

## SCIENCES INSPECTION

By Alex Rosenzweig

"Science Officer's Log, Stardate 10911.17:

The *Avenger* is maintaining course toward the Hompidae System, assigned to follow up on unusual readings detected by the starship *Le-Matya* several weeks ago. The *Le-Matya* was on a priority mission, and was unable to detour for the purpose of following up on the discovery. Since it is not yet clear what the source of these readings may be, I have been preparing the Sciences Division to make the best possible use of the time we will spend in this star system."

Commander Setak switched off the log recorder and leaned back in his chair. Sitting in his office on the port side of Deck 7, his gaze swept over the status reports coming in from the various departments within the division for which he was responsible. Based on the reports, it seemed that, for the most part, his personnel were preparing for the ship's upcoming assignment at Hompidae with their usual mix of efficiency and enthusiasm. However, he reasoned, there was a great deal to be gleaned from actually stopping in to see what they were doing. This was especially true of Humans and similarly social cultures, he had learned as a cadet at the Academy.

Levering himself to his feet, he scooped up a padd and headed for the door to the office. Stepping through, he turned to his right and entered the outermost concentric corridor on Deck 7. Accessed primarily by turbo-lifts, Jefferies Tubes, or stairways, this corridor both allowed access to the various laboratories and maintained a certain level of isolation, just in case anything got out of hand. It was a precaution that had averted disaster on more than one occasion.

Setak gazed down the circumferential corridor to his right. In that direction were the quantum mechanics, tachyonics, and nanotechnology labs. They were currently in standby mode, as no immediate need for their capabilities was foreseen on this particular mission. Should one arise, though, they could be brought fully on-line in a matter of minutes.

Instead, Setak turned to his left and began to walk forward around the edge of the primary hull. To his left were the various sciences labs that were located at the edge of the hull, while to his right were the access doors to the large banks of escape pods that were mounted where the lower part of the hull began its concave arc, narrowing through the middle portions of Deck 7. The first lab along his route was the general physics lab. It was here that the analyses of more common and "conventional" phenomena took place. Dynamics, mechanics, and the like were the stock-in-trade of the general physics team.

Reaching the doorway, the chief science officer stepped through and into the lab. Several scientists and techs were moving around the work stations and experimental hardware that made up the lab's working spaces. Against the near wall was the small accelerator that the general physics lab shared with high-energy physics, which was next door. That particular facility was often

quiet unless the ship was exploring phenomena specifically known to be of an unusually energetic nature.

"Commander? Can we help you?" It was Lieutenant Sanar, the ship's senior physicist. Sanar was also a Vulcan, though from a different part of the planet than Setak.

"Thank you, Lieutenant, no. I was simply curious as to the state of the division, and chose to find out firsthand. Please do not concern yourself."

Sanar raised an eyebrow, but otherwise gave no other reaction. "Very well, sir."

Setak nodded and moved away, letting Sanar return to his work. Several of the other crewmembers greeted him as he moved through the lab, but he took pains not to distract them. Seeing that all was running smoothly, he quietly left the lab and moved down the corridor.

Setak bypassed the high-energy physics lab, as the readings detected by the *Le-Matya* had not indicated unusually high energies at work. Should that change, though, the lab could be brought on-line in short order. Sciences aboard the *Avenger* was a dynamic division, sometimes asking its personnel to switch from lab to lab quickly, as circumstances required. The tradeoff was an excellent array of resources that made sciences postings aboard the *Avenger* coveted commodities.

Chaos physics and biophysics were likewise on standby, and Setak bypassed them, as well. Biochemistry, however, was active, with several crewmembers preparing to conduct follow-up studies of the Hompidae System's native life-forms. Setak paused and then stepped into the lab.

Lieutenant J.G. Pilar Carisa glanced over. "Hi, Commander."

"Hello, Lieutenant."

"Is everything okay?" Carisa asked.

"Yes. I am just making an impromptu walk-through."

"Okay. Well, we're getting ready to do some systems test. Just want to be sure everything will be working when we need it."

"Admirable thinking, Ms. Carisa. Well done."

Carisa smiled in response, then glanced over at a flashing display at one of the lab's workstations. Her eyes narrowed. "Hmm... Calibration's off on the second-level organic reactions." She gestured to one of the lab techs. "Ensign Callow, would you check that, please?"

Piper Callow, the tech, nodded in acknowledgement and moved to the station.

"I see that you have matters in hand," Setak commented.

"Yes, sir. We do," Carisa replied confidently.

"Then I shall leave you to it. Please keep me informed as to your progress."

"Will do, Commander."

Setak nodded and left the biochemistry lab. With a nod to two crewmembers sitting near the viewport, he moved a few meters forward and entered the General Chemistry lab.

This lab, being one of the "primary" ones, was busy. Several crewmembers moved purposefully around the room, some involved in experiments, others reviewing data on the Hompidae System

from the *Le-Matya*. The senior chemist, Lieutenant zh'Theran, approached Setak.

"Hello, Commander. Checking up on us?" The Andorian punctuated her comment with a smile.

"After a fashion," Setak quipped. He was finding the reactions to his unannounced sojourn rather amusing, although he opted not to share that opinion with his subordinates.

"I hope we pass muster," zh'Theran said.

Setak made a slight show of gazing around the lab. Some work tables had the "traditional" accoutrements of chemistry, test tubes and beakers and such, while other stations bore the advanced submolecular analysis gear of a modern research facility of the early 24th Century. Whether examining test tubes or analysis hardware, though, the staff were engrossed in their work.

Turning back to zh'Theran, Setak nodded gravely, though his eyes bore a glint of humor clear to the chemist, if perhaps not to her underlings. "I do believe that this group of crewmembers achieves a passing grade."

"We absolutely agree," zh'Theran replied dryly, winking at Setak. "Thank you, Commander."

"You are welcome," Setak told her. "And if you will excuse me, I shall leave you to your work."

"Aye, sir."

And with that, Setak stepped back and departed the chemistry lab. Turning to his left, he continued down the corridor, passing the point he knew marked the leading edge of the *Avenger's* primary hull. He passed the entry to one of the Jefferies Tubes that traversed the Deck 7 power and life support bays, which told him that he was passing the farthest-forward part of the ship and moving on to its starboard side.

The next laboratory he reached was the geology lab. This lab was also a busy one, as the geologists were hard at work assessing the planetary data from the *Le-Matya*. The destroyer might not have been able to stop in the system, but since the *Avenger* was going there specifically, the geologists wanted to be ready to study as much of the worlds therein as possible.

This time it was Commander Graevyn, the senior geologist, who took notice of Setak. The Kyonan officer smoothly rose from her station and, smoothing her silver-white fur, came over to him. "Hi, Setak. What can we do for you?"

"Hello, Sasha. I am not in need of assistance at the moment. I was simply 'taking a walk' through the division."

"Ahh, checking everything out, eh?"

"In a manner of speaking, yes."

"Well, the Geo staff are busy plotting out our research plan. Any idea how much time we'll be in-system?"

"I am uncertain of this, myself. Our primary mission is to follow up on the strange readings reported by the *Le-Matya*, but without knowing what they are, or their possible ramifications, the mission timetable is of necessity somewhat fluid."

"In short, we'll just have to see what happens."

"Exactly."

"Well, whatever we can learn about the system, geologically, we'll be ready."

"That will be quite satisfactory," Setak responded. "I have no doubts regarding you and your personnel."

"Thanks, Setak." Graevyn flashed him a smile. "Will there be anything else?"

"Negative. I believe I shall continue with my 'walk'."

Graevyn chuckled, and as Setak nodded in the direction of her station, she headed back to what she had been doing. Setak quietly exited the geology lab and continued on his way around Deck 7.

The meteorology lab was quiet. It would await a much closer approach to the Hompidae planets before planetary weather systems could be reliably studied. The next lab, planetology, was busy as researchers were analyzing the *Le-Matya's* sensor readings to build broad pictures of the various worlds. The planetary scientists were getting excited by the variety of worlds that the *Avenger* was approaching.

"Commander!" It was Ensign 1st Class Briana Ryan, one of the planetology staff. "The early readings look like this system is going to be fun! Lots of different kinds of planets and moons. I don't think we're going to be bored on this mission."

"I am pleased that you are looking forward to this star system," Setak said. "I would not want it said that we bore our researchers."

Ryan chuckled. "Thank you for that, sir. It's still a bit early for details, but I think we'll have some very interesting information for you soon."

"I shall look forward to the discoveries. In the meantime, please do not let me distract you. Continue your work."

As Ryan returned to her console, Setak left the lab and continued down the corridor.

The next two labs, oceanography and ecology, were both quiet. This was understandable. There wasn't enough detailed information yet to make powering up the specialized equipment in these facilities reasonable. Instead, it would fall to the planetologists to gather the gross-level data, which could then be followed up on if it suggested that further study was warranted in these particular areas of study.

The general biology lab, however, was active, and filled with personnel examining the data from the *Le-Matya*. They were busily speculating on the potentials for life on the Hompidae planets. "I would be quite surprised," Lieutenant T'Siena commented to Setak, "if we did not encounter a substantial diversity of life in this system. The apparent variety of environments in the system makes it extraordinarily likely that life will be found there. We are attempting to organize the information we have, so as to prepare for more specialized study, as necessary."

"Very good, Lieutenant," Setak replied. "Your diligence, and that of the staff, are appreciated."

"Thank you, Commander," T'Siena replied with a nod of appreciation.

Setak took his leave, then, and continued his walk. The last three labs on Deck 7—pathology, genetics, and paleontology—were all quiet, awaiting the potentials of more data to warrant bringing them on-line. Setak did not stop there, but instead followed the corridor as it doglegged, turning left, then right, and came to a turbo-lift stop. He reached out and tapped the control to summon the lift, and rode it up to Deck 3, where most of the remainder of the ship's labs could be found.

Stepping off the lift on the starboard side of Deck 3, turning to his right, and taking a few steps down a short segment of corridor, Setak found himself facing the library science lab. This was the domain of the archivists, the information scientists, and—at various times—members of the yeomanry staff. The team here also oversaw the ship's library, making sure that the latest

information—both for reference and recreation—was available to the crew.

After a quick stop-in with the info-science team, Setak departed, turned to his right, and walked forward down a corridor angled roughly 45 degrees from the ship's centerline. At the end of that hallway was an intersection with a curved corridor that followed the circular shape of the forward part of the hull. Ahead and to his right was the entry to the archaeology lab, which Setak knew would be inactive unless some civilization was discovered in the Hompidae System. To the left was linguistics. Setak moved in that direction, and stepped through the doorway. Lieutenants Chan and Donovan looked up from their stations.

"Hello, Commander," Donovan said with a smile. "What's up?"

"Nothing immediately critical," Setak told him. "I have been reviewing the division's activities."

"We're just continuing our research on linkages between early Romulan and Surak-era Vulcan at the moment. Is there anything we should know about, sir?"

"Not at this time, Mr. Donovan. Should that change, however, you'll know. Much will depend on whether we discover sentient life in this system."

"What are the odds of that, Commander?" asked Chan.

"While I am hesitant to quote odds, it does appear that there are two planets within the habitable zone around Hompidae, and the *Le-Matya* was not able to determine the source of the energy readings which they detected, so there certainly are possibilities." As the linguists nodded, he continued, "In the meantime, please keep me apprised of the progress of your current research. I am most curious about what conclusion you may reach."

"Absolutely, sir," said Donovan.

With that, Setak took his leave. Re-entering the corridor, he turned to his right and followed the curved corridor until it intersected with a forward/aft passageway. Directly ahead of him were the doors to the stellar cartography lab, part of the astronomy and astrophysics complex at the top center of the ship.

As he entered the lab, the chief science officer was immediately met by the hustle and bustle of one of the currently busiest labs on the ship, as the astronomers and astrophysicists observed the Hompidae System and analyzed the data pouring in through the ship's sensors. In the center of the large room, in the midst of a trio of workstation pockets, the ship's main telescope sat. The *Avenger's* approach course to Hompidae didn't allow for direct optical studies, but the astronomers were gathering positional data about other stars in the area, so as to revise the area starmaps. Meanwhile, in the astronomy and astrophysics labs directly aft, other scientists and technicians were busily studying sensor data on the system's planets, asteroids, and other related objects. Techs ran back and forth through the connecting doorways, carrying pads and flimsies and conversing with the various observational and theoretical scientists.

Setak could also hear the personnel on the intercoms to the planetology lab, exchanging observations and ideas, not to mention a few theories. He stood to one side, not desiring to disturb his busy staff. And after a few more moments of observation, he quietly departed.

Back in the corridor, he turned to his left and walked forward. At the end of the hallway, he faced the doors to the history lab. Several of the ship's historians were pursuing research projects, but otherwise there was little happening at the moment, and

Setak did not imagine that this would change in the near-term unless a civilization was discovered in this system. After only a brief stop-off, the science officer moved on.

Turning to his right after exiting the history lab, Setak passed the office of the chief of communications, which was set just down the hall from the communications bay, which itself occupied the center of the forward, circular portion of Deck 3. The communications bay was ringed by a corridor, on the outboard side of which were located four more of the social sciences labs. Progressing counterclockwise around that section of the ship, they were: political science, geography, economics, and psychology, with the middle two divided by the main stairwell and a pair of personal communications rooms. These labs were quiet at the moment, with a few specialists pursuing research projects, but otherwise the workstations were still, and likely would remain so unless Hompidae was found to harbor sentient life. While the labs themselves were specialized, most of the social sciences staff were cross-trained in various disciplines, so they could make the most efficient use of these facilities.

Completing his circumnavigation of the forward social sciences labs, Setak followed the angled corridor to his right. Ahead of him, at the end of the hallway, was a turbo-lift station, and just a bit closer, on the right, was the philosophy lab, which occupied the equivalent position to the history lab, but on the other side of the ship. The philosophy lab, Setak knew, was also inactive at the moment, being another of the specialized facilities that saw use when specifically needed, and not otherwise. Such labs occasionally were pressed into service in time of emergency to serve as backup work areas, but this was not one of those times.

Opposite the doorway to the philosophy lab, the corridor branched to the left, with the linking passageway extending aftward and running alongside the astronomy and astrophysics complex on the port side of the ship. Setak followed this corridor until it met the curved corridor that matched the passageway near archaeology and linguistics. On the port side of the *Avenger*, the labs in the equivalent locations were sociology farther inboard and anthropology at the leading edge of the extended hull.

The Vulcan followed the curved hallway until he reached the doors to the sociology lab, then turned to his right and stepped inside. Several of the sociologists were working at their stations, studying data that flowed across the viewers in front of them. Lieutenant Sukasi and Ensign Tippettt looked up to see Setak enter. Sukasi rose to his feet. "Hello, Commander," he said in a soft, mellifluous tone. "How are you today, sir?"

"I am well, Lieutenant, thank you. I have been conducting what some Humans refer to as a 'walkabout' through the sciences areas of the ship."

"I hope everything's okay, sir," Tippettt said.

Setak nodded at the young ensign. "Indeed so. I am quite satisfied with what I have observed." Tippettt smiled, and Setak couldn't help but appreciate his "eager ensign" qualities, especially in contrast to the air of calm and wisdom that surrounded the long-serving Sukasi. "Tell me, both of you. What research occupies your attention today?"

"We're reviewing the latest database updates of new popular literature and media from major Federation planets, and trying to see if they're suggesting any interesting social trends," explained Tippettt.

"Have you found anything conclusive?" Setak asked.

"Conclusive?" asked Sukasi. He shook his head. "Not as yet. However, we have observed some trends that may guide further analysis."

"Intriguing," Setak responded. "Please keep me apprised of your results."

"Yes, sir," Tippet said with a smile.

As he left the sociology lab, Setak considered for a moment. To his right, down the curved corridor, was the anthropology lab, which he knew would also be quiet until and unless its resources were required on this mission. And that would await the discovery of a Hompidae civilization. Across from anthropology and sociology was another 45 degree angled corridor, which in turn would branch into a short aft passage that in turn led to a lateral, port/starboard corridor, and on the other "leg" to another lateral corridor that accessed the ergonomics and navigational sciences lab. While ergonomics, usually used jointly by Tech Sciences and Engineering personnel, would also likely be quiet at this time, one or two of the navigation staff would be working with the QIK-14K sensors mounted nearby to catalog spatial conditions in the area and reviewing, updating, and revising the navigational charts to optimize recommended travel path in an around the system. There were two such labs, one on each side of Deck 3, though Setak also recalled that the navigators on duty for this shift were scheduled to be in the portside facility. Setak walked down to the very end of the corridor, where navigational sciences was the last door on the right.

Stepping through the doorway, Setak noted that both Lt. Commander Bradley and Ensign Ben-Yavin were working diligently at their stations. Bradley looked up at the soft hiss of the doors opening, and nodded at the chief science officer.

"Afternoon, Commander," Bradley said. "What brings you out thisaway?"

"I have been conducting a tour, of sorts, walking through the laboratory sections of the ship."

Bradley chuckled. "Checking up, eh? Want to keep everyone on their toes?"

"One might say that," Setak replied. "Also to allow the divisional staff to know that their work is appreciated."

"Good man," Bradley said. The chief navigator nodded to the displays. "We're working fine here. Nothing unexpected so far, but we're keeping on our toes, in case the source of the strange readings has any effect on navigation. Even if not, we'll have updated charts for the system in a few hours. It has a moderate sized asteroid belt, so we want to make sure we're tracking everything of any size."

"Excellent work, Commander," Setak told him, after a quick glance at the displays and what they were showing. "And also to you, Mr. Ben-Yavin."

"Thank you, sir," the young ensign replied.

Setak left the navigators to their work, and stepped back into the corridor. Turning left, he walked back to the intersection with the other hallways, made a right turn, and walked to the turbo-lift station. Riding down one level to Deck 4, he stepped out into the lounge area overlooking the arboretum. To his right, adjacent to the catwalk above the arboretum's main area were the botany and zoology labs. Zoology was likely to be inactive at the moment, with any ongoing zoology projects using the general biology labs down on Deck 7. Should there be animal life on one or more of the Hompidae worlds, the zoology lab and its more specialized equipment would be brought up to full capability. Botany, on the

other hand, would be active, especially given that it had charge of the arboretum and its operations.

Walking past the doors leading to a linking corridor, the Vulcan arrived at the doors to the botany lab and stepped through. Lieutenant J.G. Kimberlee Dunbar, one of the more senior botanists, and a pair of lab techs were working inside. Dunbar, seeing Setak enter, straightened up with a sharp, "Ten-hut!" Startled, the techs came to attention.

Setak exhaled slightly in an almost inaudible sigh. "As you were." Dunbar was from the "spit-and-polish" wing of the Fleet. For at least a couple of generations, her family had been officers in the Mobile Ground Force, and she had two brothers and a sister who served there now. Some chain of events that Dunbar was reluctant to discuss had led her to the sciences, but she'd never lost that characteristic demeanor.

Upon his response, Dunbar and the techs relaxed...at least a little in Dunbar's case. "Can we help you, sir?" she asked.

"I have been conducting an informal review of the division's activities," Setak explained, choosing his words to match Dunbar's stance. "I trust that all is proceeding appropriately?"

"Yes, sir," Dunbar answered crisply. "Upkeep is continuing on the arboretum, and three independent research projects are continuing in the lab. A full report is available in your messages. We are also making preparations for any analyses of plant life in the Hompidae System, should they become necessary."

"Very well," Setak replied. "It would appear that you have matters well in-hand."

"Yes, thank you, sir," Dunbar replied.

"Then I shall not disturb you and your staff further," said Setak. "Thank you for your time."

"Of course, sir."

Setak departed without further ceremony. In truth, he was not fully convinced that Dunbar was a good fit for botany, but he could not dispute that the lieutenant got things done. He was, however, concerned with regard to the morale of the staff. Perhaps a few judicious visits to the Ship's BBS...

While mulling over the situation, Setak walked back to the turbo-lift station. Pausing there, he considered his path, and concluded that his review was complete. A quick glance at his padd showed that since he had left his office, several new reports had reached him. It was time, he concluded, to get back to his own place and review the new information. His "inspection tour" having satisfied him that the division was operating as he felt it should, and reassured his staff of his own continued vigilance and concern regarding their activities, he stepped onto the turbo-lift and returned to Deck 7 and his office. Sitting back at his desk, he allowed himself a moment of satisfaction. He had a fine division, with an excellent staff, and he looked forward to what they might find in the star system that lay ahead.

The *Avenger* journeyed onward...

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