

*Editor's Note: This story was first published in **Wormhole Warble**, The USS Sarek Newsletter Vol.2, #'s 2, 3, & 4. Though the story is fairly long, it was originally intended to be published in a single issue of the newsletter. However, when new editors took over publication of the newsletter in January 1995, they chose to shorten the average size of each issue and split the story into three parts.*

The Fifth Fleet is now proud to present "Romulan Ail" as it was originally meant to be read.

Captain's log, stardate 48194.1:

Starship Sarek on course for the further reaches of the Gamma Quadrant on a charting mission. No contact with the Jem'Hadar to date and we are endeavoring to avoid known Dominion territory. All systems are functioning. A slight imbalance in the antimatter reactor has been corrected by Commander T'Veer and her staff. A piano recital by Lieutenant Lawrence Harcue is scheduled for 2100 hours tonight in 9/10-Forward. Ensign Raager is filling in at Harcue's post for Beta shift. No unusual contacts or readings to report.

Kale, out.

In the exobiology lab, Lieutenant (JG) Jo Ann Tredworth, a staff exobiologist, and native of the planet Betazed, gently lifted the small furry animal from its transparent aluminum cage and started stroking it. The gentle coo of the Altiberon mouselette increased in volume with each stroke.

As she continued to pet the small creature the *Sarek* crew had collected during a recent biological survey in a nearby star system, her empathic abilities suddenly picked up on a strange feeling. A powerful force was approaching the ship. Quickly, she returned the animal to its cage, its plaintive eyes begging for more attention. She carefully latched the cage door and quickly left the lab.

On the bridge, Captain Kalin Kale, commanding officer of the Federation starship *USS Sarek*, stood next to ops, where Lieutenant (JG) Setton To'Lock Arbelo, a very unique being, a hybrid of the Terran, Vulcan, and Efrosian races, carefully monitored the ship's sensors.

"Monster," said Kale. "Include in your report that sensor output is now five percent better than specs. Send my compliments to Fleetyards, Vulcan."

Before Arbelo could reply, the forward turbolift doors opened, and a woman in a blue-shouldered sciences uniform with strawberry-blonde hair stepped out. Tredworth opened her mouth to speak to the captain when she was suddenly cut off by a sudden lurch of the ship. Stars flashed past on the viewscreen, their Doppler tails longer than usual during warp, indicating a very high rate of speed. Automatically, the red alert klaxon sounded, and Kale stumbled and shuffled his way to the command chair. A few moments later, the ship steadied and the view of the stars returned to normal. Lt Commander Yu-Fen M. Cosner, the *Sarek's* first officer, rushed out of the aft turbolift, hurrying down the ramp to the command deck.

"What did we hit?" she asked.

"Still evaluating," replied Kale. "But as far as I know, we didn't hit anything." Cosner checked the computer display next to her seat. While she and Kale debated the idea that the *Sarek* had rammed something, Tredworth walked over and sat in the guest seat next to ship's counselor Kethry Sutherland, a half-Betazoid woman. The two began telepathically discussing Tredworth's experience in the exobiology lab.

"No damage reported, Captain," said Penji Fil from the tactical post.

"No casualties," added Arbelo.

"No patients left," said Kale. "I want answers! What just happened?"

"Deaaaa gods!" murmured Ensign P'rn Kes, the Caitian officer at the conn.

Kale stood and, followed by Cosner, walked over to his felinoid helmsman, the captain attempting to maintain some distance from her.

"What is it, Mister Kes?"

"Ourrrr position! The Tarrrod Sectorrrr! It can't be corrrrect!" she replied.

"Computer, what is our current position?" Kale said into the air.

After a moment to make navigation fixes on a series of known pulsars around the galaxy, the computer finally replied, "Vessel is currently in standard orbit around the planet Remus."

"WHAT?!?"

"How can that be?" asked Fil.

"Oh, no," murmured Sutherland.

"We're inside the Romulan Empire!" whispered Cosner.

Space, the Final Frontier...

These are the voyages of the starship *Sarek*!

Star Trek: Sarek

“Romulan Ail” by PJK & JT

Captain Kale looked around at his crew on the bridge. On the main viewscreen, the dark surface of the night side of Remus, the openings of the slave-labor dilithium mines bright against its surface could be seen.

“First, I want answers. What caused this, so we can avoid the same phenomenon as we try to leave orbit. Second, we must attempt to leave Romulan space without being detected by the Romulans.”

As Lt Commander Cosner gave Kale a silent look that said, ‘Yeah, right,’ Lieutenant Tredworth attracted the captain’s attention.

“Captain?”

“Yes, Lieutenant Tredway?”

“Tredworth, sir. The reason I came up to the bridge in the first place, as I was telling Counselor Sutherland, was just before all this happened, I sensed a powerful force approaching our ship... A force I have sensed only once before, a few months ago, when we were visited by the being called...”

Kale needed to hear no further.

“*Q*!” he said, his voice a growl.

“Right on the ball. Waste no time in getting the answers. Your crew would do Jean-Luc proud, Kalin,” said a voice coming from the main viewer. The entire bridge crew turned in unison to see the face of *Q*, semi-transparent, superimposed over the planet locked in half-darkness for eternity.

“Go play with the Romulans, you said,” *Q* continued. “But they’re such dullards, and I wanted you to find that out for yourself. So I arranged for YOU to play with them.”

“Sir,” said Arbelo. “We are currently orbiting Remus directly opposite where Romulus is located and have, thus far, remained undetected. That will not last long. We must leave.”

“Understood. Mister Fil, as soon as we are clear of any chance of subspace radio interception, send a message to Starfleet Command. Inform them of our situation and the danger we are in.”

A bright flash appeared in front of Kale and *Q*, dressed once again in a Starfleet captain’s uniform, appeared.

“Tut tut, Kalin. It’s impolite to ignore your guests.”

“You want polite?” Kale asked, sounding shocked. “You fling us to the other side of the galaxy without even a word of warning and you want POLITE!?!?”

“Temper, mon Capitan. Watch your blood pressure.”

Kale paced the width of the bridge once, then returned to his command chair before saying, “Well, we now know the what...Or rather, who. Monster, reconfigure our subspace transponder. See if we can pass for a Romulan merchant vessel. Helm, plot the most direct course back toward Federation space, but leave room for emergency maneuvers. Speed at your discretion. Don’t attract attention.”

“Aye, sirrrr. That courrrrse will take us through the Hobus starrrr system, but accorrrrrding to rrrrecords that system is unpopulated and should not prrrresent a prrrrblem.”

Q walked over and sat in the first officer’s seat next to Kale, crossed his legs and got comfortable. Cosner glared at him, but held her ground. The captain did his best to ignore the intrusive being.

Suddenly *Q* glared at Lieutenant Tredworth, who until that point had apparently been studying the doors to the emergency turbolift to the battle bridge, as if he had suddenly just noticed her. She looked straight back at *Q*, gritted her teeth and narrowed her eyes. Again she opened her mouth to say something when, in a flash, the Betazoid disappeared from the bridge.

“What have you done with my officer?” yelled Kale.

“Patience, Kalin. You’ll soon find out,” and with a flash, *Q* himself disappeared as well.

“Sirrrr, we arrrrre deparrrrting the Rrrromulus system at full impulse. Ourrrr deparrrrrture angle is away frrrrrrom Federrrrration space, but it is the only way to avoid Rrrromulan patrrrrrrols until we are well clearrrr of the system.”

“Understood, Ensign. Thank you. Mister Cosner, you have the bridge. I’ll be in my ready room.”

Kale walked into his ready room, stopping short a few steps inside. The model of the *USS Sverdlov* he kept on his display stand was gone. He turned around looking for where it had gone and found *Q* sitting on his couch, playing with the model.

“Why?” asked Kale.

“Pardon?”

“Why are you doing this?”

Q smiled as he replied, “You amuse me, Kalin. You and your crew. You’re certainly more fun than Ben and his motley crew were.”

“Ben? Ben Sisko?”

“The one and only... Thankfully.”

“Is there a Starfleet officer in existence you haven’t bothered?”

“My dear Captain, I have not yet begun to bother!”

“What did you do with my exobiologist?”

“The animal specialist? I’m surprised you’re so concerned about her, considering you didn’t even know her name. I wouldn’t worry about her if I were you, Kalin. She’s where they need an animal specialist. And you’ll find her soon enough.”

* * * *

Aboard the Romulan warbird *Trager*, four Centurions surrounded a lone Starfleet officer, their disruptors pointing at various areas of her anatomy as Commander Sela walked over.

“I’ll ask you just once more. Who are you and how did you get aboard my ship?” asked the blonde-haired half-Romulan woman.

“Tredworth, Lieutenant (Junior Grade) Jo Ann, serial number 26-3294-12TDJ. Exobiologist. And as I’ve already said five times, I was placed here by an omnipotent being who objected to my presence where I was five minutes ago.”

Sela took a deep breath, then said, “Just say for the moment I might believe you. Just what sort of... omnipotent being... is going to beam... I’m sorry; flash... a Starfleet officer onto an Imperial Romulan warship?”

“The being calls himself *Q*. He has inferred...”

Sela put up her hand to stop Tredworth from continuing. She remembered back to her childhood, to the times her human mother would tell her about another life. And the one mention she made of a being called...

“*Q*? I’ve heard of this entity. Well, that might mean...” Sela quickly turned and activated the intercom on the wall. “Bridge, full sensor sweep! Look for anything out of the ordinary. We may have a Federation starship in the sector! Perhaps even the Starfleet flagship itself!”

“Yes, Commander,” replied the male voice.

Lieutenant Tredworth knew that the Romulans were not particularly sensitive to empathic probes, so she stretched hers to the limits. She sensed that the Romulan Commander, though finding her tale a bit... well, unusual, did in fact believe Tredworth. That alone was a relief. At least she had no intention of trying to ‘pry the truth’ out of her with the well-known (and well feared) methods of Romulan interrogation. Three of the crew replaced their weapons and returned to their stations. The fourth positioned himself close behind Tredworth, with his weapon inches from her back. She measured the compliment empathically and guessed it to be roughly the same size as the *Sarek*, a group which nearly overpowered the young Betazoid with its volatile emotions so close to the surface. At least on the *Sarek* there was a contingent of Vulcans and other species that knew how to shield their thoughts.

The Commander resumed her seat and ignored Tredworth, apparently deep in thought. Tredworth began to wonder exactly where she was and how far from the *Sarek* she had been transported. Knowing *Q*’s abilities first-hand, she knew she could be anywhere in the Romulan Star Empire. She hoped it was far enough for the *Sarek* to be out of range of the Warbird’s sensor sweep, though somehow she doubted it. *Q* was notorious for toying with people from various ships and starbases, especially the *Enterprise*. Never had she heard of any telepath ‘reading’ the omnipotent being known as *Q*. Yet she apparently had, and quite unwillingly at first. He had not seemed to realize it until she attempted to pursue the probe further. Then he ‘zapped’ her here. Something about the Romulans being no fun, or something like that.

The lieutenant was brought abruptly back to her present situation when the Commander, who had risen to peer over her science officer’s shoulder, turned to regard her again.

“What were you doing before you were sent here? You and your ship, that is?” asked Sela. “I am correct that you are assigned to a starship, are you not?”

“Making a survey of a newly charted system in the Gamma Quadrant. I am ship’s exobiologist,” answered Tredworth, deciding she was not giving away any true secrets.

“Be aware, we will research our records and determine exactly who you are and what you were doing...”

“I encourage you to do so.”

“Until such time as we determine what we will do with you, you will be placed under guard and allotted ‘guest’ quarters. I will allow you access to certain, non-sensitive areas aboard my ship. And you will await my further requests of you.”

Tredworth bowed slightly, thanked the commander for her generosity under the circumstances, and followed a Romulan guard out the door, followed closely by another.

The quarters to which she was escorted were arrayed in typical Romulan fashion, though Spartan even by their standards. Tredworth spent the next four hours there, not hearing anything from Commander Sela. During that time, she had swept the Warbird mentally twice more, yet had found nothing onto which she could latch to aid her in her precarious (to say the least) position. Tredworth paced, but in spite of her significant intelligence and powers, she could think of nothing to help herself.

“She will find your ship soon, Lieutenant. What will you do then?” a voice said suddenly from near the cabin door. She whirled around to face *Q*, his face the very picture of smugness, dressed in a Romulan uniform and haircut but otherwise still looking human.

“I don’t know yet,” Tredworth replied. “I have not assessed the situation to my satisfaction.” Again, as earlier, she did not stretch her mental probes, but likewise did not shield herself either. And, as earlier, she felt it at the edge of her consciousness. That feeling of power, of assuredness, of amusement. All that she expected. But it was what she sensed at the edges of her ‘vision,’ feelings of insecurity, of inadequacy. Again, she reached toward it, much more carefully this time, almost reaching it...

Q stepped forward so quickly, Tredworth did not see him move, stopping directly in front of her and slamming up mental shields so quickly and hard that the young Betazoid thought for a moment her head might explode.

“How do you DO that?” *Q* roared. She blinked at him without recognition at first, finally regaining her focus with effort.

“What are you afraid of?” she asked softly. “Why me?”

Q gritted his teeth.

“Of all the beings on all the worlds in all the galaxies, of all the talented and all the trained, not even the most gifted mortals could sense the minds of the *Q*, yet you seem to do it without effort. How?”

“I don’t know,” Tredworth answered. “What do you want with me?”

“An answer.” *Q* smiled and then sauntered toward the door. Upon reaching it, he turned and smiled winningly at her. “...And perhaps some entertainment thrown into the bargain.” He laughed then, loud and long. In spite of her wonder that none of the Romulan guards had tried investigating where all the noise was coming from, Tredworth felt an overwhelming pulse of despair and knew it was *Q* trying to break her. With all her power and all her training, she focused on him, and sent back her answer with her mind, ripping at his shields. *Q* stopped laughing abruptly, and his face lost some of its color from the force of her blast, before he could restore his mental shields. He smiled at her.

“Impressive. Till we meet again. And good luck, my friend.” And in a flash of light, *Q* vanished.

Tredworth slumped down into the cushioned chair, the only padded item in the room, and held her pounding head in her hands. She looked around the cabin, and on impulse she went to the small computer terminal on the desk and played with a few of the keys. Tredworth had studied the Vulcan written language at the Academy, and was able to make sense of some of the letters on the keys. She had not coherently thought of what she was going to do, but when Romulan words appeared on the monitor screen, what little hope she had was dashed. The Romulan script was just too difficult to read. Not knowing what else to do, and not wanting to succumb to despair or frustration, she did the only thing she could think of. Moving over to the bunk, she lay down and before long was asleep.

* * * *

Back aboard the *Sarek*, someone else was taking notice of the starship’s predicament.

“Lieutenant Fil, I have heard a number of rumors,” stated Lieutenant Setac as he exited the aft turbolift on his way to the science console. “Is it true we are no longer in the Gamma Quadrant?”

“Yes, it’s true,” replied Fil over his shoulder, his attention never wavering from the tactical station’s sensor readouts.

“Where are we?”

“You’re stationed in stellar cartography, you figure it out. I don’t have time for chit-chat right now.”

Setac looked at the main viewscreen for a moment – noting a sense of familiarity with what was displayed – before moving over to the science station. Although he never would have said so aloud, he would have recognized the stars around the *Sarek* even if he were not assigned to stellar cartography. The stars of the Romulan Star Empire. The stars of home!

Setac activated the science console and loaded a program he had designed many months before. On the console screen, an image of the galaxy appeared, the Gamma Quadrant highlighted in the upper left corner. A press of a button changed the highlight onto the lower right side, the Beta Quadrant, the same quadrant where the *Sarek* was now located. The actual purpose of the new program was running separately, and as Setac expected, it caused some notice.

“Captain, we have a problem!” announced Arbelo with urgency.

“Have we been spotted by a Romulan ship?” asked Kale, walking toward the ops console.

“No, Captain, but they may as well have been. Some sort of subspace tracking beacon has been activated aboard the *Sarek* on a Romulan carrier wave frequency. The Romulans are bound to pick it up.”

“Locate it!”

“I’ve already tried. They’re tied into the EPS taps. The whole ship is emitting the beacon. I can’t locate the exact point of origin.”

“Could it be caused by *Q*?”

“I doubt it, sir. We had this happen briefly one other time, several days after we entered the Gamma Quadrant around the time the *Hudson* and *Cochecho* were launched, long before we ever encountered *Q*. It only lasted a brief moment and I was never able to locate its source.”

Setac, who had been listening from the upper bridge deck, smiled to himself, something that looked strange on the supposed Vulcan’s face, then quickly returned to his normal stone-like visage lest anyone see him and suspect.

“Find some way to stop it, Monster, any way you can,” ordered Kale, who then turned toward his tactical officer. “Penji, locate the source of the transmission. We can’t escape Romulan space broadcasting like a searchlight.”

“Aye, sir,” replied Fil, who immediately started an internal scan to trace the source of the beacon.

Kale started to return to his command chair when he noticed *Q* had returned, lounging over the arms of the chair, dressed in the uniform of a Romulan Commander, but still with the normal human face he normally used.

“It seems this little trip was more dangerous than even I imagined. My, my, what intrigue you have on your little boat. A spy on your ship, mon Capitan?”

“This is your doing, isn’t it, *Q*?” the captain accused.

“As your monster pointed out,” *Q* said, gesturing toward Arbelo, who frowned back at him, “this has happened before. Long before I ever came across your amusing little... What is the human term? Ah, yes... Soap opera.”

“Well, if you know so much about our ‘soap opera,’ perhaps maybe you can tell us where the beacon is coming from?”

“How typical, expecting me to do all your work for you. I will tell you this. It’s coming from right under your little primate noses.”

“Well then tell me where Lieutenant Tredworth is?”

“That I can do, Kalin, old friend. She’s in Dreamland.”

“Excuse me?”

“You asked where your exobiologist is. She’s off in dreamland. Sleeping. Tried it once myself, you know. I don’t understand what you humanoids see in the stuff.”

Still unsure what *Q* was blabbering about, Kale simply asked, “What is it you want with her?”

“I’m curious, Kalin, my friend. Curious why she is able to sense me? How is it she can read me? And there is only one kind of being in the universe who can read a *Q*.”

Kale found his patience slipping as he waited for *Q* to reveal the answer, finally almost shouting, “And that is?”

“Another *Q*. Think of this as a test for her. If she is a *Q*, as I suspect, if she passes my test, she can get herself back here safe and sound. If not...,” *Q*’s voice trailed off.

“If not...?” Kale prompted.

“Oh, nothing really. Commander Sela will interrogate her, learn what she can from her, and then execute her.” And with a flash, *Q* again vanished.

“Captain, the beacon has stopped,” reported Arbelo.

“Did you find its source?”

“Negative. It... just stopped.”

At the science console, Setac tried repeatedly, without looking frantic, to re-establish his beacon, which had ceased without reason. When he could not get the program to function again, he quickly loaded a display of the local quadrant before he drew attention to himself. He cursed under his breath in vile Romulan terms he himself had not uttered in almost ten years. Then he accessed his protected files in the library computer and located his beacon program. However, rather than a program the file contained a simple message.

It said; ‘LET’S NOT SPOIL THE FUN!’

* * * *

Aboard the *Trager*, Tredworth stirred. She could sense the guard approaching the door to the quarters she had been assigned. Perhaps, she thought, she could take the guard by surprise and find her way to the Warbird’s shuttlebay. She waited against the bulkhead, trying to gauge how long it would take the guard to open the door. The voice behind her startled her so badly she nearly passed out.

“Waiting for someone in particular?” asked *Q*.

Tredworth quickly turned to see *Q*, ears pointed, hair cut in a widow’s peak, the perfect image of a Romulan officer, half sticking out of the wall of the cabin, an amused look on his face.

“Yes, but not you,” she finally replied.

“Awww, I’m disappointed. I thought you would miss me by now.”

Tredworth turned away, trying to ignore the intruding being, as *Q* stepped completely through the bulkhead into the room.

“How do you sense me like that? I must find out. What *is* your background?”

“You’re omnipotent. You tell me.”

“I think you are *Q*, like Amanda Rogers. But I need to know for sure. If you are, as I suspect, then you should be able to get yourself out of this precarious situation.”

The thought struck Tredworth unexpectedly.

“Me? A *Q*?”

“That is what I intend to find out.”

Q stared at Tredworth, deep into her eyes. After a moment, she could not stand it anymore. She could not take the situation anymore. She could not stand his face anymore either.

‘STOP IT!’ she blasted mentally. *Q* grabbed the sides of his head as if it would explode, glaring at Tredworth with a look that could kill, then vanished in a flash. It was only then that Tredworth noticed the door to the cabin was open.

Cautiously, Tredworth approached the door, shaking slightly from her recent expenditure of mental energy. Fully expecting the open door to be another of *Q*’s tricks, she was very surprised to find it was not.

Lying face down on the deck in front of her door was an unconscious Romulan Centurion, the key mechanism still clutched in his hand, a tray of food spilled on the deck.

Tredworth cautiously glanced out the door, looking each way down the corridor. Here and there along the corridors were Romulans, each like the guard at her feet. Unconscious.

‘Did...? Did I do that?’ she wondered to herself.

Finally, picking up the key and the disruptor from the guard’s holster, she started to look for a way off the Warbird.

* * * *

“Commander,” said the *Trager*’s first officer, getting the blonde-haired Romulan woman’s attention. “I’ve lost contact with the guards on K level.”

“What’s happening?”

"I don't know, Commander. I was speaking to the guards at intersection 12-K and suddenly lost contact. But the circuit still reads open and active."

"Can you contact anyone on that level?"

"Commander," interrupted the Romulan science officer. "I have indications that a large number of our crew are unconscious."

A thought suddenly occurred to Sela.

"Where is this phenomena of mass unconsciousness centered?"

The science officer scanned the interior of his own vessel before reporting, "Level N, section 25-D."

"The detention area!" exclaimed Sela. "Activate alert status. Have all available guards cover the transporter rooms and shuttlebays."

"Commander, you can't believe a Betazoid female could defeat all our troops between her cell and any escape point?"

"You fool! She's a Betazoid! She's telepathic! She can probably make anyone she encounters think they don't see her. She might even be able to mentally beat our troops into submission."

* * * *

Dr. Rasa Palin exited his office when he heard the noises coming from sickbay. As he walked into the examination room he was surprised to find a man wearing a Starfleet captain's uniform, lying on the diagnostic bed with a cold compress covering his eyes.

"I hope you don't mind, but I helped myself," said the man on the bed.

"What seems to be the problem?" Dr. Rasa asked cautiously.

"I have a terrible headache." *Q* sat up, still holding the cold compress to his forehead as he said, "I don't suppose you could just prescribe two aspirin and a 'call me in the morning,' huh?"

Without replying, Rasa tapped his Bajoran-style combadge.

"Security to sickbay. Captain Kale, please report to sickbay. A... friend of yours is here."

Moments later, Kalin Kale entered sickbay where two armed security guards already stood watch over *Q*, who was once again lying down on the bed.

"Don't you have anyone else you can play with?" Kale asked in exasperation.

"You just don't understand, do you?" *Q* asked.

He sat up, placing the compress down on the bed next to his leg.

"She has far more power than even I thought. She's dangerous, Kalin. Almost as dangerous as a certain Imp I know of aboard another of your starships. And the worst part is... I'm certain now she isn't a *Q*. If she were, she would simply have returned herself here already. She wants it; she just can't do it herself. But she can sense me. She can READ ME! And worst of all... She can HURT me!"

"You're worried about a little headache?" taunted Dr. Rasa.

"You try being omnipotent and immortal and see what a 'little headache' does to your confidence," *Q* said to the Bajoran physician.

"Bridge to Captain Kale," said an urgent sounding voice over the intercom. Kale stepped away from where *Q* was sitting and tapped his combadge.

"What is it, Monster?"

"Long range sensors have just detected a Warbird at extreme range, heading toward us. It's not part of any of the regular patrols."

"Can we outrun her?"

"Negative. Not without heading further back into Romulan territory."

"Acknowledged. I'll be back on the bridge in a few minutes. Kale, out."

The captain then returned his attention to his unwanted guest.

"*Q*, I'm asking nicely. Please...! Return Lieutenant Tredworth and get us out of here."

"Always looking for the easy way out. Typical," replied *Q* as he reclined back onto the bed.

Kale started walking out of sickbay, saying as he went, "Sound red alert. All hands to battlestations. Prepare for possible combat."

As Kale stepped into the corridor, the klaxons started sounding throughout the ship as the doors slid shut behind him.

* * * *

Every Romulan Tredworth encountered was lying motionless on the deck, and the more of the incapacitated crew she encountered, the quicker her pace picked up. So many unconscious crew members would undoubtedly show up on a diagnostic monitor somewhere. She had to get off the deck as soon as possible. That meant finding a turbolift. Fast!

When the blue alert lights began flashing, and a sonorous female voice announced something in Romulan that she could not understand, Tredworth was not surprised in the slightest. She just started shaking a little more, and not only from the psychic backlash she was experiencing. Looking around, she noticed a grating for what she assumed must be a maintenance shaft. On the *Sarek*, the internal sensors were not as sensitive in the Jefferies tubes as they were on the populated decks. Perhaps she could go through the maintenance shafts and find her way to one of the shuttlebays before the Romulans found her?

Somewhere behind her, she heard shouting Romulan voices and quickly made up her mind. As quietly as she could, she removed the grating, slipped her slender frame through the narrow opening, and secured the grate in place behind her. It was a simple matter to scuttle away on hands and knees as quietly as possible. Now, if luck was with her, the officer monitoring the instruments on the bridge would turn away from the monitor for a few seconds, allowing her to just...

* * * *

The Sub-Lieutenant did a double-take.

“Commander, she’s gone!”

“What do you mean, gone? How can she just disappear?”

“I have no reading on her, Commander. Checking all adjoining decks and turbolifts.” He paused. “Nothing.”

“Damn. How can that be?” Sela sat in her chair, rubbing her chin and thinking.

* * * *

Lieutenant (JG) Tredworth crept along the service tunnel as quickly as she could, wishing as she did that she had paid more attention to the course on modern Romulan technology she had taken during her final year at the Academy. She did not have the foggiest idea where she was heading, and the designation signs posted periodically in the service tunnel junctions written in Romulan script were of no help whatsoever. She hoped that the service tunnels were not closely monitored and that she would not stumble upon any repair crews. Using her ‘talent’ was all she could think of. So far she had ‘homed in’ on a training room filled with young Romulan trainees, a security station where four male Romulans stood over a game of chance and watched silently in a third spot as a patrol passed directly beneath her in one corridor.

‘Tut, tut. Time’s running out, little one. What are you going to do?’ Q’s voice intruded into her wildly scattered thoughts.

‘Find a way out. Make my way to a comm station or a shuttlebay and hopefully blast my way out of here,’ Tredworth’s mind responded.

‘But you’re merely a mouse lost in a maze,’ said Q, his voice dripping with sarcasm. *‘Mouse in a maze.’*

‘There has to be a way out. You won’t let them kill me. That would leave too many unanswered questions. Much too messy for your liking.’

‘Perhaps. Are you really willing to find out?’

‘You know there is a way! How do I get out? How do I find the Sarek?’

‘I merely claim omnipotence. I never said I was a god.’

Tredworth stifled an audible bark of laughter as the presence retreated from her mind, to be replaced by the sounds of Deltan, Betazoid and Vulcan words being spoken from somewhere in the distance. With renewed focus, she crept more cautiously toward the voices.

* * * *

On the bridge of the *Sarek*, tension was running high.

“Status of the Warbird?” asked Kale.

“Romulan vessel is still hovering at the extreme edge of our sensor range. I can’t believe it myself, but I don’t think they’ve seen us yet,” reported Lieutenant Penji Fil.

“And I don’t believe it either. They may just be playing with us. Maintain red alert,” ordered Kale as he stood and paced close to the main viewer. Lt Commander Cosner moved up beside Kale.

“Maybe we should separate the ship?” the first officer suggested. “Two smaller targets may be harder to detect than one large one.”

Kale considered the idea for a moment, then slowly shook his head.

“No, too dangerous. The saucer section has no warp drive. The families aboard would be sitting ducks should the Romulans suddenly move in. And besides, we don’t know if two targets may be easier to detect than one.”

Kale stood in silence for a moment, his face a hard mask of anger.

“Conn, course and speed?”

“On courrrrse 327 mark 2, speed thrrrrree-quarterrrr impulse.”

“Penji, Warbird’s course and speed?”

After consulting his tactical readout, the security chief looked at Kale.

“They’re on a zigzag course, as if trying to either avoid something unseen or trying to locate something, but the base course is approximately 322 mark 3, speed warp two. I estimate they’ll be on top of us in less than two hours. No more. And that’s assuming they aren’t just toying with us right now.”

Kale stood motionless in the center of his bridge. Moments passed. Some of the crew started worrying about the captain, that he may have begun to crack somehow. Finally, Kale looked up at the ceiling of the bridge and shouted at the top of his lungs, “Q!”

* * * *

Tredworth came across another training room, this one filled with what looked like Romulans in their early teens. She was surprised that the Romulans would induct their children into their military at such a young age. In front of the class of roughly two dozen students stood holograms of both male and female Deltans, Betazoids and Vulcans, each wearing common civilian garb. The instructor at the front of the room was apparently discussing the three most psychically powerful Federation races and their physically distinctive attributes, pointing out the Deltan's lack of body hair and the Betazoid's completely black eyes. However, the lecturer focused mainly on the Vulcans, it seemed to Tredworth, which she could easily understand, given that the Romulans had sprung from the parent Vulcan race.

In fact, the differences between the Romulan lecturer and the Vulcan hologram seemed largely cosmetic. The Vulcan was somewhat taller, a little more slender and had more angular features. And of course the Vulcans had stronger psychic abilities.

But as Tredworth prepared to move along, lest she risk being detected, she noticed a splash of red amid the sea of black uniforms. A pair of young Romulans, sitting in the farthest corner of the room, one male, the other female, wore sashes of scarlet red. They stood out plainly against the tight black uniforms hugging their thin frames. They were more slender than the other trainees, with hollow cheeks and angular features. Tredworth frowned as she looked at them. They looked to Tredwell like victims of abuse or neglect. With barely a conscious thought, she extended a gentle 'hand' over the room, pausing over the two with the red sashes. A thin tendril reached out in answer to her probe. Unfocused, it groped like a drowning man. Too tired to shield herself, she recoiled in shock. Throwbacks! With psychic abilities not usually seen among Romulans? Could that be why they were separated from the others? Could they be what she had sensed? What had drawn her to wander around this section of the warbird? She blinked, realizing that in her reverie the class had ended. All the students were filing out in a chorus of hushed conversation. Yet the youths in the red sashes had not moved. Nobody else seemed to notice or care that the pair were being left behind. As the room emptied, the two seemed absorbed by something in the male's computerized notebook. As the last of the other students finally departed, the door sliding shut behind them, a few more seconds passed before the male looked directly up at the grate behind which Tredworth hid.

"Come," he said, speaking in heavily accented Vulcan. "None come soon here."

Tredworth hesitated a moment before deciding she had nothing to lose and pulled at the grating. Metal shrieked against metal. Tredworth stopped, unable to pull it out.

The Romulan male got up from his seat and moved toward the grate, looking first at it, then past it, barely making out Tredworth's feminine form, long light-red hair, and blue-shouldered Starfleet uniform.

"Who are you?" he asked, still speaking rudimentary Vulcan.

"I'm Jo Ann. Who are you?"

"Karondar. Sister is Tehanu." He noticed Tredworth's solid black irises and added, "You are Betazoid, yes?"

"Yes," Tredworth replied, unsure.

Karondar frowned before asking, "How here?"

Tredworth tried to explain, but though her Vulcan was passable, the pair were speaking an old dialect of Vulcan no longer in general use. In the end, however, she believed she had created the impression that her presence was not of her own choice.

"Where home?" Karondar asked.

"The Federation starship *Sarek*."

"Far?" Tehanu asked.

"I don't think so," Tredworth replied.

"Near?" the young Romulan female asked, surprised.

"I believe so," Tredworth said.

Karondar stepped up onto one of the tables below Tredworth, his face thirty centimeters from the grating, and placed the palm of one hand against the cool metal.

"Help?" he asked.

"Me or you?" Tredworth asked. Karondar simply nodded.

"Out," he said. "Find *Sarek*."

As Tredworth blinked, Karondar tapped his temple and smiled.

"We find *Sarek*," he said.

Karondar shoved the grate up and into the room. With help from Tehanu, he scrambled up into the maintenance tunnel and sat beside the Betazoid woman. Leaning back out, he carried on a brief conversation in Romulan with his sister.

"Talk to *Sarek* or out?" he eventually asked Tredworth.

"Will the Commander hear us talking to *Sarek*?" she asked. Karondar shrugged. "The Commander's quarters?" Tredworth finally suggested. Karondar frowned at first until Tredworth let him know she had a plan. With much less effort than their spoken conversation, Karondar seemed to understand, and after replacing the grate, gestured for Tredworth to follow him back into the maintenance shaft and away from the training room.

* * * *

"So help me, if I ever get my hands on *Q*, I'll... I'll..."

Captain Kale paced the lower deck of the bridge, back and forth. On the upper deck, behind the tactical rail, Lt Commander Cosner, Commander T'Veer, Counselor Sutherland, Lt Commander V'Pier N'Vorda, and Lieutenant Fil watched in silence as the captain paced, his hands clenching and unclenching with each step.

"You'll what?" asked a bored sounding voice from the command chair. Kale froze in place. Looking toward the chair, he saw no one. But he could feel *Q*'s goading presence.

“What’s the matter, *Q*? Afraid to show yourself?” Kale asked through clenched teeth.

“Just checking in, that’s all. No need to clean up or fix a special meal on my account.” This time the voice seemed to come from the viewscreen. Kale spun quickly to face the screen, but once again nothing out of the ordinary was visible. Just the stars against blackness.

“*Q*, I want my crew member back and I want my ship OUT OF HERE! Do you understand me? I’m tired of playing these games of yours. You’ve put over a thousand members of my crew at risk...!”

“Temper, temper, mon Capitain. You don’t know just how much you NEED to be here right now. But why should I be telling you all the scuttlebutt? You’ll find out soon enough. I must be going. Ciao!” A moment later, *Q*’s presence vanished.

“*Q*?”

Nothing.

“*Q*!?!”

Cosner walked down one of the ramps and stood by her captain.

“What do you suppose he means? That we need to be here?” the first officer asked.

“The gods know. Or rather... *Q* knows.”

* * * *

“I don’t understand what can be keeping them?” Setac said to himself as he sat in his quarters aboard the *Sarek*. “How can not a single warbird have located this starship yet?!? When I’m finally in front of the Command again, I’ll see to it that heads roll! I would never believe this level of incompetence existed in the Romulan ranks.”

Setac walked over to his replicator and ordered a Vulcan salad, lest suspicion be thrown on him, and sat at the table to eat, continuing to talk to himself.

“Were I in command of a warbird as I should be, I would have had this starship in orbit of Romulus by now, stripping every secret from its hull.”

He munched on the bloomgrass in his salad before adding, “Yes, definitely. Heads will roll.”

* * * *

Tehanu took the notebooks and walked quickly through the corridors of the warbird, grateful that she and her brother had no other training sessions that cycle. She herself still had her pilot’s training, but that would not be for another two hours, and her appearance there would throw any suspicion away from her brother and herself. All would seem normal. Not that anyone should even suspect them. They were mere sixteen year old throwbacks, considered less than fully Romulan by the officers in charge. Only their higher than average intelligence had saved them from the persecution others like them experienced back on Romulus.

Tehanu walked directly to the quarters she shared with her brother, sitting down in front of the computer terminal. Typing quickly, she ran through a series of files they had set up in their idle wanderings through the warbird’s systems. One in particular she loaded for immediate access. A file they had hacked into that normally only senior officers aboard the warbird had access to, the codes to access and send subspace transmissions. And if the officers aboard the warbird ever found out the file had been compromised, the siblings would see Vorta Vor!

* * * *

Karondar lead the female Betazoid – Jo Ann, he reminded himself, thinking what odd names aliens have – quickly through the access tunnels. He was surprised she had found her way to the classroom where she had discovered the pair until he reminded himself of the fact that she had to be a powerful empath. It was just fortunate that her powers had led her to Tehanu and himself. More likely than not, she otherwise would eventually have stumbled into a security detail and been captured once again.

Long had he dreamed of escaping from the Romulan Empire with his sister and defecting to the Federation, where skills like they possessed might be valued instead of shunned and hidden like they were aboard the *Trager*.

Now he had a Federation officer fall into his lap... if he and Tehanu were able to help her escape. If only they could all escape and join the heralded Federation Starfleet!

Karondar clamped down on his rising tide of excitement, afraid that the Betazoid might pick up on it and think he might be getting excited about turning her in to the security forces and claiming a reward. Then, muffled through the bulkhead of the access tunnel, he heard a voice on the general announcing system.

“Federation prisoner has escaped. Deck N, section 25-D. All available security personnel will report in for a deck by deck sweep until the prisoner is found. All non-essential personnel are confined to quarters until further notice. That is all.”

Karondar moved even more quickly. Security patrols would be crawling all through the ship, and when the Betazoid did not show up on any decks or turbolifts, they would have to assume she was hidden somewhere among the access tunnels.

Lieutenant Tredworth followed the teenager as fast as she could, which to her did not seem fast enough. Karondar growled audibly as he listened to the announcement ring through the access way once again and started crawling through the tunnel faster. Tredworth did not understand all the words but could easily assume it concerned her own escape. Tredworth knew she could never have found her way around the crawlways by herself, even with a map. Karondar seemed to know where he was going, as if he traveled by this route on a regular basis. What she was not sure of was if he was leading her around in circles, just to show off, or if he had a destination in mind. She was not sure if she really cared any more either. She only wanted to go home. After a short

distance more, Karondar stopped above another access grate leading down into a room and knocked three times. Tredworth peered past the young Romulan's shoulder and saw Tehanu in the room, standing on a chair to help remove the grate. Karondar slipped through and dropped lightly to the floor. Jo Ann followed, a little less agile from all her time stooped over in the tunnels. The siblings spoke several words in clipped Romulan that the Betazoid could not follow on a bet, then Karondar sat at the computer console and waved for Tredworth to join him there.

"You send to ship? Tell me," he said, looking up at her, his fingers poised over the keys.

Tredworth nodded, then started dictating, "Trapped aboard Romulan warbird *Trager*. Have encountered *Q...*"

"What Q?" Karondar asked in his halting Vulcan dialect, puzzled.

"Just type the letter. They'll understand," Tredworth told the young Romulan, then continued her dictation. "Am attempting escape and possible rendezvous at future date. Unable to specify at this time. If necessary, abandon me."

"That all?" Karondar asked after a pause. Tredworth nodded as she watched the teenager go through a number of files.

"How are you sending this?" she eventually asked.

"Through secret channels. Like orders sent to spies in the Federation. See, here are transmission file names."

The young Romulan pointed at the monitor screen, after changing the type font to Vulcan, a language Karondar assumed Tredworth could read. The Betazoid glanced at the file names and gasped at the title of one; Sarek_IV.

"Can you show me that one?" she asked urgently.

"I can access, but not long. Soon bridge will notice I am accessing files and track the access to here." Then with the press of a button, he called the file onto the screen.

Chorsus, Sub-Commander

Assignment: Tal Shiar Deep Cover Espionage Mission

Location: United Federation of Planets Starfleet

Cover: Vulcan National - Setac

Federation Starfleet Rank - Lieutenant

Assignments: Entered Imperial War College at age of conscription.

Two semesters training in intelligence gathering.

Served the Tal Shiar on Belak

Entered the Federation under code-name 'Setac' on Federation stardate 41103.6 as 'Ensign Setac,' moving from assignment to assignment as Starfleet dictated.

Current Whereabouts: Unknown, due to assignment with Federation Starfleet to 'Extreme Deep Space Exploration Mission.' Believed to be assigned to a Starfleet vessel exploring the far Alpha Quadrant past the Denab system. Awaiting signal.

Before Tredworth could finish reading the file, a signal suddenly sounded from the console and the screen went blank. Then lines of Romulan script appeared, and the siblings looked at it with widening eyes.

"Damn!" Tehanu hissed in Romulan, dashing over to her bed and returning with a pack. She opened a nearby locker and started tossing the contents into it haphazardly.

"What's going on?" Tredworth wanted to know.

"Discovery! No time!" Karondar replied as he grabbed his sister and propelled her toward the hole in the ceiling where they had entered. Jo Ann followed, the young male bringing up the rear and replacing the grate with a slam.

"Must get out. Scout ship," he said in Vulcan.

"You mean blast our way out? Do you know how to fly one of those things? Because I'm certainly no pilot!" Tredworth said. Karondar looked at Tehanu.

"Tehanu train for pilot," he remarked. Tredworth looked at Tehanu, who smiled weakly and shrugged.

"You've never actually flown anything for real, have you?" Tredworth said, a statement more than a question. Both siblings look at her and shook their heads.

Tredworth gazed upward as if pleading for intercession from any random deity and said, "Aboard a Romulan ship with a language I don't understand and I'm expected to fly a ship I've never even seen before? This stinks!"

The two Romulan teenagers looked at one another before looking back at Tredworth.

"Romulan ship no stink," said Tehanu.

"Klingon ship stink!" affirmed Karondar.

"This situation stinks!" grumbled Tredworth before they all started toward the nearest hangerbay.

* * * *

"Captain!" alerted Lieutenant Fil as he monitored his tactical readout.

"What is it, Penji?" asked Kale as he quickly strode up the ramp to join the security chief, whose face now had a look of growing concern.

“The warbird has just suddenly stopped dead in space and raised shields!”

“Are they attacking?”

“Negative. They just... stopped.”

“Captain!” called Lieutenant Setton Arbelo at ops.

“Yes, Monster?”

“I’ve just intercepted a message hidden within the Romulan carrier wave frequency. It was directed at us.”

“Q again?”

“No, sir. It’s Lieutenant Tredworth.”

Kale was amazed. He nearly ran down the ramp to join his chief of operations.

“What does it say?”

“Trapped aboard warbird *Trager* - Have encountered letter q - Will attempt escape and possible rendezvous at future date unable to specify at this time – If necessary abandon me.”

“Number One,” Kale said, turning toward his first officer who was sitting in her regular seat in the command arena. “What odds do you lay on that ship...” He gestured toward the viewscreen. “...is the *Trager*?”

“Knowing what we know about Q and his games, I’d say the odds are even,” responded Cosner as she stood and walked over to the conn to look over Ensign Kes’ shoulder as the captain gave his next order.

“Mister Kes, whatever happens, do not lose that warbird. Mister Fil, keep scanning that ship passively. If they don’t already know we’re here, I don’t want to give ourselves away. I want to know the instant anything happens over there.”

“Like what?” the Catullan security chief asked.

“I don’t know. Anything!”

“Aye, sir.”

Kale returned to his command chair and sat down, staring at the viewscreen and steepling his fingers.

“Whatever you have planned, Q, it had better be good,” he mumbled to himself. “It had better be good.”

* * * *

The odd trio crawled through a low section of the maintenance passageway, Tredworth swearing from time to time under her breath as she scraped her knees or banged her head on the low ceiling, drawing curious looks from the two young Romulans. Karondar crawled ahead, and Tehanu behind, the idea being that once the sensors started searching the access tunnels, and they would very soon if they had not started already, that the close proximity of two Romulans might mask the Betazoid’s life signs and the trio would be mistaken for one of the regular maintenance crews.

“How much longer...?” Tredworth started to ask for perhaps the sixth time when an angry glare from Karondar startled her to silence.

“We are near engineering,” Tehanu whispered. “Engineer Raschac has been reputed to hear even the slightest phase variance in the *Trager*’s quantum singularity power core.”

Tredworth did not doubt the statement. She had heard of many engineers in Starfleet who could be accused of the same ability with their own warp drive.

“That is strange,” Karondar said as he gazed out through another grating.

“What’s the problem?” Tredworth asked.

“This part of engineering is empty. Normal to have at least two technicians.”

“What part of engineering is this?”

“Shields and tractor beam control.”

An idea struck Tredworth at the same moment she could not believe her luck.

“Can we get in there?” she asked.

“This is not near hanger with scout ship. Why get out here?”

“If we’re going to steal a scout, we won’t get far if they can simply pull us back with a tractor beam. We have to disable it.”

Tredworth was suddenly reminded of an old Earth film she had seen on holo vid during her Academy years. She was not at all pleased remembering that the old wizard in the film who took it upon himself to deactivate the tractor beam trapping his comrades ship in that movie did not make it out of the space station with his companions alive.

Karondar gently released the latches on the grill as Tredworth reached out with her mind to see if the coast was really clear. To her surprise, she found no other consciousness in the compartment.

“Room clear,” reported Tehanu, a smile crossing her face.

“I see,” confirmed Tredworth. She started to move toward the opening, but Karondar beat her out.

He looked back toward the open grill and said, “It be little less suspicious if I found here.” He re-closed the grill and moved slowly into the compartment, checking readouts and altering settings on certain computer interfaces.

“Karondar train in this area,” Tehanu explained. “He knows where everything is and how to make it not found.”

Tredworth was confused by the rough translation she was interpreting, but figured the two young Romulans knew what they were doing.

‘I see you’ve made some new friends,’ said a voice in Tredworth’s mind, causing her to jump and bang her head on the roof of the access tunnel once again, drawing a curious glance from Tehanu.

‘If you’re not going to help me, then leave me alone,’ she replied angrily while rubbing the newly forming bump.

‘Trust me. It will be far better for you... and your ship... if I let you continue in just the direction you’re going.’

Tehanu was suddenly looking at Tredworth strangely. Then the lieutenant realized that the young Romulan woman was not so much looking at her as concentrating on her.

'Oh no, not another one!' Q's voice groaned in frustration before Tredworth felt the presence depart.

"I felt... another," Tehanu said, looking to Tredworth for guidance.

"You felt him?" she whispered in amazement. "You were able to tell that Q was here?"

"Q? That is what you said before. What is Q?"

Tredworth sighed, trying to think of how to describe the *Q Continuum* in words Tehanu might understand. Finally she simply said, "He's a... cosmic pest, of sorts. He's the one that brought me here."

"Then we must stop this... Q."

"If I could..." Tredworth's voice trailed off. "If only I could."

The grill suddenly opened again, startling both women huddled in the tunnel, until Karondar boosted himself back into the tube and closed the cover.

"All done," he whispered. "Commander Sela will be... What is word? ...Surprised!"

"What did you do?" Tredworth asked. Karondar simply turned down the tunnel and resumed crawling. Shrugging her shoulders, Tredworth turned and followed, with Tehanu close behind. The three made their way down the service tunnel for several more minutes, descending a series of ladders down several decks. Tredworth hoped they were nearing their goal until a hand grabbed Tredworth's foot, causing her to look back at Tehanu.

"Security come," the young Romulan said in her broken Vulcan.

It took a moment for Tredworth to concentrate, but once she had she could sense the presence of others in the tunnels. Just around the next corner, three security guards, their suspicions already raised by the alert, were searching for the escaped Betazoid.

"No!" hissed Tehanu as a worried look appeared on her face. The same look also appeared on Karondar's face as well. Behind them, the trio could hear another set of guards moving toward them.

"Another lousy alert, another lousy search," said one of the bored guards as they crawled unknowingly toward the now-shaking trio of fugitives.

"I know what you mean," replied his partner. "Next thing you know, the Commander will be expecting us to put on environmental suits and search outside of the hull."

"Shhh!" the first Romulan guard said mockingly. "Someone will hear you and think it is a good idea!"

Gritting her teeth, Tredworth recalled something one of her Vulcan teachers used to tell her over and over. 'What is important is what they believe they perceive, not necessarily what is true.' With that in mind, she concentrated hard on the two volatile minds not more than ten meters distant. They were looking half-heartedly, not even using their tricorders. Perhaps they believed Tredworth's little group was just another security team. Tredworth honed in on their minds, concentrating on them perceiving something that was not really there. She closed her eyes in concentration, her face draining of color from the strain. The two young Romulans felt waves of psychic power flow past themselves.

Down the access tunnel, one of the Romulan security guards suddenly stopped, listening carefully.

"Did you hear something? It seemed to come from behind us!" he asked his partner.

"I thought it was just me. Let's go check. Nothing's registering ahead of us except another of the search teams."

The two guards turned around, entering a side tunnel and heading off away from the escaping misfits. Soon, even their grumbling could no longer be heard. Tehanu and Karondar looked at each other with renewed hope. Perhaps they would survive this adventure after all?

"Now we just have to deal with that other team," remarked Tredworth quietly, looking from one youth to the other, sweat pouring down her face. "But don't ask me to get rid of them that same way again."

Tredworth could sense the three guards ahead of them approaching closer, now only mere seconds from rounding the corner and capturing them.

Suddenly, Tredworth remembered the Romulan disruptor pistol she had appropriated from her 'guestroom' guard during her initial escape. She pulled the gun out from underneath her uniform top, made sure it was set for stun, and aimed down the tunnel.

Right then the three other guards appeared around the far corner, freezing when they noticed the odd trio ahead of them.

"Um... Sub-Lieutenant?" one of the guards said in Romulan. "I think we have a slight problem."

Before any of the guards could react, Tredworth depressed the disruptor's trigger, emitting a beam of stunning energy at the three guards, knocking them down for the count.

* * * *

"Commander! I'm detecting an energy discharge in the access crawlway nineteen, deck R, section 16-E," reported the *Trager's* security officer on the bridge.

"It must be the Betazoid attempting to escape," shouted the blonde-haired Romulan woman. "What section is that?"

"Engineering, subsection nine."

"Have all available personnel converge on that section. Don't let her escape again, or it will cost you all your rank!"

* * * *

Knowing there was no way the bridge could not have detected the disruptor discharge, the three escapees scuttled quicker than ever, moving closer to their intended destination, when they heard an alert siren go off in the corridor below them.

"I think they know we're here," Karondar stated.

"You think?" Tredworth snapped. "Let's get to the shuttlebay and get the heck out of here, okay?!"

* * * *

Moments later, Sela and a contingent of guards entered the already secured engineering room. Nothing seemed amiss, and the escaped Betazoid was certainly nowhere to be seen.

"Where is she?" Sela demanded.

"No one was here when we entered the compartment, Commander, and nothing was out of place. I do not know if she was ever in engineering," replied one of the centurions.

As the guards finished their report, there was suddenly a rapping sound from above their heads. Two of the Romulans moved toward the maintenance grate and opened it, revealing two somewhat confused looking guards, who crawled out of the tunnel.

"Report?" demanded Sela.

"We were searching the maintenance crawlways as you ordered, Commander. The only thing we can report is detecting two other search teams in access crawlway nineteen just prior to hearing an unexplained noise in junction twenty one, but it turned out to be nothing."

The Romulan security chief with Sela looked puzzled for a moment.

"There was only one other search team in crawlway nineteen, and you should have been moving toward one another to meet at junction twenty three," he said.

The two guards who had just crawled out of the access tunnel looked at one another.

"Fools! I have no one working for me but fools!" yelled Sela. She pointed at two other guards. "You two! Enter the tunnel and search for the Betazoid! We know she was in that tunnel! She can't have gotten far. And don't come back out until you have found her!"

The two new guards entered the crawlway and disappeared down the tunnel, searching for the missing young Betazoid. Sela then turned her attention back on the two guards that had just emerged from the access tunnel.

"As for you two... Go put on a pair of environmental suits. You're going to be searching the outside of the hull in case she found some way of getting outside and is trying to access another section of the ship."

As the pair of dejected-looking Romulans acknowledged their orders and shuffled to the nearest airlock, the security chief looked at Sela.

"What makes you think the Betazoid would try and make her way outside the hull, Commander?"

"Nothing!" Sela replied, her eyes filled with anger.

* * * *

"They will soon find us," commented Karondar.

"We must hurry," added Tehanu.

"I'm crawling as fast as I can, okay?" replied a grumbling Tredworth as she scraped her knee for the forty-fifth time.

* * * *

The two new guards assigned to the search soon came across the three unconscious forms of their compatriots.

"Toval to Commander Sela."

"Sela here," replied the commander's voice.

"We found the other team at junction sixteen. All three are unconscious. We are confirming the alien is armed."

"Track her!" Sela demanded.

"We are not detecting any trace of her life signs on the scanner, Commander. I do not understand what is wrong."

A thought finally occurred to Sela, one she had dared not consider before.

"She must be getting help somehow." Sela turned to her security chief. "Order all search teams out of the maintenance tunnels. Then we'll find whoever is helping the Betazoid and we'll deal with them appropriately."

* * * *

Again, Tehanu grabbed Tredworth's foot to stop her.

"What is it?" Tredworth whispered.

Karondar gestured ahead down the crawlway and said, "I sense others ahead."

Tehanu nodded, continuing, "But they are not looking for you. They are leaving the tunnel."

Tredworth, still weak from her earlier mind-trick, tried to confirm what her companions were saying. But she proved too weak, so she decided to simply trust them.

"Maybe they've given up looking for us?" the Betazoid suggested. Karondar stifled a laugh.

"Commander Sela? Give up? If she had a choice, the invasion of Vulcan would still have been attempted, even though Starfleet had been warned of the Romulan fleet's approach," he said.

"But there must be a reason they're leaving the tunnels," Tehanu said.

The three resumed crawling a few meters more when a thought suddenly struck Tredworth.

“Oh, Deities! I think I know! If they can’t detect my lifesigns because I’m being masked by your close proximity, and they’re sure we’re in the crawlways like they must be by now, then the easiest way to find us is... to remove and eliminate all other contacts and simply home in on whatever remains.”

“That is logical,” Karondar commented.

“We have to get out of these tunnels! Now!”

Moving as fast as each of their four appendages would carry them in the cramped tunnel, they headed toward the nearest unguarded exit.

* * * *

“They’ve almost got her, Kalin,” said a voice with false concern.

Kale looked to his left at the seat where a moment before Counselor Sutherland had been sitting, to Kale’s mild shock and disgust, now sat *Q*, wearing the counselor’s blue dress, his hair long and hanging down in the style Sutherland always preferred.

“*Q*...,” Kale started, his voice sticking in his throat.

“You know, there are three of them. I found it almost impossible to believe even one like your Lieutenant Treadway could exist. Now I have THREE of them on my hands!”

Q looked at his hands in disgust, slowly turning them over and back again.

“What are you babbling about, *Q*?” Kale asked in annoyance.

“That there are three beings in this galaxy that can affect me in the way your Jo Ann can. It’s quite... annoying.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry for you, *Q*,” Kale said with an utter lack of sincerity.

“I would simply eliminate them all, but I happen to like you, Kalin, and this is the only way you and the pathetic little community you call a crew can survive the next year. Besides...,” *Q* said, his face turned to a look of annoyed anger, “if I did try and eliminate any of them, the *Continuum* would cause me more pain than I care to contemplate.”

“I don’t understand what you’re trying to say, *Q*.”

“Of course you don’t,” *Q* said, his face becoming the model of cheerfulness. “You’re only human.”

“Centauri!” Kale protested. This time *Q* rolled his eyes.

“That’s the trouble with you mere mortals. Always creating more divisions among yourselves. Terran, Centauri, Vegan... All different branches of the same root. But you’re getting off the track. As I was saying before, they almost have her. Her capture is moments away and there is nothing you can do about it... Except risk your ship and crew. Is the life of one worth the life of all the rest?”

Q looked around as if admiring the bridge as Kale started to respond to his taunt.

“Lieutenant Tredworth has already managed to contact us somehow, and has advised us to abandon her if necessary.”

“And will you?” *Q* asked with utter glee.

“Of course not. We’re still here, aren’t we?”

Q slowly shook his head.

“Typical. All talk, no action.”

With a flash, *Q* vanished again, replaced by a dazed and confused ship’s counselor.

Kale looked back at the screen where, even at maximum magnification, the warbird *Trager* was barely visible, still motionless.

“What is going on over there?” Kale asked rhetorically.

* * * *

Tredworth was feeling well enough to try another mind-scan. Sure enough, to her utter dismay, there were no other Romulans in the access ways surrounding herself and her two young friends.

“We have to get out of here,” she whispered to Karondar, gesturing toward the next grating ahead.

Karondar shook his head.

“Guard posted. Never make it out.”

“Only one?” Tredworth asked.

Karondar nodded confirmation. Tredworth pushed him aside before Karondar could protest and placed the heels of her boots against the grate. With a quick kick, she sent the grate flying across the corridor, barely missing the guard that had been posted there. Distracted by the flying piece of metal, he turned away from the opening just long enough for Tredworth to roll out of the opening with her disruptor in position, firing at the surprised Romulan. He hit the deck with a flump.

“That’s called the full frontal assault,” Tredworth said to the two teenagers as she helped them out of the tunnel. “Which way?”

“To left is the closest, but most heavily guarded,” said Tehanu. “To right is another hanger. Not as many ships, not as well guarded.”

Tredworth looked in both directions down the corridor while Karondar took another disruptor from the fallen guard, something he regretted not having done earlier.

“Eenie, meenie, miney... MO!” Tredworth pointed down the corridor, her gesture to choose which direction to choose confusing the Romulan teens.

“Who is Mo?” asked Karondar.

“Forget it! Just follow me!” And the three darted off down the corridor.

* * * *

“We’ve got them!” exclaimed the *Trager*’s security officer. “I’m registering another disruptor discharge at...” He consulted his sensor display. “...At junction twenty two. They’ve apparently moved back into the corridors.”

“Hanger complex two is near junction twenty two, is it not?” Sela asked her subordinate. He nodded.

“Send an armed platoon to the hanger complex. And cover all corridors in the area.”

“Yes, Commander,” the officer replied and walked away to order the new changes as another security guard approached Sela.

“Commander, all maintenance crawlways have been cleared of authorized personnel. We can now start scanning for the alien intruder and the traitorous companion or companions that must be aiding her.”

Sela stared at the guard, too dumbfounded to even reply. Finally she just walked away, shouting “Fools!” and leaving the confused guard to muddle it through by himself.

* * * *

Twenty security guards, all carrying disruptor rifles, entered the hanger that contained a number of small craft, including several fighters Starfleet designated as Scorpion-class attack craft, scouts and one small science vessel a little larger than a Starfleet runabout. Spreading out to capture anyone who may enter the hanger, no matter where from, the platoon was not taking chances. There was no telling just how many traitors were helping the alien woman, or how well they might be armed. But now it was only a matter of time until the Betazoid was back in their custody and the traitors were dead.

* * * *

Tredworth and Karondar slowly peeked around the corner at the door. There was lettering on it which Tredworth had no hope what so ever of reading, but which Karondar told her indicated the hanger complex.

“Are you ready?” Tredworth asked her companions. Both nodded. “Well, here goes nothing.”

Again, the two teens looked at one another in confusion, then scurried to catch up to the Betazoid lieutenant.

Cautiously approaching the door, disruptor in hand, she pressed the button to open the heavy, protective doors. On the other side waited...

...A small Romulan scout ship sat alone in the center of the large, dark compartment. It was obvious that the Romulan crew had not been planning to use either this particular vessel or hanger that day. The lighting was at a minimal setting and, unlike the *Sarek* and other similar Starfleet vessels, nobody was posted in the hanger’s control room while the space was inactive.

Carefully, the three approached the craft and entered it. Meanwhile, Sela’s armed platoon waited for the escaped alien in the larger hanger complex two on the other side of the Warbird.

Tredworth, her brain already a mish-mosh from the entire day’s events, stared at the vessel’s control panel blankly. Tehanu finally started pointing out controls they would need to use while her brother secured the hatch and moved toward the rear of the scout to monitor the engines.

“This is thrusters... This is warp drive... This is sublight drive...,” Tehanu said, pointing out each control along the panel. Tredworth tried to absorb as much as she could, starting to get the idea that she might actually be able to escape and return to the *Sarek* alive.

* * * *

The platoon waited in hanger complex two. Disruptor rifles were pointed at the door, then quickly lowered as Commander Sela walked in.

“Where is she?” the commander demanded. No one knew.

* * * *

Karondar’s voice sounded over the scout’s intercom.

“What is wait? Engines ready.”

Tredworth stared at the huge hanger doors ahead of the vessel.

“How do we open the doors?” she asked the young Romulan in the engine space.

“Controls are in tower.”

Tredworth assumed Karondar meant the control booth two decks above the hanger floor with no direct access from the hanger deck itself. A sense of utter frustration pushed down on her already tired shoulders. She turned to the young Romulan woman next to her.

“What were the controls again?” she asked.

Nervously glancing out the viewports, Tehanu again started pointing out each control.

* * * *

“What do you mean she hasn’t come in here?!” Sela screamed at the platoon leader. “This is the most likely route of escape! What other place could she have gone to?”

“Well, Commander, she might have headed toward secondary hanger two-A in corridor twenty three, but it is unlikely she would go there, since that hanger is powered down.”

Sela looked at the platoon leader with a shocked expression.

“Don’t tell me, let me guess? Because it is shut down, you have no guards posted in that hanger, right?”

“Well, Commander... You wanted a platoon here to intercept the alien... I grabbed all the soldiers I could...”

Sela just turned her back on the platoon leader and faced her security officer.

“Take this man prisoner. He will be executed for incompetence at our earliest convenience. And you are reduced one step in rank. Now find that woman!”

“Yes, Commander!”

* * * *

It was now or never.

“Opening hanger doors,” Tredworth said with conviction. Tehanu was about to ask how the Betazoid intended to accomplish that when Tredworth pressed one of the controls on the panel in front of her. The scout’s disruptor cannons fired straight ahead, blasting the doors wide open. The scout was tossed slightly toward the new opening by the escaping atmosphere. The entire warbird shook.

* * * *

“What was that?” Sela asked as she felt the tremor while walking back into the corridor. Suddenly an alarm siren sounded, followed by a voice speaking in Romulan.

“Hull breach, hanger two-alpha, deck R, section eight. Hull breach. Sealing off surrounding sections.”

* * * *

“Captain, something is happening on the warbird!” Fil shouted.

“What is it?”

“I’m not sure. Sensors are detecting a small cloud of vaporized atmosphere escaping from the lower hull. I believe they have experienced a hull breach of some sort.”

* * * *

Tredworth finally steadied the scout, facing straight out the blasted hanger doors before starting any forward movement. She did not want to risk scraping the small craft on the sides of the hole as she maneuvered through it and out into space beyond.

* * * *

Sela ran to the nearest lift, intent on reaching her bridge.

* * * *

“Now reading a small craft, scout class, leaving the warbird from the vicinity of the hull breach.”

“Could it have been blown out by whatever explosion that caused the breach?” asked Kale.

“Negative,” replied Fil. “It’s under power and heading away from the warbird.”

A smile crossed Kale’s lips.

“Tredworth!”

* * * *

“Report,” commanded Sela as she entered the bridge of the *Trager*.

“Two items to report, Commander,” informed the warbird’s senior subordinate. “The scout we had stored in hanger two-A has blasted its way out of the hull and is now on course 282 point 62 at half sublight. The second is we have detected a Federation starship, Galaxy-class, at the edge of sensor range, bearing 025 point 6. The starship is moving toward the Neutral Zone at less than one-quarter sublight.”

“So there is her mothership! Lock tractor beam on the scout and haul it back in. There is a reception party waiting in hanger two. Then intercept that starship at maximum warp. Engage the cloak as soon as the scout is back aboard.”

“Yes, Commander.”

The Romulan officer pressed his controls, locking the *Trager*'s tractor beam on the escaping scout. As he pressed the final control to activate the beam, the warbird shuddered again.

“What in...?” Sela started to say.

* * * *

“Captain, the *Trager* has just cloaked,” reported Fil, carefully monitoring his tactical readout.

“What?”

“Correction,” said Fil, his face now looking confused. “The *Trager* is decloaking. No, it's cloaked again. No, decloaked again.”

“What's going on over there?” Kale wondered aloud.

“The scout is entering warp,” reported Arbelo.

“Kalin, I suggest we get out of here,” said Lt Commander Mic Cosner.

“I agree,” said Kale. “Conn, lay in the most direct course back toward Federation space. Warp five. Engage!”

“Aye, sirrrr,” responded the cat-like helm officer.

* * * *

“What's happening to them?” Tredworth asked, watching the warbird become invisible and visible again over and over on one of the cockpit monitors.

“I cross-wired the tractor and cloaking system. I do good job, right?” asked Karondar's voice over the intercom.

“Very good, Karondar. Now let's get out of here!”

“Sensors detect another ship,” reported Tehanu, a frown forming on her lips.

“Oh no,” grumbled Tredworth.

Tehanu changed the monitor to display the new vessel in the scout's vicinity. It was a sight that took the Betazoid's breath away.

“The *Sarek*! I've got to draw the *Trager* away from them. Engage warp drive.”

* * * *

“The scout has entered warp, Commander.”

“Track them!” Sela commanded as the lights on her bridge continued to dim and brighten before dimming again repeatedly.

“The Federation starship has also entered warp, heading in the opposite direction as the scout.”

“Leave the starship. If I know the Federation, they won't leave their officer behind. We can deal with them after we have recaptured the Betazoid. Helm, set course for the scout.”

“Yes, Commander,” replied the Romulan helm officer.

* * * *

Aboard the scout, Karondar had just suggested a course of action for avoiding the warbird that was now in pursuit.

“Are you sure it's working properly?” Tredworth asked over the intercom.

“Yes,” Karondar replied.

“Then by all means, engage it!”

Seconds later, the scout ship faded from view behind its cloak.

* * * *

“The scout has engaged cloak, Commander.”

“Track their last course and follow. Prepare to fire all weapons. It's just a scout! She can't have gotten far!”

“Postulating course based on last known data.”

The *Trager*, still suffering problems with its own cloaking device due to Karondar's tinkering, passed close overhead on the scout's monitor, quickly leaving the small vessel behind.

“I figured they would assume we would continue along the same course, directly toward the border. That's why I wanted to come to a complete stop after we were fully cloaked,” Tredworth said with a small measure of pride.

“Smart!” complimented Tehanu.

“Thanks. Now let's go find the *Sarek*.”

* * * *

The *Sarek* continued on course, speeding through Romulan space at warp five.

“Do you think we’ll ever see Lieutenant Tredworth again?” Cosner asked the captain.

“I hope so. She seems to have done alright by herself so far.”

Cosner turned to face Lieutenant Fil.

“Any sign of pursuit, Lieutenant?”

“Negative,” the Catullan replied. “The warbird seemed more intent on re-capturing that scout ship.”

“Time to Neutral Zone?” Kale asked.

“Two hourrrrs, ten minutes, prrrresent courrrrse and speed,” replied Kes as she checked her instruments.

“Do you think **we’ll** survive this?” Cosner now asked, her face a mask of concern.

“Yes, Number One, I do. I’m not sure why... But I do.”

A few moments passed in quiet, until Fil’s voice suddenly drew everyone’s attention.

“Romulan vessel decloaking to starboard!”

“Red alert! All hands...,” Cosner started to order until Fil continued to report.

“Captain, it’s the same scout vessel that escaped from the warbird! They’re hailing us!”

“Open a channel, Lieutenant.”

On the viewscreen, the welcome image of Lieutenant (JG) Jo Ann Tredworth appeared. However, the relief at seeing the young officer was short lived when Kale and Cosner noticed the young Romulan woman seated next to her.

“Request permission to dock, Captain,” Tredworth said with a smile.

“Ahh... Are you alright, Lieutenant?” Kale asked with concern.

“I’m fine,” the Betazoid replied before she seemed to notice Kale’s alarmed look at her companion. “This is a friend, Captain. I wouldn’t have been able to escape from the *Trager* if it weren’t for Tehanu and her brother.”

A smile spread on Kale’s lips as he said, “You can explain later, Lieutenant. Bring your vessel into the main shuttlebay as soon as we drop out of warp. *Sarek*, out.”

As Kale started to relax slightly, T’Veer, the starship’s chief engineer, walked down the ramp to stand near the Kale.

“Captain, do you realize what this means?” the Vulcan woman asked.

“What is it, T’Veer?”

“That ship,” she said, gesturing toward the viewscreen, where the small green vessel was maneuvering to come around behind the *Sarek*’s saucer section. “It has a cloaking device. Just the item we need to escape from Romulan space undetected. Not to mention protection against the Jem’Hadar when we eventually return to the Gamma Quadrant.”

The gears in Kale’s head started turning.

“Do you think you could get it to function with our systems and equipment?”

“As the Terrans often say, it’s worth a shot.”

“Make it so.”

* * * *

The scout had just powered down its thrusters. It sat dead center in the *Sarek*’s main shuttlebay. Lieutenant Tredworth finally took a deep breath, releasing it slowly as she felt the hum of the *Sarek*’s warp drive as it resumed. Then, as the scout’s hatch slowly opened, Tredworth was the first to emerge, followed closely and nervously by Tehanu and Karondar. The trio was greeted by Lieutenant (JG) A-ZuRQuIL and a small security team and escorted out of the hanger, while T’Veer, N’Vorda and an engineering team quickly entered the scout. The next hour was spent going over the ship’s circuitry and equipment, followed by the removal of a large piece of machinery from the engine compartment, which was quickly placed on an anti-grav pallet and moved to the starship’s main engineering.

* * * *

Tredworth was deep into her debriefing with Captain Kale, Lt Commander Cosner, and Lieutenant Fil in Kale’s ready room, explaining her adventure aboard the *Trager*. She had made sure her two companions were being well taken care of in sickbay and now held the captain, first officer, and security chief spellbound with her tale.

“So Q told you it was necessary for you to escape on your own?”

“Not in so many words, but yes. In hindsight, I must assume that he meant obtaining the cloaking device too. Or else saving those two young telepaths, who would have been wasted in the Star Empire. They were already being forced to assimilate into the military. And there is something else I must tell you that I feel is important.”

“T’Veer to Captain,” interrupted the voice of the starship’s chief engineer.

“Go ahead,” replied Kale, giving Tredworth an apologizing glance.

“I’m not making any guarantees, Captain, but Commander N’Vorda thinks we’ve got the kinks knocked out.”

Suddenly the red alert klaxon sounded.

“And apparently none too soon. Thank you, T’Veer,” Kale said and closed the circuit as all four officers stood up and returned to the bridge, Kale and Cosner taking their usual seats in the command arena.

“Status?” asked Kale.

“Romulan warbird, D’Deridex-class, has decloaked dead ahead,” reported Arbelo. “From the damage I’m detecting in the vicinity of the shuttlebay, it must be the *Trager*.” A beep sounded from the ops console, prompting Arbelo to look back at Kale. “They’re hailing us, Captain.”

“On screen.”

The view of the malevolent looking green warship was replaced by the view of a malevolent looking blonde-haired Romulan woman. The image took Kale off stride for a moment, until the Commander started to speak.

“You have been identified as the Federation starship *Sarek*. You are violating Romulan territory and will surrender at once. Refuse and you will be destroyed.” It was only then that Sela noticed the strawberry-blonde haired Betazoid woman standing on the side of the *Sarek*’s bridge. “**YOU!** How did you get away from me? How did you find your way back to your starship? I will personally conduct your interrogation when I have you standing before me again!”

“I think not, Commander,” replied Kale smugly.

“You think not what, Captain? I am the one in control of this situation. You have no hope of escape. None!”

Kale pressed his command chair’s intercom.

“Commander T’Veer. Engage.”

In engineering, the circuit was closed and a loud hum filled the space as the ‘borrowed’ cloaking device, hooked into the starship’s shield generators, came to life. Sparks fizzled around the jury-rigged connections where N’Vorda had spliced the Romulan device into the starship’s EPS taps. It threatened to blow apart at any second, but none the less seemed to be working.

On the *Trager*’s bridge, Sela could not believe her eyes as she watched the *Sarek* become transparent, then vanish completely.

“Fire all weapons!” she immediately ordered. “Don’t let them escape!”

* * * *

Aboard the *Sarek*, Kale was making some demanding orders of his own. The course he ordered sent the starship spiraling underneath, behind and around the *Trager*. It would have been an impressive maneuver to see, had the Federation ship not been cloaked and therefore invisible.

“She will find you again,” remarked a familiar voice from behind Kale. The entire bridge crew, turned around to find the chief of security gone, replaced by *Q* wearing Fil’s gold and black uniform standing at the rail.

“Will you *PLEASE* leave us alone,” Kale remarked, his anger growing inside. “We’ve finally gotten our officer back and we have other pressing concerns to deal with, if you don’t mind.”

On the viewscreen, the *Trager* could be seen turning to pursue the fleeing Federation starship, having guessed the *Sarek*’s most likely course of escape.

“Well, I was going to send you back to where I found you, but if you don’t want me to...,” remarked *Q*. The omnipotent being started making some kind of emphasized gesture to foretell his imminent departure when Kale shouted at him.

“That’s what I’ve been asking you to do all along! Get us out of here, *Q!*”

The *Sarek* shuddered from a close hit by the *Trager*.

“Oh, I don’t think I want to do it anymore,” said *Q*. “You’ve been very rude to me.” He looked down over the tactical railing at Kale, a sneer on his lips. “Say please.”

“WHAT?”

“Say please. Better yet, say pretty please with sugar on top,” demanded *Q*.

Kale was not sure he could believe his ears, but with an effort, through clenched teeth, he muttered, “Pretty please with sugar on top.”

“There, now that wasn’t so bad, was it?” asked *Q*, insufferably pleased. “Ta-ta, Kalin!” And with an exaggerated snap of his fingers, the *Sarek* blasted away from where she had been, flying across the galaxy faster than comprehension.

* * * *

“I read nothing of them, Commander. No debris. No emissions. No indications. Nothing.”

Sela slumped lower into her command chair.

“This has not been a good day,” she commented to herself.

* * * *

Captain's log, stardate 48203.9:

I think back on it, and no matter how I argue it, it all comes out the same way. I really think Q's intention was to help us all along. Why? We may never know. But the one thing that the Sarek genuinely needed to continue her mission in the Gamma Quadrant safely was a cloaking device. And now we have one. Q has now returned the Sarek to exactly where we were in the Gamma Quadrant before our little side trip started. Chief engineer T'Veer has placed Lt Commander N'Vorda in charge of maintaining our 'new toy,' and with our new guests, the Romulan siblings, now settled-in aboard the Sarek, only one other problem remains.

The ready room's chime sounded. Kale looked up from his computer screen and looked at the door.

"Come," he said.

A Vulcan man in a blue-shouldered sciences uniform strode in. "You wished to see me, Captain?" he asked.

"Yes, Lieutenant Setac. You are aware of what happened to us during the last several days I assume?"

"Of course, Captain. Who among the crew is not?"

Kale nodded silently for a second before saying, "It may interest you to learn that Lieutenant Tredworth managed to access some very interesting files while aboard the warbird while she was over there. One of them seemed to have your name in it."

The Vulcan shifted uncomfortably.

"Why would I be of any interest to the Romulans, Captain? I am only a simple Starfleet cartographer."

"Then the name Chorsus doesn't mean anything to you?"

The captain scrutinized the man standing across from him closely.

"Why... ahh, no, Captain. Not a thing."

"Mm hmm," commented Kale as he steepled his hands. "That's funny, because Lieutenant Tredworth said it was listed in a file of spies planted within the Federation by the Romulan Tal Shiar."

Kale let Setac stir for a moment, carefully watching his reaction, which remained placid. Then he continued, "I have no proof that you are, indeed, a spy, Mister Setac, nor will I harass you because I have an unverified report that you may be a spy. But be warned..." Kale leaned over the desk closer to Setac. "You will be watched. Closely."

And to Kale's satisfaction, he saw a single drop of sweat trickle down the side of Setac's face.

"Dismissed!"

Setac wordlessly turned around and exited the ready room. As he stepped over to the turbolift door, he noticed every eye on the bridge upon him, particularly those of Lieutenant Fil and Lieutenant (JG) A-ZuRQuIL.

In the ready room, Kale afforded himself a small smile, then turned back to the monitor screen, reading Tredworth's report on how to best integrate the *Sarek's* two newest passengers into life in the Federation.

The End