

Previously...

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."

And now, the continuation...

To Boldly Go: Our Sacred Honor

A U.S.S. *Providence* story*

By Cleve Johnson

Robert P. Stuart, captain of the Federation starship *Providence*, sat by himself in one of the observation lounges of Starbase 82. He took a sip of his favorite blend of cinnamon tea as he contemplated the last few days. The debriefing with Admiral Takei concerning the Vendoth went as expected. The admiral had provided Stuart with the report that had been made by Commodore George of the *Excelsior*-class U.S.S. *Excalibur* concerning his encounter with the Vendoth near the end of the last century. Starfleet Command had classified that report. Classified it until now.

Stuart thought about the battle that he and his crew had fought against the single Vendoth vessel only a week before. He thought about the two crewmen who gave their lives while doing their duty. And the only thing that his mind's eye could see was the dedication plaque on the bridge of his ship. The words of Thomas Jefferson scrolled through Stuart's mind. The words that were the motto of the *Providence*. The words that Rob Stuart had pledged to himself:

*"...we mutually pledge to each other our Lives,
our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor."*

These words would be at the forefront of Rob Stuart's thoughts at his next meeting with the Vendoth.

The captain continued to sip his tea as he watched through the viewport that overlooked the berth where his ship was undergoing repair inside the large space dock facility of the starbase. He watched as the engineers in their EVA suits removed the damaged pieces of the hull and began to replace the plates of tritanium. As he observed the work progressing on his ship, Stuart did not notice the figure that approached him from behind.

“You never know who you’ll bump into at a starbase.”

Stuart turned, recognizing the voice of his former roommate at Starfleet Academy. “Benjamin!” he exclaimed.

“How you been, Stu?” the tall dark man asked as Stuart began to stand and offer his hand in greeting.

“That depends,” Stuart replied as the other man grasped his hand, shaking it firmly. “But seeing you again makes me feel better than I have for the past few days.”

“I can imagine,” the man said. “I heard about your incident with the Vendoth. Are they as bad as I’ve heard?”

Stuart tried, unsuccessfully, to feign a grin. “I don’t know what you’ve heard,” he said, “but the Jem’Hedar were as gentle as tribbles compared to these people.”

“That *is* bad,” the newcomer said as the two men sat down.

Stuart relaxed and picked up his teacup. “So what brings you to this part of the galaxy?” he asked. “I thought you were fifty sectors away from here.”

“I was in the neighborhood and heard you were here,” the man said. “I figured I’d stop by to see my kid brother and favorite sister-in-law. And an old friend.”

Stuart knew that his old friend wasn’t giving a completely straight answer, but he also knew that the bond that he had with Benjamin Goodman would cause the full truth to come out. “I see,” Stuart stated. “Well, you probably would like to see James and Mary if you haven’t already.”

“Actually, I’ve already talked to James and we’re getting together for lunch in about an hour,” the elder Goodman said. “You’re welcome to join us if you like.”

“I appreciate the offer, but I have a meeting scheduled with my chief engineer about that same time,” Stuart replied. “How about dinner at the officer’s club tonight?”

Benjamin Goodman mentally reviewed his schedule. “I think I can manage that,” he said. “How’s 1800 hours sound?”

“Sounds fine,” Stuart said. “Will you tell me the real reason you’re here when we’re at dinner?”

Goodman smiled broadly and chuckled. “Never could fool you,” the tall man said. “Starfleet Command sent me here to escort you to Earth. If there is an invasion by the Vendoth....”

“You’ll be in the fray with me, eh?” Stuart said.

“I wouldn’t have it any other way,” Goodman replied, patting Stuart on the shoulder. “It’ll be like old times.”

Just then, the lighting turned red and the irritating sound of emergency klaxons resounded through the station. “*Attention,* ” the voice of Admiral Takei boomed over the speakers in every area of the starbase. “*We have just received a priority one message from Starfleet Command. The Vendoth have arrived in Sector 001.*”

Stuart and Goodman turned toward each other, their worst fears showing on their faces. Silence fell in the lounge. Silence fell in every part of the station.

“*Captain Stuart and all other starship captains currently stationed here are to report to Conference Room Alpha in ten minutes.*”

“So much for dinner plans,” Benjamin Goodman remarked.

Stuart tried to laugh, but all he could manage was a nervous smirk. He tapped the Starfleet emblem on his chest. “Stuart to *Providence*.”

“*This is Leeson, Captain,*” came the reply.

“You heard?” Stuart asked although he knew the answer.

“*The announcement was on all frequencies, Sir. Orders?*”

Stuart walked past his friend and gazed out the observation windows at the work crew still working on his ship. “What’s the status of the repairs and upgrades?” he asked his first officer.

“*Upgrades are on schedule, Captain. The Corps of Engineers should be finished with their repairs in about two or three hours,*” Melanie Leeson stated.

Stuart sighed. “Tell the person in charge of the engineering team that they have one hour to finish,” he said. “I’m heading to meet with the admiral.”

“*Aye Sir,*” Leeson replied with a little bit of trepidation as the channel closed.



Ben Goodman and Rob Stuart entered the main conference room--in this case, a war room--of Starbase 82. The two officers were about to sit down with the other starship captains sitting around the table when a door from the main corridor opened, allowing Admiral Takei to enter. Stuart and Goodman snapped to attention as did the others, although the others took longer since they were in a seated position.

“At ease ladies and gentlemen,” the admiral said as he moved toward the chair reserved for himself.

There was no sound, and barely a breath, in the room as the captains waited for the admiral to speak. “A fleet of more than sixty Vendoth ships is parked just outside of the Sol system,” Takei stated. “From what we can gather, they downloaded the Federation database from Memory Alpha and used that information to destroy one of our starships.”

The officers in the room began to shift in their seats. Heavy sighs and looks of

dread filled the room. Rob Stuart cleared his throat to get the others' attention. "The prefix code?" he asked the admiral.

"That is our assumption," Takei replied. "It would be prudent for each of you to change your ships' codes as soon as you get back on board. That includes all security and personal authorization codes as well," he added.

"What are our orders, Admiral?" Captain Kathryn O'Riley of the starship *Spectre* asked.

Takei looked at the woman who spoke. Kate was never one to beat around the bush, he mused. "The *Nairobi* will stay here to defend the station. Sorry Captain Tanaka," he told the *Nairobi*'s CO who nodded his acknowledgment. "The rest of you will be assigned to Task Force 82."

"But there is no Task Force 82," Jomrel, captain of the U.S.S. *Exploration*, said.

Takei half smiled at that. "There is now," he said. "And you're it. Captain Stuart will command the task force in addition to his own ship."

Jomrel frowned slightly. "No offense intended toward Captain Stuart, Admiral," the Andorian said, "But I believe most of the other captains in this room have more time in grade than he does."

Stuart sat relaxed without saying anything, nor did he appear to be offended. A fact that Admiral Takei made a mental note of.

"That is true, Captain," the admiral replied. "It is also true that he is the only CO in this room who has encountered the Vendoth already."

"I appreciate your confidence in me, Admiral, but my crew and I were very fortunate to have survived our encounter," Stuart finally said. "Perhaps someone with more experience should..."

"Nonsense!" Takei interrupted. "My orders stand."

Stuart backed off. "Yes, Sir."

The admiral surveyed the conference room. He looked at each one of the men and women. Takei knew that these were all good commanders. Some of them might even become great in the eyes of history. Assuming they survived the battle that they were heading into. "Any questions or comments?"

"I have a team of my best people working on upgrades to our shields and weapons," Stuart said. "I'll have my first officer make the technical information available to each of you within the hour so you can begin modifications on your ships as well."

"Why do we need modifications to our defenses?" Captain Jomrel asked in an irritated tone of voice. "We don't have time for that."

Admiral Takei started to reprimand the Andorian for his tone but decided to see how Stuart would respond. And the admiral was not disappointed.

Stuart kept a calm demeanor. "Without the modifications," he began, "your

shields will only be able to take three or four hits before they collapse.” Stuart stood and leaned on the table with both hands and furrowed his brow. “And as the CO of this task force, like it or not, I’m ordering you to make those modifications.”

Jomrel’s jaw tightened as he glared at Stuart across the table. The Andorian's antennae begin to twitch, indicating the anger that was building. But Jomrel remained quiet as he glanced toward the admiral, whose silence was a sign of his support for Stuart’s position. The captain of the *Exploration* forced himself to relax and stand up from behind the conference table. “Yes Captain,” was all he said as he nodded in acquiescence.

Takei was pleased with how Stuart handled the situation and knew that his choice of the *Providence*’s captain as task force commander was the right one. “When can you be ready to leave, Captain?” the admiral asked Stuart.

“I plan on being on the way to Earth in less than an hour, Sir,” came Stuart’s answer. “If repairs aren’t completed by then, the Corps of Engineers may need some replacements.”

Takei laughed at that. “Then may the wind be at your backs.” The admiral’s face became serious again. “And good luck to all of you. Dismissed.”

The room emptied in record time as each of the captains wanted to get back to their ships. Each one, with the exception of Jomrel, congratulated Rob Stuart with a pat on the back or a handshake. Ben Goodman put his arm around his long-time friend’s shoulder and escorted him to the nearest turbolift. “Don’t worry. You’ll do fine,” Goodman told Stuart, knowing the weight of responsibility that he must be feeling.



Stuart entered the engine room of his ship. He approached his first officer and chief engineer, who were talking near the main console. “What’s our status, Exec?”

Commander Leeson looked up at her CO. “Repairs are complete and shield upgrades should be finished within the hour, Captain,” she replied. “Blake and Chief McKinney have made some modifications to the holocloak as well.”

Stuart nodded approvingly. “We’re the lead ship for a task force of seven starships to help defend Earth,” he stated. “When can we get underway?”

“Now, if you’re ready,” Leeson stated.

“Good,” the captain replied. “I want you to transmit all information concerning our shield and weapons modifications to the other starships.” Stuart handed a PADD to his first officer.

Leeson looked at the printout. She looked up at Stuart in mild surprise. “Jack Brady is captain of the *Rapier*?”

“Yes,” he replied. “You know him?”

Leeson hesitated. “We... were at the academy together,” she finally answered.

“Ah,” Stuart said and dropped the subject. “I was at the academy with Captains

O'Riley and Goodman. Of course, you know about him," he added.

"Our counselor's brother," Leeson stated.

"Mm-hmm."

Leeson nodded and shot a look over her shoulder at Lieutenant Salesch working at the warp power monitor. "He has some concerns about tying warp power directly to the phasers."

"I'll talk to him," Stuart said. "Move us out of spacedock and inform the other ships that we'll be on our way in fifteen minutes."

"Aye Sir," Leeson said and turned to leave.

"Oh, Exec!" Stuart said, realizing that he almost forgot something. "We need to change the prefix code and all other security codes before we encounter the Vendoth."

"That will be my top priority after contacting the task force, Captain," Leeson replied. She turned and left engineering.

Stuart turned back toward his chief engineer and started walking toward him. "Lieutenant Salesch, I understand you have some concerns about the phasers," he stated.

The alien engineer stopped what he was doing and gave his attention to the captain. "Yes Sir," he said. "I believe that directing warp power to the phaser arrays will give us a significant increase to fight the Vendoth, but...."

"You're concerned that we may lose warp power during a battle," Stuart finished for the engineer, who nodded in agreement. "I'm concerned, too," Stuart stated. "How about rigging a bypass so we'll still have phasers if we do lose warp power?"

Salesch nodded again. "Actually, Captain, I have already started that procedure."

Rob Stuart smiled, shaking his head. "I should have known you would right on top of it, K'Tok," the captain replied. "Keep me informed of your progress."

Salesch nodded as Stuart turned to leave. "Yes, Captain."



Stuart exited the turbolift and went straight to the center of the bridge. He sat down in the center seat that Commander Leeson had just vacated. "Report, Exec."

All ships report ready, Sir," she said. "Modifications specs have been transferred and all captains have indicated that they will have their engineering teams begin working on them immediately."

"Good," Stuart said. Patch me through to all ships, Mister Nakamara."

After a brief pause, the chief of security indicated that communications were open to all starships that made up the newly assigned Task Force 82. "You're on, Captain."

"All ships," Stuart began. "This is Captain Stuart. Set course for the Sol system, warp eight point five. Engage."

Two *Intrepid*-class starships, three *Defiant*-class, the *Katana*-class U.S.S. *Rapier*,

and the *Providence* --seven in all-- simultaneously left the confines of Einsteinian space and jumped into warped space, once thought impossible to attain. Seven starships to help defend Earth from the Vendoth fleet. From all reports, it seemed to be a battle that could not be won. But then, the Vendoth had not come against all of Starfleet's best at one time.



Admiral Robert Hathaway paced the floor in his office. The Borg was child's play compared to these Vendoth, he thought. The admiral stopped pacing and tapped the control console on his desk. "Get me the CNC," he stated.

"*Aye Sir,*" a feminine voice replied.

Hathaway stepped behind his desk and sat down just as the highest-ranking admiral's image appeared on the COM screen.

"*Yes, Bob. You called?*" the other admiral said.

"The President has not called a planet-wide emergency yet," Hathaway stated. "Why not?" he demanded.

"*The President does not want to create a panic, Bob,*" the CNC replied. "He feels that a public announcement at this time will do a lot of harm and..."

"Waiting too long will cause more harm, Admiral!" Hathaway was livid. "We should get him evacuated, too, before it's too late."

"*I agree, but he won't go along with that,*" the other admiral stated.

Hathaway saw the look of frustration on the CNC's face.

"*I'll see what I can do to convince him,*" the CNC said as his shoulders slumped.

"I'm sure you'll do your best," the head of Starfleet Operations said. "Hathaway out." And he touched the console on his desk to end the transmission.

At least help is on the way, Hathaway thought. *I just hope it's here on time.*

And Admiral Hathaway stood up and resumed pacing.



The stars continued to streak by the starship *Providence*. Rob noticed how quiet the bridge seemed. Even Blake Adams, who usually lightened the crew's mood with a joke or two, remained atypically quiet. Until the announcement of the security chief.

"There is a message coming in on all frequencies, Captain," Lieutenant Yoshi Nakamara said.

"On screen."

The image of a Vendoth appeared on the main viewer. His greenish-brown hide and spikes protruding from his head reminded Stuart of some of the big lizards that he had seen at a zoo in Dublin. The stocky Vendoth's biceps rippled and his head-spikes extended. "*I am Roj Ch'Dak of the Vendoth Empire,*" the less than attractive alien stated. "*We are here to right the errors of your ways. No longer will you interfere in other's*

cultures as you did in ours."

Stuart, nor any of his bridge crew, understood what Roj Ch'Dak was saying. What could the Vendoth mean about interfering with their culture? The Prime Directive forbade interference of other cultures.

"You will now humble yourselves before the might of Vendoth and learn subservience... or die."

All the bridge officers looked at Stuart as the image of the Vendoth leader faded from the viewscreen, replaced by the familiar view of stars streaking by.

Stuart knew he was being watched, looked to for direction. "Inform all ships that we are increasing speed to warp nine."



Captain Stuart stood beside the viewport in his ready room. He watched the stars go by as he wondered if the Earth would survive the next few days. He wondered if he would get to his home planet and find it occupied by an alien invasion force. He wondered if he would find that his family had been slaughtered by the Vendoth or if they managed to escape. Then, the chime sounded, breaking his focus and indicating someone was waiting on the other side of the door to his ready room. "Come."

The door slid open, revealing Commander Leeson and Doctor Edwards. The two women entered the room, Edwards with her medical tricorder in hand.

"What do I owe the pleasure?" Stuart asked.

Leeson stepped forward. "The *Spectre* is having some engine difficulties. Captain O'Riley is requesting permission to drop out of warp to make repairs. And Jan wants you to get some rest."

Stuart looked at the Doctor, who had been silent up to this moment. "I've been resting, Doctor," he replied.

"But have you slept in the past twenty-four hours?" Edwards asked, slightly irritated.

Stuart shrugged his shoulders and sat down on the couch. "Probably not."

"Then I am ordering you to go to your quarters, drink some warm milk, and get at least six hours sleep," the doctor said with no intention of backing down. "Is that understood?"

Stuart's brows came together, showing the doctor that he did not appreciate her tone nor her giving him orders. Even if she was within her authority to do so as the chief medical officer. "Could you sleep with what's happening?" he asked.

The doctor was not sure what to say. In all honesty, she probably would not be able to sleep if she were in the captain's position. "I'm not sure," she finally replied. "But I know that you will not be at your best when the moment of crisis comes if you don't get some sleep."

Stuart nodded in agreement. "You're right, Doctor," he said. "I'll go to my quarters as soon as I talk to Captain O'Riley."

"You have ten minutes," Edwards said, pointing her finger at Stuart. "Or I'll have security pick you up and carry you to bed." Edwards turned and left the ready room.

"And she'll do it, too," Leeson said as she allowed herself to grin.

Stuart smiled at his first officer. "And when did you sleep last?"

"I slept a few hours during beta shift," Leeson responded.

"Very well, Exec," Stuart stated. "You have the bridge. And I expect you to make sure I'm awake at 0630 hours."

"Aye Captain," she replied as she turned to leave the room.

Stuart touched the control console on his desktop computer monitor. "Get me the *Spectre*."

"Hailing...Captain O'Riley on the com," the computer's feminine voice stated.

"Having problems, Kate?" Stuart asked.

"We're having problems with channeling warp power to the phasers. Our EPS taps are overloading," the captain of the U.S.S. *Spectre* said.

Stuart frowned. "How long to make repairs?" he asked. "I don't want to go to this party without you."

The image of Captain Kathryn O'Riley leaned back in her chair. *"Two or three hours according to my chief engineer. We'll be a little late, but we'll be there."*

"Understood, Kate," Stuart replied. "We'll try to keep the Vendoth busy until you show. Stuart out." He ended the transmission and rose from his chair, heading for the door to the bridge. Rob had to admit that he was looking forward to getting some sleep before the battle.



Rob was groggy. He struggled to wake up as the computer kept beeping that the bridge was trying to contact him. That's annoying, he decided as the beeping continued. Stuart finally awoke and came to a sitting position in his bed. "Stuart here," he said sleepily.

"You ordered me to wake you at 0630 hours, Captain," the voice of Commander Leeson stated.

Stuart rubbed his eyes as he yawned. "You'd be in trouble if you didn't, Exec," he said. "What's our status?"

"The Spectre has made repairs and should catch up with us in about seventy-five minutes," Leeson stated. *"We'll reach Pluto's orbit in about thirty."*

Stuart slowly got out of bed and started moving toward the lavatory. He leaned over the sink and activated the water dispenser. He splashed his face to help wake

himself. "Any word from Starfleet?" he asked.

"Frequencies are jammed, Captain, but long range sensors show battles on several fronts."

"I have a private frequency to my uncle," Stuart stated. "I'll see if I can get through to him."



Rob Stuart entered his ready room and sat behind his desk, swiveling the COM monitor to face him. "Computer, establish a private link to Starfleet Headquarters, Chief of Starfleet Operations office. Omega priority," he said.

"Please provide Omega priority security code," the computer responded.

"Stuart alpha one omega Hathaway two," the captain said.

"Now establishing data link," the ship's computer stated. Then, after a few seconds... *"Link established."*

The image of Admiral Robert Hathaway, Chief of Starfleet Operations and Stuart's uncle, appeared. He looked tired and worried, but Hathaway would not show any sign of feeling defeated. *"Good to see you, Robby,"* Hathaway said. *"I only wish it were under better circumstances."*

Stuart admired his uncle's way of staying cool in the worst of situations. And this was definitely the worst of situations. "We're having trouble getting information on what is happening at Earth, Uncle Bob," Stuart said. "Can you fill me in?"

"We received a report that the Vendoth were in process of boarding the orbital spacedock when we lost contact with it," the admiral said. *"I don't know if any Vendoth have tried to put down landing parties planetside. We know that Utopia Planitia has been engaged and Jupiter Station sent out a distress call that they were being boarded. The Swiftfire is trying to defend the station."*

Hathaway folded his hands behind his back and sat on the corner of his desk. *"What's your ETA?"*

"Our task force will reach the edge of the solar system in about twenty minutes," Stuart replied. "What are our orders?"

"Aid the Swiftfire in liberating Jupiter Station and get to Earth as soon as you can," Hathaway said.

"Understood," replied Stuart.

Admiral Hathaway nodded. *"Best of luck to you,"* he said. *"I look forward to seeing you soon. Hathaway out."*

The image of Rob's uncle faded from the screen.

I hope to see you soon, too, Stuart thought.

The *Providence* captain tapped his combadge. "Exec, inform the other ship captains that I want a holo-conference in ten minutes," Stuart said. "And could you have

holodeck two prepared?”

“I’ll take care of it, Sir,” Leeson’s voice replied.

“Thank you, Mel. Stuart out.”



Stuart entered the holodeck, noticing the simulated conference table with the holographic forms of all but two... (just then, the image of Benjamin Goodman appeared seated with the others) ...one of the captains missing. It was Kate O’Riley who earlier fell back to make repairs. Stuart noticed that Captain Jomrel of the U.S.S. *Exploration* appeared to be less formidable than he was on Starbase 82. “I suppose I should have something to say that is motivational and awe-inspiring right now, but I can’t think of anything,” Stuart said. “I want you all to know that whatever happens today...” Stuart looked down and tried to swallow the lump forming in his throat. “...I’m very proud to have served with each of you on this mission.”

All eyes were on Stuart. Then, after a few seconds, Ben Goodman broke the silence. “What are our orders, Captain?”

Stuart regained his professional demeanor. “Our best chance is to concentrate our united firepower on one target at a time,” he stated. “Forget about photon torpedoes. They won’t do much damage to their shields. Use the quantums at full explosive yield and channel warp power to shields and phasers.”

“Will the upgraded defensive shields last long against their weapons?” Captain Brady asked.

“In theory, they should last between fifteen and twenty minutes in an extended fight, Jack,” Stuart replied. “But we should try to bring the Vendoth ships down quickly before they have the opportunity to punch through our shields.”

“Where’s our first target located, Rob?” Goodman asked eagerly.

“Several Starfleet ships have engaged the enemy throughout the system. Jupiter Station has the least defense against three Vendoth vessels,” Stuart said. “We’ll drop out of warp near there and engage those ships. After that, we’ll head for Mars, and then to help defend Earth.”

“Assuming we survive the battle at Jupiter,” Brady muttered.

Stuart tried not to echo Captain Brady’s pessimism but found it hard to not feel the same way. “I have another advantage that you should know about,” he stated. “My second officer and a member of our engineering team have patched our holocloak into the main deflector. We will project an image of our ships ahead of true positions by several hundred meters to give the Vendoth sensors a false weapons lock.”

“I thought that the Vendoth sensors can sense cloaked ships,” Jomrel said.

“True,” Stuart replied. “But we have made some upgrades to the cloak that will take longer for the Vendoth to detect. It’s still not foolproof, but it gives us more time to attack before they lock on.”

“One question,” Brady said. “What if our united effort still doesn’t penetrate their shields?”

Stuart chuckled. “Then we’re in trouble. The fate of Earth and the entire Federation is in our hands. We dare not fail, even if we die in the attempt. This is for our...our sacred honor.”



Stuart had just entered the bridge and sat down in the command chair. He surveyed the room, noting the apparent calm of his senior officers. No matter what happened, Rob Stuart knew that he had a great crew and that he could count on them to do their best. “Blake, prepare to drop out of warp and engage full impulse on my mark,” he said.

“Awaiting your command, skipper,” Adams replied.

“Mary, activate holocloak as soon as we’re out of warp,” Stuart ordered. “Yoshi, shields up and power up the weapons. Program quantum torpedoes for full explosive yield.”

“Aye, Captain,” Nakamara said as he started entering information into his tactical console.

Stuart looked at his first officer and smiled. “Ready Exec?”

Melanie Leeson smiled back at her CO, although it was more of a half-hearted grin. “As well as I can be, Sir.”

“Three Vendoth vessels are in close proximity to Jupiter Station, Captain.” It was Lieutenant Commander T’Les who spoke. “The station’s shields have been damaged.”

Stuart straightened himself in his chair. “Patch me through to the task force,” he said.

“You’re on, Sir,” Lieutenant Mary Goodman said from the combination OPS/Engineering station directly behind the CO’s chair.

“This is Stuart. All Task Force 82 ships drop out of warp and engage the lead Vendoth vessel,” Stuart ordered. “Engage.”

The six starships slowed to sublight speed and flew in tight formation toward the Vendoth ships. Bolts of plasma energy from the Vendoth ships—one battlecruiser and two scouts—sped toward the *Providence* and Starfleet vessels. The weapons were seconds from hitting the shields of the Federation ships, then... the energy passed through the falsified images projected by the *Providence*.

On the bridge of the starship *Providence*, Blake Adams let out a loud “Yesss!”

Stuart punched a button on the armrest of his chair. “Bridge to engineering. Transfer warp power to shields and phasers,” he said.

“Aye Captain. Transferring power now,” came the reply from Lieutenant Sales K’Tok.

“Mister Nakamara,” Stuart began to say. “Lock Phasers and fire.”

Beams of phased energy, enhanced by the starship’s warp core, lanced from the tiny starship and hit the lead Vendoth’s shields with the fury of a mad elephant. The other five starships followed the example of the lead ship and bombarded the Vendoth vessel until the protective shell, that had been forming in response to the first volley, began to crack. The Vendoth shields could not keep from buckling under the strain of six starships hammering with phasers that had been warp-enhanced. The shell finally broke and the Vendoth ship’s shields completely collapsed.

“The lead vessel has lost its shields, Captain,” Yoshi Nakamara stated with excitement.

Stuart contemplated his next order. The enemy ship had been damaged and robbed of its defensive shield. Should he be merciful and disable the ship’s offensive weapons and engines? Should he try to take prisoners? He knew from his previous encounter with this species and the reports from the other Starfleet ships’ encounters that the Vendoth were too powerful to take the chance. “Finish them off,” he said, saddened by the necessity to take the lives of other sentient beings.

Yoshi targeted the lead Vendoth’s engineering section and pressed the firing control.

A torpedo left the forward launch tube of the *Providence*. It sped toward the damaged enemy craft, but one of the Vendoth scout ships fired its weapons toward the speeding torpedo. The Vendoth weapon passed through the Federation torpedo without detonating it. Seconds later, the quantum torpedo made contact with the defenseless battlecruiser. A ball of fire and debris appeared where the mighty Vendoth ship had once been.

Melanie Leeson’s mouth dropped open. She could not believe that the torpedo did not explode when the other ship fired on it. “How come they couldn’t shoot down our torpedo?” she wondered out loud.

Blake smiled to himself, continuing to face the main viewer. “I forgot to tell you that I enhanced the torpedoes with holocloaks as well.”

Stuart chuckled. “Great job, Blake!” he exclaimed. “One down, two to go. Prepare to target...”

“Captain!” Nakamara interrupted Stuart. “The *Exploration* has left formation and is engaging the other Vendoth ship.”

“What!?” Stuart could hardly believe it. “Open a channel.”

Mary Goodman tried to establish communication with the other Starfleet vessel. “They’re not responding, Captain,” she stated somberly.

“The *Exploration* is outside the protection of the holocloak, Captain,” T’Les said.

“Understood,” replied Stuart. Rob looked at Leeson. A look of concern on his face was echoed by the first officer. “It looks like Captain Jomrel has decided to go his own way, Exec.”

“What should we do, Sir?”

Stuart thought a moment, then made his decision. “Blake, alter course and try to get us close enough to extend the holocloak,” he said. “Mary, keep hailing on priority frequencies.”

The *Intrepid*-class U.S.S. *Exploration* sped past the closest Vendoth scout ship, firing phasers. The energy interacted with the Vendoth shields, creating a solid protective shell. But without the firepower from the other ships in the task force, the lone Federation vessel was no match for the technologically superior Vendoth.

The Vendoth ship fired upon Jomrel’s vessel, creating a shell on the outer layer of the upgraded multi-layered shield. The Federation ship returned fire, but it stayed on course toward the second enemy ship.

Rob Stuart watched the main viewer, seeing the two ships fire at each other until the *Exploration* was out of range. “Send a Priority One message to Captain Jomrel, Lieutenant,” he said, jaw clenched. “Tell him to get his ship back in formation now before his ship gets blown out from under him.”

“The *Exploration* has taken another hit, Captain,” T’Les stated calmly.

Stuart watched the viewer. He saw the Vendoth scout looming closer. “Exec, have the other ships take this one while we assist Jomrel,” he said. “They can join us as soon as they take that one out.”

“Aye,” Leeson responded.

The U.S.S. *Providence* veered away from the other ships that were already beginning to fire at the nearest Vendoth scout ship. It sped toward the second scout, several hundred kilometers behind the *Intrepid*-class vessel.

Captain Stuart watched intently as the other Federation starship fired upon the Vendoth. He watched as the Vendoth fired back, hitting the starship with one salvo after another. “Are we in weapons range yet?” Stuart demanded.

“Fifteen seconds, skipper,” Blake Adams replied.

Lieutenant Commander T’Les looked up from her science station toward the center seat. “The *Exploration*’s shields are at twenty-three point six percent, Captain,” the science officer stated. “Warp power is failing as well.”

Stuart clenched his fist. He felt helpless not being close enough to aid the crew of the other ship. “Lock phasers and quantum torpedoes on the Vendoth,” he said. “Fire as soon as we’re in range with everything we have.”

The tiny starship drew closer to the enemy. Phaser beams shot across the void and made contact with the Vendoth shields. A barrage of torpedoes followed and weakened the shields of the larger ship. But the Vendoth fired in return and buffeted the *Providence*’s shields, turning the energy into solid matter that would soon crack.

Stuart felt the deck shift under his feet as he struggled to remain seated. “Rotate shield frequencies and add additional layers, Lieutenant,” the captain said. “Blake, it

appears they finally scanned us through the holocloak.”

Blake Adams just shrugged his shoulders. “It kept them guessing longer than I expected,” he replied.

“Deactivate the cloak and transfer power to the shields, Lieutenant,” Stuart told Lieutenant Mary Goodman at OPS.

“Right away, Sir,” Mary replied as she worked the controls.

Another blast jarred the bridge crew nearly throwing Leeson out of her chair. “Shields are down to eighty-two percent, Captain,” she said.

“How are the other ships doing against their target?” Stuart asked his first officer as another blast rocked the ship.

Leeson checked the readout on her monitor. “The *Avenger* and the *Rapier* are reporting minor damage to their shields,” she said. “But they are continuing to attack and seem to be doing more damage to the Vendoth than the Vendoth have done to them.

“What about the *Starrider* and *Defender*?” Stuart asked. “Any word from them?”

Leeson checked her monitor again and her face lit up. “They’re coming to assist us,” the first officer said. “Forty seconds to intercept.”

“Blake, evasive maneuvers,” Stuart said. “Yoshi, give the Vendoth another round of torpedoes.”

The *Providence* zipped past the Vendoth scout and fired a full spread of quantum torpedoes. Plasma energy from the Vendoth ship reached out to pound the Starfleet vessel but missed its intended target. Barely.

“The *Exploration* is moving away at three-quarter impulse, Captain,” Commander Melanie Leeson stated.

“Let’s keep the Vendoth off Captain Jomrel’s back,” Stuart replied. “Set course zero three five, full impulse, Blake. We want to draw their fire.”

Blake Adams skillfully piloted the *Ericsson*-class starship toward the larger enemy vessel. The Vendoth ship, its shields weakened from the torpedo strikes, moved closer. The *Providence* headed straight toward the enemy on a collision course.

Stuart watched the viewer intently. Watched as the Vendoth scout ship refused to flinch. “Lock phasers, Lieutenant,” he said to his tactical officer. “Blake, prepare for evasive maneuver Delta-three and engage when I give the order to fire.”

Blake simply nodded his acknowledgment as he concentrated on flying.

There was silence on the bridge as the crew expectantly awaited Stuart’s next order. Stuart remained calm as he saw the enemy starship loom larger on the main viewer. “Be ready, Yoshi,” he said. Then, after a few seconds... “Fire!”

Phaser beams sliced through the void of space and hit the Vendoth abruptly. Its shields began to form the protective covering of matter, which started to crack quickly due to the shields’ weakened condition. Still, the Vendoth scout returned firing at the

small Starfleet vessel that began to spin in a corkscrew fashion past the larger vessel. Several plasma bursts hit the Federation starship.

Each of the officers on the *Providence* bridge held tightly to their consoles or armrests. The enhanced shielding continued to hold, but the alien technology of the Vendoth weaponry did take its toll on the tiny ship.

“Shields down to seventy-four percent, Captain,” Lieutenant Yoshi Nakamara stated from the tactical station.

“Keep firing, Yoshi,” Stuart ordered. “Mary, have Salesh try to increase power to the shields.”

“Lieutenant Salesh reports that he has given all he can without risking a core breach, Sir,” Goodman replied.

The *Providence* rocked again as the Vendoth continued its attack.

“Shields are on the verge of collapse, Captain,” Yoshi stated.

“Where’s our cover, Exec?” Stuart demanded.

Leeson looked at her monitor and turned a gaze back toward her CO. “Right here, Sir,” she exclaimed.

Stuart turned his attention back to the viewer. The starships *Defender* and *Starrider* could be seen flying side by side toward the Vendoth scout. Torpedoes and phasers were fired from the two ships toward the scout that tried to maneuver its port side, where its shields were strongest, to absorb the full force of the Starfleet weapons.

The bridge crew of the *Providence* watched the other starships battle the enemy ship. Then, Rob Stuart saw a flash of light in the upper corner of the view screen and a *Defiant*-class starship come out of warp, firing its phaser pulse cannons at the Vendoth. The combined firepower of the three vessels crashed through the weakened shielding of the alien ship and sliced through its hull plating. Explosions began to erupt, destroying the Vendoth spacecraft.

Stuart let out a sigh and relaxed in his command chair.

“Incoming message from the U.S.S. *Spectre*, Captain,” Leeson stated.

“On screen,” Stuart replied.

The image of Captain Kathryn O’Riley, standing behind the helm officer’s position on her ship, appeared. “*Sorry I’m late, Robert,*” she said. “*Did I miss too much of the fun?*”

Stuart grinned. “Not too much, Kate,” he replied. “I believe we can assist other ships of the fleet engaged at Utopia Planitia and Earth.”

“Captain,” T’Les interrupted.

“Hold on Kate,” Stuart said as he turned his attention toward the science station. “Yes, Commander?”

“Sensors indicate that several dozen Vendoth are aboard Jupiter station,” the

Vulcan stated. "There has been heavy weapons fire on levels four through seven and level fifteen. The starships *Avenger* and *Rapier* are en route to the station now."

"Where is the *Swiftfire*?" the captain asked.

"Close proximity to the station, Captain," T'Les replied. "Other Vendoth ships are engaging both the *Swiftfire* and Jupiter Station."

Stuart turned back to the main viewer. "It looks like we're still needed here, Kate."

"Understood," the captain of the *Spectre* stated, her demeanor indicating that she was back to business. "What are your orders?"

Stuart glanced down at the monitor on the armrest of his chair and tapped the controls. He pulled up the sensor status on each of the other ships that made up his task force. "Lead the *Starrider* and *Defender* to the station and do whatever you can to rescue our people," he stated. "Either evacuate station personnel or beam the Vendoth out of there, whatever is necessary."

Captain O'Riley nodded. "*We're on our way.*"

The viewer changed from the image of the *Spectre*'s bridge to an image of the expanding debris of what once was a Vendoth scout ship.

"Exec, I would like a report on our damage as well as damage to the *Exploration* in ten minutes," Stuart said. "Yoshi, hail the *Exploration*."

Lieutenant Nakamara tried to contact the other starship with no reply. "No response, Captain," he said. "I'll keep trying." Yoshi continued for several seconds to coerce a reply from the crew of the other ship until frustration began to gnaw at him. Then...

"What is it?" Stuart asked as he saw the expression of shock on his tactical officer's face.

"The *Exploration* reports that most of the bridge crew are dead or critically injured, Sir," Yoshi replied. "Captain Jomrel has been taken to sickbay and the chief engineer has assumed command."

Stuart thought momentarily. "Tell them I'm beaming over," he stated as he turned and briskly walked toward the turbolift.

Commander Leeson quickly rose from her chair and placed herself between her captain and the turbolift doors. "With all due respect, Sir, you should not leave the *Providence* during battle conditions," she forcefully stated.

Stuart stared at his XO silently. He knew that she had a point. He also knew that his command was not limited to just the *Providence* in this situation. And the *Exploration* needed strong leadership to get it going again. "Your objection is noted, Exec," he stated. "And it is overruled."

Stuart sidestepped his first officer and entered the turbolift.



The away team materialized in the engine room of the *Intrepid*-class starship. Doctor Edwards nodded to her CO and left the room to assist in sickbay.

Stuart saw a man, presumably the chief engineer, approaching. "I'm Captain Stuart of the *Providence*," he stated. "Are you in charge?"

The man stretched out his hand toward Stuart, who reciprocated with a handshake. Lieutenant Commander Gregorio Ramirez, chief engineer," he said.

Stuart surveyed the room. "What assistance do you need, Commander?" he asked.

The engineer motioned in a sweeping gesture through the engine room. "We have things under control in here, Captain," he stated. "We could use help in damage control on the main bridge."

"I brought a team with me," Stuart replied as he motioned toward the members of the away team standing behind him. "Lieutenant Allen is one of our flight officers and can assist in getting the CONN station repaired. Ensign Patrick can help get your defense systems back online," he added.

"Thank you, Sir," Ramirez said. "I appreciate all your help."

Stuart nodded. "I better look in on Captain Jomrel," Stuart said. He then turned and left the engine room.



Stuart entered *Exploration*'s sickbay, immediately noticing Jan Edwards treating a crewman who appeared to be suffering from plasma burns on his face. He then noticed the standard Emergency Medical Hologram along with another doctor, presumably the *Exploration*'s CMO, diligently working to revive Captain Jomrel. Stuart walked slowly toward the biobed.

Jomrel's eyes fluttered open and he glanced at the approaching Captain Stuart. His antennae twitched as he struggled to sit up, but the doctor gently held him down.

"Be still, Captain," the doctor said firmly.

Stuart looked at Jomrel, then to his CMO. "How is he, Doctor?" Stuart asked.

The doctor shook his head. "Not good," he replied. "A bridge ceiling support fell on him and did some major damage to his internal organs."

Stuart took one look at the doctor's expression and knew that he was keeping the entire truth from Jomrel. The truth, Stuart surmised from the doctor's silence, was that Jomrel would not survive his injuries. "Could I have a minute with your patient alone?" Stuart asked.

The doctor nodded and motioned for the EMH to attend to another one of the injured crewmen. "Try to keep it brief, Captain," the doctor said as he walked away.

Stuart looked at Jomrel. Before walking into sickbay, the *Providence*'s captain was angry at Jomrel for such a foolhardy stunt, but seeing the Andorian like this...

“That was a brave thing you did, Captain.”

Jomrel closed his eyes, trying to control his pain. “I... should have listened to you, Captain,” he managed to say. “I let my pride...(cough) ...get in the way.”

Stuart held the Andorian’s hand and smiled. “Pride is something we all battle from time to time,” he said.

“But this time,” Jomrel began. “My pride got in the way of the unity that is needed to defeat the enemy.” Captain Jomrel started to cough again and the doctor returned to his bedside. “I’m sorry,” Jomrel said. He closed his eyes and they opened no more.

Stuart felt the Andorian’s hand slip out of his. He looked up to the doctor standing next to him. “He gave his life to protect the Federation.”

The doctor, after covering his captain’s body, faced Stuart. “He was a good CO,” the doctor said. “I hope his death is not in vain.”

Stuart nodded. “Let’s hope that none of this is in vain. He paused as he looked at the shrouded body. “My CMO is at your disposal as long as you need her, Doctor.”

“Thank you, Captain,” the doctor replied. “I appreciate that.”

Stuart turned and left sickbay, a tear glistening in his eye.



Commander Melanie Leeson checked the EPS monitors for the fifth or sixth time. She actually had lost count. She knew that Lieutenant Saleshe was one of the best engineers in the fleet, but Leeson could not help feeling helpless as repairs were being made. She tapped her combadge. “Leeson to engineering.”

“Engineering, Lieutenant Saleshe,” the voice of the chief engineer said.

“What’s our status, Lieutenant?” Leeson asked.

“Warp and impulse power have been restored to peak efficiency. Shields are at eighty-seven percent and still charging, Commander.”

Leeson nodded. “Good work, Saleshe,” she replied. “Leeson out.”

The first officer began to sit in the center seat when she heard the swoosh of turbolift doors opening. She turned and saw her captain enter the bridge, noticing the weariness on his face. “Engineering reports ready, Sir,” Leeson stated.

Stuart stopped and surveyed the bridge, then, eyeing his first officer. “Any word from Earth or the fleet, yet?” he asked.

Leeson’s gaze dropped toward the deck. “No word from Earth, Captain,” she began. “But the fleet has been hit pretty hard.”

“And Jupiter Station?”

Leeson did not have any good news concerning Jupiter Station. “Our task force has beamed some of the station personnel aboard their ships, Captain,” she said, and then hesitated. “The Vendoth ships destroyed the station.”

Stuart closed his eyes, forcing himself to suppress the wave of emotion concerning the loss of life. “And the *Swiftfire*?”

“On their way to Earth,” Leeson said. “Our ships are taking out the Vendoth ships still in the area.”

“Captain,” Lieutenant Commander T’Les interrupted.

Stuart shifted his attention from Leeson to the science officer. “Yes, Commander?”

“Sensors indicate the Vendoth fleet converging in Earth orbit,” the Vulcan stated. “I have tapped into the Vendoth communication system and deciphered part of their coded transmission.”

“What did you find out, Commander,” Stuart asked.

T’Les found it difficult to maintain her composure. “I could not translate the entire message, Captain, but the words ‘doomsday device’ were used.

Stuart was immediately back in full command mode. “Inform the other ships, Exec,” he said. “We may be too late to do any good, but set course for home,” he ordered. “Full impulse.”



The starship *Providence*, followed by the other starships—except the *Exploration*—comprising the task force sped around the moon. The six ships began firing phasers and quantum torpedoes simultaneously at the enemy vessels as they converged together. Several other Starfleet ships were pounding away at the Vendoth shields, weakening them with each succeeding blast of weapons fire.

“Keep firing,” Captain Stuart ordered as he leaned forward, sitting on the edge of his command chair.

“The Klingons are getting in their licks, too, Skipper.” It was Blake Adams who had spoken.

Leeson studied her console. “The fleet is getting low on torpedoes, Sir,” she said.

“What about the Klingons?” the captain asked.

The first officer looked again at the console. “They’re getting low, too. And the Vendoth ships are almost at optimal firing position in Earth orbit,” she added.

Stuart clenched his fist, turning the knuckles on his left hand white. “Fire everything we have left, Mr. Nakamara,” he said.

From every Starfleet and Klingon vessel, phaser beams and the few dozen torpedoes lanced through space toward the Vendoth command ship. The barrage of energy continued for several seconds. Then the torpedoes stopped coming.

“We have expended all torpedoes, Sir,” Nakamara stated.

Leeson looked from her control console to the main view screen. “It looks like all ships have expended theirs as well, Captain,” she said. “And phasers alone won’t

penetrate Vendoth shields.”

Stuart nodded. “Then our only option is to ram them,” he said.

There was silence on the bridge. Rob Stuart did not have the reputation of being rash or suicidal. But ramming the Vendoth ships seemed like the last chance of taking them out—the last chance to save the billions of lives on Earth.

“Stuart to engineering,” the captain said.

“Engineering. This is Lieutenant Sales.”

“Prepare to overload the warp engines on my mark,” Stuart said.

But before Stuart could give the order, a brilliant light filled the viewer, temporarily blinding everyone on the bridge.

“What happened?” demanded Commander Leeson.

T’Les swiftly ran her fingers across the science console. “The Vendoth command ship has been destroyed,” she stated. “The explosion destroyed the remaining enemy ships along with the mother ship.”

“Look!” exclaimed Adams from the CONN position. “There’s a ship coming through the debris.”

As the remains of the Vendoth fleet dispersed, a *Sovereign*-class starship could be seen speeding through it. Sunlight glistened on the hull, illuminating the name of the ship that made the fatal blow to those who would enslave the Federation. It was the *Enterprise*.

Starfleet had prevailed. Unity proved stronger than the superior technology of the invading Vendoth.

Rob Stuart closed his eyes and sighed his relief.



Stuart and Benjamin Goodman walked through the Academy parade grounds. They stopped and looked around the campus, remembering their time as cadets.

“The place hasn’t changed that much since we were here, have they?” Stuart said.

Goodman shielded his eyes from the sun as he turned toward Stuart. “Not that much,” he agreed. “I hear Starfleet may graduate some of the cadets early to help get the fleet built back up.”

Stuart nodded. “We got hit hard,” he said. “I hope that we won’t regret sending them out before they’re ready.”

“I hope so, too,” Goodman replied. “So what plans do you have for the next few days?” he asked his friend.

“I thought I would go to Dublin to see my father and brother,” Stuart replied. “It will probably be awhile before I get back to Earth again,” he added.

“Me too,” Goodman said.

Admiral Hathaway approached from behind the two captains. "May I join you gentlemen?" he asked.

Rob and Ben turned around to face the admiral. "Certainly."

The admiral folded his hands behind his back. "I wanted to let you know that a memorial service for those who lost their lives will be held tomorrow at 0900 hours," he stated. "I understand you have recommended Captain Jomrel for the Medal of Honor."

"That's right," Stuart replied. "He gave his life to defend the Federation...and Earth."

Hathaway nodded. He looked toward Goodman. "Could I have a few minutes alone with my nephew, Captain?"

"Yes Sir," Goodman replied. "I need to meet up with my kid brother anyway."

Ben Goodman walked away.

"Don't forget you're buying dinner," Stuart called after Goodman, who raised his hand in a friendly wave.

"I also understand that he disobeyed your orders," Hathaway said.

Stuart shrugged. "That's not part of the official record," he said. "I know he did what he thought was right." He looked away, noticing the beauty of the Golden Gate Bridge in the distance. "I want his service record to show that he died in the line of duty."

Hathaway thought about what his nephew said. "I can appreciate that, Robby."

Rob turned back to face Hathaway. "I've never asked any special treatment from you because of your position as Chief of Operations," he stated as a matter of fact. "I'm asking you now as a personal favor to allow my recommendation for Jomrel to go through."

Hathaway faced his nephew. "One condition," he said.

Stuart focused his attention on Hathaway.

"You present the medal to the Andorian Ambassador in Jomrel's honor," the admiral said.

Stuart smiled at his uncle. "You know I don't like all that ceremonial pomp."

"Then you'll do it." It was more of a smug statement than a question.

Stuart shook his head, laughing. "I'll do it," he replied.

"Good," Hathaway said, patting Stuart on the shoulder. "I'll see you at the service tomorrow." He turned and began walking away. "Oh," the admiral said as he stopped and turned back toward his nephew. "The *Exploration* will need a new captain. Would you be interested in the job?"

"I have a ship, Uncle Bob," Stuart replied. "Even if it is only a small scout-class, it's the only one I want to command."

The admiral smiled. "I understand," he said. "I felt the same way about the

Majestic.”

“Was that the first ship you commanded?” Stuart asked.

“It was the second,” Hathaway replied. “But I commanded the *Majestic* longer than any other starship.”

Stuart understood. His uncle had become attached to a ship and a crew—something that Stuart also experienced.

“Well, enough of the past,” the admiral stated. With that, Hathaway turned and began to walk away again.

Stuart’s eyes followed his uncle walk across the parade field. Stuart turned back to view the bridge that was the ancient symbol of San Francisco. And he remembered the words that were engraved on his ship’s dedication plaque:

*“...we mutually pledge to each other our Lives,
our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.”*

The End

*This story was one of many parts of the crossover Star Trek: Unity story *United We Stand*. Several fan-fiction writers came together and wrote their ships’ perspectives of the Vendoth invasion that occurred in 2376.