

Across the Threshold

an *Outpost Hope One* short novel

written by Debby, Devon, Doug, Kevin, Rich, Richard and Roger

Star Trek: Borderlands

<http://www.startrekborderlands.com>

Located near the Delta Quadrant terminus of the Geroch Wormhole lies one of the Federation's greatest centers of scientific and engineering research. Sentinel Station hovers above one aperture of the Hope One Dyson Sphere; an ancient construct enclosing a white dwarf star and having an interior surface equivalent to millions of worlds. No greater engineering marvel has ever been known.

Star Trek: Borderlands is a play-by-email roleplaying community started in 1993. For more than 20 years, fans of Star Trek have come together to write their own stories of exploration, conflict, friendship, victory and defeat. Outpost Hope One welcomes anyone looking to explore the edge of human understanding in the fields of engineering, physical sciences and humanities.

This short novel is a compilation of posts from the [Outpost Hope One Posting Group](#)¹.

¹ <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/SentinelStation/info>

Across the Threshold – an *Outpost Hope One* short novel
outposthopeone.nfshost.com

Disclaimer

The Star Trek trademarks, logos, and related names are owned by CBS Studios Inc., and are used under “fair use” guidelines.

Characters

Lieutenant **Ahkhsu “Patch” Trensū**
Captain played by Roger

Lieutenant **Theodore Bear**
Intelligence Officer played by Doug

Ensign **Hondrick**
Bridge Officer played by Richard

Chief Petty Officer (**Eiwan**) **la ui ki ewe la wiwiu’e shepenan**
Chief Engineer played by Richard

Lieutenant Commander **Althea Theophilus**
Chief Medical Officer played by Debby

Lieutenant Commander **Lionin Favor**
Chief Science Officer played by Rich

Lieutenant (Junior Grade) **Gero Ib**
Science Officer, Speciality in Astronomy played by Kevin

Ensign **Ariana Serota**
Science Officer, Specialty in Geosciences played by Devon

Prologue

Lionin Favor walked the floor of the science department's main lab slowly appraising everything he saw and he was disgusted.

He wasn't disgusted with the layout, which was well organized. This section of the ship was entirely dedicated to the science team and it was quite large for such a small ship. The layout gave a lot of space over to a central table and work area which was designed to provide a collaborative environment for the ships dedicated science team. Around that were several smaller satellite spaces for more small scale projects and more cautious discovery. It was truly brilliant.

He was also not disgusted with the way the ship as a whole had come together. With limited resources the engineers at Sentinel Station had managed to refurbish the old bird into a work of functional art! Of course, the Elaysian lieutenant commander had had no small part in the effort, so perhaps he was a little bit biased.

No, what he was truly disgusted by....flabbergasted by....was that the ship was still HERE docked at Sentinel Station like some poor dog on a leash even when it had a beautifully fenced in back yard to play in! Like that dog, the Daystrom had the ENTIRE SPHERE to investigate, but again like the dog, the powers that be didn't want it to piss in the wrong places for fear of making somebody mad. It was TRULY DISGUSTING.

Why couldn't beings play nice instead of playing politics? As a scientist he valued cooperation as one of the prime accomplisners of things in the universe. Politics just seemed to set up road blocks. You had to love it.

He slapped his hand down on a worktable, shook his head, in dismay and then looked up and sighed. The series of actions seemed to draw some attention.

Chapter One

He turned as the door opened to the tactical office to see a crewman walk in. Patch looked her over. She was from the commander's office. Turning back to the screen on the desk, "Yes crewman, what can I do for you?"

The crewman walked up to him and held out a PADD. "Sir. I am to deliver this to you. It is from the station commander." she replied.

He took the PADD. Looking it over he activated it. He scanned the information. He looked at the crewman. "You can report that I have revived this PADD and understand the instructions."

The crewman smiled. "Yes sir, I will" she said.

He looked at the computer screen and the pile of PADDs on his desk as the crewman left the room. He looked back at the PADD in his hands that read: report to USS Daystorm, do an inspection and report to me in 24 hours.

Patch sighed. Looking at the information on the screen, surprised, it has been awhile since the last time it had been out of port. But, the overhauls and updates all had been completed. He leaned back in his chair. Well I guess I will deal with this now. He started to look over all the maintenance logs and flight logs in the last year and other reports he could get on the ship.

Hours later he got up from his desk and walked over to the replicator. "Tea. Hot." he said. Standing there as it materialized, he thought the ship had good maintenance records and had been refitted with the newest equipment and assigned here. Patch finished his tea and set the cup back in the replicator. The cup vanished. "Computer. automated message for my office." A chime could be heard in the room. "Computer ready", a voice replied. "I

will be out-of-office on assignment to the USS Daystorm. I will return in two days. End message”.

“Recorded and logged.” the computer replied.

He walked out locking the door to his office.

Six hours and Patch had seen most of the ship. He looked back at Senior Chief Franklin. “Thank you for taking me around the ship.” said Patch as they stopped at the door leading back to the station. “Is there anything you would like to add to my report?”

Franklin paused, thinking, “Ya. She needs a crew. The station personnel only do so much for the ship” he answered.

Patch smiled and replied. “Yes, I can do that but you know you could be setting yourself up chief.”

Franklin laughed. “I hope not. I have been at this for 20 plus years. I don't want to move any more. I am happy where I am at, besides, my wife will kill me.”

Patch smiled “Oh, the wife thing. I don't have that problem. I am sure that is what they are up too but they send the CO of the ship to do this, not some Ensign.”

Chief Franklin looked around and replied “That is true. Well you don't have to worry about a ship command for some time being new to Starfleet.”

“Thank you Chief. See you around.”

Franklin smiled. “Yes sir.”

Walking to his quarters he quickly showered and changed his uniform making sure everything was in order. He transferred all the

Across the Threshold – an *Outpost Hope One* short novel
outposthopeone.nfshost.com

reports and recommendations to a new PADD thinking to himself,
still wondering why they asked him to do the inspection.

Chapter Two

Patch walked in to Operations Centre.

The commander's secretary looked up at him.

"Lieutenant Trensu to see Commander Mirel. I am expected" said Patch.

The man at the desk smiled "Yes sir, she is waiting on you." The man touched a panel. "Yes" came the voice from the speaker "Ensign Ahkhsu Trensu is here. Would you like me to send him in?"

He looked up at Patch "Go in, sir."

Patch walked to the door of the CO. He looked at his uniform and gave it a good tug. He touched the door, it chimed and a voice could be heard "come in!"

Patch stood at attention saying "Lieutenant Ahkhsu Trensu, reporting in with the inspection as requested by you."

The station commander held back returning the salute. She knew the Master had a rigid military training history before joining Starfleet. He would stand there for an hour if she let him. She checked her inbox. "Thank you Lieutenant. Daystrom meets your approval?"

"Yes ma'am, I do think she ready to go out. She does need a crew and a day out of space dock to make sure everything is good to go.

"You can shakedown the ship enroute." Mirel returned the salute so that Trensu would settle into an at-ease stance. "As a science vessel, I'm not anticipating anything too taxing. Your standing orders are to cut and run. USS Hunter will be on standby if you need muscle. Have you picked some candidates for the crew?"

“Yes ma'am. I am sure there are qualified people who can crew the ship and a science officer to captain like Lieutenant Commander Althea Theophilus. Or, Lieutenant Commander Lionin Favor has a great record. Could be the science department head as well.”

Mirel took the padd. All of the tactical officer's choices were sound. She had put together a shortlist herself. “I've assigned you as captain Mr. Trensus.”

Patch was stunned as the PADD was handed back to him. “Ma'am. It has been 100 years since the last time I was in a real command. I have been told by Starfleet Command that it would take 3 years before I could be put in command of a ship.

“You're a few years away from command of a frigate, true.” Mirel had briefly commanded a capital ship. She was not built for the role. “We have a science ship that needs deployment.”

Patch sighed “Yes ma'am, I understand fully. What mission would I be sent on that is so important?”

“Ensign Gero is looking to observe a stellar phenomenon. While in the area, Lieutenant Bear has an inspection to make. He'll read you into that security clearance as he sees fit.”

“I see. Yes ma'am. Give me 6 hrs to take on supplies and get the crew ready. I will have the ship under way.” said Patch.

“You'll do fine, Mr. Trensus.” Mirel saw nothing but military precision in the man. “Dismissed.”

“Yes ma'am” replied Patch.

Chapter Three

Walking in to the empty room Trensus sat down in the chair at the head of the conference table. Waiting for the others to arrive he looked over the data given to him. He was not happy with the lack of information given. Most of it was classified and no real information was given. The research station was called Threshold. It worked with different ways of space travel and propulsion systems. Hope One was not in charge of the lab but did keep an eye on it. There was no real threat detected or unusual ships in the area.

He got up and went to their replicator “Tea hot” he said. The cup appeared in a shimmer of blue light. Picking up the cup and taking a sip, it tasted good and hot. “Well something works well on this ship.” he said to himself. He sat back down in his chair and continued to look over the report.

The different departments started to report in and get operational soon after the department heads started to show up. He sat there not saying much, just acknowledging each one as they came in and took their seats. When everyone reported in the briefing room, he would begin.

Lieutenant Hondrick sat quietly to the side of his captain. The Benzite would serve as second-in-command for the mission. He had rotated through several stations during his time in Starfleet and considered himself a well-rounded officer. He would only consider promotion once he was thoroughly versed in all ship and station operations.

Althea walked into the briefing room and took a seat at the front. She sat her PADD on the desk in front of her and gave the officer she faced a nod of acknowledgement. Feeling a bit in the dark she had found what little she could, but it didn't help much. She looked forward to finding out what the commander had to tell them. The

memo had ordered to report as a science officer which suited her. She had also been trained in several other fields including medical. She was looking forward to getting started with the mission.

Lt. Commander Favor looked at Theophilus and Ib. They were HIS team in this meeting; leaders of their respective fields aboard ship, Theophilus for Applied Sciences, Ib for Astronomy. And they were both quite capable communicators. That was their most important quality as far as he was concerned. It was the reason that he'd asked for them. They weren't afraid to take initiative or to speak their minds. He needed them both.

Lionin waited for Captain Trensus to start the meeting. It was odd that members of the science team, outranked the ship's commanding officer, but that under all cases the title captain went to whoever ran the ship regardless of rank. Trensus's recent promotion to Lieutenant did something to alleviate the disparity, but in either case it pointed out that for whatever else it was, the Daystrom was first and foremost a science vessel

Trensus stood up and walk in front of the viewer. He clasped his hands behind his back and addressed everyone in the room. "Hello. I am Lieutenant Ahksu Trensus, captain of this mission and ship, welcome. We are to be dispatched to a research station named Threshold. It is a propulsion systems research lab." The viewer behind him lit up showing some of the station and surrounding area. "With the recent problems in the Sphere we are the only ones that can respond to Threshold lab at this time. We have been handpicked for selected specializations to assist the lab if needed." he paused and let that information set in.

Lieutenant Trensus waited for everyone to make their notes and look over the viewer. "Sentinel Station has lost communications with the lab. Threshold had no transmission or activity in over 48 hours. There was an energy wave detected from the location of the lab. The lab is too far out to get any real readings. Our mission is

simple: go to the lab, find out what happened and help if needed.” He sat back down in his chair. “Questions?” he asked.

Theodore was looking at the report in his high chair normally used for infants, but, given his size it felt fine. “What was Threshold’s last message?” Theodore asked.

“From what I read they were reporting some results to Sentinel Station, but, the information is lacking at best.” replied the captain.

Favor listened intently. He was doing fine for his first command at least, thus far. “Captain, I’m sorry, but I had thought that we were going to investigate a brown dwarf star. Isn’t that what you were told, Lt. Gero?”

The Bajoran nodded in agreement. “I caught the earliest shuttle back I could with the promise that we’d be doing a little stargazing.”

Captain Trensus paused “That was what we were told at first. Well I think the information has changed their.” He sat back in his chair in thought. “It is not for us to question the intelligence they get. They can and will change their direction at any time. It is for us to execute the mission put before us.” he said sounding stern.

“Ah, of course.” The older science officer exclaimed. “Well, we’re here to serve.” He stated as he switched informational displays on his PADD. “Is there anything in particular that the station is working on that could have caused a communications blackout? It could be no more than that.”

“I’ve reviewed the schematics of the station.” Chief Eiwan leaned forward. “Their position on a moon within the system can cause communications blackouts depending on the transit of bodies around the star.”

Relaxing his tone, “I am sure that the dwarf star has something to do with it. That is why we are going and not the USS Hunter.”

“I can review their current communications setup and look at improvements. Their detailed telemetry will help.” Eiwan checked the crew roster. “Ensign Serota will be particularly helpful.”

“Aye sir.” said an Ensign. She was young, and wearing the uniform of the DFA science division. “Starfleet needs a scientific vessel with their dedicated sensors to fully evaluate the Brown dwarf.”

“The brown dwarf is what is at the center of the problem and yes, we are going to take a look at that.”

“Ensign Ariana Serota.” Ariana introduced herself. “When I heard you were heading out to a brown dwarf I applied for a berth aboard Daystrom. Commander Mirel approved the temporary transfer, pending your approval sir.” she said dropping her personal duffel bag by the wall.

“Yes I saw that on the personnel report and approved it, welcome” said Captain Trensou.

“I am a geophysist, Planetary and star formations.” answered Ariana. “Given you are heading to a brown dwarf, I think my expertise will be right in line with your mission. And this brown dwarf is relatively unexplored, despite the station in the system. Did you know that a brown dwarf can vary in temperature from isothermic with sentient species to hot enough to melt iron and cause iron droplets to rain down on its surface?” She seemed to consider her comment for the moment. “Oh, wouldn't it be interesting if the brown dwarf were a living organism in human body temperature range...”

“It is too early to draw conclusions Ensign.” stated Ensign Hondrick. He found many species to be... spunky. It was a human word with no accurate translation to Ibenzi.

“Aye Sir.” said Ariana stopping her commentary and sliding into the seat. She waved at Eiwan, not having seen her for quite a while, and gave a polite nod to Lt. Hondrick. She whispered to the Bajoran. “We need to talk about your worm hole dust samples. I found something interesting.” It was ironic that her first shipboard introduction was showing up late to the staff meeting. It was how she was introduced to the staff on Hope One as well, late to the staff meeting.

“Are the readings useless? Do we know anything about this energy wave?” Althea wanted as much information as she could get. “It might help solve some questions that needed to be answered. Something that strong may also be the cause of the blackout.”

“If the readings are accurate, the communications array would be completely burnt out.” Chief Eiwan was curious about the presence of the station's Intelligence officer. The presence of the command staff, the science officers and herself were clear. Intelligence was a tight-lipped, paranoid department. Perhaps the android had some knowledge of the situation.

Captain Trensus turned back to the viewer. “The brown dwarf is what set all of this in motion. The spectral analysis shows the change but the stations sensors are at their max and cannot get a good reading. As I said before, what happened that could cause this to happen? This is why we are called on to this mission to get answers.”

Captain Trensus could tell people were glancing at Theodore. He knew he was the different. “Lieutenant Bear. I requested him as my tactical officer and risk assessment officer. He is also to look at

things in a different view, look at the threat level to the Federation of anything we fine out there.”

“How about the DFA?” asked Ariana speaking up. “Or is Starfleet intelligence limited to the Federation?” She stressed the word intelligence as a play on the gathering of scientific minds coupled with one intelligence officer.

“That is up to the Starfleet Command what they share with the DFA. This is a Starfleet ship in the end. I will suggest that we share all information in my report.” replied the Captain.

“Do not let my size fool you. In my little paws I’m equipped with the most powerful phaser they could upgrade me with; making me able to vaporize hostiles easily.” Theodore said pointing his arm up and extending his paw, “Care for me to demonstrate.”

Captain Trensus’s demeanor changed, clearly angered. “Lieutenant Bear! Act like a Starfleet officer. No one here is assaulting you. If you can’t handle your position in a professorial manner, I will find someone who can! Do you understand lieutenant?”

Theodore lowered his arm. A short time ago he out ranked Patch. Now he had to follow his orders. This did not set well with him once again overlooked by his size and origin.

“Relax captain.” said Ariana, not offended by Theodore's outburst. “Ted and I live on the same deck. He's been terrorized by small undisciplined children. He can temper his reactions when necessary.” Halloween had been challenging for the bear. Then with the poo prank that started stinking up the deck, Ariana had approached him to alert him, since his olfactory sensors did not seem to be sorting the input as offensive. She offered to help him get it cleaned up. It's hard to clean bear fur that does not grow. “The galaxy is a dangerous place, sometimes you have to be

dangerous right back.” Ariana put her cheeks into her folded hands looking down the table at the bear. “Isn't that right Ted?”

“Relax?” The captain looked vary annoyed. “I do not know where you got your training as an officer, Ensign? Behaving in that manner is not right under any circumstances. I will not tolerate that type of unprofessional behavior on this ship.” He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “Theodore, if you need help, get some. If I can act in a professional manner, so can you.”

“I can act professional. Notice how calm I was when she called me Ted though I prefer it to Teddy.” Theodore stated.

“I don't know, I like the name Ted. Think of it as a pet name. Everyone should have a pet name.” said Ariana.

“And I look like a pet to you?” Theodore said swallowing his pride.

Trensu's face now turning a shade of red. “Pet names? Really Ensign? This is going to be a long trip.”

Althea smiled a bit in appreciation to Ariana's wit. She remembered another young acquaintance that was quick to wit and could be a bit of a character. She reminded her of Laro in some ways and it brought a pang of mourning over the young Cardassians death. In fact she had known Laro while serving aboard the DFA Cromwell-B; the last ship she served on before coming to Sentinel Station.

“Of course captain.” said Ariana returning her attention to her padd. “Perhaps after this meeting Lieutenant Gero, Lt. Commander Theophilus and I could discuss possible hypotheses for this brown dwarf cutting communications and sending out gravimetric waves so we can have the sensors calibrated and set for scanning as we approach the star,” she said. She looked around the table. “Of course, any who are interested are welcome to join the conversation.” said the young DFA ensign, with a twinkle in her eye

as it rested on Theodore a hair longer than the others. There were enough scientific minds assembled that they could very well feed off each other and come up with novel hypotheses and categorize them as to probability.

Grateful that Ensign Serota had finally homed in on the mission rather than her interest in poking the bear, Lt. Commander Favor added his own voice to her suggestion and the resulting responses. “Captain, may I suggest that we conclude this meeting and let the collective science officers take the necessary time to wrap their heads around the available information?” He leaned forward, and toward the captain. His body language gave additional gravitas to his request.

Althea had never worked with the human, she looked forward to getting to know her. Althea expected Ariana’s knowledge of geophysics to be greatly appreciated on this mission. Althea smiled, she also expected her to be an interesting person to know.

It was Favor's opinion that there would be plenty for the bridge crew to do while travelling to the area of Threshold Lab and the brown dwarf. And besides, while Lt. Trensus was their commanding officer, he wasn't doing a phenomenal job at focusing everyone in this particular meeting, though not for the lack of trying. Trensus was a good man; young, ambitious, but with a lot to learn. Hopefully, this mission and successive missions of the USS Daystrom would give him the polish that he needed.

Ariana grinned. Without information they were working in a vacuum. With information, they were still working in a vacuum. Space. Oh how she wanted to point out the irony, but having made her point earlier, more with, than at the expense of Theodore, she stayed quiet despite her broadening grin. Looking around the table she saw a lot of dry scientists. She hoped they would become more interesting as she got to know them. In the back of her mind, something tickled. Something the captain had said that she knew

would become important. She kept her mouth shut, see if the other scientists had made the observation, or were distracted by her antics.

“Captain.” The quiet Benzite offered a polite bow to the captain. “I will be on the bridge.”

Chapter Four

“Lieutenant Patch, a moment if you please?” called Ariana as the meeting broke up. She caught up to Theodore in the hall.

Walking next to Theodore in the corridor the captain heard his name called. Captain Trensus walked up to Ariana, getting into her face, and spoke quietly. “Lieutenant Patch? Did you not hear me in the briefing room? I am the captain of this ship. I will be addressed as Captain or Captain Trensus, and maybe, Captain Patch! I know even in your DFA you know that! This will be the last time you will address me in that manner on this ship or I will put you back on Sentinel Station. Last warning. Do you understand Ensign Ariana Serota?”

“My bad. I got confused.” said Ariana. “It won't happen again captain.” properly mollified.

Captain Trensus walked away saying nothing more.

Ariana sighed. When she tried to play nice with Starfleet, it failed. The Starfleet officers always seemed to be so angry. But admitting ones mistakes and moving on was part of the definition of honor. It didn't matter if Starfleet didn't care. Ariana smiled. Captain Patch, Lieutenant Bear. She repeated it a few times to herself so she would not forget. Smiling she realized she was likely to call Captain Sesgaard ‘Captain Patch’ when she saw him next, what with his eye patch and all. She wondered if he would respond as negatively as Captain Patch, er, Captain Trensus. She still had Theodore to deal with and explain her actions to. She had, after all, been trying to help him, and the captain. “Lieutenant?”

Theodore turned his head. “Yes?”

“I hope you know I didn't tease you back there to make you angry. I know how tough it can be for an outsider. There was a lot of

tension in the room, you probably sensed it. I was watching the captain while the scientists talked, he was rapidly getting frustrated. He has his own self-doubts. The scientists looked at you questioningly wondering why you are assigned to Daystrom. The scientists, we're all cut throats at heart, until we can work on a common goal, wondering who was the smartest in the room.”

“And me not being scientist allows you to get your jabs in.” said Theodore.

“I teased you to defuse the situation. The captain was able to explain why you were assigned to the mission. The captain was able to exert his authority.” Ariana shrugged. “The scientists will still need to get over each other, but, hey, you guys are Starfleet. That should be the easy part right?”

“You would think.” Theodore said the fact that he was talking to an officer of the DFA, a group who was more successful in secession than the Maquis.

“It's tough being an outsider, although you are still one up on me being in Starfleet and not part of the rebellious Alliance forces here in the DQ.”

“I suppose so.” When the DFA first formed, he thought they would come to their senses and rejoin the Federation, but, now Theodore was wondering if they had more sense than him staying with the Federation.

Ariana extended a hand to shake with Patch. “DFA Ensign Ariana Serota, Geo-sciences. I live just down the hall from you on Sentinal Station. I know what those kids did to you on Halloween, remember?” introducing herself again, on a more personal level. She glanced down at his paw. “You not going to fry me if I shake your paw will you? You've still got that phaser in your paw and all.”

Theodore smirked. “It’s a gamble”

Ariana flinched, but kept her hand extended. “Really?” Seemed dangerous if shaking his paw could set off the phaser. What would happen if he tapped in a console too hard? Heaven forbid if he knocked on some door.

“I can tease to” Theodore said as he just shook her hand.

A broad grin spread across Ariana's face. “Yeah, you can.” she said. Thank you for being so understanding. I really want to work with you all, and Starfleet.”

‘Probably should not have left then’ was a thought that popped into Theodore’s electronic mind but he did not share it. Instead he just smiled

“I suppose I should also go apologize to the captain.” she said looking down the hall where Captain Patch had headed.

“I wouldn’t bother” Theodore said

Ariana nodded. “I suppose you are right, give him a chance to cool off.” said the scientist. “Thanks for the advice.”

Not exactly what Theodore meant but whatever.

Chapter Five

Not long after the meeting in the conference room, Lionin Favor held his own meeting, but whereas the previous one was about generalities of the mission, this new one was about how the scientists would combine their specialties to assess the situation.

The long worktable wasn't terribly different than the conference room's own, but it did contain computer access displays inlaid throughout its surface and of course...there were no chairs. At its center was a single display that would mirror the master image which he was about to generate. "Gather round people." Favor directed. "It's time to problem solve."

Althea was glad to finally see more information. She had little to go on when she had arrived at the initial meeting. Hoping that the team would be able to quickly find some answers and assist the Threshold Lab staff.

The Elaysian began bringing up the sensor scans that had been made from Sentinel Station. Those scans populated each of the operational master screens for the entire team to see. "The dwarf star's stellar emissions have done some pretty nasty things here." Vector lines indicated the direction of the wave, while an arc of rotation was indicated by a curved line with an arrow encircling each moon. A number above each of these arcs indicated the amount of rotational displacement the wave had caused on each of the lunar bodies, one of which contained the Threshold Lab.

The display had a dynamic look to it which would give them a good base to work from as they developed their working model. Favor looked at his own board then up at the vertical display that mimicked it. "OK, there's our primary reference model. Nothing changes this until we have better information or until we need to create additional models. Understood?"

Althea looked from the screen she was studying. “Yes, of course, sir.”

“Yes Sir.” Ariana chimed in quietly with the others.

“You're all welcome to work at the main table.” Favor said tapping its surface with the fingertips of both hands. “But remember that this area is for collaboration.” He waved his hand around the room toward the smaller partitioned spaces around the main table, which were only broken by the doors exit and the entrances to the lavatory and break room. “Each of those work areas is available for separate discussion and modeling. “Lieutenant Gero, we need to know WHAT the star is doing, why it's doing it, and when and if we can expect it to do it again.”

Gero nodded. He had already read over the information he had been given on the star. He felt some disappointment that he was being pulled away from his passion but he would have a chance to study the wormhole more when we got home. For now he had to focus on the mission at hand. “I can start working up a simulation, once we get better scans I can refine the simulation to give you a better idea of what's going on.”

“Ensign Serota, we need to look at both the moons to see if they're stable, but most especially Threshold's moon. That's our primary focus.”

“Understood Commander.” said Ariana. She was somewhat disappointed, the brown star sounded very interesting, but the movement of planets, signaled something rather big. They would need to have an idea of the force of magnitude involved. If she guessed correctly, they would be talking on the scale of several warp core explosions happening simultaneously.

“Lt. Commander Theophilus, due to your operations background, I'll want you to help develop whatever measures we'll need to get

the information required and present that to Chief Eiwan for systems compatibility issues and execution.”

“Yessir” Theophilus had worked with Eiwan before and was impressed with the chief engineer. “I look forward to working with you.”

The Himpanwei engineer always had a padd at her fingertips. “I have gone over the schematics on their communications systems. I’ll be able to affect repairs. The details will depend on the cause. I also have a small subspace transceiver we can install as needed.”

Favor’s years of project lead experience had come back to him like riding a bike, though in all honesty, his Elaysian physiology had never allowed him that particular experience. It was a metaphor. “Those are the assignments, people. You are all accomplished scientists in general and specialists in your individual areas of study. There’s no better team to help determine what we need to know.” After having met each of their eyes once, he began again. “Questions? Suggestions? This is open forum.”

“If I may Commander?” asked Ariana raising a hand.

“Of course. Go ahead.” Favor said encouraging the younger woman to speak her mind.

“I would like to work with Lt Gero to determine the brown dwarf star wave output, and the changes in the brown dwarf. That will let me ascertain the forces applied to the planets, and better predict the planetary tectonic changes involved.” said the DFA ensign.

“That’s a good, plan. Ensign.” Favor commented. “People, you are individuals but you are also a team. “I expect you to bounce ideas off one another and make time to collaborate as necessary. That is the whole purpose behind this lab’s design.” He splayed his hands outward palm up as though to say, ‘here it is, use it’. “Though you

have individual assignments, any and all assistance you can give each other is not only encouraged, but expected.”

“I would be pleased to work with you ensign.” The Bajoran smiled. He had on occasion engaged with small talk with Ariana when he first arrived on the station, but that was months ago. He looked forward to getting a chance to talk to her again.

“Also, if my initial, unscientific estimates,” said Ariana, with a nod to the Benzite, Ensign Hondrick. She did not want him thinking she just worked off the cuff but with real data. “If my initial predictions prove true, Commander Theophilus may want to also consider the operations involved for search and rescue of those on Threshold. A force large enough to move a planet is not insignificant, catastrophic casualties should be considered.” warned Ariana. “How many were on Threshold?”

“The official count is twenty-seven.” Lt. Commander Favor informed them. “However, it may be possible that they had people on leave or had visitors that are not included in the official number. They do not report daily duty logs to Starfleet or the Federation, so a best guess is all we've got.”

“Operations is prepared for such a contingency.” Lt. Commander Theophilus reported. “We have a cache of rescue equipment as well as a well-supplied Sick Bay. I have extensive medical training.”

Ariana nodded in appreciation. Twenty-seven would still tax a small ship like Daystrom. But at least they were as prepared as they could be. Then again, it was Commander Theophilus, an ex COO of Cromwell-B. Ariana took a little pride in that the DFA (even ex-DFA) officers were prepared. Of course that raised the question, why did Theophilus leave the DFA? She would be interesting to talk to, and Ariana hoped that their paths would cross on down time.

“Lieutenant Gero,” said Ariana rounding the lab table to stand next to the Bajoran. “I thought perhaps we could take a look at that wave the brown dwarf produced. We have the pre and post orbital scans of the moons, we can calculate to forces applied to the planets. It may help with determining what is going on internally inside the star.” suggested Ariana.

“That's a good place to start.” Gero nodded in agreement. It wouldn't take the computer long to do the required computations so they could get working in short order.

“Two things seemed unusual to me.” said Ariana. “This energy wave, obviously. But also this...” She brought up the images on the screen that Captain 'Patch' had shown them. “Look how the brown dwarf has changed.”

“The emitted visible light wavelengths have shifted.” Gero pointed out. The colour change was slight but it was there. The attached scans and spectrophotometry results showed that there had been a shift in the composition of the star. “That's not something that happens overnight.”

“I know. But it has.” said Ariana. “So our little brown dwarf has changed. Almost a bit of green shift. I think we should consider if it is done changing by the release of energy? Or should we expect additional changes?”

“It's probably to give a confident answer.” Gero had never seen anything like this in his experience. “Unless we know more about the source of these changes I'm not sure what to expect. It's quite possible that we have a one-time anomaly on our hands.”

“Something we may want to consider, is how did the star get the energy to change. Are there any propulsion tests Threshold could be testing that could have caused a gravity or singularity change? Romulans use singularities to power their ships...”

“It's a possibility,” The Bajoran stood there a minute thinking through the possible implications a propulsion test could have. “What if. Hmmm. I guess a shift in the gravity field could cause some sort of reaction but the scale of the shift would have to be pretty substantial to affect things on the atomic scale.”

“We should see what Threshold was also doing.” suggested Ariana.

The astronomer liked that idea. There was no use speculating when the answers could be right in front of them. “Do we have the logs of what they were working on?”

“I do not know.” said Ariana pulling up the requested data on the console. The information was pretty basic, limited to titles of projects.

Gero looked at what they had been given. “Most of these tests wouldn't come close to causing the changes we see.”

“Assuming the titles are what they actually say they are. Perhaps Lieutenant Bear could look further into it?” said Ariana.

“Commander Favor, would you be able to get the actual experimental protocols and data available from Threshold prior to the loss of communication downloaded into the system? Lieutenant Gero and I would like to see if anything could be related to the brown dwarf star.” asked Ariana.

Commander Favor turned at hearing his name and started towards the two scientists. He looked slightly to the right and nodded as he walked. “I'll do what I can, however I have it on some authority that a few of Threshold's projects were considered top secret. They may not give us access, which would be a terrible decision but intelligence doesn't always exhibit....intelligence.” He scrunched up

his face in an expression that somehow portrayed... 'You know how it is.'

There was a sparkle in Ariana's eye. "Then I happen to know someone who has the command presence to ask an on-board intelligence officer what he may be able to access, and let us know if there is anything important..."

Lt. Commander Favor became curious. "You do? Who?"

"The XO and coordinator of this gaggle of scientists?" suggested Ariana.

Lionin Favor rolled his eyes. "Gee thanks. Alright. I'll look into it. Get to work." His order was delivered with a degree of sternness but also playfulness. He turned and walked away.

Ariana turned to Gero. "One more thing." she said quietly. "You made a point here, these changes do not occur overnight. It's why I enjoy geophysics. Nothing is an emergency for that exact reason, nothing changes overnight."

Favor knew when he'd been dismissed from a conversation and as a thinker, he knew well enough not to derail a train of thought. He headed off to see what he could get from Starfleet and to leave his officers to do what they were here for.

"Yet something has changed overnight, figuratively speaking." said Ariana. "What if it didn't, but it's just our perception?" she asked.

"No one is asking about the time variable." said Ariana. "I think we should also look for chronitons and tachyons on our approach." said the scientist. No sense jumping into a temporal anomaly just because we didn't bother to look for one." She hoped Ensign Hondrick appreciated that and did not consider her overly cautious

in the face of absent data. She knew Benzite data evaluation was much different than, say, Human or Vulcan.

“From the engineering schematics, the station was not designed to work with time physics. There are a number of non-specific science labs that would have been upgraded based on their research. The station was built, first and foremost, for propulsion research.” Eiwan had little grounding in superstructure design for that specialty. Starfleet was at least 400 years away from successful manipulation of time.

“Could operations set up some of our scanners on approach to scan for chronitons and tachyons?” requested Ariana.

“Yes, I can take care of that, good thinking. Hopefully we will be well informed before arriving.”

Ariana smiled. “No, not quite done.” In fact, she had not even started on her own assignment, that of the moons. “One last sensor request.”

“Yes Ensign.”

“On approach, can we run some additional spectral scans of the brown dwarf? Also the gravimetric data and compare it to our records?”

“Yes, that will be no problem. I’ll have everything you need ready in short order.”

“In space, we are used to looking for a force to push the planets away.” said Ariana. “But there is another, equal, and perhaps easier explanation. What if there were a sudden drop in gravity centered on the brown dwarf star?” asked Ariana. “The planets would no longer have the same pull, and would shift their orbits away from the star, just as if they had been pushed, but they are being flung

away. How far depends on the gravity of the brown dwarf. A sudden drop in mass, such as an explosion, or sudden ignition of internal combustibles within the star could cause that drop.”

Ariana sat back and looked at Commander Favor's model. “I think if we can ascertain the forces applied to the planets, we will be well on our way to understanding what happened.” said the geophysicist. “And, if said forces will tear apart the moons, and if the moon shift was survivable by Threshold.” Eiwan would know, given Threshold’s construction, after Ariana gave her the force data.

Most models of planetary shifts had apocalyptic effects on the planets themselves. As smoothly as this mission had gotten started—smoother than most launches—Ariana expected several rough patches in the near future, no pun intended at the captain's expense.

“Forces of that magnitude would destroy Threshold Station.” Eiwan considered it for a moment. “It would destroy the moon it was built on.”

Chapter Six

Captain Trensus walked on to the bridge as the turbolift doors opened. He looked at the ship's commanding and executive officers' chairs at the very center of the circular bridge.

"Captain on the bridge." a crew member announced.

Captain Trensus looked over the crew. "Status." he asked as he walked to the captain's chair. Sitting, he leaned over and looked on his right-hand-side console.

A crewman walked handed him a padd. "Sir, we are on time and ready to depart."

"Thank you crewman" he replied.

"Bridge to Engineering. Ms. Eiwan, bring up power to full." said Captain Trensus.

"Mooring thrusters ready. Impulse engines online and warp drive at your command." Chief Eiwan had been in charge of readying the old Oberth-class ship for its new designation.

Trensus looked forward at helm. "Ensign Hondrick, separate from the station. Signal Hope One we are departing."

"Aye sir." The Benzite messaged traffic control. "Air locks secure. Docking clamps retracted."

"Helm. Manoeuvring thrusters. Take us out."

Hondrick applied a bit of pressure to the thruster controls. They would gain momentum slowly. "Thrusters on."

Captain Trensus had a sense of pride and accomplishment as he got the mission on its way. He knew they had a long way to go, an untested crew on an old ship. The crew was young for the most part.

“Set course for the brown dwarf, warp 6, and engage.” Captain Trensus said with confidence.

Ensign Hondrick had the location of Threshold Station keyed and ready. He engaged the warp engines and felt the ship ease past the speed of light. It would take the ship several hours to reach their destination. The Benzite settled into his routine of monitoring the ship's systems. He would run quick diagnostics when they were closer to their destination; to be on the safe side.

Lt. Commander Favor had missed all of the pre-launch niceties that were as essential to any mission as getting up in the morning was to getting ahead in life, still when he walked onto the bridge he knew full well that his team was in good hands. Like other specialty vessels designated for science, medical, or engineering purposes, the Daystrom essentially had two commands, one being that dealing with ship operations and the other specifically suited to the vessel's profile. That dual structure had been perfected aboard the USS DaVinci by Captain David Gold and Chief Engineer Sonya Gomez years ago. And that ship was still the perfect model of efficiency. Well...it was Captain Trensus's turn. God be with him. It wasn't always an easy marriage. “Sir”, Favor said to draw the captain's attention.

“Yes XO,” said the captain.

The older officer stepped over. “Everyone in the lab is on task. With your permission, I'll set up the main science station and it's auxiliary terminals to receive our inputs. I'd like to dedicate the upper left monitor as an AV comm system, that way we can converse back and forth as needed.”

“Thank you XO for that report. I know you have it under control and great idea. Make sure that the bridge keeps all of its functions. I still have a ship to run.” said Trensus.

“Yes, sir.” Favor replied. “We won't over talk the bridge. I promise.”

“That is a good thing. I and the bridge crew are here to support your science mission.” Trensus paused. “I did notice you here on the bridge. You are my XO and being in that position, you need to be here at times. I let it go due to the meeting you were conducting and it sounds like it went great.” Trensus smiled, then asked “Anything new with the brown dwarf?”

“I can't say yet, Captain Trensus.” Favor replied. “We need more data to make any kind of real assessment. I'd like to get us in closer.”

Hondrick offered facts into the conversation. “At this distance, the resolution of our sensors is no better than Sentinel Station. Once within the system, we can employ our full-spectrum sensors to the task. I will offer Lieutenant Favor my full assistance.”

“That would be very helpful, Ensign.” Favor replied.

Chapter Seven

“Captain. Approaching Threshold Station.” The Benzite officer guided the USS Daystrom into the star system. “Sensor readings do not match the cartographic record.”

“Helm. Drop us out of warp.” ordered Captain Trensu.

“Aye sir.” The USS Daystrom dropped from warp at some distance from the brown dwarf star. “One-quarter impulse.”

Commander Favor set about initiating the scans that his team would need. The brown dwarf’s emissions ebbed and flowed erratically. As he looked over one of the monitors he could see a visual representation of energy flowing out from the star one moment and flowing into it in another and it was no small amount either. The star was ‘pulsing’. He moved over to the visual display that contained the open comm to the lab. “Begin full spectral analysis.”

“Helm, take it slow for now. Let us get a good look around before we get closer.” said Captain Trensu. “Commander Favor, any thought on how to approach the brown dwarf?”

“Carefully.” Favor's single cryptic word seemed to put a pause on all activity on the bridge for a moment.

Ariana stood behind the sensor operator, awaiting the input from the sensors as they entered the system. But she stood riveted, eyes on the main view screen, waiting to see what the brown dwarf looked like coming out of warp. Or the moons, the one with Threshold was of particular concern given the early sensor readings. While Daystrom's long range scanners had no more sensitivity than those back on Sentinel Station, they had one advantage. They had been directed towards the brown dwarf after the communications blackout. They did not match Starfleet

records. And the readings were not just incongruous, they were alarming.

Ariana watched the pulsations and then closed her eyes. Like a life form breathing, or the erratic beating of a heart. Ariana was running it forward and backwards she tried to see where it was going, or where it began, getting no closer to any answers. Then she heard the ringing in her ears, 'let's not get ahead of ourselves, you are a scientist, don't guess, get the data'. Ariana opened her eyes. The scene had not changed. The star was still pulsating, the scientists were studying the readouts, the Starfleet officers remained in rigid control, while Ariana fought inner demons, demons that had only been placed at the beginning of this mission questioning her logic and professionalism.

Ariana looked at the preliminary scans. She looked for changes in chronitons and tachyons with could indicate a time anomaly component associated with the brown star pulsations.

The sensors sweep seemed to indicate a type of gravimetric distortion of the star along the lines that had been hinted at by some of the science specialists. "Now, this is interesting." Favor said, quietly. His voice had a faraway quality owed to the fact that his mental energies were fully locked in on the star and its activity.

"The star is in a type of gravimetric flux. Energy wave patterns are expanding and condensing but not in direct proportion to the force of gravity. It is not changing in size, but in the strength of its energy emissions. And since it's size and physical density remains constant, its gravity should as well!" He pulled back away from the readings. "What happened here???"

Althea didn't like the sound of that. She expected the worst.

"Captain," said Ariana, "A course change may be considered safer than a more direct approach. It will give the scientists time to

analyze what is changing with the star, and allow us to move to a position to see the Threshold's moon. If something unexpected happened, it may be time we need to get away.” said Ariana.

“If you would have heard what I ordered, Ensign Serota, I ordered search pattern Sierra.” replied Captain Trensus.

Ensign Hondrick maintained his course. He had no insight to offer. He was, after all, a functionary of Captain Trensus without the expertise of the ship's science complement.

Ariana sighed. “Aye Captain Trensus.” She had not intended to irritate the captain, requiring him to reprimand her. Indeed, she had asked her immediate science superiors if using the lateral arrays were even an option before taking it to the captain. And she didn't know what Search Pattern Sierra was; it wasn't anything she had been taught at the academy. Perhaps she should look at Starfleet ship protocols. Of course Lt. Bear would probably assume she was spying. She shot a guilty look his way. There was a definite difference in culture between Starfleet and the DFA.

Lt. Commander Favor understood the desire to see what was going on with the Threshold moon. The cautious approach to the star DID mean that they couldn't see it directly, but a refractory scan bounced off the star's coronal ejections..... From his station on the bridge he adjusted one of the telemetry scans. It was like looking at the reflection of a limb hanging over a pond after tossing a rock into the water. The scene moved and changed, but by superimposing images one on top of another a picture began to form. “Captain....ENSIGN,” he added acknowledging the young officer's desire to know, “I don't think that the moon that Threshold was on is even there.”

Chief Eivan ran analyses on the scans. There was enough information in the broad scans for her work. “The station is gone. Mixed with the planetoid debris are manufactured compounds

consistent with the station's construction: tritanium, duranium, transparent aluminum.”

“There are two other debris fields with similar trace elements.” Eiwan didn't need much sensor resolution to detect the cloud of small bits of ship. “There were at least two ships in the system at the time Threshold Station was destroyed.”

“Ensign Hondrick, take a heading of 280 mark 4. I don't like this. Let's keep some space between us and the debris fields.” said Captain Trensus calmly. “Tactical.”

“The construction is fairly generic. It lacks the major markers of Starfleet, the Federation more broadly, Romulan, Klingon, DFA. I can tell you clearly who they were not but not who they were.” So many species use a mixture of sources in their ships. Major powers could secure the entire supply chain for their proprietary components. Even the Ferengi separated the technologies they utilized on their own ships from what they sold their best customers. Lieutenant Bear found something in the records. “Hey Gero. Can you scan for borayons?” Theodore asked.

The Bajoran looked over at the intelligence officer. He set the scanners accordingly and began looking. “Any particular reason?”

“Just a hunch I have.” Theodore explained.

“I'll keep an eye out.” Gero began looking through the incoming data. “Results coming in now.”

Captain Trensus walked closer to the viewer. “Look how close the ship debris is. If a ship was destroyed by weapons fire the debris field should be twice that and both fields are the same shape. Commander Favor, how strong are the gravity fields and does the brown dwarf have the power to do all of this destruction?”

Favor looked over the readings and worded his answer carefully. “The gravity field can be stronger than normal at times but it is just as likely to be abnormally weak at regular intervals. I'd say that it is currently only likely to cause any harm if anything comes to within 70 million kilometers. Now what it was like before, I can't be 100% certain about, but honestly Captain, I don't think so.”

“Helm, bring the ship within 75 million kilometers between the moon and the possible ship wreckage, one quarter impulse.” Captain Trensu look over to Favor questioning if this was a good idea. “Engage.”

The CSO stepped over to the viewer. “Team, what else can you tell me about the star or the debris field that we haven't already disclosed?”

“In all my years I have not quite seen anything like this. I would say that everything was crushed then stretched out. The debris field is in a cone shape.” Trensu pointed at the screen. “As if it were drawn away from it's center point. Ballistics would say that something out there was drawing the debris fields away from the brown dwarf; or was.”

He closed his eyes, took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “Computer, plot the points of the debris fields.”

“Plotting.” said the computer.

“We all know that whatever did this, it took a lot of energy to make this happen. Let's get some answers.” said the captain.

Something Commander Favor said made Ariana look again at the debris fields. First the two ships. They looked like cones, from a point spreading outwards, but as Captain Trensu had noted, not as dispersed as one would expect if the two had been fighting over a region of space. That would appear more random as the two ships

evaded, and fired on each other. Then she checked Threshold's moon. The initial assumption was the star caused the destruction, so she checked the moon debris dispersal pattern. Even given the orbit, which was easily calculated from previous known data, the dispersal pattern of the moon did not match something coming from the brown star.

Then Ariana checked the pattern against where the two ships were. Could the moon's destruction come from an event located where the two ships were destroyed? Or was it the inverse, something from the moon's destruction caused the destruction of the two ships?

Commander Favor turned to the captain. "This isn't going to be an easy explanation, captain. We'll be here awhile. I recommend the ship always be at ready stations."

"Captain Trensus to Chief Petty Officer Eiwana."

"Eiwana" replied the ship's engineer. She and a crewman were the only two in the ship's engineering section located several decks below the Science and Research Operations compartment on deck four.

"If we need to get out of here quick I need to be able to do max warp at a moment's notice. Also, is there any interference from borayon particles or gravity fluctuations on the engines?"

"Engines are ready on your orders." Eiwana ran a tight ship.

"There are no unusual gravitational readings. The system is flooded with low-energy quanta, nothing that would inhibit the formation of a stable warp field."

"Thank you chief. Keep up the good work. Trensus out."

Ariana had been studying the sensor readings. The findings were well outside the parameters for normal phenomenon. But there could be an explanation that tied this all together, Propulsion theory. However, the energy levels generated would have been off the scales for most known technology. But Threshold was not working on known technology.

“Captain Trensus, I may have a working hypothesis.” offered Ariana.

“Working hypothesis. Good” said Captain Trensus. He looked around the room to see if people were paying attention. Captain Trensus raised his voice to make sure everyone could hear. “Go on, tell us what you think.”

“I was looking at the debris patterns,” said Ariana. “I could not figure out how the brown dwarf could have done this. This is way outside the normal behavior of a brown dwarf. Likewise, if the problem came from Threshold's moon, it would not account for the ship debris pattern. Even the ships do not entirely fit a specific pattern. The debris pattern is not one seen after combat, and we don't have weapons fire residue evidence.”

Commander Favor agreed completely and was impressed by the young Ensign. It was always good to see an intelligent mind at work. He nodded to her. “I like where you're going. Continue.”

“Two clues to a possible unified explanation Commander,” began the young scientist, looking for the unified theory and simplest explanation that fit. Occam's razor. “First Lt. Bear suggested we search for borayon particles. We also know there are some reports that Threshold is performing propulsion research. Borayon particles are associated with transwarp technology. I believe the ships were somehow involved, either accidentally or purposely involved, in the transwarp propulsion testing. A catastrophic failure occurred, causing the destruction of the ships, the moon, and causing the loss of mass of the brown dwarf leading to its instability.”

“Interesting. It would make sense for the type of destruction we are seeing here. That would account for some of the readings we are getting. Now we just have to prove your hypothesis.” said Captain Trensu.

“That’s where we come in.” Lt. Commander Favor said, again nodding at Ariana to lend support to her theories.

Gero began looking through the incoming data. “Results coming in now.”

“I cannot categorically say one way or the other without additional evidence. The sudden change in the brown dwarf mass could cause the moon’s destruction, although initially I am inclined to believe the star mass change and moon destruction were simultaneous. The debris pattern suggests these events happened simultaneously, likely at the time of the ships destruction.”

“We would have to examine the ships to determine if the debris were ships involved in testing; perhaps test platform and observation craft. Another possibility is these are ships caught in the testing, which could contribute to the test failure.” said Ariana. “Confirming transwarp testing and what the tests involved would help with this investigation. Perhaps Lt. Bear and or Commander Favor could access experimental protocols and testing procedures?”

“I’m not seeing any way to get to the information, Captain.” Favor said with some exasperation. “Whatever they were working on was being treated with the utmost secrecy. I can infer the protocols of transwarp and extrapolate from there, but we may be barking up the wrong tree.”

“There is the possibility the test platform ship, a third ship we have not seen here, could have hit the star, imploding and causing this

level of destruction. Captain,” said Ariana turning back to Trensu, “transwarp speeds are extremely dangerous.”

“If there was we may never know.” answered Captain Trensu.

“One more thing. Perhaps Eiwan could elaborate further, this is out of my specialty, but from what I have heard, there is a time component involved with transwarp drives,” Ariana looked to the sensor data. “We haven't yet gotten the tachyon or chroniton readings back yet from sensors at this range. Whenever you factor in the time variable, the impossible could happen.”

Althea listened. She agreed with Ariana's speculation. “When the first Sentinel Station was destroyed by time displacement, the people involved were displaced to another dimension. What are the chances of that being the case here?”

“Dimensional physics will add a whole new wrinkle to this.” Favor added. “We should look at that potential, but proceed with the investigation as though that were not the case until such time as we can prove it.”

Ariana nodded. “It would be a long shot, but could scientists and crew from Threshold or the ships be alive in some sort of time stasis or bubble? We would also need to consider 'Will our investigation drag us into something like this as well?' I recommend extreme caution Captain Trensu, Commander Favor.”

It was at this point, that Favor started to feel that Ensign Serota's youth was beginning to show. The inability to focus and letting ideas run away with themselves were often handicaps of the young. “Let's get the readings we'll need to begin this line of inquiry. Full scans for tachyon, chroniton and borayon particles as well as detailed examinations of the debris fields in evidence are our starting point. We can come back to the ‘what ifs’ afterwards, ensign.”

“Yes Commander.” said Ensign Serota. She did not fight the decision, it was after all a long shot, but to have not mentioned the possibility now, and later found someone that could have been rescued had they acted would weigh heavily. That decision had been taken out of her hands. It wasn't like she had not seen it happen, they brought back a dead captain from four hundred years ago hadn't they? Of course that mission was classified and not really available to use as a point in an argument.

“We are doing great work here. We have some hypotheses. Let's try to prove some of them.” said the captain, smiling.

Favor stepped over to the open comm screen and amended assignments with the team below. “Eiwan will review the physical debris field. Lt. Gero, follow up with the star and the moon.” He turned to Ensign Serota, but he was still in view of the screen and those below. “You know what you need to do, Ensign. Prove your theory if you can, but take it one step at a time. If the results of the scans don't support what you've proposed, adjust accordingly.” Making sure everyone knew the drill he spoke loudly for everyone's benefit. “All results to the Master Science Display in the lab and up here.”

“Looks like that hunch paid off.” Gero gave a nod of approval to the Intel officer. The Bajoran was always pleasantly surprised when someone outside the sciences came up with solutions. It was a refreshing feeling to know that everyone had something to offer.

Theodore got a lucky break. Apparently Threshold Station was involved in developing transwarp technology. Starfleet had been pursuing this technology for over fifty years. It would allow Starfleet to cover distances in a fiftieth of the time of high warp. The detection of borayons was a confirmation that this incident involved a transwarp conduit.

“Good work Gero and Theodore.” said the captain happily. “Now we have some proof. We just have to link everything together.”

“I’ll leave that up to you. I’m no science officer; just a finder of secrets and blaster of enemies.” Theodore told them.

Turning around to face Theodore, “You are more than that. You can tell who or what could be in the area and the possible threat that could bring.”

Ariana smiled at Theodore's description of himself. She wondered what she would say about herself. 'Ariana, you are not concentrating.' probably. She turned her attention back to what the captain had been saying. 75 million kilometres. They were working right up to the edge of safety. Ariana concentrated her attention on the brown dwarf to make sure they had as long of a warning as possible if something should occur. Ariana was fairly confident that it was some threshold that had been crossed, not a natural phenomenon; pun intended. Sensors were on alert to changes within the brown dwarf. Ariana awaited the Daystrom's crew's findings.

“I'll see if the sensors can start analyzing the new particles. Maybe that will provide some answers.” Gero left the small moment of victory behind as he went back into the fray.

The chief engineer continued to work through the metallurgical analysis of the debris fields. The combinations of metals and composites were non-specific. Within seconds she had ruled out some of the more belligerent groups in the sector. They were constructed by a secondary power. That did not preclude their status as proxies for a major power.

Eiwan turned to Lieutenant Bear. “Do we have any intelligence on the proxies of powers hostile to the Federation? Who else might know of the facility here?”

Theodore looked at the map. “Well, there are the Hirogen, clans of rogue Cronin, Kanterrian’s and Kalel. All these are possible hostiles.” Theodore theorized.

“Thank you.” Eiwán’s original report to Captain Trensú stood. She could not pinpoint the origin of those debris fields. Perhaps there was something unique about those debris fields. She looked through Ensign Gero’s scans. There were baryon particles steaming away from the star. The ships were definitely using transwarp propulsion. That reduced the number of possible species.

“Is there a comprehensive list of nearby planets whose inhabitants are known to use transwarp?”

“I was going by species in the area. Otherwise I would have added Cardassians, Romulans, the Nal’Gaharay. This system is near the border of each of their territories.” Bear commented.

At transwarp speed, half of the Delta Quadrant would be ‘close’ to this planet. Ariana looked up as Bear continued. The Nal’G? Using transwarp?

So many Alpha Quadrant powers had staked out claims in the DQ, especially near the wormhole, Lt. Commander Favor thought, while still looking over data coming in. It was inevitable that these races be considered as possibilities, but there was so much they didn’t know. They needed to be open to the unknown as well as the known. The Nal’Gaharay were always a question mark. Their methods and goals varied as widely as the species makeup on any particular vessel. There was no telling what they might be involved in, but, any time the destruction of Alpha Quadrant property occurred, putting them in consideration for responsibility was always prudent.

The chief engineer noted the short list. Starfleet Engineering had no notes on those species that would pinpoint their technology. Unless another ship of the same type appeared nearby for comparison, the chief engineer was at a loss. “Thank you Lieutenant Bear.”

“The fact that others may be involved would not surprise me. We all know to stay ready.” The captain looked at the bridge officers. “Our sensors are better than most and we should see them before they see us—that is my hope anyways.

Captain Trensus turned to Lieutenant Bear. “Ready two countermeasures. That should throw them off so we can run if needed. In the tactical world we call them ‘wild weasels’. It will put multiple sensor images of us out there.”

“Now we need to find the bread crumbs. There is a trail here with the particles. Where do they concentrate? Do the trails of particles link up or flow from one point to another? We need to tie all this together.” The captain said to the science crew.

The sensors registered unusual readings between 5,000 and 15,000 kilometres from Daystrom.

Trensus turned to look at Ariana. “You are right. We are close.”

“Captain, long-range sensors are detecting three ships incoming.” Ensign Hondrick reported. “Approaching at warp two, bearing 90 marks 45. Weapons range in five minutes.”

Lt. Commander Favor switched his focus from the investigation to the new arrivals. “Captain, these ships are running under primitive cloak. The type of which is almost 200 years out of date. They may believe that they cannot be seen by us, but that’s still a reach on my part.”

Trensu looked back at Favor. “I don't need to be told what that is. We have visitors!”

Favor almost visibly recoiled. What was with the aggression and the suspicion that seemed to have gripped the bridge? Both Lieutenant Bear and Captain Trensu seemed to be pushing the envelope. Why? He turned back to his scans, but now with a new thought in mind.

“Why couldn't they be friendlies? Maybe they lost someone too, like the two ships out there.” Ariana looked back at the sensors. “Eiwan, can you run an analysis to see if the inbound ship composition matches either of the destroyed ships?”

“The hull composition is extremely similar.” Eiwan could accept some variance given that volatile compounds would have reacted chemically with some hull elements. The composite materials were fairly resistant and did match. Some of the isotopic ratios were an exact match. “I would say that the two destroyed ships match those incoming. Their hull configuration identifies as Cronin.”

“I have researched the Cronin.” Althea offered. “They are a very aggressive race, males and females alike. There are many reports of outright hostility toward anyone who has contact. Don't count on logic when dealing with them. Physically, they are an average eight to ten feet tall for males and the females about the same.” Althea knew more but expected this to be enough to give the crew a heads up on who they were dealing with. The Cronin reminded her a bit of her distant ancestors; the Titans. The name Cronos and Cronin somehow seemed appropriate.

“From what I have gathered, their species is overly aggressive with a talent for destruction and carnage and a love for battle on the same level as Klingons without the honor.” Theodore told them.

“I do not know what they may want but we cannot fight them. Hell, we are not to fight at all.” said the captain.

“Are you going to warn them?” asked Ariana of the captain. “You saw the sensor readings. They are on course to go close to the same spot. It may be the same effect as we see on the other two ships.”

She turned to Favor. “They may think we did this to their ships.”

“It depends on what their intentions are.” said Trensus, his voice cold and with no emotion. “They should see us before they get into any trouble. If they are diplomatic and wish not to attack us, I will do all I can for them. If they wish to attack us, well I could leave some navigation information out of my conversation.”

“I say we just watch and see if we can save them at the last second. They will be less hostile if they realize we’re the only ones preventing their deaths. They may not trust us but they will not try and attack us.” Theodore said.

“Borayon particles!” Favor declared loudly, as he spun around to face the entire bridge complement. “Borayon particles are known to have effects on the brain. Captain, if I may be so bold. I don't think that you are in full control of yourself. Lieutenant Bear, while an android, may be going through something similar.” At least Ensign Serota, seemed to be immune.

The captain spoke in a stern tone. “I am fine Favor. We will discuss this later.”

Favor realized that maybe even he wasn't handling things the right way, but he couldn't help himself. “Are we seriously, AS STARFLEET OFFICERS, considering the idea that we are going to take a wait and see approach that could result in the destruction of 3 vessels!?”

His voice had risen to a near screech. “This isn't right! It CAN'T BE right!”

He turned back to his console in a rush. “I'm looking for a way to screen out borayon radiation.”

The captain turned to Favor. “No! We won't wait. I just wanted to see what the crew was going to do.” He paused. “We will deal with this now.”

“Open communications channel to the Cronin ships.” commanded the Captain. “This is the research ship USS Daystrom. You are entering a hazardous area, drop out of warp and prepare for navigation instructions.”

The face on the screen was someone Theodore recognized. He, Nort and the Gorn, Torraith, were taken in for questioning about the disappearance of the trader Winbal.

“This is Varg of the Cronin clan Jurlat. What are your intentions?” Other Cronin might have straight-out attacked but his dealing with other species made him less quick to violence than the rest of his kind.

“I will send you the data. Stand by.”

Gravity wells, thought Ariana. She was getting lost in what appeared to be some rather emotionally charged exchanges between the Starfleet officers. A small ping went off in her head, which she stored for later. First she had to see who was actually of sound mind.

First, she scanned for gravity wells. While they could account for the destruction of the ships, no one had been talking about any gravity wells beyond Thresholds moon and the brown star. Luckily,

this was a normal task for ships sensors. The sensors found them at the location of the probes destruction.

“Captain Trensu, advise we back off our current location...” Ariana pretended to look at some data on the console, “Another fifty thousand kilometres. If the alien ships fail to respond, their destruction could negatively impact out sensor readings. The small step back will protect the ship's sensors.” suggested Ariana. “It will also give Lieutenant Bear more time to respond to the Cronin ships if they do prove to be hostile.”

“That is my intention, Ensign Serota” replied the captain.

Ensign Hondrick followed the exchange but did not act. The captain had not, in fact, given him an order. He could accept instructions from a science officer. “Commander Favor, could you tie your borayon shielding analysis output to my console?”

“Certainly.” Favor nodded. It was never a bad idea to have multiple minds working a problem.

Ariana sighed. The afterthought of the borayon density was the real information she needed. If people were going nuts on the bridge, it was that particle's fault. They had seemed reasonably sane a short while ago, for Starfleet officers that was. Asking for the ship to back off and double checking the borayon density to ensure they retreated to a safe distance should improve the crew's attitude. Which brought up her next thought, the three alien ships may be affected as well.

“Dealing with Cronin is hard. You cannot show weakness but you cannot show too much strength either.” the robotic bear stated.

“There are three of them and even one outguns us.” said Ariana. “If it were anyone other than you at tactical and Trensu in command, I would say that was unfair odds. Consider holding fire until we reach

the outskirts of the system.” said Ariana. That would take them and the aliens far enough away from the borayon radiation sources that the effects may taper off sufficiently to bring the crew around to themselves.

“Ensign Serota, you are out of line! We are fine. Our crew is fine. And if we run now that would look bad on us. It could seem to them we are hiding something.” said the captain in a stern voice.

“Aren’t we though?” Theodore said.

Ariana accepted the reprimand, although moment ago Trensus was willing to pull back, now he was going to stand his ground. In the Daystrom?

The bridge officer was concerned that the conversation had strayed. “Captain, request permission to pull the Daystrom back to a safer distance from the Cronin vessels.”

“Helm, get ready to jump to maximum warp back to Hope One.”

“Aye sir.” Hondrick plotted a course several thousand kilometers away from all threats. In his Academy training, his martial combat instructor called it “white space”. As a Benzite, he was at a physical disadvantage. His cartilaginous body structure was susceptible to damage by most species with a calcium-bone structure. Stepping back out of a combat situation, creating a “white space”, provided him with additional defensive options.

Ariana had carefully tried to appeal to each of their normal states. Hondrick would not try new things, but only tried and true things until further testing was performed, so she had subtly suggested a retreat along a known safe route. Bear would and could fight, but she gave him a tactical reason to fight later, rather than earlier. Favor trusted science, and was already delving into the problem, she just encouraged his natural instinct. The captain, he was in

command, he would protect the ship, Ariana had nudged him in a non-confrontational direction. Ariana turned her attention to the borayon summary page she had called up when they had first entered the system. This was all unfamiliar territory for her science degree, she needed to learn a lot more about borayon particles and fast. She started getting the feeds from Favor's console.

"You should have the data that your requested now, Ensign." Favor said. "Let me know what YOU SEE."

"Open communications channel." asked the captain.

"We are not a combat ship. We have been researching what happened here. This ship is at the very edge of a hazardous area of space. I do not want to engage in combat with you. I can answer some of the questions you have about what happened here. I hope you could help us as well." said the captain.

"Helm, send them navigation information."

"Should not have told them we're not a combat ship." Theodore face-palmed.

"What? Just do as I say when I say it, Lieutenant." said the captain.

"I hear you brother bear." muttered Ariana. Out of line, insubordinate... much longer and she'd be walking home. Why couldn't they encounter a race of snuggly tribbles as she looked at the anatomy diagrams that accompanied the description of Cronin society.

"NO NOT YET!" Varg shouted to one his underling's. "Thank you captain."

"These Cronin do not sound as aggressive as the bio says here," Ariana commented to Favor. "Do you think the borayon radiation

affects them the same as others?” She was watching the borayon levels drop.

“There's no telling what effect that it would have on their physiology.” He stated, uncertain. “Some species might not be affected by them at all.”

“What borayon level should be a safe level Commander?” asked Ariana of Favor. Distance would be required, which would be up to the captain to protect his crew. She was watching to see if there was a drop.

Favor looked down at his screen. “I'd be wary of more than 1500 mSv for more than 30 minutes. Less if we're on station longer.” He warned.

“Communications, notify Hope One of our situation and position.”

“Transmitting logs on encrypted channel.” replied Ensign Hondrick.

Inside the ship, Varg head-butted one of his officers. “I will say when we kill them.” He became clan leader not too long ago after rejoining to help Brunt during the Cronin Rite of passage. If Croin were going to go it on their own they should not rely on non-Croninso he re-joined his clan. Not long after his clan leader died and Varg took over. If he did not have the biggest hump in the ship they would have challenged him for the position of clan leader since all Varg had done was talk.

“Tactical, let me know if their weapons are charged. Shields.” Trensu paused and looked at the viewer. He walked back to his chair and sat down in it. “Red alert! Favor, I know you will hate this, but we need to be ready. I will try to avoid combat but if they come at us at full speed... we know what they will do.”

“Retreat course plotted and ready. Shall I send a request for assistance, sir?” Hondrick knew well the limited capabilities of the Daystrom. He could not directly question his captain but it was incumbent on him to make sound recommendations based on the facts as they existed.

Their clan leader died along with the research station. For what purpose was never reported to Varg.

Something was wrong. Cronin were not attacking. Commander Favor was irritable. Tresu was ready to fight in a scientific vessel. Ariana was confused. Okay, the last was not unusual as she tried to put the pieces together. “What are our current borayon levels?” asked Ariana. “I think I have a lag on my console of the readings...”

Favor looked again at the readings. “We're at 1322 mSv at our current position. It is enough to alter brain chemistry in the short term.” He now thought it wise to warn his captain. “Captain Trensus, I need to point out that this location is unstable and can make us UNSTABLE.” As he said it, he keyed in a sequence meant to reduce the borayon radiation levels. The ship's deflector grid began resonating a low-level field meant to scatter the particles. “I'm trying to dissipate the borayon radiation as we speak. I'd advise the Cronin to do the same. They could need our help.”

The captain turned to Favor. “How long before the borayon radiation will dissipate?”

Favor looked over at Trensus. “Incoming radiation will cease almost immediately, but we've already got radiation inside the ship. It affects people, not things, so we don't need to worry about contact radiation, just what we already have in us.”

“Well people keep telling me I'm technically a thing so I'm fine.” Theodore said.

Trensu looked at Althea. “Can you make an inoculant for the borayon radiation? If so, how fast can you get that set up and get the crew inoculated?”

“Creating the agent should be doable.” Althea answered. “I’ll get right on it. I will be ready within the hour. We have everything we need.”

Ensign Hondrick turned to Captain Trensu. “Captain. Multiple ships approaching at high warp. They appear to be Cronin in design.” Daystrom’s bridge officer noted the silhouette, warp signature and origin as self-confirming details. He was quite sure about his conclusion.

“Get Varg back on-screen.” ordered Trensu. “What is going on Varg! I thought we were going to work this out? Now I have ships coming at us at high warp? Why? Do you want to fight with the Federation?”

“My crew wants a fight. I’m the only one keeping you alive you arrogant fool.” Varg yelled back. “My people are warriors and killers and damn good at both.”

Lionin Favor listened from his position at the science station. He shook his head. So much confusion, so much.... And then there was a ping on the screen at the edge of their scan range. If this hadn’t been one of the BEST science setups in the quadrant, they would have missed it. “Captain!” He stepped away from the station and toward the ship’s CO. “There is an escape pod at our maximum range, single occupant, strong life signs.” His eyes drifted to the screen—to Varg. “Is that what this is all about? All these ships?” He waved. “Is this a mass search?” He shook his head again, confusion was replaced by anger. “What was going on here?” He questioned. “What are you hiding?”

"What are YOU hiding? What happened to our old clan leader?"
Varg asked.

"It sounds as if you have your own internal problems. I do not know what happened to your clan leader, I suspect that one of the destroyed ships is his." Trensu said. "Helm, maximum speed to that pod. I want to be the first there. Tactical, if we are engaged fire only to disable their weapons and engines."

"Course plotted. Full impulse." Ensign Hondrick plotted a course that would arc across the path of the incoming Cronin ships. Daystrom's bulk and EM output would reduce the effectiveness of Cronin transporters and serve as a barrier to Cronin weapons.

"Yes Captain" Theodore said.

"Eiwan, I want to beam that pod into one of our cargo bays. Can you make that happen?"

"My team can." The chief petty officer said, trying to make sure that they all got their due credit. It really wasn't a big deal, but she wanted to make sure that no one was overshadowed. After a cursory look from the captain, she added, "No worries, sir. We'll get it."

"Helm, when we get the pod, maximum speed back to Hope One and ask for assistance from any Starfleet ships in the area."
commanded Trensu.

Ensign Hondrick triggered a standard "request for tactical assistance" broadcast. Tactical Operations had clearly taken proactive actions based on the previous reports by Captain Trensu. "Captain. USS Arbalest will intercept in 60 minutes."

The occupant of the observation craft had watched, quietly, the Federation and Cronin ships. His borayon radiation meter had hit

maximum safe levels the previous day. He lapsed in and out of consciousness.

“Very low power readings from the object.” Chief Eiwan reported. It was drifting with a near-zero signal.

“It is an escape pod, short range - reaction control thrusters only.” Favor said going over the readout display. “There is a single life sign, which appears weak, unknown species.” In an instant he changed tack back to the pod itself. “The emergency beacon is out, undoubtedly there's not a working comm system.” He turned toward the others, thoughtfully. “Whoever is in there, they are lucky that anybody found them.”

“Acknowledged. I have one life sign. I want to get closer before I attempt a transport.” The Himpanwei engineer knew she had one chance to beam the occupant to Sickbay.

“We might have to sedate him. All the radiation might have made him rabid.” Lieutenant Bear stated.

“I'll have a firm transporter lock at 100,000km.” responded Eiwan. As Daystrom approached the object, the life sign was resolving into a clearer signal.

“Transport!” commanded Trensu.

As USS Daystrom passed into transporter range, Eiwan began transport of the life sign. “A single life form has been transported to Sick Bay.”

“Captain, I'll be in Sick Bay.” Althea had hopes of helping the unknown being.

“Captain, permission to go to Sick Bay.” requested Ariana.

“Be careful.” As the captain talked, there was concern in his voice.

The Oberth-class ship changed heading for Sentinel Station and increased velocity. It's maximum velocity was marginally higher than the Cronin ships in pursuit according to the latest Starfleet Intelligence reports.

“I'm not sure they are done with us yet. Now we have something they want.” Trensus looked at the viewer.

Chapter Eight

Althea arrived in Sick Bay and approached the alien's body. The engineer was precise. She had also encased the being in a stasis field for protection. The alien could be dangerous to the crew and vice versa. Althea did not recognize the species.

Ariana looked at the patient. There were many species in the Delta Quadrant, both native and immigrants, the variability was greater than that in the Federation. The DFA spent time introducing themselves and learning about species. Ariana recognized the species, but could not recall their cultural traits from her classes. "He looks Loukassan."

"His borayon particle count is high compared to ours."

=^=Theophilus to bridge.^=

=^=What is the status of your patient? ^= asked the captain.

=^=Sir, the alien we have in sickbay is in stasis and appears to be clear of any contaminants we need worry about. I would like to free him. I would be open to someone coming down as back up. Under the intense borayon exposure there is no way to know his frame of mind when he awakens. Perhaps Theodore would also like to ask some questions.^=

=^=I will dispatch a security officer to your location. I will send Theodore as well.^= said Tensu.

"The Cronin." said Ariana to Althea. "They must have wanted him," nodding at the patient, "for something. Do you want me armed Commander?" Ariana glanced around for an armory box.

"No. We have no idea what the effect the borayon exposure has on him." Althea waited the short time it took for an armed security officer to arrive as well.

So the Cronin wanted him. Ariana was curious to see why. She also wanted security there, as much for when the patient awoke as just in case the Cronin tried a beam in to retake their quarry.

Althea activated the sequence for the release from stasis. The patient lay still but soon began to breathe deeply and open his eyes. “Easy, you are safe.”

Campada saw the bright lights overhead and felt a surge of panic. He had rigged his life support system to it's lowest settings. He set a timer to revive him. He looked at the faces around him. “You're humans.”

“You have been brought aboard the USS Daystrom. Your pod was adrift.” Althea did not see any evidence of hostility. Hopefully the patient was not going to present a problem.

“Federation.” Campada's memory was a bit foggy. A Federation starship was the safest place for him. “I am Loukassan. My home world is within Cronin-controlled space. Our contact with outsiders is limited.”

“The effects of borayon radiation should dissipate. Are you experiencing any other problems that may require treatment?” Althea had the readings from the Loukassan to study but could not be sure there might be more unseen issues.

“The lingering effects of borayan radiation and my own self-induced stasis will take some time, but, I am quite healthy. Thank you, doctor.”

“Now I take it you are not exactly allies with the Cronin.” Theodore Bear guessed.

“Alliance is a stretch. We are a suppressed people. The Cronin control the planet. Few of us are given permission to leave our world.” Campada knew his involvement at Threshold was the highest level of secrecy.

“Hmmm that’s a little surprising for them. Renegade Cronin have normally been a chaotic species, since they rebelled against the Solimenti Empire. The idea that they would subjugate and police another species seems unlikely unless there is something they need from her people.”

Ariana stood by, armed with a Starfleet phaser. She was more concerned about invaders than the Loukassan, but you never knew. She double checked the stun setting.

“Some Cronin clans lack the technical skill to repair their own ships.” Campada sat up. “Many of my people have been forced into the repair and maintenance of ships.”

Althea had prepared an inoculant that could be inhaled. She prepared enough to be distributed by the various department personnel. “Borayon radiation is falling. Additional doses of inoculation will be needed.”

Ariana took note of the Loukassan's answers in case Theodore needed help. Then she decided he was a walking computer and would not need the help. Then a thought crossed her mind. “Commander Theophilus, I can take the inoculation batch to Engineering if you wish.”

Ariana thanked the healer for the hyospays and headed for the door. She paused briefly near Theodore. Was he to get one of these too? Favor said Theodore was also affected by the borayon particles. How would he be inoculated? If he was only relying on shielding, he could be affected until they reached greater range. Would he be more affected than the crew who was inoculated? Could

he carry on his duties? How would they trust his investigation for that matter? Theodore did not breathe nor did he have a sense of smell so how could a synthetic being like him be affected? It made zero sense therefore he must be perfectly fine unlike the organics who do need to be inoculated.

“I will be in Engineering if you need me.” said Ariana politely.

“Thank you Ariana.” Theodore said. “ Now Campada what is your position?”

“I am a warp physicist. My own research facilities were destroyed in a skirmish between rival Cronin clans. I have been assisting Federation scientists in developing transwarp technology.”

“That does make sense.” Theodore stated. “The renegade clans have not been unified for quite a long time; no real type of government whatsoever. Yet, I still feel your holding something back.”

“I assure you I am not.” Campada hadn't ever met anyone as skeptical as the furry Starfleet officer.

“Then why was the Cronin named Varg so interested in finding out what happened to their old clan leader?”

“I don't know.”

Chapter Nine

Ariana carried the hyposprays to Engineering, still thinking about what Theodore Bear had said. He didn't breathe, and did not think he was affected by the Borayon particles.

“Eiwan.” said Ariana, a broad grin breaking across her face on seeing her friend.

“Ariana.” Eiwan was suspended from the ceiling at a console. “What brings you to Engineering?”

“I have inoculations for the engineering crew to counter the borayon radiation. Commander Favor says the particles are falling as we move away from Threshold, but we need to inoculate for residuals.” said Ariana. “Commander Theophilus just finished this batch for your crew.” said the young scientist holding up a hypospray.

“I believe the shielding around this section spared us some of the more eccentric effects.” Eiwan had seen the bridge crew reactions to the Cronin.

“I will be honest, this stings.” The inhaler hissed as Eiwan took her dose. “I can get the rest of engineering if you like.” said Ariana.

Eiwan smiled. Daystrom was a small ship and the entire engineering team consisted of a half-dozen technicians. “We can inoculate the three staff on duty together.”

Ariana stepped closer. “Actually, I wanted to come down and talk to you. Lieutenant Bear is refusing his dose.”

“I'm not sure how borayons would affect his systems.” Eiwan tried to think through the processes. In living beings, they could interact with certain molecular bonds and convert common biological

compounds into noradrenaline. Eiwan tried to think of the positronic matrices and how they would be affected by the rare particle. Eiwan was stumped as to how it affected the android.

Ariana shrugged. “He says he doesn't breath, but I know Favor was concerned the borayon particles were affecting Bear when we were on the bridge. It affected all of us. As an engineer, I was hoping you could consider talking to him. You could explain the mechanical changes that affect him, as the physiology affects living forms. If Favor is concerned, I am concerned.” confided Ariana.

Eiwan tapped on her padd. While speaking with Ariana she was reading through the literature via it's tactile interface. Little bumps scrolled across her fingertips as quickly as she could read them. “Where is Theodore?”

“He is currently questioning the person we rescued from the lifepod.” Ariana paused. “I don't know if in his state, possibly affected by the borayon particles, he will do something to ... upset... the ...pris..er, rescuee. Well, with the Varg on his mind and chasing us...” began Ariana. “I know, we are drawing away from them, which is why I brought he inoculations down here, so you would not have to leave engineering, and we can keep Daystrom at 100%. From what I am learning of Cronin, I don't think I want to become their prisoner. But I am concerned Theodore is treating Campada as a prisoner, not as a rescued scientist.”

“Althea will advocate for the rescue, I'm sure.” Eiwan had met Althea professionally. Eiwan had overseen the refit of Daystrom two years earlier. “We can maintain this velocity until we reach Sentinel Station.”

Ariana breathed an audible sigh of relief. “The more I researched the Cronin. I'd like to meet one but not until security measures were in place.”

“Daystrom was designed to outrun danger.” Eiwan looked past Ariana to a wall display showing all systems running smoothly. Truth be told, she could coax a bit more speed if it became necessary.

“This is Daystrom. We are supposed explore and research. Not engage hostile forces.” said Ariana. “I am grateful for our engines and speed.”

“Me too.” responded Eiwan. They had inoculated the staff on duty. The remainder were asleep to be rested for their shift despite the red alert. Eiwan knew they would be awoken and in Engineering in two minutes if she needed them. =^= Eiwan to Bear =^=

=^= Theodore here. =^=

=^= Please come to Engineering. =^= Eiwan felt the Intelligence officer would put up a fuss if he knew why he was being summoned.

=^= On my way. =^= The former child’s toy had guessed what it was about as he walked through the halls, and, entering Engineering he saw Ariana which quickly confirmed his suspicions.

“Hello Lieutenant Bear. How are you feeling?”

“I’m perfectly fine. I’m as sharp as ever. I figured everything out: what the Cronin were doing, why they were willing to let us investigate, what keeps them from unifying, everything.”

“Ariana and I are concerned that the borayon radiation may be affecting your systems, Theodore.”

“Are you going to try and reprogram me like they tried to do when I was 4 years old?” Theodore asked.

Ariana shook her head. “We just want to make sure you are functioning well.”

“The organic crew undergoes physicals as required. As an officer, don't you think you should have the same responsibility?”

“Not as many have to worry about mind wipes.” said Theodore. “How I can be sure if you find something you don't like I'll go back to being a servant to some snot-nosed brat.”

“It's what friends do. They watch out for each other.” said Ariana. She looked to Eiwan for support.

“We don't have a baseline to compare your positronic pathways to.” Eiwan had not, since the Intelligence officer came aboard, had the opportunity to gather data on his processing. “If the borayon radiation is affecting you, it may not be obvious.”

“It's obvious to me. I'm fine. How many times do I have to say that?” Theodore Bear started to raise his voice almost to the point of yelling.

“There is no way to verify your assertion, Theodore.” Eiwan might be able to develop a model based on the construction of the lieutenant if she had weeks. “You may very well be affected and lack the ability to perceive the effect.”

“Sure. I'll clear my schedule and just lie down and let you tinker with my brain.” he said sarcastically.

“Theodore, that's not the goal. We'll run a few tests to make sure you are functioning well and apply a manner of inoculation appropriate for you...” began Ariana. “You have to trust us Theodore.”

“If the captain was under medical duress, the chief medical officer could remove him from command.” said Ariana. “I am not sure how long the captain could refuse medical examination before the first officer would have to step in. Seems to me that you and I and the rest of the crew are under even more direct orders to have medical checkups.”

“Doctor Theophilus would be out of her element as chief medical officer when it comes to you.” said Eiwan.

“I do not know if the orders of Commander Favor apply. He is the equivalent of the CMO, although Commander Theophilus also holds the rank and experience to act. In fact, as chief engineer, you may be in an equivalent position as well for Lieutenant Bear.”

“I'm sure the regulations exist somewhere.” Eiwan did not want to antagonize the intelligence officer. “I'd rather have you volunteer than force you by regulation.”

“Perhaps, but I still do not trust you. Very well. I'll agree to the brain scan.” Theodore said.

Eiwan smiled. “I have developed a simulation of your physical brain that we can compare the scans to. Your brain does self-modify its pathways over time, correct?”

“It was based off a child's brain therefore it's in a permanent stage of development.” Bear said

“I would trust Eiwan with my life.” said Ariana taking Lieutenant Bear's paw in her hand. “If I did not believe that, I would not trust your life with her, but I do so...”

“Are you ready?”

Theodore Bear gave them a nod.

Ariana bit her lip and held her breath. She hoped Lt Bear was right and nothing was affecting him, and equally, this test did not harm him.

“The scans show only a two percentage difference in brain activity; mostly affecting the orbital cortex.” Reported Eiwán.

“So there is minimal affect.” said Ariana.

“I told you. So are we done?” Theodore Bear asked. “You’re not rebooting me.”

“A reboot will not be necessary.” responded the chief defensively.

Chapter Ten

Lieutenant Commander Favor sat at the rather full conference table not too far away from Campada, the Loukassan physicist. He wasn't ready to make any snap assessments of the Loukassan. All he knew was that their people had developed a functional transwarp, which was something the Federation had tried and tried at with only moderate success.

He had to wonder about the renewed interest in transwarp. Since the early days of transwarp in the 2280's and the subsequent failure of the transwarp program, traditional warp drives had continued to push the envelope to the point where transwarp was almost irrelevant. On the revised warp scale, the Starship Voyager's max of warp 9.975 was far and away faster than the testbed Excelsior or any of its contemporaries could muster. There was literally no comparison. So...why transwarp, NOW?

Lieutenant Commander Theophilus seated herself across from Lieutenant Commander Favor. She had been with the Loukassan when he was revived from stasis. She looked forward to hearing what he had to say.

As other officer's filtered in, Favor greeted them warmly, occasionally suggesting a chair, but for the most part, just waiting things out. There was no point in getting ahead of everyone else, just to go back and rehash the same discussion.

Ariana followed Theodore into the conference room.

“Thank you for your hospitality.” The Loukassan physicist grimaced. His body had been cramped in the small observation ship for too long. “I would like to answer your questions.”

“Well, we're trying to determine, what happened to Threshold station.” Favor said. “The readings are wild and inconclusive, but

they point to something cataclysmic. You were apparently in the area. If you're a witness, then you're the only one we have at the moment. Anything you can tell us would be appreciated.”

“I and my colleagues had developed a new transwarp theory that would allow instantaneous travel between any two points along a trans warp conduit.” Campada's small black eyes shone. “That technology has been unknown since the collapse of the Iconian civilization. One could walk between your home worlds as easily as walking through a door.”

Favor leaned in, with a look of deep concern on his face. Instantaneous transit like that is a dangerous game. There's no time to correct mistakes. If you're applying that to starship travel, you compound the problem by introducing anti-matter into an already unstable equation. “What happened?”

“The experiment encountered a positive feedback loop within the conduit. It collapsed. Some of the star's mass was drawn into the conduit and transmitted at relativistic superluminal speeds through the system.” Campada paused to regain his composure. “The energy release was significant.”

“The destruction of Threshold Station.” Thophilus stated the obvious. “Yes. It was.”

“I was in a small observation ship. When the conduit collapsed, I was caught inside a kind of closed loop which kept me outside of normal space for a few seconds. I avoided the fate of everyone else on the station.” Campada had to theorize how he survived. His sensors were overwhelmed. He had sketched some of the math and the only way he could have survived was to be within a collapsed Trans warp conduit.

“Sorry. Never knew a Cronin to care about science.” said Bear.

“No Cronin were involved in the experiment, I assure you.”
Campada had secreted his way out of Cronin hands. “Perhaps a Cronin ship was lurking within the conduit at the time of accident. There were multiple debris fields?”

“Yes.” Said Bear.

“This is a theory.” Campada looked at those assembled in the conference room. “I know, for certain, that the Cronin was not involved. I was one of three Loukassan involved in the research. Everyone else a Federation member.”

“Good job.” Theodore said, awkwardly patting Campada on the back hoping it would make people drop the brain scan thing by being nicer to him.

Ariana smiled. He was growing, even if he didn't realize it. Hopefully the others would recognize it. It may even give him a few more tricks for his trade. He had the natural looks to play the good cop, but the personality for the bad cop. Being able to play both roles would strengthen his repertoire.

“With Threshold Station destroyed, I'm sure I'll be assigned to another facility.” Campada stared out the window to the streaming stars. The ability to create new transwarp conduits held so much promise. Several Delta Quadrant species had the ability to use the conduits. None had been created in a thousand years. “Trans warp technology is too important to be allowed to end with this tragedy.”

“I suppose that the Federation thinks so.” Lionin Favor said, clasping his hands in front of him. “If you ask me, we're trying too hard to push envelopes that only the galaxy has a right to open.” He looked toward Campada. “Were you able to protect your research?”

“Only the data collected by my observation craft. Months of work is lost along with the best theoretical minds.” responded Campada.

Favor stared at Campada, intently. “Leave it be. Natural wormholes are one thing. I've studied those most of my life, and I can tell you that they are barely understood even after years and years of research. Space is small enough. If the genie is let completely out of the bottle, we will never get it back in, and what seems like a wondrous technological marvel will herald the most devastating wars in the galaxy.” He sighed heavily. “I've seen it happen.”

“There is an ancient human saying: The best weapon is the one you never have to use.” Theodore said.

“Speak softly and carry a phaser in your paw.” said Ariana quietly, mis-quoting Theodore's namesake.

“The Federation will need to make a formal declaration to the Cronin.” Favor stated. “Assuming responsibility for the incident and expressing sincere regret is in order. The Cronin is a warrior race and they may not accept that it was an accident, but that isn't something that we should worry about. I believe that they will stand down if they are met with proper force, in the meantime and we're not equipped for that.”

“Will probably have to give them something as compensation that way they can save face.” Theodore told them.

That seemed prudent, given Ariana's limited exposure to the Cronin. Then again, there was the flip side, would they expect more next time? The Cronin seemed dangerous, and was glad they were not near DFA space.

“There is no telling how much the Cronin knew of the research or whether they were pursuing myself and my fellow Loukassa as

fugitives.” Campada doubted that the Cronin saw him as anything more than a fugitive. Their ships were decades out of date and aging rapidly in their many raids.

“This was a scientific mission.” The lieutenant commander responded, looking around the table at the captain and the team assembled. “We've got our answer and the incident is closed. Isn't it?”

It seemed clear what had happened, and the events neatly packaged away for reporting and analysis later. What wasn't being said was so much knowledge and talent had been lost. For all their similarities, Starfleet was a different beast than the DFA. Such a waste thought Ariana sadly. She, however, did not contradict Lieutenant Commander Favor for there seemed nothing more to be learned at the moment.