

NOVA TREK

TREASURES

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Commander Kang finds himself
fighting for Peace- against his
own people!

Nova Trek: Treasures

By

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He moved through the corridors of the *Enterprise* with the smoothness and ease of a trained athlete. Standing at least half a head taller than most human males on board, his strength and agility were clear in every step and move he made.

The black shirt and pants, the silvery over-shirt, gold sash and close cut beard went with his somewhat shaggy hair to give Commander Kang of the Klingon Imperial Fleet a presence most non-Klingons found somewhat intimidating.

But Kang's thoughts were not on intimidation- far from it in fact. Instead, as he walked along, his thoughts were on a day almost a week past- The last time he'd set foot on Qo'nos. Ordinarily, he would have stayed on the *Cho'Mar* and not bothered beaming down. But Chancellor Gorkon himself had requested his presence in the Great Hall. Theirs was a friendship that went back to their days at the Academy- farther. There had been an alliance between their houses since their great-grandfathers time. It was also a friendship that Kang had been careful never to test since Gorkon gained the

Chancellorship. As such, upon arriving in the Hall, Kang still had no idea why he'd been summoned.

The Great Hall was somewhat dimly lit by Human standards. Stone beams rose up toward the ceiling and into the shadows. Only pools of light allowed one to see that the only chair in the chamber was positioned at the far end of the Hall- under the red and gold, tri-bladed symbol of the Klingon Empire.

There had been four councilmen in the Hall when Kang entered. These men, Gorkon dismissed immediately. It had been all Kang could do to keep from smiling as the hanger's- on left with their cloaks between their tails.

Gorkon stood before his chair till they left, the red and grey leather of his tunic catching and reflecting some of the dim light- the ancient claw he used as a walking stick always at his side. Then, he guided his friend over to a view screen. On it was an image of the Imperial Shipyard- one space dock in particular.

The ring of beard that Gorkon wore along the rims of both jawlines met at the rounded point of his chin and its rich brown color caught the light as he spoke of the image on the screen. “Our newest cruiser- *K'tinga* class. Once she's finished, she'll be more powerful than anything else we have.”

The ship was just for starters. The Chancellor- like Kang- never took long to get to the point- and this time the point, was enemies and alliances.

The Romulans had been probing the border for the past month. But were they looking for a place to cross and invade or were they trying to tie down the Empire's resources so they could not be sent to the aid of someone else? Gorkon turned from the screen and the star chart he'd called up as he spoke. “If they decide to attack us, we simply do not have the resources for a prolonged conflict- two, three years at best.”

Kang took this in silence. It was not the sort of thing that got spread around the Empire for just anyone to hear. “Kahless said ‘A wise man is known for the allies he recruits and the enemies he chooses to fight’. Perhaps it is time to speak to the Union.”

Gorkon turned to face him then- as serious as Kang had ever seen him. At first the Commander thought he was going to dress him down for even suggesting such a thing. Instead, the man said, "Talks with the Union have been going on behind sealed doors for two months now."

At first, Kang could only stare at him in shock. "Why in secret?"

Gorkon shook his head and waved away his friend's concerns. "The usual story. There are houses in the Empire that would see any offer of an alliance as showing weakness to a potential enemy.

"However, if the Romulans attack the Union, we can graciously offer assistance- or accept the Union's offer of alliance against a common enemy.

"In either case, the houses that would have opposed us, would not have the grounds to do so."

Such an alliance, Gorkon added, would go far toward preserving the Empire.

Kang would be his eyes. He'd go to the Federal border- that section located in the area the humans called the Triad- the only place in the Alpha Quadrant where Klingon, Union and Romulan borders met. Kang would watch and monitor. If anything happened, he would inform Gorkon and then use his own best judgment- knowing he did so with Gorkon's full support.

Those orders had brought Kang, his new first officer Kuntz, and the crew of the *Cho'Mar* to the Federal Neutral Zone three days ago.

At first, they had simply watched as the *Enterprise* arrived and dealt with the Romulans. When that first ship attacked, Kang almost joined in then, but he held back. If the Union couldn't handle one ship, maybe he'd misjudged Kirk and her crew. Later, when the invasion fleet itself arrived, Kang knew he would have to choose sides.

It had not been a difficult choice to make. It had been a band of renegade Andorians –with Romulan backing- that had raided the colony on Clondor VI – while the Romulans destroyed anything in orbit- including a scout ship carrying

supplies for the research colony- a scout being flown by his wife, Mara.

Kang's eyes narrowed at the memories of finding what was left of her body in the debris cloud orbiting the planet when he arrived. The Romulans had destroyed scout and all- not caring if anyone was on board or not.

The chase had led into Union territory and to his second encounter with Janet Kirk. Instead of telling him to go home, that the Union would handle it, she offered an alliance- they would track then down together. They did so, following the trail to Cestus III- and the murdered bodies of Kirk's brother and sister-in-law.

She had studied the Klingon way- understood his need for vengeance and got some herself that day as they engaged and defeated the two Romulan ships involved.*

So, no, it had not been a difficult choice as to which side he would bring the Empire in on- and that choice had been more than justified.

*Nova Trek Graphic novels. Book One "Gains and Losses".

As the Humans would say, Kirk had 'drawn a line in the sand', daring Romulan Admiral Barlock to cross it. Just her and her crew- against over a thousand warships.

He had to admire her nerve if nothing else. If they'd been Klingon, it would have been a stand entire operas would've been written about. Outnumbered from the start, Kang had brought the *Cho'Mar* into the battle- two ships against a thousand.

The battle did not go well. While they gave as good as they got, it wasn't long before the *Cho'Mar* was surrounded and being pounded by plasma energy bursts from all sides. He still remembered those final moments on the *Cho'Mar's* bridge as he, Lt.Katz and Lt.Kuntz stood helpless and listened as the ship began breaking up around them. All three expected to be at the gates of Sto-Vo-Kor soon. In his mind, Kang once again heard the groaning and shredding of his ship as it began to disintegrate. Once again, he felt the deck shudder and shake beneath his feet.

Then came the tingle of a Union transporter followed by the disappointed satisfaction that Sto-Vo-Kor would have to wait.

The *Enterprise* Bridge was brightly lit by Klingon standards. Bright colors and a level of efficiency that made Kang uneasy as he stood on its deck. Seems they had no sooner arrived, than the Romulans launched an assault that took out the shields and landed several boarding parties on board. Leaving Kuntz and Katz to help defend the Bridge, Kang hadn't hesitated to follow when Kirk called for him and headed for the turbo lift. She was going where the fight was, and he wasn't going to refuse her invitation to join in. They'd gone straight to Kirk's cabin- what she and the crew called the 'Command Suite'- where he'd found that she'd had weapons stored- phasers and a Klingon mekleth. She had surprised him then by going through the Weapon Ritual. "To loan this weapon is to loan my life." He gave the response without pause. "To accept this weapon is to accept your life."

It was the proper Klingon way to loan someone a weapon. It turned the acceptance of the weapon into a matter of honor- making certain it would not be used against its owner. He didn't blame her- he would have done the same.

Seems like only moments later that they joined up with her Andorian security chief and one of his teams- which were then scattered throughout the ship in various battles with the Romulan invaders. A momentary gleam came to Kang's eyes as he thought about that running battle through the ship's corridors. The sounds of phasers and disruptors- and the Romulan scream of death as he put the mekleth to use. That green blood of theirs flowed freely with each swing of the blade- and no *Enterprise* crewman made any attempt to stop him.

Kirk had said, "You do what you have to, to survive..." and the wonder was that they let him do just that. The Humans, Andorians, Trills and others seem to understand that the time for talk had ended.

There had been Honor and Bravery both in the corridor that day- like that human, Lt. Commander Barker. He and Kirk had fought their way through the boarding party to find the man down outside the Auxiliary Control Room- his right arm lost to a Romulan disruptor blast. Having set his phaser to over load, loss of blood robbed him of his victory, causing him

to pass out before he could use it as the grenade he'd turned it into. It was up to Kirk to toss the phaser down a branch corridor- taking out the entire boarding party.

Kang shook his head at the memories. Even now, Barker lie in Sickbay, his arm prepped and ready for the bionic replacement that Starfleet Medical would provide for him.

The Klingon Commander glanced around, seeing damage being repaired and work crews moving from one section of corridor to another. A maintenance panel closed here, one opened there as the crews did their best to keep their wounded ship running.

Enterprise had not come out of the battle unscathed- far from it. The port warp nacelle was little more than scrap metal, while nearly a quarter of the saucer section was now gone- destroyed in the collision that had annihilated the Romulan command ship and ended the battle.

And what a battle! Kang knew it was a sight he would never forget. Standing on the *Enterprise* Bridge, his eyes on the view screen. Gods, the sky was full of ships that day! He'd taken

part in the Battle of Organia, but it paled in comparison to what he'd seen that day.

Capitol ships of all shapes and sizes, old and new - even a squadron of fighters - all putting everything on the line without hesitation in defense of their homeland. It had been a task force for the gods- and not one Kang would have wanted to face.

Now, with the battle over and the Romulans beaten back, Union squadrons patrolled the Romulan Neutral Zone while the remaining survivors headed back to resume assignments interrupted by the Call-To-Arms. Some, with various degrees of damage, were headed for various spacedocks and starbases for repairs.

But *Enterprise* and her crew were not headed for just any spacedock. They- along with the *Lydia* (The first and only Union Dreadnaught Kang had ever seen) and the *Constitution*- carrying its own share of damage- were headed for Starbase One- in Earth orbit.

Once there, Kang knew he'd have to make a full report to the Klingon Ambassador- Kochon. But he wanted to report to Gorkon first- thus the reason he was now approaching Kirk's cabin. He hoped she was able to receive visitors.

During the collision, she'd been thrown across the Bridge- breaking several ribs and getting a near concussion as a result. But two hours later, she was back on the Bridge, listening as Admiral Fitzpatrick awarded a unit citation to the crew, an honorary captaincy to Kang and a promotion to Commodore to Kirk.

Privately, Kang envied the kind of medical care union citizens took for granted. How many soldiers had the Empire lost over the years due to lack of care? If they were strong enough to reach help on their own, they earned it. Otherwise, injury and death were the rewards for the weak.

And yet, he himself had carried Kirk off the Bridge. Her husband couldn't do it. Spock had been wounded prior to the battle and evacuated. He would not return to the ship till after the battle ended.

She was something special, that red-haired alien. She had proven herself willing to learn about the universe. In her studying of Klingon ways and culture, she had shown an almost 'wide-eyed' interest in things beyond her world and understanding. She accepted him, his ways, his race in a way few union citizens did. In trying to understand, she became more than just another Human.

She became his friend- which was reason enough to insure her survival.

He shook his head once more and pressed the door buzzer. It was her voice he heard a moment later. "Come."

The door slid open and he started in- only to stop at the sight of Kirk seated on her lounge- and Lt. Kuntz seated across from her. To say Kang was surprised to find his first officer there was an understatement. "What are you doing here?"

The male that slowly stood up was of a different race than Kang- but clearly Klingon all the same. The two men shared the same rich-brown skin coloring, but Kuntz also had rather

prominent ridges across his forehead. He also favored the more current styles in the areas of hair- down to his shoulders- and uniform, which was more like armor in the areas of his chest and shoulders.

At the moment, he wore an expression Kang had never seen on his face before- one bordering on reverence.

“Commander.” He looked to Kirk. “I...came to apologize.”

“Apparently,” the Human noted, “The Lieutenant said some unfavorable things about the Union- and me- prior to the battle and he felt the need to apologize for them.”

Kang looked from one to the other, remembering Kuntz’s words. He had accused the Union of being weak- insane for putting a woman in command of a ship of war. Since then, Kuntz had seen Kirk and her crew in action- fought beside Andorians, Caitians and Humans in defense of the Bridge; even as Lt.Katz fell to a Romulan disruptor blast in the chest- his hands in a death grip around his killer’s throat.

Kuntz had seen this Human place her ship in the enemy’s path- knowing it was the only way to end the Battle- and that

it might end their lives as well. His eyes had been pried open with the truth.

Kang watched him for a moment, then turned to Kirk.
“And?”

“Apology accepted,” she told him with a gentle smile.
“Wasn’t it Kahless that said, ‘To admit you’re wrong, makes one stronger than denying the truth’?”

Kuntz turned to Kang and his attitude toward the human was now clear. “Did you know she had read *The Complete Works of Kahless*, Commander?”

“Well, actually, I’m still working on it,” the Human said. She nodded toward an old book that lay on the table in the middle of the living area, next to a holographic projector currently showing a 3-D image of Earth. “I came across a very old copy at a border outpost two years ago. But my program for translating Klingon literature isn’t very good and I’ve only managed to get about a third of the way through it.”

Kang raised an almost Vulcan eyebrow at that. He was ashamed to admit that most Klingons these days never got *that*

far. He on the other hand was admittedly 'Old School' in some ways and had made the study of Kahless' writings a hobby. He nodded toward the book. "May I see it?"

Kirk looked toward the ceiling. "Computer? Release the force field around *The Complete works of Kahless*."

"Yes, Ma'am. The force field is down."

"I scanned the pages when I first brought it on board," She said. "When I realized how old it was, I asked Scotty build the force field projector to protect it."

Kang took the volume in hand and immediately realized it was far older than he expected. He also realized something else-

-It was familiar. He looked to the Human. "How old did your scans say it was?"

Kirk looked from Kang to Kuntz and back. "Fifteen hundred years."

Kang slowly nodded as he began to suspect something. "The reason your program was having trouble translating it, is

because this is not in modern Klingon- in fact, it never saw a printing press of any kind.” He gently opened the tome to an interior page- and nodded as his suspicions were confirmed.

“Fifteen hundred years ago, Kahless was nearing the end of his life. It was then that he began writing down his teachings for others to read and learn from. He made four complete copies- each in his own hand- before he died.” He looked to the Commodore and his lieutenant before continuing. “Two of the copies are in the Imperial Archives on Qo’nos- I have seen and studied them enough to know Kahless’ hand. The third is in the monastery on Boreth, said to be locked in a sealed crypt in order to protect it in case anything happens to the two in the archives.”

Kang indicated the volume in his hands. “The fourth manuscript has been missing for two hundred years.”

Kirk’s green eyes went wide. “My God...”

Kuntz looked from one to the other. “But how did it end up on an outpost?”

Kirk shrugged, her red and yellow top rising and falling with the movement. “We had a lay-over at Station K-6 for resupplies and personnel transfers. We had the time, so I browsed through the station’s bazar. One of the venders –he was a Tellarite in fact- had it on display. He told me an independent scout had traded it for a barrel of bloodwine. I paid him ten credits for it.”

“It’s worth far more, “Kang noted drily.

Kuntz was still confused. “But Commander, how could an independent scout-“

Kang raised his hand to silence the officer. “According to the history I have learned, two hundred years ago, the house of the manuscript’s last legal owner was ransacked by raiders. They grabbed everything in sight. At a guess, I would say they turned around and sold their haul all in one lot without realizing what they had.”

“Even if they had examined what they’d stolen,” Kirk noted, “I doubt there would have been anyone among them that would have recognized the manuscript for what it was.”

Kuntz looked from one to the other. “So for the last two hundred years, it has passed from one buyer to another as just another tome of strange writings.”

Kirk rose slowly to her feet. While McCoy had healed her ribs, they were still sore when she moved. “Kang, you take it- take it home. It should never have left Qo’nos.”

Kuntz nodded. “She is right, Commander. To think about all the dangers it’s been exposed to-“

Kang stood in silence, answering neither of them. He gently closed the book and almost tenderly laid it back on the table. Then he stepped away in thought. Finally, after a deep breath, he turned and shook his head. “No.”

Kuntz was shocked. “Commander- ?”

Even Kirk seemed surprised. “Kang- ?”

He raised his hand to silence them. “As I said, two copies are in the Imperial Archives- the third on Boreth. Other than the news that the Fourth Manuscript has been found, nothing would be added to our culture or our knowledge of Kahless by taking it home.”

The Commander began pacing the floor as he spoke. “But, if the Number Four Manuscript were given as a gift to the Union President as a symbol of an alliance between the Union and the Empire, it would take on a significance greater than the other three copies combined.”

Kirk smiled. “And it would be translated properly- and copied. It might even find a place on a shelf alongside the teachings of Surak of Vulcan and Churchill of my own world.”

Kang nodded. “But we need Gorkon’s approval for such a plan to proceed.” He looked to Kirk. “I came seeking permission to send him a report. He has not heard from us since before the battle.”

The human waved a hand toward the office area. “We can do that right now.” As she led the way, she added, “You know though, at this distance, it may be tomorrow- or later- before we get a reply.”

“A report must still be sent,” Kang answered.

Kirk indicated the desk chair. “Have a seat.”

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It was sometime after Kang had sent his report- there was nothing in it Jan didn't already know, having lived through the events herself- and she now found herself standing outside a different cabin door. She should have come yesterday, but things were crazy then. Organizing work details and repair crews had kept her and Spock up most of the night.

But this couldn't be put off any longer. She pressed the door buzzer and watched as it slid aside. Stepping through into the cabin, she found Tamera standing at the end of her bed, using the gift the Guardian of Forever had given her to open portals in time.

The portal she had open now, was focused on a day sixteen years ago- the last time she'd seen her brother before former Lt. Commander Ben Finney screwed up the time line. Jan remembered that day, too- kind of hard for her not to when she and Tam started out as the same person.

Jim and some of his high school friends had been preparing to attend an agricultural convention in Des Moines. He left that morning, she came back to the Academy – and Tam never

saw him again. When she woke in this timeline, Jan had been the one to tell her that Jim was dead- all the how and why of it.

Seeing Captain James T. Kirk of the Federation Universe hadn't been easy for her. Jan remembered how this younger version of herself had reached out – or at least started to-when the captain transported back to his *Enterprise*. “Tam ?”

The teenager turned- and with the breaking of her concentration, the portal closed. “Jan, when did -?”

“Just now.” Jan stepped toward her. “You can't torture yourself like that,” She said as she nodded toward the spot where the portal had been.

Tam wouldn't meet her gaze. “It's all I have left of him- the past, memories.”

“The Captain couldn't stay, Tam,” Jan stated. “He had his own life- and his own universe- to get back to.”

Tam did meet her gaze then. “Think we'll ever see him again?”

Jan shook her head as she sat down on the edge of the bed and pulled Tamera down beside her. “I won’t spend my life watching for it. In fact, I think Uncle Frank’s going to recommend that the plans for the gateway device be locked away- access denied.”

Tam’s eyes went wide. “Why? I thought Starfleet’s mission was to ‘seek out new life and new civilizations’? How can we do that when the means to do so are locked away?”

“Listen to yourself and you’ll know why,” Jan told her. “Are you wanting to explore that universe or find the Captain? Even though he looks like him, sounds like him- walks like him, he’s not our brother. He has no memories of us other than what he gained while he was here.

“This is why there can’t be regular contact- why the general public can never know his universe even exists. How many people lost family in the battle the other day? How many would love to jump into that other universe and find that version of their loved ones? Can you imagine what kind of nightmare that would be- for both sides?” Jan sighed. “I’m not normally one for suppressing knowledge, but in the case of the

gateway device, I think it has to be- if only to preserve everyone's sanity."

Tam sat quietly for several moments. When she finally spoke, her voice was soft. "I miss him- our Jim."

Jan reached over and gave this younger version of herself a hug and when she answered, her own voice was equally soft. "Me too."

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Captain's log: Stardate 5940.02

Captain Janet Kirk recording.

Ship's status continues to make slight improvements- however, some systems that were damaged in the battle continue to fail repeatedly despite the best efforts of Mr. Scott and his engineers.

We're in a race against time. Not the first one of course, but this time, I have serious doubts about whether we'll reach the Finish Line.

Estimated time to Starbase One: Forty-Eight hours.

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There was one other non-union guest on board at the moment. However, instead of being Klingon, this lady was something some people right now, would consider far worse:

She was Romulan- and an officer at that.

The Romulan Commander looked around with the eye of a former ship's captain as she headed for the Command Suite. It had been nearly a week now since the battle and the crew had worked almost non- stop getting the livable sections of the ship cleaned up and made presentable. In fact, this section on Deck Six looked as if no battle had taken place.

But it had. The evidence was all too clear elsewhere on board. She had been quartered near Sickbay- the cabin she'd occupied the first time she'd been on board had been destroyed in the collision. In order to reach the Mess Hall on that deck, she had to walk past several recovery wards-

-All of them full.

It's only been within the last day or two that Dr. McCoy has started discharging some of his patients- only for them to find

that their cabins no longer existed. In these cases, “Doubling up” had become the order of the day.

The Commander shook her head and her rich brown hair bounced about her shoulders as a result. The Union certainly had some interesting terms and phrases in their language if nothing else: “To Hold up somewhere”, “To double up”- and several more darker terms she’d heard over the last few days. Thing was, she couldn’t tell if they were directed at the difficult repairs being made or at her.

Being Romulan- and in uniform- she had to accept the possibility that the remarks had been aimed at her.

She didn’t blame the crew. If their positions were reversed, she too might curse and condemn the sight of a Romulan uniform. They had no way of knowing she had been the one that had brought word of the invasion. That she- along with their captain- had risked her life going back into the Empire to recover information- number of ships, possible crossing points along the Neutral Zone and so on- that the Union needed to stop the Romulan Fleet.

She had not acted out of love for the Union- no. She had acted to preserve the Empire. Those old fools on the Imperial Senate saw only the need to avenge their losses in the Romulan-Earth War a hundred years ago. They did not stop to think about the amount of death and destruction they'd be bringing down on the Empire once the Union started fighting back.

A full scale war would not have stopped at the Neutral Zone. No. The Union would have felt the need- the justified need- to bring the war home to Romulus. By the time the Senate found enough sense to sue for peace, the home world would have been reduced to ruins.

So, in order to save it, she'd been forced to turn her back on it. By alerting the Union, she'd given them what they needed to defend themselves at the Neutral Zone. They had no reason to take things any further. As a result, while there may still be skirmishes, both Empire and Union would survive.

She passed two female crewmembers- one human and the other Caitian and it was clear their morale and their spirits were still high, despite what they'd been through. They were

young- probably at least ten years younger than the Commander. The battle was quite possibly their first encounter with war.

She prayed to all the gods that it would be their last as well.

Upon reaching the door to the Captain's office, she pressed the buzzer and watched as the door slid open. "Captain?"

"Yes, Rayannah, come in."

That was all the Commander needed to know that Jan was alone. She had explained to the human about Romulan names- when and how they were used- and she knew this one well enough by now, to know she would not violate those rules. In fact, she found Jan alone in the living area, seated on her lounge with a ship's PADD in her hand. "You wanted to see me?"

"Yes," the Human said as she laid the device- and the status report it showed- to one side. "Thought you'd want to know. There were several reports in the dispatches this morning about skirmishes all along the Neutral Zone. Starbase 98 has been fighting off the occasional ship for a week now."

The Romulan nodded. "It is as we expected then. You said it might be too dangerous to stop at the starbase with the *Enterprise* in the shape she is in. It appears you were right."

"I was thinking of your safety, too," Jan told her. "If word got out that a Romulan officer was on board, we would've had every assassin in the sector trying to get on board to get at you."

She rose from the lounge with renewed ease, her ribs now feeling and moving like they should. "We'll reach Earth day after tomorrow. Taking into consideration the way things are right now between the Union and the Empire, I think it would be best to get you off the ship with as little fanfare as possible."

The Commander turned away to look at Jan's display containing the antique movie poster and figurine. Finally, she nodded. "I have to agree. If I were seen- and recognized as a Romulan- I would be dead before I took ten steps."

"We're going to do our best to avoid that," Jan told her. "First of all, you'll have to change uniforms- trade yours for

one of ours. It's common knowledge that Vulcans serve aboard the *Enterprise*, so no one should pay you much attention."

The Romulan sighed. "I guess, passing as a Vulcan is something I will have to get used to."

Jan shrugged. "At least, being taken for one. After we arrive, Mr. Therran and one of his men will escort you off the ship and to the nearest transporter. Once there, all three of you will beam down to the Vulcan Consulate."

The Commander turned toward this human with confusion on her face. "Why can we not use the ship's transporter?"

The Commodore shook her head. "I've placed them off limits to everyone. With all the other damage we've been dealing with, no one's had time to look at them. Under those conditions, I'm not going to trust them."

The Commander nodded in understanding.

Jan then stepped toward her. "Now this is important, Rayannah. We can't beam you *into* the Consulate- that would be a violation of Vulcan sovereignty- and about a dozen other diplomatic regulations. The closest we can get you is *outside*

the Consulate gate. Mr. Therran's orders are to see you safely *inside* that gate. Once you pass through, legally, you'll be on Vulcan soil- subject to Vulcan law and Vulcan protection.

"Now, I called Ambassador Sarek the day after the battle- he was already halfway to Starbase 98. Once Spock and I explained the situation, he agreed to turn back. He'll be waiting for you at the Consulate. Once you get there, he can begin the Asylum process.

"Keep in mind, that once you're inside that gate, no one can come in and take you- *no one*. Now, Government officials *can* come in and talk to you- and they probably will. But no one can make you leave.

"Until things calm down, the Consulate will be the safest place for you till Sarek can make arrangements for getting you to Vulcan."

At that point, the ship's A.I. spoke up. "Commodore, Lt. M'ress asked me to inform you that we are receiving a message from Qo'nos."

Jan looked to the Commander. "I've been expecting that message for a few days now."

"Then I will let you answer it," the Romulan replied. As she left, she couldn't help wondering why Jan would be contacting-

"This is the Commodore speaking. Would Commander Kang and Lt.Kuntz please report to the Command Suite? Commander Kang and Lt.Kuntz please report to the Command Suite. Kirk out."

The Commander nodded to herself. Of course. Kang would have needed to send a report home. The message was probably the reply to it. She headed back to her cabin- unaware of how right she was.

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Personal Log: Stardate 5940.03

Janet Kirk recording.

Chancellor Gorkon. It was the first time I'd ever laid eyes on him. With only the few other Klingon males I'd met to judge by, I'd

have to say he was somewhat handsome- in an aristocratic sort of way.

Kang did me the honor of letting me watch the message with him and Lt. Kuntz...

“...Until your message arrived, I had feared the worse,” Gorkon’s image stated. “Expect to receive word of promotions for both of you. “ Then he got down to the business of the manuscript. “Hard to believe it could re-surface after two hundred years. But you are the scholar when it comes to Kahless, Kang. I accept your appraisal of both the book and the situation.

“Proceed with your plan- and be careful. Yesterday, there was an assassination attempt on me- here in the Hall of all places. Obviously, the assassin failed- and talked quite a bit before he died.

“Duras hired him.” Gorkon shook his head. “I swear the man would have sold us out to the Romulans if the price were right. He was executed for treason this morning. He

accomplished nothing but dishonoring both his name and his House.

“Watch your back, Kang. Duras had many friends and supporters that would have benefited if he had succeeded to the Chancellorship with my death.

“An alliance with the Union is the last thing they’d want.

“Gorkon out.”

The screen faded to black and Kirk turned off the monitor. “Klingon justice is swift,” She whispered.

Kang nodded. “That is the best kind.”

Kirk stepped back into the living area as her thoughts turned to the problem at hand. “The book shouldn’t be seen till it’s presented to the President. That means we have to get it off the ship without being noticed.”

“How?” Kang asked. He nodded toward the monitor sitting on the shelf nearby. “I have seen enough of your civilian communications over the last few days to know that your

‘News Media’ will be watching everything this ship and crew do starting the moment we arrive.”

Kirk glanced at him with a raised eyebrow. She almost asked him what he found to watch that would interest a Klingon and decided to skip it- she didn’t want to know. “You’re right about that. The Federal News Feed will cover every aspect of our arrival- Which means we need to sneak the book out right past them.”

She thought for a moment more and found herself looking at Kuntz. “Lieutenant, your uniform is a fairly recent change isn’t it? I’ve never seen one like it before.”

Kuntz looked to Kang as he answered. “Yes- it was introduced four months ago.”

Kang looked to the female. “Why do you ask?”

“Ever since the Battle of Organia, presentations of Klingons in uniform have appeared in various media,” Kirk explained. She indicated Kang’s appearance. “But they’ve always been shown with your style uniform. I’m willing to bet very few have

ever seen Kuntz's style. Which means, if we added, say a backpack, no one would know it wasn't part of his uniform."

Kang looked at Kuntz. "Put the manuscript in the pack?"

Kirk nodded. "And walk it out right past the cameras without anyone seeing it. The Klingon Ambassador will probably meet us when we arrive- along with the Union President. Once you three are alone, you can hand the book over to him."

*

Stardate 5942.04

Kirk stepped onto the Bridge and glanced around. It was clean- like she expected it to be- but a lot of the monitor screens were still dark- like about half of the viewscreens above them. She looked to her left as she headed toward her chair. "How's she holding up, Scotty?"

The *Enterprise's* chief engineer looked tired- and it was no wonder. He'd been pulling extra-long shifts ever since the battle. "She's stable for the moment, Commodore."

Jan watched him for a moment. "Scotty, once we're docked, I want you off duty for forty-eight hours- no less."

"Ach, Commodore--"

"If I have to get Bones to back me up on that, I will," Jan told him. "I don't care if you stay in your cabin with your nose stuck in a technical journal, but no repair work."

"Is that clear?"

The Scotsman met her gaze for a moment, and then nodded. "Aye, it's clear."

She met his gaze. "You can't do your best work if you're dead on your feet- and *Enterprise* is going to need your best in the days to come."

Scotty nodded again, knowing she was right. "Aye, Commodore."

As Jan stepped down beside her chair, she glanced over to where her husband was manning the science station. "It's good to see you back on the Bridge."

Spock nodded as he stood in his usual pose- with his hands behind his back. "I must admit that it...'feels' good to be back."

His wife smiled as she sat down. "What's our status?"

"The *Constitution* is one hundred meters to starboard, holding the same elevation and speed as us. The *Lydia* is two hundred meters behind us both and Seventy-five meters above."

Jan smiled. "Uncle Frank's been playing "Mother Hen" ever since we started back."

"The starboard nacelle is starting to show stress," Spock continued. "That is to be expected since it is operating in an unbalanced configuration."

Jan glanced over at him. "What about the impulse engines? Can we switch over?"

"Impulse power is at fifty percent," the Vulcan replied with a glance at his console. "Sufficient for docking maneuvers. " He flipped a switch before continuing. "Shields are still down." They failed last night. "But deflectors remain operational."

Jan nodded. "That should do us. At least we won't get hit by any space debris." She then turned her attention to the helm and the Andorian female seated there. "All right, Shev. Bring us out of warp and switch over to impulse."

The turbo lift doors opened at that point, allowing the Romulan Commander- now wearing a red ship's services uniform- and Kang to enter the Bridge. Jan glanced back at them. "Good morning." She glanced past Kang and saw no one else. "Where's Lt. Kuntz?"

The Klingon commander shrugged. "Still asleep."

"Now out of warp," Shev reported. "Approaching lunar orbit."

Jan looked to the screen and the growing view of Earth's moon, then she spoke to M'ress. "Open a channel."

The Caitian nodded as her tail swayed about behind her. "Yes, ma'am. Channel open."

Jan raised her voice slightly as she spoke. "Starbase One, this is the *Enterprise* requesting permission to dock."

“Enterprise, this is Starbase One. Welcome home. You are cleared for Docking Berth One directly ahead of you.”

“Thank you, Starbase One. Enterprise out.”

At that same moment, an alarm sounded at the Engineering console and Jan’s voice sliced the air. “Scotty?”

“It’s the forward breaking thrusters, Commodore,” he reported. “Half the circuits in the system just blew out.”

The Romulan Commander looked to the Commodore. “What does that mean?”

Jan glanced up at her as she answered. “It means that as of now we have no way of stopping this beast before it takes out the docking berth.” She tilted her head. “Or do we? Scotty, what’s the status of the aft thrusters?”

Scotty worked his console for a moment. “They check out all right, Commodore.”

She glanced over her shoulder. “M’ress, contact the *Constitution* and the *Lydia*. Tell ‘em to give us some maneuvering room.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

Jan’s next words were aimed at the Helm. “Shev, swing us around.”

For a moment Shev was confused- then she and Janice got it at the same time and the Andorian put it into words. “You want to *back* into the docking berth?!”

Jan met her gaze without hesitation. “We don’t have much choice. “She nodded toward the Main Viewscreen- and the growing image of Starbase One. “Or time.”

Shev nodded and turned back to her console- her hands already moving over the controls. Maneuvering thrusters on the starboard side fired briefly, causing the wounded ship to go into a spin. On the viewscreen, the Starbase and Earth seem to slide away to port, but it was the *Enterprise* that moved and soon, a receding moon was seen on the screen.

“Computer, aft view, “Jan ordered. The view changed to once more show the Starbase drawing closer by the second. As they watched, the docking berth doors split and opened, reminding Jan of a seed pod as it opened.

“All right,” she ordered, “Aft thrusters at fifty percent, one minute duration. Now.”

At the rear of the saucer and the surviving starboard nacelle, thruster units intended to be used to maneuver the ship in and out of rendezvous situations flared to life for a far different purpose.

“We are slowing,” Janice reported from her navigator’s side of the helm console.

“Again,” Jan ordered.

The docking berth loomed large on the viewscreen. Those on the Bridge could easily see inside and noted another ship- a destroyer- pulling out through the rear entrance of the berth and giving *Enterprise* room for whatever happened.

Then they were gliding past the dock doors and Jan’s order came quickly. “Tractor beam, stand by.”

Janice’s hands moved over her controls. “Target, Commodore?”

“The docking berth doors, “Jan told her. “And hope we don’t tear ‘em out. Aft Thrusters, thirty seconds- now.”

Once more the thrusters fired as those standing in the viewing galleries all around the docking berth stared in shock at the sight of the wounds this ship had taken in the Union’s defense- and watched now as she fought one last fight just to come home.

On the Bridge, Jan’s order came. “Tractor beam-now.”

“Tractor beam on,” Janice reported as Shev continued to monitor the ship’s motion. “We have the docking berth doors.”

“Increase attraction by twenty percent,” the Commodore ordered.

“Approaching docking position, “Shev reported.

“Increase Tractor beam by another twenty percent,” Jan ordered.

“We’re still moving,” Shev reported. “Twenty meters per second. At this rate we’ll be out the other side before we’re stopped.”

“Increase Tractor Beam attraction another forty percent,” Jan ordered.

There was a slight lunge and Shev’s voice filled the Bridge. We’ve stopped.” She looked back at the Commodore in shock. “Two feet from the dock’s Starboard Personnel Lock! How in the Hell- ?!”

Jan just smiled as she rose from her chair. “Put her in park and let’s go meet the Press.”

2

As they approached the Starboard side personnel airlock for the saucer section, Jan found herself hoping it worked. In the three years she’d been in command, there’d never been a reason to use it- most everyone tended to forget it was even there.

As the group grew near, they noticed anti-grav stretchers- almost a dozen- and McCoy leaning over one. Jan stepped up beside him. “Bones?”

The older of the two looked up at her. “I’m pulling medical rank, Jan. I’ve got to get these people to the base medical section.”

Jan shook her head. “No need to pull rank, Bones. You get these people where they need to go.” She looked toward Scotty and nodded.

There was a ‘Thunk’ and a ‘Click’ followed by a momentary hum as the two big doors of the airlock slid open. The first stretcher was guided out as Kuntz joined the group- the backpack- and the manuscript it contained- firmly in place.

A moment later, Tam joined them as well- with Isis in her arms. She lowered her voice as she spoke to Jan. “I went back to Starbase 98- jumped back in time about five minutes. Left a note for Aunt T’Pel. “

The furred being in her arms that was a cat and not a cat, purred at Jan. Jan in turn, just smiled and shook her head.

Then she spotted someone else. “Mr. Barker.”

The assistant engineer turned at the call, his right sleeve pinned up at his elbow- a silent reminder of his one-man defense of the ship’s ACR. Jan nodded as she approached. “It’s good to see you on your feet again.”

“Thank you, Ma’am.”

She glanced at Tam as she spoke. “You’ll receive word through regular channels, but I wanted to be the one to tell you.

“Once we were headed home, I put you in for the Medal of Valor- with Ruby. It came through this morning- along with a promotion to full Commander.”

Barker’s eyes went wide at this and he stood alittle straighter. “Commodore, I- “

“No need to say anything,” She told him. “You earned them both- the hard way. Just tell me you’ll be on board when *Enterprise* leaves.”

The man nodded. “Yes, Ma’am. I’ll be here.”

“Good. Now you get going and let the doctors do their thing.”

Barker nodded once more and as he moved off, Tam looked to her older self. “Isn’t he the one- ?”

“Yes,” Jan told her. “He can’t write a status report worth a damn- but there’s more to being a Starfleet crewman than reports- and I think Mr. Barker’s proven that.”

Tam nodded in agreement. “Yes, Ma’am. He certainly has.”

Jan then walked over to the two Klingons and looked up at Kang as she spoke. “The Ambassador will probably want to get the two of you alone as soon as possible to hear your version of what happened. Considering what Chancellor Gorkon said, watch yourself.”

Kang nodded and watched as she walked over to where the Romulan Commander stood with Mr. Therran and one of his men. Jan indicated the red services uniform the other female was wearing. “Looks good on you. This’ll work. I’ll contact you as soon as I can to see how you’re doing.”

The Commander nodded and Jan turned to the Andorian.

“You have your orders, Mr. Therran.”

The male nodded. “Don’t worry, Ma’am. We’ll get her there.”

Jan nodded in reply. “I know you will- that’s why I chose you.” She then glanced around and saw that all the stretchers and medical staff were gone. “All right, people. Let’s get this show over with.”

Kang was right in one respect. As soon as they left the gangway and entered the concourse, the media *converged*. Cameras and microphones began filming and recording everything.

Having followed behind the command crew, Therran stopped the Commander while they were some distance from the crowd. Once he was sure the media was focused on the Commodore and the others, he began leading the Commander around the edge of the crowd toward the exit.

Jan had been right in one respect as well. Ambassador Kochon wasted no time separating Kang and Kuntz from the

crowd and ushering them out of the concourse. The man never spoke as they walked and it gave Kang time to look him over. What he saw, he didn't like.

Kochon may have been athletic at one time, but too many years in an easy post had taken the edge off of him. His face was narrow- almost rodent-like. What was the Earth animal? Kang had seen a picture once- Yes, a weasel.

Finally, the Ambassador led them into an empty briefing room and made sure the door was closed before he spoke. "There will be a reception for the two of you and the command crew tonight at 8:00 pm at Union Plaza. Tomorrow morning at 9:00, there will be a ceremony- a primitive tradition about giving one 'the key to the city'. They perform this farce everytime they think they have a hero to celebrate."

He walked to the far end of the briefing room table as he spoke. "Gorkon sent me a message yesterday telling me about this 'presentation' you want to make." He met Kang's gaze with a stern one of his own. "There will be no presentation. You will hand the manuscript over to me- now."

Kang's eyes narrowed. "Those are not my orders."

Kochon stepped toward him." Those are *my* orders to *you*. On this planet, you answer to me. There will be *no* presentation."

"I am operating on Gorkon's orders," Kang declared. "And even if I were not, you do not have the authority to give me orders."

Kochon's fist came up as if to strike Kang and it was clear he was barely holding himself in check. "Gorkon is a fool to offer a sacred relic like the Fourth Manuscript to our enemies!"

"They are not our enemies," Kang stated. He remained calm despite the Ambassador's outburst.

Kochon looked from Kang to Kuntz. "Where is the manuscript?"

Kang glanced at Kuntz in a signal for silence as he himself answered. "In a safe place."

"Kirk," Kochon swore. "That red-haired alien has it, doesn't she?"

“No.” Then Kang met Kochon’s gaze and his own turned deadly.” And if you threaten her in any way, Kochon, you will find my hand at your throat.”

The Ambassador dropped his fist and stepped away- but his anger was still clear. He turned to face Kang again. “You are a fool, Kang. Aiding the *Enterprise* against the Romulans. You should have stayed out of it and let the Union and the Romulans fight it out alone. The victor would have been weak- defenseless- ready for us to conquer.”

Kang hadn’t moved since entering the room. Now he tilted his head slightly to one side. “You would see the quadrant engulfed in fire and bloodshed- then have the Empire feed off of the dead and dying? Where is the Honor in that? How would you defeat the victor, Kochon? In a fair fight? Or would you stab them in the back like a coward?”

Kochon’s eyes nearly popped out of his head in indignation. “You *dare* call me- ?! Once Gorkon is dead, you will sing a different song.”

**“Gorkon will live for a good long while, “Kang stated.
“Duras’ assassin failed. Duras himself was executed for treason
two days ago.”**

**At the shocked look on Kochon’s face, Kang nodded and
turned away, gathering Kuntz with a look. “We are going to
find a transporter and beam down to the Consulate- providing
it is still open to us?”**

**“You know it is, “Kochon replied sulkingly. “I do not have
the authority to deny you- as much as I want to.”**

**Once the Commander and his Lieutenant were back in the
corridor, Kuntz spoke up. “What now, Commander? Do we go
to the Commodore?”**

**“No,” Kang answered. “If we go anywhere near Kirk,
Kochon will think we lied about where the manuscript is. He
will try to force her to give up something she no longer has.”
He took in and released a deep breath. “We must deal with
this on our own.”**

San Francisco

Union Plaza was the one location on the planet where all of the offices involved with the operations needed for the Federal Union of Planets to exist were located. As such, it was natural for all of the diplomatic consulates to be located nearby.

Some planets had simply acquired and renovated existing structures to suit their needs. Others had purchased empty lots and built structures to accommodate their offices and staff. One of these structures was the Vulcan Consulate.

The wall that surrounded the grounds was about four meters high- came up to the average human's neck. The gate was another matter. Built with an arch over it, it consisted of two wrought iron halves- each designed as simplistically and logically as possible.

Passersby only glanced around at the sound of the three beings in Starfleet uniforms materializing in front of the gate. None of them realized of course that one of three was not what she appeared to be.

The Romulan Commander glanced around before turning at Therran's call and following him through the gate. "Safe

and sound, Ma'am," the Andorian stated as his partner closed the gate behind them.

She sighed and nodded. "Thank you, Lt. Commander- and make certain to tell your Commodore I said 'Thank you' to her as well."

Therran's partner stepped up then and held a package out to her. "Your own things, Ma'am. The Commodore felt that you might want them."

Almost reluctantly, she accepted the bundle and nodded a silent thank you.

Therran called to her. "Ma'am?" He nodded toward the Consulate's front door.

The Commander turned to see a Vulcan male in his early one hundred's coming toward them. "Lt. Commander Therran?"

"Ambassador." The Andorian then indicated the female. "Your guest, sir."

Sarek nodded. "Yes. Thank you."

The Vulcan and Romulan watched as the Andorian and Human left, then Sarek turned to his guest. “I am honored, Commander. If you will follow me, we have quest quarters inside.”

“You do not seem surprised to see me in a Starfleet uniform,” she noted as they walked.

“I am not,” the Ambassador replied. “My daughter-in-law can be quite inventive when there is need.”

*

Some blocks away was the Klingon Consulate. Looking like a feudal keep, it had been built strictly along military lines—despite its diplomatic use. The chime and whine of the Starfleet transporter faded and both Kang and Kuntz looked around before stepping through the Consulate’s door.

Once inside, Kuntz took a deep breath and actually smiled. “Now this is more like home.” In point of fact, the lighting reminded Kang of the Great Hall— and the air had a degree of dust and smoke in it— an approximation of the atmosphere on Qo’nos.

Leading the way, Kang headed for the reception counter on one side of the lobby. The female working there was Klingon of course and looked up as they approached. “Yes?”

“Commander Kang and Lt. Kuntz.”

The female, in her late twenty’s by the look of her, nodded and the tight braids of her hair reflected what light there was as it lay wrapped around her head. “Yes, Commander. We were told to expect you. A room has been prepared.” She came from behind the counter, every move smooth and easy. “If you will follow me.”

She led them up a flight of stone steps and down to the far end of a second floor hallway. Once there, she opened the door and stood aside for them- her eyes never leaving Kang as he stepped past her. “Will you require anything else, Commander?”

“No.”

“If you do, ask for ‘Kara’.” She then closed the door and left.

Before Kuntz could do more than open his mouth, Kang waved him to silence. For a long moment, the Commander

stood in the middle of the room, doing a slow turn as he examined the place with only his eyes. Only after he had done a complete turn, did he examine the room physically. The justification in this came at the end of his half hour search- and the three listening devices he'd found.

Kuntz watched as he placed each one under the heel of his boot- and shattered it before throwing all 3 down a re-cycle chute. "How did you know, Commander?"

Kang glanced at him as he stepped close enough to the room's balcony doors to look out at the city beyond. "Anytime someone tells you that a room has been prepared for you ahead of time, search it. You will live longer."

The Lieutenant nodded. "And now, Commander?"

Kang turned toward the two bunks in the room. "Now, we rest- conserve our strength." He laid down on one of the bunks as he concluded, "I have a feeling we will need it before the night is out."

*

The reception was held in the rotunda of the main Union building. White and black marble with silver and gold veins running through it made up the floors and walls. The ceiling was open to the next three floors above the main lobby. White marble columns formed a circle around the opening.

Kang stood off to one side, a tankard of bloodwine in his hand as he watched the rest of the gathering. Kirk had arrived some time ago in a civilian jumpsuit that looked like it had been specially designed for her. In fact, the only Starfleet uniform in sight was the dress uniform worn by Grand Admiral Nathan Stryker.

A short distance to one side, Kuntz- with the backpack and the manuscript it contained still in place- was talking with the *Enterprise's* Andorian helmsman. That was to be expected since the two of them had faced death together defending the Bridge from the Romulans.

Kang sipped his bloodwine. On the other side of the room, Kochon and his staff kept to themselves, barely

acknowledging the people around them. Kang didn't think isolating themselves was very diplomatic, yet it was clear to him that Kochon owed his position in some manner to Duras- a move clearly designed to prevent any peaceful contact between the Union and the Empire.

“Commander?”

Kang turned, having heard her approach. Kara stood behind him. The gown she wore was definitely not Klingon- not with the total lack of sleeves and the plunging neckline that displayed ample cleavage. “Kara.”

She looked out over the gathering. “Rather quiet, isn't it?”

“By our standards,” the Commander replied. “But most Humans prefer a quiet gathering.”

“I have only been here a few minutes and it's putting me to sleep,” She stated. She then met his gaze. “Would you care to go somewhere else?”

He studied her face. She was making the invitation, but was she really interested? It had only been a month since Mara died. Could he trust this female?

His thoughts continued to bounce back and forth. He glanced over at Kochon and considered Gorkon's warning. Could he trust her- or would she stab him in the back first chance she had?

"Kuntz and I are returning to the Consulate," He stated as he waved the lieutenant over. "We have much that must be done tomorrow." With that, he set his tankard on the nearest table and headed for the door. Once there, he paused and looked back- to see Kara talking with Kochon.

The anger on the Ambassador's face was clear.

*

The fog had rolled in thick and heavy sometime ago. The streetlights could only cast pools of light barely five meters in diameter- with pitch blackness all around. Kang and Kuntz paid close attention to their surroundings and banks of fog-like clouds brought to the ground- rolled around them.

The sound of a boot scrapping on the pavement made them both stop. They no sooner turned around, than they were attacked by two of Kochon's aides from the reception. Kang

dodged as one of the assassins came at him and brought his fist round- crushing the other man's throat. As that one went down, Kuntz dodged the blade of his partner, grabbed that man's arm- and broke it with a loud 'Snap!'

"Stop!"

Both Commander and Lieutenant froze in mid-move, then slowly turned to see another assassin with a disruptor in hand. "Now, Commander, where is the manuscript?"

The fog shifted and Kang caught sight of a flash of red hair a second before the assassin stood straighter- suddenly very aware of the phaser against his back. "Drop it," Kirk told him. "Before you lose a spine."

The would-be killer did so- and a moment later, Starfleet security moved in. "Take all three of them," the Commodore ordered. "The charge is attempted murder."

As the six security guards took the three assassins in hand, Kirk turned to Kang. "I saw them follow you out- figured it wouldn't hurt to tag along."

Kang nodded his thanks. "But you cannot be involved any further."

"Kang- "

"I mean it, "He stated firmly. " You have a husband and a sister to be concerned with. If Kochon learns I have spoken to you, all of you will become targets.

"This is one time, Janet, when you must stay out of it."

Kirk met his gaze for a long moment before she reluctantly nodded. "All right. I can't argue your point. But you need someone." Then she tilted her head and despite the fog a gleam came to her eyes. "Someone who might just want this alliance as much as we do."

*

"You want *my* help?!"

The Romulan Commander stared at her late night visitors in shock.

"An interesting development," Sarek stated from where he was seated nearby.

They were in a ground floor room at the Vulcan Consulate. Kang and Kuntz had climbed over the wall surrounding the property and came in through a patio door.

If a Human had been present they would have found an interesting scene: A Vulcan, a Romulan and two Klingons- not discussing war, but rather, trying to plan a way to preserve the peace.

She turned away in silence. The Vulcan robes she now wore swinging and draping themselves to her as she moved. Kang found himself appreciating the image she presented. He had sensed a strong will in her when they first met on board the *Enterprise*- even though it had only been a short turbo lift ride to Sickbay to check on Kirk. Now, her strength of character seemed even more in evidence- and it was that that drew Kang's attention- even if she was of the same race that had killed Mara.

The Romulan Commander turned back to meet Kang's gaze- and found a strong, determined male staring back. She too had sensed a strength in him aboard the *Enterprise*- more so than in any male she'd met. Somehow she knew that

‘Honor’ and ‘Loyalty’ were words this alien still believed in- and stood by. “Why me?” She finally asked.

“Because Janet Kirk trusts you,” Kang replied. “And I’ve learned to trust her judgment.”

The Romulan stood slightly straighter at this. Trust. She’d found it sadly lacking in her own people when she needed it most. Was it possible, that- for her- she’d been looking for it in the wrong place all this time? “What do you want of me?”

Kang explained about the manuscript even as Kuntz removed it from the backpack, showed it to her and Sarek and then returned it to its hiding place once more. “...You need only watch over it till tomorrow morning. We plan to give it to the Union President at the ‘key to the city’ ceremony. After that, Kochon can do nothing.” He looked to Sarek. “Ambassador, can you provide shelter for Lt.Kuntz for the night?”

Kuntz looked at his superior officer in surprise as Sarek nodded. “Commander?”

**“Kochon has already tried to kill us once,” Kang told him.
“One of us *must* make the presentation. If we remain together,
it will only provide Kochon with an easier target.**

**“At 8:00 tomorrow morning, you will head for the ceremony.
If I am not there, you must make the presentation yourself- is
that clear?”**

Kuntz nodded and saluted in reply.

Kang nodded in return and then turned to her. “And you?”

**She met his gaze without hesitation. “I will watch over the
manuscript, Commander. You have my word.”**

**Kang nodded his thanks and then Kuntz spoke.
“Commander?” He nodded to one side and stepped away.
Kang followed and listened as his first officer spoke in low
tones. “Commander, I admit to being confused.**

**“We went to the aid of a Union ship. We fought alongside
Union citizens in defense of that ship. We are at odds with our
own ambassador. We turn to a Vulcan and a Romulan for help
in guarding a sacred Klingon manuscript—which we plan to**

give to the Union President.” He shook his head. “I no longer know who the enemy is.”

“The enemy is the same as always,” Kang told him. “Anyone who threatens the Empire. Only this time,” Kang added, “The enemy wears a Klingon face.”

*

4

Kang moved carefully through the streets of San Francisco. He’d left his silver over shirt and sash with Kuntz before leaving the Vulcan Consulate the same way they’d come- out the patio door and over the wall. Now, he was all dressed in black- a dark silhouette moving through the shadows of the city streets.

He had no set destination in mind- only one goal:

To survive till morning.

*

At the Klingon Consulate, Ambassador Kochon was in a foul mood- the same mood he’d been in since the reception.

Things would have been much simpler if Kang had taken Kara to his bed. She would've killed him while he slept. Then it would have been an easy matter to frame Kuntz, execute him and be done with it.

But no. Kang had to refuse Kara's advances, forcing Kochon to fall back on assassins like the two fools standing in front of him. "Lost them..."

"The fog was simply too thick, Ambassador," one of them said.

"The fog." Kochon stepped toward them. "*The Fog!*"

Both of the other men jumped at the shout.

Kochon turned away in disgust- then turned back. "Scan for them- there are not that many Klingons in this blighted city! *Find them!*"

*

Kang looked around as he neared one of the city's parks. There were not many wooded areas left on Qo'nos. But here

on Earth, the Humans seemed to go out of their way to make sure these natural areas continued.

He'd seen and dodged several other Klingons that evening- a necessity since he didn't know who worked for the Ambassador and who didn't. Now, near midnight with a full moon overhead, he was a black phantom moving from shadow to shadow as he neared a grove of trees.

Once in among them, he looked around, and nodded in approval.

*

Stardate 5942.05

Dawn- and Earth's yellow sun was only minutes from appearing over the horizon. Already its light was bringing the color back to the black and white world of night. Ground fog drifted over the grass in the park as two Klingon males moved toward the grove with humming scanners in hand. Separating, they approached from two different directions, only to find the grove apparently empty.

“I don’t understand,” one of them said. “According to the scan, he should be here.”

Movement- the rustle of leaves. They looked up just in time to see Kang drop from the branches- breaking the neck of one while grabbing his dagger in the same moment. The former captain of the *Cho’Mar* ducked and dove clear, avoiding the second assassin’s knife as the morning sun reflected off his blade.

The killer lunged-

Kang dropped under his guard-

And the killer found his partner’s blade imbedded in his chest. He dropped without a sound as Kang glanced around before moving off into the morning fog.

*

At the Vulcan Consulate, Kuntz passed a restless night. Instead of actual quest quarters, Sarek had settled him in the first floor room the staff called the ‘Library’.

Looked more like an arsenal to Kuntz. He paced the floor- as he had all night- his eyes going to the walls of the room and the items on display there. Lirpas and ahn-woons hung there, in and around shields and banners- all supposedly dating from the time before the Vulcan philosopher Surak. Kuntz shook his head. It was clear to him- based on this room- that the Vulcans had once been a warrior race that might have been a challenge worth facing. Why turn their backs on that?

He stepped toward one wall to examine one of the Lirpas, but his mind kept going back to Kang.

Ever since he arrived aboard the *Cho'Mar* a month ago, he found Kang to be an unusual commander- one more willing to think things over before acting. But when he did act, he brought all the force of a full Klingon warrior to bear- unlike most commanders Kuntz had known who simply reacted.

Now, the lieutenant found himself involved in events he'd never expected. Instead of waging war, he was involved in a plan for ensuring peace.

He started to reach out to one of the liras, when the door to the room opened and the Romulan Commander entered with a tray of food in hand. "Vulcans are vegetarians," she said by way of greeting. "The staff had no idea what kind of foods to prepare for you. I told them that, under the circumstances, any kind of meat would suffice." She smiled at the thought. "One of them nearly fainted at the thought. The Chief of Staff finally sent out for this. It is spicy by Human standards- which means it will probably be bland by yours."

She was dressed in a Vulcan blouse and slacks this morning. Kuntz studied her for a moment before he spoke. "Why are you seeing to my needs? Why do you even care?"

The female turned from setting the tray down on a desk and faced the Klingon without hesitation. "I gave my word to your commander that I would keep the manuscript safe. If that means keeping you alive as well, then that is what I will do."

Kuntz turned his attention to the patio doors and the growing daylight outside. The sunlight was just starting to fall on the garden that existed beyond the doors when the glint of

light on something caught his eye. “*Down!*” He shouted as he dove for the floor- pulling her down with him.

Moments later, the patio doors exploded into the room thanks to a Klingon disruptor blast. Three Klingons charged into through the debris, expecting to find only Kuntz. At first, they ignored what they thought was a Vulcan female and moved toward their target-

-until the Commander grabbed a lirpa off a nearby wall and nearly sliced one of their attackers in half with a single slice!

Kuntz had one hand on his attacker’s throat and the other wrapped around his wrist, keeping his hand- and the dagger it held- from making its final plunge. The two seemed locked in time-

-until the Commander brought the bludgeon end of her lirpa down on the assassin’s head- crushing his skull. She immediately turned, searching the room. “Where’s the third?”

She stopped at the sight of the third assassin collapsing to the floor as a result of Ambassador Sarek’s neck pinch. It was hard for Sarek to keep the look of disgust off his face. His gaze

left the fallen male and he stepped toward the Commander and Kuntz. “Are you two all right? Lieutenant, you have my apologies. I promised your commander you would be safe within these walls only to have this happen.” He glanced down at their fallen enemies. “Somehow, I feel it will be useless to file a protest with Ambassador Kochon.”

Members of the Consulate staff began coming in then and cleaning up the mess. The Commander handed her lirpa to one of them as she spoke. “Kochon knows Kuntz is here. He may suspect the manuscript is here as well.”

Sarek nodded as he watched the staff work. “We must get them both out of the building.”

The Romulan looked around as she tried to think of something. Then she spotted an item that one of the assassins had dropped. She picked it up and held it for Sarek and Kuntz to see. “They were scanning for him.”

Oldest of the three, Sarek nodded. “At the very least, they were scanning for one Klingon among a house full of Vulcans.”

The Commander stared at the scanner for a moment, then looked to Sarek. “Ambassador, do you have any recordings on hand of Vulcan readings?”

*

To say that Kochon was fit to be tied, would be putting it mildly. He stormed into the Klingon Consulate, his robes billowing about behind him as two aides tried to keep up. The Ambassador’s tone of voice- and its volume- shook the rafters. *“What do you mean they can’t find him??! They know how to use the scanners don’t they?”*

The aide on his left nodded. “They’ve checked everywhere. Two of our people were found dead in a park near here- we’re assuming they found him.”

“Then widen the search,” Kochon ordered. “See how close you can get to Starfleet Command. Find out where Commodore Kirk is staying- he may be trying to get to her.”

Both aides nodded and moved off as Kochon headed for his office. His curse rattled the windows. *“Fools!”* He shoved the door open, stormed in, and stopped-

-at the sight of Kang standing in front of his desk.

Kang leaned against the desk, but every muscle was alert as he spoke. "Where does one go to hide when one is hunted? How do you lose yourself in a city- on a world- that is strange to you? The answer, Kochon is to seek out your own kind- hide among them as one of them. Your assassins scan the city for one Klingon- when that Klingon is here- one among many."

Kochon moved slowly further into the office. "And what of Kuntz- and the manuscript? Are they here as well?"

Kang glanced at the office video monitor- which was showing the Federal News Feed. "You will have your answer to those questions soon."

*

Now wearing a cloak over her blouse and slacks, the Romulan Commander looked around as she walked beside her cloaked and hooded companion. "I feel like a fool," Kuntz muttered from under his hood.

After consulting a map Sarek had provided, the two had set out for Union Plaza along the most direct route.

The Commander started to reply to Kuntz, then hesitated as two Klingons walked by- both with working scanners in hand. She waited till they were passed before she spoke. “If you turn that scanner off, you will be a *dead* fool. Right now, all any of Kochon’s men are scanning is a middle aged Vulcan male.”

Kuntz cursed in Klingon before switching back to Galactic Standard. “I’ve never been involved in anything like this before!”

“Neither have I,” the Commander replied. “It is a new age of wonder.”

Suddenly, the soft functioning sounds of the scanner – turned-transmitter died away. She looked around as Kuntz pulled it out to check it. “The power levels are flat,” He told her. “Those fools must have been using it all night without recharging it.”

The Commander glanced around as she spoke. “According to the map Sarek showed us, it’s not much further to Union Plaza. We must hurry before you are discovered.”

*

At the Consulate, Kang had not moved. Kochon had only taken a step further into the office- but the anger was still clear on his face. “You are a fool, Kang! Gorkon is weak- and his mad dream of an alliance with the Union will make the Empire weak as well!”

Kang shook his head. “No. Gorkon is right. You were not involved in the battle with the Romulans, Kochon. You did not see the *Enterprise* crew as I saw them- did not see the task force that came in answer to their call. An alliance will strengthen the Empire- give it an ally it can count on.

“Kahless said, ‘A wise man is known by the allies he recruits and the enemies he chooses to fight’.” Kang met the Ambassador’s gaze. “You chose the wrong allies and enemies, Kochon. The days of paranoia and plotting and back-stabbing are coming to an end.”

Kochon's brows came together in a growing fury. "You accuse me- ?!"

"Of supporting a way of life we can no longer afford," Kang told him. "Of plotting and planning schemes that will only result in war and chaos."

"We are Klingons!" The Ambassador shouted. "We are warriors! It is our way! You accuse me of plotting against the Empire! You slander me and my House!" Kochon drew his dagger from his belt, extended the out rigger blades, and lunged for Kang- dagger raised in one hand and the other going for his throat.

*

The Romulan Commander and Kuntz had been running for the last ten minutes. Two of the Ambassador's men had spotted them and opened fire- killing a civilian in the process. Now, as they rounded a corner, there was the sound of a Federal Transporter and then several security guards stood before them. Their lieutenant raised his hand. "Hold it!"

“No time,” The Commander replied as she pointed back the way they’d come just as the two assassins came round the corner.

Before they realized their mistake, the two Klingons opened fire- only to receive fire right back as the security detail replied in kind. The Klingons were dropped before they could even turn around.

As his men took the unconscious assassins into custody, the Lieutenant turned to the Commander and Kuntz. “Mind telling us what’s going on? We got a civilian call about disruptor fire in the street.”

The Commander glanced at Kuntz, then after only saying she was a guest of Ambassador Sarek at the Vulcan Consulate, she went on to explain the situation. “...Lt. Kuntz must be at the ceremony in fifteen minutes. Can you get him there?”

The lieutenant was reaching for his communicator even as he answered. “Without half trying.”

She nodded and turned to Kuntz. "Go with them. I must see if I can find Kang." She then headed back the way they had come as the sound of transport filled the air.

*

Kang was flung into a chair- which shattered under the combined weight of both him and Kochon. The Commander's right hand gripped the wrist of the hand that held the dagger while his other kept Kochon's other hand from his throat. With a massive effort, he threw the Ambassador off of him, got to his feet and ducked as his enemy came at him once more. Grabbing the male by his robes, Kang sent him flying head first into the nearest wall- only to do nothing more than dent the plaster as Kochon howled and charged him again.

A strong back-hand by Kang sent teeth flying, followed by a right-cross that dropped the Ambassador, who in turn, rolled and kicked out- cutting Kang's legs from under him. The Commander went down hard, only to roll clear before the Ambassador could stomp his face in. A swift kick from Kang, sent Kochon off balance and crashing to the floor.

The two regained their feet and squared off against each other once more. They studied each other, watched and waited like primal beasts, Then Kochon lunged-

-and Kang's fist was planted firmly in his face. The sound of nose and ridge cartilage shattering mixed with Kochon's scream of pain, then a kick from Kang doubled the Ambassador over and dropped him to the floor once more.

Stooping, Kang picked up his enemy's dagger, then turned at the sound of the patio doors opening to see the Romulan Commander standing there. "Why are you not with Kuntz?" He demanded.

She pointed to the office monitor, which was still showing the FNF- and Kuntz presenting the manuscript to the Union President. "He didn't need me anymore and I thought you- *Kang!*"

Kochon was coming off the floor-

The dagger flashed in Kang's hand-

-and the Ambassador died with all three blades buried in his chest.

Kang stood where he was as the body collapsed to the floor, his eyes on the monitor. “It is the first day of a new chapter in history,” he said in a surprisingly calm tone.

“A chapter with many empty pages,” The Romulan Commander noted.

Kang glanced toward her and nodded as he looked out the patio doors. “Then we shall have to do our part to make sure those pages are filled in correctly.”

*

Epilogue: Five years later

Planet Clondar VI

The Klingon-style transporter effect faded leaving her and Kang alone on the planet’s surface. She looked around, taking in the red sky, clouds and brownish-red soil. The former Commander finished her turn to see the Colonel standing by a marker.

She'd learned enough over the years to recognize a Klingon grave marker and its eternal flame. She stepped over beside him, the cloak he'd provided for her billowing in the constant wind. "Kang?"

"Six years ago, we had a thriving colony on this world," he said. "Then a band of renegade Andorians- with Romulan backing- raided it and destroyed it. While they ravaged the colony, the Romulans attacked a scoutship that had just entered orbit.

"That scout was piloted by my wife, Mara."

The Commander-turned-aide to Ambassador Sarek looked to the marker, then back to Kang as she continued to listen.

"I had thought Mara was unique," Kang said. "She was intelligent, had strength of character next to none. She could assume command of a landing party as easily as walking across a floor. I never expected to find another like her." He glanced over at her. "Until I met you.

"The future will be difficult- the road leading to it, far from easy. She would not wish me to walk it alone."

He turned to face her then. “Walk it with me. Let us challenge the Fates to do their worse and walk that road side by side.”

The Romulan stared at the Klingon in shock and then stepped away in silence. “Challenge the Fates, indeed.” She stood silently, her thoughts going back over the last five years. How Kang always managed to get the missions calling for a trip to Earth- just so he could detour by Vulcan on the way back. How he always managed to get the missions that called for a ship to bring Sarek to Qo’nos for talks- all so they could spend time together.

She turned to face him. “You don’t even know my name.”

He stepped closer. “I know names are a private matter with your people. I know you will tell me when you are ready.”

She stared up at him, shocked once more into silence. That he would wait for the privilege of knowing her name, said more to her than any words he’d actually spoken.

She swallowed in a throat suddenly gone dry.

**“Kang...” She looked up at him, taking in his face, his eyes.
“...My name is Rayannah- and you will find me at your side
for the rest of our lives.”**

**A gleam came to the Klingon’s eyes and he did something he
had never done. He reached up and gently touched her face as
he nodded.**

END