

To Boldly Go: Survival of the Fittest

A U.S.S. *Providence* story

By Cleve Johnson

The comet hurdled through the vastness of space. It was an ordinary comet, roughly the size of the region on Earth known as Alaska. This particular object, unlike most that had been cataloged, was a rogue—a drifter among the cosmos. But this drifter would soon enter a star system that was the home to a sentient species who did not know the danger that the comet would put them in.

One member of the alien race did know of the danger his planet faced. He informed his superior at the science institute and together they convinced their planetary leaders that their world was in peril. But when the associate director of the science institute also informed his government of the alien star vessel that he had been monitoring for the last hundred and twelve days, the leadership refused his suggestion to contact the aliens for help.

“But I have been monitoring them and there is no evidence that they are hostile,” the scientist had said, pleading with the leadership.

The answer was still no. It was not pride, nor was it fear. For this species had a high level of technology and was assured that no other race within their part of the galaxy could bring harm to their planet. The leadership’s decision was based on a philosophy of self-reliance. They would deal with their problems in their own way. They would find a way to protect them from the threat that traveled toward them from the depths of space. Or so they thought.

But the scientist, known as Heseck, knew that his people would soon discover that help *would* be needed from the aliens that had come to his planet’s sector of space. And his intention was to be the one who made contact when the time came.



Captain’s Log: Stardate 54067.4

We are holding position at Sector Beta 044 awaiting a rendezvous with the starship Republic, which should arrive in three days to bring supplies and a second Runabout to replace the science shuttle that was destroyed several weeks ago. On a personal note, I am looking forward to seeing my former CO and my family who are coming for my wedding.

Captain Robert P. Stuart, commanding officer of the starship *Providence*, strolled through the corridor. He soon reached his destination and stepped through the hatchway into sickbay. He tapped on the window that separated the waiting room from the CMO’s office. “Have a minute?” he asked, addressing the doctor.

Jan Edwards’ face lit up as she saw her fiancé. “I always have time for you,” she replied. “Is this ship’s business? Or a social call?”

Stuart could not help but laugh at that. "I had some time before I'm needed on the bridge," he said. "I thought I would spend it with you."

Edwards shrugged her shoulders. "Why would you want to be with me?" she teasingly asked.

"I figure that I ought to start getting used to your presence since we're about to be married," Stuart replied. "Besides," he continued. "I happen to know that you want me "to be here."

"You know that, huh?" The doctor crossed her arms. "Oh, that's right! I need you to give a blood sample to be tested," she said playfully.

"I just had a physical three months ago," Stuart objected.

Jan chuckled. "You're not afraid of a little hypospray, are you?"

"Now you know that I..."

"*Bridge to Captain Stuart,*" the voice of Commander Leeson interrupted through the intercom.

Stuart tapped his combadge. "Go ahead, Exec," he replied.

"*We're receiving a planetary distress signal, Sir.*"

Stuart's mood and that of the doctor became serious. "I'll be right up. Stuart out." And the captain just looked at the doctor. "Duty calls, Jan."

Edwards watched as Stuart left her office. "And it usually calls at the wrong time," she murmured.



The turbolift doors slid open and Rob Stuart entered the bridge. He strode to the center seat and faced his first officer, who stood to also face him. "What do we have, Exec?"

"We have received a planetary distress signal from a planet known as Selerus," Commander Leeson stated.

"Have we responded?" Stuart asked.

Leeson shook her head. "I asked them to stand by until you got here."

Stuart sat in the command chair. Leeson, following her captain's lead, took her seat at his right. "Open hailing frequency, Yoshi," Stuart said.

"Open, Sir," Lieutenant Yoshi Nakamura replied from the tactical station. "Audio only, Captain," he added.

"This is Captain Robert P. Stuart of the starship *Providence*," he said. "We have received your distress signal. How can we assist you?"

There was a momentary silence before Stuart's hail brought a response.

“This is Doctor HeseK, associate director of the Seleri Science Institute,” the voice said. *“A rogue comet has passed near our planet, causing planetary quakes and tidal waves.”*

Stuart pondered the problem. *“Providence* is a small scout vessel and is not equipped to handle a large relief effort,” he stated. “However, another one of our ships is en route to us and will be able to assist as well.”

“On behalf of my people, Captain, I thank you for whatever assistance you can provide,” HeseK replied.

“Can you provide the coordinates of your planet’s location?” Stuart inquired of the Seleri.

“I am transmitting our location now,” HeseK stated. *“There is more I need to tell you of our situation, but I prefer to speak with you face to face, Captain Stuart.”*

Leeson interrupted Stuart. “Coordinates have been received and fed to the navigational computer, Captain.”

“Blake, set course for Selerus and engage at warp seven,” Stuart said.

“Aye Skipper,” was Lieutenant Commander Adams response.

“What’s our ETA, Blake?” Stuart asked.

The CONN officer glanced at the readout on his console. “Three hours, twenty-two minutes,” Blake replied.

Stuart turned his attention back to his conversation with HeseK. “Doctor HeseK, we will arrive in orbit of Selerus in about three and a half hours,” he said. “I will contact you then.”

“I look forward to meeting you, Captain.”

“Transmission ended,” Yoshi stated.

“How soon until the *Republic* arrives at our current position?”

Leeson checked her monitor. “Sixty-eight hours, Sir,” she said.

Stuart rose from his chair, pulling his uniform jacket down. “Please contact the *Republic* to inform them of the Seleri situation and relay Selerus’ location, Exec,” Stuart said. “I’ll be in my ready room.” And he left the bridge.



Doctor Janice Edwards exited the turbolift, heading for the center of the bridge. She was looking for the captain, but seeing Commander Leeson occupying the chair where Stuart would be seated if he were on duty, she surmised that he must be in his ready room. Edwards almost changed her direction to go to the captain’s private sanctuary, and then decided to see Leeson first.

“Is he in the ready room?” Edwards asked the first officer.

Leeson nodded. “I think he wants to hide away,” she replied. “He probably is breaking out in cold sweats,” she added.

Jan Edwards chuckled, painting a picture in her mind of Rob having last minute wedding jitters. “I better rescue him from himself,” she stated as she turned toward the door that led to Rob’s office.



Rob Stuart studied the file that Doctor Heseck had transmitted along with the location to his planet. The comet’s gravitational forces on the planet caused quakes that measured close to 6.3 on the old Richter scale. The tidal forces flooded several villages that were within two hundred kilometers of the shores of each continent. Fortunately, the Seleri had enough advanced notice to evacuate the coastal areas before the comet came near enough to raise the sea level.

The door chime sounded, interrupting Stuart’s concentration. “Come,” he said.

The door slid open, allowing Doctor Edwards to enter. “Busy?” she asked as she strolled into the room.

Stuart smiled at his fiancé. “Come in Jan,” he said. “I was looking over the Seleri situation.”

Edwards sat across from Stuart, only his desk separating them. “I thought you were going to come back to sickbay,” she stated. It was not an accusation.

“I’m sorry, Jan,” Stuart replied. “I got caught up in this,” he said as he pointed to the computer monitor.

“Are you sure that you just don’t want to be with me?”

Stuart chuckled. “You know me better than that,” he replied playfully. “Actually, why don’t we go take a walk on the beach.”

Jan cocked her head with a gleam in her eye, a look that Rob had learned meant the doctor wanted to do something, but she had other things to do. “I’m tempted,” she said. “But I have some experiments running in my lab that need to be checked in a few minutes.”

Stuart leaned back in his chair. “Could your lab tech or one of the nurses check it for you?”

“They’re capable, but you know that I complete my own work,” Jan replied.

“How about lunch, then?” Stuart asked. “Captain’s dining room?”

Jan rose from her seat. “Sounds wonderful, Rob,” she replied. “Time?”

Stuart glanced at the chrono display on the computer monitor. “How is 1230 hours?”

“I’ll be there,” the doctor said. She then turned and exited the room.

Stuart stared happily at the door that had shut behind his fiancé. After a few moments, he turned his attention back to the computer monitor.



Hesek entered his office and began collecting several data crystals. He carefully packed them in a metallic satchel and set it down on his desk. He retrieved a blank crystal from a drawer and inserted in the computer slot. "Copy all files from this terminal," he said.

The computer silently complied as the transfer only took a few seconds to complete.

Hesek took the crystal and placed it with the others. "Record message," he said. "To Director Meklahat, Seleri Science Institute. From Associate Director Hesek, head of Space Sciences Division." Hesek paused, contemplating his next words. "Against the orders of the leadership, I have contacted the alien starship for help. They are en route to Selerus and will arrive within half of a yaneth," he continued. "I will go aboard their ship and request help for our situation. I realize that this act will be viewed as an act of rebellion by the leadership and I accept full responsibility for my actions." The Seleri scientist's eyes began to water as he realized that he would face exile from his world. "Know that I do this for the survival of our people."

Hesek paused and pressed a touchpad on his desk. "End recording. Transmit message at the sixth yaneth."



"This was absolutely fabulous," Jan exclaimed as she nudged her empty plate to the side. "My compliments to the replicator."

Rob smiled as finished chewing his last bite. "This wasn't replicated," he replied. "It came from my private stock."

"I don't remember you sharing your private stock with me before," the doctor said. "What's the special occasion?"

"Having time alone with you is occasion enough," said the captain. "This may be our last chance to a quiet lunch as two single people."

"Will you be this romantic after a few years of marriage sets in?" Jan teased.

Rob gazed into his fiancé's eyes. "If not, you can put me on report," he replied, straight-faced. The captain leaned over the table and started to kiss his future wife when the chirping of the intercom interrupted.

"*Bridge to Captain Stuart,*" the voice of Commander Leeson said.

"That's the second time today that Mel has interrupted our time together," Jan stated, annoyed.

Rob only shrugged. "Go ahead, Exec."

"*We're entering orbit of Selerus, Sir,*" the first officer stated. "*Doctor Hesek is ready to come aboard.*"

"Have Yoshi meet Jan and me in transporter room one," Rob replied. "Stuart out."

The captain smiled at the doctor. "At least we had *some* time alone together. Let's greet our guest," he said, rising from his seat and taking Jan's hand in his.

The doctor stood and put her arms around Rob's neck. "First, we have something unfinished to take care of." She kissed him passionately, then walked toward the door. As it opened and Jan walked through, Stuart stood motionless, staring at the woman he loved. Jan, now in the corridor, turned to face Rob. "Coming?"

Rob recovered from the affectionate display that he had received and followed the doctor.



The door to the transporter room slid open. Lieutenant Yoshi Nakamara looked toward the entrance as Stuart and Edwards came in. "Captain. Doctor."

Stuart replied with a nod of his head. He noticed the phaser in Nakamara's hand. "I doubt our guest will feel welcome if he is greeted with *that*," he said, pointing to the phaser.

"Sorry Captain," the security chief said as he holstered the weapon. "It's a precautionary measure."

Stuart tried to suppress his amusement. "I appreciate your attention to duty, Yoshi," he said, "But this is first contact with another race."

Nakamara backed down from his position. "Understood, Sir."

"Captain?" the transporter chief interrupted.

"Go ahead, Mac," Stuart replied.

"I have received Doctor Hesek's coordinates," McKinney stated.

"Energize," the captain said.

As the Seleri scientist began to materialize on the transport platform, the doctor noticed, as the details of the alien began to coalesce, that he looked like a member of one of the Alpha Quadrant races. The doctor glanced to Stuart, who also noticed but did not let his surprise show outwardly.

Stuart took a step forward as the Seleri stepped down from the platform. "I'm Captain Robert Stuart," the captain stated. "I welcome you aboard the starship *Providence* on behalf of the United Federation of Planets."

The alien bowed slightly. "I am Hesek," he replied. "You have matter-energy transportation capabilities.... Impressive."

"This is Doctor Janice Edwards," Stuart motioned toward his fiancée. "This is Lieutenant Nakamara, my head of security, and Chief Petty Officer McKinney," he nodded toward the two men standing behind the transport console. "Mister Nakamara will escort you to guest quarters..."

"I appreciate your hospitality, Captain Stuart," Hesek interrupted. "But I would like to speak with you privately before proceeding."

Stuart thought a moment. "Very well," he said. "If you'll follow me to my ready room..."

“Rob?” Edwards said, getting the captain’s attention. “I would like to have some medical questions answered as soon as possible.”

Rob Stuart recognized the obvious hint that Jan was making. “Absolutely,” the captain agreed. “Doctor HeseK,” he began, turning toward the alien. “Your appearance has piqued our curiosity.”

HeseK tilted his head in mild confusion. “In what way?” he replied.

“Well,” Rob hesitated. “You look exactly like a member from one of the planets in our part of the galaxy.” Stuart tried to keep his tone neutral and diplomatic as he addressed the Seleri scientist. “Before you brief us on your planet’s situation Doctor Edwards would like to perform a medical examination and some genetic testing if you wouldn’t mind.”

HeseK contemplated the prospect before speaking. Finally... “I understand your curiosity,” he said. “I will gladly submit to the examination, but time is important,” he added.

“The exam won’t take long,” Edwards replied.

“And you can begin to brief me while the doctor performs the exam,” added Stuart.

HeseK’s facial expression changed to something that the humans could not quite interpret. “I really would like to talk alone before giving a full briefing to your staff,” he said urgently.

Rob sighed. “You can speak freely in front my chief medical officer,” he said. “She’s also my fiancée.”

“Fi...an...say?” HeseK tried to mimic the word without gaining understanding from the universal translator.

“We’re going to be married in a few days,” Jan clarified.

“Ohhh,” HeseK exclaimed. “You are to be mated,” he said. “You’re correct, Captain,” he nodded his head vigorously. “What I say to you in private can be also said in the company of your mate.”

Stuart held out his hand, pointing toward the door. “This way, Sir.”



HeseK sat on the edge of the diagnostic bed in sickbay while Jan Edwards moved her medical tricorder around his body. “Captain, I need to tell you that I am here against the wishes of my government,” he stated. The alien continued after he noticed that Stuart did not reply to the surprise information. “My planet is in danger, but our leaders fail to realize that we cannot save ourselves without help.”

“Are your people xenophobic?” Stuart asked.

“Not xenophobic,” HeseK explained. “My people value self-reliance in the extreme,” he said. “To admit that help is needed is to fail the task.”

“So what will your leaders do when they discover that you requested our help?” Stuart asked. “Will you lose your position at the science institute?”

Hesek hesitated. “I resigned my position before coming aboard your ship, Captain,” he said. “And...I may need to seek asylum once they find out.”

Stuart nodded. “If the situation warrants, I will consider granting asylum to you, Doctor Hesek,” he replied. “But I hope that we can convince your government that receiving help is not a shameful thing.”

“Are you ready for my medical report, Rob?” Edwards asked after she had checked the tricorder readings with the medical database.

“Let’s hear it,” he replied.

“Doctor Hesek has four hearts and his lungs are capable of providing respiration in several diverse atmospheric conditions,” Jan stated. “His DNA shows that the Seleri and the Saurians are one and the same.”

“What does that mean?” asked Hesek.

“One of the worlds of the Federation is home to a race called the Saurians,” Stuart said. “Apparently, your people are descended from them.”

“But Sauria only developed space travel about a hundred years before Earth did,” Jan stated.

“Actually,” Hesek said, “it is more likely that these Saurians are descended from the Seleri since my people explored much of the galaxy over three millennia ago.”

“You have warp capability?” Stuart asked. “Our scans show your world to be technologically advanced, but we found no indication of any space program...except for a network of communications satellites.”

Hesek blinked his bulbous yellow eyes. “The ancestors of my people explored much of the galaxy, but decided that our home world was the best place to live,” the alien stated. “They abandoned space exploration and stopped further warp development.”

Now Doctor Edwards’ curiosity got the best of her. “Why did the some of your people colonize Sauria?”

Hesek turned toward Edwards as he moved to a seated position on the bio-bed. “Three ships, each carrying over two thousand Seleri, explored your part of the galaxy,” he said. “Only one returned. And with only a portion of its crew.”

“And the other two ships apparently colonized Sauria,” Stuart interjected. “Now Doctor Hesek,” he said, changing the subject. “We can do further research on the Seleri/Saurian relationship, but you contacted us for help.”

“Yes, Captain,” Hesek said as he returned his attention to the reason that he had contacted this alien ship. “As I previously said,” he began. “a comet passed close to Selerus, creating quakes and tidal forces. Due to early warning of that threat, we were able to evacuate the coastal villages and take precautions that reduced our death toll to only a few hundred people. The greater danger is from the comet’s current trajectory.”

Stuart did not yet grasp Hesek’s meaning. “Explain,” he said.

Hesek stood and began to pace. “It is on a direct course into the asteroid field that orbits our sun,” he said. “I have determined that it will strike asteroid Sokla thirty-three, sending immense portions of debris toward Selerus.”

“How soon until impact,” Stuart asked.

“Less than two hours by your measure of time,” Hesek stated.

Jan looked at Rob. Her concern was clearly evident to him as he returned her glare.

Stuart tapped the Starfleet insignia on his chest. “Stuart to Leeson. Have the senior staff assemble in the main conference room in five minutes,” he said.

“*Acknowledged, Captain,*” the voice of Commander Melanie Leeson replied.



Captain Rob Stuart entered the conference room, followed by Doctor Edwards and Doctor Hesek. The officers of the *Providence* noticed the obvious similarities between Hesek and the Saurian species.

“This is Doctor Hesek of the Seleri Science Institute,” Stuart stated, then proceeded to introduce the officers to the Seleri. “Obviously, the Seleri and Saurians are related,” the captain said. “We’ll leave that for a later discussion. Right now, we have a planet to protect from a possible collision between a rogue comet and one of the larger asteroids in this system.”

“Should such a collision occur,” Lieutenant Commander T’Les began, “there would be a ninety-three point two eight seven percent chance that large masses of debris would be sent in the direction of Selerus’ orbital path.”

Hesek stood and addressed the science officer. “I have calculated the trajectory and have concluded that there exists a one hundred percent certainty that this will occur.” The Seleri paused. “Unless you can help,” he added.

Stuart looked at Hesek as the alien returned to a seated position. “We have less than two hours until the collision,” he said. “I would like to find a way to prevent the comet from reaching the asteroid field.”

“If it is a typical comet, our phasers should be able to melt it,” Commander Leeson stated.

“That may be true,” Hesek replied. “But this particular comet is extremely large—almost thirty kilometers in diameter.”

“It would take continuous phaser fire at full power forty-two point four minutes to melt the comet,” T’Les stated. “And that assumes that the entire mass has no more than eight percent of its material being elements other than frozen gases.”

“That doesn’t give us much time,” Stuart said. “Blake, prepare to leave orbit at full impulse power. Doctor Hesek will provide you with coordinates.”

“Aye Skipper,” the second officer replied.

“Lieutenant Sales, please prepare to channel warp power to the phasers.”

The chief engineer nodded. "Aye Captain."

"Commander T'Les, I would like you to work with Doctor Hesek to..."

"Bridge to Captain Stuart," a voice interrupted over the intercom.

"Stuart here."

"Sorry to interrupt, Sir, but we have been hailed by the Seleri Minister of Emergency Management," the voice stated.

Stuart glanced at Hesek, who returned the gaze. "Put him through, Lieutenant," the captain said. Stuart took a deep breath before speaking. "This is Captain Stuart of the starship *Providence*," he began but was quickly dismissed by the voice that was sending the transmission.

"You are violating our space and have kidnapped one of our citizens," the angry voice stated.

"Pardon me, Minister," Stuart replied. "We are here by the invitation of Doctor Hesek of the Seleri Science Institute," he added. "He is aboard our ship as a guest."

"I demand that you return Hesek to us and leave our star system," the minister's voice stated with finality to his tone.

Hesek placed his reptilian hand on Stuart's to get his attention. "May I?"

Stuart nodded.

"Minister, this is Hesek," the scientist said. "I assure you that I am here by my own request."

The communication system was still open, but only silence replied to Hesek.

"Unless we receive help from these people, Selerus will suffer a cataclysmic event that most likely will bring about our extinction," Hesek stated adamantly.

Silence.

Hesek turned to Stuart. "Minister Yaleth can be most stubborn," he whispered.

"I will take this up with the other ministers," Yaleth's voice stated.

The transmission ended and the senior officers all looked to Stuart for guidance. Commander Leeson leaned back in her chair, contemplating the situation.

Stuart noticed the pondering posture of his first officer. "Exec?" he invited Leeson to express her opinion.

Leeson sat forward, placing her hands together. She took a deep breath. "Are we getting ourselves into a situation that may be considered a violation of the Prime Directive?" she asked.

Stuart's eyebrows creased. "I don't think that the Prime Directive applies in this situation," he replied.

"I agree," T'Les interjected.

"Why doesn't it apply?" It was Jan who had asked the question.

T'Les faced the doctor who sat across the table from the science officer. "The Seleri are technologically advanced and aware of other sentient life in the galaxy," the Vulcan stated. "And as the captain has said...we were invited."

"But we were invited by someone who did not have the approval of his government," the first officer said. "No offense Doctor."

Hesek nodded to Leeson, indicating that he did not take offense at what Commander Leeson said.

Stuart lightly tapped the tabletop to bring the discussion to a close. "I think I should take advantage of contacting Starfleet about this."

"But they won't receive our transmission for several hours," Leeson said.

Stuart smiled. "You forget that an admiral is en route and only three days away," he said as he pushed the com panel on the conference table. "Bridge, contact the *Republic*. I want to talk with Admiral Hathaway."

Stuart stood and looked around the room. "Continue making preparations to intercept the comet," he ordered. "I'll talk with the admiral about the diplomatic repercussions before we leave orbit."

The senior officers all stood and filed out of the conference room, leaving Stuart and Hesek alone. "I will introduce you to Admiral Hathaway. He is the Chief of Starfleet Operations...and my uncle," Stuart stated.



Admiral Robert Hathaway entered the bridge of the *Ambassador*-class starship.

"Admiral on the bridge," the helm officer announced.

"As you were," Hathaway said, raising his hand to indicate that the crew should resume their normal duties. "You wanted to see me, Chuck?" he asked the captain of the U.S.S. *Republic*.

Captain Gardner rose from the command chair and faced the senior admiral. "We are receiving a priority two transmission from the *Providence*," Gardner stated. "You can use the holocom in my ready room," he added.

"Thank you," Hathaway replied as he turned and exited the bridge.

The admiral entered the ready room and activated the holographic communications pad. A holographic image of Rob Stuart and one of a Saurian, or so Hathaway thought it was a Saurian, appeared on the communications platform. "What's the emergency, Robby?" Hathaway asked.

"It's good to see you, Uncle Bob," Stuart said. "I look forward to seeing you in person, but now I want you to meet Doctor Hesek of the planet Selerus. He invited us to help save his world, but his government doesn't agree."

"I don't understand," Hathaway replied, sitting on the edge of the captain's desk. "Fill me in on the situation."

"It started with Doctor Hesek's discovery of a rogue comet...."



Stuart entered the bridge, followed by Hesek. “Admiral Hathaway wants me to try to persuade the Seleri government to give their permission for us to help them,” he stated. “But if they refuse, he will back up my decision to do what I think best.”

“Course is already laid in, Skipper,” Blake Adams stated.

“We’ll leave orbit as soon as I speak with the Seleri government,” Stuart said. “Mister Nakamara, please open a channel.”

Nakamara pressed the control panel. “Hailing frequencies open, Captain,” he said.

Stuart stood straight and professional, facing the main view screen. “This is the Federation starship U.S.S. *Providence*. It is very important that I speak with someone in authority,” the captain said.

Stuart only had to wait a few moments before the viewer produced the image of a Seleri standing behind a large desk. The alien’s clothes were simplistic—a robe partially covered by a silver sash. “I am Captain Stuart representing the United Federation of Planets,” he stated.

The alien nodded curtly. “*I am Prime Minister Barlek,*” the Seleri replied. “*I wish to know why you have taken one of our citizens aboard your vessel.*”

“Prime Minister,” Stuart began. “Doctor Hesek is here at his own request. He has asked our help for the benefit of all the Seleri people.”

The captain noticed the calmness of the Seleri leader—quite different from the demeanor of the Minister of Emergency Management that he had earlier spoken to.

“*Doctor Hesek did not have any authority to make such a request of you, Captain,*” Barlek responded.

“Perhaps not, Prime Minister,” Hesek interrupted. “But if these people are not allowed to help us, our world will be devastated and our people will most likely become extinct within three generations.” The scientist stood facing the viewer. “I know that my calculations are correct, Prime Minister.”

The Prime Minister lowered his head. Was it shame that he felt? Or was it a feeling of unwanted dependence. “*Very well,*” the Seleri relented. “*I give my permission for your assistance.*”

“Thank you, Prime Minister,” Stuart replied. “*Providence* out.”

The image of the leader of Selerus faded, replaced by the image of the planet that the starship was orbiting.

“Full impulse power, Blake,” the captain said.

“Aye Skipper,” the second officer replied.

Hesek approached Stuart. “Thank you, Captain,” he said. “I’m sure that my government will also thank you once they truly realize the danger that our planet is in.”

Stuart smiled half-heartedly. “I only wish that your leaders were as open to other races as you seem to be.”

“I have always wanted to see other worlds and meet other sentients,” Heseke stated. “That is why I chose to focus my studies in space sciences.”

Stuart patted the alien on the shoulder and turned toward the turbolift. “You have the bridge, Exec,” he said as he exited the bridge.



Doctor Janice Edwards sat in her office, looking over the medical staff’s duty roster. She heard something and looked up toward the entrance to her office. She saw the captain standing in the doorway, watching her.

“Can I come in?” Stuart asked, knowing the answer would be yes.

Jan smiled. “Uh huh,” she said as she stood up to receive his kiss. “I’m glad you’re here,” she stated.

Stuart kissed the doctor and they both sat down. The couple smiled at each other without saying anything for a moment. Then Stuart broke the silence.

“Are you looking forward to Saturday?” Rob asked.

Jan looked at her fiancé with a teasing grin. “Is something going on Saturday?”

Rob gently took the doctor’s hand. “Only the most important event in the galaxy,” he replied.

“Oh? And what would that be?” Jan continued to tease.

Stuart gazed into Jan’s eyes and tried to keep a serious look, but to no avail. “We’re getting a new runabout and a recorded transmission of the Academy graduation ceremonies.”

Jan pulled her hand away from Rob’s and smacked him on the arm. Of course, Rob broke out in laughter.

Jan tried to be mad, but she could not keep up the pretense very long. “You’re incorrigible.”

“And you are the most beautiful woman that I have ever seen,” replied the captain. “And the biggest tease...”

“*Bridge to Captain Stuart,*” Melanie Leeson’s voice echoed over the intercom.

Jan and Rob both sighed in unison.

Rob pressed the com panel on the doctor’s desk. “Yes, Exec?”

“*We will be within phaser range of the comet in ten minutes,*” Leeson stated. “*But it will impact with one of the largest asteroids in about twelve and a half minutes.*”

“That puts us in a serious time crunch to melt the comet,” Stuart replied.

“*Yes Sir, it does,*” Leeson said.

Stuart looked at the doctor, seeing that she looked as concerned as he felt. “I’m on my way, Exec,” the captain stated as he took Jan’s hand in his again. “Stuart out,” he said, closing the communication.

Stuart started to get out of his chair and stand. He faced the doctor and smiled. “How about a kiss for good luck,” he said.

Jan stood and slowly moved toward him. “I thought you didn’t believe in luck,” she replied as she moved closer.

Rob’s eyes met hers. “I don’t,” he said. “I just want to kiss you before I leave.”

Jan put one hand in his and the other around his neck. Their lips met and Rob thought the artificial gravity generators had failed.



Commander Leeson watched the comet on the viewer. The starship continued to close the distance between itself and the “giant snowball” that threatened the Seleri star system. Leeson turned as she heard the “hiss” of the turbolift doors sliding apart. She rose from the CO’s chair and took her position in the chair to the right of the one designated for the captain or the senior officer on duty.

Stuart sat down in the center seat. “Are we in firing range, Exec?” he asked.

“Another forty seconds, Sir,” she replied.

Hesek had been silent to this point, but noticed something different about the captain’s appearance—something seemed to be wrong with his mouth. “Are you hurt, Captain Stuart?” the Seleri asked.

“Hmm?” Stuart was not sure what Hesek meant.

“Your mouth is discolored,” Hesek said. “Or is the change a normal function of your species?”

Blake Adams turned to look at Stuart. He tried to suppress laughter from bursting out but found it difficult to at least keep from chuckling. “Were you in sickbay recently, Skipper?” the CONN officer finally said, trying to say it with a straight face.

Leeson leaned close to her commanding officer and whispered softly.

“Lipstick?” Stuart exclaimed louder than he intended. His face began to turn red as he started to wipe the makeup off of his lips.

Hesek did not understand what was happening but decided not to pursue the matter any further. He sensed that Stuart was feeling somewhat embarrassed and did not want to add to the level of discomfort.

“We are coming into optimum firing range Captain,” Lieutenant Commander T’Les stated. “We need to match speed with the comet, Captain.”

Stuart welcomed the interruption to distract the bridge crew from focusing on the evidence that he had been with his soon-to-be wife. “Very good. Blake, match speed. Set phasers for continuous firing, Yoshi.”

“Phasers are configured and set at eighty-two point six three percent power, Sir,” the tactical officer replied. “Awaiting your order.”

Stuart smiled at the precision of the power setting. He knew that T'Les must have calculated and fed the specifications needed to melt the comet. "Fire on Commander T'Les' mark," he said.

T'Les took the captain's cue. "Increase phaser power to eighty-three point three four seven percent and prepare to fire in seven seconds."

"We are now at matched speed," Blake Adams stated.

Hesek remained silent. He thought about the kindness of these aliens as they tried to help save his planet. He thought about the way his own people—his government—would prefer to keep outsiders from helping, even if Selerus and its people faced total destruction without such help.

T'Les looked at the comet on the main viewer. "Ready phasers Mister Nakamara...Fire."

An orange beam of energy lanced out of the forward phaser array on the upper dome of the small starship, hitting the comet dead center. The huge ball of frozen gases and cosmic material began to melt as the phasers penetrated its surface.

"The comet has been reduced by twenty-seven point three percent," the Vulcan stated.

"Time to impact?" Stuart asked, keeping his eyes glued to the image of the comet on the main viewer.

The science officer ran her fingers skillfully across her control panel as she viewed the readout on one of the science monitors. "Thirty-seven seconds to impact Captain," she replied. "But it will take fifty more seconds until the comet is completely destroyed," she added.

"Doctor Hesek?" Stuart said. "What do you think?"

Hesek, who had been quietly standing near the science station, stepped forward. "The reduction in the comet's size will minimize the effect when it collides with the asteroid," he stated. "But I fear that it will still have enough mass to knock the asteroid out the field and send it toward Selerus." The scientist lowered his eyes in sadness. "And the result could be worse for my planet than if smaller fragments collided with it."

Blake spun around in his chair to face the captain and Hesek. "What about the tractor beam, Skipper?"

"I'm not sure we have the power to hold an object that large," Stuart replied. "What do you think, T'Les?" he asked the science officer.

"Our tractor beam cannot hold the comet, but we can slow it down..."

"...Giving us more time to reduce its size," Blake said, finishing her sentence.

Stuart weighed the option and made his decision. "Mary, lock on the tractor beam. Full strength."

Lieutenant Mary Goodman worked at the OPS/Engineering console. "Aye, Sir. Locking on."

The entire bridge crew watched the main viewer. The comet continued to reduce in size as it plummeted toward the large asteroid. They watched and hoped that the tractor beam could slow the comet enough to minimize the force of impact.

“The tractor beam appears to be slowing the comet, Captain,” the Vulcan stated. “I estimate that the impact will not adversely affect the orbit of the asteroid.”

Stuart allowed himself to smile at that. “Well done,” he said. “Can we increase power to the phasers, Commander?”

“I would not recommend that, Captain,” T’Les replied. There would be a seventy-eight point seven two one percent chance that the emitters would burn out before comet reduction would be sufficient to minimize critical impact,” she added.

The captain thought a moment. “I think I’ll risk it,” he decided. “Yoshi, increase phaser power by three percent.”

“Aye Captain,” the security chief replied as he carried out his CO’s order.

“May I suggest that we prepare photon torpedoes in case we lose phasers, Sir?” Commander Leeson asked.

“Good thinking, Exec,” Stuart said. “Make it so, Mister Nakamara.”

“Aye Sir.”

The comet continued to shrink in size as it neared the asteroid field. The tractor beam strained to hold the large ice cube from completing its collision with the much larger rock that it approached.

“Ten seconds to impact, Captain,” T’Les stated in her usual unemotional tone.

Stuart waited. “Status?”

“The comet’s mass is still large enough to alter the asteroid’s orbit of the star,” T’Les said.

“The tractor beam emitter is reaching the redline, Captain.” It was Goodman who made the announcement.

“Phaser emitters are about to burn out as well, Sir,” Yoshi Nakamara stated, a nervousness showing in his voice.

“Standby on photon torpedoes,” the first officer ordered. “Forty percent yield.”

Stuart felt the tension building in the command center of the starship.

“Five seconds.”

“We’ve lost the tractor beam, Captain,” Goodman said.

“Fire,” Stuart said.

A single torpedo exited the *Providence*’s launcher and sped toward the celestial object. It made contact and obliterated what was left of the rogue comet, and the asteroid continued to orbit the Selerus’ star along with the thousands of other rocks that made up the asteroid field.

Hesek let out the breath that he had been holding for what seemed like an eternity.

T'Les almost allowed herself to display a grin as she said, "There were two point seven seconds to spare before impact, Captain."

Captain Robert P. Stuart looked toward his science officer and back to the viewer. "Two seconds or two hours, Commander, It's still a miss," he said. "Blake, set course back to Selerus, one-quarter impulse."

"Aye aye, Skipper."

"Exec, the bridge is yours," the captain said as he rose from his chair and began moving toward the turbolift. Hesek stepped in front of the captain before he could enter the lift.

"On behalf of my people, Captain, I thank you," the Seleri said. "We are indebted to you."

"It is our pleasure to be of assistance, Doctor," Stuart replied. "Will you be in trouble for contacting us now that the crisis has been dealt with?" he asked the alien scientist.

Hesek lowered his bulbous eyes. "I am sure to receive a reprimand at the very least." Then he raised his head and looked straight at the captain. "However, I believe that the leadership of my world will realize my position and be grateful to you as well."

"I hope that they won't be too hard on you," Stuart said with a half grin. Then he stepped in the lift and the doors closed behind him.



Rob Stuart sat across the table from Doctor Janice Edwards. They looked out the observation windows of the officers' lounge and marveled at the beauty of Selerus. "And to think that this world could have been destroyed," the doctor said. "All because their government did not want to ask for help."

Stuart took Jan's hand in his. "At least Hesek realized that outside help was needed," he said.

"What's going to happen to him?" Jan asked, expressing concern for the alien.

"He said that they will be lenient since they realized that he was right," the captain said. "But let's concentrate on us now." Stuart looked into Jan's dark blue eyes. "We have a wedding to prepare for."

And the couple looked back out the window at the beauty of the planet below.

To be continued....