

Star Trek: Bounty - 103 - "The Other Kind of Vulcan Hello"

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Star Trek: Bounty - 103 - "The Other Kind of Vulcan Hello"

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Summary

When Sunek runs into his ex-wife and an old friend that now runs a renegade sect of the V'tosh ka'tur, the Bounty's crew are taken hostage and he finds his loyalties tested as they reveal the true extent of their plans.

Prologue

Prologue

*S'Lara region, Planet Vulcan
Stardate 12475.9*

Agitated.

He was agitated. Of that, there was absolutely no doubt. Based on all of the evidence on the subject he had been able to gather after hours of researching, having cross-referenced multiple historical accounts and countless medical studies from across the galaxy and compared them to his current situation, that was clearly the appropriate term for his current state of mind.

And yet, he wasn't supposed to be agitated. The concept of agitation was, quite literally by definition, a purely emotional feeling. And emotions were not logical. Ergo, he was currently being deeply illogical. And that inescapable truism simply served to make him more agitated.

He sat at the metal desk of his study in front of the bank of screens displaying the details of his research and steeped his fingers in front of him, trying to focus. Focus on anything other than his current state of illogical agitation.

This wasn't how he should have been spending his afternoon. He had been intending to review T'Plana-Hath's seminal work 'Ascent From Chaos' as part of his ongoing studies. But as soon as he had begun to read, he had found himself completely unable to concentrate. Yet again.

He knew that both of his parents had worked especially hard to prepare him for the rigours of Kolinahr training. And that this sort of flagrantly emotional display was not what they had worked so hard for.

Not that his parents hadn't wanted to put in that work. After all, becoming a Kolinahr graduate was the highest achievement a Vulcan could attain, so it was entirely logical that his parents saw this as the appropriate path in life for their only son. Still, they had sacrificed a lot in order to get him this far down the road to attaining complete mental discipline and he deeply respected them for that.

Which meant that his ongoing failure to back up their years of hard work and sacrifice with any real tangible progress in his studies merely exacerbated the distinct emotional issues that had been plaguing him.

And as his internal struggles continued, his agitation transformed into something else. Something that he remembered from one of his earlier episodes.

He was annoyed.

Annoyed that he was getting so distracted from his studies, annoyed that he was having to waste yet another afternoon on such aberrations, and annoyed because he knew that he could ill afford such a wasted afternoon when he was already lagging behind his peers in the training programme.

But most of all, he was annoyed because he was getting annoyed. Which was a completely illogical circular argument. And that made him even more annoyed.

He suppressed a sigh and got up from his desk, gliding silently across the room in his plain white robes to the window on the far wall. Looking out, he could see the dusty streets of the S'Laran township that they called home. He saw groups of figures walking along in the rust-coloured light, all in their usual orderly formations. Very efficient, very logical, very calming.

Except, not so calming. Because today, something about those perfectly methodical movements struck him as being a little too logical. Was it really necessary, he wondered, for his people to take their dispassionate approach to life and even apply it to the concept of pedestrian behaviour?

Great, he thought to himself, now I'm irritated.

First agitation, then annoyance, now irritation. The worst part of it was, they weren't even basic emotions. No simple, beginner level feelings here, these were considerably more nuanced and complicated than all that.

He remained next to the window, feeling the late afternoon sun on his face, and closed his eyes, deciding to switch his attempts to focus onto the matter of gentle meditation. He followed a well practised technique that he had first been taught as a young child by his mother, just as all Vulcan children were. Many times during his difficult developmental years he had been able to quell any pesky emotional feelings by following this tried and tested method.

In his mind, he was onboard an ancient sailing ship in the middle of the Vorothe Sea. The air was calm, the great white sails were at rest against the wooden masts. Around the narrow, weather-worn hull, the sea was as smooth as Tholian silk, and as clear as a mirror. He stood on the deck of the ship, his feet slightly apart and angled outwards, with his arms stretched out to his sides. Perfectly balanced and perfectly in tune with the stillness of the scene. In harmony with the sea, and at one with his surroundings.

Except, he couldn't help but think as he took a deep meditative breath, since his mother had taught him this technique all those years ago, he had actually been to the Vorothe Sea, on a scientific field trip as part of his studies. Harsh winds constantly whipped up across the expanse of the water thanks to the air passing over the surrounding mountains. The sea's surface itself was a whirling, writhing tumult all year round, the water a dirty red colour from the silt churned up from the sea bed.

Presenting a meditative vision of the Vorothe Sea that supposed a becalmed, windless expanse of crystal clear water was simply...not logical.

His irritation gave way to outright exasperation as he opened his eyes. Even the most basic piece of meditation was providing him with no solace.

Behind him, he heard the door to his study open and gentle footsteps enter. He didn't turn around, but he felt his father's presence as he approached.

"It is acceptable to talk with you now?" his father asked in his usual clipped, deliberate tone.

He looked over to the grey haired Vulcan, who stood with his hands gently clasped together in front of his chest, and nodded. His father didn't meet his look, and instead turned his attention to the vacant desk on the other side of the room.

"Your studies are complete for today."

A statement, not a question.

He paused before answering, doing his best to force whichever emotion was dominating his thoughts at this precise moment to the back of his mind.

"No, father," he replied truthfully, "I was just...contemplating what I had read."

His father nodded thoughtfully, returning his attention to the view out of the window.

"There is a lot to contemplate in her words," the reply came, referring to T'Plana-Hath's work that he was supposed to have been reading, "It is necessary to ensure you fully understand them before you move on."

He didn't reply, and instead followed his father's gaze back to the scene outside the window, the slowly setting sun casting long shadows over the ground as the pedestrians below continued their carefully considered walks. There was a moment of silence, which he found excruciating, before his father continued.

"Your mother and I have been talking about your studies. Your instructors remain convinced that your progress has still not been sufficient."

At this, he instinctively snapped his head around to stare at his father. It was enough of a reaction for the older Vulcan to raise a curious eyebrow.

"I am not—!"

He immediately realised that he had spoken too quickly. His voice betrayed clear feelings that he was sure his father would pick up on. He controlled himself before he continued.

"I will try harder, father."

His father's eyebrow remained cocked at this reply.

"To not already be trying one's hardest to attain one's goals is not logical."

He did all he could not to allow the fresh flare of frustration he felt to show on his face at his father's dispassionate observation.

"Regardless," his father continued, "We have considered the matter in detail, and we believe the only correct course of action is to remove you from the Kolinahr programme."

Once again, there was no hiding his flash of annoyance.

"Wh—? But why?"

He mentally flinched as he heard the tone of his voice. He momentarily closed his eyes and tried to picture the sailing ship on the fictional serenity of the Vorothe Sea again. But it was no use. A storm was blowing in.

His father calmly gestured to him, indicating the emotional state that was increasingly clear on his face and in his actions.

"The reasons are obvious. It would not be appropriate for one still struggling with such basic irrationality to proceed any further in the programme. Your instructors tend to agree with this assessment and—"

"No," he persisted, as calmly as he could manage, "I am making progress, father. And I assure you that I am...in control."

His father considered this, then walked over to the desk, where the screens still displayed his earlier research. All carefully compiled, referenced and ready to betray him.

"Agitation is a feeling of aggravation or restlessness," his father read directly from the screen, "Often brought on by little to no provocation."

He felt a rush of shame as his father turned back to him. Another emotion that he was becoming increasingly used to. He closed his eyes again. The storm front had reached the ship, the sails flapping helplessly in the tumult.

"Father," he began, "I can explain—"

"I do not recall this particular teaching from T'Plana-Hath," his father continued, ignoring any effort he was going to make to explain away

this latest humiliation.

“What shall I do?” he managed eventually, “Tell me, how can I satisfy my instructors? And you, and mother?”

His father stared back at him in silence for a moment, keeping his hands calmly clasped in front of him. In truth, he needed no time to contemplate his son’s questions. He already knew the only logical answer.

“We all believe it would serve you well to undergo another session with Doctor Sevik—”

“No!”

He screamed out before he had a chance to stop himself. It had been an instinctive reaction upon hearing the doctor’s name. Even that was enough to send a coruscating flood of new emotions through his mind. Panic, fear, worry, angst. Ironic, he couldn’t help but admit, given what the doctor would be doing to him.

The storm raged across the sea. The main mast began to creak.

Several years ago, when his emotional issues had first become a serious and uncontrollable problem in the eyes of his parents, they had sent him to Doctor Sevik for the first time. He was a practitioner of a supposedly ancient practice of emotional purging via mind melds. The idea went that the calmer and more focused thoughts of a more centred Vulcan would help to flush out the emotional strife of the patient.

Except, while it might have served that function for a time, and brought an element of calm and logic to his thoughts once again, he also remembered the other effects it had on him. The pain, the confusion and the mental agony. The physical spasms that had lasted for many weeks after the treatment was supposedly complete. He didn’t want to have to go through any of that ever again.

And yet, his irrational and instinctive reaction to the doctor’s name and the memories of the things he wished to avoid had already sealed his fate.

“Yes,” his father noted after seeing his son’s moment of frenzy, “It appears that we should contact him at once.”

The grey haired Vulcan calmly walked out of the room, leaving him alone again. Alone, but for the feelings that still swirled around inside him, where one particular emotion was now coming to dominate. One that he felt more strongly than anything he had ever felt before.

Except this wasn’t agitation, or frustration, or shame, or fear. This time, he felt something different. Yet oddly comforting. An emotion that he had read about in his studies, but never really experienced before.

Until now.

He closed his eyes. The storm had become a hurricane.

He felt angry.

Part 1A

Part One

*Planet Redrax, neutral space
Present day*

“Three...!”

Sunek wasn't like most other Vulcans. He'd known that for a long time. But as he allowed himself a moment of indulgence to look back at the life that he'd led, he was also okay with that. Because he had never really wanted to be like other Vulcans. And right now, as he listened to the countdown heading towards its inevitable conclusion, that fact continued to bring him comfort.

From a young age, he'd felt that he was different. Plenty of young Vulcans have emotional moments. The goal of his species was to control and master their emotions, after all, they had never claimed to have eradicated them.

During his formative years, that was exactly what Sunek had done. He'd worked to contain his emotions, tried to keep them in check. Even, through a combination of peer pressure and a period of unseasonably high self-confidence, briefly been part of the Kolinahr training programme.

Very briefly.

“...Two...!”

But none of that had worked. His parents had run out of options for how to help their son and his troublesome feelings. And then Sunek had discovered the V'tosh ka'tur. The Vulcans without logic.

To call it an organisation would be far too grandiose a term. It was barely even anything, a loosely defined collective of Vulcans throughout his people's history who chose to embrace and cultivate their emotions, rather than look to suppress them. Originally, many centuries ago, the group had sought to find a true balance between logic and emotion. But in the present day, the already loose ties of the V'tosh ka'tur had splintered even further, their beliefs and their ambitions fragmenting as time went on.

And Sunek happened to have found a particularly anarchic chapter during his time studying at the ShiKahr Learning Institute. A group of free thinking Vulcans who wanted nothing more than to explore and embrace their emotions as much as possible.

Sunek had fitted right in.

“...One...!”

More than that, he had flourished. His confidence grew immeasurably as he realised that the part of him he had been taught to fight against all this time wasn't an affliction. It was a strength. He left Vulcan behind under a cloud of familial disapproval and headed out into the cosmos to start really living his life. A process which had taken him all over the galaxy and back again, and eventually brought him here.

To the end of the countdown.

“...Now!”

He took a deep breath, and along with the four other figures around the table, picked up the small glass of lurid orange-tinged liquid and slammed it down. Five empty glasses thudded back onto the table, as the crew of the Bounty flinched in unison.

They had arrived on Redrax earlier that day, ostensibly to attend a sector-wide trade fair from which they hoped to find a spot of gainful employment. But thanks to Sunek, they had first decided to pay a visit to a bar called the Pride of Andor. A bar that every one of his contacts the length and breadth of the quadrant had told him was the best hangout on all of Redrax. Or at least, the best one that didn't have a dress code.

And here they had stayed. For drink after terrible drink.

“Ugh,” Denella, the Bounty's Orion engineer, winced, as she wagged a finger at the empty glass in front of her, “That's...that one was the worst yet.”

“Yep,” Sunek grimaced, absently scratching the unruly mop of hair on top of his head, “That really smarts.”

“Feeling the heat, Sunek?” Jirel, the unjoined Trill captain of the Bounty, grinned at him from the other side of the table, “You're always welcome to back out.”

Sunek matched Jirel's grin, despite the residual pain from the alcohol in his stomach. “Never!” he replied with a dramatic flourish, “It's just Rigellian brandy reacts badly with the Vulcan metabolism. If you ask me, that whole last round was a cheat.”

“I do not think it reacts well with anyone's metabolism,” the booming voice of Klath, the disgraced Klingon who made up the Bounty's crew, sounded out unhappily.

Sunek paused as he looked over at Klath. There was still a mild amount of distance between them since their recent run in with a vengeful

Klingon named Kolar. During which Sunek had discovered the full details behind his crewmate's discommendation from the empire, after a ship he commanded had attacked and destroyed an unarmed freighter during the Klingon Civil War. He had repeatedly made it clear to Klath that he wasn't interested in gossiping about his secrets with anyone else, but he suspected that the Klingon didn't entirely believe him, hence the awkward distance.

Still, Sunek could hardly blame him for not believing him. Part of his reputation since he had fully embraced his emotional side revolved around his big mouth. He had a distinct inability to stop talking, regardless of the situation. Because Sunek was a talker. More than that, he was a joker.

It wasn't a reputation he especially hated. Nor was his reputation as the Bounty's resident drinker in chief. Which snapped him back to their current situation.

"Still," he went on, keeping his trademark grin beaming wide, "The good news is that it's my round."

He gestured amiably to a passing Andorian waitress, who uncertainly teetered over to him in a pair of gratuitously uncomfortable heels which by all accounts represented a vital component of the staff uniform at the Pride of Andor.

"Five Ferengi stardusters. No ice."

The waitress, already hoping she was in line for a big enough tip to justify the amount of time she had spent carrying trays of drinks to this particular table in these particular shoes during her shift so far, nodded demurely and awkwardly tip-toed away.

"I do not care for that drink either," Klath growled, "We should order a good bloodwine."

"You drink too much of that stuff as it is," Denella said admonishingly, "You're becoming a walking cliché."

"Watch out," Jirel chimed in, "If you keep goading him like that, we'll end up hearing the story about how he once shared a bottle of the 2309 with Martok himself. Again."

"That did happen," Klath muttered, folding his arms in front of him in something approximating a pout.

Sunek couldn't help but chuckle along with the others. The sound of laughter energised him in a way he couldn't explain. Having spent so much of his formative years being told to repress or be ashamed of such outbursts, the feeling of unencumbered laughter and joy was like a drug to him.

Probably why I tell so many bad jokes, he mused to himself.

As the blue-skinned waitress returned and set down five glasses filled with a gaudy pink liquid and topped off with neon straws, which earned a look of disgust from Klath, the fifth member of the group finally piped up.

Natasha Kinsen was still a mystery to Sunek. A former Starfleet doctor who they had rescued almost by accident while on a salvage mission for one of Jirel's contacts. And now, for reasons that Sunek was not privy to, and frankly wasn't all that interested in, she had left Starfleet behind to join them. Right now, given the groggy look on her face, it seemed as though she might be regretting it.

"Hey," she managed, slurring her words slightly, "I don't wanna spoil all the fun, but what happened to the trade fair?"

"How do you mean?" Jirel asked, the lion's share of his focus now intently on trying to balance a damp beer mat on its edge.

"I mean, when are we getting there? What's our strategy?"

Jirel tutted as the mat fell back onto the table, before glancing around at the others and smiling knowingly. "Newbie over here doesn't know about the pecking order."

"Don't patronise me," the human woman shot back with as pointed a glare as she could manage in her current state of inebriation, before looking a tad confused, "Also, what pecking order?"

"We have to wait our turn at these things," Jirel explained as he lined up the beer mat for another attempt, "Right now, the big jobs are getting pitched. Long-term deals, exclusive supply runs, mining contracts, that sort of thing."

"They'll go to the big conglomerates," Denella said, picking up the story as Jirel made a sad tutting sound to accompany the sight of the mat toppling over again, "Or Ferengi merchants with very deep pockets. Then the medium sized stuff gets thrown around. Not super high value stuff, but the kind of thing you still need a decent fleet of shuttles for. Again, way out of our league."

"Ok," Natasha nodded, slowly processing this through her booze-soaked brain, "And then?"

"Bandits," Klath stated simply, "They take their pick of the more...disreputable jobs on offer."

"Really best we don't get involved at that point," Jirel added, as he stuck his tongue out in a farcical display of concentration in the beer mat game.

"Right," Natasha replied with a sigh, "So, we get...?"

"Whatever's left," Sunek chimed in, as he slurped a generous mouthful of Ferengi starduster through his straw.

Now it definitely looked like she was regretting joining them. It didn't happen often, and maybe it was the drink talking, but Sunek couldn't help but feel a little sorry for her.

“Hey doc,” he continued, trying to put on his most convincing sympathetic tone, “Relax. These things always...”

And then he forgot all about being sympathetic. Because, over the somewhat inebriated doctor’s shoulder, he saw her walk in.

“Well, I’ll be the son of a Tal-Shanar minister...”

Before anyone had the chance to ask him what the hell that meant, he stood up out of his seat and bellowed across the Pride of Andor, ignoring the annoyed looks his actions generated from several of the bar’s other patrons. Not to mention from a number of precariously balanced waitresses.

“Hey! Hey! T’Len! Over here!”

The others at the table turned to see a Vulcan woman on the other side of the bar turn and look over in the direction of Sunek’s voice. She immediately recognised him and began to walk over. She wore her jet black hair tied up in a ponytail, revealing pointed ears either side of her porcelain face, and she was clad in a simple blue dress.

She was also smiling broadly.

As she reached the table, and the other four members of the Bounty’s crew mentally asked themselves who the mysterious smiling stranger might be, the two Vulcans embraced in a warm, lengthy hug.

Sunek eventually broke the hug and turned to his confused crewmates, his grin now wider than it had ever been.

“Guys, you’re not gonna believe it,” he said gleefully, “My wife’s in town!”

The four seated figures froze in shock. Several moments passed without anyone saying anything. It was safe to say that none of the others had been expecting him to say that.

“Curious,” T’Len said, with an amused smile of her own, “Your shipmates appear to be trapped in some sort of temporal anomaly.”

Sunek just tutted. He knew they were going to embarrass him.

* * * * *

It took another round of Ferengi stardusters for the Bounty’s crew to finally break free of the temporal anomaly. And after the following round of Maparian ales with Andorian whiskey chasers, they were almost used to the idea that T’Len was indeed Sunek’s wife.

At least, as much as anyone could get used to that idea.

“You know,” T’Len observed as the still-suffering Andorian waitress dropped off another round of drinks, “I am beginning to suspect that Sunek never told any of you about me.”

“He did not,” Klath stated flatly, still eyeing the newcomer uncertainly and recalling something that the Bounty’s pilot had recently said to him about skeletons in closets.

“Guys, come on,” Sunek managed, slightly awkwardly, “There’s not much to tell.”

Although he was delighted to see T’Len, he wasn’t entirely overjoyed with the idea of revealing too many personal details to the others. He was here to crack jokes, not bare his soul, after all.

“You’re a member of the V’tosh ka’tur as well?” Natasha managed.

“Yes,” she nodded, “I realise that me having been here for more than ten minutes without once being condescending towards you rather gives it away.”

Her mouth curled into a smile at her own joke. Something that Natasha still couldn’t help but find mildly disconcerting coming from a Vulcan.

“So,” Klath muttered, “She is another member of your cult.”

“Not a cult, Klath,” Sunek said with a wag of his finger, “We’re just a few friendly Vulcans who prefer expressing our emotions freely, rather than bottling them up behind social norms.”

“Hippies,” Natasha murmured.

The others turned to the doctor, who flushed slightly when she realised she’d been speaking out loud, and had now become the focus of everyone’s attention, before forcing herself to continue.

“Um, an old subculture on Earth. A bunch of young, disenfranchised humans who tried to escape from the trappings of society through alternative thinking, free love, that sort of thing.”

“Huh,” Sunek mused, “Well, there was no free love in the V’tosh ka’tur, unfortunately.”

“There was,” T’Len smiled, “But you were not invited.”

Sunek's grin slipped slightly. He wasn't averse to a bit of self-deprecation from time to time, but didn't enjoy it quite so much when other people made him the butt of the joke. Though, from the smirks on the other faces around the table, he was in a minority on that matter.

"But," Denella finally managed, gesturing to the two Vulcans, "What...? When...? Why...?"

"I think what my engineer is going for is: How did you end up getting married?" Jirel said, stepping in to translate, "Specifically, to Sunek?"

"What?" Sunek, grin restored, shot back, "My rugged masculinity isn't enough of a reason—?" "No," Denella answered immediately, causing Sunek's grin to vanish all over again.

"Come on," Jirel persisted, "You can't just drop the 'I was married all along' bombshell on us after this long. Do we get an actual explanation, or do I have to set Klath on you?"

The Klingon, playing along with the bit, folded his arms across his chest and stared at the Vulcan couple with a menacing glower.

"I've already told you," Sunek sighed, "There's really not much to tell. We got married on the Vulcan colony on Hexis Prime...I dunno, thirty years ago?"

"Thirty years, six months and fourteen days ago," T'Len nodded, confirming Sunek's statement and clearing up any remaining doubts about her Vulcan heritage in one fell swoop.

"So," Natasha asked, "You were betrothed then? Or—?"

"Oh, wait," Denella said, her face lighting up in drunken excitement, "Did you have to challenge someone to a fight with those big stick-y blade-y things? Because those look amazing."

"It's called a Lirpa, Professor," Sunek shot back sarcastically, "And, no. I guess the easiest way to explain it would be a...marriage of convenience?"

He tried his hardest not to take any further offence from the looks of understanding that now cascaded around the table, as if everything about the situation suddenly made complete sense.

"We were both from very traditional families," T'Len continued, "Neither of them were especially supportive of our desire to be part of the V'tosh ka'tur, and did what they could to prevent us from having any part of it. But once we were married, we were able to make our own decisions."

"Yeah," Sunek nodded, "We found a more liberally minded priestess to preside over it, did the whole ceremony, and...honestly, we haven't seen much of each other since."

He absently glanced over at T'Len, and made a mental note to avoid thinking too much about the sudden pang of longing he felt inside.

"How very romantic," Jirel deadpanned.

"How very bite me," Sunek countered, getting his mind back to normal.

"Well, I was always grateful for what Sunek did for me back there," T'Len replied, "You can only imagine what it is like to deal with having to tell your parents that you want to embrace your emotions. But Sunek was always so supportive."

"Supportive?" Jirel said with a look of feigned shock, "You, Sunek?"

"Continue to bite me, Jirel."

"Actually, Sunek was quite the activist in his youth," T'Len continued, with no lack of pride, "He helped many young Vulcans at the ShiKahr Learning Institute come to terms with the possibility of exploring their emotional side." Sunek felt himself squirm in his seat. Ironically, the emotion he was currently exploring was one of his least favourites. Embarrassment. "Yeah, well," he managed to shrug, "Everyone's an activist when they're a student, right?"

"And now," T'Len continued, gently placing her hand on top of his, "Something in our cosmic destiny has brought us back together."

Despite his continued discomfort, he couldn't help it as his face creased into the dopiest of smiles at this comment. Seconds later, not quite soon enough to disguise it, he turned back to the wider group and adjusted his features into his more usual cocky grin.

"So, that's the whole story," he said, going back on the offensive as cover for his initial reaction, "And now, the way I see it, you guys all owe us a drink."

"How'd you figure that?" Denella asked, slightly nonplussed.

"None of you ever got us a wedding present!"

Part 1B

Part One (Cont'd)

Several belated wedding presents later, the Andorian waitress in the cumbersome heels was no nearer to her least favourite table of the night settling up.

"I cannot believe you tried to bribe the Sheliak Corporate!" T'Len managed to get out through a burst of laughter as Sunek finished his latest tale of life onboard the Bounty.

"Hey," Sunek replied as he sipped his latest drink, "The alternative was reading a five thousand page trading contract. Besides, it very nearly worked."

"How very nearly?"

"We...may technically still be wanted felons in Sheliak space."

T'Len laughed some more. Sunek couldn't help but join in. There was something infectious about it.

"But," he added, "The good news is that the warrant out in our name is filled with so many clauses, there's not a bounty hunter in the galaxy who'll bother to take it on!"

Neither half of the atypical Vulcan couple could remember exactly when the rest of the Bounty's crew had called it a night. If they'd really put their minds to it, they'd have to say it had been somewhere between the shots of Aldebaran whiskey and the round of unpronounceable Klingon cocktails that Klath had taken great delight in ordering, and that had caused both Jirel and Natasha to take long separate bathroom breaks that neither of them were in the mood to talk about when they returned.

But they didn't bother putting their minds to it, because it didn't really matter to either of them. They had spent most of the night talking to each other anyway. After all, they did have precisely thirty years, six months and fourteen days worth of anecdotes to catch up on.

"Hey, I meant to ask you," Sunek continued, changing the subject, "Are you still in touch with any of the old gang? Y'know, from the old days at the Learning Institute?"

T'Len slowly calmed her laughter. It sounded natural enough, and Sunek had no way of knowing that she was simply taking long enough to make her reply seem believable. "Not especially. As I'm sure you remember, I left in something of a hurry after our..."

"Right," Sunek nodded, dismissing the latest sense of longing just as quickly as he had done with the others.

Taking advantage of the rare moment of silence that followed, the Andorian waitress shuffled over as fast as her footwear would safely allow and politely informed them that the Pride of Andor was about to close, dropping off their final bill at the same time. Without waiting, T'Len checked the bill and deposited a small pile of latinum on the table.

"Wow," Sunek grinned, forgetting all about pursuing his previous question any further, "Do I have the best wife or what?"

"You know," she said, more seriously, "I meant what I said earlier."

"About how you can tie a Kaferian apple stalk in a knot with your tongue? Cos I'd definitely be up for seeing—"

"No," she interrupted with a patient smile, "About how grateful I was for your...help back on Hexis Prime. I can see you prefer to act like it was nothing around your friends. But being able to leave that place changed my life. So much for the better."

"Hey," Sunek shrugged nonchalantly, quite enjoying his ego being massaged, "What's the concept of marriage for if not to be completely undermined in order to run away from your parents?"

She stifled a chuckle and shuffled slightly closer to him, placing her hand on his arm. It was only a small gesture, but it was also one that made Sunek's arm suddenly crackle with electricity. He suppressed a gulp.

"Well, I was thinking," she said quietly, "I mean, it was a shame that I had to leave as quickly as I did. We never really got to say goodbye. We never got to do...many things that a married couple might usually do."

She ran her hand slowly up his arm. Sunek completely failed to suppress the second gulp, nor the first dirty grin.

"Oh yeah?"

"Yes," she said with a flirtatious smile, "But now we find ourselves back together. And my lodgings here on Redrax are only a few streets away..."

Sunek's grin grew thirty percent wider, and at least fifty percent dirtier.

"Perhaps," she concluded, running her finger back down his arm, "You would care for a nightcap?"

By the time the Andorian waitress had tottered back over to find that the most obnoxious table she had dealt with for some time had also left one of the stingiest tips, the two Vulcans had vanished into the night.

She was right. She knew she'd been right. Even at the time, it had been obvious to anyone how completely right she'd been. It didn't matter who you were, staying out as late as they had, drinking the amount that they had the night before they were due to attend a trade fair was a terrible idea.

And yet, Natasha couldn't take any real satisfaction from being so entirely and unequivocally right. Because at this precise point in time, she felt worse than any of them.

It was already after midday, and even then, they were short two of their number. Jirel had been unable to raise Klath from a gently snoring slumber, while Sunek had been nowhere to be found at all. So, instead, Natasha, Jirel and Denella had headed to the fair by themselves. And it was safe to say that they weren't making much of an impression.

The main auditorium that was hosting the fair was a bustling hub of commerce in the middle of Redrax's main city. It was an enormous expansive room, filled with life forms from every corner of the quadrant and beyond. The auditorium itself was situated on the top levels of the largest building in the city, spanning several floors of the building and topped off with a huge glass dome which gave an uninterrupted view of the surrounding area.

If she hadn't been so hungover, Natasha might have taken more time to appreciate the architecture, and the view from the dome itself. But she was hungover. Very, very hungover. So all she really noted was how the glass of the dome was reflecting the harsh sunlight straight at her face.

All around them, there were elaborate stands, displays and tables staffed by Ferengi, Benzites, Gorn, Capellans and dozens of other species. At one point, she could have sworn she saw a Calamarain floating through the crowd in the distance, though she was willing to concede that may have just been a trick of the light.

Some of the stalls were decked out with samples of the wares they were looking to move. Fine fabrics, sparkling gems and fragrant foodstuffs. Some stall owners handed out padds filled with advertising material, or excitedly pointed at displays that pitched some wild new post-war business opportunity in the Gamma Quadrant. Others displayed glossy holographic projections that showed off polished fleets of transport craft, or images of their crews, men and women who looked slightly too chisel-jawed and toned to be real people working in real jobs.

Among this orgy of tacky advertisements, excessive self-promotion and elaborate promises, the Bounty's hungover trio of dishevelled representatives at the largest trade fair in Redrax's calendar year shuffled onwards through the crowds. They couldn't have looked less employable if they tried.

Natasha forced herself to hurry up and catch up to Denella and Jirel, who were walking fast, but seemingly without any destination in mind.

"So, what's the plan?"

"Plan," Jirel mused, rolling the word around on his tongue, "Honestly? Don't really have one. But, at a fair this big, something's bound to jump out at us sooner or later—"

"Jirel!"

Something jumped out at them from behind a particularly gaudy stand for a delivery company whose promotional display promised the unlikely claim that they could 'Get your parcels from Andor to Risa in two days, or your latinum back!' in garish neon letters. Natasha noted that he was Boslic, the thick-set brow and ridged forehead above his eyes standing him out from the crowd.

"Darhall!" Jirel beamed, holding his arms out in friendly greeting, "How's the family—?"

Without bothering to reply, Darhall stepped up to the Trill and delivered a single punch to his face, sending him flying back onto the ground.

Natasha and Denella rushed over to help their shipmate up, though the other attendees of the fair barely paid the little scuffle any attention. It wasn't the first such disagreement that had flared up since the fair had begun, and it wouldn't be the last.

"That's for the stunt you pulled on Sentrack III," Darhall spat out as Jirel gently rubbed his swollen cheek.

"I thought you said he'd forgiven you for that?" Denella asked with a wry smile.

"I have," the Boslic replied, "Now."

"Glad we could get that sorted out," Jirel managed with a wince.

"Not as much as I am," Darhall leered with clear satisfaction, "And now that we're even for that, I have a little business opportunity for you and your crew."

The Boslic's leer grew wider. Jirel turned to Natasha and shrugged.

"See? Told you something'd come up."

Part 1C

Part One (Cont'd)

“You know, when you think about it, this was all very logical.”

Sunek reclined on the bed and shouted in the direction of the bathroom, but he didn't get an immediate answer. Not that he really cared, because himself talking was Sunek's favourite part of just about any conversation anyway.

He was in a fairly unassuming hostel room, containing little more than the bed, a small replicator and dining table and a doorway leading off to the bathroom. But the way he was feeling, he may as well have been in an executive suite on Wrigley's Pleasure Planet.

“I mean, you were right,” he continued, idly toying with a loose thread on his bathrobe, “We did the other marriage stuff. The blessings, the offerings, the creepy old priestess, but we never did any of the fun stuff. Logically, if we're husband and wife, it's only right that we get to do the fun stuff.”

The bathroom door opened and T'Len padded out, wearing a robe of her own. He looked over at her and smirked.

“And I really like the fun stuff. A lot.”

She grabbed a glass of water from the replicator and perched on the edge of the bed, as he smiled back at her.

“So many jokes,” she muttered eventually with a sigh, “You didn't tell nearly as many when we were younger.”

He smiled and leaned over to her, suggestively wiggling his eyebrows for effect. “Hey, there's a lot of things I didn't do a lot of when I was younger—Wait, no, ignore that. All of that. Immediately. Please.”

His smirk disappeared in an instant as he leaned back in defeat, abandoning that particularly disastrous line of improvised flirting. T'Len stifled a slight chuckle as he shrank back, then grew more serious once again.

“I remember what you were like back then,” she mused, “I remember the man that spoke so passionately at our meetings at the institute in ShiKahr. The one that stood up for our emotions, when our elders looked down on us. The one who helped so many young Vulcans to embrace what they were feeling. That young man was so...inspiring.”

Sunek didn't entirely hate this latest round of ego massage. But he still shifted uncomfortably on the bed. He didn't tend to spend much time thinking of his life back then.

“Nah, I was an idiot,” he managed eventually, “All I was saying was a bunch of rebellious student politics mixed in with some cod philosophy. Anyone could've done it.”

“You really think that?”

“I dunno, T'Len,” he admitted, “I mean, everyone's like that when they're younger, right? We all think we know how to fix everything that's wrong with the universe, even though we've barely started living in the real world, and then you just...grow out of it. You grow up.”

She looked over at him with an amused aside. “You've grown up?”

He glared at her for a moment, then leaned back, propping his head on his arm and staring at the ceiling. She leaned back and rested her head on his stomach. He felt another crackle of electricity. After a moment of silence, she continued.

“Have you ever been to the Vorothe Sea?” she asked in a passive tone.

“On Vulcan?” he replied, slightly thrown by the non sequitur, “The one from that dumb old meditation technique?”

She turned to look up at him and nodded. It was the first meditation technique pretty much any Vulcan child learned, not exactly a stretch that he had known about it. But she continued. “In the meditation, you are told to picture a crystal clear reservoir of water, an island of calm. But the real Vorothe Sea is nothing like that. It is a harsh, violent place. Ironical that such a famous pillar of Vulcan meditation is so illogical, don't you think?”

“I guess I always thought that was weird, but—Hang on,” Sunek paused for a moment, looking back at her with confusion, “Are you preaching to me right now? Is this some new bit you're trying out for your next V'tosh ka'tur meeting?”

She shook her head, not entirely happily. “No,” she replied, “Although I'm sure you could make it into quite a speech.”

He couldn't help but raise an eyebrow as she circled the conversation back around to his past. Not a show of intrigue, but one of frustration. “Maybe,” he managed, “Still, I guess I just prefer my life now.”

“Making deliveries?”

It was said with innocence, and without malice, but Sunek could have sworn he detected a darker note in her tone. A sliver of derision, a slightly superior sneer. Even a touch of anger.

“Hey,” he chided with a smile, “That's not fair—”

His smile disappeared in a moment of realisation.

“Crap, the fair,” he muttered, “I was supposed to be at that stupid trade fair thing! The others are gonna be so pissed...”

He slid off the bed, leaving her behind, and rushed over to the bathroom to grab a sonic shower. As he neared the door, she called out after him.

“Could I come with you?”

He stopped in his tracks and turned back around, a dopey smile forming on his face.

“You wanna go make some deliveries?” he couldn’t help but fire back.

“Well,” she replied, a suggestive twinkle in her eyes, “We do still have thirty years, six months and fourteen days of married life to catch up on.”

Had Sunek’s mind been more logically attuned, he might have spent some time weighing up this somewhat out of the blue suggestion. But while he could still operate with supremely Vulcan levels of concentration when he wanted to, right now his decidedly un-Vulcan libido passed an immediate resolution to ignore any more rational considerations on the matter. And his dopey smile grew wider.

“You know, I could definitely get used to married life,” he grinned as he walked on into the bathroom.

A second later, she heard the sonic shower start up. She reached over to a small rucksack that sat next to the bed and pulled out a stubby communicator. She clicked open the channel, knowing that they would be waiting for her transmission.

“It’s me,” she said, her voice hidden from Sunek by the sound of the shower, “Everything is proceeding as planned...”

* * * * *

The figure on the other end of the comms link sat in darkness.

After a brief discussion with T’Len, he allowed her to return to her mission, and tapped the controls on the desk in front of him to terminate the link before leaning back and closing his eyes, now seeing darkness upon darkness.

It comforted him.

After a moment, he opened his eyes and allowed them to adjust to the dank conditions inside his quarters. He could have asked the computer to turn up the lights, but he preferred it like this.

The vast expanse of the space around him was not built with comfort in mind. It may have been an elaborately large room, but it was utilitarian in design. The walls were a mix of dark green and rusty orange, the room almost bereft of furniture save for his desk and a dining table off to one side. It was also free of any sort of personal effects. He had little time for them these days.

Still, as he looked around at the blank slate in which he now resided, he allowed himself a smile of satisfaction. The final pieces of the jigsaw were beginning to slot into place.

He knew there was still plenty of work to do if they were going to be ready on time, and he also knew that he would have to oversee every last part of it to be truly satisfied that every eventuality had been covered and prepared for. But for the time being, he decided to allow himself a moment of indulgence.

Closing his eyes again, he focused on a familiar meditative scene. The Vorothe Sea.

But not the fictional Vorothe Sea that had been forced into his mind as a youth by his parents and his teachers. The real thing. The pure, unflinching truth behind the lies.

He stood on the deck of the sailing ship with great difficulty, as a harsh gale blew across the deck. The tumultuous, writhing surface of the sea churned around beneath him, crashing waves of murky silt-filled water up and over the bow. The wind picked up, even more aggressively, sending salty spray into his face and causing him to stumble slightly as he tried to maintain his footing on the slippery deck.

But he did hold his footing, because he was well versed in this meditative exercise. He saw the true face of the Vorothe Sea, and he had conquered it after years of practice. It energised him, even as he sat peacefully at his desk in his quarters.

He stood head-on to the storm, and allowed it to feed his rage.

Part 1D

Part One (Cont'd)

Klath roared with effort as he lifted the heavy tritanium sheet above his head and set off up the Bounty's cargo ramp once again.

The ship was parked in a loading area on the outskirts of the main city of Redrax, surrounded by the cargo that they were loading onboard. As Klath headed up the ramp, Jirel and Natasha headed back down, midway through loading crates of other miscellaneous supplies. To one side, Darhall had propped himself against a pile of crates, watching on and very much not offering to help, while Denella checked off what was being loaded on a small padd, and offered Klath a sympathetic look as he continued up the ramp.

"Sorry, Klath. All the anti-grav units for this section were booked out."

"Still," Jirel smiled as the unhappy Klingon struggled on towards the top of the ramp, "That's what you get for oversleeping."

The still somewhat hungover Klath grumbled quietly to himself as he disappeared inside the Bounty's cargo bay.

"Anyway," Jirel said to Natasha with a wink as she assessed the weight of the next crate, "Told you we'd find a job."

"Although I'm still trying to figure out what the catch is," Denella added with an uncertain glance at the Boslic next to her.

"No catch," Darhall replied, "Frankly, you should all be thanking me for giving you such lucrative work."

"Presumably it was more lucrative before you took your cut," Jirel fired back.

"Call it a finder's fee. I had intended to do this job myself, but something else came up. A shipment of tulaberry wine destined for a resort on Risa. Pays twice as much as this little shuttle run, and comes with a complimentary weekend in one of their suites."

When he put it like that, it made sense that he was giving the Bounty this alternative delivery. An altogether less glamorous run to Sector Gamma 432 with a collection of engineering components, tritanium, ODN relays and isolinear chips.

"Always thought you needed to work on that tan, Darhall," Jirel replied.

The Boslic ignored him and stepped over to Denella, with a knowing leer on his face. "The suite is for two, you know," he muttered, "Private pool, so no need to pack a swimsuit."

Denella suppressed her shudder internally and kept her well-practised defences raised as she politely stared down the lecherous Boslic.

"Darhall, do you remember our little agreement?" she replied, casually reaching for the Orion dagger on her belt and flashing it at him, "You don't say things like that to me, and in return I don't introduce my favourite dagger here to your favourite part of your body."

Darhall shrank back slightly, still maintaining his leer.

"If you two are done flirting," Jirel chimed out as he descended back down the ramp, "We'd get all this loaded a lot faster if—"

"Hey guys, need some help?"

The unexpected question was enough to stop Jirel in his tracks. It had certainly sounded like Sunek, but it couldn't possibly have been him. Because he was offering to help. Yet, as he looked over to where the voice had come from, there was an unmistakably Sunek-shaped figure approaching them from the far side of the landing area, with T'Len beside him.

"Who are you?" Jirel asked, "And what have you done with the real Sunek?"

"Yeah, ok, very funny," Sunek sighed patiently, "Do you want my help or not?"

Jirel and the rest of those present in the landing area watched on with open mouths as Sunek walked over to the nearest stack of crates and picked one up. Then, without any complaints, sarcastic comments or attempts to feign a back injury, the wiry Vulcan carried the crate up the ramp.

"By the way," Sunek added, pausing halfway up the ramp and gesturing to T'Len, "Is it cool if my wife tags along with us for a bit?"

"Sunek," Jirel replied with complete sincerity, "If it means you're gonna help out like this, she can take my cabin."

"Ah, that definitely won't be necessary," the Vulcan grinned with an unsubtle glint in his eye.

"...Right," Jirel nodded, slightly uncomfortably.

"Y'know, cos we're totally doing it—"

"Yep. Got it."

Sunek turned and continued on up the ramp, whistling a jaunty tune as he did so. T'Len followed him, carrying a crate of her own. Jirel turned and looked at Denella with no small amount of astonishment. She shrugged.

"Cute couple."

Sector Gamma 432 was an unremarkable part of the galaxy. In fact, it was downright boring.

It was within a few hours travel of several populated star systems, and therefore perhaps should have been busier than it was. But it was one of those sectors where there was always a more convenient route to get where you needed to go without passing through Sector Gamma 432 itself.

No exploration vessel would ever consider visiting either. The entire sector contained just three planetary star systems, all three both uninhabited and uninhabitable, along with half a dozen brown dwarfs and a run of the mill type-4 emission nebula.

The rogue planet designated Epsilon-543-tau by Federation scientists was set to traverse Sector Gamma 432 on its current course, and had been identified as a body of scientific interest. But it wasn't due to pass into the sector's boundaries for another 300 years, which wasn't much use in the here and now. In the here and now, Sector Gamma 432 wasn't exactly flush with strange new worlds. In fact, it wasn't exactly flush with anything.

And as the Bounty slowed to sublight speeds at the end of its overnight journey to this particular position, it looked to be the only ship for light years in any direction. Which, given that Darhall had told them they were headed here to rendezvous with another ship and drop off the cargo in their hold, was more than a little troubling.

"Nothing," Klath reported with an unhappy grunt from his tactical station, "Sensors detect no ships in the entire sector."

"Maybe they're running late?" Natasha offered, from where she sat behind her own console on the right of the cockpit. She still felt a little silly sitting there. Partly because she felt the presence of T'Len where she stood over her shoulder. But mainly because the console itself still hadn't been set up to serve any specific function, the dirty bank of controls and monitors in front of her were all still powered down and dark.

Still, in her previous life as a Starfleet medical officer, she spent her time stuck down in sickbay, so for the time being she was just glad to have a front row seat. Even if she felt a little bit like a competition winner manning a pretend station.

"Maybe someone wrote the coordinates down wrong," Sunek offered, his good spirits continuing despite their current setback.

They were mainly continuing because, since they'd left Redrax, he and T'Len had barely left his cabin.

"Maybe someone input the coordinates into the guidance computer wrong," Denella fired back from her engineering console at the rear of the room.

After a moment of silence, Jirel emitted a despondent sigh from where he sat in his tatty centre chair.

"Darhall."

"You believe this is a trap?" Klath glowered, tensing up in anticipation.

"Not exactly," the Trill replied, "But I think that after that stunt we pulled on Sentrack III, just punching me in the face wasn't gonna be enough to level the score."

"So, he set this whole thing up?" Natasha asked.

"We just spent most of yesterday putting our backs out lugging all that useless scrap onboard and wasted another day flying all the way out to the middle of literally nowhere. I'd say our Boslic friend is on his way to that suite on Risa, laughing himself stupid right now."

The others in the cockpit considered this for a moment.

"Ok," Denella said eventually, "But if that's true, how come he gave us our share of the payment up front?"

Jirel turned back to look out of the cockpit window, in lieu of having an answer for that question.

"Besides," Sunek said, swinging back around to the rest of the group and grinning, "If he really wanted to get his own back, couldn't he have just slugged you in the face a couple more times?"

He let out a chuckle, even as he saw that the others didn't seem to be in the mood to join in. Instead, they were all staring at something over his shoulder. "What?" he continued, obliviously, "Guys, why are you being so—?"

He swung back around, following their collective gaze until he arrived back on the view out of the cockpit window. And all he could see was a wall of green metal.

"Oh," he managed, "I see."

The Bounty hung in space in the middle of Sector Gamma 432, the tiny ship now dwarfed by the immense form of the decloaked Romulan Warbird.

End of Part One

Part 2A

Part Two

It was Klath that broke the shocked silence that had descended on the Bounty's cockpit, the Klingon immediately jumping to action stations.

"I am raising our shields and bringing weapons online," he barked out as he tapped his controls.

Nobody else in the cockpit moved.

"Why?" Jirel managed to reply, still staring at the vast ship in front of them.

"We must defend ourselves!" Klath spat back at the Trill, "They are Romulans!"

"Yep, thanks for the ID, mighty oracle. And if they really want to pick a fight with us out here, there's not much our little peashooter of a torpedo launcher can do about it."

"It's enormous," Natasha whispered from the other side of the cockpit. She had seen Warbirds plenty of times before during her time with Starfleet. But back then, she had been on a starship. Somehow, seeing the gigantic vessel from onboard a ship as small as the Bounty seemed to magnify its size even more.

"Jirel," Klath persisted, "If we are to die, then we must die with honour!"

Jirel spun around to his incensed Klingon weapons chief and tried to keep his voice as calm and measured as possible. "Ok, Klath, just listen to me for a second. I have no intention of dying today, with honour or otherwise. And, right now, the best way of making sure I don't die today is if we do nothing that might piss off that great big Romulan ship out there, ok?"

For a moment, he thought Klath was actually about to ignore him and open fire, regardless of how futile it would be. But eventually, he merely folded his arms in a show of annoyance.

"We could always run?" Natasha offered.

"Same problem," Denella replied, "That thing'll run rings around us at warp."

"So?" Sunek asked, not unreasonably, "What exactly are we gonna do?"

Jirel went to answer, then stopped himself. A silent admission that he didn't have a clue. Instead, it was T'Len who answered her estranged husband's question.

"You could hail them?"

All five of the Bounty's crew turned around in unison to look at the Vulcan woman with varying levels of disbelief. For her part, she stared back with complete sincerity.

"You were asked to deliver your cargo to a ship at these coordinates, were you not? Well, that is a ship. At these coordinates."

Jirel scoffed, not knowing whether to laugh or cry. "Ok, so, you think the Romulan Empire is paying us - this ship - to deliver their spare parts?"

T'Len remained a picture of sincerity. Jirel scoffed again and looked over to Denella for some sort of support. The Orion woman merely shrugged.

"I mean," she offered, "If they wanted us dead, we'd be very, very dead by now, right?"

The Trill chewed his lip thoughtfully, then sighed in defeat. "Alright," he said, feeling faintly ridiculous, "In lieu of a sane plan, I guess I'll... hail them."

He swivelled back around to the front of the cockpit and tapped the controls on the arm of his chair, licking his lips and digging down to find his best captain's voice.

"Romulan ship, this is, um, the Bounty?" he began, not quite finding it, "We were, erm, told to deliver supplies to these coordinates. Do you... know anything about that?"

He slumped back in his chair and waited for a response. He had started to sweat.

"Very nice Jirel," Denella whispered from behind him, "Sounded very captain-y."

"Yeah, very funny. Do you wanna take over—?"

Before he got any further, the whole ship rocked gently. Klath jumped back into action, but everyone present knew it didn't feel like weapons fire.

"They have locked a tractor beam on us," he reported urgently, "We are being towed into their main hangar bay!"

The Klingon looked up at his colleagues, who he noted with increasing disdain had still not matched his state of battle readiness.

“Well,” Denella offered, “That’s what I’d do if I wanted to offload a bunch of supplies from the cargo bay of a smaller ship?”

“Yeah,” Jirel added, giving himself up to the farce of the situation, “In a weird way, this is actually a good thing?”

Through the cockpit window, they watched as the eerie green-tinged light of the tractor beam pulled the Bounty between the twin hulls of the ship and towards the open doors of the hangar bay at the rear of the ship’s hawk-like front section.

“So,” Sunek quipped as the ship passed inside, “Anyone know the Romulan for ‘We come in peace’?”

The Bounty settled down onto the deck of the hangar bay with a gentle thud. Behind it, the vast bay doors slowly closed and locked together. Seconds later, unbeknownst to the Bounty’s crew, the entire Warbird began to shimmer as the great ship cloaked.

And then Sector Gamma 432 was back to being as unremarkable and boring as it had ever been.

* * * * *

Jirel peered out of the cockpit window at the huge empty hanger bay and shrugged.

“Well,” he muttered to nobody in particular, “Let’s go say hello, I guess.”

He turned around, to see Klath in the middle of tooling up. The Klingon already had his bat’leth slung behind his back, and was in the process of clipping a dagger and a stout disruptor to his belt.

“Klath, what the hell are you doing?”

Klath looked back at the Trill, as if the answer should have been obvious. “I am preparing for battle.”

“Of course,” Jirel sighed, “So, what’s the plan, then? You’re gonna rush out there, single-handedly fight your way through a couple of thousand Romulan soldiers and commandeer their ship?”

Klath considered this for a moment with a look of complete seriousness.

“You are all welcome to assist,” he said eventually.

“Ok, just—No weapons,” Jirel snapped, “We’re here to make a delivery, remember?”

“You hope,” Sunek muttered with amusement from behind Jirel.

Klath stared back at the Trill for a moment. Then, with a further annoyed grimace, he reluctantly started to remove his weapons.

Moments later, six slightly dishevelled and entirely unarmed figures descended the Bounty’s rear cargo ramp and looked around.

“You know,” Sunek mused, “I was expecting it to be a lot bigger on the inside.”

Despite his comment, the hangar bay was more than large enough, made of faded dark metal and stretching out around them. But there was something slightly off about their surroundings.

What little cargo they could see was haphazardly piled up around the place, with no real sense of military order to them. The scuffed walls of the bay showed clear signs of damage and disrepair, as if the ship had just come out of a significant battle. And even the lighting seemed off, slightly dimmer than was really comfortable for a bay of this size, and flickering slightly.

“Huh,” Denella offered simply as she clocked the extent of the decay, “Does this place ever look like crap.”

As they reached the bottom of the ramp, a set of doors on the other side of the bay opened and footsteps paced into the room.

“Welp,” Jirel muttered, trying to adopt his best space captain pose and falling as short as he had with his captain’s voice a few minutes earlier, “I guess this’ll be the welcoming committee.”

Through the dimmed lighting, they saw a trio of figures with pointed ears approaching them. But they didn’t walk with the practised march of Romulan troops. This was more of a ramshackle cacophony of steps on the hard metal floor. And they weren’t wearing Romulan uniforms. Instead, they were all clad in a variety of coloured overalls and tunics. And, while they had pointed ears, they were all clearly not Romulan, but Vulcan.

And they were all smiling.

The Vulcan at the head of the trio was a tall, rangy man with short brown hair and a close-cropped goatee beard. He led the other two Vulcans, a stout male and a slender female, up to the Bounty’s crew and then stopped in his tracks, taking them all in. For a moment, nobody quite seemed to know what to do next.

Except for Sunek, who let out an audible gasp as he finally saw the face of the leading Vulcan in a clear light. “Holy crap,” he blurted out, “Sokar?”

The bearded Vulcan smiled wider and nodded. “Yes, Sunek,” he replied, “It’s me.”

Sunek laughed out loud, crossing the divide between the two crews and wrapping the rangy Vulcan in a tight bear hug. T’Len also broke from

her position and walked over to join the others, looking to be familiar with all of them.

“Anyone starting to feel a bit used?” Denella asked without amusement.

“Guys,” Sunek laughed, turning back to the rest of the Bounty’s crew, “It’s Sokar!”

“Yep,” Jirel replied tersely, “We got that bit.”

“But...I know him! From years ago, in the V’tosh ka’tur! I...”

Sunek paused, struggling to take everything in. Sokar took that opportunity to step forwards and address the rest of the Bounty’s crew with open arms.

“My friends,” he said, with a somewhat pompous air, “Welcome to the starship Tolaris. The flagship of the V’tosh ka’tur.”

Part 2B

Part Two (Cont'd)

“This is crazy...”

It was already the sixth or seventh time that Sunek had said those exact words since Sokar’s announcement in the hangar bay. And it almost certainly wouldn’t be the last.

His mind had been flying at warp speed ever since he had crossed paths with the second face from his past in the last couple of days. He had barely noticed as Sokar had introduced the Bounty’s crew to his two cohorts, Tepal and T’Prin. He had only been vaguely aware as he had led them from the hangar bay through a dizzying maze of corridors. And he hadn’t really been listening when dinner was suggested.

Because his mind was still struggling to put all the pieces together. Sokar, one of his best friends back at the ShiKahr Learning Institute, was here. Apparently commanding a Romulan Warbird.

Sunek had gotten used to a lot of things not making sense in his life. But this was stretching even his sense of credulity.

He struggled back into the here and now and looked around at their surroundings. Sokar had brought them to the enormous main dining hall of the Tolaris, a vast expanse of a room which had presumably been designed to keep hundreds of hungry Romulan soldiers fed at a time. Meaning that the room slightly dwarfed the current dining party, who occupied a scant few seats on a single one of the long metal tables that were laid out around the room in tight formation.

There was a clear delineation down the middle of the table, though Sunek hadn’t been paying enough attention to remember whether that was deliberate or not. He sat with the rest of the Bounty’s crew on one side, while Sokar sat with T’Prin, Tepal and T’Len on the other. In between the two groups, the table was adorned with a veritable feast of Vulcan cuisine, a display of luxury that seemed a little unnecessary both for the size of the dining party and for the occasion. It was more like a state banquet than a friendly cosy meal.

He looked over at T’Len, who was directly opposite him. She smiled back at him, knowingly.

“I take it you knew about all this?” he managed. There was no unhappiness at being deceived in his comment, merely a tinge of awe.

“I felt it would be a nice surprise,” she replied with a good-natured tone.

“Yes,” Sokar jumped in without prompting, “T’Len and I crossed paths some months ago on Abrion IV. We were both eager to get together with some V’tosh ka’tur members again. And she was especially keen that we tracked you down, in particular, Sunek.”

She looked down at the table with mild embarrassment. Sunek felt that pesky dopey smile creep back onto his face.

“This is crazy...” he whispered for the seventh or possibly eighth time.

Sokar let out a hearty laugh and turned back to the rest of the Bounty’s crew, who were still looking distinctly uncomfortable with the situation. “My apologies to you all,” he offered, “It wasn’t our intention to deceive you.”

“Hard fail on that front, just FYI,” Jirel replied curtly.

Sokar’s broad smile remained, but Jirel saw something change in his eyes. He definitely looked a little irritated by the Trill’s comment.

“I’m sure you have plenty of questions,” Sokar continued with a deliberately pleasant tone, “And I’ll be happy to answer them. It’s just unfortunate that our method of getting you here had to be a bit...cloak and dagger.”

“Was that a pun?” Denella asked from Jirel’s side, without a trace of mirth.

Sokar didn’t answer, the signs of irritation on his otherwise smiling face growing a tad more recognisable. He gestured to the feast in front of them. “But first: Please, eat,” he continued, “Thanks to T’Prin here for preparing such a repast. She has been busy reprogramming the replicators with appropriately Vulcan food.”

The slender Vulcan woman at the end of the group nodded and smiled.

At the end of the Bounty’s side of the table, Klath looked at the food with distrust. They had already been deceived once, and given the proliferation of poisons and biological agents throughout the galaxy, it would be an act of pure stupidity to accept anything from their untrustworthy guests without completing some sort of rudimentary inspection first.

He looked back across at his hungry colleagues to see that they had all already started eating. The Klingon rolled his eyes in frustration.

“Hey, a free meal’s a free meal,” Sunek quipped to the watching Vulcans as he loaded his plate with generous slices of fried Flatroot.

“You really didn’t have to do this,” Jirel added, as he chewed on a portion of Adronn feltara.

“But it’s appreciated,” Denella said between hungry slurps of Plomeek soup.

Natasha mustered a nod of agreement, her efforts to do anything else hindered by a mouthful of Shav-rot.

On the other side of the table, the four Vulcans watched on for a moment with a shared look of satisfaction. T’Prin turned and looked at the

final member of the Bounty's crew, as Klath unhappily sniffed a piece of freshly prepared Saffir.

"And what about you, Klingon friend?" she asked with a smile, "Is my cooking to your tastes?"

Klath glanced up, looking unsettled as he realised that he was the centre of attention. He still wasn't entirely sure they weren't all being poisoned, but he reluctantly took a tentative bite of the warm bread and swallowed loudly.

"It is...edible," he said, after a moment of guarded consideration.

"Our brave warrior," Denella grinned as she ripped off a similar chunk of bread from the communal pile, earning an especially dark glower from the Klingon.

Sokar roared with laughter at this. Jirel smiled, but there again seemed something off about his reaction. It hadn't been that funny. It felt like he was compensating for something, somehow.

"Think of this as a thank you," Sokar offered as his laughter subsided, "For bringing us our supplies."

At this, Denella paused, midway through helping herself to a second portion of T'mirak rice. "You...actually need all that stuff?"

It was Tepal who replied, from the left side of Sokar. "I don't know if you've ever tried to keep a Romulan Warbird running," he said, "But it does tend to need a lot of spare parts."

Denella recalled the state of disrepair she had seen in the hangar bay, as well as in the corridors on their walk to the dining hall, and nodded. It made sense.

"This is crazy..." Sunek offered, for what may have been the ninth time.

"I'm still a bit hazy on how you ended up with this ship," Jirel admitted, toying with his food for a moment.

"We found it," Tepal replied simply, his tone switching to a more terse and guarded level.

"Forgetful guys, those Romulans. Imagine losing a thing like this."

Sokar smiled back at the Trill, but there was no trace of even false mirth in this one. "The Tolaris - or whatever the Romulans might have called it - was drifting through the Sendran system when we happened upon it," he explained in a slightly superior manner, "Completely abandoned, but very much repairable."

"I guess that bit's still a work in progress," Denella offered.

Sokar flinched slightly. Must've hit a nerve, the Orion woman thought to herself.

"Romulans do not abandon their ships," Klath boomed out suddenly, "They destroy them before they end up in the hands of an enemy."

Sokar glanced over at the Klingon dismissively. "The Sendran system was a Dominion stronghold during the war," he explained, "We suspect the ship was boarded and captured before the crew had a chance to scuttle it, and the Dominion took it away for further study. Only to abandon it when they fled back to the Gamma Quadrant."

"Makes sense," Natasha nodded thoughtfully, "Starfleet heard similar reports of starships being seized by Dominion forces from time to time."

She was sure she detected a slight flinch on Sokar's face when she mentioned Starfleet, but she quickly dismissed it. After all, if she was being entirely honest with herself, the word still had a similar effect on her.

"The superstructure and the warp drive were fully operational," Sokar continued, "But you are right that the rest of the ship required a lot of work. With the supplies you have provided, however, we should be able to bring all essential systems online."

"Like the cloaking device?" Denella asked, politely but pointedly querying his definition of essential systems.

Sokar's smile tightened another few notches. Tepal chimed in with a response. "As Sokar said to us when we first drew up the repair schedule, when your ship has a cloak, it tends to become an essential system. Because it's so... 'wicked cool'."

Sokar burst out laughing again. Natasha couldn't help but stare at the sight, realising too late that the bearded Vulcan had noticed her gaze.

"Is there a problem, doctor?"

"Oh, um, sorry," she managed, shifting in her seat, "It's just—I guess I'm still getting used to the idea of laughing Vulcans."

She tried a chuckle of her own, her comment meant to be good-natured. But Sokar and the others didn't match her reaction. If anything, the mood across the other side of the table seemed to grow substantially darker. She stopped chuckling and coughed awkwardly.

"Interesting," Sokar nodded, with a raised eyebrow, "Tell me, Ms Kinsen, what do you have in common with Adolf Hitler?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Or Khan Noonien Singh? Or Vlad the Impaler? I mean, you are all human, are you not? Surely you must all think and feel and act the same way?"

Natasha struggled to figure out whether he was being serious, or whether this was a particularly committed joke on his part. None of the

Vulcans seemed amused, that much was clear.

“Hey,” Sunek managed, breaking the icy silence that had descended, “Come on, you don’t need to do the whole—”

“Or is it only you humans who are allowed to embrace their individuality?” Sokar continued, with what was now sounding like a well-trodden spiel, “While the rest of the galaxy must conform to these narrow little stereotypes? The logical Vulcans, the brutal Cardassians, the warlike Klingons—”

“Present company excepted, obviously,” Jirel chimed in, causing Klath’s glower to deepen further.

“Um,” Natasha managed, “Look, I’m sorry if I offended you. I just meant—”

“Doc, relax,” Sunek chimed in, looking a tad embarrassed, “This is just some old rabble rousing stuff from when we were young. Right, Sokar?”

The bearded Vulcan stared at Natasha for a few more moments, long enough for her to get the distinct impression that his forthcoming climbdown was not entirely genuine. “Yes. Perhaps it is,” he replied, “But you have to understand that it does get...tiring, to be constantly seen as aberrations.”

“All we want,” Tepal added, “Is to be seen as a natural - perhaps even a logical - part of an inherently chaotic universe. Not a strange deviation from the norm.”

Natasha nodded in understanding, still feeling like every pair of Vulcan eyes in the room was silently judging her. Even Sunek. Another silence descended. Everyone’s appetites appeared to have vanished for the time being.

“Well,” Jirel managed eventually, “Again, you really shouldn’t have...with all the food. But now we should probably offload our cargo and leave you to get on with—”

“My people will deal with the cargo,” Sokar shot back, as if he hadn’t really been listening, “You are our guests.”

Something about that comment piqued Jirel’s suspicions all over again. His people?

“Besides,” he continued, looking over at Sunek, “I’m sure that Sunek would like to stay for a while.”

“Perhaps,” Tepal offered to the others, “The rest of you would care for a tour of the Tolaris?”

Denella mused on this for a moment, then shrugged and nodded. After all, it wasn’t every day you were offered a tour of a Romulan Warbird. Regardless of what condition it was in.

Evidently, however, this wasn’t a belief shared by Klath.

“I will assist with the cargo,” the Klingon replied simply.

Sokar and the other Vulcans looked back at the impassive Klingon, but decided against pushing the issue.

All things considered, Jirel mused to himself, he had been to less awkward dinner parties.

Part 2C

Part Two (Cont'd)

Tepal's tour was proving to be as extensive as it was dreary.

"A magnificent craft," he stated flatly, "The Romulans call it a D'deridex-class. Sixty-three decks in total. Maximum speed of warp 9.6, and, of course, you're already aware of the cloaking device..."

The stout Vulcan may have embraced his emotional side, but as he led Denella and Jirel down yet another of the Tolaris's dark metal corridors, he still needed some work on his presentational skills. For most of the tour, it sounded to Jirel like he was just reading facts off a trading card.

"...The whole ship is over 1400 metres in length," he continued to drone on, not exactly disproving the Trill's suspicions, "With a mass of some 4,320,000 metric tonnes..."

Jirel and Denella had been the only two who had ultimately taken up the offer of the tour.

Sunek had disappeared with T'Len as soon as dinner was over, holding hands and giddily rushing off like two furtive teenage lovers trying to get some alone time away from their parents. Meanwhile, Natasha had surprisingly volunteered to go with Klath back to the Bounty and help to unload the supplies. Jirel suspected that decision had been down to the particularly uncomfortable time she'd had during their meal. She didn't want to risk any more faux pas.

Still, as Tepal continued with his lengthy description of the precise composition of the metal panelling in the corridor walls, Jirel found himself feeling a little jealous that he hadn't decided to go with a couple of hours of manual labour instead.

"...The Romulans seem to prefer tritanium to lighter composites," the Vulcan noted, as Jirel suppressed a yawn, "I believe this is designed to help with ship rigidity while at impulse..."

To Jirel's side, Denella was at least paying attention to Tepal's spiel. Although she was more unimpressed with what she was seeing rather than what she was hearing. The more she saw of the Tolaris, the less it looked like the unimpeachable Romulan Warbird that had first confronted them in Sector Gamma 432.

In fact, in her considered and semi-professional engineering opinion, the Tolaris was a complete wreck.

The disrepair they had seen earlier wasn't even half of it. As they followed Tepal on his exhaustive tour, she noted wires and cabling hanging down from various panels all over the ceiling, apparently unconnected to anything, while every few steps they walked past an exposed section of isolar circuitry in the walls. Barely half of the lights on the entire ship seemed to work, computer terminals flickered and blinked as if they were low on power, and when they reached the occasional section where the ship's guts were at least covered up, the walls and decking were a hodge-podge of multicoloured panels, all badly sealed together.

Despite the vast scale and the grandeur of the Warbird, she wasn't lying to herself when she thought she'd be ashamed if even a fraction of the Bounty was left in this sort of condition.

It also wasn't hard to spot that the Tolaris was unnaturally empty for a vessel of her size. Aside from the odd smiling Vulcan here and there, the corridors were virtually deserted. But despite all that, Tepal delivered his dry tour with all the reverence and pride as if they were touring the decks of the USS Enterprise herself.

"...And once we've completed work on the internal sensors, we'll have full automation of shipboard systems..."

They turned a corner and Tepal deftly swerved around a stray plasma relay spitting sparks out onto the deck as if it wasn't there. Behind him, Jirel gave the crackling relay a significantly wider and more tentative berth, glancing over at Denella and matching her look of concern.

"Love what you've done with the place," Jirel muttered sarcastically.

"There is still some work to do," Tepal replied with a shrug, in what Denella thought was a contender for the understatement of the century so far.

"I'll say," she replied, noting that Tepal's expression turned notably more annoyed at this latest comment on the state of his ship.

"Still," he countered, "Before the Tolaris, we travelled on an old Tellurian freighter. It was old, run down, barely capable of warp 4. Sokar felt it was time for an upgrade."

"I can imagine that," Jirel mused, "But, I mean, back when I found the Bounty, I thought I'd bitten off more than I could chew just getting her spaceworthy. This is something else."

"Yes, well. Yours is a perfectly fine little ship—" Tepal began.

"Little?" Denella muttered. This time, it was her turn to look offended by a comment about her ship.

"And yet," the Vulcan continued, "If you had been fortunate enough to find a Vor'cha-class cruiser, or a Galaxy-class starship, would you have turned it down?"

Jirel considered this for a moment. "Well, I'd probably have needed a bigger crew."

“You definitely would,” Denella added with a good-natured grin, “You think my overtime costs are bad now.”

They reached the doors to a turbolift and Tepal pressed the controls to summon a lift car.

“Speaking of crews,” Jirel added, “Seems a bit empty around here?”

Tepal’s face betrayed another look of irritation at this question. Or perhaps something even deeper than that. A look of anger. “There are eighty-seven of us onboard,” he admitted eventually, “Many of the other members of the V’tosh ka’tur decided not join us.”

“Huh,” Jirel replied, “Any reason why?”

Tepal didn’t even pretend to offer an answer to that question, and merely turned back to the controls to call for the lift again.

“I’m sure there’ll be plenty more onboard once word gets out about the Tolaris,” he replied, switching effortlessly back to monotonous tour guide mode, “After all, the D’deridex-class has room for a crew complement of up to 1500...”

The turbolift doors opened, and Jirel went to step inside, secretly glad that the doors had broken up Tepal’s latest monologue.

Suddenly, he felt the Vulcan grab him, stopping him from going any further. It was only then that he saw that, while the turbolift doors had opened, the turbolift itself didn’t seem to have got the message. His right foot dangled out into the empty lift shaft, a good forty-floor drop below it.

For his part, Tepal kept a firm hold of the Trill until he retracted his foot safely back to terra firma, watching the scene unfold impassively.

“Apologies,” he said simply, “We are still having some minor issues with the turbolifts.”

Jirel looked back at Denella, who was staring at the empty space where the lift was supposed to be with a fair degree of shock.

“Good to know,” he managed weakly.

* * * * *

If one half of the Bounty’s crew were finding Tepal’s tour of the ship hard to take, the other half found themselves stuck in an equally trying situation.

Natasha and Klath had returned to the hangar bay to unload their cargo accompanied by T’Prin, who wasn’t the most talkative of the Vulcans they had met so far. But they had been joined by a younger and considerably more excitable Vulcan man called Ronek, who had clearly latched onto the emotion of pride more than any of the others.

Natasha sighed with exertion as she dropped the latest crate of supplies into the Tolaris’s hangar bay, sending an echoing sound around the expanse of the room, as Ronek continued his own soliloquy on the subject of the Tolaris.

“It really is a fantastic ship,” the lanky Vulcan persisted, effortlessly walking down the Bounty’s cargo ramp with a crate in his arms, “I personally worked with Tepal on repairing the weapons systems. Six full-spread disruptor arrays, twin torpedo launchers. Remarkable.”

“Sounds...great,” Natasha managed with a forced smile.

He had been talking almost non-stop since they had arrived back in the hangar bay. And while she had hoped that helping Klath unload the cargo would be a welcome break from the awkwardness of dinner, Ronek had ensured she had just ended up with a slightly different type of awkwardness.

“I apologise for Ronek’s candour,” T’Prin offered as she descended the ramp with a crate of her own, “The younger members of our crew tend to get rather sidetracked with how...cool everything is.”

No matter how many times she heard a Vulcan say the word ‘cool’, it didn’t get any less strange. But after her experience at dinner, she decided to keep that particular observation to herself.

“Nothing wrong with being proud of what we’re building here,” Ronek shot back, with a slight edge of irritation in his voice.

Natasha left the Vulcans to their discussion and headed back up the ramp. She found Klath in the cargo bay assessing the remaining tritanium sheets, and glanced back to make sure that Ronek and T’Prin were still suitably distracted by each other.

“What do you think?” she said simply. She knew that she wouldn’t need to expand her question any further for the Klingon’s benefit.

“I do not like this,” he admitted freely.

Despite her own worries rattling around inside of her, she had to admit that she found the Klingon’s candid response settling. In fact, one of the other reasons she’d volunteered for this task was to spend time with him. He was the one member of the Bounty’s crew that she had struggled to connect with so far, and while there had been a softening to the edges of their relationship recently, she still wanted to do more to build a friendship.

Back in her cabin, her unfinished project remained. She had spent time here and there combing through the records of the USS Navajo’s dead crew, searching for the face of the ensign that still haunted her dreams. The man she had left to die. But with progress on that task proving slower than she had hoped, she felt like she needed all the friendships she needed right now. Even a friendship with a grumpy, often

monosyllabic Klingon.

Klath, for his part, wasn't worried about anything quite so personal. He was more concerned about the tactical disadvantage they were in right now, locked away in the belly of the Tolaris.

He was also somewhat concerned about the smell. Vulcans or no Vulcans, the Tolaris still smelt like Romulans to him.

"Me neither," Natasha muttered back, checking over her shoulder to make sure they were still alone, "There's something...off about all this. Especially the Vulcans."

"The thin one talks a lot," Klath replied.

Natasha stifled a smile and shook her head. That wasn't quite what she meant. "It's more...I mean, I haven't known Sunek, or the V'tosh ka'tur for very long, but everyone we've met on this ship seems darker somehow."

"Darker?"

"You don't see it?" she persisted, "I know they're still laughing and smiling, but there's something underneath it. Something twisted. It's like...they're all unhappy. Angry, even."

Klath didn't reply. Given his own mood, he felt any comment on that would be hypocritical.

"It's...unnerving," she concluded. Deep down, for possibly the first time in her life, she wished the Bounty had a Betazoid onboard.

Klath looked down at the remaining tritanium sheets and considered this for a moment.

"I believe it may be prudent for me to return to the cockpit and find a weapon," he said eventually, "From a tactical perspective—"

"As I was saying," Ronek's voice echoed up into the cargo bay as he ascended the ramp, interrupting their conversation, "The torpedo launchers really were a challenge to get back online. If this ship really was seized by the Dominion, they took those apart completely."

Klath and Natasha shared another wordless glance, conveying their collected frustrations at the fact that the Ronek show was starting up again.

"Fascinating," Natasha managed, without meaning it.

"Well, it makes sense," he continued as he walked over to them, "After all, they were adversaries in the war. And it's always important to know the weapons that your adversaries have available to them, don't you think?"

He looked directly at Klath as he said this. The Klingon couldn't help but feel like that had been deliberate. As ever, Ronek was smiling, but as Natasha had noted, Klath now saw that there was something behind the smile. They stared at each other for a moment, before Ronek gestured to the tritanium.

"Do you need some assistance here?"

Klath glared back as if he had just been personally insulted. All immediate thoughts of returning to the cockpit for a weapon were momentarily forgotten. "I am fine," he replied tersely, reaching down and picking up another of the metal sheets with no little amount of effort.

As the Klingon staggered back over to the ramp, moving slightly faster than he had before to prove just how little assistance he needed, Natasha stifled a smile and picked up another of the cargo containers, getting back to work for the time being.

She still felt unsettled, though. Partly from the nagging feeling she couldn't shake that Ronek and T'Prin were watching their every move like a pair of hawks. But also because she couldn't shift one particular question from her mind.

It was a question that had first popped up when Sokar had introduced himself as a member of the V'tosh ka'tur and welcomed them onboard the Tolaris. And she was worried that it was a question that she didn't want to know the answer to.

What does a hippie need with a starship?

* * * * *

The storm was raging all around.

He stood on the deck of the ship and tried to lean into the wind as it buffeted him, just as another wave crashed over the side of the vessel and drenched the thin tunic he was wearing. He shivered as the full chill of the wind hit his soaking wet form and desperately tried to keep his focus on the task at hand.

It was a deceptively straightforward task, the same task it had always been. Simply to achieve a state of perfect balance on the deck. Legs slightly apart, arms out to your sides.

The fact that it was so straightforward was the main reason that the Vorothe Sea scenario was the first meditation technique that most Vulcan parents taught their children. Except in the traditional scenario, the sea was calm. Achieving harmony and balance was easy. In the midst of the violence of the real Vorothe Sea, Sunek could barely stand up, never mind balance.

Behind him, he heard the main sail of the ship slapping against the mast as the storm whipped it back and forth. He tried to ignore it, wishing

for a break in the weather, even though he knew that one wasn't coming. Because that wasn't what the Vorothe Sea was really like. It was far too violent a place for breaks in the weather.

And so, as he faced down the impossible, instead of a feeling of inner calm and serenity, Sunek was just annoyed. Very annoyed.

"Screw it," he shouted out above the tumult of the swirling wind, "This is dumb!"

He opened his eyes, blinked a couple of times and refocused on his surroundings.

He stood in the middle of T'Len's quarters on the Tolaris, as she watched on from where she sat on the bed in the corner of the room. It was a generously sized room, with a bed, sitting area and a dining room with a food replicator. But it was also plain and cold, a lack of personal objects on display anywhere meaning that they may as well just been in some anonymous guest facilities.

"You know," he sighed as he rubbed his eyes to help clear his head, "When you said we should go back to your quarters, just the two of us, I was kinda hoping—"

"You see the lack of logic now?" she asked, standing and walking over to him, "The hypocrisy, that they try to teach the Vorothe Sea scenario to every Vulcan child? Don't you hate it?"

Sunek's mind was still fuzzy. He walked over to the dining table at the side of the room and sat down, trying to get his thoughts in order and attempting to hide his continued disappointment that she had brought him back here for a debate about meditation.

"Well," he said eventually, "It was definitely easier when I was a kid."

She sat down next to him and placed her hand on his. Sunek felt the familiar crackle of electricity, and that calmed him more than any peaceful meditation technique ever could.

"It was Sokar that helped me to understand," she said, "Helped me to practise that form of meditating."

"You really do that every day? Imagine yourself in the middle of that storm?"

She nodded. He considered this for a moment, remembering the tempest in his mind.

"You ever manage to balance?"

She didn't answer, but she smiled. Behind her, the door to her quarters opened and Sokar strode in confidently.

"I hope I'm not disturbing you," he offered as he walked.

"Way to knock," Sunek said with a grin. But Sokar didn't grin back. He sat down with them, steepling his fingers in front of him.

"It's been good to see you, Sunek. T'Len was right. You would make a fine addition to our cause."

Sunek stifled a snort. "Your 'cause'? Ok, who died and made you King of the Maquis—?"

He stopped himself and looked slightly awkward at his own comment, continuing in a slightly more sheepish tone.

"I mean...I know they, y'know, all actually died. I wasn't trying to—Is it still too soon to joke about—?"

"Is he ready?" Sokar asked T'Len, cutting off Sunek midway through his confused rambling.

She didn't reply, but she nodded.

"Ready for what?" Sunek asked, maintaining his grin but feeling an edge of concern, "Guys, come on, I know you missed a few birthdays, but you really don't need to throw me a surprise party."

Sokar stood and slowly walked over to a set of computer controls on the wall of the quarters. After a moment, music drifted out through speakers hidden somewhere around the room. Sunek didn't recognise the piece immediately, but it clearly wasn't designed to be soothing. Harsh percussion backed up by aggressive stringed instruments.

"Do you remember me telling you about Doctor Sevik?" Sokar asked.

Sunek blinked a few times in confusion. Did he remember that? He couldn't be certain. And the cacophonous music wasn't helping. "I...think so?" he managed, "Crazy Vulcan doctor, right?"

"Something like that," Sokar replied, smiling without warmth, "I told you about his techniques for purging emotions. About the pain he caused. The mental torture. And I also told you that, one day, I would like to get my revenge on him for all of it. For all of the Vulcans that suffered in his hands."

Sunek glanced at T'Len, then back at Sokar, not sure where this was all going. And not entirely sure that he wanted to know. "Like, leave a flaming bag of sehlut turds on his doorstep? That kinda thing?"

The music stepped up in tempo. The harsh chord progression made Sunek flinch involuntarily.

"It's a Romulan piece," Sokar offered, gesturing to the music, "The ship's library is full of them, as you'd expect. Still, I quite like this one."

Sunek was starting to feel a tad claustrophobic. T'Len gripped his hand again. The tingle that went through his body calmed him a tad. But not

entirely.

“The composer’s name was Kolas, the database tells me,” he continued, “A prolific and quite accomplished musician on Romulus a century or so ago. I’ve been through his entire catalogue since we found the Tolaris.”

“You don’t say?” Sunek offered, failing to disguise his disinterest in Romulan composers, nor his growing concern about the situation he was in.

“He writes with such passion, such intensity. Makes a change from the Vulcan dirges we were forced to endure as children, don’t you think?”

The symphony grew louder and angrier. The strings screeched out the final section of the opening sonata. Sunek felt a growing intensity around them in the room that was making him distinctly uncomfortable. T’Len stood and walked behind him, starting to gently massage his shoulders. The tingle of electricity became stronger.

“But I suppose that’s Vulcans for you, isn’t it,” Sokar continued with a dry chuckle, “What do you expect from a civilisation that thrives on ignoring and repressing their emotions so completely.”

As he spoke, he started to pace around the table where Sunek sat, disappearing from view behind him before emerging on the other side.

“Vulcan music is so rigid. So precisely constructed and scrupulously formed. But ultimately, so...empty.”

The music shifted into an altogether more foreboding second movement. Sokar vanished behind him again on his second lap of the table, as T’Len massaged his upper back. Or was it his third lap? Sunek was struggling to keep track.

“Look,” he managed to get out, “If you’re both angling for a bit of kinky stuff, I’m totally ok with that, but I do insist on some ground rules—”

“Doctor Sevik was a lot more than just some crazy doctor, Sunek,” Sokar hissed from somewhere behind him.

A blast from the Romulan horn section pierced the room. Sunek felt a chill run down his spine. He tried to focus, through the music, the massage, the whole atmosphere.

“He was a revered Vulcan medic, one that my parents sent me to, along with many other Vulcans. Over and over again, for his... groundbreaking treatment.”

Sokar’s voice positively dripped with anger and bile as he spat out those words. Sunek felt his mouth beginning to dry up. The pace of the music picked up, an urgency in the crash of the drums. Sokar disappeared behind him again. On his fourth lap. Or was it his fifth?

“Guys,” Sunek managed to get out, “Come on now, this is getting a bit weird. Actually, more like a lot weird—”

“You never experienced it yourself, did you? You have no idea what the pain was like. What I had to endure. What all of his patients had to endure. If only you had, you would understand.”

The music reached a *molto allegro* passage. T’Len’s hands reached Sunek’s lower back. Sunek felt a bead of sweat drip down his face.

“So perhaps,” he heard Sokar whisper, “You need to be shown...”

Before Sunek could begin to process what he meant by that, he felt T’Len’s hands reach out and grab his arms with a vice-like grip, holding them in place behind him.

“Hey! What the hell—?”

Sokar moved back in front of him, staring back at him with an intense look of anger. Sunek tried to writhe away, but T’Len held him firm, seemingly with the strength of ten men. The tempo of the music rushed on, faster and faster. A cacophony of strings danced around the horn section. The chords kept threatening to resolve, but never did.

Sokar reached out towards him with his hands. Sunek’s eyes grew wider as he felt fingers making contact with familiar pressure points across his face.

“No!” he snapped, now very much in a full-on panic, “Sokar, don’t! Don’t do that—!”

The music played on. Faster and faster. Sunek writhed helplessly. He couldn’t see from where he was sitting, but T’Len had started to cry.

Sokar opened his mouth and began to speak.

“My mind to your mind...”

Sunek screamed.

Part 2D

Part Two (Cont'd)

"I've got to get me one of those."

Jirel grinned and gestured to the centre chair of the Tolaris's bridge. Though to call it a chair seemed a little too much of an understatement. It was more like a throne, raised above the surrounding stations and consoles to afford whoever sat in it an unobstructed view of the entire bridge.

Moments earlier, at the third time of asking, the turbolift had finally arrived. Rather than finding the whole situation embarrassing, however, Tepal had simply used the extra time to continue his overblown bragging on the subject of the might of the Tolaris. It hadn't quite been the emperor's new clothes, but there had been something mildly farcical about the situation.

The lift had brought them to what Tepal had described as the grand finale of the tour. And as soon as Jirel had seen the chair, he had to begrudgingly admit that for once, he hadn't been overselling it.

Next to him, Denella's focus was still on the relatively poor state of the bridge in general. The layout was a traditional enough design, though like so much of the Tolaris the room seemed scaled up to twice the normal size. There were forward helm and navigation stations, tactical and operations to each side and rows of supplementary science and engineering stations down the rear. A huge viewscreen dominated the front of the room.

Although everything here at least seemed to be working as it should, there were still signs of decay and disrepair everywhere. Flickering displays on consoles, loose wires hanging from the ceiling and open access hatches on the walls. Although Jirel might have found his dream chair, Denella was still waiting to be impressed.

The two forward consoles and the tactical station were currently manned by Vulcans in similar civilian clothing to Tepal, but the rest of the bridge was empty, underlining how low on numbers the Tolaris was. The viewscreen itself showed that the ship was at warp. Denella was only able to catch a glimpse of the navigation console over the shoulder of the Vulcan who sat there, but she was sure there was something familiar about the course they were following.

"So," Tepal said as he looked around the domain in front of him, "This was worth the wait, I'm sure you'll agree."

Denella bit her tongue for the time being, aware that she didn't want to provoke the emotional Vulcan too many times. Instead, she kept thinking about the navigational readout she had seen. It looked like they were heading somewhere. Somewhere familiar.

"Can I sit in it?" Jirel asked, gesturing to the centre chair.

"No," Tepal replied simply, eliciting a look of childlike disappointment from the Trill.

"Naw," Jirel muttered to himself, as the Vulcan paced around the bridge.

"But, now we have our ship, and our loyal crew, then the galaxy is whatever we want to make of it. Our futures are waiting out there, a chance to find somewhere where we can really thrive. For us, and for Sunek as well."

Jirel and Denella glanced at each other, not exactly liking the sound of that.

"Yeah," Denella mused in reply, "Not sure all of this is really Sunek's scene."

"Definitely not," Jirel nodded in agreement, "We've been around the whole ship now, and have you seen one bottle of booze?"

Denella smirked and looked back at Tepal, who categorically wasn't smiling.

"Believe what you like," he replied, "But Sokar can be very persuasive with his people."

Jirel felt his defences rise again having heard that for the second time. His people?

Before he had a chance to press that particular issue any further, however, the bridge's tactical console chirped out an alert, and the Vulcan female stationed there called out to Tepal.

"Ronek reports that the cargo has been unloaded," she said with a minor sense of urgency, "They are in position for stage two."

A fresh chill went down Jirel's spine with that comment. He was well travelled enough through the galaxy to be of the firm belief that nothing good ever came from any sort of situation that claimed to have a stage two.

"Well," he said, gesturing to Denella and taking a step backwards towards the turbolift, "Thanks so much for the detailed tour, and the yummy food. But if the cargo's unloaded, then we should be making tracks. There's a certain Boslic I need to go have a really long and not especially friendly chat with, y'know?"

"I'm afraid that might have to wait," Tepal said simply.

The Vulcans at the forward helm and navigation stations stood up and flanked Tepal as he stood in front of them. All three of them now held small Romulan disruptor pistols in their hands.

“Please,” Tepal said, in a voice entirely bereft of any serious concern for their well being, “Don’t resist.”

The three Vulcans facing them down were all smiling, but these were cruel, twisted smiles. All bereft of joy and happiness. And all eerily similar to each other.

“What the hell’s going on?” Denella asked.

“I’m gonna take a wild guess,” Jirel offered, “And say this is called stage two.”

As the three armed figures glared back at them, something clicked into place for Denella, about the navigational readings. She had recognised it as a course laid in through Federation space. And, if she wasn’t much mistaken, the cloaked Romulan Warbird was heading directly for the middle of it.

They were heading for Vulcan.

* * * * *

The single blast of green energy burst out of T’Prin’s disruptor pistol and stopped the marauding form of Klath in his tracks. The Klingon emitted a loud growl, a combination of pain and frustration, as he fell to the ground with a heavy thud.

Natasha gasped in shock as she saw him fall down, but she couldn’t move to help her stricken colleague. The identical disruptor pistol that was pointed squarely at her, this one in the hands of Ronek, made sure of that.

“Klath!” she shouted out impotently, as the Klingon rolled on the ground.

He ended up slumped in an almost motionless heap, though she was relieved to be able to make out that he was at least still breathing. She glared at T’Prin in anger.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?” she snapped, “We’re just here to deliver your cargo!”

“You may be here for longer than that,” T’Prin replied simply.

Natasha balled her fists in frustration, but through her own turmoil, she also thought she detected something in the reaction of the Vulcan woman. A sense that she wasn’t quite as enthused by what she was doing as she was letting on.

To her side, Klath tried to force himself back to his feet with no little effort. Internally, he cursed the fact that he hadn’t stuck to his instincts and recovered his bat’leth. It might not have been the ideal item to take on a disruptor pistol, but it wouldn’t have been the first time he would have taken on someone armed with an energy weapon wielding his bladed weapon of choice and won.

But he hadn’t recovered it. And, although it may have been entirely instinctive, he had to admit that his decision to immediately charge at T’Prin as soon as he saw her pull out the disruptor pistol may not have been the cleverest of moves, tactically speaking.

His right arm was in searing pain where the blast had hit, but he still tried to get back to his feet, trying to use the blood lust coursing through his veins to propel him beyond the limitations of his injured body. But it was going to take more effort than even he realised.

“Let me help him,” Natasha called out to T’Prin, trying to appeal to whatever fleeting moment of doubt she might have seen in the Vulcan’s eyes.

T’Prin stared back at her, then glanced at Ronek.

“No tricks,” Natasha persisted, “I promise!”

The two Vulcans considered this for a moment longer, before T’Prin conceded, gesturing to her that she could move over to the Klingon.

“No tricks,” the Vulcan woman echoed back to her.

As she walked, slowly but deliberately, Natasha could feel the pair of disruptors following her across the room. It wasn’t a comforting feeling. Still, she consoled herself with the fact that she’d been in far worse situations than this throughout her life. At least one since she had met up with the crew of the Bounty. So she kept her head down and focused on the immediate issue.

She crouched down on the ground next to the ailing Klingon and assessed the extent of his injury. It was immediately apparent that it wasn’t good news.

“I need a medkit,” she said to the Vulcans.

They glanced at each other again, but this time, T’Prin shook her head. Natasha sighed and returned her attention to the injury.

The disruptor shot hadn’t hit him squarely on the arm, merely a glancing blow. But it had still been strong enough to burn through a section of his flesh. The smell that filled the air was testament to that, and the ugly wound it had left behind was likely to be a haven for infection unless she treated it soon.

The only good news that she could see, given her lack of any sort of immediate treatment options was the fact that the searing heat of the blast appeared to have partly cauterised the wound as it had passed through. He was bleeding, but not by a fatal amount.

Klath was clearly reluctant to have his injuries looked at, especially given how ashamed he was feeling that he had picked them up in the first place. But for his part, he allowed her to check the wound on his arm, because it allowed him to lean in and surreptitiously whisper in her ear, the armed Vulcans none the wiser.

“Excellent work, doctor,” he growled quietly, “Now, what is your trick?”

Natasha paused for a second in her improvised examination and looked over at the expectant face of the Klingon warrior. Preparing to disappoint him.

“Um,” she whispered back, “I was being serious. No tricks. I literally don’t have any tricks.”

“No tricks?”

“No tricks,” she replied again, not entirely sure how many other ways she had of getting that particular point across to the rest of the congregation in the hangar bay.

Klath considered this, his brow thick with sweat as he worked to control his reaction to the pain in his wounded limb.

“That is regrettable,” he grunted back eventually, “I do not have any tricks either.”

Natasha turned her head around to regard the two disruptors still trained on them. And the leers of the two Vulcan radicals holding them.

Definitely not hippies, she mused grimly.

End of Part Two

Part 3A

Part Three

The chair. The chair definitely felt familiar.

Even though it couldn't possibly feel familiar, because he was pretty sure he'd never seen it before.

It was an ungainly piece of furniture that seemed perversely out of place compared to the precise angles and proper order that existed throughout the rest of the meticulous office. A chair that possessed a palpable level of incongruity that he'd never forget seeing. Unless he'd never seen it. Which he didn't think he had.

The chair itself consisted of a rough, well worn dark grey fabric base with a metallic back and armrests, complete with thick fabric straps and restraints. He had definitely sat in it before. Even though he almost certainly hadn't.

"Tell me," Doctor Sevik said to him as he sat in the confines of the chair, "Do you believe we will require full restraints during today's treatment?"

He felt his body, which may not actually have been his body now he started to think about it, tense up involuntarily. His head, or at least the head attached to the body might not be his, shook quickly from side to side. Whether that was an appropriate response or not didn't even cross his mind. He just knew that he didn't want the restraints.

Doctor Sevik considered his silent response for a moment from the other side of the room, then raised an eyebrow slightly.

"Intriguing," he admitted, seemingly to himself, "A particularly rapid response. But perhaps not an accurate one. Given the pattern of your treatments so far, I recommend that we follow our usual practice for the time being—"

"No," he cried out, even though it wasn't really him talking, unless it was, "Please."

His throat, or whoever's throat it was, felt as arid as Mount Seleya in the dry season.

"An emotional reply," Sevik replied simply, as he began to prepare the restraints.

Doctor Sevik was an ageing Vulcan, his severe trademark haircut flecked with grey and his features ravaged with signs of age. His face was impassive, bereft of emotion. He stepped forwards and began to fasten his patient's wrists down with the thick fabric ties attached to the chair.

He may or may not have been here before, but something inside told him that resistance, at this point in the treatment, was futile. Instead, he found himself focusing his attention on the vast mirror that dominated the far wall of the room. The two-way mirror behind which he knew his father (who wasn't actually his father) would be standing and watching on. Just as he had for all of his past treatments.

He knew that staring through the mirror wouldn't accomplish anything, whether his father or not his father was there or not there. If his intention was to try and somehow provoke a sense of guilt for what was about to happen, he knew such a reaction was impossible in one so stoic. Still, he had no other possible recourse against what was happening. Nowhere else to turn, no other escape route available.

So he stared, in silent protest. Against the man who was forcing him to once again go through the procedure he was pretty sure he'd never gone through.

Or at least, that was what it felt like was happening, or possibly wasn't happening. Or did it?

Doctor Sevik completed his work on the restraints, rendering him completely immobile.

"The process will be the same as before," he explained with measured calm, "I believe we are making good progress, and I intend to continue. If you are willing to assist me, it will make the operation significantly smoother."

He requested the assistance of his bound and captive subject without a hint of irony. Because as far as Doctor Sevik was concerned, everything he was doing was completely logical. As far as the doctor was concerned, the patient was suffering from an affliction. An overdose even. The fact that this was an overdose of emotions, rather than some form of toxin or invasive microbe or other substance, didn't have any rational impact on the best course of action.

Which was to purge the overdose from the body.

In the chair, he felt the room that he might not have been in tilt around him as Doctor Sevik tapped a set of controls to tilt the chair back. Once it was in an optimal position, he felt the doctor's hands touch each side of his head. Or whoever's head this was. He squirmed and writhed instinctively, scratching on the worn fabric of the seat, somehow keenly aware of what he was about to experience. Even if he had never experienced it before.

As far as Doctor Sevik was concerned, this reaction was simply a symptom of the wider affliction, an emotional response born from an overspill of feelings. Therefore, the doctor dismissed it as an irrelevant observation, and calmly sought out the correct pressure points.

And then he felt the pain. There was no doubt about that.

Raw agony that pulsed through his flesh, but also a deeper, more transcendental torment. A biting, scalding pain that seemed to violently stab its way into his very subconscious. A pain that he knew was going to continue to grow ever stronger, festering and smouldering and blazing inside of him, until Doctor Sevik reached the point where he decided that the treatment was over for today.

On the other side of the meld, Doctor Sevik calmly and rationally continued his purge, just as he had done countless times before.

On the other side of the two-way mirror, his father watched on dispassionately.

* * * * *

Sunek was still screaming.

So intense were the emotions he was feeling that it took him a while to realise that Sokar had broken the meld. That he was back in reality, onboard the Tolaris.

He had no idea how long he had been back for, but he was pretty sure it hadn't been long. His brow glistened with sweat, and he felt his breathing had quickened. The music had stopped, and the room was momentarily silent. Sokar had stepped back and was standing in front of him, while T'Len sat next to him, her arm now wrapped around him supportively.

His head was a confused flurry of conflicting thoughts, all moving at warp speed as he tried to process them.

"Now you can begin to understand," Sokar said simply, breaking the silence.

Sunek scratched around for some sort of response. He couldn't be sure, but he felt like he might be crying. He felt T'Len's arm squeezing him tighter.

"The first time is always the most difficult," she whispered to him, "But you will recover. Sokar has shown us all the same thing. We all know how much he suffered."

Sunek took a gulp of air. His mouth felt dry. Just as it had in the meld.

"And now," Sokar said darkly, as Sunek opened his eyes again, "You will help."

Not a question. Because Sokar apparently already knew the answer. It didn't need to be said. And, for reasons that Sunek couldn't quite fathom at this point in time, he found himself going along with him entirely, almost on auto-pilot. He opened his mouth, and managed to croak out a reply.

"Wh—What...are we going to do?"

Sokar stepped over to him and looked deep into his eyes with dark determination.

"As we speak," he explained, "The Tolaris is cloaked, and at warp. Six hours ago, we crossed into Federation space. In eight more hours, we'll have reached Vulcan. Still completely undetected. And then...well, I suspect that the authorities won't be expecting a fully armed Romulan Warbird to decloak in orbit."

He leaned in closer, staring Sunek down and hissing his final words.

"And then, we will have our revenge against those Vulcans who have wronged us."

Sunek listened. But his mind was still a minefield of emotional turmoil and conflicting information. He still couldn't entirely focus. But he was pretty sure that no Vulcans had wronged him, specifically, as far as he could remember. Or had they?

He tried to remember who he was. He was Sunek. Sunek the joker. Sunek the clown.

He also knew right from wrong. Or at least he was pretty sure he did. And everything Sokar was saying definitely seemed wrong to him. But then, so did everything that he had just been shown. The torment and agony of Doctor Sevik's meld. The pain that he still felt pulsing inside his mind.

"So, my friend," Sokar continued, "The one that was so passionate and determined in his youth, you are now ready to join us."

Again, not a question.

Sunek's mind swirled. He felt lost, adrift, confused. The pain he had experienced, the torture was still fresh in his mind. It had definitely been wrong. In the distance, he heard the sound of the raging winds and the crashing waves of the Vorothe Sea.

And as he stared back at Sokar, he felt something new, something powerful. A single, clear emotion emerging from his inner tumult.

He felt angry.

Part 3B

Part Three (Cont'd)

“Well, I didn’t think you’d actually do what I said!”

Jirel sighed in exasperation as he looked down at the injured Klingon lying on the bed of their new accommodation aboard the Tolaris.

It had been roughly an hour since they had all been reunited, but it wasn’t a happy reunion. Instead, they had been marched into the same holding cell in the same brig and simply left there. The cell was one of several around the hexagonal brig layout, a gently shimmering forcefield enough to separate them from the outside world. The lights were dimmed, but there was clearly still plenty of power to keep the forcefield running.

And that was where they had been left. A Trill, an Orion, a human and a very injured Klingon, locked away on a ship of laughing Vulcans.

“You said no weapons,” Klath managed weakly, as Natasha continued to tend to her reluctant patient’s arm as best she could.

“You did definitely say that,” she said to the Trill as she worked.

“I know what I said!” Jirel snapped back at the pair of them as he quickly paced up and down in front of the forcefield, “But you know how it is. Sometimes, when I say ‘no weapons’, I mean...some weapons!”

“In future,” Klath coughed, “You should make that clearer.”

Jirel balled his fists up in frustration, now entirely sure that the Klingon was winding him up on purpose, even as he lay injured on the cell’s sole small bed.

“But—You’re Klath!” he shot back, “You never have no weapons! Even when I specifically say not to bring anything, you’ve got seven unpronounceable knives and a disruptor on you somewhere!”

“Do you think if I was armed, I would have allowed myself to be captured?”

Jirel paused in his pacing. He couldn’t find a hole in that bit of Klingon logic.

“Also, can you please stop harassing my patient?” Natasha chimed in, as she tore another strip of fabric from the sleeve of her top to soak up the excess blood from the improvised bandage she had managed to apply to the wound, having still not been given a proper medkit.

“I am not a patient,” Klath grunted, in a manner that meant she couldn’t tell if he had been attempting a pun or not.

“Should have thought about that before you let that Vulcan shoot a hole through your arm,” she countered.

Klath went to retort, but thought better of it, and allowed her to continue. That’s some progress at least, she thought to herself, even if she definitely couldn’t call it a friendship just yet.

“Damnit!”

Denella’s sudden scream filled the confines of the holding cell, and was accompanied by the sound of her head impacting on the underside of the metal bed that Klath was lying on. She clambered out from under the bed and rubbed her head with an annoyed grimace.

“Any luck?” Jirel asked with a mirthless grin.

“Oh yeah,” she replied sarcastically, “That’s the noise I always make when I’ve just broken out of a jail cell.”

She batted away Natasha’s instinctive efforts to check her head for any injury and sighed deeply, calming herself down.

“I found an air circulation vent down there,” she continued, “Got the hatch off, but there’s nothing there that’s gonna help us. And it’s too narrow for any sort of escape.”

Jirel leaned back on the wall and looked over at the forcefield. “Any chance you can short that thing out?”

“Sure, piece of cake,” the Orion woman replied, “I just need access to a supply junction, isolate the power flow and trip the connectors.”

“Great, now we’re talking!”

“Course, the Romulans who designed this brig probably realised that’s all I’d need, which is why they built all that stuff on the other side of the big impenetrable forcefield.”

Jirel stared back at her with a withering glare, not appreciating her roundabout piece of mockery. “Next time, just ‘no’ is fine.”

Natasha looked up from her work and gestured at the flickering forcefield. “You know, even by our standards, we’re crap out of luck. Half the ship’s falling apart, but that thing’s working like a charm.”

“I do not believe that is luck,” Klath murmured, “From what we have been told about this ship, it appears that they have been prioritising tactical, offensive and security systems. I suspect that the brig falls into those categories.”

“I hate to say it, but I got the same feeling,” Denella nodded, “Essential systems, indeed. Kinda like they’re not so much building themselves a flagship as they are a warship.”

Natasha suppressed a shudder at this. She’d spent too long in the presence of warships over the last few years.

“Well,” Jirel mused drily, “That sort of thing always ends well, right?”

As they considered the situation, and how they had still made precisely zero progress with their escape plans, the door to the brig opened. T’Prin walked in, along with a burly Vulcan they hadn’t seen before. Both were armed, while T’Prin carried a simple tray of food.

“Hey Klath, good news,” Jirel quipped, “More Vulcan food.”

“Actually,” T’Prin replied curtly, “I am yet to reprogram the replicators on this level. This is Romulan cuisine.”

Jirel didn’t bother to look around, but he definitely heard a low growl emanating from the direction of the Klingon.

T’Prin looked over at her colleague and nodded. The burly Vulcan holstered his own disruptor and walked over to the forcefield controls.

“So, what now?” Jirel asked through the forcefield, “This the part where you talk us through your whole dastardly plan?”

T’Prin raised an eyebrow at this, keeping her weapon raised.

“In a manner of speaking,” she replied.

It all happened very fast. As the burly Vulcan tapped the appropriate combination into the controls, the forcefield briefly shimmered and died. At the same time, T’Prin dropped the food tray and shot her hand out to the neck of the other Vulcan next to her, administering a deft nerve pinch that rendered him unconscious in an instant.

As the residents of the brig watched on in surprise, the Vulcan slumped to the ground. T’Prin quickly grabbed the disruptor from his belt and offered it to Jirel.

“That was unfortunate,” she said simply, “But I did not know the code for the forcefield.”

She looked up, realising that nobody had taken the disruptor. Most of the Bounty’s crew still stared at her in shock. The only one that was immediately eager to take the weapon was Klath, and his prone state meant that he couldn’t get up to grab it.

“You should take this,” she offered, not realising she would have to spell it out quite so clearly, “And hurry. We do not have much time.”

Jirel noted the change in T’Prin’s demeanour. Her smile had gone. In fact, all of her emotions seemed to have gone. She suddenly seemed a lot more, for want of a better word, Vulcan.

“Um, what the hell?” Denella managed, as Jirel finally took the disruptor.

“I am not T’Prin,” the Vulcan woman explained, “My name is...classified, for these purposes. But I work for the V’Shar.”

“The who?”

“The Vulcan Spooks,” Jirel replied with a wry smile as he checked the disruptor’s power settings.

Not T’Prin raised an eyebrow at this. “An illogical aphorism. The V’Shar are an internal intelligence branch of the Vulcan government. For the last four months I have been involved in infiltrating Sokar and his followers. Unfortunately, things have escalated faster than I was anticipating and I require your...assistance.”

“Yeah, sorry, but we’re not the heroes you ordered,” Jirel said with a shake of his head, “You want those other guys. Annoyingly friendly? Matching uniforms? Pin badges on their nipples? Way too smug about having evolved beyond the concept of pension plans for a group of people who live in a galaxy that still mostly uses currency?”

He idly gestured to Natasha, who was giving him her best unimpressed ex-Starfleet glare.

“She knows what I’m talking about.”

“It is vital that you cooperate,” Not T’Prin persisted, calmly.

“Not really. Whatever’s going on here, we’re not—”

“Oh crap,” Denella piped up, putting the pieces of the puzzle together in her mind, “It’s a warship. And we’re on our way to Vulcan.”

“We are?” Natasha asked.

“We are,” Not T’Prin confirmed, “Sokar’s intention is to launch an attack from orbit. They cannot be allowed to succeed. There are eighty-six of Sokar’s loyal followers onboard. I cannot call for backup while the ship is cloaked. Communications are completely locked down. We must get to the cloaking device and disable it immediately.”

Jirel maintained his unconvinced expression, despite the seriousness of the situation.

“We must assist,” Klath managed with a groan.

He tried to stand up from the bed, but fell back down in pain, angrily waving away Natasha's attempt to help him. Jirel gestured from Not T'Prin to the Klingon.

"As you can see," he remarked, "We're not exactly in fighting shape. Plus, this isn't our fight."

"They have made it our fight, Jirel," Klath countered, "Only a coward leaves a battle halfway through."

The Trill turned and looked at the faces of the rest of his crew, all of whom seemed equally as committed as the Klingon. "What? Are you all ganging up on me now?"

"Klath makes a good point," Denella shrugged, "Plus we need to find Sunek."

"Your pilot," Not T'Prin nodded, "It is possible that he is part of this now as well. Sokar is quite skilled at manipulation. That is the reason that the V'Shar have been monitoring him for so long."

"What sort of manipulation?" Natasha asked.

"He is in great emotional turmoil," Not T'Prin continued, "But he has found a way to channel that into others by melding with them. I was able to resist and remain undercover only thanks to my mental training. But members of the V'tosh ka'tur are not as disciplined. Their minds are already in disarray, and Sokar has been able to use that to great effect."

"Mind control," Natasha muttered with a shudder.

"Not entirely accurate," the Vulcan woman said with a raised eyebrow, "But an acceptable simplification."

"And only the mentally strong can resist," Klath muttered, a serious look on his face, "Sunek is in great danger."

Jirel smiled despite himself, then sighed as he realised he didn't have a choice.

"Ok, so, in summary: You're saying we need to get out of here, fight our way through dozens of angry Vulcan terrorists, rescue our idiot pilot, destroy a Romulan cloaking device and prevent a mentally unstable guy with mind controlling powers from carpet bombing Vulcan, armed with two disruptors and half a Klingon?"

Natasha shrugged. Not T'Prin raised a second eyebrow. Klath stifled a grimace. Denella just smiled in acceptance.

"One of our quieter deliveries," she replied.

* * * * *

The storm continued to rage.

The tempest of the Vorothe Sea surrounded him, as he stood on the deck of the ship. A saline taste hung in the air from the frothing cauldron of a sea below.

Sunek was no nearer finding balance in this scene than he had been before. But to some extent, that no longer seemed to matter. Because he now found himself embracing the fury.

To an extent, this was a little bit troubling. While Sunek didn't have a lot of time for meditation these days, he knew enough about it from his youth to know that fury wasn't really supposed to be a big part of any sort of meditation. And yet, here he was.

Another wave crashed into the ship, sending the deck under his feet pitching upwards. He struggled to keep himself from toppling over, never mind any thoughts of perfect harmony. It was a terrifying experience. But it was also exhilarating. He may have felt angry, but he felt all the stronger for it.

And yet, as he embraced the chaos all around him, he still found part of himself questioning what he was doing. Deep down, part of him knew that this was wrong. That this wasn't who he was. Or at least, this wasn't who he thought he was. Or was it? Sunek decided to push those questions to the back of his mind.

The deck pitched again. He felt himself falling.

And then he was back in T'Len's quarters on the Tolaris. His session of angry meditation brought to an abrupt end.

"Are you ok?" he heard her ask him from where she sat at the table.

He didn't answer immediately. Because he didn't know the answer. In the end, as he turned around to her, he decided to stick to what he did know.

"I fell over," he said simply.

She smiled gently and gestured for him to join him. A selection of Romulan food lay on the table in front of her. He didn't recognise any of it, but he sat down and ate a spoonful of something that was either a surprisingly sweet soup or a surprisingly savoury pudding.

"It happens," she offered, "But it's such a potent feeling, isn't it? To really channel the true nature of the Vorothe Sea? The power of the storm? The strength of the thunder?"

Sunek smirked. It wasn't like his old smirk. This one was more like the one that the rest of the Tolaris crew favoured. A crueller, darker smirk.

"Yeah," he nodded, "Makes me feel...alive."

"And you are only at the start of your journey," T'Len said wistfully, "The feeling only grows and grows the more that Sokar melds with you."

Sunek considered this for a moment.

At the back of his mind, where he had pushed all those questions, there was a tiny voice. A tiny voice that he had decided to christen Old Sunek, but who Old Sunek just knew as Sunek. Whoever the tiny voice was, it was starting to become a serious irritant. Because Old Sunek really didn't like what was happening. But Sunek himself, who Old Sunek had decided to christen New Sunek, but who Sunek now just knew as Sunek, just wanted more.

He revelled in the anger, he wanted the rage, he craved the violence.

"Do you want that?" T'Len asked gently from the other side of the table, as she idly chewed on a piece of Romulan fruit, "Do you want those feelings to grow?"

Old Sunek didn't want that, and he made that very clear. Or, at least, he would have made it clear if he could have. But he couldn't. Because now he lived in the back of his mind.

New Sunek was in control now. A Sunek born of his first meld with Sokar. A version of himself that was stronger than Old Sunek, thanks to the pain that he had been shown and the anger that he had been given.

And it was this Sunek, rather than Old Sunek, who stared back at T'Len and nodded.

Part 3C

Part Three (Cont'd)

"I do not like this."

Jirel had a feeling that Klath was going to say something like that. The Klingon was nothing if not predictable.

"I am a warrior," he continued, "I do not run away."

"Hey, Klath, don't think of it as running away," Jirel offered, "Think of it as running...towards...our way out of here."

"That is just another form of running away."

"Ok, fine. But look at you," he said, gesturing to the Klingon's limp, blood-soaked arm, "You need to get that sorted."

"I have my other arm."

Jirel sighed. They had only made it as far as the corridor outside the brig, where the intention had been to split up. Except Klath wasn't a fan of the fact that he was being asked to get back to the Bounty with Natasha, rather than join the assault on the cloaking device.

"Klath," Denella chimed in, trying to look more understanding and coming at the debate from a more Klingon perspective, "This is the best battle plan. You need medical treatment, and we need someone back on the Bounty to help with our escape."

"I do not require medical—" Klath got that far before he growled in pain.

"Yes you do," Natasha said from next to the Klingon, "It's a bad wound, and it's probably already infected. I've done what I can for now, but either we get you treated asap or that other arm of yours is all you'll have left."

Klath stared daggers at her, but she stayed firm, staring back at him. This might set the friendship thing back a few steps, she admitted to herself, but she didn't flinch.

"We need to proceed on our mission," Not T'Prin reminded them, the Vulcan woman growing tired of observing the odd behaviour that was on display in front of her.

Klath and Natasha continued to stare each other down for a few more moments, before the Klingon finally and reluctantly nodded.

"Good enough for me," Natasha said, "We'll see the rest of you back at the hangar bay."

Jirel looked over at Denella and Not T'Prin. The Vulcan woman gestured for them to move down the corridor, then took one final moment to look back at the unhappy Klingon.

"I believe I should apologise," she admitted, "I needed to maintain my cover while we were in the hangar bay, but it was not my intention to shoot you."

Klath looked down at his injured arm, then back up at the Vulcan. "That was not my intention either," he admitted.

With that, he turned away, and walked as quickly as he could with Natasha down the corridor. Not T'Prin turned back and led the others in the opposite direction, each of them now holding a disruptor pistol that they had liberated from a nearby weapons locker.

"The cloaking device is this way," she said as they moved, "If we can disable it, they will be exposed within Federation space and Sokar will be arrested."

"Who knew Sunek's little cult could be so unfriendly," Jirel offered as they moved.

"The V'tosh ka'tur are mostly harmless," Not T'Prin explained as they turned a corner and proceeded down the next corridor, "Unfortunately, Sokar and his followers are not strictly part of that collective any more. He has taken them down a more...radical path."

"You don't say."

"That is why the V'Shar have been monitoring him. But over the last year or so, he has been growing more unhinged, his emotional manipulations have become stronger and more violent, and attracted more and more followers to his group."

"There's something I don't get," Denella shot back as they reached another intersection, "Why the hell is he doing any of this?"

Not T'Prin didn't reply immediately, which unsettled the Orion woman all over again.

"There is something else you should know," the Vulcan woman eventually said instead, "About your friend."

"Yeah," Jirel nodded, "We still need to rescue him while we're—"

"It may not be that simple," she said, interrupting him, "By now it is likely that Sokar has had time to meld with him. If so, it is likely that your friend is under his control."

"What are you saying?" Denella pressed.

“I am saying,” Not T’Prin replied with a tone of complete sincerity, “That if we meet him, he will likely be working for them. It may be necessary to subdue him in order to complete the mission.”

Jirel and Denella looked at each other grimly. Jirel gestured to the disruptor in his hands.

“Take it these things don’t have a stun setting?”

Denella shook her head.

But they didn’t have any time for what Not T’Prin was saying to sink in.

Because then the shooting started.

* * * * *

His mind was flooded with fresh visions of horror.

He was back in the same chair that he had never seen, in the same office where he had never been, with the same doctor he had never met. The restraints he had never encountered before were tightly secured around his wrists and ankles, that weren’t his.

After a moment, he felt the familiar touch of Doctor Sevik’s fingers on his face as he was prepared for another purge. He tried to brace himself this time, having already had some experience of the procedure, but it didn’t help. At all. And deep down, he knew it wouldn’t. After all, how do you brace yourself against an emotional purge?

The pain slammed into him like a sledgehammer. There was no controlling it. Every fibre of his body, from his toes to the tips of his fingers felt like they were ablaze.

It was an impossible sensation to describe, to have his emotions purged. The closest he could have managed would be to imagine what a forest must feel like as a wildfire rips through it, indiscriminately immolating everything in its path and leaving behind nothing but scorched earth. Except this was happening to his entire mind. One by one, he felt the emotions burned off from his very soul.

First agitation, then fear, then frustration, then delight, joy and love. Each of them in turn were turned to ash by the virtual inferno that coursed through his mind.

And all that was left behind was pain.

* * * * *

Sunek lay on the bed of the quarters, panting deeply to recover from the latest meld. He couldn’t remember how many there had been now. Three, or possibly four.

As with the others, the pain had been excruciating, but it was worth it for him to feel stronger. Or at least, New Sunek felt stronger. Old Sunek felt weaker than he had ever been, displaced further to the back of his thoughts, sent into exile along with all the questions that New Sunek didn’t want to answer.

Instead, the anger and torment grew and festered inside of him, powering him up like a full hit of stimulants.

He felt T’Len’s presence next to him, standing over him as he lay and recovered. He could sense Sokar still in the room as well.

“Is he ok?” he heard T’Len say.

No, Old Sunek said. No, I’m not ok! Something’s very wrong! Help me!

But, of course, nobody could hear Old Sunek.

“I’m way beyond ok,” Sunek said, as he opened his eyes and looked at the two figures in the room with him, “Actually, I’ve never felt better.”

Liar, said Old Sunek. To nobody.

He sat up on the bed and breathed in deeply, embracing the swirling emotions in his mind. It didn’t bother New Sunek that said emotions only seemed to be negative ones. There was no happiness left behind by a meld with Sokar, it seemed.

It didn’t bother New Sunek, but it was definitely bothering Old Sunek.

“I’m sorry that you have to go through all this,” T’Len said gently, reaching out and taking his hand, “But it is necessary.”

In the back of his mind, Old Sunek still felt the comforting crackle of electricity as her hand touched his. But New Sunek didn’t feel anything. He wrenched his hand away from hers and jumped out of the bed, smiling his new-found cruel grin.

“Ugh. You sound like my mom,” he scoffed, without warmth, “Like I said, I feel great.”

He turned to Sokar, who had taken a seat in order to recover after breaking the meld.

“You really went through all that?” he asked. Not a question born of concern, or worry for the trauma that Sokar had apparently suffered. More simple morbid curiosity.

“Every time I went to see Doctor Sevik,” Sokar replied with a tight nod, “Everyone on the Tolaris has now seen the evil that was done to me, and to the others. And you can clearly see why we must have our vengeance.”

No, Old Sunek screamed from somewhere, this is all wrong!

Old Sunek tried to convey this to New Sunek. Tried to help him remember the crew of the Bounty, his old demeanour, anything. But New Sunek wasn't listening. There was something in the way. An impenetrable wall of anger.

“Yep,” he nodded, “I definitely understand.”

Sokar's strained face creased into a dark grin of his own. One of satisfaction at his impending victory. He knew that they were now less than five hours from Vulcan, still under cloak.

His moment of contentment was rudely interrupted by the chirp of the comms panel on the wall of T'Len's quarters. He tried not to let any sign of irritation show as he walked over and tapped the panel.

“What?” he barked, “I asked for no interruptions!”

“My apologies,” the voice of Tepal came back over the link, sounding distinctly more angry than apologetic, “But we have a problem...”

Part 3D

Part Three (Cont'd)

“We need to go down.”

“I’m telling you, we need to go up!”

The conversation, such that it was, had been going around in circles for some time now, with neither party willing to back down.

Klath and Natasha stood in a corridor of the Tolaris, either side of a detailed display of the ship’s deck layout on a wall in front of them. Tasked with returning to the Bounty, they had stumbled into their challenge, with Natasha paying more attention to supporting the injured Klingon than she had been to where they were going, while Klath bullishly continued to walk without stopping to check his bearings. Because Klingons don’t ask for directions.

It was only when they found themselves outside the brig they had just broken out of, having done nothing but completed a circuitous route back to where they started that they had both reluctantly admitted it might be a good idea to figure out where they were supposed to be going.

And that was when the argument had started.

“Look,” Natasha said in frustration, pointing at the deck diagram, “We’re here, and we need to get to the hangar bay here, so we need to go up!”

“Why would you think we are here?” Klath asked, gesturing to where she was pointing.

“Because that’s the brig!”

The burly Klingon shook his head and used his one good arm to point to an entirely different part of the diagram on the front section of the Warbird. “No,” he boomed out, “This is the brig.”

“Why would you think that’s the brig?” Natasha scoffed, “There’s clearly no way that’s the—”

She paused mid-rant, as she actually saw where the Klingon’s thick finger was pointing.

“Oh. That’s the brig.”

“I am aware of that,” Klath replied, with a note of smugness in his tone, “Deck 6. So, we go down.”

Natasha shook her head and pointed back to where she had first indicated, determined that she was still right. “Ok, but...this is also the brig. On deck 47.”

She quickly scanned around the rest of the diagram, pointing around as she did so.

“And...here’s another brig on deck 14. And there’s another one on deck 25—What the hell? What kind of stupid ship has four brigs?”

“A Romulan one,” Klath grunted darkly.

Natasha forced a smile and looked back at the map, seeing what she was pretty sure was a fifth brig nestled on deck 59 and considering their options.

“Ok, so, we need to look around for deck markings, signs, anything to figure out what deck we’re on, then we can narrow down which brig this is, and—”

Klath silenced her with a raised finger. He pointed back down the corridor.

The sound of footsteps. And they were getting closer.

She grabbed Klath’s good arm and tried to drag him away, in the opposite direction to the footfalls. Although Klath resisted for a moment, presumably wanting to take on whoever was approaching rather than beat a retreat, he reluctantly acquiesced to her move. As they reached the next intersection, they spied a turbolift door and raced over to it, calling the lift as the footsteps got nearer. They stepped inside the lift as it arrived and Natasha allowed herself a sigh of relief as the doors closed.

“Ok,” she said eventually, “Now we just need to go up—”

“Down!” Klath growled.

They stared each other down for a moment, preparing to launch back into their endless argument. It was Natasha who realised first, smiling in mild embarrassment.

“Main hangar bay,” she called out, as Klath’s face dawned in his own moment of realisation. A second later, the machinery whirled into life, as the lift whisked them to their chosen destination.

Natasha looked over at the Klingon.

“I won’t tell anyone if you don’t.”

“Why the hell did we split up?”

The latest volley of disruptor fire whizzed past Jirel’s head as the three figures raced down the corridor, leaving a series of gently smoking streaks on the wall behind him, and adding an extra few items to the Tolaris’s repair schedule in the process.

“I’m serious,” the Trill continued as he fired off a few shots of his own, “That’s, like, the first rule of how to get everyone killed!”

They reached the cover of the next intersection and paused for breath, as Not T’Prin and Denella blindly fired back at their pursuers.

They had made little progress, with destroying the cloaking device having quickly become a secondary priority to simply staying alive. Their journey through the Tolaris was being dictated more in terms of evading disruptor blasts than getting to their intended destination.

“There are five of them,” Not T’Prin calmly reported as another burst of weapons fire skimmed past them, “But this disturbance will definitely attract more.”

She ducked out from behind the cover of the intersection to return fire, as Jirel grimaced and glanced over at Denella.

“See, this is why I didn’t want us to be the heroes.”

“I believe there is currently no danger of that,” Not T’Prin offered as a retort as she returned to the temporary sanctity of their cover to check her disruptor’s power levels.

Jirel managed a full-on double take, as Denella smirked. Was the emotionless Vulcan actually joking with him? He forced himself back into the here and now, and gestured further back down the corridor, shouting above further incoming fire.

“Feels like it might be a good idea to keep our tactical retreat going.”

“No arguments here,” Denella shouted back.

“That may not be possible,” Not T’Prin offered, her voice remaining impassive despite the situation, “I can detect the sound of others approaching from that direction.”

Jirel couldn’t see or hear anything apart from the ongoing disruptor blasts. But he opted to trust in her more carefully attuned Vulcan hearing.

“Huh,” he managed, “Crap.”

“So we’re surrounded,” Denella groaned, “At this point, I’d just like to say: This plan sucked.”

“Indeed,” Not T’Prin nodded.

Jirel scanned their immediate vicinity, and suppressed a satisfied smile as he spied a doorway a few paces behind them. Why had nobody else thought of that?

“New plan,” he announced with confidence, firing off a few covering shots and then making for the doorway, “Follow me!”

“That serves no logical purpose—”

He ignored the Vulcan’s comment, as a further flurry of weapons blasts fizzed by. He ducked into a roll and dived through the doors just as they parted, mentally congratulating himself on that fancy little manoeuvre as he jumped back to his feet. Denella and Not T’Prin followed in an altogether more traditional manner moments later, so he opted not to make too much of a public show about his duck and roll. Still, it had been pretty cool.

“Ok,” he said, as he looked around the room they had entered for the first time, “Now we need to—”

He paused, as he took in the expanse around him. It was a huge room, filled with bulky metal housings and structures that presumably contained a litany of shipboard systems. The ceiling stretched way above them, the whole area must have spanned at least four decks vertically. And, most importantly, there were no obvious exit points, beyond the door they had just entered through.

“As I was attempting to tell you,” Not T’Prin patiently continued, “I do not see the rational purpose in electing to run into a dead end such as this.”

Jirel saw Denella give him a slightly smug look at the same time, amused by the Trill’s clear tactical failure despite their situation.

“Yeah, well,” he replied eventually, trying to save at least some face, “If it was such a bad idea, why did you follow me, hmm?”

Not T’Prin considered this for a moment, then raised an eyebrow, apparently having failed to locate an answer. Instead, she moved to the control panel next to the door and tapped the controls.

“I have locked the door with a secure encryption. It will take them some time to decode it.”

The three figures watched as the bottom right section of the door began to glow and smoke, as the Vulcans on the other side began to cut through the metal.

“Doesn’t look like they’re interested in decoding it,” Denella muttered mirthlessly.

“Ok, there’s gotta be something we can use in here,” Jirel said, looking around the expanse of the room, “Some other access point.”

Not T’Prin assessed the room they had entered. “This is a maintenance section for the Warbird’s lower decks,” she explained, gesturing to the metal structures around them, “Air circulation, environmental controls, gravity generators...”

“No transporter pads then,” Jirel sighed as he looked around.

“It would not be logical to locate a transporter pad in such a facility.”

Even as the smell of burnt metal began to fill the room, Jirel looked over at Denella and forced a smile.

“See how annoying it’d be if our Vulcan was like that all the time?”

If Not T’Prin was offended, she disguised it well. Denella gave the room another scan. Then, she pointed at something above their heads. Well above their heads. The others followed her finger to see a long tube running diagonally across the high ceiling of the room, and an access hatch visible where it met the far wall. An accompanying ladder ran down the wall to ground level.

“Intriguing,” Not T’Prin mused, “That is an access conduit traversing the room. However, it is unlikely that we would be able to climb all the way up there before our pursuers gain access to the room—”

“Way ahead of you,” Jirel grinned, recalling the items the Vulcan had listed in the room they were in.

“You can’t be serious,” Denella said with a slightly sickly look, as she came to the same conclusion moments later.

“Oh, I’m totally serious,” the Trill smiled, pointing his disruptor at a nearby metal structure, “Hold onto your lunch everyone, we’re gonna—”

“What is your intention behind destroying the air circulator for this deck?” Not T’Prin asked with an entirely logical innocence.

Denella’s sickly look gave way to one of amusement, as she saw the Trill’s heroic stance wilt a tad.

“Um,” Jirel managed, gesturing around with his disruptor, “Which one’s the gravity generator?”

“Ah,” Not T’Prin nodded, “I see.”

She levelled her weapon at one of the other metal structures. And fired.

* * * * *

Sokar’s mood was dark enough when they got to the bridge, a combination of the report Tepal had given him and the fact that it had taken him three attempts to summon a turbolift car. He burst through the lift doors and stalked over to the tactical console where Tepal was still working, followed by Sunek and T’Len.

“Report!” he snapped at his equally irritated second in command.

“I have teams scouring the whole ship for them,” Tepal replied, trying to keep his anger under control in the presence of his leader, “Nothing yet.”

Sokar growled in frustration, looking past the forward helm station being manned by Ronek to see the stars streaking past. The ship was still cloaked, still at warp, and still on course. At least for now. He tried to use that fact to calm himself down.

They were so close, three hours away from Vulcan, if that.

“And you’re sure T’Prin was behind it?” he asked.

“Yes,” Tepal nodded, “She attacked Ledok in the brig, and she has not reported back since.”

Sokar didn’t reply immediately. But he did make his feelings known by slamming his fist down onto the side of the command chair. Tepal couldn’t resist the opportunity to twist the knife a little.

“I told you I didn’t trust her.”

Sokar’s eyes flamed with rage. Tepal had indeed talked to him about T’Prin before. She had been one of his later recruits to the cause, and one of the few he didn’t know from the V’tosh ka’tur. As a result, he had quietly had some concerns of his own. Though apparently not enough.

“And I cannot pinpoint them on internal sensors,” Tepal continued to twist the knife, “Because you didn’t feel such a system was essential.”

“Nice operation you’ve got here,” he heard Sunek chime in from behind him, “So glad to be a part of something so professional.”

It was a joke from Sunek, but not a playful one, like he usually aimed for. This one was far more cruel, designed to annoy and humiliate rather than gently entertain. This was very much a New Sunek joke. Not an Old Sunek joke.

Sokar’s eyes narrowed further. He forced himself not to rise to that particular bit of bait.

“Time to Vulcan,” he barked out in the direction of Ronek, who so far had elected against joining in the spirit of minor mutiny being aimed in his leader’s direction.

“Two hours, fifty three minutes, present speed,” the younger Vulcan replied.

He whirled back to Tepal, a steely focus back on his face. “Are the weapons calibrations complete?”

“All disruptor arrays are charged and calibrated, torpedo bays are loaded, targeting controls have—”

Tepal paused in the middle of his smug report, as an alarm chirped out from his console. He checked the details with practised haste.

“We have just lost artificial gravity on deck 47!” he reported with urgency, “There are reports of weapons fire in that vicinity.”

Sokar aimed a second, less well timed punch at the side of the command chair. He was so close to his glory that he could practically taste it. And yet now, it was threatening to fall apart. He whirled around to Sunek, who merely stared back with a twisted sneer.

“This is all because of your friends?” Sokar spat, ignoring her comment.

Sunek shrugged, his confident air not shifting despite the palpable tension in the conversation. Old Sunek might have backed off, or tried another joke to disarm the situation. But New Sunek wasn’t that much of a coward.

“Probably,” he replied, “They’ve broken out of your brig, now you’ve got gunfire and chaos down there. Certainly sounds like them. I assume they’re trying to stop what you’re doing.”

“They can’t stop me!” Sokar spat out at him with irritation.

“They probably can,” Sunek retorted, “They’re annoying like that.”

Sokar stared back at him, but declined to reply. Instead, he stalked over to a storage locker at the rear of the bridge, throwing Tepal a glare as he walked past.

“Get the backup gravity generators back online down there, now!”

Tepal looked back defiantly for a moment, not appreciating his tone. But he eventually nodded and started to work.

Sokar reached the storage locker and opened it, retrieving three disruptor pistols.

“I will not allow them to ruin everything I have planned here,” he hissed, “You know so much about your friends, Sunek? You will help me find them.”

He holstered one of the weapons on his belt and proffered the others out to them. T’Len took one without question. Sunek stared at the other one.

What the hell are you doing, Old Sunek called out. Don’t you dare pick that thing up!

But Old Sunek was still behind the wall of anger that had grown inside himself. New Sunek looked down at the stubby green pistol being held out to him. For a second, he closed his eyes, and pictured the Voroth Sea. He felt the intensity of the storm, and the pounding waves on the helpless ship. It energised him.

“Are you going to help me?” Sokar repeated, more urgently.

No, Old Sunek screamed without being heard, Of course I’m not gonna help you, you psycho!

Sunek opened his eyes, his dark leer as wide as it had ever been.

“I thought you’d never ask,” he replied with relish.

He reached out and took the disruptor pistol, looked at T’Len and nodded. She nodded back. The three of them walked quickly over to the turbolift doors. Sunek’s leer didn’t slip once as he marched on.

To hunt down his friends.

End of Part Three

Part 4A

Part Four

“Really? That’s all I get?”

Jirel scoffed in a not inconsiderable display of offence as he continued to work. To his side, Not T’Prin raised an eyebrow.

“As I have stated, it was an imaginative solution,” she replied, without taking her eyes off her task.

Jirel scoffed again and looked over to the other side of the access hatch, where Denella shook her head patiently.

“Can you believe that?”

“I can definitely now believe that you’re capable of flirting in literally any situation,” she offered, as she finished unscrewing the bolt in front of her.

The three of them, now freed from the limiting constraints of gravity, floated at the very top of the four story room, along with anything in the room that hadn’t been secured to the ground. They were clustered around the access hatch to the access conduit that Denella had spotted, quickly working to unscrew the bolts securing it in place.

“Flirting?” Not T’Prin asked with curiosity, as she detached another bolt and allowed it to float out into the room.

“Ugh, great,” Jirel sighed, “Now we’ve got to explain flirting to the dispassionate Vulcan.”

“No,” she replied, “I received adequate training on the subject before I went undercover. It is a popular activity with emotional beings, after all. But I was not aware that was what you were doing.”

Jirel paused and stared back at the Vulcan, who met his stare with an impassive look. Denella, for her part, stifled an amused chuckle.

“Funny,” he replied, returning to work on the next bolt.

“That is not something I am capable of—”

“Ah, come on,” Jirel continued, “Even though you’ve dropped the whole laughing Vulcan act, you’ve still been joking with us. There’s some emotions in there, I can tell.”

Not T’Prin considered this for a moment as she worked on the next bolt.

“Perhaps I have been undercover for too long,” she offered eventually, “It is possible that the strains of maintaining my character, and the intensity of the melds with Sokar have left some residual emotional aftereffects. When I return to Vulcan, I will ensure I correct this aberration.”

“Isn’t that the problem here?” Denella chimed in, “Seeing that sort of thing as an ‘aberration’?”

Not T’Prin paused again, but this time she didn’t seem willing to offer an answer. They worked on in silence.

His plan, such that it was, had at least bought them some time. The work to cut through the door below them seemed to have slowed considerably since the entire deck had gone zero-g.

“You might have at least let me shoot it,” Jirel muttered eventually, gesturing back down to the distinctly second hand gravity generator below them.

“If I had let you shoot what you intended to shoot,” she pointed out, “We would be dead from asphyxiation.”

Denella failed to suppress this chuckle.

“Yeah,” Jirel said pointedly, “I’d get that aberration corrected, if I were you.”

“We must make haste,” she continued, as another bolt floated away, “It will not be long before the backup gravity generators come online. And then…”

She underlined her point by glancing downwards, at the considerable drop back to the ground underneath them, before continuing.

“Despite the height of the fall, I believe myself and the Orion would survive, with significant injuries. You would not.”

Jirel fixed her with another unhappy glare. “Just so you know,” he offered dryly, “Your flirting game needs work as well.”

Denella went to chuckle again, then coughed slightly, suddenly looking a tad more queasy, and less green, than she usually did.

“You ok?” Jirel asked as his penultimate bolt loosened.

“You know I don’t like zero gravity,” she muttered as strongly as she could.

Not T'Prin cocked her ear again to some faraway noise, before she quickly moved onto the final bolt on her side of the panel. "The backup generator is coming online," she reported, "Hurry."

Jirel detached his final bolt, as Not T'Prin and Denella completed their own tasks. They pulled the hatch away from the opening and it joined the bolts in floating away across the room. Not T'Prin half clambered and half swam through the hatch, followed by Jirel and Denella. Seconds later, the three of them dropped the short distance to the bottom of the access conduit, picking up nothing more than a bruise or two.

Behind them, they heard the sound of anything on deck 47 that hadn't been secured dropping to the floor with a series of loud bangs.

"Plenty of time," Denella said mirthlessly.

Not T'Prin ignored her, crawling onwards through the conduit.

"We are not far from the cloaking device," she called back, "If we hurry."

Jirel got into a crawl and followed closely, awkwardly trying to maintain his professionalism and keep his attention on anything other than the Vulcan behind that was now very much dominating his eyeline.

"I changed my mind," he called out, "Your flirting game is on point."

Ahead of him, Not T'Prin raised an eyebrow.

* * * * *

The process of cutting through the door to the maintenance room on deck 47 was taking a lot longer than the group of Vulcans had originally planned.

Firstly, there had been the loss of gravity, which had made their efforts considerably more difficult without access to any dedicated zero gravity equipment.

Secondly, there had been the regaining of gravity, which had not only delayed their work further, but also caused several broken bones when they had all dropped back to the deck without warning. It was standard practice on starships to give plenty of warning before restoring gravity, to give everyone plenty of time to brace themselves. But this was not a normal starship, and up on the bridge, Tepal had brought the backup systems online without so much as a five second warning.

All of which led to a third reason why the task was taking longer than expected. They were all understandably annoyed about reasons one and two, which was having a direct impact on their productivity. One of the disadvantages of embracing your emotions was that it was now very much possible to have a bad day at the office.

Still, none of them had much time to file any sort of grievance, because almost as soon as they had picked themselves up, Sokar had arrived with Sunek and T'Len to oversee the situation personally. And he hadn't liked what he had seen. And he was armed.

So they were now working through the final few sections of the door, twice as fast as before.

Sunek idly leaned on the corridor wall, spinning his disruptor around in his hand, watching them work without even offering to help.

"This is stupid, you know," he offered with a yawn.

Sokar spun around in annoyance, while even T'Len looked a little bit irritated. Tensions were running high among every Vulcan out in the corridor, it seemed.

"What is that supposed to mean?" Sokar spat at him.

Sunek's sneering grin grew wider, revelling in being able to ratchet up the frustration on the faces of the others by making them wait for his answer.

Meanwhile, Old Sunek was busy climbing a wall. Specifically, the wall of anger that was keeping him trapped at the back of his own mind.

He wasn't physically climbing a wall, he didn't think. He was pretty sure the thing he was climbing was more of a metaphorical wall.

His reason for thinking that was surprisingly logical, for Sunek. If he was climbing an actual wall, that sounded like it would take a lot of physical effort. Which was not something that Old Sunek really liked doing. In fact, it was something he actively avoided whenever possible. So, it made sense that any wall he was climbing would be merely metaphorical.

But then, he found himself thinking, if it was only a metaphorical wall, then how the hell was he climbing it?

Starting to feel a little bit overwhelmed by the metaphysical conundrum he was at risk of trapping himself in, Old Sunek decided to focus on something less confusing. And continued to either literally or metaphorically climb the wall. At this point, he didn't care which.

All the while, New Sunek was smiling cruelly at the other Vulcans in the corridor.

"So? Are you going to explain why my plan is so stupid?" Sokar spat, tired of waiting for an answer.

Sunek stood up straight from where he had been leaning on the wall and treated himself to a long, lazy, cat-like stretch.

“It’s stupid,” he said eventually, waving his disruptor at the door, “Because you’re wasting time trying to get where they are, not where they’re going.”

“And where are they going?”

Sunek smirked wider and took off down the corridor, with his disruptor raised. After a moment, Sokar and T’Len followed.

* * * * *

The access hatch dropped down onto the floor of the corridor, some ten feet below. The three figures followed, one at a time, as quietly as they could manage.

Pausing for breath, Not T’Prin, Jirel and Denella scanned their immediate surroundings. The Vulcan woman tilted her head curiously, again hearing something in the distance.

“The cloaking device is close by,” she reported, “But there are more guards on the way. I estimate at least six sets of footsteps.”

Jirel went to reply, but Denella got there before him.

“I’ll deal with them,” she said, checking her disruptor’s power levels, and ignoring Jirel’s grimace.

“Denella—”

“Don’t worry. You focus on the sabotage thing while I give this lot the runaround, and we’ll meet up back at the Bounty, ok?”

Jirel still looked concerned, but he knew his engineer could handle it, and then some. He reluctantly nodded.

“Catch you on the other side,” the Orion woman smiled, before she took off down the corridor with her weapon drawn. After a moment, she was out of sight.

Jirel watched her go with a sigh, suddenly feeling very alone. He turned back to Not T’Prin. “Right then, let’s go break a cloaking device, I guess? I’m assuming it’s as easy as it sounds?”

She led him around the corner and through the first door they came to on the right. It was a wide room, somewhat similar to the engineering level of a starship. Control panels covered in Romulan text dotted the walls, but it was the gently humming cylindrical device in the centre of the room which immediately demanded their attention.

Not T’Prin immediately holstered her disruptor and approached it. “This is it,” she nodded, “Now we just need to—”

“I wouldn’t,” an eerily familiar voice shot back.

Jirel whirled around to see Sunek standing in a doorway on the other side of the room. He was soon joined by Sokar and T’Len. All three of them had disruptors trained on them.

But it wasn’t so much the weapons that surprised Jirel, it was Sunek himself. His twisted leer was without any of his friend’s usual warmth. His entire demeanour seemed darker, angrier somehow. Jirel couldn’t help but suppress a gasp.

“Told you they’d be here,” Sunek continued, “Now, how about you two both just surrender to my pal Sokar here. Cos it’d be a real bummer to have to shoot you.”

Jirel looked back at Sunek’s leer. And found himself doubting whether he really meant that.

Part 4B

Part Four (Cont'd)

“Well,” Natasha managed, as the bulky crate next to them exploded into fragments from the latest incoming disruptor blast, “At least we found the hangar bay.”

The turbolift had indeed deposited them near enough to the hangar bay, with the Bounty sitting right where they had left it.

Unfortunately, it seemed that once word got out about their escape, it hadn't been much of a leap for the Tolaris's crew to realise they might head there at some point. Hence why they had been greeted by half a dozen heavily armed Vulcans, and were now pinned down behind a pile of cargo crates.

“Return fire!” Klath growled from her side.

She grimaced and fired out a few more shots as best she could, remembering her Starfleet training and focusing on maintaining a defensive posture. Even though she was a doctor, she was still more than capable of fighting. The war had seen to that. The old maxim of ‘First, do no harm’ tended to go out of the window when you started getting shot at.

To her side, Klath was still unarmed, both in the physical sense and the weapon-based sense, and feeling more than a little useless. He gripped onto his injured limb and tried to keep his focus on their battle tactics.

“This is not a particularly advantageous position,” he grumbled, as another disruptor blast struck the wall behind his head.

Natasha fired off a few more hopeless shots of her own and checked the pistol. The power levels of the disruptor were dropping fast. Klath ducked his head out around the other side of the crate and scanned the rest of the hangar bay, before ducking back as more fire came in.

“They are flanking us,” he reported, “On both sides. Make your shots count!”

“I'm trying!” she shouted back in frustration over the sound of further incoming fire.

“You must try harder.”

“You're a terrible instructor, you know that? Any other helpful comments?”

Klath considered their situation for a moment, as the weapons fire got closer and closer. “It is possible,” he said eventually, “That today is a good day to die.”

“You also suck at motivation!”

“I do not see another option,” the Klingon replied with a grimace.

She sighed and checked the disruptor's power cells again. She didn't have many shots left. And by the sounds of it, their opponents did. Two more disruptor blasts passed over their heads, leaving scorch marks on the wall behind them. She didn't have a plan either. Oddly enough, Starfleet offered very little training for how to deal with a gang of psychotic armed Vulcans. In fact, that was pretty much the only group of galactic inhabitants Starfleet hadn't found itself picking a fight with recently.

She wondered if this was how her life was destined to end. All in pursuit of trying to strike up a friendship with an injured Klingon. How stupid could she be?

Then, something came to her. She realised exactly how stupid she could be. She glanced behind them and saw another cargo container.

“Klath,” she shouted back to the Klingon, “How close are they?”

Klath ducked out to check. “Thirty metres, and still advancing,” he reported, “On both sides.”

“Ok,” she nodded, “I've got a plan. But it's kinda stupid, and a bit suicidal. Although, I assume from your previous comments that you don't have much of an issue with that?”

Klath didn't respond. Over to his left, another cargo container exploded under weapons fire, showering them both with fiery shards of debris. Natasha ducked further down, then gestured to the mostly unblemished container almost directly behind them.

“Think you can make a run for that?” she shouted.

Klath checked where she was indicating. The additional cover was a good twenty metres away across the deck of the hangar bay, with no obvious additional cover between them and it. It also didn't seem to offer any significant strategic improvement on their current suboptimal location.

“I believe so,” he replied, “What is your plan?”

Another disruptor blast whizzed by. They were almost on them.

She opened the casing of her disruptor and fiddled with the settings, quickly figuring out how to achieve what she was aiming for despite the

unfamiliar Romulan design. The pistol's muzzle began to glow bright green. Something that Klath immediately recognised.

"You have just—!"

"I know," she shouted out, "Let's go!"

They raced out from behind their cover, towards the container that was twenty metres away. Keeping low and fast, even as their adversaries trained their weapons on their moving forms.

She ducked an incoming disruptor shot. Fifteen metres to go. Maybe less.

She mentally braced herself for the inevitable disruptor blast to her side that would fell her, but two more shots whizzed past without hitting, the Vulcans apparently struggling to aim amidst the chaos around them. She didn't even know if Klath was behind her, or alongside, or if he had been cut down by a disruptor shot. But she kept moving, focusing on her destination.

Ten metres.

Behind her, the Vulcans were upon their original position, having closed up in a pincer movement. But they didn't move away from their former cover, merely swivelled around to try and get a clear shot at them. Which meant they were far too close to the disruptor pistol that she had just rigged to overload.

Five metres.

She only hoped that they weren't too close as well. Even if they made it to their cover, it wasn't exactly a safe distance from this sort of detonation. She dived forwards at the last second, just as the disruptor exploded.

And then everything went dark.

* * * * *

"Sunek, what the hell?"

"Come on, Jirel," Sunek shrugged, his dark leer remaining firmly in place, "If you're really being honest, you can't say you never expected our friendship to end with one of us pointing a disruptor at the other one, hmm?"

Jirel kept his response calm, ignoring the feeling that deep down, he felt his pilot may have a point. "Guess I never factored in the bit about you committing genocide."

Sunek's leer vanished, now replaced by a look of rage. He kept the weapon pointed squarely at Jirel's chest. Sokar stepped over to the pair of them, and relieved them of their own disruptors.

"I'm very disappointed in you, T'Prin," he told her calmly, "Who are you working for? Starfleet Intelligence?"

"The V'Shar," she replied, with an equal amount of calm.

"Hmm," Sokar shuddered, "Even worse."

Jirel's focus was still on Sunek. His long-time friend, who now looked so strangely different. "Sunek, what the hell did he do to you?"

Sunek went to answer, but it was T'Len who got there first, her own weapon pointed determinedly at the Trill as well.

"He has made him stronger!" she shouted, standing by her sometime husband, "We are all stronger for knowing Sokar."

"And to think you told me this wasn't a cult," Jirel replied with heavy sarcasm.

"Psh, this isn't the V'tosh ka'tur, Jirel," Sunek mocked, "That was just some lame little wannabe activist movement. Surely even you can see that this is way bigger than that."

"You must listen, Sunek," Not T'Prin said, her focus still on the cloaking device in the middle of the group, "Your actions are not your own. Sokar has controlled you with his melds—"

"Quiet!" Sokar snapped, "I'm tired of everyone meddling in my plans. Nobody will stop me from having my revenge on Doctor Sevik!"

Sunek and T'Len nodded along firmly at this. Not T'Prin raised an eyebrow.

"Doctor Sevik is dead."

Somewhere, deep inside Sunek's mind, near the top of a wall, Old Sunek gasped.

What? Old Sunek said.

"What?" New Sunek echoed out, before he realised what he was saying.

"Ain't that a bitch?" Jirel said, seizing on the look of confusion on the Vulcan's face, "You've come all this way, and you're not even gonna carpet bomb the right guy?"

Sunek stared blankly back at the V'Shar agent, his trigger finger faltering as his disruptor slipped to his side. If it wasn't for the identical one that T'Len still had pointed at him, Jirel might have allowed him to relax a tad.

"No," he managed, "Cos...Sokar showed me—I mean, I saw—"

"I know what you saw. Sokar also melded with me. But Doctor Sevik died many years ago," Not T'Prin continued, "In exile, and in disgrace. It is deeply unfortunate what happened to you, Sokar. But this is not the answer. This attack cannot be allowed to—"

"This is all lies! V'Shar lies!" Sokar spat.

"It is the truth," she persisted, "His methods were never medically approved by the authorities, and as soon as the full details of his treatments became a matter of public knowledge, he was removed from—"

Sokar didn't want to hear any more. He fired.

The dirty green disruptor blast slammed squarely into Not T'Prin's stomach, and for a moment the stoic Vulcan woman's face displayed a genuine emotion. A look of shock.

The energy of the blast was enough to knock her back into Jirel's equally aghast arms. The pair of them collapsed onto the floor in what felt like slow motion. Jirel stared in horror at Not T'Prin's crumpled form. No longer caring where the weapons in the room were pointing.

"Hey, hey, don't worry," he managed, "It's—It's gonna be ok..."

Looking down at the green blood soaking her top, he knew he was lying. He wasn't a doctor, but he knew that the prognosis wasn't good.

"I was...unsuccessful," she managed to croak, "But I hope you will have the chance to be a hero..."

The last remnants of life drained from her body. Jirel gently rested her down on the ground, then stared up at the armed Vulcans with primal anguish.

"This is your guy, Sunek?" he snarled at his friend, "This is the guy you wanna follow?"

Jirel wasn't sure if he was expecting an answer. Either way, he didn't get one. Because as soon as he had heard Not T'Prin's comments, and seen Sokar's violent retaliation, Sunek had vanished.

Not physically. Physically he was still in the room. But mentally, he was somewhere else.

He was on the deck of a sailing ship. On the Vorothe Sea.

And he wasn't alone.

"Hello," said Old Sunek.

Part 4C

Part Four (Cont'd)

The storm was blowing all around as New Sunek stared across the wooden deck, where Old Sunek stared back at him. If either was unnerved by what was happening, they didn't let it show.

"Talking to yourself, Sunek?" New Sunek snorted, "How many signs of madness is that now?"

"Yeah, fair enough, this is a bit weird," Old Sunek begrudgingly agreed, "But I can take weird. I like weird. I can definitely live with weird."

A booming thunderclap rang out above the ship. New Sunek looked around through the swirling gale and the spray from the writhing sea.

"So, what the hell is all this? You want to practise meditating in the middle of this storm again?"

"What storm?"

Old Sunek looked back at his doppelganger in confusion, seeing nothing but the peaceful tranquillity of the Vorothe Sea. From the dull, boring meditation technique from his youth.

A ferocious gust of wind blew across the deck in front of New Sunek, drenching his unruly mop of hair and whipping it around in the cataclysm.

"Never mind," New Sunek grimaced, "You've got my attention, now what?"

"I want my mind back. Cos, honestly, you kinda suck."

The deck pitched up as the boat crested another wave and slammed down on the other side. Or at least, it did for one of them. For the other, it laboured in the stillness.

"Psh," New Sunek retorted, "You've seen what Doctor Sevik did. Why we need revenge—"

"I've seen what Sokar showed you. I mean, showed me—Showed us. Whatever. But I've also just seen him straight up murder an unarmed woman, so I kinda think it might be a good idea to get a second opinion on some of this stuff, y'know?"

"Psh. She was a V'Shar agent! She was just trying to stop us."

"Of course she was! And she also said Doctor Sevik is dead!"

"Lies!"

Another flash of lightning illuminated New Sunek's fiery eyes. Old Sunek stood firm in the placid sunshine, not seeing anything of the violent storm that swirled and crashed above his counterpart's head.

"Shouldn't we at least check that? And besides, whether he's alive or dead, he's just one crazy doctor! How is razing half of our homeworld from orbit the right idea? Don't get me wrong, I hate the place as much as the next laughing Vulcan, but this isn't the answer. And all this definitely isn't you. I mean, me. I mean—"

"You know," New Sunek growled, trying to shut himself up as another burst of lightning flared in the sky, "It's true what they say about you, Sunek. You really are tiresome."

"See, that's why there's no future for you inside my head. I'd never use the word 'tiresome'."

"You just did."

Satisfied he'd won their latest bout of verbal sparring, New Sunek didn't wait for his duplicate to formulate another retort. He charged across the ship. He charged at himself. Sunek and Sunek collided, and crashed down to the wooden deck below them. They grappled together, one slipping and sliding across the rain-soaked deck, the other one basking in harsh sunlight.

As they broke apart and got to their feet, New Sunek aimed a punch at Old Sunek, who anticipated it, because that's how he would have aimed a punch if he was in New Sunek's position. He dodged it and fired off a punch of his own, which New Sunek evaded with equal ease.

The scuffle went on like that for some time, each version of Sunek predicting the other's attack, and dodging or parrying it. Neither able to lay a finger on the other. A literal stalemate.

"This is ridiculous," New Sunek shouted over the cacophony on his version of the boat, as he evaded a swing of his opponent's left hook.

"I dunno," Old Sunek grinned, squinting through the bright sunshine hitting his half of proceedings and spinning away from a low attempted kick from his adversary, "I'm kinda enjoying myself."

They grappled some more, as a wave crashed onto the deck, soaking New Sunek in warm saline water. In close quarters, both aimed a flurry of punches at each other's midribs, connecting solidly and firmly each time.

But even though they were finally landing, each punch still worked to cancel the other out in a different way. As this phase of the fight went

on, they both tired at exactly the same time and were both forced to back away in order to get their respective breaths back.

New Sunek grimaced, then tried to channel more of his anger and rage into proceedings, the power that Old Sunek had no access to, to overwhelm him.

His sneer was back. Even in the storm. Or perhaps because of it. Feeding off the anarchy of the tempest.

“You’ve gotta see this is all wrong,” Old Sunek managed to get out, still panting deeply from the exertion, “What Sokar’s doing? And if that wacko doctor really is dead, then—”

“You saw how much Sokar suffered,” New Sunek countered, “All of Vulcan is complicit in Sevik’s actions! They’ve always had it in for anyone who dared to explore their emotions, to deviate from the norm. You know that as well as anyone!”

Sunek recalled his own childhood. The work that his parents had put in to helping him control and repress his emotions. Counsellors, therapists, meditation. All to ‘fix’ his pesky emotions. Granted, they had never done anything anywhere near as extreme as what Doctor Sevik did to Sokar. But he still knew what it was like to be pitied, to be ostracised or made to feel like an outcast just because of the way that he felt. Or the fact that he felt at all.

It had been a miserable time for him. Until he had found the V’tosh ka’tur. Until he had found Sokar, and the others.

And as he got caught up in recalling his past, he faltered. And New Sunek didn’t.

Filled with the cyclone’s violence, he rushed forwards and slammed Sunek back against the edge of the boat, the low-hanging wooden rail around the edge of the deck now all that existed between them and the ocean.

Old Sunek wheezed as the air was knocked completely out of him. Now confident he was on top in the fight, New Sunek squeezed harder, sandwiching Old Sunek between himself and the rail and constricting his adversary’s body beneath his own.

“Still enjoying yourself?” New Sunek hissed, as he felt his counterpart weaken.

Old Sunek felt his vision start to blur around the edges. He didn’t know if he could die, because he was no longer really sure what he was, or where he was, or how he was, metaphysically speaking, but he definitely felt as though his consciousness was fading.

“You’re—We’re not a killer,” he strained to choke out.

“You don’t know until you’ve tried,” New Sunek shot back with his cruel grin.

Old Sunek stared back at his own face, a twisted version of his reality. And as his vision began to fade, he saw something in his counterpart’s eye. A reflection of a raging storm.

And then he realised where New Sunek was. And what he had to do.

With his final few ounces of strength, he grabbed New Sunek around the waist, and forced his own body up, allowing New Sunek’s crushing weight to carry them both up and over the rail. They both tumbled overboard, into the Vorothe Sea.

One into a frothing, merciless tumult, the other into clear, pure serenity.

* * * * *

Even at the best of times, Jirel had to admit that didn’t have much of an idea what was really going on in Sunek’s head.

But as he stared back at his unmoving pilot on this occasion, he really would never have guessed the inner turmoil that was going on inside the Vulcan. Nobody in the room could.

The fight between himself and himself may have gone on for some time, but to everyone else present around the Tolaris’s cloaking device, it looked like he was just momentarily daydreaming.

“Sunek!” Sokar snapped eventually.

Sunek was roused from wherever he had been. He shook his head to try and refocus, blinking a few times to clear his head.

“We cannot let this delay us any longer,” Sokar continued, pointing at Jirel, “Now...kill him.”

Sunek looked down at where Jirel sat crouched next to the body of Not T’Prin. The unarmed Trill stared back at him with fear, but also defiance.

“Sunek, come on now, you’re not really gonna...”

Sunek felt confused. He felt strange. He felt like he was gasping for air, like he was drowning. He felt everything and nothing.

He looked down at the disruptor pistol in his hand.

“I said, kill him!” Sokar repeated, more angrily.

“Sunek,” Jirel tried again, the fear overtaking the defiance, “Please, don’t do this—”

Sunek didn't listen. He lifted the disruptor.

And he fired.

Part 4D

Part 4 (Cont'd)

Slowly, but surely, the darkness began to resolve in front of her eyes. She began to make out shapes. The blurry vista in front of her coalesced into a landscape of eerily familiar patterns and surroundings.

And then it all clicked together in her head. She was staring at the grey metal ceiling of the small medical bay onboard the Bounty.

Seconds later, she saw the hulking form of Klath appear, towering over her where she lay with the closest a Klingon could get to a look of concern on his face.

“You are awake,” he stated simply, his booming voice betraying significantly less concern than his face did.

“Did we...” she managed to croak.

“We did,” he replied with a nod, “We are back onboard the Bounty. The Vulcans were neutralised. It was a...fine plan.”

The Klingon’s features softened slightly further as he spoke. Natasha mustered a smile, partly of pride and partly of relief.

She couldn’t remember anything after she dived for their cover, and certainly couldn’t remember how she had ended up back in the Bounty’s medical bay. But however Klath had got her here, she never thought she’d be so glad to see the place.

“Good job it did work,” she pointed out, “Cos if it didn’t, I blew up our only gun.”

She tried to get up from the bed, and felt a searing pain in her back, realising for the first time the extent of her injuries. Although she might have survived the explosion from the disruptor pistol, it definitely felt like she had caught a decent amount of the shrapnel.

“You should rest,” Klath pointed out.

She winced, but didn’t lie down, continuing the struggle to get back to her feet despite the pain she was feeling.

“We need to help the others,” she persisted.

“I will help them,” he replied firmly, gesturing for her to lie back down on the bed with a stubby finger, “You are injured.”

She mustered a knowing smile in the Klingon’s direction as she got herself in a position to sit up and swing her feet over the side of the bed. “Never stopped you, did it?”

Klath went to retort, then immediately stopped himself. Another look spread across his face, as he looked at the human doctor, struggling on despite her injuries, in a new light. A look of grudging respect. The corners of his mouth curled up into the beginnings of a smile, and he nodded, taking her arm and helping her off the bed.

She regretted her decision almost immediately. As her feet hit the ground, a shockwave of pain travelled up her back, hitting every cut and wound on the way. But she’d committed to it now, so she simply gritted her teeth and continued on as if it wasn’t that much of a big deal.

“I guess,” she grimaced as they slowly hobbled towards the door, “Today wasn’t a good day to die after all.”

“It would appear not—”

Klath paused, as they both heard the footsteps approaching. Natasha mentally took back her last comment, and braced for whatever fresh challenge was about to present itself. She doubly braced when she saw the disruptor.

But she relaxed when she saw who was holding it.

“Well, you two look like you’ve had fun,” Denella smiled.

* * * * *

Jirel closed his eyes.

It was an instinctive reaction, and also a completely pointless one. It’s not like closing his eyes would stop the disruptor blast. Disruptors could still kill you even if you weren’t looking directly at them. And yet, despite all of that, he didn’t feel the blast from the weapon slamming home into his body at all. Instead, he heard a loud explosion. And a scream of anger.

And then he felt someone grab his arm.

He opened his eyes to see Sunek standing over him. A far more familiar looking grin plastered across his face. A grin that looked much more like the old Sunek he knew. One without the dark edge of earlier.

“I’m back, baby,” he announced.

Jirel didn't have time to even begin to contemplate the metaphysical subtext behind that comment, before Sunek forced him back to his feet and back towards the exit.

"Also," the Vulcan added, "We should get out of here, cos they're definitely gonna kill us."

The room was filled with choking smoke, billowing out of what was now a very second hand Romulan cloaking device as a result of some recent and particularly devastating disruptor damage.

From somewhere in the smoke, Sokar called out.

"Sunek! You traitor!"

A stream of disruptor blasts came streaking out of the smoke, randomly slamming into the wall behind them.

"See?" Sunek added.

That was all the impetus that Jirel needed to scramble back to his feet and make for the exit and the corridor outside. They raced through the door, even as the disruptor fire continued.

The corridor outside was considerably more smoke-free, and they rushed off around a corner as quickly as possible, trying to evade their pursuers. Moments later, Sokar and T'Len emerged from the same room and took off after them, disruptors raised and poised for action.

Sokar's face was plastered with anguish. Everything was falling apart.

He knew that now the Tolaris would have decloaked. They had been exposed, deep in Federation space, the chance of any sort of surprise attack ruined. The decloaked Romulan ship would have triggered every warning buoy across the next ten sectors, lit up every long range sensor scan in Federation territory, and there would already be half a dozen starships racing to converge on their location.

And all of that made him angrier, and more eager to find his quarry.

Further ahead, Sunek and Jirel rounded another corner.

"You sure you're ok?" the Trill managed to ask as they ran.

Old Sunek, who was now very happy to go back to calling himself just plain old Sunek, nodded and smiled.

"Hell yeah, never better," he said, before immediately correcting himself, "Actually, that's a huge lie. I am very, very confused about a lot of what's happened here. But it'll do for now. Let's just get back to the Bounty."

"That is a plan I'm definitely up for," Jirel nodded, as he grabbed the stocky communicator on his belt and bellowed into it.

"Anyone alive back there? Me and Sunek could really do with someone working that transporter around now!"

Denella's voice came back over the channel, crackling slightly. "I'm tracking you, but I can't get a lock on your patterns! That whole section of the ship's flooded with radiation from somewhere."

"Psh. Some idiot must have just shot a cloaking device," Sunek chimed in.

"You're gonna need to get clear of it, then I can beam you over," the Orion woman continued, as Jirel suppressed a grimace.

Nothing was ever easy.

They came up to an intersection in the corridor, and Jirel pointed to their left. "Turbolift!"

They rushed over to the dark green door and called the lift, waiting impatiently for the doors to open and let them in.

"Sunek!"

They turned around, to see Sokar and T'Len reach the intersection and approach them, bringing their weapons to bear. Both of the Vulcans had murderous anger etched across their faces. Jirel licked his lips, realising that he was the only one without a weapon in his hand.

"You've ruined everything!" T'Len screamed through her anguish, "Everything that we've worked for, everything that Sokar wanted—"

"T'Len," Sunek tried, though he could see there was no getting through to her, "This isn't the answer, ok? Whatever Sokar did to me, whatever he's done to all of you...this isn't right. Besides, if Doctor Sevik is dead, then there's nobody left to have any revenge against—"

"I should never have trusted you, Sunek!" Sokar spat, flexing his trigger finger, "How quickly you've ruined everything I've worked for all these years!"

The doors opened behind him. Sunek couldn't help but muster a cheeky grin, feeling emboldened by their impending escape. "Yeah, sorry about that."

He went to take a step back into the comforting safety of the lift, ready to whisk them to a location to be beamed out. Jirel shot an arm out to stop him.

"Um..." the Trill said, pointing back behind the Vulcan.

Sunek looked back, and saw nothing but an empty turbolift shaft.

“What the hell—?”

“Should probably have mentioned,” Jirel offered with an apologetic shrug, “That happens every now and again on this ship.”

Sunek gulped and looked back at T’Len and Sokar, with their weapons still very much drawn. His boldness had very much disappeared, replaced by his more traditional cowardly streak.

“Yeah,” he managed, “You definitely should have mentioned that.”

“So, perhaps I won’t get the revenge I wanted,” Sokar growled menacingly, “But at least this will be something.”

Sunek looked over at his estranged wife, trying a final distraction. “I take it we didn’t have thirty years, six months and fourteen days of marriage to catch up on after all?”

T’Len went to answer, but she paused. Sunek saw something in her eyes that gave him a modicum of hope. Until Sokar jumped in with his own answer.

“You really think she wanted anything to do with you?” he spat, taking another confident pace forward with his disruptor raised, “How pitiful. We just knew that would be the easiest way to get you on our side.”

“Ouch,” Jirel offered from Sunek’s side.

For his part, Sunek felt himself shrink slightly. The worst part was he couldn’t tell if Sokar was trying to rile him, or if that was actually the truth.

T’Len simply refocused and brought her disruptor to bear. “I wanted to catch up with that passionate Vulcan I met at the ShiKahr Learning Institute,” she added through gritted teeth, “Not this lazy deadbeat clown you’ve become.”

“I’ve definitely seen less dysfunctional marriages,” Jirel managed to quip.

Sunek turned to the Trill. For a moment, he felt an entirely uncharacteristic flash of anger at his comment, and considered lashing out. But he managed to quickly dismiss it. That wasn’t Old Sunek’s way, after all.

“So,” he shrugged instead, looking back at the empty lift shaft behind them, “I guess we’re totally out of options?”

“I mean,” Jirel replied, “We do have one option. But it’s really, really, really stupid.”

Sunek nodded and grinned widely.

“Sounds like my kind of option.”

The pair of them turned back to the armed Vulcans. Both of them gritting their teeth in anguish. Sokar tightened his grip on his disruptor.

“Goodbye, Sunek,” he grunted.

“Yep,” Sunek smiled back, “See ya.”

They didn’t wait for the weapons to fire. They jumped. And they fell.

The twin bursts of disruptor fire which followed slammed into the rear wall of the lift shaft where they had been standing.

As he plummeted down the shaft towards the bottom of the Warbird, Sunek contemplated that this had indeed been a really, really, really stupid option. And because of that, he couldn’t help but laugh.

* * * * *

“Stupid crapping piece of crapping crap!”

Natasha and Klath watched this curious display of anger as Denella deftly worked the transporter controls as fast as her hands could move.

“I’m still struggling to get a lock on them,” she grouched, “There’s still so much interference! And now their patterns are moving about all over the place.”

“You must get a lock,” Klath offered, entirely unhelpfully.

“Ugh!” the Orion woman sighed in frustration as she frantically worked, “Ok, here goes...nothing!”

They all turned to the transporter pad in unison, to see the slightly odd sight of Sunek and Jirel both materialising in front of them while mid-freefall.

The two figures that had been transported were equally surprised as they fell the short distance from where they had materialised to the transporter pad below with a loud thump.

“Ow,” Jirel managed.

“Huh,” Denella managed, looking up from the control panel, “Told you that’d be easy.”

Jirel and Sunek awkwardly picked themselves up and looked around. The Vulcan had the widest grin anyone had ever seen plastered across his face. “Now that,” he said conclusively, “Was awesome.”

The two figures on the transporter pad saw the pained and injured Natasha and Klath for the first time, as the human and the Klingon continued to stare at the two formerly free-falling individuals on the transporter pad.

“What the hell happened to you two?” all four of them said at the same time.

“Ok, maybe we can leave all that for later,” Denella offered, “Like, after we’ve actually escaped.”

The five of them, some more awkwardly than others, scrambled out of the transporter room and back to the cockpit. They bounded down the Bounty’s short main corridor and up the steps into the cockpit, where they all slid into their usual places as quickly as possible.

“Powering her up,” Sunek reported as he tapped his helm controls.

“Sunek,” Natasha asked with a slight grimace, “What about T’Len?”

The Vulcan paused in his work, feeling a flash of loss inside. He made sure that he had fully regained his cocky demeanour before he answered, sending the memories of the tingle of electricity he had felt whenever her hand had touched his straight to the back of his mind.

“Right, yeah, that’s a really good point,” he nodded as he worked, “Anyone know a good divorce lawyer?”

The Bounty lifted off from the deck of the hangar bay, pivoted around on its axis to face back the way it had come, and gently moved forwards. Towards the dark green bay doors, which were still very much in the closed position.

“Any time you like, Denella,” Jirel called back to the Orion woman working at the engineering station at the rear of the cockpit.

“What?” she called back.

“The doors!” Jirel bellowed, gesturing forwards at the rapidly approaching solid metal doors in front of them with considerable concern.

“Yep, working on it!”

The doors loomed even larger in front of them.

“Aw, screw this,” Sunek snapped, “Klath, old fashioned way?”

“With pleasure,” the Klingon replied.

* * * * *

The incongruous form of the Romulan Warbird, now very much decloaked and out of warp, hung peacefully in the middle of Federation space.

The serenity of the scene was suddenly and entirely ruined when a huge explosion rocked the rear of the ship’s hawk-like front section, fire burning out from the surface of the hull where the hangar bay doors had been. Through the gap that had been cleared by the Bounty’s phaser cannons, the small ship pierced the wisps of smoke and fire and blasted free of the Warbird.

The Bounty swooped gracefully in between the double hull of the vast Romulan ship and moved clear, the Vulcan pilot at the helm now back to his normal self.

Seconds later, it vanished entirely, as the tiny ship streaked away at warp.

* * * * *

“They are not pursuing,” Klath reported as he checked his readouts.

Jirel sighed in relief and looked around the cockpit, allowing himself a moment to take in their escape before he turned back to Sunek.

“Set course back to Redrax,” he nodded, “Let’s see if our friend Darhall is still around. I quite fancy some revenge of my own.”

Sunek declined to pass comment as he usually did, and just tapped his controls as the Bounty followed the new course.

“What happens to the Tolaris now?” Denella mused out loud.

“It is without a cloak and deep inside Federation territory,” Klath pointed out, “It will be impossible for them to remain undetected.”

“They’ll already be lighting up the sensor grid of every starship in range,” Natasha nodded.

Sunek considered all of this in silence, not entirely sure he wanted to let on to anyone quite how conflicted he felt over the likely fate of the

Tolaris, and her crew.

“You know,” he said eventually, putting on his best Old Sunek voice, “Let’s let Starfleet worry about that. Besides, didn’t Darhall say he was on his way to Risa...?”

He turned back and grinned hopefully. Jirel smiled and shook his head.

“Nice try,” the Trill replied, “But we’ll start on Redrax.”

Sunek kept grinning and swung back to the front of the cockpit. He managed to somehow maintain his grin as he stared out at the stars streaking by. And thought of everything he'd just left behind.

End of Part Four

Part 5 (Epilogue)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Part Five

“This is completely unnecessary.”

Klath growled and shifted again as he sat rigidly on the small bed in the Bounty’s medical bay, as Natasha continued to work on his left arm.

“Counterpoint,” Natasha smiled patiently, “It’s completely necessary.”

“You have already treated my injury onboard the Warbird. It is healing adequately.”

She sighed patiently and suppressed a wince from her own injuries on her back. She idly wondered how anyone could see the improvised bandage that she had managed to wrap around his wound as anything like an adequate treatment.

Klingons really did make the worst patients.

“That was just some basic field medicine,” she explained, “So you didn’t die. This is all so you don’t lose your arm.”

She checked the results of her scans and pointed the bulky tricorder-type device over at Klath for him to check. The scanner wasn’t exactly the sort of thing she had been used to in Starfleet, but it was as good as it got as far as medical supplies on the Bounty were concerned.

She made a mental note to resupply the entire medical bay whenever she next got a chance, even as she walked through the results for the Klingon in front of her.

“There we go, see? You still have massive secondary tissue damage from the disruptor blast, significant sections of necrotic cells below the scar tissue and a minor case of blood poisoning from the wound being exposed for so long. I need to treat this. All of this. Now.”

She fixed Klath with the sort of severe expression she used to reserve for the most reluctant of patients back in Starfleet. Headstrong first officers worried about missing any action on the bridge, eager young ensigns who thought they were invincible, CMOs convinced they knew better than their subordinates, those types of people.

Klath still didn’t seem overly convinced. He barely reacted to her grim prognosis at all. She turned away to prepare the first stage of treatment, failing to suppress a slight groan of misery from the pain in her back.

“Perhaps you should treat your own injuries,” Klath pointed out, “Rather than attempting further unnecessary work on my arm.”

“Physician, heal thyself?” she fired back with a smirk, “Eh, I might have fallen for that five years ago. But, unfortunately, I’m not just some ex-Starfleet officer. I’m a war veteran. Which means I’ve become an expert in the art of triage. Not to mention an expert at ignoring my own pain.”

She worked hard to suppress another flinch as she said that, trying to ignore the particular pain inside of her that was still connected to the last moments aboard the USS Navajo. That could definitely wait for another day, she told herself, as she grabbed the slightly basic cellular regenerator from her scant supplies and turned back to the increasingly grumpy Klingon.

For his part, Klath saw the same steely determination in her eyes that he had seen before. But he still felt his own sense of pride overriding anything else.

“As I have repeatedly stated,” he insisted, “I am—”

As he spoke, she calmly reached out to his injured arm and firmly squeezed down on the affected area, just above his elbow. The immediate roar of agony the Klingon emitted was loud enough to shake the walls of the medical bay itself.

“Sounds to me like you’re still in a lot of pain,” Natasha said calmly, still matching the Klingon’s gaze with a firm stare of her own, “Your move, Klath.”

Klath stared back with anger, but it soon changed into something else. Something that had possibly been lacking previously.

A look of respect.

He held his arm back out without further argument. “You may continue your treatment,” he nodded, “If you must.”

She smiled in satisfaction. Klath stared at her as she ran the cellular regenerator over the area.

“I have come to see that I may have underestimated you, Natasha Kinsen,” he added with a low growl, “You are a fearsome warrior.”

Natasha suppressed a smug smile as she continued to work.

“Damn right I am.”

The Bounty continued on its way at warp, the entire ship running on autopilot.

In the ship's small dining area, Sunek sat alone, an untouched bowl of plomeek soup on the table in front of him. It wasn't that he wasn't hungry, he just couldn't bring himself to eat it. For some reason, he wasn't in the mood for Vulcan food.

So, instead, he just stared at the wall of the room in silence. To the point that it took him a while to realise that he was no longer alone.

"Crap," Jirel said from the now open doorway, "I know that look."

The Trill sighed and walked over to a storage locker in the wall next to the ship's food replicator, opening it and retrieving a bottle and two glasses. He carried them back over and set them down on the table, pouring out two generous measures of Antarean brandy.

"I don't really need that," Sunek shrugged dismissively.

"Yeah," Jirel countered knowingly, pushing one of the glasses over to him, "You do."

Sunek looked down at the dark liquid in the glass, and then over at Jirel on the other side of the table as he sipped his drink.

"So, let's talk," the Trill prompted, after a moment of silence, "Call it payment for getting to share my favourite booze with me."

"Maybe I don't wanna talk."

"Like hell you don't. You're Sunek. Talking is literally your thing."

Sunek paused. He definitely had him there. Although, technically, Sunek only liked to talk about things that weren't serious. Serious conversations really weren't his thing at all. He took a long slug from the glass and stared down into the dregs of the deep blue liquid.

"It just sucks, y'know?" he managed eventually, "I finally see my friends - and my wife, for what that was worth - after all this time. And they're all..."

"Crazy?" Jirel offered.

Sunek went to offer a counterclaim, but then stopped himself. The Trill had a point.

"Whatever you wanna call it, I guess. But now...I dunno, they're probably gonna spend the rest of their lives in some Federation penal colony somewhere.. And that just...sucks."

He took another sip from his drink. Jirel allowed the moment of silence to fester, waiting for the Vulcan to continue.

"I guess I've been wondering if the old T'Len and Sokar are still in there somewhere. Buried inside them. Regardless of what they've become. I just hope....maybe one day they might be able to find themselves again."

He snorted at his own sincerity and reached for the brandy bottle to top off his glass.

"I hate it when you make me do this serious crap."

"I know," Jirel replied with a sad smile.

Another moment of silence descended. Sunek swirled the liquid around in his glass.

"Plus, I mean, whatever they've become, however bad what they were trying to do was, all that stuff that Sokar showed me in those melds. That was...messed up."

Jirel considered this, recalling the little that Sunek had told him about Doctor Sevik since they had fled from the Tolaris. "You think that all really happened? Crazy Vulcan doctor, the works?"

"Wouldn't be the first time Vulcan authorities had got a bit carried away in their stupid pursuit of logical perfection," Sunek mused, before flashing Jirel a grin, "Rather than the more well-rounded vision of Vulcan perfection who sits before you now."

"Naturally."

Another silence descended. Sunek gently pushed his untouched bowl of soup away, deciding to focus entirely on the alternative form of liquid sustenance in his glass.

"You ever tried meditating?" he asked eventually, throwing Jirel off slightly.

"Not really," he replied, "I had this old yoga holoprogram I was obsessed with when I was younger. But, full disclosure, I was a teenager, the instructor in the program wore a really tight leotard, and this really isn't a sharing story."

Sunek suppressed a smirk.

"There's this old Vulcan technique. It's, like, the first thing you get taught, as soon as you're old enough to walk. You picture yourself on a ship, on the Vorothe Sea, and everything's calm and peaceful. And all you have to do is balance. Except, Sokar's obsessed with how it's all out of whack, cos the real Vorothe Sea is all murky and stormy and really not all that great for balancing on."

“Sounds lovely,” Jirel mused.

“Yeah, well, the more I’ve thought about it, the more I’ve started to realise that he’s got it all wrong. The calm sea wasn’t a lie. It was part of the meditation. Like, it was all about being able to picture serenity in the unlikeliest of places. Right?”

Jirel didn’t answer. Sunek idly spun his now-empty glass around on the table.

“They really should just explain that to you at the time,” he added, “But, then, I guess figuring that out is kinda the point.”

Jirel toyed with his own glass, feeling as uncomfortable hearing Sunek talk this deeply about anything as Sunek did in discussing it in the first place.

“I guess...I hope Sokar figures that out. I hope they all do.”

“You know,” Jirel offered, “We can try to go back for her.”

Sunek stared down at the table. He knew what he wanted to say. But he also knew what he should say. Sunek the talker. Sunek the joker. So he forced the truth to the back of his mind.

“Nah,” he said with a grin, “I mean, if we’re really supposed to have been married all this time, then I’ve cheated on her...a lot.”

“A lot?”

“Well...a bit.”

Jirel’s face creased into a similar grin, as Sunek laughed on the other side of the table. Satisfied that he had done what he needed to do, Jirel stood up and walked back towards the doorway, leaving Sunek with the rest of the bottle. He paused as he got to the door and looked back at the Vulcan.

“You gonna be ok?”

Sunek thought about everything that had happened. He thought about T’Len, and how quickly they’d reconnected, and separated again. He thought about Sokar, the misery and pain he had suffered and the twisted man it had turned him into. He thought about how easily he’d been manipulated, and how many conflicting emotions still swirled around inside him.

He even thought about New Sunek. Or as he was now very much determined to call him, Temporary Sunek, and how worryingly quickly he had been able to seize control of his personality.

Nothing he thought about made him think he was going to be ok.

Still, he was Sunek. And Sunek didn’t worry about things like that. Sunek sat in the pilot’s seat and made jokes. That was where he felt most comfortable. So he decided to lie.

“Nothing that trip to Risa won’t fix,” he grinned.

Jirel smiled and shook his head, pausing one final time before he left. “You know earlier?” he asked, “With the cloaking device?”

Sunek nodded. Jirel licked his lips, internally debating whether he really wanted an answer to this question or not.

“Do I wanna know how close you came to shooting me instead of the cloak?”

Sunek smiled. And decided to lie about that as well.

“Come on, Jirel,” he chuckled, “Who do you think I am?”

Jirel smiled and nodded, walking out of the room. Ignoring the fact that he suddenly found that he wasn’t entirely sure he knew the answer to that question any more.

* * * * *

T’Len lay on the bed in her quarters, staring blankly at the ceiling as she recovered from the latest meld.

To one side, Sokar sat at the table and steepled his fingers.

“It really does hurt me to do that,” he said with an edge of sympathy, “But you understand why I have to. Especially now, after what has happened. I need to make sure you’re completely loyal to our cause, T’Len.”

She remained on the bed, but she nodded.

The Tolaris was limping away from Vulcan as fast as she could. The sudden destruction of the cloaking device, coupled with the shoddy repairs to the rest of the ship, had caused several cascade failures in other systems. So far, they managed to evade the Federation patrols that had attempted to intercept them, and Tepal was working hard back on the bridge to disguise their warp signature on any further sensor traces that they showed up on.

Their aim was to reach the Barvin Nebula, on the outskirts of Federation space. A region where sensors would be almost useless, and where

the Tolaris could potentially hide for as long as they needed to. For as long as it took for them to rebuild the cloaking device, or to at least find an alternative mode of transport to get them out of Federation space.

But he still had no idea if they would make it that far. Decloaked in the middle of Federation space, it would be a minor miracle if they did.

"I have to be especially sure about you now," he continued, "Now that Sunek has let us down, and betrayed us all."

A tear escaped her eye, but she nodded again, feeling shame for ever having brought him aboard in the first place.

"I'm sorry Sokar," she managed, "I really thought he would be one of us—"

"No matter," he said, "We will escape, and then we will rebuild. I believe in that. And I will need you at my side, without question."

He stood and walked over to her where she lay. She saw the determination in his eyes, and she felt the rage building inside her from the meld.

"Yes," she nodded, "That is where I will be."

"No matter what I ask you to do?"

"No matter what," she replied.

"Even if I asked you to kill your husband?"

She surprised even herself with how quickly her response came.

"Yes," she nodded.

* * * * *

Minister Levok steepled his fingers in front of him, raising an eyebrow at the information that was being presented to him. On the other side of his wide wooden desk, Sub-Minister T'Mar remained stoic and calm, having concluded her report.

They were in a large windowless office, deep in the bowels of the V'Shar's main headquarters on the Vulcan Homeworld. The walls were dark, the lighting in the room kept low. Just as the minister liked it to be.

While they were a peaceful people, Vulcans also followed a rigorous approach to their own internal security matters, and the room was well shielded from any outside interference. An entirely logical step to take given the sensitivity of what they usually had to deal with.

"I understand," Minister Levok said eventually, "And there has still been no contact from our agent aboard the vessel?"

"None at all," T'Mar replied coldly, "The only logical conclusion is that she has been killed, or otherwise incapacitated in some way."

Minister Levok considered this for a moment. She had been one of his most trusted and longest serving agents, and she still had an extensive family scattered across the Vulcan colonies.

"Unfortunate," he replied eventually, "Especially given our lack of contact with the vessel since it was picked up on long range sensors by a patrol near the Gallos System."

"Indeed, Minister," T'Mar nodded, "However, we have numerous V'Shar ships conducting a full search, and we are coordinating with Starfleet's own search teams and patrol vessels. We shall find them."

"That is by no means certain," he stated, "Nevertheless your report was welcome, Sub-Minister. Please, keep me informed of any developments. And if we do not hear from our agent within the next two days, make preparations to inform her family."

T'Mar nodded curtly, but she didn't leave. Not just yet.

"Is there something else I can assist you with?" he asked with a raised eyebrow.

She paused, almost as if she wasn't entirely sure that she wanted to deliver this additional part of her report to her superior. Even though such a reaction would be deeply illogical.

"There is something else," she said eventually, placing a padd on the table in front of him. Minister Levok picked up the padd and scanned the details on the screen.

"It is a requisition list," she explained, slightly unnecessarily, "Additional requirements...for Project Sevik."

The project name elicited no reaction from Levok.

Doctor Sevik's private research into emotional purging had been uncovered by the authorities many years ago, and the doctor had indeed been sent into exile, where he had died in disgrace. Or at least, as close as a stoically logical Vulcan got to a state of disgrace.

But while he had been publicly shunned, his years of research lived on, having been seized by the V'Shar for further analysis. After all, it was entirely logical to take time to properly assess the validity of such an intensive study into emotional control. Even if the doctor had unquestionably crossed a moral line with his experiments on actual patients.

Minister Levok considered this as he surveyed the list on the padd.

“Very well,” he replied, “I will see to it that this list is actioned.”

T’Mar nodded, turned around and calmly walked out of the office, leaving Minister Levok alone with his thoughts.

Somewhere deep in the bowels of the V’Shar headquarters, the late Doctor Sevik’s research continued.

* * * * *

He stood on the deck of the ship, feeling faintly ridiculous.

It had been a long time since Sunek had done any sort of meditation. Ever since his emotional breakthrough with the V’tosh ka’tur, he’d always seen meditation as something that only boring stoic Vulcans bothered with.

But something about what he had been through the last few days made him curious about trying it again. And so, instead of spending the rest of the night drinking the rest of Jirel’s prized Antarean brandy, he had retreated to his cabin. And for the first time in a very long time, he had decided to meditate.

Surrounded by the clear, calm waters of the Vorothe Sea, he closed his eyes, balancing on the deck below.

He couldn’t say that the meditation had completely cleared his mind, but he was definitely feeling more peaceful. Whether he was Old Sunek, New Sunek, or just plain old Sunek, he was a lot calmer. The anger that Sokar had infected him with seemed to have dissipated.

Maybe I should make this a regular thing, he thought to himself as he relaxed, maybe this’ll do me some good.

He opened his eyes and breathed out. The air was calm, the sea was at peace. He was in perfect balance.

And then he looked up, across the crystal clear waters of the Vorothe Sea. And Sunek saw something way off in the far distance that made him feel slightly less balanced.

There was a storm on the horizon.

The End

Chapter End Notes

Inside Baseball/Inside Bounty - Thoughts and musings assembled from reading back over notes from my files. Presented in hope of kindling the reader’s interest, but mainly in service of the author’s boredom.

This represents the second of the unofficial trilogy of stories to fully establish everyone’s character and backstory on the Bounty (Eps 102-104). After Klath was fleshed out more in the previous tale, now it was time to focus on Sunek. The Bounty’s laughing Vulcan pilot.

This was also the first chance for me to dive into ST: Bounty’s take on the V’tosh ka’tur. The ‘Vulcans without logic’ who were introduced in the ENT episode “Fusion”. My take on the group uses a little fanfic creative licence. They are now more of a full-on (albeit minor) counterculture movement within Vulcan society, especially active during whatever would count as a growing Vulcan’s ‘rebellious phase’ (Sunek himself became involved during his time in higher education). As Natasha muses in the episode, roughly analogous to the hippie movement on Earth. I made sure that Sokar and his followers considered themselves an ‘offshoot’ of the V’tosh ka’tur, to leave a window open to explore other parts of the movement in future stories.

According to my notes, the original plot for this story involved Sunek running into a group of V’tosh ka’tur members during a “trade conference on a Gorn planetoid”, only for him to discover that his colleagues were using Vulcan mind tricks to influence deals at the conference. This entire concept was quickly abandoned, partly because it was similar (read: identical) to the Devinoni Ral plot in TNG’s “The Price”, and also because it’s not clear why Sunek would care that they were doing that (Spoilers: he wouldn’t). I was still figuring out the framework for Bounty stories at this point, clearly.

The Romulan Warbird procured by Sokar and his followers is called the Tolaris. A direct reference to one of the Vulcan characters in “Fusion”. Not that there was any real evidence that he was a major player in the movement in that episode, but I thought it was a fun little easter egg. In a less fun parallel between the two stories, Tolaris forcibly melds with T’Pol during that episode in a similar manner to how Sokar does with Sunek here. But for different reasons.

The central story here kicks off a long-running story arc for Sunek, specifically the ‘darker’ version of himself created by Sokar’s meld. He regains control of himself by the end of this episode, banishing ‘Dark Sunek’ to a metaphorical storm on the horizon of his Vorothe Sea meditation scene. But that storm (and the Vorothe Sea scene in general) will continue to be a factor throughout the first season, and the series as a whole, as far as Sunek’s character is concerned.

As well as Sunek’s extra-fragile mental state, a number of other plot threads are left dangling at the end of this episode.

Specifically the uncertain fate of Sokar, T'Len and the rest of the cult onboard the Tolaris, and the revelation that, while Doctor Sevik is dead, the V'Shar are continuing some form of research into his practice of emotional purges.

Not T'Prin, the undercover V'Shar agent who enlists the Bounty crew's help to stop Sokar, was a late addition to the story. Originally, they just managed to get out of the brig themselves and then ran around the ship for a while looking for Sunek. But Not T'Prin helped to solidify that section of the story, as well as give a way for Jirel and the others to learn about Sokar's plan and (semi-reluctantly) get involved. Killing her off was a further late change, needing something shocking to cause Sunek to confront 'himself'. The needs of the many outweighed the needs of the one.

This is also the first (but I fear probably not the last) example of Klath's strength being taken out of the story by an injury. It's a bit of a cheap trick, but at least on this occasion we got a fun subplot with him and Natasha out of it.

A very early outline of this episode gave Sunek's estranged wife's name as S'Rek, which doesn't seem to follow established Vulcan naming conventions and is also confusingly similar to Sunek's own name. Probably why at some point I changed it to the more canon-friendly T'Len.

For a long time, this episode was titled "The Road Not Travelled", but that always felt like a placeholder. Thanks to DSC's "The Vulcan Hello" for inspiring me to go for something a bit different. With the actual 'Vulcan hello' being their decision to shoot first whenever encountering a Klingon ship, the other kind of 'Vulcan hello' could be taken to mean Sokar's plot to shoot first on the Vulcan homeworld using the Tolaris, Sokar's 'hello' to Sunek in the form of a violent cult-enabling mind meld, or even the literal "Hello" spoken by Sunek to his angry meld-created alter ego at the start of their final battle on the Voroth Sea inside his mind. The choice is quite literally yours.

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