

He tried to run from the boiling ochre lava flow, but it was useless. He was trapped. Only a few meters more and he would be reduced to a cinder. His death would be quick, but not before a seeming eternity of agony as his flesh melted away. To add insult to injury, the sun appeared from behind the clouds. Even without the lava nearby, the air temperature was at least 62° C. The landscape was now a ruined, charred tract of flaming trees and scorched carcasses of animals. He steeled himself as a tidal wave of lava roared toward him!

“S’Skotomz!” he yelled. “I commend my ‘Z’ahr-T’ae!” Then the lava engulfed him.

Baael V’ahst o’hrne Dagon awoke. He felt drained, not to mention broiling hot. Perspiration saturated his clothing. His head felt as if two men were pulling at his skull like a wishbone.

Baael did not understand why his head hurt so badly. He had imbibed only one glass of Efrosian Keth, a sangria like beverage, and in fact had barely sipped from that one glass. Why had the party been moved to sickbay? Where was the rest of the crew? How did...?

“SICKBAY?!?” Baael bolted from the biobed he had been laying on, ignoring the ferocious headache and vertigo that ensued. “WHY?!?” he bellowed. Who was responsible for this outrage? Then he realized what had happened. Someone had violated his mind! But who other than a Vulcan possessed that power?

Commodore Johnson had to be warned! A renegade Vulcan was on board, raping people’s minds! Baael staggered out the door, desperately seeking the turbolift.

Assistant chief medical officer Athena Arcadian was at work in her laboratory, analyzing data with the ‘help’ of her Tellarite researcher, K’hestri. Their argument about the cause of Baael’s condition had just become more heated as a shrill intercom whine interrupted them.

Commodore Eric Johnson’s voice sounded from the intercom. “Doctor Arcadian,” he began formally. “Status of your patient?”

“Stable, sir,” Arcadian responded carefully, assuming that he was still at least a little angry with her over the recent Deck 7 party and starbase skatball tournament fiascoes.

“Have you checked your records to see how his condition compares to his own and his races’ norms?” Johnson asked, showing off his own expertise – having been a medical officer himself before changing over to the command division. Bristling at this implied insult to her competence, Arcadian double-checked her records on Efrosian physiology before looking up the assistant chief science officer’s records specifically. What she found astonished her.

“Someone fouled up royally, Commodore!” she said with an angry tone. “There are no records for Baael in the system at all!”

Johnson, sitting in his command chair on the bridge, was irritated. Did Baael have an unknown enemy aboard the *Arcturus* determined to prevent him from being treated? Or was someone just plain incompetent?? K’hestri interrupted both of their thoughts.

“Look, Athena!” she cried, pointing at the data displayed on the computer screen. Arcadian read the sentence, which seemed to her like some vague form of the Latin language.

“What does it mean?” she asked.

“This is a legal term,” K’hestri explained. “I recognize how it is written because of some legal dealings of my own. It means the Efrosian refused to submit to all medical treatment!”

Arcadian was annoyed. “Great! Another Efrosian religion thing?” she asked, secretly curious about Baael and his mysterious Efrosian beliefs.

Just at that moment, the sickbay alarm sounded. Arcadian switched the screen in front of her to the ICU monitor and was shocked by what she did not see.

“Eric!” she screamed, momentarily forgetting protocol. “Baael’s gone from sickbay!”

“Gone? Where could he have...?” Johnson thought better of asking the question and instead activated the shipwide intercom on the arm of his chair. “Lieutenant Baael, this is Commodore Johnson. Get back to sickbay immediately!”

“There was no immediate response. Instead, one of the bridge turbolifts opened and revealed the missing patient.

Space, the Final Frontier...

These are the voyages of the starship *Arcturus*!

## Star Trek: Arcturus

### “Baaeled Out” By Michael S. Cohen

Baael started moving toward the Commodore, staggering past his immediate superior at the science console, Green Orion chief science officer Kira K’tal Tefallaran Smith.

“Captain!” he called, though weakly. “Saboteur!”

Baael suddenly stopped halfway between the turbolift and the center seat. Although Baael was no telepath, he did possess empathic awareness when confronted by strong emotions, and the emotions he was now sensing were very strong indeed, searing his damaged brain. He turned and looked at the chief science officer, from whom he sensed the emotion coming.

‘Ah!’ he thought to himself. ‘Commander Smith is sympathetic. If I could only express... Eh?’

No! This cannot be! What Baael was sensing was not sympathy for his plight, but guilt! He whirled to confront her. No mistake! She radiated regret, fear, even a hint of mockery! It was SHE who had done this to him, even going so far as to recruit a Deltan female to assist in her insult!

Baael’s sky blue eyes clouded and his hands shook slightly as he pointed a finger at her. “Not forget!” he hissed to the Orion, stalking back to the turbolift. Kira batted her eyelashes in her best “Who? Me?” manner, blissfully unaware of the true extent of Baael’s fury.

The entire episode had lasted all of thirteen seconds. As soon as the turbolift doors had snapped shut once again, Commodore Johnson slammed his fist on the intercom. “Major Copeland to the bridge!” he ordered.

Several minutes later, the diminutive but muscular Marine security chief entered the bridge. He literally marched to the commodore, froze in place and saluted smartly.

“Copeland, you’ll find Lieutenant Baael in his quarters. I want him taken to sickbay if you have to carry him there!!! Dismissed!”

“Sir, yes, sir!” the Marine replied, turning on his heel and exiting, if stiffly. Copeland, like many other department heads aboard the *Arcturus*, had recently suffered varying degrees of physical damage at the hands of a very clever and dangerous saboteur. How odd that Baael had just used that same word!

Copeland located Baael’s quarters and sounded the buzzer. The door opened by itself and the Major entered. As he passed the threshold, he felt a renewed appreciation for his dense 2-G body. The dimly lit room was terribly cold, ten times worse than the worst Tamarilian winter day.

“L... L... Lieutenant B... B... B... Baael?” He shivered, “I’m h... h... here to escort you t... t... to sickbay, Lieutenant.”

Baael rose stiffly from the bed, oblivious to the cold – perhaps even enjoying it! “Authority!” he demanded in his strange speech.

“Commodore Johnson..., Lieutenant,” the Marine replied, annoyed at Baael’s attitude but daunted by the Efrosian’s commanding presence and awesome appearance, not to mention the numbing cold and nearly pitch black room.

“Refuse?”

“My exact orders are to carry you there if I have to.” Coming from anyone else of Copeland’s stature, that statement would have been the ultimate joke. Copeland stood at 160 centimeters, while Bael was more than 200 centimeters in height. However, Bael noted Copeland’s powerful physique. The Marine could probably defeat him in combat. That humiliation Bael did not need!

Both men left the refrigerated quarters and walked toward Bael’s perceived doom. Copeland escorted the Efrosian to the door of sickbay, then promptly turned to leave! Bael knew that Copeland’s action was deliberate. He was strictly obeying the letter of Johnson’s order, aiding him!

“Why?” Bael inquired, puzzled.

Copeland turned back to look at the Efrosian and said, “My orders were only to... bring you to sickbay.”

“Why?”

Copeland smiled. “Hey, I can relate to a guy who hates doctors,” the Tamarilian said. “I’ve had my own unpleasant run-ins with them. See ya!”

“Will reciprocate,” Bael promised, profoundly grateful.

Copeland shrugged as he headed down the corridor and said, “Don’t worry about it.

\* \* \*

Thirty minutes later, Commodore Johnson contacted sickbay.

“Athena, what’s the latest on Bael?”

Arcadian was becoming irritated. Johnson knew as well as she did that Bael had left sickbay nearly an hour prior!

“Look, Eric, I’m sorry already!” she exploded. “Why are you trying to twist the knife?!?”

Now Johnson was becoming annoyed as well. Why was Arcadian being so obnoxious?

“Look,” he said diplomatically. “I know you have other jobs to do, but if you could just look him over for a few minutes!

“Well send him down and I will!” Arcadian remarked back.

“I did send him down!” Johnson countered.

“You know as well as I do he left!” Arcadian complained.

“I mean I sent him down to you a half hour ago!” Johnson explained.

“Bael hasn’t been in here since he walked out about an hour ago!”

“What?!” Johnson exclaimed, even more confused. “I ordered Bael to sickbay myself! I ordered Cope...!”

Johnson’s anger increased. Simultaneously, Arcadian realized what had happened.

“Copeland!” they both exclaimed.

Johnson punched the intercom once again, heading toward the turbolift as he said, “Kira, you have the conn.” A moment later he disappeared inside the turbolift.

Johnson seethed. Leave it to Copeland to pull another act of insubordination! The overgrown teenager was probably still throwing a tantrum about the intended expulsion of his beloved German shepherd pup from the Marine’s custody.

“I’ll deal with you later, Copeland,” Johnson vowed to himself as he exited the lift on the deck where the officer’s quarters were located. Striding down the corridor, he soon reached Lieutenant Bael’s quarters. Before simply barging in he paused and took several deep breaths. *‘I’ve got to handle Bael carefully,’* he thought. *‘He’s got all his culture’s religious beliefs on his mind. Besides, it’s not his fault that he’s a bit slow.’* Johnson strengthened his recent resolution to be more tolerant of Bael’s behavior. In their first encounter, Bael had treated Johnson as if the Commodore were the subordinate. Johnson had researched the Efrosian’s record and discovered Bael’s poor academy grades and difficulty in speaking Federation standard. Naturally, Johnson had come to the perfectly reasonable conclusion that Bael was mildly mentally challenged, accounting for his obvious shame and false bravado.

Johnson pressed the buzzer, and almost immediately the door opened. Like Copeland before him, Johnson began to shiver furiously as he entered the quarters. Unlike the Marine, he was merely human, and could not take the frigid temperature for very long.

“Come out here for a minute, Lieutenant,” he commanded instead, quickly exiting. The Efrosian complied. “I’ll make a deal with you,” Johnson began, using the simplest words possible. “The crew’s annual physicals are coming soon. If you’ll agree to go to sickbay at that time, I won’t push you to take a physical right now. At least not yet.”

Bael stared at Johnson. He then nodded once and the Commodore left.

Bael returned to his quarters. Once alone inside he closed his eyes. And he screamed.

“S’Skotomz! He knows!”

Fear gripped the Efrosian. Bael had never wanted to alienate his captain, but his faith forbade close ties to non-Efrosians. He understood this. His people had no right to contaminate another race with unhealthy L’ahr-T’a-R’han; ‘Soul ties.’ Unfortunately, Bael’s intellect was another matter.

The clever captain must somehow have realized that Bael had only been feigning his intellectual disability! Johnson had even been clever enough to have discovered why! The most important element to the Efrosian Way by far was the demand for purity. Each Efrosian was expected to excel in one – and only one – area of study. His own sect, for example, was comprised of the greatest Haderach - scientists.

True, all Efrosians were naturally adept navigators, but most simply never developed that skill. The same held true for the Warrior-Priest/Priestess’ superb medical skills. Where would society on Efros Delta be if everyone could do everything well?? Individuality would fade forever!

Unknown to his Hyperborean K’alama’ti, clansmen, Bael’s navigation and medical skills had been undiminished by time. Furthermore, he was strong, a puissant warrior, an expert philosopher, even an adequate technician. Blasphemy! Surely, he would be doomed if his sin were to be known!!!

He staggered to his mirror. Tearing his shirt, he examined the long scar on his chest. Oh, how he remembered the C’Hrys-S’cha, the ‘ice agony!’ At 16, he had been brought to the Altar, stripped and spread eagled. The sacred C’Hrys-N’alak-T’har, the ‘ice dagger,’ was scraped across his chest as a fire was built within the altar’s interior, warming young Bael terribly. The thin, ochre blood seeped from his veins. The priestess stopped at the center of his chest. She pushed the blade into his flesh until the tip could no longer be seen. Bael forced himself not to cry out. This pain would be nothing, he knew. It was when the Priestess’ chanting ceased and her index finger touched the dagger’s hilt that Bael tensed and closed his eyes.

The Priestess spoke once more. “To S’Skotomz be all honor. Let the elements speak his praise, for he is our example!”

The other Hyperborians shouted their agreement. “Let Bael V’Ahsst O’hrne’s heart be tested here. Let him begin his quest for Dagon! Let the Ice Blood strengthen him!”

She pressed a button on the dagger’s hilt. Bael felt the liquid nitrogen enter his body. Cold! So Cold! His joints burned. He saw the fire grow, enveloping him. His skin boiled away. His heart swelled to bursting. His screams lasted years.

Bael found himself back on the *Arcturus*; back in his quarters. He had survived C’Hrys-S’cha, but what would be done to him now??? Then he realized that someone was knocking on his door and probably had been for some time!

“Hold!” he called. Changing to a fresh crimson shirt and strapping on his hard won scared C’Hrys-N’alak-T’har, he opened the door. To his surprise, his former roommate was there.

Upon his arrival aboard the *Arcturus*, Bael had had to suffer the indignity of being assigned to share quarters with another member of the crew. Far worse, however – in what had to rank as the greatest blunder of the millennium – an inexperienced quartermaster named Pearson had assigned the arctic spawned Efrosian with, of all beings, a desert-raised Vulcan! And only because both were assigned to the sciences department. Not that science specialist Samuk was a bad sort. In fact, the two men had rarely seen each other since Samuk was assigned to the Beta shift while Bael preferred the late night Delta shift. On occasions when they had encountered each other, their

conversations were short, informative, and mutually beneficial. Further, unlike most others, Samuk never pried into Baael's religious beliefs.

Still, Baael had been relieved to be assigned his own quarters upon being made assistant chief science officer. While Samuk had been considerate, there were times that Baael had to endure searing heat! No doubt Samuk had been no less uncomfortable when the room's environment controls were set to frigid cold.

In deference to the cold sensitive Vulcan, Baael exited his quarters rather than inviting Samuk in. The two men stared at each other.

"You are considered a superlative sociologist," Samuk finally said to open the conversation. "Further, I know you to be an orderly and honorable being. I wish to entrust you with this thesis, contingent upon your oath never to reveal its contents."

Baael was shocked. This was highly unusual behavior! Of course, Samuk was no ordinary Vulcan. Though as intelligent as any, something in his demeanor reflected... emotion? However he had respected Samuk's privacy as Samuk had respected his own.

Baael drew his C'Hrys-N'alak-Thar. He cut his index finger, doing the same to a bemused Samuk. "Swear", was Baael's only reply. The Efrosian had not revealed his true intellect even to his roommate.

Satisfied, Samuk placed a data card in Baael's hand and left. Baael watched him walk down the corridor for a moment before returning to his room. He sat down at his computer station and placed the data card into the slot to access what it contained. He soon realized the reason for Samuk's secrecy. Samuk's thesis actually encouraged the use of emotions as a deterrent to the dreaded pon farr!! Anathema!

Baael removed the data card immediately. Secrecy indeed! What if someone could access the computer's memory?? This would take a very long time. First, he returned the card to the reader slot and commanded the computer to begin transferring the data from the end files first, running back to the beginning. Next, sentence by sentence, he translated the Vulcan words first into Federation standard, then into Hyperborean Cant. Finally, after saving the newly translated files onto a different data card he drew his C'Hrys-N'alak-Thar, sprayed the original card with liquid nitrogen, drew a drop of blood from his palm, sheathed his blade, picked up the frozen tape – sustaining significant 'burns' in the process – and threw the card at the bulkhead, shattering it like glass. He even went so far as to pick up the pieces and throw them into different receptacles!

There was one last problem, in Baael's estimation. What if a computer program could decipher Hyperborean Cant? He had to secure his computer! Luckily, one person aboard this ship was tailor-made for the job.

How low he had sunk! First, he had had to offend an obviously respected ship's captain, then he had allowed his psychic shields to drop, almost crippling him; then wound up in sickbay where a doctor could pry into his body's secrets; his captain had discovered his Great Sin, and now he would have to initiate a conversation with an outworlder!!

Steeling himself, Baael left his quarters and strode to the turbolift, his head still throbbing badly. "If only I had requested lessons in Vulcan pain control from Samuk... NO!!" Now he was actually beginning to think that the Efrosian Way was insufficient! "Warrior Priest! Bah!" he cursed himself.

Baael entered the turbolift. "Engineering!" he demanded. The device obeyed. Several seconds later it stopped on the requested deck. Baael exited, searching main engineering for assistant chief engineer Briana Lithir.

He spotted her at a control panel near the starship's vertical intermix chamber. The tall, ebony haired Cygnian was busily overhauling a communications panel. Baael patiently waited until she was finished. When she had put her tools away, he saw his chance.

"Lieutenant!" he said, his voice booming. Briana Lithir turned and regarded the speaker, nearly dropping her toolkit, her jaw dropping slightly as she recognized who had called to her. She managed to collect her wits immediately.

"Yes, Lieutenant?" she responded politely, hoping to learn something about her mysterious peer.

Baael pointed to himself and said, "Sociologist. Cygnian females expert programmers?"

It took Lithir a moment to decipher Baael's stilted standard. "Yes," she finally answered. "Computer programming is our most important science. Why do you ask?"

“Assistance requested,” was all he said.

“If I can. What do you need?”

“Security. Vital.”

“Who besides yourself should be able to access the data?”

“None.”

“Give me ten minutes and I’ll meet you at your quarters.”

Lithir was always ready to help someone in need, but this was a special opportunity. Of all the department heads and assistants, Bael was the one she understood the least. Commodore Johnson was certainly competent. ...For a male. Commander Kira was almost a spirit sister for she was, like Lithir herself, a strong, commanding woman. Chief medical officer Kyri Morgaan’s Capellan stoicism appealed to her. Security Chief Copeland was a kindred spirit, considering their mutual love for practical jokes. As for Copeland’s assistant, 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant David Maddox, she could neither like nor dislike, since they had never met. Lithir had only recently met the newly assigned assistant chief medical officer Athena Arcadian and had found her very likeable; an exuberant, vibrant woman. As for her own superior officer, Peter Timinar was tolerant, pleasant, and very smart. She enjoyed his company very much. These in the operations department Lithir did not know well. The acting chief of operations appeared to be vaguely Caitian, but Lithir had heard she was actually from another similar feline race. And as for communications, she figured that fellow Cygnian Aerina Lorrass would soon be replaced, for Lorrass was obnoxious, self righteous, and quite sexist, even for a Cygnian. Lithir disliked the narrow minded Lorrass, but at least she could understand her.

And then there was Bael!

Bael Vast Whatever Dragon, or something like that. Here he was, reporting aboard the starship as a petty officer who spoke standard like a six year old and possessed all the tact of a photon torpedo, yet in weeks he had been promoted to the rank of lieutenant (junior grade) and become assistant chief of sciences.

Lithir’s insatiable curiosity asserted itself. Whatever the Efrosian’s secrets, she swore that she would learn them. Descended from a long line of diplomats, Lithir enjoyed learning of other cultures, and with her political connections back on Cygnet XIV, there was little information she could not obtain.

The engineer used the ten minutes she had given herself to access all available data on Efrosian culture. No good. Efrosians were still relatively new to the Federation, and very little information on their culture had been compiled yet. Next, she called up Bael’s personnel file. A definite puzzle of a man. His first semester academy grades had been almost perfect. However, his grades had plummeted dramatically after that, to the point where he had narrowly managed to avoid expulsion! There were two anomalies here. First, what had happened to cause his grades to drop so precipitously? Had he simply stopped studying and taken up partying?

“Bael? Forget it!” she said to herself, dismissing that idea at once. Perhaps he had had a superlative tutor the first semester and once the tutor left, Bael was on his own...?

The other anomaly was that while his other grades had dropped, his social sciences and Federation law grades had remained outstanding. How could anyone who spoke standard as poorly as Bael appeared to, not to mention being from a race so unfamiliar with the Federation, know so much about Federation law? This did not add up to Lithir!

Her ten minutes nearly passed, Lithir left her quarters and headed for Bael’s. Arriving on deck 5, she noticed Aerina Lorrass walking – more like storming – away from a tall but unusually muscular Vulcan male. Marine 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Solak turned to Lithir as she approached.

“Lieutenant,” he greeted her respectfully though formally. “Perhaps you may assist me? I seek the quarters of Lieutenant (JG) Bael V’ahst O’hrne’ Dagon.” Lithir laughed inwardly. Was the anti-social Efrosian suddenly making new friends and throwing a party?

“I’m heading there myself. Why don’t you just follow me?” she suggested.

The two officers arrived in front of the entrance to Bael’s quarters. Even the door was terribly cold, condensation forming a frost over its entirety. Lithir pressed the buzzer. The door opened. Bael appeared in the entrance, now wearing a scarlet shirt and matching trousers, his hair straight and properly groomed.

“Goddess!” she thought to herself regarding the amazingly demonic looking Efrosian. “All he needs are horns and a pitchfork!” She remembered the legends of Earth, a planet where she had resided while attending Starfleet Academy. Bael certainly looked like ‘The Devil’ himself! Bael’s already angry looking expression hardened even more when he noticed Solak. Lithir could not fail to notice. Was Solak somehow considered an enemy of the Efrosian?

Solak offered the Vulcan salute. Bael returned it, though with seeming difficulty.

“Sir? I am...,” Solak started to say when he was interrupted.

“Bael!” stated the Efrosian.

“Very well, Bael. I am Solak. Though a Marine, I am also a student of the social sciences. I proffer cooperation.”

Realizing that he would never escape these encounters, Bael nodded but held up his hand in a gesture signifying to wait. He then beckoned Lithir into his quarters. The Marine assumed a stance of attention, seeming not to mind this snub. How typically Vulcan.

Once inside, Lithir sat at Bael’s computer and began her work. Even Bael had to marvel at the Cygnian’s speed and efficiency. Within minutes, she had finished.

“This should be quite secure, Lieutenant,” she said, rising quickly from the seat. The numbing cold of the quarters still bothered her despite her tail and thick mane.

The Efrosian nodded once. “Payment?” he proffered.

Lithir simply replied, “I’ll let you know.” She then exited the quarters, thanking the goddess for the warmth of the corridor, also somewhat irritated that Bael had not allowed her to use his name as he had Solak. Was Bael another male chauvinist?

The Vulcan in question was still standing at attention in the corridor outside. Solak and Lithir exchanged pleasantries and the Cygnian departed. A moment later Bael exited his room. Even he was tactful enough not to force the Vulcan to endure the frigid temperatures he so loved!

Solak offered his credentials. They were quite impressive. Several PhD’s, literary publications, consideration for a Nobel Prize... The Marine officer was eminently qualified to be a science officer if he so chose. The two men began a long, scientific discussion, though Solak did much of the talking. Bael knew little Vulcan and less Standard (or so he wanted his shipmates to believe!), and Solak certainly did not know Efrosian! In an attempt to make communicating easier, the clever Vulcan produced a universal translator. Uh oh! Bael had no excuse now. Bracing himself, he switched from standard to Low Efrosian, keeping his words exceedingly simple. The scientist and the scientist-Marine spoke for some time more in the corridor, arranged a subsequent meeting time, then parted company.

Bael entered his quarters once more and again let out a scream. “I am undone!” he cried. “S’skotomz, I... I LIKE these people! Why may I not join with them? Where is the K’ahht?!? Why is it ‘sinful’ to interact with non-Efrosians??” Bael prayed for an answer. Once finished, Bael decided to do what he did best. Research! He began to investigate his shipmates personnel records. The *Arcturus* was a sociologist’s dream! The crew was incredibly diverse; almost literally A through Z: Arkenites, Benecians, Cygnians, Denebians, Efrosians, Falasians, Gamma Vetesians...

Bael suddenly paused in shock.

“Halt!” he ordered his computer. “Reverse! Efrosians?! Specify!”

The computer complied, listing not one but two names.

“Tammuz, Isaiah Ben Taarch. Rank: Petty Officer 3<sup>rd</sup> Class. Department Assignment: Medical.”

“S’skotomz!” Bael yelled as he leapt to his feet. “Tammuz! Where?” The computer tracked his location on the bridge. Bael bolted from his quarters. He had to warn the Commodore! Tammuz was of an allied sect, but he was a BOY! If Ante-L’ahr-B’ahht-Karinn occurred while he was on the ship...!

Bael boarded the turbolift. Moments later the door finally opened on the bridge. Petty Officer Tammuz was filing a medical report. He heard the turbolift door open and turned to look, seeing the one person he never expected to see. And all hell broke loose.

\* \* \*

Tammuz's eyes widened. His head pounded. He felt a strange buzzing in his brain. He screamed in agony and shock. His stylus and pad flew from his hand. Small objects soared across the bridge, occasionally striking one of the crew.

Waves of telekinetic force reverberated from Tammuz. Commodore Johnson tried to reach the young Efrosian, but the powerful waves forced him back. Even the strength of Major Copeland was no match for the fury of Tammuz's psychic energy.

"Sir! Permission to stun him!" Copeland requested. Johnson nodded, but no sooner had the Marine raised his phaser than it was wrenched from his grip and smashed into a bulkhead.

Bael took the time during which that occurred to concentrate. "L'Ah B'hat Karinn T'acch!" he intoned. Then, to the amazement of everyone on the bridge, he walked toward the young Efrosian apparently unimpeded by Tammuz's power! Reaching Tammuz, Bael placed his hands upon his fevered brow.

"Isaiah... Hoh L'ach nar uvarich. Echod ha katan Loh! Kivacch Ha Gahdoh! I Melech!" he chanted. The strange words seemed to affect Tammuz. The waves of energy faltered and finally died. Objects settled onto the deck. The youth's eyes closed and he collapsed into Bael's arms.

Commodore Johnson stared at Bael. "Obviously, I can't have such a dangerous member of the crew aboard my ship," he said. "I'm transferring him as soon as possible." Johnson made his statement with obvious regret. After all, Tammuz had an excellent record thus far, and had not caused the incident that had just occurred on purpose. Yet Bael's reaction was astonishing.

"Captain, you must not!" he pleaded. "Young Tammuz is without fault! To do this thing would be to destroy a good man." To everyone's shock, Bael was speaking perfect standard!! "What you just witnessed was the first manifestation of his clan gift. Once surfaced, the power never reaches even a fraction of such a level again. Further, I will take it upon myself to train him. Punish me if you must. Had I not entered the bridge, this would never have occurred..."

Bael halted in mid-speech, realizing what he had done. Now the entire bridge knew his secret.

"It no longer matters," he thought resignedly. "Though I am doomed, I must save Tammuz."

Johnson considered Bael's words. After several moments he said, "Take him to sickbay. Depending on your behavior, I'll take another look at this incident. Dismissed." Then, as Bael left, easily hefting Tammuz in his arms and carrying him toward the turbolift, the Commodore pressed the intercom button. "Bridge to sickbay. Athena?"

"Let me guess," the Centauran responded with a disgusted tone. "Bael again?"

"Half-right," Johnson replied with a single laugh. "He's coming down to you as we speak with another Efrosian. Petty Officer Isaiah Ben Taarch Tammuz. As of today, he's one of your people. ...Maybe. Check him out. And while you're at it, put Bael at the top of the inoculation list. Perfect opportunity."

Arcadian acknowledged and signed off. She then turned sickbay over to an assistant and left, searching for Carey Copeland.

"It sure would help if we could ask the computer where any member of the crew is and the computer could locate them instantly," the young doctor remarked to herself.

Failing to locate the Marine security chief after several minutes, and not being aware he was on the bridge, she instead went to the quarters of Records Officer N'aghari.

"N'aghari, I need your help," Arcadian said after ringing the door chime and the door opening. "Can you make a dart gun? I have to give a shot to a very unwilling patient."

The ebony-skinned Haitian silently beckoned Arcadian to enter. Once she had, she marveled at the incredible beauty of the man's quarters. There were tapestries hanging on the walls, a collection of exotic musical instruments displayed on shelves, and even an ornate hand-made comforter on the bunk.

N'aghari handed Arcadian a dart gun from a drawer full of odd artifacts. "Please return it, but take as much time as you wish," he requested calmly and pleasantly.

“Don’t worry. I’ll get it back to very soon if everything goes right,” Arcadian promised, thanking and saying goodbye to N’aghari. She then jogged back to the turbolift, saying to herself, “Let’s see you get out of this one, Bael.” She snickered to no one in particular.

During Arcadian’s absence, Bael had arrived in sickbay with Tammuz. He placed the younger Efrosian on a diagnostic bed, but immediately deactivated the sensors, ignoring the protests of the technician on duty. Bael then began to manipulate Tammuz’s arms and legs before obtaining ice cubes and placing them in the younger man’s hands. Tammuz awoke rapidly, to the technician’s surprise. He looked up at Bael, his eyes expressing pain.

“I ask your help, Ha’Moreh,” the exhausted Efrosian requested.

Bael nodded. “You are my responsibility now. We shall...”

The science officers sentence was interrupted by a female voice. “Bael?” it said from behind him.

Carelessly, the Efrosian man turned. As he did, Athena Arcadian fired the specially rigged old fashioned hypodermic needle into his right arm – SHHOOKKK!

Bael stared at the hypo, now delivering its unnatural poisons irrevocably into his body. He glared at Arcadian before ripping the needle from his arm. His body shook violently. Arcadian watched in fascination as the Efrosian’s eyes changed from their normal sky-blue to deep scarlet. Bael then lunged at the surprised doctor. His right hand shot out, grabbing Arcadian’s throat, and he squeezed mercilessly.

“Bael! Knock it off, damn you...!!” she said as her breathing became harder. She tried to grab hold of his arm and flip him, but he was too strong – too savage. The nurse on duty noticed the scuffle and called for help. Within seconds, several doctors tackled Bael, yet were unable to loosen his vice-like grip on Arcadian’s neck. Her eyes started to flutter.

Grabbing a nearby hypo, one doctor jammed it into Bael’s side. It took several more seconds for the sedative to kick in, but Bael finally slumped over, unconscious. Arcadian collapsed to the deck, still unable to breathe. A technician injected her with Tri-Ox compound, then administered a local anesthetic to her neck. Sweet oxygen finally filled Arcadian’s air-starving lungs. Fear had replaced her anger.

“Jeez, he’s a maniac!” she croaked. She then crawled to her feet and, grabbing the dart gun, reloaded it and walked to Tammuz’s bed – determined to inject the second Efrosian while he was still too weak to fight her.

Arcadian aimed the dart gun at Tammuz from several meters away. Tammuz happened to turn his head and see what the doctor was doing. Alarmed, he leaped from the diagnostic bed.

“What do you intend to do??” he cried in terror.

Arcadian’s aim with the dart gun followed Tammuz as he moved. “Let’s just get this shot over with!” she said as she prepared to fire.

“Shot? Why didn’t you just say so??” Tammuz asked as he calmly proffered his arm to the utterly confused doctor! Warily, Arcadian put down the dart gun, grabbed a spray hypo, and injected the un-opposing Efrosian.

“I don’t get it!” she said after putting down the hypo and rubbed her still aching throat. “No religious objections to shots?”

Tammuz smiled. “Please do not judge me by another,” he said. “Bael is... Bael. I am Tammuz, not Dagon.”

“Then will you allow me to perform a full physical on you so I’ll know how to treat Efrosians?”

“If you will familiarize me with your equipment,” Tammuz offered. I am, after all, to be assigned here in medical. ...I hope.”

“Deal!” Arcadian exclaimed.

Arcadian and an assistant went to work on Tammuz. Across sickbay, now strapped to his bed, Bael awoke. He struggled uselessly against his restraints, trying to escape.

A few minutes later, after finishing with Tammuz, Arcadian turned to the elder Efrosian. “I hope you had fun,” she hissed at him.

“Fun?” Bael questioned.

“Almost ripping my throat out!”

“Not!”

“Oh, knock it off! We all heard you speak perfect standard to Mister Tammuz. ...And you certainly did nearly kill me!”

“I... did no such thing.”

“Ok, let’s play your game! What do you call this?” She pulled down her green uniform shirt collar, displaying terrible bruises.

“Impossible!”

“Will you cut it out?!? Four people saw you!” She pulled a bedside monitor over to where Baael could see it and played back the sickbay surveillance footage. As Baael watched it, Arcadian stared at him. Something in his eyes suggested that he actually might not know what had just happened!

“Are you trying to tell me that you don’t remember trying to kill me?!?” Arcadian questioned firmly.

“I... cannot have done this... Then... I have the L’o-K’ahht. You must kill me before the danger grows!”

“What?!?” Arcadian’s anger melted away. She could not imagine the glacially-stoic Efrosian in such a state of desperation. He might truly have a brain injury or disease causing him to lash out, then making him forget having done so! He needed help, not condemnation. “We’ll call it even if you’ll forgive for me shooting you with the hypo without permission and let me perform a full physical on you. Even you have to admit you could be a living time bomb right now!”

Baael turned his head. He had already committed enough sins to warrant his death back on Efros Delta. What did it matter if he now allowed an outworlder to know his body’s secrets?

“Do what you must,” he finally answered hoarsely, attempting to place himself in a trance, unwilling to endure this humiliation.

\* \* \*

At that moment, Commodore Johnson was rushing to sickbay, having been notified of the incident that had occurred there and fearing the worst for his loved one, promising himself that Baael would suffer dearly if anything had happened to Arcadian!

“I give him every chance to straighten up, and he goes and tries to kill someone just so he can avoid being examined by a doctor?!?” he fumed.

Seconds later, Johnson arrived inside sickbay in time to witness Arcadian remove Baael’s restraints. “Explanation, Mister?” he demanded.

Without a word, Baael drew his C’Hrys-N’alak-T’har and handed it to the amazed Commodore. Johnson knew enough about Efrosian culture to know that Baael’s ‘Ice-Dagger’ was a sacred weapon and to reveal it to an outworlder must have great significance! Baael placed his hands behind his back.

“It is your right,” were his only words.

Composing himself, Johnson handed the weapon back. “It doesn’t work like that,” he stated. “This isn’t some savage Klingon warship. What you did is a court-martial offense...” He stopped as he noticed Arcadian shaking her head vigorously. “...But Doctor Arcadian doesn’t want to press charges – apparently – so I’ll leave the matter to her.” He was confused, but understood that Arcadian had made some sort of breakthrough that his angry rant had almost negated.

“You can go, Baael,” Arcadian told the Efrosian science officer. “I’ll call for you when we’re ready.”

Baael slowly sheathed his dagger, then turned and left sickbay. As soon as the doors were shut, Johnson grilled Arcadian for more details on what had occurred. He also checked on young Isaiah Tammuz’s condition, deciding to let the younger Efrosian remain aboard his starship. Despite what Baael had done, there was something in him that Johnson trusted, even perhaps liked. If Baael swore that Tammuz was not a threat, then so be it.

\* \* \*

A full day had passed. Baael had completed twenty one hours on duty at his own request, then slept for three more. He began to study his sciences staff – he was assistant chief science officer after all. The apparent mass exodus of crewmen from sciences stung Baael deeply. Had he been that incompetent to drive members of the crew away? Or was it the fault of Commander Kira Tefallaran Smith? The thought of the Orion still brought rage to the surface of his thoughts.

With concentration he stopped himself. Arcadian had forgiven him. Was he so small that he could not also forgive? He erased Kira from his thoughts, ritualistically drawing a drop of blood from his finger with his dagger. He then returned to his files.

Many of his... err... Commander Smith's staff were unknown commodities – transferees from the starbase that the *Arcturus* had recently call on. He was pleased, however, for all of the personnel had excellent credentials. All – that is – save one.

Petty Officer Second Class Merak Samuel had been in sciences longer than anyone else, even Kira Smith herself, yet he had never been promoted and was still in the same low level research position in which he had started. Was he lazy or just incompetent? He called Samuel's file up on the screen. The man was only twenty standard years of age. Ah, perhaps a prankster like Major Copeland? He probed more deeply into the information in the file. No, Samuel's psychological profile showed that he was fearful, insecure and perhaps even schizoid. Baael froze when he finally came across Samuel's species. Impossible!!! Baael checked again. No mistake! The Efrosian deactivated his computer, jumped up and ran toward the nearest turbolift.

"Perhaps my fate is not yet sealed! I have been granted the means to repay my greatest debt!" he thought to himself. Baael eventually stopped at the office door of Major Copeland.

"Come in," a voice responded to the door chime. Major A. Carey Copeland turned to see who was entering and nearly fainted at seeing Baael standing before him.

"Hey! What's up?" was all the Marine officer could say.

"I have come to settle my debt," Baael responded.

Copeland was intrigued. "What've you got in mind?" he asked.

Baael held up a computer card and said, "I have contained on here the file of a crew member that might make a useful transferee to your department."

"No way!" Copeland responded without interest. "We're full up as it is!"

"Only one. He is special." Copeland still did not look convinced until Baael added, "He is Antosian."

"So what?" Copeland said, not recognizing the species name.

Baael was becoming angered yet again. He despised being mocked or belittled. However, considering his recent experiences, he realized that misunderstandings could come too easily. Perhaps Copeland did not understand?

"Major," Baael explained. "Antosians are shape-shifters."

Copeland's eyes suddenly lit up with understanding. "A shape-shifter?? Man, what an infiltration expert he'd be! Not to mention a great help with a few pranks!" he added quietly to himself. "Who is this guy? Where is he?"

Baael handed the Marine Samuel's personnel file and left, gratified that he had so greatly pleased the man who had saved him from medical tyranny. The Efrosian then decided to complete his obligations by finding some way to repay Lieutenant (JG) Briana Lithir for her help with his computer. He returned to his quarters and researched her personnel file, discovering that she was a wealthy young woman descended from a long line of diplomats. What could he possibly do for her? Shrugging his shoulders, he returned to his research – learning Lithir's typical ship-board schedule, then headed for the Cygnian's quarters. Minutes later he was pressing the chime at her door. A moment later the door opened, and it took Lithir all her strength not to blatantly show her surprise.

"Yes Lieutenant?" she asked, as surprised as Copeland had been.

"I have come to settle my debt," Baael answered in exactly the same way he had spoken to the Marine officer.

Lithir smiled gently and said, “No offense, but there’s really nothing I need right now. Maybe some other time I might need help on a project.” She noted Baael was no longer using stilted language as he spoke.

“It is vital that I do so now. I would assist in any event. It is right,” Baael said.

Lithir realized what Baael could do for her. His personality seemed to have changed radically. Who was this strange man?? She was determined to find out.

“All right. This is what you can do for me. Answer my questions about you.” She noted the look of shock that crossed Baael face and quickly added, “Anything that’s not forbidden.”

The Cygnian asked a great deal! Still, Baael was doomed anyway. He nodded, then entered Lithir’s quarters upon her invitation.

Baael was immediately struck by the stark beauty of the room. The woman had impeccable taste! Was it truly so wrong to get to know her and the other fine people he had met aboard this starship?? Surely his religion could not be so narrow! Meanwhile, Lithir began her interrogation.

“The first thing I’m curious about is why you wanted everyone aboard to think you couldn’t speak standard.”

“I... could not allow it,” Baael answered. “I feared that I would lose my ability ...to speak Sur’Efrosian.”

What Baael had said was only partly true. ‘Sur’Efrosian’ – also known as low-Efrosian – was still Efrosian, and so was indeed important to Baael’s self-concept. But it was an easy language to learn and retain. Baael was not yet ready to tell anyone – even Lithir – the real reason; that he wanted others to believe he was less intelligent than he actually was.

Lithir somehow sensed that Baael was still hiding something, but let it pass. *‘I’ll find out everything, Mister Baael! That I promise you,’* she silently and defiantly thought to herself. Then she spoke aloud again. “What about your grades at the Academy? What went wrong?”

“The first semester was simple. The others... introduced difficult new concepts,” Baael replied, but again telling only a partial truth. The subjects he had studied at the Academy had been virtually child’s play to the near-genius level Efrosian. The ‘difficult concept’ had been his sudden exposure to non-Efrosians and their incessant prying into the Efrosian way! Lithir smiled inwardly. This man was going to be a challenge!

“Why did you invite Solak to call you Baael, but not me?” was her next question.

“You referred to me as ‘Lieutenant’. This is correct,” Baael explained. “The 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant called me ‘Sir.’ Incorrect. I am Baael or I am Lieutenant. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant owed me no false respect. In your case, there was nothing to correct.”

Lithir was willing to accept Baael’s answer. She then asked, “Are you considered typical for your race?”

Lithir’s question completely threw Baael off guard. He had not expected her to ask this! It took him almost a full minute to respond.

“No,” he finally replied. “My way is especially... demanding.”

“What are characteristics of a ‘typical’ Efrosian?”

“Efrosians find other beings fascinating. ‘Prejudice’ has no meaning to us. We have no taboos except for revealing our faith. Beyond this, ‘typical’ is a difficult term.”

Lithir was not totally satisfied, but Baael was still a very interesting person. The Efrosian could not have known it, but he had made her day. At last, a nut to crack! Someone among the crew she could not read like an open book!

“Thank you... Baael?” He nodded once. “I’ll let you go now. I can see this wasn’t easy for you. I appreciate your time.” Baael nodded again and left. Again he had met kindness! The engineer could have pried much more deeply than she had, yet she had respected his privacy while still displaying a shrewd, clever mind! He would have to re-evaluate his behavior!

As he strode toward the turbolift, it opened, allowing a crewman unknown to Baael to walk past him. The human man’s face betrayed his emotions, visibly disturbed by the sight of the handsome but almost demonic-faced Efrosian. Baael was amused.

He started to enter the turbolift when a voice behind him called out.

“Hold the ‘lift!’”

Bael held the doors open with one of his hands and turned to see who had spoken. By the fierce winds of Malaboge! ‘Captain’ Johnson!

Johnson entered the turbolift, then looked at Bael and said, “Good! Just the person I was looking for!” Bael had stepped away from the doors, allowing them to close, but Johnson pressed one of the buttons on the control panel to keep the lift from moving anywhere. “I’ve figured out something about you, Mister Bael. Despite your attitude, I’ve noticed that in every instance you’ve only disobeyed the spirit of my orders, not the letter. Since you apparently have to be ‘pinned down’, I’m doing so now. You’re going to help me make a decision.”

The Efrosian could not imagine what Johnson was talking about. Perhaps he was trying to decide the fate of his student-to-be, Isaiah Ben-T’aarch Tammuz? Maybe he even intended to throw Bael himself off the ship? He braced himself as Johnson spoke again.

“None of what I am about to say leaves this lift,” the commodore said, pointing to Bael’s sheathed dagger.

Bael raised his eyebrows in an almost Vulcan-like fashion. *‘Ah, corrupted by my former roommate,’* he mused.

“Understanding that,” Johnson went on. “I’m giving you a direct order to answer my questions with the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, as they say in Earth courtrooms.” With that, Commodore Johnson unleashed a barrage of questions frighteningly similar to those Briana Lithir had recently posed. Bound by his honor, Bael answered Johnson’s questions in much the same way he had the engineer’s, though in greater detail.

“Good,” Johnson said several minutes later, after asking his final question. “Now my decision. You’re going to undergo Advanced Training and Command Studies. And this time, you have a direct order not to fake a bad grade!” Bael stared at the intuitive Commodore, utterly astonished. “Kira feels overworked, so she’s decided to step down as chief science officer to concentrate on her duties as executive officer. WHEN you pass the tests – and you WILL pass them – you will be promoted to chief science officer... LIEUTENANT COMMANDER Bael.”

The Efrosian’s jaw dropped. In a matter of days, he had gone from a disgraced supposed-invalid to a soon-to-be head of an important ship’s department. His destiny was clear. Dagon was his at last!

**The End**