

CRASH SURVIVAL COURSE

By Judith Waidlich

Late June 2307

The *U.S.S. Avenger* is en route to Sector 22769 to conduct a survey of a nebula. Captain Waidlich is jogging around Deck 5, as she usually does in the hours before reporting to duty. Lt. Mick Kellor comes out of a nearby turbo-lift and joins Waidlich in a jog around the deck.

"Hey, J Dub," he says between breaths. The captain stops immediately and whirls around to glare at Kellor.

"Do not address me like that unless we are in private quarters...better yet, not even then. Next time I'll have you put in the brig and demoted to ensign." She turns and walks toward her quarters. Mick follows, hesitantly at first.

They continue on in silence; at her quarters, the doors whoosh open, the pair enter, and the doors whoosh shut. The sitting area is adorned with various specimens, both geological and archaeological. Mick spies a particularly ugly rock on a shelf, barely noticeable unless one looks hard for it, and smiles. "We need to talk. I am scheduled to be a keynote speaker at a conference at Sedonius," Waidlich begins.

"And you need a shuttle pilot," Kellor interjects.

"No, not really, but the XO insists that I be accompanied by a shuttle pilot. We leave in two hours. Dismissed," continues Waidlich.

"Yes, sir," Kellor says with a grin and turns and exits the captain's quarters. Waidlich watches him leave, maybe a bit too closely, shakes her head, then turns to the sleeping quarters to head on past to the sonic shower. Before she gets two steps, the intercom chimes, Waidlich answers the hail. "Waidlich, here."

The soft voice of her XO comes over the comm system. "Kellor has plotted his course. It takes you through a bit of Kenosian territory."

"Noted. He's trying to cut out that four-hour detour. I'll try to talk him out of it. Either way, I'll keep in touch as we discussed. You know what to do if I fail to report on schedule."

"Yes. T'HoD out." The intercom goes quiet and Waidlich proceeds toward the shower so she can get ready. Some time later, she exits her sleeping quarters attired for her trip, grabs a padd and some gear, and heads out of her quarters, accompanied with the whoosh, whoosh of the opening, then closing, of the doors. She turns and heads toward the nearest turbo-lift. She enters the lift when the doors open and commands it to take her to Shuttlebay 1.

In transit, the lift stops and another passenger enters, the tall Efrosian XO, T'HoD. He says, "You make a cute couple according to Aurora."

She glares at him and replies, "She's a romantic. I'm the captain."

He continues, "She says you need someone." He pauses, and then, with a bit of discomfort, continues, "Doctor's orders."

With a quiet *hrum* and a shrug, Waidlich answers, "I'm fine."

The lift comes to a stop and Waidlich exits with another, "I'm fine, really."

She hears T'HoD's response, "It's not me you have to convince," as the doors close behind her. She continues across the shuttlebay to join Kellor, who is finishing up a pre-flight check. She enters the shuttle, followed by Kellor. Kellor moves to the pilot seat. Waidlich moves over to the co-pilot seat, grudgingly. Mick's fingers glide across the controls. The door closes, then the engines engage. He notifies the flight officer that they are ready to depart and watches and waits as the shuttlebay doors open and the force field is disengaged.

"Permission granted," comes the voice in reply to the request to depart. The shuttle gracefully lifts off the deck and glides out. Mick gives a grin to Waidlich and says, "We're off," as Waidlich continues with her "not amused" look that he has been getting to know so well. A safe distance away, Kellor activates the warp drive. Waidlich rises from the co-pilot seat and says, "I need to finish my speech. I'll be in the back," and takes a few steps to the rear seating area.

About an hour later, Waidlich joins Kellor up front. "I'm a pretty good pilot and didn't need a babysitter." Kellor nods in quiet assent. She continues, "We should detour around Kenosian space."

"We'll be in and out before either you or the Kenosians notice."

"Well, you're the pilot," she replies as she sits in the co-pilot chair and flashes a smile that practically knocks Mick out of the chair. Mick gulps back a quip.

"You might be more comfortable in back. We still have a ways to go," he says tensely.

Waidlich replies serenely, "I'm fine," and smiles at him again, knowing full well how off-balance he is becoming. Maybe he'll eventually get used to my teasing, she muses. She looks down at the monitors to see how the trip is proceeding, not wanting to drive the poor lieutenant to total distraction.

The trip continues in silence for another hour and a half, with Waidlich taking an occasional glance at the younger pilot and keeping from teasing him further. There are matters that need to be cleared up between them, but Waidlich figures that can wait for the return trip; why mess up either one's mood before enjoying the conference? Suddenly, alarms cry out. Waidlich checks the sensors and catches a Kenosian scout on the edge of sensor range. She tells Mick, "I'll take over. Prepare a distress buoy and grab whatever survival gear is onboard."

Mick hesitates. Waidlich's hands dance across the control board, giving her station primary control of the shuttle. "Just do it. I'll take us to the Class M planet I've just located nearby," she says tersely. The captain grabs a padd and downloads the shuttle logs, especially the sensor logs, while Mick sends out the distress buoy, finds four survival packs, and starts packing extra phasers and tricorders – there's no time to check the battery charge on all the gear, so better be safe. The shuttle drops out of warp and

enters the atmosphere of the planet with minimal buffeting. Mick returns to the forward portion of the cabin to see Waidlich drop down low and maneuver expertly through the terrain with twists, turns, climbs, and drops. He is both impressed and nervous since he is not piloting. He says, "Damn, who are you trying to kill, us or them?"

"Can't shake him," she murmurs. She tells him to activate restraints as she continues her zig-zagging maneuvers. She spies another canyon and spirals down into it with the Kenosian in pursuit. She pulls abruptly out and banks right to go parallel with the edge of a forest. She keys a few more commands and activates her restraints.

"Prepare for a bumpy landing," she murmurs, while executing a few more twists and a dive into the trees. She starts to level off and prepares to set down the shuttle in a controlled crash.

"How're your survival skills?" Waidlich asks Kellor.

"Just fine," he replies. The two officers brace for impact as the shuttle hits the ground. The craft hits a tree, but its momentum twists it past the obstacle, although the left nacelle is severely damaged. The craft slides another seven or so meters, plowing over some smaller trees and undergrowth, and comes to a stop.

Mick looks over at Waidlich. "Are you okay?"

She replies, "I'm fine." She shakes away the fuzziness from the not-so-soft landing. Mick helps her up and gives her a couple of packs with survival gear.

"Then let's move it. Shelter-water-high ground," Judy says. The pair move out quickly, with Mick in the lead, using the tricorder to scan for water, caves, and such.

Mick looks back at the wreck. "It's not a complete wreck."

Waidlich replies, "As the saying goes, any landing you can walk away from is a good one." The pair continue to move out to higher ground.

The forest is getting thicker, but the pair maintain a fast pace, jogging as best they can through what seems to be a gorgeous forest. But there's no time for sightseeing. They need to set up camp before nightfall and hang out until they are rescued. T'HoD knows to come for them when she fails to make the next couple of prearranged checks.

Waidlich takes a tricorder out of one of the packs she's carrying. Mick has two, also. "This way," Kellor urges, almost ready to take the captain and drag or carry her to safety. He knows that is totally crazy. She has no problem maintaining the pace; she is in great shape. Quickly he focuses back on the matter on hand. There's no time to think about how he is alone (hopefully) on a planet with a beautiful woman (even though she outranks him). The two continue through the forest and up a slope. After a couple of hours, their pace has slowed, but there appears to be a suitable cavern ahead to set up camp. The two reach the area, fill canteens with fresh water from a nearby stream, and gather firewood on the way back. The two settle down to snack on some MREs and get comfortable for the evening. A tricorder is set up to scan for anything out of the ordinary. Suddenly, the captain cries out in pain. Mick turns to see a scorpion-like creature near her. He quickly draws his phaser and shoots it. Waidlich tries to tell him "Wait!", but not in time. "You didn't have to destroy it. We could have analyzed it and found a way to treat the venom."

Mick locates a medkit and removes a hypo. "You don't know for sure it was poisonous." Waidlich glares as he administers the general antibiotic. They finish eating in silence by the fire, but as

time ticks by, it is apparent to Mick that the captain has had a bad reaction to the bite.

"I'll be fine," she murmurs. Mick nods and edges closer to her.

The night passes slowly, with Waidlich tossing about. Mick covers her with extra blankets and stays next to her. She finally falls asleep in his arms.

In the morning, the captain awakes with a start, grabs her phaser, and points it at the intruder, which turns out to be Mick, entering with more water and wood. She lowers her phaser and explains, "Had a bad dream. Dreamt I crashed on a planet—"

"Not a dream," interrupts Mick.

"You weren't in it. There was this Chief of Security from the— Oh, never mind," says Waidlich. Suddenly, the tricorder flashes a warning. The pair cram gear into their packs.

"Gotta run. You look awful," notes Kellor.

"Don't worry, I'll be fine," replies Waidlich as the pair exit the cavern and ascend higher up the slope, away from whoever or whatever is approaching, covering as much ground as possible.

"J Dub, you sure you're okay?" says a concerned Kellor. She just nods. About thirty minutes later, the dense forest cover is gone and the pair glance up and spy a suitable place to protect the high ground. Kellor helps Waidlich to quickly get to cover behind some large rocks. The duo barely makes it behind the rocks when the whine of an energy weapon sounds and the beam hits just overhead. Judy and Mick take out phasers and return fire. Judy stuns one Kenosian. She is on high alert, adrenalin kicking on high, despite her weakened condition. Mick is laying down phaser fire. Waidlich hears some rocks falling from above, whirls, and gets her second Kenosian, who was trying to sneak up from behind them.

"Good shot," says Kellor and Waidlich just nods. She fires at the lone attacker below, but Mick is able to take him out. "Got him," he says matter-of-factly.

Waidlich looks at the tricorder. "Four more approaching from below," she informs the brash pilot. He responds by arming himself with a second phaser. Waidlich notes the fading power on her weapon and picks up her last phaser. Both fire on the Kenosians below before the four take cover. Before the Kenosians are about to return fire, the whine of a transporter is heard and Kellor and Waidlich are whisked away.

As Kellor and Waidlich materialize on the transporter pad, Judy collapses and Kellor holsters his weapon and catches her before she hits the floor. Transporter Chief Snyder immediately calls sickbay, saying, "We need a medical team in Transporter Room 2," and informing sickbay of the situation.

T'HoD intercepts the med team and joins them in the transporter room. He gets the captain's tricorder from Kellor, tells Kellor to follow the captain to sickbay and keep him informed of her situation, then heads out to the bridge. The med techs put Waidlich on the anti-grav stretcher and proceed to sickbay, followed by Kellor.

Arriving in sickbay, the techs move Waidlich to the diagnostic bed indicated by Doctor Parker-MacKenzie. "Nurse, get me that hypo, stat," Aurora orders one of her team. She administers the hypo.

"You don't happen to have a specimen," she asks Kellor, who shakes his head no, his concern for the captain written all over his face. Aurora looks at the diagnostic display. "That seems to have

done the trick," she says with a sigh of relief. "She's responding slowly, but responding well," she adds.

Back on the bridge, T'HoD swiftly exits the turbo-lift and tosses the padd to Setak. The Science Officer is able to download the info and link it with Tactical in a matter of moments. Setak analyzes the sensor data.

The sensors detect a Kenosian ship, somewhat larger than the scout the captain and Kellor had encountered. "Shields. Arm weapons. Open a channel to the Kenosian vessel," orders T'HoD.

Ayes are heard around the bridge.

A Kenosian appears on the viewscreen. "Trespassers, prepare to be destroyed." Communication is cut off by the Kenosian vessel.

The tactical officer reports, "Weapons locked." The alien ship opens fire. *Avenger's* shields are down 20 percent. *Avenger* returns fire and disables the Kenosians' weapons area. "Got them," says the tactical officer. The Kenosians wisely turn tail and leave.

"Let's get out of here," T'HoD says to helm and navigation. After pausing just long enough to recover the wrecked shuttlecraft, the *U.S.S. Avenger* warps out of the system on a heading back to Sector 22769.

The captain has been released by the CMO to rest and relax in her quarters. She is sitting on the small sofa. The door chime rings. "Enter," she says, looking up from the padd she was reading, some tawdry romance novelette from Aurora. She smiles broadly as Mick Kellor enters. She hopes to herself that she looks better than she feels.

"You're looking better," he says with a slight smile. She rises and crosses over to him.

"I have something to show you," she says, as his eyebrows go up in amusement. She takes him over to her computer and presses a button, and the log from shuttle appears on screen. "This is from the dig I was going to talk about. My mentor has never forgotten or forgiven me for that ride," she informs the pilot. Mick watches as the shuttle weaves and pirouettes, avoiding laser fire, and finally escapes to space. While Mick is engrossed in the shuttle log, Waidlich turns and crosses over to a bottle of Saurian brandy on a small table. She pours two glasses full with the amber liquid. She turns back with the two glasses.

Mick looks back at her, accepts a glass, and says, "So you've had practice trying to kill people in a shuttle."

She replies, "Next time, it's your turn to try and kill us. Deal?" They clink glasses. Judy sips at her brandy.

Mick begins to gulp, then stops and rasps, "This is real!"

"Rank hath its privileges. Besides, it's for medicinal purposes," she informs him. He looks back with a "yeah, tell me another whopper" look on his face. Both continue to sip the brandy. She places her empty glass on a shelf. He leaves his by the computer. He rises out of the chair and turns to face her. He brushes some stray hair off to the side of her face as his other arm comes around her back. In response, she tilts her head up and to the side and leans into his kiss. The kiss lingers and deepens and soon they come up for air. They stare deeply into each other's eyes. Mick embraces and snuggles her neck. Waidlich reluctantly breaks the embrace, steps back, and says, "Doctor says I need to rest."

Mick whispers in her ear, "I won't be overtaxing you, promise."

Judy replies, "I feel like I've been hit by our shuttle. By the way, Engineering tracted it up from the planet, just before we left, and it's in the shuttlebay."

Mick steps back, puts his hands on her shoulders, and asks, "Raincheck, then?" and Judy nods. They walk toward the door to the corridor, and then enjoy another embrace and a long, lingering kiss. Then he looks into her eyes, trying to assess her mood and feelings and remembers the rumors about her poker prowess. He turns and exits her quarters. Waidlich watches him leave, then returns to the couch and the story she was not really reading. She sighs, and her mind races as she thinks about what just happened, and what could have happened, should it happen, will it happen. Hey, life is an adventure, let's see where this goes, she muses as she gets up and heads for bed for a much-needed rest.

THE END

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