



The Freighters of Acquisition, Part I

Runabout *Indus*

Near the end of Ep.7

Authors: Tyrlai Zade, Novia Yenn (NPC Tyrlai), Ash Sullivan, Arthur Reynolds, Malbi tai-Konjah

"So mother signed the papers today." Novia said a bit sadly and with a little nervousness.

"I'm sorry, but it will be okay." Tyrlai winced a little in sympathy, she remembered a much less kind time when she had gone through almost the exact same thing. "I'm at Dad's until Portland is ready. He got a letter too."

"I'd love to tell you that she will come around, but that's probably not going to happen." Tyrlai said tapping at her console as she spoke.

Novia nodded. "Zinzac and Berelca are worried that they can't see you anymore. Where are you?"

Tyrlai shook her head. "Their range is astounding, we will have to do some tests on that. I'm about to arrive at a place called Oromi IV-C."

Novia started tapping on her computer.

"Don't look that up." Tyrlai tried her stern voice.

"That's a red zone, it's not even in the Federation."

"I just told you not to look that up." Tyrlai slid the runabout out of warp at the edge the gas giant's atmosphere. "I have to go now, do your homework or something."

"It's done."

"Go do some more." Tyrlai looked at the display. "I'll be back soon and Ill want to hear about an extra credit project."

Novia looked lightly irritated. "I looked up your grades,..."

"Don't look up my grades. Tyrlai out." She cut off the comlink, put the ship on autopilot and turned around to look at her volunteers. "We have arrived at Brightside Casino and Trading Shop. Don't get to wrapped up on the bright part, it's a dingy station on a cloud choked moon. But someone here has a lightly damaged Breen freighter salvaged from an ion storm and we want to get it before the Breen come for it. There are a couple dozen watering holes here and we need to do some old fashioned greasing the locals for information. Questions?"

Ash was the security representative on this mission and had only received the assignment at the last minute. He had visited the armoury and then hurried down to the shuttle bay and since he was running late had just filed quietly into the back of the shuttle, skipping the usual pleasantries. Listening vaguely to the mission leader's dialogue over the comm he thought he recognised her voice but didn't pay it much attention until she turned to address the rest of the team. 'Oh god.' He thought to himself. 'This can't be happening! No... surely that's not her, she must just look similar.' He looked closer while at the same time attempting to hide his face. 'She's a Star Fleet Officer?!' He kept silent and did his best to hide at the back of the pack.

When Arthur had heard this mission would involve some dealings with a nasty underground criminal ring, he tried to avoid being pulled into it. Everybody who could pull up his Starfleet records knew he once lived in the Rigel colonies, where the Orion Syndicate carried out most of its operations. That was a life he desperately wanted to leave behind. But rather than show sympathy, somebody ordered him to come along. Nobody knew about the hell that was his adolescence, but they suspected he would be familiar with the unsavory environment.

If only I wasn't, he thought in exasperation as he silently focused on the runabout's sensor readouts.

"Yes," Malbi spoke first, to the surprise of some, "What are we to offer in exchange for this ship?"

"Due to my previous host having a predilection towards more exotic pleasures and a decided knack for economic deceit, I have holdings in Orion space and an account on Ferenginar. We can use that to purchase the freighter if need be. The Federation would prefer the Breen not be able to trace this acquisition so in practice we would prefer to find a less overt way to achieve this. However, the freighter is critical, if we have to stoop to free enterprise we have permission to do so."

"Will we be working alone or in pairs?"

"Pairs whenever possible. People can disappear on Oromi, the slave trade here ends on Breen mining worlds that is not the way in we want to take. Keep an eye on each other." Tyrlai said nodding to Malbi.

"So the plan is: go in, do a couple of odd jobs, and get enough money to afford an entire

ship?" With a chuckle, Arthur shook his head and kept his eyes locked to his console. "Maybe we'll enter a race with a million-bar payout in gold-pressed latinum."

"I'm not much of a pilot." Ferguson admitted.

Tyrlai smirked as she remembered bartering Thosk on her previous trek into the red zone. "No, the plan is to find out who has the ship and how to get them to part with it in a less traceable way. Barter, sleight of hand, leverage. Worst case scenario we pay cash through a series of disreputable banks on Ferenginar. Which describes most of them, really. Any suggestions?"

"Well, my stepfather taught me how to play poker and black jack, and I'm quite good, if I do say so, myself." Jena said. "If we could find a game, perhaps we could use the shuttle as collateral."

"Jena, this is a dangerous mission, where is your father?" Tyrlai frowned wondering when she became the sort of person who said the kind of things she just said.

"My father couldn't make it, he sends his regards." Jena said hoping Tyrlai wouldn't look into it.

"Better start small then: a comm badge or an isolinear chip." Arthur wasn't quite as enamored with the plan as everyone else, but he felt it necessary to contribute. Finally, he turned in his chair and looked around at the others. Aside from the half-Tellarite, he had a difficult time seeing any of them on a world like the one he came from. Then again, he'd cleaned up in more ways than one after he joined Starfleet.

"Let me get this straight. Starfleet's sending us in to collect a ship with only the clothes on our backs." Though he risked sounding as argumentative as a full-blooded Tellarite, he stated his case anyway. "Forgive me, but that sounds incompetent by Starfleet standards. There should be a contact when we arrive. An undercover operative or something."

"No." Tyrlai shook her head. "Something is happening right now, I don't even know what yet, but a need for a Breen ship has materialized in the last solar day and this is the only one in range we can get. We are very much without a net here which is why I asked for volunteers. I think this group will do quite fine, and I do have a contact here. Just not a Federation one, or a military one, or one with any sort of espionage training. We'll be fine." She smiled in what she hoped was a reassuring manner.

Arthur raised his brow, but turned back toward his console before responding. "So a human, a Tellarite, a Klingon, a Trill and a child walk into a bar." He chuckled and shook his head as he realigned the sensors to give a better view of the landing area. "Sounds like the setup to a bad joke." When he finished, he glanced back over at Tyrlai. "Starfleet doesn't want its hands caught in the cookie jar? Fine. But we're still in a Starfleet runabout with Starfleet transporters and Starfleet comm badges. And we don't even have fake identities, do we?"

"Transporters, yes! We aren't landing the runabout,..." Tyrlai looked down at her repli-

leather pants and only slightly shimmery black tunic, "you should probably change clothes, yes. As for identities, they don't have a government much less an HR department, pick a name, I'm going with Tyrlai. It's the Trill version of 'Jessica'. So here it is, I need people to locate the ship, another group to liberate the ship, we need to hack station security and possibly interdict pursuit. I'm probably forgetting something so I need you guys to figure out what that is."

Malbi had been quietly taking notes and coming up with ideas. She intended to check Klingon databases later to see if she had any old acquaintances out here who could perhaps get her information or assistance. She spoke up after she had noticed that the others seemed to have asked all of their questions, "When do we depart?"

"I wouldn't be so hasty," Arthur stated as he turned his seat around slightly so he could look back at Tyrlai with a determined expression. "This is wrong. Starfleet should know that getting a ship from one of the most xenophobic species in the quadrant isn't going to be that simple. HR department or no, those merchants down there aren't going to sell something like that to just anyone. These are people who learned to be cautious because if they aren't, any undercover cop can drag them away. If they catch even a whiff of Starfleet on us, you can kiss that ship goodbye."

"Fair Enough, Mister Reynolds, what is your suggestion?" Tyrlai looked back interested in his ideas.

The Freighters of Acquisition, Part II

Runabout *Indus*

Near the end of Ep.7

Authors: Tyrlai Zade, Ash Sullivan, Arthur Reynolds, Malbi tai-Konjah

Arthur briefly froze in surprise. Nobody had ever asked him for suggestions before. Usually, superior officers would rather bite his head off and throw him out an airlock before accepting even the slightest bit of help from him. He didn't reply for a second, rather focusing on the window and the starscape beyond. When he did speak, it was tentative and suspicious.

"Something tells me that if Starfleet wants a Breen ship so badly, they've already got someone working on it. We're just the distraction. If anything goes wrong, they'll be able to point the finger at us." Despite his cynical disposition, he was able to conclude his thoughts on a fairly positive note. "But on the other hand, we can still pull it off. We should make new names for ourselves, figure out some sort of shared history. If any of us get captured, we'll all be able to tell them the same story." He glanced at Tyrlai. "How much influence does your contact have on the surface?"

Tyrlai didn't need to ponder the question. "He will be an excellent source of information. His practical influence will be slim. And trust me, Starfleet didn't know it needed a Breen ship 49 hours ago. Although we do look like what I would pick for a distraction."

Ash had until this point been biting his tongue, trying not to be noticed by Tyrlai and hoping he could just hide for the rest of the mission. But he faced an internal struggle between the desire to avoid embarrassment and his own moral obligation to be a useful member of the team. Still trying to keep his face obscured behind another member of the crew, he spoke up. "So what is our common story? What reason would we all have to buy a Breen freighter together? Just an idea but, I was thinking maybe it would be better if we pretended not to be all together. Each pair could be business partners and have their own separate story, pretend not to know each other. Think of it like an auction. If we all collectively make one bid we have less of a chance of winning than if 5 of us are bidding separately." Unfortunately hiding his face couldn't hide his fairly distinctive accent.

Tyrlai, was concentrating on the conversation and not the voice and did not recognize the speaker. "I don't believe we should bid against each other. I don't believe we should bid it all, I would prefer the freighter just disappear this would give us the best chance of sneaking across the border. If the Breen find out that auction has occurred here they will be more likely to be looking for freighter coming back across their border."

For once, Arthur found himself surprised and subtly delighted by the fact someone else on this mission appeared to challenge his initial idea. With a smirk, he shot a glance at Ash, but otherwise maintained his focus on Tyrlai. "It's a good idea... if only one of us asks about the freighter. Otherwise, it'll seem too contrived that several separate visitors are searching for the same thing." Finally, he sat back in his seat and crossed his arms, his brow creased as he stared intently at the Trill. "So who ordered this mission? And I mean tracing the orders back to their source."

"With respect sir, I don't think it would. A Breen freighter is not a common item to go up for sale. I don't believe it would be odd for multiple groups to show interest, in fact I wouldn't be surprised if we face some competition for it down on the planet." Ash interjected once again.

"And when we try and split what little money we might acquire between us, what then?" Arthur countered, a brow raised as he looked questioningly at the security officer. "Any competition we find will be between rich bidders, and if you've ever been to a market on a planet full of types who'd sooner steal everything you own than play by the rules, you'd know they check to make sure their potential buyers can pay long before giving them a chance to bid for it... and you can bet it'll be an auction or a meeting with private investors they know are rich."

"You are starting to sound like Ferengi," Malbi riposted under her breath. They were arguing too much and not planning. If this team couldn't work together, they would not acquire the freighter.

That particular comment left a bitter taste in Arthur's mouth, but he only responded in a distant tone: "... or an Orion."

"Another good reason for us not to engage in the auction in the first place, we can pause as bidders in order to locate the freighter but after that I think we should go with a less

capitalistic method of acquisition. I think it's best if we split up into groups of two. Two of us to locate the freighter, another two to disable security, perhaps another pair to distract flight control. Mind you the most important thing is to find the ship in the first place." She looked over the team noticing for the first time that one of them appeared to be going to a fair bit of effort to hide himself in the back of the room. She looked back towards Arthur, "to answer your question I ordered this mission."

"That's what I was afraid of," Arthur said with a certain tone of concern as he laid back in his chair and looked wearily out the viewport again. "We won't get away with this by playing fair. I volunteer to deal with flight control then. Minimize any damage I may cause."

Jena raised a questioning eye brow. "What do you need a Breen freighter for?" She asked.

"I assume we are going into Breen territory in the near future. Specific details on that would be either completely unknown by myself, or classified enough that I can't really go into it right now. After all, I retrieved a Tolic shard before I knew we would need such a thing, or that it emitted strange temporal radiation and you really shouldn't carry around in your pocket." Tyrlai tried to rein in her narrative, "yeah, uh, so that's why. So Arthur is headed to flight control who would like to join him? And are there any volunteers for the security disruption team?"

"I'll go with locating team, after all I'm the only engineer here." Ferguson said.

"I've been working om my Academy prep classes, so I'll go with whoever needs a hand." Jena said proudly.

"I'll join flight control," Malbi added.

Arthur eyed Malbi as if she'd just challenged him, but then he smirked. It had been a long time since he worked with a Klingon, but oddly enough, he rather looked forward to it.

"I'm a security officer so I guess I can handle security." Ash said simply resigning to the fact that he would not make it through this mission without showing his face. In fact the embarrassment of the realization had almost passed and he was somewhat proud to have made it with a senior officer.

Tyrlai was taken aback and paused notably staring at Ash for a moment. She had recognized the voice but not placed it, it was unlike her. She broke the stare and her inner self screamed and kicked as her outer self-murmured. "Alright, Ferguson you are with me, Jena you are with Ash." She walked over to where Jena stood, "be careful and transport yourself back here the instant you are in trouble. I'm not explaining this to your father. I brought the Captain back from the dead, I can drag you back too, little lady."

"Understood, Ma'am." Jena said.

Tyrlai leaned in to Ash as she stepped past, whisper-growling. "We'll talk later." She got back

to the front. "Change outfits, replicate something non-federation, we don't need a coherent backstory, its better if it is confusing. Just don't dress in uniform."

Freighter Filchers

Brightside Casino

Shortly after arrival

Authors: N'xyrb X'rry (NPC Alenis), Tyrlai Zade, Ferguson (NPC Beauvoir)

With it's dark and dingy atmosphere, as well as the shadowy patrons who hung out there, the Brightside Casino appeared to have been named ironically. As a backwater station on the outskirts of Federation space, it was a very different atmosphere than the sanitized pubs and restaurants one might find on a starbase.

At a small table in the corner, a green-skinned, orange haired woman slid a suitcase across the table to an insectoid creature. The insectoid opened it up, basking for a moment in the glow of the gold-pressed latinum, before closing it again. Emitting some clicks and clacks in a language that was untranslatable to most universal translators, he handed the briefcase off to an associate and reached into a pouch to produce a PADD and an isolinear key. After making a claw print on the PADD, he slid it across the table and made some more clacking sounds.

"A pleasure doing business with you as well," replied N'xyrb X'rry, the green-skinned woman, as she placed her thumbprint on the PADD. "I have shipments to take care of; I expect my freighter ready to go within the next two hours."

The insectoid made some more clacking sounds with his mouth and finished his drink.

"I see we understand each other," replied N'xyrb as she stood up from her table, taking her drink in her hand. "Now, if you will excuse me, the tongo tables are calling."

Ferguson looked around the Brightside Casino as he and Tyrlai entered the place. "It's almost like home." He said. No sooner had the words passed his lips, than a fight broke out between two patrons and a grim-looking Nausicaan bouncer stepped in to sort it out.

"Now, it's just like home." The Engineer said with a nostalgic grin.

Tyrlai accidentally bumped into the woman, spilling a bit of her drink just as the fight broke out. She mumbled an apology and stepped back next to the Engineer. "Okay, I have the key, now we just need to follow the insectoid over there to find the freighter." She smiled, tucking the isolinear key into a pouch on her replicated leather top, beneath her red tunic.

No sooner had she tucked it away, though, did she feel a cold duratanium blade against her neck. The bar instantly went silent, as everyone turned to face the newcomers. "If you value your head," said a stern, female voice, "give it back. Slowly."

Tyrlai reached into her tunic slowly and pulled one of her silvery lockpicks out. A press of her nail on the gliding sensor and the little tendrils shot out for the only obvious weapon, the

blade, wrapping around it. Tyrlai jerked back on her coil enough to pull the blade back a little and spin free. "Perhaps we could negotiate?" She said, once she was facing her opponent.

The teal-skinned woman held her blade out in a defensive pose as she whistled for assistance. With her other hand, she pressed a button on her wrist. As she did so, lightweight armour plates replicated themselves over her form-fitting leather jacket, creating a high-tech piece of body armour. Her off-hand became a spiked gauntlet which she held out in defense. N'xyrb had been in knife fights before, and while she had come out on top, she had learned that the best way to win was not to fight fair.

And six goons with guns was a good way to make the odds a little more lopsided.

By this time, the bar patrons had backed away, their bodies forming a circular ring with Tyrlai and N'xyrb in the center. At N'xyrb's call, a half-dozen crew members muscled their way to the outside of the ring and trained their disruptors on the Trill in the middle. "Unless your friend there has a lot of latinum in his briefcase," she said, nodding towards Ferguson, who was presently feeling the tight grip of a Nausicaan's hand on his shoulder, "I'm not interested."

For a second Tyrlai thought 'if only they had brought more security officers'. But that would doubtless have left several people dead and she still hoped that sort of trouble could be mitigated. She raised her hands and fished the key out from the pocket she'd placed it in. She remained ready for an opportunity, just in case. "Sorry, I guess I am not the best thief."

N'xyrb quickly snatched the key away from Tyrlai and backed away. As she did so she nodded to one of the Nausicaans, who delivered a brass knuckle to Tyrlai's cheekbone. "Evidently not," shot back N'xyrb as she sauntered off, securing the key in an inside pocket that would be difficult for a pickpocket to reach. "Oh, and welcome to Brightside IV."

"And what a nice welcome 'ts, Lass." Ferguson said sarcastically. Then to Tyrlai he added. "Look what providence has dropped into our hands." Showing her the Nausicaan guard's Security Pass.

Tyrlai rose to a knee testing her jaw. "I don't think I've lost a fight before. Perhaps a swordfight to Captain Kim, shes really good though." She winced as she touched her cheek, "and that was a holosword." She looked over at Ferguson. "Excellent job, I was wondering what you were doing back there, but clearly yours was the better plan."

Tyrlai looked for a computer console and fished another of her lockpicks from her outfit. "Now we just need to find out where my Freighter is."

Stealth 101: Don't get caught (part I)

Brightside station

Shortly after arrival

Authors: Arthur Reynolds, Malbi tai-Konjah

Arthur felt uncomfortable - yet paradoxically comfortable - with the gritty environment of the planet below. Flight control was stationed in one of the towers on the edge of a major city. He preferred the relative peace and quiet of the building which he had to sneak around in. At least here, he wasn't likely either to be recognized or drawn into some kind of fight where he'd likely have to kill the other party. That said, if he and the Klingon were to be caught, it was likely their role in the plan would go south fairly quickly.

"I know your kind are eager to get into any kind of fight," he whispered with a lack of subtlety or manner as they slipped through an empty corridor, Arthur, at least, with his phaser ready. "But here's Stealth 101: don't get caught. Now which way to the control center? I couldn't get an accurate scan from orbit due to some sort of interference. Is it any better down here?"

Before Malbi had the chance to be offended, a large Klingon strode around the corner; he was a foot taller than Malbi and about three times as wide. "There you are!" He said loudly, with a distinct lack of stealth or decorum, he was wearing club clothing in a mix of black, cobalt blue and teal and was wearing a long, fluffy, ice-blue scarf that shimmered and sparkled. "The Trill snippet sent me, she thought you could use some help. She seemed concerned you might get lost." He offered Arthur a datapadd. "This is a map of the station."

At first, Arthur glanced between Malbi and the large Klingon before tentatively taking the PADD. After looking over it, he pursed his lips and peered back down the hall around the corner they now stood behind. When he was certain the coast was clear, knowing full well this wasn't going to be easy with a lumbering brute of a Klingon at his back, Arthur muttered, "Okay, Chewie, how about some kind of distraction?"

The large Klingon looked around for a moment smiling pleasantly, a disturbing trait in a Klingon his size. "Who now?" He mumbled loudly, "ermmm, A distraction? A simple matter, but whom would you like distracted?"

It took a moment for Arthur to mull something over in his head, but he responded a minute later by gesturing for the Klingon to follow. They were still in the outer corridors, where there would be few guards wandering about. Using his tricorder, however, he followed a line of circuitry on the wall. Once he found what he was looking for, he subtly suggested the Klingon stand back. Then he aimed his phaser and fired.

Alarms went off throughout the building, and the fire suppression systems kicked on. Quickly, he shoved his phaser toward the Klingon. "Here. You and Malbi hold down the fort," he exclaimed as his eyes darted down the hallway. With an insincere smile, he added, "I'll be back in a minute." With that, he used the tricorder while making his way down the corridor in the opposite direction from the inner layers of the building.

The large Klingon was no one's fool. He tucked the phaser into one of the layers of his colorful outfit and pulled a small shiny instrument from another. A check of the settings and he smiled at the closest sensor relay. Security would see nothing in the corridor as they had all along, which honestly would make their diversion even more effective. "Come, dear. Let us wander a few corridors over to where there are a few more people to serve as additional

suspects."

"First, he tells me to be stealthy. Then he goes and alerts the entire complex to our presence," Malbi said, "Try as I might, I will never understand human tactics." She shook her head and followed the man down the winding corridors.

Whatever the Klingon did was out of Arthur's hands now. Instead, he focused on slipping past security as they rushed past him in the corridor, taking cover behind whatever door he could find. It wasn't the best tactic, he knew, but it would do... at least until the alarm ended. By then, he expected to be somewhere near the control room.

Unfortunately, there was one minor problem with his tactic, which he assumed would happen: the door he slipped behind didn't close. The security guards noticed almost immediately, but by then, Arthur had already taken cover behind a desk. Silently, he cursed his own short-sightedness. He rarely had the opportunity to go on away team missions, particularly those involving stealth, and thus, he had little experience to draw from. At best, he could remember the time he was a child occasionally hiding from his cruel Orion task-masters on Vem'ir. Little good that did him, since he frequently ended up caught and punished severely.

"Drilith, go check on that fire alarm with Yildra. Gran, Mulkar, you're with me. Fan out and search the room." They were professional, Arthur could give them that. Initially, he tried to peer out around the corner, but had to duck back before the security officer could see him. Then it struck him - a realization that made all the blood drain from his face. The security guard... was none other than Vira, the Andorian who kidnapped him long ago. Although he wondered what she was doing here, he suddenly felt a certain measure of fear. If she was here, then that meant...

"Attention, security alert on habitation deck. Repeat, security alert on habitation deck." Came an announcement over the station's PA.

So much happened so fast that Arthur almost didn't realize what happened next. Startled, his head hit the top of the desk he hid under, causing far too audible a thump to go unnoticed, even amidst the distant klaxon. Quickly, he reached for his phaser... then remembered that he'd given it to the Klingon. Part of him thought he'd made the right decision, given the fact that he couldn't have completely foreseen the fact that doors to each room remained open much longer than on a Federation starship. The other part cursed his own short-sightedness.

"Whoever you are, come out or we'll open fire." It was Vira's voice who called out first. Arthur realized with some trepidation that the weapons they were holding could no doubt vaporize any flimsy cover like the metal desk that betrayed his position.

With a deep breath, Arthur inched out slowly and held his hands up. "You have me again, Vira." At first, the Andorian could only narrow her eyes as she and the rest of her security team fixed their aims on him. "Hope you're not too disappointed."

Vira didn't recognize him for a moment, but it was clear he knew her name. Then it struck her. "You're..."

"Names don't matter much on Rigel, do they?" While Vira frowned, Arthur continued with a malicious look in his eyes. "Not if you were a kid sent to work in the mines."

"Vira, report." From an old communicator strapped to Vira's waist, another familiar voice echoed. "What's going on out there?"

Slowly, and without lowering her weapon, Vira reached for the communicator and lifted it up to her lips. "I've found the intruder."

"So?" The man on the other line questioned. "Who is it?"

"I don't know," she verified while glancing over at her comrades and gesturing for them to take Arthur into custody. "But we're about to find out." With that, she signed out and replaced the communicator to her belt, ordering the two security guards to take him to 'processing' and find out what he was doing here. "I'll see what Drilith and Yildra found out. Oh--" She stopped short of the doorway after sheathing her phaser, an uncertain glance cast back at Arthur. "And if he is who I think he is... Maya will want to speak to him."

After one last nod, she left. The guards then 'led' Arthur back down the hallway - away from his present and deeper into his past.

Stealth 101: Don't get caught (part II)

Brightside station

Shortly after arrival

Authors: Arthur Reynolds, Maya (NPC Arthur)

"Sounds like they found him and are coming back this way," Malbi remarked when she heard the security detail call for reinforcements over the comm system, "I suppose we ought to hide and make a plan to recapture Arthur, do you know of anywhere we could go?" she asked the other officer.

"Follow me."

The path to his unknown fate led further into the building via turbolift. Next thing Arthur knew, they stood in the middle of a holodeck with a frail old figure sitting in a grandiose chair in the center. This stranger appeared to have many of his limbs and skin replaced with cybernetic prosthetics, and nothing recognizable remained. But as Arthur approached slowly, urged ahead by the weapons pointed at his back, he recognized one notable feature: an elaborate, silver earring which nearly every Bajoran wore.

Suddenly, a program activated, and his surroundings changed to resemble the enormous

room he'd first been brought to upon being abducted as a child. The glazed, marble floor reflected a soft light that flooded in through the colossal, thin windows behind him. When he looked, he saw a sight he'd hoped never to see again: "Rigel..." Under his breath, he muttered as he looked out over the vast megacity, the soft, blue light of Rigel's star nearly blinded him. It had been too long since he stood on a planet surface and looked out at its sun. "Never thought I'd see this place again."

"Neither did I."

Arthur looked behind him to see a familiar old man, his nose wrinkled and a silver earring of unmistakable fashion on one ear, stare back at him.

"Then again, I don't expect to see it again either."

"Maya," Arthur exclaimed under his breath as he faced the man who started him on his path to an utter, living hell of a childhood: Maya Kesuma.

"In the flesh." Maya held his arms out to either side. Since he wore the typical robes of a monk, the effect reminded Arthur of the god-complex the man once had. If his choice of wardrobe was any indication, he hadn't changed. In fact, Arthur just noticed how the stained glass window behind the desk, and behind Maya, framed the man. It was orange, bronze, and red mixed into the familiar insignia of the Bajoran Republic. The circular portion at the bottom of the symbol framed Maya's head like an aura, further enhanced by the recognizable logo of the Alliance for Global Unity.

"What the hell are you doing here?" Arthur narrowed his eyes at the sight.

"I could ask you the same thing." Maya's hands patiently intertwined together in front of him, just like how a calm vedek would carry himself while addressing another. "Perhaps you will answer me first."

Arthur held his tongue, but knew Maya wouldn't allow that for long. His bodyguards would beat and torture any answers he wanted out of the former child slave, and that particular thought didn't appeal to either of them. Nothing would stop the only Bajoran leader in the Syndicate from ordering him to certain pain and humiliation, however. Not even the tearful begging of a child could soften this man's heart.

"Just thought I'd drop in and look around." Arthur tried to sound casual, uncertain as to how much Maya knew about him after their first - and last - encounter. "Funny coincidence I should meet you here."

"Bajorans don't believe in coincidences." Although Arthur wanted to refute that with cold, hard evidence, he knew it would be pointless. Once Maya had his mind set on something, it was either a fact or it would become a fact - if he had any say in it at all. "The facial recognition software in my optical implant tells me your name is Arthur. Arthur Couer-Reynolds, formerly brought before me by my assistant Vira, then sent to work in the mines on Vem'ir. Last we heard, you graduated Starfleet Academy and celebrated by murdering a

fellow cadet... an Andorian, I believe?" He merely smirked and raised an eyebrow. "Did he remind you too much of Vira?"

"No," Arthur struggled to respond, his teeth grit until he calmed himself enough to speak with some semblance of civility. "It was an accident."

"Yet, here you are." Eerily enough, Maya's smile resembled that of a father's when doting his children, though his tone suggested a subdued, sadistic enjoyment toward Arthur's reaction. He started to walk around the wide desk, eyes on his feet. "The Federation makes some information on its officers available to anyone. You can even dig deeper with the right security clearance. Not that I needed it." He stopped at one end of the desk and raised his hands out to the side again. "It was in the news."

"Why don't we cut to the chase?" Arthur hoped to shift the direction of this conversation away from his past mistakes and on to the present. "Seeing as you haven't killed me on sight, I take it you've got a good reason."

Maya actually chuckled at that and continued to wander slowly toward one of the massive windows overlooking the holographic recreation of Rigel. He maintained a certain distance from Arthur, both literally and figuratively, as he did so. All he stared out at was the pristine upper levels of the city, below which Arthur knew from personal experience lied some of the worst conditions imaginable.

"It isn't quite like Bajor, you know." Maya narrowed his eyes as a ship flew by in the near distance. From what Arthur saw of it, it must have been an old Orion raider. "Neither of these planets are. But I guess... the Bajor I knew is long gone."

"Have you ever heard of the kohn-ma?" When Maya addressed that question to Arthur, the latter could only purse his lips and shake his head slightly. "I'm not surprised. Many of us were wiped out when the Bajoran Republic rose to power under their Federation masters. We had plenty of supporters on and off the planet, however. Those of us who lived on other worlds survived the purge and carried on the fight against Cardassia."

"One of my colleagues, Elva Bel, went undercover in the Federation a couple of weeks ago. She played a significant role in my particular cell before the arrests began. Last reported, she was on Trill." Before Arthur could ask, Maya interjected, "I can't tell you the nature of her mission. All I can tell you is she stopped reporting in a few days ago. I need to find her, but I can't risk my few contacts in Starfleet."

"Let me guess," Arthur began with an exasperated tone. "You want me to find her?"

Maya simply looked at him and grinned. "If it isn't too much trouble."

With another glance over his shoulder at the guards, Arthur knew he didn't exactly have a choice in the matter. But he felt it pertinent to ask:

"What do I get in return?"

That elicited another of those eerie smiles and brief silences that followed, before Maya decided to respond. "Tell me," he began, slowly stepping toward Arthur. "How long have you been in Starfleet?"

"Years. Why?"

"Oh," Maya exclaimed as he stopped right in front of Arthur. Clearly, he felt disgusted to be so close to a non-Bajoran like this, particularly a human. Yet he took a deep breath and tried to ignore the sterile, Federation smell. "I only wonder how well you've fit in. Didn't your last commanding officer reassign you to that run-down little ship? What was it called? The Portend?"

Arthur wanted to say something to throw Maya off, just to maintain his cover. Unfortunately, it seemed at least his public Starfleet record left him an open book, free to be read by any decent facial-scanning software and anyone who once knew him. In his mind, he cursed himself for not foreseeing this in the first place. Even more disturbing was how Starfleet apparently didn't think of this before sending them on this mission. Then again, they probably didn't expect anyone on the surface to have access to that kind of equipment in the first place.

"I don't hold you responsible for the mutiny aboard my ship. You were just a child, easily swayed by a man who knew you'd be looking for someone to call 'father'." Then Maya narrowed his eyes and grew ever more serious. "But Starfleet wouldn't excuse your crimes so easily. Child or not, you took many lives as a renegade.

"It would be a shame to lose everything you worked for... just because word got out about your criminal activities."

That piece of--, Arthur thought as he grit his teeth for the second time that day. He knew this would come back to bite him in the ass at some point. Perhaps it was luck that it only happened here with a figure from his past than from Starfleet Command.

Maya's expression softened, a sure sign that the man's moods swung back and forth like a pendulum. "Arthur," he uttered in a soft, gentle way. "You know as well as I do that Starfleet isn't where you belong. You're a child of Rigel, born and tempered in the flames of hell. Since day one, you proved unable to meet the Federation's demand that you fit into their little utopia. Paradise isn't for you, Arthur. It never was."

Rather than dignify that with a response, Arthur merely turned and looked back out at the city. But he couldn't hold his head high. Part of him knew what Maya said was true. He always felt like he didn't belong, no matter how often he tried. Starfleet demanded he respect someone due to rank, rather than due to their actions. He'd been expected to conform to a dress code, a formal manner of speaking toward his superiors, and a strict, by-the-book method of carrying out his job. None of that happened aboard the Orion Dawn.

But wasn't paradise worth the effort? Ideally, he thought yes; but experience told him no. It

wasn't so much the fact that it was too high a cost, but that it was a cost Arthur couldn't pay. Every single year that passed since he entered Federation space with that Vulcan ambassador, he continued to make the same mistakes while trying to fit in. It was nothing short of a miracle that he got through the Academy in the first place. Yet part of him wanted to believe in the Federation's utopia so much that he tried - even when his natural inclination was to act without conscience.

"You don't belong with them," Maya re-iterated, his gaze intensely focused on the man who could've been his prodigy. "You belong with me."

A lump grew in Arthur's throat, forced down only when he felt he could speak again. This time, however, he chose not to look the Bajoran in the eye, for fear it would spark that rapid shift in demeanor his former master was notorious for.

"What do you need me to do?"

Stealth 101: Don't get caught (part III)

Brightside station

Shortly after arrival

Authors: Arthur Reynolds, Malbi tai-Konjah

Little did the security team know, but the two Klingons had followed them to the room where they held Arthur. The captors were so caught up with their prize that they never noticed the two following them. So when the security detail left, save for two guards at the door, Malbi and her new ally hid and formulated a plan.

Unfortunately, they would have to attack the two guards from the front, meaning that there was no way to quietly eliminate them. So they pulled the knives from their boots and snuck as close to the door as possible before jumping out from their hiding place and slitting the two guard's necks quietly. One of them had managed a squeal, but they quickly hid the bodies in their former hiding place and waited a few seconds to ensure the coast was clear before executing their second part of the plan: getting into the room and getting Arthur out.

Malbi was disappointed to find the door locked, but began working her magic to try and open it as the other watched her back.

But before she even had the chance to finish, the door opened from the inside, sending the two once more ducking for cover.

Somebody on the inside flung Arthur out into the corridor, only to follow moments later. It was the two guards from earlier, Gran and Mulkar. They wouldn't realize the guards stationed outside had disappeared -- until it was too late and the doors had closed behind them.

Arthur struggled to stand. He'd been beaten black and blue, his clothing partly torn and bloodied. As he got to his feet, he stumbled back against a nearby wall and tried to catch his

breath. When he noticed who'd rescued him, he took a deep breath and held his head high, if for no other reason than to scavenge whatever little bit of dignity he had left at this point. Otherwise, it was a point of pride for him not to show far too much weakness. If there was one thing about him that he shared in common with a Klingon, it was that particular fact.

"What took you so long?" he quipped with a grunt as he started to straighten his back.

The Purple Man

Brightside station

Authors: Ash Sullivan, Coln Jena (NPC Beauvoir)

"Ash. Can I call you 'Ash'?" Jena asked not waiting for an answer. "So, what's the plan?"

"Listen uh... Jena." Ash said untying his hair and trying to make it look a little less well kept. "How old are you?" His first thought, when Tyrlai said they'd be working together was that this was some sort of punishment... baby sitting duty.

"I'm 15, but what does that have to do with anything?" She asked. "You're not here to babysit me, if that's what you think." She added, as if reading his mind.

"It's not that..." He argued, "Well it is a little... The thing is, this is a dangerous mission. There's a very good chance we could be shot at and I doubt these guys will be nice enough to use the stun setting. Do you even know how to fire a phaser?"

"Yes, I know how to use a phaser, I've been practicing on the holodeck. I've also been studying humanoid anatomy, so where to aim to do the most damage." She told him.

"On the holodeck, right." Ash mumbled. "Well we need a plan." He added looking up and down the corridor they were standing in, just outside the security office. "I'll wait out here, I want you to wander into the security office, pretend you're a little lost or something and get a look at how many officers there are and what the layout of the room is. Think you can handle that kid?"

"Sure, mate." Jena said mimicking his is accent. "You best hold this." She said handing him her Bajoran phaser. "And this." and handed him a telescopic baton. "And this." As she handed him a knife from her boot. She was about to leave when she remembered something else, she tossed a hypo over her shoulder into his hand. "Careful with that, it contains a powerful sedative." She added not looking back.

Ash stood a little stunned, holding the young girls small arsenal. 'Maybe I've underestimated her.' He thought to himself as he stuffed the weapons she had given him into the satchel he had slung over his shoulder, being careful not to slip with the sedative.

Taking a PADD from her jacket pocket, and walked into the Security Center. "So, could any of you fine people direct me to the Arboretum?"

"What?" One of the Security Personnel asked.

"The Arboretum. You know, the place with all the trees and plants? I was told this station had the best one in three sector." Jena explained.

"Sorry, Miss. We don't have an Arboretum." The Security man said.

"Oh, great," Jena said acting exasperated. "Damn Ferengi travel agent. Next you're going to tell me there's no dedicated shuttle service from here to Galvin three."

"Sorry, Miss, we don't have a shuttle service."

"Thanks, Gents. I'm now going to look for alternate transport, so I can catch up with a certain Ferengi and test how long he can hold his breath in a vacuum."

Returning to Ash she said. "There are three personnel in the Security Center, with patrols out doing their rounds. The personnel are carrying Romulan disruptor pistols and there is a weapons locker at the back of the room. The tech in the center roughly 30 years out of date and there is at least one blindspot. The personnel are all male humanoids. One is built like a Klingon, another is covered in what appears to be a bony exoskeleton and the is of average build and purple."

Ash was impressed by the young girl's detailed reconnaissance. Opening his satchel he began handing her back her weapons, "Set that phaser on stun and keep the knife away unless you really need it." He said pulling out a pair of Klingon disruptors of his own and placing them on magnetic holsters he had attached to his belt. "I'll go in first, and take the left. You stay behind me and take the right. Find cover as soon as you can and try not to let them reach their weapons locker. Understand?" He asked as he pulled out a tricorder.

"Understood." Jena said put on her 'game face'.

Ash began scanning the corridor to see if anyone was nearby. All of a sudden an alarm blared. Acting on nothing but instinct Ash grabbed Jena by the shoulder and pulled her back down the corridor and into a small alcove. "Was that us?" He asked frantically.

"Attention, security alert in flight control centre. Repeat, security alert in flight control centre." Came a computerised announcement over the station's PA.

Two security officers ran past the alcove, ignoring Ash and Jena. "Were they two of the guys that were in the office?"

"Yes," Jena said trying to make herself heard over the alarm without drawing attention to herself. "Only the Purple Man is still in there now."

"Alright let's go. I think Arthur and Malbi were headed to flight control, if they've tripped the alarm they might be in trouble." Ash said putting his tricorder away and jogging back to the doors to the security office. He stood on the far side of the door and unholstered one of his

disruptors, with the other hand poised on the door control. "Ready?"

"Ready." Jena said aiming her phaser. She felt a mixture of excitement and fear and took a deep breath to calm her nerves.

With that Ash hit the door release and raised his disruptor looking for a target.

'The Purple Man', as Jena had dubbed him, turned slowly from a console on the far wall. He was not expecting two phasers pointed in his direction.

Almost in unison Ash and Jena fired on the man who didn't even seem to flinch. The phaser bursts struck him square in the chest, 'Kid's got good aim.' Ash thought to himself but was quickly shaken from his thoughts.

The Purple Man didn't drop. Instead he raised his own disruptor, aiming straight for Jena.

In a heartbeat, without even thinking about it Ash had dived into Jena, pushing her behind a control console and out of the Purple Man's sights. A flash of light indicated he had fired his shot and Ash felt a sudden pain in his left shoulder. He let out a short, angry expletive before turning to Jena, "Looks like he has some kind of body armour. Are you okay?" He asked as he examined his own injury. Luckily the disruptor blast had cauterised the wound.

"I'm a bit bruised, but I'm glad to be alive. Thanks." She said. Jena thought for a moment. "Okay, body armour, like that would have to be powered. Perhaps if we hit him from two different directions we could overload the power source."

"Good idea." Ash said adjusting the settings on his disruptor. "Take yours off the stun setting until we can take out his body armour." After giving Jena a chance to adjust her phaser Ash continued, "I'll try to get over behind that far console but I'm going to need some cover fire."

"Ready. Go." Jena said and began laying down cover while Ash made his way to his new position. Her heart was beating fast. She synced her breathing with her shots, in an effort to calm herself.

As Jena started firing Ash crawled out from behind the computer and ran as fast as he could to the next console. He could still feel a burning pain in his shoulder as he moved. It looked like the Purple Man was moving towards the armoury at the rear of the room slowly but he was still facing Ash and Jena and began opening fire as Ash ran. Once in behind cover again he shouted over the din. "On 3 Jena! One... two... THREE!" Standing and raising both phasers, Ash fired on the alien.

Jena fired and at first the Purple Man shook off her and Ash's shots as if they were the annoying bites of midges. Soon though his armour began beeping and after several minutes later a computerised voice began saying. "The RonssumTech Centurion MK-VI Body Armour was not designed to handle concentrated fire. Please power-down the unit to avoid overheating the power source and causing serious physical damage to your person. RonssumTech accepts no responsibility for any damage caused by the misuse of its

technology."

The Purple Man growled in disgust, then put down his weapon, raised his hands and ordered his armour to power down.

Keeping one phaser aimed at the Purple Man, Ash moved towards him and retrieved a pair of restraints from his bag. He placed the restraints on the man's wrists and then moved him to one corner of the room. "Keep an eye on him there for me kid." Ash said as he sat down at the main computer terminal. It took a few minutes but eventually Ash had taken control of station security and sealed the doors to the office. He then remembered the earlier alarm that had drawn the security guards away. Pulling up security footage he noticed that it was in fact Arthur and Malbi who had tripped the alarm. Thinking quickly he deactivated the alarm and triggered a new one in the habitation deck to try and lure as many officers away from the flight control centre.

"Attention, security alert on habitation deck. Repeat, security alert on habitation deck." Came a familiar sounding announcement.

Jena tried her best to look intimidating as she held her phaser on the Purple Man.

"Perhaps you could put that hypospray of yours to good use Jena." Ash said walking back over to aim a phaser at the purple man.

"Indeed Ash." Jena agreed. A wicked smile crossed her lips as administered the sedative to the Purple Man.

The Freighters of Acquisition: Part 1

Runabout Indus

Near the end of Ep.7

Authors: Tyrlai Zade, Novia Yenn (NPC Tyrlai), Ash Sullivan, Arthur Reynolds, Malbi tai-Konjah

Tyrlai crept through the darkness, crouching as she moved through the infrastructure, low hanging beams and tubes obstructing progress and at the same time masking her from scans with the aid of some tech she had brought along. Crawling the last two meters she found herself on the inside edge of the vents overlooking bay twenty-seven. Her contact had led her to the far hangars as the most likely place the 'hotter' freighters would be located. This had been the third she had checked with a few small drones and the one that seemed to be most likely.

Inside the large landing bay was her target. With a large, boxy cargo bay, it didn't look too much like the sleek, curved vessels that Starfleet fought during the Dominion war, but it had some distinct design cues that betrayed its origin as from the Breen Confederacy. How such an exotic vessel managed to find its way into a dingy docking bay on an out-of-the-way station was surely an interesting story, and given the price that its "rightful" owner paid for it, she undoubtedly had more exciting plans than doing the milk run from Earth to Andor.

A few crewmen, some Nausicaans and Orions, busied themselves with loading some large cargo containers into the vessel. Though the ship had seen better days and could use a coat of paint, it was serviceable and no doubt its new owner was in a hurry to take it out to wherever she was going.

Suddenly, and rather unceremoniously, Arthur crawled up from behind her and peered through the nearest vent. He didn't recognize the type of vessel, but on the other hand, he'd never encountered a Breen ship before - only images. Although there weren't any detailed diagrams of Breen vessels, Arthur thought he could identify a few parts of the ship: the shield emitters, the particle beam emitters, impulse thrusters, even numerous, scattered maintenance hatches that appeared like small polygonal impressions in the hull.

"Hey," he whispered as he started to take note of possible entry points and the personnel working around it. Then he pointed at something, or someone. It was an Andorian wearing what passed as a security uniform, flanked by several others. She'd approached the Orion in charge of overseeing the cargo being unloaded and began to address him. "That's her."

"That's who?"

"Vira, head of security," he answered, trying to keep his voice down. Despite that, he wouldn't explain much. He highly doubted they had the time for the full story. "I... made a deal with her." He sounded reluctant to share that information. "She can draw their attention while we get in close."

Tyrlai's eyes narrowed and she simmered for a moment. "You will report every detail of this deal when we get back to some normalcy." She moved then, silently over the edge, dropping cleanly to the deck below and moving purposely for the Freighter at a normal pace so as not to be noticed.

Watching as she went ahead, Arthur remarked in his usual tone, "Well, you're welcome, princess." Then he followed behind closely, keeping an eye on the guards even as they began to vacate the hangar or move to the opposite end. In any case, their approach would go unnoticed.

She reached one of the hatches and placed one of her robotic 'keys' at the lockplate. It took a few moments to read the key sequence and bypass the lock. The door slid open and she waited for the others to dash inside.

Ferguson followed the others down, anxious to get a look at the Breen ship.

Meanwhile in the station security office, Ash and Jena were monitoring the situation and doing their best to keep security away from the hangar. As Ash cheered slightly at the site of the team infiltrating the ship unnoticed a loud bang sounded on the office door.

"Hey what's going on in there? Open up!" A voice barked from the other side of the door.

Ash looked over to Jena, still worried about the young girl. "We're going to be okay for a little while, I've scrambled their access codes and locked down this room. See if you can make contact with Tyrlai and the others. Let them know our situation."

Jena smiled at Ash. "Patching through." She said. Then after a moment. "There, got it, channel open."

"Tyrlai here, how can I help you?" Came the slightly crackling response from the intercom system

Ash winced a little at the sound of Tyrlai's voice over the intercom, they still hadn't spoken about their night on Trill and Ash was worried she might just leave him behind. "Good work getting the comms up and running Jena." He said before pressing the intercom.

"This is Sullivan. We've taken control of the security offices and are holding out here for now. I've got access to the hangar doors, force fields and security web from here but... we might need a beam out once you're clear of the station." Ash responded, keeping it very professional.

There was a muffled exchange on Tyrlai's side of the line followed by a terse "Just go and find it!!" A short pause was followed by, "Understood, I have people looking for the transporters now. The architecture is decidedly different and there are bio components everywhere. We'll sort out which squiggly tendrils operate the transporter. Um,... soon."

That was not a great report to hear back but Ash tried to stay positive and optimistic for Jena's sake. "Sounds like a plan, keep us updated on your progress. You shouldn't encounter much of a security presence, I think they're all headed here."

"Since we're having company, maybe we should serve refreshments." Jena joked.

"That's actually not a bad idea, we should give them some water." Ash said with a sly grin. "Think you can activate the fire suppression system out in the corridor?"

"I'll try, the hard part will be bypassing the safety protocols." Jena said as she got to work. Moments later she said. "Ready, I await your order, Ensign."

"Stand by on that kid, we'll wait till we really need it." Ash replied looking back at the screens that monitored the rest of the away team's progress on the freighter.

The Freighters of Acquisition: Part 2

Runabout Indus

Near the end of Ep.7

Authors: Tyrlai Zade, aENS Jena Colm (NPC Jason), Ash Sullivan, Arthur Reynolds, Malbi tai-Konjah

Tyrlai held her palm unit in front of her as it built an internal map. The Freighter had been significantly larger than she had thought. What had looked like four freighters sitting near each other in the bay turned out to all be a single ship. There were four major hulls each separated from the others and connected together by a perpendicular wing structure running along the width of the ship. The bridge was near the top rear and it had taken them a good eight minutes to reach it. Seven more than she had budgeted in her makeshift plan.

They stepped onto the bridge, it was apparently undergoing refit and several consoles were in different states of removal and replacement. The command panel was thankfully intact. She pulled a key from her replicated-leather jacket and placed it in the matching depression at the center of the console. The console itself was a mix of crystalline circuitry and biological components. Flying it out was not going to be simple.

"I thought they took that from you?" One of the security types seemed puzzled.

"I had it long enough to copy. I have a neat Ferengi decryption system."

"In your top...?"

Tyrlai looked back as if he was on the slower side, "of course, where else?"

"Clearly you haven't been to prison," Arthur commented disinterestedly, much of his focus on his tricorder as he tried to figure out the complex control panels on the Breen vessel's bridge. Although he had plenty of experience jury-rigging components of many different ships into a single, gelatinous mass his former superiors called a 'raider', all his experience with technology came from the opposite end of the quadrant, near the Federation, Klingon & Romulan borders. The only similar technology he encountered there was from the Son'a, and even that was a one-time occasion. "From what I can tell, some of these circuits have feedback receptors calibrated to receive commands from an external source. Maybe a wrist device or a helmet. I don't think we can use any of the ship's tactical systems unless we get one."

"Seems like an accurate assessment, Lieutenant." Ferguson said as he checked the freighter's structural integrity.

"The ship has tactical systems." Tyrlai raised a brow, the Breen were somewhat controlling societally speaking, arming freighters was an interesting development. "Given the bio systems you might find these devices in Medical."

"I doubt they'd keep an access device to the ship's key systems in the infirmary," Arthur countered in a sardonic tone, though he quickly caught himself - too late to stop those words from slipping out, but just in time to apologize. "Sorry," he muttered with a sigh. Clearly, his meeting with his former 'slave driver' had more of an effect on him than he'd realized. "Just feels this day's never going to end."

As the ship powered up, Arthur and Tyrlai heard a distinct humming sound, one which could

only be one thing: the powering up of a TK-517 disruptor carbine, known for both its high rate of fire and its complete lack of a stun setting, likely pointed in their direction. "It was a nice attempt," said the teal-skinned N'xypb X'rry, flanked by a couple Nausicaan goons. Her orange hair poked out of a helmet which matched the captain's station, and her eyes were concealed by a silver reflective visor, "but I think I'll be taking my freighter back."

For what seemed like the hundredth time that day, Arthur sighed and bowed his head slightly, not even bothering to turn to face their captor. Rather, he lowered his tricorder and glanced over at Tyrlai with an annoyed look on his face. "So much for the distraction."

Ferguson, who had discovered what he hoped was the gravity generator controls, took the advantage that no one was looking at him, to turn the gravity off.

Tyrlai felt the tug of zero gravity in her abdomen and reacted. She had played zero grav orbital ball in college. To be exact, it had been four lifetimes ago in college. Nevertheless, a touch of her toes and she sprang at an angle towards the trio and with a flip of her palm against the ceiling beam, changed direction to slip under a staggeringly wild swing of a Nausican and kick him solidly in the chest. The blow sent him spinning towards the back wall where his head met the bulkhead with a crack. She dropped to a controlled crouch halfway up the bridge wall, but once you started moving in zero gee it wasn't so easy to stop. She kicked and sprang out into the open once again.

As soon as he began to float, Arthur got that nauseated feeling in the pit of his stomach again. He hated zero gravity. It made him feel less in control of his own movements. Given how he clumsily tried to turn himself in mid-air, there was a certain truth to that assumption. In any case, he knew damn well there was no way the alien couldn't quickly shift her aim and fire on Tyrlai the moment she made for the Nausicaan. Although he would've reached for his phaser, he realized that by the time he drew it from his belt, the teal-skinned alien would already have its gun pointed at him.

So he did the only other thing he could. His tricorder already tied into the system, he quickly programmed it to send data from the tactical console straight into the commander's helmet. With any luck, that would briefly blind it to prevent Tyrlai from being shot as she hovered toward the Nausicaan, and maybe, just maybe, give one of them enough time to distract the other Nausicaan while the other went after N'xypb.

N'xypb winced and let out a scream as the data overload had the effect of a flashbang grenade going off underneath her helmet. Holding one hand to her head, the other instinctively squeezed the trigger, sending a full-auto burst of disruptor fire off in all directions.

If he could, Arthur would've taken cover, but being halfway between the floor and the ceiling, all he could do was grit his teeth and brace himself as the inaccurate disruptor fire hit all around him. At least one burst hit him in the side with enough force to send him careening into the tactical console, which, despite the sudden shock, he was able to grab onto and pull himself down from. Thanks to the Breen preference for freestanding consoles, of one kind or another, Arthur was able to duck behind one while keeping Tyrlai and the

others in sight.

"Jesus!" Ash exclaimed as he watched the sensors. "Looks like trouble on the freighter. Someone's knocked out the ship's gravity and I picked up what looks like disruptor fire. Either they really don't know how to fly that thing or they've run into a problem. How's the door holding up Jena?"

"Let's just say, I hope Tyrlai gets that transporter working soon." Jena said.

The last of Jena's words was all but drowned out by a loud hum coming from the doors. Ash looked over and noticed a bright red spot at the bottom of the door, slowly growing larger and glowing brighter. "They're phasering through the doors." He explained.

Tapping the intercom he shouted to the freighter team over the deafening hum, "We're just about out of time up here. I'm opening the hangar you're in and releasing the docking clamps. I've also knocked out their external sensors for now. We're about to take some heavy fire up here so if you could organise a transport ASAP, that'd be great."

The Freighters of Acquisition: Part 3

Runabout Indus

Near the end of Ep.7

Authors: Tyrlai Zade, aENS Jena Colm (NPC Jason), Ash Sullivan, Arthur Reynolds, Malbi tai-Konjah

Tyrlai twisted and tumbled as she arced through the bridge and managed to pass over the disruptor fire and snatch the helmet off the leader as she passed. She tossed it towards Arthur shouting, "find the transporter and swap out our problems." She hoped Arthur had a skillset to perform a two way transport on alien equipment. She spun around to meet a corner of the bridge ceiling and wall and sprang back towards the remaining Nausican.

At first, Arthur reached out to the helmet, only for a stray disruptor beam to catch it. With a loud curse, Arthur ducked again just as a disruptor blast also hit the console he was hiding behind. "Damn it, can someone take care of that?!" As if the universe wanted to give him one last finger, one of the disruptor blasts hit a pipe carrying a smoky compound which must've been part of the environmental system keeping the bridge warm for its new 'crew'. "Great," Arthur muttered bitterly under his breath as he looked for a way to reach the helmet floating listlessly in the distance. "That's great."

Tyrlai sailed towards the Nausican who was much better prepared than his counterpart. He swung in a wide circle as she approached, she had to curl in a ball to avoid it and then kicked quickly, catching him with a glancing blow to his shoulder. The Nausican caught himself with a clawed hand on a console and launched himself after her. Tyrlai meanwhile drifted back towards their leader and grabbed the gun, it was a momentary struggle that she was not well situated for, but it bought Arthur about eight seconds. She let go and kicked

upwards, suddenly clanking against the bridge ceiling once more, just as the Nausican barrelled into its leader sending them both tumbling away.

As soon as Tyrlai made her bid for the commander, Arthur made his for the helmet. He caught it just in time to see the Nausicaan knock away the leader. Without any time to waste, he fuddled with it for a few seconds until he could fit it over his head - a minor miracle given its size and shape. Unfortunately, he continued to have trouble flailing about in zero gravity, hitting the ceiling as soon as the helmet fit snugly over his head. When he tried to speak, his words were translated into the metallic Breen language through the helmet's communication socket. "Somebody get that gravity back online!"

Tyrlai shifted her weight, spinning in the air just enough to catch the right console with one long arm, she was just stong enough to swing herself around slowly enough to not bounce off. Her eyes read the console. Recognizing some panel configurations. Others were mystifying but together she recognized a flashing dial reading close to naught and took a shot. The gravity switch to half force dropping everyone towards the deck.

When he could feel solid ground underneath his feet again, Arthur wasted no time in approaching the tactical console. Thanks to his advanced operations training, which included information on Breen technology captured during the Dominion War, he was able to quickly access the transporter systems and use his tactical training to jury-rig a site-to-site transport. With no more time to lose, he locked on to the Breen and her Nausicaan friends and 'energized' them into the transporter buffer while locking on to the only familiar signatures he could locate on the other end. "I've got 'em," he exclaimed as he pulled the other signatures in just before the scramblers could go active. "Energizing!"

"Take cover behind the console over there Jena. Don't worry, we're gonna get through this and I'm going to get you home safe." Ash said almost as much for his own comfort as for Jena's. She seemed brave but at 15 years old he knew deep down she had to be scared. "Those doors only have a few seconds left in them so I want you to hit the fire suppression system as soon as they break through. That should disorient them a little and give us a fighting chance. I'll concentrate my fire on the doors. Once the suppression system is on, please just keep yourself safe until the others figure out a way to transport us out." He locked eyes with Jena and held her gaze for a few seconds then tried to nod reassuringly. He then readied a compression rifle he had borrowed from the security office's weapons locker, wincing a little as he felt a sting in his shoulder from the earlier phaser blast.

Jena gave Ash a brave smile and a thumbs up.

Moments later a man-sized hole appeared in the doors. The girl activated the fire suppression system and then hid behind the console. She was wondering if she was about to meet the Prophets in person, when she felt the sensation of a transporter beam.

Ash opened fire as the security officers began moving through the doors. He looked over just in time to see Jena beam out, replaced by a very confused and angry looking Nausicaan. He'd

jokingly considered the possibility of Tyrlai leaving him behind, but never thought she'd go through with it. With the Nausicaan now raising his weapon and the security team still pouring in, Ash was caught off guard and started to panic, not knowing where to fire. A bright bolt of energy discharged from the Nausicaan's disrupter, headed straight for Ash. In what he thought were his final moments, a feeling of peace and serenity seemed to wash over him. Or maybe that was just the transporter beam.

As she felt herself materialize inside the station, N'xybp felt her gun being grabbed away from her before she could even react. Before she knew it, force restraints were around her wrists. As she looked around the security office that she had found herself in, she saw her Nausicaan companions being held at gunpoint. "You are under arrest," barked the security officer in front of her as she sighed. "You have the right to remain silent..."

Rematerialising in the very alien looking freighter was disorienting at first but seeing the familiar faces of the rest of the away team filled Ash with relief. He looked around to make sure Jena was okay and sighed with relief when he saw her smiling excitedly. "Thanks for the beam out." He said simply before letting himself sprawl out on the floor of the freighter and letting out a deep sigh of relief.

"So, this a Breen freighter?" Jena asked with a smile, when she was sure all over her had made it through the transporter process. "Looks ominous, perhaps we should repaint it a nice mauve."

"Shields active," Arthur muttered in Breen as he quickly and anxiously pulled the helmet off his head. Though he wasn't claustrophobic, breathing in that helmet was more difficult than he had anticipated. He looked back at Tyrlai, only glancing at the two he'd presumably rescued. "If we're gonna go, we better do it now."

"I'd have to agree." Replied Ash pulling himself up to his feet and nursing his injured shoulder. "The station security had just made it back into the office when you beamed us out. It won't be long till they figure out the security protocols I disabled and lock down the hangar."

Having finally found how the intraship communications work, Ferguson had been in Engineering listening to Bridge. "I'm glad everyone is finding their way around up there, but Engineering looks like a living cave with giant pulsing arachnid in the centre. Just be glad you can't smell it." He said.

Jena had studied bio-organic technology before, but this was the first time she had seen it for real. A giant pulsing arachnid sounded as interesting as it sounded frightening.

"Don't try their helmets then," Arthur responded almost as if that thought was an aside. As the adrenaline continued to surge through his veins, he took one step toward Tyrlai and reiterated, "We have to leave, now." The last thing he wanted was her 'indecisiveness' to lead to their early deaths. "Starfleet diplomacy's not going to save us here, commander."

Tyrlai picked up the helmet and placed it over her head. Her thoughts were towards departure sequences and the ship thrummed to life around them. There was a station with extra displays left of center of the bridge area. She walked over to it and started 'reading' the odd dotted language on the panel. A few buttons, switches and tendrils later and they were floating out towards the open hangar bay doors.

The Big Talk

When: After Freighter Finale

Where: The Breen Freighter

Authors: Tyrlai Zade and Ash Sullivan

Safe and sound on the freighter, en route to a rendezvous with the captain's runabout, Ash decided he should familiarise himself with the layout of the freighter and stay the hell away from the bridge and Tyrlai. He jogged through the empty corridors, deck by deck trying to paint a mental map for himself. He also had a tricorder attached to his belt making a digital map for the records. Rounding a corner he was caught of guard by a figure standing directly in his way. He just narrowly avoided bowling over the figure but ended up tripping over his own feet and slamming shoulder first into a bulkhead.

Tyrlai had noticed the flash of movement and sidestepped just in time, turning in a half circle as he hit the wall. She pulled a medical scanner from her belt and ran it over him as he lay on the deck. The scanner whirred and she frowned. "I'm not really this kind of a doctor, how's your shoulder?"

Ash looked up to see Tyrlai standing over him with a tricorder. He was a little dazed and didn't respond at first, "Uhhhh... It'll be fine I think." He said pulling himself back to his feet on the bulkhead and rubbing his shoulder which was a lot more sore than he was going to let on. "What are you doing down here?"

"It's a Breen freighter," she said, looking back and forth, "I've never seen one before and the list of things I can say that about aren't as long as most peoples. Now, why is it that you aren't on the starbase you are supposed to be posted to?"

Ash gave Tyrlai a puzzled look, as he briefly thought back to their encounter. Surely he didn't lie about his position on the Portland, he had no reason to. "Starbase? What are you talking about?" He asked.

"Hmmm," she said brushing a lock of hair from her brow, "It is possible that I just made that assumption, but still you ran with it. And that is just as bad. I take it you are stationed on Portland?"

"Oh I'm the bad guy here. You didn't even tell me you were with Star Fleet. Given that we

were on Trill I think my assumption that you were a local was a lot more forgivable than your assumption I wouldn't be on the same ship as you." Ash responded defensively, he wasn't going to roll over and take the blame that easily.

"So you admit to being the bad guy," Tyrlai said with her usual diplomatic efficiency. "I accept your apology." She closed her scanner with a click and crossed her arms, shifting her hips and flipping back her long raven hair. "As for any assumptions I may have allegedly made, I'm sure they were normal and reasonable."

"Very funny." Ash said rolling his eyes, "I wonder if the captain would see things from your point of view if she found out you were fraternising with a junior officer?"

Tyrlai thought about things, the Portland had been somewhat different from her other postings. The goings on with the holo-Alenis, the Science Officers ponn-far infatuation and possible werewolf disorder, the XO impregnating the Admirals daughter. She smirked, for the first time in her career she was practically on the straight and narrow. "Let me know how that works for you, Ensign. Fraternization between officers is a two way street, it's not like you're an enlisted grade or anything. Be sure to mention how you were drinking while hitting on the native girls, poor defenseless native girls, a lifetime in the science labs doesn't prepare them for you roguish space hero types."

"Okay, okay, jokes and threats aside. We're going to be serving on the same ship for the foreseeable future and if this mission is anything to go by, we're not going to be able to just ignore each other. The Portland's not a huge ship." Ash said trying to return things to a more professional conversation.

Tyrlai looked like the choice between jokes and the professional conversation was a difficult one and paused for a few moments. "Okay, fine. The truth is, I'm almost eight hundred years old and sadly enough have done this before. Cedria Zade was the second officer on the Hood when she and the chief engineer had a momentary thing, a somewhat less physical thing but a thing. The point is, it all worked out just fine." The last part was a complete lie but she was good at those after four lifetimes of diplomacy. "If it helps, we're going to be wearing dog shaped masks for large amounts of our next couple weeks. After that, you can hide in the science department, or wherever it is you will be working. It might be easier just to be friends though."

Shaking off the initial shock of finding out he'd hooked up with someone who was almost eight hundred and remembering that Tyrlai was a Trill and so, hopefully, talking about her symbiont, Ash smiled and replied in a mockingly prideful tone "I'm security actually. Chief in fact, just got a promotion before this little adventure. Not to brag or anything." He chuckled, "But I agree, friends would be easier." He said, offering a handshake.

Tyrlai shook his hand and smiled. "Commander," she said, pointing to where her pips would be if she was wearing a proper uniform instead of the form-fitting unitard and Breen style cargo pants, also omitting the lieutenant part of her commandership. "So you should probably salute and stammer nervously and such. 'Cause I could go power mad and make you polish all the railings in here." She looked around and the Breen freighter did not appear

to have any railings. "Though I suppose, 'congratulations' would have been friendlier. You know what I was pretty friendly the other night, it all averages." She tapped some commands into her handcomp, "So your name is Ashley, eh? I was a bartender on earth for a couple years and I could have sworn that was a girl's name."

Ash cocked his head to one side and squinted in mock disbelief, "That's low." He replied.

"Freindly banter." Tyrlai replied. "At least this is how it was done at the bar I worked at. Now you say something like, I'm too athletic and not good at math. That's how you insult a Trill by the way."

"You know you were right before. I must have been drinking pretty heavily to take you home from the club because you're annoying. Be honest, did you spike that ice whiskey to get me sleep with you?" Ash replied sarcastically.

"Oh, I am most definitely a nightmare. Fortunately it generally takes people some time to figure that out. You've been fast-tracked is all. And the ice whiskey is synthahol, I don't actually drink for real. Not since I was fourteen." Tyrlai motioned down the corridor, an invitation to continue the conversation while walking.

As they started walking, Ash winced as a sharp pain shot through his shoulder. It was the same shoulder he'd taken a disruptor blast to in the security office and he had just patched it up as best he could with a dermal regenerator. Slamming into the wall must have aggravated it. "Did we bring a real doctor along on this trip?" He asked.

Tyrlai stopped, sudenly concerned, and ran the scanner over his shoulder again. She looked over the readout more closely the second time. "I'm like this too, pretending something isn't as bad as it is. You have a tear in your shoulder, can't say exactly what, you mammals are strangely put together. I sent a transmission to have Alenis bring us a pair of field medics. Until then I'll have a go, I had two courses in field medicine while I was at the academy, I might be able to at least knit the tear enough to prevent further damage 'till our help arrives."

"Any excuse to get me out of my uniform again?" Ash replied with a laugh that he instantly regretted as his shoulder once again flared with pain.

"There you go with the banter," Tyrlai smirked a little, "remember that laughing feeling just now because we only have the runabout first aid pack, you may need to be stitched without anesthetic."

"I've had worse. I think I'll be okay." Ash replied as the pair continued walking.

"I'll make sure there are tissues, just in case you need to dab tears."

Ash very carefully considered giving Tyrlai the old hip-and-shoulder straight into the wall but in his current state he'd risk doing more damage to himself than to her and for all he knew she'd have him thrown out an airlock just to get even.

Confession

When: After Freighter Finale

Where: The Breen Freighter

Authors: Tyrlai Zade and Coln Jena

Jena finally found Tyrlai, she felt bad about lying to her friend and decided to get it off her chest.

"Tyrlai have you got a minute she asked?"

Tyrlai pulled the Breen helmet she was working with off and looked over at the young woman. "Everything alright?"

"I'm sure you've already realised this, but Jason didn't exactly let me go on this mission." Jena said.

"You are lucky we were already here before I noticed you onboard. Of course Jason wouldn't have let you come. If we had been headed for Risa he still wouldn't have let you come. I'd have left you with the runabout but I couldn't have gotten to the runabout in time to save you if there had been trouble. So, my question then, what have you learned?"

Jena thought for a moment. "Fire fights aren't fun, don't lie to my father and my friends, and try not to grow up too fast." She said.

Tyrlai concentrated for a moment. "That sounds mostly right. Also never assume you can get away with anything that almost never works out. And be very afraid of the day you do." Tyrlai Zade turned around and looked the younger girl straight in the eye, her tone dead serious for once. "When I was twelve I ran away, I was very clever, got to the orbital station. But my parents, you see, they didn't come for me. Two hops later I was captured by an Orion raider. Do you have any idea what Orion pirates do with young girls?"

"I can imagine, but I'd rather not." Jena said. "Anyway, I get your point."

"Stay smart, stay safe. I am usually a ships councilor and if there is one thing I can promise you it's that Starfleet has plenty of crazy people to handle the dangerous stuff." She handed the helmet to Jena. "I have adjusted this one to your bio-signature, your punishment job is to find out what each of these workstations does," Tyrlai pointed to a row of a dozen along the wall, "and label them with this marker. Without, dropping us out of warp, firing weapons or breaching anything. Got it?"

Jena put the helmet on and said. "By your Command." Before getting to work.