

## Cannons Roaring - Drums Abeating

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## Cannons Roaring - Drums Abeating

by [B\\_Radley](#)

### Summary

The fuzz. Two captains of the *Aerfen*. No remorse. Recognition. Just sitting in a bar, with warm beer and good friends, minding their own business. Revelation. Greetings from Section 31.

### Getting to the Top of the Bottom of Everything

Mike Walsh watches as Saavik sleeps. It had been two days since she had collapsed, at the breaking up of Stivek's conspiracy.

Or at least his part in it. He looks up as the door slides aside to the sickbay. He smiles as he recognizes the tall officer who walks in. He gets up and takes her hand in his.

"Hello, Cavendish," he says.

"Admiral," she says, giving him a warm smile of her own, for her first captain out of the Academy. "It's good to see you in one piece."

"It's good to be in one piece," he replies. His eyes fall on the woman who follows her in. Another tall woman, though not as tall as Eleanora Cavendish, wearing the dark green of the Security Department under her service dress-Alpha jacket. He'd heard that the departmental colors were going to be consolidated, where she would soon be wearing the gold of an Operational Department. He's pretty sure that her bearing and questioning eyes, along with accompanying an Intelligence officer, especially this one, she probably wouldn't be mistaken for an engineering officer.

Her dark features, under a short mass of natural curls, are neutral as she takes him in. The accompanying dark eyes seem to be analyzing him. She wears a silver arrowhead on her rank strap, with a gold scales-of-justice insignia superimposed, indicating that she is a Senior Investigator/Warrant Officer.

"This is Special Agent Casey Ambrose," he says, using the generic term for a member of the Special Investigations Branch. She's here to help unravel some of this knot you've managed to tie up."

Mike nods. "Welcome aboard, Mr. Ambrose," he says.

"Admiral," Ambrose says. "So where is my prisoner?"

"He's in the brig. Along with three others here in sickbay, with various injuries from makeshift weapons when they took my staff and me hostage."

A brief smile shows in Ambrose's eyes, if not on her lips.

"Have you been briefed about what this is about, Mr. Ambrose?"

"Yes, Admiral," she replies. "Both my boss and Commander Cavendish's have briefed us." She looks at Cavendish. "It's my understanding that the Commander here was pulled out of a sensitive operation, because the Prince doesn't trust anyone else."

"Or he just had room in the shuttlecraft," Cavendish snarks. She sticks her tongue out at Ambrose, who rolls her eyes—the first true sign of emotion, except for the infinitesimal smile in her eyes.

Cavendish looks at Mike. "It's also our understanding that you've been appointed as our ultimate boss," she says.

"Somewhat. I'll still have to be confirmed by the Council and a committee of the Assembly, but yeah, this ship is the current HQ for Special

Operations, overseeing your two divisions, the Border Patrol, and the Rapid Deployment Force.”

“And who has taken over the task force?” Cavendish asks.

Mike exhales. “Captain Prandi of the *Constitution*,” he replies tersely.

He sees Cavendish and Ambrose exchange glances. “So the person who is the primary witness against Captain Stivek is still in charge? With information that we have no idea how the hell she got it?” Ambrose asks.

“Yes.”

“Do you trust her, Admiral?” Cavendish asks. Her eyes gaze into his with a question. Just as she had as a midshipman, then as an ensign on the old *Constellation*.

“I don’t know. I’m told that I should. That she was being blackmailed by Section 31, specifically by the late Commander Reese. Or t’Sonrees, as the case seems to be. She was able to identify Captain Stivek, having acquired Reese’s commcodes.”

Both young women seem to look skeptically at him.

*She won’t be in command of the Constitution or Task Force 51 much longer if I have anything to say about it*, he thinks.

## Relief

Decker Sinclair watches as the remains of her first, and possibly only command are lowered by tractor beam to her revetment at FOB Merlin. Her eyes take in the shattered line across midships, behind the bridge assembly. She is surprised to realize that the rip didn’t extend through all three decks, but from the exterior, it doesn’t look like much is holding *Aerfen* together.

She feels her eyes sting as the ship touches the ground. She watches as an engineering crew from the rest of the group moves into the ship through the rent. Regit Thro’lev, her one-time Ops manager, is the first in. She smiles as she sees that his severed antenna has apparently been restored.

Probably made possible by Communications Technician 3rd Class Karl Havarti, who had kept the organ in a freezer pack throughout their time in the pods. Decker watches as Havarti—called ‘Cheese’ by his shipmates, for obvious reasons, follows Thro’lev in.

Decker senses a presence next to her. She turns and sees a woman in a short-sleeved Service Dress-Delta pullover, with a synthleather flight jacket over it, Lieutenant Commander’s insignia on each shoulder. The woman is close to her height, maybe an inch or so less. Auburn hair with brown highlights hangs to her shoulders. Decker is struck by the power of her piercing blue eyes.

She pulls herself up to attention. “Brevet Lieutenant j.g. Decker Sinclair, Commander,” she says.

The woman, who looks to be about Chandra’s age gives her a warm smile. “I know who you are, Mr. Sinclair. I’m Morgan McMurtry.”

Decker breathes out. *Admiral Walsh’s daughter. The one he calls Michaela*, she thinks, remembering a late-night conversation on watch with Chandra. *The one who was supposed to take command of the Aerfen*.

She looks away, then down. She feels a strong hand on her shoulder.

“I broke your ship,” Decker manages.

“Ships can be fixed, Decker,” Morgan says. “You saved the people that made her live.”

“Most of them.”

She sees the smile fade, even from her angle. The hand moves under her chin, lifting her eyes to meet a pair of now-hard blue eyes. “Stop kicking yourself. You brought most of them home.”

Morgan draws herself up to attention. After a moment, Decker does as well.

“I relieve you, Captain Sinclair,” she says.

“I stand relieved, Captain McMurtry.”

They look up at Regit steps out. “She’s still got power,” he yells to them.

“Then she can be salvaged,” McMurtry says.

“If they’ll let us,” Chandra observes as she walks up, with another officer that Decker only vaguely recognizes.

“Hello, Em,” Morgan says.

“Hey, Mike,” the other woman says. Decker sees the blue eyes flash fire.

The other officer, wearing a lieutenant’s insignia, with a ‘command in space’ line on the divisional band on her left sleeve, turns to Decker, extending her hand. “Hello, Mr. Sinclair. I’m Emma Rosewarne, captain of the *San Sebastián*.”

Decker starts with recognition. She takes the hand. The woman’s eyes seem to sparkle with life.

“Don’t kill the messenger, but I’m taking you to Earth. It’s apparently going to be a month or so before BUPERS schedules your hearing.”

Decker grits her teeth. The anger she feels about the hearing calms when she sees the three classmates embrace each other tightly. Laughter and love in their eyes and on their faces.

After a moment, Chandra holds out her arm. Decker feels privileged to join the embrace of these three women, relishing the warmth, both physical and emotional.

## **Interview**

Nell Cavendish sits and watches as Casey Ambrose takes her own seat across from Stivek. He is clad in his trousers and undershirt, but with no delta or rank insignia. Nell leans against the bulkhead in the corner of the interrogation room, her arms crossed. She sees that Casey has steepled her fingers in front of her, her eyes betraying nothing.

Much like her interview subject.

“So who do you work for?” Casey asks in a quiet voice.

Stivek says nothing for a moment, staring at her. “I work for the same entity that you do, Mr. Ambrose,” he says calmly. “The Starfleet of the United Federation of Planets.”

Casey doesn’t immediately respond, either. “I may have missed something in my training. I have nowhere near the experience that you do. But I don’t remember anything in that experience that would lead me to space a subordinate, or kill an Admiral and his staff one-by-one. Especially one that had been a member of your crew for so long, on loan to Admiral Walsh.”

One eyebrow raises. “Explain.” It isn’t a question.

“Ensign Stokak. Your pet security goons were going to kill him.”

Recognition shows on Stivek’s features, for just a half-second. The blankness returns. “I believed an example was needed to pull Admiral Walsh into line.”

“And you chose a member of your crew?”

“Stokak was expendable. He seemed to be aligning himself with Commander Saavik, rather than his own kind.”

Cavendish clears her throat. Ambrose looks back at her and apparently sees the questioning raised eyebrow. “Kind? You mean those ascribing to Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations?” she asks.

Stivek’s gaze moves to her for the first time. “That is a myth. Surak never ascribed to that philosophy.”

“So you’ve never read T’Hora’s biography of Surak?”

“That was a heretical text.”

“Oh really?” Nell continues. “Its section on IDIC is considered to be the foundation of Vulcan jurisprudence. Every first-year law student in the Federation has to read it.”

“The more’s the pity,” Stivek says.

Nell smiles at his words. She can feel that Ambrose had noticed the very slight informality of a contraction.

“So, why did you hold Vice Admiral Walsh and the others hostage? Why did you order Commander Saavik to be murdered by being thrown into space through an airlock?”

“Intelligence I had received from another source suggested that they were going to betray the Federation. That Admiral Walsh had been influenced unduly by Saavik.”

“Intelligence from your masters at Section 31?”

There is no surprise on his face.

“Shall I play the transmission for you?”

Stivek stares at her. “It is not illegal or against Starfleet regulations to have membership in an organization that exists in the Starfleet Charter.”

Nell smiles. “No, actually it doesn’t. Section 31, under Article 14, gives Starfleet authorization to protect the Federation and its citizens. But nowhere in there does it say we will do it by forming a secret organization that is in many ways separate from the control of Starfleet and its oversight bodies.”

“By any means necessary,” he intones.

“You’re right,” Casey says. “Maybe it isn’t illegal. But the murder of Starfleet officers, with no real evidence, is illegal. You’re being charged with conspiracy and the murder of Lieutenant Commander Joseph Blankenship, among other charges.”

“Who is that?”

“You know who it is,” Nell says. “Admiral Walsh’s flag lieutenant, who was killed in the initial assault. You’re also being charged with assault and the attempted murder of Commander Saavik.”

She raises her eyebrows at the slight smile—no, a smirk—on his otherwise impassive face. “I think I will stop contributing to this interrogation. I will wait for counsel. Or to be ordered to be released.”

“You’re lawyering up?” Casey asks with incredulity.

Nell moves over. “Come on, Casey,” she says. “He’s desperate. Hoping that his Section 31 will save him. Maybe so. But he’ll never command a starship again. We may actually turn him over to Vulcan justice.”

Nell and Ambrose leave the room. A large Vulcan security officer comes in to lead Stivek back to his cell.

“What do you think?” Ambrose asks. “Will he get off?”

Nell can’t answer. She doesn’t know who else is part of the conspiracy.

## Reassignment

Saavik looks up as Admiral Walsh steps next to her medbed. He glances up at the monitor, looking at only a couple of the readings. “You appear to be coming along nicely,” he says. She sees him wince at the pleasantries.

“I’m fine, Admiral,” she says. “I’ll be fit for duty in another day or so, or so the healers tell me.”

“Never doubted it, Saavik.”

“You’re here to tell me what my future holds,” she says. She gazes at his features as he looks away.

“Yes,” he replies. “The Vulcan Science Ministry has already sent their nominee to command the *Intrepid*.”

“And it isn’t me,” she says calmly.

“No. A distinguished scientist with command experience, on the *Statica*, a *Miranda*-class light cruiser.

“A starship that has been primarily engaged in nebula research,” she says, keeping any inflection in her voice neutral.

She notices that Walsh’s blue eyes fill with what humans call sympathy. She gives him a slight smile. “And will I remain as First Officer?”

He shakes his head. “No. You won’t.”

“I understand,” she replies.

Walsh grins. “I don’t think you do, Captain.”

Saavik feels her eyebrow go up. He glances at her, asking permission as he holds out his hand. When she nods, he reaches down and takes her right hand, with his left, turning hers over. He drops two metallic objects in the palm.

The three bars of full post-captain. With only one arrowhead on the top, denoting less than three years seniority. But still a captain. Something she had been working towards, ever since Spock had introduced her to the concept of Starfleet and its starships.

“Congratulations, Captain,” Walsh says.

“Thank you Admiral.”

He smiles. “You haven’t asked what ship,” he observes.

She says nothing for a moment. “It doesn’t really matter,” she replies after that moment. She stops herself. She isn’t sure she is being entirely honest. With Walsh or herself. The one ship that she desires above all others, is taken and Captain Harriman shows no sign of relinquishing her. She has heard that after a rough patch, he has come into his own as the captain of the *Enterprise*.

“There is a relatively new *Shangri-La*-class just coming off of a refit. Only six years old,” the Admiral says. She feels herself tense. “The USS *Titan*. NCC-1777. She’s yours.”

Oddly as she absorbs what Mike Walsh has said, she idly wonders if Spock, wherever he is, might be proud of her.

She shakes that thought out of her brain.

“I understand that you served on her as science officer when she came off of the ways?”

Saavik nods after a moment, remembering. “Yes, Admiral. Captain Ronaine selected me. I gained valuable experience, even though as a defense cruiser, she didn’t have a large science presence.”

He grins. “Yeah. Y’all were burning up space on the Klingon border, before Khitomer.” He takes a deep breath. “Since she’s been in extended refit, you’ll get to pick your command crew. I’m thinking you’ll want to start with an XO?” he asks.

That is what her brain starts to concentrate on, rather than the memories, of other sides to Captain Taggart Ronaine.

The two that she would be at the top of her list, with equal weight to each, are now unavailable. One has recently been promoted to Captain herself, albeit in command of a Border Patrol group; the other seems to now hold the rank of a Marine major.

Others are too junior.

All save one.

She wonders if that recently promoted captain will forgive her for what she is about to ask. Or even if the person she has in mind will want to transition from what she is doing now. Given that her mother is now the Commander of the Border Patrol.

She comes back in as hears Walsh's voice. "Walsh to Saavik," he says, a grin on his face under the mustache.

"I'm sorry, Admiral," she replies, slightly chastened for daydreaming.

"All I said was that I'm looking for a way to get you to Mars. I think that the *San Sebastián* is on her way there, taking young Sinclair to get ready for her BUPERS hearing."

Saavik nods. "An unfortunate circumstance. She acquitted herself quite well, from what I hear from everyone involved."

"Yeah," Walsh replies. "One last volley from the cheap seats instead of the box seats."

Saavik isn't sure what he means, but she has her own thoughts on that subject.

## **Earthbound**

Chandra lifts her beer to finish it. She makes a face at the warm dregs, then sets it down. She focuses on the young woman sitting across from her, the Altair water untouched. Decker is dressed in her full service dress uniform, with the flap open showing the gold turtleneck of an operational department. She hadn't had time to change into the white of command; her appointment had been so short.

She stares into the water, concentrating on the bubbles.

"Penny for your thoughts," Chandra says, reaching out and taking Decker's cooler hand in hers.

The young woman smiles. "Not sure I have that many, Chan," she says, "and not sure they're worth that much."

She stares at the water. Chandra is tempted to pick it up and throw it on her, just to replace the brooding with anger. Instead, she says, "Decker, you've got to focus on something besides that hearing. It doesn't matter to any of us that you might be returned to being on probation as a midgie. You'll come back to us, and you'll continue to grow and learn. Morgan told me that she was impressed with your record in such a short time. It's what the Border Patrol does. It gives you a helluva a lot of experience at a lower rank than anywhere in the Fleet."

Decker had shifted her look up to her. "I know, Captain," she says. "It's not that. I can figure that out. It's the motivation behind it. My mom thinks that I'm being used by Admiral Harrington. She's pissed about it and is ready to go to war." She smiles ruefully. "That can't help her, even though she's got some people with more rank than her in her court."

Chandra smiles, then squeezes her hand, before taking the other one as well. "You don't have to worry about that, as well. I think Mary Decker has a great deal of experience in taking care of herself." She stops, attempting to choose her words carefully.

Decker smirks and finishes for her, without bothering to self-censor. "She's good at landing on her feet."

They fall silent. Decker doesn't make any move to pull her hands away. Instead she closes her eyes, apparently relishing the warmth. Chandra takes this moment to send a calming and what she hopes is a healing, relieving wave through the Link and the bond she was already forming with the young officer.

She looks away from the relaxed young face and feels herself relax as well. As she turns towards the bar, she sees Usura, the human, or near-human server talking with a hulking figure. As she stares at the two, the figure's hood slips.

Revealing the ridged forehead of a full Imperial-race Klingon. One that she feels like she recognizes.

She gets up, intending to confront the server, but her balance is thrown off by the quaking of the floor. Decker releases her hands, her eyes snapping open as the rumble of an explosion, followed by a sharper report of another one.

They both run out of the bar. Chandra grabs her communicator.

"Red Alert!" she shouts. "Prepare for group scramble."

## **The Manager**

Captain Sandiya Prandi clicks the comm off, watching Mike Walsh's face fade from view. She leans back in her chair and looks around her ready room. She wonders if the next couple of days, or however long it takes to get back to Earth would be her last time spent in this room, as well as in the center seat of the old 'Double-Zero', as the *Constitution* is fondly referred to by her crews.

She reaches up and rubs her chin. She had a report from the *Intrepid* that had told her that Stivek had been keeping silent under interrogation by the Security investigator and McCall's Intelligence lackey.

She isn't sure how long that will last. Her reports had told her he had stopped talking and asked for counsel. Either this was a delaying tactic, or a sign he intended to cut a deal.

Sam spares only one moment of thought for the now-late Commander Reese, or whatever her near-unpronounceable Romulan name was. The thought is accompanied by a smile, as she thinks of the tiny bit of information she had gleaned from someone placed in the Deltan Link-joint.

The bit of information that had led to the completion of her plan. The plan to root out other influences on Section 31. The plan that would restore Section 31 from the shadows of Starfleet, from where it had relegated because of what had nearly happened at Khitomer.

When the conspirators' plan had been foiled by Kirk and others. Admiral Lance Cartwright, her sponsor at the Academy, and later in Section 31, had kept completely quiet, so much so that no one in power was sure that Section 31 had been involved with the Klingon followers of Chang, and their puppetmaster, the current Romulan Praetor-Prime.

She looks at herself in the mirror. She sees a woman of South Asian ancestry, in her early forties, but one who looks much younger. No one would suspect her of any affiliations than that of Starfleet starship captain.

One who has manipulated the truth to serve her own ends. A slip that she had covered up the death of a crewman to the right person and Commander Reese had come calling, always willing to bring what she thought was another asset into the Section 31 fold.

She feels something vibrate in the inner pocket of her tunic. She pulls out the black delta and inserts it into a slot.

An older Tellarite's face comes on the screen. He wears the insignia of Starfleet Security. "It is done?"

"Yes, Commodore," she replies. "Stivek has been sacrificed, at least to Starfleet Security. I think that we should take other action, before he decides to talk."

"Do you think anyone suspects you?" he rumbles.

She thinks for a moment, then replies. "That's none of your business. If they do, I will handle them."

"Make sure that Captain Carmen is handled. She hasn't given us indication that she knew that we had a Romulan in our folds, but she was close to Stivek and his little rogue section."

She nods after a moment as the officer's face fades.

The Manager of Section 31 will only obey him as far as she needs to. She had another asset to get into place, as well as a couple more 'handlings' to take care of.

She looks up as the door to her ready room opens and her operative stands there. She smiles as his face morphs into his own.

## **A Reckoning**

Stivek waits patiently, kneeling in his cell. His mind isn't troubled; someone will get him released. He had given his loyalty to Section 31 since he had become a captain. The organization, if anything, seemed to be loyal to its upper management.

His eyes continue to remain closed as his mind travels over what had happened in the last few days. The operative that he had been working with, compartmentalized like most of Section 31's operatives these days, had turned out to be an actual Romulan, rather than just an agent of the Praetor.

This compartmentalization had taken root ever since the failed attempt to foster a war between the Federation and the dying Klingon Empire. The attempt, which would have put paid to their entire race, had been foiled by elements of the Federation, namely Kirk's troublesome crew.

Reese, or whatever her name was, had most probably betrayed him at some point. He unconsciously shakes his head. Reese had never given him any indication that she was disloyal, and the fact that she was a Romulan would have decreased the chances that she would betray him, as that action ran the risk of exposing her connections to her true masters.

His mind tracks over other possibilities. Carmen, the human captain, hadn't known that he was the other contact, as he had always remained in the shadows on the communications she had participated in. He makes a mental note to have her eliminated anyway.

His eyes snap open. He had been exposed after he had contacted Reese's so-called mark, Captain Prandi. He sends his mind back to the past, thinking of what Reese had told him of how she was blackmailing the starship captain.

There had been something about the story that had not synced with what he knew of starship procedures. He is about to go deeper when the forcefield to his cell deactivates.

A large Vulcan, broad and tall steps in, dressed in security armor. Stivek is sure that he had never seen him before. He rises, his mind looking for a way out. The Vulcan's golden eyes, a shade that he does not remember seeing in his species, stares at him emotionlessly. The guard's face is otherwise unremarkable. Bland even.

"The Founder sends her regards," he says in a toneless voice.

Stivek exhales as he draws his phaser, deliberately adjusting the controls.

He aims it at Stivek. Stivek only has a microsecond to react.

Before his world dissolves in pain and fire.

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