

To Stand and Face Another Foe

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To Stand and Face Another Foe

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Summary

Boarders repelled, for now. Time to eat crow in a bar. A memory that stabs in the heart. Tension in the briefing room. Loss now and then. A plan going forward.

Onslaught

Chandra vaults up the ladder. “All power to shields! Bounce those bastards!”

She slides next to Siobhan. The young captain’s finger had been poised over the computer interface of the arm console of her chair. All at once, Chandra knew what Shiv was prepared to do.

Chandra gestures towards the figures. The shimmering pattern starts to change as soon as she hears the shields go up. One column disappears completely.

The other forms, but there are two different absolutely horrifying sounds. One is from the column of light itself in its distortion.

The other from what forms on the bridge.

Another sound forms, from the young rating at the quartermaster’s mate’s position.

The figure is just barely recognizable as a Klingon male. He drops to the floor, a scream issuing from where his mouth should have been. Chandra stares at his chest. The armor is merged into his clothing and skin. She exhales as her eyes fall on a bulge in the center of his chest.

One of his hearts has materialized outside of his chest, embedded into the wall of his chest.

Still beating.

“Medical team to the bridge,” Chandra says, finding her voice. She knows it will be futile, even if Sinclair and her teams aren’t already stretched thin with their own people.

The sound of a phaser shot rings out. The Klingon’s heart stops beating. Chandra turns and stares at Siobhan, who lowers the weapon. She gestures to the Klingon’s hand.

Just as it drops to the deck, a disruptor fused to the hand. The finger still on the trigger.

It had been aimed at the technician at the helm position. Chandra could see that there had been pressure on that trigger.

“I was ready to blow us up,” Siobhan says quietly. There is something in her eyes, something that Chandra had never seen before. She hears the technician sobbing. Siobhan holsters the weapon, her entire demeanor changing. She touches the heaving shoulder and squeezes gently.

The young woman, probably the most junior technician there, looks up at her captain. She snuffles once, then sits down at her console, holstering her own weapon.

“We’re being hailed, Captain,” says a voice from below. There is a questioning quality from the voice. “Don’t know where it or the transporters came from,” it says.

“Scan for cloaked ships,” Chandra orders.

“Surrender your command, Deltan,” a rough male voice says. “I will eat your heart in front of you for what you did to my boarders. After I’ve feasted on the hearts of those two women who had been your juniors on Vostus. For this and what you did to my House’s honor. And for what those honorless DenIb Qatlh’a did to my aunt.”

She searches for a name to go with the voice as she translates the insult in her head. *Denebian slime devils*. “Your House did that to itself, Verag,” she says. “As for your aunt, she was trying her damndest to actively kill those two officers when they dropped her in the slush deuterium. They both presented me with the mek’leth they took from her after killing her with the dk’ tahgs they took from her other two nephews. It had their blood and hers on it.” She smiles devilishly at Siobhan’s next words.

“All three of us drank her blood from it, you bastard.”

“I will burn your ships. You’re outnumbered,” Verag says, his anger growing even more.

“Near as I can tell, you haven’t really done a good job of that. And if you look, you’ll see that we’ve burned up your reserve. And we’re close to being evenly matched. So fuck off,” Chandra replies.

She hears the channel disconnect.

“They’re massing again. All coming together,” Siobhan says tiredly, looking at her repeater screen.

“Captain, more warp signatures coming in,” one of the techs says from the CIC.

Siobhan looks at Chandra, their eyes understanding. “All ships form on *Panhandle*,” Chandra says. “Cohort Manager, select individual targets. Let me know of overlap. *Crusader*, stay in orbit.

In A Bar in Toledo

Ava follows Jamie into the disreputable bar. *Is there any other kind around here?* she asks herself.

She watches as she moves up to the barkeep and speaks to him in low tones. The barkeep points back behind Jamie. He nods, then turns to the indicated direction.

Ava’s eyes widen as she sees the hooded woman standing there. “Hello, Darkwing,” he says. Ava watches as the woman’s dark eyes smile behind her hood.

“Hello, C’daya,” she says.

“You have anything for me?” he asks, not bothering with pleasantries.

“I think so. But you owe me big time.”

Ava feels her eyebrows climb skyward at that euphemism. She can see the outline of the woman’s ears in the tight hood.

“How do you figure?” Jamie asks.

“I’ve had to take three showers to be in close proximity to some of the scum I’ve been around to get you something that might help your little group that’s under attack. As well as the possibility of maybe ending this little side-distraction from our real work that the KFS is providing.”

“Well, what you call a side-distraction may be just as big for us as what you’re doing for your Empress. Especially if this whole thing is a circus brought to you by a certain double-digit agency.”

She nods after a moment. “We may have taken care of that particular agency’s involvement. At least one strand of it.”

“Maybe two,” Ava says. Jamie flashes a look at her, which she ignores.

“Ah, she speaks. Enjoying your time with D’Shaya?”

“It’s passable,” Ava says.

“Well, just so you can figure out what her loyalties are. If you do, she’ll be a good ally. If you can’t...

Ava nods at the trailing off of Darkwing’s words. She files that, but falls silent again.

Darkwing pulls something from her belt. Ava notices that it is a PADD linked with what looks like a Klingon communicator.

She hands it over to Jamie. “I’ve done the work for you. Or at least one of my disreputable contacts has. That’s a closed unit. I’d be careful linking it, though. I’ve got coordinates from the communicator, and then some schematics of what waits for you there.”

Ava leans over Jamie’s shoulder as he pages through the PADD. “Lot of defenses here. Seems like an unending supply of old deuterium carriers, not to mention a couple of other surprises.”

Darkwing gets up, then leans down, lifting her mask. She kisses Jamie for a moment, then rises. Ava raises her eyebrow. Darkwing shakes her head, then leans down and repeats the gesture on Ava, before putting her mask back in place.

As she watches Darkwing leave, her lips tingle with the warmth on her lips, as well as the surprise of the woman’s tongue between her lips. The warmth reinforces the woman’s origins.

She isn't sure what the introduction of the tongue means.

Jamie gets up without a word. Ava grits her teeth, getting up to follow him. They are quiet as they walk back to the small runabout from the *Starlight*.

"I gotta eat crow," he says as they approach the ramp.

"How is that usually different, from what I've seen?"

He looks at her sourly. "The place that she gave up. I'm going to need a decent-sized assault force, even for a recon."

"So, your marine buddies?" She smirks. "You're going to have to call your old girlfriend."

The sour look intensifies as they start to enter the small shuttle.

Four large shapes, their forehead ridges unhidden step out of the shadows.

The one who can't be anything other than their leader speaks in a harsh tone, in a language not his own. His single eye stares malevolently at him. The other is covered by a metal patch, which appears to be bolted to his eye socket.

"Hello, Croft," he says. "I finally get to kill you, after a year of waiting for the chance."

"Hello, Korag," he replies after a few seconds. "Only if you want to lose the other eye, to match the one Lieutenant Lincolnton took then."

Horror

Vostus
2295

Jamie Blackthorne runs up the side of the steep hill. He tries to keep his breathing in check, but it is becoming harder to keep breathing, much less not huffing and puffing in the thin atmosphere.

Beside him, T'Varilyn scales the hill effortlessly, her heartrate probably not anywhere near above Vulcan standard.

"You know, I've told you that you have really needed to work your cardio," she says in her dry-as-Vulcan's-Forge voice.

"You've never complained about my cardio before," he manages. "Particularly when you or Chandra were the ones raising it."

He sees a quick lift of her lips; something that would be like a smirk or broad grin on anyone else. He knows that Chandra lives for those expressions.

Jamie will admit to some that he does as well.

They come over the crest of the hill. They stop as they see Kaylin Stone-Hunter on her knees, as a large Klingon warrior stands over.

His bat'leth raised. He can see the dazed expression in her eyes. The younger officer, Lincolnton lies on the ground, her eyes closed. He can just tell that her chest is rising and falling.

The Klingon, massively muscled, broad and tall starts to swing the blade.

A blurring figure moves between the blade, shoving Kaylin out of the way.

Both he and T'Varilyn scream as their bond-mate stumbles.

T'Varilyn fires, striking the arm.

Chandra adds her voice to the scream as the blade's edge bites into her skull, but doesn't tumble her head into the dust.

There is another choking scream beside him.

T'Varilyn stares at the blade that is suddenly protruding from her chest. The blade buried completely between her breasts.

Her heart isn't there, but her lungs and other major vessels are.

He feels her emerald blood strike his cheek as she expels it from her mouth.

He hears Chandra scream again.

Debate

Saavik watches as the *Constitution's* transporter room materializes. She realizes that Prandi isn't here to greet her, only a Saurian with a lieutenant commander's insignia and blue sciences tabs.

"Captain Saavik? Welcome aboard," she says with only a trace of hissing sibilance. "I'm Varianska. Ship's science officer. Captain Prandi sends her regrets, but she has been called to the flagship, along with the XO. Apparently there is a flap on."

Saavik feels her eyebrow raise at the patently English expression. Varianska breathes out, a bit of impatience in the sound. Saavik nods after a

moment, then starts towards the door.

The *Constitution* is laid out just like the *Intrepid* had been, just like the original *Enterprise* had been. She enters the turbolift. “Deck 5, visiting officers’ quarters,” Varianska says. The brief ride is made in silence.

The turbolift expels them, not far their destination. Varianska enters before her. She seems to be about to launch into a description of the cabin’s amenities, when Saavik holds up her hand. “Thank you, Commander,” she says. “I wonder why I haven’t been called to the *Intrepid*? I should be at that conference.”

She isn’t familiar with all of a Saurian’s physical cues, but she can tell there is discomfort there. “I’m not sure. Captain Prandi merely instructed me to make you comfortable.” She looks away. “I can’t be certain, but I think that there may be a detour on your trip to Mars.”

At that moment, the intercom chooses to chime with an incoming call. Saavik walks over before Varianska can answer. “Saavik here,” she says.

There is a brief pause. Finally the voice at the other end regains any loss of composure. “Call from the Admiral, Captain. He wishes you to join their conference via holo.”

She wonders if any of her human acquaintances would expect her to say, “I told you so.”

Saavik nods. “Very well. I’ll be taking it in your briefing room.” She clicks off and raises an eyebrow at Varianska.

A short five minutes later, she is seated at the wardroom table. The lights dim and several other figures join her around the table, products of the holo emitters around the room.

Mike Walsh grins at her. “Sorry for the mixup, Captain. You may not have an assignment with us, but I value your counsel.”

Captain Sokoro nods to her. “It is agreeable to see you Captain Saavik, before you leave us. You will add great value to this conference.” She sees him give a pointed look to Prandi, who says nothing, but appears to have the air of one who has been overridden. Saavik receives a nod from the captain of the *Pathfinder*, an older Andorian named Thelek.

“The situation at Leelix III is growing. Captain Chandra and the forces she has managed to muster have been holding their own, but they have taken heavy damage. Long range sensors from our outposts in the area show that it looks like whoever is attacking them are getting reinforcements. We can’t tell if they are more of the converted deuterium carriers, which Chandra and the Banshees have been able to stave off, or something heavier.”

“Are any other forces coming to Chandra’s relief?” Saavik asks.

“Commodore Rosen is out of position. She is rushing back from Antares Deep Space Area Command as quickly as she can, pushing the Ayoan to her limits.”

“Why was she at ADSAC?” Saavik asks.

Walsh’s expression, which she has come to know over the last month is telling. “She was summoned by BUPERS for some kind of audit.” He grins wolfishly. “Indications are that the auditor wasn’t BUPERS.”

There is an audible exhale from those around the table, except from Sokoro.

Surprisingly, there isn’t one from Prandi, either. Saavik notes that as well.

“So what are we going to do, Admiral?” Prandi asks.

“I’m sending us to Merlin,” he says.

Thelek nods with satisfaction. “We’re ready to go when you are Admiral,” he says. His body language does everything to demonstrate that satisfaction—no, glee, Saavik thinks—all but rubbing his hands together.

“We can’t,” Prandi says. “This attack could be just a feint. We’re in a position that could stop a larger invasion. It’s what we and Task Force 31 on the Klingon side are here for.” She stares at Walsh. “The Border Patrol’s job is to stem the tide until help can get there.”

“No matter what the cost?” Saavik asks, fixing her eyes on Prandi.

“If need be,” she replies without hesitation.

“Very easy to say when you’re not there. And I don’t believe that the Border Patrol was designed to be a sacrificial lamb, at least not when they hadn’t been allowed to atrophy like they have.” She knows that her words are pointed for Prandi, as she had once been the Starfleet advisor to the legislative committee overseeing ship construction and personnel allocation.

She forges ahead. “Especially when we have the ability to at least give them closer help.”

“You’ve been a captain for five minutes and already you know the entire situation?” Prandi says.

“And you’ve been one for about ten,” Thelek says. “Captain Saavik has been present at some very momentous events in our recent history, in a relatively short career.”

Prandi closes her mouth.

“Do you have a solution, Saavik?” Walsh asks.

She takes a deep breath in, holding it for a moment. “I think that we are closest to help Merlin,” she says finally. “But I recognize that we are at a crucial blocking point with the nebulae here.” She stops for a moment. “I understand Task Force 31 has five ships assigned right now?”

Walsh nods. “Yes. Two of the ships were supposed to be relieved, but haven’t left yet.”

Saavik gives a slight smile. “Then I think those two ships could shift here, to stay with you, Admiral. I think the danger is at Leelix, which is positioned near the Triangle and both borders.”

Walsh digests this. Prandi clears her throat.

“So you’re proposing to send *Pathfinder* and *Constitution* for relief of the Forward Operating Base?”

“Yes, Captain,” Saavik replies, focusing on her.

“I think that this is a bad idea,” Prandi says, turning towards Walsh. “It’s never good to split your forces.”

He has a quick response for that. “It is when you’re not given enough to do the job with,” he replies. “When you’re not *allocated* enough,” he corrects.

She sits back, as if struck. Saavik is sure that he hadn’t intended it as a slight to her services as a legislative staff member, even with the definite emphasis, but she appears to be taking it that way.

Walsh turns to Thelek. “You will take *Pathfinder* and *Constitution* to Leelix as acting-Commodore. There, you will assume tactical command of the situation until Rosen gets there.”

“Why is he being placed in command?” Prandi asks.

“Because, he’s had fifteen minutes as a starship captain, where you’ve only had ten.” He looks at Saavik. “You’ll shift over as flag captain and assume command of *Pathfinder*, so that he can focus on the whole situation.”

She nods. “Aye, Admiral,” she says in unison with Thelek.

“I’ll write your orders now. Good luck.”

The three of them rise. Saavik feels Prandi staring at her back as she exits. The other captain hadn’t acknowledged Walsh’s decision.

Saavik wonders if Walsh had noticed.

Darkness

Vostus
2295

Jamie starts to push towards the Klingon who had just stabbed T’Varilyn. “No,” she chokes. “See to Chandra, my th’y’la.”

He turns around just in time to see V’keth lift his bat’leth for another strike. This one aimed better to take Chandra’s head from her shoulder, without the belated kick that Kaylin had managed to give him or the phaser bolt from T’Vari.

Kaylin shakes her head, having received a blow from the handle of the weapon. Her eyes appear glassy—dazed—even more so than before.

He isn’t going to make it in time to save Chandra. As he moves towards her, he sees her gray eyes lock with his. Even through her pain, there is something else in those eyes. Something familiar.

As V’keth swings the blade, she slips under it, allowing him to overbalance. She grabs the handle below his hand and swings the end with her blood on it up.

Into his throat.

Jamie slides to a stop as he starts to choke his life out. He turns back to T’Varilyn, where Korag, V’keth’s younger brother has pulled the dk’ tahg from her chest, hastening her death as the blood pours from the wound.

He drops her and turns towards Jamie. Jamie pulls up short as he hears running footsteps passing him. There is a blur of coppery curls hanging free, as Siobhan Lincolnton, thought to be incapacitated, leaps and scrambles up the taller figure.

Korag screams as the purloined dk’ tahg in her hand slices into his left eye. He drops his own blade, then turns and runs, clutching his bleeding eye socket, a wound dispensed from his brother’s stolen blade.

Jamie turns and grasps Siobhan, who slumps to the ground besides T’Varilyn. He looks up to see Chandra being helped over to where T’Varilyn lays.

There is a sound of firing impulse engines. Jamie looks at Siobhan, then Kaylin. “I need you to go take care of the head of House. I need those Birds to stay on the ground.

Kaylin makes to protest, wanting to stay with Chandra. Siobhan shakes her head. She gets up and moves away, pausing to scoop up the knife that Korag had stabbed T’Varilyn with.

Jamie turns his eyes back to Chandra, as she holds T'Varilyn, trying to staunch the flow of blood.

T'Varilyn smiles, showing emerald-stained teeth. She chokes again, before reaching up and touching Chandra's cheeks. "My beloveds. You can't do anything for me," she manages. "At least not in this world."

Jamie crouches beside Chandra. He sees T'Vari's shaking hands move up to both of their face. He doesn't make a move to stop her, when he feels her long fingers touch his face in a familiar position.

He feels immense calm come over him. Chandra as well, through the bond from T'Vari, as well as the Link.

He comes back to himself in the present.

Korag stares at him, along with his minions.

"Well, Croft? I'm waiting," he taunts.

There is a roaring sound above them. A large shadow comes over them, as the first two minions dissolve screaming from disruptor fire.

With a curse, Korag draws his mek'leth and charges Croft. The other minion, a woman charges Ava.

She is blocked by a sword from a different culture.

The t'Lemaska, the executioner who had saved Ava before, swings her blade, cutting off both hands holding the disruptor rifle.

She looks at Croft, who has just plunged the hook of the mek'leth he had taken from Korag into his right eye socket.

Fulfilling his promise at the beginning.

He gazes at the two Klingons that remain intact.

Failure Is Not an Option

"Incoming vessels," Decker says from the Cohort table.

Siobhan hears the despair in her voice, even from one deck above. "Three Birds of Prey. With four more converted deuterium carriers." She exhales sharply. "Chan, the carriers are full. Deuterium and something else." Siobhan looks at the repeater screen.

"Bronsidium," she says quietly, recognizing the pattern. "A catalyst for when you want to make slush deuterium even more unstable than it is."

"Are they manned?" Chandra asks.

Decker takes a slight moment to respond. "No, CAG," she says, remembering that they are in public. "Each one is controlled by a Bird of Prey, except the trailing BOP is controlling two."

Siobhan can almost hear the wheels turning in their Captain (L)'s head. "Then that might be a weak point." There is a renewed sense of something in her voice. "Shiv, I need you down here."

There is a whispered conversation. Shiv hears feet on the ladder to the bridge.

Her eyes widen as Dr. Kimberly Sinclair's head pops up. She is clad in her white trousers and a tank top, with smudges of black and various bodily fluids on it and her arms. Her own blood oozes from a cut on her forehead.

"I relieve you, Captain," she says.

Shiv pauses for a moment. "What the hell? Don't we have injured?"

"We're at a lull in the injuries. Plus, the three dumbasses who are most likely to get injured are sitting in command of the whole thing. Relatively safe."

The young Navigation Technician chokes off a giggle. Probably at Shiv's baleful expression. "Then we're supposed to leave the driving to a quack?"

"I'm rated as a watchstander," Kim says smoothly. "Get below."

Shiv gets up from the command chair. Kim sits down, as if she was born there. Shiv reaches out and wipes some of the oozing blood from her forehead, then moves below.

"We're about to hit the trailing asshole," Chandra says as she walks up. "I'm going to have the *Crusader* drop some low-yield, long range torpedoes from orbit. "But we've got another problem."

"Just one?" Shiv asks.

"Grasp called. They're getting more attackers on the ground. I'm at a dilemma, Shiv. You're the best ground fighter I've got, who isn't a redshirt. Decker here can't move very fast with her various boobos."

"Hey," Decker exclaims. "I can move. I can outrun her ass," she says, pointing at Shiv.

“Yeah, ‘cause you got no ass to begin with,” Shiv automatically responds.

“Children,” Chandra says. “Shiv, take whatever crew you can get down to the surface. Reinforce Grasp.” She looks above. “Even though she hasn’t crashed us yet, take the Doc as well. I think they’ll need her.”

Decker raises her eyebrow. Shiv can see the worry grow on her face, but she stifles it. “And me?”

“You’ll take command of the *Comstock*. Chief Jokar can take over the Cohort.

Shiv turns and nods at Decker. Without a word, Decker pulls her into her arms, resting her forehead against Shiv’s. “Take care of my mom,” she says.

Shiv gives her a quick kiss. “We’ll take care of each other.”

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