

## Trial of Transfer

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## Trial of Transfer

by [LordMcCoveyCove](#)

### Summary

#### First Episode of Star Trek: First Duty!

Seasoned and unconventional Starfleet officer Lieutenant Commander Leo Verde arrives as a disgraced transfer to Starbase Eight, the bustling hub in orbit of Memory Alpha. Previously a line officer serving on starships, he is reassigned to the local office of the Judge Advocate General, falling back on his law degrees. There, Leo finds himself embroiled in a web of injustice as he investigates the arrest of a marine corporal. His investigation propels him into a labyrinth of politics and power dynamics, placing him and his fledgling team of lawyers and paralegals at the heart of a high-stakes legal battle that will test their principles and resolve.

Cover: Art by [Pundus](#), Lettering by Lord McCovey Cove.

### Notes

This series takes place in the same shared fanfic universe as [Gibraltar](#)'s series, "[Starship Reykjavik](#)."

Historian's Note: This story takes place approximately 25 years after the events of the movie, "Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country," and approximately 46 years prior to Star Trek: The Next Generation's pilot episode, "Encounter at Farpoint." This story takes place four years prior to *Reykjavik*'s story, "[Conduct Unbecoming](#)."

**Star Trek: First Duty**  
**By Lord McCovey Cove**

**"Trial of Transfer"**

**Part One: De Novo**

Starbase 8  
In orbit of Memory Alpha  
Main Landing Bay  
January 16, 2318 (Stardate 138947.33)

The cover for First Duty #1



The large transport shuttle *Doubleday* touched down on Starbase Eight, its reaction control thrusters firing with a resonating roar. Once the post-landing sequence finished, the egress doors to the rear slid open, allowing its passengers to disembark. Everyone departing the shuttle carried their personal effects in various forms of luggage, except for one: Lieutenant Commander Leo Verde.

Leo stepped down from the side doors, his gaze drawn to the gleaming gold and silver lettering above the bank of turbolifts, displaying the starbase's identification underneath the seal of Starfleet's Starbase Operations division. As he observed several people waiting for an open car to arrive, ready to whisk them away to parts unknown, his eyes wandered to the vast expanse of the landing bay spread out before him. Shuttles and personnel transports landing and lifting off, the entire bay bustling with activity, and the hum of energy permeating the air filled him with anticipation and excitement.

"Sir?" said a human petty officer second class, her black utility uniform showing her enlisted status. The Windsor green tabs on her shoulders revealed her membership in the local constabulary. Her sharp alto tone carried a touch of formality. "May I help you find your way?"

Leo, adorned in civilian attire for the long flight from Spacedock, responded with a toothy grin, his rich and smooth baritone voice exuding confidence. "Yes, please," he said as he reached into the inside pocket of his reddish-brown jacket and produced a tan folded case, unfolding it to reveal his office and rank, which he offered to the petty officer. "I'm new here, and I'm not sure where to go to report in."

The petty officer stiffened to attention upon realizing she addressed a badge-carrying officer. Her eyes fell on the display within the case, which showed Leo's name, role, and badge number. "I'm sorry, sir, I didn't realize," she stammered, returning the case to him.

Leo accepted the case, placing it back inside his jacket with a light chuckle. "No apologies necessary; you weren't to know. I like to travel in comfort," he said with a soft pat against his jacket to show off his style.

Managing a slight grin, the petty officer gestured toward the central bank of lifts, her raised hand showing the way. "This late in the base's cycle, most of the command-level officers are asleep, sir. I would head toward the Quartermaster's and find the Billeting Office. The night duty officer will find you a place to rack out for the night. Take the lift down to level thirty-seven. Head toward section gamma; you'll see the big Q logo on the bulkhead to your left. Billeting's inside, to the right side; it'll have a big sign, you can't miss it."

"I will do that. Thanks for your help, Sheriff..." His voice trailed off, prompting for her name.

"Lois. Uh, Lois McLaren, sir. Master-at-Arms Second Class," she supplied, her tone now playful.

The mention of McLaren softened his reaction, as the surname also belonged to his mother. "Leo Verde," he replied, pronouncing his name as 'bear-day.' Tapping the top of his ID case, he added, "But you already saw that."

"Uh, yes, sir."

The conversation paused, and Leo held a frozen smile for a moment. "I should leave before this gets awkward," he admitted, a flicker of amusement dancing in his eyes. "See you around."

McLaren nodded once as he departed, her gaze lingering behind him, reflecting a mix of curiosity and anticipation. Leo entered the nearest open lift and verbally ordered his destination while peering at the base map on the rear bulkhead to orient himself with his new assignment. Upon it, he located the local JAG office, a veritable closet compared to the sizable headquarters of the Shore Patrol and the base's armory.

As Leo arrived at the entrance to the Quartermaster's section, his eyes swept across the expansive office, noting its three distinct areas. The atmosphere within changed from the bustling landing bay he left. The few people working in the office appeared unoccupied, their actions contrasting with the hectic energy he became accustomed to. Above the reception counter, a placard displayed the name "Billeting Office," its arched bulkhead casting a shadow over a bored-looking ensign who absentmindedly tapped on a PADD. The ensign's attire, an excursion jacket layered over a sky-blue turtleneck shirt, showed his affiliation with the special services division.

"Excuse me?" Leo's voice cut through the monotony, capturing the ensign's attention. Startled, the ensign's widened blue eyes darted upward, meeting Leo's gaze. Leo raised his hand in a gesture of apology. "Hey, I'm sorry. I'm reporting to my new job tomorrow, but I hoped to find a place to sleep tonight. My name is Lieutenant Commander Verde."

"Geez, sir. I wasn't expecting anyone this late," the ensign explained, his surprise clear in his tone. "Okay... spell that for me?" With Leo's compliance, the ensign redirected his focus to a nearby terminal, entering the information. "Okay, Verde. Right. One moment."

Leo nodded, finding solace in resting his hands atop the counter, his gaze wandering across the office. Amidst the paperwork and computer screens, he saw a weathered baseball occupying a small pedestal on the desk behind the counter. Though he couldn't discern the lettering on the base from his current position, Leo's lips curled into a smile as he appreciated the ubiquity of the item. The discovery of another baseball enthusiast sparked a surge of warmth within him, a shared connection that transcended the confines of formalities.

"Verde, okay, okay. I got you down on level sixteen, section bravo, number twenty-two," the ensign recited the details from the screen, his voice projecting a mix of professional efficiency and earnestness. "If you give me a moment, I'll inform the computer to activate your access."

"Hey, by chance, are you the baseball fan in the office?" Leo's curiosity permeated his words as he nodded toward the desk, his eyes upon the treasured baseball.

The ensign's attention shifted, his gaze drawn back to Leo's indicated spot. A softness crept into his voice, carrying the warmth of a shared passion. "That is indeed me. Been a fan since I was a little kid," the ensign replied, a smile tugging at the corners of his mouth as he now gave Leo his undivided attention. "Baseball is an amazing sport. Shame they don't play it anymore."

Leo's eyes sparkled with delight, his natural wit and humor gleaming through his response. "I couldn't agree more. I was six when my parents showed me Willie Mays' catch during the 1954 World Series. Mays' sheer athleticism as he ran the ball down still resonates with me."

"Yes!" The ensign's voice brimmed with enthusiasm, his genuine passion breaking through. "If we're talking Giants, what about Thompson's home run in '51?"

Leo's tone turned reverent, his love for the game pouring forth. "The 'Shot Heard 'Round the World.' You know your history."

In that moment, the burdens of their respective roles fell away, replaced by a shared love for the sport. A respite from the monotony of duty unfolded as Leo and the ensign exchanged stories, reliving legendary moments and engaging in spirited debates over the game's intricacies. The connection forged in their mutual admiration for baseball revealed a more profound understanding—a recognition of the beauty and camaraderie that the sport brought into their lives.

The ensign's distracted air dissipated, replaced by a genuine warmth and camaraderie. "You know what, Commander? I may have a better berth for you. Some VIP quarters on the edge of the base have just become available. Level six. It's on the quieter side of the base. It'll be much more to your liking than slumming it down on sixteen."

Leo responded with a touch of humor, his sharp wit shining through. "Stop mining, you've hit dilithium!"

The ensign began changing the system, his fingers tapping away with purpose. "By the way, my name is Tom. Tom Maroni."

"I'm already more than pleased to make your acquaintance, Tom."

"Hey," Tom said, handing over Leo's new location on a chip, "you like poker?"

Leo's grin widened, his playful nature clear. "I've been known to hold 'em or fold 'em from time to time, yes." He placed the proffered chip into his pocket.

"Me and the flyboys have a regular weekly game going. You are most definitely invited, sir."

"Call me Leo," he replied, his hand waving nonchalantly. "And if you need anything, come find me on level four during office hours."

Curiosity shone in Tom's eyes as he contemplated Leo's suggestion. "Level four? Shore Patrol?"

Leo shook his head, a mischievous look in his eyes as he retrieved his badge for the second time since his arrival. Facing the inside of the case toward Tom, he revealed his true identity. "I'm with JAG. I'm going to be the new lawyer around here."

Tom's eyebrows shot up in surprise, a chuckle escaping his lips. The unexpected revelation added an extra layer of intrigue and amusement to their encounter. "It seems some rather interesting company has arrived on base. Welcome to the Crazy Eight, Leo."

## Post Hoc Ergo Propter Hoc

Starbase 8  
In orbit of Memory Alpha  
VIP Quarters 6A01, assigned to LCDR Verde  
January 17, 2318 (Stardate 138949.92)

Leo scrutinized his reflection in the full-length mirror, noting every minute detail. The mirror seemed to capture everything from his tousled waves of dark brown hair to the captivating hues of his heterochromatic green-brown eyes. His trimmed full beard added a hint of rugged charm to his overall appearance, while his polished uniform boots shone, a testament to his dedication to perfection.

Every element of Leo's uniform exuded pristine freshness straight from the supply office. Earlier that morning, he sought the help of Senior Chief Quartermaster Sket, a resourceful Tellarite non-commissioned officer recommended by his new friend Tom. Within an hour, Leo acquired a complete set of uniforms for service and formal occasions. Alongside his new wardrobe, an excursion jacket hung, a purposeful addition that hinted at his past.

Leo's deep maroon uniform jacket displayed the rank insignia of a Starfleet lieutenant commander, positioned atop the command white strap that curved over his right shoulder. Beneath the jacket, he wore a turtlenecked shirt of the same hue as the strap, complementing his ensemble. His commissioned officer's badge resided on his left chest, and below it sat the separate medallion of the Starfleet Judge Advocate General Corps to symbolize his specialized role within the organization.

Despite his carefree personality, Leo's appearance exhibited his military-level of meticulousness. It hinted at signifying the upcoming meeting; a critical moment where making a positive first impression was paramount. Though, the challenging circumstances of his transfer gave him doubts he might succeed.

Leo glanced at the screen where the current stardate glowed in the corner. It showed a mere twenty minutes before his mandated time to report to his new commanding officer. A failure to do so might cause a charge of "absent without leave" or a lesser charge of "failure to appear."

A short turbolift ride to the fourth level within Starbase Eight delivered him a mere two-minute walk to the JAG Office. He entered the corridor and noticed the abundance of Shore Patrol personnel scattered about, holding independent conversations in groups of two and as large as six. They all locked eyes on his uniform's accessories, the JAG badge on his chest as he passed them.

He did his best to acknowledge the stares with a smile and a nod until he entered the double doors of his destination and stepped inside.

A yeoman first class staffed the reception desk. When she locked eyes with him, she rose to her feet out of respect for his rank. "Good morning, Commander. How may I assist you today?" she greeted him with a smile.

Leo raised a hand, signaling her to relax and release her rigid posture dictated by military bearing. "Oh, please, Yeoman, put yourself at ease." Once she did so and reseated herself, he continued, "I have an appointment to report to Captain Ch'charhat at oh-eight-thirty."

The yeoman glanced down at her desk's display, then replied, "Oh, of course, sir. You're Commander Verde?" She mispronounced his name as "Ver-day," using the Anglicized phonetics.

"Verde," he corrected her in the proper Spanish method.

A hint of embarrassment colored the yeoman's cheeks. "I apologize, sir."

"Everyone always gets it wrong the first time," Leo assured her with a wide smile.

The yeoman rose to her feet once more. "If you'll excuse me, sir, I'll inform the captain that you're waiting to see her."

"Thank you. I'm happy to wait," he said with appreciation. As the yeoman left her desk, Leo looked past it and into the bullpen area of the office, seeing the activity of junior officers of both the fleet and marine variety, ensigns, and the various lieutenants. The perimeter of the bullpen held several doors leading to private offices, likely occupied by the lawyers.

His attention returned when he heard the yeoman call to him, "Commander? The captain will see you now."

Leo turned to face her. "Thank you, Yeoman...?" he trailed off, prompting for her name.

"Zenn, sir. Lara Zenn."

"A pleasure to meet you, Yeoman Zenn. I'm sure we'll speak again soon." Off her acknowledging smile, Leo moved past her and through the double doors leading inside the captain's office. The room's size and the various adornments lining the walls suggested it was intended for a flag officer, exuding a sense of luxury. The imposing seal of the Starfleet Judge Advocate General sat above the large desk at the other end of the room to remind anyone to enter that the occupant held the full authority of that office within Starfleet Headquarters.

It took over twenty steps to bring Leo face to face with the thin Andorian woman seated behind the desk, known to him as Captain Janeera Ch'charhat. Her antennae twitched in his direction as he approached, and he came to attention, reporting in the style of an ordered drill:

"Lieutenant Commander Verde, reporting for duty, sir!"

She scanned him with her eyes, up and down. "You can always tell the line officers from the others," she remarked in a melodic soprano tone.

"Especially from those of us who took a commission direct from civilian life." He saw her impressive height when she got to her feet to lean forward over her desk toward him and offered her hand. She stood at least a foot above him.

Leo grasped her hand and then released it.

"Relax, Commander," she ordered. "Please conduct yourself to a seat."

He felt relieved at the warm welcome and her friendly demeanor. "Thank you, sir," Leo replied, opting for the chair to his right.

Ch'charhat smiled. "First, allow me to welcome you to the starbase. Have you been here before?"

"No, sir," Leo admitted. "However, there are quite a few bases out there I've never visited. I'm surprised they opted for the massive design, akin to Spacedock in orbit of Earth. They go for the smaller outpost style."

"I suppose the encounter with the Zetarians proved that the Federation's largest data archive needed adequate protection," mused the captain.

He accepted her reasoning with an agreeing nod. As a silence stretched between them after the short small talk, he knew the question he dreaded would be forthcoming: the reason for the transfer to her command. However, given his subordinate status, he decided not to be the first to speak.

"So, how are you feeling about this transfer?" she asked him, though the question surprised him.

He sputtered in response, caught off-guard. "What?" When she responded with nothing more than a patient smile, he answered, "Uh, I suppose it's okay so far, sir. I've met some good people here already."

She chuckled. "I'm glad to hear it. This unit is deficient because of recent personnel transfers. I have been awaiting your arrival with great anticipation."

When he said nothing in response to her, Ch'charhat continued, "Our caseload is horrendous. It's gotten to where we've had to pass requests for field inquiries to other sector offices. An embarrassing situation, to be sure, but the admiral has assured me she is doing her best to augment our meager office as quickly as she can."

The admiral she referred to was the Judge Advocate General of Starfleet, Rear Admiral N. Jeanne Devereaux.

"And, I'm afraid that as a lieutenant commander, your rank and time-in-grade put you as the next senior officer after myself. I have to appoint you as my executive officer." Ch'charhat lifted a portable access display device and gestured as she explained, "According to your service record, you have experience with administration."

Leo nodded, "Yes, sir. I've served as division officer during my tours on *Decker* and *Hansen*."

"Those duties included report writing, personnel management, et cetera?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you did them well?"

"According to most of my performance evaluations, yes, sir." When she grinned at his mention of his evaluations, he closed his eyes, unable to keep the grimace from his expression. He groaned, "Walk right into that, didn't I?"

"Good that you recognized you were under a brief cross, Counselor," she said, and they shared a mutual smirk at one another. "You're just as bright as your mother said you are. Humans are prone to a high level of boasting about their offspring. Glad you are as advertised."

"My mother's pride in all of her children is rather legendary, sir. And I'm very proud of her, as well."

Ch'charhat leaned forward to rest her elbows on her desk. "Listen, I know you went through a terrible experience on *Hansen*. I read the report from your former CO."

"I, uh... I understand," Leo sighed as he spoke, realizing she knew everything. "You should ensure you're getting what you bargained for; I'd do the same if our positions were reversed."

She regarded him before speaking softly, "Yes, well. I want to say that while that report was less than flattering of your abilities as a line officer, the space service's loss is our gain."

Leo looked at her in surprise. "Sir?"

Ch'charhat smiled. "A little about me, Commander. As I mentioned earlier, I'm a direct commission. The admiral and I went to the same law school and worked at the same firm, starting out before she joined Starfleet as a judge advocate. Two years ago, when she accepted the appointment as the new JAG, she asked me to take a commission as a staff corps captain to help her fill a much-needed role as a field JAG for Starbase Eight."

He wondered, "You have experience in military justice?"

"Ninety percent of my practice as a civilian on Earth centered on representing members of Starfleet in a myriad of proceedings, including courts-martial," she explained.

"Understood, sir," Leo replied.

"Now, I told you all that to let you know because of my experiences, I have made many friends within this institution in various roles and responsibilities."

His eyes widened. "I'm at a loss for words, sir."

She shook her head. "Say nothing. I'm aware of the truth of what transpired. As long as you are under my command, you've nothing to worry over."

Leo deflated in his seat as she made that promise to him. His throat locked up on him as he tried to say something. After several swallows to get his emotions under control, he croaked out, "I... I appreciate that, sir. Thank you."

"Don't thank me yet," she said with a raised hand. "You're the new XO, so maybe wait a month or two and see if you're still as grateful *then* as you are right now."

He smiled. "Fair enough, sir. Are there any priorities you'd like me to attend to?"

"I'll speak to Lara - Yeoman Zenn - and let her know you'll need an office," Ch'charhat said. "After you get settled, meet up with Major Bex. She's been doing her best as our acting XO, but her caseload makes it a struggle. Introduce yourself and start taking over what you can; she will be appreciative."

"Will do, sir," Leo said as he made a mental note to find Bex first.

"And pull any of the support officers or NCOs as you need to get a handle on things," she added. A chime sounded on the heels of her last words, pulling her attention. "Oh, I have a call with the boss in five minutes. Clear me an hour for lunch this afternoon, say, at thirteen hundred."

Leo rose from his seat and stood before the desk. "Looking forward to it, sir. Anything else?"

"One last thing," she said as she joined him in standing. "I know in the space service you're used to a certain formality amongst senior officers, however, I keep an informality amongst my staff. You can call me Janeera or Jan."

He grinned. "Thank you, Jan. I prefer informality, myself. Please call me Leo."

"All right," said Janeera. With a dismissive wave, she ordered, "Get to work, Leo."



"Hello, old friend," said the human male captain on the viewscreen. "What can I do for you?" He raised a mug of dark liquid to his lips and took a quick sip while waiting for a response.

Commodore Thelk, Starbase Eight's deputy commanding officer, smirked. He leaned upon his desk with his left elbow and placed his right hand with its hoof-like fingers atop the desk. "I trust you've been keeping well?"

"Oh, as well as expected. Thankfully, the border has been uneventful this morning." The captain leaned forward and peered into the visual pickup. "You're not one for casual conversation. I assume you have some issue you wish to discuss."

The smirk disappeared from the Tellarite's tusk-ended lips. "Indeed. It would appear your problem child has arrived on my starbase."

The captain's expression darkened. "Verde." With a shake of his head, he noted, "I had heard through the grapevine that he transferred to JAG. I would have thought that my word would be good enough to force him to resign his commission, but I supposed being the son of two Starfleet Admirals helped avoid early retirement."

Thelk replied with a raised hoof-like hand. "Leave him to me. He may have thought he avoided a fitting end, but I have it on good authority that mountains of paperwork await him beginning today and for the foreseeable future. Chained to a desk for the rest of his years in service."

That information appeared to assuage any consternation by the captain. "I suppose that will do. However, your admiral over there has a penchant for taking an interest in certain mavericks like Verde. Are you certain he won't interfere?"

"The admiral's decisions are tough to predict. However, he is en route to a command conference on Earth at Starfleet Headquarters and intends to remain on leave for a few weeks."

The captain grinned. "Then that leaves you in acting command of the base. Fortuitous timing."

Thelk shared his friend's smile. "I will possess abundant opportunities to set things in motion without interference."

"Then, while it gives me no pleasure to hear that you must deal with my wayward former operations officer, I am content that you shall ensure he presents no further problem for me or the service," the captain said, settling back into his seat.

"If it is within my power, it will be done," Thelk promised.

## De Minimus

Starbase 8  
In orbit of Memory Alpha  
JAG Complex, Level Four  
January 24, 2318 (Stardate 139001.4)

Seven days later, Leo sat hunched over at his desk in the second largest office of the starbase's JAG complex. He met with Major Bex, the marine attorney of Bolian heritage, who eagerly transferred her collateral office duties to him. Over the course of those seven days, he and Bex uncovered their shared interests and demonstrated great synergy. Unfortunately, their growing relationship was abruptly halted by the unexpected assignment of a field JAGMAN investigation to the starship *Valkyrie*.

Bex and her paralegal departed hastily, leaving Leo and the office understaffed for the remaining tasks. He submitted a request to the Detailer's Office, asking them to publish twelve job postings with Janeera's approval, outlining specific skill and duty requirements for each position.

"Sir, I have the personnel reports and evaluations for you," said Lieutenant (jg) Barzel Timel, the male Trill serving as his paralegal. "The captain is requesting that you review and approve on her behalf."

Leo glanced up from his terminal and motioned for Barzel to join him, beckoning with his right hand. "Come in and take a load off. I could use a distraction."

Barzel followed the invitation to one of the two seats before Leo's cluttered desk. "She's keeping us on our toes, huh, sir?"

As he typed out a response to a memo, Leo spoke while his hands smoothly glided over the input. "Quite... the... taskmaster, yes."

"So..." Barzel began, drawing out his first word, "do you think she'll let you take a case?" When he finished speaking, he stared at Leo pointedly, scanning his expression for a response.

Leo fought the impulse to smirk at him. Spending working lunches and dinners together for the last four days allowed him to learn that he initially worked at JAG as an NCO before earning a correspondence degree in military justice and earning a reserve commission. "Juggling all this administrative paperwork and doing case prep seems overwhelming."

Barzel murmured, "I guess you're right, sir."

Leo wondered if there was a betting pool about when he would take on his first case, noticing Barzel's disappointment.

"I'm not sure, sir..." Barzel's eyes flickered under Leo's scrutiny.

Leo grinned at the onset of his paralegal's discomfiture. "I'm sure the captain will eventually have me take on some cases once I put a serious dent in this pile. Until then, I'm happy to keep chipping away at the pile until we get it under control."

"But... you're a lawyer, sir. Aren't you eager to, you know... fight for justice?"

"Your wager must be on me getting a case soon, eh?"

Barzel averted his gaze, attempting to conceal any trace of guilt.

Leo chuckled. "Look, I'm content fighting for justice by doing this. This office can't function without the flow of papers. The law is always about paper."

"So, not soon."

"Sorry to disappoint you."

Barzel got to his feet and offered, "Can I get you anything, sir?"

"Only if you're getting something for yourself," Leo acknowledged. "Then, I would kill for a hot cocoa."

"You got it, sir," Barzel nodded and left the office.

Leo exhaled deeply and resumed his work. Still, the solitude and concentration lasted less than three full minutes before he saw the visage of Lieutenant Alejandro Martinez staring at him through the transparent pane that looked out onto the office floor.

Martinez always waved at him through the window, instead of using the panel next to the door to announce his request to see him. Leo signaled him to enter via his own hand gesture, and within seconds, Martinez stood within the office, though maintained a respectful distance by intruding a couple of feet inside.

"¿Puedo hablar con usted brevemente, señor?" inquired Martinez in their shared language, meaning: "May I speak with you briefly, sir?"

Glancing at his terminal screen and realizing that he had made very little progress on the first report, Leo assessed the urgency of Martinez's tone. He decided he could use the distraction. "My office is your office, Ale-esé. What's up?"

Martinez crossed over to the empty seat that Barzel used, sitting down as he spoke. "I got this strange case from the marine holding company downstairs yesterday. An AWOL corporal got herself arrested and tossed in holding, and I got this anonymous message that she needed counsel. I was next in the rotation anyway, so I went down to talk to her, and she brushed me off. Said she was guilty of everything and sent me on my way."

Leo shot Martinez a smirk. "It sounds like a short case to me. What's strange about it?"

"I don't think it's that simple."

"Tell me."

"Do you recall your first day here? That D&D you helped me out with... you told me to go with my gut."

"Right."

"My gut's saying something else is going on here. She's on a one-way trip to Andor. No matter what I say, she doesn't care." Andor's rehabilitation colony had a reputation for being particularly harsh on marines undergoing discipline as they took it as a personal affront to the Honor of the Corps.

Leo leaned back in his seat to consider the case so far, and Martinez was correct in suspecting the behavior. "Interesting," he noted. "She being cagey about her situation?"

Martinez nodded. "Yes, sir."

Leo rubbed his chin and considered his workload. "All right, I can give you an hour, and that's it." He grabbed his uniform jacket and pulled it on. As he snapped the front together, he followed Martinez out of the office and onto the main floor.

Barzel found him in the middle of the bullpen and offered him a mug. "Sir, your drink?"

With a firm grip, Leo twisted it around to secure it by the handle in order to prevent any further burning of his fingers. He switched to Federation Standard and explained to Barzel, "I'm heading down to holding with Ale for a bit. Checking out something 'weird' about a case."

The mention of a case caused Barzel's lips to curl upward in a wide grin. "Does this mean you're taking the case?"

"This is one of *mine*," Martinez said.

Without waiting for dismissal, Barzel hurried to a desk within the bullpen and pulled aside an ensign to relay the sudden development as Leo and Martinez made their way toward reception and down the corridor. "Martinez's day in the betting pool," said the ensign's voice.

Martinez turned around, wagging his tongue at Barzel. He mouthed the words, "I win," along with his victorious expression. When he faced forward again, he paused as Leo had abruptly halted with a less pleasant expression than his.

"What did you win?" Leo asked in Spanish.

"The captain put in the pot two bottles of Aldebaran whisky."

Leo downed the rest of the hot cocoa in one long quaff before setting the empty mug down on Zenn's desk. He switched his language back to instruct her, "Sorry, Yeoman. Tell Barzel to clean it up for me?"

Zenn smirked. "Yes, sir."

"If I do this for you and you win, I want a bottle," Leo said, passing Martinez on his way out.

Martinez sighed. "Deal."



The starbase holding facility sat within the "spindle" of the base's construction. Leo and Martinez arrived via a long turbolift ride down from the top levels. When they stepped into the reception area of the holding facility, every guard on duty wore the midnight black battle dress uniform that marines typically wore as their uniform of the day.

The gunnery sergeant behind the desk, seeing two officers enter, rose to attention.

"Welcome to Holding, sirs," he said. "How may I help you?"

Leo walked up to the chest-high counter and gestured to himself and Martinez. "Here to see a prisoner you're holding. We're legal counsel."

The Gunny nodded his dark-colored head. "Yes, sir. Name of the prisoner?"

Leo turned to Martinez for the name, to which he helpfully supplied. "Angela Torres."

"Angela Torres," Leo repeated.

With a brief grimace, the Gunny responded, "I'm sorry, sir, but we're under orders not to allow Prisoner Torres any visitors."



Leo's eyes widened in surprise. "Who issued those orders?"

"The corporal's commanding officer, Captain Kline."

"*Marine* Captain Kline?" Leo sought reassurance that he outranked the officer responsible for the decision.

"Yes, sir."

Leo exhaled, sharing a quick, silent glance toward Martinez. Martinez responded with a subtle tilt of his head and widened eyes.

"Gunny," Leo tried another tactic, "is the Corporal under arrest right now? She's been read her rights as required by the Starfleet Code of Justice?"

The question led the Gunny to narrow his eyes toward the rank insignia on Leo's shoulder. "Sir, I'm not sure. I believe she has, but I would need to confirm."

Leo cut him off. "You or someone in your unit informed her of her right to counsel, correct?"

"That is part of the wording, sir."

"It's one or the other, Gunny. You're telling me they have read her rights, among which is the right to counsel, or she was not read her rights, in which case this is an illegal arrest," Leo pointed out. "Which is it?"

The Gunny disliked the pressing question, so he glanced at his display hoping for an answer. "I can't speak to that truthfully, sir; I was not there when it happened."

"Okay, fine," Leo said. "Captain Kline denied all visitors, but she's guaranteed counsel under the law."

"Sir, Captain Kline... he's an *officer*," the Gunny's nervous tone underscored his response.

Leo closed his eyes, weighing his options. Ultimately, he stayed true to his nature, respecting the principles he held dear. "Gunny, I understand that Lieutenant Martinez and I may seem like a couple of assholes from JAG who took the easy path. I assure you, that's not the case. I'm a ring knocker."

The Gunny's lips curled into a fleeting smirk, a hint of amusement dancing in his eyes at Leo's unexpected use of a long-held pejorative term. The term "ring knocker," often used by the enlisted members of Starfleet to describe the overconfident and arrogant graduates of Starfleet Academy, slipped out of Leo's mouth, catching the Gunny off-guard. Witnessing an elite fraternity member openly acknowledging their status ironically surprised him.

Leo's voice carried a note of sincerity as he pressed on, his gaze steady on the Gunny. "I served on the line with the Marines, so trust me when I say that I understand your predicament with your chain of command. I'm not here to make your life miserable." His words held an earnestness that resonated with the Gunny.

"Understood, sir," the Gunny acknowledged, his tone remaining neutral but distant. The tension building up between them eased slightly as the Gunny processed Leo's words and acknowledged his understanding. A flicker of guarded respect glimmered in his eyes, indicating that Leo's empathy impressed him.

"Just take us to see Angela Torres, if you please," Leo directed. When he saw the conflict within the Gunny still causing a problem, he continued, "If Captain Kline takes issue, you tell him that a candy-ass light commander pulled rank on you."

The Gunny grinned and said, "You *have* served with marines. Thank you, sir, I appreciate that."

Leo reached into his pocket to pull his identification for the Gunny's records. "I'm Leo Verde. My office is up on four," he introduced himself, his voice firm and resolute.

"Gunny Tolliver, sir," the Gunny followed suit, keeping his volume low. Then he straightened his posture and snapped his fingers. Two junior NCOs stepped forward to either side of Leo and Martinez. "Take these officers to Prisoner Torres, now."

The two male corporals of differing heights cast a glance toward Tolliver in surprise before nodding. "Aye, aye, Gunny!" said the shorter one on the right. "Commander, if you'll follow the corporal?"

# Habeas Corpus

Starbase 8  
In orbit of Memory Alpha  
Holding Facility  
January 24, 2318 (Stardate 139001.47)

Leo's gaze scanned the surroundings in the secluded corner of the holding facility. He noted that each cell surrounding Torres's lay empty. The deliberate isolation amplified the weight of her predicament. Looking up, he observed the vaulted ceilings and the marine guards stationed at strategic vantage points overseeing the entire area.

Leo dismissed the marine corporals and then turned to address Torres with empathy. "Corporal, I'm Commander Verde with the JAG office. I think you're already acquainted with my colleague, Lieutenant Martinez?"

Rising energetically, the woman on the bunk in the cell stood up. In the officer's presence, she assumed an attentive posture. Angela Torres impressed Leo with her commanding presence, tall figure, and evident physical capabilities, despite being dressed in prisoner coveralls.

"Relax, Corporal, please," Leo ordered, his tone soothingly warm.

While locked in eye contact, Torres briefly looked away to acknowledge Martinez standing beside him.

"Good to see you again," Martinez returned her look with a cordial greeting and a wave of his hand.

Torres's face lit up with recognition and relief when Leo effortlessly switched back to speaking Spanish, a language that brought familiarity to their interaction. "I haven't had the chance to review your record, Corporal. Might I ask where you're from originally?"

"Sir, Cestus III, sir," Torres responded in the disciplined speech pattern ingrained in her Marine infantry training.

Leo's tone became gentle, showing he understood. "You can speak freely with us. We're here as your legal counsel."

Torres folded her arms across her chest. "I already admitted to the lieutenant there that I'm guilty."

Leo sighed and quickly glanced in Martinez's direction. He explained, "It's... essential to me that you understand that pleading guilty to this charge will probably result in your transfer to Andor for rehab. Also, you'll likely end up with a Big Chicken Dinner... or worse." A Bad Conduct Discharge, known to the marines as a Big Chicken Dinner, could result in Torres being labeled a criminal for the rest of her life.

The mention of that possibility caused Torres to pause visibly, despite her stern demeanor. The conversation fell silent as her body language revealed her inner turmoil.

Leo maintained a comforting cadence as he persisted. "We're here to help you."

She struggled with her conflicting emotions, causing her expression to contort. She tightened her jaw and chewed on the flesh inside her mouth. Eventually, she conceded, her words tinged with both fear and emerging hope. "Fine. I'll trust you, sir." Torres's gaze leveled on Martinez. "And you."

With purpose, Leo headed towards the closest communications terminal and activated it. "Verde to guard station. I need a private conference room to talk to my client."

"Denied, sir. Captain Kline's orders," said the response from the other end after a brief crackle when the circuit closed.

Kline again, Leo noted. He keyed the audio pickup to mute and tossed a phrase to Martinez, "They're truly testing my patience."

"This whole thing is giving me the creeps," replied Martinez.

Leo refocused his attention on the panel and unmuted. "Very well. Please inform Captain Kline that his presence is required."

"The captain is occupied with other duties and cannot be reached," said the same gruff voice, carrying the not-so-subtle tone of insolence with it.

"Identify yourself, marine," ordered Leo sharply.

"This is Gunnery Sergeant Samson H. Drake."

"Gunny, this is Lieutenant Commander Leo Verde from JAG. I understand that Captain Kline is busy, as are we all. My problem is that the captain's order violates my client's due process rights," Leo explained steadily and confidently. "I would prefer not to escalate this matter to your colonel. I'm sure we can find a resolution amongst ourselves."

Silence hung in the air, along with Leo's words. A begrudging response followed the pause: "Stand by. Out."

Leo's eyebrows shot up when the conversation came to an abrupt end, and he gave Martinez a wry smile. "Charming." While they waited for an additional response, Leo strode back to Torres's cell and asked, "Have they been treating you all right, Angela?"

Torres gave a nonchalant shrug in response. Leo noticed the clear indications of fear clear in her stance, confirming her traumatic experience while in custody.

With their precise footfalls resonating through the nearly empty side of the holding facility, three marine non-commissioned officers made their approach. When they turned the corner, the group's leading NCO wore the rank of a gunnery sergeant atop his black and white battle dress uniform's shoulders. He addressed the two attorneys with none of the customary military courtesy. "Your meeting with the prisoner is over. You are ordered to depart the holding facility *immediately*."

Once again, Leo's brows arched as he received an inexplicable response from the marines at the holding facility. At that moment, his fascination outweighed his adherence to military protocol. He made a deliberate gesture, raising his hand to assure Torres, while hiding it from the marine guards. He turned towards the group of marines, smiled softly, and extended his hands in a non-threatening gesture. "Good morning, Gunny. I'm Commander Leo Verde, this is my colleague, Lieutenant Alejandro Martinez."

Martinez waved cheerily. "Hello."

"I'm going to reach into my pocket for my identification," Leo announced, slowly extracting his badge case. He presented the contents to the Gunny after opening it. "This is an official JAG matter, and we are representing Corporal Angela Torres in response to the charges brought by Captain Kline."

"I don't care," Drake retorted with a brief flicker of scorn on his features. "Captain Kline has ordered your removal. If you do not comply, we will ensure your prompt departure."

Leo's sigh indicated his frustration with the lack of results from the gentle approach. He closed and returned the badge case, while noting the other two sergeants projecting hostility with their expressions and stances. "Seems like Captain Kline wasn't as out of reach as you claimed."

Drake's face twisted in a grimace at Leo's barb. Advancing with a raised finger, he exuded a sense of menace. "Look, you-"

"Gunny, would you address a Major this way?" Leo added in a sharp tone, interrupting the man before he finished his threat. Similarly, his voice dropped to a growl-like level. The second sentence he spoke was noticeably more restrained: "You are to address me as 'Commander' or 'Sir' when talking to me."

The three marines were taken aback and paled when they received the sudden rebuke. Even Martinez stood taller, as if he had been transported back to his field drill days.

Drake swallowed, uncertain of his footing than he was previous to that moment. The manner in which the JAG lawyer challenged him caught him off guard. "Aye, aye, sir," he replied, finally.

"That's a start," Leo responded, allowing his irritation to surface. "Do not mistake my friendly tone for capitulation. Given the gravity of these charges, your behavior has exhausted my patience."

A frown formed on Drake's face as his lips curved downwards in distaste. With a growl meant to assert dominance, he disrespectfully said, "Sir-"

"Stand at attention when I'm speaking to you, Gunny!" Leo roared in a tone comparable to a drill instructor's. "You will speak only when I ask you a direct question and not before!"

In an instant, the NCOs immediately snapped to attention, with their hands at their sides and their backs straight as a board. Inwardly, Leo grimaced and reproached himself for allowing his emotions to overpower him. He exerted mental discipline, restrained himself, and spoke with a neutral tone. "First question: Gunny, has the corporal been formally charged as being AWOL?"

"Yes, sir," Drake promptly responded.

"Thank you. Is she being held here in holding on Captain Kline's orders?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was she read her rights when she was placed under arrest?"

Drake hesitated. He became less confident and sharp in his tone. "Yes... sir."

"Did you or the officer placing her under arrest include her right to counsel?"

Drake's expression hardened. "Yes, sir."

"Then what's the problem, Gunny? She has the right to counsel and would like to exercise that presently."

"The problem is that we follow orders, sir," Drake replied, answering the only question he heard from Leo. "That's how the Marine Corps functions. We trust our superiors to make the right decisions."

"I admire your loyalty, Gunny," Leo said, while offering a patient smile. "We both took oaths to uphold the Constitution, and they spell her rights in that document. Not to mention the principles of fairness and justice. We owe it to Corporal Torres to ensure her rights are respected and that the truth prevails."

Drake remained silent, awaiting a direct question.

Leo closed the distance between himself and Drake and told him with only inches between their eyes, "We do not trample on anyone's rights

while wearing these uniforms, Gunny. Is that understood?"

"Sir, Corporal Torres made her choices-"

"Is that understood?" Leo repeated.

Drake frowned. "I understand you, sir."

Leo took a step back and sighed. Disappointed, he said, "Gunny, since you leave me no choice, I'm ordering you to release the corporal from custody on my authority."

Drake's eyes shifted from their drill-ordered position to lock eyes with Leo.

"I wasn't joking," Leo pressed on. "I expect to see the Corporal in my office upstairs in fifteen minutes, gentlemen. If I don't, I'll be in your colonel's office with my CO and the IG, where I will recommend an investigation into whatever the hell is happening here."

Once Leo stopped speaking, the marines stared straight ahead in their ordered stance at attention. "Dismissed, marines. Carry out my orders."

## In Personam

Starbase 8  
In orbit of Memory Alpha  
JAG Complex, Deck Four  
January 24, 2318 (Stardate 139001.53)

Upon entering the office, Leo and Martinez caught Janeera's voice as she stood at the reception desk, speaking to Yeoman Zenn. "Major Bex will remain on *Valkyrie* for at least two to three weeks, so we'll need to change the rotation." The captain, wearing the less formal "bomber jacket" variant of the Starfleet uniform, moved the PADD in her hands from her midsection to her side just as she heard the pair of attorneys.

"Have you both finished your inspection of the holding facility?" Janeera mused with a smile.

Leo smiled, appreciating her humor. "We'll need a word with you in your office, sir."

Her expression turned into one of interest. "This sounds like it'll be good."

He held up his hand to forestall further comment. Instead, with a glance toward Zenn, he ordered, "Yeoman, I'm expecting Corporal Torres to be released by the holding company. And please page Captain Lawson, tell her we need to confer with her; we'll all be waiting in there."

The mention of the starbase's inspector general caused glances back from both Janeera and Zenn. "The IG?" asked Zenn to confirm. When Leo gave his nod, she reached over to page out without further discussion.

"Oh, my," Janeera looked between the two as they spoke. She then led her lawyers into the office to wait.

Although Leo kept his expression neutral while they remained at reception, he smirked the moment they cleared the doors and into a more private setting. "It's entertaining, sir."

As they took up seats at the small conference table set up in the corner of Janeera's office, they waited only minutes before Captain Rebecca "Becky" Lawson arrived.

"I was summoned?" Lawson said as she entered the office. Her long blonde hair, blue eyes, height, and athletic build gave Leo pause, as though he were seeing Janeera's human twin sister. The comparison became evident to him as they stood side by side to greet one another.

Leo and Martinez rose in kind to make their introductions. Upon shaking Leo's hand, Lawson paused and remarked, "Commander, your reputation precedes you."

After casting a furtive glance toward his commanding officer, whose expression betrayed nothing but her perpetual amusement, Leo stammered, "Y-You have me at a disadvantage, Captain Lawson. However, if you'd prefer, please call--"

"Call you 'Leo,'" Lawson finished for him with an amused smile like Janeera's. "I'm willing to do it, but only if you call me 'Becky' as a favor."

Leo's eyes shifted between Janeera and Martinez before replying hesitantly, "Of course, sir. Becky."

They took seats at the small table while Leo and Martinez recounted the events leading up to their return to the JAG reception foyer. Upon hearing their anecdotal evidence, Becky posed similar questions about Leo's interrogation of the marines in the holding company and Torres' subsequent responses. She gave a nod of approval once she was satisfied with the information brought to her attention.

Becky smiled at Janeera, "'Astute hire,' indeed."

Janeera ignored Becky and questioned Leo, "If Corporal Torres isn't freed by your deadline, do you plan to file a writ of habeas corpus?"

"Yes, sir," Leo answered.

Becky noted, "We should loop in Colonel Sullivan." She turned to Leo and pointed out, "Given that you've requested my presence, I can only presume a request for an investigation--"

Before she could even complete her sentence, the office intercom crackled and Zenn's voice broke through, informing the captain of Marine Captain Kline's presence along with three others.

Janeera activated the intercom by leaning forward and pressing a key from her seat. "Please send them in, Lara."

Within seconds of closing the intercom circuit, a marine captain trailed by the same three non-commissioned officers Leo and Martinez met in holding entered the office.

Kline's physicality, stride, and demeanor reminded Leo of the Marine Corps recruiting posters; he kept his dark hair shorn to the skin, and his muscular build rivaled that of the meaner-looking non-comms Leo had met in his career. Whatever confidence he held striding into the office vanished at the sight of two naval captains glaring at the unsolicited encroachment into their discussion. The marines snapped to attention.

Janeera swiveled toward the marines and asked, "How may I help you, Captain?"

"Sir, my name is Captain Kline, and I am the commanding officer of the holding company. Please forgive my intrusion, but I'm here to arrest Lieutenant Commander Verde," Kline said without emotion.

Leo sighed and shook his head at the absurdity. He rose to his feet and presented his wrists for binding. "My name is Verde. I'll surrender to the arrest."

Kline's attention shifted to him, and Leo saw the look of unabashed scorn when they locked eyes. "Gunny, take the commander into custody."

Drake and his sergeants followed Kline's command, but Janeera and Becky had the same reaction.

"Stand fast, marines!" said the captains. The stereophonic response from the senior officers froze the marines in their tracks.

"With all due respect, Captains," Kline said without bothering to hide his smugness, "neither of you have the authority to revoke my order. Proceed, Gunny."

Drake smiled at Leo as he moved to advance and take him into custody as Kline made his assertion. But, before he could slap the binders on any wrists, Janeera moved forward and barked in her soprano voice, "I said stand fast, Gunny!" She keyed open the intercom once more and called out, "Lara, I need a squad of bailiffs in here with their sidearms."

Though Zenn did not respond to the call from her intercom circuit, the doors parted, and five members of the court bailiff team entered wearing their type-two phaser pistols at their sides. The lead bailiff wore the rank of a full lieutenant.

"Captain?" Lieutenant T'Imri said as she entered, her hand on her weapon.

Janeera ordered, "Cover these marines; ensure they do not move until I say so."

As T'Imri and her team took up positions behind the marines to ensure they did nothing further, Becky, who had risen from her seat, added, "Quite right. This is beyond the pale, Captain Kline."

Kline remained unapologetic. "Sirs, I am the CO of the holding company. I have full arrest authority on this base."

Lieutenant T'Imri replied from behind him, "As do we."

"And I might remind you, Captain," Janeera added, "I'm the Sector Judge Advocate here. I adjudicate your arrests. So..." She retreated to behind her impressive desk and sat. "Convince me that your arrest of a judge advocate is just and proper."

Kline blanched at the mention of adjudication. "Captain--"

"Your Honor," corrected Janeera. "In this capacity, I'm acting as a judge. We'll call this an informal hearing."

"Your Honor," Kline softened his tone. "I issued orders that Corporal Torres would receive no visitors, and Lieutenant Commander Verde countermanded those orders, using his so-called authority."

Janeera listened and then turned her head toward Leo. "Commander, your response?"

Leo approached the desk and placed his hands behind his back during orations. "Uh, Your Honor, Captain Kline's orders were unlawful. Corporal Torres was read her rights during the arrest, which included her right to counsel. Those rights are handed down from the Constitution and cannot be repealed by anyone, regardless of rank or position. Captain Kline denied Corporal Torres access to counsel, and further, he overreached on his authority by removing an officer of superior rank from seeing to his duty."

Kline scoffed. "You're just a lawyer."

Before Leo could respond, Janeera spoke over him. "Commander Verde is, in fact, a commissioned officer. As is everyone here who wears the uniform. However, you're inferring that he is not a proper officer because..."

Kline replied, "Your Honor, I meant the Commander got his reserve commission because he has a law degree and does not have the proper experience of the typical field grade officer in Starfleet."

"I see. Well, we'll have to unpack all of that later, but for the record, Commander Verde is a lawyer on my staff, which is correct. He also has over six years of space duty with the Border Service, where he served alongside marine companies in boarding actions. Until two months ago, he served as Operations Officer aboard a starship." Janeera paused and asked him, "Does that meet your definition of 'proper?'"

As she spoke, Kline winced, unaware of Leo's personal history. "Your Honor, I was misinformed."

Leo smirked. "I'll say."

Janeera shot him a rebuke, "Commander."

"Apologies, Your Honor."

"Captain Kline," Janeera continued without missing a beat, "Commander Verde's interpretation of the law is correct. You have no authority to deny Corporal Torres access to counsel. To do so violates due process and calls the entire arrest into question."

Kline replied, "Your Honor, the holding company must have a certain level of autonomy to do the job. JAG does not intervene in every arrest we make. Sometimes, we must hold people to protect them but not charge them and return them to duty."

Leo countered, "Captain Kline is correct that when certain members are found, taking them into custody for public safety is not improper,

although we look to the Shore Patrol division to handle those duties. However, Your Honor, In this case, Corporal Torres was being held on a felony charge of Absent Without Leave and informed Lieutenant Martinez and me she wanted to plead guilty before any discussion with her counsel. The short few minutes I had to speak with my client, made it clear she made that decision in haste."

"Corporal Torres made her choices, Commander," Kline said, his words dripping with irritation. "She didn't need some lawyer to interfere in a clear-cut case of AWOL."

Janeera held up her hand to end the bickering. "Captain Kline, while I appreciate your attention to your duty, I would prefer that you allow me to do my job. This office decides whether the Corporal is guilty of being AWOL. That is *not* a duty that falls to you and your company."

"Your Honor," Kline replied, pointing out, "In the past, your predecessor did not interfere with our policies and procedures. He approved our actions."

"Admiral Devereaux has made me aware of Kyle Gregson's performance," Janeera informed him. "That is the reason he has been transferred and I've been assigned here. This office will no longer be rubber-stamping your arrests or charges, and we will follow the process to the letter."

Kline frowned. "I understand, sir."

Leo requested, "Your Honor, I respectfully motion on behalf of my client to dismiss all pending charges for the reasons previously stated."

Janeera raised her hand once more. "Hold on, Commander. There's no one here to represent the government."

Kline stepped forward and said, "Your Honor, I have a lawyer to present our side of the argument. Can I get whatever this is... delayed somehow?"

She briefly pondered the request. Their eyes met. Leo shrugged, acknowledging the need to hear the other side. Janeera sighed. "Fair enough. Let's postpone the rest of this hearing until we can find and brief Captain Kline's choice for governmental representation. We'll meet tomorrow in Room Alpha with everyone."

"Understood, sir," the gathered officers uttered variations of that within the office.

Janeera issued one more order. "In the meantime, Captain Kline, you'll put Corporal Torres on ORR pending the hearing. Right now." She nodded to T'Imri, who understood the unspoken request.

Kline sighed. "Aye, aye, sir."

"Good. We're done. Everyone other than Captain Lawson, get out."



Within the confines of his office, Leo concentrated on the stack of paperwork he left behind a few hours prior. By the time T'Imri returned with Torres in tow, he'd whittled the pile to less than half remaining.

"I have Corporal Torres, sir," said T'Imri.

Torres wore her marine enlisted service uniform instead of the prisoner's coveralls earlier. Stepping into the office, she stood at attention as T'Imri recounted the events that led to that moment.

"We oversaw her release, sir. Although the company commander used unreasonable means to stall the process, we persuaded Captain Kline to comply with orders."

He offered nothing more than a nod to T'Imri. But he let his curiosity drive a question. "Were there any other issues of note?"

"Other company members appeared most displeased with Corporal Torres during the release procedure, sir. Our presence prevented any overt adverse action," said the Vulcan bailiff, wrapping up her report.

Leo stretched his back while he listened and then walked over to stand in front of Torres. "Thank you very much, Lieutenant. I'll take it from here. Pass my compliments to your bailiffs. Dismissed."

T'Imri nodded. "Aye, sir." Without further comment, she departed the office, leaving Leo and Torres to speak alone.

"Stand easy, Corporal," he ordered, noticing a visible improvement in her demeanor. Without the unflattering lighting of the holding facility, she made use of the brief opportunity to change back into uniform. "I'm going to contact my friend Tom downstairs and see if we can't find you another bunk. I doubt you'll be welcome in the marine barracks after today."

Torres relaxed and sighed. "Yes, sir. Sir, I-"

"One moment, Corporal." Leo leaned out his office door and called, "Barzel, Ale, a moment of your time, please?"

After Barzel and Martinez joined them, Leo bade Torres to continue her sentence. She said, "Sir, I wanted to say thank you and Lieutenant Martinez for intervening on my behalf."

Leo signaled for both to sit on the corner couch while he claimed the armchair. "All part of the service, Corporal. Let us bring you up to speed on what's happened so far..." With Martinez's help, they regaled both of them with an abridged version of events, then Leo ended with, "Now we're awaiting the government's lawyer. We can proceed with the hearing once they announce themselves to the court."

Torres's brow creased with worry. "Do you think they'll make a case to put me back in the cell, sir?"

Martinez shook his head. "Not likely. They violated due process. I would be shocked if the court upheld the arrest."

As the intercom signaled, Leo nodded. "Agreed. Pardon me." He reached over to the nearest panel and opened the circuit. "Verde, here."

Yeoman Zenn's voice called out to him over the channel. "Commander, meeting in the Captain's office in thirty minutes."

"Is she reconvening the hearing?" Leo asked.

"No, sir. The attorney taking up the government's side has arrived."



When Leo, Martinez, and Torres arrived in Captain Ch'charhat's office, Captain Kline and an Edosian male wearing a marine first lieutenant's uniform awaited them. Besides the marine officers, an enlisted petty officer, second class wearing the rate of a Legal Specialist (LS), sat nearby, to record the conversation.

Janeera sat behind her desk once more. "Welcome, Lieutenant Reter," she said to the Edosian.

Reter inclined his head and offered a salute with his right arm while he held a portable device in his left. "Thank you, Your Honor. My apologies for the delay, tardiness, and hold on this issue. I was handed this case a mere twenty minutes prior."

She glanced over at Leo to share a brief look with him before asking Reter, "You are licensed to practice law on Starfleet matters, Lieutenant?"

Reter stepped forward and offered an optical chip. "My credentials for your edification, Your Honor."

Janeera leaned toward Reter to accept the proffered chip and placed it within the input port on her desktop terminal. Within seconds, the information appeared, and her eyebrows climbed upwards. "Impressive. I thought I knew all qualified legal personnel here on the base. Might I ask how you came to take on this case?"

"It is... an unusual, uncommon, and atypical story, Your Honor," Reter replied, scratching at his bald, orange head. "I do not serve in the Corps in any legal capacity. I am the supply officer for the company."

She blinked. "*Supply* officer? What are you doing for the company, specifically?"

"This morning, I was inventorying our cargo containers in the garrison hold, Your Honor."

Leo flashed a brief smirk at the aggrieved expression on Janeera's face. She noticed him enough to cast an unhappy glance in his direction. To explain her mood, she told him, "He has an LL.B from the TPau Institute of Law and Culture on Vulcan." She sighed and returned her attention to Reter. "Since I'm guessing that Captain Kline unburied you from the mountain of supplies down in the garrison dungeon, are you going to assemble the charge sheet?"

"Your Honor, if I could please petition for a continuance-" Reter began.

Janeera raised her left hand. "Granted. Under the circumstances, a continuance is the very least I could do. However, I recommend you and the defense counsel find an alternative solution."

"I only need a few hours, sir," Peter promised. "May I borrow an office and some staff in the JAG complex?"

Leo spoke up before Janeera could. "I'll have a couple of paralegals assigned to your new office, Lieutenant. We'll take good care of you." Seeing Reter's support taken care of, he asked, "Considering current events, Your Honor, I'd like to propose a change in billet for Corporal Torres."



## Modus Operandi

Starbase 8  
In orbit of Memory Alpha  
VIP Quarters 6A01, assigned to LCDR Verde  
January 26, 2318 (Stardate 139013.6)

"So, what happened after?" asked Commander Keena Val, her image on the small desktop screen in Leo's quarters. He leaned back in his chair, the ambient light from the screen casting a soft glow in the dimly lit room.

Leo unfastened the shoulder strap of his maroon uniform jacket. He pulled the front flap down with a quick motion—the metallic snaps on the side released with soft clicks, punctuating the silence in his quarters. "Well, once everyone was up to speed, the Captain ruled the charges be dismissed, you know... considering the whole massively violating due process. Subsequently, the charges against me became baseless, leaving Mister Reter with no other recourse but to withdraw."

Keena's image nodded on the screen, her expression curious and empathetic. "And what happens to the corporal, now?"

"Oh, she's resting comfortably in the VIP Quarters two doors down from here," Leo said with a loud sigh. "And I'm working on transferring her to JAG as my orderly to start."

"To start?"

"I've got plans. She has a certain... quality."

Keena leaned closer to the screen, blocking most of Leo's view into her senior officer's stateroom aboard *Hansen*. "Plans, huh? Man, you always stir things up, Rally. You've barely been there, what... two weeks?"

Because of the lack of distance between Keena and the visual pickup, her features became more defined as a result, and Leo noticed how tired she looked but decided not to call attention to it. "A little over nine days," he said.

"Nine days. You've already tangled yourself in another mess you couldn't ignore."

He shrugged, his fingers idly tapping on the armrest. "It wasn't even my case to begin with. Torres was being railroaded, and while I can't prove it, those assholes probably goaded her into pleading guilty. She won't say anything about that, and I don't know if I should admire her loyalty."

She smiled. "But you do."

"Yeah," Leo smirked. His eyes drifted away from Keena's knowing expression on the screen. "But, having gotten to know the people she's been working with, she needs a new address."

"I'll bet."

"Still at a loss how they thought they'd get away with it," Leo admitted, scratching at the top of his head as he pondered the notion.

"Considering their circumstances, I can see the desperation," Keena noted. "Plus, your office sounds understaffed and under-resourced, with a caseload so large..." Her voice trailed off.

Leo brought his gaze back to the screen. "True. But it wasn't my observation that set things in motion. Alejandro had a gut feeling about the situation and brought it to my attention."

Keena replied with a warm and knowing smile, "Sounds like you've found some kindred spirits over there."

His lips quirked upward. "The entire office appears driven by a genuine desire to serve justice. The CO, the other attorneys, the paralegals, even the bailiffs... they all strive to do their best."

"And that surprises you?" Keena's voice held a mix of curiosity and gentle teasing.

He paused, contemplating her question. He finally exhaled after a long pause. "Honestly, I don't know. My mind's been distracted by how much I missed serving with you and everyone when I arrived here."

"Well, we miss you, too," she assured him. "You know, they transferred in a replacement the month after you left."

"Oh? How are they getting along?"

"I guess all right. Grax called him by your name twice during the first wardroom meeting," she said with mirthful eyes.

Leo raised his hand to cover his eyes. "He *didn't*."

Keena grinned. "It's *Grax*. It's the only way he can rib a certain someone over what happened. Y'know, without calling too much attention to himself."

"I hope he didn't get raked over the coals for it."

She shook her head. "Not that he's let me know, but I know the new guy didn't mind." Then she added, "At first."

"What does that mean?"

"He thought it was amusing, but then after about a week... I guess he got the scuttlebutt from someone about you and who you were, and then he wasn't too happy about it. But Grax outranks him, so nothing ever came of it," she explained. Off his distressed look, Keena offered a soft, "Sorry."

Leo waved it off with a quick hand gesture. "It's all right."

She sighed. "No, it's not. I feel like I'm on a ship run by teenagers sometimes. But enough about that. Are you doing okay?"

He lifted his eyes to meet hers on the screen. "I'm okay. This is all new, right? I'm trying the whole 'throw yourself into the work' method of distraction. Because if I don't, I'll sit here and lament that no starship captain would ever take a chance on... an officer with... well, you know. My melancholy was clouding my perspective those first five or six days."

Keena's gaze softened as he spoke. "You're good at what you do, Rally. And listen, if anyone ever asks my opinion about your space service credentials-

Leo's swift reaction communicated his mix of surprise and caution. "Keena... you *can't*."

"If it's off the record-

The potential outcome increased Leo's anxiety, and he leaned forward to drive his point home. "You know what will happen if you talk about it."

"You could always ask your mom-

"She's already done what she can," he interrupted thrice. "I'm wearing this uniform because of her influence with the CO."

Her sigh displayed her resignation and empathy for the situation. "I know..." Then, she added confidently, "I hate that there's nothing I can do. It's not fair."

He sighed, then crossed his arms over his chest. "Life rarely is."

Keena's eyes met his, a silent understanding passing between them. "Politics," she stated, her tone bitter.

Leo nodded in agreement. "Politics."



An hour before his duty shift, Leo arrived at the JAG complex and saw a marine second lieutenant in the waiting area. Her early morning appearance was surprising, but the most remarkable thing was her hairstyle, which was short and almost completely shaved. It was an unconventional choice that stood out against the standard marine appearance. The tradition of shaving heads, which was once a prominent part of marines' close-order training, diminished.

With a smile, Leo addressed the yeoman operating the desk, saying, "Good morning, Karl."

Yeoman Third Class (YN3) Karl Fields shot a grin toward Leo. "Likewise, sir. Getting an early start?"

"There's a backlog of paperwork I want to put a dent in as quickly as possible," Leo explained. "I figured I could get an hour of peace, just me, the stack, and a plasma torch."

Fields chuckled. "I'll raise shields for you, sir."

"You're a good man, Yeoman Fields," Leo praised him with closed eyes. "I'm going to grab some cocoa and get to work."

The yeoman got to his feet and offered, "Sir, I can get that for you-

Leo raised his hand. "No, keep your seat. I can get my drinks. Do you want anything since I'm heading that way?"

Fields shook his head and raised a full mug from his desk. "I'm set, sir. Thank you."

"Fair enough." He stepped toward his office, paused, and turned back around. "Oh, tell Mister Timel to barge in on me when he gets here?"

"Will do, sir."

Leo tapped the desk and said, "Thank you." After stopping by the food synthesizer unit to get his morning cocoa, he set himself to work.

The computer signaled the end of the hour. He immersed himself in administrative tasks and lost track of time, but an incoming call interrupted his desire for additional work time.

Yeoman Fields' voice called for him, "Sir, apologies for the disturbance."

"It's all right, Karl," Leo replied. "What's up?"

"There's a Lieutenant Collins here to see you," he informed him. "Shall I send her in?"

He leaned back in his seat and grinned. "No rest for the wicked, Karl. Yeah, go right ahead. And thank you."

"My pleasure, sir. Fields, out."

Within moments, the door announcer chimed in, and Leo touched his panel to open the door. "Enter."

The exact second lieutenant seated in the reception area stepped inside, and Leo got to his feet. "Oh... were you waiting out there the whole time?"

"Yes, sir, but it's fine," said Collins. "I know you're pretty busy."

Leo gestured to an open seat. "Not too busy to make people wait for an hour, Lieutenant. My sincerest apologies."

As she took the offered chair, Collins shook her head, "No, sir, it's alright."

"How can I assist you this morning?" Leo asked her softly.

She sighed, then shook her head once more. "There's no easy way to say this, sir, so I'm just going to come out and tell you. Corporal Torres used to be a member of my platoon."

A momentary flicker of understanding appeared on Leo's face. "I... see. Are you looking to have her transferred back?"

"No, sir."

"Then... how can I help you?"

She shot him a nervous glance. "I understand you're not my lawyer, but would it stay confidential if I shared something with you?"

"Is this something that could involve admitting to an illegal act or violating the law?" He asked her pointedly.

"No, sir. Quite the opposite."

He leaned back in his chair, studying her expression intently. "Then, I'm not entirely sure I understand. I am an officer of the court. So, if you admit to violating Starfleet regulations or Federation law, I must stop this conversation and advise you to seek legal counsel."

"I appreciate that," she replied. "It's just that I know what exactly happened with Corporal Torres... Angela. I was present when Captain Kline arrested her. And I'm the one who left an anonymous note with Lieutenant Martinez about her sitting in holding without legal counsel."

Leo smiled. "Aside from the fact that it's nice to see someone from your company care about a prisoner's due process, I cannot see how this information would need to stay confidential."

Collins dropped her head downward in defeat. "I was under direct orders from Captain Kline to leave her there until he said otherwise," she said, though her words stumbled haltingly out of her mouth.

Leo leaned forward. "Really?"

She nodded silently.

"Okay," he placed his hands on the desk and clasped his fingers together. He allowed his sightline to stare beyond her and through the clear pane of transparent aluminum out into the bullpen. The day at JAG had begun; people began working at their desks or holding conversations.

"Okay," he repeated, concluding his thoughts. "I'm going to ask you a few questions."

"Shoot."

"How long ago was Corporal Torres arrested?"

"Six- no, seven days ago."

"Was she read her rights during the arrest?"

"Yes, sir. Gunny Drake read those to her in front of her squad."

"Was she actually AWOL?"

"No, sir, she was not. When I brought that to Captain Kline, he told me that Angela was no longer my concern and to direct my attention to my duties."

Leo thought out loud. "Then why was she ready to admit her guilt?"

She swallowed before responding. "Sir, Angela was covering for a private in her squad, a fresh recruit struggling to adjust his duties."

"Is this private still on base?"

"No, sir. The Captain transferred him back to the recruit depot for reassignment the night they threw Angela in holding," Collins spat angrily.

"All right. The case against the Corporal was withdrawn-" Leo started, but the door chime interrupted his thought. "Enter."

With a PADD and stylus in hand, Corporal Torres entered the room. The "ring and ridges" devices adorned her shoulders as she wore her marine duty uniform. "Sorry to bother you-" she caught herself as she made eye contact with Leo's guest. "Lieutenant!" She automatically snapped to attention because of her drill training.

Collins' eyes flicked towards Leo, who was the highest-ranking officer on the deck.

"Corporal, relax, please." When Torres returned to her normal stance, Leo asked, "You needed something from me?"

"Yes, sir," Torres replied. "I need your endorsement for my school application."

Leo accepted the PADD and scanned it. He found the line for his endorsement and applied his authorization to the form. "There you go," he said, handing her back the device.

"Application?" wondered Collins.

Leo grinned. "We're sending the Corporal to the criminal investigation school to learn how to become an investigator. She'll be studying for two years on Luna."

Torres added, "Captain Ch'charhat promised that when I pass, she will request me back on the base."

"JAG has investigators?" Collins asked, her interest piqued.

Leo explained, "Not as such; we often work with the Department of Criminal Investigation. But, one recommendation I made to my boss is to put together JAGMAN teams comprising personnel with specialized disciplines to help facilitate preliminary inquiries more efficiently."

"Sorry, sir, I'm not sure what that means exactly," replied the Lieutenant.

"Most JAGMAN teams typically just have a lawyer and a paralegal to assist, sometimes not even that many people," Leo said. "But if I were to conduct my inquiry with two lawyers, two paralegals or yeomen, and two investigators, then I'd have a well-rounded team to focus the inquiry as needed to recommend further action."

Collins tilted her head. "It's a minor change, but I would guess an impactful one."

"Corporal Torres is going to be one of my investigators when she returns," Leo said. "Though, I hope the corporal will study hard and try to test out as many sections as she can to cut some time in training down."

"I won't let you down, sir," Torres promised.

"I'm certain you won't," he said warmly. "By the way, we're discussing the SOP of your former unit."

Collins added, "I wanted the commander to be aware of how widespread of an issue this is."

"Oh..." Torres said, letting her voice trail off. Unsure of her footing, she half-turned toward the exit, and with a chuck of her thumb, she asked, "Should I leave?"

Leo glanced at Collins sidelong while responding, "You could provide some corroboration if the lieutenant agrees."

"Of course," Collins' reply was instantaneous. "Ange, you were in the trenches more often than I was."

Torres crossed to Collins and took the other open seat before the desk. She held her PADD across her midsection as though she were shielding herself. "Yeah, I did. But, I thought since the case was dropped and I'm thankfully no longer under Kline's command..." She left the rest unspoken to show that she had already moved on.

"Well, sure," Leo noted after pressing his lips together. "That's good for you, but I'm curious if they subjected others to the same treatment. Or perhaps it's happening right now."

Collins and Torres shared a chagrined look. Torres nodded and cleared her throat. "Uh, it's happened before, sir. More often, it would be holding people who had gotten out of hand at the local after-hours' places by imbibing too much. Rowdy, drunk marines who need to sleep it off. We can hold them without processing once the Shore Patrol drops them off."

Collins provided more color. "Overnight stays, followed by some poor private in the company on cleanup detail to bring the cells back to a presentable state."

Leo smirked. "Understood. Beyond drying out the drunks, did the company use their discretionary powers?"

"Kline is not a fan of Fleeties," Torres recalled. "He hates them. Sometimes, he'll hold them longer than marines."

"Biases against different services isn't new, but how long would he hold or keep them locked up?" asked Leo.

Torres sighed. "As long as he could get away with it. Three days, sometimes a little longer. A year ago or so, he kept a petty officer long enough to force them to miss a movement," she said, shooting a look toward Collins. "That was before you transferred in, sir."

Leo's jaw dropped at the implication. "That's a severe charge. What happened to the petty officer?"

"So, the JAG who was here before... he was this lieutenant who was chummy with Kline," Torres explained. "I think his name was Gregson, I

don't recall. He and Kline were bosom buddies, and he kept his office near the company office, so they were pretty close. But, this JAG lawyer would sign off on pretty much anything and everything Kline wanted."

This information caused Leo's lips to dip down low. "Okay, that's terrifying. What did you see?"

"Before I tell you, sir, I want to say that I'm ashamed that I took part in any of this," Torres admitted, unable to bring her eyes up to meet his. "I have no excuse for waiting this long except to say that it was easiest not to make waves, especially with an officer like Kline."

Collins glared at Leo, almost daring him to chastise Torres in front of her.

Leo held up his hand to forestall Collins' contribution to the discussion. "I understand, Corporal. And I'm not here to judge. But I think it is necessary to understand how deep this corruption goes. So, please speak freely."

Torres nodded her head in understanding but still kept her eyes downcast. "Aye, aye, sir." She took in a deep breath, then continued her story. "He would use a series of codewords or phrases under some unwritten SOP. But everyone in the holding company knew what it meant."

"Under what reason would he hold them?" Leo wondered.

"As a person of interest pending an investigation or held for questioning; once, he had them in protective custody, which caused the Shore Patrol to get involved, so he didn't do that again.

"One of the spoken codewords was 'P47 detainment,' something that could be said over channels aloud. Whatever the code was, they weren't to be touched or spoken to until he said otherwise. We filled the logs with stuff like that, but its standard procedure for hanging on to folks for being a danger to the rest of the base, so when the colonel or one of her staff looks through..."

"Nothing looks out of the ordinary," Leo finished her thought.

Collins breathed, "Holy shit."

Leo asked, "And so if someone was being held under these circumstances and asked for legal counsel, what would happen?"

"Gregson would ignore them and attach his report that stated they refused counsel," Torres explained. "Kline would leave them there long enough to get them to sign a statement saying they were guilty and refused counsel."

"Is that what he did with you?" asked Leo.

Torres nodded.

"And Lieutenant, you didn't know about any of this?" he asked.

Torres came to her defense. "Sir, the officers never got involved in prisoner details unless they were being punished. Many of the stuff we get told comes from Gunny Drake, anyway."

"Did you interact with Captain Kline much?" Leo wondered.

Torres shook her head. "I met him when I reported in, and he would bark at the company during periodic briefings. Otherwise, all orders passed through our platoon leaders or the gunny. None of the platoon leaders I worked with ever issued orders to hold someone."

"We didn't have that kind of authority," Collins admitted. "I didn't realize how fucked up things were until Ange got tossed right in front of me."

"Thanks for not letting me rot down there, sir," Torres said to Collins.

Collins reached out and placed her hand on Torres's shoulder. "You're a good NCO, Ange."

Leo reclined in his chair, his fingers tapping the desk's surface as he voiced his thoughts. "They withdrew your case because of obvious due process violations," he began, his unfocused gaze as he contemplated the situation. "But Kline's been the beneficiary of circumstance; the lone JAG officer stationed here previously, and the understaffed team that succeeded him. He didn't expect Collins to take action, thinking he had firm control over the company. What troubles me most are these casual violations - indicative of a blatant disregard for procedure. This office relies on the Shore Patrol and the holding company for arrest and detainee information. It's clear that either trust in their competence was misplaced, or they're exploiting our staffing issues to skirt the process. That may have given him a sense of impunity."

Collins noted, "He acts as though his shit don't stink, sir. And he hates you for interfering in his fiefdom." The door to the officer slid open when she said the word "fiefdom."

Lieutenant (jg) Barzel Timel entered with a smile and a PADD. The smile turned into a grimace upon seeing the two seated in front of Leo's desk. "Sorry, I was told to enter without knocking."

Leo waved Barzel off with his hand and leaned forward. "No problem. Would you mind assisting Corporal Torres with her application to DCISAC? Also, if you could take statements from both of them on a new case I'm putting together, I'd appreciate it."

Barzel nodded. "Sure thing. Anything else?"

"Yeah, reach out to Captain Lawson for me; I'd like to sit with her the first opening she has today," Leo added.

"I will let you know when she's free." Barzel smiled at the two marines. "Lieutenant, Corporal... My office is four doors down." As they got to

their feet, he added, "The boss wants to see you, Leo."

Collins glanced at Leo. "By your leave, sir?"

Leo replied with a nod, "Of course. And please, call me Leo."



"Come in, Leo," Janeera said as soon as he poked his head through the door to announce himself. She gestured to her guest, the Edosian marine first lieutenant who had come into their collective acquaintance the previous day. "You can help me convince Lieutenant Reter that he might find a home here at JAG."

Leo approached the desk and sat in a chair after she kindly offered it. "Oh?"

Reter turned his head and admitted, "It's an intriguing, attractive, and luring offer. However, should I seek a transfer, the honorable choice would be to finish my tour of duty with my current billet." He looked back at Janeera and continued, "I had given brief consideration to my career options, presuming I might remain at Starbase Eight in any capacity. Joining this office in twelve months is worthy of contemplation."

Leo responded before Janeera could, "Through a matter of fortunate coincidence, Lieutenant, I'm glad you're here right now."

"Why is that, sir?" Reter asked, his tone holding suspicion.

"This morning, Lieutenant Collins was waiting to speak with me right when I walked in. She told me some interesting things about the holding company's SOP with prisoner detainment, and Corporal Torres corroborated all of it when I put the questions to her," Leo explained. He turned his head toward the Captain and added, "I've already reached out to Captain Lawson for follow-up."

"You have enough evidence to meet the minimum for an IG investigation?" Janeera allowed her curiosity to distract her from the purpose of the meeting.

Leo raised his hand and wiggled it back and forth in a non-committal motion. "Not quite. I don't think anecdotal evidence will be enough, but I want to show my cards and see what's what."

"Can you bring us up to speed?" asked Janeera.

"Now?" Leo asked, tilting his head toward Reter.

She smiled. "I'm in the middle of enticing the Lieutenant into transferring to JAG. As an attorney and marine, I think he is interested in hearing the details of your discovery. Don't you?"

Clearing his throat, Leo nodded. "Yes, of course, sir." He cast an embarrassed glance toward the Lieutenant. "My apologies, Mister Reter. I didn't mean to imply you were untrustworthy."

Reter shook his head. "No apologies are necessary, Commander. I admire your prudence, sagacity, and circumspection."

Leo spent twenty minutes summarizing Collins' and Torres' accounts, then finished with, "I have both of them sitting with Barzel right now to put it all down in a written statement, just in case I need it. I'm just waiting for an open spot on Becky's schedule. But, safe to say that the implications are alarming."

Reter's eyebrows rose at the casual use of the base IG's nickname. "'Alarming' is not the word I would use," he said with a heavy sigh. He offered several alternatives. "Outrageous. Shocking. Scandalous. Untenable."

"Thank you, Mister Reter," Janeera smiled, then turned her gaze back to Leo. "I presume you have a role in mind for our new friend here?"

"Well, seeing as he has not yet transferred-" Leo began.

"Pardon me, sir, but I have not yet agreed to transfer at all," cautioned Reter as he raised his central hand in the air, a finger raised to make his point.

"Details..." Leo smirked. "But right now, you're still in the holding company. You have a certain amount of access as the supply officer. Not to mention learned testimony on daily business within the garrison."

Reter moved his gaze between the two officers and smiled. "That is quite true."

Leo asked, "Can I count on your sense of justice, loyalty, and honor as a marine to understand what's at stake?"

"Commander. If these accusations are true, then I would have little choice. To do otherwise would be a faithless, treacherous, and disloyal act weighed against my oath of office. Therefore, I would be honored to assist you, sir."

Leo reached over and shook Reter's hand. "I hope you don't mind me saying, Lieutenant, that you've restored my faith in the Corps. Given my most recent experience."

Reter nodded as he released Leo's hand and returned to a seated position. "Understood, sir."

"Speaking of help, let me talk to Becky about getting her officer involved. She might have one of her minions look into it," Janeera noted. "I have an idea about that."

Leo grinned. "I'm happy to let you work your magic, boss."

"In the meantime," Janeera said, "Leo, you're going to have to run point on this as I'll have to preside over any cases. Keep this between you and Barzel for now, in case we need to firewall."

"Understood," Leo replied and rose from his seat. "By your leave?"

She dismissed him with a wave. "Back to work, Leo."

"Aye, sir," Leo grinned. "Talk to you later, Lieutenant."

Reter rose out of respect as Leo turned to use the exit. "Looking forward to it, Commander."

Before Leo disappeared beyond the door, he paused and said, "Call me Leo."

Once Janeera and Reter were alone again within the office, he turned back to her and, in an enthusiastic tone, told her, "I'll gladly, happily, and eagerly take that transfer, Captain. If possible, I would prefer to accept it following the closure of Comm-... er, Leo's case."

She took the news with a slight smile on her lips. "I'm very pleased to hear that, Lieutenant. And I was going to use this to sweeten the deal, but I am happy to promote you to captain upon transfer."

Reter said, "Sir, I don't need a promotion to perform these duties."

"I have a significant amount of discretion with personnel to fill the vacancies we've identified as critical needs," she explained. "Allow me to use it on your behalf, as you're doing us a favor in helping us out."

"Then I will cease debating the matter with you, sir," he replied, placing his right and left hands in a steeple. "I don't wish to appear unseemly, but I would like to request one more condition of my transfer if you're amenable?"

She made a "come on" gesture with her hand. "Don't hold out on me. You have my undivided attention."

Reter leaned forward and adjusted his seated position. "When I report for duty here, I wish to work for Leo Verde."

Janeera nodded, wearing a silent and satisfied grin. "Agreed."

## Cui Bono

Starbase 8  
In orbit of Memory Alpha  
Observation Level  
January 28, 2318 (Stardate 139029.9)

"Marine to be promoted! Center! March!" Colonel Marina Sullivan's voice boomed loud enough to bounce off the high ceilings of the split-level observation level on the starbase. The marine regiment assembled within the "parade grounds" of the spacious field, standing in a line formation facing the small group of the regiment's leadership. The field enjoyed a nearly unobstructed view of the surrounding space thanks to the massive viewports providing an unparalleled vantage.

First Lieutenant Reter executed the drill maneuver with precise grace because of his having three feet. They pivoted to the right, positioning him in front of the colonel and the lieutenant colonel, the two officers commanding the starbase's marine garrison. Off to the side, the starbase's deputy commanding officer, Commodore Thelk, stood, observing the proceedings with his resolute gaze.

The lieutenant colonel produced a PADD and began reading from it, each word carrying the weight of centuries of tradition. "To all who shall see these presents, greetings: Know ye that reposing special trust and confidence in the integrity, diligence, patriotism, fidelity, and abilities of First Lieutenant Reter, I do promote him to the rank of Captain in the Starfleet Marine Corps, as of this stardate." His words hung in the air, marking the significance of the moment.

Reter listened, his attentive stance unwavering. The garrison deputy commander continued, "This officer will, therefore, carefully and diligently discharge the duties of the office to which appointed by doing and performing all manner of things thereunto belonging."

The lieutenant colonel completed reading the promotion order, including the Federation Minister of Defense's signatory and the Commandant of the Starfleet Marine Corps.

Commodore Thelk, a well-known figure of authority and respect, stepped forward. He removed the insignia device from Reter's service dress uniform, replacing it with the device of a marine captain. As he performed the task, he offered quiet congratulations that Reter acknowledged with a subtle nod.

Colonel Sullivan moved forward to re-administer Reter's oath of office. Reter's voice rang out, determined, as he repeated the oath on the heels of Sullivan's voice, emphasizing words such as "protect" and "defend" and underscoring the gravity of his commitment. The colonel then addressed the assembly, her words speaking of the significance of the promotion. She praised Reter's exemplary performance as the company's supply officer, highlighting how even support roles impact the entire Corps.

"Captain Reter, I congratulate you on your promotion, and I dare say this is but another accolade on the path to a bright future and career within the Corps."

With that, the ceremony concluded, and the assembled marines broke formation once dismissed. The air buzzed with congratulations from Reter's fellow officers within the company and talk of a celebration in the officers' club on base promised later in the day: a proper Wetting Down with Reter as guest of honor.

Amid the crowd, Commodore Thelk approached Reter, placing a hoof on his shoulder. "Captain, a moment of your time, please."

"Certainly, sir," Reter promptly replied. Quickly, they entered a small conference room without a view of space, right across the corridor.

Thelk wasted little time. "I understand you met with Captain Ch'charhat yesterday morning."

"That is correct, sir," Reter answered, giving a brief nod from his head.

"Might I ask the topic or topics of discussion held within her office?"

"I'm sure you're aware, sir, that until I appeared before the captain in her office, she had not been previously aware that I was a licensed attorney and wished to speak with me about how my legal training and talents could augment the sparse, paltry, and meager ranks of the JAG Corps aboard Starbase Eight."

The Commodore, a Tellarite, harrumphed with a flaring snout. "I see. Are you considering a transfer?"

Reter tilted his head with curiosity. "My prospects, given my new rank, have not yet been made known. The colonel mentioned temporarily continuing as the company's supply officer, though I am now too senior for such a billet. I'm certain that the Corps shall have use for me once my tour of duty is completed." Off Thelk's pointed glare, he added, "I'm considering, appraising, and pondering all options available to me, sir."

Thelk grimaced. "It has also been made known that Lieutenant Commander Verde took part in that meeting. What substance did *he* bring to the discussion?"

"Forgive my impertinence, Commodore, but you are well-informed of my itinerary. May I ask why this is?"

A growl erupted from Thelk at the question while closing the distance between them. "The day that something occurs on *this* starbase without my knowledge is when I hand in my resignation. Answer my question."



Reter showed no signs of intimidation. Instead, he blinked, keeping his curiosity at the forefront. He kept to the agreed-upon cover story developed during his discussion with Ch'charhat and Verde. "Captain Ch'charhat had called Commander Verde in to answer direct, candid, and straightforward questions regarding my prospective duties and responsibilities that I would be expected to executive. The role in mind might report directly to Commander Verde."

"What else?"

"They mentioned an early promotion if I should transfer," Reter admitted.

Thelk grinned wide enough to display the roots of his tusks. "You have your promotion. No need for you to consider a transfer if that was the only benefit they saw fit to offer."

Reter said nothing in response to Thelk's determination. The Commodore's stance and body language clarified that their conference was ending rapidly.

"I'm going to give you some advice, Captain," Thelk grunted. "Stay away from Verde. He is toxic to careers, especially yours, being that it's just barely getting started. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, sir. I hear you loud and clear," Reter replied.

Thelk stepped back, offering a toothy grin of satisfaction. "Good to see you know how to be a team player. You are to inform me of any discussions involving Verde. I want to know what was discussed and what was decided."

"Is that a direct order, sir?"

The question drew a loud snort from Thelk. "You're damned right it is."

Reter snapped to attention. "Aye, aye, sir."

Finding no other matters to discuss, the Commodore stalked back to the exit. He paused at the open doorway, just before the threshold, and parted Reter's company with a simple, "Congratulations again, Captain Reter. Make us proud."



Reter recounted his discussion with Thelk at a secluded coffee table in the starbase's bustling commercial district. Verde listened on the other side of the small table and arched his eyebrows during specific parts of the story.

"To keep this chat superficially innocuous," Leo began, choosing his words, "let's say it was just a follow-up from yesterday's meeting. I congratulated you on your promotion, which I do, by the way... and you declined our offer."

Reter acknowledged Leo's words with a nod and smile, his bright amber eyes showing his understanding. "Thank you for your congratulations, Commander," he responded with a subtle look. "However, we can both guess at some unforeseen circumstances soon."

Leo sighed, the corners of his mouth tugging lightly downward. "I'd rather deal with the present than speculate about the future. Our platoon leader friend is on board, acting as our intermediary until we're ready to take the next step."

"Agreed," said Reter. He held a smug grin, as though he relished Leo's disappointment. "So, I assume the Inspector General passed on launching a formal, official, and sanctioned investigation?"

"Captain Lawson has decided to stand by," Leo said as he gazed into his mug. "This is where you and our friend come in."

Reter's gaze followed Leo's to a pair of second lieutenants standing at the bar well across the dining floor that twisted their attention away. "Understood," he said, finishing his mug in one quaff. He extended his right hand in a comforting motion. "I'll rendezvous, meet, and confer with our friend. I will remain in contact, Leo."

Leo shook Reter's hand and let out a resigned sigh. "Good luck, Captain," he said in a raised voice. "And if you ever should wish to pursue a career in JAG, our door will remain open for you."

"I appreciate that, Commander," Reter replied, matching Leo's volume. "Thank you."



Second Lieutenant Mara Collins stared at the desktop terminal in frustration. Regardless of how she accessed the holding records, it did not matter. The computer informed her that her access credentials lacked the clearance to view them. The change occurred between the previous day and that morning, which alarmed her, considering she needed access to complete her reporting as a platoon leader.

"Trouble, Lieutenant?" asked an unfamiliar voice.

Collins felt a shiver up her spine. She jumped somewhat in her seat before looking up at the source. "Damn, you scared me, sir."

Reter frowned at her reaction. "It was not my intention, aim, or purpose. My sincere apologies." He crossed his right and left arms over his midsection but held the center hand in a palm-up gesture. "Might I be of some help?"

Her eyes drifted around the company's open floor plan, and she kept her voice low in response. "Working on my weekly reports and tried to call up the holding records. I'm locked out."

"All holding records have been locked down," said another voice. Gunnery Sergeant Sam Drake added, "CO's orders." He approached the officers, not bothering to conceal his contempt. "There is also a delay on all reporting until the lockdown is lifted."

Collins replied, "I wasn't informed of this, Gunny. The colonel mandates reports. Do we have her permission?"

Drake's eyes glanced at Reter before he responded to Collins' uncharacteristic defiance toward the Gunny. "Shouldn't you be down in cargo, counting whatever you need to count?"

"Gunny, it is no trouble for me to be here," Reter replied with dispassion. "I remain the company's S-4 until the regiment reassigns me to a new billet aligned with my new rank."

The Gunny's attention drifted to the new device on Reter's shoulder. "We see little of you here in the company office, is all."

"I was walking by when I heard the lieutenant having troubles with her terminals," Reter explained. "I thought perhaps it was a malfunction, fault, or glitch within our system. Something that perhaps my new friend, Commodore Thelk, would want to be aware of."

Drake went ashen at the mention of Thelk. "Oh. Then you know-" he cut himself off, realizing that Collins remained part of the discussion. "I meant to say, sir, there is no need to involve the Commodore. Captain Kline is working with Colonel Sullivan on a project involving the custodial and arrest records, and to prevent tampering, access has been restricted."

Reter turned back to Collins. "Reasonable explanation, don't you think, Lieutenant?"

"Of course, sir," Collins agreed in a performative fashion. "Absolutely."

"Gunny, in the future, it might behoove those in command to communicate changes to process and procedure, even if they are temporary. To prevent future misunderstandings," Reter noted.

Drake paused as though he were considering Reter's suggestion. "I will be happy to mention your words to the CO," he spoke with an edge to his tone.

Reter inclined his head. "It occurs to me that as a marine non-commissioned officer, protocol prescribes address respecting our ranks. Regardless of your personal feelings, I believe it would be sensible, polite, and courteous of you to address us with proper honors in conversation. I find your tone to be borderline insolent."

The Gunny suddenly straightened his posture as he stood before the two officers. "I meant no disrespect, Captain."

"I will take you at your word, Gunny," Reter said after looking at Collins for her leave, which she gave with a quick nod. "If you wouldn't mind, I'd like to continue discussing with Lieutenant Collins without further interruption. You're dismissed."

Drake flashed a scowl toward Reter, but instantly composed himself. "Aye, aye, sir." Although he attempted, he did not remove his hostility from his stride.

Once the Gunny departed, Collins leaned over and asked, "You're friends with the Commodore, sir?"

"He's placed me on orders to keep him informed of any conversations of note," Reter replied.

# Audi Alteram Partem

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Starbase 8  
In orbit of Memory Alpha  
Storage Compartment 27B-47  
February 1, 2318 (Stardate 139063)

Leo declared with emphasis, "Fold." He pushed his cards away as though they emitted radioactivity. Nearly thirty hands of poker played out after he took his seat a mere ninety minutes since his arrival, and his five stacks of poker chips dwindled to one very short stack, just enough to cover the blinds on the next hand. Not enough to stay in the game without a "re-buy," which came with its disincentives, including favors for the host, Ensign Tom Maroni.

Said the host, offering Leo a sad grin: "Just not your night." He glanced at the marine officer to his left. "Jelly, the bet's to you."

Leaving the table with nothing more than a wan smile, Leo pocketed his meager chips in the pocket of his civilian jacket, a dark-brown fake-hide jacket that came to his waist with a wooly lining that kept his neck warm inside the empty storage compartment that Tom repurposed as a party hall to host poker and libations.

Within that commandeered empty storage compartment on the twenty-seventh level of the starbase, Leo approached the floor-to-ceiling beverage servitor, a silent sentinel against the bulkhead housing the frigid beverages. A much smaller bin of warmer options sat nearby, catering to those with more delicate tastes. Two marines pilots stood next to the beverages; one unknown to Leo.

"Knocked out again, eh, Leo?" quipped the lanky pilot on the right, a first lieutenant with shaggy black hair that obscured his dark brown eyes. Leo knew him as Tam Pelt, a Trill who earned his colorful nickname, "Yak," from his human comrades in the squadron.

Taking a bottle of ale from the servitor, Leo offered a smirk and a shrug. "You know what they say, right? 'Unlucky in cards, lucky in the law.'"

"I thought it was 'lucky in love,'" chimed the other pilot, a short woman with straight black hair, brown eyes, and dark skin. She spoke with a light and lilting accent heard near London on Earth.

Leo smirked and took a sip, giving the woman a wry smile. "I haven't found that to be the case so far."

Yak looked between them, humor dancing in his eyes. "I heard that," he agreed. He gestured to the woman and introduced her, "Leo, this is the rook, Jillian Al-Adel, callsign Jake. She joined the squadron on Tuesday. Jake, this is Leo Verde."

Jake wore the maroon/black jumpsuit of pilots on flight ops, her first lieutenant's rank insignia sitting on the shoulders. She acknowledged Leo with a salute-like nod. "All right, Leo," she said, offering her hand.

Leo transferred his bottle to the other hand and accepted her handshake. "Yeah, all right," he replied in kind. "Welcome to the Crazy Eight."

"Thanks," she said with a smile. "Yak says you're with JAG?"

"That's right. I've only got a week on you. I arrived the Sunday before last. So that makes us the FNG of our respective units."

"He's a light commander, Jake," Yak informed her.

Jake stood to attention, her expression a mixture of respect and concern. "Sir, my sincere apologies."

Yak and Leo replied, "No, no... Call (him/me) Leo."

Laughter rippled throughout the room, especially those from the poker table.

"Am I that predictable?" Leo asked with amusement and chagrin.

From the table, Tom said, "You're already famous, Leo."

Leo said at Jake's chagrin, "I'm not in uniform, and I don't care for all the pomp and circumstance. I mean, this is supposed to be a casual gathering, right?"

"Yeah, he's one of the good ones," confirmed Yak. "Tom vouches for him."

Jake relaxed. "Ah..." She appraised Leo as though seeing him in a new light, then furrowed her brow for a different reason. "Direct commission? Maybe a reservist?"

"Academy, class of oh-seven," Leo corrected her with a shake of his head. "I pulled space duty from '12 to just about two months ago. Served on frigates the whole time with the Border Service. I did quite a few hot boardings with Marines having my back. That's why I feel at home with this bunch."

Understanding became apparent in her gaze on him. "Indeed. Then, you're most welcome, Leo. Not many of your Fleet brethren are as lax with the protocol as you."

"I took ill the day they surgically implanted the massive stick up all the ensigns' asses," Leo quipped, earning grins from most of the marines in the room. "In seriousness, though, I prefer treating everyone with respect. And I guess now I'm making sure of that in JAG."

"Cheers," Jake said with a salute of her bottle.

"All part of the service," Leo promised. "If you or anyone else here needs help, come find me. I'm happy to listen."

The doors from the corridor admit a lieutenant, junior grade, and a marine staff sergeant, both wearing the uniform of the day with their Shore Patrol badges and armbands. A third officer, a commander with large dark brown eyes betraying Betazoid heritage, glanced around the room and sighed.

A declaration of righteous admonition erupted from the commander, "I must tell you I am shocked - SHOCKED! - to find out there is gambling going on in this compartment!"

Tom did not miss a beat. He approached the commander, tray in hand, and handed it to them. "Your chips, sir."

"Oh, thank you, Tom, you're a true gentleman," came the reply. Tray in hand, they made their way to Leo.

Leo grinned. "Xaraq, good to see you again." As Yak and Jake moved off to allow the two commanders to speak, he lowered his tone. "I was hoping to run into you here."

Commander Trael Xaraq said nothing to Leo. Instead, they pulled out an ale identical to Leo's and frowned. "Hey, Tom?"

"Yes, sir?" Tom replied from the table.

"Got anything harder than this? Leo's about to drop a loaded cargo container on my head."

"Yes, sir!" The ensign rose from the poker table and passed the deck to another ensign wearing a dastar turban. "Shukla, take over while I run over to get the good stuff?"

Shukla nodded, accepted the deck, and slid into Tom's now-empty seat. Tom moved with haste toward the exit and disappeared behind the sliding door.

Xaraq sighed. They replaced the bottle inside the servitor, undid their shoulder clasp, and then pulled the flap open of the maroon jacket. "Should we wait until I have something to deaden the pain?"

Leo stuck his tongue out at them. "It'll be fine. Let's find a quiet corner to chat."

That caused Xaraq to look around. They indicated the hatch in the room's corner. "There's an anteroom used for clerical work, should be suitable. Follow me." Without waiting, their strides are quick and confident. "Mister Shukla," they called out, "inform Ensign Maroni that we will return in fifteen minutes."

Shukla gave a silent nod, then returned to the table to deal cards.



As Xaraq referred to it, the anteroom turned out to be an entire bullpen-style office intended for use by the logistics staff assigned to that level. However, because of under-utilization, only a desk, a table, and six chairs existed. Xaraq grabbed one and turned it around to sit backward while Leo took another nearby to sit opposite him at the intimate table.

"You should know that Thelk has a penchant for keeping tabs on you, my friend," Xaraq began without preamble. "He has even ordered me to keep him informed of any interactions you and I may have for the foreseeable future."

The information brought a wince to Leo's expression. "I take it that this is your way of telling me to watch what I say around you?"

"Gods, no!" they scoffed. "I don't report to him. I'm answerable only to the admiral, per standing orders. Thelk can go take a flying fuck at an unsealed stem bolt, for all I care!"

Off Leo's surprised gaze, they continued, "In the short time you've been here, you have been nothing short of impressive. If that makes someone like Thelk nervous, the more of that, the better!"

"Is he a Slimy Creature?" Leo asked, invoking the term used by many a marine.

"One of the slimiest."

"So... should I infer from this discussion that I have the support of the Shore Patrol?"

Xaraq took a swig from the bottle and nodded. "Myself, the deputy, most of the supervisors. You won over many of our marine non-comms over something you did for one of the Gunnys on duty down in holding."

Leo deflected, "Except for Drake."

"Drake is not someone you should care about. Whenever Captain Kline opens his mouth to bark orders, that thing hanging down in the back of his mouth is Drake's chin," they scoffed.

The visual image resulted in Leo allowing a chortle to escape. "Fair enough," he said. "Should I be worried about Thelk?"

"Not at all. Put him out of your mind," Xaraq assured him, placing his near-empty bottle on the tabletop. "Thelk only cares about Thelk, and his moves are nothing more than political acts to ensure he ends up with a rear admiral's medallion on his shoulder."

Leo shot Xaraq a crooked smile. "That's status quo for the flag ranks, and I say that as an admiral's son, twice over."

"Well, the old man's one of the good ones," they mentioned. "I would march into hell even if it was a flimsy whim on his part."

"Never met him," he admitted. "Not that I would be on his call sheet or anything."

They smiled. "He's not one for the spotlight. But I will say he knows who you are."

"Why?"

"I told him," Xaraq said with pride. "I meet with the man every morning to review activity reports over breakfast."

Leo smirked. "Well, he *was* in tactical and security before he became a ship captain. Makes sense."

"You should meet him. Remind me, and I'll set something up for you."

With both hands raised, Leo shook his head. "I'm all right. Whenever I meet an admiral, they don't see me; they see my parents."

They snorted. "The perils of being a Starfleet legacy."



Captain Victor Kline, Starfleet Marine Corps, frowned at the empty glass before him within the starbase's officers' club on level eleven. He tilted the empty glass on its edge in his customary seat, overlooking the incoming traffic to the base's interior docking facility. He rolled it along the surface of the table. As he watched the glass reflect the overhead lighting in a particular pattern, he heard approaching steps behind him, but did not turn his head.

"Here," said a feminine voice as another glass of his favorite liquor settled before him. "Since you seem unable to find the energy to ask for another."

Kline looked up into the face of Lieutenant Karen Holiday, one of the many officers working within the administration department for the starbase, her specialty being management analysis. He smiled at her, admiring the cut of her civilian attire, allowing his eyes to wander over her curves. "Thank you, Karen," he said, accepting the glass. While he spoke to her, his focus never left the allure of her décolletage.

If she noticed, she did not inform him. She settled into the seat across from him and smirked. "What's eating you?"

"No one. You offering?" he asked as he lifted his dark eyes to meet hers, his smile turning wolfish.

"Settle down, boy," she scoffed. "I heard something about your fiefdom in holding being interrupted by JAG."

The mention of JAG forced a deep scowl on Kline's face. "That fucking candy-assed JAG lawyer is ruining everything. I liked it better when Kyle Gregson was here to help me out."

"Kyle's transfer was inevitable, Vic," she said. "No way the new JAG admiral would let a high-profile base like this not have proper representation. One lawyer serving a base population of over five thousand?"

"Hey, he was doing a good job."

Holiday laughed. "I think the old man begged to differ. Kyle's been reassigned to Earth, where they can monitor him."

"No, this all started when the old man took command last year," Kline noted.

"To your benefit, the old man is off-station at the moment. You have time to solve your problems."

He muttered as he cast his eyes down to his drink. "I prefer to operate without everyone looking over my shoulder."

She conceded, "You accomplished a lot when JAG was on your side, and the base CO was more interested in returning to space duty. But, listen..."

Kline leaned in, eager to hear Holiday's words.

"You need to cool down. Think things through," she finished, her tone losing its joviality. "There are ways to resolve this issue without calling attention to yourself. The more you fight openly, the worse it'll be for you. Also, remember that the candy-ass you're going up against is pretty well-connected."

He rolled his eyes. "Like I give a shit." Kline touched his glass and offered, "Tell them I'm doing my best despite the interference."

"And *we* appreciate that," Holiday replied, her words carrying a pointed inflection. "However, do not let pride interfere with the greater goal. You must ensure you continue to be an asset."

"Or else?" Kline rejoined.

She shrugged. "You become a liability."

A flash of fear showed on his features before he adopted a scowl. "They understand Verde is the problem and not me, right? I cannot operate under these conditions. No one could." Beyond his forceful tone, Kline's eyes locked onto Holiday's expression as he pled his case, seeing if his words swayed her to his argument.

"That's an indictment against your lack of imagination than circumstance. Others operate in an environment far more stringent than this and see success daily," she informed him playfully. "If excuses are all you've got, remember that we're not interested in hearing them. We care about one thing."

"The mission," he said with a brief nod, as though recalling a previous conversation. "Understood."

She patted him on his forearm. "Vic, you're useful to us. Everyone knows this. But, you need to figure out a way to avoid Verde becoming an obstacle."

Kline stared at the amber-brown liquid within the old-fashioned glass. With a single motion, he picked it up and knocked back the two fingers' worth of smoothness down his throat. With a swallow and a smile, he told her, "I'm a marine, Karen. We improvise, adapt, and overcome." He got to his feet, leaving the two empties on the table.

"Do you have a plan?" she asked as he stood over her. She straightened her posture to attract his attention to her bust. Her motion succeeded as Kline's eyes drifted over her form.

Then his eyes snapped to hers, and with an open-mouthed grin, he nodded. "I will handle Verde."

#### Chapter End Notes

The [Starship Reykjavik](#) character "Shukla" makes a cameo appearance with the kind permission of the series author, [Gibraltar](#)

## Res Ipsa Loquitur

Starbase 8  
In orbit of Memory Alpha  
Level 37, Section Gamma-Two (Quartermaster's Office)  
February 4, 2318 (Stardate 139081.5)

Chief Warrant Officer Rostya James "RJ" Federov waited patiently within the billeting office, casually conversing with Ensign Tom Maroni. In his Alaskan Russian-accented voice, he told Tom, "Milly asked when you were going to drop by for dinner."

Tom offered a smile. "It's been a while, hasn't it?"

"At least six months," RJ replied. "She worries that it's a commentary on her cooking skills."

The ensign raised both hands in a placating gesture. "Her cooking is top-notch, Chief. It's just been jam-packed the last couple of months." As the Chief's doubting expression caught his attention, Tom added, "Tell you what, tell Milly I'll be by next week. Any night she wants."

RJ nodded and pointed. "I'll hold you to that."

The doors parted to admit Leo inside the large office complex from the Monday-busy corridor. "Sorry, I'm late."

Tom grinned. "You're not late." He wasted no time, turning to RJ. "Leo, meet RJ Federov. He is an old friend of the family and one of the best systems specialists on this side of Vulcan. RJ, this is Leo Verde. He's with JAG, and he's got a problem."

Leo and RJ exchanged handshakes and gauged each other. Leo, being a short and stocky man himself, grinned at the relief of not having to constantly look up during discussions. RJ's lack of facial hair and dirty blonde hair set him apart. They released their hands and moved back.

RJ asked, gesturing to Leo's build, "You play football? You look like you'd make a decent full-back."

"Back on Earth," Leo admitted with a wide grin as RJ guessed his usual role during matches. "I haven't found a team here on the base if one exists."

Tom pointed to RJ. "He's been trying to put a couple of teams together."

The older man frowned, sucking air through his teeth derisively. "Not much appreciation for a glorious sport on this base."

"Well, if you put one together, let me know," Leo told him. "I've been mostly doing weights and running the track since I arrived. I would love to get back into team sports."

Excited at the prospect, RJ nodded. "Definitely."

Leo turned to Tom and wondered, "Is there someplace private we can talk?"

"Lott!" Tom bellowed. When the petty officer across the room turned toward him with an expectant expression, he continued, "Cover the front for me? If the boss asks, I'm conferring with a lawyer from JAG."

"Aye, sir," replied Lott.

In a secluded conference room with a round table and four chairs, Leo filled in RJ after making Tom promise not to say anything. Subsequently, he had a handful of queries. "Have you discussed this with the old man?" RJ asked first.

Leo exchanged a glance with Tom, who sat as he had been throughout the entire recitation of events. "No," he finally answered. "Until I have some hard evidence, I don't know there's a *this* to discuss yet."

RJ raised a dismissive hand. "Good, because I think this would cause a warp core breach between his ears. He has a reputation."

Offering nothing more than a grim expression, Leo nodded. "As legend has it."

"I can get a message to him for when he returns."

Leo shrugged. "I don't know if that's a good idea, but I'll trust your judgment."

"Fair enough. Next question: what happens if I go digging around and they catch me?"

"How good are you?" Leo wondered with a smirk.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, if Tom says you're the best, will you get caught?"

RJ glanced at Tom, then returned his attention to Leo and snorted. "I like you. We have to kick the ball around sometime."

"All in good time," Leo promised. "How soon do you think?"

Considering the task, RJ paused as he framed his response. "Depends on what I find. If it's nothing, then it'll be quick. Otherwise, if you come to find me or Tom doesn't hear from me by tomorrow..." he trailed off to leave the rest unspoken.

Before Leo could ask how Tom interjected, "I'll know what to do."

Leo nodded, "Good. Questions?"

Neither officer said anything.

"Then, if you need me, you know where to find me," Leo moved to leave but paused. "And thanks, RJ. Appreciate it."

"Hey! Thank me for getting back into shape for that full-back spot." RJ patted Tom's shoulder. "And you, *sir*, I will see you at dinner next week."



Leo left the quartermaster's office smiling, but his excellent humor only lasted until he reached the turbolift to return to the office. When the doors parted to admit his entry, Commodore Thelk stood inside, and both men made the briefest of eye contact.

Thelk's Tellarite heritage, specifically his tusks, resulted in a resting scowl.

"Commodore," Leo greeted him with a nod as he entered. "Level Four," he ordered.

Thelk waited until the lift engaged to reply. "Commander," he snorted when he spoke, speaking his rank with disdain.

Leo chose not to turn his head toward the Tellarite, despite the little hairs on the back of his neck standing on end. It wasn't until the lift rose to level twenty that his sense proved him right.

"Lift, halt!" ordered Thelk. "Commander, you and I need to have a chat."

Leo turned around to face the Tellarite flag officer with his hands behind his back, an attempt to show some subtle penitence toward his superior officer. "Yes, sir?"

Thelk's eyes scanned him from head to toe. He did not like whatever he saw as his lips curled downward in disapproval. "This investigation you're pursuing against Captain Kline? Drop it."

"Sir," Leo said, slumping his shoulders, "I apologize, but I'm not precisely certain of my footing-"

"You're damned right you're not," muttered Thelk over Leo's words.

"-in this conversation. May I have permission to speak freely?"

Thelk again eyed Leo instead of responding, forcing the corners of his lips even further downward while showing his agitation through bared teeth and the roots of his tusks. He used that expression many times to intimidate others into backing off. When Leo appeared unaffected, Thelk grunted, "Fine, Verde. I'll give you enough latitude to say what you will. Permission granted."

Leo brought his hands forward and rejoined them in front. "Thank you. I'm not sure what you mean, sir. I'm merely making preliminary inquiries into the policies and procedures of the holding comp-"

"You're digging into things you shouldn't," the commodore growled at him. "So what if some corporal sat in the brig for a few nights? What's it to you, huh? Are you mating with her?"

Stunned by the sudden aspersion against Torres, Leo lowered his hands and stiffened. "Watch it," he responded, lowering his voice to match Thelk's. "I understand that Tellarites like to use insults to communicate with people. I'll make accommodations for Civil Conversation, but if you want to be Civil, direct yourself to comment about me. Don't drag an innocent marine into it."

"You're dragging another innocent marine," scoffed Thelk. "Captain Kline has been commanding that company for over two years without incident. Suddenly, some *sea lawyer* comes in and thinks he knows better?"

Leo shook his head. "I'm not a sea lawyer. I'm an *actual* lawyer."

"Because you couldn't perform as a proper line officer on a space assignment." Off of Leo's surprised expression, Thelk reveled in the direct hit made. "Oh, yes. I'm well aware of your contemptible service out on the border. How you stayed in Starfleet..."

Breaking eye contact with Thelk, Leo dropped his gaze to the lift floor and sighed.

"I know that you're the only son of Admiral Rey Verde and Admiral Bran McLaren," Thelk answered his subtle query. "You're a *pitiful* shadow of those fine officers. I'm sure your mother did everything she could to keep you in uniform by providing an escape to the JAG Corps. And the only consolation I have is that you will never be trusted with the command of good people in the field."

Again, Leo said nothing to Thelk's words, because nothing was untrue. Instead, he brought his eyes back up to Thelk's.

"Nothing to say to that?" Thelk advanced on Leo, bringing his snorts close enough to be felt and smelled. "Then I'll assume that I've made my point. I expect you will return to processing paperwork in your office soon."



Leo smiled at Thelk. "I presume, then, that you're ordering me to drop my inquiry?"

Another scoff from the commodore. "You're showing your incompetence, time and time again, Verde. Yes, it's an order. Drop the inquiry. *Now.*"

"My sincere apologies, Commodore," Leo said with a slight bow. "I'm unable to obey that order." He lifted his voice so that the computer could hear him. "Resume."

The lift returned to its upward ascension within the starbase. Thelk sputtered at the refusal. "Insubordination?" Then he grinned as the realization dawned on him. "You make it too easy to exit you from the service."

Keeping his smile, Leo shook his head. "No, sir. The order itself is illegal. As you so eloquently reminded me, I'm no longer in the space service. The JAG Corps is not subject to orders from the local command staff, as it's expected that we might have to investigate and prosecute matters involving said staff. If you want me to drop an investigation, you'll need to speak with Admiral Devereaux, who will then speak to Captain Ch'charhat. If they agree, then I'll drop my investigation." He pointed to his chest just as the doors parted to allow him access to level four.

Fuming under the riposte's effects, Thelk growled again, "You're assigned to this duty station for at least one tour, *Lieutenant Commander*. It is best to remember that you need to work alongside base personnel to be effective at your job. Your effectiveness will drop precipitously if you continue as you have. Getting the cooperation of your fellow officers is difficult when they actively dislike you."

Leo stepped beyond the door but held his hand up to keep it from closing. "Commodore, I'm in the JAG Corps. Just seeing us walking down the corridor causes active dislike toward us. Have a nice day, sir." He stepped back and released his grip. Before Thelk could respond, the lift doors closed, and he wore an uncharacteristic slack expression.

## Ex Turpi Causa Non Oritur Actio

Starbase 8  
In orbit of Memory Alpha  
JAG Complex  
February 7, 2318 (Stardate 139102.35)

"You found nothing?" asked Leo incredulously. Seated behind his desk, he stared up at RJ, who stood a mere foot away from the front edge.

RJ shook his head, then sighed. "I'm so sorry, sir. After checking the backup copies on the secondary and tertiary cores, I could not locate an uncorrupted version of the records you asked for."

"*Corrupted?* Is that possible?" Leo wondered.

"Starfleet employs several solid tried-and-true data health processes to lower the chances of corruption to almost nil, like regular diagnostics. When those show a problem, the data systems specialists will run optimization and repairs, and when all else fails, there're typically backups to recover from on the other cores."

Leo eyed RJ warily. "You're telling me this, but something in your tone..."

RJ pressed his lips together to express his baffled state of mind. "It's highly unusual to have the original and both backups unrecoverable like this. My instincts are that this was deliberately done, but no evidence points to who, why, or how. Whoever did this was fucking good. Better than me, maybe."

As he rose from his seat to walk around his desk, Leo leaned against the front and asked, "Is there someone else we can bring in on this? A friend of yours that might know how to get the data back?"

"It's not likely," RJ admitted.

"Damn it," Leo spat. He folded his arms across his midsection.

"I'm truly sorry to disappoint you. Tom said how important this was--"

He stopped him from speaking. "RJ, it's fine. They must have been exceptionally thorough if they left no trace."

RJ offered, "I could still reach out and have someone from--"

"I believe you. And I didn't mean to doubt your abilities like that." Leo lowered his eyes as his tone signaled his contrition.

"You know what, sir," RJ said, using the honorific for the first time since meeting Leo, "given what's at stake, it's okay. I wasn't expecting this, either."

Leo stared at his screen with a crestfallen expression. However, he recovered with a forced grin. "Not your fault. And I appreciate you taking the time to look into this for me. If you need anything, RJ..."

Forcing a grin, RJ nodded, "I know, sir. You don't owe me anything, but I'm glad to know you." He stepped forward and offered his hand.

As they shook hands, Leo reminded him, "Whenever you get that team together, you got yourself a full-back."



Corporal Angela Torres sat next to Leo at the round table. Martinez took the seat across in the small pub called "The Delta, Star, and Anchor" on the commercial level of the starbase. The pub owner, a Bolian woman named Tex, served three decades in the Starfleet Marines as a senior non-comm. Because Leo explored the level, one night of animated discussion made them fast friends. Leo shortly became one of the few non-marines welcomed openly, the others being Xaraq, RJ, and everyone's favorite best friend, Tom Maroni.

Torres sat quietly as Leo explained Federov's latest update. She asked, "So... that's it? Are we done? Are they going to get away with it?"

Leo stared at the top of the table. "Unfortunately. I spoke with the captain; she's disappointed as well. But we don't have any other hard evidence to pursue action. So, we'll have to wait for them to commit another violation."

Ale scoffed. "I'm sure they're being cautious now that they've been called to the carpet. And now we're all going to watch our backs because these guys are everywh--" He stopped speaking as someone came up from behind Leo.

Ale splashed over Leo's head, shoulders, chest, and back; the excess pooling on the table's surface. Shortly after, an unapologetic voice said, "Oh, wow, I didn't see you sitting there, sir."

Leo wiped at his face, and Torres got to her feet. She growled at the marine holding the glass without bothering to hide her displeasure. "That's a piss-poor apology for drenching a senior officer, *Private*."

The private first class, a female human holding the glass, shrugged. "I don't take advice from those who turned their back on the company."

Three additional human male marines rose from their seats at a table across the barroom floor and approached their table. All of them,

including the PFC, wore black and grey battle dress uniforms as they enjoyed the bar's atmosphere. Several other marines in attendance glance their way, though a high-ranking fleet officer in uniform drenched in ale was cause for amusement and bemusement.

"It's all right, Corporal," Leo said, standing up and wiping the excess fluid from his chest. He added, just within earshot of the additional marines. "Nothing a quick laundry can't fix." He gestured to the bar. "Hey, Mike? Can I get a fresh ale for the private?"

Mike, the barkeep, shifted his eyes between Leo and the advancing marines. "Yeah, sure," he said, wary of the trouble brewing under his charge. "Sure thing, Leo."

The presence of more marines, wearing knowing and satisfied grins on their faces, made Leo's tiny hairs stand up on end. His eyes darted between the flanking positions of the marines and realized that they were intentionally provoking a conflict. As their table sat two steps from the bar, Leo reached for the newly poured ale and offered it to the private. "There you go. A fresh pint."

Smirking at the others, the private raised the pint above Leo's head and poured it similarly.

Leo did not move to avoid it, letting the whole pint pour over his forehead, face, and chest. He once again wiped at his face and raised an arm to prevent Torres from participating. "Stay where you are, please," he told her. "Let me handle it."

"But-" she protested.

He interrupted her. "It's just a misunderstanding."

The lead corporal of the group noted, "Oh, *sure*. A complete misunderstanding, *sir*."

"Typical candy-assed JAG-off," muttered the private in front of Leo. She asked him, "Couldn't hack it on space duty, *sir*?"

Leo offered a warm smile. "Apparently not, private. And my patience with you is wearing thin."

She chuckled. "Did you hear that? *His* patience with *us* is wearing thin." The other marines joined in their laughter.

"Leo," called Mike. "You okay?"

He did not turn his head to address the bartender. Instead, he raised his voice. "I'm fine, thanks. Just discussing with my new friends here."

A lance corporal to his right snickered, "Oh, we're not your friends. We're here because you need a memorable education regarding your position here."

Leo glanced at the man before focusing on the lead corporal. "What *exactly* is my position? Tell me."

"You should know better than to mess with marines, especially Captain Kline," informed the lead corporal. "You gambled and lost; now it's time to pay up."

Leo patted his uniform as though looking for his wallet. "I don't carry any money on me, sorry."

The private first class reached out with her left hand and said, "Then we'll take it out of your ass instead."

Torres slapped away the Private's hand, then defensively positioned herself before Leo. Her tall, muscular stature gave the Private pause as she considered her new opponent. "You'll have to get through me first."

Martinez got to his feet, but Leo showed him his palm and gestured he should sit. "Just watch," he ordered.

"Yes, Lieutenant," the lead corporal said menacingly. "Watch us beat the fuck out of this asshole, so you'll know what not to do in the future."

Closing the distance between them, the private swung at Torres while the corporal did the same to Leo.

Torres effortlessly stopped the attack with an arm block, then countered by stepping inside the held arm and elbowing the private in her sternum. Given their difference in height and weight, the more prominent woman used her total body weight to deliver the blow. The force of the hit pushed the private backward until her back hit the edge of the wooden bar.

Leo did nothing. He saw the punch coming and leaned his cheek up to ensure an impact on his orbital bone instead of his eye. He pulled back to minimize damage, but still fell to the deck. With his other eye, he saw an imposing figure standing within view.

"STAND FAST!" barked a loud voice from the entrance to the bar. Everyone looked towards the source of the deep voice.

Gunnery Sergeant Tolliver stood with his hands on his hips. His practiced stare froze the quartet of marines in their tracks, none willing to challenge the senior non-comm. "What in the hell do you think you're doing?"

The lead corporal stammered, "Gunny, we weren't doing anything."

"That's not exactly what I saw," Tolliver replied, scowling at the corporal. "Looked to me like four marines asking for brig accommodations to reflect on their poor choices."

The private first class scoffed. "Captain would have us out of there in five minutes, Gunny, and you know it. He's the one who sent us-"

"Shut your mouth, private!" yelled the lead corporal. "The fuck is wrong with you?"

"It's beginning to make sense," Tolliver said. He nodded and then folded his arms. Behind him, Commander Xaraq and six badge-wearing

members of the Shore Patrol appeared in view. The Gunny, sensing them, turned around and nodded. "Commander."

"Gunny."

Tolliver chuckled a thumb toward the law enforcement detail and ordered, "The four of you, fall in. We'll take a little walk upstairs to have an abrupt conversation with the Shore Patrol." When they hesitated to obey the order, the Gunny lowered his voice to show his anger. "Don't make me repeat myself, marines. Fall in, right the fuck now." He pointed at the empty deck next to him to punctuate his urgency.

Each one settled into a column formation on Tolliver's side, awaiting his next order. None of them cast a glance toward Leo, Ale, or Torres. Xaraq joined Leo as the Gunny led away the offending group.

"You all right?" they asked with a tone of concern.

Leo reached up to his cheek and felt the tenderness there. "I'll live."

They offered a hand up, and under Xaraq's impressive arm strength, Leo got to his feet with ease. "That was stupid."

"Yeah, I guess I should've ducked or something," he admitted sheepishly.

Xaraq tilted his head. "What? No, I meant them. Striking an officer is a guaranteed court-martial."

Martinez stepped forward after getting to his feet. "Commander, I saw the whole thing."

Mike added from the bar, "I did, too."

They nodded. "Thanks. We'll take your statements upstairs as we arrange alternate accommodations for those four." Xaraq shot a smirk at Leo. "I don't trust the holding company to be fair and just about this situation."



The following day, while reading the report from the Shore Patrol, Karen Holiday sighed as she sat inside her private office. She flipped through the pages of the entire report, backward and forward, in a repetitive motion, not bothering to reread it but distracting herself as she considered her options.

The Shore Patrol took the four marines into custody. The witness testimony taken from inside the bar, including the junior non-comm with Verde and the JAG lieutenant who sat at the table watching the affair, along with the bartender and eight other patrons, resulted in a litany of felony charges. Faced with being sent off to a penal colony, the Shore Patrol convinced the four to admit that their company commanding officer, Captain Victor Kline, ordered them to make an example of Commander Verde.

As a result, the Shore Patrol arrested Kline on their testimony, and he and they were now being held together in the Shore Patrol's small holding pen. Commander Xaraq wrote the report and noted that the starbase's commanding officer received a copy. Notably, Kline chose Captain Reter as his counsel under the circumstances.

It took but thirty seconds for her to land on an appropriate solution.

She opened her desk drawer and reached inside to touch a device secured to the underside of the desk. A small, black communications device appeared as she retrieved it. With a flick of her wrist, the device opened to allow her to access the controls within.

"Eight-Tango-One," she intoned into the audio pickup.

Another feminine voice responded. "Eight-Tango-One acknowledged. Send your traffic."

"Delta-Two advisement: Plan Sierra to be terminated due to critical mission failure. Recommend janitorial deployment three-three-niner."

"Copy. Delta-Two shall be advised."

Karen felt relief at the response. "Nothing further. Clear."

An audible click signified the unnamed person closing their end of the channel. Karen closed the device, replaced it underneath her desk, slid the drawer closed, and locked her fingerprint to her biometric signature.

She accessed the secondary computer core of the Starbase and found the backup folder she created for security. Familiar with Kline's weaknesses, she felt less confident in his capacity to solve the problem. She duplicated the database they had painstakingly corrupted within the system; a move to prevent JAG and its investigators from using it to confirm Kline's many violations of due process on their behalf. But the version she accessed contained every bit of the scrubbed data as a failsafe against his stupidity.

The database sat in a secured directory under a specified passcode. Swiftly, she duplicated the entire content onto an optical chip for transit. With a flick of her index finger against the intercom, she said, "Holiday to Chief Federov."

"Federov, here. Hello there, Karen. What can I do for you?"

With a Cheshire smile, she replied, "It's something I can do for you, RJ. Someone told me you were looking for data from the holding records?"

"That's right. You were talking to Xaraq?"

"Something like that," she replied cryptically. "Today is your lucky day."

## Sub Judice

Starbase 8  
In orbit of Memory Alpha  
JAG Complex, Level Four  
February 16, 2318 (Stardate 139168)

"Given the data placed in evidence provided by Chief Federov, Captain, I see no path forward that does not result in a guilty verdict via a general court-martial," intoned Reter.

Kline sat across from the attorney, showing no emotion. "Several experts told me that the database corruption rendered it completely irretrievable. I find it hard to believe that this Chief Federov performed a miracle."

Reter leaned forward in his seat. He touched the display on his PADD to call up the pertinent information. "You are correct in that Mister Federov found the database within the main computer corrupt, contaminated, and unrecoverable. However, another officer performing routine analysis on the record made a complete copy of the data before corruption. Once Mister Federov conducted an authentication procedure, the copy was determined to be of sufficient forensic quality."

"And this Mister Federov is qualified to make such determinations?"

"Captain Ch'charhat confirmed his credentials and accepted Commander Verde's petition to accept him as an expert in his field. Chief Warrant Officer Federov has an impeccable service record of over twenty-five years, all of them serving as a data systems specialist," Reter replied calmly.

The mention of Verde's name caused a vein to throb on Kline's forehead. "Who made the copy of the database?"

Reter tapped the PADD once more to call up the information. "A Lieutenant Karen Holiday, the base's management analysis officer, provided the copy to Mister Federov during his investigation." He skimmed the full report to glean what had transpired over the course of the weeks prior. "Oh, that is quite interesting."

Kline's reaction to hearing Holiday offering critical evidence against him left him reeling. He placed both hands atop the table, no longer hearing anything Reter had to add to the discussion. Instead, his mind ran through all the reasons she could have taken such action, none of which resulted in a net positive for his outcome. He felt the bile rising in his throat as the new information settling within him.

"If it were not for this Lieutenant Holiday, I doubt the prosecution would have a case against you," Reter noted thoughtfully. "However, as they have indicated that they will proceed with the case, we do have an offer from Commander Verde to avoid, head off, and circumvent the full proceeding of a court-martial."

Kline controlled his emotions by exhaling slowly and fixed a bitter gaze on Reter. "What *exactly* is the offer?"



Janeera read through the agreement with a puzzled look on her face. "I'm not quite understanding the motivation for this, Commander," she told Leo. Reter sat in the chair next to him; much as they were, they discussed his future with JAG.

Leo shrugged. "Uh, well, sir, it's just that I feel like there's something else going on here. This evidence landed in our laps far too easily. I think Kline's being cut loose by whoever is pulling the strings."

She glanced at Reter, who did nothing but stare back at her as Leo spoke. "Care to share your suspicions with the rest of us?" Janeera pondered aloud.

He sighed. "Not yet, sir. I'm still working on that. But, I think the best outcome here is to authorize the Separation Agreement, let him resign, and have the Bureau of Personnel note his discharge as 'Other than Honorable.' I feel that the Government is being very generous with the offer."

Janeera started as though she were about to add her thoughts to Leo's, but stopped herself. Instead, she turned to Reter. "And your client agrees with the offer?"

"Yes, sir. I have so informed the Captain of the consequences. He has authorized, sanctioned, and empowered me to proceed along this course," Reter said, holding a signed document on his PADD's display. "I have gone over all other possibilities and outcomes should he opt to go to court. He signaled his complete understanding during that meeting."

She frowned. With her right hand, she picked up her stylus and affixed her signature and code to the document. "Then I authorize this Separation Agreement as specified in the plea deal, and it shall be transmitted to the Bureau of Personnel forthwith." Janeera submitted the document to her yeoman for transmission and declared, "That takes care of the matter of *Federation v. Victor Kline*."

Leo rose from his seat, sensing the finality of her words. "Aye, sir. Thank you." He turned to Reter and offered his hand. "Great to work with you, Captain."

As Reter accepted the gesture, Janeera cleared her throat. "Leo, there is some good news on the same subject of the disposition of marine captains." She passed another PADD to Reter and smiled. "Congratulations, Captain."

Using his right hand, Reter reached out and took the device. He grinned. "Then it is official, authorized, and confirmed?"

Leo asked, "Is that what I think it is?"

Janeera got to her feet and offered her hand toward Reter. "It is. Captain Reter is formally transferred to JAG, effective this morning."

"Then let me add my congratulations and welcome, Captain," Leo said as the other two shook hands.

Reter grinned. "Thank you, Captain, Commander." He asked Janeera, "I assume from this transfer that my conditions were acceptable, satisfactory, and without objection?"

She nodded. "Yes, indeed. This leads me to inform you, Leo, that the Captain here will work alongside you for the foreseeable future."

Leo showed his confusion. "Really?" He cast a sidelong glance at Reter. "All I do is paperwork around here."

Janeera snorted. "'Paperwork,' right."



Lieutenant Karen Holiday sat within her private office in the small section of the starbase's administration complex when the former Captain Victor Kline announced himself for entry.

With little surprise, she sighed and rolled her eyes in disdain when he arrived, having anticipated his visit after the morning's events. She rose from her desk and walked around it to greet him. Standing and talking without inviting him to sit down would bring their discussion to a quick close, from her experience.

"Enter," she called.

Kline stormed through the door, wearing his civilian attire. He advanced on Karen Holiday angrily. "Why?" he asked, his voice trembling with fury.

Holiday grinned. "I don't understand why you're surprised, Vic. I warned you plenty of times to clean up your mess and solve the problem." He opened his mouth to protest, but she cut him off with a knife-hand gesture. "Ironically, you did exactly that. We loaned you one of our best specialists, and you did get the job done."

He brightened considerably. His expression hopeful, he started again, "Then-"

Her sharp tone prevented his thoughts from taking form aloud. "But your ego wasn't satisfied with that. You had to make a point."

Kline grimaced briefly but recovered to puff his chest outward and defiantly stated, "He needed to know his place. I had it on good authority that he would not let it drop."

"So, you sent four marines to go rough him up."

"Damn right," he said proudly.

Holiday sighed, shaking her head at the same time. "Vic... this is the problem. Verde is free to investigate anything he wants. That's his job. But we had already worked hard to remove any records of wrongdoing to cover your ass, and then you destroyed all of that work. My superiors were... not pleased." She wore a smirk as she said her last sentence.

"Hey... I was promised a position within the organization. And, as you said, I cleaned it up... I can still transfer over, can't I?" he asked, though her features showed he already knew the answer.

She smiled at him as though the idea were pure amusement. "I can't even tell you how underqualified you are for even the smallest role we have. We look for people who know how to handle themselves."

"I *was* handling it!" he roared, raising both hands above his head.

"Agree to disagree," she said with a sigh, leaning back until she touched the front of her desk and relaxed slightly. "It's time for you to enjoy your retirement now."

Seeing her unrepenting expression and the bored tone of her voice changed Kline's demeanor from frustration to fury. "We had a deal," his tone grew a growling edge.

She stared at him. "You became a liability, Vic. You should have taken my advice."

"No! This is *your* fault!" Kline suddenly lashed out with a wild backhand to her cheek, but Holiday's opposing hand reached up and caught it before he made contact. The loud slapping sound of her palm impacting the back of his hand startled Kline.

Her dark red hair flipped opposite her motion as she closed her fingers around his hand. Her grip tightly used his hand for leverage as she brought her right fist up and buried it in his midsection, hitting his solar plexus with a short, forceful punch.

Kline folded over and instantly collapsed to the ground as his ability to breathe became compromised by her paralysis of his diaphragm. He gasped and stared up at her with tears forming in his eyes, a series of rhythmic, guttural whines emanating from his lips.

Holiday's pleasant demeanor vanished. In a near-monotone voice, she told him, "I warned you, and you ignored me." She added a forceful kick to his stomach once again, drilling the same spot as before.

He spasmed on the ground, squinting through painful eyes as though to ask her why a second blow was necessary.

She shrugged, uncaring. "The first one was for daring to strike me. The second was to drive the lesson home. And the third one..." She advanced on him as he held his stomach, ready to strike him once more.

Despite the pain, Kline skidded across the floor until his back slammed against the wall in fear. He held his hands up in surrender.

"I'll save the third one for the next time you deign to darken my door," Holiday lowered her voice, allowing her anger to shine through. "You're done, here. There's nothing more I or anyone else wishes to do on your behalf." She waited a few moments to allow him to recover, and when he stopped holding himself, she ordered, "Now, get out."

With little dignity, Kline slowly reached his feet and strode toward the exit.

"Before you go," she said, adopting a more pleasant tone. "If you disclose your involvement in our little plan out here, trust me when I say that *you* will be *my* problem to solve. And my solution will be *permanent*."

His eyes widened as he understood the message. Saying nothing, he merely nodded, unable to meet her gaze as he looked down at the floor.

Victor Kline left her office, holding his midsection as he shuffled off-balance because of the throbbing pain.



Leo, Reter, Martinez, and Torres enjoyed a celebratory round of coffees and cocoa standing near the lieutenant commander's office door.

"With the database now on the record, Becky's informed me that her office will take up an investigation of the marine garrison," Leo added to the discussion after taking a hesitant sip from his mug. "I'm sure that will put me on the colonel's shit-list."

"I'm only aware of her reputation. If that holds true, then she will be difficult, troublesome, and problematic to work with in the future," Reter agreed, empty-handed.

Torres leaned against the wall. "So, what's next, sirs? More paperwork?"

Martinez chuckled. "Paperwork is how we got into this in the first place, isn't it?"

"Well," Leo began, "I-" He stopped as his eyes drifted over to the reception lobby. "Uh oh," he muttered.

Commodore Thelk had entered the JAG complex. Following a short and direct exchange with the yeoman, he approached Leo with determination.

Leo shifted his focus to Thelk when he was within a comfortable (or uncomfortable) distance and greeted him with, "Good afternoon, Commodore."

Thelk glared at Leo. "Report to the Command Conference Room tomorrow morning at oh-eight-hundred sharp, Commander. That's a direct order," he said with a growl in his tone. Without waiting for a response, he stormed away from the group as swiftly as he came.

Leo, unsurprised by the commodore's anger, responded, "Yes, sir."



## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Memory Alpha  
Department of Management Analysis  
Office of the Deputy Director  
February 17, 2318 (Stardate 139174.05)

Lieutenant Karen Holiday waited, seated in the ante-office where a watchful senior chief yeoman staffed the desk across from her. The yeoman never broke his gaze upon her, prepared to respond as if she were a threat.

A familiar voice called over the intercom. "Send her in."

The yeoman rose and gestured for Holiday to precede him until he could place his hand on the doorknob, open the door, and step aside to allow her access. Once inside, the yeoman closed it behind her. It was unusual not to see an automatic door as with almost everywhere else on the installation, but the deputy director tended toward anachronism regarding his office designs.

Holiday nodded and smiled toward the occupant behind the expansive desk, and noticed he was wearing civilian attire: a smart-looking suit and an identification badge. But she knew that given the circumstances, he could wear any uniform at any rank he chose in order to accomplish his mission. "Sir," she greeted him. "How can I be of service?"

The deputy director gestured to the open seat across from him, and when she settled in, he slid a PADD across his desk with such speed that if she had not caught it, it would have hit the deck after a short flight. "That came in early this morning. I didn't want to send it over comms. One of our loose ends has been tied."

Holiday tapped the PADD's input and waited for the security authorization to clear her for access. The first image made her smile. "Poor Kline. Serves him right." The departmental report on the death of Victor Kline in his suite on Risa laid out the scant details. She flipped to the second page to finish reading.

"Indeed," he replied curtly.

"I assume then that the Director was highly displeased?"

"The Director felt that given Mister Kline's emotional disposition, should he find himself compromised, he might use his meager knowledge of our operations to leverage any positive outcome for himself. I concurred."

"Understood." She looked up after reaching the end. "Our Chameloid janitor is doing very well."

"They are. That was an excellent recommendation."

"I'm pleased, sir," she said with a smile. "I wonder if perhaps..." She trailed off, lost in thought.

The silence led to a prompt. "Something on your mind?"

Her eyes flickered to his stony gaze, leading her to further contemplate her words. Finally, she admitted, "I was just thinking that if Verde continues to be a problem, the Director may see a need for a similar solution."

The deputy director grimaced. "The Director is aware of Commander Verde and, thanks to your report, further aware of any exposure." He pointed down at the PADD in her hands and said, "You may want to read the third report."

Holiday tapped twice to move forward and skimmed the first page. "I see."

"I thought you might find that enlightening."

She finished going through it once more. "All of this is confirmed?"

"I have full confidence."

"Then, it's going to be an interesting day for Leo Verde." She placed the PADD on the edge of the desk and leaned back in her seat. "Hold action?"

"For now."



"Commander," said Commodore Thelk, his single-colored eyes glaring at him from across the conference room table, "within one month of your arrival, you have seen fit to disrupt the operations of the marine garrison aboard." His snout twitched as he shared a look with the starbase's marine garrison commander, Colonel Sullivan, who only inclined her head to support Thelk's opening statement.

Leo silently listened to the superior officers across the table.

Thelk continued, "Your actions have caused a company commander to resign in disgrace, and now we have an entire regiment of marines under investigation by the Inspector General's office. Was it your intention to disrupt the daily operations of this starbase when you arrived, or is it your general SOP to bring chaos no matter where you go?"

Again, Leo remained quiet as he felt the question might be rhetorical. When he would not contribute to the discussion, Thelk groused, a deep rumble that increased until it became a growl.

"Answer me, Commander!" Thelk roared. His hooves flexed atop the table's surface, leaving fleeting vapor streaks punctuating his contempt.

"No, sir," Leo replied with poise.

"No, sir, *what?*" Thelk snarled.

Leo kept his breathing even, keeping his emotions in check. "No, sir, I did not intend to disrupt your daily operations. No, sir, it is not my standard operating procedure to bring chaos no matter where I go." He kept his tone respectful, though he knew what was coming next.

Thelk thundered, "Insolence!" He pointed his right hoof at Leo, "Theodore Keller and I graduated from the Academy together! Don't sit there all proud and innocent and think that I don't know exactly the type of officer you are! You have no place in Starfleet; I don't care how many admirals spawned you!" His rage created spittle that flew in specks from between his tusks and a line of moisture that dribbled from his lips.

The mention of Leo's former captain aboard *Hansen* would have forced a distasteful downward curl of his lips, but Leo refused to show any outward reaction. He heard no question in Thelk's diatribe; therefore, he chose silence as the most prudent option.

Sullivan placed a warning hand on Thelk's shoulder. "Commodore, decorum, *please*."

Her pleas did nothing to assuage the scorn and fury on Thelk's face. While his jaw was in action, the Tellarite's tusks moved almost independently on both sides of his mouth. Leo remained in his central vision as the low rumbling of his growling persisted.

Experiencing a sigh, the marine colonel showed her disappointment. "Commander, we both know the troubling circumstances of Victor Kline's departure. However, while your choices were in line with the letter of the procedure, you had several options for discretion open to you that might resolve the matter with a more... palatable outcome."

Thelk muttered, "That is putting it mildly."

Sullivan pressed her lips together, causing dimples to appear on her cheeks, but said nothing to chastise the flag officer. "That being said, understanding your service record and history, we know that your assignment to JAG was not your first career choice. If you had chosen a less disruptive avenue to pursue this Kline matter, the Commodore and I would have been in a better position to put your career back on a path you might prefer over the present."

That last sentence caused Thelk to shoot a surprised look at Sullivan. When she noticed his disconcertion, she closed her eyes and raised a hand to him to mollify any response that could derail her point. Instead, Thelk fumed in his seat.

"JAG was not my first choice," Leo admitted. "But, sir, with all due respect, I think you're approaching this issue with a flawed premise."

She furrowed her brow. "What do you mean?"

Leo opened his mouth to explain; however, before he could say a word, the door slid open. Seeing the gold-trimmed uniform of a Starfleet flag officer, he joined Sullivan and Thelk as they rose to their feet out of respect.

The latter officer nodded and said, "Welcome back, Admiral. Congratulations on your promotion, sir."

Entering with his hands behind his back, the unassuming flag officer smiled and nodded to Sullivan and Leo. He approached and occupied the head of the table. Now comfortable, the Admiral cast an expectant glance toward Thelk as everyone retook their seats.

"Uh, sir, we were just discussing the commander's performance and offering some career advice," Thelk's tone had none of the malice it held before. Instead, it seemed to Leo that all the storms had left his sails; the Admiral's presence brought a calming atmosphere.

The summary from Thelk amused the Admiral, whose graying hair seemed in a locked battle with his natural color, beginning at his temples. Despite his age, he still held onto his boyish features with only mild wrinkles around the eyes and lips. "Is that so, Thelk?" he asked, his accented Standard betraying his Russian upbringing.

"Yes, sir," replied Thelk in earnest.

The Admiral steepled his fingers as a Vulcan might. "And were I to ask Commander Verde for *his* honest opinion of your discussion, do you think he would agree?"

Thelk snapped a scowling glance at Leo. "I'm sure he *would*, sir," he uttered pointedly.

"Thelk," the Admiral raised a finger. "I'm sitting right here."

Chagrined, the Commodore turned and returned to a respectful repose. "My apologies, sir. I am uncertain that Commander Verde fully understands the point of our discussion."

"Yes, well," the Admiral noted, taking his eyes off the officers and letting his vantage drift toward the large windows to the surrounding space

beyond. He sighed. "There's been quite a lot of mixed messages. What is your specific issue with the commander's performance, Commodore? Be honest."

"Sir," Thelk's tone suddenly found its prior confidence, "ever since he has arrived, he has been set upon the dismantling of an excellent company. His interference reached a point where the commanding officer was forced to resign in disgrace. Furthermore, he comes to this base after having the audacity to question his captain while on a dangerous mission in the Border Service. Were it not for his *family* connections, he would have been permanently relegated to civilian status. Instead, he flaunts his legacy status by finagling a transfer to the JAG Corps and bringing ruin to a highly decorated regiment."

As Thelk made his case to his commanding officer, Sullivan closed her eyes and let out a sigh. To mask her discomfort, she lifted her hand to cover her eyes.

The Admiral frowned. "Wasn't the commanding officer of this supposedly 'excellent' marine company caught tampering with records?"

Leo responded with, "Yes, sir," before Thelk had a chance to. "Evidence of tampering and data deletion was found by Chief Federov, and Lieutenant Holiday provided copies of the altered data to support our case."

Thelk glared at Leo. "Commander, the Admiral was addressing me."

"Commodore," the Admiral countered, "'the Admiral' has a dislike for being referred to as if he were not present."

Thelk showed remorse by lowering his gaze and speaking with a contrite tone, saying, "My apologies, sir."

"This conversation goes beyond just us, as the Commander-in-Chief and the Judge Advocate General have already emphasized to me."

Thelk noted, "Sir, Admiral Devereux is not classified as a line officer."

"Admiral Sulu, however, is very much a line officer," the Admiral reminded him. "So, what exactly is the problem?"

At that moment, Colonel Sullivan spoke. "Admiral, I am of the opinion that although Commander Verde's actions were in accordance with procedure and policy, there were other more diplomatic options at his disposal."

"Oh, I'm certain he could have, Colonel," he agreed, earnest. With a sudden sucking sound from his teeth, he raised his right index finger and continued in an instructive tone, "However, I think the point you're trying to make is that Mister Kline was operating under your nose for so long a time that there is a fear that the findings within the Inspector General's report may hurt your chances of seeing a general's star on your uniform."

The truth hit home as the Admiral spoke, causing her face to flush crimson. "As you say, sir," Sullivan conceded with a nod.

"Perhaps, then, you could see this as an opportunity to adjust your leadership skills to a level requisite of a general," the Admiral offered. "And pray that I don't reach out to the Commandant of the Marine Corps and have you transferred elsewhere to make those improvements."

The colonel, feeling sufficiently daunted, nodded and leaned back in her chair, staring straight ahead.

"So, Commodore," the Admiral said as he leveled his gaze on Thelk.

"Sir?"

"You chastise Commander Verde for not obeying the letter of the law on the one hand, and you, Colonel Sullivan, would have him skirt the law on the other," the Admiral restated the problem from his perspective. "This feels like a tragedy in the making. The man's career has already taken a hit because of leadership failures."

Seeking support, Thelk looked to Sullivan, but she avoided making eye contact with anyone.

"A lot of mixed messages," repeated the Admiral, directing his words at no one in particular. He lifted himself off of his seat. "This is something we will work on."

Once again, everyone stood up, expecting the Admiral to leave soon.

Seeking to salvage the interaction with him, Sullivan offered lamely, "Congratulations on your promotion, Vice Admiral."

"Thank you, Colonel," the Admiral replied. "Oh, and speaking of promotions. Admiral Sulu asked me to bring this back from Headquarters." He reached into the side pocket of his uniform trousers and retrieved a box. "After speaking with Captain Ch'charhat and Admiral Devereux, it was decided that I should present this to you, Commander."

Leo took the box and opened it. Within, there was a complete set of rank insignias, signifying the rank of a full Commander in Starfleet. "Admiral?"

"Congratulations, Commander Verde. Well done." The Admiral approached Leo and offered his hand.

Leo accepted and smiled. "Thank you, sir."

When they released hands, the Admiral told him, "It might interest you to know that I've had the pleasure of serving under your father during the Gorn War when I held command of Task Group Charlie eleven years ago."

Leo blinked. "He never mentioned it, but then he wasn't forthcoming with war stories."

"No, I would imagine he wouldn't," the Admiral noted with sadness. "We lost a lot of good people during that conflict." He wondered, "Have you and he spoken lately?"

"Uh, not really, sir," Leo said with a shake. "I think he's still grappling with the hard truth of my career's trajectory."

The Admiral grinned. "He would. And he might not tell you directly, but you should know that he has always been proud of you."

"Thank you, sir," Leo replied softly, touched by that information. Then, he smirked at the Admiral's assessment. "You're right; he would never tell me that."

"Fathers and sons have tough relationships. There's a famous Russian saying, 'To you, your father should be as a god,'" said the Admiral. "Your father exemplifies that thinking."

Leo tilted his head, his expression betraying his confusion. "Sorry, but isn't that Shakespeare, sir?"

"No, no. It was my great-grandfather's great-grandfather, Anton Chekhov. Russian playwright," corrected Vice Admiral Pavel Chekov with a smile. "I named my son for him."

## Chapter End Notes

My thanks to all of my first-draft and beta readers for providing a lot of sound advice about story structure. I'm always seeking to improve my writing and having objective supporters is really helpful toward accomplishing that goal.

Stay tuned for Leo's next story, "Borderline Justice!"

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