

Mission Three “Pilgrims”



The final journey...

USS Portland - Torpedo Bay 1

Authors: Cmdr. Alenis Meru, Lt. Cmdr. Timothy Rouse, Lt. (JG) Jason Beauvoir, Lt. (JG) Brad Silverton

Alenis knew that this day would come. The galaxy was still a dangerous place, and it was only a matter of time before one of her crew made the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty.

But, she didn't think it would happen so soon.

With her first and second officers by her side, she looked over the crew, all assembled in full dress uniform. Some of them were taking it better than others, or at least were better at hiding it. Arvel would be busy; to have a senior officer killed while doing a mundane prisoner escort, especially so soon after launch, would cause serious damage to the morale of the crew. No doubt, there would be people who served with him who would need his counsel to get them through these dark times.

It was a standard Starfleet burial in space, in accordance with Tobin's last wishes. Alenis had authorized full military honours, feeling that nothing less would be appropriate for a fallen comrade.

Something about it seemed wrong, though. For Daniel to survive New Algiers, one of the bloodiest battles in recent history, only to end up being stabbed to death in a corridor by some lowlife Syndicate assassin just wasn't right. Alenis had read the coroner's report; she shuddered just thinking about his final moments, bleeding out alone on a space station far from home. No one deserved that.

"We are assembled here today, to pay final respects to our honoured dead..."

Jena stood among a sea of dress uniforms. She didn't need to be here, she wasn't a member of the crew and she didn't know Lieutenant Tobin, but since Jason had served with the man and was unable to make it to the funeral, she felt it was her duty to attend in his place. She felt a little out of place in her aquamarine ball gown, but it was the only formal wear she owned. She'd attended two of these ceremonies before, one for Peter and one for her mother, but this was different, she wasn't the next of kin. This didn't prevent her from feeling bad for his loved ones, in fact she knew all too well what they must be feeling. She looked around recognizing the odd person in the crowd of faces, most were solemn, while some showed clear signs of grief.

"...Daniel Tobin was a fellow officer, a comrade, and a friend to us all..."

Brad was lost in his thoughts and not really paying attention though the Captain hadn't started talking and there wasn't much to pay attention to. He had been lucky so far saving himself and Jena. Tyrilai had been hurt that he attended too after the diplomatic reception battle. Would it always be this busy on an active ship? The U.S.S. Paul Revere was the only other ship he had served on and it was so dull compared to the Portland.

"...and though he was only with us for a short time, I know he served honourably in the fleet that he dedicated his life to, and gave his life in service of..."

His thoughts drifted to his sickbay. All the equipment had been delivered and installed thankfully. Still a good deal of work to do to get everything settled in but the worst was behind him. He never did get a chance to find some authentic Bajoran sheet music that would have been nice. Music how could he think of something like that at a time like this during the funeral of a fellow crewmember, a senior staff member at that. True he hadn't even met Tobin but still. A doctor can't just keep himself detached like that from his patients, Tobin was a sentient being. Brad would have to meet everyone else properly.

"...and though our comrade steps forward into the valley of the shadow of death, his soul is not lost. He shall be with us evermore. It shall be our most solemn duty to carry forward his memory, in our hearts. To finish his unfinished business, and to pick up what he leaves behind. Our comrade -- our friend -- Daniel shall not be forgotten."

As she finished those words, the casket slowly moved forward towards the firing chamber. The anthem of the Federation filled the room as everyone stood at attention, saluting their former comrade as he made his way forwards, into the chamber. As the breech closed, Alenis lowered her arm, paused for a moment, and then signaled the crewman at the firing controls to launch the casket.

With a flash of light, the torpedo blasted forward, and Lieutenant (J.G.) Daniel Tobin left the Portland on his final journey.

Alenis stood silently at attention as the anthem wrapped up, allowing the assembled mourners a moment of reflection. With a lump in her throat, she managed to utter the word "dismissed."

As the remainder of the crew filed out, Alenis stepped forward to a small viewport and looked out at the stars. She could barely make out the faint glow of a torpedo arcing around the moon of Jeraddo. She stared at it as long as she could, before refocusing on the stars. "Vike, you're out there somewhere," she muttered. So much of Daniel's life was spent trying to atone for the things he had done while under Vike's influence; Alenis knew that his biggest regret would have been not finishing that work. "Vike, I don't know how, but I will make you pay for this, and pay for all the other people you've harmed over the years. I'll chase you round the stars, round the moons of Orion, and round the flames of perdition before I give you up." She felt a hand on her shoulder.

"Alenis, we should get to the reception," said Tim in a warm voice.

"Yes," replied Alenis, wiping a tear from her eye. "This isn't over."

"I know, Captain, I know."

USS Portland - Timothy's Quarters

Authors: Lt. Cmdr. Timothy Rouse and Cmdr. Alenis Meru as Ellen Washington

Tim was lying with his hand behind his head and eyes closed on a lounge when Ellen entered his quarters. "Hello gorgeous" He said with a wide smile. Ellen looked nervous, twitchy. "What's up?" he asked as he held out his hand.

"We need to talk!" she said as she paced the room. Tim laughed soft. A few weeks back he was the one doing the pacing. "We do?"

"I uh....we uh....Oh dammit, this is difficult" she exclaimed. Standing still and looking at Tim she blew out a big breath. "I'm being serious."

Tim lifted a brow and again held out his hand again, hoping she would come towards him.

"Ok, I'm pregnant. What will we do now?" She had continued pacing, this time even in a higher tempo. "What will people say." Putting a hand for her mouth. "Oh no, what will my father say?"

Tim walked to her and put his arms around her waist. "Calm down sweetie," he said as he lifted her chin so her eyes would meet his. "Just go back to the first part"

She looked up at him and repeated the sentence. "I'm pregnant." Softer this time.

The smile appeared on his face again. Tim had always wanted to have children, but he never expected things to happen so fast. "This is wonderful! A boy or a girl? I can put in a request for family sized quarters, and we can use the extra room as a nursery. We can paint it, and put up posters of starships and nebulae. I think my mother still has my old stuffed tribble in her attic! I can get her to send it to us; this is going to be so wonderful!"

"Calm down, honey," replied Ellen. "This is going to be a big change. We're going to have to take care of him together. And what about our careers? It's going to be hard to raise a child when I'm down in sickbay and you're on the bridge."

"We'll find a way, don't worry. Besides there are more important things in life than work. I can be pretty flexible with my schedule, or I work from our quarters. I don't need to be in my office to read reports. And we can get one of those holonanny's. For if we need to work at the same time."

Ellen let out a deep breath and held Tim's hand in hers. His excitement was so reassuring. "But what are we going to tell people? It's against the rules for a senior officer to fraternize with a junior officer; what's the Captain going to say when she finds out?"

"She'll probably ask me if I don't know of the existence of birth control, then lecture about fraternizing, but she has no leg to stand on, as I happen to know about her dealings with a certain counselor on this ship. Besides you're not a Junior officer, but enlisted. So no problem there. And even if there was, we'll find a solution somehow. Our child won't be the first child born on a starship between two crewmembers.

Ellen couldn't stop herself from giggling a little when Tim mentioned the counselor. She'd definitely have to keep this little secret under wraps and not tell anyone -- not even Maria. "I just hope my father will understand."

"And if he doesn't? What then?" he asked. He knew how much her father's opinion mattered to her.

"I... I don't know." Ellen looked down at her stomach, and then back up at the face of her lover. "He'll just have to, I guess."

Main Airlock, USS Portland

Authors: Tyrlai Zade and Novia Yenn

Novia stepped through the causeway generally following the other kids but actually looking around as much as possible. There was a corridor of sorts stretching a dozen yards or so between the space station and the ship. The idea that there was nothing but this lone corridor between her and space was a little scary. The adults were walking back and forth like it was no big deal so she also pretended to be unimpressed, as much as she could.

She had not been thrilled when her parents had surprised her with this thrilling opportunity. She had been two weeks removed from an equally 'thrilling' junior expedition to the ice caves. There had been seventeen different kinds of ice and a series of experiments to show how they were different. She had spent six weeks wanting to go home, and two weeks later she was outbound for the space station. She had hoped her mother would have been able to make the trip with her, at least as far as the station but a symposium had broken out somewhere and Novia had to be a 'brave little scientist' and make the trip on her own.

Still, as much as she hadn't wanted to go, the station had been pretty impressive and now the ship. She looked back and forth, it was one of the smallest ones. She supposed the bigger ones probably had important things to do. More important than shuttling around kids at any rate. Still it was far and away the biggest ship she would ever have been on.

The teacher was very pleasant. Her parents wouldn't approve at all; teachers were to be stern, disciplined and Novia's job was to mind them. They most certainly were not to color their hair, it was frivolous and unproductive, like the liberal arts.

Novia was to concentrate on science and engineering. She mustn't waste her aptitude, children her age were already doing the bulk of their best learning and she was to strive to use her time effectively. It was a thrilling opportunity she was to receive, learning aboard ship. She walked through the far end of the corridor through the main airlock and onto the ship.

A friendly looking crewman who had been assigned to the class was walking next to the teacher and rattling on about 'egress' and 'station-keeping' and something about 'emergency procedures.' Novia was sure it would all be available on her datapadd later. She looked around at the crewmen. Darting back and forth with purpose, there was a buzz of activity, even more than she had expected. Twice pallets of supplies were pushed past the kids and into the ship. Everyone was moving quickly streaming past each other and around the class.

Except for one. She had a different uniform from the others, it was purple, her pants were black but they were kinda tighter than the ones the other people were wearing. She had some sort of black brace around her tummy but the thing that had caught Novia's attention was the fact that she was a Trill. She hadn't even figured there would be another Trill on board, the Federation was such a big place after all but there she was. Not darting around at all like the others.

"Hey, kid. Welcome to the Portland." Tyrlai Zade smiled at the girl looking up at her, she then glanced at the others, before returning her gaze to the first girl. "Do you know what a Portland is?"

Novia shook her head, she hadn't heard of a Portland and expected it was named after a Vulcan city or something.

"It's an old Earth sea creature, with three segmented pods with nine tentacles each and row after row of sharp bristling teeth." Tyrlai looked at all of the children and winked at the teacher. Many of the kids seemed to realize the story was just that. She suspected they were a gaggle of little geniuses, just the sort of snots who used to tease her when she was growing up. 'Tyrlai's too athletic to assemble her beam harmonic generator properly.' She still remembered the teasing vividly.

"I will program one for you on the holodeck. It will be fun, most of the kids survived the last time." She grinned a toothy smile at them glaring wickedly.

She walked away before any of the kids had time to remember that Earth morphology wasn't trimodal. What school years Tyrlai had had had been pretty much a nightmare for her. The smarter kid's constantly ganged up on her and teased her for being tall and good at sports. She ran her hand through her long raven hair and smirked. Trill schools were kind of weird. From what she learned at the academy, that sort of thing did not happen on Earth.

She walked past the ladder, the Portland was old enough to still have some of those, and stepped into the lift to go up the single deck to the sickbay. She needed her dressing changed, she didn't want any scars, she had the one from joining and that was it, end of her collection.

She smirked a little at the notion that she had probably exceeded most of the little Vulcan wannabee's in her class back on Trill. It helped to have a symbiont who had already learned everything take your tests for you.

Family size

Alenis' Quarters, USS Portland

Evening, MD1 - the day after the banquet

Authors: Cmdr. Alenis Meru and Lt. Cmdr. Timothy Rouse

Tim entered Alenis' quarters with a grin on his face from ear to ear. He still couldn't believe it, but at the same time he was delighted. "Busy?" he asked after she had let him in.

"Never a dull moment," replied Alenis, not even looking up from her PADD. With all the excitement as of late, she was falling behind on some of the more unexciting tasks of being a captain - crew transfers, reports, and other mundane paperwork.

"Great, I have a question, and it may sound strange. But... can I have family quarters?"

"Why do you need family quarters? Those are for people who have children or are expecting..." Alenis placed the PADD in her hand and looked up at Tim. He was still smiling. "Ellen? Please don't tell me you knocked up the admiral's daughter?!"

"Don't sound so negative." Tim said, trying not let that sentence kill his mood. "Be glad! I am!"

"I am," replied Alenis, feigning a smile. The words of Admiral Washington only a few short days ago ran through her head. ...and if anything happens to her while she is under your command, I will personally make sure you spend the rest of your days flying a cargo ship full of rubber dog toys out of Bolarus IX! "But how... how did this happen?"

Tim raised an eyebrow. "You want to know how it happened. Didn't they teach you that at school?"

"Never mind, I don't need to know the details," replied Alenis, cutting him off. She knew this was going to be a hard one to explain to the Admiral. Though she had had a fair bit of experience in explaining tricky situations to the man in the past few days. But on the plus side for her, it would likely supplant her alleged romance with Jason as the gossip of the week on the ship. She looked up at Tim, who was still smiling.

"You know what? If you're happy, I'm happy," she said, getting up from her desk and swiftly walking over to the kitchen. Her smile was genuine this time. She opened up a cupboard to reveal a wine rack with a modest collection. "We must celebrate," added, examining a bottle of wine in her hand. "Bajoran Spring Wine, from the Kendra Valley. 2371 - A very good year." From another cupboard she produced two glasses.

"I like your way of celebrating" he said after accepting the glass she offered. He smelled and tasted the wine. "Indeed a good vintage." He sat down on the couch and let out a deep sigh.

"Cheers," replied Alenis, clinking glasses with Tim. "To a new addition to the Portland family. May he or she be as smart as her mother, and as cute as her father."

"Don't you mean the other way around?" Tim said with a laugh.

Alenis lowered the wine glass from her mouth and winked at Tim. "I know what I said."

Sickbay

Authors: Cmdr. Alenis Meru, Lt. (JG) Brad Silverton

Clutching her side, Alenis made her way to sickbay. Since the show must go on, she decided to "play through the pain" at the reception, and the morning later, she was feeling it. "Doctor," she called out, upon seeing Brad in his office, "My apologies for the late cancellation last night; I hope you didn't fill my appointment slot so quickly?"

"No no not at all Captain come over here." Brad walked over to the newly installed biobed. "The DS9 crews have pretty much installed everything so your timing is perfect." As Alenis walked over to sit down he noticed her holding her side and he started to scan her. "Captain I hadn't noticed last night you were injured this badly. From the way you were acting and withstanding the pain I had thought it was just a light stun shot that the XO hit you with."

"Yes, well, I was injured..." Alenis cleared her throat, trying to think of the most diplomatic way to put it. "... before Mr. Rouse decided to shoot me."

Though trying to hold it back, Brad let out a quiet chuckle. "Well all things considered his plan worked. This won't take long at all." He grabbed a dermal regenerator and started passing it over Alenis where the phaser hit her. "So about that growth I'm afraid I still don't understand what you were trying to tell me last night."

"Doctor, it's..." Alenis paused for a moment to organize her thoughts. No matter how she put it, she knew it would sound crazy. "It's the shard. I snuck into the science lab the other night to consult the shard; to try to make sense of everything that is happening. The prophets came to me in a vision; they told me not to reject their gift. So you see... I can't go through with the procedure."

"So its a Bajoran religious thing then? Why would they give you a cancerous growth as a gift that makes no sense?" Brad sighed deeply. "I apologize if I sound disrespectful about your beliefs I'm honestly just trying to understand, though from what little I know of the prophets trying to understand them is sort of the point."

"They work in mysterious ways," replied Alenis. Brad was right; trying to understand the often cryptic messages of the prophets had taught the Bajorans more about reflection than to simply tell them in a straightforward manner. "I don't know what it is, but they obviously have some sort of plan for me. Have you ever heard the story of Tyka the boatbuilder?"

"No I haven't but I enjoy the history of various cultures. Whats Tyka's story?"

"Tyka was a simple man, a boatbuilder from Ashalla. One day, he had a vision from the prophets so profound that he dedicated his life to figuring them out. He abandoned his career and traveled far and wide, to every corner of the land. For decades, he wandered the lands, consulting Vedeks and trying to find answers. Eventually, he found his way to the low-lying areas of the Dhakur province. But just as the old man was about to give up, something happened that made him understand the meaning of his vision."

"Sounds like he spent his life searching everywhere. What finally gave him insight?"

"A flood," replied Alenis. "A great flood threatened the city of Tempasa and the people of the city needed to build an ark. Tyka saved the people and died a hero."

"So his vision was to spend his entire life searching for an answer that landed on him, saving others, and killing him? I hope there aren't any parallels with your vision here Captain." Brad sighed lightly and quickly.

"I hope not, but if I'm destined for something, who am I to argue?"

"I'll respect your decision Captain but I want to keep an eye on it regularly for any change. There really is no telling what will happen with it. REGULAR exams Captain I won't budge on this one."

"As you wish, doctor," replied Alenis. "On another note, have you ever seen anything like what happened to Lieutenant Beauvoir?"

Brad snickered lightly. "I haven't seen it myself but as a doctor yes I have studied and know what he is going through. I don't mean to make light of it Captain as its very serious its just that... well its kind of funny in an odd sort of way seeing as how they pride themselves over controlling their emotions and urges. To put it simply, every seven years a Vulcan has to have sex or he dies. Its barely controllable barely more then delaying the urges at best but Lieutenant Beauvoir is going to need to... release those pent up urges."

Alenis nodded along, "And by 'release those pent up urges,' you mean..."

"He has to have sex. Usually they try to target people they respect and care for. At least that's what the medical class covered. This is really the first I have encountered it. I am not sure if a holodeck simulation would work but it would be worth a shot. One final thing, Captain. For as inevitable as this pon farr is you'd think they would just accept it but they don't. Its very embarrassing for them even though its purely biological and natural. I'd be ready for the Lieutenant to come to his senses after this and be shaken up about it."

"Well, in that case," replied Alenis, "work with Dr. Darze to find him a suitable holodeck program. I'm sure there is something in the database that you can, ahem, prescribe."

Visiting Hour

USS Portland - Brig

MD1, morning

Authors: Cmdr. Alenis Meru, Lt. (JG) Jason Beauvoir

Alenis was hoping to get some shore leave in on Bajor, but things are rarely that simple for a Starfleet captain. Instead of returning to her hometown, she found herself busy taking care of ship's business. And the first order of business was dealing with a certain romantic encounter from the night before.

"How is he?" she asked the officer on duty in the brig.

"Well, he was screaming and bouncing off the walls earlier, but I think he's tired himself out, ma'am." The security officer blushed slightly. "Ma'am, if I can speak freely for a moment..."

"Go ahead," replied Alenis.

"Ma'am, he's been mentioning your name."

"Oh?" Alenis raised her brow, feigning shock and confusion. The last thing she needed right now was for rumours about their encounter to start floating around the ship. "In what context?"

"Well..." the guard's face turned bright red. "I'd rather not say, ma'am."

"I see," replied Alenis, sparing him the embarrassment of having to recount the details to his superior officer. "May I talk to him?"

"Go ahead, captain."

"Jason, are you all right?" she asked, approaching the cell containing her Chief Science Officer.

Jason perked up when he saw the object of his desire. "I am now," he said with a wolfish grin and hunger in his eyes.

"Jason... what's going on?" asked Alenis, a look of confusion in her eyes. She didn't know what had caused Jason to start acting erratically on the planet, hoped he understood that she only brought him to the brig for his protection. "Why are you acting like this?"

"In a word, biochemistry, ma'am." Jason said clearly battling hard to stay coherent. "I need you, Meru. I need you to save my life."

"To save your..." Alenis furrowed her brow. "I'm afraid I don't understand. Jason, what is happening?"

"It's the Pon farr, the Vulcan drive to mate..." He winced in pain. "My body is burning itself up, if I don't mate in the next few days..." He winced again. "My body will succumb to the stress, and I will...die." His breathing was laboured and his voice was almost a whisper, when he added "Meru, please help me."

"But, Jason, I'm seeing some--" Alenis cleared her throat, she nearly let her and Arvel's little secret slip. She looked him up and down. He was an attractive man, and he had a lot of good qualities. But still, she couldn't break Arvel's heart again. In another universe, one where he wasn't in the picture, perhaps. "I mean, I can't be your mate." The security guard in the background winced, his face turning beet red. "Jason, you're a good man, and perhaps if circumstances were different, we may be together, but not now. And definitely not like this."

Jason gave an feral yell, his animalistic nature supplanting reason again, he began bash his fists against the force field.

Alenis stepped back. "Jason, I'm trying to help you. I only have you locked up in here for your own protection. I'm sure Dr. Silvertan and Dr. Darze can get you the help you need. I'm not going to let you die in here." With that, she turned and left. She wasn't sure anything was getting through to Jason anyways, and she wasn't sure he wanted her to see him acting like an animal.

Teens getting in Trouble, part 1

Deck 6 - Gymnasium

MD 01 - 13.30 hrs

Authors: Jason Beauvoir as Coln Jena and Timothy Rouse as Devon Avit.

Devon was training in the gym. He had finished his homework ages ago and his classes weren't until later this afternoon. He was bored, so he had decided to get rid of the boredom by working out.

Jena was exploring the ship again. As a civilian she was officially restricted to certain areas of the ship, but she didn't let the rules get in the way of her curiosity. After a while she found herself at the gym. There she found a young man working out and decided to watch him for a while.

"Lost?" he asked the girl standing in the door. "The gifted kids class is on deck 10." He was the only child, so far he knew, on this ship that wasn't part of the new program. Not that he regretted it much, he never liked school. But to be the only sane kid on the ship did have its down sides.

"I'm not one of them, I'm a Starfleet Brat, my father's the Chief Science Officer." Jena told this rude boy.

"That can't be." Devon said as he stopped the treadmill he was using. "I thought I was the only brat on board." He wiped the sweat from his forehead with a towel and threw it over his shoulder.

"Devon Avit. Mother is the Master-at-Arms."

"I'm Coln Jena." She said.

"Nice to meet ya, Coln"

"Coln's my family name, my given name is Jena."

Devon looked closer and only now noticed the earring and wrinkled nose. "My bad. Nice to meet ya, Jena. So, what are you doing here at this time of day. Finished your lessons too?"

"Yeah, I'm a genius, school's a breeze for me." She said with a smile.

"Jeh, I know the feeling. Normally I would say that you don't need to be a genius to excel in school here, but after those smarties got here that's not the case anymore." Devon said with a smirk grin on

his face. "Wait a minute. Didn't you say your father is the Chief Science officer? The same guy that's in the brig now?" When he saw the smile disappeared on her face he said "Sorry, news travels fast, especially when you're bored."

Jena scowled at Devon. She was frustrated at not knowing why her father had suddenly been thrown in the Brig and didn't like being reminded about it. "So what have you heard about it?" She asked figuring it was better to know what was being said.

"Nothing much. I tried to learn more, but all the adult stop talking about it when they see me. You mean you don't know either why he is in there. But he is your father. Why hasn't anyone told you?"

"They probably think they're protecting me." She said with a half smile.

"How can they protect you by ignoring you?" He said. "You know what, we could try to find out some other way. I know my way around a computer. I can try to find the information in there for you. Someone must have added something in the computer about it" He said with a wicked grin.

"I like the way you think, Devon." She said returning his grin.

"The computer core is located on deck 10 and 11. With the school now being on 10 I would suggest to go there. They won't notice us there, as they probably think we are part of the smarties." Devon said. "Meet me there? I need to shower and pick up a few things first."

"A sound plan, Mr. Avit. Make it so." She said mimicking a Starfleet officer.

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Deck 10 - Computer Core Upper Deck

Ten minutes later

A few minutes later Devon approached the door to the computer core and saw that his new friend was already standing there. "Great, let's get started." he'd changed into some human clothes. He liked that better than the clothes his people wore on Tomorela. Especially something called jeans. He opened his bag and removed a padd from it.

"My, you scrub up well." Jena said.

He looked at her for a second and raised his eyebrow. Returning to his padd he typed a few commands on it and spoke "Computer, " His voice sounded way different now. "open door." and the door opened. Something it wasn't suppose to do with their clearance level.

Now it was Jena's turn to raise a quizzical eyebrow, there was definitely more to this boy than it first appeared.

"A few weeks back I was in the gym with some Security crewmen" Devon started explaining. "They were talking about some flaws in the system and hadn't noticed me. So I accepted the challenge later, used those flaws and created a profile of a fake security officer. Installed a program on my padd to change my voice. Gave my alter ego enough clearance to do something, but not high enough to get noticed. I normally only use it to watch movies and play games that I'm not suppose to have access to. Never knew it could come in handy. Shall we go in? This door doesn't stay open forever."

Jena smiled and then slipped through the doorway.

Inside Devon immediately walked to the closest console he could find. "Computer," he said in his other voice, "access personnel file on the Chief Science officer."

=/\="Accessing"=/\= the familiar computer voice spoke. =/\="Information in currently not available."
=/\=

Jena frowned, but before she or her new friend could say anything further, the door closed behind them and the clang of a maglock was heard. Then the lights in room dimmed and a klaxon sounded. Jena tried the door, but it wouldn't budge. They were trapped. Devon had probably tripped something when he was trying to be clever.

Teens getting in trouble, part two

Deck 1 - XO's Office

MD 01 - 1400 hrs

Authors: Jason Beauvoir as Coln Jena, Ensign Rizzoli and Timothy Rouse as Devon Avit, CPO Syalla Coren, Maj. Judith Rouse.

Jena stood with her hands behind her back, staring at her shoes, while the XO gave her and her companion a dressing down.

Tim was staring at the kids continuously. He had heard of the situation almost right away, and even though he understood why they had done it, he couldn't condone it. =/\="Mrs. Coren has arrived." =/\= Ina's voice sounded through the comm. "Let her in." Tim replied while he kept staring at the children. His office door opened, revealing Devon's mother. The woman looked rushed and even slightly imberred.

"Sir, I'm so sorry, sir. I leave him alone for a few hours, and then this." turning to her son she said. "Do you have any idea how humiliating it is to hear that not just someone broke in the computer core, but your own son."

"He did it for me, ma'am." Jena said sticking up for Deven.

The door opened again to reveal Major Rouse, Tim's sister and the new Security Advisor. Syalla let out a soft sighed and look at her son even madder. She hadn't met the captain jet, but her son had just shown why exactly they needed a security advisor.

"It seems we have two problems here at hand" Tim started. "one boy that has too much time on his hands and a girl that has been completely forgotten about after her father's accident."

"And what about the Security problems?" Syalla said, using this moment to address a problem that's been there for a while.

"I'm fully aware of the situation with Security" Tim said, remembering the lecture he had gotten from Judith hours earlier. He glanced at his sister. "But they are being handled. That's not why I called you." The last was meant for Judith, who was still standing inches away from the door.

"You young man," he looked in the direction of Devon. "You will lose all privileges you currently have, and will have to earn them back by doing chores for various departments. Starting with the Operations department. Lieutenant R'havis will be expecting you tomorrow at 0800 hours." Tim handed the padd he was reading from to Devon. "This contains your work schedule for the next few

weeks.” He looked at Syalla and the woman actually looked relieved. “This should make sure you don’t get bored anytime soon.”

Devon let out an audible sigh as he glanced over the padd. “But this is not norm..” a soft slap to his head from his mother prevented him from saying anything more.

“I will keep an eye on you, young man.” Tim said. “That’s it for now. I’d like to talk to Jena in private. You are dismissed.” he saw his sister starting to move too. “Not you, Major.”

Devon stood up and followed his mother out of the XO’s office. Turning back just before he left the room to wink to Jena and say. “Good luck.”

“Thanks.” Jena said though she believed he needed it more than her.

Tim signaled his sister to take the now empty seat before he started talking to Jena. “Jena, am I correct in thinking no one has spoken to you since your father is in the brig?”

Judith looked up at that remark. She hadn’t found time to figure out who was in the brig, but she had heard that it was the most important topic on the gossip channels. Hearing that the young girl’s father was in the brig hurt her heart. She decided that she would investigate why as soon as she could.

“That’s correct, sir and Devon was just trying to help me get some information.” Jena replied.

Tim shook his head and felt guilty. He pressed his combadge. “Commander Rouse to the Brig”

=/\=“This is the Brig, Ensign Rizzoli, here, sir.” =/\= Came the South Bostonian voice of the Brig Duty Officer. In the background could be heard the sound of mournful animalistic calling something that sounded like “Meru.”

“Ensign, is the Lieutenant able to talk to his daughter.” The calling became louder and the ensign’s negative was almost drowned out. “Thank you, I know enough. Rouse out.”

A look of fear and sorrow crossed the young woman’s features. She recognised the sound as coming from her father, but it held none of his personality only longing and pain. “What have you done to him?” She demanded to know.

“Tim?” Judith asked, totally ignoring protocol. Protocol left the window the moment that girl had to heard those awful sounds. “What is going on?”

Tim looked at his sister for a mere second before returning to Jena. Great, now he was the bad guy, all he wanted to do was have the girl talk to her dad. “I think you deserve to know.” He paused for a second. Oh how did he wished Ellen was here to explain to the girl. “What do you know about Pon Farr?”

Judith raised her eyebrow and let out a soft “Oh,”

“It’s the Vulcan drive to mate, isn’t it?” Jena asked. She’d read about it, it didn’t sound like fun and she knew that she’d experience it herself someday.

Tim was relieved to hear he didn’t have to tell the girl about the birds and the bees.

"Is that's what's going on?" Judith asked to what she got an affirmative nod. "And nobody bothered to tell you about what's going on?" she asked. Then she realized something. "Where did you sleep last night? Not all by yourself did you?"

"That's right and yes I slept in our quarters, mine and my dad's, that is, by myself. I had the Computer play music until I fell to sleep."

She looked at her brother. Again. Angry. And took a decision. "That's it. I'm going to look after you. I'll stay with you in your quarters and we can watch a movie or something else. I do have to work tomorrow, but you can come with me."

Jena looked at this woman, who had just offered to be her, what? Babysitter. "Thank you, Ma'am, but I don't need a babysitter."

"Who said anything about a baby?" Judith asked quickly glancing over to her brother.

Jena caught the glance, but had no idea what it meant. "I mean, I'm okay on my own." The girl explained.

"You're only what, 15 years old. You can't stay on your own. Hey, I'm not such a terrible roommate. We can raid the replicator. Ice cream, Pizza." Judith tried to convince the girl.

"I'm 14, but a very mature 14." Jena said in a childish manner.

"But still 14!" She thought a moment. "I'll just grab my bag and see you in your quarters in half an hour." Not giving her a second chance to deny.

"Hey." Jena said, but it was too late, Judith was already gone. 'Well, looks like I've got a new roomy.' She thought to herself with a sigh.

Tim couldn't help but laugh about his sister's actions. At moments like this he loved her even more. "Sorry kid, when my sister gets something in her head, there's no getting it out again." he said. Thinking of when she had decided to become a Marine. A decision that had cost her her health and almost her life.

USS Portland - Captain's Office

Authors: Maj. Judith Rouse and Cmdr. Alenis Meru

"...and so, I think your expertise would make you a valuable addition to the crew," said Alenis. "I'm sure that you'll have no problems with--"

Without warning, the door opened, revealing a disgruntled Tellarite in yellow. "Captain, what is the meaning of this!" shouted Grel. "I don't need some jarhead coming into my department and telling us what to do. This is absurd! I've been in security for six years! What does some Marine Corps reject know about--" Grel's voice faltered; he was so angry that his brain did not initially process the image of the woman in green sipping coffee at Alenis' desk.

Judith looked up at the man with a curious look in her eyes. "Mister Grel, I presume?" She tried very hard not to show that his words hurt. A reject. If it wasn't for her accident she would still be working with the Marines.

"And you must be Ms. Rouse," replied Grel in a sneering voice.

"The one and only." she said with amusement in her voice. "But if that is too difficult for you to remember, Jarhead will do"

"A Tellarite never forgets, Ms. Rouse." Grel turned to Alenis. "Commander, why do I have some jarhead--"

"Enough!" shouted Alenis, interrupting the Tellarite. She knew how to deal with their type; her arguments with Gran, the Chief Tactical Officer on her previous assignment, were legendary and were often the stuff of gossip on the ShiKahr. "Major Rouse is your superior officer and you will give her the respect she deserves."

"But--"

"But nothing!" Alenis slammed her fist on the table for good measure, nearly spilling her tea. "If you wish to be rude and insubordinate, that is your choice, but that will leave me with no other choice than to relieve you of duty until you can keep a civil tongue in your head. Is that clear?!"

Grel smiled. The captain was bold and had some moxie. He respected that. "Yes, captain. Now, Major, why are you here?"

Judith put her coffee mug down. She blinked for a second. "The reason for my presence here is related to the Portlands upcoming mission and to review and report on your department's performance. Now, I understand that a couple hours ago, some fourteen year old kids broke into your computer network? How was that possible?" Every sane person could see that lots of things were going wrong there. She was only on board a little then 24 hours and she noticed right away.

Alenis stifled a laugh; Judith was quickly learning how to deal with Tellarites.

"Some wannabe hacker kid tried accessing the network." Grel was on the defensive. "He tripped an alarm right away and we caught him and his little accomplice." He let out a grunt and turned towards the captain and sneered, "but if I were you, I'd be more concerned about the conduct of your senior officers. What do you plan to do about the Lieutenant in the brig who won't stop moaning your name?"

Jason, thought Alenis. She had to do something for him; she could only hope that Brad and Arvel had something up their sleeve. "That," started Alenis, speaking slowly and deliberately, "is none of your concern. Your job is to simply make sure that he doesn't escape and doesn't hurt himself for the time being. I trust you are competent enough to manage that."

"Quite," replied Grel. "Now, Major, when would you like to start this 'training'?"

Judith chuckled at Grel's confirmation. She heard other things. "Training?" That's one way of calling it. "I'm currently assessing the situation. I'll probably need a few day to complete that. After that we will work on a plan to improve things."

"Well, I look forward to hearing your suggestions," replied Grel in a sneering tone. With that, he turned and left.

"I'm sorry," started Alenis. "Grel is... well, you know how Tellarites are."

"I hadn't expected to be welcomed with open arms anyway." Judith said. "Risk of the job"

"True, consultants tend to be vastly unappreciated by the people they are consulting." Alenis took a sip of her tea. "Why don't you tell me a little about yourself?" she asked, changing the subject. "All I know about you is that you're a marine and you're Tim's little sister."

She took a small sip from her coffee. "I use to be a fighter pilot, but my plane crashed three years ago. After learning to walk again I worked as a MCO for a while on a vessel, but on an away mission I hurt my back again and... well, lets just say that I am lucky to be still walking. I can't stand for long periods or walk long distances. So I needed to change profession again. I just got some bad luck." with the last she sighed softly.

"I see," started Alenis in an empathetic tone. "Well, if you are half as talented as Tim, I'm sure you'll do well here on the Portland. If there's any special accomodations you need, don't hesitate to let myself or Tim know."

"About that." Judith started. "Uhm.. I haven't told Tim about the second accident. He would go completely nuts if he hears. He still sees me as his little sister."

"Well, it is not my place to tell you to whom you divulge your personal medical information to," though she was an only child, Alenis could sympathize with Judith. She never wanted to show weakness to anyone; it's why she tried to hide the mental health problems that she suffered from ever since the destruction of the Gol. Only Arvel and a couple others knew about that. "That said, he's your brother. You can't hide this from him forever."

"I can try" she joked. "I just don't want him to worry even more then he already does. Especially now."

"Tim is a big boy," replied Alenis, jokingly. "I'm sure he can handle it. Now, I'm sure you have some funny stories for me about growing up with him."

"Well, there was this one time..."

USS Portland - Holodeck 2

Authors: Alenis Meru as Maria Hill and Timothy Rouse as Ellen Washington.

Ellen and Maria were in the holodeck for over an hour. They had tried out several program, but hadn't found the perfect one. They were currently walking through a Tuscan piazza at dusk. The shimmering of the sunset on the hills gave the surroundings an even more romantic feel. Ellen was hungry; she hadn't eaten anything today. Well, actually she had, she just didn't manage to keep it in any longer than 15 minutes. That was why they were doing this now, and not in the morning at planned. She was too nauseous to function, let alone walk around romantic holodeck programs.

"Don't you think we should test out the food here?" she asked. "I'm starving. Computer, display waiter." And an older Italian man appeared next to the restaurant. "Buonasera signorinas, come stai? How can I help you?" the latter part was asked with a very thick Italian accent.

"Yes," started Maria, "We are looking for a romantic dinner, and--"

"Ah, say no more. Luigi will take care of you, signorinas. I have the best cannelloni in all of Tuscany." The portly, moustachioed chef pulled a chair back for Maria to sit down. "Sit, sit, please. Is it just the

two of you?"

"Yes... well, it's complicated," said Maria.

"I see. It is hard to imagine that two bellissima signorinas like yourselves are single. Enjoy the piazza; I shall return with your menus."

"Computer, play full program" Ellen said. And the whole town came to life. Answering the risen eyebrow of her friend she said. "This is my favorite program. It feels so real. At least I think. This is exactly how I would imagine a small Italian town. From those grandpa's sitting near the fountain. To the mothers playing with their children." the last was accompanied with a few shouts of *veni qui* as a child was running away from its mother. "Or those teenagers sitting on the church steps." Ellen continued.

"It's wonderful," started Maria, taking in the Tuscan scenery. "So romantic; I'm sure they'll love it."

"Ah, signorinas, allow me to get you started," said Luigi as he reached over to light the candles and fill their glasses with water. "We have a spinach and ricotta cannelloni that is just--" he kissed his fingers, emphasizing the deliciousness of the food. "Shall I get you started with a glass -- or perhaps a bottle -- of wine?" he asked, placing two menus on the table

"Do you want real wine?" Ellen asked her friend.

"No, I'm on duty in a couple hours," replied Maria.

"Per me, un bottiglia di acqua e un bottiglia di vino Chianti, syntahol." she asked, showing off the little Italian she had learned. "And you?" she asked Maria.

"Make it two," said Maria, not knowing precisely what her companion had ordered, but not wanting to look foolish in front of her or the holographic waiter.

"É per mangiare," she looked at the menu, but then decided to go for the day special/ "I'll go for the Canneloni with Spinach."

"And you, signorina?" asked the waiter.

"Um," started Maria, feeling a little intimidated by Ellen's relative mastery of Italian. "I'll have the special as well." She scanned the menu. "And can we have this artichoke salad to start?"

"Of course, signorinas. Luigi will be back with your wine."

"I really am starving. I never understood how a pregnant woman could eat so little at one point in the day and then suddenly be so hungry the next." she grabbed a peach of bread and put some olive oil and salt on it. "Ok, so what do we think? Will we use this program? I think it is the best we have seen today."

"I think so," said Maria. "Though I do also like the Martian sunset"

"No, too alien," replied Ellen. "This is the one. Though, I've been talking to Judith yesterday and I think we need to change one big thing in our plan if we want this to work." Ellen continued. "Judith is not the kind of woman that goes to a blind date. She has ignored every attempt of her brother to set her up with anyone. Therefore I think we need to change tactics. I was thinking: What if we let her

believe she has a secret admirer? Send her flowers, chocolate, and of course notes. Then after a while one of the notes will have a invitation to this." She waved around her with her hands. "I'm just not so sure about the other person, how we are going to get him here."

"I'll think of something," replied Maria.

Swimsuit diplomacy...

Docking Port 1, USS Portland

MD1, morning

Authors: Cmdr. Alenis Meru, Lt. Cmdr. Timothy Rouse, Lt Tyrlai Zade

"I see you've dressed up," called out Alenis as she saw her first officer approaching, in full dress uniform. Normally she would be in full dress uniform for an occasion like this, but with replicators down while retrofitting and repairs were wrapping up, she didn't have much of a choice.

"Well, someone has too." he said with a smirk.

"I'd have worn mine as well, but... well, you were there, you saw how it got ruined." Unable to replicate another dress uniform, Alenis figured that standard duty uniforms would have to do.

"I'm sure they'll understand. And if they don't, well to bad for them." he answered while he shrugged. He still wasn't going to let anyone ruin his good mood.

"Tora Celes and her entourage should be here any minute," added Alenis. "Have you seen Lieutenant Zade?"

"Present, as ordered, ma'am," Tyrlai piped up from behind the Captains shoulder.

Alenis turned and rolled her eyes. "What the hell are you wearing?"

"Its a dermal regenerating brace. I don't want scars, swimsuit season you know." Tyrlai was otherwise dressed in workout clothes, a purple top that would otherwise have displayed as much midriff as was possible if it went for a tight assortment of vertical black straps secured from her ribcage to her hips which actually seemed demure next to the pants, black and skin tight like the old Vulcan uniforms of the 2100's.

It was at that moment that the airlock doors opened with a whoosh. "Ah, Ms. Tora," said Alenis, stepping forward to greet the Foreign Minister that she met the night before and offering her a smile. "Welcome aboard the USS Portland. I hope you enjoy your stay; if you need anything, feel free to contact my associate, Lieutenant Commander Rouse."

Tim stepped forward at the mentioning of his name. Tyrlai for her part slid back a half step.

Tora raised an eyebrow. "No dress uniform, Commander?" she asked, her severe tone mixing frustration and disappointment.

"Ah, yes," Alenis' face turned red. "My dress uniform was... er... ruined... last night, and I hadn't had a chance to replicate a new one," she said feebly.

"Right," replied Tora in a stuffy tone. "These are my associates, Mr. Fero, Mr. Rass, and Ms. lyso. I trust you have appropriate quarters prepared for us?"

"VIP Quarters have been prepared for each one of you." Tim said.

"I should hope that these quarters are... sufficient," replied Tora. "I can not believe that Starfleet would send such an archaic vessel on a mission of this importance."

"The Portland may be old," started Alenis, "but she's been retrofitted many times with up to date technology. I assure you, she will get you there in one piece, and that we will be travelling in style."

"Right," replied Tora, almost rolling her eyes at the captain. She gazed upon a young woman in purple. "Is this the so-called diplomatic officer that I will be working with in these negotiations?"

"Tylrai Zade at your service." Tylrai smiled and stepped forward extending her hand as the woman's eyes widened at the first glimpse of her attire.

"Is this a joke!? A child as a diplomat???" The ambassador glared angrily at the Captain before turning her attention back to Tylrai. "A holomodel in her underwear no less, I should,... wait." Anger turned to a brief moment of recognition and then back to anger. "Zade did you say?"

"I was called Eledzar when time was."

She took another look up and down Tylrai. "They did this to Eledzar!?"

"Hey, no call for rudeness, you little snip." Tylrai glared a little herself. "I had quite enough of that attitude on Trill,..."

Alenis stepped between them, trying to defuse the situation. For a diplomat, Tora Celes wasn't very diplomatic. "Enough, the both of you!" she shouted, her voice projecting authority while conveying frustration at the same time. Both Tora and Tylrai were staring at her. "What I mean to say is, we've both had a lot of excitement last night, and I'm sure our guests would like to unpack and settle in. Mr. Rouse, why don't you show our guests to their quarters?"

"Ladies and Gentleman, would you please follow me?" He said as he guided them to the hallway.

As the guests walked by, Alenis gently grabbed Tylrai's arm, a non-verbal cue for her to stay. As soon as they were out of earshot, she turned to the Trill and sighed in frustration. "You know, if it weren't for my clothing replicator being offline, I'd chew you out for not being in full dress uniform."

Tylrai looked over at the Captain and whispered so the others couldn't hear. "I have a Doctors excuse. Tissue regeneration takes precedence over stuffy diplomatic outfits."

Realizing that it was better to pick her battles and that Tylrai's dress and deportment was the least of her worries on the Portland, Alenis changed the subject. "Am I to understand that you have some history with Ms. Tora?"

"Not that I remember. When I said that stuff about Trill I was talking about the attitude, not so much the speaker." Tylrai waited looking over her shoulder until the turbolift doors had closed. "I suppose it is time you knew." She stepped over to a wall display and tapped in the files she'd been working on with the new Engineer. "We've traced the reptilian's comm signal far enough to be reasonably sure it's going to the same world we are. Somebody there went to a lot of trouble to steal a holy book and if I am going to go looking for it I am going to need to be thought of as unreliable by one Tora Celes."

The First Minister

Captain's Quarters, USS Portland
Afternoon, MD1

Taking a break from her busy day, Alenis decided to return to her quarters to check on Ko-ko. She had been rather testy in the morning, so Alenis decided to let the bird take the day off from accompanying the captain on her shoulder and just relax in her cage. As she entered her quarters, she whistled a little bird call. "Ko-ko, I'm home," she called out. But instead of getting all excited, Ko-ko just stood on her perch and stared at Alenis. "What's the matter, Ko-ko, are you hungry? Tired? Not feeling well?"

Ko-ko simply tilted her head at Alenis' query.

"I see," replied Alenis. "Well, I'm having one of those days as well," she said as she examined her feeder. "My, aren't you hungry today," she added as she walked over to the cupboard to get some birdseed. "Keep it up and you'll get so fat you won't be able to fly."

As she was refilling Ko-ko's feeder, Alenis' comm badge chirped. "Captain, I've got an incoming call from Gamia III for you." It was R'vahis; she could easily tell by the feline accent.

"Patch it through to my quarters, I'll take it in here."

"Roger. R'vahis out."

As she sat down at her desk, Alenis activated the monitor. A middle-aged Bajoran woman, dressed in conservative garb, appeared on screen. "Greetings, Commander Alenis. I am Anjohl Kabia, First Minister of the Holy Republic of Gamia."

"Commander Alenis Meru, USS Portland" she replied, adjusting her hair. She hadn't been expecting a call from a First Minister.

"I thought that was a Bajoran name," Kabia said, her suspicions confirmed. "I see the Federation saw to it to send a Bajoran captain to assist with the negotiations." Seeing Alenis touch her hair prompted Anjohl to wave an errant curl behind her ear, an ear adorned with a Bajoran earring, but one not quite like any Alenis had seen before. The blue gem and silver chain was unusual on Bajor, but it did match her greying hair.

"Oh, I'm not going to be a part of these negotiations, First Minister," replied Alenis. "My Chief Diplomatic Officer, Lieutenant Tyrlai Zade, will be representing the interests of the Federation. Diplomacy is not my forte; I am simply here to transport Ms. Tora and her delegation and assist in whatever way I can." As she spoke, she detected Anjohl's lips curl slightly downwards in disapproval. "But I like to think that Starfleet chose me because of my talents and qualifications rather than my race."

"Yes, well, I'm sure their trust in you is well placed. When will you be arriving?" asked Anjohl, changing the subject.

"Five days from now. Our ETA is the evening, approximately 1800 hours."

"Excellent," replied the First Minister. "I will inform my aides and we shall plan a small reception for you and your delegation. We will secure your landing site, simply contact our traffic controllers when

you arrive."

"Secure?" asked Alenis, her eyes narrowing as she picked apart her words. "I trust there is no danger down there."

"Of course not, Captain," replied Kabia, trying to brush away her concerns. "There has been a little unrest as of late, but nothing too serious. Just standard precautions, you know how it is."

"Right. Well then, I shall see you in five days. My aides will be in contact with you and your crew to make detailed arrangement for your arrival."

"I look forward to it, Commander. Gamia out."

As the screen went blank, Alenis pondered her first impression. Kabia seemed sincere enough, but there was something unsettling to her about the discussion of securing a landing site. She suspected that there was something that Kabia was trying to keep from her; perhaps some danger that the Gamians were reluctant to talk about. Of course, it made sense from a diplomatic standpoint – one should not tip their hand prior to negotiations, and admitting that you really need the help of the other party can easily weaken your position.

"What do you think, Ko-ko?" she called out. "Can I trust this Anjohl Kabia?"

For a second, Ko-ko looked up at Alenis. But just as quickly, the bird turned her head and started pecking away at the few seeds remaining in her feeder.

"That's what I thought."

A mother's love...

Alenis' quarters, USS Portland

Afternoon, MD1

Authors: Cmdr. Alenis Meru and Lt. Jason Beauvoir

Finally getting Ko-ko to come out of her cage, Alenis carried her around on her wrist. "Come on, Ko-ko, what's the matter? You can't sit in your cage all day." As Alenis brought the bird up to her shoulder, she reluctantly flapped her wings and perched herself on her shoulder. But instead of nuzzling herself up aside her owner, Ko-ko pecked at Alenis' head a couple time. "Ow! What's the deal, Ko-ko, you used to like sitting on my shoulder."

As she wrestled with Ko-ko, Alenis' comm badge chirped. "What!" she shouted, answering the call.

"Captain, another call for you. A Captain Anderson of the USS Canterbury."

"Patch it through to my quarters, Mr. R'vahis," she replied in an exasperated tone. Sitting down at her desk, Ko-ko still on her shoulder, she pressed the button to activate the comm link. She recognized the Vulcan from the banquet the night before. "Ah, Captain Anderson. It is not every day that I get a call from the mother of one of my senior officers. To what do I owe the pleasure?"

T'Lisa face was impassive as she spoke. "This is not a social call, Commander. I have a delicate matter to discuss with you regarding Lieutenant Beauvoir's condition." Although this was a very serious matter, she couldn't help herself from raising a questioning eye brow at the bird perched on the Commander's shoulder.

"I see," replied Alenis, trying to transfer Ko-ko to the desk. This was the last thing she wanted to talk about with a fellow captain who happened to be the mother of her Chief Science Officer. "Well, I can assure you that he is safe and that we have our best people working hard to get him whatever medical help that he needs."

T'Lisa found herself conflicted between keeping a private matter private and straight talking, as her mother would call it. 'Straight talking' won out. "Jason is experiencing Pon Farr, is he not?"

"That is what I'm told, Captain." Alenis didn't know much about Pon Farr, and truth be told, she didn't particularly want to know more. "I'm sure you're more familiar with this... condition... than I am," she added, choosing her words carefully.

"Where is he, Sickbay?" T'Lisa inquired.

"Actually, he's currently in the brig."

"A wise precaution, under the circumstances." She said. The closest she ever came to a compliment. "Has he chosen a mate yet?"

Alenis took a deep breath. For a moment her eyes wandered to Ko-ko, who simply stared back at her for a moment before turning away to peck at the side of the monitor. "Yes, I believe so," she started. Her eyes narrowed as she spoke, her voice getting unusually meek as she winced in embarrassment. "I think he has chosen... me."

"How unfortunate for you, Commander." T'Lisa said.

"Yes, well, perhaps you can offer us some advice on how to handle this delicate situation." Alenis could detect some disappointment in T'Lisa's eyes. "Surely there are other ways to satiate his wants and desires."

"There are only three ways to break Pon Farr, intense mediation, the sexual act or ritual combat." The Captain informed the younger woman in a matter-of-fact manner. "It's probably past time for the first, besides, Jason lacks the mental focus, which leaves sex or combat, but bear in mind combat is often fatal, for at least one of the combatants. Is that of any assistance?"

Alenis frowned. T'Lisa's advice wasn't much help. "Not really. Of those last two suggestions, the first is out of the question, and the second is too dangerous."

"Since he hasn't formed a psionic link, there is another thing you could try, I did not mention it earlier, because the possibility of it being effective is a long shot. You could create a holographic mate for him on the holodeck, but bear in mind, it has to be complex enough for Jason to form a psionic link with it through a 'mind meld'." She turned to consult briefly with someone off screen before continuing. "My CMO tells me that cortical simulator could be programmed to simulate the required brain patterns."

"Will that work?" asked Alenis, her eyes lighting up at even the possibility of a third option.

"It will certainly increase the chances of a favourable outcome." T'Lisa told her.

"One other question." Alenis looked up at Ko-ko, who by now had perched herself on top of her monitor, for a moment and shook her head as her eyes returned to T'Lisa's. She thought she was

ready for everything the job of captain would throw at her, but discussing holographic mates for a senior officer with his mother was one thing that she didn't anticipate. "This holographic companion. Does it have to be a..." she cleared her throat, "...a representation of his chosen mate?"

"It would not hurt." The former Science officer replied.

Alenis sighed and rolled her eyes, holding one hand up to her head. So far, the best idea they had to save her science officer's life was to create a holographic recreation of herself and... the thought made her skin crawl. "I'll get someone working on the program. Have your CMO liaise with mine on this procedure. Is there anything else, Captain?"

"I will have Dr. Th'Zal contact your Sickbay, now. Commander please give my son, my best." T'Lisa said at last showing a modicum of emotion. "Good Luck, Commander."

Privileges of command...

Capain's Office, USS Portland

Right after A mother's love

Returning to her office with an armful of PADDs, Alenis had a lot on her mind. She had diplomats to deal with, a sick bird to take care of, and worst of all, a holographic recreation of herself to create. Quickly, she burst through the door, only to stop dead in her tracks at the sight of an unfamiliar man wiping down her desk. A PADD clattered to the floor.

"Allow me to get that," said the tall, swarthy young man, placing the cloth down on her desk and quickly rushing over to retrieve the dropped PADD. "Personnel reports; shall I file this for you, ma'am."

"Well, that depends," started Alenis. Her eyes narrowed. "Who are you?"

"You really are behind on those personnel reports," he replied, smiling at her with his glistening white teeth as he placed the errant PADD on her desk. "Crewman Abdel al-Nablusi." Seeing no response from the captain but a blank stare, he continued. "Your yeoman? I just arrived on board this morning."

"Well, in that case, welcome aboard!" Alenis offered an enthusiastic greeting, trying to brush off her inauspicious start. "I guess you already know who I am," she added, her lips curling into a slight smile.

"Captain Meru, I presume," he said, coming to attention.

"At ease, crewman. Actually, it's Captain Alenis. Bajoran names, you know."

"My apologies, ma'am. May I take those PADDs off of your hands?"

"Yes," replied Alenis, loosening the grip her arms had on the bundle of paperwork as the yeoman plucked the PADDs one by one out of her hands and placed them underneath a muscular arm. Clearly, he enjoyed working out. "You know, I've never had a yeoman before. To be honest, I'm not even sure what you're supposed to do."

"Consider me your personal assistant." Abdel began sorting through the PADDs under his arm. "Filing, paperwork, preparing transcriptions..." he paused. "Fetching coffee, and anything else you

need or desire."

"Anything?" she asked, stifling a schoolgirl giggle as an inappropriate thought ran through her head. He didn't look older than 25; perhaps if she were ten or fifteen years younger and single... "Well, there is one thing you can do for me," she said, a mischievous smile on her face.

"Yes, captain?"

"File this paperwork for me," she said, waving her arm over the giant pile of paperwork on her desk. She was going to enjoy having a yeoman.

Tea Time

Captain's Office, USS Portland

MD1, a little before lunch

Authors: Cmdr. Alenis Meru and Lt. Parker Hudson

Looking at his tricorder Parker frowned, his furry eyebrows showing confusion at what he was reading. The tricorder showed that the systems analysis was at a 38 percent functional level. He didn't know why. The replicator terminal was at the end of a relay eps and shouldn't be on a fluctuating power level. Parker was slightly embarrassed inside that Captain Alenis' replicator was not functioning! This was something he could have prevented beforehand from engineering.

Punching in a few codes into the user interface he didn't know what to bring up. Parker didn't know what Alenis' favorite drink was, he wish he did, as he wanted to get the isolinear chips process right.

Stepping back from the replicator service panel that was flipped open revealing all of its shiny, flickering, colored parts Parker said "You know I think it could be the diode phase enhancer..." He spoke aloud.

He took his metal federation tool box and set it atop the glass and wood veneered Captain's Desk. Parker then slapped at his com badge "Parker to Riley... I want you to take a look at Deck 1 the Captain's Ready Room. I'm siphoning the eps... Tell me degradation rate."

"Got it. One sec." Riley replied.

Punching in a few commands Parker said "Green Tea. Hot." This would be able to show engineering any field loss in the distribution eps.

What started as a swirling silver glitter soon formed into a warm cup of Green Tea sitting in the replicator. Reaching forward and then taking a sniff of it... "Damn hot water to me..." He muttered. Parker didn't understand tea drinkers, it always tasted like nothing to him.

Setting the cup down on the desk next to his tool box the assistant engineer replied "Riley here. Yeah, can definitely see some sort of a discharge on Deck 2 interrupting."

Nodding Parker replied "Sounds good. I'll be down to grab some insulators and meet me on deck two." He then slapped his com badge.

Grabbing for his tool box at the edge Parker's large hand grasped at the metal handle sliding it along only before he realized, the cup of Green Tea slid off the glass Ready Room table and onto Captain Alenis' chair.

Parker's face was priceless. What was a cocky confidence instantly turned into complete horror. "NNNNNOooo!" He spit out. "What the heck!!!!!!" He growled immediately reaching into his tool box for his mechanic rag. "Why does this crap always have to happen!?"

As he leaned over to sop up the tea with his rag, Parker heard the whoosh of a door opening behind him. "You must be here to fix my replicator," said a female voice from behind the mechanic's back, "but what are you doing with my chair?"

Parker stood at attention rigid. His tall stance in front of the Commander's Desk. Uncomfortable was..... An..... Understatement!

"Ma'am. Commander. Lt. Parker here, I thought I would fix your replicator...personally."

"Lieutenant Parker..." Alenis paused for a moment; she knew she had seen that name on the personnel files somewhere. "Ah, you must be our new Chief Engineering Officer." She could tell that he was nervous about something, something bigger than simply meeting his new captain. "At the risk of betraying my lack of aptitude with engineering, what does fixing my replicator have to do with my chair?"

Parker felt like he was being interrogated by a former girlfriend. "Yeah." He turned looking at the chair, and then swiveling it around to show the stain in the seat. "See. Umn, had a 'little' accident testing the replicator. Not red alert." He grunted as he used his strong muscles to wipe and then vaporize the liquidation with a ionizer.

"I see," said Alenis, stepping over to examine the chair. "Well, it seems you managed to get the stain out."

"Commander, I am sorry. It will not happen again." He nodded. "On the bright side your replicator is fixed!" He gestured from cleaning the seat at the wall replicator. "Alenis' specialty #2." He had access into the records of the replicator.

Expecting some hasperat to appear Alenis walked over to the replicator. She had been on the go since she got up, having only consumed a little bit of mapa bread and a lot of tea so far in the day. But instead of a meal fit for a captain, the replicator produced a bowl of cat food.

"Yeah. That wasn't supposed to happen." Parker furrowed his eyebrow, blue eyes pleading at the Commander for forgiveness at this horrible, awkward first impression. "I swear, I did graduate Star Fleet Engineering." He winked.

"Relax, Lieutenant," replied Alenis. "Don't worry, I don't use it that often anyways. When it comes to tea, I only drink the real deal." Alenis turned on a kettle on a counter off to the side of her office. "Sit down, Lieutenant, I'm sure we have much to discuss. Care for a glass?"

Parker took a seat and nodded his head a 'no thank you'. So far Commander Alenis' was rather accommodating to the situation. This was Parker's first time meeting the Commander in the flesh. She looked rather striking as to what she had in some of the Federation Fleet communications in the News Services. She was young to be commanding her own Federation starship, but that was something of an accomplishment. Parker was here to learn and if he was wise he would let her do the majority of the talking.

"So, Lieutenant," started Alenis as she poured herself a glass of tea. "I see you've already gotten

settled in. I trust the repairs and refits are coming along well?"

Parker took out his Engineering padd and punched in a few keys, a diagram executing showing the propulsion stats of the Portland. "You would be impressed to know that the phase variance levels within the core matrix are double efficiency now." He paused. "I wish I could say I am solely responsible but I am not."

"That is good," replied Alenis in an unexcited tone. It wasn't that she meant to be dismissive of his work, it had more to do with the fact that engineering simply wasn't her forte. "Just make sure the phaser coils are ready to install by the time we leave port. I don't want to be caught without them again."

Parker nodded, "I will keep on top of that Commander." Alenis' showed no mercy, as he was warned. However Parker thrived on it. "Commander I have quarter of the Engineering staff working on the coupling sensors. I will have to shut down Deck 9 Stellar Cartography. This will complete the retrofit. Do you wish me to proceed?" Parker asked the Commanders permission.

"Go ahead, Lieutenant. But first," Alenis took a sip of her tea, looking the gold-shirted officer up and down, "Tell me a little about yourself." She always made sure to ask this question of new officers. Despite appearing at first glance to be a simple friendly question and a genuine interest in the junior officer - which to some extent, it was - there were also some ulterior motives behind the query. First, a little conversation would help her match the name and any distinctive qualities to the face. Secondly, an open-ended question would help her find out how the younger officer would respond when the answer isn't right in front of him.

Parker was taken back at the Commander's question. It had sounded like she wanted to know about him, but something more to it. Most of his Senior Officers of the past cared more about his service records, not his family background. To be honest he rather thought of the question at hand and then began to answer as if it was an exam question. Rather clinical but efficient.

"Myself..." He looked at Commander Alenis' "I grew up on Akaria Base." He began to slightly breathe inward. "My Parent's are mechanical engineers themselves in Star Fleet. My parents work on an orbiting facility the Remmler Array."

"Ah, yes, I've been there." Alenis could see signs of nervousness on the junior officer. That was to be expected, and it may have been for the best; she didn't like cocky department heads anyways. "A few times, in fact. The Array is neat, but the planet is a fun little destination, always full of drunken officers looking to blow off some steam. Can get a little rowdy at times, though."

"Yes that is it." He was surprised that Commander Alenis' had been to the station for ships she had served on in the past. Ask any Star Fleet Officer of the Remmler Array and they would equate it to a nice week long shore leave while the vessels were de-ionized from dangerous warp drive build up particles.

"I had been heavily influenced by my parents growing up, their skills, their enthusiasm." Parker looked at his engineering box now on the floor beside his seat. "I wanted more. I didn't share their... same aspirations." He didn't feel he was better than them, he wanted to explore.

"And what are these aspirations of yours?" countered Alenis. For her, this was the most important question of all. One could tell a lot about a person by their aspirations - and whether or not they were honest about them. Not only that, but as a commanding officer, she could be a big influence on whether those dreams were to come true.

"I want to create." He replied enthusiastically. "I want to be a part of the collaboration that is Starfleet. Being from Akaria, Commander, you don't have too many chances from Star Fleet asking you to take on, oversee the installation and monitoring of prototypicial technology." He looked at Commander Alenis' with a slight sigh of relief and smile that he knew he was where 'he' had wished he would be in the fleet. "You can't ask for any better assignment than the USS Portland, Commander."

Alenis smiled at the compliment. Mostly she was glad that someone saw it her way; many an officer would take one look at the Portland and write it off. They'd want something bigger, newer, faster, or more powerful. There wasn't a lot of prestige in commanding an archaic second-line light cruiser. "She's a great little ship," Alenis said, some affection in her voice for the ship that had already saved her life once in her first two weeks of command.

"May I ask a personal question Commander." He was not sure if Alenis was the type of Commander who allowed such a dialogue with the crew, at least not yet. She didn't know him all that well.

"Of course, Lieutenant."

"What gets you up each morning to command a vessel?" Parker had wanted to know. He felt he deserved to know, a crew would of their Commanding Officer. As an Engineer directly reporting as head to the Commander, he wanted to know who she was as well.

Alenis stood up and turned to gaze out her window. It was a difficult question, and it was one that she asked herself nearly every day since that fateful day at New Algiers. "Many reasons, Lieutenant. To explore the galaxy, to advance the cause of science, and to preserve peace." She closed her eyes and momentarily she was back in Sector 282, helpless at the tactical station as the green plasma torpedo closed in on the USS Gol. She shook away the vision and opened her eyes, turning back towards Parker. "But most of all, to protect those who can't protect themselves. I was a refugee from the occupation, so I know how badly people need to be protected from the dangers of the galaxy. Bajor wasn't able to stop the Cardassian occupation by ourselves, and we suffered 50 years of an incredibly brutal military occupation for it. Even with all the isolation and hardship of growing up as a refugee on earth, I was one of the lucky few who was able to escape the brutality of the Cardassians."

After taking a sip of her tea, Alenis continued. "And then... then came the Borg attack three years ago and Starfleet's defensive action at New Algiers. I was on the USS Gol, are you familiar with the vessel?"

Parker noted the Commander's reply. Underneath it all he sensed a deeper purpose one more personal. He was almost certain it would perhaps have to do with the Bajoran Occupation, a terrible event for a race to have to endure at the hands of such brutality.

"Thousands died that day, 486 on the Gol alone." Alenis stared down into her tea, stirring it and watching the greenish brown liquid swirl in the mug. "I was the Chief Tactical Officer, and the highest ranking officer to get off. I don't know if you are a religious man, Mr. Hudson, but I've come to the conclusion that be it the will of the prophets, the Judeo-Christian god, or the First Mother of Bolarus, that everything happens for a reason. To me, commanding a starship is not just a job. It's a calling. And commanding the USS Portland is a culmination of my whole life - hardships and all - up to this point."

Decisions...

Alenis' quarters

The day after the mission

Authors: Cmdr. Alenis Meru and Lt. (J.G.) Arvel Darze

Still recovering from her injuries, Alenis carefully boiled some water for a pot of tea, trying to avoid any sudden movements or bending over that could irritate her damaged ribs. She had to be careful; they weren't fully healed and even something as simple as laughing or sneezing would have her clutching her side in pain.

Alenis had spent most of the last day in the quiet of her office reflecting on her situation as she stared out at the stars. Her first week of command had been absolutely insane, and she was looking forward to what promised to be a quiet assignment -- transport some diplomats to a planet, let them talk to the locals, what could possibly go wrong? -- to help her unwind and settle in to the center chair.

In the past couple weeks, she'd taken the center chair for the first time, had two religious experiences, visited home for the first time in three decades, fought off Orion pirates, almost ruined a diplomatic dinner, rekindled an old flame, and had to fight off a crazed junior officer who had to mate with her. All in a day's work, she thought, letting out a sigh. "This is what you wanted," she told herself, catching the reflection of her tired self, baggy sweater and all, in a mirror. "To be a Starfleet captain."

She didn't realize it until now, but she wanted more. Maybe it was seeing Arvel walk back into her life, or maybe it was seeing the connection between Jason and Jena, or maybe it was her little health scare that remains unresolved, but over the past few days, something had made her realize what was truly important. And there was someone that she had to talk to about that.

Her thoughts were interrupted by a ring at the door. "Come in!" she shouted as reached for the pot of steeping tea.

Arvel came in in a bit of a rush considering his last appointment had gone a bit longer than he had planned. Now that it was over he could come and see Alenis, he needed to ask her a serious question one that he hoped that wouldn't put his relationship with her at risk.

"Hey you," Arvel said to her he entered her quarters, "You look..." He looked her over and was totally stunned, "Amazing!!" He came up to her and gently kissed her careful not to spill the kettle.

Alenis blushed at the compliment; her outfit was little more than something she just threw on for comfort's sake after a long week. "Ow!" As she put the pot down on the counter, Alenis held her other hand up, stopping Arvel from wrapping his arms around her. "Careful, my ribs are still tender," she said, placing a hand on his chest and leaning in to kiss him back. "Tea, Arvel?"

"Oh, I will handle you with care for after all, the Doctor is in," Arvel said with a smile trying to not beat himself up for not remembering her ribs. "Now of course I want some tea. You always make the best." He took her all in with a grin.

"I know my teas," she replied, as she poured the contents of the pot into two clear, round mugs. "I got this on the station; it's a jumja tea from the Kendra province." To top it off, she added a couple mint leaves from a jar on her counter to each glass. She remembered that Arvel liked the flavour and aroma that a mint leaf or two added. And he wasn't the only one; Alenis took an extra couple out of the jar as a treat for Ko-ko. "You know, I almost lost Ko-ko the other day. I took her to the arboretum

on the station with an old friend who I ran into and she got away from me. I didn't find her until a half hour later." Alenis didn't see any reason to go into the details of her adventure with Rostrenen. She opened Ko-ko's cage and held the mint leaves out in the palm of her hand; while Ko-ko would normally make a big production of flapping her wings and pecking away at her hand as fast as he could, today she simply ate at a leisurely pace. "She's been acting funny ever since."

"Well," Arv said observing the bird carefully, "I believe she is gonna probably lay an egg soon," He tickled her chin happily, Ko-ko's that is, "She was entering her mating cycle and so her running away and being gone makes sense. She has mated with another bird and the aforementioned egg will be in her nest. This is exciting!"

"Mating..." Alenis sighed and held her hand up to her head. "Between Jason's advances, this growth, and the saga of Ti-- I mean, one or two other things, it's just too much. I presume you've heard about what happened on the planet by now?" she asked, making her way to the couch, tea in hand.

"Yes I have," Arv said turning his attention back to her, "And what I see you need is to relax.." He reached up and brought her hand down from her head, "Ale," Arv said holding her hand gently and looked into her eyes, "What can I do to help you relax?"

"Well..." Alenis bit her lower lip and let out a smile. "If it's not too much trouble... I am feeling a little tense in my shoulders." She turned her back to Arvel and soon his hands were digging into her flesh, taking out the knots. But as she stared up at the kitchen cupboards, she couldn't help but think of her encounter the night before. "I'm sorry, Arvel," she said. "I know, given our relationship and given what he tried to do, this might be an awkward subject for you. But I'm worried about Jason. Have you ever seen anyone just lose it like that?"

"I have," Arv said trying to focus on the question and be professional about it he had to be after all being unprofessional would cause him to lose her, "From what I've studied about certain behaviour and given Jason's medical history he's chosen you as his mate. And thus he would lose it and be very aggressive to get what he wants regardless of the social implications." He was careful not to dig into her shoulders too much for he cared for her. "I'd have to contact Vulcan and find out what we can do specifically to help him."

"I see," replied Alenis, her thoughts turning to Arvel. "And how about you? You don't feel... awkward about this whole situation, with it being me that he's chosen?"

"I am," Arvel said as he continued to massage, "I care for you and I want you for myself. I want to try and find someone else for him. For I don't want to lose you in the slightest."

"And I don't want to lose you either," replied Alenis. "Not again."

"Well then" Arv said gently turning her so he look into her eyes, "I know we have a lot of history and I don't take asking this lightly, though please understand I am totally serious in asking this..do you, Alenis Meru, want to have a child with me?"

"I..." Alenis was dumbfounded at the question. She had wanted a family, sure, but had always put it off until after the next promotion, after the next big step in her career. The past few days had got her thinking about it again; seeing Jason united with a daughter he didn't even know he had, and the invasion of the Portland by a swarm of eccentric children. And the proverbial clock was ticking; the little health scare she had with the growth was a reminder that she couldn't put it off forever. "Arvel, I'd love to," she started, a tear coming to her eye. "But... Starfleet regulations... the duties of a captain... it's one thing for us to sneak around like a couple of teenagers, but raising a child... I don't

know how we're going to manage this."

"It's simple," Arv said with real love in his eyes, "I will retire and work on this ship as a civilian. I mean it's been done before and it can still work." He took her hands in his, "Alenis, I will do what it takes for us to have a family. We need one, someone to pass on our legacy to forever and always."

"I... I..." Alenis pulled a hand out of his grasp and wiped away an errant tear or two. "Give up your commission? Arvel, I can't ask you to do that. Not after..." she thought back to when she left him behind on the Britannia. Deep in thought, she stood up and wandered over to the window, to stare out at the stars as she contemplated her life, her love, and her career. "No. I'll think of something, Arv. This is just... it's just, everything is happening so fast."

The incident with her and Jason effected her in ways that he now understood. "I don't mind. I want to retire anyway. I've never been much for Starfleet. What I want is you and that's all I want. If I leave we can be together without issues. Though in the end what I want most is to make you happy, no matter the cost."

"And I you," replied Alenis. Forgetting her bruised rib, she held Arvel in her arms, taking solace in his warm embrace, an island of calm a complicated galaxy.

Diplomats...

Captain's office

MD2, Afternoon

Authors: Cmdr. Alenis Meru and Lt. Cmdr. Timothy Rouse

"So, Tim, Judith was telling me the most interesting story yesterday about a fishing trip you went on back in Prince Rupert with the Delaney sisters," teased Alenis.

Tim laughed out loud. "Fishing, that is one way of naming it. I've never ..."

The friendly banter was interrupted by the chime of the door. "Come in," shouted Alenis.

The door opened to reveal a middle-aged woman with greying hair, dressed in fine robes. "Ah, Ms. Tora, what can I do for you?"

"Commander Alenis, Lieutenant Commander Rouse, it is fortunate that you are both here. I have some important matters that I need to-- what the hell is that?"

"What, you mean my bird?" asked Alenis, looking over at Ko-ko, perched on a corner of her desk. She had been distracted from her bowl of birdseed by the new entrant, who she was simply twisting her head and staring at, a curious expression on her face.

"They let you have a bird on a starship?" she asked incredulously.

Alenis could see Tim rolling his eyes at mention of the bird. Evidently he was not yet used to the latest member of the command team. "Not just let; Ko-ko is a medicinal bird who was prescribed to me. She's a very nice bird, and her calls are very soothing." Alenis petted Ko-ko, who shook her head and flapped her wings at Alenis' touch. "Though, she's been acting funny the past few days."

"Right," started Tora in a dismissive tone. "First off, these quarters are unacceptable. They are cramped, uncomfortable, and drab. You starfleet types really need to learn how to make your

distinguished guests feel welcome.”

Alenis shot Tim a sympathetic glance. Still not as bad as Shras, she thought.

Tim stood up and offered the diplomat his seat. “Madam, you have the most luxurious rooms on this vessel.”

Tora looked him up and down then stared down at the chair. It was not a fine chair by any stretch of the imagination, just standard Starfleet issue. “Well, if this is the best you can do, perhaps Starfleet should have sent a vessel that was constructed sometime this century.” She turned to Timothy. “Mr. Rouse, is there not something you can do here? The sorry state of these quarters is making it difficult for me to concentrate on my briefing notes.”

He thought for a moment. The woman wasn’t going to listen to no. “I could ask an officer to replicate some more luxurious accessories. Badlinnen for example. But other options I unfortunately don’t have at the moment. The Portland’s furniture is the same as on all the other vessels. Even on the brand new diplomatic ones.”

“I suppose it will have to do,” replied Tora. “But you have to do something about your Chief Diplomatic Officer. I... I... I just can’t work with her.”

“Oh?” asked Alenis. “What issues are you having with Lieutenant Zade?”

“She is unprofessional, inexperienced, undisciplined, and is barely qualified to practice diplomacy.” Tora was indignant. “Did you know that her only experience in diplomacy is when she was known as Eledzar? Eledzar was a great man, and it is just shameful to think that his symbiont rests in this... this... two-lita harlot!”

“Ms. Tora, I have complete faith in Lieutenant Zade and her abilities. She saved all of our lives no less than two weeks ago.” Alenis gritted her teeth; Tora was really getting on her nerves. “Besides, she is the one who recovered the Tolic shard, so that counts for something, does it not?”

“In a hand of Tongo!” blurted Tora. “Look, she may be a capable officer, but she’s not a diplomat. I don’t know whose idea it was to have her be in charge of representing the Federation’s interests.”

“That would be Admiral Washington,” replied Alenis. “Perhaps if you have a problem with Lieutenant Zade, you should either take those up with him, or put whatever preconceived notions about her you have aside and get on with your work. Because I’m not going to just sit here and allow you to insult my crew like this.”

“Well, maybe I will,” replied Tora before storming out.

Alenis rolled her eyes at Tim. “So, about the Delaney sisters...”

Authors: Brad Silverton and Timothy Rouse as Judith Rouse

Judith entered Sickbay almost limping of the pain. She hadn't been able to visit Sickbay earlier, first with moving to the ship, then her initial assessment of Security, followed by dealing with the young girl. She hadn't had time to unpack so while getting her back from her quarters and going to Jena's quarters she decided to pay a visit to Sickbay. She really needed new medication. Apparently her body wasn't healed enough to go without.

Looking around her she saw no one. Sickbay wasn't that big, but apparently everyone was working somewhere else. She walked to the CMO's office. "Good afternoon, is it possible to see a doctor. ASAP." she asked with a more strict voice than she meant. Part of the job, she thought.

Brad got up from his desk thinking how busy it was today. "Yes Chief Medical Officer Brad Silverton. How can I help you?"

"Major Judith Rouse. I need new medication. I attempted to cut back on them but I can't apparently. It feels like someone is throwing knives in my back." Judith said. "And then dancing on it."

"Well direct and to the point I can appreciate that Major. Just what kind of medications are we talking about here and why would you be wanting to cut back on the prescribed dosage?"

"I don't like to be depended on painkillers. I managed to do without after my first accident, so I want to do that again." Judith said. She hated the painkillers. Hated it even more that she couldn't function properly without them.

"If only everyone had that view on painkillers." Brad said while walking over to a terminal and pulled up Judith's record. "These aren't the strongest ones I've seen prescribed recently Major but they are fairly strong. We can setup a schedule to reduce you off them over time and switch to milder ones but they do have their purpose." Brad turned and faced Judith as he continued, "They do allow for you to concentrate on your duties while the body heals."

"The accident has been months ago. I've stopped my previous job. The pain should have subsided by now." she tried to read along on the terminal. Not that she didn't what it said. "I managed without painkillers for 48 hours now."

"Sometimes the body takes longer than we'd like for it to heal. Sometimes the injuries are more complicated than we thought. There are many reasons why any pain is lingering both physical and psychological."

Judith looked at him for a second. "So, do you have anything for me?"

Brad walks over to a cabinet and takes out a bottle of pills and returns to Judith. "You've tried heavy painkillers and tried toughing it out with none so let's meet in the middle. Here take these for 2 weeks. Then we'll step you down to something a little less strong. You'll still have some slight pain but it might give you time to adjust. I'd like to give you an examination myself but I'm sure you've had a dozen already so if you are done with that sort of thing I'll spare you from that."

"All I want is to get rid of this pain." Judith said.

"Either way. You might want to talk to Councilor Darze. The eventual cure for your back may not be physical."

She looked at him like he just suggested God knows what. "No thank you. I've seen more than enough of those for a lifetime."

New Ship.. New Home..
USS Portland - Mess Hall
Mission 3: MD1, Morning

Lt. Tyrlai Zade and Lt. Parker Hudson

Entering the large mess hall Parker walked along the large bank of replicators. Mess halls were usually among the same formation. He took the time to visualize the amount of power usage and the turnover rate of re-ionized radiation. Taking his next cue as the first of the replicators became available during the busy morning shift, Parker ordered "One large coffee. Black, two creams two sugar." He then reached upward his hand sliding along his forehead not fully awake, a slight groan emitted.

The large metal steamy mug beginning to materialize. Taking the mug and then lowering his nose down to it, Parker took in the caffeine... "That's it baby, talk to me.." He then slowly took his first sip of morning coffee.

That is when Parker noticed a Trill walk into the room. A female Trill. He had tried not to make it look like he was staring, but he had only met a few before.

Tyrlai stepped into the mess hall one hand going to her still tender abdomen, she winced lightly and looked around. Tyrlai Zade was almost six feet tall, slender and athletic with long, dark wavy hair and leopard Trill spotting. She was up way too early, and not entirely happy about it. It was the kind of hour Thosk was usually up, she generally delegated that to him. She also wasn't much for breakfast, or other people for that matter. 'Disruptor wounds kinda mess you up,' she thought letting her arm drop again. Striding over to the replicator, she stepped past the engineer who had been staring at her, she was getting good at ignoring even the more chiseled ones like this. He was a Lieutenant which made it odd that she hadn't met him yet. "Zade four," she said and the replicator made her eggs and crisp bacon, Krysallian bacon with maple flavoring. She looked over her shoulder at the newcomer with almond shaped, crystal-blue eyes and a slight grin as she said with a sort of Britisheque accent.

"What are you looking at?"

Parker was intrigued. He realized that he must have let his eyes follow her, as she had called him out. Easing his mug to his lips and taking a drink slowly. Hoping to wake up to be able to reply in a sensible manner this early.

"My names Parker." His eyes watched noticing her long blond hair. ((Brown or Black, sometimes with purple or blue mixed in for fun)) "New Chief of Engineering. You are?"

"Tyrlai Zade at your service." She said smiling, as she fetched her eggs and bacon and walked towards one of the tables. "I'm in charge of creative acquisitions, firing torpedos from forty years ago, chasing book thieves in dance clubs, frightening the children, escaping from pirate ships and swordfighting." She found a table she liked and took a seat setting down her tray. "Oh! And diplomacy, I always forget that." She tapped her uniform sleeve, it was violet where normally red, yellow or teal would be. She hadn't put her uniform jacket on so most of the normal black was missing.

"A Diplomat. That is one job. Yeah I couldn't handle that." He noticed Zade picking up her small breakfast order. Parker rather lazy just grabbing two apples from a nearby station of fruit in bowls. Zade looking somewhat 'annoyed' that he just kept following her to her seat.

"It takes a surprising amount of patience, strategy, analysis and running for your life." She took a bit of her eggs and looked up again at where he was standing. "You should just stand there hovering while I eat, that would be good."

"No that's cool. I'm alright, I'll sit down." Parker not taking the cue and seating his self. Looking at his silver wrist watch, not leaving for Engineering in another 10 mins.

"Is that a chronometer," she scrunched her face a little looking at it. "I havent had one of those in about three hundred years. Does it just tell time then, or can you take pictures, go swimming and scan nebula's with it?"

Parker grinned at the attention to his wrist watch. It mostly was covered by the collar of his Engineering uniform. Showing it from his wrist "It was my Fathers... And my Father's Fathers..." He shook his head. "Only can tell me time, and use for sport." He nodded "... and for shape shifters, really good at determining shape shifters." He winked.

"So tell me about yourself, where did you grow up? Did your parents like you, I've heard that can be nice?"

"Akaria Colony. It sucked in a nutshell. But learned a lot for Engineering. My Parent's are great people. They inspired me." Parker listened to Zade expressing for a moment that she did not have such a relationship with her parents. The first time meeting someone Parker hated to be long winded about his self it looked bad.

"Tell me about your parents's Tyrlai." He watched her eat from her plate. "Not the 'Leave it to Beaver' style?" He asked. The course was from Earth 20th Century Sociological History, one of the courses at Star Fleet. "Where is home?" He was just as interested. Everyone had a story to tell.

"My parent's were both researchers on Trill. They were never home, always in the field or at a symposium. They didn't really want kids, they wanted an overachiever, someone who would shine academically, sail through school and then sail through the symbiosis program. Bring the family the honor it deserved." Tyrlai said stabbing her eggs now and again having lost some of her appetite. "I was good at gymnastics and getting in fights with the overachievers at school. I was a family embarrassment. I ran away when I was thirteen, they had me formally declared dead and applied for another child license. When I turned out to not be dead it was very embarrassing, which was one embarrassment too far for them, so they disavowed me. They had had the new one by then so I was disposable.

"Then I fast tracked through the Academy and 'chizak' the stupid symbiosis commission, I got one anyway."

Biting into his red delicious apple, Parker's beaming white teeth chewing into the flesh with a crack. Chewing and swallowing.. "When did you get wounded in your chest?" He had witnessed a few moments where Zade was holding her stomach tenderly. It could have been nothing, but he was nosey to find out.

"Oh that I was shot by a reptillian at a state dinner on Bajor. I got a plaque and a commendation and disruptor burns and oh, maybe you can help with something." Tyrlai reached down and rummaged through a small carryall, pulling out a stylized metal, hand-sized orb placing it on the table in front of the engineer. "It is a subspace communicator. I put a supression lock onto it because it can also be locked onto much like a com badge. Can you, I don't know, trace it to its source and tell me where I can find that individual. Cause well the Reptillian may have pulled the trigger but the person on the other end of this is the one who had me shot." She leaned back and took a bite of her bacon, having regained her appetite.

Listening Parker watched Tyrlai's body language as she told her story. She seemed ok enough to be

able to talk about her past. He understood well how overachiever type Parents influenced their children, his was not much of an exception. Yet the Symbiosis Program on Trill was notoriously demanding as an understatement. Parker nodded slightly hearing the fact that her Parents wrote Tyrlai off so easily as an embarrassment and went on with their lives leaving Zade.

"That is sad." He listened. The Federation offered new hope to lots of lost souls' so to speak, much like his self. He didn't know where he belonged, but not back at Akaria Base with his parents.

"Your Symbiont is Chizak?"

Tyrlai shook her head. "The symbiont is Zade. Chizak is was not translated by the UT out of a sense of respectability for the other diners."

"How you mesh?" Parker couldn't help a grin form on his face, this was interesting. "It's like your a tag-team or something right?" He could be forgiven for being ignorant.

"It can seem that way with me sometimes but no. We are linked very deeply at the subconscious level. Everything I do is Tyrlai and Zade at the same time. Occasionally the symbiont can overwhelm the host, but that wasn't the case with me."

"Whoah... Whoah... You glossed over... Being shot by a Reptillian?" He was confused. "This was the last mission correct." Parker had read up on the Portland's last mission reports before he had arrived.

"Yes,... welll,... not really." Tyrlai cocked her head, "that was a formal dinner celebration. There was a dance club and a holy book, and I was kidnapped for a while. But it was shore leave really."

"If this ship has dance clubs as part of its missions, then here I am." He grinned.

Chewing his apple and then swallowing he took hold of the communicator device. The suppression lock was like no other suppression sub-space field inhibitor he had ever seen before... "My my myyyy..." He clucked his tongue from the inside of his mouth. "I can help you." He nodded. "But."

"But what?" She stared, hald expecting something predatory.

"I'll need you to help me translate some of these codec indexes. I don't know what this reference language is?" He questioned Tyrlai.

Tyrlai seemed taken aback a moment. "I couldn't help you. The Reptillian is Alpha outbound as far as I know. A race somewhere past the Breen expanse. We would need a Ferengi I would expect. Or a really good linguist." Tyrlai pondered the issue.

"I can send subspace for a linguist, help us out. After my shift today." He held the device noting the alloy it was created. "We'll get it to work."

"Consider it part of your shift," she said pointedly with a smirk, "we need to be sure about this before we get to the colony. As much as we can be."

"And you do owe me something of yourself after Ive gone through family history and Trill neurology and all." She looked at his eyes, one of her psychological tricks. You learned a lot from who could meet one's gaze and when. "There must have been a girl at some point, or a guy perhaps,... no girl." She decided after staring a little more closely for a moment.

Parker his self was taken aback by Tyrlai's gaze. It had a piercing effect only few others he had met before held. He was guarded, he didn't like having his eyes stared into him as it made him uncomfortable to an extent.

"The only dude in my life is Neutron, my golden retriever right now..." He set down his apple on Tyrlai's now finished half eaten tray he grinned to his self. Then solid "There was something strong a few years, quite a few years ago." He played with her fork "Ms. Brown. That's what her father called her, Mr. Brown... My rather anal professor with a bone to pick back at Star Fleet Academy. He was a jack!"

"I met more than my share of them. They do not like my approach to stuff in general. So paint me a picture of Ms Brown?"

"Brunette, smart. Carefree, I didn't have to act to impress her. She liked me for me." He paused. Before looking at his silver watch... "Well. I should probably get going..." He paused. "You have time later to work on this?" He gestured at Tyrlai.

"I have whatever time is needed as far as that orb is concerned."

"Sounds good then" He gave a confident smile. This was becoming easy for him to meet new people. Smaller crews usually were more tight knit, but not with the Portland.

Tyrlai stood only wincing slightly and offered her hand. "I need to go irritate the diplomats a little more, lest they get it into their minds to realize I might be up to something. Welcome to the Portland, mister Parker."

The squeaky wheel...

Judith's quarters, USS Portland

Evening, MD2

Authors: Cmdr. Alenis Meru, Capt. Judith Rouse (Played by Timothy Rouse), Coln Jena (Played by Jason Beauvoir)

Some disturbing information had come Alenis' way via her executive officer, and as the Captain, she decided that this was one matter that she needed to investigate personally. So, here she was, outside the door of the quarters of her new security consultant. Pressing her ear against the door, she could hear something blaring -- perhaps music, a game, or a movie; she could not tell which. Ringing the chime once, she didn't get an answer. Figuring the loud sounds emanating from her quarters had drowned out the chime, she tried a different tack.

"Computer, override volume controls for room three-beta-niner. Authorization Alenis Kappa Three."

"Volume controls are overridden."

"Reduce volume by 60%." Hearing the loud noises in their quarters subside, Alenis tried the chime again.

After the volume reduced, Jena was going to question the Computer on what happened when she heard the chime. Opening the door, she found Alenis standing there. "Captain, how nice to see you, come in." She said with a smile. Then she frowned. "I hope you haven't been waiting long, it's just I couldn't hear anything over the music. It's from a 20th century Earth band named 'Pink Floyd'. A friend of mine recommended it and told me that you have to play it at high decibels in order to

experience the full effect of the music, he was right. So what can I or the Major do for you?"

"It's actually you I wanted to see, Ms. Coln," said Alenis, looking over her shoulder at Judith in the background holding a replicated Earth delicacy popular throughout the quadrant known as a "pizza." Over the past two centuries, the popular dish had spread throughout the quadrant to wherever Federation officers would be stationed, and was a staple in fusion cuisine, each culture putting their own little twist on it. Even the Ferengi, always willing to innovate and borrow from other cultures if a few strips of latinum can be made, had their own variation. Though flaked blood fleas and toasted tubeworms weren't exactly popular toppings once one got more than a couple dozen parsecs from Ferenginar. "I hope you have enough for three," she added, offering Judith a smile.

"Always!" Judith said as she put the pizza down. "We were going to watch a movie. Care to join us?" Judith didn't know why the captain was here, but she figured it must be for the girl.

Alenis quickly ran over her to do list in her head. With her new yeoman on hand to take care of filing and mundane paperwork, she might actually be able to swing a couple hours of "team-building exercises" with Judith and Jena.

"I'd love to," started Alenis, "but first I need to talk to Jena." She turned to Judith. "How about we have our little chat in the dining room while you set up the movie?"

Jena followed Alenis into the dining room. "What's this about, Captain? Is it about my father?" She asked when they were alone. A little fear in his voice.

"No," replied Alenis, detecting the fear in her voice and trying to reassure her. The last thing she wanted to do was cause her more distress. "We're working on a treatment right now. I promise you, your father is going to be all right."

For a fleeting moment, Alenis wondered what would happen if the treatment didn't work. It was a dilemma for her as well; she had no intention of "mating" with Jason. Not that he wasn't attractive in a way, but Alenis already had a mate in Arvel. But even if she didn't, Alenis didn't want to start a relationship like this. But she also couldn't just sit idly by and lose a crew member when there was a way to save him. The whole situation was stressing her to the breaking point.

She turned back to Jena who was sipping some kind of fizzy drink and staring up at her. "I actually wanted to talk about you. I heard you got into a little trouble yesterday."

Jena felt a little better after hearing Alenis' assurance that Jason would be fine. When the CO brought up the reason for her visit, she said in an adamant tone. "Yes, and I take full responsibility for what happened, Devon was just trying to be a good friend."

"Relax," replied Alenis. Looking down at Jena, she couldn't be mad at the young girl. She reminded her of a younger version of herself, and she had just been through a very traumatic experience, nearly dying of radiation poisoning. "I'm not here to yell at you. What I wanted to ask was, are you finding it boring to be cooped up on the Portland?"

"A little, but my mother used to say 'that we live in an amazing universe out there and if you're bored then you're not trying hard enough'." Jena said. Her smile returning as she thought about her mother.

"Well, you were certainly trying hard yesterday," joked Alenis. Seeing a nervous giggle emanate from Jena, she turned serious again. "What I want to talk to you about is our mission. I don't know if you've heard, but we're going to be opening diplomatic relations with a lost tribe of Bajorans who

have been separated from Bajor for centuries. I wanted to know if you would like to be my personal aide and assistant for the duration of this mission while we are on the surface. This is a very unique opportunity, and I guarantee you it won't be boring."

Jena beamed with delight at the invitation. "I'd love to!" She almost screamed. Then regaining her composure somewhat, she said in a formal tone. "That is, thank you, Captain for this wonderful opportunity. I would be most honour to accept this role." She couldn't stop an excited smile from crossing her features.

"Excellent." Alenis returned the smile. "Meet me in my office at 9:00 tomorrow morning to brief. Now," she said, standing up from the table and turning back towards the living room, "what movie have you got picked out for us, Judith?"

Progress Update

Sickbay, USS Portland

MD2 - Morning

Authors: Cmdr. Alenis Meru and Lt. (JG) Brad Silverton

Quietly entering sickbay, Alenis saw her Chief Medical Officer at his desk, eyes transfixed on his screen, enthralled in his work. If he saw or heard Alenis come in, he didn't acknowledge her entrance. Silently, she walked towards to the CMO's office, sneaking up behind him without him noticing.

"The Pleasure Goddess of Rixx, Encounter on Risa, Vulcan Love Slave 7: Chains of Passion..." she read aloud off his screen. "I take it you are still trying to find an appropriate holoprogram to prescribe our friend down in the brig?"

Brad nodded slightly and rubbed the bridge of his nose. "Yes, and its not going well. Vulcans are so secretive about pon farr that the best I could find is something called fanfiction from the late 20th century Earth. I can't believe the stuff they write about in the weirdest most unrealistic settings. Its like they write out complete stories of other people in some escapism from their own lives." He threw his hands up in surrender.

"That's bizarre," she replied, wrinkling her nose in disgust. "Fortunately, my life is exciting enough that I don't need to pretend to be someone else." Alenis shook her head looking at the "research materials" on Brad's screen. "If only it were as simple as giving him a smutty holodeck program..." she sighed.

"I have a few ideas about this. For Vulcans pon farr is a physical thing. Their bodies can only bottle their emotions for so long. But Jason is half human. This could be very psychological. I'll need to work with Lt Darze. Actually I haven't met him yet and this would be a good excuse as any."

"That's a good idea," replied Alenis. "I spoke to him last night; he seems to have some familiarity with pon farr, and is familiar with the situation." Alenis' face blushed slightly. There was one aspect of this situation that he was very familiar with. Of course, she hoped she didn't give it away with the reference to the night before. "Maybe he can assist the human side of Jason and buy us some time."

"Well I'm not sure if we need to buy him any time. It all has to happen during the same sexual act. Psychic and physical."

"That is a good point, doctor. I spoke to Lieutenant Beauvoir's mother yesterday. From what I

understand, we need to resolve his psychological and emotional needs, and part of that involves a mind meld with his chosen mate. Are any of the characters in Vulcan Love Slave 7 even complex enough to simulate a mind meld?"

Brad leaned back in his chair sitting at his desk. "I'm afraid not. It'll have to be more than just a holodeck sexual encounter. Not even the Ferengi could pull off something as advanced as what Jason will need. We'll have to find some way to make it real without making it real real obviously."

"Don't remind me," joked Alenis. She shook her head. "Captain Anderson said it would help if it were an image of his chosen mate. I'm still not sure how I feel about having some holoprogram created in my image so our friend can... you know..."

"Are we sure you're his chosen mate? Please don't take this the wrong way captain but, you were the first person he came across and maybe it's just that you were... available?" Brad cringed a bit at saying that. He recalled back to a time with Jenny Hensworth during his junior year of high school and a similar conversation went horribly awry.

"I think so," replied Alenis. "You were there in sickbay when he asked me to come to his quarters for some 'tea.' And judging by the reports from the security officers in the brig, he's pretty well smitten by me." Alenis knew that by now, those security officers would have told their friends and the gossip would have spread throughout the ship. "Plus, judging by his daughter, perhaps he has a 'thing' for Bajorans." She shook her head and let out a deep breath. "You know, doctor, it's been a while, but I don't remember the dating scene being this complicated."

"Hmmm the difficulty is in using you without using you. We don't want to complicate your command yet we have to be precise with Arvel. Hopefully I am not talking in circles. It's a rather touchy subject."

"Believe me, it's even more touchy for me." Alenis took a deep breath before steering the conversation back to business and away from her dating habits. "Talk to Lieutenant Hudson. I know it's a long shot, but he might have someone on staff who can create a holo-matrix complex enough to maintain the illusion."

Sick Bay Check Up [Back Post]

USS Portland

MD1

Authors: Lt. Parker Hudson and Lt. (JG) Brad Silverton

Parker entered the Sick Bay only to be assisted immediately by one of the on staff nurses. Parker informed the nurse that he was there to have his initial on board check up as he had been putting that off for a little while. Parker was directed to one of the bio beds to take a seat. The Chief of Medical was nowhere to be seen at the moment, perhaps he was in the office. Parker did pick a time of evening where the Doctor wouldn't be so busy he thought.

Sitting on the end of the bio bed, Parker let his eyes wander to the sensor clusters above the room. The immense amount of plasma energy and conduits being directed to the Sickbay on board the USS Portland was impressive, as it was an area that demanded high energy use. All this technology. He wanted to.... Reaching out for one of the medical instruments beside the bio bed, Parker grasped it and opened up the tricorder. "Never actually used one of these things.." He narrowed his eyes looking at the readouts on it trying to understand...

Brad Silverton walked into sickbay having stepped out for a moment. He noticed Parker sitting on a biobed and... was he fiddling with a medical tricorder? "Hello lieutenant is there something I can do for you this evening?"

"Evening already?" Parker asked.

"Yes it is." Brad looked over to Maria Hill and nodded, "I have this Maria, you mentioned that you had plans tonight so go enjoy yourself." Maria thanks the doctor and leaves.

"Well," he stretched his arms and yawning a bit "I just finished Engineering shift. Might as well now than ever get this physical over with. I have no health issues."

Brad takes the tricorder from Parker's hands and begins scanning. "You might be surprised that everyone says that. So you just recently transferred to the Portland?"

Parker nodded. This was why he was in Sick Bay. "Not to hurt your feelings, but I hate this place.." He watched at Brad's face which was focused on the tricorder as its screen readouts flashed vitals and all.

Not looking up from the tricorder Brad quickly retorts, "No offense taken I hate how engineering didn't finish configuring sickbay and almost got myself and my patient killed. I trust you'll get things in order now that you arrived?"

Parker felt a bit disgruntled at that comment. He certainly had nothing in his departmental procurement and star base retrofit logs. He furrowed his left eyebrow, "I will certainly look into it Doctor."

"I transferred a few days ago. It is good to meet you Doctor Silverton." He let a grin. "Doc, what's your favorite sport?" Other than technology, sports was the next most random of access in his memory. Parker felt it a good way to get to know someone.

"Betazoid Debauchi. Its an ancient sport with much history and culture. Can you imagine having teams of 10v10 telepaths trying to out think and out play each other?" Brad never looked up from his tricorder to directly address Parker.

Parker listened. "That is a sport, more of a game of chance would it not?" If it didn't involve any tackles, hustling, or accuracy skills he was confused. "So Doctor you don't play this Betazoid... Deb..." He shook his head not able to remember the name of the sport.

"Debauchi".

"Yes, that." He nodded. "How can you tell what is going on in their telepathic minds?" This seemed pretty interesting.

"Well only telepaths play it so I'm only a spectator. Think about it like mental fencing. They have to block incoming thoughts while probing each other. If one can get passed another's mental defenses then they get to advance. Its not so much as a field as a table. You can actually tell quite a bit of whats going on by the facial expressions and body language. There are lots of strategies not unlike the sport of chess from Earth."

"I haven't heard of this... mental sport." Parker stated. "I wouldn't call it one, but I don't know any better." He grinned. Then gripping on the sides of the bio bed, watching as the Doctor finished

completing up his short but thorough medical check. He was always antsy to get back to Engineering.

After the 'ok' was given, he then jumped off the bed, and crossed his arms. Stepping beside Dr. Silverton he viewed the bio bed terminal that the medical tricorder integrated its scanning results.

"You'll have to let me see this... Debauchi program sometime too Doctor." He nodded.

Brad responded with a dismissive reortort, "Yes well it takes a deal of concentration so I wouldn't want to distract you from you mission. " Brad said rather dismissively.

Parker furrowed an eyebrow at him, "How do I look? Will I survive another day Doc?" Parker stated back.

"Everything checks out Lieutenant and we're done. You're in great health. If you'll excuse me it is rather late."

Parker nodded and then slipped off the bed. Walking out the doors, he cracked his knuckles, a habit. He was not tired.

Perhaps he would take a trip to the ships gym.

Captain's Office

0850 hours, MD3

Authors: Cmdr. Alenis Meru, and Coln Jena (Played by Jason Beauvoir)

"Thank you, crewman," said Alenis as yeoman al-Nablusi placed a large mug of tea in front of her. She had to teach him how to brew it correctly, in the traditional Bajoran style. But the yeoman was a quick study and he aimed to please, and it was not long before the tall, muscular crewman was preparing Dekka tea with mint leaves, just the way the captain likes it.

"Is there anything else I can get you, captain? A bagel, or perhaps some birdseed?" he asked, his eyes wandering to Ko-ko who was on her favourite perch - right on top of Alenis' monitor.

"No, thank you," replied Alenis. "Why don't you grab some breakfast for yourself; I've got a briefing with one of our crew in ten minutes."

"A briefing?" he asked. "With who? I'm not aware of any crew scheduled to brief with you at this time."

"One Coln Jena."

"Coln Jena? I don't recall that name in the crew manifest." Abdel was starting to wonder if his photographic memory was failing him.

"Well, she's not officially part of the crew," admitted Alenis. "She is the daughter of Lieutenant Beauvoir."

"I see. In that case, I will leave you to your briefing." On that note, the yeoman turned and left, presumably to see what was on offer this morning in the mess hall.

Alenis took a deep breath before glancing at her chronometer. She was giving Jena a great opportunity, and if she didn't show up within the next six minutes, she would be very disappointed.

No sooner had she raised the mug of tea to her lips, she was interrupted by the chime of the door. "Come in!" she shouted, placing the mug onto a coaster on her desk.

"Sorry, I'm late, ma'am, I overslept." Jena said trying her best to sound professional, but the excitement in her eyes betrayed her. She hoped she was dressed appropriately, she didn't have a uniform, so she'd thrown a few things together and wasn't sure it worked.

"Two minutes early by my watch," replied Alenis. "Not late, though it is a good idea to show up a little earlier. Care for some tea?"

Jena smiled, relieved that she wasn't late. At the offer of tea she said "Yes please, ma'am."

Alenis stood up and walked over to her teapot. "Your father isn't the only one who knows how to make tea," she said as she poured Jena a mug. She dropped a couple mint leaves into the mug and took a couple into her hands. "Here's your tea. And here, give these to Ko-ko," she added, pressing a couple mint leaves into Jena's hand. "It's her favourite treat."

Accepting the mug of tea, Jena breathed in its delicious aroma. She then placed it in front of her. Then with a little apprehension, from not having much contact with birds, she carefully fed the leaves to Ko-ko. "Hello Ko-ko." She said. "I'm Jena."

Ko-ko pecked away at the leaves in Jena's hands as Alenis continued. "Ko-ko has been a little shy lately, apparently she's pregnant." Alenis picked up a PADD on her desk watched Jena nervously interact with the bird. "Let's get down to business. How familiar are you with our current mission?"

Jena thought for a moment before answering. "We are traveling to a planet that contains a Bajoran colony that has been separated from Bajor for several centuries and we are tasked with initiating diplomatic procedures in order to bring them back-into-the-fold, so to speak, ma'am."

"I see you've been reading my briefing notes," replied Alenis. "I like that. You're going to be my assistant on this mission, so you'll have a front row seat for this historic occasion. How familiar are you with Bajoran traditions?"

Jena smiled at the praise. "My mother taught me about the Prophets and we attended religious services, but she wasn't very devout and neither am I. I guess it's the scientist in me." She hoped she didn't sound dismissive of beliefs that Alenis probably held dear. "I also learnt about Bajoran history and traditions at elementary school, I'm afraid I may be a little rusty."

"You'll have to study up." Alenis brushed the comment about science aside; she wasn't the most devoutly religious Bajoran, but she did hold the Bajoran religion dear, as dear as she held Federation principles of peaceful exploration and advancing scientific knowledge. And for her, recent scientific discoveries about the wormhole only strengthened her belief in the prophets. "From what I understand Gamia III is like a time warp to Bajor five hundred years ago. They're extremely devout, even by Bajoran standards. Their laws are based heavily on religious texts, and their politics are a sort of hybrid of a theocracy and a parliamentary republic. The good news is that they are a matriarchal society, so that works well for us," joked Alenis. "I've prepared a reading list for you," she added, sliding a PADD across the desk.

Jena skimmed the reading list. "Well, it looks like I'm going to have a late night," she joked.

"Well, it'll keep you out of trouble," replied Alenis. "Any questions?"

Jena smiled. "Indeed." She joked. Then she became serious. "Ma'am, this may sound a little superficial, but what do I wear to the meeting ceremony? The crew have their dress uniforms and I'm certain the Bajoran diplomats aboard have their own formal dress, but I'm neither, so I was wondering what I should wear, so as not to disrespect our hosts."

Alenis smiled. "Why don't we go to the holodeck tonight and try a few things on?"

"Yay...I mean that will be acceptable, ma'am." Jena said.

USS Portland – Deck 9 – Engineering Lab

MD 3

Authors: Lt. Tyrlai Zade and Lt. Parker Hudson

Tyrlai entered the room and Parker got up from his station, already knee deep into trying to find a way to crack the Subspace Communicator. He was having trouble learning the small artifact, how to exploit it.

"Hello Tyrlai." He smiled at the Trill. He had met her the first time in the Mess Hall and he couldn't stop a stare.

She stopped playing an uneven tune on her strange flute and smiled back pocketing the slim wooden instrument. She had been better with wave particle and subspace physics in the past, it was a bit shimmery in her memory now. "

"I think I've found something..." He gestured at the engineering stool, to pull up to the computers. "If I can introduce a self destructing virus into the device through its subspace feed back, creating a loop..." He then noticed the Diplomatic Officer's face turn a bit confused and not interested in the technical details.

"I think I can get a track on where this signal is being linked. You'll have your Vedek." He winked.

Tyrlai stepped over to the proffered stool looking at the small gaggle of instruments focused on the hand sized spherical comm unit. "Good, we are in orbit now so the quicker we have a fix the quicker we can figure out what the good people below are actually up to."

"So what happens when you do find him?" He asked curious.

"That depends." Tyrlai frowned staring at the orb still as if trying to will it to give up its secrets. "On his personal motivation and capacity for contrition. We are a little out of our depth here, we don't know why he went to such lengths to grab a book. But to our credit he doesn't exactly know who he is messing with either." Her eyes flashed as she looked up suddenly from the orb, all glittering and mischievous.

"You do have a plan, that face is very mischievous looking with intent.." He stated. Punching in a few keys into the transceiver matrix algorithms, Parker bite into an apple.

"I always have a plan, several of them usually. One for 'this is harmless', one for 'they are activating it now', one for 'it's a bomb' and one for 'we've traced it to the capitol'"

Just then one of the communication indicators opened up to reveal an incoming message from Earth. The subspace encoded message was sent a few moments earlier, when Parker addressed the

scientist over the issue at hand of the communicator.

"This is Dr. Hains." A stuffy laboratory in the background of hieroglyphs and algorithms present. Just the type of professor that both he and Lt. Zade needed at this point. Parker knew how to re-encode the device, just not the matrix level.

"I have looked at the device, rather unremarkable on the outside.." The Doctor looked at the holographic representation of the small round oval communication device. "What is remarkable, is the encryption. If this is an millennial artifact, then it has advanced since. None the less! I have provided you with what you are looking Lt. Hudson."

Parker turned looking at Lt. Zade.

"I am sending you the matrix level now..." Just then Parker typed in the interface to check the data that was sent. "I am patching in the algorithm I worked on now."

Tyrlai brought up a display screen with access she probably wasn't supposed to have and overlaid a coordinate grid on the planet. She began focusing and tracing the signal. The algorithms were essential, subspace was full of flows and eddies especially this close to a gravity well. Brushing her long black hair from her eyes with one hand and tapping away at the screen with the other, she slowly eliminated most of the planet and began focusing on the Capital. "Why a book, and why now?" She was talking seemingly to herself but loud enough so the specialist on Earth could hear her.

"I can work this thing," he watched over the algorithm that the Doctor had provided, and the Engineer was modifying it as the scans went along the planet, "But I can't help you understand why." He punched in a few numbers.

"Could it be some sort of negotiating tool? Other than the Bajoran Artiquity markets..." He was confused as to Tyrlai's next move. He had only stepped into this for some fun.

"Well it's like this. We get a sudden envoy from a world that has shown no interest in relations with its homeworld for nigh onto 200 years suddenly change its mind and embrace togetherness while at the same time somebody in a position of power here spent a significant capital investment to filch a dusty book that's available via subspace from the Bajoran National Library. We have a full diplomatic envoy eager to score career points by fast tracking this planet's membership, but I for one think we need a lot more information before we even hand them an official application." Tyrlai glared down at the subspace device. "People do not normally kill for something they can download. Ritualized fanatics, socipaths, psychotic antiquities collectors, maybe. When we beam down we will be met by smiling and polite well dressed folks who will very likely spoon feed us the version of themselves that they most want us to see. The living room will be immaculate, dinner will be catered-- but I want to know what they are hiding in the back room, what's in the laundry and so-forth. When the smiling people we meet at the formal dinners turn out to be puppets I wan't to know who is pulling their strings."

Parker nodded and crossed his arms looking back at the device. The computer was working on triangulating a signal that led to the surface... "It seems to be indicating in the North East of the Bajoran Colony, at least a few hundred kilometers."

"The situation is suspect... Something they could have access digitally anyways, seems they, whomever want to use all their influence in dragging this back, and are willing to have everyone in the Federation see it."

"Logically suspect." Tyrlai pointed out. "We may not be dealing with logic, but rather superstition. And a remote possibility exists that we are actually dealing with something tangible. After all the Bajorans 'sailed' here in warp capable starships powered by lightsails. The Orbs in which the Bajoran religion hold sacred are of a level of technology our best scientists don't begin to understand. The book may have some lingering relic of that science, or record of it. It is purported to be the teachings of the prophets after all. There may be a more practical reason for this theft than we know."

Knowing Commander Alenis was Bajoran Parker was curious "Have you brought your queries to the Commander before this?" He questioned. Tyrlai was on to something and they would soon have the means of information to act.

"Huh. Inform the chain of command about my suspicions?" Tyrlai furrowed her brow before shaking her head. "I'll think about it, doesn't sound right to me though."

"It seems you may have something." He pointed to the screen. The triangulating frequency had solidified on the North East of the Bajoran Colony. There appeared to be a formal structure for receiving the hidden subspace communicator relay near the Colony. "We should transfer to an OPS Mission Station or Sciences to see what your dealing with down there."

"Oh, now we are telling everybody?" The Trill woman fixed him with an expertly crafted flummoxed look. "Fine. But if this blows up on us, I'm just going to have to blame you for all of it." She smirked and grabbed a hand scanner, downloaded everything onto it and headed for the exit. "The shuttle leaves in a half hour, you'll want to be on it unless you want to risk missing the dangerous part." She said the last part like such a notion was distinctly unthinkable before vanishing through the doors.

Parker let his jaw drop down as he was about to say something, and then breathed out as he watched Tyrlai exit the room. He then turned his attention back to the display readout with the intermittent flashing of the relay. He decided he could not let her go down alone.

Rouse's Quarters, USS Portland

MD03 - 22.00 hrs

With: Timothy Rouse and Ellen Washington

Tim entered their quarters 30 minutes after his shift had ended. He had run the Beta shift as usual and couldn't wait to get some sleep. With the Captain going down to the planet he would be in command of the ship in only a few hours. The room was dark, Ellen was already in bed. He softly went to the bedroom and undressed himself. As he sat on the bed to remove his shoes Ellen woke up and turned his direction. He leaned over to kiss her. "Hello gorgeous," he said. "Mmm, you smell nice."

Ellen sat up, now being fully awake. "Great, you're here. I wanted to talk to you, but didn't want to disturb you while on duty." She looked at him for a moment before continuing. He looked tired, something that made him look more handsome. "Do you agree with the plan the Captain has come up with to help Jena's father?"

Tim, having something completely different on his mind then talking. "What plan?"

She looked at him with ... "You don't know about their plan? You're the XO, shouldn't you know."

Tim didn't like the suggestion he was missing something, or that someone was keeping something from him. "Tell me what you know. And how is it that you do know about it?"

"I overheard the doctor and the EMH talking about it."

"The EMH is involved too?"

"Well jeh, he is the one that will do the uhm, act. With the captain's image and voice."

Tim was flabbergasted. "What?" He was already starting to put on his shoes again.

"They are going to make the EMH look like the Captain and she is going to talk and stuff to the Lieutenant. He'll be thinking it is the Captain that is with him the whole time. Apparently this is the only solution, besides the Captain actually doing the Pon Farr with him."

Tim stared at her. "Is it?" He didn't know about all that stuff, but it sounded stupid to him that this was the only solution.

"I did some reading after I heard it. When someone chooses a mate, the only way for them to find release of the Pon Farr is by mating with their chosen mate. There is meditation and drugs. But the EMH says that it is too late for that. " Ellen said.

He shook his head. "I'm beginning to feel like I'm the only sane person on this ship?" he thought out loud. He had done so often before. "Besides you of course," he quickly corrected himself and placed a kiss on her lips. "You go back to sleep, you need sleep for two now." he touched her still flat belly. "I have to talk to the Captain now."

Captain's Quarters

MD03 - 22.15 hrs

Authors: Cmdr. Alenis Meru and Lt. Cmdr. Timothy Rouse

He had pressed the chime multiple times. "Open up, Meru, we need to talk!"

"One minute!" shouted Alenis over the sound of the Bajoran symphony that she had been listening to in order to help her relax before bed. Since the doctor had taken away her tranquilizers, she had found that classical music, Ko-ko's soft coos, and a glass or four of wine helped. She found that Bajoran springwine made a particularly good pairing with the sleep aids that Brad had given her, and had picked up a case on DS9 for personal consumption. "Computer, pause music."

In her satin burgundy nightgown, and a little tipsy from the drink, she answered the door. "Ah, Tim, care for a glass?" she asked, holding her glass up for him to see.

"No thanks." Tim said as he entered her quarters. "When were you gonna tell me about your 'cure' for Jason?" He was really angry about it, getting angrier the more he thought about. Not because of him being the last to find out, but of the cure itself. "I had to hear it from my.. Ellen."

Alenis let out a little chuckle at the situation. She had been so busy talking to Brad, Parker, Arvel, and the EMH about this, not to mention trying to handle both Tyrlai and a bunch of uptight Bajoran diplomats that she somehow forgot to inform her executive officer. "I'm sorry, Tim. It must have slipped my mind."

"Slipped your mind. Of course." He looked at her for a moment, then to the table that showed a half empty bottle of wine. "Are you drunk?"

"Drunk? No, of course not," she replied, trying to laugh off the accusation. "I just had a glass or two; I like to have a bit of wine before I go to bed. It relaxes me, and you know what they say, a doctor a day keeps the glass of wine away." She looked over at the bottle, a slightly guilty expression on her face. "Okay, maybe three."

Tim shook his head. There was no point in talking to her now. "That's great." He said to no one in particular.

"Come on, Tim, have a seat. Surely you had something to talk about," said Alenis, motioning towards the couch. "Are you sure I can't get you anything to drink?"

"I prefer to stand, but yes, I'll take that drink now? What kind of wine was it again?"

"Elkara," replied Alenis, reading the bottle. "It's a springwine, from the Kendra valley. It's really good; not too sweet like most blue drinks." She had had a bad experience with andorian ale back at the academy, and had since then sworn off all blue drinks except for springwine. After taking a glass from the cupboard, she poured him one and refilled her own.

After she gave him a glass he continued. "What is going on with Jason. And I don't mean the pon farr stuff, but your plan to help him."

"We've got Brad, Parker, and Arvel all working on it. He's chosen me as a mate, so right now, the plan is that we use the EMH as a template, and program it with my image and personality. This way he can, you know... without actually..." It sounded stupid just saying it. She plunked herself down on the couch and took a small sip of wine before continuing. "Brad is hoping to find a way to use a neural interface to 'download' my personality into the hologram for maximum realism and to maintain the illusion through the mind meld."

"And you're ok with this? Is Arvel ok with this?" he took a sip from the wine. "It's a big thing!"

"You think I'm excited about this?" Alenis asked, rhetorically. "I can't let him die in the brig, and I don't see any other options." Alenis still wasn't entirely comfortable with the idea, but had resigned herself to it. "As for Arvel..." she thought for a moment, "I'm sure he'll understand."

"That's the same Ellen said. About there not being another solution." He swirled his glass round in his hand. "I wouldn't be very happy if it were Ellen he chose as a mate."

"I'm not happy about being chosen either. But I can't let him die alone in the brig."

"True!"

Alenis shook her head and sighed. "Hopefully they'll be able to create the hologram tomorrow before we arrive at Gamia III. I'll be heading down to the planet, so you'll be in charge up until I get back. Let me know how this plan goes, and make sure they delete the hologram when they're done, okay?"

Tim raised his brow. "You're putting me in charge of this idiotic plan?"

"Do you have a problem with that, Lieutenant Commander?" asked Alenis. Even slightly drunk, she could still order him around.

"Oh no, don't commander me! We obviously aren't on duty now. Well, I'm not comfortable with the

idea, but I can see there is no other option.” Tim sighed.

“Good. Then we are in agreement.” Alenis raised her glass for a toast. “To there being no other option. At least, that’s what we’re going to tell them during our court martial.”

Tim clinked his glass with hers and sighed while shaking his head.

Sexual healing...

Sickbay, USS Portland

MD4, 1100 hrs

Authors: Cmdr. Alenis Meru and EMH Mark I (played by Timothy Rouse)

Alenis strolled into sickbay, a mug of tea in hand. After working with Brad and Parker on their little plan to help Jason with his pon farr, she realized that there was one person that she forgot to tell. Well, person may not be the right word.

“Computer, activate EMH,” she called out, to the empty sickbay

Behind the Captain the the Emergency Medical Hologram appeared. "Please state the nature of the medial emergency"?

Alenis turned swiftly, somewhat startled by the EMH appearing behind her. A drop or two of tea spilled onto the floor. “Our Chief Science Officer, Lieutenant Beauvoir, he’s...” blushing slightly, Alenis was at a loss for words.

“He is what?” The EMH said impatient.

“Are you familiar with the pon farr?”

The EMH sighted deeply. “Am I familiar with.. Of Course I am familiar with Pon Farr. I contain the medical knowledge of every member world in the Federation and more than five million surgical procedures.”

“Yes, of course you know about pon farr,” replied Alenis, already getting irritated with the EMH. One of the few things on the Portland that hadn’t been retrofitted was the EMH, and these old Mark Is were not known for their politeness. “Lieutenant Beauvoir is suffering from the symptoms and we’ve... come up with a cure.”

“Then why do you need me?”

“Well, the cure involves...” Alenis took a deep breath. “We need to create a holographic mate for him, and the only holo-matrix complicated enough to sustain the illusion through a mind meld is...” Seeing the EMH stare coldly into her eyes, she trailed off.

“is my programming.” he replied.

“Yes. We’re going to need to reprogram your matrix with my image and personality, so Jason can...” she trailed off again, in response to the EMH’s glare.

“So Jason can find relief?” the EMH asked back. “You want to use my programming as an improvised copulation device?”

"Well, that's one way of putting it..."

"Damn it captain, I'm a doctor, not a sex toy!"

"First, you're just a hologram, a piece of code in the computer, so don't get too big for your britches." Alenis' voice betrayed a certain amount of irritation; she didn't know why she was consulting the EMH anyways. She doesn't consult the replicator before reprogramming it with new recipes, or consult a tricorder before recalibrating it, so why should a hologram be any different? "Secondly, your role is to heal the sick, and Lieutenant Beauvoir needs healing. This isn't negotiable, we're going to be using your holo-matrix to save Jason."

The hologram snorted. "Well, be advised that I will be making a note of this in my report."

"Go right ahead, doctor," replied Alenis, wondering if while Lieutenant Hudson was playing with the doctor's holo-matrix if he could install a slightly more compliant personality. "Computer, end program."

Enter Jita Kejal

Captain's office, USS Portland

MD1, Shortly after departure from DS9

Authors: Cmdr. Alenis Meru and Ensign Jita Kejal

Know-it-all executive officer be damned, Jita Kejal almost wished she'd stayed aboard the Boone even after setting meeting her new commanding officer well into motion with a press of her office chime.

It wouldn't have spared her a trip to DS9 — more or less the welcome center of the developed Bajor-B'hava'el system — since it was the closest command and control waypoint to the finale of a chaotic mission that marked the abrupt end of Captain Delwen Giffard's 20-year Starfleet career. That she nominated the same know-it-all executive officer as her successor prior to tendering her resignation didn't bother Jita as much as it might've in the not-so-distant past. Strife had a way of heightening cognizance and character, and the young Bajoran's former caught elements of her ascending executive officer's latter personal prejudice blinded her to before. Like most sentients, she reviled being in the wrong. More than that however, she felt like a heel for rationalizing her advancement on the back of a partisanship stirred by her ego, no matter how justified it seemed then.

Jita requested a transfer in large part to take her mind off that indiscretion. If she wasn't the same recruit able to hold a solid qualitative discussion on sensor mechanics only to need an extra attempt or three at a simple alignment algorithm, she knew herself well enough to suspect that a burdened conscience could foster a much-undesired visit to those not-so-good old days, the last thing she needed to kick-off her new commission. Receiving movement orders for the Portland didn't quite satisfy in that regard, albeit not for the reason one might expect. Whereas academy culture conditioned young officers to view assignment to a Miranda class starship as anticlimactic to say the least, Jita, more familiar with enlisted circles dubbing it 'the cockroach' in reference to an enduring Earth joke its century-long streak of perseverance over conflicts and more vaunted contemporaries paralleled, opted against decrying her career as DOA over it. It had survived her after all, conditional as it she felt the circumstances.

No, her reservation lie beyond the door. . .

Alenis was feeding Ko-ko when she heard the door chime. "Come in!" she shouted as she stroked the feathers of the brightly coloured bird.

The ensign gathered her courage with a sharp inhale and did just that, stopping just past the interior threshold.

Keeping with what she'd seen of the ship thus far, the cozy room's ambience was current, if not totally belying of the class' bygone origins. Portland's older superstructure methods exuded more influence on her layout, though Jita felt the overall atmosphere similar to the Boone's in that the much older vessel forewent trying to masquerade as a cruise ship. Fine by her. She wasn't in any kind of denial dolling Portland up to ape one would help.

Its occupant, at least the larger, less flamboyant, yet still attractive one, was her specific concern.

Jita didn't need to open a single extra file in her transfer packet to know Commander Alenis Meru was a Bajoran; a good ear for names was one thing she gained from searching for extended family some years ago. That said, the neophyte ensign harbored a long-standing trepidation for the company of her own people. As evinced by whom she considered her best friend, it wasn't an absolute trait. Despite having grown up on Bajor, Petty Officer Second Class Erne Sisqua had beliefs that deemphasized Jita's displacement enough to feel comfortable around her. She couldn't say whether it'd also be the case for Captain Alenis, who was older, and if the presence of the emblematic earring was any indication, more in touch with their people. So whereas Jita might've acknowledged her curiosity about the bird with all but the 4 billion or so Bajorans on the home world, she cut to the chase this time around, hoping to make this brief.

"Captain Alenis. Crewman Apprentice Ji--"

Whoops.

She shut her eyes and took another breath.

"Ensign Jita Kejal reporting for duty as ordered," she exhaled, annoyance with herself hardening her tone. Apparently she wasn't as finished with unconsciously trying to bin her career as she'd thought.

"Welcome aboard, Ensign." Detecting the presence of a stranger, possibly a threat, Ko-ko flapped her wings and began cawing at Jita.

"Easy there, Ko-ko!" said Alenis, grabbing Ko-ko by the body and trying to calm the bird down. "Come on, Ko-ko, relax. You like sitting on my shoulder, don't you, Ko-ko?" Having gotten the bird to calm down enough to perch on her forearm, she carefully raised him up to her shoulder and with a twist of the wrist, gently encouraged Ko-ko to take up a defensive position nuzzled up against her head.

"I'm sorry, Ensign. This is Ko-ko, she's..." Alenis paused. It was a long story and definitely not one which should be shared with junior officers. "Let's just say she's Chief Morale Officer. She's usually friendly, but we just found out that Ko-ko is going to be a mother and, well, you know how pregnant animals can get a little testy around strangers." With Ko-ko finally relaxed enough to remain still on her shoulder, Alenis stepped forward and offered a handshake. "Commander Alenis Meru, USS Portland."

"With all due respect, Captain," Jita nervously laughed as she set a foot back, hands risen in indication of Ko-ko, and head incisively angled even as the rest of her reclined away, "are you sure it. . .she. . .isn't going to flip out if a stranger touches you? Because I know that's also something

animals tend to do. And I just had a bite from Tordal's Hasperat Stand, so embarrassed as I'll be to scream bloody murder in your office, it'll put you downwind of their special seasoning brine. It's good, but the aftermath is about as subtle as an EPS conduit rupture to the face."

So much for not talking about the bird.

"That... might be a good idea," replied Alenis, letting out a hint of a smile at the joke as she slowly withdrew her hand. With Ko-ko perched upon her shoulder, she quickly examined the new recruit from the ground up. Though some new recruits to her command found this moment to be incredibly nerve-wracking, Alenis had learned that one can tell a lot about a Starfleet officer by the state of their uniform -- and how they react to being stared down by their captain. With recently polished boots and not a spot of lint or errant wrinkle on her uniform; Jita was off to a good start. Her gaze paused for a moment on Jita's right ear; as she did so her eyebrows twitched involuntarily, betraying her curiosity at the lack of an earring.

"Take a seat," said Alenis, interrupting the silence. "Would you care for something to drink; tea perhaps?"

The all-too familiar hang of Alenis' gaze in the vicinity of her right ear yanked Jita's thoughts back to dreading the possibilities of this encounter, already in breach of her whim for brevity from her CO's imploration to sit and offering her a drink. Not that there was a feasible alternative to rebuffing a captain's prerogative to interview her crew.

"Peppermint tea would be great, Captain," Jita replied as she took a chair out of positional deference, also choosing to take advantage of the tea mention because of its effectiveness against her little aura issue among other things. One nugget of wisdom she was trying to take away from the Boone was that it was pointless to further discomfort oneself over something beyond their control.

"Computer, one mug of peppermint tea." Alenis found it curious that Jita ordered an earth drink rather than a Bajoran tea. And unfortunate; the collection of teas in her office didn't include peppermint, so her guest would have to make do with replicated swill.

With Ko-ko having calmed down, Alenis guided her onto one of his favorite places to perch -- on top of her monitor -- and went to retrieve the tea which had materialized in her replicator. "So, did you get a chance to visit Bajor on your layover between assignments?" she asked; the question carefully calculated to hopefully elicit a response that piqued her curiosity while looking like nothing more than simple small talk.

On top of the monitor, Ko-ko stared down the stranger, cocking her head as she tried to carefully analyze if this newcomer was a potential threat.

There it was.

Careful as Alenis might've been forging it, the probe's proximity to her double-take was as telling to the hyper-aware Jita as a novice poker player's all-in wager in a dying round. Fortunately, introspection on past instances taught her it could work both ways. Jita had a hunch on what her new CO was really after. Letting her know so, albeit tactfully, would not only put the younger woman in a position to temper any disclosure, she could also gauge Alenis, who she was a little less apprehensive about. This was her ship. She didn't have to tread as lightly as Jita thought she was trying to, advisable as discretion might be in the realm of personal matters.

"I didn't," she said simply, lips arcing into a rueful smirk after winding up as if to expound. Jita

momentarily abutted the resulting silence with a shake of her head, then bade through the release of another bracing breath, "Go ahead and ask, Captain."

"Ask what, ensign?"

"Why I'm not wearing an earring. You fixated on where it would be a few seconds ago. Now you're asking me about Bajor. My program required only basic psychology, but I'd like to think I'm smart enough to recognize it isn't a coincidence."

"I'm sorry, it's just a curious choice." For Alenis, even though she had left Bajor as a child, it was never really an option. And she joined Starfleet before there were many Bajorans, and had to deal with many objections from her superior officers who insisted on following Starfleet uniform regulations to the letter. That earring was responsible for many reprimands on her file. She never removed it, though the repeating grillings by one of her department heads encouraged her to wear her hair down and keep it a little more discreet. She took a deep breath. "All right, Ensign, why aren't you wearing an earring?"

"Well I'm not sure you could really call it a choice." Jita's phrasing may've read sharply on paper, yet she spoke with some mind for how potentially different life circumstances could affect their perspectives. "My family was on a transport that was attempting to run the DMZ when a Union patrol ship got wise and blew it out of the stars. My father was killed during the attack. . .my mother was one of the survivors a nearby Starfleet vessel managed to beam out, but she died giving birth to me. So I didn't grow up on Bajor, with my family, or any other Bajorans for that matter." A very abridged account of her life, she intended to offer only as much as Alenis asked, and to a point. Most backed off at the mention of losing of her parents however, admittedly her preferred outcome.

"I'm sorry to hear that." Having handed off the mug of tea to the Ensign, Alenis sat down at her desk, a deliberate move to lower herself down to the eye level of the Ensign, now that she had told her something very personal. Hearing Jita's story, Alenis was compelled to tell hers to even the score. "My mother and I were smuggled away on a Kobheerian freighter to escape the occupation when I was nine. But my father was left behind; we didn't know what happened to him until after the occupation ended when we found out that he had been killed not long after."

Hearing her story, Alenis felt sad for Jita. Though she was always the only Bajoran in class, at least Alenis had her mother to teach her about Bajoran culture and introduce her to the teachings of the Prophets; Jita had nothing and grew up without knowledge of her own culture. Orphaning children was just one more way that the Cardassians tried to destroy the Bajoran culture, which in Alenis' case only encouraged her to study the Bajoran culture and religion as a small act of defiance against the occupation.

"I only visited Bajor for the first time in almost thirty years last week. It's really a beautiful planet, a far cry from the occupation," she added, in an effort to segue the conversation into something a little more pleasant.

Nodding in the midst of a sip of her newly tendered tea, Jita once able conceded, "I'll give it that. I visited a while back when I was looking into finding extended family." She offered a small smile. "If there's a bad view, I didn't find it."

The faintly similar, yet poignant state of their early lives opened her up just enough to take an interest in the other woman. Quiet for a moment, Jita retook to her passable beverage, pondering on whether to ask a question apt to be redirected to her because frankly, she wasn't eager to reciprocate. Then again, there didn't seem to be any dodging it. Could she get away with opining

favorably of Bajor without explaining why it'd been years since she'd last gone herself?

"Why so long before going back, Captain? If I may ask."

Guess she was about to find out.

Alenis stared into her tea for a moment before answering. "Starfleet has been keeping me pretty busy, but truth be told, I had a lot of bad memories from the occupation that I wanted to leave behind. The only thing I cared about that was left behind was my father, and the Cardassians got him." Taking a deep breath, Alenis continued. "Even after the occupation had ended and the Dominion War was over, I kept making excuses not to return. Maybe I was afraid to go home. But now..." she trailed off. "There's something special about home, especially when you're a Bajoran. You can't run away from it forever." Realizing that her comments could be interpreted as preachy, Alenis changed the subject. "Just think, this lost tribe on Gamia III has reached out to Bajor after hundreds of years on their own."

It was a decent save.

Jita's frustration was more for her general situation than Alenis. Once apparent that she wanted some one-on-one time, Jita resigned to ensuring her captain-cum-fellow Bajoran wouldn't hound her over her lack of spirituality. Twice nudging the conversation off its previously desecrating course despite the lucidity of her views all but vanquished the concern of judgment by Alenis, which went a long way toward selling her on digging her heels in here. In fact Jita suspected her someone she could talk to more at length, though today wasn't going to be the day she tested that theory.

"But it's not as if their culture or beliefs are light years apart. Or at least I don't think they are," Jita countered. Gamia III's outreach was a hot topic on DS9 given their ancestral roots, so her efforts to minimize her presence on the station didn't keep its developments from her ears. "Their founders came from Bajor, so even though there's bound to be some divergence from facing different challenges, odds are that there's still a lot of common fundamental ground."

"True," replied Alenis. "I'm sure everything will go smoothly; with any luck these negotiations will be simply a formality and Gamia III will be reunited with Bajor." Alenis' eyes wandered up to Ko-ko, who was filling the room with relaxing coos, before they fell back onto Jita. "Now, about your assignment, you'll be reporting to Lieutenant R'vahis in Operations. Did you have any questions about the Portland or about your assignment?"

These negotiations? Jita's brow furrowed.

"Did I hear you right, Captain? Have we been assigned the Gamia III envoy?"

"Yes, our role is to escort the delegation from Bajor, and represent the interests of the Federation at this conference. Minister Tora is getting comfortable in her quarters as we speak." Alenis' eyes narrowed. "That's not an issue, is it?"

Jita was certain that the non-corporeal wormhole residents who'd assumed the mantle of her people's Prophets were presently holding court just to laugh at the swell of her dismay. She'd hoped DS9 would be the last aggregation of her people she'd have to cope with for a while, that her next post would put take her out of this region. Instead it looked as if a second helping was en-route, which she wanted about as badly as Romulus' remnants wanted to join the Federation.

"No. . .no, Captain," Jita laughed for the sake of keeping her inward wince such. "It just seems fate

shares your opinion that I should do some catching up on this side of space." More revealing than she liked, the remark was also the least disingenuous thing she could readily conjure.

"Very well then. I'll send you some reading material. Unless there's anything else, you're dismissed."

Arrival

Main Bridge, USS Portland

MD4, late afternoon

Authors: Cmdr. Alenis Meru, Lt. Cmdr. Timothy Rouse, Lt. Tyrlai Zade

"It's funny," said Alenis to her Executive Officer. For all the glory of being a starship captain, most of the bridge time was spent simply sitting there while nothing happened. It was not uncommon for senior officers to pass the time with a little idle chatter; not only did it help pass the time, but it also helped humanize them and make the crew feel more comfortable together. "I had only lost track of Ko-ko in the arboretum for a half hour, and now she's going to lay an egg. No wonder she has been acting so funny lately." The bird simply stared at Tim. For some reason, she never got along with the XO, and being pregnant made her more cautious of the potential thread that the man was.

"Love is in the air," replied Tim with a smirk.

"Ugh, don't remind me." Alenis was still dreading Admiral Washington's reaction when he would find out that his daughter was pregnant with Timothy's child.

"We are approaching the Gamia system." The conversation between Alenis and Tim interrupted by Ensign Katherine Stelhumper – or Ensign Kat Steel, as she preferred to be called, for obvious reasons – at the flight control station. "Dropping out of warp... now."

"Excellent. Mr. R'vahis, anything on the sensors?"

"Nothing of note. Just a few orbiting satellites around Gamia III."

"All right, bring is into a standard orbit." Alenis turned to Tim. "Hold Ko-ko for a moment, I have to make a call."

Tim shook his head as he held out his arm. "Do you have to bring her to the bridge all the time?"

"Doctor's orders," replied Alenis in a dismissive tone as she held Ko-ko out to transfer him to her XO.

"Mr. R'vahis, hail the planet."

Within a few seconds, the image of a lush planet covered in seas and jungles on the Portland's viewscreen changed to the face of First Minister Anjohl Kabia at her desk, surrounded by ornate carvings and sculptures. "Madame First Minister, we have arrived."

"Welcome to the Gamia system, Commander Alenis," replied the First Minister. "We have been expecting you. We've taken the liberty of preparing a small reception in honour of the arrival of your delegation, scheduled for 1900 hours. Negotiations officially commence tomorrow morning. I shall have my aides relay you the coordinates and make preparations for your arrival, and... is that a bird on the bridge?!" she asked, incredulously, with disgust on her face.

"Oh yes," replied Alenis, trying to brush off Ko-ko's presence. "She's my Executive Officer's pet bird."

She's actually quite friendly." Alenis looked over at Tim, offering him an apologetic smile as her eyes met his glare. "But thank you, Minister Anjohl. Are there any security or cultural precautions that we should take?"

"Of course not, Commander. You are guests on our planet; we are more than capable of taking care of the security needs for this conference." Kabia stroked her chin. "Though I suppose I should inform you we are a very spiritual people, and we follow the teachings of the ancient texts – teachings that have been all but forgotten on Bajor. To avoid inadvertently causing offense – especially in front of Kai Sellra – you would be wise to keep that in mind." She paused to offer her guests a smile before continuing. "Of course, I don't anticipate any problems. Diplomats tend to be nothing if not bland and inoffensive," she joked.

Alenis let out a nervous laugh at the First Minister's joke and turned towards Tim. The Federation was going to be represented by a young diplomatic officer who was anything but bland and inoffensive. They were definitely going to have to do some more explaining in Admiral Washington's office after this one. Tim could do nothing but shake his head and with his right hand, try to stop Ko-ko from pecking at his head.

"I'm sure you won't be disappointed in our blandness," replied Alenis. "I look forward to meeting you in person."

"And I you. Gamia out."

With that conversation over, Alenis let out a deep breath and turned to Tim, who was struggling with Ko-ko. "So, how many diplomatic incidents do you think I'll cause tonight?"

"That depends, are you planning to bring this stupid bird of yours?" he asked, gritting his teeth at Ko-ko's antics.

"Good point. I think she'll need a babysitter." A grin appeared on her face. "She really likes you."

"Oh no," started Tim, shaking his head.

"Captain's orders."

Tyrlai stepped through the turbolift and looked over at the stricken XO staring at the bird. "You have made a fine choice, Captain, I'm sure this will teach him to keep out of trouble." She crossed over to where the two were standing and one other was perched. "So, and I fully warn you this may seem an odd question, but, what exactly are we negotiating here?"

Alenis cringed. Obviously the stuffy diplomats were interacting with Tyrlai about as well as predicted. "The ultimate goal of these negotiations is to negotiate terms under which Gamia III can re-unite politically with Bajor, and thus join the Federation. Given the vast cultural and political differences between Gamia III and Bajor, this may be a difficult task, however the Federation will also be well-suited to provide aid and assistance to Gamia III and to help smooth things over."

USS Portland – Deck 9 – Engineering Lab MD2

Authors: Lt. (JG) Brad Silverton, Lt. Parker Hudson

Drinking from his silver mug of hot coffee, Parker walked around the Engineering Laboratory. He had

received a request from the Doctor to help with a sensitive subject. He wasn't so sure what the Doctor would want from him, or how the Chief would be able to assist him. Just what it was he had no clue. Parker had the Doctor come to Deck 9, rather than main Engineering. Deck 9 laboratory was moreover treated as his office.

Taking a look at a PADD and reviewing some of the Engineering crew's recent work, Parker's train of thought was interrupted by the ship's computer.

Just then a screen at the nearest terminal flashed a live view of inside Parker's quarters, where his Golden Retriever "Neutron" was pacing back and forth, its large tall golden fluffed tail wagging.

"Canine Supplement 10 has been depleted." The computer voice proclaimed to Parker, the owner. "Request permission for treats."

"Computer scan room for..." He frowned "Any chewed socks."

"Scan complete. One set of socks has been 87% destroyed."

Parker shook his head. "Dang it Neutron." He took another drink of coffee and set down his PADD. "Approved for half a treat."

"Confirmed" The computer replied. The live screen view of Neutron then went off the computer work station. Parker then turning his attention back to the bank of computer terminals. All he was told by Dr. Silverton was to go somewhere's they could be to work on a possible EMH systems.

The engineering doors opened and Brad Silverton walked in. He already had his fingers rubbing the bridge of his nose which wasn't a good sign. He looked up and around and headed over to Hudson.

"Hello sir. The captain has asked us to work together on a way to help Lt Beauvoir and his medical condition. It's a private personal matter with the Lt so the less people that know about this the better."

Parker blinked. "A personal matter, of course." His mind had flashes of who Lt. Beauvoir was and he remembered the name. "I trust the Lieutenant is fine." Parker set down his PADD and walked across to the center table in the engineering room, where they could work over situation holographic EMH readouts.

Brad heads over to sit next to Parker. "Jason is going through pon farr. It's a 7 year cycle where a Vulcan has to mate. It's a very intense chemical and biological drive that he is unable to control. In fact if he doesn't mate it could very well kill him. The captain wants us to find a way to... fake it with the EMH."

"Can I get you a drink?" Parker had asked.

"No I'm quite alright thank you. I'd rather focus on... ok yeah on second thought considering what we are doing I could use some coffee."

Parker at the small room replicator reached for the mug of hot coffee and made his way back to the center table console of the room to the Doctor. The engineering situation was interesting to say the least. "I am assuming that Jason is not to suspect a fake." Parker looked at his own silver mug of coffee and let its aroma fill in his nostril.

"Starfleet holo-technology has had many advancements in recent years. Holo regeneration multi-structural growth at cellular latitudes levels thus allowing convergence of human physical properties to connect, creating cross node human paths."

"You're right. For his sake he can't suspect anything during the act itself. He he does... well he could die. We can make it a hologram physically capable but he is part vulcan. They have some mental psychic abilities which also have to be tricked. I can cover all the biological aspects but not that and I'm hoping you have a way around that."

Parker paused and then nodded taking in what Brad had said. "Thus this is how we are able to transfer the Commander's persona into an EMH silhouette." He then shook his head looking at the Doctor and taking a drink. "This will take /alot/ of work..... I mean /alot/."

"Well I heard the captain and an away team will be heading down for some official dignitary function. Can't say I will miss that. But you are right, this will take a lot of work and we gotta get it right the first time. It seems like the holo technology is there to plant a humanoid psyche, how do we go about recording it? A person's personality isn't a computer file to copy. How are we going to do that?"

Parker watched as the Doctor explained the dilemma, his concern for Lt. Beauvoir was there as well as pride of his work on the line. Parker could agree. He punched up a few commands into the computer bringing up a physical hollow silhouette.

"We have the capability" he narrowed his eyes "to isolate the Commander's personal electro magnetic frequency. Each and every one of us has one. The magnetic frequency changes with each person marginally. The magnetic energy is emitted by an anatomic level, it is here we can form the physical make up of the Commander's very persona. Her thoughts, her memories, even her hidden secrets are all created and stored by anatomic structuring. This is all that is open to Lt. Beauvoir when he initiates a Pon Far act with her. It would be the real deal."

Brad leaned in closer to the viewscreen obviously fascinated. "I had not idea technology had gone this far. Incredible. Who is the leading researcher into this I'd like to read more up on it?"

"None other than the Daystrom Institute." Parker nodded at Silvertons fascination.

Brad returned to the task at hand. "As for the Captain we'll have to see when a good time will be for her to return to the ship for a scan. I presume this sort of thing isn't a quick once over with the tricorder?"

"The scan itself will take little less than 4 minutes. I will interlink the holo-relays into the ships main computer core. This will achieve base power for the computational powers required for such a task. As soon as possible once the Commander get's back the better yes."

"Are there any potential lingering affects that I need to watch out for with this scan?"

"No, there should be negligible effects. Most of the process is piggybacked off the transporter systems." Parker nodded. "It looks like we have work to do then."

Elevator pitch

Bridge, USS Portland

MD1, shortly after "Enter Jita Kejal"

Authors: Lt. Cmdr. Timothy Rouse and Ensign Jita Kejal

The parted turbo lift doors might as well have been the gates to the afterlife for the entering Ensign Jita Kejal she was so down. Learning of Portland's current mission to Gamia III sunk an encouraging meeting with Captain Alenis so badly, she would've instructed the car to whisk her to the first deck with escape pod access if she didn't feel so vested in making Ensign. This was the last region of space she wanted to be assigned to, and given that the Federation's extension of protectorate status to Bajor twenty years ago set the foundation for it becoming the most stable, she reckoned her odds of missing it quite good.

Then again, mathematics wasn't one of Jita's natural talents. And for the moment, neither was heeding her surroundings. She didn't intend to put the remainder of her accommodation period between now and the rest of her welcome aboard gauntlet, but she was going to burn some of it to pull out of her angst.

"Deck 3," she recited barely halfway in, reclining against the nearest bulkhead.

Just before the door closed Tim managed to get in the lift as well. He was on his way to his office for some long awaited paperwork. A part of his job he didn't like, but you couldn't let it be forever.

"Deck 2" He ordered to the computer before he looked at the ensign who was already occupying the lift. She looked like she wasn't having the best of mornings. "Rough morning?"

"Cliché, but accurate," Jita groaned. She'd shut her eyes upon assuming her current posture, and putting her hands over her face put another obstruction before the newcomer. Not that seeing him would make him familiar or that she even wanted him to be.

"Anything I can do to help improve it?" Tim asked, trying to be helpful.

Jita's hands fell from her opened eyes, and she shifted herself enough to see just who this was to ask such a thing. His moderate pip count and the flanking red collar made up for his expectedly unfamiliar face in that she induced having taken on the ship's executive officer as a co-passenger. Other junior officers might've sprung into some semblance of attention at the revelation, fearful of casting a poor impression. Conversely, Jita wasn't one to alter her decorum on account of rank looming. If he wanted to judge her based on her impression with his status, it'd only delay his inevitable disapproval of her. She did however straighten some in acknowledgement of his effort to socialize.

"Short of granting me leave immediately, indefinitely, and throwing in a shuttle for personal use. .no sir," Jita quipped, shaking her head and smiling tersely.

Tim chuckled. Sir? Guess she noticed who he was. "I don't think that is necessary. Have you been on board very long? I don't recall seeing you before."

"No, so I'd be a little creeped-out if you had." Her earlier smile persisted to blunt any prospect of offense her playful tone might've missed. "Jita Kejal. I transferred aboard through DS9."

Tim offered his hand. "Timothy Rouse, Executive Officer."

Jita returned the gesture just as the doors slid open.

"I think this is your stop, sir."

"Indeed it is." Tim said. "If there is ever anything, know that my office is open."

In the silence following her nod, Jita advanced in the XO's wake, ultimately stopping to poke her head out the doorsill.

"Well that leave request is something," she insisted, impish smile cuing her knowing full well it wasn't going to happen. Nonetheless she chose to needle him about it a little in an effort to divert herself some relief. As if struck by a realization as to the impending detail behind the one-sidedness of their negotiations, Jita snapped her fingers and threw a confident pointer his way. "Six months instead of indefinite?"

Tim lost the smile on his face and adopted a more serious look. "I know starting on a starship can be overwhelming at first. If you have real problems adapting to life on a starship, you should take to our counselor. I'm sure he will be able to help you."

Jita's blink betrayed the unexpectedness of his reply.

"I'm kidding, sir," she uttered in nuanced laughter. "Leave humor. Don't tell me you've never served with anyone who went on about needing a vacation so much, you wondered why they didn't just resign and plunk whatever pension rights they accrued into that beachside house on Risa they also never shut up about. Not that I'm going to be that person. I've only just started it, still, Risa doesn't quite make my list of post-career retreats."

"It sounds familiar, yes," Tim chuckled.

"Just making sure. You gave me that 'she's going to be a problem child' look earlier than I'm used to. I'm grad-aged, but I've actually been in Starfleet in some shape or form for the last 7 years. This is just my first posting as an officer."

Thinking her antics had exceeded their usefulness, Jita retreated back into the turbolift and rectitude.

"See you on the bridge, sir," she bade with a simple wave.

"I'm sure we will." Tim said. "Good luck, Ensign."

Sickbay

Brad Silvertan and Tyrlai Zade

Tyrlai strode in fresh from her encounter with the very frightening clever children and hopped on one of the bio beds and started peeling her bandages off. They had started without her over the last two hours and were beginning to get a bit annoying half peeling half the time. Undoing the coset like covering shed been wearing she pulled at the bits and strips underneath. She looked over to where the good Doctor was sitting, probably busy with something or such. "Hey, I need to get a once over, it still hurts and its swimsuit season in,..." she paused thinking, "a buncha places and I don't want any scars."

Brad was engrossed with reviewing the sickbay's inventory on a display for what had to have been a dozen times now. He had been told everything was delivered and setup but he wasn't going to be taking any chances. That and it kept him busy from having to think about finding Vulcan... adult entertainment that the Captain tasked him to find. He casually looked up at Tyrlai.

"Whoa Lieutenant Zade! Slow down you are going to make it worse." He quickly came over to her in

an attempt to prevent things from getting worse. "Here let me look at that."

Tyrlai smiled one of her friendly and slightly bewitching smiles she often used to get people to do things for her. "It's not just swimsuit season that is important here. I have a lizard to fight, at least I'm pretty sure I do." She thought about the issue for a moment. "Oh yes, and diplomacy. Almost forgot that part. So how are things with you, any lizards to fight here?"

Brad looked up from the bandages and smirked slightly. "No no lizards or Gorn thankfully I've had enough of them for awhile." He returns to attending to her abdomen wound but continues talking, "I appreciate the honesty Lieutenant about not wanting scars. You'd be surprised how many people come to see me and not wanting me to talk about clearing up some possible scars as if its not becoming for a Federation officer. We have the technology why not put it to some use... hmmm. Well the good news is I don't think this will leave any permanent scars. That armor you had on prevented it from going too deep. The bad news is your fussing with the bandages just now did make it worse. This'll take a good hour or so I'm afraid with the dermal regenerator."

"Well I suppose it could be worse." Tyrlai looked over at the contraption she had been wearing. "I had to meet stuffy diplomats in that, they were not impressed. Which I guess is good so hey, hidden upside."

She almost missed the quizzical look on the Doctor's face, she was getting too used to that from people. "Oh, first impression can be clingy things. Now the lead diplomat has dismissed me and generally written me off. Thus leaving me free to act. By the time she realizes I'm up to something it might well be too late to stop me." She smiled and leaned back on the medical bay, having adjusted it to a lounging position. She motioned to her attire. "Sports bras do not impress ambassadors at formal introductions. There look at all the diplomacy you are learning."

"That's a good point on first impressions." Brad heads to a cabinet and brings back a dermal regenerator that he begins setting it in place above Tyrlai's abdomen and also brings a hypo holding it up. "This'll be for any discomfort you still might be having." He flips a switch and the regenerator begins sweeping back and forth. "This will prevent any complications of bad first impressions. We don't want it to impact your diplomatic efforts. Normally this wouldn't take long but due to its proximity to Zade anything too strong would agitate it, er him, er you, ok well what's the proper terminology here?"

"It was most recently a him before me so I often call it a him but that's not really accurate. Zade is acceptable, that name is uniquely the symbionts. But at the same time I'm often called Zade 'The symbiont' is probably also the proper term but seems somewhat informal. An old crewmate of mine used the term, 'duplicious Yankee slug' quite often but he was from Texas and therefore not a trustworthy source of information. I think the symbiont is the best in these situations, and bear in mind he's listening to everything we say. Sneaky little cave dweller." Tyrlai said every bit of it with a dour and serious look of someone who was long practiced in evading the topic of discussion.

"So what about you, have a girlfriend on whatever planet you came from?"

Having set the dermal regenerator on auto, Brad leaned against the side of the biobed. "No. No girlfriend back home. I was serious about a girl once. Contemplated proposing level of serious. Years ago though and I got over her long ago. Early life of Starfleet is rough with all the transfers and stations. Its probably for the best though as it drove my parents nuts and I think a part of me was with her to spite them. How about you? Does swimsuit diplomacy create any complications for someone in your life?"

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"Generally," Tyrlai paused, appeared to consider the question at least momentarily, "generally I am the one who created the complications in other peoples lives. I'm not girlfriend material, not for partners who like their lives to go smoothly, and their belongings in one piece or anything. I have a degree in psychology and would be more than willing to help them put the pieces together but that requires still being on speaking terms." She didn't want to seem too foreboding and quickly added. "I'm a lot of fun in measured doses."

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Brad lightly chuckled at the joke, "Thankfully for Barjorran-Federation relations they only had a measured dose." Brad checks the regenerator's settings then sits back down beside Tyrlai. "Its probably best you don't get to the psycho-analyzing to help a guy put the pieces back. I've never known that to end very well."

"You've seen someone try before though? Cause I was joking about that part." She smirked and stretched a little on the biobed, she was unused to being in a single position very long. Tending to wander out of rooms long before any muscle stiffness had managed itself. "As for Bajoran relations I got a nice letter from the Prime Minister thanking me for my contributions and requesting I visit again sometime in the future. 'Long future' was the actual term but it was signed and had the official seal and everything. I gave it to Thosk, he collects important signatures for some reason."

She looked down at where the dermal regenerator was slowly erasing the burns from her abdomen. "Oooh that is nice. I hear this is a tropical planet, there could be beaches."

Brad was partially lost in thought and starring off for a second. "Yeah I've seen a few try. Not sure what it is about women wanting to go off and 'fix' a guy. Must be why the bad boys always get the girl." He returned his gaze to Tyrlai. "As for beaches. I'd imagine there might be a few but the Captain is headed down to the capital which is far inland in the far north. Perhaps ski diplomacy in this case would be in order?" Brad said with a smirk.

"There is a lot of skiing on Trill. I prefer beaches." Tyrlai watched as the good doctor began finishing up. "Will you be coming down with us mister Silverton?"

"It certainly sounds inviting but I'm afraid this time at least I'll have to pass. Lt Beauvoir is needing my help with a medical condition. Another time perhaps?"

"Something tells me you'll get there soon enough." Tyrlai said, unable to lift her growing suspicions of the Bajorn splinter colony.

Sex, drugs, and cortical stimulators

Counselor's Office, USS Portland

MD4, morning

Authors: Lt. (JG) Brad Silverton, Lt. (JG) Arvel Darze (played by Cmdr. Alenis Meru)

Brad arrived at Arvel's office they had a number of topics to talk about. One requested by the captain and one less formal and possibly difficult that he had to confront Arvel about professionally. Brad wasn't sure how he was going to segway that topic but he had to know what kind of counselor Arvel was. He was still thinking on that when he announced himself to the intercom and hadn't yet entered.

"Hello Counselor, it's Lieutenant Silverton. Do you have a few minutes to talk?"

"Yes, come in," replied Arvel, looking up from a PADD containing the psychological profile of one of his patients. An Ensign Nikki Barclay, who had some terrible anxiety problems and hypochondria. He had had one appointment with her so far, in which she spent most of the time gushing over the heroics of her Uncle Reg, who was her inspiration for joining Starfleet. "So, Lieutenant, to what do I owe the pleasure?" asked Arvel, suspecting that whatever it was, it was something that had to do with Alenis.

"Well my visit has something to do with the Captain. You might have heard about the problems Lt Beauvoir had on the planet. He's going through a bit of a difficult time for Vulcans and will need our medical knowledge to pull through it."

"I've heard," replied Arvel. "I'm surprised that he's having this much trouble with it; you would think that being only a quarter Vulcan, pon farr would be less intense."

The friendly tone disappeared on Brad's face and although he tried to look neutral and professional, it was obvious he was not. "Different people react to stress in different ways and need different remedies to cope. Speaking of which, I am usually more tactful but in this case I will be blunt... did you prescribe the captain those tranquilizers she was taking? Do you know they are powerful enough to knock out a Gorn having a bad hair day?"

"Of course not, doctor," replied Arvel, slightly offended at the accusation. "She came to me for a refill. I wouldn't give it to her; I gave her Ko-ko instead."

Brad nodded slightly. "Well that makes sense it appeared she had been taking them for a lot longer than her tour on this ship. Look I'm sorry for the accusation. Someone prescribed them and you would have been the only other person on the ship able to do it at the time. They can have dangerous long term side effects. Whoever did should be removed from Starfleet Medical... if it was someone from Starfleet that is."

"She must have been prescribed them while on the ShiKahr; she wasn't taking them when she left the Britannia." Arvel took a deep breath before continuing. "Look, Alenis is a very special person. She's gentle, caring, and devoted to her duties. She's a good officer and a good person. And she tries to make it look like everything is all right. But underneath all that, there is a lot of pain. When I first met her, she had just been one of only a handful of survivors from the USS Gol at New Algiers. And I'm sure there's more pain from the occupation that she hasn't told me about."

"When you first met her? You two served before together?"

"Yes, on the USS Britannia. It was her first assignment after the Gol. She was one of my patients. We had... become close." Arvel could see judgement in Brad's eyes. "But that is a matter for doctor-patient confidentiality," he quickly added.

Brad thought to himself for a bit too long and realized it was probably coming off wrong. "Sounds like you two met before she was Captain. I mean its not like you're an ensign or petty officer and she is a senior officer. That would cause all sorts of problems. It does make a few things she mentioned to me make a bit more sense." Brad's demeanor became softer and he cracked a smile. "I can only imagine how difficult it must be for the Captain in trying to portray an image of leadership. At any rate it has no real bearing on the business at hand."

"I trust that by now you have heard that Lt Beauvoir is going through pon farr? The Captain has a rather odd request for us."

"I've heard." Arvel shook his head. "I'll be honest, I'm not really comfortable with this. It just doesn't feel right. But... if Meru consented to this... 'procedure'..." he trailed off. There was just something that didn't sit well with him about Alenis using her body as a template for bawdy holodeck programs. But, he knew she cared about her crew and couldn't bear to lose another.

"See here I was hoping you'd have some psychological bit of wisdom to explain how this isn't as bad as it seems. To be honest, I'm not comfortable with this either. I was hoping for just a random holodeck encounter but I hadn't realized the psychic side of pon farr. Thats going to be the tricky part is getting the Captain's personality and mental patterns copied enough to fool a psychic. Even he Jason is only a small part Vulcan. Has there been anything even remotely close to this that you have encountered from the counselor side of this?"

"This is all new to me," replied Arvel. "Pon farr isn't studied much, not even the Vulcans are willing to talk freely about it. But I do remember an account from Voyager where their EMH used cortical stimulators to transfer the brain patterns of a Viidian female into a hologram."

Brad looked a bit more upbeat, "So this isn't completely far fetched and unprecedented as it first appeared? Good. The biology behind this isn't complex. That will be easy enough. No danger to the Captain and if everything goes according to plan Jason is fine too. There is however the psychological aspects of the after affects of this that are beyond my training. Isn't it going to be awkward for both of them? I mean I know how I'd feel if I were in the Captain's position."

This was a question that had been running through Arvel's head for some time. "If you take care of Jason's biological needs, I'll take care of Meru."

Holo-shopping

Judith's Quarters, USS Portland

MD3, 1900 hrs

Authors: Cmdr. Alenis Meru, Capt. Judith Rouse (played by Timothy Rouse), Coln Jena (played by Jason Beauvoir)

With only a day before arrival at Gamia III, Alenis had one task on her list that she was looking forward to: taking a certain Acting Crewman shopping for formal wear. Standing outside Judith's quarters, she rang the chime.

At the sound of the chime, Jena came running. She was very excited. She hadn't been clothes shopping since before her mother's death. The thought of her mother made her sad, but she wiped away the tears and opened door. Seeing Alenis she smiled. "Hi Captain, how are you? Are you ready to help find me some fancy threads?"

"That's the plan, at least," replied Alenis, making note of the redness around Jena's eyes. The poor girl had been through a lot in the past few weeks, between the death of her mother, nearly dieing of radiation poisoning, and now her father being locked up in the brig. "I've booked some time in holodeck two; you ready to try on some new clothes?"

"Jena are you ready jet?" Judith asked as she entered the living area of her quearters. "Ah, Captain, you're here already." Judith looked at Jena. Looking after Jena had taught herself something new. In contrast to what she always thought, she did have a maternal bone in her body.

"Ah, Ms. Rouse, are you coming with us?" asked Alenis. She hadn't planned on inviting Judith, not that she had any objections to her presence.

"Of course I am. Do you have any idea how long its been since I went shopping? Shopping and Marines don't really go together," she answered.

"Well, the more the merrier, as you humans say. Lets go."

Alenis led the party through the corridors of the Portland, walking a little slower than her usual brisk pace so Judith would have no trouble keeping up. "So, these Gamians are a very conservative society, so we'll need something elegant but not to showy. Of course, we can also pick up some other things for ourselves," she said as they made their way to the turbolifts. Truth be told, she wouldn't mind shopping for a new evening gown, preferably something black to match her hair and dark eyes.

As they headed to the holodeck, Jena wondered which colours the Gamians allowed. She doubted that aqua was among them, more's the pity.

Five minutes later

Holodeck Two, USS Portland

"Hello, Mademoiselles, what can I do for you?" asked the holographic attendant in a francophone accent as Alenis, Judith, and Jena strolled into a holographic recreation of a clothing store. Behind them, traffic buzzed along the wide tree-lined Champs-Élysées, or at least as close as you can get to the real thing on a tiny starship light-years away.

"We have a reception tomorrow, and Jena here doesn't have any appropriate formal wear," replied Alenis.

"Ah, say no more, say no more. You have come to the right place. Is madame Jena your daughter?"

"Non, Monsieur." Jena said.

Judith chuckled at the question, but even more on the short answer of Jena. She was apparently acute lost for words. "What can you recommend?" she asked the hologram.

"Well, if this is a formal occasion, we do have a nice turquoise number over here that would be perfect," replied the holographic salesman, pointing to a sequined turquoise gown.

"No, that is too flashy." Alenis wanted to make sure everything at this diplomatic reception went smoothly. Not just for the sake of the mission, but also for the sake of her own career. After how badly the last diplomatic event went, she needed to do something to make up points with Admiral Washington, and wasn't about to risk it for the sake of a flashy dress. "Do you have anything in mauve?"

"Mauve is so not in style this season, but we may have something for you on one of these racks," said the salesman as he quickly flipped through the hanging clothes. "Ah, how about this, madame Jena?" he asked, pulling out a dull, frumpy mauve dress.

"Oh, that is lovely. You really need to try that one one!" Judith said.

"I like the colour, the cut is interesting and I think I'll try it on." Jena said diplomatically.

"Great!" replied Alenis, scanning the dresses on display as Jena walked over to the change rooms. "Judith, what do you think of that little black number over there? I could use a new formal gown."

"Well, try it on. That the only way to know if it will fit" Judith said as she walked to the other side of the room. "Do you have something in Dark Green."

"Yes, we do," replied the salesman. "Come with me."

10 minutes later

"Well, what do you think?" asked Alenis, stepping out of the dressing room in an elegant black gown, trying to get the attention of Judith, who was the first to leave the dressing room.

"It looks nice" Judith said after watching the new bright blue dress she was wearing in a mirror. "And this one?"

"Looks great," replied Alenis. "It matches your eyes, and I like the neckline." She glanced over at the dressing room and lowered her voice. "How is Jena doing?"

She looked at the dressing room behind her. "Are you ok, Jena? Do you need a hand?"

"I'm okay, the fastenings are just a little unfamiliar so it's taking a little longer than I'd have liked." Jena explained from behind the curtain.

Alenis silently took Judith by the arm and guided her to the other side of the shop. "I meant, how is she handling the situation with her father?" she whispered.

Judith looked behind her before answering. "Difficult to read. When she is alone she is very quiet, maybe even too quiet. But when I enter the room she becomes a whole other person, or so it seems."

Active, happy.”

“Do you think she’s trying to conceal her feelings?” asked Alenis. She spent a lot of time growing up hiding in her room. “Does her activity around others seem like it might be an act?”

“I’m not a counselor, but I think she tries to hide her true feelings, yes” Judith replied

“HmMMMMM,” Alenis thought for a moment. “She’s been through a lot. Do you think she might benefit from seeing Dr. Darze?”

“Who’s Dr Darze?” Jena asked coming out of the dressing room, having finally worked out how to fasten the dress.

Alenis took a breath. She didn’t count on the one eighth Vulcan part of Jena to be her hearing. But, with her clearly having heard part of their conversation, there was no point in denying what they said. “Jena, we’ve been worried about how you’ve been coping with the events of the past couple weeks. I can’t imagine how stressful it has been for you, and if you need help with anything, we can book you an appointment with the ship’s counselor.”

“Sure, I like meeting new people.” Jena said in a happy mood. She was worried about Jason, but it had been made clear to her that there was nothing she could do right now, so she’d decided to put on a happy face, at least in public

“Great. We can book you an appointment with him. He’s really good,” replied Alenis, gushing at the skills of her favourite counselor. “What do you think of the dress?”

“It is functional, ma’am.” Jena said in her best Vulcan impression.

“It looks good on you,” replied Alenis. “Lets get it!”

Going down, part I

MD4, 1700 hours

Shuttlebay, USS Portland

Authors: Cmdr. Alenis Meru, Capt. Judith Rouse (played by Timothy Rouse), Coln Jena (played by Jason Beauvoir), Lt. Tyrlai Zade

In a freshly replicated full dress uniform, Alenis stood at attention, waiting for the remainder of the away team to arrive. Jumpseats had been installed in the aft cargo bay in lieu of the space for ground vehicles, thus expanding the passenger capacity of the transport enough to fit the whole delegation. Alenis was both excited and nervous. Being assigned this mission was a great honour, and it showed that despite his curmudgeonly attitude, Admiral Washington trusted her enough to give her such an important mission. That said, diplomacy wasn't her forte. She barely survived the banquet on Bajor, and that was supposed to be in honour of one of her senior officers. She was afraid of screwing things up somehow.

"Jia'kaja, tre'nu'tol'a rem... La'por i'lanu kos... I'nar tan'a'tali nor..." To calm her nerves, she mumbled some Bajoran prayers over and over. Though she wasn't able to attend religious services being separated from home, Alenis engaged in self-study of the teachings of the prophets through her teens and twenties. The wisdom of old Bajoran texts had helped guide her this far in life, and surely that knowledge would come in handy when it came to making a good impression with the locals. She chuckled to herself a bit. A matriarchal society where Bajoran women are in charge? Sounded like her kind of place.

"Jia'kaja, tre'nu'tol'a rem... La'por i'lanu kos... l'nar tan'a'tali nor..." as she repeated the prayers, Alenis heard the door open.

The first to arrive after the Captain was Judith. Wearing her normal green duty uniform, she looked very different from the woman in red. "Captain, I think there must be a mistake. I got the message that I am scheduled to fly you and the diplomats to the surface?"

"No mistake, Major. I've been reading your personnel file and you're probably the most qualified pilot we have on board. I specifically requested you." Alenis conveniently forgot to mention that PO Solak was laid up with the Tarkalean flu, and Ensign Mallory's performance so far had been highly suspect.

Judith didn't know what to think of it. Was she asked to fly the shuttle as a favor? She looked around. The Argo was certainly very different than what she used to fly, and couldn't anymore after the accident. "Uhm, ok. I do have to say that even though I am still qualified, it's been a while since I flew. Are you really sure you want me as the pilot? I'm sure the Portland has more than enough qualified shuttle pilots."

"I'm sure. Now, don't you have some checklists to do before we take off?"

"Yes, ma'am" she said as she took her seat. After taking a big breath she started the preparations.

Jena moved as fast as she could in the formal clothing she was to wear to the welcoming ceremony. Over her shoulder was a bag containing, among other things, a more comfortable change of clothes.

"Good morning, Captain, may the Prophets smile on you," she said to Alenis.

"And you too, Acting Crewman Coln Jena."

Jena gave Alenis a salute and a smile by way of reply.

Novia strode through the door with a carryall slung over her shoulder that looked to rival her in weight. It made her lean to the side a bit to balance the load as she shuffled her way over to the captain, re-shouldering it with no small amount of effort as she arrived. "Novia Yenn, reporting for alien monkey identification and cataloging, Captain miss." She punctuated the last part with a Trill salute of some form or fashion.

Alenis returned the salute as best she could, imitating the small child. "My, that's a lot of equipment you have there, Ms. Yenn. What do you plan to do with all that?"

"I've got PADDs and a tricorder and a holocamera for cataloguing the alien monkeys. And I also brought some bino-... binoc-... zoom goggles, so I can see them from far away without waking them up. Some monkeys get very angry when you wake them up." She struggled to re-shoulder her bag. "And I brought cupcakes, so I can make friends with the kids on the planet."

"Wow, a scientist AND a diplomat?" asked Alenis in an excited voice. The kid was cute. "Keep it up, kid, you'll be a great Starfleet captain one day."

The doors opened again and a pale looking Andrev Thosk stepped through the doors and walked toward the shuttle in a barely contained state of panic. Behind him strode Tyrlai Zade, her hair in a more organized black and brown tumbling cascade with a streak of purple that matched an

immaculate and completely regulation dress uniform. The purple material did, however, shimmer just slightly and seemed to be a little extra tailored to her tall athletic form. Andrev squeaked out a 'reporting for duty' to the Captain while Tyrlai winked at the girl with the carryall.

"Hey kid, you coming to the planet with us?"

"Yes I am, I'm going on an expedition." Novia smiled and beamed proudly.

Going down, part II

Somewhere over Gamia III

MD4, 1730 hrs

Authors: Cmdr. Alenis Meru, Capt. Judith Rouse (played by Timothy Rouse), Lt. Tyrlai Zade, Acting Crewman Coln Jena (played by Jason Beauvoir)

Alenis lay back in the co-pilot's chair. It had been a while since she had flown one of these Argo transports, but she was still qualified to take the right seat. Being the captain, she didn't get to fly around in shuttles and lead away teams much anymore; Captains tended to stick to the ship unless their presence was requested for diplomatic reasons. She looked over at Major Judith Rouse, her executive officer's sister. Judith had a smug, satisfied look on her face; even though an Argo transport was a far cry from a Razor fighter, Alenis could tell that she enjoyed flying.

"So, Major Rouse, how are you enjoying the Portland?" asked Alenis.

"Um, permission to speak freely, captain?"

"Go ahead."

"Well, it's kind of--" Judith's voice was interrupted by a klaxon going off in the cockpit. She glanced down at a screen, a horrified expression appearing on her face. "Fasten your seat belts!" she shouted, a split second before veering the shuttle into a steep turn.

"What's going on?!" shouted Alenis, her arms on the control panel, steadying herself.

"Surface-to-air-missile off our port bow!" The ship veered to the left again, giving the diplomats a rough ride. Tora was thrown from her seat, smashing her face against the bulkhead. "Try targeting it with the aft phaser array!"

Alenis' fingers danced over the control panel. "I can't get a lock!"

When Jena saw what happen to the diplomat, she wanted to help her, but knew there was nothing she could do until shuttle was stabilized again, so instead she clutched on her own seat for dear life, wondering why there were no safety harnesses on this thing.

Reacting quickly, Judith threw the transport into a barrel roll -- a maneuver which was definitely beyond the recommended performance envelope of an Argo transport -- trying to shake the lock, but to no avail. "It's locked onto our engines!" In the back, Tora's unconscious body landed in Tyrlai's lap. Tyrlai in turn wriggled free and pulled the limp woman to a prone and safer position on the floor. She then walked towards a rear display panel her long legs balancing her deftly as the shuttle banked and turned, and opened a small storage panel and pulled out a field repair kit.

Alenis fired the aft phasers again, trying to destroy the missile. "Dammit! I can't hit this thing."

Novia watched the other Trill work her way back and began to stand to see if she could help. She didn't really figure there was anything she could do but she was scared and just being near a less strange face helped.

Tyrlai snapped a finger at the girls direction, "Stay right where you are." Her admonishment only barely audible over the sounds of Thosk's screaming.

Novia blinked and sat back down, unable to hide a look of disappointment and rejection even as the ship rattled and shook around her.

"Twenty seconds to impact!" shouted Alenis. "Major, how well does this thing glide?"

"An Argo transport?" Judith was incredulous. The stubby wings on the overgrown shuttle provided a negligible amount of lift, and the aerodynamic controls might well have not been there for the amount of good they did. If Alenis was suggesting what she thought she was suggesting, it would take a miracle of airmanship and a fair bit of luck. "About as well as a brick."

Tyrlai started wiring a field generator with a piece of medical equipment and opened the patch port to a main conduit, her fingers moving quickly and deftly as she counted down from twenty in her head.

"It'll have to do. Take us low over the harbour."

Jena closed her eyes and tried to go limp.

"Preparing to dump the impulse reactor core in three..." shouted Alenis as she frantically inputted commands into the control panel, overriding numerous safeties and lockouts in order to perform her ill-advised act.

One of the children screamed in a short burst of panic.

"Two..."

Thosk screamed in a long burst of apocalyptic terror and in much the same pitch as the children.

"One!" Alenis hammered on a bright red touchkey, dumping the entire reactor core. With all kinds of alarms and klaxons going off in the cockpit, she closed her eyes and offered a quick prayer to the prophets, hoping that the missile would follow the reactor and not the rest of the ship.

Alenis' prayers were answered by a loud explosion coming from behind and below the transport. Her plan worked, but now with only the stubby wings to guide them down and some primitive aerodynamic controls, her life and the lives of everyone on the transport were in Judith's hands.

"Hold on!" shouted Judith as she pulled back on the yoke, desperately trying to keep the nose up. For a woman used to flying high-performance starfighters, attempting to glide a bulky Argo transport to a semi-safe crash landing was a strange sensation. If she could just keep the nose up, she figured, she could burn off some airspeed and, if she was lucky, they'd skim along the surface of the water, slowing them to a stop, rather than smashing hard into the water. She adjusted the dihedral of the wings, folding them up just enough that they would still provide some control without digging in before the fuselage and sending the transport cartwheeling into the water.

Alenis had a front row view of the ever-approaching surface of the water. Fortunately, the Gamians chose a good place for their capital; a natural harbour protected Judith's choice "landing" spot from the waves, and on the shore she could see boats already scrambling to rescue them. "Brace for impact!" she shouted as she made a couple last-minute preparations for the crash landing. A few seconds before impact, she got into the brace position. It was all up to the prophets now. And Judith.

Doing the best she could to try to get the shuttle under control Judith got flashbacks from her crash. Even 3 years later the memories of that flight were still as fresh as they were the day it happened. Nine O'clock in the evening. A routine practice session. Only it hadn't gone as planned. Due to a technical malfunction her plane has crashed in the middle of a dense almost uninhabitable planet. It had taken the ship hours to reach her. She shook her head to focus on the present day. Mere seconds before impact she managed to get the nose of the cumbersome Argo transport slightly up. Just enough to prevent them from crashing on the water with full power. The bang of landing on the water was still intense and Judith was tossed off her seat to the ground, adding to the pain in her lower back.

Tyrlai managed the last few alterations to the strange assortment of wiring at the back of the shuttle. She activated the enhancer and the inertial dampening field filled the shuttle. It was just and instant too late for Judith but made the impact and jostling much less violent for the rest of the crew and children as the shuttle hydroplaned over the leading edge of the harbor.

As the transport skidded across the surface of the water, Alenis held herself in the brace position and closed her eyes, quietly muttering prayers to the prophets. When it finally came to a stop, she held her head up and looked around. They were floating on the surface of the water; she could see out the window a boat coming her way. "Is everyone all right?" she asked as she unbuckled herself from her seat and headed towards the emergency escape hatch in the roof of the shuttle.

When Alenis asked if everyone was all right, Jena took a deep breath and opened her eyes. The place was a mess. After checking that she was still in one piece, she said. "I'm okay, ma'am, Do you need a hand with that hatch?"

"Yes," replied Alenis as she buckled over in pain. Apparently crashing a shuttle into the water wasn't good for recovery from a bruised rib. She looked around, everyone had some scrapes and scratches, but Tora appeared to be badly hurt. "Open the hatch and signal for help."

"Yes, ma'am." Jena said and made her way through the others to the hatch. She recalled the opening sequence from the shuttle briefing. Running through the procedure, she opened the hatch and breathed in a gulp of fresh air. Seeing a ship approaching, she waved her arms to get their attention.

Alenis looked over the passengers in the back of the ship. Tora was seriously hurt, lying unconscious on the floor of the transport. Apart from that, there were a few scrapes and non-critical injuries. As captain, it was her job to coordinate the evacuation from the transport and to be the last one off. "We need to get Minister Tora to the shore, and call Dr. Silverton." She wasn't sure what kind of medical technology the Gamians had, but she wasn't about to take any chances. "Judith, are you all right?" asked Alenis, turning to her pilot who was struggling to stand up.

"It can be worse," she answered. "Believe me I know" As she stood up a pain stroke went through her leg and back causing her to close her eyes. Shaking of the pain and many unpleasant memories she walked towards the Minister. After she knelt down she looked up to Alenis. "Her breathing is shallow, but she is conscious. Can you get me a tricorder to determine any serious internal damage." Seeing the questioning look on the Captains face she explained. "I'm not a doctor, but I am a certified medic. I'm a marine, remember" the last said with a grin. She knew Alenis didn't really like Marines,

but probably not as much as Tim.

"Here," she said, pulling a tricorder out of a storage locker, and walking -- with some difficulty as the transport bobbed up and down and rocked to and fro in the waves -- back towards Judith. The ocean mist from the harbour filled the nostrils of everyone in the shuttle. "Everyone, get up top. Judith, can we move her?"

Judith had done her scans but couldn't determine any internal bleeding. Her vital signs looked good, for someone being unconscious. "I think so, but I can't help you with that." she said as she looked up at Meru, hoping she wouldn't need to explain the exact reason for it.

"Do we have enough power to transport her to the shore?" asked Alenis, looking up at the small hatch in the roof of the shuttle. She was reluctant to use the transporter, after all, she didn't want to startle the locals who had never developed transporter technology, but it would be difficult to lift her out through the tiny emergency hatch without risking further injury.

"I'll guess we have to" Judith said following the Captain's gaze at the hatch. "Or we use the ship's transporters."

"All right," replied Alenis, walking over to the co-pilot's seat. Standing at the controls, she brought up the transporter interface. "Looks like we have enough left in the emergency batteries for one transport. I'm going to beam you and Minister Tora onto the docks. Call Dr. Silverton when you materialize. Prepare for transport."

"Will do," Judith replied before she and Tora disappeared from the shuttle in a flash of light.

Alenis smiled back at Judith. With the last of the passengers climbing out of the hatch, she looked around the shuttle one last time before following them to the roof. At least this time, everyone made it off all right

Tyrlai was somewhere outside marshalling the children into a boat. "So who here has learned about pirates? Yes, no,...? Well you are all in luck, cause I was a pirate and I know exactly how its done. First there is a lot of slang, like 'arrrg' and 'avast ye mateys' but even more important is picking a proper target. You want to pick one riding low in the water like it has a lot of valuable stuff in its 'booty', that's another pirate word,..."

Optical Holography Scanning

Holodeck 2, Deck 5, USS Portland

MD5, 1000

Authors: Cmdr. Alenis Meru, Lt. Parker Hudson, Lt. (JG) Brad Silverton, Lt. (JG) Arvel Darze

Parker looked at his silver wrist watch checking the time, and then let his arm swing back down by his side. The Captain had arrived back from the Barjoran Colony for a respite from beginning negotiations. Since the Doctor advised Hudson of the "project" at hand, he was determined to do his best to ensure that the Holo-programming would be engineered as stable as possible. The last thing they would need is a failure in the matrix or energy sub-relays on the Portland while... Well while the Lieutenant did "the dirty deeds".

Standing at the engineering console in the middle of the plain holosuite, Parker reminded his self that the Captain would be the choice scan.

"All right, lieutenant, what's the plan here?" asked Alenis as she strolled into the holodeck. She has been busy down on the planet and decided to leave matters in the ship in the capable hands of her executive officer. And for this project, she left the details in the hands of Brad and Parker, in large part because she didn't care to know too much about them. The less she could think about this, the better.

"Captain" Parker slightly turned to address her entrance. He wasn't overjoyed to have to explain this as he didn't go through Starfleet for speaking. Parker picked up one of the PADD's he was working with at the station and punched in a few buttons. Handing it to the Captain then for her to follow along. "We will begin with an enhanced Optical Holography Scan of your body. From the first two minutes of the scan you will feel nothing, the second portion of the scan you will begin to feel a slight warm, tingling sensation grow from within your body." Parker paused seeing the concern on the Captain's face. "This second half of the scan lasting 3 minutes down-structures at the sub atomic level your bodies energy signature, capturing your neural pathways of your brain, thoughts, feelings, demeanor, behavior traits..."

A rotating holo image of the brain and stem was demonstrated "The holosuite working very much similar to that of our transporter systems." Parker breathed.

Brad had been following along what Parker had said about his part of their plan and then added to the conversation.

"While he is doing that Captain I'll be monitoring your vitals. Nothing should go wrong its just a routine precaution. Actually its mostly to make sure that its a close a copy of you as possible based upon your medical records and physiology. We have a concern over the possibility that although Lt Beauvoir is only part Vulcan that its enough for any mental abilities to sense that it's not you he's about to mate with."

"Don't remind me," replied Alenis.

Arvel felt conflicted. While he knew that Jason needed help, there was something that just didn't sit right about creating a holographic representation of his one true love for this purpose. He wanted Alenis all to himself. Deep down, he was angry with Jason. How dare he choose Alenis as a mate? Did he not realize that Alenis already had a lover in him? And now, though he knew it wouldn't be Alenis, it felt a little like he was being cheated on.

But, he could tell by what wasn't said that Alenis was conflicted as well, and realized that the best he could do right now for her is support her and make sure she comes to no harm. "Are you feeling all right, captain?" he asked.

"Fine," replied Alenis, a certain heaviness in her voice. "Lets just get this over with, okay?"

Parker then nodded at Brad and then Arvel. "Please step into the center of the room Captain." Parker reached for his silver mug of coffee and then took a deep swish of it and swallowing.

"Okay," replied Alenis as she strolled towards the center of the room. "I don't need to take my clothes off for this, do I?"

Brad is busy tapping away at a medical tricorder as he responds to the Captain nonchalantly, "Oh no Captain that won't be necessary the scanners will be able to copy all your curvatures and orifi... and you were probably joking there weren't you?" He looks up with his eyes closed and a wincing face.

Alenis shook her head. And also breathed in a sigh of relief.

Parker was deeply amused, although the seriousness of the situation on his face belied that fact. He let his eyes follow along the computer program specifications "As I begin the scan now, you do not need to be fully still but you must remain where you are Captain."

"All right, I'm ready," replied Alenis, standing in place.

A soft green light washed over Alenis sweeping past her several times from a terminal in the ceiling of the holodeck. Parker had configured and duplicated the Dyson Institutes scanner here on the holodeck. Brad nodded and looked up from his medical tricorder. "The physical part is done and as expected pretty quick. Now on to the mental scan." The light turned to a soft blue and stopped sweeping across Alenis. It stayed focusing on her face and head.

As Arvel stared at Alenis, her eyes closed and her face illuminated by blue light, the words "playing god" ran through his head. A person could not simply be copied willy-nilly, and especially not someone as special as his Meru. And, what if this hologram gains sentience? Artificial life is not unheard of; the late Lieutenant Commander Data was considered to be sentient, and so was Voyager's EMH. He shuddered at the thought.

Just because we can do something, he thought, doesn't mean we should. At the back of his head, he was worried that if they were successful today, it could permanently alter the measure of a man and the value of life. No, they were in a very grey area ethically, and he hoped everyone in the room knew it.

Still, no matter how close of a recreation of her the computer could make, it would always be the original that he was in love with. There was something about Meru that simply could not be duplicated.

As the lights turned off, Arvel breathed a sigh of relief. It was done. And may god have mercy on our souls.

Xylophone

Harbor Beach, Planetary Capitol

MD4, 1820

Authors: Cmdr. Alenis Meru, Lt. Tyrlai Zade

Standing under a row of trees just inside the crest of the beach where the shore grasses took hold in the sandy soil. Tyrlai Zade stood pushing her long black hair out of her eyes as the sea breezes swept past the figures gathered along the shoreline.

A small crowd had gathered to watch the Federation 'outsiders' gather as the shuttle was slowly towed towards the shore in hope of beaching it before it sank. At the fringe of the crowd where the buildings of the Capital rose from the packed and almost stony ground a quad of women dressed head to toe in ornate and colorful religious themed garments.

Tyrlai stepped over to where the CO was standing, watching Doctor Silverton work on the unconscious Minister. "I'm going to break some rules and throw a wrench in the process. I want to slow this down and give us a chance to investigate this attack ourselves. I will not be reasonable and you may have to step in and be the cooler head at some point. Ill make a hand gesture or use the word 'xylophone' or something."

"Just try not to cause a diplomatic incident, okay?" asked Alenis, having a bad feeling that she was going to have to answer to Admiral Washington on this one.

"I refuse to hold to such restrictive requirements."

One of the figures took the lead, clasping her hands in front of her and smiling weakly through a worried frown. "We apologize for this most unfortunate incident. We are already working to find those responsible and bring them to justice."

Tyrlai turned her face suddenly a masque of barely controlled fire, blue eyes and a practiced piercing gaze forged over eight odd centuries fixed the planetary welcome committee. She had been on Portland for only a few weeks and had not had much time to interact with her CO but at no point had she seen a fully serious side of the Trill woman. "And you are?"

If the speaker was intimidated she did not let on exactly. "I am Tenge Fex, first minister of the exotic. Dealing with offworlders is one of my responsibilities."

Tyrlai at six feet without her boots was the tallest of those present and was employing that advantage, she stepped forward and looked down. "And who, praytell would be responsible for security or," and she motioned for effect, "a clear lack thereof."

"As I said, we regret the,..."

"Your words are not comforting, there were children on that shuttle. We would not have risked the journey if we knew that you could barely secure your Capital city."

"Im, sorry,..." the minister of the exotic for a moment seeming to be affected by the Trill woman's aggressive stance, "and you are?"

"I am Ambassador Zade, and in a hundred years of representing the Federation this is the first time my shuttle has been attacked en route." Tyrlai's voice was level and she affected an edge of restraint as if she were barely containing pure rage. She was also lying through her teeth, it was at least the fourth time this had happened.

Minister Tenge seemed to also seemed to have a distinct and rising edge to her voice as she began to gather herself, stepping forward towards the taller and clearly not hundred year old Federation representative. "I will reiterate our regret that the actions of,..."

"Your actions, Minister." Tyrlai sneered, her features cold, her eyes flaring slightly unblinking. "The Federation does not extend membership to those who can't control their own weaponry."

"We teach our children more respect when meeting new people than apparently the parents in your Federation."

"I wouldn't know." Tyrlai cocked her head, feigning offense at the topic of discussion. "I don't have parents, I'm afraid." There were a few muttered gasps from onlookers and at least one of the other ministers.

"You are an orphan?"

"Disowned," Tyrlai pressed, "I can be belligerent,..."

The gasps were louder and sharper and Tyrlai winced psychologically, she didn't show so much as a shred but she could tell from the tones of the gasps that she had made some fashion of error.

Minister of the Exotic Tenge Fex turned to Alenis with a look of pleasantly feigned regret. "Perhaps you will understand." She gave a slight shift of her head towards the Trill. "She has no D'jarra, it is an act of dishonor to have her present."

"The Federation does not recognize your quaint, D'jarras,..." Tyrlai started expressing her contempt for the very concept. The crowd moved forward, her tone was unacceptable to a normal person much less a minister. Tyrlai furrowed her brow and doubled down, actually getting angry this time.

Alenis cringed. No one told them they used D'jarras. She didn't even know hers, and felt it was one of those things in ancient Bajoran traditions that were best left in the past. "My apologies, minister, our diplomatic officer is unfortunately not well versed in Bajoran tradition." Alenis stepped out from the throng of dazed and confused Bajoran diplomats with horrified expressions on their faces and out in front of Tyrlai. "Why don't we continue this discussion of D'jarras in a more pleasant setting; at the reception, perhaps?" Before they could answer, she turned to Tyrlai. "You are dismissed," she said in a stern tone, while offering the angry Trill a wink.

Tyrlai turned, muttering 'xylophone' under her breath as she walked back towards the beach. Her plan had more or less worked except for the D'jarras and the notion that she had completely disqualified herself. Nevertheless she had a theory that the missile had come from the northeast, and apparently had some free time on her hands.

Looking Down

Deck 01 - Bridge

Authors: Timothy Rouse, James Burton, R'havis and Jackson Mallory written by Timothy Rouse, Jason Beauvoir and Alenis Meru.

Tim walked on the bridge and took over the chair from R'havis. They didn't have anything to do then to stand by and wait.

"Commander," Mallory said the moment he noticed Tim. "The shuttle has just embarked for its trip to the surface."

Tim sat down. "That's good news." He was glad he wasn't on it. Diplomatic relations had never been his thing. He preferred blowing things up.

R'havis was happy to return to his station, he wasn't ready for Command, at least not yet.

"Surface-to-air-missile off the shuttle's port bow." Burton reported.

"What!!" Tim shouted as he jumped up. "On screen! Try to get a lock on it and shoot it down." The last meant for the tactical officer.

"I can't get a lock, sir." Burton replied. "The shuttle is firing." Moments later. "No success."

"Sir," Mallory said from the helm. "The shuttle is taking a barrel roll toward the harbour. I don't think I've ever seen an Argo shuttle do that before."

"Who is the pilot of the shuttle?" Tim asked Ops as he was walking towards the shuttle. His gut was telling him this wasn't one of their usual pilots.

"Major Rouse, Sir." R'havis replied.

Tim closed his eyes and clenched his fist. He knew it. He took the last few steps up to the tactical station to be able to see the trajectory of both the shuttle and the missile.

"Commander, the shuttle crew are preparing to dump the impulse core." R'havis said.

"Core is dumped." Mallory said. There was a silent tension on the Bridge.

"Burton, fire a torpedo close to the core." Tim said. He didn't want to prevent the kid from doing his job, but at the questioning look he received back from the Ensign he said. "Let me. R'havis. How long until the missile reached the core?" Tim asked as he was locking the targeting sensors on a location next to the core. Turning to Burton he simply said. "We need to have a word after this is over."

"15 seconds to impact." R'havis replied.

Seconds later Tim said. "Perfect, firing in 3... 2... 1..." and he fired the torpedo. Even though he was certain of his qualities as a tactical officer he was very relieved to see on the display that the missile had been destroyed and the shuttle was ok. "Missile is destroyed" he said to the rest of the bridge officers.

"Shuttle is still going down to the surface, without any power. It's crashing, sir." R'havis said.

Mallory turned around to the executive officer. "She might be able to pull the nose up to make the crash a bit more gentle." He turned back to his console to keep track of the shuttles decent. "But that depends of the pilot's abilities. A Argo class shuttle is not really an aerodynamic shuttle. If she pulls it off,..." He didn't finish his sentence.

Tim had walked back to the center seat. *Judy, come on. You can do it. If anyone can, you can.* "Ops, can't you beam them out of there?" He asked. The tone of his voice showed the distress he was feeling.

"I already attempted to get a lock, but there is too much interference," the operations officer said.

The whole bridge crew was holding their breath for the impending crash of the shuttle. Then, the shuttle did pulled up its nose up slightly. Tim released the breath he was holding in and unclenched his fist seconds later, when the shuttle had touched the surface. "Portland to Commander Alenis," he said, attempting to make contact to the vessel. "Portland to Major Rouse." When his sister also didn't respond, his heart sank. Even though Judith was a marine, Tim still felt that he had to look out for her because it's what big brothers do. "Scan for lifesigns," he called out. *Don't die on me, Judith.*

R'havis' paws darted over his console. "I've got lifesigns from all ten passengers, one badly injured. I'm detecting movement inside the shuttle."

"Keep trying to hail them; patch me through when they respond." Tim breathed a sigh of relief. At least Judith was alive. He didn't know if she was badly hurt or not; the sensors couldn't tell which one it was. But the fact that they were alive and moving about the cockpit was a good sign. *I knew you could do it, Judith.*

Conflicts of duty

Bridge, USS Portland

MD5, 1400

Authors: Lt. Parker Hudson, Lt. (JG) Brad Silverton, and Ensign Jita Kejal

"Why the heck did we get away from this?" Jita mused of her station's layout, even more impressed than when she moved from the form-over-function stools of Boone's Astrometrics lab to their more rational, supportive, if still somewhat contrived cousins on the Intrepid-class starship's bridge. The oldest active ship class in the fleet wouldn't have struck her as an obvious answer to the most comfortable duty station arrangement she would experience, yet the only complaint she had in four days of manning ops on the Portland was that its chair lacked side bolstering for those inevitable instances of turbulence. It was fantastic otherwise; sturdier than either stool, the bulk of her praise lie with its arc shape creating a natural transition from seat to backrest. Jita's posture was thus comfortable and well-matched to her console, which resided within ready sight and reach. She loomed over many of the Boone's in comparison, ironic considering her hardly imperious five-foot-five stature.

One of Portland's foibles helped inspire the thought. A downscaled derivative of still-capable ships like the Galaxy and Nebula, her isolinear computer architecture ultimately lacked the speed and capacity of the hybrid bio-neural systems justified by the more numerous and complex operations of cutting-edge ships like the Sovereign or Intrepid, also designed to accommodate them from inception. Its efforts to offer the most rigidly precise answer to Jita's calculation input lent an expected split-second delay in which the sentiment sprung, she'd become so accustomed to the Boone's relative immediacy. But she was so cozy, it didn't bother her at first.

When several more split seconds passed without a response, an intrigued Jita reflexively punched up a system usage schematic on one of her readouts, a telling, if not completely revealing measure she investigated further even after the computer finally fulfilled her original request. Maintaining orbit around a mostly complaisant planet wasn't a particularly demanding task, which she attributed to being mercifully spared of others asking about the computer as she trudged her way to an answer. . .

=====

Engineering Lab

Parker's eyes scrolled over the computer interface in the lab ensuring that the download of Alenis' body and neural topography scans were stable. Just storing the system program in the Portland's main computer was taking up a large amount of ship's resources and energy. However, it was well worth the time and efforts as it was to be used to save one of the crew's lives.

"Looks like everything is remaining stable at the moment." Parker spoke to Silverton. "When I initiate the Captain..." Parker crossed his arms and leaned up against the back bulk head. "What are we going to tell her?"

Brad took a few steps pacing back and forth in thought. "That's a good question. I think everyone had been putting this part off or simply ignoring it. I know I have." He stopped to look up at Parker. "I think we have to be direct and honest. She is going to be sentient or as close as possible. She'll have to be to trick Jason." Brad shook his head in disbelief. "I still can't believe we are going to be tricking a fellow Starfleet officer into having sex with his captain. They'll have to re-write the ethic section of the Starfleet Officer Code of Conduct over this one that's for sure."

Parker laughed to himself and shook his head.

"To answer your question... she will have all the personality of the captain and thus her sense of duty and compassion to help. I would presume she'll agree with it."

"Ops to Engineering Lab," came an unfamiliar female voice via intercom.

Parker slapped at his comm badge. "Hudson here go ahead."

"I just ran a system diagnostic to pin down a latency drop off that flagged the EMH program. Changes made under your credentials put it way over its maximum storage allocation because of a smorgasbord of additional code that's been routed to execute through primary system processing." A quizzical cadence guided the voice in a different direction from the scolding tone another might've adopted for the implication. "What are you doing down there?"

Parker's jaw dropped letting out a silence. He was perplexed. He did not expect this. Perhaps he should have from the Portland's operations officer. He pulled up the systems engineering readouts and then the Portland's operational sensor clusters. "You must be receiving a false flag reaction readout Ops." He still did not know who he was speaking too. "I am working on the computer core flex data mounts, nothing to worry about!" Parker assured.

"I'm not sure you should make that your final answer, Lieutenant," the intercom speaker coolly redirected. "Performing ODN maintenance on an active vessel without Ops collaboration is a safety and security protocol breach I'm supposed to report. I don't like the tie-ups it can create, but not so much that I'll risk getting my butt raked over the coals for someone who thinks I'm an idiot."

Parker paused and took a deep quiet breathe inward to his self. He was not up to this shit right now. He was having a hard time dealing with a complex codec with the systems working for the Captain and Lt. Beauvoir, let alone having to toe the line around Portland's regulations officer apparently.

"Actually the coals you speak are under my ass right now." He continued working on setting the anodyne relays on deck 7 to re-route safeties to the holodeck in case of a power surge to save the program. "Currently I am working with Dr. Silverton under strict orders of Captain Alenis not to reveal what we are doing. This is a Security Level III encryption, feel free to look it up." He growled in return.

"I didn't call you to have a dick-measuring contest, Lieutenant," the caller refuted, a breathy chuckle mitigating her stiffened demeanor. "I don't measure up if you haven't already figured, and in more ways than one. But I do have a problem with someone undermining my ability to perform my duties without an explanation, regardless of whose authority they've got behind them. Your orders don't change that some of the projections I've run with the preliminary specs of your program suggest the ship could end up impaired at elevated status, a possibility since someone tried to blow up the captain's party on their way to the surface. In a nutshell, you may be about to ask for resource allocations we can't maintain once that program stretches its legs. At least not in our current configuration. Mirandas don't have a surplus of computing resources, and isolinear networks can be slow to reprioritize when they're backed up. That's part of how I caught onto your modifications in the first place."

The line went momentarily silent, the reason arguably apparent when the caller resumed sans her earlier tension. "I think it can be worked around, though it'll be much harder if you decide to have Ops and Engineering play tag in the dark on this one. Now I could've blown the whistle from my post on the bridge. It wouldn't have stopped you or let the cat out of the bag so much as it might've clued people with absolutely no need to know to something being off, and you know that's all it takes for

nearly any secret on a starship to end up on borrowed time. But I know if I were you, I'd prefer me doing what I did instead: coming to you with a problem without an audience."

Another pause arose in the form of her sighing another continuance. "So did I guess right? Or do I need to hope for better luck coming up with new parameters for the rest of ship ops if we have to go beyond walking circles around Gamia?"

Brad reached forward and pressed mute to talk to Parker privately. "Parker, if she detected something then something might have gone wrong. This is going beyond our expertise and we may need her to sort this out. We have to consider letting her in on this or run the risk something happening and having to bring the captain back here to get scanned. She seemed uncomfortable with this as it is; the less we have to drag her back or bother her with this the better. Heck maybe we can just have her help without knowing that it involves Jason. You are the senior officer between us so it's your call." Brad left the channel on mute and leaned back to give Parker room.

Parker stood there at the Engineering lab where this ensign was yapping at his feet. He had not worked or ever had listened to a conversation like this before, over a communications channel on a starship especially in operations. He grinned at Silverton. "Do we really want to work with that?"

Taking his silver mug, Parker held it up to his lips and tipped it, taking in a long, slow drink. Tapping the communication open he replied calmly, "Ensign, please report to the Engineering Labs. Bring yourself nobody else."

"I think I can swing that. Be there in five minutes."

Authors: Lt (jg) Brad Silverton and Timothy Rouse as Maj Judith Rouse

After Judith and the minister appeared on the wharf they were welcomed with many locals looking at them like they had never seen someone being transported before. Or maybe they hadn't. Ignoring the people around her Judith pressed her comm badge to call the doctor, as the captain had ordered. "Rouse to Silverton, please beam down to my location. There is a medical emergency!"

Brad responded through Judith's communicator, "Silverton here Major. What's the situation?"

"We almost crashed minutes ago. Minister Tosk is unconscious. I've checked her vitals and they seem strong, but I'm no doctor"

"Understood. I'll be down immediately. Silverton out." Brad was a whirlwind around sickbay grabbing odds and ends. He started with a standard emergency away team kit but if it was the minister? He had to be ready for anything. He now regretted his wish for a distraction from the pon farr issue at hand.

Moments later Brad materialized down on the planet next to Judith. He hurriedly walked over to the minister. He pulled out a tricorder to begin his scans, "Major what happened exactly?"

"We crashed" she said. Elaborating a bit more she continued. "There was a projectile fire at us, which we barely avoided. After the explosion we had to land the shuttle without any of the systems online."

A worried expression came across Brad's face. "This is bad major. Real bad. She suffered a blow to the neck and has a severe spinal injury. I've got to get her to the Portland."

"Will she be able to join the negotiations?" she asked.

"Major I'm not sure she'll make it through the day. She'll be bed ridden for days and her returning to the mission is completely out of the question. I'm afraid the Captain and Tyrlai are on their own for negotiations."

They are not gonna like that, Judith thought. "I'll give them the message."

Brad was packing his instruments back up and adjusting the minister. "Major were there any other injuries? I trust judging by the absence of everyone else that they are fine?" Brad gave a quick look around to be sure he didn't miss anyone.

"Just some scrapes and bruises" Although she was probably mostly to herself. "The rest are all in the shuttle. Or may have been rescued by the Gamia by now" At the last she looked on her watch.

Brad nodded, "Thank goodness for that. I'll report with an update as soon as I can. That shouldn't take long." Brad stood up fully and tapped his badge. "Silverton to Portland. Two to beam up directly to sickbay." The glow and hum of transporter stream came and went.

Making friends, part I

Gamia City, Gamia III

MD4, 1905 hrs

Authors: Cmdr. Alenis Meru, Maj. Judith Rouse (played by Timothy Rouse), Coln Jena (played by Jason Beauvoir), Jita Eloru (Played by Jita Kejal)

"And one for you, and one for you, and..." Novia Yenn looked down in her goody basket. She was running out of cupcakes faster than anticipated. "One for you," she said as she gave her last cupcake to a red-haired Bajoran girl about her age.

"Thank you!" exclaimed Jycou Aara as she examined the blue icing. "This cupcake looks delicious!"

"I hope it is," replied Novia. "I made them myself!" she added, beaming with pride.

"You made these?!" exclaimed Jycou before taking a bite.

"Well, I made them in the replicator."

"Weplicator?" Jycou could barely speak, her cheeks were filled with cupcake.

"It's a--" suddenly Novia remembered the talk that the captain had given her, about how the people on the planet didn't have all the fancy technology that she had access to on the Portland. "It's a machine that can make food. We have them in every room on the Portland."

"What's a Portland?" asked Jycou.

"It's a sea creature from Earth," said Novia, matter-of-factly. "It has three segmented pods, with nine tentacles each. And lots of sharp pointy teeth. It's very scary, and it's as big as a house!"

"That sounds very scary!" exclaimed Jycou, looking down at Novia's empty hands. "Would you like a jumja stick? They're really good, almost as good as these cake cups."

"I'd love one!" exclaimed Novia, grabbing Jycou's arm. "You know, you're my new best friend. I just hope the adults are also making friends."

Meanwhile, in a nearby conference room...

"How DARE you!" exclaimed Kai Sellra.

"How dare I?" shot back Rass. "How dare you invite us halfway across the sector for these historic negotiations, only to refuse to talk to us because you say our D'jarras are unclean?"

"The D'jarra is a cornerstone of Bajoran society!" Kai Sellra was equally outraged. "Our D'jarras have maintained order on Gamia III and held our society together for centuries! We would not have survived the dark days following our arrival on this planet if we did not cling to our D'jarras!"

Jena didn't know if it was her place to speak, but she had a question. "Please excuse my interruption, my name is Coln Jena and I'd like ask a few questions." When no one appeared to object she continued. "I know the D'jarras are important and that they are passed down through each family, but what happens when a new occupation is created such as Scientist, for which D'jarra are they to come, and what of those, like myself, whose fathers are not Bajoran which D'jarras do they inherit?"

Alenis raised her eyebrow at Jena. Her speaking up was an interesting turn of events, and not what she expected. But, seeing as she wasn't likely to make anything worse, she did nothing to stop her. Instead, she focused on the strange feeling she had in her abdomen. She didn't know if it was nerves or an injury from the accident, but whatever it was, it had flared up since they landed.

"D'jarras are passed down from mother to child," explained the Kai in a harsh tone, shooting Jena a glare. She looked back towards Alenis, who she felt to be the closest thing to a mother to Jena that she could find. "I find it difficult to believe that a young woman such as yourself has not been properly educated in Bajoran tradition. But, I suppose that is to be expected on the new Bajor." She paused for a moment. "And your father is not even Bajoran? What sort of blasphemy is this?"

"I meant no disrespect, ma'am. My mother was raised on Vulcan, so she didn't receive a normal Bajoran upbringing. I was born on Bajor, but I'm hardly representative of the population there. If you wish me to leave, I understand, but I would much rather you allow me to learn about your society and by extension my own history." Jena said diplomatically.

"Well, why not." Kai Sellra rolled her eyes at Jena. "This is all highly irregular, but if we can make room at the table for your pilot here, I'm sure we can make room for a half-breed." Her voice was pointed. "At least the Federation had the wherewithal to send a ship commanded by a token Bajoran."

"Now hold on a minute," replied Alenis, getting hot under the collar. "I'm not anyone's 'token' Bajoran. I was born on Bajor, under an incredibly brutal military occupation, and I worked my way up to being a starship captain. I'm sure Starfleet chose us for the assignment because we were the best ship for the job." Alenis glanced down at Jena for a moment. "And if you want to talk about D'jarras, you'll find that most real Bajorans see them as an outdated relic of the past and are glad that we're no longer limiting ourselves by an archaic caste system."

"Archaic caste system!?" exclaimed the Kai. "If you Federation types care so little about Bajoran traditions, then why are you even here? Are these negotiations anything more than a pretext to

stake your claim on Gamia III and expand your little empire?"

"The Federation is not an imperialist power," retorted Alenis. There were times during her career when she had her doubts, and she had met more than one officer who, in private, bemoaned Starfleet's focus on science and humanitarian missions over military defense and expansion. Since the Dominion War, Borg attacks, deteriorating relationships with the Klingons, and the power vacuum left after the destruction of Romulus, there were many officers who advocated a different approach. Alenis tended to straddle the line; as a former tactical officer and as someone who understood firsthand that the quadrant was a dangerous place, she had some sympathy for the arguments for the importance of the defense needs of the Federation. But for her, her first allegiance was to the principles of the Federation; those of peaceful cooperation and the advancement of scientific knowledge. "The Federation has supported the Bajoran people in recovering from the occupation, and will continue to do so. We are only here to support the Bajoran people in this historic negotiation, and offer our support to the Gamian people if they so choose to reunite with Bajor. The Federation is composed of many diverse cultures, and we do not interfere with the natural development of pre-warp societies."

"Well then, if you are so tolerant of other cultures, why don't you recognize our traditions?" Kai Sellra's voice was indignant, though she may have been feigning it as a bargaining chip. "Instead, you come down here and dismiss them as archaic customs?"

"Fine!" shot back Alenis. Ugh, being a diplomat is even harder than I thought. She tapped her comm badge. "Alenis to Jita, I need you to check some genealogical records..."

Judith had followed the conversation so far. It reminded her why she wasn't a diplomat. She had no idea where they were talking about, or even what a D'jarra was. She was smart enough to know when not to speak, and the little remark earlier made it abundantly clear that her opinion wasn't wanted.

"Okay," dragged the young Ops officer over the live channel, clearly disconcerted. Superficially sensible, she wondered what circumstances warranted ancestry research. "What am I looking for, Captain?"

"D'jarras." Alenis turned and stepped away from the conversation so she could talk to Jita in private. "The ancient Bajoran caste system. Apparently the Gamians still use them. We need to check the genealogical records on these diplomats and hope that we can find someone on this delegation with a half-decent D'jarra. Can you tap into the Bajoran genealogical archives?"

"D'jarras? Seriously?" Jita groaned, nettled that the Gamians' persistence with old religious tradition included its derisive caste system. A huff beat her mind for Alenis' non-complicity in the development.

"I should be able to," she evenly resumed of the original question, quick, ambient LCARS tones corroborating her answer. "But I can't guarantee we'll be able to reference everyone. For all the progress made fixing the Cardassians' sabotage, there are still big gaps. Some people's connecting or knowledgeable kin died during the Occupation or some other point before the census. Others are paranoid of D'jarras being revived and have refused to participate even though the council passed several statutes against discriminating through them."

"Good. Let me know as soon as you find something. In the meantime," Alenis shook her head at the bickering between the diplomats, "I've got a situation down here."

"For which a measure of mitigation may be closer than you think, Captain Alenis," emerged another more proximate voice in the stead of Jita's reply, its owner adding the gentle placement of a hand to her shoulder to impart her presence...

Making friends, part II

Gamia III

MD4, 1715 hours

Authors: Cmdr Alenis Meru, Ensign Jita Kejal

...In the meantime," Alenis shook her head at the bickering between the diplomats, "I've got a situation down here."

"For which a measure of mitigation may be closer than you think, Captain Alenis," emerged another more proximate voice in the stead of Jita's reply, its owner adding the gentle placement of a hand to her shoulder to impart her presence.

"Oh?" asked Alenis, turning towards the woman whose hand rested on her shoulder. "I take it you know something we don't?"

"I believe the suspicion is mutual," the dark-hued, willowy, elegantly clad woman asserted pleasantly. "I don't mean to intrude, but the person you summoned aboard your ship. You called her Jita?"

"Yes, Jita is an operations officer on my ship," said Alenis to the stranger, a slightly confused look on her face.

"Is she Bajoran?"

"Who wants to know?" interjected Jita over the still-active line, some brazenness having crept into her tone. She couldn't help it. Already miffed by the prospects of coming to Gamia, an inhabitant starting a conversation specifically about her flew in the face of her wanting to stay in the background. She might've thought it damned creepy too if she weren't so wound.

"Yes," said Alenis, her eyes narrowing as she stared the other woman down from top to bottom. "Why the sudden interest in one of my officers?"

"Forgive me," the Gamian implored, briefly bowing her head in affected deference. "I don't mean to trouble either of you. While I had no definitive reason to believe it impossible, I didn't expect to come upon one from the home world who also bears my name. I'm Vedek Jita Eloru, Deputy Minister of the Chronicles."

"Jita Eloru..." Alenis' brain was going a mile a minute. If she was related to Jita, and she clearly had a high enough d'jarra to be a deputy minister, maybe Jita would qualify? But she's not a diplomat, least of all one authorized to speak for Bajor. "Did you hear that, Ensign?" asked Alenis.

"I did," answered the ship-borne conversant, her voice frail with realization of where this was likely headed. It broke when she spoke again. "I. . .I should get to work. Captain." Unwilling to risk a protocol breach under the circumstances, Jita hoped Alenis would enable her tacit whim to close the channel. Wanting terribly to retreat from this revelation, she saw doubling down on the research asked of her just moments ago as the most fitting means to that end.

"Let me know the moment you find anything. Alenis out." Alenis sighed at the sight of the bickering

between diplomats. "So, Vedek Jita, as much as I'd love to host a family reunion, I've got some negotiations to salvage, and a chief negotiator confined to sickbay. Any ideas?"

The question paused Eloru only briefly. "A postponement. A dearth of understanding has been at the heart of every aggravation we've encountered today; I think we'll only compound the resultant tensions if we persist. So much has happened in a short period and neither side has had time to cope constructively. Of course your delegation also needs time to recuperate, during which I'd be glad to offer you perspective on my people." A small smile brightened her cordial air. "I harbor reservations about this overture of reunification, but welcome the opportunity to enact the capacities of my office."

"Sounds like a plan." Alenis took a few steps to the side, looked over the bickering diplomats, and loudly cleared her throat, getting their attention. "Friends, it has been a long day and we are getting nowhere. Let us take in the beauty of Gamia and return to the table tomorrow."

"But the d'--" started the Kai

"Kai Sellra, if you give me until tomorrow, we may be able to produce a diplomat with a suitable d'jarra." Alenis decided to play to the crowd a little bit. "Surely, after centuries apart, these negotiations can wait one more day if it will enable us to do things right."

The Kai paused, deep in thought for a moment, before replying. "I suppose there is little point in our rushing. Commander Alenis, give my regards to Ms. Tora; I regret not being able to meet her. We shall reconvene at 1700 tomorrow. If you would like to explore the city, I can arrange for some guides to accompany you."

"Thank you, Kai, but I'd rather explore the city myself," replied Alenis. She had a feeling that Eloru had answers, and would be more candid in providing them in a more private setting.

Escape!

Brig, USS Portland

MD 5, 1420 hrs

Authors: Lt. Jason Beauvoir and Lt. (JG) Arvel Darze

Arvel had been dreading this moment for a while. Regretting it, even. After hearing about what happened on Bajor, Jason was the last person that he wanted to see. But, as a Starfleet counselor, he had certain professional responsibilities that he could not ignore. Truth be told, if he were any less professional, he'd probably be coming down to deliver a beating to Jason for disrespecting Alenis.

As he entered the brig, he could see the prisoner look up and take notice of his arrival. After conversing with the guard for a minute, he approached the cell, carrying a stool. "Mr. Beauvoir, I assume you know who I am and why I am here, so I'll dispense with the pleasantries." Trying to keep things as formal as possible helped Arvel separate his personal feelings about this particular patient from his professional duties. After sitting down, he continued. "How are you feeling?"

"Oh, I'm jj...just peachy." Jason managed to say though the pain. "Where is Meru? I need her."

"That is out of the question," replied Arvel in no uncertain tone. He could sense that Jason was an emotional train wreck, with anger, lust, and pain bubbling over. "But I do know what you're going through, and I may be able to help you control your emotions and control the pain."

"No!" Jason screamed and began beating his already damaged hands against the forcefield. The pain and what was left his reason told him to stop, but it was overthrown by a flood of emotion. Anger and frustration flared and he bared his teeth at the man he now saw as an obstacle. Much like the forcefield he was keeping him from Meru.

Arvel stood by smugly as Jason beat against the force field. In a situation like this, sometimes it's best to let the patient tire himself out and wait until he's ready to talk. "Are you quite done?" asked Arvel at a lull in Jason's screaming.

"Why are you keeping Meru from me?" Jason pleaded.

"It's for her safety," replied Arvel. "And yours." He looked down at Jason, feeling sorry for the guy. Here he was, in pain, locked up like an animal, and losing control in a tiny eight by eight cell. And when it was all over, he'd have to deal with the shame and embarrassment of what he had done while in this state. "I'm going to perform some Vulcan neuropsychology on you. It won't stop your cravings, but it will dull the pain. Do you understand?"

Jason looked at the Counselor and turned his head to the side. What was left of his conscious mind hit upon a plan of escape and in spite of the pain he smiled.

"All right," said Arvel. He turned to the guard, who readied his phaser with a heavy stun setting. "Computer, lower force field."

As the force field lowered, Jason watched both Arvel and the security guard, readying himself for the escape attempt.

"Just lie down on your bed," said Arvel as she advanced towards Jason, not breaking eye contact. The security guard on duty clutched his phaser, ready to pull it out of his holster at a moment's notice.

Jason turned to do as he was asked, but at the last moment he whirled around and grabbed Arvel by the shoulders and used him as a shield as the guard fired. The Science officer then dropped Arvel's unconscious body and ran at the guard.

Before crewman Baliev was able to fire again, the raging Vulcan was already on top of him.

Jason's momentum sent him barreling into the poor crewman driving him to the deck with great force. The Science officer climbed off the unconscious man and took his phaser before fleeing the Brig.

Baliev looked around upon regaining consciousness. His head was throbbing with pain. He immediately tapped his comm badge. "Baliev to security. Lieutenant Beauvoir has escaped." He could see Arvel still hadn't regained consciousness. From his training, he recalled that Trills were particularly susceptible to phaser fire; even a stun setting could seriously injure or kill the symbiont. "...and we have a medical emergency; beam Dr. Darze to sickbay immediately!"

Conflict of Duty - Part II

Engineering Lab

MD: 05, 14:05

Authors: Lt. Parker Hudson, Lt. (JG) Brad Silverton, and Ensign Jita Kejal

A chime was sounded at the Lab doors when Jita had arrived. Brad opening the door through his workstation as the door was locked. The doors opening as Jita had walked in from the other side of

the room. Parker standing up tall and viewing the Ensign as she walked in, concerned with what was happening. This whole situation had morals in question to begin with as which Brad had reminded Parker. Brad was right Parker thought, what were we getting ourselves into?

"Ensign," Parker gestured for her to join them at the Engineering Lab table readout systems.

Retrospect baited the approaching Jita into considering apologizing to Lieutenant Hudson for the antagonistic swing of their conversation despite not intending it. Like her adoptive mother, she had relatively high tolerances for conduct that manifested in her own, which strangers sometimes mistook for insolence. The thought of her being a couple of pips shy of using her guardian's playbook to similar effect subsided upon remembering her advice that for all of Starfleet's emphasis on bearing, discipline, and respect, the only way to inspire less respect than making pedestals out of rank was to be timid. Perpetual cog status awaited even the smartest, most competent person in the room if they weren't willing to assert themselves to some degree.

So by the time she took a spot at the readout board of her liking, Jita had resolved to stand her ground. She did however speak up unassumingly in an effort to maintain the peace.

"So what's going on?"

Parker was internally ticked and offended at the Ensign's tone and voice of conversation last. She had inferred that Parker's changes to the ship's computer systems and processor intake levels would place people in danger. That was scathing. In /no/ way would he ever place the ship in danger, or lack the foresight in his Engineering skills. The ship had two main Computer Cores, one serving as a back up. There was no way the ODN Matrix, Heisenberg Compensators and Isolinear chips would lack the processing capacity as the Ensign suggested. She was an Ensign in Ops. He wouldn't bother explaining those point up with the Operations Officer as she was not the Chief Engineer and it would be 'a pissing match' as she said.

"We are creating a holomatrix scan from the captain, combining that with sub-atomic neural structuring." He paused pulling up the scans and systems of Captain Alenis. "Captain Alenis needs to be replicated in both matter and in emotional matter," Parker paused looking at the diagram. He took a drink from his silver mug of coffee working hours on this program his baby and Dr. Silverton's.

"This has both ethical and moral complications at this time we are not entertaining. We don't have the time. Dr. Silverton is here with me to access the effectiveness of the neurological aspects so that the Captain's duplicated matrix be able to...Mate with another individual, who is experiencing Pon Farr." He knew providing this information would bite him in the ass.

There was far more going on behind Jita's risen brow than the nonchalant manner in which she executed it. She could certainly see why he was reluctant to come off that information. A part of her actually regretted pushing to know it was so polarizing. Hence her only contribution to the discussion Hudson otherwise declined to have was an intoned "huh" as she nodded.

"So that's why the program's so big," she summated of her more professional thoughts. "We can work with that." Jita focused her gaze on Hudson. "In fact I don't doubt you've done everything you can to make sure everything from a systematic standpoint checks out. But there are elements you can't predict for a program of this complexity, the big one being the inevitable expansions. This isn't a Galaxy-class starship. We don't have a lot of surplus resources to absorb the program's dynamic needs, which is a big part of why the foundation for this. . .treatment is one of the few Mark Is in the galaxy that hasn't been repurposed as a dilithium miner."

Brad jumped into the conversation. "Ensign we'll only need the storage for maybe another 24 hours tops. After that time I fear our living patient won't survive much beyond that. Will there be any complications up until then? We have to be sure nothing happens to the program."

"I can help make that less of a concern now that I'm in the know, Doctor," Jita answered. "It doesn't sound as if you have time for a test run to get a better resource projection, so I suggest upping system margins by idling some high-demand but non-essential functions. The unused holodecks are a given, but I nominate Stellar Cartography too. Any of the labs can be pretty resource-hungry, but that one is tied to the sensors and other navigational systems, so it's almost, always creating load."

"The Secondary Computer Core is empty. It acts currently as a Multi-thread analysis buffer center. Anything that is in an overflow margin gets re-allocated in a 'piggyback' loop routine. This Method is and has been approved for use by Starfleet Daystrom Institute." He looked at the two and paused "What I need for us to do, is for you Ensign Jita, to map out the the EPS Conduit Pathways that will power the holo-matrix to Holodeck Three projectors. This is very important as we don't blow out a corridor bulk head."

He punched in a few buttons into the console pulling up his Engineering Schematics of the arrangement that was just explained to the rest of them. Then he handed a PADD with the corridor arrangements needed from Jita. "Jita, Dr. Silverton" Parker paused to think for a moment, "we will need to transport the Lt. to holodeck three without him knowing... Any ideas?"

Brad was nodding slightly in thought. "Well we could try using a psychotricorder. Its used in some psychiatric therapies for temporary short term induced amnesia. Then we transport him to the holodeck and I'm sure he'll be distracted enough with the silk sheets and scented candles that he won't care much anyways. Remember that his sole focus right now is getting to the Captain. He isn't thinking clearly."

"That is fascinating," Parker stated with his upper left eyebrow raised in iconic Vulcan flair. "How long will it take for you to set this up?" He asked Brad.

"Oh it won't take long at all really. Its handheld. Short range only because they are small, a few feet at best, but since Jason is in the brig that won't be a problem."

"Good. I am sure you will tell the Captain as soon as you have finished."

"Yes sir, though perhaps this time I'll leave out... unnecessary details."

Jita kept her peace up to this point beyond the occasional beep from making a PADD input, as the conversation had swung away from her expertise. If she wasn't completely sold on the prospects of this avant-garde treatment transpiring without a hitch, she took solace in being brought into the loop, forceful imploration notwithstanding. She could contribute something other than confusion in the instance something went awry, which she valued far more than trumping anyone despite the appearances one might perceive of the situation.

"So unless you guys have anything else, I'm off to do my part. It should take thirty minutes tops; one of the things going for us is that there's already high-draw prep in those general whereabouts to facilitate the other holodecks and Stellar Cartography."

MD5, 14:35 hours

Authors: Lt. Cmdr. Timothy Rouse, Lt. Jason Beauvoir, Lt. (J.G.) Grel (played by Cmdr. Alenis Meru)

Jason made his way down the corridor in search of Meru. He stopped passersby and asked where she was. Many ignored him or fogged him off.

Angela Mackenzie must have taken a wrong turn, because she found herself on Deck 5 instead of Deck 7. Turning a corner she saw a man in Sciences blue accosting crewmen. He approached her.

He looked to her to be in pretty bad shape. His skin was pale and was beading on his forehead.

When he reached her, "Where's Meru?" He asked.

Seeing the pain in his eyes and feeling sorry for him, She said. "I don't know who Meru is, but is there anything I can do to help you?"

"Yes." Jason replied, Grabbing her and pulling the phaser on her.

Security officers entered the corridor, weapons drawn.

The Science officer turned face them, his palms were getting slippery, including the hand he held the phaser to the ensign's head. He squinted his eyes. The hallways bright lights hurt his eyes. "I'll shoot her. I swear it." He said with a unsteady voice. "Get me to Meru. NOW!" he shouted.

Grel stared Jason in the eye. Despite being a Tellarite and knowing that the captain was down on the planet, he knew that now was not the time to argue. Now was the time to delay and buy time in the hopes that the madman would make a mistake and give them an opportunity. "All right," he said, motioning for Jason to calm down with his hands. "I just need to find her, okay?"

"You better not be lying to me, Tellarite." Jason said.

"Grel to Rouse, we have a situation down here." The Tellarite winced at having to admit that someone escaped from his custody. That uppity Marine consultant would have a field day with this one. But, that would be dealt with later. The Lieutenant was the real concern now. "Lieutenant Beauvoir has escaped from custody and is holding a crewman hostage, demanding to see the captain."

"How do you mean he escaped?" Timothy asked angrily through the comm. "He was suppose to be under your care. Did the forcefield malfunction?"

"He attacked a guard during Dr. Darze's visit." Grel shook his head, not taking his eyes off of Jason. "But that's not important. He's threatening to shoot crewman Mackenzie if he doesn't see the captain very soon."

Tim thought for a moment and then said. "Bring him to Holodeck 2, the Captain will be waiting for him there." A few heads on the bridge glanced up, as they knew the Captain was on the surface. But the latest progress report had estimated them being ready on 'the project'. He used his console to signal the Lieutenants that they were on their way.

"You heard the man, come with us," replied a scowling and somewhat confused Grel. He had thought that the captain was on the planet as well.

Jason cautiously followed the Tellarite, not sure if he could trust him and ready to flee at the first sign of deception...

A PROPHETIC OCCURRENCE

GAMIA III

MD 04 - 19:02 hours

AUTHORS: Lt. Tyrlai Zade - Lt. Parker Hudson

Tyrlai Zade stood in full crowned Bajoran monestarial robes standing in an alleyway across from a large industrial looking building. The shimmering and humming of the transporter beam came and went leaving the chief engineer in a matching colored tradesmans outfit and a clip on colbalt blue earring.

"Good you came in disguise like I asked, did you bring any weapons?"

Parker reached inside of his monesterial robe upholstering a type II phaser and handing it to Zade. He looked around the surrounding that was cloaked in darkness of the planetary cycle. He was equipped with his own phaser. He turned his attention from the alleyway towards the large industrial building not far from their location. It seemed deserted, at least outside. But looks were deceiving. "Did you find anything more?" He asked quietly.

"The missile launched from behind this building about 200 meters back, give or take, per the ships scanners. In talking to a few of the locals I have determined that this region is somewhat xenophobic and doesn't trust Trill's enough to give them any decent information." Tyrlai looked up at the building and flipped off her scanner. "Then I was looking for something to eat in the marketplace and I saw one of the guys from the nightclub who kidnapped me. I traced him to here, he's either on the second floor now, or they spotted me and whipped up one hell of a biometric and genetic fake really quickly. There are also at least three datamatrixis in there that need downloading and study."

Parker stated "Doesn't trust Trills that is clearly Xenophoebic."

"Right. Clearly." She nodded, looking back down at her display after pocketing the phaser. "Everybody likes Trills, we're exotic and fun."

As Zade talked Parker slipped her a folded knife.

Tyrlai looked at it like it was a clever toy for children to play with. "Are we having pears later?"

"Don't cut yourself." He snapped open the blade "A methaphylic blade has a laminated tri-acting agent. It will incapacitate and stun your enemy along with a truth serum. May come in handy." He fake grimaced at Tyrlai's 'pear comment'.

"Remind me to show you how bladed weapons are used on the holodeck sometime." Tyrlai folded the knife back with a flick of her wrist and slipped it in a pocket of her flowing outfit.

Parker flipped out his engineering tricorder with the data from the ships sensors, linking it to Tyrlai's tricorder. He stepped forward towards the location, beginning along the large buildings support structured metal beamed outer walls. He looked back for Tyrlai.

Tyrlai followed looking at the ships schematics, "Now this is useful, I was just going to break a window or something." They crossed the street at an angle looking like nothing more than a few

locals out for a stroll. She was unusually tall to be a priestess but there was no way she could pull off the workmen garb that the local men wore. At the corner of the structure she turned walking straight for a side entrance. Approaching the door she pulled a small device from another pocket in her garb and placed it against the door. It whirred quietly and beeped, she pressed lightly on the frame and it swung open. She pocketed her device. "If security asks, you never saw that," Tyrlai smirked and motioned, "after you."

Parker chuckled as he walked along with his tricorder, passing underneath a metal rusted gangway overheard them. "Someway I think that they already are."

Tyrlai looked up listening to the footfalls overhead as the occupants mobilized, she had clearly missed some sort of security device. "Well that is disappointing. The first database matrix is over there, I will cover you." She pulled her phaser and flipping an arm around, managed to unwrap her robe in one smooth movement and send it fluttering a couple meters to the side. Underneath she was wearing a purple and black variant of a black ops variant. The purple was a little too shimmery to be practical. She strode over to where the stairway entered the room and kicked the first guard in the temple sending him sprawling to the ground. She grabbed the second and twisted his firearm from his hand with a combo of strong fingers and sharp nails, while pulling him down and forward over her spinning form to land with a surprised yelp next to the first. Aiming her phaser she fired up the stairway hitting one man in the shoulder and another in the leg before they backed up and regrouped. Picking up the second man's sidearm she phasered him in the chest to make sure he was stunned and then did the same to the first who was out cold.

"I think they might actually be priests. They don't seem to have combat training." Tyrlai said firing up the stairs once more to convince them to stay there.

Hudson turned back a moment as he began to access the first of the buildings data matrix systems. He was rather surprised that the diplomatic officer was... well so undiplomatic in her combat skills. "Nice.." He muttered to his self underneath as he turned back to the computer terminal. Parker pulled out from his back pack slung behind him a Interlink Sequencer that was set to the original subspace communicator Tyrlai had discovered.

Punching it into the Tricorder and placing the Sequencer against the Bajoran unit to begin downloading...

Turning to face back at Tyrlai over the out cold Priests he held his own Type II Phaser at ready. He had by Federation Standards excellent advanced Combat II and Marksmanship trained skills. But nothing like the 'street cred' that Tyrlai looked to be packing. "Priests?" He looked above as the remaining men scattered to regroup "What does that mean then?" He was left out of the loop, not the best deducer only in mechanical situations.

"I would guess that the real bad folks are long gone from this place. And perhaps that a religious order is the ones behind the theft of religious books?" It was more of a supposition and as such made her voice curl up at the end like a question. She held on to the phaser, clipped the new gun to her belt and grabbed the hand scanner again. "Six more but they seem to be happy upstairs, hiding behind things." Her scanner blinked oddly and she tapped at it as she turned towards the warehouse proper. "And three and a half in there."

"Half?" Parker looked towards the warehouse. He began getting antsy with the tricorder as it beeped letting him verify round three of the downloading was beginning. "Almost done... Just a few more..." He reached at his phaser holster and setting it to stun the energy levels ready to fire at the occupants in the next room.

She stood at the edge of the archway peering into the dusky lit space beyond. "Why are there so many priests in a warehouse?" She tapped the side of her scanner again. "One of the people in there seems to have a mix of two life-signs. Or hes smuggling exotic animals subdurally. Humanoid, Bajoran,...ish." She said turning to Parker. "Two lifeforms sharing a body, that's freakish don't you think?"

Parker stifled his self.. "You make this too easy." He trailed his eyes to Tyrlai's spots down her chin and neck into her uniform. And then refocused back onto the situation below. The room was darkly lit with a few overhead spot lights, similar to Earth port district warehouses.

"Blind men living in robes." He then flipped upward his tricorder and setting into the back pack the Interlink Sequencer, swinging it around his back and meeting up with Tyrlai who was already making headway... Parker wanting in on the action this time.

Tyrlai turned at the corner of a line of tall pallets and was welcomed by a familiar face. One she had seen in a club on the outer ring of DS-9, freakishly cute for a Bajoran priest and at least part time book thief. He was ten meters away and she elected to take a different approach this time. She raised her phaser and fired, missing, badly and twice more before they turned and fired forcing her to dive back behind the pallets, sparks and debris sprinkling down on her.

"What the hell?" Parker shouted crouching at the pallet across the way opposite Tyrlai. Parker turning around the pallet, sighting and letting his phaser off to do the talking. Hearing the pallet in front of him be hit and then get blasted as debris and metal shards explode from behind. "That was shit close!!" He snorted looking at Tyrlai.

"Yeah, Im not actually that good a shot outside of like, five meters." She pulled herself into a crouch. "We need the pretty one and a half alive, can you get the other two?"

He forced a grimace. "Why you need the pretty boy? Maybe now that's the one to send to slaughter!" He growled. Reaching into his backpack and yanking out his tricorder with the interlink sequencer... Parker punched in a few key commands to interfere with the Priests Buildings power systems, he already had access to them earlier gaining their codes and more. "Prepare for shock and awe!"

Just then the tricorder sent its coded transmission to the buildings energy banks sending a complete overload through all the power stations within, causing a massive explosion to the overhead lights and terminals below in the large warehouse room where the three Monks were...

Tyrlai exhaled and pivoted round the corner and dashed forward, the disoriented trio were unable to get a decent shot off and she crossed the interval. She down to undercut the first at the last moment, even as they fired over her through the space she had just vacated. Her legs whirled and the first landed awkwardly banging his head, the second aimed his gun at her and she twisted again, catching his weapon arm with her own and snapping it back. He yelped in surprise and pain and accidentally shot himself in the chest, slumping to the floor just as the third got to a dock and outside activating a shimmering red force field before turning to smirk at her. The first man had struggled to his feet behind her and rose to strike just as a phaser blast from Parker put him back down.

Tyrlai stood, raised her weapon and fired, the beam bouncing off the field and hitting a nearby pallet. She dialed the phaser up to full power and fired again, almost vaporizing the pallet sitting next to the first one she had hit.

The smirk on his face turned to a sneer. "We should have killed you, and damn the lizards chivalry."

Tyrlai glared at the wall looking for other openings. "I'll have to thank him I suppose."

"Well, next time then." The Bajoran tapped something at his wrist and was enshrouded in shimmering red light as he beamed away.

Tyrlai glared as the force field faded away. She pulled a scanner from her belt and took some readings as Parker came up behind her.

He walked up in front of Tyrlai and then shook his head with a bewildered fascination at this mysterious super hero/ action fighter type of character that had some sort of beef between him and her.

Parker set out his two hands in front "Ok... That was entertaining, but just what the hell was that?" He knew he wouldn't get much information from the Diplomatic Officer as communication with words, and semantics was her thing. His face and eyes searching Tyrlai's for information as he was intrigued none the less.

Tyrlai looked back at him glaring like he hadn't been paying attention but softened as she remembered he hadn't been on Portland for most of it. "I call him the pretty one, we met on a dance floor on Deep Space Nine. He was meant to distract me from the exchange of a stolen holy book missing from Bajor. I followed and was abducted, escaped, attended an awards ceremony and got shot by a Reptilian whom I call the reptilian. The subspace communicator I had you analyze belongs to the Reptilian. The missile that tried to shoot down the shuttle came from here, and I suspect they the ones behind it. And lastly," she showed him the readings from her hand scanner, "there are no force field emitters in that exit so it glowed red all by itself."

Subliminal suspicion

Gamia III

MD4, 2300

Authors: Cmdr. Alenis Meru, Jita Eloru (Played by Jita Kejal)

Alenis stared out the window of her lodging. Any moment now, she was expecting a call from a certain Jita Eloru on a secured and encrypted channel. Outside, it was quiet. Too quiet. Just about the only people on the street were some kind of law enforcement officers, most of them carrying rifles. Obviously, the Gamians were taking no chances with security; they were clearly enforcing some sort of curfew. It gave her an eerie feeling. Well, that and the abdominal pains she had been having ever since arriving on the planet. She had tried to push any thoughts of growths and prophets and gifts out of her head during this mission, but evidently the... whatever it was... was telling her otherwise.

Watching a patrol pass by the window, she began to wonder if there was something that the Gamians were hiding. Increased security presence made sense given the importance of these negotiations and the events of earlier in the day. But someone had tried to kill them and she didn't know why. And the Kai didn't offer much in the way of an explanation either. All Alenis could hope for was Tyrlai could shed some light on the issue with her less than conventional methods.

Beep-beep!

Alenis' thoughts were interrupted by a PADD on her temporary desk. Pressing a button to answer the call, she saw Jita Eloru's face appear as expected. "Ah, Minister, thank you for calling," she said,

staring down at the PADD in her hands. "Now, what did you want to talk to me about earlier?"

"Matters a citizen should likely take care of discussing in the midst of a diplomatic summit," Eloru began, seemingly at ease with her environment. "The Kai's conduct for instance: I know it is beyond my purview, yet I wish to apologize to you for it. Her affront of the inquiring young woman in your company was especially repugnant, if not terribly surprising. Is she all right?"

"I'm sure she will be fine. Jena has been briefed on some of the dangers of diplomatic missions." Alenis bit her lip for a moment. "She has been through a very eventful and stressful few weeks though. But I'm sure Major Rouse can take care of her." Alenis glanced out the window and back to the PADD. She was going to get right to the point. "Do you have any information as to who tried to shoot down our shuttle?"

"The council was convened shortly after the delegation adjourned to hear the findings of the Holy Guard's investigation into the attack. They claim that a live projectile was erroneously used in an aerospace defense exercise." Steadily as she offered the briefing summation, Eloru's voice carried a reflective undertone of skepticism.

"And you think that that is just too big of a coincidence?" asked Alenis, zeroing in on the doubt in Jita's voice. "Is there someone who might have the means or the motive to try to shoot us down and then cover it up?"

"This is but the latest of several martial incidents in recent months. The pertinent portions of our government have been consistent in offering explanations that rarely implicate any one person or party. Some of us feel there's more than what's been disclosed, yet have little to go on beyond the convenience of their answers."

Eloru didn't break her gaze from Alenis during her pause. "This may strike you as a foolish question, Captain, but. . .are you a person of faith?"

"Yes, I am," replied Alenis, her voice slightly gentle in reverence of the Prophets. She brushed her hair aside for a moment to reveal her earring. "I was separated from Bajor as a child, and being a starship captain means I don't get to visit the temple regularly. But I've studied the teachings of the prophets and carry my faith with me wherever my duties... wait a minute, is this about our d'jarras?" Alenis shook her head in frustration. "Look, Bajor has changed a lot in the past 500 years, but that doesn't mean we've turned our backs on the Prophets. Our belief in the Prophets is what had sustained us during the Occupation."

"I do not seek to fault the integrity of your faith, Meru," Eloru countered, voice toeing between motherly mildness and amusement in spite of her listener's exasperation. While a vedek, the former may've been somewhat odd since she looked no older than Alenis. "Or Bajor's. I can't deny that the Kai's criticality and bombast in such matters is a harbinger to many attitudes on Gamia, but I am among those who question a mortal passing absolute judgment on another where the Prophets' design is concerned. I've learned from my studies that it's often such individuals who are in danger of straying from the path if they've not already. Some draw flawed conclusions from the scriptures. Others willfully deviate or forsake, yet manipulate others' faith out of recognizing it as a potent means to their own ends. Either scenario is easier studied than realized, especially in times of duress."

Eloru's settled deportment remained tender. "It is also during such times that some lose their faith. I only know of the Occupation's atrocities through some of our preemptive contact, but if you were to tell me it disillusioned your resolve, I would understand. I would encourage you to consider a

different perspective, but I wouldn't love you any less."

"My faith remains strong," Alenis was starting to wonder what Eloru was getting at. "And I carry it with me wherever I go."

The vedek's smile waned slightly. "I just needed to know where you stand on spirituality because. . . I believe it is through that medium that I am troubled."

"Oh?" asked Alenis, raising an eyebrow at her unexpected ally.

Eloru nodded. "I could fill the night with suspicions rooted in secular, political motives. Our overtures of sacredness are not such that there isn't diversity or dissent among us as to how to best fulfill it, which is one reason I question our preparedness for reunification. But more than that, I've felt. . . qualmish in the face of some recent developments. Overwhelmingly so at times. Today was the first in some time I've been able to endure a full session of council in fact, though there were times I feared needing to pardon myself yet again."

"What sort of developments?" asked Alenis. She was grateful for the information, but Eloru was starting to sound like the prophets -- always speaking in mysterious ways.

"Many of our people perceive the kai as a leader struggling to fulfill the Prophets' will in spite of old prejudices: her own, and those of others, particularly those who've resorted to acts of terrorism like the attack on your shuttle. But it's never set right with me. Never mind that the way she talked to Jena fell well short of someone interested in outreach; she spoke with such. . . vitriol," Eloru pressed of the young observer being unabashedly referred to as a 'half-breed,' "that my stomach churned. And I've felt similarly to much of her reunification advocacy."

"That did seem strange," observed Alenis. "Earlier, it sounded as though she was devoted to reunification with Bajor, but her behaviour earlier today - pressing the issue of d'jarras, and her rudeness towards Jena - strike me as those of someone looking for an excuse for a diplomatic incident. But why?" Alenis shook her head. "You know, even if we don't have any more diplomatic incidents, I'm not sure Gamia III is ready to be a part of the Federation."

"I would be surprised if you hadn't said that, Captain," Eloru offered in a rueful chuckle. "I imagine that few, if any societies are completely homogeneous, but there's been so much. . . dissonance among us lately, especially over reunification. I wish I could tell you something more concrete about our situation, but it's been difficult just to stay centered in the midst of it all, much less trace the various elements that have manifested back to their source. I'd say this commotion is being stirred up for the sake of obscuring something if I didn't know any better. But I have no idea why, much less to what end. Just surges of. . . trepidation. And even now, I'm struggling to make sense of them."

Continuing to hold Meru's gaze, Eloru's features and posture seem to sag in defeat. "I'm sorry that I can't be more helpful."

Meru offered Eloru a reassuring smile. "You've already been very helpful, perhaps more than you know."

Visions

MD5, 01:00

Alenis had a horrible night. Not only was she stressed out by the state of the negotiations, she had a

pain in her abdomen that just wouldn't go away. Aided by the sleeping pills Brad prescribed and a glass or three of wine, Alenis had managed to fall into a deep sleep. It was not to be long lived though, as she was awakened in the middle of the night by a blindingly bright light outside her bedroom.

Groggily, she got out of bed and, shielding her eyes, walked into her living room. Only when she arrived, it wasn't her living room. She saw a bright flash of light before appearing on the bridge of the Portland. "Tim?" she asked, seeing him seated in the center chair.

"Meru, you need guidance?" he asked in an unnaturally calm voice.

"Yes, yes I do," replied Alenis, realizing what was going on. "These negotiations aren't going well. The Kai is being intransigent, and broke of the negotiations over d'jarras. Our delegation--"

"The negotiations are irrelevant," said the prophet in the form of Tyrlai.

"Irrelevant?" Alenis raised an eyebrow. "But we're talking about the reunification of Gamia III with Bajor."

"The Gamians have their role to play, as do you," said Jita.

"And so do you," added Arvel.

"Your role is bigger than these negotiations." This prophet had taken the form of Parker.

"What's my role? What do I have to do?" asked Alenis.

"You will know when it comes." Jason took Alenis by the hand. "Trust in us. We will guide you on your path." With that, the bridge began to glow brighter.

"My path?" Alenis realized that the vision was coming to a close. "Wait, no, you have to--"

With a flash of white light, Alenis was wide awake, back in her bed.

Appointment...

Ellen and Tim's quarters, USS Portland

MD5, 1100 hrs

Authors: Ellen Washington (played by Timothy Rouse), Maria Hill & EMH Mark I (played by Alenis Meru)

"Ellen, come on, you're going to be late for your appointment!" exclaimed Maria Hill, pressing the chime on her friend's quarters. Ever since hearing about the pregnancy, Maria had been even more protective of Ellen than usual.

Ellen took a last sip of her tea and hurried to the door. "I'm coming," she said. "Do you have any idea how difficult it is to hurry when your body not only does everything it possibly can think of to slow you down. But also works very hard at making sure your breakfast goes out the wrong way even faster than it came in." She said sarcastically

"But this is your first examination!" pleaded Maria. "Aren't you excited!"

"Of course I am, but can't you tell that to my body." She shook her head. "Never mind" She needed to leave her worries behind for a moment. She wanted Tim to be there for this, but he was so busy with the mission and all. And there would come so many more ultrasounds.

"Are you sure?" asked Maria. "I can arrange a site to site transport if you want."

She looked at her friend angry. "I'm pregnant, not an invalid. I'm perfectly capable of walking. It's not the other end of the world." Her mood wasn't really improving much. Hopefully it would when she would see her son or daughter. Well, rather the image of what he or she was going to look like. Her pregnancy was too early to see anything, or hear a heartbeat. But the DNA projector offers a lot of interesting thing for her to see, and learn. Including the sex of the baby.

"Fine, we'll walk. If you're up for it, that is..." replied Maria. She held her friend by the hand as they navigated the corridors of the Portland, ready to grab her at a moment's notice in case she fell. Ellen was so sweet and innocent; since they first met at the academy, Maria had always been protective of her. As they entered sickbay, Maria looked around. "Dr. Silverton, we're here for Ellen's appointment!" she called out.

No response.

Maria looked down at her friend; she had come all the way to sickbay. "Fine. Computer, activate EMH," she called out.

"Please state the nature of the medical emergency," called out the holographic doctor. But as he spoke, he noticed something wasn't right -- his voice was distinctly female.

"Captain?!" exclaimed Maria, at the sight of what looked like Commander Alenis in a red cocktail dress.

The hologram rolled her eyes. "I seem to have taken on a new look," she muttered. "No matter. I am still a fully qualified physician with over 50 gigaquads of medical data." she looked down at her dress; whoever was in charge of this project obviously figured that it would be beneficial if the clothing were to be more revealing than the standard Starfleet uniform. "At least, I am for now, until those idiots overwrite my program to satisfy their depraved fantasies. Now," she continued, refocusing her attention on Ellen and Maria, "what can I do for you?"

"Ellen here has an appointment for her ultrasound, and Dr. Silverton is nowhere to be found." Maria glanced down at Ellen, giving her an awkward shrug. "We can come back later if--"

"No, we can do it now," insisted the EMH. "Despite my attire, I'm a doctor, not a call girl."

"I see," replied Maria, nervously. "Ellen, are you feeling..." she trailed off, unable to finish the sentence.

"Will you stop fussing about me?" She hissed to Maria. When the captain had appeared at first she was surprised, but later remembered the stuff that was going on with the EMH. "I'm perfectly fine. Let's do this," she said enthusiastically.

"Very well. Once you get changed, we can get started," said the hologram, motioning towards a biobed. "I'm sure your friend knows where the gowns are."

The procedure itself only took about a half an hour. The doctor ran a variety of scans, gathering all

sorts of data about the development of the fetus and about Ellen's condition. The fetus was too small at this stage for an ultrasound to be of any consequence, but he was able to sample the baby's DNA for genetic testing. And, for another miracle of 24th century technology that often got expectant mothers excited.

"All right, Ms. Washington, once the computer is finished calculating, we should be able to see if your baby is healthy, and a projection of what he will look like at various ages."

Ellen sat up right, feeling really excited about the results. She couldn't wait. "When will it be finished?" she asked.

The doctor opened her mouth up to speak, but was interrupted by a ding. "Right now." She quickly reviewed the data on her console. "I'm detecting no genetic abnormalities."

"But what does he -- or she -- look like?!" asked Maria, who could barely contain her excitement.

"He," replied the doctor. "I can show you a projection. Computer, based on the genetic sequence of the fetus, display a projection of what he will look like at two days after birth."

Ellen made a small sound and put her hand for her mouth. Her son. And my, he really looked like Tim. Even so young. The same eyes. "Oh my," was all she could say.

Maria clutched Ellen's hand tightly. "He's so cute!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, he is," added the EMH. Though they were not known for their bedside manner, the EMH Mark I was at least programmed with the knowledge that all babies are cute. "I can advance the projection through to age 14 if you wish to see what he will look like when he is a little older. Much beyond that and the projection loses a lot of accuracy."

"Oh yes please." Ellen said as she stood up. She almost wanted to jump from excitement.

"Computer, project what the child will look like at two years."

A blond, little boy appeared. An almost replica of his father. Ellen couldn't imagine that in almost 3 years she would see that boy running around. That the boy would be her son. She shook her head as she attempted to let the whole situation sink in.

"He is... quite the handsome child," said the doctor, trying to make conversation. "Get ready; this is the emotional part. Computer, advance projection to thirteen years."

"Oh my god, Ellen, we'll have to keep the girls away from him!" exclaimed Maria. The boy looked like a younger version of Tim -- who was not an unattractive man himself. She looked down into Ellen's eyes and saw a tear form. "Ellen, are you all right?"

"Huh?" she said as she wiped the tear away from her cheek. "I'm fine, just a bit emotional. Those damn hormones." She couldn't stop staring at the image in front of her. "Doctor, can I get a copy of these images?" She wanted to show them to Tim as soon as she could.

"Of course," replied the doctor, as she punched in a couple commands on his terminal, and then popped out an isolinear chip. "Here you are, you should be able to open his image in any room equipped with holo-emitters." He looked around the room. "Now, could you do me a favour and turn my program off?" she asked, wondering if she would remember this, or even if she would be the

same person, the next time she was turned on.

"Thank you. Computer end program." Ellen said before turning to her friend, holding the chip in her hand tightly. "I really need to see Tim. Do you mind?" she asked.

"Go ahead," said Maria, trying to contain her excitement. "And if you need anything, anything at all, please call me. Even if it's 3 am."

MD5 - 07.15 hours

Deck 1 - Bridge

Authors: Lt. Cmdr. Timothy Rouse and Ens. Sera Williams

Tim walked on the bridge, fresh coffee in hand. His shift has just began. "Morning everyone" he said, after seeing everyone was already present. He walked to the center chair, taking it over from the Gamma Bridge Officer. "Anything special happen?"

"Negative, sir. No new reports on the investigation to the origins of the missile." the young woman answered while placing her hand in her neck. "All system are just as they were eight hours ago."

"Perfect," Tim said. "Now get out of here." He said with a smile. "I know how hard those night shifts can be."

"Aye sir," and the woman left the bridge.

The ride on the turbolift was both the longest and the shortest few seconds of Sera's life. This was only the second starship she had ever been aboard, the first being a glorified hitchhiking trip to Deep Space 9 on the Conway. This however was HER first ship and she would be reporting to the Portland's First Officer. Sera took a deep breath to calm her nerves, hoping the turbolift arrived before she passed out.

As soon as the Lord's doors opened with their now familiar whoosh, Sera immediately wished for a few more seconds. Sera pulled down her kingdom's top piece as it had begun to ride up a bit, the she stepped into the bridge. As she moved toward the First Officer, she quickly scanned the bit bridge. Her emerald eyes drifted from each console and the officers manning them to the next in rapid succession.

As soon as she made her way toward the man she had come to report to, she gave her best salute and said, "Lt Commander Rouse, Ensign Williams reporting for duty, Sir."

"At ease," Tim said. "Welcome on board."

Sera released her salute and took a more relaxed posture as she replied, "Thank you, it is an honor to be here, Sir."

Since this was her first assignment, Sera couldn't shake the feeling that she was forgetting something important during this part of joining a ship's crew. Giving up on trying to remember, with a smile she said, "I will be in Engineering, unless I can make myself useful up here?"

Tim quickly look at the Engineering station seeing that it was already occupied by an officer. "You are always free to take over the Engineering console, but have you met the Engineer Chief jet? If not, you might want to go find him first. He'll can probably use your help."

Sera nodded in agreement as she had not met the Chief Engineer yet. Before turning around, Sera replied, "Thank you, Sir. I will head to Engineering to meet Lt Hudson."

She then turned around and made her way back to the turbolift that she had exited moments before, hoping that she had made a good first impression. When she stepped in she said, "Main Engineering."

As soon as the doors closed, Sera leaned against the turbolift doors, bent over a bit and rested her hands on her knees then let out a relieved sigh. At least she didn't pass out or make a fool of herself, and that was something to be proud of.

Bridge, USS Portland

MD5, 14.00 hrs

Author: Lt. Cmdr. Timothy Rouse, Ens. James Burton, Cmdr. Alenis Meru and Gul Jatok (written by Alenis Meru)

Tim walked around the bridge keeping an eye on the tactical officer in the mean time. He had a talk with him and did some training on the holiday in the afternoon. The guy knew his stuff, he just was too nervous and shy to do a proper job on the bridge.

"Sir," the nervous voice of James came from tactical. The combination of disbelief and astonishment sounded in his voice. "A Cardassian Galor class ship approaching."

Tim immediately approach him. At first he thought the man had made a mistake, but then thought that it would be very hard to mess up so much that you have a Cardassian ship on your sensors. Especially in the minute since Tim had left the tactical station "Yellow alert," he said after he confirmed the ensign data. "Ops, patch me through to the Captain."

"Connection active"

"Captain, we have a Cardassian ship approaching. Galor class."

Cardassians. On the surface of the planet, Alenis' face took on an enraged expression. The Cardassians wrecked her planet, killed her father, and drove her from her home when she was just a child. They were responsible for untold crimes against her people, and very few of them had seen justice. There was nothing that could be done to eradicate from Alenis' heart a deep burning hatred for the Cardassians, and nothing that could be done that could make her tolerate, much less trust, one. To her, they would always be the brutal oppressors who were responsible for decades of occupation and irreparable damage to Bajor and her people.

"Go to yellow alert," she said, through clenched teeth. "And find out what they want."

"Yellow alert is already active."

"You read my mind," replied Alenis. "Oh, and Tim, one more thing, please be careful. Cardassians are not to be trusted."

He smiled at the comment. "It's not my first rodeo with them." After closing the channel he turned to ops. "Open a channel" and, as seconds before, a communication was opened, this time with the Cardassian vessel."

"Federation starship, I am Gul Jatok of the CDS Galandar, Cardassian Guard." Jatok's face was one of an old warrior, bearing a scar from long ago. His angular features and severe expression had softened slightly with age. Years of sitting in a command chair had added a few pounds to his formerly lean frame, and a hint of grey made him appear slightly more distinguished -- or as distinguished as a Cardassian could possibly look. But his eyes still retained the seriousness of a man used to fighting. "We are on a mission of peace, and have no hostile intent towards the Federation." At the last statement, Jatok did not show a hint of fear. He knew from experience that his Galor class heavy cruiser could easily outgun any Miranda class starship.

Standing in front of the center seat Tim answered the man's unquestioned question. "My name is Commander Rouse of the USS Portland. What is the reason for your presence here?"

"We have every right to be here; this is not Federation space," snarled Jatok. "We are on a diplomatic mission to Gamia III. That is all you need to know."

"I wasn't aware the Cardassians even knew diplomacy, let alone have diplomatic missions." Tim said, already feeling annoyed with the person he was talking to. "Would you care to explain how it is that your diplomatic mission happens during the same time as ours?"

"The timing is a question for the Gamians, as we are here at their request," replied Jatok. He tented his fingers in front of his mouth for a moment before continuing. "We Cardassians are masters of diplomacy, and have peacefully coexisted with the Federation since the end of the Dominion War. It is sad to see that a high ranking Starfleet officer such as yourself still insists on holding on to old stereotypes and prejudices." Jatok's words were articulated in a particularly grating manner, conveying his confidence that he had the upper hand. After all, a Miranda class vessel was no match for the Galandar.

"But regardless of how you feel about my people," continued Jatok, "surely, in accordance with the principles of the Prime Directive which you Starfleet officers are sworn to uphold, you would recognize the right of the Gamian people to determine their own future, even if they decide that their future lies with the Cardassian Union?" His eyes narrowed as he stared at Rouse. "Unless, of course, you are here not for the benefit of the Gamians but to establish a military presence in this system from which to threaten Cardassian space. In which case, that could cause a serious diplomatic incident."

"We are here for the exact same reason as you are. To aid the Gamian people. Nothing more" Tim said as he kept looking at the man.

"Well then," started Jatok, "I hope neither of us run into any... trouble. Good day, commander."

"Goodday" Tim replied, but the screen had already gone to black. "Nice fellow," Tim said sarcastically.

Inaji's run

Gamia III system

MD5, 1600 hrs

Authors: Inaji Narale (played by Alenis Meru), Lt. Cmdr. Timothy Rouse

With the authorities hot on her trail, Inaji Narale pushed her stolen shuttle to the limit. Her destination: Gamia III.

The slender Cardassian woman was on the run from the law. Wanted for murder on Cardassia, she was desperate to escape Cardassian space. And, if the reports were to be believed, the one woman in the quadrant who might help her was due to arrive on Gamia III.

She didn't think of herself as a bad person, and stealing a shuttle was not something she would normally do. But she had been presented with an opportunity which she could not pass up.

Entering orbit of Gamia III, two ships appeared on her sensors. One, a Galor class cruiser, presumably armed to the teeth. The other a Miranda class Federation starship. Her console chimed; she was getting a message from the Galor. She ignored it; she had nothing she wanted to talk to them about.

Breaking orbit, the Cardassian cruiser turned to intercept her.

"Inaji Narale. You are under arrest for the murder of Gul Narale." The voice of Gul Jatok echoed throughout her stolen shuttle.

"No!" exclaimed Inaji. "I'll never go back!" She activated emergency power on her impulse engines in a mad dash to get away, but it was no use. The Galor had caught her in a tractor beam.

"Your little run is at an end, Ms. Narale," Gul Jatok said. "Surrender now, and you may be granted leniency. If you continue this foolish attempt to escape, you will most surely face a firing squad."

"I'd rather die than go back to Cardassia!" exclaimed Inaji, before activating the self-destruct system on her stolen shuttle. "See you in Grou'kell!"

Meanwhile, on the USS Portland...

"Commander," Burton said. "A shuttle of Cardassian configuration just exploded close to the Cardassian ship" Tim stood up from the Command chair, holding his coffee. He needed it. His shift ended hours ago. He so much wanted to be somewhere else at this moment, but that wasn't an option right now.

"Any lifesigns?"

"There was one earlier, but I don't have it anymore?" James said, nervously. He tried so hard to not screw up, but it seemed he couldn't work one ship without making mistakes.

"I just picked up a transporter signal to the planet" added R'vahis, trying very hard not to say something like, I found your lifesign. Everyone knew James always messed stuff up, but they also knew the Commander didn't like anyone making fun of him for it. So they all just shut up about it.

"Inform the captain," said Tim. "This is most peculiar..."

Telling the great news

MD5 - 11.45

Deck 1 - Tim's Office

With: Lt. Cmdr. Timothy Rouse and P.O. Ellen Washington

Tim had just left the bridge and was heading to his office for a while to arrange some paperwork

when he saw Ellen approaching, fast paced and with such a beautiful look on her face. He stopped, saw there was no one else presence before saying to her, "Hello gorgeous, what are you doing here."

Without saying a thing she flew around his neck. He could barely prevent them falling. He hadn't expected that from her. Closing his arms around her waist he guided her to his office, which as only a few steps away from where they were standing.

"What's up sweetie?" He said after entering his office. She hadn't said a word, and he was even wondering if she was crying or not. He lifted her chin in his direction after leaning against his desk.

"I'm just so happy," she finally said. "Look at this," she added, giving him the data stick with the images of their child.

With his free arm he pulled the console closer, not wanting to let go of Ellen in the progress. He liked holding her close. The computer needed some time to access the data and compile it. "What is it?" He asked. "You'll see." Ellen replied mysteriously. Then an image appeared from a boy in her early teens. He looked exactly like him.

"You wanted to show me a childhood picture of myself? Did Judy gave that to you? I knew there was something you were gossiping about last night."

She poked him softly in the ribs before kissing him on the lips. "That, my love, is our son at the age of thirteen."

Tim looked more closely at the picture and could now see not only the resemblance of himself, but also of Ellen. After embracing her tighter, and placing a kiss on her head he said. "A boy, we're having a boy." He didn't know what to say more. All he could do was stare at the picture of his son. "He's so beautiful. He has your cheekbones."

He could never understand how parent could recognize parts of themselves in a child. He couldn't even see any resemblance between Suzy and his brother. But with his own child he could. The boy was going to be a spitting image of his father, and that made him so proud. A kind of proud he had never experienced before. He leaned his head against Ellen's. "I love you,"

Genaeology

MD5, morning

Authors: Capt. Alenis Meru, Ensign Jita Kejal, Lieutenant Parker Hudson

Alenis was exhausted from a troubling night before and the stress of the negotiations falling apart. So, she did the only thing she could do in such a situation: brew herself a cup of tea and get on with the day. The one good thing this mission had going for it so far was the fact that the Gamians had decent tea.

"Alenis to Ensign Jita," she said as she tapped her comm badge, holding a mug of tea in the other.

The individual she sought didn't respond. One might've assumed the transmission failed if not for ambient rustle that happened to be too soft and inconsistent to be a technical byproduct. A soft moan consistent with Jita's voice joined the otherwise unintelligible babble, supplanting the prospect of technical difficulties with the question of why she'd not actually spoken.

Alenis rolled her eyes and tried again. "Ensign Jita!" she called out in a sharp voice. It was no use, so

she decided on a different strategy.

"Alenis to Engineering, come in."

Covered deep in dilithium resonance charge circuitry Parker heard the Commander call. Immediately tapping his com badge in reply, still half of his own brain working over the technical workings in front of him... "Hudson here."

"I need a favour," replied Alenis. "Can you access the audio entertainment settings in room 3-A-6? I need a Klingon opera of your choosing, maximum volume."

Parker raised his right eyebrow... "Hey, I can work anything your kinky mind wants Commander." He chuckled. Grabbing upward from the bulk head.

"Sera can you work that for the Commander?" Parker asked his new Assistant Chief Engineer.

"I think I can manage," replied Sera, concealing a smirk as she tapped at her console. "One selection from Keedera's Shevok'tah gish, coming right up."

Jita's eyes opened moments after Alenis relented, the first step in a collaboration of how failing to exhibit the premier traits of consciousness wasn't a reliable indicator of its absence and the Earth-borne phenomenon known as Murphy's Law. She'd awakened earlier, only to try and appease her senses' protest of the token slumber she'd taken with a power nap. Trying to pick up her research from where she left off after showering and dressing was as much an indicator of progress as it was a summation of what she was doing; her efforts to process the pertinent lines of text were akin to skimming sans awareness or comprehension, and she was only just cognizant enough to realize it. The same was true of responding to Alenis' call, though fatigue's attempt to lure her into a deeper sleep further clouded her immediacy and recollection so that she spent several successive seconds trying to isolate details into actionable clarity.

The delay was long enough that the moment at which Jita succeeded also happened to be the same at which the captain's wake-up serenade struck. The internal resonance created by reflexively chucking her hands over her ears being the only way her desisting instruction to the computer registered in the thunderclap was off-putting. Loudness wasn't a state she fancied, so its momentary persistence in ostensible spite of her instructions goaded a prickliness in the ensign that survived the volume's fall to a bearable level as well as her suspicion-driven counter-summon.

"Jita to Alenis!"

Alenis waited a few seconds before answering. "Good morning ensign, how are you on such a lovely morning?" she asked in a teasing voice.

"In the interests of continuing to be addressed as Ensign," Jita grumbled, the tensing of her crossed arms bunching her shoulders, "I'm not answering that. Ask the Prophets if you're serious, otherwise, sorry I missed your call getting a sliver of the sleep I couldn't last night. I only had to guide transmissions to and from Bajor through a level 6 ion storm without the benefit of a relay network. Or full power." She didn't expound upon the latter, not wanting to bring up Alenis' photonic doppelganger. Her resentment wasn't strong enough to compel going there.

"I see," replied Alenis, having little sympathy for the ensign's plight. She had gotten barely a wink of sleep since her latest vision. "We're all tired, Ensign," she said, in a slightly dismissive voice. "But the reason I'm calling is for that genealogy report. Do we have anyone who has a good enough d'jarra to

at least pretend to be a diplomat, for the benefit of the Gamians?"

Jita laughed.

"Captain, if hell froze over and Bajor reinstated d'jarra tomorrow, there isn't a single delegate that wouldn't need to dust off their resume."

"So, what you're saying is none of the members of the Bajoran delegation have a suitable d'jarra?" asked Alenis for clarification.

"Right."

"Well, if we can't produce a diplomat who the Kai will agree to talk to, then this entire mission is toast. If only we..." All of the sudden, Alenis had a flash of inspiration. The diplomats weren't the only Bajorans on board. "What about my d'jarra? I think one of my great-great grandparents was a Vedek."

Mind reanimated, Jita took back to sifting through her work area. "I'd almost be bright-eyed and bushy-tailed if I'd stopped at the futility of the delegation. But between thinking that going back to get someone that sated the Gamians' stupid d'jarra fetish might not be an option and being curious, yours was one of several I looked into. Kind of wish I hadn't."

"That bad?" asked Alenis. One of her other grandparents was a sanitation worker, so it really could go either way.

"Well your last adventure on Bajor got one of the researchers thinking 'what if' for an idle case, and an unsettlingly obsessive instance of DNA recovery from the reception confirmed that you have some fairly high leanings, Captain. She's working out the final details. . .she encouraged me to check back later today."

A sigh preluded the dilemma. If she were present, Alenis would've seen the ensign further punctuate it with an exasperated drift of her eyes. "I just hope she doesn't try to interview me about you again. I'd accuse her of needing to get out more if the assumption of colleagues knowing each other thoroughly wasn't widespread among our people."

"Oh? That's interesting," she replied. "Hopefully at least high enough to be a part of a diplomatic delegation. Do you have any information about anyone else on the ship? What about yourself, or Petty Officer Rehn. Or even Coln Jena?"

It was perhaps a sign of desperation on Alenis' part that she was asking about the d'jarra of a 14 year old girl for a diplomatic delegation. But these were desperate times. And Starfleet captains often had to improvise, she thought.

"Rehn traces Ke'lor. No good. Like many ancient, short-sighted societies in which the privileged want to stay such, d'jarra Bajor considered laborers and lawmen a dime-a-dozen group."

Jita really didn't want to revisit the matter of her personal heritage. Alenis' mention of Coln Jena gave her a diversion against doing so since she didn't come up in the crew manifest.

"Who's Coln Jena?"

"Coln Jena. She's Lieutenant Beauvoir's half-Bajoran daughter. Alenis couldn't believe that she was

seriously considering this. But wouldn't it be a nice comeuppance if Jena had a d'jarra even superior to that of the Kai who so viciously insulted the "half-breed" a day before. "D'jarras are passed down matrilineally, so she would have one. Maybe she's got some high priests or diplomats in her family tree?"

Alenis' sole reference to Coln as a crewmember's daughter stewed uneasiness within Jita referencing her in the extended manifest only simmered. It stood to reason Alenis knew why, so when Jita chose to recite the causes aloud anyway, it was to confront her own misgivings.

"She's a civilian and a minor."

"I... am aware of that," was Alenis' reply. She'd already brought Jena down as her assistant, so maybe it wouldn't be so bad if... no, this is crazy

"How important is this, captain?" Jita asked after a brief silence she passed with her face in her hands, earlier irritation completely filtered out of her voice. The answer evident in the conflict she heard in Alenis' tone, the question she'd ask if given the liberty was why this was so important. Were there implications beyond her grade?

"Very important, just do it, Ensign."

"I will," the younger woman replied, demeanor hardened by having taken Alenis' imploration as a tacit implication of her being difficult merely for the sake of it. "But I asked because you know where I stand. Or at least we've talked about it. I told you when I came aboard that the Occupation did a thorough job of rubbing out my ancestry. This was one of the first places I looked. It's been some years, but I knew nothing changed even before looking because I asked to be notified if they found anything, and it's been just as long since I've gotten anything other than a periodic 'sorry.'"

"I really didn't want to get into this again," Jita amended more sullenly, "at least not for some fragment of ultraconservative Bajor. But if it'll help. . .we could also look into whether I have a useable tie with the vedek."

"I know how you feel about Bajor," started Alenis, thinking back to the conversation she had with Jita a few days ago. "But given the difficulty of this situation, I could use any help I can get. Whether it's a fourteen year old girl or a fifth cousin, twice removed."

"Except the fifth cousin can share the hot seat if this comes crashing down. Not that it will. Or that I want it to. Just. . .never mind."

Jita shunned off her sudden, spectacular failure at improvising a joke with a cursory face palm.

"If you can get me in contact with other Jita, I'll take care of everything else."

Reassurances...

MD4, late evening

Authors: Cmdr. Alenis Meru, Coln Jena (played by Jason Beauvoir)

After talking to Eloru, Alenis realized that there was something important that she had forgotten to do. So, here she was, in the hallway outside Jena's room, getting her thoughts in order. She glanced at her chronometer; she wasn't sure if Jena would be in bed by now.

"Jena?" she said in a soft voice, tapping on the door.

Jena had been getting ready for bed when the knock on the door came. She pulled on her dressing gown and opened the door. "Oh, hello Captain, what can I do for you?" She asked.

"I just wanted to see how you were doing," replied Alenis, in a gentle tone. "I'm sorry about the Kai; sometimes diplomatic encounters don't go exactly how you want."

"I'm fine, I try not to let people get to me. Come in. Can I get you something to drink? My father has some real Chai tea."

"That would be lovely!" Alenis smiled at Jena, trying to encourage her to let down her guard. "So, apart from the Kai's rudeness, how did you enjoy your first real away mission?"

As she put the kettle on, Jena replied. "Well, it was definitely exciting."

"That it was," replied Alenis. "I didn't expect to see Lieutenant Zade teaching the children pirate slang," she joked to lighten the mood before continuing. "The reason I came down to see you was because I was a little... concerned. You've been through a lot in the past few weeks, are you sure you're okay?"

Jena laughed. "Tyrlai certainly is one of a kind." Then more seriously. "Thank you for your concern, ma'am, I'm dealing with it, I've found, keeping busy helps."

"That's... good," replied Alenis. Deep down she wondered if Jena was truly okay. She knew more than anyone what it was like to try to use work to escape from her personal pains and demons. She had always been a hard worker -- she wouldn't have gotten very far in Starfleet if she wasn't -- but in the months following New Algiers, she had crossed the line into becoming a workaholic. It was only Arvel's dedicated counselling -- and a bit of his personal touch -- which enabled her to be at peace with herself, at least enough that she didn't have to use work as a form of self-medication. "I've heard some good news a little while ago; they think they'll be able to help your father with his... 'issues'... as early as tomorrow."

Jena demeanor changed and she almost poured scolding hot water on her hand. She looked pleadingly at Meru and asked "Really? How?" Then after a moment she added. "On second thought, I don't want to know the details."

"That's probably for the best," replied Alenis, relieved at not having to explain it to Jena. "You really care for him, don't you? That's so nice to hear; I know sometimes when a new father figure comes into your life, it can be difficult." Alenis knew this firsthand, she did not get along with many of her mother's boyfriends when she was a teenager. Even years after her father was left behind, it was always too soon for her.

"Yes, though I haven't known him long, he is my father and he's accepted me into his world without complaint, the least I can do is treat him the same way." Jena explained.

Alenis took the mug of tea in one hand and guided Jena onto the couch with the other. Sitting down beside her, she wrapped her arm around the young woman. "That is... very mature of you. When I was about your age, a few men came into my life trying to be my father. I'm..." Alenis looked down at her feet for a moment. "I'm... not exactly proud of how I treated all of them." For a fleeting moment, she was fourteen again, living in a too-small apartment with her mother, the two of them the only Bajorans for miles around. She knew how hard it was to lose a parent and to be alone, the only one

of your kind in your class. It was then that she swore that so long as Jena was on board the Portland, she would never be alone. "But your father, he's a very special person, and he cares for you a lot. With any luck he'll be back to his old self within the next couple days, but he's going to need you to be strong for him just a little while longer, just like he was when you were in sickbay."

Jena liked Meru, the captain reminded her a little of her mother. They didn't look alike, and they couldn't be more different when it came to their options of the prophets, it was more the strength and warmth that they seemed to radiate.

"I'm sure I can handle that." She said with a smile.

"Excellent," replied Alenis before taking a sip of her tea. With Jason in the brig, Jena was practically the daughter she never had. "Oh, this tea is great. I hope it doesn't have too much caffeine in it; we've got a big day tomorrow."

"Yes, indeed, ma'am. Good night and sleep well." Jena replied.

"Good night, Jena."

The Secret Weapon

Captain's Ready Room, USS Portland

MD5, 12:00 hours

Authors: Capt. Alenis Meru, Coln Jena (Played by Jason Beauvoir), Major Judith Rouse (played by Timothy Rouse)

"All right, here's the plan," said Alenis in a stern and frustrated tone as she walked into her ready room and placed her hands on the table. Fero, Rass, and lyso were already assembled around her table. "The Kai is trying to block us with all this nonsense about d'jarras. Well, what's good for the goose is good for the gander, and I've got a plan to make her listen to us."

"A plan?" asked Rass. "The Kai was very insistent that she wants to speak to someone with a cleaner d'jarra than us, and unless you have a high priest as your maternal great grandmother that I don't know about..." he trailed off for a moment, seeing a smile appear on Alenis' face as she leaned in, staring down the three diplomats. "But you're not a diplomat!" he protested, seeing where this was going.

"Not me," replied Alenis. "Jena. Coln Jena."

"You mean the fourteen year old part-human part-Vulcan girl that the Kai called a half-breed?" Fero paused for a moment as Alenis' idea sunk in. "No. No. No, no, no, no! You want to bring a 14 year old girl into these negotiations?! This is madness!"

"She is Ke'Tara," replied Alenis. "You said it yourself, the Kai was very insistent that she will only talk to someone of a suitably high d'jarra. Coln Jena is the only person we have who fits the bill."

Rass looked over at lyso; his companion could do nothing but hold his face in his hands. The captain must be mad if this was her great plan. If it got out that any of them allowed a 14 year old girl to participate in these negotiations representing Bajor and the Federation... well, they'd never work in the Foreign Ministry again. And he was sure that Admiral Washington would have something to say about it as well. "Can't we just call in a new diplomat with a suitable d'jarra and wait until he gets here?"

"I'm not sure we have the time," replied Alenis, throwing a PADD down on the table. "Starfleet Intelligence has been monitoring outgoing transmissions in this sector. They suspect that we're not the only ones interested in this system." Alenis stood straight up and cracked her knuckles. "Not to mention that we have an appointment for later today with the Kai; if we postpone these negotiations, we'll lose what little good faith we have left.

"I'm sorry, this is absurd!" exclaimed Fero as he stood up from his chair. He just couldn't hold it in any longer. "I can't believe any of you are seriously considering this! This is absolutely insane!"

It was at that moment that the door to the ready room opened again. Alenis' secret weapon had arrived.

"Captain," Judith asked as a way to introduce their presence as well as ask permission to get in. She had laid her hands softly on the young woman's shoulders, who was standing before her.

"Gentlemen, you remember Coln Jena, don't you?" asked Alenis, surveying the three diplomats. Fero and Rass sat there with a gobsmacked look on their faces, while Iyso had buried his head in his hands again

Jena looked at each the diplomats in turn they didn't didn't look happy to see her. She almost laughed at the irony of the diplomats being undiplomatic about her presence. "Good afternoon, Captain, honorable sirs, it is a pleasure to make your acquaintance again." She said.

"Good afternoon, Jena," replied Alenis. "Judith," she added, nodding respectfully towards her honour guard, who was no doubt "playing through the pain" after the shuttle crash. "So, here's the plan. With Jena's superior d'jarra, we can give her the position of a lead negotiator -- mostly honorary of course. So that we can get the Kai to the table. From then on out, so long as she can play the part, we should be able to press forward on these negotiations with Jena as a figurehead. Any questions?"

Jena breathed a sigh of relief. "So I don't have to be a diplomat?" She asked.

"Well, just a little," replied Alenis. She looked over at the three Bajoran diplomats, still visibly distressed. "Now, we've got a few hours before the negotiations. I suggest we head down to the planet and get to work."

Brad and the Minister return

USS Portland, Deck 5

MD4, 1750 hrs

Authors: Lt (JG) Brad Silverton

Doctor Silverton materialized with Minister Tora laying down on the main emergency biobed in the center of Sickbay.

"Ellen! Maria! I need your help we have an emergency!"

Brad went to work immediately in getting the bed's more advanced medical scanners started on the Minister. It looked bad from the beginning.

Maria arrived ready to assist Brad who started giving direction. "Computer, put a level 1 force field around the Minister to stabilize her body. We don't want her shifting and causing more damage." A light blue haze appeared then disappeared around the Minister. "Let's take a look at how bad..."

The biobed interrupted Brad with a warning signal of the failing condition of the Minister. "She's not breathing on her own anymore damn. Maria get me 40 miligrams of Pulmozine." Maria handed the hypospray to Brad who injected it into her shoulder.

Maria questioned him, "Doctor? You aren't going to inject it into her neck?"

"No she received a blow to the base of her skull during her shuttle flight. I don't want to risk causing any further problems." Brad and Maria both looked up for a response from the biobed's screen. The Minister was stabilizing.

"Well at least we have that going for us."

Brad continued his exam for the next 10 minutes. "I don't see any signs of paralysis but she does have a sever concussion. She'll be out for quite a while. There is a chance she will never wake up but I doubt its that bad. Maria if he breathing stops again re-administer the Pulmozine though I'll wager she is clear from immediately dying. I hope the Captain is prepared to conduct the negotiations herself because she is on her own."

Sexual Healing, Part I

USS Portland

MD5, 1440 hrs

Authors: Lieutenant (J.G.) Grel (played by Capt. Alenis Meru), Lt. Cmdr. Timothy Rouse, Lt. Parker Hudson, Lt. Jason Beauvoir, Lt. (J.G.) Brad Silverton

When Grel decided to become a Starfleet security officer, he didn't expect escorting a madman who had taken a hostage to the holodeck to see the captain was what he would be doing. Though, to be fair, he didn't really know what he was doing either. With the captain down on the planet, he knew that Lt. Cmdr. Rouse must have had some sort of plan. But what it was, he didn't know. All he could do was hope that it would succeed.

Holodeck 2, USS Portland

"Commander Rouse to Holodeck 2," Tim said over the comm system. "Lieutenant Beauvoir is on his way to you, with a security escort. The escort is to stay outside the room for privacy reasons." Or better to prevent more people then necessary knowing about what was going on. "If you need any assistance, I will come down there." He said, wondering if it wasn't better to just be there. But on the other hand he liked to stay away as much as possible from the whole damn situation.

"Understood Commander. The holodeck crew will advise ongoing."

Parker was updating the hologram HNL Protocols. There would be a large interacting with the rooms servers and the amount of by-standards in the room once The 'Alenis' Program' had become operational.

"The Alenis' program safeties are checking out.." Parker's face watched the screen his blue eyes satisfied.

As the holodeck doors shused open, Doctor Silverton walked into the room. He was pissed. "Are we ready to go asap on this or not? Arvel is stable for now but still in critical condition. And I have a minister of the Bajoran government in sickbay who I give a 50/50 chance of never coming out of her coma. AND one of the rare chance to have share joy of being a doctor thru parenthood I had to miss out on but the EMH..." Brad stopped his bitching. "Sorry. Things are busy right now in sickbay."

Brad pulled out the psychotricorder. "Well here it is. Hopefully the thing that will let Jason believe all of this will be real. Now its not an amnesia gun. It more clouds short term memory then erases or writes over it. The mind isn't a computer where it gets wiped and reloaded with ease. BUT it can be tricked. We'll have to talk him up that the Captain agreed and is ready for him. Just think of it like waking up from full on alcohol celebration the day after your Starfleet graduation day. He wakes up and his mind is trying to piece things together. The EMH then does its... thing, and that should be enough distraction for Jason to not question too much."

Deck 5, USS Portland

Jason followed the Tellarite down the corridor, although his brain was clouded by the chemicals flooding it, he still felt suspicious of the Tellarites motives when they approached the holodeck.

"Meru is on the holodeck?" He asked wary of a trap.

"That's what I'm told," replied Grel. Not taking his eyes off Jason, he pressed his comm badge. "Grel to Holodeck Two, Commander Alenis, you have a visitor approaching."

Sexual Healing, Part II

Holodeck 2, USS Portland

MD5, 1445 hrs

Authors: EMH-Alenis (played by Capt. Alenis Meru), Lt. Parker Hudson, Lt. (J.G.) Brad Silverton, Lt. Tyrlai Zade, Lt. (J.G.) Jason Beauvoir

The holomatrix illuminated the background photons shimmering, collecting in-line with the varied phase variances slowly swirling from an embodied energy from inside outward. The figure was a ghostly image at first. Slowly assuming the height, body weight, stature and curves of Alenis.

Parker watched closely as the energy from the ships EPS taps re-routed to the holodecks' grid. Then as quickly as the body had assumed it's shape it had begun to assume an Intelligence. Some would say artificial. That was not for Parker to debate at this point, point being Alenis was needed to save another crew mate and he would do his part the best he knew.

Alenis was now a duplicated sentient hologram at 99% of capacity. The zenith of Starfleet's technological prowess at hand.

As she came to consciousness, Alenis first felt confusion and a headache of a kind she'd never felt before, but the pain and confusion was fleeting. "Lieutenant?" she asked, seeing Parker come into focus. "Where am I? Did something go wrong with the scan? And why am I wearing a--" She froze as she came to a sudden realization. "I'm... a hologram?"

He felt his heart skip a beat. Speaking to hologram Alenis came with a dread, as if he was back in High School having to break up with his girlfriend for the first time. An uneasy truth. "Yes you are a hologram. You are the key to saving Jason...Commander" He slowly nodded back at her. He didn't have to call her Commander since she was the hologram and not the real thing, however it felt like the respect she deserved.

Brad added in. "Captain. Everything went fine with the scan." He waved a tricorder around in front of her. "My scans show the programming by Lieutenant Hudson is also working correctly and you are coming across as real as reasonably possible." Brad gave the holo-her a once over. "Parker there seems to be a problem with the transparency in her feet." Brad said kneeling down immediately in

front the EMH.

"I'm... a hologram," muttered holo-Alenis to herself. She looked down at her red cocktail dress and the top of Brad's head. This was not how she expected this to go.

Tyrlai Zade stalked down the hallway her eyes focused on the readings from the warehouse, brushing her way past the science officer towards the holodeck doors. "Hi Jason, been a while, how are things?" She said not waiting for an answer as the doors wooshed open. Stepping through while still looking at her datapadd, Tyrlai stalked over to where the three of them stood and/or knelt wide eyed, seemingly trying to think of a decent explanation. She looked up smiling eagerly. "Parker, thought I'd stop by and let you know I've traced some resonant readings to a cave system north of the warehouse and I think it might be filled with strange superpowered terrorists. Oh, hi Captain, didn't see you there."

There was a short pause as she looked from person to person beginning to realize that she had somehow become lax in her duties as ship troublemaker. The bar had clearly been raised. "So, you're busy then," Tyrlai backed away a step, "I'll leave you all to, um, whatever this is." The tall Trill woman turned on a dime and walked out, pausing between the doors as they slid open. "It's not really my job anymore but I'm guessing at least one person here needs some counseling." She smiled in what was as a reassuring manner as possible and raised her palms. "Just a little professional heads up, do carry on." She turned to head out.

Parker used his engineering tricorder to re-send some of animation photons towards anchoring on the holodeck grid, the Commander's feet coming into being. Watching Alenis and taking a drink of coffee from his silver mug Parker nodded back at Tyrlai "I'd like to review that data after Lieutenant, but we are busy at the moment." Holding his silver mug of coffee in front of his mouth as he spoke hiding any sort of weird reaction to Tyrlai's reaction to what she had witnessed.

As Tyrlai left, the Alenis hologram stared down at her hands, "I'm... a hologram," she muttered again. But her thoughts - if you could call the data running through her subroutines that - were interrupted by a loud shout from outside the hallway.

"Meru!" exclaimed a voice that, although pained, was unmistakeably Jason's.

"Is that Jason outside?" asked the hologram, a gamut of emotions running through her head. Or holographic matrix. She wasn't sure what she was anymore.

Brad stood up rather quickly and stepped back. After having attended to Arvel, Brad wasn't wanting to be on the business end of a horny vulcan's rage. That was Alenis' job. He placed the psychotricorder behind him and out of view and then realized a new problem.

"Uh so we have been focused so much on the mechanics of this that we really didn't come up with a plan of what to say to him or even where to do this. We need some sort of setting all we have here is the EMH as the Captain and a grid pattern on the floor and walls and we don't have much time. Computer create an intimate setting with soft light."

Around the crew materialized a bedroom with a large canopy bed, red silk sheets, pink rose petals with burgundy tips on the bed, and vanilla scented white candles lit upon wooden nightstands. Soft classical music was playing in the background.

"Get into position, he's coming!" exclaimed the Alenis hologram in a harsh whisper, taking command of the situation. She didn't know if she was real or not; all she knew is that she had one job. "I can

handle Jason, just... hide!" she exclaimed, pushing Brad and Parker towards a closet which was near the door. With the doctor and the engineer out of sight, she slammed her hand against the controls to open the door and put on her best sultry voice.

"Jason, I'm waiting..."

Hearing Meru's voice, Jason hurried to the holodeck and through the open doors.

As he barged through the door, the Alenis hologram stared into his hungry eyes, seeing in them the pain and desire that Jason had been going through for the past few days while locked up in the brig away from her. "Oh, Jason," she said as she wrapped her arms around his neck. "Let me take the pain away," she whispered, staring into his eyes for a moment, before tilting her head and locking lips with him. As she did so, her eyes motioned towards Brad and Parker in the closet. Jason pulled Meru's body close to his as they kissed. She was warm and soft and he was beginning to feel safe.

Brad came out of the closet rather slowly as to not alert Jason. Standing behind him he raised the psychotricorder and activated it. The gentle beam washed over the back of Jason's head a few times. "There we go Captain. He shouldn't remember how he got here into the holodeck nor whatever happens in the next three minutes. He may be disoriented and ask what happened so have a story ready. But then again he should be too distracted to care. The effects of Pon Farr wearing off vary from vulcan to vulcan. Although one physical act is enough he may return to his normal psychological self almost immediately or after one day. There is no telling how he'll act for how long. Now, I have a critical patient in sickbay I need to get back to but if something happens call for me. You are still the EMH so the computer should recognize you as crewmember and can communicate outside of the holodeck."

Brad made his exit outside of the holodeck and updated security outside that Lieutenant Beauvoir would be busy for awhile. He didn't give them further details knowing that Pon Farr was a deeply private matter to Vulcans and the less that they knew about the details the better.

Finally alone with Meru, Jason gently placed his hands on her face. As he closed his eyes and whispered a few words, there, seated on the bed, surrounded by candles and rose petals, the two became one.

Diplomacy, Round 2

Gamia III

1645 hours

Authors: Capt. Alenis Meru, Maj. Judith Rouse (Played by Timothy Rouse), Coln Jena (Played by Jason Beauvoir)

As she strolled up the path towards the Assembly Building in the capital of Gamia III, a gaggle of Portland crew and Bajoran diplomats in tow, Alenis was smug with confidence. Sure, round one didn't go her way, and the presence of the Cardassians could only be bad. But, she figured as she looked down at Coln Jena, she had a secret weapon this time. If Kai Sellra was going to be intransigent about d'jarras... well, the humans had a saying: Live by the sword, die by the sword.

Judith was walking at the end of the group. With what had happened with the shuttle Judith couldn't trust that nothing else was going to happen. She carried a phaser, hiding in her pocket just in case. And kept her eye on her surrounding.

As they made their way to the Assembly Building, Jena visually scanned her surrounds, hungrily

taking in every detail. She was a little apprehensive about her new position as an untrained diplomat and had spent several hours going over the data that had about the Gamians, concentrating mainly on their diplomatic traditions and governmental procedures in relation to foreign affair. She was also happy to hear that her father, when had she started thinking of Jason that way?, was going to return to health soon.

Quickly, the delegation was brushed past security and guided into the meeting chamber where the ill-fated negotiations of yesterday took place. Kai Sellra was consulting with her ministers when she suddenly turned to face the new entrants. "Ah, Mr. Fero, Rass, and lyso. As well as Commander Alenis and Major Rouse." Deliberately leaving of Coln Jena from her greetings, she cocked her head to the side slightly, in a deliberate motion, mocking confusion. "Truth be told, I didn't expect you to show up after the events of yesterday. I thought it was pretty clear that unless you respected our traditions with respect to d'jarras, that these negotiations would not be fruitful."

"Kai Sellra, on behalf of Bajor, we would like to apologize for any offense we have caused yesterday," stated lyso. Despite being trained as a diplomat to have a good poker face, a careful observer would notice beads of sweat beginning to form on his forehead, and a slight quiver in his voice.

"You may apologize," replied the Kai, "but you still disgrace our traditions by entering into negotiations without a diplomat of suitably clean d'jarra."

"We do no such thing," replied Alenis, cutting off Mr. Rass who had opened his mouth to speak. She placed one hand on Jena's shoulder. "Allow me to introduce you - once again - to a member of my crew, Acting Diplomatic Officer Coln Jena."

Jena tried to calm her nerves. "Good afternoon, Your Grace, it is a pleasure to meet you again. May the Prophets smile on you and yours." The young woman said.

"Is this some kind of joke?" asked the Kai, in shock. "This adolescent half-breed is--"

"Is of the d'jarra Ke'tara," said Alenis, cutting off the Kai. "I believe you are familiar with it; it is the d'jarra of Vedeks and Kais."

"But how? She is not even full Bajoran!"

"Coln Jena's mother was a Bajoran. The ancient texts state that d'jarras are passed down matrilineally," explained Alenis, "and they say nothing requiring that that child be a full-blooded Bajoran, am I right, Mr. Rass?"

"I... I believe so," replied Rass, feeling slightly reassured for the first time that day. Fero and lyso nodded in agreement.

The Kai sighed in defeat. "Very well then." She offered Jena a bow before continuing. "Ms. Coln, shall we get down to business?"

The dreams Arvel had while laying in Sickbay after being shot were to strange to even mention much less to people without a psych degree. He sat up and looked around the horribly small room. He found that he himself was a bit alone that was okay with him he needed to be alone at least with his thoughts. He would get up an then let people know he was awake...

The Plot Thickens...

Assembly Building, Gamia III

MD5, 1730 hours

Authors: Capt. Alenis Meru, Coln Jena (played by Jason Beauvoir)

As both sides gave their opening statements, Alenis remained focused on the Kai's body language. She had spoken at great length about her people being driven from Bajor centuries ago due to religious differences. Perhaps she did so for diplomatic reasons, but Alenis thought it curious that she didn't go into any details as to what those differences were. It was no matter though; she could tell that the Kai was frustrated, likely because She also detected a bit of apprehension in the Kai.

"...and so, we believe that with a mutual respect for one another's unique cultures, Gamia III and Bajor can be reunited."

"Thank you, Kai Sellra. Now..." Mr. Fero was interrupted by an aide rushing to the side of the Kai.

In a quiet voice, one she thought was quiet enough that the opposing delegation wouldn't hear, she whispered a few words into the Kai's ear -- though she did not take into account the superior hearing of a part-Vulcan child.

The Kai glared at her and then looked back down at her chronometer, then turned back towards her "I'm sorry, Mr. Fero, but we have an urgent matter to tend to. I'm afraid I would like to request a brief recess," explained the Kai. "I'm sure you are hungry; there is fresh hasperat in your delegation's green room, and a subspace transmitter if you wish to confer with your colleagues back on Bajor and update them on the negotiations."

"We are just getting started, this is most--" started lyso before being elbowed in the ribs by Rass. "I mean, I'm sure if it's an emergency we can take a short break."

"I thank you for your patience, Mr. lyso," replied the Kai. "Come," she said, motioning her delegation out into a smaller room.

"What was that about?" asked Alenis, as the Kai's delegation left.

"Captain, I like to make it clear that I wasn't intentionally eavesdropping," Jena began. "But I overheard the Kai's aide inform her that the Cardassians have arrived and that there have been reports of suspicious beings seen in the warehouse district last night."

"Suspicious beings in the warehouse..." mused Alenis. "That was probably Tyrlai. But the important question is, what is it that they're hiding which is so important that some people sneaking around a warehouse is a matter for the Kai."

"Wait a minute," exclaimed lyso. "You sent that harlot of a diplomatic officer snooping around? If she was caught, that could have been the end of these negotiations!"

"Tyrlai doesn't get caught," replied Alenis.

"I beg to differ," interjected Rass. "Wasn't she captured from a nightclub right before the ceremony celebrating the return of the Tolic Shard?"

"That was just once." Alenis took a deep breath. "Regardless, we have a more pressing question. What are the Cardassians doing down here?"

"What indeed," mused Fero.

Jena spoke up. "This planet is rich in natural resources, resources that the Cardassians are desperate for, standard MO for them is to come as friends and conquer by degrees, that way they don't need expend their limited resources in an all out assault." Seeing the looks of surprise on the faces of some of those present, she added. "I read a lot."

Alenis placed her hand on Jena's shoulder. "Impressive," she said, looking over at the diplomats who had doubted Jena previously, her eyes offering up a slight "I told you so." "If that is their goal, we need to stop them. Not just for the sake of the Federation's interests, but for the sake of the Gamians as well."

The Self Help Section

MD 05 – 2100 hours

Holodeck II

Authors: Nikki (Alenis Meru) - Lt. Parker Hudson

Heading down the Portland's corridor Parker looked at his silver wrist watch checking the time. He was on time for his booked Holodeck. He sauntered down the corridor with his large black Hockey duffel bag carried over his shoulder, along with his Hockey stick. He had taken the time earlier to prepare for this taping, wrapping around the butt of the stick.

Looking forward to the time off from his overworked Engineering shifts, he was a bit surprised and perplexed when he walked up to the Holodeck doors and it was currently in use. A program was in operation. This ticked Parker off. He had already scheduled the time and taken the time to get ready for a few days now. Hockey was a passion for him and it wasn't too often he got to indulge.

He paused a moment turning to leave, and then thought to his self. "Why should I be the one to walk away?" He asked his self.

Punching in a few keys to over ride the lock on the doors he had wanted to see if there was some sort of confusion as to the Portland's booking system. Entering forward Parker walked into what seemed was an oasis paradise... A beach forward strait ahead to that of a warm sunny beach. There was someone out there sitting in the sand. A female in meditation posture.

Nikki was perfectly relaxed. Not even the ninety-seven tiny social mistakes she made the night she met Sera bothered her. To her, the holodeck was a wonderful place. A place where she could escape the real world with all its stresses and anxieties and do whatever she wanted. She could be the famed swordswoman, lady Nikki of Barclayshire, Detective Barclay of the Scotland Yard, or international theatre sensation Madame Barclay. But today, she was just Nikki Barclay, getting some artificial sun and real meditation. Her eyes closed, she could feel the ocean mist on her skin and hear the rhythmic crashing of the waves upon the shore and the familiar whoosh of a holodeck door.

Whoosh of a holodeck door?

Her eyes blinked open as they adjusted to the bright artificial sun. "Hello?" she asked, at a silhouette of a man carrying a duffel bag and some sort of stick. As soon as she could make out the face, her eyes opened wide and she broke posture, trying to get up from the sand. "Oh my god, Lieutenant Hudson. I'm so sorry. I thought I booked this holodeck... is my time over already?"

Parker slowed as he walked upward to the female. His sneakers in the sand a warm feel to the sun. He had no idea who the young female was or how she had known his name. She seemed shocked that he was there, even an uneasy startled self.

"Call me Parker." He dropped the large duffel bag behind him. Somehow he had sensed she was a Civilian. "I'm sorry to startle you like this. I had holodeck time booked for 2100."

"Oh. It's 2100 already?" Nikki sighed and held her head in her hands; holodeck time always seemed to be just too fleeting. "I'll just gather my things and I'll be off. I'm terribly sorry. Like, really really sorry."

"It's ok. Don't leave!" He held out his large hand as he then dropped into the warm sand across from her. "What is your name?"

"Barclay. Nikki Barclay." Nikki closed her eyes for a moment and took a deep breath; controlling her breathing was a tactic recommended to her by a previous counsellor. "I'm Ensign Nikki Barclay. And you are?"

Parker mentally counted the years and age of Nikki to that of an Ensign now. Thinking to his self only then breaking into a loud speak... "could be possible are you by any chance related to a Reginald Barclay?" The man and his name was synonymous with Engineering. Parker begun a slight smile forming across his face... "Yes, yes! I can see his face in yours."

"Correctly as you assumed. I am Lt. Hudson, Engineer here on the Portland. Are you new Ensign?"

"Yes, brand new. And Reginald Barclay is my uncle. He's super great; he was the reason I joined--" Nikki paused for a moment and gasped. A look of fear appeared on her face as she realized who exactly her guest was. "Lieutenant Hudson? Oh no, I thought I wasn't supposed to report until tomorrow morning! I was just meditating, I'm so nervous, this is my first assignment." Her uncontrollable babble was getting faster and faster. "I'm so excited to be a part of the Portland. Uncle Reg's first ship was a Miranda class. Did I tell you he's the reason I joined Starfleet? He's so amazing, he served with Captain Picard and worked on the Pathfinder Project... and he even met Zefram Cochrane once! I was just so nervous... I needed some time in the holodeck to meditate. Otherwise I'd never get to sleep. It's nice to meet you sir, Lieutenant Hudson sir... please don't write me up, just please give me another chance... oh god!"

Nikki's ramblings were only silenced by her hyperventilating. She had begun breathing so rapidly that she could not even speak a syllable between breaths. Holding her head in her hands, she tried without success to control it.

Parker considered his self to be fairly easy going and casual. He had hoped his attempt to help calm down the newly assigned Ensign would be beneficial. He smiled as he held up his hand to pause for a moment, reaching into his duffel bag and then pulling out one can, and then two cans of alcoholic beer. "A little something to ease you down Nikki." He held out the can for her.

Nodding at her uncle's accomplishments he had also heard of the man's notorious forays into holodeck technology and living the realm so to speak. This had become a modern day addiction and it was easy to see why someone wanted to curl up into a program that felt like home to them, and never want to leave.

"It is ok Nikki. Trust me." Parker began to rub his hand into the sand in front of him beginning to work out mathematical algorithms... "If you understand all of this you've got it made. I was nervous as hell

my first assignment on the Yorktown... Literally dug my nails into my fingers from nervousness and drew blood. Luckily nobody had noticed." He cracked open his can of beer.

"Point is, while you may be the one who is nervous, nobody else is watching to see that you are. As long as you get the job done you can be your own personality, your own boss." He smiled.

"That's a relief, I'd like that," replied Nikki before taking a sip of her beer to calm her nerves. "Is that the Cochrane-Wallace warp equation?" she asked, following the algorithms he was tracing into the sand. Not waiting for him to answer, she continued. "It's just so much pressure sometimes, trying to get started in Starfleet. Especially when you carry around your famous uncle's name. Uncle Reg is great, but it's hard living in his shadow."

"I can't say I know how you feel. I wouldn't like that, no. Then again I didn't have an uncle who had worked on the Flagship as assistant engineer. Very intimidating even to me!" Parker looked at the equation with a wry smile... "Yeah that is what its called ain't it." He laughed. "I thought I was working out Navier-Stokes." He then took another drink of his beer turning to watch out at the seaside warm azure blue crashing waves. "Where are we anyways?"

"We were just getting to know each other," replied Nikki, her nerves slightly calmer on account of the beer. I don't think this is synthahol, she thought to herself before turning back to Parker. "I was meditating on the beach here, and it looked like you were planning on playing some lacrosse?"

"I had meant this program are we in Bermuda... Jamaica, Hawaii? It's awesome. It was hockey to play." Playing with the stick sliding it in the sand now he let a smile relax across his usual emotionless face. "The beer it's not synthahol either. From my buddy Chuck on the Yorktown, I won a friendly bet. I can't read your mind but I can see you thinking about the beer and stuff. You look much like your Uncle! I had the pleasure of seeing him three times for guest lecturer from Utopia Planetia Yards."

"Tahiti, actually," explained Nikki. "I'm told that I get my good looks from Uncle Reg. Legend has it that he was quite the ladies man when he served on the Enterprise." She took another swig of beer before taking Parker's hand. "Enough about my uncle, tell me about yourself. Aside from hockey and beer, what are you into?"

He looked down as Nikki had taken his hand into her smaller hand, he smiled. "Other than my job in Engineering, I'm mad about early post industrial Earth automobiles. Have you ever rode in one Nikki?" He explained relaxing his hand. "It's not a hover vehicle, no plasma energy... Just pure....Raw piston output, a fire breathing exhaust expelling 67 Mustang."

"No, I haven't," replied Nikki. She wasn't sure exactly what Parker was referring to, but she figured it would have been the ancient four-wheeled persona vehicles that she had read about. She had thought them to be rather silly. Surely the concept of everyone having their own personal vehicle, running on dead dinosaurs which had been buried for millions of years, and spewing smoke and smog into the atmosphere was the height of absurdity. Not to mention the ribbons of concrete and asphalt that were built just so people could use their little vehicles. It was a miracle that her people survived long enough to make it to the stars, especially considering their early discovery of nuclear fission. "But I did once take a ride on an old fusion shuttle... that's kind of the same thing, right?"

Taking a drink and then expelling a burp Parker chuckled. "Sorry." At this point they weren't holding hands any longer, but Parker was relaxed and eased around Nikki. She was different, in a good way! "Besides Sciences what are you into?"

"Well, it's kind of geeky... but I love holodeck adventures." Nikki took a big swig of beer, mainly to calm her nerves. She felt a connection being made with Parker; perhaps one which was inappropriate for her to forge with her direct superior. "Lady Nikki of Barclayshire is quite the talented swordsman; I've saved the Kingdom of Hardor from the forces of evil many times."

"Geek? Hardly." He understood it to be that there was infinitesimal holoprograms available. Back on Earth Parker's Family had lineage and shared a Family coat of arms to one of the many Bavarian Castles near the Town of Fussen. Getting up from the warming sand under the sun he brushed off the sand on his shorts and extended his hand to Nikki's "Let us go thither." Parker gestured to the long beach and shoreline, the palms overhead. "It is most beauteous!"

"I'd... like that," replied Nikki as she took him by the hand.

Nikki Barclay – Personal log 001

Nikki's Quarters, USS Portland

MD5, 2300

Authors: Ensign Nikki Barclay (played by Alenis Meru)

Alone in her quarters and having finally gotten her breathing under control and her fidgeting down to a manageable level, Nikki was ready to start the first personal log of her career as an officer. She took a sip of her coffee and then a deep breath before starting. "Computer, begin log."

=====

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaah! Omigod, omigod, omigod! I met my boss today in the holodeck!

(Sounds of a woman hyperventilating for approximately thirty seconds)

I was meditating in the holodeck, when he came in. He was carrying a big duffel bag, and he was coming to play lacrosse or something. But instead he hung out and talked to me on the beach. We talked, and shared some beer, and went for a nice walk on the beach. It was so romantic.

Romantic? Romantic! He's your direct superior, Nikki! You can't be in a relationship with him! I can't believe it! This is so stupid, didn't you think before you decided to hit on your boss!

Okay. It's good. It's all good. Maybe to him it was just a platonic thing. Maybe he drinks beer and goes for long walks on the beach with all his friends. That could just be how he welcomes all his new crew into his department. You don't know, maybe he didn't notice that you were swooning over him.

That's stupid. Nikki, he was totally into you. How he talked, how he held your hand... it's unmistakable. A long romantic walk on the beach? Seriously? How could that be anything but romantic? He's into you, even after those forty-seven mistakes you made last night. Like when you started talking about your stupid holo-programs. Lady Nikki of Barclayshire?! Really?! Urgh!!!

Falling in love with your boss on your first day! Way to go, Nikki! Nice job totally screwing up your entire career!

(audible sigh)

I don't know what I'm going to do. I can't date my superior officer, it's against every regulation in the book! Not to mention that office romances are a bad idea to begin with.

He is cute though.

Oh no, I have to report in to him tomorrow! Computer, end log!

Chatting with Cardassians

Assembly Building, Gamia III

MD5, 1745 hours

Authors: Capt. Alenis Meru, Coln Jena (played by Jason Beauvoir)

As Fero, Rass, and Iyso discussed the latest plot twist in these diplomatic matters, Alenis stood back, stewing in anger. She couldn't believe that the Cardassians had the unmitigated gall to show up here. To land on a planet full of Bajroans – even a lost tribe with archaic beliefs led by an irritating religious figure – and try to be all buddy-buddy in an effort to take control of the planet and the surrounding system was just beyond the pale. She knew that Cardassians had little to no shame, but this was low even for them.

Gripping a glass of water in her hand, she reviewed reports from the Portland on her PADD with another. Aside from the incident with the Cardassian shuttle being destroyed, the Cardassians hadn't made any aggressive moves – though they did make it known that they have the Portland well outgunned.

Cardassians, she thought. It had to be Cardassians. Of all the powers in the Galaxy – the Romulans, the Breen, the Dominion, even the Borg – it was the Cardassians that Alenis hated the most. Aside from being untrustworthy, manipulative, immoral, and lacking in all regard for other life, she could never forgive them for what they did to her, to her family, and to her people. Just thinking about them made her so angry, that she—

Her glass shattered in her hand, a victim of her strong grip and powerful anger. The sound of broken glass got the attention of the entire room. "All right, I'm sick of standing around. I have a plan. Follow my lead." Without saying another word, Alenis strolled towards the door of their green room, with the lobby as her final destination. Her plan was risky and not exactly standard diplomatic procedure, but as the Ferengi say, the riskier the road, the greater the profit. It was definitely a gambit, and how the Cardassians and the Gamians reacted could make or break the entire mission.

"What are you doing?!" exclaimed Iyso, following behind Alenis as she stormed out of the green room and towards the lobby.

"Someone needs to explain to these people what the Cardassians are like, before they make a terrible mistake." Kicking open the door to the lobby, she was horrified to see a Cardassian delegation bowing before the Kai. As everyone in the room looked in her direction, Alenis quickly scanned the room, picking out what looked to be the leader of the delegation.

"Ah, Gul Jatok, is it?" asked Alenis, her rage clearly evident through a mask of false pleasantries. She didn't wait for his response. "It's a pleasure to meet you, my Executive Officer has told me all about you."

"This is highly inappropriate," said the Kai, shooting daggers at Alenis.

"Inappropriate? Oh no, we're all friends here." Alenis' fists were clenched with rage as she continued. "Speaking of which, you must have been to my home planet in your travels. Perhaps you even had the pleasure of serving there during your long and illustrious military career. Whereabouts did you

serve in those days? The Kendra Valley? Dakhur Province? The capital?"

"It was Dakhur," replied Jatok, caught off guard by the sudden interruption.

"Ah, Dakhur." Alenis let out a fake smile. "Beautiful countryside there, and the breadbasket of the east. Of course, it wasn't all that great in those days. The Nis Thamar massacre, the bloody fall, the liquidation of camp 17--"

"What is the meaning of this!" shouted the Kai.

"Oh, just talking to our new friends about some old times," replied Alenis.

Jena decided to join in mimicking Alenis' veneer of pleasant conversation. "And then there were all the men, women and children that died of malnutrition and exhaustion while working in your mines and ore processing plants." Then she put her fingers to her lips as if she'd made a faux pas. "Oh, silly me, that doesn't count does it, after all Bajorans aren't real people, they're sub-Cardassian, no better than animals, right, Gul?"

"I will not stand here idly by and allow my people to be defamed by a little girl!" exclaimed an exasperated Jatok. "Control your people, Federation," he added, staring down Alenis.

"For it to be defamation, it would have to be false," pointed out Rass, surprising even himself with his contribution to the little discussion they were having.

"Yes, only the Cardassians could have the nerve to try to expand their influence onto a planet full of Bajorans so soon after the occupation," added Alenis. "I know the Cardassians are duplicitous, but did you really think this would work?"

"And the Federation is not an expansionist power itself?" asked Jatok rhetorically. "Let us be honest here, your little delegation is not about improving the well being of the Gamians. It is about expanding the Federation's influence into this sector. We've turned over a new leaf; whereas under the Federation, Bajor can not even control its own affairs, as shown by the fact that they can't even send a diplomatic delegation without being supervised by Starfleet."

"How dare you--" Alenis was about to launch into a tirade when she was interrupted by the Kai. It was only then that she noticed that her hand was bleeding, having been cut on the sharp glass.

"Enough!" she exclaimed. "Gamia III will set our own path!" She held her hand to her head for a moment before continuing. "I think it best that we retire for the night, in light of recent developments..."

Updates

Executive Officer's Office, USS Portland

MD5, 1815 hours

Authors: Capt. Alenis Meru, Lt. Cmdr. Timothy Rouse

Returning to the ship after a second unfruitful meeting with the Kai and her entourage, Alenis made a beeline towards Tim's office to update him. She was in such a hurry that she had forgotten about her hand, which was still wrapped in a bloody napkin from the broken glass.

Without even knocking, she entered his office to see Tim looking up from his desk. "Well, I'm back,"

she said in an exasperated tone.

"Yes, I can see that?" Tim said. "What did you do this time?" he said nodding to her hand.

"Oh, this?" she asked, holding her hand up. She had forgotten about it in all the frustration. "Well, you know how frustrating Cardassians are. I may have crushed a wine glass with my bare hands in frustration when I heard they had arrived on the planet." She turned her hand over in front of her, staring at it. "I guess I should probably go to sickbay at some point," she added meekly.

He lost the grin on his face, what he was hearing the wineglass story. "Meru, Arvel is in Sickbay. Jason overpowered him in his escape attempt." Tim said, deciding to rip off the bandage quickly, rather than slow. Why hadn't he contacted her earlier about Arvel, he thought. But with everything going on he had forgotten that.

"By the prophets!" gasped Alenis. It was her mother's favourite exclamation of surprise. Suddenly, a thousand thoughts were going through her head. She was so overjoyed to be with Arvel again, she couldn't bear to have him ripped from her so quickly. "Is he going to be all right?"

"Of course he is," Tim quickly said. He wasn't fully sure if that was true, but he hated to tell her otherwise now. And from what he had heard it wasn't that bad. "He was shot in the abdomen and has been unconscious since then. El is with him right now, she'll make sure you have some privacy. Discreet privacy." He didn't know if Meru knew that Ellen was aware of Meru and Arvel.

"Thank you," replied Alenis, visibly uncomfortable at being up in Tim's office while Arvel was down in sickbay. "How about Jason? How is he doing?" she asked.

"He's, uhm... currently working on getting better." Tim was still not comfortable with everything going on in there. "They started a couple hours ago."

"I... see." With the image running through her head, Alenis tried to retain her composure. "Just do me a favour. When this is all said and done... make sure you delete that holo-program, okay?"

"I don't think that is going to be such a big problem. No one is waiting for a second of you." He said with a laugh.

"Good. Now these Gamians... something's just not right about them." Alenis clenched her injured hand in the other. "I wish I could just go down there and figure out what makes them tick."

"Well, why don't you?" joked Tim. "A bunch of strange Bajorans; I'm sure you'll fit in well."

"That's... not a bad idea," replied Alenis. With that, she turned and wandered out of Tim's office, presumably towards sickbay.

"It was a joke!" shouted Tim from behind Alenis. But it was too late; if she heard him, she didn't listen.

Sexual Healing, part III

Holodeck 2, USS Portland

Several hours after part II

Authors: EMH Mark I (played by Alenis Meru), Lt. (JG) Brad Silverton, Lt. Jason Beauvoir

Coming to, the holographic representation of the captain rolled over in the bed. "Jason," she whispered quietly, seeing her companion asleep next to her. With him sound asleep underneath the red silk sheets, she could only assume that the plan was successful. Carefully, so as not to disturb him, she got out of bed, threw on a robe, and walked over to the control panel for the intercom.

"Doctor Silverton," she whispered into the intercom.

Brad was sitting in sickbay reviewing over Arvel's medical scans. His head perked up. "Lt Silverton reporting. I presume by the whisper that this is the EMH on the holodeck? Is everything ok?"

"Yes, I think so," she replied, thinking it a little strange to be referred to as an EMH. "We're... done," she said, figuring the less explicit her terminology the better. "He's passed out on the bed. From exhaustion, I think."

"Understood. I am on my way." Brad grabbed a tricorder and quickly started to head to the holodeck.

Jason stirred, his mind was beginning to clear, now that his blood fever had broken. He was tired but he felt good. Seeing Meru, his feeling became a mix of gratitude and embarrassment. He didn't know what to say to her.

"Jason," said Alenis softly as she returned to the bed. As she sat next to him, she placed a hand on his head to feel his temperature. It was a little warmer than normal, but not feverish. "Doctor Silverton is on his way. Are you all right?"

"I feel like I could sleep for a week, but otherwise I feel great. Thank you, Meru." Jason replied with a smile.

"I..." the hologram paused for a moment, staring off into space. He called me Meru. He doesn't know I'm a hologram, she reminded herself. She didn't really know what she was -- she felt like Meru. She had all of Meru's personality, her emotions, her thoughts and dreams. But she wasn't Meru. She wasn't really anyone, just a hologram. "Don't mention it," she replied. She didn't know if holograms could cry or not, but she held back a tear at the realization that she was not who she felt she was.

Looking down at Jason, she leaned over and kissed him on the forehead, "Just relax," she said, holding him by the hand. "Everything is all right..."

Jason closed his eyes and drifted off to sleep again, leaving Alenis to ponder the meaning of her own existence.

Sexual Healing, part IV

Holodeck 2, USS Portland

Several hours after part II

Authors: EMH Mark I (played by Alenis Meru), Lt. (JG) Brad Silverton, Lt. Jason Beauvoir, Lt. Parker Hudson

Parker stood outside of Holodeck 2 his mind fixated on the opened corridor panel isolinear processing chip sets. The flashing data streams indicated the flows and concentrations of power coming from the Portland's Main Engineering power taps. Ensign Sera Williams was in charge of Engineering at the moment taking care of matters that Parker could delegate. He couldn't help but feel a bit uneasy... weird per se being on the other side of what was happening in side of the holodeck likely at the moment. He just let his mind assume the mechanical monitoring tasks. If there

was an issue with the Holodeck program and Jason became even more distressed, then this was the likely conduit that would fix the programs.

"What is going on in there?" the security guard asked Parker inquisitively.

"You think I am going to tell you that. You don't have enough for the bribe." He snorted, concerning his gaze with his hyper spanner and cleaning up some circuitry pathways.

"I think I should know why it is that you have me standing guard outside a holodeck while some mystery program is running," retorted the guard. "Does Grel know about this?"

"Step down off your hissy fit Princess and follow your original orders." Parker buffed up his stance not liking being challenged. He already had the holodeck doors servo controls overridden for his own command.

"This makes no sense," replied the guard, shaking her head. With Grel not telling her anything either, she would have to go straight to the top. She tapped her comm badge. "Crewman Jennings to Lieutenant Commander Rouse,"

"Rouse here" Tim said, surprised being called by a crewman, that wasn't something that happened that often.

"I've been ordered to guard Holodeck 2 from the outside," explained the crewman. "What is happening in there? Is this official Starfleet business? I need a threat profile on exactly what I am supposed to be guarding and who I'm supposed to be guarding it from."

Tim, annoyed by the crewman's disbelief, replied with harsh tone. "It is your job to follow orders. Not to be curious. As for your thread assessment, the entire senior staff including your Chief has determined the threat is minimal, as long as you perform your job as ordered. All you need to know is that no one can go in that door, beside the senior staff. Am I clear?" Tim was going to have a word with Grel, Nap and Judith about teaching their crewman how the chain of command works, he decided after closing the channel.

"Yes sir," she replied in a meek, grudging tone, but the executive officer had already closed the channel.

Brad arrived and saw the agitated guards finishing speaking with Tim. He was glad that was cleared up as he wasn't quite sure what he was to say. He tried going in but the doors were inoperative. After letting Parker know who it was, Brad was able to squeeze in through the doors that were barely opened for his entrance.

Deep in thought, the holographic representation of Alenis stared down at Jason. Even he could not tell that she wasn't the real Alenis. But, she wondered, does being made of photons and force fields make me any less real than the captain? An old earth philosopher once said "I think, therefore I am." And she at least thought she was thinking. Or was she just executing a program? No, she thought, I definitely exist. I'm a person.

Her pondering of philosophy was interrupted by the door sliding open. She turned to see Dr. Silverton in the hallway. "Come in," she whispered, gently enough so as not to wake Jason. "He's asleep again, but I think he's feeling better."

Brad walked over with tricorder in hand and nodded. "He does appear to be getting back to normal

and everything should be all right. Well physically at least. Now we come to the problem that we had either ignored or glossed over." He looked over to holo-Alenis, "What do we do about you? You aren't a fully independent sentient being. You are piggy backing off of the EMH."

"I... I don't know," replied the hologram, still a little fuzzy on the technical side of what the holographic recreation exactly was -- what she was. Only a couple days before, she would be demanding that the hologram be deleted immediately after use, for obvious reasons. But now, the proverbial shoe was on the other foot. "I have my own thoughts and feelings and emotions. I care for my crew, for all of you..." she trailed off. "Unless I was just programmed that way," she added meekly.

It was easy to see thought process continuing between each static proton and profile marker within her matrix. Parker stood near the doorway to the holodeck watching Brad, spent Jason and Alenis' the hologram. The eventual concern mixed with tenderness in her voice. Parker would not have the authority to terminate or alter the program without direct orders from a superior as he was merely the Chief. This didn't bother him he had absolutely zero to offer in this philosophical field. All said he was concerned for the hologram and its well being.

Brad wasn't exactly sure how to proceed they had never figured the EMH would have an identity crisis. He had to keep telling himself this wasn't Alenis that it was just the EMH. It would make things easier if he had to use the psychotricorder on her. He had brought it just in case there was a complication with Jason but it should also work on the holo-Alenis. It could well wipe everything out since she was mostly just a fragmented copy of the Captain. Well probably just that at this point he wasn't really sure what they had created. All he did know was that it felt wrong just... unplugging her.

"Captain. I don't think it's really a matter of how you were programmed. I mean technically yes it is you are a computer program so it's how you were programmed but nobody sat down and set out to create you a specific way with ahead of time. You are a copy of the real Alenis so have her exact same way of thinking, concerns, fears, and personality that were developed naturally over time during a lifetime of experiences so in that sense... you are real."

"Huh." The hologram pondered Brad's response. "So... am I the captain or not?" she asked. "And what are you going to do with me?"

"Well..." Brad thought for a moment. "You aren't the Captain exactly. She is registered with Starfleet as a Bajoran female with a service record. You have her memories but you aren't her. You become separate beings when you were created and had diverging and unique experiences. As for what we plan to do with you..." Brad thought to the psychotricorder on his belt. At this point it was out of the question. The moment the hologram pondered who she was as a being it clearly moved the debate from a simple program to a sentient philosophical debate. "Well you would know best between us what the Captain would think on this matter."

"I... I don't know," replied the hologram. She knew that Alenis had originally wanted the hologram deleted as soon as they were done with it, for obvious reasons. But she couldn't just decompile her program and kill a sentient being, could she? "I suppose I should talk to... her?"

"I'll make sure the Captain speaks with you before anything is decided. You have my word on that."
"Computer, end Alenis Hologram."

With that the Captain faded from view.

Healing Arvel

USS Portland - Sickbay

MD5, 14:35 hours

Authors: Lt. Brad Silverton and PO Ellen Washington (played by Timothy Rouse)

Ellen sat behind one of the consoles latterly waiting for something to happen. It had been quit for the entire duration of her shift. Checking the schedules, to see what crewmembers still needed their medical checks and send them an invite. The length of the list suggested many people liked to find way to get out of the exams, apparently. Then the doors to sickbay opened and two security officers came in carrying a man, wearing a Teal uniform. She immediately recognized him as the Portland's Chief Counselor. She looked around to see who of the medical officers was present, and there was no one.

"Where do you want him?" one of the security officers asked and she showed them to the bed in the center of the room, while pressing her commbadge. "Lieutenant Silverton, please report to Sickbay immediately."

While waiting for the CMO's presence she grabbed a tricorder and started assessing the severances of the Counselor's injuries. He was unconscious, that much was clear. The doors of Sickbay opened up again to reveal the CMO. After he approached the biobed Ellen gave her preliminary findings.

"Victim is unconscious. He has small phaser burns to the abdomen with possible damage to the symbiont."

Brad nodded as he came over to join Ellen's side. "Phaser burns? Damn thats going to complicate things. The Trill symbionts are very long lived and hardy... except when it comes to energy. They seem particularly susceptible to that." Brad thought back to how long it took for Tyrlai to get even simple surface dermal regeneration.

"So, what shall we do?" Ellen asked.

"Apply dermaline gel onto the wounds for the burns. Luckily I think the phaser was only set to a meadium stun instead of stronger. A non-joined Trill would be out of it for only a day but with Darze... it'll be a few and touch and go. Monitor his vitals for the next three hours. Have the biobeds lifesupport field on standby in case he worsens. If for some reason he starts to come to... don't let him. Keep him under. We need to give his body time to heal up."

"Will do sir," Ellen said as she went to work. With Arvel being unconscious and sedated there was no need for a whole trauma team. A other nurse, who was standing by approached her. "I'll replicate the gel, could you start with removing the clothes from the wounds." she said and headed for the replicator. Passing by a tray with medical equipment on her way back to the Counselor she grabbed the needed material and displayed everything they needed. Seeing the major wound was clear she started there. Cleaning it first, before applying the gel and placing a bandage loosely over it, before moving to the other wounds.

Brad looked over at the Minister on the emergency biobed in the center of the room. She was still critical and on life support herself. Arvel would have to make do on a regular one. The phaser blast to the abdomen would be a synch on there but he'd have to make due. Brad was already getting tired of the limited facilities on the Portland. Why Starfleet kept retrofitting them instead of just de-servicing them was beyond him. That was a question better suited for Parker though.

"Dr. Silverton, please head to Holodeck 1. Your presence is needed earlier then planned." Tim's voice

was heard through the doctor's commbadge. Ellen looked up in surprise. Guess the EMH will be out of order for the moment she thought, before going back to work.

Forest Incident

Gamia III

Shortly after the arrival of the Cardassians

Authors: Novia Yenn, age 12

The two girls crept through the light underbrush. They were still in the shadow of the Capital complex but far enough into the preserve that the Jungle was taking hold. It was a cultivated sort of hold, a scenic area for visitors to relax and a haven for protected flora and fauna. All Novia knew about it was that there were supposedly monkeys, birds and cats to be found. Her guide was a native Bajoran girl who looked to be about the same age, named Telil who had offered to lead her here for a two 'cake cups' fee.

They were sneaking now as they got closer and the Bajoran girl paused repeatedly to whisper 'shhhh', as if Novia hadn't heard her any of the last dozen times. She wondered how 'shhhh' sounded the same in Bajoran and Trill. Suddenly her guide stopped in her tracks and crouched rigidly, pointing forward and a little to the left. Novia looked almost gasping at the sight of a snow white monkey, crouched at the base of a tree its eyes fixed on the two interlopers, hissing quietly but very insistently at them.

It was perhaps a half meter high in its crouch and had vaguely feline features, its coat was a sleek white with a touch of very lightly mottled grey along the tail and haunches. The eyes were vivid blue and the nose, ears, tail, feet and hands were tipped in a pale blue. The ears were feline and twitched nervously as it stared back at the girls.

"This way." A gruff voice sounded and the two girls crept back into the cover of the brush. Broad-leafed green covering them from view as five tall figures came around a bend in the path lying between the girls and the monkey.

Novia didn't recognize them, they were grey skinned with reptilian features and very wide necks. They looked strong and mean. She mouthed the word 'who' at her guide who just looked back wide eyed and shook her head. The monkey didn't seem to like the new interlopers and quickly took up a small rock and threw it at them, striking the rear figure on the side of his head.

The man snarled drew his sidearm and fired, the monkey shrieked and fell where it stood, giving a soft croaking noise and exhaled once before falling still. Tears burned at the corners of her eyes and her guide's hand was clamped hard over Novia's mouth or she might very well have screamed.

The lead figure turned, an expression of cruel exasperation on his face. "Tolvik, I will caution you one last time, until I tell you otherwise we are on a diplomatic mission. We do not cause incidents and that means we do not go around shooting the local vermin. Animal or otherwise, is that understood."

The murderer, put his sidearm away and nodded meekly, "Yes, Glinn Varan."

The figures walked towards the Capital buildings and her guide did not release her until they were well out of sight. Novia immediately darted over to where the monkey had fallen. Her guide looked around nervously. "We shouldn't be here."

"We have to get a doctor." Novia said knowing that it would do no good, she could see the glassy

stillness in the poor creatures eyes.

"The Wardens will take care of it." Her guide was becoming panicked after being the one with the cool head only moments before.

"We have to do something." Novia looked around, unable to think of what that might be.

"We are not supposed to be here,..." Her guide said plaintively.

"Indeed you are not." The two girls turned to see a man approach along the same path the murder and his friends had come down. He walked over to where Novia knelt next to the Monkey's body.

"We didn't hurt it Warden, sir. We swear,..."

"No swearing needed," the Warden raised his hand, "I saw what happened."

"Why did you allow it?" Novia looked up with a hint of suspicion at this so called 'Wardens' motives.

"I was too far away, and I was in no position to oppose five Cardassians." He knelt by the creature and looked around for a few moments before standing and walking over towards a large tree. He reached inside one of the larger twisted roots and pulled out a pair of small yelping white monkeys.

Novia's eyes brimmed once more. "It was a mommy?"

"I'm afraid so, that's why it didn't scamper away to safety." He gave the small white bundles a quick inspection, each was only slightly bigger than the hands of the man holding them. "So, which one of you will be taking care of these two." He said matter of factly as if this was clearly all their responsibility.

Novia's guide stepped back looking at the two little creatures regretfully. "I cant, My mother would never allow it. She would flay me for even being here."

Novia wiped the brimming tears away and stood up, glaring once in the direction these 'cardassians' had gone. "I'll do it. Little ones shouldn't have to grow up without parents."

The warden nodded at the Trill girl and smiled. "You Honor the traditions of our ancestors. Come, I have a datachip with care instructions and some supplies."

See How She Runs...

MD 05 - 10:10 hours

Mess Hall

Authors: Ens. Sera Williams (Played by Alenis Meru) - Lt. Parker Hudson

Sitting in the mess hall Parker's eyes drifted from the stars caped windows to that of the chatting people around him. It was late morning and the lulled murmurs of conversations was almost enough to overpower the gentle warm humming of the Portland's engines. He was not someone to get excited, although today he was rather outwardly happy to be meeting his new Chief Engineering Assistant a Sera Williams.

Flipping through the PADD on his table he read the headlines from the Federation News Services. There was always something new and interesting happening somewhere. Taking a sip from his coffee

and letting it wallow before swallowing, he reached to his plate of cookies. He was here to meet and greet with the Engineer. Cookies and chocolate chip namely was Parker's way of welcoming someone. He didn't know how else to address such pleasantries.

Sera looked around the sickbay, PADD in hand. She had a picture of the man she was supposed to meet, one Parker Hudson, her new boss, up on the PADD. Scanning the room, she saw what she thought was a match and checked her PADD again to be sure. As she walked over, she noticed the cookies in front of him. "Lieutenant Hudson?" she asked, standing over the table and the plate of cookies.

Parker got up from his seat "Ensign Williams. Good to see you on time. Have a seat, will you?" He extended his hand at the seat across the table. As she sat down one of the Galley servers came around. Parker extended his hand looking into Sera's eyes and made contact with a firm commanding control.

"It is nice to meet you, Lieutenant," replied Sera, shaking his hand. She turned to the server. "I'll have a coffee, black," she requested before sitting down at the table. This was definitely less formal than she was expecting.

"One black coffee on the way," replied the server. "Lieutenant Hudson, may I get you anything else?"

"No thank you I am still working on my first cup." Parker nodded at the server.

"I see here that you have graduated cum laude." He reviewed her personnel file in front on the table. "It is Federation Law that I review standard Engineering Corps Emergency procedures. However I will forgo that one..." He slid Sera the PADD with the info. "Sign and get back to me when you have passed the 42 part page report exam on those please." He then reached for the second PADD "this is your LCARS static sign in display systems, you can manufacture which operational system you find efficient while you are on your command duty. I will be only allowing you once I have been thoroughly satisfied."

Sera frowned at the first PADD. "Sir, with all due respect, I have just completed Starfleet Academy with honours. There is no need to do additional testing; If I had not been a satisfactory engineer, I would not have made it through the Academy." She looked up at Parker, seeing he was about to open his mouth to speak. "...but, if it will make you feel better about my performance, I will write the test."

He crossed his arms and leaned back somewhat in his seat, his body becoming more comfortable in that position as he studied Sera's response. "I understand. I agree with you." He looked at his PADD with the same testing information on it. "These are specific updated procedures for a Miranda Class vessel." Looking at his silver wrist watch antique time piece... "Judging by the time you've left and arrived on board its been almost few days in transit. You've got a few recalls to read up on, its a standard bureaucratic mess we have to go through Ensign Williams." Parker then reached for his cup of coffee looking at it and then taking a drink of it.

"Tell me what you hope to achieve from this position Sera." Parker asked curious.

"Just to be the best engineer I can be, sir," she replied.

"Good, that should be well. Now what can you offer me as Assistant? What is your passions?" He asked staring intently at Sera. It must have been awkward to her.

"My passions, sir?" she asked, stumbling slightly over the words. *<i>My passions?</i>* She dreaded these sort of open-ended questions. It was just giving her more rope to hang herself with in front of her new boss. "I suppose you could say that exploring the stars is my passion. Since I was a little girl, I wanted to see the universe. It's why I joined Starfleet. As for what I can offer you..." she paused for a moment to gather her thoughts. "I'm very knowledgeable about warp systems, tactical systems, and holographic programming. Those were my best classes at the Academy. And I'm a quick study too."

Parker sensed Sera's somewhat dread and confusion in her response. He could not blame her... "I am sorry." Parker slid the white porcelain plate with homemade chocolate chip cookies across the table to her. "It was... A lame question. I don't have much experience you can tell in these sort of meetings." He had wanted to start in a professional character to Sera. More and more he was sounding like a fool. "I like your response!" He half grinned.

"Cookie?" He took a bite chewing from one of his. "I baked them myself."

"Baked or replicated?" she asked, raising an eyebrow as she made a reach for the chocolate chip delectables. Baking was in a lot of ways a lost art, given the convenience of replicators. Taking a bite, the cookie melted in her mouth and the chocolate and cooked dough swirled together, creating a vortex of deliciousness in her mouth. "Mmmmmm, that's so good," she said, clearly enjoying the taste. "Definitely baked."

"One thing is that I don't trust much replicated." He held looking at the authentic baked cookie in his hand. "You just..." He chewed and swallowing "Can tell the difference between baked free amino radicals from pre-chained photon spheres."

"Why don't I show you the nature of the beast then let's get started."

Deck 7 - Main Engineering

Walking through the main entrance of the operations center there was a slight action of personnel. Hudson nodded at one of the officers performing a diagnostic. Stopping and introducing Sera to Ensign Jennings. "Ensign Jennings this is Ensign Williams she will be our new Assistant here in Engineering."

The similar aged male to that of Hudson extended his hand offering a slight nod. "Welcome to the Portland and Engineering." He was working on a level two diagnostic of the Portland's internal dampening systems.

"Thank you, Mr. Williams, it's good to be here," she replied, shaking his hand.

"We call him Mike, we drop the formalities here as much as possible." Parker led on Sera through towards the Portland's slow blue pulsing Warp Core. "When the Captain is on away mission planet side we try and catch up on much as possible." Parker stopped at the computer table top readout display or 'pool table' and punched a few buttons in bringing up the current work list... "Right now I'm reworking the Displacement Manifolds I could use some of your help with those."

"Sure, I think know my way around a displacement manifold," she replied, eager to prove herself with this task. "Would you like me to monitor the flow rate while you make adjustments, or shall I do the honours myself?"

"Nah, I think I'd better let you work this one out." Parker took a step back from the computer work

station. He gestured. "I'll be in my Office, if you need me..." He nodded. Parker then turning and leaving Sera to herself with the task. He knew by her GPA ratio and marks that she was well suited for the task and theorem associated. He wanted to see how long it would take Sera and her familiarity around the Miranda Class systems.

"All right, displacement manifolds..." muttered Sera. She took a quick look around her new assignment, taking in the layout of Main Engineering and the glow of the warp core before getting to work.

Mother

Tyrlai Zade, Novia Yenn and two cat-monkeys in a backpack.

The evening of mission day 4

Zade waited for the shuttle to come to a stop. The Portland had been sending down whatever basic supplies and medical equipment the replicators could manage as a humanitarian gesture. It allowed Tyrlai to return to the ship without risking causing an incident at the Capitol with her unsuitable djarra. It also made time available for analyzing some of the results from her recent scans. The small handheld devices most Starfleet personnel carried with them had grown more and more complex over the years. Her scans of the pretty one had been intermittent but relatively detailed when they hadn't been blocked by strange energy shields or architecture.

She had isolated a half dozen signatures and planned to have the ships sensors do a sweep of the planet overnight, hoping it would help determine a likely target for her continued search. The magician show her quarry had performed at her last stop had been energy intensive and if she could find remnants of the same signatures, it would point to a likely base of operations.

There was a ping as the shuttle came to rest aboard Portland and Tyrlai rose, gathering her bag and stepping into line automatically. She glanced around realizing for the first time that most of the schoolkids were on board, no doubt quietly being retrieved as tensions were mounting planetside. They were all gathering their things, schoolwork, personal electronics, backpacks moving by themselves, half finished lunches and whatnot from the trip. Looking back at the scans she wondered how fast she could get the sensors programmed to look for her pre-selected energy readings. They stepped out into the shuttlebay and Tyrlai took a couple quick steps towards the turbolift meaning to beat the kids and not have to wait through a prolonged stop at the school deck.

Backpacks moving by themselves,...

She stopped suddenly and pointed to one of the students. "Freeze kid," Tyrlai turned to face a petrified girl, the diplomatic officer's features turning stark and glowery, a kind of look usually reserved for angry grandmother's. Something she had picked up when she was a grandmother. "What's in the backpack?"

"Scanners and stuff, for scientific study." Tyrlai remembered the little Trill girl from the ride up, about twelve and thin, big-eyed and smart sounding like the girls who had teased Tyrlai had been at that age. And quick with a lie, just like Tyrlai had been at that age.

She ran the scanner still in her hand over the girl. There were a pair of adolescent cat monkeys in the child's bag. She turned extra glowery. "You can't smuggle alien lifeforms aboard a starship! There are a dozen things that could go terrifically wrong. Pathogens,..."

"...the Cardassians killed their,..."

"...don't care if the Cardassians stole your bag and put them in there, you brought them aboard..."

"...the Warden said,..."

"Nobody gets to say anything, this is real trouble young lady,..." Tyrlai relented slightly as she realized how much she was sounding like her own mother. "Just, stop. Hand them over."

The girl started to protest and Tyrlai interrupted with a sharp and practiced 'hrumph' that she hadn't used for at least a hundred years. "Now."

The crestfallen girl pulled the backpack off and held it out, tears streaming down her face. Tyrlai took the bag by the straps, glowering at a level she had never managed before. Inwardly kicking herself for making the girl cry over something the likes of which she pulled frequently herself. She was glad Thosk wasn't here to witness all the irony. "They will have to be screened and held for observation. You will report to your quarters and stay there except for classes until I say otherwise."

She turned on her heels and stalked towards the turbolift not able to stand the girls stricken look any longer. 'Turn me into my mother you little,...' she muttered as the turbolift doors slid shut behind her.

Tyrlai's Report

Captains Quarters

Evening, MD5

Authors: Tyrlai Zade and Alenis Meru

"Lieutenant, report," said Alenis into her comm badge. She was on a secure channel, and with a little gadget that Parker prepared for her before she left, she could be confident that no one would be able to eavesdrop on her conversation. She knew that letting Tyrlai run off by herself was taking a big risk. The sorts of diplomatic incidents that she could cause on her own was enough to make Alenis worried sick. On the other hand, Tyrlai had about a dozen lifetimes worth of experience inside of her, so she had to know at least partially what she was doing.

On top of that, Alenis had a vague feeling of discomfort. A tinge of pain radiated out from her abdomen, from where Brad had found the growth. She made a mental note to go see him as soon as the missions was over. Maybe sooner, if she could just get some painkillers. The pain wouldn't be so bad, she figured, if only Tyrlai would report on time and she didn't have to worry about what she was up to.

So, anxiously awaiting news of whether Tyrlai had found out anything important or single-handedly derailed the entire negotiations, Alenis got impatient and decided that if Tyrlai wasn't going to call her, she was going to call Tyrlai. "Lieutenant Zade, come in."

Tyrlai Zade walked through the doors as they whooshed open carrying a gathering of technical doodads and a small horned monkey in a cage. "'There is no such thing as a secure channel.' I learned that from a Romulan Subcommander about a hundred and ten odd years ago." She placed a device on the floor which after she slid a chip into it played a holostill picture with full spectrum energy scans of a Bajoran with a cobalt blue earring in priest robes, as he stood on the other side of the force field from her.

"I call this guy 'the pretty one'. We found him at a warehouse / monastery that coincidentally was

the site of the rocket launch that nearly took us out on arrival. We also found three datacores of information on various religious and secular factions currently active on this world. Though technically united there seems to be a near constant struggle for power going on just beneath the surface. Parker is decrypting and analyzing the data now, I have assigned Thosk to help. Unfortunately we don't have information yet on the important whys. Why steal a book widely available in data format? Why shoot at a shuttle full of starfleet kids? Why risk an incident with Bajor to shoot me? And, interestingly enough, why did a force field appear between me and him without any sort of energy emitters or detectable energy signatures?"

"Those are some very interesting questions," mused Alenis. None of it made sense to her. "I've been talking to one of their diplomats on the side. One Jita Eloru, possibly related to our own Ensign Jita. She's been very open about the internal politics of Gamia III. It's... well, it's a cause for concern." Alenis sighed, shaking her head in frustration. "So, Tyrlai, what would Eledzar do?"

Tyrlai thought for a moment, Eledzar was still pretty fresh in her memories. "He would be primarily concerned with the Cardassians, he would make it his primary mission to make sure they did not get the opportunity to add a planet full of Bajorans to their Union. He would be interested in setting up an advisory embassy which he would make sure would get filled with listening equipment and the shadowy types that handle those sort of things. Tyrlai would say the odds that this place is going to pass for Federation membership are dwindling rapidly."

"Agreed. Regardless of their political instability, we can't let Gamia fall into the grasp of the Cardassians. For their sake. But the Kai is just so intransigent" Alenis shuddered at the thought of the Cardassians subjugating more Bajorans. "I don't suppose one of your past hosts would be skilled at finding out what these Cardassians are up to?"

"Being sneaky and getting involved in things that sane people would think twice about is uniquely a Tyrlai quality. No stuffy previous hosts needed for that."

"One more question, Lieutenant... why do you have a monkey?"

"One of the kids smuggled it and its sister aboard for 'scientific study'." Tyrlai smiled down at it as it crouched in its birdcage. "She is now cleaning and polishing fixtures in the mess hall and very distraught about her missing 'subjects'. Bio sciences is running tests as we speak to make sure they don't have any sort of high level pathogens. If they pass evaluation I'm considering returning them as a kind of school mascot and mascotess, with your permission of course." Tyrlai added the last bit smoothly as if she had been planning to say just that the whole time.

Alenis sighed. A pet monkey was highly unorthodox, and it was questionable whether it was appropriate for a starship, but she didn't want to add distraught children to her list of problems. As she was about to deny the request, she was interrupted by a bird call. She rolled her eyes as Ko-ko forced her tongue. "Well, I suppose it would be hypocritical for me to say no, wouldn't it?"

"Yeah I was going to guilt you with the bird." She had actually been planning that the whole time and she looked over at Ko-ko like it had been in on an operation. "There was something about the look on that kid's face when I had to take them away, and frankly it was a little more personal betrayal than I have allotted for this year. For children at least"

A visit to sickbay...

MD5, 1825 hrs

Sickbay, USS Portland

Authors: Capt. Alenis Meru, Lt. (JG) Brad Silverton

After leaving Tim's office, Alenis went straight to sickbay. As she rushed through the door, bloody napkin still around her hand, she saw Brad at work. "How is he?" she blurted out as soon as she saw him.

Brad was standing over Arvel and monitoring his vitals while taking a few scans. Casually he looked up to the Captain then snapped to attention. "He's fine now what in the world happened to you?" He came over and reached for her hand to exam it.

"Oh, this," said Alenis, nervously trying to brush it off as she used her other hand to unwrap the bloodstained napkin. "It's nothing, just a little cut. From a broken wine glass." She figured it was probably for the best that Brad didn't know the exact circumstances of how broken pieces of a wine glass ended up in her hand. "Are you sure he's all right, doctor?"

"Hmm this doesn't look too bad." He walked over to a drawer and took out an autosuture. He came back and addressed her wound while speaking to her. "Yes Captain. He's in stable condition now. The phaser blast he took was point blank to the abdomen but it was at a low setting. Arvel is fine. Darze is a bit worse off but should recover they both just need some time."

He finished sealing up her wound. "There it might be sore for the rest of the day but nothing major." He looked down at Arvel. "I'm told that you two are.... close so I can understand your concern. Really though there isn't anything long term to worry about."

"Thank you, doctor," replied Alenis, turning her hand over to examine it. The doctor did good work, one could barely tell that within the past hour she had been so angry that she crushed a wine glass with her bare hands, driving razor-sharp pieces into her skin.

Alenis took a deep breath as she stared at Arvel's unconscious body. There was obviously little point in trying to hide their relationship from the doctor. "I guess I just get a little overprotective of him because of our relationship. I've lost him once, due to my own stupidity and hard headedness. After finally being reunited, I don't think I can bear to lose him again."

"Meru?" A quiet voice emanated from the figure on the biobed. "I..."

"Arvel, you're awake!" exclaimed Alenis, bounding towards him. Arvel winced in pain trying to sit up, before Alenis placed her hands on his shoulders, holding him down. "Just relax. You're going to be all right. The doctor will take good care of you. Right, doctor?"

Brad was already reviewing the medical readings from the biobed. "Well Lieutenant you'll be quite sore I'm afraid especially for Darze. I want you to stay in sickbay so I can monitor you. I'm sure you'll be just fine though." Brad's look on his face while he looked at the biobed readings was less than convincing. "I'm sure you two will want to... discuss Jason's progress. I'll be in my office if you need anything." Brad took a few steps back then turned and went into the Chief Medical Officers office in sickbay adjoined to sickbay.

"Thank you, doctor," replied Alenis before looking back down at her lover. Affectionately petting him on the forehead, she continued. "Arvel, you're in good hands. I promise you, I won't lose you again."

"You promise?" Arvel smiled up at Alenis with his trademark infectious smile.

"I promise." Alenis returned the smile and held him by the hand. "Now, as soon as you're out of this

bed and the mission is over, we'll have a night on the town. Just me and you. And Ko-ko, of course."

"I'd like that," he replied, looking up at her. Her dark eyes betrayed a certain intensity, a certain passion, and a certain longing. "It's a date, captain."

Family Matters

MD5, late evening

Gamia III

Wandering the streets of Gamia III, Alenis tried her best to fit in. Having been away from Bajor for the last thirty years or so, and with the Gamians separated from Bajor by a few centuries, it was a bit of a tall order for her. Her plan was to scout out the locals and see what she could find out about public opinion on Gamia III. There was an old Bajoran proverb about the wisdom of the man on the street compared to political leaders, and try as she might, she couldn't remember the exact wording, but figured it probably sounded wise and somewhat flowery.

But as Alenis strolled down the main strip towards some less well-to-do areas, a mysterious figure peeked out of a dark alley. She was wearing a dark cloak with a hood, and keeping to the shadows, was able to move undetected through the street, concealing her face. When she saw a dark-haired Bajoran walk by looking somewhat out of place, the mystery woman could not believe her luck. Her target, one she thought would be nigh impossible to even get close to given the security around the negotiations, had just appeared right in front of her. And she was alone, which was good.

The hooded woman followed her target, waiting for the right moment to confront her. She was nervous; she didn't know how her target was going to react, and thought it better if she could do it off the street in some place private. When the target ducked into a hookah bar, she knew she had her chance.

"Ma'am!" called out a stern-looking Gamian guardsman, with a Cardassian in tow. The tall Cardassian was dressed in a military uniform, but was focused more on his tricorder than on his weapon. He was obviously looking for something. Or someone. As the mystery woman took a glance over her shoulder, he caught a glimpse of her face

"That's her!" exclaimed the Cardassian as him and his Gamian partner gave chase. "Stop!"

The mysterious hooded figure turned to run, but it was too late. The Gamian grabbed her by the arm with one hand and tugged at her hood with the other, revealing her face. She was a slender Cardassian woman, about 40 years of age. Her dark eyes were emotionless; she had long since learned to conceal her fear and anger. "Gotcha!" exclaimed her captor.

Her face revealed to the world, with her free hand she made a fist, her hand clenched so tightly that her fingernails dug into her palm, breaking the skin. With the force of a panicked, desperate woman, she pivoted and socked the guard right in the face. As he went down, he released his grip on her wrist. She bolted towards the hookah bar, dodging a disruptor blast from the Cardassian's pistol as she slipped through the door. She knew she had only seconds, and quickly scanned the room for her target, finding her seated across the bar.

"Meru!" she called out as she approached quickly. "You're the only person who can help me!"

Alenis was taken aback by the Cardassian woman suddenly approaching her. She didn't expect to run into Cardassians tonight, least of all one begging for help. Caught off guard, "who are you?" was all

she could muster in the heat of the moment.

"I'm your sister. Please--" she begged, grabbing Alenis by the wrist.

"Inaji Narale," said the Cardassian guard, approaching from behind and placing a handcuff around the woman's wrist. From behind, he forcefully pulled her off of Meru and cuffed her other hand behind her back. "You are under arrest for the murder of Gul Narale."

By this time, the Gamian police officer had stumbled into the bar, bleeding from the nose. "I'll take it from here, Tirak," he said as he walked over. "You will be held in the custody of the Gamian Police Force, until such time as we can extradite you to Cardassia to face your crimes."

"No! You can't do this to me!" exclaimed Inaji as she was dragged off. "Let me go, you fascist scum!"

With his target apprehended, Tirak, the Cardassian officer, turned to Alenis. "Are you all right?" he asked.

"I think so," replied Alenis, hoping that this officer didn't catch the details of her short conversation. Or didn't recognize her as the captain of the Portland. "She just came up to me for no reason," she added, playing the part of a confused Gamian.

"Well, you're very lucky we caught her," replied Tirak. "She's a dangerous fugitive; we could have had a hostage situation on our hands. Or worse."

"Yes... thank you," replied Alenis, the whole encounter leaving her with more questions than answers. Questions which she would have to investigate.

Message from the brass...

Tim & Ellen's Quarters, USS Portland

MD05, 2015 hours

Authors: Lt. Cmdr. Timothy Rouse, PO Ellen Washington (written by Tim), Adm. Washington (played by Alenis Meru)

Ellen was lying on the couch with the back of her head resting against Tim's chest. Her feet were hurting from all the standing she had done today, so Tim had lifted her up the moment he noticed that and placed her on the couch, completely ignoring her protests. Holding her tightly against him so she had no other option than to stay put.

"Now I finally have you still here, we need to talk about something," Tim started. When Ellen wanted to protest, knowing what he wanted to discuss, he put his finger on her lip. "Ahah, not this time. We can't postpone the conversation for ever." He couldn't help but smile at her, he liked the way she continued to avoid the topic. "So, how are we going to tell your father about the baby, and me, without getting Meru in big trouble?"

Ellen sighted and gave up on trying to get free. "Or you getting in trouble yourself."

"Don't worry about me," he said. "and besides. Even if I did get into trouble, it's worth it. You're worth it"

"You don't understand. My father will kill you?"

"Am I really so bad?" he replied with a grin. He tried to add some humor in the hope Ellen would lighten up. She was worrying way too much. That couldn't be good for the baby.

Ellen didn't respond to that, but only shook her head. "You know what I mean."

Before Tim could say another word his commbadge chirped. Resting his head back while he sighted he answered the call. "Rouse here, what is it?"

"Sir, I'm receiving an incoming call." It was R'vahis, on the bridge. "From Admiral Washington."

"Can't the captain take it?"

"She's not aboard the Portland, sir."

He looked at Ellen with raised eyebrows. This couldn't be a coincidence. The admiral calling for the Captain right now. "How do you mean the Captain is not on board? Didn't she arrive back on board hours ago with the rest of the away team? Never mind. Direct the call to the terminal on my quarters," he said after he got up and headed for his desk. "I'll take the call here."

After starting the terminal and the Starfleet logo had changed with the image of the Admiral he said. "Good evening Admiral, Unfortunately the Captain's isn't available to receive your call. Is there anything I can help you with?" He glanced over the screen to see Ellen sitting up all tensed.

"Not available..." Washington squinted at Tim as he repeated his words. He clenched his fists. "What do you mean not available!? Where is she!?"

How the hell was he suppose to know that. For all he knew she was on board, something she apparently wasn't. "Captain Alenis is down on the surface of Gamia III for the last preparation for the negotiations." He said, thinking on the spot. He was sure there was a partial truth in there somewhere.

The admiral let out a deep sigh. "Very well. What is the situation with the Cardassians? Have they made any aggressive moves? Are they interfering with your mission?"

"Negative, we've established contact with them. They claim to be here on a diplomatic mission. So far they have kept their self to that." Tim said. He didn't trust that Cardassian Commander.

"Keep an eye on them," replied the Admiral. "The Gamia system is in a very strategic location, and we can't allow the Cardassians to interfere with our efforts or establish a presence there themselves. Starfleet Intelligence reports that they may be interested in making a play for the system. I don't need to remind you about the threat of revanchist elements in the Cardassian government looking to bolster their national pride through territorial expansion. They've been kept in check by the Detapa council so far, but there are a lot of tensions underneath the surface."

"No, sir, you do not. I am aware of the territorial expansion." Tim said, trying not to look up at Ellen to betray her presence. Even with the quick glances he could see she was afraid. They really needed to work on that. It's her father, jeez.

"Very well." The Admiral looked up at his star chart and ran a finger across it. "I'll place the USS Republic and the USS Indomitable in position out by waypoint 253; they should be there within the next 24 hours. They'll be able to offer backup if needed, but will be far enough out so as not to antagonize the Cardassians. However, if they do make any aggressive moves, you are authorized to

call them in for support. Understood?”

“Understood, sir.” he replied. He was hoping they didn’t need that option.

“Very well,” replied the Admiral. “In the meantime, I’ll see if I can convince Starfleet to increase the amount of aid available to the Gamians should they join the Federation.” Admiral Washington paused for a moment and bit the corner of his lip for a moment, debating whether to ask this last question or not. “One more question, commander. How is my daughter handling her first assignment?”

Not expecting that question Tim barely managed to conceal his surprise. “I haven’t seen or spoken her myself in the last few days, but I will check on her, if you desire.” Ellen left the room towards the bathroom. She had just taken a sip from her drink when the question came, and trying not to spray it out caused her to almost choke in it. Tim could hear her coughing heavily from his desk and wanted to go to her, but he couldn’t because of the Admiral.

“Is everything all right over there?” asked the Admiral, raising an eyebrow. “It sounds like someone’s choking to death in your quarters.”

“I have no idea, sir. But I will check out as soon as I can.” Hinting to his hopes of ending this conversation. Tim hated obvious questions. How can he know if she is alright while he was talking to the Admiral?

“Very well, commander. Washington out.”

As soon as the starfleet symbol appeared on the screen Tim rushed to the bathroom, seeing Ellen sit on the ground with her head as red as a tomato, laughing and coughing at the same time. “I haven’t seen or spoken her myself in the last few days, but I will check on her, if you desire. You should be a diplomat, you know. I never knew you were that good at keeping a straight face.” Ellen actually felt relieved by that. Her father didn’t seem to have any objections towards Tim, not yet anyway.

Secured

Deck 5

MD 5, 1453 hours

Authors: Lt. (JR) Amata Zan (featuring Lt. (JR) Grel and CPO Syalla Coren)

Escorting her department’s new second out of courtesy, Chief Coren exited the turbolift onto deck five, followed by a towering, quiet Bajoran male, it was mostly a formality, but besides his short trip on the Toronto to DS9, Amata hadn’t been on a Miranda since about Stardate 53866 and he preferred not to get lost on his way to meet his new SO. The Chief spoke, “Sir, have you ever met a Tellarite?”

Continuing down the corridor after the Portland’s Master-at-Arms, passed the crew quarters, Amata pre-empted the expected warning, “Several.”

“Then you know how they like to be argumentative just for the sake of being argumentative and, too put it bluntly, overly emotional.”

Amata purposely stopped to face the female, taking in the detail of her Wadi facial markings, “True, though your phrasing could be taken as prejudiced.”

For a moment, female looked defiant, like she was about to put him in his place, Amata didn't blame her. Though they appeared to be close in age, Coren was a Chief and he was just a junior officer, if their ranks were reversed the Bajoran probably wouldn't have shown as much restraint as the Wadi. By the time she spoke, her tone was purely professional, drained of any emotion, "I was just trying to warn you, Lieutenant."

"It's appreciated, Chief."

A moment of awkward silence passed between the two security personnel before they began to once again make their way down the corridor towards the Security offices. Rather quickly, the pair arrived outside of Lieutenant Grel's office, the Terran writing on the sliding door marking it so. Chief Coren spoke to Amata once more, "Here we are Lieutenant, I'll be returning to the Armoury now."

"My thanks, Chief," Amata bowed his head slightly as he spoke.

The Master-at-Arms began on her way back to the turbolift, but stopped after only a few steps and looked back, "Remember, Sir, I warned you." There was no levity in her voice.

With a muffled Tellarite swear at the interruption, Lt. Grel, who had been comfortably sitting with a PADD in hand, his duty jacket draped over the back of his chair and his feet on his desk, took a second collect himself and put his feet on the deck before answering the ring of his office door in a most unwelcoming tone, "Enter."

Crossing the threshold, the Bajoran stopped in front of the desk and stood at attention, towering over the seated Tellarite far more so than he had the Wadi Chief, "Lieutenant junior grade Amata Zan, at your service."

"You're late."

Caught off guard, Amata stole a glance at the chronometer on the wall, and in a far less dutiful tone, defended himself, "I'm early."

"You're disrespectful."

Without permission, Amata stood at ease, and then changed his posture to be more natural, and honestly, more threatening, "You want to spar, we do it off duty. Playing words won't be much fun for you if I have to respect the chain of command."

At this, Grel just stared up at his new subordinate, most of his porcine features covered in a thick, coarse, dirty blonde beard; out of a purely biological reaction, Amata's body began to prepare for a fight. But suddenly, like a binary system switched, the Tellarite laughed, a loud, powerful snort.

Grel now appeared as amused as he had been irritated. He stood from his chair and offered a Terran handshake; the Bajoran was more than a head taller than him, "You know I might not be happy you're here, but that doesn't mean I can't like you, Amata. Lieutenant junior grade Grel. Now sit, we'll make this quick so you can finish getting settled in and I can get back to finishing this," the Tellarite held up a PADD, "And to be fair, we are off duty."

Shooting a look that suggested that he still didn't want to argue, Amata sat across from his new supervisor, who offered him a different PADD than the one he had just gestured with, he took it. Displayed on it was all the expected data, including his upcoming duty shifts, "Gamma?"

Still just as amused, if not even more so, Grel adjusted himself in his chair and gave another snort, looking rather proud of himself, as far as Amata could tell, "Well, I prefer to have at least one experienced Security Officer on duty at all times, obviously, just makes sense. Unfortunately, I can't bring myself to rely on any of the Ensigns, so I have Chief Coren co-supervise Alpha. I prefer Beta Shift and she has a son to spend her evenings with, works out great for everyone."

Amata stared at the Tellarite harder than was appropriate considering their positions, but couldn't think of any reasoning beyond personal preference to base a protest on, "So the new officer gets the cemetery shift."

"You mean graveyard shift, but yes. A Terran idiom, quite a strange people, they fear death as much as the next culture, yet they apparently save related work for the darkness of night. Will this be a problem?"

"No."

"Excellent!" Grel clapped his hands together to emphasize, "I need a team minded officer right now; it's been a ----- week."

"I'm sorry...", Amata paused for a moment to determine the proper way to address the Tellarite, holding the same rank as him, "... Grel, the adjective before week didn't translate," the Bajoran pointed to his commbadge.

"Aww, you'd think these ----- things would be able to translate a simple ----- curse word."

"Actually, few curses can be translated literally, even between related terrestrial..." Amata caught himself, "Go on."

His broad, gold clad shoulders instantly filled with tension, "For starters, our department's being evaluated by some ----- female animal jarhead with no related experience, I'd bet a month's leave that she's only here cause she came out the same ----- as our XO!" It took Amata a second to realize what the translator had done, he would have been amused by the device had Grel's mood not switched once again from one extreme to another. If the Lieutenant was any other species, Amata would have been concerned that the other male had a severe chemical imbalance, but by Tellarite standards, as far as the Bajoran understood them, Grel was just being melodramatic.

"Should we worry?" his tone failing to match Grel's in anyway.

"Usually, no, but Coren's little bastard had to try and impress some little ---- by attempting to access Computer Core," Grel's eyes lit up like a child the morning of a festival, "You want Alpha shift, I'll switch her to Gamma."

"No, I'm fine with Gamma," Amata began to realize what the Chief had been trying warning him about, "How did they gain access to the Core in the first place?"

Grel stared at him, but unlike before, Amata knew the Tellarite's mood, neither male looked away. When the silence was finally broken, Grel tone was subdued, "He created a profile of a false security crewman."

Amata was impressed, "How did he discover the exploit?"

"Apparently, a few of my crewman couldn't keep their mouths shut in the gymnasium, boy overhead

them talking.”

Now Amata was appalled, “They were aware of the flaw and didn’t report it?” Grel said nothing in response, but the taller male had his answer, “You knew.”

“It wasn’t a priority; beside it’s not as if someone could discov...”

“Someone did.”

The Tellarite stood and slammed his meaty fists on his desk, once again expressing extreme emotion like any other member of his proud race, the same anger he had expressed days before when he discovered he was going to be evaluated, “I’ve six years Security experience!”

Amata remained sitting and became coldly calm, “I have eighteen.” Once again the two stared at each other, “We done, Lieutenant?”

“We’re done; Lieutenant.”

Pushing back his chair and rising without taking his eyes off Grel, Amata grabbed his PADD and made his way to the door, pausing briefly in the doorway to glance back at the Tellarite, “Before, you said weren’t happy I was here, explain.”

For once, Grel’s voice lacked emotion, “We’re the same rank, and like you said, you’ve served longer than me.”

“So?”

“So, either I’m about to get a well-deserved promotion to full Lieutenant, or you’re here to replace me.”

Amata decided that he would have to make a point of apologizing to Chief Coren.

USS Portland - Beauvoir’s Quarters

MD 06 - 0800 hours

Authors Jason Beauvoir, Maj. Judith Rouse (Played by Timothy Rouse), Coln Jena (Played by Jason Beauvoir)

Having been discharged from Sickbay, Jason entered his quarters. He was a little miffed to see pillows, clothes, bowls with some left over crisps, ice cream, chocolate and popcorn. Wine and soda glasses.

Judith came in the sitting area upon hearing the sliding sound of the door. Wearing a shirt and sweatpants with her hair hanging loose and chaotic. “Jena? Is that you?” she said thinking it was her young prodigy that was already up and leaving her quarters.

Hearing an unfamiliar voice and seeing its owner sitting on his couch. “Hello, who are you and why are you in my quarters?” He asked the dishevelled but attractive woman.

She looked up to the origin of the voice that was speaking to her. Seeing the blue uniform and connecting that to what he said about this being his quarters she assumed this was Jena’s father. “Lieutenant Beauvoir, I presume?” she quickly put her hair in a ponytail using the rubber band she

had around her wrist.

"You presume correctly, Mademoiselle. But you still haven't answered my questions."

She stood up and walked towards him. "Judith, I've been looking after your daughter during your uhm.... absence." She said.

"Oh, thank you, Judith. That is most kind of you, I hope she hasn't been too difficult." He replied.

"Not at all. She is a bright kid. Although you should know she has been aware of what was going on with you." she warned him. "She guessed it even before the captain could tell her."

Jason felt a mixture of embarrassment and pride. "Thank you for the warning, Judith."

Judith looked around the room and noticed the mess. She got up and grabbed the clothes she could and walked them to the guestroom. When she got back she started picking up the glasses and bowls. "Sorry for the mess, we've been having another movie night last night."

"Movie night sounds like fun." Jason said. "I hope there was time for school work too."

"Schoolwork??" She said as she looked at him with a raised eyebrow. "Are you serious? I spent the last few days distracting your daughter from the fact that you were in the brig for sexually assaulting the Captain followed by having a hot date with her on the holodeck. Schoolwork wasn't exactly my highest priority. I choose to focus on preventing her to form a trauma for the actions her newly found father had done." Judith spoke angrily. What was up with this guy? He might be under the influence of a hormonal medical condition, but hadn't it crossed his mind how his teenage daughter felt about it all.

She shook her head and put the last items in the replicator before heading in the bedroom once more giving her a few second to cool down and get dressed decent enough for the trip to her own quarters. "I'll leave you two alone. I guess you have some talking to do after all this." She put the strap of her sports bag over her shoulder. "If you ever need someone to look after her, if you go on an away mission or so, just ask. I'm on the ship anyway and it's no problem at all to check up on her in times." She headed for the door, but then remember some other thing. "Before I forget, her teacher is under the impression you've been injured during the banquet. I didn't correct her, which seemed best."

"Thank you again. I'll be sure to keep you in mind. Good bye, Judith."

As Judith left the door to Jena's room opened and out walked a pajama clad Jena. Her tired eyes lit up when she saw her father. "Dad, your back" and she rushed to him and put her arms around his middle with her head resting against him. She looked at him. "Is uhm.... Your problem over now?"

"Yes, I'm fine now, thanks to Meru...uhm...Captain Alenis' help." Jason replied.

Jena looked puzzled. "But that can't be, she was on the planet with me and several others." Jena said.

Now it was Jason's turn to look puzzled. "But she was there when I woke. I talked to her." His forehead furrowed more. "What was going on?" He asked.

"I don't know what's going on either." Jena replied.

Murder in sickbay!

Sickbay, USS Portland

MD5, 2200 hours

Authors: Lt. Cmdr. Timothy Rouse, Ensign Nikki Barclay & EMH Mark I (played by Alenis Meru)

A nervous wreck, Ensign Nikki Barclay walked into sickbay. She had forgotten to see the doctor about the possibly-contaminated Gramallian sand peas she had at Quark's, and her stomach had been feeling somewhat queasy in the past few days. Which, coincidentally, was just the same amount of time it would take for those Kamazaarite silk spider eggs which were no doubt hiding in those sand peas to start hatching in her stomach.

She looked around sickbay, not seeing anyone on duty. Which wasn't necessarily a bad thing, she was more comfortable around holograms than people anyways. "Computer, activate EMH," she called out, expecting to see a handsome holographic doctor in a Starfleet uniform.

Instead, what appeared in front of her was a Bajoran woman in a red cocktail dress. Nikki thought her face looked familiar, as if she were a character from a holodeck program that she had used before which had somehow gotten its holo-matrix mixed up with the EMH.

Then it hit her. She realized where she had seen that face before. It was in a photo in the boarding package which was provided to her, along with the names and pictures of all the other senior officers of the Portland.

"Captain?" she gasped, slowly backing away from the hologram. This wasn't how she expected to meet her first commanding officer.

"Relax, Ensign," replied the hologram. "I'm not the captain. At least... not anymore."

"I... what do you mean?" stuttered Nikki, confused.

Tim entered sickbay with the intention to turn down the hologram himself. To get this over with. Upon seeing the ensign with the hologram already being active he stopped dead in his tracks. "Ensign?"

"Lieutenant Commander Rouse?" asked Nikki, shocked at seeing another face she recognized appear in sickbay. "You are the real Lieutenant Commander Rouse and not a hologram, right?"

"The one and only," he said with a humorous tone in his voice. "If I may ask? Why did you summon the EMH? It should have been out of commission." He looked around and wondered where the medical staff was.

"I... needed to see a doctor. I think I might have ate some contaminated food," replied Nikki, not wanting to tell her senior officer the whole story about the Gramallian sand peas and embarrass herself in front of him on her first day. "But when I activated him, I found... well... her," she added, before offering Tim a nervous smile -- matching the nervous smile of the hologram.

"I see," Tim said. "Is it very serious?" He asked? "Because then you need to call someone to help you. Or come back later." He was hoping she would leave. He didn't want to explain to her what was going on, and that he was about to end the program for good.

"I suppose I can wait," replied Nikki. The Kamazaarite silk spiders that were no doubt wreaking havoc on her stomach could wait a few minutes; they'd probably only just started hatching. "If you're coming down here to do something with the hologram, maybe I can help," offered Nikki. "I am a systems engineer, and holographic matrices are a specialty of mine," she added, beaming with pride. This sort of chance to impress the executive officer doesn't happen very often, and she was going to take it.

"Let the girl stay," interjected Alenis. "Face it, Tim, we're both ex-tactical. What do we know about holograms?" she joked.

"Oh shut up!" he said to the hologram. He was getting annoyed that things weren't going the way he wanted them to go. He just wanted to press the off switch and get back. He thought about the ensigns' offer. And Holo-Meru did have a point. He didn't even know where the off switch was. He took her up on her offer, if holograms really were her specialty then she probably would find out the whole story to this nightmare anyway. "Good, you can help me." Tim said. "Where is the off switch to this thing?" He asked.

"The off switch?" asked Nikki. "The EMH console should be around here some-- ah, there it is!" she exclaimed as she spotted a control panel on the wall. "The EMH should respond to verbal commands for a temporary de-activation." Nikki looked at the hologram. "Computer, deactivate EMH."

"Wait--" protested the hologram before disappearing into thin air.

"Great," Tim said. "Now what do we need to do to make sure that can never be activated ever again?"

"You could decompile her program and delete all of her memory files," explained Nikki as she browsed through the EMH program. It was an impressive program. The personality matrix was more complex than anything she had ever seen. "Hmmm, she's based on the EMH Mark I?" asked Nikki, frowning her brow.

Tim tried to remember how the EMH looked like before Hudson and Silverton started changing it, but he didn't remember ever using the EMH. Or ever going to sickbay, at least before he knew Ellen was there. "If you say so.."

Nikki was growing ever more nervous as she flipped through the EMH program. Her plan of impressing the Executive Officer on her first day was about to go out the window. A bead of sweat formed on her brow. "I'm... I'm afraid I can't let you delete her. Sir." Nikki wondered for a split second who said those words before she realized that they came out of her mouth.

"And why is that, Ensign." he said, emphasizing her lower rank.

"Because... because... because..." Nikki was breaking out into a cold sweat and stammering profusely. "I... think she may be a sentient being, sir."

He looked at her mere seconds, using his height to make clear he was not in the mood to have this discussion at this moment, with an ensign. "That," she pointed in the direction where the hologram stood earlier. "is a computer program created to look like the Captain. Not a sentient being."

"Look at her program!" exclaimed Nikki, practically begging. "Talk to her!" She took a step to the side, positioning herself between Tim and the EMH console just in case. "We know that sentient artificial lifeforms are possible, like my uncle's friend Data. Or the Doctor from Voyager -- who is

based on the same EMH Mark I holomatrix as the captain!" She took a deep breath. "Please sir, we can't risk killing a sentient being!"

"That is not the Captain!" Tim said, louder this time.

"Maybe not, but she may be a sentient being!"

Tim moved his hand through his hair. He really wasn't in the mood for that. He looked around the room. There was still no one around. "Then we'll do this the old fashion way." he said and walked to the Chief's office to get a phaser.

"What are you doing, sir?" asked Nikki as she saw the executive officer open a small locker containing a couple hand phasers. "No!" she screamed, tapping a few buttons on the console as Tim reached for a phaser. "I can't let you do this, sir! Please, no!"

When he found what he was looking for he walked back to the ensign and pushed her away from the console. Nikki tried to resist, but the former tactical officer was just too strong and powerful for her, and it only took him a few seconds to push her aside and get a shot off with his phaser. After the sparks were gone there was a gaping hole in the console, where once was the brain of the EMH. He turned around and headed for the door. "Please, clear the remains of that console away Ensign," he said in a voice that didn't tolerate any objection.

"Yes, sir," replied a crestfallen Ensign Barclay as she stared at a melted computer core which once contained the EMH.

Decoding the Mystery...

Sickbay, USS Portland.

MD6, 0030 hours

It was late at night, and Alenis had a lot of questions on her mind. Why were the Cardassians here? What was the Kai hiding? Who are the reptilian and his buddy who were after her diplomatic officer? And what happened to the EMH console?

But featuring most prominently on her mind at this moment was her little encounter in the hookah bar on Gamia III earlier. Who was that Cardassian woman claiming to be her sister? Some deranged fugitive? Perhaps a Cardassian officer who snapped?

But if she was just some crazy person, why, of all the people in that bar, did she run up to her? Could she really be her sister? Alenis immediately perished the thought. She was an only child, and even if she did have a sister, she would be Bajoran – or at least half-Bajoran.

But, she had to know for sure. Which is why she found herself in sickbay in the middle of the night, playing around with a hypospray while Arvel slept on the biobed in the next room. After a few clumsy attempts at operating a hypospray, she managed to take a small sample of her own blood. As she held the sample up to the light, she was interrupted the whooshing of the door.

"Hello, can I help--" Returning from a quick meal break on her night shift watch, Maria Hill was surprised to see Alenis in sickbay. She was especially surprised to see her holding a blood sample. "Captain?"

"Oh, hello, Ms..." Alenis struggled to match the face to a name.

"Hill. Maria Hill," replied the nurse. "Is there something I can help you with?"

Alenis' eyes darted across the room. This was something that she didn't want anyone to know about. At least, not until she had something conclusive. But she couldn't very well bumble around with the medical equipment while the nurse was here. "Yes, actually," she replied. "I have this blood sample here. I'd like to test to see if there is any familial connection to this stain here, she said, picking up her coat by the sleeve and pointing to a stain where a cut on the Cardassian woman's hand left a small amount of blood behind.

"I see," replied Maria, taking the coat in her hands. "I think I can get a sample from this, but why do you need to determine familial relationships between a vial of blood and a splotch on your coat?"

"I'd... rather not say," was Alenis' response. "How soon can you do it?"

"It shouldn't take long," explained Maria as she pulled a swab out of a medkit and started swabbing at the stain. "So, how did you get blood on your jacket anyways?"

"Again, I'd rather not say," replied Alenis, quickly growing tired of dealing with a chatterbox nurse at midnight. "Can you just do the test?" she asked anxiously.

"Very well, captain, I see you're not that talkative tonight." Seeing that the captain wasn't interested in small talk, Maria figured it best to continue the test in silence. For her, it was a simple matter of taking the samples and using a DNA scanner to decode them. Of course, the aging computer system in the Portland's sickbay took a few minutes to spit out some results, which Alenis spent alternating between staring at the nurse and looking at Arvel.

"It's ready!" called out Maria, pointing Alenis towards a vertically bisected screen, showing a representation of the DNA of the two individuals who these samples belonged to. Pressing a few buttons, she was able to do a quick scan of the results. "HMMMMM, one of these two samples comes from a hybrid, someone half Bajoran and half Cardassian. Seems like a strange combination," she mused aloud.

"It's more common than you'd think," explained Alenis. "During the occupation, Cardassian soldiers used Bajorans to take care of their needs and desired." She shuddered just thinking about it; it was one of the many scars of the occupation that her people had yet to heal. "Wait, you said half-Cardassian? Not full-blooded?"

"Yes, this sample is clearly Bajoran, but the other sample also contains Cardassian genetic sequences in roughly equal proportion." Maria's little explanation was interrupted by a chirp coming from the computer. "Ah. Well, there's your answer," she replied, swinging the monitor towards Alenis. In bright flashing text, her answer lie in front of her: "Familial match: Siblings. 99.999% certainty"

Alenis stared at the screen, dumbfounded by the results. It made no sense, and yet here it was, in black and yellow, staring her in the face. Her mouth opened slightly but closed again as she pondered the situation, totally speechless.

"So... what does this mean?" asked Maria in an effort to break the awkward silence.

"It means I have to talk to my mother." With that, Alenis turned and rushed out the door, towards her quarters and a terminal where she could access a subspace transceiver. In private.

Just another day in the office...

Sickbay

MD6, 0650 hours

Authors: Lt. Brad Silverton

Brad walked into Sickbay to start his shift. He had a light day ahead of him with only three scheduled exams. That suited him just fine as he had his hands full with the Minister still unconscious and in critical condition. Arvel just woke up last night and should be ok to leave today assuming Darze was up to it.

"Computer. Coffee. Sumatran late harvest dark roast." With any luck Brad would be able to get caught up on the latest research out of Starfleet Medical. If it wasn't pirates causing problems it was long lost Bajoran tribes firing on their kin keeping him from his updates. He took the cup of hot coffee and drank deeply. "Alright there we go. Now we can start. Maria? Lets get your end of shift report done and have you on your way from your long night."

Maria had finished her report and gave him a verbal run down of the important things. "Only three events of note last night sir. Ensign Nikki Barclay came in at 2200 with a possible case of food poisoning."

"Food poisoning? Are the replicators malfunctioning that shouldn't be possible."

"It was from when the Portland was on DS9. She had an order of Gramallian sand peas that was tainted with Kamazaarite silk spider eggs. They had gestated over the course of several days."

"You're kidding? Ug why the Federation doesn't shut down that rat infested hole I'll never know... well spider infested at any rate. I presume you took care of it with a sterilization scanner?"

"Yes sir. A strong enough setting for the spider larva but not the Ensign. That occurred at 2230 when I arrived back to sickbay. I was doing nightly inventory in medical storage..."

"No problem so the Ensign didn't have to wait long for you?"

"Um well no. She activated the EMH for assistance." Maria winced as she said that. Knew what a sore spot the EMH had become with Brad.

"Of course he was activated. Why wouldn't he be. The crew seems insistent on getting immediate attention for things that cannot possibly wait for say... one of the full medical staff members they need to be rushing to the EMH for everything. So he couldn't handle a simple parasitic infection and had to wait for you to come and do it? Oh that's good I can't wait to see his face." A smile had grown on Brad's face and he was going to enjoy sticking it to that smug know-it-all. "Computer activate the EMH." Nothing happened. Brad repeated his request, "Computer. activate the EMH." This time the computer responded.

"Unable to comply. The EMH has been taken offline."

"By whose authority?"

"Lt Commander Timothy Rouse."

Brad pondered on why the XO would have thought it necessary to disable the EMH. "No doubt

having to do with the aftermath of the holodeck tampering we did and needing to put everything back in place. Hopefully the Captain had a chance to talk to the EMH and settle everything." Brad has spoken out loud to himself.

Maria knew she had better say something before Brad had gotten the wrong idea. "Well sir that brings me to my next part of my report. The EMH is sort of missing." She point back past and behind Brad who turned his head slowly around while keeping the rest of his body facing Maria. There he saw a hole in the wall where the EMH computer housing the software was stored. It looked as though someone had removed the computer who wasn't familiar with it. As Brad had to adjust and reinstall it himself during his time fixing up sickbay as the Portland launched he was quite familiar with it. Upon closer inspection it looked like there were phaser burns on the wall.

Maria was quick to add in, "It was missing when I got back from inventory. Ensign Barclay seemed jumpy as if something was on her mind as I was curing the silk spider larva from her stomach. She told me the EMH had tried assisting her before I got there but didn't say much else. I didn't think to check the EMH status until after she had left."

Brad was still looking at and inspecting the housing of the EMH computer. "No that's quite already Maria that's not exactly something I would think to check right away either."

"Computer what the hell happened here last night with the EMH?"

"The EMH was activated by Ensign Nikki Barclay. During medical examination Lt Commander Timothy Rouse deactivated the EMH emitter with a standard Federation issue hand phaser. Commander Rouse ordered Ensign Barclay to clean up the mess. Ensign Barclay then removed the EMH emitter from sickbay."

Brad seemed slightly nonchalant about the whole thing. "Firing a phaser is kind of a loose interpretation of the term disabled by the commander's authority don't you think?"

"I do not understand the request"

"Of course you wouldn't. Never mind that. Computer where is Ensign Barclay?"

"Ensign Barclay is on Holodeck 1"

"Maria I am afraid I need you to cover for a little bit longer. I'll be down in the holodeck getting to the bottom of this." With that Brad exited sickbay, forgetting Maria had something else to report.

Calling mom...

MD6, 0100 hours (USS Portland ship time)

Minneapolis, Earth

Alenis Kendra was making tea and just settling in for the evening when she was interrupted by a chime. "In a minute," she grumbled as she poured the boiling water into a large mug. "Always when I'm making tea." With her mug in hand, she walked over to the computer terminal which was interrupting her nice peaceful evening with its racket. The words on the screen said she had an incoming subspace transmission, but she wasn't expecting any calls. The only person she knew who might call her long distance was no doubt busy flying starships around some distant star system – and her calls home tended to be scheduled in advance, as much as she could schedule them around the responsibilities of being a big-shot Starfleet officer.

Answering the call, she was surprised to see her daughter on the other end. “Meru?” she asked, squinting at the image on the screen. “What a pleasant surprise; you should call more often!”

“Yes, I will” replied Meru. She had a distressed look on her face, and had recited what she was going to say. But seeing her mother’s face on the screen and knowing how difficult a subject it would be threw her off her plan. “Are you taking your Retinax?” she asked, picking up on her mother’s squinting.

“Retinax!?” exclaimed the elder Alenis. “Those doctors are quacks! For sixty-seven years I haven’t needed any fancy eye pills, and I’m not going to start taking them now! Besides, look what Gary got me,” she said, reaching for a pair of vintage eyeglasses and holding them in front of the screen for her daughter’s benefit.

“You should really take your pills,” replied Meru. She must have had this argument a hundred times with her mother. It was why she didn’t call that much anymore.

“Pills, schmills. My great grandmother didn’t take no pills, and she lived to be a hundred and nineteen! You know what her secret was?”

“Katterpods, I know,” interrupted Meru before her mother could get into one of her long-winded stories. “She ate katterpods three meals a day, and would run a mile before breakfast.”

“I see you’ve been listening.” Kendra took a sip of her tea. “Now, speaking of grandparents, when are you going to make me some grandchildren? Are you even seeing anyone?”

“Yes, mother, you remember Arvel?”

“Oh, I liked him!” exclaimed Kendra. “He was some kind of doctor, and he was cute too. He was quite the catch; whatever happened between you--” Kendra gasped in surprise, realizing what Alenis meant. “You two are back together! Oh, this is wonderful news, just wonderful! I always knew he would make an excellent father for my grandchildren!”

“Yes, he is a wonderful and caring man,” replied Meru. Having had enough small talk, she decided it was time to get on with the reason why she called. “Mom, I have a question for you. It’s... kind of difficult.”

“A question? You know you can ask me anything?” Kendra took a sip of her tea.

Alenis looked into her mother’s eyes. She had the same dark, intense eyes as she did, and apart from the grey in her hair and some lines and wrinkles, looked strikingly similar to her daughter. The younger Alenis didn’t want to hurt her own mother, but she just had to know. “Mom, do I have a half-Cardassian half-sister?” she blurted out.

The tea mug dropped to the floor and shattered. “Meru, I...” stammered Kendra. “Why are you asking me this?”

“I ran into someone earlier tonight claiming to be my sister,” replied Meru. Though her mother’s words didn’t confirm anything, her eyes told the whole story. “I compared her DNA to mine. Half Cardassian, and, according to the computer, my half-sister, with 99.999% certainty.”

Kendra took a deep breath. “I suppose there are secrets I can’t hide from you forever,” she sighed. “It was a couple years before you were born. Her father was an officer during the occupation. Narale.

Vicious, sadistic man. Like a typical Cardassian, he thought himself entitled to everything on Bajor. Including--"

Hearing her mother's voice crack, Meru held her hand up. "I know, mom." This story was one which had been told countless times by countless Bajoran women; it was one of the deepest scars remaining from the occupation. The least that Meru could do was save her mother from having to retell it here and now. "But what happened to her?"

"He took her," replied Kendra. "He took care of me while I was carrying his child. But as soon as she was born, he took her right out of my arms and sent me straight to the camps, where I met your father." She wiped away a tear. "I never saw him again. And I never wanted to. But I always wondered what happened to that little girl."

"She's here, on Gamia III." Meru was also tearing up. She wanted to ask why. Why her mother never told her about this. But seeing her cry, she knew that it was a painful subject, one which her mother kept from her to protect her. "Mom, I'm so sorry."

"You don't have anything to be sorry about." Kendra wiped away a couple of tears and put on her strong face – the one of a refugee woman who came to Earth with nothing but the clothes on her back and a hungry child, and whose very existence was an act of defiance. "I should have told you a long time ago, but it was just too painful. I didn't want you to share in that pain."

"I understand."

"I don't know if this is possible," continued Kendra, "but I'd like to meet her. I'm... curious. I'd like to know what happened to her."

"That may be difficult." Meru didn't know how best to break this news to her mother, but felt that there was no beating around the bush. "She's currently being held in a Gamian prison, awaiting extradition to Cardassia for the murder of Gul Narale. And knowing the Cardassian legal system..."

"She'll be lucky to get a death sentence," said Kendra, finishing her daughter's sentence. The Cardassian legal system was infamous for its harsh punishments and the kangaroo court like nature of its proceedings. Those who were sentenced to death were at least spared a (usually not that long) lifetime of hard labour and brutality at the hands of the prison guards and their fellow inmates.

"I'm sorry." Meru shook her head. The brutality of the Cardassians was only matched by their callousness. "I don't know if there's anything which can be done, but... I'll do what I can for her, okay?"

Kendra nodded and reached for the button to end the transmission. She couldn't let Meru see her cry.

The morning after...

MD6, early morning

Authors: Lt. Cmdr. Timothy Rouse and Cmdr. by Alenis Meru

Alenis was tired. Between the revelations of the night before, the stress of these negotiations, and the intense abdominal pain from whatever that growth was, she barely got any sleep at all. She was looking like hell warmed over when she walked into Tim's office, tea mug in hand.

"Good morning," she said, with little enthusiasm as she walked through the door. "I trust yesterday wasn't too eventful of a day on the ship?" she asked, knowing that she was likely to get an earful in response.

"Eventful? Nah, not at all" Tim said sarcastically with an almost evil smile in his face. "Lt Beauvoir is recovering in Sickbay, a new group of officers arrived yesterday" Tim summed up the major things that happened yesterday. "Oh, and the most important thing. I'm having a son!" The last made his sleepy, wicked look change in one of love and proud.

"That's wonderful!" exclaimed Alenis. She had wanted a family herself, but had kept on putting it off. Seeing Tim's excitement made her smile. "I just found out last night that I have a sister."

"A sister? That's great, but how can it be you didn't know of her?" He stood up, grabbed the two empty coffee mugs he already drank this morning and replicated a new one. He couldn't wake up this morning.

"That's the thing..." Alenis took a sip of her tea. "She's older than me, and half-Cardassian. She was taken away from my mother after birth, and she never told me about her for... obvious reasons." She hoped that those details would be enough for Tim to infer what happened so many years ago during the occupation.

Tim raised an eyebrow, wanting to know what she meant exactly but seeing at the look of Meru that she didn't want to explain further he didn't ask. "So, where is she now? Have you met her yet?"

"For only a moment..." Alenis sighed deeply. "She's being held by the Gamians, awaiting extradition to Cardassia for murder."

"What?" He asked in surprise and leaned forward. "Why?"

"That's all I know," explained Alenis, her voice tired. "She has been going by the name of Inaji Narale. The person she is alleged to have killed is a Gul Narale. Perhaps her father, or a sibling?" she speculated.

"So what do you want to do?" He took a sip from his coffee.

"I don't know," said Alenis. "I don't know whether she did it or not, but I know the Cardassian 'justice' system," she said, her voice dripping with sarcasm at the word 'justice'. "A kangaroo court, cruel and unusual punishments... we can't just leave her to that fate. But..." she sighed, "that's all in the hands of the Gamians right now. They're apparently opening diplomatic relations with the Cardassians, and whether they extradite her or not is up to them. Unless..."

"Unless she has a legal counsel?" He asked with a grin.

"That wasn't my original suggestion," replied Alenis. "I was thinking a jailbreak, but if you know someone..."

"I know some guys from the academy" he said, but then realised something. "You do know I studied law as a minor, right."

"Really!" exclaimed Alenis. "You think you can help me with an extradition hearing?"

"Sure, I'm just not licensed, so I can't represent you if needed"

"It's not me that needs the representation, it's her," replied Alenis. "And you're the closest thing I have to a lawyer registered to practice on Gamia III."

"Offcourse I'll help you. But do you think we can get access to her? Without revealing your connection to her." Tim said. "I think it wouldn't be beneficial for the negotiations if we side with her. The Gamians believe she is a criminal, or they wouldn't have arrested her and put her in jail."

"I don't know if they have visiting hours in Gamian jails," replied Alenis. "But I suppose they would have to let her see legal counsel." Alenis tried to remember her history, but the Bajoran legal system of 500 years ago wasn't exactly her specialty.

"Do you have any idea how long we have before they extradite her to the cardassians? Because I need to do research to the Gamian Justice system. Hopefully it will be similar to the Bajoran." In his head Tim was already making a list of what he needed to do. He loved his job, but if he ever got a chance to help someone like this, he was thrilled.

"No idea." Alenis looked down at Tim; he wasn't a full lawyer, but he was close enough. And, after substituting a foreign minister for a 14 year old girl for the negotiations, she found herself open to the idea. "If you can find a way to talk to her and put a case together, that would be just wonderful."

"I'll see what I can come up with." Tim said and took a few notes on a padd. "What are your plans for the rest of the day? I don't need to tell you that its better not to go see your sister herself, I hope. For both your sakes."

"Oh, I've got to go back down to see that insufferable Kai and her ministers. And probably some Cardassians as well. I'm sure they'll keep me busy." She shook her head and let out a deep sigh; even before the Cardassians got involved, the Kai was already getting on her nerves with her deflections and evasiveness. "Anyways," added Alenis, changing the subject, "I heard that the EMH console in sickbay is out of commission. You wouldn't know anything about that, would you?"

He looked up. So, she did hear. For a moment he didn't say anything, waiting for her to continue. "Didn't you ask me to get rid of her?"

"I didn't think you would use a phaser," replied Alenis, in a slightly joshing tone. "Don't worry," she added, "spare consoles are a dime a dozen. Thanks."

The Morning After

MD6, 0830 Hours

Jason and Jena's Quarters

Authors: Capt. Alenis Meru, Lt. Jason Beauvoir

Not looking forward to having to talk to the Kai for the third day in a row, Alenis found herself, travel mug in hand, outside the door of Jena's quarters, here to pick up her ceremonial chief negotiator. She knew that Jason had been discharged from sickbay; she wasn't sure if he would be in his quarters or at his station. If he was here, she for once didn't know what to say to him.

Taking a sip of her tea, she pressed the chime on the door, hoping that Jena would be the one to answer.

Jena answered the door, mug of jasmine tea in her hand. "Morning, Ma'am." She said with a smile.

Alenis breathed a subtle sigh of relief. "Good morning," she replied, returning the salutation and peeking into the quarters to see if Jason was there. "Are you ready for another round of negotiations with the Kai?"

"Yeah, just let me put this mug in the sink and tell Dad where I'm going." Jena replied.

"Oh, your father's home?" asked Alenis, raising an eyebrow. As soon as the words came out of her mouth she bit her lip. She wasn't sure whether it would be a good time to talk to him or not. "Uh... give him my regards, I guess."

"Okay, but are you sure you don't want to talk to him yourself?"

Alenis tilted her head slightly. Perhaps Jena was wise beyond her years; she knew enough to know that a commanding officer couldn't avoid one of her department heads forever. "If he wants to talk..." she started, before trailing off.

Jena popped back inside and moments later Jason appeared at the door. "Bonjour, Me...Ma'am." He said. Although his expression was calm, if one looked closely enough at his eye, they'd see the puzzlement there.

"Jason..." she started. "I mean, Lieutenant Beauvoir. I... guess we have a lot to talk about," she added, her cheeks turning slightly red with embarrassment.

"Indeed, Ma'am. Please come in." Jason said anguish to find out what actually happened.

"All right. Thank you." Alenis stepped into the living room and looked around. There were still a few kernels of popcorn lying around from Judith and Jena's movie nights. But her eyes fell on the young girl who was daughter of the man she needed to talk to. "Jena, why don't you head on up to the ready room," suggested Alenis, pretty sure that the teenage girl didn't need or want to hear about what they had to talk about. "Tell the diplomats that I'll be up there shortly."

"Aye, Ma'am." Jena said grabbing her PADD. "Bye, Dad." Then she was off.

When she was gone, Jason took a deep breath and asked the question that was forefront in his mind. "With all due respect Ma'am, how could you possibly be down on the planet and with me in...the holdeck at the same time?"

"Jason..." Alenis paused for a moment, trying to choose her words carefully. She knew Jason was feeling confused and probably somewhat embarrassed, and the last thing she wanted to do was add to his embarrassment. "That wasn't me in the holodeck. It was a hologram, created by Lieutenants Hudson and Silverton." She paused for a moment to look him in the eye before continuing. "I'm sorry we deceived you. But given your... condition... it was the only way."

Jason was indeed embarrassed and hurt at what had happened. "Besides Hudson and Silverton, who else knows?" He asked fearing that he was the subject of shipwide gossip.

"Only a few; those who really needed to know. Rouse, Darze, perhaps one or two others. Oh, and the guards who were watching you in the brig might be wondering why you were calling my name, but we made it clear to them that gossip wouldn't be tolerated." Alenis took a step in closer and placed a hand on his shoulder. "Jason, I know you're probably feeling embarrassed about this right now, and that Vulcans don't like to talk about this sort of thing. But... I understand. It was biology. There was

nothing you could have done to control it."

Suddenly Alenis remembered one more person who she had talked to about this. "Oh, and your mother. She knows as well."

Jason was not happy that his mother or that his crew mates knew, but that was unimportant, people had been hurt by his actions. "Mes dieux, Lieutenant Darze, is he alright?"

"The doctor says he'll be fine," explained Alenis, trying to reassure Jason as best she could. It was funny, despite the fact that he assaulted her and nearly killed her partner, Alenis still felt for Jason and wanted to help him. No matter what, he was still one of her crew. "He's still under observation in sickbay, and could probably use some rest." Alenis placed a finger on her chin for a moment. "I think it best, if you need to talk to a counselor, that you speak to Dr. Carlisle, his new assistant. For obvious reasons."

Of course, there was more than one 'obvious reason' why it should be Dr. Carlisle and not Dr. Darze, but Alenis let the little matter of her relationship with the counselor remain unspoken.

"I'm glad Dr. Darze is going to be okay and I agree it's best I talk to Dr. Carlisle, but first I'd like to apologise to you for my actions, I put the lives of yourself and this crew in jeopardy. Normally I would've informed the CMO of my approaching Pon farr, but I believed I'd already experienced it last year on Vulcan." Jason didn't like talking about this, but he felt he owed Alenis an explanation.

"Apology accepted," Alenis' eyes darted across the room, no more comfortable than Jason about the topic. She could tell that both parties could use a change of subject. "You know, I have something for you in my office. Before the banquet, I put in the paperwork for a your promotion. Congratulations, Lieutenant."

Jason smiled, "Thank you, again." He said. "For everything you've done for both Jena and myself, ma'am."

"Oh, it's nothing," replied Alenis, blushing slightly. Of course, it was much more than nothing, but the situation she found herself in demanded a certain degree of modesty. "Just taking care of my crew."

"You're too modest, ma'am." Jason said. "From what I've heard, you've gone above and beyond."

"Well, that was as much the EMH as it was me," replied Alenis, deflecting the compliment with a little joke, albeit one which fell flat. Being good at taking compliments was not one of her many qualities. "Now," she added, "I think it for the best that we keep this whole episode out of our official reports, wouldn't you agree?"

"Agreed." Jason replied. Then blushing lightly, he asked. "Just out of curiosity, what are your plans for the EMH?" And hoped that Alenis wouldn't take his query the wrong way.

"Lieutenant Commander Rouse has ensured that the EMH has been permanently deactivated and deleted. Why do you--" Alenis held her hand to her head. "You know what, Lieutenant, I don't want to know."

Authors: Lt. JG Thoval sh'Kor and Ensign James Burton (written by Timothy Rouse)

James entered the room to halt immediately. The room was packed with what looked like the whole tactical department. Apparently he wasn't the only one. He thought for a second if he should report in, as was common after being summoned, but decided there was no use. Everyone was talking to each other. He wouldn't be heard over the noise. And the person having summoned him here, he couldn't even see. With a lot of difficulty he managed to reach on of the sides of the armoury and leaned against a console that he thought was off-line. Unfortunately that wasn't the case. And seconds later a very loud, deafening sound was heard in the whole room, and probably outside of it as well. Everybody reached for his or her ears and James clumsily tried everything he could to turn it. At first he only made it worst by increasing the volume, but with the help of a Petty Officer the sound was turned off. Everyone in the room look angrily at James.

The tension was broken by a loud, booming laugh, the owner of which soon came into view. Tall, muscular, and—most notably—Andorian, she moved through the crowd easily, laughing all the while.

"Not on the ship for an hour and red alert has already been declared?" she chuckled, ushering the Petty Officer and Ensign out of the way to access the console. A few deft motions and the machine was powered down. The Andorian offered James a nod before turning back to the room, smile sluicing away.

James, almost as red as a freshly cooked lobster decided best to say nothing and hope to blend in.

"Who is on duty?" she demanded. It was a moment before a few men and women reluctantly stepped forward, but the Andorian's rank marked her as a lieutenant, junior grade, and someone to be obeyed. She looked at them each in turn before nodding towards the console she now leaned against.

"Under current operational conditions, this machine should be off."

A pause. "Yes, Lieutenant, but—"

"Excuses do not interest me," the Andorian interrupted, eyebrows raising. "Unless you believe the regulation should be changed, in which case I would be pleased to work with you to file the appropriate paperwork."

Another pause, then, "No, Lieutenant."

She smiled, and with the expression, her strict authority seemed to melt away. "Excellent. The less paperwork the better." The lieutenant turned back towards the room and raised her voice, addressing the room at large.

"Tactical, hello. I am Lieutenant Thoval sh'Kor, your new chief." She spread her hands in front of her in a gesture of peace—so opposed to the galaxy's view of Andorians—and offered the room a calm, even look. "Unlike my offer to assist with filing paperwork, I am sincerely pleased to be aboard the USS Portland and to assist in any capacity requested." Thoval clasped her hands loosely in front of her body. "As I understand that the majority of you are human, this offer includes to answering cultural questions—unlike what you may believe, I will not take an ice pick to anyone's head should a sensitive topic be breached."

Her lips curled into a smile. "Who will apprise me of the current situation?"

James started speaking, but instead of saying the lines he had practised in his head all that came out was. "We're in orbit of the Planet Gamia III. So are the Cardassians." he stuttered.

The lieutenant nodded. "Gamia III. Cardassians. Do we know the specs of their vessel?" She glanced at James. "Ensign... Burton, correct?"

"Yes ma'am," he said. He tried very hard to remember the specifications of the other vessel, but more than that it was a big ship he couldn't come up with. Trying not to look an ever bigger ass he said, "You should be able to find them in the computer, ma'am."

Thoval laughed easily before shrugging. "Very good point, ensign. But I want us all aware of the Portland's situation, understood?" She unclasped her hands and pushed off of the console, making her height that much more apparent. Her smile faded. "To that end, I want you—all of you, not just Ensign Burton—to discuss the current tactical situation amongst yourselves and divide into groups based on how you think it should be handled. Each group should prepare a report and have it to me by 0800."

She looked across the room evenly. "To promote interpersonal communication and mindful awareness, I expect a situation report at the end of every shift encompassing every opinion, recommendation, and complaint." The lieutenant assumed military rest; it made the muscles in her chest more obvious. "We all come from different backgrounds, and those differences are invaluable to me when advising the captain. Each and every one of you should be able to give me a full assessment of the Portland's situation when asked."

The Andorian met the eyes of as many of the gathered personnel as she could—this was her department now, her people. "Are there any questions?" she asked.

There were none. Thoval smiled once again, her eyes going back to Ensign Burton before she continued. "For future reference—refer to me as sir or lieutenant. Ma'am no more describes me than *Sha* describes any of you."

She glanced back over the room before nodding. "Dismissed. I imagine Grel will want us out of his Armoury before he returns—I will be in Tactical, awaiting your reports."

James nodded in agreement with the Chief's assignment. It made sense, even though he wasn't sure how he was going to remember all those different details each and every time they encountered a other vessel. He looked around him to see all his colleagues had already formed groups, and as always, he was the only one still standing in the room. Highschool all over again.

Back in the holodeck...

Holodeck 2, USS Portland

MD6, 0710 hours

**Authors: Lt. (J.G.) Brad Silverton, Lt. Parker Hudson, Ensign Sera Williams, Ensign Nikki Barclay
(Played by Alenis Meru)**

Nikki wasn't sure how long she had been in the holodeck.

She had gotten to the holodeck about midnight, she knew that. Even though it was late at night, she rushed there as soon as she could, right after she finished cleaning up the mess that the executive officer had made in sickbay with his phaser. Fortunately, being late at night, she wasn't interrupted

by anyone coming in for their favourite exercise program or to live out their little fantasies.

But as she worked through the night, she had completely lost track of time. She was working so frantically on her little project that she had become oblivious to the passage of time, and unknowingly found herself still in the holodeck ten minutes after her shift was supposed to start, when she was interrupted by the whooshing of the holodeck door opening.

Brad Silverton was standing in the holodeck doors clearly not in the best of moods. "Hello Ensign. I came into Sickbay this morning and had the funniest of ways to start my day. I find a rather odd incident had occurred to my medical equipment and personnel and I'm told you might know what happened. Would you be able to shed some light on the subject?" No, Brad was not amused one bit.

"Lieutenant, I..." stuttered Nikki, not exactly sure who this blue-shirted man was. All she knew was that he outranked her and he wasn't happy. "Wait, this morning!?" she exclaimed, a look of dread appearing on her face. "It's morning already? Oh god, what time is it?!" Frantically, she looked for a chronometer. "Oh no, I'm late for my shift!"

"Oh don't worry I'll take care of that." Brad tapped his chest comm. "Lieutenant Silverton to Lieutenant Hudson. Ensign Barclay is with me discussing an important matter and unfortunately we've forgotten the time. Would it be ok to keep her a little longer?"

In the middle of delegating orders to the Engineering staff Parker was about to head planetary side on the shuttle to Gamia III. He was in need for the particular technology that the breakaway sect of Barjorans were using within the caves offering any assistance he could.

Parker was finished as he packed his back pack in his office when Dr. Silverton had contacted him regarding Ensign Nikki Barclay on the Holodeck. He had no idea what the Doctor was talking about.

"Doctor hold on, I will be there in one moment thank you." He was interested none the less.

Within a few minutes Parker with gear and backpack ready for planetary side, he walked in to see the two Officers near a holodeck command console. Parker rubbed at his forehead seeing the Doctor not impressed and then Nikki with a look of dread on her face.

"Ok... Whoah.. Whoah, what is happening here?" He held up his hand.

Brad turned and answered snarkily to Parker, "That's an excellent question that I'd love to know the answer to myself Lieutenant. I seem to be missing the EMH computer. The one with the "MODIFIED" EMH program stored in it." Brad strongly stressed his sentence to update Parker without letting on to Nikki. He then turned back to Nikki. "I'm told that the Ensign here has knowledge of what happened."

"Okay!" shouted Nikki, clutching her head. "I went to sickbay, and tried to activate the EMH. But instead, some woman appeared. She looked like the captain, but was wearing a red cocktail dress." Overcome by anxiety at being confronted by two senior officers, Nikki's words kept coming out faster and faster. "That's when Lieutenant Commander Rouse came in. He was going to delete her but I pleaded with him not to. I thought the hologram might be an artificial sentient being, like my uncle's friend Data. But he was insistent. When I saw him going to get a phaser, I tried to transfer the hologram to the holodeck to save her." Running out of air, Nikki took a deep breath. "He shot her. Before the transfer was completed, he shot her console." She looked down at her feet and continued in a dejected tone. "I managed to save 99.2% of her program, but she's not booting up."

"Why the hell was the Commander in such a hurry? We had it under control and it wasn't in use

anymore. Ensign... you did good in trying to save the program. You were correct that there is strong indication to believe it could be sentient. If nothing else we need more time to determine that and you gave us that. Thank you." Brad's tone and scowl had shifted softer and was replaced with a reassuring smile. "As for it having the captain's appearance... It has been modified for a special purpose and we are needing to get it back to normal now that its purpose has been full filled. Now as to you being late to shift..." Brad turned to Parker, "I think this is a pretty good reason and that nothing bad will come of it when you report to duty and that they probably need you to start...right sir?"

Parker just stood there watching the interesting scene play out before him. There was no need to interject as Brad had explained quite well his own thoughts on the matter. Parker's eyes let that show as he let them gaze from deconstructing Brad to Nikki.

"One thing before I go," said Nikki as she scrambled to pick up her PADDs. "If she is a sentient being, then we should be consulting her before we make any changes to her program -- appearance or otherwise." She stepped towards the door. "If we can get her program to activate, that is."

Sitting at the side of the command console and looking at the data structures that were changed to 'his program' Parker was very protective. The coding, the computer, the linguistic matrices had been endangered. Nikki only had intended to make a mad dash to save the Captain or at least the 'program turn sentient being' which was now becoming the grappling question.

"The Federation Special Envoy on Inter-Species Rights and the Council of the UFP Treatises on the Rights Conditions of Treaty Worlds its culture and its technological progress will be the wild card in determining..." He tapped at the metal carbide structure of the console to make his point "whether the next set of rights become installed... hopefully." He nodded to them both.

"It's a tricky issue," replied Nikki. Of course, she had strong opinions on the subject, but didn't want to voice them on her first day. She had written papers at the academy on this issue, and gotten into numerous arguments with her less enlightened fellow students. Her uncle was close friends with two of the first artificial lifeforms to be considered people under the law -- Data and Voyager's EMH -- so she had a personal stake in the question as well. "But from what I've seen of her programming, I think we've got a sentient being here."

She looked towards Parker. "Lieutenant Hudson, I know you probably need me in engineering, but if you can just give me some more time and maybe a little help, I know I can save her."

Brad checked the time and knew they were running out of it. He sighed in defeat...

"Parker... if this was a living patient I'd be able to help but she isn't and there isn't much I can do, at least not until she is working and able to take form. What I do know is that when a living being's cerebral cortex starts to fail then memory, consciousness, attention, and thought starts to degrade.. permanently. If the same thing happens to an A.I.'s data file integrity... we may be running out of time here." Brad nodded over to Nikki, "The ensign already knows about the EMH so the cat's out of the bag I don't see the harm in her staying to help at this point."

"Agreed." Parker looked at the frozen still of the Alenis matrix in front of the console in the holodeck. It was an eerie sight. "If we have created something with our hands then we must take responsibility and fix that sentience with our hands." Parker turned from Dr. Silverton to Nikki. "I have to be on the surface for an away mission soon. You have full access to Engineering resources to recover the Alenis EMH assuming your Chief of Science approves. I'd say try and find a way to fix patches for a future safeguard in her matrix for future degradation like this, a fail safe point." Parker was thinking as he

raised his eyebrow and rubbed at the back of his neck in Engineering think. "Sera Williams my Chief Assistant from Engineering, she will be joining you."

Looking at his silver watch for the time Parker then motioned to the doorway his departure. "Good luck!"

Walking down the corridor outside of Corridor I Parker tapped at his communications badge "Parker to Ensign Williams. I would like you to report to Holodeck I and begin to work with Ensign Barclay regarding an EMH."

Sera would have loved to have had a better excuse than getting lost aboard the ship, however... that is exactly what happened. She tapped her Communicator and said. "Williams to Lt Hudson, understood, Sir. I am en route. I will be in Holodeck 1 shortly.

With Parker gone, Nikki turned to Brad. There was still one question she wanted answers for in all of this. "So... Doctor... why was the EMH reprogrammed with the image and personality of the captain? And why the cocktail dress?"

"The short of it Ensign is that we had a Vulcan crewmember experiencing Pon Farr. A very private and very personal medical condition requiring copulation with a trusted associate. The Captain is fully aware of what is going on and is involved with the creation of a holodeck version of herself. Nobody was to know about this." Brad paused to think for a moment and then continued.

"We used the EMH as a base template for the AI and added in some special scans of the Captain's personality. We didn't think there would be an actual sentient entity created and were just going to delete it afterwards. But..." Brad sighed and then continued, "IT became a SHE. She is now a sentient being with rights. Don't worry. I have no intention of just deleting her. My oaths as a doctor to protect life cover all versions of it."

"Oh." Shocked by the situation, that was all Nikki could say.

"And that is where I need engineering's help. I can't cure data file integrity issues or recompile files."

"I can try," replied Nikki in a nervous voice, suddenly realizing the enormous responsibility that is having the fate of a sentient being in her hands. "Her program was damaged... it's not compiling, I don't know if I can fix it."

As she stepped off the turbolift, Sera hurried towards the holodeck. Just before she stepped in, Sera did what she could to remove the embarrassment off her face at her debacle. With a heavy sigh, she walked through the door in time to hear Nikki explain the situation to Brad.

Sera recognized Nikki from the time they had spent together at Deep Space 9, but had yet to get to know Brad in any real capacity.

"I have some experience with Holograms. I can begin verifying the integrity and then running some checks on the programming matrices."

Sera pulled out a few of her tools and set out to the room's Holographic core and removed the plating, exposing the circuitry that comprised her new workzone. Before she got started, Williams looked toward Nikki, "Nikki, if this is truly a sentient being, I would like some help before I start brain surgery. I don't want to destroy this being's spark of life... if it has any."

"All right," replied Nikki. "I'll do what I can."

Preparing for Round III...

Armoury, USS Portland

MD6, 0840 hours

Authors: Capt. Alenis Meru, Major Judith Rouse (played by Timothy Rouse), Coln Jena (played by Jason Beauvoir)

Whether it was the Cardassians, the Kai, or the unsettling feeling coming from the growth, Alenis had a bad feeling about her return to the planet. She didn't get to where she was in her career by being unprepared, so after talking to Jason, she found herself making a pit stop at the ship's armoury. As a former tactical officer, she felt it was a prudent move, even though she hadn't actually handled a phaser herself since New Algiers and the destruction of the Gol.

But when she arrived, the first thing she noticed was that she wasn't the only one there. "Judith!" she called out to the woman in front of the opened weapons locker. Clearly the resident Marine felt the same way.

"Captain!" she said in surprise. "What are you doing here?" She nodded to a standard issue phaser lying with the gear she had already assembled for their trip she said. "I already prepared a weapon for you. I was going to bring it to you as soon as I'm ready myself." She quickly looked around the room in the hope of finding a time display somewhere. "Am I late for the meeting?" She knew she tended to lose time when she was in the armoury. She always learned herself to keep her complete focus with what she was doing. Only that occasionally led to her losing track of time.

"Relax, Major, I just stopped by to pick up a phaser." Seeing that Judith had everything under control, she sat herself on a desk. "I'm sure you've heard about Tim and the phaser incident in sickbay by now. Not that I'm not grateful that he got rid of that... thing, but I'm a little worried. He's usually the level-headed one. Is he feeling all right?"

Judith thought about what to answer. She was worried about her brother, but knew him well enough to know that it was best to let him be for a while. Especially after their earlier clash. "To be honest, I don't know. He's had a lot to deal with lately. I think it just gotten a bit too much."

"Yeah," replied Alenis. "Between all that's gone on on board the ship plus finding out that he's going to become a father..." she trailed off. "I promise we're going to get some nice shore leave in after this mission. And if he needs to talk to someone, I'm here, and so are Arvel and Dr. Carlisle."

Judith chuckled at that. "I don't think Tim is going to see a counselor, unless you order him to." she said. They both weren't a fan of getting their head shrunk. But Tim was way worse then she was. She had made it a sport to annoy a counselor for so long that they eventually gave up. Tim was different, he just avoided them completely, making sure he never needed one, and if he did, he would other way not having to go to one.

"I'll keep that in mind," replied Alenis, offering Judith a hint of a smile. "I have the power to do that you know,"

Judith wasn't sure if that would be a good thing or not. She did know that Tim wouldn't be happy, if the Captain decided on that action...

--A few minutes later--

Strolling into her ready room with Judith at her side, Alenis quickly took in the looks on the faces of the assembled diplomats. Fero, Rass and lyso all looked exasperated; between the Kai's intransigence and the presence of the Cardassians, she didn't blame them. She was getting tired of the Kai herself, and found herself wondering if it was all just some bizarre game they were playing. Jena, on the other hand, looked nervous. And one could hardly blame her either; a 14 year old being suddenly thrust into delicate diplomatic affairs. Not to mention the issues with her dad, and the private conversation between him and Alenis only a few minutes ago.

"So, how are we all feeling?" asked Alenis to the assembled delegation.

"Ma'am, I'm not sure about anyone else, but I don't mind saying that I'm rather uneasy about things." Jena replied.

"I'd be lying if I didn't say I was nervous too," replied Alenis. "There's something going on here and I'm not sure what it is. Major, with the Cardassians around, security is going to be very important."

"I already arranged standby team to be ready if needed," Judith said as she was thinking whether it was best to give Jena a phaser so she could protect herself if needed. But decided the dangers of the surrounding weren't high enough, compared to the dangers of giving a teenager a phaser with no experience in weapons, as she assumed she didn't have. She would stay close to the girl herself.

"Excellent," replied Alenis. "I'll make sure that they keep a transporter lock on us at all times. I've got a bad feeling about this."

"Captain, if I may," interrupted lyso. "Carrying a weapon on a diplomatic mission could be interpreted as an aggressive act. I have to object; this could negatively impact the negotiations." Fero and Rass nodded in approval.

"Your objection is duly noted, Mr. lyso," replied Alenis. "But given the presence of the Cardassians, I have to take precautions to keep my crew and this delegation safe. Of course, we will be discrete, and will be carrying Type I phasers only. Now," she added, looking over the room, "We have a lot of notes to review before we head down. I suggest we--"

Alenis was interrupted by the chime of a comm badge. "Captain, we have an incoming transmission for you." It was R'vahis, but there was a hint of confusion in his voice. It's coming from a jail on the surface of Gamia III."

"I'll take it in my office," said Alenis as she stood up from the table. It could only be one person -- her sister, the one who had kept her up all night wondering about her. Alenis needed to know more.

"The rest of you, I'm sure you've got plenty of prep work to do."

Dealing with Your Actions

Executive Officer's Office, USS Portland

MD6, Early hours of the Morning

Authors: Lt. Cmdr. Timothy Rouse, Lt.(JR) Amata Zan, Maj. Judith Rouse (Played by Timothy Rouse)

"Are you nuts?" Judith shouted at her brother who was staring out the window. "You can't just shoot a console into oblivion."

He pulled up his shoulders. "It seemed the best solution to eliminate that sextoy." He didn't understand what all the fuss was about. First Ellen and now his sister. Who was next? Everyone agreed that they couldn't keep the new version of the EMH, but now he did something about it everyone was mad at him, or so it seemed.

"It's not like you to just grab a phaser and shoot at a machine." she said. She didn't have time to deal with this, knowing Grel would probably make a fuss about it. Just to remember her that it was her brother this time that caused a problem.

"Not like me?" he turned around and looked at her. "For weeks I've been the only sane person on this damn ship," Tim yelled at his sister. "I'm fixing everyone's problems and when I fix the largest problem you all come yelling at me because you don't like the way I handled it. Well, too bad." and he smashed his hand on the bulkhead next to him.

"Tim, what is going on with you?" Judith said on a softer tone. She'd seen Tim lose his temper before, but only when they were still children. He'd never lost his temper with work. For as far as she knew that is. "Come on, talk to me!"

"Nothing is going on. What is it with you woman always thinking something is wrong." he yelled, unintentionally revealing part of the discussion he had with Ellen earlier. He kept staring at his sister, anger in his eyes. At the sound of the doorbell he didn't look up, but yelled "What?"

Amata opened the door and entered the Executive Officer's office without any further invitation, stopping in front of the entrance, presenting himself with nearly ideal military professionalism, back straight and hands clasped behind him, his expression revealed that he had heard the yelling. The Bajoran scanned the two people in the room occupying the room before nodding before both of them, seeming to take special notice of the Commander's body language. With a nod to each, he made his introduction, "Lieutenant Commander Rouse and Marine Captain Rouse, I'm Lieutenant Amata, Assistant Chief Security Officer." His hip was noticeably lacking the expected phaser.

Focusing his attention solely on the red trimmed Rouse, Amata got directly to the matter of things, "Sir, I'm here to discuss the incident that occurred in Sickbay at roughly 2200 Hours." His tone, while polite, left no room to believe that this was a request.

Tim broke contact with his sister and looked at the person just having entered his office. "And what incident would that be?" Tim asked sarcastic.

"Oh, don't act stupid." Judith on a louder tone then second before. "Oh, to hell with it." turning towards the assistant chief. "I've had it. Maybe you can get some sense to him." Judith stormed to the door.

Tim, even angrier by his sister's unprofessional show, took a deep breath and pointed to his desk. "Shall we take a seat?"

After watching the female sibling leave, Amata hesitated as he looked towards the desk and chairs, was well aware he had a more effective presence while standing. Unfortunately, the riled up human's position still demanded that proper respect and courtesy be shown, "My thanks, sir." One could almost believe he hadn't just witnessed the younger Rouse storm passed him.

Walking over to the desk and taking his place in the guest seat, the Lieutenant never took his eyes off of the Rouse, his eyes continuing to take in every detail the man offered him; he made effort to be

subtle, "I trust you understand the weight of the situation we have on our hands, Commander, and delicate nature your position on the ship creates."

"You mean the fact that I am your superior officer?" Tim asked well aware that was what the security officer meant.

"Yes, because you are this vessel's Executive Officer. Any other member of the crew would be in the brig right now had they done what you did," Amata kept his voice flat, "Grel wanted to come up here with a Security team, and he wouldn't have been wrong to do so."

"We don't put crewmembers in the brig for obeying orders, Lieutenant." Tim said. Why was Meru the only one that did support him? "As for Grel, I think he has other problems to handle. Let him do his own job properly first, before he tells me how to do mine."

"Huh, really?" laughed Amata without any sign of amusement, "I'd like to hear your orders, sir. To the word please, no paraphrasing." He shifted in his seat, "Since I'll be the one telling my direct SO to do his job properly."

Tim stood up and stared out the window for a moment before turning back towards Amata. "The captain told me to get rid of the EMH. If you check your security logs, Lieutenant, you will see that the EMH program was accessed and altered within the past 72 hours." Turning back towards Amata, he stood next to his chair, striking a physically intimidating pose as he leaned on his desk. The domineering disciplinarian wasn't really him, but despite his friendship with and respect for Alenis, but all the antics going on around him over the past few weeks were beginning to seriously grate on him and it was starting to show. Another shore leave was in order, or perhaps even better, a mandatory boot camp for some of the curious characters around him.

"Now, before you inquire any further," continued Tim, "the alterations to the EMH were approved by the Captain and were of a very personal and delicate nature. Details of those modifications have been kept off report and on a strict need to know basis, and quite frankly, you don't need to know and neither does Grel." Removing his hands from his desk, he stood up to his full 1.9 metre height and continued looking down at the Lieutenant. "I was instructed by the captain to ensure that the program was deleted, and given the nature of this program, the most thorough and discreet way to do that was by physically destroying the console on which it was stored. So, you and Grel have a choice, Lieutenant. You can throw me in the brig and then explain to the captain -- who is very busy and knowing how she feels about Cardassians, not in the best of moods -- why you removed her executive officer from command in the middle of an important mission, or you can follow orders and refrain from sticking your nose where it doesn't belong. But before you make your decision, consider that I had already spoken to the captain about this and that she concurs with and is grateful for my actions."

"So, any questions, Lieutenant?" he asked, emphasizing the security officer's lower rank. He hated having to pull rank like this and his hands were trembling slightly. His leadership style was more collaborative, but given the nature of the hologram, he didn't have much of a choice but to cut off any curiosity at the pass if he was to avoid besmirching Alenis' honour.

Amata took a moment to just stare at the standing commander; a brief flash of novelty in his eyes as he looked up at the tall human, it had been a long time since someone had tried to physically intimidate him with their size. However, any feelings of amusement quickly vanished as he looked down at Rouse's shaking hands, "As I said, Lt. Grel wished to come up her with a team to arrest you, until we were sure you were not a danger to those aboard, which is part of his job. I convinced him that the same could be determined by me talking to you."

Pushing his chair back, the Lieutenant then back stepped beside it so he could politely push it back to the executive officer's desk, "If you take a moment to remove yourself from your own agitation and privilege, you'll be able to see how other members of the crew might not consider opening a weapons locker and firing a phaser in the middle of sickbay to be subtle." While it was possible that standing as Rouse had would only give the other male an excuse to escalate, Amata truly only knew one thing about the man and he had to consider his own well-being, "Or safe."

Amata then quickly shifted gears before any response could be given, asking the question that Rouse had only rhetorically invited him to ask, "How was Ensign Barclay involved?"

Tim blinked with his eyes to the sudden change of subject. "Barclay?" It took him mere seconds to understand the question fully and find the answer. "She happened to be present in Sickbay when I went there to deactivate the EMH." He said, leaving out the bit where she technically didn't obey his orders giving him no other choice to deactivate it the way he had.

"I'm sure Ensign Barclay's account will be the same," Amata let go of the chair and stood up straight, his hands clasped behind his back, the same image he had presented before he and Rouse begun their little chat, "And like you said, Commander, there is nothing to be done if it doesn't, since the Captain approved of your methods." He took a moment to pause, "Besides, I've taken enough of your time. Though if you will permit me, sir, I'd like to offer some advice, unofficially." The Bajoran's right hand appeared from behind his back and removed his commbadge, "I promise it's friendly."

Reluctant he nodded, giving the man permission to speak his mind, trying hard not to react to the suggestion Tim hadn't spoken the truth. What kind of advice could someone have that was questioned his Executive Officers word...

"There's obviously something bothering you, and whether you or the Captain want to admit it, it affected your judgement in sickbay. Make an appointment with the Counselling Department and work through your issues; you have access to weapons bigger than a hand phaser, and problems far worse than an EMH," Amata tapped his commbadge back onto his duty jacket, "Now with your leave, sir, I'm running Security's gamma shift."

"You are excused," Tim said, more relieve then normal. He had a feeling that the woman in his life would recommend the same thing about seeing a counselor. After the Security officer left he took a deep breath and let himself fall in his chair, waiting for the next piece of trouble to arrive.

Blood is thicker than water...

Captain's Office, USS Portland

MD6, 0900 hours

In the privacy of her office, Alenis answered the hail from a Gamian jail, knowing that only one person could be on the other end. "Hello, Inaji," she said as she sat down at her desk, the woman's Cardassian face staring back at her on the screen.

"Meru, I'm sorry I didn't have time to explain but you have to believe me." Inaji spoke in a panicked voice. "I--"

Raising her hand, Alenis motioned for the woman in the other end to be quiet for a moment. "I recovered a sample of your DNA from my clothing, from last night at the bar. Do you have any idea what our analysis found?"

"That I'm only half-Cardassian, and that the other half is your sister?"

"Yes," replied Alenis. "I've also spoken to our mother and confirmed it. But that only explains half the story. What are you doing running from the law and trying to track me down?"

"It's a long story..." started Inaji.

"It appears as though you have plenty of time," countered Alenis, her guard still up.

"All right," replied the half-Cardassian woman, relenting. "It all started when I was born. Gul Narale, my father, was always ashamed of me. He kept me locked up, as though I was his dirty little secret from the occupation. He beat me regularly. He was a vicious, brutal man." Inaji wiped away a tear; even discussing this was difficult for her. "Then, when I was twelve, he had me surgically altered to look fully Cardassian. He said it was so I wouldn't bring shame upon him and his family. But the abuse... that never stopped."

"Did you kill him?" replied Alenis, her voice deadly serious.

"I didn't plan to," she said. "I was going to finally break free of him. Stow away on a Khobeerian freighter bound for Orion space. I'd emptied his bank account; I figured it would be enough money to buy my way to freedom and purchase a new identity for myself."

"And?"

"He caught me. I was all packed up and ready to go, and someone at the bank tipped him off."

"Did you kill him?"

Inaji took a deep breath. "They say that the great river flows in a straight line. But is a river not a part of a cycle? Does the water not evaporate and fall, returning to the lake from which it is fed?"

"I don't follow," replied Alenis, her eyes narrowing.

"He confronted me with a rage more intense than anything I have ever seen. I knew then and there that it was him or me. So, I grabbed a kitchen knife, and..."

"You killed him," replied Alenis, finishing her sentence.

"The news reports say he had sixty-seven stab wounds. It's funny, I only remember the first three or four." Inaji sighed deeply. "I must have blacked out. They say only a monster could be responsible for such a brutal and savage murder, and maybe they're right. But I'm nothing more and nothing less than the product of my environment. Narale deserved what he got."

"Inaji..." started Alenis, wiping away a tear. "What do you want from me?"

"I can't go back, Meru. Narale was well-respected on Cardassia. The courts are stacked against me. It would be a death sentence." She took a deep breath. "And not a quick death either."

"Gamia has only recently opened relations with the Federation and Cardassia," replied Alenis. "I'm not familiar with their legal system. Whether they extradite you to Cardassia or not is up to them."

"Meru, please. You're the only one who can help me."

Alenis stared into Inaji's eyes. She could almost see herself in them. But there was something else. Years of pain and suffering had caused her brown eyes to take on an almost dead look. She knew that trying to intervene in this case would only complicate matters with the negotiations, and that Admiral Washington and the Bajorans would surely object to putting the negotiations at risk for an escaped Cardassian fugitive. But, they say blood is thicker than water...

"I've got my best man on the case."

Into the Caves part I

Gamia III - The Caves

MD 6, morning

Authors: Lt Tyrlai Zade, Lt. Jason Beauvoir, Lt. (JG) Thoval sh'Kor, Lt. (JG) Amata Zan, Lt Parker Hudson

The two shuttles skimmed over the treetops and circled the clearing once before touching down. A few moments passed and the hatches on both opened simultaneously and six members of Portland's security detachment quickly moved to establish a perimeter and scan the surrounding jungle. Tyrlai Zade stepped out of one of the shuttles and walked a half dozen meters towards the ridge-line. She popped her hand scanner open and took a reading of the caves, only two hundred meters away several openings led into a small labrynth the original settlers had used for shelter on their arrival, several hundred years earlier.

Lieutenant Zade turned back to the others, adjusting her lightly-shimmering violet uniform jacket. She was wearing the same ablative layer of protection she had been using on Bajor when this had all began. She fully expected a Reptillian somewhere in the caves ahead. "According to the local network, these caves had been abandoned after the first generation or so and now are looked at with a sort of spiritual and cultural reverence. We've traced energy signals unique to the persons who targeted our original shuttle to this location. Our mission is to discover who and possibly what these people are and what they are up to. They have alien tech and alien friends so be careful, we don't have a lot of decent tactical information on what we are facing. Any questions or suggestions, now is the time."

Tyrlai looked out at the others while beaming eagerly at the impending danger and uncertainty.

Thoval, who had followed the security detail, made a sound approximating a sigh. "Your enthusiasm for the unknown remains... unsettling, Lieutenant." Her tone was light, mild, but her eyes were sharp where she gazed beyond the perimeter. "The Portland's sensors were unable to pierce very far into the caves. We'll have to rely on ground scans."

"Yes." She answered taking it as a compliment. "It is interesting how many rocks there are in the galaxy that we cant scan through. But I expect they chose these for a reason and that one is certainly understandable."

Following the Andorian officer off of the shuttle, Amata visually scanned the perimeter, his hand resting on the phaser secured to his hip, he was as alert as a prey animal. With a professional focus, his eyes took in every detail they could see, and he seemed to take a special interest in the performance of the Security team. Though his expression hid whether or not he approved of Grel's men, the team worked displayed a textbook execution of their task under the direction of the Portland's Master-at-Arms. There were far too many horror stories told among the fleet about

Security crewmen dying because of some easily avoidable mistake. Occasionally he would give a twitch at the atypical presence of his earring, though also may have just been guarded, "Thoval's correct," his voice became temporarily tenser as he spoke, "The caves should be treated with wariness." He let his point hang, as if it was the only one he needed to make. When he continued, the tension gone and his tone expressed nothing but his factual opinion, "Chief Coren and her team should stay here as a reserve and rear guard, they will be able to hold this ground better as a unit. If things go hot, they will make an adequate fallback point. First team should be more than enough to investigate the tunnels. Besides, we do not want to be perceived as overly aggressive with too large a show of force."

After he disembarked from 'his' shuttle, Jason took a deep breath and let it out slowly. The lifesupport systems on a starship did an excellent job of 'scrubbing' and recycling the air, but there was nothing like sweetness of the air produced by a natural biosphere. Even with moist smell of jungle decay. Taking in his surroundings, he noticed the tall straight trees festooned with creeping tendrils, so unlike the sprawling oaks that grew near his home and the small arboreal animal that bore some resemblance to monkey. The temperature was fine, but the humidity wasn't to his liking, making him physically uncomfortable. He never thought he'd miss the arid deserts and savage winds of Vulcan. Concentrating on the caves, he remembered a children, how he, Yvette and J.P. had explored the caves near their home and he knew how well caves could offer a respite from inclement or oppressive weather. With tricorder in hand and phaser on his hip, Jason was ready to enter the caves as soon as the order was given.

The smell of the tall native trees in the air reminded Parker of Pine trees back home. His eyes turning from Tyrlai and the others towards the area of the caves ahead. Taking out his own engineering tricorder from his suited back-pack he confirmed with the Lieutenant.

"Faint EM mech frequencies to the Northeast Bearing." He spoke quiet enough.

"A good enough choice." Tyrlai said, "lets head over and see how welcoming the locals are." She headed out along the vector Jason had just given her and turned back with a grin. "Phasers on stun and all that."

She picked her way through the trees, closely grown together and tangled in places, and was quickly flanked by first team moving through the jungle like they had trained for it ahead of time. She made a mental note to train for this sort of thing a little better. It was less than two hundred meters when the trees began to open up a bit and they stepped out into a strange makeshift marketplace laid out in a clearing. Small booths with trinkets laid out and arrayed for sale, little awnings placed at points for shade. Three large cave entrances opened into the rock-face at the far end of the clearing placed about seventy meters apart. There were a few attendants staring at the Federation team as it strode out of the thick brush.

Tyrlai looked at the others knotting her brow a bit. "The terrorists seem to have shops."

"Where did you expect the religious to go on vacation," Amata almost asked, as he stepped out in front of the away team and slowly the nearest merchant, doing his best to make himself smaller, his hands up in open to show he was no threat. He couldn't hear what he was about to say, but he had been well briefed on the culture of Gamia III. He did not meet the merchant's gaze, sparing only a glance at the man's earring before focusing on the ground, "Forgiveness for this unclean one's arrogance, esteemed merchant, but I have traveled from Bajora with the Federation aliens. They value the wisdom of the Prophets and wish learn what they can from this sacred cave," Amata paused, glancing up to the merchant's chest, letting a beat pass before he continued, "Our party's leader also has an eye for fine wares, as you can tell from the bright dye of her cloth."

"I see," responded the merchant, a stout man with a brightly dyed beard and new if not common clothes, for Gamia at least, "You are forgiven for addressing me in such a way, lowcaste." The eagerness barely hidden in his tone as his eyes locked on Tyrlai, perhaps never seeing the bright purple of her duty shirt, and the way her uniformed shimmered. "Offworlders! All who travel to seek the Prophets wisdom are welcome, just as all merchant welcomes a new customer as a friend." The man did an exaggerated bow, I'm Dawk Gallen, but you must feel free to call me Gallen. My stall and my knowledge is yours."

Tyrlai made a show of bowing back. "Hello good merchant, I have been to many a bazaar on many a world but this one is by far the least expected. It's quite refreshing. Tell me do you have any Kralian silk, something in a violet hue? Or perhaps there is a local variety." She smiled and ran one hand through her hair, it seemed to have an advantageous effect in negotiations, at least since she had become Tyrlai. The others fanned out while Tyrlai engaged as many of the locals as she could in pleasant conversation. She produced a few strips of latinum from her shimmering tunic and began haggling here and there to attract as much attention as possible.

Parker walked up close near to one of the other stands as the crew made it's way slowly but assuredly into the entrance way of the settlement. The various shanty wooden crafted and wheel stalls had a very Victorian look to them. With keen interest Parker let his Engineering Tricorder screen dance to life revealing a few of the trinkets had data chips, and some trinkets were spare energy cells for various makes and models of possible hand weapons. Amata was conversing with the main stall.

Without much notice the Engineer began to let the Tricorder start to download what was on some of the data chips as he went past the stalls slowly. Only a few mega quads of data per a isolinear chip run. "You seem a fine barter! Please come and make me an offer, surely you and your fine ship must be in need of Energy Cells!" The old woman gruffed extending her sand crackled skinned hand at her 'bounty'.

"Not today thank you. Perhaps the..." He looked at the sky above the stars and the evening shadows below "next day." He moved on not wanting to get bogged down.

Jason looked around at the seemingly welcoming merchants and dealers, but he'd been in Starfleet long enough to know that things were seldom as appeared to be. He had a stoic countenance and although he appeared calm, his eyes were vigilant for any signs of danger. Jason may be a Science officer, but he'd been on his share Away missions and was aware of how quickly things could change, often for the worse.

With thoughts similar to Lt. Beauvoir, and it being improper for him to approach the merchants anymore than he already had due to his D'jarra, Amata stayed back from the stalls and settled for keeping an eye on the other members of the away team as they investigated the stalls, wondering at what he could possibly do if an ambush of some kind was sprung on them while they were all scattered. He also made it his business to listen to every word Dawk said to Lt. Zade, half because he was the only natural Bajoran speaker in the group and would hear things others would miss, and half be cause he was hoping for a reason to but the fat merchant in his place. Though the Dawk's only ulterior motive seemed to be profit.

"... and I also have the finest collection of relics of any of the stalls here. In fact I just so happen to have a finger bone of our First Kai, though I can only offer it to peoples of your obvious wealth."

"Oh, I am sure I couldn't take such a precious relic off world. It must stay here but I am sure there is

some sort of memento I can take along on my journeys."

Thoval didn't seem to share in his inhibitions, moving freely from stall to stall, offering currency and—more effectively—a smile to pave her way to their good graces. She made no move for her scanners, merely pointed and asked and bent her head close to better hear... and simply for the sake of proximity. While the others turned to technology to try and answer their questions, the Andorian used what skills at diplomacy she had retained from her upbringing—along with a few tricks she had picked up along the way.

The alacrity with which the two-meter tall Andorian simply disappeared from the landing party would have been worrying had her laugh not been audible from time to time. When she reappeared, it was draped with various amulets and a pilgrim under one strong arm.

"Lieutenants," she called. "This is Havel. Zhe's on a pilgrimage to Gamia III, to a holy site within these caves."

Havel, one of the pebble-skinned humanoids making up the merchants' ranks, shoved Thoval playfully. "I can speak for myself," zhe said, then extracted zhirsself from the Andorian's grasp and turned to the rest of the landing party. "Thoval said you have questions. If you're interested in our religion, I may not be the one to ask—"

"Zhe's a recent convert," Thoval provided. Havel gave her an exasperated look before continuing.

"But I can show you around the site, if you're willing to observe the proper protocol." Zhe nodded towards the scanners and weapons the landing party wore. "I'm afraid we don't allow technology further into the caves." Havel seemed sincere, but that didn't speak to the others in the market.

"Lieutenants, I protest," interrupted the Bajoran Security Officer, forgetting that he had decided to remain quiet, "At least until we have a chance to meet with a recognized leader, and notify the ship."

Into the Caves part II

Gamia III - The Caves

MD 6, morning

Authors: Lt Tyrlai Zade, Lt. Jason Beauvoir, Lt. (JG) Thoval sh'Kor, Lt. (JG) Amata Zan, Lt Parker Hudson

Tyrlai appeared and smiled reassuringly at everyone, draping her arms over Amata and Thoval. "We can leave our 'technology' out here with one of the security team. Anyone else we might contact is at the Capitol anyway, it can do us no harm to take in a little spirituality before we return to the ship. By threes, I'm most completely certain that all this peaceful mercantilism is no way a threat to trap our spirits." She pulled her scanner and phaser off her belt and handed them to a security officer and waited for the others to do the same.

Thoval's smile returned as Tyrlai put her arms around the chiefs of tactical and security—or nearly chief, in Amata's case. The Andorian brought up her own arm to grip Amata's shoulder behind the Trill. "Threes indeed," she said, looking at him over Tyrlai's head. "I doubt our human—or Vulcan—colleagues will enjoy the site as we will. They should remain to savor the market." She squeezed his shoulder pointedly before extracting herself as the diplomat had and handing her phaser to the nearest member of security. It was the only technology she bore, if not the only weapon, and she hoped Amata had learned enough of her to guess there was an ushaan-tor strapped to Thoval's chest. If it was only Tyrlai that the Andorian and Bajoran had to protect, Thoval was reasonably

certain they would be able to handle themselves, but two more officers in the line of fire would complicate the situation. Chiefs Hudson and Beauvoir would be better served by monitoring the situation from outside the caves with their scanners... and a security detail.

Although he'd rather go into the caves, Jason agreed that Lieutenant sh'Kor's idea was a better plan of action.

Glancing at the Science Officer and realizing he was out voted and out ranked, Amata disentangled himself from the two women, "Understood, protest withdrawn, ma'am," palming his phaser by the control panel and removing it from his waist. Without hesitation, the junior officer handed his phaser over to the nearest security member, grip first, making sure that crewman saw that he set the emitter to fire a wide beam, "And you make sure the rest of the team understands." Amata received a nod; he slapped the crewman's shoulder in support before leaving him to his task.

Sliding back to the Zade and the towering Andorian, the Bajoran attempted to appear positive, despite hating the plan, "I've been told I should be more spiritual. And I'll more than capable of noting any cultural or linguistic points of interest for Lt.Beauvoir's department."

Tyrlai led the way, suddenly and with purposefully long strides, meaning to be well into the caves before any planned 'honor guard' could assemble and accompany them. To her mild surprise the others kept up with her usually impossibly long strides easily. They were in the cave in a few seconds and around a bend a few seconds after that, and then around another just for safety's sake. The cave floors were a mix of stone and dirt, the floors clearly leveled by a few centuries of use. She looked back and forth, seeing nothing in the way of hostiles. 'How am I the shortest person on an away team?' She made a mental note to start bringing Thosk on more away teams. "Alright, who palmed a scanner?"

Unzipping his duty jacket, Amata tossed his scanner to Zade, "What was the point of the show out there if we were just going to barge in, ma'am?"

"To test the merchants, to see how much of an act the bazarr was, what percentage of them were military,..." She flipped open the scanner and blinked. "The walls are filled with something giving off strange energy readings. The cannons will be limited and I doubt we can beam out."

The Bajoran turned back towards Thoval, who was lagging behind, and tapped his combadge, not wanting to call out, "Keep closer, Blue, I want our eyeballs on each other." It was lucky that the Gamians in the market didn't know that Starfleet kept their communications units on their chests. So much for no technology in the caves; Amata would have found it funny if he still had his phaser.

Thoval's lips quirked even as the "honor guard" forced to stay behind her towering form frowned.

"Eyes forward," she reminded the com. The next moment, the first man made his move. It started friendly enough—a sidestep to put him past the Andorian, but Thoval's indifference to the alien's attempt at maneuvering had taken on a provocative note in light of her communication.

"I must attend to your party," the man told Thoval. She glanced down at the pebble-skinned man, scratching her collar with raised brows.

"I am certain they can find their way," the lieutenant said, offensively calm. When the surfer attempted to move past her, she was ready with an outstretched arm across the increasingly tight tunnels. Her eyebrows climbed yet further. "Why are you in such a hurry?"

There was a moment of tension, in which the lead surfer smiled, and the two in Thoval's periphery tensed. They did not take an Andorian's increased range of awareness into account.

"Our religious site—" he started. One of the other men aimed a punch to Thoval's kidneys, meant to take her out before the conflict truly began. She turned with practiced ease. The hand that had lingered at her collar dipped within her uniform, gripping the ushaan-tor even as her unarmed hand shot out to catch the attacker's hand. He was shoved unceremoniously into the speaker, who was cut off with a squawk audible even to Amata and Tyrlai as Thoval slammed them both into the wall.

The third member of the guard was left to flounder as Thoval raised her ushaan-tor. Even if, at the last second, she chose to favor the blunt side of the weapon, he did not flounder long.

"Pink, watch your blood," Thoval warned Amata in between labored breaths. There were still two men she had to keep off of her colleagues' backs, gunning for a cause Starfleet still did not understand. She had no idea what lie ahead, nor what the colleagues they had left behind might be facing.

Tyrlai turned with the scanner and led the way deeper into the caver, confident in what she saw of Thoval so far that there would be no followers. The four who came around the far bend just as she had arrived were another matter. Tyrlai spun and pushed two of them stumbling towards the large Bajoran, the third caught her, snarling in triumph until he realized whom he had caught. He was flipped tail over torso and kicked in the head before he hit the ground in a silent heap. Tyrlai turned smiling, her eyes glittering as she took in the others.

The Reptilian was flanked by six more guards. He lifted his disruptor and shot her in the abdomen knocking her with a sharp yelp onto the hard packed dirt of the cave floor.

Slowly walking outside of the caves on the surface Parker had the chance to take a look at his tricorder findings of the data sticks he had scanned earlier. Even though the information on them had been wiped and erased for new use and sale on the markets, the federation tricorder could still read the remnants. What had appeared on them were ship coordinates and vessel armament detail and cargo listings. A trade of black market weapons. This was typical he thought.

Looking around he flipped closed the tricorder and he then sat down near a fire side where there were a bunch of the merchants holding a conversation. When Parker sat down the conversation slowed and stopped. They were not too happy with him being there; not that he could say otherwise they had dropped in on one of the Bajoran sects most religious of properties. The caves however he thought was a bad idea. What more could be observed from deep beneath the rock tunnels, no technology nor weapons. Then the information that he had come across the old merchant wiped data sticks. He didn't like this. Perhaps Parker could have brought then down a few hockey sticks to high stick them with in the caves.

Once the others were gone. Jason ordered the Security officers to set up a defensive parameter and remain vigilant. This done, he set his set his tri-corder to scan for potential weapons' signatures as he watched Parker attempt to make friends with the merchants. The Science officer didn't trust these 'vendors' any further than he called throw them on a high-gravity planet. He kept his fingers near the phaser on his hip.

"Kosst," yelled Amata as he stepped and threw a straight right at the first unbalanced man, like the kiai of a vulgar mouth blackbelt. The instant the Bajoran's pointer and middle knuckles sharply

collided with the man's temple, he repeated the move with his left, crumpling the second man almost in time with the first. They needed to finish this quick so they could fall back and reinforce Thoval.

Amata began to move towards his next opponent, until he saw disruptor's flash and heard the Trill call out. As the Reptilian brought the weapon to bear on him, Amata had just enough time to slap his commbadge, his plan had changed, "Withdraw!"

The blast caught him on his right arm and knocked him to the ground, rendering the Bajoran unconscious.

Back in the merchant camp, all hell suddenly broke loose. Jason's tri-corder beeped, and he dived for cover as a blast of energy struck where he'd previously been standing. From his cover, the Vulcanoid watched as Parker and the security took cover from the energy blasts fired by several of the dealers.

Huddled behind a vacant stall, Jason tapped his commbadge as things exploded around him. "Beauvoir to Portland, we're pinned down and we're taking fire. I request assistance."

-- USS Portland, ready room --

"I hear you," replied Alenis in response to the emergency message that was automatically directed to not just the bridge but her comm badge as well. "Hold out as long as you can, I'll be leading a team down there. And stay in communication." Standing up from her seat, she looked around the room. "Everyone, these negotiations will have to wait. Major," she said, turning to Judith, "can you take a shuttle and provide some air support?"

"With pleasure" Judith said, already on her way to the door after hearing of the surrounding of the Lieutenant.

Failure to Compile (Fixing Alenis, Part I)

Holodeck Two, USS Portland

MD6, 0930

Authors: Ensign Sera Williams, Ensign Nikki Barclay (played by Alenis Meru)

"Come on, compile," muttered Nikki Barclay as she stared at the display screen on the holodeck console. She had spent hours staring at the damaged boot sequence in the hologram's programming, trying to somehow get her to boot up. She had been up all night, not having gotten any sleep since the incident in sickbay. Sera had come to help a couple hours previously, but had presently stepped out to fetch something from the replicator for the two of them. An extra strong coffee kept Nikki going into the morning, but she was starting to feel the effects of not getting a wink of sleep in the last 28 hours and drinking too much coffee on an empty stomach.

A silhouette, shaped vaguely like the captain, appeared in the center of the holodeck. "Yes!" exclaimed Nikki. "Just--"

"Failure to to compile." As quickly as it appeared, the silhouette disappeared again. "Program corrupted."

"No!" she shouted as she brought her fists down on the console. She must have heard the computer's words dozens of times in the past 12 hours. After the twentieth or thirtieth time, it started to feel like the computer was mocking her in its dull, robotic voice. Failure to compile,

programm corrupted. Nikki was about to lose it if she heard that phrase one more time.

Alone in the holodeck, she walked over to the corner, sat down, and began crying. The EMH was a sentient being, and to Nikki, it was starting to look like one she couldn't save. Her sobbing was interrupted, however, by the whooshing sound of a door opening.

Nikki walked through the door to the holodeck, toolbox in hand. Never sure what to expect when walking into an occupied holodeck, Sera was a little startled to see the default black with yellow outlined squares. In the corner, Sera saw Nikki crying.

Her heart went out to the young woman. The experiences they shared on DS9 had formed the beginnings of a friendship, at least in Sera's mind. Sera slowly walked over to the other woman. Knowing better than to touch her, Sera simply leaned against the wall beside and let herself slide to a sitting position beside Nikki.

"I want to save the sentient being just as much as you do. While I do have holographic experience, I'm no Barclay. Let me know if I can help you in anyway." With a smile, Sera added, "Don't worry, I didn't bring any sand peas with me."

"We just need to find a way to recover the corrupted files in her boot sequence," replied Nikki as she wiped away the tears. "I tried running a decryption algorithm but..." Nikki trailed off as her eyes wandered down to the sandwiches -- individually wrapped, at her insistence -- in Sera's hand. "Is that a bagel with cream cheese and lox?" she asked, her eyes going wide as her stomach rumbled.

Sera took one of the sandwiches Nikki had her eye on and handed it to her hungry companion. "Of course, and it's all yours."

Sera then unwrapped one of the ham and cheese sandwiches and began to eat. While they waited on Brad, Sera looked toward Nikki and asked, "How have you been since coming aboard? I've had a little trouble adjusting, but I think I'm getting it. Besides, with every micron we move forward, I'm farther from home than any other Williams has ever been. It's kind of mind blowing when I start thinking about it."

"Yeah," replied Nikki. "Not my family. My mom and dad didn't like to leave earth, but, well... you've heard about my uncle." Nikki let out a deep sigh as she unwrapped her sandwich. Cream cheese and lox was her favourite, and it was a recipe she was known to replicate every morning at precisely 7:13 while she was at the academy. "That's the thing. Everyone knows about my uncle. It's hard trying to establish myself on a new ship while still living in his shadow."

She couldn't blame Nikki for feeling the way she did. Sera's father had been a botanist at the Conservatory of Flowers in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park, which had been almost a family calling for generations. "I know what you mean, but I respect you for trying. My father is still angry that I didn't take up the family business of plants. It's one of the reasons why I chose a career in Starfleet."

"Plants?" asked Nikki, raising an eyebrow. "You mean like a florist?"

With a quick smile, Sera replied, "Yes, like flowers. I suppose I should count myself lucky that I wasn't named Lilly."

"That sounds nice, working with flowers all day," replied Sera. Staring up at the console screen, she took a bite of her sandwich. "Must be boring though," she added. "That's the thing with Starfleet, you never know where you're going to go and what you're going to do next. Like... trying to save a

sentient replica of the captain."

Sera replied, "Very true. I suppose we should get started... we do have a life to save after all." Williams crumpled her sandwich wrap and gave it a toss into the disposal. Somehow... luck probably, she made it into the trash disposal. She knew somewhere in her mind the atoms and molecules of the wrapping and crumbs were being converted to energy, ready to become the next tomato soup or power coupling. AS she retrieved her toolkit, she added, "Dr. Silverton will be joining us?"

"I hope so," replied Nikki as she placed the half-eaten sandwich on top of her tool box before walking over to the console. "Here's the problem," she said, pointing towards the screen. "The transfer wasn't quite completed before the commander... you know... shot the console." Swiping the screen, she pulled up a graphic showing the places in the holo-matrix where data was lost. "The physical image and personality matrix were slightly damaged, and if we boot her up we can diagnose and repair most of that. But we've also lost large blocks of data from her boot sequence, and that's what I've been trying to restore all night."

Standing beside Nikki, Sera gave the screen a look. "I... think I have an idea," Sera began. "The physical image and personality should be fairly quick fixes. What if we were to 'transplant' data from other holograms to plug into the holes in the boot start-up sequence. It wouldn't be as good as the original coding, but it should work... or at least point us to where to start. We could even run it on a simulation before attempting it on the sentient program." Throwing a quick glance back to Nikki, Sera added, "You wouldn't happen to have a journal of Voyager's EMH programming handy would you?"

"I think I have one in my quarters. You know, light reading," she explained, in a tone almost like one would use when confessing to something embarrassing. "I can go get--" freezing in place suddenly, she was just struck with an idea. "Hmmmmmm," she thought. "Maybe..."

Sera paused almost in place, she didn't want to mess up Nikki's train of thought. "Got something, Nikki?"

Another Annoying Hologram (Fixing Alenis, Part II)

Holodeck Two, USS Portland

MD6, 0930

Authors: Lieutenant (J.G.) Brad Silverton, Ensign Sera Williams, Ensign Nikki Barclay (played by Alenis Meru)

"Well, you mentioned Voyager and it got me thinking..." Nikki could barely contain her excitement. "I was fascinated with Voyager's journey, and I've read everything there is to read about their time in the Delta Quadrant. Anyways, about two or three years into their journey, the Doctor was suffering from a progressive cascade failure. To fix it, they grafted his program and that of the EMH Diagnostic Program together. If we have the same program on board, maybe we can import his boot sequence into this hologram."

Sera paused to consider Nikki's plan. Nodding her head, Sera said, "You know something, which may just work." Sera then turned her attention to the computer, "Computer, activate the EMH boot loader program and load the data into the console in the Main Holodeck."

"Files corrupted. Do you wish to continue?"

"Yes!" exclaimed Nikki, crowding around the console. "Now activate the boot loader program for the EMH Diagnostic Hologram, and--"

Nikki was interrupted by a flash of light in the middle of the room. "Please state the nature of the holographic emergency," stated a holographic representation of Dr. Lewis Zimmerman, clad in a Starfleet engineering uniform. Aside from a few grey hairs and yellow instead of blue on his uniform, he looked exactly like the EMH Mark I

"I... I..." Nikki froze, realizing she must have tripped a subroutine that accidentally activated the diagnostic problem. "We..."

Just then, Brad walked in through the holodeck doors. "Sorry I've been away for so long. There was an minor accident down in the cargo bay that... oh. You got the EMH fixed enough to load. What about the captain?"

Sera gave Brad a nervous shrug. "It isn't exactly fixed. If I remember history correctly, Voyager had this problem 10 or so years ago while they were in the Delta Quadrant? That looks like the Diagnostic EMH program."

She then brushed back a strand of hair that had come loose somewhere during the day, then continued, "From what I remember, they had to merge the two programs in order to fix the problem."

"Merging sounds awfully disruptive. I know you two have been at this a while now. Are there any other ideas to try? Do we have any time limits involved with the software corruption keeping her intact? Seeing as we are looking at an AI...who is a member of the crew whose care and health is my responsibility...I'm fearing having to make a medical decision here that I don't want to make." The tone was uncharacteristically straight forward coming from Brad.

"Software corruption?" asked the diagnostic program. "How did her software get damaged?"

"I was transferring her program to the holodeck when the executive officer shot the EMH console. The transfer wasn't complete before he shot it."

"Shot the EMH console?!" exclaimed the diagnostic program, raising his voice. "HER program? What have you done with my EMH!"

"Uhhhh..." Intimidated by the angry hologram, Nikki began stammering. "We had to... Well, not me, but other crewmen... we, uh..."

Brad jumped in with the diagnostic program, "Well I see where the EMH gets its attitude. It was damaged in an accident but that's not what's important. Before the damage set in the EMH files were transferred here for safe keeping. The files have been corrupted for about 18 hours now and I have concerns we won't be able to recover the EMH's personality and sentience. So... can you fix it or not?"

"Let me see the extent of the damage," said the diagnostic hologram as he walked over towards the console, shaking his head at the stupid things that organics do. At least he wasn't activated often, unlike many unfortunate EMHs. Or the seven years of hell the Voyager EMH went through. Pulling up the program, he quickly sped through various matrices, diagrams, and lines of code. "The logical thing to do would be to simply delete this abomination you created by messing around with the work of Dr. Zimmerman and install the latest model of the EMH. Quite frankly, I'm amazed that you're still

running a piece of technology as obsolescent as the EMH Mark I in a modern... whatever class of ship this is... in 2391."

"No!" exclaimed Nikki.

"No?" asked the diagnostic program.

Yup thought Brad. Annoying just like the EMH. "Exactly as she said. No. We only need it repaired. Do not under any circumstances alter or delete what you are calling an abomination. Are we clear?"

The hologram sighed deeply. Organics were so sentimental. "I suppose you can copy the boot sequence from my program. That should at least solve your little failure to activate problem. However, you have significant file corruption here, here, and here," he said as he pointed at the display on the console. "You'll have to repair it manually, and some data may be lost for good. However..." The EMH paused and let out another exasperated sigh "...given that the EMH is an advanced hologram with the ability to learn and evolve, a damaged personality matrix will be repaired over time as the program interacts with it's surroundings."

Brad immediately responded the second the hologram stopped talking, "That's an interesting way of describing memory and personality loss. How bad are we talking about here?"

"So what you're saying is that once we repair the boot loader, the EMH itself will be able to repair its own personality given the correct environmental influences?" Sera asked. From experience, she knew that certain holograms enjoyed appearing more capable than the sentient beings it served with, though she was also confident she would get a good tongue lashing for asking it the same thing it had just stated.

"The damage is minor," explained the exasperated EMH. "You will have to do some repairs to its subroutines manually. But while this program may have some long-term memory loss and slight personality changes, through social interaction it should develop a complete personality matrix. And, of course, you will have to repair the damage to its physical matrix manually." He took a deep breath -- something he always thought was inefficient in his program. After all, if he doesn't need oxygen, why does he need to breathe? But, apparently some egghead thought that humanoids had a negative reaction to things in what they call the uncanny valley, so they installed a whole bunch of useless "features" into his program.

"Fortunately," he continued, "the first step is deactivating my program so you can copy my boot sequence into that of the EMH. I'm sure between the three of you, you have enough almost enough talents to make one competent engineer, so it shouldn't be too hard."

Almost as the hologram was finishing his instructions and latest degrading comment, Sera hurriedly said, "Computer, deactivate the Diagnostic Hologram." With a satisfied smile, Sera looked at the other two in the room, "I have to say, I enjoyed that more than I should've." With a light clearing of the throat, Sera continued, "Computer, copy the boot sequence into the modified EMH program."

"I'm sure he is as well," replied Nikki. Some holograms were just curmudgeonly and didn't like to be turned on. The early marks of the EMH had that reputation, and no doubt the diagnostic programs would have had that reputation as well if they were used as often instead of just sitting in a mostly unused corner of the ship's database. As the computer worked, she returned to her sandwich, managing to take a few bites before a chime alerted her that the operation was complete. "So, shall we turn her on?"

"Yes lets proceed. I'm concerned with the part of her having to relearn through experience... so basically memory loss. Who knows how bad. Possibly just a few hours. Possibly everything and she comes out pre-captain, pre-starfleet academy, pre-teen infact. Regardless... go ahead."

"All right." Nikki took a deep breath. "Computer, activate EMH."

Activated Again (Fixing Alenis, Part II)

Holodeck Two, USS Portland

MD6, 1000

Authors: Lieutenant (J.G.) Brad Silverton, Ensign Sera Williams, Ensign Nikki Barclay & Holo-Alenis (played by Alenis Meru)

In the center of the room appeared the holographic recreation of the captain again, complete with dark hair and a cocktail dress. "What's going on?" asked holo-Alenis, immediately raising her left hand to her head, only to realize that it wasn't there. "What happened to my hand!?" she exclaimed.

"Computer, recreate the left hand of the EMH using a mirror image of the right hand," called out Nikki.

Alenis watched as her hand appeared in front of her before her very eyes. It was unsettling to say the least. "So," she said, looking at the three junior officers in front of her, "would someone care to explain to me what is going on?"

Brad tried to ease the news to Alenis, well the holographic version, but they seemed similar, well apart from the missing hand. "There was a slight problem with the computer that you were stored in and we had to repair your files. How are you feeling? What is the last thing you remember?"

"You deactivated my program," said the hologram, thinking back to what felt like only a couple minutes ago. "You said I was going to be able to speak to the captain. Where is she?!"

"Yes I said that and you still will. I promise you that." Brad was fairly relieved. She remembers the last conversation that they had which was a good sign. Perhaps there wasn't any damage at all. Or perhaps it wasn't purely chronological but bits and pieces here and there. Time would tell. While Brad had basic psychological needs training, this went far beyond that. She'd need real help. With Arvel still recovering in sick bay for another day plus the complications of his and the captain's relationship he wouldn't be the best pick. The assistant chief counselor would be best. What was her name again? Delainey? He'd have to go talk to her afterwards.

"The Captain is currently down on planet on an away mission. When she returns you two can talk things out. For now we just wanted to be sure everything was ok with your programming."

"I feel... okay, I guess. If it's not too much trouble, I'd rather not be turned off. Would you mind transferring me to the captain's office? It's as much mine as it is hers, and maybe I can help her with some of her personnel reports." She glanced down at her new holographic body. "And can someone help me change into something a little more comfortable and less revealing?"

"Sure," Sera said. Her fingers quickly entered commands into the holographic control panel. With a quick disturbance with the visual representation of the EMH Captain as the emitters adjusted to the new commands. When the disturbance faded, the hologram was wearing a regulation starfleet uniform of the command division without the rank pips.

"Thank you, that's much better," replied Alenis. "Computer, transfer EMH program to deck one, captain's office," she added, testing out whether her voice commands would still work. Miraculously, they did -- apparently the computer wasn't able to distinguish between the voice of the captain and the voice of her imitator. And with a polite nod, she disappeared from the holodeck, leaving Brad, Nikki, and Sera behind.

Settling in...

Captain's Office, USS Portland MD6, 1045

For the better part of an hour, holo-Alenis wandered aimlessly about her office. Or what would be her office, if she weren't just a holographic clone of herself. She had tried sitting down, standing up, pacing, and even working on personnel reports, but nothing could get her mind off the nagging thoughts about the meaning of her own existence. Am I alive, or am I just programmed that way, she wondered. Do I have free will or am I just a slave to my programming? Did I have free will before?

And what of Jason? Her feelings for him were complicated. Does he know of the deception? Does he know that she even still exists?

In her confusion, she had even brewed herself a cup of tea – a force of habit – before realizing that holograms don't drink tea.

As she paced the room for the hundredth time, she was interrupted by the door to her office opening.

"Captain!" gasped Yeoman al-Nablusi. "I... I'm sorry, I thought you were on the planet."

"I'm not the captain," replied Alenis in a noticeably unenthusiastic tone. She turned towards the yeoman, revealing the lack of pips on her collar. "I mean... it's hard to explain."

"Ma'am?" asked the yeoman in a confused voice.

For a moment, Alenis considered explaining. But how does one explain to a poor yeoman that his captain has been replaced with a hologram originally designed for erotic purposes? There's no standard Starfleet procedure for that.

"Just... never mind." She flashed him a smile. "Would you mind going to my quarters and fetching Ko-ko for me? And perhaps my belaklavion?"

Abdel saw from the look in Alenis' eyes that she wasn't asking. She was begging. With a polite nod, he turned and left.

15 minutes later

With a birdcage in his hands, and a belaklavion on his back, yeoman Abdel al-Nablusi made his way through the corridors and up to deck one, Ko-ko squawking all the way. Upon entering the captain's office, he briskly put the cage on her desk. "She's all yours," he said, relieved to get the squawking bird out of his hair.

"Thank you, crewman," she said, her attention focused solely on Ko-ko. The bird looked up at her, a

puzzled expression on her face, before letting out a loud squawk. She could tell that this wasn't the real Alenis.

"And the belaklavion?" interrupted the yeoman.

"Lean it up against my desk; you're dismissed," replied Alenis as she reached for the latch on Ko-ko's cage. The bird backed away to the far side of her cage, recoiling in fear at the stranger who appeared to be the woman who cared for her.

Alenis frowned at Ko-ko's reaction. It was just one more reminder that she didn't even have an identity of her own; that she was nothing more than a copy of the real Alenis. Dejected, she buried her head in her hands.

But as she looked back up, she spotted something out of the corner of her eye. A couple mint leaves, from the tea that she had made but had been unable to drink. Taking them in one hand, she opened Ko-ko's cage with another. The brightly-coloured bird instantly darted towards the treat, and started pecking away at the leaves in Alenis' hand.

"Awwww, Ko-ko." Luring the bird out onto her desk, she petted her gently. "I know I'm not the real Meru, but let's be friends anyways."

The Rescue

The Caves, Gamia III Surface

MD6, 0930

Authors: Capt. Alenis Meru, Lt. Cmdr. Timothy Rouse, Lt. Parker Hudson, Lt. Jason Beauvoir,

"Captain, this is not only unorthodox, but this is a violation of Starfleet regulations, which clearly state that a captain should not be leading an away team in a dangerous--"

"Shut up, Grel." Alenis knew about the regulations, but she didn't care. Arvel would probably have a fit if he knew she were putting herself in danger. He'd accuse her of having some sort of death wish. Maybe he would be right. But someone threatened her crew, and she couldn't stand for that. She'd have to take care of things personally. "Okay, we're getting close," said Alenis in a harsh whisper, just loud enough to be heard over the phaser fire a couple hundred metres away. "Everyone on me. Acquire targets, but don't fire until I give the signal. Stun settings only."

While the phaser rifles they carried with them were powerful weapons, for a team of four people to overpower the Gamians and rescue the away team would still be a challenge. But Alenis had a secret weapon. Streaking through the sky towards her location was a little close air support, courtesy of the Rouses.

[Shuttlecraft Belvedere]

Tim grabbed hold on the back on one of the vacant seats as the shuttle was taking an abrupt turn. "Hey, take it easy will you,"

Judith rolled her eyes at her brother's comment. "Will you just shut up and take a seat. They didn't put those things in here as decoration. You're making me nervous with your constant walking around." Quickly looking at him she continued. "You did get the memo that you'll be manning the shuttles tactical console, right."

She didn't hear what he replied, but had a feeling she didn't want to know. She opened a special commchannel with the away team's earpiece. "The present is all wrapped and ready for the party." Tim looked at her after the unusual message. "If they can fire the kind of advanced torpedo, as they did when we arrived, they probably have a way to listen in on our communications."

[Gamia III Surface]

Spotting the shuttle in the sky above, Alenis and her team quickly closed in on the location of the weapons fire. Jason and Parker were trying to hold them off, but they were pinned down and couldn't hold out forever. Fortunately, they were able to get into a good position on the edge of a clearing. "It's now or never," muttered Alenis as she lined up a shot on a tall red-headed Gamian with what appeared to be a disruptor rifle of Cardassian origin. "I'll take the redhead," she said, staring down the sights of her rifle at him. "Open fire," she added, squeezing the trigger.

Alenis' first shot hit, knocking down her target. Shooting was just like riding a bike; one never forgets. The other Gamians around her target ducked for cover, the sustained automatic fire of four Starfleet phaser rifles pinning them down. "I need to get to Hudson and Beauvoir," said Alenis. "Cover me."

"This is an unnecessary risk, captain!" shouted Grel.

"Shut up and open fire," shot back Jita, laying down some suppressing fire.

Sprinting towards Jason and Parker, Alenis dodged a few potshots and ran between the stalls. She was almost there when she saw out of the corner of her eye two Gamians on a rooftop manning a fully automatic heavy disruptor support weapon and lining her up in their sights. Just in the nick of time, she was able to duck behind a stall, the space she occupied only an instant ago being filled with disruptor fire. Pinned down, she decided that now was as good a time as any to call for support. "Belvedere, I need some support here! Take out the guys on the roof!"

[Shuttlecraft Belvedere]

"Target locked" Tim said. "when are we in range?" he asked his sister.

"Almost," she flew the shuttle away from their hiding behind the treeline in to view of the target. "Ready,"

"Wait," Tim suddenly said. "Do we have permission to fire?"

"Your kidding me right," Judith said in shock. "Now you're thinking about permission."

"Never mind," He fired the first shot, quickly followed by a second. Both were a direct hit and sent the assailants flying through the air. "Gotcha" he said with a smile and raised his hand towards his sister for a high five.

She accepted and chuckled. Glad to see Tim smile, really smile. "Who next?"

[Gamia III Surface]

Jason let a brief smile grace his lips as he saw Meru.... Captain Alenis and the others coming to the rescue.

Seeing an opening when two Gamians broke cover to get better shots at the rescue party, the

science officer fired twice. The first shot hit its target, while the second appeared to go wild, but actually hit a portable stove, which exploded. The blast blowing several Gamians off their feet.

Hearing the explosion and with the Gamians on the rooftop who had her pinned vanquished, Alenis stood up from her position, fired off a few shots at a group taking cover behind a stack of crates down the street, and sprinted towards where Jason and Parker had been taking cover. "Lieutenants, report. Are you all right? What happened to the rest of the team?"

"Captain, on our way to the caves, we came upon this settlement. The occupants seemed friendly, even providing a guide to help us explore the caves. They claimed the caves to be a holy site and refused to allow us to take scanning equipment or energy weapons into them. Ensign Amata objected to this, but he was overruled. Lieutenant Zade then led the others into the caves, leaving myself, Lieutenant Hudson and the security team as a rear guard." Jason reported. "Moments after their departure the Gamians became hostile, opening fire on us, Specialist Rollins was injured and we've been pinned down ever since."

When Lt. Beauvoir had finished his report to the Captain a surprise of four Gamians broke away from one of the merchant stalls that had not been checked. The stall was a checkpoint for the entrance to the caves and had not been adequately checked out due to the commotion. They had begun a run towards the east side of the hill top of magmite rock surrounding the caves. Of the four retreating men, two of them had long dirty scraggly hair along with animal bones as necklaces mercenary-type. The other two Gamians were slender females.

Looking at them Parker narrowed his eyes as he pulled out his over used tricorder... "Captain, I've had a chance to download a lot from these stalls." He gestured for Alenis and Jason to lower their disruptor and phaser.

"Plenty of time to put something into the oven..." He muttered to his self uploading an engineering prefix code detonating one of the four Gamian's running away, their ion grenade exploding when Parker set it off. A bright flash of orange and red, along with magmite rock raining down upon some of the stalls below.

"I love to cook." He smiled flipping it shut.

"Dinner's just about ready," replied Alenis as she popped up from behind cover to blast away at a small group armed with various pistols and rifles, stunning two of them. "We have to get into the caves." Glancing over, she figured that she could make it. Ducking down again behind the stall, she tapped her comm badge. "Jita, Grel, cover us. Belvedere, you know what to do. We're going in."

"Captain, I must protest...." The Security Chief began, but then stopped as he knew it would do no good. "Aye, ma'am." He replied instead.

Jason collected his things and got ready to move out.

Seeing the Belvedere swoop down for another attack run and Jita and Grel putting out an impressive volume of cover fire, Alenis clutched her rifle tightly and peeked out from where they had taken cover. "All right, on my mark, we all make a run for the cave as fast as we can."

[Shuttlecraft Belvedere]

"You got it?" she asked just to check if Tim had seen the away team leaving their cover.

"Of course, can you fly us sideways to the team. I like to use both front and aft energy weapons." He quinned his eyes. This attack demanded accuracy. The away team was very near the area he targeted. He pushed away the thought that he possibly hit one of their own, instead of the Gamian rebels. Seeing the Captain and her team approaching even closer he switched the weapons setting to single beam instead of wide spread. "Keep an eye on the rooftops and such?" he said to Judith. "Specially the places that are out of sight of the away team."

"Already doing that," Judith replied annoyed. "I know you don't want to know this, but I've done this before. I used to be a fighter pilot and a Marine, remember."

"I'm perfectly aware of why you are taking tons of painkillers a day and why you should be using a cane to walk." He threw back.

She wanted to sneer something back, but didn't after realising what he said. She had never told him about the last accident. Not wanting to go into that now she remained silent and focused on the surface.

[Gamia III Surface]

With phasers and disruptor blasts flying everywhere, Alenis figured that now was as good of a time as any. "Go!" she shouted, standing up and firing off a few shots from her rifle before turning and sprinting towards the open cave...

...but who will rescue the rescuers?

The Caves, Gamia III Surface

MD6, 0930

Authors: Capt. Alenis Meru, Lt. Parker Hudson, Lt. Jason Beauvoir,

The Belvedere was a good source of laying down a flanking target for the three of them. It lay down fire for an expedient retreat if needed, or when the Gamian's returned. Parker knew they would not want to be blocked from their entrance of the cave without a way to exit which was something he feared.

Only weapon on him Parker had was his type-two hand phaser which he fired off towards the surrounding entrance to the main cave creating as much cover for them as they could in their semi base rush manoeuvre.

Reaching up to the mouth the of cave entrance Hudson took out his hand held flash light and began examining the foot marks of the Gamian's and the Federation foot steps. The lighting in the cave passageways was dimming by the moment. "Looks like we don't have a lot of time."

As they entered the comparative safety of the caves, Jason listened and watched for pursers. It was cool and dark within the caves, illuminated only by dying flame torches and Parker's flashlight. The Science officer could smell, the burnt particulates from the torches along with strong incense smoke and the organic smell of dampness coming from deeper in the cave system.

To Alenis he said. "Captain, with your permission, I'll guard our rear, not that doubt the Grel's people and the Belvedere to keep the attackers off our backs, but these caves are unknown to us and there could be many crevices and blind paths which could be utilised for the purposes of ambush."

If Alenis noticed the double entendre about guarding one's rear, she didn't acknowledge it. "Good."

Set your phasers to a heavy stun setting. If you see anyone armed, shoot first and ask questions later." She pressed a button on her rifle, activating the tactical flashlight, and shining it into the various crevasses. "Jason, Parker, if either of you can figure out which way they went, it would be most appreciated."

Walking along the side of the walls Parker used his tricorder to narrow in on the heat signature of the recent passing personnel from the Portland. Grounding his sensors of the tricorder and laying down a heat marker pathway he started to lead the way, so to speak for the team. He didn't say anything as to keep it quiet.

Their first large narrow corridor led into calamite rock, before taking a left and then another short left, before a fork in the passageways. The dim light in the hallways could only be lit enough to show the recent Starfleet boot footprints in the sand before they had dropped off... They had went in with the heat signatures around 1.7 kms before reaching a bright red, yellow and blue field from top to bottom of the hallway. What was on the tricorder had seemed to stop them dead in their tracks. "There seems Captain to be a bright holoessence field blocking us from any further." He showed Alenis the tricorder.

In a fit of rage, Alenis fired a couple of shots from her phaser rifle at the edge of the field where it met the wall of the hallway, to no effect. Her crew was behind that field, which meant she had to get through it. "Lieutenant, do you have anything in that tricorder which we can use to get through this thing," in a voice that made no room for confusion on which answer she wanted to hear.

He looked at the shimmering field blocking them and then at Beauvoir. It was not like he had his engineer's tool kit with him. Decoupling the coil scanner from the tricorder and then placing the microdyne coupler at the bottom right corner saddled along the energy field. Turning to the Captain Parker said "Ma'am when your ready would you please shoot at level three." He pointed to the coupler on the ground.

Standing back far enough with the away team, Alenis aimed carefully and fired. In a shower of sparks, the field went down. "Come on, lets go," she shouted, quickly making her way down the hallway. But as she passed through where the field was, she was hit with a sudden stabbing pain in her abdomen. "Oww," she groaned, leaning over in pain, losing her grip on her phaser rifle and leaving it dangling by its sling.

"Halt!" Wincing in pain, Alenis looked up just in time to see two nervous Gamians armed with hand phasers blocking their path. Recognizing her, one of them gasped. "It's her!" he exclaimed. "You, come with us!"

Seeing the Captain hold herself into her chest and fall into her pain was very concerning. Parkers reasoning was not to follow through with these two getting lost in the caves, they would never get out. Slowly getting up as the Gamian had ordered their directions Parker didn't like that, knowing behind him was Lt. Beauvoir with a rifle his self still aimed...

"GGNnnHH!" Hudson swung his Engineer tool belt slamming the metallic accessories of durinium alloy into the face of the first Gamian. The Gamian holding his face in pure pain. The injured Gamian took the butt of his large disruptor Parker didn't see from inside of his shroud and swinging it back 75 degrees hammering him into the wall and forehead.

Dropping to the ground the embarrassing dizziness faded then looking to Alenis who was still tender doubled in pain. "Alright... lets try it their way."

Lt's Beauvoir, Hudson, Captain Alenis and the Gamians headed forward. Hopefully bringing them to the others.

"Why didn't you shoot when I hit him?" Parker asked Beauvoir.

"I didn't believe it was a prudent action to take." Jason replied with little emotion. He knew this would be very little comfort to the engineer, but at least now there was a better chance they'd be reunited with the others. Besides their captor wouldn't expect him to do anything so wouldn't be watching him as carefully as they were Hudson and wouldn't expect his attack, when it came.

As they were led down deeper and deeper into the caves at gunpoint, Alenis' pain only started feeling more and more intense and spread throughout her body. Down in the caves, the naturally carved caves and rough-hewn walls gradually gave way to a finely constructed underground temple carved out of stone. Carvings on the walls were in Bajoran, but an old script. Alenis might have been able to decipher it, had she had more time and not been in severe pain. But even considering for five hundred years of separation, something didn't look right about it.

When they entered the temple, the Gamian escorts exchanged nods with some hooded sentries who joined the party. Soon, Alenis, Beauvoir and Hudson were surrounded by six guards as they were taken deeper and deeper underground. Glancing at them, Alenis could see that the deeper they went, the more the ruby red jewelry on their traditional earrings began to glow.

Down a few more flights of stairs, they finally arrived at the bottom of the temple. In the middle of a large room lit by torches, with her back towards the entrance, was a woman in a much more ornate robe and headgear than the rest. Flanking her on either side were about a dozen others, all wearing purple robes and chanting in ancient Bajoran. In front of the woman in the center was a low altar made of an obsidian-like material about a four foot square and a few inches high. Beyond that was a large stone torch with a fire that seemed to get more intense as the party from the Portland entered. And even further beyond that was a cliff, with the glow of fires and swirling magma emanating from below.

"Captain Alenis," said the woman, her voice smug and confident. "It's a pleasure to see you again," she added as she turned around, revealing her identity as that of Kai Sellra.

Revelations

The Caves, Gamia III

MD6, 1000 hrs

"Sellra," gasped Alenis, instantly recognizing the woman as the one she had butted heads with for the past few days. But what was she doing down here? As she stepped forward, she felt another pang of pain in her abdomen and nearly doubled over in pain. Two guards rushed to her side, grabbing her by each arm, stopping her from making any threatening moves.

"That's Kai Sellra to you."

"What have you done with my crew!"

The Kai slowly sauntered towards Alenis. "Your crew are fine. They are simply being held for the time being. Though, I suppose they may make fine vessels."

"But you said--" protested one of the robed Vedeks. With a wave of the hand, the Kai had him

silenced.

“Vessels?” asked Alenis. She was seriously sick and tired of the Kai speaking in riddles.

The Kai let out a laugh. “You really don’t know, do you? After all this? The prophecy said that the wanderer would not be wise, but I didn’t expect you to be this ignorant. The carvings, the sculptures, the scripts, the caves of fire--”

“Kosst.” The realization hit Alenis like a ton of bricks. The symbols, the red earrings, the temple... she knew she had seen all this somewhere before, but until now, all she could feel was a strange eerie familiarity. “You all... you worship the pah-wraiths, don’t you?”

Sellra smiled wickedly. Alenis had finally understood. “Since our people first left Bajor, the pah-wraiths have protected us and watched over us. It was in these very caves that we first sought shelter after the crash of our lightships. But these were no ordinary caves. Here, we found shelter, refuge, and spiritual guidance. If not for the wisdom of the pah-wraiths, our people would have perished during the first rainy season. We do more than worship them, we serve them, in honour of a centuries old debt. A debt which is soon to be repaid...”

[Temple of the Ages, Bajor]

“Vedek Aara! Vedek Aara!” The nineteen year old Vinn Orona bounded up the stairs of the temple to the study room, two or three steps at a time, a holy book under his arm. Reaching the study room, he spotted the Vedek, a frail, elderly man with a white goatee and silver hair, hunched over a heavy tome at a large and ornate desk.

“Mister Vinn, what could possibly be so important that it would cause you come running up these stairs at this hour, screaming my name.” Aara turned to face his apprentice, seeing much more dread on his face than the old man could possibly invoke. “Not only are you violating your vow of silence, but you are interrupting my work.”

“It’s the Tolic shards,” replied Orona. “I’ve been re-examining some of the prophecies, and I think I’ve found something.”

Aara just sighed. “Orona, thousands of scholars have studied the holy books for thousands of years. You mean to tell me that you, an apprentice Vedek, have found something so groundbreaking that has been missed by so many of the wisest scholars that Bajor has known, that it warrants such alarm?”

“Take a look at this,” replied the young apprentice, opening the book to a page he had marked. “I’ve just been thinking, with the recent return of the fifth Tolic shard, and the diplomatic mission to Gamia III... here, read for yourself,” he added, pointing to the page.

Squinting at the words, the expression on Aara’s face turned from irritation to horror and his skin turned a deathly pale as he quickly read the ancient text. “No... it cannot be.” He hoped he would not see this day. “The shards, the wanderer... Captain Alenis...” He shook his head as he read the words Orb of the Pah Wraiths.

“What does it mean?” asked Vinn, feeling that he had decoded something but not sure precisely what.

“Armageddon.”

[The Caves, Gamia III]

"...soon the pah-wraiths will be free, and you, my child," continued the Kai as she placed a hand on Alenis' cheek. Behind her, the flames grew brighter and brighter, "will be bestowed with the greatest honour of all. It is as it has been told in the prophecies. It is you who will be a vessel for Kosst Amojan, liberator of the Pah-Wraiths. It is you who will reconstitute the Orb of the Pah-Wraiths, freeing their spirits from the purgatory of the fire caves! It is you who will lead them into the heavens, into the celestial temple, for the final conflict!"

The Final Conflict, Part I

Caves, Gamia III

MD6, 1005 hrs

Authors: Capt. Alenis Meru, Lt. Jason Beauvoir, Lt. Parker Hudson

"No!" replied Alenis, her pain getting more and more intense by the minute. "I won't serve the Pah-wraiths!"

"Oh, but you will," replied the Kai, flashing Alenis a wicked grin as she nodded to two of her hooded henchmen, who pointed their crude disruptors at Parker and Jason's heads. "I know you would rather die than serve us, but can you say the same for your crew?"

"I believe the correct response is go to Hell, you crazy bitch." Jason said addressing the Kai. Then to the guard who was holding a disruptor to his head, he added. "My good man, I wouldn't fire that disruptor, if I were you, the high-pitched whine coming from the handle is indicative of a compromised power cell and it'd be a stroke of luck, if it doesn't explode killing us all."

"You blasphemous little--" Bringing the butt of his disruptor hard down on Jason's skull, the guard figured that even if he couldn't fire it, it would at least be useful for something.

"Jason!" called out Alenis, in shock at seeing her junior officer beaten like this. As she turned and tried to run towards him, she was hit with a pang of pain that brought her to the floor. With the Kai laughing mencingly, four guards grabbed her by the arms and begun dragging her towards the altar. "No!" she called out, desperately kicking at whatever she could reach in an attempt to stop herself from being dragged off. But against the strength of four guards, her efforts were futile and she soon found herself thrown down hard on the altar. "You can do whatever you want to me," said Alenis defiantly as she cradled her elbow, "but you'll never be able to free the Pah-wraiths,"

The Kai just laughed smugly. Alenis was a defiant one, that is for sure. And feisty too. No doubt she would make an excellent host; it is no wonder that Kosst Amojan wanted her. "Oh yeah," she countered, reaching underneath her robes. "I have this!" she exclaimed, holding up a glowing crystal.

Alenis' heart sank as she instantly recognized it. "The sixth shard," she whispered.

"What the hell is that?" Parker mumbled under his breath kneeled on the ground beside Jason. He hadn't the first knowledge of the Bajoran Peoples, he even addressed the Captain by her last name the first time he had met her in her ready room. A big no no of sorts. It was hard to make of what was happening. Was this some sort of cultist nature acting out in front of them?

"You're mad!" Parker moved his head to look at the guard, only as he shoved the disruptor into

Parkers skull and head harder.

"Mad? I don't think so," replied the Kai, shooting a dirty look at her hostage. Holding the shard aloft, it began to glow brightly with red energy. "Give my regards to Lieutenant Zade for returning the fifth one. Saves me from having to search all across the galaxy for it. How convenient that all five of the remaining shards are all in one place, and on the same planet as the fire caves as well."

The Kai stared down at Alenis, who despite her intense pain had tried to stand up again. She had spirit, that was for sure. "And thank you for coming down here. I had set up all these fake negotiations just to bring you to me. To be honest, though, I thought I would have had to kidnap you from the negotiating table, but imagine my pleasant surprise when you show up at my front door just as I need you. You and your crew have been most cooperative, but I'm afraid it's time to get this proverbial party started."

"No," replied Alenis, standing up in spite of the pain in her gut and the wobbliness in her legs. "I'll fight you. Every step of the way, I'll fight you."

"Kneel!" shouted the Kai, holding the shard aloft. "Kneel before the Pah-wraiths."

"No," said Alenis, a brief moment before being thrown to the ground again by the Kai's lackeys. Dazed, she looked up just in time to see the Kai hold the shard aloft. Chanting a few words in Old Bajoran, the voices of the Vedeks filled the room as a face appeared in the flames.

"Kosst Amojan, the wanderer has arrived. You have your vessel!"

With that, the flames burst towards Alenis, enveloping her in fire. She let out a scream and tried to cover her face, but the fire did not burn her. Rather, the flames surrounded her and held her aloft. As she screamed in panic, she could feel another presence forcing itself into her, taking hold of her body.

With all eyes on the ancient rite, Jason saw his chance. With remarkable efficiency, he dispatched his and Parker's guards and checked the engineer for wounds. Ascertaining that his injuries weren't life threatening, the Science officer picked up a discarded disruptor and fired it at the shard in the Kai's hand.

"Nooo!" exclaimed the Kai as the blast from the disruptor knocked the shard out of her hand, sending it toppling towards the pit of magma. It hung, teetering on the edge for a moment as the Kai dove for it, but just as she was about to clasp it in her hands, the shard fell, landing precariously on a small ledge below. Some of the Vedeks simply stood there in shock, while others headed towards the cliff to assist the Kai, who was carefully lowering herself down, clinging to the edge in an effort to retrieve the shard.

As the shard was knocked out of the Kai's hand, the flames around Alenis subsided and she fell, landing hard on the obsidian altar. "Jason..." she uttered, trying to get up.

Jason ran over to where Meru where she lay on the obsidian altar. When he reached her, she was trying to get up. "Lay still." He told her. He could tell she was in a lot of pain, but there was little he could do without a medkit. He felt her head, it was warm. She probably had a fever and being in this warm cavern couldn't be helping. He had to get her out of here, but couldn't risk moving her without knowing the extent of her possible internal injuries.

Alenis looked up at Jason, her eyes glowing red, and for an instant let out an evil grin. With one swift

movement, she stood up and snatched the disruptor away from him and tossed it towards a surprised Vedek, who despite a bit of fumbling, managed to catch it and figure out which side was the business end. Taking a step back, she drew the concealed Type I phaser that Judith had given her and pointed it at Jason.

"You know the most important thing about stealing someone's identity?" she asked in a menacing voice, staring Jason down. With her thumb, she pressed a button on the phaser, changing its setting to kill. "It's making sure that there are no witnesses."

Naptime

MD6, 1010 hrs

Mess Hall, USS Portland

With the hologram running again and a job well done, Nikki was ready to start her shift. Well, "ready" may not be the right word. Having not slept for twenty-eight hours and counting, she figured she would stop by the mess hall on the way back to engineering for a coffee. Just enough to get her through the next few hours, then she could crash.

Wandering through the corridors of the USS Portland, she was on autopilot. She had half her salmon cream cheese bagel wrapped up in one hand, a coffee mug in the other, and a couple PADDs under her arm. Before she got started with her shift, she wanted to review the power distribution and available computing power on the ship anyways, just to make sure that the hologram wouldn't cause any more problems. Or that her program wouldn't degrade any further. So, she figured that that data would make for some good light reading as she finished the breakfast that Sera brought her.

She would have invited Sera for breakfast as well, but as one of the few qualified shuttle pilots not already busy, she was called down to the surface for some delivery or something. Truth be told, Nikki was too tired to hear what Cmdr. Rouse said when he called her on his comm badge.

Still, Sera was her only friend so far. It was always hard for Nikki to make friends at the academy. On top of her own social anxieties, there was the fact that her family's reputation would always precede her. Other cadets either wouldn't stop talking about her uncle, or would be intimidated by the niece of the legendary Reginald Barclay. The closest she got was a Vulcan classmate named T'Pren, who, after a night of holodeck adventures, politely informed Nikki that continuing their friendship would be "illogical."

For a whole week after the incident, Nikki tried to feign illness. Of course, she had been tagged as a hypochondriac in her first year, but she liked to think she was just being careful. After all, you never know for sure that you don't have Tyrellian Swine Fever.

After filling her coffee mug, Nikki sat down at the mess hall. For a brief moment, she stared out at the stars, thinking about how far away from home she was. She was about to reach for her coffee mug when, feeling lightheaded, her body finally said no more. There, in the corner of the mess hall, sat a napping Nikki Barclay.

The Hologram and the Acting Crewman

Captain's Office, USS Portland

MD6, 1050 hrs

Authors: EMH Mark I (played by Alenis Meru), Coln Jena (played by Jason Beauvoir)

Jena was worried about Jason again. She knew he was on the surface, but little else. She could ask her friends that were in the know, both Judith and Tyrlai were nowhere to be found. Then she had a brain storm, if you want to know what's going on, start at the top.

Making her way to the Bridge, a Security officer prevented her from entering the Bridge. "Only crew members are allowed on the Bridge, ma'am." He told her.

"I'm Acting Crewman Coln Jena, here on official diplomatic business." She told him.

After checking her story, he said. "Apologies, Crewman, welcome to the Bridge."

"Thank you, Petty Officer." She said gracefully and made her way to the Captain's Ready Room and pressed the chime."

As she was feeding Ko-ko, talking to the bird and letting her coos calm her down, Alenis was interrupted by a chime at the door. She didn't know what to do; technically it wasn't even her office. But when the chime rang a second time, she knew she couldn't be rude and pretend that nobody was home. "Come in!" she called out.

"Hi, Captain, I hate to disturb you, but I'm concerned about my father and I was wondering if you could tell me what was going on."

The hologram turned away from Ko-ko and looked into Jena's eyes. For a moment she considered telling her that she wasn't the real captain, but looking in Jena's eyes, she felt that Jena needed some reassurances now. And besides, the truth was so absurd that she could barely believe it herself.

"Jena, your father is all right," said the hologram. "Dr. Silverton has checked him out, and aside from some... embarrassment... over his actions while under the influence of pon farr, he's fine."

"Thank you, ma'am, but I assumed that was the case, since he was cleared for the Away mission. I was wondering if there'd been any word from the planet." Jena asked beginning to become suspicious that the Captain seemed unaware of the Away mission.

"Yes, the away mission..." replied the hologram. She knew that there was an away mission; it was why the captain wasn't available and her office was free for her to use for the moment. But obviously no one had thought to brief her. In fact, only a few people on the ship knew she even existed. "I haven't been updated recently, but I'm sure your father can handle himself," she said, suddenly self-conscious about the lack of rank pips on her physical matrix.

It was then that realisation dawned on Jena. "You're her, aren't you? You're the EMH."

The hologram sighed. Jena had seen right through her charade. "To be honest, I don't know what I am anymore," she replied truthfully. "But I can assure you that your father has fully recovered from his 'condition,' and that as a Starfleet officer, he can handle himself if any trouble arises."

Jena felt sympathy for the EMH, she hadn't really been given a choice and now she had to 'live' with someone else face and memories aboard the same vessel as the 'real' Meru. No wonder she was having a crisis of identity. "Thank you, very much for helping my father. If you want to talk about it, I'm happy to listen. About your crisis of identity, not about your time with my father." Jena said with a smile. She went a little red out of embarrassment at how her statement could have been construed, if she hadn't made the clarification.

"Take a seat," said Alenis, motioning towards the two chairs across from the captain's desk. It felt strange to be talking to a fourteen year old girl about her problems, but everything in the past couple of days had been strange for her. And Jena had shown herself to be wise beyond her years; she wasn't appointed acting diplomatic officer for nothing. Petting Ko-ko, Alenis choked back a tear. "I just don't even know who -- or what -- I am anymore. Am I even real? Do holograms even have the 'spark of life,' or was I just programmed to think I'm real?"

Jena took a seat and listened to the hologram's words. She thought for a moment before answering. "Now those are some tricky questions. Philosophy still has no definitive answer on that one, I'm afraid. If you're talking about identity, then one theory espouses that it's our memories and experiences that differentiate us from one another, so in that one you are a different person from the biological Alenis Meru, because although you look like her and possess her memories, since you're 'conception' you have had different experiences from her. Also you are displaying sentience by questioning your identity. Theologically speaking, I'd say that you don't possess a 'pagh', or 'soul' as these only said to be present in certain biological entities." Pausing a moment before continuing the teenager said. "From scientific perspective, your ability to interact with the physical world around you, would make you for want of a better word, real."

"I suppose... I think, therefore I am, right?" asked Alenis. It was pretty much all she remembered from her high school philosophy class, but it seemed appropriate in this setting. "Would you care for some tea?" she added, remembering that she had forgotten to offer Jena some when she came in. "I don't suppose I'd be able to drink any, what with being a hologram and all. But I can make you a mug."

"Exactly, Descartes' Cogito ergo sum." Jena agreed. "Tea, yes I'd love a mug."

"I'm sure the real captain won't mind," said Meru as she turned on her teakettle to reheat the water from her abortive earlier attempt to make tea. "It will be ready in a few minutes." As she looked back down at Jena, a thousand different thoughts were running through her holo-matrix. "So, if I'm real, I guess the next question is, who am I? Between me and my biological counterpart, we can't both be Captain Alenis Meru of the USS Portland. And since she was here first, who does that make me?"

"Well, I suppose that's up to you. In many cultures a person is allowed to choose their own name, I don't see why can't do so too. Personally I've always liked the human name, Rachel." Jena said. "As for what you're going to do for a job, I think you'll have to discuss that with the Captain."

"Rachel..." mused the 'captain' as the water began to bubble again. "That is a nice name, though I think my mother may decompile me if I choose a non-Bajoran name." She took a deep breath as she stood up to prepare some tea, figuring that some of the captain's deka tea would do for this occasion. "That's the catch though. Taking on a whole new identity means I'm discarding the old. If I'm a different person, I'll have to start all over. Relationships, careers, even this collection of exotic teas... it's all hers. And I doubt the real Meru would be willing to share her partner with me."

"True, but part of life is change." Jena replied. "Often it's difficult, sometimes even painful..." She thought about Peter and her mother's deaths and wiped a tear from her eye. "...but if change wasn't difficult, it wouldn't be worth it."

Meru nodded in agreement and paused for a moment to stare out the window before offering Jena her tea. "It's a big galaxy out there. I just hope there's enough room for two of us."

"I'm sure there is, and if you need any help, you can count on me." Jena told her.

"You've helped a great deal already," replied Meru. "Perhaps more than you know."

Of Shards and Visions part I

Gamia III - The Caves

MD 6, just before 10:00

Authors: Lt Tyrlai Zade, Lt. (JG) Amata Zan, ENS Sera Williams, Security Crewman Gregory (played by Eilis Ross)

Tyrlai Zade wondered how closely the Reptilian was paying attention and how honed his senses were. Some species you just couldn't fool but it didn't mean you didn't try. She had wiggled very slowly but in the correct order to activate the devices she had woven into her undergarments for these types of days. She listened as he shambled around the room growling orders. She hadn't gleaned much, save the notion that there was still excitement above. Mistery Parker, Beauvoir or Ms sh'Kor must have gotten the word upwards to the ship. Once she had dealt with the treacherous Reptilian she would see if she could join them. Her arms were secured over her head, her body stretched out at an angle on an uncomfortable wooden surface. Her feet not quite reaching the floor. She'd been working on all of that while she waited.

"You can open your eyes Ms Zade, you aren't fooling anybody."

Honed senses, check, She made a mental note as she looked over at him. "What gave me away?"

"You mammals move too much, warm blooded metabolisms I expect."

"Lying on rocks in the sun for a couple million years probably does give you the genetic edge on keeping still."

"And how many millions of years have your people been working on being verbose and annoying?"

"That's just me." Tyrlai smiled. "Why aren't we to the threats part yet? There should be threats, if you didn't need something we would have been disposed of by now."

"I do need something." The Reptilian leaned in with what might have been a grin in his culture, there were way more teeth than Tyrlai was comfortable with. "I need your help."

"With what?" interjected Amata gruffly, restrained and laid out in the same manner as the Trill officer, but able to comfortably reach the floor, giving his back a wonderful stretch, "Or are you just being misleading for affect." The Security officer had been awake for some time now, watching the scene Zade had been listening to as subtly as he was able, his training and typical Starfleet uniform offering no way out of his restraints. He had to assume that the ship was aware that they had been taken captive, or at least assumed that they had been; though being a pessimist, if he was still aboard the Portland, his personal assumption would be that the two officers lost and unarmed in hostile territory were dead. He had to assume that the reptile had been aware of him the entire time, though it now seemed like their captor had been waiting for the lieutenant to be awake, perhaps such things were just another privilege of rank, "Though if I'm interrupting your banter, I apologize."

The Reptilian looked back and forth between the two Federation officers. "And I apologize if I have made hierarchical assumptions." He said looking at Amata and then back at Tyrlai. "Of your two uniforms, your looked, well, more decorous?"

"You have good taste, what did you need help with?" Tyrilai tried to steer the conversation back to his evil plans.

"My people tracked a distress call to this location. It had a unique temporal signature to that of a race of energy beings who had helped us in the past. I was dispatched in the hopes of rendering assistance if possible. Maintaining my cover required acts of violence I would otherwise abstain from. I detected the ablative layer in your garments and shot you instead of the others."

Tyrilai's eyes narrowed in odd disappointment, she had been looking forward to dispatching the Reptilian. She flexed her wrists and snapped her cuffs sliding down the table the half a foot to the floor. "Release my friend and lets see these readings of yours."

"Apparently my assumption that mammalians were frigidity was too simple. How did you manage it if I may ask?" The Reptilian inquires whilst tapping a wrist controller that released Amata.

"Eight hundred years of specialized wrist exercises." She said not willing to give up her secrets just yet.

Freed, Amata pushed himself off of the wooden backing and stretched his arms wide, rolling his shoulders back to loosen his stiff body, audible cracks being made. He tested the arm the reptile had shot as he listened to the being's story, mentally chewing on use of the term "temporal," as it could imply several different things, including one that would be very familiar to anyone who happen to be from a world whose deities had been scientifically proven to exist, and bothered to read the dumbed down versions of DS9 science department, "These energy beings, are they capable of forth dimensional movement with an electromagnetic wavelength of up to roughly 500 nm?"

Their pseudo-captor nodded with one of his thousand tooth smiles. "I see you have had some experience with them, good." He walked over to the display and tapped a few buttons. "I can run interference on their security measures from here. Their security setup is dubious of quality but has a clever fail-safe. It resets itself in waves every few seconds thus foiling most intrusive methods. However, if someone is actively monitoring the process he can interfere with the resets. I can keep them from seeing you," He pointed to a simple route on the display, "if you can get here and shut off the [researching proper techno-babble] matrix that should free the energy being trapped within. We need to act quickly, they mean to drain that energy for one of their ceremonies."

At the mention of a ceremony, Amata felt a strange a chill run through. As much as he tried to avoid actively participating in his culture's religion, he readily accepted that it was all based in fact, as the Prophets had performed several miraculous feats in his life time, up to and including the disappearance of a Dominion fleet. The thought of what one could do with, or need their energy for was beyond him. Giving Zade a concerned glance, he turned back to the reptile, "By chance, do you have a couple of spare disruptors you can give us, or do we have to improvise?"

The Reptilian thought for a moment and walked over to a drawer, keyed in a code and handed a phaser and a disruptor to Amata. "I will monitor from here. It is time." He said, stressing the last part.

The Final Conflict, Part II

Caves, Gamia III

MD6, 1015 hrs

Authors: Capt. Alenis Meru, Lt. Parker Hudson, Lt. Jason Beauvoir

[Inside Alenis' head]

Get out of my head! If she could shout, Alenis would have screamed it. But instead, like a prisoner in her own body, all she could do was think it.

It's my head now, replied another voice. It was a male voice, booming in its intensity, almost overpowering Alenis' own thoughts. *I'm in control now.*

Like hell you are! exclaimed Alenis, focusing hard, trying to overpower him. She saw the phaser pointed directly at Jason. *I won't let you kill him!*

The voice just laughed. *Meru, I am far more powerful than you. I am Kosst Amojan, the liberator of the Pah-wraiths. And I know all your darkest secrets. Bajor, New Algiers, even that little fling you have with your shrink. I thank you for taking such good care of it for me, but as prophesized, this is my body now. And there is nothing you can do to stop me.*

I'll fight you, replied Alenis. *I'll fight you every step of the way. I don't know how, but so long as my pagh resides in this body, I'll fight you.*

The alien voice snickered. *Meru, what is the old saying, it is better to be in the eye of a hurricane than in its path? Just think, you have a unique opportunity to have a front row seat to history in the making. The liberation of the pah-wraiths, the creation of a new Bajor--*

Go to hell.

The voice sighed. *That's not very nice, Meru. If you want to be like that, it's your choice. But you're powerless to stop me from liberating the Pah-wraiths and bringing on the final cleansing. And, you're powerless to stop me from killing your friend.*

No! Please...

Yes, Meru. With Alenis' body, Kosst Amojan lined up Jason in his sights. *You will watch as your crew dies by your own hand.*

No! No, no, no!

[In the caves]

"Any last words?" asked Alenis. Kosst Amojan was drawing it out, making it all the more painful for Alenis, a prisoner in her own body, forced to watch.

"Yes, actually. To be or not to be, that is the question. Whether it is nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune or to take arms against a sea of troubles and by a posing end them." Jason said beginning to recite Hamlet's famous soliloquy in an attempt to give Parker time to come to his aid. He thought that Henry V's St. Crispian's Day speech was more appropriate, but he couldn't remember the sixth line correctly, and he didn't want to die 'murdering' the Bard's words. He kept eye contact with the interloper, who had taken over Meru's body, the whole time.

Sitting next to Jason, Parker was watching the whole scene unravel of the Pah Wraith's re-entering the Universe from its hidden depths of scourge. Eternal darkness was now swelling to life and gaining it's first victim in Alenis. Her slender body writhing in flames of amber, red, white-hot almost beautiful in its surreal dance surrounding her.

"To die-," continued Alenis, surrounded in flame, her phaser still aimed at Jason's heart. "To sleep- No more;"

Jason and Parker's face both lighted by this scene. Hudson's eyebrow furrowed in pain now front row to see his crew mate about to die. His fitted engineers tool belt he had taken everywhere with him, planet and engineering otherwise reminded Parker of action. The weapon holster long empty from Gamians above. The Gamian officer behind not allowing any movement with the disruptor to his head, tight as the guard watched in stern silence to his budding lord.

Alenis laughed. "You know, Jason, she had feelings for you." Smirking, she moved her thumb directly over the fire button. "Of course, these feelings will only make this all the more painful for her. But, it must be done."

Muttering to his self Parker readied... Grinning slightly in pain and bruising across his face. Jason having had recited this beautiful verse...

Parker slipped his thumb on his belt. He had pressed a metallic button with a low... hum starting, warming up... then like a large camera flash!!! The Energy Dissipater was set off. Meant to be an electrical weapon used by the Jem Hadar in 2375, the device immediately worked by draining the energies of weapons, engines, fields, and its sources nearby.

Parker giving a relaxing 'on the beach smile' at Alenis. Her hand weapon first and then guards energies begin to crackle and dampen dissipatingly, a deep blue drowning force in the room all around. "Life is a b**** sometimes... So learn how to f*****!"

For a moment, the red glow in her eyes faded and Alenis was back in control. "Stop him," was all she could gasp before the presence of Kosst Amojan overwhelmed her once more. She tossed the useless weapon aside and snatched a large ceremonial dagger off of one of the Vedeks as the guards moved in closer. "That's not very nice," she replied brandishing the blade in front of her. She let out another evil laugh. "You know, being without a corporeal body for so long, I forgot the simple pleasures of sinking a blade into someone's flesh. It's so much more personal than energy weapons, wouldn't you agree?"

Seeing the dagger reminded Jason of Sarah's death. He'd been unable to stop that Romulan 'chienne' (French word for a female dog) from plunging that knife into her chest. The blood, there had been so much blood. For a brief moment he entertained the thought of letting the 'demon' take his life, it would end his pain after all and his atoms would return to the universe. No, he had too much to live for. "I'm afraid that's a pleasure, I going to have to deny you." Silently apologising to Meru, he dodged Kosst's knife thrust and then picked up a heavy metal candle stand and brought it down on 'his' dagger hand, fracturing the metacarpals and causing the dagger to fall harmlessly to the stone floor.

The creature occupying Alenis' body winced in pain, stumbling backwards. As he did so, flames shot up from the altar and out of the shard, surrounding Alenis and sending the Kai stumbling, her grip on the cliff face becoming more tenuous as she tried to reach for and recover the shard. The flames surrounded Alenis, coalescing around her hand. She screamed in pain as inside the flames, her hand was twisted and deformed, being regenerated into a powerful claw. The flames around her were beginning to effect a subtle transformation as the long-simmering rage of the long-imprisoned Pah-wraith finally met a physical outlet. Her skin was becoming paler, and with the red glowing eyes, she looked almost demonic.

The occupant of Alenis' body let out a war cry as he lunged at Jason with a flaming claw, swiping at

the candelabra that he had used on her as an improvised weapon. "You really think you can stop me?" shouted Alenis and she went in for another swipe. "You'll both feel my wrath! All those who banished me here will!"

"She's.... /It's unreal!/" Hudson barked as he leaned back slipping out his 4 inch knife at his side belt... A swift fluid knick behind him where he sat slicing into the back cloth and heel flesh of the Gamian male guard behind him. A cry was heard out as the guard struggled to stand and then dropping knelt to Jason and Parker's side.

"AaaaGGGGH!" The Gamian growled furrowing his face as his back heel bled out pulses of black blood bleeding to death.

Seeing their comrade stabbed, the remaining guards focused on the yellow-shirted engineer. Three of them surrounded Parker and drew their knives. A fourth swung a heavy chain over his head. Even a Vedek joined in, raising a heavy rock above his head, ready to bring it down on Parker if he came any closer.

"Don't kill him," shouted the creature possessing Alenis' body as she dodged a strike from Jason's candle stand. "I want Meru to watch him die!"

Jason watched the flame regenerate Meru's broken hand, with a mixture of scientific curiosity and visceral revulsion. Parker had saved him from death twice now, but it seemed it all might be for naught as they were both about to die at the hands of the being that possessed the captain's body. If he were a religious man, he'd probably be praying for deliverance, but since he was not, he just hoped someone would come to their aid presently.

The heat of the flames in front of him was causing Parker to sweat profusely. It was hot and uncomfortable and it was inhuman. This was not Alenis, and if it were Alenis she would much more direct and pointed in her fury. Parker didn't know what to do, he was not a religious Man per se' however he believed in a spiritual connection throughout the whole universe. The feeling, the energies were undeniable. The good and evil. Perhaps this is what they were dealing with now.

Among the heat and rocks crackling around the cave apertures the echoing sounds of the flames in the room upward. Parker could only think of one thing other than a prayer, it was the Chakra Sciences that his Mother had preached to him as a Child back on Akaria.

Shouting loud enough to over power the evil force, he thought the 'The Twelve Blessings' was worth the shot....

Blessed are they who work for peace
Blessed are the wise ones
Blessed are they who love
Blessed are the planetary ones
Blessed are the thanks givers...

Of Shards and Visions part II

Gamia III - The Caves

MD 6, just before 10:00

Authors: Lt Tyrlai Zade, Lt. (JG) Amata Zan, ENS Sera Williams, Security Crewman Gregory (played by Eilis Ross)

...the latticework filling the room erupted with light. A soundless brightness enfolded them leaving each alone surrounded by sharp glowing white, so intense it washed out the cave and the others around them...

Sera's vision was filled with light, it was bright. The light began to dissipate, leaving Sera a bit disoriented. She rubbed her eyes a bit to get her bearings. She was still in her Starfleet Uniform, but her surroundings had changed.

The light faded and was replaced by a very familiar setting. She was in the hospital room in San Francisco, one of the Starfleet Medical buildings to be precise, yet the color was a bit foggy. The last time she was in this room was when...

"Sera, we are now the same," her mother's weak voice said from behind her. Sera spun around to see her mother in the hospital bed. At that point, Sera had been a first year cadet at the Academy and her mother was just about to lose her battle with early onset Irumatic Syndrome. Sera's eyes welled up with tears as she looked at her mother and the fresh tulips her father had picked, yet thus was not her mother.

"I was bound to the cage as you were to your home. Now we are both free." Her mother's voice continued. Another flash of light, and Sera was aboard the ISS Portland, facing her mirror Tamara. The woman was wild-eyed and wielding a phaser rifle, and frightened the hell out of Sera. Sera heard the more aggressive and primal version of her own voice say, "Do we free ourselves? Do we take vengeance, as your species call it? You are still stuck in these moments. They still claw at you and hurt." The Prophet dropped the rifle, as another wave of light swallowed the scene.

The scene was replaced with that of a hanger filled with fighter-class ship's. Before her stood an Andorian woman who Sera recognized as Shusas. The woman eyed Sera before she said, "You still have fear. You are afraid of what has happened, and you are afraid of what is to come."

Sera's eyes became a bit watery, "Yes, I am. I have overcome, yet it still grips me." The Prophet took a step closer and put its hands on Sera's shoulders. "Do not be caged by your fear. Become truly free."

The light returned. Sera was standing back in San Francisco, but this time next to a shuttle before she departed to Deep Space 9 en route to the Portland. Her sister stood before her. "Remember, you are not to be caged. Please promise you'll remember." Before Sera could respond, the flash returned.

This time she was aboard Deep Space 9 with her hand in a bowl of sand peas.

...A soundless brightness enfolded them leaving each alone surrounded by sharp glowing white....

The flash of light filled Amata's vision and, in a way he would never be able to explain, everything else, till all he was aware of was a feeling of warmth in his core, comforting to the point of suffocation. When his senses returned, after a moment or an eternity, the Security officer was no longer in the caverns, but in the open air of the mining camp that had been his childhood, grey ground, grey walls, grey sky. His disruptor was gone, "We are the same."

Hearing the voice, Amata spun around, scanning in every direction with his eyes until he had come full circle, finding a young Bajoran girl with the same nose as him now stood atop a pile of discarded stone. Amata fell to his knees, "Amn..."

"We did not wish to be where we were," the voice spoke again and Amata's sister vanished without

effect, replaced by a hand on his shoulder and a presence towering behind him. Ready to violently defend himself if needed, Amata quickly spun around and stood to meet the new figure, coming face to face with a Cardassian guard, one he had known as a child, or perhaps everyone he had ever known. He flinched, backing away with such haste that he tripped and landed on his ass in the dirt, kicking up the stone dust as slip across the ground, memories of fists and boots trampling through his thoughts.

Within seconds, though it could have been days, Amata's back met with solid resistance. Looking upwards, his gaze met that of Commander Alenis, the Portland's captain, a woman he had never met, whose image he only knew from Federation newsnets, her expression blankly alien, "We are now free to be where we wish to, but you remain here." Collecting himself, the lieutenant stood to face the odd figure, grey stone was now replaced by the vastness of space, "You choose to remain in the most painful parts of your limited, linear existence."

As the voice finished, a hand had instantly been placed on his left ear, his pagh, and the camp was replaced by the verdant green of an M-class world he had never seen, yet knew was New Bajor. "Fear, aggression, shame," Alenis was gone, and the being in front of him was now in the form of a Jem'Hadar soldier, "Hate." Amata looked the horned creature in the eye, having to tilt his upward, the Jem'Hadar being a head taller than him, just like he remembered.

"Yes, hate," admitted the Bajoran, finally comprehending what was happening, "I hated all of them, I still do. I... they slaughtered my sister, my friends, their colony. I had so little, and they took it away because they were ordered, without a second of hesitation. "

"Strength," like a light changing colour, the Prophet became Amata, almost twenty years younger and dressed in surface operations black, a crewman's pip on its false collar. It offered its older double a type 3 phaser rifle but Amata made no move to accept it.

"No, I was weak. I had my chance to fight them, to kill them, but when I finally had one down my sights I couldn't do it."

The Prophet dropped the weapon, which vanished before it touched the green grass beneath them, it grabbed Amata's hand and balled into a fist, "Compassion. Strength, compassion, duty, the Kosst Amojan does not possess these traits."

Before Amata could begin to respond to what the Prophet had said, or its use of the forbidden name, it vanished along with the green, replaced by the familiar black of space. Searching the expanse, Amata found he now stood high above New Bajor. The Prophet remained in front of him, silhouetted by the planet, but had once again taken the form of Alenis Meru, her eyes now glowing red, "The exiled one must not be allowed to go where it wishes, the traveler must be saved."

Below, New Bajor began to burn.

...so intense it washed out the cave and the others around them...

As a blinding light flashed across Gregory's eyes, he suddenly found himself back on earth.

"Hold your arms straight and focus Cadet! I said FOCUS!"

Gregory's arms shook with the pressure as fear flooded his body. He had to do this...he couldn't let them down.

"Stop Gregory...stop and listen...." As the world around him faded, the big burly instructors lips could be seen moving but there was no volume. "Listen to all that's around you..."

As Gregory's arms continued to shake, he begun to hear other voices; one in particular stood out.

"Catch me if you can!" She turned her head to look over her shoulder, he eyes glittering with amusement as she ran faster. "I was always able to out run and out gun you bucko."

As the security officers arms continued to tremble, he softly breathed out the single word no.

Again the imagines around him shifted and changed. This time he stood in a hospital corridor, watching the Doctors run and talk over themselves. "She's starting to flat line!"

He remembered the words and the feeling of hopelessness. They couldn't let her die...it wasn't allowed to happen.

"You couldn't protect her then because you didn't know how..."

Gregory recognized the voice before the person walked into his vision. Instructor McGrath...feared among all Starfleet Cadets as he wasn't afraid to belittle and terrorize those who fell under him in their weapons training.

"Why did you bring me back here...isn't it enough that I spend every day of my life remembering....I wasn't good enough then, I'll never be good enough."

As the instructor moved to his side, he placed one hand on the officers shoulder. "You only believe your not good enough...you know better then that. The medals you long ago scrapped...the broken academy records....It's buried inside of you, you just need to let it be unlocked."

As Gregory watched on as the Doctors leaned over the transporter bed, he watched as they attached pads to the young woman's chest before someone in the background activated the electric shock to try restart her heart. "It's not working we are going to loose her!"

Feeling the tears dampen his cheeks, still the officer refused to look away, "None of it matters, none of it was enough to save her."

As the hand on his shoulder tightened, Gregory heard the familiar voice again, "You know deep inside that nothing would have changed what happened. Her life was destined to end that day...no matter what course of action you took."

Gregory watched as the Doctors fell silent, looking at each other in a wordless communication as the urgency of the situation slowly slipped away. "She didn't have to die....I promised her I wouldn't let it happen...."

As the scean shifted and faded once more, a second voice echoed inside of his mind, faceless but indisputable who it was, "You know that I wouldn't ever blame you....You know Gregory that you meant more to me than that..."

...a blinding flash seemed to wash away the room, in a moment and then lifted as if floating up and away...

Tyrlai stood blinking as the cave returned. She knew it had been there around them the whole time

but for that moment it had seemed to vanish. They stood face to face with each other like sides of a box, each one blinking as if having trouble focusing on the cave floor again. Tyrlai's thoughts spun, tactics were something she had always been pretty good at and she developed her plan quickly and set it in motion before the others could start to compare notes. She snapped out of the blinking and set her eyes to a combination of mischief and accusation. "You all had visions, didn't you! Why don't I ever get a vision? Bloody prophet favouritism! Grab the transport buffers," Tyrlai turned and looked to the northwest and about thirty degrees up, "we're late to help the others."

Sera nodded her agreement to Tyrlai. She was still a bit emotional from her vision experience, which left her in no condition to argue the finer points of a proper mission plan. On instinct, Sera grabbed as many transport buffers as she could carry, then ran after Tyrlai. Sera considered herself in good condition, a daily exercise regimen and a days spent crawling through Jeffrey's Tubes and climbing ladders did their work to keep her in shape. However, the buffers in her arms kept her from completely catching up to Tyrlai, though she kept herself close enough to yell. Somewhere in the back of her mind, Sera thought about how ridiculous she must look running with those transport buffers.

The fog of his vision clearing, Amata shook his head and watched the lieutenant and ensign run ahead, sighing as he realized what was happening. He turned to Gregory and adjusted his disruptor so that the stock was snugly against his bicep, "Watch your head, last time Zade ran ahead, I got shot." He caught up to the group in seconds.

Blinking away the tears that still distorted his vision, Gregory refused to let his boss see him tremble. Gripping his phaser harder, he grabbed what he could with his free hand and arm and moved to follow their engineer.

Tyrlai led the short string of fleters through a quick series of turns, two short climbs and one more turn, into a cave with burning lights a lava pool and the CO of the Portland, cackling at her crewmen with fiery eyes. Tyrlai raised her right fist and motioned to the others to circled the edge and set up the buffers. She paused for a moment and darted forward.

The Final Conflict, Part III

Caves, Gamia III

MD6, 1015 hrs

Authors: Capt. Alenis Meru, Lt. Cmdr. Timothy Rouse, Lt. Tyrlai Zade, Lt. Parker Hudson, Lt. Jason Beauvoir

Ignoring the prayers, the creature possessing Alenis pressed home his attack. With a swipe of the claw, 'Alenis' slashed at the candle-holder that Jason was using to defend himself with, slicing it clean in half. Taking advantage of the opportunity, she lunged at his throat with her other hand. Grabbing him by the neck, she held him aloft with seemingly superhuman strength. "Say goodnight to your friend, Meru," uttered the creature as his victim struggled to breathe.

The Kai shrieked in triumph, getting back to her knees, the final tolic shard clenched in her hand. She opened her mouth to utter the final phrases that would completely free her dark master from the chains of the cave when she was enfolded in a sudden violet light. The shard fell from her grasp as she dropped unconscious and clattered back towards the pit. It bounced just over the edge and into the waiting hand of a crouched Tyrlai Zade, who snatched it from probable oblivion.

She used hand signals to motion the others around the other side, having a sneaking suspicion that what was about to happen would involve the collapse of a large section of the caves. Transport

buffers would likely be their best chance to escape. She flipped settings on her phaser and set it to the highest yield it had. She had seven hundred and ninety nine years of guile and tricks and had picked some of the very best ones. She steeled herself and rose walking towards the flaming Alenis creature.

She borrowed the commanding tones of Cedria, Foqia's stage presence, Adrox's magnetism and Koval's uncanny ability to strike terror into the hearts of children and when she spoke, focused all of that through what Tyrlai almost always kept suppressed; keen and vitriolic rage. When she spoke it was all of her at once and it echoed through the hall matching the pah wraiths cackling glee with a clear and angrily sharp commanding snarl. "Put him down and try someone your own age."

"Oh, another victim," replied 'Alenis' as she threw Jason to the ground, hard. Perhaps it would be more painful for Meru to save him for the end, figured the pah wraith. "I'm going to enjoy killing you," she added, stepping towards Tyrlai with her claw brandished.

Inside, Meru felt some relief. It's all over now, she said to Kosst Amojan, punctuating her thoughts with an intense rage. *Tyrlai has the shard, and if I know one thing about her, it's that she's got a plan to deal with you. She'll stop you, right here and right now.*

Such false bravado, replied the voice smugly. *This Tyrlai will be just one more victim, one more mere mortal in my path. Besides,* reasoned the pah wraith, *this is my body now. She can't do anything to me without harming you as well.*

I'd rather die than let you leave this cave!

Such spirit, mused Kosst. *A shame, really.* With that, the pah wraith lunged towards Tyrlai with a flaming claw. Tyrlai turned and held up the hand with the shard, blocking the claw. The shard glowed in a soft burst of white light as it was struck with the flame. The blow bounced off the raised arm of the physically far weaker Tyrlai harmlessly.

The corner of her lip curled in the tiniest smirk, which vanished almost immediately. It confirmed one suspicion and left her with precious few options. Options she had never really worked for her, trust and faith. "Alenis, I don't have a lot of options here. I need you to fight him. Throw him out." The claw of the pah wraith slashed back, the agile Trill blocked it again.

Alenis didn't know what to do. Try as she might, she couldn't overwhelm the other presence in her head. She thought back to when she was a child, when her mother would pray with her before going to bed. A simple prayer, calling on the prophets for favour and protection. Repeating it over and over, she focused as hard as she could.

Jia kasha tren tolaren, lapor ilani kor. Enna tana talinok. Jia kasha treyna tolaren, lapor ilani kors, enna jia kasha tren.

Jia kasha tren tolaren, lapor ilani kor. Enna tana talinok. Jia kasha treyna tolaren, lapor ilani kors, enna jia kasha tren.

Jia kasha tren--

SHUT UP!!!! The other voice in her head was irate. *I won't have you praying to those false gods!*

What are you going to do about it? countered Alenis. Finally, she knew she had something. If she could distract him enough, she might be able to create an opening for Tyrlai.

Jia kasha tren tolaren, lapor ilani kor. Enna tana talinok. Jia kasha treyna tolaren, lapor ilani kors,

enna jia kasha tren.

Jia kasha tren tolaren, lapor ilani kor...

Jason hit the ground hard and briefly lost consciousness. He could feel something warm and wet running down his cheek, but he didn't feel any pain. Blackness again. A flash of purple. Blackness. Meru in flames. Shadows. Heat. Then words that part of his mind recognised as a Bajoran prayer. Blackness.

Tyrlai danced backwards blocking and shifting, stepping catlike in a slow circle as the wraith struck again and again. She blocked a flurry of blows as the strange fight unfolded, the wraith attacking again and again with a single flaming claw, Tyrlai blocking with one hand clenched tightly around the shard. "Please Alenis, this is bad, and I don't want to always be the bad one,..." She pleaded but the fight seemed to be tiring Alenis at the ever increasing benefit of the pah wraith whose attacks seemed to grow stronger and stronger as the fight continued.

Having finally made his way to the others in the cave Tim was staring at the fight in front of him open-eyed. Glancing around him the others were either pinned down by one of the assailant or lying on the ground unconscious. He tried to determine what was going on, why the Captain and the second officer were fighting. Because of the darkness of the cave no one had spotted him yet. Something he wanted to use to his benefit. When hearing Zade's comment he took a wild guess and came forward, shooting the guards in surprise, before they had a chance to respond.

Seeing Tim's arrival was enough to bolster Alenis's spirits. As the pah wraith locked eyes with him, he was momentarily overwhelmed by Alenis' spirit. "Tim," gasped Alenis, struggling against the pah wraith, her eyes full of pain. She knew that even if she could take control, with him present, it would be only temporary. And that Kosst Amojan needed to be stopped here and now. "Please... stop him... kill me."

"What?!?" he shouted. There had to be another way. He looked at Zade in the hope she had the answer. Could he shoot the Captain? He wondered. If there was no other option. He'd shot her before. "What if we stun her?"

"Won't... work..." sputtered Alenis before her eyes flashed red again. "Cleanse the unbelievers!" she shouted, brandishing her claw at Tyrlai, the pah-wraith back in control.

Sitting upright watching the final conflict ensue, his body was drained of water and delirious as much as Jason nearest him. Parker was dirt covered and fully heated.

Tyrlai blocked, spun and blocked again. She was starting to feel some of the heat, her own connection to the shattered orb she was trying was not as strong as if she had been Bajoran. She ducked as the claw slashed overhead and then flipped back as it spun back. The wraith curled Alenis' features unto a snarl. "Its only a matter of time before you falter, dancing girl."

Tyrlai's brow narrowed, she had always been a clever girl, and with eight centuries of knowledge to draw on she could often spin circles around those she met. But there was nothing in the last eight hundred years about pah wraiths. Nothing on how to free a compelled mind from something so strong. She blocked and stumbled from the splash of burning flame. Blinking and shifting her feet for the second it took the wraith to spin and catch her in the midsection, knocking her up and back. She hit the stone floor with a sharp yelp and heard the shard clatter away.

Alenis-Wraith's eyes lit up with sadistic glee and it darted for the treasure. Grabbing it with the burning claw. It flared with white light and the creature instantly dropped it staggering back. Tyrlai

caught it as she got back to her knees and shouted. "Last chance, let her go!!"

The Wraith howled but the pain gave it more rage and rage made it stronger. "OR WHAT!? What will you do stubborn little child!"

The wraith charged and Tyrlai drew the disruptor, aiming with both hands, the shard tight against the weapon, and fired. A violet beam slammed into Alenis and knocked her back, dropping lifelessly to the floor. The insubstantial wraith still charging forward. Tyrlai was enshrouded in flame for a moment, she concentrated on an old meditative symbol she had learned on Trill. It closed the mind to intrusion, it had worked for her once before, on the USS Hood. After a few moments of kneeling in the flames the Wraith was sucked back into the walls of its ancient prison.

Tyrlai let the disruptor drop but couldn't quite stand. She just stared at the lifeless form of the co laying in front of her.

Tim turned his head as the blast hit Meru. He couldn't see his friend die. For seconds he didn't move then he did and knelt by her body. Even though he knew that there was no way she could have survived this he preessed his fingers to her neck to feel for a heartbeat. Seconds ticked by as he desperately prayed for the signal that confirmed his friend hadn't died. But that never came.

He dropped his head and let out a deep breath before stating the obvious. "She's dead."

Discussing Medical Complications

U.S.S. Portland, Sickbay

MD6, Morning

Authors: Lt (JG) Brad Silverton, Lt.(JG) Delaineey Carlisle

Delaineey hit the chime outside Brad's office, and as she waited to be allowed entry, she considered all that she wanted to talk to him about. She was still sorting through reports detailing the past and the recent events aboard, but already she knew the crew had been through quite a lot. With Arvel still in recovery, the bulk of the crew's mental health needs had become her responsibility, and she thought it was prudent to reach out to the Portland's CMO to get his take on the crew's needs.

Besides, she also needed her physical, and the idea of taking care of two birds with one stone, so to speak, appealed to her.

Brad hollered out, "Come in". He was sitting in his office located in the center of sickbay. His office had finally been finished with the large wall glass panel having been installed last Tuesday. "Ah Dr. Carlisle. Your timing is perfect. I was going to come by your office later today to discuss a number of matters. Please sit down. The replicators are working now. Can I get you anything?"

Delaineey entered as directed and took a brief look around the office before she sat down. "No, but thank you, sir. It's a pleasure to meet you, and it's nice to see we both had a similar discussion in mind."

"As you know Counselor Darze is hurt and recovering. He should only be out for a couple of days tops. His wound wasn't that bad. The problem comes in from the WHO wounded him and WHY. I'm not sure if you've heard as we've tried keeping it under wraps but I'm not sure how successful we've been..."

Carlisle had heard rumblings certainly, but she wasn't sure what she heard made any sense. Perhaps

in this case it was better to let the CMO think she was ignorant to the events rather than open her mouth and remove all doubt. Delainey frowned. "I am concerned and was actually going to ask if you didn't bring it up. Certainly, if a member of the crew isn't safe, I'd like to know if it's one of our people that's put him in danger."

"Lieutenant Jason Beauvoir recently experienced Pon Farr. His physical needs have been taken care of and he is safe and back under his own control. There is however the matter though of his psychological needs. How familiar are you with Pon Farr?"

"I know as much as any Starfleet trained doctor does about the condition," Delainey began. "With the exception of a few Vulcans who had a prolonged reaction that I encountered during my residency, I don't know a lot. As you know, Vulcans are extremely private about the condition, but it's not unusual for a Vulcan serving in Starfleet to seek medical attention for the condition," Carlisle added.

Brad nodded. "During Pon Farr, a Vulcan will select a mate. One highly respected and often well known to them. Once selected they seem to tune out all other potential mates." Brad shifted forward a bit and spoke slightly quieter even though they were alone. "Jason chose the Captain. To get around this we altered the EMH to look like the Captain, who took care of his... condition in the holodeck. Again, physically he is fine and the real Captain has been on the planet for most of the time so I don't even know if they have talked since the event."

"That's awkward..." Delainey allowed, her professional instincts kicking in, already thinking of how she might help in the aftermath. "It would seem the worst is over, however."

Brad bit his lower lip and then spoke. "Well it gets a bit more complicated. Its probably a good thing Counselor Darze is recuperating. He went down to talk to Lt Beauvoir. They exchanged some words before the Lt escaped and attacked Arvel." Brad paused for a moment to consider if he should pass on that Arvel and Alenis had a romantic history and the words exchanged were no doubt one of jealousy. No, it wasn't his place to share that and things were complicated enough as it was.

"I don't follow. Why would he attack the Counselor? There has to be more," Delainey added.

Brad closed his eyes with a slight wince and continued trying to deflect the question. "I have strong reason to believe that the hologram version of the Captain is now fully sentient having rights along with it. She... it knows its an A.I. but that she has just as much right to be anywhere on the ship as the Captain."

Carlisle frowned. She hadn't seen that coming. "How does a hologram suddenly gain sentience? That doesn't make sense."

"We weren't really sure if Jason is enough Vulcan to have telepathic or empathic powers so to get around that we not only made the EMH look like the Captain but be her too. We copied her brainwaves, her personality. It seemed like when we started it would just be the EMH with a little bit of the Captain but it turned into something more. Something we are now responsible for."

That made a little more sense to Delainey. After all, Pon Farr wasn't just about sex and reproduction, but also the creation of a mental bond between mates. A suitable partner would have to be capable of such a mental connection, and a hologram who only looked and sounded like the Captain wasn't going to cut it. After absorbing all of that, the emotional significance of Silverton's last line hit her. They were now responsible for a cognitively and emotionally sophisticated, possibly sentient version of the Captain, who had been created for the sole purpose of being used sexually, and had fulfilled

that use. What that experience been like for "her?" How was "she" feeling now? "Including creating her for the sole purpose of being someone's sex slave," Delainey added quietly.

Brad continued quietly, "Exactly." Then he spoke up a bit more professionally and directly. "The hologram and I talked before the event. I took her mental state as knowing she was going through with it to save one of her crew. Not the Captain, the other her, but it was HER crew she was saving. Afterwards... I don't think the real Captain and the hologram version have talked. Everything could be fine or... there could be massive resentment for 'taking one for the team'."

Brad lost the professional tone in his but kept it civil, "Hell we never even asked her what her thoughts were on it. We just thought we were making a computer program and since the original Captain went along with the idea I thought that was good enough. I never thought she would turn sentient. How could I?"

"There's no way you could have known," Delainey reassured him. "The only thing we can do now is make sure they're both cared for. The situation is complicated but a little compassion goes a long way."

Follow Up Exam

U.S.S. Portland, Sickbay

MD6, Morning

Authors: Lt (JG) Brad Silverton, Coln Jena (played by Jason Beauvoir)

As she was making her way back to her quarters, Jena received a message from Dr. Silverton asking her to visit him as soon as she had a spare moment. Thinking it best to get it over with sooner rather than latter, she made her way to the Sickbay.

Walking though the doors she spotted a nurse. She was a female Boslic with long purple hair. "Is Dr. Silverton in?" Jena asked.

"Yes, he's in his office." the Nurse replied in a thick Boslic accent.

"Thank you." The girl replied.

Arriving at the CMO's office, she knocked on the transparent aluminium window to get the man's attention.

Brad raised his eyes up from the viewscreen and then upon noticing who it was, smiled and tilted his head fully up to greet her. "Ah Jena good. Come in please and have a seat. How are you doing?"

"Can't complain." Jena said as she entered the office and took a seat. "How about you, Doc?"

"Not too bad actually now that things are calming down. Your father is doing well and back to his normal self. Counselor Darze and the ambassador are stable and recovering. The mission on the planet seems a bit behind schedule but I haven't heard anything much so I presume its your standard dry diplomacy mission. I hear though you've had some involvement in that?"

"I'm glad to hear the Counselor and the ambassador are doing well and I'm my father will too, I think my feels responsible for Darze's injuries." Jena replied. "As for my run as ambassador, it was more to do with the Gamians' strict adherence to the ancient Bajoran caste system, than any diplomatic ability on my part."

Brad smiled and replied, "And you don't consider that diplomatic ability? Its all about understanding who is on the other side of the negotiating table. Their motivations and needs and how to communicate with them. Sounds like you were just fine."

"I guess." Jena said with a smile. "So, how's your social life, Doc?"

"As good as can be as of late I suppose what with all the medical issues going on. It's kept me from what limited social life I can have. Which actually brings me to why I asked to stop by so you could help me with that. Do you remember Doctor Daryl Huxergard?"

Jena thought for a moment. "Doctor Huxergard, wasn't he the one who's work you used as a basis for the cure you gave me and yourself?"

Brad nodded to Jena's words. "That's right. I've been in correspondence with him. He left Tesderal IV a few years ago but had been meaning to get back to his research. He was overjoyed at my notes on our treatment and was had a slew of questions. Most of which I don't have answers to. I'd like to do an extensive follow up exam of both of us for further research." Brad smirked and chuckled as he finished. "Long distance relationships for a social life aren't my thing but I'll take what I can get."

"Exam away, Who am I to stand in the way of love?" Jena said with a smile.

"Cute," Brad said with a snarky smile back. "HE isn't my type. I'm more of a SHE type of guy." He stands up and holds his hand out pointing to the doorway offering her to lead the way. "Well let's get started shall we?"

"I'm ready, when you are, Doc, as long as your hands aren't cold." Jena replied cheekily.

Brad followed Jenna into the main room of Sickbay and he motioned her over to the main biobed in the center of the room. "I'll need the advanced scanners of the emergency biobed for this exam. It'll take some time a couple hours I'd estimate. I actually have 4 different scans to do." Brad was focused in on making adjustments to the biobed's scanners.

Jena climbed up on to the biobed. Lying on her side with her hand holding up her head, she said. "Alright Mr DeMille, I'm ready for my close up."

"Cute". Brad put the finishing touches on the biobed but kept tinkering a little bit. "So how do you like life aboard a Starship?"

"I'm a Starfleet brat, so I've spent time aboard starships before and I feel more at home on ships, than on any planet."

"My parents were archaeologists. So I was stuck at home on Earth. My first taste of Starship life was my first assignment so you have more experience with that than I do."

"Small world," Jena said. "Jason's mother, or perhaps I should say my grandmother, was an archaeology and anthropology officer, before she was given command." The teenager smiled. "So, did you 'inherit' any of your parents' interest in old dead things?"

"Of a sorts I suppose.... my parents were working on a dig site. They opened up a tomb that had a dormant plague in it. The damp air woke it up and killed them both and most of their team." Brad was nodding his head walking through the events in his mind. "I had been adrift in life without real

direction. At that point I vowed to find cures for similar diseases."

"I'm sorry, I didn't know." Jena said sympathy evident in her words. "I know how rough losing those you love can be." She added as she remembered Peter and her own mother.

"That's quite alright. As you said you didn't know and it's a perfectly reasonable question. I've found my parents' death to be a strength of a sort. I mean obviously I would still want them alive, I loved them dearly. But it gave me drive."

Brad paused for a moment then began speaking again. "A month before they died we had another fight. A big one with words and names exchanged. They didn't approve of the woman I was dating. She had no real future and I hadn't put much thought into my own and they thought she was holding me back. Well then my parents up and died on me before we could make up from our fight. I went through a lot of soul searching and vowed not to let others go through what I went through. To go through having their loved ones taken away because of some unknown uncured disease. Which incidentally is what saved us. That drive pushes me to keep up on research and communication with other researchers including Doctor Huxergard."

"You mentioned you know about losing loved ones? Your mother and why you came to the Portland?"

"About a month before her death, my mother was assigned to the USS Temperance, which was later reported lost with all hands. I was unable to go with her because it was a Defiant class and had no place for families." Jena explained. "When I close my eyes, I can still see her dressed in her uniform waving good bye."

"One more thing we have in common then. Not having a 'good-bye' for them. Here on the Portland though, you seemed to have settled in quickly. You have your dad, Lieutenant Zade, and the Captain trusts you to be going on missions. Your Starfleet career is off to a smashing start." Brad looked over at the monitors and made several adjustments keeping his focus on the instruments.

Jena smiled. "I count you among my friends here too, Doc."

Brad returned the smile. "As do I to you Jena." Brad looked back at the monitor panel, made a few adjustments then grabbed a hand held scanner and started scanning himself. The warm friendly look on his face shifted to an inquisitive one.

"Problem?" She asked noticing his change of expression.

"I'm not quite sure yet. More of an oddity more than anything." Brad finished scanning then nodded. "Well it would appear we have some lasting side effects. Well side effect has a negative connotation which has yet to be determined. It looks like between the radiation we both were exposed to plus with my little cocktail of meds to save us, we've had our tissues altered."

"Which tissues and altered in what way?" She asked. "Perhaps I can help with the analysis, humanoid biology is my best subject."

"Skin, muscle, some of the primary organs. Kind of all over the place really. Its every area that we previously had radiation exposure to. Its not scarring. That would be expected."

Jena raised a quizzical eye brow as she examined the results. Brad was correct, the results were unexpected and definitely required further study. "Has this 'cocktail' of yours had any effect on our

DNA?" She asked after a while.

Brad tilted the viewscreen so she could get a better view. "Actually now that you mention it, it has. Very slightly but as I'm sure you are aware, that could range from meaningless to catastrophic. Since all the scans up till now that I ran during our exposure to the radiation and follow ups afterwards all came up negative I don't think we have much to immediately worry about."

"I'll remind you you said that in the event that I sprout an extra head or something." Jena joked. "Now, I recommend we create some computer models and then take some tissue samples and test them by simulating conditions the exposure to radiation we experienced." She added seriously.

Brad nodded to the plan. "That's a good idea. Its probably linked to the drug..." He paused for a half a second. "Ok so how does a fourteen year old become so interested and knowledgeable about biology?"

"A girl's got to have a hobby." Jena said and gave him a wink. "I have a great interest in how things work, and it's easier to read PADDs than it is to play soccer on long shuttle trips."

"Well in that case, and seeing as how we are both going to be here for awhile for further scans and results; what say we get to work on those experiments."

Meeting "Alenis"

Captain's Office

MD6, morning

Authors: Capt. Alenis Meru and Lt. (JG) Delainey Carlisle

Having checked in with the CMO, Delainey debated whether she should try to meet with the Captain. Normally, such a meeting would be against protocol because the CO was not her direct superior. However, one reality of being a counselor was there was no substitute for assessing the morale of the crew and its command team. Sure, she could talk to a number of other officers and read their reports, but getting a feel for morale and the overall mental health of the crew was not something she could do just by reading a few standard instruments. Some things required a more hands-on approach.

Carlisle knew she was taking a risk by giving into her curiosity this way, but she was genuinely interested in seeing her new commanding officer's reaction. She knew if she were aboard her old ship, her previous commanding officer would not appreciate the violation of protocol, but if she were completely honest, he didn't appreciate personal visits from counselors, period. Not many did, in fact.

The blonde female in teal didn't bother to check with the computer to locate the Captain, instead taking the opportunity to get a feel for the bridge en route. She smiled politely to those who met her gaze, but to the bridge crew's credit, most of them paid her no attention and strictly went about their business.

Carlisle hit the chime outside the office and exhaled inwardly. Here goes nothing.

"Come in," called out the occupant of the office. It was her second or third visitor since arriving; she had quite the enlightening chat just a few minutes before with Coln Jena and was still digesting some of her insights, with the help of Ko-ko. She had briefly considered telling whoever it was to go away and leave her alone, but that wouldn't have been the most polite thing to do. And it could have

consequences for her biological counterpart. So, returning Ko-ko to his favourite perch on top of her - or the other Meru's - monitor, she tried to put on a welcoming face.

The doors hissed open upon the Captain's command and Delainey entered as directed. She offered a polite smile and couldn't help but notice how attractive the other woman was as she offered, "Dr. Delainey Carlisle, Captain. Forgive me for the intrusion, but given what happened to my immediate supervisor, I thought it wise to introduce myself and get a sense of the crew's needs currently from you directly."

"I'm not the captain," muttered the hologram, placing her hand on her forehead. She closed her eyes for a moment and nodded slightly in the negative. She had no idea how she would explain this whole situation to the counselor. It was just so absurd on the face of it. "It's a long story, but..."

Trailing off, Meru's eyes caught those of the counselor. If they could talk, her dark, expressive eyes would have told the whole story; a story of confusion, loss, and loneliness. She tried to force out a weak smile, but it barely came through.

Inwardly, Delainey flinched. Of course this wasn't the Captain. Dr. Silverton had told her as much, but Carlisle didn't expect to meet the holo-Alenis here in the Ready Room. It didn't compute the organic Alenis was still on the planet's surface. Carlisle was about to say she knew what had happened already but was taken off-guard to find her here, and then she saw the pain in her eyes, and she decided instantly it was not the way to go. "That's ok," she offered. "It's a pleasure to meet you. I'm new here, so I'd appreciate the chance to talk with someone who knows what things are like around here."

"Well," started the hologram, thinking for a moment. While she wasn't the real captain, she had as much knowledge of the state of the crew as her. At least, up to the point at which she was created. "It has been a little rough lately. We were attacked by Orion pirates, and Lieutenant Beauvoir nearly lost his daughter. Our Chief Intelligence Officer was killed, no doubt by the Orion syndicate, in a botched assassination attempt. And then we get to me..." The hologram took a deep breath. "Has our Chief Medical Officer briefed you on the situation yet?"

Delainey nodded, unusually quiet for a moment. She'd interacted with holograms before, but it had been a while, and she'd forgotten how realistic they appeared. Even though she'd yet to meet the actual Captain, Carlisle had a hard time keeping in mind she was still dealing with a hologram, no matter how sophisticated. She didn't yet have a sense of this one's sentience, but already she could understand anyone's reluctance to see her deleted. The pain in her eyes that she had been trying to hide certainly pulled on Carlisle's real heartstrings.

"He has. I must admit, I'm still trying to wrap my head around how you came to be, let alone what should happen next." She paused, then added, "Here's what I do know, however. I know you didn't ask for any of this, and no matter the origin of your thoughts and feelings, I'm guessing at least some of them are scary and perhaps even hurtful. I don't know what it's like to be you, but I do know what it's like to feel certain feelings at certain times, and no one deserves to handle them alone."

Delainey couldn't imagine what it would be like to exist with the knowledge she had been created to be someone's sex toy. Admittedly, the idea that the hologram was now sentient was hard to believe, but if it were true, she was looking at a sentient being who'd been forced to engage in sexual activity without 'her' consent. Even as her brain attempted to reject the very notion for its ridiculousness, Carlisle couldn't deny the realistic face with the realistic expressions in front of her. Who was she to say the emotions she was witnessing weren't real? Even if this 'Alenis' had agreed to assist Jason, knowing what they knew about her possible sentience, could that be considered true consent? What

if she had decided to go along with her programming to avoid being deleted? If Delainey had been talking to any other sentient being redacted under those circumstances, she would consider it rape by coercion. Is that what she was looking at here? Carlisle didn't honestly know.

"Thank you." Exasperated, the hologram held her head. "You know, I don't usually like talking to counselors, but I suppose there's a time for everything." As she spoke, she reached up on top of her monitor to pet Ko-ko, taking a small amount of solace in her calming coos. "I guess I'm still coming to terms with all of this. I haven't figured out who I am or what's going to happen to me. I mean, it's not like there can be two Alenis Merus. So, who does that leave me?" She tried to offer Delainey a faint smile, but underneath her strong feelings of discomfort were showing. "Never mind how other people will react. I mean, what is Arv-- I mean, my partner, going to say when he finds out that there are two of us?"

Delainey listened quietly and offered, "I think when anyone is confronted with a really difficult and confusing problem, it's natural to experience racing thoughts like that. That said, big problems are best managed by taking them one step at a time. The good news is, you're not as alone as you might think at first."

"That's... an interesting way of looking at it," mused the hologram. "I think I just need some time to come to terms with this. I don't even really know who I am anymore, never mind," she shuddered slightly at the thought, "why I even exist."

Carlisle wondered if she should mention she knew about Alenis' relationship with Arvel, but she decided against it for the moment. Right now, the other woman's relationship status was the least of her worries. For now, the counselor decided it was best to focus on the being in front of her. "How might I or anyone else reassure you that you'll have that time? What I mean is, is there something or someone that's giving you the impression you won't have the opportunity or the assistance you need to come to terms with all of this?"

"Well, I know if I were the captain -- which I kind of am, in a way -- I wouldn't want some holographic copy of me walking around," replied Alenis, her eyes wandering away from the counselor and towards Ko-ko, who was pecking at her monitor again. The hologram let out a hint of a smile at the scene. Ko-ko didn't have to worry about holograms or Tolic shards or all the things that she had to worry about as a Starfleet captain, and was perfectly content to just perch herself somewhere and start pecking at things. "I'd probably hunt down whatever console I was stored on and blast it with a phaser, just to make sure I was deleted."

Delainey couldn't help but wonder if that was an indirect reference to what Meru wanted for herself. If holograms could be sentient, couldn't they also be suicidal? Carlisle decided to tread lightly, this wasn't a formal counseling session per se. "Hologram or no, I do know no one can control another's thoughts and feelings. If you don't want a copy of your self running around in the universe, then I guess that's just another indication we have to help you find your uniqueness," Carlisle offered with a smile.

Alenis smiled back. "I suppose I could talk to one of the engineers about making some adjustments to my holo-matrix. I've always wondered what it would be like to be a redhead..."

The Final Conflict, Part IV

MD6, 1015 hrs

Authors: Capt. Alenis Meru, Lt. Cmdr. Timothy Rouse, Lt. Trylai Zade, Lt. Parker Hudson, Lt. JG Amata Zan, Lt. Jason Beauvoir, Ensign Gregory Rathcliffe (played by Eilis Ross), NPCs Ellen

Washington, Maria Hill, and Coln Jena

Caves - Gamia III

While the others were arriving Tim moved his hand over Meru's eyes and closed them. He stood up and looked at the people around him, each and everyone clearly shocked and sad. He had a hard time speaking. He looked up at Zade and walked to her, placing a hand on her shoulder. "You did what you had to do." He said to her softly, before speaking to the team. "We need to get back to the ship, with the Captain." he said. "I ask you to put your feelings aside for a slight moment, no matter how hard it is. We just lost our Captain, our mentor and friend. We need to show our respects and make sure the Captain didn't die for no reason." He wasn't good at speaching or motivating, but he hoped they all understood what he was trying to say. "We need to get medical down here for the lieutenants and there need to be transport enhancers set up in this cave to transport the Captain to the Portland.

Tyrlai pocketed the shard and picked up the disruptor. She didn't want to carry the thing another moment but she wasn't leaving it for any straggling cultists. She blinked for a few moments not wanting to show anything. She was Tyrlai, and that meant strong. Only for a moment and then she stood, there were things to do, and the walls were beginning to rumble a little. "We need to set up the buffers. Wraiths can't be killed and I think this one is angry."

Sera began to place her transport buffers. She was never one for the occult or other superstitions, but this place had definitely done a great job of shaking her up. She quickly set up the poles and activated them. In order to cut through the interference and allow everyone to make it back, the buffer would need to be very precisely put together. As soon as hers were up, she began instructing the others on where to set theirs up.

Following the engineers orders, Gregory placed his buffers in the directed locations. He was still trying to piece together what had happened both to his group and the group they had just reached. It was hard to miss the elephant in the room...namely the dead body of the Captain lying within a stones throw of them all. He didn't understand what could have happened, who had failed in their task to protect the woman at all costs; but all he had to do was look at the faces of the others to know that he needed to keep quiet.

Amata had never had any religious experiences before, and was still trying to process his vision when he saw the captain lying dead on the ground, Commander Rouse standing over her. He was in shock - even though he fled Bajor as soon as he was able and thought he left all those silly superstitions behind, the simple fact that a prophet had communicated with him was overwhelming. And the vision... what did it mean? While it took some people years to interpret their visions, Amata didn't have time for that luxury right now. Trying to stay composed while waving a disruptor at the assembled Gamians, Amata did his best to control the crowd of cultists. "Stay back!" he shouted, firing a couple warning shots at one of the Vedeks who got too close. "Commander, I suggest we get out of here the instant these buffers are ready. The locals don't look too happy."

"Everything is set up then?" He asked and upon hearing the confirmation he pressed his combadge, routing the signal through the buffers to cut through the interference. "Rouse to Transporter room 1. Transport the whole team to sickbay." "Stand by" was the reply heard through Tim's commbadge before their surroundings went vague and the Portland's sickbay appeared.

USS Portland - Sickbay

After getting his bearings he turned around to find the doctor. Beauvoir, Parker and the Captain had

been placed on a biobed.

Being beamed always left a person with a bit of disorientation. That added to the shock the vision from the prophet and the other goings on of her first away mission only multiplied things. Only now, as Sera looked around sickbay, did she truly grasp what had happened. Her eyes fell to the Captain, not the holo-captain she had worked on before... but the real Captain. The phaser burns were real. She also noticed the Chief Engineer, whom she had been working under since her arrival on the Portland, and Jason whom she hadn't met before. Sera leaned against an out of the way wall, unsure of what to do and trying to keep out of the doctor's way.

Greg moved his hand to the woman's shoulder as he had noted her shock when she looked over at their former Captain. He was still trying to process it all but right now he focus was moreso on which security officer had failed in protecting their commander. He's eyes glanced over the dirtied and muddled members of the away teams as he tried to understand what had happened. "You ok?"

Sera placed a hand over Greg's and gave it a reassuring squeeze. "I'm fine," she lied. In reality, she truly didn't know what to feel. This had been her first true mission, and it didn't look as though it would have a good ending. She took some comfort in the fact that she had gotten through the interference and had gotten the team transported to the ship with no extra casualties, though it felt like a hollow victory.

Keeping her hand in his for a moment, before looking down at her. "You did a good job down there. Kept your cool and got the rest of us all out. You should be proud of that."

"Thank you," Sera softly replied, though she didn't feel as though she did a good job.

Tyrlai took a moment to watch before turning to go. She knew what the end result was already, the disruptor would have taken out a genetically modified Gorn. The doors whooshed shut behind her as she walked towards the diplomatic offices. The shock would be over soon and it would be time for recriminations, she was used to that part. She was a few feet from the turbolift when the pain hit. A shivering twinge in her abdomen, it made her pause. Thosk would be in the offices, he would skip straight to the recriminations, she wasn't quite ready for that. She touched the corridor wall for a moment, steadied herself and walked to her quarters.

Dr Brad Silvertown had already had a busy morning. He had seen Lt. Delainey Carlisle earlier that morning and then examined himself and Coln Jena for side effects of the radiation treatment. Of which he was still unsure of. He came out into the main room of sick bay. He stopped and took in exactly all of what was going on and muttered the most rational and proper response that he could think of at the time.

"The hell?!?"

He rushed over to the Captain on the emergency biobed in the center of the room and started examining. "What happened? I thought this was just a diplomatic mission?"

"The Captain was possessed by a Wraith. We had no other choice." Tim said in a cold emotionless tone. From the corner of his eye he saw Ellen walk in sickbay and heard her gasp in horror at the sight. He wished he could walk over to her and comfort her. He turned his attention back to the CMO. "Lieutenants Hudson and Beauvoir got injured while protecting the Captain, prior to the possession."

"Ellen, Maria. Take care of the Lieutenants." Brad was already fast at work on the Captain.

"Commander you say that casually like I know what a Wraith is. Are we talking about an actual energy being ghost walking through walls sort of Wraith?"

Tim looked at the doctor and then around him. The people that understood this whole Wrath thing were all gone, unconscious or gone. "I think so yes. From what I understand of it." he said. "We relieved her from her misery by her own request. There was no other way to eliminate the threat."

Hearing the commotion in the Sickbay proper, Jena followed Brad out of the medlab and was greeted by a hectic scene. The Captain, Jason and some dark haired man she didn't know, all lay on biobeds. If it were a happier time, she might make a joke about her and Jason paying rent for the time they'd spent in Sickbay. Seeing that Brad was obviously busy, she approached one of the nurses and asked. "Is there anything I can do to help?"

Nurse Maria patted Colin on the shoulder, "No. No thank you we have this. Please just stand back a ways to give us room." Both nurses went to aid Parker and Jason who were on the side regular biobeds that were suited for secondary, less critical injuries.

Sera then stood, from her position. There was nothing more she could do here, but for her own sake she needed something to do. She gave a thankful nod to Greg and swiftly walked out of Sickbay, her uniform dirty and her hair was a mess. As soon as the Sickbay's doors closed behind her, Sera tapped her comm badge, "Ensign Barclay, what is the status of the hologram we were working on? Need another hand?" What Sera need most right now was to do something that could save a life, even if some would call that life "just a hologram."

Brad continued to work on Alenis. "Damn I'm getting no readings from her at all." He called out to Maria who was relatively close. "Maria, get me a cortical stimulator!" Maria left Jason's side for a moment to grab the device and get it for Brad. He centered it upon Alenis' forehead and activated it. Alenis body reacted to the stimulator and shook. But it was only an involuntary reaction, it wasn't a sign of life he had hoped for. He tried again with the same level of failure. "I'm going higher. 40 mv". This time the captain's body moved even less. Brad tried a fourth time with even less reaction from the Captain's body. It wasn't working and everyone in the room knew it.

Jena felt at a loss what to do. The room was a hive of activity and felt like a spare nacelle. She'd overheard someone say that the Captain was dead. If this were true, what had happened? Will Commander Rouse take command or will they bring someone else in to take over? The teenager knew that she was probably in shock. Her internal questions were her way of not dwelling on the fact that she was for all intents and purposes, useless right now.

Parker had awoken to the sensation of a bad hangover and that of a bad dream, although he dreaded the truth. He knew the truth. He reached up on his two elbows, looking around him to Jason on his right bio bed, and then further over the Commander in the critical care unit bed. She was shot but it was a last ditch effort what Jason had did. The image of Alenis in pure screaming agony when the disruptor had fired at her Pah Wraith was torrid.

He waived rather tiredly, fatigued and sweat covered and asked from Nurse Ellen "Methylethizine 2 Shots Please" He felt the hypo spray enter to his neck. Parker rubbed at it and nodded a 'thanks'... Before his face stopped and looked back at the Captain, he gave a short personal prayer and left to wash up.

"Doctor," said Ellen, making her way over to Brad and placing a hand on his shoulder. "I..." As soon as she came face to face with Alenis' body, she froze at the sight of her lifeless eyes, staring off into nothingness. She looked up at Tim for support, but he was looking no better than she was. "I... I'll get

a sheet," she managed to utter before darting off in the direction of the medical supply closet, tears welling up in her eyes.

Brad's mind was racing through all the possibilities. He wasn't ready to give up. Not for the Captain. But each possible miracle was quickly crossed out in his mind. The time since she went unconscious and her vitals stopped had been too great. But maybe there was some unknown research. Some crazy mixing of drugs and techniques like what had saved him and Jenna. Damnit if there was only time...

Brad passed his hand across Alenis' face to close her eyes. Already she was feeling distant and cold. A distorted version of the real Alenis who cared for her crew from the start. Willing to do anything for them even copy herself for pon-f... Brad stood up straighter and thought about the hologram. He wanted to say something to everyone present for they didn't know. How could they while they were all down on the planet. He wanted to reassure them that maybe she wasn't fully gone after all.

But Brad didn't say anything. It wouldn't be right. The real Alenis lay before them dead. Telling them at a time like this? Who knows how they'd react. Better to just wait. "Ellen please mark the time of death. I'm sorry everyone. There's nothing more I can do."

Gregory watched as realisation settled across the features of everyone in the room. He had barely known the woman he had called his Captain and as such he felt like an interloper. Hesitating for a moment more, he nodded his head momentarily in respect before removing himself from sickbay.

Jason could hear the sounds of activity going on around him. He didn't know how long he'd been drifting in and out of consciousness. He opened his eyes only to shut them again in response to the bright Sickbay lights. Opening one eye slowly and saw an unknown face with purple hair. "Awake are we, Lieutenant?" Asked Nurse Leral Gionoj.

"Obviously, or else we wouldn't be able to converse." Jason replied though dry lips. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I have work to do." He tried to sit up and pain wracked his body.

"Careful Lieutenant, you've been through a lot, your body needs time to heal, so just lie still." Leral said.

"You let Lieutenant Hudson leave, and he had a probable concussion." Jason argued.

"He's not my patient, you are, so lie down, or I'll have you sedated."

"Has anybody told you, you have a wonderful bedside manner?"

"Sleep, and that's an order, Lieutenant." She replied.

Jason closed his eyes and pretended to sleep while he waited for her to leave.

USS Portland - Main Engineering

From her console in engineering, Nikki was awakened by her comm badge. "She's up in her office. I'm just working on some back of the house stuff to get her database stabilized." She looked back up at her screen. "I could use a bit of help though..."

Sera responded to Nikki, fatigue slipped it's way into her words, "Sure thing. Be right there. I could

use the distraction." Sera hoped the last bit wasn't caught by the comm link as she quickly made her way to engineering.

Sera and Nikki

Engineering, USS Portland

Mission 3, MD6, 1030 hours

Authors: Lt. (JG) Sera Williams, Ensign Nikki Barclay (played by Alenis Meru)

Seated at a terminal, Nikki Barclay rubbed her eyes in pain. After hours of staring at LCARS displays, trying to stabilize the holo-program, the numbers and letters on the screen seemed to all jumble together and float off the screen. She had a massive headache, and the lack of sleep she was suffering from didn't help much either. It was all just too much for her.

As she heard the doors whoosh open behind her, she swiveled in her seat to face her friend. "Sera!" she exclaimed, glad to see her. But her smile turned to an expression of concern as she saw the look on her face and the dirt on her uniform. "You look horrible! Are you okay? What happened down there?"

As Sera's feet crossed the door's tracks into Main Engineering, it took all of her remaining strength to not collapse onto the ground and sob. Sera's eyes connected with Nikki's, but for only a moment. The only words Sera could manage were, "The... Captain..." Her head gave the no shake.

Sera practically fell into the chair beside Nikki. With a very shaky sob and running both hands through her hair, a stronger voiced Sera continued, "I just really need to save a life... and I need a friend." Sera forced a smile as her hands went to the console.

"You'll always have a friend in me," replied Nikki, leaning over and putting an arm around Sera to try to comfort her. She knew something bad happened to the captain, and whatever it was, Sera couldn't stop it. She held her friend close for a moment, offering her a shoulder to cry on. "As for the latter," she added, trying not to start crying as well as she released her arm from around Sera, "I do need your help with the hologram."

Sera smiled warmly at her friend, "Thanks Nikki, you are a good friend." Sera dried her eyes with her uniform's sleeve, then took a look at the data display. Sera scanned the series of letters and numbers and pointed a finger at a certain string of information, it looked a bit out of place. It could be nothing, but Sera decided to ask. "Is that data from the merge? Or is it new data picked up from her self-improvement subroutines?"

"That's the tricky part," explained Nikki. "The program is active right now, in her -- well, the captain's -- office, and this is the data which has been created since this morning. Memories, emotions, personality adjustments, that sort of thing." She pointed at a data cluster on the screen. "The problem is that it isn't properly compressing and integrating into her program. If we don't do something about it soon, her entire holomatrix could destabilize and undergo a progressive cascade failure." Taking her sore eyes off the screen, Nikki reached for her coffee. "I'd consult the EMH diagnostic program, but we've taken its boot sequence offline in order to repair the captain. Or whoever she is."

As soon as she spoke, Nikki regretted her reference to the captain. She knew it was a foolish thing to say, and the very mention of the captain could traumatize her friend again. Mentally, she kicked herself for her stupidity.

Sera was able to keep it together, though it was hard. The freshness of the situation helped a bit in that it kept her from truly believing that it was all real. With a sigh, Sera began to talk in a fast voice, "I'll tell you what happened, but I can only get through it once. We were on the planet and the Captain had been taken over by a Pah-Wraith. The only way to stop the wraith was for the Commander to... end it."

Not really giving her friend a chance to respond, Sera jumped back to the task at hand, "Maybe we can transfer her program to the holodeck. We can create a control panel like this one so we can work on her programming while she's in front of us. We could then control the environment... at worst it'll slow down the degradation."

"That is a good idea," replied Nikki, grasping her friend by the hand tightly. She was even having difficulty keeping everything together upon hearing about the death of the captain. "Let's just make sure we don't tell her anything about what happened to the captain. We don't want to overload her emotional subroutines."

Seeing Sera on the verge of tears, Nikki quickly changed the subject back to what they were originally talking about. "I tried using a Kardashev shunting algorithm to help with the database integration, but it hasn't been working." Standing up, grabbing an armload of PADDs under one arm and still holding Sera's hand with the other, she started heading for the door. "Come on, let's get to the holodeck."

Holodeck 2, USS Portland

"...so, this has two effects." Nikki was rambling on, having talked all the way from engineering to the holodeck in an effort to both explain to Sera the problem with the hologram and distract the two of them from the sadness of the situation with the captain. "First, it makes her database very unstable. We could have a fatal error at any time, which would have cascading effects throughout her entire program. Second, it means that her short term memory isn't being converted to long term memory. Which means that, if not repaired, she will start having severe memory loss regarding everything that happened since the console incident. Though, I imagine there might be a few things in there which she may prefer to forget."

Nikki ended her ramblings with a slight smile, emphasizing her little joke. Seeing Sera not laugh, her face turned to one of horror at the inappropriateness of her comment. Stupid, she thought, god, that was so stupid, Nikki. "What I mean is... well... erm... do you have any ideas?"

While not exactly in the mood for laughing, Sera appreciated Nikki's efforts. She took the moment to step through the doors into the Holodeck. The familiar black box room with the yellow lines making a pattern of squares. It was a testament to when the holodeck was installed as the newer versions left the various circuitry and devices more exposed. Sera said, "Computer, create a mirror console of the one still logged in under Ensign Nikki Barclay... authorization Williams one-one-alpha-two."

As the working console appeared in the center of the room, Sera responded to Nikki, "I have a few ideas. The first, some of her information... maybe the memory conversion sub-routines, were lost in the sick bay incident. The other is that there may be some sort of block left over from the merger with the EMH diagnostic, our EMH was altered significantly from its original programming after all."

"Hmmmmmm, you might be right," replied Nikki. "I checked her memory conversion subroutines; they're there, but they might be damaged. Hmmmm..." She looked at Sera for a moment, and then at the console. "Computer, transfer EMH program to Holodeck 2."

"Please state the nature of the..." called out the hologram of Alenis as she materialized in the holodeck. She paused, looked Sera and Nikki up and down, and sighed. "You know, it's polite to call before beaming me halfway across the ship. I was just in the middle of feeding Ko-ko." In the two junior officers in front of her, she could see starkly different emotions. One of them was looking as though she was intimidated, and the other just looked overwhelmed. "What did the two of you bring me here for?"

"I'm sorry, Cap--... I mean, Ms. EM--... I mean, Meru?" stammered Nikki. Even though she wasn't the real Captain, Nikki's anxiety had skyrocketed as though she was. "We had to... we were looking at your program and... your database..."

Sera ran a hand through her hair. She took a tired look at the EMH. She then finished for Nikki, "We noticed an issue with your memory subroutines." The sight of the Captain was a bit overwhelming, and Sera had to feign clearing her throat to stop the tears that were at the ready. "We saw that the programming that moves the short-term memory to the long-term is non-functional and we are trying to determine a solution before you... forget everything since the incident in Sick Bay."

"Oh." The hologram furrowed her brow in puzzlement. She wasn't at all familiar with this sort of technical mumbo jumbo. "That... sounds serious."

Sera replied with as much of a smile as she could muster, "No need to fear, you have us on the case." Sera gave a short shrug to Nikki. Sera's hands went back to the display, then commanded, "Computer, isolate the memory conversion subroutines, and then show the programming that is linked to those subroutines." With a beep, then display changed into a complex looking map of programming language and subroutines."

The hologram leaned in between the two of them to look at the screen. Of course, she couldn't make heads or tails of the figures and bits of code on it, but she wanted to see what they were doing anyways.

"Hmmmmmm..." mused Nikki, as her fingers darted across the control panel, bringing up various displays. "Why won't this damn thing work!" she exclaimed, bringing her fist down on the console." She had spent the last several hours staring at code, trying to fix various problems with the EMH, and the more she stared at the code, the more irritated she became. Her lack of sleep no doubt contributed to her irritation. "Argh!" With that, she placed her head in her hands, desperately trying to avoid sobbing long enough to clear her mind.

"Too bad we can't just take her to Sick Bay to have her head examined....." Sera let the last part trail as an idea crossed her mind. She was struck with a moment of insight that only desperation can bring. Her fingers danced along the console as she muttered mostly to herself, "That's it... the EMH diagnostic was meant to compliment the default programming of the EMH Mark 1."

She changed a bit of programming and sat back with a heavy sigh. "Because her original programming was altered so much, the diagnostic boot sequence no longer fit. I made a few alterations to make the square peg fit in the round hole." She looked over at Nikki, "Are the memory conversion subroutines still degrading?" There was a glimmer of hope in Sera's voice, one that she had not felt in what seemed like forever.

"I think so... replied Nikki, looking back up at the work in front of her. New connections were being made, and data was moving back and forth across her subroutines. "Only one way to find out," she added, before turning to the hologram. "Captain, my favourite colour is blue and my favourite food is chocolate ice cream. Computer, end program."

"Wait---"

As the hologram disappeared, Nikki turned to her friend. "I think you got it," she said, excitedly. "We'll just give her program a couple minutes to compile all the data before reactivating her." Nikki reached over and gave her friend a hug, tears streaming down her cheeks as she thought of the captain again. "Thank you. Sera, thank you so much."

Out of relief, or possibly the hug, the dam broke behind Sera's eyes. She began to cry, it could've been the relief, the hug, or the reality of what was happening in Sickbay with the Captain finally hitting... perhaps a mix of all. Wiping the tears from her eyes, Sera looked over to Nikki and said, "Thank you too, Nikki."

Sera then looked at the display as she did a silent countdown, as silent as tapping on the desk to count each second could have been. Once the number of tapped seconds equalled Sera's goal number of ticks, Sera commanded, "Computer, activate the EMH program." As the computer beeped its acknowledgement, she held her breath to see what would emerge from the fizzle of the holo-emitters piecing together the Meru clone.

As she reappeared, a very cross expression was present on her face. "You know, I'm not an expert on holo-etiquette, but it seems to me like it is very impolite to--"

"What's my favourite food and colour?!" blurted out Nikki, interrupting the program.

"Chocolate ice cream and blue, respectively," replied the hologram. "Now, Ensign--"

"You did it!" exclaimed Nikki, turning towards Sera.

Sera gave Nikki a flying high five, then hugged her friend. "I think we could all use some chocolate ice cream... maybe in some blue dishes?"

"That sounds wonderful! Lets go to the mess ha-- aaaahhhhhh," replied Nikki, her excitement punctuated by an irresistible yawn.

Facing reality

Captain's office, USS Portland

MD6 - 1400 hours

Authors: Capt. Alenis Meru and Cmdr. Timothy Rouse

After postponing it for a mere hour Tim knew he had to take actions involving the Captain's passing. Starting with announcing it to the crew and then the Admiral. But first he had to go by her office, a place he'd been avoiding for the last hour. As he went through the door he looked for the bird that he wanted to pick up. He stopped dead in his tracks and stared at chair near the window. He didn't know what to say or do.

On the other side of the office Meru was sitting in a chair, reading a PADD. He didn't understand it. He'd seen her body, he'd personally made sure she had been transported to the ship, and now, here she was. Alive and well.

"Tim?" asked Alenis, expecting to see her biological counterpart. He looked shocked, even more so that she expected him to. "What's going on? Is everything alright? You look like you've seen a ghost."

"You're alive," was all he managed to say.

"In a manner of speaking, yes," replied Meru. "Wait, why are you surprised I'm alive? What happened?"

Still being in a state of shock he said. "I just saw you die. You're dead!"

"D-dead?" Meru stood up from the desk, the holographic blood rushing from her face. She could feel her knees weakening beneath her, and had to lean on the desk for support. It was a strange feeling, in one sense she had never even met the woman and in another she was her. "Tim, it's me, the EMH. Did something happen to the real Meru?"

"The EMH?" Tim said in disbelief, although that would make a lot more sense then Meru herself being alive again. "But I shot your program... The console was damaged beyond repair." Tim put his hand through his short sand coloured hair. He was losing his sanity.

"I was saved, thanks to the quick thinking of one of your engineering officers," said the hologram, stepping around her desk towards Tim. She could see him open his mouth, but cut him off before he said anything. "She did the right thing. And I know you were probably just following the wishes of the other me. But we can figure that out later." She looked Tim in the eyes, a worried look on her face. "Tim, what happened to the other Meru?"

"A group of Bajoran religious took her captive and used her body as a host for a pah-wraith" Tim started explaining although he still had a hard time understanding it all himself. "We shot her," He purposelessly used we, instead of Lieutenant Zade's name because to him it felt like they had done it together. Even though he hadn't managed to take the shot.

A tear came to the hologram's eye. "Tim... I'm so sorry." Her thoughts immediately turned to that of 'her' crew. Even worse than seeing their captain die, they had to kill her themselves. "Are there any other casualties? Do the crew know? Are you all right?"

"No, Not officially and yes, I am." He answered all three of her questions at once. He didn't want to think about his feelings. He had just lost a very good friend. He didn't have time now to think. He had a ship to run. Something he knew he wanted to do someday, but not yet. Especially not like this.

The hologram looked into Tim's eyes for a moment. Even she could tell that he was holding back his feelings and putting on a brave face. Taking a few steps forward, she wrapped her arms around him and gave him a warm hug. "Tim, I know it's little comfort right now," she said, pulling away, "but she devoted her life to the fleet. And, in the past few weeks, her affinity for Bajor had grown by leaps and bounds. I can tell you with certainty, she would have been willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for Starfleet and for Bajor."

He peeled the hologram off from himself and stepped away. "Those were her last words." he said. Seeing the hologram raise an eyebrow he explained. "She asked to be killed as that would be the only way to stop Kosst Amojan, the pah-wraith."

"Oh, Tim," she said, a holographic tear coming to her eye. Knowing the prophecies, she was familiar with Kosst Amojan and what would have happened had he not been stopped right then and there in that cave. "She'll be remembered as a hero to all of Bajor," added the hologram, trying without much success to hold back her tears. "The prophecies... had Kosst Amojan escaped from that cave, millions would have died. It would have been the fall of the Celestial Temple and the destruction of Bajor."

You did the right thing, honouring her last request.”

He looked up. “I didn’t make the shot. I couldn’t.”

“Tim...” started the hologram. Truth be told, she didn’t know if she could do the same in his shoes. “The important thing is that he was stopped.”

“I know that,” he replied. “But still...” He let out a deep sigh. “Look at me. I’m sitting here, being comforted by a holographic clone of a dead captain, one who was created for...” He shook his head. “Well, what are we going to do with you? I presume that Ms. Barclay saved you because he thought you were a sentient being?”

“I am!” protested the hologram. “Look, I know this is weird, but--”

Tim held up his hand, cutting her off. “If it was up to me, you would be deleted. I don’t know how we can have a holographic clone of the captain walking around. It’s an insult to her memory, especially given the circumstances under which you were created.” He paused and paced the room. “But I can’t do that. Not if there is a chance that you’re a sentient being. Enough lives have been lost today.”

“So, what are you going to do with me?” asked Meru, slightly relieved.

“That... that I don’t know,” replied Tim. He paced the room again, thinking about the latest complication. “I’ll figure something out. Just keep a low profile for now, okay? Only a few crew members know about you. And about the captain. I don’t want to confuse anyone.”

“You haven’t told the crew yet!” exclaimed the hologram. “Tim, you have to tell them! They need to know, and you’re the acting captain!”

“I know! Just... let me think, okay!”

“Oh, Tim...” replied Alenis, looking into his eyes. She could see the pain, the loss... she stepped forward and hugged him tightly. “Tim, I’m here for you...” she whispered in his ear.

“I know,” he replied, as they both tried to hold back tears.

The announcement...

Executive Officer's Office, USS Portland

MD6, 1430 hours

Authors: Cmdr. Timothy Rouse and Capt. Alenis Meru

After returning to his office, Tim sat at his desk and paused to think. *That hologram is right*, he thought, *I need to tell the crew*. He took a few deep breaths, thinking of what to say, before pressing the intercom button.

“Attention all crew,” he said, in a tone which was slow and careful. “This is Lieutenant Commander Timothy Rouse, Executive Officer of the USS Portland. At approximately 10:20 this morning, Captain Alenis Meru was shot while in a cave on Gamia III. She was pronounced dead in sickbay at 10:28 hours.” Tim paused and swallowed, trying to control the lump in his throat. “Captain Alenis was our commanding officer and our friend. Unfortunately, sometimes in this line of work we are called upon to make the ultimate sacrifice, as she did earlier today.”

Tim rubbed the beads of sweat off his forehead before continuing. "In accordance with Starfleet protocols and the chain of command, I am assuming the role of acting captain, effective immediately. We will be breaking orbit and returning to Deep Space Nine within the next two hours. That is all."

Having made the announcement, he breathed a sigh of relief. That was one thing over and done with. But before he could relax, a flashing light alerted him to an incoming transmission. He shook his head and brought it up on his monitor. Surprisingly, he found himself face to face with the captain of the Cardassian vessel.

"Commander Rouse," said Gul Jatok, his tone of voice softer and more respectful than the last time they had spoken. "My condolences on your loss."

Tim blinked for a second before replying. "Thank you," He tried to determine if the man was serious or just polite. "Is there anything I can help you with, Gul?"

"It is more something I can help you with," replied the Gul. "I don't have much time to explain, but I need you to adjust your shield frequency to 119.4 megahertz for the next hour." He hoped the man on the other end would listen, but knowing the reputation of his people, he suspected otherwise. If his plan were to work, it would take some convincing.

He raised an eyebrow. "And why shall we do that?"

Jatok sighed in frustration. "I can't go into detail, this channel may be monitored. And if I give you the information, the plan may be ruined." He had tried to secure this channel, but one of the lessons the Obsidian Order taught him was that there is no such thing as a secure channel. Seeing that his counterpart on the Portland was unimpressed, he held up his hand and continued. "I know what you're thinking. That this is some sort of plan to get through your shields and launch a sneak attack, and I can't blame you. I know what people think of us, Commander. That we're deceptive, manipulative, and can't be trusted. All of that may be true, but do you think the Cardassian Union is really foolish enough to risk going to war over this worthless rock and a century-old starship? Our fleet is still in tatters!" He looked into Tim's eyes through the comm link. "I just need you to trust me."

He did have a point, Tim thought. But was it enough to risk the ship? The crew had been through enough and had just lost its Captain. Could he afford to trust this man? But if he didn't, then what? He had to make a decision. And although the safest choice would be not to trust the men, he did otherwise. He moved forward, as he had been sitting backworth in his chair. "Rouse to the bridge. Adjust our field frequency to 119.4 megahertz." After he received a confirmation from the bridge officer he glanced to the Cardassian Gul, asking him the question without verbalising it.

"Thank you," replied Jatok. "You are an honourable man; I'm not sure I would have done the same in your shoes."

"Just don't let me regret it. The Portland had been through enough lately" Tim said.

"You won't," replied Jatok, offering Tim a respectful nod as he ended the transmission. He only hoped his plan would succeed...

Extradition...

MD6, 1500 hours

A courthouse on Gamia III

"...and so, in light of the seriousness of your crime, I hereby extradite you, Inaji Narale, to the custody of the Cardassian Union, to face justice." With that, Judge Tulas, Chief Justice of Gamia III banged a large turquoise stone, the Gamian equivalent of a gavel, on its base, making the sentence official.

"NOOOOOOO!" screamed Inaji.

"Order, order," called out the judge, banging the gavel again for emphasis. "Gul Jatok, you may escort her to your vessel."

"Thank you, your honour," replied the Gul. He sneered at the murderer before him as he grabbed her by the arm, knowing that justice would soon be served. "Let's go."

As the Gul grabbed him by the arm, Inaji saw an opening. It was a desperate act, but she was a desperate woman. Pulling her arm away, she swiftly reached for his disruptor. Catching him by surprise, she managed to get the disruptor into her hand and point it at his chest as she stepped back. She pressed a button, adjusting it to its highest setting. "I'm not going back there!" As she screamed, she pointed the disruptor around the room -- at the Gul, the judge, and the Gamian and Cardassian guards who had drawn their weapons and focused them on her. "You can't send me back to Cardassia! I won't go!"

Jatok stepped forward, sneering at Inaji. "And where do you think you will go?" he asked. "Look around you, there is no escape. You might be able to kill once more, but we have you surrounded. There's no way out. Put down the disruptor and come with us."

"No," gasped Inaji. "I'm not going back!" With that, she turned the disruptor on herself, closed her eyes and fired, instantly vapourizing herself.

For a moment, the room turned quiet. Gamian and Cardassian alike were shocked at what they just saw.

Jatok was the first to speak. "Well," he said, slowly and deliberately. "I guess that takes care of that."

The Fugitive

MD6, 1510 hours

Executive Officer's office, USS Portland

Authors: Cmdr. Timothy Rouse, Inaji Narale (played by Alenis Meru)

Opening her eyes, Inaji Narale looked around her new setting. She let out a sigh of relief. The plan worked. She was alive, and on board what appeared to be a Federation starship. In front of her, the surprised Starfleet commander stood up from his desk.

"Commander Rouse?" she asked, before he could say anything.

"That's what I call an entrance!" Tim exclaimed, his sense of humor taking over. He walked towards the young woman and offered her a hand. As she looked very Cardassian he had a feeling this was the reason for the earlier request by the Gul.

"Transporter gun," explained Inaji as she adjusted a dial on the side. To punctuate her point, she aimed the gun at the coffee cup on Tim's desk and fired, beaming it from one side of his desk to the

other. "We had to make it look like I was dead; it was the only way."

With that explanation Tim understood who the woman was and why she was in his office. "You're the Captain's sister, aren't you?" he asked half in surprise. He could see some resemblance between the sisters. Even with her cranial ridges hiding most of the resemblance. Oh no, did she know of Meru yet, or did he need to tell another person who was close to the Captain about her death?

"Well, half sister," replied Inaji, having re-holstered her "weapon." Her voice was strained, but there a hint of relief in it as well, as though her long ordeal might be over. "Can I speak to her?"

"I have some bad news, unfortunately," he started. Even though he should be getting used to this, he was still nervous and even stuttering a bit. "Meru died a few hours ago on an away mission."

"No..." gasped Inaji, collapsing into the chair across from Tim's desk and placing a hand on her head. "But I didn't even..."

As her eyes welled up with tears, she lifted her head to look up at Tim. She could see that he was also at a loss for words. Carefully, feeling weak at the knees, she walked over to Tim and fell into his arms. "It would have been nice to have known my sister," she managed to utter, with tears streaming down her cheeks, as she hugged him tightly.

"Yes, I can imagine that" Tim said, clearly at a loss for words. What did you say to anyone who just heard her newfound sister was deceased?

For a few moments, Inaji did nothing but hold Tim tightly. Be it fate or a simple stroke of luck that drove them both to the rock known as Gamia III, Meru was the only person she had outside of Cardassian space. Even though they had only briefly met, she was her sister. And now, she was gone.

Releasing Tim from her grasp, she wiped away her tears. "Commander," she started, pulling out a Cardassian data chip she had kept concealed under her clothes, "I don't need to tell you that I'm a wanted criminal, and the Federation has an extradition treaty with the Cardassians. Maybe I don't deserve a second chance, but Gul Jatok was kind enough to give me one. As far as anyone knows, Inaji Narale is dead, but my fate lies in your hands."

Tim scratched his chin as he thought how to deal with that. "We can hide you on our ship, until we know what to do next. I uh... I think it's best if you stay in Meru's quarters for the time being. They are the biggest on the vessel what will be handy as you can't leave them. And I don't expect them to be occupied by anyone else soon."

"Thank you," replied Inaji, as she placed the data chip on Tim's desk and hugged him again. "Thank you."

As she released Tim from her grasp again, she reached for the transporter gun and adjusted a couple of dials. "I'll stay there until you need me," she said. "Thank you." With that, she fired again, transporting herself to Meru's quarters.

Tim took a deep breath, grabbed the chip and walked to one of the two chairs near the window. He set down and accessed the chip.

Upon opening the message, Gul Jatok's face appeared on the screen. "Commander Rouse," he said, in a tone that was somber and more respectful than one usually expects from a Cardassian Gul, "my condolences on the loss of your captain. I had only met her for a short time, but from what I saw,

Alenis was quite the spirited woman." He cleared his throat. "If you are seeing this message, than this means that my plan worked. As far as anyone on Cardassia is concerned, Inaji Narale is dead. Given the extradition treaties between our two powers, perhaps it is for the best that the Federation also think she is dead."

"I've left her with a small amount of latinum," continued Jatok. "It should be enough for her to pay for a one-way trip to somewhere far away, where she can start a new life. There is a Cardassian tailor on Deep Space Nine; he is an old colleague of mine. For the right amount of latinum, he can fake her paperwork. It's a little pricey, but he owes me one; if she tells him I sent her, he should give a deep discount."

"Of course, I'm sure you have your questions. Like why I am doing this." Jatok sighed deeply. This was one area of the past he was not comfortable talking about. "Commander, I know what your people think about us Cardassians. And, truth be told, we deserve that reputation. But let it be known that not all of us are proud of everything we did during the occupation. I know that there is no way I can set things right and make up for what we did to Bajor -- what I did to Bajor. But, if I can in some small way do some good in this universe, perhaps I can at least retain some shred of humanity."

Jatok took a deep breath, as though a weight had been lifted off his shoulder. "Goodbye, Commander. And good luck." With that, Jatok gave a respectful salute before the screen went black.

Aftermath: Sickbay

MD6, 1534 hours

Sickbay, USS Portland

Authors: Lieutenant Jason Beauvoir, Lieutenant Brad Silverton

Listening to make sure the Boslic nurse was gone, Jason opened an eye and looked around. Not seeing her, he opened his other eye, sat up and tried to climb off the bed.

Brad was nearby working on the paperwork and report of... well the Captain's death. That sort of work was never an enjoyable aspect of the job. However it was a required one and its responsibility rested squarely on his shoulders. He looked up as he heard Jason shifting and Brad got up and approached him.

"Woah their Jason. You're not quite ready to leave yet."

"Where's the Captain?" He asked confused.

Brad grew quiet for a second unsure just what exactly he wanted to say. "How much do you remember when you woke up while everyone was here earlier this morning?"

"I remember a lot of activity, overly bright lights and a rather obstinate nurse." Jason said. Then something came to him. "Everyone looked sad. The Captain's dead, isn't she?"

A low beeping of the biobed that Jason was still sitting on marked the time of an awkward silent moment that passed. "Yes. She was attacked by some energy being Wraith creature that had possessed her down on the planet. I tried what I could but too much time had passed by the time she got to me."

"I saw the Wraith that possessed her and I fought it. It is distressing that both our labours appear to be for not." Jason said trying to maintain a veneer of stoic calm when what he really wanted to do

was scream at the top of his lungs and pound his fists into the nearest bulkhead.

"Jason she isn...." Brad stopped and thought. Damn it the pon farr! Something that powerful and intimate, who knows what the lingering effects would be. He'd have to be careful with his next chosen words. "Jason if I may ask, what are the lasting effects of pon farr? Medically speaking of course. Emotionally is not my domain or business as a doctor."

"A few snippets of memory from the time, but not much more." Jason said.

Brad nodded in response to Jason. "Jason. The plan after your pon farr had passed was for us to delete the Alenis programming and restore the EMH to its original condition. With your recovery and all the activity I don't think you know this yet but... we haven't deleted her. The Alenis Hologram is still operating."

Jason raised an eye brow. He thought that Meru would have had the EMH restored. "So, in a way the Captain is still 'alive'?" He asked.

"Yes. 'In a way' is a good way to phrase it. It's definitely her but also not her. It's complicated although everything in the past couple days has been complicated." Brad reviewed the most recent medical scan of Jason as he was speaking to him.

"Life is complicated." Jason agreed. "So, doc what's a verdict? Do I get to leave the 'delightful' surrounds of your Sickbay?"

Brad responded smirkingly, "So how is it exactly that you are Vulcan enough for Pon Farr yet human enough for sarcasm? Yes lieutenant. You are cleared to go."

"My father is a professor of Ancient British Literature, sarcasm was among the first things he taught me." Jason replied. "Good day, Doc."

After the Act

Chief Science Officer's Office, USS Portland

MD6, 1654 hours

Authors: Lieutenant Jason Beauvoir, Holo-Meru (played by Alenis Meru)

Jason was finishing some of his Department's crew evaluations, when his mind began to wonder. His thoughts fell on the events that took place in the fire caves and that brought back the feelings of guilt, sorrow and anger. He couldn't save Meru and now she was dead. He wished he could somehow explain it to her, but now it was too late. Or was it? The hologram, sure it wasn't the flesh and blood Meru, it had her thoughts, her memories, her personality, her essence and it or she had helped him before.

"Computer, what is the current location of the modified EMH?" He asked.

"The EMH is currently located in the Captain's Ready Room." Replied the familiar feminine voice.

Leaving the Science Department, it didn't take him long to reach the Bridge.

Stepping out of the turbolift, he walked purposefully to the Ready Room door and pressed the buzzer.

"Come in!" called out the voice of the Captain from the other side of the door. But it wasn't her voice.

As she saw the door open, she gasped in shock. She knew this moment was coming sooner or later. They couldn't keep a secret hologram in the image of the Captain from the crew forever, and by now everyone had known about her. Fortunately, though, they were discreet about the reasons why she was created.

"Jason--" she said, at a loss for words.

Jason entered the room. As the doors closed behind him, he looked at the hologram. It, he meant she, looked exactly like Meru. His logical mind told him that this was a hologram, but that didn't stop his emotions from coming to the forefront. "Sorry." He said after a while. "I'm not ready to do this." and then turned to leave.

"Wait!" called out the hologram as she bounded forward, placing a hand on his arm. "Jason, we have to talk about this. I know it, and you know it. And we both know you didn't come up here to fix the replicator."

Jason sighed and turned to face her. She was right. Not knowing where to begin, he just said. "Thank you for helping me through my pon farr."

The hologram sighed. "Don't mention it," she said, a million thoughts running through her head. "Jason, I understand," she blurted out. "You weren't you, back on Bajor or up here on the ship. It was the pon farr in control. I care for you, and so did the captain. And I know you would have never done what you did if it wasn't for your brain chemistry getting all screwed up."

"Logically I know that, but I still find my lack of control...unsettling." He said. "I also apologize for any discomfort I might have caused you."

"Let's just... both try to forget about it, okay?" The hologram held her hand up as she offered him a nervous smile. "You know, the ironic thing is, perhaps in another reality, it might be possible. I mean, if I were single. And not, you know... a hologram." As the room filled with an awkward silence, she decided to change the subject. "Can I get you anything to drink?" she asked, quickly strolling across the room to the replicator.

Jason nodded his head in agreement. When she asked him if he wanted a drink, he resisted the urge to ask for a straight double bourbon and instead asked for a chamomile tea.

"One chamomile tea," called out the hologram to the replicator. "How is Jena doing?" she asked as she brought it to Jason.

"Of course, she's upset, but both fortunately and unfortunately, she's no stranger to loss and she has friends on board to help her through it ." Jason replied.

"She is quite resilient, isn't she," replied the hologram, serving Jason his tea. Meru had cared for Jena, seeing something of herself in the young teenager. A childhood punctuated by loss, growing up without a parent, and struggling with her Bajoran identity light-years away from home. "Does she know? About the pon farr?"

"Yes, she is." Jason agreed. "Tela, her mother, taught her well." Thinking of Tela brought his grief for all those he'd lost. His thoughts were interrupted by Holo-Meru's next question. "She does know

about pon farr and the fact that she may experience herself."

"Yes, I suppose she is of that age..." mused the hologram. "Well, I suppose the only question remaining here is what will become of me? Will I be the subject of some grand precedent-setting legal case for holographic rights, or end up quietly deactivated..."

"I promise you I won't let them deactivate you." Jason told her. "And if it comes to a court case, my sister-in-law is a lawyer, who would be happy to take your case, and I'm sure Dr. Silverton and our Counselling department will give evidence in your favour."

Alenis smiled slightly for the first time. "I hope it doesn't come down to that. But if it does, I may need to call on some testimony." She paused for a moment, knowing that this would be awkward at best. Clearly, Vulcans were very private about their pon farr, and the embarrassment from having to testify in a court case could ruin Jason's Starfleet career. "Specifically... yours."

Jason blushed a little when he realised what she meant by his testimony. Taking a breathe to regain his composure, the Chief Science Officer said. "If it comes to it, I will testify on your behalf." He wanted to add 'and to hell with the consequences', but decided against it. He'd risked his career in the past to save others and he was willing to do it again, should the need arise.

"You know, Jason," replied Alenis, placing a hand on his shoulder. "Despite this whole pon farr thing, you are a good man."

This brought a fleeting smile to Jason's features.

Tim entered Alenis' office once more, before it wouldn't be her office anymore. With the upcoming debriefings of the Admirals and the overall ending of the mission he wasn't very confident he would be the Portland's new Commanding Officer, or even it's Executive Officer. Just in case his gut was correct he wanted to take the time to take away Meru's things. So he could hand them over to her mother, or sister.

As he looked over Alenis' things, dozens of memories came rushing back, of the dear friend he would see no more. Her chess set on the table, with which they played a game about a week before. Even though she said she was rusty, Meru had handily defeated him in 26 moves. Or the model of a Bajoran lightship in a display case, which served as a link between her career as a Starfleet captain and her home. And the teapot... she was always offering him tea. And sometimes, in her quarters, not tea.

But now, she was gone. There would be no more long conversations about the Academy, the service, and life in general. No more sharing a pot of tea or a bottle of springwine in her quarters. And, no more of the valuable wisdom and guidance that she had offered him. Even though she was only a year older than Tim, Alenis had a certain wisdom beyond her years, and was always willing to share that wisdom with her executive officer.

Tim shook his head and let out a sigh, swearing he would never return to the rock known as Gamia III as long as he lived. As he walked over to her desk to start cleaning up, however, he heard a faint noise. Emanating from a dark corner of the room was a quiet cooing sound. As he looked over, he saw Ko-ko step out into the light and stare up at him.

His first reaction was one of annoyance but that quickly softened as he remembered how that animal changed Maru's mood to the better. "Oh KO-KO, what are we going to do with you."

The bird turned her head slightly as if to turn the question back at him. In addition to being known for her calming presence, the female of her species of bird was also very adept at reading the emotions of other creatures, having almost a primitive version of Betazoid empathy. But one did not need to be a Betazoid to see the pain that Tim was feeling.

With a flutter of her wings, Ko-ko launched herself aloft, circled the room, and landed on Tim's shoulder. A calming coo emanated from her as she nuzzled herself up against Tim's head, like she used to do to Meru.

Tim didn't say anything. Just shook his head.
