

A WORLD OF ICE AND FIRE

By Alex Rosenzweig

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Admiral Alex Rosenzweig was having a routine day. He'd had a meeting in the morning with the Strategic Operations Working Group, and then sat in on a discussion between several senior Operations personnel and a team from the Advanced Starship Design Bureau, reviewing one of the new cruiser designs being touted as a supplement to the *Excelsior*-class heavy cruisers. The new design was planned to be a workhorse vessel for the Fleet for the next 50 or 60 years, and the Operations review group wanted to have a sense of its intended capabilities in order to factor them into the overall planning posture.

After the meetings came reports. A senior flag officer's life was filled with a lot of reports. Whether from various departments at Star Fleet Command, updates from starbases around the Federation, or material from one of a number of ships of which Rosenzweig kept track, information flowed through Star Fleet like water through a river channel. It wasn't uncommon for him to spend his lunchtime—a relative luxury that shipboard personnel often had to skip, but which Rosenzweig had come to appreciate—reading reports.

Amidst the variety of reports, one happened to catch the admiral's eye. The *U.S.S. Kon-Tiki*, an *Explorer*-class reconnaissance cruiser, was reporting from the FGC-42769 System, the latest of a series of ships which had been monitoring the system, and especially the fourth planet of the F-type star, for the past several years. With three large and one small continent, it boasted a thriving civilization which was approximately at the level of Earth in the late Middle Ages or very early Renaissance period. Most of the activity seemed to be taking place on the western large continent, which was described as approximately the size of South America on Earth. That continent had at various times been home to as many as seven distinct major kingdoms and a number of smaller principalities.

According to the reports from the *Kon-Tiki*, the last few years had seen a substantial increase in conflicts among the various political groupings on this continent, and the sociologists speculated that a major realignment of sociopolitical power might soon be in the offing. Due in part to the similarities between the civilizations on FGC-42769-IV and Earth, there was considerable interest in the shakeups in this world's society.

An advantage for Star Fleet's study of the planet also was that the civilization still lacked anything like large, powerful remote sensing equipment. Small telescopes were as far as that technology had developed. This made it relatively easy to observe what was happening, whether from orbit or even from aerial craft. As a result, monitoring

this world had become something of a "pet project" for a number of high-level personnel in Star Fleet Sciences. Reading the report from the *Kon-Tiki*, Rosenzweig could easily understand why.

The admiral paused for a moment, thinking. As it happened, he didn't have any major meetings again for about a week. It had also been some time since he'd used his "roving troubleshooter" status to log any star hours, and the wanderlust had been making itself felt. *This world*, he thought to himself, *could be a perfect opportunity to get out and stretch my legs a little.*

With a smile, he tapped the intercom switch on his desk. A moment later, Lieutenant Brand appeared on the desktop viewer. "Yes, sir?"

"Mark, check my calendar and make sure I don't have anything pressing in the next few days."

There was a pause, and then Brand looked back up. "Just routine briefings, Admiral." He quirked a smile. "Nothing you couldn't skip, sir." Brand had served long enough with Rosenzweig that he'd learned to recognize when his boss got into one of those moods. "Shall I rearrange your schedule?"

"Please do," Rosenzweig told him. "Then call down to the Motor Pool and see who's on the available roster to pilot *Anduril*." "Motor Pool" was a slang term for the small craft bays and their support facilities. When Lieutenant Shralat had moved on to another assignment after a substantial number of years, the Powers That Be had decided that Rosenzweig didn't need a pilot permanently assigned solely for himself, but could make use of a standing staff that handled piloting duties for flag officers and other key personnel. Truth was, Rosenzweig didn't really mind, especially after his older warpshuttle, *Hyperion*, was replaced with a newer model. *Anduril* was the same general type of craft, but had a few surface differences and noticeably more speed.

"Aye, sir." The channel closed. After a few minutes, Brand signaled back. "Admiral, we have a pilot for you. Lieutenant Verex An Nath is at the top of the duty roster, and he's all set to fly on your order."

"Excellent," Alex answered with a smile. The Edosian pilot came well-recommended. "Have him get *Anduril* ready to go. And have it in 'mobile command post mode'. We can do our routine business from out there." He was answered with a huge grin from Brand, who didn't always get to accompany Rosenzweig when Alex went on jaunts like this.

"Yes, sir!"

As Brand set about making the necessary arrangements, Rosenzweig called up the images of FGC-42769-IV that the *Kon-Tiki* had sent back, including the planetary maps. Gazing at the variety of landscapes, he

wished that he'd be able to see those places firsthand, but knew that it would be unlikely at best. But from the deserts in the south of the western continent and the central portions of the large eastern one, to the strange wall built in the north, to the various great cities on all the continents, the clear sense that this was a unique and fascinating civilization was everywhere, and he looked forward to seeing it up-close, even if "up-close" meant from orbit. It was trips like this that reminded the admiral that there was still adventure to be had, and that was why he still treasured them.

"Sir?" It was Brand again. "Lieutenant Verex reports that *Anduril* will be ready when you are."

"Very good," said Rosenzweig. "Ready to put this show on the road?"

"Aye, sir!"

"Then let's do it." And Rosenzweig shut down his desktop terminal and led his aide out the door.

-----THE END (FOR NOW)-----