

Only Wrongs to Right

The Reioshekian mobile holographic emitter remained in one of the engineering labs on the *Athena*, and it appeared completely inert as it was not connected to any system. Rodall Dewuchun, the chief engineer on the Federation starship, was looking over the device. He did say to the captain, Leonard Thorpe, who was present, “The zero point energy emitter is still functional, and that perhaps is the most fascinating part of the technology. The mobile emitter and the processor and the memory system, that’s all stuff we can do ourselves, although perhaps more crudely than what the Reioshekians developed. We had even done some earlier experiments with a mobile emitter.”

“Yeah, the llama incident,” the captain remarked.

Dewuchun laughed slightly at the mention, saying, “Well, Lieutenant Quintollez won our little contest to pick the animal, and she picked the llama, and... well, you know what happened. Anyway, the problem with the mobile emitter is that the power cells could not power it for any length of time, but a zero-point energy emitter solves that problem. It draws out that energy between the universes—in a manner of speaking, and that energy is virtually limitless—and so can supply all the power that the mobile emitter would need.”

“And yet, when we beamed on board that Reioshekian official in his emitter, we attempted to use a copy in the pattern buffer to replace the device. That did not replicate the zero-point energy module?”

“Unfortunately, we have not been able to activate it, and perhaps do not know how to activate it.”

“And yet we were able to beam this device, and the device occupied by the official, onto the ship and the emitter worked.”

“That would seem to suggest that once activated, the device would continue to function, even after going through the transporter. I don’t know how. One thing we could do would be to disassemble the device and study the module in more detail when it is isolated, to figure out how it works exactly. Right now, this technology is beyond our ability.”

“But there is a risk?” Thorpe asked.

“Yes, captain,” the Odonan engineer replied, as he looked over the inert device. “Bojek is in there, as much as he can be in there in some sort of machine

or artificial intelligence suspended animation. The problem is that removing the module could damage that and perhaps erase or alter the coding of his memories and the like. I know that it is risky to transfer his essence into the *Athena's* computers, even an isolated buffer, because of the Reioshekian AI kill code. We don't know what it is and what it could do. Also, the zero-point energy module is a risk too."

"What?"

"Well, if we could exploit this technology, that would mean almost limitless energy, but at a risk. I know that the zero-point energy which holds the universes apart is unimaginably vast, but it's not infinite, and there is the risk of bubble nucleation, although that risk is tiny and might not manifest itself for a billion years, but some of the other engineers with me suggest that perhaps excessive use of the zero-point energy might have led to this 'burn' that will occur sometimes between now and the thirty-second century. We don't know what caused—or will cause—that, but you can't rule out this technology. We simply don't know enough about it."

"So you're suggesting?"

"We leave this module alone, and take it back to the Federation, to a research facility that can handle this. It could save Bojek, and us."

"I see," the captain said, and as he got those words out, he heard his commbadge chirp. "Thorpe here," he said firmly after tapping the badge.

"Vorwoorts, sir," came the response from the tactical officer, Henrietta Vorwoorts. "We've received a signal of an incoming message from the Battlesphere."

"Okay," Thorpe replied. "I'm on my way."

Dewuchun looked at the captain, and said, "The star-destroyer has made another appearance?"

"So it seems."

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Captain Thorpe arrived on the bridge, just in time to hear Vorwoorts say, "The message is coming in now. It's audio only, and naturally, given the distance, it's a one-way communications."

The captain's chair in the centre of the bridge was unoccupied, so Thorpe sat down in it, and said, "When you have it, play it."

"Of course."

A few seconds later, the message was played, "This is Alito Ngezhavara, commander of the Arosian Battlesphere, to the Federation starship *Athena*. We have detected another signal that might have come from an Arosian installation of some kind. We do not think it is the missing Arosian star-destroyer ship, allegedly in the possession of Remans, but it may be linked to it. It is possible that they found another Arosian installation that survived the self-destruction of the Arosian Empire, and that contact perhaps initiated some sort of transmission

or activation. At the present time, the Battlesphere is not able to make the trip, so I am transmitting coordinates, and if it is close to your current location, you can investigate it if you so desire, as it may lead to the whereabouts of the missing ship. We would appreciate hearing any information that you might recover concerning that ship or what else was found at the location of those coordinates.”

Vorwoorts added, “There was some technical data included, indicating a location where this signal is coming from.”

“Is it associated with a star system?”

The tactical officer ran some calculations, and said, “Yes, it’s associated with a star system, known only by its catalogue number from the mapping probes.”

“What do we know about it?”

After a quick search through the database, Vorwoorts replied, “No class-M or apparently inhabitable planets in the system, no record of any ship ever having been there.”

“Perhaps it is this elusive ‘Janna’ that Ngezhavara thinks Arosians who did not want to die during the self-destruct might’ve headed to?”

“Perhaps, but it is a fair distance from the location of that station where we found the other star-destroyer ship.”

“How far away is that location from our current position?” the captain asked.

“Three and a half days at our best speed.”

Thorpe did not think long about it, and so said, “Well, it’s worth taking a look. Sanjay, get the coordinates from tactical and change our course to that location.”

Sanjay Indesakar, the first-shift pilot and now at the helm, quickly entered some instructions into the panel in front of him, and then reported, “Coordinates acquired, course computed and laid in.”

“Execute course change,” the captain ordered, and as he said those words, the pilot made the adjustment, and they could see the stars slide across the screen until they settled into their new positions.

“How long?”

“Three days, fourteen hours.”

“Very well.”

First officer Julia Bayanhong, seated beside the captain now, did say, “You know, I still find it something of a coincidence that this ship, under Reman control, is making an appearance now, since it has been eight and a half years since they took it from that station in the Arosian Empire. Has it been hanging around this region of space all of this time?”

“It’s hard to say,” Thorpe replied. “I had been thinking that perhaps the Romulans, and hence the Remans, are here, knowing that we’re poking around the remains of the Arosian Empire, and they decided to send that ship in case we found or encountered something that might be of use to them. It’s as if they’re lacking something they need to fully exploit the ship for what they want to use it

for.”

“That’s a longshot.”

“It’s the best I can come up with so far.”

Vorwoorts added, “That also could imply that we might run into that ship one day, and do we want to?”

“Well, if we do, I hope that Ngezhavara has the Battlesphere in operational condition again...”

“Captain’s log, stardate 56592.4. We are on approach to the star system that has acquired the name Ngovuljanna, using the Odonien word for ‘maybe,’ ngovul, and this alleged Janna, although we do not think that this planet is in fact this Janna we had heard about. However, there could be something there, which had sent a signal that the Arosian Battlesphere had detected. It’s unlikely that the missing star-destroyer ship is here, but if it had come here, we would like to see what they found here and why they came here... and perhaps get some idea where they went.”

The system map was displayed on one of the secondary viewscreens. The star was a K2-class star, a bit smaller and a bit cooler than Earth’s sun. There were six planets in the system, three small worlds close to the sun and they were all within the diameters of Mars to Mercury. The next two planets were gas giants of the Uranus size, and the last planet was a Pluto-like icy world. They did notice that the first of the gas giants had a large moon, about eighty percent of the diameter of Earth.

Vorwoorts reported, “I’m detecting very weak subetheromagnetic signals from this system, and as we get closer, the source of those signals appears to be coming from the large moon of the first gas giant planet.”

“So there’s something there?” Thorpe asked.

“Possibly, but it’s weak and not coherent and nothing about it identifies it as Arosian, although admittedly we have little data on Arosian subetheromagnetic signals.”

“And,” Bayanhong added, “this is a long way from the known limits of the Arosian Empire.”

“True.”

Thorpe ordered, “Helm, when we enter the Ngovuljanna system, take us to that moon around the fourth planet.”

“The moon is not classified as inhabitable,” science officer Grace Brigson added. “It’s most similar to Titan in our home system, and way too cold for any sort of known biological life to function.”

“So it’s a good site for some sort of installation that the builders want to keep hidden.”

Indesakara, at the helm, added, “Course set for the moon. We should be there in fifteen minutes.”

As the *Athena* got closer, they learned very little more, beyond the fact

that there were no non-natural installations around the moon or the planet it orbited, which was a mostly featureless world with gaseous clouds that were a dark blue with some lighter banding under natural light, not unlike Neptune but a little darker. When they had the first look at the moon, they saw a featureless disk with a light brown colour. Brigson remarked, "The moon is shrouded with methane and carbon dioxide clouds, which show little in the way of features. It is rather like Titan. The atmospheric pressure is about eighty percent of Earth normal, and the equatorial temperature on the lit side is minus fifty."

"Not a place likely to be inhabited," Thorpe remarked.

"Still nothing in orbit."

Fifteen minutes passed, and the *Athena* entered orbit around the shrouded moon. Naturally, as was standard procedure, Indesakar flew the ship in a powered orbit around the moon and Vorwoorts and Brigson ran the usual series of scans. Before long, the alert tones started to sound. "Got something," the science officer suddenly said. "Picking up an installation... but it appears to be in ruins... and lifesigns."

"What kind?" Bayanhong asked.

"They read as Odonan, so they must be Arosian,"

"How many?"

"Six."

Thorpe asked, "Can we hail them?"

Vorwoorts did access some functions on the console, saying, "Opening hails using known Arosian frequencies and coding parameters... no response. I don't think they have a functional receiver and we don't have the protocols to access portable communications systems."

Brigson added, "The six lifesigns are in an underground chamber. Much of the surface structure has been destroyed, debris scattered about... and I would say that the destruction was recent."

Bayanhong said, "We might have to send an away team."

"Definitely a risk," Thorpe replied, "but on the other hand, not much choice. Grace, can you get any information on the environmental conditions where the lifesigns are?"

After a few seconds, the science officer replied, "There appears to be small pockets of the facility that have life support, but I'm not reading any main power systems as functional. They could be running on reserves or something similar. That does imply that the attack is very recent, within the time frame of the message from the Battlesphere."

Bayanhong said, "The away team might have to use environmental suits."

Thorpe continued, "The problem is that if life support is failing there and there are survivors, we would have to beam them on board the ship, basically rescue them, and then what? There is no home system for them to go to, beyond any of the other known survivor locations. There's also the risk that with Rodall on board, they could get infected with the *overhimpennyon* virus from him."

“On the other hand, we can’t just leave them there either.”

“I know.”

“Somehow, we will have to contact them, and assess their current conditions. If the facility here was attacked, it is possible that they were injured, and could require assistance.”

“That would imply access to sickbay, which means we need to isolate it, in terms of life support, and ensure that Rodall does not access it.”

Mark DeWillis, the assistant chief engineer, was at that console on this shift, so he said, “That’s possible. Sickbay does have a dedicated life support node, and in an emergency, it can be isolated from the rest of the ship.” That, Thorpe knew, was in case there was some sort of dangerous virus or other microbe that appeared in sickbay, and by isolating it, the virus could be contained. In a sense, that meant that it could also be used to keep out a potentially dangerous microbe, such as the *overhimpennyon* prion.

“I know,” the captain replied. “Have Lieutenant Dukkottor make the necessary changes to isolate sickbay from the rest of the ship in terms of life support, just in case.”

While Mahingoda Dukkottor, who was the engineer responsible for life support functions on the ship, was making the adjustments, the away team was getting ready. Bayanhong was the away team leader, and Psakolaps was also in the group, to assess the medical condition of the survivors. Two security officers, Edward Chan and Kevin Wickenheimer, were also on the team. The four of them were in the transporter staging room, getting into the environmental suits. Psakolaps did say, “Sometimes, I think that we should more frequently practice getting into these suits and working with them.”

“Such an idea would make you unpopular,” Bayanhong remarked, as she got into the suit, and then strapped on the breathing tank and made sure that the hoses and power systems were connected and functional. She also had the helmet in hand.

Chan and Wickenheimer did not fuss as much about donning the environmental suits, since as security officers, they practiced more often in them than the other members of the crew, especially the command level officers, who were more likely to order other members of the crew on missions that required the suits rather than wear them themselves. The two men got into the suits, and double-checked the connections on each other’s suits. Bayanhong and Psakolaps were doing likewise, going through the mental checklist to make sure that everything was secure and functional.

“Comms are working,” Bayanhong said as she checked over the small panel mounted on the lower left arm of her suit. “Arosian language database downloaded.”

Psakolaps added, “Forcefield belt integration is working too, in case the Arosians start shooting at us.”

“Hopefully not, but then, we don’t know what happened here and why.”

“We’ll soon find out.”

Once the four were suited up, except for the helmets, which they carried, they returned to the transporter room itself. Transporter chief Megan Wilder was behind the controls. Bayanhong asked her, “Has life support in sickbay been isolated yet, and purged?”

“They’re still working on it,” Wilder replied, “the purging part anyway. The captain has said that they should be done momentarily, so you are cleared to beam down.”

“Anything obstructing transporter access to the survivors?”

“Nothing that the sensors are picking up.”

“Very well,” the first officer said. “We will proceed, and be prepared to beam the survivors directly to sickbay. Even if they’re not injured, they may have to be confined there for now.”

“Of course.”

Psakolaps said, “This *overhimpennyon* thing certainly does make things complicated. It’s hard to believe that something like that can have such dire consequences.”

“All indications are that the prion was engineered to be like that.”

“And oddly enough, for those that it does not kill, it actually benefits them. That is one odd engineered disease.”

“I know.”

Wilder reported, “I’ve located what looks like a good arrival location, close to the survivors but not within their immediate vicinity.” Those in the room realized that it would not be desirable to simply beam to where the survivors were because they could react in an unexpected way to the sudden appearance of the away team.

“Very well,” Bayanhong said, as she stepped onto the transporter platform with the others. They took a minute to put their helmets on, and activated the automated sealing procedures. Bayanhong and the others checked their arm-mounted displays to make sure that the diagnostics came up positive and that the oxygen was now flowing and allowing them to breathe. Through the comm-link in the suit, she said, “Energize.”

Moments later, the four rematerialized in the darkness and among the ruins. They switched on their helmet lights and looked around. Bayanhong had no idea what kind of room they had beamed into, as it was generally strewn with the wreckage of what had been used to construct it mixed with whatever the room had been used for. Bayanhong had her tricorder out, and immediately got a reading on the environmental conditions. The atmosphere was mostly nitrogen and carbon dioxide, with a negligible quantity of oxygen. The temperature was minus thirty.

Psakolaps also had a tricorder out, and said, “The survivors are in that direction.” He pointed to one of the multiple exits from the room. “I believe that they are in a secured location.”

“Can we enter it?”

“I don’t know.”

Chan then reported, “I believe that they know we’re here. We’ve been scanned.”

Bayanhong also had determined the location of the survivors and so led the way out of their beam-in location, and they had to move carefully and step over debris. The more direct path to their location was not usable because part of the floor had been destroyed by falling debris. They did find a long way around to get to a lower level, using a ramp that they found was a bit rickety but which held as they moved down slowly. After taking longer than they anticipated, they finally arrived at what looked like a thick hatch cover, perhaps an airlock of some sort. A facility built on a cold, uninhabitable planet with an unbreathable atmosphere likely had safe rooms secured with an airlock in case the facility was breached. More than likely, that was where the survivors went. The only question that Bayanhong had was whether or not the safe room had environmental suits. She would be surprised if it did not.

“Now what?” Psakolaps answered. “Do we knock?”

Bayanhong scanned the immediate interior, and noticed that the machinery was consistent with an airlock. She also saw the controls, and then said, “Anybody know how to access an Arosian airlock?” The writing on the panel was very similar to the Odonan alphabet, which, Bayanhong knew, was also used by the Arosians, as their alphabet and the Odonan one was derived from the old Kroosian script. The words, assuming that the letters retained the sound values that the corresponding letters in the Odonan alphabet had, were meaningless. She then contacted the ship. “Bayanhong to *Athena*.”

“*Athena* here,” came the response, from Vorwoorts.

“The survivors appear to be in a safe room with an airlock access. We don’t know if the survivors are capable of coming through the airlock. Are there instructions on how to operate an Arosian airlock?”

“Can you transmit an image?” Bayanhong recorded an image with the tricorder and transmitted it to the ship. The tricorder did have a visual translation routine for the Arosian language, but that did not return any useful information. Either the language used here was not the standard Arosian language or else the words were technical terms or abbreviations or something similar. A few moments later, Vorwoorts remarked, “The words do not properly translate, but the layout seems to suggest that the main lever should be turned clockwise to the vertical position to replace the breathable air with the air from where you are, and then the lever below opens the door... but I’m not sure what the status light would be.”

The “lever” that Vorwoorts referred to was a large dial with a central bar that could be gripped even with a gloved hand and then turned to turn the whole dial. Bayanhong gripped that and tried to move the lever clockwise, but it did not budge. “Clockwise doesn’t work.”

“Try counterclockwise then.”

Bayanhong tried, and then said, “Same result; it doesn’t move.”

“Perhaps the power source has run out and the system no longer works.”

Psakolaps then said, “Why don’t we simply beam into the safe room? We have already been scanned so they know we are here, and they probably know that we’re now standing in front of a door that cannot be opened.”

“I know,” Bayanhong replied. “The fear is that they start shooting as we rematerialize.”

“But they also would realize that we are potential rescuers. I find it hard to believe that these Arosians have been here fifty years believing that the Arosian Empire still exists. They have to know that their own people are not going to rescue them.”

“But if the star-destroyer ship did this, then they could also think we’re hostile to them.”

Vorwoorts, from the ship, asked, “Has there been any attempt by them to communicate with you?”

“No, not that I’m aware of.” Bayanhong then scanned the safe room again, and saw that it had a roughly T-shaped layout, with the six survivors in the longer and larger part. She did say, “Perhaps if we beam into one of the side areas, we would have enough time to activate forcefields before they could come at us shooting.”

“Are you going to try that?” asked the tactical officer.

“That could be our only chance to contact them, and I do find it hard to believe that they would come out shooting—but then again, I would not know the mindset of Arosians, especially Arosians who had been attacked.”

“The captain said if you feel confident, you can go ahead with beaming in.”

Bayanhong did look at Psakolaps, who then said, “What other alternative do we have? They do not seem to be responding in any other way.”

After a few seconds of thought, the first officer said, “Okay. We’ll do it. Heni, have us beamed into one of the side rooms here.”

“Understood.”

The four members of the away team took up a conventional pattern of standing adjacent to each other for transport, and momentarily, the effect took over and they quickly rematerialized within the safe room, in one of the side alcoves. The forcefield component of their suits came on automatically with the completion of the transport process, and for a few seconds, they stood there stiffly, in case the Arosians came around firing.

But they did not.

Bayanhong checked the environmental conditions again and found that the atmosphere was breathable, but the temperature was cool. She took off the helmet and the others did likewise. Then they stepped out of the alcove, which they saw had shelving that held equipment and supplies, and into the main part of the room. That was roughly rectangular, about five metres wide and twelve deep, and at the far end were benches and chairs and a table, and some equipment, perhaps a replicator, built into the back wall. The lighting was dim. The

Athena officers did see the six survivors, three males and three females. They were clearly Arosian, physiologically similar to Odonans, but in general they were taller than Odonans and had considerably less *san* on their exposed skin than what Dewuchun had, Bayanhong knew. Four of the Arosians were lying under blankets, and it was clear that they had injuries, including burns and impact injuries. The two who were standing, one male and one female, had some visible injuries, but were clearly mobile and not in immediate danger. Psakolaps was not so sure about the other four.

The male approached. He was not wearing what looked like a uniform, but simple pants in gray and over that, a pullover of some sort and a dark-coloured jacket. Arosians, like Odonans, did not cut their hair, and so the man had his long hair loose, down his front and back. He spoke, his words translated through the translator implant the officers had in their ears. "Who are you?"

Knowing that the Arosians likely did not have similar implants, at least not programmed in English, Bayanhong spoke through the tricorder, which did the translating. "I'm Commander Julia Bayanhong, of the Federation starship *Athena*." She introduced the other three as well.

The man continued, "I'm Konath Izanza, one of the survivors. I see three humans and one Kentyan. You are from the Federation?"

"So you are aware of the Federation?"

"Of course I am," the man continued. "Your organization was part of the alliance that defeated the Arosian Empire, which then destroyed itself." He did not sound bitter as he spoke, but he was merely stating facts.

Bayanhong did not want to rehash a fifty year old conflict, which was actually started by the Arosians, who had a policy of eradicating any species that learned of their existence. Instead, she asked a simple question, "What happened here?"

"We were attacked by a ship that we recognized as Arosian, though I was not familiar with the design. We thought that they had come from another group of survivors, to rescue us, but when we contacted them, we found an unknown race in command." To Bayanhong, that seemed odd, since Izanza recognized her species and that of Psakolaps, so why would he not recognize the Remans? "They were not here to rescue us, so that we could begin our grand revenge, but they wanted information that we could not provide. They were angered, and so opened fire on our research facility. We were the ones that managed to get to this safe room before environmental containment was compromised."

"How many people were here originally?"

"A hundred and twenty-six," the Arosian answered.

"And just six survived?"

"Yes, but four of us are injured, and may not survive."

"We can beam you on board our ship and treat their injuries."

"Why would you do that?"

"Why would we not?" Bayanhong asked. "Your only alternative is to stay here and die here. There is no other rescue ship going to come for you."

“Then why did you come here?”

“That ship that attacked you. We’re basically looking for it, because it is a threat to us, or a threat to somebody. We received a signal that it was here.” Bayanhong decided not to mention the Battlesphere that the Odonans controlled.

Izanza did go back to the rear of the room, while Bayanhong gestured for the rest of the away team to remain where they were and let the Arosians decide among themselves what to do. They could not force the survivors to return with them to the *Athena* if they did not wish that. A moment later, Izanza returned to the four Federation officers, and then asked, “If we accompany you to your ship, would we be prisoners?”

“No.”

“What would happen to us?”

“We have information of other groups of Arosian survivors. If you desire, we will take you to one of them.”

“Very well. We know that our deaths are certain if we remain here, so we will accompany you to your ship.”

Psakolaps went with Izanza to examine the four more seriously-injured Arosians, while Chan stood beside Bayanhong, and said, “He said something about a ‘grand revenge.’ What does he mean by that?”

“I’m not sure, but what risk are six Arosians like these?”

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Shortly thereafter, the six surviving Arosians were beamed directly to sickbay, which was isolated from the rest of the ship in terms of life support. Psakolaps and the other medical officers, familiar enough with Odonan physiology that they could treat the Arosians, assessed the conditions of the injured, and soon had them in the surgical unit, one at a time, to repair broken bones and skin damage, internal injuries, and to start the healing process for the burns. The two who were not seriously hurt were treated by the two medical technicians from the security department.

Chan was the one who worked with Izanza, who had the least injuries, while Ensign Zuridah Allende, another officer with medical technician training—making her essentially a paramedic like Chan—was treating the other Arosian with minor injuries. She was Mala Busuron, who appeared to be quite young, as these Arosians were like the Odonans in that their skin tended to darken as they got older, although the effect was much more pronounced in Odonans than Arosians. Allende did find this unusual because it had been her understanding that in Odonans, their skin built up melanin pigment through their lives because they settled on a planet much closer to the sun than their originating world, and the darkening was a genetic adaptation to higher ultraviolet radiation.

Izanza said, “Your medical technology is quite advanced, and you are able to treat someone that’s not of your xenotype.”

“That’s because Arosians and Odonans have essentially the same physiolo-

ogy, and we know how to treat Odonans.”

“And you have Odonans on board this ship?”

“One,” Chan answered, “but you’re unlikely to have contact with him.” He did not state why that was so and Izanza did not ask.

Instead, the man asked, “How are the other four doing?”

“I don’t know. Some of their injuries are pretty serious, and we won’t know until the doctors have completed their work.”

“Eleven of us survived the initial attack, but since then, until now, five had died from their injuries. The safe room simply did not have the medical equipment necessary to treat them, and among the survivors, none of us were doctors.”

“I see.” Chan closed up the equipment he had been using, and said, “Done. Your minor injuries have been repaired. There might be some scarring, and some residual soreness that could linger for a short period, but there should be no long-term consequences.”

“I understand.” Izanza left the treatment area and headed to the recovery ward, where two of the four was still waiting and one was recovering. The Arosian saw a man surveying the three, and he had come to recognize the colour of his uniform to indicate that he was a member of the medical staff. “How are they?” he asked.

Doctor Andrei Tieugne, one of the doctors on board the *Athena*, turned and looked at the Arosian, and was momentarily startled by someone who looked Odonan, but was taller than any Odonan he had seen. “The most critically injured of the four had successful surgery, and is recovering now. He should remain unconscious through the recuperation process. He was treated for broken bones in his legs, blast injuries to his legs and damage to his intestines and genitals. Unfortunately, I do not believe he will be a father, but he should make a recovery with minimal impairment. Given that he had the most severe injuries, we do not anticipate any negative outcome for the remaining three.”

“I understand. How long will Jheligo be held unconscious?”

“At least a day, to give his body full concentration on recuperation. We understand that is the most effective way for Odonans to recuperate injuries of that extent, so logically it should apply to Arosians too.”

A short time later, Izanza met with the captain in the doctor’s office. He had been asked to meet with the commanding officer of the starship he was on, and he had to wonder what this was about. Tieugne led him into the office, and he saw the captain sitting behind the desk. Now he stood up, and said, “I’m Captain Thorpe, commander of the Federation starship *Athena*.”

The Arosian said, “I’m Konath Izanza.” He sat down in the chair across from the captain. “What do you want to discuss with me?”

“You were on an installation in an uninhabited system, and you were attacked by a ship you said was Arosian.”

“That’s correct.”

“Did you get a look at the ship, and did it look like this?” Thorpe gestured towards a display screen in the room, which was now displaying an image of the star-destroyer vessel.

“Yes, that was the ship that attacked us.”

“You also said that they came seeking information, which you could not provide.”

“Yes.”

“What in particular did they request?”

“How to refuel the ship. They asked if we had a refueling facility, but we do not, nor do we know of any that survived the demise of the Empire. In addition, we had no information on the fuel needs of a vessel of that type. I recognized it as Arosian, but had not heard of a ship exactly like that, or exactly that size, before. Our installation was small and isolated, and we lacked such information.”

“And yet the installation survived the Arosian self-destruct.”

“Actually, it’s not Arosian. We suspect it was left behind by a race that had been destroyed centuries earlier. We were aware of it from a time before the destruction of the Empire. After, I was one among a group of survivors, and we headed there, and then adapted it to our standards and procedures.”

“What was your purpose there?”

“Refuge,” Izanza answered. “We had no idea if there were other survivor groups, and if there were, we had no means to contact them or determine where they might be.”

Now Thorpe got to something else that he had been told about and needed clarification on. “You mentioned that you thought the star-destroyer ship had come to rescue you and so you could begin your ‘grand revenge.’ What do you mean by that?”

Izanza did not immediately answer, as he had to carefully compose his words. They had been rescued, but not by a ship that would allow him to carry out the plans, at least directly. He did say, “That was an... instinctive, emotional reaction.”

“Really?”

“Captain, imagine if your Federation, and all the worlds that you know and all the people and all the society and all the history that you know were destroyed. Would you not want revenge on those that were responsible for such destruction, even if in practical terms, that might not be possible?”

“But the Arosians were responsible for their own destruction. The Federation and allied races were not responsible.”

“The self-destruction occurred only because we knew that we were defeated and that what we valued the most, the central icons of our civilization, could become the possessions of those who were not Arosians and do not share our values. The defeat came because of the disease introduced by the Odonans, a disease that they called *overhimpennyon*.”

“It is my understanding that the disease was introduced because in the early stages of the conflict, you encountered ships with Odonans on board, and

you captured them and held them prisoner.”

“Then your understanding is wrong, captain,” Izanza said, raising his voice slightly. “Of course, those ships that first captured the Odonans did suffer the consequences of the disease, but in those cases, it was confined to the ships themselves. No, what happened was that the Odonans came to Kazmarine, and they came with the full intention of inflicting the disease on us.”

That was an angle that Thorpe had not heard before, and he was curious on the details. “*Why* did the Odonans go to Kazmarine? Where they there to negotiate the release of the prisoners, to try to understand what the Arosians were and more?”

“No. They came pretending to be something that they were not, and if we fell for those claims, we would have found ourselves subjugated to them. Their claim was false, of course, but it was merely the pretense that they came to Kazmarine with. Their real intention was to inflict *overhimpenyon* on us, knowing, of course, that if they did not destroy us, we would destroy them.”

“Then,” Thorpe started, “that was ultimately the flaw in your culture. You had developed this ideology, to the fervor of unshakable religious belief, that no other race could be aware of your existence, or could have interstellar flight capability within range of your space. If you encountered such a race, you were obligated to destroy them utterly.”

“You make it sound...”

Izanza could not quite find the words, so Thorpe provided them, “It does sound like a very bad thing, and any race that engaged in such an ideology was almost doomed from the start.”

“How?”

“Because at some point, they would run into an organization, or a group of organizations, that was simply too large for you to destroy. At some point, your race would meet an adversary that you could not defeat and you would be destroyed in turn. You even planned for that with your system-wide self-destruct protocols.”

“But it was not your Federation and your allies that defeated us. It was the disease that defeated us. I am firmly of the belief that without that, we would have won the war and destroyed the Federation and all others that learned of our existence.”

Somehow, Thorpe doubted the Arosians would have defeated the Borg, but he did not mention that. He did say, “However, all of that is history now, and cannot be undone. Your idea of revenge is dangerous and could simply endanger you and the surviving Arosians. Perhaps in time, the survivors can gather and restart their civilization, but without the dangerous ideology, which would be ineffective anyway.”

“Why?”

“Pretty well the entire galaxy can learn of your existence easily now.”

When Thorpe had no further comments, Izanza asked, “Is that all, captain?”

“For now.”

A short time later, Thorpe and the other senior officers, except for Psakolaps, met in the conference lounge behind the bridge. The captain said, “We have to consider our options with these Arosian survivors. It’s not practical to take them back to the Federation with us.”

Bayanhong answered, “The best solution is to take them to one of the Arosian survivor colonies.”

“That assumes that any of the colonies would accept them,” TKor answered.

“What makes you say that?”

“I am of the impression that these Arosians are part of an elite intelligence group. The survivor colonies that we have heard about are generally populated by those who have the genetic sequence necessary to resist the *overhempinyon* prion. As you know, the prion was created as a biological warfare weapon used against the Kroosians. A small percentage of the population had a genetic sequence that rendered the prion impotent, and in fact repurposed it almost as a part of the immune system. That small percentage of survivors became the Odonans. Now, it is certainly likely that a segment of the Arosian population had this same genetic sequence and so were immune to *overhimpennyon*. Those that survived the self-destruction of the Arosian Empire are more than likely those with the immunity. This group, however, were at some remote, non-Arosian facility that was not equipped with the self-destruct system. Our sensors have detected no vessels here, so they either came here before the Arosian Empire fell or were transported here by some other means, alien starships perhaps. They had a purpose at this facility, and I do not believe it was refuge.”

“So,” Thorpe asked, “can we send down away teams and explore the place, and perhaps learn what they were doing here?”

“That might yield useful information,” the intelligence officer replied.

“It would, considering the ‘grand revenge’ comment that keeps going through my mind.”

“And my mind too,” Bayanhong added. “Who would be the victim of this ‘grand revenge’?”

“The Odonans,” Thorpe replied. “When I was talking to Izanza, that was whom he blamed for the fall of the Arosian Empire, saying that the Odonans intentionally introduced *overhimpennyon* to the Arosians as the only means to defeat them. I cannot imagine what kind of revenge such a small group could inflict.”

“Another disease, perhaps?” Brigson replied, “something related to *overhimpennyon*, but perhaps bypassing the genetic sequence that protects the Odonans. Again, we might have to examine the facility to see what we can learn about the purpose there.”

“Very well,” the captain started. “Sal, you’ll lead the team, with engineering and science support as necessary, and see what you can learn. Much

of the facility is in wreckage, but hopefully there could be something useful to learn down there.”

“Understood,” replied Sal Hakamura, the chief of security.

Tieugne met with Psakolaps outside of the operating room, where the last of the Arosian patients was still on the operating table, still under anesthesia. He was Morad Ghorugon, and though he had been assessed as the least serious of the four patients, the surgery did not go well. “His lungs are worse than our initial assessments suggested,” Tieugne remarked. “I don’t think that he can recover sufficient lung capacity to be viable. He could always have trouble getting enough oxygen into his system at any level of activity. He also has some internal injuries lower down.”

“I understand,” Psakolaps replied. “Our treatment options are limited.”

“I was thinking... the Odonans have the medical technology that allows them to regenerate organs. I understand that their approach might violate a sense of ethics that we have, but I do wonder if the technology would allow Morad to recover more fully, by growing a new set of lungs that could then be implanted. The Arosians are physiologically close to Odonans, so their technology should work.”

“It probably would, but we’re a long way from Odonan space, and the captain still has to consider what to do with the survivors. The most likely solution is to take them to an Arosian survivor colony, because they cannot stay on the ship indefinitely.”

“Would the Odonans use their technology to help the Arosians in this way?”

“Perhaps, but if a ship with the regeneration technology were to come, it would be many days before it gets here.”

“The Battlesphere?” asked Tieugne.

“Is not Odonan and might not have the technology on board. It’s possible the Arosians might have developed similar technology, but we do not know.”

The other Arosian who was less seriously injured, Busuron, approached the two doctors and asked, “How long are we going to be confined to sickbay?”

Psakolaps answered, “At the present time, sickbay is operating under an isolated life support system, so that air from the rest of the ship cannot mix with the air here in sickbay.”

“And that is why there is an airlock attached to one entrance?”

“Yes.”

“Why is this precaution necessary?”

“Because the *overhimpennyon* prion could be in the air and could circulate, and you could be at risk.”

“So there is an Odonan on board your ship?”

“Yes.”

“But *overhimpennyon* is not a concern for us. One of the things we had worked on and developed was a vaccine for that prion, a method to neutralize it

and prevent it from replicating in our system. We have inoculated ourselves with it and that is the reason why we survived exposure. None of us have the natural immunity to the prion.”

Tieugne looked at Psakolaps, and asked, “Is that possible?”

Since he had an Odonan on board the ship, Psakolaps had to stay on top of medical issues and circumstances surrounding them, while Tieugne was a relatively new member of the medical staff. He answered, “It is possible and the Odonans themselves had also developed a vaccine and treatment regimen for the disease.”

“So,” Busuron continued, “being confined to sickbay is not necessary?”

“The decision to allow you to leave sickbay, and have access to guest quarters and amenities outside of restricted areas is upto the captain.”

“I would not worry about restricted areas, doctor. I highly doubt there is technology on board this ship that is more advanced than anything we had in the Empire.”

“Still, it is not my decision to make.”

“Of course.”

Thorpe met with Izanza and Busuron in the office of the chief medical officer, and he said, “You two feel that you have no need to be confined to sickbay?”

“That’s correct,” Izanza replied, as he looked at the captain. “We do not know how long we will be on board your ship and we do not know where we will end up. However, it would not be justified to remain confined to sickbay, and its isolated life support system.”

Busuron continued, “As I mentioned to your doctors, we have developed a vaccine and treatment protocol for *overhimpennyon*, which was how we survived the spread of this disease through the Empire.”

“So you were not at that facility you were found in during the war?”

“No. We—actually, those in the group but not us survivors—were a medical team that had access to the prion and its composition, and they were able to genetically engineer another similar virus to basically neutralize the *overhimpennyon* one. It might seem peculiar, captain, but medical research was often done in isolated environments, in case something went wrong. Being isolated would mean that the general population would not be exposed to research mistakes.”

“I see,” the captain started, “and if you were not part of the medical staff, then what were your roles?”

Izanza answered, “We were part of the administrative and security details, engineers that kept the facility running, that sort of thing.” Gesturing to where Busuron was seated, he added, “Mala is actually the medical liaison between the researchers and the administrators, so she would know more about what the research was than the rest of us.”

“So,” Thorpe continued, “you are confident that the vaccine you developed would protect you? I suspect it has not been tested.”

“That is true, though we are confident of the success. In our past, other alien species have attempted to use biological weapons against us. A race called the Miskritti captured several of our people and used them as research subjects to create a disease that would work against us. They did develop what we called the ‘dark fever,’ but when it appeared, we were able to use the same modelling technology we used for the *overhimpennyon* prion to create a treatment regimen for the dark fever—and it worked. The disease was stopped in its progress path and quickly eradicated. Thus, we feel the treatment and vaccine we have are effective.”

“I see,” Thorpe repeated.

“Captain,” Izanza started, “I understand that you have doubts, so one of us, Morad Ghorugon, has agreed to be the test subject. His injuries are more severe than we first thought, and it is possible that he might not survive. He is stable now, but his physicality is extremely limited and will remain so. He has volunteered to meet with your Odonan on board, in an isolation ward, and take the chance that the vaccine might not work. If he, in his weakened state, does not become infected—and I believe he will not be—then the vaccine works and we have no need to be confined to sickbay. In truth, captain, we are eager to meet the Odonan. We have never met them, and had no contact with them. We are curious on what the viewpoints the Odonans have on the war, or at least this one’s viewpoint. I’m assuming he is old enough to have been alive during the war.”

“I understand, but that would be something he would have to agree to.”

“Of course...”

Thorpe next met with his chief engineer in the ready room on deck one. He had told Dewuchun what the Arosian survivors had told him, so he asked, “Is a treatment or vaccine for *overhimpennyon* legitimate or possible?”

“It should be possible. The *overhimpennyon* is a cell, and a suitably-designed vaccine can neutralize it. I believe that Odonan medical researchers themselves had worked on such vaccines and treatments, although I have not kept too up-to-date on that. They did this research in case Arosian survivor colonies were found, as it seems almost certain that not every single Arosian died with the demise of their empire, and there could be many survivors. We do not wish to see any further deaths due to *overhimpennyon*, so I can see that the work on the vaccine would have been done, and I can see the surviving Arosians doing this research as well. Still, there is no real way to test a vaccine than to expose those who had taken it to the pathogen that the vaccine is supposed to suppress. Still, I do worry about meeting with Ghorugon and infecting him, in case the vaccine did not work.”

“That is a risk that he is prepared to take, especially since surviving his injuries is not a sure thing.”

“I know, and that is what I have been told too. I still worry about the vaccine not working.”

“And the other survivors are concerned that they might have to be con-

fined to sickbay if the vaccine does work but it is not tested.”

Dewuchun then had another question, “What are we going to do with the survivors? Are we going to transport them to a survivor colony, if we can find one?”

“I’m not sure what we can do. The problem is that there is no overall authority overseeing this, neither the Odonans nor the Arosians themselves nor any other outside group. Nobody has taken charge.”

“That’s probably because most of the survivor groups are unknown, like this group was before we learned of their existence. It also makes me wonder if the star-destroyer ship has a means to find the survivors. Maybe their mission now is to eradicate them, to complete their revenge since the Romulans, and by extension the Remans, suffered the most at the hands of the Arosians during the war.”

“That is a complication that we do not need.”

“Or maybe they want to draw out the Battlesphere and confront it.”

“Also something we don’t need.”

After a slight pause, Dewuchun asked, “Captain, do you think that meeting with Ghorugon is a good idea? Is it beneficial in some way beyond testing the effectiveness of the vaccine?”

“That’s hard to say.”

“Do you think they’re hiding something?”

“I’m not sure. It seems unlikely that six survivors, who probably had no means to contact anyone or leave their facility, would be hiding something, even if they have made references to a ‘grand revenge.’” “Perhaps you are right, and meeting the Arosian would be harmless, to him and to me...”

Hakamura and DeWillis led a team to the ruined Arosian facility on the surface. They made the trip without informing the Arosians that was happening, but Hakamura had to suspect that the Arosians knew that at some point, the *Athena* crew would inspect the facility, and they could do nothing about it. He did remind the others in the team to be careful and to be aware of potential dangers and hazards.

The five in the away team rematerialized in the same open area that the original away team had headed to, and they too were in environmental suits. The facility had no power, so they had to use their helmet and wrist-mounted lights to move around. Debris were everywhere, as the attack by the star-destroyer ship had caused enough shocks and explosions to rip through walls and collapse ceiling materials, exposing pipes and conduits, though none of them spewed dangerous materials nor sparks. They did see a lot of smashed equipment. As they moved through the facility, which consisted of operational rooms on top and crew quarters and the like below, Hakamura remarked, “Do you think there is any recoverable information from the computer?”

“I’d have to see the system core,” DeWillis answered. “They’re usually placed in a strongly-secured part of the structure and the storage is usually non-

volatile. I'm assuming that the Remans would not necessarily target the computer core."

They did examine what looked like laboratories, with the engineer adding, "This does seem consistent with medical or biological research. It's certainly possible that they could've been working on a vaccine or treatment for *overhimpennyon* here."

"Which would imply that they would have samples of it."

"Though I would suspect that whatever samples they had, given the conditions here now, would have deteriorated completely."

"More than likely," Hakamura replied.

Then the security chief heard his communicator come on. "Ensign Mkholupe, sir," came the response from another of the officers on the away team. "I've found the morgue, where the bodies of the others are."

"Anything unusual there?"

"I don't know... except one does not look like she was killed in the attack."

Hakamura joined the other security officer in the morgue, and as he walked down the row of chambers where the bodies were stored, he saw obvious signs of trauma, ruptured skin, extensive burns and missing body parts. It was rather gruesome, and showed Hakamura what directed-energy weapons and antimatter blasts and more could do to a body. Some of the injuries looked less severe, suggesting that the victims had survived the initial attack, but had succumbed to their injuries earlier. The bodies were preserved despite the lack of power to the chambers. It was cold enough in the morgue that the bodies did not deteriorate at any noticeable rate.

The last chamber had a different victim in it. Hakamura was pretty sure that the individual was a woman, although among Arosians, like Odonans, it could be hard to tell. She wore clothing that seemed different than what the Arosians wore, and she was also much smaller than the Arosians, implying that she might not have been an adult. She might have been a child of one of those who came to this facility.

Hakamura said to Mkholupe, "She probably died before the attack and not a consequence of it."

"It is strange, in a sense," said the other officer, "that these Arosians might've been here for at least fifty years, since the war, and yet she was the only death before the Remans struck with the star-destroyer ship."

"Yeah," replied the security chief. He had his tricorder out, as he was thinking about something. He started to scan the body of the younger woman, perhaps to determine a cause of death, and yet something about this convinced him to scan for something else. He found it. Hakamura said, "This person is not Arosian. She's Odonan."

"How can you tell?"

"She has the *tam-ulk-yr* implant. Odonans have that, and Arosians do not. The implants originated with the Odonans once they settled on Odon, and

so was well after the end of the Kroosian realm and well after the military garrison was established on Kazmarine.”

“How would an Odonan get here?”

“In the early stages of the war, the Arosians captured some ships, and on those ships were some Odonans. That was how *overhimpennyon* got into the Arosian Empire, because they had no idea that it existed. They were apparently curious about beings that were similar to themselves.”

Mkholupe remarked, “That would imply that there are Odonans that were captured and never recovered. Would the Odonan authorities know about that?”

“I don’t know. It might be difficult to identify her, although the Odonans may have information on those who were still missing from the war, especially civilians, which I believe this one was.”

“How can you tell?”

“No modified *orsotic* tips for the forcefield belt.”

The younger security officer said softly, “I never could understand Odonans and these implants and modifications...”

* * *

The isolation ward in sickbay had its own dedicated life support system, independent of the system in sickbay. Dewuchun, feeling a little tentative, entered the ward and the room where Ghorugon was laying. He was awake, lying in the bed, which was an adjustable bed so that he was in somewhat of a seated position. Visually, on the outside, he appeared to be in respectable shape. However, the monitors told Dewuchun that the patient’s life signs were not good, as he was weak and his breathing was a little laboured because of limited lung capacities. Arosians did not grow darker at the same rate as Odonans as they aged, as that was an adaptation the Odonans developed once they settled on Odon with its higher ultraviolet radiation, so to Dewuchun, Ghorugon looked to be youthful. He had no idea of his true age.

Ghorugon said in a soft voice, “I see you have decided to meet with me.”

“I gave it some thought,” Dewuchun replied. He sat down in a chair close to the bed, and leaned closer to the other man, as his voice was low and did not travel far.

“Have no fears about infecting me with *overhimpennyon*. The vaccine we developed is effective, I believe, and even if it were not, I doubt I would survive much longer anyway and dying from that cause might be less upsetting than dying from the injuries.”

“Of course,” Dewuchun said. “I was told you wanted to talk to me. What did you want to talk about?”

Ghorugon started, “Did you serve on a starship during the war?”

“I was the chief engineer on the *Pollon*, which was an *Omni*-class starship in the Odonan Space Service.”

“And you saw combat?”

“Actually, no. The *Pollon* was a science vessel and poorly equipped for combat, so it was not in any battles. We were in Romulan space during the war, in the areas that the Arosians had attacked and from which the Romulans withdrew. We were on a kind of salvage and intelligence mission.”

“Salvage and intelligence?”

“Learning what we could from the Romulan infrastructure that had been destroyed, rescuing survivors where we found them, support and the like.”

“So you did not encounter any Arosians during the war?”

“The *Pollon* had no direct contact with any Arosian ships, and we remained basically in Romulan space, behind the lines, through the end of the war. Then we returned to Odonan space and resumed our original mission.” When the Arosian had no immediate response, Dewuchun asked, “What about you? What did you do during the war?”

“I was a low-level administrative worker on a relatively new colony. It had been established just a hundred years prior to the war, and had less than a million people living on the planet. Most of those were workers building the infrastructure for additional people to come and live on the planet, which was named Oronojo.”

“Did the war come to Oronojo?”

“No. There was no attack on the colony, no warships and the like. In truth, of course, and I’m sure you know this, the war was fought outside of Arosian space. None of our planets were directly attacked. Nevertheless, the administrators on Kazmarine did inform us that we might have to house refugees and so we had to accelerate construction. We learned of the diseases that was destroying us only when those first ships of refugees showed up. They had the diseases. They were dying. Then they spread the disease to the people already in the colony. It was insidious. A person would go to sleep feeling healthy and able, and then never wake up. The diseases took many days to incubate, and then just a few fractions of a day to kill the victim.”

“And yet... you did not succumb to the disease. Were you exposed?”

“I believe I was, and yet, somehow, I did not die. A small number of people did not die, perhaps one in ten thousand, one in twenty thousand. We became ill, as I had an intense fever, and I think it did damage to me that lasted, and why the injuries I suffered in the attack by the star-destroyer ship were more serious than they appeared to be at first on your medical instruments.”

“I am... sorry to hear that,” Dewuchun remarked.

Ghorugon then asked, “Do you, or your people, regret what happened in the war, that the disease you introduced had such devastating effects, enough to destroy our realm?”

“Before I answer that question, can I ask you one?”

“What?”

“Had *overhimpenyon* not existed and this disease had not ravaged the Arosians, how would the war have proceeded? What were the goals of the Arosian

Empire in the war? Did you support those goals?"

Ghorugon did not immediately answer, because he was sure that the Odonan engineer fully knew what the answers to those questions were. Finally, slowly, he did speak. "It was the mission of our society... to guard the treasure of Kazmarine, to make sure that it did not turn over to the non-Arosians. To do that, nobody had to learn of our existence, or more precisely, nobody with the ability to travel interstellar distances, had to know of our existence. If some other species found out... we had to remove them."

"So the objective would be to destroy the Federation, the Klingons, the Romulans, my people, all of them?" Ghorugon again had no immediate answer to that, so Dewuchun added, "That would have meant the deaths of hundreds of billions of people, the erasure of extensive and long-lasting civilizations—and an impossible task because if we knew about your existence, the entire galaxy would know."

"The entire galaxy?"

"We have connections in the Gamma and Delta quadrants."

"I'm not familiar with those terms."

"The other side of the galaxy. There are many, many interstellar realms scattered through the galaxy, and they know about us, and if our section of the galaxy was obliterated, they would know and they would come. You can't destroy the entire galaxy. Your mission, your highest ideals, to protect the hypermatter treasure of Kazmarine, was impossible."

Ghorugon replied, "We never conceived of such a thing. We find it implausible... but then we also would have found implausible what we in reality did encounter. You still have not answered my question."

"The regret?"

Dewuchun did consider his words and chose them carefully. "The regret that we have is that your people did not realize the error of your ways before starting the war, or not stopping the war when you saw what you were up against. We have no intention of stealing the hypermatter at Kazmarine. How can we have regrets when the opponent's aim is your annihilation? You are implying that we are regretting that our lives continue."

"And ours did not."

"By your own hand," Dewuchun pointed out. "You had no need to invoke the system-wide self-destruct. You could have negotiated. You would have learned that we had no interest in stealing the hypermatter you had at Kazmarine. You chose not to do that, but to press on with a war that you could not have won ultimately."

"But the disease."

"What percentage of the population did it kill? You survived, and your colleagues survived, and a certain percentage of the population survived. You could've rebuilt your civilization."

"With a fraction of the population?"

Dewuchun paused for a moment, and then said, "We once suffered a

devastating war. We lost ninety percent of our population and half of our planets, but we survived and we rebuilt our civilization, and it took less than a century. Why would the Arosians have been different?"

Ghorugon did not say anything immediately, as he was momentarily struggling for breath, but did not want the Odonan engineer to realize that. Finally, he said, "Still... the stain of our deaths will remain with your people, and you need to understand that what you did... has consequences."

"I see."

"That is all that I want to tell you." With those words, Ghorugon settled back on the pillow in his bed and closed his eyes. Dewuchun looked at him for a moment, and once he realized the Arosian had nothing more to say—and neither did he—he got up and left the isolation ward.

Before leaving the morgue, Hakamura made a detailed visual record of the Odonan, because of the possibility that the Odonan officials might know who among their people were still missing or unaccounted for from the Arosian War and so could identify this person. The away team assembled at the beam-in point and returned to the ship. Once they were out of the environmental suits, they met with the captain and first officer in the deck one conference lounge. Thorpe asked the obvious question, "What did you learn on the surface?"

DeWillis replied, "The facility does appear to be a medical research site, although the equipment was damaged to the point that it was impossible to determine accurately what they were working on. It also appeared that the computer system took a direct hit from the star-destroyer, so the memory storage units were obliterated, as was the primary power reactor. It was surprising that the Remans operating the star-destroyer ship were able to hit targets with such precision, which seems to imply that they are getting increasingly comfortable with the ship systems."

"That is unnerving," Thorpe admitted.

The assistant chief engineer continued, "The structure was non-Arosian, so we have little details on backup systems and the like which the original builders would have had, as the Arosians had added on their own technology on top of what was there, and that was hit, while the original systems were significantly damaged."

Bayanhong asked, "Any indication on who the original builders were?"

"No."

Hakamura continued, "We also found the bodies of the other Arosians, stored in a facility similar to a morgue. All but one died from obvious trauma, their bodies blasted or burned or otherwise harmed by explosions, directed-energy weapons and debris flung about. The one exception was a woman who I believe is actually an Odonan."

"An Odonan, how do you know?" Thorpe asked.

"She has the *tam-ulk-yr* implant. That is unknown among the Arosians since the practice originated with the Odonans, not the Kroosians."

Only Wrongs to Right

“How did an Odonan get here?”

“She was likely one of the Odonans captured by the Arosians in the early stages of the war. I made a visual record of her face so that we can transmit it to the Odonan Empire, and officials there may be able to identify her.”

Bayanhong then inquired, “Why was she on this planet?”

“You’d have to ask Izanza and his people that question.”

“Any indication on the cause of her death if she appears to have not suffered the traumatic injuries of the others?”

“Our scans did not reveal anything like that.”

“Perhaps we can exhume the body and do an autopsy here.”

Hakamura did say, “Perhaps first we should transmit this information to the Odonans and see if they can identify her.”

“Of course...”

Once again, Izanza found himself meeting with the captain in the office of the chief medical officer. “You wanted to see me?” he asked, as he sat down.

“Yes, I do have a question for you,” Thorpe started. “We sent an away team to the facility we found you in.”

“I don’t believe they would have found much of value there, as the destruction was pretty thorough.”

“That was what we found, but we also found the bodies of your colleagues.”

Izanza looked down somewhat as he spoke in a more hushed voice. “I know... we moved those who died in the attack, and who died from their injuries later, to stasis chambers, although, sadly, there is no real chance for a final internment, so they will have to remain here, those chambers as their graves.”

“But one of the casualties did not die in the attack, a woman.” Izanza had no immediate response to that, so Thorpe pressed on. “That woman was an Odonan, not an Arosian.”

Now Izanza looked at the captain with surprise. “An Odonan? Are you sure?”

“You did not know that?”

“I never suspected such a thing.”

“What was her name?”

“Nojhe Me’an,” came the response from the Arosian leader. Thorpe was not that familiar with naming conventions among the Arosians and the Odonans, but it was possible that the name was something plausible in both groups, in their respective languages. “She was a low-level support worker, the kind that ran the cleaning equipment, prepared meals, tasks such as that.”

“You knew nothing of her origins or what she did before the war?”

“No. Most of us were from Oronojo, but not all of us. The rest were refugees that came from all over, and I believe she might’ve been one of them. With the trauma of the war, we did not talk too much about our pasts. That was irrelevant.”

Thorpe did not find the story believable, since if Me'an—if that was her actual name—was an Odonan captured by the Arosians, he did not believe she would willingly cooperate with them and perform low-level tasks, unless she was promised something, or perhaps threatened with something. He also wondered why the Arosians considered it wise to be in the proximity of an Odonan for an extended period, especially before they developed their treatment and vaccine for the *overhimpennyon* prion. There had to be more to the story. He did ask, “Would you object if we were to exhume the body of Me'an and conduct a post-mortem on her on board the ship?”

“Captain. I believe in the dignity of the dead, and that they should lie where they are as their final resting place.”

“She would be returned there after the autopsy. This is a common practice among my people, and no doubt, your people did likewise when the cause of death is unknown.”

“And the cause of death is important?”

“It could be.”

Izanza looked at the captain, and for a moment said nothing, because he knew he was not in a position of power while on this ship, and he knew he would never be in a position of power. The captain could do what he wanted and there was nothing Izanza could do about it. Finally, he said, “Oronojo is a dead world. The Arosian Empire is dead and the last of my people are dying. The cause of her death is unimportant and will not save other lives. Let her body lie undisturbed.”

“I will take that into account...”

The following morning, several of the senior officers met in the conference lounge behind the bridge, with Psakolaps the last to arrive. He saw that Thorpe, Bayanhong, Hakamura and Vorwoorts were already present, while the third shift officers were finishing their time on the bridge. “Sorry I am late,” the doctor said as he sat down. “But I was informed that Morad Ghorugon had succumbed to his injuries about an hour ago. Despite our treatment and best efforts, we could not save him. His lungs were simply too damaged to provide sufficient oxygen to his body.”

“I understand,” Thorpe replied, “and we do feel saddened for the loss. We can add his body to those in the makeshift morgue on the surface should Izanza approve. I will ask him when I speak to him later.” Thorpe looked at the doctor, and then said, “What is the prognosis for the remainder?”

“The others should recover. Some might require physiotherapy and other services the ship is not suitably equipped to provide, but I believe their recovery is possible.”

Bayanhong then asked, “So what do we do with the Arosian survivors?”

Thorpe answered, “I see three options. Option one is to bring them back to the Federation, as there are policies and procedures available for those who survived such a cataclysm as their society being destroyed, basically the same sort of thing available to the Cheshirians. Option two is to turn them over to the

Odonans, as the two groups are physiologically similar, and the Odonans would have the additional services that they might require. In addition, if they truly are immune to, or protected from, *overhimpennyon*, then they can exist among the Odonans. Option three is to find an Arosian survivor colony and turn them over to such a colony. Ultimately, I believe, the choice should be up to them.”

“Do we know of the location of Arosian survivor colonies, one that is advanced enough to handle refugees, essentially?”

“It’s possible that Izanza and his people might know.”

Hakamura added, “I wonder if the Remans in the star-destroyer ship have learned the whereabouts of such survivor groups. Afterall, they did find this place.”

“That is a worry,” the captain replied. “It appeared that during the attack, the star-destroyer ship somehow sent out a signal that the Battlesphere picked up and so transmitted to us. I’m not sure if that is something the ship would normally do, since there were apparently no other signals from other attacks.”

“But the ship staged no known attacks,” the security chief remarked. “It contacted the Japhites, but did not attack them.”

“There is much we don’t know, but if the star-destroyer ship attacks again, and the Battlesphere becomes aware of that, I am sure that we would be informed.” Thorpe was not sure that he would want to be informed because if the *Athena* were to confront that ship, he was pretty sure that he and his ship would lose that confrontation. Just as he was finished speaking, he did hear his commbadge chirp. “Thorpe here,” he said, after tapping it.

“T”Kor, sir,” came the flat, emotionless response from the Vulcan conn officer. “We received an incoming data transmission from the Odonans.”

“Relay it here,” Thorpe replied, suddenly worried that the Battlesphere had detected the star-destroyer ship again and was sending more information.

However, that was not the case. Vorwoorts received the information, and after looking it over, reported, “The Odonan authorities have identified the Odonan woman that Sal found on the surface. Her name is Nojhe Me’an.”

“So Izanza was correct with the name.”

“Apparently so. She and her husband, Sejand Me’an, worked as stewards on the passenger liner *Emerald Ismelda*, which operated on runs near the Romulan Neutral Zone. It was one of the first Federation-registered ships attacked during the Arosian War, and it was presumed destroyed with all hands. Sejand had a bond-link with his mother, and she reported that the link was broken at a time that correlates with the attack. Nojhe had no bond-links except with her husband, so both were presumed killed in the attack.”

“Though it became known later that the Arosians did capture Odonans in those early days of the war,” Bayanhong pointed out, “curious at beings like themselves that they did not know about.”

“True, but since her husband was killed, it was presumed that so was she. Why she was captured and her husband killed is not known, but it is possi-

ble that was an outcome of the Arosian attack on the ship.”

Thorpe said, “But it does confirm what Izanza said, about the name, and perhaps what she was doing. If she was a steward on board a passenger liner, then those ‘low-level’ tasks he said she did would have been something she was familiar with.”

“It’s still curious she ended up on Oronojo,” Bayanhong pointed out. “Why there?”

“All the more reason for the autopsy,” Hakamara added.

Thorpe finally said, “I agree. We need to learn more, regardless of what Izanza said about leaving the dead to their rest.”

“We can perform the autopsy,” Psakolaps remarked, “but the Odonans might want the body returned to them, to her extended family and so on. That should be more important than what Izanza wants. Afterall, Nojhe is not Arosian, and does deserve to have her final resting place among her own people.”

Vorwoorts said, “The information sent by the Odonans made no mention of returning the body to them.”

“That could come later,” Thorpe remarked. “The Odonans likely identified the woman based on the information we sent them, and then they informed us of what they had learned. At the same time, they would have to find and contact her closest relatives, and after fifty years, it might be hard to say who they are. They would likely make the decision on how to handle her remains, and then we would be informed of that. Anyway, we can recover the body and do the autopsy and determine how she died.”

Bayanhong then asked, “Do you think her death might have been suspicious?”

“Anything is possible.”

Psakolaps and Hakamura got out of their seats, as they were starting the process of recovering the body of Me’an and bring it on board the *Athena* for the autopsy and possible repatriation to the Odonan Empire. As they did, the doctor heard his commbadge chirp. Tapping it, he said, “Psakolaps here.”

“Doctor,” came the voice of Ashana Ngyguen, the head nurse in sickbay. “Rodall has shown up in sickbay, and he’s not well.”

“What?”

“He has come down with... something.”

Those in the conference lounge looked around with confused looks on their faces.

Psakolaps headed for sickbay, and when he arrived, he saw that the Odonan engineer was lying on one of the diagnostic beds, the display switched over to Odonan physiology. The doctor could tell that the heartbeat was elevated, and Dewuchun’s temperature was five degrees above normal. The breathing rate was little higher than normal, even though the man was mostly lying still. Ngyguen remarked, “He showed up in sickbay, complaining that he felt suddenly weak, and was feeling hot. He’s running a fever.”

“The bioelectricity?”

“Inactive,” the nurse replied.

Approaching the bed, Psakolaps asked, “What happened, Rodall?”

“I woke up this morning, and felt a little queasy and a little hot. I took a shower and had something to eat, but that did not resolve the issue, and when I tried to walk, I felt my head... vibrating... no, spinning I believe that you call it.”

“You were not steady on your feet?”

“No, walking was hard and I feared falling down. I barely made it here.”

Ngyguen added, “Scans reveal nothing out of the ordinary.”

Psakolaps replied, “Something has affected him, but what? It’s not like there’s a lot of Odonan viruses circulating around the ship.”

“Except from the Arosians. Perhaps they have something endemic to them that does not affect them, but it can affect Odonans because they have not been exposed to it.”

“We can check.” Psakolaps retrieved a blood removal device and used it to withdraw a small amount of blood from one of Dewuchun’s arms. He looked at the small cylinder of the dark red, chromium-based Odonan blood, as if he could see anything unusual in that. Nothing looked out of the ordinary, so he took the sample to the nearby lab and inserted it into the scanner. It went through the sample identifying what was there, and it would list what it should find and anything that normally would not be there. If the Arosians had some blood-based virus that had spread to Dewuchun, and if that virus was in the sample, the scan would find it. However, the scan found nothing, and did not even find any unexpected antibodies. “Curious,” he said.

Ngyguen asked, “What?”

“There’s nothing in the blood. The symptoms Rodall is showing suggests that whatever is causing this should be in the blood, but there are no unexpected viruses or other pathogens and no unexpected antibodies either. The level of the *overhimpennyon* prion in his blood is about ten percent higher than his norm, but that tends to happen to Odonans when something affects them like this. I’d have to check the blood of some of the Arosians to correlate what is here, but the scanners are picking up nothing beyond that.”

“His physiological response is consistent with an Odonan immune system fighting off an infection.”

“I know, but I can’t see what the infection is.”

“What do we do?”

“We might have to introduce cooling measures to prevent the body from overheating, which could result in physical damage.”

“Okay.” The nurse returned to the ward where Dewuchun was, and she activated a containment field around the engineer, explaining that the environment within would be cooled so that his body would not overheat. She also attached an intravenous line to keep his fluid levels up and also attached one arm to a bioelectricity conductor, to draw off any static charge that Odonans in their secondary nervous system sometimes generated when the body was fighting off

an infection. She was pretty sure there was some sort of infection, but her quick scan with a medical tricorder had not identified a pathogen, nor did Psakolaps' more detailed analysis of a blood sample. She had no idea what was going on.

Izanza came into the ward, and said, "I heard that Rodall has taken ill."

"Yes," Ngyguen said. "He has some kind of infection, and we're not sure what it is."

"It's my understanding that the Odonans have the *overhimpennyon* prion in their system and that augments their immune system." Ngyguen just nodded at the information. "Would that not combat any pathogen introduced into his system?"

"It would aid the immune system, yes." Then the nurse asked, "Are there any viruses endemic to your people, something that due to long exposure is harmless to you, but might be dangerous without the immunity you might've acquired?"

"Not that I'm aware of."

"Okay."

Moments later, Thorpe entered sickbay and approached Ngyguen, asking, "Any developments?"

"No, captain," the head nurse replied. "He's resting, and his body is trying to fight off whatever it was that has infected them, but Ger has not been able to find a cause. He analyzed a sample of the blood, but could find nothing in it that was out of place."

"Meaning?"

"Right now, we have no idea what is happening with Rodall, why he is sick or how he got that way."

"Could the Arosians have transmitted something to him?"

"That's possible, and we're looking into that. However, he spent the most time with Morad Ghorugon, who has since died. Because we know how he died, with did not do any post-mortems on him, and beamed his body down to the makeshift morgue on the surface, with Izanza has said should be the final resting place for those among his people who had died. Because he is dead, anything he might have had in his system would have broken down already." Thorpe knew that because the two more mobile Arosians had requested that they accompany the body to the surface, and he allowed that, even allowing them access to environmental suits.

Thorpe asked the Arosian, "I presume that the chambers with the bodies were originally stasis chambers?"

"That is correct," Izanza remarked. "However, with the failure of the power systems during the attack, they are no longer functioning as such. Instead, it is the cold that is preserving the bodies."

"Would it be permissible if you or some of the other Arosians to give a blood sample so that our doctors can analyze it?"

"You can do that," Izanza agreed.

Shortly thereafter, Psakolaps gathered small blood samples from Izanza

and Busuron and a couple of the more seriously-injured Arosians. He saw that the blood was the same dark red colour of Odonan blood, as it too was chromium-based, and when he put into the high-resolution scan processor, he did not get much of a surprise. He did say to Ngyguen, "All four samples contain the *overhimpennyon* prion, but at low levels. I do not know if they were exposed due to Rodall, or if they had it prior to our contact with them."

The nurse replied, "It seems logical that they would have had it prior to contact, because they were in the presence of Nojhe Me'an, and for an unknown period of time. They survived because they have the same or similar genetic makeup that the Odonans have that prevents *overhimpennyon* from turning the immune system against the body."

"That seems possible, though the levels of the prion in the blood is orders of magnitude less than what Rodall normally has. In addition, there are some unknown pathogens in all four of the samples, but none of those were in detectable levels in Rodall's blood."

"What is the detectable level?"

"This scanner can isolate and identify a single cell of something with a different DNA structure."

"So no closer?"

"No closer."

* * *

Although he was sure that Izanza would disapprove, Thorpe did approve of the retrieval of the body of Me'an. He had yet to hear back from the Odonans if the body should be repatriated, but he was sure that the Odonan authorities were first consulting with the closest relatives of the woman. He was sure that they would request that the body be returned so that it could be interred according to Odonan customs. Hakamura and DeWillis returned to the surface, and returned to the makeshift morgue. They could see that the body of Ghorugon was in the first available chamber, while the one at the far end contained the body of the Odonan woman. They approached it, and looked upon the body of the Odonan woman, who unlike the other bodies did not bear any physical damage or injuries. DeWillis was able to open the chamber, which released the inert gases that had been in it. The body was basically frozen, though in such a way that it was not overtly damaged by the freezing. Hakamura did wonder how they could thaw the body and then conduct the post-mortem examination.

DeWillis asked, "How do you think she died?"

"I don't know," Hakamura remarked, "but the most likely explanation is that she got infected by something that the Arosians had in their system and which they were adapted to, but the Odonans were not."

"And Rodall could have the same condition?"

"Yet according to the doctors, nothing suspicious has been found in his system. Anyway, we need to transport the body back to the *Athena*." There were

some internal restraints that held the body in place, so they were removed, and then some transport tracers were put on her and activated, which would transmit back to the ship an accurate reading of her position, size and so on. Activating the communications system, the man said, "Hakamura to *Athena*, the body is ready for transfer."

"Understood," came the response from Vorwoorts, who was on the bridge. "Megan has been informed. Transporting now."

The two watched as the body of Me'an dematerialized into the transporter beam, leaving the chamber empty. DeWillis at least closed it before he and Hakamura returned to the ship. When they did return, they were informed that Dewuchun had slipped into unconsciousness.

"What can we do for him?" Bayanhong asked Doctor Tieugne, as she stood beside the biobed where Dewuchun lay, still enclosed in a sterile and isolating field. The monitors indicated a low breathing rate and low heartbeat, but his body temperature had dropped to just two degrees over the normal. The brain activity was consistent with the deep sleeping phase.

"There's nothing we can do for him but stabilize him until we learn exactly what is affecting him," Tieugne replied, as he again checked the readings. "Ger is considering transferring him to a stasis chamber if his condition gets much worse."

"And nothing from the Odonans themselves?"

"They have sent information, but it duplicates what we already have in our databanks. With Rodall in the crew, we were given the entire Odonan medical database. If they have used our data and come up with some different conclusions, we had not been informed yet. The idea of putting him into stasis is so that his condition can be suspended until we return to Federation space and turn him over to an Odonan medical ship."

"This is unfortunate."

"The really unfortunate aspect is that we do not know what caused this."

"The Arosians are somehow responsible," replied the first officer. "They specifically asked for Rodall to meet with them, and he met with the one who died shortly afterward. What kind of effect could he have had on Rodall?"

"But if he passed something to him, whatever it was does not show up on the medical scanners. There was nothing in his blood that should not have been there."

"Then it would be a coincidence that Rodall came down with *something* after that talk with Ghorugon, and according to what I've been told, he was asking Rodall if he felt any responsibility, any regret, as a person or for his fellow Odonans, to what happened to the Arosians."

"Are you implying that the Arosians somehow planned this, somehow planned to infect one Odonan, so that he might infect more?"

"It is one possibility. Another is that the Arosians might've come up with some defense against the *overhimpennyon* prion that somehow, if it infects a

person with the natural immunity, might cause... something.”

“And yet nothing shows up in his system.”

“Maybe the post-mortem on Nojhe will tell us more.”

Captain Thorpe still had the other decision to make, what to do with the Arosian survivors. He had the feeling that given what had happened to Dewuchun, having the Odonans take responsibility for them was an option not likely to be pursued. Since the Arosians had shown that they had the *overhimpennyon* prion in their system and were not affected by it, they were allowed to leave sickbay. Izanza and Busuron were assigned guest quarters and given the standard speech about where on the ship they could and could not go—though again Izanza said that there was no technology on board the *Athena* that was more advanced than what the Arosians had or was unknown to them—but Thorpe insisted that they follow the rules. The remaining Arosians were still in sickbay, still recovering from their injuries, but they were making progress.

Thus, when Thorpe met with the two most able Arosians, it was in the deck one conference lounge and not the office of the chief medical officer. “Again, captain,” Izanza said, as he sat down across from Thorpe, with Busuron at his side. “You want to meet with us again? I hope that it is not about your engineer. We are not responsible for whatever befell him.”

“That’s not what I want to discuss. We’re preparing to leave the planet here. Ultimately, our aim is to return to the Federation, and my superiors are expecting our return. However, you and your fellow Arosians cannot remain on the ship indefinitely.”

“We know that.”

“So my question is, what would you be most in favour of.”

Even before Thorpe could offer his choices, Busuron remarked, “The best possible option for us would be for you to use the ship in a slingshot warp course around a star and go back in time to before the fall of the Empire, so that we could return to our people.”

“And if I were to do that, how would history change?”

“What do you mean?”

“Would you go back and advise your people that it would be unwise to attack the Federation and other realms, and that it would be best to accept that others know about your existence and that your stash of hypermatter at Kazmarine is not something we would want to steal?” Busuron did not have an immediate response to that, as Thorpe added, “That’s not an option, however. It has been my experience that the timeline should not be disturbed. What has happened has already happened and could not and should not be undone.” On the other hand, he was surprised that nobody had attempted that already, or maybe they had and the outcome was worse each time they tried. How could he know if he was living in the “true” timeline? A lot of his experiences on the *Athena* suggested that he was not and that nobody knew what the “true” timeline was.

Busuron did admit, “Actually, it was the policy of the Arosian authorities

to not listen to anybody who claimed to be a time traveller. Such individuals were usually confined to facilities designed to deal with those who had mental issues.”

“And that was a wise approach by your people. However, the possibilities here is that you could be transferred to another Arosian survivor colony, should they accept you.”

Izanza added, “But would you be sure that the survivors did survive because they were immune to *overhimpennyon*, or did they just avoid getting exposed and being destroyed by the self-destruct?”

“That we would have to find out,” Thorpe replied. “The other option is for you to return to the Federation with us, and once there, you would essentially be treated as refugee survivors, capable of finding new homes and new roles in the Federation.”

“But could we not live among the Odonans? We are physiologically similar, and so they would be able to treat us medically, and we could eat their food and it’s possible that we are still genetically compatible and could mate with them. We’d basically become, in time, Odonans.”

“Until we learn what caused the ailment that Rodall is experiencing, that’s not an option, and I’m sure that the Odonan authorities would agree with that.”

“I see. Unless we can ascertain the risk to the survivor colony that we encounter, assuming that you know where they are, our best option could be to head to the Federation. At a later date, we could search out a suitable existence among the Arosian survivor colonies, if we should choose that route.”

“And you speak for the others?”

“The others will agree with us,” Busuron remarked. “They will follow what we suggest.”

Thorpe, somewhat tentatively, said, “Okay.” He tapped his commbadge, and said, “Thorpe to Indesakar.”

“Indesakar here,” came the response from the ship’s pilot.

“Break orbit and resume our course home.”

“Right away, captain.”

Once Izanza and Busuron were essentially discharged from sickbay, they did move around the ship, carefully observing the restrictions that Thorpe had imposed, though they had no interest in seeing engineering or any of the weapon systems and the research facilities and the like. They had no interest in using the computer systems to attempt to access classified or restricted information. Though the *Athena* functioned well and was a suitably advanced starship, the Arosians had technology that was better than what the Federation had. There was nothing on board this ship that their people did not already know, or could not do better—though the problem was that most of those people no longer existed, nor did that technology. So few Arosians remained, with Izanza and Busuron having no idea how many, that their society would take millennia to be recreated, and it would not be the same society. As Thorpe had said, the entire

galaxy now knew of the existence of the Arosians, and though “the entire galaxy” might be an exaggeration, the concept was certainly there. A lot of very extensive interstellar realms knew of the Arosians and that could never be undone. Then again, the treasure their society was created to protect had been destroyed as well. Sure, Izanza knew, the surviving Arosians could regroup and restart their civilization, but what would follow would be very different than what they knew.

The two ended up in the Acropolis. Not surprisingly, there was a security officer there, to watch over the Arosians, but Izanzo and Busuron knew they were no threats to anybody. They had no weapons, and no knowledge in how to turn common items into weapons, and they had no training in any form of hand-to-hand or non-weapon combat. They were scientists and medical researchers and bureaucrats, nothing more. Once in the Acropolis, Busuron looked at the windows at the front of the room, which they knew was at the front of the ship. The stars and other objects were streaking at a noticeable pace. They switched to a dialect of the Arosian language instead of the standard form, as Busuron said, “This ship is capable of a great velocity.”

Izanza replied, “I understand that the warp convertor uses a higher-order hyperelement, hyperboron or hypercarbon, I believe. The Odonans provided it so that this ship can travel great distances at great speeds.”

“As long as we are away from the facility, we should be safe.”

“Yes, I was worried that while the ship remained at the planet, the crew here would learn more, but now that we are underway, we should be safe.”

“The plan is still very difficult.”

“I know, but we have years, decades even, to carry it out.”

“And still there is no guarantee of success.”

“I understand that. Nothing in life has a guaranteed level of success.”

Ensign Craig Warner had the current assignment to monitor the Arosians, and assist them as necessary. It was the latter role that Thorpe emphasized, but Izanza was sure that in reality, it was the former one that was most important. Now, Izanza approached the officer and asked, “Can you help us?”

“How can I help?” Warner answered, as he had his universal translator implant programmed with the standard Arosian language.

“We are hungry and we are not sure how the replicators work.”

“You simply ask the system what you want.”

“True, but the problem is that we do not know what to say. It’s obvious that the system would not have any Arosian dishes—and we lack any real knowledge in how to create them—so we would likely have to eat the same food your Odonan crewmember eats, because we are physiologically similar.”

“Of course.” Warner led the two to the replicator station, and showed them how to access the display screen. He switched the display to the Arosian written language, which used many of the same symbols as the Odonien writing system, with some slight variations, and had the system identify common Odonan foodstuffs and dishes and what went into them. They selected a dish called *peze’eth*, which appeared to be similar to small balls of a whitish meat and broad

pasta-like noodles with a purple-coloured sauce. For drinks, the Odonan varieties available were totally unfamiliar to them, so they went with water.

As the two got their trays out of the replicator, they headed to one of the tables, and said, "May we ask that you sit with us?"

Warner answered, "Okay," but since he was on duty, he got only a coffee from the replicator.

"What is your beverage?" Buruson asked.

"It's called 'coffee.' It is a common drink among humans."

"Can I have a sip?"

Although a bit weary of the suggestion, he did allow the Arosian woman have a small sip. The reaction on her face, he could tell, was almost universal. She remarked, "That is... awful. How can you drink that?"

"It's an acquired taste."

The two did start eating their *peze'eth* dish, and they did find the taste much more agreeable, and certainly different than what they had been used to. They had been at that research facility for decades and the replicator system there had only a limited number of dishes available, and any attempt to create a new dish based on their memories was a failure. Clearly, the Odonans had created a lot of dishes that they could explore. As they ate, Izanza asked the ensign, "How long until we return to your Federation space?"

"In about a month," he answered.

"I do not understand that time reference."

"Thirty to thirty-five days, assuming that we are not redirected to investigate that star-destroyer ship should we learn of another appearance of it."

"And then what?"

"The senior officers will likely be debriefed on their experiences on this mission into what was once Arosian space, and then we will get a new mission. You and those still in sickbay will be turned over to a Federation agency that handles refugees and survivors, like you."

"What did you do during the Arosian War?"

Warner almost giggled at the suggestion, and then realized a truth about the Arosians. "Actually, the war occurred fifteen years before I was born. My parents had no role in the war, as they were both on Earth at the time."

"Earth is your home planet?"

"Yes."

The body of Nojhe Me'an had thawed out sufficiently that Psakolaps and Ngyguen could begin their post-mortem examination. They had the body in one of the biology labs, which was a restricted area where the Arosians were not allowed to go, and as far as the doctor knew, the Arosians did not know that the body was on the ship. Psakolaps, seeing the body of the Odonan woman on the examination platform, looked at the sensor display on the screen above. "No sign of trauma to the body," he informed Ngyguen. "No sign of bodily deterioration due to abusive practices."

"If she was really working like a steward to the Arosians, as they claim," the nurse replied, "they were not abusing her to any visible extent."

"And yet, she died of something, and it was not the attack. Unfortunately, they kept the body in stasis, which makes it impossible to tell when she died."

"Her skin is not noticeably darker than it was in the image transmitted to us."

"True, but the darkening of the skin among Odonans is a gradual process, and it varies by individual. Some would show noticeable darkening in fifty years and others would not. It's not a reliable way to determine the age of an Odonan."

"The worry is that she died of whatever it is that is affecting Rodall?"

"Yes," Psakolaps remarked, "that is the worry."

The doctor realized that he had no real need to cut into the body and get tissue samples, at least not yet, but the first thing he wanted to do was to get a sample of her blood. Upon Me'an's death, she had been placed in stasis as-is, so her bodily fluids were still intact, and that, according to the sensor information, included her final meal, which was still in her stomach. That did imply that the death came quickly, and she did not linger. It also meant that her blood was still in her circulatory system, so he used the tool to draw out a sample of her blood. He took this and put it into the scanner, which would scan the sample and identify everything that it found in the sample, even if there was only one example of it. The system would compare what it found to a database of what was known to be in Odonan blood, pathogens and cells and anything else.

Almost immediately, the level of one particular component in the blood sample seemingly jumped out at them. "Look at that," Ngyguen remarked. "The concentration of the *overhimpennyon* prion in her blood is four times the normal level. I'm assuming that the levels do not vary in healthy Odonans by that amount."

"No. In the vast majority of Odonans, the concentration of the prion varies no more than ten percent above or below the normal level. This is unusual. Even if the patient is battling a disease, the prion level does not rise that much."

"Why did they in this case?"

"That I don't know. However, perhaps we can take a closer look." He had the scanner system select one of the *overhimpennyon* prions and sequence its genes. The standard sequence of genes was known, especially the "non-individual component," the part of the prion that was standard among all Odonans. The rest of the genes were influenced by the genetic makeup of the person with the prion. Psakolaps also knew that the non-individual component was genetically very stable, as mutations in that part often led to the prion being destroyed since the body identified it as invasive. The scan of the first prion the system picked up found that the non-individual component matched what it was supposed to be, as did the second one, and the third one. On the other hand, the fourth one showed a different sequence of genes. It was minor, just a few genes were different, but it was noticeable.

"It mutated," Ngyguen remarked, "and it survived. The individual component matches Ma'en's profile."

"Yes, that's unusual."

"We should check Rodall's prions too."

"We will," Psakolaps remarked, but he tried something else. He had the system scan hundreds of prions, and soon found that about half had the expected non-individual component, and of the remaining half, they saw six different mutations, with one mutation far more common than the others. Several of the ones with the more common mutation had a different individual component.

"That is most unusual," Ngyguen said, as she looked over the readings on the screen. "That's not Nojhe's own *overhimpennyon* prion. That is someone else's, but unless she was exposed to another Odonan more recently than when she was captured, where did it come from?"

Psakolaps had an idea. "The Arosians." He was beginning to contemplate what those medical researchers had been doing. "As you know," he started, "the *overhimpennyon* prion in those who do not have the genetic sequences that makes them immune gets the immune system to attack the body itself. That's how those who are infected die from it. Now, to me, it looks like these Arosians might have developed a way to resist the effect of the prion by genetically engineering one of their own, to give them the immunity. At the same time, the genetic change might have allowed the prion to work around the genetic immunity of the Odonans."

"So this biological warfare disease was turned against the Odonans by the Arosians."

"That's possible, and they might have tried various genetic manipulations, as seen in the variety of the prions in Nojhe's system, to find one that worked. They used her as a, what's that human expression?"

"Guinea pig."

"Yes, as a guinea pig, to find the modification to the prion necessary to allow it to bypass the immunity that the Odonans genetically have. That's what killed Nojhe."

"And what could be killing Rodall?"

"Yes."

Psakolaps left the lab and headed back to the ward where Dewuchun lay within the sterile field. He was unconscious now, and the vital signs were still weak, but the body temperature was slowly dropping. He did wonder why the modified *overhimpennyon* prion had killed Me'an so quickly her last meal was still in her stomach, while Dewuchun was lingering. The doctor used the tool to remove a sample of the engineer's blood, and returned to the lab with it. Once that was in the scanner, he programmed it to scan for the prion and to sequence the ones that it found.

Ngyguen noticed the results, "The levels in Rodall's blood is only eight percent his normal level, which is a bit lower than the last time that was checked."

“True,” Psakolaps remarked, “and the modified ones account for that additional eight percent. What’s curious is that the genetic modification seen in him is one of the rarer ones in Nojhe’s blood. We were assuming that the one that was most abundant in her was the one that killed her, but perhaps that’s not the case, and one of the rarer ones was the actual cause.”

“Now the obvious treatment is to remove the modified prion from his system, but if the Arosians have it, then it can become airborne again and he could get re-infected.”

“And if these Arosians somehow can expose other Odonans to the modified prion, there could be more cases like Nojhe among them.”

“It’s almost like they’re getting their revenge on those they believe are the true cause of the collapse of the Arosian Empire.”

“Yes, it seems that way.”

* * *

“Are you sure that this is going to work?” Captain Thorpe asked Psakolaps, as he was in the ward where Dewuchun lay on the biobed.

“In theory, it should work, because the biofilters can remove agents which do not belong in the body, but the tricky part is that they work because the agents removed have a completely different genetic or chemical profile compared to the body. That’s especially true for known pathogens and the like. The problem is that the modified *overhimpenyon* prion consists a lot of the known prion, the ones that are not to be removed, so the processing routine takes longer, and the programming can be tricky. The other danger is that the patient could spend too long in the wave state of the transport process while the processing takes place, and that could induce some quantum fluctuations in the molecular structure the patient is made of. Every time a person transports, there is some of those fluctuations, but they make up such a tiny fraction of the quantum state of the person that they are generally considered to be of no danger. What we don’t know is the threshold for when those fluctuations can potentially be dangerous.”

“How long would Rodall have to be in the wave state for this to work?”

“I’m still working to figure that out. Right now, Rodall appears to be stable, with the overabundance of *overhimpenyon* in his system declining, and his temperature is starting to return to normal too.”

“So he could be recovering on his own?”

“That’s possible, but he could relapse, and the modified prions could continue to exist in his system. We know that Nojhe died from this—or at least I strongly suspect that as it is hard to tell—so some Odonans might be vulnerable. Thus, Rodall is a danger to his fellow Odonans, including his wife and daughter.”

“I see,” the captain remarked. “Would it be possible to remove *all* the *overhimpenyon* from his system?”

“That could safely be done using the normal biofilter process, but that would leave him vulnerable because he would lack the protection from his own

overhimpennyon, and the modified prions from the Arosians are still present, possibly airborne, and if he gets reinfected, the outcome could be worse the second time around.”

“So we need to get the Arosians off of the ship.”

“Easier said than done,” the doctor replied.

“I know. It’s unfortunate that Rodall can’t speak for himself on whether or not he wants to take the risk of the treatment you suggested.”

“In the absence or inability of informed consent, captain, it would be your call on whether we should go ahead with the treatment.”

“In your option, if we delay the treatment, to give further thought to this, would it adversely affect Rodall?”

“At the present time, his condition appears stable. His body is holding its own against the modified prion, but that could change at any time.”

“Of course.”

Thorpe was in the ready room with Bayanhong, and he had discussed with her what he had discussed with Psakolaps, about the treatment options for their chief engineer, and the risks involved. Bayanhong did add, “I did a quick review of the medical literature on patients being in the wave state for a prolonged period, while the biofilters are analyzing the data and making the changes. There are cases of wave state matter persisting in the pattern buffer for extended periods, but admittedly, in those cases, the biofilters are not being used.”

Thorpe replied, “It’s the use of the filters and for an extended period that could result in other changes. That’s always the risk with the biofilters, but the risk is much reduced if the agents being removed have a completely different genetic or chemical composition, as Ger said. It’s trickier when the analysis must be much finer.”

“Data on such situations is much scarcer,” the first officer admitted. “The possibility of quantum and even molecular fluctuations is much greater, I can imagine. The programming would have to be very precise. I doubt that Ger had the odds of success on the tip of his tongue.”

“He would not offer any odds.”

“And so the choice on whether or not to proceed is up to you.” Thorpe just nodded, so Bayanhong continued, “And you don’t want it to be?”

“I would not necessarily say that, but I want to make sure I am making the right decision.”

“So a second opinion?”

“If only there was a way to consult on any Odonan experts in the field, as they probably have had some experience in this. I can’t believe there have been no examples in Odonan history when the *overhimpennyon* prion went bad. What if a mutation such as the ones the Arosians induced occurred on their own? Could it have happened?”

“Perhaps some time in a couple of thousand years, but finding informa-

tion on that could be hard.”

“True.” As he said those words, he heard his commbadge chirp. Tapping it, he said, “Thorpe here.”

“Hakamura, sir,” came the reply from the security chief. “Izanza insists on meeting with you?”

“About what?”

“He would not say.”

Thorpe hesitated for a moment, and then said, “Bring him to the ready room.”

“Right away, sir.”

Bayanhong asked, “What does he want this time?”

“I don’t know.”

“Should I leave?”

“No, you can stay.”

A few moments later, the door to the ready room opened, and Hakamura entered, and was followed by Izanza. It was hard for Thorpe to gauge the mood of the Arosian leader, and he had no idea of what he wanted this time. The captain did ask, “You wanted to see me about something?”

“Yes,” Izanza said. “I have learned that you have the body of Nojhe Me’an on board your ship. You were asked to leave her where she was, as that location was her grave, along with the others who died during the attack. Why did you violate that?”

“Me’an is not Arosian. She’s Odonan,” Thorpe started. “We sent information to the Odonan authorities in an attempt to confirm her identity. At the time, they informed us that they would contact her family about how to handle the body. Subsequently, we got a request to repatriate her body and allow her family to inter her as to their desired customs.” That was not strictly true, Thorpe knew, or at least the order of events was not true. They had received that request from the Odonans, but it had come after they had recovered the body and left the planet. Izanza did not have to know that.

“That is irrelevant. It was her wish to be interred where she was.”

“Unfortunately, we only have your word for that.”

“Then I hope that you are keeping the body in stasis and not examining it.”

“The Odonans requested information on the cause of death,” Thorpe said, and as he said those words, he did notice the change in expression on Izanza’s face. “That’s what you don’t want us to know, is it?”

After a few seconds, the Arosian leader replied, “She became a victim of the medical research that we were doing. We were attempting to create a variant of the *overhimpennyon* prion that would protect us from the original variant, and it appeared that the modified form had the same lethality on her that the original variant had on us.”

Bayanhong gave a derisive snort to that comment, prompting the others to look at her. She said, “If that were true, you would not hesitate to inform us to

the cause of her death.”

“Are you implying?” Izanza started.

“Yes, I’m implying. I’m implying that used her to test the modifications to find one that would make the prion lethal to Odonans.”

“That is... outrageous.”

“It’s also the truth,” the first officer continued. “Your plan was revenge, to somehow create a version of the *overhimpennyon* prion that the Odonans were not immune to, and then you wanted to introduce it to the Odonans so that they would suffer the same fate as your people did. You had this captured Odonan woman, and you infected her, more than once, before finding a variant that resulted in her death. Then, you arranged for our chief engineer to get infected by that same prion, perhaps as a further test, or perhaps with the hope that the Odonans would come for him and before they realized the situation that they had, the disease would spread and infect them the same way the original *overhimpennyon* prion infected and spread among your people. In essence, you—or your team but you indirectly—murdered Me’an.”

“That is ridiculous,” Izanza remarked. “However, assuming that we did create this modified version of *overhimpennyon* and had this plan to infect the Odonans with it, *how* would we have carried that out? We had no ship, and we were isolated at that facility.”

“A facility which has Arosian technology, and that undoubtedly detected a signal that indicated a viable Arosian ship was out there, a signal likely generated by the self-destruct signal from the base where we had encountered some Arosian technology.”

“The star-destroyer?” Thorpe asked, suddenly realizing that his first officer had thought ahead about this.

Bayanhong continued, “Somehow, you contacted the ship and it came to the star system you were located in, but you did not know who was in control of that ship, and they came to the planet with quite different intentions than you would’ve wanted. Instead of helping you, they attacked you and killed many in your team and basically destroyed the place.”

Thorpe then asked, “Is that why the star-destroyer ship came to the planet? Were you hoping for a ride off the planet and a means to put your plan into action?”

Izanza remarked, “You have no proof of any of this. You could not determine if *overhimpennyon* caused her death.”

“No, but we do have one Odonan crewmember who is in sickbay seriously ill from the disease, which was no doubt introduced when he had that meeting with the member of your team who had died. We find it hard to believe that was not intentional, and that Ghorugon volunteered for doing it because he knew he would not survive his injuries.”

Izanza looked at the two officers, and did not know what to say, or even what his choices were. If the captain and first officer believed the tale that had been spun, then he knew that there could be consequences and the plans that had

been made could not go forward. If only there was a way to get off of this ship... but there were none. He knew that there was no realistic way he could take over the ship because he and his people were vastly outnumbered, and it was Thorpe's ship and not his. He did say, "Captain, the death of Me'an was an honest mistake, because we were working on a way to make us immune to the prion, not to create a variant that would be lethal to an Odonan."

"If that were so, and you knew it was lethal to Odonans, then why did Ghorugon want to meet with our engineer? *You* and your people should have gone out of your way to make sure there was no contact. Your actions suggest what your intentions were."

"But you have to understand the situation," Izanza started, feeling a flash of anger that he had to keep under control. "Our civilization was destroyed. It was a glorious civilization, very advanced, spread over multiple planets and in existence for thousands of years. We had access to technologies that you and your kind, space-going for centuries, not millennia, could not understand or comprehend—and then it was all destroyed, because of *them*, and what they did."

"We have been over this before," Thorpe started, doing his best to remain calm. "You destroyed your society by your own hand. By your own admission, there were many who survived the *overhimpennyon* diseases, but many of those who did survive the infection died because you had set up your society to self-destruct if it could not continue under your own rules. When a society has interstellar flight capability and can contact other civilizations on other worlds, they cannot expect to get their own way every time. You cannot impose your vision on other civilizations when that vision requires that they be destroyed. What gave your people the right to destroy other civilizations once they achieved interstellar flight and learned of your existence?"

"That was the basis... of our culture, to protect the treasure at Kazmarine."

"And undoubtedly, if your realm was as advanced and technologically sophisticated as you said it was, then your people should have been able to protect that treasure without the need to destroy other civilizations. Did you not say that you were confident that without *overhimpennyon*, your people could have defeated the Federation and the Klingons and the Romulans and the rest?" Izanza had no response to that, so Thorpe added, "But now you say you could not have defended Kazmarine and its treasure against those same forces?"

"You don't understand my people."

"You're right, I don't. What I am is an impartial observer, and when I think of the Arosians, I think of a bully who insisted on getting their own way, beating up and destroying everyone that they feel should not exist for whatever reason—and then that bully experiences the same thing. That bully then destroys himself. He does not understand the fundamental error of his ways. That's ultimately what did in your people. Sure, *overhimpennyon* exists and its endemic in Odonans and they did not understand that the prion could be fatal to related peoples without the necessary genetic sequence. However, you, a ragtag

group working in an alien facility, were able to come up with a vaccine and a treatment. It's my understanding the Odonans have too, and it should be available to any survivor group that is encountered and does not have the natural immunity. Surely, your full society would have found an effective means to stop the spread and treat it, but you resorted to society-wide self-destruction instead. Thus, the fall of your civilization was at your own hands."

"Captain, if the same fate befell your society, would you not want to seek revenge on those that caused it?"

"The same fate would not befall us. We don't have society-wide self-destruct protocols. I just implied to you how we would have handled it. We would work to stop the disease, cure it in those who had it and work to prevent its spread. That's our approach. If there was a war, we would work to defeat them, and not destroy them. Quite often, the enemy learns the lesson. War and violence usually do not solve anything, and societies can prosper when their aim is not to obliterate others, for whatever reason. That's the approach that we have been taking, and the approach that we believe in."

"And," Izanza said, "it's an approach that could lead to your downfall. You don't think your Federation will exist until the heat death of the universe, do you?"

"No, of course not, but I believe it will not fall because we seek to totally obliterate another society. It's certainly possible that something that we have no concept of could destroy us, but of what could destroy us, we are aware of and we take the necessary measures to prevent it."

"Including destroying the enemy?"

"No, just to prevent them from attacking us. The Federation and the neighbouring races had no intention to invade the Arosian Empire, and no plans to travel all the way to Kazmarine. Our goal was to secure our own borders and prevent further attacks. Your people were in no military danger from us. That was our goal."

More softly, Izanza added, "Our mindsets are clearly different."

"Clearly."

After a pause, the Arosian asked, "So what is going to happen to us?"

"When we return to Federation, you will be turned over to the appropriate authorities. It's possible you could face charges for the death of Me'an—as killing someone in the name of medical research is a crime in the Federation—but that is up to the prosecutors and the legal officials who understand the law. Until then, you should be confined to the quarters you have been given, and as those in sickbay recover to the point they can be discharged, they too will be confined to quarters. If Dewuchun dies, then you could certainly face charges, and there, we would be on firmer legal ground because it occurred on this ship."

"I did not do that."

"But you had knowledge that it was going to be done, and the decision to proceed might have been yours, or at least you knew what Ghorugon was planning to do and did nothing to prevent it or notify us. That too is a crime."

“I see.”

Thorpe turned to his security chief, and said, “Commander Hakamura, escort Izanza to the quarters that he has been assigned, and follow usual procedures involved in confining someone to quarters.”

“Yes, captain,” Hakamura replied, and then he escorted the Arosian out of the ready room.

Bayanhong remained, and asked, “So what will happen to them?”

“I don’t know how the legal authorities will handle this, but it might be best when we beam them off the ship that we remove the *overhimpennyon* from their systems, so that they can be no further threat to the Odonans.”

“Could removing the prions from their system also remove the protection they have from the original Odonan version?”

“I suspect that the surviving Arosians have the natural immunity, because they would have been in prolonged contact with Nøjhe while working on their modified versions of *overhimpennyon*. They did not suffer from the disease at that time, so they are likely to be immune. Even so, I’m sure that the authorities back home will make sure that their contact with the Odonans is limited.”

“Of course.”

Thorpe settled back into the chair, and said, “And now for the other big decision?”

“Rodall?”

“Yes... whether to let Doctor Psakolaps go ahead with the recommended treatment...”

A short time later, Thorpe entered sickbay. Since Izanza had been escorted out of the ready room, he had been thinking about his chief engineer and the treatment option to use the biofilters to remove the modified *overhimpennyon* prions from his system while retaining the original ones, a procedure that had the risk of perhaps degrading the quantum connections between atoms and molecules within his body. He found Psakolaps monitoring the Arosian patients who were still in sickbay. The doctor heard the doors opening and closing, and looked to see who entered. “Captain,” he started. “Have you decided?”

“Before I answer that,” Thorpe replied as he approached the Kentyan, “what about the other Arosians?”

“All should make a recovery, though some might have disabilities and deficiencies they will have to deal with.”

“And what about the *overhimpennyon* prions in their systems?”

“All at low levels and all the modified versions. What I have noticed is that their bodies are not able to provide the essential proteins necessary to build any *overhimpennyon* prion, and that is, I believe, their natural immunity, not the genetic sequence that the Odonans have. It also means that they cannot really spread the prion themselves and over time, the concentration in their blood will drop eventually to zero. I also suspect that some of the modifications were being done and tested to see what could replicate within their bodies.”

“Interesting.”

“Yes, and about Rodall.”

“How is his condition? If he is stable or deteriorating, then we should go ahead with the procedure.”

“I have been working with Marlina to improve the coding in the biofilters, and develop a specific routine just for him that would minimize his time in the wave state under manipulation. You are right, it depends on his condition.”

Nurse Ngyguen came into the room, and said, “Doctor, the latest analysis is showing that the level of *overhimpennyon* concentration in Rodall’s blood is now down to three percent over his norm, and the difference is mostly the modified version. It’s like his body is fighting off the infection itself.”

“So perhaps the procedure is not needed?” Thorpe asked.

“Perhaps,” Psakolaps answered, “but we still must have it ready in case it is needed. I’m not sure how his body is handling it, but it is possible that the modified version might not work the same on all Odonans as it did on Nojhe. Afterall, she was infected several times, and in all likelihood, only one was fatal to her.”

“Well, Rodall’s recovery is still a positive development.”

A short time later, Dewuchun woke from his fitful sleep. He woke and felt stiff and groggy and was even a bit sweaty, as if the heat in this location had been turned up high. His body was stiff, and when he realized that he was uncomfortable in the position he was laying and wanted to turn, he found that his body was slow to respond. His vision was blurry and his hearing was distorted. He looked around, and for a moment was confused on where he was. Then he seemed to recognize that this was sickbay. What was he doing here?

Then he remembered. He woke up and his body did not feel right. He tried to shake it off, to start his day and hope that the feeling of “not right” would dissipate, but it did not. In fact, it got worse. He tried to eat his breakfast and only got halfway through it when his body told him he could not handle any more of that. He made the decision to go to sickbay because something was wrong.

And now here he was. The rest of it seemed to be a blur, a series of moments with no concept of time or order. They took blood samples. They spoke but their voices were distorted. What was happening? One word came through. It was an Odonan word. Yes, now he remembered, *overhimpennyon*. They were talking about the prion, and how something was affecting him. What could have caused that? All he knew was that his body did not seem to be working properly and it was like his brain was no longer in control of his body. He ended up on this bed, his senses not working, and the bioelectricity was not working either. He felt hot or cold or something, he was not sure what. He had fallen sleep, or maybe it was a coma. That would explain why his body was so stiff. Why could he not turn over? Was his body restrained? No, his body was just not functioning normally. He willed his muscles to move, and they started to cooperate. He looked around, and now knew that he was definitely in sickbay. A woman approached, and he

recognized her.

Ngyguen said, "Rodall, you are awake?"

"I think so," he managed to reply, the words hard to come out and not sounding right. "Was I asleep, or worse?"

"More like a coma."

"How long?"

"Three days." Ngyguen checked the life sign display and said, "Your body temperature is now one degree above normal."

"And I feel hot. What happened?"

"When you met with the Arosian who later died, he passed on a modified *overhimpennyon* prion to you, the same one that apparently killed the Odonan woman, Nojhe Me'an, found on the planet where we rescued the Arosians."

"A modified *overhimpennyon* prion? Why?"

"To infect the Odonans and do to them what was done to the Arosians during the war."

"That is... unfortunate. This same variant killed Nojhe?"

"Possibly. We found six different varieties in her blood. One of those is the same in your body. We feared that the modified *overhimpennyon* might kill you, and we were preparing for a pass through the transporter with the biofilters specially modified to remove the modified *overhimpennyon* prion."

"That level of manipulation of matter in the wave state could damage the quantum connections."

"We know that, but if the alternative was your death, that was a risk the captain was prepared to take. However, it appears that your body was able to resist the modified *overhimpennyon* prion and prevent it from turning your immune system against your body."

"And yet, it feels like it had."

"However, you are awake and recovering, though full recovery could take time."

Dewuchun noticed something else too, a sense that he could feel because he was an engineer and seemingly attuned to it. "We're at warp, aren't we?"

"Yes."

"Where are we heading?"

"Back to the Federation."

"What about the Arosians?"

"They are still on board, but their movements are restricted. We beamed each of them from one point of the ship to another, and removed the *overhimpennyon* from their systems, and we have worked to purify the air as much as possible so that you could not be reinfected. Doctor Psakolaps believes a second infection in a weakened state could have a more serious outcome."

"And what about the Arosians being infected by me?"

"Not likely. The *overhimpennyon* in their system was not designed to protect them from your prions, because if that was the case, they would've had the same reaction that you had, but none of them did. It was determined that their

immunity to the prion was based on a different genetic sequence than the one that protects Odonans. Basically, the prion could not reproduce in their bodies, as they lacked the right enzyme and protein-building tools. It's why they survived in the first place."

"I see," Dewuchun said. He still felt hot and stiff and his body was slow to react, but at least his brain was feeling more normal. "I fear that they could try again."

"Yes, we understand that," the nurse replied.

"It has been a fear among my people since the war that the surviving Arosians would somehow get their revenge for what happened, because that is their mindset. This one might have been stopped, but what about the next one?" The head nurse and chief engineer just exchanged looks.