

Hail to the Valiant

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Jerry carried Lt. Anderson over his shoulder. She wore nothing but the tatters of her undergarments. He wore the remains of his pants and scrap of black cloth that once made claim to being an undershirt. She was limp and unresisting. This was never a good sign. The grass crunched underfoot as he staggered step by step across the brittle dry plain. In the distance the remains of the crashed ship and the rest of their penetration team sent a long column of smoke into the sky. In the other direction a smudge of green promised something more than this hostile, shadeless plain. Jerry shifted the Lieutenant and kept walking. So much for infiltrating the pirate base. Someone had them made before they could even ask for landing clearance.

Time and persistence took him at last to the waterhole. He dropped Anderson under the trees like a rag doll and staggered to the waterside itself. He buried his face in the water. After a long moment he came up for air looking much better for his actions.

He returned to Anderson and checked her pulse. It was weak and thready. Both of them had been without water and food too long. He tore what was left of her right stocking off and carried it to the water. He cleaned it and soaked it in the water. This he carried back to her and softly dribbled across her face and into her mouth. After a moment she spluttered to consciousness. She sucked at the water filled cloth eagerly. He got her another cloth full of water, and she drank more. At last she nodded and fell back among the water loving plants into a more normal sleep.

He stared long and hard at the rat-like creature. At last he caught its eyes. Slowly, ever so slowly it stumbled toward him in a fatal dream. His hand snatched, and in a sudden twist he broke the creatures neck.

The rat creature slowly cooked over an open fire. Perhaps it was the water, or the smell of food, but Lieutenant Anderson was starting to come around. "Wha?"

"Good evening Lieutenant. Good to have you among the living."

"Where are we?"

"Some god forsaken arid plain just short of a desert."

"The ship?"

"Crashed, the rest are dead."

"We were shot at."

"Good you remember that at least."

"What about the Orions?"

"I suspect it will be a major effort to keep ahead of them. A single man carrying a woman does not leave a stealthy trail in this terrain. I don't think we can depend on any rain to erase the evidence.

"The ship went in Lord Jong."

"The Gold Orion looked down from his elaborate throne at the subservient underling. "I find you continued statements of the obvious tiring Of course the ship went in as you put it. My question, and you have one chance to answer it, were there any survivors?"

"I, I do not know my Lord."

"I do not know...." Jong's tone dripped dangerously. "Words I do not like to hear sirra. I strongly suggest that you get a flitter and find out."

"Yes my Lord, but they crashed."

Jong motioned to one of his guards. The man leveled his disruptor and fired. Jong raised his perfumed handkerchief against the smell of the charred body as it hit the floor. He looked at the former servant's underling. "You will do as I have ordered."

"Yes my Lord." His wide-eyed terror evident on his face.

"Good, get about it."

He left the chamber before Lord Jong changed his mind.

Anderson picked up the faint sound of the distant flitters and gave Jerry a quick shake. He rolled to his feet. She looked back at him. "Suggestions?"

Jerry looked around. The plain was about as barren as you could ask for. Not so much as a short bush to hide behind. "Not a one. Unless you feel like fighting to the death this doesn't look like a good place for a fight."

"With Orions the thought had crossed my mind."

"No, even with Orions, where there is life there is hope. We are not out of options as long as we're alive."

"Can you get out of an Orion prison?"

"I got out of a Klingon prison."

"I guess you get a chance to try. Orders?"

"Don't fight. Near naked and unarmed, all we can get is dead."

The two flitters landed to either side of them. Gold Orions armed to the teeth approached with caution. The swarthy Orion bringing up the rear leered at Anderson's lack of dress. "Well, we won't have to undress her...much." He leveled his gaze at LaSaille. "Are you going to make shooting you a necessity?"

"I don't see why I should."

"Then you don't know us very well." He motioned with his blaster. "After you."

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Gonk bowed his way out of Lord Jong's presence, glad to be alive and not frowned upon. Lord Jong waved his handkerchief about to clear the air of the smell of lesser beings. He turned is attention to the spare form of a Vulcan standing to the side of the hall. "Srock, we have need of your services."

Srock stepped forward with a slight bow, enough, but never too much. "Indeed my Lord, and which of my services to you require."

"The Humans, take what you can from them. We will sell what is left."

Srock slowly shook his head. "Unwise my Lord. Starfleet personnel never make good slaves. Use them as you will, but I fear your reputation for quality goods would suffer if they were sold."

Jong allowed himself a slight frown. "I find you attention to my reputation fascinating."

"Only in my best interest Lord Jong. Your reputation is my reputation."

"Indeed, I shall consider your recommendation. Meanwhile, do what it is that you do, but see that we learn what there is to learn."

"Yes Lord Jong."

Jerry looked the tall, austere Vulcan over. For some reason a Vulcan head just looked wrong coming out of rich Orion robes. The Vulcan returned his gaze. LaSaille was hardly impressive in the remains of a torn uniform. The Vulcan spared a look for the guard. "Leave us." The guard scurried out.

Jerry didn't bother to move. He kept the level stare. "I suppose you want 'answers'."

The Vulcan arched an eyebrow. "Then you are familiar with the process. I am Srock."

"A Vulcan renegade would be my assumption. I have found nothing about Vulcan philosophy that is in accord with Orion philosophy."

"Nothing in Surakian philosophy Jerold LaSaille. That is not the only Vulcan philosophy there is. However this is not about me, it is about you. What are you willing to tell me, to avoid pain."

"Old game, I'm tired of it. I am willing to tell you nothing."

"You misunderstand me Jerold LaSaille. You will not be the one to suffer pain. Your female, Lily Anderson, she will suffer pain until you tell me what I wish to know. The longer you hold back, the more she will suffer. Your silence will increase her pain."

"False dilemma. What actions I take or do not take have no governance on what actions you do or do not take. The responsibly for your actions are yours and yours alone."

"I seriously doubt you can remain unmoved as you watch your female tortured Jerold LaSaille. My study of humans has been most complete."

"Not complete enough Srock. Do this thing, and I will Remember."

"You are amusing Jerold LaSaille. You will never be free of this place to remember anything. I will give you 24 hours to consider this." Srock turned to leave the cell.

LaSaille's gaze burned into his back. "Never is a very long time Srock." The Vulcan stopped as if to reply, but continued out without a word.

Clouds hid the light. In the parlor the old record player was scratching out something by the Navy band. Jerry walked out the open door onto the porch. His Father was in a rocker watching rain pour through the trees. Thunder pealed in the distance. It was going to be an all day soaker. Jerry brushed his buzz cut back, an unnecessary move. "Dad?"

"Yes Jerry?"

"I've been thinking about college." Jerry moved to the rocker beside his Father.

"Yes, we have been discussing that."

"I want to do a tour in the Army first."

"Son, I would be the last man to tell you not to serve your country. But I have ask why? You didn't apply for any of the service academies. I'm sure your marks would have gotten you into Annapolis. Congressman Simmons would write you your appointment."

A brief smile flashed over Jerry's face. "I guess I'm not the water type Dad."

Ryan LaSaille looked at his son in mock anger. "You do know how it pains an old Navy man to hear that, don't you?"

"I suppose, but I'm more at home with dirt under my feet."

The elder LaSaille reached over and lightly punched his son on the shoulder.

"I'm glad to hear you know yourself that well. Why not West Point then?"

Jerry sat and watched the rain for a long moment. "I don't see myself as a soldier Dad. I want to serve, but I don't see it as a career. I figure I'll do an enlistment then go to school. My future is here, on the farm."

"Well son, I'll stand behind you on that. Service to one's county is never a bad thing."

Jerry blinked and the walls swam back into focus. ****No, not unless you were in an Orion prison.****

****But never alone.****

Jerry shuddered at the smooth soft mental touch. ****Aleilan, it's good to feel you. I just want to close my eyes and let you wash over me.****

****The time will come love. I am here, we are here. You have strength.****

****I need strength. You are my last weapons, my last hope here.****

****We are with you, do what you must.****

Jerry took a deep breath and let the strength wash over him. No matter what, he was not alone and he would fight.

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"Incoming message from Starfleet Command Captain Marshall"

Marshall nodded. "Status?"

"Ordinary, urgent, Sir."

"On screen Mr Carter."

"On screen, Sir."

The screen resolved to show Commodore Kalfax at his desk. "Captain Marshall, we have received intelligence as to the location of the Orion base and your missing officers."

"Intelligence? But I only reported them overdue a day ago."

"Yes, Captain, a reliable outside source has reported the location of the pirate base. I am keying that information to you now."

"Received sir. If I may ask how reliable this is?"

"Direct from Starfleet Command, Captain Marshall. Kalfax out."

Captain Marshall scrubbed his hands together. "Odd. Mr., Carter, call the senior officers to a briefing in ten minutes. Mr Karprax you have the con."

The guards shoved Jerry into a chair. On the other side of the room Anderson was spread naked to an upright board.

Srock ran his hand down her hip and thigh. "Now, we will have the answers I seek Jerold LaSaille, or you will get to watch this fine female specimen reduced to a sobbing wreck. It would be a waste to do so...."

Jerry shut Srock and his ramblings from his mind. He concentrated on Anderson, looking directly into her eyes. ****LILY!**** Her eyes popped open as she looked directly back at him. ****Lily, listen closely. Open yourself to me, open your mind to me come within. I will dull the pain, I will make it distant, an illusion.****

"Commander?"

"Ah, she pleases. How can your Human emotions disregard that." Srock prattled on.

Jerry intensified his concentration and pulled on Aleilan. ****Lily, don't speak again. Lieutenant Anderson, I am doing everything I can and that requires you to look only at me, concentrate only on me.****

****Sir?*****

****Open, let me deep within your mind. Yes, deep within. Let us fortify you.****

There was tickle up her side. Jerry brushed it aside. Her body spasmed from the attack. Jerry relaxed enough of his concentration to see what Srock was up to.

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"Yes, the Klingon agonizer is most effective. If you don't cooperate, we will see what it does to the lovely lady's more, tender, body parts."

Jerry pulled his attention solely back to Anderson. **Stay with me Lily, we'll get through this together.**

Hours later the guards dumped him weak and sweating into his cell. She hardly felt a thing, but it wasn't easy. Srock followed them.

"You are a hard case Jerold LaSaille, we will try again tomorrow."

Jerry shot him a glance of pure hate. "Today, tomorrow, it will not matter."

Srock arched an eyebrow. "We will leave that for tomorrow to decide."

Three days into the work Lord Jong summoned Srock before him. He lounged on his throne ignoring the fawning slaves. "How does the interrogation proceed Srock?"

"Not well. This Human, he is as hard as flint. He watches the woman tortured impassively, never wavers. By the expression on his face he might even be enjoying it."

Lord Jong pushed the attentive slave away. "As much as you do Srock?"

Srock looked at him sharply. "Your attempts at insults are childish. We may get further questioning the woman herself, before the torture destroys her mind."

Jong snorted. "The woman? You honestly believe the Human sluts know anything? This man however, he sounds worthy of being an Orion."

"Humans are not Orions. Logic dictates that they are not the same."

"Now you are falling back on the very thing you claim to despise. The Human slut knows nothing. Work on the man, directly if you must. I know you enjoy that."

Srock stiffed and a glare slid towards the Orion Lord. "By your will Lord Jong." Srock remained stiff as he left the room. **And never more than you will.**

The lights came up again. Srock walked into the room, and the door closed behind him. Jerry looked up. "Well, look who's come for dinner."

"Your levity is misplaced Jerold LaSaille. I have come for the information you hold."

"Things will not be any different this time Srock. I will not tell you, and your time is getting short."

"Do you still believe that the *Republic* is coming for you Jerold LaSaille? I have heard that humans are capable of the most illogical hope. But you are the most fascinating case."

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"Pot calling the kettle black."

Srock allowed himself a frown. "I do not understand your Earth idiom."

"You calling me illogical. A Vulcan working for Orions? That is illogical."

"Because you do not understand the logic Jerold LaSaille does not mean it does not exist."

"You find logic in evil Srock?"

"The concept of evil is not logical."

"Then you make no claim to logic."

Srock stiffed his resolve. "I am not here to discuss philosophy."

"Logically no, that would not be your reason for being here."

"We are back to baiting me with statements about logic I see."

Jerry waved him off. "It passes the time. I have plenty of time."

"Time is shorter than you think."

"Time is indeed short Srock. But I have plenty of time."

"I think not. Your time is over. Humans are known for their weaknesses in many things Jerold LaSaille. The physical, the mental. You will yield, or I will force it from you."

Jerry steeled his mind and pulled Aleilan closer. "That is not an advisable course of action Srock."

Srock steepled his hands. A leer slid across his face. "Vulcans have certain talents, that we are traditionally reluctant to use."

"It would serve you to remain reluctant." Jerry strengthened his connection to the All.

Srock approached LaSaille, the menace written in his walk. "Since my exile from Vulcan and my subsequent employment by the Orions I have come to have a certain taste, for the process Jerold LaSaille."

Jerry relaxed physically. The body need not fight this battle. His voice sounded distant. "It would be unwise."

Srock picked LaSaille up by the shirt. "You will tell me all I wish to know, or I will take it."

Jerry heard himself speak as if it was someone else. "I do not advise that course of action."

Srock gripped LaSaille's face. "My mind to your mind...."

The ground came up and slammed Srock hard. Cold rain poured down his bare back and through his hair. A gasp and shiver escaped his control. Srock staggered back to his feet. He was naked. The sky rent with lightning and vomited forth the cold hard rain.

****Welcome to my Id Srock.**** The voice spoke like a roll of thunder.

****Where is this? Who are you?*****

****This is the place you wanted to be Srock. The place I advised you not to come. I am Jeriban. I am the one you call Jerold Ryan LaSaille.****

Srock clutched his arms about himself. The figure before him rippled with muscle, and stood impervious to the cold rain. ****LaSaille, the Human?*****

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There are Human telepaths Srock, but you wouldn't listen. Now you are in the place where I am strong.

I am Vulcan! I am the superior being!

LaSaille frowned and sleet mixed into the rain. **Spending too much time with Orions I see. The natural order will not save you. Now, you will tell me all I wish to know.*

Srock shivered in the growing cold. **I will give you nothing, you are the prisoner here.**

I was with Lily Anderson every minute Srock, every minute you tortured her. How do you think she withstood the pain. I said I would Remember, and Remember I have. I will take from you all I want, and give you back in full measure Srock, Fate pity what I leave behind.

Srock stood up, and straightened his arms with a will. He balled his fists even as his body shook uncontrollably in the driving snow and rain. **I will give you nothing!**

Jeriban stepped forward, his eyes a glowing, unfathomable blue. **Then you will suffer the fate you envisioned for me. I said I would *Remember*.

"Captain, we have further updates from Starfleet command. A detailed map of the Orion base and information about their watch keeping and manpower."

Captain Marshall tapped the arm of the command chair. "Fascinating. I wonder how he is getting the information. It's almost like LaSaille was interrogating them."

Persimmons stepped up to the Captain. "Possible sir. LaSaille's jacket notes him as being a telepath. They might be giving him more than they realize."

LaSaille pushed Srock away from him in disgust. The spent Vulcan crumpled on the floor and curled into a fetal ball, whimpering. Jerry slumped to the floor himself, the Orions not having provided such comforts as furniture. **And now Mr. Srock, we shall see what we shall see.**

The *Republic* rolled out of warp and into orbit around the planet. Commander Persimmons worked the sensors. "The base is exactly where it was indicated. I have two ships, they are moving out."

Marshall nodded. "Noted, we came for the base, we'll find them later. Tell Mr. Tarrant to beam in when ready."

Tarrant's security forces beamed into the Lord's chambers themselves. With

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their phase rifles on heavy stun they cut down screaming women and guards alike. They would sort them out later. Lord Jong caught a beam as he came through the door to see what the commotion was about. Starfleet security quickly striped him of his weapons and spread out throughout the complex.

There was heavy fighting on the main docks as pirates that missed the ships fought to make it to shuttles and clear the planet surface. Smarter pirates fought to get out of the base and into the planet's concealing jungles. Starfleet security meant a Starfleet ship overhead.

The lock glowed and slagged. The door burst open to reveal Lt Tarrant and his security team. In the corner sat Lt. Commander LaSaille. At his feet was a whimpering Vulcan curled up in a fetal position. "Sir? Are you all right?"

"Reasonably well Lieutenant, given the circumstances. We will however, let the Doctor decide that."

"The base is secure Commander. What are your orders?"

"I am compromised Lieutenant, you shouldn't take any orders from me until I have been debriefed and returned to duty."

Tarrant flushed. "Yes sir. What about the Vulcan?"

"He is one of the pirates, and will require medical treatment. Have you found Lt. Anderson?"

"Yes Sir, we have beamed her to the ship." Tarrant stepped back and opened his communicator.

"*Republic* here."

"This is Lt. Tarrant. Medical and security to the transporter room, two to beam up, these coordinates."

Doctor Reeves put his fineberger away. "Mr. LaSaille, you should not be as healthy as you are. I know how Orions treat prisoners, and I have heard what Vulcans can do with that mind meld."

"Doc, what can I say. Not all Vulcans are created equal. Srock here is not the best you will find. He had an illogical opinion of his abilities."

"Well provided you pass the psyc tests I have no problem returning you to duty. Hell of a vacation."

Jerry gave a wry smile. "Yea, vacation. How is Lt. Anderson?"

"Abused, but in better shape than I would suspected. She doesn't have your bounce back capacity. She is down at least a week. I don't know how much therapy she will require yet." The two felt the ship move to warp. "Joe isn't wasting time. Two of the pirates got away. The base must be secured and destroyed already. Well no time like the present. Let's get the psyc scan taken care of."

The *Republic* had been in pursuit of the Orion pirates for half a day when LaSaille started his shift on the bridge. Capitan Marshall nodded as he took his seat. "Good to have you back Mr. LaSaille."

"I can honestly say not half as good as it is to be back Captain." Jerry quickly checked the helm board, affirmed the readiness of the lasers and photon torpedoes.

The *Republic* was on course toward a giant of a star system. Three stars and half a dozen giant planets. Mt Carter had his head in the sensor hood. "Beta Madrigals. The noisiest system for 50 light years."

Capitan Marshall grunted. "Perfect hiding place for a pair of rats. Take us in cautiously. Heads up."

The shift had not changed for hours. Twice they had spotted the fugitive ships only to lose them again amid the rampant sensor noise and piles of stellar rubble. Captain Marshall looked into the screen as if he could pull the Orion ships out of the darkness. "Mr. Carter?"

"Sensors are taking a great deal of interference from the magnetosphere of the gas giant sir."

"No ships?"

"No sir."

"Mr., LaSaille, that is where our quarry lies then. Take us in, one half impulse."

"Aye aye sir."

"INCOMING!!!" Shouted Carter from the sensors. Thunder filled their ears and the bridge reeled, darkness, red light, flying bodies, darkness. Jerry hung on to the helm console for dear life itself. The red lights came back up and the motion stopped. The silence was punctuated by a high pitched scream, escaping air. Jerry looked around, only a couple of people were even moving. Captain Marshall was missing most of his head. Commander Persimmions was not in any shape to command with one leg missing. "Abandon the Bridge! Anyone able help those who are not." He hauled Lt. Carter, to his feet and slammed the intership as he did. The light flickered, but indicated function. "Auxiliary control, take the ship. The bridge is breached and loosing air."

"The turbolift is working." Screamed Ensign Marcelle over the laboring life support.

Jerry helped Lt. Karprax the navigator to his feet he was favoring his right arm, blue blood smeared his face. "Everyone out! Move!" The car was soon packed with the quick and the near dead. It was plain the car was over loaded as it was. Jerry made a quick decision. "Go!"

"Sir the air won't last."

"GO DAMN YOU!!!" Jerry hit the external send. "Sick bay, command override". The doors closed. No time to waste. The air was getting thin. The life support knew the battle was hopeless and had stopped trying. Jerry could hear

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the vents slam closed. He held his breath with as much air as he could get. The ship lurched slightly. Jerry quickly checked the two bodies on the bridge to make sure they were bodies. His vision was starting to red out as the capillaries in his eyes burst from the dropping pressure. He lungs screamed to breathe but he knew there wasn't the air to do so. He threw the gangway hatch open and all but fell down the ladder with his eardrums bursting from the lack of pressure. The hatch overhead slammed shut, and the hiss of incoming air replaced the pounding of his own blood in his ears, a few blinks cleared the red haze from his vision. After what seemed like an eternity the hatch under his feet opened. He dropped onto B Deck and made for the turbo lift. The ship shuddered again. He felt the thump of the torpedoes beneath his feet. At least they were fighting back.

The Turbolift doors opened to show Lt. Cater and Yeoman Gagx getting into life support suits. They stared wordlessly as he stepped in and took the control handle. "Auxiliary control."

"Sir?" said Carter.

"What is is Lieutenant."

"You have been bleeding from the ears and eyes Sir."

"Fancy that. We need to fight this ship, then I'll worry about it."

Jerry stormed into the auxiliary bridge. "Situation?"

"We have two Orion ships flanking us. You are the senior officer Sir."

"Weapons, shields?"

"We have torpedoes, two working laser banks. Shields are at two thirds, and not yet stable."

"Give me the plot." The requested information came up on his tactical screen. "Good. Make a frontal assault on target alpha. Reduce the rear shields by 30%."

"Sir, that will make us a sitting target for beta."

"That's the idea. Watch beta closely, when she fires, veer starboard, as hard as you can. All she has left. and rake alpha with everything we have."

"Aye aye Sir."

Carter nodded. "Steed feint, if it works."

"That's the idea Mr. Carter. Hold us steady."

Jerry turned toward the science station. "Ensign, how do we look."

Marcelle kept her eyes glued to the scope. "He's lining up."

"Carter, on her call."

"Aye, aye sir."

Minutes passed as the three ships closed toward each other. "NOW!" Shouted Egn. Marcelle.

Carter hauled the wounded *Republic* to starboard with quick fingers over the board. Twin lances of energy flashed passed her hull and slammed into the other Orion vessel. Lt. Tarrant likewise fired the lasers. The abused Orion exploded in silent fury.

"Shields full power. Torpedoes to maximum yield. Come around Mr Carter and we'll finish this."

"Aye, Aye, Sir coming around heading 172 mark 3."

"Fire at will, all lasers."

Twice the lights dimmed with the lasers firing. Egn Marcelle kept her eyes glued to the sensor scope. "He turning away Commander. His shields are heavily damaged."

"Range?"

"Long range and he is pulling away. Warp buildup. Sir the target has moved to warp."

"Mr. Carter?"

Carter shook his head. "No Sir, we don't have warp power on line."

"Commander LaSaille, I am reading several possible ships on long range sensors, same heading as alpha's departure."

"Damn." Jerry slammed his fist on the chair arm. Stand down to yellow alert. All damage control parties to stations. We need warp power and shields as the priority. Captain Marshall is dead. Everyone take stock of your department. I want all senior officers in the briefing room in twenty minutes. Ensign, get me all the readings you can on the unknowns. I have feeling this is not over. I'll be in sickbay."

Sickbay was a first-rate horror show with wounded personnel on every bed and lining the walls. It took LaSaille a few minutes to find Doctor Reeves. He was up to his wrists in someone guts putting things back together. Jerry stood back out of the way and let him finish. Reeves noticed him while cleaning up. "Who's in command?"

"I am. Doc, how is Commander Persimmons?"

"He'll live, but he isn't taking a starship bridge for a good long time. What about Joe Marshall?"

Jerry took a deep breath. "He was dead before he hit the deck Doc. I didn't see it happen, I was holding on to my own console. Half his head was gone. The part with the brain in it. He had no pulse, nobody home. I'm sorry." Jerry gave the Doctor a few minutes to digest the news. Finally Reeves nodded. Jerry continued. "What is the state of the crew?"

"We have sixty down, twelve of those are dead. Nine I can have back on duty on 24 hours."

"We might not have 24 hours. One ship got away, and it looks like he has friends."

Doctor Reeves sighed. "War and rumor of war."

"They caught us flat footed once, I'm not letting that happen again. Get the wounded battened down. Put beds in the companionways if you have to and we'll seal sickbay off. Stay here with the wounded. I'll consider that your report is given"

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"Okay Skipper. We'll do our best."

Jerry was the last into the briefing room. Once everyone was seated he started. "We have a wounded ship and a wounded crew. It looks like we might have more fight on our hands as well. Doctor Reeves gave me his report in sickbay. Mr. Carne, what is the condition of the ship?"

Lt. Commander Carne cleared his throat. "We will have warp power within four hours. The bridge is breeched. We have extensive damage along the port secondary hull at the strongback that will limit our tactical maneuverability. Weapons are functional, shields are functional."

"Can you seal the bridge before things get hairy again?"

"Yes, Sir, but what do you want me to do?"

"How bad is the secondary hull damage?"

"Serious. We could lose ship integrity if we are hit there again. She could snap in two."

"Forget the bridge. However, we have two bodies that need to be recovered. Keep the structural crews where you see they are needed. Ensign Marcelle, what can you tell us?"

"In the limited amount of time I have I can tell we have three ships in addition to the one we were fighting. If all three come in we are looking at a four to one fight. If they are of a similar class, we are outgunned and outmassed. We can handle any one, but not all four."

"We need an advantage."

Lt Carter perked up. "Terrain?"

"Yes, the Orions used it against us once. And this star system is full of it. We need to get them mad enough or confused enough to come in after us, one at a time. Mr Marcelle, I want you to take anyone qualified that isn't working sickbay or damage control and rig all the probes you can to ping exactly like the *Republic*. Let's give him too many targets."

"What if that makes them stay away?" Asked Carter.

"Then we run like rabbits and be glad for it. We are in no condition for a stand up fight."

Two hours later Jerry settled back into the auxiliary bridge command chair. "Report?"

"I have four Orions coming into tactical sensor range. They are at warp and decreasing speed." said Egn. Marcell.

Jerry nodded. "Fire probes."

The lights dimmed four times. Eng. Marcell reported. "Probes away, they are taking up their preprogrammed courses."

"Good. Lt. Tarrant take us into the magnetosphere of class J One."

"We will lose sensor effectiveness, Sir."

"Yes, ping off the probes. Ensign, keep us as informed as you can."

"Aye, aye sir."

"Steady as she goes people."

Joss viewed the images of his fellow ship commanders with disdain. Moce was grumbling, the fat sow. "Joss, you said one wounded Federation battleship, not a whole fleet!"

It is one ship you fat fool. Look at your sensors. All the "ships" are identical. Our quarry is playing a hiding game."

"Then we can split up and locate him at our leisure." Drawled Lord Sybin.

Joss bowed in his seat. "I do not recommend this Worshipful Lord. This one is clever. Together we can confront and defeat him. One at a time, he will take us."

Sybin waved a beringed hand dismissively. "Nonsense. If it is damaged as you report, it will be easy prey. It is as damaged as you report, isn't it Captain Joss?"

Joss stiffened. "My report is accurate."

"I do not have time to troop around together. We will divide our efforts We will find this Federatii and destroy him." The screen with Lord Sybin went blank. The rest shortly followed.

"By your command, my Lord." grated Joss under his breath.

His second stood to attention. "Orders Worshipful Captain?"

"As Lord Sybin desires Teng. We will do what our damaged vessel can do. Sweep wide in support of the rest."

"My Lord?"

"If they will play the Federatii's game, I will not. He is wounded. And the wounded prey is the most dangerous. Let the natural order sort out who is worthy, and we will finish the task."

Static obscured the viewscreen. Muttered conversations sounded around the bridge as each station talked with their department. Marcell had her face buried in the sensor scope. "They have dropped to sublight and are splitting up Captain."

"Yes. Let them come. Marcell goose probe two. Get it to give a good sweep."

"Aye, aye Sir. Trying to lure them in?"

"That would be the idea."

"One is turning. It is approaching cautiously."

Hail to the Valiant

"Let it come. Keep us quiet. Full weapons ready?"

Tarrant nodded. "Lasers and torpedoes on line and changed, Sir."

"Hold your fire until we have a good shot. We are only getting one."

The Orion ship approached at an oblique angle, trying to get into the probe's blind spots.

Marceel was back into the scope. "He's slowing Sir, the jig might be up with that one."

Jerry looked at his helmsman. "Tarrant?"

"I have a shot."

"Take it!"

Tarrant hesitated a moment, then punched the firing switches. The lights dimmed as torpedoes and laser beams lanced out. The Orion ship shuddered, faltered, and detonated under the barrage of weapons.

"Got him!" Shouted Tarrant."

"And they know where we are now." Added Marcell.

Jerry kept his gaze on the tactical screen. "Yes, cometary orbit to class J Two. Get me 10 grams of antimatter in pods with a proximity fuse. I want three of them."

"Carter looked up from his board. "Mines?"

"Yes, the sooner the better. We still have three to go, this is hardly over yet."

Joss watched the detonation on the screen. "Report."

"It was not the Federatii worshipful Lord."

"That was evident, sensor. This one will not come easily." Joss chided himself privately for loquaciousness with the crew. "Who of our illustrious comrades has fallen?"

"Lord Moce's *Golden Calf* worshipful Lord."

Joss sneered. "He will be missed. We now have the quarry's location, ignore all other targets, keep locked on the real one. Teng, bring us around slowly. We will be last to face him."

Teng nodded briefly. "By your will Worshipful Lord."

A few minutes later Engineering reported the mines ready.

"Good, put them in an airlock and blow it on my signal."

"We are not going to fire them Skipper?"

"No Tarrant. The less attention the better."

Marcell reported. "Two Orions are on us Skipper, Targets Delta and Beta."

Jerry studied the tactical plot.

"Closing Skipper."

"Let them close."

"Delta is right on out tail."

"Drop the first package."

"Incoming!"

The *Republic* shuddered and boomed with the hit. "We just lost the shuttlebay."

"Detonation!"

They all watched the blast clear. The Orion ship was still there, but clearly damaged.

Jerry leaned forward. "Come around, take him. No cripples."

"That could force a pass with Beta Skipper."

"Accepted. One at a time we can handle. We have to look strong."

The *Republic* came around and lashed out at the wounded Orion. She struck out in kind at the Starship. Each came away but the Orion was drifting.

Jerry kept his eyes on the tactical plot. "Report".

"We got clean away Skipper. The Orion is dead in space."

"Drop him."

Marceel was face deep in her sensor scope. "Delta still coming in hot."

"Full spread of torpedoes."

"Skipper, at this range?"

"Old tactic Tarrant. Fire on my mark."

"Aye aye sir."

"Fire."

The torpedoes spread out heading for the Orion ship.

"Good come around. Run. And drop those last two packages as the torpedoes go off."

Each crewman concentrated on the task at hand. "Torpedo detonation sir, Delta avoided completely."

"Mines away."

"Good, continue the cometary to J2., full impulse."

"Delta is slowing. Detonation! Still there Skipper, Detonation. She is still with us."

"J2 five seconds."

"Delta is still poking around, I think it expects more bombs. Gamma is still holding back."

"That was our first target?"

"Aye sir."

"She hasn't had much time to repair damage either."

"What have you in mind skipper?"

"I don't exactly know. Get us in the magnetosphere. Are our three remaining probes still pinging?"

"Yes sir, the Orions are ignoring them now."

"Good we are going to try something I saw on Galaxy Quest once."

Hail to the Valiant

"Galaxy what?"

"I'll tell you later. Rig torpedoes to take target information off the probes, give me a couple. How soon?"

Tarrant grinned. "Five minutes skipper. Who are we taking?"

"Whoever comes in first. We need to be ready to close and take advantage of the situation if it works.

The *Master's Jewel* cautiously approached the giant planet. Her foe was hiding somewhere in the massive magnetic fields and radiation belts, and her sensors were partly burned by the mines. At least her foe had no more idea of what was going on that she did. It was luck of the draw.

Jerry watched the Orion probing the magnetosphere on the probe screens. The probes were paying off. "Ready Mr Tarrant. Easy. Fire. Come around 134 mark 43, arm all weapons."

The two torpedoes flew without guidance. Then they picked up the probe data, locked onto the Orion and plunged in for the kill. The *Republic* was right behind them. Detonation. "Fire Mr Tarrant, on the explosion." Weapons thumped and whined.

The Orion ship was wracked by hits, and started to lose orbit.

Marcelle called from her scope. "She is going in."

LaSaille watched the screen fizz and break up as the wounded ship plunged deeper and deeper. "Burn in Hell bastards."

Tarrant shook himself. "We have one more."

"Yea, and I have an idea. Stay out of clear sight. call Ensign Mong to the bridge. Cater, you have record of the Orion communication? Good. Set your board to emulate that as much as possible."

Carter looked over his shoulder? "You going to try and fake them in Skipper?"

"That's the idea. They are faster than we are. They need to come to us."

"I don't know that I can get the set up 100% Skipper."

"Well, we are going to try. I hope the radiation covers any mistakes we make."

The comm officer on the *Pride of Joss* pressed the contact closer to his ear. The communication was faint and fuzzy. He adjusted his board and listened again. "Worshipful Lord, The *Master's Jewel* reports successfully engaging and

destroying the Federation battleship. They require assistance."

Joss relaxed on his command throne. "Since it is obvious I must ask; why in the name of the natural order must we assist them?"

Pell bent back to his communications. "Their impulse engines are damaged worshipful Captain. They cannot break orbit."

The gas giant flared suddenly as something within it's depths detonated. Pell wrenched the contact out of his ear with a wince of pain.

Joss pulled the green girl closer to him. "Well, something big just died in there. Sensors?"

"It is difficult to tell worshipful Captain. Something orbits, but what and whose is currently beyond detecting."

Joss sighed. "Very well. We will investigate this ship in need of help. With the flare the advantage is ours, even if we are being lied to."

The screen totally derezzed as a blast of noise shredded any pretense of communication. Eng. Mong ripped the ear bug from his ear and shook his head..

"They sounded skeptical Skipper."

"They would. Any movement"

Tarrant played his board. "When I can read the probes, I'll let you know Skipper. That blast blinded us worse than it would have blinded them." Tarrant continued to work. "I can't read anything."

Jerry nodded. "Break orbit 180 from Alpha's last reported location. Take us out 100,000 clicks and come around until we can see something."

Pride of Joss came in slowly, cautiously. The radiation from the blast still made using the sensors a difficult proposition. Joss tapped his command throne. "I require information."

The sensor office ducked his head. "There is a great deal of interference My Lord. The ship as reported is not where I expect it."

Joss stood suddenly dumping the Green girl off his throne. "What?"

"My Lord, the ship is not where I expect..."

The bridge shook with a thunderous roar as panels exploded and lights shattered.

Jerry smiled. "Good shot Mr. Tarrant, you win the brass ring. Mr. Marcell, any activity?"

"No sir. Their engines and weapons are off line."

Hail to the Valiant

"Hail them. Let's see how the Natural Order takes to losing."

"Hailing sir. I am getting a reply."

"On screen."

The *Republic's* screen mostly cleared to show the bridge of the opposing ship. Bodies were draped like scattered dolls. Someone, her commander by the richness of his tattered dress sat painfully in the command throne. He looked at the screen. "You wish to gloat your victory Captain, understandable."

"No Captain, I do not. I have called to offer your surviving crew honorable surrender."

"This is not gloating?"

"Not among my people, no. When the fight is over it is over, you aid the wounded equally."

"You fight cleverly Captain..."

"Lt. Commander Jerold Ryan LaSaille, my Captain, is a causality."

Lord Joss smiled weakly. "Well then, you fight well for one so young."

"Surrender sir, you do not need to die today."

Joss shook his head. "No, I am Lord Joss of House Auric. I do ... not ... surrender."

"Sir, you are wounded we can hel..."

The crew of the *Republic* flinched back as the screen derezzed again in a blaze of light.

Silence settled over the bridge for a moment. Finally Marcell said. "Sir?"

"Yes, Marcell?"

"They fired a probe, a recorder marker I believe."

"Leave it. Let the Orions know what happens when Starfleet is crossed. Anything else to worry about?"

"Not currently on the scopes Sir."

"Stand down to Yellow Alert. Let's get this ship moving in the direction of a Starbase."

The *Republic* pulled into Starbase 24 much the worse for wear. Blast marks covered her, patches lined the strongback where Orion disruptors had torn into her fabric. Starfleet medical forewarned was at the dock to transfer casualties, the quick and the dead.

Lt. Commander LaSaille took himself to the Admiral's office to explain. The look of shock when a Lt. Commander walked in and not Capitan Joe Marshall was all the prelude he needed. "He was loved and respected sir."

"You have your reports Commander LaSaille?" Admiral Page looked weary before they even started.

"I do. The *Republic* is not fit for space duty at this time. My engineer is of the opinion that she is going to be a long time in dock. We have many wounded,

too many dead."

"The Orions?"

"They lost five ships, no survivors."

Admiral Page flipped through the reports. "Commander Persimmons is still with us?"

"Barely, he lost his right leg at the hip. Doctor Reeves is of the opinion that it may be as much as a year before he is fit for duty."

Page frowned at the report. "You leave me in the position of scaring up a Captain out here, Mr LaSaille."

"Sorry sir, I can but serve."

"I'll have to read this in detail later. There is the matter of condolence letters as well."

"They are in the packet Sir. I took care of them on the way back."

"Amid trying to keep the ship from falling apart you wrote the condolence letters as well?"

"It's part of the Job Admiral Page. The stripes on my sleeve don't matter. I had the Job. They were all people I knew and knew well."

Page nodded. "Right now I don't have a line officer on the station I can assign. Continue to command the *Republic* and see that the ship gets a through inspection. With repair in mind. Starships do not come cheap. We need her."

"Aye aye, Sir."

"Dismissed."

LaSaille found himself the Junior officer at a rather high powered meeting. Admiral Page and his chief engineer Captain Decatur were discussing the future of the *Republic*. LaSaille had just finished a lengthy report of the *Republic's* damage and shortcomings. It was a depressingly long and detailed list. "In conclusion Sirs, the *Republic* is not now fit to move. We were lucky to get her home in one piece. Returning her to service will require extensive dock time to rebuild major space framing through the saucer, the primary pylon and the secondary strongback."

Decatur shook his head and Page looked grim. Decatur spoke. "I've examined the damage myself. It's not a repair, it's a major rebuild. We don't have the facilities as of yet. We have them planned, but we don't have them now."

Page looked up and LaSaille. "What would you suggest Commander?"

"Reluctantly, I would pay her off Sir. The expense of shipping her back to a yard that could rebuild her is considerable. She isn't an old hull, but the damage is extensive."

Decatur nodded. "I concur. repairs at this time are unreasonable."

Page grumbled as he stood. "I hear you gentlemen. Make it so. Commander, shut down the ship and pay off your crew. Dismissed."

Hail to the Valiant

LaSaille spent the next two weeks getting assignments for his crew and querying personnel as to his own berth. once again he paged Robert Clemens.

"Bob, it's Jerry, what's up?"

"I know what's up, you are looking for a ship berth. Well, I hate to admit it by the *USS Enterprise* has just posted a opening for a senior helmsman."

"That would be Captain Pike?"

"Yup, it would"

"A good man, his reputation precedes him. I accept the transfer."

"I will contact the *Enterprise*. Pike will be gratified to get his needs filled so quickly.."

Jerry pressed the button on the Captain's office. "Come."

The door opened to admit him. "You wished to see me sir."

"Yes Commander. Please, have a seat."

Jerry sat. Pike shuffled papers on his desk, Papers were unusual.

"I just received a package from Starfleet Command. A most unusual package. One I have never in my career in Starfleet received." Jerry was looking a bit nervous at this point. "Oh, it's a commendation, don't worry. But I am aggrieved to be loosing a good helmsman so quickly."

"Ensign. Sulu is a quick study Sir. Where am I going?"

"Eager to leave?"

"Not really, I've only been here three months. However, you seem to have me out the door already."

"The whole thing in order. I have here on my desk a Commendation for the Federation Medal of Honor. I also have a promotion to full Commander and transfer to command of the *USS Lydia Sutherland*, a light cruiser, if you accept that is. Close your mouth Jerry, you'll catch flies." Pike had on the wry grin that he wore so well. "I'm putting this one down in the log. Seeing that look on your face is all too rare."

Jerry stammered a bit. "I really don't know what to say. Yes, I accept, but, why?"

"Someone thought you deserved it. Admiral Page seems the responsible party, cosigned by Commander Persimmions, and the rest of the *Republic's* surviving senior staff. Makes me wish I had been there."

"Not really, it wasn't pretty at all."

"I know, it never is. However, I'm just as glad we are a good two weeks from any station. I've never gotten to pin one of these on before." Pike stood up and offered his hand. "Congratulation and good luck with your new command."

Hail to the Valiant -- May, 2008

No one sets out to be a hero. But I describe Jerry as a hero, one with the Medal of Honor in fact. I hope the my version of events is sufficient to the honor.

I have been pecking at this one for a long time now. It has not been a easy write. A couple of years of on and off typing and many scenes have been refined and rewritten repeatedly. I finally got past the difficult parts and over the plain workmanlike parts and got it done. My first new piece of fiction in a couple of years.

Subtext 2011 - *The usual clean up and error finding. Fairly light on this one.*