodded.

“I only have a few questions,” Arias said. “Did you hear Ms. Lakinas’s testimony and see the holo of Yusef Kabac?”

“Yes.” Gão’s voice was quiet. She seemed shaken.

“You testified that Captain Preemas had disobeyed your order to return. You also testified that it was possible he stole the *Renegat*,” Arias said.

“Yes,” Gão said.

“Under Fleet regulations,” Arias said, “would a crew be justified in removing a captain in that circumstance?”

“It’s a gray area,” Gão said. “But if the captain has been shown to be reckless and

incompetent and the majority of his crew agree, then yes, he could have been removed. He should have been taken to the brig."

"But he wasn't," Arias said, "because, Nadim Crowe told you in his holo, they had to control the random and unpredictable trips into foldspace first."

"Yes," Gão said.

Mukasey clenched her fists and placed them under the table. She wasn't going to be able to repair this.

"In the circumstance where a captain is deemed incompetent," Arias asked, "who takes control of the ship?"

"Regulations say that the first officer does, unless there is some pressing reason for him not to."

"You were also planning to make Nadim Crowe captain if you could, is that correct?" Arias asked.

"I considered it, yes," Gão said.

"Would you have done it?" Arias asked.

"If there was a way to do so without bloodshed, yes," Gão said.

Mukasey resisted the urge to close her eyes. She didn't want to listen to this any more.

"So, after Captain Preemas's death," Arias said, "in your opinion, who was captain of the *Renegat*?"

"Nadim Crowe," Gão said.

"According to Fleet regulations," Arias said, "when a crew throws a captain off a ship and takes that ship somewhere else, what is that called?"

Gão lowered her head just a little. "It is one of the definitions of mutiny."

"Thank you," Arias said. "I'm done now, Your Honor."

The chief judge looked at Mukasey. "Redirect, Counselor?"

She almost asked *What's the point?* But she hung onto her professionalism just enough to stop that question from coming out of her mouth.

"No, Your Honor," she said.

"Then we're done for the day," he said, and gavelled the proceedings closed.

* * *

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It took three more days for this never-ending case to actually end. Three more days of arguments and witnesses and attempts at repairing the damage.

But Mukasey could never find her footing.

If she were a different kind of attorney, she could have turned on her own clients, asked that Serpell and Kabac and maybe a few others get charged with the crime and the others be let go.

But she wasn't willing to try that. Besides, 193 people had committed one, maybe two, mutinies, and they decided *not* to commit one when the *Renegat* left Crowe and the others behind at the Scrapheap.

A first-year law student could argue that case and win.

Mukasey just had to survive, and she did. Her closing argument focused on the defendants' amazing trip back to the Fleet against all odds, and she implied, because she didn't dare say, that they had been punished enough.

She knew that argument wouldn't hold, and it didn't.

The judges deliberated long enough to make it seem like they had spent time considering the evidence, but it had been clear from Gão's last statement that the case was over.

The judges came back with a unanimous verdict, something that rarely happened

in a twelve-person tribunal. Usually one judge had a slightly different argument or a disagreement or some small nit to pick.

Not here.

The only gift the judges gave her was a small one. The ringleaders—Kabac, Serpell, and a few others—received life in prison. The rest received ten to twenty years. A few, those who had fought with Preemas, were banned from the Fleet. They would be sent to a rehabilitation center on the nearest sector base, before being exiled from any Fleet-established community.

Lakinas would be banned, after she received her court-ordered medical treatment. Others who had been denied similar treatment would get that as well.

The staggered sentences were probably fair, but she didn't care about that. The truth of it was that Mukasey had just suffered the worst defeat of her career.

She staggered out of court while the various guards were rounding up all of the defendants. They would lose their privileged quarters in Tower Six and be transported immediately to holding at the base of the starbase.

She didn't even get to say good-bye to them, not that she wanted to. She was certain they were as unwilling to deal with her as she was to deal with them.

The one thing she did decide at the end of this case was that she needed a life. She didn't even have real friends to go get drunk with, and she couldn't remember when she last had a lover.

That would change.

Maybe not even voluntarily. Because who was going to hire someone who was 1) willing to defend the indefensible and 2) who lost when doing it?

Then Mukasey squared her shoulders and made herself take a deep breath. She would give herself two full days of self-pity, maybe three.

After that, she was going to return to the land of the living. Because self-pity was one of the ways that the misnamed *Renegat* renegades got into trouble.

All of them.

And she didn't want to mimic their behavior.

About anything.

* * *

Arias rested her head on her desk. The bullpen was quiet. She was tired, but she didn't mind as much as she usually did. This case was over, and she had won.

A hand slapped the desk beside her head, making her jump. She recognized that hand after weeks of watching it fiddle with tablets and tap restlessly on tables.

The Old Man.

"No sleeping!" he said. "We need to celebrate."

She lifted her head. The pile of tablets, coffee cups, and odd bits of clothing (mostly suit jackets or tunics) threatened to tumble off the side of the desk. She caught the tablet stack, moved it, and then looked at him.

He didn't seem tired at all. He was grinning, his hair slightly mussed. He looked younger, like he always did when he smiled.

"We need to celebrate," he said again.

"How do you propose we do that?" she asked.

"Great meal," he said. "Great booze. Lots of laughter."

One of the young lawyers—a new one, who had been hired during this case, whose name Arias hadn't learned yet—sat up on a nearby couch. Apparently he had heard the *no sleeping* command, and thought it applied to him.

"You're celebrating putting 193 people away?" he asked.

"E-yup," the Old Man said, and then peered at the young lawyer. "You *are* in the prosecutor's office, you know."

"I know," the young lawyer said as if his life had ended, and flopped back down on the couch.

Arias smiled. She recognized lawyers like him. They either left the profession or became defense attorneys.

She forced herself out of the chair. Food would be good. Alcohol even better.

The Old Man was already threading his way through the desks. She had to hurry to catch up.

The smile had left the Old Man's face.

"Does it bother *you* that we are putting 193 people away?" he asked.

"No," she said. "They are probably the worst group of people it has ever been my displeasure to encounter."

He laughed. "Yeah, they are that. But in their defense . . ."

She looked at him sharply. "Defense?"

"Yeah, defense. The one I was the most afraid of, actually, the argument Mukasey never really made." He stopped near the door. "They were chosen because they were the worst. Why would they behave better as a collective than they had as individuals?"

Arias's breath caught. "You think that was a winning argument?"

The Old Man laughed. "In my hands, it would have been."

"But they—"

"Yeah, yeah," he said. "But really, who cares? It all happened one hundred years ago, in a Scrapheap so far away that we don't really understand where it is."

"Wow," Arias said. "That's very . . . nihilistic."

"Naw," he said, and started walking again.

He pulled open the door to the main office, the place she had just assumed she was returning to, now that this case was over.

"You know," he said, as if he were reading her thoughts. "That office is yours permanently."

"A private office?" she asked. "Really?"

"E-yup," he said, "but only if you promise to take over this entire department one day."

"Oh, wow, that's a condition." She was too tired to consider it right now. "Your argument—it probably wouldn't have succeeded in court."

"The key word in that sentence," he said as he stepped into the hallway, "is 'probably.'"

He was right. The key word was *probably*. And with the right combination of judges, a trial might have failed.

"That argument is not designed for trial," she said with a bit of wonder. "It casts enough doubt that a lesser prosecutor, one like that kid on the couch, would be willing to deal."

"Exactly," the Old Man said, clapping her on the back. She stumbled a little. "And that's the very last lesson of this case."

"You know," she said, moving slightly away from him, so he didn't try that back-clap again. "If I take over this department, I'll never be able to compete with your legend."

"Don't sell yourself short," he said. "You just won the biggest case we'd ever seen."

"You did," she said.

"We did," he said. "And that counts. But you're right. You'll never be me."

"Thank the universe for small miracles," she said. Then she grinned at him. "I'm picking the restaurant—and you're buying."

"Oh, no," he said. "This one's going on account. So we better make all that documentation worthwhile."

And, ultimately, they did.