

# UNITY UNDER FIRE



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## Region One Alien Ambassador Corps

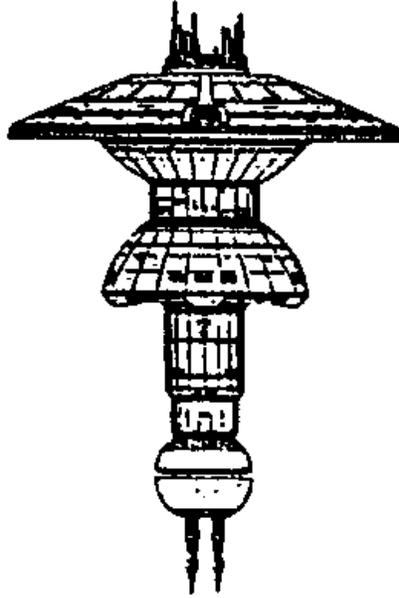
|                                    |             |
|------------------------------------|-------------|
| Ruth Green                         | Betazed     |
| Janice "Alanya" Graham             | Deltan      |
| Warren "Tigri K'Tel" Price         | Maquis      |
| Dennis "Quirk" Relyea              | Ferengi     |
| Curt "Curtis of Borg" Bellman      | Borg        |
| John Kiwi "K'athvaj" Kane          | Klingon     |
| Brett "Krim Los" Morelock          | Bajoran     |
| Shawn "Dakar" Fields               | Cardassian  |
| Patricia "Shakara Nix" Lewis       | Trill       |
| Greg "Brak' Tul" Franklin          | Breen       |
| Eris3 Vorta                        | Vorta       |
| Wade 'Weyoun' Larkin<br>Supervisor | Vorta Field |

Michael "Dragonfly" Browne  
Genetically Enhanced Human

Chris "Skotek Tr'Kitanriis" Parker  
Romulan Unificationist Movement

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This is the continuing story of the everyday events of the Region One' Alien Ambassador Corps based on the space station Unity.

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## SOMEWHERE NEAR BETAZED...

“Computer,” the voice speaks softly in the dimly lit quarters, “resume personal log of Ambassador Alanya, senior Deltan Ambassador of the Alien Ambassador Corps.

“This year has been...interesting. It has been a few moments of leisure between bouts of chaotic insanity. I had not been on Unity Station for long enough to unpack when I began hearing about or in fact, receiving warnings about some of the other ambassadors. Though I prefer to make my own determinations, I put the information into files for future reference. Let me see if I can recall some of the more intriguing.”

She thinks of those first welcoming messages with amusement. “The first was about the Ferengi Quirk. I believe I was warned to stay clear of him and all offers of ‘free’ holosuite visits. Quirk runs an ‘establishment’ which most call a bar. He is a true Ferengi, letting neither friendship nor blood relationships stand in the way of profit.” She grins. “But he owes me due to some personal wagers and a few Tongo games. I learned Tongo from a master–Jadzia Dax through Dax’s current host Ezri. I did warn him.

“Word has it that Mr. Rosen is Section 31. It seems like this supposedly ‘secret’ organization is not much of a secret. But of course, he denies being connected with it. He is a strange mix of gallantry and sharp observations. He vanished a few months ago, presumably for duty. But we’ve heard nothing either from him or about him for some time.

“A few of the ambassadors have been quiet–the Vulcan, the Breen, the Cardassian, and the first Deltan ambassador. And some others. These people may have left before the trouble began or they may be dead. I know some did not escape but which they are, there is no way to know yet. I think I’ve heard something about the Trill, Shakara Nix, being in seclusion over the loss of her husband.

“There are two Vorta, Eris3 and Weyoun. He took me to lunch while she tried to take a chip I found in my computer. Eris3 is amusingly creative, drove poor Quirk to distraction by claiming he promised to marry her. It is a well-known fact that Quirk would rather be put in a room full of tribbles and Klingons than have anything to do with Vorta.

“Another warning was about our Klingon K’athvaj, and Curtis of Borg--good friends who have hunting parties. It seems they like to prowl about the station hunting the pet cats of other ambassadors. I recently saw where they plan to make it an annual event and jokingly named it after Skotek: ‘The Skotek Memorial Cat Hunt.’ However, the cats are equipped with Borg-enhanced shields. That evens it up a bit. Who would have guessed that within a few months, the name would be no joke?”

She sits in silence for a moment, sipping hot Deltan tea. “Tigri K’Tel has vanished as well. He is the Maquis ambassador, one of the first of those I met before I was assigned to the station. He’s quiet, tricky, and a master at being invisible in plain sight. He laughingly calls himself a lurker. There have been whispers that he had a run-in with Q. I periodically send out messages on his private comm channel to meet us at Betazed. I don’t know if he has received them.

“Our genetically enhanced Human is Michael Browne. And I was immediately informed that if I ever needed to find him, look under a table at Quirk’s. There are those who hint and even some who insist that the enhancement was in connection with his capacity for alcohol consumption.”

She stares at her mug for a moment, her smile turns to something else but not quite a frown. It is stiffer than that; it turns Vulcan. “Then there’s Skotek. He’s the Romulan Unificationist and Chief of Security, at least until recently. He is one I hadn’t met face to face yet. I get the distinct

feeling it is because of what I am. Being only half Deltan, I was not required to sign The Oath. But because of an incident that occurred in the recent past, I am aware that I am, in some ways, more dangerous than a full Deltan. Consequently, I am constantly monitoring my pheromones which affect all humanoid life-forms.

“Skotek avoided me, though we did speak through messages and the comm. I learned he had some training on Vulcan in the mental disciplines and would like to have discussed this with him; how he, as a Romulan, dealt with certain aspects of the training, and of course other subjects as well. I want to ask...no, wanted to ask...” She takes a deep breath, mentally watches to see which half would win this time: the half that looks at Skotek’s absence as a regrettable fact, or the half that feels anger, frustration, and maybe a threat of tears. “But he would not be where I was. I wonder why. Fear, perhaps? And if so, why?”

“This began when Betazoid Ambassador Ruth Green and I were returning in our personal shuttles from a visit to Earth. We’d spent a few days at a gathering they call a convention. But when I approached Unity, the station’s computer refused to allow me access...”

Captain Janice R. Graham  
“Alanya”  
First Officer, USS Renegade

## Chapter 1 “Red Alert”

Early September: Deltan Ambassador Alanya and Betazoid Ruth Green stop outside Quirk’s bar to finalize plans for the event they will be attending on Earth. Suddenly, the doors open and a terrible noise is heard coming from the bar, followed by the bar’s owner. He has a huge grimace of pain on his face. “Somebody shoot me and put me out of my misery...or better yet, shoot HIM and put him out of my misery!”

“What’s wrong, Quirk?” Alanya asks.

“It’s that Hew-mon!”

“You must mean Michael,” Ruth says.

“Who else?” Quirk frowns.

Through the doors can be heard strains of “I’ll Take You Home Again, Kathleen.”

“He’s ruining my business!” Quirk adopts a pathetic expression. “Oh, my aching ears! You wouldn’t want to rub them for me, would you, Alanya?” He looks lecherously hopeful.

She laughs. “Now, Quirk. You know the answer to that.”

He shrugs. “Yeah, but I had to try, didn’t I? Who knows? Someday, you might say yes.”

“In your dreams, Quirk!” Ruth laughs. “You know it would kill you.”

“But I’d die SO happy!” Quirk sighs, then steeling himself, turns and enters his bar again.

A few days later:

Unity Station’s Chief of Security, Skotek Tr’Kitanriis, who also doubled as the Romulan Unification Ambassador, is at his security station comm issuing a warning to the station personnel. “Attention, Unity Station, Red Alert!!! This is not a drill! I repeat, RED ALERT!!! Keep comm channels clear until further notice! We have an intruder aboard, security is dealing with this matter. Please remain calm and in your quarters until this is sorted out. I repeat: stay INSIDE your quarters. The nature of this intruder is unknown and the worst is assumed. Security will fire upon any unauthorized personnel in the hallways regardless of appearances. More information upcoming as it is received. Skotek out.”

Across Unity Station, ambassadors and others react to the alarm and Skotek’s warning. Tigri, the Pride of the Maquis, yells, “Good gosh, what is all that noise and what is that smell?? Quirk, are you cooking something? Will some one please turn off the alarm???? I can’t do a good job of lurking!”

Eris3 Vorta is talking to a Jem’Hadar soldier in her room when the alert comes in. “Good, you have arrived here just in time. Go out and find out what these people are complaining about. Report back to me.” The newly arrived Jem’Hadar soldier fades into the background as he cloaks.

Skotek’s next message is transmitted only moments later across Unity Station. “There is a hull breach in lower engineering. Security vessels are opening fire on unknown vessels. We have a hostile force aboard. Ambassadors, please make your way in an orderly fashion to the security office.”

This excites the Klingon ambassador, Kang SutaI' John Kathvaj. "Why can't we kill the filthy intruders like the dogs they are?"

In Quirk's, Ferengi Ambassador Quirk transmits a message to security. "Skotek, I will be there in minutes, have a phaser rifle ready for my hands. After all, I am a Marine, ready to fight for the station."

Colonel Michael "Dragonfly" Browne, Genetically Enhanced Human Ambassador, is doing what he normally does: drinking. He finally hits the right button to call Skotek. "Good. Time for some R&R. Like reading my dear manuals or just drink. You know me by now, I have a wet bar inside my quarters. Bar? Did I say bar? That's exactly what this station needs--more bars." He hums a few of an old drinking song, then laughs. "That's not quite the bars I meant but they'll do for starters. Hey, Skotek, just call me when the all clear is sounded or if you need me... Just call! If I am drunk, then still call me. I may hit someone else but? But with my abilities, I may actually hit the culprit."

Deltan ambassador Alanya and Betazoid ambassador Ruth have returned from a convention/conference that they were attending. Skotek had shut down all docking to the station by the time they arrive at Unity.

It's been a long trip and Alanya stretches. "Computer, I am returning from my trip after taking a few days for myself. Please acknowledge and alert station personnel of my return--WHAT?! What Red Alert?? What do you mean, I cannot dock ? Of course I can--CONFIRM MY IDENTITY?!?! I AM ALANYA, Computer--voice print and retinal confirm! What have they been up to?? What about Naya??? So help me, if she has been harmed, [Vulcan and Deltan phrases unable to translate]!!! Skotek!!! What is going on???"

Alanya had deliberately waited several months to bring her pet sehlat, Naya-Mirith, to the station, carefully assessing the possible threats to her safety. Some of the ambassadors were a little strange but seemed harmless enough (though there were those rumors about cat hunts. But Naya would not be mistaken for a feline, unless there were 400-pound cats on Unity, so she sent for her. And now, a mere three months later, this. Alanya glares at the console. She is concerned for the sehlat, left with Quirk while she was away.

## Chapter 2 “Defend”

A Jem'Hadar soldier walks quietly up behind Quirk and takes his phaser rifle. Since he is cloaked, Quirk just watches open-mouthed as his phaser fall into pieces. At the same time Browne starts for the rifle, hits Quirk instead and they fall to the floor. As the two of them struggle, each thinking the other is the intruder they do not notice the cloaked Jem'Hadar leaving to check the rest of the station.

“Get off me! You blubbery idiot! Give me the rifle! It is not a gun,” Browne yells.

“You have no weapon to be returning, you wanna-be Marine !!! I know what WEAPON is and a Rifle is. I mean no offense but you have insulted a fellow Marine. Let's get these intruders before they ruin the station. That's our first priority.” Quirk tries to explain to Browne.

After seeing the floating phaser, Kathvaj realizes what is happening and thanks to a visit to his trusted friend Curtis of Borg's quarters, is prepared and fires at a spot in the corridor. Suddenly where there was nothing, a dead Jem'Hadar soldier materializes and Kathvaj walks quickly up and strips the corpse of all the useful gadgets, then returns to help his fellow ambassadors get to safety so they can recover.

Quirk and Browne are furiously fighting for their lives, in a secured area of the station. *Whiz... boom!* “Got one!” says Quirk triumphantly. “Where is that back up I called for? I hope they get here soon.”

Elsewhere on Unity, the security teams lead by Skotek try to defend the station from these unknown intruders. Phaser and disrupter fire ricochets around the bulkheads.

“Skotek, what's going on?” blears in his communicator. The Romulan jerks back, catching a blast on his arm.

“Dammit,” Skotek starts cursing in Rhiannsu. “Computer, disconnect diplomatic channels, relay only tactical channels and security channels, and get some reinforcements down here.”

Blasting away with a phaser in his left hand and a disrupter in his right, Skotek calls back to his security team, “Back off, get this sector secured, override the safety protocols and isolate this level with force fields.” Nodding, the other members of the security team back away; soon it's only Skotek left. He smiles grimly. “Now we play it my way.”

Skotek manages to squeeze through the Jeffries tubes and finds two more of these intruders felled. He doesn't know who they are—or were; they are wearing some kind of armor. Skotek tries to pry the armor off of one, but it results in setting off a self-destruct timer. Luckily, Skotek manages to duck around a corridor before it goes off...the resulting mess isn't pretty.

His phaser is gone, lost down the reactor core of the station itself, his disrupter is gripped tightly as he hears more footsteps walking by. “Damn it, where are those reinforcements?”

Skotek hears on his communicator that Quirk and Browne, along with Naya the hunter and the Klingon are on the way. Then he hears shots in the corridors adjacent to his location.

Skotek looks over at the console near his position. Glancing out at the several troops standing outside the Jeffries tube, he growls softly. "Computer," he whispers, "Shut down life support on this level".

Skotek looks down the shaft into the reactor core, grimly judging distances and reactions. He decides there are few options still open to him. Bleeding from several wounds, almost all of them close-combat oriented, he doesn't know how much longer he would hold out. He accounted for nine dead and three possible, but the rest were managing to break through his interdiction; more reports were coming of several enemy vessels approaching, many looked like the old Orion wanderer class. Skotek, however, doubts that pirates are doing all this; they are too well organized, too efficient. They apparently weren't Jem'Hadar, but they felt just as strong; curiously, he has had a report that some of his security underlings are, in fact, fighting Jem'Hadar. Is the Dominion behind, or perhaps allied to these warriors?

Clutching his arm where a particularly nasty cut peeks through his fingers, Skotek leans farther out into the reactor shaft. Holding his breath, he jumps, the thin cord taken earlier from an engineering supply room his only lifeline from plummeting into the core itself, burning him up in microseconds; he hopes no friendlies are near the reaction charge he planted

Coming to a junction, Browne looks at Quirk, "Quirk, you go to the right and I'll go left." Browne begins softly singing as he leaves, "I'll be in Scotland before you!"

He is out of Quirk's sight for only moments when he screams in agony!

Quirk hears the screams of Browne and proceeds cautiously to his last known position. "Mr. Browne, answer me if you can"... (Where is that backup? I called 3 days ago for Starfleet Marines get here and aid your comrades in arms.) "Mr. Browne, where are you?" Cautiously moving down the corridor watching for eminent danger, Quirk continues to move toward the scream.

### Chapter 3 Not as Planned

Newly assigned Bajoran ambassador, Krim Los, tells the Captain of the cloaked Defiant class that is transporting him to Unity Station, "Sir, when we arrive please send some one to my quarters to retrieve me please sir".

Alanya sends the Defiant class vessel a coded message. 'Sorry, Ambassador, the station's shields are up so you cannot beam onto Unity at this time. Stay put on your ship. I'm working on something.'

Alanya spots several Unificationist Warbirds coming into viewscreen range. She hails them knowing they must be Skotek's command unit. "This is Ambassador Alanya! You normally answer to Ambassador Skotek but he is unreachable at the moment. If you are not enjoying just sitting out here unable to assist station personnel, beam me over. In fact, I insist that you do. But be warned: I am half Deltan, half Vulcan. I have suppressed my pheromones as much as I can but I have noticed that all humanoids are still somewhat affected. Please prepare yourselves for this. Acknowledge."

"Hmmm... Interesting communication" Tigri has monitored while lurking back on Unity but he will not acknowledge that he knows what is going on.

Meanwhile he is also noting that Quirk and Browne are just stumbling in the dark, like the blind leading the blind..... Hehehehehe!!! "Now where is that Cardie? I bet he is responsible for this mess."

"Please state the nature of your emergency" EMH says. "Well first time being called to the turbolift. Ambassador Browne, that is a nasty wound. What is that noise?"

Quirk comes stumbling into the turbolift. "How am I to work with all this noise and ruckus. Computer put up a level 3-containment force field around the turbolift. Only release field on my voice pattern. Now, Mr. Quirk hold this patch right there and I just tighten the bandage around Ambassador's B....."

Lights dim and emergency lights come on. Quirk and Browne look at each other both realizing their situation. EMH is not there. Emergency power only. No way to get the EMH back on line with emergency power. Quirk goes to walk out of the turbolift but gets thrown back to the backwall. The level 3-containment force field is still working at full power.

Quirk and Browne look at each other. "HELP" they yell. They know they are trapped and can NOT get out. "It's your fault" Quirk yells at Browne. Trapped and fighting, Quirk and Browne are at each other's necks now forgetting about the trouble on the station.

Choking, Quirk tells Mr. Browne, "Col. Browne get hold of yourself we are in this mess because of some intruders. Now we are trapped in the turbolift". Still choking, Quirk tries to remove Browne's hands from around his throat.

Krim Los is awakened from his slumber by a crewmember of the ship transporting him. He reports to the bridge where the Captain tells him that they have arrived at Unity Station, but there is a problem. "What problem sir?" Los asks. The Captain informs him that the station is under emergency power and shows signs of

intrusion. Startled at this, Los says "Captain I recommend that we keep the ship cloaked and try to dock with the station, If they are on emergency power, there may be fluxes in their shield efficiency one we dock if we can. Sir I request to lead a squad of marines heavily armed, with body armor, hand phasers, phaser rifles, and photon grenades sir." To which the Captain replies "alright Mr. Krim, select your troops and wait for my command, Good luck Lieutenant." "Thank you sir, for everything" Los replies. "Once you and your team are on board we will send a communication to get you some more reinforcements." Los salutes and leaves. He selects a team of marines for this mission and arms them as he specified and waits for his order to disembark. "Hoo ah marines! lock and load this is a drop and sweep we don't know how bad it is in there, so be ready!!" (Los thinks to himself "I hope my old buddy Quirk is ok in there")

Alanya's personal log: I have been informed by Naya-Mirith that something has happened to Michael. She wants to go to him but I have ordered her to guard our quarters so she will not leave there unless I give her permission. She does say, however, that Michael is still alive. She is also concerned about Quirk, and several others that she has met on the station since she arrived. I understand her thoughts from her being with me as long as she has. She does not think in words but in images, and being Deltan as well as Vulcan, I get very clear images from her. Hope Michael is well, and the others. I can't do much here but we'll see when I get to the warbird. End entry.

Having waited for hours now, Los begins to get impatient. He fears his long time friend; Quirk and the rest of the ambassadors may already be dead but puts the thought aside praying he is wrong. The Captain of the ship gives him even more bad news. Los is informed that even though the station is on emergency power, the shields are still up. After another few minutes however Los gets some good news. The Captain of the ship informs him that they overheard a communication from Ambassador Alyana to the Romulan Unification Movement. "Send a comm to Alyana Sir. I've got an idea that's just crazy enough to work. The Romulans have cloaking devices too and Alanya may have the Shield harmonics of the station." To which the Captain replies "I don't understand Lieutenant Krim. How would that help?" "We don't know the layout of the station, Alanya does and if she has the shield harmonics of the station we can remodulate the cloaking device to that frequency, we may be able to slip through the Stations shields Like a piece of paper under a door Captain."

"Ambassador Alyana this is Lieutenant Krim Los. I need your assistance in a matter we may be able to board the station and rescue everyone. I would prefer if you allowed us to beam u to this ship as we can talk more in depth about my plan."

The Defiant Class ship decloaks to show the Ambassador that they are there then recloaks and moves positions. The moment the Defiant Class ship decloaks another unknown vessel decloaks and fire on the ship then cloaks again.

"Sorry, Lieutenant, for what I have in mind, I must beam to the warbird. They are hailing me now. Please stand by."

"Ambassador Alanya, I am the Romulan commander in charge of the warbirds in Skotek's absence. Before we lost contact, he told us to cooperate with you. We will beam you aboard at your command. And yes, he warned us that you are Deltan but we have not had contact with one of your species before so I cannot predict what the reaction will be."

(Oh, wonderful. Can't be helped, I will deal with it.) "If it helps, commander, remember I am a captain. Beam me on my mark"-- \*Alanya orders her shuttle's computer to monitor activity around the station; if there is fighting outside, set autopilot to the nearest starbase and go. "Commander: mark!"

Just before the transporter's distinctive whine is heard, Alanya sees Krim's ship decloak, then as it begins to vanish, another ship suddenly appears and fires on Krim! "Oh--" The rest is lost in the transporter's hum. Alanya disappears from her shuttle...and finds herself on the bridge of the warbird.

Los grunts "Unngh!! What the hell was that!! Somthin hit us. Is everyone alright?" All the marines are fine. "Captain sir, what happened?" The Captain replies "Nothing major Mr. Krim. We took a hit from a Jem'Hadar vessel but the armor held. There are no casualties." "That's a relief, sir. Ambassador Alyana can't help us right now. There is one more alternative, however. If you will allow me to speak to you privately sir." Los says. "My ready room 5 minutes." "Yes sir" replies Los as he leaves for the Captain's Ready Room. "Alright Lieutenant what's left?" asked the Captain. "When I was in the Bajoran Militia I learned to hack security systems. I may be able to hack the station's systems and get its shield harmonics. I must inform you of the risks though sir." To which the Captain asks, "Which are?" "Well sir if I'm off at all when we attempt to remodulate the cloaking device, we could be blown to pieces passing through the station's shields. Its your ship and your risk to take though sir." Los explains. After thinking for a moment the Captain replies "Make it so Lieutenant. After your team disembarks, we will go for reinforcements." "Yes sir" Los answers. Los goes to the bridge and uses the science station. He bypasses the station security by going in through the replicator system.(never thought I'd have to do this to an ally's defenses) he thinks to himself. After an hour or so he tells the Captain "I think I got it sir." The Captain then says "Bridge to engineering, remodulate our cloaking device to this frequency that is being transmitted to you." Los rejoins the marines and prepares them "Alright people this is it. Set you weapons at maximum, fire at any thing that is not in a Starfleet Uniform or and Ambassadors Uniform. Keep in mind body armor is good but it can only take so much." As the Defiant class ship slides through the shields to dock with the station, Krim Los's thinks to himself (I'm so sick of fighting, of war, of battling. He's been fighting since he was born. It started with the Cardassian, then he joined Starfleet and it was the Romulans or the Borg or the Dominion, but he also remembers his friend Quirk, And his own personal philosophy "Sometimes peace is only achieved on the other side of war." The Defiant class slides through the shields like a piece of paper under a door, then docks with Unity Station.

"Ambassador, this is Alanya from the warbird. I order your captain to undock immediately! Your ship's internal sensors are malfunctioning! You have a warp core breach in progress caused by enemy fire. I repeat: UNDOCK AND MOVE AWAY FROM UNITY! And prepare to meet some Romulans--we're beaming some of you here and some to the other Valdore class ship. DO IT NOW!!"

While still in the turbo lift and being choked almost to death both Quirk and Browne realize they are trapped not by their own choice..."Mr. Browne why don't we relax and get your butt bandaged up before you bleed to death."

"Watch where you are putting your hands Quirk... I am about ready to shoot you"  
" You do that and you will bleed slowly to death."  
"all right then lets get this over with Quirk. I am in no hurry to die  
here....\*\*@\$%^&\* that hurts "  
"I suggest we rest while we can Mr. Browne. We are here for the duration."  
"Quit sniveling you two face big eared Ferengi, I know for a fact it was  
your fault! Here's my refund! Quirk, quit sniveling! Get the H\$^^ off me. Stop that  
biting! You are not my type. If I still had my phaser then I'll show you how."

The Captain of the Defiant gives the order "Lieutenant Krim, and all marines disembark now!! Lieutenant, it your mission now!!" Los and all but a few of the marines are able to get inside the station before the ship he was on undocks and pulls away. Los gives orders to his troops "Alright people this is the real thing lets do this right! Medics stand by in case we come across wounded! Move Out!" Slowly sweeping and ever alert an inch at a time Los and his troops begin to search. "Ambassador Alanya this is Lieutenant Krim myself and most of my troops are inside the station. Have you got the ship's crew?" as Los thinks (I could use some good news about now.)"I may need your help in engaging the enemy, since you know the station layout better than I. My troops and I will try to secure at least a portion of the station to use as a command post. Krim out."

The Defiant class ship explodes due to the core breach, but does no damage to the station.

As Los and his few troops move down the first corridor, Skotek's security measures kick in and pin down the rescue party. Weapons fire and the cloaked Jem'Hadar are hit by the same security weapons. "I didn't expect this" exclaims Los.

In the corridor, stands John Wayne. Skotek left in the hall to the shuttle bay. The robot goes the computer panel and punches in the following "Jem'Hadar soldiers helping guard shuttle bay 1 killed by intruders. Intruders not authorized on station. Activate program Skotek/Wayne 641B". Lasers fire fill the corridor. Bodies of the marines everywhere. A single Bajoran stands in amazement as the computer starts to disconnect the shuttle bay from the station and it is expelled into space with the lone Bajoran.

Seeing his marines dead and feeling the shuttle bay break loose from the station Los begins thinking of options which there is only one. He has to get outta here. "Ambassador Alayna, this is Lt. Krim Los, I need immediate extraction my attempt at trying to help liberate the station failed. All my marines are dead except me. Beam me outta here. I am in the shuttlebay that just broke loose." Then he thinks back to a conversation he had with Quirk about becoming an Ambassador (Yeah Los you'll love it. I like being an Ambassador, you will too.) Then Los thinks and mutters under his breath, "This was just a REAL good idea." "Prophets help me."

On the warbird, Alanya orders, "Commander, lock on Ambassador Krim and beam him aboard now!!"

As Ambassador Green makes her way to the station she suddenly notices the air around her begins to shimmer and sparkle. Within seconds the bridge of her ship is replaced with the interior of a Jem'Hadar warship. Two Jem'Hadar soldiers stand before her with their weapons aimed at her. She notices a figure facing the ships view screen. When he turns and she recognizes him, she is surprised... and then maybe not.

"Ah, Ambassador Green! Welcome to the Rapier! I trust we've not inconvenienced you? You see, we're about to have a... let's say "diplomatic incident" aboard Unity Station and we can't have you getting hurt, now can we?"

"What are you up to Weyoun?" she says....

"What diplomatic incident" aboard Unity Station? Did you cause it?" Ambassador Green said. "Explain yourself, Weyoun" All along she is watching the shuttle bay floating away from the station and wonders what part next may be blown off.

"I'm sorry ambassador, there is little time to explain. Things seem to be getting interesting. We need to get to your Romulan, he's getting ready to irradiate the station." Weyoun turns to the Jem'Hadar first "have you located Skotek?"

The Jem'Hadar nods "we have."

"Fine, go quickly and retrieve him. Contact me as soon as you have him in custody."

Weyoun watches angrily as the shuttle bay breaks away. Ambassador Green is puzzled by this since she has never seen the Vorta display such anger. Weyoun slams his fist down on the console he is watching and barks orders to the Jem'Hadar. "Get that fool off that shuttle bay! He's screwing everything up! Founders preserve us! Beam him directly to our brig." Weyoun walks off shaking his head and muttering under his breath. "Heroes!" he says sarcastically.

Just seconds before the Romulan ship's transporters lock onto Krim, the Rapier's transporter grabs the dazed and confused Bajoran.

Skotek nodded slightly to himself, He had managed to isolate most of the attackers on the lower levels of the station, He had received garbled reports of Jem'Hadar attacks, either his people were mistaking these creatures for Jem'Hadar, or else the Dominion was making use of this distraction to further their own agendas.

No Matter, soon, the enemy trapped below the security forcefields would be dealt with, He finished adjusting a few circuit lines and cut off the auxiliary safeties. The intruder's armor was good, standing up to physical attacks and even protecting them from glancing phaser hits, but Skotek doubted they were radiation proof.

He stepped back and looked at the chrono....ten minutes until the lower station was awash with lethal radiation doses from the reactor core. Skotek figured that his death would take roughly three hundred of the enemy troops with him, pretty fair exchange in his opinion. The rest of the station would have to fend for itself, he trusted the other ambassadors, most were warriors or tacticians in their own right.

Nine minutes...he hated waiting. But a noise made him look up. One of the enemy troops was above him, looking at what he was doing..Skotek couldn't allow him to reverse the command, or risk him finding away the safeguards that Skotek had removed. With a growl of a man who had nothing left to lose, Skotek charged the trooper. Behind the struggling fighters, the display called out "Eight Minutes to radiation purge" in its

emotionless voice pattern. Skotek hoped he could hold out long enough for the computer to do its work.

Skotek fought off his assailant, managing to throw the screaming creature into the matter/antimatter stream of the power core. Hearing shouts above, he glanced up, four more troops were coming down. Skotek leaned back, his disruptor tracking them when a beep caught his attention, glancing over he saw the strange satchel that the first soldier was carrying, glowing lights were blinking and even as Skotek watched, one light winked out, a Timer! Running toward the satchel, he gazed in horror as the satchel's timer reached zero lights and the satchel exploded, blowing a hole in the wall it was laying beside. a massive rush of air jerked Skotek off of his feet, throwing him out of the hole and into the freezing void of space. Fighting for consciousness, Skotek turned and fired his disruptor at the hole, sealing it back up. At least now the Soldiers would be killed by the radiation instead of venting the gasses and plasma into space. Skotek managed a slight smile and holstered his disruptor as was proper for a former member of the Tal Praiex and a Starfleet Marine, before darkness took him and he saw no more.

## Chapter 4 This Sucks

On the warbird, Alanya watches as the transporter starts to grab onto Krim Los, and suddenly there is nothing there. "Commander!! What happened—belay that! Explain it after you get him back!" She glares at him, half because they lost Krim and half because of the predictable reactions she is getting from the Romulans to her pheromones, dampened down as they are. (What is happening over there?)

She closes her eyes, focuses her mind on reaching the sehlat still on the station. She can't help smiling at the animal's cunning. Naya-Mirith is inside her quarters where she would have the element of surprise on her side if anyone who isn't supposed to be there tries to enter. In the sehlat's case, though she is not yet a year old, she weighs 400 pounds, and her two-inch fangs are most capable of inflicting considerable damage. The Deltan ambassador touches her pet-friend's mind and feels Naya's joy at the contact. (Naya--go to the Infirmary, it's shielded; you'll be safe there. Go to this place, Naya, see it in my mind...that's it, go there.) She breaks the contact, satisfied that the sehlat will obey and have at least some measure of safety.

"Sorry, Captain," brings her back to the bridge. "There is nothing there to get. The ambassador is not there."

"Find him!"

"Wait--there! Got him! He's been beamed--to the Rapier!"

"Weyoun?? Is he in on this?"

Suddenly the Romulan Commander all but chokes, "Skotek!"

"What? Where?" Alanya looks where the Romulan points...to the small figure firing a disruptor at a hole in the station's wall, effectively sealing it. Then, of all things, the figure--Skotek holsters the weapon and goes limp. "COMMANDER!" Alanya roars.

"Already on it!" another Romulan at the transporter controls shouts, fingers flying over the panel...

In the turbolift, Quirk is trying desperately to quell the awful pain in his ears, the cause of that pain being Browne, who is drunkenly serenading Quirk with an old Earth song called "My Wild Irish Rose." Browne is putting so much into the song that he is in danger of passing out and falling to the floor of the turbolift. Leaning against the wall for support, Browne finishes off what is left in his flask in one large gulp before turning to Quirk. "Sorry buddy, no whiskey for you! One of us has to stay sober and it is not me. And besides, it is mine."

Quirk presses his hands harder against his ears and moans. "Oh, my poor ears! I will need some soothing oomox if we ever survive this." Quirk thinks to himself, (I will need my strength, too, to carry him if we survive.) He looks sourly at an obliviously--to Quirk--screeching Browne. "I'd bet any odds that he'll be too drunk to walk out by the time we get out of here!"

Meanwhile, on the Vorta ship Rapier, Weyoun looks up at his viewscreen at the image that appears there.

"Strike team First to Rapier!"

"Yes, do you have the Romulan?" asks Weyoun.

"No, sir, the intruders blew a hole in the wall and he was pulled out of it just as we engaged his assailants." Though trying not to, the First sounds a little awed as he continues, "He then sealed it up behind him."

Weyoun turns to the Rapier's tactical console. "Do you have him?"

The Jem'Hadar looks up. "Yes, Commander, he has been transported to medical and he is alive but unconscious."

Weyoun nods. "Strike team, have you eliminated the group of infiltrators you engaged?"

As the First speaks, there are a few phaser shots in the background. "Negative! We're pinned down and they're bringing reinforcements in."

"Keep me posted. Rapier out." He turns to the Jem'Hadar on tactical and asks, "How long until the station is covered with radiation?"

"Three minutes, Commander."

Weyoun turns back to Ambassador Green. "We have a big problem. Your Romulan is going to kill just about everybody on that station other than the intruders. *They* won't be harmed by radiation. Suggestions?"

Ambassador Green, still confused by the whole situation, begins to realize that things are not as they seem. Just as she is about to suggest an emergency beam-out of the ambassadors, the Jem'Hadar at tactical interrupts. "Sir, the radiation discharge countdown has stopped! It appears that the command came from Station Operations."

"That solves one problem, but I would imagine that it creates another, much more difficult one." Weyoun looks worried.

"What do you mean?" asks the Ambassador.

"They obviously have taken Station Ops. That means that they have control of everything."

"Sir, the station is hailing us."

"Well, put them on," says Weyoun.

The screen switches from the exterior station view to that of Station Ops, one that Ambassador Green is very familiar with. What she is surprised about is the face that stares back at them, smiling a familiar smarmy smile. Another Weyoun. Not just any other Weyoun, but the genetically enhanced version that had been coming and going from the station for the past year. This is not good...

Los is looking around even before he finishes materializing. Unpleasant memories surface as he registers where he is: standing in the brig of a Jem'Hadar warship. He has been in one before, during the war, but as he takes stock of his surroundings, his irritation changes to puzzlement. "Why didn't they just kill me and be done with it?" he mutters out loud. Looking down at himself increases his surprise. "I'm still wearing my armor and weapons?" He checks and from what he can tell, all weapons have full charges in them. Then it hits him there is more going on than he thought. "I'll be damned!" he says loudly, then goes on, "I gotta remember to punch Quirk in the mouth for getting me into this mess. This was such a REAL, REAL GOOD idea." He unfastens the clamps that affix his helmet to his body armor; facing the cell door, he sits on the floor with his back to the wall and waits.

Kathvaj is silent now. He has two more edges to hone on his *bat'leth*. He has been biding his time, preparing, knowing the battle on the station has not been going well for Unity's side. He has helped as many as he dared get to cover, then hidden himself. If he had stayed in the open, he might have been killed; and though it would have been a glorious death in battle—thereby guaranteeing his place in Sto-Vo-Kor—he knew he would be more useful alive. There would be other good days to die. So he had made his way here.

His weapons are arrayed around him, an impressive collection; some Klingon, some with Borg enhancements, courtesy of his friend Curtis of Borg. He has gone over each, making sure each is working properly, or razor-sharp. He deliberately saved the *bat'leth* for last because working on it calms him. He draws the oiled stone over the edge slowly, taking pleasure in the sound. He thinks of it as the *bat'leth's* voice; the song it sings fires his warrior's blood. "Soon," he promises it softly, "your hunger for enemy blood will be fed. Patience."

That was one of the hardest lessons he'd ever learned. A warrior must sometimes wait, be patient for a better time when every instinct screams *kill now!*

The ringing of the blade isn't loud enough to be heard by the intruders. He is in a still-under-construction part of the station. No one would ever think to come here. Even *he* didn't think of it until he and the Borg Curtis were on one of their—Kathvaj grins—hunting trips and chased several cats—or, rather, prey in here. Since the "prey" did him a service by showing him this place, he let them go...*that* time. With just a little work, a few alterations, he had a secret place to use as needed.

He tests the last edge. Wicked but a little more and it will be perfection. He begins to softly sing a passage from a Klingon opera for discipline. He normally likes to sing it full voice, loud enough to rattle the bulkheads. If he has his way, his voice will soon echo through the corridors in a Klingon victory song. He can wait...but not long.

The Borg Sphere carrying Ambassador Curtis of Borg has dropped to impulse and unhurriedly nears Unity's space, unaware of the events unfolding on the station. Curtis is returning after long and involved surgery to remove a few more of the Borg implants, and looks forward to relaxing for the remaining few days of his leave before officially returning to the duties of ambassador.

"Sir, we're intercepting reports of a massive explosion aboard the station."

"What?" Curtis blinks in surprise, jumping to his feet."When!?"

"Just minutes ago. There are numerous ships around the station now, several types and species."

"All ahead full, best speed to the station!" Curtis snaps. Already he is dreading what he will find, that he might arrive too late to be of any help, but he still has to try. He has friends there.

"I want all the tactical data I can get before we get there! How many ships are orbiting it? What damage has been done? Who is still alive? Call up all the engineering information on the station—we may need it." Now over his initial surprise at the news, he rattles off additional orders from long experience, keeping his apprehension well-

suppressed. “I want answers NOW! As soon as we are in range, I want contact made with anyone that can be reached.”

He sinks back into his command chair, gazes at the viewscreen with a slight frown on his face, and murmurs too low to be heard by any of his crew, “And let’s hope we are not too late.”

On Unity Station, Kathvaj decides it’s time to find out what’s happening. He hasn’t heard fighting for a while. He grins; if he happens to run across a few enemy soldiers along the way, all the better. He’s more than prepared.

He crawls out of his hide and makes his way silently toward the section leading to the station’s control center. His silence is uncanny, not only for his size but for the fact that none of the many weapons he carries in various locations makes even a whisper of sound. He moves on cautiously.

Near a corridor junction between the business side of Unity and its living quarters, he hears soft moans of pain. A *d’k tahg* appears in his hand; he carefully looks around the corner and sees some wounded station staff members. Several of the station’s support staff lie crumpled on the floor; all are bleeding, one is propped against a wall holding an obviously broken arm.

Trusting his senses which say there is no enemy here, he sheaths the Klingon knife and checks the wounded. All are alive, though one is unconscious. The nearest room is locked but not for long. Kathvaj forces the door open, pulls the injured inside, and does what he can for them, then slips out to survey the scene for useful information. He checks other parts of the station, seeing what he can, an unseen, unheard shadow. But not unfelt. Once, he carries out his promise to the *bat’leth*. Four enemy soldiers round a corner right into a smiling Klingon with whirling death in his hands. They are dead in seconds. Hardly worth the effort of taking the sword from its harness over his shoulder. But he *did* promise it would drink today. And so it has.

He returns to the room where he left the injured staff members. The unconscious one has awakened, says she jumped a soldier to allow two children to escape and got hit over the head. “But the kids got away,” she tells him with satisfaction. “That’s worth a headache anytime.”

“Your bravery does you honor,” he says.

“I don’t think I was brave. I was scared to death,” she admits, “but they were just kids.”

He looks her right in the eyes. “Courage is when there is something, a necessary task, that *might* be dangerous but you do it. Bravery is *knowing* the challenge you face *is* dangerous—but you do it anyway. You are brave.”

She blinks, then accepts his compliment with a nod. She is too choked up to speak.

“Stay in this room if you can. Find a way to jam the door shut so it appears still locked. I’m going to see if I can contact another ambassador who may be able to get us out. No promises, though. If you are still here after a full day, then make your own plans.” It sounds ominous but not hopeless. It is the truth, though.

He returns to his secret place and, using a portable comm unit, sends out a message to his good buddy, the Borg, to fill him in on what is happening. He gives only

the most important details, saving the rest for when he is on the Sphere. He makes it a point to give him the location of the wounded staffers.

He goes to the small replicator unit he has patched into the main system, orders; then he sits and waits with a mug of prune juice and a plate of vegemite sandwiches for his hail to be answered.

Meanwhile in the brig, Krim Los waits for something to happen. When he finally hears steps, he makes a private bet with himself as to who will enter. Seeing who it is, he mumbles, "I lose. Hope I get a chance to pay up." He is startled when he doesn't see the expected Jem'Hadar soldiers. Instead, he is staring at the faceless environmental suit of the Breen Ambassador. Krim Los is at a loss for words at this surprise. The Breen indicates that Krim is to follow him.

Los stands and, still a little confused, stares at the Breen before him. He grabs his helmet, slings his phaser rifle on his back, and places his helmet under his arm. He thinks, (Ok, I'll play it their way. I've still got my weapons but no need to use them...yet. Let's find out what's going on.) He says a silent prayer to the Prophets and follows the Breen to the bridge of the Rapier.

As he enters, Los spots Captain Green and Weyoun standing a little apart from the rest of the crew. He is about to speak when he catches sight of the image on the screen. "What the-! There are *two* of them?!" He looks at Captain Green as if expecting her to have the answer to end his confusion. But she is just as surprised.

"This is impossible," Ambassador Green says to Weyoun as Los is brought in. "That is you but you are here! I thought there could be only one Vorta cloned at a time. What is the meaning of this? Is this a trick of the Dominion?"

Weyoun stares at his double on the viewer. "There are some differences, Ambassador," he observes quietly. Green looks again at the Weyoun on the viewer and notices the more muscular shoulders and thicker neck, and there is just something evil in those eyes. She glances at the Weyoun next to her and realizes that he is not as muscular and looks like the other versions she has encountered. In all of the excitement, that is a detail she had failed to notice. "Hello, Weyoun," he speaks to the viewer.

"Greetings, Weyoun, Ambassador Green. You may call me Governor from this point forward, as I will shortly be assuming those duties in this sector." The double smiles. "I would appreciate it if you would call off all of these 'little ships'," the way he says it sounds as if he considers them to be distasteful, annoying little bugs, "floating around out there and withdraw. You are now trespassing on the property of the Empire."

Ambassador Green looks at the Vorta standing next to her. "Do you know what he is talking about?"

Weyoun nods. "I'll explain later." He turns back to the viewer. "We'd like to negotiate terms that will enable us to safely remove the remaining ambassadors from the station, um, Governor."

Ruth feels like her whole world is spinning out of control. She wants nothing more than to sit down and have a drink of something real and strong. So many questions...so many Weyouns! But she has to hand it to this Weyoun; he could sound every bit as sickeningly *nice* as the other.

The "governor" shakes his head. "No, I'm sorry, we'll be holding on to them for 'security' reasons. We want to ensure a peaceful transition of power in this sector. I'm sure you understand." Again, the smarmy smile. (Do I really look like that idiot?) he thinks. (Perhaps I should consider having my face changed surgically.)

"I understand completely, Governor." Weyoun manages to get that out without choking on the words.

Ambassador Green looks at him in open astonishment. "You *UNDERSTAND*?!!!! Weyoun! What are you doin-?!"

He cuts her off with a wave while still looking at the screen. "Forgive the ambassador, Governor, she is rather 'attached' to the beings on the station. A Human weakness."

"I understand." The smile suddenly vanishes. "Now please leave—quickly."

Weyoun turns to the nearest Jem'Hadar. "Take us out of the sector," he says.

"What are you doing?!!! We can't leave them!" Ambassador Green is raging.

Weyoun turns to her, for the first time looking very angry. "We *MUST* and we *WILL*!!! Now calm yourself or I will have you removed from the bridge!"

Ambassador Green steams, but there is little she can do at the moment. Questions whirl in her head. What could she do? Would she be able to save the people on the station? It didn't look like it.

"Got him!" the Romulan Commander yells, staring intently at the internal sensor indicators.

"Med team to the transporter room immediately!" Alanya orders. "Can you tell how he is?"

"Not sure, Captain, but—it doesn't look good." The Romulan is staring at the indicators as if he can will them to change the readings he sees. He glances at her, and suddenly loses interest in the indicators, not noticing that several other Romulan males on the Bridge are now glaring at him.

"Be more specific," she says pointedly, wondering if she's going to have to break up a fight.

The Romulan drags his eyes back to the sensors, swallows. "I think—he's dead." Alanya and everyone else stares at him...

## Chapter 5 This Was Supposed To Be Easy

The moment the Rapiet is out of the sector, Weyoun gives the order to stop. Ruth's questioning look brings his explanation. "I said we'd leave the sector. We have. I have a few more things to do before we can continue."

Tigri has been doing what he does best. Lurking in the shadows, he has seen what has been happening. He was even nearby when the incident with Skotek occurred. But unfortunately, he was too far away to do anything to stop it. And the only thing it would have accomplished would have been getting him killed, too. The Maquis ambassador saw the hole seal up and knew that Skotek had done it, probably his last conscious act. (Who would have thought a Romulan could be a hero?), he thinks. (Hmmm...This is crazy. What is going on with this Station and the Ambassadors? Have they all gone mad? And what about these invaders? Who are they and what do they want with Unity?)

As Tigri stares at a console on which the Red Alert signal is blinking, there is a flash of light, and a faint "ping" is heard. Tigri spins toward the sound; the phaser appears in his hand so quickly, it seems to materialize out of nowhere—it's there before he finishes his turn. He nearly drops it when, to his surprise, he sees.....

"Q?!" he shouts. "What do *you* want, Q? This is all I need—you here tormenting me!"

"Torment? Me?" Q asks innocently. "Now that really hurts. I come here to do you a favor and this is what I get."

"A favor?" Tigri glares suspiciously. "Well, sorry if I don't believe you."

"I was going to offer to get you out of here." Looking very pleased with himself, Q regally sits down.

"What do you mean—out of where?"

"Here," Q says. "Away from the station. You are in a no-win situation. You must know that."

Tigri feels anger begin to build. "So you want me to *desert*—"

Q interrupts. "No! No, Tigri, not 'desert'! I would *never*—" He notices Tigri's look of disbelief. "Well—okay, maybe I would suggest it but not this time. No, what I'm suggesting is you let me take you away from this...mess. Let them—I mean, they can take care of things here and I can send you out of harm's way where you could get help."

The Maquis studies Q, wondering if he dares trust him. (Should I? *Can* I trust him? Do I really have a choice? I can't get off the station without help even if I do get to my ship. All Q needs to do is snap his fingers and I'm gone.)

Then something else occurs to Tigri. "Why don't *you* just get rid of the invaders?"

Q manages to look shocked. "Oh, no! Not me! You Starfleet types are stuffy about things like that. That little 'non-interference' thing you have. What is it again? The 'Prime Directive'?"

"You know very well what it is," Tigri snaps heatedly.

"I'm probably interfering enough just by offering to help you." He has a too-bright look on his face.

"Then why offer?"

"I have to have some fun now and then, don't I? And since I can't help everyone, at least not directly, I've chosen you."

"Oh, joy."

"You know, you remind me of someone else. You're not afraid to say what you think, not even to me. I like that."

Tigri is still suspicious but he can see little else to do. He looks Q in the eye. "No tricks?"

"No tricks" Q replies.

Tigri asks, "Where will you send me?"

"Your Listening Post Philliger at the edge--"

"You know about that?!" The Maquis ambassador shakes his head in disgust. "Of course you do."

"--of the Badlands comes to mind," Q continues as if Tigri hasn't interrupted.

"You would really send me there?"

"I would."

He could easily send out a distress call from there. "Okay. I see no future here right now. I'll send Ambassador Green a message that I'm leaving the station." He does so, then turning back to Q, Tigri points a finger at the self-called Omnipotent Being.

"Okay, Q, you better not be tricking me!"

The smile on Q's face sets Tigri's mental alarms to shrieking. "I give you my word--as soon as you're out of my sight, no tricks. However, I said I 'would' send you there, *not* I 'will'!"

With an evil grin, Q snaps his fingers and as he and Tigri vanish, the Maquis's enraged "*Q!*" vanishes with him.

As the Sphere approaches Unity, the former drones are at their stations. They seem to be working as one unit, performing duties as if they are the same entity, as they did when they were part of the Collective, except now, it is their conscious choice to work together. Curtis looks at each of his crew in turn: T'Sket, former Vulcan at Science, running sensor sweeps; Bretacha--the Sphere's Medical Officer is a former Klingon; at comm is Mr. Dorvan, whose species they still haven't figured out; and Mr Starcher, who was Human before he became Borg.

T' Sket calls out the whereabouts of all the ambassadors within scanning distance of the Sphere. As he places Alanya on the warbird, Curtis thinks, (So few? How did Alanya get on a Romulan ship? Where are the others?) The former Vulcan emotionlessly notes the presence of Skotek--his body, at least--also on the warbird. Curtis immediately orders hailing frequencies open to the warbird. "Alanya, this is Curtis of Borg of Unimatrix Zero. This is urgent. Please lower your shields so my medical officer can beam aboard. There is still a way to help Mr. Skotek. You must trust me!"

"I have no reason to not trust you, Curtis of Borg," Alanya replies. "We will comply, but only for three seconds. Hope your transporter is very fast."

"Bretacha will take good care of him. I will inform you when we are ready to transport. As always, be assured we come in peace."

Curtis's next call is to the Rapier. "Ambassador Green, go with Weyoun. It will be okay." She starts to protest but he knows time could be very short. He does something

he rarely does. "I'm sorry, Ruth." His use of her first name brings instant silence. "I have a fight to finish!" Without waiting for an answer, he cuts the channel off.

Now that he is here, there is no indecision, no hesitation. He is Curtis; formerly, to be sure, but still Borg. "T' Sket, get a lock on Ambassador Kathvaj and the sehlat pet of the Deltan ambassador. Beam the animal to the warbird with Alanya, beam Kathvaj to my side. The rest of the ambassadors aboard the station we leave there for the time being."

T' Sket replies, "Sir, we have a lock on both."

Curtis initiates ship-to-ship. "Now, Alanya."

"Understood." On the warbird, Alanya nods to a Romulan who is stupidly staring at her with something more than love in his eyes; she refuses to contemplate what. "Sub-commander, drop shields on my mark for THREE SECONDS ONLY." On ship-to-ship, "Ready." Her eyes are ice as she turns back to the Romulan. "Mark!"

"They are being beamed to your specified locations," the former Vulcan continues.

The sensors indicate someone is beaming to the medical deck, but unexpectedly, there is a humming sparkle on the Bridge. Before the figure can completely materialize, there are a dozen disruptors and one or two phasers pointed at the being.

"Shields up!" comes from the Romulan at Tactical just as Naya-Mirith gives an unearthly shriek of joy and bounds to Alanya. Seeing the weapons drawn, she immediately goes into protect mode. She becomes a snarling demon, ready to attack.

"Naya??! No, Naya, no! Stop! Everyone, weapons away. Naya-Mirith, stop now. Ship to ship. Curtis of Borg, I thank you. We will stand by. Off. Commander, I'll be in Sickbay. I must see how Skotek is." Signaling Naya to come with her, she leaves the Bridge.

Curtis pulls his phaser and, adjusting it to stun, he turns to Kathvaj who has just materialized beside him, and calmly fires, knocking the Klingon to his knees "Sorry, old friend. Our sensors picked up the signature of Founders aboard the station. I had to be sure. You understand, don't you?"

Kathvaj nods but as he stands up, he looks Curtis in the eye and says, "Yes, I do but I will return the favor someday." The Klingon growls softly. What just happened—the fact that Curtis feels he must check the identity of his friend in such an extreme way – gives Kathvaj all the more reason to want to turn back and challenge this new “enhanced” Weyoun.

Curtis knows the Klingon is joking but he is just as sure that when things get back to normal, he will be in for some heavy-duty, Klingon-style pranks. "Mr. Dorvan, open a channel to Unity. I want to have a word with this Weyoun. Mr. Starcher, while I am occupying the pirate on the station, prepare to open a transwarp conduit, target the station with a cutting beam, and have a tractor beam standing by. On my mark, I want the conduit opened and the tractor beam on Unity. I want to pull that station into the conduit with us and drag it to the Delta Quadrant. We can drop it there." Curtis turns to Kathvaj and asks, "What do you think of the idea?"

Kathvaj nods in approval. He is about to add the comment about how useful the Vorta's enhancements would be against this ploy or a good *bat'leth* when T' Sket announces, "Sir, communications are open."

"Weyoun, this is Curtis of Borg. I see your intentions are hostile. Stop immediately and we will have mercy on you and you crew."

Weyoun's response is almost predictable. "Curtis of *Borg*, is it? I am the New Governor of this region. You will address me as such. Your presence here is nothing more than an annoyance to me. I suggest you follow the Rapier away from here with all the other little annoyances or I shall have no other choice than to take you and your 'crew'" –he sneers the word– "captive for use at a later date. How do the Borg say it?– resistance is futile?" With his last statement, Weyoun lets out a guttural laugh that sends a chill down Curtis's spine

"As you see, Weyoun, I am no longer full Borg, and resistance is not futile. My crew and myself are proof enough of that! Weyoun, do not underestimate me. I have no intention of doing anything you suggest." He turns to the former Human. "Mr. Starcher, the cutting beam now." Instantly, the beam powers on, aimed at the bottom of the station and slowly moving upward.

"What are you doing?" Weyoun asks angrily.

"You were partially right, *Governor*," Curtis sneers the word exactly as the Vorta had said *crew*. "In this instance, resistance is futile." He turns to the former Human again. "Mr. Starcher, mark two NOW!" The cutting beam shuts down as fast as it had started, and the second part of Curtis's plan starts to come to life.

"Curtis, your attack is–" Weyoun is cut off in mid-sentence by a gigantic movement of the station.

"Sir, the transwarp conduit is open and we are at full power on both tractor beam and engines."

Curtis considers a moment, then orders a second tractor beam on it. He wants to be sure Weyoun can't break away.

Slowly at first, so slowly, the station begins to move toward the open conduit.

Alanya and Naya-Mirith make their way to Sickbay. They ask the medtech where Skotek is. He leads her over to the bed where Skotek now isn't.

Surprised by his absence, Alanya asks, "Where is he?"

"He was just here!" says the medtech, more surprised than she is.

Alanya says, "He is not now. Where could he go?"

They quickly look through the Sickbay but find no sign of him. "Computer, locate Ambassador Skotek."

A moment passes, then the mechanical voice announces, "Ambassador Skotek is not on this vessel."

It suddenly becomes real: SKOTEK IS MISSING AND MAYBE DEAD.

"Weyoun, I must tell the ambassadors to get out of here," Ambassador Green says.

"Very well," the Vorta agrees after a moment. "Computer, send the following message to *only* the ambassadors' ships around Unity Station."

Ambassador Green regrets she has to tell the ambassadors to leave but it is the only way to save themselves, and the ambassadors aboard the station. "Attention, all Ambassadors! Evacuate this space now. There is nothing more you can do here. Weyoun has explained the situation and I see no other option but to leave. We will rendezvous on Betazed. DO NOT SECOND-GUESS ME AND TRY SOMETHING ELSE. IF YOU VALUE YOUR LIVES, BE SOMEWHERE ELSE."

With a heavy voice she says, "Done. Let's leave, Weyoun."

"We will. When I'm ready."

The Breen has stepped back, stands impassively nearby. Ruth smiles sadly at the Bajoran. "Sorry, Mr. Krim. You seem to have come aboard at the wrong time. We're having a bit of a problem at the moment. We just have to trust that Weyoun knows what he's doing."

"I'm sure he does." Krim looks pointedly at the view screen now filled with the starfield outside, then at the Vorta on the bridge. "But my question is: which one?" He faces the Betazoid. "How do we know both Weyouns aren't working together?"

"You don't," comes stiffly from Weyoun.

Krim continues. "In a battle, the ability to think like your enemy is an advantage, so if this Weyoun really wants to help, he should tell us what he would do next if he were on the station. Then we can do something that he won't expect like double back."

Weyoun nearly laughs. "Double back? That's one of the first things I would expect. But unfortunately, though he looks like me, we do not think alike. Up to a point, our memories are the same. But unless we share exactly the same lives and experiences, our thoughts diverge and develop in their own ways. I can tell you what *I* would do, what he *may* do, but any good tactician could do the same. I cannot tell you what he *will* do. So forgive me, Bajoran, but you're on your own!"

Seething, Krim glances at Ruth but her expression stops his angry comment cold. (There must be others,) she thinks. (Where are they? Some of them should be here by now.).

With a shake of her head, she pushes that aside for now. "Weyoun, I did as you asked and ordered the other ambassadors to meet us at Betazed. Why will you not tell me the reasoning in not striking the station right away?" she asks.

"All in good time. Your ambassadors have not even shown up here yet. I do hope they did not have trouble leaving." Weyoun says. With that, he returns to the console on the bridge that has captured his attention since they left Unity Station.

On Unity station, Cardassian Ambassador Dakar wakes. He stretches leisurely, thinks, (Oh, my! This cryo chamber gives you such restful sleeps. Just wish I could translate the settings a bit more and make it one week instead of one month.)

At that moment, the computer repeats its warning: "Red Alert! Evacuate Station! All Unity personnel—station evacuation in progress!"

(What?!) "What?! Computer, station status. What's this about Red Alert and evacuation in progress?"

The computer answers with its artificial voice, "Evacuation has been manually initiated by a member of the Command Staff. Please evacuate according to your designated instructions."

"I do say. Things really do change a lot when you are taking a nap around here. But, computer, that doesn't answer the question of why."

"Unauthorized intruders have infiltrated Unity. Please evacuate according to—" "Okay," Dakar interrupts. "That part I got."

Meanwhile in the turbolift, Quirk is holding his ears as Ambassador Browne sings "I'll Take You Home Again, Kathleen" for what has to be the 500th time. "I can't stand it anymore!" the Ferengi suddenly yells. "I have to do it!" His hands start for Browne's throat.

But just then, there is a jerk and the lift drops down a little more. The lights flicker briefly and barely stay on...but they do! Immediately, Quirk sees his chance to escape more torture.

"Okay, this should heal you," the EMH says as he treats Browne, picking up right where he was when he disappeared. Quirk looks at the EMH in amazement because the Doctor is hardly there. He can see right through its ghostly form. The EMH notices Quirk's stare and looks at himself. "How strange...I seem to be the one requiring medical attention," he says amused.

Quirk is nearly jumping up and down in an effort to get words out before the EMH disappears again. So fast that it nearly sounds like one word, he says, "EMH, release the Level 3 force field now—right now! Before I have to kill him!" There is another jerk, the lights flicker, and the EMH begins to fade "NOW!" Quirk roars in desperation, "Or I swear by all the latinum on Ferenginar that the first chance I get, I will delete your program permanently!"

"Computer, shut down—".....(flicker).... "—the Level 3 force field by my voice print." The EMH barely gets the words out but still manages to sniff haughtily at Quirk as it disappears.

"Finally! I need a drink myself after this," Quirk says.

"Bridge! Sweep the area with every sensor you have! Skotek is missing!"

"He can't be--"

"How much of your life would you like to bet he can't be?" Alanya asks quietly. Naya, beside her, is pacing and growling softly.

Several seconds later, the Romulan Commander reports no trace of Skotek, or any anomalous readings. "The only things within sensor range are things we already know about."

"Computer, what was Skotek's condition while he WAS on this biobed?"

"Ambassador Skotek did not appear to be alive. Readings were consistent with a being who had expired--"

Alanya breaks in. "Enough. One can appear to be many things that one is not. What were the readings of heart rate and blood pressure and respiration?"

The computer mechanically rattles off, "There were no readings in those areas."

(That is not what I had hoped to hear. If he were here, I could have done a mind-meld...but he is not. So I must get this crew to safety.) She touches the bed, says, "Some people will do anything to avoid a meeting. May you have fair winds and sunny skies wherever you are. Bridge, prepare to break orbit."

Realizing they are free to leave the turbolift, Browne abruptly cuts off his rendition. "I was just getting warmed up."

Quirk starts for the doors, barely stopping in time when they don't open. "*NOW* what?!" He wants to pound on the doors and yell, "Let me out!", but he eyes Browne and seriously considers pounding on him instead.

Browne hopes the problem with the doors is nothing serious. He, too, wants to get out of here; his flask has been empty for too long. "Hey Quirk, have any of those isolinear chips on you?"

"Now why would I be carrying isolinear chips?"

"You got lots of pockets in that coat. Check, would you? With your inventiveness and my brain, we should be able to do something. Maybe we can override this thing."

Quirk rummages through his pockets while Michael scratches his head in thought and mumbles, "Now where did he say that emergency tool kit—ah! I remember!" He finds lines on the wall that are all but unnoticeable, triumphantly pushes just so, and grins at Quirk when a small panel slides up. He reaches in. "One spanner, coming up. Have you found any isolinear chips yet?"

"Don't have any."

"Oh, well. I may be able to get the access panel open with this." He works for a few minutes, mumbling. Finally, he says, "Now if I can reach the circuit, I should get the escape hatch open—" As he speaks, the hatch slides back and reveals an opening just large enough for them to fit through.

Quirk climbs out first, followed by Browne. At that moment, the computer repeats the evacuation order.

Browne exclaims, "What? Leave?! But we just got out of the turbolift. We can't leave now. Not without making a stand, I don't. Computer, enable Browne Alpha One Two Niner." He grins at Quirk. "That'll show 'em! It's a little program I installed...just in case. It turns Unity into a defense station. Now it can hold its own, take on anything, including all foreign and domestic starships—"

"Browne Alpha One Two Niner has been shut down," the computer informs them.

"*HOW?!*" Browne yells, astonished.

"The command was overridden by Security Chief Skotek's program 'Got You, Browne'," the computer answers.

"Skotek, why do you always derail my programs?!" Browne howls.

The computer replies to the comment as commanded, in Skotek's voice, "Got you, Browne. I am the chief of security, not you."

"Control freak!" Browne yells as he turns away.

"Let's work together," Quirk suggests, "and try to find a way out of here. Maybe we can get a drink at my establishment and get our thoughts together. We aren't far away. We should be able to make it there safely through the lift shaft." Browne agrees and they start climbing.

As Dragonfly tries to pull himself up to the next floor, the turbolift abruptly falls a couple of meters. "What is going to happen next? I thought you said we aren't far away."

"If you weren't so clumsy, Mr. Browne, we would be out of this shaft and there already." Quirk resumes climbing, wonders if they'll be able to open the turboshaft doors. He's ready to do it any way necessary, including using Browne to pry them open, and hopes they don't run into any of the enemy. Glancing at Browne, he hopes not to have to shoot his overconfident companion. (Oops—Marine killed by friendly fire,) Quirk thinks for a moment. And tempting though the idea is after what he has just been through, (No, I can't do that.) He sighs, says to Michael, "Let's get going then, Marine!"

They get the shaft doors open with little trouble. More cautious now, going down a corridor of the station, Quirk notices several doors that are left open. "What's this? Let's take a look, Mr. Browne."

Looking into the what seem to be the quarters of a Gorn, Quirk notices the bodies of a Gorn, and an Andorian.

"Mr. Browne, look at this. Seems like the Jem'Hadar have been here. Let's get moving and stay sober enough to kill the enemy if need be."

But he needn't have said anything. Seeing the bodies sobers Michael very fast.

The Valdore-class warbird heads out of the system, Alanya sitting in the command chair. The viewscreen shows the other three warbirds, two D'Deridex-class and one D'Kazanek-class in perfect formation behind them. The doors of the turbolift hiss open and Sub-commander Taulek steps onto the Bridge, coming to stand at attention before Alanya.

"Where is he?" she queries softly.

"Commander Tr'Kitanriis is dead, Ambassador," Taulek returns. "We will search for him ourselves. However, as per our standing orders, I have contacted one of the other Ambassadorial vessels. They will rendezvous with us shortly, and you can transport over. We will remain until you are safe aboard before leaving."

Alanya, preoccupied with the news of Skotek's death and subsequent disappearance, doesn't really hear him until he has almost finished. "Wait a minute, what?"

"Commander Tr'Kitanriis has given us explicit orders on what to do upon his death, or in the event of the Station's loss. We are transferring you to one of the other Ambassadorial vessels, then we will perform that duty."

"And your duty?" asks Alanya.

"We will attack the enemy."

Alanya looks at him, her anger rising. "That is madness. Four warships against a battlestation, an unknown enemy, another group as dangerous as the first, and a copy-Weyoun? If we wait, maybe the Dominion and the other attackers will kill each other."

"Our orders are explicit. We will find Commander Tr'Kitanriis' body, take it to his chosen place and bury him, then we will follow through on our orders as directed," remarks Taulek, as damnably calm as any Vulcan.

"Ambassador Green ordered us to retreat and regroup," snaps Alanya. "We are going to Betazed."

"Ambassador Green has no authority over us now. We always answered only to Commander Skotek. His loyalty was to her, ours is to him. And as for us being outnumbered..." Taulek turns and motions to the viewscreen. Alanya's breath catches.

There are nearly twenty vessels following them now: Romulan destroyers,

Klingon K'Vort cruisers, Federation Excelsior classes, even a few warships that could only be built along Vulcan designs. She sinks back into the command chair, dazed by the sight. "How...?"

"We are for Unification. Some along both sides want that. IF we can win, it will be a glorious victory, as our Klingon colleagues might say, though they're in it for a good fight more than any political reasons. As for the Federation ships, most of them are ours, too, sold off by Starfleet as being outdated, and refitted by us. Cloaks, disruptors, and a few things that are classified inside them make them much more powerful than they're rated...even if we don't win, we will weaken the opposition.

"But for now, it's goodbye. Give our regards to the others." Alanya's eyes widen as she feels the familiar tingle of a transporter beam, and then she is in the medical bay of a Federation starship....apparently a real one as she looks at the uniforms of the medical staff.

Naya is there as well, snarling at the unexpected change in location and the unfamiliar smells. Alanya barely has enough time to call the sehlat over to her before it begins a bloodbath.

Scratching Naya's ears, Alanya looks out the doorway in the direction of the bridge. "Fools..." she whispers.

Taulek takes the commander's chair, nodding to himself he turns slightly to look at the officer behind him. "Very well done, Lieutenant."

Lieutenant V'ren smiles slightly and touches a switch on the science board; immediately, the other ships disappear—holograms. Taulek motions to his Weapons Officer and their own ship immediately cloaks. To the ship to which Alanya has been beamed, it would appear that they have all cloaked.

"Helm, bring us around. I want a record of all transport activity and a scan for Commander Skotek's body. We will need to find it soon."

"What of our mission, Sub-Commander?" asks V'ren. "If they manage a trace on us, they will see we are not going back to the station at all."

"It doesn't matter, we have our orders, whether they make sense or not. We will approach the station in due time, just not now. As stated, maybe the intruders and the Dominion forces have annihilated each other, but Commander Skotek's defenses won't be a problem to us." Taulek pats a small device he had kept secreted the whole time Alanya was on board. He is glad she was too preoccupied with the fight to notice his own mental defenses were up. Sometimes, the movement to reunite with the Vulcans became useful for more than its surface reasons.

So the search for the Romulan begins.

## Chapter 6 It Can't Get Much Worse

(Deltan Ambassador's Log: Skotek is missing and according to the warbird's medical scanners, dead. I was going to try a mind-meld to see if he might have been locked deep inside his mind but by the time I got there, his body had vanished. The Romulans scoured the vicinity but found no trace of him. I felt it my duty to get them to safety as Ambassador Green commanded and ordered them to Betazed. However, en route, Sub-Commander Taulek reported that they believe Skotek dead as well and intend to search for his body. He apparently gave them last orders in the event of his death which they are obligated to follow. I cannot fault them for their loyalty. But Skotek's last orders did not include a trip to Betazed. They have beamed me and Naya to a nearby Federation ship, cloaked, and where they are now, only they know.

(Curtis of Borg's attempt to dispose of the intruders by dragging the station to the Delta Quadrant failed. He had to give up the idea when the tractor beams began to cause structural damage to Unity. The Sphere's medical officer never had a chance to look at Skotek. Whatever plan he had to help the ambassador has failed as well. It seems there is little good news.) She pauses in her mental assessment of the situation.

(Something nags at me, though...something doesn't feel quite right... But I must leave that for another time. End log entry.)

Alanya spends a moment calming the sehlat. The med techs aren't crazy; they have scattered out of reach. Naya grumpily settles but stands in front of Alanya. She doesn't like all this transporting around. It's confusing to have so many strange scents and visuals bombarding her without warning. The next one who tries it...!

Alanya hits the intercom. "Bridge."

The filtered voice answers almost immediately. "Bridge here. Who is this?"

"Ambassador Alanya. I'm in your Sickbay at the moment. Send out a hail for the ship of Curtis of Borg."

"Borg??"

"The ambassador's ship was in the area a short time ago. I need him to pick me up. And I do not have time to argue. Also, be warned that I am Deltan." She could already see the effects on the medical staff. Sehlat or not...

She hears, " Oh, sh--" just as she cuts off the intercom. Some days...

"Curtis, we are receiving a hail from the Romulan vessel. They are requesting that we pick up Alanya for transport to Betazed."

"Mr. T'Sket, turn us around and let's go pick her up. Mr. K'Teliv, as soon as the ambassador and her pet have beamed aboard, raise the shields," Curtis orders.

"There are too many cloaked vessels in the area and I don't want to take a hit from one of them. Any word on why the Romulan ship has not started to Betazed?"

T'Sket watches the panel in front of him. "They are conducting a sweep of the area in an attempt to locate Skotek."

"They haven't found him yet?" He knows the answer. If they had, they would not be looking.

"No, Curtis. They have not."

"Scan all ships in range for any sign of Skotek."

"Yes, Curtis," T'Sket answers and turns to follow his orders.

Curtis stares at the view screen for a few moments; then, as it begins to sink in that Skotek may indeed be dead, slowly, as if in shock, he moves to his chair and sits down. Skotek dead? He feels a deep sadness for the possibility. Everything he and Kathvaj did to Skotek on the station was in fun. He knows it gave Skotek headaches, but he also knows the Romulan had his fun with them as well. And in the end, all their games had resulted in modifications to the security systems. "But it wasn't enough," he murmurs. "Not enough to keep out the invaders or—or to save Skotek."

His attention is diverted when the doors open and Bretacha strides onto the Bridge. He goes directly to Curtis to report. "Bretacha, did you see Skotek at all?"

"No, Curtis. I barely made it to the warbird. I saw Skotek being beamed out, then found myself back here."

"Did you see anything that might give us a clue to who took him?"

The former Klingon shakes his head. "I didn't. It was too late to see even enough of the transporter signature to identify who it belonged to."

Curtis sighs. "Well, you tried. Thank you for that."

"But if we can get to him within the next few hours, Curtis, we can still revive him," Bretacha adds.

"You're sure?" Curtis feels a tiny bit of hope. Bretacha nods emphatically once. "Mr. T'Sket, maximum speed back to the station. We will pick up Alanya and help the Romulans search for Skotek."

He senses the Sphere's acceleration. (I know he has to be somewhere close to the station,) Curtis thinks. (When we tried to pull it into the transwarp conduit, we were able to pull Unity only a few hundred meters before we had to release it.)

Minutes later, when the Sphere reaches transporter range, Alanya calls with new information. "This is Ambassador Alanya hailing Curtis of Borg. I am now on the Federation vessel, not the warbird. They beamed me and Naya here before they called you, then cloaked." Alanya's voice is stiff, tightly controlled. "If you would be so kind as to beam us aboard, we can rendezvous with the others at Betazed." (The ones who got out, that is), she thinks. "Quirk and Michael were still on Unity the last I heard but looking for a way off. There is little chance we can rescue them now. They are smart enough to survive until we return, though." (If they don't kill each other first.) "I await your arrival. Alanya out."

"Open hailing frequencies...Federation vessel, this is Curtis of Borg. We have come to take Ambassador Alanya to Betazed. Lower your shields so we can transport her over."

She is waiting for them; in mere seconds, Curtis watches her materialize on the Bridge with the sehlat beside her. He steps toward the pair to greet them, only to have the sehlat bare her fangs, flatten her ears, and emit a low rumbling growl. This is just too much! *Another* shipload of new scents and strange beings! Alanya tries to calm her. "Naya-Mirith, this is Curtis. Please stop threatening him," she says gently. "You know his scent. It's on the station." To the Borg who stands a few feet away, she offers an apology. "I'm sorry, Curtis. She isn't used to being transported so much in a few hours."

"I quite understand. She's just confused. She doesn't mean anything by it. Do you, Naya?" He looks straight into the eyes of the beast. "Remember me, Naya. Here," he says, offering his hand, "this will help."

She sniffs, recognizes his scent and relaxes a little but stays where she is—right in front of Alanya, because she doesn't know all those others.

"Oh," Curtis sees where she's looking. "That's my crew and they won't harm you or Alanya. I give you my word."

The sehlat senses no deception and finally stops her defensive posturing.

Curtis finishes his greeting. "We will try to make your stay as comfortable as possible. Should you need anything, let us know."

"My thanks, but all I need are quiet quarters. There is something I must do, and Naya needs time to rest on one place."

One of the crew is asked to show her to quarters. As soon as she leaves the Bridge, T'Sket tells Curtis what he has expected to hear all along, that there is no sign of Skotek in the area. Deciding that any more time spent searching would be pointless, Curtis gives the order to set course for Betazed at fastest possible speed. "Mr. Starcher, send a message to Betazed that we are on our way with Alanya and Kathvaj on board. Include our estimated arrival time. Send the same message to the Klingon ship."

Kathvaj stops pacing long enough to thank his Borg friend. He wants more than anything to go back to the station, to tear Weyoun apart with his bare hands. Though every sense is screaming for it, he remembers that so-difficult lesson from long ago. "Patience," he tells himself. And keeps repeating it as he paces once more.

Quirk and Brown enter the bar through one of many secret entrances. They keep the lights off—a real feat in itself since the computer automatically turns them on when sensors detect movement—and Quirk pours drinks for both. Much as he dislikes it, the Ferengi insists they drink synthehol because the effects can be dissipated by merely thinking them away.

They sit on the floor behind the bar, and Browne asks the computer for the current status of the station. Most of it is no surprise, but one piece of information shocks both. When Browne asks for a repeat, the computer restates, "Ambassador Skotek was caught in the explosive decompression and pulled out of the station into space. Unless assistance was available within five minutes, Ambassador Skotek must be presumed dead."

If it says anything more, the Human and the Ferengi do not hear. "Dead?" Browne asks.

"Skotek? Not—computer, lights off!!—Skotek. Maybe someone saw him and picked him up."

"Sure! That's it!" Browne sounds falsely cheerful even to himself. "He had someone waiting, just in case."

"Yeah," Quirk agrees. "He's always ready for anything..." But both know that this time, he most likely wasn't ready for that.

They decide it's time to get out while they still can. They head for a turbolift but as usual, neither is paying much attention to the other. Browne makes a comment to Quirk, gets no answer, and discovers the Ferengi is no longer there. "Quirk!" he calls in a voice so soft, he may as well save it. (Where did he go? He never said he wanted to split up.) Browne automatically pulls his flask from a pocket. This discovery is even worse: he forgot to refill it at the bar. He stares at it blackly for a moment; then, grumbling, shoves it back in the pocket and begins a stealthy creep down a corridor toward a lift.

Quirk is heading almost parallel to Browne, through the guest quarters section. He passes several, most of them empty and silent, some not empty but still silent, the doors gaping open like astonished mouths. Quirk enters the occupied ones to see if anyone needs his help but it's too late. He finds the bodies of several non-Human species. He taps his comm badge, hoping Browne isn't where it will be overheard. "Quirk to Browne."

"Browne here."

"I have found evidence that the Jem'Hadar are still on board. Do you agree?"

"Yes. I believe you're right."

"Watch yourself, will you? And keep out of my establishment unless you're going to pay your bill!" He grins. (Had to say that so he won't know I'm concerned for his safety.)

"That figures. All you're worried about is getting your latinum." But Michael knows otherwise. "I've come across four dead Jem'Hadar. One has been cut literally in half. Looks like it was done with a *bat'leth*, so we know Kathvaj was around."

"Hope he got off the station."

"Me, too. Hey, there's something wrong with these dead Jem'Hadar," Browne says, examining one, then all of the bodies. "Or maybe 'different' is a better word—the tubes."

"What about them?"

"They're gone," he mumbles to himself, then repeats, "They're gone. There are no feeder tubes for the ketricel white. Have you seen *that*—!" He ducks just in time to avoid being decapitated. Moving so fast, he's a blur, he swivels and lands a mighty blow to the Jem'Hadar soldier's chest. Off-balance, the soldier stumbles backward into a plasma junction terminal and nearly disintegrates. Browne takes a moment to calm his breathing before answering Quirk's frantic shouts. "And about me paying—don't bet on it!" He grins when he hears Quirk sputtering, then continues down the corridor.

On the Sphere: her quarters are dark but for the tiny flame of a lamp lighting her face, reflecting in her dark eyes. She sits on a mat on the floor, the lamp on a short metal pedestal. She no longer sees it, though; nor does she hear the sehlat's quiet breathing. Her own breathing is nearly nothing.

She is reaching deep inside to the place where she has stored that moment when she touched the biobed Skotek had lain on so briefly.

Deltans live immersed in sensations from the moment of birth; it is as much a part of them as breathing. Vulcans don't deny the existence of emotions, but they choose to ignore or control them.

She is Vulcan, and she is Deltan, two near-opposites. Her father's people taught her knowledge of her mind's abilities, gave her the training and discipline to use them. From her mother's people, she learned the value and power of her senses and emotions. And from herself, she learned to use them together.

Her discovery of this ability was quite accidental, done when she was trying to use one half to temper the other. Since that time, she has deliberately used it, refining and strengthening it until she can, at will—

(Feel it again...Become my fingertips and feel it, *know* what each one felt...I seek a heartbeat...the smallest flutter of a cell...I seek warmth...) She examines each fragment until, an unknown time later, she knows she has found— (Nothing. Is he truly gone, then? He was so cold...) At last, there is a spark of hope. (Is it possible that cold saved him? He was trained in some mental disciplines on Vulcan. Is he dead? Or is he still alive?)

There was no way to know for certain without his body. She ends the ritual slowly, then tries to rest until they reach Betazed.

Quirk has his share of run-ins with Jem'Hadar. He takes out several, then finds one holding the limp body of a member of the station's support staff in the air, sneering over how easy Humans are to kill. The soldier throws the staffer's body on the floor, then turns when he hears a voice behind him. "How about a Ferengi?" Quirk snarls and fires the phaser on the setting he likes to call "no mess to clean up." And there isn't. "Nothing left but a few stray molecules," he says with grim satisfaction as he checks the staffer. Unfortunately, the man is dead. "The only thing I can do for you I just did." He knows he must go on, and does.

Browne, meanwhile, is confused. He is seeing areas that he has never seen on Unity before. He comes to a split corridor (But there aren't any!), turns left, and runs into a wall. A wall he recognizes. "Oh, great! Just great! What else can go wrong? I'm in a holosuite! *QUIRK!!*"

"What now?!"

"I'm stuck in your holosuite! Turn it off!"

"When did you get—"

"I don't know!"

"How long have you—"

"I DON'T KNOW! Shut it down!"

Quirk tries but his voice commands are ignored. He tells Michael that it won't work. "I'll have to come there, try the manual override."

"Fine. Just do it, please?" The Genetically Enhanced Human slips into an empty room to wait. (Hard to tell how long it will take him to get here,) he thinks gloomily. (If I could only get my hands on Weyoun!!) He is shocked when the room changes. He is now in the office of the self-proclaimed Governor of the station. (Well, maybe this won't be so dull after all!)

When Quirk arrives and finally manages to shut down the holosuite, he is relieved to see an uproariously laughing Browne stagger out. Then he sees a few bruises and blood on the Hew-mon. "Browne? Are you all right? What happened? You're bleeding!"

"Yeah. I let him get in a couple—okay, he got lucky, landed a couple punches. But I gotta tell ya, Quirk," he starts laughing all over again, "if that's the best a Vorta can do in a fight, it's no wonder they made the Jem'Hadar!"

"Fight? Vorta? What Vorta?! What are you talking about?!"

"I don't know how it happened. I wished I could get my hands on Weyoun and all of a sudden, there he was." He sighs, wipes blood from a corner of his mouth. "Too bad it wasn't the real thing."

"Well, I have an idea that I think you'll like. Instead of us trying to leave, why don't we stay here, re-open my establishment? We may be able to get valuable intel for the others. I'm sure they'll find a way to contact us. We can be more help if we stay here. It'll be dangerous but we can do it."

"But won't they suspect we're up to something?"

"All they'll see is a Ferengi more interested in latinum than loyalty, and a drunk Hew-mon. And that's all they'll see—we'll make sure of that."

Browne considers it for a moment. "Quirk, I like it. When do we start? How do we start? How about with a drink?"

"We need to get the word out that I'm open for business again. Think you could manage that?"

"No problem." Browne's face takes on a sly smirk. "How about if we invite your girlfriend?"

Quirk knows where he's heading, and comes out with his own sly remark. "You know very well Alanya isn't here."

"And *you* know Alanya isn't *your* girlfriend. I was talking about Eris3 Vorta."

They head back toward Quirk's bar. "If you're going to be insulting, Browne, I'll make you pay for your drinks—starting with the *first* one which you *still* owe me for..."

Eris3 paces impatiently. "Where is that Jem'Hadar solider? He's been gone too long. He should have been back long ago. Why is the alarm still on?" She opens the door but when she tries to leave, she hits a force field. "What is this?! Skotek!" She strides back to the comm unit. "Skotek? What is the meaning of this? Skotek!! Computer, patch me into the Rapier—computer?!" There is no answer. "Wonderful. The computer is offline and I have a force field around my door. There must be another way out of here, some way past it." Just then, there is a surge that brightens the lights. With an audible crackle, the force field goes down. "Finally! I can find out what is going on!"

She heads for the command center, moving cautiously, expecting at any moment that one of Skotek's security programs will kick in. But they don't and she becomes more careful as she gets closer to her destination. When she gets to Skotek's office, she decides to stop there first. She may get some answers from him.

The Romulan isn't there, however, and surprisingly, the office isn't locked. "This is just too easy, even for him," Eris says. "What's he up to?" She steps to the security console and hits the monitor button.

A familiar face appears on the screen, but at the same time, it is different. "I have been expecting you. So nice you could join me," Weyoun says.

Eris looks up to see Jem'Hadar at the doorway, but she notices they do not have tubes for the white. (What is going on?) she thinks.

"Bring her to me," Weyoun commands the Jem'Hadar as the security monitor goes blank and the red alert signal restarts.

Eris makes her way to the command center with the Jem'Hadar escort. She finds it curious that these Jem'Hadar have no tubes for the white, but why didn't she know about them? How is Weyoun controlling them without it? Their dependence on ketricel white and the Vortas' strict control of it is what has kept the much stronger species in line all these years. If these soldiers don't need it, why do they obey? Or perhaps they have found a different way to deliver it into their systems, one not visible. They enter the command center and her mouth drops open. This is Weyoun, but it is not Weyoun. He is much more muscular and larger than the last time she saw him.

Weyoun turns around and smiles. "Welcome, Eris. We are about to have some more fun."

Eris is taking in the everything going on. She does so with ease; in her position, she has learned to be aware of many things at once. Luckily, she is near a monitor that normally she would not be able to see with the eye sight of most of her race. She sees that it displays the inside of Quirk's Bar.

The monitor shows Quirk ending a holosuite program that Browne was in. Browne is laughing about something but since there is no sound, Eris cannot make out why.

Weyoun catches Eris looking at the display. "The Ferengi and Human are clueless. I just amaze myself at times," Weyoun says.

Eris looks at the tag of the camera: "Holosuite 3." The monitor next to her shows the same Quirk's Bar but without anyone in it. The tag of that monitor is "Quirk's Bar." Eris can tell by the real "Quirk's Bar" monitor that the holosuite is running. It suddenly becomes clear to her what Weyoun has done, and she stares in fascination.

"It will take them forever to get out of there, if they even can. Even if they do figure out they are in a holosuite, they will never realize they are in a holosuite *inside* a holosuite. Browne and the Ferengi will most likely kill each other long before they figure that out, and I can just sit back and watch them," Weyoun tells Eris. "Brilliant, don't you think? Now on to more important things."

As they approach Betazed, Curtis has an uneasy feeling about those left behind on Unity station. With the changes he made to its security, adding different Borg systems to enhance what was already in place, anyone trying to change the shield settings or the enhanced power systems could do themselves more harm than good. He knows the very two persons who would attempt such things are still on the station: Browne and Quirk. It would not be above those two to try something screwy, but he also knows they almost *have* to try something, whether because of the survival instinct, or trying to show off, or in Browne's case, the alcohol that would force them to do it.

The more he thinks about it, the more concerned he becomes. He wonders if Kathvaj may not be right in wanting to go back and fight.

Ships are in orbit around Betazed. Ships of many types and races, ships that under other circumstances would probably be at each other's throats, but not now. Now these ships, each loyal to a specific ambassador, are gathering to decide upon the fate of their home, and their comrades. It is an awe-inspiring sight, a fleet that could rival any sector battle group of any government, all united in a common cause: to see what Ambassador Green will decide.

Three ships decloak and enter a standard orbit over the lush world of Betazed. D'Deridex warbirds *Syriax* and *Steris*, and the D'Kazanak warbird *Sethor* have arrived. Ambassador Alanya notes their presence with outward calm but she is very curious. The commanders of the warbirds have declined to speak of their mission, or of the whereabouts of the Valdore-class warbird *Arasham*, that was with them. That ship would have been useful if an assault were decided on as the plan of action. Alanya can only guess that the *Arasham* is on a mission of its own, perhaps still on the same one while sending these three to help the ambassadors. It is a slight encouragement in a string of depressing situations.

The latest reports from Skotek's intelligence devices show the imposter (or real?) Ambassador Weyoun's Jem'Hadar forces have succeeded in wiping out the mysterious alien invaders and now have almost complete control of the station. These intelligence scanners were disconnected a short time later, many thought by the Jem'Hadar, but Alanya could swear she heard Browne's voice barking out a curse as the last monitor went out.

Sighing, Alanya dresses somberly in plain dark clothes, and gives Naya an affectionate scratch behind the ears before leaving her quarters. She won't take the sehlat with her; the tension and feelings in the meeting room will undoubtedly be quite high, and Naya-Mirith doesn't need to be in such an environment. The blood stains from the members would never come out of the carpets.

A hundred systems away, another ship is decloaking. Sub-Commander Taulek watches the screen intently. "There," he says, pointing to an apparently lifeless and totally unremarkable asteroid in the middle of nowhere. Absolutely nothing is here except that hunk of rock, nearly two kilometers across; it is hidden in the best place imaginable—in the open.

Taulek stands and nods to his navigator. Cloaking once more, the *Arasham* edges toward the asteroid. Just when it seems it must crash into it, the Romulan ship nudges through it, revealing a hologram hiding a cavernous tunnel into the floating detritus. Once inside, the *Arasham* is able to decloak without fear of discovery, the heavy ores in the asteroid masking it from any scans in the area.

Looking forward, Taulek breathes a sigh of wonder. Skotek had given him instructions on how to get here, but he had never thought it true. Yet, there is the tiny scoutship in which Skotek had escaped into the Federation, its gleaming wings still bearing disruptor scorchs, but that isn't what Taulek is staring at; it is the ship behind the scout that has his attention.

"Skotek did it..." Taulek whispers. "He built the *Phoenix*."

The ship, easily the size of a D'Deridex-class warbird, is sleeker. Four graceful wings curve away from the hull as from a beast of Romulan mythology, and a slender neck sports a command module forward of the main engineering deck. But the apparent fragility is misleading. As the *Arasham* pulls nearer, it's obvious that the *Phoenix* is easily three times larger than Taulek's ship.

If Skotek is right, and even half of the ship's capabilities match its creator's claims, then they might have a chance. Taulek will have to find a way to bring this to the Fleet's attention. He knows, however, that as powerful and wonderful as this ship may be, it still won't be a match for Weyoun's forces alone. They will need help.

Taulek marches back into the crew quarters and begins making his plans.

## Chapter 7 What Happened to Tigri?

At first, Tigri was disoriented. He remembered talking to Q on Unity, and Q offered to get him off the station. Tigri had agreed, thinking he could summon help, or return later when the invaders weren't expecting it. But instead, here he was, wherever this was. Tigri groaned. "I knew it! I knew I couldn't trust that--!" He realized he was in his Raider when the warning klaxon began screaming. Looking up at the viewscreen, he saw, big as life and coming straight at him... "A Federation ship?!" Automatically, he punched in an evasion code and as the Raider dropped down and spun around, he began thinking of ways to get Q for this. "Someday, Q," he grimaced as the ship shuddered from a hit. "If I get out of this alive--!"

It happened when he glanced away for just a moment. The *something*. He was never quite sure what had happened. One moment he was outrunning a Federation ship, the next-- He had an eerie sensation, felt the hairs on his neck stand. "What the--?"

Then the stars were wrong. Not just wrong, completely wrong, like he'd jumped to another galaxy. Then he noticed he was heading for a planet and, pushing everything else aside, he ran an atmosphere scan and found a place to set down.

His Raider had been hit a couple times by the weapons of the Federation ship. He didn't think there'd been any damage but he wanted to check while he was landed. Sensors showed 72 degrees F and sunny, clean fresh air, trees and grass. Nothing hostile, unless those two squirrel-type animals were irritated with his presence and threw sticks at him.

He opened the hatch, stepped outside and began walking around the ship to check for damage. A few scorch marks but nothing seemed to be broken...

Point in his face. A very sharp point, metal, attached to the shaft of an ARROW??! He froze without being told. He didn't even move to raise his hands.

Whoever was holding the arrow spoke words he didn't understand in a language he'd never heard before. Yet it was compelling, musical, flowing and beautiful. "I'm sorry," he took a chance and answered the speaker since his universal translator apparently wasn't so universal after all. "I don't understand what you're saying." He also chanced looking up at the being. And gaped in shock.

His first thought was, (They're Vulcans!) But if they were, it was the first time he'd ever seen a blond Vulcan; lots of them, in fact. All the ones he could see had pointed ears, though they lacked the upswept eyebrows. The blond hair was very long, but the beings he could see were male. (Unless this is a very weird place!)

Arrow-owner spoke to another who was next to him. "Another who speaks that odd version of Common."

"What do you want to do with him?" the other asked.

"What I *want* to do is beside the point. We have our orders. We take him to Nienna." He lowered the arrow a little, released the tension on the bowstring to half-drawn. "Come with us. I do not think I must say make no sudden moves."

Tigri slowly shook his head. "No, I got that from the arrow."

They led him to the other side of the clearing and into the trees. They seemed to be following a path but if they were, he couldn't see it. They didn't go far. They stopped at an extremely well-camouflaged tent. He was told to wait while Mr. Arrow went inside, ducking a bit to get under the raised flap. He was gone only a moment, returned and gestured for them to enter.

Tigri took a deep breath, prepared to meet their leader. Inside, they stopped a few feet from a small table. The leader was standing with his back to them, looking at what could have been a map. When he turned, Tigri found he was *not* prepared at all.

Their leader was female.

She was dressed as the males were, in a tunic, leggings, and boots of browns and greens. She had a quiver of arrows on her back, and he saw a bow in a holder rack behind the table, near enough for her to get it in a heartbeat but far enough away that he would never reach it if he was stupid enough to try. He wasn't. He also saw a knife sheath in her boots and one in her belt, and a sheathed sword and baldric on a trunk near the bow. This was one very dangerous lady.

They spoke again in that beautiful language. Then she shifted to English, what they had called Common. "I am told you speak this language?"

"Yes," he said cautiously.

"Where do you come from? And how did you get here?"

"Begging your pardon, Lady," he said and shrugged helplessly, "I cannot answer your questions because I don't know how I got here. I mean I can say I come from a different place but I'm sure you already guessed that. But as to how I got here, I have no idea. I don't even know where 'here' is!"

Then came one of the strangest sensations he'd ever felt. It was as if time simply stopped and was content to wait for her to start it again. Her dark eyes became the focus of his existence; for time unknown, he lived in them. Then--

She blinked, released him. "You do not." Not a question.

He shook his head, suddenly realizing what it could mean. "And if I don't know where I am, how can I know how to get back home?"

"Is that what you wish, to go home?"

"Yes, more than anything."

She turned to those who brought him here to her. "Dariand," and Mr. Arrow stepped forward, "please bring a chair for our visitor. Then you can go back to your duties."

"My first duty is to protect you, Nienna."

"I know," she smiled, and the prospect of being stuck here was not so bad after all. "And you do. But I am in no danger."

"As you wish." He gave a small bow, brought a camp chair, set it by the table, and as he left, shot a glance at Tigri that he had no doubt meant "Harm her and there is nowhere in ANY world that you can hide!"

She poured a cup--goblet, really--of a clear, golden liquid which smelled like flowers and tasted like cool water and rich earth and warm sunshine, invigorating and relaxing at the same time. After they sat down, she said, "My name, as you have heard, is Nienna."

"I'm Tigri K'Tel."

She repeated his name, an odd expression on her face as if she was trying to remember something about it.

"If I may ask a question, Nienna?"

She raised an eyebrow, nodded.

"I mean no disrespect or offense but--what are you?"

"You do not know?"

"No," he answered. "Where I come from, there are people similar to you but they all have black or dark brown hair. And their ears are like yours, except more upright. I know you aren't of them, of their kind, but I can't figure out what you are."

She laughed--silver rain on a blue lake--and said, "I am Elvish. An Elf. We are Woodland Elves, if you wish me to be more specific." Then she frowned slightly. "But there is something about your name--I have heard it before...but where?..." She had propped her booted feet up on a wooden box; they suddenly dropped to the ground as she sat up. "There was someone else who came here much as you did."

Tigri sat up himself, gripping a chair arm. Someone else? Someone who knew him?! "What?! Who?"

She went on. "He said, 'Tigri K'Tel is never going to believe this, not in a million years!' His name was--"

--Marcus Newton," Tigri finished.

"Yes! Do you know him?"

"Yes, I do. That was a couple of years ago. Marcus disappeared for almost two weeks. When he came back, just reappearing out of nowhere, he had this wild story about Elves and goblins. Not such a wild story after all, was it?"

"Then he did make it home."

"Yes," Tigri said, excited. "And if he did, I can if I can figure out how he did it."

"Ah! Now I understand why he left what he did. One moment." She called Dariand in and spoke to him in Elvish; he left and returned just minutes later with a flat leather pouch which she opened, and withdrew a sheet of parchment. "Marcus left this. 'For the next one; it will save him a lot of trouble,' he said."

Tigri took the page and as he read, his grin got bigger. "Yes! *YES!* It's all here! He wrote the coordinates, power settings, acceleration curves--everything!"

"You will be able to return to your world, then."

He froze. "My--"

"World. Yes, I know you are not just from another place but another world. It was not difficult to guess. And my people know there are other worlds."

There was nothing he could say to that so he didn't. He waited for her to go on.

"Will you leave immediately?"

Now that he could, he didn't want to. He wanted to stay, to learn of her people, her world. Her. (I want to know her. I may never have the chance again.) "If you wouldn't mind, I'd like to stay a while."

She shook her head, her tiny smile a sunburst. "I wouldn't mind at all. It seems that if we are going to have visitors from time to time, we should know what we can do of them."

She told him much, some he would recount in a private journal, and some he would keep to himself, for himself for his lifetime. She spoke of the battle with the goblins that Marcus had mentioned. "It is long over but we guard our borders as a precaution."

He explained about the Maquis, who they were and why they were. She nodded in understanding. Over an incredible meal, they laughed and chatted about everything...once he got over the shock of seeing her in that long gold and white gown, flowers twined in her long hair. She had left him breathless. She offered him a ride on an Elf horse, and he offered her a ride in his Raider. Both accepted the challenge; he with "But I am not very good on horseback," and she with "It truly flies as a dragon does?"

She answered his with "Our horses would never let you fall if they are charged by us to bear you."

He answered hers with "Sounds like a dragon, too!"

He ended up staying for what he thought was four days. It was actually twenty-three days. "Days I will never forget," he murmured as he set the coordinates to return home. One of the hardest things he ever did in his life was push the toggle forward that activated the navigation computer.

She had shown him things what were unbelievable, including a real dragon during their flight in the Raider. And an archery demonstration that would have made Robin Hood weep at the perfection and speed. And evenings in the forest, long talks in wood-land halls, simple meals and feasts, walks in the moonlight. She sang to a huge old tree and he could actually feel its slow, slow waking and sense of gratitude at her attention.

She sang to him one night, too. And they danced...

He cut off the memories. Not now. They were still too present, too real and painful. He was determined that one day, he would reverse the coordinates Marcus provided and see if that would take him back. One day soon.

"Computer, personal log entry. Stardate--stardate--I don't know. Computer, add the correct date. I can't think straight right now." (Wait till I see Q again!), he thought. (I was going to tear his head off for this but I think I'll thank him instead.) He grinned. (That will just kill him that something he did to be a mean joke turned out to be...incredible.) "I met an Elf, a Woodland Elf named Nienna Palantir..."

The closer he gets to Unity Station, the more cautious he is. Tigri has only just realized how long he was gone. What has happened while he was gone? Moments ago, he intercepted a message from Alanya telling him to meet them at Betazed. That alone tells him that it isn't good news. He gets as close as he dares, takes a quick scan of the area, and punches in the coordinates for Betazed.

To be continued...