

## THE CIRCLE

By Judy Waidlich

The *U.S.S. Avenger* glides in orbit above the planet UFC-18249-IV. Captain Judy Waidlich, XO, rises up from behind her desk in her office on Deck 2. She stretches in an almost feline manner and begins to pace restlessly around the cabin. Coordinating five landing parties to the planet surface has been quite fatiguing. First there was the decision on which personnel to send to the planet. Then to divide them up into teams. Worst of all is staying behind to coordinate it all.

Then there is the business regarding the CO, Captain Carlos Maldonado, Jr. Rumor has it that he may be leaving command of the *Avenger*. He's not said anything to Judy yet, but there's still talk. If it's true, hopefully, the Powers That Be won't stick the ship with one of those by-the-book commanders. Even worse would be bumping her up and her never again setting foot on a planet!

With her archaeological background, she wants to be down on the planet leading one of the landing parties, not stuck up here organizing things.

The intership communicator chimes and the XO answers.

"Well, dearie, how y'all holding up?" a female voice purrs.

"I'm fine, Doc," she replies tersely.

"You sound a bit on edge to me. I know you'd rather be elsewhere" the doctor continues in her southern drawl.

"I'm not in the mood for this conversation, now," growls the XO.

"Well this **was** more of a social call, but if you want me in CMO mode, I can oblige."

"You wouldn't dare..."

"Just hold your horses. Like I said, I was just being social and all and wanted to ask you about Ensign Erin McGwynn. It being her first landing party and all."

Captain Waidlich replies, "Relax, Doc. I wouldn't have given her a shot if I felt she couldn't handle it. I would have gone down myself, regardless of my duties. I could run things just as well from down there."

"You okay with staying shipboard?" continues Doc Reilly.

"I'll be fine. It's just a hell of an opportunity. An unknown world with untold archaeological finds... She'll be fine and I'll be fine. Just a little bit jealous, that's all," replies the Captain.

"I hope you're not buried behind your computer," continues the CMO.

"In fact, I'm taking a break now. Doing some stretching. Perhaps I'll go to the gym or take a few laps in the pool."

"Glad to hear that. Remember I'm here for y'all if you need me. Take care, hon."

"Thanks Doc".

Her mood somewhat better, she begins to think that working out in the gym is exactly what she needs to release this pent-up energy as she makes her way out the door. The communicator beeps again and she answers the hail. "Waidlich here."

"Captain, you have to come down here!" exclaims an excited Ensign McGwynn, the A&A Officer.

"What's up, Ensign McGwynn?" replies the Captain in a calm, cool tone.

"You have to come down and **see** this!" McGwynn squeaks with greater excitement.

"Okay, Ensign, I'll be down," she replies, her curiosity piqued. Captain Waidlich calls the bridge. "Kagan, you're in the chair 'til the captain comes back up from Engineering. I'm needed planetside."

"Sure you are, Captain. Give the kid a chance," replies Kagan.

"The kid called me; she said to come down."

"And you're only too happy to oblige."

"Duty calls," replies the XO. She turns left out of her office to the nearest turbo-lift and steps inside. "Deck 7, transporter room."

Moments later, she enters Transporter Room 1 equipped with a phaser and tricorder. Transporter Specialist Ensign Patrick Snyder snaps to attention.

"At ease, Ensign. Just beam me down to Ensign McGwynn's locale," says the XO.

"Yes, sir," replies the ensign.

She smiles slightly, resisting the urge to laugh at the new crewman. Her mood is totally lightened from moments earlier, when she was ready to tear the head off a mugato. She reflects on whether she was ever that young and raw as she springs onto the transporter pad. She turns to face Ensign Snyder and tells him, "Ready for transport."

"Aye, aye, sir."

She smiles again, hoping she is succeeding in not giggling. Who needs an XO with an attack of the giggles? The room fills with the hum of the transporter and the next thing she knows, Captain Waidlich is planetside, standing in front of Ensign McGwynn, the petite A&A officer. Standing 1.6 meters tall, she possesses typical Irish coloring - intense Blue eyes, raven hair and fair skin with a smattering of freckles. A recent graduate from the Academy, the *U.S.S. Avenger* is her first posting and she is very eager to show her stuff.

"So, McGwynn, what's up?" she asks as she gazes upon the serene landscape behind the young officer.

"Look b-b-behind you," Erin stammers.

The captain turns her head, and her eyes go wide, mouth gaping as she reaches for her tricorder. There behind her is an enormous structure.

"That's amazing; it looks like Stonehenge!" she exclaims excitedly as she scans the structure with her tricorder.

Huge stones, over two meters in height, are arrayed in a circular pattern. The circle is 120 meters in diameter. There are over one hundred stones, many standing upright. Most of the arches are still standing, with just a few stones toppled. Within the ring

are 6 other arches, some stand-alone slabs, and several smaller stones. Encircling the structure, about 10 meters out, is a circle of smaller rocks.

"Y-y-yes, sir. That it does. What do you make of it?" squeaks the overly-excited ensign. They both start to circle the stones. Judy can barely take her eyes off them.

"I think we need a professional opinion on this. I'll send for Astrophysicist Nguyen," says the captain. She contacts the ship and requests Lieutenant Nguyen to beam down; she has a not-so-little surprise.

The two scientists continue their circuit around the structure, almost running over the rest of the landing party, T'Siena, Kellor, Chin, and th'Doltar, biologist, shuttle pilot, geologist and security officer, respectively.

"Come on, people, get back to work," commands the curious XO.

Kellor steps forward, "I have the results of the scan of the area as we landed and the preliminary scan of a 20-kilometer radius out from this point. The most notable thing is a cave system at the limit of the scan, south-southwest from here".

"Good work, Kellor," says Waidlich. "Is the basecamp ready"

"Yes, we've finished securing the shuttle and setting up camp," finishes Thandicar th'Doltar, the Andorian Security Officer. Light of build, as are most Andorians, he is an expert marksman and expert in Andorian and Vulcan Martial Arts.

T'Siena, the Vulcan biologist, reports on the unremarkable vegetation in the surrounding area and will have a full report in a hour.

As the Vulcan is giving her report, the hum of a transporter is heard and Astrophysicist Yuen Nguyen materializes.

"Oh, my God, this is incredible," cries Nguyen.

"Lieutenant, please perform a detailed analysis of the structure," orders Waidlich.

"Yes, sir. Right away," says an excited Nguyen. "This is totally amazing." And she goes off on her first circuit of the ring of stones.

Geologist Ting Ting Chin asks, "When can we start exploring the caves, sir?"

"All in good time, Chin," replies Judy. "I think I'll send for another shuttle with another team. I know of several security guards with rock climbing experience. Geologists Escaban and Miller are also excellent spelunkers. You can join them and proceed to the caverns and check them out."

Waidlich hails the *Avenger* to have the other team come down in a shuttle. Then she continues her circuit, tricorder in hand, of the megalithic structure.

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