

Writer's Note: Later in this story, the name of the Kai is given as Unqtei. This name was taken from a line of Dialogue in the last Episode of Deep Space Nine. Where Quark tells Kira that the Smart money is on Unqtei being the next Kai.

All done with smoke and Mirrors.

Anarita Jat checked her chronometer as she drunk down the last of her rapidly cooling morning coffee; she drummed her fingers absentmindedly upon the desk as she turned her swivel chair to face the large window of her office. The Night-fire nebular was a constantly moving swirl of boiling gasses. But to her it seemed to be one of life's few constants. She smiled as a chime from her door interrupted her thoughts. She hastily straightened out a number Padds on her desk as she called for the person waiting to enter. Commander Steven Woods strolled in with a cheery 'Good morning Admiral.' She returned his smile. 'Good morning Steven, what's new for today?' He sat down opposite her, in a black leather upholstered office style chair placing his duty roster upon her desk.

'We have a ten O'clock meeting with the Ambassadors in the main briefing room, Followed by lunch at one.' He paused as she replicated another pot of coffee. 'Then Admiral, if all goes smoothly, the rest of the day's your own.' She smiled. 'Are K'hellenbeck and b'Sel back from Romulus yet?' She asked. He checked his Padd. 'The Romulan Ambassador has prearranged an E.T.A of O'nine-fifteen Station time.' She nodded. 'Almost an hour from now then?' She smiled. Steven nodded.

Aboard the USS. Merlin, Admiral Varr crossed the bridge to where a young Andorian woman sat nervously in the Merlin's command chair. Sirens sounded and smoke poured from consoles that crackled sparked and flickered under the intermittent red of the emergency lighting 'Well done Cadet Yazna. We'll

make a Captain of you yet.' He said placing a reassuring hand on her shoulder, as he ordered the Sirens to cease. The USS. Merlin slowly righted itself in space, as the smoke and flames cleared. 'Did I pass?' She asked. The Admiral smiled. 'With flying colours.' He grinned. 'Battle training program-303 was designed and programmed by Commander Woods. 'And I usually end up losing my ship to it.' the young woman stood up as her cadet crew clapped her from their duty stations. Tactical Officer Andrei Sergeyeovich, a tall handsome human with sandy coloured hair and ice-blue eyes, stepped up to the Tactical rail as a number of officers re-entered the Bridge. 'Well, do we still have a ship Sir?' Admiral Dalen Varr nodded. 'I take it she passed then?' The young man asked. Dalen smiled. 'She passed Andrei, with flying colours.' The Admiral gave him a grin. As they spoke Commander T'Pren a tall slim and graceful Vulcan woman of an indeterminable age took her chair. 'Your Orders Admiral?' She asked. Dalen approached the helm and looked down into the electronic LCARS display for moment, before speaking. 'If we sit here and wait, we'll get to see a Romulan Warbird up close.' T'Pren looked a little put out at his reply, but with a Vulcan it was often hard to tell. 'I've seen the Romulan Ambassador's vessel, and as impressive as it undoubtedly is, I see no real reason, for us to sit here and wait for it. 'The Admiral suppressed a smiled. 'You're probably right.' He said with a slight shrug of his shoulders. He moved back to his chair, before turning to the Deltan woman at the helm. 'Ensign Saril, take us once around the station at our current orbital distance, half impulse speed, direction at helm's

discretion, then turn us for home.' The Admiral sat down.

'Aye Sir!' The woman replied. He then turned to face T'Pren, and hiding his smile. 'Oh and be careful Ensign, there's a cloaked Romulan ship out there somewhere. Please try not to hit it.' The Deltan woman grinned mischievously, as the Admiral winked at her.

Meanwhile- upon the station, Bajoran Ambassador Madia Amme was sorting out the last few pads for her morning meeting, as Evad walked in doing up the collar of his Uniform. Madia glanced up and smiled, as she offered him a piece of spicy Hasperat. 'Breakfast?' She asked. He took a bite before wiping his hands on a yellow paper napkin. 'That's good!' he said with a gasp. 'Where did you get real Hasperat?' Madia raised her eyebrows playfully. 'There's a new Bajoran Delicatessen on the stations promenade; and they make six kinds of authentic Hasperat. This-' She said pointing to the spicy Burrito style dish. 'They say, is made to a three hundred year old recipe.' He took another bite, the delicious spices almost made his eyes water, as good Hasperat is likely to do. 'It's one of four new Bajoran businesses to come to the station in the last month. Do you know, that I can now get Bajoran fruit loaf delivered to my office? And it's still warm from the oven, when it arrives.' He laughed. 'Prophets be praised.' She nodded. 'Praised indeed! At this rate I'm either going to have to improve my Willpower, or spend more time in the station's gym.' He gave her an understanding grin through a mouthful of Hasperat.

Aboard the Romulan Ambassador's ship, b'Sel stroked her eyes with the back of her hand and yawned as she sat to the right of K'hellenbeck's command chair. He looked over to her and gave her a rare smile. It was as the Romulan Warbird Ra'kholh (Avenger) approached the

Starbases outer defence perimeter, that he spoke. 'Tired?' He asked. She nodded touching the back of his hand. 'Between sightseeing on Romulus with three children, and those long meetings with the new Romulan Senate, I'm just feeling a little drained.' He nodded.

'If you had been on Romulus a few years back, you'd have been arrested, perhaps even executed for espionage.' He said in a hushed conspiratorial tone. She grinned. 'I was on Romulus a few years back.' She retorted playfully. His eyes widened. 'Really?' He asked. She grinned. K'hellenbeck sighed sadly. 'It feels strange that my Homeworld is changing so fast. I mean it's only a little over a year since the entire Senate was wiped out. Then a couple of months later, we have elections and a number of Unificationists get themselves voted into the new Senate. Now there's even talk of both the Klingons and the Federation building Embassies on Romulus.' She looked up, as the circular disk of the Starbase appeared as a distant object on the forward scanner. 'Klingons on Romulus.' She joked. 'Well I suppose Stranger things have happened.' She whispered. He raised his hand slowly, giving the signal for his ship to de-cloak. The huge vessel turned almost lazily through space to line up with the station, for its final approach.

The USS. Merlin moved in a slow starboard arc, it was as they did so that a yellow blip appeared on the Operations console where Betazoid Ops. Officer Lieutenant Talyn Zawahl sat. 'That's odd.' Talyn said, turning his head to face the Admiral. Dalen stood up and moved to stand beside him. 'What's odd?' He asked. 'There's a ship out there, giving off some very strange readings.' Admiral Varr turned towards Tactical. Andrei nodded. 'I've got it too Sir, and he's right! Their engine's power readings are intermittent at best; they must have sustained some damage to one of their nacelles. I'm picking up an overly long

plasma trail, my guess is that they must have been venting their plasma very slowly for hours, to avoid a complete core shutdown, or at worst a breach.' Dalen scratched his beard as he thought. 'I suppose we better go take a look.' He sat back in his chair as he flicked a small blue switch set within his chair's armrest to activate the ship's internal communications. 'Doctor Ryan.' He said calmly. Doctor Maggie Ryan the Merlin's red-haired, green-eyed, Irish Chief Medical Officer sat beside her Medical computer. She had just put a chocolate biscuit in her mouth as she read a fascinating paper on Slowing Cellular degradation in Bolians. 'We're about to investigate a damaged ship.' Admiral Varr informed her. She swallowed a mouthful of biscuit and washed it down with the last of her milk. 'How many survivors are we expecting?' She paused, before continuing. 'And what are their known conditions?' She asked, as she lowered the screen of her desk console. 'I'm not sure yet Doctor. But I'd like you to make yourself available for an away team.' She nodded.

'When?' She asked.

'Best pack your Med-kit Doctor, and get yourself down to Transporter room three.' She smiled.

'Aye Sir!' Dalen flicked the switch for a second time and moved his finger to the Com-switch for Main Engineering. 'Lieutenant Malgern, are you busy at the moment?' The blue skinned Benzite stepped away from the Central engineering console. 'Nothing, I can't put down for a while Sir, We've almost finished our monthly level three diagnostic down here.' Dalen nodded.

'Good! Then I have a little job for you, the Doc will soon be waiting for you in transporter room three. We've picked up a ship that seems to be having engine problems, I'd like you to pick yourself a small team, and go take a look.' The Benzite looked around the room before speaking. 'Rodriguez, Sovok, get your tool-belts and follow me to transporter room three.' Dalen flicked off the Com, before turning to

face Lieutenant Sarah Walkinghorse at the Security station. Her long black hair glistened, it had been held back by a feather patterned leather Navajo headband. 'Sarah, pick yourself a couple of ensigns. I'd like you, to go take a look at this vessel.'

'Aye Sir, Lucas, Haines, Grab yourselves a hand Phaser, you're with me.'

Eight figures dematerialised aboard the Alien vessel. The lights were out as they arrived. Sarah switched on her Sims beacon. (A pair of small flashlights strapped to her wrist guard.) The others followed suit. Under the glare of the Officers flashlights the walls of the room that they had arrived in were full of boxes painted with stars and moons and various other strange symbols. The walls were lined with ornate gold frames, each held a picture of a series of men dressed in old-fashioned cloaks and tuxedos. Another picture showed a woman in a golden catsuit posing or dancing around various boxes. 'Ensign Tanya Lucas stepped closer to a picture. 'He's a Magician?' She said with a grin. 'A Magician my Dear?' Came a mysterious voice, as a man dressed in a tuxedo and a red-lined black cloak carrying a top hat and cane stepped out of a white flash and the resulting cloud of purple smoke. 'I am The Magician!' The elderly Terran man said theatrically. 'My name is Marvello, Marvello the Magician!' Sarah smiled as she stepped forward. 'I'm Lieutenant Sarah Walkinghorse; I'm the Assistant Chief of Security aboard the USS. Merlin.' The old man grinned; as a red silk rose appeared in his hand as he extended it. She fixed her eyes on it with a slight shrug, as her shoulders dropped. 'Sorry my dear.' He apologised. 'Force of habit, I'm afraid.' He explained. 'Merlin you say?' She nodded. 'A magical name?' He said thoughtfully. 'A magical name indeed.' He repeated, as he pushed a button atop his cane. Sarah stepped back cautiously. 'Sorry my dear, I didn't

mean to make you jump. I'm afraid we had a little problem out near the edge of that cursed red nebular. I reckon we must have hit something; there was a loud bang, and all the lights went out. My ship, the Presto is rather old.' He explained. 'And though I hate to admit it, she hasn't had a good service in years.' Sarah nodded at the tale out of polite curiosity, before tapping her com-badge, and hearing a bleep. 'Admiral, the owner of this ship, that he calls the Presto, claims to have hit something, probably a small meteor, out on the far edge of the nebular. Several ships have been reported damaged there in recent months. He's going to need a Starbase layover to check out the damage.' She paused in her report, before continuing. 'Perhaps you could ask for Lieutenant Cornell to extend the Starbases small Engineering repair cradle.' Admiral Varr glanced around the bridge, as he let her words sink in. 'Okay Lieutenant, have your team render any repairs and assistance needed, prior to towing' Doctor Ryan raised her medical Tricorder as they spoke. Beside her stood her nurse Michael Umbarto, a lightly bearded dark skinned twenty-two year old man, carrying a heavy field Med-kit. 'Excuse me Sir.' Michael asked, as he raised his medical scanner. The Magician looked around himself. 'If you people keep calling me Sir. I'm afraid that I'm going to find myself saluting. It's Marvello, please.'

'This is all very entertaining!' Maggie said curtly, her Irish brogue much in evidence. 'But if you're quite finished with your parlour tricks, I'd like to know if there's anyone aboard this ship, that may be in need of medical assistance. Otherwise, this wreck becomes an Engineering problem.' Marvello nodded.

'I'm forgetting my manners, my dear. When your people saw me tap the top of my cane, I was summoning my crew.' As he spoke the door at the end of the room opened as a Ferengi clothed in a shiny red and gold

patterned jacket and black trousers came in accompanied by a pair of heavily made up identical Human twins with crimson dyed hair, they were followed into the room by a bare-chested Orthellian giant as broad as two men and almost three meters tall, he was dressed in baggy gold pantaloons. 'The Ferengi is Lundo, the builder and maintainer of my props, and these ladies are my daughters and stage assistants Stella and Astra. The big fellow is Jell, my.' He paused. 'I suppose in the old days, the term Roustabout would just about cover it.' Doctor Ryan put her Tricorder back into the slot in her shoulder hung medical case. It was as she did so that a Terran man entered the room, an oily bloodstained bandage made from an old t-shirt had been wrapped around his right hand. The Doctor stepped forward, the man looked a little cautious, as she slowly started to carefully unwrap the makeshift bandage. He had a deep red welt across his palm and fingers. 'Her manner softened as she ran her Tricorder across his right hand. 'How did you manage this?' She asked. He shrugged. 'I had to make a manual shutdown of the Warpcore, I was hurrying.' He paused as he studied the Starfleet officers. 'I got a little careless, and grabbed hold of a unshielded plasma conduit.' He explained. 'I swear they could hear me yelling in the Gamma Quadrant. But that old skinflint.' He said gesturing to Marvello with a nod of his head. 'Wont put up some credit to get the Presto fixed.' Marvello gave him a short irritated intake of breath. 'In fact, the only thing that old duffer can pull out of his pockets these days are doves and flags!' The man continued. The Doctor turned to Sarah. 'I'm going to have to get him to the Sickbay. He has multiple second and possible third degree plasma burns, along with some indication of light nerve damage there's also early signs of a mild skin infection.' Sarah nodded.

It was a little over an hour later, that the USS. Merlin arrived at Starbase - 410. Lieutenant Andrew Cornell lent against the window frame looking out over a slowly unfolding cage-like concertina framed structure made up of steel bars, tractor-beam emitters and banks of huge one million candlepower spotlights. It was as he watched the smallest of the station's three repair cradles extend into position. He turned as he heard a voice behind him. 'I hear the Circus is in town.' Lieutenant Christine Aldous, Head of station Security joked, as she came around the corner flanked by a two-man Security team. 'Seems that way.' The Engineer said, as he tapped his communicator. 'As soon as its in place Dan, lock the ship down and let the engineering crews commence their assessment.' He said to the duty Dock-Master. 'Pausing as he looked back at the Security officers standing behind him, before continuing. 'Then we'll find out what's wrong with her, and discuss repairs. Cornell out.' He continued.

Aboard the Presto, Stella looked worried as she turned to her sister. 'That damn fool of an engineer is going to ruin it for all of us'. Astra nodded. 'We have to play it quiet; Dad can't know what we're up to. It would break his heart.' Stella smiled. 'Sod his heart; I'd rather break a bank or two. If this deal, we've got going with.' She lowered her voice. 'Interested parties.' She said in a hushed voice. 'Comes off, we'll be living like princesses.' Astra, the younger twin by about five minutes, nodded. 'But what about Dad?' Stella smiled. 'We'll by him a Club On Risa or Casperia Prime, somewhere warm. And he can bore people with his magic. People who will pay him well, for the privilege.'

Admiral Jat massaged the back of her neck, as she left the conference room. She was looking forward to lunch as she made her way slowly to the private Turbolift. That would take

her back to her suite of offices. Commander Steven Woods caught up with her, as she reached out for the lifts activation panel. 'I hear from Security that we have a Circus on the Station.' He informed her, with a grin, as she gestured him into the Turbolift. 'After a couple of hours of political debate and trade talks with the Stations Ambassadors, and then a long meeting with a three man trade delegation from the new Romulan Senate, she really wasn't in the mood for riddles at least not on an empty stomach. 'Circus?' She asked, as a few seconds later the doors opened into the plush outer office and private waiting area of the Admiral's business suite. The Security officer on duty snapped to attention, as they entered the room. A few moments later they stood in the Admiral's private dining area. A fresh white tablecloth edged in Starfleet blue had been spread over a large dining table. She offered Steven a seat, as a small Asian woman, Anarita knew as Tai'San Li Yung from the stations Celestial Dragon Cantonese restaurant, handed them each a menu. 'I fancied Chinese.' She informed him. He smiled 'Chinese is fine with me.' He said. Making a playful belly rubbing gesture with his hand.

Down in the Merlin's Med-bay, Doctor Ryan had just had the injured man put his damaged hand into the Medical scanner. The stranger hardly said a word, as the scanner projected a 3D image of his injury onto a large screen set within the wall. 'What's your name?' She asked. He shrugged his shoulders. 'Thomas.' He said reluctantly. 'Thomas what?' She asked, as she prepared her dermal regenerator. He glanced down at his feet. 'Thomas Cody.'

Ambassador Ke'reth smiled as b'Sel entered the Klingon Embassy. 'Good Afternoon Chief!' He said. She gave him a slight smile. Enjoy your Holiday?' He asked.

'Hardly a holiday Ambassador, I was there for the Empire! There was an awful lot of hard work to do.' He grinned, as she checked the contents of her desks in-tray. 'Oh come on Chief.' Ke'reth teased, as he played with his pet wolf Taj. 'You spend a month on Romulus's beautiful Zia'trana Coast, and you didn't get a chance to top up your tan?' He asked making a play at tipping her face towards the light of her desk lamp. She lightly slapped his hand away, as she shook her head. 'If I'd known, that you wanted to hear holiday stories Ambassador.' She said curtly, as she read the topmost Padd. 'I would have brought my Children into the Embassy. They're full of Stories. K'hellenbeck's family really spoilt them.' She alleged. Ke'reth smiled.

'Lucky them.' He said, with a grin.

After her lunch, Anarita had Marvello brought to her office. He smiled as he wandered in. 'Sorry I have no tricks to show you. I must seem to be a poor magician.' She looked up at this curiously dressed Gentleman. 'Your Security Chief ran her Tricorder thing, over me from head to toe. She then took away all my little toys.' He explained. 'She even took my double headed Indian penny, it's an antique you know?' Anarita sat back in her chair. 'Whatever she took, I can assure you, that it will be returned.' He smiled, at her assurance. 'My unscheduled arrival seems to have put your crew to a lot of trouble.' He sighed. Anarita's features softened. 'Can I get you a drink?' She asked. Pointing towards a blue China teapot and it's infused contents, which seemed to perfume the air. He nodded as she placed a cup in front of him and poured out a cup of the sweet smelling liquid . . .

Two hours had passed since Marvello had entered Anarita's office. Commander Woods had chosen to sit outside the office. Where he sat and examined the numerous and eclectic

content's of the Magician's pockets. He'd already found a miniaturised holographic projector built into the head of the magician's walking cane, and a pre Third World War American coin that had been incorrectly minted with a head on both sides. He smiled, as the wand that he was playing with became a bunch of flowers at the flick of his wrist. It was as he was rolling a small squishy red foam ball between three yellow plastic cups that Marvello the Magician came into the room. 'Mine I think, the Magician said as he picked up his Cane and stepped back before twirling it, as a second Marvello appeared on the other side of the desk. 'If you like those little tricks Commander.' The Holographic Marvello announced. 'Then you'll love our show tomorrow night!' Steven glanced up at Anarita for clarification. 'Tomorrow night?' He asked. She smiled. 'A magic show! And I can get you front row seats.' He looked mildly bewildered. 'I know the Magician.' Anarita explained. Steven stifled a smile. 'Okay!' He said. 'I haven't seen a Magician since I was a child.' Marvello tipped his hat. 'Then Commander, you are long overdue, to have the magic put back in your life.' Anarita tapped a screen as Marvello refilled his pockets finishing with his lucky penny, which he flipped in the air. As he caught it he opened his hand slowly, the coin appeared to have vanished. He then pretended to pull it from Commander Wood's ear. 'Tomorrow night then?' Steven asked. Anarita smiled. 'Tomorrow night, our friend here and his group will put on their first show here, and then repeat it every night until their ship is once again space worthy. Lieutenant Cornell has pencilled in a week for it's repair.'

Admiral Varr sat and chatted with a short pillow-plump square headed Ferengi merchant. The Ferengi seemed to be a little taken a back as this Starfleet Admiral spoke to him in his own tongue. 'DaiMon Mok, your ears should be ringing with the sound

of opportunity, when this deal comes off, you'll be bathing in latinum coins.' The Ferengi's grin spread over his piranha toothed mouth 'I can put you in touch with a Trill Freight-pilot, who already has import/export trade licences with the Government of Trillius Prime. She can carry your unrefined Dilithium ore, and probably find you a profitable buyer for your grain into the bargain. Before taking the ore to the Processing plant on Trillius Prime's third moon, at a fraction of the price you'd have to pay, if you had to acquire your own trade licences.' The Ferengi's smile threatened to split his broad face. 'Where's this pilot?' The Ferengi asked greedily. Dalen gestured to a table to where Lucretia Nax sat and idly stirred a cocktail of fruit juices with a pink and purple swizzle stick. The Ferengi blinked as Dalen called her over. 'Her?' The Ferengi asked. Dalen nodded. 'Don't mistake a pretty face for naivety Mok, She has more than sixty years trade experience, under her belt.' The Ferengi's eyes narrowed, as he gingerly extended his hand as Dalen introduced them. 'DaiMon Mok, this is Lucretia, formally Orlan Nax, Captain of the Freighter Lady Luck. Lucretia this is DaiMon Mok, commanding officer of the Starship Grevak.' They shook hands. Dalen smiled, Well Nax, I'll leave you and Mok to talk shop.' As the Admiral turned to walk away, she gave him a grin, and mouthed him a silent thank you. She'd been planning a trip back to Trill, for a couple of weeks now and if this deal paid off, she could get the engine upgrade that she'd been promising herself.

The following evening, at around eighteen hundred hours station time. Ambassador Ke'reth had finished up his work early, and taken a shower before dressing in a black Tholian silk shirt and lightweight black cotton trousers. He then slipped a concealed dual shot wrist blaster under his right cuff as he glanced in the mirror while he pulled his freshly washed and platted hair back with a Targ-leather

hair band. Kana sat in his office. She was wearing light framed optical scanning glasses, as she checked a new power transfer coil for micro-fractures, it still had on its protective plastic sheath on. 'I can't believe your going to make me watch some old duffer pull holographic rabbits out of a computer generated hat.' Ke'reth grinned as he slipped a long thin silver dagger into a concealed scabbard within the lining of his belt. 'I thought you would enjoy a night out.' She looked up and grinned. 'A night out?' She asked. 'Is a drink with my engineering team. The last thing I need.' She took a breath. 'Is something that will keep me up all night, trying to figure out how the tricks are done.' He patted her shoulder giving it a slight squeeze. 'I suppose you'd rather be reading a technical manual, or playing with your pet rat, China?' Ke'reth said, picking up her Padd. 'What is this anyway?' He asked. She raised the thin frames of her glasses away from the bridge of her nose, and gave him a smile. 'You don't recognise your own ship?' Ke'reth took another glance at the padd, before dropping it back on the table in front of her. 'Not from a circuit diagram I don't!' He replied. She grinned as she tucked her manual back into her shoulder bag as she stood up and placed the new power transfer coil under her arm before turning to leave. 'I'll need to pop back to the Vengeance, take a shower and change into something much less practical.' She said with a grin as she posed playfully in the doorway in her multi-pocketed Engineers jumpsuit. 'Oh, and this Diagram.' She said with a smirk. 'Is the wiring plan, for the Underside of your Command chair.' His brow furrowed. 'About a week ago, you said it was slow to respond to a right hand turn.' She explained. 'I was checking it.' She said, as she left.

Madia sipped from a cup of hot sweet tea, as she listened to a Bajoran Holographic music box. She lowered her head, so that it rested on her arms

as she sat forward against her desk as she gazed at the image of a young man playing a Bajoran flute, its curved copper coloured shaft fanned out at both ends as the man blew across an opening in its curved outer edge, his left hand touched against the shorter tube of the instrument, while his right played the chanter. The woman seated beside him played a wooden keyboard. Madia allowed her mind to wander as her desk monitor bleeped its incoming message tone. She reached across and answered it. A woman appeared on the screen. Madia's eyes widened. 'Loyna?' She asked. 'Madia, have you heard?' Madia blinked. 'Heard what?' The woman on the screen smiled. 'You haven't heard, have you?' Madia shook her head as Loyna, a friend from her childhood, spoke excitedly 'I've got a new job Madia.' Madia sneaked a look at her chronometer. 'I'm coming to see you.' Madia allowed herself a diplomatic smile. 'When?' The woman grinned. 'I'm on route, and about nine hours away from your station. I'm aboard the Prophet's Glory.' Madia almost dropped her cup. 'But the Prophet's Glory, is Kai Unqtei's ship' The Woman smiled. 'The Kai is making a surprise visit to all major outposts and places where large numbers of Bajorans are currently serving.' Madia sat back in her chair, as she felt a wave of shock pass through her. 'I can't believe that the Kai, is coming here.'

Aboard the Bajoran Kejal Class Vessel Prophet's Glory, Kai Unqtei was seated beneath a latinum plated Bajoran symbol that was almost a metre high. Around her were hung banners and religious tapestries, Unqtei Lah, was a striking woman in her late forties, who radiated a kindly and subtle energy. Her robes were dyed in dark shades of red and orange accented with thin gold braid at its edges. She also wore a simple red felt sculpted skullcap fronted with a Bajoran religious symbol and edged in gold, with a red veil that hung down her

back and covered her auburn hair. 'She smiled beneficently, as she read from a padd. 'What is this Starbase Four One O like?' She asked an orange robed Vedek, who stood beside her. 'I believe my Kai, that it's a Federation Station, out near the Klingon border.' He paused; she nodded for him to continue. 'The nebular is known locally as the Ram-qul, which I'm reliably informed means night-fire, in Klingon. It's an Embassy Station, a floating diplomatic venue, if you will. A place where many different races are encouraged to put aside old hatreds.' A smile came to the Kai's lips. 'A worthy aim.' She said. 'How many Bajorans are there on this Station?' She asked. The Vedek looked down at his notes. 'It varies.' He said. 'But they do have a temple with it's own shrine.' The Kai wove her fingers together as she turned her head to one side as she listened. 'Also each of the Embassies is said to have a standard crew Compliment of around three hundred persons, including Civilian Aides Interpreters, Pilots, Engineers Scientists, Medical team, Military and Security personnel Etc... Each Ambassador also has a Flagship at their disposal, with a dedicated flight crew.' The Kai nodded, as he spoke. 'Then my Kai, there's also around two hundred Bajoran civilian workers, and persons with various business interests on the station, shopkeepers and their families Etc...' She smiled. 'Tell me the name of their Vedek?' The man smiled. 'That would be Vedek Emek Prel, he's a Traditionalist, and one time founder member of the Ornaitia resistance cell, before he heard the Prophet's calling.'

Anarita stood and watched as number of dresses appeared and disappeared on her pattern replicators viewscreen, She was trying to find the right outfit for a magic show, something which her Starfleet training hadn't quite prepared her for. Her communicator bleeped upon the desk in front of her, she answered it, it was Commander

Woods, and he seemed a little agitated. 'You might want to break out your Dress whites Admiral.' A look of bewilderment crossed her features. 'I was in the Command and Control Centre a few minutes ago.' He explained. 'When a call came in from one of those new Bajoran Capital ships, they claim to have the Kai aboard, I thought you ought to know.'

'Thanks Steven!' Anarita said, as she turned off her replicators monitor screen. 'Well at least my choice of what to wear tonight has been decided.'

'Sorry Sir?' Came Steven's voice.

'Nothing Commander, I was just thinking out loud. Has Ambassador Madia Amme been informed?' She asked. 'She received a coded communication on a Secure Bajoran listed frequency about nine hours ago Sir. As you now all Embassies have their right to private communications protected under the Treaty of Alliance. We know when they receive or send, but we don't routinely attempt to monitor content, it's probably all encrypted anyway.' Anarita walked across her room as she spoke and opened her wardrobe, before taking out a plastic wrapped white and gold uniform; she then took down a silver jewellery box that served as a place to keep her medals.

Later that Evening - A message came through Anarita's duty padd that the Kai's ship was on its final station approach. The magic show had been a great success; the station's cavernous Starlight lounge had been amazed and amused by Marvello the Magnificent and his travelling magic show. Madia checked her chronometer, as the Magician took his third well-earned encore. There was now, only around an hour until her Embassy would have the honour in hosting the Kai.

Less than ten minutes had passed since the Kai's ship had docked, but there were already several Bajorans standing expectantly, around the docking port, including four slightly

sleepy Bajoran children who were being escorted by a large matronly woman. Around the corner came Lieutenant Christine Aldous, Head of station Security, after arriving she briefed a pair of duty Security officers standing smartly in their dress uniforms, sending one to backup to the man at the airlock, and another up to stand with the two female Security Officers on the mezzanine walkway above her. She shrugged as she fought a personal battle with her gold edged grey collar. She'd only had two hours sleep, before being woken by the station's Security Night-watch Commander.

Madia stepped out of the Turbo-lift dressed in a pale purple Ambassador's dress uniform, that she'd partially designed herself three weeks previously, as an excuse to visit the station's new Bajoran tailor. Beside her stood Vedek Emek Prel, in his traditional saffron and tan robes, behind them stood Evad, a purple sash over his right shoulder that hung to his hip and had been tucked into his belt so that it hung over his thigh front and back. By the time she had arrived, most of the night's Bajoran commerce upon the station had been speedily closed down, and a Religious banner removed from the nearby shrine had been reverently, if hastily hung over the airlock entrance.

Admiral Dalen Varr sat upon his bunk aboard the Merlin; he was reading *The Vedek's tale*. A Bajoran fable, that Sul Varr his previous host, had read back in the 2320's. A bleep interrupted his thoughts. 'Yes!' He said carefully re-rolling the long Bajoran story scroll. 'Sir you might like to go back to the station.' He looked over to the blue backlit chronometer beside his bed. 'It's 23:16, Ensign.' There was a pause.

'I'm aware of that Sir, But the Kai of Bajor has just arrived on the station.' Dalen swung his legs down from his bed and walked over to his en-suite

bathroom to wash his face and hands before looking up into his mirror, He stroked his bearded chin, as he reached for his clippers to tidy it. A few moments later he opened the sliding door of his wardrobe and removed one of his dress uniforms and a small ornate wooden box carved with Bajoran Ideograms. He sat back upon his bed and opened the box, inside were a number of medals, honours and citations. He took out his Christopher Pike medal, and pinned it to his chest beside his Silver Star, and Golden palm leaf of Axanar medals, beside these was his Starfleet League of Honour, with clusters, and his Grankite order of Tactics. He felt a slight wave of embarrassment as he slipped the jacket over his shoulders, feeling the weight of the medals as they tapped against his chest as he walked briskly towards the transporter room.

He arrived on the Station, just as the Kai had left her ship. It was as he rounded the corner, that he found his path barred by a cheering crowd of Bajorans of all ages. At the front of the crowd stood Barella Elle, a black haired Bajoran woman, who glanced up and held his attention briefly with her dark eyes. The Kai stepped cautiously up onto the platform of the small antigravity device that raised her slowly from the ground; her hand gripped the rail as she raised her free hand to still the applause. 'People of Bajor!' She announced. 'We have had our times of both highs and lows, but we are now following the path of peace. The path of the Prophets!' 'Prophets be praised.' The crowd responded to her words. 'It is for this reason that tomorrow, starting at 0' eight hundred hours, I will be walking around the station giving the blessing of the Prophets to the Bajoran Embassy and other Bajoran businesses here on the station.' Then at midday Station time. I will be holding a service of blessing at the stations Bajoran temple.' A wave of excitement washed across the crowd. 'I shall also

allow some of you to view the Orb of Prophecy.' The excitement built, as the Kai raised her hand to once again still the crowd.

Kana sat in her quarters and fed her pet Terran black rat, that she'd named China. The small rodent bristled its dark fur as it snuggled into her lap, as she hand fed it some thin sliced ketha fruit. She'd had to endure the magic show, even though a sneaky look at her Wrist Tricorder once or twice had revealed many of the tricks. All done with smoke and mirrors, she thought to herself. Smoke and mirrors.

Ke'reth had returned to his quarters after listening to the Kai's speech, it had been a good speech as long political speeches go, a little overly long perhaps, and much of it in Bajoran. He'd used a small device clipped to his belt to record it, and was waiting for his desk computer to finalize its translation. He'd read it in the morning.

It had gone two in the morning station time, by the time Madia had got back to her Quarters. The excitement of the Kai's visit had left her feeling drained; she only just managed to make it to her bed. She was asleep almost as her head hit the pillow.

Morning came slowly as the automated lighting in the Stations corridors gradually became brighter imitating a planets natural daylight. Day Security officers relieved their nighttime colleagues. And the soft hum of night workers gave in to the quiet but building hubbub of day. Soon the shops would open and people all over the station would be going about the business. Andrew Cornell removed his duty uniforms black and grey jacket from its peg, and looked around himself for his toolbox. 'Madia!' He called out. She rolled sleepily across the bed, till she came to face him. 'Toolbox?' He asked. She blinked the sleep from her eyes causing the

delicate ridges at the bridge of her nose to wrinkle. 'Toolbox?' She repeated, as he turned to face her with a freshly replicated breakfast tray. She smiled, as she smelt the warm toast, and sweet preserves, and the choice of dark coffee or sweet Bajoran tea. 'I had my toolbox here last night; Today's duty padd was on top of it.' He said. She smiled through a mouthful of toast and pointed to a small box beside the washstand. He thanked her with a kiss, and moved out into the corridor. An Engineering Ensign greeted him at the Turbolift.

Ke'reth awoke with a start, almost rolling off his sleepshelf; only his sharp reflexes avoided him hitting the floor. He scratched at his ridged brow as he called for the lights. His room was bathed in a soft golden light. He stood up his broad back was covered in a fine tracery of faded purple scars and some fresh bruising, from his helping out with some Security training for the Stations new Bajoran Security Service. It had been Admiral Jat's idea, that People should share any specialist skills that they had. Ke'reth smiled, as he trimmed his beard into its characteristic streaks. A young Bajoran officer had thrown him, a couple of days ago. It had come as much as a surprise, as it had been painful. 'Your getting old!' He said to himself, as he chastised his reflection in the mirror. 'Wouldn't be the first time you got yourself thrown by a pretty face.' He should have seen it coming, and he would have, if he'd been watching her shift her weight forward onto the ball of her right foot, rather than gazing at the line of her body through her jumpsuit, he would have. He'd recognised the throw instantly as one of b'Sel's Aikido hip tosses, from an earlier training session. Unfortunately he'd recognised it a tenth of a second too late, and that was all it took to turn him off balance, and land him flat on his back. He winced slightly, as he remembered the laughter and

applause from his would-be Bajoran students.

A sound that came from his desk console caused him to turn back to face it as the communications screen slowly rose up to greet him. Ke'reth threw a dark red towel around his shoulders as b'Sel's face appeared on the Screen. 'If I was you Ambassador I'd get yourself dressed and get down to the Bajoran shrine.' Ke'reth blinked. b'Sel knew from old, that this slow blink hinted that he wanted an explanation from her. 'Sometime late last night, the Bajoran Shrine was robbed.' Ke'reth heard himself snarl at the news, almost under his breath. 'I'll be there in about five minutes.' He said turning of the screen and grabbing undershirt, He was buckling on his armour over it, as he headed for the door. Ke'reth made it to the Turbolift as he buckled his belt. Kana appeared beside him, she'd independently slipped back from the shrine to inform him of the theft. 'I can't believe anyone would desecrate a shrine, let alone rob it.' She moaned. Ke'reth nodded as the Turbolift moved sideways. 'Some people are without an ounce of honour.' He replied curtly, as he combed his hair, and tied it back.

Barella Elle, stood talking with a pair of Bajoran Security officers, it was rare to see the handle of her hand Phaser holstered against her thigh. She rarely had found the need to wear it, so often went without it on the station. Two Starfleet Security officers stood to attention as Ke'reth approached them, a courtesy extended to Ambassadors. The Security officers where polite, but insisted on holding back the growing crowd of both curious and angry onlookers. The Kai had appeared briefly to call for calm and to postpone her tour of the Station; she also called for the safe return of the orb.

Anarita sat in her office, she was waiting for her Security to check

out the Crime scene and report back to her. Security Chief Christine Aldous was leading the investigation herself, due to the seriousness of the crime.

Christine shook her head as a Bolian ensign showed her a Forensic Tricorder. There were several sets of pheromone traces; also several sets of fingerprints and a strong acrid burning smell, from the industrial laser cutter that had been used to slice open the doors to the shrine. b'Sel gestured for Ke'reth and Kana to approach. The Guards stepped back to allow them to pass. 'What have you found Chief?' He asked. She pointed to a series of black burn marks scattered across the shrines floor. 'Sparks from the cutter?' He ventured. She nodded. That's what I thought until I used my Tricorder.' He smiled. 'What have you found Chief?' He asked, managing to lower his voice conspiratorially below a whisper. She raised her hand slowly from the screen. 'Who ever did this, has irradiated themselves. Kana thinks that they may have the laser cutters power output set too high. She tells me that it's quite a common mistake with inexperienced engineers using such devices. Hence the shower of sparks, and if they did as she believes, it will probably be around two days "before they stop glowing." Kana's words, not mine.' b'Sel explained. Ke'reth smiled. 'That is unless they realise their mistake, and De-radiate themselves.' Ke'reth said with a scowl. You better inform station Security of your finding.' She nodded.

In the Merlin's Security office a perplexed Chief of Security Andrei Sergeyevich, tapped irritably at his screen. The same Error line reappeared in the Transporter log, from the previous night. Someone somehow had altered the ships log, which meant they must have had access to the USS. Merlin's Security Access codes. He ran another deep search algorithm, before smiling 'Got you!' He snapped as he saw a pair of

previously unlisted transporter log entries. The first to the station at 02:43 Hours and a second trip back to the Merlin at 03:51. Both from a small transporter room near the Sickbay. He wasn't the only one who was confused a Rigellian Nurse had noticed that one of the medical monitors had been connected incorrectly. In this configuration, a series of vital sign test signals had playing back into its own Medi-comp for a little more than an hour so the medical monitor hadn't registered being disconnected. If it had, the nurse thought, it would have sounded an alarm. She logged the possible error on her duty Padd, and corrected the machines connection.

Thomas Cody woke up groggily as the nurse rechecked his Vital signs. He grinned weakly. She dutifully returned the smile, as she worked. 'Doctor Ryan!' She called out as she heard the older woman enter the room. 'Mmm?' Maggie asked. 'How's our patient today?' The Rigellian nurse handed her the padd, Doctor Ryan blinked as she read it, as she spoke. The man's body had a slightly raised radiation level. 'Very good nurse.' She said as she walked briskly back to her office.

'Computer, Search Federation records for a Human Male, given name Cody, Thomas, age around 36, 6'2 brown hair and eyes around 185 lbs.' The computer simply beeped and displayed the word "Searching." About five minutes passed. 'Computer records show no relevant record for the name Cody, Thomas.' Doctor Ryan removed file disk from her desk and fed it into to the reader slot. 'Computer Search Federation files for a match for the following DNA sample. The computer beeped again and displayed the word "Searching." Ten minutes passed, as Maggie replicated herself a Coffee. The computer then spoke four words. 'Match found, File Restricted' She cursed. 'Who are you Thomas, if that is your name?' She tapped a

switch. 'Andrei, are you busy?' She heard a slight sound of amusement As Andrei spoke. 'I'm up-to-date with my shots Doctor.' She smiled. Can you come down to the Sickbay?

'I'm a little busy Doc, I've just found out, that someone has altered a Transporter Log.' Doctor Ryan smiled. 'Andrei, we might be working on the same problem, from different ends.' 'Really! Put the coffee on Doctor, I'm on my way down.'

Anarita drummed her fingers on the desk as she thought. It was becoming a habit, while Commander Woods read the incoming reports. 'Admiral!' She looked up.

'Yes Steven?'

'We have a report from Christine, There's a number of unknown readings among those who's Bio-traces have been found, and checked. Kana suggests a signal scrambler may have been used to confuse the readings of a forensic Tricorder.'

In the Sickbay aboard the Merlin, Andrei sat down and sipped his hot coffee. 'We have ourselves a little mystery here, Mags. He said shortening her name. 'Does the Admiral Know?' She shook her head. 'Thought I'd run it past you first Andy.' She said, making a point of using his pet name. 'Curious isn't it? I take it our patient is still blissfully unaware, that we're on to him.'

'Perhaps we could see if Admiral Varr has clearance to access the file encryption.'

Half an hour later, in Admiral Jat's office, Admiral Varr removed his jacket and hung it on the back of his chair. 'I'd like to know who I've got on my ship, before I confront him.' Admiral Jat nodded. 'That's understandable Dalen. I too am curious as to why the file is encrypted.' Before I turn this file over to b'Sel, whom we know has a reputation for an expertise in covert file decryption, and ask her to use her

skills to crack it. But before I do that, I'd like to have a word with Admiral Ross at Starbase 357. She turned her chair back to face her console. 'Computer, put me through to the Office of Admiral William Ross at Starbase 357, Priority Code 47, Eyes only.' She turned to the others present, as her screen lit up. 'Anarita, what's the problem?' The man asked.

'We've got a situation here Bill. I've had to order a Station-wide lockdown.' The man on the screens features tightened. 'This situation, sounds serious!' Anarita nodded.

'We've had a theft, Bill.'

'Must have been some theft.' He said concerned. 'To justify a station-wide Security lock-down'

'We had a Bajoran Orb on the Station, and it appears to have vanished overnight, as if by Magic.' He lowered his eyes. 'Anything I can do to help?' He asked. Anarita looked at Admiral Varr, before turning back to the monitor. 'I have I file, that I can't seem to access.' Admiral Ross nodded.

'You could send it to me, and I'll see if I can access it here.' He offered Anarita tapped the key to send the encrypted file. A few moments passed before William Ross reappeared on the screen his brow was furrowed with concentration. 'Anarita, Where did you get that DNA sample?' She shrugged. A visitor to the station aroused the suspicion of Admiral Varr's Chief Medical Officer, she went to him, and he came to me, why?' William Ross shook his head. 'The file comes up as Section 31 encoded.' She looked a little shocked. 'Can you read it?' She asked. He smiled. 'Using an unauthorised decryption algorithm that I have here, oh yes!' She urged him on with a gesture. 'Thomas Cody, also known as Commander Michael Thomas Covington, he was, or should that be he is? A deep cover field agent; for Section 31, the last anyone officially heard of this Commander was that he was thought to have disappeared during the early days of the Dominion war; Starfleet presumed him dead, and

his file was closed and barred. Or it was, until you and I started trying to reopen Pandora's box.'

Admiral Jat smiled as she thanked Admiral Ross for his help. She then stood up and moved briskly toward the Transporter room. A pair of Security officers parted as her party approached. Admiral Varr smiled at the young Denobulan woman at the transporter console. 'Can you beam us directly to the corridor outside the USS. Merlin's Sickbay Ensign?' She smiled. 'Not a problem Sir, I'll just scan the Merlin for the coordinates.' She then glanced up. 'Okay Admirals, if you and your party will take your positions on the platform, I'll beam you across.'

Upon arrival, Admiral Varr walked up to a panel recessed into the wall and opened it after tapping in an access code. He then pulled out a Phaser and placed it on his belt, before handing one to Andrei, and officering a third to Anarita. She declined as Admiral Varr closed the wall panel.

Command Woods checked his own Phaser, before returning to his belt. As they entered the room they could see that their mystery man was still sleeping, Admiral Varr knelt beside the Biobed and placed the business end of his Phaser against the man's nose. 'Commander Michael Thomas Covington!' He said, waking the man with a start. 'You're just about the healthiest looking dead man, that I've that ever seen.' The man slowly sat up, his hands, one of them still encased in a sterile silver coloured medical wrap-over burn dressing gradually rose up until they were rested lightly upon his head. 'Guilty as charged!' He admitted. 'If you can have me released from your Doctor's TLC, I'll tell you my story.'

Admiral Varr nodded. 'Just remember Commander, you're already a dead man to Starfleet, please don't think that for a minute that I'd have any problem with shooting a sick man in

the back at close range.' Anarita glanced at the Trill; his jaw was set and his eyes where as unreadable as green glass, Even the spotted pattern on his skin seemed to darken.

After a short walk to the Admiral's office, the man sat down, and tried to make himself comfortable. 'I'll start at the beginning.' Thomas said, as Admiral Varr administered a strong painkiller from a borrowed hypospray, to ease the pain in the man's hand. 'It was August 2373; I was called to a meeting aboard the USS. Lancaster, somewhere out near the Cardassian border, Are you all familiar with Alpha 441?' He asked. Admiral Varr nodded. Commander Woods smiled. 'It's near an area of space known locally as the Badlands.' The prisoner nodded. 'The Dominion were sniffing around Cardassia, They'd already approached Romulus, and we'd even had good information that they'd infiltrated the Klingon Homeworld.' He paused, as Admiral Varr sat forward. 'We don't need a History lesson Commander! Get on with it!'

Meanwhile, In the Bajoran Embassy, Madia was almost close to Screaming point. 'All this technology, and they can't perform a simple scan of the shrine! We have a Vedek and two Security officers in the stations sickbay, and the latest reports, which I received more than an hour ago. Say that they were all hit with at least treble dose of an Anestacine derivative anaesthetic gas.' Evad tried to calm her with a cup of tea. 'Ambassador.' Evad said quietly, trying to pacify her. 'The Federation says that a device was used to render the scans inconclusive.' At this rate I'm going to need more than Tea, to calm my nerves. It was at this point that Evad produced a small bottle and placed it upon the desk before her.' She smiled. 'Shinsi Brandy.' She recognised the bottle. 'You're a good friend Evad, but I'm going to need to keep a clear head, on

this one. The Kai will be here within the hour for my report, and I have nothing of note to tell her.'

Aboard the Merlin, Thomas continued. 'We had a report that the Orion Cartel was involved. I was asked to go under deep cover. My name, or at least my Alias was added to a list of Missing personnel from the USS. Oakhampton, one of the first vessels reportedly lost to the Dominion.' He paused. 'May I have a glass of water?' He asked. Anarita nodded to Steven who crossed to the replicator. Thomas drank thirstily. 'Thank you, Had myself a throat as dry as a Vulcan desert.' He joked, as he got back on topic. 'I found myself in a really low tavern on Koralis. So I put my name and Qualifications down on a Job-board, Engineer, Ex-Starfleet, ex Marquis, in need of work. It was then, that I met Marvello. He told me of his travelling show, I took it to be the best, or shall we say the most legal of what I was being offered. About a year later, I was still helping him run his show, maintaining and helping to repair his tricks, and trying to fix up that rust-bucket he called a ship. It was during this time I let it be known that my skills were for hire. It was also about this time, that I started to keep an eye on Marvello's daughters, if I were you, they're the ones you should arrest. I'd bet you my last bar of Latinum, that they're up to their pretty dyed red-hair in something illegal.' He got back to his story. 'Well, a few months passed. It was around the time the Dominion invaded Betazed.' Commander Woods looked up from his padd. 'That would be around October 2374.' Anarita smiled at him. Thomas nodded. 'Sounds about right, anyway I was approached by a Rigellian man who introduced himself as Silas Graa. He told me, that he worked for a member of the Orion Cartel. A man whom he wouldn't name, But I'm told that he was an obsessive collector and Gambler. I was also told that He wanted a Bajoran Orb, Namely, our currently missing Orb of Prophecy.' He

paused to take another sip from his water glass. 'I told him, he'd never be able to get an Orb, the Bajorans only take them out, once every Blue moon, and even then, I'm told that they don't just talk to anyone.' Anarita smiled, finally it seemed that she was getting somewhere. 'They're not only sacred to the Bajoran people, but they're considered as near sentient links to the Prophets.' She informed him. Thomas nodded at her words, before continuing. 'Then a month ago, I was talking with a Ferengi Trader' Admiral Varr's face slipped into a faint smile. 'Would I be right in asking if this was one DaiMon Mok?' The man looked surprised. 'You know of Mok?' Admiral Varr smiled. 'Oh yes! I know of him, He's here, on the station.' Thomas's eyes betrayed him. 'Then he's working for the Cartel!' Thomas said, as Admiral Varr picked up his jacket and turned to leave the room. 'With your Permission Admiral?' He asked she nodded. It was as he left, that she tapped the switch upon his desk. 'Communications Officer, put me through on the Bajoran Embassy's direct line. It's important that I speak with the Ambassador.'

Admiral Varr slipped into the station's Starlight lounge through the on-suite Security Office. Sitting there, at the Dabo table, seated behind a stack of Latinum, with a scantily clad beauty on each arm, and drinking an expensive Ksanthi amber wine sat Mok. 'I think my luck's changing for the better!' He grinned through crooked teeth as he stared lecherously towards the Dabo girl, as he spoke Admiral Varr Sat down beside him covertly pulling his Tricorder, Admiral Varr scanned him. He smiled as he picked up elevated Radiation readings. The Trill then took a couple bars of Latinum from the Ferengi's stash and handed a piece to each of the girls. 'Ladies, this is business, Go powder something!' The Ferengi moved to protest his grievance; his protest was cut short as he felt a concealed Phaser dig into his lower ribs. 'Luck changes Moq; you

should know that Lady Luck is often a fickle mistress. You're under arrest Mok.' The Admiral then smiled as he handed the Bajoran Dabo girl another bar of the Ferengi's Latinum. 'That's for you, my dear, if you would be so kind as to do me a modest favour. She looked a little confused. 'If I can Admiral.' She replied. He smiled. 'Splendid!' He grinned. 'Have everyone here at this table brought a drink, as my apology for interrupting their game, then have the rest of this money sent the President of the Rebuild Cardassia Fund.' The Dabo girl smiled. 'If that's what you want Admiral.' She said with a Shrug as she cleared the money from the table.

Still protesting, although a little more quietly now, the Ferengi slipped his jacket off, as he made a run for it, straight into the waiting arms of Christine Aldous, Head of Station Security. Beside her stood a Member of Bajor's State Security service, his Phaser had been drawn but he held it at his thigh.

The Ferengi turned a darker shade of orange, As the Bajoran officer repeated Admiral Varr's arrest, and this time under Bajoran Law.

Half an hour had passed as Madia made a call to the Kai's ship to postpone her meeting while she investigated this new occurrence. She picked up the small bottle; them decided to save it until her Security brought this Ferengi thief to her Office.

It was as Evad sat in the Chief Constables chair at the Bajoran Security office, that pair of young women were briskly marched into the office. Something about them was curiously familiar. He stood up and pulled at the first woman's hair. It came off revealing a shock of dyed red hair beneath. The woman spat at his feet and missed. He then reached for the other woman revealing another shock of red hair. When the Ambassador

asked me to have you two picked up, I must admit I was a little curious. It's not everyday you meet near identical Human twins with crimson dyed hair. Stella, Astra, You're both being held by Bajoran authorities, under suspicion of involvement in the theft of a Bajoran Orb.' He then turned to the woman standing beside him in a tan coloured Security Officer's uniform. 'Sergeant Bekka, please have these ladies put in separate holding Cells, then contact Ambassador Madia Amme, and tell her that we have them.'

Commander Steven Woods moved briskly toward the Stations guest quarters, a pair of armed Security officers in tow. It was as he rounded the Corner, that he almost ran into a Klingon officer that he knew as the newly Promoted Captain Havok of the I.K.V. Firstborn. The man towered over him by at least six inches, and wore the coveted black dagger insignia upon his fur sleeve. 'What are you doing here Captain?' Steven's knowledge of Klingons told him, that it was nearly always best to be direct with them. Havok smiled, not always a good sign with Klingons. 'Ambassador Ke'reth wants me to serve arrest Warrants for a pair of criminals known to Klingon Imperial Intelligence.' Steven scratched his head; it was slowly turning into one of those days. The big Klingon handed him a Padd, a press of a button switched the writing on it from Klingon, to Federation standard. He read it quickly, as Havok stood at ease. It seemed that the Ferengi Lundo, and the Orthellian giant known as Jell were wanted on several theft and smuggling related charges within the Empire. The Commander was no lawyer, but the warrant looked good and predated his own by at least two years, and since they'd escaped from the Klingon run Penal Colony on Rura Penthe. The Klingons appeared to have jurisdiction. Two more Klingons arrived with a stun net, to incapacitate the Huge Jell. Steven tapped in his Security access keying the door to

open. As he did so a blast of energy greeted him. He closed his eyes, as Havok almost lifted him, pulling him clear of the shot. 'Careful Human!' The Big Klingon said as he returned fire, shooting the Ferengi at point blank range with a Stun beam. The Orthellian charged them with a howl as his huge multi horned head rammed into the Klingons, his head-spines puncturing one of the Klingon guard's tunic. There was a little blood, but to the Commander's eyes the injury didn't look too bad. The Orthellian moved with the force of an angered bull, head down it charged again. Steven set his Phaser to heavy stun and fired point blank. The Giant twitched but continued to run, he had started to realise why the Klingons had brought a neural incapacitation stun net with them. He tapped his communicator badge as he ran after Jell. 'Commander Woods to Security, I'm in pursuit of an Orthellian along Corridor G-12, in the guest quarters, seal the doors to all guest rooms on this sub-level. He seems to be heading for turbo-lift G-level-South-4, that's the nearest.'

Memo was a Soong series Android; He had been one of the late Doctor Soong's creations, an experiment in Artificial Intelligence. Memo had been given the outward appearance of a young boy, but was in reality a collection of Bio neural learning circuits, pistons Micro-valves and Nano-relays. The difference between Memo, and other Soong type androids, was that Memo was designed to grow with age, and to mature as he developed. Ever since the destruction of Commander Data, in the line of duty against the Remans, Memo was thought to be the only fully functional artificial life-form in Starfleet. There was a prototype Soong-type Android known as B4, that had been recovered and reassembled, but it seemed that its positronic relays were inferior to the other Soong-type Androids known to exist. Memo was a

learning computer, one that had been enrolled by Starfleet's into its Cadet Corp.

The doors opened as Memo heard the sound of children's voices, as he exited the Turbolift. He also heard the wine of Phaser-fire and the echo of running feet. He saw the look of fear in the Children's eyes as the wild-eyed Orthellian charged down the corridor towards them. Memo spaced his feet and made a series of lightning calculations, Speed, Mass, trajectory angle of impact, and compared them to his own abilities and reflexes. He then extended his arm telescopically and grabbed the giant by the throat with his powerful mechanical hand, and with this one hand he lifted the flailing giant's feet clean from the floor, with a look of mild curiosity. 'Please stop struggling!' Memo said, as he turned to speak to the children who were wisely backing away. A scream came from a young Andorian girl, as the Orthellian pulled a hook bladed dagger from his belt and planted the tip into Memo's Chest, with a loud clang. Commander Woods and the Klingons arrived. 'He smiled at Memo. 'Nice catch!' He joked the Android smiled at him. 'You are welcome Commander.' It said politely, as he looked down at the dagger in his chest. He then placed the giant into the Klingon's waiting stun net. Commander Woods looked a little shocked by the Android's oddly impassive reaction at being stabbed. 'Are you okay Memo?' He asked the Android smiled. 'Penetration depth appears to be a little over five point three centimetres, no internal systems damaged.' He said as his eyes flitted rapidly left and right across the wound. Before pulling the knife from his chest. 'Apart from the obvious, Commander. I appear to be undamaged, but I shall consult an Engineer as soon as it is convenient to do so.' He said, as he gestured to leave, as his arm retracted back into his sleeve. 'If I may?' The Android asked. Commander Woods smiled, gesturing that it was okay for Memo to

leave, as he lightly shook his head, partially in disbelief at what he'd just seen. He then gave a verbal command to station Security to unseal the doors in that section.

Within the Klingon Embassy Ke'reth grinned knowingly, as an amber light lit up on his desk signifying an internal transmission. 'Admiral Jat.' He said with a practised statesman's grin. 'How can I assist you?' He asked politely.

'I believe you've had one of your men make an Arrest.' She said calmly. Ke'reth nodded. 'I believe that I'm quite within my rights to make an arrest here on the station, Admiral.' He said. 'I believe its article 312 part C, subsection 4, Paragraphs 2 through 6 of the Federation's treaty of Alliance with the Klingon Empire.' He said almost smugly, as she smiled. 'And I bet you could quote it for me General, couldn't you?' She said, using his new rank as a barb. Klingon Generals, she thought to herself, always trouble.

Anarita sat back and pulled her facts together. The Klingons Have Lundo and Jell, the Bajorans have Astra and Stella, and we have Thomas and DaiMon Mok, But as yet no Orb of Prophecy. It was as she considered these facts, this she came over a little dizzy, everything around her seemed to go white, and there in the glowing nothingness stood the Images of Admiral Varr, Ke'reth and Madia, they seemed to be contacting her telepathically. 'Prophets?' She found herself thinking. 'She knows of us.' Madia's voice said. 'She is accepting.' Ke'reth's voice seemed oddly distant as he spoke within her head. Then Admiral Varr spoke. 'She sought the Prophets, and we are here!' 'She seeks to return the Orb.' Madia's Voice spoke from its distant place. 'The Orb is near, but there is another of Bajor.' Ke'reth smiled, a strangely benign smile. 'She knows not, of what we speak.' Madia spoke again.

'Is it of her time, to be revealed? A place of concealment among the food of men and rocks of worth.' The Sound of her door chime startled her and the light, along with its trio of ghostly voices disappeared. She felt herself gasp, as she realised that she must have been holding her breath, as she fell. 'Come!' She called pulling against her collar to get some air. Commander Woods walked in. He looked worried, as he helped her back to her chair. 'Are you okay Admiral?' He asked. She seemed a little disorientated. 'I think that I've just had a quasi-religious experience Commander.' He looked at her questioningly. 'Sorry Sir?' He asked. 'I think the Prophets contacted me Steven.' He almost hid his look of surprise. 'I wouldn't say that too loud Admiral. Talk like that almost landed poor Ben Sisko in a Psych ward on Betazed.'

'I'm going to need to speak to Marvello, about his daughters, I feel that I now know, how it would feel to have told King Lear about his wayward daughters Gonoril and Regan. I greatly fear that my words.'

'Might drive him mad?' Steven interrupted. She nodded. Something like that, Please would you bring him to me Commander, I have some hard questions for him.'

'Before I go Admiral, I don't think you're a fool.' She glanced up at him. 'It was the fool who tried to give warning to King Lear, wasn't it?' He said, explaining his earlier statement. She smiled. 'I believe it was Commander, Thanks!'

After speaking to a tearful Marvello, about the charges against his daughters, she started to consider the Prophets words. The Ferengi's ship, she gasped as she pulled it's cargo manifest. It was hauling grain and Dilithium ore for Trillius Prime, and that would take it within days of the Orion Border. Her thoughts rolled the facts around her mind, as she sat back and closed her eyes to think. Suddenly, her

eyes flicked open. Admiral Varr had arranged for the Ferengi to speak with Lucretia Nax, about hiring her ship to make the grain and ore run. She smiled as she silently thanked the Prophets for their timely intervention. She tapped a switch. The Presto had already been searched, and the Ferengi registered vessel Grevak had been scanned, but she'd had no real reason to suspect the Ferengi until now. But she hadn't considered someone that she trusted, a fellow joined Trill, could be involved, however innocently.

Admiral Jat tapped her communicator, as she picked up her Tricorder and left for the Space-dock. Ambassador Madia Amme responded to her call. 'What is it Admiral? I'm a little busy.' Admiral Jat smiled. 'I think I've found your Orb.' 'Where?' Madia asked urgently. 'Meet me at docking port 51 Alpha.' 'Where did you get this information Admiral?' Anarita smiled. 'Let's just say I've had a flash of inspiration.'

Docking Port 51 Alpha, The Home of Orlan Nax's Old Antares Class freighter, the Lady Luck, a vessel shaped a little like a violin, with its long neck and rounded aft cargo hold. Its hull was a patchwork quilt of Tans, silvers and greys, and its upper hull was garishly painted with a spread of Playing cards, above this was a Trill symbol painted in blue. This ship, that now belonged to his successor, Lucretia Nax. It was a ship that if Anarita Jat hadn't given the order to lock down the station, would have departed at eleven O'clock that morning. Lucretia sat on the bottom rung of her ships boarding step, She wore a pocketed jump suit in a pale purple colour, with a heavy belt. An antique blaster pistol had been holstered on her hip. In her hands was a small computer console, Her thumbs moved rapidly over a set of coloured rubber buttons, to control the game

that seemed to be occupying her attention. Madia's arrival with Evad and a four-man Security team caused the young Trill to jump. 'What the-?' She was about to swear, but managed to catch herself as the Bajoran officers fanned out around her ship. 'We need to search the Lady Luck.' Admiral Jat informed her. A small voice seemed to ring in the young Trill's head; she knew only too well that it came from her stomach. 'Suppose you've got a warrant?' She suppressed her smile; it was only her time studying meditation techniques with the Mysterious Timelord who simply called himself the Inquisitor that allowed her to control her symbiont's sceptical inner voice. 'Am I being charged with something? She asked.' Madia stepped forwards and was giving her a very strange look. 'Depends!' Madia said slowly. 'On what?' Lucretia asked, starting to dislike the way this situation was panning out. She cautiously unbelted her blaster, and after placing slowly on floor, pushed it away from herself with her foot. 'Steady boys, I really don't want you guys to get trigger happy, especially not in my direction, all right?' She said, slowly raising her hands. Anarita gestured for her to drop her hands. 'You're not under arrest Lucretia.' The Admiral said. A look of confusion crossed Lucretia's face. 'So I'm not under arrest?' She asked. 'Admiral Varr put a word in for you.' She smiled as removed a small item from her hip pocket, the tossed Madia her ships door pass. 'He apologises for getting you involved.' She gave a small shrug. 'What's life without a little Excitement?' Madia smiled as she passed the young Trill. 'Longer!' The Bajoran woman said, as she sneezed, then blushed.

Inside the vessel known as the Lady Luck, Madia walked through an arched doorway, and found herself on a safety railed mezzanine walkway around a large cargobay and a metre above about one hundred and fifty metric tonnes of Grain. Another section

of the ship held a cargo of raw Dilithium. Her team arrived behind her. 'Careful men!' She warned. 'You can drown in grain, almost as easily as in water.' They nodded as she started to scan the room, until one of them got a bleep from his Tricorder. She'd found the Orb of Prophecy, all she had to do now was retrieve it from the grain in which it had been buried . . .

From what Anarita had been told. Ke'reth's people had been very thorough in their interrogation, and from what she'd heard that he'd already told Madia, both the Ferengi and the Orhellian Giant had broken under questioning. Both had given a name of a man on Bajor, a man named Jul Tehna, who had broken the Kai's confidence, and arranged to sell information pertaining to the Orbs whereabouts, into the hands of the Criminal organisation, known as the Orion Cartel.

Madia was disgusted. How deep did this conspiracy go? She wondered. She decided to take the battle to her Enemy in person. 'Prophets preserve me! Not only am I talking to myself, I'm thinking like a Klingon!' She said to the mirror in her quarters, as she stifled another sneeze. As she sat her desk a chime rang out as the Kai entered her office. 'My child, I have a favour to ask.' I asked the Prophets to guide me, and they led me to you, they tell of a time for a secret to come to an end, and for a distant wrong to be righted. They want you to make the arrest of a Bajoran Senior Administrator, a man known as Jul Tehna, you'll acting for the Prophets.'

Madia packed a small case; the last item she threw in was her Phaser in its holster. She zipped her case. She'd already left several notes to explain her absence for the next week or two. She'd claimed that it was for personal reasons. Not a lie, more a sin of omission. She thought to herself as she pulled on a flight suit and picked

up her helmet. She then took her private Turbolift down to a small private hangerbay beneath the Embassy. There in a corner, under a large polyurethane sheet was her personal shuttle; eight metres of a copper coloured almost triangular wedge shaped hull, mounted with a pair of Klingon designed warp nacelles. It had been a gift from Ke'reth. Okay she thought to herself. He had bribed me with it. It had been a kind of trade deal sweetener, but the deal had been good for Bajor. She'd long since squared it with her conscience, and this vessel was about to come in useful.

Madia smiled, as she re-familiarised herself with the controls, she hadn't used it much since having her engineers retrofit it with Bajoran language control surfaces. She smiled as she found the word cloak. She'd pushed the deal hard, to have Ke'reth allow her to keep the cloaking device installed. She pressed the button, a shimmer ran beneath her pilot's chair, as a greenish glow ran across the hull, before shimmering out.

Two days had passed, as she travelled at high warp. She'd slipped into the area of space known as the Dalcas Corridor; a narrow area of subspace distortion that she knew would shave almost a week off her journey. Due to this, it was also was also the busiest trade route to and from Bajor.

It was morning on the third day, as Madia was woken by an irritating bleeping noise from the ships planetary system awareness proximity sensors. She almost rolled out of the chair as her back complained about Klingon upholstery, or the lack of it. It took a few minutes to get her head around the information on her screen. She found that her ship had dropped from warp, after approaching the orange Class K Planet Andros, with its twin moons that slowly passed on her port side. She rubbed her eyes, and searched for a

Heading that would put her on-route for Bajor.

Another hour or so passed as the blue green of Bajor, with its light wispy clouds and frozen icecaps came into view on her screen, as her vessel threaded its way through the asteroids of the Denorios asteroid belt. Bajor appeared, framed within the window of her shuttle. She pulled up a Bajoran planetary map and started her approach. Dahkur Province was still shrouded in darkness, as she pulled her ship into a high orbit above it.

After making a couple of minor course adjustments to her trajectory she sat back in her chair, and replaced her helmet. She was heading for the monastery near the city of Tamulna. She chose a clearing on the outside of the city, and decided that she would take the Air-tram into the city.

After landing she opened her case and after having a rather unsatisfying sonic shower, she changed into a fresh red duty uniform and attaching her holster to a strap above her hip. She replicated herself a couple of high protein energy bars, in what Klingons called black chocolate flavour. She opened one and bit into it, it had strong almost bitter taste at first, but then seemed to sweeten in her mouth.

Her Uniform afforded her free travel on the Air-tram. As she journeyed into the city, she glanced up from her seat as a young woman offered her a drink from a hovering hostess trolley. Madia took a Frelberry Soda, a favourite from childhood. It had a deep reddish colour to it, which matched the Bajoran sun coming up over the city, turning the crystalline structures of towers ahead to the colour of fire.

The Cartel Had made an enemy of her, when they involved themselves in her life.

It was as she approached the Monastery that she realised that the journey had taken longer than she'd expected. She could already hear the Chimes calling the Monks, Prylars and Vedeks to Morning Prayer. A man in a Grey and Charcoal uniform approached her. 'Can I help you Sir?' He asked. She smiled. 'Yes!' She replied. 'I'm looking for Monastery Administrator Jul Tehna.' She said. The guard nodded. 'Then you're on the wrong side of the quad General.' She shrugged. He looked back at the door behind him. 'Quickest way to the Admin block, is through those doors, down the stairs, take a right, down to the end of the corridor, third door on your left, through those doors across the contemplation gardens through the large green double doors, up the stairs along the corridor through the tan doors and you should be at the reception area of the Admin block.' She thanked him. 'May you walk with the Prophets.' He said reverently. 'And you.' She replied.

About twenty minutes later she found herself in an office reception area. A middle-aged woman with her hair pulled back into a tight bun smiled at her. 'How may I help you?' She asked. Madia took a deep breath.

'I need to speak with Jul Tehna please.' The woman smiled as she tapped something unseen into her computer console. 'He's in prayer for the next hour, would you like to wait for him in the garden of Contemplation? He retires to the garden after morning prayers.' She returned the woman's grin out of politeness.

Madia sat down near a Bajoran woman dressed in Vedek's robes who sat and prayed with a string of jade coloured glass beads. Madia watched the water from an ornamental fountain scatter across a tower of rounded pebbles. The woman then glanced up at her and smiled, She was elderly,

and had a face lined with age, but her eyes were sharp, bright, and almost cornflower blue. After chatting for a few minutes, the woman's manner changed slightly. 'Can I help you child?' She asked. Madia nodded politely. 'Do you know Jul Tehna?' The Woman smiled. 'I shouldn't speak ill; The Prophets know, it's not my way. But he's an odd one.' Madia sat closer to the woman. 'Odd?' She asked. 'In what way?' The woman looked around herself, and then leant towards Madia in a conspiratorial manner. 'He's not of the Prophets, I don't even think he prays anymore.' Madia blinked. 'I was told by the woman at the desk that he was in prayer.' The elderly woman, who'd earlier given her name as Raorym Vellen, coughed. 'Oh! He goes into the temple, but He doesn't seem to care.' Madia checked her chronometer. 'How so?' She asked. 'They said he was troubled by the occupation; he like the rest of us lost many friends. It effected him, made him sour.' Madia glanced down. 'Are you telling me that he lost his faith?' The old woman looked sadly into her eyes. 'There are days, it almost seems so.' She said. Madia almost found herself feeling a little sad for him, before a thought about the Orion Cartel's attempt to steal an Orb, and this man's involvement returned. 'Can you point him out to me? I'd like to speak with him, I've come a very long way.' The old woman reached out and grabbed the lobe of Madia's ear. She then smiled. 'You have a strong Pagh child.' Madia nodded. The woman turned, as a small sad looking balding, and portly man in a tan suit came out into the garden. The old woman nodded towards him. Madia thanked the woman, and approached him slowly, so as not to alert him to her presence, she walked as if she was heading towards the door. It was only as she passed him, that she put her hand lightly on his shoulder. 'Jul Tehna?' She asked. He looked at her. 'I'm very busy.' He said Curtly.

'I'd like a word with you?' She snapped as soon as she'd led him out of earshot of the old woman. 'I'm placing you under arrest!' He looked shocked. 'For what?' He asked angrily, 'For attempting to profit from the sale of an Orb.' He almost hid his a look of fear. 'I don't know what you're talking about.' he said. She pulled her Phaser and placed it in the small of his back. 'Don't try and be a hero.' The man made a sound, in his throat. Madia thought for a moment that he was going to be sick, he doubled over and collapsed to the ground broken and sobbing. 'H'h'hero?' He queried, his voice almost a whispering stutter. It was then that she realised that this man wasn't much of a threat to her, so she replaced her Phaser in her belt. He was crying, 'Incompetent bastards!' He moaned, 'they've ruined everything.' She tried to comfort the man that she'd set out to hate, or was hate too strong a word? He was pitiful. 'How long before you have to take me in?' He whispered. 'We have a little time.' She replied, as he nodded, wiping his eyes on his sleeve.

My problems started around two months ago. Or perhaps about forty something years ago.' He almost started to cry again, as he tried to compose himself. 'My recent Problems started when a man came here, he said that he wanted to see one of the fabled orbs of the Prophets, He told me that he had become fascinated with them, ever since he'd travelled through the wormhole. He'd even learned to speak a little Bajoran. I told him, that I couldn't help him.'

It was then that he pulled out a padd, and showed me a Cardassian report from the early days of the Occupation. He told me that he knew that I'd been a collaborator, a traitor to my people.' Madia repressed the look of shock using her diplomat's skills. There had been a number of Collaborators during the Cardassian Occupation, but she thought them all

dead or imprisoned. 'I was a young man, a foolish young man.' He coughed. 'No, I was worse than that, I was a Coward, and a traitor.' The words seem to shake him. 'Back then; I lived with my mother in the Rakantha Province. We were so poor, that at first even the Cardassians couldn't even find anything to steal from us. Mother washed and repaired Cardassian uniforms as she listened to them talk. They didn't know it but my mother was gifted with languages. She listened and remembered their words. She then passed it on to a man she knew in the Resistance.' She waited while he cried, again he wiped his eyes on his sleeve before continuing, I found out that he was my mother's lover, and I hated him for it. So one day, I reported him to a Glin I knew. Two days later, I heard that the entire Felia Resistance cell had been wiped out. I'd betrayed my own people in anger.' Glin Darot was promoted to Gul, for his massacre of thirty or more Bajorans at Prylar's cavern. He then came back to me, and told me that he would send my mother to the camps, to the north. If I didn't help him.' She shook her head sadly, as she pushed a wayward lock of blond hair from her eyes. 'He blackmailed you.' The old man nodded. 'First the Cardassians, then the Cartel, I've been a coward and a traitor all my life. The man from the Cartel offered me a fortune in latinum if I could tell him when and where the Orb would be travelling. It all seemed so simple. One more betrayal and I could go to Risa, live out my days in the sun.' Madia had heard his story, it had saddened her, but she still had a job to do. 'If you hand yourself in, to the authorities, and tell them your story as you've told it to me. I'm sure the courts will try to be lenient . . .'

It was the day before Madia's return. Doctor Ryan smiled as she removed a silver bandage from Michael's hand. He flexed his fingers experimentally. Thank you Doctor.' He said with a grin. 'It seems okay.' He continued.

'You'll have to be careful in future.' She warned. 'In my line of work Doctor.' The man said with a roguish grin. 'Always!' And with that Michael stood up, and slipped his hand into the sleeve of his Starfleet Commander's uniform. She lent forwards, lowering her voice. 'I suppose your not allowed to tell me where you're heading? Or even if I should call you Michael or Thomas?' The man grinned. 'Either or.' He replied cryptically. 'And as for my heading.' He continued. 'I'll be taking this afternoons shuttle to back to Earth. Then on to New Los Angeles.' She smiled. 'If your hand should bother you.' She hinted' He grinned. 'I promise to consult a Doctor' He said calmly, as he caught himself extending his freshly healed hand. She took it lightly in her own. 'Good luck, and Bon Voyage.' She said. 'Thanks Doc!' He replied as he turned to leave.

Ambassador Madia Amme had been back on the station for about a week, when she read from her news-feed, a report written about a Prisoner at a Bajoran Penal farm colony. His name was Jul Tehna. The Man had written on the wall of his cell. "The Prophets are all forgiving in time, they are merciful, and they talk to me. There is a place where there is no pain, a place where the sun still shines. Do not mourn my passing." He was later found to have hung himself . . .