

Author's Note: This adventure is a prequel to the Star Trek: Dauntless adventure "Return to Orig" (Archive Year 2372). It is recommended that you read the Dauntless adventure prior to reading this story.

"Ten degrees right standard rudder. Move her in slowly."

The *USS Arcturus* turned and came alongside the small freighter that had spent the better part of the last hour vainly trying to outrun the powerful Federation starship. Some pressure applied by way of the starship's tractor beam finally made the freighter's captain finally think twice.

Commodore Eric Johnson, Commanding Officer of the *Arcturus*, and Admiral Bryan Ackermann, Johnson's close friend and acting First Officer, both stood in front of the helm console watching the freighter on the main viewscreen as the starship slowed alongside it.

"This blockade is really starting to wear me out," Johnson commented to Ackermann. "This is the tenth ship we've stopped in the last week, and the third one to try and run."

"The ships attempting to leave the system have been on the increase ever since the attacks on Alpha Rogneu, Eric. And... We have our orders," Ackermann replied.

"Yeah, yeah, I know." The Commodore turned toward his chief communications officer, Setton To'Lock Arbelo. "Setton, inform Major Copeland that it will be the same drill as usual."

"Yes, Commodore," the hybrid Terran/Vulcan/Efrosian officer replied.

Down in transporter room two, Starfleet Marine Major A. Carey Copeland, a stocky Tamurellian, readied his squad. The Marine officer rechecked each of his Marine's in turn, making sure each carried the right tools for their mission of searching the vessels they stopped, making sure no contraband was passing through the blockade, then ordered the four of them up onto the transporter platform. However, before Copeland himself could join his squad, the transporter room doors opened again, admitting a tall Vulcan officer.

"Solak!" Copeland exclaimed. "I see you've finally come to your senses and decided to rejoin your old platoon." Months earlier, Solak had been a Marine captain under Copeland's command, but had transferred to the *Arcturus*' operations department when the department had lost a number of personnel for various reasons.

The mission ops officer donned a survival jacket and joined the armored Marines on the pads.

"I did not, as you say, come to my senses. I am quite satisfied with my current position on the bridge. Commodore Johnson felt it would be logical to have me participate in this boarding party. The freighter we've stopped lead us on quite a chase. Logic suggests that they must have something very important, and perhaps very dangerous, to hide."

"Spoken like a true Vulcan," whispered 2nd LT G'edd to the Marine standing next to him. Solak turned to face the Tellerite while Copeland ascended the platform.

"I not only speak like a Vulcan, Mister G'edd, but I hear like one as well."

G'edd's pig-like Tellerite face turned a brighter shade of red than normal as the transporter beamed the party away.

Space, the Final Frontier...

Star Trek: Arcturus

"Ship After Ship After Ship..." By PJK

Captain's log, stardate 8495.2:

The Arcturus is on a one month assignment to patrol the Origami Sector to stop and search vessels leaving the system for contraband following Orig VIII's attack on three Federation member worlds, which has resulted in the Federation applying sanctions against the planet. As a result, the necessary trade with other planets has been cut off until such time as Orig VIII stops threatening war on its neighboring systems.

While a relatively routine assignment, it has been taxing to the Arcturus and her crew, and indications are it will only get worse.

Johnson, commanding Arcturus, out.

Commodore Johnson and Doctor Athena Arcadian, the starship's Chief Medical Officer and the Commodore's fiancée, sat in the officer's lounge, playing a game of Tri-D chess as they discussed the latest shipboard gossip.

On the bridge, Admiral Bryan Ackermann sat in the command chair. Ensign Thomas Mack, manning the helm, reported a course change he had entered. At sciences, Deltan Lt Idrisu, called 'Cueball' by his friends, reported that sensor readings of the sector were unchanged.

Down in the ship's botanical garden in the lower hull of the *Arcturus*, Lieutenant (JG) Kalin Kale and his girlfriend, the recently assigned Crewman Mickey Ku, were tending to Kale's pet project, a small fern that Kale had brought with him from his home on Alpha Centauri which he had carried with him on all his travels.

"Kalin," said Ku as she watered the fern and some of the small plants around it. "Is every mission like this?"

Kale looked up from his weeding.

"Like what?"

"You know... Tense and boring."

Kale laughed. The *Arcturus* had been Ku's first assignment since enlisted training, and she was still earning her space-legs.

"No, not really," Kale replied with a chuckle. "Most of our missions, the ones that involve the exploration of new sectors are pretty exciting. But like all life, you have to take the good with the bad."

Suddenly, the alert klaxon sounded.

"Yellow alert! Yellow alert! Vessel approaching from Orig VIII. Prepare the boarding party," said the voice of Admiral Ackermann.

"Uh oh. Gotta go," said Kale, quickly wiping the soil from his hands and putting on his uniform jacket. He leaned over and gave Ku a quick kiss.

"See you later, Hon."

Ku watched as Kale, clipping his shoulder strap, walked out of the garden.

* * * *

As Kale exited the turbolift to take his place off to the side of the bridge as standby helmsman, Commodore Johnson was just sitting down in the center seat. Having just briefed the Commodore, Ackermann took his own place in the 'off-center' seat just behind and to the left of Johnson.

"On screen," Johnson ordered.

The view quickly changed to that of a freighter that appeared to Kale as probably being several centuries old. It approached the *Arcturus* at half-impulse. It would really have surprised Kale to see the wreck go any faster, though it must have in order to reach as far outside the Origami system as it had.

"Hail them," Johnson said.

The communications officer, Penji Fil, opened the frequency.

"This is the Federation starship *Arcturus* to unidentified freighter. Heave to and prepare to be boarded."

The tranceiver crackled static for a moment, then an oddly accented voice came through the speakers.

"Starship... You must help... We are requesting asylum."

"This is Commodore Eric W. Johnson, Commanding Officer of the *Arcturus*. To whom am I speaking?"

"No talking! You must take us! We seek asylum!"

"We won't be taking anyone anywhere until we understand what is happening."

"What is happening is Orig VIII is a hell. No jobs, no money, no living. **YOU MUST TAKE US!**"

"Orig VIII is currently under sanctions because of your government's aggressive stance toward neighboring Federation member worlds. No vessels may leave the system until those sanctions are recinded."

"You will take us!!"

"Commodore!" exclaimed Idrisu, looking up from his viewer at the science console. "The freighter has increased speed and changed course for a direct intercept. They will collide with us in 5.3 seconds!"

"Shields full forward!" Johnson shouted. "All hands, brace for impact!"

The shields had just locked in place less than a second when the freighter struck the *Arcturus*. The force of the impact sent the crew flying. Kale found himself sprawled on top of Admiral Ackermann, Fil was down on the deck next to the comms console, and even Johnson was jolted onto the helm console.

"Damage report?" the Commodore requested as soon as he returned to the command chair.

"Forward shields have buckled. Damage to forward sections of decks F and G. Minor casualties all over the ship," reported Idrisu.

"Status of the freighter?" asked Ackermann.

After scanning the vicinity for a moment, Idrisu looked up, a sad look on his hairless face.

"Totally destroyed. No survivors."

A grim-faced Commodore Johnson just stared at the viewscreen.

* * * *

"It was so senseless!" Kale said over dinner as he and Ku ate in one of the rec rooms. "They just turned and rammed us! So senseless."

"But painful!" Ku commented, rubbing her left arm which was held tight by a sling. When the Origami freighter had rammed the shields of the *Arcturus*, everything not secured, including the crew, went flying. Ku was one of the many minor injuries, spraining an arm on one of the benches in the botanical garden.

"I only hope we don't have to go through anything like that again," Kale said, shaking his head.

"Yellow alert!" announced the voice of Commodore Johnson over the intercom.

“Not again!” Kale moaned as both he and Ku started heading for the bridge. Once there, Kale took his position at the helm, replacing the ensign who normally manned the station. Ku took her station at tactical.

On the screen, two small spaceships, though they barely deserved that working definition, slowly approached the huge starship. They looked like they had both been built out of scrap, with pressure leaks providing more forward thrust than the weak engines.

“Here we go again,” muttered Johnson. “Mister Kale, stay alert. I don’t want a repeat of our last encounter.”

“Aye, sir.”

“Open hailing frequency. This is the Federation starship *Arcturus*. How can we be of assistance?”

“Asylum.”

Sigh...

“Asylum from what?”

“Orig VIII cannot support its people. We must flee to the stars. To find our sustenance elsewhere.”

“The *Arcturus* is not authorized to take on economic refugees,” stated Johnson.

“Help us!”

“Return to your planet. Your ships are in danger of destruction. We can escort you back as far as orbit.”

“NO!”

“Commodore!” exclaimed Idrisu. “The lead ship is coming at us!”

Mister Kale...!”

“On it, sir,” replied Kale, working the helm controls almost by reflex with one hand, moving the *Arcturus* away from the small alien vessel’s path. With his other hand he locked a tractor beam on the second ship to prevent it from trying the same maneuver as the first.

“Very nice, Mister Kale. My compliments,” said the First Officer, Admiral Ackerman.

The *Arcturus* returned to her previous relative position and locked a second tractor beam on the other Origami vessel.

“*Arcturus* to unidentified ships,” said Commodore Johnson. “You have proven yourselves to be hostile. We have no choice but to take you under tow to Orig VIII and leave you in orbit. Any attempt to leave orbit once the tractors are released will be considered a hostile act and we will be forced to fire upon you.”

Johnson closed the circuit. Ackermann walked up beside the Commodore and whispered, “Eric, you wouldn’t!”

“No, but it should make them think.” Then to Kale he said, “Are the tractor’s secure?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Mister DuLac,” the Commodore added, turning his attention to the navigator next to Kale. “Plot a course for Orig VIII.”

* * * *

Captain’s log, stardate 8495.9:

The situation in the Origami sector has gone from bad to worse. The Arcturus has been on constant yellow alert for the past six days. My crew is tired. I’m tired. And the Origami keep coming. Ship after ship after ship of them!

I’ve contacted Starfleet and requested relief. They report that it will be at least five more days before the starship Farragut can arrive on station.

Meanwhile, we continue to warp all around the sector, intercepting what amount to ‘boat people,’ and returning them unwillingly to the home they no longer wish to be.

I need a vacation.

Johnson, commanding Arcturus, out.

* * * *

“This one is coming right at us!” reported Commander Bael V’ahst Ohhrne’-Dagon, the Efrosonian Chief Science Officer, as he looked up from the viewer.

“What makes them believe that ramming a starship will win them asylum from the Federation?” Kale asked in frustration as he tried to maneuver away from the approaching craft.

“**Shields full!** I wish I knew, Mister Kale,” replied Commodore Johnson.

On the screen, the small refugee ship quickly came closer. Then suddenly the ship bloomed into an expanding fireball.

“What happened?” demanded the Commodore.

“Incoming vessel, bearing 045 mark 30,” reported Bael. “It is a warship.”

“Red alert!” ordered Ackermann.

“Commodore, the commander of the warship is hailing,” reported Arbelo at communications.

“What’s the warship’s current status?” Johnson asked.

Crewman Ku reported from tactical, “Shields and screens are raised, main weaponry is charged.”

“Understood... On screen.”

The view changed to that of a male humanoid with deep reddish skin and long straight dark hair. His eyes were covered by bluish colored ‘Aviator-style’ glasses. The man was obviously Origami.

"I am Comander Voash of the Orig Fleet, Legion 9. We are here to deal with the traitors who dare to abandon their homeworld and no longer require your assistance... or presence. You are no longer needed here."

Johnson stood and walked in front of the helm console.

"This is Commodore Eric W. Johnson of the Federation starship *Arcturus*. Why did you fire upon and destroy that unarmed transport?"

"I will repeat only once... no more," said Voash. "You are no longer needed, nor wanted here. Your Federation has all but declared war on Orig! Leave this system or we will open fire on you!"

"Mister Arbelo, close the frequency," Johnson ordered. With a click and a nod, Arbelo indicated that Voash could neither hear nor see the Commodore.

"Baael, does that ship have the capability to hurt us?"

The Efrosian scanned the opposing vessel, then turned his cold, ice-blue eyes on his commanding officer.

"While their energy and projectile weapons are not anywhere near the class or power of the *Arcturus* weapons systems, they could pose a danger to the ship."

Johnson nodded his head, then flicked a finger toward communications.

"Commander Voash," started the Commodore. "The government of Orig VIII has displayed hostile intent toward its closest interstellar neighbors, member worlds of the Federation. If your government wants this or any other Federation starship to discontinue the blockade of your system, it will disavow its current actions. And be warned, any display of force against this ship will be met with equal or greater retaliation. Johnson, out."

Arbelo closed the circuit and the view on the main screen returned to the image of the Orig warship.

"What do you think they'll do?" Ackermann asked as he stepped over to Johnson.

"I'm not sure. It's in their hands now." Johnson raised both of his hands to his temples as he began to attempt to massage away another of his recurring headaches. "But this killing must end."

* * * *

"Frankly, Admiral, it's ridiculous!" Johnson sputtered to Rear Admiral Murrett on his office desktop viewer. "We've been intercepting ship after ship, all of them requesting asylum lately, and now we've got a warship nose to nose with the *Arcturus*. They've blown three vessels out of space already, and have threatened to do the same to any other ships that attempts to leave their planet. And we can't fire upon them unless they fire at the *Arcturus* first!"

"We know the situation, Eric. The same thing has always happened everytime the economic situation of a society becomes unbearable, from the Vietnamese, Cubans and Haitians of Earth's late 20th century all the way to the Lot-Suas of Vericore II or the Shanami of Ruustai just a few years ago."

"But what could be causing this situation this time?"

"The same old thing, Eric. The government became hostile to nearby civilizations to boost their own power or economy. Then they're blockaded to prevent an escalation to war, and the economic situation they were attempting to boost in the first place simply become even worse."

"Admiral, my crew can't take much more of this. We need a break!"

"*Farragut* is warping to your position as we speak, Eric. You can expect her by 1900 hours, stardate 9096.5."

"It's not just that, Admiral..."

Johnson's sentence was cut off by an announcement over the intercom.

"Commodore Johnson to the bridge, please."

Johnson pressed the intercom on his desk.

"This is Johnson. What is it?"

"We're receiving a signal, apparently broadcast covertly, directed specifically at us from the surface of Orig VIII."

"I'll be right out." Pressing the intercom off, the Commodore turned back to the viewer. "Something's come up, Admiral. I'll contact you later. *Arcturus*, out."

* * * *

An hour later Johnson had assembled his command staff in the main briefing room. Most stared with horror and revulsion at the image on the tabletop tri-viewer.

On the viewer, a weak voice, obviously whispering, described the scenes showing major weapons and 'defense plants' being built where residential neighborhoods once stood, leaving hundreds of residents homeless. Citizens actually being pulled from their homes and off the streets to work like slaves in the new factories to replace those who had been literally worked to death. Whole family savings drained from banks by the government, taxes to pay for the new *wehrmacht*. And all for the greater glory of their exalted Leader, clawing his hold on power.

Johnson, Ackermann, Dr Arcadian, helmsman Kale, mission operations coordinator Solak, security officer Timinar, communications officers Lithir and Arbelo, Marines Copeland and Whitehorse, and science officers Idrisu and Baael Vhahhst O'hrne'-Dagon continued to watch. It was obvious from what they saw that the video's 'producer' was most definitely not a supporter of Orig's vaunted leader.

Finally, to the staff's relief, the video ended.

“Well, there you have it,” Johnson commented to the collected group. “That’s the reason these people are willing to die trying to escape the Origami system. And all we can do is sit, watch, report to Starfleet and hope it gets better for them.”

“Commodore, can we not take some kind of action?” Logan Whitehorse, the Marine corpsman asked with genuine concern.

“You know as well as anyone here that taking any kind of action would be a violation of the Prime Directive, Corporal,” Solak commented to the Terran Native American.

Whitehorse glared at the Vulcan for a moment, grumbling something under his breath before returning his attention to the now-dark viewer.

Johnson continued, “It’s the same story we’ve heard countless times before. A leader in need of glory or purpose to retain his power decides the best means are by declaring an unnecessary war on their neighbors, literally sacrificing his people. This one apparently felt it would bolster his planet’s economy.”

“It appears to have had exactly the opposite effect,” said Copeland as he shook his head.

“Apparently this leader never believed the Federation would take the action it has,” commented Bael in a cold, hard tone.

“Something should be done,” said Dr Arcadian.

“Unfortunately, all we can do... is wait,” replied the Commodore.

* * * *

The next two days passed exactly as everyone had expected. Almost like clockwork, spaceships would appear on the sensors leaving Orig VIII. Those that Voash’s warship did not destroy, the *Arcturus* would take station alongside, Marines would board, search for contraband, and would declare the vessel to be full of more refugees seeking asylum. The *Arcturus* would tow the vessels back to Orig and deposit them in orbit while keeping a sensor lock on Voash the whole time. A few of the ships even became quite familiar to the *Arcturus* crew as they tried to run the blockade two, three, even four or more times.

And through the entire situation, the words of Dr Arcadian haunted Corporal Whitehorse as much as the faces of the people aboard the ships the Marines boarded. “Something should be done.” The time had come to do something. All he needed was the opportunity he knew would soon arrive.

* * * *

“Entering orbit, Commodore,” Kalin Kale reported while trying to stifle a yawn.

“Prepare to cut tractor beam,” Johnson ordered, sympathizing with the young helmsman, as he too had not slept much during the past week.

“Ready to cut power.”

“Tractor off.”

With the flick of a switch, Kale shut off the tractor beam’s power, leaving the battered old freighter in orbit. But before the helmsman could make his report to the Commodore, Lt(JG) Idrisu called for Johnson’s attention.

“Sir, I’ve just registered a power surge in transporter room four.”

“Source?” Johnson asked as he turned toward the science station.

“Unknown. Sensors were partly jammed.”

Johnson pressed a button on his chair arm and said, “Security report to transporter room four. Possible unauthorized intruder.”

“Aye, sir. I’ll check it out,” replied Lt Commander David Maddox.

“Commodore,” Kale said, regaining Johnson’s attention. “The freighter we just returned has broken orbit. Starting to descend toward the planet’s surface. They’ve never done that so quickly before.”

Johnson looked at Admiral Ackermann and said, “Looks like they’re finally getting smart and giving up without a fight.”

* * * *

The bulky freighter, built more for the vacuum of space than atmospheric flight, bobbed and rocked as it made its way toward its landing zone. On the small, cramped bridge, Logan Whitehorse removed what remained of his uniform, carefully folding and packing it into a duffle bag on the deck by his feet.

“I promise you, I’ll do what I can,” he said to the few Origami crew members around him. They smiled silent, grim smiles.

* * * *

“Phobos, you seen Whitehorse?”

Bobby-Jo Hicks quickly strode up to Tristan Phobos just before the security specialist entered his quarters.

“No, ma chere’. Why?”

“Well, ya see, he promised to teach me some emergency triage techniques earlier t’day. I waited in the rec room for him an hour, but no ones seen ‘im.”

Phobos walked inside his quarters, inviting the young Marine communications specialist inside as well. He pressed his intercom.

“Phobos to Majhor Copelaand,” he said in a heavy French accent.

“Copeland here.”

“Majhor, has Corporal Whitehorse checked in with you recently?”

“No,” Copeland replied, sounding annoyed. “In fact, he missed the operations brief I held at 1600.”

Phobos looked at Hicks, concern covering both faces.

“Majhor, I believe we have a meessing man.”

* * * *

At that very moment, the object of the Marine squad’s concern was stelthily making his way with two of the freighter’s passengers away from the landing sight a few dozen kilometers away from Orig’s capital. It had taken almost no time at all for government troops to arrive and arrest the remainder of the freighter’s passengers and summarily executed its crew.

After walking many kilometers, the three men eventually encountered a village. Whitehorse’s Native American skin tone and jet-black hair aided him in melding with the local population. With the help of his newfound companions, he quickly found a place to stay at the local inn, where they began working on a more definitive plan.

* * * *

“We’ve searched decks A through I and half the engineering hull,” Copeland reported to Commodore Johnson by intercom. “And we haven’t found a trace of Whitehorse.”

“If this is tied to that power surge in the transporter room, he could be gone twelve hours already.”

“I have Maddox working on that as we speak, Commodore. If...”

Copeland’s report was cut short by another incoming message.

“This is Maddox in transporter room four. We’ve found something.”

* * * *

A few minutes later, Copeland stood before Johnson in the Commodore’s ready room.

“Maddox found this sub-routine hidden in the virus that blocked us from reading the beamout. It was ‘addressed’ to me and my security code was the only one that would activate it.”

Johnson nodded thoughtfully as he ordered playback. On the viewer, the image of Logan Whitehorse appeared.

“This is to you, Major, and you as well, Commodore Johnson, since I’m sure you too will be watching this as well.”

“I did my best to follow your orders. I tried to fulfil my first duty. But there comes a time when you have to set aside all you’ve spent your life **defending** for what you truly believe in. For that reason, I must resign my position in Starfleet and take this battle directly to Orig VIII’s ‘glorious’ Leader. I’m sorry if I’ve disappointed you, Major, but I have to do this. I can’t live with the alternative. Since I know you can’t condone my actions, you can at least pray for me. Logan Whitehorse, stardate 9096.2, out.”

The viewer went black. Johnson continued to stare at the screen for a moment, then closed his eyes. Without even looking at the Tamurillian Marine Major, he said, “Copeland, keep this quiet, but ready a team to go after Whitehorse.” He then pressed his intercom.

“Bridge, this is Commodore Johnson. Get me Rear Admiral Murrett on subspace.”

* * * *

Night finally fell over the small town. Unnoticed, Whitehorse made his way down the building’s fire escape, pausing only to let the military patrol cruiser pass below, its searchlight passing mere centimeters below his feet.

He felt the reassuring weight of the pack on his back shift as he jumped down the final flight to the ground. Meeting his companions, who had remained hidden in a nearby alley with almost a dozen more Origami. As Whitehorse joined them, they all started making their way on foot toward the capital city of Orig VIII. The former member of Starfleet figured in his head that the group should arrive at the city around two hours before dawn. Plenty of time to do what must be done.

* * * *

“Absolutely not!”

Johnson stared, mouth agape, at the image of Admiral Murrett on the viewer. The Admiral continued as if explaining to a child.

“If you send an armed team, it’ll be just the piece of evidence Oig needs to prove their contention that the Federation is invading their sovereignty and bullying its way into the planet’s personal affairs. And you can’t afford to lose any more of your people on the planet. As it currently stands, Whitehorse will undoubtedly be captured. And when he is, if he is identified as a member of your crew, you can still deny knowledge of his actions, whatever they might have been.”

“But, Admiral...!”

“You have your orders, Commodore. Continue your mission as stated. Starfleet, out.”

Johnson took a series of deep breaths to calm himself, then turned to his intercom.

“Johnson to Copeland.”

“Copeland here. We’re ready to...”

“Stand down, Major,” Johnson stated.

“Stand...? But, Commodore...”

“You have your orders, Major! Stand down.”

The channel remained silent for a moment before Copeland’s voice, obviously spoken through clenched teeth, replied, “Yes, sir.”

* * * *

The palace was even less guarded than Whitehorse and his new followers had prepared for. Once again looking through the macronoculars, Whitehorse studied the guards simple patrol patterns, then quietly yet quickly approached the wall where his makeshift troops waited. Word of a new rebel leader, one who had no fear of the Leader of Orig, had spread like wildfire before their journey. By the time the capital was in sight, Whitehorse’s forces numbered close to a thousand.

“I read two guards patrolling the wall on this side of the compound,” Whitehorse announced to Malchek, the first of the Origami to side with him aboard the freighter and now the former-Marine’s top lieutenant. “Two more are on the far side behind the palace, with sixteen life forms inside, but from the movement patterns, I deduce only five of them are guards. The remainder must be servants of some kind.”

Malchek nodded in agreement, then passed the word to other groups staged at various points around the palace complex. The signal, a single shrill whistle, was sounded and immediately the two guards patrolling the wall above Whitehorse fell, victims of the silent but deadly ancient Origami blow-pistol.

Moments later, ropes grappled to the top of the wall and one by one, lead by Logan Whitehorse, the rebels scaled the battlement.

* * * *

“Commodore, something is happening,” reported Lt(JG) Kalin Kale. “Commander Voash’s warship is retreating back toward Orig.”

“What? Why?” Johnson started to ask, watching the Origami warship slowly recede toward the planet.

“Commodore, we’re intercepting a planetwide broadcast from Orig VIII,” reported Arbelo at communications.

Johnson exchanged a concerned glance with the communications officer before ordering, “On screen.”

The view of the distant planet on the screen changed to the image of a lone Origami man about thirty years of age. While he was dirty and his clothes were torn, he looked otherwise unharmed.

“Citizens of Orig!” he started. “Our revolution is a success! Our once feared and hated leader is dead and we now stand at the dawn of a new age under our new, benevolent leader.”

Puzzled glances were exchanged among the *Arcturus* bridge crew. Meanwhile, the spokesman continued.

“People of Orig, I, Malchek of the Torrain Province present to you our new leader... Logan the First!”

The image changed to that of the new leader as he walked out among the crowd of thousands of his followers. The jaws of every person on the *Arcturus* bridge dropped in unison. Logan the First, formerly known as Marine Corporal Logan Whitehorse, raised his hands and accepted the adulation of his new followers. Johnson’s face became set like stone as he spoke only three words.

“Get me Starfleet.”

* * * *

A week had passed and it had become apparent to the *Arcturus* crew that the mass exodus from Orig has ceased. No ships had left the planet’s orbit since the announcement that King Logan the Benefactor had immediately stopped the military’s aggressive overtures toward both its interstellar neighbors and its own populous, spreading the former leader’s gathered wealth back among the people of Orig. Throughout that time, the *Arcturus* remained on station and monitored the situation.

“Admiral Ackermann, the *Hood* is hailing,” reported Penji Fil. “Rear Admiral Murrett would like to meet with Commodore Johnson and Major Copeland as soon as possible.”

Ackermann kept his eyes on the image of the approaching Constitution-class starship, sent specifically for the new situation that had arisen, simply saying, “Acknowledge the signal, then notify the Commodore and Major.”

“Aye, Admiral.”

Moments later the turbolift doors snapped open into Johnson’s ready room located aft of the bridge. As the Rear Admiral walked into the room, Copeland snapped to attention and Johnson stood respectfully.

“This is a fine situation you’ve put us in, Johnson,” the Admiral stated after the trio had taken their seats. Johnson’s mouth opened to respond but he was cut off as Murrett continued.

“Not only does a member of your crew go AWOL, but he kills a hostile planetary government leader and starts a revolution.

A God-damned revolution!”

Murrett fell silent. Unwilling to speak for a moment, both Johnson and Copeland simply looked at the Admiral. Finally the Major spoke.

“So what do we do?”

“Do?” Murrett said incredulously. “Why, we don’t **do** anything. Your reason for being here, to blockage and sanction the planet, is no longer necessary. Orig has sued for peace with the Federation. And like it or not, the Origami have accepted that idiot Whitehorse as their new king. There’s nothing left to do but go home and keep your mouths shut.”

“Excuse me, Admiral?!?” Johnson asked.

“How many of your crew know about this situation?”

Johnson thought for a moment, then answered, “Myself, Admiral Ackermann, the Alpha shift bridge crew...”

As Johnson’s list ceased, Copeland added, “A few guys on the squad, including Hicks, Maddox and Phobos.”

Murrett seemed somewhat satisfied. He looked Johnson square in the eye and stated, “Get this straight, Commodore, and get it good. This incident **never** happened. Make sure your crew understands that! Starfleet has no knowledge of what transpired here except that Orig ceased hostilities and the *Arcturus* was withdrawn. The *Farragut* is being sent to relieve your station and monitor events here. In a couple of weeks, maybe less, they will likewise be recalled. Is that clear, Commodore?”

“Crystal, sir.”

Copeland nodded in agreement. At that, Murrett stood and walked out of the ready room. Minutes later, the *Hood* warped out of the Origami sector and the Commodore started the process of making sure the news of recent events in the Origami Sector would never be told.

* * * *

Captain’s personal log, stardate 8500.1:

Arcturus is now on course at warp 6 to the Felonia Sector for a few days of star mapping. We leave behind former Starfleet Marine Logan Whitehorse, who has been listed in the ship’s records as MIA. I hope he realizes the severity of the situation he has placed himself in. He has a lot of long, dangerous work ahead of him. All of our prayers, all of us who know, are with him, and I really hope for his own sake he made the right choice. Because now... there’s no turning back.

All hail King Logan the Benefactor.

Johnson, commanding Arcturus, out.

The End...

...or is it?

Comments by the author (Fall 1997): You may not comprehend what it has taken for this story to finally reach publication.

I first started writing this story back in early 1993, when I lived in Bayside, Queens, NYC and worked for the NYC Department of Transportation, back when I was a member of the chapter *USS Arcturus NCC-1807-A*. Originally meant to be a comment on the issue of ‘Boat People,’ a big topic at the time with the Haitians and Cubans, but told in a science-fiction context, something Star Trek (especially the Original Series) always did quite well.

Halfway through the story it was put aside and packed away with the rest of my other ‘Starfleet’ and ‘Federation’ paperwork during one of my many almost-yearly moves, where it was quickly forgotten.

Flash forward to December 1995... I had left the *Arcturus-A* to form the *USS Sarek* and later joined the US Navy. It was while at Submarine School that I started forming a new fan club chapter, the *USS Dauntless*. After finishing Sub School, while at home on leave before reporting to my first sea-going command, I came across the papers I had so carefully ‘stored’ in my parent’s basement several years earlier. Among them was the first half of “**Ship After Ship After Ship...**” I liked how well the beginning worked so much that I decided I wanted to finish the story.

Unfortunately, after more than two years, I could not for the life of me remember in what direction I was heading with the story or how it was supposed to end.

So, rather than the commentary on refugees I originally intended, I instead present here a comment on the Prime Directive and the crisis of conscience it would almost certainly produce when it must be enacted.

What would you do in this situation? Follow the letter of the law and obey the regulations? Or take your fate into your own hands to help those you see in need of help? This story is but one possible answer.

Intriguing question, isn’t it?

PJK - 06 September 1997