

To Boldly Go: The Better Part of Valor

A U.S.S. Providence story*

By Cleve Johnson

Yeelan studied the COM screen. He had been surveying the nebula for several days and now, beginning to feel the loneliness of the deep space mission, wanted to go home. But home was the one place that he could not go to until his mission had been completed.

“Computer, record log entry,” the fury alien said. “I have studied and recorded three thousand four hundred and seventy-nine different gases within the Grotzik Nebula. Only four of those gases are compatible with our life support systems, but I am planning to run a retzilomic analysis to measure the amount of these gases contained within the nebula.” Yeelan stood and walked to the rear of the interior of his small research vessel as he paused the log entry. The bipedal ape-like creature stretched and lay on his bunk.

“If a large quantity of these gases is present,” he continued recording as he closed his brownish-red eyes, “our scientists should be able to harvest them for use in our recycling system.” Then the alien drifted off to sleep.

Unfortunately for Yeelan, his sleep did not last long as his ship’s security sensors detected a spatial distortion that activated the irritating warning Siren.

Yeelan jumped from his bunk and ran to the forward section. He plopped into the pilot’s seat and began to flip switches and push buttons. The console lights illuminated the control panel and a small viewscreen activated. What Yeelan witnessed was beyond his experience as a Huaken surveyor.

“Computer, full sensor sweep,” he said. “What is it?”

There was a brief pause as the computer calibrated sensors. “*A spatial vortex has appeared in Grid five-zero-eight,*” the mechanical voice stated.

“A spatial vortex? Is it like a wormhole?” Yeelan wondered out loud.

“*Insufficient information,*” the computer replied.

“What is its origin, computer?”

“*Insufficient information,*” the computer replied again, annoying Yeelan.

Yeelan felt the hair on the back of his neck begin to stand on end as the sixth sense his people possessed indicated danger. And then, as he looked closely at the viewer, Yeelan saw the alien ship exit the spatial anomaly. “Shields, full strength,” he ordered the computer, which complied silently. “Set course for the nebula’s center and engage sublight engines at half power.”

Yeelan hoped that his ship would get to its destination and be hidden by the giant nebula’s radioactive gas. Of course, his ship’s sensors would be blinded as well. But he had to risk it, hoping the other vessel did not have more sophisticated technology. Or that the aliens were peaceful.

Yeelan was wrong on both counts.



Three Klingon warriors surrounded Melanie Leeson, ready to attack. Leeson never stood still, looking at each opponent as she kept moving to keep herself from leaving a vulnerable spot open to one of the Klingons. She held her bat'leth with a firm grip, the blade pointing outward. Then one of the warriors saw an opening and lunged at the Starfleet officer.

Leeson saw him, almost too late. She ducked as the warrior swung his sword. Leeson moved quickly and let her bat'leth swing in retaliation as she noticed the other two warriors close in on her position. She had missed the first Klingon but recovered soon enough to block a blow by the second. Leeson pushed away from the warrior, who was twice her size and spun around to decapitate the third warrior that was trying to attack from behind.

Stunned by the human female's quickness, one of the remaining Klingons pulled a disruptor from its holster and tried to take aim at the woman. But she was already swinging her weapon toward him and the Klingon's hand, still holding the disruptor, was gracefully sliced from the end of his arm. The warrior was in disbelief as blood gushed from his limb. He fought the pain and rushed Leeson, who ducked and spun around. With a final blow, Leeson brought her bat'leth down with all her strength and impaled the Klingon in the back.

As the warrior fell, Leeson turned just in time to see the last remaining Klingon aiming a disruptor at her head. She dropped the bat'leth as an offering of surrender and dropped her head in defeat. "End program," she said.

Leeson wiped sweat from her forehead as her commanding officer approached. "That was quite good," Captain Robert P. Stuart stated. "I thought you handled yourself very well up until the end."

Leeson half-heartedly laughed. "You should try it sometime," she said as she walked toward the exit.

Stuart followed her into the corridor. The two officers walked side by side. "Why do you do that?" Stuart asked.

"I like a challenge," Leeson replied. "And... it's good exercise."

"Looked more like a death wish," Stuart said. "Why did you program three Klingons? Wasn't that a little much?"

Leeson smiled at that. She spent most of her Starfleet career as a security officer before transferring to command and becoming the first officer of the *Providence*. She still liked to train hard as if she were still part of security. "I like to keep on my toes," Leeson stated. "A fight against superior forces tends to keep me on the ball."

Stuart thought a moment. "I see your point," he finally said. "But you also need to know when to exercise the better part of valor."

Leeson stopped and let her mouth drop open. Stuart turned and saw what he

perceived as a look of disbelief on his first officer's face. "Problem, Exec?"

"I just don't believe you said that," Leeson said. "I know you didn't run away from the Jem'Hedar when you took command of the *Republic*."

Stuart nodded in agreement. "I didn't have that option then."

"And what if you had the option?" Leeson pressed her CO. "Would you have tucked tail and ran?"

Stuart turned and continued down the corridor with Leeson hurrying to catch up. "Exec, you will command a starship of your own someday," he said. "And there will be times when you must put your pride on the shelf and do whatever is necessary to protect your ship and crew. And sometimes that may mean tucking your tail and running."

Leeson thought about what her captain had just said. She did not completely agree, but she thought about it. "Aye Sir," was all she said. "If you'll excuse me, Sir, I want to take a sonic shower before my watch," she stated as they walked the circular corridor.

"I'll see you later," Stuart replied as he entered a turbolift.



Lieutenant Commander T'Les sat at her post, scanning the area of space directly ahead. There was a momentary energy surge detected on the long-range sensors... then nothing. The Vulcan science officer increased the scanning range to try to determine what the lateral sensors previously detected. Suddenly, something registered. Actually, two somethings.

"I am detecting two alien spacecraft near the nebula directly ahead, Mister Adams," the Vulcan stated in her typical professional tone.

Lieutenant Commander Blake Adams sat in the seat that would normally be occupied by the captain. But as the ship's second officer, it was Blake's turn to have the bridge. "Distance?" he asked, turning his head toward the science station.

T'Les, not wanting to be inaccurate, double-checked her instruments. "Approximately two point eight seven one light years," she replied.

Blake rolled his eyes. *Approximately?* he thought. *She's definitely a Vulcan.* "On screen."

The main viewer that had previously displayed a dense starfield now changed to show a beautiful class two nebula. In the foreground were two ships, a small scout slightly larger than a *Danube*-class runabout. The other, approximately the size of an *Intrepid*-class starship. The smaller craft appeared to Blake Adams as if it was trying to get away from the larger. And when a flash of energy passed between the larger vessel to the smaller, he knew that what appeared to be actually was.

"I am receiving a general distress signal from the smaller ship, Commander," Lieutenant Yoshiama Nakamara, or Yoshi as he preferred to be called, said.

Blake pressed the panel on the end of his armrest. "Bridge to captain."

"This is Stuart. Go ahead, Blake."

"Skipper, we have two alien ships. One is pursuing the other," Adams replied. "And David is calling for help to get Goliath off his back."

"Set an intercept course, maximum warp. I'm on my way."

Blake nodded to the ensign that was seated at the CONN station, who immediately worked the controls to follow the unspoken orders of his superior. And the starship jumped into warp.

"All hands, yellow alert!" Adams exclaimed over the intercom. "Power up the weapon systems, Lieutenant," he said to Nakamara, who had anticipated the order.

The turbolift doors parted and Captain Stuart entered the bridge. Adams immediately vacated the center seat and relieved the CONN officer, who exited the bridge. Stuart watched the chase that appeared on the viewer. "Report," he said.

Adams turned around to face his CO and friend. "The little guy seems more maneuverable, but his pursuer has more firepower than his shields can handle."

Commander Leeson entered the bridge and sat at her station to the right of the CO's chair.

Stuart sat down, thinking about his options. "Yoshi, open hailing frequencies."

"Frequencies open, Captain," the security chief stated.

Stuart tried to remain calm as he thought of what he would say. He never did like seeing a bully pick on those who could not defend themselves. And this definitely appeared to be a mismatch. "This is Captain Robert P. Stuart of the starship U.S.S. *Providence*, representing the United Federation of Planets," he began. "Why are you attacking a vessel that apparently cannot do you any harm?"

There was a momentary silence.

"No reply, Captain," Nakamara said from the tactical station. "Wait, I'm receiving a transmission from the smaller ship."

"On screen," Stuart said.

The chase on the viewer was replaced by the image of the interior of the small scout ship. At the controls was a fury, primate-like creature with a row of short bony horns protruding from the center of its head. "*I am Fren Yeelan of the Navar,*" the creature said. "*Please help me. My shields are weakening.*" Then the transmission abruptly ended.

"Sorry, Captain. The transmission has been jammed by the other ship," Nakamara said, anticipating that his CO would ask what had happened to communications.

"Try to reestablish and keep trying to get Goliath's attention," Stuart said. "Increase speed, Blake."

"The pedal's to the metal now, Skipper," Adams replied.

"Bridge to engineering," Stuart said as he hit the intercom control.

“This is Lieutenant Salesh.”

“Can you push the engines to give more, Salesh,” Stuart asked, urgency in the tone of his voice.

“I will try to transfer power from other areas, Captain. Salesh out.”

Stuart looked over his shoulder at Lieutenant Mary Goodman, the senior OPS officer. Mary manned the combination OPS/Engineering station that was located directly behind the CO, at the rear of the bridge. “I would like you to correspond with engineering, Mary,” Stuart said. “See what you can do to help Salesh.”

“Aye Captain,” Goodman said as she began to work the controls at her station.

“T’Les, any information available on that ship?” Leeson inquired of the science officer.

The Vulcan quickly scanned the data banks. “Negative, Commander. There is no record in our files that contain information on any vessel with that configuration.”

“Have you scanned it?” Stuart asked.

“I have tried, but our sensors are having difficulty penetrating the hull,” the Vulcan replied. “I do have a partial reading on their defense systems that would suggest their technology is potentially superior to our own.”

“Change status to red alert,” Stuart said. “Yoshi, I want full power to shields as soon as we come out of warp.”

“Aye Sir,” the security chief said in reply.

Leeson leaned toward Stuart so that he alone would hear. “With shields up, we won’t be able to beam that pilot aboard,” she said, stating what was obvious to her captain.

“Is it possible to open a small hole within the shields near one of the transport beam emitters?” Stuart asked.

Leeson thought about Stuart’s request. “It may be possible, Captain,” she finally said. “I think I can make the modifications to open a hole for a few seconds.”

“Do your best, Exec,” Stuart said. “And let the transporter chief know what you’re going to do so he’ll be ready.”

Leeson immediately activated the backup control panel beside her seat as Stuart turned his attention back to the main viewer.

“I’ve reestablished contact with Fren Yeelan, Captain,” Nakamara stated. “Voice message only.”

“Patch me through, Lieutenant.”



Yeelan was glad someone had responded to his distress call. He really did not care that it was some unknown furless alien species that would be his savior. He was just

glad that help was on the way. Of course, he had to evade the other ship for several kroniks before the alien ship would arrive. Hopefully, he could manage at least that long. If only his COM system had not been jammed, Yeelen might be able to coordinate a strategy with his would-be rescuers. And then his hopes were fulfilled.

“...’re trying to reestab... ..unication. Do you... ..ead?”

Yeelen tried to tune in the transmission and make it clear. He knew that he could not filter everything through his pursuer’s interference, but he was going to try his best. “This is Yeelen. Please respond.”

“This is Captain Stuart of the Federation starship Providence. We will intercept within a few minutes and beam you to our vessel. Please stand by.”

Yeelen did not understand what minutes were. He assumed the term referred to a time measurement. And what did the alien mean by “beam” to their vessel? He decided not to worry about it since concentration on piloting his spacecraft to dodge the energy blasts from his adversary was his primary concern.



The Federation starship entered normal space and slipped between the two other vessels. Just in time to catch an energy blast from the hostile ship. The *Providence’s* shields were in place, but something happened to them at the point of impact that surprised all the Starfleet personnel on the bridge.

“Status report,” Stuart exclaimed.

“Shields at sixty-eight percent, Captain,” Nakamara stated. “And...”

“And what, Lieutenant?” It was the first officer who made the inquiry.

“I’ve never seen anything like it,” the tactical officer exclaimed. “The area of shielding has...” The bridge crew was silent, awaiting Nakamara’s pronouncement. “...solidified.”

“Say again,” Blake Adams said from the CONN station, his voice indicating disbelief.

“Commander T’Les?” Stuart said.

“Scanning,” the science officer stated in her non-emotional tone. Within moments she had completed the sensor readings of the shields. “Fascinating. A portion of our shields has been transformed from energy to solid matter.”

As the Vulcan finished her explanation another blast rocked the starship.

“Shields at forty-three percent,” Nakamara said.

“Return fire. Phasers and Photon torpedoes,” Stuart ordered. “Let’s get that pilot aboard, Exec.”

Leeson tapped her combadge. “Bridge to transporter room one. Energize.”



Yeelan looked out his viewport at the battle that was taking place between two alien spaceships. He worried that his rescuers themselves might need to be rescued. He suddenly felt strangely as some kind of energy began to swirl around him. And then, instead of inside his small scout ship, Yeelan found himself in a room staring at one of the aliens who had come to his aid.

“I’ve got him, Commander,” the tall, furless creature stated.

“*Good job, Chief,*” a bodiless voice replied.

Yeelan did not move. He had been rescued by these creatures, but he remained cautious. He had never seen beings like this before. And Yeelan was unwilling to give his complete trust.

The alien stepped from behind a console and slowly approached Yeelan, baring its teeth. Was it going to attack? Or was it baring its teeth the way that this species smiled? Yeelan did not have to wonder very long once the creature began to speak.

“Welcome aboard the United Federation of Planets starship *Providence,*” the transporter chief said warmly.

And then Yeelan knew that the creature had been smiling.



The alien ship fired one more blast of plasma energy. Like the previous volleys, this one reacted with the *Providence*’s shields by creating a solid shell. And the shell was beginning to crack.

“Shields at twelve percent,” Nakamara stated. “We’ll lose them with the next hit, Captain.”

“Set course for the nebula’s perimeter. Warp seven,” the captain said. “This is one of those times when we need to exercise the better part of valor, Exec.”

Leeson looked at her superior officer. “Like you were explaining earlier, Sir?”

“Stuart half smiled. “Absolutely,” he replied. “Engage!”

And the starship shot away from the alien vessel, which quickly began to pursue it.

“We’re being followed by the hostile, Sir,” Nakamara said. “They’re gaining on us.”

Stuart paced the bridge. “Blake, increase to warp factor nine.”

“Aye Skipper,” the second officer said.

Rob Stuart thought back to his days on the *Republic*. As first officer of that vessel, he had found himself in command when the Jem’Hedar had injured his captain during an attack. The Dominion War was now over, but now he almost wished this new attacker was the Jem’Hedar. At least he would have a fighting chance with them.

“Receiving a transmission from the hostile, Sir,” Nakamara said.

Stuart straightened in his seat and put on his “poker” face. “On screen.”

The commander of the alien vessel replaced the image of the streaking stars on the viewer. The creature appeared to have leathery skin with a color that fell between green and brown, almost the shade of muddy swamp water. The alien’s nose, if one could detect it, looked flattened with two slits for nostrils. There was a look of arrogance, as well as malevolence, in its deep-set eyes. “*I am VenQa’ Pa’drek of the Vendoth ship Je’Har’ket,*” the creature stated. “*You will drop shields and prepare to be boarded.*”

Stuart’s face was stoic, a fairly adequate impersonation of his Vulcan science officer. “I am Captain Stuart of the Federation starship *Providence,*” he said calmly. “I want to know why you have attacked my ship.”

VenQa’ Pa’drek cocked his head in slight amazement that the Federation captain should be so bold. “*You, Captain Stuart, are speaking to a member of a superior race. You will show more respect to your masters.*”

“Masters?” Stuart said, not quite believing what the Vendoth had just stated. “We are slaves to no one, VenQa’,” he added.

The image of Pa’drek leaned forward, almost coming through the main viewer if it were possible. “*You are now,*” he said in a very serious tone of voice. “*Prepare to be boarded,*” the VenQa’ ordered. And the viewer image again changed to the stars streaking by.



The bulky alien watched the Federation starship on his personal viewscreen. *Cowards,* he thought. *These creatures run like a scared gibuch.* “We will have no trouble conquering these Hu’Jok,” the commander stated. “Target the weakest part of their shields again.”

“I obey, VenQa’,” the warrior at the weapons station replied.

The commander of the Vendoth, as these aliens were known, paced the deck of the control room. He occasionally peeked at the viewer to see if the “prey” had changed course. “Status, VenQe?” he inquired of his second-in-command.

The leathery-skinned Vendoth bowed to his superior. “We will be within weapons range in twelve Qudeks, VenQa’. The Federation ship does not have our speed.”

“Once their shields have been destroyed, we will board the ship...” An evil grin began to appear on the Vendoth’s face. “...And download their database.”

“With your permission, VenQa’, I will lead the boarding party,” the executive officer stated.

“Permission is granted, Ja’Ulrek,” the VenQa’ said, using the name of his second informally. “And then we will proceed to their home planet. And join our fleet to suppress the interfering creatures that came to our galaxy.”



Stuart looked at Commander Melanie Leeson. “Have our guest brought to the

bridge, Exec,” Stuart said. “We don’t know who these people are, but their weapons are much more powerful than ours.” He paused. “And our weapons didn’t seem to have a great effect on their shields,” Stuart added.

“What about quantum torpedoes?” Nakamara inquired. “They were effective against the Borg during their last incursion into Sector 001.”

“Load them,” Stuart said. “And program for medium explosive yield, Yoshi.”

“Yes, Sir.” Nakamara turned and started to carry out the captain’s orders.

Stuart touched the small console on the armrest of his chair. The viewer image changed to show the stars flowing in the opposite direction. And at the center of the screen was the Vendoth starship growing larger as it neared the Federation ship. “Fire aft torpedoes, Mr. Nakamara.”

One after another, three quantum torpedoes exited the aft torpedo tube located on the bottom of the saucer section. They quickly found their target and weakened the Vendoth scout ship’s deflector shields. But a solid bandage formed over the injured shielding, allowing it to heal.

“Report, Lieutenant Commander,” Stuart said as he looked toward the science station.

“Their shields lost thirteen percent power, but a protective solidified shell has formed at the point of impact,” T’Les stated. “Sensors indicate that their shields are being reenergized beneath the shell.”

Rob Stuart remained calm, at least as far as his crew could see. But inside, the captain started to feel panic. This man of peace and exploration, out of necessity, had known times of battle, but Stuart had never faced an enemy as powerful as the Vendoth until this moment.

“We’re coming up on the nebula now, Skipper,” Adams said.

“Drop out of warp and engage full impulse power. Head for the center of the nebula,” Stuart replied.

The starship, flown skillfully by Lieutenant Commander Blake Adams, moved closer to the nebula and began to enter the outer rim of the stellar gases. But before the ship could enter its intended hide-a-way the Vendoth vessel exited the mini-wormhole created by its vortex drive system and into normal space. It immediately fired its plasma weapon. And the *Ericsson*-class starship’s shields were no match.

As the blast crashed through the previously created shell on the starship’s shields, the OPS panel exploded with a shower of sparks, sending Lieutenant Mary Goodman to the floor. The rest of the bridge crew had difficulty staying seated as the ship rocked violently. Surprisingly, it was T’Les who rushed to Goodman’s side and tried to comfort the injured officer. She almost made a visible show of compassion, which would be uncharacteristic for a Vulcan; however, T’Les’s ancestry was mixed with Romulan and human blood as well as Vulcan.

“Damage report!” Leeson yelled.

It was Yoshi Nakamara who recovered from the blast first, allowing him to pull up a readout of the starship's condition. "Shields are gone. We have a hull breach on the starboard aft quarter of deck four."

"What about weapons?" Stuart asked excitedly.

"Phasers are off-line, but we still have torpedoes," Yoshi replied.

"Fire another volley of quantum torpedoes and get us into that nebula," the captain ordered.

"Aye," Nakamara and Adams said in unison as they each carried out their assigned tasks.

Several torpedoes from the *Providence* hit the Vendoth scout ship without major damage, but the force of the powerful quantum torpedoes made more of an impact in weakening the enemy vessels shields. And the Starfleet ship entered the nebula, momentarily safe from the alien vessel.

"Now let's get our shields back up and figure out a way to disable our nemesis."

Rob Stuart turned when he heard the familiar swoosh of the doors to the turbolift open. Doctor Janice Edwards and Counselor James Goodman, Mary's husband, entered the bridge. James rushed to his wife's side as the Vulcan science officer returned to her station. "It's gonna be alright, Mary," the counselor said as he tried to hold back tears

The doctor ran her medical tricorder over the OPS officer and pulled out a hypospray. She injected Mary in the side of her neck, nodding positively to James. "She's going to be fine, but I want you to help me get her to sickbay," Edwards said.

James picked up his wife and followed the CMO back to the turbolift.

CPO John McKinney, who had just exited the port side turbolift along with Yeelan, approached the center of the bridge. "Our guest is here per your request, Captain," McKinney said in his usual good humor.

Stuart noticed the trepidation of the furry creature as it studied the bridge and those who were on duty. Stuart slowly stepped toward the creature with an outstretched arm, intending to shake the hand, or more appropriately, paw, of the alien. "Welcome aboard the United Federation of Planets starship *Providence*," he said.

The ape-like creature cautiously looked at Stuart, wondering if the alien's protruded arm was a prelude to an attack or a form of greeting. He had been rescued by these people from the other aliens. Yeelan decided that he would believe that these furless creatures had his best intentions in mind. "I am Fren Yeelan of Navar," he finally spoke. "Thank you for coming to my rescue."

Stuart gently grasped Yeelan's hand to indoctrinate the alien in what is known as a customary handshake. "I'm Captain Rob Stuart. Can you tell me why these people were chasing you?"

Yeelan thought a moment. "I think that I was in the wrong place when they appeared."

"Appeared?" Commander Leeson interjected.

“A hole opened in space and that ship came out of it,” Yeelan began. “I tried to hide from it in this nebula, but their sensors located me.”

“Their sensors detected you in the nebula?” Blake Adams asked as if he could not believe what his ears had heard.

“They told me to hand my ship over to them and direct them to the homeworld of the humans,” Yeelan continued. “I told them that I did not even know what a human was, nor had any knowledge of their homeworld.”

Stuart smiled at the pilot. “We’re the humans. Or at least most of us on this ship are.”

“I’m happy to meet you, although I wish the circumstances were different,” Yeelan stated.

“As do we,” Stuart replied.

“I was afraid to refuse their demands. And since I knew nothing of what they were referring, I tried to outrun them,” Yeelan said.

Leeson stepped forward to speak. “Do you know anything about them,” she asked. “Any information that you have might be helpful in finding a defense.”

Yeelan tried to remember the communication that the alien commander had initiated with him. “They call themselves Vendoth and they claim to come from another galaxy.” Yeelan paused. “The Vendoth weapons and sensors are far superior to that of my people,” he said. “And at least their weapons appear to be superior to yours as well.”



The senior staff, minus the doctor, ship’s counselor, and his wife Mary, sat around the conference table as Stuart entered the room. The captain sat in the customary chair that afforded him the ability to see everyone else around the table. “We may not have much time until their sensors lock onto us,” Stuart said, getting right down to business. “I want your best advice on the situation now.”

“Obviously our shields can only take a few hits before they collapse,” Commander Leeson stated.

“And our best shot didn’t even put a scratch on their ship,” Nakamara echoed. “How can we beat them?”

“The Vendoth may have us outgunned, but we can outsmart them,” Stuart replied. He could only hope that he was not making a false assumption by his statement. “Blake?”

The CONN officer cleared his throat. “Well... um... they’re faster than we are, but they don’t seem to have typical warp drive,” he said. “Not by our standards, anyway.”

“They employ a variation of warp drive that is very different from our own,” T’Les interjected. “It may have temporal properties as well.”

“Time travel?” It was the security officer who inquired.

“Affirmative,” T’Les answered.

“This is all very interesting ladies and gentlemen, but we need some options that will get us out of this,” the captain reminded his staff.

“We have metaphasic shields, Captain,” the science officer stated. “The Beta Tongarii star system is only two point one seven light years distant.”

“Are you suggesting we take up residence inside the star, Commander?” Leeson asked. “We could get fried if the shield fails.”

“A phaser blast at the precise coordinates on the star’s surface will create a solar eruption that should destroy the enemy vessel if it chooses to follow us,” T’Les stated as a matter-of-fact.

“The only problem is getting there ahead of the Vendoth,” Stuart said.

“I have an idea, Skipper,” Blake Adams said.

Stuart gave a gesture to his friend to lay out his plan.

“We could equip a probe with a holographic cloaking device that will project a hologram of the *Providence* and leave it in the nebula as we make a run for Beta Tongarii. Their sensors may be able to see through the holocloak, but it may be enough to give us the head start we need.”

Stuart thought about Blake’s plan. “It might just work, Blake. I would also like to add a bit of a surprise to the probe.”

“Excuse me, Captain,” Lieutenant Salesh K’Tok interrupted.

“Yes, Mr. Salesh?” Stuart said in acknowledgment to the chief engineer.

“The Vendoth are the aggressors and seem intent on enslaving the Federation,” the green-skinned Derkhanan said. “But is it the right thing for us to destroy them in return?”

Rob Stuart’s eyes glanced downward as he contemplated the engineer’s question. “I’m an explorer, Salesh,” he said. “But there are times that I am forced to be a warrior.” The captain paused as he looked directly into the chief engineer’s eyes. “If we could disable the Vendoth without killing them...” Stuart let his words trail off, hoping Salesh understood.

Lieutenant Salesh nodded his understanding. The Derkhanan was a member of a benign race who lived in peace and harmony. He knew that his life since leaving his world placed him in a position where violence could and did occur, but he also knew that he had been chosen by Derkha to live among the fallen ones. Of course, he would obey his captain, although he detested the loss of life. And he would mourn those who would be lost...even the Vendoth, who we acting wickedly.

“Blake, have Chief McKinney help you with modifying a probe,” Stuart said. “Mr. Salesh, when will the deflector shields be back?”

“The shields will be at one hundred percent power within twenty minutes, Sir.”

“Reinforce them with warp power if you need to,” Stuart said as he arose from his

chair. "Let's get to work. Dismissed."

Everyone started to exit the conference room. Stuart, however, sat back down and began to rub his eyes. He knew when the sound of the doors slid shut that one person had remained. Stuart looked up slowly, his first officer standing across from him on the other side of the desk. "Yes, Exec?"

Leeson stood with her hands folded in front of her. "This morning when you tried to tell me about doing whatever it takes to protect ship and crew, even if it meant hiding or running..."

"You didn't agree with me, did you?" Stuart said more of a statement than a question. "And what do you think now?"

Leeson thought before speaking. She pulled a chair away and sat on the edge of the table. "I see the wisdom in what you said," the first officer replied.

Stuart just leaned back and nodded his head.

Leeson looked at her CO. "Are we going to survive this?" she asked with the slightest hint of fear in her voice.

"I honestly don't know, Mel," he replied. "I know that I can't allow the Vendoth have this ship. And if necessary..." Stuart stopped in mid-sentence, knowing that Leeson could fill in the blank.

"Understood, Sir."



Lieutenant Commander Adams entered the bridge and went straight to the center of the bridge, where the CONN awaited him. He sat down and went through the flight checklist. "The probe is ready and waiting, Skipper."

Stuart, who had been visiting the different bridge stations to check on his crew's progress, returned to the center seat and settled himself into it. He turned as the turbolift doors slid open and Lieutenant Mary Goodman entered the bridge.

"Doctor Edwards has certified me fit for duty, Captain," the OPS officer stated in her most regal British accent.

"Take your station, Lieutenant," Stuart replied. "And good to have you back," he said as an afterthought. "Bridge to engineering."

"*Yes, Captain?*" Salesh's voice replied immediately.

"Status report, please."

"*Deflector shields at full strength. Warp power at full power.*"

Stuart looked around at his officers. He was proud to serve with the finest crew in Starfleet. Of course, that was something that every captain thought, but Stuart really believed that his crew was second to none. And he was grateful to have known them. "Yoshi, launch probe." Blake, set course for Beta Tongarii and set speed at one-half impulse. Engage warp factor nine once we clear the nebula," he said.

The probe left the starship and moved slowly away. If one were to observe the space surrounding the ship, he would see the probe transform into a duplicate of the starship *Providence* as the holocloak activated. The “real” *Providence* moved in the opposite direction toward the less dense area of the nebula’s outer clouds.

Stuart kept his eyes fixed on the viewscreen as stars began to shine through the thinning nebula gases. “Warp speed in five seconds,” he said. “Engage.”

And the Starfleet vessel was on its way to the star that would hopefully save them.



“We have an object on our sensors directly ahead, VenQa’,” the crewman at tactical stated. “It appears to have the same mass and configuration as the Federation vessel.”

VenQa’ Pa’drek allowed himself a moment of gloating, even if it was internalized. He had the humans, the vermin who could not keep themselves from interfering in the affairs of the Vendoth. “Move closer and prepare to board their ship.”

The alien ship moved closer to the “*Providence*” and grabbed it with a tractor beam. The starship was pulled near to the Vendoth scout.

The look of the tactical crewman was one of astonishment. Or was it fear. Fear that he had made a grave mistake. “VenQa’!” he practically shouted. “It is not the starship!”

“What!?” Pa’drek was incensed.

“It is a probe with a holographic generator, VenQa’,” the Ven at tactical stated. “And something else!” The warrior’s eyes almost jumped out of their sockets as he realized that the humans had laid a trap.

And then, an explosion rocked the alien vessel. The superior Vendoth shields were buffeted with the concussive shock of the anti-matter explosion, and they could not keep from being weakened severely by the blast.

Pa’drek cursed under his breath. “Find that ship.”



The starship *Providence* approached the star. The brightness reflected off the tritanium hull of the small Starfleet vessel as it closed in on the massive nuclear furnace.

Stuart stood in his ready room, staring out the window. He waited. He knew that the Vendoth ship would be here in a short time. Possibly moments. And then, the door chime chirped, breaking the captain’s train of thought. “Come,” Stuart said.

The door slid aside and Commander Leeson entered. She waited for the door to shut behind her. “We’re in close orbit of the star, Captain,” she stated. “So far, no sign of pursuit.”

“They won’t be long,” Stuart replied as he sat behind his desk. “Have a seat, Exec.” He motioned to the chair across from his desk. “How are repairs coming?”

Leeson sat down and leaned back in a “forced” semi-relaxed position. “Shields and weapons are at one hundred percent power. The hull breach has been sealed, but we’ll need to put into a starbase or spacedock to make it like new.”

“Any casualties?” Stuart asked.

Leeson took a deep breath. “Sickbay has reported about a dozen people injured,” she said. “But most of those were minor cuts and abrasions. And...”

“Go on Mel,” Stuart prompted.

“We lost two crewmen,” Leeson said with a heavy heart.

Stuart closed his eyes. He felt the loss of those two members of his crew. He imagined how their families might feel. The captain rose from his chair and walked back to stare out the window into space. “Let’s make sure that they are the last to die,” he stated resolutely.

And the ship was rocked by a blast of energy from the Vendoth vessel.



Stuart, followed by Leeson, entered from the port side door that separated the ready room from the main bridge. “Report,” Stuart demanded as he sat down.

The ship was hit by another blast.

“Shields are at sixty-two percent,” Nakamara stated.

“Rotate shield frequencies,” Leeson ordered. “That might keep them up longer.”

“Aye, Commander,” Nakamara replied as he started to make the necessary adjustments.

“Activate metaphasic shield and enter the star’s corona,” Stuart said.

“Commander T’Les, we’ll need those calibrations to be absolutely precise so we get Goliath without incinerating ourselves.”

T’Les cocked her eyebrow upward in a small display of annoyance. “They will be precise, Captain,” she said as she went about her calculations.

“Incoming transmission from the Vendoth commander, Sir,” Nakamara said.

“On screen.” Stuart watched as the image of VenQa’ Pa’drek appeared. The viewer displayed an unclear picture due to the interference associated with the fact that the U.S.S. *Providence* was engulfed by the star’s photosphere.

“This is your last chance to surrender, Captain,” Pa’drek stated. “You will comply or be destroyed.”

“The answer is still no, VenQa’ Pa’drek,” Stuart replied assertively. “If we are destroyed, you have no prize.” Stuart rose and stepped closer to the viewer. “You will not be able to complete your mission.”

The spikes on each side of Pa’drek’s head began to rise. Stuart surmised that to be a sign of the Vendoth’s anger being aroused. *“You have two of your minutes to*

surrender.” And the transmission abruptly ended.

“The coordinates have been plotted and verified, Captain,” T’Les stated. “I have transferred them to Lieutenant Nakamara’s station.”

“Prepare to fire on my mark,” Stuart said.



Pa’drek bared his teeth. *How dare that Hu’Jok refuse the order of a clearly superior lifeform*, he thought. “Lock all weapons on the Federation ship and prepare to fire.” The Vendoth began to feel a hint of pleasure at the thought of his adversary being blown into a billion pieces.



Stuart began to perspire as he watched the fuzzy image of the alien ship grow larger on the screen at the front of the starship’s control room. “Another few seconds...”



VenQa’ Pa’drek stared at the viewscreen and the image of the starship waiting like prey that is ready to be consumed by the hunter. “Goodbye Captain.”



“...Fire!”

With Stuart’s order, the phaser beam zipped through the stellar gases until it made contact with the star’s surface. A solar flare erupted and lanced toward the Vendoth scout vessel. And Pa’drek’s last thought was one that he had never had before—failure.



Rob Stuart escorted Yeelan to the transporter room. “I’m sorry that we cannot get to know you better, but our circumstances dictate that we head for home,” he said as the double doors opened. “Maybe we’ll meet again under better conditions.”

“I want to thank you, Captain, for coming to my rescue and for repairing my ship,” Yeelan said. “May you have good fortune.” Yeelan bowed and stepped onto the transport pad.

“Energize,” Stuart said. He waited until the Navar’s molecules had been scrambled and sent to his own ship, then the captain turned and walked toward the door.

“Too bad the Vendoth couldn’t have been friendly like him,” Chief John McKinney said with a wide grin.

Stuart patted the transporter chief on the shoulder as he walked by. “I have to agree with you there, Mac.” And the captain exited the room.



Rob Stuart stepped out of the turbolift. He surveyed the bridge and noticed how serious the expressions were on the faces of all his officers. “I take it that Starfleet Command has replied to our report concerning the Vendoth,” he said off-the-cuff.

Melanie Leeson rose from the CO's chair. "Admiral Hathaway said that there are classified records of past encounters with the Vendoth," she said. "Starfleet Command is expecting an invasion of Earth."

Everyone was silent as Stuart slowly approached the center seat. He put his hands on the backrest of the chair. "Set course for Starbase 82," he said almost whispering. "First, we put in to get our battle damage repaired. Then, we head home to join the fleet."

"With your permission, Sir, I would like to put together a team to upgrade our defenses," Leeson said.

"Good idea, Exec," Stuart replied. "I think our lives just became more complicated."

To be continued...

*This story was one of many crossover stories by fan-fiction writers who participated in *Star Trek: Unity*, which culminated in the story, *United We Stand*.