
The Praetorian Plot



THE PRAETORIAN PLOT

By Crewman 3rd Class Caulford

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T'Re stood at attention before her Commanding Officer; her shoulders squared, her hands at her sides, and the toes of her carefully polished boots facing forward at a 45° angle. Before answering the summons that a servant delivered earlier that morning, she made sure that the wrinkles were pressed out of her uniform and every strand of her brown hair appeared neat. The fact was that even though Captain Hycom hand-picked the Romulans recruited to join the ranks of the Tal Shiar and serve the Empire by weeding out those individuals that embody or are willing to embody disloyalty, this would be their first one-on-one meeting.

“Relax, Officer. You’re not here for a uniform inspection.”

“Permission to speak freely, sir,” she requested.

“Granted,” the commander replied with a wave of his right hand.

As she exhaled, the stress that weighed on her since the moment that she stepped foot into the conference room lifted as her stance moved to that of an officer at ease. She clasped her hands behind her back and spread her feet apart by moving her right foot two inches to the right, evenly distributing her weight on both feet.

“As Commanding Officer of the Tal Shiar, you have more important tasks to attend to than handing out assignments to your subordinates. That is a job that you recently decided to hand over to your second in command, Ja’ar. Which makes me wonder why you requested that I meet with you?

“If you considered me a traitor to the Empire, secrecy would not have been a requirement for this little meeting. Instead, you and several other officers would parade me through the barracks to make a point and show that even the Tal Shiar are not immune to traitors.” T'Re paused and took a steadying breath. “That little parade would only be the beginning. While I know that we are not fond of physical torture like the Tal Diann, we have ways to learn what we want to know. My next stop would have been the mind-control device. There you would have injected

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me with a cocktail of drugs and picked apart my brain to determine where my loyalties lie.”

Commander Hycom nodded but remained silent.

“Disloyalty and treason are met with death. Depending on the seriousness of the offense, mnhei’sahe acknowledges the right of the Empire to extend death to the traitors’ family as well. But again, I point out that you summoned me to meet with you privately.”

T’Re noticed that he allowed a small smile to break his composure for a brief second before it was quickly replaced by a neutral expression. For a man in his position, showing any form of emotion could be taken as a weakness to be exploited. But being emotionless and refraining from showing joy in the things that one enjoys is only possible for short periods.

“Haven’t you heard that curiosity killed the Sehlat?” Commander Hycom paused. “Please, sit. I’ll explain everything.”

She accepted the invitation and made her way to the chair that her Commanding Officer pulled out for her. As she went to sit down, she noticed that as the palm of her hand brushed against his, his eyes turned violet. Her only hope was that her own had not done the same. It wasn’t that he was unattractive. For a man his age, he fit society’s standards for handsome. However, she had no time for romance. She was still young by the standards of her people, and she needed to focus on her career. Silence hung heavy between them as he pushed her chair in and took his seat at the head of the table.

“First, I want to point out that you were recruited to join the Tal Shiar because you displayed exemplary behavior during Serona and your time at the War College.”

“Like all our kind, it is my responsibility to bring honor and power to myself, my family, and the Empire. To do that, I must be all that I can be, sir,” T’Re stated.

“It also doesn’t hurt that you have an ability that the rest of us covet.” He stopped and placed a file down on the table. “You were born

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with a fully developed midbrain. Like our Vulcan ancestors, you're telepathic."

T'Re bit down on her lower lip, a habit that had followed her from childhood when it came to worrying. She knew that people like her, the ones that possessed the telepathic abilities of their ancestors, were rare and considered special. However, as a child, she learned to hide her abilities. All she wanted was to be treated like every other Romulan. She earned her place at the War College through dedication and hard work during Serona. Having a fully developed midbrain endowed her with telepathy, but it was an unfair advantage and she refused to use it.

"I made it through Serona and the War College on my own. I spent long hours ensuring that everything I did exceeded the demands of my Commanding Officers. I did not use my telepathic abilities to cheat my way through, if that is what you brought me here to accuse me of."

"No. I'm not accusing you of anything. I am simply stating that your abilities will turn out beneficial for the good of the Empire."

She narrowed her eyes and pressed her lips together.

"Look, I'm about to disclose sensitive information that is only shared on a need-to-know basis. Since you are the operative that I want to send in, you need to know."

Commander Hycom slid the file across the table to her, the expression on his face a grim one. She opened the file, her eyes landing on the hologram of the suspect. There in full color, was the image of the recently elected Praetor. T'Res' eyes flew up to meet those of her Commanding Officer. For a moment, she thought that he might be testing her to determine where her loyalties lay. He simply nodded.

"You want me to determine if the Praetor is loyal? Do you realize that the Praetor represents the hope of our people and inspires loyalty?" T'Re questioned.

"It isn't that simple. Before becoming the Praetor, her name was T'Rehu." Commander Hycom paused and took a deep breath. It appeared

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as though he was struggling with the situation. “A concerned Senator believes that she may attempt to follow in the footsteps of her namesake.”

“Does this Senator know her well?”

“Well enough. She has caused harm to his family before.”

T'Res' heart felt as though it detached itself from her circulatory system and plummeted to the pit of her stomach. She could have sworn that she heard it shatter as it hit the unyielding surface. The Senator that her Commanding Officer spoke of was her father. Her father, Malor, had adamantly opposed the election of the only female candidate. His explanation revolved around her being unfit to lead their people. However, the other Senators observed a woman born to a Great House that was loved by many. It also meant that she knew who birthed her before she was given to Malor and his wife, Allyan, to settle the debt owed for the death of their son.

“T'Re, are you alright?” he asked.

She shook herself from her thoughts and noticed that her Commanding Officer was kneeling in front of her with one hand resting gently on her shoulder in a manner meant to be comforting.

“I... I'm fine, sir,” she replied.

“Here, drink.”

T'Re accepted the glass of water from him and took a drink. As she drank, she took the time to steady her nerves. She knew that Malor and Allyan adopted her into their family. Her father explained everything to her before she started Serona.

“Will you be bringing my father in as a traitor?”

“No. He came to me during the election when it became obvious that T'Rehu was the front runner,” Commander Hycom paused and ran a hand over his face as he let out a heavy sigh. “He told me what happened to his son, your father, and how they used mnhei'sahe to take you, their granddaughter, to right the wrong that she dealt to the family. He thinks that she will only harm the Empire.”

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T'Re swallowed down the tears that threatened to erupt. She had no reason to cry. Her life was a good one. Malor and Allyan loved her dearly. They gave her everything that they could. As a Great House, that meant she wanted for nothing. She never knew her father, there was no use crying over someone that she didn't know.

"What is my mission, sir?" T'Re questioned.

Commander Hycom moved back and took his seat again, placing his hands palm down on the table.

"You're going undercover as a member of the Praetorian Fleet. With the new Praetor taking over, the Fleet will change to align with the Senators that support her. This makes it easy for you to slip aboard without suspicion."

"I won't let you down."

T'Re pushed her chair back and stood up, saluting her Commanding Officer as she prepared to leave with her mission in hand.

"Remember two things. First, if you need to, play to her feelings. She may still care about the daughter that she lost due to her recklessness," he stopped and cleared his throat. "Second, by the look that registered on your face earlier when I mentioned knowing about the development of your midbrain, I can tell that you're not comfortable with your telepathic abilities. Don't ignore them. They will come in handy."

She nodded before walking out the door, leaving her Commanding Officer behind in the conference room and moving forward toward the mission that the Tal Shiar leader assigned to her.

T're stood at attention on the bridge among the other members of the Praetorian Fleet as the Praetor boarded, her Praetorian Guard escorting her aboard.

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The Praetor was a tall, middle-aged woman with brown hair that barely brushed the tops of her shoulders. She held her head high and her shoulders were squared. It was a way of distinguishing herself from the rest of the Romulan population. The Praetor knew that she was above the rest; she stood as the embodiment of the people. Everyone looked up to her while she held her current position.

“Welcome aboard, Praetor. This ship and the rest of the fleet are at your command,” the Commander stated as she bowed low, her nose almost touching the tops of her boots.

T’Re noticed the Praetors’ lips curl up in a smirk as she looked down her nose at the Commander. In that moment, she realized that the woman that most of the Senators voted to enthrone as the representative of the people truly believed that she was superior.

“Plot a course for the colonies. It is my responsibility to introduce both Romulans and natives alike to their new Praetor.” The Praetor paused to brush a speck of dust off the sleeve of her uniform. “Start with ch’Havran. I will be in my quarters. Don’t bother me until the ship has landed on the planet’s surface. As Praetor, I need time to rest and prepare the speech that I intend to give to inspire the people.”

With that, the Praetor brushed past the Commander and made her way back the corridor that led to her quarters, the Praetorian Guard falling in behind her. Even though the ship was staffed with individuals that pledged to serve and protect the Praetor, the Praetorian Guard was responsible for ensuring her safety at all times. The Praetor herself handpicked those serving as her guard. They were Romulans that she trusted or trusted enough not to stab her in the back, anyway. Some of them were members of her House.

Staffing the Guard with members of her House killed two birds with one stone. In her position as Praetor, she brought honor to her family. As long as she held the power, she controlled her House and the lesser Houses that owed allegiance to her House with an iron fist. They

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wouldn't dare harm a hair on her head. Similarly, that same power provided her with the opportunity to place members of her family in positions that exceeded their abilities.

"The Praetor is boarded and secure. Return to your posts. We best not keep her waiting," the Commander ground out.

With that, the woman responsible for the ship and all of those aboard turned her back on the crew. As Commander Hycom stated, with the recent appointment of the Praetor, it had been easy for her to sneak aboard and assume a vacant post among the Engineering Division. Before the Praetor came aboard, T'Re took the time to disable several comforts in the Praetorian suite that she felt the Romulan representative would have trouble doing without. That meant that shortly, her department would receive a call requesting that an Engineering Officer fix the issues post haste. She was the lowest man on the totem pole which meant that the job would fall to her. It was the best way for her to encounter the woman in a setting that could be considered private. Private enough for her to do the job that needed to be done.

After another glance down the corridor in the direction of the Praetors' Suite, T'Re turned and made her way below deck to the main engineering room. The room was well organized. Shelving units and peg boards lined the walls displaying various parts, tools, and gadgets. Drawers in the cabinets and desks were filled with different types and lengths of wire and tape. Basically, the ship carrying the Praetor and the rest of the fleet possessed the equipment necessary to perform proper maintenance. Each ship was required to possess this equipment to ensure that the fleet remained intact. Having a ship in the fleet dry dock to receive repairs while the Praetor was aboard was unacceptable. While the loss of one ship seemed a miniscule loss, it provided an opportunity for the enemies of the Praetor or the Romulan Empire to make their move. The Empire possessed several enemies, the Federation in particular.

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Since the Praetor represents the people, the Empire's enemies were her enemies as well.

With a shake of her head, T'Re made her way to the workstation that the Lieutenant assigned to her when her father used his influence as a Senator to get her a position aboard the Praetorian Fleet. Commander Hycom held an influential position, but her father had more pull.

Each member of the Engineering Division received their own workspace in the room. The goal was to ensure that the members of the department had an area to work if something went wrong with the ship and all hands were needed to complete the repairs.

Currently, she was the only one working on a project for the ship. One of the circuit boards for the control panels on the bridge needed repairs. The replacement had been installed so the control panel was in working order. Repairing the broken circuit board provided the ship with a back-up in case of failure. Another benefit of spending her time fixing the circuit board was the fact that it provided her with an opportunity to occupy her time. Sitting around doing nothing didn't suit her well.

"You there. You, girl." T'Re stopped messing with the circuit board and turned around to face the entrance to the room. There, with a hand resting on a disruptor stood the head of the Praetorian Guard. From the intelligence that the Tal Shiar gathered, they knew that T'Rehus' son held the position of Captain of the Guard. He followed her every command.

"Can I help you?" she asked.

"You would do well to respect your superiors. But that's another matter entirely," he paused and tapped the butt of the disruptor with the tip of his right index finger. "The Praetor has encountered some issues with certain comforts in her suite. She requests that an Engineering Officer make an appearance to fix these issues at once."

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She nodded and pressed her lips together tightly to prevent her thoughts from spilling out vocally. He may have a position in the Praetorian Guard as the Captain, but that did not make him any better than her. Without his mother, he would still be drudging along through his attempt at passing the War College.

Knowing that his eyes were boring holes into her back, T'Re grabbed the equipment and parts that she would need to fix the problems that she created and threw them into her bag.

"Will you hurry up?"

"One more second and I will be ready, sir."

After another glance in her bag to make sure that everything she needed was accounted for, T'Re placed the circuit board that she'd been working on earlier in the drawer at her workstation before standing up.

"Alright, I'm ready," T'Re stated.

"Thank the Elements," the Captain ground out.

He spun quickly on his heel and walked away from the engineering room without looking over his shoulder to make sure that she was following him. A brief encounter with the man and she knew that he was as arrogant as his mother. She had no time to worry over such matters. Her Commanding Officer gave her a task to accomplish and accomplish it she would. Pushing all thoughts from her mind, T'Re threw the bag over her shoulder and followed him.

She kept her eyes down as she followed the Captain of the Praetorian Guard into the suite reserved specifically for the Praetor while aboard. Unlike the quarters established to house the crew, the suite was designed to provide the reigning Praetor with all the comforts of home. They were considered comforts that the representative of the people could not be without.

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“Took you long enough to find someone. Did you have to track her down?”

“No, ma’am. I did not have to track her down.”

T’Re glanced up and noticed that the Praetor was staring at her, her dark eyes filled with a mix of confusion and recognition. Looking at the woman had been a mistake. She quickly rectified that mistake by returning her view to that of the floor. As she did so, she removed the bag from over her shoulder and placed it on the floor beside her feet.

“What do you need me to fix, ma’am?” T’Re questioned.

“Well, I would like my comms fixed first. I can’t keep sending the man that I entrust my life to the most to seek out those that I need to speak to or to perform a task for me. It hardly seems appropriate,” the Praetor stated.

“Very well, Praetor.” She picked up her bag and moved over to the comms unit. The comms unit sat in a docking station on the wall that connected to the speakers in the room allowing the Praetor to hear the message throughout the suite. If she wanted to remain connected to the ship while among the people on the colonized planets, the comm could be removed and clipped to her uniform. This meant that the Praetor would be able to remain in contact with the Fleet. It worked well when the wires were not messed with.

T’Re pulled the comm unit from the docking station and separated the covers to expose the mass of wires on the inside. Earlier she disabled the unit by pulling the green wire and replacing it with a red wire. The red wire did not support the wattage needed for the device to work. It was simple. Simple enough that others might have overlooked it at first.

Extracting a green wire from her bag, she used her slender fingers to reach into the unit and removed the red wire. As she moved to replace the green wire in the unit, T’Re heard male and female voices whispering back and forth in Rihannsu. Rihannsu was a language that closely resembled High Vulcan, a language spoken by their ancestors. Very few

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Romulans understood or spoke Rihannsu. The language spoken by both the Senate and the rest of the Romulan population was Rom'lesta. She turned her head to the right ever so slightly and noticed that the Praetor and her son were locked in an intent conversation, their voices barely louder than a whisper.

Malor and Allyan wanted to give her every advantage possible for her to succeed and go far within the Romulan Empire. With that goal in mind, money changed hands to hire a tutor fluent in Rihannsu. Years of studying and conversations entirely in High Vulcan created a noble woman fluent in the dead language. T'Re listened intently as she continued to fiddle with the comms unit. "Are you sure it is safe to speak with her in the room?" her son asked.

"You are such an idiot. High Vulcan is a dead language. I spent years teaching it to you so that no one would know of our plan even if we talk in front of them."

"So, what is our next move, mother?"

"As Praetor, I have the entire military under my control. They will do whatever I order them to do. Those that refuse to do as ordered, die. The Senators want to remain in my favor, if I promise to let them live, I doubt that they will oppose me naming myself Queen."

"What of the colonies?" he wondered.

"The people need to believe that I care about them. If they believe that, fewer groups will be willing to revolt against my control," the Praetor stated.

T'Re returned her attention to the comms unit and merged the panels together again before placing it back in the docking port. As it connected with the port, it beeped to let her know that it worked.

"What else do you need fixed, Praetor?" she asked.

As she turned around, she came face-to-face with the Praetor, an older version of her face staring back at her. Her eyes were black holes

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welcoming lost souls to open themselves up and spill their secrets to her. The pull was hard to resist but resist it T'Re did.

“Hello, daughter. It is nice to see you after so many years.”