

. . .Along Came a Spider. . .

'Captain's log, 56716.2 Captain Alicia Callahan, Commanding the USS. Trailblazer. We're currently travelling along the Seltsian Expanse, our continuing mission to map this area of space on the edge of the Gamma Quadrant. Two days ago we picked up a faint unknown signal from a Class H world. We are currently on route at warp eight to investigate.' Alicia switched off her Log recorder and sat back in her chair as she ran her fingers back through her lightly cropped black hair. It had been a little over three months since they had travelled through the Bajoran wormhole, in one of six, new Nova Class vessels to be sent into the Gamma quadrant, their mission, to search for a possible location for the proposed Starbase Deep Space Gamma two.

Her First Officer was a Bolian Lieutenant Commander, a trained scientist; he was a quiet, and thoughtful man by the name of Zehk. He gave her a slight smile as he vacated the command chair for her as she entered the bridge. 'How long till we arrive at the source of those signals?' She asked. He turned slowly, to face her. 'We'll be within primary scanning distance; in about two hours.' He replied. She nodded, as she sat down before switching on a padd containing several novels. Almost four months ago, she'd joked to her sister Kyah; that at least she'd be able to catch up on her reading, during this mission.

The planet ahead of them was dark and scarred with deep canals littering its silicon-dust covered surface. The Bajoran ops officer turned back to face her. 'Sir!' She called. Alicia looked up. 'Yes Ensign?'

'I've scanned the planet; as planets go, it's not a very inviting one Sir. I'm reading a Nitrogen, Argon, hydrogen sulphate atmosphere ' A surface temperature that in equatorial regions, in excess of sixty degrees Centigrade. Planetary circumference 14'530 kilometres, twenty-two percent of planetary surface appears to be covered with shallow salt-water lakes, with heavy mineral content. Current weather conditions show a sand-storm covering around thirty-three percent of the planets surface, with a wind-speed in excess of two hundred kilometres per hour.' Captain Callahan smiled. 'So hardly a Holiday destination then Ensign?' She joked. 'No Sir, with respect; it appears to be a barely habitable Very hot, Class H rock. With dust storms that you wouldn't really enjoy it; unless you wished to have your uniform sandblasted off your back.' Captain Callahan smiled.

'Well; it looks like an away team is out of the question; at least, until that storm lifts.'

'Aye Sir, I think that would be wise.'

A voice called out, from the dark haired man at the tactical station.

'Sir, I'm picking up a Starship on an direct intercept course-' As he spoke, an almost blinding bolt of iridescent neon blue light struck them amidships . . .

Four Months later, aboard the Federation space station designated as Starbase 410. Admiral Anarita Jat walked along the Promenade; She smiled,

as a number of assorted alien children ran past her, they were laughing and playing noisily among themselves. The warm smell from the Stations Bajoran bakery at this time in the morning was sweet, and almost seductively overpowering. She reached into her shoulder bag and removed her black coloured plastic credit swipe. She was just about to enter the shop; when a bleep sounded from her communicator. 'Admiral?' Commander Wood's voice came through the pin on her chest. 'Yes Commander?' She asked. 'Are you free to talk Sir?' Anarita glanced left and right, his tone had piqued her interest. 'What is it Commander?' She inquired. 'A message has just come in, from an Andorian transport Sir; they claim to have found the wreckage of a Federation Starship, while in the Gamma Quadrant.' Anarita felt her symbiont twitch, at least that what she thought it was; it could have been hunger pangs. 'Do they know which vessel Steven?' She lowered her voice as she used his first name. 'They identified it as the remains of the USS. Trailblazer. I've looked up the vessel, on our lists. The Trailblazer was a Nova Class vessel; NCC - 72326, under the command of Captain Alicia Callahan.' Anarita sighed. 'I take there were no life signs aboard Commander?' He paused before answering, which almost answered her question for her. 'No Sir.' He said, reluctantly. The Andorians are bringing the wreckage here. As we have the repair cradle facilities, that Deep Space Nine lacks. Starfleet wants us to perform a forensic examination of the wreckage.' The words sunk slowly in. 'When will the wreckage arrive Commander?' 'In about three hours Admiral.' He replied. She sighed, as she entered the bakery. 'Okay Commander, I'm going to get something to eat with my morning coffee. Have you informed Commander Cornell, of this vessels imminent arrival?' 'Yes Sir, I've already asked him to assemble a team and deploy the cradle.' She smiled as she pointed to a plate of Bajoran sweetly spiced breakfast rolls. 'Okay Commander, I'll be on Duty within the Hour, I'll see you in the Command centre then.'

The USS. Trailblazer, or at least what was left of her; was slowly positioned suspended by invisible mooring beams within the stations telescopically extended repair cradle. Two thirds of the saucer section had been torn away leaving a rip down through its engineering hull. One of its nacelles had been torn clean off by some kind of explosion, and was floating separately within the cradle. It appeared to Cmdr. Cornell's eye, as if its warpcore had breached, killing all aboard; or at least it would have done, if it hadn't been for the long black streaks, and the telltale carbon burns that had been scorched across what was left of its hull. These burns had already told him, that the loss of the Trailblazer hadn't been due to an accident. This ship had seen battle.

Meanwhile - in a neighbouring sector, aboard the Academy training vessel USS. Merlin, Admiral Varr sat back in his chair. After a week away from the station he was looking forward to being back on the Starbase. He'd arranged to attend a performance of William Shakespeare's The Tempest, by arguably Earth's finest troop of strolling players that weekend. His mind had just started to relax when Betazoid Ops. Officer Lieutenant Talyn Zawahl looked up, and back towards Tactical Officer Andrei Sergeyeovich. 'Did you see that Andrei?'

The blond man nodded. 'Probably a sensor Blip.' Admiral Varr glanced back at him.

'Problem Andrei?' the Admiral asked. The man's brow furrowed as he worked at his console. 'With you in a minute Sir, I'm just checking something.' Admiral Varr glanced at his Vulcan first officer, she looked as impassive as always, but he thought that he sensed a slight pique of curiosity on her part. 'Call me crazy Sir!' Andrei said. 'But I could have sworn, that I saw a spider out there.' Admiral Varr stood up as Lieutenant Zawahl smiled nervously. 'That's what I thought I saw, Admiral; a Terran spider, a big blue-black spider.' Admiral Varr scratched his beard.

"When along came a spider." Dalen said. The Vulcan woman's eyebrow raised around an eighth of an inch, with a puzzled look. 'Sorry Sir?' T'Pren asked. 'It's from an old Terran nursery rhyme, Commander. 'Little miss Muffet sat on a tuffet, eating her curds and whey, when along came a spider, and sat down beside her, and frightened miss Muffet away.' The Vulcan woman looked mildly confused. 'A rhyme to scare young children?' She inquired. 'And one, which seems to involve arachnophobia as a primary response.' The Admiral looked back towards Andrei. 'Have you isolated the Image yet?' He heard Andrei respond with a deep intake of breath. 'Image may be too strong a word for it. It was there; then it was gone, there was just a ripple of background radiation, then; I guess it cloaked Sir. I mean, it's not there now.' Lt. Andrei Sergeyevich gestured for the Admiral to look at the main screen. The image was poor, as the thing displayed on it had only been there for a split second at most. It appeared to be a ship. He had to admit; it also looked uncannily like a spider. Three dark coloured flattened oval shaped spheres connected one behind the other smallest to largest, with what appeared to be eight legs jutting out from beneath the central part of its hull.

As the Merlin went to yellow alert, a message came through on a usually redundant back-up frequency. It was Audio only.

□ YOU HAVE VIOLATED OUR NEST-WORLD! AND FOR THAT; YOU SHALL ALL BE PUNISHED! □

Ensign Saril turned back to face the Admiral, from the pilots chair. 'Short; and not very sweet, Sir!' Dalen nodded.

'I agree; Ensign! Turn us for home. We're on a cadet cruise, no need for any unnecessary risks; take an indirect route, Andrei, you better keep an eye out, it sounds like we've inadvertently upset someone!' The Tactical officer nodded. 'Aye Sir, I'll take us back through the Wormhole, then run at top speed till we reach the Night-fire nebula, our sensors have been calibrated for it, and if we're being followed, perhaps theirs haven't. Admiral Varr smiled his approval for the plan. 'We should also be able to detect their subspace wake as they emerge.' Andrei continued.

'A good plan!' He said appreciatively, as he turned to Cadet Yazna, who was sitting at the Communications station. The Andorian woman's pale blue skin and white hair seemed to glisten under the amber light above her workstation. Her antennae twitched as she spoke. 'Cadet, you better send a code seven encrypted message, warn the Starbase, and Deep Space Nine, that we may

have hostile company upon our return!, We'll give them a wide birth, and hopefully, what ever we've upset will stay with us.'

Meanwhile aboard the remains of the Trailblazer, Commander Woods sat and tried to retrieve a damaged file from the Science vessel's Tactical computer. He was a little concerned by the blood, on some of the screens, floors, and walls throughout what was left of the ship. Beside him lay the feet of Cmdr. Cornell, half in, and half out of a fire damaged computer pedestal. Steven looked up at the flickering forcefield that sliced across what was left of the bridge. Even though; it would not of harmed him, he fought the desire to touch it. A tall green skinned Orion woman, in an engineering division Ensign's uniform, showed him her padd. He smiled as he read it. 'If it's okay with Cmdr. Cornell, move on to what's left of the communications systems, and see what you can pull from there?' She nodded. 'We need to know what we're dealing with here, Ensign.'

'Aye Sir.' She said, taking back the padd.

Admiral Jat sat in her office talking to a man on her wall mounted Communications screen. A man she knew as Captain Thorvald 'Bear' Petersen. She smiled as he spoke. 'Firstly Congratulations upon your new Command.' The man smiled a thank you. He had the fullest beard that she'd ever seen permitted on a Starfleet officer; it was copper red, and like his hair was flecked with grey streaks, it hung over his broad shoulders; standing she knew that he was easily more than two metres tall. 'My old ship the USS. Georgia has nothing on the Valhalla.' He said, making her smile. 'You must have done something right to get her, Bear.' She said using the nickname he'd acquired all those years ago in the Academy wrestling team. 'It was either this; or taking over Starbase 316, from Captain Jensen; now that she's been made an Admiral.' The Trill woman smiled. 'So you chose a shiny new three nacelled Dread-naught?' He grinned, at her words.

'Better than sitting still, in one of these Starfleet mushrooms.' He jibed at her. She smiled, at his words. 'Have you read the file I sent you?' She asked; he nodded.

'I've already ordered best speed to your position Admiral. So I'm currently on route to you, and about twenty three hours away.' He said causing her to smile. 'Good!' She said. 'You should arrive a little under an hour after the Merlin.' He nodded, as she explained.

'Is Admiral Varr still commanding the Merlin?' He asked.

'He is; why?'

'His previous host, was my Deep Space Tactics teacher at the Academy. If we're going to see battle, I can't think of anyone I'd rather take orders from; present company accepted, of course.' Admiral Jat loosened her collar. 'I don't know if you'll see battle, but Admiral Varr says that he believes; that he may be being followed back to the Station by what he described as a giant spider.'

'A spider; Sir?' The man asked. She nodded. 'I've seen the file; Captain, it's more than a fair description. The Vulcans have sent the Escort vessel T'Prelah to assist us. It arrived a little over ten minutes ago. I'll see you when you arrive for your briefing.' A bleep sounded from her door. 'I'll have to go,

Bear. That sounds like Sub-Commander John Telok of the T'Prelah.' She switched of her wall monitor; as a tall thin Vulcan man entered the room. Sub-Commander Telok was half Vulcan, Human on his mother's side; it made him an excellent first contact specialist; an almost perfect blend of logic and instinct. He smiled as he extended his hand. 'Greetings Admiral Jat!' He said warmly.

Aboard the Merlin, Admiral Varr held a minute's silence for the crew of the Trailblazer. He then looked back to his report of the loss of the Starfleet vessel.

Another report arrived as he sat in his ready room. He read from the file. The red border told him that it was the intelligence document that he'd requested earlier. It had turned out that one of the few Starfleet intelligence files that been found on the subject of giant spiders was a file extract taken from a crashed Jem'Hadar vessel.

"Translated File- Extract: We must warn the Founders of these extremely xenophobic, hive minded creatures. They wiped out twelve units of Jem'Hadar troops. They are described as Octo-pedal predatory carnivores, each almost two metres tall. These aliens are incredibly strong and are capable of disgorging a heavy silk like webbing at speed; up to a distance observed at around three metres per second, from glands within their mouths. This webbing has an adhesive quality, which makes it hard to remove. They also have a pair of four pincer equipped upper limbs. Their mouths appear to be a simple hole capable of intense suction. Inside the mouth are six rows of razor sharp teeth protected by three rubber-like lips. The creatures also have ten lidless blue eyes. Their skin has a rocky silicone base, coloured a pale milky tone mottled with green patches, and it appears to be capable of turning a blade."

"Their ships are black, and capable of being rendered invisible to both eye and sensors. They have shown themselves capable of destroying a Jem'Hadar vessel with three or less shots from a blue Iso-kinetic type blast. They seem to prefer to disable a Starship, then using the eight hinged llimbs on their vessel they lock onto their captured prey vessel's hull and then vanish. Damaged hulls are later found torn open, with no sign of their crew aboard. The amount of blood later found aboard, allows us to speculate that the crews were eaten alive."

Aboard the Merlin, Admiral Varr looked up from his padd, as he handed it to the Vulcan woman beside him. 'It looks like we have a new threat species in our part of the universe.' As he spoke, he thought for a second, that he might have seen the slightest flicker of emotion in her dark impassive eyes. 'One Sir

that is reported to eat it's victims. A predatory race that openly seeks to consume other sentient lifeforms.' She continued.

'Judging by this intelligence file, I would be inclined to agree with you. At least until more reliable information to the contrary presents itself.' He said as he handed the report to a Communications Officer to have encrypted and sent to Admiral Jat.

As the Merlin streaked through the nebular, Andrei's eyes watched his tactical Screens. 'You find anything Andrei?' The Admiral asked. 'Sorry Sir!' The man replied. 'It's like radioactive soup back there, I can barely trace our own wake, let alone discern another.'

Aboard the Valhalla Captain Thorvald Petersen turned his command chair to face the human woman beside him. 'Well Kelly; it looks like we'll finally find out, if the grease monkeys at the Antares Fleet-yard put this battleship together properly.' She grinned.

'I'd just as soon, not find that out in the heat of battle Sir.' As they spoke a Bolian Lieutenant called out from his seat at the Tactical station. 'Captain, we have the Merlin on tactical sensors. She's dropped from high warp and is now approaching the Station on 131 mark 26, at little over one-quarter impulse.'

Captain Petersen nodded. 'Any sign of this mysterious pursuit vessel?' 'Negative Sir, but that's not to say that their isn't one.' The Bolian continued. 'The report spoke of some kind of advanced cloak.'

Sub-Commander John Telok arrived back on the bridge of the Vulcan science vessel T'Prelah, after his briefing. He composed as he entered the bridge, masking his emotions as he spoke.

'Report!' He said calmly. The Vulcan man beside him looked up before speaking. Both the Merlin and the Valhalla are taking up a defensive perimeter around the station.

Madia sat within her embassy; She'd just had a communiqué from Andrew informing her that he would be a little later than he'd originally planned. She toyed with her stylus before pulling a pile of Padds towards her. She sighed as she rapped her stylus on the top most padd, before signing it.

Admiral Jat had been in contact with Starfleet Command. They were sending an investigation team from the Judge advocate General's office. She knew that they weren't investigating her, but she wasn't looking forward to having them around. She'd seen many a promising Starfleet career cut short by interfering investigators, who'd barely ever left space-dock, they were people that judged an officer's actions in the field, from the safety of a desk, and often with the 20/20 clarity of hindsight.

She hated waiting; she'd already made a call to the Klingon Homeworld. If her Station was going to be attacked, she wanted all the firepower she could muster and she liked the odds better with a Klingon Capital ship on her side.

She'd been informed that the Ambassador's ship had left Kronos three days earlier. That put him on route. She knew that his ship had recently been retrofitted with a Borg Trans-warp drive. He could be here within minutes, if he so chose. Up to now she'd resisted making the call. 'To hell with it!' She snarled, to herself, almost under her breath. 'You can never have too many guns.' She said, quoting an old Klingon proverb, as she gave her reflection, a week smile, before lifting the panel on her desk communicator and tuning it, to a Klingon frequency.

Aboard the Starbase a small blue-black metal ball rolled down the corridor, it stopped against the far wall as it opened revealing a black small black metal spider around six inches across which after emerging slowly climbed the wall before entering the Starbases network of Jeffreys tubes.

Ke'reth lay back on his sleep-shelf, a slab-like metal plate suspended by a pair of bronze coloured chains. This was a bed, that wouldn't have looked out of place in a prison cell. His eyes were closed, but he was mediating, not asleep. He sat up as a buzzing noise broke his concentration. He tapped a wall panel beside his bed. Kana strolled in as the doors opened. 'She sat down in his office chair causing it to turn left and right.

Ke'reth scratched his chin, as he watched her. 'Something on your mind?' He asked sensing something in his engineer's eyes. 'There could be a problem back at the Starbase.' She said.

'Could be?' He asked furrowing his brow as he slipped off the shelf feet first. 'That's just it!' She answered. 'The com-link opened on our emergency frequency, from the Starbase. But there was no message.' He buttoned his black undershirt as he took a deep breath.

'I know what you're going to say.' She sighed. 'But I've already checked the systems our end.'

'Can we contact them?' He asked. She shook her head. 'It appears that their long range subspace communicator is off-line, all we received is the signal carrier wave.'

Acting First Officer Ahnah Jerran, a Bajoran exchange Officer was returning to the station, after her successful three-month tour of duty aboard the Vengeance. In a week from now she'd be in command of a new Bajoran defence Cruiser, the Prophet's hope.

She looked up from the command chair, as Ke'reth entered the bridge. Ke'reth stopped, and glanced around, as he stood at the Tactical rail beside KIHQaS. Ahnah spoke. 'The fault isn't at our end.' She said. Ke'reth raised his eyes to the main screen. 'So Kana tells me.' He said. 'How long to till we reach the Starbase?' He asked. At warp eight, a little over twenty hours; the Bajoran woman said. Ke'reth smiled, as he stepped down, on to the lower level of the bridge, and rested his right hand on her console; He tapped the ship-wide intercom switch. 'This is the Captain speaking, all hands be aware that we are going to Black alert.' Black alert; was the signal that Ke'reth had assigned to warn of the Proud Vengeance's crew of going into Trans-warp, due to the fact that every external scanner on the ship registered only

blackness and that the erroneous ship-wide readings that the ship was stationary.

K'Taal sat in one of the Vengeances monorail carriages, part of the ship-wide rapid transit system that took him at speed towards the bridge. He travelled at a speed; that without the forcefield dampers that surrounded the carriage the G-forces would have crushed him almost to a paste. A klaxon sounded from an unseen speaker above him.

Suddenly the blackness upon the main screen seemed to leap up towards them, then almost as soon as they had disappeared, a black velvet cloth, full of diamond-like stars reappeared; as the Vengeance dropped out of Trans-warp, and back into normal space.

K'Taal walked up to the Science station and logged on before turning to Kana. 'I'm not sure I'll ever get used to Trans-warp travel he moaned.' She smiled. 'Every time we go Trans-warp I half expect to see my lunch again.' He complained. She pulled a face. 'Oooohh!!! Thanks for the image.' She said feigning sickness, by cupping her hand over her mouth and holding her stomach with the other hand.

K'Taal jumped as a strange metallic humming noise startled him. A shimmering silver/blue metallic tube, fronted by a pair of rounded doors, started to appear. 'Great!' K'Taal snapped. 'It's Jack in the box! Back to bother and bewilder.' He exclaimed, as the doors opened and the Inquisitor stepped out, hanging his tricorne hat on a lever beside KIHQaS's console. He was dressed in a long black braided coat with frills at collar and cuff. He wore an oddly cheery expression on his face, as he explained his attire by waving a crudely block printed concert ticket, written in German, proclaiming a concert by a young man by the name of Mozart. He then looked to the unfamiliar Klingon numerals that made up the display upon the ship's chronometer. 'Good morning, good day good afternoon, good evening good night?' He said with a shrug. 'I've never been any good with Klingon Chronometers. When am I?' He glanced towards Ke'reth. 'My dear General, I'm sorry for bothering you. But I'm afraid that I may have some information on the problems that you're about to face.'

Ahead of them, just visible beyond the red glow of the night fire nebula, the Starbase came into view. Ahnah watched the screen. 'That sight gets me every time!' She said, taking a deep breath. KIHQaS glanced up from her screen. 'Sir, it's looking a little busy out near the Starbase.' Ke'reth stepped forward towards the main screen. 'Identify ships at the Starbase?' He ordered. A Vulcan Science vessel registered as the T'Prehah, And two Federation vessels the Merlin and the Valhalla. I'm also picking up a wreck within the repair cradle; it appears to be the remains of a vessel, our files have registered as the USS. Trailblazer.

Aboard the wreck of the USS. Trailblazer, Engineering Ensign Tommy Walters was checking a crack in one of the internal walls. Something seemed to be lodged tightly within the space between the hull plates. 'Sir!' He called

out. 'I think I've found something here! It doesn't appear on the ships schematics, he said glancing at his padd. Commander Woods stood beside him. 'Can you remove it?' The young red haired ensign looked up. As he stretched his right arm further into the hole. 'I think so Sir; it's wedged in pretty tight against a bundle of subspace communications cabling. It feels like it, I mean.' He corrected himself. 'It seems to have some kind of legs on it.' He said, as he glanced back at Commander Woods. As he spoke; his eyes widened as his body stiffened, then twitched before his body started to spasm uncontrollably. Small flecks of white foam, had already gathered within the corners of his mouth, by the time he fell back stiffly to the floor. Commander Woods looked on, shocked as he called the Chief Engineer across the bridge, while raising his left hand palm up to stop another Ensign from coming too close to the body. Andrew looked confused. 'Power conduit?' Steven asked. 'Not behind that wall.' The Engineer said pulling his Tricorder. 'I'm not reading any power levels in this section of the hull.' He said with a shrug before hesitantly touching the young man's neck. 'I'm no Doctor, but He's Dead!' He reported as a matter of fact, as his fingers failed to find a pulse against the man's neck. 'I don't know what he touched but he's already feeling cold.' Steven looked concerned as he tapped his communicator. 'Dr. Karen Michaels please.'

Doctor Michaels, the assistant CMO tapped her com-pin. 'What is it Commander?' She asked. 'We have a fatality, aboard the Trailblazer!' He said. The doctor looked concerned. 'Who?'

'Engineering Ensign Tommy Walters.' The doctor sighed, as she summoned an orderly with a press of a button. 'I'm on my way.' She said; as she turned to an Asian woman who had just entered the room. Her name was Hotaru Tobe and she wore a blue undershirt, beneath her grey-yoked black uniform jacket. 'Tobe can you get me a hover-gurney from the Med-store?'

'Of course Doctor.' The woman said, as she turned to leave. 'Oh Tobe!' The woman stopped.

'Yes Doctor?' She asked. You better grab a body bag too. We'll be collecting a body from the Trailblazer, and bringing it back for Doctor McKenzie to do the autopsy.' The woman nodded as she left. Doctor Michael's grabbed her med-kit and strolled across to the Chief Medical Officers Office. Sorry to bother you Sir.' Dr. Kalah Fenix The Starbases Klingon CMO looked up from a medical journal that she'd been reading. 'Yes Karen.' The Klingon CMO asked. A message from the repair cradle Sir there's been a fatality aboard the wreck of the Trailblazer.' The Klingon stood up, and approached her. 'Doctor McKenzie is the stations Chief Coroner.' She said. 'Has he been informed?' Karen nodded. 'Good! Then proceed; if you need me Doctor, I'll be here. I look forward to reading your report, and that of Dr. McKenzie'

Aboard the Vulcan vessel T'Prelah The Vulcan woman at the tactical glanced up as the Klingon Vessel Proud Vengeance slipped shark-like into orbit around the Starbase. 'Captain!' She said, calmly. 'There's a Klingon Capital ship moving into orbit. It appears to have Trans-warp capabilities.'

'Fascinating!' Captain Telok Said with a slightly ironic rise of his left eyebrow. 'That would be the Proud Vengeance.' He informed her.

Doctor Matt McKenzie stood at the Bio-bed and ran his hands through the blue beam of dermal steriliser. He glanced up as the shorthaired brunette female form of one of the stations Emergency Medical Hologram Mark 5's appeared beside him. She smiled, as she spoke. 'May I assist you Doctor?' She asked. He nodded 'Please.' Matt said as he switched on the Medical log recorder.

'Stardate: 57521.4, 18:31 Hours Station time. Doctor Mathew McKenzie, performing the autopsy upon 'Engineering Ensign Thomas Walters, age 23 Standard years, Race Terran.' He took a deep breath as he picked up a dermal scanner. 'The young man's currant service assignment is to be listed as Starbase 410. At first death appears to be some kind of bio-neural shock.' He raised the scanner and stopped, as he noticed a little discoloration upon the underside of the man's right wrist. 'What do you make of that?' He asked as the EMH leant closer to the body. 'Possible chemical burns, caused by a pair of sub dermal punctures.' The Doctor nodded as he removed a sterile swab from a transparent plastic tube from the surgical tray beside him. The Swab turned blue showing him, what he and the EMH had already assumed. A toxin, of unknown biological origin.'

Anarita had called both Andrew and Steven back to her office. Dr Fenix, had already informed her of the events leading up to the young man's death, Upon her desk was a twisted metal ball with eight buckled legs, it had been scorched black and twisted by an intense heat. Steven put his phaser on the desk beside it. 'I believe it was this thing that bit him.' He said. 'So you shot it?' She asked.

'The moment it started to move, too damn right I shot it!' He said defensively. 'It had already killed one of my Officers, I wasn't about to give it a second chance.' She nodded, as Andrew sat forward. 'I think it was defending itself.' He said. Steven glanced at his friend. 'Defending itself?' He asked incredulously. The engineer nodded. 'I believe this device is designed to sever communication systems. As far as we know, that was the first system that went down on the Trailblazer. Although they probably weren't aware of it.' Anarita nodded, as she made a note on her padd. 'We could have a bigger problem than a dead Ensign.' Both men glanced at each other, as she continued. 'Ambassador Ke'reth contacted me via our short-range communications receiver, a few minutes before you arrived. He told me that he'd only received the carrier signal of my earlier message, and not the message itself. I now believe that there may be a problem with our own long-range communications array.'

An alarm went off on her desk communicator raising her screen. She tapped it. 'What's the problem she asked?' This is Lt. Drelo in the long-range Communications tower, Sir. I think you better get up here! We've lost more than a dozen people up here! I think they've been partially eaten.' Her voice was punctuated with soft sobbing sounds; she sounded like she was repressing her rising panic. Anarita looked at the two men. 'Get yourselves a Security team and head up there. I suggest until we know what we're dealing with, that you go in fully armed.'

Anarita had already called Admiral Varr to her office. He was on his way; it was as he exited the Turbolift on the Command level that he saw a number of Security guards run past carrying pulse rifles. He tapped on Anarita's door panel. The door opened. 'Come in Dalen!' She said pointing to a chair. He sat down and handed her a padd. She glanced at it. 'I've read the intelligence file.' She said. 'It's your opinion I want.' Admiral Varr nodded. 'I suggest that we work with what we've got here, and order a temporary Station quarantine. I also suggest we raise the stations transporter inhibitors, and seal any external doors.' Anarita nodded. 'I'm glad you agree, I've already commenced a station-wide lockdown, nothing enters or leaves the station without permission, I'd like you to go down to the Hanger, and oversee an orderly search and evacuation.' He nodded. 'I've already warned nearby Starbases and vessels.' She continued. 'Using Ke'reth's unaffected Com-systems.' Admiral Varr nodded, as she spoke. 'I've also requested that Kana, Ke'reth's Chief Engineer send across a clean Mobile Communications array, so we can still communicate inside the station after we deactivate our communication array, as it seems that something to found away to block the signals to and from our own.' He flexed his fingers and straightened his five-year service pin. 'I believe that's a probably prudent course of action.' He said slowly. She nodded, as she spoke.

'I've also set up checkpoints and containment fields in the major corridors.' She continued. 'All the Embassies have been sealed, I've also had Andrew shut down power to all transporters until further notice.'

'Civilians?' Admiral Varr asked.

'I've told a white lie Dalen.' She said, fixing him with a sad glare. 'I told them it was a Drill, for station personnel. I hope we can get this problem sorted out before the find out otherwise.'

Commander Steven Woods arrived at what was left of the doors to the Communications array; Security Chief Aldus had arrived with several Security Officers in tow, all armed with pulse rifles. Steven glanced at her as she ordered her men to fan out and secure the area in pairs. 'What do you think happened here?' He asked. She ran her Tricorder over the twisted remnants of the door. 'If I had to make a guess, I'd say that they were levered open.' He nodded as he turned to Andrew. 'I'd concur.' The big man said as he ran his hand-scanner across the frame. 'But I wouldn't want to meet anything that could pull open blast-doors.' She nodded in agreement, as he spoke. 'There's also an acidic residue on these doors; and some kind of silicon based threads.' Commander Woods crouched down beside his friend. 'A spider?' He asked.

'I hope not!' The Engineer replied. 'To damage these doors it would have to be able to bite through a steel plated duranium blast door, and spit acid at around 600 °C. As I said earlier, I REALLY don't really want to meet a spider, that can do that.' Steven nodded in agreement.

Inside the room, was a scene from a nightmare; the floor was stained with blood in various shades, but there were no bodies to be seen. It was as they explored, that something wet dripped from above, and hit Commander Wood's sleeve. He knew it was blood, almost before he glanced up, almost wishing he hadn't, as he stared into the terrified dead eyes of Lt. Drelo. 'He

felt his stomach twitch in revulsion at the image of a partially eaten Starfleet Officer laying wrapped in what appeared to be a cocoon of silicon thread. It was as they explored the scene of carnage; That Andrew pulled aside an upturned desk from near the wall, to reveal a jagged hole in the corner of the room, a hole that had been cut through the hull plate, into the Jefferies tube behind it. The hole was over a metre across.

Admiral Varr walked briskly across the hangerbay as he helped arrange station Security. His hand rested on the side of one of the Starbases transport shuttles.

An Orion trader approached him. 'What is going on here Admiral?' The man asked angrily. 'Sorry?' Admiral Varr asked, buying himself a few seconds thinking time. 'A Ferengi trader overheard a pair of Klingons, talking about some kind of deaths on the station. Now my Transport-ship has been impounded. I have a schedule to keep!' The Trader snapped. Admiral Varr nodded calmly. 'I understand your problem, I'll have a Security team check your vessel, then I'll authorise your departure, as soon as I can.' The man snorted as he slowly walked away. Admiral Varr stood in the centre of the Hanger-deck, surrounded by Starfleet Security Officers. 'Okay people I want thorough checks on these ships, then start giving them times for departure, fifteen minutes apart.'

A couple of hours had passed since the finding of Lt Drelo's partially eaten body. Anarita put a cup of sweet tea in front of Steven. He smiled as he pushed it away. 'No thanks.' He said, as he shook his head. She pushed the cup back towards him. 'You've had a shock, I could make the tea an order.' She said. He sipped the tea, without really enjoying it. 'I don't think its shock Admiral, I've seen my share of death!' He explained.

'Ever seen a person partially eaten?' she asked. Steven shook his head. 'No Sir, that was a new one on me, and not one I really feel any need to see again.'

For what seemed like the twentieth time that day, she watched as the desk mounted com-screen rose up before her. She tapped the screen. 'What is it?' She asked. 'Sir we have a message from Ke'reth's Black Dagger team, they claim to have wounded and captured a spider-like creature, that they've caught it in Jefferies tube CT2-L24-B junction 421-J.' Admiral Jat smiled to see Steven was halfway to his feet. 'Good luck Steven, keep me informed.'

Steven moved swiftly to the Turbolift, picking up a couple of security officers on route. He tapped the code into a wall-mounted screen, a station schematic appeared. The code was a series of coordinates for Communication Tower two, level twenty-four, the B told him, that it was a location beneath the floor of junction 421 section-J. He'd soon learned to trust Ke'reth's handpicked special ops team. After all, a few months back, one of them had saved his life. A warrior stepped out in front of him. 'I was sent back to get you Commander, Watch your step we had to rip up some floor panels to get it. The creature is just ahead.'

Chief Engineer Andrew Cornell sat at his desk behind a reinforced transparent aluminium screen as he controlled four electronic hands that slowly dismantled the remains of the robotic spider that had killed Ensign Thomas Walters. It seemed to be an automated saboteur. He thought as he carefully removed a pair steel syringes from a pump within what he took to be the creatures head. And placed the now redundant syringes or its toxic fangs within a box. He took it with him as he stood up, turned, and briskly left the lab.

In the Stations Morgue, Doctor Mathew McKenzie, was finishing up the autopsy upon Engineering Ensign Thomas Walters.' He was looking at traces the Venom through a micro-bio-scanner. As several more covered medical gurneys were pushed into the morgue. A few minutes passed before the Engineer arrived. 'Dr. McKenzie!' Andrew called out. The Doctor turned to face him; his eyes were focussed on the box Andrew was carrying. 'Is that it?' He asked. Andrew nodded. 'I came straight down, after I'd pulled them out.' The Doctor nodded as he took the box over to his worktable.

Meanwhile, by the time Ke'reth had arrived, Officers of the Klingon Special Forces had already rolled back the carpet and removed several floor and wall panels, revealing a trench beneath the floor, there sat the spider-like creature that had attacked the Starfleet officers, it just sat there fat and bloated. If it had been standing up, it would have probably been over two metres high, but crouching in a ball, with its legs drawn up around it, it didn't quite fit the description of the creature earlier described by those who had seen it as a spider. 'Is that it?' Commander Woods asked. Ke'reth sighed. 'One of them.' He replied calmly. Commander Woods nodded his head. 'I see your point, if they're anything like Terran spiders Ambassador, they'll be more of them.'

Two hours had passed, as Anarita was briefed on events of the capture. Engineers had repaired most of the damage done by the metal spider; She had heard that Klingon warriors ripping up the floor panels had done much of the damage, and it now seemed the murderous creature had been captured. Anarita ordered it to be taken to a secure med-lab and scanned, so that they could use the knowledge of the creature to check for others aboard the station. So far the internal scans had revealed nothing.

Dr. Kalah Fenix arrived at the bio lab, and after running her hands through a Sterilizing beam, She started to restrain the Alien creature. It was as she worked toward the head, while setting up a series of restraint fields around its limbs that she noticed that the eyes were clouding up. The creature was dead.

She was about to call down to the Exo-biology lab to send up an examiner when her hand brushed the creature's underside that she noticed an opening surrounded by a pale green viscous fluid. She realised what that meant, almost instantly. The creature was female. And it had recently given birth.

Anarita looked a little shocked, at the news. It had been during her time on Earth, that she had known a young man who was into Bugs and spiders, and he'd once told her in nauseating detail about Arachnid reproduction cycles.

Some ate their own mothers, others were laid inside victims, but the outcome was the same. Spider eggs were born in large numbers, inside something they ate. But how many where here, and how many eggs had been laid, and in whom.

It was as she pondered this, while watching a tactical overview holographic display that hovered between her and her office window. She jumped, as a bright blue flash hit the shields of the Vulcan Science vessel T'Prelah, causing its shields to buckle. Ke'reth ordered KIHQaS to triangulate the enemy vessels position, and then raise their own shields and set the Proud Vengeance for red alert that would bring online their secondary power-core. Ke'reth spoke up. 'Put us between the T'Prelah and the spider!' He then turned.

'K'Taal!' He yelled. Take your ship, the Jungle Warrior; I want you to evacuate the T'Prelah. Don't let those Vulcans bully you, with logic. You're in charge!' K'Taal stood there. Ke'reth sighed. 'Do it and I'll get you those research files you want from imperial intelligence. I think my reputation still holds some sway there.' K'Taal smiled and nodded as he left the bridge, at the double. Ke'reth then turned to the Communications Officer, Put me through to Sub-Commander John Telok of the T'Prelah.' Ke'reth didn't wait for the connection, to be conformed he just watched the lights appear on the console before speaking. 'Your shields are down Sub-Commander prepare to abandon ship. Admiral Varr sent me a Starfleet file that tells me that downing your shields, is how these spiders ring the dinner bell.' John nodded, as he spoke rapidly in Vulcan to his crew, before turning back to Ke'reth. The Klingon continued. 'I've sent a ship to collect you! You'll then be taken to the relative safety of the Starbases Vulcan Embassy.'

Ten minutes later, K'Taal slipped into the command chair of the Jungle-Warrior and ran his hand over a row of switches on a panel above his head, as he pre-heated the engines. He then released the door clamps and opened the cargo doors beneath him, as a pair of metal clamps lowered his ship through the hull of the Proud Vengeance, and out into space. K'Taal pushed the throttle slowly forward as he tapped his thumb against the thrusters controls, as the Jungle-Warrior slipped it's moorings and turned slowly for the stricken Vulcan Vessel. He then pushed the ship to full impulse.

The Merlin moved in to cover the Jungle-Warriors approach, as a Blue blast, which missed K'Taal by inches. Taking a blast on its rear shield for its troubles. As Ke'reth watched the battle on his view screens Tactical overlay.

KIHQaS placed a Targeting marker over an area of seemingly empty space. 'You have contact?' Ke'reth asked. 'She nodded. 'If Kana can boost our tight-band sensors to read nano-low level Gamma radiation, within the immediate area, then I think we'll have them.'

'Kana moved to the vacant science console. 'Hang on, I'll give you a little extra gain.'

KIHQaS smiled as another blast struck the Federation Dreadnought Valhalla. 'Okay Kana, I think that's it. I'm picking up a gamma band discharge a few seconds prior to firing.' She turned to Ke'reth. 'I hope you like your spider extra crispy?' Ke'reth returned the smile as she activated the Proud Vengeances pulse Disruptors, and pushed the power settings to ninety percent.

'Next time it flashes, I'll hit with our main dorsal array.' She yelled. Ke'reth nodded his approval as the Jungle-Warrior made contact with the Vulcan Vessel.

Meanwhile on the station, Commander Woods moved slowly up the hallway. Behind him he could hear the tread of Klingon Warriors boots. But these boots were the soft rubber soles of Klingon Black dagger troopers. Not the heavy Iron shod boots of the standard Klingon warrior.

There before them was a Starfleet Engineering crew removing a series of hull plates, a little more carefully than the Klingons had done. There was a smell, which came from the hole in the wall as a bloody human hand fell into view, surrounded by a partial cocoon of a web-like substance. One of the Starfleet ensigns a young dark-haired Terran covered his mouth and turned away. 'Steven tapped his Com-pin. 'I think we've found our nest.' Anarita was about to reply when her door opened by itself, and the Inquisitor wandered in.

He smiled as he perched on the edge of her desk. 'May I have a word Admiral?' She glanced up, switching off the tactical screen. 'I usually ask people to make an appointment to see me.' The Inquisitor toyed with the sonic screwdriver that he'd used to open her office door before slipping it into a pocket within his jacket.

'You're not an easy person to get to see in a crisis. Hence I had to let myself in.'

'You better have a very good reason for this intrusion Inquisitor. If that's still the title you wish to use.'

'My real name is a little tricky to pronounce.' He said with a smile. But that's another story, I know what you're facing.

Anarita looked up. 'Really?'

He nodded. 'They're a dying species known as the Je'Saa. They're from the far side of the Elar-a-teah sector of the Gamma quadrant.'

'Never heard of it.' She said.

It's on the far side of the Gamma quadrant, as you'd know it. About a hundred years ago their nest world was irradiated when a nearby star went nova. It rendered all but a few of the males sterile, many of the females were also damaged. So their scientists created the spider-like ships like the one that you encountered and sent out the last fertile members of their race, to search for new homes. Along with the automated Nurse/guardian drones that I believe you have already encountered, to protect them. The only real problem is that without the Hive-world that they used to inhabit, these creatures became so

desperate to rebuild, there race that started to actively hunt other races as food for their young.’ Anarita shook her head sadly. ‘But you want to know what the real tragedy is?’ Anarita nodded for him to continue. ‘The mother dies soon after birth, so the young can feed on her. Like many spiders the male of the species is killed post copulation. She didn’t live long enough to know that her eggs had already been destroyed by gamma radiation from their own weapons.’ The ships and drones are automated. They’re designed to hunt down meat for her young. Its part of a last ditch attempt to preserve a dying race.’

Anarita lowered her gaze as she watched the distant flashes of battle. ‘Sad.’ She said quietly.

K’Taal’s vessel slipped slowly into the private cargo hanger of the Vulcan Embassy, as another blast rocked the Dreadnaught.

Ke’reth looked at Kana, then over to KIHQaS at the tactical console, No words were spoken but all considered the order given. Ke’reth then reached over to the communications microphone. ‘Proud Vengeance to starships Merlin and Valhalla, when we start firing, we’ll be shooting close to the unseen enemy vessel. We want you to help us sweep the area with Phaser fire.’

This time, as a blast bounced off the Vengeances shields. Ke’reth dropped his hand, as if he was starting a race. KIHQaS opened fire

Several flashed illuminated the station as the Federation vessels moved into position as they brought their weapons to bear on the flickering image of the spider.

The explosion was huge, No one could be sure who had made the kill, but cheers went up from all three vessels.

Later that evening, in the Stations Raucous Klingon Bar known as the Targ-pit. Ke’reth had asked Kana to try and lift K’Taal’s spirit. A young woman brought them their drinks. ‘So you missed out on one little battle.’ She said. K’Taal snarled. ‘They’ll be other battles.’ She continued, with a sympathetic grin.

‘Yeah, s’pose you’re right!’ He said raising his tankard. She nodded as the band came back on stage.

‘I just feel bad running from a battle.’ He said under his breath. She grinned. ‘You weren’t running, you were following orders.’ He swigged from his drink. ‘Running is running!’ He said. ‘Transporting a bunch of pointy-eared-.’ She shook her head. ‘They’re scientists like yourself.’

‘Not like me!’ He snarled. ‘I don’t think that there are many left like me.’

‘Here’s to being the last Rogue Klingon then!’ He grinned, as she mocked him.

'To the last Rogue Klingon then?' She repeated the toast.

He smiled as he raised his Tankard. 'To the Last Rogue Klingon!'