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Quirk and Spook walked out of the turbolift together while continuing to discuss the spatial anomaly Spook had found. "Is the anomaly still in front of us?" Spook asked of Solo, but the viewscreen was showing Coprah again.

Solo stood up to relinquish the captain's armchair, but Quirk took one look at the white stain in the middle of the seat and decided to stand instead.

"How can you sleep with so many men?" the Reverend Nott's voice emanated from the viewscreen's speakers. "You never know what diseases they're carrying these days."

"I agree with that," Dr McBoy declared as he walked out of the turbolift. "When we encounter new life and new civilizations, we should always use personal protective shields."

"I'm sorry captain, I can't agree with the doctor," Spook argued. "My sensors can hardly detect anything as it is. A protective field would make it virtually impossible for me to participate in any of our scientific research."

"It's not a matter of protection, it's the positions you get into," the captain explained. "So far my studies have shown that positions 757 to 1476 are perfectly safe without protective shields. This is primarily because you never actually come into contact with the life form's reproductive organs."

"That's all very well for you Captain Superstud but for us mere mortals, still on position number four, we need to have a supply of protective shields."

"I'm sorry for you 'Balls'. When you finally complete that rejuvenating potion you're working on, maybe then you could keep up with me."

"Nobody in the universe could keep up with you," the doctor retaliated.

"If you're that worried about shields 'Balls', why don't you get the replicator to create some for you?"

"That stupid machine has trouble differentiating between personal shields and ice cream. The last time I tried using it, the bloody things came out banana split flavoured," McBoy complained. "I wouldn't mind so much but I hate bananas."

"I quite like bananas," Lt O'Hurry explained but nobody thought it prudent to expand upon the subject. The image of a supersonic vibrating banana was a picture the men didn't really want to think about.

"Aren't we delivering personal shields to Promiscuria?" Spook questioned.

"The manifest shows that we have two billion of them in the hold," Quirk replied.

"Why can't we just steal a few then?" the doctor suggested. "A couple of hundred out of two billion wouldn't really notice."

"I need at least that many just for myself," Checkoff added, while punching the buttons on a hand calculator. "I calculate that two hundred shield would last me for less than a week."

"Who actually holds the record out of you two anyway?" Spook asked.

"Checkoff has acquired greater numbers," the captain conceded. "But I concentrate more on variety rather than quantity. If you count the number of different species and positions, I win hands down. Checkoff here is still a quick 'missionary' man."

There's nothing quick about our weapons officer," Lt O'Hurry commented. "I've seen snails perform faster than him."

"What about the Clingoffs captain. Have you ever done it with a Clingoff?" Dr McBoy asked quickly, in an attempt to prevent a verbal slanging match developing between Checkoff and O'Hurry.

"I've encountered all the known races in the universe, with the exception of the Clingoffs," the captain answered. "They like to do it to you rather than the other way round. I personally prefer to be on top of any situation."

"Logically speaking the Clingoffs are the most perverted race in the galaxy," Spook added. "To even consider a liaison with a Clingoff pushes back the bounds of respectability beyond that tolerable in any federation culture."

"Didn't you have an encounter with a Clingoff Spook?" Lt O'Hurry asked. "Wasn't that how you came to die?"

"In an attempt to escape from the bonds of a Clingoff torture squad I applied a death grip to myself. It was the most logical method of escape at the time."

"Only that you had to die in the process?" the lieutenant added.

"That would be the logical outcome of a death grip. On the whole dying is more preferable to experiencing the emotions that a Clingoff torturer can inflict on you."

"All this talk of Clingoffs makes me feel edgy," the doctor interrupted. "I have this feeling they're here with us at the moment."

"It's just your age 'Balls', look at the screen, not a Clingoff in sight and nothing on the sensors, apart from that slight spatial anomaly," Quirk returned the screen to a view of the stars. "That reminds me Spook, where exactly is this anomaly?"

"Directly in front of us captain. There's nothing to see visually but it's definitely out there."

"Have you any idea what it could be?"

"Whatever it is, it's watching us," Dr McBoy interrupted. "I have this feeling that somebody is spying on me."

"It's the Clingoffs," Lt O'Hurry declared after the others had turned away from the screen to continue their discussion on the necessity of personal protective shields.

"What makes you think that?" the captain asked.

"Something to do with a Clingoff ship appearing in front of us."

As all the officers turned back towards the viewscreen a Clingoff Bird of Play appeared as large as anything across the entire width of it. Looking similar to a swan in flight, it had a large round body, giant wingspan, long protruding shaft and a bulbous head where all the primary activity took place.

Snotty walked out of the turbolift at that same moment, just in time to see the monstrous white object disappearing again out of sight, "Bloody Clingoffs, up to their usual tricks of flashing defenceless ships."

"Are those engines ready yet Snotty?" Quirk asked.

"Sorry captain, we can't even get impulsive power out of them for another half an hour yet."

"What about weapons Checkoff. Do we have anything we can fight back with?"

"I'm afraid not captain. We're totally impotent at the moment. With the sneeze turbines down, we don't even have enough power for the klatex shield generators."

"That leaves our future in your hands then Snotty. We need power and we need it now," the engineering officer re-entered the turbolift. "Do you think the Clingoffs realise we're defenceless?" the captain asked Mr Spook.

"They're undressing us with their sensors as we speak captain. Logically they'll be curious to know why we're sitting here with our shields down."

"Sound red alert," the captain ordered. "We may as well have an impressive light show, if nothing else."

The Clingoff Bird of Play decloaked twice more during this conversation, the second time remaining in full view without recloaking again, head pointing directly at the Tantalise.

"Lieutenant O'Hurry, open all hailing frequencies. We need to talk to that Clingoff captain."

"That would be a logical decision in the circumstances captain but I must warn you, it could be a fate worse than death to surrender to them," Spook warned. "Myself, I'm already dead, so they can't do much more to me."

"I don't intend surrendering to them," Quirk explained. "But we do need to find out if they're aware how vulnerable we are."

"The Clingoffs are hailing us captain," Lt O'Hurry announced a few moments later.

"Put it on the viewscreen," Quirk instructed as the picture of the stars changed into one of a leather-clad Clingoff. "This is Captain Quirk of the Starship Tantalise. What are your reasons for crossing the neutral zone?"

"We were just wondering what a pretty little ship like yours was doing out here in the middle of nowhere, all defenceless like. We just stopped by to see if you needed any kind of assistance."

"We don't require any assistance, so you can go back to your own part of the galaxy," Quirk tried bluffing, but the Clingoff ship was still approaching slowly. "I'm warning you..." he continued.

"Why don't you just give in captain," the Clingoff suggested. "It'll be much easier for you if you don't struggle."

"This is a federation starship," Quirk tried again. "If you don't leave immediately you'll be placed under arrest for trespassing in federation space."

"You're full of hollow threats captain. You have no weapons and your ship has broken down close to the bad side of town. It's unfortunate, but we can always look upon this as an opportunity for you to sample the seedier side of life."

"Any response from other starships patrolling this area?" Quirk asked Lt O'Hurry.

She fiddled with the radio receiver in her ear for a while before informing Quirk that the nearest backup was over four light years away. "They'll never get here in time captain," she added.

"Bridge to engineering, I need a miracle Snotty or we're going to be laid by a very nasty marauding Clingoff."

"I could redirect the sneeze propulsion circuits into the klatex shield generator. That would give us fifteen minutes of protection. After that we'd be defenceless again and it would take me considerably longer to get the engines back on line."

"We need those shields now Snotty. Be ready to initiate the transfer on my command. Can you get me any weapons?"

"The tasors will be off-line but I can probably get you one shot of nace."

While the Tantalise sat motionless in the darkness of space, the Clingoff ship continued to move closer. "Are you ready to join with us voluntarily captain or are we going to have to get violent?" the Clingoff captain's face was back on the viewscreen again.

"I detect an energy build up in the body of the Clingoff craft," Spook reported. "It's transferring along the connecting shaft."

"They're committed to firing. Brace for collision!" Quirk ordered. "Snotty, initiate the power transfer, NOW!"

As a shower of torpedoes exited the Clingoff ship, a klatex shield appeared around the Tantalise. "Shields are holding captain. Not one of the Clingoff torpedoes has penetrated the protective skin," Checkoff reported. "I now show one shot of nace in our weapons inventory."

"Good old Snotty," Quirk commented. "Prepare to fire nace canister on my instructions."

"That was the last of the Clingoff torpedoes captain, zero penetration," Spook informed him.

"Lower the shields and fire nace," the captain ordered.

"Nace away captain," Checkoff reported. "Shields reactivated again."

"Are they powering up for a second torpedo attack?" Quirk asked.

"Negative captain, I think we've surprised them," Spook replied.

"Five seconds to nace impact," Checkoff called out.

Seconds later a fine nace mist enveloped the head of the Clingoff craft, sending every sensor array crazy. The effect on the ship was one of total confusion as their weapons, navigational and communications equipment went totally epileptic.

"They're retreating captain," Spook reported. "My readings indicate complete incapacitation of all their sensory systems. They're running away blind."

"The Clingoff captain's hailing us," Lt O'Hurry reported.

"Captain Quirk, you may have won this battle but I assure you we'll meet again. On that day I'll have you where I want you and you'll be begging for mercy," the image on the viewscreen was intermittent but when it was there, clearly showed the Clingoff crew fighting to stabilize the ship's sensory systems.

"Let's hope Snotty can restart the engines before the nace wears off. I have a feeling that we've just pissed off a very nasty Clingoff," Quirk observed. "Did we sustain any damage in the conflict?"

"Negative captain," Spook reported. "The shields held."

"I need to go to the toilet again," Solo explained.

"Every time we finish a battle, you have to go to the toilet."

Checkoff was opening his little black book and getting his pen ready, "Do you spell Clingoff with one 'f' of two?" he asked.

"Spraying a Clingoff Bird of Play with nace doesn't qualify for an entry in that book," Quirk observed. "No wonder it's full, Solo could fill ten black books if he entered every self encounter."

The Clingoff ship in question was still limping away in the general direction of the neutral zone when suddenly it disappeared out of sight. "What's happened to them?" Quirk directed the question at Spook who was busy checking his sensors.

"They've obviously cloaked again captain. All I'm reading on my sensors is that minor spatial anomaly again."

"Keep your eyes on that anomaly, It's obviously being caused by their cloaking device," the captain punched the communicator button for the engine room again. "Snotty, concentrate on restoring shields and weapons. That Clingoff ship's still around and he's going to be pretty angry when the nace wears off."

"If you didn't keep calling every ten minutes, I'd be able to work a lot faster," Snotty complained. "Now if you'll excuse me I have another batch of flu injectors waiting to be installed."

"Does anybody know how long nace works for?" Quirk asked generally.

"The effect is different depending on who it's used against," Checkoff explained. "With the Clingoffs' masochistic tendencies, I have a feeling it won't last too long." As the ship's weapons technician it was his speciality they were discussing. "Using nace is a last resort weapon though. I've never known a case of it being used by a starship before. Usually tazors prevent an adversary getting close enough for it to be effective."

"Well, we know it's definitely effective but being able to run afterwards might be a nice idea."

"The Clingoffs are decloaking again," Spook reported, "and it looks like they're angry."

"Is weapons control showing anything available Checkoff?" Quirk asked. He'd decided not to call Snotty again after his last encounter.

"Negative captain. No weapons and no shields. We don't even have the nace option this time."

"The body of the Clingoff craft is heating up again captain," Spook reported.

"Try to engage shields anyway," Quirk ordered.

"No response captain. Shields are still down."

"Energy transferring along the shaft," Spook continued. "Torpedo release is immanent."

"Brace for impact!" Quirk shouted.

As all the bridge officers held tight onto any part of the superstructure they could find, the viewscreen displayed the image of a flood of white torpedoes exiting the head of the Clingoff ship.

"Any chance of a last minute activation of the klatex shields?" Quirk asked.

"Negative captain. I'm still showing nothing in the inventory."

On the viewscreen the white blob emanating from the Clingoff Bird of Play was fast approaching the Tantalise and soon it had grown in size to nearly fill the massive screen. Surprisingly, at the point when it was expected to impact, the torpedoes suddenly disappeared and the screen returned to its usual predominantly black colour.

"Where did they all go?" Quirk asked.

"They must still be under the effect of the nace," Spook determined. "Their targeting systems can't be working properly. All the torpedoes missed us by a mile."

"We're still sitting ducks remember. All they have to do is keep firing and before long they'll get lucky."

"It looks like they're powering up for another shot," Spook reported.

Seconds later the head of the Clingoff craft was engulfed in a cloud of white spray. "It looks like they just prematurely ejected the next load of torpedoes," Spook reported.

"We have shields," Checkoff reported. "Engaging shields now."

"What about weapons?" Quirk asked.

"Tasors coming on line captain. Shall I give them a blast?"

"I don't think that will be necessary," Quirk decided as all eyes were on the viewscreen. The Clingoff craft was having considerable difficulty avoiding the cloud of torpedoes it was now stationary in. "By the time they sort themselves out, they'll be ready to cut their losses. Do we have engines Solo?"

"Still nothing on the helm captain. Snotty must have concentrated on weapons as you instructed."

"At least we're capable of defending ourselves now," Spook summarized as the Clingoff Bird of Play disappeared out of sight again. "They're slinking off towards the neutral zone," Spook reported.

"I have a feeling this isn't the last we're going to see of that Clingoff," Quirk declared.