

# The Devil Rem

## By Mark Daley 2021©

Rem had worked hard and had left the *USS Canterbury* with a promotion to Petty Officer. The captain had been full of high praise for Rem after his handling of the events around the Talosian mind stone. Rem had a particular skillset which could be taken advantage of. His talents could be put to better use in security as he had shown considerable skill in hand-to-hand combat and tactics. He was placed under the tutelage of the head of security and had started his in-depth training. Rem had thoroughly enjoyed this; he had learned all about the weapons systems and tactical systems and had showed excellent promise.

It was with a heavy heart that Rem had left the ship eight months later, but with new knowledge and training came new opportunities. He had thought long and hard on where his career would take him, at first the short route to senior officer appealed but perhaps the longer way to that lofty pinnacle could be achieved in other ways. Rem liked learning new things, he was quite physical in his approach to things, so he thought the hands-on subject matter expert way was better than book learning. Rem had been accepted as an Ensign aboard the *USS*

*Lincoln*. It was the lowest grade of commissioned officer, but quite a step up from a non-commissioned officer.

His new position was in security, and he was assigned to Lieutenant Hughes for this tour. Lieutenant Hughes was the ideal officer for Rem to learn from, not only was 'Hughie' an expert on all thing's security, but he was also easy to get along with too.

The *USS Lincoln* was a *Nova*-class ship being used for short term planetary research assessing planets for potential settlement. Ship's compliment was 78 crew. It was captained by a competent, well thought of Antaran by the name of Looloare. It was her first command.

Most of the crew were science, specialists in geology, astrophysics, xenobiology and xenobotany, with a few xeno-archaeologists. Rem's job was to assist in any security functions aboard and planet-side. He was to fully familiarise himself with all of the weapons and tactical systems, complete all of the calibration required and see to the rostering of the security teams. Although a research ship, she was armed; there were always dangers in space. Romulan ships had been harrying vessels in the sector, they didn't pick on the bigger ships, but freighters and the smaller vessels were fair game.

Orders were to proceed to Beta Canum Venaticorum, a G-type main sequence star in the Alpha quadrant to two M-class planets of interest. After that,

the ship would report to star base 80; mission length of 6 months.

Day 64 of tour, Rem had partnered with a very young but promising female Vulcan pilot called Tivull. They were on board one of the *Lincoln's* shuttlecraft, around 20,000 metres from the *Lincoln* running through the shuttle's weapons systems. Protocol required that they do this at a specified distance from the mother ship.

She was an absolute stickler for procedure and protocol like all Vulcans, but she was the best pilot on the ship despite her age.

Rem liked working with her. She was professional and polite and there wasn't any of the chatter that you got with humans. There was the fact that Vulcans had a pleasant smell to them as well, where humans did not. Rem couldn't face being cooped up on a small shuttle for too long with a human.

Rem met Tivull on the shuttle desk and she ran through the pre-flight checks after getting aboard the shuttle. The small craft was manoeuvred out of the bay to their designated point starboard of the main ship.

Rem looked at Tivull closely during their short trip out. She was tall and slender with long jet-black hair tied up as per regulation, her skin was an olive colour and she had large, oval dark eyes. The ears you couldn't miss, Rem liked Vulcan ears. Better than those broad pink flaps the humans had.

He knew that most of the human males on the ship found her attractive. He doubted many on the ship would find him attractive, but he didn't care much about that. He was short and slim with big lidless eyes with nictating eyelids, nostrils for a nose and a wide mouth filled with sharp teeth. He had a bristly scalp but no body hair, his skin was a sort of pale blue colour. His species were known for their strength and agility which was superior to Human or Vulcan.

Once the shuttle had reached its designated point Tivull carefully adjusted their position and Rem got about the work of test firing and calibrating the onboard phaser arrays against a target beamed into place from the main ship. There was quite a bit of work to do with test firings under simulated conditions, but eventually the test firings were complete.

Rem addressed the computer "Computer, complete calibration of the aft phaser array targeting system allowing for manual entry points."

"Aft phaser array targeting fully calibrated."

"Computer, calibrate forward phaser array targeting system and update calibration records."

The computer responded, "Forward phaser array targeting system calibrated and calibration records updated."

Rem said, "That should do it, Tivull. I'll go through the records later and compare them with specification."

Tivull turned in her chair to regard Rem, reflected light shining in her tightly pulled back black hair. Her eyes sparkled. “Mr Rem, I think you will find that the discrepancy between the calibrated readings and specification should only differ by 0.16%.”

“I don’t doubt it. But I still need to familiarise myself with these systems.” He gave her the wide, toothy smile which humans found rather unsettling.

Rem rubbed a hand through the bristles on his head and added, “In the heat of battle, I need to know the parameters of the phaser arrays. If I have calibrated them personally, I know they are correct. Don’t always trust the computers to do it for you.”

Tivull said: “Very well” and swivelled her chair back around to face her console. Her back straight, her long black hair still shining in the overhead lights. Her fingers danced across the board in front of her and the craft slowly pirouetted to face the planet they were in high orbit around.

The planet below had been designated the title of Beta Canum 1. Whilst just about habitable it was unsuitable for colonisation as too arid. The ship would be moving onto the next candidate after breaking orbit in twelve hours.

Tivull said, "I have completed the internal diagnostics as requested and unless there is anything else required, I will return to base."

Rem said, "I want to try something that I have been working on. We have a little time before we are due back"

Tivull swivelled her chair around to face him again, this time her right eyebrow was raised quizzically. "May I ask what it is you wish to try?"

Rem gave her another toothy smile and said, "Sure, I'm going to try to route ship's power to a hand phaser. It's never been tried as far as I recall. The computer simulations indicate it can be done. I have modified my personal sidearm to accept beamed ship's power to augment the phaser's range and yield. The battery should be able to accept the additional power. I have cleared it through Lieutenant Hughes." Rem opened his mouth to explain further but only got part of a word out.

A small Romulan warbird had just decloaked aft of the *Lincoln*!

Rem shouted: "Get us planet side fast. We can't outrun or outgun that!"

He leapt for the console.

The small shuttle craft was violently rocked by the shock wave of a tremendous explosion. The *Lincoln* had been hit at close range by multiple disruptor blasts. The

hull had exploded, the nacelles sent spinning into space by the force of the blast.

Rem was knocked to the deck but caught a glimpse of the warbird turning towards the shuttle. It was likely now targeting the small craft. He leapt to his feet to stand at the console, his fingers keying in data; the subspace radio was jammed!

The small craft was rocked again, this time by Tivull initiating evasive manoeuvres to try and evade the warbird's targeting systems; the manoeuvres temporarily overloading the inertial dampers.

There was another violent blast right outside of the ship, Rem and Tivull were both jolted from their seats. Console relays blew with showers of sparks. The computer sounded a warning. "Warning, Structural integrity is at forty percent." The shuttle must have caught a close blast from the warbird.

The main consoles were now smoking from burst relays and the cabin was filling with smoke. Tivull's hands moved expertly over the controls, reconfiguring console layouts. In all the commotion Rem had failed to see the big drops of green blood all over the console and front screen.

Despite the rolling and bucking shuttle deck Rem got the environmental controls working to clear the smoke. He quickly accessed the aft phaser array. The targeting system was offline, but he was able to get the manual targeting system operating very quickly. He

targeted the starboard nacelle of the warbird and fired a short blast.

Success! There was an eruption of fire as the starboard nacelle exploded. The warbird sharply banked left and up out of sight, trailing smoke. The painted feathers on its hull clearly visible. It was out of the fight for now.

The damaged shuttle had lost main engines and was pulled into the gravity of the planet. Rem and Tivull had no time to react as the shuttle slammed into the upper atmosphere of the planet, much too fast and at too acute an angle. The shuttle's now useless engines could not pull them out of the pull of gravity; they were going down.

Tivull was pushing the structural integrity of the shuttle past its limits. It was groaning like some sort of tortured metal beast. The only control they had were the attitude thrusters which, every time they fired, jolted the ship as if someone had taken a large hammer to the hull. The computer kept warning them of imminent structural failure or shields dropping to low power. Rem turned them off.

Superheated air was slamming into the shuttle, but the shields were holding; they managed to get the nose up and correct re-entry. The attitude thrusters were firing



to scrub speed and to correct a tendency to slowly roll to starboard.

Rem looked at Tivull for the first time since the attack, his jaw dropped. Her neck and lower face and the front of her tunic were a burned and bloody mess. He could now see blood all over the shattered console and the front screen.

She had taken the full blast of a burst plasma conduit under her console. She was still at her post despite her devastating injuries and yet had said nothing.

Scrambling around, Rem found a field medic kit and quickly loaded a hypospray with some Levomorphine. Despite the motions of the ship, he managed to get some into her arm. It would not affect her concentration but would dull the pain. Tivull never stopped what she was doing, manually correcting the flight path and initiating computer assistance in finding a landing spot at the last moment. Rem held onto Tivull tightly and braced himself against the shattered console.

The ground came up very fast! Without main engines these shuttle craft had the aerodynamics of a brick.

There was a blur of dusty ground and scrub and then – impact!

Rem opened his eyes, there was the sound and smell of burning and the pop and crackle of hot metal, his

vision was blurred by billowing smoke. He coughed and struggled to his feet swaying unsteadily. His vision cleared a little as the wind blew some of the smoke away from the crash site.

He looked down rather groggily at his uniform, some rips, and tears but virtually intact. All he had were bruises and some small cuts. There was a big lump on his head and that explained how he had lost consciousness. It was incredible that not only had he survived but he had done so without injury. He had been thrown clear of the wreck, which at this point was a smoking ruin.

Rem's head shot up and his eyes darted across the crash site. Tivull, where was Tivull??

He quickly began searching for the pilot. It wasn't long before he found her behind some hull plating. He ran over and carefully checked for vital signs, nothing. She was dead and had been for a little while.

Rem carefully turned her over and cradled her head in his lap. She looked almost asleep, beautiful and at rest. He brushed some of the dirt off the portion of her face not burned or bloodied.

Rem's people didn't have the capacity for crying, but his sorrow was as deep as any human's. His heart was broken. He had not known Tivull long but the fact that she had stayed at her post despite severe injuries, saving his life in the process deeply affected him. Her young life was

cut short. He lifted his head and wailed into the smoke and the wind.

The *Lincoln* was gone, all hands lost. He was the only survivor. He hung his head for a moment in utter despair and sorrow filled him. He tried to calm himself and think of what to do next.

Rem picked up the young Vulcan's body and carried her clear of the wreck. He laid her down in a little hollow and carefully smoothed her uniform out and patted down the hair that had escaped her hair band. He then began searching for a suitable implement to clear some dirt and affect her internment.

The burial took an hour or so in the sweltering heat and thin air, he finished off by placing stones into the top of the dirt. He was done, his tunic was streaked with blood from Tivull and himself and was sodden with sweat.

He looked around for some shelter and saw a deep rocky outcrop nearby, he made his way over to get out of the sun. He passed out through physical and emotional exhaustion, the effects of the blow to his head and the sheer need to switch off.

Rem carefully scanned the horizon with his field glasses. Nothing stirred except the dust devils and the shimmering air.

He stowed the glasses into his bag and reached for his water bottle. He took several long swigs and then stoppered it. The water tasted muddy; Rem had boiled the

water to kill anything nasty in it. Boiling killed the bugs but didn't do anything for the flavour.

He jumped down from his viewpoint on the ridge and made his way back to his makeshift camp just a dozen metres away. This was the perfect spot for his camp as it was close to a good vantage point, had some shelter under a rocky overhang and was close to his wrecked and useless ship. His basic training had taught him to stay close to the ship and await rescue.

Rescue was overdue, Rem had been here for two weeks. It was obvious that the *Lincoln* had not had the time to warn Starfleet. Surely, they would know the ship was missing as it would not have made scheduled calls back? Not knowing what his fate was the worst part of his ordeal.

Life on this hot and dusty rock was tough going but Tivull and the ship's computer had made an excellent choice of location to 'land' here – if that was the word to use. There was water nearby and scrub vegetation, but that was about it. Rem had managed to save a geology field kit from the wreck of the shuttle which meant he had field glasses, a water canteen, and some scientific instruments he had no use for. Thankfully, Rem still had his phaser plus one additional power pack – he strictly rationed using the weapon. He only ever used it when his fire went out as starting fires in the thin air was almost impossible.

It was only the pilot's skill that had saved Rem's life. Sadly, that pilot had lost hers, she was buried under a cairn of stones next to the wreck of the shuttle.

Rem could not afford to waste time on thinking about how he had got here even though he had lost all his crewmates, that alone had threatened to plunge him into despair. His daily survival was such a struggle. Luckily, he had enough water to live on. Food, however, was scarce. Very scarce.

The only things he could find to eat were the grubs he dug up from the roots of vegetation and the small furry animals he laid snares for. There was nothing else that he could find that was edible. The thick, pulpy plants he found were too bitter to eat.

None of these food sources were very palatable, but it was better than starving. Rem worried about strange micronutrients or poisons that were harmless to indigenous life but harmful to him. The first week here was plagued with vomiting and diarrhoea after he had eaten the local fauna, but this second week was better as he was getting used to it. His weight had gone down quite a bit and he was permanently hungry.

All the ship's supplies had gone up in the fire after the crash so there was nothing to supplement his diet.

Rem made himself comfortable in his rocky shelter to escape the heat and light of the midday sun; the temperature here got to 40 degrees Celsius during the

day, but dropped to single figures at night, meaning he had to keep a small fire going despite the risk. It was no mean feat in the thin air, the fire was always very smoky.

Some sleep would be good right now, the smoke from the low fire was enough to keep the biting insects at bay. Rem needed to sleep during the day as much as possible as it was simply too hot and bright to venture far out during the day. Most of his activities were at night. He settled down as best he could on his bed of brush.

Rem awoke with a start and stretched out; the insects had begun their nightly chorus. Something that Rem remembered from his own world. He felt a pang of homesickness.

It was dark and so much cooler when Rem stepped out from underneath his deep rocky outcrop. He stood there a while gazing up at the night sky. It was a marvellous sight to see. The stars sparkled in the sky, millions upon millions of points of light, twinkling away.

Around one of those points of light was his own world, it would be over forty light years away from this barren rock in the back end of nowhere. He wondered if anyone on Baatix, his home world, would be gazing up at the star he currently orbited.

His eyes scanned the sky from horizon to horizon. Soon the larger of the two moons would rise and flood the land with reflected light. The second moon would add its glow several hours later.

Just there, movement! His sharp eyes caught something moving against the backdrop of stars. It was too small to make out any sort of shape, it certainly wasn't anything made on this planet as it was devoid of intelligent life and always had been.

Rem hoped it would be some ship searching for him. He quickly went back to his pack and got his field glasses out. He put the magnification on full and searched for the shape.

There! It was lower now, probably out of orbit and high in the atmosphere. He strained his eyes to see in the dark.

He could just make out a shape. His heart dropped like a stone. It was a Romulan warbird!! Rem turned and quickly kicked dirt over his fire. His heart lurched in his chest; they had found him!

The Warbird *T'Haz*, banked to port and took up position to commence another sector sweep for the Federation shuttle. The sweeps were going very slowly due to the damaged systems all over the ship. The shuttle's phaser shot had taken out the starboard nacelle along with a host of ship's systems. Four crew had died in the resulting plasma fire. Their bodies had been unceremoniously dumped into the air lock and ejected into space.

The *T'Haz* was no longer able to make warp and was on limited power. The crippled ship had only just

made it to stable orbit to lick its wounds, the extensive repairs needed had taken almost a week. The hull had been holed in several places and the plasma fires after losing the nacelle had knocked out primary sensors and the main computer. Life support was on half capacity, if the four crewmen had not died the sub commander was going to sacrifice some crew to make sure there was air for the rest.

Sub-Lieutenant Risal finished her preliminary sweep in sector three and started on sector four. Risal had been searching for the lost Federation shuttle for a week. The very fact that the system was not swarming with Federation ships paid tribute to their surprise attack and destruction of the larger vessel and the jamming of subspace channels.

She raised her head to refocus her eyes after hours bent over the scanner. The main computer system was down, and she was using a hastily rigged secondary system to run limited scanners. The ship could not even run lifeform scans. Infra-red was being used to pick up heat signatures. She caught the eye of Sub-Commander Cojuth who was glaring at her.

Risal immediately straightened and saluted the Sub-Commander with her arm across her chest.

“Nothing to report *Sub-Commander*.”

Cojuth said, “Back to the scanners Sub-Lieutenant unless you wish to join your comrades in space.”



“At your command Sub-Commander,” Risal said, bending forward to the scanner. She was doing her duty to the best of her ability, but she was in emotional turmoil, it was her first ship assignment and it had been a big shock to see her vessel openly destroy a Federation vessel without provocation.

The internal plasma fire on her ship after the Federation shuttle had fired on the *T’Haz* had shaken her badly. She had not seen death before. It took all her composure to remain calm and professional amongst the crew, any signs of weakness would not be tolerated. She adjusted the scanner focus with a shaking hand.

Some two hours later Risal thought she had seen something in the infra-red range. She refocused the scanner, there were indistinct shapes reflecting the infra-red light she had pulsed down at the planet’s surface. It could only be one thing, the Federation shuttle. They were the only metal structures on the planet’s surface. There was a small heat signature nearby which could only be the remains of a fire. That meant at least one survivor!

Without breaking her attention at the scanner, she quickly keyed in the co-ordinates to the ship’s helm computer before uploading the data from her scanner.

She quickly straightened and saluted as before. “I have located the Federation vessel Sub-Commander. The data has been linked to helm. It is confirmed at least one survivor.”

Sub-Commander Cojuth swivelled in his chair to bark an order at the helm officer. "Helm, Lay in a course to the Federation vessel. Standard landing procedure."

The helm officer replied, "At your command Sub-Commander. Planet fall in twenty minutes."

Now the Sub-Commander would get his revenge, he would personally torture and kill any one he found down there. He rose from his seat to prepare for landing. He shot a glance at Risal before leaving, he had the impression that her heart wasn't in this. He reminded himself to have a one-to-one with her on his return.

Rem knew he didn't have much time before the Romulans appeared. It was only sheer luck that he had spotted the ship. If he hadn't seen it, the Warbird would have been on him before he was aware. Rem didn't want to be unprepared when meeting Romulans.

He grabbed his pack and made his way to his water hole and began scooping big handfuls of mud and spreading it liberally all over him, it took him a few minutes, but he could now no longer be picked up on infra-red. His lifesigns couldn't be masked, he could live with that as it was never pinpoint accurate and could be blocked by terrain. Rem checked his phaser and replaced it on his belt. He wouldn't get a chance to use it much as it would give his position away. He had an idea though and scabbled around in the loose stones nearby. He picked up

several heavy loose round stones that would fit in his hand easily and carefully put them in his pack along with a long strip of material he had ripped from his tunic.

Satisfied, he made his way up the ridge and carefully selected his position. This is where he would make his stand, he couldn't run forever, and he couldn't hide.

The *T'Haz* entered the upper atmosphere gingerly, the loss of power would make this a rough ride. The ship's engineer had said they would be able to land and make orbit again but getting back to Romulan space would not be possible just on impulse power. They may not make it out of the system as the cloaking device could not be used either. They would be easy pickings for any Federation vessel they came across.

Radio silence had been maintained, the Federation must not know that the ship was operating in this area, it was a big risk going down to the planet. The Federation shuttle's comms had been jammed and it had been two weeks since the initial attack.

Sub-Commander Cojuth had readied himself for landing, his heart was pounding in anticipation of the fight ahead. He had no idea how many Federation personnel were on the planet, there was at least one, as the heat signature of a fire had been picked up. One would have to do for now. Cojuth needed something to vent his anger

on, Humans and their allies would pay for what they had done.

The Romulan star was going to go supernova. Starfleet had offered to help with evacuation of Romulus. A Federation plan had been formulated by Admiral Jean-Luc Picard, despite stiff opposition from within the Federation, to put together a fleet of ships to assist. This fleet was attacked and destroyed by rogue synthetic lifeforms whilst en route.

There was no rescue for Romulus. Hundreds of years of Romulan aggression and hatred to everything non-Romulan, had meant they had no friends. Any alliances they had formed had dissolved in acrimony. No one would help. Starfleet would send no more ships.

The surviving Romulans that had managed to flee the destruction of their planet had formed the Romulan Free State. This body was determined to make Starfleet pay in blood.

What meagre resources the Free State had were focused entirely on the destruction of whatever Starfleet ships it could find. The *T'Haz* was one of these resources. A lone wolf pursuing whatever prey it could find.

The *T'Haz* approached the landing site on thrusters, throwing up plumes of dust into the night sky. It slowly turned full circle, limited electronic senses probing the night. The ship settled on its jointed legs, looking

every inch the monstrous killing machine that it was. With a metallic thunk, the ship was down. There was an electronic hum as the landing ramp was lowered. Cojuth and two armed guards advanced cautiously down the ramp.

They were being observed through alien, lidless eyes.

Rem looked over the Romulan ship through his field glasses. It was a sorry sight. His manually aimed phaser blast had done quite a bit of damage. The starboard nacelle was missing and there was some heavy patching of the hull all around it. He saw the tell-tale signs of a plasma fire. Rem knew there would be some internal damage too.

As it had made the landing it stood to reason that it would be used to lift off again too. It was looking like this was Rem's only hope of getting off this planet!

He switched his attention to what the Romulans were doing. They were scanning the area with hand scanners and poking around the shuttle wreck. It was soon his rock shelter's turn to get some attention.

He watched with mounting anger as one of the Romulans started to move rocks off the grave Rem had dug for Tivull. The Romulan seemed satisfied that the grave contained nothing more than a body after a moment or two and moved off to join his comrades.

Rem stowed his field glasses in his bag and moved off to circle around the group below him, he was careful to keep some terrain between himself and the group. He stooped and crouched down. He was now around 200 metres away from the lead Romulan guard. Carefully Rem removed a heavy stone and the strip of tunic from his bag, then he carefully wrapped the stone in a few loops of strip, leaving the two ends in one hand. He carefully surveyed his escape route before rising slightly. By the light of the moon, he steadied himself.

Rem's left hand picked up a pebble and tossed it over towards the left of the lead Romulan guard. The Romulan jerked his head left and raised his carbine.

Rem swung the slingshot around his head twice before launching the stone at the Romulans head. The stone described a perfect arc and hit the Romulan on the right side of his head with a sickening crack. The Romulan's legs folded, and he pitched forward into the dust.

Rem was off, sprinting for his life. He circled right this time and dived down under some rocks. He saw some wild disruptor fire piercing the night aimed towards the position he had just left. He didn't have much time. Disruptor fire turned night into day, his previous position and close to where he was now coming under heavy bombardment. Rem was half blinded by the light, and he scrambled back, which brought more fire onto his

position. He managed to roll clear and was up and running...

Cojuth was scanning the perimeter through his handheld scanner, his weapon at the ready. He was getting only background lisesign chatter. There were small animals in the undergrowth interfering with the readings. He could not get a fix on anything bigger. His patience was wearing thin, he had expected two or more crew on the shuttle. There was one body and the signs of one other crewmember and that was it. This remaining crewmember was proving difficult to pin down. When that crewmember was found alive Cojuth would relish personally ending their life. If they were Vulcan, so much the better.

The two guards Cojuth had bought with him were scanning the area with weapons drawn ready to fire on anything. Two guards were deemed sufficient for this exercise. Cojuth could not spare anymore crew for this. Four crew had died in space and that had stretched ship operations. He only had three crew left onboard.

Cojuth dropped his scanner back into its pouch to sweep around with his rifle. As he brought the weapon up, he heard a loud meaty crack off to his left. He spun around in time to see his lead guard pitch forward onto his face. There was a big, circular depression in the fallen man's head. Cojuth brought his weapon around to the right and laid down heavy fire from where he thought the attack had come from. He risked a glance back to the fallen

guard, the remaining guard made a gesture with his hand, the fallen man was dead.

There was movement and a small sound further off to the right. Cojuth trained his rifle quickly over to that position and fired again. Nothing moved.

Cojuth signalled his remaining guard, his fingers flashed a clear message. He was to circle around left to get behind their quarry. He himself would circle right and they would meet in the middle.

Rem was tiring due to the thin air and two weeks of not eating properly. He could hear one Romulan circling around to his left and the officer circling around to his right. Rem still had his phaser, but he couldn't use that just yet. He could not give away his position until he was sure he could do so and win the firefight. The Romulans were wearing armour and could take several phaser shots at close range.

If he could subdue the two Romulans now circling around to his position he was in with a chance at getting to the ship.

The Romulans had used their weapons, and no one had come down the ship's ramp to help, he concluded that the rest of the crew were either under orders to stay put or were limited in numbers and could not be spared. Either option would suit as he didn't want any more company.



Rem pulled his phaser and thumbed it to maximum, it had a full charge. He carefully concealed himself and waited for the Romulan coming from his left as he was the nearest to him. The guard was a fool, he was making plenty of noise. The moon would be behind him making for a silhouette, it was going to be a costly mistake for the Romulan to make.

The Romulan promptly appeared, Rem glanced nervously behind to make sure that the officer wasn't coming up behind him. Nothing yet.

Rem returned his focus forward and carefully sighted his phaser, he fired! The shot pierced the night and hit the guard square in the abdomen underneath his armour. The guard let out a surprised 'oof' sound and fell over backwards. Rem was up and vaulting over the rocks in front, he slid down into a depression by the side of the downed guard and turned to see where the officer was. Rem could hear him making clumsy progress toward where he had fired from.

The downed guard Rem had just phasered let out a gargled croak before falling silent. Rem knew that he had breathed his last.

Rem carefully started moving backwards on his stomach; he wasn't going to make the same mistake the guard had made by making a silhouette against the moon. He put a few meters distance between him and the dead guard before creeping off left and making his way silently

down to the warbird, all the time careful to keep from giving his position away.

Risal was getting more and more panicked. Cojuth had told her and the two remaining crew to stay at their posts. It was her, the helm officer and the ship's engineer alone on the ship. She had heard the disrupter fire from outside and then nothing for ages. Then the sound of another weapon, this time something different, maybe a phaser?

Risal had no weapon with her, none of the bridge crew did. Romulans didn't give weapons to crew on board ships as they didn't trust crew not to try and mutiny. Weapons were only allowed by senior officers *outside* of the ship. She just had to stay put and do nothing, if she ventured outside of the ship, it was leaving your post and that carried a death penalty. She couldn't trust the other two crew either, they would surely kill her if she disobeyed orders.

There was one thing for certain and that was she wanted to live. It had not been her idea to join this mission she had effectively been press ganged, Since the fall of Romulus this new political system was hell bent on revenge. It was a warped and twisted way of looking at things. Romulan civilisation was doomed unless things changed.

Risal busied herself with monitoring what she could with the systems that were working. She didn't

think that what was happening outside was going the Sub-Commander's way. At least the air coming in through the open ramp was a relief.

Cojuth heard the phaser fire and ran towards the sound, he knew it meant that his remaining guard was dead, it was of no use hiding from an assailant that had killed his two guards using stealth and cunning. He would be next, cut down without ever seeing his opponent.

Rounding a pile of rocks Cojuth saw the body of his guard. He was face up and illuminated by the light of the moon. As Cojuth moved closer he saw the phaser burn in the guard's abdomen, it had been placed perfectly between the join of the top armour to that protecting the waist, right in the middle of the articulation between the two. A perfect shot into the only weakness of the armour.

Cojuth gritted his teeth, it seemed that he had underestimated his opponent. The only place his opponent would be going now was back to the ship, his ship!

He broke into a run, his carbine pointed out in front with his fingers tight around the grip. He skirted around the rock shelter back towards the ship, he could now see it close by. Suddenly there was movement! Before he could react, his carbine was snatched from him and sent whirling into the rocks to smash. Something fast and hard slammed into his throat and he stumbled backwards, shocked and gasping for air, both hands

clutching at his throat as he struggled to breathe. He fell to his knees and looked up through tear-filled eyes. He finally got to see his opponent. Despite the agony in his throat and his struggling to breathe properly, he almost laughed out loud.

What was standing before him was short and thin and caked in thick, dried mud, the only bits not obscured were the large, lidless eyes and the wide tooth filled mouth. This '*devil*' had killed two of his best men but stood no taller than a child. Cojuth thought that he easily weighed twice what was standing before him. He could do nothing as he watched the *devil* raise a phaser and shoot him. The world went dark.

Rem regarded his heavily stunned foe, a Sub-Commander no less from the insignia on his tunic. He wasted no time and quickly used the makeshift sling in his bag to tie the Romulan's hands together behind his back. The Sub-Commander would be out of action for hours, plenty of time for what Rem had in mind.

Rem turned and, with phaser in hand, walked over to the ship and then cautiously proceeded up the ramp.

He saw no signs of life as he entered the ship. He knew there would be Romulans waiting for him, but he didn't know how many. He advanced toward the front of the ship where he hoped the Bridge was. Rem was passing a closed door on his left just as it swished open! A Romulan launched himself from the darkened room and

grabbed at Rem's throat with both hands. Rem's phaser went skittering away across the floor as he instinctively raised his hands in self-defence.

Rem blocked the Romulan's clumsy attack and bought up his right knee to connect with the man's groin. He followed it with a palm strike to the man's nose. There was a spray of green blood as the cartilage in his nose crunched flat. The Romulan fell sideways to the floor, unconscious. From his tunic insignia the Romulan was an engineer, certainly no fighter.

Rem quickly retrieved his phaser and shot the Romulan on heavy stun before turning around to go back to the ship's ramp. He found the ramp controls off to one side and activated the ramp closure. He watched as the ramp slowly folded itself back into its closed position to form a tight seal. Rem didn't want anyone creeping up behind him.

Rem found the Bridge at the front of the ship; the door was open. In readiness, he checked his phaser was still on stun. He wanted to be able to communicate with who was left. This ship was his ride home and he didn't know how to fly it!

Gingerly he approached the open door, he stepped through quickly, phaser sweeping the room. He saw the Romulan launch his attack just in time. Rem flicked his phaser to the other hand as the Romulan jumped from his hiding place under a console to aim a punch at Rem's

head. Rem parried the blow and brought his elbow up to connect with the Romulan's jaw. The Romulan staggered back, stunned. Rem followed up with a roundhouse kick to the Romulan's head, all the time still holding his phaser. The *coup de grace* was a lingering burn of the phaser on stun.

Rem glanced at his opponent; the tunic insignia was helm officer he thought, but he wasn't certain. The security briefings he'd had went through the ranks of most of the more common antagonists that Starfleet might face, Romulans included. He couldn't remember them all though. Rem's attention was now on the rest of the room, were there any more assailants?

A whimpering sound over to the left of the command chair in the middle of the Bridge had Rem's attention. He approached cautiously, phaser at the ready.

He saw a female Romulan cowering beneath her console, she looked up at him with fear in her eyes.

Rem gestured with the phaser for her to stand. As she nervously got to her feet he said, 'How many crew?' She looked at him blankly, but with undisguised terror in her eyes.

Rem realised that there was no universal translator, his comm badge was long gone. The computer on this ship either didn't recognize English or wasn't working. This was going to be more difficult than he realized. He tried his very limited basic Vulcan hoping that

would work. The Romulans language was based on this but was still very different.

He said 'Vu tor haurok hash teraya-eingelsu?' Translated it was 'you make bird fly Federation?' It was enough to get her attention. She nodded. Rem hoped that it was an interspecies movement that meant yes!!

He tried 'Kilp su'us?' which was "how many crew?" She held up all ten fingers. There were three on the surface and three onboard, where were the other four? He struggled for the right word, 'Wilat' he said which meant "where?" Hoping she would pick up on the fact he was asking about the remaining four crew.

She said 'Ma-toi' – dead....

Rem could relax a little if what she said was true, but he couldn't help noticing how agitated she was. She was shaking like a leaf and staring at him open mouthed. He tried to calm her down by saying 'Rai dash-for', which he hoped meant 'no hurt'. He smiled at her, but she gave out a little shriek! His wide, tooth-filled mouth giving her completely the wrong impression of his intent.

Risal was shaking, she was utterly terrified! The engineering chief had gone to face off the alien that was making his way aboard. He had not come back.

The helm officer had tried to fight the alien when he came onto the bridge. This alien, this *devil*, had beaten him easily and then shot him with a weapon. She didn't know if he was alive or dead. What was going to become

of her? She had been cowering under her console when the alien had approached. He, it, had motioned her to her feet with its weapon. The appearance of the alien was truly frightening. Romulans by nature were xenophobic, this was the first non-Romulan Risal had ever seen.

She stared at him in open-mouthed horror. The creature was quite small with big, lidless eyes and a wide mouth full of sharp teeth; the patches of skin she could see were *blue*. The smell of the creature was nauseating in the close confines of the bridge. She didn't know if it was the dried mud the alien was covered in, or the creature itself. Why was it covered in mud? She couldn't begin to fathom.

The creature shocked her more than she could bear when it spoke! It didn't use Rihannsu, it used old high Vulcan and said, 'You make bird fly Federation'. The syntax was practically non-existent, but she understood it as meaning can you make the ship fly to Federation space. She had meekly nodded at the alien.

The creature had then asked about crew numbers, she answered, but had then shrieked when the creature had said 'No hurt' but had showed those rows of sharp teeth in its mouth!

Risal didn't want to go back to the Romulan Free State, it was anything but a Free State. The Tal Shiar were exerting more and more pressure to militarise all the Romulan ships that were left.



She had been living on a converted freighter that was packed with civilians, no room to herself and no prospects of getting off the ship unless it was to work on the derelict Borg cube that the Tal Shiar controlled. There was not a chance that she wanted to go anywhere near the cube.

The *T'Haz* had come calling and she had been forced into service. You didn't say no to the Tal Shiar unless you wanted to be executed on the spot for treason.

This alien, although truly frightening, could be the way to a better future. What if she were to surrender to the Federation? What would become of her? The Federation could not be as it was portrayed by the Tal Shiar. So many alien races could not co-exist effectively, and from what she had heard peacefully, without higher ideals.

Rem needed to get things moving, he had to move the two unconscious Romulans somewhere secure and keep them there. The Sub-Commander was out on the surface, but out cold. He need not worry about him.

First thing to take care of was to make sure the ship had no more crew on board. He gently gripped the Romulan female's arm and gestured with the phaser to move off and out of the Bridge. With the Romulan leading the way every part of the ship was carefully searched.

Rem searched some crew quarters; they had a simple bed with a sort of shower/toilet combo. He chose

one of these quarters to put his captives in, at least they would be ok in there with access to water, at least. To make sure any captives could not get access to comms or computer, Rem carefully disabled anything in the room that looked as though it had a screen or keyboard. As an afterthought, Rem threw in a couple of medkits he had found in another room. One of the Romulans, the engineer, had a bad facial injury after Rem had broken his nose.

Moving the two unconscious Romulans had been hard work as Rem had to do it whilst keeping an eye on the Romulan female. Training a phaser on her whilst dragging dead weight around was no fun, he finally had the two unconscious bodies in the crew quarters after grunting and sweating at the effort. Rem took a moment to get his breath back before using his phaser on high power to fuse the door shut to the crew quarters. He tested the door, and it wouldn't budge; it would do for now.

The *T'Haz* slowly lifted on thrusters, clouds of dust and grit were kicked up high in the air. Its insect legs slowly retracted into its belly. The craft wobbled slightly as it lifted into the sky, gathering pace as it did so.

The ship was shaking and rattling and there were groans of protest from the superstructure, the limited computer control was keeping everything optimal, for now at least. Shields and trajectory were holding. Risal was a science officer but had cross trained as a pilot as

most bridge crew were on these ships. With limited crew everyone had to double up as something else, she was doing an adequate job in getting airborne and back to orbit.

Rem was keeping a close watch on what the young Romulan was doing, he didn't want her using the subspace radio at all or doing something to prevent the ship getting to orbit.

He had the name of the system's planet and that is all that was needed to get help here. Starfleet would have known the last position of the *Lincoln*, too.

Finally, the *T'Haz* made stable orbit, it was a low orbit that would start to slowly spiral in over the course of several days, but it was stable for now. It was technically Federation space; he doubted the ship could go much further anyway.

He gestured the Romulan away from the console and moved over to sit in her vacant seat. He studied the comms console for a little while, he recognised some of the letters and numbers. He keyed in what he thought was the right sequence for the Starfleet emergency channel and was rewarded with a light on the panel.

He said, in what he hoped was a firm voice "Emergency assistance required, Beta Canum 1. Possible Romulan aggressors in area. *USS Lincoln* crew on board disabled warbird."

He set that to repeat and sat back, he was a little overwhelmed by events. He had not come to terms with the fact that the entire crew of a Federation research vessel had been murdered in cold blood in a surprise attack. His friends and colleagues were all gone forever, he had buried the Vulcan that had saved his life. He could never repay her for her heroism. He vowed that he would find her parents and tell them face to face what an utterly courageous officer she was.

The Romulan officer was watching him. Rem didn't think she was any danger to him. She had been willing to help him and didn't seem like the uptight overly military Romulans that he had seen in briefing videos. He believed she was an unwilling pawn in what had played out between the *Lincoln* and the *T'Haz*.

His thoughts were rudely curtailed by the subspace radio crackling into life.

"This is Captain Terence of the *USS Exeter* calling *USS Lincoln* crew, we are currently *enroute* to your position. Please stand by for further instructions. ETA, 4 hours."

Rem had never been happier in hearing a human voice, if he were capable of weeping, he would.

The sun was approaching its zenith when Cojuth stirred and rolled onto his side coughing, the sweat rolled into his eyes, and he tried to blink his vision clear. His head pounded and the pain in his throat was making him

cough and retch. He couldn't move his arms and realised that his hands were bound behind him.

Why was it so hot? He rolled onto his front and tried to untie his hands. After struggling for what seemed like an hour, he had his hands free.

The first thing he did was to strip off his armour and tunic, the heat was oppressive.

Groggily he got to his feet, swaying from side to side he made his way down the slope, thirst was now added to the pain in his head and throat. He stopped in his tracks; his ship was gone!

Rage boiled inside him.

Quickening his pace, he made it down to the rock shelter that had been used by the survivor of the Federation shuttle crash. He looked around, there was nothing of any use except the detritus that that thing, that *devil*, had left behind before stealing his ship!

If he could have screamed out, he would, but the pain in his throat stopped him. His thoughts were whirling but he managed to calm himself a little to look around. He needed water and he needed to think of a way out of this mess.

At the back of the shelter Cojuth found a plastic bottle full of water, he pulled the top off and greedily downed the contents, wincing at the pain in his throat. He angrily threw the now empty bottle to the ground and sat down.

He was still too hot; he pulled his undershirt off over his head.

The rock shelter was a little cooler than outside, he still felt hot and groggy, perhaps some rest out of the sun would clear his thoughts. His head was spinning so he lay back on the rocks and promptly passed out. Dehydration and a prolonged spell under heavy stun had taken their toll on him.

Cojuth was rudely awoken by a jab in his ribs. There was a strong light in his eyes, he put up his hands to block the light, but his wrists were grabbed and painfully bent behind him. He was forced to his knees. Metal shackles were placed on his wrists, and he was pulled to his feet. He tried to speak but his tongue was swollen and his throat painful, he could barely stand upright.

The light in his face was extinguished to be replaced by smaller lights to his right and left.

Someone right in front of him said "Sub-Commander Cojuth, you are under arrest." The face of his accuser came into focus in the dim light. Human!

Starfleet had him now and Cojuth would answer for his crimes.

Risal was late, she quickened her pace. She wanted to set a good example to all, being late wouldn't be the way to do it.

The doors were just closing as she got there but she managed to squeeze through with a smile of apology to the guard on the door.

She sat down in a spare seat after drawing a glare from the lecturer for being late and got her computer out and signed in. This lecture was called 'Plasma containment using Monopoles'. She couldn't wait....

The previous twelve months had been a blur after being transferred to the *Exeter*. At first, she was seen as an enemy combatant and treated accordingly. There had been extensive debriefings where she had been as honest as she could be. Trust in her had to be earned and she knew that. There was a lot of very useful information that the debriefing team were keen to learn. She gave up what she knew willingly.

Forensic examination of the senior officers' logs on the *T'Haz* and intelligence from other sources within the Free State had backed her story. Risal had been forced into service against her will on threat of death.

She could not be handed back to the Romulans as there was no stable entity to hand her back to. Even if she were handed back, she would face summary execution. Risal pleaded to remain, she didn't want to go back, she wanted freedom.

After several months she was given a sort of freedom, although she had a curfew and was watched around the clock it was all very low key. Starfleet had to be sure she was not a spy or some sort of saboteur. Risal didn't really mind the surveillance, it was a lot better than life on the freighter or life serving on a Tal Shiar vessel. She had her own quarters now and even friends and a

social life, people wanted to know everything about her, they were for the most part, accepting.

She had been sponsored and was accepted into a university. She had been a science officer, but the Romulan idea of that post and the Federation's were very different. She had a lot of learning to do and needed an accredited 'qualification' before she could be offered a post anywhere on a Federation ship.

Starfleet distrusted Romulans, and for good reason. Whilst she could join Starfleet, she could also apply for any Federation vessel that would have her. That was her goal now she was free of the shackles of the Romulan Free State.

It would be an uphill struggle for Risal, but she owed all of her good fortune to her sponsor, Rem.