

Winding Down

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by [DavidFalkayn](#)

Summary

The concluding chapter of this arc. The next few stories will take us back to the ME verse as we take care of some personal quests. The USS Bellerophon captained by Boris Rodenko--coming soon!

Notes

As the timeline for Star Trek Online is rather fluid—every game addition often adds a major change, quite a bit of what you’re seeing is my head-canon. While not totally dismissing Discovery, I have set much of the events of that series in an alternate universe. There was a Klingon War shortly before TOS, but it’s generally called the “Four Years War,” and Burnham’s role in it was the same as in the series. While not overly fond of the “Kling-orcs”, I didn’t want to dismiss them completely, so I made them a different Klingon phenotype instead. Also, in my head-canon, as you’ve probably already seen, there is something of a revival of interest in the 23rd century—including uniforms, hair styles, and other elements. I’ll be going more into this in later chapters.

This chapter will be the last one for this arc. The upcoming chapters will have us switching between the ME and STO verse as I continue to set everything up for the ‘BIG EVENT’. Sorry it’s taking so long and seems so tortuous, but I need to be sure all the pieces are in place first before I pull the trigger.

Debrief

“You owe us extra for taking that base and getting those files for you.” Nelia jibed, sipping her antarean sunrise, as she and the rest of her team spoke to the three images on the lounge computer monitor.

“You’ll receive payment.” Drake responded with a slight incline of his head. “It’s a pity you didn’t get Mok, but his files are almost as good.”

“How’s the decryption going?” Shelana asked as she took a draught of beer.

“Slowly.” Tal’Mera confessed with a scowl. “Mok was paranoid even for a Ferengi.”

“Hey!” Belen exclaimed in protest as he served up fresh drinks to his teammates.

“My apologies.” The Romulan spymistress replied. “I did not mean to give offense.”

“None taken.” The Ferengi merchant cheerfully responded, “Order your usual special plate at the restaurant and spend some latinum at the dabo table and we’ll call it even.”

“Agreed.” Tal’Mera answered back with a slight grin on her face before returning to business. “It will take time to decrypt those files, but our cryptographers tell me that they’re already making progress.”

“In other words...” Ramir, the Klingon member of the triad, spoke, his voice a deep rumble, “Be ready to act once we do.”

“I have to confess...” Drake admitted, the scar on his face accentuating his scowl, “I am worried about the fate of those slaves your new... recruit...mentioned. Not to mention the fact that the Tal’Shiar are working with a Mirror Universe Terran Empire.” Pausing for a moment, the human Section 31 agent turned to his Romulan counterpart. “Do you think this might have something to do with this indoctrination your

people ran into? Could they be using the slaves as test subjects.”

“Indoctrination?” Rana exclaimed with a note of alarm in her voice, her face etched with fear at the mention of that word.

“Wait a minute!” Ashley interrupted, holding up her hand, worry and concern mingled with fear also being reflected in her facial expression. “What’s all this about indoctrination? The last time I ran into that was when we were chasing Saren. The Reapers used indoctrination to keep their puppets in check.”

“Right.” Rana confirmed, “We need to know what you know if we’re going to be able to deal with this.”

“You do.” Tal’Mera conceded, further explaining, “Before her disappearance, Subcommander V’lana Avesti, the commanding officer of the RRW *Gallena*, and her command encountered this indoctrination on at least two different occasions.”

“When?” Twesata asked, “And what happened?”

“The first time was when she was attempting to infiltrate the Tal’Shiar and was captured. It was a mission I had sent her on.” Tal’Mera confessed. Responding to the grim nods given her by her fellow triad members, the Romulan spymistress sighed, “I had received word from Avesti that a Tal’Shiar operative who was once...familiar...with her executive officer...named Charva had made contact with them.”

“So...what’s the story on this Charva?” Ashley prompted.

“As I stated...” Tal’Mera continued, “She and Avesti’s executive officer, Tovan Kev, were involved in a serious relationship until she decided to join the Tal’Shiar several years ago...long before the attack on Virinat and the disappearance of Romulan colonies. She had made no effort to communicate with him until after the *Gallena* had defeated a Hirogen hunting pack at Chaltok IV. Shortly after that, she contacted them and gave them misinformation.”

“What sort of misinformation?” Rana asked as she took a drink of tulaberry wine.

“That Virinat was attacked because it was a secret base being used by D’Tan for weapons development.” The Romulan woman’s lips turned down in a derisive scowl, “Of course that was nothing more than a pile of veruul shit, but word got to me about the contact, so I indirectly, through Commander Nadal, encouraged Avesti to return to her home to investigate.”

“So what did she find?” Twesata inquired as she took a sniff of a mildly narcotic flower.

Shaking her head dejectedly, Tal’Mera responded, “A lot of destruction, but nothing to prove that any sort of weapons research or anything else of military significance was being carried out there. Virinat was nothing more than a farming colony. Although...” The Romulan operative shook her head mournfully, “Had the colony not been wiped out, I think it would have grown into becoming a valuable and influential member of the Republic. That’s probably one of the reasons why the Tal’Shiar did hit the colony.”

“That and the desire for...specimens.” Ramir added, a note of disgust in his voice as he cursed, “Tal’ Shiar pet’aQs and their Elachi allies.”

Taking the lead once again, the Romulan spymistress further elaborated, “The question then became whether Charva was participating in this disinformation plot as a willing agent or merely a dupe. That’s what not only myself, but also Subcommander Avesti and Centurion Kev wanted to ascertain. That led to Subcommander Avesti’s first encounter with indoctrination when she and her people raided a hidden Tal’Shiar research base on Nimbus III.”

“That’s the Wild-West world where practically everything goes—right?” Ashley inquired curiously.

“Yeah.” Nelia interjected, “You can buy anything...or anyone...there. Gangs...pirates...slave traders...smugglers...drifters...you get the picture...all call that shithole home.”

"Another Omega." Ashley grumbled. Then seeing the curious looks on her friends faces, waved her hand, "I'll tell you later."

"I am also familiar with Omega." Rana added, "It's run by an asari named Aria. It's very similar to your Nimbus III."

The Romulan spy confirmed. “Avesti discovered that the Tal’Shiar were working with the Elachi on perfecting indoctrination.”

“What did she find?” Rana queried.

“It’s too complicated to explain, so I’m sending you a report on her findings now.” Tal’Mera declared as she typed on her console, “Have you received it?”

“Yes, I have.” Rana replied, “Thank you.”

“What about the second encounter?” Nelia queried, “What went on there?”

“She was captured...” Tal’Mera admitted, “And, according to her log, underwent indoctrination.”

“Shit.” Rana cursed, “How was she able to overcome the indoctrination? Not even Saren or Benezia could do that.”

“Yeah.” Ashley interjected with a worried frown. “I wasn’t there at the time, but I remember Kaidan telling me that Benezia couldn’t break Sovereign’s indoctrination—and she was a powerful asari matriarch.” Gesturing at the image of the youthful Romulan commanding officer of the *Gallena*, she shook her head, “She’s about my age—how was she able to resist?”

“Subcommander Avesti is a low-level telepath and remarkably strong-willed.” Tal’Mera responded defending her fellow Romulan.

“So was Benezia. If anything, her mental abilities were probably far greater than your subcommander’s” Ashley countered, “And Saren also had a strong-will. Are you sure she’s clean?”

“Yes.” Tal’Mera replied affirmatively. “Although it did take time for her to heal—both physically and mentally. She was very traumatized by the experience as you can well imagine.”

Nodding her head in empathy, the asari scientist responded, “I’ve seen up close the process and results of indoctrination. It’s not a very pleasant thing to have to deal with.”

Tal’Mera continued her narrative. “We had a sleeper agent on Hakeev’s ship where she was being held. He was the ship’s doctor and had developed a serum that arrested the process long enough for her to free herself and get help.”

“As you stated…” Rana speculated, “the serum would only have arrested the process…not reversed it. So…How did you…” glancing at her girlfriend’s wink, she exclaimed in understanding, “Oh…you used a telepath.”

“Correct.” Tal’Mera affirmed, “Although we also had to remove nanites and some strange spores from her blood system that we’re still analyzing. We know some of the nanites are Borg, but there are others we haven’t been able to figure out as yet.”

“What about the spores?” Rana queried as she suddenly felt a queasy feeling in her stomach.

“There are at least two different species.” Drake interjected, entering into the conversation. “One of was a derivative of the spores released from a pod plant native to Omicron Ceti III.”

“We’ve been using drugs made from those spores for over a century.” Twesata pointed out, “They’re used in radiation therapy because they’re a natural protection from the effects of exposure to berthold rays. And because of their rejuvenative qualities, they’re used in a variety of medical treatments—everything from regrowing missing organs to serving as an antiagathic, increasing life expectancy by at least a decade or two for humans—more for other species such as Vulcans.”

“They’re also used in the illicit and semi-illicit drug trade.” Tal’Mera primly pointed out, receiving in return an amused giggle from the recreational drug using Betazoid.

“It’s called ‘Floating Cloud.’” Twesata chuckled, “It’s a favorite of mine and Rana’s when we’re…” she trailed off her final sentence, settling instead for a sly grin and a wink while her lover blushed a deep blue. “In low concentrations, it produces a sense of wellbeing and euphoria.” Her lips curling up in another flirtatious grin, she added, “It also has very positive effects on the user’s sex drive.”

“But in high concentrations…” Tal’Mera quickly interrupted, “It produces such a sense of contentment and euphoria that it renders the addict listless and pliable.”

“Right.” Twesata conceded, “Like too much of anything…it can lead to bad consequences. That’s why I’m careful about who and where I get it from—and no—I’m not revealing to you my connections, so don’t even ask.”

“We’re not interested in what you do after-hours.” Drake interrupted, “So long as it does not affect your mission. Besides…” he added with a crooked grin, “we already know who your sources are.”

“Can I look at what you have?” Rana pleaded, intervening in the discussion. “I studied Reaper indoctrination back home. Maybe I could find something your people might have missed.”

Nodding her head, the Romulan spymistress agreed, “I’ll send the information over to you as well as the rest of Avesti’s logs.”

“Thank you.” Rana acknowledged as Nelia cleared her throat.

Seeing that the information has been successfully transmitted, Nelia acknowledged, “We got everything, but there’s an awful lot of it for us to digest. Can you give us some time to look it over.”

“Of course.” Drake responded, “We’ll continue the debrief in…would twenty-four hours be sufficient?”

“Yes.” Rana responded, “That should give me enough time to analyze everything properly.”

“Good.” Drake nodded his head, “Now…if there’s nothing else…”

“There is one thing.” Ashley interrupted before the grizzled spymaster could cut off the transmission. “Did you get our request for a school and counselor for Ajun?”

“We did.” Tal’Mera replied, her lips turning up in the faintest of smiles, “We’ve made arrangements with the Keiko O’Brien Foundation for her tutoring and a counselor has been assigned to her. We’ll make sure she’s taken care of.” The Romulan spymistress assured.

“Thank you.” Ashley answered back with grin. “I appreciate it.”

“And I’ll put her to work bussing tables and doing cleanup in the restaurant.” Belen added, “She can have Tala’s old room. She left to go to college back on Trill, so the space is available.”

“I knew you were just a big softie, Bel.” Twesata smirked, causing the Ferengi merchant to blush.

“Just…don’t let it get around.”

“Don’t worry.” Shelana chuckled, “Your secret’s safe with us.”

“Right.” Drake declared, “We will meet again in twenty four hours or earlier if you have a breakthrough. Transmission terminated.”

Taking a deep breath, Rana announced to her friends, “Looks like I’ve got homework to do.”

From Bad to Worse

“Everything okay, imzadi?” Twesata asked in a hushed tone as she walked up behind her asari lover and began kneading her shoulders, “You’re tense.”

“I just finished examining the data that Tal’Mera sent.” Taking a deep breath, Rana exhaled, “It’s what I thought it was. The serum that undercover doctor gave her probably saved her from the risk of permanent indoctrination. It killed most of the spores and neutralized the nanites.”

“Well...that’s good news.” Twes remarked in a soft tone, “Now tell me the bad news.”

“The bad news.” The asari geneticist sighed, “Is that the other nanites are Reaper in origin and the spores...Thorian.”

“Reapers were the sentient machine race in your universe that come back about every fifty thousand years and wipe out all starfaring life—right?”

“Right.” Rana affirmed, chewing her lower lip. “And the Thorian was a sentient plant creature that originated on Feros. It used spores to control the minds of those it infected.”

“Turning them into something like drones or Terran worker ants?”

Nodding her head, Rana confirmed her lover’s conclusion, “Yeah. Saren was interested in the Thorian because he was worried about Sovereign’s indoctrination taking increasing control over him—which it was.” Shaking her head, the asari scientist spoke, her voice tinged with worry and alarm. “Someone has managed to bring both Reaper tech and Thorian spores into this universe and gave them to the Tal’Shiar and I don’t know who else and they’re trying to combine that with Borg tech and maybe something else.”

“The Mirror Universe Terrans are probably the ones doing it.” Twesata concluded, “The question is...are they the ones calling the shots or are they just the middlemen for someone else who’s really pulling the strings.” Letting out a breath of air, the lovely Betazoid’s face took on a grim countenance as she said in a low voice, “I think it’s time we got everyone—including the terrible trio—together, imzadi.”

“Yeah.” Rana agreed, “That would be a good idea.”

Laying Plans

“I get the funny feeling I’m not going like what you’re about to tell us.” Nelia remarked as she and the others gathered in the lounge.

Shaking her head, Rana replied, “I don’t think anyone’s going to like what Twes and I found. Were you able to reach the three? They need to be in on this.”

“We are here.” Ramir declared, the Klingon spy chief’s image appearing along with those of the human and Romulan member of the triad.

“What did you uncover?” Drake inquired.

As Rana and Twesata revealed their findings, their audience listened silently, pausing to ask the occasional question.

“Are you sure about the nanites and spores coming from your universe?” Ramir queried, his face an expressionless mask.

“Our universe or one similar.” Rana promptly replied, “We can’t rule out the possibility that there are multiple universes stemming from critical events in my universe’s timeline as well as yours.”

“But you think they’re from our universe?” Ashley sagely observed.

“Yeah.” Rana answered back affirmatively. “Of course, I would need more precise readings to be absolutely sure, but our analysis of the combination of verteron and chroniton particles, as well as the very small amount of dark matter we were able to detect are very similar to those that were detected on us.”

Twesata quickly chimed in, confirming her lover’s hypothesis. “Rana’s correct. You’ve seen the scans I made of her and Ash when we first encountered them—the proportion and composition of the verteron and chroniton particles. Also, the presence of trace amounts of dark matter. They’re identical to the readings your people made on those nanites and spores you recovered.” She declared, now addressing her comments to the triad. “I’m 99.9 percent sure that they’re from Rana and Ashley’s universe.”

Tal’Mera remarked questioningly, “Why do you think that one of the Mirror Universe Terran Empires is involved in this...exchange?”

“It makes sense.” Shelana interjected, weighing into the discussion. “Remember what Ajun told us? She heard her guards talking about Tal’Shiar and humans that were dressed in clothing that looked a little like that worn by the *Belladonna*’s crew, but not the same. Sounds like one of the Terran Empires to me.”

“Agreed.” Ramir declared with a low rumble to his voice, “The question now becomes which Mirror Empire—there are at least three we know

about and most likely far more.”

“Like our universe, the Mirror universes also have points of divergence.” Twesata pointed out to her audience. “Often, the point of separation was a decision made or course of action taken—such as the one that occurred when Hoshi Sato succeeded in assassinating Jonathan Archer after his murder of Captain Forrest. She then took the *Defiant* and used it to become Empress.”

“Correct.” Drake interjected, supporting the Betazoid science officer’s analysis. “From the interviews and interrogations we’ve made with those Terrans who have either defected or were captured, in some of the timelines she’s overthrown—while in others, she remained in power and established a dynasty.”

“So these Terrans might not be the same as the ones whose incursion into the Alpha Quadrant were thrown back recently.” Shelana postulated, referring to Admiral Leeta’s attempt to take Deep Space Nine.

“Right.” Twesata acknowledged, “They could be from another...but similar timeline.”

“What about Captain Rosza and the *Belladonna*?” Ashley inquired, “Did they also come from one of these divergent timelines?”

“Not quite.” Twesata shook her head, “They’re not from a Mirror Universe, but from a truly alternate universe. I’m not familiar with all of the details—you’ll need to ask Salome sometime--she’s the intel officer on the *Belladonna*. She could tell you more.”

“I’ll put that on my to-do list.” Ashley quipped.

“We also know of one other Mirror Universe that comes from a divergence which was the product of yet another divergence in our or some other timeline.” Tal’Mera nodded her head in understanding.

“That’s the one where J’Ula and her entire House come from, right?” Shelana asked.

“J’Ula is an outlaw and a renegade.” Ramir forcefully declared, “And will be dealt with accordingly.”

Rana, replying to the Romulan’s question, returned the subject to its original topic as she glanced at her human teammate seated near her, “Just like there are probably points of divergence in the universe Ashley and I come from.” She asked the ex-Alliance soldier, “Ash...what if Shepard had been orphaned on Earth? Or born on a colony like Mindoir? What if, instead of being the Hero of the Skyllian Blitz, she was the Butcher of Torfan? What if she was caught in that thresher maw attack on Akuze? What if instead of being the compassionate leader you know, she was a hardened xenophobe who was only interested in self gain and what if she decided to tell the Alliance fleet to hold back when Sovereign attacked the Citadel. Hell...what if Shepard were a man instead of a woman? Or had biotic abilities? Or had an aptitude for tech? What if...”

“What if she chose to save me on Virmire instead of Lieutenant Alenko.” Ashley interrupted in a hushed voice, “Or chose to...”

“Kill me to punish me for working for Saren or just because I was a loose end.” Rana finished her companion’s thought, her voice also taking on a mournful quality. “Or me not finding that gateway before you arrived on Virmire and the two of us not going through it.”

“I would have died.” Ashley murmured.

“And I might or might not have escaped that nuke.” Rana continued, “And even if I did, I wouldn’t have met Twes.” squeezing her lover’s hand, the asari scientist continued, “Not to mention the fact I would still be under the influence of indoctrination.” Feeling a shudder running up and down her spine as if she were walking over her own grave, Rana concluded, “What if I did something horrible one day because of that indoctrination?”

“There are a lot of what if’s here.” Nelia grumbled as Belen handed her a cup of hot tea, “We need something concrete.”

“Quite right.” Drake agreed. “We are making good progress decrypting Mok’s logs. Once we have the location for that base, we will inform you so that you can deal with it.”

“It’ll be heavily defended.” Ashley cautioned, “I’d expect both Tal’Shiar and Terran Empire warships if one of these Mirror universes is involved.”

“We’ve also considered that.” Tal’Mera responded, “We’re putting together a multilateral task force spearheaded by the *Belladonna*, *D’ressa*, and *Klothos* under the command of someone you’re familiar with—Captain Soren Magnussen, the commanding officer of the *Valley Forge*.”

“We’re also hoping to bring in the *Bellerophon* if Captain Rodenko finishes the mission he and his ship were assigned in time.” Drake added, “A *Nebula*-class starship could prove very helpful.”

“No argument there.” Nelia agreed, “The more the merrier.”

Noticing Ashley’s momentary expression of anticipation at the news concerning the *Valley Forge*, Drake declared after conversing briefly with his fellow triad members. “After what you’ve just uncovered, we believe you now need to know some additional information that had been kept from you.”

“Go ahead.” Nelia encouraged, “We’re all ears.” Gently teasing her long-time Ferengi business partner and friend, she joked, “Some of us bigger ears than others.”

Waiting until after the brief laughter had subsided, Drake continued. “The *Valley Forge*, along with the *Aeolia* and other Federation, Klingon, and Romulan ships have been carrying out surveys in the Mempa Sector near where the *Gallena* had disappeared.”

“You’re looking for a stable wormhole between the universes!” Twesata exclaimed, at once putting two and two together.

“Yes.” Tal’Mera confirmed. “Or a gateway or something similar. So far, we haven’t had any luck, but the search is ongoing.”

So what are we supposed to do in the meantime?” Ashley inquired.

Ramir responded, “Our cryptologists tell us that they should have the coordinates for that base very soon. For now, proceed to Drozana Station and enjoy some shore leave and spend some of the latinum you’ve earned from your work.”

Her lips turning up in a sly grin, Tal’Mera addressed her remarks primarily to the human member of Nelia’s team, “The *Valley Forge* should arrive at the station soon after your ship does—along with *Belladonna*, *D’ressa*, and *Klothos*. If all goes well, *Bellerophon* will join sometime later as should *Aeolia*. By then, we should have everything we need to move.”

Drake instructed as he ended the conference, “Enjoy yourselves. You’ve earned the time off.”

As the monitor screen went blank, Nelia turned to her teammates and beamed, “Well...you heard the man. Time to have fun.”

Belen declared with a laugh. “Once we get to the station, I’m going to throw a banquet that will rival the Grand Nagus’s last wedding anniversary.” His lips turning up in a wicked grin, the Ferengi merchant added, “And I’m sending the bill to Drake and his friends.”

“Don’t skimp.” Nelia smirked back at her old friend as she raised her glass in a toast, “We’re going to have the blowout to blow all blowouts.”

“I’ll drink to that!” Ashley grinned as she tossed back a whiskey. Turning to Shelana, she suggested, “Ajun told me she wanted to learn hand-to-hand...wanna help me teach her?”

“Sure.” The Andorian security officer responded, “Let’s get her and hit the gym. See you all, later!”

“So...imzadi...” Twesata batted her eyes seductively.

“Yes, siha...” Rana purred, using the asari term for endearment for her lover.

“Wanna see what I bought?”

“What are we waiting for?” Rana exclaimed as she grabbed her girlfriend by the hand and practically dragged her towards the lounge door, “Let’s go.”

Chuckling as her teammates departed, Nelia gladly accepted another antarean sunrise from the Ferengi bartender, “So, Belen...” the green Orion grinned, “...up for another round of tongo?”

Smiling back at his old friend, Belen replied, “You set it up...I’ll bring the drinks and snacks.”

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