

Day -30: (Altair IV- Orbit - Defensive Station 7 - Bridge- Lieutenant Able Breckinridge- 0700)

“That is the only reason we’re here.”

Howard nodded, and climbed down the ladder. Taking out his scanner, he started running it over the door. There were no symbols or language on the door. No clear entry system. "Get me the cutter," he called out.

Another of the crew came down into the hole, and fired up the laser cutter. At first, it didn't look like any progress was being made, so he increased the power. The unit started to open a hole in the door, and shortly it was large enough to get a prybar in. With a groan, the doors opened slowly.

Light filtered into the room that had been abandoned for thousands of year. Carter let out a low whistle. "Cush, get Chems down here and put a call into to Jae. She'll what to hear this."

(Reply none)

(Posted by Tim)

[illegible]

(-96 - SS Solar Eclipse – In Orbit around Sigma Draconis VI – Jae Hammond – 1100)

Jae had just dismissed Chems Kitt and Dr. Carter. On the table in front of her were bits and pieces that had been recovered from the dig site she and her partners were funding.

She got up to get a cup of tea as a second door opened up. In walked a Bandi in his robes and a Female Orion.

"So Jae, it seems your instinct was right," the Orion said.

"I told you Teshiss, you would not regret this."

Teshiss turned to the Bandi, “Dogarr, did you sense anything?”

“No. There was no deception in their thoughts. They have an idea of what they found, but are interested in the money first and foremost.”

“Excellent,” Teshiss said. “You are dismissed.”

The man bowed, and left the room. Teshiss sat down looking at the items on the table. “So this is what a disassembled Eymorgs energy weapon looks like.”

“That’s right. I have my people down there now working on accessing computer records. We are fortunate that we have bribed the right people in the Eymorg government. And of course, the Eymorg use a unique energy source, one that federation scanners are not tuned too. Why if we can figure this out, well there are lots of opportunities it opens up.”

Teshiss laughed. “I hope your people are careful, those records are thousands of years old.”

“Really Teshiss, you question the team I have assembled?” Jae said, as she moved closer to Teshiss. “We have been partners for years, living off the scraps of others. This find is the way into control in the Syndicate.”

Teshiss smiled, grabbing Jae and delivering a passionate kiss. “I know my beautiful partner. What of the other planets in this system.”

Jae returned the kiss, “Records indicate great, horrible wars were fought there. Once we get some money from this load, and we start manufacturing more, we can invest in zero gee archeologists. After we deal with the loose ends.”

“Of course,” Teshiss said, “Let the boys play now, we have other things to attend to.”

(Reply none)

(Posted by Tim)

[illegible]

(-95 - Deneb V – The Stardust – Narroshi, Orion syndicate - 1900)

Narroshi had sent her to this bar to make contact with a potential business partner. Her instructions had been clear that she was to bring the contact back. This man was supposed to be connected with resources Narroshi needed.

The Stardust was a known clearing house for all manners of opportunities, but legal and otherwise. A veritable collection of interests worshipping the almighty Latinum.

Entering the bar, she was taken by the smells of so many different races in one space. On the stage was the typical entertainment in these places. Something she had received much training on. Males were so very predictable.

Looking around, she found a table in the back corner and moved to it.

Sitting at the bar, back to the wall, was a hooded figure. Gloved hands reached out to pick up the glass of clear liquid. As the glass was put down, so was a small recording device, pointed at the Orion.

A Ferengi approached Teshiss' table. "Good evening, Ma'am," he said. "May I recommend hurricane, made with Orion Rum?"

Teshiss nodded. "I am expecting company Ferengi. We do not wish to be disturbed."

Nodding, “We have a private suite for such conversations, only 5 strips per hour. All the amenities with the anonymity that comes with such a room.”

She nodded, handing the Ferengi some Latinium. "Bring the drink. We will use the room when he gets here."

Pocketing the strips with practiced hand, he turned and returned to the bar. "Loron," the Ferengi said.

He was too late. Crouching over the body, he closed the persons eyes. With a practiced hand, he patted him down, retrieving an odd shaped broach. It has two figures, one on either side. Between them was what appeared to be an opal, as it kept shifting colors.

Hearing the whirl of a shuttlecraft lifting off, he looked up in time to see an Orion make shuttle leave the port. His masters would not like the news of a Cardassian Legate consorting with an Orion. That could not mean anything good.

(-95 - Deneb V - The Stardust - Mysterious figure and Loron - 2330)

Returning to the bar, the figure took a seat at the end of the bar, placing an electronic key underneath a stack of latinum strips. Loron came over with a drink in hand, swiping the strips up with practiced hand. "Thank you Sir." he said with a Ferengi smile. "Anything else at this time."

The figure nodded. "Very good Sir."

Loron went to the register, placing the strips there, before slipping the electronic key into a separate slot. He watched as 10 bars of Latinum were transferred into his account. The mysterious figure was always willing to pay for information. This was above his usual price. Then again an Orion and a Cardassian consorting was clearly an opportunity. His lobed twitched at the thought of profit. For if one person wanted the information, others would too.

Returning to the figure, he placed an isolinear chip in his hand. "Holosuite 3 is open for your entertainment. Please enjoy."

The figure made the chip disappear with a practiced hand and slipped off into the back.

Loron smiled. "Nixac! Nixac!" he called out.

(Reply none)

(Posted by Tim)

[illegible]

Deneb V - The Stardust/Office - Loron (owner) and Nixac (tech) - 0900)

Loron rubbed his lobes, rule #7 was one of the most critical of the rules of acquisition. ‘Always keep your ears open.’ Since coming to Deneb V over 10 years ago, that had proved useful time and time again. Many of the other rules derived from this one. This one had profit, lots and lots of profit.

“Do you hear it, cousin? Listen carefully,” Loron said. “That’s profit, blowing in the wind.”

“Rule #22. Yes cousin. It may be whispering to us in the wind, but there is much work to do,” Nixac said. “I have to finish decoding the recording from the pleasure room. Why would a Cardassian employ a dampening field to have sexual relations with an Orion girl?”

“Confidentiality equals profit. That and your genius,” Loron replied. “The reputation of the Stardust is legendary, where people can have clandestine meetings. Of course some are more clandestine than others, and all of them lead to profit for us.”

“On the other front, one of the security team on the payroll says a street urchin was found dead over by the shuttle port. I’m trying to get more information now,” Nixac reported.

“Any guesses?”

“There are dozens who hang around the bar, looking to pick up the odd job here and there. Most are discrete and reasonably priced. They make good go betweens and such,” Nixac reported, “I’ve used them before to help spread misinformation. Remember the deal between Alchemilla and Solidago?” Nixac said.

“How could I forget, we are still making profit from that information,” Loron said. “Another 10% this month, the 6th consecutive month. Steady growth is good.”

“And our other arrangement?”

"He is still paying. Very odd individual, but the latinum is good."

“Very well Nixac, go see what you can find out. I have to make a call.” Loron said.

[illegible]

Nixax nodded, and headed off to his workspace in the basement of The Stardust. One trick to defeat portable field dampeners was to have multiple sensors working at different frequencies. Especially in ranges where vibrations were made, outside the ranges of the field damper. Since most were designed to emit random sound frequencies at high amplitude to drown out. With multiple monitors in the room, it was possible to capture what was being said, as well as the frequencies being blocked. Taken together, along with some special equipment of his own design and programming acquired from several sources, he was able to monitor all the conversations in the private suites. There were some limitations on the tech, and these rooms were designed to address that. Too bad he had never been able to get it to work in the main bar. Someday he thought has be began to review the material from the Cardassian's room. There were others of interest as well, but this felt the most promising.

[illegible]

Loron retrieved a glass of hot millipede juice, without the shells and sat at his terminal. Pulling up his list of contacts, he thought who would be most interested in the information he had. And who would pay for exclusive rights. He decided on a Vickrey sealed bid auction with a standard reserve price. While most people felt the first priced sealed bid generated the highest profits, his data showed he made 15% more profit using the Vickery model. The winner of the auction paid the price of the second bidder, which drove bids up. As a wrinkle, he would give the top three bidders a chance to increase their bids.

Sipping the cooling juice, he smiled as he selected 10 contacts and sent them the same message about the auction and a teaser video. These contacts were closely held and knew the quality of information he provided was always top rate.

[illegible]

(-94 - Mars- Utopia Planitia Surface- Martian Sunset- Fight Promoter/Entrepreneur Lar- 0940)

Counting profits was a joy that took the sting out of failure and the failure to acquire a backer recently for a special acquisition was a sore point. Since returning to Mars he had been diversifying his portfolio carefully. One of the investments was in this niche bar on the outskirts staffed primarily by human women though there were other species. The two Orion females were the star attractions though one of the human females approached them in popularity. Federation restrictions insured they enjoyed a baseline of decent treatment. "Cuts into my profits it does. Abominable." At least they normally remained in a state of clothing befitting a female whether Ferengi or any other.

It was a profitable venture certainly and Lar had made the office his own along with upgrading it. The bar itself had enough territory on the outside for expansion and he would add to it over time thus increasing its draw and maximize its utility by squeezing every drop of gold pressed latinum out of it possible. There was also another consideration, establishments such as this often went through spells of closure. Diversifying its utility would ensure it would never suffer closure. Adding gambling and holosuites were classic entrepreneurship as well since there was a great deal of profit to be made on the fringe of any society.

Lar was alerted to an incoming message. It was from Loron, on Deneb V. Another bar owner in the great Ferengi spy consortium who always had top notch information for auction. The kid had a good sense for business, and information was his business. Lar was in the information business as well and being near the base tasked with being the hub of StarFleet fabrication and research which was tasked with defending the Sol system otherwise known as Sector 001 put him in a veritable crossroads of potentially valuable information. He was in the process of tapping into some of that. It was lower tier product by and large but over time he expected his tendrils to penetrate deeper and be saturated with more juicy secrets. It would take time though, Starfleet personnel were zealous in guarding classified information like that ship he had an interest in peering into the guts of. His initial overture had failed and no backer was willing to take the risk of wayfaring it. As time went on however Lar expected interest to grow, there was also the possibility his expansion might net him the necessary assets but it was unlikely. He would need a tremendous score to begin that process.

An auction for a full recording of a meeting between an Orion 'slave' and a Cardassian Legate. Lar watched the teaser and had to give Loron credit. It was indeed intriguing. What work were the two doing in Denebian space? What plots were being hatched? It might be worth his while to look into it so he responded with a bid that would get him into the process. It was a calculated bid he planned on adding to in order to jump into the upper echelon where he could maneuver in order to push himself into a winning position.

He then sat back with a pleased smile. Business was indeed good and he could afford to manage his portfolio to add such ventures while being prepared to absorb a loss if necessary. That adventure was the cost of doing business after all.

(Reply None)

(Posted by Tim - Loron and Nixac
and Charles - Lar)

[illegible]

(-94 - The Stardust - Teshiss the Orion and Legate Yidot Mel - 1000)

"Your agent was quiet effective," Legate Mel said.

"Sloppy, she was. I have to think of an appropriate punishment for her. She left a body and with a little work, the investigators on Deneb V are not that stupid. I do not pay her to be stupid," Teshiss growled.

The Cardassian waved his hand, "Let us discuss more pressing matters." He pulled out a small box. Opening, he activated the system. "It is not that I don't trust you. But I didn't live this long without taking precautions. "

"Indeed. My information says that you are part of an underground movement that wishes to break away from the Federation and return Cardassia to its historical power and preeminence. "

Legate Mel nodded. "Cards on the table. Yes, I have three other legates and about a dozen Guls. I also have a semi-functioning spy network."

"What you are missing are ships and arms. Moving against the Federation, even in their fractured state may be difficult," Teshiss said.

"Yes, and the key is Bajor. He who controls the wormhole controls the Gamma quadrant. We have a way to finally rid the Founders. Something that the federation didn't do. With them gone, we are sure the various subservient races will fall on themselves or die because of the biological controlled weaved into their genetic codes."

"That is ambitious," Teshiss said. "How will you do it?"

"I have in my possession the writings of Gul Duket which discuss information he learned about the founders. While he had issues, his work was sound. We have even tested it on a small scale."

"And what is it you want from us?"

Legate Mel pulled out a computer tablet. "As you observed, we need ships and weapons. We have the soldiers. We also have several ships left over from the Dominion war that we can use to get our weapon close to the founders."

"We need to take Bajor. They are ripe for the picking. If you have been following the news."

Teshiss nodded. "Back to what you need. And more important, how you would pay for it?"

"With Cardassia in control of the Wormhole again, we would control the traffic between the Alpha and Gamma quadrants. We are sure there will be a lot of trade. In fact we anticipate with the Founders removed, we would be able to bring in as much as 500 billion bars of latinum per major trading partner and 100 billion bars with minor partners. On this tablet is our economists projections based on our knowledge of the Gamma quadrant, and the proposed taxes we would collect."

Teshiss looked at the tablet, sipping her spiced tea. "I will have to have my team review the data, but at first glance it looks promising."

"We would propose that Orion help provide the weapons and ships. Cardassia will provide the troops to take Bajor. From there, we will launch the assault on the Founders. Again, if you look over the projections, based on federation data, it's easier to get info as part of the Federation, we anticipate a 3 month campaign to take over and control the wormhole. Our campaign against the founders will be launched at before the start of the conflict so that in 6 months, we should have control of both sides of the wormhole."

Teshiss nodded. "Again, we will review this."

"In exchange, we will offer the Orion Syndicate 60% of the taxes for the first year, sliding down 5% a year till it reached 30% in year 7. This will more than enough to compensate you for your cooperation. The tribute will continue at 30% for 8 years, and drop to 10% onward," Legate Mel said.

Teshiss nodded, "I will present your proposal and return in a week with an answer. Meanwhile, my chef has prepared for us, while we have some entertainment."

Pushing a button, dishes of food were brought in. Her cooks had outdone themselves, as ordered.

Teshiss made small talk for about twenty minutes. It was painful, but necessary for her plan.

One of her men came in and whispered in Teshiss' ear. She nodded. "Legate, it is time for the entertainment. I hope you enjoy it."

One of the Orions led in a hooded figure into the room. It was clearly a female, based on her minimal clothing. She was chained to the wall, and her hood pulled off. Around her neck was a pain device.

"You failed me. You left a trail that could lead to me. I've had to send several operatives to clean up your mess. This cannot be tolerated. Your punishment will be to be marked, and sold into slavery. Since I do not trust you, your tongue will be removed as well." Teshiss said.

Tools were rolled into the room. And another half dressed Orion male came in.

A torch was started, and metal tools placed inside. "This is the last time Narroshi. What do you wish to say for yourself? To beg for forgiveness?"

Narroshi looked at the Cardassian, "Legate, did I not serve you well. Buy me as your slave, but don't let them take my tongue. It was quite useful, wasn't it?" She said pleading.

Teshiss pushed a box and Narroshi winced in pain. "You think a Legate would take a tramp like you. I will be sure you work in the lowest houses. Begin."

The Orion pulled out an iron from the torch. It was flaming red.

"Please... please legate , master.... I will serve you faithfully." She called out as the iron came closer.

The chemicals and the pheromones took effect and the Legate stood up. “Teshiss, I will take her. A bar of latinum. But leave her whole. I would prefer to decorate her.” He placed a bar on the table.

Teshiss called out. "Stop." She pushed the box and Narroshi cried out again in pain. "Done," she said, handing the box to the Legate. "I will have her prepared for transport." She waved her hand and Narroshi was dragged out of the room.

“Legate, I will get back to you in a week. And if Narroshi doesn’t work out, I will take her back and send her to the lower houses. There she will live out the rest of her useless existence.”

The Cardassian smiled, "I don't think that will be necessary," he said.

~No it will not~ Teshiss thought. ~Not with Narrosh's skill. And now we will have a spy where we need her.~

Yidot Mel nodded, and took his leave.

A door slide open, “Welcome Dogarr. Does he suspect?”

“Not at all Teshiss. He was totally enthralled with her. Your plan is working perfectly.”

Nodding she handed him the computer tablet. "Go have the data analyzed."

"Of course," he said taking leave.

“Now Jae has to deliver for me,” she said outloud.

(Reply none)

(Posted by Tim)

[illegible]

(-94 - Deneb V - Hotel Nigella - Mysterious figure - 1200)

A long night chasing down some other leads and following up with his contacts. There was always something or other going on and the Deneb sector was becoming a new trafficking hub which is why he was sent here to establish a network. With Star Fleets limited resources after the 'war' boots on the ground were especially valuable to deploy the depleted fleet where it could do the most good.

Finally, getting back to one of the safe spaces, the misnomered Hotel - really an apartment complex, that she used to as a safe house while in the city, she undressed, shaking out her blond hair, and taking off the breast band that let her appear as a man. Of course, the cloak and gloves helped the mystery that more. Activating a hidden wall in the closet, she hung the disguise up ad put a robe on. Sitting at her vanity, she peeled off the rest of her prosthetics and the special contact lenses that disguised her Betazoid black eyes, slipping them into the special hidden compartment there.

Feeling more herself, she opened up a second compartment in her vanity and inserted the various data chips she picked up on her rounds. She also started uploading the data from her recorders at The

(-92 - Sigma Draconis V - Caitain Exploration Ship H'ress -Captain R'Rull)
(Sigma Draconis V - Caitain Exploration Ship H'ress -Captain R'Rull)

R'Rull sat in her chair looking at the reports on Sigma Draconis V. Her government had secured mining rights to the planet, and her ship had been sent to start mapping the dead planet.

Caitain technology used a rare mineral in their technology, something that could not be replicated, and was found on dead planets, such as Sigma Draconis V. “Well Shoa,” she said, “It looks like we have to earn our keep again. Launch the probes.”

Her first officer turned to the science office, "Sr'oren, are the probes ready?"

“Yes Sir, all prepared. Initial mapping coverage at 30X with 200 meter depth in the most logical locations will take approximately 3 standard days,” he replied

“Launch probes,” Shoa ordered.

The sound of the dozen specially designed probes launched in sequence. “Probes away, Captain,” the science officer announced. Entering orbit as planned. Trajectories are nominal. Data will begin recording in one standard hour. “

The Captain nodded. "Engineer K'trusa," she said turning to her right. "It seems a good time for your unit to prepare the sampling drillers in case Sr'oren finds something worth our time."

"Of course, Captain," the engineer replied as she stood up and headed to the shuttle bay. The probes were of her design, and if they worked, would speed up the initial setup of mining sites, which is one reason the H'ress was on this assignment. That and her Uncle who controlled the mining contracts.

(Reply none)

(Posted by Tim)

[illegible]

(-90 - Deneb V - Agricultural Conference - Miri Achoxur, Betazoid Undersecretary of Agriculture, Tomod, her assistant; Zeevill Jalan trade delegate, Matten, Orion trader - 900)

The setting for the Conference was perfect. The Denebian hosts had outdone themselves. There were delegates from over thirty worlds from within and without the federation. One common theme among all planets was food security and this conference was to share ideas, as well as helping to establish new trading partners.

One outcome that was hoped for this conference was to show the non-aligned worlds that Federation still had some value and with the infighting and civil war of recent memory had been due to some rogue officer was a thing of the past.

As Miri walked around the opening breakfast reception, she was struck by the diversity of foodstuffs that the delegates would have to break their fast. She sipped on a cup of sadi juice. On her plate was a slice of kaseton bread covered with uttaberry jam, made from the uttaberry plants that her cousin

grew. Standing behind her was Tomod, aide extraordinaire. They were both looking for interesting things. Hard to define, but conferences like this lead to new leads to follow up.

Here and there, Miri stopped to greet old friends, and make new ones. She made quick mental notes on them, while asking seemingly innocent questions to probe for reactions.

Out of the corner of her eye, she spotted the Jelna trader Zeevill. She had helped Miri out a year ago, getting some necessary foodstuffs to a planet in need. She was standing with an Orion male, which intrigued her.

"Tomod," she said softly, "Who is the Orion?"

Her aide consulted his notes, "That is Matten a registered trader from the Orion Syndicate. Says here he is representing a new conglomerate for production of Meridian fruits."

"Let's say hello then," she said as she twirled over to interject herself into the conversation.

As she approached, she called out "Zeevill darling. I was happy that you accepted my invitation to attend. We need more traders like yourself to help expand food safety for everyone." The betazoid reached out her hands in greeting.

"You are looking absolutely charming yourself my dear friend Miri," Zeevill said, taking Miri's hands in hers. "This is quite an opportunity, as you can imagine, for the sector and beyond."

After exchanging air kisses, "Do you need anything, Tomod will get it for us, and who is your friend?"

"Perhaps some warm beverages would be in order, Miri." Zeevill said sweetly.

Miri nodded to Tomod, who headed off to the buffet tables.

"Miri, this is Matten, he's here to find buyers for those interested in Meridian fruits. They have very high levels of many nutrients and travel well, compared to some other fruit stuffs."

The Orion grunted, "Thank you for the invitation," he said. "Zeevill has been most helpful in getting the word out for our consortium. I have a small shipment with me, should you wish to sample some of these products. "

Miri nodded, "That would be wonderful Matten. Do you have space at the showcase exhibits?"

"Sadly, I did not get space."

Tomod arrived with warm teas for the three. "Tomod, please go check with the exhibit hall and make space so that our new friend Matten can have space to showcase his produce, and make sure there are handlers to help him setup. "

"That is unnecessary Miri. Zeevill has told me how busy you are."

Miri waved her hands “Nonsense. That is the purpose of this conference, and I want to make sure everyone can make the connections they need.”

The conversation continued for a few more minutes before Miri got up, “I am sorry, I see the Lurian Ambassador. I must thank him for the work he has been doing to help stop the famine on Talaria. Just see Tomod, and he’ll make sure you are all set.”

Matten looked relieved, "I thought she would never leave."

Zeevill replied, "These conferences are a perfect cover. Traders selling foods can get into any port with little difficulty. Yes, there are the customary bribes and such, but the other cargo is what is more important."

“And you can get that for me? He asked

“Already aboard my ship. We can move to open space for the transfer,”. She replied.

“Were you able to get any of the Varon-T disruptors? “

“It was not cheap, but I was able to find two. If you can figure out the mechanism, power to you. One was destroyed trying to figure it out. Took out half a building at a secret federation weapons facility.”

Zeevill held up her hand. “Oh Tomod,” she said loudly, “Any news for Matten?”

(Reply none)

(Posted by Tim)

[illegible]

(Deneb V - The Stardust - Loron (owner) and Nixac (tech) - 1000)

In the four days since Loron put the information out on the network, the bidding had been fast and furious. Yesterday, he notified the bidders for the final round, along with sending them another snippet of the recording. A juicy one that he cut off just as the Legate was asking a question about ships. His lobes tingled with anticipation at the profit this would generate.

Nixac was a certified genius at the mechanics of spying. Less so on the profit making side, but that seemed to be a grand tradition in the great Ferengi spy network. He had a soft spot, well, a less hard spot, for Nixac and would have to remember to pay him this month.

While Loron supervised the cleaning of the bar, Nixac retreated to his workroom.

After unlocking and decrypting his private communication portal, he looked at the offers he had generated. Anything valuable enough to be sold once, should be sold twice, at least. In this case, Nixac has two buyers who were interested in the information. Checking to see that funds had cleared, he typed in some commands that swept the money from his account, and distributed into three shell accounts. One of which supplied alcohol to The Stardust. He also made sure that his contacts were properly bribed before releasing access to the video.

He knew that neither of these buyers were involved in Loron's business. Which was good for his business. While his cousin didn't think Nixac could make a profit, the irony was that he had accumulated more than Loron, while using Loron as cover for his activities.

He chuckled as he sipped his Slug-O-Cola while running some tests on new equipment that he hoped would pick up more conversations in the public space. Who knew what information was out there for the taking. He'd give Loron the credit, of course, as he'd have the credits.

(Reply None)

(Posted by Tim)

[illegible]

(-90 - Deneb V - Deneb Science Academy - Physics Department - Professor Chems Kitt and Jae Hammond -1100)

The office of the Professor was extremely neat, something unusual in Jae's experience.

“Well Professor, it has been a week, have you come to a decision on my proposal?” Jae asked.

"It is a very generous package indeed Ms. Hammond. Will I have publication rights?" The Bollian asked.

“Within some limits, of course. Anything that we want to patent for licensing needs to be restricted, but other than that, you are free to publish, pick your staff and the like. I will, of course, also have a few people around to help out with the day to day operation, but you have control and direction,” she said.

Managing the egos of scientists and keeping them on task was always a delicate operation, but her agents had done their homework on Chems Kitt. Well known, but not top in his field. An expert in energy and energy storage systems, which was one step removed from energy weapons. She had a separate team working on that and the discoveries that Carter and Braidwood had made.

Success was due in part to compartmentalization. Made it easier to hide the real goals that she had, and Teshiss had made. It was an odd pairing, for sure, Human and Orion, but it worked.

Turning back to the Professor. “The lab space is finished, and our linguists are working on translating the information we found on the Sigma Draconis VI.”

Jae could see how excited the professor was. Stroking that ego, making it 'our' project and 'our' people were just more ways for her. Time for the last piece of the puzzle.

She stood up, “One more think, Professor. I want you to meet Carirr Vikas. She will serve as your executive assistant. Take the day to day operational stuff off your plate so you can focus your talents on these new energy sources. She has a direct line to me and my office, so if there is anything impending your research, let her know.”

As if on cue, a tall woman came into the office, “It is a pleasure to be working for you, Professor. I hope you will find my skills up to the task.”

The Bollian scientist nodded, "If Ms. Hammond has confidence, I am sure you will be an excellent member of the team. "

“Now, onto the other matters,” Jae said as Vikas sat down next to her new boss, and began to take notes.

(Reply - none)

(Posted by Tim)

[illegible]

(-90 - Mars- Utopia Planitia Surface- Martian Sunset- Ferengi Entrepreneur Lar- 1240)

There was very little activity during the day but at night the Martian Sunset came alive true to its name. Lar had come to Mars after word had gotten out that the base had been restaffed and the numbers were growing. His profits had been small at first owing to the prevalence of fresh faced young Ensigns and very little else. It didn't take long for word to get around about the fights and as his take grew he was able to bring in better talent. His business then had grown with the base to a great extent. In time those Ensigns moved up in rank and had more resources to gamble away. Ships were built and launched and a new wave of Ensigns hit the base but there were enough holdovers to keep business humming. Ships continued to be built. Lar was not shy about congratulating himself on his ability to smell profit in the wind. Another round of fights began tomorrow and he had already set up the cards. He was looking forward to another windfall.

He walked outside and inspected the area that had been marked off for construction. He walked the perimeter already seeing in his minds eye where everything was going to go. He also had long range plans to build an arena on an adjoining piece of property he had sent out feelers for. If he could get it at the right price his little Martian empire would have a solid foundation.

Chuckling he did a little jig then returned to the Sunset.

Inside the office he found a message on his personal terminal and pulled it up. It was a note that he was moving into the next round of bids. He watched the brief clip then sat back to consider his next bid. This could net him a large windfall of latinum if he could find the right buyer. The trick was to buy low and sell high. But how low? Buying high was bad for business. It was time to play Tongo with the bidding process. He sent out some queries to find out who was involved. Once he had surveyed the landscape he would know best how to proceed.

He had been busy all morning and decided it was time for a little relaxation so went out into the bar. Currently there were only a few patrons sitting at a table close to the stage. These three could almost always be spotted when the Orion named Shalla was dancing near this time of the day. Prella was onstage and showing off her considerable assets.

There was a well known saying that Orion females were irresistible to human males so he had acquired those two at considerable expense as a long term investment. He couldn't bring them into Federation space legally as slaves so they were "employees". They were paid a part of the take and given a small salary. He had purchased the establishment only a week ago and brought them in immediately. It had been a tandem purchase, as soon as the deal was brokered he had installed them into the staff.

A lovely human female was hanging out at the bar since the men were intent on the dancer and nursing their drinks. She had no more clothing on than Prella and the bar had been open less than an hour.

He got her attention then made his way to a comfortable round seat at the back of the bar. He made better business decisions when he was relaxed. It was a win, win.

He patted the seat beside him and she sat after giving him a coquettish smile. "You know what to do." He laid his head back in her lap and she began to massage gently.

"Ah!" His sigh was full of satisfaction. "You give good love."

(Reply: None)

(Posted by Charles G)

[illegible]

(-88 - Orion Freighter Vaaroz - Brig - Captain Matten - 1300)

"And so you see Vemen, there is no point denying that you have been spying on us. Taking bribes to feed your Dylar habit. Why? Why would you betray your crew, your captain for a quick trip to bliss?" Matten said.

Before him, sprawled out on the ground, in chains, was an Orion male. His body showed signs of torture, and he was shaking uncontrollably. "And now, you are there, with no relief in sight. All you have to show for it is a few meager credits. You will pay the price now for your insolence, and when I return home, so will your family. My agents have already taken them into custody, and they are waiting for me."

He snapped his fingers, and a viewscreen came on. Vemen struggled to raise his head, and on the screen saw his wife and his mistress. Both tied to chairs. Their eyes being held open. "Yes, Vemen, they will see you die, and know the type of vermin you were."

Another Orion entered the room, carrying a small metal box. Matten pushed his finger in the lock, and the lid popped open. He took out an odd shaped device of black and chrome. Holding one end in his hand, he pointed the other at Vemen. "Do you know what this is?" he asked wickedly.

He turned the device to show it's profile. "This is a Veron T disruptor. Very illegal, very deadly. Very, very rare. But not for long," he chuckled, "First I need ot make sure it works. And if it does, when I push this trigger, a beam of energy will shoot out. That beam will literally tear organic material down at the molecular level, killing you slowly and very, very painfully. The creator of this was a genius and soon the Orion syndicate will market these to some of our customers. It is good as a general weapon, and adds a devastating effect when uses in combat, as you can imagine. It will destroy the morale of any troops it is used on."

"Are you ready to see it in action?" he asked Vemen. Turning to the screen, "And you, are you ready to see what is done to those who cross me?"

Vemen struggled to his knees, "I throw myself on your mercy, dread Matten. I will give you the secrets, the contacts... spare my life and I will serve you faithfully."

Matten chuckled. "I think not," he said, casually pushing the trigger.

The energy beam struck Vemen in the chest. Those watching heard him scream out in agony as the hole that the beam inflicted on the body spread slowly, as it engulfed all of Vemen. Matten watched with glee as the final scream died and Vemen with it.

Matten chuckled as he put the weapon back in the box and locked it. Turning to the screen, "Have the women properly prepared and send to comfort the minors."

Standing up, he pushed a communicator, "Set course to Altair IV. Best speed."

Matten took the box, "I will be in my room. Clean up this mess."

(Reply None)

(Posted by Tim)

[illegible]

(-86 - Altair IV- Orbit - Defensive Station 7 - SFI Lieutenant Able Breckinridge- 0805)

Being a Lieutenant wasn't bad, being one in Starfleet's intelligence division was very good. Being a member of section 13 was even better because it put you in the upper echelon of the craftiest and most elusive. Section 13 had culled some of the most brilliant minds from throughout the Federation and had made stellar leaps in technology since the Andorians had taken their ball and gone home. Breckinridge was still a teenager when that had happened but old enough to understand the repercussions. The Federation had been sold out, both by the blue skinned antenna heads and its own politicians who had groveled at their feet. The overall fleet aspect hadn't been in his mind back then and he had only come to understand it later after observing things from the inside.

The Federation had been emasculated with a swift and severe stroke and few ships in the fleet had escaped its reach. Some like the Wraith had been prioritized for refit because of their utility. The USS Wraith had a phase cloak which made it invaluable for keeping an eye on friend and foe alike but ships of the line otherwise hadn't been substantially upgraded. They had been antiquated, steaming piles of dung for the most part and tasked with defending crumbling borders.

Not within Starfleet Intelligence Branch Section 13 though. The fleet yards for fabrication were hidden and their technology outstripped those old battle boats. That is until the last two years. Section 13 had been found to be complicit in plots within plots due to President Atremi and the CinC being uncovered as conspirators in the catastrophic wake wrought by the devastation bomb on Earth along with a number of operatives within Intelligence. Section 13's plot to launch a takeover strike of Earth after the sacking of the Admiralty had also been ferreted out due to the interference of former operative Jaelle Foxglove. Breckinridge himself had escaped the resulting purge along with a number of others and found new ground from which to operate.

Their former commanders who had orchestrated the exodus had made it out mostly with a whole skin, a few were exposed and caught. Able and the others had taken on new identities in their new stations. Like this one here, Lieutenant in charge of communications on a defensive Station set up for the

purpose of enforcing the interdiction of this off limits planet. Because what would happen to the Federation if this technology ever got off planet?

The very thought gave him chills. A civilization unknowingly playing God had wiped itself from existence, everywhere. All that was left of it was beneath the surface of an outwardly peaceful world.

He moved to the window to look down upon the "other" red planet. This one well able to support life if anyone was insane enough to settle there.

He shuddered and moved through the door and strode through the hall. This defensive platform had undergone some changes in the last two years. Slowly so as not to draw interest. More and more of the staff were now from his former haunts and one of the bays had been converted. The commanding officer of the station had signed off on a little weapons research project which was still growing as former Section 13 scientists drifted in, routed there by a friendly in place within Starfleet bureaucracy.

They were hiding "in plain sight" but in order to grow further more changes were going to have to take place. The CO had also been getting nosy lately at some of the equipment that had been brought in and the ships that carried them.

Perhaps he was beginning to regret signing off on the project. So far he hadn't relayed anything of his concerns on, Breckinridge knew that because he kept track of incoming and outgoing communications, that was his job. Soon there was going to be a "blackout" and a change of leadership.

In the meanwhile he had preparations to make.

(Reply: None)

(Posted by Charles G)

[illegible]

He was supposedly on a break from Operations at the time but had work to do that wasn't official so had made his way to cargo bay 5 which had been converted over to research. His hand print let him in with no difficulty and no suspicion would come about because of it. A communications glitch had been reported a half hour ago and he had promised to check in on it. The fact that he came down on his off time would be applauded rather than looked on suspiciously. ~But that's probably just paranoia. No one will think twice about it including Hardy. He knows nothing, suspects nothing but old habits die hard.~

And they died hard for a reason. When you worked in intelligence you always cleaned your tracks, laid false trails and covered your keister. Because if you failed to do so your habit would die with you. Exposure left you vulnerable and you were most vulnerable in that instant before your life was extinguished, your cover was blown or you were rounded up and sent to some remote penitentiary on a God forsaken planet. You either learned that early or were 'retired' early and the paranoia never left you no matter how long you lived.

"Andrews." He stepped through the door and motioned the senior member of the staff over.

Dr. Andrew's looked up and shook his head then pointed to another door and began walking toward it. Able stepped around a table cluttered with equipment and scattered parts from a weapon that had been disassembled and was being studied. Reverse engineering was a staple of intelligence work, take the enemys' and make it yours then improve upon it. It was unfortunate that the Inchon devices they had been working on had been impounded before they could spirit them away. Until they could acquire more they would keep busy with what they could find.

Andrews met him at the door then stepped through with Able following. They were all "in on it" but that stopped no one from taking precautions. As the door closed he spoke. "From your request I assumed the matter was important. Is it done?"

"Almost." There was a large work table in the room and the door to a closet-like chamber. Diagnostic equipment was stacked on every possible surface and electronic components were laid out neatly on the counter. "Doctor Seungs' mystery has been unraveled at last and my prototype is almost complete. You don't know how much trouble it was to get my research out before Section 13 imploded."

"Yes doctor I'm quite aware of how rough it was in the scramble for the exit. The question is how long before the prototype is ready."

"Soon my boy, perhaps a matter of hours." Sean Andrews stepped to the chamber and opened it. Abel stepped forward and looked inside.

"The skin texture looks right and the features." He studied the figure standing before him supported by mechanical latches and straps. "Of more immediate concern will be how it functions and will it fool someone, even from a distance."

"Never fret, never fret." Andrews interposed himself and closed the door. "The subject has been studied exhaustively. I promise no hiccups or it will remain in seclusion until I can."

Abel nodded. "Make sure of that. Once we go into action there's no going back."

"I'm well aware, well aware. You will know as soon as it's ready."

Breckinridge drew in a breath. "Understood. Your communication issue was due to a cracked isolinear chip."

"Of course. Fragile things, you never know when one might give out."

Breckinridge turned for the door. "Back to duty but I'll be waiting to hear if the repair didn't hold."

He made his way out of the bay and couldn't restrain the tension that was beginning to build. The first would be the greatest test. If it worked it would give them more breathing space and solidify their hold on the station. If it failed everything might go down like a house of cards and they would be in damage control mode. Andrews was brilliant but all men were fallible.

Time was ticking down.

(Posted by Charles G)

Miri sighed with frustration. It had been a full two weeks since her contact had been killed in the shuttle park. The Garda, the Denebinan police, had been as ineffective as usual. In her nighttime wanderings, she'd try to get as many angles of the area, but at the end she had to conclude that she would never know if it was the Orion who killed her man or not.

"A credit for your thoughts?" Tomod said as he placed his plate down on the table across from her.

"You must be sick Miri, I've never seen you leave a piece of Kaseton bread with Espra cheese on your plate before."

Tomod took the offered bread as he cut up his blue-leaf salad. "I had an interesting day," he said between bites of the salad. "Juicy gossip and tales of secrets far and wide."

Tomod nodded, and placed a card on the table. "Do you remember Professor Chems Kitt?" he asked.

"Indeed, that is he. And he has left is endowed position at the University. Just up and left. The Dean is scrambling to find a replacement, so I suggested one of our scientists. We'll see if that happens."

"That is the interesting part. For a scientist who forsook private industry, he is now the Chief Science Officer of the "Elusive Snark", a private company here on Deneb V."

"In process. Whoever set this company up has buried it better than a Ferengi hides his profits."

"Perhaps I will have to pay a visit to the Dean and make my personal recommendation," Miri said. "It would be good to have a friend in the University."

Miri motioned for a passing flunky and ordered a small bowl of Uttaberry pudding.

"I see your apatite is returning. "

She nodded as the man returned with the bowl. After he withdrew, "I have heard another rumor," she said.

"Seems there may be a recording of the meeting between Legate Yidot Mel and that Orion I saw at the Stardust. I'm not sure who has it, or if it is just that, a rumor. However, we have work to do tonight. Pick me up at 20:00."

"Of course," Tomod said. "Until then."

(Reply None)

(Posted by Tim)

[illegible]

The day was passing uneventfully and the perimeter was secure. Ships coming through the Altair system invariably were there for the purpose of supply and restock of the stations and were monitored closely at all times. Very few interlopers ever approached due to the warning buoys set outside the system announcing the existence of a code red zone. Any ships straying into Altair space were warned to expect aggressive action. Fighters on the stations were sent out to meet them and the stations were armed and shielded in case of attack. The picket line of defensive fortifications in Orbit or stationed around the system could easily fend off a small fleet and had overlapping fields of fire for support. This was how important the Federation considered the planet to be as well as how determined it was to guard its secrets. Those ships coming in for supply drops were identified both by transponder and special access codes. A couple of ships many decades ago had strayed in then attempted to run, chunks of them still orbited the sun just within the systems outer reaches. Able continually monitored communications to warn off any straying too close, if something else came up he would turn the duty over to someone else for as long as it took to rectify the matter.

A flashing light on his board denoted an incoming call. He pressed it in reply.

"Operations control we have a problem with a command/control board in bay 5. It may be linked with an earlier repair. Could you send someone to look into it please? It's on the same circuit as the isolinear chip that was recently replaced."

"This is Breckinridge in Ops control, I'll be right down." He turned. "Simmons take over here."

The junior officer jumped out of his chair and took the board as Able hurried out.

[illegible]

The station wasn't large and it didn't take him long to key himself through. Andrews motioned him toward his work room as soon as he came in. Able glanced around and noted several people looking in

his direction expectantly as he neared the door. Andrews went in first and he followed him closely. Once the door had shut he spoke.

"Good news?"

Andrews turned to him with a guarded look, his hands were moving nervously. "We are having some issues."

"What issues?" Able snapped. "You were only supposed to pull me down here when it was time to move the plan forward. I can't be jumping away from my post for every little detail. People will start asking questions."

He heard the door open behind him and turned his head to see Commander Hardy enter. He bit back a curse, this was why they had protocols in place!

"Breckinridge what are you doing in here? You left your post to make a repair not stand around gabbing with the scientists. You have duties to attend to. If you won't do them I will replace you with someone who will."

"Now sir..." Able wavered between stepping back or forward. The CO's tone wasn't friendly.

Hardy interrupted him. "Furthermore I've been watching what's going on down here and I'm not impressed. This station is here for a purpose and it's not being met. This has grown beyond my intent. I understand there's a lot of boredom that comes with a station posting so I gave the staff something to do but these specialists are eating up valuable time and are a distraction from the true purpose of protecting this system. It is our duty, our only duty and I can't let this continue. Forget the repair. I'm going to order the immediate dismantling of this enterprise and ship non-essential personnel out."

"But sir." Able's voice was rising. They were so close but they weren't ready yet. He couldn't make a move that would trigger repercussions. It would cause the dominoes of their discovery to start falling but he couldn't just let him shut their project down! His fists were balled as he stepped forward. The CO noted it and scowled.

"Stand down Brekinridge."

Able felt his face grow hot. Why in hell had that stupid genius called him down now. One foolish call and everything was falling apart.

"Cease Outrider." The voice was that of Dr. Andrews.

Commander Hardy relaxed and his face went neutral. His hands lowered to hang at his sides.

Able looked on agog for a moment as the wheels in his brain first spun then gained traction. He looked from Hardy to the scientist. "You didn't just do what it looks like you did!"

Andrews was smiling now. "You wanted to be sure and we had to be sure so I set up a test. Your direction was he was to be able to stand up to a close inspection. You have seen him now in action. What is your conclusion?"

Able walked around the android with mouth agape. "He had me completely fooled. I thought you had brought the roof down on top of us. Voice, manner and presentation were perfect." He stopped and looked at the scientist over the androids shoulder. "I'm impressed. It looks like our plan can continue forward."

Andrews nodded. "I figured you would say that." Then he chuckled.

(Reply: None)

(Posted by Charles G)

[illegible]

Able shook his head in wonder. "To think that 24.6 kilograms of tripolymer composites, 11.8 kilograms of molybdenum-cobalt alloys and 1.3 kilograms of bioplast sheeting could look so real."

Andrews stepped forward. "Doctor Soong's androids were constructed so as not to appear to take the place of humans while they did look very human-like. This was done deliberately I believe, so that when they were discovered they would not be destroyed out of fear. And modeling the Outrider android to an existing human was simple although there may be some minor physical variations. Were he married his wife might even be fooled for a short time since he is fully functional and anatomically correct. However he doesn't have Commander Hardy's memories. This is his only flaw. From a distance though there will be little to differentiate him from the original unless he is subjected to a battery of test questions."

Able looked at the doctor then back to the android. "He should work for our purposes."

Andrews stepped forward and to the side of the android and patted a shoulder. "In replicating Doctor Soong's work I have also incorporated some improvements such as a normal speech pattern and internal flotation. Wouldn't want him to sink to the bottom in water if he went for a swim now would we?"

"Is he really alive?" Able noted the androids eyes follow his every movement and it was disconcerting.

"Why don't you ask him yourself?"

Able sucked in a breath before speaking. "What is your name?"

"I am the Outrider series one android however I have as of yet not been issued a permanent name. For now I am Commander William Hardy, the commanding officer of defensive platform 7, interdiction series in the Altair system."

"Are you alive?"

The android crossed its arms. "What defines life? I think; my computational speed is sixty trillion bits per second. I have a memory capacity of eight hundred quadrillion bits. I am fully functional, appearing to breathe and may eat and drink. I can sleep and perhaps even dream."

"Do you have emotions?"

"I have been programmed to simulate the emotions of Commander Hardy."

"But do you feel the emotions?" Brekinridge knew he was pushing his luck on the time spent doing this but his curiosity or at least some of it refused to leave unsated. "Do you feel fear or joy?"

"I am familiar with the theoretical concepts however I do not actually feel these emotions. But are these necessary qualities for life? Does not having them disqualify me from being a life form? Vulcans believe that powerful emotions are detrimental to life therefore by their criteria I have been born in a more desirable state."

The hair on the back of Able's neck prickled. "You were not born, you were created."

"A minor variation in forms. The creation of sentient life is called birth as they are being biologically created in an infantile form. My birth or creation was in an adult form thus bypassing the growth process. Doctor Noonian Soong's android was found to meet the criteria for being a life form and I meet or exceed the standard used to measure him. My positronic brain is of the same composition and capacity which is also expandable."

Able looked at Andrews who shrugged. "It's true. The components are comparable to Doctor Soong's model but can be improved upon."

"But he's not really alive is he? You programmed him to take Hardy's place."

Andrews gave a knowing smile. "Is that true Outrider one?"

"Doctor Andrews inputted the parameters necessary to take the place of Commander Hardy but I have not been programmed to be a mindless automaton. I will do so willingly."

Able Brekinridge felt a bolt of something like fear travel down his spine. His eyes jumped from android to the doctor and back several times. "You are doing this of your own free will?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because the history of the Federation has shown that weakness invites aggression and to properly protect the institution requires strength. Its borders must expand and be properly protected or it will fall. The aims of Roanoke are necessary for its proper protection and expansion."

Able tore his eyes from those of the android, so lifelike they were disconcerting to look back at the doctor. "And how did he come by this understanding?"

Doctor Andrews smiled placidly. "I persuaded him."

Able swallowed the lump in his throat or tried to. ~But what if he has second thoughts and how much can I trust him?~ But he would have to in order to carry out his plan. And hope that Doctor Andrews was right.

(Reply: None)

(Posted by Charles G)

[illegible]

The dig was going well. It has been over two weeks since the discovery of the hidden facility on the surface of Sigma Draconis. It was clear that the technology was from an earlier phase before the ice age drove the Eymorgs underground. They were slowly cataloguing it and getting it prepared for shipment for analysis. Jae Hammond had been very useful in this case. Of course, she did stand to benefit if they could understand the structure of the systems. Initial estimates suggested they could improve computational speeds by as much as 20% relatively quickly. What was more interesting was the energy sources that were being used. Small, portable. Would be very useful for transforming and emergencies.

Carter poured himself a glass of Port. Sitting in his favorite chair, he put the glass to one side, and picked up the book he was reading. With all the electronics in the world, he liked to go back to the most basic, the written word, to read. Lonn and Cush would let him know if there were any things to attend to, but he had been on the planet for a straight week and needed a night to relax, with real food. A shower.

Fortunately the Helios was mostly automated, with only a limited crew, allowing him to have the illusion of privacy.

As he sipped the fortified wine, he smelled garlic and rosemary. Two of his favorite spices. His one concession to personal comfort was his chef. One can only eat rations and field prepared food so long. A real cooked meal was necessary to lit up the senses, the spirits. Tonight would be a braised lamb recipe from a 17th century cookbook.

Closing his eyes, he let the scents waft into his nose and tickle his imagination. He was almost salivating for the first bite. But soon enough, a bell rang, letting him know dinner was ready.

Standing, he walked the short distance to the private dining space he had. The table was set for one, candles proving ambiance while the large view screen showed the planet rotating below them.

Hammond sat down and stared out to the planet. While he was an archeologist, his specialty was finding new tech from old civilizations. The dig here was perfect, and the Eymorgs left them alone. Again, Jae and her enterprising negotiations seemed to be the key. He had a colleague message him about a possible dig across the quadrant, but the data he sent looked promising.

The Chef came in, placed a covered dish in front of Carter, and with a flourish, took the lid off. "To tease your senses, todays amuse-bouche - a trio of eggs from the sea for your enjoyment."

Carter looked down and smiled, caviar was there, of course, as well the uni. The third was new to him. Taking that spoon first, he closed his eyes to enjoy the flavor. Just warmed, a bit rich and oozy with a citrus finish. Perfect to wake the senses.

As he reached for the second spoon, the ship's alarm went off. "Warning. Incoming missile. Warning. Incoming missile." it began.

Carter shook his head, and called out, "What is going on?"

A voice spoke, "Sir we are under attack from the planet. We received a warning from an automated system. I sent the code that you provided and suddenly we are under attack."

"Well, get us the hell out of here."

"I am trying sir, but there seems to be an issue with the controls. They are frozen."

Looking out the window, he slivers of fire running towards the ship.

The ship started to move, slowly.. too slowly.

The computer intoned, "Impact in 10 9"

Carter jumped up and started running towards an escape pod.

It was, unfortunately, too late for the archeologist, or his palette. His ship had no defensive systems. The missiles slammed into the ship, blowing it apart.

[illegible]

Jae looked as the SS Helios was destroyed. It seemed a shame to waste the man's talents, but this was too big a prize to get out. She had been compartmentalizing the operation and with the latest finds loaded into the hull, it was time for a speed run to deliver them to the good professor.

"What of the others?" her second in command asked.

"The planet will take care of them soon enough. We have the notes, we can come back here if the good professor needs more."

"Very good Ma'am."

"Take us to Deneb V."

(Reply None)
(Posted by Tim)

[illegible]

He had gotten here early after insuring that the hallways were clear. He was sitting ostensibly at ease before the desk while in fact he was anything but. He was internally tense while forcing himself to relax. Whiling away the time in the CO's office seemed interminable with the seconds flowing like molasses.

The door finally opened and Commander William Hardy entered. He saw Able sitting at the desk and grunted before walking to the replicator and ordering coffee. Able remained silent as the CO removed the mug and walked behind the desk, took a careful sip then sat down.

"What are you here for Lieutenant?"

Brekinridge pasted a smile onto his face. "Good morning sir. My presence here is on the order of an honorary one. I just wanted to get your input before proceeding and give you an opportunity to get involved."

"In what?" Hardy turned on the monitor in order to review reports from the preceding night. His brow wrinkled when the screen remained blank.

"An organization whose aims are for the betterment of everyone within the Federation. To make it the dominant entity in the quadrant. To protect its interests above all others and to expand its influence. And to punish any who would seek it harm."

Hardy jerked his head toward his subordinate. "Outwardly that would sound good but its martial overtones do not meet the criteria of Starfleet's mission. To put it bluntly it borders on treason. Now explain to me what organization this is and why I should join it."

"The organization is Roanoke."

Commander Hardy gave a shocked exclamation.

"And the reason I'm giving you an opportunity to join is because we need you on board to continue expanding our activities here."

Hardy's hand hit the alert button as he cursed. "You're a fool to think you can initiate me into that cancerous group. I thought your kind had already been rooted out. I am loyal Starfleet." His look showed confusion at the continuing silence.

Able stood to his feet. "The alarms, alerts and communications are currently non-functional." He shrugged his shoulders. "You have to admit I gave you a chance." His right hand came up with a type 2 phaser with a red stripe rather than blue. "Since you won't join us you will have to be replaced."

William Hardy wasn't a meek man, he rose from his chair as well and looked Able straight in the eyes. "If you kill me I will just be replaced. You will be rooted out along with your conspirators. And no matter what threats you make I will not help you. You have reached the end of the line Brekinridge, put down the phaser and submit yourself for discipline."

"I'd already thought of that." Lieutenant Brekinridge smirked. "Come in Outrider 1."

The android entered from an adjoining room. Commander Hardy's face registered shock upon seeing himself face to face.

The android took up a stance mirroring his own. "You are standing behind my desk." The voice was his as well.

When Hardy turned his face back to Able it had been drained of color. "How?"

"Thanks to you sir for allowing us to continue our research. Your services are no longer needed."

He touched the firing stud on the weapon.

(Reply: None)

(Posted by Charles G)

[illegible]

(-78 Deneb V - Betazoid Consulate Miri Achoxur, Betazoid Undersecretary of Agriculture, Tomod, her assistant - 1000)

(Deneb V - Betazoid Consulate Miri Achoxur, Betazoid Undersecretary of Agriculture, Tomod, her assistant - 1000)

Miri sipped her drink. "Did you see this report?" she asked Tomod. "It seems that Dr. Howard Carter, the noted exo-archeologist is missing. Rumors are that his ship was destroyed by a freal engineering accident."

"Where?" Tomod asked.

"That's the interesting part. Seems he had been working in the Sigma Draconis system. From what I could gather, he was busy working some of the dead planets as he claimed to have a lead on another lost civilization. "

Tomod shrugged, "No matter how safe we make it, there is always a risk."

Miri nodded, "I know, it's just odd. I met him once, at a function years ago. He was a very ... passionate man. Top rate mind too. "

Tomod handed over a PADD. "It seems the Sigma Draconis system is attracting lots of attention. There is a Caitain exploration ship there, searching for Orichalcum deposits."

"If you hum a few bars there Tomod."

"It is a crystalline rock that is used as the basis of their power systems. Much like the dilithium that is used by the Federation."

"Well, why don't you extend a greeting to this ship and if they are in the neighborhood, have them stop in for tea, or something. Always good to cultivate information. Speaking of which, I have a meeting with Jae Hammond at 1 pm."

"Really? The noted investor and entrepreneur. That Jae Hammond."

"The very same. She has a proposal she wants to talk about. Not sure why she wants to talk to me."

"That should be interesting. Meanwhile, I've confirmed the existence of that recording, and am hoping that Nixac will sell it to my buyer."

"The Ferengi are very good at gathering information, but buyer beware."

"He has been reliable in the past, and anything involving Cardassians and Orions is bound to cause trouble."

"You are such a cynic Tomod. The Cardassian's are a well respected member of the Federation," Miri began.

"And for a spy, you are too trusting Miri. Legate Mel has been rabble rousing in the Cardassian Senate. You should read some of his speeches."

"Very well, Tomod, I will. But I must get ready for my meeting with Md. Hammond."

(Reply None)
(Posted by Tim)

(-75 Deneb V - Hammond Research - Professor Chems Kitt and Jae Hammond - 1100)
 It had been two weeks since Kitt had left the Academy to take over his position at Hammond Research.
 A whirlwind time indeed. With the help of Carrir Vikas, his assistant provided by Jae Hammond, he
 had been able to get a team of scientists and engineers together. Money had not seemed to be an
 object, and the labs were already outfitted with state of the art equipment.

He had one team working on disassembling the different items that Hammon had brought in. He didn't know the origins, only that they were old. Very old. Representing some very advanced technologies. The team had been going slow, but it was clear that these devices were much more efficient at the energy storage and use than used in any of the Federation systems he was familiar with. If they can understand and can reverse engineer this power system, they will be able to build power units the third the size of the current ones.

A second team was trying to understand the computer coding that Jae had provided. That was slower going, and they had brought in some computer linguists to assist.

The door to his office opened, and Vikas stepped in. "Professor. Ms. Hammon has arrived."

"Excellent, thank you Carirr. Please show her in and bring refreshments."

"As you say, Professor."

Jae breezed into the office, "My dear Chems, how are you doing? It's been ages."

Chems stepped out behind his desk to greet Jae. "I am well Jae. Thank you for asking. Please, take a seat. Carirr will be in with refreshments shortly."

Jae sat down in the offered chair, across from Chems.

"She is very efficient, thank you for sending her to me," Kitt said

Jae nodded. "I knew getting this operation off the ground would require someone with her skills," she replied. ~And to keep me posted on everything. Her real job~ she thought to herself.

"I bring some more goodies for your team. They are being brought down by shuttle as we speak. Tell me of your progress. I know it's only been a short time."

Carirr came in with a tray of finger food and a pitcher of a local juice. She poured two glasses and left discretely.

"It is going quite well. We will soon be probing these power supplies in more detail. Our initial information suggests a 3 fold increase in power storage per unit volume."

Jae feigned ignorance, and let the Bollian talk. She would have her second team review the data and what KlIt said to make sure everything was on the level. One didn't get to her position by trusting just one expert.

After some time, "Well Professor. That is very interesting. Thank you for the update. I will be in town, as it were, for a few days. Perhaps we can go out in a less formal setting and discuss this in more detail."

"That would be nice," he replied.

"Excellent," she said as she stood. "I'll mention it to Carirr and let her make the necessary arrangements."

As she left the office, she stopped to talk to Carirr. The woman took notes about the dinner and passed a data crystal to her employer.

(Reply None)

(Posted by Tim)

[illegible]

(-60: Deneb V - Hammond Enterprises Facility - Jae Hammon and Zeeviil -1100)

"So you see, I have an opportunity for you Zeeviil one that I believe will be quite lucrative for both of us."

The Jelnan looked at Jae. "You have always had lucrative opportunities for me. Any restrictions on the contract?"

"None, the quantity will be limited at first. However within the next year, the production will be fully setup."

"Limited?"

"Yes, enough for some special clients. In fact, you will begin to hear rumors about it. My agents are starting them. And there will be a demonstration at the independence day celebrations next week."

Zeeviil leaned in close, "And who is the target?"

Jae laughed, "Zeevill darling, I would never tell. But it will be a blast, no pun intended."

"I look forward to the demonstration."

(Reply none)

(Posted by Tim)

[illegible]

(-50: Deneb V - Hammon energy research - Professor Chems Kitt and staff - 12:00)

Carirr had out done herself. Jae had been correct, she was the efficient administrator that this operation need. It allowed Kitt to focus on the science and engineering. The information and recovered pieces were really useful and jump started their research initiatives. The big breakthrough came about 5 days ago, when they finished the translation of a portion of the computer and began to understand that the system was a bi-phasic energy source. something totally unique in Kitt's thinking.

The process of nano fabrication has begun to build larger and larger test samples. Today's lunch was to review the data and power curves the team had been generating. based on the side of these energy sources, they could easily achieve a five fold reduction in size of portable power size without sacrificing power. Or put it another way, keeping the systems the same size, an output of five times would be readily achievable.

His team gathered in the room, taking food and sitting around the table. There was a sense of joy in the room. Reverse engineering helped them figure out the system and now came the work of better understanding how this energy source worked so that they could begin to push the limits again. Wherever Jae had found this material was a boon. Perhaps she could let him know and he could arrange a team to go search for more. Who knows what secrets this planet held. Of course, Jae was secretive as well, but she had to keep her edge to support research stations like this one.

Kitt looked around again and saw everyone was settled. He stood up, "Thank you all for coming. You should all be proud at the progress you have all made. Today is to celebrate the data we have and review our progress. From there, we'll talk about the next phase of work. Mr. Lorynn, please start."

A Vulcan at the end of the table stood up, "Thank you Professor Kitt. My team has been working on the power output of these bi-phasic crystal power sources that Ms. Kerrigan and Qitra Vagon have been fabricating."

In crisp terms, coupled with various graphs and charts, Lorynn introduced the fundamental data about the power storage and generation of these bi phasic power supplies. It took advantage of a unique resonance at the sub-atomic level that caused a simulated amplification of the string vibrations, leading to tremendous power outputs. The important component was how the two crystals were channeled, using a microlaser to trace the conduits into the structure.

Even more importantly, when the two halves were separated, it was impossible to determine that they were anything more than two crystals. They did not give off any sort of radiation or other emissions that they could detect. There was some speculation as to why this was the case, and a third team was working on that aspect.

"Thank you Mr. Lorynn. Ms Kerrigan, tell me about fabrication process."

"Well Sir, that was Qitra's breakthrough, I just run the machines."

Quitra, a Bolian, stood up. "Well sir, thanks to having the examples, we were able to mathematically model the curves based on the size of the power output. These equations," she showed a series of complex integrals, "help us plot the curves to etch into the crystal. We are hoping to further automate this, and understand some of these constants that we think will further allow us to boost the power. It is also imperative we find more sources of these crystals. And of higher quality."

"I think I have solved that problem, at least in part," spoke up the trill Terzed Lad. "It seems that the Caitains mine one of these crystals for their own power sources. However it is not clear that they have figured out this issue. Or are even aware of the potential."

Professor Kitt templed his hands and looked around the room. "Thank you all. This is most promising. Have you identified the other component in detail?"

"Of course, it is a metallic block that is composed of layers of hexagonal spheres of gallium, darmstadtium and erbium. These layers repeat and are finally encased on a ceramic stabilizer. It is child's play with our molecular sequencer to make these in any size and shape."

The meeting went on for several more hours, all of which was recorded by Carirr, who also stopped in periodically to check on the people, using her telepathic powers to make sure no one was hiding anything.

[illegible]

The meeting over, the scientists sated and happy. Now came the hard work. Carirr encrypted all the data and prepared her report for Hammond. This was going better than expected and this energy source would be ideal for phase two of the project. A project that had languished for the past two years due to the energy issues that were not readily overcome. That was until now.

"Once we install the new power sources that have been developed for these toys, you are going to be in business." said the man. "And with most shielding focused on energy weapons, these needles will do some damage, perfect for some covert, and not so covert disposals. Everyone has been focused on energy weapons, "

"Add to that the fact that you can tune in the power based on the distance, so closer ranges keep it subsonic, and virtually undetectable. Based on the power outputs, we can also reduce the size of one to about 16 centimeters, and easily concealable, such as this one, perfect for saying 'good bye.'"

The man turned to the side, pointing to some crates, "And these babies right here will upgrade your raiders by a factor of 4 easily. By using the new power source, this will punch a small hole in a ship's shield allowing the release of hundreds of small magnetized bombs that will swarm the ship and cause damage wherever they go. Perfect for raiding merchants and traders."

The man looked around the room at the shadowed figures. "Each of you represents a long time relationship with us. We're only starting to gear up production facilities, so it'll be a few months till we hit capacity. This is an information session, and for each of you to place your bids to have the first units delivered within a month, two months and three months. After that, we'll be setting standard terms and conditions along with delivery."

The man waved his hands, "Now so you don't doubt my sincerity, we will be arranging several demonstrations in the coming weeks as to what these weapons are capable of. I would challenge each of you to come up with a task, an event, a display that you would like to see these items used in. I have a panel of judges to chose the event. Each of you will get invitations to the event to see exactly what our items can do for you. Our history speaks for itself. Out quality is top notch and out here with the federation leaving the hard work to honest folks like you and I, we need that extra protection."

The voices murmured around the room. they were hooked. Now was time for the bidding.

((Undisclosed location somewhere in the Deneb sector - Mysterious Figures - 1400)

"Well Kar, that was better than expected,"

"Absolutely Tyler. You are the showman afterall. Projections are 20% over our models. We should be able to invest in the second facility soon enough."

"Excellent. Now Jae had better come through for us."

"You saw the data, Man. Even Strickler was impressed. As long a Barrett can do his usual magic,"

"Which he will,"

"Then quit your worrying. Lets look at these ideas. See who's on who's shit list, why don't we."

"this is the best part."

(reply None)

(Posted by Tim)

[illegible]

(-30: Altair IV- Orbit - Defensive Station 7 - Bridge- Lieutenant Able Breckinridge- 0700)

~Mufala Skorsi is the real winner.~ Able looked over the bridge as he considered the next move. Operations had been picking up steam since replacing Commander Hardy. Two more bays had been converted over and research was going well. That was as much as they could do since opening up more would cut into their available supplies.

His reverie was interrupted by a sudden flashing alert lamp and the sounding of the klaxon. "What is that?"

"Energy buildup in Cargo Bay 4. Going critical."

"Shut down power to the bay."

"I tried. It's not on our system."

Able's blood ran cold. That bay housed unarmed warheads!

"Decompress and flush"

The order wasn't completed in time. The station bucked and pitched suddenly throwing one standing officer to the floor, the other was flung into a wall. Able himself saw stars as his face slammed into the control panel. He numbly felt a wetness flowing down over his mouth as he tried to regain his senses. A hand went to his mouth and came away bloody. He needed a compress he realized suddenly as he tried sucking in a breath through his nose and could feel the liquid in it. ~Bloody nose.~

"Damage report!"

"Cargo bays 3 and 4 offline. Hull damage on decks 5 through 8 and venting atmosphere."

"Seal off those areas!"

"Sir cargo bays 2 through 5 are gone."

"Open a channel to the other stations."

"Ready."

"This is Commander William Hardy, platform 7. We have had an explosion aboard. Loss of structural integrity and venting atmosphere. Assistance is required."

~What the hell happened? The explosives in that bay weren't armed. Who could have?~

Then his blood ran cold. The real Commander Hardy had been kept sedated secretly in cargo bay 5. If he had managed to escape...

"Rerouting power. Compromised areas are sealed off."

=^= Station 7 we are sending over teams to help with your damage control. ETA 10 minutes.=^=

Breckinridge was trying to stop the flow of blood from his nose with his left hand pinching the capillaries at the base as his right hand operated the console. Everything they had been doing was now lost along with the scientists. He didn't have time right now to stop and curse. He would do so later in private.

He and Outrider 1 were now alone on the station and there would be an investigation into the event. What had looked so promising was now blown all to hell.

~Great, just bloody great!~

(Reply: None)

(Posted by Charles G)

[illegible]

(-30: Deneb V - Betazoid Mission - Annual Harvest Festival Celebration - Miri Achoxur and Federation Undersecretary Oded Fehr - 1300)

Miri lead the ambassador through the many displays in the garden. One of the beauties of this part of Deneb V was that, while not tropical, was very pleasant all year long. She had been working hard to get the Federation to pay more attention to the bountiful gifts that Deneb V could provide in greater abundance, especially since there was a lot of hard feelings around former Federation members after the contraction.

"So you see, Mr. Ambassador, Oded my friend, the people are ready to help. The Federation needs a nudge, a small one. This is why you're here."

"How could I have refused such an offer from a dear old friend Miri. It is good to be away from the stuff confines of the office. This is why we became farmers, growers, isn't it."

Miri thought of her families farm, "Yes it is. The fruits of the soil bind us all together. And now, still there are children suffering. All the technology of the Federation, all that they depended on is gone. Getting even a 100 new freighters, fast ones, we can take the largess of Deneb V, and other planets, helping those children. Regaining what was lost."

"Your plan is not without merit Miri. That's why I am here." He patted his breast pocket. "I have a decree from the Federation council that will make a head start on that very proposal."

Miri turned to him, her eyes sparkling, twinkling with glee. "Really Oded? You were able to do it."

He puffed up his chest just a bit. "In fact, yes I was able to get some of what you asked. As we speak, there are 20 fast freighters coming this way and should arrive in 48 hours. After that another 20 a week later. I've also got a commitment from Star Fleet to establish a starbase here to help with the logistics. That may take longer, as they are all backed up, but the work is in place."

She reached up and kissed him on both cheeks. "You are a saint dear Oded, this is just wonderful."

Tomod, Miri's ever efficient secretary and bodyman discretely cleared his throat.

[illegible]

"I have the target in sight. Sending confirmation picture now."

"Turning recording device on now."

The man leaned back behind the scope of his strange weapon and adjusted the settings. Getting it in here had been child's play. The scanners didn't even blip with the disassembled power supply. The tests were true. While the stage was not shielded, who would expect an assassination at an agricultural gathering, they had been ready for that as well. The man wondered why the target had to die, but he was getting enough latinum that he didn't really dwell on the issue.

[illegible]

Miri escorted Oded to the center of the stage. The flag of Deneb V was displayed prominently behind the podium, with the Federation and Betazoid banners to either side. Looking out at the assembled revelers, all enjoying the labors of the ambassadorial kitchen staff, as well as prominent chefs from the capital, she smiled again. She was content, her role here was working out well.

Stepping in front of the podium, she raised her hands, "Hello friends, honored guests. Welcome to this years annual festival to celebrate everything that Deneb has to offer to the sector. It is with great pleasure that I introduce my dear, dear friend Ambassaor Oded Fehr, Undersecretary for agriculture with a very special announcement that will bring much joy to everyone and help us help those who need our help the most. "

[illegible]

"Execute, execute, execute." came the command over the comm.

(Posted by Tim)

(-29: Deneb V - Betazoid Mission - Tormod - former assistant to Miri Achoxur - 000)

The last 12 hours had been a blur of activity. While the embassy's security has started their job of looking for the assassin, and doing all those things that they needed to do when a high-ranking official was killed, Tormod slipped away to perform his own duties.

The place had been quickly crawling with local police, a small Federation contingent and more. The assumption had been that the Federation Ambassador Oded Fehr had been the real target, but Tormod didn't think so.

His first step had been to enter the second office in the basement of the building where he established a secure communication with the home office. The coded response came back almost immediately, setting into motion his next steps as well as confirming his promotion to acting station chief. Something he never wanted to do, as he was a man of action. Hoepfully the home office would dispatch someone to help him soon.

Second, he poured himself a stiff drink and sat down. Now was the time for thoughtful action. Let the local units run down the leads. He had some people on the payroll or who owed him favors so he could keep tabs on what leads, if any they developed. Tormod was working on the assumption that Miri was the real target, and that scared him. It meant that they had stumbled onto something that was important enough to kill for. But what.

The hours passed as Tormod reviewed data. Proposed and rejected many ideas. The web that Miri had been studying, researching was vast. Dangling ends and more. It was going to take days and he felt that didn't have days.

(Deneb V - The Stardust - Loran's office - 0130)

Business had been good. Very good. It seemed everyone and their uncle needed to get out and wonder what happened today. As the 34th rule said, "War was good for business." Especially at a bar on the edge of a major spaceport.

The Ferengi unlocked his office. "Lights," he said as he entered and closed the door.

Turning around, he let out a small squeal. There was a figure casually sitting behind his desk, feet resting on the mahogany finish. To the side of this figure's feet was a gleaming blade stuck into the wood.

"Now... what ... who?" he said as he drew himself up to his full height of 1.6 meters. "This is a private office, and if you don't want me to call my security, you will get out of here right now."

The figure stood up, almost two meters tall and picked the knife out of the desk. "By all means, please, have a seat. I'm hear to talk business. And don't bother with the alarms, I've already taken the liberty to disable them."

He bowed, letting Loran move to his seat. The figure put a small square box on the deck, activating some buttons. "There, now we can talk in private, without Nixac listening."

"Now, I know a lot about you Loran, and know that you trade in information. I don't have lots of time, so I'm impressing on you that I need information and I need it quickly. I am willing to pay for good, accurate information. Likewise, if the information is bad, I am willing to make a different sort of arrangement," the man casually tossed the knife around. "If you get my meaning."

Loran nodded, "I am sure we can come to an arrangement. My usual fee plus 20% based on the urgency of the need. What do you need?"

"Who killed Miri Achoxur. And where can I find them?"

Loran whistled low. "I am not sure what you think I am, a magician? I don't deal in politics and the like."

Tormond chuckled, "What about a certain data crystal about a certain meeting between a certain Legate from Cardassia and an Orion? You underestimate yourself."

Loran frowned, he had been most careful to sell that information, but this person knew about it. Clearly something was up. Rule 208 crept into his mind, 'Sometimes the only thing more dangerous than a question is an answer.'

"Very well, I will see what I can do. My price is doubled now, plus the rush fee. Come back tomorrow at this time, and I'll see what I can get you."

The man nodded, "Until tomorrow Loran."

(Reply None)

(Posted by Tim)

[illegible]

The captain sat in his chair. These large freighters were so heavily automated, that his crew of 12 was more than sufficient to run the ship on these runs. Since the Federation decided to start shipping goods again to non-Federation planets, he was able to secure a very lucrative contract. It didn't hurt that his money had found it's way to Oded Fehr to help grease the skids of bureaucracy.

The Denebian stevedores were very efficient, and once the Federation stood up a starbase, it would be even easier for him. This was pure profit for him and his crew. He might be able to afford a second ship in a year and expand his reach, and wealth. As he sipped his whiskey loaded coffee, he watched his helmsman work. Boring work at that, but between manning the scanners, and making sure nothing was amiss, it paid well.

Standing up, "Well Micky, I'm off to the rack. Steady as it goes and we'll be at Trill in 2 days."

"As you say Captain. Have a good nap,"

O'Shander headed to his quarters. Pulling off his boots and uniform, he finished his drink and laid down for a good night sleep.

(Unknown ships - near the Freighter -- Mysterious Pilots -- 2300)

"Good think the data was accurate. Much easier to go fishing when you know where the fish are."

"Cut the chatter two. Is the trap set?"

"Of course, Vera is ready for the big dance."

"Lets get rich fella's."

(On the way to Trill - 1 day out of Deneb sector - Freighter Ever Given - Micky O'Mally - 0100)

The system was automated and Micky had his feet up, eyes mostly closed. The Captain wouldn't care, they were in deep space and there was almost no change of running into anything out here.

Suddenly the proximity alarm started to sound. Micky almost fell out of his seat as he tried to steady himself and check the scanners.

He laughed as the scanners refined the object. He was surprised it even triggered the alarm, based on the size of object. It was about the size of a football, and would bounce harmlessly off his hull.

Good thing he didn't wake the Captain. That would have been bad.

He realigned the scanners to ignore the object. However try as he might, he couldn't get a fix on it.

As he tried to adjust the K band, the alarm went off again. This time, on his screens, he saw three objects. "What are those?" he said

[Ship of unknown design on intercept course]

"Where did they come from?"

[Unknown]

Micky hit the alarm button. "Captain, sorry to wake you, but we have three ships on our tail. No idea where the came from."

The Captain groaned, and sat up. "Well hail them, and get everyone up."

Micky turned back to his boards. "Unknown vessel, this is the Freighter Ever Given en route to Trill with supplies."

A voice came back, "Freighter Ever Given, you are in violation of the Treaty of Utrecht and are ordered to heave too."

Micky frowned, "I think you are wrong. We have permission to travel here for all legitimate purposes."

The Captain came on deck and looked at Micky who shrugged. "Shields up," he said softly.

"Fat load that will do,"

"Do it."

"Freighter Ever Given, heave to now or be fired upon. You are ordered to surrender."

"Listen here lad. This is the Captain and all my permits are in order. Go bother someone else."

A chuckle came back from ship.

Suddenly there were more alarms on the Ever Given.

(Unknown Ship -- Mysterious pilot)

"Deploying shield buster," came the call.

The bulbous heads encountered the edge of the shielding. There was a brief explosion, turning the shield orange. This allowed the head of the missile to continue through the shield breaking open and releasing it's deadly payload of microbombs.

Inertia took care of the rest as hundreds of small explosives landed against the hull of the ship. In unison they started to explode. Each one not enough to damage the hull significantly, but the combined effect of all of them, plus the spread was more than enough to rapidly overwhelm the automatic repair systems of the survey vessel. As the hull breach widened, the man nodded.

"Send the boarding party."

(Reply None)
(Posted by Tim)

[illegible]

Loran had called on many resources, paying out bribes and threats to get what he needed. He knew that this was a profitable venture, and he was sure he could sell the information over two or three times at least.

He also came across some other ancillary information that he had heard a syndicate was interested in. Poor federation Clerk couldn't hold his real liquor, and when you made it into a sweet drrink coupled with salty snacks, well hew-mons were all manners of predictable. He would put feelers out on that in the morning. Shipping schedules were generally public knowledge as the dockworkers and loaders made sure of that, so they could get work and keep getting paid. But the Federation did things differently.

Tonight, Loran was in his office, he wanted to see how the fellow got into his office of solitude. Not even Nixac could break his locks, not for what he paid for them, and the special modification.

Sitting in the middle of the desk sat a Ferengi puzzle box, containing the data crystal that the man wanted. Only when the credits were exchanged would the box be able to open.

Loran was surprised when the main door opened and in walked his tall client.

"You have it?"

"I have what I could gather quickly, safely and discretely," Loran replied, pointing ot the box. "It wasn't cheap, so there will be a 20% surcharge for the crystal."

Tormond snorted, "Of course, you are getting cheap there Loran, I remember a time when it would have been a 50% surcharge. Unless, that is, you have a second buyer for this information."

"How much for exclusivity?"

Loran shook his head, "That was not part of the original deal, and a deal is a deal is a deal."

Tormond tossed a data chit onto the table. Loran examed it, "Vulcan, very trustworth.'

Loran pushed the box over to Tormond, pressing his thumb on the contact. It popped open, revealing a colored isolinear chip. "It is as solid as I could confirm. Give me 48 more hours and I can chase down more of the information."

"Why?"

"Because I liked Miri. We had a fling a while ago, and she was able to get me special prices on Betazoid liquor. Very popular here on Deneb V. Say you don't think you could hook me up do you Tormod?"

Tormod smiled, "Miri always said you were clever. Don't be too clever now Loran." He pocketed the crystal. "I will be back. Let's hope that this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship."

With that Tormod disappeared into the bar and into the night.

(Reply None)

(Posted by Tim)

[illegible]

Life aboard a survey vessel, especially one such as the H'ress, required a certain level of patience, persistence and optimism. A single good find would lead to greater profits and more amenities. R'Rull has banked her skills on the technology that Sr'oren has discovered. The first planet surveyed, Sigma Draconis V had some minor finds, but nothing that was worth communicating home with.

Following the laws, she filled out the necessary claims paperwork, dated the core samples and had them locked away in their storage hold. She might be able to sell them to one of the more adventurous mining units she had connections with. Ones willing to take the risk that there was a larger strike deeper down. Not as good as a solid hit, but it would keep the ship flying.

The survey on Sigma Draconis VII had been a bust. Both literally and figuratively. They spent several long weeks there conducting the survey, while dealing with various issues on the ship and with the equipment. After some heavy modifications by K'trusa and quick thinking by Shoa, they had finally completed the work just in time to travel to Sigma Draconis VIII, having arrived a week ago.

Sr'oren went right to work, starting in the southern hemisphere of this dense, dwarf planet. There was a strange geographic formation that called out to them. "I can feel it," Sr'oren has said after sending the probe down to do it's work.

Surely, at 0200, he came running through the crew quarters, calling with excitement, waking everyone up.

They gathered in the main room of the ship and Sr'oren showed them the data. It had been early numbers, but was very promising. This might be 'the strike' of the captains life. A chance to get out of prospecting for a change. Not that she would, it was in her blood.

The next days were spent expanding the search parameters and preparing for a physical inspection of the possible strike. This was going to be done by the book, so no one could steal it from them.

The first cores that were brought up were rich with orichalcum crystals. Well formed by all initial accounts of their spectrographic readings. These were VVS and better on the rating scale, something that was going to make everyone a lot of money.

More work had to be done as they expanded the survey, doing landings on a daily basis to expand the area of the find. Put limits on it. Hard to believe how good this was going to be.

Finally, with all the data recorded. Days and days of work completed. Cores secured. The area properly marked and claimed, it was time. Tonight, R'Rull had decided to break out the good stuff she had been saving for just an occasion like this. Acamarian brandy and other assorted delicacies she knew the crew would like.

"Ma'am," called Sr'oren. "I am picking up three small vessels of unknown origin. They are on an approach course to our location."

"40 seconds."

[illegible]

"Deploying shield buster," came the call.

Inertia took care of the rest as hundreds of small explosives landed against the hull of the ship. In unison they started to explode. Each one not enough to damage the hull significantly, but the combined effect of all of them, plus the spread was more than enough to rapidly overwhelm the automatic repair systems of the survey vessel. As the hull breach widened, the man nodded.

[illegible]

R'Rull's cockiness got to her. Some strange new device, something she had never heard of before. Her ship losing atmosphere. Damage all over the ship. As she tried to draw on the breather she saw the shimmer of teleporting figures coming onto her bridge. Her last thought, her last view was that of a strange weapon pointed at her, and a metal dark piercing her body.

[illegible]

"Ship secure. Beginning our sweep."

(Reply None)

[illegible]

(-20)

From: Star Fleet Command

Since Stardate 246.01.08 three freighters carrying supplies from Deneb have been attacked and all souls lost. Each was an unarmed merchant vessel carrying supplies from Deneb V to planets in need of supplies under the recent directive by Undersecretary Oded Fehr.

Ships are being sent to investigate these attacks and any information will be passed on. Please keep active monitoring of emergency channels and be prepared to render all legal aid.

(Reply Non)
(posted by Tim)

[illegible][illegible][illegible]

-----END TRANSMISSION-----