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"Thirteen minutes to self destruct," the computer continued announcing in an unemotional way.

"Caaannnnceel seelf deeeestuuuuct," Quirk ordered, whilst still being bounced around by the sneeze drive.

"Unknown voice command. Twelve minutes, thirty seconds to self destruct," the computer continued counting down.

"Spooook. Doooo Someeethiiiing," Quirk pleaded.

Being a ghost, Spook didn't have the same problems of stability as the human members of the crew. He could effectively project his ghostly form in any manner that he chose. It was only a case of matching his movement to that of the ship. The problem with synchronized sneezing was that even though all the noses sneezed together, the delay between them wasn't uniform. When Spook projected himself, sometimes he was beside his science station, occasionally he wasn't even on the bridge at all and one time he was even on Quirk's lap. Until the unpredictability of the sneezing sequence could be stabilized, Spook wasn't going to be of any use in the current crisis.

"Ten minutes to self destruct," the computer announced as the super sneeze kicked in again, this time sending Snotty flying across the engine room floor. All the gains he'd made over the previous five minutes had been negated in this one single sneeze.

It was becoming a desperate situation as the ship's timer continued to count down. Quirk would have been punching button on his armchair, if the designers of the Tantalise had thought to include seat belts. Amazingly, despite all the money spent on this gigantic starship, nobody had included a few pennies worth of seat belting. Consequently Quirk had been thrown forward onto the floor of the bridge as soon as the sneezing started.

"Five minutes to self destruct," the computer announced as Spook disappeared through the rear wall of the bridge.

"Sorry," Spook apologized as he appeared in the female living quarters. "It's the sneezing..." he started to offer in way of explanation but the ship bounced on its next leap and he was out of their cabin and back on the bridge again.

"Stooooop peeeepiiiiing ooon theeee woomeeen," Quirk chastised but Spook had disappeared again before the captain finished the sentence.

"One minute to self destruct," the computer announced with its usual uncaring tone.

The massive ship sneezed once more and suddenly came to grinding halt. "Destination of Star Brothel Alpha achieved. Deactivating main engines and engaging orbital thrusters," the computer announced. "Thirty seconds to self destruct."

"Abort self destruct sequence!" Quirk shouted at the computer.

"Self destruct cancelled," the computer confirmed as everybody on the bridge sighed with relief.

Slowly they all picked themselves up off the floor and returned to their duty stations. Quirk staggered towards his armchair and sat down again before realizing that Spook was absent. "Where did Spook disappear too?" he asked generally.

"He's clinging to the outer hull," Lt O'Hurry announced. "If you look at the viewscreen you'll see him waving at us."

The final lurch had sent Spook flying through the outer skin of the Tantalise and only catching the forward camera had prevented him from being propelled into his own orbit of the space station.

"He's using interstellar sign language," the communications officer announced as Spook made various different hand signals.

"What's the sign for 'Stop messing about and get back inside'?" Quirk enquired.

"He's saying that he can't float back through the hull, it's apparently too thick. He's asking us to beam him back inside the ship?" Lt O'Hurry translated.

"If the hull's too thick, how the hell did he get outside in the first place?"

"He didn't actually say, but I think he wants to come back inside again," she replied. Spook's face had a pleading grin across it as he stared into the viewscreen's camera.

"Transporter room," Quirk called into his microphone. "Beam Mr Spook directly onto the bridge. You'll find his co-ordinates in the vicinity of our forward camera."

Seconds later the ghostly image of the science officer materialized beside his science station. "Sorry about that captain, I couldn't find a logical pattern to the sneezing sequence. It sent me totally off balance."

"How come you managed to get outside the ship but couldn't get back in again?" Quirk asked.

"The most logical explanation is that the added velocity of the sneeze propulsion made it possible for me to penetrate the specially lined hull."

"What the hell's been going on?" Dr McBoy stormed through the turbolift doors. "Two months of tests destroyed in fifteen minutes, and I was so close to cracking the rejuvenation problem. Now I'll have to start all over again with..."

"We've got more important things to worry about at the moment balls," Quirk interrupted. "Get your medical equipment ready, we may need you onboard Alpha."

"Is that Star Brothel Alpha?" Dr McBoy was staring at the viewscreen. "It's huge. It must be the largest brothel in the galaxy."

"There's no bigger or better star brothel than this one," Quirk announced. "You name it, they cater for it."

"I thought that was Pervertia's slogan," Spook interrupted.

"Well ... Alpha caters for any non perverted activities and with their notoriety, I expect the station's making a handsome profit."

"Maybe it was Interstellar criminals who attacked the station," Checkoff suggested. "There must be billions of credits passing through their finance department every day."

"They have one of the most elaborate security systems in existence," Spook explained. "That together with an army of pimps who guard them night and day."

"Well, it looks like somebody or something managed to get passed their security," Quirk observed. "Are the scanners showing any signs of life?"

"Our scanners can't penetrate the station's defences captain. Their transporter scrambler must still be operational."

"Lt O'Hurry, open all hailing frequencies. Try to establish some kind of contact with Alpha's command centre."

"No response captain," the communications officers reported.

"It looks like we're going down there," Quirk decided. "What kind of defences are we up against?"

"We'll have to use the shuttlecraft captain," Spook explained. "They installed the transporter scramblers after an increasing number of clients beamed off the station without payment. All access is now via the docking station in the central core."

The old space station visible before them looked very similar to a gyroscope in appearance. The counter rotating circles helped to create an artificial gravity similar to that on earth as well as preventing any unauthorised ship from approaching the station at speed. To successfully dock with the central core, all clients were required to stop level with the outer ring and then a tractor beam would yank the ship between the rotating rings at the correct moment. The problem for the officers of the Tantalise was the fact that there wouldn't be a tractor beam to pull them into the dock and the proximity of the multiple rings made a graduated hop between them extremely dangerous.

"Can't we override the transporter scrambler?" Quirk enquired.

"The last person who tried skipping off without payment ended up being reformed on his ship as a real dickhead," Spook explained. "You can't say the girls on the station don't have a sense of humour. Other variations on the theme have included breast formation, testicular enlargement and for repeated offenders, sex changes."

"Testicular enlargement doesn't sound that much of a punishment," Checkoff interrupted.

"Would you be content with testicles the size of watermelons?" Spook countered.

"In that case I think we need to formulate a plan which doesn't involve us using transporters," Quirk quickly decided. "The only other option I can see is relying on the shuttlecraft. The only question is, how do we manage to find the right hole to penetrate the station?"

"The logical answer would be for the station's tractor beam to guide us in, that way we can dock without any complications," Spook suggested. "The only problem there is, how do we turn the tractor beam on?"

"In that case somebody will have to get onto the station first," Quirk stated the obvious. "Do we have any volunteers to be transported over?" Everybody on the bridge conveniently found something else to keep themselves occupied, and effectively there wasn't any member of the crew willing to risk their own genitalia. "What about you Spook? As a ghost the transport scrambler probably wouldn't adversely affect your projected image."

"You want me to risk my spiritual manhood in the hope that the station's security systems aren't calibrated to effect spiritual energy."

"It's a good bet that they weren't expecting an attack by ghosts. The scrambler's probably only set for molecular energy," Quirk argued.

Ten minutes later they were all standing in the transporter room. "I don't know how you managed to talk me into this?" Spook commented.

"It's the logical answer," Quirk countered, catching Spook in his own analysis of the situation. "Wait until we're level with the outer ring before you beam over, that way you'll spend less time waiting to activate the tractor beam."

Quirk left the transporter room and caught a turbolift to one of the shuttlebays. When he arrived there he found Dr McBoy and Snotty were already onboard the shuttlecraft.

"Why have you picked us for the landing party?" the doctor asked. "Checkoff was keen to visit Alpha but you've left him on the bridge."

"It's obvious [sniff]," Snotty interrupted. "Our captain doesn't want any competition if we find the brothel staff [snort]. Look at who he's chosen to accompany him. Spook's a ghost, I've always got a bloody cold [snuffle] and you can't keep it up for more than five minutes. If the girls want to thank us, who do you think is going to get all the attention? Our captain, that's who."

"Nonsense," Quirk lied. "I picked all of you for purely technical reasons. Now, let's get this shuttlecraft en-route to that space station."

The giant shuttlebay doors silently opened and moments later the little shuttlecraft was heading towards the spinning space station. Back on the bridge Lt O'Hurry still hadn't been able to raise anybody on Alpha, despite repeated attempts using all the possible hailing frequencies.

"OK then Spook, beam across and activate the tractor beam," Quirk ordered.

On the transporter pad, Spook's translucent image faded to nothing as he was beamed through the space station's transporter scrambler. What shape he was going to end up in was a mystery to everybody. Beaming a ghost through a scrambler had never been attempted before, so all fingers were crossed that it wasn't calibrated to scramble his spiritual energy.

"Quirk to Tantalise, any word from Mr Spook?" the captain asked as the space station's outer ring rotated passed their windscreen. "We can't just sit here all day." Over thirty minutes had passed since the science officer beamed across to Alpha and Quirk was getting worried.

Spook himself was sitting in the tractor beam control room of the space station, trying hard to remember his lessons in basic anatomy. The transport scrambler had effectively scattered his body parts across the room and so far he hadn't found his vocal cords. Gradually, piece-by-piece, he was finding lumps of psychic energy and rebuilding himself like a three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle.

"Ahh, there's my other eyeball," Spook thought to himself as he reached for a spherical object, only to find it was actually a testicle. It was Dr McBoy's medical knowledge he needed but unfortunately the doctor was still in the shuttlecraft awaiting Spook's activation of the tractor beam.

"Are you still locked on to Spook's co-ordinates?" Snotty asked the transporter operator.

"I still have a lock on whatever it is he's turned into," the operator replied.

"Can you beam him back onto the Tantalise?" Quirk enquired.

"It'll mean another pass through the scrambler to get him back," the operator explained. "Whatever has happen to him will almost certainly be compounded if we try to retrieve him."

Snotty nodded his agreement with the transporter operator's assessment of the situation. There was nothing the crew of the Tantalise could really do for Spook, he was now effectively on his own.

"Your thigh bone's connected to your, hip bone," Spook sang in his mind as he replaced his various body parts. "Now where could this big squishy thing logically go? I know, it's a brain, it goes in this big round bony thing."

Spook slipped the image of his brain into his skull and instantly realised why he was on the space station. He'd replaced a large number of his body parts by this time and the rest could now wait. Minus one arm and a larynx, he started accessing the tractor beam controls. The task was made difficult by virtue of the fact that the controls were designed for a two handed person. Consequently a one handed ghost, only recently experienced at telekinesis, wasn't getting very far quickly.

On the orbiting shuttlecraft Quirk had given up on Spook and decided he was an expert enough shuttle driver to squeeze the small ship between the counter-rotating rings. He'd piloted the ship into a position so that it was orbiting at the same speed as the outer ring and then slipped in behind it, following one of the outer rings on its rotation. The problem now was to get passed the second set of rings, which were rotating in the opposite direction. Every time Quirk thought it was safe to drop to the second level, the rings came flying passed his windscreen. He couldn't even drop the shuttlecraft into a gap between the ring layers, because the gap between them was far too small. The designers of Star Brothel Alpha knew what they were doing when they invented the concentric ring pattern as it effectively blocked Quirk's efforts to reach the docking bay unaided.

"If you're trying to kill us this is a sure-fire way to do it," Dr McBoy commented as Quirk threw the shuttlecraft back outside the spinning rings again.

"Captain, the station's docking bay doors are opening," Solo reported. "Maybe Spook has managed to activate the tractor beam."

Solo's theory was proved correct when a blue translucent beam suddenly appeared from out of the docking bay and attempted to drag the Tantalise towards the spinning rings.

"Full impulsive reverse!!" Solo shouted as the massive ship fought against the docking beam.

When the rings spun passed the beam shut down for a few seconds before locking on again during the next window of opportunity. It was tug-of-war between the tractor beam, designed to quickly yank small shuttlecraft into the docking bay, and a starship which wouldn't fit through the available gap under any circumstances.

"Quirk to Mr Spook, you're locked on to the wrong ship."

Unfortunately Spook couldn't hear a word Quirk was saying, he was still trying to find his missing ears. After engaging the tractor beam he'd returned to hunting for his scattered body parts on the floor of the control room. With his brain reinstalled the task had become considerably easier and he'd removed his testicle from his left eye socket, replacing it where it should have been. He was slowly rebuilding himself. He'd found his second arm but it was the small parts that were proving to be a problem. Most of them had rolled into corners, under computer consoles and behind control panels.

"It's no good captain," Solo called. "We're slowly being pulled towards the station every time the tractor beam powers up."

"What about engaging reverse super sneeze?" Snotty suggested.

"The main engines are still off-line while your engineers correct the synchronized sneeze. It should only take another ten minutes but by then we'll have collided with the outer rotating ring."

"I can try to take out the tractor generator with our tazors," Checkoff suggested.

"Only use the tazors as a last resort," Quirk ordered. "We came here to rescue the crew of Star Brothel Alpha, not destroy the station. Remember that Spook's in the docking bay somewhere."

Quirk tried once more to manoeuvre the shuttlecraft between the rotating rings but another near miss with the second level forced him to abort the attempt. Somehow he had to get into that docking bay before the Tantalise collided with the space station.

"Solo, can you concentrate on saving this ship," Lt O'Hurry suggested. "Just because being in a life threatening situation turns you on, a lack of concentration at this time might just get us all killed."

"I was just adjusting their position," Solo argued in his defence. "Are the tazors charged?" he asked Checkoff.

"Ready to fire on your command," Checkoff replied.

In a direct line of fire Spook was still searching the floor of the tractor control room. He'd found his other eye and even discovered his penis lodged down the back of a chair. It was during a moment of thoughtfulness; when he'd sat down to decide on his next move, that the missing appendage had made itself known. He was still contemplating the pros and cons of the experience as the Tantalise charged up its tazors, the repetitive vibrations from the activating tractor beam serving to distract Spook even more.

"Prepare to fire tazor on my instructions," Solo ordered as the Tantalise was being drawn perilously close to the spinning space station.