

FROM THE AVENGER LOGS...

TO EVERYTHING THERE IS A SEASON

By Alex Rosenzweig

SD10406.05:

The orders came without ceremony, just as Admiral Alex Rosenzweig had been expecting. His tour as Commander of the 7th Fleet was done, and he'd be returning to his position at Star Fleet Headquarters. This had been planned, of course. Even when he'd taken this post, it had been expected that it wasn't a permanent thing. And now there was someone that Star Fleet was ready to assign as 7th Fleet Commander, allowing Rosenzweig to return to his prior role of Fleet Strategic Deployment/Development Specialist cum troubleshooter.

What Alex **hadn't** expected was that his replacement would be none other than Fleet Admiral Michael Smith. He'd known, of course, that Smith was still active. Not all Star Fleet Commanders retired after a tour in that post, perhaps the most (in)famous being Cartwright. Smith continued to turn up around the Fleet, often aboard the escort *U.S.S. Starlord*, his flagship. But to return to a command of one of the fleets? Alex wouldn't have predicted that. Well, he mused, there were a lot of not always expected things going on these days, and certainly stranger things had happened. So, why not this?

At least, the complete lack of surprise involved in these orders had allowed the admiral plenty of time to prepare for his physical transfer back to Earth. He'd also spoken to his staff, and all three of his "inner circle" had asked to remain with him. In the case of both Lt. Commander Coburn and Lieutenant J.G. Shralat, his aide and pilot, respectively, he wasn't at all surprised. Not only had they all become friends, but they proved to be a highly effective team. In the case of Commander Sanak, his adjutant, he'd been less certain that Sanak would opt to continue with him. The Vulcan had been a real find, looking for an opportunity to stretch his talents in an unorthodox way, and, knowing that Alex was looking for a replacement for Captain Green, Fleet Captain Rhea Naylor of Fleet Personnel—another officer who'd once served under Rosenzweig aboard the *Avenger*—had recommended him. Considering that Green's style practically verged on being Vulcan at times, anyway, having a Vulcan to serve as her successor was, in its own way, ironic, an irony that was not lost on Naylor, given the note she'd sent the admiral with Sanak's file.

Alex was glad that Sanak would be remaining, though. While he'd not yet come to be as close to the Vulcan as he was to the others, nonetheless the two had forged a solid working relationship, and even a cordial, if not exactly warm, personal one.

With the staff preparing for the journey back to Earth, Alex was hard at work making sure that all the 7th Fleet files were properly organized for Fleet Admiral Smith. As with so much, it seemed these days like more of the Fleet ran on paperwork than on anything else, and every month brought status reports, mission analyses, personnel evaluations, and so on. Fortunately, the efficiency of both the staff at Starbase 7 and the three squadron commanders made the task a lot easier than it might have been,

and the task wasn't an onerous one. So it wasn't long until Alex had secured everything he needed to, and just awaited the handoff.

Smith arrived at Starbase 7 aboard the *Starlord*, and Rosenzweig met him at the main transporter facility on the base's spacedock. As Smith materialized on the platform and the last of the transporter shimmer faded into nothingness, Alex stepped forward, and the two shook hands warmly.

"Welcome to Starbase 7, Mike."

"Thanks, Alex. Is A'von up here, or down on the surface?"

"Down below."

"Okay. So, tell me what's going on."

And Rosenzweig did. From the *Thagard's* mission between the galactic arms to *Malverne* running peacekeeping patrols near the Romulan Neutral Zone, from the *Alpha Centauri* on a long-range exploration tour to the *Accord* still operating beyond the Storm Line in the New Colonies Sector, he filled Smith in. When he was done, Mike nodded sagely.

"Looks like you've had your hands full," he commented.

"Been a...unique tour," Alex commented. "Fortunately the squadron commanders were a big help. Took care of a lot of the smaller issues."

"I'm having the *Albany*, *Justice*, and *Matrix* rendezvous here at the base. I want a face-to-face with Ed, Joe, and Lamar, just to make sure I have everything covered."

"Sounds like a good plan."

Mike winked. "Glad you agree." Then he thought of something. "Any base-related issues?"

"Thankfully, no. Threll's very efficient, and he always was right there when he was needed. And so's the base's crew. Good folks."

"Good to know." As critical as the folks in charge of a fleet could be, it was every bit as important to have the homeport be a smoothly-running operation. And with the base on as rough-and-tumble a planet as the one spinning below them, keeping morale and efficiency up was often no easy task.

The two men finished up the briefing fairly quickly after that. Alex knew that the squadron commanders would fill Mike in on anything else he needed to know. Satisfied that everything was in hand, Alex wished Mike the best of luck and took his leave.

The admiral stretched in his seat as the warpshuttle *Hyperion* arrowed away from Starbase 7's spacedock and accelerated smoothly into warp. Under Shralat's practiced control, the shuttle responded smoothly, and Rosenzweig was confident that the vehicle was in good hands.

"Relaxing, Admiral?" asked Sanak, who sat nearby.

"For a few," Rosenzweig replied.

"You should try it sometime," quipped Coburn.

Sanak merely raised an eyebrow. "When the time is right," he said softly.

"No time like the present," Coburn commented with a hint of a chuckle. He leaned back and closed his eyes.

Alex managed not to laugh. But when he saw just the smallest hint of a smile on Sanak's face, he also allowed himself a chuckle before leaning back and losing himself briefly in a short story.

As it turned out, Rosenzweig's rest period didn't last very long.

"Admiral?" It was Shralat. "Sir, I'm picking up a signal. It's U.S.S. *Highlander*. They've been attacked. Attackers unknown. Ship's suffered damage, and Rear Admiral T'Rell's been injured. The signal's to Starbase 7. They're asking for escort in."

"Has the starbase responded?" Alex asked, sitting up straight, his boots thumping onto the deck.

"Yes, sir. They're deploying the *Starlord*."

Rosenzweig considered for a moment. Then, his decision made, he turned toward Shralat. "Lieutenant, track the transmission from the *Highlander*, and lay in a course to rendezvous with them. Maximum warp."

"Aye, sir." Shralat worked her console, and the *Hyperion* smoothly arced around and sped off in the direction of the *Highlander*.

The *Hyperion* reached the *Highlander* in about twenty minutes. Rosenzweig had Shralat put an image of the ship up on the viewer. As the screen came to life, Alex winced. He heard an audible gasp from the general direction of Coburn. Even Sanak briefly closed his eyes. The heavy cruiser showed multiple rents in its hull, and one of the two warp nacelles was flickering with only intermittent power. Shralat brought the shuttle alongside and hailed them.

The signal was answered, and the visual channel displayed the Chief of Operations, Geraldine Sylvester, in the center seat. "*Highlander* here, sir," Sylvester responded. "Are you here to escort us to Starbase 7?"

"No, the *Starlord* will be here in a few minutes. We were in the vicinity and came to see if we could be of any help."

"Well, as you can see, we got shot up pretty badly. Just came out of nowhere. I don't know how our sensors didn't detect them."

"Nobody you recognized?" Alex asked, his memory flashing back a number of years, to the U.S.S. *Aristarchus* and a Klingon attack that led to the discovery of saboteurs on Starbase 26.

"No, sir, definitely not. Completely unknown. We even checked the records on the Darnath. No match."

Sanak leaned down and whispered in Rosenzweig's ear. At the admiral's nod, he directed his attention to Sylvester. "Are your ship's computers operational?"

Sylvester glanced off to one side, apparently checking a display. "Yes, they are."

"Can you transmit the sensor data to us here?"

"Yes. Stand by."

"Thank you."

"Patch it to Sanak's console," Rosenzweig told Shralat.

"Aye, sir."

While the data was transferring, the admiral returned his attention to Sylvester. "What's Admiral T'Rell's condition?"

"Sir, she got injured pretty badly. She's in Sickbay now. The doctors think she's out of danger, but she has a lot of recovering to do. She's sleeping now."

"Where's your XO?"

"He's directing repairs below."

"All right."

"Admiral?" It was Sanak. "I have reviewed the data from the *Highlander*."

"Conclusions?"

"What Ms. Sylvester says is accurate. It is apparently an unknown."

"Hmm..." was Alex's initial response.

"But why would they even want to attack a Federation starship without provocation?" asked Coburn. "It was without provocation, right?"

"Yes, Bill," Sanak replied. "And that is indeed a very good question. As it turns out, however, the available information does allow us to project a course back, to the limits of the *Highlander*'s sensor range. There are limits to the utility of such projections, of course, but accepting those limits, we could begin to estimate from where the attacker might have come."

"Do it," Rosenzweig ordered.

"Yes, sir."

While Sanak worked on his analysis, Shralat watched the navigational sensors. Soon enough, she saw what she was looking for. "Admiral, I'm reading the *Starlord* on approach."

"Give them an update on what we've learned so far."

"Aye, sir."

Then Sanak looked up. "Admiral, I believe my analysis may have yielded an unexpected result."

"Really? What have you found?"

"I believe that the vessel that attacked the *Highlander* may not be a complete unknown after all." Sanak proceeded to put his data up on the main viewer. "I trust the admiral recognizes the area of space that the projection reaches?"

Alex studied the viewer. For a moment, it didn't hit him. Then the memory surfaced, from over sixteen years ago. "Oh, my... The Ahrman'yak Transstellar League. But... The Ahrman'yak vessels are in our database. They wouldn't be an unknown. And there's a treaty between them and their antagonists, the...Jinimar, isn't it?"

The Ahrman'yak and Jinimar had come to the attention of the Federation when an Ahrman'yak starship had encountered the starship *Konkordium* in 2288. The Ahrman'yak were non-humanoid, while their enemy, the Jinimar, somewhat resembled humanoids. Even more, Jinimar vessels resembled Federation ships enough that the Ahrman'yak crew believed that they had encountered a new design of Jinimar ship, and, believing themselves in imminent danger, had attacked. The U.S.S. *Avenger* and U.S.S. *Tai Shan* had responded to the *Konkordium*'s distress call, and met the crew of the Extended Range Explorer *Rhentas*. Once contact had been established and the nature of the mistake revealed, the Federation had opened diplomatic relations with the Ahrman'yak, and even sent an ambassador—backed up by a battle group—to attempt to negotiate a peace between the two races. The last thing Alex had heard, the peace was holding.

"You are correct, Admiral," Sanak said.

"But you think this is one of their ships?" Sanak tapped a control, and the viewer lit to display an image of a ship. "Well, now," Alex went on, "that's very interesting. It sort of looks Jinimar, but...not quite."

"Looks like they've done some upgrading in the last decade and a half," commented Coburn.

"I would agree," Sanak said. "At least enough that someone less attuned to the details of ship construction might not recognize the similarities."

"But why would they attack a Federation ship?" wondered Rosenzweig. "There's been no report of any breakdown of the treaty between the Jinimar and the Ahrman'yak, and certainly no direct hostilities with the Federation."

"We do, however, know that some factions of the Jinimar have never been satisfied with the cessation of hostilities with the Ahrman'yak, and bore no small amount of unhappiness toward the Federation for, as they perceived it, forcing the peace at the point of a phaser."

"You think one or more of those factions might be acting unilaterally?" asked Alex.

"Given that there have been no reports of any breakdown in formal relations," Sanak said, "with either the Federation or the Ahrman'yak, I believe it to be likely."

"Admiral," said Shralat, "the *Starlord* has come alongside us and the *Highlander*. Fleet Captain Podesta is on for you."

"On screen," Alex told her. The viewer lit with an image of the *Starlord's* bridge.

"Admiral, I didn't realize you were still in the area."

"We were headed for Earth when we heard the distress call."

"And had to check it out," Podesta commented.

"Yup. Has Ms. Sylvester sent the *Highlander's* data over to you?"

"We just got it."

"We're going to send some additional analysis that my adjutant conducted. Mr. Sanak, if you would?"

"Of course, sir." Sanak turned his attention to his station for a moment. "Done."

"And we have it here," said Podesta. "Let me and my officers take a look."

"Course," said Rosenzweig. "Shralat, switch us back to *Highlander*. Splitscreen the viewer." Shralat nodded, and the viewer responded to her commands. With all three officers on his screen, Alex filled them in on what his team had determined. When he was done, Podesta shook his head.

"Sounds like we've got a pretty serious diplomatic situation here. Any reason to believe that this...err...Jinimar ship is still in the area?"

Sylvester shrugged. "We're not detecting them, but we're also suffering from sensor damage, so our readings might not be reliable."

"We don't have the *Highlander's* range, but there's nothing on our sensors, either," Shralat reported.

"All right," said Podesta, "let's assume that they're not nearby. Would they just go home?"

"That would not be logical," Sanak observed. At Sylvester's questioning look, he elaborated. "Consider: If this attack is intended to send a message, but no communication was received, how would the message be sent?"

"Do you assume it's random?" asked Rosenzweig.

"No."

"Part of a coordinated action?"

"I think we should be alert to that possibility."

"I agree, sir," Podesta said, and Coburn nodded as well.

"As do I," said Rosenzweig. "All right. First things first. Joe, contact Starbase 7 and advise Fleet Admiral Smith of the situation.

Put all ships in the area on alert. I'll get in touch with Star Fleet Command. If there are further attacks by Jinimar vessels, at some point they're going to let us know why. But if we can intercept them before they attack again, maybe we can put a stop to this."

"What should we do, sir?" asked Sylvester.

"Make your ship ready for escort back to base," ordered Podesta. Rosenzweig nodded his agreement.

"Aye, sirs," Sylvester acknowledged.

Both Rosenzweig and Podesta got to work letting the appropriate people know what was going on. Fleet Command wasted no time in placing all ships in the area on a heightened state of alert. They also brought in the Diplomatic Corps, in the expectation that a formal dealing with the Jinimar government would be necessary. Since it was also believed likely that the Jinimar ship that attacked the *Highlander* wouldn't have gone too far if it was still a part of the overall Jinimar strategy, Smith was given authority to put together a task force to locate and, if necessary, engage the ship and any of its fellows that were in the area.

Smith reviewed the status of the 7th Fleet's ships, as well as any others he could call upon, and selected a group to comprise the task force, including the *Avenger*, *Archer*, *Malverne*, and *Kirsanov*. The four ships were ordered to report to Starbase 7 for briefing.

From Headquarters came the approval for *Hyperion* to escort the *Highlander* and the *Starlord* back to the base. Along with it, though, came a note from Admiral Malotte:

"Alex, I know you'd love to get hands-on with this, but we need to get you settled back here first. Once the *Highlander* is back at Starbase 7, we need you here post-haste."

At Malotte's comment, Lt. Commander Coburn chuckled. Alex cocked an eyebrow at him. "Well," Coburn said, "you can't say he doesn't know you."

For just a moment, Alex looked like was contemplating a sharp reply, but then he gave up and laughed, himself. "Yeah, you're right about that. Course, getting to do what I do, I don't suppose I can really complain."

"Indeed not," Sanak commented, in as wry a tone as a Vulcan might typically muster. Considering that Rosenzweig's unusual role was precisely why the Vulcan had sought to work with him, Sanak was undoubtedly not complaining, either. Alex winked at him, and was rewarded with a raised eyebrow.

"Maybe if the situation's still going on when we get settled, they'll let us get involved," suggested Shralat.

"Maybe," said Alex thoughtfully, though it's anybody's guess what might come up." He shrugged and seemed to force himself to focus on the task at hand. "Lieutenant, contact the *Highlander* and find out how Admiral T'Rell is doing, and if she's awake and able to see visitors."

Shralat bent to her task. She looked up a moment later. "*Highlander's* CMO says she's just coming out of a healing trance. She'll allow a short visit, but says that the admiral has a lot of recovery ahead of her."

"All right," Alex said. "Please request the transporter room to beam me over." He activated his communicator insignia and stepped to the aft center of the cabin. Just after Shralat reported the *Highlander's* confirmation, the admiral vanished in a column of light.

Admiral Rosenzweig arrived in the *Highlander's* sickbay a few moments later, with a yeoman in tow. Rosenzweig would have preferred not to have the yeoman tailing him, but Sylvester had insisted, saying that a flag officer would be treated properly while on her watch. Rather than start an argument in front of the crew, the admiral had acquiesced. As he and Yeoman Solano entered, the Chief Medical Officer intercepted them.

"As I said, Admiral, please keep this visit to just a few minutes. Rear Admiral T'Rell's awake, but she still is going to need a great deal of rest, Vulcan physique or not."

"I understand," Rosenzweig told her. He glanced at Solano. "Yeoman, if you could just wait right here, I'll take those few minutes and then get myself out of everyone's way."

Solano nodded. "Aye, sir." The yeoman stepped back, and Rosenzweig moved quietly to T'Rell's bed.

The *Highlander's* commanding officer opened her eyes. "Hello, Alex," she said softly.

"How are you feeling?" he asked.

"As you might imagine, I have been better," T'Rell responded. Perhaps only someone used to dealing with Vulcans would have caught the wry tone of her voice, but Rosenzweig was one such person, and he gave her a smile in response. "The doctors tell me that I will need to spend some time recuperating."

"How long?" the admiral asked.

"They are not certain, or at least are engaging in what you Humans refer to as 'hedging your bets'. I suspect they are unwilling to predict on the information they have."

"In other words, they're not sure how quickly you'll recover, Vulcan recuperative techniques or no."

"Precisely."

"Well, I'm sure you'll be a good patient...right?" He favored T'Rell with that mock-glare that was reserved strictly for CMOs to use on their Commanding Officers, or for Commanding Officers to share because they all played the same game with their CMOs.

Had T'Rell been Human, she probably would have sighed. As it was, though, she just nodded. "Yes, Alex, I shall. I will have much to consider during my convalescence."

"Consider about...?" Rosenzweig prompted.

"My future. I have been considering a change for some time. Perhaps this is an indication that now is the time to make it."

"What kind of change?"

"I have been thinking of leaving command of this vessel," T'Rell said simply.

Rosenzweig blinked. T'Rell had been a fixture in the *Highlander's* center seat, almost as much as Bob Vosseller aboard *Challenger*, or even his own 14 years aboard *Avenger*. "Are you serious? Why?"

"It has been something I have been thinking over for some time. It has begun to seem that other challenges may await me, aside from command of a vessel. Since my current injuries will almost certainly require convalescence for some time, and this ship cannot operate without a commanding officer for that period, it seems an auspicious time to make that change."

Soberly, Rosenzweig nodded. "Yes, I suppose it does, at that. Have you spoken to anyone about this as yet?"

"Only my Chief Medical Officer. The rest can wait until we have returned to starbase." T'Rell beckoned to him, and Alex leaned down to her. "I hope I can rely on your discretion in this matter."

"Of course you can, T'Rell."

"Thank you, Alex." She closed her eyes for a moment, then reopened them. "I am sorry. It seems I may need to rest more quickly than I had foreseen."

The CMO had been watching, of course, and took that as her cue to hurry over. "Okay, Admiral, I think visiting hours are over."

"Of course, Doctor," Rosenzweig said. "Thank you for your patience." He turned back to T'Rell. "Feel better soon, T'Rell."

The Vulcan nodded, her eyes closed. Alex paused for just another moment, then turned and walked softly out of sickbay, Solano in tow.

In the corridor, Rosenzweig turned to Solano. "Yeoman, if you need to be somewhere, I can find my way. I'm just going back to the transporter room."

"I appreciate that, sir, but Ms. Sylvester would have my hide if she found out."

"All right," Rosenzweig said with a chuckle. "Guess we wouldn't want your hide hanging on her wall, would we? Well, since I keep feeling like I'm taking up your time, let's get going." And with that, they headed off to the transporter.

Shortly after Rosenzweig returned to the *Hyperion*, Sylvester pronounced the *Highlander* ready to travel. Within a few minutes, both ships, with *Hyperion* alongside, were underway.

The flight back to Starbase 7 took a few hours, mostly due to the fact that the *Highlander* was only able to travel at low warp, even after the repairs that had been made. She'd need a lot more once she reached the base's docks. As they traveled, Alex sat quietly, gazing at a padd, but not really seeming to do anything with the information it contained. After quietly observing this for some time, Coburn leaned over and looked straight at him.

"Okay, sir, what's on your mind?"

Alex looked up at Bill. "Hmm...? Oh, sorry. Was just thinking."

"I could see that. But I was wondering what you were thinking about." Bill smiled as he said it, but Alex could also see the curiosity, and a little concern, in his eyes.

"I was thinking about T'Rell and what she said, and about all of us." He paused for a moment. "To everything there is a season..."

"Sir?" asked Sanak.

"It's a quote from the Bible, one of Earth's great books of mythological literature. From Ecclesiastes, in fact. 'To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven.'"

"Interesting," Sanak said.

"Yes. Between us going back to 'Fleet HQ—or, really, me going back and you all sticking with me, which I do appreciate—" Sanak nodded, acknowledging the comment, and Coburn smiled. "—and T'Rell's decision to leave her command after quite a few years, it's gotten me to thinking about all the changes, whether by choice or otherwise, and what they mean."

"Y'know, it does make you think," Coburn said. "Think what's happening is for a reason?"

"As in, is there a higher power governing it, beyond Star Fleet Command?" Alex asked with a smile.

"Well..."

The admiral chuckled. "Sometimes I wonder." At Sanak's raised eyebrow, he shook his head. "No, I haven't suddenly got religion. I just have to laugh from time to time at how various events play out."

"It does seem, sir, that as much as events might seem to be guided by us, we may simply be adapting to events. Rear Admiral T'Rell's choice is one such example."

"I agree," Alex said, "but at the same time, don't you perceive, at times, a synergy between what we might believe should happen, and what does?"

"But you know as well as anyone, sir, that just as often things happen that we don't think should, or that we wouldn't even want to," Coburn said.

For just a moment, Alex's expression went shadowed, but then he seemed to shake it back off. "True, Bill. Very true."

Not long afterward, the ships reached Starbase 7. On the shuttle's viewer, the *Archer* and *Kirsanov* could be seen orbiting in formation, likely awaiting the arrival of the two larger ships. Rosenzweig leaned over the pilot console and tapped on the communication system. Hailing the *Archer*, he passed along his compliments to Commodore Neigut and Captain Milan. In a brief conversation, he got a sense of where things stood from their point-of-view. He wished them luck on their quest and signed off.

The *Hyperion* stood off at a safe distance and observed as the *Highlander* was guided into the starbase's spacedock facility. A quick signal from Sylvester, saying "Thanks," was received just before the doors slid closed. Then another hail came in. "Admiral, it's Fleet Admiral Smith," Shralat said.

"On viewer," Rosenzweig replied.

The screen lit with an image of Smith, sitting in his office. "Okay, *Highlander's* safe and sound. We'll take care of them from here." He smiled. "Go home, Alex. You have work to do."

Alex chuckled. "Okay, Mike. We'll be on our way."

"I'll talk to you soon. I'm sure there'll be plenty to discuss," Smith commented.

"No doubt about that. Take care. *Hyperion* out." The viewer went momentarily dark, and then switched back to the orbital view. "All right, then," the admiral said, after one more look at the view, "I think it's time for us to get back underway. Shralat, lay in a course back to Earth."

"Already plotted, sir," Shralat said with a smile. A few taps of controls later, and she added, "And laid in."

"Warp five, then, Lieutenant," Alex directed, "when we're at range."

"Aye, Admiral," Shralat replied, and the shuttle accelerated steadily away from the starbase.

Alex said softly, again, "To everything there is a season..." and then *Hyperion* leapt into warp, homeward bound.

-----THE END-----