

Agamemnon

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Agamemnon

by [LordMcCoveyCove](#)

Summary

Part One of Star Trek: The Quarterdeck Breed

Stardate 53441: When LCDR Richard James arrives on the Border Patrol ship Agamemnon, he clashes with his new captain's command style... and fruit that it bears.

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Notes

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Historian's Note: The events of this story take place roughly four months after the War with the Dominion, as depicted in the final two seasons of Deep Space Nine.

Reporting for Duty

The Quarterdeck Breed

By Lord McCovey Cove

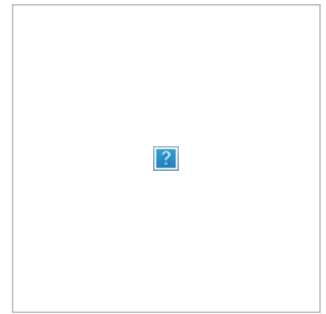
Part One: Agamemnon

NCC-11638 (USS *Agamemnon*)

Docked at Deep Space Four, near the Romulan Neutral Zone and the Typhon Expanse

Stardate 53441.4

Transporter Room One



The shimmering blue column of the transporter beam brought the tall lieutenant commander into focus as he materialized on the transporter pad. He kept his dark brown hair cut short in the back with bangs coming down to cover his forehead just above his brown eyes. With his eyes, he scanned the interior of the transporter room, noticing that the chief petty officer standing behind of the transporter console was an older, short human female with long blonde hair and blue eyes; her hair kept up in a ponytail away from her face. Standing in front of that console was another human female; younger, almost as tall as he, but she allowed her shoulder-length red-brown hair to swing free around her ears. Unlike the non-commissioned officer, she wore the rank of a commissioned lieutenant and the mustard colored turtleneck of the support services portion of Starfleet.

Both women wore a rather odd variation of the gray-on-black Starfleet duty uniform. The chief's uniform top was not the normal jacket like his, but in fact was an unzipped vest. The Starfleet insignia/communicator was pinned to the left strap that ran up to her neck. Meanwhile, the lieutenant was actually wearing a gray jumpsuit with the zipper down around her midsection. To his eyes, they were far from obeying the standard uniform of the day he had become accustomed to. Despite his disapproval, he put his best foot forward with his warmest smile for them.

He stepped down from the transporter pad, satisfied that all of his parts were in good working order. Readjusting his weighty duffel, slung over his left shoulder, he extended his right hand in greeting. "Permission to come aboard, sir?" he said, in a soft tone.

The lieutenant offered a pleasant, but forced, smile, grasping the hand and shaking it firmly. "Uh, permission granted, I guess. Welcome aboard."

"Lieutenant Commander Richard James," he said as he retracted his hand.

She was only too aware of him, his rank, and especially his reputation. "Halley Gage," she replied. Tilting her head in the direction of the chief behind the console, she introduced her, "This is Heather Munoz. May I show you to your quarters, so you can have somewhere to put your duffel, Commander?"

Commander James bristled inwardly at her tone. Everything about her was forced; from her smile to the pointed address by rank and not "sir." Even her body language screamed hostility. He could see that she disliked him before he arrived. The look on the chief's face confirmed that, with her more than casual curiosity at the exchange. The fact that the chief would not even meet his eyes said volumes to him. Keeping things civil, he tried to appear oblivious to Lieutenant Gage's nature. "I would very much appreciate that, Lieutenant, but if you would have someone take this to my quarters, I'd like to report in to the captain."

Gage nodded, "Of course, Commander. If you would just leave your duffel here, I'll see to it it's delivered. Would you like for me to escort you?" Her tone was no longer masking her displeasure, making her sound as though being in his presence was taxing her last ounce of strength.

With a sidelong glance, James replied with a shake of his head, "No, Lieutenant. I think I can find my way, thank you." He did not wait for her to respond, twisting on his heel and making his way out to the corridor. Looking to his right and left, he determined the shortest route to the nearest turbolift and within moments, he was on his way to the bridge.

Unlike the bridge of the Excelsior-class heavy cruiser he had transferred from, the Apollo-class light cruiser *Agamemnon* enjoyed no ready room on the same deck. In fact, the bridge module installed here looked to be designed with the efficient use of deck space; the captain's chair was only a meter in front of the aft bulkhead, with all of the support stations lining the port and starboard sides. The ship's flight controller had a small half-circular station before the modest viewscreen. Where his former ship lacked in computer stations and consoles, his new assignment made up for. It was pretty obvious that the bridge's design leaned toward tactical operations than exploration duty. His first thought when stepping from the turbolift was about where he would sit during his duty shifts.

"Over here, sir. The executive officer usually has priority seating here at the auxiliary station to the right of the captain's chair," said the male seated at that very console. He had the single pip of an ensign, and he wore the same color turtleneck as James did, that of command. The ensign's eyes were huge, his black pupils seemed to only allow a little bit of the white to show, and his hair was jet black and shaggy; far outside the regulations with regard to personal grooming. Unlike the rest of the ship, however, this ensign wore the same standard duty uniform; the jacket's zipper was even in the upright position.

James approved inwardly, but tried very hard to push that thought aside quickly, as his earlier thought was obviously heard. "You're a Betazoid," he said, in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Yeah," he replied with a snicker in his tone. "I'm Rittian Low, your friendly neighborhood hotshot flyboy." He rose from the station, clearing himself off and walked over to greet James. As they clasped hands, Rittian smiled at him, "If you're wondering about the hair, well, the captain likes to keep his bridge informal. You get used to it."

"I'm noticing." James said this with a chuckle. "I was looking for the captain, actually. I wanted to report in and assume my duties."

"You just missed him. Since we're in dock, he doesn't spend much time on the bridge so much as he does in his quarters." Rittian leaned in, "Ships like ours often go years without seeing a starbase like this, so you'll find most of the officers scattered about the ship and the port, relaxing."

The lieutenant commander asked, "You're the officer of the watch, then?"

"To be honest, no. If someone from docking operations calls, it's pretty much whichever officer or non-comm that's up here when the call comes through acts as the OOW." The ensign noticed and felt the new exec bristle at the explanation. He tried to smooth things out by adding quickly and almost stumbling over his own words, "I mean, when we're underway, I stand a watch from time to time, but when we stand in to port, well..." He offered a shrug.

"Indeed." James smiled again. "Tell me, Ensign, about how long have you been assigned to the ship?"

Rittian replied immediately, "This is my first assignment from the Academy, sir. I've been aboard about eight months, now." He asked, "May I ask where you were posted before arriving here?"

James grinned, "I was stationed aboard the *Fearless*."

"That's Captain Simpson's ship," said Rittian with wide eyes. James could not help but look deeply into his large dark eyes and see if he could find the edges. The ensign asked, "I've heard stories..."

"I'm sure you have," replied James. "He's a pretty famous captain."

"Are any of them true?"

Rather than indulge the young officer, James chuckled, "Well, let's just say sometimes it's a good thing to have such a reputation."

Rittian smiled in return. "Yes, sir. I've always wanted to serve on an exploration vessel."

This seemed to amuse James, "Who doesn't?"

"Most of this crew, actually," the ensign admitted, breaking off eye contact with James to look at the deck. "You'd be surprised how many of them are content to wander the border, sir."

"Is that so?" James asked, in a conversational tone. "I guess I'll be experiencing that wanderlust first hand." He continued on to tell the ensign that he was glad to have met him, but that he needed to report in. "We'll talk later, I'm sure."

Rittian appeared to like James, "Oh, absolutely, sir. I look forward to it."

Suppressing the urge to chuckle at the ensign's enthusiastic tone, he said nothing as he withdrew from the bridge and back into the turbolift. Proceeding downward into the ship's fourth deck, he had a little time to think about the sloppy nature of the crew he had experienced so far. As the ship's executive officer, he would be responsible with the carrying out of the policies of the captain. If the sloppiness stems from above, then he would feel very powerless at trying to bring a sense of order to the chaotic nature that the *Agamemnon* seemed to become accustomed to.

Arriving at the door to the captain's quarters, Commander James touched the panel to the side to announce his presence and request to enter. There was a drawling tone that consented to his entry, and once within the confines of the captain's quarters, he understood two things upon looking at the room and seeing his captain for the first time.

The cabin was well used and immaculate. This told James that his captain was someone who paid close attention to details. Every personal item within view was stored in an orderly fashion. The collection of old-style books were sorted within a bookcase, and to his amazement, were all in alphabetical order by author. Fresh uniforms, obviously from the station, were neatly folded and stacked by class on top of his bed. The model starships lining the shelf underneath the forward viewport were all secured with thin and transparent pieces of string, but ordered by armament. This impressed James, and he understood then that perhaps things got out of control over the years, but that his new captain was someone he could reason a return to protocol with, and not face resistance.

Master and commander of the starship *Agamemnon*, Commander Henry Grayum stood before his own reflection in a mirror wearing the standard duty uniform for Starfleet officers, the same uniform worn by James and Rittian. Though his uniform was very new, the officer was a much older gentleman. His blonde hair was giving way to silver in the fight against age, and losing badly. His hairline was receding, bringing it back to the top of his head. Unlike other officers, however, he was not even close to being described as physically fit. The two-piece jacket and pants was kinder to that fact, not drawing too much attention to the already noticeable waist. James decided it was a blessing that they had since stopped wearing the single-piece jumpsuits almost fifteen years ago.

Despite the man's physicality, he believed him to be an officer of a like mind. But to bring order to the ship, he needed to report in. "James, Richard T., Lieutenant Commander, reporting for duty, sir," he said, stepping forward and standing at attention.

Grayum did not turn, not wanting to acknowledge him just yet. His hands were both preoccupied with his uniform jacket, and taking a few moments to look at both shoulders and his back, he asked a single question of James, in a Southern drawl, "Are you here with the Admiral's office, son?" He seemed to not be expecting him at all.

That fact caught James by surprise, stammering a little bit before being able to form a response. "No, sir. I..."

Another voice, this one female, came from the bedroom. She was an enlisted rate; wearing command red and the single curly brace of a third

class petty officer. "No, sir. This is Commander James, remember?" She had a pleasant alto voice, and like the captain, wore a very nice-looking duty uniform. James found her instantly attractive, with her winning smile, and long blonde hair. He did not even care to note that her hair was outside of regulations, reaching near her posterior.

"James?" Grayum still did not seem to understand.

"Your new executive officer, Captain," James spoke up, not quite sure of how to handle this. He felt a little slighted by the lack of attention to the schedule.

"Oh!" The captain turned away from the mirror to bring his hand out and his best smile. "Damn, I'm glad to see you here, son. Why don't you have a seat, here, and Missy'll fix you up a cup o' coffee or something."

Missy, James noted, was obviously the name of the petty officer. Her relation to the captain suggested something of a more intimate nature than was probably acceptable. As this was a new posting for him, he decided to bite his tongue until an explanation was offered. No need to step off on the wrong foot. However, the accusatory glance toward the woman adjusting the captain's uniform made James shift uncomfortably in the chair he seated himself in. He brought his hand up toward the young woman, and smiled at her, "That's all right. I'm fine."

Grayum nodded, "All righty. Fix me a cup, then, Missy. Then go get me the kid's service record on my display."

"Right away," she said, moving off toward the replicator, while Grayum sat down behind his desk and faced James.

"Welcome aboard the *Agamemnon*, son. I'm Hank Grayum," he rose from his seat, realizing he forgot the gentlemanly nicety of shaking hands. "Sorry if I seem a little off my game, but there's this meeting at the port admiral's office, y'see, and I have to get ready for it."

James made an attempt to be sensitive to his captain, his tone concerned, "Sir, if this is a bad time, I can come back later."

"Shit, son, call me Hank. Everyone else does," Hank said, smiling widely at his new exec's dropped jaw. "I had a chance to chat with your old skipper last night about you. He said you're one of his best officers." Missy had returned with the cup and set it on his desk atop a coaster she provided.

"That's very kind of him to say, sir. I had the good fortune of serving under Captain Simpson for three tours of duty," replied James, as Missy pulled up the requested service record for the captain. Three tours of duty equaled over six years of service, which was often the mark of a good ship captain within Starfleet.

"Yeah," Grayum said. "B. J. and I are old friends. We graduated from the Academy and did our first tours together. I know when a CO is bullshittin' me about a person, but if you get Simpson's good word, then that's more than okay with me." Missy disappeared, moving into the captain's bedroom and remaining there.

Inwardly, and with great outward strength preventing the desire to drop his jaw once more, James was shocked. Captain Simpson wore four pips on his collar and commanded a crew of over eight hundred. Hank Grayum, while captain, only wore three pips and appeared to be much older than Simpson. Maybe it was just time not being as kind, but the polar opposite styles of command gave James a great deal to think about. Had he made the wrong choice, here?

Commander Grayum continued, "But what I wanna know is, why would a fireball like yourself want a transfer to a bucket like this?"

The truth was, he had been told that Grayum would soon be transferred to a shore assignment, most likely within a year or two. With time in grade and an exemplary service record, James would find himself promoted to full Commander and holding command of the *Agamemnon*. Deep Space Four's port admiral made that clear to him. While the Border Patrol was not exactly the most prestigious service within Starfleet, it still had the ability to make James look exceptional. As he was told, there were many captains and admirals in Starfleet who boasted a few tours of duty on the border. Officers who can handle themselves at the front lines with distinction were officers worth noting. But in the case of Commander Grayum, it seemed as though he was overlooked. His vessel never seemed to stand out from the others. His reports were mundane and uninteresting. The gossip aboard the station held that he would retire at his current rank. It was this opportunity that encouraged James to send in for the transfer.

"Well, sir, I've served aboard the *Fearless* for a while, and before that I was on the *Venture*. I'd really had my fill of exploration duty and I wanted to round out my training with an assignment out here on the border," James lied, trying to prevent the customary blush from appearing on his cheeks.

Grayum gave a succinct nod, "All righty, then. I'd say that the move benefits us both. Welcome aboard the *Agamemnon*, son."

"Thank you, sir." The exec did not know how to tell the man that the constant derogatory use of "son" was beginning to irritate him. Was it better to let it slide and ensure stepping off on the right foot, or would it be better to clear the air now and save himself the trouble of undoing a habit? "One request, I do have, though, sir."

Hank Grayum reiterated, "Call me Hank, son. What's on your mind?"

"Yes... Hank," the younger officer tried on for size. "If you don't mind, suh... er, Hank, I would really appreciate it if you would call me something other than 'son.'"

"Sure thing, sport."

"Preferably something less casual, sir."

Grayum grinned. "Is Rick okay or do you like Richard, better?"

"Rick is fine... Hank." He bit off the automatic "sir;" it appeared they would both have to make adjustments. "What should I attend to, first?"

"B. J. tells me you're a whiz kid when it comes to paperwork." Grayum leaned forward, "MISSY! Get in here!" He bellowed, scaring James enough to make him jump while seated.

Missy appeared from the bedroom, "Yes, Captain?"

"The ship's paperwork. Pile it up and give it to Rick, here," the captain nodded his head toward James.

"Aye, sir," smiled Missy. She walked across the captain's sitting room and leaned over to retrieve a stack of PADDs sitting within a drawer underneath the model starships. As she did so, James noticed that the captain was most definitely leering at her behind. Disgust and outrage overwhelmed the executive officer, his mouth opening just slightly to express it all. That poor woman, he thought to himself.

She returned with a stack of ten devices, all of them filled to the brink with overdue items of a clerical nature. He looked up at her with an apologetic smile, and she rewarded him with one as well. Seizing the initiative, he asked her, "I'm sorry I didn't get a chance to introduce myself to you earlier..."

Grayum interrupted, "Shit, Missy, I'm sorry. I'm being rude. This here is my yeoman, Missy Davies."

Missy smiled, "Missy is a nickname they call me around here. My given name is Melissa. It's a pleasure to meet you, Lieutenant Commander." Her tone was warm and inviting; he was affected by it immensely.

"Indeed," said Rick. "A pleasure. Thank you for the PADDs."

"I don't believe you'll be thanking me later, sir," she quipped.

"That'll be all, Missy," Grayum said with an annoyed tone.

"Aye, sir," she said. Instead of retreating to the bedroom once more, she headed for the corridor.

Once they were alone, Hank sighed. "She's a damn fine yeoman. She took this tornado I called a cabin and organized it. 'Course, now I have no clue where anything is, but I don't know what I ever did before she came aboard."

"How long has she been your yeoman?"

"Going on nine months, now."

James decided to change the subject, looking down at the stack on his lap. "Were you without an executive officer long enough to create a pile like this, uh, Hank?"

"Something like that. I mean, let's face it; we're not a high priority ship like your darling *Fearless*. Our requests for someone with your experience usually fall on a wish list, not a necessity list," said Grayum, his drawl getting a little more pronounced.

"Understandable. Did you appoint an acting first officer?"

"I sure did," replied Grayum, thumping the desk. "Halley Gage did a bang-up job for what was asked of her. She pulled her butch in engineering as well as on the bridge and she came out with flying colors. Gave her a letter for her promotion jacket."

With his eyes moving away from his captain's, he looked at the stack as another piece of the puzzle fell into place. As this information was coming to light, the exchange in the transporter room began to make sense; Gage's attitude was no longer dismissed as being a small part of the whole. She had a personal problem with his presence aboard the ship. "I'm sure she did. However, it would appear to me that she neglected a rather important aspect of the job."

Captain Grayum frowned, his brow furrowing, "Under the circumstances, Rick, I think she did pretty good. I know all that paperwork looks like a lot, but let me tell you something; out here on the border, paperwork don't mean shit. Sure, we got the forms and the reports to do just like everyone else, but the different between a patrol ship and the *Fearless* is that we're not under that gun to dot and cross every I and T."

James sighed. It was a losing battle he was facing, now. Not to mention that it would be in the poorest health of his assignment to criticize an officer who obviously has the captain's favor. "I think I see what you mean. Now that I'm here to dedicate myself wholly to the job, I'll make sure that all of the ship's paperwork is caught up with Starfleet as soon as I can."

"That's the spirit, Rick!" Grayum thumped his desk once more, to express his enthusiasm.

He smiled in reply, not only because he was amused, but also because it was the only way to express his irritation at the captain's inadvertent patronizing act. James said, "If you don't mind, then, sir..."

"Hank," interrupted the captain.

"Hank," James followed up quickly, realizing his mistake.

"Go on and get out, Rick. I'll be off the ship for a few hours to meet with the port admiral in thirty minutes. Have a look around; make sure you meet the senior staff. I have a feeling that our leave here at the station is going to be cut short."

Lieutenant Commander James stood up from his seat, cradling the stack under his arms in preparation to leave, "Understood, Hank."

Gage

"I think your biggest problem, Gage, is that you've not even given him a chance," said Munoz, looking across to the chief engineer over their respective drinks. They were both seated in the ship's wardroom; the officer's mess. While Munoz and her fellow chiefs had their own designated lounge, as a senior non-commissioned officer, her presence in the officer's sanctuary often went overlooked.

Halley Gage did not say anything in response, brooding over her mug and keeping her eyes upon the table.

Heather tried another tactic, "I know you wanted that promotion, but you're really good at what you do. No one knows this ship better than you."

"One more reason why I would have made a better first officer," Gage tossed back with a sharp tone.

"Damn it. He hasn't even been here a whole day!" Despite her friendship, Heather's patience was wearing thin. "You're acting like a child."

Gage's eyes narrowed, "Watch it, Chief."

Heather stood up, "Kiss my ass, Lieutenant. When you're done pouting, I'll be in my transporter room."

"Heather, don't go, please," the chief engineer rose from her seat, instantly feeling remorse over driving her away.

Chief Munoz shook her head; "I think you need to be alone with your thoughts, now." She began to move toward the corridor, when the new first officer entered, carrying a stack of PADDs in his arms. Heather twisted on her heel and returned to Halley, "Besides, I think this would be a nice opportunity for you to build a bridge, instead of burning one. See you later."

Once Heather left the wardroom, Gage shot fleeting glances toward James. He took a seat at the other end of the long wardroom table, unknowingly sitting in what would come to be his regular seat at wardroom meetings. She watched him out of the corner of her eye, as he poured through each PADD. After nearly five minutes of glancing at him, her last glance locked eyes with him.

"Something on your mind, Lieutenant?" James tried to start things out on a good note, wearing his most charming smile.

Gage took her time in responding, curbing her immediate response in the negative, followed by an abrupt departure. Instead, she decided that Heather was right. She had not really given the new officer any sort of a chance to earn her respect. "I just wanted to apologize for my demeanor in the transporter room, Commander."

The olive branch was extended, and he recognized that it must have cost her more than a fair share of pride to do so. "There's nothing that needs apologizing," said Commander James, returning his gaze to the PADD in his hands. "Although, I will admit to being taken a bit off my guard at the utter lack of protocol around here."

"Yeah, well, this isn't the devil-may-care explorer fleet, with all the pretty little uniforms and pristine starships," Gage snorted. "Here in the border patrol, Commander, we find ourselves face-to-face with the leanest and meanest ships. We've fought the Jem'Hadar, the Breen, the Cardassians..."

"In case you haven't noticed, Lieutenant, we wear the same uniform. Just because the war's over, didn't mean that I sprang into existence on that transporter pad back there," James replied. "*Fearless* was involved in a lot of the same situations that you faced."

"*Fearless* is an Excelsior-class battlecruiser. Eight hundred in crew, state-of-the-art weaponry..."

"She's sixty years older than the *Agamemnon*," James rolled his eyes, but spoke with a jovial tone. "Sure, she's a little more polished, but she's old. I figure by the time I make captain, they'll probably be scrapping her for parts. But that does not detract from the fact that you have nothing to prove with me."

Halley fell silent, appearing to think over his words. Why was her blood running all of a sudden? What was it about this man that made her feel as though she was threatened? Her self-confidence disappeared and anxiety and insecurity began to overwhelm her. "Once again, I offer my apologies, Commander," she said in a quiet tone.

James looked at her, "I'll consider it, Lieutenant. If you can bring yourself to saying 'sir.'"

"What is your problem?" Gage asked as she stood up suddenly, knocking her chair back. She was no longer able to contain her anger.

"I would recommend that you watch your tone, Lieutenant," he said, his voice barely above a whisper.

"This is the wardroom, Commander. If you want to pull rank over me speaking my mind, you can take it to Hank and see what he says." She challenged him and his authority.

James counted to five in his head, thinking that she was incredibly lucky that they were the only two officers in the wardroom right then. There would have been no other option but to enforce discipline to prevent any damage to his authority. "Lieutenant," he said, as calmly as he could, "I don't really care about how much slack the captain gave you. From here on in, you report directly to me."

"We'll just see about that," she turned to leave.

"Hold it right there, Lieutenant." His voice rang as loudly and as filled with authority as he could muster. James rose from the wardroom table and advanced on the still chief engineer, holding her position just before the exit out into the corridor. "If you decide to go over my head on this one, I'd imagine that in spite of the captain's good graces, he's going to get more than little upset with you. When he sends you back down

here, you'll have two superior officers to deal with. Is that what you want?"

She appeared to consider his words, but the damage to her pride was obvious as her cheeks flushed. "I came to you to apologize."

"And I appreciate that, Lieutenant," he conceded with a slight nod. He sighed. "I realize that protocol has been pretty non-existent around here, but that's about to change."

"Aye, aye, sir," said Lieutenant Gage, deciding to stand at attention in a mockery of respect toward him.

He nodded approvingly, "Well, your attempt is pretty pitiful, but at least it's a step in the right direction." Commander James let out a long sigh, looking up and then down as he tried to figure out how best to proceed. "I am not here to be anything more than the best executive officer for the *Agamemnon*. I know you carried out those responsibilities in the past, and the captain was very pleased with your willingness to step up and take on the extra duty for the team. As a point of fact, I was actually hoping that you would be willing to help me go over the paperwork so we can get caught up."

"Oh," she replied, giving up her rigid posture to go slack. Her shoulders slumped slightly, and she turned around to face him. "I'm sorry about that. It's just that with trying to oversee engineering along with the duties of a first officer, all of the reports and logs sort of fell through the cracks."

"I'm not blaming you," he said instantly, raising both hands. "Starfleet isn't going to send out a firing squad just because you forgot to file an energy consumption report. But all of those loose ends are going to end up tangling us up if they decide to put us through an inspection."

Gage wrinkled her nose, "An inspection?"

James asked with incredulity, "You mean, you've never undergone an inspection?"

"Not in the four years I've been aboard."

"That's... very interesting."

"That's how things are done in the Border Patrol."

He frowned, unable to really make any sort of a comment. "I don't suppose you would accept the reasoning that perhaps an inspection is due, would you?"

She shrugged. "As much as it pains me to say this, you are the executive officer, now. If you want to catch up to a point where you feel comfortable, that's your prerogative." Halley's voice got a little too quiet for him to hear what she mumbled.

"I'm sorry, what was that last?"

"I said," Gage raised her voice, "I will support any new policies you want."

James smiled instantly, but he brought his hand over his mouth and coughed. "I appreciate that, you have no idea." He was silent, moving away and returning to the wardroom table once more. "The first thing we need to start with is the engineering section's requisitions for the past year..."

Guardian Six, also known as Rear Admiral Elizabeth Davies, looked across her desk at the commanding officer of the *Agamemnon* as her flag lieutenant laid out the appropriate information to process her query. She was a woman of presence; that is, every room she entered automatically acknowledged her. The very pillar of authority for the Border Patrol service, she was a two-star flag officer who reported directly to the chief of Starfleet Operations on the status of her group. For a captain of a light cruiser to be seated in the same room meant that either he was being reassigned, under review, or about to receive orders of the highest priority.

Commander Grayum had even more cause to be nervous. While Admiral Davies was enough to make him fidget in his chair, the fact was that he was only two feet away from Deep Space Four's commanding admiral, Rear Admiral (lower half) Edward Porter (Barracks One). His presence there was one of courtesy, as Admiral Porter was the sector commander, as well as the ability to mobilize the entire Ninth Tactical Fleet at a moment's notice. DS4 was located at the juncture between the neutral zone of the Romulan Star Empire and the Typhon Expanse.

This much brass in the same room began to make Hank Grayum very nervous. What had originally been thought to be nothing more than a friendly little chat with Admiral Porter had turned into a briefing. Once the flag lieutenant withdrew to the small anteroom, Guardian Six leaned forward in her chair, bringing her fingers into a Vulcan-like steeple before her. "Commander," she said, her voice cold and harsh, "am I correct in my understanding that the *Agamemnon* is at full operational status?"

Grayum cleared his throat nervously, "I, uh, yes, sir, that's about right. We can pack up and be anywhere you want us to be."

"May I also further assume that you and your vessel are cleared for X-Ray activities?" Guardian Six asked, wishing to know if his ship and crew were ready to undertake a class two priority assignment, which would require a level of readiness that should be maintained on vessels of the Border Patrol. Alternately, it would also give Grayum the opportunity to decline, if he was simply being prideful and wished to not put his ship or crew at risk.

He nearly leaped out of his chair. This was the opportunity he was waiting for. Despite all outward appearances, he was eager to perform a task worthy of promotion. To be able to retire as a Captain would allow him a higher set of benefits. It had been a long period of service for him, enduring both the Cardassian War and the Dominion War. He was willing to settle for retiring a Commander, but the chance to reach a little further made it just a little bit sweeter. "Absolutely, sir."

Admiral Porter spoke up, immediately following Davies' nod to him. His clipped British accent always made him seem like something of a

snob to Grayum. He listened to the admiral as he spoke, "Commander, as you are no doubt aware, certain sects of the Breen Hegemony have ignored the peace accords signed by the Dominion. Starfleet Intelligence has been able to determine with a fair amount of certainty that they have arranged mobile command centers located between the Black Cluster and the Typhon Expanse."

Guardian Six continued the briefing. "We have reassigned elements of the Ninth and Twelfth fleets to augment the patrol ships along this part of the border." She turned her desktop display around to illustrate. The "north" border, which ran from the "west" border of Cardassian territory and Deep Space Nine to the "east" border with the Romulans, had the Black Cluster in the "northwest" corner and the Typhon Expanse in "northeast" corner. Points began to be marked beyond the northern border, each one seemingly equidistant from one another. "Based on the information from Starfleet Intelligence, and on orders from Fleet Admiral Nechayev herself, we are deploying several light cruisers to each of these theorized locations of where each mobile base is. *Agamemnon* will be deployed to provide information on this command center, which we have designated as Objective Epsilon."

Hank Grayum nodded eagerly, "I see. You want us to go take a look and report back on what we find out?" If that was truly the extent of the mission, then he was assured of that fourth pip and his retirement. In his mind, he was already plotting out the little strip of beach he wanted to buy on Risa, maybe build himself a pier where he could put that little fishing boat he inherited from his great uncle back on Earth. It would not take much trouble to beam it up to a cargo ship, pay them to make the long trip out...

"Not exactly. Each cruiser will be outfitted with a Romulan cloaking device, and each vessel will also be carrying along a Romulan officer to oversee its use and operation. This is one of the stipulations outlined by the defense treaty with the Romulan government," replied Admiral Davies, interrupting his train of thought and bringing him back to the present. "In exchange for the device, we will provide the Romulans with limited Starfleet resources and personnel, along with detailed information about the Breen's current military capabilities."

"Just like with the *Defiant* and the Gamma Quadrant all those years ago," Grayum noted.

Porter added, "In the same spirit, yes, however unlike the *Defiant* missions, this time we shall be looking to bring back a little more than basic information."

The captain of the *Agamemnon* pressed his lips together, having heard all of the bait. It was time to bite down on the hook. "Admirals, would you mind being a little more specific?"

First Officer's Log

First Officer's Log

Stardate 53445.22

My arrival aboard the *Agamemnon* two weeks ago has given me a new sense of appreciation for the diversity that Starfleet has to offer. Since being appointed to my duties, I have spent a great deal of time going over the many reports and logs that have been accumulating for over twelve months. With the tremendous assistance of Lieutenant Halley Gage, the ship is now current on its records and libraries of information necessary for the logistics of the Border Patrol service.

We've been docked at Starbase 510 for the last seventy-two hours for a complete systems analysis and review, along with some scheduled upgrades. The captain has also advised us that we will be undergoing a limited crew rotation. I must admit to being a little curious, as the service records of the crewmembers transferring aboard have not yet been made available. There is also the concern that the ship's chief tactical officer is retiring, and a replacement has not yet been assigned. A hole in the senior staff may or may not be covered by one of the officers transferring over. As executive officer, I am more than a little dismayed, though if necessary, I can handle those responsibilities in addition to my own until the Bureau of Personnel sees it convenient to provide us with a replacement officer.

If the schedule is maintained diligently, the ship should be ready to depart in under six hours.

Personal Log of Richard James

Stardate 53445.22

While I have been appalled and dismayed over the sheer lack of protocol in the past, I think I'm coming to understand why it might be necessary for the crew to drop any sense of formality. However, the captain's demeanor has changed radically over the past week, ever since his meeting with the port admiral. I have not really come to know Captain Grayum to a point where I might be concerned, but the fact is that Halley is voicing her concerns to me privately.

That brings me to another topic. In the last week, I feel like my example of protocol has been understood and even emulated. Use of given names has dropped noticeably, but that's probably due to the fact that the captain has also been given to observing a more disciplined bridge lately. I wonder if my presence aboard ship has had that much of an impact in such a short amount of time.

Though in dock, the executive officer's decision to maintain a standard bridge watch regardless went unopposed by the captain. It was a sign to the rest of the ship that Grayum supported James' decision to slowly reintroduce a higher level of discipline to the officers and crew of the *Agamemnon*. In turn, James also fell in line with the sense of camaraderie among the members of the bridge crew, including the use of many of their first names.

"Halley?"

The chief engineer looked up from her station on the bridge, "Yes, sir?"

"How're we doing?" Commander James leaned over the engineering station, his concern and worry illustrated in his tone.

Halley called up the current status of the systems upgrades. She reported that the engineering teams from the starbase were wrapping up and preparing to return, while voicing her excitement at the same time. "I'm just really eager to see how well these new systems perform. Augmented sensor palettes, ablative armor, upgraded shielding systems, cobalt device packages for the torpedo systems. With all of this new equipment on board, we're going to be on the cutting edge of technology."

He smiled at her enthusiasm and he honestly shared in it, "It's a lot to get done in three days. Has it really been long overdue?"

"You have no idea, sir," she said. Genuinely pleased with herself and the transformation of her ship, she returned her attention to her station.

James returned to his seat, but had very little time to settle in. He rose from the captain's chair as Grayum exited the turbolift not soon after. "Captain on the bridge," he said, out of habit. Under normal circumstances, the captain would fix a look of admonishment upon him and settle down into his chair with a quiet harrumph. His entrance onto the bridge, however, was not a solitary one.

"Ma'am, allow me to introduce my first officer," drawled Grayum to the Romulan woman accompanying him onto the bridge, "Lieutenant Commander Richard James. This here is my chief engineer Lieutenant Halley Gage." He continued to introduce the other members of the bridge crew, including Rittian. When he ran out of officers to introduce, he returned the courtesy on behalf of the Romulan. "This is, uh, khre'Arrain t'Aimne with the Romulan Star Navy."

The khre'Arrain was one of the more attractive specimens of her race. Her jet-black hair trimmed neatly at the edges, framed a very regal and tanned face. She had a set of deep blue eyes that seemed to scrutinize every detail around her. When she made eye contact with the executive officer, he felt his knees weaken and threaten to collapse him to the floor. It was the first time he had met a Romulan woman, though he had gotten to know a couple of male officers during the final push toward Cardassia in the last days of the Dominion war. "I am pleased to meet you, Lieutenant Commander James," she greeted him, bowing respectfully toward him. Her hair fell forward as much as the artificial gravity

could manage to hold onto, before she returned to her standing position to greet Halley in the same manner.

"Captain," James looked over to him with a question in his eyes, "may I ask the purpose of the khre'Arrain's visit?"

Grayum's drawl was more pronounced now, as it always did when he was under a great deal of stress. Halley recognized it, but James tried very hard to understand the words he spoke. "khre'Arrain t'Aimne has been kind enough to agree to joining our crew. Her duty station will be tactical."

James was alarmed. That was an unusually high amount of trust being given to this foreign military officer. The tactical systems aboard a Federation station were classified, and to offer them up to her could be a court-martial offense. He sputtered, "C-Captain, that's..."

"By the order of Admiral Davies, Rick," the captain finished, looking at him with a cold glare. He did not wish to be arguing in front of their guest, even if she would be interacting as a subordinate officer. "I know it's unusual..."

"Hank, you can't be serious," Halley spoke up, rising from her station.

"I am not gonna stand here and allow my bridge officers to make me look like a damned fool!" thundered Grayum. "Commander James, see to rustling up a cabin for the khre'Arrain."

The bridge fell silent. In the years that Henry Grayum had commanded the *Agamemnon*, he had never shown his temper before nor had he shown such contempt for his crew being casual with him. Halley was right, James understood now. There was something going on here beyond the obvious that had him in a constant state of agitation.

"Aye, aye, sir," Halley replied, returning her attention to the engineering station and sitting down.

Captain Grayum resided in his seat, after showing t'Aimne to the tactical station. She instantly began to access the controls. Every officer on the bridge had their eyes on her, as she expertly called up commands and diagnostics. He became annoyed, noticing the undue attention, "People, we have an important mission to prepare for. Commander, I want a briefing of the senior officers in one hour. See to it."

James moved his fingers over the console, reserving the conference room on deck two for the briefing. "Aye, sir," he said, having already completed the beginnings of his task. All that was left was to alert each senior officer, though the captain had carried out his own order between Halley, Rittian, and himself. He shot a quick glance toward t'Aimne, trying not to raise the captain's ire once more while also wondering if she would be included in the briefing.

"Captain, Starbase Operations is beaming aboard four classified cargo containers," said Halley.

t'Aimne spoke up immediately, "Captain Grayum, I request permission to oversee the transport and installation of my equipment at this time." She secured her station and rose from the seat to face him as she spoke.

Grayum nodded, "Go ahead. Lieutenant Gage, why don't you go down there with her and lend a hand?"

After the two officers departed the bridge, James approached his captain, waiting by his chair with his hands clasped behind his back. The captain looked up to him, smiling. "Let's go down to the wardroom for a bit, Rick."

Captain Grayum and First Officer James were already seated in the conference room when the other officers made their appearance for the scheduled briefing. t'Aimne arrived with Halley, entering in and taking an open seat at the opposite end of the conference table from the captain and first officer. Her presence on the ship had already spread rumors and gossip across every deck, but that did not prevent the other members of the senior staff to regard her with a curious or scrutinizing look.

Halley took her seat opposite James, offering him a friendly smile of acknowledgment until she realized that his expression was frozen, his eyes staring off at nothing of interest. "Rick?" she said in a quiet voice, in an attempt to gain his attention.

He blinked, looking a little disoriented, before turning his gaze toward her. "Yes, Lieutenant?"

Grayum cleared his throat, "Let's get this little meeting started. I want you all to know that before we begin, that we're all en route to a point outside Federation territory. Effective immediately, this ship'll be under X-Ray mission procedures." The dramatic effect was exactly as he intended, watching the faces of his officers harden at the news. He felt it was good for the crew to be entrusted with such an important mission after doing nothing but chasing the occasional smuggler or wayward ship for almost two years following the end of the war with the Dominion. The captain looked at the other side of the table and nodded to their guest, "khre'Arrain t'Aimne has been assigned here as a tactical officer courtesy of the Federation-Romulan treaty. She will be here to overseeing all operations regarding our new cloaking device."

Halley did not react; knowing already that the cloaking device was installed and ready to test, while her colleagues ranged in their reactions from muttered outbursts to silent looks of shock. She held her gaze on James, who looked down at the conference table while the captain continued on.

"Due to the fact that the Breen have been kicking up their heels along most of the border between the Cardassian and Romulan empires, Guardian Six has ordered us to head up north and take a look around," he explained. Looking back at the Romulan woman, he asked, "If I'm right in my recollection, your rank is equivalent to a lieutenant commander, correct?"

t'Aimne replied, "That is correct, captain."

"Thought so," he nodded. "All righty. Here's how we play this. As soon as we leave Federation space, we begin testing the cloaking device. Any changes or adjustment we gotta do, we do en route. Halley, that'll be your department."

"Miss t'Aimne and I have already completed the installation, and I've already made some notes on some possible configuration possibilities to

work with should the need arise, sir," Halley gave a respectful nod to t'Aimne.

"I realize that my language does not come easily to Terrans," t'Aimne stared back at Halley. She was actually thankful that the chief engineer did not make an attempt to speak her rank. The captain's drawl mangled it and she bristled inwardly every time he tried to roll it around on his tongue. "If you prefer to use your ranking system, please address me as Lieutenant Commander."

James asked, "The literal translation of khre'Arrain is Centurion, is it not?" His pronunciation was slightly accented, but it was the best she had heard so far.

"Not quite, but it is close enough," she replied, her tone did not betray her surprise at his revealed knowledge. She made a mental note to not underestimate him again.

Grayum harrumphed slightly, "We'll stick with Lieutenant Commander, then. Everyone, pass the word to your teams on that. I appreciate you trying to accommodate us, Commander t'Aimne." He used the preference immediately, making a show of it to the rest of the officers so they would understand. At her nod, he continued his briefing by calling up a tactical display of the target region. A path between Starbase 510 and the point marked simply as Epsilon sprang into existence once the map had been drawn. A point above the starbase on the path represented the ship. "Once we're certain the cloak is working, we will use it as soon as we clear Federation space. We will arrive at our objective in fifty-three hours at warp eight."

Halley opened her mouth to make a comment, but closed it immediately. James raised an eyebrow toward her in askance, but she shook her head slightly to dissuade him from calling any attention to her.

"Upon arrival, we will commence surveillance operations on any Breen ships we find, but the one we're looking for is any one ship large enough to be a mobile base," Captain Grayum smiled. "After we provide sufficient information on their technological and fleet strengths, we will provide Starbase 510 with on-site data for an assault." Finished with his briefing, he resumed his seat and looked at the collection of officers for comment.

James spoke up first, looking at Halley, "We'll need a weapons systems checklist for all the new hardware we took on board, as well as a detailed testing schedule to be accomplished by the captain's timetable, Halley." He turned his head to look down the table at Rittian, "Ensign, we're going to be counting on your best, now more than ever. I'd like for you to work with khre'Arrain t'Aimne, when her duties permit, to get a feel of maneuvering the ship while cloaked."

Halley and Rittian both responded in the affirmative as James continued on his mental checklist, "khre'Arrain, as our only tactical officer and based on your obvious familiarity with this stealth technology, I think it would be prudent to have you construct and see to the completion of tactical drills in various situations we may find ourselves in." Smiling, he inclined his head, "I'm sure we'll all be curious to see how we perform to Romulan standards."

t'Aimne replied in an even tone, "That is one way of putting it, Lieutenant Commander."

James let the matter drop. He was sure her natural air of superiority was fighting to be seen and heard. The fact that she maintained such a high degree of control over the racist remarks spoke highly of her disposition. But he knew he was pushing the envelope. Looking back to his captain, he nodded to him, "Nothing else from me, sir."

"All righty. You heard the XO, so let's make sure we follow the plan to the letter. Dismissed," Grayum said. When the room cleared out, Gage and James remained seated in their chairs. The captain looked between the both of them before leaning forward to rest on his elbows on the table. "What's on your minds, kids?"

The lieutenant deferred to the lieutenant commander, tilting her head to indicate so. James nodded his thanks, and turned his chair to face the captain, "Hank, I have some concerns about putting a Romulan at the tactical station."

"I'm not going to go into dramatics over it, Rick. I don't much care for it, either, but orders are orders," said Hank. He inhaled and exhaled loudly, "If it'll set your mind at ease, then why don't you take her in hand, make sure she doesn't get into any trouble."

Halley offered, "I don't think you'll have much to worry about. She seems pretty nice on a personal level. I'll admit at first, I had reservations, but working with her in installing the cloaking device and the other... equipment..."

James inquired, very curious about that, "What other equipment?"

She looked at Grayum hesitantly.

The captain sighed, "Might as well tell him."

"With all due respect, Hank, I think I'm entitled to know," said James in a more annoyed tone than her would have liked.

"I will let you know what I think you're entitled to, Commander," snapped Grayum quickly.

Halley dropped her eyes to the table as James flinched. Despite that, he didn't let up, "What is going on here, Captain?" There was more here than a high priority mission, James knew by the way the captain was acting.

Grayum pushed away from the conference table, walking toward the viewscreen with his arms folded across his chest. "Have things changed that much? Have I really become as big an asshole as I think I have?"

Replying first, Gage rose from her chair, but made no move toward her captain, "Hank, we care about you. You know that. We're concerned."

"Ah, Halley," chuckled Hank. "You always did find a way to sidestep a direct question. I guess you wouldn't like to answer any more than I

wanna hear it. But listen," he turned around to face his two officers, "the fact is that I'm getting' to be too damn old for this job. I've been talking about retiring my commission within the next couple of years. The admiral is throwing me an opportunity to prove myself worthy of a fourth pip. If I can get it, retirement on a captain's pension is much better than a commander's."

It all fell into place for Halley. Sure, the old man had been talking about retiring, but that was never taken as anything more than a dream out of reach. All skippers talk about retiring on some pleasure planet somewhere, with a boat of their own and a pretty woman (or two) to keep them company. But his recent behavior, the change in his mannerisms, even the rise in discipline made sense to her. He was not simply backing James' seemingly unyielding sense of protocol; he was trying to make sure that everything went by the book, so to speak, to maximize their chances of success. When the shock subsided, she was left with the sense of loss over his decision to leave the ship. She would miss him greatly.

James allowed the silence to drag on, before he decided to move onto the business at hand. "What other equipment did she have, Halley?"

She broke out of her own train of thought to return to the present long enough to answer the question. Halley described several buoys and probes, all modified with cloaking devices and all of them appearing to be primarily used for various ranges of surveillance missions. "There were also four smaller crates, marked for Commander t'Aimne's personal use. All of them were locked with a voiceprint verification system."

Grayum leaned against the back of his chair, while in a mock accusatorial tone he asked, "You were snooping around her stuff?"

"Of course not. She explained how they worked when we opened up the cargo containers," Halley replied, a little offended. "You make me out to be some kind of a sneak. Anyway, she told me that it was mostly just clothing, some personal food items, and other perishables."

James absorbed that, nodding. He looked to Grayum, "One thing I think we do need to determine, Hank, is where our new friend fits into our ragtag group."

"How do you mean?" Grayum asked.

"Is she going to assume a link in the chain of command?"

The captain brought his hand up to scratch at an itch on his cheek. "I know it's a little strange to have a foreigner sitting in a position where she might be called upon to command, but I don't see any way around it. As far as I'm concerned, she'll sit as our Number Two."

"Second Officer?" James whispered, not trusting his voice to keep from screaming.

"Hank!" Halley blurted it out at the same time, clearly distressed with that decision.

A small bit of Grayum's temper made an appearance once more, "Knock it off, both of you. She's a light commander, and she's a key officer." He looked at Gage, "I'm not saying that you need to start calling her 'sir,' or anything like that. Just that if anything happens to me or Rick, you know who's next. So far, she seems to be taking her cues from us and you, Halley, so I wouldn't worry about a power struggle or a mutiny. One Romulan against the whole ship doesn't make for very good odds."

Chief Engineer's Log

Chief Engineer's Log

Stardate 53445.5

The cloaking device is now operating in concert with the ship's defense subsystems, after almost forty-eight hours of double shifts to accomplish that goal. I'm looking forward to seeing the shift end logs tonight, as we're already on route to our destination under cloak.

I would like to commend my staff for rising to the challenge. Lieutenant Commander t'Aimne's expertise and assistance in the procedure was invaluable.

Personal Log of Halley Gage

Stardate 53445.51

Commander t'Aimne didn't exactly make a whole lot of friends when she first arrived, though I think I noticed that Rick James seemed pretty taken with her then. Who knew he knew a little Romulan? I think he puts her off her guard a little. Recently, they seem to grate on each other.

The time in Engineering she put in turned me around as far as she was concerned. Forget everything you've heard about Romulans and their stuffy attitudes when dealing with her and you might do just fine. She comes across as genuinely interested in us, instead of treating us like we're not good enough to breathe the same air. She got to know Heather really well; I saw them exchanging anecdotes in the wardroom during a break in the shifts. Even though she scored points with the engineers, she still has the rest of the ship to contend with. I hope she'll continue to prove to be as charming. I just wish I knew where all that charm went whenever Rick walks into the room.

"It's not that I don't like her. She just rubs me the wrong way," admitted Commander James, seated within the captain's stateroom. The stars outside of the forward viewport were distorted by the effect of subspace, and immediately below those large ports was the captain's reception area, consisting of a couch and five chairs around a coffee table.

Grayum was stretched out across the couch, his hands steepled over his stomach as he listened to James' explanation. "Like it or not, Rick, she's here on orders. Truth be told, I'm damned pleased about the cloaking device, but not so much about this exchange program."

Missy seized that moment to enter from the bedroom and into the reception area. James sensed she was doing more back there than arranging the captain's clothing for him. After having served almost three weeks aboard the *Agamemnon*, the executive officer quickly learned to turn a blind eye to any sort of action that might insinuate anything inappropriate. Even if they were engaging in an activity that might cause rumor and gossip aboard ship, they were both consenting adults and knew how to handle themselves. Besides, James thought, the captain was kept in a good temperament. Such a temperament was foreign aboard his old ship.

"May I offer you a cup of coffee, Commander?" Missy asked, with a very warm smile.

Rick did the same thing he always did when she would look him in the eye and offered something to drink. "Double sweet, please," he replied. The captain took his coffee without any alteration or additives. He leaned back into the comfortable chair and agreed with Grayum, "Regardless of how we feel, I would say that she is fitting in nicely with the engineering crew. And she's earned the respect of the security division so far. However, the notion of her sitting as second officer just doesn't sit well with me. Ah, thank you, Missy." He accepted the cup and saucer from the captain's yeoman.

Captain Grayum sat up, to sip at his coffee set before him. "You're a good woman, Missy. Thank you, and I'll see you later." It was his way of telling her to be somewhere else for a while, without coming across as rude to her. Of course, there was very little that anyone supposed would upset Missy to a point where she would lose that smile of hers. Once she departed the stateroom, he continued the conversation, "Let me ask you another direct question. You think she's a threat to the chain of command?"

It was direct enough of a question to give Rick pause before responding. Did he honestly feel that she was threat to their leadership? And if so, what could they do about it? It was only a suspicion, not any proof that she was conducting herself contrary to what was expected of her. She happened to be a Romulan officer aboard a Federation ship, acting with authority as though her commission came from the Federation Council instead of the Romulan Senate. What damage could she do to the ship before he could act to prevent her? He tried to reason within himself the kind of answer that the captain deserved. It was a yes or no question and he was waiting for either. At last, he lowered his eyes to his coffee and responded. "I don't know."

"That makes two of us," admitted Hank. "But you do think she bears some watching, right?"

"Of course, sir. That goes without saying, and it's something she would probably expect."

This drew a scrutinizing stare from Hank. "There's something I've been meaning to ask you... where in the hell did you learn to speak Romulan?"

Rick nearly inhaled his coffee rather than drinking it. It was the manner of the question, the jovial tone of the captain's voice, as though perhaps he himself were a Romulan spy aboard Hank's ship. And it was true, not a single soul aboard knew as much as the executive officer when it came to the language and the customs of the Romulans. But that was easily explained. "I don't speak it fluently. I just know a few choices phrases and the ranks of the Galae. Uh, that's what they call their main military fleet. Back on the *Fearless*, during the war, we had

two Rihannsu officers serving as liaisons to the Romulan attack wing we were assigned to. I got to know both of them fairly well. Add to that a natural ear for languages, and well, you'll end up picking up a lot of the words. Amazingly enough, they were willing to teach."

"No kidding," remarked the captain. "I've met some Romulans in my time, and every single one always seemed to look at you as though you were something they scraped off their boot."

"Same here. And for a while, that was how it seemed at the very beginning of their stay with us. Both of them wouldn't look at you to spit on you," Rick reminisced, looking toward the stars again. "After the first couple of engagements, though, they started to loosen up. The senior officer was a khre'Arrain, and the junior was an Arrain; a lieutenant commander and a lieutenant, respectively."

Hank chuckled, "Well, if you don't mind an amateur opinion, but I think you picked up the dialect enough to scare poor t'Aimne."

Rick nodded, remembering that scene in the conference room. "Speaking of which, she's royalty. Or at least, in her house, she is. The t' prefix is significant. She would be a Lady of the House of Aimne, if I'm recalling the naming structure correctly."

"She sure doesn't act like royalty."

Chief Munoz, Ensign Low, Lieutenant Gage, and khre'Arrain t'Aimne sat in the wardroom surrounding a curious looking dish of food. Around them stood many other officers looking on in interest at the dish, and to see if Heather, Rittian, or Halley would be brave enough to sample t'Aimne's offering.

Rittian asked, "What's this called again?"

"Viinerine," replied t'Aimne in a proud tone. "It's a traditional dish, often shared by officers serving on a Rihannsu ship. The strips are made from a root grown near the Fethraie River on my home world, and seasoned with a mixture of tangy spices."

"I didn't know that you programmed the replicators to make Romulan dishes," Halley said.

"This isn't replicated matter, Lieutenant," the khre'Arrain looked at her. "It would be an offense to offer replicated viinerine to the compliment of officers."

Heather blinked, her tone incredulous, "Are you trying to tell us that you made this by hand?"

t'Aimne said in a matter-of-fact tone, "To do otherwise would risk insult."

Rittian made a gesture with his head, reaching over to poke at one of the strips with a fork. "If you don't mind, I'll just go ahead and take a taste."

His hand never made it, arrested by t'Aimne's. "Ensign. Lieutenant Gage is the senior officer present. She has the honor of being first."

Halley's expression was one of astonishment at the way t'Aimne grabbed Rittian's hand. "Whoa, hey, wait a minute. I don't know how things go on board Romulan ships, but here we just serve ourselves."

Righting her stance, t'Aimne released Rittian's hand, "My apologies to you, Ensign. A misunderstanding, of course."

Rittian looked at his hand, rubbing at his wrist, "You have a very strong hand, Commander."

Halley smirked, "That's what you get for having no manners." She was trying to diffuse what was obviously a culture clash. "All jokes aside, we definitely appreciate the gesture. And now, I'll do the honors." Looking down at the dish, she realized that she was not learned in how to serve herself. Rather than risking further misunderstandings, she asked, "Why don't you just put it in the plate for me?"

"Of course," t'Aimne nodded. She took a large flipper-like utensil and sliced a long strip from the whole, and without breaking it, places it gingerly upon the plate proffered by Halley. Heather and Ritter both hold up their plates and she repeats her motion until all three officers have a portion of the viinerine in front of them.

"Here goes," said Halley. She took a medium-sized bite from the piece and placed it into her mouth. To her right and left, the transporter chief and the helmsman followed suit. Unfortunately, the bite never passed any further than her tongue. Coughing, she spit the piece back out into her hand before waving at her mouth and requesting something to drink in an immediate fashion. t'Aimne's nonplussed expression became one of concern, turning around to fetch a glass of water from the replicator.

"Are you all right?" asked Rittian, as Halley drained her glass.

Nodding her head while trying to put out the flames, she finally gasped for air and said, "I'll be all right. I think those Romulan spices were not meant for us mortals."

Chief Munoz, on the other hand, was finishing up her plate. "It's not that hot, Gage. My Papa makes some meaner dishes than this," she held her plate out for more. "But it tastes great, Commander. Mind if I have another dish?"

"Yellow alert," called the computer in its feminine tones. "Yellow alert. This is not a drill."

Everything was left as it was as every officer filed out of the wardroom and reported to their respective stations. Captain Grayum and Commander James were already at their duty stations when Halley, Rittian, and t'Aimne stepped onto the bridge.

To the left of the captain at the auxiliary console, James explained, "A Breen frigate appeared on sensors. We've altered our course to pursue."

Halley examined her station from over the shoulder of the ensign manning the engineering console. "Cloaking device functioning with normal parameters," she said, as she gave the junior officer a chance to log out of the station to allow her to use it.

"Weapons systems powered," t'Aimne reported, settling in at tactical.

Grayum acknowledged Ensign Low with a brief nod as he relieved the officer at the helm console, and logged in to switch over to his helm and navigational display configuration. "Let's keep our distance, Ensign," the captain ordered.

"Presently maintaining a distance of three hundred thousand kilometers at our present speed of warp seven. If he alters course unexpectedly, we won't have much time to react, but I'll do what I can," Rittian replied.

"Does our current trajectory take us anywhere near Epsilon?" asked James in a curious tone.

His fingers flew over the console as he plotted various courses for comparison. "We're traveling in the general direction of Epsilon, sir," Ensign Low turned his head toward James to answer his question.

"How general are we talking?" asked Grayum.

"The difference is approximately two-point-nine light years, if we remain on our present course."

James offered to his captain, "Close enough."

"My gut's telling me that may not be what it's cracked up to be," Hank replied. "If this turns out to be a wild goose chase, at least we won't be too far off the beaten path. Maintain pursuit for now. This guy could be on a patrol or something."

"Aye, sir." Commander James pulled up sensor information on his console, looking for anything out of the ordinary. "Are we sure this is a member of the faction we're after?"

t'Aimne replied, "This ship's passive sensor package does not provide enough information on the frigate to make that determination. Switching to active sensors would reveal our presence."

A alarm began to sound at the helm, to which Rittian reported, "They're accelerating, their speed is now warp eight."

Grayum responded, "Wait until we've got another three hundred thousand kilometers between us and then match speed."

"Stand by, sir," the ensign replied, keeping an eye on the distance readout. "Target distance achieved, we are now matching their acceleration curve."

"Call out your speed, Ensign," ordered James.

"Aye, sir. Now at warp eight-point-five," Rittian answered, keeping his eyes on the helm display before him.

t'Aimne reported from the tactical position, "Cloaking device efficiency is decreasing as we continue to match their acceleration, Captain. If we increase speed to warp nine, I cannot give any assurances as to the device's..."

Rittian called out, "We are now at warp nine and holding. He's up to something, Captain."

"On screen," said Grayum.

The viewscreen blinked once to show the Breen frigate turning slightly, the bow of the ship angling from port to starboard in a very slight movement, but not so slight as to go undetected by the naked eye. Suddenly, the ship angled sharply and fired a single blue beam toward the *Agamemnon*. When the beam struck the ship, the cloaking device's field was penetrated. They had been discovered.

James held on to the auxiliary console as the ship suffered a direct hit to the hull. To his far left, Gage was redirecting damage control teams to the proper areas with multiple keystrokes on her console. t'Aimne looked to Grayum immediately for orders while Rittian was holding to evade any further strikes against the ship.

A series of orders came out of Grayum's mouth, his lips curled up in a snarl, "Damage report! Disengage the cloaking device and bring us about to an attack posture. Raise the shields and sound battlestations. Halley, can you jam his communications? We don't want anyone crashing our little party, here."

Rittian responded first, "Bringing us about, sir." The viewscreen showed the stars blur slightly as the ship responded to the ensign's commands.

Gage shook her head, "Hank, they're putting out enough interference to make communication impossible. That hit was a low-level particle beam, so it did superficial damage only. Minor damage to the outer hull and superstructure points on decks two and three, sections four through six."

"Shield grid online and functioning," reported t'Aimne, as the red alert indicator began to blink and the alert siren wailed.

"They were knocking on our door, to see if we were there," James muttered to no one in particular. He looked at Halley, "What kind of interference?"

"Enemy vessel has acquired a weapons lock and is targeting our warp core." t'Aimne said, switching from passive sensors to the more powerful active array. Not only did she get the information she wanted about their ship, but the Breen knew exactly what she knew as well. "Request permission to destroy."

Grayum shook his head, "Lock weapons, but target their communications and propulsion systems."

With the results of her scans on her display, Halley shook her head in an expression of confusion, "I can't identify the type of interference. It looked like a basic electromagnetic disruption pattern, but it's spanning the entire EM band, rather than a portion of it. The good news is that they can't call for help, but then again, neither can we."

"Resetting targets to communications and propulsion only, Captain. May I open fire?" t'Aimne did not look up from her console to speak to Grayum.

The captain nodded his consent. "Fire at will, Commander."

Commander James rose from his seat, "Hank, it sounds like they're on the same mission as we are."

"Incoming fire," warned t'Aimne. The ship rocked slightly, but not as violently as before. "Shields are holding at ninety-seven percent. Returning fire." The beams from the ship lanced out at the frigate, scoring hits across their shields.

"Minimal damage to the forward shield generators, no other reports of damage," reported Gage, checking the *Agamemnon's* damage control display quickly.

Rittian looked over his console, "They're swinging around for another pass, sir."

"They've suffered a loss in power output to their forward shields," scanned t'Aimne. With the active sensors back in use, she could scan the Breen a lot more effectively than before. "Captain, they are no match for this ship," she determined after having run a tactical analysis.

"How's that?" Grayum asked. It was pretty unusual for him to hear that kind of information. In his previous encounters with the Breen, they had always held the upper hand.

"While they hold the advantage in maneuverability, we possess the advantage in offensive and defensive capabilities." t'Aimne programmed a new firing pattern that fit her recent report. "Once they return within weapons range, I am confident that they will be disabled. Do you wish to take prisoners?"

"No. Just destroy their capability to send out a distress call or maneuver."

"Understood, sir."

The captain watched and waited in his chair, looking at the viewscreen intently. As the frigate completed its turn and brought its bow to bear on the light cruiser, it sped up to close the distance quickly. But as t'Aimne had said, they had the upper hand in weapons. Moments after passing within weapons range, she had effectively tore through their shields with a rapid pattern of visibly destructive phaser fire. Small explosions erupted across the surface of the nacelles, and on the exterior transceiver array. It was like watching a surgeon at work, as the beams were handled with such precision.

"All targets destroyed, with a point-seven-seven-eight percent margin of error," reported t'Aimne, who rested her hands at her sides, as though she had finished playing a piano concerto.

James stared at her from his station, his mouth open in astonishment. "Point-seven..." he trailed off. "That was outstanding work, khre'Arrain."

Grayum rose from his chair, not wanting to give t'Aimne too much of an ego. "Uh, yeah, Commander, good work." He turned to look back at the disabled frigate. "Lock a tractor beam onto them and prepare to tow at full impulse."

Captain's Log

Captain's Log
Stardate 53446.9

Commander t'Aimne pretty handily disabled the Breen frigate encountered en route. Without comms or propulsion, it's pretty likely they won't be sounding any alarms for a while. We towed it at full impulse power, and released it on a trajectory that will take it into Federation space. The starship *Bozeman* will be waiting to intercept it and take it into custody for towing to Starbase 510.

We're back on course for Epsilon, at warp eight. Ensign Low reports our ETA to be under seven hours.

Captain's Personal Log
Stardate 53446.91

I couldn't help myself and pulled up the pictures of the strip of beach that Mister Falcot transmitted before we embarked on our mission. There's room for that fishing pier I want, and the depth surrounding the beach drops off enough for that boat I inherited from my uncle. Falcot assures me that the oceans there are populated with enough fish to catch without worry. Of course, the real reason to fish isn't simply to catch anything. It's an excuse to enjoy the view with a cool drink at your side. And on Risa, it's possible to add a sexy woman to that mix.

As for the ship, this whole business of having a Romulan officer is going a little better with the others than it is with me. Even though I have to accept her being here on orders from Guardian Six, I don't have to like it. I thought Rick would be on my side about this whole affair but after the stunt she pulled on the bridge, she scored a lot of points with the bridge crew. I'll admit she's good, but as soon as this mission is over, she will be the next CO's problem, not mine.

"Now arriving at designated point Epsilon," called Rittian, looking down at his console and rereading the distance readouts once more. "Sensors not picking up any ships or bases in the area."

t'Aimne reported, from behind Grayum, "Confirmed."

"No surprise, there," said the captain. "Rittian, take us along the prearranged course. Warp two."

"Aye, sir. Engaging course Epsilon-variation-one at warp two." The helmsman entered in the commands to the ship's navigation system, watching the new trajectory appear on his display. The ship's nacelles powered up as they were supposed to and created the subspace field around the ship. "Warp two achieved. Estimated time of arrival at point Epsilon Two is fifteen minutes."

James ordered, "khre'Arrain, you may commence dropping your buoys."

"Understood, Lieutenant Commander." t'Aimne's console sounded as each buoy found its way from the aft torpedo tube into space. "Buoy alpha-one released. Cloaking device functioning within normal parameters. Telemetry is transmitting and being received."

Four more times, each course, until the Epsilon point was surrounded on all sides by cloaked sensor buoys, that would feed vital telemetry on the sector while *Agamemnon* hid some distance away at the fleet rendezvous point. Once the telemetry frequencies were transferred to the flagship of the task force, the *Agamemnon* would remain on station to act as a relay point in case reinforcements were required. If it was determined that the battle was going well, they would be relieved on station by another cruiser and sent back to Starbase 510 to stand down.

When the last buoy went online and began broadcasting what it saw, t'Aimne activated another command, and the sector lit up like a large floodlight had been aimed within the cube formed by the buoys. It was a tachyon net, to prevent cloaked vessels from passing through the sector undetected. The main viewscreen interpreted the tachyon net appropriately and increased sensor resolution on screen, making it appear as though the sector had been illuminated. Every cubic meter of the sector was accounted for, catalogued, and tracked by the ship's computer from the information provided. Once the sector showed activity by the Breen, the task force hidden at the rendezvous point would advance without warning on the Breen command center and the accompanying enemy fleet.

Grayum waited for t'Aimne to report that the grid was online and functioning before he turned back to Rittian, "Plot us a course for the rendezvous point, warp eight. Rick, stand ready to signal the fleet that the trap has been placed once we're safely out of detection range of the sector."

Rittian laid in the new course and took the ship away at high warp, reporting that it would take them twenty minutes to reach the point where they could safely transmit and await the main fleet. The captain acknowledged the helmsman, settling into the center seat as comfortably as possible.

The mission was all but over, now, barring any further obstacles. Hank Grayum felt a sense of pride in his ship and his crew, for pulling together and carrying out their duties above and beyond what he had generally come to expect. He began to think about who would replace him, once he earned that promotion to Captain and retired from Starfleet. Would they allow Rick to carry on as captain? He had the time in grade as a lieutenant commander and the outstanding service record with glowing recommendations. But was Border Patrol really what Rick wanted to do? He made an outstanding executive officer; he had come to rely on the man for a great deal more than he had with Halley. Halley was a good officer, but she needed more time to mature as a leader. She did well in engineering, but he had to admit that she did lack a great deal when she acted as his executive officer.

He made a mental note to write his recommendation for Rick to assume command as he watched the stars stretch by his ship. As much as he would like to believe that his name carried prestige with the Admiralty, his recommendation was only a part of the process in appointing a new commanding officer.

Once the ship entered the star system where the task force would arrive, his executive officer took care of the rest automatically. Grayum watched them work around him, stealing a glance at Rittian as he repositioned the ship to a standard orbit. He craned his neck around to look at Halley as she reported the status of repairs to Rick. t'Aimne remained at her position, vigilantly watching the sensors for any unusual activity. He did not say a word to interfere or encourage the duties of his bridge crew. Satisfied that he had burned the memory into his mind, he returned his gaze to the main viewscreen.

Commander Henry Grayum relaxed in his chair and enjoyed the view from the bridge of the *Agamemnon*.

Second Officer's Log

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Second Officer's Log

Stardate 53448

The result of the mission to provide intelligence on the splinter Breen faction proved to be a success for both the Rihannsu and the Federation. The task force's assault on the Breen fleet exceeded expectations, I am told. As such, the *Agamemnon* has returned to Starbase 510 for standard crew rotation and the appointment of the new commanding officer as Captain Grayum has retired his Starfleet commission.

I am awaiting a response from the Rihannsu government as to my next assignment.

Halley could not believe it; Captain Henry Grayum was no longer the master and commander of the starship *Agamemnon*. In the five years she had been with Starfleet, four of them were with the Border Patrol. She loved the ship, but she cared deeply for those she served with. They were what made being aboard and patrolling the long borders worthwhile. Even Rick James had grown on her; she had even felt a small bit of attraction toward his attitude. But Hank was like that fun uncle in the family; she felt like she was his favorite niece. He looked good, though, she thought. He finally got to wear those four silver pips on his uniform, and Admiral Davies even wrote him a letter of commendation for his service record.

When the news came down about the promotion, she organized a large celebration in every free bit of space she could find aboard ship. The Starbase offered its massive facilities, but this was a party that needed to happen within the confines of the ship they called home. It was a loud and joyous occasion with lots of drinking and singing. Rick arranged through the port admiral to have the local jazz band play on one of the empty cargo decks for dancing that lasted through the night and into the next morning. Heather introduced Rittian to the taste of Romulan Ale, courtesy of t'Aimne. Hank and Missy danced and enjoyed themselves.

Near what seemed to be the end of the party, Hank announced that he decided to retire his commission. Immediately following that announcement, he turned around and dropped to one knee to propose marriage to Missy, which confirmed a lot of the rumors but shocked a great number of the crew. Her acceptance brought the house down, and the party appeared to be reenergized for another six hours.

Outwardly, Halley gave the impression that she was having fun along with the rest of the crew. However, when the band grew tired and had to leave and the crowd began finding themselves in their quarters, or in some cases, others' quarters to continue the party privately, she found a seat on the cargo deck and looked wistfully at the deck. Rick found her there, by herself, and pulled a chair up next to her.

"When I was first assigned here," he said without preamble, "I thought that this was the most disheveled and slovenly looking ship I had ever seen in the eleven years I've served. I thought that Hank was a poor captain, and that you were a vindictive bitch."

Gage looked up at him, unsure of where he was going with the conversation, "You sure know how to cheer a girl up."

He grinned with amusement at her expression, "That was then. Then, I was transferred here to get to know the ship so that when Hank was forced to retire in three years, I would step in to command her. Ambition drove me to accept this assignment, but now I see that the way things are around here are that way for a reason. It's not about commanding or being a leader straight out of Command College; it's about the people who serve alongside you. On the *Fearless*, I think a lot of the leadership involved a healthy amount of intimidation rather than respect."

"You're just learning this now?" Halley replied, her tone indicating her annoyance.

Rick dropped his smile for a moment, "Sometimes, the lessons don't come as easily to those who did not have the opportunity to learn it from the start. Had I been here for eleven years, I think we would at least be friends."

She sputtered, not realizing that he felt that way, "I thought we *were* friends."

He shrugged. "I thought we were just getting along a little better, but you still hold me in contempt from time to time." He made a gesture with his hand, to indicate that he meant just then. "We don't have to be friends to work together, Halley, but maybe if you would let go of whatever it is you're hanging onto, you might find that I'm an okay guy."

Halley stood up from her seat, her emotions already stirred up about Hank's departure, she did not feel she was ready to be raked over the coals for Rick. "I'll take it under advisement, Commander." She made a motion to begin walking for the door.

Rick reached out and grabbed her wrist, a move very uncharacteristic for him. "Hold on a second, Lieutenant. I didn't mean to make you feel bad. I came down here with the intention of saying something a little less tactless. I'm sorry."

"Let go of me," she said, her voice only slightly above a whisper and her tone weak and weary.

"Will you sit down?" he asked.

She returned to her seat, looking at him with expectant and glaring eyes.

He sighed, trying to think of the best way to say what he wanted to say. "It wasn't my intention to pour salt into the wound, Halley, really. What I wanted to say was that even though I felt that way when I first got here, after working with all of you for nearly a month, I've come to understand and appreciate the way you all handle yourselves." He offered a small smile, "Even though I still think you guys could use a little

more attention to protocol from time to time."

She felt disarmed by his words, relaxing a little more in her chair. "It probably didn't help matters that I thought you were stealing my job from me. But I have to say that I think you make a better first officer than I did."

"It's hard to pull double duty, Halley, don't be so hard on yourself. Besides, if you were the new first officer, who would they get to keep this ship from flying apart at the seams every time we jumped to warp?" smirked Rick.

"Whomever it would be, they'd have a really hard time serving under me," she said quietly. She liked being an engineer, and she understood then that the only reason behind her wish to be the executive officer was only to be there for Hank. She tried to imagine herself being the executive officer on any ship other than the *Agamemnon* and failed. With Hank leaving, Rick would be acting captain by default. And that meant that, "t'Aimne will be the acting XO, right?"

"I don't know," admitted Rick, folding his arms across his chest and slouching in his chair while looking over the mess left behind on the cargo deck. "I guess that depends on whether or not she's staying aboard or going back to the Galae. Without the cloaking device, there's really no reason for her to be here, unless she wants to."

Personal Log of Nuhir t'Aimne

Stardate 53448.5

Recorded under security lockdown t'Aimne-Gamma-hwi-rhi-the-mne.

I have received my response from erei'Enriov tr'Khnialmnae with respect to my request for an extension of my assignment aboard *Agamemnon*. He assures me that the recommendations received by the Galae from Starfleet were posted to my file, and based on the permission to continue my service from the Tal Shiar, my request for an extended assignment has been approved.

In the short time that I have come to serve aboard this vessel, I have also come to understand my former enemy. Perhaps, with time, more of my people will understand as much as I have, and instead of fearing the threat, would embrace the genuine friendship. I don't foresee that happening anytime soon, but I would like to believe that my presence here would help promote that. And if not, then it's possible that my information would assist my people if we should find ourselves in arms against the Federation again.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading. If you'd like some background information about "Agamemnon,:" I [published a blog post](#) long ago answering those questions and more.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!