

Star Trek: Perseus Burden of Command

By David Falkayn

Looking down, the young, slightly pudgy, dark-haired human standing on the transporter pad immediately recognized that the Deltan woman wearing red trim and the three gold pips of a commander standing next to the transporter technician was most likely the First Officer. Coming to attention, the young officer, herself wearing the gold trim of the operations branch, formally introduced herself. "Lieutenant, junior grade Pamela Riddell reporting aboard, Sir."

"Welcome aboard the *Perseus*, Lieutenant Riddell." The Deltan woman smiled. "I'm Commander Anara Rysyl, the First Officer. I see that you're our new engineering officer. Your department head is Lieutenant Barrows. You'll report to her..."

"Barrows?" Lieutenant Riddell interrupted. Quickly remembering to whom she was speaking, the junior lieutenant apologized, "I'm sorry, Sir. But I knew an Angela Barrows at Starfleet Academy. We were in the same flight..."

Anara's smile growing wider, the Deltan XO replied, "Lieutenant Barrows' first name is Angela. Looks like the two of you are going to have a class reunion." Returning to business, the commander smoothly picked up where she was interrupted, "As I was saying, you'll report to Lieutenant Barrows after you've been assigned quarters and have cleared medical. Crewman Foltz will escort you to your quarters and then to sickbay. From there you can make your way to Engineering. I'm sure Treasure'll be glad to see you."

A broad grin crossed the junior lieutenant's face as she entered the pristine engineering section as she spotted her old classmate. Striding over to the console behind which the chief engineer stood, Lieutenant Riddell snapped to attention just as if she were a first-year plebe.

"Lieutenant, junior grade Pamela Riddell reporting for duty, SIR!"

Immediately after belting out the final 'SIR', a broad grin broke out on transferee's face. "Hello, Angie...long-time no-see."

"Pammy?" An equally wide and toothy grin appeared on the buxom blonde chief engineer's face. "Is that really you?"

"Yep. It's me." Pamela responded. "So...chief engineer...who'd have thunk it?"

"Tell me about it." Treasure chuckled, her gentle laughter dying as the XO cleared her throat.

"Well, I'll leave the two of you to your reunion; I have to report to Captain Hobson." Anara announced; a beatific smile on her face. Her smile vanishing, the Deltan first officer then pointed out in a slightly disappointed tone, "Oh...I almost forgot...I didn't see your name on the roll for the Bridge Officers Qualification Exam Course that I and Mr. Miller are teaching. Did you perhaps forget to sign up, Treasure?"

"Oh..." The blonde lieutenant exclaimed as she quickly concocted a cover story, "I didn't know. I was so busy getting situated and all and you know how the engines on these *Intrepids* are..."

"I see..." The empathic Deltan replied, maintaining a straight face. "Well...perhaps the next section..."

"Oh yeah." Treasure quickly promised, "You bet."

Holding her tongue until Anara had safely exited engineering, Treasure heaved a breathy sigh, "I can't believe she let that slide."

"Let what slide?" A curious Pamela asked.

"My not taking the Qualifications Course." Treasure replied, explaining, "Captain Hobson's big on getting all us department heads qualified as bridge officers, but I ain't in no big hurry. I'm happy just being an engineer—I don't want that third gold pip—too much damned work to it." Her smile returning, the buxom engineer placed her arm around her friend's shoulders, "It's good seein' you again, Pammy. Let me show you where everything is and where you'll be posted an' then when we get off shift, you can join the rest of us at *Andie's Place* and we'll party hearty!"

"Sounds good to me!" The slightly chubby junior lieutenant chuckled. As the pair walked together, Pamela asked in a conspiratorial tone, "So...Angie...how did you get the name Treasure?"

Entering the *Perseus's* recreational lounge, dubbed *Andie's Place* by her crew, Captain Christopher Hobson, his first officer by his side, raised an eyebrow as he spotted his chief engineer, laughing and urging on, along with the rest of her crew, a crewman chugging down a beer.

"Chug! Chug! Chug! Chug!" Downing her beer, Pamela, with a triumphant flourish, held up her mug as Treasure, bringing her fingers to her lips, whistled. "Way to go, Pammy!"

Her psychic bond with the captain making her exceptionally sensitive to his emotional moods regardless of the stoic expression that he normally wore on his face, Anara inquired; a concerned look on her face. "Do you want me to break it up, Chris?"

"No." Hobson replied with a slight shake of his head. "*Andie's* is a place to unwind. As long as they don't get out of hand and as long as they're just drinking synthehol, let them have their fun." Taking his first officer's slight nod of the head as acknowledgment, the newly-minted captain asked, his voice edged with just the slightest hint of concern. "Who was that woman with the mug? She must be one of the new transferees."

"She is." Anara confirmed, "Turns out she's an old Academy classmate of Treasure's."

"Hmmm...."

"Chris...I know that 'Hmmm'..." The lovely Deltan gently prodded, "You only make that particular noise either when there's a problem or when there's going to be a problem. What is it?"

"That depends on Treasure." The coolly analytical Hobson replied. "I think though..." he paused for a moment before deciding to continue, "...that Lieutenant Barrows and I are going to find out a few things. She's going to find out what sort of person she is and I'm going to find out whether I have a chief engineer or not." Seeing the perplexed look on his first officer's face,

Chris guided her towards the door to the Captain's Mess. "Come, Anara, our game was supposed to start five minutes ago. We shouldn't keep the others waiting."

As the neo-rock sounds of *Jason Phillips and the Maia Threes* blared from the engineering section's speakers, Lieutenant Angela Barrows wandered from station to station, checking on her crew. "How's it going, Anson?"

"Not bad, Treasure." Lieutenant, junior grade Anson Riley, the New Albion born assistant chief engineer responded. Then, after pausing for a second, he added somewhat hesitatingly, "Well...there is one thing...but I let it slide this time...figured it wouldn't happen again."

"What is it?" The blonde chief engineer inquired.

"Well..." Anson began, and then halted.

"Go on..." A now concerned Angela prompted.

"Well...it's probably nothing. First day and all...but the new girl...Lieutenant Riddell..."

"What about Pamela? I see her over there at her station monitoring the flux matrix."

"Now...yes." Lieutenant Riley responded, "But she was five minutes late for her shift and when I checked her station ten minutes ago, she was absent. When I asked her why she was away from her post, she said that she had to go to the head."

"It happens." Treasure replied with a laugh, "Is that all?"

Taking a deep breath and exhaling, the assistant chief shook his head, "No. When she left her post, she left it unmanned and the matter—anti-matter ratio began to deviate. It was a slight deviation—nothing serious and I corrected it immediately, but..."

"It shouldn't have happened." A suddenly very serious Treasure declared, completing her subordinate's thought. "I'll talk to her about it."

"Hey Pammy!" Treasure smiled as she approached her friend's station. "How's it going? Settin' in ok?"

"Yeah. Just fine, Angie." Lieutenant Riddell grinned back. "Something I can do for you?"

"Yeah." Treasure replied in a friendly tone, "I heard that you left your station a while ago..."

"Had to go to the head..." Pamela responded, "You know...when you gotta go..."

"You gotta go." The chief engineer laughed, "I understand. But you forgot to get someone to watch your console..." Angela pointed out, her laughter fading.

"Oh..." the chubby assistant quickly exclaimed, "I must have forgotten. I'm sorry, Angie...I won't let it happen again."

"That's all right." Treasure replied, her smile returning, "But you gotta remember, these new engines are very tricky...you gotta keep an eye on 'em all the time."

"I'll remember that, Treasure." Pamela smiled back, "I promise."

"Good enough for me." The buxom blonde grinned, "You need anything, you just holler—you hear?"

"Sure thing." Pamela answered back, adding, "*Andie's Place* after shift?"

"You forget, Sugar?" Treasure responded, "You're in charge of Dog-shift tonight. You better get some sack time—ya'll never know when Hobby's gonna pull a surprise inspection here."

"Oh." The young junior lieutenant exclaimed, "I'm sorry—I forgot. Thanks for reminding me."

"Anytime, Pammy." Treasure waved as she moved on to the next duty station.

Quietly watching as the entire tableau played out from his secluded location near one of the Jeffries tubes, Captain Hobson stroked his chin knowingly as

he made his mental notes. After a few more seconds of quiet observation, the captain, his facial expression giving no hint as to his reaction one way or the other to the scene he had just witnessed, turned back, exiting the way he came. Exiting the Jeffries tube the next level up, Chris nodded his head once at the Deltan woman standing next to the opening.

"So...Chris?"

"I think that I shall conduct a surprise general inspection of Engineering during Delta shift."

"Aye, Sir." Anara answered back, entering the time on to her padd, "0130?"

"0130. Now..." Chris inquired, changing the subject, "Who's on for bridge tonight?"

A smile crossing her face, the lovely Deltan responded, "You're teamed up with Lieutenant Nor against me and Lieutenant T'Pren."

Excellent." Hobson exclaimed, a slight grin crossing his face, "Lieutenant Nor is a very good partner and T'Pren a skilled opponent. It should be a good game."

"And then someone called out, telling her to show 'em the twin moons of Bereleya and she did!" Pamela laughed as she sloshed the beer in her mug.

"That's our Treasure, all right." Ensign Val'rane chortled, his antennae twitching in amusement. "So what happened next?"

"Hell, what do you think happened?" Lieutenant Riddell responded as one of the others at the table refilled her mug. "She got busted for indecent exposure and had to walk two weeks worth of punishment tours!"

"Tellin' tales outta school again?" Angela asked as she joined her fellow engineers in the crew's lounge. Her smile quickly vanishing after she took a swig from the beer mug supplied to her, the chief engineer reminded her old friend, "Thought I told you that you had Dog Watch tonight, Pammy?"

"Don't worry, Angie." The slightly plump junior lieutenant replied, "I was just goin' to head to my quarters after this beer. Why don't you join us?"

"Well...all right." The North Star born chief engineer reluctantly agreed, "But just this one drink and then you better go and rack out."

One drink soon led to another and then another until, the buxom blonde looked at her chronometer. "Damn. It's 0130! Girl—you better get your ass down to Engineering right now!"

"On my way!" Lieutenant Riddell replied as she swayed out of her seat.

Watching as her friend staggered out of the lounge, Treasure turned towards Ensign Val'rane. "Chrisi? Ya'll are drinkin' synth-hol, aren't you?"

"Of course." The Andorian junior engineer responded. "You know the Captain's rules regarding alcohol and duty personnel..."

Picking up her friend's mug, Treasure sniffed the contents. "Frak...I was afraid of that. She dropped an ethanol tablet into the pitcher. Rising to her feet, the blonde engineer felt herself sway just a bit. "Hell. You guys are goin' to sickbay for some sober-shots an' then you're all hittin' the hay."

"What 'bout you?" Ensign Val'rane asked, slurring his words.

"I'll be ok." Angela answered back; I didn't have that much to drink." Her face taking on a disappointed look, the now disconsolate woman explained, "I'm headin' off to Engineering. I just pray I get there before Pammy manages to frinx things up again."

As Treasure rushed into her engineering department, the sight that greeted her caused her heart to momentarily stop. Delta shift, all but the personnel absolutely needed to monitor critical systems, stood at attention in a straight line looking, for all intents and purposes, as if they were at a cadet inspection. Her friend, Pamela, stood—or rather swayed—at one end of the line as Captain Hobson, Commander Rysyl, and Lieutenant Commander Miller stood in front." Fu..."

"Ah...Lieutenant Barrows." Captain Hobson, hearing his chief engineer, pivoted in place to address her. The flat, level, polite quality of his voice rendered his words all the more chilling to the young blonde as he spoke. "So

good of you to come. You saved me the trouble of having to comm you to request your presence here."

"Sir." Treasure promptly replied as she took her position in front of her department.

"We were just about to conduct a general inspection of your department and the personnel of this shift. Join us, please."

"Yes, Sir." Angela meekly replied as the captain, accompanied by her, the first officer, and the operations officer first went to the various consoles and stations with Captain Hobson interrogating the duty officers as regards their responsibilities, the condition of their work area, as well as inspecting their appearance.

Noting both obvious and not so obvious defects and flaws as Lieutenant Commander Miller recorded them all on his padd, Hobson turned towards his chief engineer, his icy mask still in place. "Now, Mr. Barrows...let's inspect the rest of your people." Walking to each individual in the line, the captain's sharp eyes detected even the slightest flaw in appearance. Finally approaching Lieutenant Riddell, Captain Hobson raised an eyebrow at the young officer's slight swaying and glassy eyes. Turning his attention to his chief engineer, the stone-faced captain, his eyes burrowing into those of the young blonde, inquired, "Is this officer intoxicated?"

Taking a deep breath and exhaling, Treasure responded truthfully, wincing inwardly at the look of hurt betrayal on her old friend's face. "I believe so, Sir. When she left *Andie's* for her shift, I sniffed her beer. I think she slipped in an ethanol tablet."

"I see." Hobson drawled as he outwardly maintained his level disposition. "Lieutenant Riddell. You are hereby relieved of duty and confined to your quarters until further notice. Dismissed." Watching as the plump young officer departed, the captain turned his attention back to his chief engineer, "Mr. Barrows. My ready room in half an hour."

"Aye, Sir."

Lieutenant Angela Barrows stared straight ahead, her eyes focused on the painting behind her commanding officer's desk as he sat silent, the only

sound in the room the light tapping of his fingers on the padd he held in his hands. Finally after what seemed an eternity of tapping, Captain Christopher Hobson glanced up at his chief engineer. His voice that of an arctic wind, the fastidiously correct captain said simply as he slid the padd over to the blonde officer standing at attention before him, "The results of this morning's inspection."

Picking up the padd and reading over it, the young chief engineer sighed inwardly in relief as she saw that the captain found little to no fault in the engineering systems or their maintenance. However, she noted to her dismay, her department as a whole did receive average to poor marks for readiness in response, situational awareness, and personal appearance—and this was before she came to the part discussing the appearance and demeanor of her friend, Lieutenant Riddell. As she read Hobson's report of her former classmate coming to duty intoxicated, Angela's heart sank.

"Well, Lieutenant..." Hobson's voice cut through the blonde engineer's thoughts as a duranium blade, "...what do you have to say for yourself and your department?"

Knowing that there was only one answer she could give, Lieutenant Barrows straightened her back ramrod straight as she annunciated in a clear voice, "No excuse, Sir."

Nodding his head at her answer, the captain replied, "That is the first correct thing you have said or done since Lieutenant Riddell reported aboard. You're damned right there is no excuse. Your people were dilatory in their responses to the questions I and the other inspectors posed to them, they took too long to assess conditions, and the appearance of more than one of them bordered on slovenly." Raising his hand, Hobson immediately silenced his chief engineer's protests, "But that wasn't the worst of it. What is truly inexcusable is the fact that your Delta Shift supervisor reported to duty in a state of near-intoxication. For that alone I should not only have her busted down to crewman and transferred off this ship, I should have you reduced in rank and removed from your position as well for allowing it to happen. What do you have to say to that, Lieutenant?"

"You're absolutely right, Sir." A shamefaced Angela, her eyes moistening with tears, responded, her voice cracking. "I'll...I'll take whatever punishment you give me. If you want my pips..." she said as her hand went to her collar."

Waving off her gesture, Chris motioned towards the chair next to where

Angela stood, commanding, "Sit down, Lieutenant." Once the junior officer had complied with his request, the captain continued, his voice now taking on more of a professorial tone, "Angela..." the captain lectured, deliberately using his engineer's first name, "...your problem is a simple one—but it's one almost everyone given responsibility for the first time face. You want the people under you to like you, so you try to be their friend all of the time. Some..." the fastidious captain allowed, "...will respond positively to that. There will always be some who will do their jobs and do it well regardless of the command style—or lack thereof of their superiors. But others...as I think you've now found out...will take advantage of that fact and will abuse your good nature. Where the real problem comes though is how the actions of those ones impact the majority of the people under your command. They see those people getting away with what they're doing—or not doing—and will very often take the path of least resistance."

"In other words..." Treasure interjected with a sad smile, "One bad apple..."

"Spoils the bunch." Hobson completed, nodding his head. "You're learning."

"But, Sir..." Angela protested, "I don't think I can run my department like you run the bridge or Mr. Miller runs his department. If that's the way you want me to run engineering, maybe you're better off..."

"No one says you have to, Mr. Barrows." Chris interrupted, a slight smile crossing his face. "One thing you will find as you advance in the Service is that what works for one commander won't necessarily work for another. I do not run the *Perseus* as Captain Shelby did the *Sutherland* because Captain Shelby's style would not work for me, and I would not expect you to run your department in completely the same manner as Lieutenant T'Pren runs hers or Commander Miller runs his. In the Academy, you were instructed in a wide variety of leadership and motivational strategies and techniques and you've seen some or all of them at one time or another during your time in service. You've also seen how different officers have adapted those techniques to their own personalities and to the situation at hand. The trick is to find what works best for you. I have no problems with you taking a...relatively...relaxed approach to your department—as long as you and your people meet Starfleet's operational standards—and my own—which—as you have just seen—are somewhat higher than Starfleet's. It is a challenge, but one I think you're up to, Lieutenant. But...if you think differently..."

"No, Sir...I can do it." The former barrel racing champion responded.

"Good." Hobson replied, nodding his head in approval, "That was the answer I wanted to hear. Now..." he ordered, his eyes once again burrowing into those of his subordinate, "I want that mess in engineering cleaned up. In twenty-four hours there will be another general inspection. I expect that the report from that inspection will be far different from this one."

"It will be, Sir." Angela declared, "I promise." Her voice softening, she then asked, "What about Pa...Lieutenant Riddell?"

"I'll expect your recommendation as to any disciplinary actions regarding Mr. Riddell on my desk in twenty-four hours as well, Lieutenant." Chris answered back, "Are there any other questions?"

"No, Sir."

"Very well..." Chris announced, terminating the interview, "Dismissed."

"You let me down, Lieutenant..." Treasure declared as she looked down at her old friend, Lieutenant Pamela Riddell, sitting at the edge of her bed. "You lied to me...you took advantage of our friendship...and you put my people and my engines in danger."

"I did not!" The plump lieutenant protested, rising to her feet in anger.

"Sit down, Lieutenant!" Treasure all but shouted, the violence of her response immediately cowing her old friend. "You reported to your shift drunk! I don't give a damn how long we've known each other or how good friends we are, I ain't gonna let you put my people or this ship at risk just 'cause all you want to do is have a good time!"

"This isn't like you, Angie..." Pamela pleaded, her eyes tearing as she shamelessly attempted to appeal to her friend's sentimental nature, "You're always the first person at the party and the last one to leave. What happened to you?"

"I grew up." Angela bluntly replied, crying inwardly as she knew that her next several words would probably end a friendship. "But it looks to me like you still haven't."

"So..." Pamela asked, "What happens now?"

"I'm requesting that you be taken off engineering and transferred off the *Perseus*." The chief engineer responded. "I can't have you pulling down everyone else in my section and *Persy's* too small a ship to assign you elsewhere. On another ship, you'll maybe have a fresh start and a chance to put things right."

"But...Angie...this is my third transfer in as many years..."

"Then you better make this next one count." Turning about, Treasure, forcing herself to ignore her friend's sniffles, walked away as she began to make her way to her next destination—engineering.

Striding purposely into her department, Lieutenant Barrows barely heard the Sonny Clemonds tune playing as she occupied a central position where she could be seen and heard by everyone. Raising her voice, she ordered simply, "Kill the music and listen up, everyone." Seeing that she had gotten their attention, the chief engineer spoke to her department. "There's gonna be some changes around here—effective immediately. First, no more music 'til we get three good inspection reports in a row from Captain Hobson, Commander Rysyl, or Mr. Miller. Get the good reports and the tunes come back on—got it? Good! Second, I ain't gonna have any more incidents like what happened with Dog Shift happen again in this department. Lieutenant Riddell won't be coming to duty here anymore. She is being transferred out. And I'll do the same damned thing to any of ya'll who come in drunk or stoned or deliberately screw up. Now...let's get to work. We've got an inspection coming up in twenty-four hours and this time we're gonna be ready for it."

Nodding his head in approval as he strode through engineering, Captain Hobson deliberately overlooked any minor flaws he spotted as he noted, to his approval, that his chief engineer did indeed take his advice to heart. "Very good, Lieutenant." The fastidious captain declared, deliberately raising his voice tone so that the entire engineering section could hear his praise. "I see a drastic improvement here." Lowering his voice so that only she could hear, the captain further added, "I've also decided to accept your recommendations regarding Lieutenant Riddell and I think I've found the perfect billet for her." Pausing for a moment, the captain concluded, "This captain is a most fair—yet at the same time demanding—commanding officer. She'll either thrive under

him or she'll find that she doesn't belong in this uniform. Either way she will find out a lot about herself as you have already found out about yourself."

"Ah. Captain Hobson! So good to hear from you again. Congratulations on your command—it was long overdue. So...what can I do for you, *tovarisch*?"

Nodding his head in greeting at the smiling face of Captain Boris Rodenko, the commanding officer of the border cutter *Scamp*, a slight smile crossed Chris's lips as he addressed his fellow Dominion War and Battle of Caernarvon IV veteran, "Hello, Boris. I have a favor I need to ask of you..."

"Anything, Christopher! What is it?" As he heard his fellow captain's description of the situation with Lieutenant Riddell, the Russian border skipper known as the *Commissar* amongst his crew nodded his head sagely, waiting until his friend had finished before speaking. "I see...so...do you truly think this one is salvageable?"

"My chief engineer believes so and I concur."

"I hate to ask this question, *tovarisch*..." Boris began, "...but I think it needs to be asked. Does Lieutenant Barrows' recommendation stem from sentimental reasons—from her ties of friendship to this young woman?"

"In part, perhaps..." Chris conceded, "But I've read through Mr. Riddell's Academy and service record. Almost all of her evaluations say the same thing—that she has the ability and talent, but that she is an underachiever. While under normal circumstances or if this were a larger ship, I would keep her here and try to work with her..."

"Her relationship with Mr. Barrows in combination with what just happened would make that a difficult proposition at best. I agree. Very well..." the burly Russian agreed, "I'll approve her transfer. We'll see whether a tour in the Border Service can straighten this woman out or not."

"Come to see me off, Angela?" Lieutenant, junior grade Pamela Riddell frowned as she saw her former friend enter through the transporter room doors.

"Yeah." Treasure replied with a sad smile, "I guess I just wanted to tell you that I'm sorry things turned out the way they did here and I hope you work things out over on the *Scamp*."

"Frakking Border Service." The plump lieutenant snorted, "Who'd a' thunk it?"

"Captain Rodenko is a good captain and the *Scamp*'s a good ship with a good crew and I happen to know for a fact their chief engineer's one of the best." Treasure declared. "They'll treat you fairly there. Just don't blow it this time, Pammy, 'cause I got a feeling this is your last chance."

"Yes, Sir." Pamela answered back, "Is that all, Lieutenant?"

"Yeah." Angela replied somberly, "Just take care of yourself, you hear?"

Several days later, after receiving their third outstanding inspection report, Treasure, watching her crew celebrating their triumph, smiled broadly as she entered *Andie's*.

"Hey, Boss..." Lieutenant Riley called out, "Why don't you come over and join us?"

"Love to, boys!" Treasure responded, her grin growing wider, "But I got roped into one of the Captain's bridge games." Seeing the disappointed look on her crew's faces, she quickly added, "Tell you what though...save me a beer and after the game I'll join you."

"Sure thing, Boss!" Riley replied with a laugh, "None of us have duty tomorrow so we'll still be here."

Entering the Captain's Mess, Angela immediately spotted Hobson, Anara, and T'Pren sitting at one of the card tables. Joining her fellow officers, Treasure warned, "I'm afraid I'm not very good at this."

"That's all right, Treasure..." Chris replied with a slight smile, "We all have to learn sometimes. Speaking of which..." he remarked, his grin taking on a slightly devilish quality, "I noticed that your name was not amongst those signed up for the Bridge Qualifications Course, so I took the liberty and added you to the roster. The first class session is tomorrow at 1800—don't be late."

The buxom engineer responded, a wry smile crossing her face, "I guess this is one of those things that a commander does for the good of their people even if they don't happen to like it at the time..."

"Very good, Lieutenant." Chris answered back, the slight smile still on his face, "You're learning. Keep it up and you'll soon be wearing a third pip on your collar."

"Commander Barrows..." Treasure said, rolling the syllabus around her tongue, "I think I like the sound of that. So...guess it's my bid? How's about three no trump?"

Cringing at his partner's opening bid, Chris exhaled, "I think before you get that third pip though, you're going to have to pass my course on elementary bidding."

The End