

*Captain's log, stardate 48102.1:*

*As we return toward the Idran system to investigate why we have lost contact with the GammaOne relay outpost, we will be stopping at the planet Vlitas IV, previously contacted by Starfleet personnel from DS9. The Vlitasians expressed interest in someday joining the Federation, and our mission is to begin the preliminary negotiations, the final aim of which may be the eventual admission of the Vlitasians as the first Gamma Quadrant members of the Federation.*

*Kale, out.*

Lt Commander Yu-Fen Mickey Cosner, called Mic by her friends and associates and first officer of the starship *Sarek*, prepared herself for the away team she would lead in just a few minutes. She could feel the vibration of the deck beneath her feet subtly change as the starship dropped out of warp. Finishing the pre-mission check of her phaser and tricorder, she holstered the equipment and prepared to head toward the transporter room just as the intercom beeped.

"Lt Commander Cosner, this is the bridge. Gather your team and report to transporter room four," said the captain's voice.

"Cosner to bridge. Acknowledged."

"Okay. Good luck, Mic."

"Just a routine negotiation, Captain. No sweat."

And with a nod, she left her cabin, heading toward the transporter room.

Space, the Final Frontier...

These are the voyages of the starship *Sarek*!

Her ongoing mission;

To seek new life, to contact new civilizations...

To boldly explore the unknown!

## Star Trek: Sarek

### "The Ransom of Red Chief" by PJK (With apologies to O. Henry)

The away team, consisting of Lt Commander Cosner, Lt(JG) A-ZuRQuIL, the Capellan assistant security chief, Lt Sylvan Xaran, the Betazoid MD and counselor, Commander T'Veer, the chief engineer, and Lt(JG) Carrie Karandanz, the duty shift security officer, materialized on the main plaza of Vlitas' capital city of Lectain. Almost immediately they were greeted by a group of natives. The Vlitasians were humanoids, on average about three-meter tall, fur covered, with bright and intelligent looking eyes. They reminded Karandanz of the Wookie characters from a series of 2-D science fiction Earth films of the late 20th century she had seen in her youth. As they approached, the Vlitasians at first seemed puzzled, but smiles, an unexpected reaction on the non-human faces, soon appeared.

Cosner stepped forward, saying, "I am Lieutenant Commander Yu-Fen Cosner, first officer of the Federation starship *Sarek*." She then presented each member of the away team, after which the Vlitasians introduced themselves, the largest of the natives, who had some grey hair peeking out from under his brown fur, calling himself Pensora Tark.

"...The elected leader of the Descendants of Arkmed." He motioned his guests into one of the nearby buildings, talking as they went.

"I'm sorry, Lieutenant Commander Yu-Fen Cosner, but one thing has puzzled us. The HooMans that contacted us previously wore sky clothes, like your Lieutenant Sylvan Xaran. What is the significance of your own blood clothes and your team's sun clothes?" asked Tark.

It took Cosner a moment to realize the Vlitasian was asking about the significance of the away team's uniform colors. The initial contact team from *DS9* had consisted of science officers and wore blue-shouldered jumpsuit uniforms. Her own team wore the new command-red and operations-gold jumpsuit uniforms that the crew had been authorized for all starships when the *Sarek* had visited the Bajoran starbase in the Alpha Quadrant about a month earlier.

"In our fleet service," she explained, "the departments we work in are signified by the color. My red, as we call this color, signifies the command division, while most of my away team are members of either the security or engineering departments, which as part of the operations division are represented by gold. Lieutenant Xaran and the team you previously met from *Deep Space Nine* work in the science and medical departments, represented by what we call blue."

"Ahh. I understand now," Tark replied. "So the reason you are wearing 'red' means you are more important than the rest of your team?"

"I wouldn't say more important, but I'm in charge of the team, if that's what you mean. In fact, part of my duties aboard the *Sarek* is being the Red Division Chief."

Tark smiled again, exchanging a look with one of his own subordinates, as the party entered the government building. Two hours later, after the first day's negotiations had concluded, Cosner contacted the *Sarek*.

"From what we can tell, this planet looks like it would make a fine addition to the Federation eventually. The technology and engineering report the Vlitasiens submitted to Commander T'Veer indicate the planet's level of technology is only slightly below our own, so there is no conflict with the Prime Directive. They report the planet never developed any equivalent to warp technology because they feel that the exploration of themselves and their immediate environment are of more importance. Additionally, the Vlitasiens feel an alliance with the Federation would counteract any interest the Dominion may have in their star system's resources." Captain Kalin Kale nodded as the information was relayed. Lieutenant (JG) Setton To'Lock Arbelo monitored its entry into the library computer where it would be appended to an application the Vlitasiens wanted to submit for Federation protectorate status and eventually possible admission. Cosner meanwhile continued. "Doctor Xaran's report on their medical knowledge shows it to be superior to our own in some ways. They have cures for some diseases that we are months or years away from developing. My own report is that culturally, the planet has a united, democratically run government. That their standards of humanoid rights are comparable in most ways to the Federation's. And the planet's population apparently feels comfortable joining an interstellar alliance based on the other side of the galaxy rather than fall under the control of the Dominion."

"Thank you, Mic. When do you plan on returning?" Kale asked.

"We'll beam back up within the half hour. We have some final negotiations to settle about shore leave rights and other incidentals."

"Acknowledged. *Sarek*, out."

\* \* \* \*

Still on the planet, the away team was seated around a table in the main government complex, Cosner and her team on one side, Pesora Tark and his aides on the other. As the talks wrapped up, Tark said, "Lieutenant Commander Yu-Fen Cosner, there is something I would really like to show you."

"What is it?"

"Very hard to explain. Much easier if I just showed you. Would you please come with me?"

Tark rose from the table and took a few steps toward the door of the meeting room. Cosner hesitated for a moment, looking toward the members of her team. A-ZuRQuIL advised the away team leader not to go unescorted.

"But she will be escorted, Lieutenant A-ZuRQuIL. I will be escorting her," Tark assured.

Cosner could find no diplomatic way of refusing the request, and the Vlitasiens had been so very gracious thus far, she was afraid of inadvertently insulting Tark and his people. Cosner stood and followed Tark out the door.

The two walked down a long corridor, a very odd pair. The Vlitasian leader was almost three and a half meters tall, and Cosner was literally half his height. A number of the other Vlitasiens watched and commented about the short HooMan, a few even whispering conspiratorially.

After turning a number of corners and passing through a few large halls, they eventually came to an ornately decorated door, twice the width of any that Cosner had yet seen on this planet. Pensora Tark pressed the keypad next to the door which was located higher than Cosner could have reached without the aid of a stepladder. The door slowly slid upward into the ceiling, revealing a room filled with statues, paintings, ornate jewelry and other treasures.

"This is our place of valuable things," explained Tark. "Most come from a time before our recorded history. The time of Arkmed. Please step in and see them."

Cosner, her face aglow with the wonder she felt about all the precious treasures, stepped into the room, actually the largest hall she had seen within the government complex. She never heard the door slide down behind her.

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At the meeting table, Lt Sylvan Xaran blinked in surprise as the tricorder he had been monitoring fell silent.

"Lieutenant A-ZuRQuIL!" he called to the assistant security chief. "I was monitoring Commander Cosner's life signs. Everything just went blank!"

A-ZuRQuIL immediately tapped his combadge.

"Away team to Commander Cosner. Commander Cosner, please respond!"

Only silence issued from the communicator.

A-ZuRQuIL looked accusingly at the Vlitasian aides.

\* \* \* \*

In the treasury, Cosner started to turn around to ask Tark a question about a crown-like piece on display that would have been too big around to even fit as a belt on the petite Asian woman when she finally realized she was alone in the room. She rushed to the door, but could not find anything that would open it from the inside. Finally, in frustration, she tapped her combadge.

"Cosner to away team."

There was no response.

"Cosner to *Sarek*."

Still nothing. She pounded the communicator pin once again.

“Cosner to *Sarek*! Damn it, respond!”  
But nobody did.

\* \* \* \*

Tark returned to the conference room alone. Immediately A-ZuRQuIL stood and confronted the Vlitasian, who towered almost a full meter over him.

“Where is Commander Cosner? What have you done with her?”

“She is safe and well,” Tark replied as he resumed his seat at the table.

“But we lost her life-sign readings!” exclaimed Xaran.

“If you have harmed her in any way...,” growled A-ZuRQuIL before Tark cut him off, handing the Capellan a scroll-like mechanical device.

“She is unharmed and in good hands... for now,” Tark said, quickly standing and leaving the room. It was not until he was gone that the away team noticed all the other Vlitasians had departed the room when Tark had entered and been confronted by the *Sarek* security officer. With the Vlitasian leader’s departure, the *Sarek* away team was now alone in the meeting room. A-ZuRQuIL finally thumbed the button on the device and a sheet of paper flowed out of a slot along its bottom with writing on it written in perfect Standard. He read the ‘scroll,’ frowning as he went, then handed it to T’Veer, who also read it.

“It says that in exchange for returning our Lieutenant Commander Yu-Fen Cosner, the planet Vlitias demands the plans, documentation and specifications of Federation warp drive. Until that time, she is a ‘guest’ of the Vlitasian government. We have twenty standard hours to comply.”

T’Veer tapped her combadge.

“Away team to *Sarek*.”

“*Sarek*. Kale here.”

“Captain, signal yellow alert. Four to beam up. We have a hostage situation here.”

“Not again!” Kale groaned, thinking back to the mission a year earlier that had led to Kale gaining command of his own starship.

“I’m afraid so,” T’Veer replied.

\* \* \* \*

Ten minutes later, back aboard the *Sarek*, the away team was gathered with Captain Kale, Lt Setton To’Lock Arbelo and the ship’s chief of security, Lt Penji Fil.

“We have been unable to determine the location of Commander Cosner,” Fil reported. There is an area of the main government complex where the away team met with the Vlitasian representatives that incorporates some sort of electromagnetic dampening field. Sensors cannot penetrate the field, nor can we beam anyone or anything in or out of the area covered by it.”

“So we can’t simply beam in a rescue team without knowing where Commander Cosner is,” Kale remarked. “What else do we know?”

“Upon extremely close examination, we discovered some of the reports the Vlitasians provided for our inspection were doctored to make us think they are more advanced than we are in some respects,” explained T’Veer. “Apparently the part about not being interested in warp space travel was a complete falsehood. We have also discovered something else.”

The Vulcan woman nodded toward Arbelo.

“Apparently there is a segment of their broadcast system that works on an EHF carrier wave, not one normally monitored by our subspace radio systems. Once we detected it, we started monitoring all their broadcasts, hoping it might provide some information on where Commander Cosner is or how we may rescue her. Something we learned from monitoring those frequencies is that a normal method of conducting business on Vlitias IV is extortion,” the operations chief explained.

At the captain’s surprised expression, T’Veer continued.

“We have also determined it was through those EHF frequencies that the Vlitasians learned everything they know about the Federation, such as our standard spoken and written languages. They were able to access the unprotected files aboard the runabout the *DS9* team used when they first visited this planet several months ago. They knew exactly what they wanted to see when we got here.”

“How much danger do you believe Commander Cosner might be in?” Kale inquired.

“From what we have seen on the video channels we’ve been monitoring, the demands are generally met shortly after being issued. But there is evidence that in the rare cases where the demand is refused...” Arbelo paused, taking in a breath. “Well... The hostage is executed. Until that point, the hostages are treated very well. Surprisingly well, in fact.”

“Work on a plan,” ordered the captain. “Maybe we can make them think we’re giving in but actually just fool them into letting Mic go?”

“Agreed,” said the others.

\* \* \* \*

On the planet’s surface, Cosner had just finished having a pointless argument with Tark, the Vlitasian leader explaining that the Starfleet officer would be free as soon as they received their ransom, Cosner trying to explain the *Sarek* would not give in to the

Vlitasian demands. While Tark did not fully understand the HooMan's resistance, he endeavored to take it in stride and again left the room, locking Cosner inside. Several minutes later, another Vlitasian entered the treasury, carrying a tray of food.

"You must be joking," Cosner said.

"Please. Eat. You will not be executed for another seventeen hours. You must be hungry."

"Yeah, you're joking alright. You expect me to be hungry in a situation like this?"

"Have you never before been taken for negotiations before?" the large furry Vlitasian asked.

"No!" Cosner replied to the native's surprise, though he again offered the food tray. Cosner took the tray from the Vlitasian, but instead of putting it down on a table or taking anything from it to eat, she flung it against the nearest wall, splattering brown mush over one of the paintings mounted on the wall there. The native's mouth dropped open and he started to stammer.

"You...! The food...! You threw...! Oh, dear!" And he quickly left, the door closing again before Cosner could even think about jumping through.

"Odd reaction," she said to herself, staring at the closed door.

Seconds later, the door opened again, but this time Pensora Tark stepped through. He looked at the mess sliding down the wall and pooling on the floor.

"It is true!" he exclaimed to himself.

"You take me hostage in exchange for Federation technology, and you don't expect me to protest?" Cosner yelled.

"We are conducting a simple business transaction," Tark replied. "It should take no more than..."

"Simple... business... TRANSACTION!?!?"

"You will no doubt be released as soon as your..."

"I demand to be released now!"

"But your ship has not complied. They must still give us all plans, specifications and documentation to your warp drive engines."

Cosner could not take it anymore. In frustration, she pushed a small statue off its pedestal. The statue struck the floor, shattering it into a thousand pieces.

"WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?!?" Tark exclaimed.

Realizing the significance of Tark's reaction, Cosner pulled out her phaser, which had proven useless on the energy-absorbing walls and door of the treasury when she had tried escaping earlier, and set the control on level eight. She aimed it at the nearest wall and pressed the trigger. As expected from her previous experiments when she was first locked in the room, the beam was absorbed by the wall. But not before the painting that had been hanging there – the one that had the brown mush she had been offered as food sliding down off the face of – was vaporized.

"AHHHH!!!" shouted the Vlitasian leader.

While he was distracted, Cosner walked past him and pulled a crown more than half a meter in diameter off a display case. As best she could, she held it up at her own eye level.

"No, not the Crown of Arkmed! Perhaps we can bargain," pleaded Tark, a very nervous look in his large grey eyes. "We'll change the demand to just the specifications and documentation for warp drive."

Cosner tossed the crown a few meters into the air. Tark scrambled to try and catch it, but it flew out of his reach, hitting the floor with a clang. Almost every jewel that had been encrusted on it fell off, skittering along the floor, under cabinets and chests. The crown itself was bent into an odd shape, one part of the frame hanging loose. Tark began to cry, his tears matting the fur around his snout-like nose.

Cosner then moved around the room, stopping in front of a very large, very old, very ornate gilded vase. She placed one hand on the vase's side. Tark's eyes were wide with shock.

"P..p..please... Negotiate...! We'll only ask for the specifications of warp drive. Please!"

Cosner shrugged, then with a quick shove that was surprising from a person of her petite stature, she pushed the vase over. The vase cracked as it hit the floor, rolling into other stands, knocking over a half dozen other smaller treasures before the vase collapsed in on itself at Tark's feet. Cosner continued walking around the treasury, pushing, dropping and phasing items at random. After a minute, she paused, glaring at Pensora Tark as he lay sobbing on the floor.

"Are you going to release me? Or do I have to get really nasty?" she asked.

\* \* \* \*

Back on the bridge of the *Sarek*, Kale ordered hailing frequencies to the planet opened. The crew had come upon an early design for a warp drive the Romulans had been developing almost a century before that had accidentally been stolen by Federation operatives just prior to the Battle of Wolf 359. The design, though promising, had never worked and was abandoned when the Romulans obtained warp drive from their brief alliance with the Klingon Empire a century earlier.

"*USS Sarek* to the government officials of Vlitias IV. We wish to arrange a meeting to settle the demand you have placed on us for the return of my first officer."

Almost before Kale had finished speaking, a voice responded on the open frequency.

"Vlitias IV government complex to starship *Sarek*. Anytime that's good for you. Why not now? See you soon. Out."

Kale blinked, puzzled by the unusual response, but made the preparations for beaming down.

A few minutes later, the away team of Kale, T'Veer, the two security chiefs Fil and A-ZuRQuIL, and security officer Karandanz materialized on the plaza, all with phasers drawn. T'Veer also held a padd that contained the Romulan warp drive specifications on it. Exiting the main door of the government complex across the plaza were two Vlitasians, each carrying a large

round gold object, followed closely by Lt Commander Cosner. The two separate groups closed the distance, the three security officers keeping their phasers on the two approaching natives.

Once they had moved close enough to talk, Captain Kale spoke first.

“In regards to your demands for the release of our crew member...”

“What do you want to take her?” one of the Vlitasiens asked.

“Excuse me?” asked Kale, starting to be confused again.

“Please! Take anything you want from us. Just take her away!” the other native pleaded. T’Veer’s right eyebrow shot up as Fil, A-ZuRQuIL, and Karandanz lowered their phasers and exchanged confused looks.

“I’m missing something here,” Kale said, holding up his hands in an effort to get the Vlitasiens to slow down and explain. “Didn’t you want us to give you the plans for warp drive in exchange for Commander Cosner?”

“Keep them! Just take her! **Please!!!**”

Still thoroughly confused, Kale simply nodded to T’Veer to put away the padd, then indicated to Cosner to join the away team. Cosner walked slowly past the two Vlitasiens, a smug look on her face.

“Captain Kale,” one of the two Vlitasiens said. “Please accept these items as a gift. Just promise never to let HER on our planet ever again!” They quickly placed two large gold platters in Kale’s arms and literally **RAN** back into the government complex building. Kale turned to face his now free first officer.

“What just happened?”

“I guess I wore out my welcome,” Cosner said with a giggle.

“Ahhh... yeah,” replied Kale, still very confused but pleased with the outcome. He tapped his combadge, saying, “Well, we still need to find out why *GammaOne* went silent. Kale to *Sarek*. Six to beam up. Prepare to break orbit as soon as we’re aboard.”

A few seconds later, the Starfleet officers vanished in the hum of the transporter, leaving Vlitasi IV far behind.

## The End

*Author’s Note: The origin and inspiration of this story.*

*The Star Trek: Sarek story “The Ransom of Red Chief” was inspired by a short story of the same title, one of the most famous and best loved short stories by the author O. Henry (William Sydney Porter).*

*The short story, “The Ransom of Red Chief,” written by O. Henry, is about a young boy kidnapped by two men and held for ransom. Bill and Sam are two fugitives who have escaped to the deep-south in order to find money to pay their own bonds of \$2000. The town in which they hatch their plan is fictional Summit, Alabama. Bill’s reason for choosing Summit specifically is because of **philoprogenitiveness** (a noun meaning 1. Producing many offspring; prolific, 2. Loving one’s offspring or children in general, 3. Of or relating to love of children.) that such small southern communities demonstrate. After constructing a plan to kidnap the son of the town’s mayor, Ebenezer Dorset, a boy who likes to pretend he is the feared Indian warrior ‘Red Chief,’ Bill and Sam will send a ransom note demanding \$2000, secretly exchange the boy for the money, and be about their way. Unfortunately, the two men find that their plan backfires. Red Chief actually enjoys his stay with his kidnappers and thinks he is on a camping trip. Red Chief plays his favorite game – ‘Scout’ – with Bill and Sam, who he calls ‘Old Hank’ and ‘Snake Eye’s.’ The kidnappers quickly discover that Red Chief is actually a ruthless little terror that no one in the town wants to be involved with. After a time, Bill and Sam start lowering the amount they demand in ransom from Ebenezer Dorset, who continues to cooperate. Eventually the pair of kidnappers are forced to pay the father \$1500 just to take Red Chief off their hands, which was all the money the men had in their possession before coming to Summit in the first place.*

*The real-world member of the Sarek crew who inspired the character of the starship’s first officer, Yu-Fen M. Ku, had a similarly fearsome reputation as Red Chief, and her story was easily adapted to the classic plot.*