

Team Medea

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Team Medea

by [BubuBORG](#)

Summary

Kaitlin Reid has been transferred to the USS Medea. The mission the ship is on and the passenger who has agreed to help them explore a new area of space, one that has an ancient legacy.

Pilot

It was the worst day to be posted to a starship in the year, Kaitlin thought.

Remembrance Day.

She looked down at her pin. The ship she repped on her chest was the *USS Tempest*, where her great-great uncle was an officer, forty years ago.

However, there were no shortage of Reids in Starfleet.

She'd made her lieutenant's stripes last month, and her commanding officer on the *USS Kyiv* had approved her transfer thereafter. It was supposed to be a step up in her career as an officer.

So why did she feel like she was being punished?

The *USS Medea* was a puny little *Haas-class* ship that Kaitlin found herself on. The crew, including her, only added up to maybe a dozen.

And she was being greeted by a great big dog.

"Lieutenant Reid?"

In Command gold, with their hand extended toward her, was a large, barrel-chested Cainian who looked for all the world like an anthropomorphic Rottweiler.

"Yes?" she replied. *Cainian*, she reminded herself. The people from the planet Cain had officially joined the Federation recently, and this individual was most likely one of the first Cainians in Starfleet. *Maybe don't refer to them as big dogs*, she chastised herself.

"I'm Lieutenant Ag'ta. Welcome aboard the *Medea*. I'll take you to the captain for your official onboarding."

They walked down the length of the main corridor of the ship. After a few minutes of silence, Kaitlin had to fill the space with...something.

“So...I don’t think I’ve seen any other Cainans serve in Starfleet,” she remarked.

“My graduating class had five Cainian graduates,” Ag’ta replied. “We were the first,” He turned to her and smiled. “Not the last, I assure you.”

Kaitlin nodded. “Cool.”

“I mean, we got accepted into the Academy years before Cain officially joined, so there were lots of expectations. It’s kind of liberating, really,” Ag’ta chuckled.

“Oh?” Kaitlin asked. “How so?”

“Yeah, I mean...back home there were lots of...” He seemed to struggle for the right words. “...Social obligations I found myself in, and I don’t have to deal with any of that in Starfleet. It’s...nice.”

Kaitlin was still a little confused, but didn’t press. There was no time; he had taken her to the Captain’s quarters.

Here you are, Lieutenant,” Agta told her and smiled. “I’ll be seeing you soon,” he said, as he walked back into the corridor.

She tapped the page.

“Come in!”

She walked through the doorway into a spacious living space. The captain was at a desk near the front-facing windows, tapping at his terminal.

“Lieutenant Reid, please sit down.” He seemed cheerful, but preoccupied, as if he was performing three tasks as well as welcoming her. His dark, curly hair was cut short on the sides, but seemed to pile up on top. He had a stocky build, but with broad shoulders.

“I’m Captain Martin Feldman,” the captain said. “Allow me to welcome you aboard the *USS Medea*.” He stood up, and extended his arm across the desk. Kaitlin took it.

“I’m sure you’re wondering why your former CO had you transfer to this little tub,” Feldman said, sitting back down.

“I am more than a little curious, sir,” Kaitlin replied, nodding in agreement.

“I requested for you specifically,” Feldman told her. “You came highly recommended by Captain Forrester on the *Kyiv*, and...Mister Grey.”

Ah.

Kaitlin nodded, and ran a hand through her hair. “I see.”

“No nepotism going on here, don’t worry,” Feldman assured her. “It’s just the nature of our mission, is all. You see, we’re about to head out on the edge of our territories in the Beta Quadrant, close to the Neutral Zone.”

She cocked her head to the side. “Which one?”

“Both of them, actually,” Feldman explained, and brought up a display on the desk. It was a star map, with several systems denoted.

“The Federation meets both the Romulan and Klingon borders here in an area of space currently known as the Triangle.” The area, indeed triangular in shape, was highlighted on the map.

“Historically, this area is also the heart of what was once known as the Númenorean Empire,” Feldman explained further. “Hundreds of thousands of years ago, the Númenoreans had a stellar empire that spanned half the quadrant. We’re only just starting to uncover their influence on dozens and dozens of civilizations in our own backyard.”

Kaitlin looked at the map, at the system highlighted.

Anor II.

“The Federation has recently reached an agreement with the R’ongovians, which allows us to travel through this corridor of space,” Feldman explained. “The way is opened for exploring the remnants of what the Númenoreans left behind.”

“Um,” Kaitlin spoke up, pointing at the marked system. “What’s over here?”

“Hmm,” Feldman murmured. “That’s one of the planets that is possibly the seat of the Empire itself. Anor II, called Arda.”

“Is that our destination?” Kaitlin asked.

“That is a very good question, and the answer is...we don’t know. Yet.” Feldman pushed a button, zooming into the system, which revealed a single G-type star and 12 planets.

“Yet?” Kaitlin repeated.

“There’s plenty of space around it, and maybe if we’re lucky we can get special access to the system. See, the planet seems to have an uneven level of technological development, which

means that General Order One would seem to be in effect. More caution and protocols and..." Feldman smirked. "More bullshit to be honest, pardon my language."

"So," Kaitlin said, "Back to my question, sir. Why me?"

Feldman paused, took a look outside the window. "Mister Grey has a feeling about you. That and your very good Starfleet record, which is enough for me, to be honest. But he feels that you are the right officer for this ship, and this mission. That's as good enough a reason I can give you."

Kaitlin nodded. "All right. She paused and found her boldness. "Captain...why you?"

Feldman chuckled. "That's a good question, Lieutenant." He stood up and moved toward his cabin's door. "Let's just say I have my reasons. The rest will come as you need."

Kaitlin nodded as he opened the door for her. "Fair enough.

"You'll report to Commander Corell tomorrow. With as limited a complement as we have, most hands are on deck most days. Mostly bridge duties, but who knows. Whoever we need. You've already met Rott, and you and Maurice should be working closely together. Until then. Get some rest. Your full briefing will begin then. Good night, Kaitlin."

She found herself on the other side of the door, wandering toward her assigned quarters.

Who was Rott? She suddenly thought. *Lt. Ag'ta? And Maurice?*

Well, soon enough for that. Time to settle in.

The Medea had comfortable quarters, and the first thing Kait put on the table by her cot was a photo of herself and her two younger brothers, Ashford and Bradley. Ash, like herself, was aspiring to Starfleet, while Brad aimed for a more academic career.

Kaitlin was the one who wanted to fly from the beginning. The one who wanted to be lifted higher, to run further, to explore the place over the next hill, the woods too dark for Brad or Ash to venture into. *Too fearless not to join Starfleet*, John, her father, used to say.

She always knew her family was a little quirky, simply from the family tree alone.

After all, not every family had a historical building named after them.

The clock said 1800. She decided to go to the lounge area, a small space near the forward section, to stretch her legs. It was gonna be hard to stay still on this little ship, she realized. Jogging laps around the outer corridor might be a bit tricky.

The lounge was empty, except for two other off-duty officers.

One of them was Ag'ta. The other one was a lean man with piercing eyes, who gave her a glance the moment she walked in, then darted back toward the Cainian.

"Um," she began. "Hi."

"Ah!" Ag'ta said, and glanced in her direction. "Lt. Reid, hello!"

"I don't really do hanging out in my cabin, so I thought I'd wander," Kaitlin explained.

"No, no, please—can we get you a drink?" Ag'ta offered.

"I'll take an Italian soda," Kaitlin replied. "Cherry flavor?"

"Coming right up," the other officer replied, moving toward the food slot.

"Didn't catch your name?" Kaitlin said, walking up to Ag'ta.

"I'd have thought you'd recognized me, *chere*," the officer shot back with a slightly drawled patois. "The Complex Reunion of '48?"

"Um," Kaitlin's mind blanked. The Complex was positively stuffed with people in attendance at that reunion. "I'm sorry, please remind me."

"Reid-LeBeau. The other side of the family. Shame on you!" He mock-chided her.

Then finally, it clicked. Her uncle Gene introduced her, she remembered, and the name Captain Feldman dropped. "Of course. You're Maurice?"

"Tha's me." Maurice handed the glass of soda to her.

"Well!" she smiled. "Small galaxy. "Kaitlin Reid!"

As he was about to fire off a retort, the doors opened once more, revealing a very unsure looking young man with a badge marking him as a Starfleet cadet, in command gold. He had a bit of a aquiline nose, a cleft chin, and hair that looked like no comb could tame it.

"Dammit," he cursed quietly. "Still not auxillary control."

"Are you lost, Cadet?" Ag'ta spoke up.

"Trying to find Aux Control," the cadet replied, not quite meeting the Cainian's gaze. A pregnant pause occurred while Ag'ta bored his eyes into the cadet, until the young man added, "Sir."

Ag'ta nodded his leave at the other two as he walked toward the door. "Follow me, Mister...?"

"Riley, sir. Cadet Riley, just checked in for my rotation. The officer in charge of my orientation thought it would be amusing if I didn't get a full directory on my PADD."

"Now, now, I'm sure I can get you sure-footed in no time. After all, you're here to learn as well as serve. This way."

And with that, Rott Ag'ta and Cadet Riley left.

"Twelve crew and one cadet?" Kaitlin asked, still looking at the now-closed door.

Maurice looked at her gaze and smiled. "Might be wise to leave the young man to his education, Cuz."

Kaitlin scoffed. "No crime in looking. He just looked like a deer caught in bright lights, is all."

"He's working with me in engineering for a few weeks. Don't let his demeanor fool you," he turned to her, deadly serious. "He's a survivor."

She looked at him, sighed. "Well, you know. Survivors run in our families, don't they?" She thought for a moment. "Anybody else you want to introduce me to?"

Maurice considered. "When was your last service physical?"

A quick walk down the hallway led the two to a small, utilitarian Medical Bay, where a stocky little woman in a white nurse's uniform was testing various pieces of equipment. She had a fluffy cloud of blonde hair, turned away from them.

Maurice spoke up. "Mavis, *chere*, how's it goin'?"

She turned to face them, and Kaitlin got a look at her features. Her nose was prominent, as were her eyebrows and mutton-chip sideburns. Her eyes were horizontally slit, but a brilliant shade of blue, shining with intelligence and just a little bit of mischief.

"Just checking out these hypos for the fiftieth time before we launch to keep from going crazy from boredom," the nurse named Mavis replied.

"Lieutenant Kaitlin Reid, meet Nurse Mavis Stone," Maurice gestured toward her. Kaitlin took her handshake and found the petite woman had one hell of a grip. Not...quite...human, she squared away.

"Mavis here is part of an exchange program we have going on," Maurice went on to explain.

“The Stanford Morehouse epigenetic project, to be exact,” Nurse Stone clarified. “In addition to providing RN duties, I’m also helping the Project add more genomes to the database. Lots of those in the Triangle.”

“Of course,” Kaitlin mused. “There’s more than one way to explore the galaxy, I suppose.”

“I’m not too shabby with a hypospray either, in case you were worried about your healthcare,” Mavis added.

Kaitlin stifled a laugh. “Good to know,” she replied. “Where’s the doctor, anyway?”

“Unless you’re dying, leave my nurse alone,” a gruff voice called out from another corner of the compact Medical bay. A short, squat, bulldog-looking human turned toward them and glowered. “Some of us still have to work before we launch, Mister LeBeau.”

“Kaitlin, that’s Dr. Thaddeus Wright,” Maurice said, as he moved her toward the exit.

“We’ll be properly introduced at your formal exam,” Dr. Wright told her. “Now shoo.”

“Attention crew,” a voice called over the comms. “Ship will launch from space dock in four hours. Repeat, ship will launch in space dock in four hours.”

“Well, either you do another lap around the main corridor, or you take a little nap before launch. You’re on helm duty, by the way, so,” and Maurice shrugged.

She sighed and shrugged. “Not much for naps,” she told him. “Let’s go to the bridge and get that pre-launch locked down.”

The bridge was two decks above the main deck, in a circular chamber much smaller than the *Kyiv’s*.

Captain Feldman was in the center seat. He turned to see Kaitlin and Maurice step onto the bridge.

“Couldn’t stay away?” Feldman teased. “Well, I can’t say as I can blame you. If you want to join Cadet Riley at the Helm, be my guest.”

She sat down beside him, as he continued his pre-launch. “So did you ever find Auxillary control?” She asked him.

“It turns out,” Riley replied, “That there is no specific Auxillary Control on *Haas-class* ships.”

Kait grimaced. “Yikes.”

He waved off her sentiment. “Mister Ag’ta assures me that it was all in good fun.”

At the sound of Captain Feldman clearing his throat, Kait began her own pre-flight checking. “I mean, I just stepped on board myself, so if it makes you feel any better, I’m sure it could have easily been me.” She turned to him and extended her hand. “Lt. Kaitlin Reid,” She introduced herself.

“Kevin Riley, Cadet Second Class,” he took her hand and shook. “If you don’t mind my asking, are you from the same Reid family as from the Complex?”

“Yes,” Kait replied, nodding.

“My, um, folks actually met on the tour of the Complex,” Riley said. “Before they moved to Tarsus IV.”

Kaitlin frowned for a second and didn’t say anything for an awkward amount of seconds. “Oh,” was all she could muster. “Are they—?”

“No,” Riley tersely replied. “No, they’re not.”

Now Kaitlin knew what Maurice meant.

“Open mouth, insert foot,” Kaitlin sighed.

“Ahh, don’t worry about it, Lieutenant,” Riley assured her. “That was many years and therapy sessions ago.”

Kaitlin chuckled, and continued to work the checklist on her console, as red areas became green on her screens. “That’s a very mature attitude, Cadet.”

“Thank you, Lieutenant.”

Captain Feldman turned to Rott’s station. “Are all hands aboard, Mr. Ag’ta?”

“The final passenger is boarding now,” Rott reported. “He’s en route to the bridge.”

Which, Kaitlin calculated, would take about five minutes, give or take.

“This passenger is the lynchpin of our mission, Lieutenant Reid,” Feldman said to her.

The turbolift door opened, and for a moment, Kaitlin thought a light source was shining from inside the cab.

A man stepped out, and all eyes turned to him.

Kaitlin's first, knee-jerk reaction surprised even her.

That is the most beautiful person I have ever seen in my life, she thought.

His hair was gold. Not blond, but almost shimmering gold. His attire seemed a combination of humble and opulent, with gold thread embroidered onto a simply-designed tunic, with a high collar over his throat. He wore leather boots laced up to his mid-calf, and simple slacks held with, again, a intricate buckle.

His eyes seemed the color of a clear, cloudless sky, and they gazed at Captain Feldman with serenity.

"Captain," he said to Feldman in acknowledgement.

"Mister Glorfindel, in person at last," Feldman said getting out of his chair, extending his hand to the guest. Glorfindel, for his part took the hand gingerly.

He looked around the bridge. "For such a humble ship, it still seems quite hale," Glorfindel said in approval. "Just like all the Earth ships I've found myself on, all these many years."

Feldman nodded and gestured to Kaitlin. "Mister Glorfindel, I'd like you to meet our newest member of my crew, Lieutenant Kaitlin Reid?"

The passenger turned his gaze on Kaitlin, and she froze. His ice-blue eyes were piercing. The ambient sounds of the bridge seemed to go away as he looked down toward her and smiled faintly.

"The Reid family again. Are you descended from Adam or Joshua?" He asked her.

"I-I'm sorry?" She stammered. *What a first impression,* she thought, chastising herself.

"It was about a hundred years ago," Glorfindel explained. "I was in association with an Adam and a Joshua Reid...Perhaps your ancestors?"

Then it clicked. It would have been Adam II around that time. "A-Adam," she replied.

"Good. I'm hoping good fortune continues to reside in your blood." He then turned to Rott. "And a Cainian! It was the hope of Ay'uffi Gup'ta that your kind would find peace and explore the stars."

Rott grinned and nodded. "Yes sir."

Glorfindel turned to Feldman. “And the others?”

Feldman nodded. “Everything’s been set up with yours and Mr. Grey’s recommendations. We’re ready to launch and to brief the crew at your leisure.”

Glorfindel turned to the screen. “It’s been a hundred of your years since I was able to leave and see the greater world how it truly is. Whether they know it or not, my kind have become...diminished. Knowing and understanding the truth of our history will only better ourselves. If not for us, but for the descendants of old ship-farers of old and all peoples of Arda.”

Kaitlin didn’t understand what he was talking about. She suspected she wasn’t supposed to. Not yet.

That was all right, though. She loved to solve a mystery.

Rott went over to the Navigator console, and told Riley “I’ll take over the Nav, Cadet. Go ahead and shadow Mr. Corell at Ops.” As Riley got up, he sat down next to Kaitlin, and reported to the captain, “Course plotted for Pharazon VII, captain.”

“Navigate us out of the solar system, Lt. Reid,” Captain Feldman told Kaitlin. “The proceed on course at warp 6.”

Kaitlin set the controls for full impulse, nodding. “Aye-aye, Captain.”

Feldman grinned. “*Lemir geyn*,” he said.

Kaitlin turned toward him for confirmation, though she suspected what the phrase meant.

He nodded, and gestured toward the screen. “Let’s go.”

A Forest Primeval

Chapter Summary

The USS Medea arrive to find the ruins of a Numenorean city in space. A ancient forest is found within its remains, and other life forms within.

“I just don’t see the resemblance.”

Kaitlin and Cadet Riley were in the main officers’ lounge, at the bow of the Medea, looking out into warp-space.

“No, it’s true! You look a lot like that reporter for FNN,” Riley insisted.

Kaitlin made a face. “Cynthia Torqueman? That’s not very flattering, Cadet. She’s at least ten years older than me!”

“Well, I remember her when she was younger,” Riley admitted. “She was one of the first ones reporting at Tarsus.”

Kaitlin sighed and shook her head in amusement, but inward she flinched. *How was he able to be so blasé about it?* She wondered. *Was it a defense mechanism? A deflection?*

“So,” Riley said, changing the subject, “Have you worked much with him?”

She turned away from the port toward Riley. “Um, who?”

“Glorfindel. Is it...me, or does he actually glow in the dark?” Riley asked her, smiling.

Kaitlin scoffed and turned back toward the window. “I think you’re exaggerating a little.”

“No, I don’t think I am. I think he’s casting shadows when he walks out of the turbo. And he’s always so damn nice and serene, so it makes me wonder if the sun literally shines out of his—“

“Hello.”

Riley never broke eye contact with Kaitlin, whose eyes raised as they both knew who had walked up to them in the lounge. “Well, shit,” Riley cursed.

“That is...a very colorful turn of phrase, one that I had never come across in Middle-earth,” Glorfindel began. “And very refreshing, to be honest.”

Kaitlin beckoned Glorfindel to sit down with them, and to his credit, he complied. “How so?” she asked him.

“Cadet Riley is correctly perceiving that I, like my people, are a little different than other peoples, whether home or abroad. I have been told that I am similar to the people from Vulcan. But they are very much...of their land. Me and mine cannot say as much.”

Indeed, Glorfindel shared the pointed ears, upswept eyebrows and greenish complexion of the Vulcans, if not a little more pale. Doctor Wright confirmed that Glorfindel’s blood was copper-based, like the Vulcans, and even shared the same blood type and rh-factor—T-Positive, he remarked.

“I have been traveling the stars for many years, hoping to find others of my kind, separated from us,” Glorfindel continued. “*Úmanyar*, my people called them. I wonder if they planted seeds on places like Vulcan and elsewhere, the aeons making them different from myself. If they are indeed the ancestors of Vulcans I would be glad, for they have thrived and adapted well.”

“What prompted you to leave your planet?” Riley asked.

“Death and life can sometimes have different meanings to my kind,” Glorfindel answered. “I know that I had died, or had been mortally wounded. I came back, with knowledge that what I knew, what my people remembered of our history was...wrong—altered. I felt that the answers lie beyond Arda, beyond Aman, beyond the confines of the world I knew. Thankfully, I knew of one who literally fell from the sky to visit, and pressed for his help. That was over a hundred of your years ago.”

Kaitlin reached over and put her hand over Glorfindel’s. To her surprise he started a little bit in surprise, but smiled warmly at her. “Thank you,” She told him. “Thank you for sharing, and sharing your experiences with us.”

Riley nodded in agreement. “That’s what we’re all supposed to be out here doing, right? Exploring the unknown and learning from it?”

Glorfindel looked at Riley and beamed. “It is indeed what you do. Your peoples’ curiosity know no bounds. Over and over I see it. It is a song in my heart.” With that he stood up and left the lounge, leaving Kait and Riley to ponder.

“I don’t know what to tell you, Kevin,” Kaitlin said after a moment. “Let that sunshine in.”

Captain’s Log, Stardate 1328.5. Medea is on final approach to the Pharazon system. Long range probes have detected faint traces of automated activity, which may indicate signs of ancient technology from an area of space once occupied by the ancient empire of Númenor. No Starfleet ship has entered this area of space before now, as we are the first since the alliance with the R’ongovians. Therefore any discoveries we make, no matter the magnitude, will be significant.

On the Bridge of the *Medea*, Captain Feldman was pacing the bridge, while the executive officer, Commander Zeb Corell, kept an eye on the sensor feed.

“Bring up a schematic of the system,” Feldman told Corell.

The system was a binary system with a G-type primary and a white dwarf secondary. It had two inner planets, three mid-sized gas giants and a super gas giant on the outside, almost the size of the white dwarf.

“The gravitic effects of that massive exoplanet would keep the inner system relatively free of rogue asteroids and comets,” Corell noted. “At present we’ve identified nearly three dozen satellites in its orbit alone.”

“Hmm,” Feldman noted, reading through the report. “What about this gap between the inner and outer planets?”

Between the outer terrestrial planet and the next gas giant was a sizable gap, roughly twenty million kilometers wide.

“That’s a puzzler,” Corell agreed. “In any other system, ours included, that kind of gap would be occupied by an asteroid belt circling the sun. But here? Nothing.”

As the two discussed, Lt. Rott Ag’ta manned the ops station. “There’s no unusual gravimetric activity that would explain it,” he added. “It’s just open space.”

“And,” Corell concluded, “That is also where our signal originates from.”

“Not from the inner planets?” Feldman asked.

Corell deferred to Rott. “Pharazon II is Class-M, but no signs of intelligent life,” he reported. “Innermost planet is airless and tidally locked. No chance.”

Feldman frowned. “What do you think?” He tossed the question to the bridge.

“Artificial structure?” Maurice LeBeau suggested. He was manning the Engineering station.

“Even if it’s abandoned, some low-power generators could keep the signal going for millennia,” Rott added.

“So...something out there generating a signal...no idea how big, no idea what to expect...,” Feldman said to Corell. “I don’t know about you, Number One, but this is as exciting as it gets!”

“Nav, set a course for the source of the signal,” Corell told the Nav officer on duty.

“Aye, sir,” she replied.

“Enter the system at full impulse, Feldman told the helmsman. “Go to Yellow Alert.”

That earned him a puzzled look from Corell.

“I want all hands on deck to see this,” Feldman explained.

Kaitlin and Riley arrived within minutes to relieve the Helm and Nav officers on Duty.

“Maintain current course and speed,” Feldman told Kaitlin as she logged in.

“Aye sir.”

Glorfindel arrived on the bridge his keen eyes locked on the screen. “We will see something soon enough, Captain,” he told Feldman.

The captain nodded. “I’m hoping so.”

“What was the signal that you picked up?” Glorfindel asked. “Was there a message, or something less sophisticated?”

“Just a repeating blip,” Feldman explained. “A subspace signal, and with the signal degradation, we think it’s been going for at least four thousand years.”

Glorfindel nodded. “It would seem around the correct time period.”

“Any insights you might have would be invaluable,” Feldman prodded Glorfindel.

“I know no more than you and your crew,” Glorfindel admitted. “We are all in this adventure together.”

“Zeroing in on signal now,” Kaitlin reported. “Passing the orbit of innermost gas giant.”

“Long-range sensors should tell us what it is about now,” Rott said.

Feldman turned to Corell.

Corell looked into his sensor display as the others looked on with anticipation. After what seemed like an eternity, he smiled and nodded.

“Picking up several objects at the source of the signal,” he reported. “Largest reads about two kilometers in length. Signs point to a structure built by intelligent life-forms.”

“Yes!” Riley exclaimed from the Nav station, but everyone on the bridge shared his sentiment.

“You said ‘several objects’, Zeb,” Captain Feldman said, with a tone that reminded everyone, especially Cadet Riley, that there was still work to do. “What do you think we should expect?”

“If this is the ruins of some ancient space structure,” Corell replied, “The remains should no doubt be fragmentary and much of it may be in extreme disrepair. Any away team should expect to suit up.”

“I assume, Zeb, you got your team ready?” Feldman asked.

“I was hoping I could persuade our guest to come along?” Corell suggested. The both of them looked over to Glorfindel.

Glorfindel looked...reluctant, but smiled anyway. “I’m...open to the possibility?”

“You’re the closest thing we have to an expert, Mr. Glorfindel,” Feldman said. “Your expertise would be invaluable.”

“Captain,” Kaitlin interrupted. “Getting a visual on the artifact.”

“Onscreen,” Feldman replied, never taking his eye off of his guest.

The screen shifted to a scattering of light-colored objects floating in deep space.

“Magnify.”

Kaitlin complied, revealing a central structure, with a tall height, three or four kilometers high, in the center with four wings at ninety-degree angles. Two of the wings were destroyed, or ripped away. Debris floated around the artifact, sparkling in the light of the twin suns.

Something of that debris caught Feldman’s eye.

“Zoom in on that in the lower right quadrant,” he told Kaitlin.

“Aye sir.” As she did, it appeared to be the figure of a humanoid figure.

A statue.

It got Glorfindel's attention.

He moved toward Kaitlin his eyes never leaving the image on the screen. "Can you focus further on the statue's head and the crown upon it?" he asked her. "And quickly?"

"I'll see what we can do," Kaitlin complied.

The crown upon the statue's head seemed to be some kind of crystalline object, different from the material of the statue itself, shining brightly in the darkness.

"That is a figure of Eärendil!" Glorfindel cried. "That would confirm this place's origin. This is indeed Numenorean!"

Feldman smirked. "Does that mean we can add you to the away team?" he asked Glorfindel.

He turned toward Feldman, wildness in his eyes. "Try and *stop* me, Captain!"

The away team, it turned out, consisted of Corell, Rott, Kaitlin and Cadet Riley.

In the transporter room, they began to snap their EVA suits into place, checking the oxygen levels and getting the fit right. Especially Riley, who hadn't worn a starship-grade suit before.

Glorfindel arrived fashionably late, looking extremely uncomfortable in his EVA suit.

"First time in the suit?" Kaitlin asked.

"No, actually," Glorfindel countered. "The suits they used on the old NX-Class were a bit more...roomy in the undercarriage," he told Kait with a smirk. "*If* you must know."

Rott cast Kait a glance as he put his helmet on. "He told *you*," he muttered, as she stifled a laugh.

"All right, we all ready?" Corell asked the team.

All nodded their acknowledgment.

"All right Chief, take us to the drop point."

The transporter materialized them in an open area within the ancient station. The light from the twin suns shined into it through wide intact windows. A vast reverse-dome ceiling structure looked like a temple or a church tabernacle with dazzling mosaic decoration upon it.

It looked exactly as Corell expected an ancient Numenorean city would look like.

However, not everything was expected within the open plaza.

Kaitlin moved closer to what looked like a large tangle of—

—Vines?

“Look with your *eyes*, not with your *hands*, Lieutenant,” Corel reminded her. “Tricorders out, people!”

Kait nodded and got her tricorder out. The vines were not statuary, it turned out, nor were they dead.

“These plants are *alive*, sir!” she exclaimed.

“We have oxygen and pressure, sir!” Rott added.

“Amazing,” Corel breathed, then turned to Riley, who looked to be popping his helmet. “Helmets stay on, Cadet! At least for now.”

Riley, chastened, relented. “Aye sir.”

Glorfindel looked at them, and proceeded to pop his helmet anyway. With a hiss of the equipment, he took the helmet off and shook his golden hair out of the suit.

Before Corel could scold him, he held out a hand as he sniffed the air. “This is a forest,” he told them. “A forest that is thousands of years old, within this ancient place.”

The looked again around them, and as they grew accustomed to the light, they saw trunks and leaves, reaching out toward the endless ceiling. Moss hung from branches, and roots overlapped roots, covering whatever the original floor was. Soil and dead leaves littered the ground.

Which led Corel to ask other questions.

“Signs of animal life-forms?” he asked Caitlin.

She wheeled around with her tricorder. “Animal scans show signs of animal life in the soil—invertebrates, insects, annelids, that sort of thing.” As she did, a rise of quiet droning could be heard in the distance.

Corel put a finger to his helmet, and they listened. “Could be bugs,” Rott suggested. “Could be frogs?”

“But no signs of *humanoid* life?” Corel asked them.

“Not within tricorder range,” Caitlin confirmed.

“But perhaps *outside* of it,” Glorfindel suggested.

“Also a good deal of fungal life,” Caitlin added, with surprise.

“Well,” Rott remarked to her, as they spread outward, “Let’s take a look at the fungus among us!”

“How long have you been waiting to say that?” Caitlin called as she moved out.

“All day!” Rott exclaimed, and moved outward himself.

Back on the bridge, Feldman looked at the screen, while Maurice LeBeau took the helm.

The turbo opened, and Nurse Stone stormed out. “Why am I not on the away team?” she demanded of him. “They are getting life readings and taking samples and I should be *down* there!”

“Nurse,” Feldman said, beckoning her closer. His hard visage softened as he looked down at her. “Mavis, we talked about this. You’re here on loan, and rest assured, you and Dr. Wright will be getting the first crack at any samples we bring back—“

“*You said—!*” she cried, and, looking at the glances they were getting, lowered her voice. “You said that I would not get any preferential treatment on this ship, for better or for worse. Now I am a member of the crew and I deserve to participate with the rest of you. Yes?”

Feldman reached a hand out to grab hers. Her glare softened and she sighed.

“We also agreed that we wouldn’t let our professional relationship get in the way of *us*,” he reminded Mavis.

“Martin, *please*,” she said. He kept his hand over hers, both with matching gold bands. “You know better than to molycoddle me.”

He put both his hands up in relent. “Okay. Okay. The team is coming back with samples, and when they go back, you will be on the away team. You and Doctor Wright. Okay?”

Mavis sighed. “Fine.” And then, realizing she won, added, “Thank you.”

“Also, we’re also gonna talk about this,” moving his finger between himself and Mavis, “when we have dinner tonight, okay?”

She turned and walked toward the turbo holding her hands up in relent. “Okay, Captain!”

After she exited, Feldman cleared his throat and glared once again at the viewer.

“Um,” Maurice spoke up, “*When’s* the wedding again?”

“February,” Martin sighed. “Probably.”

Back on the station, in the forest within it, Rott had gotten a spike on his tricorder.

“Around this corner!” he quietly said to Kaitlin, following his lead. Glorfindel trailed behind them, absently looking around, seemingly at nothing, but, Kait noted, his senses seemed to be...differently tuned than hers or Rott’s.

“Have a care,” he said, calmly to them. “There seems to be some kind of activity that you may not want to interrupt.”

Rott frowned, but pushed forward cautiously.

Kaitlin gasped when she saw it.

In another open plaza, overridden with flora, nearly a dozen creatures listed around.

Nearly the size of elephants, with tough grey hides, hairless, but with a silhouette more resembling one of the great apes, they moved from tree to tree, sniffing for...food? Water? It wasn’t immediately clear.

Rott looked down at his tricorder. “Found my fungal readings,” he whispered.

“Really?” Kait replied, in amazement. “That’s pretty rare, wouldn’t you say?”

Glorfindel looked upon the beasts, a guarded, yet amused look on his face. “They are as the trolls from Middle-earth,” he remarked. “Though more bestial here.”

“Trolls?” Rott reacted, turning toward Glorfindel.

“Like a little creature with big hair?” Kaitlin mused, which caused Rott to turn back to her, smiling. “What? I didn’t like dolls growing up.”

“Like a big creature with big teeth and slightly limited intelligence,” Glorfindel replied to them, keeping his eyes on the band before them.

“They seem to be in some sort of social group,” Rott noted. “Like *Urga ’burrz* back on Cain.” Now it was Glorfindel’s turn to react to him. “Gentle giant creatures with big teeth in the Downlands.”

“Or a gorilla on Earth,” Kaitlin added. “Right now they seem gentle amongst themselves, but we don’t want to push our luck.”

Rott flipped open his communicator. “Rott to Commander Corell,” he said quietly.

“Corell here,” Zeb replied, walking up a concourse filled with vines and flowers, a tiled floor barely visible underneath. He and Riley were attempting to find any surviving technology, anything that would explain why the ancient structure in space would still have atmosphere and pressure enough to sustain the vast ecosystem around them. He hoped he wouldn’t have to cut through the greenhouse around him to find it.

“We’ve found a group of ambulatory life forms,” Rott reported. “Fungal based, but resembling a troop of great apes. We’re observing but not pushing forward.”

“Take precautions. Record everything. Corell out.” He put his communicator back in its holster.

“Looks like Lt. Reid and them found the scenic route, sir,” Riley remarked.

“This is just as important, Cadet,” Corell reminded him. “We need to figure out why this structure is in as good a shape as it is, why it's got atmosphere and pressure, and apparently a replenishing water supply.”

“Huh?” Riley perked up at that. “Oh, yeah! The water has to keep coming for a forest to grow *this* wild, right?”

“Exactly. And wild water and infrastructure very rarely mix, so let’s figure out how it’s happening.”

The two followed the vines down a narrowing corridor, which showed signs of deteriorating walls, where the vines simply flowed through.

That gave Zeb the opening he needed.

“What is keeping the water flowing?” He muttered to himself. The opening in the walls revealed utility trunks, and other small piping. The vines grew nearly parallel to them, within the walls. Riley peeked his head into the wall, still scanning.

“The vines keep growing into the walls,” he confirmed. “They might be conveying the water from an internal reservoir inside the station.

“A natural pipeline,” Corell mused.

“Something the other plants tap into?” Riley suggested. “An interconnected root system?”

“That could indicate that all *this*,” Corell gestured outward toward the main forest, “Is all one singular plant form. Like a strawberry patch, writ large.”

“Or something that was grown like this by design,” Riley suggested.

“I think that is a given,” Corell affirmed. “None of this could have just...*happened*. Forgive the expression, but there is quite a bit of intelligent design at work here.” He flipped open his communicator. “Corell to Lt. Ag’ta.”

Rott responded, still watching the lumbering creatures move docilely before him and his team. “Ag’ta here,” he said, quietly.

“Return to the drop point. We’re heading back to the *Medea* with our samples.”

They began to about-face from the group of beasts, With Rott keeping an eye on them to make sure their movements weren’t noticed.

While he did so, he noticed that one of the group had slightly different coloring at their shoulders and head. Like a mushroom, it was red and shiny, with irregular white speckling.

That looked like it would be important to note, so he did so.

He wasn’t sure, but he thought—just for a moment, that the two of them had made eye contact.

The two groups came back together at the drop point.

“All good?” Corell asked them all.

Kait lifted up her sample bag, as did Rott. Glorfindel, free of any real away team duty, simply shrugged.

“All right. After we drop off our samples in the bio-lab, we proceed to debriefing with the Captain.” He flipped open his communicator. “Away team to Medea, ready to beam up.”

“Standby,” the transporter chief replied. Within moments, the team was whisked away in a flurry of light and whining sounds.

Not too much later, the red-capped creature emerged into the clearing, where the away team had departed. Their heavy brow was furrowed, and moved back and forth, seemingly looking for something. They sniffed the air, and, slightly dejected, lumbered back to their group.

The creature would, however, remember the being that locked eyes with it.

Overthinking A Miracle

Chapter Summary

Issue One!

The Medea crew get caught up to speed and get ready for the second away team outing.

“Here’s what we’ve discovered.”

Feldman had his officers around the briefing room table. Dr. Wright, Nurse Stone, joined Commander Corell, Cadet Riley, Rott, Kaitlin, and Glorfindel. When Maurice LeBeau sat down to join them, the meeting began.

Maurice set up a schematic on the big screen. “This is the artifact as we’ve seen it,” he told them. The representation was from the top of the structure, showing its four wings, seemingly at ninety-degree angles. “The main chunk of it anyway. Analysis of the design has us thinking that the original structure was larger. Much, *much* larger.”

The structure shrunk as extrapolated, identical sections latched on and extended it outward, zooming outward, further and further until a thin ring circled an orbit around the twin star system of Pharazon.

Kaitlin was the first one to say it. “A Ringworld,” She said, her mouth agape.

“We don’t know if it was completed, but we think it was the intention,” Maurice replied. “The structure has a subtle curve that suggests that modules on both sides would extend the structure outward, encompassing an orbit.”

Feldman turned to Glorfindel, whose expression was inscrutable.

After a long pause, he spoke. “It’s certainly possible,” Glorfindel said. “The great structures they were capable of constructing...yes. They would be up to that level of ambition. They might have been on their way toward creating an even greater feat, even in their decline.”

“This might have been their first steps toward creating a Dyson Sphere,” Corell suggested.

“If they hadn’t already,” Glorfindel finished. “In preparing for this mission I studied up on the theory of such mega-structures and it tracks.”

“Hey, um, elephant in the room here,” Riley spoke up. “Where’s the *rest* of it?”

“We might find other pieces of it in this orbit,” Rott suggested. “This is the only chunk that was sending out a signal.”

Riley conceded that point but pressed. “What do we think broke it up, then?”

“Or *who*?” Dr. Wright spoke up.

Again, all eyes turned toward Glorfindel.

“If the stories have any kind of truth,” He began, “Númenor was destroyed by the Valar themselves.”

“Um...?” Rott said.

“The celestial beings that form the basis of a shared mythology between my people and the Númenoreans,” Glorfindel explained. “But they are *not* myths. We have interacted with these beings. They are real. Whether or not they in fact were the chorus that sang the universe into existence remains...up to interpretation.”

“Folks, before you pile on...” Feldman warned.

Riley, youthful and rash as he was, steamed ahead anyway, “So what we’re going with is... ‘Act of God...s?’ he asked Glorfindel, incredulously.

“*Cadet*,” Corel warned.

“With respect to Mr. Glorfindel and his held beliefs,” Riley backpedaled, “That is open to any kind of interpretation.”

“The cadet is correct,” Glorfindel admitted. “For my people, our myth and our facts are one and the same. What you call fables, we would call the news of the day. And perhaps not as accurate as even we would prefer. This is *why* I seek out Starfleet. You are not hindered by any romantic notions of the past. You can be objective. You can seek the truth.”

“For the sake of simplicity, we are going to take Glorfindel’s recollections or beliefs as open to interpretation,” Feldman instructed them. “He’s all but admitted that they are possibly inaccurate and is open to new possibilities. And he’s right. We’re here to discover the truth. So here’s what we know. The structure may have been part of an ancient megastructure. Within it lies a living ecosystem, sustained by the structure itself. How is that organized? Was it by design by the Númenoreans? What is the nature of the creatures Lts. Reid and Ag’ta found within that ecosystem?” He turned to Dr. Wright and Mavis. “Life Sciences have the samples brought over, Doctor?”

“Already under the microscopes, Captain,” Wright affirmed.

“All right. Forty-eight hours to analyze the data, and then we send another away team to follow up. Dr. Wright and Nurse Stone will be on that team,” he said, keeping his eyes on Mavis, who simply nodded. “Maurice, engineering will be working to create a working model of the full structure. Be nice if we can find other pieces of it out there, yes?”

“*D’accord*,” Maurice agreed.

“Lt. Reid, you and Rott go through the scans of the structure. Find us a second drop point, possibly with some technology we can poke around in, get some records, anything like that?”

“Aye, sir,” Kaitlin agreed.

“And guys—This is a huge discovery,” Feldman told them. “A millennia-old forest in a ruined space station? This is one for the history books, whether it seems like it or not.” Satisfied that his instructions were complete, he finished, “Dismissed.”

As everyone gathered their materials and left the briefing room, Feldman called out to one member in particular. “Cadet Riley,” he announced, and Kevin winced. “A quick word.”

Riley moved back to the table where Captain Feldman remained. “Nice participation in the discussion today, Cadet,” Feldman began, smiling. “Officer’s instinct to contribute to the discussion is commendable. However—“

Riley’s smile faded.

“Our guest is at least as old as that structure out there, whether he looks it or no. Perhaps a little more respect for our elders and guests aboard this vessel is in order. Got it?”

“Aye sir.”

“Good man; now get outta here and join Reid and Ag’ta,” Feldman finished, getting up himself.

Half a shift later, in the Officers’ Mess, Maurice, Rott, and Kaitlin sat together, with their dinners. Kaitlin couldn’t help but notice the Captain, in his exclusive corner of the room, dining with Nurse Stone.

“Yes, they are together,” Maurice affirmed. “She came aboard for this mission somewhat against his wishes.”

“Because of her exchange program?” Kaitlin asked.

“For one thing,” Maurice affirmed. “Also because they’re engaged. It’s a recent thing. So this assignment kind of went through the cracks.”

“Oh,” Kaitlin said. “So they want their relationship on the *Medea* to seem professional.”

“The mission means a lot to both of them, so they’re trying very hard to keep professional distance,” Rott added.

“*Hint, hint,*” Maurice emphasized.

“I,” Kaitlin said, looking pointedly at Maurice, “Am being professional. “Cadet Riley is only three years younger than me, and does not report directly to me. We are allowed to be friends, which is *all* we are.”

“I’ve already been through this with him,” Rott said, taking a swig of his drink. “He entered Starfleet late because of...well, you know.”

“Great. So let’s talk about something else,” Kaitlin said, turning back to Maurice. “Have you found any other fragments?”

“We think so,” Maurice said. “But this one is the only one with a signal. Maybe this is the only piece that’s important.”

“Like someone wanted us to find this specific artifact?” Rott suggested.

“Now you’re going to sound like Glorfindel,” Maurice remarked, “And tell us you believe in destiny and magic.”

“Would that be so bad?” Kaitlin mused. “An ancient empire doesn’t just *disappear*...what becomes of the people that it leaves behind?”

The two men turned toward her, listening.

“All these star systems that they touched. What’s there now? Just ruins? Highly unlikely. Those creatures on the artifact can’t be the only things left of Númenor!”

Over at Martin Feldmans’ table, he peeked over Mavis’ head to the trio having their work discussion.

“Well, what do you know,” He said, not quite to Mavis. “Not just a mission for our Ms. Reid.”

She turned to sneak a peek. Indeed, Kaitlin was animated as she was explaining herself to her fellow officers. “Mister Grey never misses a trick, does he?” She turned to Martin and moved to squeeze his hand. “Are you *ever* gonna forgive him for putting me on your boat?”

“He got me an honest-to-god Quendi on my boat,” Martin chuckled, and squeezed her hand back. “I think I’ll live.”

“Good. Because, you know, my *adad* said all sorts of things about him, and holding a grudge is never wise.”

“I wish I could have met him,” He told Mavis.

“Me too,” She sighed. “But the chances of him being able to come back from Arda are...”

“...Are as likely as us getting permission to visiting him on Arda.” Martin slumped. “Mister Grey’s boss is so *mean*.”

“I mean, he has snuck some letters from him over the years,” Mavis admitted. “In which he expressed an alarming obsession with Moria—the less said about that the better—“

“Right,” Martin agreed. They’d discussed Moria before.

“I know he would love you,” Mavis said.

“That is so sweet,” Martin said, gazing lovingly at his fiancée. “Now can I get your agreement that you’re *never* gonna storm my bridge again and make demands of me so I *don’t* have to put my future wife in the brig?”

Their forty-eight hours were up.

Kaitlin and Rott located a new drop point, while Mavis and Dr. Wright were ready to analyze new samples. Glorfindel and Corell were the last to walk into the transporter room.

They switched out the EVA suits for field jackets; the first outing proved no harm to the away team.

“Chief, we got the coordinates?” Corell said to the technician at the controls.

“Yes, sir,” was the reply. “It was strange, though, sir.”

“Eh?” Corell turned back toward the console.

“As we were pinpointing the coordinates that The Lieutenants gave me,” Chief Dae-suk Park explained, “It looked like we had some interference, or some shielding, and then, it...cleared up?”

“Do you think we should scrub the drop?” Kaitlin asked. “Because this seems a little suspect to us.”

Corell turned to Glorfindel, who shrugged. “I cannot think of who could possibly be left to live in these ruins. Perhaps we should seek them out. Perhaps someone needs help.”

“When put in those terms, it does sound like a good idea to keep our eyes open. As unique a place as this is...”

“Right,” Rott finished. “Nice place to visit; wouldn’t wanna live here.”

Corell made his decision. “Alright. On the pads, folks.”

The transporter placed them in a clearing in the vast forest within the ruins. As well as the running vines among the trees, blossoms of purple and orange bursting among the green.

Kaitlin looked around. “It’s uncanny,” she said. “Here, you can’t find any signs of a space station. Just a forest in the middle of nowhere.”

“There is a primeval forest on the world I’m from,” Glorfindel told them. “Old. Old trees, older than any around it. There, the fauna seemed to have an awareness of their own.”

“Sentient trees?” Rott said with incredulity. “What would *that* be like?”

Kaitlin leaned over and remarked. “It means you’d have to be careful where you mark your territory in the woods.”

“Oh, ha *ha*,” The caninoid Rott called after her after she moved away from her mischief.

“Oh, she has *jokes*!”

“All right, folks get to work!” Corell called out. “Reid, Ag’ta, start looking for some technology we can study. Doctor, Nurse, go ahead and analyze the flora...and *be polite*...just in case.”

“Right,” Wright muttered and pointed at one of the hanging blossoms. “We’ll get a sample of that blossom, Mavis, and maybe a core sample of tree trunk for starters...see if it correlates to the vine sample back in the lab.”

Mavis glared at him for a moment. “Thad...aren’t you forgetting something?”

Wright looked absently at her until it struck him. She was at least two heads shorter than he was! She *couldn’t* get to the blossom without help. He let out a wheezing laugh. “Oh! I’m

so sorry! I keep forgetting. Your personality is taller than *you* are, you know.”

“May I be of assistance?” Glorfindel stepped in between them.

Mavis smiled and drawled, “Sure, you can! We need to get a sample of one of those flowers there and placed in this canister...”

Before she could finish, Glorfindel deftly jumped up and snatched one of the purple blossoms and landed perfectly before her, presenting her with their prize.

“...Like so,” she finished. “Thank you.”

“Anything for a Daughter of Stone,” Glorfindel replied.

“Met many of them?” She teased. “We’re kind of rare out here.”

“But when you’re found, what a surprise!” Glorfindel replied smoothly. “You trace your beauty from Queen Disa herself, surely.”

“That’s what my *Adad* told me,” Mavis remarked. “Me, I think I just got my good looks from my mom.”

“If you two are done *flirting*...” Wright sighed.

“It’s all right, Thad,” Mavis reassured the doctor. “Glory and I go way back.” She turned back to Glorfindel. “Can you grab that orange one too, just for good measure?”

As Glorfindel obliged, Corell assisted with getting a core sample from the closest tree trunk. “What are we looking for in this second set of samples?” He asked the doctor.

“We’re looking for genetic tags in the plant matter,” Mavis replied. “If this ecosystem was engineered to exist in this environment, the evidence would likely be in the genetic material.”

“We might want to find some samples of the fauna as well,” Wright added. “Insect life, annelids, maybe a small vertebrate we can get a blood sample from.”

“From what Reid and Ag’ta reported, there might be some peepers around here,” Mavis suggested.

“Eh?” Glorfindel turned to her, his second sample secured.

“Little frogs,” Mavis replied. “They’re usually heard more than seen, at night in the spring or summer where I grew up in Colorado.”

Rott and Kaitlin moved outward, working on a hunch they found in their scans from the Medea.

However, finding what they were looking for took a bit of manual labor.

Rott pulled vines away from the wall, careful not to rip too many asunder. After all, they hadn't ascertained how delicate the remote ecosystem was.

"Still wish I could have brought my blades," he grumbled.

"You have a sword!?" Kaitlin exclaimed.

"Swords," Rott corrected her. "The Twin Blades of Ag'ta. They're a family heirloom, but very much functional."

"Well now I'm just plain curious," Kait drawled.

"Captain Feldman's already warned me about carrying swords down the corridors," Rott sighed. "It's so not fair."

"Yeah—wait, Rott, wait! I see something!"

Rott moved his hands away from the vines. Sure enough, something that looked like a control panel showed through.

"Although...whoof, that looks pretty rough," Rott remarked. Indeed, the panel, thousands of years old, had a green patina to it, its keys wore off and had a look of overall corrosion and decay.

"If you recall, we accounted for that," Kaitlin reminded him, and brought her tricorder to bear. "Although, if there's still power in the control, that might help us attempt to interface. Try that lower right button, won't you?"

Rott complied, and pushed the button. It barely pressed, the millennia of grime, pollen, and dust stuffed within its crevices.

"Not to sound biased, but...*yeuchhh*," He complained, wiping his finger onto his jacket.

"I appreciate your sacrifice," Kaitlin quipped, and moved her tricorder by the device. "Well, fortunately something solid-state is intact here, so let's push some virtual buttons."

A few moments, the tricorder and the control panel began to twitter at each other, sorting out a common *lingua franca* while Rott looked on. After about another minute, they began to bleep in unison.

"Are we getting data?" Rott asked.

"I think so," Kaitlin replied, not looking quite sure. "Tricorder's showing internal activity."

“Cool, cool. Maybe it’ll point us a direction to a central databank,” Rott suggested.

Kaitlin shrugged, and looked further down the vine-covered hallway. “If we do, we’re still gonna have to wait until Commander Corell catch up with us, and—“

Before Kaitlin could finish, the wall in front of them, began to shudder and move up.

“What in the...?” Kait muttered, as the two of them backed away.

It was a door, albeit covered in vines. Most of them remained intact, but pushed up and down.

And what showed up in the space between was nothing Kait or Rott expected.

A face, covered in overgrown beard, looking tired and annoyed. It moved outward, revealing shoulders covered in a rough green cloak.

Further, the figure, apparently male, appeared to be grasping what looked to be a dark, varnished wooden staff, which contained a smoky quartz stone at its end.

He turned and glared at the two of them, and pursed his lips.

“Do you *mind*?!” He shouted at them. “Can’t a fellow get some *sleep* around here?!”

The Wizard in the Woods

Chapter Summary

Kaitlin and Rott meet Gol, a strange man living in the Numenorean derelict.

He stepped out of the vines and the doorway that Kait and Rott had inadvertently opened, appeared to get his bearings, and turned to them and squinted at them. He seemed a bit older than middle-age, but not quite elderly. His eyes were a pale blue, and were sharp as he looked them over. “Hmm,” he grumbled. “Human?” He quizzed at Kaitlin. “Or maybe— No, not quite Dunedain. Human it is. Nosy as ever, *you* lot. And...” He scrutinized Rott. “Plundarran? No, Cainian. Cainian. “What’re you doing here?”

“I’m Lt. Kaitlin Reid from the Federation Starship *Medea*,” Kait introduced herself. “This is Lt. Rott Ag’ta. Do you...live here?”

He pointed his staff at them. “You kicking me out?”

Kaitlin was more and more confused. “Well, no, but—“

Rott spoke up. “We’d be happy to render aid if you need it...?”

“Oh,” he muttered, and looked around once more. “So this is a Federation wellness check?”

Despite herself, Kaitlin began to laugh. “No, not at all. We came upon this place because of the signal. We came here hoping to explore an ancient Númenorean artifact, and... here it is.”

“Is? Nah, more like ‘was’,” the strange man sighed. “Oh, but you should have seen it in its prime. And there were dozens of them, strewn across so many systems. Why discover a planet, when you can just... build your own, right?”

“Okay, let’s start over,” Kaitlin sighed. “What’s your name?”

“Call me Gol,” the man replied, and wandered away from them, and away from the beam-in point. “Said you followed a signal from here, did you?”

“Y-yes,” Kaitlin replied. “A simple blip, and a hunch from someone named Glorfindel.”

Gol perked up. “Oh, really?” He moved, with a fluidity of motion that belied his appearance. “The Vulcans have a figure in their legendarium. Have you heard of the warrior known as Glor-fan-daal?”

Rott frowned. “Yes, I *do*!” he exclaimed. “I...can’t believe I didn’t make the connection.” He turned to Kaitlin, who still looked lost. “No?”

“I took many electives at the Academy,” Kaitlin told Rott. “Vulcan mythology was not one of them.” She turned to Gol, and a sly smile grew upon her face. “I took a liking to aviation, myself.”

“Ahh,” Gol moved to her. “Wings. You are a woman with wings beneath her, are you?”

Kaitlin laughed. Despite the oddness of the situation, she felt at ease with this strange old man who had a bit of wildness to him. And the feeling felt familiar to her. “I guess you can say that.”

Gol chuckled. “You must forgive me. I’ve been wandering this forest of mine for...maybe a little bit too long. Nobody of note to talk to, you know.”

If Commander Corell okays it, we can have you speak to our captain,” Rott suggested. “And Glorfindel, as well, if you like.”

“Oh, that should be most productive, but perhaps I can help you two out first,” Gol offered. “You have to be wandering along here for a reason, yes?”

“Well, yes,” Rott agreed. “We were looking for some sign of technology still existing in the structure...perhaps to get a better idea of what it looked like in its prime.”

“Oh! Well, that’s easy,” Gol chuckled, and turned back round toward the doorway he stepped out of. “The forest hasn’t gotten into *everything*! In fact, back here, where I popped out of, there’s a whole cluster of old maintenance alcoves that they used to check on the structural integrity of the place, and to communicate with areas that—well—I guess don’t exist anymore.”

Kait and Rott looked at each other. That was exactly what they were hoping to come across, and Gol was offering it to them. It would also, they both realized, take them further from the away team, and possibly into an area where comms would be blocked.

Rott, however, was the senior officer in this instance.

“Your call,” Kait told him.

Rott flipped out his communicator. “Ag’ta to Team Leader”

Corell responded. He, Mavis and Dr. Wright were still gathering samples with Glorfindel. “Corell here. What’s your status?”

“We’ve encountered an...inhabitant,” Rott replied, side-eyeing Gol. “He seems benevolent; he’s willing to help us with our objective.”

There was a pregnant pause over the communicator. “Um...can you give me some more details, Lieutenant?”

“Humanoid, late middle-age in appearance,” Rott said, describing Gol. He’s dressed in a Blue-green outfit, looks like, and is carrying a...walking stick with a stone at the tip.”

“What’s your take, Rott?” Corell was willing to give the Cainian the benefit of the doubt.

“Seems sincere in wanting to help us; we want to get him debriefed onboard Medea if possible when we’re done here.”

“I will pass that along to Captain Feldman,” Corell replied, not willing to okay that at the moment. “Best judgment, Rott, and proceed with caution. Corell out.”

Corell put his communicator away. He turned around toward the trees, and found Glorfindel right before him, causing him to start. “Geezus!” He exclaimed.

“My apologies,” Glorfindel replied. “Did they say someone was here?”

“Yes,” Corell replied. “I told them to be careful.”

“Did they give a name?” The golden haired man asked.

“No they didn’t...Just said he was dressed in... blue and carried a staff.”

“They found someone?” Mavis called, and Dr. Wright looked over as well.

“It’s under control, Nurse Stone,” Corell called back, and turned back over to Glorfindel—
—Who was gone.

“And I guess he’s going to be joining them,” Corell sighed. Which, he thought, *why not?* He was an independent player, not under his direct command.

“We were going to delve deeper into the tree canopy,” Wright told him, beckoning him over.

“Don’t worry about Glory,” Mavis told Corell. “He’s lived this long...he’ll last a while longer.”

Gol led Kait and Rott into a very different corridor; one without vines running along the walls. It had a smell of metal, of rust, and none of the overwhelming smells of the forest. The floors were hard, devoid of soil.

Just like any other space station they'd ever been on.

The walls did, however have dark smooth panels, like monitor screens. Kait absently began to run her hands along its surface, and felt its smooth texture, unblemished after so many millennia.

However, it felt cold. Unresponsive.

"Yeah, the power doesn't go to these," Gol remarked. "I'm surprised you got that door to open at all."

"Ah...we got our portable sensors to interface with the panel," Kait explained, and double-stepped to keep up with him. "We also got some other data, but we won't sort through it until we get back to the ship."

"Ship, huh?" Gol rhetorically asked. "Warp drive?"

"Uh-huh," Kait replied.

"How long you had that, you humans?" Gol asked.

"Oh, we've had warp drive for almost two hundred years," Kait said.

"Two fifty for *us*," Rott added, looking smugly at Kait.

Gol sighed. "I remember when you lot were still zipping around in winged ships with propellers," he told Kait. "And all the little cars! Now look at you, with warp drives, still zipping around." He turned to her and smiled, that twinkle back in his eye. "Despite everything, there's no stopping you." He turned to Rott, whose smug look returned. "And you! All those feudal houses warring with each other, from the mountains to the sea! Which house are you, anyway? K'gar?"

Rott frowned, the hackles of his neck raised slightly. "No," he coldly replied. "*They're* from the mountains. I'm from House Ag'ta, from Gra'nah."

"Ah, the Fishermen's House!" Gol exclaimed, and cackled to himself. "Nice. Of course, those extra years having warp drive gave you a chance to do battle with the Thunderans, half a quadrant away. How'd *that* work out for you?"

"They had problems of their *own*," Rott grumbled.

“That’s what I heard. Poor Jaga, he had his hands full,” Gol sighed. “Anyway, you’ll find that the computers will start becoming responsive around...” he looked around. “Here!”

And just as Kaitlin put her hand away from the wall, it began to light up with an amber glow.

“Ahh!” Rott moved past her and shoved his tricorder to the wall. “Okay, now we’re getting data!” He turned back to Gol who had his hands shoved into the pockets of his robe. “Thank you.”

“My pleasure. So tell me,” Gol moved toward the end of the corridor, closed off by another door. “Why are you and your little ship out there? Why pick at the remains of a bygone empire that...clearly failed and destroyed itself?”

“Or, according to some, got destroyed by the gods themselves?” Kaitlin added.

“That’s a little reductive,” Gol muttered, working the door. “I mean, how many times have you been mistaken for gods on those little planets you keep visiting for research purposes... yes?”

Kait and Rott had nothing to say to that.

“So let’s see what we have behind door number two?” Gol said, snickering at his own joke.

Kaitlin hung back, looking at the schematic glowing on the screen. It showed their position, a cutaway map of something larger...much larger.

But not quite a complete ring around the twin suns.

That saddened her a bit. They never had a chance to finish, she realized. Something wrecked their ringworld before they could complete it.

“Was it just this one?” she thought out loud.

“Eh?” Gol turned back to her.

“Was it just this one that they didn’t finish?” She asked him.

“I don’t think we’ll ever truly know,” he answered. “Much of what was, is lost...”

“...For none now live, who remember it.”

Kaitlin turned back, and saw Glorfindel standing there. He looked taut, like the string of a bow ready to fire. He looked at Gol with a great intensity.

“Hello, Alatar.”

Gol rolled his eyes. “Do I *look* like I’m wandering the wilderness of Middle-earth?” He admonished Glorfindel. “Do I look like I need to take on some fake persona or alias like some common criminal or fugitive?”

“You look like your blue robes have taken on some moss,” Glorfindel chided. “I thought your kind were set to wander?”

“No,” Gol said, his voice turning dark as he stalked toward the Quendi. “My ‘kind’ were set to listen. We are a race of listeners! The things we listened to when we came upon *your* kind, Glor-Fan-Daal!”

Glorfindel laughed, a clear and friendly sound. “I haven’t been called that for over a hundred years!” “But pray, what shall I call you, if not Alatar the Blue?”

“My name is Golruffe,” Gol proclaimed. “Golruffe Kakare, pleased to meetcha!”

“Can I still call you Gol?” Rott asked. “That one syllable suits you!”

“Yes, you may, Rott!” Gol replied, and with the press of the panel, the next door opened.

“This might interest the young lady,” Gol suggested, the mischief returning to his eyes.

“Oh really?” She replied, and as he beckoned, she walked through.

“I’ve seen it before, here and there, in my travels,” Gol told her. “The look in a young person’s eyes that can foretell the path of an entire generation, and this may be the first step that could start everything.”

“All of that in my eyes?” Kaitlin teased. “Why, Mister Kakare...!”

She was going to continue teasing the older man, when she saw it.

It was highlighted by an overhead light, like a spotlight upon something upon a stage.

It was a simple enough thing, when you first saw it, but upon every second glance, it continued to have more intricate detail.

A flat, oblate object, almost resembling a badge. It had the look of a cloisonné pin, with a shiny gloss, in fire engine red and gunmetal, with gold detailing.

Three gems within a tree with wings on each side was etched into its front face.

She walked up to it. She turned back to Gol. “Can I...?”

“Oh, I should hope so,” Gol replied. “See how it takes to you.”

“Is that what I think it is?” Glorfindel asked Gol, peering at the object Kaitlin began to pick up.

“This is where it all begins,” Gol told him. “And you all thought that the line of Elendil would be the one to watch, but you never thought to turn your eyes to that third planet of a minor sun.”

“In the last two centuries, I have come to believe the truth to that,” Glorfindel agreed. “Is that why you left?”

“I had my reasons,” Gol replied, “Which have nothing to do with this. Agamir’s instincts were spot on, it seems.”

“ ‘Agamir’ ...?” Glorfindel repeated the name.

“Yes, that’s his name. I’m not fond of nicknames,” Gol sighed. “Now pay attention, some history’s happening.”

Kaitlin ignored their verbal sparring. The device was...warm. like something generating its own power. It looked like a badge; so she put it to her field jacket to see how it looked.

It affixed itself to the jacket.

She searched herself; to see if it was interacting with her in a way she wasn’t aware of. It didn’t seem to make any sounds, any particular vibration, other than to attach to her clothing.

“Okay, I give up,” She turned to Gol and Glorfindel. “What does it do?”

The forest was dark in the narrow corridor of the ruins.

Corell took his hand-torch out of its pocket and shined it left and right, looking for more ways forward. The trees grew closer and closer into a seeming knot of wood and vine. Every now again some sparkle of bioluminescent material, perhaps pollen from the flowers, perhaps some unspecified spore, or small insect, shined in front of the Commander, nurse and doctor, but for the most part, the torch lit the way.

Mavis, being the smallest of the three, led them, looking for ways through.

After awhile, however, Mavis held up her hand, to get them to stop moving forward. Wright hunched over, slightly winded from the extra effort.

“Remember the captain’s rule against certain bladed weapons?” Mavis asked Corell.

“If I recall that was directed to Lt. Ag’ta’s twin swords, and how he can’t just carry them openly in the corridors,” Zeb said, himself catching his breath.

“Well...” Mavis grabbed her field pack and pulled something out from its ornate handle. It was a rather stylized hand axe, with rune letters running up and down the handle and blade. “I might have been a little naughty myself.”

As she charged forward to hack at the knot of vegetation ahead, Wright called out. “Mavis, *wait!*”

“Thad, I’m sure we can safely clear this without damaging the water system too badly!” she protested.

“No, no, you’ve got the right idea, I was just gonna suggest we cauterize the water supply rather than let it dribble out onto the ground.” And with that, he whipped out a miniature Phaser-1 pistol.

“Clearly we need to keep a closer eye on the Life Sciences Department,” Corell grumbled. “And we’re gonna talk about the axe, Mavis! Later...on the other side of these trees.”

Dr. Wright gave a sidelong glance to them both as he pointed his phaser at the knot and fired. The beam was narrow enough to evaporate the center, leaving a dark hole, the other side obscured in darkness.

“Commander?” Wright beckoned Corell to investigate. “Let’s see if there’s more to be done.”

“Doctors with guns, I swear...” Zeb grumbled under his breath as he did as Wright asked. He shone the torch into the cooling opening, smelling vaguely of mesquite.

“Wonder if we can take enough to have a barbecue,” he muttered as he looked.

A pair of glowing green eyes looked back. They blinked.

“OH SHIT!” Zeb jumped back three feet, dropping his torch.

“What was it?” Mavis asked. She held onto her little axe tightly.

“Something! Eyes!” He said, trying to slow his breathing. “Doc! Point th-th-the thing!”

“Of course, Commander,” Wright complied, looking smug as anything. He moved toward the opening, carefully, with the tricorder, and looked for the scan results.

Large amount of fungal life,” he reported. “Fungal...?”

“Like the creatures Reid and Ag’ta found?” Corell prompted.

“Looking—” Wright began but didn’t finish.

A large arm punched through the opening, tearing branch and vine asunder.

“Thad!” Mavis pulled him out of the way of the debris with outsized strength. He yelped as he was yanked away.

Another punch opened the way completely, revealing the red-capped fungal beast, looking intently at the three of them, sniffing. After about three sniffs, he looked at Corell and roared, a loud, guttural sound that filled the corridor.

“Maximum stun, Thaddeus,” Corell said, keeping his eyes fixed on the beast, who began to huff and stamp his arms down on the ground.

“Did you hear that?” Rott asked.

“Hear what?” Kaitlin replied, shaking her head.

Glorfindel was already running back toward the other three, with Rott close on his heels.

Gol grabbed Kaitlin’s arm. “Come on, Lieutenant Reid, This might be what this situation calls for!” And beckoned her to follow.

“Captain!”

Maurice burst onto the bridge. All the bridge crew turned toward him. After Mavis’ outburst, however, they didn’t appear to be too scandalized.

Captain Feldman simply put his hand to his temple.

“*Oy vey*,” he muttered. “What now?”

“I gotta go down and help the away team!” He exclaimed.

“Mister LeBeau,” Feldman sighed. “Why the dramatics?”

“Did a minor dynoscan to figure out the shielding that was happening prior to beam-down,” Maurice explained. “The shielding didn’t dissipate—it migrated.”

“Something moving throughout the structure?” Feldman asked.

“It may or may not indicate a sign of something wandering throughout the structure,” Maurice concluded.

“That’s...really vague, Maurice,” Feldman said.

“Okay, that’s what I got on the machines, but that’s really only half of it,” Maurice admitted.

He didn’t seem to want to elaborate.

“Do you want to elaborate?” Feldman prodded. “I can’t send you down without a that other half.”

Maurice leaned in close to Feldman. “I’d prefer to tell you about it in your ready room.”

Feldman lurched out of his chair and beckoned him to the ready room. “Jesus, you are all killing me on this one.”

As the door closed, Maurice turned to Feldman and point-blank told him:

“I’m descended from Augments. I have a Latent power.”

Feldman leaned on his desk and nodded. “Of course you do. You’re a Reid-LeBeau. What have you got?”

The beast looked down at Corell.

Zeb couldn't tell if there was any intelligence in the eyes of the creature. It certainly looked sapient, but as they'd never seen a fungal life form that advanced, there was no knowing. He slowly crab-walked back away from it, hoping not to agitate it any further. Mavis and Wright were still standing still, not knowing if any attack on the beast would have it strike out against their commanding officer.

"Thad, options?" Mavis said. "You're the one with the phaser."

"Aim for the legs," Corell suggested, maintaining even tones.

As Wright began to aim, a loud cry came back from behind them.

All four heads turned toward a charging Glorfindel, a short blade in his hand. Rott was close behind him.

"No *blades!*" Corell exclaimed, causing the beast to slam a front fist down in front of him. Rott surged ahead and proceeded to tackle the beast. "What is it with everybody and blades!?"

Rott's tackle wasn't exactly successful. The Cainian was well-built, certainly, but could simply not match the sheer mass of the creature. The beast, forgetting Corell, threw Rott off landing him on his rear close to Mavis. The branches and vines along the walls of the corridor broke a good part of his landing.

Glorfindel gazed at the creature. "There is something else here," he said, gazing at it with his crystal blue eyes.

The creature looked at Glorfindel and grimaced. It shrugged one shoulder and turned toward the Quendi.

It spoke.

"You are quite correct," it said to Glorfindel, startling everyone there.

“What the f—“ Corell said.

Gol and Kaitlin made onto the scene shortly.

“Did you understand what I told you?” Gol asked her.

“I think so, but it still doesn’t make any sense,” Kait replied.

“Did you know these things could talk?” Rott asked Gol.

“The Ologrim?” Gol asked, confused. “No, they’re too primitive for speech.”

“Did you know they were this aggressive?” Glorfindel asked. “You could have warned—“

“The Ologrim are peaceful, they’re vegetarian,” Gol insisted. “When they’re not being used for fell purposes...*Uriunas!*”

“Alatar...” the Ologrim said, gesturing widely with its simian arms. “Out of hiding, *finally!* I’ve been waiting for an opportunity to talk to you for so long.”

“Don’t call me that!” Gol exclaimed. “Kaitlin, like I showed you—“

Kaitlin was about to say something, but was interrupted by the hole in the woods created by Uriunas.

Another Ologrim flew out of it, as red-capped as Uriunas, and just as massive.

He grabbed the other creature and began to put it in a headlock. As he did, he turned to Kaitlin and Rott and addressed them.

“Hey, *mes ami!*” he greeted them in Maurice’s Acadian patois. “Miss me?”

Forbidden Knowledge

Chapter Summary

The conflict goes within as Maurice reveals his hidden power, and Glorfindel reveals the reasons for his wanderings.

“Maurice?!”

“Ehh, more or less,” Maurice said in with the Ologrim’s raspy voice. “But what about this guy?”

“His name is Uriunas,” Gol told them. “He is not to be underestimated, by any means; he is never what he seems!” He turned to Kaitlin. “Now, Kaitlin! Say the words!”

Kaitlin looked at the artifact still pinned to her field jacket. She didn’t understand what Gol was saying about it, but apparently, it was ancient Numenorean technology that was still operable over thousands and thousands of years.

What the hell, she thought. Let’s call it an experiment.

“ARMOR...UP!” She cried.

The inert badge began to hum. At a pace that she could barely register, it began to...form around her. Plates of pewter armor began to appear in brief flashes around her chest, moving to her abdomen, to her legs, to her arms. A bright red breastplate, with warm glowing seams going down the front. It moved around her head, forming a helmet. As it began to obscure her vision, a blue visor appeared over her face, and a floating display switched on.

It wasn’t done yet.

On her back, stylized metal wings sprung forth, splaying out, making her look like an art-deco angel.

Rott looked at it and pointed at Kaitlin. “The RED ANGEL!” He cried. “It’s back!”

“What?” Kait’s voice was projected through the armor. “No, Rott, it’s *me*!”

“The Red Armor,” Uriunas drawled. Shrugging off Maurice, moving toward Kaitlin, his interest in Corell lost.

“What was your endgame, Alatar, hiding this from me?” He asked Gol. “What else have you hidden from me? The White Armor? The Quicksilver? The Copper Child?”

“You were never going to use them,” Gol cried back. “You were going to horde them away. Not for good...not for ill...only for yourself.”

“That was always your problem, Alatar,” Uriunas retorted. “You never trusted the system! Both you and Pallando! You never trusted *me*.”

“Now Kaitlin! Bring your arms to bear. Say it!” Gol cried.

Kaitlin looked at her arms, covered in the armor, but not overly cumbersome. She could move her fingers just as easily if she were wearing light gloves.

“*HEAVY MODE.*”

Those gauntleted hands became bigger...larger, filled with more power allocated from her armor.

Those light gloves became boxing gloves.

Rott began to get up. Uriunas’s attention was focused on Kaitlin. Maurice saw it too.

“Now young lady,” Uriunas said, a silky condescension in his voice, “You are clearly out of your depth. These are stakes that are far beyond your ken.”

Kaitlin punched Uriunas squarely in the face.

The impact nearly spun nearly around. Everyone's eyes were on Kaitlin and her techno-armor.

"Oh!" Mavis exclaimed.

The Ologrim looked dazed.

"I really don't like being talked down to," she said. "No matter *who* it is."

"A worthy strike, Lt. Reid!" Glorfindel exclaimed.

That got Uriunas' attention.

"Reid?" He turned to Glorfindel. "That is the name of the Terran our Grey Wanderer utilized, a century ago, on his wandering away from Middle-earth...To make peace between the Thunderans...and the Cainians..." He now turned to Rott. "And now they are here..." He turned to Gol. "Finding *you*."

"Who are you?" Corell demanded. "How are you doing this?"

Uriunas ignored him. "Finding you, finding this place, finding that..." he pointed at Kaitlin. "Oh, he's scheming all right. Wouldn't it be a shame," he said, an unpleasant smile on his borrowed face, "If I ruined those schemes?"

"Hey."

Uriunas turned around to find the other Ologrim, with Maurice's voice, glaring at him.

"Remember me?"

Maurice gripped his face, peering into Uriunas' eyes. "I think it's time to get a little more intimate."

The Ologrim eyes Maurice was borrowing glowed blue, and for a brief moment, a blue mist rose from him and moved toward Uriunas.

Now it was *his* eyes glowing blue.

The Ologrim was empty. Now, fearful, it retreated toward the entry it came from, cowering.

But the Ologrim now had Uriunas and Maurice, and a new battle was about to begin.

“Maurice—!” Corell called out.

“No, Commander,” Gol warned Zeb. “Your Maurice might be in over his head, regardless of his impressive power.” He helped Zeb to his feet. “There is nothing we can do for him for now.”

Ever since Maurice Reid-LeBeau was a teenager, he was able to Leap.

The first time was with a childhood friend. His family lived in the Louisiana Bayou country, outside of Baton Rouge, and the two friends were playing in the woods. She was wandering around a ancient tree, with a dead branch barely hanging on. One push of the tree was all it took, and the tree began to fall. Doreen was too scared to move, and without even thinking, Maurice made his first Leap.

Into Doreen’s mind, commandeering her, moving out of harm’s way.

That’s when he learned the family’s long heritage.

That as far back as the 1990’s, his family could trace the source to an Augment named LeBeau.

That made Maurice a Latent.

Latents often had subtle powers, such as a higher ESP rating or unique eye colors. But Maurice’s was more pronounced.

He was sent to the Starfleet Academy Genetic Research facility, where his powers were gauged he was instructed to control them.

Nearly two decades later, there he was, back in the White Space of an Ologrim.

With another Leaper.

He was dressed in white, with a loose, layered outfit. A leather strip ran along the collar and down the front of the long cardigan-like outer layer, with lettering cut out. A white cap sat tall upon his head. He had a gaunt face and a long thin nose, with intense eyes glaring out under large, dark eyebrows. His face was clean-shaven, and he had an arrogant smirk upon his face.

“Uriunas, I presume?” Maurice spoke first.

“What are you?” Uriunas replied. “Terrans don’t have these gifts.”

“Surprise, surprise,” Maurice countered. “So what’s the deal, friend?”

“This does not concern you,” Uriunas said, dismissively. “Leave Alatar and I to conduct our business.”

“Can’t do that,” Maurice said, shaking his head. “You endangered Starfleet personnel. You involved us. We’re here. Now, if there’s a conflict, we can arbitrate, but otherwise, we’re gonna have to ask you to heave-to and leave the man alone.”

“You insinuate yourselves in matters that do not involve you,” Uriunas sneered. “*All* you humans. You have the ambitions to spread throughout the galaxy but with no glimmer of being worthy enough to claim the glory of Númenor. Leave well enough alone and stay in your place.”

“Hey,” Maurice said, putting up hands that, admittedly, were purely representation in his astral form. “We just want to explore, and to learn, and to, hopefully, get to know our neighbors a little bit better. We’re not here to conquer or to deceive or to engage in interference. In fact, It’s codified into our charter *not* to interfere.”

“How naive,” Uriunas scoffed. “By your very nature, you will interfere, you will insinuate, you will tamper. It is your nature. You cannot deny *yourself*.”

Maurice shook his head. “We can go round ‘n’ round forever with this, but it doesn’t change anything. We’re here. We don’t want to continue this conflict, but we’re not backing off either. We’re not going anywhere.” With that, Maurice crossed his arms.

Uriunas glared at Maurice, his face twisted in a sneer. “Very well,” he growled. You leave me no choice. But before we go any further, I have a message to your superiors.”

With Maurice’s Ologrim continuing to crouch in the darkness, Uriunas’s remained in the center, doing nothing for several minutes, aside from the odd twitch here and there.

“Is, um,” Rott asked Corell. “Is Lt. LeBeau...okay?”

Zeb turned to Gol. “*Is* he? Who is this Uriunas that he can hitch a ride on fungal primates?”

“It’s one of his talents,” Gol said, dismissively. “Parlor trick considering the source of his power.”

“Which is?” Kaitlin asked. “Also, how do I turn this off?”

“ ‘Armor Off’,” Gol told her, and added, with annoyance, “And—you don’t have to shout the commands; it can hear you just fine.”

“It’s just fun to say louder. Armor off,” Kaitlin said, with a sigh. “Back to my question?”

As Gol moved toward her, the Red Armor began to disappear in sections, in brief flashes of white light.

“Listen, kid...” Gol began

“Condescending,” Kait sighed.

“Lieutenant,” Gol amended. “What he called me—Alatar—It’s not a name. It’s a job title; it’s a description.”

“So what’s Uriunas’ job description?” Rott asked.

“He’s a tinkerer,” Gol explained. “A planner, he manipulates situations to get the results that he wants.”

“What does he want?” Zeb asked.

“Our mission,” Gol replied. “To attempt to pick up the pieces of what was left of Numenor and to keep the Big Bad from ruining everything.”

“Big Bad?” Rott repeated.

“The Dark Lord,” Glorfindel spoke up. “Sauron.”

“I feel like I read this story when I was in middle school,” Kaitlin quipped.

“So you’re saying that this guy that’s after you is...one of the *good* guys?” Zeb asked. As he did, Uriunas’ Ologrim began to twitch with frequency, and his eyes began to focus once again.

“This is not over, Alatar,” Uriunas said to Gol. With that, the Ologrim collapsed.

“Maurice!” Kaitlin called out.

Glorfindel cocked his head, as if he had heard something the others didn’t.

“He’ll be along shortly,” he told them. “He apparently leaped back into his true body.”

“Leaped?” Kaitlin asked.

Glorfindel shrugged. “That is what he called it.”

“So...” Gol said, stepping gingerly away from the unconscious behemoth Uriunas left behind. “Why don’t we get away from this fella before he wakes up...?”

“Yes, let’s do that,” Corell agreed.

The away team, with Gol included, beamed back aboard the *Medea* shortly after.

Captain Feldman met them in the transporter chamber, while Chief Park finished up.

“That interference cleared up?” he asked Park.

“Yeah, like five minutes ago,” Park replied. “Weird.”

“Weird, indeed,” Feldman agreed and walked right up to Gol. “Welcome aboard the *Medea*,” he greeted Gol, who took his hand. “I’m hoping you’re receptive to having a thousand questions asked of you.”

“I’ll help however I can,” Gol replied. “I’m grateful to your people for their help.”

Maurice, Rott and Kaitlin walked together as Feldman and Corell spirited Gol away to a briefing room. “Why didn’t you tell anyone?” Kait asked Maurice. “Your power could come in handy.”

“You know Starfleet’s standing policy on genetic enhancement,” Maurice reminded her.

“Yes, but that doesn’t apply to you. You were born with your powers,” Kait protested.

“It’s guilt by association,” Rott told her.

Her shoulders slumped.

“Right,” Maurice said. “All I need is the wrong person finding out, and I’m washed out, or in stockade, or worse.”

“So why did you go to Captain Feldman?” Kait asked. “Why did you blow your cover?”

“Over us?” Rott asked, jostling him. “You shouldn’t have.”

“Because I knew I could trust Captain Feldman. I’ve worked with him longer than you two. I was the first one that Mister Grey referred to him for this mission.” They turned a corner, and walked into the officers’ lounge. “He did his homework, and figured it out.” The doors closed behind them. “He’s not going to be a problem.” He went to the dispenser and started a drink. “Besides, I was trained at SAGR. My powers are on record. As long as I’m not overly flamboyant about my powers, I’ll be fine.” He chuckled. “I’m not some kind of superhero.”

“Speaking of,” Rott said, turning to Kait, “I noticed you didn’t relinquish that new toy of yours. Are you planning on keeping it?”

Kait absently held the Red Armor badge in her jacket pocket. It was warm in her hand. “It’s the first intact piece of technology from Numenor,” she said. “Just like the plant life, and the ruins out there, we’re gonna study it. Aren’t we?” she asked Maurice.

“I guarantee it,” Maurice agreed. “And hoping I get the first crack at it, too.”

The three of them sat down, in front of a window view that looked directly at the ruins ahead. Outside, the statue of Earendil floated slowly, the jewel upon his head shining in the twin suns’ light.

“Then I’m your test pilot. And hey—“ she turned to Maurice. “There’s more of these out there. You heard what he said, there’s at least three other armors like this. The Quicksilver? The Copper Child?

“It’s not just a new technology,” Maurice said, looking as Kait took the badge out and placed it on the table. “It’s a new clue to this old civilization we’re studying.” He looked at both at them. “Might be the key to unlocking everything.”

“Gol said it was history we were making,” Kait reminded them. “Let’s make it good.”

Maurice held up his glass. “I’ll drink to that.”

Gol left the Briefing Room, leaving Feldman and Corell behind.

“I’ll take you to your quarters.” Glorfindel offered to him.

“Why are you here?” Gol asked him.

“I wanted to see the stars,” Glorfindel said, loftily. “I like seeing all this beauty up close. Right here.”

The door opened, revealing Gol’s guest room. As the doors closed behind them, Gol smiled at him. “Bullshit.”

Glorfindel’s eyes raised. “I beg your pardon?”

“You’ve been out here for a hundred years. You are getting further and further from the grace that is given your people. You are aging, albeit infinitesimally. Why are you out here? What are you doing this for?”

Glorfindel was silent.

“You were killed in a battle,” Gol circled around him. “The Fall of Gondolin.”

“Yes,” Glorfindel affirmed.

“You were sent back, ages after,” Gol continued. “You were practically the Sixth Istari!”

“That is not for me to—“ Glorfindel stammered.

Gol glared at him. “What did you do?” Gol demanded. “You are helping them out of some obligation that I cannot ascertain. What is it?” He paused. “What are you paying penance for?”

Glorfindel became very still and very silent.

“Uriunas is one thing, but I will *not* abide this!” Gol exclaimed. By Mandos, you will tell me!”

“I have made a terrible mistake,” Glorfindel said, sitting down on the guest quarters bed. “I might have jeopardized the entire galaxy.”

“Tell me!” Gol demanded.

“I was among the Vulcans,” Glorfindel explained. “They have a retreat, the Ankeshtan K’til. It is for those among them who have lost their logic, but are attempting to regain it.”

“It’s a prison for Vulcans who refuse to get with the program,” Gol corrected him. “Go on.”

“I was working among them. There was one among them, who was so sharp, so bright, he could have been one of my kind. I counseled him, told him about myself and of the Quendi. We agreed that our peoples had a common origin that his people evolved from the *Úmanyar* that had gone their own way. While we spoke, I began to wonder if I was helping him or subverting the counselors. Before I left, we had an...epiphany of sorts.”

“Yes?”

There is an old, old myth on Vulcan. A place, called ‘The Source’. They call it ‘Sha-Ka-Ree’.

Gol turned away from him, stroked his beard absently. “Shakari”, he said, simply.

“He told me there are barriers in this galaxy,” Glorfindel continued. “One encircles the galaxy, but the other...protects the inner core. He told me...that he believes that Sha-Ka-Ree exists on the other side of the barrier. I told him about the War of Wrath, about the battle against the Great Enemy, about my own death...but he was determined. He told me that something was speaking to him from the other side of that barrier.”

“Oh, I have no doubt!” Gol cried. “Imprisoned in Utumno for these millennia, and for good reason! If he finds a way to breach that Barrier—“

“But he won’t, though. He’s not going anywhere. He’s unrepentantly against the Vulcan Way.”

“Morgoth’s allies don’t simply reside in Mordor,” Gol chided Glorfindel. “And they are much more sly than any Orc.”

“Which is why I must remain among the stars,” Glorfindel said, with a nod. “They need to be prepared for the day when the Shadow moves once more.”

“All right. All right.” Gol nodded, and sat down beside Glorfindel. “He’s set things in motion, but so have we.” He sighed. “I suppose I shall have to go and have a talk with Agamir.”

“He goes by ‘Mister Grey’ these days,” Glorfindel said.

Gol sighed. “Grey is his *rank*. Wandering Teacher is his *job*. Agamir is my friend’s name. And maybe—” Gol stopped. “Maybe it’s time to reunite with Gomphor as well.”

“Well, what do you think?”

Feldman and Corell sat in the Captain’s ready room, across from each other. Zeb had asked Martin the question.

He looked troubled, but thoughtful.

“He’s pointed us in a direction,” Feldman conceded. “And it’s very promising. The Bed-Lama system is deep in the former Numenorean territory.”

“Further from port,” Corell noted. “Three weeks from Starbase 13.”

“True, but it’s a First Contact,” Feldman countered. “That’s part of the mission.”

“It’s just...we just *got* here,” Corell argued. “We might have more discoveries to find.”

“It’s a huge amount of ground to cover to find every single nugget of the Ringworld,” Feldman replied. “We aren’t equipped for that kind of canvassing mission. We’ll make our report and recommendation to Starfleet to let the archeologists have at it.”

“And what this Uriunas said?” Corell asked. “What do we make of that?”

“That we’ll never set foot on Arda as long as he has anything to do with it?” Feldman replied. “He’s not the boss of me. Not officially. We’ll take that as it comes. In the meantime, we have two incredibly learned individuals who can guide us through this territory. We gotta keep blazing through.”

“I mean, Arda was never a guarantee anyway,” Zeb conceded. “Some long-range probes might give us some insights ahead of landfall anyway.”

“First thing’s first,” Martin said, getting up. “Set the course for the Bed-Lama system, warp 5. We’ll have Life Sciences do their research in the meantime and confer with Gol about what we discovered. Sound good.”

“You’re the captain,” Zeb threw a mock salute at him, and moved toward the door to the bridge.

“I’ll relieve you at ten hundred,” Feldman told him and got back to his desk. “Dis—“

The door closed behind Corell.

“—missed.” Feldman shrugged, and went back to his new line of research.

“Meanwhile, who to send to our little forest?” he murmured to himself. He read off the scholar list of academics researching Numenor and found a familiar last name.

It was a young historian, out of Ohio.

A Bradley Reid.

Kaitlin Reid was at her helm station when Corell arrived. “Plot a course for the Bed-Lama system,” he told Cadet Riley. “Helm on my mark, we’ll be going to Warp 5.”

“Aye sir,” Kait replied.

“Board’s green,” Riley reported.

“Engineering reports we’re a go,” Maurice reported.

“All departments are ready to rock,” Rott reported.

“Good job, everyone,” Corell said, cheerfully. “Lt. Reid...let’s jam.”

“Proceeding to jam...sir,” Kait replied, with a smile.

The Medea left the Pharazon system behind with a flash of its warp engines, the statue of Earendil still serenely bobbling away, while a separate piece of the statue floated nearby, a hand, with a familiar splayed gesture, wishing all to live long...and prosper.

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