

Close Action

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Close Action

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Summary

The Banshees engage. A young officer finds her own, mostly. A Captain takes the measure of her crews. A grieving Doctor finds a tiny bit of hope.

Notes

Thanks to Gibraltar for a certain nickname for our intrepid captain.

I. Siobhan

Forward Operating Base Merlin
2296

Siobhan spares a glance back at their new group/wing/possibly division commander—they hadn't heard anything from Commodore Flynn or her staff—as her hands automatically raise the *Comstock* through the atmosphere.

She glances over at the replacement next to her. Ensign (Midshipman) Decker Sinclair doesn't return her look, instead, her eyes are focused between her console and the forward viewscreen, superimposed over the bridge windows. She can feel the tension in her thin body, clad in the white pullover shirt that is normally worn under the service dress jacket. Her shiny new officer's delta, with its single full pip prominent in the center, gives her at least a modicum of authority

Siobhan gives her own greasy tanktop, with her older and slightly more tarnished delta with the one closed and one open pip of her rank and service dress pants a glance.

"If you're through admiring your sartorial style, Mr. Lincoln, I'd appreciate it if you'd check the impulse output," comes from behind her. *You're one to talk, Captain No-Pants.*

Siobhan feels herself blush deeply. "Aye, Captain," she says. She glances over at the acting first officer. She gets an impression of straight red hair, large brown eyes, and freckles.

Not too much unlike her, except for paler skin and more height with a wirier frame.

Or skinnier, she thinks uncharitably.

"Commodore, the other two Unicorns are answering on Cohort," Kaylin Hunter-Stone says from the CIC.

"Just Captain will do. Or Group. One of them's a marine ship, right?"

"Yes ma'am," Kaylin replies evenly. Siobhan, who has known her at least for a year, can detect the wounded tone under the professionalism. The wounded tone of someone passed over for promotion to the Group command.

Even though she wasn't ready, flits through her mind, unasked. She shakes that thought away. She glances at Chandra's reflection in the viewscreen.

The Group commander, or Captain (L) in old-fashioned naval parlance is looking up at the Cohort system repeater. She had managed to overcome her own sartorial challenges when her new yeoman had brought her trousers up to her, to cover what had appeared to Siobhan to be a silk thong. She'd kept her service dress tunic closed, as her shirt had been left on Leelix III.

She brings her eyes down to the main viewscreen. "Right, Unicorn Actual," Chandra says, apparently in deep thought. "The marines may have to bring their defensive armament up to help us press the attack," she says.

"I agree, Captain," Kaylin replies without hesitation. "I'm locking them into the Cohort system. I've got weapons control if I need it." She pauses for a moment. "Targets?"

Chandra doesn't hesitate, either, doing some quick calculations. "Target bears three-five-zero, twenty degrees up bubble.

Siobhan feels her eyes widen as she realizes what Chandra is marking.

There is silence from CIC.

"You got that, Kaylin?" Chandra asks.

"Aye, Captain. You want us to go after the mothership for the gunboats." It isn't a question.

"Affirm," Chandra replies. "We'll use the few torpedoes we have between us and the Lancer-class. The jarheads'll keep the gunboats off of us with their point-defense."

"And the gunboats attacking the base?" Sinclair asks. Siobhan looks at the Ensign in amazement at her first words to the new Captain (L).

"The planetary defenses'll have to handle them. I'm hoping that we'll draw some up." She looks at the Ensign. "Good question, Mr. Sinclair," she says. "Don't ever be afraid to ask me."

Siobhan gives her what she hopes is an encouraging smile, from her lofty experience over the newly-graduated officer candidate.

All of three years, she thinks.

She catches Chandra's eyes. The captain nods and lets one side of her mouth quirk up. That had been the first sign of emotion that Chandra had projected since she had come aboard. In fact, it had been the first Siobhan had seen since she had defeated the Klingon bat'leth wielder in single combat.

Saving all of them from a painful execution, as well as distracting the KFS assholes enough for the *Enterprise-B* to finally get her shit together and take the two purloined K'tinga class cruisers out of the fight.

With some encouragement from the *Enterprise's* Chief Engineer and Chief of Ops, if not her first officer, to her captain.

An undercover Starfleet Intelligence officer had lent encouragement as well, on the ground, with a well-placed photon grenade in a docked Bird-of-Prey.

A human that had been rumored to have once been bonded with the *Enterprise's* Security Officer, who now sits in the *Comstock's* center seat, and a Vulcan High Command intelligence officer, who was one of two fatalities in the whole operation. The other had been a prisoner who had been executed as an example to the others.

She starts to feel the ship being buffeted by phaser or disruptor fire. At least they hadn't started dropping photon torpedoes into the atmo.

Chandra snaps her hand down on the intercom. "Comms, signal to all ships. 'Engage the enemy closer'," she says. There is a brief smile. "Keep it flying," she says. Siobhan smiles at the reference to ancient naval signalling.

A girl after my own heart, she thinks cheekily.

"Weapons reports all three ships in range of the mothership. Appears to be a converted deuterium tanker," Kaylin says from CIC.

"Maybe there'll be some residue," Decker says.

Chandra looks at her, her eyes more blue than gray in their intensity. Siobhan smiles as she sees Decker shrink. "You may be right, Number One. Cohort, mesh targeting for all three ships. Concentrate on the former cargo areas."

Siobhan touches Decker's hand as the young woman realizes that Chandra had called her by the title that she had fallen into, since Kaylin is now the squadron commander.

"Ready, Group," Kaylin says. Another title given freely, from someone who might not've used it.

"Execute," Chandra says.

As she feels the *tchunk* of the torpedoes being released, as well as the concentrated phaser beams, Siobhan smiles. She turns to say something when her console explodes in her face.

She feels herself falling.

Or being shoved, as everything goes dark.

II. Kaylin

Kaylin Stone-Hunter grips the sides of the Cohort table. She sees the main target, the mothership, along with her three ships.

All three of hers are linked by the amorphous bands of the computer brain's predictive software. She moves her hand to the 'commit' button for the second combined salvos as she sees that every thing is synced.

Before she can, she is thrown to the deck by a large explosion. She can see arcs of electrical feedback from the conduits in the overhead.

The arcs lead up to the flight deck. She shakes her head and gets up. The young fire control assistant, a junior technician, in lieu of a chief or an officer, gazes at her, his eyes wide as he lifts his finger from the 'commit' button.

"Good man," Kaylin says. Her heart sinks as his brown eyes fix and he slides down to the deck. A swath of blood follows where his back slides down the table leg.

A shard of metal protrudes slightly from his chest, all the way through his body.

"Medical and damage control teams to the flight deck," Chandra says over the IMC.

She gropes her way up to the intercom. "Are we under control, Group?"

"I need a backup helmsman," she replies. "Check that. Ensign Decker has taken over. We're good, since the primary console just blew up."

Kaylin narrows her eyes at the mistaken name. Not exactly a mistake, seeing who her grandfather, her uncle, and her mother were. Her first name might stick for everyone.

Kaylin exhales as she thinks of Siobhan Lincoln. Chandra had called for medics, so there was hope. In her memory, poking out with everything else she is doing at this moment, she sees Siobhan, defiant, as she stood up for an injured shipmate in the Klingon pen.

She had taken intense punishment from the guard, with a broken arm, several broken ribs, and a punctured lung as her reward.

The guard's superior had made him leave the more severely injured crewmember alone. To live until they had been relieved.

Nobody in the Banshees, the callsign for the 17th, would ever say that they were rescued.

She sees a pair of feet climbing the ladder to the flight deck, a leg clad in the whites of a medic.

"Can I get a report on whether or not we hit the broad side of a barn?" Chandra asks.

Kaylin's anger flares for a moment, given the young FCA's death—she still couldn't think of his name—but she lets it subside. Chandra was dealing with many things, as well as making sure that a shiny new ensign was flying the ship, keeping them out of the enemy's sights.

"Hits!" someone yells.

"Torpedoes dead true."

"Damage assessment," Chandra says immediately.

Kaylin steadies herself on the console.

"Their impulse drive is heavily damaged," she says. "Shields are down over half of the ship."

"What's our damage?"

"The gunboats are still pressing the attack, but the *O'Bannon* is holding her own. She has lost three PD mounts on her starboard side." She exhales, pausing to gather her analysis. "All three ships' shields are down 75% on average."

Kaylin looks at Ishimoto, the engineer warrant officer that they carried in lieu of a commissioned engineering officer. She nods at him.

They look up at the ladder. A stretcher starts to move down, with a figure strapped to it securely. Siobhan's face is sliced up with splinters, but she is breathing. The antigrav steadies as it reaches the deck. Kaylin starts in surprise as she looks at the medic. A full captain, who looks to be in his sixties, or even his seventies or older gazes at her with sharp blue eyes.

"Any other casualties?"

She motions to the young man on the deck. He nods, then crouches down. He shakes his head at the young man, checking, even though he is obviously dead.

"Two dead down below. A few other injuries in the engineering spaces, Doctor—?" Ishimoto replies.

"McCoy. I was on an inspection tour of these FOBs and their medical capabilities, when the attack came. Looked like this was the game to

follow.”

Kaylin starts, realizing she hasn't finished her report. “Three dead, Group,” she says. “Unknown injuries on several other ships. Siobhan seems to be the most seriously injured here.”

“Warp signature,” a sensor operator calls. She doesn't say anything else.

“Remember your training,” Kaylin chides.

“She's preparing to jump away,” the young technician says.

Kaylin nods. “Stand by to return to the FOB,” she says.

“Belay that,” comes the clear voice from above. “Stand by for warp speed and pursuit.”

“Secure for warp navigation,” the engineering console operator says, looking at Ishimoto.

Ishimoto looks at Kaylin. “I better get aft.”

Kaylin looks at the rest of the faces in the reduced lighting of the CIC. She sees a mix of emotions.

Ranging from fear, to satisfaction.

She makes her own expression steadfast. “You heard the lady. Let's take the hurt to those assholes.”

She sees the doctor, McCoy gazing at her calmly. A grin breaks out, along with understanding in those calm, wise eyes.

III. Decker

Decker Sinclair, named for at least two heroes in her eyes, feels the building of the warp drive. As she does, her mind slips to those two heroes. Mary Decker, daughter of a Starfleet hero and Elizabeth Sinclair, a Starfleet doctor who had raised her when Mary had returned to the stars.

Except for her middle name, Jane, she doesn't bear any part of her sperm donor that isn't genetic. She curses under her breath and quickly returns to the present, hopefully that her propensity for daydreaming isn't noticed. She checks her controls; she is ready. She watches as the damaged enemy jumps.

Without being told, she engages the drive. The stars streak. Her eyes lock on the tracking scope.

“Able to make Warp 2, Captain,” she says.

She sees Chandra's face in the viewport/screen. There is something in the woman's eyes—a young woman who is less than a decade older than her new helmsman and captain.

Something that appears to Decker like satisfaction. Satisfaction tempered with something else.

“We're the only ones who jumped, Captain,” Kaylin's voice comes over the intercom.

“I understand, Commander,” she says. “I didn't really give orders for them to. But next time they'll need to anticipate our needs.”

Decker gazes at her reflection. Her tone is matter-of-fact, but not without some compassion. The matter-of-fact-part tells any listener that things will need to improve.

Just like the fact that she was pursuing their attacker might tell them a great deal about their new group commander.

“Mind your helm, Deck,” Chandra says absently. A quick glance back at her gives Decker the impression that she is communing with someone in her head.

She starts and looks at her console, then at the ship. There is something about the aspect of the ship's shape.

“Captain, she's maneuvering in warp!” She curses as her voice goes way up in pitch.

“Weapons are free, Kaylin,” Chandra says calmly. “Stand by for warp maneuvering,” she says over the speaker. She spares a smirk for Decker. “I'm sure that there are some animals back on Leelix who are stampeding now, Number One,” she says dryly.

Decker feels herself flush behind her freckles. Thoughts of freckles lead her to thinking of Siobhan, her erstwhile captain.

“She'll be okay, Deck,” Chandra says. She feels something like a calming wave flow over her. She focuses on the ship. She realizes that the enemy ship has completely flipped around and is now heading towards them.

Both ships drop out of warp, no more than a hundred thousand kilometers from each other. “TAO, stand by on weapons. I want her disabled,” Chandra orders.

The *Comstock* shudders as three separate phaser banks open up on her.

“Shields are down to twenty percent,” the Tactical Action Officer says.

Decker brings her focus out from the target as she starts to jink right and left, trying to avoid the shots. Her eyes widen as she sees something

like a large piece of wreckage near the ship.

“Phaser banks offline,” Commander Stone-Hunter says over the intercom.

Chandra curses in a language that sounds like Romulan. “Arm photon torpedoes,” she says, her voice showing the first sense of urgency.

Even that sounds like she might be slightly more interested than bored.

“There aren’t any more,” someone from CIC says.

Decker sees what she needs to. She reaches down and starts to manipulate controls. Ones that were hers originally.

She punches the final control, then turns the ship to starboard.

“What the hell?” comes from below.

Chandra says nothing, trusting her to do her best. Or her worst.

The tractor beam emits in two separate sections. One seizes the wreckage that apparently had come off of the ship as they had reverted from warp.

The other attaches to the ship.

She hears the engines start to strain.

“We can’t take much of this,” Ishimoto says over the speaker. “What the fuck are you trying to do to my boat, snotty?”

“Give her everything she needs, Engineer,” Chandra says, a hard edge to her voice.

The whine of the engines decreases as Ishimoto takes his charges in hand, finding some reserves of power.

Something snaps in the forward velocity of the mothership.

She watches as the tractor beams come together, then fizzle out.

There is another explosion. The sublight engines of the marauder flare out, as one warp nacelle separates. She starts to tumble.

“Open a hailing frequency, Comms,” Chandra says. She looks at Decker. “It’s your ship, Captain,” she says.

Decker knows that it is a good bet that she has a completely dumb expression on her face. She gathers herself, taking a breath, hoping the pitch of her voice doesn’t go up again.

“Unknown vessel, this is Commander, *Comstock*. You are ordered to surrender your vessel and prepare to be boarded.”

Her eyes burn as there is a bright flare. The *Comstock* shudders and flips as the ship explodes.

“Self destruct,” Chandra says. “Look for any survivors, but I’m pretty sure we won’t find any, Kaylin. Make a note in the log, Decker. We’ll need the marine ship to come back and investigate. They all started out as security specialists. They’ll have to do until we can get some real redshirts here.”

The hatch opens from below. Commander Stone-Hunter sticks her head up above the coaming. Chandra notices her. “Secure from General Quarters, Kaylin. And get some relief for the hard-charger up here.” She grins. “Well done, all.”

She reaches out and pulls Decker out of her seat and tightly to her. “Come on Deck,” she says, releasing her, but keeping her arm around her shoulders.

Decker manages not to fall on her face or her ass when she makes it to the CIC. She can see broad smiles on the tired faces of the crew.

Chandra moves over to the engineer.

“Report, Engineer,” she says.

“We’ll have to do some repairs. We blew some of the circuits on the warp drive; we can replace them, but we’ll be here for about ten hours, unless you want to be towed. Ma’am,” he adds at a look from Kaylin.

“Do it,” Chandra says. She makes to turn, then looks back at him. “Oh, and Ish. The ‘snotty’s’ name and rank is Ensign Sinclair. She’s also the captain of this ship, until Captain Lincoln’s back.” She turns and is gone.

Ishimoto stares after her. “Don’t let it go to your head, ‘ma’am,’” he says out of the corner of his mouth. “I’d make the same amount of money as you do, if we did. I also got socks older than you and ‘Captain Lincoln’ combined.” He does give her what passes for an almost warm smile and claps her on the shoulder.

“Well done.”

Deck isn’t sure, but praise from the engineer is almost the best she has received.

Almost.

IV. McCoy

Surgeon-Captain Leonard H. McCoy, known to some on another ship as 'Bones', although the number who could call him that has been reduced by one in the last few months, pulls himself out of the sterilization field in the small Sickbay of the *Comstock*.

The *Comstock* is an example of the *Morrigan* patrol/escort leader class of cutters. She is only a bit larger than the other cutters, but has much more space for crew, even larger than the double crew compared to other cutters she currently holds.

She also rates a CMO, rather than just nurses or medtechs like her fellows.

He reaches behind him and cracks his back. He glances over at the three covered bodies resting out of the way. He shifts his look to the medtech and their current patient. "Think you can finish, Josh?" he asks.

"Yessir," the young man drawls. He smiles and touches him on the shoulder. *Not bad for someone from Alabama*, Bones thinks.

He shifts his gaze over to the young woman sleeping fitfully against the bulkhead. Her heavily freckled face is marked by cuts from her console. She is nude under the sheet, her clothing having been cut away to check for other injuries. There hadn't been time to put her in sickbay clothing.

She moans sharply, her head starting to toss from side-to-side.

He checks the bandage on her shoulder. An arc of power from her console had intersected with the shoulder, burning through to her shoulder blade.

It would've been through her face and probably her brain if the young Decker child hadn't shoved her to the deck as her console exploded.

She starts to moan louder. Her head comes off of the pillow, her eyes snapping open. He is pretty sure she sees nothing as a louder groan comes from her throat.

Bones moves over with a hypospray. He is extremely reluctant to give her more pain medicine, but she may open up the electrically-cauterized wound.

Suddenly, Bones feels a warmth in places that he isn't supposed to feel warmth at his age. He turns around and sees the smudged face and smooth skull of the young woman who had led this tiny unit in the battle.

Her eyes are on Lincolnton's face. He can see the start of tears in her blue-gray eyes, more dark gray with pain and grief.

Fortunately, for some reason, the grief isn't being projected, something he would've expected, not as a product of the pheromones, but of her own empathy.

He watches as she reaches over and touches Siobhan's cheek. Bones sees Siobhan calm a little bit, but he can still hear the moans. *Of course*, he thinks. *Tactile pain relief*. Something he'd witnessed from Deltans before.

Relief, but no healing.

He watches as Chandra gazes down at the younger woman. He curses to himself. She is maybe seven years older than the lieutenant. He isn't sure if she has seen her thirtieth birthday yet.

Chandra closes her eyes, her hand moving down to the skin around the shoulder. After a moment, she opens her eyes, then leans down and kisses her officer on her lips.

Her lips linger for a moment. Bones suddenly feels like he wants to look away, but as he starts to, Chandra lifts her lips from the contact.

She smiles warmly. She has reason to smile as Siobhan's face is completely relaxed.

Chandra looks up, as if now becoming aware of her presence. Bones suddenly feels like he is a teenager again. He somehow manages not to stammer. "Captain," he says.

A warm smile grows over her grimy features. "Doctor McCoy. Nobody told me you were here."

"Not actually supposed to be, Chandra," he remarks. "My ride was held up. Like a dumbass, I ran for the chaos."

She looks down at Siobhan. "I'm sure many are glad you did," she says, almost in a whisper. She looks up at him with that clear, now with more blue in the blue-gray, gaze again. "I haven't had a chance to tell you, Doctor, how sorry I was about Captain Kirk."

He feels a stab of fresh pain. "Thank you, Captain. I'd heard that you and your friend Croft were both there."

He sees something dark play over her features at the mention of the last name. She shakes it away, smiles, then turns to the three who hadn't survived.

He sees her taking a deep, shuddering breath. She walks over to the three bodies. Bones doesn't turn away. Chandra places her hand on each one in turn, closing her eyes.

She opens her eyes, standing straight, as if stiffening her resolve.

"Fair winds and following seas," she whispers. She nods to him and turns to leave the compartment.

Bones smiles. Just like captains the universe over, from the beginning of time. At least the good ones.

He suddenly feels a tiny bit of closure at Jim Kirk's death.

The torch has been picked up. At least in one tiny part of the galaxy.

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