

# 1

"Captain's log, ready room, recyclatoilet number one. Nothing significant has happened for the last two hours so I'm taking a well deserved crap. Our destination is the planet Promiscuria, where we..."

"Captain Quirk, we have a problem," Solo reported as the doors to the toilet slid back with a gentle whoosh.

"I can understand the main doors being automatic but you'd have thought the toilets would have been made lockable," the captain commented. His trousers were still wrapped around his ankles. "I hope this is important Solo, because I was just starting to enjoy myself."

"The engines have developed antibodies again captain. We're dead in space. There isn't even impulsive power at the moment."

"Thank you for the report Solo, you can return to the helm now." Captain Quirk then pressed a button on the wall beside him, "Snotty, what seems to be... whaaaaaaa... Shiiiiit..."

"What's wrong captain?" Solo asked, running back into the ready room.

Checkoff and Mr Spook followed closely behind him as Captain Quirk's screams carried throughout the bridge of the Tantalise. The sight that greeted them as they entered the ready room toilet was one of their leader being sucked into the toilet bowl.

"Get me out of here!" Quirk screamed as they grabbed his arms and pulled. "Who the hell designed a toilet where the communicator button and vacuum flush were situated so close together?"

"Logically you should have looked at them first," Spook commented.

"Look here Mr Logically. Just because you died and are now you're a ghost, it doesn't mean that during times of intense personal stress, us mere mortal can't make mistakes."

"You call sitting on a toilet extreme stress?" Spook asked.

"If Dr McBoy would give me something for this constipation, rather than concentrating on his rejuvenation experiments, it wouldn't be so stressful."

"Quite so captain. Has the good doctor had any success with the second half of his experiment yet?"

"Not so far, but he is still trying."

Dr McBoy, being the oldest member of the crew, begrudged being left on the shelf whenever the crew of the Tantalise encountered new submissive life forms. In an attempt to rectify this matter he'd been spending all his spare time working on a rejuvenation potion to make him young and virile again. Unfortunately his success had only been partial and although he now looked like a twenty year old, his stamina still resembled that of his former years. This in effect caused him even more problems in close encounters, because unfortunately he'd always be asleep before the vital moment arrived.

"What's the emergency?" Doctor McBoy panted as he ran into the captain's ready room.

"The captain hit the flush button by accident again," Spook explained.

"Quirk by name and Quirky by nature," the doctor commented. "Does the intense suction give you a thrill or something?"

"It was an accident," Quirk pleaded. "I was reaching for the communicator button and..."

"Why don't I believe you?" the doctor interrupted. "Let me have a look at the wound anyway."

Quirk turned around to reveal a rather red posterior with a harsh demarcation line in a circle around it. "Is there anything you can give me to relieve the pain Balls?" 'Balls' being Dr McBoy's nickname on the ship.

"Your arse will heal all by itself captain. I'll give you a something for the pain if you're sure but I thought you liked pain?" he commented, while producing an injection pen and proceeding to administer the required dose of painkiller.

"Not this kind of pain," the captain answered as he carefully selected the communicator button, remembering the reason he'd reached for it in the first place.

"Quirk to engineering, what seems to be the problem Snotty?"

"It's the sneeze drive captain. [sniff] The noses have developed antibodies to the flu viruses again. [snort]"

"How long before we're moving again? The last thing we want is to be stationary too long this close to the neutral zone. There are bound to be Clingoffs lurking around here somewhere."

"I'm working as fast as I can captain but it's going to take at least two hours to replace the flu injectors. [snort] It's not just one nose chamber this time; the whole bloody lot have developed antibodies. [cough] I'll have to use the newly mutated super flu virus injectors."

Scientists had recently surpassed their previous invention of warp drive technology. Biophysicists, working on the fact that a sneeze is the fastest human reflex, had

developed the new sneeze propulsion system. The heart of these engines was comprised of billions of genetically engineered creatures, consisting of 99% nose and a minute brain to support their minimal life systems. When all these microscopic noses were installed into tubes, perfectly in line with the direction of travel, and flu viruses injected into the tubes, the multiplication of sneeze energy made a ship capable of a speeds ten times that achievable by warp engines.

The prototype engine, as a result of this scientific breakthrough, was installed into the Starship Tantalise during a recent refit and on the whole the crew were impressed by its performance. There was one major drawback though. The noses kept developing antibodies to the flu viruses and on average the flu injectors needed to be replaced once every few months. In itself this didn't appear too much of an inconvenience but the unpredictability of antibody generation meant there was a serious risk they could lose all power in the middle of a battle. Until this problem was rectified no other ship would be converted to this new form of propulsion.

A more personal problem with the sneeze drive was its effect on the engineering crew. Constant exposure to super strains of flu virus had left the chief engineer with a permanently runny nose and therefore made him very unappealing to the opposite sex. This meant that he was often left behind to run the ship while the other officers disappeared onto a planet's surface to study any newly contacted species.

"Two hours to replace the flu virus injectors. I just hope we don't need the engines in the meantime, Quirk out."

"What about our mission captain?" Spook asked when the captain finally returned to the bridge. "The population of Promiscuria are awaiting the supplies of personal shields that we're carrying."

"There's nothing we can do about that until Snotty's repaired the engines," Quirk reasoned. "Until then we're stuck here. Can you see anything on the long range sensors?"

"Negative captain. Just lots of empty space out there."

"In that case I'll be in my cabin if you need me. Mr Spook, you have the bridge and Solo, even if we don't have any form of propulsion, you can still keep your hands above the desk."

"I was just scratching an itch captain. These tight trousers are murder on your leg hairs."

Solo was well known on the ship for pleasing himself. It was one of his favourite pastimes. On occasions he was even known to take ten toilet breaks in just one hour.

"You've already worn out the crotch on thirty uniforms this month," Quirk chastised. "The fabric recycler is having difficulty keeping up with your requisition forms, not to mention the overloaded laundry on this ship."

"I've managed to balance the inventory by allocating my share of uniforms to Solo," Spook explained. "Logically as a ghost I generate my own uniforms from psychic energy."

"That's fine for now Spook but you're not the one who has to deal with the uniform stores department. They questioned your need for uniforms the last time I talked to them. So far they've agreed that a naked ghost isn't desirable on a starship."

As Spook settled himself down into the captain's padded armchair situated in the centre of the bridge, Captain Quirk entered the turbolift, heading in the direction of his day cabin. Spook pressed a button on the chair's armrest and the viewscreen suddenly changed from a picture of the stars, into one of a Stellar police craft colliding with ten others and then somersaulting over the wrecked vehicles, landing upright, and continuing the pursuit of the galactic criminals.

"That couldn't logically happen," Spook commented. "The damage to the police craft would obviously have prevented them from continuing..."

"It's only a movie," Checkoff explained. "It's not meant to be realistic. It's just entertainment."

"Maybe there's something better on another channel," Spook decided and pushed another button on the armrest.

"Space, the final frontier..." boomed out the massive speakers to the side of the viewscreen, as a view of the stars sped by.

"Boring, been there, bought the T-shirt," Spook commented before flipping through another six channels. "Even with two thousand channels to chose from, all you get is the same old crap. Logically you'd have thought at least one channel would be worth watching."

The viewscreen image jumped from one scene of fire filled carnage to another as a large proportion of the channels only screened action movies. Occasionally a news channel would appear but there was so little visual difference that Spook completely failed to notice.

"Can't you just find one channel and stay on it," Lt O'Hurry complained. "The constantly changing images are giving me a headache."

Spook ignored her and continued jabbing the next channel button until the picture changed to one of a television studio. The camera flipped between views of the audience and a panel of invited guests. The show's host was walking between the two groups with a microphone.

"It's Coprah," Checkoff declared. "I wonder what the subject is?"

"If you'd listen, you might find out," Lt O'Hurry chastised while Spook punched the volume increase button to drown out the noise of his bickering bridge officers.

On the screen the interviewer had approached one of her audience. "It's a disgrace to the galaxy, this station should have been self destructed a long time ago. What kind of impression are we giving the universe if the first thing they see in our quadrant is this kind of an establishment?"

The camera panned back to one of the invited guest as Checkoff interrupted, "I recognise her. That's Bridgett, and there's Pauline beside her. Even Madame Pleasure is there. They must be discussing Star Brothel Alpha."

"You should know," O'Hurry commented. "You entered all their names into your little black book the last time we stopped there."

"We're providing the galaxy with a service," Bridgett explained. "You'll be surprised how many frustrated spaceship crews there are out there. We just help to relieve their tension and in a way, reduce the risk of war."

"What about the diseases you spread throughout the galaxy," the moral crusader in the audience continued.

"All our staff are checked by our own medical team after each booking. The station is fully licensed and we have regular supply runs of personal shields. There's no way that my staff spread any diseases," Madame Pleasure defended.

Coprah's attention turned to another member of the audience and she meandered over to her with her microphone. "How can I get a job on your space station?" the young girl asked.

"If you see us after the show, I'll arrange for an interview and practical assessment," Madame Pleasure informed her. "If you're successful we have a spare seat on the cruiser back to Alpha."

"I've seen this before," Solo interrupted. "It's a repeat. I'm just going to the toilet."

"Don't take too long," Spook instructed. "If you're not back in five minutes, I'll send Lt O'Hurry in there to help you."

The female communications officer was renowned for getting bored very easily and if anybody ever took too long, the threat of this woman was sufficient to speed things up.

"The program can't be that old," Checkoff observed. "I'm sure I haven't encountered that new recruit."

"Maybe she failed the interview," Spook suggested.

"I can't imagine a girl looking like that could fail Alpha's entry test," Checkoff explained. The image on the screen being one of a slim, well proportioned girl in her early twenties.

"What's your name?" Madame Pleasure asked.

"It's Sally," the girl replied.

Checkoff was flipping through his little black book, while keeping one eye on the viewscreen. "No, definitely no Sally from Alpha. I've got a Susan and a Sandra but no Sally. The nearest Sally was on Promiscuria, six months ago."

"I can't say that we're really interested in your exploits Checkoff," Lt O'Hurry informed him.

"Why do you want to burn in hell with the rest of these jezebels?" the moral crusader in the audience interrupted. "They're already condemned to live in Satan's fires for the rest of eternity. On the day of judgement they'll stand trial before God for their crimes against morality, and at that time God will punish them."

"Who's that idiot?" Checkoff asked.

"Computer?" Spook called. "Identify loud mouthed self-righteous individual on the viewscreen."

"The person in question is the Reverend Roger Nott, leader and founder of the Church of Total Abstinence," the computer replied.

"He's obviously got to be frustrated," Checkoff replied. "He can't be getting enough."

"Logically that must be the case for the leader of a church proclaiming total abstinence. It would be illogical to expect it to be otherwise."

"It was a joke Spook. A humorous observation," Checkoff tried to explain but had difficulty getting through to his logical mind.

"I fail to understand why humans regard restating the obvious as humorous," Spook commented.

"If we all took your view, a species would die out after just one generation," Bridgett argued.

"We now have the technology to reproduce without the need for messy exchanges of bodily fluids. We've evolved beyond that unnecessary requirement," the Reverend explained.

"It's not just a case of reproduction," Pauline added. "Intercourse is also a pleasurable and stress relieving experience. We at Star Brothel Alpha specialize in helping starship crews to reach their peak performance."

"The guys there take forever," Lt O'Hurry commented. "I couldn't find one of them who could keep up with me. Talk about bored stupid. The jerk was still going ten minutes after I'd finished. What's more, they even refused to give me a non-satisfaction refund."

"A gazelle on heat couldn't keep up with you," Checkoff replied. "I have no complaints about the service Alpha provides."

The channel suddenly changed to another action movie but only for ten seconds, Spook was flipping channels again, looking for something worthwhile to watch.

"Can't we watch Coprah?" Checkoff whined. "Just because you can only have wet dreams, the rest of us actually like talk shows about star brothels."

The viewscreen stopped on a scientific channel and Spook, as the ship's science officer, became interested in the topic being discussed. He was in charge of the bridge at that time and consequently had command of the remote control. Regardless of what anybody else wanted to watch the viewscreen was firmly staying on his selected channel.

"Computer!" Quirk called. He was in his cabin talking to the television screen in front of him. "Link to the stellar Internet."

"Affirmative captain," the female metallic voice boomed back. "Link established via the galactic net," she informed him a few seconds later.

The captain gave another couple of instructions and before long, was totally engrossed in the images on the screen. He was so distracted by them that he failed to notice Spook walking through the door until the ghostly first officer was standing beside him.

"Are you misusing the stellar Internet link the federation has provides for us?" Spook accused.

"I'm just studying the tactics of our sworn enemy," Quirk responded in defence of the images on his computer screen.

"I can see the need to study the Clingoffs captain, but is it really necessary to ogle over pictures of the victims of those perverted creatures."

"It's not just pictures of victims," Quirk defended. "Look at this one..." the image suddenly changed, "...it clearly shows a Clingoff torturer, dressed in her full battle outfit." On the screen in front of them was the image of a leather clad humanoid creature, chains holding her minimal outfit together. Hanging from her utility belt was a bullwhip on the right hip and a pair of handcuffs on the left.

"There's still the image of a cowering victim at the Clingoff's feet," Spook observed. "You never know captain, one day you may actually meet a Clingoff in person. What will you do then?"

"I'll think about that when it happens," Quirk replied. "Anyway, what brings you down here?"

"You may want to come back to the bridge captain. I've discovered a small spatial anomaly that's appeared in front of the ship. There's nothing to see on the viewscreen but there's definitely something out there."