

Flashback Week

Write and roleplay about
your character's past

Flashback week stories, 2011

In August 2011 we ran a week-long event called [Flashback week](#) where we encouraged roleplayers and writers to think about the backstory of their character and write about a flashback to a different time in their lives. We held a [competition](#) which finished on the very last day of Flashback week, and our team of judges have been busy over the last two weeks reading the entries and voting for the best story, and we're happy that we can now announce the winner!

The winning story

The winning story was "Rage!" by Chas Hammer. This is a Star Trek story flashing back to a time when Lieutenant Hammer's shuttle was shot down on a planet, and he had to fight enemy Cardassians to survive. The story regularly cuts back to the present where Lieutenant Hammer is being questioned by superior officers about the events on the planet.

Rage! By Chas Hammer

Rage settled across Chas' heart as he caressed the strands of her red hair, brushing away the mud. There was nothing that could be done. Her skin faded to white. The glow of life left her eyes. Thump! Another impact. Crack! A pulse of energy surges past.

"Sir, they are getting closer."

Chas looked up blankly at the ensign, whose name he did not know.

"Sir?" The ensign continued, a hint of desperation in his voice.

Chas looked back at the body and rolled her onto her side, removing the small Type 1 phaser concealed in her uniform waistband before placing it in his own.

"We have to keep moving," Chas finally whispered, before barking, "Repack the medical kit!"



As the ensign fumbled to stuff everything back, Chas switched his tricorder from medical to tactical. Complete gibberish filled his screen - faint shadows of mass here and there, lifeforms appearing and disappearing at random. Both sides were pumping out so much electromagnetic garbage that sensors were unreliable. As long as the rain held up, they had a chance.

Peering out from the thicket under which they had taken cover, Chas noticed a ditch about ten meters away running through an open field to a stand of reeds. "This is our best option."

"What about the commander?"

Chas turned his gaze back at the body. "We have to leave her," gruffly adding in a statement meant for his own person, not the ensign, "This is no time to be sentimental."

Pulling the phaser out from his waistband and setting it to maximum, Chas disintegrated the body, but not before pulling the combadge and rank pips off her uniform.

"Lieutenant Hammer, would you kindly explain to this board of inquiry why you vaporized the body of Lieutenant Commander Higgins?"

"I did not want her to fall into Cardassian hands, sir. I've seen what they do to the bodies of Starfleet officers. I owed her that."

"I see," the JAG attorney responded, drawing out the word see so he could gather his next thought.

"And after that, you made it to the reeds, where Ensign Hu was killed?"

"Yes sir."

Everything was soaked through. Chas no longer bothered to wipe the rain from his eyes.

They had been hunkered in the reeds for a good hour. It seemed the Cardassians had given up looking for them. In fact it seemed the entire world had disappeared. No signals showed up on the tricorder, not even echos. Even the sounds of battle had disappeared, leaving the two of alone with the rain slamming into the muck.

"Here, eat something," Chas pulled a ration kit from the haversack and passed it back to Ensign Hu. Both were leaning their backs against the other for support.

As they ate, Chas' ears perked up. In the distance came the noise, a faint electromagnetic pitch.

Chas adjusted his tricorder. Ensign Hu looked into the rain.

Out of the clouds swooshed a Federation shuttle craft. Before either could process the image and the hope it brought a crack of energy surged from the ground a hundred meters distant, striking the shuttle and causing it to spin out of the sky.

"Over there," Chas exclaimed, motioning with his hand.

The pair slowly crawled their way through the reeds to where the bolt originated.

Suddenly they stopped. "One, two, three, four, five." Chas counted the Cardassians huddled around the anti shuttle battery concealed in the reeds. Ensign Hu moved along Chas' side to look. "Lets take them out," Chas said in a hushed whisper as he pulled the phaser from his waistband.

"Sir, with all due respect, we're not soldiers. When we crash we're supposed to remain concealed and await rescue."

Chas peered at the ensign and hissed, "They just shot down fellow pilots. They could have been the ones who shot us down. We are going to take them out. Prepare your phaser, that is an order."

Both men aimed their phasers at separate targets and fired. Ensign Hu hit his mark, obliterating a Cardassian manning the battery. Chas missed his mark, the officer who appeared to be in charge.

The Cardassians immediately dove for cover and grabbed their disruptor's, firing back into the reeds over the heads of Chas and Ensign Hu.

Chas pressed his head into the mud, looking up to see Ensign Hu drop another Cardassian. Chas opened fire again, missing each time.

Enraged, Chas stood up and charged towards the Cardassian position. He leveled his phaser at a startled Cardassian and blasted a hole through her chest.



Ensign Hu stumbled to get up. A disruptor blast took off his head.

"Commander Soniack, how would you categorize Lieutenant Hammer as an officer?"

"He's one of the best pilots under my command. That is why he was chosen for the mission. He is meticulous in his planning. However, he does show a strong emotional streak, even for a human."

One of the Cardassians grabbed Chas from behind. Chas summoned his strength to spin away, pushing the Cardassian off and into the path of the other. As both Cardassians collided and stumbled, Chas leveled his phaser and shot the nearest one.

A disruptor blast narrowly missed Chas' head. He immediately dove to the ground and rolled behind a log, losing his phaser in the process. The remaining Cardassian lumbered towards Chas, kicking mud into his face.

Their eyes met. A grin spread across the face of the Cardassian as he prepared to fire. Not taking his eyes away from the Cardassian, Chas slammed a rock into the foot of the Cardassian and in one quick motion exploded from the ground and propelled his momentum into the chest of the Cardassian.

As the alien stumbled Chas flung his arm, the sharp side of the rock digging into the tendons and muscles of the Cardassian's thick neck.

The Cardassian grabbed his neck and fell to his knees in pain. Chas yelled "Spoonhead!" as he tackled the alien, driving him back into the muck. With a quick blow the rock slammed into the center of the Cardassian's head. Chas turned the rock to its blunt side, hitting again and again, the skull cracking underneath.

"This board of inquiry finds that Lieutenant Hammer performed his duty in a manner befitting a Starfleet officer. His shuttlecraft was lost to enemy fire through no fault of his own. Indeed, he is to be commended as a pilot for landing his crippled craft. This board further recommends that both he and Ensign Hu be recommended by their commanding officer for a medal commensurate for the bravery both displayed in eliminating the Cardassian anti shuttle emplacement."

The vulchers had made quick work of the quarters. Chas looked around the dark, empty room that had once belonged to Commander Higgins. All of her belongings had already been packed by faceless crewmembers, those enlistees who never knew death and never would, into a small case to be shipped back to her parents on Earth.

Chas fumbled with the lock, finally managing to open the case. Into it he placed her combadge and rank pips.

Closing the case and looking around the room he broke down. "I'm sorry Nicole." Falling to his knees, he buried his face into the foot of the bed.

Air rattled through the vents, the slight vibration of the ship at warp ever registered in the back of the mind.

Chas wiped the tears from his face and stood up. If he was to continue he needed to separate himself from his emotions.

Tugging at his uniform, he took a quick look at himself in the mirror before walking out of the quarters.



Other Flashback stories

We're proud to give you the other stories that were submitted to the Flashback week competition. These are a collection of stories from many different roleplaying games.

Clarisse du Volde by Clarissa Marie

This is a story written by Clarissa Marie and is from a game played on www.roleplayer.me.

It is always asked of me, do I remember my first taste of human blood? I cannot help but shudder, but I do remember it. It isn't fondly simply because I nearly revealed my true nature to the world. I was clumsy in my first days, I hadn't the faintest idea of what on earth to do. How could I? I had stormed off like a pigheaded fool and left Colin to burn in the flames of our burning cottage. My rage was a thing not to be trifled with and after three years of marriage, I'd had enough. Bad enough that he paraded about town with his drunken friends and his whores, bad enough that he should degrade me and even raise his hand to me. He was a horrid man and I rued the day I had agreed to marry him. He was my only source of answers and as far as I knew he was dead. I shuddered as his screams entered my mind once more and I raised my hands to rub at my temples. As long as I lived, I swore that his screams will forever live on in my mind and his horrified expression will remain emblazoned within my memory as well as the smell of his burning flesh. I can't help but feel guilty, but if he'd not been so bitter and callous to me, I wouldn't have done as I had. I would have endured any insult, but no, to make me into a monster and deny me any pleasure I may have ever known, he had it coming for sure. No, no regrets.

I emerged from the catacombs beneath Notre Dame when the sun was well set and the people of the night began to come creeping out. I wrapped my shawl around myself even though I didn't really need to. The bitter cold was nothing to me now, which was a perk and a negative thing. It required some acting on my part to look like I was cold. Things that came naturally before, are very difficult to learn how to pretend to do. I couldn't help but think that it was proper that I sleep surrounded by the dead. I was dead, really, I just didn't have the sense to lay down and stay dead. The musky air was likely upon me and I longed for a bath. Perhaps I could take a bath in the Seine, I mused to myself quietly, after I had found my supper.

Supper. Oh dear God, how I hated the idea of it. No, my supper didn't consist of normal meals, but of succulent, rich blood and a life. It was a delightful cake—with a disgusting icing. I knew that someday, I'd be strong enough to say, "no" or hold off awhile. But I had no self control yet.

Everyone appeared as a potential meal. So into the streets I wandered with a heavy heart, knowing that tonight would be the night I made a kill. I was so disgusted that I made off into an alley and threw up. "Dear God, please let me not fail..." I prayed quietly, holding to the hope that God would hear me, one of his pitiful creations, and grant me the strength I needed. I had not asked for this life. I hadn't asked to be damned. How could he condemn me and forget about me? I kept my hands pressed to the brick wall for a few moments to steady myself and regain my composure. I slowly began to move when I smelled him.

My emerald eyes darkened to a crimson hue and I felt my fangs elongate and prick my bottom lip. I shuddered as I knew the monster was coming out in me. I looked down the alley, spotting the man. He was deformed and little, part of some acting troupe more than likely. He seemed unaware of me and in an instant, I found him in my arms screaming as I made my first attempt to bite him.

"Nosfetatu!" he screamed in a heavy Russian accent, pulling a crucifix necklace out to try and ward me off.

"Doesn't work, you little prat," I hissed and found myself laughing as he pressed the cold silver



against my forehead and writhed in my arms to break free. I grasped him tighter growing frustrated and delirious with hunger. "It will be quicker if you stay still!" I hissed again, tightening my grasp and finally sank my fangs in, tearing through his tender flesh and directly down into the vein. His blood flowed into my mouth and I finally felt peace flow through me. Its bitter, yet sweet coppery taste filled my mouth and I wanted more. He was still crying, though not nearly as loudly and I squeezed him tighter, unaware of the fact that I was crushing him as I drained him further. His heartbeat was still strong despite all his blood loss and I, being full now and tired of his incessant screaming, grabbed his head, twisting it and sighing at the disgusting sound of his neck bones breaking. I let him go, looking at his body as it landed with a thud. I leaned back against the wall, my eyes

closed when I heard a voice inside my mind.

"Run."

Confused but knowing I had to before I was caught as I knew I would be if I stuck around, I took off running. I was glad for the speed that I had now, appreciative that no one saw me. I felt bloody tears streaming down my face as I went back into the catacombs. Back into my safe haven. I was about to settle down, resting my head on my small sachel of clothing when I heard footsteps. I sat up with a start, looking around. I looked around for something to defend myself, but all I had was myself and the fangs in my mouth.

"Who's there?" I demanded.

"Calm yourself. I'm not here to hurt you." An Italian accented voice responded. I nearly swooned, I adored accents.

"Who are you?" I asked, standing up, preparing to run if I had to. I had to be ready.

"My name is Sanglant Di Moira," he spoke, his Italian accent curling through his words and he came out into light. I nearly swooned once again, but kept a hold of myself. He was seductive without even doing anything. His movements all seemed planned, yet were graceful and carried out with ease. He was taller than I was; around 6 feet, I wagered. His skin was lightly tanned and I bit on my lip as I continued looking at him. He seemed... perfect. His lips were well formed, and he had a long thin nose with high cheekbones. His light brown hair was tied back with a small black ribbon. How unusual for a man to be out without a powdered wig! His eyes, however, were truly what drew me in. They were an amazing grey hue, almost the color of storm clouds. I blushed as I looked down, noting his impeccable taste in clothing and here I was in an old dress that was a castaway from the theatre, my shoes half falling apart and my long black hair in a messy bun. I wished to no end that I would gain

my inheritance soon. But I was six years away from it.

"What do you want from me? I asked softly as he stepped closer to me, pushing a stray tendril of my hair back to look into my green eyes. As he did, I felt that I wanted him to touch me more. I felt... safe with him. I wanted to hate him yet I was already infatuated.

"I've been watching you...and I want to help you..."

I pushed his hand away, stepping back and frowned. Help always had a price. What was his?

"I have no price," he answered to my shock. How did he do that? "Trust me?" he whispered into my mind. "Please. I'll help you..."

"I..." I paused but before I could stop myself, my want to believe there were still good people in the world overpowered me. And I wanted to know more of this Sanglant Di Moira. "I trust you," came tumbling out of my mouth and he let a soft smile cross his lips, turning me into mush. I had a feeling I had just met the most important man I'd ever meet in my life and so, I faintly smiled back at him.

"Come, Clarisse," he spoke softly. "Let's get you out of here..." he motioned to the squalor that I was calling home. "That's the first step...."



Commander Deitrich Vonrose by Roman Gitlarz

This is a Star Trek story written by Roman Gitlarz, the roleplaying game is USS Discovery on Star Trek Borderlands.

October 4, 2409

Dietrich smiled as he made his way through the ship's corridors. The slight smile on his face and the bounce in his step visually demonstrated the pleasure which he felt, and it wasn't in regard to his work earlier in the day. After all, being XO of a starship was not anything to sneeze at. He had countless duty rosters to approve, systems reports to analyze, and rounds to make... not to mention his Bridge duty. His contentment was a result of the game of poker which he played regularly with his crewmates on Friday nights... and which he had just won minutes earlier.

The crew were his friends, there was no doubt about it. Conservative superiors still held to the notion that Starfleet relationships were strictly professional. The countless Starfleet marriages, children, and lifelong friendships are a testament to the opposite. And Dietrich was in full support of it. He had met his wife aboard his previous post, the USS Voyager-A. And although the two were now divorced, Dietrich could not regret the decision. She had been a great chapter in his life, despite it coming to an end prematurely. The two spoke almost weekly, and he was grateful that she had stayed in touch... if only for Frederick, their son.

But there was more to just friendships on a starship. The ancient Romans used to believe that soldiers who were better friends would create a more harmonious team in battle. And even though Starfleet was not a military organization, it encountered battle more often than it should. Dietrich agreed with the Roman philosophy. A crew that felt awkward around each other was inefficient in comparison to the smoothness of a team which knew their members thoroughly. He knew that not everyone would agree... but those that did certainly showed it on those Friday nights.

The door to his quarters hissed open, and the XO braced for the familiar welcome.

"Daddy, daddy, daddy!" Frederick called, running toward his father with outstretched arms.

Dietrich crouched on one knee and swooped the young boy up, hugging him intensely.

"There's my Little Captain," he called out, using the nickname the crew had given the boy following Frederick's wandering away from his babysitter a few months earlier. When asked why he walked off, he said he had wanted to sit in the Captain's chair.

Dietrich walked in and looked at Emma, the ship's Astrometrics Officer. "Thanks, Em," he said.

"Always a pleasure," she replied, gracefully standing up from the living room couch despite her obvious pregnancy. "Bye Fredrick. Buh bye!" Her playful demeanor had as much an effect on the boy as his father. Although Dietrich had at one point initiated a romantic relationship with the woman, they soon mutually drifted away from romance to simple friends... and he could not have been happier. "Just so long as you repay the favors," she replied jokingly, placing a hand on her swollen belly.

"You bet!" he called out, before the door hissed shut. He was truly happy for the woman, who had seemed to find her match with the ship's Counselor.

These people aren't just my friends... he thought, they're my family...

"It's getting late, buddy. You ready for bed?" he said to the boy, who's wide grin seemed to lighten the room.

"Oh daddy, you promised LEGOs today," Frederick replied with mocked sadness.

"I did!? Silly me! Go get them!"

"Yaaay!!!" the boy called out, running to the other room. The XO was tired and ready to feel the softness of his pillow against his head. But a promise was a promise...

October 5, 2409



The morning felt like any other aboard the Dostra. Dietrich awoke early, as usual, in order to eat breakfast, shower, and get dressed in a timely fashion. Frederick was still sleeping in the next room when the XO fastened his combadge to his uniform... ready for duty. The officer walked in and sat down at the edge of his son's bed, nudging him.

"Hey buddy. Time to get up... you're gonna be late for school."

Frederick had recently shifted from being an early bird to a night owl. Naturally, most parents would have preferred such a change, but since Dietrich's schedule is of the former variety, their cycles were no longer in sync.

Frederick rolled over onto his back and opened his eyes.

"Okay, Daddy."

"What would you like for breakfast? Oatmeal with blueberries?"

"Yeah," Frederick replied happily as he sat up.

"Alright. Go freshen up and get dressed. We need to leave in 20 minutes."

The Dostra was a large ship with many families aboard... a relic of the Federation's pre-Dominion times. These days, it was rare to see Starfleet families together outside of a starbase. Yet, despite the common presence of children, a dozen officers stopped to give the two a personal greeting each morning as they walked through the corridors. By the time they reached the holodeck, Dietrich had just enough time to give his son a kiss on the cheek before immediately heading for the turbolift.

"Have a good day. I'll see you later."

"Okay, Daddy!" Frederick called out, already running into the room. Dietrich loved the holodeck program. He was amazed to think that every teacher on Earth once had to be a person... it seemed unimaginable and endlessly tiring. And even though the kids were separated by age groups, the holograms were extremely adept at immediately shifting between different subjects and levels of difficulty. Frederick greatly adored his teacher, and he sometimes felt closer to her than the "real" education specialist which monitored the school sessions.

The holodeck doors closed behind his son, and Dietrich quickly made his way to the lift.

Another day in the life of a First Officer... he thought to himself. Only later did he realize how wrong that assessment was...

The morning had gone smoothly. The Dostra was charting an asteroid belt, one which indicated a richness in resources. Although this was great news to the Federation, the majority of the crew was looking forward to leaving. For the past few days, only the Science personnel had gotten any real action. The rest of the ship seemed somewhat restless.

Dietrich was on the Bridge when the first warning klaxon went off. It came from the Tactical station. Dietrich looked up toward the station expecting a trivial piece of information, but his blood ran cold when he was the officer rise to his feet... his eyes wide.

"Sir, there's a massive object approaching! It's one of the asteroids!" the officer shouted out in surprise.

Dietrich had always been good under pressure. While other officers may have inquired about the source or the nature of the readings, he wasted no time in taking the ship to Red Alert.

"Time to intercept!" he commanded, asking for the object's distance.

"12 seconds!" the officer responded. "Our sensors didn't pick it up until..." but Dietrich cut him off.

"Get us out of here, Lieutenant!" he quickly called out to the CONN, but the officer was already a few steps ahead, attempting to maneuver the ship away from the asteroid's present course.

"6 seconds!" Tactical shouted out. Dietrich watched the miniature monitor beside his chair. Why weren't they moving?!

"All hands, brace for impact!" he managed to call out just before the object reached the 2 second mark. The ship finally started to clear the danger zone. Just a little farther...

It was under this pressure that Dietrich started recalling the details of the asteroid belt. The areas



rich in resources also gave off a strong field which affected the ship's engines. At the time, the crew considered the small lag to be an acceptable risk. How differently they all felt now.

That's it... Dietrich thought with relief. Were they safe? But before he could get an answer, the XO was thrown headlong into the viewscreen, along with most of the bridge crew. He could hear the crunch of bones and felt the pain of the impact spread throughout his body. He was conscious long enough to hope that the broken bones weren't his.

He didn't know how long he had been unconscious when he was being woken up with a hypospray. The ship's CMO was standing above him, reaching out a hand.

"Are you alright, sir?" the man asked, pulling the XO up to his feet.

"Fine, Doctor. Report!"

"The ship's primary hull was grazed by the asteroid. Shields are down and so is the main deflector. Micrometeoroids are beginning to compromise hull integrity all over the ship."

Dietrich looked up at the voice. It was one of the junior officers. Only then did he realize that most of the bridge crew was still sprawled around the viewscreen.

"Where's the Captain?" he asked.

"She was in the turbolift during the impact. She has been taken to Sickbay."

By now, the XO was seated at the Ops station and looking over the data coming in from all over the ship. The hull was being pulverized by the tiny bits of rock and ice. Only then did he realize that the shuddering he felt was real and not a result of his headache.

=^= Warning. 15 minutes to hull integrity failure. ^=^=, the ship's computer announced.

"Can we reactivate the shields?" Dietrich asked.

"I'm not sure, sir," another young man called out from the Engineering station. "I think our best bet would be to reactivate one of the deflector dishes."

"How much time?" Dietrich asked.

The man, to his credit, replied simply and honestly: "More than 15 minutes, sir."

Dietrich stared at the console before him. Decisions decisions. Who ever thought of putting the bridge at the very top of the ship? He suddenly thought as the irritation rose within him. It should be deep in the heart of the ship where nothing would get to it.

He tapped his combadge. "All hands, this is the First Officer. Engineering is, at present, safe from the impacts to our hull. I am moving command of the ship to Main Engineering. Everyone else, abandon ship and head for the coordinates being sent to the escape pods. The Dostra will rendezvous with you as soon as the main deflector is reinitialized. Vonrose out."

"Doctor, how is the crew?" Dietrich asked, indicating the personnel still being woken from unconsciousness, almost wishing he didn't need to know.

"Three dead, sir."

"Help get the rest to the escape pods," Dietrich ordered the individuals present.

"What about you sir?" the Doctor asked.

"I'll be heading down to Engineering just as soon as I finish here. You have your orders."

Without question, the crew took the bodies and proceeded to the escape pods behind the bridge module. Dietrich watched as his console indicated each launch. He continued working for several minutes until he was interrupted by the comm system.

=^= Clarkson to Vonrose ^=^=

"Go ahead," the XO called out, his hands flying over the LCARS display.

=^= Sir, Escape Pod 26 won't jettison. 27 and 28 also appear to be stuck. ^=^=

Dietrich examined the cluster on his display. They were closest to the grazed hull.

"I'll attempt to jettison them from the Bridge, stand by," he replied.

He pressed the launch button. Nothing. He pressed it again: "Error: Launch Mechanism Failure."

He was about to contact the pods to inform the crew that they would need to move to a different cluster when the unexpected occurred. A power surge in the primary hull began to polarize around



the grazed section of the ship. Nearby hatches from the airlocks blew open with the surge, sparks and fire flying into the vacuum of space. Dietrich's heart began to speed up as he saw the surge burst through system after system until it reached the pods themselves.

Almost in slow motion, as if it was happening in a dream, the three pods exploded into a wave of burning white flames, their glaring brightness causing the XO to turn away from the screen. Upon looking back, a charred remnant of the power surge split the ship's hull like a lightning bolt through a tree. A hollow dark pit was visible where the escape pods had been just moments earlier...

October 29, 2411

The Dostra was not destroyed. Dietrich and the Engineering team managed to reactivate the deflector and shields just long enough to get out of danger and await rescue. Over 50 people lost their lives in the accident, the fault of which was later blamed on an asteroid rich in frozen magnasite. The mineral apparently deflected sensors until those last few seconds prior to impact. Dietrich sat on the grass of a local forest outside of his native Essen, Germany, reliving the events on the Dostra. Despite the many thoughts which had entered his mind over the past several weeks, none were as chilling as the site of those escape pods exploding. The image was forever burned into his memory, and he knew that no amount of time could ever lessen their impact on his emotions, for he lost more than just crewmen on those pods...

It was not until hours after the explosion, when the Dostra finally met up with at the pre-arranged coordinates, that a heaviness began to settle in Dietrich's chest. He could still remember the sight of the escape pods coming into the shuttlebay... people exiting and beginning to fill up the chamber. But it was not until he saw the Captain approach him that he knew that something else had gone wrong. It was not the way she walked or her facial expression. It was her eyes. He had never seen that look before, and he immediately knew what it meant.

He relived that moment too, sitting there on the edge of a hill, overlooking the darkening woods. He played with a tiny daisy in his hand. The night was getting chilly and the wind started to pick up. He let the flower go and it sailed across the air into the deep shadows of the trees... the same place where his son's ashes had been scattered just a few days earlier.

"Goodbye, Frederick," Dietrich whispered into the wind. But just as soon as he said it, the emotions and distress of the accident became as fresh as that moment in the shuttlebay weeks ago. He let a tear roll down his cheek as lay down on the grass. The cool blades pressed up against his cheek as the wind caused him to shiver under the darkening sky. Despite the discomfort, he didn't want to leave this place. Not now... not ever.



Diagnosis by Adam Pracht

This is a Star Trek story by Adam Pracht from the roleplaying game Star Trek Borderlands.

~I wish my feet touched the floor.~ Marius thought sadly as he swung his feet, making his Awesome Angel superhero shoes flash and blink with red lights. ~Then I'd feel braver.~

But the wooden chair remained tall, hard and unyielding. It was as uncomfortable as everything else in the sterile office – the white walls, the books that were somehow all the same color and height, the lights that were too bright and too harsh.

He felt his father place a hand on his shoulder and give it a little squeeze.

~Courage has nothing to do with how tall you are, Marius.~ Warren said in his mind. ~This will all be OK. I'm proud.~

Marius licked his lips and swallowed, wishing he'd taken a drink at the fountain in the hall. He was tired, mentally and physically, after half a day of testing in Dr. Slove's office. Now he just wanted to go home.

He reached out his right hand without looking, and felt reassured as his mother, Molly, took it without a word and held it firmly.

The door to Dr. David Slove's office opened with a sound like grating sandpaper, making Marius wince and hunch down farther in the uncomfortable chair. The doctor strode briskly to his desk, a thick old-fashioned paper file in his hand, and sat down with a soft sigh.

Slove was pale and thin, even for a Betazoid, and had a pinched look about his face – like he was constantly sucking on a lemon. He looked like one of the Fates; the one that led all people to the After.

~Well, I'll get right to it.~ Slove began in mindspeech. ~The results of your son's tests are not encouraging.~

He paused, waiting for a response.

~Go on.~ Warren thought back at the doctor.

~He...~ Slove began, but was interrupted.

“Do stop that,” Molly said, tightness in her voice. The fresh chameleon rose in her pocket swirled red and green with her mixed annoyance and anger. “You are both aware that I'm human, correct? If it isn't too much trouble, I'd like to find out the testing results as well.”

Slove cleared his throat, and when he spoke, it sounded raspy, as if rusted from disuse.

“My apologies, Mrs. Prott,” he said. “I'm afraid it's a force of habit. I'll speak aloud from here on out.”

Slove coughed dryly and took a long drink from a mug on his desk. He opened the folder and shuffled through it for a few moments of tightly wound silence.

“Our tests have shown,” he said at last. “That Marius has a condition known as E.D.D. – empathy deficiency disorder.”

Molly Prott's mouth drew thin, and her cheeks began to flush.



“Translation, Doctor Slove?”

Slove shuffled the papers and pointedly avoided Molly’s burning gaze.

“It means that Marius has telepathic ability, but absolutely no empathic sense – as all other Betazoids have. This leaves him with a complete inability to navigate Betazoid society. Mental deficiencies aren’t uncommon in... mixed species parentage... but this particular condition is rare, even so.”

Slove went silent, as if expecting Molly to respond to this. Receiving nothing, he continued.

“Testing has also revealed that he also has S.D.S. – screening deficiency syndrome,” Slove said, with a hint of hesitancy.

Anticipating the question, he said, “It means that his telepathy is wide-open. He doesn’t have the ability to turn off hearing the thoughts of those around him. It’s been known to cause social withdrawal, substance abuse and, in extreme cases, insanity.”

The doctor trailed off lamely, and the silence became a palpable presence in the room.

It was, at last, his father that dispelled the quiet.

“So, what do you recommend, doctor?” he asked.

Dr. Slove licked his lips, and addressed his words to the reflective glass surface of his desk. “There’s a very good facility just outside of Olivan. It’s designed to help care for children like Marius.

Sometimes – with transcranial alteration, medication and a... structured discipline system... children like Marius can be reintroduced safely back into Betazoid society...”

“No!” the monosyllable was so loud and sudden that it seemed to come from the very walls.

Marius nearly fell out of his chair at the sound. He looked over to his mother. She was sitting stiffly, her face was a mask of stone, the chameleon rose was a chaos of swirling red and a black, wet streak made its way down one of her cheeks. She gripped Marius’ hand so tightly that he cried out in pain.

“Mom,” he gasped. “My hand...”

The pressure eased, but Molly continued in a voice just a tense.

“You will not take my son away from me,” she said. “He is... my... son. He is coming home ... with me.”

Marius looked back at Dr. Slove, whose had turned – if possible – even paler, his mouth comically open in a wide “O”.

“B... But, Mrs. Prott,” Slove stammered. “You have to understand. There’s no public school that will take him with his condition. He...”

“Then, I’ll teach him myself,” Molly said, her eyes narrowed and determined. “You’re not taking my boy.”

Marius suddenly became aware of his father’s reassuring hand on his shoulder. “Molly,” he said, meekly. “Maybe we should consider it. He’s at a big disadvantage compared to other Betazoids...”

He was cut off as Molly whirled, her dark hair spinning around her like a vortex. Her face was suddenly as scarlet as the chameleon rose.

She spat out the words. “A disadvantage? Like I’m at a disadvantage, Warren? Is that how you see me? An emotional cripple? Because I’m



human?”

Her eyes bore into her husband, challenging him.

Warren dropped his head and folded his hands, abashed at his wife’s rebuke. “Molly... Imzadi... Fifteen years ago I stood before you unclothed and swore before all the gods to love and obey you. I have never thought of you as crippled in any way. You have always been my Imzadi, and always will be.” He hazarded a look at Molly. “If this is what you say we will do, then we will do it.”

The chameleon rose eased back into a sedate orange and the flush receded from Molly’s face.

“I know, Warren,” she said, in mixed affection and sadness. “Never doubted it.”

And suddenly she was standing, with Marius being pulled gently along the slick surface until he slid out of his seat. His feet touched the ground solidly and his shoes flashed vividly around the sterile white of the room.

“Come on Marius,” Molly said softly. “We’re going home.”

Dr. Slove nearly stumbled out of his chair.

“Mrs. Prott, you’re making a mistake,” he jabbered. “I urge you to reconsider. I... I must protest.”

“Protest all you want, David,” Molly said without turning around as the door slid open. “We’re leaving anyway.”

And the door rasped shut again against the near-shouting of Dr. Slove.

Marius felt his mother’s hand relax in his own as they left Dr. Slove’s cold office and made their way into the bright sunshine of a Betazed summer. His father was left behind for a few moments, settling the bill for the consultation, which left Marius alone with his mother for a few moments.

“Mom,” he asked, “What are you feeling?”

Molly stopped short, her muscles tightening for a moment before she knelt down to eye level with Marius.

“Happy... that I won’t lose you,” Molly said gently. “And... a little scared.”

She paused, looking down and past her son for a second before her eyes came back to focus on him. She barked a rueful laugh.

“OK, a lot scared. I...I don’t know if I can do this, Marius. But I love you too much not to try.”

Marius felt something warm blooming in his center as his mother’s dark eyes drew in his own. The chameleon rose in her pocket was a deep royal blue shot through with swirling pink like licking flames.

“Can you tell?” Molly asked, as she took the rose and tucked it into Marius’ shirt pocket. It turned a rich sunset purple.

Marius thought about it for a second. He had never had an empathic sense, not in the way his dad had described the sensation. But...

“Yeah, mom,” he said, a slight smile coming to his lips.

“Yeah. I think I’ve always been able to tell.”



Four Nations by Ruth Connelly

This is a flashback taken from a novel in development written by Ruth Connelly.

Tilda could not think of a single thing to say, so she simply stood up, walked out, went upstairs to her room, locked the door behind her, and lay down on her bed. It was her normal response whenever she found anything just too much to deal with, although she usually did it with rather more shouting and slamming of doors. Once there, she clasped her hands over her stomach, and stared at her ceiling, her mind strangely blank. She could hear her parents' voices drifting up the stairs – they were talking too loudly as usual.

'We need to go and check on her,' her father was saying,

'Leave her, Ronic,' her mother said, 'she's just had a huge shock, she needs time by herself to absorb it.'

'But we don't know what she's doing up there! Whatever happened to her friends could happen to her – it could be happening right now. We need to go and see!'

'She's locked in her bedroom. She's not going to just disappear. She'll come down and talk to us when she's ready. We need to give her time.'

Tilda heard her father harrumphing, but then things went quiet, and she figured out that her mother must have prevailed, which was a profound relief. Much as she loved her parents, she just didn't think she could cope with them right now.

There was nothing to see on her ceiling, except for the shifting patterns of shadow and light as the breeze ruffled the branches of the bunton tree outside her window. She watched them play across the plaster for a while, and then closed her eyes to watch instead the patterns inside her eyelids.

Time was passing, but she didn't know how much. No tears came; it was as if her emotions had simply shut down, along with the rest of her. She knew that sooner or later she would have to get up off the bed, to eat or drink or go to the toilet, and that she would have to go downstairs again, sit at the table, and discuss things with her mother and father. At some point she would have to deal with this, she would have to go back to school and see the empty desks where her friends had sat, and fend off all the questions and the teasing... but not now. Now she just wanted to lie there, staring at the inside of her own eyelids, not doing anything, not thinking anything, not feeling anything, just lying.

Of course, it is impossible to not think anything indefinitely, and soon she found her mind dwelling on her friends' disappearances, going back over the details of the previous night, all the statements made, hints that had been dropped, trying to work out what she could have done to prevent... whatever it was that had happened. It was fruitless; they simply hadn't told her enough for her to even take a reasonable guess at where they had gone. The thing that she found most difficult to understand, was that they should both have disappeared on the same night. They had had separate plans, secret even from each other – or at least, that's what they had told her. The suspicion that they had actually conspired together, excluding her, and were even now playing some joke, with her as the butt, took hold. It was the first thing that had any sort of emotional impact – suddenly, she felt hurt, and that hurt was strangely comforting, because it was within the boundaries of normality. She rapidly started persuading herself that this was the correct, the only, explanation: they must be playing a mean trick on her. It was tough to think that her only friends at the school had turned against her, but at least now she knew them for what they really were, and maybe her father would finally consent to taking her out of the awful place and sending her somewhere more normal, where there were others like her. Perhaps even one with boys. She began to imagine what another school might be like, although she had only very limited ideas, as her experience of school and her experience of the Myrmed Academy were one and the same. It was just as difficult when she tried to imagine making new friends: Conny and Hex were the only friends she had ever really had, and



their faces kept drifting into her mind. It was just impossible to think of her life without them. Eventually she gave up trying, and instead thought back to the first day she had met them, nearly a decade ago. Tilda could still remember vividly what it was like as she left her parents at the gate: her mother trying not to cry, her father trying to comfort his wife and hide his own emotions at the same time. Her uniform was strange and uncomfortable, the school gates were huge and capped with intimidating statues, her new books were heavy and awkward to carry, and the teachers were terrifying. Worst of all were the other girls. Most of them were bigger than her, all of them looked neater than her, and as she scanned around the playground with a sinking heart she saw that they all looked fully human. Not only that, they mostly had the dark skin of the highborn. Some were a bit paler, but there were scarcely any sallow complexions, and absolutely nobody else had the greenish tinge that bespoke Orc ancestry. In the five years of her life, Tilda had never been anywhere where she didn't belong, but now, she felt a powerful trepidation that she didn't belong here.

At one end of the playground was a seating area of benches and tables, and in the middle sat a group of girls who were obviously the most important girls in the school. Without exception they were dark-skinned, and much, much, bigger than her. They were surveying the arriving new girls with haughty disdain, sticking their noses up at most of them. When they caught sight of Tilda, they glanced at each other, whispered, then crossed their arms and stuck their noses higher in the air than ever before. The girl in the middle, who seemed to be the leader, stood up and started walking towards her, and not in a friendly way. Tilda stood, rooted to the spot in terror, with no idea what was going to happen next except for that it probably wasn't going to be very pleasant. Luckily, she never found out: before the girl could reach her, she was accosted by another first year, one much more confident than Tilda.

'Marta! Hello!' called the little girl.

'Seryn!' the older girl exclaimed, and stopped and bent down to talk to her, a huge smile on her face. There was a family resemblance between them: Tilda guessed that they must be sisters or cousins, and wished she had someone to meet her and smile at her. Instead, she took the opportunity to slink away, making herself as inconspicuous as possible. She went over to the far side of the playground, where there was an area of garden, complete with some bushes which looked suitable for hiding.

When she got there, she walked straight over to the far side, and went behind the furthest bush, growing nearly up against the wall. She was startled to discover two other girls already there, talking together with bowed heads. Even on that very first day, the ten-years-old Tilda couldn't help but recall bitterly, the other two had met first and were gossiping without her.

They looked up at her, equally surprised to see her. At first they looked hostile; but then, as they took in more of her appearance, and she more of theirs, they softened, and Tilda stepped cautiously towards them. The one on the left was unusually short, but stocky; she had pale skin, and dark hair falling in riotous curls. The one on the right was nearly as short, but much slighter in build; her skin was sallow to the point of looking downright yellow, while her straight hair was the same colour, and so fine that her scalp was visible through it. The most giveaway thing about either of them, though, was her ears: huge, and pointed, they protruded through her hair, and hairs protruded from them.

The one on the left was the first to speak.

'Hi, I'm Conny,' she said.

'Hi,' Tilda said, in a voice squeaky with nerves, 'I'm Tilda.' Conny nodded at her, with the solemnity only a five-year-old can muster. The yellow-skinned girl was the last to speak.

'I'm Hexamaria,' she said, 'but you can call me Hex.'

'Hi Hex,' said Tilda, 'are you...'

'Half-elf? Yes I am. And Conny is half-dwarf. And you – you're half-orc, aren't you?'

'Quarter-orc, actually. My father's mother.' Tilda said, and felt instantly embarrassed about saying



to much to someone she'd just met. But Hex and Conny didn't seem to mind. For a moment they all just looked at each other, awkward, but nonetheless feeling an unspoken bond. At last Tilda plucked up the courage to ask the question which had been bothering her since she first arrived.

'Are there any others here?' She didn't need to define what she meant by 'others'. Conny and Hex shook their heads.

'Not that we've seen,' said Conny. 'No other halves, and certainly no pures. Not even any other quarters. We're the only ones.' It took a moment for the profundity of that simple statement to sink in.

They were abruptly interrupted when a tall figure loomed over the top of the bush which was their place of concealment. Looking up, Tilda saw that it was Marta. Her young relative, Seryn, appeared at the side of the bush and said brightly 'Here they are!'

'Yes, here they are,' Marta agreed, grinning at them. Spontaneously, all three shrank back from her and huddled together. Marta, revelling in their fear, cracked her knuckles.

'Now,' she said, 'I'm going to show you what we think of nons here,'

'What are you going to do?' The question came not from one of the three frightened targets, but from Seryn, who was looking up at the older girl in puzzlement. Marta didn't look pleased to be interrupted.

'I'm going to teach them a lesson, is what I'm going to do. A lesson that we don't like their sort here.'

'I think they know that already.' Seryn's matter-of-fact voice cut through the atmosphere of menace, and Marta sighed in exasperation.

'Still, I want to make sure,' she said, sounding less convincing than before.

'Why?' asked Seryn, 'I mean, if they're so beneath us, why bother with them at all? Mother says that all nons are so stupid, they won't be able to learn to read anyway.'

Tilda was about to protest that she had already learned the alphabet, but thought better of it. Marta seemed lost for words. She eventually settled for spitting at them, and stalked off with the parting shot 'You just make sure you stay out of my sight.'

Seryn stayed behind for a second, looking at them curiously. She had the deep, rich brown skin of the highest of the highborn, and she was tall for her age, towering over Hex and Conny. Only Tilda could look her in the eye. Her hair was plaited into four neat braids, two on each side of her head, and she wore a slim gold bracelet on her wrist. Everything about her bespoke of wealth, breeding, and class. Unlike Marta, there wasn't any particular antipathy in her gaze, but there wasn't any sympathy either. Just plain curiosity. It occurred to Tilda that she had surely never seen any other races up close before. After a few moments, and without saying anything further, she turned and left them skulking in the shrubbery. The three of them breathed a collective sigh of relief.

'Clearly, school is going to be tough. I think we should stick with each other,' said Conny. The other two nodded fervently. The bell to call them into class rang, and they joined hands to walk out from their hiding place and face the world together.

It was the remembrance of that moment that finally made a tear fall from Tilda's eye and run down the side of her face to the pillow. For they had stuck with each other; through ten years of school, her friends had always been there to help her, to protect her, to cheer her up. They had teased her; she had teased them. Once, she and Conny fell out, and each of them would talk only to Hex, but that only lasted two days before they all started laughing together. Sure, they had their secrets from each other, but Tilda knew, deep down, they would never betray her.

Which meant... that they weren't playing a trick on her. Which meant... that they had actually disappeared, that they were probably in danger, or even...

Tilda abruptly sat up, her previous lethargy gone. A burning need for action replaced it, sadly unaccompanied by any clear idea of what she could actually do that would be any use. But she knew that lying in her bedroom was unlikely to help. As she got up and went out to the landing, she



heard her mother's voice calling up to her.
'Tilly dear, are you ready to come and talk to us now?'

Fredda, lady winter by Charlotte Willow-Edwards

This is a story written by Charlotte Willow-Edwards from the roleplaying game Shattered Realities.

The bitch was dead.

Dead, or at least gone forever. It seemed to be generally accepted now and she hoped, she desperately hoped, that it was true. There was no place in the world for that one.

While Lady Winter had no illusions about how she herself was viewed, she was surely a shining light in comparison to the pretty little girl who could, and had, ripped out human souls and ruined lives in a moment's pique. Pretty child in her little pink dress, with her simpering smile and her recently assumed false air of servility. All an act to hide the demon beneath.

Their paths had entwined for the past ten millennia or more. Such an unlikely combination: Fredda, the cold, reserved spirit of Winter, whose frosty beauty had aged & shrivelled and whose heart, over the years, had come close to freezing solid, her sole focus becoming to increase the power of her realm regardless of whom she had to tread on to do it, and Flame, the impulsive, emotional spirit of Fire, sister of Winter's husband the Sun King Belenos, who changed her body and her demeanour whenever the mood took her but seemed incapable of changing the evil in her soul – however much she whined on about it.

Flame said she wanted to become good for the witch she'd fallen in love with, wanted it enough to constantly be recreating herself for the witch and enslaving herself to the witch and even regressing herself to an eight-year-old child for the witch to raise her as she should be (and Fredda would have loved to know the witch's thoughts on that), but ultimately it all failed. At that point the witch was the generally adored and fawned over ruler of Avalon and so Flame's final act, ripping out the witch's soul, threw all the Fay realms into chaos and would have led to her being permanently encased in ice... if she hadn't escaped from her cell and vanished.

At her trial, held inconveniently but necessarily in her absence, it became apparent that she had been causing chaos and ruining lives, both Fay and mortal, for millennia. She had firmly denied having harmed the witch – the only thing she did deny – but given her history of soul-stealing and that she had been found by the empty body, there was no question of her guilt there. There was really no viable alternative, and Winter had no objections. Especially given how close Flame's meddling had brought her own realm to destruction.

Oh, Winter had had some revenge. She'd kidnapped Flame when she had the chance and rubbed her nose hard in exactly how much harm she'd done. Flame had even seemed to be genuinely sorry and promised to make reparations.

It had been a complete lie, of course. The realisation that Flame had betrayed her once again was no surprise to Winter, but she was surprised at the extent of her disappointment. It also meant that she felt very little surprise to hear a few months later that Flame had betrayed her beloved witch too.

She was becoming increasingly certain that the bitch was incapable of loyalty to anyone but herself. After Flame's escape, the search for her had been on an unprecedented scale, but had found nothing... and then the jewel that held her soul, in the way that all Fay souls were kept, had cracked in two. It was taken as hard evidence that the bitch was dead.

Winter had been relieved, like everyone else. But in the midst of it all she found her thoughts drifting back to the early days, when the two of them had been like sisters, and then the row that had ruined the friendship forever...

There were four of them: the golden twins, Flame & Belenos, the beautiful, dark-eyed Fredda, and Piri, thoughtful, scholarly and serious. They argued, laughed, teased each other – and the mortals – and got through far too many bottles of wine.

Fredda was naturally quiet and solemn, but the group drew her out of her shell. Flame was the first close female friend she had ever had and she found herself sharing secrets with her, getting into



trouble with her & simply messing about having fun with her. She enjoyed Flame's company and envied her cheerful confidence, although she was sometimes privately irritated by her friend's assumption that the others would do as she pleased. Belenos was the only one to stand up to his twin, which would nearly always lead to a screaming row and end in the twins hugging and laughing and Belenos adopting Flame's ideas & wishes as if they'd been his from the start. Belenos, bright, beautiful Belenos, was the one secret Fredda didn't share with Flame. Her love for Lord Summer was growing every day, even though she knew there was no chance of his ever returning it. She found that Flame was often dragging her brother away when the four of them were together, leaving her alone with Piri, but Flame had always been possessive about her brother. The knowledge didn't stop her staring wistfully after them on occasion.

She was alone in the forest, reading, when it happened. At first she thought she was dreaming but as she gazed at the man kneeling in front of her, listening to his words of love, Fredda found herself brimming over with a joy unlike anything she'd felt before.

She reached out to take his hands. Rising, he drew her into his arms and into a long, deep kiss.

"Marry me, Lady Winter."

"In a heartbeat, Lord Summer."

Belenos threw back his head and laughed in delight, then took her hand. "Come on. We have to share this."

She nodded, running with him, knowing how happy their friends would be for them & eager to share their joy.

When they came out of the trees, Flame & Piri were standing there. As she looked at their hands Flame's face took on an almost classic look of shock before her eyes hardened. Piri simply stood there, frozen.

Fredda hesitated, thrown by the reaction, and then felt Belenos squeeze her hand before he drew her over to his twin. "Flame, we're in love and we're getting married. Fredda will be your real sister. Be happy for us."

Flame took a deep breath and shook her head, looking from her twin to her best friend. "No."

"No what?" Fredda demanded.

"If you do this it will be a complete disaster. You think you're in love but it won't last. Don't do it."

Belenos stared at her, his quick temper rising. "What the hell does it have to do with you?"

"It has everything to do with me!" she yelled back. "I know it's only going to bring you both grief! It won't last!" She turned to look at the shocked Fredda, the words tumbling from her mouth.

"You're all wrong for each other. You're meant to be with Piri. He loves you. You'll be happy with him. Don't do this. I've seen what will happen if you do."

Fredda gazed at Flame, suddenly speechless. She heard a kind of strangled choking sound from Piri, glanced in his direction and saw a bouquet lying at his feet. "Piri? I'm... sorry. I didn't know. You're a good friend but it's Belenos I love."

He nodded slowly and walked off.

On what was meant to be the happiest day of her life so far, Fredda looked from the dejected back of one ex-friend to the furious face of the other.

"You bitch." she said softly. "You encouraged him and now look at him. And you can't even try to be happy for us because we're not part of your plan, whatever that is."

"You're idiots, the pair of you!" Flame yelled. "But you're bloody lucky that I'm not giving up on you. Get married. Break your hearts. And when you finally realise what a huge mistake you've made I'll be there to pick up the pieces and get you both out of it."

"Don't bother." Belenos snapped. "We'll take our own risks, together. We never want to see you again."

He took Fredda's hand and led her away, leaving Flame behind.

Today, Winter couldn't say that Flame had been wrong.



While the marriage had been blissfully happy for centuries, there had always been a wariness beneath their love. Flame's predictions burrowed into their minds, and however hard they denied and ignored them, there was always the fear that one day they might come true.

Belenos, lost without his twin's strength, gradually drank more and more heavily. When his wife threw him out of her bed in disgust, he found solace in the arms of the local whores and then entertainment in the form of gambling. Fredda threw herself into building up the realm as a distraction and rapidly found herself increasingly gripped by the game of politics and power, while she paid as little attention to Belenos as possible. With the loss of her love for him, the splinter of ice that had formed in her heart at her best friend's betrayal grew bigger every day until the once gentle girl was feared not only through her realm, but through all of Avalon. As predicted so long ago, Winter and Summer had eventually come to loathe each other and only the inclusion of Piri and Belisama, Belenos's new love, in their relationship had finally saved their marriage and their realm.

Flame had also been as good as her word in trying to divorce them. However, her methods had involved manipulation and meddling on a catastrophic scale and very nearly destroyed not just their realm but half of Avalon. Besides, Fredda knew that ultimately, Flame wasn't trying to 'rescue' them out of any real concern for anything but her concept of how things should be.

If Flame had accepted their marriage and turned her considerable talents to supporting it instead of to proving herself right, Fredda suspected that things would have been very different, but she would never know. She was only grateful that she would never have to deal with her again.



Lawrence Trisees by Ryan Eames

This is a story written by Ryan Eames, the roleplaying game is Blue Dwarf.

The star port bustled with thousands upon thousands of people making ways between bars, restaurants, starship gates and seating areas. It was the busiest star port in Jupiter's orbit and served nearly the entirety of it's tourism branch and the mining corporation. Lawrence Trisees, former mental technology specialist of the JMC Blue Dwarf, stood by Gate 44b having transferred himself from the ship a number of years ago.

Trisees was a tallish man with very closely shaved blonde hair. He had wide green eyes, an ever so slightly hooked nose and a thick, and equally blonde, beard. He looked utterly relieved as he walked from the arrival gate into the large swath of people.

It had taken his stolen Blue Midget nearly three years to reach civilisation and he relished the thought of being amongst normal people for a change. His life aboard the Blue Dwarf had been nothing but headaches, death and irritation. He was especially glad to be rid of the irritation, but his escape hadn't exactly gone as planned.

Whilst making his way back to the Solar System, Trisees had happened upon a derelict vessel. Running low on a few amenities, such as water and cheezits, and he'd boarded the vessel in the hopes of securing some of the delightfully orange snacks. Instead of finding a lifeless and empty spaceship, he'd discovered that amongst the ruins a youngish girl was making do and surviving as best she could. He'd also noted that she'd eaten all the cheezits.

Trisees had begrudgingly allowed the girl to come aboard the Blue Midget and ride back with him to the centre of human life. She'd flown with him for over a year and whilst he would never outright say it, Trisees had been glad to finally have some company.

"This is the Tethys Star port, Miss Hart," he said.

Michelle 'Shelley' Hart was nearly as tall as Trisees. She had exceptionally long brown hair, never allowing Trisees to give it a trim, and she appeared to be in her early twenties. She'd stowed aboard the 'Conscript', her previous ship, to escape her family. She'd not expected that the captain would go space crazy, shut himself and the crew in the cargo bay and then eject them all into the vast twinkly black.

"I've been here before," she said, destroying Trisees thunder.

"I'm getting a drink," he scowled. Shelley shrugged and followed him. They grabbed a couple of glasses of dubious looking brown liquid from a dirty looking barman and sat at an empty table.

"What's your plan?" Shelley asked Trisees.

He raised an eyebrow. "Undecided. I thought it would become clear once I returned. I can see this is not the case." He reached to his left and hauled up to the table one of the nearby NewNits (small touch screens that displayed everything that was being fed from the local news feeds).

"What about you?" he asked Shelley. She hummed and looked up, deep in thought. "Not sure. I think I'll follow your lead."

She smiled and took a sip from her glass as Trisees snorted. He changed the NewNit from the Saturn feed and redirected it into the JMC's inter ship traffic.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm checking up on my former 'post'" Trisees said derogatorily.

"Why? I thought you were glad to be rid of them?"

"Curiosity."

He scanned the crew roster and noticed a few changes in the command centre of the ship. Captain's changing, flight navigators moving posts. He flicked the feed upwards quickly, scrolling to the MediBay. 'Good', he thought. 'Charles Keto is still in charge. They'd be a fool to lose such an accomplished man.' Keto was the only person Trisees had gotten along with on board the Blue



Dwarf., seeing as they both did not suffer fools gladly.

He scrolled downwards a little, expecting more familiar names to be shown, but they weren't.

Trisees ignored it and scrolled to their 'Important News' postings. As he idly flicked through the previous headlines, he stopped on an article that shook him.

"Oh no," he said quietly.

"What is it?" Shelley asked.

He blanked her and continued to read the article: MEDICAL BAY LOSES TWO ON RESCUE MISSION. Trisees scanned the words quickly, shaking his head all the while.

"I don't believe it."

"Believe what?"

He handed the unit over to Shelley who also gave it a quick read.

"Doctors Hazel Coffey and William Shakespeare are dead? Did you know them well?"

"In a manner of speaking." He admitted. "Shakespeare and I go...went...way back."

"You never spoke of him. Come to think of it, you hardly ever spoke about the Blue Dwarf. You always ignored my questions."

"Of course! That ship of morons was the last place I wanted to think about, I had just left them."

"So why is this upsetting you now?"

"It's different!" he said angrily.

"How? Tell me," Shelley said gently.

"Look. Shakespeare was a fool. He was an idiot. He was a menace and an utter incompetent. Sure, he was a good surgeon, but as a person! God, as a person he was simply..." Trisees tailed off.

"Shakespeare came from me. From my head and body."

"I don't understand and frankly, I'm a little weirded out."

Trisees sighed.

"It happened nearly 17 years ago when I worked on Saturn."

17 Years Earlier

Scientist Lawrence Trisees wiped a torrent of sweat glistening on his forehead and stared proudly at his latest invention. It was a small circular pod, big enough to hold a single person connected to a large mess of cables, pipes and metal rectangles. To the untrained eye, it appeared to be a very rudimentary stasis pod. To the trained, it was so much more. Trisees was a very clever scientist and he specialised in unlocking the potential of the mind. He'd been called up by Saturn's highest military branch in order to help them develop the best possible soldier they could. Trisees jumped at the chance and his last five years had been spent working alongside a number of other intelligent scientists on a machine that would unlock all the secrets of the mind. Tonight, he had decided, it was finally ready for testing.

Trisees exhaled deeply and climbed into the machine. This was his moment, the moment when all his labours would come to fruition and all those years of being held back by slow neurons would be gone. He connected the little metal dome to the top of his head and fastened the gas mask nozzle to his mouth. Trisees closed his eyes and flicked the switch.

The light and the pain was intense. He screamed and his back arched wildly as the machine fed into his brain and shattered his mind. Trisees flailed as he felt the world slip from view. He tried to fight it, to claw his way back to a stable plane but all around him was ever approaching darkness. He cowered as pure nothing swallowed him whole.

After a few minutes, the machine stopped glowing. It's noises grew quieter and with a swish, the pod's top half rose upwards displaying the unconscious body of Lawrence Trisees. It lay there, unmoving for what seemed like an ice age, before Trisees' eyelids rose sleepily. His expression changed to one of terror and he began lazily fighting against the equipment holding him in place. He ripped the metal dome away and wrenched the face nozzle from it's resting position, tumbling out of the pod.



“Oh god,” he said, grabbing his head. It throbbed and pounded and shook and stuttered. He couldn’t see, he couldn’t think, he could barely speak. Trisees stood up gingerly and waited for the pain to leave him. It didn’t. He tried to walk and found himself unable to coordinate his feet. He was getting angrier with every passing minute. His head continued to ‘slam’ against his nerve endings and he clutched it tightly. It was the machine’s fault. It was all the machine. He just wanted the pain to stop, just for a moment. Just a single moment of relief. He would do anything to stop that pounding. He grabbed hold of the cables to steady himself and fell to the ground, his feet giving way. He ripped the power cables from their housing and the pod sparked. Trisees growled in anger again as his head got even worse.

“STOP!” he screamed blindly, the world a lost mixture of shapes and colours. He hit the floor with his fists and pleaded with anyone to make the pain cease. No one replied and Trisees screamed again. His vision was still a mess, he could barely see his own hands. He staggered away from his laboratory and up the stairs to the cool night air. He slumped against a parked taxi and could only just make out the driver’s words to him.

“Are you going to prop up my cab all night, or do you want a lift somewhere?”

“Medical,” he said, before passing out entirely for the last time.

“What does that have to do with Shakespeare?” asked Shelley, interrupting Trisees. He sighed, growled and scowled at the same time, the resulting noise coming across like a dog choking on a chew toy.

“I’m getting to that part. Don’t interrupt me woman. I don’t like telling people about this. Count yourself lucky.”

Trisees awoke with a start. His head no longer thumped which immediately relieved him. His surroundings did not.

“OK, three things wrong with this picture.” He said, staring at all the elements on display. “One, where am I? Two, why am I here? Three, why is there a beautiful woman resting her head in my lap?” He looked down at the mystery girl, her hair a mysterious shade of purple. “Well, the third isn’t so much of a problem.” He lifted her head up gently, excusing himself, and hopped off the bed. “Now to find out answers for questions one and two,” he muttered to himself. He looked around and decided that based on the various Red Crosses, syringes, beds, ointments and a sign saying Medical Department, that he was probably in some sort of Medical Department. He wondered how they’d been able to stop all the head pain when a lively looking girl bounded through the doors into the main room.

“Heya Shakespeare,” she said to him. “What’s on today’s cards?”

He stared at her as she looked at him, obviously waiting for a reply.

“Well?”

Trisees looked behind him, wondering if the purple haired girl had awoken, before realising that the excited looking girl was talking to him.

“You’re asking me this?” he said.

“Hey, why no middle English?” she asked.

“We have to speak ‘Middle English’ here?”

“Well, no. But you always do,” she stated.

“I what?”

“Are you okay, Doctor Shakespeare?” she asked, sounding very concerned.

“Why do you keep calling me that?” replied Trisees.

“That’s...err...your name,” she said, very uncertainly.

“Young lady, whoever you are, I think you need to get your facts straight. My name is Lawrence Trisees. I am a scientist.”

“No, you’re Doctor William Shakespeare. You’re a surgeon.”

“Get out of my way woman, I think you’re on some kind of illegal substance,” he said, annoyed and



pushing roughly past her. As he stalked into the main corridor he began muttering to himself.

“What in god’s name is going on around here? Shakespeare?! Doctor?! What the hell is she talking about? How in the hell did I end up here?”

He kept on walking, ignoring the many hellos of people he passed. Every time someone said ‘Doctor’ he wanted to scream. He felt groggy and out of alignment, and all these people accusing him of being the ship’s head of surgery fuelled his bad mood.

He eventually came out to a large promenade full of shops. Trisees spotted a bar at one end of the promenade and what looked like the local AI singing to itself on a monitor. He strode over to the screen and tapped on it.

“You the AI around here?” he asked.

“Yes Doctor,” it replied, visibly annoyed by the tapping.

“Where am I?”

“You’re on the promenade of the Blue Dwarf,” it said matter of factly.

“The Blue Dwarf? What am I doing here?”

“You’re the ship’s surgeon. You transferred here after an altercation with your previous captain. You tried to cut his head open with a drill.”

“I what? I never attacked Professor Jaran. Doctor?! Why would I be made doctor when I don’t have any medical training?! Is everyone around me insane?!”

“Doctor William Shakespeare!”

Trisees spun around to see the purple haired girl standing behind him.

“STOP CALLING ME THAT!” he shouted viciously. “I’m not your damned Doctor! I want to see the captain of this scow! There’s been a mistake, I should be on Callisto!”

“William, I want you to return to the Medibay. I think there’s something wrong with you,” she said.

“I AM NOT A DOCTOR! YOU WILL TAKE ME TO THE CAPTAIN NOW! I AM IN NO MOOD FOR GAMES!” He screamed, pointing furiously at the girl.

“Mr Trisees,” she said. “Our captain is not on board the ship at present. He’s involved in some training.”

Trisees scoffed. “Then take me to the second in command. Really, it’s not a difficult request.”

The purple haired girl gave a little laugh. “Our second in command is,” she faltered. “Also unavailable. We’re not exactly sure where he is.”

“Isn’t there someone with SOME amount of competence on this vessel?!”

“Do we have a problem sir?” asked a deep male voice behind Trisees. He turned around to see a very large and well built man wearing a security uniform. His arms were folded and his name tag read ‘Tiny’ Jackson.

“Tiny. How cute,” muttered Trisees. “Mr Jackson, these people, this balding AI and that girl are claiming I am someone I am not. Moreover, she refuses to take me to see the captain. I demand I be allowed to see whoever is highest ranking on this vessel!”

“Miss Coffey, is there something wrong with the good doctor?” Jackson asked, turning to face her. Coffey shook her head. “I don’t know. It’s like that collapse gave him amnesia, or something far worse.”

“EXCUSE ME,” Trisees said defiantly. “Don’t you know it’s RUDE to talk about someone in the third person when they are present?!”

“Calm down, Doctor,” began Jackson, placing a muscled hand on Trisees’ shoulder.

“GET YOUR HANDS OFF OF ME!” Trisees shook himself away and backed up against the nearby wall. “All of you are against me! There’s some kind of conspiracy going on here! Why am I on this ship?! Why did you remove me from Callisto?! Where’s all my research!?”

There was a zap and Trisees felt his back sting violently. He turned around to see Jackson brandishing a stun gun. “I’ll get you for this,” he said before slipping into unconsciousness.

Trisees awoke to the familiar sight of a grey ceiling.



“Great. I’m back in the Medibay. It wasn’t a hideous dream. And what’s this?” he asked, realising his arms were tied down. He struggled to move up and just about reached a seated position, spotting the familiar purple hair of Miss Coffey, holding a clipboard and looking forlorn.

“So. I’m tied to this bed. I’m apparently dangerous?” he asked.

“Yes. Yes you are.”

“Why are you keeping me here?” he spat.

“Who are you?” Coffey asked.

“My name is Lawrence Valcavia Trisees. I repeat, why are you keeping me here?”

“What have you done with Dr William Shakespeare?” continued Coffey.

“WHY ARE YOU KEEPING ME HERE?” shouted Trisees, his patience at an end.

“You’re ill. I’m trying to help you.”

“Help me? You could start by releasing me.”

“Not until you’ve calmed down.”

“Look. I’m going to say this for the very last time today. My name is Lawrence Trisees. I’m a scientist. I work at the Callisto research base. My ident code is GB-9980-YOI-777. Check the ship’s database and you’ll find that it’s the truth. Speak to Professor Aldous Jaran if you really have to. He is stationed on Ganymede and working in the University there.”

Coffey rose from her seat and moved towards the MediComp. She tapped a few buttons, bringing up the ident records of a Lawrence Trisees.

“Your record says you’re dead,” she offered.

“Oh. I’m dead? This is a dead man talking to you? I’m a hologrammatical being that has been tied to a bed with real ropes. Technology really has progressed.”

Coffey sighed. “What is the last thing you remember, before being here.”

“Testing my research, being in searing pain and walking out of my lab. After that I open my eyes to find myself in this charming insanity spot.”

“You don’t recall any of the last twelve years?”

Trisees looked worried for a moment. “Twelve years? Explain to me what’s going on.”

Coffey shrugged. “I don’t think I can,” she admitted. “I think we’re going to have to run some medical tests on you.”

“Tests! You think I’m some kind of lab rat?”

Coffey threw up her hands and gave an exasperated sigh.

“Lawrence, how else are we to find out what is wrong with you? We’re not resting until we work out what happened, why and how to set things straight!”

Shelley waited as Trisees stopped to take a drink.

“Then what? What about Shakespeare?” she asked.

Trisees shook his head. “Another time, Miss Hart. We have more important things to do. Like catch the shuttle to Saturn. It’s leaving in fourteen minutes.”

“Fine. Fine. You need to tell me later, though!” Shelley grumbled.

“Perhaps,” he said.

Trisees and Shelley got to their feet. Trisees looked down at the article once more and nodded sadly.

“Goodbye, William,” he said under his breath.

Trisees straightened up, adjusted his jacket and walked with Shelley towards their gate becoming lost in crowds of people.



Lieutenant Saveron by Sarah Eccles

This is a Star Trek story written by Sarah Eccles from the roleplaying game USS Thunder on Starbase 118.

The Vulcan doctor was accustomed to having the answers to questions or the where-withal to find them. His professional life was ordered, organised and logical; his personal life was anything but, and he had yet to deduce a solution to the problem. He had no answers, only a determination to search until he found them.

But even the keenest minds need rest and quiet. Saveron sat cross-legged on a traditional Vulcan sitting mat in his quarters, before a low table on which stood a solitary meditation candle. The environmental controls were set as always to duplicate the high temperature, low pressure and low humidity of his native world, the gravity set to Vulcan standard.

Steepling his fingers together before him, Saveron allowed his mind to slip into the familiar patterns of meditation, his thoughts on Vulcan, his grey eyes focused on the flame of the candle.

[Saveron and T'Rel's apartment, ShirKahr, Vulcan]

Saveron blinked, and the bright glare in his eyes resolved itself into the light of Yel – the star Humans called 40 Eridani A – which still struck the plateau where the Temple of Gol sat on its stony outcrop on Mount Selaya, turned golden by the light.

The Temple was visible from the balcony of their apartment, and was the centre of the strictest mental disciplines on Vulcan, whose initiates mastered many arts great and subtle, not least the true segregation of their thoughts, closing off forever the fierce and volatile emotions that had made their species' history so violent. There were those there who could cast their mind to another's with only the most cursory contact, or indeed no contact at all; who practiced telekinesis and who could, through meditation, overcome the strongest of biological drives, taking the mental disciplines far beyond what Surak had envisaged when he said that they must master their emotions, lest they be mastered by them forever, and thus destroyed.

There were few enough who were sufficiently talented and disciplined to follow the advanced teachings of the Temple; T'Rel was one of them. She would be on her way home from the Temple now, having attended training after the school day finished. He was home earlier, as always. Dinner was cooking, and he took the time to watch the sun go down and think. Saveron had never shown either the talent or the inclination to follow the Temple's advanced teachings, something which had disappointed T'Rel. No, in truth she could have lived with that, he knew; what frustrated her was not his disinterest, it was his disapproval; his persistently moderate view that while emotional control was obviously necessary, denial was destructive. She wished to undertake the Kolinahr, the purging of all emotions, and his approval was important to her, but he could not give it. ~To think that she still seeks that from me.~

It was an old point of disagreement, and Saveron automatically suppressed the annoyance it provoked, unwilling to give the unwanted emotion any space in his thoughts. He turned his gaze to the other horizon where the sky was darkening and the stars beginning to twinkle. Low on the horizon one star shone steadily, and Saveron knew it was no star, but the Vulcan starbase, reflecting the light from Yel. It was the gateway to the galaxy, and he had never been there. One day, he promised himself. The Hospital where he worked and the associated facilities where he did his research were some of the largest and best equipped on the planet, run by the medical school of the Vulcan Science Academy. They dealt with a great many cases, including those that the Starbase was not equipped to handle, and the exposure to alien life forms was greater there than any other facility on the planet, but he knew that beyond there were far more. Another subject of contention.

He turned from that horizon too, and stared out across the desert plains, in the direction of Kal-an



although it was far from here, a third of the way around the planet on the other side of the deep desert and narrow ocean. An area of high cliffs and deep valleys near the coast, Kal-an was less arid than the Capital, though all things were relative. Saveron's people, the Nel-Gathic race, were native to that region; the tall, pale-eyed Vulcans with the long names, of whom so few went to space. They were known for spawning philosophers, moderates and mavericks, people who thought tangentially to those around them. The infamous Valeris had been half Nel-Gathic, and one of the few of their people who ever left Vulcan's gravity well.

The apartment was empty until he heard the door-seal cycle, and soft foot-falls cross the living room and through the portal onto the balcony. He was watching the darkening horizon again when she came to stand beside him, beautiful in her long robes, her thick black hair bound up, her dark eyes knowing. "You are watching the stars again." T'Rel observed.

"Affirmative." Saveron agreed. It would be illogical to deny it.

"Vulcan holds many fascinating subjects of its own." She pointed out.

"That is correct." He agreed. They stood silently for a moment, and she followed his gaze to the bright 'star' on the horizon; she knew it was the station he was looking at, and she knew why.

"The wonders of Vulcan do not hold your interest." She said at last, her voice moderate and serene, the accusation all implied.

"There is far more complexity in this galaxy than is held in our world." Saveron replied quietly; he appreciated the vast vistas and dramatic landscapes of his home, the huge monuments and especially the scientific breakthroughs his people achieved, but he had always been curious.

"Wanting is often more gratifying than having." She told him; and old proverb.

"So I said in Kal-an." He replied, referring to the time when she had wanted to move to ShirKahr to further her studies and he had not; they had gone in the end. But for all that life beyond the red soil of their homeworld seemed to call to him, he had made no move to answer that call. He had a bondmate and it was only recently that their younger child S'Rel had left their home for student accommodation at the Vulcan Academy of Science. But since then there had been a certain level of tension in the air; they were at a crossroads in their lives. As yet they had not chosen a path. His bondmate did not want to go to space, he knew.

T'Rel turned from the view of the stars on the horizon, looked up at him until he turned to meet her gaze, her unfathomable dark eyes bewitching as always in her beautiful, serene face. She watched him for a long time before she spoke. "I have been invited to undertake the training for the Kolinahr." She said at last.

Saveron knew that her training in Vulcan mental techniques would ultimately culminate in such, and that T'Rel wanted to undertake that final step. "You wish to accept." He said. It was not a question.

T'Rel watched his face. "Affirmative." She agreed, and said no more.

Saveron let the silence drag out, waiting. When it became apparent that T'Rel would say no more he searched her face, pale eyes noting the tension in her stance, the stiff control that allowed no expression of true emotion, which had become an expression in itself, so accustomed had he become to reading her over the years. "You have no yet accepted." He deduced.

"I have not." She confirmed.

A long pause. He knew why she had not. He looked away from her, out over the plains in the direction of their old home beyond the desert, far further than any could see from here.

She stepped to stand close beside him. "What do you see?" She asked softly. The question allowed a distraction.

"Kal-an." He replied. "The past."

She looked at him, one eyebrow raised. He had always been too much of a dreamer to her. He met her gaze then and held out his hand, index and middle fingers extended, ring and little fingers curled against his palm, the traditional gesture. After a moment she made the same gesture, and touched



the tips of her fingers to his, her dark eyes meeting his pale ones. It was all that was needed for their minds, bonded since childhood, to touch. It was an intimate contact that had become comfortable over the many years they had spent together.

He could feel the conflict in her mind, the duty to tradition that bound her to him, the desire to go where he would not. But she kept the resulting confusion walled up, separated from the logic of her thoughts. She was far more skilled than he, able to compartmentalise and wall away parts of her mind, even from him.

He hadn't that skill, in the meld all his thoughts were laid bare before her should she care to look, but he had nothing to hide. He showed her what he was thinking, the memory that had surfaced, of when they were children. Already bonded, though not so deeply as they would be as adults, they could touch minds shallowly using that gesture. He had felt her amusement that first time, signalled his own query. Wrong hand, had been the silent reply. Saveron was left-handed, and he had a tendency to mirror people rather than copy directly.

T'Rel had tolerated that then, years later it came to frustrate her, if she let it, like many of his quirks that he didn't make the effort to remedy. Imperfections. T'Rel was nothing if not a perfectionist. But they had balanced each other, she steadied him, he lightened her.

~I have not forgotten.~ T'Rel's thoughts echoed in his own mind.

He remembered the city of Kal-an, where they grew up. He remembered the day he and T'Rel were bound as children much more clearly than their bonding ceremony as adults, not surprising given his state of mind at the latter. They had been so different, complimented each other perfectly, both intelligent professionals and quite fascinated with each other. S'Rel's birth only two years after Teron's had raised eyebrows, but their life had seemed complete.

~The past is another country, Saveron.~ T'Rel told him, almost gently.

~I had thought that, in coming to Shirkahr, we would both find that which we sought. We could regain what we had.~ It was the truth. He still found her beautiful and exotic, enchanting. She was intelligent, logical, disciplined and dutiful, true to the traditions of their culture. What more could a man want in a bondmate? But the distance between them had grown, and in many ways they had not fought that, it had been easier not to. He showed her then the confusion he felt, the desire to regain the love they had shared and the ignorance as to what to do to achieve that. Emotions that were always suppressed, were never allowed to affect the logic of his thoughts and actions, but which never the less were there. ~What can I do?~ He asked.

~Come with me to the Temple.~ She told him, answering the candour of his thoughts with her own. Share the learning with me. It was, to her, the epitome of what it was to be Vulcan.

Yet the thought disturbed him so that he had to suppress the desire to recoil from her mentally. ~You know that I will not.~

She had not missed his reaction, though he had quashed it. ~You find the heritage our greatest thinkers bequeathed us so abhorrent?~ She asked. His reaction had hurt her, he rejected what she most believed in.

~Surak said that we should master our emotions. He never said that we should not have them.~ Saveron pointed out.

~Surak paved the way for us to rise above our animalistic past, but that does not mean we cannot build on his teachings.~ T'Rel replied. It was an old argument.

~It is the loss of a part of myself and that which we have shared that I find abhorrent.~ Saveron admitted. ~If you succeed in the Kohlinahr what will I be to you? You will not love me then, you will not be capable of it.~ Long accustomed to walling off his emotions so that they would not influence his actions, the idea of possessing no emotions at all still seemed unnatural to him.

~Cannot two beings be together in perfect logic?~ She asked him.

~Is that enough?~ He asked.

It was her turn to react badly, to draw away from his doubt. ~How you be Vulcan and doubt that?~



~I do not share your certainty.~ He admitted.

~Learn the disciplines that give us freedom from our emotions.~ She urged him. ~Then you will be certain.~

~I have loved you T'Rel; that is not something that I wish to be free of.~ He showed her then, as he had shown her when they were wed, and often when they were younger. His feelings for her had waned somewhat as they had grown apart, but had never vanished, and he had never given up hope. When they were younger T'Rel had responded in kind, but now there was only reluctance, conflict, and above all confusion.

~What?~ He asked her, feeling the shape of her thoughts. Why was T'Rel, of all people, confused? And there was a momentary glimpse, a flash of thought brief but startling, guilty in it's revelation, as though T'Rel had wanted him to find it for himself, but knew that she had the skill to keep him from doing so.

It was a man, dark-eyed, shorter than him and heavier set, of the Golic people like T'Rel. Serok, the name appeared in her thoughts. Another disciple at the temple. And so he understood. Understood her reluctance, her distance, and her inner conflict. She believed in Vulcan tradition, which held that she was bonded to him, bonded for life, but she had found another who fit her ideal more closely than her dreamy, alien-obsessed bondmate. Ah.

Saveron did not know how long T'Rel had hidden Serok from him in her thoughts, nor whether the man cared for her. He had no interest in such, only in his bondmate. It saddened him that he disappointed her so, yet somehow the betrayal did not hurt him as much as he knew it should. Had he already had some subconscious inkling? But T'Rel lived by traditional mores, she could not simply leave him.

The desire to keep her, to have her love him again was strong. He could go with her, study with her, show her that he could be what she wanted. Anything not to lose her. For a moment he almost determined that he would do so, and fight for the woman he yet loved. But that would be acting on his emotions, and above all he was a logical man. He knew that he lacked the aptitude and the conviction to achieve the discipline she had, and that she had hoped to see in him. No, he could not be what she wanted, he knew, and he would only disappoint her further if he tried. There was only one logical thing to do. ~Be glad that I am not the traditionalist you would have me be,~ he thought. ~Tomorrow we will go to the Temple, and find as a Priestess to perform the ceremony of Unbinding.~ Then he withdrew his mind from hers, abrupt and final.

Her shock registered before she could quash it, and it was the last thing he felt as he withdrew his hand and mind from hers. T'Rel stared at him outright for a moment before she gathered her control and her usual serene expression returned. She bowed her head once, accepting his decision.

“That will not be necessary.” She said quietly, then she concentrated for a moment, and where before there had been a constant, subtle sense of her in his mind, there was nothing. They had been bonded almost the entirety of their lives; the empty sensation was startling.

Without another word she turned and moved quietly to the portal. She paused there, deep in thought, then turned back to look at him where he stood by the balcony rail. Finally she raised her hand in the Vulcan salute. “Live long and prosper, Saveron.” She said quietly.

Saveron slowly raised his own hand in echo. “Peace and long life, T'Rel.” He replied gravely, bidding her goodbye.

She stepped inside, and that was the last time that Saveron saw her. He heard her moving quietly about their apartment, no doubt packing some essentials, but he stayed on the balcony and watched the stars, the hollowness in his mind echoing a hollowness in his heart, a loss that he suppressed lest it consume him. Finally he heard the door seal cycle, and the apartment was silent once more.

[Saveron's Quarters, USS Thunder]

As Saveron rested his hand on the balcony rail it changed beneath his fingers, became the smooth surface of the table in his quarters, the glare of the sun became the glare of the candle flame. Years



had passed since he and T'Rel had parted, but it had felt as though he was making that terrible decision again, living through that silent anguish that he never truly acknowledged. The Vulcan had never wished to experience the moment his wife had left him again.



Lucinda Steel by Duri Aspire

This is a story written by Duri Aspire, the roleplaying game is Two Halves make a Whole played on OngoingWorlds.

“Pack your things, Lucinda. We’re going on a trip.” Her father said to Lucinda as he woke her. Her mother stood nervously behind him, shaking.

Without complaint, Lucinda did as she was told. Her teddy, some clothes and a colouring book were all that she crammed into her backpack. Lucinda was scared. Nothing like this had ever happened before. Her mother held her hand tight and told her everything was going to be alright as they walked out to the car. Lucinda still thought that her mother said it more for her own benefit to calm herself down.

The three of them strapped into the car and began heading towards the outskirts of the city, near the boarder. Lucinda could hear her parents talking in hushed voices about a tear in the wall and people coming after them. Nervously, Lucinda asked where they were going.

“Just away, Luce. We need to get away.” Her mother replied shakily.

“It’ll be okay.” Her father reassured her as he turned his head to face her.

All of a sudden, her mother screamed and Lucinda felt the car turn sharply left then down the steep drop down the side of the road. They slammed into a tree and then there was silence. Lucinda looked around. Her parents lay in their seats with their hands joined. The windshield was virtually non-existent and there was blood and glass everywhere. Lucinda screamed at the top of her lungs and began to cry. She tried to shake her parents awake, hoping that they were only asleep, but they didn’t move. Lucinda began to bawl louder and louder.

Eventually, she stopped crying and just listened to the silence. She rocked back and forth, listening. After three or four hours of waiting, two dots appeared on the horizon – police officers.

“Over here!” She yelled, hoping to be heard.

The lights came closer and closer until she saw a man and a woman in police uniform. As they reassured her, they dragged her out of the car. Lucinda resisted, insisting that she didn’t want to leave her parents.

“Come on, sweetie.” Said the female officer, coaxing her out. Lucinda crawled out and the woman picked her up. “Okay, let’s go to the hospital now.” She said, smiling.

“No!” Lucinda wailed. “I don’t want to leave Mummy and Daddy!” She began to cry again as the officer carried her up the slope to their car and strapped her in.

After arriving at the hospital, still bawling her eyes out, Lucinda’s aunt, Mariam, picked her up. The funeral came and went with Lucinda knowing nothing about it. Mariam had decided that it would be too much for poor six-year old Lucinda.



Maisie Howard by Izzy Stuart

This is a story written by Izzy Stuart for the game What will be, will be on OngoingWorlds.

Maisie smiled as she looked to her student. Saturday, it was finally Saturday. Luckily for her she could go back to school on Monday. Be a teacher again. She was pleased for the time off, but she missed her work. She missed what the students thought of her. And as much as she didn't want to admit it, she missed the excitement.

"It was...nice to see you Natalie." she smiled. Although she wanted to talk to her more, she was tired, so was Natalie, and they were both heading home.

It was that night that Maisie realized what she missed most, and what she remembered most. The little details that made her who she was, and what she did. She sat comfortably on the edge of her luxury duvet, looking at the pine dresser across the room.

A pine dresser. Pine. She remembered the huge pine trees that grew outside her house. The small forest that accumulated over the years, which had lay the as the playground for all local children in her village. Many good times spent climbing trees, building dens, playing hide and go seek. Many years spent running almost savagely around the thick forest floor, careful no to fall on anything too sharp. The hours spent worrying their parents about where they were, or what contraptions they were building.

As darkness would fall along the edge of the pines, casting long shadows onto the ground below, and the cold air came crisp to the bare and dirt-streaked faces of the children, people would begin heading home. Home to their mothers food and their fathers games. And Maisie, being a normal child, did the same, almost.

Maisie would return to a loving family, as did the others, but she knew that she was lucky to be here. Lucky to be with a mother and father, who provided games and food. With bed-time stories and goodnight kisses. The children she played with didn't think of this as they returned to their homes, no, it didn't even cross their tiny minds. For Maisie was used to a life before love, a life of abandonment. But she had found love, and parents, and a good home, and she was thankful for this everyday.

She would run into her mothers arms, and be greeted with the apron she had been wearing for that day, before launching on her father, who would pick her up and spin her round, his business suit flaying at the bottom of his blazer. It had always felt rough against her arms when he hugged her, and smelt of wet dog when he had drudged through the snow.

And as Maisie thought back upon her happiest moments in life, she wondered and hoped about the life she and her husband would provide for their child. For if even an orphan could find the love she did so desperately seek, then perhaps the child's life would be good enough after all.



Rites and Responsibilities by John Wilson

This is a story written by John Wilson, about a character from play-by-wiki game that grew out of an old World of Darkness Changeling game that has been ongoing for over a decade.

“So, you are to be my replacement?”

Master Tyr looked down his hooked nose at the young troll stood before him. Even with the loose robes of an apprentice draped over her, it was easy to tell that his new student was slightly built. She bowed her head, letting her blonde hair fall loosely over her flat horns.

“Yes, Master Tyr.”

Tyr snorted and ran his hands through his moustache, coming it down the sides of his mouth until it merged with the white of his beard.

“And what qualifications do you have? What is it that makes you think that you can exercise wisdom?”

The young troll swallowed. She had not expected this reception from her new master. In fact, she wasn't sure what she had expected him to do. Master Tyr was the oldest troll she knew, and she had never had any dealings with him beyond staring at his single broken horn as he cursed the youngsters in his way or officiated over some arcane point of lore.

“The elders told me I was to be your apprentice, master. They must have thought there was some good in me.”

“Really? And do you know how my successor is selected? The elders draw lots to see which of you cubs will earn the privilege of receiving the benefit of my knowledge. Unless they have been cheating and have sent me an idiot to punish me, you are merely lucky. Do you understand now?” The young troll sniffed. He couldn't tell whether she was crying or being indignant. He didn't care which.

“Yes, Master Tyr.”

Master Tyr shook his head and hauled himself up to his feet, using his staff to steady himself. It had been many years since his bones had been free from aches and pains, and he knew that he would have to teach this child to take over from him. Yes, he could have protested to the elders, but they had followed the law when they had inflicted the girl on him. Master Tyr extended his right arm towards his new apprentice and tried to make his voice sound as disgusted as he could make it.

“Well, come with me. Take my arm – quickly now. Time does not wait for youth, no matter what opinions youth holds in its empty head. Come.”

He put his weight on the young troll's arm and shuffled forward. She matched his pace, keeping in step with him. Good. If nothing else she would make a reliable companion. Tyr guided the pair of them across the snow-bound village towards the temple that was his home. Compared to the rest of the buildings in the village, it was a model of Spartan austerity. There were no carvings or decorations, no evergreen boughs draped across the lintel; just plain stone torn from the mountains above the village.

A few oil lamps flickered fitfully in their niches, barely lightening the darkness inside the building. The main chamber was just a hollow cube with a lectern at the far end. Ancient scrolls were rolled up and placed in slits in the wall, shielding them from the elements. Tyr made his way past the lectern towards a dark opening, then paused.

“Bring a lamp. I do not want you falling over yourself. It is bad enough that I must take you under my roof without you sprawling on my floor.”

The young troll obeyed, and returned obediently to Tyr's side. She held out her arm for him to rest on, just like before. Tyr looked down at her.

“If you are going to be my apprentice, I need to be calling you by a name.”

“I am Second Sarsd ttir, elder.”



Tyr laughed. Second was not sure what to make of this.

“No other name, then, second child?”

Second shook her head.

“No, master.”

“You do not even pretend to a name among your peers? Well, not one that you are prepared to admit to, eh? At least you have that much respect for tradition.”

Tyr made his way into the deeper darkness, into the labyrinth of the temple. He continued his lecture.

“If you are my student, then one day you will take my place. You must devote your life to the lore of our people. All that has been recorded, you will learn. All that is questioned, you will answer. You shall guide our people in their journey through this world.”

“It sounds like a heavy burden, elder.”

“It is. And it is one that you will have to bear alone.”

Second’s voice was very quiet.

“What do you mean ‘alone’?”

“You must show neither fear nor favour in your pronouncements. Our people will rely on you to guide them, and you must always be right. You must not allow anyone to tempt you from the true path. When our gods abandoned us, we had to rely upon our own strength and our own honour.

Other people may have gods to follow. We do not. Do you understand, second daughter?”

Second hesitated, thinking over what she had heard. If she said yes to Master Tyr, then she would be accepting a future of lonely responsibility. If she said no, then she would be rejecting what fate had thrown at her. She decided to be truthful.

“I am not sure, master. I understand that we stand alone, but I am not sure that I understand what it will mean to me.”

Master Tyr stopped and pulled away from her. He looked curiously at Second, then gestured towards a bare room.

“You shall sleep there. I take it that you have your possessions?”

Second lifted a bag containing the measure of her life. It was small. Tyr nodded.

“Very well. Tomorrow you shall begin your duties.”

“I shall get to read the scrolls?”

Her voice was eager, almost hopeful. Master Tyr snorted in derision.

“No. Of course not. I take it you know how to use a broom?”



Roquel Atrell by Richard LeValley

This is a Star Trek story written by Richard LeValley from Star Trek Borderlands.

Roquel stepped inside her quarters and shut the door. Her need for another connection to the K.I.S.S. simulator would have to wait. She only hoped that the engineers and Marius could fix the units like they wanted to before it really got out of hand.

She humphed and flopped down on the bed. ~If I had the resources that I used to, there wouldn't be any need for the third rate connections on a backwater planet like Setlin.~ She closed her eyes, and fell to sleep with thoughts of days past lingering on her subconscious.

“Roquel!” Maximilian called after his wayward daughter. “You never take things seriously. Why won't you pay attention, when I'm trying to share my knowledge of the industry with you?”

The industry, that her father referred to, was his pride and joy. As one of the biggest developers on Risa, he ran 8 separate resort areas. These various investments netted him enough financial freedom to do whatever he wanted, but he wouldn't be around forever. He needed an heir. Roquel, his 22 yr old only daughter, was to be that heir. If she'd just PAY ATTENTION.

The auburn haired girl looked at her dad with pity and disinterest all rolled into one. “Dad, I've told you, Risa is pretty and all... It offers security and a future that any girl should be happy to have. But, I'm not just any girl. I want adventure! I don't care about financial security and the safety of a controlled environment. I don't want this!”

Maximilian slammed the ledger book on the table, which made his daughter flinch reflexively. He leveled his finger at her and laid into her for her wanton ways. “You are going to regret your impertinence and your ingratitude one of these days. Everything I've done has been for you and your mother. The least you could do is show some respect for it, and take an interest. Beings come from all over the quadrant to stay in one of our establishments. They pay good money. You'll never want for anything, Roquel! NEVER!”

The lecture was so much like some of the others that they'd had that Roquel that it rankled her. She pushed away from the table and moved away. Her father's eyes bored into her back as she walked. He shook his head, once again, in frustration.

Turning to face him, Roquel opened up, completely, but only from the safety of a 10 ft distance.

“Dad, there is a whole universe out there. There are worlds that I've never seen. There are things that I will NEVER get to do, if I tie myself to this giant albatross. I DON'T WANT IT!” She screamed “How many times do I have to tell you? I don't want controlled climates. I don't want cushy armchairs and beach blankets with my name on them. I...want....out!”

Maximilian couldn't understand his daughter. Try as he might, he simply could never get through to her about the importance of financial security and living a comfortable life. Irritated he stood up and took a step toward her. He'd reclaimed the ledger book and now he waved it at her like it was the Risan version of the Holy Bible. “Roquel, do you want to deny this? Do you seriously want to turn your back on all that I've built for you? You can't be that big a fool! No offspring of mine could EVER be that stupid!”

The words stung. -fool- -stupid- Whenever, someone disagreed with Maximilian Atrell, he lashed out with an anger unequalled by any. “You'd be surprised.” She said, simply and softly.

One week later, Roquel handed the outfitter several bars of latinum from her private stash.

Walking between rows of personal craft, the Risan woman could hardly contain her excitement and anticipation of what waited for her.

The Type 10 Enhanced, personal shuttlecraft had been in the family for a long time. It was sleek, powerful, and just what she'd always wanted. It represented independence and freedom. Dad would



have killed her if he'd known that she had taken it upon herself to get it refitted like this. "So, are you sure that she's entirely spaceworthy?"

Leonidus blinked. "You don't doubt my work, do you? She's 120% the ship she used to be. Not only will it be reliable as hell, it will make an excellent companion thanks to an integrated personality program that I've installed in the main computer. I've provided for a personal cabin on the port side, an excellent replicator system, and superior waste management systems." He said proudly. "It's not a short hopper any more. You could cruise in that baby for years."

The two past beyond the other craft, and there it was. The Bee, her own personal escape craft. It glistened with newly applied yellow and black paint. Roquel's eyes went wide as saucers at the sight of her. She stopped and gawked, awestruck. "Leonidus, you're a master."

"I know." He responded. He looked at her curiously, then. "Exactly how long a trip are you planning on taking, Miss Atrell?"

The young woman smiled broadly. "As far as I know....I'm never coming back."



Sienn t'Lovok by Juliet Anderson

This is a Star Trek story written by Juliet Anderson, the roleplaying game is S. S. Seiklon Axel on Star Trek Borderlands.

I don't like mirrors.

They remind me. Of what – of who – I used to be. And how different I am from that person now. My name is Sienn t'Lovok. I'm half Romulan, half Human, and 76% machinery. I'm an engineer on an independant freighter that I get the lovely job of holding together, the S. S. Seiklon Axel. The UFP doesn't trust me, and neither does the Romulan Star Empire. Although sometimes I think it's not so much my abilities render me untrustworthy, more that – I scare them. People are scared of what they don't understand. I've learned to accept that.

I sit on my bed, leaned against the wall, arms wrapped around my knees. There's a mirror on the opposite wall; I feel like it's watching me. Maybe I'm crazy. I can't count the times I've felt crazy since. . .

Well. We'll get there.

I look up. My hair grows excruciatingly slowly now. It's been two years, and I have a whopping half inch of hair on my scalp. They could advertise that, you know. "Can't afford laser hair removal? We've got a Borg that'll do just the thing!" My left hand grazes the jacks lining the nape of neck; jacks that at one time had metal and organic plugs connected to them, interfacing my organic and electronic/positronic components.

I lean my head back against the wall and close my eyes. I don't want to remember, but I don't have a choice. I don't want to remember what I've done, how I helped them assimilate ships, colonies, worlds. . . How at one time I loved them. Loved them for their aspiration towards perfection.

They still sing to me sometimes, you know. The digital melody is frighteningly beautiful. But I'm not one of them anymore.

I sat at tactical, pensively gnawing on a chipped, black fingernail. My uncle, Hatham tr'Lovok, was scrambling back and forth across the bridge of his petite research vessel – the Hydra, named after the multicephalic reptilian beast in Human Greek mythology in honor of its handsome sensor array – studying the image of the crater-ridden, ash-colored moon on the viewscreen and reading results from the science and ops stations. Ever since I was five years old and living on Earth – in a dismally small town surrounded by nothing but dust, rocks, barbed wire and more dust in a state where people spoke with bizarre, drawled intonations called Texas – and I'd met Uncle Hatham for the first time, I'd loved watching him. He was like a Terran squirrel – he never stopped moving, no matter how old he got. To be quite honest, it was comical.

Not in need of the engineering station on the bridge and not having anything to do down in Main Engineing itself, I sat with my best friend N'alae t'Dar, our actual tactical officer. S'Ten tr'Maec was at helm, Thue t'Mendak at ops, and Lhaerrh tr'Kayton at science. It was a typical "day" aboard the Hydra – dodging Uncle Hatham in his scurrying, filling out charts, N'alae and I talking about superficial things when I wasn't obsessively keeping the ship and its warp core in prime condition. N'alae would joke that I practically lived in Jefferies tubes and that she was jealous of the warp core because it got to see me more than she did.

That's when we saw it.

"What the hell?" I muttered, slowly rising from my seat, a deep frown wrinkling the skin between my eyes.

I swear, it was not much smaller than the moon itself, an intricacy of metal in the shape of a sphere. It was fascinating.

I glanced fleetingly over at N'alae before my eyes returned to the viewscreen. I'm sure my



expression was something akin to hers: shock, fear, morbid interest. “Hatham?” N’alae called shakily, her green eyes wide. My uncle looked up sharply from the dataPADD in his hand, obviously detecting the urgency in N’alae’s voice.

“Elements,” Hatham whispered.

“That’s – that’s – ummm -” S’Ten stuttered, glancing around at the rest of us for a reaction. His face was pale and strained. S’Ten wasn’t the brightest person you ever met; that’s why he was at helm, instead of a job where you did more than punch some buttons on a console.

“Borg sphere, genius,” I snapped, fear making me edgy.

Uncle Hatham looked like a – what’s the Human idiom? Rabbit-in-the-headlights? He was like prey frozen in the gaze of a predator. “If we don’t do anything, maybe they won’t react – if they don’t perceive us as a threat -”

“They’re hailing us,” I interjected, my eyes on the tactical station. “Open hailing frequency?”

N’alae was so frozen in terror she didn’t even glare at me like usual for doing her job. At Uncle Hatham’s noise of acknowledgement, I nodded sharply to my friend and she opened a frequency.

“We are the Borg. Existence, as you know it, is over. We will add your biological and technological distinctiveness to our own. Your culture will adapt to service us. Resistance is futile.” The commlink was severed, leaving our bridge in utter silence. It was deafening.

“They’ve locked on a tractor beam,” N’alae reported. So the predator had its prey in its claws.

The bridge became a flurry of movement and noise. Uncle Hatham was shouting orders, none of which I tuned into until I heard my name. “Sienn! Get to Engineering; they may target the warp core.”

“Ye,” I replied, turning towards the lift. I’d only taken a couple of steps before I felt a cold hand on my arm. Whirling around I saw N’alae.

“Just in case.” She smiled sadly, her eyes sparkling with moisture, and hugged me tightly. N’alae was smart, she knew what was going to happen. She knew the odds were against us.

Die or be assimilated. Lose your life or lose your identity.

I was in Main Engineering, disruptor rifle in hand, when they boarded the Hydra. I’m not sure how they got aboard or where, but two drones ended up in Main Engineering. My Main Engineering.

What happened was my fault, really. I’m sure they wouldn’t have touched me if I’d left them alone. But, being my typical self, anger got ahold of me. They were here to condemn my family, friends and I to a fate worse than death. And only when Arreinye froze over would I just stand back and let them.

I set the phase variance on my disruptor to fluctuate irrationally, hoping it would be enough to get some damage in without allowing the drones to adapt. So when they approached the bulkhead and inserted assimilation tubules into the consoles, I attacked them.

The next thing I knew I was sprawled on the floor, my back burning with pain. One of the drones approached me. Shoving myself to my feet I backed away, glancing out of the corner of my eye at my weapon laying on the floor. While one drone continued assimilating Engineering the other advanced, pinning me against the bulkhead. Growling in frustration and fear I lashed out at the drone, but before my fist even came in contact with it I felt a piercing pain in the side of my neck.

Before I could even scream it was over, the drone continuing away as I slumped on the floor. At that time I hadn’t understood what had happened. Hadn’t known millions of nanoprobes were now racing through my bloodstream, altering the molecular structure of my erythrocytes to carry fuel and electrical impulses as opposed to oxygen, which was why I felt as if I were suffocating.

It felt like dying. No, it felt worse. It felt like losing.

I fought. I fought with every fiber of my being, but each second a fiber disappeared, falling into the abyss of a dissolved individuality. I held onto myself as long as I could, even after the nanoprobes in my bloodstream had constructed my interlink node, cranial and neural transceivers, effectively



connecting my mind – and its various positronic components – to the hive mind. I could hear them, hear them sing to me. . . It was hypnotic. But more than anything I heard Her.

Now I sat in a dark, spartan room aboard the sphere, leaning back against the wall, arms wrapped around my knees. My skin had begun to be deprived of its pigment as my natural hormones were replaced with a bio-synthetic gland and electronic impulses; gray spider veins snaked down my arms.

“Why?” I choked out. I was still badly shaken from seeing drone-N’alae and drone-Thue – images I would gladly forget if I could. I still had enough threads of humanity – or Romulanity, if you will – to hate them. To hate Her.

“You do not understand. They never do.”

I looked up sharply. Her voice was warm and smooth, finally hearing it with my ears rather than via binary code. “What is there to understand?” I was gritting my teeth. “You assimilate entire worlds, cultures, to add to your sick, twisted idea of -”

“Perfection,” She finished for me. “Our goal is nothing more and nothing less than. . . perfection. You will understand soon. And you will come to aspire for the same goal -”

I did. She was right. She was right all along, I just didn’t see it. No, I hadn’t understood. But I came to. I came to understand how we were superior – a mix of the organic and inorganic, the best of both worlds, if you will.

I was no longer Sienn t’Lovok – no longer knew who that was. I was Five of Seven, Tertiary Processor of Unimatrix 58. I was Borg.

As such, when one day I opened my eyes to see the sterile, blinding whiteness of a hospital room, to smell the sharp scent of disinfectants, hear the whispers, sense the fear in the air, feel the absence of my right arm and left eye that the Borg had so generously removed and replaced with utilitarian implants (which the Federation medics had removed), I felt a twisted sadness.

I was alone. My mind was my own again, my thoughts isolated. I couldn’t hear them anymore, couldn’t hear Her. The hive mind was gone – and I was angry. Angry at the physicians on that starbase for depriving me of the implants that connected me to the Collective. Angry at myself. Angry at the Collective.

Once I was out of the hospital and adorned with more natural-looking cybernetic anatomy, I submitted to the masses – the masses being a very pushy chief medic – and went to therapy. It helped, actually, despite my apprehensions. I learned, after two years, to accept myself, my individuality. But that didn’t change the stares, the whispers, the hands on the weapons. It was obvious I was different – eidetic memory and enhanced strength put aside. My body was still adorned with their jacks, plugs that had once connected the cords that wired the organic to the inorganic.

I was no longer Borg. Existence, as I knew it, was over, but not in their way. My biological and technological distinctiveness had been added to the Collective, then taken away. I had adapted to service them, then been rescued.



Warren deMontford by Sue Wilson

This is a story written by Sue Wilson about a tabletop roleplaying character.

The man they now call Warren DeMontford stares at the water drops freezing to the window. The image takes his thoughts to darker places and memories he does not want. Beyond that window had not been the white expanse of Antarctica. That time the other side of the pain showed the rolling ocean of the southern Atlantic. Still he leans his head against it and closes his eyes....

The SnowBird rolls again. He can't afford to sleep, not properly. The waves are too large. He could head north in the hope of calmer seas, but it would lengthen the route and lose him more time, and he knows at least Peyron and Lamazou are ahead of him. He drags himself from the bunk and climbs back onto the deck to check the auto-pilot.

The waves throw the boat. Deep in the shadow of the trough the sky and sea are almost the same grey. It is impossible to tell whether the freezing water hitting him is spray or rain. Maybe this far south the water cycle has given up on such distinctions.

He moves forward to gather the sail, climbing up onto the top of the cabin. SnowBird pitches again, ducking down into the trough like a sledge, before crashing into the next rise sending the water cascading over him. He reaches the mast and slackens off. It will lose him time but if a big wave hits high and hard it could rip the mast right off the vessel and leave him stranded in the storm. The bight in the cleat holding the stay is covered in a thin sheen of ice. The line freezing to itself. He struggles with it, the breath of his cursing helping to ease away the cold. As the recalcitrant rope comes free he feels the boat start to pitch down again. The incline much steeper this time. He curses as he slides on the ice covered deck.

He looks up. And up.

The wave builds before him like the Welsh cliffs of his childhood. Three or four crests hitting at once. He grabs at the railing and braces himself. Some instinct for survival slams the carabiner of his safety line down onto the cable he is holding, securing him to the boat. The sea lifts them both up, twisting the little vessel and dropping it back down again. The compass spins as it tries to keep up and the auto pilot whirs to correct the rudder. All he can do is hold on and pray SnowBird is built well enough to withstand these forces.

He hears something deep beneath the deck strain and then there is a load crack.

He holds his breath as another wave crashes over the front of the boat and pushes him back along the deck. He feels the safety line jerk him to a stop. Then there is a brief second of false hope before he hears the cable break.

He knows he is dead. If he hits the ocean in this he has only minutes, even in the survival suit.

Hyperthermia will make it impossible to think. The boat is slick with ice and he will never get back on board. There is a second of empathy with his ancestors who never learnt to swim; They said if the White lady wants you she takes you, swimming only delays the inevitable.

His fingers lock on something as the water drags him away. Though numb with cold somehow they hold firm. He rolls, feeling his shoulder wrench, but he is desperate to lift his head clear of the fluid so he can catch a breath. By chance his foot finds a stay and pushes against it. As the last of the wave drains clear he realises he is holding the catch to the aft locker, only a few centimeters of metal but some miracle guided his hand to it. Able to orientate himself at last he pushes up off the rudder assembly and back onto the boat.

Before him the wheel is spinning freely; betraying that something in the rudder assembly has broken. He looks up at the mast, the sail he was freeing gone now, dragged off by the wave, but at least it did not take the mast with it.

He rolls into the door of the cabin, pulling it shut behind him. His only option now is to wait for the storm to blow out and pray the damage is minor enough that he can do running repairs. He falls into



his bunk, almost crying in frustration. Cursing his stupidity at taking such a southerly route at this time of year. He knows any hope of winning the race has gone.

Exhaustion and defeat drop him into a light doze, as the rocking ship is pushed around by the waves and wind. He daren't sleep, the possibility of capsizing is all too evident and he would never get out of the boat in time. But he is also aware that if SnowBird succumbs to the storm he has nowhere else to go. In this they will never find him; they may not even attempt a search. He would be just one more of the long list of names carved into the rock at Plymouth – those claimed by the sea. Just one small part of the family folklore told as a warning to adventurous nephews and nieces. He drags himself round realising, given the way he and Len parted company, probably not even that.

He pulls down the hood of his jacket, waiting for the next wave to slide him across the cabin in a vague attempt to save energy. He pulls out the self-heating can of meat mush and slams the base, hugging it to maintain as much of the warmth for himself as possible. As he braces his legs against the galley fittings there is another crash on deck. Instinctively he ducks. The boat does not roll, there is no warning pitch to suggest another massive wave. For a moment he fears the mast has come down, but if that had happened there would be fragments everywhere. Confused he drops the can in the metal sink where it can finish heating and drags himself back out of the cabin.

There is a shape near the wheel, something large caught up in the remains of the rigging and deposited on the deck by the last large swell. At first he assumes it is a seal, it's about the right size and shape, but as he approaches it he realises the form beneath the ropes and strips of sail is more humanoid.

It stops him. He looks round for a boat that the 'Man Over Board' may have come from, but he is all too aware that in a swell this large there could be a vessel only a few hundred yards away and he still might never see it. He moves closer to see if there is any identification on the body.

Then the body moves.

He jumps back, fear running through him. For a moment he is sure the 'body', is a pirate and this is some elaborate attempt to board and hijack SnowBird. He fights down the paranoia and moves closer.

The body is completely enwrapped by the rigging, effectively restrained by it and secured to the deck. If this is a hijack attempt it has gone very wrong. He looks round, checking the sea as much as for attackers. Then starts to pull the strips of sail away from the head.

The neck shifts, the head rolling back to look up at him. Large bulbous eyes, mostly black blink at him through blue-green eyelids. The mouth moves, fronds around the lips waving limply. At the neck he sees slits like the gills of a fish flash open and then close again.

The beast emits a whistle. Long and forlorn and desperate.

Despite the impossibility of what he is seeing he moves quickly to strip away the rest of the destroyed sail and lines. The creature he reveals is sleek, its body covered in fine scales of shimmering blues and greens. Its upper limbs end in long clawed fingers; its lower ones thin and splaying out to become flippers. A line of fins run down its backbone, rising and falling as the creature labours to 'breathe'.

Another wave crashes over the boat. He grasps at the railing, holding onto the beast to stop it being lost into the sea. It leaves a pool of water on the deck, held there by the sail cloth. The creature rolls into it. The gill slits open once more.

The beast whistles again and then the noise is followed by a series of rapid clicks.

He looks at it confused. He knows the noise and has heard it before. Thought it takes a few moments to place where. The pod of dolphins that joined him a week ago and ran with SnowBird for almost a full day. He had been glad of their company on the long solitary voyage and had even shared some of his rations with the playful animals. The clicks had been almost the same as the noise they had made in response to the fish he had thrown to the pod. At the time he had amused himself with the idea that they were saying thank you.



He looks at the 'fish man' part in shock at the echo of the noise and the appropriateness of the concept.

"Your welcome." he responds, and then feels foolish for doing so. It seems impossible the beast could know what he is saying.

It lies in the pool, breathing the water. It seems exhausted.

He looks back into the cabin, not sure what to do. Then he recalls the meat mush. May be the beast is hungry. He returns rapidly with the can and, ripping the top off, he holds it out.

The 'fish-man' lifts it's head from the water, clearly sniffing the can. It flops back and opens it's mouth. He scoops out some of the food and drops it into the waiting maw, carefully to avoid getting too close to the numerous sharp teeth.

The creature chews, swallows then opens it's mouth again.

"Guess we've finally found some one who likes this shit." He observe.

He drops in another scoop and then claims a few mouth fuels for himself. It is warm and nutritious but none of the scientist who developed it cared enough to consider the taste or texture. Perfect for emergency rations his old commander used to claim in that "it would have to be a bloody emergency for you to want to eat the crap."

By the time the tin is empty the creature seems to be coming round. It even risks sitting up for a few moment, despite the problems that brings with it's breathing.

He nods to the remains of the sail. "I'm sorry, I was trying to get it in when the wave hit."

The creature tilts it's head and whistles low.

He risks standing up, the sea is calming now, the storm finally blowing itself out. Though the waves are still rocking them there is no sign of the massive peaks and troughs that had threatened to swamp them. He moves over to the wheel and spins it, trying to diagnose the damage.

The creature whistles again.

He turns, "Rudders broken." He says. "Can't steer." He looks up at the sky half in hope of a rescue plane though he knows there will never be one. "I'm fucked." he confesses.

There is a wet slapping noise. He turns to see the creature is standing awkwardly on it's flippers, almost on tip toes. Clearly it is not really designed for 'land' at all. It moves over to him and looks into the cabin.

"Know much about ship-righting do you?" He asks.

The creature emits another series of clicks, but not like the dolphin ones.

He turns round and releases the catch on the deck, pulling up the cover to reveal the rudder mechanism beneath. There is a metal spar clearly bent out of shape, and a pin deeper on the system that has snapped- he concludes that was the noise he heard earlier. He reach's in pulling out the pin to confirm his worst suspicion. This is not something he has in the spares.

He drops back on the deck trying to come up with a solution. He could jury rig a replacement pin but the bent bar will offer more of a challenge, and he knows that it will only bend again in the next big swell.

The Fish-man reaches into the hole and touches the damaged rod.

"Yeap that's knackered." he says.

The beast looks up with it's black bulbous eyes.

He stares into them, seeing his own reflection staring back.

"I'm drowning, aren't I? This is some end of life hallucination. It must be or I would not be taking things so calmly." As he hears himself say it he knows it is not right. "What the fuck are you?"

The Fish-man whistles again.

"What are you doing on my planet?" He challenges.

The creature looks at him. It almost looks affronted. Then it reaches out and prods him in the chest with a loud series of clicks and whistles.

He looks down, the claws are sharp, if the creature wanted to spear him it could have done so easily,



but it did not push hard enough. Instead he can only assume it was trying to make a point. He frowns at it. “You can understand me?”

Clicks.

“Great, I can’t understand you.”

The creature just stares at him and looks back into the mechanism.

“I’m in a race.” He says. “Single handed sailing. Round the world. I’m representing the British Royal Navy.” He explains. “I’m fucking it up royally enough.” he adds self disparagingly.

The creature moves round to the other side of the hatch looking at the mechanism from the other side. Then it seems to nod. It steps back and releases a series of whistles and clicks into the air.

He frowns at it. “Nope sorry pal, not getting you.”

The fronds around the mouth raise; Later when he knows the creatures better he will know this is their equivalent of a smile, he will also know that the clicks and whistles and prod pretty much translate as “What do you mean your planet Land boy!” but for now he is ignorant and just stares. Then in a flash and a splash the beast is gone.

He had sealed everything down and climbed into his bunk. Too tired and too defeated. There had been a brief moment between sunset and Dawn when he had slept for the first time in a week. There was no longer any point in pushing to keep going. A short time after dawn he had come back on deck and found them. The pin and bar tied together in the lines still tangled round the wheel. But there had been no sign of the ‘fish-man’.

The replacement parts had served him well, back in the race again trying to prove that Britannia still ruled the waves. But at scrutineering in Rio the serial numbers didn’t match. The french competitor claimed outside interference, especially when he could offer no explanation as to how another competitor’s equipment had got on board his own yacht. There was talk of piracy until it was proved from GPS records that the vessel identified as the source of his spares had been scuttled and left to sink long before he arrived in the area.

After persuasion by ‘Men from the Ministry’ he changed his story. Claimed by chance he’d come across the vessel foundering in the deep seas. Boarded it and salvaged the parts he needed. What else could he tell them? No one would believe the truth anyway!

Back in Blighty and ‘Interview without Coffee’ with a gaunt private secretary to some nameless government department had made a temporary truth out of the lie, hiding the actual events away from him behind a gas; until years later when Capital Laundry Services needed an experienced Naval officer to negotiate with ‘Fish-Men’.

The sad truth was, now, many years later on again, he missed the lie. He like the scavenge and salvage version of events and the ‘one man triumphant against the sea’ it represented. The knowledge that he had received outside aid irked him. It was cheating. Better if he had drowned. He wanted to be the man with all the answers, reliant on no one else the lie had lead him to believe he was.

He leans his head off the view point forcing his eyes to open. He turns to look at the two men beavering away on the samples and books, hunting for the solutions to the problems the Laundry has cursed them with today. Ian on the computers he can not touch, Dr Markham using the science he can not understand.

“Any closer to finding me something to kill?” He asks hopefully.

Dr Markham grimaces at him and turns back to his coloured potions.

Ian doesn’t even look up. “That might not be the solution War.”

“Fine, I’m gonna stick the kettle on. If any one fancies a drink...” he offers heading for the door to the pod and leaves them too it.

This work is inspired by Charles Stross Laundry Files book and uses characters, organisations and concepts created by Charles Stross. No challenge to the I.P. is intended by their inclusion in this



*work, which I wish to be considered Fan-Fic as outlined in Charles Stross's Policy.
Consult <http://www.antipope.org/charlie/blog-static/2010/05/faq-fanfic.html> for details.
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Xanxa Symanah by Sarah Xanxa Bartlett

This is a Babylon 5 story written by Sarah Xanxa Bartlett, the roleplaying game is called 'Beyond Babylon', and is played on Facebook.

So you want to know what a Centauri is doing in the Anla'shok? Well, I'm not the only one, but that's not my story to tell. First of all, I'm not pure Centauri, in fact I'm half Minbari on my mother's side, so my entrance into the world was bound to be controversial anyway. So many questions were asked about how I came to be conceived when Centaurii and Minbarii are physically incompatible. Well, love conquers all, as the old saying goes, and with much consultation of Technomages and other shady figures, I came to exist.

Racism was alive and well on Centauri Prime during my childhood and young adulthood. What also didn't help was the fact that I refused to keep my head shaved like most Centauri women, and also a lot of the time I dressed more like a man, for practicality's sake. As befitting my status, I was taught by some of the most gifted tutors and initiated into the Couro Prido duelling society, not because I was especially skilled with the coutari, but because of my weaponry tutor's absurd vicarious ambitions.

House Symanah had always been a quietly respected house, keeping to the old traditions and never attracting the wrong kind of attention. Until I was born, that is. My parents always did their best to keep me off the radar, but I have always been strong-willed with a rebellious streak, so despite their best efforts, I did attract the worst kind of attention.

It all started when I first met Lady Khmiza Grizano during my time with the Couro Prido. She took an instant dislike to me and uttered withering insults about me being a "filthy halfbreed". Apart from my small group of friends, most of the other young nobles ignored me, but Khmiza seemed to go out of her way to provoke me. Sometimes we were chosen by the tutors to spar together and on those occasions, it felt more like a Morago than a practice round. There was pure hatred in her eyes and murder in her hearts, so determined was she to bring about my downfall.

However, it wasn't with the coutari that she brought me down, she was far more devious than that.

With the help of her well-connected family, she arranged for false evidence to be planted, to arouse suspicions that I was a Narn collaborator. That was about the worst thing a Centauri could be accused of in those days, as I'm sure you're aware.

Perhaps I should have been prepared for something underhanded, but I wasn't. My whole existence crumbled around me when I received the warrant for my arrest, on the grounds that I had been collaborating with the Narn Regime, spying for them and passing on vital military information. As if I even had access to such information! So my father was a member of the Centaurum, but so were the fathers of many of my peers, including Lady Khmiza.

My mother's relatives on Minbar offered to have me stay with them, but my father insisted that I should remain on Centauri Prime. Running away from the situation wouldn't solve anything, and might be seen as an admission of guilt. So I stayed and faced my trial, saying goodbye to my family and friends, as I didn't ever expect to see them again. The usual sentence for treason was execution, so I tried to make my peace with my Household Gods and prayed that my family be kept safe.

So we sat through the faked trial, hearing the outrageous evidence against me, watching videos which supposedly showed me meeting with a Narn agent. Later I learned that similar charges had been brought against one of my good friends, another Couro Prido initiate who was somewhat rebellious in nature, but innocent of the crimes of which he was accused.

Everything about this trial seemed surreal, and finally when all the evidence had been heard, and the Judge called a recess to deliberate on his verdict, I hoped that it had all been a dream and that I



would shortly wake up and find everything back to normal.

Once the court was reconvened, the Judge looked at me severely and delivered his verdict. “Lady Xanxa Symanah, I find you guilty of treason against the Emperor and the Centauri Republic. As you are no doubt aware, the usual sentence for treason is execution, but in this case, I am prepared to make an exception. As you are of previous good character and reputation, you are instead to be sentenced to life imprisonment at the penal colony on Kentari. Let the record show a guilty verdict”.

For someone such as myself who had led a life of privilege and had never known hardship, my time at the penal colony was tougher than I had ever imagined. Most of my fellow prisoners were the usual thieves and murderers, but there was one human who was different from all the rest. He had a wickedly sarcastic sense of humour and affected a casually bored demeanour which I found fascinating.

Life in the penal colony soon established its dull routine. The prisoners were roused early, given a meagre breakfast then set to various construction tasks according to their strengths and abilities.

Together with the mysterious human, my tasks were constructing computer circuits, repairing energy conduits and sometimes reprogramming computer consoles. Other prisoners were assigned to making or repairing furniture, building new prison cells, kitchen duties, gardening duties and other menial tasks. The work was intended to be boring and repetitive. The guards patrolled all workplaces, making sure that no prisoner was idle. There was a brief break for lunch, then the prisoners returned to their assigned duties until early evening, when supper would be served and they would be locked in their cells until the following morning, when the routine would begin again.

During my conversations with the human, I learned that he was a specialist in computer systems, but he made his money by dealing in stolen goods and selling information to the highest bidder. He had been informed by a reliable source that there was a secret experimental weapon hidden on Kentari, which was why he had allowed himself to be caught, knowing that he would be sent there.

He told me that he had an exit plan, but made it abundantly clear that he had always worked alone and nothing would make him change his mind.

After several weeks had passed, a new batch of prisoners arrived at the penal colony. Most of them were common thieves and murderers, but there were two who stood out. One of them appeared to be human, the other appeared to be a Minbari/human hybrid. They were wearing priestly robes of some kind, which intrigued me immensely. Why would priests find themselves sentenced to life imprisonment in a penal colony? I hoped that I would have a chance to find out.

It transpired that the Minbari/human hybrid was assigned to work in the computer section, so I awaited my opportunity to start up a conversation with him. I didn't have to wait long, for he called me by name and introduced himself as Ignacius ra'Mir of the Anla'shok. I recalled what little I had learned from my Minbari relatives about this secretive order of warrior priests and asked him how he came to be at the prison colony. He mumbled something about correcting miscarriages of justice and serving the greater good, most of which I didn't understand at the time.

Several days later, there was an explosion in the computer section, during the afternoon work shift.

Nobody appeared to be badly hurt, but the prisoners made the most of the disruption. Some of the bolder ones tried to rush the guards and one even managed to steal a firefighter's uniform and equipment, hoping that he would be able to escape after the fire had been extinguished.

I stayed at my assigned workstation, as the blast was in the far corner of the room. I noticed that the mysterious human had vanished and suspected that it might have been him who set the blast. I doubted that I would ever see him again. In the midst of the confusion, I felt someone grab my arm.

It was Ignacius. His human companion, who turned out to be another Anla'shok, was also there.

The two of them led me off down a darkened corridor. I was expecting the guards to pursue us at any moment, but they were still occupied with recapturing and securing the prisoners who were



trying to escape from the computer section.

The sequence of events which followed seemed even more surreal than the ridiculous charges, trial and verdict which had brought me here. Somehow the three of us managed to get out into the main prison yard without being pursued by guards. Then we were beamed up by some kind of transporter technology into a waiting cargo ship. At that time, I was unused to transporters and passed out.

I awoke sometime later, on board the freighter. I was told by Ignacius that I was now a free citizen and that the Anla'shok had rescued me partly because of a direct request from my mother's family and also because they wished to make me some kind of offer.

I could hardly believe what was happening. My mother's clan had made a direct request of the Anla'shok. I had no idea that my mother's people held such influence, but silently thanked the Great Maker for the rescue. I wondered what would become of me now, knowing that I couldn't return to Centauri Prime, at least not for the foreseeable future. Was I any less a prisoner now? I wondered what the Anla'shok would offer me, hoping that it would be more bearable than life in the penal colony, at least.

I was given my own quarters on arrival at the Anla'shok secret base. They were simple but comfortable. However, I was still unsure as to whether or not I was being held prisoner, despite what Ignacius had said. I knew little enough of the Anla'shok and their methods, since very little information about them was ever made public.

Several days later, Ignacius came to see me. "Now I will explain everything" he said. "I am the current leader of the Anla'shok. I bear the honorary title of Entil'zha. It is both a gift and a burden, which in time you will come to understand. You realise of course that you cannot return to your homeworld for the time being. So it is my intention to make you an offer. If you choose to refuse it, you will be sent to live with your relatives on Minbar, but I can't see you wishing to settle there.

The Anla'shok need new recruits. I know enough about you to realise that you are a person of honour and integrity. Also you have various skills which will be useful to us. Ask me any questions you wish. Take as long as you need to make your decision. You are safe here so there is no hurry".

We spent many hours in conversation. I asked questions and Ignacius told me a great deal about the history and ideals of the Anla'shok. "You have much to consider" Ignacius said. "I will leave you to think it over. When you have decided, I will hear your decision".

To this day, I still can't be absolutely certain what made me decide to join the Anla'shok. If I'm totally honest with myself, at first I did wonder if I could settle with my mother's clan on Minbar, but I knew that I would probably be even more out of place there than I had been on Centauri Prime. One of the deciding factors was that the Anla'shok had arranged for a close friend of mine whom I had known from early childhood to visit me at the base. From him I caught up on events back home. It was then that I learned of the other friend who had also been falsely convicted of being a Narn agent. He was not as fortunate as me, since he had been executed for his supposed crime against the Centauri Republic. While I grieved for him, it also served as a useful reminder that it could easily have been me. So I took the view that the Great Maker had given me a chance of another life, far different from the one I had imagined, but I could be a part of something bigger, an

organisation fighting to make a difference.

Shortly after my friend left, I had another visitor. I could hardly contain my astonishment as the mysterious human from the prison colony was shown to my quarters. "I haven't changed my mind" he said, as I offered him a drink. "I still intend to work alone. I just wanted to say goodbye and wish you luck in your new career". "Thank you" I said. "So you were responsible for the explosion in the computer section at the penal colony?" He smiled and nodded slightly. "Well, I have a meeting with a potential buyer, so I will leave now" he stated. "I doubt we will meet again,



so have a good life”.

“I knew you would join us” Ignacius commented later. “I never had any doubt”. “How could you be so sure?” I enquired. “All part of the prophecy” he said mysteriously. “This is just the beginning for us, Anla’shok Xanxa, our time together will be most interesting!”

