

Constitution

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Constitution

by [LordMcCoveyCove](#)

Summary

Part Three of The Quarterdeck Breed

Stardate Unknown: RADM Winslow did not want to be kicked upstairs, but he goes where Starfleet points. That is, until the advent of the Constitution-class starship.

Notes

This story was originally published on the classic Ad Astra site on 23 February 2009, and written and published back in October 2002, both under a different name than my current nom-de-plume.

Historian's Note: This events of this story take place prior to Star Trek: Discovery.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

The Quarterdeck Breed By Lord McCovey Cove

Part Three: *Constitution*

Federation News Network Studios
San Francisco, Earth

"Welcome back," said the woman seated on the stage across from the Starfleet officer. "I'm Polly Kinsella and with us today is Rear Admiral Heathcliff Winslow, the current fleet operations liaison to the United Earth Space Probe Agency. Thank you again for joining us on *In Focus*, Admiral."

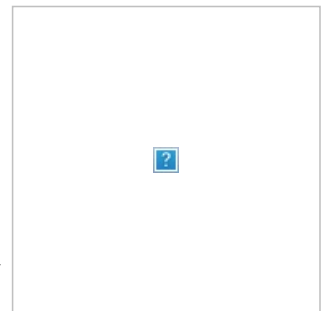
The rear admiral smiled for her and the cameras; it was a forced smile rather than a genuine one. "Thank you for having me. I'm happy to be here," he lied in a polite tone.

Polly's brunette hair was curled in ringlets across her brow and falling down across the shoulders of her maroon outfit. It was clear she was not a field reporter, but a studio anchor reading questions from the prompting display behind Winslow. It was a list of questions that Winslow's office had approved for use on the air, to prevent any information that was not for public consumption to be aired across the Federation. She smiled at him briefly before launching into the interview, "Admiral, let's address the controversial issue at hand first. Given the disastrous first contacts with the Klingon and Romulan empires, do you believe that we should continue to support our deep space exploration projects?"

Winslow had expected that question to be the first one, "If I didn't, Polly, I certainly would not be in Starfleet, working with the Agency to further that project." He used his most jovial tone, trying to play down his remark from being interpreted as hostile. In a more serious tone, he pointed out, "As for the wars with the Klingons and the Romulans, all I can say is that while Starfleet prefers to look for peaceful solutions to conflicts, we are going to encounter other cultures that do not share that viewpoint."

"But twice now we've had to mobilize Starfleet for war. How would you respond to the critics who tout Starfleet as nothing more than a collection of warmongering officers?" Polly asked.

He tried not to frown as he responded; "I would respond by saying that at no time did we ever start those wars. Our charter with the



Federation specifically states that we are to be used as a defensive force, not an expansionist fleet."

She smiled, "So why not send out unarmed science vessels instead of heavily armed military craft?"

"Well," he thought out loud, "I believe that the primary role of the exploration fleet is to boldly go where no man has gone before. Now, I'm a firm believer in the motto of the Boy Scouts of America, having been an Eagle Scout myself, that as explorers, we should take with us the tools to be prepared for anything. This means that we bring supplies to sustain us along the way, we bring the best scientists we have to discern what we discover, and we bring weapons to protect those brave men and women should they find themselves with no other option but to fight." Winslow tried another tack, raising his hand toward the anchorwoman to prevent her from asking another question, "When the pioneers of the Ancient West first embarked on their journeys to find a new home or even to find a new route to more natural resources, did we admonish them for bringing weapons to protect themselves?"

Realizing she would not win with that line of questioning, the prompter told her to ask, "What can you tell us about the Starship-class project?" It was then that a graphic representation of the gleaming white ship appeared in the upper right portion of the screen while Winslow began to reply.

Finally, he thought to himself. This was the real reason they had him go on the news feed in the first place. "Keeping with the tradition of exploration, we intend to send our sons and daughters into the great unknown in the very best of Federation technology. The Starship class of ship is by far our largest product ever constructed. She is nearly three hundred meters in length, and her crew compliment is well over four hundred people."

"You have a more than passing familiarity with the Antares-class, right Admiral?" asked Polly.

"I commanded the USS *Aldebaran* for eleven years," he replied with a nod. "She was a product of that class."

"What are some of the major differences between the two?" The visage of the Antares-class appeared in a side-by-side comparison with the Starship-class graphic.

Winslow saw the comparison out of the corner of his eye, "As you can see here, most of the difference lies in the sheer size and various capabilities of the two ships. The Antares-class of cruisers had a maximum speed of warp seven, while the Starship-class has the projected top speed of warp nine."

"Quite an achievement, Admiral."

"Some of the other differences you might notice beyond the shape of the hull are the addition of a secondary or engineering hull. Besides serving as the base of operations for the support services such as engineering and security, in certain circumstances or conditions, it's possible to separate the saucer section of the ship from the engineering hull and proceed at sublight speeds," explained Winslow as the graphic demonstrated. He was reading from the scripted responses off-screen and directly opposite him.

"You mentioned that this new class carries with it major improvements. Does this include weapons?" she baited him.

The rear admiral nodded, "It does. The Starship-class will carry a more powerful version of the ship-mounted phasers, and will feature additional torpedo launchers. Of course, these are all defensive weapons."

"Critics of the exploration programs have stated that arming our explorer vessels is an aggressive stance."

"Those critics have obviously never served a day of their lives in deep space," Winslow countered. "When we charter Federation colonies, we always provide two stipulations. The first is that each colony will have the protection of Starfleet, and the second is that they have the right to take with them an allotment of weaponry for defense. Some colonies have even formed militias and home guard organizations. Any occupation dealing with the necessity of being in space is not a safe one. How can we contribute to danger by not preparing our people with as many options necessary?"

Polly winced off-screen to her lack of experience with deep space jobs. "But colonies are stationary."

"That's true. However, when they do encounter hostile forces, and there have been documented cases of that happening, are you suggesting we send unarmed vessels to defend them?" Winslow looked at her with a sly smile.

She cleared her throat, "Let's return to the construction of this new class of ship, Admiral. Does it have a name?"

He nodded, "It does. Though, for the past twenty-eight months, she has been referred to simply as NCC-1700, but a month ago, the Agency suggested a name to the Corps of Engineers and it was confirmed just last week that the first vessel of this class will be *Constitution*."

"Named for the eighteenth century American vessel?"

"That's right. I suspect that this will also change the name of the class in time. Traditionally, you always name the class for the first vessel constructed," smiled Winslow.

"The Constitution-class," Polly tried the new name. "How many vessels are planned at this point?"

"Right now, we've laid the hulls for three vessels including *Constitution*. They have not yet been named, but the hull numbers are one-seven-zero-one and one-seven-zero-two. The next vessel to be completed will use an unfulfilled contract number from the Antares-class, and that will be one-zero-one-seven. Overall, the project calls for twelve to thirteen ships under the first run, and if the Agency will allow us to continue, then an additional ten will augment that fleet. Some of the names tossed around for those ships have been *Wasp*, *Exeter*, *Excalibur*, *Constellation*, and *Farragut*," answered Winslow.

"Which one is your favorite?" she asked.

"Well," he said, wearing a large grin, "I'm a little partial to *Excalibur*. My first assignment as an Ensign was aboard a ship of the same name, and even though she was decommissioned a few years ago, I've always believed that the fleet should always keep that name alive. If I have my way, 1701 will be named *Excalibur*."

"For our viewers who are unaware, the *Excalibur* that Admiral Winslow is referring to was the same ship that led the fleet at the battle of Algeron during the Romulan war," Polly supplied the information before continuing, "Have they selected a captain for the *Constitution*?"

"Not yet. Though we do have several candidates in mind," Winslow replied.

"Can you talk about these candidates?" she asked.

He shifted very slightly, trying not to say too much while also trying to remember each candidate's name. If he mentioned one and not the other, the candidates could misinterpret it negatively. "Let me say that I'm not on the review board for the Bureau of Ships, so my knowledge of the list of potential captains is by circumstance. But some of the names I recall were Captain Alexander Ybarra, Captain Robert April, and Commander Christopher Pike. All of the candidates being considered are good officers and very capable commanders."

"Commander Pike?" said Polly with a strange look on her face.

"Should Commander Pike be selected, he would receive a promotion to Captain, I'm sure. The rate and class requires a ranked captain to assume permanent command."

"I don't understand."

Winslow blinked. Of course not, he thought. How would he best explain it? "For every class of ship, and this is not just in Starfleet, but in the navies of tradition, each class or rate has a requirement of rank. For example, the Antares-class is considered to be a light cruiser by contemporary standards, so it is to be commanded by either a Commander or a Captain. But the minimum rank necessary to be requested and required to assume command would be a Commander. For a frigate, it would be a Lieutenant Commander, and for a corvette it would be a Lieutenant."

"But they are all Captains?"

"By title, but not by rank."

She opened her mouth with an understanding look on her face, as though the cloud of confusion had been lifted. "Why wouldn't the rank and title match?"

"One would not expect someone of a senior rank to be assigned to a position below his seniority. A captain by rank would not be assigned to command a corvette because an officer of that many years and experience would be best utilized on a vessel of appropriate size and armament."

It was enough exploration off the line of questioning; her curiosity was satisfied at the expense of time. The prompter warned her to return to the questions, but as she looked at the admiral, he did not seem to mind the follow-ups and he actually appeared more animated when discussing tradition than he had about the first couple of questions. She looked up briefly to refresh her memory as to the next question and continued the interview, "Do you agree with some of your colleagues at the new Starfleet Headquarters in Sausalito that the purpose of the Agency has become redundant as Starfleet has assumed more and more of the duties responsible for the Agency's creation?"

"Uh, well, I am seeing more and more Starfleet personnel coming in and out of the UESPA administration building in San Francisco than I had when I first arrived to take on this assignment," Winslow looked away from her to think about his answer. He pronounced the acronym as "yew-spah" as opposed to saying each individual letter. "I wouldn't be surprised if Starfleet replaced the Agency outright in the next ten to twenty years. That is to say, since the UESPA registry has fallen out of use and Starfleet has grown out of its infancy in the past fifty years to build up a fleet worthy of the Federation charter."

"What would happen to the men and women who are employed by the Agency?"

"I can't speak intelligently to the options they would have, but I'm sure Starfleet would not displace the hard working members to fend for themselves. Starfleet also employs a great many civilian contractors, even more than the Agency does," he replied.

"How would you respond to the criticism that replacing the Agency with a military command would be a step backwards?" she needled him, returning to a hostile question.

Winslow sighed inwardly, trying to keep his patience and not lose his temper. "The founding principle of the United Earth Space Probe Agency was the search for extraterrestrial resources in the solar system. It was not exploration of deep space, but a necessary search for more resources to consume on Earth. At the very beginning, we sent the United Earth Marine Expeditionary Forces to act as the exploration arm, and those Marines fell under a military command." He paused to lean forward and raised his hand once more, "Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not trying to justify a militarization of every exploration arm that the Federation has; we still have civilian explorers acting on behalf of the Federation even today. But unifying the chain of command insofar as Starfleet's exploration programs are concerned is a more efficient method of carrying out the missions we've been charged with. Having to answer to UESPA Administration as well as Starfleet Command can cause a great deal of confusion, and as history can attest, can hold some rather disastrous consequences in certain situations."

Deciding that she had explored that topic sufficiently for her audience, Polly moved on to the next topic, and one that she found most of her subjects loved to talk about: themselves. "What exactly is your role in the construction of the new ship, Admiral?"

"Lately, it seems I've been drafted into public relations," He smiled as they shared a fake laugh. "It's been a long couple of years and in that

time I have been donning various hats in that time. At the beginning, I was simply an advisor to the starship design board as a commodore. I had just been relieved of my command to accept a desk job here in San Francisco. Following that, I have moved from an advisory role to a more interactive position as the liaison officer. Since the Agency has a great interest in seeing the *Constitution* completed, they have relied on me to provide them with daily on-site updates. Secretly, I'm hoping they'll let me handle the new ship for the shakedown."

Polly nodded her understanding, moving on to the next question on the list, "Are there any specific exploration programs that are in progress or about to commence?"

"One of the programs we are going to put into motion once the *Constitution* is put into service, is the five-year exploration program. See, when we designed these new ships, it was with the intention to put them into deep space for extended durations; anywhere between one to two years before it would be necessary for the ship to either be resupplied or dock with a Starbase." He reached for the glass of water they supplied on the small end table between the chairs.

"Five years is a long time for a ship to be out of contact, Admiral."

As he swallowed his mouthful, he conceded that fact with a small shrug, "We send out the border patrol on similar durations. I think the longest any single ship has been assigned to border duty without reassignment is four years. However, and I think this is the more important part of the missions, rather than fly back and forth over the same sector of space, we're sending four hundred people out to the depths of space with the intention to make discoveries and explore the unknown. But the nature of the mission does make our intention to serve the mission of peaceful exploration very clear."

The biting cold of the foggy San Franciscan morning forced Winslow to shiver and pull the top of his bulky peacoat all the way up, until the gold velour of his uniform could barely be seen. The material of the overcoat was thick wool that had brass buttons and the single star and anchor on both shoulders. On his head he wore the matching officer's white cap, with the "scrambled eggs" on the black brim. From a distance, he looked out of place and time, as though some unseen force had scooped him from the late twentieth century San Francisco and deposited him upon the sidewalk.

Outside of the main entrance to the Federation News Network studio complex at Van Ness and Lombard, he was only a few blocks south of the UESPA Administration Complex, which resided at the North Point corner of the same street. If he wished to, he would brave the bitter cold and walk it as he had done several times in the past. Today, however, his destination was not his office, but the new headquarters facility for Starfleet.

Hailing a cab, he made his way across the Golden Gate Bridge, obscured from view by the rolling fog, and found himself walking across the recent redesign of the United Federation of Planets' insignia, the olive branches framing a starfield made up of white dots against a blue grid. Starfleet's plethora of various insignias was confusing to him. The insignia for both the Starbase Operations and Starfleet Command were one and the same; the gold "flower" design he wore over his left chest, it was something every officer assigned to Earth wore. The most confusing aspect to Winslow was in the regulation that each starship would employ their own insignia, and upon that insignia would hold the Starfleet sanctioned divisional emblem. Visiting starship crewmen were easy to spot in the crowd on Earth, but remembering which insignia belonged to which starship became an exercise in futility.

Although he had no office at Headquarters, Admiral Winslow's presence was expected on the admiralty levels of the main office complex every day. He was not required to report in to any particular command in an official capacity, but he did have to make his presence known so as to maintain his political visibility to the other admirals. When the doors parted to allow him to step into the main reception area for Starfleet Operations, a vice admiral with silvering chestnut hair and green eyes smiled as he recognized him.

"Cliff," Vice Admiral James Komack greeted him, "good to see you."

"Sir," he nodded with a similarly warm smile. Admiral Komack was his sponsor on the promotion review board, the flag officer directly responsible for handing him not only his promotion to rear admiral, but his elevation to captaincy. Even though they had known each other for almost twenty years, Cliff Winslow could never bring himself to addressing his senior by anything other than "sir."

"How're things over at UESPA today?"

"I don't know, sir. I came here straight from the interview."

Komack pointed a finger toward the left corridor from the receptionist's station, indicating he wished to walk and talk in that direction, "We caught that on the news feed." He teased the rear admiral, "You did very well for someone who swore he would never spend more than five minutes talking to the press."

Cliff Winslow shrugged, "I don't make a habit of it, sir."

"Who does?" Komack walked into his office and gestured to a seat in front of him, "While I have you here, Cliff, I did want to discuss something pretty important with you."

Winslow made himself comfortable, looking at his former commanding officer with a question in his eyes. "Of course, sir."

The vice admiral heaved a heavy sigh as he sat down behind his desk, "I spoke with Ziggy and Sam Jacobs this morning on my way in to the office." Ziggy was actually Rear Admiral (upper half) Misha Ziganov, while Samantha Jacobs was the rear admiral who served as the vice chairman of the review board. "We talked about the candidacy list for *Constitution's* skipper. I'm sorry, Cliff, but they disqualified you."

From across Komack's desk, it was now Winslow's turn to sigh. "I was afraid of that. Did they say why, sir?"

"They did, but you're not going to like it."

"I think I'm entitled to hear the reason, regardless of whether or not I'll like or dislike it, sir."

Jim Komack looked down, unable to face Winslow as he spoke, "You're too senior for the position, and they want to give her to a younger officer."

Winslow did not say anything in response, dropping his own gaze to the edge of the desk and keeping it there as he sat insulted.

"I really am sorry, Cliff. I know you wanted that command," Admiral Komack tried to console him.

"Is there any chance of reconsideration?"

Komack sighed, "I suppose so, but I'm not sure what you could do to make them change their minds."

"A charge of discrimination, for one."

"You're kidding."

"Sir, if they're going to disqualify me because I'm too old, then that's a violation of policy."

The vice admiral stopped to consider the severity of Winslow's words, "You're going to bring charges against two admirals?"

Admiral Winslow nodded, "You're damned right I am, sir."

Komack rose from his seat, his expression perplexed. Of course, he had written off the reason as being acceptable to him, but not the ethics surrounding it. Age discrimination was the obvious interpretation Winslow had made and if it was that easy to jump to that conclusion, it would stand to reason that others would as well. "Before you start making any calls to the Inspector General, Cliff, let's go down and talk with Ziggy and Sam. We'll give them the opportunity to reconsider before they make the new list official."

Cliff Winslow stood from his seat, ready to follow the vice admiral to the offices being occupied by their colleagues. As he watched Komack speak to his chief of staff, he recalled the first memory of stepping aboard the *Aldeberan* as a lieutenant commander and meeting the legendary Captain Komack. He was a personable commander; a change of pace from the strict nature of his former command. With such a personality and the accompanying character that drove it seemed to stir the loyalty from his crew, Winslow felt comfortable in less than a week after reporting for duty as the chief of operations. Two years later, he would serve as the executive officer, and eventually assume command of the ship when Komack accepted the promotion to the admiralty.

It was Komack who convinced Winslow to consider the admiralty. "For the good of the service," he had told him. Even though he had met and served with a group of hard-working individuals, being chained to a desk and watching Starfleet evolve beyond you was getting to him. Unlike Komack, who played the political game very well, Cliff had no use for playing that game and instead envisioned himself on the bridge of the *Constitution*, out in deep space and away from the games that admirals play. With an ally like Komack at Headquarters, his position as captain of a starship would allow him to pursue missions he felt were at the heart of the very program he helped to create.

His entry on the list of candidates for captain was a long shot, but he believed that Starfleet would give him as fair a shake as they had the other captains. He might have been the only flag officer to cast his bid for the honor of commanding the new ship, and surely not the most qualified, but it would have been far more understandable to disqualify him because of a lack of skill rather than a lack of youth. Winslow began to try and understand the reasoning behind the unfair decision, and could not come up with anything that would calm the raging fury he kept well in check. Cliff would let Admiral Komack do the talking, not saying anything until it was time. He did not trust himself to speak to either admiral.

Rear Admirals Misha Ziganov and Samantha Jacobs were in his office, holding a private discussion with the updated list of candidates being displayed on the large viewer opposite the bay windows looking out over the San Francisco Bay from the south end of the office building. Both of them had an empty cup in front of them with an open box of pastries and a large pot.

Ziganov was the first to rise when Komack entered, "Hello, Jim, Admiral Winslow. What brings you two down here?" His accent was one of a modern Russian, thick but not enough to cause a problem in understanding him when he spoke.

Admiral Komack smiled, "I was just talking to Cliff about your findings, and he voiced some concerns over the ethical nature to them."

Jacobs' shared a look with Ziganov before deciding to respond for the both of them. "Ethical? What do you mean?"

"He feels that your decision to disqualify him was not based on his skill as a captain."

"Is that so?" Jacobs' replied, now seemingly recognizing Winslow for the first time since he entered the office. "And a threat of a charge now hangs over the review board? Hardly an honorable method of asking us to reconsider his application, Jim."

The vice admiral raised a hand to silence Cliff, whom he knew was about to allow his temper to rise to the surface. "I don't think this is the proper time to be casting stones, Admiral Jacobs." Komack's use of her rank brought the matter into perspective. Vice Admiral Komack was the deputy chief of personnel for Starfleet Operations.

"Be that as it may, sir," said Ziganov, "we have already made our decision."

Winslow cast his anger aside in favor of honest curiosity, "Who?"

"We were going to submit our recommendation to the Bureau of Ships tomorrow, but I don't see any reason to not tell you," came the reply from Ziganov. "Matthew Decker is our choice."

Komack appeared to approve of that decision. Decker was one of the rising stars in Starfleet; he had the experience and had proven himself

many times over to be a capable captain. This would be quite a promotion for the young man.

"My objection stands, Admirals," said Winslow quietly.

Jacobs frowned, "That is your right, Admiral Winslow. However, we feel we made the right choice."

"If that is the case, then barring my age or seniority, what other skill or experience do I lack?" Winslow asked.

"Admiral Winslow, I don't wish to seem as though we do not recognize your service record simply because you are an admiral," Ziganov began, folding his arms, "and you lack no skill that either of us could determine."

Jim Komack shrugged, "Then what's the problem?"

"We found Commander Decker to be the best candidate for the job," he replied.

The vice admiral turned to look at Winslow, as if to ask if he was satisfied with their response.

Rear Admiral Winslow took a deep breath, as though he were about to resign himself to the fact that he would not command *Constitution*. "I know this is somewhat irregular, but would you do me the favor of reconsidering my candidacy before announcing your decision in any official capacity?"

"Why is this so important to you?" asked Jacobs. "You realize that in order to accept command, you would have to take a reduction in rank to Commodore."

"I'm aware of that fact. To be honest, I welcome it." Winslow replied with an affirming nod. "Admirals, I stand here before you as a simple ship handler, nothing more. I've spent two years behind a desk, one as a commodore and the other as a rear admiral. My experience in working alongside you has taught me one thing: I've no desire to continue here. The only interest I find in my position is the fact that I am helping to bring about what will be the most important step that Starfleet will take. To my dismay, I fear that I will be left behind to watch others make those strides. I want to be there, not here. I only ask that you reconsider me for the position, and let me return to a position where I know I can make a difference."

Komack exhaled, not realizing he was holding his breath as Winslow spoke. "I didn't know you felt that way, Cliff." He looked to the two admirals, "I don't want to tell you how to do your jobs, but I urge to take his statement into heavy consideration before making your final decision. I know Admiral Winslow will not disappoint you."

Ziganov rubbed his chin thoughtfully as he considered Winslow's words, "Perhaps this bears further deliberation. Would you agree, Admiral Jacobs?"

"I think it's a little unfair to the other candidates, sir," she replied.

"Privilege of rank. Admiral Winslow is the most senior officer on your list," Komack pointed out. "I'm sure it would mean a great deal to the others to know that he was willing to put aside his rank and position to return to space duty. I know Matt Decker and Bob April would. They would step aside for Cliff Winslow, if you asked them to. Besides, there will be plenty of new ships to go around in the coming months and years. They've waited quite some time for those opportunities, but I think Cliff's waited a little longer than they have."

Jacobs relented, "Very well. I think that with the recommendation of Admiral Komack, there can be no other question as to whom our choice will be."

"We will announce Admiral Winslow's appointment to command a week from Friday," Admiral Ziganov decided. He stretched out a hand to Winslow, "My apologies to you, Admiral. Please understand that we had no intention of besmirching your record or accomplishments. We do appreciate you bringing this to our attention." It was not exactly the truth, but when you apparently have the support of a vice admiral, it was the politically correct thing to do.

Winslow accepted the proffered hand regardless, "Thank you for listening to me, sir."

The thin plastic covering over the center seat on the incomplete bridge of the *Constitution* made a soft crinkling noise as he sat down in what was to be his chair for the next five years. Visiting the ship was something he did every day, and yet today the bridge seemed a little different to him. Everything about the starship appeared to be a little better than it had in the past, when he would be found wandering the completed decks, admiring the handiwork and the sheer size of her. Always knowing then that it was a strong possibility he would never have the chance to stand on her bridge as master and commander. A return to deep space had been exactly what his heart desired, and now Starfleet would afford him the opportunity to do just that.

A familiar laugh erupted from within the turbolift, as the doors slid aside to admit the officer. "Couldn't wait?" His British accent was unmistakable, as was the light brown mop of hair atop his head with the silver lining the edges of his sideburns. He did not look like an imposing man, though the flecks of green in his large hazel eyes were very noticeable. The officer was a captain, wearing the dual gold bars along the cuffs of his gold uniform tunic. Upon his chest was the starship insignia of the USS *Betelgeuse*, another product of the Antares-class.

Winslow smiled widely at the officer, genuinely happy to see him again, "Bob! What the hell are you doing here? I didn't know your ship was in the neighborhood." He very nearly hugged the man, and instead opted for a very enthusiastic handshake. "How are you? How is Sarah doing?"

Captain Robert April chuckled at Winslow, "We're both doing fine. Sarah's down at Bethesda Medical Center, visiting a colleague of hers." Doctor Sarah April, his wife, also served as the chief medical officer of the *Betelgeuse*. He leaned in with a conspiratorial tone, he asked, "Do

you have a few minutes to chat, or would you rather I leave you two alone?" He gestured at the bridge.

"No, no, please stay. I haven't had a chance to sit and talk with you in..." The admiral paused as he contemplated the number of years, "Has it really been three years?"

"More like four, but who cares?" April took a seat at the engineering monitoring station and sighed. "I spoke with Admiral Komack an hour ago. I know I'm not supposed to know, but I understand that you've been awarded the command we were all chasing after."

"Jesus, Bob. I'm sorry about that," Cliff tried to say.

"Oh, that's bull and you know it. You fought tooth and nail to get her, and I for one am damn glad of it."

"Come again?"

April scratched at the top of his head, "How do I put this without sounding as though I only speak in clichés? To hell with it. Alex Ybarra and I think it's about time you got back on the horse. I don't know about Matt Decker, but I think a lot of the older captains feel the same way."

Winslow smiled, "That's a hell of a thing to say to me, Bob."

"Would you rather I socked you in the face?"

"I was expecting you to be a little miffed, is all," the rear admiral mocked the captain, putting on a horrible accent.

Captain April shook his head while chuckling once more, "It wasn't deep space without you, Cliff."

There was a pause in the exchange; long enough for them to acknowledge it was time for a new topic to discuss. Winslow asked plainly, "So, are you going to remain on the *Betelgeuse* for now?"

"For now," nodded April. "Until the third ship is finished. They've decided to give Matt Decker the one-oh-seventeen ship. I'm to command seventeen-oh-one; I think it's a blessing. I don't like this idea of using the abandoned hull numbers, I think it's bad luck."

Winslow blinked, his tone incredulous, "They've decided all of this already?"

"If the project holds, they have already determined the captain of the next six ships of the line." Bob smiled, "They told me that Decker's pushing to have his ship be commissioned as the *Constellation*."

Admiral Winslow looked toward the captain's chair for a moment, just before sitting himself down to rest while conversing. "That's a nice name. I don't think it would have been the one I would have chosen."

"Nor I. I've always been fond of the name *Indefatigable*."

"For me, it's got to be *Excalibur*," Cliff's tone was one of awe.

Bob laughed, slapping his knee. "I'm sorry, Cliff. Not that I don't like your choice, but you say it with such reverence." He cleared his throat at the admiral's admonishing glare, "Seriously, it's a good name for a ship, Rear Admiral, sir."

Cliff could not help but laugh at the captain's sudden attention to protocol, even if it was in jest. "Is that the name you really intend to use for seventeen-oh-one?"

Robert April gave a slight shrug, "I'm not entirely sure of that, yet. Even if they're accepting our suggestions seriously, I'm not sure which name to choose. Every ship I've commanded so far already had a name, so it's a little daunting to select one for my next command. Look at it this way; I won't be the last captain of that ship and it has to be a name that each subsequent captain would be proud of."

"I see what you mean, there," replied Cliff, having not really given it as much thought as Bob had.

"When you name a ship, you're putting a name to a legacy. The name has to mean something more than the ship, I think that it has to set the expectations properly for the crew to live up to," April went on. "Like *Excalibur*. There's a name you could set your expectations by."

"There certainly is a lot of prestige, I won't disagree there."

A small smile hung upon April's lips. "I put a lot on your plate, didn't I? Having second thoughts about the name of your ship, are we?"

"No..." he replied quickly, his voice barely above a whisper. "No," he repeated, a little louder. "Though, when you consider history, the name *Constitution* is certainly one that falls into that category, doesn't it?"

"Indeed," said April, with folded arms and a slight nod.

"But I think that it's time there was a *Constitution* serving in the fleet. There hasn't been one since the late eighteenth century," Winslow voiced his thoughts. "It's still a floating museum on the east coast."

"Yes, it is," Bob said, rising up from his seat to look around the bridge. He ran his hands over the helm and navigator positions, admiring the advanced controls and the swing arm communications devices. "I must say that I am looking forward to having one of these of my own. You did a pretty fair job of telling them way they should lay these quarterdecks out."

A lot of the new bridge layout was largely due to the suggestions that Winslow made to the design team. It was a departure from the standard designs, with the command station in the center and all of the support stations facing outward in a circle. On the older bridges, the layout was less centralized and required the captain or the officer of the deck to divide his time between the conning station and the information center.

There was something to be said for being able to have direct contact with the officers you entrust with the running of your ship, and it was a belief that both officers shared.

"So, Bob, where are you off to once your ship comes off leave?" Winslow asked. "Back out into deep space for another two years?"

"I'm afraid not." Bob sat down at the helm station, "Jim Komack has asked me to visit Admiral Leighton to discuss the possibility of accepting a position at Headquarters." Off of Winslow's shocked expression, he chuckled, "Don't worry, I know what I'm getting in to. I spend a year here on Earth, Sarah gets to see her family for a while and then we ship out on the new ship."

"Really? Which position did he have in mind?"

"Why yours, of course. Since you're leaving, there will be an opening. The Agency has made it clear that they want experienced deep space officers in the liaison position. If it gets me a ship in the long run, I'm willing to take over."

Cliff smiled at Bob as he offered his advice about dealing with James Komack by explaining what had happened to him when he had a discussion with the very charismatic admiral. "He gave me the speech about doing what's best for the fleet, and serving as best as I could for the future of the explorer fleet. He told me that as a liaison, I would have the ability to directly affect Starfleet in the best way possible." The admiral had asked him to consider that before turning down what was going to be a move that would further his career.

"Sounds vaguely familiar," admitted April, resting his head against his palm. "Do you think I'm making a mistake, then?"

"I didn't say that, Bob. I just think that you need keep your head on straight before Jim Komack performs his cheerleading act and talks about taking one for the team," Winslow warned. "The first six months were very nice, I'll admit. Having all of the comforts of home right at your fingertips is something a man could get used to, but then after having spent a great deal of time living in a sardine can with almost two hundred people, you get used to the close sense of community. I lived in my apartment complex for almost two years and I think I know my next-door neighbors' first name."

April did not say anything, listening to his friend speak. He tried to think about that, having considered returning to Earth a blessing. Sarah had told him that she could try for a year of residency at Bethesda or even Stanford Medical, as they would live in the San Francisco Bay Area. Would they adjust to living in an apartment? Maybe, he thought. He hoped they would fare better than Cliff. The fact that Sarah would be with him did not paint too dark of a picture. Perhaps that was Cliff's problem; he was alone.

"All I'm saying is," Cliff said, "I think my time at the Agency is done, and it's time for me to go back to where I really belong."

Robert April smiled at him, "Where we all belong, old friend."

"It's now coming up to the top of hour and we're catching our first glimpses of the newest starship to join Starfleet's exploration command, the USS *Constitution*," said Polly Kinsella, her curly hair straightened and trimmed shorter than it had been a month earlier during the interview with Winslow. The visual feed from the dockyard displayed a live image of the starship still housed by the large construction frame.

"The ship completed her warp trials and shakedown cruises yesterday, passing with flying colors according to the release handed out by the United Earth Space Probe Agency. The commissioning ceremony has just concluded and we are now going to switch live to our field reporter Norman Stenseland, who is on the observation deck of the *Constitution*, where the commanding officer, Commodore Heathcliff Winslow will read aloud his orders to assume command. Norman?"

The scene switched immediately to show a human male with thinning blonde hair and a cheery expression wearing a headset. His baritone voice echoed his demeanor, though deep and booming, it was kept as light as he could manage while making his report, "Thank you, Polly. We're about to witness the official reading of the orders by Commodore Winslow."

When the view changed to bring the commodore into focus, he smiled at the assembled members of his crew and the division heads standing before him, and turned to acknowledge the admirals and captains that stood behind him as he gripped the podium. "I'd like to begin by thanking the members of the United Earth Space Probe Agency for making all of this possible. Without their guidance and support to Starfleet, I don't believe we could have achieved what we have here in the *Constitution*." He paused to allow the audience to applaud.

"Starfleet was founded just over eighty years ago, and in that time we've been charged with many missions on behalf of the Federation. We protect the borders; we've carried out missions of mercy. We've fought two wars, and at the same time we continue to maintain the fragile peace we all worked so hard to create by bringing an end to them. Every starship that flies the flag of the Federation, and the men and women who are stationed aboard her are entrusted with the responsibility of furthering the goals that we set down on paper in 2161.

"About four hundred sixty-nine years ago, a group of men driven by the desire to live free in the face of tyranny gathered in a modest hall in Pennsylvania to set down on paper the basic rights of every man. In order to separate from their mother country, a brutal war erupted which resulted in the new nation known as the United States of America. In 1812, Great Britain made another attempt to reclaim their lost territory and it was then that the sailing frigate *Constitution* made a name for herself.

"In the afternoon hours of August the Nineteenth of that year, the *Constitution* engaged the HMS *Guerriere* east of Boston. It was a battle that began as a stalemate based upon the sheer maneuverability of the frigates and after some time, the two ships decide to square off with broadside shots. One of the shots from the British ship was reported to have bounced off of the wooden side of the *Constitution*, and cries out, "Huzzah! Her sides are made of iron!" Twenty minutes into the short-range exchange, the *Guerriere*'s mizzenmast falls, and the battle resulted with Ol' Ironsides as the victor."

Commodore Winslow took a moment to look at Captain April and his wife, Sarah. They stood the furthest away, near the other future captains of this Starship-class fleet who could make the ceremony. He shared a knowing smile with Bob and Sarah, both of whom already knew the contents of his speech to the crew and to the people watching on the live news feeds. "The history lesson comes in whole from a conversation I had with an old friend of mine. He reminded me of why we place such a high value upon the naming of a ship. We have here the

opportunity to take a large step forward into the future of Starfleet, the *Constitution* and all those who follow are the vehicles that will make that a reality for us.

"Our future history will be remembered by the names we give our ships, just as we look back in our most recent years and remember names such as *Excalibur*, *Phoenix*, and *Enterprise*. They represent the best part of us, and in turn they present to our legacy the challenge of bringing good fortune and continuing the success that their predecessors have achieved. The USS *Constitution's* predecessor lies manned and ready by historians in Charleston Harbor in North America. She's survived the centuries through the meticulous care of those she comes into contact with because with her comes the tradition and history that binds us all by the same principle that the United Federation of Planets stands for. Freedom."

He smiled, looking down at his notes, coming to the end of his speech. "To Commodore Heathcliff G. Winslow. You are hereby requested and required to assume command of NCC-1700, USS *Constitution*, effective as of this date. Signed, Rear Admiral (upper half) Misha Ziganov, Starfleet Command." Cliff looked over to the operator manning the computer station and nodded his head toward him.

The operator flicked a switch on his console and the computer spoke aloud immediately, "Working." It's voice was that of a female's, a departure from the annoying tenor male voice of the Antares-class, but the voice was devoid of any personality and seemed to speak in a single tone.

"Computer, this is Commodore Winslow. I am assuming command, by order of Starfleet Command," intoned Winslow.

"Working. Initialization of command function requires admiralty verification."

One of the admirals stepped forward, smiling toward his friend at the podium and offered his assistance. "This is Vice Admiral James Komack, Starfleet Command. Commodore Winslow's command is verified."

"Voiceprint verified. Initialization complete," the computer seemed to take a bit of time to process the order before announcing the result. "NCC-1700, USS *Constitution* is now under the command of Commodore Heathcliff Winslow. All command authorization codes have been transferred."

The cheering and applause from the assembled crowd was thunderous. Winslow looked at them, a small blush beginning to form at the enthusiasm. His modesty demanded that they not call attention to him, but then he realized that the ovation was not for him. It was for Starfleet, and what they were setting out to do. It was for the exploration missions, and venturing out into the stars and return home with the discoveries and knowledge that they yielded. It was for the *Constitution* and the sister ships in the dockyard nearby, like Matt Decker's *Constellation* and Robert April's *Enterprise*. That realization brought his hands together as he joined in the celebration of not just the future, but to those who came before and blazed the trail to the stars.

Admiral Komack accepted the cloth-covered rectangle from his chief of staff, and with only a small bit of dramatic flair, the dedication plaque for the ship was unveiled in a single motion. He handed it to Winslow, who held it above his head in triumph, as it read:

U.S.S. CONSTITUTION

Starship Class

San Francisco Fleet Yards

End Notes

And now, for a word from the author...

In *Agamemnon* and *Bellerophon*, I had completed two post-Dominion War stories, and I was afraid that I was going to favor that era of history in my storytelling (which I do, actually). I had a reactionary response and went pre-TOS all the way back to the days of UESPA, before the famous Constitution-class that contained NCC-1701.

This story underwent nine drafts before being finalized as you've just read. The original story was about a ship named *California*, in which Commodore Quince (from J. M. Dillard's *The Lost Years*) was promoted against his will and found only misery with an admiral's star on his shoulder. In *The Lost Years*, though, he died in misery, and I found that I didn't want to write that story. Instead, I started out with a news interview between a journalist looking to make her big break and trying to sensationalize anything and everything, and a grizzly ol' admiral who was barely tolerating her on the air live. That's how *Constitution* came to be, though I didn't have the name down until I realized I should go for a 'closer-to-mainstream' story, rather than keeping myself in writing about the more obscure portions of the fleet.

My favorite part is the scene between Winslow and Robert April. I had to read and reread *Final Frontier* to get a sense of his character, which I wholly borrowed from that novel. I did not, however, subscribe to the story being anywhere near canon within the context of *The Quarterdeck Breed*. Not that *The Quarterdeck Breed* itself is anywhere close to canon to begin with, but I try my best to make sure I don't trample on the already written history of the series.

Thanks for reading! Stay tuned for *Dallas* (the ship, not the TV show).

-- McCC

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