

## Between The Rock and a Hard Case

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## Between The Rock and a Hard Case

by [Gibraltar](#)

### Summary

Captain Sandhurst encounters an old nemesis in an unexpected venue. Conventional wisdom says time heals all wounds. Conventional wisdom has apparently never met Captain Terrence Glover.

*This story takes place between **DarKush's** Dark Territory story Fallout and my story Backup. For more backstory on the Sandhurst/Glover relationship, see DarKush's marvelous tale, The Crucible: <http://unitedtrek.org/star-trek-dark-territory>*

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It was a quiet night at a Quark's Bar, something of a rarity of late. Nearly twenty-two hundred hours and only a thin sprinkling of patrons dotted the landscape of Deep Space Nine's most popular drinking establishment.

Captain Donald Sandhurst and two of his crew from the starship *Gibraltar* had found their way to a secluded table on the second story, overlooking the dabo table and the main bar. Their civilian clothing fooled no one, and everyone from the wait staff to the semi-conscious Lurian on the stool at the end of the bar had pegged them as Starfleet from the moment they entered.

They ordered a round of drinks and sat for a moment in a comfortable silence. Across from Sandhurst sat Lieutenant Pava Lar'ragos, an old friend from their academy days two decades earlier. Lar'ragos, an El-Aurian, was now Sandhurst's Chief Security/Tactical officer. The trio was completed by Lieutenant(j.g.) Issara Taiee, *Gibraltar's* Chief Medical Officer. A nurse practitioner, her healing skills were remarkable enough to have warranted a CMO's commission in a division of Starfleet stretched so thinly that holograms frequently took the place of sentient physicians.

Sandhurst was gaunt and ashen, not quite six feet tall with his once luxurious hair shaved down to mere stubble. Lar'ragos was physically smaller than his captain, but whipcord taut and lithe, honed to peak physical condition. He appeared to be in his mid-30's, but was actually much, much older. Taiee was short, compact, and jovial, her hair cut into a bob almost as an afterthought for someone who cared little for her own physical appearance.

"Liana didn't care to join us?" Lar'ragos queried. He referred to Commander Liana Ramirez, the ship's executive officer.

Sandhurst smirked. "No. She said she'd hold down the fort for me."

Lar'ragos nodded in reply, understanding that seven months after taking the XO's post on the *Gibraltar* Ramirez still harbored hard feelings about having been muscled into an assignment not of her choosing.

A Ferengi waiter appeared, hurriedly delivering their drinks before moving on to another table.

Taking a sip of his Tarkalian ale, Sandhurst looked to Taiee. "So, how do we do this? I keep trying to think of something to discuss and the only topics that come to mind are shoptalk."

Taiee laughed, her hand brushing aside the bangs of her low-maintenance bob. As short as she was, she appeared to almost need a booster seat. "Have things gotten so bad that we've forgotten how to relax?"

Lar'ragos snorted, shaking his head bemusedly. "Looks that way."

Taiee took the initiative and looked to her captain. "Alright, sir. Since everyone else is stymied, I'll go first. I've some questions for you."

The captain grinned. "We're off duty, Issara. Call me Donald."

"Or Sandy." Lar'ragos piped up.

Sandhurst shot his friend a pointed glare. "Four hundred years old and you still don't know when to keep your mouth shut."

Taiee looked between the two and registered Lar'ragos' broad grin. She remarked, "I'm guessing that particular nickname falls into the *never-to-be-mentioned-again* category?"

Sandhurst nodded emphatically.

"Alright, then. Donald... where do you hail from? I've never been quite able to place your accent." It took a concerted effort not to affix 'sir' to the end of the question.

"Earth. The city of Johannesburg in Southernmost Africa."

Taiee cocked her head. "Really? Never been there. What's it like?"

A faint smile graced Sandhurst's lips as he thought of home. "Paradise, really. A gleaming ultra-modern metropolis right there in the cradle of human civilization... where it all started." He took a draught of his ale. "They rebuilt the city after World War III, creating great bands of park land between the residential and business districts. Not many people know it, but Johannesburg was the first of the megalopolis habitat cities. You can see almost to the horizon in every direction from the top of the Mandela Spire at the city's center."

Lar'ragos suddenly shifted his eyes, as if having caught a familiar scent and trying to identify the source. He glanced over the railing and stifled a chuckle as he saw another trio of Starfleet officers enter Quark's. "Well, here comes trouble." Lar'ragos looked to Sandhurst. "It appears you've an old acquaintance in this port, my captain."

Following Pava's gaze, Sandhurst craned his neck and caught sight of Captain Terrence Glover, former commander of the starships *Cuffe* and *Aegis*. A pained sigh escaped him and he muttered, "Oh... hell."

Taiee fought the urge to stand up and move to the railing. "Trouble?"

"No." Sandhurst said a bit too quickly.

"Yes, most definitely." Lar'ragos replied at the exact same moment.

Sandhurst leaned back in his chair, looking distressed. "Maybe he won't come up here."

Lar'ragos gave his captain a disbelieving look. "You don't think he knows you're here already? Please."

Sandhurst gave Lar'ragos an indignant scowl as he groused, "I'm grasping at straws here, Pava. Little help?"

The El-Aurian merely shook his head and grinned. Much to Sandhurst's dread, Glover and his entourage mounted the spiral staircase and began ascending to the second story. Sandhurst inspected the other captain's companions, guessing that the dangerous-looking muscular man in the services gold undershirt was likely his security chief. The sprightly female wore sciences/medical blue, the sprinkling of spots running up her neck to her temples leading Sandhurst to surmise that she was either Trill or Kriosian. Glover and the female appeared involved in an animated conversation that seemed to exclude the lieutenant.

Glover himself was tall, well-muscled, and appeared to have been cut from a single slab of ebony stone. His handsome features lent him an air of casual competence, and he carried himself with a kind of regal assuredness that Sandhurst couldn't help but envy.

Sandhurst was torn. He wanted to get up and leave but couldn't find a reasonable excuse for doing so. It wasn't as if he and Captain Glover were sworn enemies. Sandhurst hadn't even crossed paths with the larger man for the better part of a decade. So, he sat in mute silence, hand clenched around his glass, waiting for the proverbial 'other shoe' to drop.

It didn't take long.

Glover actually put quite a bit of effort into looking surprised to see *Gibraltar's* captain. Terrence's eyes widened slightly, and a slow grin formed on his face at the sight of Sandhurst pretending not to notice him. "Well, look what the cat dragged in."

Lar'ragos turned in his seat, his expression intentionally neutral as he glanced over the new arrivals. He raised his glass in greeting. "The junior Glover. Welcome. And how is the admiral's son this fine evening?"

As intended, Lar'ragos' seemingly light-hearted salutation took some of the wind from Glover's sails. The man *hated* being reminded of his father's position, and the inference that his father's rank had somehow influenced his rise to a captaincy galled him to no end.

'Now I remember why I hang out with you, Pava,' Sandhurst thought. It took extraordinary willpower for him not to crack a smile as Glover's smirk vanished, replaced by a wary frown.

"I'm fine, thank you. And you would be?"

Lar'ragos smiled broadly. "Magnificent, thank you for asking."

Taiee, who had fallen silent in the face of the mounting tension at the table, actually erupted in a snorting fit of laughter at that.

The diminutive female in services blue and the burly security officer exchanged curious looks.

Sandhurst decided to break the ice in hopes that Glover and his friends would move on. He stood and offered a hand to the young woman. "Donald Sandhurst. It's a pleasure to meet you, Lieutenant...?"

She grasped his hand lightly, shaking it. "Ezri Dax."

His eyebrows raised in genuine surprise, Sandhurst blurted, "*The Dax?*" like an awestruck sporting fanatic in the presence of his hero. He chastised himself for appearing so enthralled. '*Smooth, Donald. And for your next trick, ask her for her damn autograph.*'

Dax laughed good naturedly, and even appeared a bit embarrassed. "I suppose so."

His cheeks blushed slightly at his gaffe and Sandhurst turned to extend the same hand to the lieutenant in the gold undershirt. The man grasped it firmly, his grip giving the captain little doubt that if push came to shove, the security officer would soon be beating Sandhurst with his own limbs. The brawny fellow introduced himself as, "Lieutenant Tai Donar..." Donar looked uncertain, not knowing the rank of the man with whom he was speaking, but then added a precautionary, "...sir."

"These are Lieutenants Pava Lar'ragos and Issara Taiee, my chiefs of security and medical, respectively."

Lar'ragos smiled broadly as he directed a mischievous wink at Dax. "The counselor and I are already acquainted, sir."

Another round of greetings ensued, with Donar giving Lar'ragos a piercing yet otherwise inscrutable look. Glover seemed irritated to have lost the momentum of his opening, but stood back and allowed his friends to chat with the other crew for a moment.

Without preamble, Donar addressed Lar'ragos. "You were at Invarakk during the war, with the Teams."

"I was," Lar'ragos intoned stolidly. "If I'm not mistaken, you led the diversionary attack that allowed us to escape that deathtrap." Lar'ragos stood. "You saved a great many good people that day. I'm in your debt." The El-Aurian stepped forward, clapping the Angosian on the shoulder in a gesture of camaraderie. "I believe at the very least I owe you several drinks, and a corresponding number of stories."

Donar glanced at Glover. "Captain?"

Glover smiled despite himself. "Go ahead, Mister Donar. I think you've more than earned the right to go and throw a few back with an old war buddy. I'll catch up with you later." He fixed his gaze back on Sandhurst and added, "Besides, I was hoping to have a few words alone with the captain."

Dax picked up on Glover's cue and gestured to Taiee. "Lieutenant, have you ever played tongo? No? Well, do I have a treat for you..." Dax glanced over her shoulder at Lar'ragos as she hurried Taiee towards the stairs and called out, "And don't you wander too far, Pava. We've got some catching up to do ourselves."

Lar'ragos gave Sandhurst a questioning look, and only descended the staircase to the main level after his captain inclined his head fractionally. Sandhurst's expression suggested that he'd be just fine without backup.

And just like that, they were alone.

Once the others were out of earshot, Glover slid his large frame into the chair across from Sandhurst. The *Gibraltar* captain sipped idly at his beverage, obviously in no hurry to initiate a conversation. Glover inspected him, finding him rail thin despite recent rumors that he'd been noticeably overweight. His hair had gone white and was cropped close to his skull. His hazel eyes were wary, and bore an unaccustomed steeliness, giving Sandhurst a hard edge that Glover found incongruous with the man he used to know.

Sandhurst thought Glover looked the same as he remembered, the intervening years having added only a few character lines to the man's face. Still huge. Still imposing as hell.

The silence stretched on. Finally, Glover said, "Nothing to say, Captain?"

Sandhurst shrugged nonchalantly. "Nothing you'd have any interest in, I'm sure." He frowned slightly and then added grudgingly, "I was sorry to hear about the *Cuffe* and *Aegis*. I didn't know the latter, but the former was a damn fine ship."

Glover mirrored Sandhurst's frown as he ignored the other captain's attempt at diplomacy. "I'm not entirely certain what your problem is, Sandhurst. We haven't crossed paths in seven years." The larger man queried, "You're not still holding a grudge over that business with the *other* Ojana?"

Sandhurst smiled. "Not so much, no."

"Then what?"

Taking a draught of his ale, Sandhurst held it in his mouth for a moment, swishing the liquid around as he pondered the question. "You don't have any use for me, Terrence. Never did." He set the glass down, grasping it by the base and turning it in circles absentmindedly "I don't measure up to your standards of what a good leader should be. I get that. I suppose my problem is that I don't have time for people who have no use for me."

"Really?" Glover caught the attention of a passing Ferengi waiter and ordered himself a K'tarian hard cider. As he looked back to Sandhurst he smirked disarmingly. "C'mon, you actually think I'm that bad? How do you know what I think of you, anyway? Have you developed some Betazoid abilities since we last met?"

"Word gets around, Terrence. Captains are notoriously talkative when it comes to whose been promoted up into their august little club... and

who they believe shouldn't have been." Sandhurst finished his drink, pushing the glass off to the side. "Truth be told, I didn't want the job. I'd have been perfectly happy back at Utopia Planitia building the fleet back up to strength."

Glover couldn't hide the dour expression that descended across his features. "So why did you take the commission?"

Sandhurst looked up to lock eyes with Glover. "Obligation. Someone whom I respect greatly told me I was needed in this capacity. So here I am."

"Monica." It was a statement, rather than a question.

Sandhurst nodded. "Admiral Covey, yes."

Glover's obvious disdain seemed to exude from his very pores. "And you didn't question her motivation?"

Sandhurst appeared perplexed as he leaned back in his chair. "How do you mean?"

"It's not a secret, Donald. You and Monica."

The *Gibraltar* captain blinked, looking dismayed. "You're kidding?" Glover remained stonily silent. "You think we had a relationship... Monica and I?" Sandhurst laughed loud and long at that. Glover appeared annoyed by Sandhurst's unexpected amusement with his barb.

He caught his breath and Sandhurst wiped at his eyes. "Oh, that's rich, Terrence. You've got me pegged. That's absolutely my style, sleeping my way to the top." He leaned in closer, his voice taking on a conspiratorial quality. "And perhaps you'd better check with Tryla Scott before you start throwing around accusations of that sort. Glass houses, don't you know?"

Glover blanched and shifted uneasily in his seat but remained silent. He hadn't realized Donald knew of his torrid affair with the famed starship commander.

Sandhurst was beginning to relax, and as another ale arrived he found he was almost enjoying himself. "I know it must eat at you, Terry. I have to be strong-armed into a job you've spent your entire career coveting. Boy, I guess they'll let anyone be a captain these days."

Glover's expression darkened, both from Donald's intentional use of a hated nickname, as well as the comment which had hit too close to home. His drink arrived with Sandhurst's, the waiter glancing between the men as the acrimony at the table mounted incrementally. The captain of the late starship *Aegis* considered his next statement as he sipped at his cider. "Nice job at Lakesh, by the way."

"Thanks. It's good to be appreciated."

Glover leaned in, his large form looming across the table. "So, tell me, why did you let the Klingons chase you off?"

"It wasn't as if I had a choice." Sandhurst grew more subdued. "General K'Vada arrived on scene and assumed command. You *do* remember how the chain of command works, right? All I had at my disposal was a battered *Constitution*-class filled with Starfleet and civilian wounded." He took a long drink. "You think I should have stood firm and gone toe-to-toe with one of the most celebrated Klingon commanders of the Dominion War?"

The senior captain sneered, "I think he was bluffing, and you folded early."

Sandhurst answered with a shrug and noted dryly, "Hindsight is twenty-twenty. At the time I was sandwiched between two Klingon battlecruisers, and K'Vada was implying not-so-subtly that I'd better play along or I and my people would become the casualties of some kind of unfortunate 'accident'. I wasn't willing to bet the lives of my crew and the survivors of *Phoenix* and *Sojourner* on whether or not he was willing to back his threats up with actual force." He shook his head ruefully. "Besides, Starfleet Command tacitly supported his move. They weren't eager to take any more losses at the hands of Cardassian insurgents. Even if I'd stayed and put up a fight, not only would we have lost, but Starfleet would have swept the whole thing under the carpet."

Glover looked unconvinced, and in lieu of replying he took another swig from his drink.

"Of all people, I'd think you would have given me the benefit of the doubt."

An expression of vague curiosity alighted upon Glover's features. "And how's that?"

"In a word... Loyal."

Glover froze at the mention of the Cardassian colony he had laid waste during the final days of the Dominion War. It had been a horrible necessity of war, and the memory of that decision still weighed heavily on him.

Sandhurst continued, heedless of Glover's reaction. "Despite the fact that I can't stand you or your arrogant self-superiority, I've never once questioned that you made the only call you could have under the circumstances. A lot of people continue to have reservations about what you did that day." Sandhurst lifted his half empty glass towards Glover in a mock salute. "I'm not one of them."

Terrence glowered. "I don't recall asking for your approval, or your absolution."

He waved his hand dismissively and Sandhurst sighed, "Entirely not my point. I'm saying that you were second guessed by every admiral's uncle after Loyal. Having been under the microscope, I'd assume you'd give me a bit more latitude." Sandhurst took a draught from his glass and then gestured towards Glover with the index finger of his drinking hand. "And by the way, K'Vada threw Loyal in my face when I argued against Klingon retaliatory strikes on Lakesh's civilian populace. That wasn't so helpful."

Captain Glover looked at Sandhurst incredulously. "What the hell, Sandy? You want me to apologize for Loyal being *inconvenient* for you?"

Sandhurst shook his head, clearly well on his way to being drunk. "Negative. Loyal or no, he wasn't prepared to listen to my arguments." He drained his glass, bringing it down too loudly atop the table. "I'm suggesting that actions often times have unintended consequences. Though undoubtedly necessary, the destruction of Loyal has seriously undermined the Federation's perceived moral superiority."

Glover sneered and quaffed a mouthful of his drink. "I'll take that under advisement the next time I'm considering annihilating an entire planet."

Sandhurst appeared to inspect Glover for a long moment. "You're looking fit. I take it the stockade has some nice athletic facilities."

Glover gave him a hard look. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Only that you've kept in shape. Since taking command of *Gibraltar* I hardly ever have the time to work out. True, I lost some weight recently, but I certainly wouldn't recommend my diet plan. It was sheer torture." Sandhurst grinned lopsidedly at his own clever turn of phrase.

As he shook his head, Glover muttered, "You're unbelievable."

"No, really," Sandhurst protested innocently. "When I think of what Commander Cherenkov and your other senior officers risked to rescue you from those terrorists, it makes me think that maybe you've changed. And the fact that you went to Jaros II with them in voluntary solidarity speaks a lot about who you've become."

Glover's gaze hardened as he strove to dissect the subtext to Sandhurst's inebriated discourse. "And I'm guessing you think they risked too much for me."

Sandhurst replied with a shrug, "Not for me to say. Cherenkov's career is over, that's a certainty. Starfleet will never risk a command on him now. He's lucky they reinstated him at all." He idly rubbed the side of the frosted glass with his thumb as he observed, "He'll ride out his career watching junior officers rise around him and eventually move on to their own commands. Or he'll end up behind a desk on some starbase somewhere, pushing data."

"I'm aware of what he sacrificed by going against orders," Glover responded, a hint of menace in his voice. "You're suggesting you wouldn't have done the same for me aboard the *Cuffe*?"

Sandhurst leaned forward, "I'm saying that I'd have disobeyed orders to rescue Captain Diaz, whom the entire crew respected and revered. The tin-plated XO, however, didn't inspire much beyond a healthy amount of fear."

"And what the hell would you know about leadership, Sandy? Diaz whom you so admired betrayed her uniform and took up arms against the Federation! That doesn't say much about your choice of role models." Glover noticed the cloud of doubt suddenly registering on Sandhurst's features, and he added, "And a little introspection might be in order, as so far your illustrious career as a starship commander consists of running away from the Crolsa system with your tail between your legs and getting caught up in Picard's War in the Briar Patch when you weren't too busy babysitting convoys back and forth to Cardassia."

Sandhurst inclined his head. "Been checking up on me, eh? If you've read my after-action reports, you're aware as anyone that both those situations were resolved within the bounds of Starfleet regulations."

Glover glowered. "Those missions seem to be par for the course with you and your crew. According to a jury of your peers, you're bad luck and the *Gibraltar* is a ship of fools."

Sandhurst clutched his chest mockingly as though mortally wounded. "As if I give a good goddamn about what anyone else thinks. By the way, if that's the case we're a ship of fools that rescued your wife, if I recall correctly."

At the mention of his wife, and by implication his troubled marriage, Glover visibly tensed. His voice grew thick with warning. "Tread softly, *Captain*."

Too inebriated to pick up on Glover's darkening mood, Sandhurst continued, "Terrific woman, Terrence." The *Gibraltar* CO waved earnestly at a waiter as the man darted between tables. "Seriously, you're wasting her at Ops. Jasmine's a top-notch engineer, and it kills me to think of her skills atrophying on the bridge." He turned his attention back to Glover and smiled. "She really helped us out at Yashk'lin IV. Jasmine and Lieutenant Ashok got the engines back online in time to..."

Glover's fist struck the tabletop with sufficient force to upset Sandhurst's empty glass. "I *don't* want to talk about Jasmine!" he roared, coming halfway out of his seat. Sandhurst fumbled awkwardly to grab the glass before it rolled off onto the floor, oblivious to the stares from patrons throughout the bar now directed towards them.

Sandhurst placed the rescued glass back on the table. "So... what I hear you saying is you don't want to talk about your wife?" His voice was equal measure sarcasm and curiosity.

Glover sat slowly, clearly struggling with a surge of emotion that threatened to overwhelm him. He took a few slow breaths, centering himself as Sandhurst looked on.

"Something's happened; that much is obvious." Sandhurst held up his hands in a near-universal gesture of supplication. "I don't need to know what it is." He mustered as much conviction as he could through the alcohol induced haze that engulfed him. He ventured carefully, "But if it's bad and it has to do with Jasmine, please know that I'm truly sorry."

Glover didn't appear especially mollified by that, but no longer looked ready to come across the table at the smaller man.

A look something akin to understanding suddenly washed over Sandhurst's features. "Is that what this whole song and dance is about?"

His frame still taut with tension, Glover hissed through clenched teeth. "Care to elaborate?"

Sandhurst waved his hand around at the bar. "This little scene here, Captain. This convoluted show you've put on for my benefit." He paused to smile graciously as the server deposited another glass of ale before him. "The man who came up here to belittle me isn't the one that led the *Cuffe* all the way to Cardassia during the war, or the one the crew of the *Aegis* fought to rescue from insurgent hands. He also isn't the person Jasmine married."

His chair toppled over as Glover shot to his feet, his daunting frame poised on the brink of upsetting the table and going straight for Sandhurst's throat. The smaller man, however, sipped idly at his ale, looking not the least bit worried.

"Oh for pity's sake, sit the hell down, Terrence. We both know you've too much to lose by attacking another officer."

Hands flexing with unexploited anger, Glover nonetheless held his ground. He gathered as much composure as he could as he reached down and picked up the chair, settling into it as gingerly as if it were made from Tholian crystal. "Go to hell, Sandy."

Sandhurst shook his head. "I can't imagine what's gone wrong with your life that you'd come up here tonight looking to pick a fight with me. Despite the loss of the *Aegis*, you'll doubtless be getting your pick of any ship in the Fleet for your next command. Your reputation as a decisive leader is beyond reproach, and you've got more friends in 'high places' than I could count." He downed the remainder of his ale in three gulps. "Your cup runneth over, Captain Glover." Sandhurst tittered drunkenly, "Hey, that rhymes."

Jaw twitching with repressed rage, Terrence Glover's eyes sent daggers into Donald Sandhurst's heart.

Sandhurst rose unsteadily to his feet, and he gripped the edge of the table to anchor himself. "There's a good man inside you screaming to get out, Terrence. Jasmine sees him. So does your crew." The *Gibraltar* CO fumbled in his pocket, finally producing three strips of latinum which he deposited atop the table. "Both of us know who the better captain here is, absolutely no contest there. But if being the better human being is the consolation prize, I'll gladly accept it."

Glover directed a final, biting retort at Sandhurst's back as the man made for the stairs. "Enjoy commanding that little toy starship of yours, Sandy. You'll never graduate to the big leagues."

As he paused precariously at the top of the spiral staircase, Sandhurst shook his head amusedly. Drunk as he was, he managed to keep his last barb inside his head, rather than delivering the words that were sure to send Glover into an unrecoverable rage. '*Well, it may be small and old and slow, but at least I still have a ship, Terrence.*' Instead, he offered a whimsical salute. "And a fine evening to you, Captain."

Fortunately, Lar'ragos was there to catch him at the base of the stairway. His unceremonious tumbling descent had crushed any hope Sandhurst had of making a stylish exit.

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