

Cleve Johnson's

# To Boldly Go

S*pace...*



*...the final frontier.*

*M y s t e r i e s*



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# *These are the voyages of the starship U.S.S. Monarch. Its mission—to explore, to seek out life, to represent and defend the Federation.*

## M y s t e r i e s

Cleve Johnson

The U.S.S. *Monarch* returned to normal space and approached the planetoid known to its inhabitants as Tann Rohuna. Orbiting above the planet's surface, the Federation space station sparkled with the reflection on the star's rays.

Captain Robert P. Stuart looked around the bridge, observing the crew—his crew—diligently working at each person's assigned station. Only a few days had passed since he had assumed command of this state-of-the-art vessel, yet Rob had already gained an affinity toward the officers and crew that he worked with each day. After leaving the *Providence*, Rob could not imagine working with another team of people that would have the rapport that his former

shipmates enjoyed, but the seeds of another great team had been planted on the *Monarch*. "Standard orbit, Mister Little Bear," Rob said.

"Aye Captain," replied Ensign Roger Little Bear, the young officer manning the CONN station.

"Eight *Peregrine*-class fighters are approaching, sir," Lieutenant Jeremy Brackin announced from OPS. "The lead ship is hailing, Captain."

"On speakers, Lieutenant," Rob said.

*"This is Raptor leader to U.S.S. Monarch. On behalf of the Raptor squadron, I request permission to come aboard."*

"Permission granted," Rob stated. "Shuttlebay two is prepared to receive you and your squadron."

*"Thank you, sir. Raptor leader out."*

Stuart rose from the center seat and turned toward the tactical station. "Lieutenant Mills, you have

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the bridge," he said as he started toward the turbolift. "Have Commander Grey meet me in shuttlebay two to welcome our new arrivals."

"Sir, Starbase G-6 control has signaled that our crew additions are preparing to beam over," Lieutenant Brackin stated.

Stuart stopped and turned toward OPS. "Thank you, Lieutenant." The captain turned back toward Jennifer Mills, who was moving toward the captain's chair. "On second thought, have Mister

Grey greet the new crew members in transporter room one.”

“I’ll see to it, Captain,” Mills replied as she occupied the center seat.

Stuart entered the turbolift and sped toward the rear of the starship.

Mills pressed the communications panel on the chair arm. “Commander Grey, please report to transporter room one.”

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Commander Marcus Grey walked out of the head...the traditional naval term for ‘bathroom’...drying his light brown hair with a towel. He grabbed the red tunic and pulled it over his head...not the bathroom...and finished getting dressed. “Ian.”

“Coming Dad.” A twelve-year-old boy, his brown hair slightly darker than his father’s, entered Grey’s bedroom. The boy carried his father’s uniform jacket and held it out, waiting for his father to take it. “Looking for this, Commander?”

Marcus smiled at his son as the elder Grey accepted the jacket. He put it on and straightened it. “How do I look?”

“Ship shape,” Ian said with a British accent more pronounced than his father’s—probably due to the elder Grey’s time spent away from his native England. “Will I get a tour of the bridge soon, Commander?”

“You know that only Starfleet personnel are allowed on the bridge, son.”

“I thought you said a civilian specialist of some kind was coming on board. Will he be allowed on the bridge?”

“Mister Rab is an official member of the crew. He’s an exception to the rule. Besides, you’re not old enough,” Marcus said. The bridge is no place for a twelve-year-old.”

“I’ll be thirteen in two weeks. I think the captain should allow civilians to tour the bridge...maybe as a birthday present,” Ian stated

with the arrogance of an emerging adolescent.

“Marcus winked at his son. “I’ll pass your suggestion to the captain.

“Right-O, Father.”

“*Commander Grey, please report to transporter room one.*”

The first officer tapped his communicator. “I’m on my way, Lieutenant.”

Ian’s eyes brightened. “Can I come with you, Dad?”

Marcus thought a moment to consider if there would be any harm in allowing his son to accompany him to welcome the new crewmembers. Seeing the excitement in the boy’s eyes, the first officer smiled. “I don’t see why you can’t,” he said. “But you must stay in the corridor, Ian. The transporter rooms are...”

“...off limits,” Ian said, finishing his father’s sentence. “I promise to follow the regs, Commander.”

“That’s a good lad,” Marcus said as he messed his son’s hair by

rubbing the boy's head briskly. Marcus turned and exited his quarters, his son following as he used his fingers to smooth his dark brown hair back into a respectable look.

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Robert Stuart entered the shuttlebay just as the last of the eight fighters passed through the atmospheric force field. He watched the ship gracefully come to rest on the flight deck with the aid of one of the *Monarch's* many tractor beams. The captain stepped toward the lead fighter craft as the pilot exited through the hatch on the ship's belly. Stuart extended his hand to the pilot. "I'm Captain Robert P. Stuart," he said. Welcome aboard the U.S.S. *Monarch*."

The pilot removed her helmet and placed it under her left arm. The blonde-haired woman shook the captain's hand, smiling as she did so. "Thank you, Captain. I'm Lieutenant Commander Kimberly Thomas, in command of the 63<sup>rd</sup> Fighter Wing," she said.

Stuart looked at the fighters that filled the flight deck. "These are fine looking ships, Commander. I've never seen one this close before."

"We're proud of them, sir," Thomas said. "They proved themselves during the war."

Stuart studied the young woman. From her looks, Rob thought that she was too young to have participated in the Dominion War. "You fought the Dominion?"

"Yes sir," Thomas stated. "I was an ensign, fresh out of the Academy when I was assigned to the 63<sup>rd</sup> as a pilot. We had seventeen fighters back then, but..." Thomas' eyes seemed to darken as she thought about the comrades and fellow officers that had been lost in battle. "...Well, war took its toll."

Stuart could empathize with the young woman. He had lost friends in the war as well. "I understand," he said. "If you and your squadron would gather your gear, Chief Shanev will show you all to your quarters."

The Andorian Shanev stepped forward. "At your service, Commander."

"Thank you, Chief," Thomas said.

"There will be an orientation meeting at 1400 hours, followed by a reception," Stuart said. "Please inform your squadron."

"We look forward to it, Captain Stuart."

Stuart smiled and shook Thomas' hand. "I look forward to working with you, CAG."

"And I you, Captain."

Stuart left the shuttlebay and the Raptor Squadron in the capable care of Chief Petty Officer Shanev.

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Marcus and Ian Grey approached the entrance to transporter room one. Marcus stopped as the doors to the room slid open. He turned to face his son. "This will only take a few minutes, Ian."

"I'll wait for you right here, Commander."

Marcus smiled at his son's use of the rank that the elder Grey held. Ian had always made a point of calling his father by the man's Starfleet rank. It was not in a mocking way, but one of respect.

Marcus turned and entered the transporter room just as the first group of new crewmembers materialized on the platform. He nodded to the female transporter technician and the man standing beside her—Chief Petty Officer Hernandez of the quartermaster's office. Marcus turned his attention to the new members of the crew as they stepped off the transport platform. "Welcome aboard the U.S.S. *Monarch*," he said warmly. "I'm Commander Marcus Grey, first officer. Your quarters will be assigned by Chief Hernandez," he motioned toward the man standing next to the transporter tech. "An orientation session will be held at 1400 in the 11-forward lounge where you will meet the senior officers and your respective department heads."

The group of people, happy to be on board, each thanked Commander Grey and gathered around Chief Hernandez, who passed out isolinear chips containing room assignments to each person. One by one the new crewmembers, some with family exited the transporter room to search for their quarters. This process repeated itself four more times as additional crew beamed into the chamber. Finally, the last person beamed on board. The man wore civilian attire.

"Welcome aboa..." Marcus began, but had been interrupted by one of the men walking down the platform steps.

"It's good to meet you, Commander Grey," the man said with an outstretched had. "No need to show me to my quarters. I know where they are."

"You must be..."

"...Elsen Rab. Yes. I'm the first contact specialist assigned to this mission."

"And you're..."

"...Betazoid. That's right." Elsen Rab, knowing a person's thoughts instantly, had a bad habit of not letting others finish their sentences. The Betazoid, a man in his mid-thirties, was considered to be one of the most powerful telepaths born on his world. He did not intend to read the thoughts of others, but he could not easily block the thoughts of those around him that freely flowed into his mind. Well, Commander, I would like to settle in before meeting Captain Stuart."

"Of course, Sir. Orientation is at..."

"...1400 hours in 11-Forward. I'll be there," Rab said and left the transporter room.

Grey smiled and shook his head. "This will be interesting." He nodded to the transporter technician as he started for the exit. "Carry on."

"Aye, Sir."

\* \* \*

Ian had obediently remained in the corridor while his father took

care of ship's business, welcoming aboard new officers and crew. He watched the various groups of people—Starfleet personnel and a few civilians—as they exited the transporter room. He came to attention when he saw a girl come through the door with her parents. Ian felt his heart beat faster. He had never had that happen before at the site of a girl. In fact, the presence of members of the opposite sex previously motivated Ian to avoid as much interaction with them as possible. But that was before his body started to go through the changes that come when a boy starts to become a man. It was an amazing and mysterious process of change in a boy's thinking. Ian stared at the girl and stepped toward her. "Welcome aboard. I'm Ian Grey."

The girl noticed Ian, his brown hair, brown eyes. She returned his infectious smile. "I'm Carrie. Carrie Nelson."

"I'm glad to make your acquaintance, Miss Nelson."

Carrie heard her father clear his throat. She turned and stepped aside as her dad stepped forward. "These are my parents, Greg and Christine Nelson."

Ian offered his hand to Carrie's father and shook his hand. He then shook Carrie's mom's hand. "A pleasure to meet you, Sir. Ma'am."

"Likewise, Ian," Carrie's father said as he tried not to show his amusement at the young man's efforts to impress them. "Are you the first officer's son?"

"Yes Sir."

"He seems like a very nice man," Carrie's mother said. "I look forward to meeting your mother."

"My mum died a few years ago," Ian said, hiding the pain of his loss. It was not something he liked to talk about.

"I'm sorry," Christine Nelson stated sadly.

"It's alright, Ma'am. I understand that the universe isn't always as kind as I would like it to be."

"That's part of the mystery, isn't it?" Carrie's father stated.

"Yes, Sir."

As Commander Grey entered the corridor, he stopped when noticing that Ian was talking with three of the new arrivals—a science officer, his wife, and daughter. Marcus took notice that Ian's eyes were primarily directed toward the girl, whom Marcus guessed was about Ian's age. *Adolescence*, Marcus thought. He approached his son and the family, smiling cordially. "I see that you met my son."

The science officer turned to face the first officer. "Yes Sir. You have a fine boy here," he stated. Holding out his hand to Marcus, who returned the handshake, the officer introduced himself. "Lieutenant Greg Nelson. This is my wife Christine, and our daughter Carrie."

"Good to meet both you and your family, Mister Nelson."

Christine, the civilian botanist assigned to manage the ship's arboretum, smiled at Marcus. "You

son is very polite, Commander. He seems quite mature for his age.”

“Thank you,” Marcus said.

Ian tried not to blush.

“Father, may I escort the Nelsons to their quarters? I would also like to give them a tour of the ship, if I may.”

Marcus smiled at his son.

The first officer had a good idea where this was leading, but he did not want to embarrass his son, nor the Nelsons. “I have no objections if the Nelsons don’t.”

“I think it would be wonderful,” Christine said.

“It will be nice to have our own personal tour guide,” Greg chimed in. “What do you think, Carrie?”

The blonde-haired, blue-eyed young teen smiled, not averting her gaze from Ian. “I’d like that,” she said quietly.

Ian’s face displayed a wide grin. “Well, let’s be off then. The turbolift is this way.” The boy led Carrie and her mother down the

corridor, but the science officer delayed to talk with the Marcus.

“I’ll catch up with you,” Greg Nelson said as his wife and daughter followed Ian. The man turned to face Marcus. “Are you really okay with Ian doing this, Commander? You look a little nervous.”

Marcus looked past Greg down the corridor. “I’m just a bit concerned, Lieutenant. My son is at *that* age. Emerging hormones and all that.”

Greg nodded in agreement. “I remember how it was for me. Don’t worry, Sir. We’ll keep an eye on him.”

Marcus smiled as he patted the lieutenant on the shoulder. “Thank you, Mister Nelson. You better catch up with your guide so you don’t lose your way.”

“Yes Sir. I look forward to talking more with you.” Greg turned and briskly walked down the corridor.

Marcus’ gaze followed the younger man as the first officer

thought about Ian’s interest in Nelson’s daughter. “I don’t know if I’m ready for this,” he whispered to the air.

\* \* \*

Rob Stuart entered sickbay and looked around the room, searching for his wife. He slowly walked toward the duty nurse who was testing medical tricorders at her station. “Nurse.”

“Yes Sir?” Karen Ingalls was startled by Rob’s approach. “How can I help you?”

“Sorry, Miss Ingalls. I didn’t mean to scare you,” Rob said smiling. “I was looking for Doctor Stuart.”

“She was feeling a little nauseous, Sir. Doctor M’Tan convinced Doctor Stuart to end her shift early and go to her...your quarters.”

Stuart’s good-natured smile faded to a slight frown. “Is she okay? Are there complications?”

Karen shook her head and smiled at the captain. “Don’t worry,

Sir. Everything is fine with the doctor...and the babies.”

Stuart regained his cheerful demeanor. “You had me worried, Miss Ingalls.”

“Sorry, Captain. I didn’t mean to,” the nurse stated. “The nausea is a normal part of pregnancy for most women.”

“I don’t mean to be so nervous, Miss Ingalls, but I’ve never been a father before.”

Ingalls smiled at her CO. “Most men survive it, Sir.”

Stuart grinned as he turned toward the exit. He left sickbay and the doors slid shut behind him shortly after entering the corridor. He nodded at various crewmen as he started toward the nearest turbolift. As he entered the lift, Stuart’s communicator pin chirped. He tapped the delta-shaped symbol on his chest. “Stuart. Go ahead.”

*“All new arrivals and cargo have come aboard, Captain.”*

“Very good, Exec. Set course for Pacifica and engage at warp eight.”

*“Aye Captain.”*

Stuart entered the turbolift and sped toward his quarters. Within minutes the captain had arrived at deck ten and stepped from the turbolift into the corridor. He walked briskly through the rounded corridor until he reached his quarters. The doors parted as the computerized sensors scanned and recognized his DNA pattern. Rob walked straight to the bedroom where he found his wife laying in bed reading a book.

Janice Stuart stopped reading and smiled half-heartedly at her husband. “I figured you’d be on the bridge.”

Rob gently sat on the edge of the bed and took his wife’s hand in his. “I heard that you were shirking your duties. I thought that I should find out why before putting you on report.” He loved to tease his wife.

Jan forced a smile. “I really have work to do in sickbay, but Doctor M’Tan insisted that I take the

rest of the day off,” she said. “I’m not too happy about it either.”

“I’m not surprised, Jan. I’ve always heard that doctors are the worst patients.”

Jan grabbed the pillow beside her and flung it at Rob, who didn’t duck soon enough to avoid the collision.

Rob smiled at his wife. “Did that help?”

“Yes it did,” Jan replied. “The next time I’ll throw it harder.”

Rob leaned over and kissed Jan on the forehead. Standing to his feet, Rob winked at his wife as he said, “Next time...I’ll get out of the way.” He left the bedroom for a moment. When he reentered the room, Rob carried a cup of hot cinnamon tea. “This might help you feel better,” he said while offering the cup to Janice.

Jan reached out and accepted the tea. “Thanks, Rob. The cinnamon usually settles my stomach.”

“You don’t have to attend the new crew orientation if you’re not up for it,” Rob said.

“I’ll be there if I can, Rob. I don’t want to miss meeting the new crew.”

Rob kissed Jan again. “I’ll be on the bridge if you need me.”

Jan watched her husband leave their bedroom. She put her hand on her abdomen and smiled. “Your father is a wonderful man. I hope both of you will inherit his love and kindness for others.”

Janice picked up the book that she had been reading earlier—*Engineering Operations for Bridge Officer Candidates*.

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The starship *Monarch* entered orbit around Pacifica, an ocean world renown for its warm waters and sandy beaches. Unfortunately, this was a short visit that would not allow the crew to enjoy a holiday on this beautiful world.

Captain Robert Stuart rose from the center seat and started toward the turbolift. “Have Mister

Rab meet me in transporter room one, Exec. You have the bridge.”

“Yes Sir.”

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Elsen Rab of Betazed waited for the captain to arrive. The telepath knew that he would be summoned to the transporter room minutes before the summons ever came. Rab sometimes felt that his ability, stronger than most Betazoids, was more of a curse rather than a gift. Since coming on board, Elsen suffered frequent headaches from the hundreds of minds, all the random thoughts that assaulted his mind constantly. Sometimes he thought that he would go mad if he couldn’t find a way to block out the conscious...and unconscious thoughts of the entire crew. He wished that he were back on...”Vulcan,” Rab replied to the unspoken question.

“What about Vulcan?” Stuart, having just entered the room, asked.

“You were going to ask me about my home,” Rab stated. “I was born on Betazed, but I consider Vulcan to be just as much my home.”

Stuart lifted an eyebrow and slightly cocked his head to one side. He started to speak. “...”

“Because I lived on Vulcan for a number of years, trying to master their mental disciplines.”

“So that’s why...”

“Yes, that’s why I preferred to serve on a ship primarily consisting of a Vulcan crew.”

Stuart tried not to project his irritation over having his thoughts read, but he knew that Elsen Rab would know how Stuart felt regardless of how well the human captain tried to block his thoughts. So he deliberately projected a single thought to the Betazoid. *You are being rude, Mister Rab! Even if you already know what we’re going to say, show us non-telepaths the courtesy of letting us communicate verbally...without interruption!*

Rab looked down at the floor. "I apologize, Captain Stuart. I'll try to be courteous."

Stuart, seeing Rab's painful expression, immediately regretted the mental outburst that he had projected toward the Betazoid. "I'm sorry for snapping at you, Mister Rab." Stuart paused, contemplating his next words. "It's not easy, is it?"

Rab raised his head, facing the captain. "No, Captain, it is not. You can't imagine the stress caused by hundreds of minds assaulting me every moment. I hear the pain, the love, the anger, the confusion of everyone on this ship...except for the Vulcans, that is."

Stuart felt sorry for Rab. He realized that the man was constantly in mental anguish. "What if my wife gave you some kind of neural inhibitor?"

Rab resisted that suggestion, but found himself tempted by the offer. "The problem with that, Captain, is that I would be unable to function in my job."

"Not if she only gave you a small dosage. You could still function, but maybe..."

"...I could be more selective on what entered my mind."

"Exactly."

Rab nodded. "I am willing to try, Captain."

Stuart tapped his communicator. "Doctor Stuart, please report to transporter room one."

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Jan Stuart felt slightly queasy as the transporter effect subsided. She held her abdominal area to settle the awful feeling. She did not need to suffer the embarrassment of vomiting in front of Elsen Rab and the small group of people who waited to greet the trio from the *Monarch*.

"Are you alright?" Rob whispered to his wife.

Jan nodded. "It's settling down. I'm fine."

Rob stepped off the transporter dais, followed by Jan and Elsen Rab. He grasped the

hand of the Andorian who led the welcoming committee.

"Welcome to Pacifica, Captain Stuart," the Andorian said. "I'm Admiral Thalen."

"A pleasure, Admiral," Rob replied. He stepped aside as Jan and Rab moved forward. "This is my wife, Doctor Janice Stuart and Elsen Rab. He's our first contact specialist."

"Welcome Doctor Stuart, Mister Rab." Admiral Thalen motioned for a young human woman to come forward. "This is my aide, Lieutenant Triana Hollingsworth."

"Good to meet you," Rob Stuart said as he shook the young officer's hand. *She can't be more than twenty-five*, he thought.

"The lieutenant will fill you in on Commander LaSalle's condition," Thalen stated, "while I tend to diplomatic matters with the Welvan ambassador."

"Thank you, Admiral," Rob Stuart said.

The admiral shook Stuart's hand again. "I will see you before you return your ship, Captain." Thalen turned and briskly walked out of the transporter room located inside the Federation office complex.

Lieutenant Hollingsworth smiled at the group from the *Monarch* and swept her arm toward the exit. "If you will follow me, I will take you to Commander LaSalle in the medical wing."

Rob, Jan, and Elsen followed Hollingsworth into the corridor. "He's still in sickbay after four weeks?" Rob asked as all four moved closer to the medical section of the complex.

"Physically, Commander LaSalle is fine, but he's having a difficult time getting over whatever shock he suffered mentally and emotionally," Hollingsworth stated. "The counselors have been working with him for hours each day, but he claims that he can't remember what happened."

"Whatever happened," Jan chimed in, "must have been so traumatic that he's got it locked tightly inside of him. Maybe Mister Rab can help."

"You're Betazoid," Hollingsworth stated. "I thought so."

"Betazoid, yes. Trained counselor, no."

"But being a telepath..."

"I should be able to reach him." Rab did it again. He had to consciously remember to stop interrupting people and let them finish their sentences. "It depends on how deep his mind has turned inward." *And how effective I can still be under the affects of Doctor Stuart's neural inhibitor.*

"Ah, here we are," Hollingsworth said as they stopped in front the duty nurse's desk. "We're here to see Commander LaSalle."

"He's in room two thirty-one," the nurse said. "I understand he's leaving us today."

"That's right," Hollingsworth said. "He's being transferred to the

U.S.S. *Monarch*. This is Doctor Stuart. She'll be in charge of his care."

The nurse looked at Janice contemptuously. "Good luck, Doctor. I hope you have better luck than we've had."

"Thank you, *Lieutenant*. I'm sure that my staff and I will manage," Jan stated in a harsher tone than she intended. She turned and walked away, followed by her husband, Rab, and Hollingsworth.

After starting toward Commander LaSalle's room, just out of earshot of the duty nurse's station, Rob placed a gentle hand on Jan's shoulder. "What was that about?"

"I've never seen Nurse Randall act cold toward anybody like that before," said Lieutenant Hollingsworth.

"If I may, Captain?" Rab interjected. The Betazoid continued without waiting for the captain's reply. "The nurse feels like a failure on both her own and her staff's behalf. They have been trying for

weeks, unsuccessfully, to unlock the mysteries trapped in Commander LaSalle's mind. I believe that her behavior stems from insecurity."

"And I probably didn't help build her confidence with the way I responded," Jan said. "I should go back and apologize."

"Maybe you should wait until we leave," Rob said. "A 'cooling off' period will probably help her receive it better."

"That is wise counsel," Rab said, vigorously shaking his head in the affirmative. "I can tell you that right now, she is most certainly *not* receptive."

"Later would be better," Jan said as she grabbed Rob's hand, squeezing it gently. "Make sure that I don't leave without speaking to her."

"I'll make sure," Rob replied.

Lieutenant Hollingsworth, along with the Stuarts and Elsen Rab stopped in front of LaSalle's room. Hollingsworth knocked on the partially opened wooden door. "Commander, I have some visitors."

"Come in." LaSalle, a man in his mid-thirties, stood looking out the window. He slowly turned as the four newcomers entered his hospital room. He snapped to attention once he noticed Rob's rank insignia. "Commander Joel LaSalle of the...formerly of the U.S.S. *Columbus*."

"At ease, Commander," Stuart said. "I'm Captain Rob Stuart of the *Monarch*. This is Doctor Stuart, ship's CMO...and my lovely wife." Rob noticed Jan's face redden slightly at the compliment. "This is Mister Elsen Rab, our first contact specialist."

LaSalle relaxed. "Care to sit down?"

"I don't think we'll be here that long," Rob said. "Have you been briefed about why we're here?"

"Yes Sir. I understand that you're going to search for the *Columbus*' crew."

"That's right, Commander," Rob said.

"I doubt that they're still alive, Captain."

"We must keep hope, Commander," Jan said. "Can you remember anything about what happened?"

LaSalle turned slowly and stared back out the window, looking skyward. His blue eyes looked glassy, the skin around them wrinkled and took on an ancient quality as he peered into nothingness. "Sometimes I feel like I can picture an image of what happened in my mind's eye..."

"...and then the image fades," Rab finished LaSalle's sentence."

Rob glared a warning at the Betazoid.

Elsen Rab faced Stuart and leaned close to whisper. "Sorry, Captain. Old habits."

Stuart turned back toward LaSalle. "Go on, Commander. Tell us what you can."

LaSalle continued to stare blankly out the window. "We were mapping sector Alpha-three-seven-

D when we discovered an array of alien satellites. We did a standard sensor sweep and realized that the satellites were at equidistant points that would, if connected, create a sphere...more than three light-years in diameter."

Both of the Stuarts and Lieutenant Hollingsworth were stunned by the enormity of the network of satellites. Elsen Rab already knew the information before LaSalle revealed it verbally, so he did not show the surprise that the others had shown. "That must have taken a lot of engineering skill to build," Rab stated.

"That was what my chief engineer said," LaSalle replied. "Our sensors detected a long-range scan coming from a planet within the sphere, about one light-year from our position. We tried to hail the planet, but no one answered. We continued with hourly hails for the next two days, but not even a 'hello' came back."

"Did you launch any probes?" Rob asked.

"Of course," LaSalle stated. The first probe was destroyed as it passed one of the satellites. Apparently, the satellites were connected by invisible energy beams."

"Weapons?"

"It seemed to be more of a shield grid," LaSalle said. "When our probe made contact with it, it was destroyed. The same thing happened when we launched a second."

Stuart felt his jaw draw tight. That usually happened when he was deep in thought or unsure how to proceed. "What happened next?"

LaSalle turned away from the window and walked toward the captain. "We continued our mission," he said. "The next four days were routine...okay, they were pretty dull."

Rob and Jan smiled at LaSalle's comment. "At least you still have a sense of humor," Jan said.

"Is that a good sign?" LaSalle asked, grinning. "Anyway, we

picked up an approaching ship on the fifth day. We hailed them. That's the last thing I remember until I woke up in this hospital."

Elsen Rab peered into LaSalle's eyes. The Betazoid concentrated hard as he tried to plow through the deep recesses of the other man's mind—into LaSalle's subconscious. The neural inhibitor, given to him by Doctor Stuart before beaming down from the ship, worked well enough to give Rab the control that he needed to block out the random thoughts of every person around him. It also prevented him from seeing the repressed memories in LaSalle's mind. "There is more," he stated. "It's locked away so deep that I can't see it, but the answer is in your mind."

LaSalle returned Rab's gaze. "Help me remember," he said.

Jan stepped toward LaSalle and placed a comforting hand on his shoulder. "You've been through a traumatic event, Commander. Your loss of memory is probably due to

your mind's defense mechanism to help you cope with whatever happened." The doctor gently squeezed the man's shoulder. "I'm sure your memories will return. Just give it time."

LaSalle closed his eyes and nodded. He appreciated Doctor Stuart's vote of confidence, but struggled with his current ability to believe that he would fully recover whatever ordeal he had experienced. He figured that his Starfleet career was over. "Thank you, Doctor."

Lieutenant Hollingsworth, who had remained quietly observing the conversation, stepped forward to interrupt. "Captain Stuart, I don't want to rush this, but there's some paperwork that needs to be signed to complete Commander LaSalle's transfer."

"Transfer?" Joel LaSalle, puzzled by the statement, looked at Hollingsworth, then to Stuart, then back to Hollingsworth. "What transfer?"

Rob Stuart patted LaSalle on the shoulder. "You're coming with us, Commander," he said. "We'll wait outside while you change into your uniform."

Rob, Jan, and Elsen followed Lieutenant Hollingsworth out of the room into the corridor.

Elsen Rab pulled the door shut and approached Rob Stuart. "He's reluctant to go with us, Captain. Commander LaSalle is both afraid and full of doubt about himself."

"Of course he is, Mister Rab," Jan interjected. "That's normal for someone who's been through a traumatic event. And the best thing for him to do now is face his fear. It's the only way he can recover."

"And we need him," Rob said. "Whatever is locked inside his mind is the key to solving the mystery of his crew's disappearance."

"I agree, Captain, but realize that until his mind is unlocked, there is a great potential for danger." Rab's face displayed fearful

concern. "Whatever happened to the *Columbus*' crew could befall us as well."

Rob nodded. "I appreciate your concern, Mister Rab. We'll proceed cautiously as we enter the frontier. And hope that Commander LaSalle's memory comes back before we get there."

LaSalle's room door opened and the former CO of the U.S.S. *Columbus*, fully dressed in Starfleet attire, stepped into the corridor. He stood at attention in front of Rob and the others. "I'm ready, Sir."

"Very good, Commander," Rob said. "I'll let the doctor sign you out of the hospital while I sign your transfer orders." Rob turned to face Jan and Elsen. "I need to meet with the admiral, so why don't the two of you take Mister LaSalle under your care and return to the ship. Commander Grey has already taken care of assigning quarters."

Jan leaned into her husband and kissed him on the cheek. "I'll see you on board."

Stuart nodded toward Hollingsworth. "I'm ready, Lieutenant."

"If you'll come this way, I'll take you to the admiral's office."

As Rob followed the lieutenant down the corridor toward the exit, Jan turned to face LaSalle. "We can sign you out at the nurse's station. Are you ready?"

LaSalle's face was etched with reluctance, but he forced a slight smile anyway. "Not really, Doctor, but ready or not..."

Jan smiled back. "That's the spirit," she said. "Face your fears head on and everything will work itself out."

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Lieutenant Hollingsworth led Rob into the waiting area outside of Admiral Thalen's office. The lieutenant knocked on the door and opened it just enough to poke her head in. "Are you ready to see Captain Stuart, Admiral?"

"Yes, Lieutenant. Please escort him in," Thalen replied.

Hollingsworth opened the door and stepped aside to allow Rob to enter the office. "I'll be at might desk if you need me, Admiral."

"Thank you, Lieutenant." Thalen waited until his aide closed the door. "Please come in, Captain."

Stuart, noticing two Vulcanoids standing at the side of the admiral's desk, walked toward the flag officer.

"Let me introduce you to my guests, Captain," Thalen said. "This is Ambassador Yangala of Welva and his aide Jovani."

Each of the two aliens placed a hand over his chest and bowed slightly. Rob noticed the exquisite design of their satin-like clothing. It seemed to shimmer like Pacifica's oceans at sunrise. In addition to their clothing, Rob noticed that the aliens' ears were pointed with rounded tips. They looked similar to Vulcans, but several differences were present in their appearance. Unlike Vulcans, the Welvans' eyebrows were not upswept and their hair was considerably lighter

in color...and worn longer. Welvan skin color had a gold hue that created the appearance that their bodies radiated light in the moderately dark room. To Rob, it seemed that the aliens really did produce a visible aura.

Rob, keenly aware that many cultures did not follow the human custom of shaking hands, imitated the Welvans by bowing as they did, with his left hand over his chest. "A pleasure, Ambassador. Mister Jovani." Rob straightened and looked at the aliens. "Please forgive me, Ambassador, but I am not familiar with your planet or your people."

The ambassador, an older man with graying hair, nodded his head toward Stuart. "*Cahp-teen Stoo-art*, forgiveness no needed. Welva meet *Federshun* short *teem*."

Rob struggled to understand the Welvan ambassador's obvious lack of spoken Standard. "I'm sorry, Ambassador. I'm afraid I don't understand."

The ambassador smiled and turned to his aide. “Jovani t’konda eespechim oden vana odin.”

Rob heard the alien words and wondered why the universal translator built into his communicator did not translate them. His confusion was apparent to the ambassador’s aide.

“Captain Stuart, the ambassador wants me to explain. He means that Welva and the Federation have only been aware of each other for a short time. We only have hyperspeed engines for twenty-six Earth cycles and came here to this Federation world three cycles past.”

The admiral stepped forward. “The Welvans are an advanced race, Captain. The ambassador is on his way to Earth to meet with the Federation Council. Welva has petitioned for Federation membership.”

“*Cahp-teen*, Welva wish to be part of *Oonted Federshun ov Plah-nets*,” Ambassador Yangala said. “Me wish to *serev* with your

*meeshun* by give Jovani to go with you.”

Stuart tried not to show his frustration as he tried to understand the Welvan ambassador.

“Ambassador Yangala, I thank you for your offer, but...” Stuart stopped when he saw Thalen lift his hand to signal that the captain should accept the alien’s offer.

“*Cahp-teen*, Jovani understand *koosem* you wish to go. Jovani first Welvani to travel *stela wetti*.”

Jovani, standing slightly behind the ambassador, place his hand on the elder Welvan’s shoulder. “Maleka Yangala t’kon *Captain Stuart* fa logiken. T’kondi eespechim odan vana odin.”

The ambassador nodded. “Jovani t’konda eespechim oden.”

Jovani stepped forward. “Captain, Ambassador Yangala has only studied Federation speech for a few weeks. He has given me permission to speak on his authority if that satisfies you.”

“By all means,” Stuart replied.

“The ambassador wants to begin serving the Federation by offering to send me with you as a guide to the area of space where you intend to go,” Jovani stated. “I am familiar with that area because I traveled through there during Welva’s first fast-light space flight.”

“Wait a minute,” Stuart said. “You just said that you made the first warp flight for your people, right?”

“Captain, yes, that is correct,” Jovani stated.

“And that was twenty-six years ago?”

“Yes.”

Stuart shook his head. “But you don’t look like you’re more than twenty-five or thirty years old!”

Jovani bowed his head in a gesture of thanks. “I have lived one hundred thirty-seven cycles, Captain Stuart.”

Stuart, surprised by Jovani’s revelation, cocked his head to one side. “One hundred thirty-seven? How long do your people live?”

“Welvani average life span is three hundred sixty-two cycles,” Jovani said, “but my grandfather’s grandfather has seen four hundred three cycles. Recorded history reveals few who have attained that age.”

“Amazing,” was all that Stuart could say.

Admiral Thalen put his hand on Stuart’s shoulder. “I think Mister Jovani would be an excellent guide,” he said, encouraging Stuart to accept the Welvan ambassador’s offer.

Stuart thought about taking on another civilian advisor and decided that he had little choice if the admiral willed it to be so. “I welcome your company, Mister Jovani,” he finally said.

“Splendid,” Thalen said, his antennae twitching. “How soon can you be ready, Jovani?”

“Admiral, I travel with few materials,” Jovani said. “I will be ready within the half hour.”

Yangala stepped forward. He smiled and gave Jovani a

solemn blessing. “Jovani t’kon eerwenta kareda leepa oden.”

“Malekada t’kondi eerspechim feren hooper oden kith ereth.” Jovani was concerned that the ambassador would not be able to function without an interpreter. He had been the elder Welvan’s protégé for the past year and knew that Yangala did not yet possess a fluent command of English.

“T’kon eerwentahoo odan uden anther vana eespechimhoo odan,” Yangala replied.

Despite Yangala’s assurance that he could get a replacement to help with translating Welvan to Standard, Jovani felt that he should stay with the ambassador; however, Yangala’s will had been stated and Jovani knew that if he did not do as the elder Welvan had asked it would be an act of disrespect. Jovani bowed to the ambassador, accepting the elder’s will. “T’kon eerobed odan.”

Stuart merely watched the exchange between the two aliens, wondering what they had said since

the UT didn’t provide any translation. He waited until the conversation appeared to end and then spoke the younger of the two aliens. “Mister Jovani, gather your belongings and meet me back here. We’ll beam up to the ship in thirty minutes.”

Jovani bowed to Stuart. “Yes Captain. I shall be on time.”

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Commander Grey entered the transporter room where the *Monarch’s* chief medical officer waited. “Good afternoon, Doctor Stuart.”

“Hello Commander,” Jan replied with her infectious smile. “Are you looking for me? Is it time for another surprise test?” Jan had studied hard to take the bridge officer’s test—actually there were a series of tests involved—to earn a promotion. Marcus had been a good teacher and Jan appreciated all the help that he had given her.

“Not today, Doctor,” the first officer said. “I’m here to greet the captain and his guest.”

"Guest? I'm not aware that we're having another guest come on board," Jan stated. "I wonder who it can be." She wasn't concerned, just curious. Rob didn't mention that anyone else would be coming on board. He would have said something if he knew. Maybe Admiral Thalen wanted a brief tour of the ship before the *Monarch's* departure.

Grey shook his head. "I don't know. The captain contacted me ten minutes ago and wanted guest quarters assigned."

"Commander, Captain Stuart has signaled for beam up," the transporter technician interrupted.

"Our wondering will be over in a moment, Doctor," Grey stated. He looked over at the young man standing behind the transporter controls. "Energize."

Marcus Grey watched as two shimmering beams activated on the transporter dais. Within moments, they dissipated and two people—Captain Stuart and...a Vulcan—stepped down the steps. Grey had

never seen a Vulcan with light brown hair before. Nor had he seen one whose hair was worn at shoulder length. Then the first officer realized, despite the pointed ears, this man...alien was not Vulcan.

"Commander Grey, Jan, I would like you to meet Jovani of the planet Welva," Stuart said.

Jan smiled at the new arrival. "A pleasure to meet you, Mister Jovani."

"Welcome aboard, Sir," Grey said. "I've assigned quarters for you on deck ten." Grey bowed slightly to the alien from Welva, a place that the first officer had never heard of.

Jovani bowed and place his right hand over his chest. "I come to serve."

Stuart swept his hand toward the exit. "Commander Grey will show you to your quarters. I would like you to have dinner with my wife and me."

Jovani nodded. "I accept your hospitality, Captain Stuart. And yours, Milady healer," he said as

they left the transporter room and entered the corridor.

Elsen Rab stood outside transporter room two, waiting for the captain. When the doors parted, Rab peered past both Stuarts and Marcus Grey. When he saw Jovani, Rab almost turned white with fear. But he had to pretend that nothing was wrong. "Captain, I need to speak with you if I may."

"It seems that I'm needed," Rob Stuart stated, "so I will leave you in Commander Grey's charge, Mister Jovani."

"I would like to accompany our guest, Rob, if that is alright," Jan said.

"Go ahead, Jan. I'll see you at end of shift." Rob grabbed his wife's hand and gently squeezed it as he smiled at her. He let go and started down the corridor in the opposite direction with the Betazoid first contact specialist.

As the doctor, first officer, and Jovani walked through the curved hall Jan was puzzled that the alien knew that she was a doctor,

but realized that Rob must have told Jovani that she was a doctor before the two beamed up. “My husband told you I was a doctor,” she said, seeking confirmation.

Jovani smiled at Jan. “No, Milady,” he said. “I look at you and know that you are a healer.” He nodded at the doctor and saw her confusion. He felt that some explanation was in order. “Welvans can sense things that are not always seen.”

“You’re telepathic?” Jan asked.

Jovani searched his mind for the word that the doctor spoke. He realized what she meant. “No Milady. My people do not enter the minds of others. We just know things. We see what your people do not.”

“Ah.” Jan didn’t understand, but feigned ignorance. Of course, Jovani was not fooled, but would not embarrass the doctor by mentioning it.

Commander Grey remained quiet, but the first officer’s curiosity

got the best of him. “Where is your home world, Mister Jovani?”

“Please, Commander, just call me Jovani,” the Welvan said. “Welva is a beautiful world thirty-four light years from Pacifica, as your people measure distance. We will draw near my world as we travel toward the galactic center. Perhaps I will have the opportunity to show Welva’s hospitality to you on our return journey.”

“I would like that,” Grey said. “So would I,” Jan echoed as they continued toward the nearest turbolift.

Jovani smiled at the doctor, instinctively knowing that she was a mother-to-be. “The blessings of all Welva will be upon your children, Milady.”

Jan stopped abruptly. How did he know she was pregnant? At nine weeks, she wasn’t showing yet. “How do you know I’m pregnant?”

Jovani turned and smiled at the doctor again. “Welvans know.” Jovani then turned his attention to the first officer. “And your son will

share in Welva’s blessings as well, Commander. He will become great among your people.”

Neither Marcus nor Jan understood...nor knew what to say.

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Stuart and Rab entered the bridge. “Prepare to leave orbit Mister D’Neskos,” he said to the Veloran CONN officer as he kept walking, with Elsen Rab following, to the ready room.

Once the ready room doors closed behind the two men, Stuart immediately went to the replicator. He ordered a cup of hot apple cinnamon tea and retrieved it as soon as it materialized in the slot. “Can I get you something, Mister Rab?”

“No thank you, Captain,” the Betazoid said with a frustrated tone. Captain, I need to speak with you about an urgent matter.”

Stuart sat behind his desk and pointed toward the other chair. Rab declined to sit. The Betazoid leaned on the desk and put his face within inches of Stuart’s. “There’s

something you should know about your Welvan guest.”

## To be continued...

### Translation of the Welvan language

*The following translation has been provided for the reader to understand the conversations written in Welvan.*

**Yangala:** “Jovani t’konda eespechim oden vana odin.”  
*Jovani, will you speak to him?*

**Yangala:** “*Cahp-teen*, Jovani understand *koosem* (sky/space) you wish to go. Jovani first Welvani to travel *stela wetti* (lit. star ocean; can be translated as ‘outer space’).”

**Jovani:** “Maleka Yangala t’kon *Captain Stuart* fa logiken. T’kondi eespechim odan vana odin.”  
*Leader/Elder Yangala, Captain Stuart does not understand. May I speak to him?*

**Yangala:** “Jovani t’konda eespechim oden.”  
*Jovani, tell him.*

**Yangala:** “Jovani t’kon eerwenta kareda leepa oden.”  
*Jovani, my heart will go with you.*

**Jovani:** “Malekada t’kondi eerspechim feren hooper oden kith ereth.”  
*My leader, who will speak for you at Earth?*

**Yangala:** “T’kon eerwentahoo odan uden anther vana eespechimhoo odan.”  
*I will send for another person to speak/interpret for me.*

**Jovani:** “T’kon eerobed odan.”  
*I will obey/submit.*