

On the Road Again!

Major Ayesha Deveraux had just received the last of her paperwork when she spied a Vaegan woman with a Terran male standing near one of the other assignment windows.

Ayesha was naturally curious. She knew there weren't many Vaegans who were starship commanders and had assumed this was her new CO. Ayesha continued her covert observation of the couple, noting their every move. She concluded that while they were very business like in their dealings with the administrative staff, they cared very deeply for each other. That last bit of information cinched it for her. She cautiously walked over.

"Captain Devlin?"

"Yes?"

"I am Major Ayesha Deveraux, the new Special Forces Liaison for the USS *Stellar Wind*."

"Ah...yes, Major Deveraux. May I introduce you to the Wing Commander, Commander Kyle Argent."

"Commander Argent," replied Ayesha, accepting the handshake.

"Can we give you a lift? I'm using the *Stellar Hotspur*. I never had the opportunity to use the Captain's gig during this last voyage and I concluded not to use it now would be a severe waste."

"Thank you Captain Devlin, I would appreciate it."

"Excellent. We shall meet you at Hangar Deck Three at fifteen hundred hours."

"I shall be there, Sir."

"Very good. Until then, Major."

Ayesha knew that she was being dismissed. "Captain, Commander," she replied, then moved away from the couple. *Well, this is going to be a very interesting voyage.*

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Volume II: The Stellar Wind Years

"Damn!" Commander Claudia Grant Fokker, newly appointed Surgeon to the *Stellar Wind* mumbled to herself. She had barely managed to catch one of the last shuttles to the ship.

A sober-faced Ensign directed her to an empty seat. "Welcome Commander. Please strap in because we are running late."

Claudia buckled herself into the seat and held on for dear life. It had been many years since she last set foot on a starship and while she was looking forward to serving again with her good friend Arcadia, she wasn't looking forward to the shuttle ride to the ship.

Before Claudia knew it, they had arrived. Everyone scurried out of the ship making a noise loud enough to raise the dead. They were all chatting as they all tried to simultaneously depart through the one door. Suddenly everyone became still.

"Excellent landing Mister Overlake."

"Thank you Commander Argent."

Departures continued but it was done so much more quietly and professionally than before. It wasn't long before Claudia found out why.

"Good of you to finally show up, Claudia. I see that you haven't changed."

Claudia blushed as a huge smile broke out on her face. "Well, Arcadia, you know the old saying, 'the more things change, the more they remain the same'."

"Indeed they do," replied Captain Arcadia Devlin. "Good to see you again, Claudia. Come by my quarters tonight when you have finished all the necessities."

"Thank you, I'd love to," replied Claudia noting that Arcadia had changed since their days on the Hospital Ship *Sarah April*. *For one thing*, Claudia mused as she left the hangar deck, *she's much happier. And I wonder if it has anything to do with the very handsome Commander standing next to her?*

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Stellar Wind crewmembers continued to check and settle in. Old and new members intermingled. Everyone quickly fell into their new routine hoping this voyage of the *Wind* would be uneventful. There was more than enough excitement during the previous voyage to last everyone for a lifetime or two.

Volume II: The Stellar Wind Years

Before the ship departed port, there was a ceremony to dedicate the *Stellar Wind's* new bridge plaque. The ceremony was very short in deference to the original designer Commander Burson's advanced age. He once again talked about the history of the 1501, the new 1501A, and his involvement with both ships.

"Leave it to Starfleet to figure out how to forget the commissioning plaque," he concluded. Burson lifted up the cloth to reveal the new plaque. Everyone clapped and the ceremony was over.

Captain Arcadia Devlin formerly welcomed everyone back on board the ship. "I'm sure that everyone will be most surprised with the new mission we have been given." She scanned the smiles surrounding her and thought about the frowns that were sure to cover their faces when they found out about their new mission.

"I would like all the Division Chiefs to please meet me at my Ready Room at 1500 hours to meet our new Executive Officer who is, I assure you, here on the ship." Her last comment drew a laugh from the bridge crew and no doubt about the ship.

"We will be departing this evening at 1800 hours, so please be prepared. Devlin out."

When she finished everyone on the bridge clapped and a rare smile illuminated her face. She then turned to her honored guest. "Commander Burson, please allow me escort you to the transporter room."

"I would enjoy that, Captain," he replied.

Once she had seen Commander Burson safely off, she returned to her Ready Room to finish up some paperwork and await her Division Chiefs. As she expected, they all arrived promptly at 1459. The first order of business was to introduce the new Executive Officer. After his introduction, Arcadia could swear that she heard an audible sigh of relief from the Chiefs assembled at the table.

Arcadia finished briefing the Chiefs and the frowns and, as expected, the mumbling and cussing commenced. However, she repeated in a clear and concise voice using a tone that expected no disagreement, "These are our orders, gentlemen, and I expect that each and everyone of you will carry them out."

She scanned their depressed faces and added, "If there are no questions, you are all dismissed."

Volume II: The Stellar Wind Years

Arcadia watched them slink out of her Ready Room to face their department personnel. If their reaction was any indication, her Division Chiefs were going to have a rough time of it.

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Newly minted Lieutenant Commander Aubrey Maturin almost missed the meeting of the Science Staff called to discuss the new mission. The Chief Science Officer congratulated him on his recent promotion, engaged in some more small talk with the rest of the assembled masses, and then finally got down to business.

Aubrey was thunderstruck. He couldn't believe it! He actually thought there was going to be a mutiny in the meeting room when the Chief Science Officer announced that their new mission was to chart gas giants. As he remarked to his assistant Boris Brown as they left the meeting to go back to their labs, "Well, at least we've now become experts on the subject."

Boris remained mute. Aubrey concluded that Boris was in no mood to discuss the matter further. Neither was he, for that matter.

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"*Bloody hell...Romulans?!*" growled Captain Devlin, staring at her amended orders from SFHQ delaying the *Stellar Wind's* departure. She paused for a moment and then barked at the comlink, "Lieutenant Talia, please report to the CO immediately!"

It didn't take long for the Security Officer's to arrive. Silver entered the Ready Room.

"You wanted to see me, Captain."

"Yes, we've received priority orders. The padd has all the details. Please take care of it personally."

Silver accepted the padd and scanned it. "Interesting..."

"You could say that!" Arcadia snapped, and then added, "Let me know when you have everything ready."

"Yes, Sir!" Silver quickly departed the Ready Room.

Volume II: The Stellar Wind Years

Arcadia was busy with paperwork when Silver informed her that they would all arrive to her Ready Room at 1600. Arcadia sighed and went back to her work trying not to think about it. She glanced at the chronometer on her desk again and noted that the time had only advanced another minute. She tossed down her stylus realizing that her constant glancing at the chronometer simply underscored her feelings of uneasiness.

Romulans.

Arcadia still didn't like them. In a few short moments, she would be sitting at her Ready Room table with, in her opinion, one too many of them. It hadn't been that long ago they had been involved in a life or death fight with renegade Romulans had tried to take over her ship. She was sure the rest of the crew of the *Wind* agreed with her which is why she instructed Silver to keep their "guests" confined to quarters and to secretly move them from point to point about the ship.

She still didn't understand why they were being tapped for this mission. All the message from HQ said was that she was to escort T'Shera and part of her crew to her new ship, the *Shadow Hawk* currently waiting for them at the west shipyards. She was assured that this extra assignment would cause very little disruption in the *Stellar Wind's* routine. *Besides*, she considered with a chuckle, *this is better than mapping gas giants*. As amusing as that thought was, Arcadia quickly went back to the matter at hand: transporting Romulans.

And who knows, she further considered grimly, *these Romulans could have had a hand in her late husband's death*. However, Arcadia was an officer in Starfleet and would obey orders. *But, I don't have to like it*.

"Captain Devlin?"

Arcadia looked up at her yeoman.

"They have arrived."

"Show them in, Boffin."

"T'Shera... gentlemen," she replied with all the professionalism she could muster as she pointed to the chairs around the large conference table. "Please be seated."

The briefing was mercifully short and she was able to hand over her "guests" to Security then make her way to the bridge to personally oversee their departure from space dock. She stood at the back of her command chair and

Volume II: The Stellar Wind Years

decided to savor the moment for just one second more. When she felt she could no longer delay their departure, she sat down, and turned to communications.

"Mister Templar, signal Orbital Control we are ready to depart."

"Aye, aye sir."

"Helm, take us out on impulse power."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Set course for the Alpha Orion system."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Arcadia nestled in her chair and enjoyed the view as they whipped past Sol III's outer planets towards their destination. She lingered on the bridge for several moments before the mound of ever-increasing paperwork beckoned her back.

"Mister Templar, you have the Bridge," she announced in a voice tinged with regret.

"Aye, aye, sir!"

Arcadia slowly walked back to her Ready Room and contemplated what needed to be done. Now that the *Wind* was underway, she could turn her attentions to taking care of her "guests." It was now time to finalize the necessary arrangements for getting them to their destination.

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Wing Commander Kyle Argent had barely enough time to put on his uniform tunic and rush double-time to the Captain's Ready Room.

"Captain Devlin, Commander Argent is here," announced her yeoman, in his smooth baritone voice. Boffin led the *Stellar Wind's* Wing Commander into the Captain's Ready Room and left.

"Commander Argent, thank you for coming by my office on short notice." She pointed to the chair in front of her desk, which Kyle took. "Commander Argent, I'll get right down to business, I need you to drop off some..." she paused and then spat between clenched teeth, "*Cargo.*"

"Cargo?"

Volume II: The Stellar Wind Years

"Cargo...Personnel... *Romulan* personnel need to be transported to their new ship. This is all being done in the name of good relations. However, you know how I feel about this. I shall do my duty and--"

"Did HQ say why the *Stellar Wind* was chosen?"

"I didn't ask, Mister Argent," she replied coolly.

Realizing that the CO wasn't in a mood to chat, he got down to business. "Captain, what ship do I use and when do we depart?"

"You'll use the *Dart* and you depart tonight. I've already made arrangements for departure. I suggest taking one of your own people. Lieutenant Bill Rasman will accompany you as the Security Officer on duty. Do you need anything else?"

Kyle studied both his Commanding Officer and his companion and decided she was under enough strain as it was. "No Captain, you've covered all the bases. I'll let you know if I need anything further."

"Excellent."

Kyle stood and left her office. He didn't have much time to do anything fancy but did decide on taking Virgil with him on this jaunt.

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Newly minted Ltjg Virgil Taylor Senior Ground Technician for the Nighthawks was sitting near the large windows of the lounge with the other crewmembers who wanted to witness the ship's departure from space dock. Everyone was enjoying the view of the ship as she left port. After watching the planets zoom by, he decided the only sight he'd consider lovelier would be when he piloted a Nighthawk out there.

As he was making his way back to the flight deck, he received a priority message from Commander Argent. Virgil hurried over to his office. He lightly rapped the door of the makeshift office perched on the edge of the flight deck.

"Enter!"

Virgil opened the door and sighed. *You'd think that now that he's made Commander, they'd give him a bigger room.*

"Come in Virgil."

"Thank you, Commander Argent."

"How would you like to earn those new Lieutenant Junior Grade bars?"

"I'd love it sir!"

"Have a seat. Captain Devlin has given us a short assignment. It won't take long but I realize that you may not be too thrilled with the idea."

Commander Argent told him all about the assignment and he was right. Virgil wasn't thrilled with the idea of transporting a bunch of Romulans especially since his brother Scott was killed during the Romulan invasion of the *Wind* but still, he couldn't let this opportunity pass him by.

"I'd like to go, Commander."

"Great," Kyle replied. "Bill Rasman will be along to keep the Romulans in check, but I suspect everyone will be on their best behavior. Have the *Dart* ready at twenty-two hundred hours."

Virgil took the padd and left the office wondering if he was ready to face the Romulans again.

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Lieutenant Commander Ian Comprehensible was sitting on the Bridge, serving once again as the Officer of the Watch. His normal job was the Assistant Chief of Engineering, but he never missed an opportunity for a chance to be on the Bridge because it was really the only time he was sure to actually see it.

He noted in the duty log that the *Stellar Wind* had cleared the plane of the planets and related gravity wells. The ship was steady on course.

"We're now at Warp 3, sir."

"Excellent. Steady as she goes," Ian replied to the helmsman, sitting back to enjoy the view and the chair.

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Arcadia stifled a yawn as she looked to the Romulan officers waiting to board the *Dart* and decided that it would be a long, long time before she could ever completely forgive.

Volume II: The Stellar Wind Years

"I trust that you have everything, Fleet Captain T'Shera?" she said evenly.

Giving the appearance of a commanding officer who was in control of everything, T'Shera remained mute and nodded her head. She turned to her people and gestured for them to board the ship.

Commander Argent stepped forward. "Everything is ready for departure, Captain Devlin."

"Very good, Mister Argent," Arcadia replied and then turned to Fleet Captain T'Shera. "Have a safe journey, Fleet Captain."

"Thank you Captain Devlin."

Fleet Captain T'Shera politely shook Captain Devlin's hand and then walked towards the *Dart* for the short journey to pick up her own ship, the *Shadow Hawk*.

Arcadia stood in the shadows and watched the *Dart* depart saying a silent prayer for Kyle's safe return.

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"We've dropped out of Irrelevant drive, sir, because there are no drive beacons here to continue the jump," helm reported.

"Go to Warp 3, recalculate the course, and estimated time of arrival to the Alpha Orion system at this speed," Ian Comprehensible replied.

"Yes, sir!"

Several moments went by before Ian asked, "Helm, can we make another Irrelevant jump?"

"No, sir."

Ian thought for a moment and made a decision. "Go to Warp 5 then." He paused. "Do you have an estimate of the time of arrival?"

The helmsman tapped a few keys. "Three days to Alpha Orion, sir."

"Very good," Ian replied and then made a log entry for the Captain to review in the morning.

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Volume II: The Stellar Wind Years

"There goes the *Shadow Hawk*. Good bye and good riddance to the Romulans," Virgil chuckled as he adjusted the helm controls.

"Yeah, don't call us -- we'll call you," Kyle replied. He paused and fixed his gaze on Virgil. "But since we're on the subject of the Shadowhawk..."

Kyle looked over his shoulder to make sure that Bill Rasman was still sleeping in the back hold. Finding his assumption to be true continued. "While I was at HQ, I was briefed on a matter that you might possibly find interesting. Your participation would entail yet more work, but I think you might find the payoff worth while."

Kyle outlined the Shadowhawk project to Virgil who listened with rapt attention until the Wing Commander had finished his monologue.

"Wow!" Virgil exclaimed.

Kyle chuckled amicably. "I felt much the same way at first." He fixed a stern gaze up on him. "So, are you in or not?"

"Am I ever!"

Both men returned their attention to the control of the shuttle with what amounted to very pleased expressions plastered on both their faces.

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