

To Boldly Go: In-Q-Spicuous

A U.S.S. Providence story

By Cleve Johnson

Captain's Log: Stardate 54864.2

After returning Doctor Heseke to Selerus we are en route to Jarek III to bring supplies to the science team studying the ancient Habiru. We will provide them with any recreation and rest that our holodeck and other ship's services can provide. We have been invited to Hurak Prime for cultural exchange once our mission to Jarek III is complete. I hope to renew my friendship with Commander Tal while visiting his planet.

Captain Rob Stuart turned off his computer terminal and stretched out on the couch in his quarters. He picked up a book and opened it to where he had left off reading.

Not long after he started to read, Rob heard the sound of the door to his quarters open. Jan, the ship's CMO and Stuart's wife, entered the room. "Rob?"

Stuart came to a seated position. "So how did you do?" he asked his wife.

Janice plopped down in the chair directly across from where her husband was sitting. She looked exhausted. "I took her four sets to two," she said. "But it took everything I had to do it."

"Melanie is very competitive," Rob said. "I hope you won't be too sore tomorrow."

"Me neither," Jan replied. "If I am, I know someone who gives great backrubs."

Rob's face started to turn mildly red as he smiled at his wife. "Can I get you anything?"

Jan slowly rose from her chair. "No thanks," she answered. "I think I'll hit the sonic shower and go to bed." The doctor started toward the bedroom and continued to talk to her husband as she walked. "Will you be up long?" she asked.

"I'm going to read for a while," Rob responded. "I'll be to bed in about an hour."

"I'll be sound asleep, so I better say goodnight now," Jan said as she entered the bedroom. "Goodnight Honey."

"Goodnight," Rob said and stretched out on the couch once again as he opened the book.

Little did the CO of the starship *Providence* know that he was under surveillance by an alien being. The life form was powerful and intelligent. He had been a source of irresponsible interaction with humans, as well as other species, for centuries.

Stuart turned the page and continued to read, but quickly jumped off the couch as the alien appeared in front of the captain with a flash of light. Rob stared at the man in

front of him. The man, actually the alien whose appearance was that of a man, wore a Starfleet uniform. Rob noticed that the man's uniform had four pips on the collar.

Rob finally spoke to the alien. "Who are you and what do you want?"

The alien smiled impishly. "I would have thought that you had heard of me," he replied. "But no matter. You may call me Q."

"I have heard of you, Q," Rob said. "I've read several reports on your dealings with the *Enterprise* crew. I even read that you paid a visit to *Deep Space Nine* once."

"You must be one of my fans, then," Q stated with glee.

"Hardly," Stuart answered. "Why are you here instead of getting on Captain Picard's nerves?"

"Jean-Luc misunderstands me," Q said. "I thought that I would let others get to know me for who I truly am instead of how those dull Starfleet reports portray me in such a biased way."

Stuart walked past Q to the nearest panel on the wall. He touched one of the touchpads. "Security report to the captain's quarters immediately," he said. Unfortunately, there was no reply. "Security, report."

"They can't hear you, Captain," Q stated. "May I call you Rob? Or how about Robby?"

Stuart faced the Q being and glared at him. "What have you done to my crew?" he demanded.

"I've done nothing to your crew," Q replied. "Honestly, I don't understand your hostility toward me."

Stuart, usually very calm by nature, stepped close to Q and stared at the alien straight into his eyes. "I'll ask you once more, Q," he said. "Why are you here?"

Q disappeared in a flash and reappeared just as quickly sitting in a chair. "Have a seat, Robby, and we'll talk about why I'm here," he said.

Rob willed himself into a calmer disposition and slowly walked back to the couch, where he previously was seated. He sat down and tried to keep his anger in check. "Okay, I'm listening," he stated.

Q's face became serious. "I've turned over a new leaf," he stated. "I'm here to fulfill your fantasy."

"My fantasy?" Stuart did not know what Q meant.

"Of course," Q said. He snapped his fingers and the book that Rob had been reading, and had still been holding in his hand, was now in Q's hand. "I know of your fascination with the early days of Earth's exploration of the stars."

"And what would that be to you?" Stuart asked.

Q smiled. "I thought that I might be nice and give you a chance to see what it was really like in the time when Starfleet was new," he said. "Instead of reading about in a book, you can live the adventure."

Stuart realized that Q had the power to traverse both time and space. He found himself tempted to take the offer that Q was making. But Stuart could not take a chance of polluting the timeline. “You must know that I wouldn’t take a chance of changing history,” he said.

Q smirked. “You Starfleet captains are all alike,” he said. “What if I promised that you can interact with the people of the past and it will not make a difference in your precious timeline? You could do or say anything and nothing will change.”

Stuart thought about that and found himself tempted by Q’s offer. “This has a certain appeal, but...”

“Then it’s settled,” Q said without letting Stuart finish his sentence.

Stuart saw Q prepare to snap his fingers once again. “No, Q, wait!”



Suddenly, Rob Stuart found himself flat on his back, on a bed, in a historically intriguing, but primitive-looking sickbay. He opened his eyes to see the wide-grinned face of a Denobulan standing over him.

“You finally came around, crewman,” the alien said. “So, how are we feeling?”

Stuart felt disorientated. “Where am I?” he asked as he looked around the room.

“You’re in sickbay,” the alien said. “You took a nasty blow to the head when the gravity generators gave out.”

Stuart tried to sit up, but the Denobulan held him down on the examination table. “This isn’t my sickbay,” Rob Stuart stated. “What ship is this?” he demanded.

“*Enterprise*, of course,” the alien said as if Stuart should have known where he was. “Perhaps you hit your head harder than I thought.”

Stuart sat up slowly. “You act like I’m part of your crew,” Stuart said. “I don’t even know your name.”

“I’m Doctor Phlox,” the alien said. “And you *are* part of this crew.”

Stuart looked at the doctor. “I’m somewhat familiar with the history of the *Enterprise*,” he said. “Is Captain Jonathon Archer still in command?”

“At least you remember who your commanding officer is,” Phlox said with a grin.

“And who am I?” Stuart asked.

“You are Crewman Robert Stuart,” Phlox replied. The doctor paused as he picked up a neural scanner and began to slowly wave it over Stuart’s forehead. “I find it odd that you can remember the name of the captain, but not your own,” he said.

Stuart forced himself to smile. “I know my name, Doctor, but I wanted to see if you did,” he stated.

Phlox thought that was an odd statement, but did not let it interfere with his examination of Stuart. “And why do you think that I would not know your name?” he

asked. “It would be hard not to at least know the names of everyone on a ship of only eighty people,” he said.

“What if I were to tell you that I’m not part of this crew?” Stuart asked.

Phlox did not reply.

Stuart realized that Q had placed him almost two hundred thirty years in the past—before the beginning of the Federation. Q had somehow integrated Stuart into the time period and in the minds of the crew, or at least in the mind of this doctor. He contemplated the danger of changing the timeline if he explained who he was and where he came from. He conjured up the memory of every report that he had read concerning the Q being, remembering the last reported visit to the *Enterprise-D*. Stuart remembered that that particular report indicated that Q had created alternate timelines that Captain Picard traveled between. In the end, Stuart remembered, Q had restored the proper timeline, and except for Picard, no one else was aware that time had been disrupted. And Q promised that Stuart could interact with these people without changing history. But could Q be trusted to keep his promises? Finally, Stuart decided to take the risk. *This all may be an illusion anyway*, he thought. “I need to speak to the captain,” he told the doctor.



Captain Archer entered sickbay and approached Stuart, who was seated on the edge of the exam table. “I understand you wanted to see me, crewman,” Archer said.

Stuart started to stand but saw the doctor eying him carefully. He decided to stay in a seated position. “May I have a word with the captain alone, please,” he said to the doctor.

“I’ll be in the laboratory if you need me,” Phlox stated as he turned to leave.

Stuart waited for the door to close behind the doctor. “I need to talk to you, Captain.”

Archer pulled a chair close to the bed and sat down. “What’s on your mind, Mister Stuart?” he asked.

Stuart took a deep breath. “You probably won’t believe what I’m about to tell you,” Rob stated. “But I need you to keep an open mind about what I say.”

Archer nodded. “I’ll do my best to be objective,” he said. “Go ahead.”

Stuart thought about what words to choose. He decided to be direct and honest. “I am not part of your crew, Captain Archer,” he said. “I am from...” Stuart paused. “...the future.”

Archer was momentarily speechless as his mind tried to process what Crewman Stuart had just stated. He immediately remembered the events that surrounded the mysterious crewman who had also claimed to come from the future. Of course, Archer was transported to the future as well and could no longer deny that time travel was possible. “Are you an associate of Crewman Daniels,” Archer finally asked.

Stuart shook his head. "I don't know anyone named Daniels," he replied. "I was sent here against my will from the twenty-fourth century."

"Against your will?" Archer wondered. "Who sent you here?"

Stuart hoped that his revelation to Archer would not damage the proper unfolding of history. He took a deep breath before speaking. "I must ask you, Captain, that everything that I have said, and will say, be kept completely confidential."

Archer clenched his jaw and nodded. "If I'm convinced that what you say is the truth..." Archer stated. "...I'll keep it under my hat."

Stuart was satisfied with Archer's response. All Rob had to do was convince the other captain that he was telling the truth. "I was sent here by a rather mischievous, and very powerful, alien," Stuart stated. "He can manipulate time and space as simply as you and I breathe air," he added.

Although Archer knew from firsthand experience that time travel was a possibility, he found it unlikely that there could exist a being who was all-powerful. "And does this alien have a name?" Archer asked.

"He calls himself Q," Stuart replied. "And he has been a menace to another starship captain in my century as well."

"I can believe that you may have traveled through time, but this notion of an alien as powerful as you say is hard to swallow," Archer said. "Maybe if you tell me more about..."

"Bridge to Captain Archer," a female voice stated over the intercom.

Archer rose from the chair that he had been sitting on and quickly moved to the communications panel on the nearby wall. He pushed the button to activate the transmitter. "Archer. What is it, Sub-commander?"

"You are needed on the bridge, Captain," the voice said. *"There is a distress signal coming from a disabled ship near Gamma Ceti."*

"Do you know where the ship came from?" Archer asked the unseen woman.

"It's an automated signal, Captain. They have not identified themselves."

Archer looked back toward Stuart, who remained seated on the medical bed. Archer turned back to face the wall. "Have Travis set a course," he said. "I'll be there in a few minutes."

Archer walked back to the bed where Rob Stuart still waited. "I would like to continue our conversation, but duty calls," he said to Stuart.

Stuart realized that Archer would be hard to convince. "Please don't say anything to your crew, Captain," he pleaded.

"What do you want from me, Crewman Stuart?" Archer asked.

Stuart looked at the other captain's eyes, seeing that Archer had not been convinced. "Help me find a way back to the future," he said.

Archer felt pity for Stuart. The man either had a terrible injury to his brain or was telling the truth. "I'll talk with you some more about this when I can."

Archer left the sickbay, leaving Stuart to wonder how he would get home.



Jan Stuart woke from a deep sleep. She thought she saw a flash of light shine through the bedroom door. "Rob? Are you coming to bed?"

Rob never answered.

Jan rose from her bed and grabbed a robe from the edge of the bed. She went to the other room and saw a man in a Starfleet uniform reading a book as he sat on the couch, but it was not her husband. "Who are you?" she demanded.

The Q entity looked up from the book that he was reading. "Doctor, so good you're awake," Q said in his usual irreverent tone.

"I asked you a question," the doctor said angrily.

"Temper, temper, Doctor," Q replied. "I am called Q," he finally answered.

Jan Stuart had heard of Q. She had heard that he was a being of immense power and intelligence. And he was *definitely* not to be trusted. "Where's my husband?" she demanded, her anger starting to get away from her control.

"Oh, don't worry, Doctor," Q replied. "Robby is having the time of his life."

Jan turned and rushed into the bedroom. Q shrugged and resumed reading the book that Rob had been reading earlier. When he looked up he saw that the doctor had returned and stood pointing a phaser at him. Q merely smiled at the doctor. "Oh, please," he said. "Surely you should realize that your little toy won't affect me."

"Maybe not," she said. However, she did not lower the weapon. "I want you to immediately return Robert Stuart to this ship."

Q put the book down and stood to his feet. He sized up the doctor and had to admire her gall. Not many life forms would stand up so bravely to a being as superior as Q. He thought it funny as he decided what to tell, and what not to tell, to Janice Stuart. "Don't fret about Robby," he said. "He will be returned as soon as he learns what he needs to know."

Jan relaxed slightly and let the hand that was still holding the phaser drop to her side. "What do you mean?" she asked the intruder. "What does he need to learn?"

"I don't want to give away the surprise," Q replied. "Let me just say that his journey to the past will provide him with information that may allow this ship and crew to survive what lies ahead."

"And what lies ahead?" Jan asked, the angry tone lessening from her voice.

"I'm afraid I can't tell you," Q replied. "I can't interfere with underdeveloped cultures, you know."

Jan burst out laughing. "From what I hear, you have interfered plenty of times," she said. "Like when you introduced humanity to the Borg." Jan felt her cheeks turning red as her anger returned. "That led to the deaths of tens of thousands."

Q rolled his eyes. "If you can't take a little bloody nose, then you shouldn't be out here," he said.

Jan stared Q in the eye as her boiling blood raced through her veins. "Rob's mother died at Wolf 359," she said coldly."

Suddenly, the jovial irreverence drained from Q's features and he became deadly serious. "If you want full disclosure, you should know that my introduction of the Borg to Jean-Luc and his crew saved millions of lives. The Borg would have come without any warning had you not been introduced to them by me."

Jan was still angry but understood the principle of sacrificing a few to save many. "So why are you doing this?" she asked Q.

Q softened and returned to his previous mood. "As you said, your husband lost his mother to the Borg. I thought that I would do something that might keep him from losing anyone else that he might be close to."

"You feel guilty about the loss of those lives and you want to make restitution," Jan stated. The doctor's anger subsided and she realized that Q, as superior as he was, did have a streak of humanity running through him.

Q smiled. "Don't think that I succumb to your primitive emotional displays or your view of morality," he said. "I just think of myself as doing a little community service to a pitiful species."

Jan saw through Q's attempt to make her think that he did not care. She saw that he *did* care, at least a little bit. "When will Rob be returned?" she asked.

Q looked at the doctor and his face displayed a playful, mischievous grin. "I promise that he will come back to you in one piece," he replied. "Now if you will excuse me, I need to check in on Robby." And in a flash of light, Q disappeared.

Jan walked to the viewport and stood to watch the stars streak by. "Stuart Leeson," she said.

There was silence for a few seconds. Then the first officer's voice replied over the intercom. "*I thought you would be sound asleep after three hours of tennis.*"

Although no one could see her, Jan forced a smile. "I was asleep," she said. "I need to talk to you about a visitor that was just here."

"*A visitor?*"

"Have you ever heard of a powerful alien named Q?" Jan asked her friend.

"*The same Q that has visited the Enterprise several times?*"

"That's him," Jan replied. "He's taken Rob to somewhere in the past."

There was a momentary silence blaring loudly from the intercom. "*I'll meet you in the main conference room in ten minutes.*"

Jan turned away from the view of streaking stars and went back to the bedroom to change.



Rob Stuart continued to sit on the edge of the bed. He needed to find a way back to his ship, his time. That did not seem likely without Q. “Okay Q,” he said. “You’ve had your fun. Now take me back to my ship.” Stuart’s peripheral vision detected a flash of light and he whirled around to face the Q being.

Q shook his head. “But you only just got here, Robby,” he replied. “You haven’t even toured the ship yet.”

“I don’t need a tour of the *Enterprise*,” Rob announced.

“You will be home soon enough, Captain,” Q replied. “First, you need to witness an event that is about to happen. I suggest you find a way to find out what is happening on the bridge.” And with that, Q disappeared once again.

Now what Q meant was a mystery to the captain of the starship *Providence*, but he decided that there must be a reason that Q brought him here. Stuart got off the bed and walked to the wall monitor he fumbled with the controls, trying to tap into the internal sensors. Based on what Q had told him, Rob needed to find out what was going on. But as Stuart managed to get an image of the bridge, Phlox entered the room.

“You should be in bed, Crewman Stuart,” the doctor said, not noticing that Rob had accessed the monitor.

Stuart shut off the monitor, using his body to block Phlox from seeing it. “Can I get out of sickbay, Doctor,” Rob said as he turned to face Phlox. “I’m going crazy in here.”

Phlox smiled. “I would like to keep you under observation for several more hours,” he replied.

Stuart knew that getting out of sickbay would not be easy, but he had to find out what was going on. “Please Doctor,” he pleaded. “I’m feeling fine.”

Phlox approached Stuart and ran a scanner over his head. “Well, you seem to be doing better,” he said. “I’ll let you out on the condition that you remain off duty for at least twenty-four hours and report any abnormal symptoms that occur.”

Rob smiled for the first time since arriving on the *Enterprise*. “Thank you, Doctor,” he said. And Rob Stuart started walking toward the double doors that led out of sickbay.

“Don’t you want your uniform?” the doctor asked.

Rob stopped and looked down, noticing for the first time that he was in standard blue underwear that was Starfleet’s standard issue during the twenty-second century. “Quite right,” he said. “I wouldn’t want to catch a chill.”

Phlox went to a nearby locker and retrieved a jumpsuit. He walked over to where Stuart was standing and handed the uniform to him. “I think a cold in addition to everything else you’ve been through would be inadvisable,” he said.



Rob Stuart wandered the corridors of *Enterprise*. He had studied the ship and crew in the history archives for years, ever since first being introduced to a transparent hologram of Jonathon Archer at the Academy in his freshman space flight history course. Unfortunately, he did not have the ship's schematics memorized. He found a computer terminal on the corridor wall and accessed it. "Computer, show me the quarters of Crewman Robert Stuart in relation to this location," Stuart stated. The monitor flickered to life and a deck schematic appeared. Stuart was grateful that the quarters that "belonged" to him happened to be on the same deck. He turned off the terminal and proceeded down the corridor.

Within minutes, Stuart found his quarters and entered. He sat in front of the work desk and activated the computer terminal. "Now all I need is to do is access the bridge sensors," he said to himself.

He worked the primitive computer controls and a picture of the bridge appeared. Now Stuart needed to hear what was being said, so he touched another key on the terminal and the audio activated. Now he could find out what was happening, and what he needed to witness so Q would send him back to the future.



Captain Archer peered at the main viewer, trying to see the as yet unseen ship that had sent the distress signal. "Anything, Sub-commander?" he asked his first officer.

The female Vulcan looked away from the sensing device at her station. "Negative contact, Captain," she replied. "The distress signal came from one thousand two hundred twelve kilometers away at bearing seven two mark two."

"We should be detecting something, then," Archer replied.

"Excuse me, Sir," the officer at the tactical station interrupted.

"What is it, Malcolm?" Archer answered.

"This smells all wrong," the armory officer said. "I recommend that we polarize the hull plating and bring phase cannons online."

Archer realized that Lieutenant Reed was overzealous at times, but he did take his responsibilities seriously. And he usually had good instincts. "This is a rescue mission, Malcolm," he said. "I don't see any need in taking a defensive posture."

The words escaped Archer's mouth only seconds before the ship shook violently with sparks flying from several consoles around the bridge.



"So what are we going to do about the captain's abduction?" Lieutenant Nakamara asked.

"I'm not sure what we can do, Yoshi," Commander Leeson replied. "Jan?"

Doctor Janice Stuart took a deep breath. "Q said that Rob would be returned unharmed," she stated. "I just don't know how soon it will be."

James Goodman looked at the doctor. “Do you believe him?” he asked. “The reports on Q regard him as unpredictable and somewhat devious.”

“I know that,” Jan said. “But he seemed genuine. I believe that Rob is fine.”

“Forgive me, Doctor, but you should remember that...” Goodman said but was interrupted by a flash of light.

Everyone in the conference room stared at the head of the table. There, Captain Rob Stuart stood behind his chair. Janice jumped up from her chair and ran to her husband. She wrapped her arms around him and kissed him, not caring that several members of the senior staff were watching them.

The captain returned his wife’s embrace, aware that they were being watched. He let go of Jan and glanced at the others in the room. “Haven’t you seen two people kissing before?” he asked his officers.

“I hope you don’t greet all your officers that way,” Lieutenant Commander Adams said dryly, which precipitated laughter from the others.

“Are you alright, Captain?” Commander Leeson asked.

“I’m fine, Exec,” Stuart replied. “What’s our status?”

“Now that you’re back, everything is fine,” replied the first officer. “Maybe you should get some rest, Sir.”

“I will,” the captain said. “I want a staff meeting at 0700 tomorrow. I’ll fill you in on what happened then.”

Rob and Jan went back to their quarters to discuss his experience in the past.

Melanie Leeson started toward the exit, but the second officer blocked her path. “Aren’t you supposed to be on the bridge?” she asked him.

“What do you think happened to him?” Blake asked, ignoring her reminder that it was his duty shift.

Leeson shook her head. “I’m not sure,” she said. “He’ll tell us in the morning.”



Rob and Janice Stuart entered the conference room, finding that all of the other senior officers were already present. Rob could almost feel the expectation of his staff hanging in the air. “Good morning,” the captain said as he sat down, his wife sitting next to him. “I can tell that you all want to know what happened last night,” he said.

“Before or after you returned,” Blake Adams jibed.

Everyone in the room chuckled at the second officer’s comment except for T’Les. Jan smiled as her cheeks turned slightly pink as Rob even grinned at Blake’s comment.

“If our comical CONN officer will allow us to continue, I will gladly summarize what happened,” Stuart stated, trying to suppress the smile on his face. “As you know, I was abducted by Q at approximately 2130 hours last night. He sent me into the past, where I met Jonathan Archer.”

“Of the *Enterprise*?” Mary Goodman asked.

“Yes,” answered Stuart. “Apparently, according to Janice, Q felt like he owed me something due to my mother’s death at Wolf 359.”

“Why would he think that?” Leeson asked. “It was the Borg who wiped out that armada.”

“But it was Q who made us humans known to the Borg,” Jan Stuart reminded her friend.

“Anyway,” the captain said as he refocused the conversation. “Q took me back to witness an event so that I would learn from it.”

James Goodman and Blake Adams looked at each other, both with the same thought. Blake was the one to take the initiative in asking his friend and CO. “Learn what?”

“I’m not sure yet,” Stuart replied. “But it seems that something I witnessed will have a bearing on the safety of *this* ship and crew.”

“In what way, Captain?” Leeson asked.

Rob Stuart shook his head. “I honestly don’t know,” he said. “But I hope that I recognize it when the time comes,” he added.

“Can you tell us what you witnessed when you were with Captain Archer?” Mary Goodman asked. “Maybe that will help us determine...”

“*Bridge to Captain Stuart,*” Lieutenant Kelly’s voice interrupted the captain.

“Go ahead,” Stuart replied.

“*Sorry for the interruption, Sir, but we are receiving a distress call from an unknown ship.*”

“What’s the location, Lieutenant?”

“*The signal is coming from 038 mark 41, just under a light year away, Captain,*” Kelly replied.

“Alter course and increase speed to warp nine, Mister Kelly,” Stuart said. “We will join you on the bridge momentarily.”

“*Aye Captain.*”

Stuart rose from his chair, with the other officers following his lead. “I guess the briefing on my little adventure will have to wait,” he said.



Lieutenant J.G. Eric Kelly rose from the CONN position, allowing Blake Adams to take over. “I kept your seat warm, Commander,” he told Adams.

“Thanks, kid,” Adams replied. “Keep up the good work and I’ll let you take it off autopilot someday.”

Kelly shot a look of disgust at his superior, but he had learned that Adams' insults only showed that he thought well of Kelly. "And someday I'll teach you how to fly a runabout," he shot back. "Sir." With a look from Adams, Kelly exited the bridge.

Stuart took the center seat and glanced around the bridge as each of the senior officers took their positions. He noticed that James, not being a bridge officer, was not present; however, Rob did notice that Jan stood by his side instead of going to sickbay.

"Have you picked up anything on sensors, Commander?" Leeson asked the science officer.

"No ships have appeared within sensor range, Commander," T'Les replied. "I have detected an ion trail leading toward the second planet of the star system directly ahead."

"What's our ETA, Blake?" the captain asked.

"Twelve minutes, Skipper," Blake Adams replied.

"Yoshi, have you been able to raise them?" Stuart asked.

"No response to our hails, Captain," Lieutenant Nakamara replied. "There is a repeating automated signal that claims their main fusion reactor is damaged and leaking gamma radiation."

"T'Les?"

"No indication of excessive radiation has been detected by sensors, Captain," the Vulcan answered. "I am continuing scans."

Jan Stuart looked at her husband. She could tell that he was deep in thought and bothered by this distress call. Jan was not surprised when Rob gave the order to stop.

"Take us out of warp, Blake," Stuart said. "Yoshi, raise shields."

Both officers looked at their CO, wondering why he was abandoning a ship in distress. But both officers obeyed their captain without hesitation.

"What is it, Captain?" Leeson asked.

"This is what happened when I was on *Enterprise*, Exec," Stuart replied. "They were baited by an alien ship giving a false distress call, then attacked."

"But that doesn't mean that this is the same situation, Captain," the first officer protested. "Respectfully, we should find the source of the distress signal and render aid."

"You're right, Exec," Stuart replied. "I just don't want to go in without being cautious. Archer almost lost his ship and crew by not being careful enough."

The captain turned toward the science station. "Commander T'Les, focus your scan on the magnetic pole regions of the second planet."

"Aye Captain," the Vulcan said as she reconfigured her controls. After only a few seconds, the science officer looked toward Stuart. "There is a ship hovering over the north magnetic pole," she stated. "It appears to be a Tranak vessel."

"They appear to be outside of their space," Leeson stated.

“And preparing an ambush by using the planet’s magnetic field as a natural cloak,” Stuart added.

“They’ve got to be kidding,” announced Blake Adams. “They’re no match for a Federation starship.”

“Maybe not,” replied Stuart. “But if they had caught us with our shields down, they could have done some major damage.”

“Including the loss of your friends,” a voice said from behind.

Stuart spun around in his chair and looked at Q. “So, you’re back,” Stuart said. “Do you mind explaining all this?”

“It’s quite simple, actually,” Q said. “I had reason to believe that the Tranak were planning to attack you. And I just gave you the clues needed for you to realize that you would be in danger.”

“And by saving us from a hostile species, you feel that you have repaid Rob for the loss of his mother to the Borg,” Jan said.

“I find it hard to believe that even you would consider the loss of a single life to be redeemable,” Q replied. “As I said before, think of this as a little bit of community service.”

“Whatever your reasons, Q, I thank you for tipping us off to the danger that was ahead of us,” Stuart said. “Even a powerful being such as yourself has at least a little human compassion.”

Q smiled and stood up straight. “Just don’t expect too much compassion from me in the future, Robby.” In a flash, Q had disappeared.

Rob Stuart looked at his wife, still standing by his side, and winked. He turned to face the tactical station. “Yoshi, send a message to the Tranak vessel,” he said. “Tell them we are sorry that their little ambush did not work out and we will be on the lookout for them.”

“Aye, Captain,” Nakamara replied.

“Blake, return to our original heading, warp five,” Stuart said. “I believe we still have some supplies for the science team on Jarek III.”

The starship *Providence* sped away, leaving danger behind. The ship and its crew still had new adventures ahead.