

Captain's log, stardate 66603.5:

USS Bellerophon has just departed Starbase 719, where we loaded cargo for transport to the new colony being established in Sector 50115. We expect to arrive at the colony in two weeks present speed.

K'danz, out.

Holodeck 1 aboard the Intrepid-class starship *USS Bellerophon* was programmed to recreate 1890's London, but from the perspective of some late-20th century Hollywood movie director. The 'city' was blanketed in near perpetual darkness and thick fog clung to the cobblestone streets and Victorian-era buildings crowded so close together there was barely a gap wide enough to walk through from block to block.

Two men slowly strode down the seemingly deserted street, one of them concentrating almost exclusively on the ground in front of the pair, the other looking around anxiously, as if expecting some villain to pop out of the surrounding shadow. The man leading the pair wore a plaid Inverness cape and matching deerstalker cap, a pipe clutched tightly between his teeth. The second man wore a bowler hat and waistcoat.

"Watson!" the first man called out, startling his companion and causing him to nearly trip on a cobblestone as his feet skidded on the dampness. "I believe we have located the place where the abduction occurred!"

"How can you tell?" 'Dr. Watson' asked the world-famous consulting detective, Sherlock Holmes.

"Take note of how several of the cobblestones have been knocked loose from their normal places," Holmes explained. "As if several large men were shuffling about and not paying attention to where their feet were going. This is also a very busy street during the daylight, and these stones would have been pressed back into place by the passing hooves and cart wheels had this not happened after dusk." Holmes then spotted something lying in the gutter nearby and hurried off in that direction, picking the object up and examining it with a magnifying glass. "Behold, a workman's hat, size seven and three-quarters, discarded as if forgotten here on the curb. Would you not describe our victim as having a head size of approximately seven and three-quarters, Watson?"

"Indubitably, Holmes," 'Watson' replied. "So you believe our victim was attacked here and carried off to be murdered at what Inspector Lestrade believes is the actual scene of the crime where the body was found?"

"I believe, based on the evidence we have accumulated thus far, that our victim was abducted from here as he made his way home after a tiring day of work along the waterfront, his abductors believing he would be too weak to defend himself. They were evidently surprised to find he had strength in reserve to fight back. Perhaps they did not intend to kill him right away, but once subdued, he was taken somewhere and murdered, his corpse then transported to the scene at which it was discovered two hours ago in an effort to throw us off the trail of whom the actual murderers are, Watson."

"And where do you believe he was actually murdered, Holmes?" 'Watson' asked.

"If we can discover that, we will discover who the murderers are," Holmes replied. "As I believe the location of the actual murder will connect directly with the murderers in question. All we need do is..."

"Bridge to Lieutenant Zhadesh."

'Dr. Watson' closed his eyes in annoyance at being interrupted during his free time. He then said, "Computer, freeze program." Around him, the entire scene, including the still speaking Sherlock Holmes, froze in place. "Computer, arch." As Xin Zhadesh stepped forward, the holodeck control arch appeared. The Efrosian officer touched the communications panel and said, "Bridge, this is Lieutenant Zhadesh."

"Sorry to disturb you, Lieutenant," said the voice of one of Zhadesh's junior operations officers. "I know you're on the holodeck. But the Captain has called a meeting of the senior staff in the briefing lounge in twenty minutes."

"Very well. I will change my clothes and be right there. Thank you, Ensign. Zhadesh, out." The copper-skinned Efrosian removed the bowler hat from his pure white hair as he said, "Computer, save at current point and end program, then exit." The computer beeped acknowledgement, the scene quickly fading around Zhadesh to reveal the bare hologrid at the same time the heavy doors to the corridor appeared in the far side of the arch. The doors parted and Zhadesh stepped into the corridor beyond, heading for his cabin to change back into his duty uniform and head to the bridge.

Space, the Final Frontier...
These are the voyages of the starship *Bellerophon*!

Star Trek: Bellerophon

“Wolf at the Door” By PJK

Based on characters created by Robert Bloch

Twenty minutes later, the command staff of the *USS Bellerophon* was gathered in the briefing lounge located on the port side of the bridge module. Seemingly the last to arrive were Captain K’danz – commanding officer of the Federation starship – and her husband, the half-Klingon chief engineer Commander Dar. As Dar sat in one of the seats along the side of the table, K’danz moved toward the large forward windows and sat down in the lone seat at the end.

“Sorry for calling you all in here unexpectedly like this,” K’danz apologized. “Due to an impending ion storm, I’ve just been ordered to alter our planned course to the new colony at Persephone IV.”

As K’danz spoke, the doors to the bridge opened once more and Starfleet Marine Captain Michael C. Drake walked in, quickly moving to the last empty seat on the far side of the table, directly next to T’Var.

“Sorry I’m late,” he said as he sat down, addressing the ship’s captain. “I was down in the gym when I was informed of this meeting and – trust me – you’ll prefer that I showered before I came here.”

“We appreciate your candor, Captain Drake,” Lt Commander T’Var, the *Belle*’s Vulcan chief science officer remarked. “Humans have a tendency to smell bad enough under normal circumstances.”

“Thanks, T’Var. I knew I could count on you for a compliment,” Drake replied with a grim smile before nodding toward K’danz. “Again, sorry, Captain.”

“As I was saying before Michael began regaling us all about his hygiene, the ship is being re-routed to reach Persephone IV. It’s actually a more direct route, but it will take us through the PN-2699 Stellar Cluster. It’s an area of extreme gravimetric distortion and large pockets of metreon gas, so we’re going to need to be extremely cautious passing through the region. The entire crew will need to be on their toes!”

“Do you want me to take the helm for the passage through the cluster, Ma’am?” Commander Tom Paris, the starship’s first officer asked.

“No, Tom. I’m sure Commander Hickam will be fine,” K’danz replied, the human woman looking at her chief helmsman down the side of the table as she spoke. “I just want the crew to understand what we’re going to be going through and that we need to be extremely cautious while it’s happening. One wrong move and we could wind up damaging the ship as we set off an explosion of metreon gas or a gravimetric anomaly flings us into a newly developing star.” She addressed each member of her command staff as she added, “Make sure everyone in your department is aware of what we’re going to be doing.”

* * * *

Down on deck 13, a pair of Marines were making a routine security patrol of the ship.

“Have you seen the specs on the new mark-IX phaser rifle they’re issuing next year?” the corporal asked his companion.

“No. What about it?” the sergeant asked in return.

“The design supposedly incorporates a third emitter crystal to increase beam power with no appreciable drain on the power system. You get more bang for the buck because you don’t need to fire for as long for the same amount of damage,” the corporal replied. He was about to describe how the new firing mechanism interacted with

the emitter crystals when he was interrupted by the sergeant putting his hand across the corporal's chest, stopping both from walking any further.

"Do you hear that?" the sergeant asked.

The corporal listened carefully. From further down the corridor he could hear a swishing sound that paused for several seconds, then repeated – over and over.

"Sounds like a door having some sort of malfunction," the junior marine said. "Should we inform engineer...?"

"Let's check it out first," the sergeant said, pulling his hand phaser from its holster and slowly leading the way down the corridor. Just around the corner of the next intersection, the sound was much louder. It was definitely a door swishing open, pausing for several seconds and then trying to close again before immediately re-opening. The two Marines could see the door in question about five meters down the side corridor as they turned the corner.

"Why is it doing that?" the corporal asked.

"The automated doors will automatically open if they sense a blockage of any sort, like a hand or foot caught in the threshold," the sergeant remarked.

As the two Marines moved closer, they could see what looked like a boot, sole facing out into the corridor, laying in the center of the door, the doors themselves closing until almost hitting the boot before re-opening once again.

"There's something blocking the door," the corporal said as he moved ahead, ready to kick the blockage away and allow the door to finally close. But when he reached the door, his hand shot up to his face, covering his mouth as a look of horror appeared. "Oh my God!" The corporal quickly turned around and leaned on the opposite bulkhead, concentrating on not vomiting.

"Sergeant Young to sickbay!" the second Marine said as he tapped his combadge after reaching the door. "We have a situation on deck 13, section 39, engineering tool room." He pressed the control beside the door, locking it open, and looked inside at the carnage – blood everywhere. Then he noticed, written on the wall above the body, a single word written in what also appeared to be blood; 'Boo!'

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An hour later, Captain K'danz and Commander Paris were standing in the starship's morgue with Dar and the starship's chief medical officer, Dr. Robert Cuomo. Sealed inside a bodybag laying on a stainless steel table that retracted into a stasis chamber was the body of Lt Gary Clark. The doctor, who had just completed an autopsy on Clark's body, was reporting his findings to the two senior officers.

"Definitely not an accident, Captain," Cuomo reported. "This man was gutted like a fish, his entrails deliberately spilled out across the deck. And the worst part..." Cuomo paused, trying to hold back the bile building up at the back of his throat for a second before continuing. "The worst part was, he was still alive when it happened. My tests confirm that. He didn't die until his carotid artery was severed nearly five minutes after someone cut him open from the Adams apple to the groin. And if that wasn't conclusive enough, there's this..."

Cuomo activated the padd he was holding and showed it to K'danz and Paris. It showed an image of the room where Lt Clark was found.

"Boo?" Paris remarked. "Is that someone's idea of a joke?"

"A very sick joke, if you ask me, Commander," Cuomo replied.

"Given the circumstances and the evidence, I have to agree with you, Doctor," K'danz said. "This must be classified a homicide. But I find it extremely hard to believe any member of my crew would be capable of such an act. There has to be some other explanation."

"Like what?" Dar asked, unable to come up with any suggestions of his own.

"What are we going to do about this?" Paris asked.

“We have little choice,” K’danz replied. “Until proven otherwise, we have to assume we have a murderer loose aboard the ship. We need to start an investigation immediately. Have Mister Drake, Mister Zhadesh, and T’Var report to my ready room immediately.”

“Aye, Ma’am,” Paris replied as the captain, first officer, and chief engineer left the morgue and headed toward the bridge.

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A short time later, Lt Commander T’Var, Captain Drake, and Lieutenant Zhadesh were seated across the ready room desk from Captain K’danz. She had just shared the chief medical officer’s autopsy report with them, including pictures of the corpse and the murder scene, images that had nearly sickened even the stoic Vulcan woman.

“I want the three of you to lead an investigation into this murder,” K’danz told them. “You have full investigative powers and my authority. You can question anyone aboard the ship you feel needs to be questioned and have every resource available to you. I’ll be updating Starfleet Command on this investigation every twenty-four hours, so make sure you keep me up to date on what you have discovered.”

“We will be quite thorough in our investigation,” T’Var assured. Both Drake and Zhadesh nodded agreement.

“Very well. I await your report,” K’danz said. “Dismissed. And good hunting.”

“Thanks, Captain,” Drake replied.

The first thing the trio of investigators did after leaving the ready room was review all the information currently known about the murder, including visiting the scene of the crime on deck 13. Most of that area of the deck had been sealed off, with warning tape blocking the corridor and two Marine guards standing at the corridor intersection. All three could smell the putrid scent of death and congealing blood as soon as they exited the turbolift. Once arriving at the open door, even the pictures they had looked at had not prepared them for the gruesomeness of the actual crime scene.

The carpet of the small room, normally used as a tool and parts storage for the engineering division, was completely soaked with blood, which had spread through almost the entire room since the body of Clark had been found. Zhadesh was amazed by just how much blood the human body contained.

“I could never understand the concept of committing such a heinous crime,” Drake remarked, surveying the scene while covering his nose and mouth with his hand. “It had to take a seriously sick mind to have done this.”

“What purpose do you suppose the writing on the wall was for?” Zhadesh asked, studying the three letter word, long red drips now turning brownish in color extending toward the deck from the bottom of each letter and the exclamation mark that followed.

“Someone’s sick idea of a joke, I guess,” Drake remarked.

“Or an effort to induce fear in the rest of the crew,” T’Var added. “Is not the term ‘Boo’ often associated with ghost stories on Earth?”

“Yes, but usually it’s said by the ghost in question, not by the person who murdered him,” Drake replied as he pulled out a tricorder and began taking detailed scans of the crime scene.

* * * *

Several hours later, all three investigators were back in the briefing room they had commandeered to use as their investigative office. Displayed on several monitor screens on the wall were images of the crime scene, the victim, and the victim’s personnel record in an attempt to see if anything in the young officer’s past may have contributed to his death.

“According to Doctor Cuomo’s autopsy report, the victim was cut open with an unusually sharp, unusually thin blade,” T’Var commented as she compiled evidence in a padd.

“We don’t normally carry knives matching that description that can be used as weapons like that aboard the *Belle*,” Drake commented. “Where did this murder weapon come from? And where did it go? No weapon was found at the scene.”

“Do not your Marines use knives as weapons, Captain Drake?” Zhadesh asked.

“We have our KA-BARS, yeah,” Drake said, pulling his own combat knife from its sheath attached to his right shin and spinning it in his hand before placing it on the table. “But look at the thickness of it. The knife that killed Clark had a much thinner blade, almost akin to an old-fashioned scalpel. If it was a knife, it would be too pliable to be effectively used as a weapon. Too easy to break the blade.”

“We must determine what in fact the murder weapon is and where it came from,” T’Var said. “Knowing what the weapon is could help us determine who the murderer is.”

“Computer, what is the current time?” Zhadesh said.

“The current time is 0043 hours,” the computer replied.

“We need to be back on duty in just over five hours,” Zhadesh observed. “Why not call it a night for now? I will do some research on anything aboard that could be used as the murder weapon fitting our mystery blade’s description while I am on the bridge in the morning.”

“It is getting late, and I could use some sleep,” Drake said with a nod.

“Agreed. We will reconvene our investigation immediately following our duty shift,” acknowledged T’Var.

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The following afternoon, the three investigators were back in K’danz’s ready room.

“Any progress in your investigation?” the captain asked.

“Yes, Captain,” Zhadesh said. “We determined the most likely object fitting the description of the murder weapon based on the damage it did to Lieutenant Clark’s body was, according to the shipping manifest of the cargo we brought aboard at *Starbase 719*, a ceremonial knife being shipped by one of the new colonists contained within shipping container 9-2313-679. Captain Drake, Commander T’Var and I retrieved that shipping container from its storage location in Cargo Bay 3 to determine if it was still packed where it was supposed to be.”

“And what did you find?”

“The knife is missing,” Drake replied. “And all evidence suggests it had been there when the containers were beamed aboard. The cargo unit’s seal was broken, so the odds are the knife was taken from that container, not packed in another shipping container and misfiled in the manifest.”

“Who had access to that shipping container in that particular cargo bay?” K’danz asked.

“According to the cargo bay logs, only two members of the crew had access that area of the cargo bay since the *Belle* departed starbase,” Zhadesh replied. “Lieutenant (Junior Grade) Jerome and Lieutenant (Junior Grade) Tuggle.”

“Both are normally assigned to the cargo bay, so their access of the storage area where this particular shipping container was stored could be merely coincidental,” Drake remarked.

“Either way, I want both of them questioned in regards to what they may know that might have impact on this investigation.”

“Our thoughts exactly,” T’Var confirmed.

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An hour later, T’Var and Zhadesh were sitting in one of the interrogation rooms near the ship’s brig across the table from Lieutenant (JG) James Jerome.

“Lieutenant,” said Zhadesh. “Can you explain what your duties are in Cargo Bay 3?”

“Sure,” Jerome replied. “Lieutenant Tuggle and I are assigned to maintain the systems and monitor the cargo in that particular bay. Some of the cargo is required to be stored in certain environmental conditions – specific

temperature and humidity for example – while others need to be stored in stasis and monitored closely, especially if there are any kind of power interruptions in the EPS conduits.”

“Are you aware of the cargo shipping containers that were beamed aboard the *Bellerophon* while at *Starbase 719* that are currently stored in Cargo Bay 3?” T’Var asked.

“Of course. But none of that stuff required any special conditions, so Tuggle and I have been able to pretty much ignore it all.”

“Have you or anyone you are aware of accessed any of those shipping containers?” Zhadesh asked. “Specifically; container 9-2313-679?”

“Not that I’m aware of,” Jerome replied. “What’s this all about, anyway?”

* * * *

“Hey, Anderson, have you seen Lieutenant Harty lately?” Velez asked as he approached his fellow officer in crew’s mess.

“Not since we got off watch two hours ago,” Anderson replied. “Why?”

“She was supposed to meet me on the holodeck for a training exercise.”

“Maybe she just blew you off?” Anderson suggested.

“I doubt it. The training was her idea,” Velez said. “Computer...” The computer beeped acknowledgement. “What is the location of Lieutenant Harty?”

“Lieutenant Harty is currently located on deck 15, plasma relay room,” the computer replied.

“What the heck is she doing down there?” Velez asked.

“She’s been a little depressed ever since she and Tuggle broke up a couple of weeks ago. Maybe she wanted some time alone?” Anderson suggested.

“Well, she’s the one that made me cancel my own plans to do some training in the holodeck, so she better have a good explanation. Come on, let’s go find her.”

The two men departed crew’s mess and entered a nearby turbolift. As they exited on deck 15, the lowest deck on the *Intrepid-class* starship, they sensed something was wrong immediately.

“What’s that smell?” Velez asked.

“It smells like some sort of Klingon slaughterhouse,” Anderson remarked.

“You don’t suppose...?” Velez started to ask, looking at his companion. They cautiously approached the plasma relay room, one of only two spaces on the small lower deck, and peered inside the open door.

“Oh... my... God...!” Anderson choked out.

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The door to the starship’s morgue opened and the three investigators entered to find Captain K’danz talking with Dr. Cuomo. Behind them, the stasis chamber containing Lieutenant Clark’s body was sealed shut and activated, but a new second body bag could be seen on the tray right next to the first unit.

“You called for us, Captain?” Drake asked.

“Yes,” K’danz said grimly. “There’s been another murder.”

“What?!? Who? Where?” Drake demanded to know.

“Lieutenant Justine Harty of the operations department,” replied Dr. Cuomo. “Her body was discovered in the plasma relay room on deck 15 just fifteen minutes ago.”

“Was she killed in the same manner as Lieutenant Clark?” T’Var asked.

“It appears the murder weapon was once again a sharp thin knife of some kind, but the similarities end there,” Cuomo replied. “Lieutenant Harty was tied to a chair and had almost all of her internal organs removed – one by one – with surgical precision. Once again, however, the perpetrator kept her alive for as long as he could while he did what he did to her, which by the evidence I have so far appears to have taken around an hour.”

“How could that be done without anyone aboard hearing her scream?” Drake asked.

“Preliminary tests show a large amount of dylamadon in her system,” Cuomo explained. “If administered correctly, she would have been paralyzed and unable to talk or react while remaining completely conscious and aware of what was happening to her.”

Even the Vulcan T’Var had difficulty restraining an emotional reaction to the doctor’s description. The Efrosian Zhadesh was the first to recover enough to ask another question.

“Have you been able to determine exactly when she died?” he asked.

“Not with complete accuracy yet. I may be able to tell you more once I complete the autopsy. But witnesses saw her leaving her watch station around 1210, just after the afternoon watch turnover two hours ago, and her body was found twenty minutes ago, placing her time of death between 1215 and 1345 hours.”

“I think we’ve narrowed down our pool of suspects,” Drake remarked to his fellow investigators.

“What do you mean, Michael?” K’danz asked.

“T’Var and Zhadesh have been with Lieutenant Jerome in the interrogation room since about 1315,” Drake explained. “Prior to that, he was in crew’s mess with more than a dozen witnesses since they all got off watch at 1200 hours.”

“You still have a second suspect, don’t you?” K’danz asked.

“Yes, Captain,” Zhadesh replied.

“Find out if he has an alibi or not, but until he can be definitively cleared I want him locked in the brig. I don’t want any more of this carnage aboard my ship!”

“Right away, Captain,” T’Var agreed.

* * * *

Several minutes later, T’Var, Drake, and Zhadesh were outside the door of Lieutenant (JG) Tuggle’s quarters. Drake pressed the door chime. It took nearly thirty seconds and a second press of the chime before a groggy-sounding voice from inside said, “Come,” and the door opened into darkness.

“Computer, lights, one-third intensity,” Drake ordered as the trio entered the cabin. “Lieutenant Tuggle?”

“Who wants to know?” the voice asked back as the light came on at a low level, just enough for T’Var, Drake, and Zhadesh to see the man climbing out from under the blankets of his bunk.

“Security Chief Drake, Lieutenant. We need to ask you some questions. Where have you been since 1200 hours?”

“Right here in my bunk,” Tuggle replied, sitting up on the edge of his bed. The man was wearing pajama pants but no shirt. “I went right to sleep after my watch because I was up most of the mid-watch performing maintenance down in the shuttlebay.”

“Can anyone confirm that?” T’Var asked.

“Probably not,” Tuggle replied, nodding toward the empty second bunk in the room. “My roommate is on the afternoon watch and he was already gone when I got here. I’ve been alone all afternoon. What’s this all about, Commander?”

“Are you acquainted with Justine Harty?” Drake asked.

“Yeah, we were a couple for nearly a year, but she broke it off about two weeks ago. Said Lieutenant Clark had told her I was seeing Ensign Pace behind her back, which wasn’t true. Why?”

“Lieutenant Harty was found murdered on deck 15 this afternoon,” Zhadesh informed. Tuggle appeared momentarily stunned. “If you would please get dressed and come with us, we have additional questions we need you to answer.”

“You think I killed Justine?”

“We suspect you may be involved in not only the death of Lieutenant Harty, but also of Lieutenant Clark as well,” T’Var confirmed. “Will you come with us voluntarily, or do we need to call for Marine escort?”

Tuggle quickly stood up, raising his hands in surrender as Drake started moving toward him.

“Just let me get some clothes on,” he said, grabbing a sweatshirt and pants out of a nearby drawer and pulling the shirt over his head.

“Escort the Lieutenant to the brig and begin questioning him,” T’Var told Drake. “In the meantime, Mister Zhadesh and I will start a search of the Lieutenant’s quarters to see if we may discover the murder weapon among his effects.”

* * * *

In the starship’s Learning Center, made up of several classrooms and a recreation area for the children of crew members, young Jacob Danz – the 12 year old adopted son of Captain K’danz and Commander Dar – was by himself, playing games on one of the rec area computers. The young boy had just completed one level of the game he was playing and began the next sequence when he had the feeling like someone was standing directly behind him, looking over his shoulder. Startled, he turned around, but no one was there. Confused, he looked around the recreation area, but aside from himself the room was empty.

“That was weird,” Jacob said to himself before returning his attention to the game. The momentary distraction had almost caused him to lose the game as the next piece of the puzzle appeared out of place, but Jacob managed to return his attention quickly enough to avert disaster and finish off another level.

Jacob smiled at the brief victory, ready to begin a more advanced level when the feeling like he was being watched returned. Starting to grow nervous, he looked around the entire recreation room again, confirming once more he was still alone.

In one of the adjoining classrooms, Mrs. Susan Collins, one of the *Belle*’s civilian primary school teachers, was reviewing a test her small class of 4th graders had taken that morning. Her school work was interrupted by the sound of a high-pitched piercing scream coming from the recreation area. Collins knocked over her chair getting up from the desk and rushed to the door only to nearly be tackled as Jacob came running in, grabbing onto her legs with all his strength. The boy had tears running down his cheeks.

“What is it, Jacob?” the teacher asked. “What’s the matter?”

“Monster!” Jacob replied, pointing back toward the recreation area. “Horrible monster with glowing red eyes!”

Collins tried moving closer to the door to look for herself, but Jacob – panic taking over – dragged her away from the door by her clothes.

“Would you like to go see you Mommy and tell her what you saw?” the teacher asked. Jacob silently nodded, fresh tears running down his face. “Come on. Take my hand.”

Jacob tentatively grasped Mrs. Collins’s hand and she led the boy toward a second door that led directly from the classroom to the corridor outside. Within a couple of minutes the pair were in K’danz’s ready room, the boy grasping the seated captain around the waist as he described what he saw to his mother.

“Did you see this... this monster with evil red eyes?” the captain asked Collins.

“No, I didn’t, but Jacob wouldn’t let me go into the learning center recreation area,” Collins explained.

“I wonder if this could have anything to do with what happened to Lieutenants Clark and Harty?” She pressed her intercom, saying, “K’danz to Drake.”

“Go ahead, Captain,” Drake quickly replied.

“Michael, my son says he encountered something he described as a monster in the Learning Center Recreation Area several minutes ago. Could you go there and check it out. I know it sounds fantastic, but perhaps it could be related somehow to our recent murders.”

“I’ll check it out and report back to you, Captain,” Drake replied.

After deactivating the intercom, K’danz got up and, directing her adopted son in front of her, moved over to the nearby replicator where she ordered a hot chocolate and handed it to the boy in the hopes it would help him calm down. Jacob then went to go sit on the couch under the large forward-facing windows as K’danz spoke with Mrs. Collins again.

“I’ll let you know if Captain Drake finds anything, but I don’t think you’re going to have to worry about cancelling any classes or any...”

“Brig to Captain K’danz.”

K'danz looked over at her desk before excusing herself to the primary school teacher. She leaned on the top of her desk, touching the intercom control.

"This is the Captain. Go ahead."

"Captain, this is 2nd Lieutenant Asra. We've just discovered Lieutenant Tuggle dead in his brig cell."

"Dead?" K'danz repeated in shock. "Did he commit suicide?"

"I don't think so, Ma'am. He's... Actually, you better come down here, Captain."

K'danz looked at Collins with concern. "Could you stay here with Jacob?" she asked.

"Of course," the teacher replied as K'danz rushed out onto the bridge and directly into the turbolift.

Moments later she reached the outer door of the brig. Like the cargo bays and holodecks, the brig door was large, thick and heavy. As she approached from one direction, T'Var and Zhadesh were approaching from the other.

"We searched Lieutenant Tuggle's quarters, but did not find the murder weapon nor any evidence that might tie him to these crimes," T'Var stated.

"That may all be moot at this point," K'danz remarked as the brig door opened and the three walked in. Inside, in the common area between the rows of brig cells, stood 2nd Lieutenant Asra, Drake's second in command of the Marine contingent aboard the *Belle*, and two of their Marine enlisted men. All three were staring at the center cell with expressions of disgust on their faces. K'danz paused as she joined them, only then able to see the remains on the deck in front of the single bunk within the cell.

"My God! He looks like... like he's been torn apart!" the captain remarked.

"He has been," Asra confirmed. "Arms and legs cut off the body as if done by a professional butcher. Those in turn cut at the joints to remove the hands, feet, lower arms, and lower legs. Looks like whoever did it tried to cut out his heart too, but he bled out from the open arteries at the shoulders and hips before they could do that. Head was removed postmortem as far as we can tell."

K'danz, T'Var, and Zhadesh continued to look at the scene of horror in the cell, unable to look away. Most of Tuggle's body was spread across the deck of the cell, as if tossed disinterestedly. Only his head, still displaying a look of abject terror, was sitting atop the formerly white blanket covering the bunk. T'Var then took notice of letters written in blood on the bulkhead above the bunk.

"What do you suppose R E means?" she asked.

"R E?" K'danz repeated, as if saying it aloud might help her figure out the two letter's meaning. "Could they be the initials of the killer? Do we have anybody aboard with the name beginning in R and E?"

"Actually, Captain, it appears to me that the killer may have been writing a longer word and was somehow interrupted," Zhadesh observed. "The word 'Boo!' at the scene of the first murder was centered on the wall of the room. These letters appear to be more to the left, as if the killer intended to write more letters."

"You could be right," K'danz agreed, finally able to turn around and look away. "Get Cuomo down here quickly. And get Drake back here. I want to know if he noticed anything suspicious when he left the suspect here."

"Where is Mister Drake?" T'Var asked. "I thought he was starting the interrogation of Mister Tuggle?"

"I asked him to check out something my son said he saw in the Learning Center on deck 5," K'danz explained. "I thought it might somehow be connected to..."

As she was speaking, the outer door opened again and Captain Drake returned. He appeared surprised to see all the people gathered in the brig.

"I thought I only asked Asra to come look after our suspect while I was gone?" he remarked before he noticed the carnage inside the cell. "My God! What happened?"

"We were hoping perhaps you could shed some light on that," K'danz replied. "Did you see anything suspicious here before you went to the Learning Center? Anyone hanging around the brig that really shouldn't have been?"

"No, Captain, but we have a way of finding out..." Drake replied, moving over toward the guard station in the middle of the room. "Anyone entering or exiting should be on surveillance and we can see whose code was used to open the cell." Drake accessed the brig surveillance file, then called up the video of the past hour. "That's strange," he commented.

"What is it, Michael?" K'danz asked.

“There’s no surveillance video for the entire time Tuggle was incarcerated. The surveillance was turned off.”

“How can that be done, Captain?” T’Var asked suspiciously.

“It can’t be done accidentally. It requires high-level access codes. The kind of codes either Asra or I or Captain K’danz or Commander Paris hold.”

“Well, somebody went into that cell and killed that man! He certainly didn’t do that to himself!” K’danz excitedly stated. “Whose access code was used to shut off the forcefield? Or has that information been erased too?”

“No, apparently that’s still in the computer records,” Drake confirmed. “Let’s see... It appears to...”

Drake suddenly stopped talking, simply staring at the monitor screen on the guard station.

“What is it, Captain?” Asra asked, moving up beside her superior officer.

“That is impossible!” Drake finally protested.

“What is it?” K’danz wanted to know.

Asra looked over Drake’s shoulder at the information displayed on the screen. Her eyes went wide momentarily, and then she looked at Drake as she said, “According to the computer records, it was Mister Drake who lowered and then re-raised the cell forcefield.”

“What?!?” K’danz exclaimed.

Immediately, T’Var had a tricorder in her hand and she started scanning the Marine officer. After several passes over Drake’s body, the tricorder beeped and T’Var raised her right eyebrow.

“Captain,” the Vulcan woman said, addressing K’danz. “I am detecting traces of blood on Mister Drake’s arms and uniform. That blood matches our latest victim, Lieutenant Tuggle.”

Drake was speechless. He simply looked at K’danz wide-eyed. The starship commander, her own expression a mixture of surprise, sympathy, and outrage, simply said, “I’m sorry, Michael. Under the circumstances, I’ve got no other choice.” K’danz then looked at 2nd Lieutenant Asra and ordered, “Lieutenant, place Captain Drake under arrest for the murder of Lieutenant Tuggle. I want three guards on him 24 hours a day, two Marines and a Fleet officer! No one goes near him except the investigators. Am I clear, Lieutenant?”

“Crystal, Ma’am,” Asra replied. She then grasped Drake by his elbow and started directing him toward one of the cells furthest from the carnage-filled one everyone was gathered around. “Sorry, Mike.”

“You’re just doing your job,” Drake replied, offering no resistance to being placed in a brig cell. “But for the life of me I don’t know how blood could have gotten on me. I was never near any of the victims!”

* * * *

Captain’s log, supplemental:

With Marine Captain Michael Drake now our prime suspect in the murders of Clark, Harty, and Tuggle, I have assigned 2nd Lieutenant Asra as a replacement investigator. She should hopefully make an adequate replacement for Drake in the investigation team looking into these murders.

K’danz, out.

“Can you believe it?” Lt McGinley said as he leaned on the console next to Ensign Peters. “Our chief of security, Captain Drake, a murderer!”

“Can we change the subject, please? All this talk of murder and mutilation has got me sick,” Peters replied back. “It’s bad enough I have to work down here in environmental control all by myself most of the time, but to know we had a crazed killer running loose is just too much for me to take.”

“I wouldn’t worry about it too much, Karen,” McGinley said. “Drake’s been locked up, all his security codes have been cancelled, and all is right with the *Belle* once again. And besides...” McGinley winked at Peters

with a smile. "I'll check up on you twice as often until the shift is over. It'll give me an excuse to spend more time with you."

"You're sweet," Peters replied with a slight blush. "Thanks."

McGinley got up and started toward the door. He paused at the threshold, looking back at Peters with a smile as he said, "Remember, you just gotta follow the rules."

"What rules?"

"Rule number one: Never say, 'I'll be right back.'" He then winked again as he stepped back through the door, and as it started swishing closed quickly said, "I'll be right back!"

Peters could not help but laugh genuinely before returning her attention to her work. She jotted a few readings down on her log, then looked back at the closed door nervously.

"I know there's really nothing to worry about. They have the murderer locked up in the brig. I'm perfectly safe down here," Peters tried to reassure herself. For a moment, the self-reassurance worked, and she took the padd to record more readings from indicators across the room. As she passed the door, it swished open once again.

"What's the matter, McGinley? Forget something?" Peters asked as she added more readings to her log, then turned to face the now-open door.

A shrill scream filled the small space.

* * * *

In the *Bellerophon's* brig, Captain K'danz sat in a chair behind a table that had been set up in front of the forcefield enclosing Drake's cell. While her other three investigators were searching Drake's quarters for any additional evidence, the Captain had taken it upon herself to interrogate her security chief. One Marine non-com stood guard at the main door of the brig, while a Marine officer manned the security station in the center of the room and an additional Fleet officer, Commander Dar – the starship's half-Klingon chief engineer and the captain's husband – stood across the room from Drake's cell, his eyes constantly shifting between the back of K'danz's head, Drake inside his cell, and the two other Marines guarding the space.

"You say you didn't murder Mister Tuggle," K'danz said to the man sitting on the bunk inside the cell, his face in his hands. "If that's true, Michael, what is your alibi? Can anyone attest to the fact you were elsewhere when Tuggle was killed?"

"Captain, I'm being honest when I tell you I have no alibi," Drake said, finally looking up at the captain. "During Alpha shift I was on watch on the bridge with you. I remember heading off the bridge to meet with T'Var and Zhadesh in our briefing room once the watch shift ended. The next thing I remember, I was responding to your call to investigate the Learning Center – that your son had seen a... a monster. I stopped by one of the heads on the way to wash my hands and then went immediately to deck 5. Looked around – saw nothing. Even took a quick scan of the space with no results. Then I remembered I needed to interrogate Tuggle, so I..."

"Wait," K'danz said, holding up her hand. "Why did you need to go wash your hands before you investigated the Learning Center?"

"Because they were sticky," Drake said matter-of-factly. "Must have gotten something on them during lunch."

"You said nothing about eating lunch. You just said you remember nothing after leaving the bridge when Beta shift started. According to the investigation report you arrested Tuggle about ninety minutes after watch turn-over along with T'Var and Zhadesh. How could you then remember you needed to interrogate him in the brig?"

"I... I don't know, Captain!" Drake replied, at a loss for words. "I..." The Marine officer looked at K'danz, his eyes silently pleading. He then said, "Captain, I need to know what happened as much as anyone else. Would it be possible for T'Var to mind-meld with me? Perhaps she can determine what I was doing during the period I blacked out? Maybe she can prove my innocence!"

"Or your guilt," K'danz reminded. "However, mind-melds are an extremely personal experience for Vulcans, Michael. I'll raise the subject with her, but keep in mind she may choose not to go through it with a human..."

“Bridge to Captain K’danz,” interrupted the voice of Commander Tom Paris through the intercom.

K’danz tapped her combadge, saying, “Go ahead, Tom.”

“Captain, there’s been another murder,” Paris stated flatly.

“What? When!?”

“From what Doctor Cuomo can determine, not all that long ago. Within the last thirty minutes.”

“See!” Drake exclaimed. “I’ve been in here for more than an hour! I couldn’t have murdered these people!”

“There’s something more than simply a serial killer loose aboard the *Belle*,” K’danz remarked, looking back toward her husband. She then looked at Drake again and said, “And just because you may not have committed this latest murder doesn’t mean the evidence we’ve found in the previous killings doesn’t point toward you. I’m afraid I must leave you locked up in here, Michael.”

Drake’s expression looked like someone who had just been told their puppy had been shoved out an airlock, but he nodded solemnly as he said, “I understand, Captain.”

K’danz got up from her chair and started toward the brig door. “Dar, walk with me,” she said, prompting her husband and chief engineer to fall into step alongside her.

* * * *

K’danz and Dar arrived at the scene of the latest murder in environmental control at the same time as T’Var, Zhadesh, and Asra. Dr. Cuomo was examining the body of the latest victim, Ensign Karen Peters, while one of his nurses tended to Lt McGinley, the crew member who had discovered the body, a few meters down the corridor. Nearby, several of Asra’s Marines stood guard.

“What do we have this time?”

“The crime scene isn’t quite as messy this time, Captain,” Cuomo remarked over his shoulder. “Only a single stab to the heart and some defensive wounds to the hands and arms. And one other major difference...”

K’danz moved closer to see what Cuomo was talking about. The doctor turned around, holding a knife with an elaborate handle in his gloved hand.

“This time we’ve got the murder weapon. Our murderer is either getting sloppy or was in a very big hurry when he did this. Looks like he hit and run.”

Zhadesh leaned closer to look at the murder weapon. He then looked at T’Var as he said, “As we supposed, a ceremonial knife. Not meant to be used for actual combat or killing. It appears the tip of the blade broke off this time. Perhaps that is why it was left behind?”

“Any chance you can identify its origin, Lieutenant?” K’danz asked.

Zhadesh, who had put on gloves of his own, accepted the blade from the chief medical officer, who returned to his work examining the body of the latest victim. The Efrosian studied the knife for markings that could identify its maker or place of origin on the hilt of the blade and found nothing there.

“No maker’s mark or other identifying symbol. The handle, however, is very unique. We may have to run the design pattern through the library computer to determine its specific place of origin, but based on the patterns I am familiar with, I would deduce the knife is Rigellian in origin.”

“Rigellian?” T’Var suddenly reacted, as if the word had called some old memory to mind. The Vulcan woman then looked at K’danz and said, “If you will excuse me, Captain, I need to look up some files that may help us determine with greater accuracy the origin of the murder weapon. And perhaps the identity of the killer as well.” As K’danz nodded, T’Var turned away and headed down the corridor.

“Sergeant,” the captain said to one of Asra’s Marine non-coms standing nearby with his phaser drawn and ready. “Accompany Commander T’Var. I’m uncomfortable with anyone walking around alone right now.”

“Aye,” the sergeant replied before moving down the corridor behind the Vulcan.

“Captain, if you do not mind, I would like to join the Commander in her research as well,” Zhadesh requested, still holding the murder weapon.

“By all means, Lieutenant.”

K'danz watched Zhadesh head down the corridor after T'Var and the Marine sergeant for several seconds before she returned her attention to Dr. Cuomo and Lt Asra.

"Lieutenant, I want a new standing order in place. No member of the crew is to go anywhere alone! In fact, I would prefer anyone moving through the corridors to be in groups of three or more. All non-essential personnel are confined to quarters until further notice. And make sure..."

K'danz's order was interrupted by the sound of a disturbance down the corridor, quickly followed by an alarm. Asra and the remaining Marine reacted by pulling out their phasers as a voice announced over the intercom, "Security alert, deck 12, section 38! Medical personnel to deck 12!"

"Come on!" Asra prompted. "That's right around the corner!"

Asra, the Marine corporal, K'danz, Dar, and Dr. Cuomo all rushed in the same direction T'Var, the sergeant, and Zhadesh had gone. As they turned the corner, they found T'Var kneeling on the deck, her hands covered in reddish-tan blood as she held the wound across the Efrosan's chest closed as best she could.

"What happened?" K'danz wanted to know. "Where's the Sergeant?"

Cuomo replaced T'Var and pulled out some medical tools, working quickly and injecting a pain killer into Zhadesh's neck with a hypospray before starting to close his wound with a protoplaster. Zhadesh looked up at K'danz with his ice-blue eyes, slightly clouded by pain, as he said, "I caught up to the Commander just as the Sergeant pulled his KA-BAR out of its sheath. It appeared to me that he was about to attack the Commander, so I intervened."

"I turned around just in time to see the Sergeant slash his knife right across the Lieutenant's chest," T'Var explained. "I attempted to employ a nerve pinch, but the Sergeant twisted away and ran down the corridor."

"Has Gonzales been the murderer all along?" Dar asked, confused.

"Asra," K'danz said to her acting-security chief. "I want Sergeant Gonzales apprehended as soon as possible. Shoot to kill if he resists!" she ordered.

"I do not believe that would be adequate, Captain," T'Var remarked, again holding the murder weapon found at the scene of the last attack and studying it closely.

"What do you mean, Commander?"

"It was not Sergeant Gonzales who attacked me," the Vulcan explained.

"What do you mean, it wasn't the Sergeant?" Asra asked, now more confused than Dar was. "Lieutenant Zhadesh said he saw the Sergeant take out his KA-BAR and try and attack you!"

"This attack only confirmed what I have suspected for the past few hours. If I am correct, the origin of this knife will be an artisan among the Hill People of Rigel IV." T'Var held out the ceremonial knife once again. "And I believe we do have a single murderer aboard the ship, but he is making use of multiple hosts in order to commit his crimes."

"How is that possible?" K'danz wanted to know.

"Captain, I believe – aboard this ship right now – we have the non-corporeal entity known as Redjac."

* * * *

As Zhadesh was being treated for his wounds in sickbay, back in the briefing room the investigation team was using as their base of operations, T'Var started briefing K'danz, Commander Paris, and 2nd Lieutenant Asra on her hypothesis.

"Have you ever heard the name Beratis?" she asked the Captain.

"Can't say I have," K'danz replied.

"Beratis was the name applied to an unidentified serial killer on Rigel IV in the year 2266. What about the name Kesla?"

"Wasn't that the name given to an unknown serial killer on Deneb II around the turn of the 23rd century?" Asra asked. She then looked at K'danz and Paris and explained, "I heard about it during a mission there shortly after graduating the Academy."

“You are correct, Lieutenant,” T’Var replied before adding, “And I am confident all of you have heard of Jack the Ripper.”

“Of course. Mysterious serial murderer in the city of London on Earth in the late 19th century,” K’danz remarked. “But all those crimes are centuries old. What does any of that have to do with what is happening here, today, on this ship? And who is this Redjac you mentioned?”

“What all those names have to do with what is occurring aboard this starship is they are all the same entity, and I believe it is running loose aboard the *Bellerophon*.”

“Wait! Excuse me? The same person who murdered prostitutes on Earth five hundred years ago is loose aboard this starship now?” Paris asked with disbelief.

“Yes, Commander. Though the killer is not technically a person,” T’Var replied. “Some of what has happened here seemed familiar to me, but it was the murder weapon from Rigel IV that prompted me to remember a file on true crime I read several weeks ago.” She then began explaining the history of the entity called Redjac as it was known, up to and including its encounter with the crew of the *Enterprise-1701* a hundred and twenty years earlier. “The Redjac entity literally subsists on fear and pain. I believe Redjac possessed Captain Drake to commit at least one – and perhaps all three – of the earlier murders, and each murder was committed in such a way as to generate the maximum amount of pain and fear, precisely what Redjac feeds upon. Mister Drake would have had no control over his body during the possession and no memory of what occurred while he was possessed, except perhaps what Redjac allowed him to remember. Once Drake was locked up and in a position where he could not escape, Redjac possessed Sergeant Gonzales and attempted to attack me – whether by design because I suspected its presence or merely as a target of opportunity I do not know. The Sergeant may even have been the host when Ensign Peters was killed. And I believe even your son Jacob’s encounter in the Learning Center is related to the entity,” T’Var concluded. “Somehow, while it was between possessions, Jacob could sense the entity’s presence and could even perceive it in some manner. Perhaps Sagions are capable of sensing the energy the Redjac entity is composed of?”

“While I find this all extremely hard to believe,” K’danz said as she reviewed the log entries of the *Enterprise* from more than a century prior, “I have to admit no other explanation fits. But if we’re dealing with a nearly-immortal non-corporeal entity, how do we capture or kill it? Captain Kirk and his crew evidently thought they had killed it once already, but if this is the same entity, here it is again! And my own experience with Mister Spot aboard the *Dauntless* has shown me how hard it is to localize and detain a being made up of nothing more than mental energy.”

“Captain Kirk and his crew trapped the entity in a sedated human body, the corpse of Argelius II’s off-world administrator Hengist, and then beamed the body and entity into deep space on wide dispersal in the hopes it would eventually die of starvation. I surmise that, instead of killing the entity as hoped, it was weakened but managed to survive until it could find a new host.”

“But how did it get aboard our starship?” Paris asked.

“I can only assume it came aboard in the body of either a crew member or visitor to *Starbase 719*,” the Vulcan woman replied. “Perhaps even one of the colonists heading out to Persephone. It would be an interesting exercise if, once this affair is concluded, we were able to look up the number of unexplained killings that have occurred between Argelius and the Typhon Sector in the last one hundred and twenty years. I do, however, believe our starship was merely another transit point for the entity. I believe it was intending to reach the new colony at Persephone IV.”

“For what purpose?” K’danz asked.

“A fresh ‘hunting ground,’ where it could begin its campaign of fear anew,” T’Var replied. “The entity was probably intending to wait until it reached its new home before killing again, but in desperate need of sustenance it started committing murders here aboard the *Belle* and unintentionally drew attention to itself.”

“All well and good,” K’danz remarked. “A fine hypothesis, T’Var. But that still leaves the most important question unanswered. How do we get rid of it?”

“Much as was done aboard the *Enterprise* over a century ago,” the chief science officer replied. “We must trap it.”

* * * *

The crew spent the next few hours reviewing what they knew of the Redjac entity from both history and the *Enterprise* logs, having been re-joined by Lt Zhadesh after Dr. Cuomo approved of the Efrosian returning to light duty following his treatment in sickbay.

“I don’t want to drug the entire crew, like Kirk did,” K’danz stated firmly. “We’re going to be entering the PN-2699 Stellar Cluster in less than twelve hours, and we need to all be awake and aware when we do if we’re going to navigate the cluster successfully. There has to be another way to trap this entity!”

“Captain, I have been reviewing the *Enterprise* logs as well,” Zhadesh said from his seat across the table from the K’danz. “According to the chief science officer’s log, the entity was not limited to merely possessing humanoid life forms. At one point it possessed the starship’s computer system as well, trying to generate fear in the entire crew before being driven out.”

“Are you suggesting we should let Redjac possess the *Belle*’s computer systems, Lieutenant?” K’danz asked.

“Not at all,” Zhadesh replied. “I am merely observing that the entity is capable of assuming control of technology as well as biological life forms. Perhaps we can use this to our advantage?”

“In what way?”

“I will work with Commanders T’Var and Dar to design a module that can be attached to our computer systems. Once there, the module can ‘absorb’ and contain the Redjac entity and then be removed from the computer.”

“That would be great if it will work!” Lt Asra commented. “Then we can just dump the module into the nearest star we’re passing before we get to the Persephone system!”

“I would not recommend such an action,” Zhadesh remarked. “History has proven the entity hard to kill. Were we to simply try and dump the module into a star, Redjac would probably escape once the module is destroyed in the star’s heat and gravity. I would suggest burying the module intact deep on some moon or class-D planet we encounter before reaching the new colony world; some place we can declare off-limits.”

“That sounds like a plan,” K’danz agrees. “Now, how do we find Redjac and get him into the computer once you’ve built this module trap?”

* * * *

The entire *Bellerophon* crew – with the exception of Captain K’danz, Lt Commander T’Var, and Lieutenant Zhadesh – had been injected with a mild sedative that would allow the crew to function calmly for the time being while guaranteed to wear off before the starship entered the PN-2699 Stellar Cluster in less than nine hours. During the several hours it took Cuomo and his staff to sedate the crew, Zhadesh and Dar had designed and constructed a module to trap Redjac, made from one of the starship’s neural gel packs attached to a small processor attached to a miniature force field generator and a fusion power source designed to operate for centuries, while T’Var reprogrammed the computer to direct the entity into the module almost like a data file if and when it ever tried entering the system.

Now, with only six more hours remaining before K’danz would have to call red alert in preparation for traversing the stellar cluster, T’Var and Asra – led by young Jacob Danz and his mother the Captain – were hunting the elusive entity throughout the ship.

“Commander, how do we know this Redjac isn’t leaving the body of one person we haven’t check yet and possessing someone we already have checked?” Asra asked in a lyrical tone of voice, as if intoxicated by the sedative Cuomo had employed.

“We do not,” T’Var replied. “However, as everyone not currently on duty declared absolutely essential is confined to quarters in groups of four, if the entity was to change hosts, their change in demeanor would likely be noticed and we would be informed.”

The four people were passing the door leading into the astrometrics lab when Jacob suddenly paused, a look of nervousness on his face.

“Mommy, I’m feeling something nearby. Like we’re not alone here,” the boy said.

Before she could even ask, K’danz saw T’Var turn her tricorder in a circle around them, finally coming to a stop facing the door to astrometrics.

“Captain,” T’Var said calmly. “I am detecting a single life form reading from within the astrometrics lab.”

“Could be Redjac. Could be some drugged-up crew member not doing what they’ve been told to do,” K’danz said. “Let’s check it out.”

All four entered the lab, Asra with her hand phaser drawn and ready. Inside they found one of the enlisted crew members, a petty officer, sitting at one of the far consoles. He seemed surprised to see the four people enter.

“Petty Officer Hodson, what are you doing here? Astrometrics was not declared an absolutely essential function,” K’danz remarked. Then she felt Jacob take hold of her left hand and grasp it tightly. She looked down at her son, noting the look of fear in his eyes.

“I’m sorry, Captain. I was not aware of the current alert status,” Hodson said. “I will return to my quarters immediately.”

“Hold on right there,” Asra said, aiming her phaser at the young man when he started to move toward the door. “T’Var?”

The Vulcan woman started scanning the man with her tricorder, attempting to ascertain if the man was possessed by the murderous entity called Redjac. As T’Var scanned, Hodson looked at K’danz and spoke.

“You can’t stop me, Captain K’danz. I am eternal.”

“What...? What are you?” K’danz asked, her son’s infectious fear starting to spread unconsciously even though the boy was mildly sedated.

“I have had many names throughout history,” the petty officer replied, almost relishing in his exposition and the fear he was feeling from the young boy. “Perhaps you know a few of them? Kesla... Zodiac... The Boston Strangler... Red Jack... I’ve always preferred that last one, the one for which I am best known.”

“Jack the Ripper?”

“It was a simpler time, back then,” Redjac replied. “Easier to hide. Easier to blend in. And much easier to generate the fear I need to survive among a population easily fooled by myth and legend.”

“And what did you hope to do by hiding in here, by possessing Petty Officer Hodson?”

“I hoped simply to remain inconspicuous,” Redjac replied. “I was hungry when I arrived aboard your starship, having worked so hard to avoid revealing my presence aboard the space station. So hungry I could not help myself when I possessed your security chief and tortured Lieutenant Clark before killing him. I much prefer women, you see. Their fear is more easily produced... sweeter... more satisfying. But I was not in a position to hunt my prey yet. Clark was alone and trusted your security chief. He was an easy target. And once he was dead and word started to spread around your ship, the pain and fear I craved was much easier to reap.”

As Redjac spoke, K’danz noticed T’Var attempting to move closer in order to perform a nerve pinch on Hodson’s neck. K’danz tried not to look at her science officer, hoping Redjac would be concentrating so much on the captain herself that he would not notice the Vulcan. Unfortunately Jacob was not privy to his mother’s thoughts. He glanced over at the Vulcan woman just as she was raising her hand.

In one quick swift movement, Redjac had his left hand grasped on T’Var’s neck and his right hand holding a knife – the same Marine KA-BAR that had belonged to Sergeant Gonzales – poised directly beneath her pointed left ear. K’danz took advantage of the entity’s momentary preoccupation to rush forward, pressing the hypospray she had hidden up her uniform sleeve against Hodson’s neck and activating it. Redjac’s eyes went wide as it felt the sedative start to course through its host’s bloodstream. He turned, slowly, looking at K’danz with a goofy grin forming on his face as he said, “I already told you, Captain. You can’t stop me.” A second later the Petty Officer collapsed into T’Var’s arms. She gently lowered him to the deck, where he slept peacefully. A moment later, the images on the monitor screens of the console where Redjac had been working when the quartet had entered changed to abstract images – colors melding together amid chaos.

“The entity has fled into the computer system as anticipated,” T’Var announced.

“K’danz to Zhadesh,” the captain said after tapping her combadge.

“Go ahead, Captain.”

“I hope you and Dar are finished installing the trap. Redjac has just entered the *Belle*’s computer system.”

“Ready and standing by, Captain.”

“You may proceed, Commander,” K’danz then said to T’Var. The Vulcan woman nodded, then addressed the ship’s computer.

“Computer, this is Lieutenant Commander T’Var, chief science officer. Activate computer program T’Var-9.”

“*No!*” a distorted male-sounding voice cried out from the speakers around the lab. “*Noooooooooo!*” Moments later the monitor screens returned to normal, displaying readings of the stars and planets in the immediate vicinity of the *Bellerophon*. T’Var moved over to the console and tapped several commands into the controls, then nodded with a satisfied look.

“My program has routed Redjac through the circuit paths directly to the trap module. I recommend we change course to the nearest planetary body that would suit the needs of our plan and proceed with phase two.”

K’danz tapped her combadge once again before saying, “Bridge, this is the Captain.”

“Bridge. Paris,” replied the first officer’s voice with a slight giggle.

“Tom, alter course to the moon we discussed earlier in the Alpha Serpentis system and prepare to dig the hole we need.”

“With pleasure, Captain,” Paris replied. “Altering course now. Estimated time of arrival at warp 6, one hour ten minutes.”

“Very good. If you need me, I’ll be in the main computer core with Dar and Zhadesh monitoring our... stowaway.”

* * * *

Captain’s log, stardate 66611.7:

Using the ship’s main phaser bank, we excavated a pit nearly five kilometers deep in the surface of the only moon of Alpha Serpentis II, into which we have deposited Redjac’s prison via shuttlecraft before collapsing the hole and placing warning marker buoys in orbit around the moon. Bellerophon is now back on course toward the Persephone colony. We have just completed our transit through the PN-2699 Stellar Cluster without incident and have increased speed to warp 7.

In the aftermath of this incident, Captain Michael Drake has been released from the brig and he and both Sergeant Gonzales and Petty Officer Hodson have been subjected to intense analysis by psycho-tricorders and several mind-melds by Commander T’Var, who graciously agreed to help. Through the melds and tricorder readings, Doctor Cuomo has determined that Redjac possessed Drake for the first three murders, using the Marine security officer’s knowledge to cover its own tracks and lay blame on other suspects.

K’danz, out.

Captain K’danz was sitting behind her desk in the quarters she shared with her husband and adopted son. Dar was currently in engineering, helping perform some work that had to be rescheduled when the crew went into security alert status. Jacob was playing with some toys across the room while K’danz tried to get herself to do a job that, while necessary, she never liked; writing letters of condolence to the families of the crew members killed by Redjac. She was about to put figurative pen to paper, picking up the padd on her desk, when the door chime sounded, offering her another excuse to delay writing the letters.

“Come,” she said.

Little Jacob looked over with curiosity as the door opened and Commander T’Var, Lieutenant Xin Zhadesh, 2nd Lieutenant Asra, Doctor Robert Cuomo, and Captain Michael C. Drake all walked in before returning his attention to his toys. All five visitors stood in front of K’danz’s desk.

“How are you feeling, Michael?” the captain asked.

“Lousy,” Drake replied. “How would you feel if you learned your body had been stolen to commit the murders of three innocent people?”

“Just remind yourself it wasn’t you performing those acts,” K’danz advised, though her words sounded hollow even to herself. She then looked at Cuomo and asked, “Have we learned anything new I can add to my report to Starfleet Command regarding this incident?”

“I believe we have,” Cuomo replied. He then glanced over his shoulder at Jacob before leaning closer to the captain and saying softly, “Your son came very close to being another victim himself.”

“What do you mean?” K’danz asked softly with alarm.

“In my melds with Captain Drake, Sergeant Gonzales, and Petty Officer Hodson, I learned another member of the crew had briefly been possessed by Redjac,” T’Var replied. “Lieutenant (JG) McGinley.”

“McGinley? You mean the officer who found Ensign Peters, the last of Redjac’s victims?” K’danz asked in surprise.

“The same,” T’Var confirmed. “By melding with him, I learned Redjac had discovered there were several children aboard this starship and decided it might be worth attacking one of them in the hopes it would generate even more fear than attacking an adult female victim. It just could not locate find a convenient host to possess in order to do so. It was also surprised by the fact that Jacob could sense its presence – even see it in its natural form to some degree. That is what prompted it to possess McGinley and commit one final murder before going into hiding once more – this time within Petty Officer Hodson, in hopes of reaching the Persephone colony undetected.”

“Well, I’m just glad it’s over with,” K’danz remarked with a deep breath before looking at the padd on the desk in front of her. “Now if only my other obligations were done as well.”

“Would you like me to write the letters of condolence, Captain?” Drake offered.

K’danz looked at her security chief, able to see his discomfort at the thought of writing to the families of those his body had murdered. She smiled – though the smile was not a happy one – and replied, “No, thank you, Michael. This is something I – as captain – must do.” She then looked at everyone standing in front of her and said, “I want to thank you all for your hard work. Who knows how many more victims there might have been if not for your dedication. Now please excuse me.”

Each of the five officers nodded and headed out the door. After the door had finally swished shut, K’danz amended her report to Starfleet Command – making sure copies of the report would likewise reach Admiral Fil aboard the Fifth Fleet flagship and Admiral Raijah aboard the starbase – adding the latest information her crew had discovered before transmitting it back to Earth. She then picked up the padd on her desk again and sighed loudly.

“I hate this part of the job,” she remarked to herself.

The End