



# The Wages of Sin

By Garry Stahl

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Kirk looked around the too bare office again. The terminal was gerry-rigged into the desk, the coffee dispenser looked like it was built in the late 20th century, and there wasn't a curved line in the room. Well, it was home until the *Kongo* was space worthy again, and he was a spacedock worker, again. He turned back to his visitor. "Peterson, Captain of Engineering."

"Yes Captain Peterson, what can you tell me?"

"Well Captain Kirk, you're likely stuck in this rat-hole for about two weeks. At that point we will have the space frame finished and the skin back on, the ship will be livable."

"The sooner the better, I have crew squirreled into every space I can find."

"Do you have any spacedock experience?"

"Yes I do, Mars Utopia, and I ran the Starbase 159 spacedock for nine months. Unless you object, I planned to oversee the repairs myself."

"Engineering crew?"

"I have the entire crew of the *Kongo*, ready and willing, just get me the materials I need."

"How long do you think it will take?"

"We should be out of your hair in a two weeks Captain Peterson."

"That soon?"

"I have a crew with excellent motivations, they want back into their comfortable quarters on the *Kongo*, as do I."

"Then I'll see you get what you need. However, I don't have replacements for that fancy turret you have on there."

"We can fabricate most of the parts, if there is anything we can't. I'll be stopping at Felicity shipyards for it."

"Anything else?"

"No Captain Peterson, I think we can get started at once. The crew knows their ship. I however, have to present myself to Admiral Ci'kekher for a full debriefing.

"Good luck, you'll need it."

----

Kirk met Stiles outside the Admiral's office. He looked nervous. "Relax, he doesn't eat people."

"Yea, right. Relax. I've never been called in to explain my actions when those actions got someone killed."

"Neither have I." Kirk gave stiles a sympathetic grin.

"The Admiral will see you now."

"Once more friends..."

"Eh?"

"Shakespeare, Henry the V, it seems to be required knowledge these days."

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The two officers entered the Admiral's office. The general impression was one of space. The office was a three story highbay, with most of the back wall open to space. It had little furniture, and few decorations. The most notable was a feather banner nearly ten feet long. "Greetings Ca'tian Kirk, Commander Stiles. You have 're'ared your re'ort?"

"Yes Sir, all is in order."

"I will view it in a moment. You are aware that the Drah have demanded your immediate extradition for 'iracy and murder."

"No, but I expected as much."

"A sim'le question. Who fired first?"

"They did, I saw to it every time."

"Then you have followed the rules of engagement in regards to the Drah." Admiral Ci'kekher looked distracted for a moment. He examined one of the controls on his terminal. "Commander, your commbadge is o'en."

"Excuse me Sir, I wasn't aware." Stiles tapped the badge, it chirped. "Starbase 140 comm center." Stiles looked confused. Kirk looked perplexed and Ci'ekher looked ready to bite someone. Stiles tapped it again, it made the usual signal closed sound.

Ci'kekher looked at his terminal. "It is still o'en, and broadcasting."

Kirk was staring at it now. "Commander, how long have you had that commbadge?"

"Since we left Earth. I forgot it when I dropped my laundry down the hatch at Starfleet Command, just before I was assigned to the *Kongo*. I requested a new one. I have had it since."

Ci'kekher pressed his comm. "Security, to my office." In a moment an officer entered. "Take the Commander's comm badge and find out why it is o'en, and who it is sending to." The officer took the proffered comm-badge, and left. "Commander Stiles, you are considered a security risk at this time. You will not engage in any classified activities until this matter is cleared up."

"Yes sir."

Kirk said. "Does that include the debriefing Admiral?"

"I am afraid so. We will reschedule the debriefing after the matter is cleared u'. Commander Stiles is temporary assigned as su'enumerary, with no duties."

"And what do I do for a first officer?"

"I believe Commander S'acik is qualified. Make him acting First Officer."

"Yes Sir. I was hoping to get this matter out of the way."

"I also Ca'tain Kirk. However, you do understand."

"Yes Sir, I do."

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"Damn!" Kirk flung a couch pillow down in the hotel room he and Tathilan were sharing while the *Kongo* was under repair. "Dick had that damn thing

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since we picked him up at Earth Spacedock. This could seriously compromise a lot of Starfleet battle procedure, depending on who got it."

\*\*I feel a little sheepish. I should have caught the fact it was broadcasting myself.\*\*

"If it's any help I am going to ask Admiral Ci'kekher for a pattern for his little detector. We can at least know from now on. However, that is no help for what has already happened."

\*\*So what can be done?\*

"Well, not much. Can you go back through the logs and find every logged conversation that Commander Stiles had, we can at least try and find out what damage has been done."

\*\*Simple, I should have a report ready by morning.\*\*

"In the mean time we have a ship to fix, a Acting First Officer to inform, and Hell knows what else. Maybe I'll suit up and give the crew a hand."

\*\*And get in their way?\*

"I do know my way around a spacedock job Tathilan."

\*\*You be careful.\*\*

"Yes Dear."

----

Stiles tossed himself on his bed, well, not his bed, his bed had a few problems, like a hole where his cabin used to be. Life was great, not only had what few possessions he had been vented to space, but now this Admiral thought he was a spy. Stiles sat on the bed, his hands in his lap. For all he knew, he might be a spy. The intercom broke his train of thought. "All *Kongo* personnel report to Station security. All *Kongo* personnel report to station security." Well, now everyone will know. He better go as well, no exceptions were indicated.

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The hall outside of the Starbase 140 security station was crowded with crew from the *Kongo*. The problem getting worse as more came in. Commander Vepporti called for order. In a moment the room quieted. "Ladies and gentlemen, A commbadge has been located on the *Kongo* that has a constant broadcast mode to persons or places unknown. Admiral Ci'kekher has ordered that all commbadges from the *Kongo* be tested for this function. Please form a line, open your commbadge in front of the desk, and close it. That is all that will be necessary to test your badges."

Crew shuffled around as the nearest ones started to form a line. As they passed the check station, and the room began to empty, more crew were brought in and briefed.

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The *Kongo's* senior officers wandered around the sitting area of Kirk's suite. Each acquired their snack preference and found seats. Kirk called the staff meeting to order. "So, what are we looking at?"

Felialan replied. "\*\*All the hull across frame 12 has to come off. That rib has to be replaced, I don't trust a simple weld.\*\*"

"Why not?"

\*\*Micro-fractures and some not so micro fractures extend a good deal into the "good" part of the rib. The Darhan disrupters are tuned to do as much structural damage as possible. We are supplying a good deal of data as to just how effective they are.\*\*

Dr. Handson waggled his eyebrows. "A dubious honor at best."

\*\*From the looks of it the weapons is very effective in making ships fall apart. Had our shields gotten any worse, the fractures could have spread to the point of condemning the hull.\*\*

"Can you tune the shields for greater protection?"

\*\*Based on the sensor data, yes.\*\*

"Good get a report to Fleet Command. Let's be the last ship the Darh damage this badly. How about the rest of the ship?"

\*\*Minor mostly. The starboard turret is repairable. I am getting the part fabricated. Other system repairs are fairly simple. The hull is the big worry.\*\*

"So noted. Mr. Spacik, how is the crew managing?"

"Our man power requirements are adequately met on all fronts.

Replacement requests have been placed with the Starbase personnel office. We are currently short 20 positions, 17 as a result of our recent hostilities, and 3 from crew transfers at Earth."

"Have word spread among the station personnel, see if we can scare up a few transfer requests."

"Captain, I have confidence in the Fleet personnel office. Seeking informal staffing is illogical."

"There is a shortage of personnel on the station?"

"Yes Captain, the officer in charge of posting said so. I have confidence that a logical distribution will result."

Hanson was, as usual, leaning back in his chair. "Mr. Spacik, are you familiar with the concept of a 'conflict of Interest?'"

"Yes, I am."

"Well, that is what Tim is talking about. We have X positions to fill on both the station and the ship, and X-Y personnel to do it with. Now, who do you think the personnel officer is going to favor, the Starship Captain that is leaving in a few weeks, or the Station Admiral he has to live with?"

"I would think he would not favor either, but post crew in a logical manner."

Kirk broke in. "That however will not be the case as the personnel officer is

a Human, not a Vulcan. Try it my way."

"Yes sir."

"Doctor, since you have caught the attention of the Captain, what is your report?"

"Everyone is mending nicely. I should have the crew fit by the time the ship is ready to sail."

"Good. Counselor, how is morale?"

"Below peak, and drooping slightly. Word of the damage to the ship has gotten around. People know we are in for a long haul at station. They were ready and eager to get back to the real work of Starfleet."

"The solution for that is work. Keep them busy getting that ship fixed."

Felialan said. \*\*Shall I start a spec plus contest?\*\*\*

Hanson jumped in. "Spec plus?"

Kirk answered. "Sure, it's always good for morale. Spec plus; Who can finish their section the best, to specification and then some. The offered reward is minor, an extra holodeck slot or some such. However, the bragging rights are beyond price."

"Must be an engineer thing."

\*\*Hard to fix a body to spec plus. \*\*

"Anyone else?" Kirk looked aground.

Tathilan said. \*\*Yes, Commander Stiles. Any word?\*\*\*

"No, none. I am all but pressuring the Admiral on that matter. Stiles might be young, and inexperienced, but he does the job, and he is Starfleet. I can't see him willingly spying for anyone. is that it?" Silence from around the table. "OK, let's get back to it. If anything comes up you know where to find me."

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Stiles sat in the lounge. It was small, and cramped. Part of the original station from 100 years ago. The synthahol didn't sit well with him, the drunk was thin, and superficial. He wanted to get really drunk. Dirty drunk, sick drunk, so drunk he didn't remember his name.

\*\*Why ever would you want to forget who you are?\*\*\*

Stiles started, his hard won fuzziness vanished. The female Ane was small, about the smallest he had seen.

"I don't think I know you." Damn, even his voice didn't slur.

\*\*No, you don't, but the waves of misery coming form this corner are thick enough to cut. \*\*

"So I got your attention."

\*\*Yes. \*\*

"What can I do for you?"

\*\*Unload your troubles. \*\*

"That's part of it, I can't even talk to anyone. Secret you know."

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\*\*Caught between a rock and a hard place?\*

\*\*Yea, you could say that. Hey, do you know of any place on the station that has real booze?"

\*\*You don't impress me as the drinking kind.\*

Stiles deflated. "No, I'm not."

\*\*Can I speculate?\*

"I can't tell you if you're right."

\*\*Doesn't matter. I see a man caught in a place he doesn't figure he belongs, and in a position he didn't make, and can do nothing about, at least as he sees it.\*

"With out mentioning any specifics."

\*\*Of course.\*

"So, here I sit, can't talk, can't move, and I'm stuck."

\*\*There is one person you can talk to.\*

"Who is that?"

\*\*Your Captain.\*

"And have him think less of me?"

\*\*Is sitting still better?\*

"No, not really."

\*\*Do you really think Kirk would think less of you?\*

"I don't know, I can't really say. I hardly know him. He seems so, hard, one minute, and incomprehensible the next."

\*\*So, try it.\*

"I don't know, I just don't."

\*\*You will when your ready.\*

With that she turned and left the room. Stiles stared after her.

----

Kirk was standing on the open hull of the *Kongo*, well out of the way. Engineers, even in the zero gravity of the spacedock work area had to move slowly. That rib might "weight" nothing, but is multi-ton mass was not the least bit lessened. Problems started almost at once, as the rib was stressed, it started to come apart. It was being removed in sections. Kirk watched the work a while longer and went inside. \*\*Felialan, I want everything that rib was attached to gone over with a fine toothed comb. And double check everything else that disrupter hit.\*\*

\*\*Understood, I think we can kiss our two week turn over good-by.\*

\*\*I have to agree. I'll inform command after we finish the re-re-assessment\*\*

Kirk came in after the rest, the engineering staff of the *Kongo*, the space dock engineers, and Mr. Spacik. "All right, how bad is it?"

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Felialan took the question. \*\*Not as bad as we fear, but not as good as we hoped. The *Kongo* is not totaled. However we are looking at reframing, and replacing the hull in saucer frame sections 11, 12, and 13. A partial replacement in section 17, as well as the previously mentioned repairs. Space framing is the most time consuming of all repairs. We are currently looking at a month, maybe six weeks. To get the Hull tight enough to finish the repairs we estimated at two weeks.\*\*

"So we are looking at six to eight weeks on the inside?"

\*\*Yes.\*\*

"Mr. Spacik, anything to add?"

"The crew is in good spirits, in spite of the set backs. It is possible to work on several aspect of the repair at once, if we follow in a logical sequence. Captain, I recommend we do not repair the damaged sections."

"What do you recommend?"

"Replacement. In examining the *Kongo's* construction record, I noted that the complete build and installation of the sections of hull we have damaged required two weeks each. We have sufficient crew to work on all three sections at once, salvaging as many usable parts from the current sections as we can. I estimate that if we replace the damaged sections as new construction, we will have an over all time savings of two to four weeks in the total repair."

"What about tear down?"

\*\*That will be simple Captain. I can have the damaged sections out in two shifts. That part of the saucer is semi-modular.\*\*

"Sounds feasible.. We will have a spec plus reward for the crew that finishes their section the best. Let's do it."

---

Kirk met Commander Stiles in the Admiral's foyer. Stiles was attempting good humor. "Moment of truth Sir?"

"End of the matter with little repercussion I would hope."

"Yes Sir, very much so."

"Gentlemen, the Admiral will see you."

Kirk and Stiles rose and entered the office. Ci'kekher looked stormy, if Kirk was reading his expression properly. It was hard to judge with a beak. Ci'kekher rose to shake hands. "Sit down gentlemen. I have investigated the matter and made certain inquiries as 'er that investigation. I have received orders regarding the matter from Starfleet Command."

Stiles looked at Kirk, swallowed hard. Both looked at Admiral Ci'kekher.

Ci'kekher continued. "As of this date, the matter is to be considered dro"ed. No re'ercussions will come of the matter, and the matter will be stricken from the records."

Stiles said. "That's it?"

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"Yes commander, that is it."

Kirk said. "I don't like it."

"Nor I Ca'tain, but those are the orders."

Stiles added. "All that fuss, then nothing?"

"That is the way Starfleet Command wants it."

Kirk's head snapped up. "Who in Starfleet Command?"

Ci'kekher examined the orders. "It is marked out as secret."

Kirk looked thoughtful for a moment. He slowly came to his feet. "Admiral Ci'kekher, I will have those orders in writing."

"That is a dangerous move Ca'tain. One does not lightly demand orders in writing."

"No Sir, one does not. There has been a security breach on my ship, and I am being ordered to ignore what I see as a serious matter. I will have the orders in writing, and signed by the issuing officer."

Ci'kekher said. "That is your right Ca'tain Kirk, however, it is a serious matter. You do understand that?"

"Very much so. I find these orders to be highly irregular in nature. Further more I find they conflict with Starfleet Command's policy of openness. I will have them confirmed in writing and signed by the issuing officer before I will proceed on them."

Admiral Ci'kekher handed Kirk a PADD. "Do you find the wording here acceptable?"

Kirk read the contents. "Yes Sir." He signed off on the PADD and handed it back to Admiral Ci'kekher.

"That will be all gentleman. We will continue as we have until these orders are confirmed."

"Understood Sir."

"Yes Sir."

Kirk and Stiles left the office and walked back toward the transportation area. Stiles looked at his Captain like the man had gone mad. "Sir?"

"Yes Dirk."

"If I might speak freely?"

"You can."

"What in the Hell was that about?"

Kirk stopped. "It's about principle Dick. Those orders are wrong. Wrong headed, wrong thinking ,and I have a gut feeling, legally wrong."

"I know the book says you can demand orders in writing, but you don't, you just don't."

Traffic flowed around the two men. "Dick, you are under my command, right?"

"Well, yes."

"If I ordered you to pull your phaser and shoot that woman over there, would you?"

"No Sir. That would be murder."

"And murder, even if ordered by your commanding officer is wrong, so you don't do it."

"That's right."

"So if I give you orders you know to be illegal, or wrong, you are not going to obey them right?"

"Well, yes, no..."

"I get your meaning."

Kirk started to walk again, Stiles followed. Kirk continued. "Dick, those orders are wrong. I know this as surly as I know the carpet is green. They are so wrong that who ever ordered them will not place their name on the orders. Someone in the right never has to hide in the shadows within their own house."

"Is that why you demanded the orders in writing?"

"Exactly, to bring the order giver into the light. I have a feeling the orders will not be reissued."

"And if they are?"

"I will know who I am saying 'no' to. I would much rather have the entire matter out in the open, not under the rug."

"You plan to refuse the orders even with a name?"

"Yes Dick."

"Why? That could destroy your career."

"Because once I refuse the orders, there will have to be a hearing. Whoever will have to explain their orders and the reason for them. Something no commanding officer has to do in the field. And they will have to make this explanation to their superiors."

"But if they have good reason, your career is toast."

"A chance I have to take Dick, a chance I have to take."

----

Commodore Henkil watched as the tug *William Otis* brought the ravaged *John Gill* into the Spacedock. He was aware of the subtle presence of the Starfleet security forces. He watched his ship tethered to a Federation spacedock, a prize of war. He tuned to the man beside him. "What becomes of my ship Captain Kirk?"

"That will be for the Federation Council to decide. They have rejected Ekos' 30 light year claim. Under the circumstances I don't see the them being generous."

"Circumstances?"

"I would not call the civilians murdered a misunderstanding."

"No, but I and my forces followed the orders we were given."

"Commodore Henkil, I think you will find a deaf ear to that argument. We are expected to disobey wrong orders, to object in the strongest of terms."

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"But do you ever, really?"

"Funny you should ask that, I am in such a circumstance right now."

"You have order you have refused to honor?"

"Orders I have challenged."

"I was under the impression that your Starfleet did not give 'bad' orders Captain Kirk."

"If would be nice if that was the case Commodore, but Starfleet, and the beings that populate it, are only mortal, and therefore subject to error."

"Your Fleet Command does not claim to be infallible?"

"No, they don't. I can think of many a time that Starfleet has bowed to the judgement of the commander in the field."

"And the consequences of your action?"

"Remains to be seen. However I have confidence in my judgment."

"Your actions destroyed life pods."

"Regrettable. And I do regret it."

"Why did you do it?"

"It was that or my ship. I was right. Examination proves the *Kongo* could not have taken much more of that pounding. Yet I regret the lives."

"Have you ever been wrong Captain?"

"Yes, as is every man Commodore. However, I endeavor to not be wrong, the cost of being wrong, as you have learned, is way too high."

"Will their be war."

"I doubt it. The Federation Council may see the loss of your fleet as censure enough. Then again, I am a poor judge of the politicians. The may force Ekos back into a protectorate. I think that would be a mistake."

"You do? Why?"

"You didn't learn better under the first Protectorate. Why would you learn better under a second? I don't believe in repeating mistakes, to correct mistakes."

"So, what would you suggest?"

"Letting you sink or swim, that is after all the path you have chosen, is it not?"

"Yes, I suppose you are right."

"However, the Federation being the Federation, that will not be entirely the case, even if it is the case. We have never refused a plea for help."

"This is assuming we plea for help."

"I don't assume, I do point out the historical pattern."

"To what point Captain Kirk?"

"To what ever point you make of it Commodore. If you will excuse me, I have a ship to fix."

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The chime sounded on the office door, an unpleasant sound at best.

"Come." Kirk called.

Lt. Cmd Spacik entered the cramped little office. "Captain, I have made a discovery that might speed our repair efforts."

"Please, tell me more, the quicker he better."

"There is a decommissioned Ambassador class ship in the space dock. She is marked for salvage."

Kirk came around to his desk. "Tathilan, pull up the records please."

\*\*Sure thing Tim, on the monitor.\*\*

Kirk looked at the record. He sat down. "It's the *Republic*."

"Is there a problem Captain?"

"My last space tour before the *Kongo* was on the Republic Mr. Spacik. Her last action, in the late Cardassian war."

"Forgive me sir, if this is a matter of a painful emotional memory we do not need the resources."

"It is, and yes we do. If the vultures haven't gotten to her yet, she will have just what we need."

"Your orders Sir."

"Tathilan, claim the entire hulk. Mr. Spacik, you and I will need suits and an engineer's inspection pod. I'll see you at the service dock in an hour."

"Yes Sir." Spacik left to tend the matter.

\*\*Tathilan, what is the hull correlation between the *Republic* and the *Kongo*.\*\*

\*\*Correlation in hull and framing members of 98%. All differences are accountable due to changes in the *Kongo*. Tim?\*

\*\*No hiding form you girl.\*\*

\*\*Do you want me to come?\*

\*\*No, no. It's a ship, it's hull plates and framing members. She, is not there,\*\*

\*\*But how do you feel about it?\*

\*\*Someone is laughing at me I think. The utter irony of the matter.\*\*

\*\*That he ship on which you experienced death...\*

\*\*May be exactly what I need to bring my ship back to life.\*\*

----

Stiles pressed the call button on the door to Kirk's office. The door slid open. He gathered his courage and walked in. The office was empty.

\*\*Commander Stiles, can I help you?\*

"Oh, hi Tathilan. I needed to talk to Captain Kirk.\*

\*\*He is off to look over possible salvage material. Can I be of assistance?\*

"No, thank you, but, not this time. I have to do this with Captain Kirk."

\*\*I think I understand. I'll let you know when he is available.\*\*

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"Thank you. I guess I better go." Stiles left the office.

----

Inspection pod #140/137 undocked from the maintenance area an hour after Kirk and Spacik spoke. The two officers wore light EVA suits. Little was said on the ride out. The *Republic* was in the back of the spacedock. Several smaller vessels partly obscured it, as it obscured several others.

"Mr. Spacik, can you make out the ship it is over?"

"Partly sir, it's the 1689."

"Now that is old."

"Indeed."

"Move us in closer."

"The majority of the damage seems to be confined to the secondary hull."

"I know."

"Sir?"

"I was on her when it happened Mr. Spacik."

"If you are aware of the damage, may I ask why the inspection tour?"

"You may, it's to see what is left after a decade plus of salvage. Take us to the starboard docking port."

A few moments later a hard thump announced their arrival.

"Sensors show no atmosphere on the other side."

"Power?"

"No Sir."

"OK. Pump the air down." Kirk felt his suit stiffen as the atmosphere in the pod was salvaged.

"Zero pressure."

"Open the locks."

The pod's hatch rolled back, but the *Republic's* didn't respond.

"No power indication to the *Republic* sir."

"Right" Kirk fished a line out of the pod's lock and plugged it into a receptacle on the *Republic*. "Try it now." Spacik hit the cycle control again, and the hatch parted hesitantly.

"Grab the power converter, I'll get the spare lights. Don't forget to activate your boots." Spacik looked a little uncomfortable. "Problems Mr. Spacik?"

"I have not been overly diligent in zero G work Captain."

"Isn't there a wise Vulcan saying for that circumstance Mr. Spacik?"

"Always Captain. *'So as you do, so shall you be.'* I will endeavor to improve my skills."

"Meanwhile we must do with what we have."

Kirk moved on to the dead ship, Spacik clumped after him. Conduit hung down in the old ship, corridor sections had been removed and the plumbing was bared in many places. Odd bits floated undisturbed by their passage Scorch

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marks on walls the ceilings marked the passage of fires. "How do the tricorder readings look?" Kirk hooked the converter to yet another door and got it open.

"The Cardassian weapons are not nearly as hard on the ship's structure. Everything we have checked is sound."

"Can we use what we have checked?"

"Baring any problems we might find with a closer examination, yes, we can."

"Good, she is worth dragging out of the heap then."

"Absolutely sir. The prefabricated parts contained here could save us as much as a month in repairs. While the ship's systems seem to be well picked over, the hull, which is what we want, has not been."

"One more thing then, I need to go to engineering."

"I don't recall anything we need in that area, and the secondary hull is badly damaged."

"Personal business Mr. Spacik."

"Do you wish me to remain here?"

"A bad idea, I would like you to come with me."

"As you wish sir."

A sweaty half hour later the two men stood in the wreckage of the main engineering section. A gaping hole in the ship marked where the intermix core had been. Kirk worked his way back through the wreckage to the secondary intermix control station. Utter devastation was all that was left of it. Kirk stood, silent. Spacik matched him, and waited. "My fiancée died at this station in that last battle, I never got down here after that. I just needed to see it to know it was real. To say good-bye, one more time." Kirk removed a glass tube from the pocket of his EVA suit and wedged it into the broken panel. It contained a single rose. He stood for several minutes. "OK, let's go." Spacik followed him without a word.

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The door chimed pleasantly. Felialan had gotten into the guts of the door and reprogrammed it. "Come."

The door opened to admit Commander Stiles. "Sir, I need to talk to you."

"Mr. Stiles, I would be glad to talk with you, but why the formal tone?"

"I, that is I would like, no, I wouldn't...."

"Have a seat Dick, the accommodations are not grand, but they serve." Kirk got up and went over to the coffee dispenser. "One black. One, double cream." He handed Stiles his cup and sat back at the desk. "Why don't you just say what's on your mind, and forget the formal wording."

"Ahem, Yes Sir. Captain Kirk, no matter the outcome of the investigation, or lack thereof, I don't fit the job. I am requesting a transfer to a sciences post,

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preferably on the *Hadrien* if it is available."

"What brought this on, if I may ask?"

"Yes. I have done some soul searching..."

"Tim, call me Tim."

"Tim, sir. And I don't deserve the *Kongo* posting."

"That's a fairly harsh judgement to make of yourself Dick. It does concern me that you would make it. Those transfer papers are half filled out, just from your admission, but I want to know why."

"I am lieutenant material, Lt. Commander at best, at least right now. I am a scientist, not a line officer. I'm not comfortable in the job, and Tathilan was pretty much dragging me around the entire time I was serving as First Officer. I didn't ask for Command School. I didn't ask for command track either. The truth be told, I don't really want it."

"Such a move could stick you in grade forever, totally dash your chances should you change your mind, you do realize that?"

"A chance I am willing to take to be in the place I belong. There is something else I need to say, in light of certain issues, but I would like to say it in front of the Admiral as well."

"That serious?"

"Yes Sir, that serious, and a breach of orders as well."

"I'll set up an appointment. Tathilan?"

\*\*I have contacted his office, he can see you at your earliest convenience.\*\*

"That's Admiral talk for 'Yesterday'. Let's go."

Kirk and Stiles arrived at Admiral Ci'kekher's office shortly thereafter. His receptionist let them right in. "Good afternoon sir. Good of you to see us."

"And to you also Ca'tain Kirk, Mr. Stiles. First, the good news I can give you. You are cleared to use what ever material from the *Re'ublic* that you wish."

"Good, has that clearance been forwarded to my crew?"

"Yes, the dockyard crews will move her to clear dock as soon as 'ossible. Now, the matter to which you called me."

"Yes Sir. Mr. Stiles, your show."

"Sirs. First understand that what I am about to say is in direct violation of orders given."

Ci'keker give him a curious look, a Skoor frown. "There may be consequences for this action Commander."

"Understood Sir, however, like Captain Kirk, I believe, now, that these orders were wrong, and will stand on that if I must."

"This understood, continue."

"Before the *Kongo* sailed from Earth I was called into Admiral Necheyev's office. She asked, ordered me to 'keep an eye' on my Captain, she made vague references to Captain Kirk being lend by 'other interests not friendly to the Federation', specifically, the Ane."

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Ci'kekher looked at Kirk, Kirk at Ci'kekher. The admiral turned to Stiles. "Continue 'lease."

"After being assured that I was 'doing my duty' I was ordered not to speak of the conversation outside of that office. Orders which I have just broken."

"Dick, how did you feel about it?"

"Lousy, the entire scene left a hollow in the pit of my stomach."

Ci'kekher frowned again. "Where you required to leave your commbadge on the desk outside the Admiral's office?"

"Yes, I was. I was told it was standard procedure."

"Was this before or after you lost your commbadge?"

"After... Oh God, you don't think?..."

"I do. Ca'tain Kirk, I think I can tell you now where the commbadge came from, and to whom it re'orted."

"Yes Admiral, I have it figured out as well. The only question remains is what do we do about it?"

"I will consider the matter Gentlemen. We will let it as it is for the moment. Good day."

Kirk turned to Stiles as they left the office. "So Dick, how do you it feel now?"

"Cleansed, my Starfleet career could be in the can, but I feel good."

----

Admiral Necheyev sat at her desk. The words on the terminal blurred by rage. Signed orders. *Signed orders*, how *dare* he. Didn't Kirk know who he was dealing with? She stopped, took a deep breath. No, Kirk didn't know, that is why he wanted signed orders. Kirk was, at least at last report a good officer. She would deliver the orders in person. Once he understood the gravity of the matter, yes, she would have a measure of the man. No good officer would request the orders signed once they understood the gravity of the matter. She hit the intercom. "Weasel."

"Yes Sir?"

"Come in."

Commander Weasel came in as ordered and walked to the Admiral's desk. "Yes Sir."

"Weasel, is the *Avenger* ready?"

"Yes Sir, it has been for weeks."

"Good, inform Captain Martenette we have a little trip to undertake. I'll inform him of the destination once we are underway."

"Yes, Sir, at once."

"And inform him in person, no comm traffic."

"Yes Sir."

Admiral Necheyev leaned back in her chair. The Defiant class escort was

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the perfect courier. Fast, well armed, and stealthy. Kirk would understand, or Kirk wouldn't last long.

----

The *Republic* was towed beside her sister ship. Both battered, battle scared. One would rise renewed from the fusion. Crew swarmed over the old ship, victim of the Cardassian War. Plasma touches lit the bay as the needed hull sections were cut from the *Republic*, and place cleared for them in the *Kongo*. The *Republic* would be broken up after this, her hull too cut up to possibly fly again. The crew worked in haste, but they worked with reverence. The *Republic* had served well. Their comrades had worked, fought, and died on this ship too.

As the work progressed an inspection pod drifted into the saucer hanger bay. Five figures emerged, one in the strange construction that served the Skoor as vacuum suits. All proceeded to the bridge. Lights were set up, log recordings started. The figures set themselves up. Admiral Ci'kekher began. "Attention all hands." The Boson sounded the signal, all work stopped, the crew outside turned toward the giant monitor by the dock side. "Gentlebeings we are here today to formally condemn the *USS Republic* NCC-10530, and strike her from the lists of ships. The *USS Republic* was launched Stardate 14575, and served until the Cardassian war on Stardate 36760, when severally damaged in fleet action against major Cardassian forces. She and her comrades were none the less able to win the day. We will have a moment of reverence for those that have served, and died on this great ship, and for the spirit of the ship imparted her by her crew. May they fly free." Admiral Ci'kekher waited a long moment, then he continued. "I hereby condemn the Hull of the *USS Republic*, and strike her from the lists of ships. Quartermaster, remove the plaque.

Two hefty dock yard workers cut the commissioning plaque free from the wall. Ci'kekher motioned them to Kirk. They handed him the plaque. He fumbled with it slightly, his visor fogging briefly. "Captain James Timothy Kirk, who served as an officer on this ship for many years, and in her final battle. Will you accept this plaque in memory of those that served, and died with this ship."

"Y, yes Sir, I will."

"These ceremonies are over."

The crews turned from the screens and back to work. Kirk numbly followed the others back to the pod. Back at the maintenance center he numbly striped the suit, muttered something to the others, picked up the massive slab of his life and beamed back to his hotel. For a long time he stared at it lying on the rug. Tathilan came over and gently nudged her head under his hand. He grabbed her fiercely. The damn burst and wracking sobs over took him. Tathilan rode out the storm. She thought softly to herself as he slept exhausted. \*\*And now, this can also heal.\*\*

----

The next morning Kirk woke groggy. He finished breakfast and got dressed. "It" lay of the floor where he left it the night before. \*\*What will you do with it?\*

\*\*Send it back to the Academy, they have a Hall of Honor for commissioning plaques. Silver for those that never came home, replicas. Gold for the real ones, like that. That damn bird, he could have told me he was going to do that.\*\*

\*\*And ruin his surprise. Really, if you were more up on Skoor warrior customs you would have expected it. The item of Honor is always presented to the ranking participant present.\*\*

\*\*All right, I wasn't up on my social customs for the day. But, it was like a punch in the soul.\*\*

\*\*I know.\*\*

Kirk stroked her mane. \*\*Yes, I know. Do me a favor, have it packed with letter of explanation. Oh, and scan it first.\*\*

\*\*You want copies?\*

\*\*Yes, half sized for the main mess hall in section 12. I want people to remember how the *Kongo* was saved. I have to get to work, you are doubtless already there.\*\*

----

"Attention please." Kirk called the meeting to order. "We have a definite plan and progress at this point. We will take it around the room. Mr. Spacik?"

"Sir. The work is proceeding well. We expect to have the necessary hull sections airtight within 10.2 days. This however is not the end of the matter. Much work is still to be done on the replaced hull to integrate it into the *Kongo's* system. The old conduits in the *Republic* do match most of the *Kongo's* system, but the hull is not wired for Crystalmind, and that has to be done. One crew is dedicated to salvaging all the equipment that can be from the damaged hull section. The good news is we will be flight capable, if not fight ready in 10.2 days."

"Good, an improvement. How is man power?"

"We have received five additional personnel from the Fleet office, this does not address our losses. However, we have also received six transfer requests for personnel on base, or from other ships."

"We are still undermanned however. We also have one transfer request off the ship. I am considering it at this time, and will speak of it later. Doctor?"

Handson was in good humor. "Just about everyone is back on their feet and eager to work. Ensign Mallory is still in the regeneration tank, and will be for at

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least another week. The good news is she will recover fully, and we will be able to take her on board when we leave. Ane are good for at least one more thing. They have allowed the patients in the regeneration tanks to communicate. It is not necessary to "keep them under". Mallory is eager to get back to duty."

"Counselor, how is morale?"

"Morale is high since the *Republic* was brought into the picture. The crew in general is feeling that an end to the damage is at hand. The *Kongo* herself will once again be whole and they can also be whole. The condemning ceremony was a good reminder that we are not the first to suffer loss, but the *Kongo* will rise from it."

"A note Counselor. You can tell the crew that the *Republic's* commissioning plaque is on it's way to the San Francisco Academy for inclusion in the Hall of Honor."

"I'll do that."

"Felialan, anything to add?"

\*\*Not really. Commander Spacik has the repair situation well in hand. All engines are cold, but operational, weapons systems with the exception of the phaser arrays across the damaged hull section, and the hull itself of course. The big job will be wiring the new hull sections.\*\*

"Then we have it. First priority, getting as much crew back into the hull as we can once the hull is air tight."

Mr. Spacik said. "I would estimate 10.27 days until the completion of pressure tests on the hull."

"I can hold you to that?"

"Yes sir, or I would not have stated it."

"Counselor, you can broadcast that to the crew."

"Yes Captain. I don't think anyone will object."

"OK, lets do it."

The meeting broke up as most of the assembled headed back to work. Counselor Deateli remained behind. Kirk came back into the living room after everyone else had left. "You have something private Counselor?"

"Two somethings Captain."

"The first?"

"Your transfer."

Kirk sat down, coffee in hand. "Yes, that would be Commander Stiles."

"Did he give you a reason? He hasn't spoken to me at all."

"He has given a number of reasons, I can't find fault with any of them. The crux of the matter is he is not comfortable in the command position, he wants to return to sciences."

"I dislike doing my work remotely."

"I know Deateli, but unless your are willing to approach him, I doubt he will come to you."

"Do you know why?"

Tathilan said. \*\*I do.\*\*

"Has the Commander been speaking to you?"

\*\*Yes Deateli, he has. Since before the Skylark incident.\*\*

"If I might inquire as to what?"

\*\*Commander Stiles feels very much out of his depth. He is also intimidated by a Deltan Counselor.\*\*

"This is not uncommon among the male population to start with. Can you suggest anything to over come it."

Kirk griuned. "Yes, stop being a female Deltan."

"That would be difficult Captain."

"I understand, but that is part of the problem. Your first impression on most men, and not a few women is overwhelming."

"You read more than vocal tone and body language?"

"Yes, I do. I knew about the problem with men, I had my adjustment period. But it wasn't until Tathilan pointed it out did I realize it was women as well."

"I don't recall you displaying any discomfort Captain."

"I'm a Captain, blood of ice water and nerves of duralloy."

"Doesn't fool me a bit."

"The truth be told, I had too much on my mind at the time to have room for being lusty. Would it help if I admitted to lusting since?"

"Captain would that I could get such honesty from every man."

"Your average human male is still insecure in the matter of a forward woman, and Deltans are as forward as women get. Look on the bright side, you don't live in the bad old days of required celibacy oaths to serve in Starfleet."

Cmd. Deateli sighed. "For that I can be thankful."

"But to the matter of Commander Stiles. As he explained, he didn't choose command, and wanted back into the science track. He requested transfer to the *Hadrian* if possible."

"You seem to have a good grip on the man Captain, do you think his is being honest with himself?"

"Yes, I do, he has been very honest in matters which I cannot reveal. I believe Dick knows his mind. The transfer is half approved. I am only waiting on certain events before I give final approval. What was the other matter?"

"The Captain of the *Kongo*."

"What about him?"

"Well, I never see much of him."

"That is simply because I have my own confidant, and gained her early in the relationship."

"Tathilan."

"Yes."

"I feel like I have fallen down on the job with you Captain, it wasn't until I noticed that you and Tathilan were in the same hotel room that I realized you were a couple. I didn't even consider it."

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"Why Counselor?"

"Did I never consider it?"

"Exactly."

"Are you counseling the Counselor Captain?"

"If necessary, yes. So, why didn't you consider it?"

"Frankly, she's an artificial life form."

"When you cannot tell the difference, what is the difference?"

"Can you tell the difference?"

"No, I can't, and I get considerably further than skin deep. May I ask a personal question?"

"You may ask Captain."

"Have you had sex with the Ane?"

"I would be less a Deltan if I passed that up, now wouldn't I."

"I'm not a Deltan to say."

"What are you Captain Kirk?"

"Ansis; a human Telepath that is part of the All. Tathilan, interested in an experiment?"

\*\*Sure.\*\*

"Are you Deateli?"

"Depends on the experiment."

"Why don't we find out if you can tell the difference between an RI, and a born Ane. You can judge for yourself."

"How many are in this experiment?"

"Four. Interested?"

"I do believe you are propositioning me Captain Kirk."

"Well, you question the validity of my relationships Counselor. I am offering you some empirical data."

"I'm a Deltan Captain, and everything that means."

"And I am Ansis, and everything that means."

"Very well, I accept."

Hours later Deateli, Kirk, Tathilan, and Haifaban relaxed around Kirk's hotel room.

"So Counselor, does my relationship pass?"

Dealeil looked up from the mane she was braiding. "Tim, I honesty cannot feel any difference between the nature of Tathilan and Haifaban."

"And that was the point."

"Yes, that was. Sometime again?"

"Sure."

----

"All rise." The courtroom stood as the Judge Advocate entered. He spoke.

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"The court is now in session. You may be seated. Bosen, first case please."

"Captain Heinbein of Ekos and his crew vs. The United Federation of Planets The defendants are charged with piracy and murder. It is recorded that Captain Heinbein stood mute before the court and a plea of Not Guilty was entered in his behalf.

*"I will not participate in this farce!"*

Judge Advocate Marteel banged his gavel. "Counselor. Will you calm your client."

"Yes your honor I..."

"I will not be tired before some inhuman *beast!*"

The entire court was silent, all eyes where on the disheveled Ekosian. Most eyes held open disbelief, even disgust, one pair held shame. Judge Marteel looked down his long brown muzzle.

"One more outburst from you, and you will be removed from the chamber."

"You cannot make me participate in this *animalistic* exercise. I am..."

"SERGEANT, remove this person."

*"HEIL RESING!"*

The Security officers moved to Heinbein. One cuffed him as the other covered him with his phaser. Heinbein continued to shout insults as he was dragged from the courtroom. Judge Marteel rapped his gavel. "Court is adjourned for one hour."

Captain Kirk and the others stood and departed for the given hour.

Commodore Heinkil moved over to where Kirk stood in the small knot of his officers. "Captain. I thought it was a right that the accused face his accusers. Yet the trial will go on?"

"Commodore Heinkil, a right can be abused. However long set precedent states that a disruptive defendant can 'face' his accusers from his cell, via camera. He will have constant access to his attorney. He will not prevent justice from being done. He speaks poorly for Ekosians at large. Rest assured, this trial is being watched in the Chambers of the Federation Council"

"He is beyond my orders. The Fuher has repudiated him."

"Rendering your sacrifice meaningless."

"One cannot know the future."

"I would at least hope to know I was supported."

"Your government would support you under such circumstances?"

"No, and wouldn't send a rescue fleet to fight and die for me either. In fact I am quite sure that if I gave such orders my officers would see they did not get carried out."

Heinkil looked at the men and women gathered around Kirk, he saw the conformation in their faces. "We are back to disobeying orders again."

"Yes Commodore, we are. Gentlebeings, I believe they are places we can wait out the adjournment."

Heinkil watched the back of the Starfleet officers for a moment. He turned

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back the lobby of the court at large. Any that caught his eye, turned away. He stood, alone in the crowd. The shined gold, and bright leather of his uniform a beacon to shun. A uniform he had worn proudly, even arrogantly. Of the hundreds of beings in the room, none would meet his eye, except Starfleet, and those eyes held menace and warning. A Caitian grinned at him, he shivered. He had serious doubts that a show of teeth was friendly for that race. Heinkil left the court antechamber. He realized as he walked away that he wasn't coming back. He could not sit in that court room to be reviled. He could not be the scapegoat. His wandering shortly found him in his room. A bare small chamber, not the VIP quarters his rank would normally rate. His status was between guest and prisoner. Even he was not sure which it was. He took off his hat, turned it in his hands to see the swastika. The images of the hanger of the *Skylark* swam before his eyes. He squeezed them shut to block the sight of the murdered children. The images would not leave. Heinkil threw the hat across the small room, in a fit of temper he ripped his jacket off, then his ceremonial dagger, one after another he divested himself of all the symbols of his rank and place. When done, he stood an old man in baggy gray pants and a white shirt. Heinkil sat at the table. "Computer."

"Awaiting function."

"Take a letter, To; Ekosian High Command"

"Recording"

"I Castor Heinkil resign my commission in the Ekosian Star Forces as of this day. I cannot continue to serve in light of the decisions and orders made, by the Star Command, and the subsequent actions taken to repudiate the consequences of those decisions and orders. Signed, Castor Heinkil."

"Recorded for transmission."

"Computer, will there be in a difficulty in sending this message?"

"No difficulty anticipated."

Castor Heinkil went about his small room. He gathered the cast off emblems of rank and stuffed them in the disposal slot. "Lights down."

The lights lowered in the small room. Castor Heinkil sat on the bed in his small room and wept for his dead."

----

Kirk stood on the bridge of the *Kongo* for the first time in weeks. He looked at the others standing about him. "Air pressure?"

\*\*Air pressure is nominal and holding on all decks.\*\*

"Unseal people."

Helmets came off around the bridge.

Tatilan said. \*\*How does it smell?\*

Miratath took a deep breath. "It smells like us."

Kirk punched the call. "All hands, you are free to unseal suits." Cheers

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sounded around the ship as the crew of the *Kongo* took a breath of ship air for the first time in weeks. Kirk let the backslapping go on for a while. "Attention all hands. Congratulations. We have the *Kongo* air tight. We still have a lot to do before we are space worthy. Crew with usable cabins may move back aboard as soon as possible. We will do some doubling up until we have the new sections livable. See Lt. Cmd. Deateli for assignments if your old cabin assignment is not yet livable. That is all." Kirk looked at the beaming bridge officers. "Well, get to work people, we have a lot to do yet."

The group broke up grinning. Kirk entered his ready room, and started stripping his pressure suit. The intercom spoke again, this time Tathilan.

"Attention, section leaders please gather all pressure suits not required by personal for return to Starbase 140 material reclamation."

There was a call at his door. "Come."

A Rating poked his nose in. "Sir, your suit?"

"On the couch O'Hailey, thank you."

"You're welcome sir. Sir, the boots?"

"Oh, right." Kirk pulled the boots off and handed them over.

O'Hailey left, suit and boots in hand. Kirk made a careful check of the room, everything seem to be in working order, the couch didn't look to have taken too much damage from the extended vacuum. Time would tell on that. Well, if necessary he would recover it again. He stopped, remembering what it looked like when he first found it. He shook his head. Well, once done can be done again. He went to the replicator. "Coffee, black." "Beep" No coffee made an appearance. Kirk frowned.

\*\*Sorry Tim, the replicators are not on line yet.\*\*

\*\*Are we taking meals on the station?\*

\*\*No, they should be up in a few hours.\*\*

"And what is the Captian to do for coffee may I ask?\*" The battered coffee machine form his station office sparkled into existence. Kirk sighed, better than then nothing. \*\*We have transporters, but no replicator?\*

\*\*No, I borrowed the station transporters.\*\*

\*\*Right. OK, I have my coffee. How does our quarters look?\*

\*\*About the same, anything fragile to vacuum was stored, I have things about back in order. We will however need grass.\*\*

\*\*Grass?\*

\*\*Yes, grass, we were not able to salvage the grass in the Ane quarters before vacuum got to it.\*\*

\*\*I am grateful we salvaged all the Ane, grass we can replace.\*\*

\*\*No argument.\*\*

\*\*OK, grass, anything else on the list?\*

\*\*Lots, but we'll take care of it in order.\*\*

\*\*It feels almost strange to be back. Something you've waited for, but didn't expect any time soon.\*\*

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\*\*Like getting back on my new old body.\*\*

\*\*I can see that. Well, what's first on the endless list...\*\*

----

Admiral Necheyev looked over the tactical display. Starbase 140 grew larger as the ship closed. "Have they detected us yet?"

Captain Martenette said. "No Admiral."

"Close enough, move back out and come in without the cloak. No use shocking everyone."

"Yes Sir."

"Estimated time of arrival?"

"At your discretion sir."

"Take us an hour out, then back."

"Two hours 15 minutes then Admiral."

"Good. We can get this matter closed at once."

----

Kirk was getting well into his work when comm called. "Admiral Ci'kekher on the line Sir, priority one."

"Got it. Kirk here Admiral."

"Ca'tain Kirk, we can have a resolution at this time. Could you come to my office at once."

"Yes Sir, shall I call Commander Stiles as well?"

"Yes Ca.... Yes, bring him also. Ci'kekher out."

Kirk frowned at the hesitant tone. He hit the intercom. "Commander Stiles to the gangway at once."

"Stiles here, acknowledged Captain."

He met Stiles at the gangway. He looked nervous. "Well, Dick, we see the end of this."

"Or the start?"

"Or the start, but at least we will know what we are dealing with."

A few minutes walk took then to the now familiar door, and into the Admiral's office. Also within was Admiral Necheyev, and a Commander he didn't know. The whole thing was starting to smell. Necheyev spoke first.

"Captain Kirk, you are perhaps unaware of the serious Intelligence nature of the orders you were given."

"I am unaware of anything about them Admiral, except that they are given."

"Let me make it plain then my orders. As of this date, the matter is to be considered dropped. No repercussions will come of the matter, and the matter will be stricken from the records."

Kirk looked Admiral Necheyev in the eye. "I will have those orders in

writing sir."

Necheyev stepped back as if he had slapped her. "Mr. Kirk, I don't believe I heard you clearly."

"I said sir. I will have those orders in writing and signed by the issuing officer. Are you are the issuing officer Sir?"

"Kirk I don't think you understand the security implications of this matter. I am going to ask you one more time to reconsider that request."

"I understand perfectly Admiral. My First Officer was ordered to spy on his commanding officer, he was secretly given a communicator designed to broadcast everything in his hearing. A communicator incidentally, he received in your office."

"You have nothing Kirk, and you're a fool if you think you do."

"The orders in writing Admiral Necheyev. In writing and signed."

"You arrogant asshole. I'll have you broken to midshipman, you will never sit a center seat again."

Admiral Ci'kekher said "Admiral Necheyev, you are out of line. Ca'tain Kirk is well within his rights to request written orders. Do you issue those written orders, or do you stand down?"

"You're backing him?"

"Yes, I am."

Necheyev turned on Stiles. "You, you broke orders, it's the only way Kirk could know."

Stiles shook with nervousness. "Yes Sir, yes I did."

"Your career is in the trash, I suggest you quit now, it will be easier on you."

Stiles stiffened. "No Sir, I will not quit. You will have to charge me."

"I made you Stiles. I got you your command school and your little dream posting. I can just as easily make it go away."

"Thank you sir, you just explained a lot to me. You asked me if I could sniff out anyone else making an end run around the rules, today, that is you sir. No sir, I will not obey your wrong orders. You want them enforced, you will have to bring it out in the open, for all to see."

"No Mr. Stiles I don't. I can simply bury you in some backwater like Benson."

Kirk said. "In that case Sir, I will charge him as the immediate commanding officer."

"You are another matter."

Ci'kekher was frowning again. "Admiral Necheyev you are treading dangerous ground."

"I'll have all of you out of here."

Weasel, who had been hanging back, spoke. "Admiral, you will do nothing of the sort."

Necheyev whipped around and looked at Weasel. "Where are you coming from all of a sudden Weasel? You work for me."

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"For starters Admiral, my name is Wessel, not Weasel. Investigator Marcus Wessel. I don't work for you, I work for the Federation Council, Department of Justice, Internal Affairs."

"I see, it is already too late. Even the Federation Council is overtaken."

"Alyna Necheyev your delusions that you are the sole authority on what is safe and proper for the Federation are one of the reasons you are in the position you are now. You are under arrest, for violations of the Basic Guarantees of Rights, and for violation of the Treaty of Algeron."

Necheyev stepped back and reached into her uniform. Before she could withdrawn her hand Ci'kekher had a battle phaser aimed at her chest. He clucked at her. "Necheyev, have you never heard it is bad luck to face the Skoor in a draw down. Bring the hand out em'ty, it was a foolish move, and before you think brave thoughts, my 'haser is on kill."

Necheyev brought her hand out slowly. It was empty. She slumped.

Ci'kekher pressed the comm. "Security to my office." In a moment the security officers came in. "Admiral Necheyev is under arrest. Take her away."

The two guards searched her and took her weapons, then led her out.

Kirk turned to Ci'kekher. "The orders have not been issued in written form. Admiral, are my officers and myself bound by them?"

"No Ca'tain, your are not."

"As to the breach of orders by Commander Stiles?"

Wessel said. "The orders are illegal. There will have to be a hearing of course, but I can have the matter cleared in few days. I will also need your logs Admiral, and dispositions from everyone."

Kirk said "I have an additional logs on my PADD, I will make it available to you."

"Thank you Captain. Excuse me gentlebeings, but I have to make sure she stays for the trial."

The three remaining looked at each other. Finally Ci'kekher bobbed his head. "I believe we all have work to do."

Kirk said. "Of course. Mr. Stiles?"

The two left the office. Admiral Ci'kekher placed the phaser back in its accustomed place, and started to dictate a report of the incident.

Kirk and Stiles didn't say much until they were back in Kirk's ready room. Kirk went right to the replicator. "Coffee, black. Want?"

"Ah, in lieu of stronger."

"What stronger?"

"Oh, brandy."

"Brandy, real, override seven." The items appeared on the replicator. Kirk handed Stiles the snifter.

"I thought you didn't approve of drinking, especially on duty."

"Because I never drink myself?"

"Well, yes."

"I don't like the taste Dick, it's nothing against the practice."

"Oh. Well." He sipped for a moment. "How about the on duty part?"

"Normally yes, but Hell. I don't know about you, but I have the jitters all the way down."

"And your drinking coffee?"

"Right." Kirk got up and returned to the replicator. "Scotch, single malt, real, override seven." The scotch made an appearance. Kirk raised the glass.

"To close shaves."

"Here, here."

Both men tossed back the liquor. Kirk grimaced as the scotch burned it's way down. "Blagh. I have ever understood how my father drinks the stuff."

Stiles chuckled at Kirk's discomfort. "I guess your will never make a drinking man sir."

"No, guess I won't. To business. Do you still want that transfer?"

"Yes, I do. My reasons are no less valid, and might be even more valid."

"I've already contacted Captain Ap Owen. She said she could use you. And the *Hadrian* will be in space trials for at least a month more. You have plenty of time to get back to Earth." Kirk came around his desk, and extended his hand. "I'm sorry to see you go Dick. It has been good working with you."

Stiles took the proffered hand and shook firmly. "And with you also Captain. You have taught me much, thank you."

Stiles left. Kirk stared after him for a long moment, and turned back to his desk. "Tathilan, get me Admiral Picard, priority three." Kirk sat down to the interrupted work of the morning.

\*\*Picard on channel Tim.\*\*

\*\*That was fast.\*\* "Admiral Picard, Kirk here."

"Yes Captain, what can I do for you. Things have suddenly gotten very hot."

"I know Admiral, I'm in the middle of it. Do you recall our last conversation?"

"Yes, I do."

"Consider me in."

"I will do that."

"One other thing. Commander Richard Stiles. He has a backbone, and his head is in the right place, and I believe, his heart. You will be getting reports. Consider him."

"Thank you Captain Kirk, we will. Picard out."

Captain Kirk turned back to the work of getting his ship repaired.

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"All rise for the Court."

Judge Advocate Marteel entered and took his seat. Grim determination

## The Wages of Sin

marked his features. Once again Heinbein was in the courtroom proper. This session was being broadcast to the prison level, to the crew at large. "The Defendant will rise." Heinbein stood, trying to look defiant, and managing only to demonstrate how haggard he was. "Fredrick Heinbein, you stand accused of an act of piracy in free space, 349 counts of murder in the first degree, one count of attempted murder. 148 counts of kidnapping in association with an act of piracy in free space. The finding of this court are; Guilty on all counts. This court sentences you to 488 life sentences, to be served consecutively and the Coventry Colony Penitentiary. Case closed."

Fredrick Heinbein, late of the Fuher's service, fainted.

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The *Kongo* floated free of her umbilicals for the first time in over two months. Her fresh paint proud in the spacedock lights. The great doors rolled back in the silence, and the stars beyond them beckoned. "Make our regards to spacedock control, thank you for everything."

Miratath answered. "Control replays, you're most welcome, good sailing."

Commander Spacik checked the XO's boards. "All departments report ready for space Captain."

Kirk looked around the bridge once more, a few familiar faces missing, a few new faces to learn. "Mr. Mordane, you may take her out."

The Wages of Sin---- Garry Stahl, October 1999

**Subtext 2011** -- This story didn't get a subtext the first time around. I found myself changing quite a bit of wording that did not please me. Nothing that changes the outcome, but plenty of little things.

Yes, I arranged a far different fate for Necheyev. She impressed me as someone far too loose with the idea of rules, and someone that needed a just fate.