

Stardate 57327.3

Fleet Captain Rob Stuart had finished breakfast in his ready room and took his dishes to replicator and set them on the materialization pad. “Recycle.” As the dishes were transformed from matter to energy, he returned to the couch, and before he could sit, the chime sounded. “Enter.”

The XO entered the ready room. “The *Ontario* has detected seven Enkara ships in orbit of Vedren, sir.”

“Thank you, Marcus.” Stuart rubbed his chin. “Only seven?”

“According to the *Ontario*’s sensors, yes.”

“What about the *Icarus*? Any contacts in the asteroid belt?”

“Captain Jeffers has reported that he has not detected any unnatural objects so far,” Marcus Grey said. “However, some of the minerals in the asteroid field are interfering with ship’s sensors. He said that every technician and member of the science department is working on trying to modify the sensors.”

“Any word from the *Kiev* or the *Cheron*?”

“Still more than a day away,” Marcus said, “but both ships are pushing their warp cores above one hundred percent to get here as quickly as possible.”

“I’m concerned about where the rest of Bek’s ships are hiding, Marcus.” Stuart turned and walked to the window and stared at the stars that pierced the blackness of space. “There’s at least another five out there. Maybe more.”

Grey didn’t usually trust in hunches, but he believed that the probability of his CO’s hunch about Bek and the ships under his command was probably right. “What are your orders, Robert?”

Stuart turned away from the window and faced his first officer. “We need to give Captain Santiago-Vargas and Commander Johnston more time before we commit ourselves to go on the offensive. We will wait until tomorrow before we approach Vedren.”

“What if the Enkara detects us and decide to attack us sooner?”

“Then we will adjust our tactics.” Stuart smiled at his XO. “Contact the *Ontario* and have Captain Hunter join us at the edge of the system. And have Captain Baker stay hidden behind the seventh planet.”

“Yes, sir. And he *Icarus*?”

“Tell Captain Jeffers to stay in the asteroid field for now.”

Marcus nodded, turned, and exited the room.

Stuart returned to the window and stared into space. His eyes squinted as if he could will himself to spot the enemy starships in the distance. He suspected that Bek was already aware of the *Monarch*’s and *Ontario*’s location and wondered why the renegade former supreme leader of Enkar hadn’t yet made a move. “I wish I knew what you are up to, Bek.”



To Boldly Go: Retribution

A 3rd Exploratory Group story

By Cleve Johnson

Zar-Bek entered the command center of his ship. He strode toward his second-in-command. “Report,” he barked.

Zen-Koba faced his superior and snapped to attention. “Supreme Leader, all ships are in position and have signaled ready for the attack. Two enemy starships have been detected moving toward the outer edge of the system.”

“Only two?”

“Yes, Zar-Bek.”

“After previous encounters with our superior strength, they should have sent more ships.” Zar-Bek walked toward the forward windows and looked out into the void. “Stuart has more at this disposal. They must be hiding.”

Zen-Koba knew that protocol demanded that he stay silent until addressed by his leader, but he also knew that he must provide sound advice. If his leader did not find it sound, Koba could face serious consequences. He decided to risk it. “Permission to speak, Supreme Leader.”

Zar-Bek turned swiftly and glared at his second. His facial skin turned a darker shade of green as he started to grit his teeth. He did not tolerate the breach of protocol but softened the intensity of his look as he remembered that Koba had always been loyal and would not break protocol unless he had something significant to say. “Speak it.”

“Should we not send a ship to seek out the other enemy vessels? Perhaps we could draw them out if we provide a target to tempt them.”

Zar-Bek contemplated the risk. Being self-assured that no matter how many Starfleet starships were hiding in the system, they would be no match for the ships that he commanded. “Where would you deploy your resources if you were Stuart?”

“I would hide ships behind the nearest planets to Vedren if they knew we were here.”

Zar-Bek began to smile wickedly. “Then send out one ship to Nerador to see if your theory is correct.”

“I will be done, Supreme Leader.” Zen-Koba saluted and quickly walked to the communications station to send the message to one of the other Enkara starships to do the Supreme Leader’s bidding.



Nerador was the fifth planet. It was inhospitable with its high winds and poisonous atmosphere. No life could survive for more than a few seconds on the surface. Even protective suits would degrade from the acid in the air in less than an hour, but the world was a good place to hide a starship behind it if subterfuge was the goal.

The Enkara ship approached the planet and entered orbit. The commander ordered the release of sensor probes to detect any and all ships that might be orbiting on the opposite side.

The probes would detect a ship soon enough if one was to be found. The only problem for the Enkara was that no ship, other than theirs, was in orbit of that world.



The next day, The starships *Kiev* and *Cheron* rendezvoused with the rest of the task force minus the U.S.S. *Diligence*, which was still orbiting the seventh planet of the system, and the U.S.S. *Icarus*, which had not yet left the asteroid field.

On the *Diligence*'s bridge, Captain Martin Baker studied the PADD that his tactical officer had handed him. "What is your recommendation, Lieutenant?" Baker asked.

"Well, Captain, we could make a warp jump to Vedren as soon as we get out of this planet's gravity well and immediately activate the multi-vector assault mode as soon as we re-enter normal space. We should target the lead ship. The others might disengage if we take out their leader."

"I like your thinking, but the tactic might backfire."

"In what way, sir?"

"From Captain Stuart's reports about the Enkara, they think that they are superior to everyone that they encounter, so I suspect that it might embolden them more if we do go after their leader." Baker thought about what he had just said and cocked his head to one side. "On the other hand, it might demoralize them and make them hesitate if their leader was defeated swiftly."

"Shall I come up with an alternate course of attack, Captain?"

"See if you can come up with three or four possible tactics and brief me in thirty minutes."

"Yes, sir." The tactical officer started toward the tactical station.



On the *Icarus*, Captain Franklin Jeffers enjoyed a cup of hot coffee as he studied the possible tactical scenarios that the tactical officer, Lieutenant Commander Rex DeSilva, had sent him. He was about ready to contact DeSilva to congratulate him on his thoroughness when the door chime sounded. He looked at the door. "Come in."

The doors parted, and Lieutenant Commander Anesh Lem, the Bolian senior science officer, stepped into the room and stood on the opposite side of the desk from Jeffers. "Sir, I have an update on the sensors."

Jeffers gestured toward one of the chairs. "Please have a seat, Mister Lem." Jeffers waited for the officer to sit down before continuing. "Continue with your report."

"Sensor modifications have been completed, Captain, and I apologize that it took my team longer than I had hoped."

"No apology needed, Anesh. Did it pay off?"

The Bolian smiled. "I'm happy to report that we have detected six additional Enkara vessels hiding within the asteroid field. They are spread out between two hundred thousand and seven hundred thousand kilometers from our current position."

“Have they detected us?”

“Unknown but there has not been any indication in movement, and their shields and weapons are on standby according to our scans.”

“Excellent. Send the coordinates of each of those ships to Captain Stuart and the rest of the task force on a secured channel.”

Lem rose from his seat, said, “Aye, Captain,” and left the ready room.



Zar-Bek stood in front of the main viewer and looked at the stars beyond the planet that half the small fleet that he had assembled now orbited. His only thought was the revenge that he sought against Stuart. “Pilot, prepare to leave orbit. Communications Operator, send the coded message to all ships to set course for the outer star system and the coordinates of the Starfleet vessels.”

Zen-Koba approached Zar-Bek and stood silently beside Zar-Bek. He waited to be acknowledged by the supreme leader. He did not need to wait long.

“What is it, Zen-Koba?”

“Sir, the *Gredar Ruev* has returned from Nerador. No Starfleet ships were detected.”

“I expected as much, Koba, but your theory was sound,” Zar-Bek said with uncharacteristic words of praise to a subordinate. “You have shown vigilance.”

“Thank you, Supreme Leader.”

“Today is the day, Koba, that the Starfleeters will regret they heard my name and the name of Enkar.”

Zen-Koba bowed to his superior. “You will regain your position on Enkar for today’s deeds.”



Fleet Captain Rob Stuart entered the bridge and approached his first officer. Moments earlier, Captain Marcus Grey had requested Stuart’s presence. “What have you to report, Marcus?”

Grey stood as he gave up the command chair to Stuart. “We’ve detected movement near Vedren, Captain. Five vessels are heading toward us.”

Stuart nodded and took his seat. “Time?”

“Seventeen minutes at their current speed.”

Stuart looked over his shoulder toward Lieutenant Commander Jennifer Mills. “TAC, go to Red Alert.” He then faced forward and addressed the Chief of Operations. “Lieutenant Brackin, open a channel to all ships.”

Both officers responded with an “Aye, Captain.”

Stuart did not look forward to what was about to happen, but he hoped that the message that he had sent to Ambassador Chen before the task force left *Gateway Alpha* would produce

the results that he hoped for. He straightened in his chair. "Stuart to all ships. Five Enkara Vessels are on their way to our position. We know that six more vessels have been hiding in the asteroid belt, but we have not detected them as of yet. We have less than seventeen minutes until the five reach us, so be ready. Move your ships into position but let them come to us. Captain Jeffers, I want the *Icarus* to stay in the asteroid field and wait for the other six to head this way. Follow them but not too close, Franklin."

"Don't worry, Captain Stuart. I promise not to take on six enemy ships by myself."

Stuart couldn't help but chuckle. "You make sure you keep that promise, Franklin." Stuart turned his attention to OPS. "Mister Brackin, contact the *Diligence* on coded frequency Alpha three."

It only took a few seconds for Brackin to establish contact. "Captain Baker is standing by."

"Captain Baker, it looks like the ships will be passing near the seventh planet, so keep the planet between you and them so they don't detect you, and then right before they get within firing range, warp in and engage your multi-vector attack mode."

"That should surprise them, sir."

"Here's the catch, Captain," Stuart said. "Don't attack."

"Sir?"

"We're not going to take the first shot. Bek started this and we will defend ourselves, but even though Bek and his followers have been the aggressors, I don't want to take the chance that the Enkara government will think that we started this."

"Are you sure that their government didn't sanction this, sir?"

Stuart, with a shrug and a slight grin, said, "Reasonably sure. Don't fire until they do."

"Aye, Captain. Baker out."

Stuart turned toward his first officer. "Marcus, I think it's time to contact Ambassador Chen."

Captain Marcus Grey turned his head toward the tactical station. "Lieutenant Commander Mills, send the following message on subspace frequency nine-nine-seven point three: The hunters are closing on their prey."

Mills entered the information into her console. "Message sent, Exec."

Stuart faced forward. "Time until the Enkara reach us?"

"Firing range in six minutes, Captain," Mills said.

"Patch me through to all ships."

Lieutenant Brackin worked at his controls and said, "You're on, Captain."

"This is Fleet Captain Stuart to all ships. Red alert. Take defensive positions. Do not fire unless they fire first. Starships *Icarus* and *Diligence*, begin your approach."

All the commanding officers acknowledged and relayed orders to their crews. The ships all moved to optimum firing positions to welcome the approaching Enkara vessels. The U.S.S. *Cheron* took the point position about one hundred forty kilometers ahead of the *Monarch*.

“Four of the Enkara ships are breaking formation and moving toward the *Kiev*, Captain. Jennifer Mills readied herself as she waited for Stuart’s reply.

“Mister D’Neskos, move us closer to the *Kiev*. TAC, full power to shields and phasers. Arm Photon torpedoes.” Stuart leaned forward in his chair and focused on the enemy ships on the main viewer. “Magnification level five.” He watched as the images of the four Enkara starships zoomed in.

“Mister Brackin, contact the *Cheron* and have Commander Johnston stay within five hundred kilometers of the *Ontario*.”

“Aye, sir.”

“Patch me through to the *Diligence*.”



“Fleet Captain Stuart is hailing, Captain.”

“Put him through, Lieutenant,” Captain Baker said as he straightened his posture.

Stuart’s image appeared on the viewscreen. “*It’s time, Captain Baker.*”

“Understood, sir. We’ll be there in a few seconds.” Baker smiled. “CONN, set course zero-zero-seven mark four and engage at warp two.” Turning toward the tactical station. “Lieutenant Jones, as soon as we exit warp, engage the multi-vector assault mode. Have each section target a different ship, but only fire if fired upon.”

“Aye, sir.”



On the U.S.S. *Monarch*, Lieutenant Commander Mills looked up from her console. “The other seven Enkara ships have changed course and are heading toward us, Captain.”

“Mister D’Neskos, change course and veer away from the *Kiev*. Let’s see if they will follow.”

“Aye, Captain,” the Veloran said as his four hands played across the controls.

“They’re following, sir,” Mills said. “The lead ship will be in firing range in less than fifteen seconds.”

“Hail that ship, Mister Brackin.”

Lieutenant Jeremy Brackin pressed the touchpad and looked toward the center of the bridge. “Frequencies open, Captain.”

Stuart nodded. “This is Fleet Captain Stuart aboard the Federation starship *Monarch*. You are charged with committing an act of war against the United Federation of Planets and violated the non-aggression pact when you attacked Starbase *Gateway Alpha*. You are ordered to deactivate your weapons and lower your shields.”

The image of Bek appeared on the viewer, one corner of his lip raised in a mocking snarl. “I will not bow to an inferior species. The only reason I responded was so that I would be the last face you see before you die.”

The image faded and was replaced by the approaching Enkara ships. An energy beam lashed out toward the *Monarch* and rocked the ship.

“Shields holding, sir,” Mills said. “Shall I return fire?”

The ship was hit by multiple beams from the other enemy ships.

“Fire phasers, TAC.” Stuart leaned forward and focused intently on the viewscreen. “Marcus, contact all ships to converge on the Enkara. Tell Commander Johnston, the *Cheron* has the lead and tell Captain Baker to make his run.”



All eleven Enkara warships fired upon the U.S.S. *Monarch*; however, the *Defiant*-class U.S.S. *Cheron* quickly dove toward the enemy vessels and strafed the lead ship and several others with its phaser pulse cannons. Within moments after the initial barrage, three of the enemy ships broke formation and pursued the *Cheron*.

As the *Cheron* pulled away and swooped back toward its pursuers, the three sections of the *Prometheus*-class *Diligence*, each section targeting a different enemy vessel, attacked the remaining Enkara ships.

The *Monarch* returned fire at the Bek’s flagship, both phasers and photon torpedoes hitting their mark. The other Federation starships joined in the fight, each firing at a different enemy target. The battle raged on with no clear advantage for either side until the *Cheron* let loose a volley of quantum torpedoes into the midst of the three warships, bringing down the shields of all three, followed by another strafing run with the phaser cannons breaching the hull of one.



On the *Monarch*’s bridge, Stuart watched the damage inflicted by the *Cheron*. “That should take the wind out of their sails,” he said. “Mister D’Neskos, attack pattern Stuart Delta-One.”

“Aye, Captain,” the Veloran CONN officer said.

Lieutenant Commander V’Len, the science officer, turned her head toward the center of the bridge. “Captain, long-range sensors detect seventeen Enkara warships approaching at warp six. They will be here in approximately two point seven two minutes.”

“We’re overmatched, Captain,” the tactical officer said. “Orders?”

“Concentrate on the Enkara that are already here, Jen.” Stuart looked at his first officer. “Marcus, I told Admiral Sjögren that I had an ace up my sleeve. We’ll see if that gamble paid off.”

Marcus Grey tried to maintain his British stoicism, but he could not help his look of confusion.

The bridge officers struggled to stay seated at their stations, gripping their consoles as the ship shook violently.

“Shields down to sixty-four percent, Captain,” Lieutenant Commander Mills said.

“Return fire and see if Commander Li can transfer more power to the shields.”

After a moment, Mills replied. “Commander Li acknowledged and is transferring power from the warp core.”

“Sir, we’re being hailed by the approaching Enkara ships.”

Stuart straightened his posture. “On screen, Mister Brackin.”

The image of an Enkar appeared on the viewer. His dark green skin, black short-cut bushy hair, and serrated brow ridges dominated his other features. His eyes were harsh and focused. *“I am Zar-Pela, Supreme Leader of Enkar.”*

“Fleet Captain Robert Stuart. What are your intentions, Supreme Leader?”

“You are engaged in combat with Enkara warships under the command of the renegade Bek.”

“Yes, Zar-Pela,” Stuart said. “Bek attacked our starbase on two separate occasions, and we came here to persuade Bek to not do it again. I assure you that he fired first, and our combat with him and the ships under his command is in self-defense.”

Zar-Pela almost smiled. *“Bek and his misguided followers are my responsibility. I will exact retribution for his treachery.”*

“I offer you our services, Zar-Pela.”

“Your Ambassador Chen has informed me that your Federation has a mandate to not interfere with the internal affairs of other worlds. This is an internal Enkara matter, so if you want us to continue to honor the non-aggression pact, you and your ships will cease fire and withdraw.”

Stuart nodded. “We will withdraw, Zar-Pela. Good luck to you.”

The leader of Enkara gave a “harumph” and ended the transmission.

Stuart looked to his OPS manager. “Mister Brackin, patch me through to all ships.”

“You’re on, sir.”

“Stuart to all Federation ships. Cease fire and withdraw. Set course for *Gateway Alpha* and prepare to go to warp.”

As the *Monarch* and the other starships pulled away, Zar-Pela’s forces fired on Bek’s flagship, severely damaging it.

On the *Monarch*’s bridge, Lieutenant Jeremy Brackin monitored the communications between Zar-Pela and Bek. “Sir, do you wish to eavesdrop on the Enkara?”

“As much as I would like to, Lieutenant, I think that we will honor Zar-Pela’s claim that this is an internal Enkara matter.” Stuart turned toward his first officer. “Captain Grey, please give the order to take us home.”

Grey nodded and addressed the OPS manager. “Mister Brackin, please hail all ships.”

“Hailing frequencies open, sir.”

“All ships, it’s time to go home. Warp six.”



Two Enkara soldiers, one in front and one behind, led the former supreme leader in chains to the bridge. The lead soldier saluted Zar-Pela and stiffly walked around the prisoner to stand beside the other. They each placed a hand on Bek’s shoulders and forced him to his knees.

Zar-Pela glared at the prisoner. “Bek, you are charged with treason against Enkar *and* your supreme leader.”

Bek looked up and returned his captor’s glare. “I am *Zar-Bek* and *you* are the traitor to Enkar by approving the absurd non-aggression pact with these Starfleeters.”

“You are a fool, *Bek*. These Starfleeters are stronger than you think. You have always been overly ambitious and put your personal desires above the good of Enkar. We will weaken our forces if we fight the Starfleeters.”

“We are superior to them, Pela.”

Zar-Pela forced himself to smile. “Again, I tell you that you are a fool. Your ambition blinds you to the truth.” The supreme leader looked toward the two soldiers. “Take my traitorous kinsman to his cell.”

The End