

Five Times Riker Staked His Claim + One Time Worf Staked His Instead

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Five Times Riker Staked His Claim + One Time Worf Staked His Instead

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Summary

Worf and Troi are finally dating. After seven years, Riker has no right to be jealous.

But is he jealous of Worf for dating Troi?

Or is he jealous of Troi for dating Worf?

Chapter 1

It was their first formal banquet together as a couple, and Worf was still stinging about the fact that he had to wear a *dress*.

Or close enough to one. He tugged self-consciously at the hem of his dress uniform and met Deanna's eyes. Her *sparkling* eyes. As if she sensed his embarrassment. With a grunt, Worf joined her, and was mollified a little when she looped her arm through his.

"You look *fine*," she said in an undertone. "Sit with me?"

Worf grumbled his assent. Others were starting to file into the room now, so he and Deanna made their way to two empty chairs on the far side of the table. She leaned against him as they sat down, hiding a smile against his shoulder — close to the very edge of professionally acceptable behavior, but Worf let it slide. She seemed to sense his discomfort anyway, because she pulled away and straightened up, casting him an amused sideways glance.

Was she acting extra-formal just to tease him? Yes, he decided, she most certainly was. He could tell by the way she lifted her chin and gave Captain Picard a mock-haughty nod. But before Worf could defend himself, the doors slid open and Commander Riker stepped inside, looking irritatingly comfortable in his too-feminine dress uniform.

Riker glanced around the room, searching for a place to sit. Normally, Worf realized with a prickle of unease, Riker would sit next to Deanna. And if Deanna weren't here, he would sit next to Worf. But Riker's eyes fell on them, nestled together, newly dating, and his step faltered. He took a single step forward and hesitated, his thumb rubbing at his forefinger.

"Will—" Deanna started to call.

Riker abruptly turned away and raised his hand, greeting the first person he saw. "Mr. La Forge! Mind if I sit with you?"

Geordi and Data glanced at each other. "Uh..." Geordi said, but Commander Riker was already upon them, and Data obediently shifted his chair aside to make room. Worf and Deanna shared a bemused glance, but they didn't get the chance to comment on the strange behavior.

The visiting admiral clinked his fork against his glass and cleared his throat. Across the table, Riker sneaked a look at Worf and Deanna, his expression naked and strangely sad. Then he realized Worf was watching him and stared down at his feet, a blush stealing across his face.

Was he *jealous*? *Could* he be jealous, after seven years of absolutely failing to stake his claim as a Klingon would do? Seven years of acting like he was too Human and highly-evolved to even think about marking Deanna as his own? Worf had heard a dozen speeches from Riker over the years about how all he wanted was Deanna's happiness, and now here he was, sneaking glances and staring miserably into his glass like a child. And Worf couldn't even begin to question him!

The banquet had begun.

Chapter 2

The band was in high gear when Deanna and Worf entered Ten-Forward, her dainty hand clasped in his and making his heart patter at a most warrior-like pace. Jazz, for all its faults, had never sounded more triumphant than it did now, with light glittering off the brass instruments and Worf leading Deanna straight to a private table tucked in the corner by the bar. The loud, bold notes of Riker's trombone solo drowned out any possibility of conversation, so Deanna just folded her hands beneath her chin and smiled at Worf, and he felt himself almost — almost! — smiling back.

"This is nice," she said whenever the music dipped.

"Indeed," Worf thundered. Deanna placed her hand over his, and at the bandstand, Riker's hand slipped on the slide and a sour note blared out. Worf whipped his head around, affronted by the noise.

But the soft touch of Deanna's hand against his arm drew him back.

"Tell me about Betazoid courting rituals," he invited.

Deanna swallowed a mischievous smile. "Why? Would you like to court me, Betazoid-style?"

"I—"

Another sour note bleated out of the trombone.

"I may!" Worf said, practically roaring to be heard. "Tell me what it entails!"

"Well, first of all, there's a ritual nudity involved, usually on the shores of—"

Riker went flat, then sharp, then flat again, totally out of step with the band. Worf half-stood, his fighting instincts ignited by the sheer terrible quality of the music, but he stopped when he saw Riker abandoning the bandstand entirely. Red-faced from embarrassment, Riker left his trombone and headed straight for the bar.

"Anything," he said to Guinan, a little breathless. Worf settled back down in his seat. He made eye contact with Deanna, who cocked her head questioningly.

"You were saying...?" Worf prompted.

"Nudity," said Deanna, eyes glittering. "The two lovers meet, sans clothing, in the moonlight on the shores of the Yelan River. It's a particularly beautiful spot, so of course it's actually overrun with tourists. Savvy young couples go to the Janaran Falls instead."

"Oh?" Worf glanced over Deanna's head at Riker. He was leaning on the bar now, his shoulders hunched and his ears still red from his shoddy performance. Was it just his imagination, or was Riker making a *point* not to look their way? Could he hear them talking about the Falls?

Part of Worf wanted to continue the conversation. A more honorable part won out. He shifted uneasily in his seat and blurted out the first topic that came to mind, his harsh tone making it sound like an order.

"Tell me of your most favored meats."

Deanna blinked. "My ... you mean, my favorite foods? Worf, why do you assume they're meats?"

Was she a vegetarian? No, he would never be attracted to a vegetarian, he was sure of it. Worf made a tolerant hand gesture. "Or your most favored stews," he allowed. Deanna laughed, a clear sound that cut through the air like the ringing of a bell, and at the bar, Riker hunched in on himself even further. Geordi sauntered in just at that moment and gave Riker a friendly wave.

"Commander! Care for a drink?"

"I've already had one," Riker snapped, and everyone in earshot went silent. Deanna glanced over her shoulder in concern, but Riker was already stalking out of Ten-Forward, his sour mood trailing him like the scent of a prey animal's fear. Worf's nostrils flared; he fought to keep his face neutral when Deanna turned to look at him again.

"Your favorite meats?" he prompted.

Chapter 3

“Like this?” Deanna asked.

Worf started to correct her posture, then hesitated. He pulled back, studying her closely. Was this a feint? Was she pretending to be ignorant of proper sparring form, just to lure him closer? With her lower center of gravity, she could easily throw him. He circled her, eyes narrowed, and watched the corner of her lips turn up in a secretive smile.

“What?” Deanna asked, spinning on her heel. Worf jumped back, just in case, but she made no effort to strike him.

“I am being...cautious,” he said.

“Worf, I can hardly be a decent sparring partner if you won’t teach me the moves,” she said. She put her hands up in a paltry defensive position. “Like this?”

“No. Your left hand—”

She stepped backward and stumbled over a holo-rock. The terrain Worf had programmed was uneven and a bit humid, perfect for a light sparring match, but Deanna wobbled on the rock and reached out to him with a gasp. Worf went to her by instinct, supporting her so she wouldn’t fall.

“I am disappointed,” he said.

Deanna’s hands clung to his arm like two firebrands. “Why?” she asked, her beautiful dark eyes so close it made his throat close up.

“A proper warrior would have taken this chance to fell me,” he said.

“Maybe I’m not a proper warrior,” Deanna said with a grin. “But I’m sure you’ll teach me the basics. Let’s try again.”

She let her hand trail down his arm as she stepped back, that simple touch striking lightning over his nerves. Worf swallowed convulsively even as Deanna fell into a defensive position, hands up.

“Like this?” she asked.

Worf cleared his throat. He nudged her left hand out a little farther, lowered her right arm so the elbow wasn’t locked. “There,” he murmured. “That’s better.” And he tucked a stray lock of hair behind her ear. “Clear vision is a necessity on the battlefield,” he chastised her.

“Thank you.” She turned her head, cheek resting against his palm, cool breath grazing his skin. Worf’s lungs stuttered.

“Are you ready to begin?” he asked.

“When you are.”

Cheeky. He stepped back, marshaling the blood fever that always came over him in battle. The quick, strong heartbeat — the surge of adrenaline — the swell of arousal to cloud his mind and stave off pain—

“You’re blushing,” Deanna whispered with a smile.

Worf grunted. “If my face is flushed, it is only from battle rage.”

“Is that so? Well—”

She swept her leg in a high kick, one that Worf barely managed to block, her ankle coming down on his forearm. He was so distracted by ... by adrenaline, that he almost missed. With a growl, Worf shoved her off and went on the attack. She was smaller, possibly faster, but he had the superior reach, the strength—

The holodeck arch appeared, unprompted, and Worf’s battle drive shriveled at once. He and Deanna snapped their heads around as the doors opened.

And Commander Riker strode in.

“Oh!” He stopped short, dressed not in his uniform, but in a sparring gi to match Deanna’s and Worf’s. He nodded to Deanna politely, but with a look in his eye that suggested she shouldn’t be here. “Counselor Troi.”

Deanna moved out of defensive position, her lips a thin line. She wasn’t smiling, but Worf got the sense she was more exasperated than angry. Riker wheeled away from her, his head cocked, his eyes fixed on Worf.

“Lieutenant,” he said almost pleasantly. “I thought we were scheduled for calisthenics this morning.”

Worf straightened up slowly. “No, Commander,” he said. “Our calisthenics sessions are Tuesday and Thursday.”

“Really?” said Riker lightly. “Since when?”

“Since always.”

Riker's gaze raked down Worf's body, measuring him. "I guess I forgot the date," he said.

"Evidently," said Worf in a growl. Why was he still here? Riker seemed almost like he was waiting for something — an invitation? He couldn't be that obtuse. That bold. But after a moment, Riker hitched one shoulder up and turned away. He nodded at Deanna again and strode right out the way he came, and Worf was left behind feeling somehow like the wind had been sucked from his sails.

"He came here only to interrupt us," he said, his voice stiff from disbelief. Deanna's lips parted, her tense posture disappearing.

"Worf—" she started.

He gave her a sharp look, waiting to hear her excuses. But Deanna took one look at his face and pursed her lips.

"Never mind," she sighed. She spread her feet to shoulder width and raised her hands again, ready to go. "Let's fight."

Chapter 4

It was a rare treat — and a rare nerve-wracking *threat* — for Worf and Deanna to join an away team together. They beamed down to a cold, icy planet that had Deanna shivering immediately, even under all her fur-lined layers, and Worf was happy to sling an arm around her and keep her warm when nobody was looking.

For the first six hours, they did what they'd been sent to do. This planet, nicknamed Paradise, was in desperate need of terraforming help, and since Commander Riker had experience with icy locales, he'd been sent to help. Deanna and Worf were just there to follow orders. They joined the work teams while Riker scouted the perimeter and set up watch stations to keep the local predators at bay.

In the evening, though, freed from duties, exhausted and cold, Worf and Deanna met in the starlit glass-ceilinged barracks they'd been assigned. Deanna was already smiling, the stars reflecting off her dark eyes as she took Worf's hand. He reached up, tangled his fingers in her curly hair, loosened the band that kept it out of her eyes. It fell in waves down to her shoulders, and the scent of her filled his lungs as he pulled her closer.

"Let's dance," she murmured, her face buried against his chest.

"Dance?" Worf said.

Her fingers clenched in a loose fist at his waist, tugging him closer. "Do you mind?" she asked. "We've never danced before..."

"There is no music," Worf rumbled.

Deanna just met his eyes with a grin. She laced her fingers through his and started to hum. He didn't recognize the tune. Soft and beautiful, fast enough to morph into a waltz, slow enough to justify how close they stood, her chest against his, their breathing synced—

"Lead the way," said Deanna softly.

So they danced. Starlight fell in shafts from the glass ceiling and illuminated Deanna's face, brought out the auburn highlights in her hair. She let him lead, and she set the pace via music, and with her thumb she rubbed a slow, sensual circle on the base of his wrist, teasing him even as they swayed together, as they spun — as he held her closer — as he pressed his lips to hers—

A blast of cold air slammed into them as the barracks door opened. They stumbled through another three steps before they stopped. Deanna's humming ceased, but she didn't let go of Worf's hand.

Commander Riker stood in the doorway, his cheeks burnt from the cold wind, his parka still zipped up to his throat. The sight of him, hair ruffled and face flushed, flipped Worf's stomach.

"Having fun?" he asked, uncharacteristically flat.

Deanna hesitated and tugged her hand away from Worf's. "We were just dancing," she said.

"I can see that." He bit the tip of his gloves to pull them off and rubbed chapped hands together for warmth. "But we're not here to dance, Counselor. Lieutenant. We're here to work." He studied them, eyes narrowed, and then his gaze fell on Worf. "Lieutenant, with me."

It was after duty hours. Worf's chest swelled in anger, but Deanna shot him a warning glance. He grabbed his coat with a scowl.

"Where are we going?" he asked as he followed Riker to the door. The cold, barren landscape greeted them with a torrent of icy snowflakes right to the face, and Worf growled as he wiped them out of his eyes.

"We're going to do our jobs," Riker said, his voice hard. "You might like it — if you tried it sometime."

Worf gave him an unimpressed look, waiting for an apology. But Riker — who would *definitely* apologize to anyone else, if he spoke to them that way — just squared his shoulders and glared back, refusing to back down. It was ridiculous. Worf could *see* how sorry he was in those painfully clear blue eyes, but Riker refused to admit it. The longer the expectant silence went on, the more stubbornly Riker stood his ground.

...And Worf had to admit, as a Klingon, that impressed him.

"Lead the way," he grumbled.

It was only as he stomped through the snow banks that he realized Deanna had said the same words to him, just minutes earlier.

Chapter 5

Dinner was a paltry affair. Betazoids apparently subsisted on the same foods that the Rozhenkos' pet rabbit had found easiest to digest. Flower petals floated in Worf's cup of tea, which was a glittery blue color, and a cloying fragrance wafted from the bed of stewed leaves and wine over rice.

"You don't like it," Deanna guessed.

Worf mustered all his courage for a bite of velvety flowers, each petal crusted in sugar. "A warrior never backs down from a challenge," he said, fighting the urge to gag.

"Worf, if you don't like it—"

"Deanna, it is fine," he insisted. He sighed through his nose. His hand shot out to grasp hers in a warrior's clutch. "It has ... been a long time since we had an evening together..."

Deanna opened her mouth to protest.

"...uninterrupted," Worf finished.

Deanna closed her mouth. "Well, you have a point," she said eventually. She wiggled her fingers to get out of Worf's crushing grip. "You still owe me a dance, you know."

"Perhaps this time, we will dance to the strong drumbeat and klaxon horns of a Klingon martial band," Worf suggested.

Deanna's face spasmed. "Perhaps. How do you like the bed of rice?"

Worf poked his fork into it. Hidden among the grains of sweet rice were slivers of candied fruit and pink wine stains. And more flowers. He sighed heavily.

"Something's bothering you," said Deanna, her eyes softening. "And it's not just the food."

Worf tried to contain his irritation. Not at Deanna — at Commander Riker. He didn't even need to say the name to communicate his feelings. Deanna would know. "When he last interrupted us, on Paradise, he ordered me to stand an all-night watch on the perimeter, watching for predators. Ten hours in the snow."

"Alone?" Deanna asked, studying Worf's face.

"No," Worf admitted. "He stood watch with me. That is the only thing I can say in his favor."

"Worf..." Deanna hesitated. If she defended Riker's behavior, Worf thought he might go berserk, but he forced himself to stay calm and listen. "Perhaps," Deanna suggested, "he simply wanted some company."

Worf gave her a flat look.

"He was going to stand that watch himself anyway," said Deanna reasonably. "Is it so hard to believe he invited you along—"

"Ordered me!" Worf thundered.

"—okay, ordered you along, for the pleasure of your company?" Deanna twirled a fork through the air. "Worf, he's lost his two best friends in one fell swoop. He might be at a loss with how to spend his time."

"He has not lost us," Worf protested. "We are still here."

"With each other," said Deanna pointedly. "And it gets rather lonely, doesn't it, when your two best friends are having fun without you?"

Worf opened his mouth to argue, but before he could say a word, the door chimed. He lurched to his feet, one hand going to his phaser. Deanna looked over her shoulder with a roll of the eyes.

"Come in," she called.

The doors hissed open. Commander Riker stepped in with a steaming bundle of aluminum foil in his hands, saw Worf's grip on his weapon, hesitated.

"Commander," said Worf, his voice tight.

Riker shifted his bundle under his arm and held his hands up for peace. "Lieutenant. Er, I hope I'm not interrupting—"

"You are," said Deanna and Worf as one.

Riker bit his bottom lip. "Alright, I won't take long." He set his bundle down on the table, carefully clearing a space for it among Deanna's Betazoid dishes. He peeled back the aluminum foil to reveal the mouth-watering scent of bloodied meat and gag worms. "Guinan made a Klingon special tonight," he said, backing away. Even in the shadows, Worf thought he detected a distinct blush on Riker's face. "I — well, I thought it would be a shame if you missed it." He shrugged one shoulder awkwardly. "I'd best be off."

Deanna's hand shot out. She wrapped her fingers around Riker's and tugged him down to the low table where she and Worf were sitting. "Stay," she insisted. "We were just talking about you."

"Oh?" Riker shuffled into place on his knees. He shot a strange, almost hopeful look at Worf. "Anything good?"

"No," said Worf stiffly.

Riker grinned. He leaned across the table to dole out a portion of gagh worms for himself and Worf. To his own plate, he added a generous helping of Deanna's Betazoid rice, and both Deanna and Worf grimaced when he mixed the two together. Riker took a bite, his elbow brushing Worf's arm. A sizzle of — of blood fever coursed through Worf's veins at the touch.

"Delicious," said Riker with sincere delight.

"Will, that looks terrible," Deanna said.

"Well, it tastes amazing," said Riker with a grin. "Much like yourse—"

Deanna gave him a scandalized, wide-eyed look. Riker stumbled over his words and glanced at Worf, his face pale. Worf's pleasant tingling sensation of blood fever turned into something totally different. He surged to his feet, and Riker and Deanna had to scramble to keep him from knocking the table over.

"Get out," Worf said. "Now."

"Worf—" Deanna protested, but Worf gave her a withering, no-nonsense look, and her words died on her lips. She avoided Riker's eyes as he stood.

"Worf—" he started, in a more apologetic tone.

"Commander," said Worf, fighting for control of his voice, "it is only your rank and placement on this ship that keeps me from doing something I may regret. Go."

Riker searched Worf's face — almost said something — thought better of it. He left the room far too slowly for Worf's taste. Every lingering step drummed Worf's pulse to a fever pitch. By the time the doors hissed shut, Worf was seeing red.

"Now why did you do that?" asked Deanna, exasperated.

"Why?" Worf thundered. He looked down at her, flabbergasted. "Deanna, he has interrupted every single date of ours, and now he has the *audacity* to court you in front of me! He has no *right* to be jealous of me. Of *us*."

"Jealous of you?" Deanna threw up her hands. "Worf—"

"His time with you has passed! His romantic strategy has failed! He has had *seven* years to rectify his mistakes! It is *dishonorable* for him to stake his claim now, only when his fellow warrior has advanced!"

"I'm not a *battlefield*, Worf." Deanna rolled her eyes. "And he's not jealous of *you*."

Worf's chest swelled and he opened his mouth to argue, but the next words stopped him cold.

"He's jealous of *me*."

Chapter 6

The blushes. The new, testy personality. The constant interruptions. The occasional bids for company. All of it made sense now, but Worf didn't have the chance to work it through. He was still struggling to accept the fact that Riker might have feelings for him — for Deanna — for both of them — when Riker went on an away mission.

He came back, bloodied and unconscious, beamed straight to sickbay.

"I knew it," Deanna said, blinking back tears. "I felt it, Worf. I told you! I felt his pain!"

Worf shifted uneasily. They were stationed outside sickbay, waiting for Dr. Crusher to give them the go-ahead. It had been over an hour since Commander Riker returned, but they'd only heard bits and pieces from the away team. There had been a swarm of Romulan commandos — a sneak attack — a primitive, rusty blade wedged between Riker's ribs — a gruesome, near-deadly battle with cudgels and swords—

Worf groaned. Deanna patted his arm.

"He has all the fun," Worf said.

"I know," Deanna said. She wiped the moisture from her eyes. "I think he's almost ready. He regained consciousness ten minutes ago. And his pain is fading now. Maybe—"

The sickbay doors hissed open. Dr. Crusher leaned out, eyeing Worf and Deanna where they stood comforting each other.

"Visitors for Commander Riker?" she said a little dryly.

Worf and Deanna looked to each other. They each gave Beverly a nod.

"Well, come on in. Try to stay quiet, though. He took a nasty blow to the ear and we're still trying to repair it."

Worf, who had been charging forward at his normal warrior-like pace, slowed to a hunter's crawl. He padded silently to Riker's bed, where his uniform had been stripped away and his bruised chest swathed in bandages. Riker turned his head wearily and cracked open a black eye.

"Easy," he said when he caught sight of Worf. "It's not very honorable to kill a man when he's already beat to hell."

Worf bristled. "I am not here to kill you," he said with great dignity. "I have elected to forget your tasteless remarks."

"Oh?" Riker's face softened a little — at least, the unbruised, unswollen portions of it did. "That's good to hear." His eyes flicked over Worf's shoulder. Slowly, Deanna circled the bed to sit on the other side. "You both came to visit me?"

"To keep you company, yes," Deanna said smoothly, as if she hadn't been crying a moment ago. "And to make sure you're okay."

"I'm alright," Riker mumbled. "Beverly hasn't killed me yet. I don't know how long I can stay awake, though."

Clearly, the painkillers were hard at work. His eyes slid closed even as he spoke to them, lips barely moving. Worf settled in on the other side and surveyed Riker's bruises and bandaged wounds while Deanna took his hand.

"How are you feeling?" Deanna asked.

Eyes still closed, Riker managed a half-smile.

"You fought honorably," Worf cut in. "I understand it is against Human custom. But I must urge you to keep these battle scars. They are ... most appealing."

Riker snorted out a laugh. He barely seemed to hear.

"Can we stay?" Deanna asked softly.

"Of course you can stay."

"Both of us?"

Worf waited anxiously for an answer. A line appeared between Riker's eyebrows.

"Of course," he said. "Why wouldn't—"

Worf struck fast, allowing his opponent no chance for defense. With all his years of battle-hardened instincts, he lunged forward and conquered the battlefield.

He took Riker's hand. Gently. And Riker finally opened his eyes, his lips parting. He stared at Worf in surprise. Deanna on his left, Worf on his right, both twisting their fingers through his... The surprise melted into an easy, delighted smile, one that made Worf's heart lurch. Slowly, Riker raised Worf's hand and brushed his lips against Worf's knuckles.

"Don't push it," Worf said.

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