

STO ACADEMY

Gre'thor's Hand

AN ORIGINAL STORY BASED ON STAR TREK ONLINE

Attilio

Stardate 87310.7

The I.K.S. veS baqto' fired a volley of torpedoes at the Herald's Quas Cruiser. Each one pounded the hull in sequence with the last hitting critical systems. The cruiser exploded into two large chunks with smaller pieces being launched in multiple directions. Numerous secondary explosions continued to break the ship apart.

On the bridge of the veS baqto', Vice Admiral P'Triq stood from her chair and stared at the explosion on what was left of the view screen. The bridge was in shambles from the long battle. They had come up against this Quas Cruiser and two Baltim Raiders which they believed were an advanced scout group. By the time the battle was over, the veS baqto's shields had failed, consoles spit out sparks, the fire suppression system was working overtime, wires and bulkheads hung from all over, and lighting in the ship was dimmed. None of this stopped the Klingon crew led by their Romulan commander from achieving and celebrating victory.

"Set a course for Deep Space 9," P'Triq ordered. "We'll need to make repairs and celebrate. The first round of blood wine is on me!" The bridge crew cheered louder.

Their first officer, Maradith, looked up from her console, "Admiral there was a strange reading on internal sensors momentarily but it is gone now. I can't get an accurate scan."

"Helm, delay going to warp," she tapped the console on her chair, "P'Triq to engineering. What is the status of internal sensors?"

Kihr's voice crackled over the damaged comm system, "internal sensors are functioning at 13%. We... Heralds!" The comm cut out and P'Triq turned to Maradith who was studying her monitor. "Report!"

Maradith looked up, "The readings aren't accurate but it seems like there are Herald lifesigns in engineering. They must have come on board before their ship was destroyed."

"Dispatch a security team." P'Triq pulled the disruptor from its holster, "I'm going down there. Maradith you have the bridge."

As she turned to walk to the turbolift, Herald portals opened around the bridge, one directly in front of P'Triq. Her disruptor was knocked from her hand by a Thrall who was wielding a staff. As the staff slashed towards her head, P'Triq rolled out of the way and picked up a nearby bat'leth. She wasn't as skilled with a bat'leth as some of the Klingon warriors on board, but she had enough training to take on any Herald.

Holding the bat'leth at both ends, she deflected the Thrall's attacks one by one with ease. Using the left side of the bat'leth she blocked an incoming attack, then swung the other side towards the Thrall's head. It jumped back to dodge the attack and P'Triq used that moment to drop her left hand down and hold the bat'leth from one side like a sword.

The Herald was now on the defense but managed to defend against the incoming attacks. Then P'Triq grabbed the center of the bat'leth and pushed forward knocking the Thrall against a bulkhead. In a scream that would rival any Klingon, P'Triq slashed at the Thrall's arm causing it to drop the staff, then struck again from the other side to deal the final blow.

She spun to find the next enemy and saw similar battles throughout the bridge as well as disruptor blasts filling the room. The Heralds were out numbered so P'Triq made her way to where she lost the disruptor. She carried the bat'leth in her left hand and picked up the disruptor in her right. Taking cover behind a pillar, she fired at any Herald that were in a clear line of sight.

The number of Heralds on the bridge was dwindling down. P'Triq ordered the crew to secure the bridge, handed her bat'leth to one of the officers, and then entered the turbolift. As it traversed the floors towards engineering, the turbolift made an odd buzzing sound which was bothersome to her sensitive Romulan hearing. She assumed it was damaged in the battle.

As it neared Engineering P'Triq took cover on the right side of the turbolift and waited for the doors to open. When they did she peered out expecting to see Heralds lying in wait. Instead she saw a dimly lit corridor, clear signs of battle damage, and Klingons laying on the deck motionless. She slowly exited the turbolift with her weapon at the ready and made her way down the unusually quiet corridor towards main engineering's doors. Upon reaching them she used the console to open the doors and saw the last of the Heralds being struck down by Kihir, the chief engineer. "Status," she asked as she entered engineering.

Kihir approached P'Triq, "engineering is secure ma'am."

A voice came over the comm, "Maradith to P'Triq."

P'Triq walked to a comm unit that was partially hanging off the wall and pressed a button to respond. "Go ahead."

"Bridge is secure. What is the status in Engineering?"

"Same. Lay in a course for Deep Space 9 and go to warp right away. While en route I want each deck searched and secured. Deep Space 9 does not need any Herald stowaways."

"Understood," the comm chirped signaling the line had closed.

P'Triq faced Kihir "repair the internal sensors. I want them fully operational within the hour. I'll be on the bridge. Notify me when they're ready."

Before reaching Deep Space 9 Kihir and his engineering team had repaired the internal sensors. Through the deck by deck search and the use of the sensors, P'Triq was confident that no more Heralds hid within the ship. They were now approaching Deep Space 9 and the communications officer reported that they were cleared for docking. After putting in a repair request with the station a few of the crew, including P'Triq and Maradith, went to Quark's bar.

It was an all too familiar sight that brought back memories of the Dominion war to those who lived through it. The Dabo table was surrounded by patrons trying to win some extra Latinum or simply enjoying the company of Leeta, even though she was just a hologram now. Starfleet and Klingon officers sat and stood around tables drinking and enjoying some much needed R&R. Morn, who had been a regular for many years, was captivating a small group of patrons with a tale about one of his many unbelievable, yet true, adventures.

The crew of the veS baqto' took a few tables in the far corner. P'Triq went up to Hadron, the bartender who was currently on duty, and ordered a round of bloodwine for her officers, and a glass of Romulan Ale for herself. She distributed the glasses and raised her own, "cheers to the finest crew in the Klingon Empire and the STOA Fleet!" The Klingons' cheer sounded loud enough to reach Ops.

Maradith began telling the tale of their glorious battle against the Heralds. "We were surrounded by 10... no 20 of their ships! The odds would be against any normal crew but we are Klingon warriors of the veS baqto'!" P'Triq cleared her throat and Maradith looked over, "with the only Romulan captain who has the heart and soul of a Klingon!"

One of the officers yelled out, "but can't stomach a glass of bloodwine! Bring another glass of Romulan Ale for our captain!" They all laughed. The crew knew for small victories she enjoyed Romulan Ale as much as they enjoyed bloodwine, but they weren't fooled. Her crew witnessed her enjoying bloodwine and outdrinking some well known Klingons. Still, they often joked with P'Triq about her being the only Romulan on a ship full of Klingons.

She, of course, always had a response. "And bring a glass for my friend here. Unless he is too much of a coward to drink something this strong." Again the crew laughed. Somehow this felt like home to her, more so than on New Romulus.

Once the laughter subsided Maradith continued the story as other patrons began to listen in. "We destroyed half of their ships in a matter of minutes without taking damage! Those petaQ didn't know what hit them! Then the Admiral had the brilliant idea of using the tractor beam to tow one ship into another." She slammed her fist on the table, "and like that two more were gone. Eight more remained but were no match for us. A fierce battle took place until only ourselves and the final Herald ship remained. We sliced through them as easily as a bowl of gagh!"

Hadron walked over with a tray of drinks, handed them out, and said, "I will never understand the Klingon need to exaggerate. As I heard it, there was only three ships." One of the Klingons snarled at him and he slinked away in fear.

"The battle was not over yet. A thousand Heralds boarded our vessel! Oh it was a sight to behold. Klingons throughout the ship battled for control! You should have seen our captain use a bat'leth, she could have rivaled Kahless himself! She defeated 50 of them on her own! It was a glorious battle! One worthy enough to ensure entry to Stovokor for any Klingon!"

Kihr, who had been sitting at a nearby table yelled out, "and even for a Romulan who drinks Romulan Ale," and they laughed again.

P'Triq stood up and faced him, "Kihr I have no plans of going to Stovokor. I wouldn't want to smell you for all eternity!" The Klingons banged on the table in enjoyment. Then P'Triq's communicator chirped. She placed her glass on the table and walked to a quiet corner. "Go ahead."

It was one of the officers from the bridge of the veS baqto', "ma'am we have just received orders from the Chancellor himself. We are to return to QonoS immediately."

"What are the status of our repairs?"

"Still underway."

"Did you mention this to the Chancellor?"

"Yes. His exact response was 'do not worry yourselves with repairs. Return immediately'."

"Understood. Recall all shore parties. We'll depart as soon as everyone is on board." P'Triq gathered her crew from Quarks and they returned to the veS baqto'. Once on the bridge she awaited confirmation that the crew was on board and that Deep Space 9 gave the clearance to disembark. A short while later they were at warp and headed for the Klingon homeworld.

"Admiral, we're entering standard orbit around Qo'noS. We are receiving a hail from the surface. It's Chancellor J'mpok."

"I'll take it in my office." P'Triq exited the bridge and walked down the corridor to her office. She entered the room, sat at her desk, tapped a few commands on the console and J'mpok appeared on the screen. "Chancellor it is an honor. What can I do for you?"

"I need you to beam to the surface and meet me in the council chambers. We have an important matter to discuss."

"I'll beam right down." He cut the connection before she had a chance to say anything else. P'Triq returned to the bridge, "Maradith I'm beaming down. You have command." Maradith confirmed the order and then P'Triq left for the surface.

A while later she was walking into the council chambers where J'mpok was waiting. A long red carpet with two yellow stripes on either side covered the length of the room from the entrance to the top of the steps where the Chancellor's chair was placed. Statues lined both

sides of the room, and a large emblem for the Klingon Empire hung above the Chancellor's chair.

P'Triq approached J'mpok and noticed that his facial expression was unusually serious. Clearly this was not a social call. They exchanged greetings and then he said, "P'Triq I have some unfortunate news. The wars that we've been fighting are taking their toll on the Empire. Resources are running low and our enemies' technology is superior to our own. We no longer have the resources to refit old ships. The High Council has made the decision to retire the veS baqto'."

"You cannot do that! It is a fine ship. Once we complete repairs it will be battle ready again!"

"The decision has been made. We need the resources to repair and construct new ships with the latest technology to combat the Iconians."

"What of my crew?"

"They will be reassigned to necessary postings, some may even make it aboard these new vessels."

"You dishonor my ship and its crew!"

"It is also honorable to give up one's life for another. That is what the veS baqto' will be doing. As for the crew, they will live to fight another day. Their exploits under your command have surely earned them a place in Stovokor."

"And what of me? Will I be given another command within the Empire?"

"That is yet to be determined. You have proven yourself in the eyes of the Empire, but many influential Klingons still dislike the idea of a Romulan in command of a Klingon vessel."

P'Triq was burning with anger. "So I am to return to New Romulus and wait? Or should I simply enjoy the comforts of Qo'noS?"

"For now, you are to return to your ship and notify your crew. The veS baqto' will dock with the shipyard and its crew will disembark. Then we will talk again."

P'Triq reluctantly did as she was ordered. Upon returning she made a ship wide announcement. Needless to say, some of the crew were infuriated by this decision. The veS baqto' proceeded to dock at the shipyard. For the next few hours the senior staff oversaw the crew disembarking. Small groups left the ship one at a time until only P'Triq and Maradith remained on the bridge where they stood in silence.

Maradith was the first to speak. "Admiral, it has been an honor to serve with you. Perhaps one day we will meet on the battlefield again."

"We will my friend. This is not the end."

When they returned to Qo'noS, P'Triq decided to visit a bar not far from the Great Hall. Outside of it was an arena where soldiers of the Empire would test their strength and abilities against each other. Normally she would watch such contests but this wasn't the time for it. She entered the small bar which was lined with tables and chairs. A bloodwine fountain sat in the middle of the bar.

She heard the voices of crewmembers from the veS baqto' telling tales of their adventures and drinking in honor of their once great ship. In the corner P'Triq saw Maradith drinking alone so she joined her. Maradith looked up at P'Triq, "we should be out there fighting."

"What would you have me do? J'Mpok gave his order."

"There are reports coming in from all over the galaxy about the war and yet we do nothing! The finest crew in the Empire and members of the STOA fleet reduced to this!" In her anger she knocked her glass to the floor and stood up. The bar quieted and everyone stared at Maradith. She looked around and then walked out. P'Triq's eyes followed her as she exited.

She understood Maradith's frustration even though she was a Romulan. Klingons should not be sitting idle while there was a war to be fought. She rose from her chair, exited the bar too, and headed straight in the direction of the Great Hall. It was time for answers.

She approached the Great Hall and pushed the doors open. In the distance she saw J'Mpok talking to some of the council members who turned around to see what was happening. P'Triq called out to him as she walked closer, her voice filling the room with anger.

"How dare you barge in here," one of the council members said as he positioned himself to get in P'Triq's way. As she neared him, P'Triq reached out and pushed the Klingon to the side, then stood toe to toe with Chancellor J'Mpok. "I demand to know what is being done with my crew and my ship!"

J'mpok was visibly angered at this intrusion. "You come in here and make demands? Romulan petaQ! I should slay you where you stand!"

"You can certainly try! So either slay the only Romulan captain who was hand chosen by the Alliance to command a Klingon vessel based on your personal endorsement, or give me the answers I seek!"

"Bah! Mind your tongue Romulan. You cannot hide behind the Alliance forever." P'Triq continued to stare at him, the anger in her eyes was piercing his soul. Suddenly she reached for the d'k tahg at her side, turned slightly to the right with her arm outstretched and the blade pointing to a council member's throat who was preparing to attack her from behind. "Enough," J'mpok exclaimed, "leave us." The council members walked out and P'Triq sheathed her blade.

When the room was empty J'mpok sat in his chair and looked at her intently, "what I said was true. The veS baqto' is an old ship. We need the resources for technologically advanced ships to fight the Iconians. What I failed to tell you is that there are those in the Empire who believe you and your crew are a dangerous mix. A Romulan in command of Klingon warriors was never a popular idea. They fear that the respect you have earned will corrupt the Klingons under your command, and possible the Empire as a whole."

"This is all political? Where is the honor in that?"

"P'Triq these are dangerous times. Everyone is looked upon with a suspicious eye, most of all the Romulans. Before the destruction of Romulus we knew where all Romulans stood. Now no one is certain if a Romulan is part of the Republic, or a Tal Shiar agent being led by the Iconians."

"Is that how I am viewed? Have I not proven my worth? My honor? My loyalty? You speak of Iconians and their minions. My crew fended off a Herald precursor to an invasion. Shall we not be prepared to defend any Alliance installations in nearby sectors and utilize all available ships?"

Before J'mpok had a chance to respond, a member of the Honor Guard entered the hall. His uniform was black with silver armor plates on his shoulders, arms, and legs. From his shoulder pads a long red cap hung with the Klingon Empire's emblem embroidered on it. The guard approached J'mpok and stopped at the bottom of the steps. He placed a fist over his chest and bowed his head. He then looked up and said "Chancellor I have important news," he turned to look at P'Triq, "private news."

J'mpok waved the soldier over to the throne, "come closer. P'Triq you may wait there."

The guard approached the throne and spoke in whispers. J'mpok nodded his head. The guard leaned a little closer, pulled out a kut'luch and jammed it into J'mpok's chest. He backed away, tapped the comm on his wrist and beamed out. P'Triq watched in horror. It happened too quickly and she was too far away to stop it.

She activated her comm unit and hailed local security. Within moments they arrived with a medical team. Kadak, who was in charge of this security detail, approached P'Triq. As she gave him the details of the events she noticed the suspicion in his eyes. It was becoming clear now. What J'mpok had said was true. Due to the fact that she was Romulan, many in the Empire did not trust her.

"May I go now," P'Triq asked.

"Go, but do not leave Qo'noS. We may have further," Kadak paused for a moment as if to think of the proper word to not directly accuse her, then said "questions."

When she was clear of the Great Hall, P'Triq activated her comm unit. After a brief moment of silence the familiar voice of her first office came through.

P'Triq and Maradith met in a dark corner of the bar that they had visited earlier. She quickly told Maradith the tale of what transpired minutes earlier. "I need you to get access to the veS baqto'," she said. "Gather as many of the crew as possible. If the assassin beamed to a ship we must pick up the trail before it is too late."

"We should not get involved."

"If J'mpok dies then those who do not trust me will find a way place the blame on me and I will be dishonored. I must find the assassin and bring him to justice."

"Spoken like a true Klingon. If only more Romulans were like you then perhaps our people would have been allies years ago. What will you tell the crew?"

"That we are doing our duty to protect the empire."

"Very well. I will see what I can do. Meet me in the alley behind the bar in one hour."

The hour went by quickly. P'Triq had spent most of it waiting in the alley going over the events and trying to understand why a Klingon would attack J'mpok. She heard footsteps approaching and spun around to see that it was Maradith. "Everything is ready," she said. "I have secured a shuttle for us. If we use the transporter they'll be alerted that you beamed to the station."

"Very well. What news do you have of J'mpok?"

"He is alive but has yet to awaken. The wound is extensive. Let's not waste any more time. Take this. It is a mobile holoemitter that will disguise you as an engineer. It should let you slip on board our ship unnoticed. I'll accompany you under the guise of inspecting the ship. Once onboard we can beam up our available crew members. They will be gathering in secluded areas."

P'Triq took the holoemitter and activated it. In a shimmer of light her form changed to that of a Klingon engineer. The two of them made their way to the nearest shuttle bay. They took a shuttle to the shipyard and after docking they walked to the bay where the veS baqto' was located. So far there were no complications.

As they approached the airlock a Gorn security guard stopped them. "You may not pass. This ship is locked down."

P'Triq was ready to speak but Maradith stopped her to protect her cover and stepped forward. "Lieutenant, do you know what is happening on the surface?"

"I do," the Gorn responded.

"Do you want to add to the Empire's troubles by not allowing us to fulfill our duty? Or would you rather I contact the medics and have them force the Chancellor awake so he can confirm his orders? I'm sure he will be glad you risked his life for such a trivial matter as a ship inspection."

The Gorn snarled and bared his pointed teeth. He stepped aside. "Proceed, but do not take long." He entered a passphrase into the nearby console and the doors unlocked.

P'Triq and Maradith walked in and when the door closed behind them Maradith locked it. P'Triq turned off the holomitter, returning to her former self. Maradith looked at her, "I liked you better as a Klingon."

"I liked it better when I was the one to make officers fearful. Get to the transporter room and start beaming up the crew. I'll return to the bridge and engage essential systems that won't raise suspicion." Maradith nodded and they parted ways.

As Maradith beamed groups on board she ordered them to man their stations and await orders from the bridge. A few of the engineers were ordered to other transporters to assist with the beam up and relay the same orders.

After the crew was on board Maradith called the bridge. "Admiral, we only have a skeleton crew, but we'll fly. They are awaiting your command. I'm returning to the bridge now."

P'Triq sat in her chair as if it was the first time. She looked around the bridge at the few stations that had officers and ordered a ship wide hail. "Attention crew of the veS baqto'. I am certain that by now you have heard the news on the surface. I witnessed the assassination attempt on our Chancellor and saw the petaQ escape. We will track him down and bring him to justice for the Empire! There is no greater glory than what we are about to do.

"This crew has honored the name of the ves baqto' and I ask that you do so one last time. Today is a good day to die!" She cut the comm and began giving orders. "Scan for any warp trails that left the system within the past 2 hours. Note their direction and ship configuration. Download the sensor logs from nearby satellites. Lay in a course for the nearest nebula that will hide us. Engage warp engines and go to warp as soon as possible. Release the docking clamps. Break them if you have to."

The ship came to life as the crew prepared for their mission. Maradith entered the bridge and manned her station. They were being hailed by the shipyard but ignored it. The docking clamps began to release but snapped closed when the officers in the shipyard overwrote the command. The helm officer brought the engines to full power and the ship began to rock as the docking clamps started to give way. P'Triq ordered every bit of power to be rerouted to the engines.

Me'vekk, the tactical officer, looked up from his console. "I'm detecting two bird-of-prey approaching our position."

Maradith walked over to the helm, pushed the officer out of his chair, taking her place. She tapped the console and the ship violently rocked in every direction. The docking clamps began to snap and then after a few moments the veS baqto' was free. As the two bird-of-prey closed in, Maradith took the ship away from the planet at full impulse. When they were in range the ships activated their tractor beams, but were too late. In a streak of light the veS baqto' went to warp and evaded capture.

They took refuge in a nearby nebula which masked them from sensors. For a number of hours the crew analyzed the sensor readings from Qo'noS and finally found a lead. Among the usual traffic around Qo'noS a single DujHod Chariot warped out shortly after the assassination attempt.

"How certain are we that this is our assassin," Maradith, who had command of the bridge at the time, asked.

Me'vekk looked at her unconvincingly, "not very. Although it is the only ship that could be piloted by a single person. Plus we can eliminate most other ships."

"Let us hope your assumption is correct. Calculate the heading and plot a course. Go to maximum warp as soon as you're ready."

They calculated a heading which took them close to the Pheben System. As they approached the helm officer announced their arrival and P'Triq returned to the bridge. "We still have damage from the battle with the Heralds," she said. "Enable cloak. We should avoid any unnecessary fights. Scan for any ships in the system."

Me'vekk accessed his console and ran long range scans of the system. A single DujHod Chariot with no lifesigns on board was detected orbiting a small class D moon. The veS baqto' approached it and began scanning the surface. A small structure was detected in the northern region with only one lifesign - a Klingon.

"Have a security team meet me in transporter room 2. Maradith, you'll join me with the raiding party," P'Triq ordered. They met the security team in the transporter room and beamed to the interior of the structure, near the target's location. The corridor was dimly lit and filled with Klingon decor. In the distance the flicker of a torch could be seen coming from what must have been the open door to a crew member's quarters.

"Keep alert," Maradith said. "There are no known Klingon installations in this system."

"It seems to be abandoned," P'Triq said as the team slowly walked towards their target's location with disruptors drawn. When they were within a few meters P'Triq took point. Upon reaching the door they entered with weapons drawn and pointed at the Klingon warrior that stood before them. His arms were folded and did not seem as if there presence was a surprise.

“P’Triq I am surprised to see you here. I was certain you would have been arrested,” the Klingon said.

“You are coming with us,” she retorted.

The Klingon reached behind his back and pulled his bat’leth out. “I think not.”

P’Triq smiled and bared her teeth as she holstered her disruptor. She held out her right arm and one of the security officers handed her his bat’leth. The raiding party made room for the duel that was about to unfold.

P’Triq and the Klingon circled each other, studying one another and looking for a vulnerability. When the moment was right she held the bat’leth like a sword and swung for the Klingon’s head. Raising the bat’leth above his head, the Klingon blocked her attack with ease. He pushed her off then went on the offensive.

She battled many Klingons before but this one was different. Each attack that she blocked seemed to have a strength behind it that was unlike any Klingon’s. P’Triq could not be distracted by that now. The Klingon attacked her left side, and with great skill she flipped the bat’leth over her left arm so it was pointed straight up and protecting her left side. With a loud clank the Klingon’s bat’leth met hers and deflected off.

P’Triq punched the Klingon with the base of her palm, knocking him back a few feet but he was seemingly unphased by the assault. Clearly brains would have to win this battle. She allowed the Klingon to attack her, deflecting each blow and waiting for an opening. The Klingon swings for her head and P’Triq jumps out of the way. The bat’leth lands on the table and is stuck long enough for P’Triq to kick the Klingon in the stomach. He jumps back and pulled the bat’leth with him.

She crouches down and swept his legs from under him, causing him to fall on his back. P’Triq swings to deal the final blow but the Klingon rolls to the side and jumps up ready to continue fighting. He lunged at P’Triq with all his might sending her flying backwards and into a console. Her bat’leth fell to the floor and sparks from the console shot in every direction. The Klingon slowly walked over, lifted the bat’leth over his head and swung down.

Just as the tip of the blade was about to bury itself into P’Triq, she shoved a d’k tahg into his stomach, stopping him in his tracks. A look of shock appeared on his face as he backed away and dropped to the floor. P’Triq stared down at the petaQ who betrayed the Empire. She began to walk passed him but out of the corner of her eye she saw movement. The Klingon’s mouth opened and a small creature emerged.

P’Triq looked around and found a small container nearby. She used it to trap the Bluegill that had taken control of this warrior and forced him to attack their Chancellor. The raiding party that accompanied her looked on in shock. She turned to them, “we have what we came for. Let us take this body and return to the ship.”

They signaled the veS baqto' and in moments a shimmer of red light appeared around them. When they materialized in the transporter room P'Triq ordered the security officers to contain the Bluegill and bring the dead Klingon to their sickbay. She would need to return this to Qo'noS as evidence of the true assassin. She also ordered that the DujHod Chariot be brought on board.

Maradith supervised the security arrangements for the shuttle while P'Triq returned to the bridge. She knew now that they must return to Qo'noS. The evidence she had would have to be enough to prove that she did not attack J'mpok. As soon as she arrived on the bridge she ordered a ship wide announcement.

"Brothers and sisters we will be returning to Qo'noS. All of you risked your lives to help bring J'mpok's assassin to justice and we have done just that. It is unfortunate that a fellow Klingon warrior was taken over by one of the Iconian's pawns, but this is proof that we will not let them win! I do not know what welcome will be awaiting us on Qo'noS, but I do know that we took the only action that honor and glory would allow. We are warriors of the Klingon Empire and we will march in to Qo'noS with our heads held high!"

The ship filled with cheers of Klingons warriors! Maradith, who was still in the shuttle bay, was glad to see that her friend still commanded the respect and loyalty of the crew.

On the bridge P'Triq gave her orders. "Plot a course back to Qo'noS and proceed to maximum warp when ready." She stared at the view screen as the dots of light in the sky transformed into long white streaks.

As P'Triq had suspected, the Honor Guard had been on their trail since they stole this ship. It didn't take long for them to detect another Klingon vessel on an intercept course. "Admiral, they are hailing us," the comm officer announced.

P'Triq stood up from her chair, "on screen."

"Vice Admiral P'Triq this is Captain Morg of the G'roth. You are hereby ordered to surrender your vessel and prepare to be boarded."

"Captain, we have captured J'mpok's assassin and are returning his remains to Qo'noS."

Morg cut her off, "drop out of warp or we will open fire."

P'Triq looked around the bridge at her officers. They had only one goal now, to return home. "Captain Morg, allow me to present our findings. You will see I am telling the truth."

"This is your final warning."

"Helm drop out of warp."

"A wise decision."

"Raise shields and bring weapons online. We will not allow anyone to prevent us from completing our mission!"

Morg furrowed his brow in anger. "You are making a mistake Romulan!"

"You, Captain, made the mistake of threatening the crew of the veS baqto' and delaying our return to Qo'noS." The screen went black and the stars appeared as the ship transitioned to impulse.

P'Triq turned to her communications officer with a puzzled look, wondering what happened to the communication. The comm officer lifted her head high, "he was annoying me."

P'Triq smiled and nodded, then gave battle orders to the crew. "Turn us to face the incoming ship. Full power to shields. Target their weapons and engines. We will only disable them. No warriors will die this day."

"They have dropped out of warp 8000 kellicams away and closing."

"Begin firing as soon as they are in range."

Me'vekk's console displayed the distance to their target. It counted down as the two ships approached each other. "They are 1000 kellicams away," he announced.

"Slow to one quarter impulse and turn 45 degrees to port," P'Triq ordered.

"Admiral, they've stopped at 700 kellicams." Me'vekk looked at P'Triq in shock, "they have warped away."

"What is their heading," P'Triq asked.

"Calculating." He tapped his console before looking up. "They are returning to Qo'noS."

Maradith, who had returned to the bridge moments before, walked over to P'Triq, "perhaps the Chancellor has returned to the land of the living and cleared your name."

"Admiral!" The communications officer looked up in horror, "we have just received general orders from Fleet Admiral Attilio. He is calling for any STOA ships in range of Qo'noS to assist in their defense. Heralds are invading."

"The alliance must have recalled Captain Morg. Helm bring us back on course for Qo'noS. Divert every bit of power to the warp drive. Hail the Fleet Admiral."

A few moments later Fleet Admiral Attilio Varrak appeared on screen. He and P'Triq served together for months in the STOA fleet and quickly became close friends. She was a

Romulan who felt the lure of the Klingon Empire. He was a Vulcan-Human hybrid who embraced logic and instinct. They were similar, yet different. "It is good to see you are well P'Triq," Attilio said.

"You as well. We are en route to Qo'noS. What is the situation?"

"Heralds have begun an invasion. They are attacking the orbital station and the shipyard. Our guess is that they are trying to weaken the defenses before the larger invasion force arrives."

"The Heralds we fought earlier must have been an advanced scout force."

"It is possible. Speaking of which, I have received a report."

P'Triq interrupted, "sir I should let you know that the rumors of me attempting to assassinate J'mpok are false."

"I assumed as much. What I was going to say is that I received a report about the damage done to the veS baqto'. If it were another officer I would order them to the nearest shipyard for repairs and avoid the battle, but I know that you and Maradith would say you never received that order due to faulty communication equipment. You have a fine crew and a fine ship. Today may be a good day to die, but it is not your day. Instead, perhaps this once, you can live by the Vulcan adage of live long and prosper."

"We will live to fight another day. You have my word."

Attilio smiled, nodded and ended the transmission. The sight of the space around them replaced his image on the view screen. P'Triq walked over to the helm officer, stood next to him, and stared at the stars flying by. "How long until we reach Qo'noS?"

"A few hours. We could engage the quantum slipstream which will reduce that time."

"P'Triq to engineering."

Kihr's voice came over the speakers, "go ahead."

"Can the ship handle the stress of slipstream?"

"She should hold together but I wouldn't recommend it. There will be some structural damage."

"As long as it gets us there quicker and in one piece." She sat back down in her chair. "Activate the quantum slipstream when ready."

The deflector dish came to life and emitted an energy burst which formed what looked like a blue hole in space. The veS baqto' entered it and was enveloped within the slipstream.

Their speed drastically increased and the ship began to shake. The stress from the slipstream and the weakened state of the ship caused consoles to burn out and additional damage to form on the outer hull.

During the trip, Kihl had his engineering team repair as much of the ship as possible and reinforce weakened areas. Hours later they dropped out of slipstream and into regular warp as they approached Qo'noS. When they were at the edge of the homeworld they dropped to impulse. In the distance they could see the battle had already started.

"Admiral we are being hailed. It is Captain Kagran," the comm officer announced.

"On screen."

Captain Kagran looked like the very definition of a Klingon. He had long grey hair tied in dreadlocks and a neatly trimmed beard to accentuate his frown. Under his right eye was a scar that he must have obtained from one of his countless battles. "It is good to see you Admiral. The invasion of Qo'noS has begun. The Heralds have used gateways to land their ground troops and have set up transport inhibitors to prevent us from sending reinforcements. Transport ships with our soldiers are inbound, but we need to clear a path for them to launch shuttles. We must establish a safe zone by the station and the shipyard."

"Understood. We will do what we can." The screen switched to the view of the battle. "Tactical analysis."

"The G'roth and U.S.S. Prestige are valiantly defending the station. The U.S.S. Phoenix and R.R.W. Chula are protecting the shipyard but being overrun by Herald forces."

"Helm lay in a course for the shipyard. Divert power to the shields and structural integrity. Take it from every available system. Leave enough power for the weapons."

P'Triq could not help but think that after all this they have come full circle. It started with a battle against the Heralds and it will end the same way. She knew this would be the last battle that the veS baqto' would ever have. Not because the Empire did not trust her. Not because the Alliance needed materials to construct new ships. It was because this ship had been pushed to her limits and for one last glorious battle she will give it her all and be victorious.

The veS baqto' flew at full impulse towards the shipyard. They targeted the nearest ship, a Baltim Raider, whose shields were already weakened. The tactical display read 1500 kellicams, 1000 kellicams, 500 kellicams and then the space in front of the veS baqto' filled with disruptor beams. Even in its current state, the veS baqto' tore through the Raider without giving it a chance to fight back.

Me'vekk looked up from the console, "Admiral one of the Quas Cruisers is focusing fire on the shipyard."

"Protect the shipyard. Destroy any ship that attacks it." As the veS baqto' turned to face the Quas Cruiser, its aft beams began firing. The cruiser didn't break its attack. "When that ship is in front of us fire all cannons and torpedoes."

On the viewscreen the Quas Cruiser slowly came into view. The green bursts from the cannons bombarded their shields, followed by a volley of torpedoes that rocked the area around it. "Fire all beams." The front of the ship lit up from the green hue of the beams. They hit the Cruiser's shields. "Status of their shields?"

Me'vekk tapped his console, "they are weakening but still up. The cruiser is turning its attention to us" The Quas Cruiser's beams hit the veS baqto's shields. The bridge violently shook from the attack. "Shields are down to 87%."

"Fire all weapons," P'Triq yelled. Every fore weapon of the veS baqto' unleashed its power on the Quas Cruiser. Their shields failed in time for the torpedoes to hit the hull. On the viewscreen the bridge crew could see the damage to the Cruiser.

The Heralds were not finished yet. They opened a gateway which utilized solar energy as a weapon. It disrupted systems throughout the veS baqto'. "Target the gateway," P'Triq ordered. "We must destabilize it."

As she gave the order the Chula began targeting the gateway as well. It was a small Romulan Bird-of-Prey who was providing cover for the larger ships. "Fire aft beams on the gateway. Fore weapons continue targeting the Herald ship. Fire at will!" The combined power of the Chula and veS baqto' destabilized the gateway, freeing them to finish off the Quas Cruiser.

A series of photon torpedoes pounded the hull of the cruiser, breaking it into multiple parts. The cruiser managed to fire a final torpedo before it was destroyed. The helm officer of the veS baqto' tried avoiding it but the torpedo hit the aft shields and the ship rocked from the impact. Me'vekk looked up from the console, "critical hit. Shields are down to 70%! Damage on decks 7, 8, 9, and 10."

Captain Kagran's voice came over the comm on all of the Alliance ships, "the station is secure, focus defense on the shipyard. We must hurry, the transports are nearly here."

Just then a Vonph Battleship entered through a gateway and fired on the shipyard. P'Triq and her bridge officers stared at it on the view screen. "Lock disruptors on that ship and open fire," she ordered.

The Chula and Phoenix joined the attack on the battleship. Being a smaller ship, the Chula did strafing runs along the top of the battleship, pounding its shields with their cannons. The Phoenix, a Heavy Escort Carrier, launched fighters to deal with the Herald's smaller crafts and keep them distracted long enough for the starships to defeat the Vonph Battleship.

“This is Captain Morg of the G’roth. All ships focus fire on that battleship. Phoenix, prepare to activate your torpedo point defense system when their shields drop.” The G’roth and Prestige which had been defending the station were now joining the fight at the shipyard.

“Captain Zegx here. We’ll prepare the point defense system now.”

The Prestige, a Scryer class science vessel, swooped above the battleship and activated its tractor beam to hold the ship in place. Then powered up its deflector dish to generate a gravity well. A purple cloud formed at the center of the battleship with a dark hole in the center. The combined strength of the well and the tractor beam held the battleship in place.

The Heralds turned their attacks to the Prestige in an attempt to break the battleship lose. “Captain Sovara to the alliance ships, I don’t know how long we can keep this up. Our shields and structural integrity are weakening. If we don’t take out that battleship now I fear my ship won’t make it.”

“Sovara, this is P’Triq. Pull out of there now. The Prestige won’t be any good to us destroyed.”

“We can hold it a little longer. Our shields are at 48%.”

“We’ll extend our shields to the Prestige. That should hold you together a while longer.” Morg gave the order to his crew and the G’roth’s shields strengthened those of the Prestige.

P’Triq looked at the console on her chair, “our sensors detect that their port shields are weakening. If we focus fire on them we can create an opening for the Phoenix’s torpedoes.”

The Alliance ships acknowledged the orders and adjusted their position and heading. The port shields of the Vonph Battleship were lit up with a variety of colored beams from all the ships. Torpedoes bombarded the hull, weakening it with every hit. Within moments the shields failed.

Captain Zegx stood up from his chair, “fire the torpedoes!” The Phoenix’s torpedo point defense system activated and from the top of the ship large salvo of torpedoes were fired. The hull of the battleship along with the area around the ship rocked with the explosions from each torpedo. Some of the smaller Herald ships were destroyed in the process.

The Prestige had released its tractor beam and used evasive maneuvers to avoid the explosions. Sovara hailed the fleet, “that did it! Their entire shield system is down. Let’s end this.”

Together the Alliance ships tore through the Vonph Battleship and remaining Herald forces. Kagran’s voice came over the comms of all the ships. “Good work, the transports are now arriving.”

“Are there any more Herald ships in the area,” P’Triq asked her crew.

“None. Wait! I’m detecting gateways along the transports’ path,” Maradith said.

Kagran’s voice came over the comm, “additional gateways are forming near the station and shipyard. Some are emitting theta radiation. Split up and get them closed at all costs. The transports are unshielded, we cannot let the radiation penetrate their hulls for long.”

“Hail all ships. This is the veS baqto’. We’ll focus on destabilizing the gateways by the shipyard. If someone can cover us it should buy us time to make necessary repairs.”

Captain Kabak responded, “this is Kabak from the Chula. We’ll cover you. Everyone else defend the station.”

The five ships split up to accomplish their individual tasks. Using the deflector dish, the veS baqto’ was able to destabilize and close the Herald gateways, but more kept forming in an attempt to prevent the transports from reaching Qo’noS.

Thanks to the Chula’s cover, Kihl and his Engineering team had enough time to complete some emergency repairs. The ship was falling apart at the seams, but all they needed was for it to last long enough to hold off this assault.

“Ten transports have made it to Qo’noS and landed troops. More are inbound. Keep it up!” Kagran’s voice projected confidence to the crews of these five ships.

“How many more transports are we expecting,” Sovara asked.

“Sixteen more. Hold the line. For some reason the Heralds aren’t sending their strongest ships. This could be a diversion.”

“Enough talk,” Morg said. “We will defeat any ship the Heralds send our way!”

The defense of the transports lasted a few more minutes and then suddenly the gateways closed. The remaining Herald ships were destroyed and the space around Qo’noS was quiet once more.

Maradith looked around the bridge, “is that all? I was hoping to send more Heralds to Grethor!”

“That was too easy,” P’Triq said. “Why would they suddenly leave?”

Kagran’s voice came over the comm again, “there’s a massive gateway forming between the station and shipyard. All ships converge on that location.”

Anger and joy could be heard in Maradith’s voice, “you had to ask.”

The five alliance ships set course for this new gateway. As they approached it a laidon Dreadnought emerged. P'Triq looked to her first officer, "becareful what you wish for." Smaller gateways opened and additional Herald ships entered the area. For a moment it seemed like everything was calm. Each ship hung on the backdrop of the stars. Not a single weapon had been fired yet.

That moment ended quicker than it should have. Ships on both sides opened fire, each trying to take control of Qo'noS, the home of the Klingon people. The outcome of this battle could determine how quickly this war ended and which side would be the victor.

On the bridge of the veS baqto' P'Triq was ordering her crew. They had started on a mission with only a skeleton crew to find J'mpok's would be assassin, only to end up defending Qo'noS and losing many fine warriors. They had been through too much this day to surrender, even to death.

"P'Triq to the fleet. Chula and Prestige, focus on the smaller targets. Your maneuverability will give you an advantage. The rest of us, focus on that dreadnought. Same plan as before, weaken the shields so the Phoenix can use the point defense system."

She was glad to hear that her orders were acknowledged. Even though there was some in the Empire who did not trust her, she knew that on the battlefield she commanded respect.

Outside the battle raged on. The Phoenix's fighters had all been destroyed. The Prestige was weakened from the assault they received against the battleship. The veS baqto' was barely holding on. The G'roth and Chula were in better shape, but even they had limits.

The Heralds' attack seemed never ending. As the Chula and Prestige took out one ship, another two appeared. Some came from gateways and others were launched from the laidon Dreadnought.

Zegx's voice came over the comm, "this is not working. We're barely making a dent in those shields!"

P'Triq thought for a moment then turned to her tactical officer, "drop shields and reroute that available power to weapons and structural integrity equally. Bring life support to its minimum and use that power as well."

The bridge crew became quiet. All that could be heard was the sound of the consoles notifying them of various reading. "Sir," Me'vekk asked.

"You heard my order." She smiled at the officer, "it seems that after all, today *is* a good day to die."

Me'vekk nodded and carried out her orders. When the shields dropped Kagran hailed them, "Admiral what are you doing? Raise your shields!"

“We must destroy that ship if the transports are to have a chance of surviving.” She tapped a button on her chair and cut the connection with Kagran. “Fire all weapons and don’t stop until their shields are down.”

The veS baqto’s weapons hit the Battleship’s shields causing fluctuations in it. P’Triq realized that even with their shields down and increased weapons power the Heralds did not turn all of their attention to them. *Arrogant fools*, P’Triq thought, *they think they’ll win even if they don’t take the easy targets*. “Status of their shields?”

“Weakening. If we keep this up they should fail sooner than,” he was cut off by a Herald torpedo that hit the hull of the veS baqto’. The bridge shook hard. Consoles sparked and officers were thrown around. The inertial dampeners kicked in to compensate and the bridge crew helped themselves up. Some checked on comrades that were knocked out or killed.

“Get a medical team up here. What’s our status?” P’Triq barked orders as she got into her chair.

Me’vekk was unconscious so Maradith took over. “Damage throughout the ship. Bulkheads and force fields are holding in areas exposed to space. We can’t take more hits like that, we need to raise shields.”

P’Triq was angered at the turn of events. “Evasive maneuvers,” she ordered. “Clear the areas that are exposed to space and activated bulkheads. I want those emergency force fields down. We need that power for the weapons.”

“Admiral this is,” Maradith stopped talking when P’Triq snapped her head around and stared into her eyes. “Acknowledged. Relaying orders now.”

“What’s the status of the battleship?”

“Shields are still holding but down to 33%.”

“Fire at will. I want that battleship destroyed!”

“We are being hailed by the other ships and Kagran.”

“Ignore them. Cut power to the communications system if you have to.”

“Another torpedo incoming. Brace for impact!” The veS baqto’ turned in an attempt to avoid the torpedo but it struck the bottom of the ship, violently shaking it. Maradith managed to hold on and stay standing. “We’ve lost all the lower decks. Another hit like that and we’ll be destroyed. Admiral we need to raise shields now!”

P’Triq looked around. The bridge was in worse condition than before. Half of the consoles were destroyed. Everyone was beaten, bloody, and bruised. She could only imagine the similar scenes throughout the rest of the ship. “Are the battleship’s shields still up?”

“Yes. They are down to 5%.”

“Raise our shields and put all available power to them. Hail the fleet.”

“No doubt you have the same readings as us on the battleship. Recommend we all focus fire on it. Perhaps if we take it out the remaining ships will retreat.”

Kagran’s voice came over the comm, “you heard the Admiral.”

The battle lasted a little while longer, until the combined force of the Alliance ships defeated the Heralds. As soon as the dreadnought’s shields dropped, the Phoenix launched their torpedoes causing massive damage to it as well as the surrounding Herald ships. As P’Triq suspected, when the dreadnought was destroyed the Herald ships retreated.

Within the next few hours the warriors that arrived on transports had successfully defended the Great City and Qo’noS was saved from the Iconian invasion. Although P’Triq’s work was not done.

The following day she approached the Klingon Council with her findings. “I’d like to remind the council that the veS baqto’ had a battle with an advanced Herald scouting force. I later witnessed the assassination attempt of J’mpok by this Klingon warrior who was under the control of the Bluegill. I believe it was an attempt to ‘cut off the head’ so that when the invasion took place, we would not have a leader to look to. Thankfully Kagran had come to Qo’noS on official business.”

Kadak, Qo’noS chief security officer who had originally questioned P’Triq, stepped forward. “This proves nothing. You could have had or found that Bluegill. This Klingon could be a dead member of your crew. For all we know you were the one who assassinated J’mpok.”

The doors of the Council chambers swung open and everyone turned to look. “I am not dead yet Kadak. It will take much more than an Iconian lapdog to kill me. P’Triq, Kagran has told me what happened.” He slowly made his way to his chair and sat down. “You served the Empire well. As did you Captain Morg, and the others from the alliance. This is not a time for us to point fingers at each other.

“For the first time, multiple worlds have united to fight against a greater threat. I know there are those of you who distrust the Romulans, and P’Triq in particular. She has proven herself to be more Klingon than most of you. Bringing my assassin to justice. Defending a world that is not even her own. Songs will be sung about her and the veS baqto’. Speaking of which, she is yours to continue to command.”

“Thank you Chancellor, but she had the final glorious battle that she deserved. There is no greater honor that a Klingon could ask for. Whatever remains of her shall be used to construct new ships. The Iconians have come to our world. Now let’s take the fight to them!”

End.