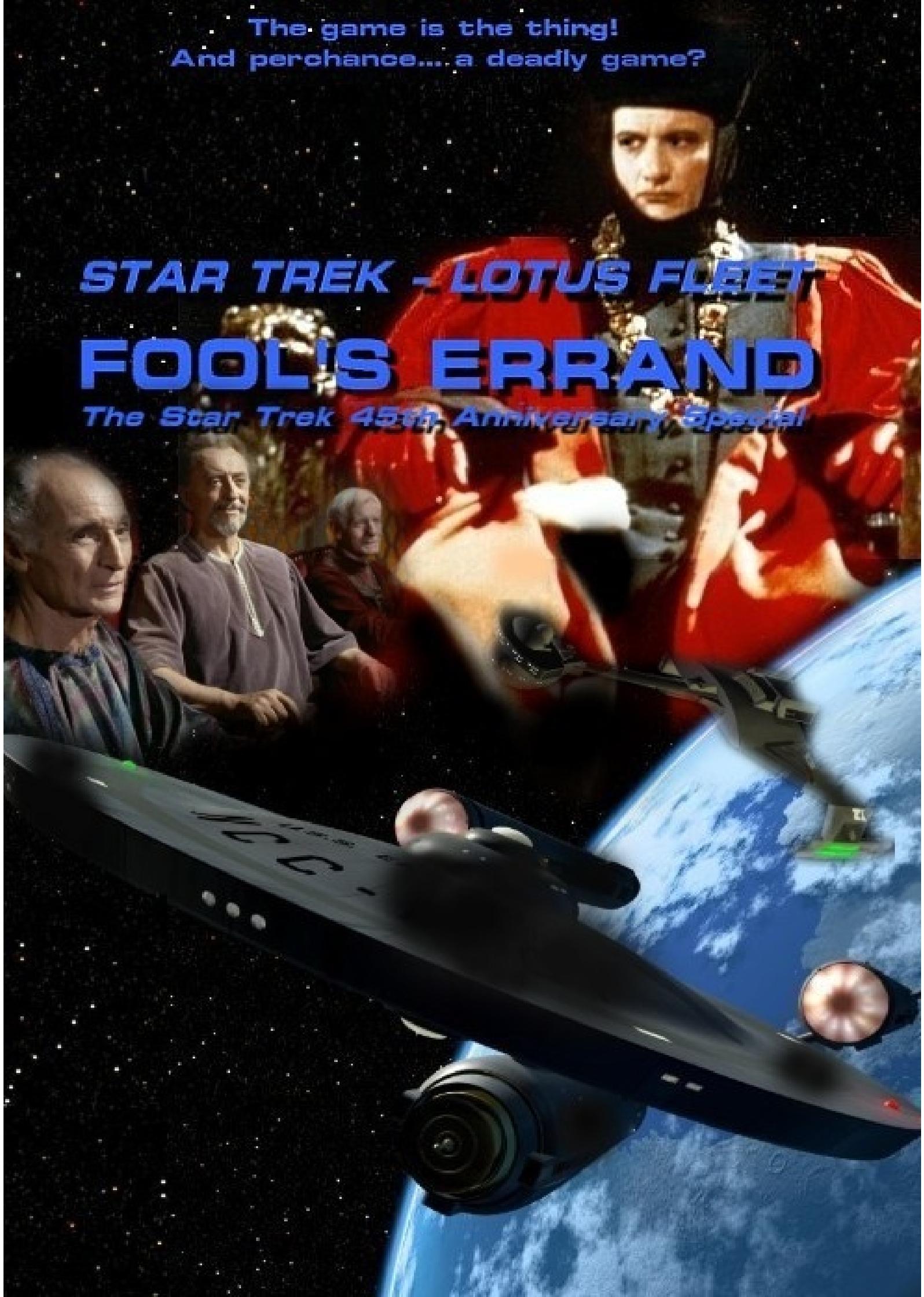


The game is the thing!
And perchance... a deadly game?

STAR TREK - LOTUS FLEET

FOOL'S ERRAND

The Star Trek 45th Anniversary Special



STAR TREK - LOTUS FLEET

STARBASE 10: FOOL'S ERRAND

THE STAR TREK 45th ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

(in order of appearance)

Evshell as Commander Allen Samji

Storm Windfall as Medical Assistant Storm Windfall

Kheren as Captain Kheren

Azzy as Lieutenant Junior Grade Brad Jackson

BlueKnightOne as Lieutenant Junior Grade Danik Brie

Jeff T as Lieutenant Syntron

Gothamkitty as Lieutenant Junior Grade Pel

Forum Roleplaying Session

September 8th to September 11th 2011

Novelization by Kheren

Story Concept by Evshell

Editing by Jeff T.

Cover by Kheren

With Anomaly Beta successfully redirected by the Spectre and the other active ships out on their various missions, Commander Allen Samji prepared for another day overseeing the Lotus refits and the usual daily occurrences on Starbase 10, including check-ins and checkouts of cargo and ordering repairs on the various systems. Upon entering Ops, he saw Ensign Grok at his usual station and he nodded a 'hello' as he passed by on the way to his desk. Various other crewmen and Ensigns were at stations along the circular wall and were actively discussing the day's work. The low murmur of voices was something he was used to although at times were distracting, forcing him to take his work back to his office for an early lunch.

"Anything new to report, Ensign?"

"Same old net loss, different day," the Ferengi replied, modifying the usual human expression slightly to include his own culture's idea of waste.

Samji smiled and said, "Alright... keep me," and he stopped mid sentence with his mouth agape. The Ferengi had just disappeared right in front of his eyes without even a noise or the usual shimmering that accompanied a transport.

"Samji to Chief Carlisle. Any unusual transporter activity?" he asked of the transporter chief and received no response.

"Samji to any senior staff on the Starbase, please report." Again his request was met with silence.

"Samji to anyone, please answer!" Silence again. He envisioned the thousands of people in the starbase all mysteriously lost to some strange transporter malfunction that he alone was immune to. The horror of such a thing mixed with the unusual silence in normally active Ops began to make his heart race.

"Can I help you Captain?" a voice came from behind him. Samji jumped, startled by the sudden noise and turned to see a tall, lanky human man in an Operations uniform at the rank of Ensign. His Brunette hair was held up slightly by mousse and his nose was rather pronounced. He smiled a devious grin at Samji as he offered his assistance.

"It's Commander. Who are you? You are obviously new, but I don't believe I remember seeing your service record."

"Ensign Popeye the Sailor Man, at y'er service Commander, huaghgahgah..." he replied with an odd laugh reminiscent of the cartoon character.

"This is no time for jokes, Ensign!" Samji replied in a raised, commanding voice with a hint of denouncement, and just then he saw that the man was wearing an eye patch. He swore that it had not been there a second ago.

"What is going on here?" Samji asked.

"What do you mean, Sir?" the man asked and offered his hands which had previously been clasped behind his back in a questioning gesture. The arms were suddenly enormous with muscles and an anchor was tattooed to each bulging forearm.

Samji stumbled backward in shock. "I demand to know the meaning of these tricks... Ensign!" he shouted at the man before him.

The man sighed and, asking no one in particular, replied, "Meaning, meaning, meaning. Why are they always concerned with meaning!? Can't the experience itself be enough?"

To Samji's utter shock he then transformed before his eyes into a very recognizable Captain Jean Luc Picard. "What is the meaning of this, Q," he asked in Picard's familiar voice.

"So you're Q," Samji said as the realization flooded into him.

"No, you're Q, and I demand to know why you're on my ship... again!" said the *faux*-Picard. Samji looked around and realized the scene before him had transformed into the so very familiar Enterprise-D bridge.

"Stop this at once, Q!" Samji demanded as the scene then changed again to the Operations room of Deep Space Nine. He looked around and then back at Q, now taking on the persona of Benjamin Sisko.

"Or what, you'll hit me?" he asked in a falsely timid, scared voice. "Picard never hit me, but Sisko hit me. I was surprised, but now I'm ready for it. So hit me."

"I'm not going to hit..."

"Hit me, hit me! Hit hit hit hit me!" he sang as he danced around jabbing Samji with Sisko's fists.

"Or maybe you'd rather kiss me," he -- now she -- said, as the scene changed to the bridge of the USS Voyager. As Captain Janeway, Q struck his best seductive post and batted his eyelashes.

"Janeway is an Admiral now," Samji said, noting the pips, "and I wouldn't even dare entertain the thought..."

"An Admiral!" Q exclaimed. "My former crush and godmother of my child, an Admiral! It's been so long. I should pop in and say hello..."

"Can we get to the point!?" Samji cried, angry enough to hit the entity even while looking like Janeway, but still controlling himself.

Q changed everything back and they were once again standing in Starbase 10's Operations, but none of the officers had been returned. "Oh yes, you're so like the other ones. Nobody wants to have any fun," he pouted. "Fine, if you don't want to have fun, I'll make you have fun. Let's play a little game. If you win, I'll return everything to normal. If you lose, well... you won't be around to realize you lost... so you don't have to worry about it! Now, how to start off... hmm..." he thought, tapping his chin. "Oh yes! You will choose some officers from some of your little Fleet's ships for an adventure!"

Samji refused.

"I will not interrupt the important work they are doing in their missions."

Q shook his head and sighed. "I promise you that your feeble little concept of the importance of your miniscule section of Space-Time will remain satiated. I will return them to the time and place they were taken from."

"What will we be doing?" Samji asked dryly; still not amused, but going through the motions in order to get his officers back.

"That is for *moi* to know, and *vous* to find out, *mon Capitai... er... Commandant.*"

Samji sighed, "I can't very well choose officers if I don't know what we're doing."

"Hmm... you have a point," Q replied. "Good luck, my friend," he said. He then folded his arms in front of his chest and, with a sly grin, nodded and blinked at the same time. Samji recognized the motion as a reference to the ancient Earth show "I Dream of Jeannie", and sighed one more time before his surroundings were whisked away and he ended up in darkness.

As his eyes adjusted to the darkness, he first noticed that he was in a Federation cargo hold, although things looked just a bit different. Next he recognized some of the officers from Lotus Fleet looking around bewildered, also trying to adjust their eyes.

* * *

In the main medical bay of Starbase 10, medical assistant Storm Windfall caught herself daydreaming again. With a deep sigh she turned towards the replicator.

"T-bone steak, raw, with the bone, please!"

Within seconds, the smell of fresh beef reached her nose and she inhaled deeply. Nothing like a steak to take her mind off of a certain...

She blinked.

She could have sworn...

Yes! There it is again!

The eyes of the object of her daydreams!

She shook her head, mentally trying to smooth down her fine pelt that stood on end on her feline-looking lithe body.

"Go away! You are not real!"

She felt her reality shifting, causing her stomach to heave and everything went dark.

* * *

Captain Kheren was in a meeting with his senior officers in the main conference room of his own ship, the Ambassador class USS Artemis, still orbiting the Azimuth Horizon anomaly they had been sent to investigate, one light year from Starbase 10. He opened his mouth to retort to his reporting chief of security and tactical...

And he suddenly found himself in some echoing darkness.

His silvery eyes blinked in a useless attempt to pierce the obscurity, but already the antennae each top side of his white thick-maned earless head were picking up the shades, breathing, smell and bio-aura of several people around him; more than a few quite familiar...

Bradley Jackson, Lieutenant Junior Grade and newly assigned chief of security and tactical, had just finished apprising Captain Kheren about the tactical readiness of the Artemis following a week near the Azimuth Horizon anomaly when he suddenly found himself in a cargo hold.

Looking around, he realized he didn't recognize anyone except for his captain.

At least there was one familiar face.

Reaching down to his hip, he felt that his phaser was still where it had been during the briefing, so it hadn't been a standard transporter beam from the Artemis or the weapon would have been removed by security protocols.

Chief of operations Danik Brie had been listening closely as Lieutenant Jackson was delivering his report to the senior staff of the USS Artemis. They had just completed a survey mission around the Azimuth Horizon and were now discussing the results.

As Danik listened, something out of the corner of his eye had shifted. In the middle of the triangular conference table, a holographic projection of the anomaly they were studying had been floating just above eye-level, but there suddenly had been something strange about it.

Well, strange for a giant, fire-ringed white hole in subspace.

Danik had squinted as he had tried to determine what was different. Then, the projection had moved again and the bald, blue-skinned Bolian had realized what it was.

There was the face of a man in the surface of the Azimuth Horizon projection... and it was looking right at him!

The Chief of Operations was about to run a diagnostic on the conference room's holographic systems when the face winked at him.

Suddenly, the room shifted and Lieutenant Brie was somewhere else.

He tried to look around the new location in confusion. It was definitely not the conference room aboard the Artemis. It felt more like an old cargo bay. The artificial gravity felt different as well, like it was being created by a different kind of generator. Around him was a group of other Starfleet officers. He recognized a number of them as being from his own ship, including the captain; but the others were strangers to him.

Then, a voice the Andorian commander of the starship Artemis recognized with surprise as that of Commander Allen Samji of Starbase 10 was heard.

"Alright folks. I'm Commander Samji, and this is what is happening..." He then proceeded to tell them all about his encounter with Q. Finally he ended with, "...so if we want to get our officers back on Starbase 10, not to mention the various civilians he took... we have to figure out what he wants us to do and try to get it done. Understood? Any questions?"

Samji was a name Danik Brie recognized; the voice too: he had received a message from the man not that long ago, assigning him to Captain Kheren's ship.

The thought that they were embroiled in something involving the infamous Q was not a comforting one.

Brad listened to Samji's report of the situation from a tactical standpoint. They apparently had no idea what their mission was, but from what he'd learned about Q at the Academy, he generally gave the 'team' the tools they needed to play the game he'd created for them.

As he was thinking about the situation they'd been put in, he heard his captain's voice.

"I have heard of this Q entity," then said the deep, soft voice of Captain Kheren. "Because of its level of power and not quite corresponding level of maturity, The best option for us would be to... go with the flow, as you Humans say. The more we will resist, the more we risk angering it and the more dangerous it will get for us... if not for much more than just us."

He scanned around, his antennae waving.

"So... first, *anyone* can tell exactly where we are... and what is expected of us?"

He was obviously not just addressing the people around him.

Unfortunately, chief of security Jackson realized, having a phaser wasn't too much help for telling where they were, but it didn't appear that they were in any danger, at least at the moment. From what he'd learned, he didn't want to unholster his phaser because some of the meetings with Q that he'd read about had mentioned that he didn't like hostile actions... and the rules of the 'game' could change in an instant.

Suddenly he was left wishing he had a tricorder instead of, well preferably in addition to his phaser. Then, somebody familiar stepped up from behind him.

Lieutenant Syntron, chief science officer and also from the conference room of the starship Artemis, took in his sudden shift in reality with typical Vulcan stoicism and a barely raised eyebrow. He listened to the message from Commander Samji and afterwards his Captain's response.

He then quietly tapped into his PADD to bring up information on this Q entity... and found out it was an old 23rd century version of it, black and bulky with a stylus attached to it. Using the stylus, he brought up what was noted in it and, with a raised eyebrow, found out it was the information he wanted.

Afterward, he informed his commander:

"Captain Kheren, according to Starfleet records, Q is a highly powerful entity from a race of omnipotent, godlike beings also known as the Q and is part of a collective known as the Q Continuum. According to these records, in every appearance with Federation officers, Q demonstrated superior capabilities, but also a mindset that seemed quite unlike what Federation scientists expected for such a powerful being. He has been described, in turn, as "obnoxious," "interfering," and a "pest".

As he continued to read through the files, he noted that they were erasing themselves as he read them. Nevertheless, he added:

"Captain Jean-Luc Picard stated emphatically in 2367 regarding Q:

"He's devious and amoral and unreliable and irresponsible and... and definitely not to be trusted."

The Vulcan scientist continued to read through the file.

"Among the numerous interactions with Starfleet personnel, the records show that in 2366, Q was stripped of his omnipotence and immortality and transformed into a Human by the Q Continuum as punishment for his irresponsibility."

He continued reading through the file of incidents and interactions, committing the data to memory and formulating his own conclusions as he went. Then, once everything had been erased seemingly by his own reading, the tall, bearded Vulcan looked up at the Captain and stated:

"It would appear that a common thread through the majority of these incidents, Captain, is that he would put Humanity on trial and have various Starfleet officers react within a series of circumstances that he created to challenge their integrity as a species. He referred to Starfleet officers and humans specifically as being a dangerous, savage child-race and a pitiful species. Yet, paradoxically, despite his acerbic attitude, he proclaimed that he had the best interests of Humanity in mind throughout each of these incidents."

"Wha..?"

The voice came from the shadows in the hold.

Confused, Storm Windfall noticed she was no longer in her quarters; nor alone.

Her eyes adjusted with an uncharacteristic slowness to the darkness and she saw a group of people standing a few steps away from her. She crawled back silently deeper in the shadows, or at least tried to, making much more noise than she normally did, hoping to stay unnoticed. Her usually sharp hearing barely caught the end of their conversation.

Q? What does an omnipotent being want from her? She is not as important as the others, Captains and Officers; she is just a medical assistant! Without rank!

She decided to move a little nearer to the group.

Vulcan logic and information, starbase commander Samji thought. Helpful sometimes but right now I don't care what Q is like.

"That is all well and good, but where are we?" Samji wondered aloud.

He then was able to look closer at Kheren as he's eyes adjusted and he gasped.

"Captain, you look different!"

Kheren certainly felt different... in fact, he felt not at all like himself. He had assumed this was from disorientation after such an abrupt transport to who knew where... but it was more than just a lingering bad feeling. He felt weak, a bit apathetic...

As he saw the starbase commander look at him with wide eyes, he instinctively looked at his hands.

They were pale... as if he hadn't had any meat for several weeks. And his antennae...

Kheren raised a hand to his head and delicately touched his cranial appendages. They were still there, on each upper side of his head but... rigid... knobby and stiff; they were not retracting into his skull as they were reflexively doing when he did so...

His stare went wild as his mind tried to grasp what had happened. He was still himself.. and yet, he was not anymore. It was like his mutation, the 24th century genetic engineering that had created him as a full-gendered Andorian male, had been but a dream.

He was still Andorian, still Kheren Kalel Th'Ch'leryll Keth Reiji in his mind, in his heart... but not in body.

He had been... changed.

And he was not the only one.

He was looking at a bald Human whose body shape and facial features were absolutely identical to those of his Bolian chief of ops. But the blue skin and the facial and cranial ridge were utterly gone.

Danik stared at his Captain, noticing the slight changes. He still looked like an Andorian, just a much different Andorian; much slimmer, paler, almost fragile looking compared to his usual dark, athletic self.

"Lieutenant... Brie?"

"Yes, Sir?"

When the Captain continued to stare at him with bewilderment, Danik looked down at his uniform to see if he had spilled something on himself. What greeted him was not a stain, but a fully golden shirt... and pink skin. Danik raised his hands in surprise staring at the distinct lack of blue on his skin. He felt his face and skull, horrified when he felt a smooth dome, and tiny, small-lobed ears... and no facial ridge. He stuck out his tongue and felt it as well, finding the cartilaginous lining was gone.

"What's going on? I'm Human!"

No sooner did the words leave his mouth than a woman with reddish-brown hair and a science division uniform stomped past him and up to the Commander.

Lieutenant junior Grade Pel, onboard the USS Alsea, had been sitting calmly in her chief of science office one minute...

The next, she had fallen out of thin air from where her chair used to be and hit something hard. She had yelled and swore involuntarily.

"What the debting..."

Then, she had frozen, as Commander Samji was explaining their situation... or at least part of it. Something wasn't right here. She didn't know these people. But she knew what, and especially who, he was talking about.

Her eyes narrowed.

Q.

She knew about him. Her brain recalled the relevant information even as she picked herself up and looked around...

And froze again.

Something... something was very, very wrong.

She was taller. Slimmer. Where were... her ears?

And, as she had realized what had happened, her face had darkened thunderously.

That sonofabitch. I'm Jhu-Mon! That... Oh, when I get my hands on him, I'm going to kill him, immortal entity or debting not.

"That *jackass*. He turned me human!"

Pel had muttered in disbelief. Her hand, reconstructed from a past injury with metallic parts, was still the same though, so she had assumed most of her other relevant characteristics had stayed the same... mostly.

She took a look around, and made a beeline for the two men in the room who stood with authority: Commander Samji from Starbase 10 and an Andorian she did not know.

She didn't know exactly yet how she appeared to them: a small, slim, human female, Caucasian, with pert features and auburn hair that curled some, earlobe length. Her facial tattoo was intact though, as was her metallic hand, and the sharp glint in her green eyes that spoke of intelligence.

After getting over the initial shock of the changes, the woman in blue Samji had seen before, but not quite recognized, approached him. He immediately noticed the tattoo and mechanical hand.

"Lieutenant Pel, I presume," he said looking down at her; she was still somewhat short for a human.

"Excuse me, Sir, Commander. Where are we?" she asked, even as she took in the darkened room.

"I'm not sure," he said, thinking for a bit.

The petite woman that came to them was the first person Kheren did not recognize. But she looked quite as upset as his chief of operations was, or himself...or that other lithe cat-like woman in a medical assistant uniform he did not know either that just now he perceived lurking in the darker part of the cargo hold.

The Andorian made a conscious effort to control his own conflicting emotions... and found it amazingly easy; easier than it had ever been in his life.

Of course... I only have the normal amount of hormones for a Chaan now...

It was nevertheless an effort to deal with how deeply he had been altered. Even more than the average Andorian, his very psyche had been born out of his own specific physiology. He wondered how long now it would take for him now to also lose his mind...

He grunted with a barely repressed snarl as he mentally chastised himself.

Stop it! You are still a Starfleet officer! A starship captain! These people need you as much as you need them!

As the auburn-haired woman asked where they were, he stood straighter and answered:

"Wherever we are, people, we have to keep two things in mind. First, it seems over half of us are not Human... or at least we were not *before* Q put us here. This means he has apparently broadened his... interest beyond "testing" Humanity."

As they all listened to him, he continued:

"We do not yet know why he altered some of us to look Human... and not others. Mister Jackson and Commander Samji, true Humans, are unchanged... and Mister Syntron is his usual Vulcan self. And I... I have been turned into an... an average Thallassan Andorian."

He made a pause to calm himself from his own words before finishing:

"So, the second thing we must never lose sight of is this: there would be no reason for Q to make such alterations if this was but one of his infamous fantasy constructs. So we must assume that, wherever we are, whatever will happen next... all of this... is real."

Samji himself also wondered for a bit at the changes that were made before fully noticing also how the uniforms were different. He wondered why it had taken so long to notice, although it was still quite dark, so one really had to stare hard or get close to someone to notice. Kheren was wearing a green wrapped shirt, whereas Danik and he were in gold. Brad Jackson was in red. Their combadges were missing and in place of those were embroidered larger deltas with the familiar logo of Starfleet. Also their collars and pips were missing, but the rank was instead embroidered around the sleeve nearer to the wrist.

He also noticed that the Vulcan had not been changed at all.

"We are in the past, folks," he said.

Kheren looked around again and nodded with appreciative respect to the starbase commander.

"A fair assumption, Commander, and not just because of the uniforms; early to mid-23rd century I would guess. So is your sidearm, Mister Jackson. During this era, there were very few Vulcans serving in Starfleet, certainly no Bolians... and only Thalassan Andorians were known after the Bishee met during the previous century had retreated back to their traditional ways on the homeworld... certainly no one like me... or what I used to be."

Awesome.

Just.

Awesome.

Pel massaged the bridge of her nose, thought some very unStarfleet and unladylike words in Klingon, Romulan, and native Ferengi, and turned her mind away from her frustration, which was considerable, to their problem... also considerable.

If they were in the past wearing these uniforms, that put them in a specific time zone. With more clues she could perhaps narrow it down.

Hearing the Commander speak the words, it became obvious. The question was why had they not realized it previously; probably simply because of the shock at having been randomly transported from their original locations to wherever they were now.

Suddenly, the thought of the phaser popped into Brad's mind. His hand moved down to the weapon at his side. Pulling it out of his holster, he saw that it was tiny, much smaller than what he was used too. Again, something that he should have caught immediately had been overlooked. He should have noticed the change in the feel of the tiny weapon. He remembered seeing replicas of the old phasers in the Academy, but he'd never held onto one before. There was no point in training with such antiquated equipment when they had such greater technology now.

"My phaser has been changed out. Does anyone have a tricorder?" he asked looking around at the group, wondering what equipment they had at their disposal.

"I suppose 'when' and 'where' are the first things we need to answer," she said, mind ticking away.

Then, the officer next to her spoke, and she blinked. As a science officer, she carried her tricorder at all times, but it was gone.

"I used to have one, but I guess Q took it."

As the Andorian in the old captain's uniform spoke, she realized he must be Captain Kheren of the Artemis. And Syntron; she knew him, abstractly at least. She had studied some of his scientific papers. They were quite intriguing.

His words got her thinking, and Pel slipped into Science Officer Mode without realizing it.

"Hmmm. It could be, if we're in the past... Well, official first contact with the Ferengi isn't for another hundred years, fifty years for the first unofficial encounter at the Battle of Maxia between Captain Picard and Daimon Bokh. Perhaps it's to fit Federation species of the future with the past."

Her metal enhanced hand went up to stroke a lobe automatically, but it wasn't there. She only encountered hair. Pel dropped her hand as if it had been burned.

This was is as weird as a three-headed singing targ.

Samji nodded at the Ferengi turned human's remark.

"Yes, and Bolians had not been a part of the Federation until the early 24th century. I can imagine the kind of shock we would cause if unknown races began marching around in Starfleet uniforms during this era. I know from Starfleet history that they started phasing out these uniforms in the late 23rd century, so that at least gives us an estimate for timeframe... as of where? We're obviously in a cargo bay. Beyond that I'm not too sure."

Samji began to take charge of the situation, although technically since they weren't on Starbase 10, he knew he should defer to the newly normal Andorian starship captain.

"And if this real," he said, nodding to Captain Kheren, "we must be very careful to remember our Temporal Prime Directive," he warned. "However, if Q wants us to do something, and our very being depends on it, it may need to conflict with that Directive. Are we all willing to sacrifice ourselves, and the thousands of lives on Starbase 10 to uphold that Directive?"

The Andorian in the antiquated captain uniform looked around.

"I believe we should first do a roll call. I know several of my officers are here, and Commander Samji of course we all know. But as for the others..."

He stood straight and said:

"I am Captain Kheren, up until now commanding officer of the USS Artemis. These are some of my senior officers: the Vulcan is Lieutenant Syntron, my chief science officer; this man with the phaser is my chief of security, Lieutenant Junior Grade Bradley Jackson; the bald man here used to be my Bolian chief of ops, Lieutenant Junior Grade Danik Brie."

He then waited silently for all the others to identify themselves, so that they would know at least who they could count on and how.

Suddenly though a little shy, Pel spoke hesitantly.

"Um, I'm Lieutenant Junior grade Pel, Chief Science Officer of the USS Alsea. I'm a recent transfer."

Her voice was quieter than normal. Damned if she didn't feel like she was back the Academy all of a sudden.

"I, uh, don't think there's anyone else here from my ship."

A small voice then came to them from the deepest shadows of the darkened cargo hold.

"I... I am Storm Windfall, medical assistant, Starbase 10. I don't carry any rank, Sirs, Ma'am."

Storm's ears twitched. Everyone was changed, except the Humans and the Vulcan.

And me, she added mentally.

She curled her tail around her left leg and burrowed deeper into the shadows.

At least I am not the only woman in this group.

She felt their eyes on her. Her features were more humanoid, except for her retractable nails and her tail, which, if she was careful, no one would notice... hopefully.

"I am confused... Why am I here, I am not even an officer!"

Samji had noticed the partially cat-like woman previously but didn't recognize her until she spoke up and he took a better look. He then nodded to her and said:

"I suppose, Storm, that Q felt we should have someone versed in medicine to accompany us. I don't know why he didn't pick a medical officer from one of our ships, but I won't claim to be able to understand his odd intentions."

Brad reholstered his phaser as he searched the cargo bay. The Captain and Commander were discussing the situation and taking a roll call. His security instincts were kicking in and he wanted to assess the situation, figure out where they were, what tools or equipment were at his disposal.

Off in the corner of the cargo bay, he saw what looked like an access panel. He moved over to investigate it. Inside he found a medical kit and an old fashioned tricorder, at least old fashioned to their 'normal' standards. Bringing the kit and the tricorder back to the group he passed the kit off to the only person who appeared to be versed in medicine and the tricorder off to Syntron.

"These might come in handy..." he said, making an assumption that might not have been accurate but seemed correct in his head.

"Fascinating" Syntron replied as he accepted and began to examine the antiquated tricorder from the Artemis's new Chief Security and Tactical officer Brad Jackson. His comment directly addressed the instrument, but also referred to their current dilemma.

After the exchange, he began taking readings with the big, black and silver tricorder. He then noticed the other young humanoid female beginning to approach him.

Storm didn't know how to tell them that she only recently graduated and was only allowed to heal minor wounds and abrasions. She took the med-kit that was handed to her and after making a quick inspection, realized that that was exactly all what the kit was useful for.

"I am sorry to inform you all, gentlemen, but this medkit won't heal anything more serious than a burn or a small scrape. Even the hypospray is without dosages."

"Well, I suppose we'll have to be careful not to get hurt, then," Danik replied to Windfall's observation. "Lieutenant, Junior Grade Danik Brie he offered to her as an introduction. I'm currently serving my first tour aboard the USS Artemis as her Chief of Operations."

"Well, I guess we should be grateful with what we have," Samji said in response to Storm's remark. "Also, it looks like you now have a rank, congratulations doctor!" he said grinning.

He had no way of knowing what it really was because she was dressed in shiny, blue short-sleeved medical scrubs.

"This looks like the cargo hold of a starship," observed Kheren after a moment. "Although I am not that much of an expert in ancient vessels, despite my current command. We might find a sickbay with anything we need... which hopefully we will not need to use."

Looking over everyone, he thought for a moment then turned towards Samji.

"Commander, I am not sure what this Q entity has in mind but apparently he gave us some... roles to assume, judging by our uniforms, somewhere during the 23rd Century. If this is a ship, my green shirt and braids points me out as the captain. You by rank should be First officer, but since you're the one who actually met him, your counsel will be invaluable. So, if you agree, I would ask you to assume that role, whatever Q planned."

He then turned to the others, first looking at the felinoid woman. He was not really surprised by her appearance, now that he understood the setting they had been put in; there had been Caitans aboard Federation starships during this time period and she somewhat looked like one of those cat-like humanoids with her thick hair, retractable claws and tail.

"You seem to be our designated doctor, lady, whatever your rank would be; which is in fact irrelevant to a ship's doctor anyway. And you certainly know more about medicine than what our Starfleet first aid course provided any one of us."

Now looking at the others, he spoke to each one in turn.

"Lieutenant Syntron will be our science specialist, Mister Brie our engineer and Mister Jackson our tactical officer... I believe it meant also navigator in those days. That leaves Lieutenant Pel to assume communication so as to always work closely with Mister Syntron. Two science officers on our side will be our best advantage if we are to understand how to get out of this all in one piece."

Communications officer. Shiny. Well, it's not as if I don't have the ear... Dammit and deficits, she thought, as she realized she DIDN'T have the ears for it anymore.

The Andorian turned once more to face the starbase commander.

"If we are to assume bridge duties... how are your piloting skills, Commander?"

Samji was about to say something to the effect of his piloting skills being rusty to the point of being non-existent, until an Ensign in a red shirt opened the door to their cargo bay. As he did so, the lights turned on and he saw the group standing there in a circle.

Shocked he looked from one to the other, without knowing what to say, until he saw Kheren.

"Captain Shoral! Why are you having a meeting with your senior staff in a dark cargo bay?" he asked.

The young Ensign had not yet met any of the senior officers of the newly commissioned Constitution-class ship that was docked at Deep Space K-7, but he certainly recognized the famous Andorian Captain, Shoral.

Pel lied.

She was a Ferengi, after all, even if she wasn't one physically at the moment. And the falsehood rolled off her tongue in such reasonable, easy tone it would have done Deep Space 9 station bar owner Quark proud had she known him. And the words were out of her mouth before she had any kind of chance to think them through.

"Captain Shoral and the Chief were just discussing some intermittent power problems with the ship's systems. This cargo bay, for instance, has lighting issues," she said.

She hoped she hadn't jumped the gun with the lie, but there it was.

Picking up on Pel's story, Danik jumped in:

"Right. The power grid seems to be fluctuating in this section." Turning to Captain "Shoral," Danik continued; "I appreciate your coming all the way down here to discuss this with me, Sir. I'll assign a team to begin tracking down the problem right away."

Phew, Danik thought. Nice save, Lieutenant.

"I am definitely *not* a Historian..." whispered Kheren knowing only the sensitive Vulcan ears of Syntron would pick him up, along with Allen Samji who was closest to him. "No clue who this Shoral is."

Fortunately, the Ferengi-turned-Human had promptly reacted with a believable answer to the inquisitive Ensign suddenly coming up on them.

And the young man looked at him with obvious recognition in his eyes.

Whoever this Shoral was, I seem to look just like him... although I suppose we Andorians look all alike to...

He suddenly remembered something that made him pause.

There were very few non-Human commanding officers in those days, very few ships with a non-Human commanding officer. There was the USS Intrepid manned mostly by Vulcans... and the only ship with an Andorian captain had been...

He blinked.

Is this the... the USS Eagle?

"As you were, Ensign. We will presently go to the bridge."

Game on... he thought as he took the lead, hoping turbolifts of this era would be as easy to find and as automated as he hoped.

As the group moved out into the corridor, Danik began looking around the ship. He couldn't tell what class it was, but it was definitely of an older design. Danik thought back to his History classes from the Academy. These days, vocal interaction with the computer hadn't gone much beyond information queries. That meant most of the ship's controls were handled through manual control interfaces. Isolinear circuitry hadn't been invented yet, which meant...

Duotronic circuits? Was that right?

The Lieutenant continued puzzling over the problem as he followed the group through the corridor. The Ensign looked quizzically at Pel's response, wondering why the entire senior staff was required to consult on a simple Engineering issue, but didn't want to question his superior officers.

As the rest headed to the bridge, the Ensign went off to find the component he was looking for and then followed them down the hall to the turbolift. On the way, he walked beside Danik.

"I guess you're our Chief Engineer, right, Lieutenant...?" he said, holding out his hand and searching for a name.

Danik hesitated a moment before replying. If they were in the past, he didn't want to give away too much information, nor would he want to offer a Bolian name to the Ensign. His thoughts went back to the incident aboard the Artemis concerning one of his Transporter Chiefs which had dismantled the transporter earlier for diagnostics while they were launching.

"Wayne. Lieutenant Wayne," Danik answered.

"Ensign Mayweather, Sir," he responded, shaking "Wayne's" hand. "I'll be your Assistant chief."

He slowed as the rest of the group made its way to the turbolift. This officer might have some useful information. He could catch up with the others.

"Ensign, this will seem a strange question, but how much about our current mission and ship's status are you familiar with?"

"I know about the same as you, I reckon," he continued. "I read the same brief."

He then stood at attention and listed the ship and her mission as if from rote.

"USS Eagle, NCC 956, Constitution-class. First mission to explore the newly discovered planet of Organia near Klingon space to investigate a pre-warp culture there, Sir. As per the directive of non-interference, we are restricted from making our presence known or associating with the natives in any way, as any interaction with advanced technology could unknowingly affect the development of the species, Sir. Failure to abide by such directive, as you know, forces upon those responsible a court martial and potential dishonorable discharge from Starfleet."

Organia? Danik thought, as in the Treaty of Organia? And the first mission? That means we're here before Kirk and the Klingons forced the Organians to end a war and set up a truce. Why would Q send us here?

The once Bolian officer nodded as if it was the answer he expected the Ensign to give.

"Very good, Ensign Mayweather. It's important for you to be familiar with all the available information regarding our mission. I'm heading for the Engineering station on the bridge. Get back to the Engine Room and get me a report on current ship's status."

Thank you, Ensign Mayweather...and of course you too Mister Brie, silently thanked Kheren, listening to the engineers conversing. His antennae might not retract anymore, but they were as sensitive as ever to sounds even a Terran dog would have strained to hear.

"Aye, Sir," Ensign Mayweather said, and made his way down to the Engine Room.

He went to the main console and brought up the ship's status and then the Engineering duty roster on another screen. He wanted to make sure that he was familiar with all the officers in their department, including the nice looking blonde Chief Petty Officer that was on duty assisting him.

Unknowingly, and without physical contact with Kheren, the Vulcan Syntron had picked up on the Andorian's thought after his initial comment and stated to him nonchalantly:

"If I recall from Academy studies Captain, the U.S.S. Eagle was a late 23rd century retrofit Constitution-class Starship, similar to the Enterprise of Captain Kirk during this era."

"Even earlier than that, Mister Syntron," retorted the Andorian between his teeth. "NCC-956 was of the original Constitution design commissioned during Kirk's historical five-year mission. It has always been the dedicated flagship of the Andorians, to honor them as one of the founding members of the Federation, just like the Intrepid was to Vulcans and the Enterprise to Humanity, even today... I mean... well... you know what I mean."

They spoke with low tones as they exited the cargo bay and came into the high-ceilinged and brightly lit corridors beyond the door. They were crossing path with many crewmembers, almost all Humans, but who did not eavesdrop on senior officers' talks as Starfleet etiquette directed. They were nevertheless cautious in not raising suspicion with their odd conversation.

"Intriguing" the Vulcan acknowledged quietly to the Captain as they stepped up to the turbolift.

Fortunately, they easily found the nearest turbolift by its bright red door in the pale blue wall and the black plate engraved "turbolift 7" in bold white letters. They all packed themselves inside the circular cabin encircled with what looked like badly designed vertical safety handles.

"Bridge." ordered Kheren once the door slid shut on them.

And nothing happened.

"Perhaps if we grasp and turn this..." Syntron stated as he grabbed the lever and engaged the manual lift control.

Meanwhile, the Ensign named Mayweather had luckily stopped with his back turned to the turbolift and did not see the Captain make the critical error that would have raised his suspicion even further. Syntron's suggestion worked and the turbolift was whisked along to the bridge without the Engineers in company.

Commander Samji stepped out of the turbolift and looked around at wonder to see how similar it was to the pictures he had seen of the bridge of the original starship *Enterprise*. There were however a few distinct differences. One was that every console and display contained Andorian Graalek lettering, which fortunately his Universal Translator automatically translated for him. There was also a distinct blue lighting that made the aura of the bridge a bit darker, and the room was definitely colder than any Starship or Starbase he had been on.

He looked around for the Commander's chair and realized that unlike the newer ships, this wouldn't have one. He mused that he was to stand beside the Captain like a faithful Labrador... at least when they were both on duty and on the Bridge.

His specialty was in Science, but they already had two officers to handle that. He amused himself with the thought that Syntron would look better at that station anyway.

So he took his place and turned around, waiting for Captain Kheren to take his.

As they stepped onto the bridge, Kheren had no doubt now that they were indeed "there." Like all Andorians, he had seen holopictures of this bridge in the astronautic exhibition of the Laibok Museum, the Andorian capital city; it was the same in every detail. But to genuinely step onto this bridge...

At least I am familiar with the chair, mused the Andorian as he went directly to it. He had an almost exact replica of it installed on the Artemis; almost: the 25th century arm consoles he was familiar with were now replaced by the original push button controls of that time period. And there was no data screen.

Sitting in the swiveling command chair, he looked at those unfamiliar controls while the rest of his bridge officers took place at their own stations, themselves taking time to orient themselves properly, looking at the controls with the well-feigned unhurriedness of senior officers assuming their posts. Fortunately for him as for them, they were simplistic enough so as to have them settle him and them quickly in their unfamiliar environment.

Arriving at the science console after exiting the turbolift, Syntron sat down on a chair very much like his own swiveling retro chair on the Artemis. The temperature on the bridge however was uncomfortably cold. This was irrelevant though, therefore he would ignore the chilling sensation as he instead focused on his task at hand.

He began to engage the primitive console. Luckily, he had some experience working with antiquated equipment like this. Within moments he had accessed the computer and library files and then begun doing research.

As their feline doctor settled nonchalantly albeit a bit stiffly to his left and Commander Samji to his right, Kheren noticed there was already a pilot at the helm control, a rather small Andorian Than who turned towards him.

"Captain, we have cleared all moorings and have been authorized for departure by station K7 flight control. Plot laid in for Organia, ready to engage at standard cruising speed."

"Bridge, this is Ensign Mayweather. Ship's systems are functioning efficiently and ready for launch. We're a go in Engineering."

"Thank you. Helm: Warp speed."

Kheren guessed standard cruising speed of a Constitution class starship would be much lower even than that of his own old-style Ambassador class. That would at least give them all time to familiarize themselves with their surroundings and roles before reaching their destination.

Organia.

Like all Starfleet officers out of the Academy, he knew quite well what Organia was and its place in galactic History.

This is the first contact mission with them. And no one knew what they really were until the next ship got there... and that would be Kirk's Enterprise... on the eve of the Second Klingon-Federation war... which the Organians averted... will avert... unless we screw things up.

And this was no game... this was for real.

Pel had followed silently behind, listening. Her hearing was... not nearly as keen. It was odd and troubling. She didn't like it. She wanted her damn ears back!

She looked for the comm station, saw it, and sat gingerly in the seat. The buttons were unfamiliar, but she was sure she could figure them out. Hopefully... Maybe... She reached for one, hesitated, and pushed it anyways. Nothing exploded, so she began a careful scan of the system and, discreetly, brought up the user's manual.

And Pel began to read, committing to her considerable memory the specifics of her 'new' job even as she brought up the data the Federation had on Organia. No sense in being less than prepared.

Down in engineering, Ensign Mayweather went over to chat up the CPO, forgetting to check her name first. A few minutes later when they went into warp he returned to look over the rest of the names, and was shocked to see the first name on the list: Lieutenant Commander Todd Brunswick, Chief Engineer.

"Um, Lieutenant Wayne, Sir, this is Mayweather again. Where is Lieutenant Commander Brunswick?"

Samji bent down and whispered to Captain Kheren, "Perhaps, Sir, it may be best to look up our assumed names on the duty roster. Also, I think a meeting with *just* the senior staff may be advised, ASAP."

He moved over to the nearest console which happened to be next to where Syntron was standing and hit a few buttons to bring up his name before responding in an authoritative tone.

"This is Commander... Patel. Lieutenant Commander Brunswick is off for medical leave until further notice, Ensign. Carry on."

"Y-yes, Sir," the man responded, clearly feeling nervous that he was having to constantly question the senior staff.

Pel overheard Samji speaking to the captain and seconded that notion quite heartily. She brought up her own name: Penny Jackson. An ordinary enough name, unassuming. But the picture was completely wrong.

She experienced a moment of great annoyance. If Q could go through all the trouble to bring them here and even change their own damn species, he could at least give them a solid cover from which to work...

She tapped a button and sent the image on her screen to Syntron's science station, silently informing him of their little problem. With their combined skills, it shouldn't be hard to change the files, or at least make a 'picture not presently available' appear on the reports.

Moments later, the Vulcan received a message from his fellow science officer, the Ferengi named Pel, who was temporarily changed into a human female... apparently named Penny Jackson. He read through her message and after carefully modifying the files she referred to, sent her back an acknowledgement.

Afterward, he turned back to the computer to focus on discovering as much information as he could about the ship, her crew, and possibly their mission.

Danik had arrived on the bridge just in time for Mayweather to deliver his report and question his identity. He gave a sheepish grin to the Commander and nodded in thanks for the quick cover.

Turning to his station, he admired the stark, primary colors of 23rd century ship design. It certainly made things clear as to what went where. A wave of nostalgia rolled over him as he actually *pressed a button* to call up status displays to confirm Mayweather's report.

That nostalgia quickly dissipated as the computer churned over his request. The Artemis was an old ship, but with her upgrades she was never *this slow*.

Danik Brie monitored the status of the warp engines as they powered up. Not as smooth as in the future, and only integral warp factors were available, but these old Constitution-class ships were as reliable as anything the Fleet had ever built. He reveled in the opportunity to fly in one, something he thought he could never have a chance to do.

Kheren for his part nodded without a word to his Number One, waited for him to dispose of the inquiry from engineering then stood up and announced:

"Steady as she goes, Helmsman. Notify me when we will reach the system. Senior staff to the briefing room. We have a first contact mission to prepare for."

"Aye aye, Captain. Steady as she goes." answered the Andorian piloting the ship, his four eyes glued to the screen.

As they all filled the meeting chamber, Kheren felt again a sense of familiarity seeing the triangular table in the center of it. Had it not been for the triangular viewing screen in the middle, he could have almost believed he was back on the Artemis, which had the same type of conference table, inherited from that very era they were now trapped in.

"Mister Jackson, seal the door and stand guard. But your input in this meeting will be needed also."

The altered Andorian did not sit, but stood at one end of the table, resting his hands on its glossy surface and looking at each one of his time-travelling companions.

"Alright; first we need to know *exactly* who we are supposed to be, where we are supposed to be and what we are supposed to do here... and fast."

"Well, it's not like we can exactly look up the history," Samji noted. "One disadvantage to the popularity of the Enterprise in Starfleet Academy history is how its stories overshadowed all others to the point where it is the only thing you remember. I remember every detail about their involvement with the Organians, but no mention of the Eagle studying them prior to the event!" he said, throwing his hands up in frustration.

He then crossed them and paced slowly back and forth while attempting to bring up some inkling of memory.

"Be sure Q did not put us in a situation where we would know the outcome beforehand," agreed Kheren. "Mister Syntron, Lieutenant Pel, did you find anything from computer files or communications records that could at least tell us who we are and what is expected of us from the current Starfleet Command?"

"Sir?"

Storm stepped forward hesitantly.

"If I may... It's general knowledge that the Q can't abide the Organians. My personal opinion is that, while I can't be exactly sure... both the Organians and the Q possess the same powers. They just operate on different ends of the spectrum. Where the Q, or rather just Q, do their utmost to be irritating and act irrational and childish; it's interesting to know that Q called the Organians that... the Organians prefer to observe rather than interfere. They practically disappeared after establishing the Treaty of the Organian Peace zone that ended the second Klingon-Federation war before it even began, while Q is still making a big nuisance of himself."

She paused, taking a deep breath before continuing.

"Captain, you may just consider that Q has sent us here for his own amusement, rather than to perform any 'worthwhile' task."

She sat down nervously, uncomfortable under the gaze of the Captain.

"I'm just sayin'..."

"Thank you, Doc. This is the first thing about this whole situation that starts to make any sense," acknowledged the Andorian towards the feline woman. "At least it might give us a clue about the why. But, whether or not Q is using us for some grand cosmic purpose or simply to cause mischief with the Organians, I do not see us having any choice but to play the game until an opportunity offers itself to us to either win it or bow out... gracefully if possible."

He looked at the others.

"So... the immediate question is about the how; any info about game rules and playing pieces?"

Syntron first searched for data throughout Starfleet records and then perused through the ship's library banks for any information about the mission or the history of the Organians, yet found virtually nothing except their names and that they were being sent to Organia on a preliminary survey mission.

He then reflected back through his own memory for pieces of information. As he started to remember some basic details, he turned and addressed the commander.

"From what I recall about Organia... it is a class M planet located critically along the Federation-Klingon border in the Beta Quadrant."

He added then after a short pause:

"This planet utilized a committee of wise men known as the Council of Elders. They were not a governing body, since the Organians do not have leaders, but more like a group of passive advisors who were extremely powerful yet portrayed themselves as weak and defenseless. As it turned out, they were once humanoid, but had evolved beyond the need for physical bodies and had become extremely advanced and powerful energy beings."

Looking at them all thus assembled in their historical uniforms, he concluded:

"Apparently, since this planet is in such a critical location, we are being sent there to gather information before first contact is actually established. However, it is very possible that we could have hostile encounters with Klingon ships on the way and when we arrive at Organia."

They were all nodding in agreement. And so he continued:

"And we are just at the turning point where negotiations for border settlement with the Klingons will start breaking down. In a few months, they will fail completely and two fleets will be massing over there, ready to drench this sector in blood and fire... until the Organians themselves will put a stop to it... everywhere from here to QuonoS and to Earth," recalled Kheren. "They will impose the terms of the Organian Peace Treaty Zone where no hostile action from either party will be tolerated within a bandwidth of 1 parsec wide by three-hundred parsecs long between Klingon and Federation territories... but peaceful settlement, especially joint ventures between the two governments, will be promoted, which will lead to several incidents like on Sherman's planet... and planet Neural."

The Andorian thought for a moment, his antennae lashing this way and that until he said:

"If first contact is prevented or fails between the Federation and the Organians, a war that never happened might come to pass... Or if we were suddenly to have ourselves forced into an early confrontation with the Klingons, it could precipitate that war before its time and change events... maybe cause the war itself before the Organians could be aware of it and intervene... Or this very confrontation might be necessary to start the chain of events leading to the conflict that brought them onto the scene..."

Looking at his friends, Kheren sighed:

"As Commander Samji told us, we have no specific data about the mission of the USS Eagle; even on Andoria, her known record starts with the command of Captain Igrilan Kor who was her captain for forty-three years; the longest successful term of service for a Federation starship in history. There is no mention of a previous captain named Shoral... at least that I know of. So, we cannot recall our own History to foresee what will happen... or what *should* happen."

The Andorian punched the table in repressed frustration.

"No way to tell until we actually get there... and what are our exact roles in this? Apparently, I'm supposed to be Captain Shoral, commanding officer; Commander Samji is believed to be a Commander Patel, First officer of this ship... Lieutenant Pel is supposed to be Lieutenant Penny Jackson, her comm officer... and apparently Lieutenant Brie was expected to be Lieutenant Commander Brunswick, before he named himself Wayne... What about the others?"

Storm walked over to the nearest computer and quickly entered the sickbay inventory.

"Captain?" Her voice sounded surprised and a little taken aback. "It seems I am still me, Sir! Though fully Dralaxian and quite a bit older!"

She pondered the fact.

"It must be one of my forebears... It's been a generations' long tradition for the women of the family to study medicine... in fact, only female children are born in our family."

Seeing the unasked question in the Captain's eyes, she continued;

"Our line doesn't form marital or any long term bonds or relationships, Sir. The fact that my twin was male was seen as something of a miracle, as males haven't been born in the Windfall family for over fifty generations. And never twins, for that matter."

After a pause she finished saying:

"The only conclusion I can come to is that I am in the place of one of my forebears. Though I haven't read anything like this in the family journals..."

Only the slight twitch in the tip of her tail showed her disconcertment.

"Coincidentally, Jackson was apparently a very common name back then and their tactical officer was also a Lieutenant Jackson" slipped in the security chief just then.

Bradley Jackson had sealed the door as requested and was standing guard in front of it to ensure no one joined them that wasn't already inside the room.

"Needless to say Sir, Q had a purpose for bringing us here, be it to 'test' us or to have us do something."

The Andorian pondered the feline female's discovery and his security chief's revelation for a moment.

"Not impossible that I am myself trusted into the skin of one of my own ancestors, especially that Andorians have very large and extended family ties... although there will be no way of knowing for sure."

He did not want to dwell any further on the details of his peculiar origins, of having been artificially created in a genetic combination of DNA to fuse together the two male genders of his species into one, in an attempt to avert their coming extinction. Andorians did not discuss such matters with off-worlders anyway.

"This could have possibly explained away the apparent randomness of selection Q did with us for this... game of his... Except that I cannot believe either Pel or Brie had any genetic link to those Humans they are supposed to incarnate at the moment. This is probably some more element of confusion for us to amuse our... game master."

He looked at Syntron.

"And so... who are you supposed to be here and now?"

Syntron looked back through the records and with a slightly raise eyebrow.

"S'Trion, a Vulcan male science officer who was a Starfleet science officer aboard the USS Intrepid prior to being transferred to the USS Eagle three point seven weeks ago. He currently holds the rank of Lieutenant Commander and is listed as being the Second officer."

As he perused through the personnel file he noted:

"Curiously, the likeness of his Starfleet image on record is similar enough to my own that I did not tamper with it when I modified the records for Lieutent Pel... that is Penny Jackson."

Pel stepped up, a little hesitant at all the new people but determined nonetheless. If only they didn't make her feel like she was twelve. And the loss of her ears was particularly unnerving. She just didn't FEEL right.

"Mr. Syntron and I looked up the personnel profiles. There was a slight discrepancy with the pictures, but we got that fixed, so if anyone looks these up, they'll see a small computer error that makes the picture 'temporarily unavailable'."

She took out the PAAD, a clunky old thing like everything else on the ship, and handed it to Captain Kheren first.

"It seems the rest of the crew is relatively familiar with our names, if not our faces, so it'd be good for everyone to get familiar with it."

She had. Penny Jackson, human female, 28 Earth standard years old, communications officer. Used to be a science major, changed it in her last year at the Academy, going to Communications. Mother was a dentist; father was a teacher at the Mars University for Math and Science. She had been transferred to the Eagle last week from the Potemkin, where she had served for two years.

It wasn't a stellar record, but that was probably actually a good thing: the less that was noticeable about her, the less she would be noticed; Which was good at the moment.

Damn that Q.

"If there's anything else you can think of, Sirs, that could be a hole in our cover story, I'm getting the hang on my console, *I think*, so I can access the computer and edit whatever is necessary. The last thing we need is for someone to get suspicious. I suspect we will be too busy for that shortly."

She took a breath and finished saying:

"As for Organia... It seems like we'll just have to wing it, as discouraging as that is."

Lieutenant Jackson continued to listen as the other officers lend their expertise to the situation although no one truly knew anything.

"At this point I don't think there is much we can do but go on our way. We don't know what we are supposed to be doing; we don't know what we should not be doing. If we second guess every decision we would have made we'll only be less effective. I would recommend going about our 'mission' but remaining extra vigilant, remaining on guard for anything that gives us a clue as to what Q wants."

Samji listened to all the interesting points about what could and couldn't be the result of their actions there in that time and place in history, and contemplated on their best strategy. At last he spoke up.

"As the Captain said, who we are and any link there exists will most likely just be a distraction to amuse Q. Additionally, second guessing every decision to try to come out with the correct events would also be a mistake, and another reason why he probably put us here to further amuse him. Our best option: to act in accordance with Starfleet regulations and expectations and do 'our' job to the best of our abilities! We know what the officers we inhabit probably would've done in certain situations, so let's honor them by assuming they'll do the right thing, while still keeping in mind the general line of events that followed this first mission."

He then checked the nearest chronometer. They had been discussing this topic for quite some time and they were about halfway to their destination.

"Shall we now go get ready for whatever faces us then?" he suggested.

Kheren listened to the commander while perusing the content of the quaint black PADD and its stylus the former Ferengi had handed him.

"I agree, Commander. Good work here, Lieutenant Pel; I mean Lieutenant Jackson... Penny Jackson I mean."

This was getting confusing with two bridge officers with the exact same name. He resolved to call her by her rank and his security chief as Mister... and hoped they would know when they were addressed.

"Let us first avail ourselves of the data our lady science officer provided us to assume our expected identities properly. Then we will brief ourselves for this mission as for any other one we would in normal circumstances."

The Andorian paused to gather his thoughts before continuing:

"Starfleet protocols are virtually unchanged since the present time period... but technology has. Mister Brie, you will have to correct us when we go beyond current technology capability and refrain us from trying to do anything with some sudden "wondrous" genius invention from foreknowledge before others native to this time period. The same goes for you from the tactical standpoint, Mister Jackson, and from you both, Lieutenant Pel and Mister Syntron, about general knowledge."

He then looked at the shy felinoid woman.

"Doc Windfall, I have a special task for you; study all our given roles and help us keep in character or cover up any blunder. Of all things, we must not do anything to arouse suspicions that we are not who we are supposed to be and not where we are supposed to be. There have already been several dangerous slip ups and we cannot both concentrate on solving this mission and on play-acting at the same time. Your help will be invaluable in this."

He sighed, lifted his head and his antennae before finishing:

"All right: let's get busy."

They would barely have enough time to do it before the call from the bridge would come for them to face history.

Brad waited for the word that they were dismissed to unlock the doors. One of the worst possible slipups would be allowing someone on the bridge to hear them discussing the temporal timeline and how they didn't want to change anything.

Most certainly *that* would change something.

He knew that he had a huge task in front of him. He had to figure out what tactical procedures were currently known. Procedures were very different today, well in the past, than they were in their normal timeline.

Historical tactical procedures were not a huge discussion point in the Academy and it wouldn't do for him to use a maneuver that hadn't been developed in their current time line.

"Bridge to captain Shoral,"

It took a moment for Kheren to realize he was the one being addressed. He tapped the insignia on his green shirt, and then rolled his now deep blue eyes upward before looking at the comm button on the table and depressing it.

"Shoral here."

"Sir, we are coming out of warp at the edge of the Organian system. Sensors are detecting a Class D7 Klingon battlecruiser orbiting the inhabited planet... They're hailing us, Sir."

"On our way. Shoral out."

He did not have to say more.

Time was up.

He led the rest of the time-displaced officers back to the bridge and they poured out of the turbolift to head to their respective stations as he slid back in his command chair with a glance towards the altered Ferengi:

"Lieutenant Jackson, ship to ship channel please. And find all you can about whose ship this is. Mister S'Trion, full scan of this ship and the surrounding area."

Klingons did not have cloaking technology yet during this time period, but there are other ways to hide one.

Game on, he thought, looking at the viewing screen.

Brad pulled up what the computer knew about the ship which was relatively little. He on the other hand knew a little bit more as he had taken to studying Klingon technology and history as a hobby during the Academy. If his memory served him correctly, which it usually did, the Eagle and the ship they were facing were about equally matched. Armed with two heavy disruptor cannons, a photon torpedo launcher and a phaser array it was close to the armament of the Eagle herself. If it came to a battle, he could certainly ensure they came out on top due to his additional information.

But, was that the correct decision in this situation?

The Vulcan science officer was audibly confirming his own data.

"Affirmative Captain" Syntron... now S'Trion affirmed as he stood up ready to take his station: the pieces to this game were falling into place and the first move about to commence.

It was now a matter of how well this makeshift crew of mostly officers could adapt to this timeframe and these circumstances to effectively play out the hand that was being dealt to them.

Scanning throughout the sector as he searched for ships and any anomalous readings, he currently found only the one D-7 orbiting Organia.

Looking over the design of the ship itself, he could see that it was predatory in nature. This was not a vessel of exploration or research... it was a vessel created for battle. He noted that the bulk of the ship's overall mass was incorporated in the aft section. The bridge was located on the bulbous head, which was separated from the aft section by a relatively thin neck that flared out into the wings. Jutting from below these wings were a pair of outboard warp nacelles. The ship's impulse engines were located on the caudal section of the ship.

It was especially menacing to a Federation ship being manned by a crew of Starfleet officers thrust into to this predicament and only vaguely familiar with how to maximize the potential of their given Constitution class vessel.

"Captain... Shoral," the Vulcan Scientist began, it would appear the D-7 is the only ship in the vicinity. At the moment, it has not taken any actions to indicate a hostile intention."

But these are Klingons from the 23rd century he thought. Some level of confrontation seems inevitable... But the science officer stated none of this.

Hearing his name and a responsibility that he would normally have performed, Brad Jackson began to attempt to open a channel but thankfully remembered that on board ships of this era there were specific communications officers and, as annoying as it was, the communications officer was also named Jackson.

Instead, he began a scan of the Klingon ship to determine its weapons status as well as any other information this antiquated ship could give them about what they had just encountered.

"Initiating tactical scans Captain." he reported as he waited to see if Pel would attempt to open the channel with the potential enemy ship.

Danik nodded his understanding of his orders. The two most important rules of ocean diving were to never dive outside your experience and to never dive alone. Danik was pretty sure they all were way outside their experience, which meant the second rule was even more important. They had to be ready to come to each other's rescue if they began "floundering."

Following the rest of the time travelers back out onto the bridge, he had once again seated himself back at his station and begun calling up every technical manual he could get from the library computer.

The general principles of starship engineering hadn't changed much over the centuries, but the capabilities of the equipment had. The ship topped out at a maximum cruise speed of Warp 6, but could be pushed to Warp 8 for a short period. Overtaxing the engine meant possibly burning out the dilithium crystals in the reaction chamber, which would mean replacing them. The technology to recrystallize them inside the reaction chamber would not exist until right before the end of this century.

Weapons and shields were standard equipment for the time period, which meant Jackson would probably feel more effective with sharp sticks and harsh words.

Subspace communications, navigational deflectors, transporters, and tractor beams were all what one would have expected, but sensors were less efficient and possessed lower resolution.

Three weeks, Danik estimated in his head. Three weeks and I could get this up to modern Starfleet standards.

Danik signaled his Engineering teams to be ready for action. Klingons weren't exactly known for their congenial spirit, especially in this time.

Storm touched Captain Kheren's sleeve.

"Captain, remember the names." She whispered in an undertone. More loudly she said: "I will be heading towards sickbay and prepare myself, if you don't mind, Sir. With Klingons, we never know when I will have to patch up a few scrapes and bruises!"

"I don't know where the sickbay is," she whispered again. "I've never been on a ship before, Captain."

Her ears dejectedly flattened against her head.

"Neither have I... on this antique class I mean," he whispered back, "and let's keep together for the moment," before saying outloud; "please stay here, Doctor. I fear this will require some diplomacy and your counsel might prove precious."

Before communication was established, he ordered:

"Lieutenant Jackson, contact Starfleet Command, apprise them on the situation and request new orders. Mister Jackson, tactical analysis of that ship."

"Aye, Sir, ship-to-ship channel," Pel said crisply as she trotted to and took her seat.

She pressed two buttons -the right ones, and she thanked the Treasury she had always been a quick learner- matched the Klingon's frequency, and activated the main viewscreen.

"Onscreen."

There was a half-second moment of static that she cleared up immediately, cursing herself silently. Maybe not as quick a learner as she had thought. Damn. She didn't speak to apologize because they were live now, but she flushed just a tiny bit and her green eyes narrowed in frustration. She completed her given orders silently, for she didn't want to interrupt the conversation, but gave a small nod to let them know the deed was done.

Then Pel, watching the viewscreen like the rest of the crew, blinked.

On the screen a stern tan face with dark bushy eyebrows and a black mustache that curled around thin-pressed lips appeared. Others like him sat at consoles behind him.

The faces were not Klingon... at least not what the Lotus Fleet officers turned Eagle crew recognized as Klingon. Mostly they looked to be Human; slightly reminiscent of the people on Earth of the Middle East or the southern former Soviet states.

Only one figure that did look like a Klingon they were familiar with sat almost completely obscured in the unusually dark shadows of the D7 bridge.

That figure back there. He... He looked like a normal Klingon... a 25th century Klingon.

Pel could only just barely see it for a second, as he was almost completely hidden, but something about his body size, the muscles, the posture was different than the others.

Ever so casually, she turned to her console, as if she were disinterested and merely going back to her work, and discreetly tapped the button to record the video. She'd take it to the Captain, Commander Samji and Syntron. If she was crazy, well, no harm done.

But if they weren't the ONLY ones from the 25th century... were they?

Then, there was a very good reason Q had sent them here, a very good reason indeed.

The man standing in front spoke.

"I am Captain Krug of the I.K.S. K'tang. I have claimed this pathetic little planet for the Klingon Empire. You will leave immediately or be destroyed!"

He then recognized the Captain.

"Ah, Captain Shoral, I see you got yourself a new post! It would be a shame if this first mission on your pretty new ship were your last. Leave now and I will spare your pathetic Starfleet vessel," he spat.

Typical... whatever they look like thought Kheren as he glared at the startlingly human-like faces of this Klingon commander and his crew.

"Commander Krug; how generous of you. I am sure you aware however that this area is free space and that my ship is easily a match for yours. Are you ready to risk your honor and that of your crew in possible defeat? Are you eager to plunge the Empire into a full scale war here and now?"

He ostensibly tasked.

"And all of this over a backwater world with no significant resource..."

As he left the words and the feeling suspended in the air, the Andorian glanced at the message sent by Pel.

Is it possible this is why... he suddenly wondered. He had noticed the shadowy figure in the background but did not see the possibility so cleverly perceived by the Ferengi.

And now it had him worried. He tapped on the small readout as if in annoyance to steer Samji's attention towards it.

History might have already been altered. He shuddered inwardly.

As the Klingon bridge appeared on the viewscreen, Brad noticed the familiar looking Klingon as well. The man stuck out like a sore thumb. It was obvious he didn't belong in this timeline, but the question was: did Q bring them here to deal with that Klingon, or was that Klingon Q himself... or did this have nothing to do with the man who theoretically did not belong on board that bridge?

At this point, most of the decisions were in the Captain's hand. He was prepared to provide a tactical analysis of the situation but with the channel open to the Klingon ship, it was not an appropriate time.

Samji looked at the readout and then up to the viewscreen to look closer at the shadowy figure. It WAS a normal Klingon... which meant he had to be from the future too.

Krug smirked maniacally before saying, "Do not intend to understand our strategy Starfleet! I will fight to the death for this planet and so will my crew. To die in battle is honorable! Are you so willing to do the same?"

As he spoke, Samji turned and whispered to the Captain.

"Sir, Perhaps you shouldn't be so quick to antagonize him. I'm sure the Federation didn't encounter the Klingons at this planet until the Enterprise arrived several weeks from now. If they had, war would've broken out in the same manner as we are seeing now. On the other hand, maybe we *need* to destroy this ship to fix the timeline... or it could make it worse."

As if to confuse the issue even more, Krug bellowed:

"And are you so certain we're evenly matched, Captain? Perhaps a demonstration of our new and improved weapon systems is in order!"

As Brad watched the interaction between the Klingon on the other side and the Captain, he saw something that concerned him. Weapons were powering up on the other ship, and the type of power output they were showing they were capable of was something that shouldn't have been created for years, almost that of a Klingon battlecruiser from their own timeline.

"Captain, something's not right here..."

Krug then nodded to his tactical officer who fired a single disruptor shot directly at the bridge.

Suddenly his tactical analysis was thrown out the window. The timeline had already been altered. It appeared that this Klingon that they saw had armed the ship they were facing with modern day weapons, something the technology of the Eagle couldn't withstand even with Jackson's advanced tactical knowledge.

The weapon melted away their forward facing shield as if it was made of ice and consoles began sparking. One exploded in front of the Andorian manning navigation and he was dead before hitting the deck.

A few other suffered major plasma burns and several fell to the deck from severe electrical shock. Many of the crew from Lotus Fleet were harmed but only with minor burns and abrasions.

Through it all, Krug laughed maniacally before the screen malfunctioned and cut him off.

"Rotating shield frequencies!" Brad Jackson yelled as he began reallocating the shield's power; knowing it wouldn't do much good against another shot from those weapons.

The attack came so suddenly and with such overwhelming power that it took but a second for Kheren to understand what was going on.

Klingon from the future back in the past to alter History; obviously to ensure no interference from the Organians when the war will break out. And he already did: this ship with such weaponry should not even be here.

In one salvo, Commander Samji's estimate was proven and his question answered.

Now, the Andorian already had a very clear idea what he could do to ensure that the timeline would be restored... but kept it as a last resort plan. Before he went that route however, he needed his officers to give him other, less drastic options if any was still possible.

And quickly. The Klingon would typically gloat... but not for long.

Pel was rocked as the bridge came under fire. Consoles exploded and, though her own merely smoked a bit, she however was thrown from her chair and landed hard, hitting her head on the floor. The world went gray and spun for a moment, before she picked herself up unsteadily. She had a bleeding gash on her left temple, and her mind was fuzzy.

Where the hell did the Klingons get that tech?!? We just got our asses handed to us! Treasury and the Great River!! It must be that Klingon I saw. He must have improved the weapons of that D7, she thought, even as thinking hurt and red trickled down her Human face.

She shook herself.

Stop whining and get back to your post, you idiot! What if they fire again??

She scrambled back to her chair.

"Communication systems are down, Captain. Reports of injuries and casualties coming in. Deck 2 has a hull breach, and deck 3 has a plasma leak, but engineering is on it," she reported.

Her head pounded but Pel ignored it. She could be injured later. Right now she had a job to do.

She almost opened her mouth to report aloud her observation of the Klingon from their time, but stopped herself.

There were other officers on the bridge; she'd have to make it private.

Pel checked the recording. Her console had escaped major damage, and she immediately transferred it to a data square which she pocketed for later, even as she referred people's communications and tried to fix their own.

The force of the explosion had swept Storm off her feet. With her natural ability, she landed firmly on her hands and feet, her tail straightened for balance. A surge of very hot air singed her pelt and she felt small blisters popping up on her skin.

Oh My god! Oh My God! Oh My God!

She shook her head, her eyes skimming over the silent and the screaming figures, the stench of burned hair and flesh hanging thickly in the air. Her hand automatically tapped her breast and it's with frustration that she remembered:

No combadges!

"Lieutenant Jackson!" she bounded up to the smaller woman, "alert sickbay and transport the injured and the bodies to sickbay! Let the medical staff there take care of them. Ask them to send me emergency burn packs; dermaline and a dermal regenerator and a hypospray with enough cortical stimulators and painkillers! NOW, Lieutenant!" she nearly roared when the smaller woman dithered over her computer.

Then she recalled also that site to site transport was quite dangerous during this time period with the transporter technology available then... now. With a growl she directed several junior officers to carry the injured to the turbolift.

"Sickbay alerted, ma'am," Pel said.

Her ears rang and her pride hurt some; it wasn't like she hadn't gotten to her chair as fast as she could, and she was bounced around like a springball! But to see the formerly shy and out-of-place felinoid CMO suddenly bark orders and spring into action was enough to put a small smile on her face nonetheless.

"I am sorry, Lieutenant, it wasn't my intention to jump on you like this," apologized Storm as she ran the scanner over Pel. "No serious burns or contusions..."

She pressed a hypospray against her neck.

"There! That will make you feel better in no time!"

Storm then turned towards the Captain.

"Are you unhurt, Sir?"

"Except for my pride," he simply shot back. "Ready yourself to help anyone here faltering or wounded."

Storm grimaced. Why are senior officers so stubborn?

"I'm sorry, Sir, I can't do anything for your pride, but I can do this," she ran the dermal regenerator swiftly over the lesser burns and scrapes and applied dermaline over the welt on his forehead. "You never know what germs might be floating around in this tub!"

She quickly scanned and applied medical aid where needed to the rest of her teammates... Yes, she felt a sense of pride run through her, yes indeed! Teammates.

Her slight euphoria vanished when the ship started to rock under the impact of another hit.

Then Kheren swiftly ordered:

"Mister Wayne! All power available to raise back and reinforce those shields! But keep reserves for propulsion! Mister Jackson, concentrate all shield power on direct facing with their firing arc and add a deflector pulse to strengthen them! Mister S'Trion, find a way to disrupt their targeting sensors! Commander Patel, take the helm!"

He shouted to Pel:

"Shipwide channel!"

Then he said in a strong, firm voice:

"All hands to the saucer section!"

Brad looked over at the Captain and between the officers from his own time line. They needed to be able to talk, to strategize but they couldn't do it with the other officers present.

"Captain, I suggest we confine the bridge to Senior officers only and clear all junior officers to their battle posts."

He hoped that would give the Captain the opening to clear the deck, leaving just those that had been brought by Q to the bridge, but the question remained whether the Captain would take the option, or if it was even a good suggestion.

Kheren stood up, nodding to acknowledge tactical chief's suggestion.

"All junior officers, clear the bridge! Report to auxiliary control!"

As they moved out swiftly, he looked around at his Lotus Fleet crew now all alone in the Eagle's command center.

"People, I need options in the next seconds!"

The Vulcan scientist pondered for a few moments and then offered the captain a possible option:

"Perhaps with the primitive resources available I could fabricate a makeshift frequency scan detector to determine the location and energy signature of the D7's targeting scanners and then create a cascading barrage of phaser array blasts to disable each of the targeting sensor emitters... that is, with the help of Mister Jackson working on the weapons aspect of this plan..."

Pel's mind followed Syntron's train of thought.

"...It could work. After we disarm them, we can hit their shields and engines and leave 'em drifting. We can't engage them head on, so something more tricky seems in order, Sir," she said thoughtfully.

"Oh it's gonna be tricky alright," growled Kheren sitting back in his chair, looking at Syntron, Jackson and then back at Pel. "Work on it you three and make it quick!"

"Also, and I could be crazy, Pel added, but I think I saw a modern Klingon, one from our time, on that bridge. If that is the case, we'll have to account for it in any plan we make."

Her head wound throbbed, and it was still bleeding sluggishly; they always did, due to the high amount of blood vessels in the area. She ignored it as best she could. It didn't matter, not in the scheme of things.

"Yes you did, Lieutenant; and that is why we will be able to act now," confirmed the Andorian.

The two Science officers Syntron and Pel and Security Chief Jackson immediately headed for the turbolift to get down toward main engineering. If they were going to get this process going in the shortest amount of time, they would need to split up.

As they started towards the turbolift, Syntron stated quietly:

"Mister Jackson, if you can prepare the weapons array so that they can precisely target the D7's sensor emitters, Pel and I can begin to fabricate a frequency scan detector and then reconfigure the main sensor arrays to pinpoint each of their targeting scanners."

But before they could leave however, the voice of the Captain stopped them:

"Belay that! The engineering hull is being evacuated! If you cannot do it from up here do not bother. The Klingons will not give us much time!"

As if to bring the point home, the ship shook and sparks flew out of some console. It was but a grazing shot on their barely resurrected shields as Samji managed a desperate evasive maneuver.

They would not be always that lucky.

He looked down at Samji sitting at the damaged but still operational helm station.

"Commander, plot a direct course to that battleship and prepare for a micro warp burst right in their face."

He then looked straight ahead at the main viewer trying to reassert itself and finished:

"Mister Brie: rig main engines for self-destruct and emergency saucer separation at my command."

Kheren knew all Starfleet vessels of the capital ship basic design could detach their primary hull. This Constitution class would not be able to reattach it afterwards... but it would serve its purpose: save the entire crew by running at full impulse from the antimater explosion of the secondary hull left behind... right in the face of the Klingons.

A slight snarl escaped Storm's mouth before she could stop it.

Cool it girl! These people know what they are doing! And if they really have to die today, she will be in honorable and elevated company.

With her duties done, she stepped out of the way and marveled at the precision, skill and confidence her teammates exuded in the face of certain annihilation.

Seasoned Warriors, she thought, doing the right thing in the face of adversity and in the process saving the Federation, like many times before.

Suddenly her universe turned into a ball of red and black pain filled colors. She tried to scream through the tight constriction threatening to crush her chest when she mercifully lost consciousness.

Pel paused, halfway out of her seat, then sat back down, thinking hard.

"....Sir, I might be able to reconfigure the communications system to function like one big frequency scan detector. I wouldn't be able to do it on a modern starship, but the parts are essentially the same on these old ships, merely different purposes, and it should be relatively easy to bypass the appropriate coding, and I think..." she said, trailing off as she pressed buttons quickly and popped in the data square; "Yes, there it is: I recorded the attack, Sir, because I wasn't sure I saw the Klingon or not, but I also recorded the readings at the time, and there is a jump in the electron emission of their targeting scanners just before they fire. I've got the location of the targeting scanners right here!" she said, triumphantly. "All we need to do is reconfigure the sensors and the weapons and we're in business!"

Kheren heard her; and as he turned to better align his antennae to her voice, he also heard Storm crumble to the deck.

He jumped out of his seat and went to her as he ordered:

"Do it! Mister Syntron, reconfigure systems now! Mister Jackson, ready all phasers and fire all banks on my mark! Mister Brie, Mister Samji, keep us in one piece!"

He did not bother with the roleplay anymore, as the only ones left on the bridge now were his reality-jumping companions. The Andorian picked up the unconscious felinoid as if she weighted nothing, although he felt definitely weaker in this reconfigured body, not even quite as strong as a Vulcan, and brought her limp body to the wall near the turbolift. He looked her over quickly but could not find any visible wound beside a few minor scrapes and small spots of singed fur.

But then again, he knew nothing about her species... or medicine for that matter, beyond basic first aid.

But she was breathing, her heart beating... just unconscious. He went into her open medikit, found a hypospray in the slot for what every Starfleet officer knew was the correct drug, whatever it was called, and injected her with it to make sure her condition would stay stable until more competent help would arrive. If ever.

They were truly on their own now.

"Auxilliary control room to bridge!"

The Andorian hesitated a second, then went back to his command chair and pushed the comm button there.

"Captain here."

"Ensign Mayweather, Sir. Captain, all crew including wounded have cleared out the secondary hull and filled the escape pods, except for a skeleton crew to all key systems of the primary hull."

"Good work, Ensign. Keep monitoring us. If the bridge is incapacitated, I want you to take over. We have to stop these Klingons and save this crew, Understood?"

"Loud and clear, Sir," came the reply with an audible gulp." Good luck to us all."

Kheren returned his gaze to the main viewer where they could see the Klingon battlecruiser turning around for another pass, with the leisurely unhurriedness of a confident predator circling a weaker wounded prey.

"Now or never, people!"

Bradley Jackson had done as requested and had phasers ready for a quick burst. It would be nearly everything they had, potentially blowing out the circuits. He'd over ridden the safety procedures to ensure the largest possible blast they could throw at the other ship. Theoretically, if everything went as planned and everyone else was able to do their part, it should work and they could eliminate the hostile ship's weapons.

"Phasers ready, Sir, we're only going to get one shot at this though!" he screamed over the sound of the red alert klaxons going off.

Pel and Syntron worked side by side. Pel's small human hands flew as she worked at warp speed to reconfigure the sensors. She wanted to go to Storm, but she was kinda sorta REALLY busy at the moment. Her specialty being Exobiologics, and with no medical officer on the bridge, she'd go see about her in a sec, though she looked decent enough from here.

Even as this judgement call went through her head, the main part of her considerable mind was focused into a diamond point on her work. This, this was her element, where she belonged, and despite the dire circumstances of their crazy situation, she felt... Yes, she felt as... as if this was her place in the world, here at Starfleet, on a starship, doing science, even in this insanity... it was adventure and life, life itself, and Pel felt like she had spent the other twenty-five years of her life just getting the *courage* to *live*, and do so without hesitation.

Adrenaline pumped through her veins but her movements were quick and surgically precise as she dismantled the core coding surrounding the comm systems and began to, manually, write the new commands that would be needed. Small shoulders rose to meet the challenge set before her.

Syntron, besides her, worked with equal skill and speed. Deeply involved in reconfiguring sensors, the only signs of stress were the slightest narrowing of dark brown eyes, and a hint of tension in his frame. His mind didn't race and he did not experience adrenaline, but worked with a calmness that was an island in the storm of chaos on the bridge. He was unaffected by smoke and sparks; that force of nature that was the Vulcan intelligence, combined with Vulcan determination, always analyzing, always drawing conclusions, focused entirely on his task. It was no wonder that the systems didn't have a chance.

Pel finished typing her last command and hit enter.

Syntron activated his modifications. And both turned at exactly the same moment and said:

"Systems reconfigured, Captain," Syntron as if he were delivering a report on the weather, Pel's voice excited and anticipating and a wee bit nervous ; if she was wrong, they were QUITE screwed...

But that didn't bear thinking on so, she turned back to her console, ready to hit the button. Syntron was already poised for action.

Each merely awaited the word.

Allen Samji couldn't believe how rusty he was at simple piloting. When the Captain ordered him to take the helm, he thought back to the last time he was in that position: 2392 on the USS Leeds, before he followed then ship Captain Kotari into the administrative track. It came with a promotion to full Commander and, with what, he did not realize at the time what would be the inevitable slow decline of his skills.

And now the first time back at the helm and he also had to deal with unfamiliar controls.

It's all the same, just a different configuration, he thought. This is certainly impulse, and here is yaw control.

That was enough to allow him to turn and escape in the opposite direction they came from. He then saw them charge up weapons and just punched pitch and roll wildly in some direction. Luckily it allowed the ship to move enough from its present course to narrowly avoid the second shot.

Barely.

"Whatever we do Captain, I suggest we do it fast," Samji said nervously. "Don't rely on my piloting skills to keep us safe for long!"

"Nothing fancy, Commander; just a nice straight line right at them... Micro warp burst and sensor disruption on my mark... "

On the viewer, the Klingon battlecruiser was just now about to break orbit to pursue and finish them, weapons port blazing fiery death.

"Engage!"

The Eagle suddenly jumped forward four hundred million kilometers, leaving behind her the afterimage of her presence on all scanning instruments, artificial or biological, from sensors to eyes... and at the same time, registering barely hundreds of meters on top of the Klingon warship whose fatal shot only went through a ghostly afterimage.

No one had ever seen this before at this moment in time; but the bridge officers from the future all knew instantly what it was:

The Picard Maneuver.

Over half a century from now, at Maxia, it would fool the slower-than-light sensors of a then unidentified attacking Ferengi cruiser, allowing the USS Stargazer under the command of novice Captain Jean-Luc Picard to turn the tide from a surprise attack into complete victory.

The maneuver was now textbook tactic, unusable against most modern starships... of the 25th century. But here in the 23rd, it worked.

The Klingons would not have time to recover from their surprise; barely a second after Samji moved the vessel, the modified emitters of Pel and Syntron fried out all sensors of the battleship, blinding them for good. They could barely navigate now.

"Fire!"

Brad's fingers flew across the controls of the ancient ship's weapons console.

Knowing how Q had operated in the past, he had no idea what the current rules to the game they were playing entailed. If they died here, did they die in their own time? All these thoughts flew through his head as he unleashed more than a hundred percent of the fury of the Eagle's weapons on the Klingon ship. The console in front of him sparked with that fury as weapons conduits exploded throughout the ship. Suddenly the newly assigned tactical officer of Lotus Fleet was thankful for the mission the Artemis had been currently undergoing when he had been snatched away and thrown into this nightmare. It had forced him to hone his manual targeting skills and that was a blessing in this situation.

Answering the order barked by the Andorian, all phaser banks of the USS Eagle poured out their overloaded rays of destructive energies. And as they burned themselves out, the precise shots of Lieutenant Jackson disintegrated all weapons ports of the IKS K'Tang.

Blind and weaponless, the D7 warship came to a full stop scant hundreds of meters below them.

"Captain, weapons are offline..." Jackson said quietly. They wouldn't get another shot.

"Stand by, Mister Brie!" then shouted Kheren, raising a hand towards the transformed Bolian engineer. "Mister Syntron, scan them for any trick they might try to pull!"

Syntron merely nodded in response to Captain Kheren's request.

"Scanning, sir."

Kheren still had one last ace in his sleeve to play... if it became necessary to destroy the Klingons and at the same time save his crew... But if there was still a chance to end this without any further bloodshed...

And there was a joker, maybe even two in the cards... at least he hoped so.

"Lieutenant Pel; open a channel to the K'Tang."

And it worked, by the Great River, it worked! Hot damn! Yes!! cheered silently the Ferengi's mind.

The D7 drifted in space, and Pel, smiling so big her weird Human face hurt, obeyed orders.

"Aye, sir. Channel open."

Then she sat back, and watched a master at work. Captain Kheren didn't finish them; he could have, but he was still going to try diplomacy. Then and only then, if he had to, would he blow up the ship.

But maybe now they'd feel a little bit more talkative.

Vulcan science chief Syntron also approved of the way the Captain was handling the Klingons. It was eminently logical. Now that the Klingons were disabled, they would be able to attempt reason with them.

If reason failed... The other logical option was still available.

Samji was impressed. The Picard Maneuver worked, and the D7 was now disabled, without the ship suffering much more damage from the superior weaponry from the future.

The viewscreen popped on and showed a frazzled, slightly less confident Captain Krug frowning instead of grinning deviously like before.

The mysterious Klingon with the alterations the Lotus Fleet officers were used to however was gone.

"Captain Shoral, you will pay for your insolence! I swear it!" an enraged Krug shouted.

"Perhaps... but not today," shot back the Andorian. "Captain Krug, you have one minute to evacuate your ship before we destroy it. This is your only warning."

Pel snorted at the Klingon's threat.

Yeah, cause threatening us has worked out super well for you so far...

Kheren signaled Pel to cut off the link then ordered:

"Commander Samji; back us away slowly until we clear the area blast of their warp core."

Turning to the man sitting at the other end of the long console before him where the starbase commander piloted from the left side, he addressed Jackson at his right:

"Lieutenant, keep our forward shields at maximum and ready a full salvo of photon torpedoes on their warp core and overload the warheads. On my mark. But I want you also to keep a target lock on their bridge."

His gaze then went to Danik Brie on his left:

"Chief, give us all the power you can to our shields... but keep our final option open."

The four eyes then swung to the right:

"Mister Syntron, you will tractor beam any and all escape pods to cargobay 1 and have it turned into a detention area. Lieutenant Pel, signal all transporters, including emergency and cargo transporters, to lock on any vehicle or EVA suit on sensors and beam all lifesigns to cargo bay 1. Then, advise Starfleet Command that we will bring in prisoners."

If we get any... sighed Kheren inwardly. Their choice.

Pel listened closely as Captain Kheren spoke fast, delivering them a new set of orders.

"Aye, Sir, will do. But the long range communications are still down; it may take me a minute to get them back up again," she said.

In truth, they had been shot to hell along with a lot of the ship in that first attack, and then she and reconfigured them down to the core; but maybe she could get them running again... She notified the transporters as he requested, and received affirmatives from each. Then she went to work on the comm.

"Aye, Sir," Syntron also replied.

He sent notifications to the security heads, ordering them to turn Cargobay One into a detention area and post as many security details as they could around the area.

Klingons are not known for their logic or ability to accept defeat gracefully, he mused. They may initiate violence.

"Bringing tractor beam online; Ready."

His hand held steady on the button, awaiting the appropriate command.

Pel, meanwhile, was ripping up the coding she had just written and replacing it. Syntron looked over at her, saw what she was doing, and, so as not to interrupt the efficient operation of the bridge, spoke quietly.

"If you require assistance in rewriting the communications codes, I am finished with my task and may be of some use."

Pel looked up at him and nodded.

"That'd be great, thank you, Sir. Here, I'll transfer my work to your station, so you can see where I am."

"Logical."

Syntron received the information, looked at it, and promptly went to work. Their speed increased exponentially as the two worked together, and Pel was finished in much less time than she had anticipated.

"Ready, Captain," she said aloud. Then, quieter and to Syntron; "Thanks."

Her gratitude was unnecessary; it was the logical thing to do. But Syntron had been among other humanoid species long enough to know the proper reply.

"You are welcome, Lieutenant."

"Lieutenant Jackson, fire all torpedoes!" said Captain Kheren.

Just a moment after, Storm Windfall slowly regained consciousness.

As they watched the weapons approach their defenseless mark, it was clear that no Klingons had utilized the time given to them to escape the ship. The Klingon way was to die with "honor". This was understood in the 25th century, if not in the time period they were currently in. A death in battle was considered an honorable one.

A few milliseconds before the torpedoes met their mark, however, everything stopped. The torpedoes ceased their journey and floated just meters away from the D7's hull. The sparks and plasma still coming from the broken consoles on the Eagle ceased their activity. Any officers still on the bridge or who had returned were stopped as well. The only movement came from the officers of Lotus Fleet looking around confused. Most realized that this was yet another of Q's tricks and were now looking around trying to find him.

Eventually, Q was noticed as he approached the front of the bridge from some unknown location and stood in the same outfit as Captain Kheren at the front of the ship.

Storm watched in fascination as the torpedoes suddenly froze a few moments from impact: As did everything else.

When a man suddenly materialized in front of the view screen and addressed the captain in a smarmy voice, she was shocked.

"Well done, well done indeed Captain," he congratulated. "I never knew you Starfleet types had it in you. To fix the timeline, you were willing to destroy a ship full of Klingons even if it was, at this point, a defenseless floating space heap."

He smiled.

"Perhaps you are learning that space and time are bigger than you and your silly little morality."

This is Q? Wondered Storm silently. This... petulant, sulky-looking person is omnipotent, immortal and it seems to me, immoral as well!

Kheren however laughed between his teeth.

"As expected... how little you understand."

Looking at him from the command chair, he planted his eyes into those of Q.

"Morality means abiding by a higher code of conduct than base instincts and selfish goals to do what is right... and for us of the Federation, this includes respecting the choices of others without abnegating one's own principles and laws," he explained. "Our morality demands we respect sentient life, even that of an enemy. By offering them a chance to live, and preparing to take them into custody for their crimes, I followed our morality. And by allowing them to take the choice to die in battle instead of submitting to the ignominy of defeat and capture, I followed also their morality... which again, doing so, was still in accordance to our own. And one way or the other, we were then ready and able to do the right thing."

YES! Tell him, Captain!

Storm felt something she hasn't felt before: a sense of pride, of self-worth, of at last being part of Humanity like never before.

Of belonging.

This is how it should be; all of us, alien or human, working towards a common goal where the end result isn't for glory of the individual, but for the continuance of honor, respect and tolerance, friendships forged across boundaries laid down by centuries' old beliefs.

Straightening her spine, pulling her shoulders back, she lifted her head high and stepped forward and stopped two steps behind the Captain. Her whole posture affirmed that no matter what the outcome, she would stand with her teammates.

Standing up from the captain's chair, the Andorian finished saying with a wink:

"Space and time, the universe, are always but the size of your own conscience."

Q pretended not to let the Captain's words affect him, though in truth it was clear they had. "Well, mon Capitaine, the teams were stacked in your favor. Seven against one and you still were nearly beaten. Next time I may not be so gracious," he ended with a sly grin.

He snapped his fingers and disappeared.

The torpedoes hanging off the port side bow of the D7 vanished, as well as the D7 itself. The officers then began to float outside their bodies, and the original intended officers of the Eagle appeared, looking around confused and wondering how they had arrived there.

* * *

On the bridge of the USS Eagle, Kheren blinked... in the conference room of the USS Artemis.

For a moment, his mind was flooded with a rush of memories he did not even know he had.

He saw himself thrown out of the here and now, into the body of another, non-mutated, Thelassian Andorian of two centuries ago, in command of the legendary USS Eagle on her maiden voyage; a voyage that made him lead the aborted first contact with the Organians as he was diverted into stopping a time-altering incursion by the Klingons.

And he had not been thrown alone into this bewildering event.

There had been a felinoid, Caitan-like medic woman... Storm Windfall; and Allen Samji, commander of Starbase 10... And also a Ferengi scientist named Pel, although she too had been altered, turned into a Human female to fit the timeline... And...

His silvery eyes met those of Brad Jackson, Danik Brie and Syntron. And he saw in their own eyes that they too shared the exact same memories... at the exact same moment. And they all recalled the source of those memories... and of those events that happened centuries ago between two of their heartbeats.

Q.

Somehow, while they were here, all four of them had been transported by the god-like entity to the times of James T. Kirk and the original USS Enterprise... and lived a little known historical moment, managing to keep it intact from a time-travelling Klingon bent on changing the foreshadowing events that led to the Organian Peace Treaty Zone, which in turn had averted the second Federation-Klingon war.

All because of Q who wanted to make a point... and ended up being handed one himself by the honorable actions of all those he had abducted for his little game with time and space.

Kheren now knew that, because of this backfiring of his little scheme, they or anyone else in the Federation would not be bothered by Q for some time.

It was a great tale to be told... but they all kept silent. For at the end of those memories was that of a private communique from Starfleet Intelligence each one of them had received before this mission began... and one more for Kheren as their commanding officer responsible for them.

A communique that they only now remembered; one that sternly commended and thanked them for their valor in the line of duty... and for their silence.

And so, they all shared a look of mutual surprise and understanding... and kept silent about the past to resume their discussion on the present.

* * *

The scene was whisked away and Samji was back on Starbase 10 staring at Ensign Grok.

The usual hustle and low buzz of Operations continued on as before.

"Keep you...?" Grok asked, wondering why the Commander had stopped mid-sentence.

"Keep me... informed of any new cargo transports," Samji finished remembering what he had said in the previous few seconds that had seemed so long ago.

"Ensign, can you look up the Starfleet record on a Captain Shoral, circa 2267?" he asked.

"Uh, yes Sir," Grok replied and attempted to pull up the record only to find that it was highly classified. "Nothing I can access, Sir; at least not without an Admiral or Starfleet Intelligence command code."

"Nothing about his maiden voyage on the USS Eagle?"

"No, Sir. Although..." Grok pulled up the record of the Eagle itself and said, "It looks like the maiden voyage of the USS Eagle was commanded by Captain Igrilan Kor, Sir."

"Oh," Samji then realized that Starfleet Command of the time must have seen fit to disperse the original crew to other assignments to keep the unusual incident under wraps. They then made all indications of the original maiden voyage of the Eagle classified. "My mistake Ensign, carry on."

Knowing that the other officers were no doubt also returned by Q to their original time and place, Samji promptly put the "game" out of his mind and carried on with the day's duties.

A lone tall, lanky figure stood at the back of Ops dressed in a red uniform with Captain's pips, watching him. He then smiled, turned around, and walked into the turbolift. He snapped his fingers and fading into nothingness as the doors closed in front of him.

* * *

Personal Log: USS Alsea Chief Science Officer Pel
Stardate 87181.4

Well.

I have just returned from my debriefing with Temporal Investigations regarding the Q Incident I was involved in. They asked a lot of annoying questions and kept me from my work far too long.

But I'm sitting here with my Raktajino, fully Ferengi again, thanks the Great River; it was way too disconcerting to not have my ears!

But I can't help but reflect on what happened.

I was transported through time and space by Q, the bastard, to the old Constitution class cruiser the USS Eagle, along with a mishmash of crew from other ships. One Captain Kheren and Starbase Commander Samji took charge of the situation, for which I am grateful. I'm a science squint, not a command officer, and I'm pretty sure I'd make a terrible one. Ha!

I can't talk about the rest of what happened, or, as I understand it, Temporal Investigations will come and find me and rip my lobes off. But there was a part there, in that craziness, that really kind of got to me.

Captain Kheren was talking to Q, there at the end, and he said this:

"Morality means abiding by a higher code of conduct than base instincts and selfish goals to do what is right... and for us of the Federation, this includes respecting the choices of others without abnegating one's own principles and laws. Our morality demands we respect sentient life, even that of an enemy. By offering them a chance to live, and preparing to take them into custody for their crimes, I followed our morality. And by allowing them to take the choice to die in battle instead of submitting to the ignominy of defeat and capture, I followed also their morality... which again, doing so, was still in accordance to our own. And one way or the other, we were then ready and able to do the right thing."

And then, he had said:

"Space and time, the universe, are always but the size of your own conscience."

That last line...

I think I learned something today... something important. I'm not entirely sure what it is yet, but I will figure it out.

I always do, after all.

End Log.

The End