

# To Boldly Go: The Rival

A U.S.S. *Providence* story

By Cleve Johnson

The *Ambassador*-class starship slowed to sub-light speed and the stars that were streaking by came to a halt as the mighty cruiser engaged its impulse engines. It approached the world known as Selerus, home of the parent race to the Saurians. As the U.S.S. *Republic* neared the planet, a smaller vessel could be seen, on the viewscreen, in orbit around the alien world.

Captain Charles Gardner rose from the captain's chair. "Standard orbit Mister Richards," he said to the helm officer. "Paul, please inform our guests that we have rendezvoused with the starship *Providence* and to report to transporter room two." Gardner started to turn and walk toward the turbolift.

The first officer, who had been standing next to his CO, nodded his acknowledgment. "Right away, Sir," he replied. "Sir..." The first officer stepped closer to Gardner.

"Something else, Paul?" Gardner said as he stopped and turned to face the XO.

"I request permission to accompany you to the *Providence*," Paul stated.

"May I ask why, Commander?" Gardner inquired curiously.

"It's a...personal matter, Sir," he replied. "There's someone I need to talk to on board."

Gardner smiled at his exec. "Old girlfriend?"

"Something like that," Paul replied.

Gardner saw the serious look in his first officer's eyes and suspected that the "old girlfriend" might be the woman that Gardner's former first officer was about to marry. "Why don't you wait until you're off duty," he said. "I'll be back to mind the ship by then."

Paul started to protest but decided to let it drop. "Aye Captain."

Gardner turned and entered the turbolift.



Rob Stuart and Jan Edwards walked through the corridor, talking. "I'm looking forward to meeting your family, Rob," the doctor stated. "I only wish mine could have made it," she added.

"Why couldn't your parents come?" he asked.

"Mother is negotiating a trade agreement between Bajor and Cardassia," Jan said. "Dad was going to come, but his medical expertise was needed on Betazed."

"Betazed?" Rob wondered out loud.

“He’s a specialist in neurology,” she answered. “He was called in to head up a serious brain injury case that involves the telepathic center of the Betazoid brain.”

The captain and doctor turned a corner and entered the transporter room.

Chief McKinney looked up from his console as the couple entered the room. “Just in time, Sir,” he said. They’re ready to beam over now.”

“Thanks, Mac,” Stuart said. “Where’s Mister Adams?”

The transporter chief shrugged. “I haven’t seen him, Captain.”

Stuart looked to the doctor. “He made a point of telling me that he wanted to be here when Captain Gardner arrived,” he told her.

“Maybe he decided to replicate a gift for his old captain,” Jan suggested.

Stuart rolled his eyes at that. “Not likely,” he replied. “Blake’s not much on giving gifts.”

Just then, the door slid open and Lieutenant Commander Blake Adams entered, somewhat out of breath. He carried a box with a ribbon tied around it. “Sorry I’m late,” he said while still trying to regulate his rate of respiration. “I replicated a little gift for Captain Gardner.”

Stuart didn’t say anything, but he looked at the doctor, who was giving him one of those “I told you so” looks. The captain did not respond to her gaze. Instead, he turned to Chief McKinney at the console. “Energize.”

The columns of energy lit up the transport chamber. When the beam faded, four people stood on the pads. Rob did not know who to go to first. His father. His brother. His uncle. Fortunately, Admiral Hathaway, his uncle, waited on the platform with Captain Gardner, to allow Rob’s father and brother first opportunity to reunite with him.

“Welcome aboard,” Rob said to the guests.

His father stepped off the transporter pad and embraced his youngest son. “It’s good to see you, son,” the eldest Stuart said. “You’re looking well.”

“You are, too, Dad,” Rob replied. “But you’re starting to get a few gray hairs,” Rob said, turning his attention to his brother.

“You gave them to me, little brother,” Sean Michael Stuart II stated as he embraced Rob. “You’re finally tying the knot,” he added.

“To the most beautiful and intelligent woman I’ve ever known,” Rob replied, turning to the doctor, who had remained in the background. “This is Jan.”

The doctor stepped forward, smiling at her future in-laws. “A pleasure to meet you both,” she said as Rob’s father gave her a hug.

“The pleasure is ours,” Rob’s father replied. “I know you and Robert will be very happy together.”

Rob noticed his uncle and Captain Gardner stepping down from the platform and gently pulled Jan away from his father and brother. “This is my uncle, Admiral Robert Hathaway,” he said.

Edwards extended her hand to shake the admiral's, but he took her hand and raised it slightly as he bowed and kissed it, to her surprise. "I've heard a lot of good things about you, Sir," she said.

"And how many bad things has he told you?" Hathaway joked.

Jan smiled at that and tried to keep from blushing. "He hasn't told me anything bad about you, Admiral.... Yet."

Hathaway stifled a laugh.

"She has your number already, Bob," Captain Gardner said.

"And this is Captain Charles Gardner," Stuart said, introducing his former CO.

Gardner shook the doctor's hand. "Good to meet you, Doctor," he said.

"And you, too, Captain," she replied.

Gardner turned his attention to Lieutenant Commander Adams, who stood silently in the background as the introductions had been made. "Blake Adams," he said. "How are you, son?"

Gardner had always called Blake son during his days on the *Republic*. "I'm doing well, Sir."

"Are you keeping Blake out of trouble, Rob?" Gardner asked.

Stuart tried to suppress his amusement. "More like he's watching out for me," Rob replied, thinking of the incident with the Tranak only weeks before when a future version of Blake Adams came back in time to save him.

"I have something for you, Captain Gardner," Blake said as he handed the wrapped box to his former captain.

Gardner accepted the gift and tested the weight by lightly shaking it. "What is it?" he asked. "It could be a nest of Rigellian fleas knowing your sense of humor."

"You may not want to shake it too hard," Blake said. "Open it."

Gardner gently opened the box and found himself speechless as he saw its contents. "I don't know what to say," he muttered.

"I thought I should replace the one I broke a couple of years ago," Blake said.

Gardner remembered the time when *then*-Lieutenant Adams played one of his practical jokes by hiding all of the mementos and knick-knacks that he had collected in the ready room. Only, Blake dropped Gardner's most prized possession—a crystal replica of the *Constitution*-class starship *Republic* that had once sat on the corner of his desk. Now, thanks to a sentimental gesture by the more mature Blake Adams, Gardner's crystal replica had been restored.

"Thank you, Blake," he said. "This means a lot to me."

Blake started to blush. "It's the least I could do, Captain," he said.

"I hate to break this up," Jan interrupted. "But our first officer has prepared a reception in the officer's lounge."

“Quite right,” Rob echoed. “And afterward, I will give you all the grand tour of this little starship.”

Jan led the way with Rob, Blake, and each one of the guests following her out of the transporter room.



“A fine ship you have here, Robby,” Admiral Hathaway said. “These little *Ericsson*-class scouts are proving to be a benefit to paving the way into unknown territory.”

Rob felt pride building within himself. He was glad that he had the privilege to command one of the new ships that seemed to be *paving the way* to new frontiers. Rob was especially pleased that his uncle spoke highly of *his* ship. “Thank you, Uncle Bob,” he replied. “How many of this class are on active duty now?”

“The *Coronado* will be the sixth,” Hathaway said. “Its crew has been assigned and will enter active service in a little over two weeks.”

“It amazes me that the engineers can pop these out at the rate that they do,” Rob said. “Has Starfleet found out what happened to the *Magellan*, yet?”

The *Magellan* was the fourth *Ericsson*-class ship to be launched, and it had disappeared without a trace just six weeks into its survey mission.

Hathaway drew closer to his nephew. “Officially, it’s lost in sector Eight-nine seven,” the admiral whispered. “Keep this to yourself, but off-the-record *Magellan* is on a covert mission in the Gamma Quadrant.”

Rob’s body became tense as he leaned closer to his uncle. “Is the Dominion going to renege on the treaty?” he whispered.

Hathaway shook his head and clasped his nephew’s shoulder. “Nothing like that,” he assured Rob. “I can only tell you that there is a race of up and coming would-be conquerors who have been taking advantage of the Dominion’s demise. Starfleet Intelligence is keeping a close eye on them.”

“What are you two so secretive about?” Captain Gardner said as he approached. “I thought this was a party.”

“I’m glad you decided to join us, Chuck,” Hathaway said, changing the subject. “Robby, Chuck has some news for you.”

“You haven’t told him?” Gardner asked.

Hathaway motioned Gardner and Stuart toward a table near the large viewing windows of the officer’s lounge. “I thought you would like to tell him,” the admiral stated as the three of them sat down.

Hathaway had piqued Rob’s curiosity. “What news?” Stuart asked.

Gardner picked up his glass of synthale and took a sip before telling Rob the good news. “Your uncle thinks that I have commanded the *Republic* far too long,” he said. “He plans to reassign me to the newest *Sovereign*-class that comes out of Utopia Planitia.”

“And with a promotion to commodore,” Hathaway interjected.

“Congratulations, *Commodore* Gardner,” Rob said. “What ship?”

“The *Majestic*,” Gardner replied. “She launches in three months.”

“I bet you’re looking forward to getting a state-of-the-art vessel after commanding the *Republic* for...How long has it been?”

Gardner thought a moment. “Almost twelve years,” he told Stuart. “I’ll definitely miss the old girl,” he added.

“What’s going to happen to her?” Stuart asked.

“She’ll go back to Utopia Planitia for several upgrades, then launch under the command of my current first officer,” Gardner said.

“Shrev is getting his own command?” Stuart asked, surprised.

Gardner shook his head. “No. Shrev requested a transfer a few months back,” he said. “Family matters required that he be close to home, so he has been reassigned as the Starfleet liaison to the Andorian government.”

“So who is your first officer?” Rob wanted to know. “Someone I know?”

Gardner looked to Hathaway. “Could I have a moment with your nephew alone, Bob?” he asked.

Hathaway saw the look in his friend’s eyes and knew that there was something about his first officer that could personally affect Stuart. “Certainly,” he said. “I need to prepare for tomorrow’s meeting with the Seleri government anyway.” He walked away, leaving his friend and nephew to talk privately.

Stuart turned his attention to Gardner. “What is it, Captain?”

Gardner smiled and shook his head. “Why is it that I call you by your first name, but you still call me *Captain*?” he said as a light-hearted reprimand.

“Sorry. Old habits are hard to break, Cap...I mean Chuck,” Stuart replied. “What did you want to tell me?”

Gardner hesitated before speaking. “My first officer wants to come see someone on your ship. I’m pretty sure he wants to see your fiancée.”

“What makes you think he knows Jan?” Stuart asked. “Did he tell you he knows her?”

Gardner shrugged. “Not in so many words,” he replied. “But he said he needed to talk to an old friend on your ship. And...”

“Go on,” Stuart prompted.

Again, Gardner hesitated. “His last name is the same as hers,” he finally stated. “My first officer’s name is Paul Edwards.”

Stuart sat back in his chair. His expression told Gardner that his suspicions were justified.

“They’re related, then?” Gardner asked.

Rob sat up straight in his chair. “They used to be,” he said. He’s Jan’s ex-husband.”

“Oh,” was the only response that Gardner could give. “I’ll keep him from beaming over.”

“No, that won’t be necessary,” Stuart replied.

“But Rob...” Garner protested.

“It will be Jan’s decision if she wants to talk with him or not,” Stuart said. “Excuse me.” He rose from his seat and walked toward the other side of the lounge where Janice Edwards was talking with Rob’s father and brother. Gardner remained seated and shook his head.

Jan saw Rob approaching and saw the concern on his face. She thought about asking what was wrong, but she decided to pretend that she had not noticed that something was bothering him until he brought it up. “Rob, your brother was explaining the work he has been doing on the Atlantis project,” she said. “Sounds very interesting.”

“I don’t want to interrupt, but I need to talk with Jan alone,” Rob said politely. “Please excuse us for a moment.” Rob gently pulled Jan away from his father and brother, who just looked at each other in surprise.

“What’s wrong, Rob?” the doctor asked.

Stuart did not know how to tell her the news that he had just discovered, other than being direct. “I just found out that Paul is the first officer of the *Republic*.”

Jan was stunned. “You mean the Paul that I used to be married to? *That* Paul?”

Rob nodded. “*That* Paul,” he said. “He wants to see you.”

Jan Edwards was silent, pondering why Paul might want to see her. They had divorced six years prior on amicable terms. But she was the one who had initiated the dissolution of their marriage. “I’ll see him,” she finally said. “But he’s not invited to the wedding.”

Rob chuckled. “I doubt he would want to be there anyway.”

“Come on,” Jan said. “Let’s get back to our guests.”

And the couple walked back toward Rob’s family.



***First Officer’s Personal Log: Stardate 54072.8***

*I have just been informed by Doctor Janice Edwards—my best friend—that her ex-husband is beaming over to speak to her. I would not be so concerned, but tomorrow is the day that Jan and Captain Stuart are getting married. I can only speculate about what Paul Edwards is going to say to her. And I hope I’m wrong.*

Blake Adams stood at the open door of Melanie Leeson's quarters. He had not intended to eavesdrop, but the door was open and he could not help but hear the first officer's log entry. He cleared his throat to get Leeson's attention.

Leeson pretended not to be surprised at his presence. She turned off the computer monitor and turned to face Adams. "How long have you been standing there, Blake?" she asked nonchalantly.

"Long enough," he said. "You've known Jan almost as long as I've known Rob." It was more of a statement than an inquiry.

"That's right," she replied.

Blake leaned against the wall. "Do you know her ex, too?"

Leeson walked slowly toward Adams. "I met him when he came to Starbase 82 to visit Jan a few years ago."

Blake, who usually had a light-hearted and jovial personality, appeared to Melanie Leeson as being overly serious. "Why do you think he's here?"

Leeson could see that Blake was bothered by Paul Edward's upcoming visit. "He probably wants to talk Jan out of marrying the Captain," she said. "Paul still loves her."

Blake thought about his captain, his friend. Thought about the hurt that Rob endured when he lost someone that he loved. He would not allow anyone to come between Rob and Jan. Even someone who had more rank. "I'll convince him that he better leave Jan alone," he said to Leeson.

"I'm not sure he can be convinced," Leeson said. "He's a man with a lot of drive."

Blake smiled. "I have a lot of drive myself," he replied.

Leeson reached up, placing a firm hand on Blake's shoulder. "Don't do anything stupid, Blake," she said. "Jan can take care of herself with Paul. And so can the captain."

Blake smiled at Melanie. "Don't worry," he said. "The worst I'll do is reprogram the replicator in his quarters to produce mud in all his drinks."

Leeson tried to be serious but found holding in a slight laugh was near impossible. "Paul is soon to be promoted to the rank of captain and take command of the *Republic*," she stated. "I don't want you to do anything that will jeopardize your career."

"I'm just going to have a talk with him," Blake replied. "I want him to know that messing up Rob and Jan's life would not be in his best interest."

Leeson cocked her eyebrow and watched Adams turn and exit her quarters. *I only hope that you remember what you say may not be in your best interest*, she thought as she watched the door close behind him.



Captain Charles Gardner entered the bridge. He stopped momentarily to survey his surroundings, his crew at their stations. He noticed his first officer rise from the command chair and approach.

“Welcome back, Captain,” Paul said. “Admiral Hathaway wants you to meet with him at your earliest convenience,”

“Thank you,” Gardner stated as he turned to the tactical officer. “Tell the admiral that I will join him in fifteen minutes.”

“Aye, Captain,” the woman at the tactical station replied.

Gardner turned back to his first officer. “Could I have a few moments?”

“Certainly, Captain.”

Gardner, followed closely by his first officer, entered his ready room and moved behind the desk. He sat down and pressed a touchpad on the computer monitor, activating the screen. Gardner scanned the display and turned the monitor off. “Have a seat, Paul,” he said.

The first officer sensed something different about his captain. He reluctantly sat across the desk from Gardner.

Gardner observed the XO before speaking. He knew that this man was a fine officer and would be a good replacement to take command. “I understand that you and Doctor Edwards were once married,” he stated factually.

Paul Edwards nodded. “That’s correct, Sir,” he said.

Gardner leaned forward and rested his elbows on the desk. He clasped his fingers together. “I don’t make a habit of meddling in the personal lives of my crew,” he said. “But you need to understand that Captain Stuart and I served together several years. And I consider him a good friend.”

Edwards said nothing.

“I won’t say anything else on the matter, but please understand my position,” Gardner added.

“With all due respect, Captain,” Paul began. “This is a personal matter between Janice and myself.” Commander Edwards’ posture became tense.

Gardner slowly nodded in agreement. “You’re right,” he replied. “But I’m willing to bet that it’s also between you and Captain Stuart.” Gardner looked for some reaction from Edwards. He got none, so he changed the subject. “Before you visit Janice, I would like you to greet the second officer of the *Providence* in Transporter Room Four and escort him to the shuttle bay.” Gardner rose from his chair. “He’s coming to transfer the runabout *Amazon* to the *Providence*.”

Paul Edwards also rose from his chair. He felt nervous, although he did not let his lack of comfort outwardly show. “Yes Sir,” he said and turned to walk toward the door.



Edwards entered the transporter room as Blake Adams stepped off the platform. Blake extended his hand toward the *Republic*’s first officer, who grasped it and firmly shook. “Paul Edwards, first officer,” he said rather curtly.



Blake nodded as he withdrew from the handshake. “Lieutenant Commander Blake Adams, second officer of the U.S.S. *Providence*,” Blake replied just as curtly. “I’m here to pick up...”

“...A runabout. Yes, I know,” Edwards rudely finished Blake’s sentence. “I’ll show you to the shuttle bay,” he said as he walked out the still-open door.

Blake followed silently, planning what he should say to Jan’s ex-husband.

Edwards quickly moved through the corridor, with Adams trailing, and entered a turbolift. He said nothing the entire time that the turbolift took to reach the deck where the shuttle bay was located.

Blake decided to break the ice. “I understand that you and Doctor Edwards used to be married,” he said calmly.

Edwards rolled his eyes toward the ceiling, still saying nothing.

Blake knew the enjoyment he would get from pushing this guy’s buttons. “I hope you don’t plan on interfering with the festivities tomorrow.”

Paul felt anger rising within him as he turned and tried to stare down Blake. “I respect your right to your opinions, *Lieutenant Commander*,” Paul said testily. “But my relationship with your ship’s doctor is none of your business.”

Blake stiffened and stared right back at Edwards. “Rob Stuart is my best friend and that makes it my business, *Commander*,” Blake said in the same tone that Edwards had used. “I will not let anyone ruin his life. Or his happiness.”

Edwards clenched his fists, but he suppressed his desire to slam Blake through the side of the turbolift wall. “I respect your loyalty to your friend, Mister Adams,” he said. “Please respect my privacy.”

Blake turned and faced the turbolift door without saying anything else. He waited until the lift stopped and exited as soon as the doors parted. Blake turned and held up a hand to stop Edwards from leaving the lift. “I used to serve on this ship and know my way around,” Blake said. “I think it would be best if I went the rest of the way myself.”

Paul Edwards stopped, staying in the lift. “That might be a good idea,” he said. “I have somewhere to go anyway.”

Blake turned and walked down the corridor. “Just remember not to mess up my friends’ wedding,” he shouted back as the lift doors began to slide shut.



“Are you nervous?” Melanie Leeson asked Janice Edwards.

The doctor smiled. “Aren’t new brides supposed to be nervous right before the big day?”

“I mean about Paul coming on board,” Leeson said across from across the doctor’s office desk.

Jan laughed a little nervously. “I can’t say that I’m looking forward to it,” she said. “We parted as friends, but...,” she paused. “His timing is a little too coincidental.”

Melanie started to say something when her communicator chirped. "Leeson here."

"*Commander Edwards is on his way to sickbay, Commander,*" the voice of Lieutenant Yoshi Nakamura stated.

"Thanks, Yoshi." Leeson gave the doctor a worried look. "Leeson out."

Jan stared at her friend.

Leeson saw the look in Jan's eyes. "Would you like me to stay for moral support?" she asked.

Jan shook her head. "Thanks anyway, Mel, but I need to do this by myself."

Leeson rose from her chair and started for the door. She stopped and turned to face the doctor. "Good luck, Jan." Then she left the room.

Jan stood and went to the replicator. "Cup of coffee, hot and black," she said. As soon as it appeared, Jan took the cup and began to drink.

"A little strong for you, isn't it?"

Jan quickly turned, almost spilling the coffee. She recovered and set the cup on the edge of her desk. "I occasionally indulge myself," the doctor stated. "Would you like anything?"

Paul Edwards shook his head. "Nothing that comes from a replicator," he replied. "May I sit?" Paul pointed to the chair on his side of the doctor's desk.

"Not at all," Jan said as she sat down as well.

Paul had rehearsed what he had wanted to say to Janice, but now that he was in the same room with his former wife, words escaped him. "You look good," he finally managed to say.

"Thank you," Jan replied. "You seem to be taking good care of yourself, too."

Paul tried to collect his thoughts, his feelings. He remembered the day that he and Janice had met. The day they married. The day they divorced. "I want you to reconsider what you're about to do," he said.

Jan stood up and faced away from Paul. She stared at the picture of rolling green hills that hung on the wall. "Don't do this, Paul," she said.

"But I still love you," he replied. "I want us to try again."

Jan turned around to face Paul, shaking her head. "What makes you think that *I* want to try again?" she asked. "It didn't work the first time."

Paul stood up and started to walk around the desk, but Jan held up her hand. He stopped, not wanting to be too aggressive. "I know I made mistakes," he said. "I want to make it work, Janice."

"I'm getting married tomorrow, Paul," Jan replied. "How can you come on board and expect me to just cancel those plans and come back to you?"

Paul looked straight into her eyes. "I still love you, Janice."

Jan stared back. "I'm sorry, Paul." She paused. "I still care for you in some way, but *I* no longer love you."

Paul felt his heart pound within his chest. "What about the eight great years we had?"

Jan sat back down. "It was only three *great* years," she said. "The last five went downhill."

"Where did I go wrong?" Paul asked.

Jan looked down, sighed, and looked back at Paul. "I was tired of taking a back seat to your career."

"You're a Starfleet officer, too," Paul protested. "You know that there are times the uniform needs to come first."

"But you *always* put the uniform before me," Jan said angrily. "You accepted an assignment that took you away for two years without discussing it with me first." She buried her face in her hands.

Paul started to walk toward the door, then stopped and turned back. "I'm sorry, Jan," he said. "I'll change if you would postpone your wedding plans with Stuart. I can prove how much I love you."

"I told you, Paul," Jan said. "I don't love you anymore." The doctor stood up and glared at her one-time husband. "I want you to leave now."

"Without even giving me a second chance?" Paul protested.

"I think she told you to leave."

Paul quickly turned around to face Rob Stuart who was standing in the doorway, glaring at him. "You must be Captain Stuart," Paul Edwards said, stating the obvious.

"And you must be the man who is trying to steal my fiancée away from me," Stuart replied in a calm, but firm voice. "I want you off my ship, *Commander*," Stuart ordered. "Now."

Paul Edwards' eyes narrowed, but he said nothing more. He quickly walked past Stuart and out the door.

Jan rushed over to Rob and hugged him. He, of course, returned the gesture. "Why did he have to show up in my life right before the happiest day of our lives?" she asked without expecting an answer.

Rob smiled at Jan. "Put him out of your mind," he said.

Jan looked into Rob's eyes. "What if he tries something tomorrow?" Of course, she did not think that anything would happen.

"He won't have the opportunity," Rob replied.

The door to Jan's office slid open and Counselor James Goodman entered. Stuart, who was still hugging the doctor, let go and faced Goodman.

Goodman, being married himself, did not make an issue of the display of affection that he had walked in on. "Sorry to intrude," he said. "Who was that guy who almost ran over me in the corridor?" he asked.

Stuart just smiled as Edwards explained. "He's my ex-husband."

"He's definitely carrying some unresolved baggage," Goodman said. "He's very angry. Almost bordering on obsession."

Rob and Jan looked at each other, concern written on their faces. They both worried that Paul might become more than just a slight irritant on the upcoming happiest day of their lives.

"I'll have to report his emotional state to the *Republic's* counselor," Goodman added.



The next day, the wedding day, finally came. Admiral Hathaway entered the holodeck. He saw his nephew talking with Lieutenant Commander Adams and Lieutenant Goodman at the simulated wedding gazebo. He approached the trio as they conversed between themselves.

Stuart was first to notice his uncle approaching. He excused himself from his officers and started walking toward Hathaway. "How was your meeting with the Seleri, Uncle Bob?" he asked.

Hathaway stopped walking as Stuart reached him. "It was very productive," he replied. "They want to send a special representative to Sauria. They want to renew contact with their people living in our part of the galaxy."

"I thought they might," Stuart said. "Do you know who they will send?"

Hathaway smiled slightly. "The Prime Minister has appointed your friend, Doctor Heseke, as ambassador."

"He should be suited for it," Stuart said. "He would probably argue that he is not much of a diplomat, but Heseke has an explorer's heart. A rare thing among his people."

"He's preparing for the journey now," the admiral said. "The *Republic* will take him to Sauria before returning to Utopia Planitia."

"How long will he be there?" Stuart asked.

Hathaway shrugged. "That's not been determined yet," he replied. "I'll make arrangements for you to bring the *Providence* back to the Alpha Quadrant when Heseke is ready to come home."

"That will be a good chance for the crew to visit relatives and friends, too," Stuart said. "I'll have Commander Leeson alter our planned survey course to keep from going too much farther into the Beta Quadrant until then."

"Good idea," Hathaway agreed. "Well, enough about work. Is everything set for the wedding?"

“All but the guests,” Stuart said. “Dad and Sean are having lunch with me. Sort of their last meal with me as a bachelor.”

Hathaway smiled at that. “And what if Commander Edwards decides to drop in?”

Stuart smiled. “My security chief has made plans to keep him off the ship,” he said. “I won’t even tell you what Blake offered to do.”

They both began to laugh.

“And are the two of you going to get off the ship for any kind of honeymoon?” Hathaway asked.

“Hesek suggested we go to Thallas,” Stuart said. He says it’s a world with more than eighty percent of its surface covered by water and some very beautiful islands.”

“Inhabited?” Hathaway asked.

“Hesek said that there is an amphibious race of sentient beings that live there. But they don’t travel more than a kilometer or two inland when they come ashore,” Stuart replied. “Of course, this is based on the historical records of two or three millennia ago when the Seleri explored space.”

“Be careful,” Hathaway said. “And make sure you have a good time.”

Stuart only smiled.



Paul Edwards entered the bridge. He was still angry about being ordered off the *Providence* by the man who had stolen his wife’s love. Paul looked around the bridge and saw Captain Gardner leaning over the communications station conferring with the young ensign that manned that station. Gardner heard the turbolift slide shut and he looked over at Edwards, who simply nodded his acknowledgment.

Gardner said a few more words to the communications officer and then walked toward his first officer. “I need to see you in private,” the captain said as he walked past Edwards toward the door to the ready room.

Edwards followed silently and stopped in the center of the room. He stood at attention while he waited for Gardner to turn to face him. But Gardner kept his back to Edwards, looking out the window at the planet Selerus below.

The door separating the ready room from the main bridge finally slid shut. Captain Gardner turned and faced his first officer. “I understand your visit with Doctor Edwards did not go well.”

“Yes Sir,” Paul replied.

“I received a report that your emotional state may be out of control,” Gardner told his first officer.

Paul flinched but remained at attention. “Did Stuart tell you that?”

“No, Paul,” Gardner replied. “You practically ran over his ship’s counselor on your way out of sickbay.”

“And being one of Stuart’s officers, he couldn’t wait to tell you,” Paul said sarcastically.

“He was duty-bound to report what he sensed,” Gardner stated.

Edwards stepped forward and thrust his finger at his commander. “And you believe that he’s telling the truth?”

“He’s part Betazoid, Paul,” Gardner said. “I have to consider that his empathic abilities may be accurate.”

Paul Edwards shook his head in disbelief. “Some half-breed counselor thinks he senses that I am upset and you immediately take his side.”

Gardner sighed. “You are to report to Counselor Martinez for a psychological evaluation at 1300 hours, Paul,” he said. “And you’re temporarily relieved of duty pending the results of the counselor’s tests.”

Paul grew silent. Relieved of duty and no way to communicate with Janice. He weighed the options and decided to force himself to become calm. “And what will this do to my record?” he asked. “Is my promotion in jeopardy?”

Charles Gardner liked his first officer. He knew that Paul had the potential to be a fine CO. But Gardner also knew that a ship’s captain had to be able to bury his personal feelings at times, not letting them interfere with his judgment. And at this moment, Paul Edwards did not possess that quality. “I can’t say anything about that until the counselor makes her report,” he said. “And for the sake of all involved, I am confining you to this ship.”

Edwards clenched his teeth and snapped back to attention. “Understood, Captain,” he said. “Will there be anything else, Sir?”

Gardner shook his head. “No, Commander,” he replied. “You’re dismissed.”

Paul Edwards turned and quickly made his exit as the captain of the *Republic* looked on. This day would be bittersweet for Gardner.



Paul left the counselor’s office. He knew that the results of his *tests* would not be available for at least twenty minutes. And the counselor’s report would probably take an hour to write. So, he decided to go back to his quarters and think about ways of stopping his former wife’s wedding to another man.



Captain Robert P. Stuart of the U.S.S. *Providence* stood next to his best man—Blake Adams. Captain Gardner, who was officiating the ceremony, also stood at the front of the wedding chapel that Blake had programmed in the holodeck.

Stuart looked at the seated guests—his father, brother, and uncle sat together. All of the senior officers, except for those in the wedding party, were seated behind Rob’s family. He looked at his first officer, who was Jan’s maid of honor, walk toward the dais. Then, Rob watched as Jan, accompanied by Chief McKinney who was giving the doctor

away in lieu of her absent father, started down the aisle. His heart began to beat loudly in his chest as she approached.

McKinney placed the doctor's hand in the captain's and stepped back. Jan gazed into Rob's eyes and they both turned toward Captain Gardner.

Gardner smiled at the couple and opened a small black book and began the ceremony. "Since the days of the first wooden sailing vessels, all ship captains have had one happy duty...."



Paul Edwards sat on his bunk, arguing with himself about what to do. Should he let go? Or should he "crash" the wedding and fight for Janice? He thought, weighing the consequences of his actions. Then, the time for a decision had come. He decided to crash the wedding.

Paul got up and walked toward the door. He almost bumped into it when it failed to open at his approach. He hit the manual control panel to open the door, but it still failed to open for him.

"Computer, open this door," he ordered.

*"Unable to comply,"* the computer responded.

"Security override," Paul stated.

*"Unable to comply."*

Paul's anger began to grow. "Why will the door not open, computer?"

*"Authorized access code has not been input,"* the computer replied.

"What authorization code?"

*"That information is not available without proper authorization."*

Edwards, completely frustrated, began to pound on the door, hoping someone would hear him.



Rob and Jan entered the shuttle bay and were greeted by the first and second officers of the *Providence*. "Looks like a top sendoff," Rob stated.

"We didn't want you to leave without saying goodbye," Leeson said.

"I also wanted you to know that the *Republic* left orbit ten minutes ago," Blake said. "They finally got Commander Edwards out of his quarters."

"Say again?" Rob inquired.

"It seems a computer malfunction locked him in his quarters," Leeson said. "And it seems that it mysteriously corrected itself a few hours later."

"And what do you think could have happened, Blake?" Rob asked.

Blake's eyes lit up, but he didn't let on like he knew anything about the malfunction. "I'm not sure," he replied.

Rob lifted an eyebrow as he studied Blake's expression. He decided that the less he knew about this *malfunction* was better left unsaid, so he took Jan's arm and escorted her aboard the runabout U.S.S. *Euphrates* without pursuing the matter.

Blake offered his arm to Melanie Leeson, who locked her arm in his, and they walked out of the bay as the runabout lifted off.

Captain and Doctor Stuart were on their way to boldly go on their honeymoon. Their adventure together was just beginning.