

All Her Paths are Peace

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All Her Paths are Peace

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Summary

The (Task) Force is with you. Drills, drills, and more drills. A mystery deepens in the Beta Quadrant. Another ship, a new captain. The visiting fireman. Or firestarter.

The Neutral Zone
Federation Patrol Zone Epsilon 9
(Border Patrol Service 1/1 Area of Responsibility)
USS Intrepid (NCC-1631)

Vice Admiral Mike Walsh stares out at the blue chaos that is the Travon Nebula. The port that he gazes out of has the Nebula centered in the middle, with the *Intrepid* holding station on it. Another vessel, holding station on his flagship, can just be seen at the right edge of the viewport of his flag quarters. He breathes in the air of the ship, then exhales.

The temperature of his flag bridge and his quarters, as well as those of his small staff, had been adjusted downward to the comfort levels of the various species, mostly human, who had been assigned to the Vulcan-only starship. Walsh grins at his reflection in the transparent aluminum. He himself was fairly hot-natured, coming from Arizona. He would make a point of appearing on the bridge of the starship and in other spaces to show the crew his comfort in their ship.

Not that the Vulcans would necessarily care about such things. The troops didn't need to be rallied.

He moves to another viewport and sits in his command chair. He'd insisted that this chair, a duplicate of the one on the bridge be installed in a place where he could see the stars. At the angle of this view, he can see the one other ship currently under his command. He smiles at the clean, familiar lines of the ship, then sighs, thinking of the passage of time.

The USS *Pathfinder* was the last of the *Constitution*-class starships that had been built. She, the *Intrepid*, and the USS *Constitution* were the last ones still in active service. Even the *Enterprise-A* had been taken from service, though it was relatively new as starships go. Last word was that she was on her way to the Starfleet Museum, superseded on active service by the *Excelsior*-class *Enterprise-B*.

Wonder when I'll be given a berth at the Museum? he muses. He exhales and looks at his reflection. Forty years in space, with over twenty of them spent as commander of one particular starship, one similar to the *Pathfinder*, hadn't taken too much of a toll on his body. His face is lined, under a mop of gray hair, but his blue eyes are still clear.

He tries not to think of that ship that he'd spent much of his adult life on. The *Constellation* had been retired, her fate uncertain. He knew that a new class of ships was being built, a smaller class, but with great power, that would bear her name.

Passages, he thinks again. His eyes fall on a two-d holo taped to the bottom of the port. A young woman, with the auburn-brown hair of her mother and a more piercing version of his blue eyes, stands tall, clad in the long tunic of the dress blue uniform, one-and-a-half brand new gold stripes on the sleeve. She is smiling proudly for the recorder.

That tells anyone who knows them that he isn't the one taking the holo.

The door opens behind Walsh. He sees the entrant in the reflection of the window; he spins his chair around and looks up at her.

He grins up at the tall young woman—not so young as when he had first met her, in her mid-thirties, now—but still, compared to him, everybody seemed so much younger.

Or at least they seemed so. You could never tell with Vulcans.

She stops in front of the chair and gazes at him, her jade-green eyes calm.

“Hello, Number One. What fresh hell are you bringing me today?”

A slight lift of the right side of her mouth warms him. For her, it is the equivalent of a broad grin. For the rest of the crew, it is the equivalent of a paroxysm of laughter.

“It depends on your true definition of hell, Admiral,” Saavik says. “If it is the Klingon version, then what I bring you, is mild. If it is the Deltan version, then there will be calamity.”

“I’m somewhere in the middle,” he replies.

“The *Constitution* has been delayed again. Captain Prandi says they had gotten the warp engine casualty taken care of, but it revealed cracks in the port impulse manifold.”

He closes his eyes and breathes in. “How long?” he asks, after releasing the breath.

“Four more days in dock, then three days to get here.”

He turns his gaze to a short, compactly muscled human male. “Message, John,” he says. “To: Mary Decker, Rear Admiral Commanding, Utopia Planitia Dockyards, etc., etc., Mar, get me my goddamned ship.”

He sees Saavik raise her left eyebrow. Lieutenant John Reeves smirks at him. “I’ll put the appropriate pleasantries in there, Admiral.”

Mike snorts. “Okay. Send it.”

“That’ll tell them,” Saavik says dryly. She pulls up a PADD. “Have comm traffic for you, as well.” She hands the PADD to him.

He narrows his eyes as he opens it. He puts it aside.

Saavik nods. “Problem, Admiral?”

“One of the Prince’s minions is on her way. To read me in on something

“Who is it?”

His eyes focus on hers. “Lieutenant Commander Cavendish.” He sees Saavik’s eyes go distant. “You know her?”

She takes a moment to answer. “We were on the *Enterprise* training cruise together.”

The fact that she use ‘the’ and not ‘an’ as the article, tells him which one it is.

“The Battle of the Mutara Nebula. Khan and Genesis,” he says quietly, so that the others can’t hear.

“Yes sir. She was one of the the third-year cadets.”

“Along with my daughter. Michaela.

“I thought that her name was Morgan,” Saavik observes.

He says nothing. Saavik wisely choses to continue on

“Chandra, Emma Rosewarne, James Blackthorne, and Roged Meeliy were the other third-year cadets that were all close to one another. Hunter’s daughter Kaylin was a first-year cadet, along with a friend of mine, Peter Preston.”

Mike nods. “Preston was one of the ones who died,” he says quietly. “Along with Roged Meeliy.”

Saavik closes her eyes and looks down. She gives a brief nod.

Both of them remain silent as they think of their dead, from both of their careers. Roged and Peter had been Saavik’s, his daughter’s, and their friends’ first.

The first of many, for all of them.

For Saavik, given her background on Hellguard, it hadn’t actually been her first.

Federation Border Approach Zone Epsilon
USS Comstock (NCC-3007)

Chandra sits in the captain’s chair in the CIC. She watches the activity around her. She focuses her gaze on the slim—some would say skinny—young officer standing at the Cohort system’s main data table. Decker herself is watching the activity of the other members of the crew. Chandra sees her eyes narrow as one of the weapons assistants takes longer than expected to calibrate their part of the system.

The captain can see that Decker is having to fight the urge to go over to complete the task faster, herself. Something Decker had become an expert on, as she worked to qualify as a watchstander on the system.

Kaylin had signed off on her taskbook before the *Reed* had departed with the rest of her squadron.

“Time,” Siobhan Lincolnton says from the bridge. There is a pause. “Fifty seconds,” she says.

Chandra sees Decker slump slightly, then stand straight when the CIC team looks at her. “We’re getting there,” she says to them. Chandra watches her walk over to the weapons assistant. She starts to demonstrate some of those shortcuts she’d learned, with at least two that Kaylin was sure she had developed on her own.

Chandra taps a control on the arm of her chair. “Bridge, CIC. Securing Cohort from Red Alert. Set Condition III.”

She gets up from her chair and stretches. As she does, the crewmember at the comms panel says, “Incoming message, Captain. Priority from Division.” He hands her a PADD.

Chandra looks up from it and sees Siobhan coming down from the bridge. She moves over next to Decker who has walked over to stand in front of her. Both redheads gaze at her, expectantly.

She hands the PADD to Decker. “Coordinates for a rendezvous with Hunter,” she says. “She might have another ship for us.” She grins at them. “For Kaylin.”

Both young officers nod in unison. She hides a smile. Some of the crew had taken to calling them the Freckle Twins, but from what Grasp had told her, it was with the deepest respect.

She isn’t sure that Grasp might not’ve suggested the nickname.

“Go ahead and head there. Notify the *O’Bannon* to form up in starboard echelon. Best possible speed.”

She sees Decker doing some quick calculations. “Warp 4 will bring us there in a couple of hours.”

“Do it,” she says.

Decker nods and moves back up to the flight deck.

“We’re getting some more officers,” Chandra says. “Bringing us up to closer to full complement. There’s at least one lieutenant j.g. who’s command rated.”

Siobhan exhales sharply. “Decker’ll be superseded at first officer.”

Chandra nods. “I’m afraid so. I think with her performance so far, she might be eligible for a ‘promote before peers’. But I’m not sure I can overcome the seniority.”

Siobhan. “Don’t I get a say in who my first officer is?”

“Only if they’re more senior than this j.g. coming on board.” She holds up a hand. “Let me try and figure this out. And, if this goes like it might, I expect you to be a professional and work with the new XO.”

Siobhan’s features still have that hint of rebelliousness, but she nods. “Aye, Captain,” she says. “Always.”

As she turns away, Chandra is already planning how to mitigate the shitshow that might follow.

Unknown Location

Beta Quadrant

Commander Daina Reese feels the insignia vibrate on her chest. She sits down at her desk, then engages the compartmentalization field. She stares at the stars outside the office on the small ship, then taps the black insignia. She taps a few controls on her PADD, then stares at the figure on the screen. An officer in a Starfleet captain’s uniform is present; her background is blank and nondescript. Daina sees the bit of lag before the woman speaks.

“What do you want?” she asks, her voice as blank as her background.

Daina narrows her eyes at the curt response. “You might keep a civil tongue in your head, Captain,” she says. “We can make your life a living hell.”

“You already have,” she replies, her dark eyes hard. “So, I say again, what do you want?”

“We want to be kept informed of your task force’s activities, when you are able to deploy.”

“So what else is new?” the Captain asks.

“Oh, we just wanted to remind you, before you ship out. Also, to remind you that you’ll never be free of your debt to us. We own you. Just like we own many people.”

“I’m not sure that someone who belongs to an institution such as Starfleet, one belonging to the Federation, should be saying things like that.”

If you only knew, darling, Daina thinks. She makes sure that she doesn’t voice that, in Basic or the language she is thinking in. “We have a mandate from the Starfleet charter that gives us broad authority to act in times of emergency.”

“So what’s the emergency?”

“We also get to decide that, as well.”

“Oh,” says the woman, “I didn’t know that Article 14, Section 31 of the Starfleet Charter says the ‘ends justify the means’ in a free society.

“That’s exactly what it says,” Daina replies. “Somebody has to be willing to do what is necessary to protect the utopia.” She smiles mirthlessly. “‘Extraordinary measures to be taken in times of extreme threat’.”

“And what is the extreme threat?”

“Destabilization of the Romulan Government.”

She sees the eyebrow go up on the woman. She hits the ‘end’ button and looks out at the stars again. For a moment, she lets the Other, whose name she daren’t think of, run free in her mind.

A different soul.

She smiles and runs her index finger tip over the rounded edge of her right ear.

She thinks of another organization that she belongs to.

Davyna System

Hunter watches as the point of light shifts back into real space in the viewer. Her eyes play over the sleek, long lines of the small ship. She can see the small, cockpit-like bridge at the forward end, just aft of the sharp bow, rather than the rounded bow of most of Starfleet’s ships, with the conning platform behind it secured. Even though the ship doesn’t look thick, the long shape conceals a long main deck with two half decks each above and below, with larger compartments than the others. The ship is wider and longer than most of its other Cohort-equipped counterparts, with a small two-space hangar bay in the port aft section. The long nacelles are tucked in tight to the body

Another ship breaks out of warp. She feels a spike in her heart—a spike of powerful love, as well as one of farewell.

Farewell to the ship that had been her first and only command, as well as, improbably, her flagship, not just of her squadron, but later her group and for a brief time, her division.

Her eyes take in the clean, triangular ship with the nacelles at the aft points of the triangle. Themselves sharpened like spear points. The powerful impulse engines disengage in their own triangle at the stern.

The forerunner of all of the Cohort corvettes and cutters, the gunboats, the torpedo boats, the escorts, even the marine and security cutters. She is mesmerized by the still vibrant colors of the phoenix, on both the dorsal and ventral hulls.

Now she would be someone else’s. Entrusted—indirectly at least—to the young woman who she thought of as a daughter, as well as the one who actually was. Two young women, different in many ways, but with a similar drive.

With the same values. Hunter stands up from the chair located just to the left of the captain’s chair. She nods at the captain, a full commander, not yet a post captain.

As a medium scout, called a frigate, warranted.

She turns to the man who rises as well. “Captain, please signal to the *Comstock*. Group commander, captain, and XO repair on board as convenient.”

“Aye, Admiral.”

She sits in the captain’s ready room as the three young women step in. She acknowledges their snap to attention, then walks over and pulls Chandra into a deep embrace. She feels the burble of the familiar Threads as she kisses the warm neck.

She turns and holds out her hand to the senior, Lincolnton. There is a hint of suppressed snark in the brown eyes, surrounded by the mass of freckles.

The youngest among them, or at least the lowest ranking one, still stands braced at attention. Hunter takes her hand and looks into the large eyes, which take up most of her face, along with the apparently-obligatory freckles and two slightly arched, sculpted eyebrows. She is struck by the number of freckled redheads in her life. McCall’s yeoman, who is more than she seems. This young woman’s mother, a prickly engineer.

The eyes and the brows are widened and raised.

“I read the report of the battle, Mr. Sinclair,” she says. “Well done.”

“Thank you, Admiral,” she manages to get out.

“I have an idea that you will soon be hearing from the Admiralty, soon, for an investiture.”

She nods. “Captain Chandra told me,” she says. She says nothing, but appears to be searching for words.

“Don’t worry, Admiral,” Chandra says. She looks at Decker Sinclair fondly. “She was appropriately humble. It’s refreshing actually, seeing the example she has.” She points at Siobhan, who gives a ‘who me?’ look and gesture.

Chandra looks around. “So I didn’t expect to see you on a *Horton*-class frigate. Thought you’d be in the Aerfen.”

Hunter shakes her head. “They tried to put me in a *Miranda*,” she says, naming the class of light cruiser/starships. “Or even one of the

remaining *Constitutions*. I persuaded them that the heavies would be better served concentrated in a combined task force.” She grins. “They next tried to put me in a *Sal-ah-din*-class destroyer, but I wanted something still smaller.” She shakes her head. “Guess I should use the Starfleet-approved terms. Heavy scouts and medium scouts.”

“You’re among heathens, Admiral.” Lincolnton says. “We’re still working on Sinclair here to turn her into a knuckle-dragging Border Dog.” Hunter is treated to the sight of the intense blush on the young woman’s features.

“Knuckle-dragging aside,” Chandra says. “I’m assuming that you’re giving us *Aerfen*?”

Hunter nods. “Only thing is, she’s short of officers. She’s only got two midshipman and an Engineer Warrant Officer as officers. The two middies were appointed a couple of weeks ago and have never seen action. She should have at least three commissioned officers plus the XO.”

Chandra’s eyes grow thoughtful. She looks at Hunter after a moment. “Do you have anyone in mind for her, Admiral?”

Hunter’s eyes lock with Chandra’s. The gray eyes are even and calm.

With a tiny bit of a twinkle.

“Do you, Captain?” Hunter asks again.

“I do. But it may be a month or two before she can get here. She’s recuperating from some injuries.”

Hunter nods with recognition “Mike Walsh’s daughter. She was injured testing a new fighter, right?”

“Yes, Admiral.”

“So what’s your plan-B? Until you can get her.”

Chandra doesn’t hesitate. She points at Decker. “Admiral, you’ve got more juice than I do. I need a brevet promotion.”

Decker recoils. “Wh-what?” she stammers. “No!”

She looks at Siobhan Lincolnton, as if seeking support. Instead, Siobhan breaks out into a wide grin. She shoves Decker, who forgets herself and shoves her back.

“I’m not qualified,” she says, looking from Hunter to Chandra. “I’ve only been on the *Comstock* for a couple of weeks, maybe three,” she tries. “Just like the others. They’re probably from my class.”

“Well, the Bronze Cluster with ‘V’ says something differently,” Chandra says.

“What about Siobhan? The captain,” she corrects.

“There’s a new XO coming in. A Lieutenant j.g. You wouldn’t stay as XO.”

“I’d be okay with that,” she replies.

Chandra looks at Hunter, who shares her look. “Decker, it’s good that you are thoughtful about your skills. But you’re wrong. I think you’ll do fine.”

“What about the new j.g.?”

“I want to see what he can do. He’s never even been a department head or division officer. But that’s not your problem.”

Chandra pulls something from her pocket. “Hold your hand out.”

Decker complies. She drops two objects into the palm.

The split pins of the service dress uniform rank insignia.

Hunter gazes at the eyes of the new captain as Siobhan hugs Decker tightly.

They are filled with the fear of the unknown.

But there is something else.

Resolve.

The Neutral Zone

Federation Patrol Zone Epsilon 9

(Border Patrol Service I/I Area of Responsibility)

USS Intrepid (NCC-1631)

Saavik enters the briefing room. Admiral Walsh nods at her with a grin. Captain Stivek gives her one without the grin, though almost grudgingly in the briefness of the motion. Saavik makes sure that she keeps her expression even, as well as her Romulan half’s emotions in check.

Something that if she had let slip, would’ve played into her captain’s narrative about her. If a full Vulcan could have a narrative.

Most of the *Intrepid's* crew that she had interacted with had apparently ascribed whole-heartedly to the philosophy of IDIC—Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations. The few who hadn't had been obedient to her orders and had responded positively to the respect that she had shown them.

The captain hadn't exactly been one of those on board with that philosophy, or at least the universally accepted interpretation of it. She lets those thoughts move out her mind. Walsh had been appreciative of her and supportive. His blue eyes had taken in the subtle rebukes that Stivek had given her, namely in public, as well as in private.

She turns to the newcomer. She stifles a slight smile at the warm grin that Eleanora Cavendish gives her. The younger officer raises her right hand in the standard Vulcan salute.

"Greetings, Commander Saavik," she says in the accent of the island of her birth.

"And to you as well, Lieutenant Commander Cavendish," Saavik replies formally returning the salute. "Welcome to *Intrepid*."

Cavendish, as she prefers to be called, except from a select few, who have another name for her, drops her hand. If there was no one in the room, Saavik would accept a tight embrace from the taller woman. There were only a few, namely those who know Cavendish by that diminutive, who she would accept that from.

Namely those who had survived under her command as training first officer of the original USS *Enterprise*. In a place known formerly as the Mutara Nebula. She gives a quick thought to one in particular who had died a few days later after that battle, a Klingon dagger in his chest. A blonde young man of her age with curly hair and his father's ready grin.

"It's good to see you, Saavik," Cavendish says. "It's been awhile."

Almost five years, she thinks. She is sure that Stivek would have something to say about the impreciseness of that estimate, if she had voiced it.

Another name, more of a nickname for Cavendish, rather than a diminutive of her given name, coined by Jamie Blackthorne—the 'Last Word'—would've probably manifested itself if Stivek had've corrected Saavik's impreciseness. Cavendish was nothing if not a passionate protector of her loved ones.

Of course, Cavendish had repaid Jamie Blackthorne by using the propensity for the final statement on everything by coining his own nickname. An unfortunate shore leave incident when on an Engineering rotation in Glasgow, had precipitated that nickname. When a drunken, naked offer to buy a small farmhouse near the city, owned by a retired woman who was an adjunct engineering professor at the Academy, had resulted in Cavendish naming him after the local term for one of those small farmhouses.

Croft.

"Do I need to leave?" she asks Cavendish.

"It's up to the Admiral," Cavendish replies, "but I think that you should hear this."

Saavik notices that Stivek narrows his eyes, but says nothing as they look to Walsh.

"You can stay, Number One. But I think from how she has described it, this will be small circle on the *Intrepid* and the *Pathfinder*."

"Yes sir," Cavendish replies. She look down, gathering herself. "There is an effort by Starfleet Intelligence to reinstitute attempts to suborn the new Praetorate, namely the one trying to make herself the sole Praetor. We are building up along the Neutral Zone, to be ready for anything. Captain Chandra's Border Patrol Group will be in direct support of the efforts."

"How?" Stivek asks.

Cavendish looks at him, with a brief glance at Walsh. "We'll be determining that. We are in contact with elements on both sides of the Neutral Zone. It's very delicate, now. But we think we will be able to support those looking to sponsor regime change."

"What is new?" Stivek says. "We've backed Ael t'Rllaillieu's claims to the Empty Chair. That hasn't exactly been productive, even though she bears the S'harien blade of the Senate."

"There are some added variables we didn't have then, that we have now," Cavendish says. "I can't go into them, as it's got a lot of moving parts." She checks her chronometer. "I have to go. I have to get back to our contact ship," she says.

She nods her goodbyes to them all. "Saavik, can you walk me to the hangar deck?"

She follows the tall frame from the room. "You're on your way back to Chandra?" Saavik asks quietly as she pulls up next to Cavendish.

"At least one of her ships, if not hers."

"I never expected her to take a Border Patrol command again," Saavik says.

"Well, I don't think she had a lot of choice. Her foster mother needed her. She's hoping to parlay this into a starship command. It's what she's always wanted," Cavendish says.

Saavik nods. "She has the heart of an explorer. She's just so damned good at being a soldier."

Cavendish enters the hangar deck, then walks to the shuttle. She turns and looks at Saavik.

“Do you think that this time it will work?” she asks.

Cavendish gives her a half-smile. “I don’t know. It’ll be a long shot. If it doesn’t, though, we’ll still be able to have an infrastructure in place on the other side that could keep us on a path to dialogue.”

“So all paths will still lead to peace?” Saavik asks.

Cavendish smiles. “Good reference to my birth-country’s foundational hymn. Even though she didn’t always live up to the words.” Her expression grows serious again and she lowers her voice. “There’s something else at play here. Only you and one other, outside of my boss, know this. There are other, outside entities, within Starfleet, interested. At least one of them is interested in fostering the cold war. So we’re hoping to draw them out into the open. Might do more for peace than anything else.”

“Why aren’t you telling Walsh?”

“Because we aren’t sure of who to trust.” Cavendish holds up both hands. One has three fingers up and the other has one. Saavik nods in recognition of the significance of those numbers.

Cavendish drops one hand and raises the other one higher, forming a Vulcan salute. “Live long and prosper, Saavik,” she says.

Saavik raises her own hand, mirroring the gesture. “And you, milady Duchess,”

Cavendish snorts and rolls her eyes. They widen when Saavik looks around, then pulls her into a deep embrace.

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