

"Visitor from the Fourth Wall"

A Star Trek: Voyager
Novella

by
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Chapter 1

He was sweating. Perspiring profusely. His body temperature was rising, approaching 105 degrees. His gastrointestinal system felt like it had turned inside out. His body was stretched on its back across the bed, he occasionally jerked and rolled from side to side, unaware of the virus that gripped him. His thoughts were swirling in a fever delirium. *Spinning...everything spinning...wet...must be sweating...no, I'm swimming...am I drowning? B'Elanna! Where...is...B'Elanna? I've lost B'Elanna! Bright light...overwhelming...dizzy...I'm still spinning...zero-G? The...penal...colony...I'm back! Never...left! got stabilized...stabilize myself...stop spinning...stabilize...aft thrusters...got to stabilize the Flyer...Aye, Captain...I have the coordinates...penal colony...tell my father...I'm sorry...B'Elanna...I'm sorry...got to stabilize...swimming...drowning...heat...intense heat...spinning...spinning...losing*

consciousness...no...No!

Can't...lose...consciousness...can't lose...

The tall man backed his four-wheeled land vehicle about 12 meters down a slight incline and away from the ranch-style house he called home. Pulling onto a main street he began to work the control of a frequency modulated receiver on the instrument panel of the vehicle. The speakers came to life.

"and the Dow opened this morning at its highest level of 2018. The NASDAQ was also --"

The man turned the frequency knob in frustration. "Just give me the traffic," he muttered.

"And tonight, the Dodgers are back at the Stadium for the first of a three game series with the Marlins. On the mound for --"

"Can't I find one station with a traffic report?" he asked aloud, but to no one but himself. He turned the knob again.

"and a crash on the 101 coming out of Thousand Oaks just before Liberty Canyon Road..."

"The 405," he pleaded. "The 405! Come on! I've got to be in San Diego by 10 o'clock."

As if his receiver had suddenly become a transmitter, the voice on the other end seem to hear his cry, and said in response, "*and the earlier delays on the 405 have thinned out and you've got the normal heavy traffic through Irvine and the 5 merge.*"

It was good news. The man looked at the wristwatch on his left arm. Just past 7:30 a.m. He should make it. It was important he do so. He was an expert in his field and made the once-a-month trek to one of San Diego's best known locations. But not as a tourist but rather a professional researcher and observer.

The ride was long, but the tedium was held in check by his favorite music on his receiving device, punctuated by items of information on what was happening on his planet, descriptions of possible changes in the day's environmental conditions, dispatches on the results of various contests between athletic organizations and reports on possible obstacles that would impede his journey.

Arriving at his destination, he exited the vehicle and made his stride quickly to an area that an unknowing person would mistake for a prison

yard. There were cages, each containing various fauna not necessarily native to the current locale, but from all over the planet.

The man carried a large black bag containing instruments of measurement -- the kind that would assess the health of zoological specimens. He reached into the right pocket of his trousers and extracted a metal key. Placing it in the lock of the cage he was facing, he slowly turned the key and stepped into the chamber.

He was exceedingly careful to meet the beings inside. Even though he was an expert at what he did, he always approached his subjects with extreme caution. Now he was ready for the start of the examination.

"Hi, fellows. You miss me?" said the man extending his hand toward one, knowing there would be no verbal response. The others drew closer. They all knew the man well, if not by sight, surely by his odor.

The man laid his bag near the door and returned to his examinees. By now there were five simian creatures surrounding the tall man. He felt no fear.

Then, suddenly from out of nowhere a brilliant blue light appeared from above. The man blinked and before he could move another muscle, he and his five companions were enveloped in a brilliant shimmer, accompanied by a haunting high pitched whine. When the shimmering stopped the six figures had vanished from the cage and from the face of the Earth!

There was no one in the vicinity of the cage to observe the phenomenon. But had there been, any observer would have to admit they themselves were the victim of a hallucination.

Stardate 53947.7. The sound of a chirping communicator badge awoke Kathryn Janeway from a sound sleep. Without opening her eyes, she reached to the nightstand next to the bed and tapped the intrusive device with her index and middle fingers. Upset that she had been disturbed during what apparently was a very good dream, she forced out the words, "Whoever this is, it had better be good."

"Captain," announced Ensign Harry Kim, who was in charge of the overnight shift on *Voyager's* bridge. "I know it's late..."

"How late, Ensign?" Janeway interrupted, still a bit groggy.

"It's just after 0300 hours, Captain, but I'm sure this is worth waking you."

Janeway's mind searched for a reason for the interruption. "Have we gone to Red Alert? Are we under attack?"

"Bigger than that Captain. Long-range scans indicate a wormhole about 150 million kilometers ahead of us. I did a preliminary analysis and it appears to lead to the Alpha Quadrant."

Janeway shot up straight up in the bed. Jerking the bed covers back she swung her legs around to make contact with the floor, immediately standing and grabbing the communicator with her right hand. "Alert the senior officers, Mr. Kim. I'm on my way!"

"Coffee, black...hot and extra strong," she commanded her replicator.

She quickly grabbed a utility jumpsuit from the top drawer of her clothing storage. There was no time to even think about a regulation uniform. After well over five years stranded in the Delta Quadrant, the possibility of a shortcut to get back

home was her highest priority. She quickly slipped on the jumpsuit, grabbed the cup of coffee from the replicator and made her way out of her quarters into the corridor. Then she remembered this had happened before. Stardate 52542.3. The *Voyager* crew was deceived by a bio-plasmic organism -- a beast that consumed starships by telepathically preying on their crews' desires -- into believing they were entering a wormhole to Earth. "I hope this isn't a repeat performance," Janeway muttered, "and I hope I'm not still dreaming."

As she strode rapidly toward the bridge turbolift, her mind raced to put in perspective the events of the past few days. Then she remembered. The ship had been on Yellow Alert for the past 72 hours. At least one-fourth of her crew had been infected with an unknown virus.

It had begun when Tom Paris and Ensign Charles Vickers had returned from an away mission in the Delta Flyer to investigate a nearby nebula. Tom had insisted on Vickers to assist him, as the ensign had worked closely under the tutelage of Seven of Nine ever since Harry Kim had created the astrometrics lab. Vickers'

expertise, Tom figured, would prove invaluable in checking out the giant space cloud.

The pair had reported that a bright light had penetrated the Flyer's hull and rendered them briefly unconscious. When they regained their senses, both began experiencing feelings of malaise and started to perspire. They returned almost immediately to Voyager and Janeway had decided to put them in isolation in sickbay while the Doctor looked for a reason for their malady and hopefully a treatment.

It was just a few moments after the Doctor activated the isolation force-field when a massive electromagnetic surge coming from the nebula caused a ship-wide power failure. It lasted only a nanosecond, and was only discernible by sensors, but it had been long enough to drop the isolation field around Tom and Vickers and allow the virus to escape into other areas of the ship. The Doctor had been initially unaware of the escape.

That was three days ago, and the unknown disease had begun to spread to other parts of the ship, before the Doctor and Seven of Nine finally isolated the virus and placed it in containment fields, in all 76 areas in which it had been

discovered. Meanwhile, more than two dozen of *Voyager's* crew began to show symptoms of fever, respiratory distress and gastritis.

Over the next 48 hours the Doctor had only managed to determine a few things about the illness. First it appeared to be non-fatal, but did cause symptoms severe enough to keep the affected members of the crew bed ridden, each drifting in and out of consciousness in some kind of fever delirium. With a good portion of *Voyager's* crew flat on their backs, the others were forced to work double shifts and be called on to perform other than their primary duties. Second, the Doctor had noted only the human members of the crew were affected, but he had no answer why. Probably it was something that distinguished the human immune system from those of non-Terran species. It had not affected Vulcans, Boleans and the one Talaxian aboard. Janeway realized that if the Doctor could not get a handle on the problem soon, both the stamina and morale of the unaffected crew members would be seriously affected as well.

This prompted the Captain to call a muster of what senior officers had not been affected by

the illness, in the ship's wardroom, to discuss the situation. The entire staff would be in attendance with the notable exception of Tom Paris.

As she moved upward in the turbolift, Janeway recalled a meeting that had occurred not ten hours earlier in the briefing room.

"We're able to keep things together with lots of extra duty, Captain," Chakotay reported, folding his hands and placing them before him on the conference table, "but I can't say for certain how long. By the end of the week, if we're still in the same condition as now, it should start to seriously affect the crew. I guess we can be thankful no more are suffering this affliction than we have now, and also be glad we have this virus contained, albeit all over the ship. We're out of room in Sickbay and have converted Cargo Bay One to act as an emergency sickbay. The Doctor is treating the more severe cases in main Sickbay. Unfortunately, his chief medic, Mr. Paris, is also his chief victim."

"I've managed to rig a totally failsafe backup power system for sickbay," said B'Elanna Torres, "and the cargo bay," she added.

The captain looked directly into the chief engineer's eyes, "It's my belief," said Janeway, "that no system is totally failsafe, B'Elanna. But I'm sure you've done the best that can be done." She turned to her tactical officer. "Tuvok, has ship's security been compromised by this incident?"

"Not at this time, Captain," was the Vulcan's answer. "My security detail appears to be coping well with the situation."

Janeway continued to move the discussion around the conference table. "How about it, Mr. Kim? Any evidence this whatever-it-is has tried to attack Voyager directly?"

"Captain, we've had sensors on the longest and widest possible scan and we're detected nothing like what struck the *Flyer*. It's likely this attack came from inside the nebula, but I can't be certain of that. So far though, we've turned up nothing more than pulses of electromagnetic radiation from it. I doubt it is directly responsible for our present medical problems, but who knows what could be inside it? We have taken some pretty good EM hits since we discovered the nebula, including the big one that caused the

isolation force-field in Sickbay to fail. The good news is the shields are holding well."

"How long till we're past the nebula?" the Captain asked.

"A week. Maybe two at high warp," Kim answered. "Because of the EM interference I can't get a complete scan on how deep the nebula is. But at least several days seems to be a good guess."

"All right, Mr. Kim," Janeway said, "what can we do about the EM pulses?"

"I'm working on something now, Captain," chimed in Seven of Nine. "I believe I can modify one of our probes to draw the EM pulses away from the ship."

"A sort of lightning rod?" asked Janeway.

"Precisely."

"Work fast, Seven," Janeway said. "If we catch a pulse strong enough to knock our shields down, we might be vulnerable to what hit the *Flyer*."

Janeway turned to Margaret Castro. The young transporter chief turned toward the captain. "Castro," the Captain began, "we have the virus on the ship contained in several areas. Can we

transport it off the ship?"

"I haven't tried, Captain. We'd have to release it from the containment fields to do so, and...well, you know how fast it travels. It might escape before I could get it off the ship."

"Castro, when this meeting is over, I want you to get together with the Doctor on a way to transport this stuff off *Voyager*." Then she turned to address the entire senior staff. "This, of course, is priority one."

"Captain, as morale officer, I'm doing my best to lift the crew's spirits in this ordeal," volunteered Neelix. "I've visited each crew member in Sickbay and in the cargo bay. Since only the human members seem to be affected, I'll also try to engage those humans who have not been infected in activities that would keep them from worrying about things."

Janeway turned to the final face at the table. "Well, I guess the games' around to you, Doctor. Raise, call or fold?"

"Well, Captain, I suppose the card game analogy is apropos, since we seem to need a couple of aces up our proverbial sleeve."

"So what's the latest?" Janeway questioned.

"Our homo sapiens patients aren't getting any worse, but they're not getting any better either. Most are quite delirious. It still may be early. This thing just may run its course, like the common cold."

"Or not!" B'Elanna interrupted, only to draw a stern look from Janeway.

"B'Elanna, I know your husband is affected. That makes you personally involved. But I don't have to remind you not to let that affect your judgment," Janeway continued. Then she added, "Go on, Doctor."

"This illness is definitely transmitted by light waves. A 'photo-virus,' if you will. I've been working on a treatment, and I believe I may be on to something. But I'm afraid to test anything on human patients. I have tested some methods, but results are inconclusive."

Janeway asked, "How you think you can resolve this dilemma?"

"It would be helpful," the Doctor began almost facetiously, "if we had a non-human, and yet Terran primate. An orangutan or spider monkey would be sufficient."

"And, of course, we have no such animals

aboard *Voyager*," said Janeway. "And even if there were, I wouldn't think you would actually infect them with the disease. You know how we value the proper treatment of all life forms."

"Actually," returned the Doctor, "I could conduct non-invasive tests that would not be harmful to animals. But, of course, the whole thing is moot since we don't have any 'non-human' primates," adding with a smug expression, "I suppose I'll have to do what I always do and come up with something that would give us a miraculous solution despite the odds."

"Thank you for the confident attitude, Doctor," said Janeway, ignoring the hologram's burst of egotism. She added, "It seems we all have work to do, so let's do it." With the meeting dismissed, each of the staff members rose and headed for their assignments.

That meeting had been in the late afternoon the previous day. Now Janeway was on her way to the bridge to investigate something totally unrelated to the photo-virus. Well, *maybe* unrelated, she thought. The possibility of finding a wormhole which might be a shortcut to the

Alpha Quadrant almost overwhelmed her thinking. After almost six years in the Delta Quadrant, the remaining dozens of years it would take to get home was more than a lifetime which seemed like an eternity.

As Janeway stepped from the turbolift onto the bridge, she noted that the senior officers had already arrived. Harry Kim had moved from the captain's chair, his usual post on the overnight shift. Chakotay was already at his own position, and Tuvok has assumed the tactical post. Seven of Nine was on the bridge, standing over Harry, looking like a predatory bird about to swoop down on the ensign at the sign of his first mistake. B'Elanna Torres was standing behind Tuvok, thinking that the captain would have done better to send her directly to Engineering. Then Janeway looked at the pilot's position. Ensign Gaat, a Bolean, was seated where one would normally expect to find Tom Paris. Tom's absence was a grim reminder to Janeway and the others of the severity of the ship's current crisis.

Seven of Nine was the first to speak. "Captain, I have modified a probe that will draw the electromagnetic interference away from the

ship."

"Have you released it?" Janeway asked.

"Yes, just before you called us to the bridge. It is heading toward a position about halfway between *Voyager* and the nebula. I have programmed it to continuously maneuver between the ship and the nebula. It is my hope it will draw all the EM pulses until we are clear of the nebula."

"Let's *all* hope so," said Janeway.

Seeing Tom's seat prompted Janeway to address the human members of the bridge crew.

"Chakotay and Harry, as you know, we have the virus contained, and the 'lightning rod' Seven has provided should draw the EM pulses away. Still, I want you to keep the Doctor informed of your whereabouts should you leave the bridge. Heaven forbid what would happen if that thing should get loose again. You two, of course, along with myself, would be the most vulnerable among those on the bridge." Then she had an afterthought.

"Seven, I want you and B'Elanna to be careful also. Seven, you may consider yourself Borg, but most of your DNA is human. Same thing for you, B'Elanna. We have no way of knowing if this virus could attack your human half." The two

nodded in agreement,

Then Janeway changed the subject. "Now, let's get down to the business of this wormhole. Mr. Kim, what do we know so far?"

"Captain, we're closing in on the opening on this end of the wormhole. It's now about 100 kilometers away. It appears to be stable except for some strong gravimetric and temporal distortions.

"The gravimetric and temporal distortions appear to be caused by the electromagnetic pulses coming from the nebula," Seven added.

"Harry, you said this wormhole leads to the Alpha Quadrant," Janeway said. Then she asked, "How can you be sure?"

"When I first discovered the wormhole it was much wider than it is now. Sensors were able to get a good look at the star field on the other end. The computer identified the other end as being in the Alpha Quadrant. And get this!" His voice began to show excitement. "According to the stellar positioning, the far end of this thing is in the Sol system."

"Home!" said Janeway with anticipation in her voice. "Maybe." She turned to Seven and spoke: "The last time we thought we had a

wormhole we were affected by the bio-plasmic organism that deceived us. Do you think we are being deceived now?"

"I don't believe so, Captain. It would appear the wormhole is real, and the possibility of traveling through it to the Alpha Quadrant is real."

Janeway signed. "We may never get a chance this good again."

"There's a problem," said Harry. "As I said, the wormhole is shrinking. I can't determine how long before it collapses. Right now it's not wide enough to put *Voyager* through. In fact, when we first discovered it, it was too small then."

"What about a probe?" Chakotay asked.

"A class one probe could make it, I believe," Tuvok said. "But we had best send it now before the wormhole gets any smaller."

"When we get close enough, do it," Janeway commanded.

In a matter of minutes, *Voyager* had moved to just outside the wormhole opening. At just the right moment, Harry released the probe. Within a minute Harry was receiving sensor information.

"I was right about the width of the opening, Captain," Kim said. "The far end of the wormhole

appears to be above Earth." The he added with irony in his voice, "of all places."

Seven was observing the probe's progress and reported, "The probe has identified the west coast of North America. The probe says the opening is about 200 kilometers above the earth's surface. But the wormhole is continuing to collapse. We have perhaps two minutes before it shuts down altogether."

"This the chance of a lifetime!" exclaimed Janeway. "Harry, open a channel. We've got to get a message through,"

"I've opened the emergency Starfleet channel, Captain."

"Starfleet, this is *Voyager*. Do you copy us?" Janeway said.

There was no reply.

"It's no use, Captain," said Kim. "It wasn't received."

"What? Harry, is the EM eating up the signal?"

"It doesn't appear to be."

"Are the gravimetric and temporal distortions causing the signal not to get through?"

"No," said Harry. Then he checked his

console again. "No, Captain. The signal is apparently getting through the wormhole. It just seems not to be received. As if there's no one there to hear it."

"Try again," directed Janeway. She spoke into the comm. "This is Captain Kathryn Janeway of the starship *Voyager*. Does anyone copy this message?"

There was still no reply.

"Blast it!" shouted Janeway. "Something has to work. This opportunity is too great. We have to do *something!*"

"Seven continued looking over Harry's shoulder at the returning data from the probe. She spoke up. "Captain, if the EM interference, nor the gravimetric and temporal distortions, are not affecting out subspace transmissions, perhaps it would not affect the transporter either."

"What are you saying, Seven? That we beam everybody through the wormhole down to the Earth's surface, six at a time? That would be fine if we had a half hour. How much time left, Mr. Kim?"

"Thirty seconds, based on what we're getting back from the probe."

"Not even time to draw straws to see who goes first," said Chakotay.

"Twenty seconds," announced Kim. "The probe is returning through the wormhole."

"Why didn't Starfleet answer? It's the biggest chance of our journey and we're going to miss it!" Janeway said in disgust.

"Ten seconds," said Kim. "The probe has returned. Still nothing from Starfleet. Wait, Captain, something is happening in the wormhole. I can't tell quite what...the wormhole is collapsing in five...four...three...two...one...it's gone, Captain." There was now only normal space where the wormhole had been.

Janeway hit her fist on the arm of the captain's chair. "We missed it!" she said in utter frustration and disappointment. Then she turned to Harry. "Ensign, you said something happened in the wormhole just before it collapsed. What was it?"

"Give me a minute to look at the data." He pause a moment and then spoke, "It was a transporter beam, Captain."

"What? *Our* transporter beam? Was someone trying to beam off the ship?"

"Let me check the sensors," said Kim. "No, Captain. It looks like *we* beamed something aboard."

"Beamed something aboard? Why would we do that?" She immediately hit the comm keypad button on the arm of her chair. "Janeway to Transporter Room. Castro, why was our transporter operating just then?"

"Captain!" Castro's excited voice came over the comm. "I got them!" she cried with a tone that indicated she was rather pleased with herself. "I got them!"

Chapter 2

"*You did what, Lieutenant?*" said Janeway, raising her voice in incredulity.

"I saw the wormhole, and before it collapsed, I beamed aboard six-non human primates. I've got them stored in the pattern buffer right now. I remember the Doctor saying in the briefing yesterday afternoon he needed some 'non-human' primates. I saw the wormhole opening and scanned a section of Earth in the southwest corner of North America. I had the sensors set for them and then just as found them, I beamed them up."

"Without orders?" Janeway said disgustedly. "Do you realize, Lieutenant, they may have belonged to somebody? Starfleet vessels are not in the habit of stealing people's property."

"I'm sorry Captain. I remember how you told me a few weeks ago I needed to take initiative," said Castro.

"That wasn't what I had in mind," muttered Janeway, under her breath. She opened the comm again. "All right, Lieutenant," she continued,

resigned. "I'm not pleased with this. I want you to take initiative, but not to the point of compromising ship's security. You should have checked with me first. In the future, use discretion. I don't want to put you on report."

"Understood, Captain," replied Castro.

"Now," Janeway ordered, "materialize them and then immediately put a containment field around the transporter pad. I'll ask the Doctor to clear an area in Sickbay and then you can transport them there."

"Okay, Captain. I'm doing it now. Castro out."

Castro's fingers moved over the controls as the familiar whine of the transporter beam began in the chamber. Six figures began to shimmer in the chamber, but almost immediately Castro saw that something was not right. When the materialization process was complete, Castro's eyes widened as she realized she had beamed aboard five apes...and one humanoid! She instantly looked at her console and realized she hadn't had the sensors set right.

"Oh, no!" blurted out the startled Castro. Then after a moment's pause, she collected herself

and quickly brought up the containment field.

It was some kind of a standoff as Castro stared at the humanoid form as the figure -- definitely a mature male who appeared human and in his late thirties -- stared back at her for what seemed like forever. After a minute, the tall man's expression changed from shock and awe to one of recognition.

Castro tapped her communicator badge. "Transporter room to Bridge. Captain! We have a problem!"

"What is it Lieutenant?"

"There's one humanoid in the group I beamed up!"

"What?"

"I've got five apes of various kinds, and...a man!"

"A man? Is the containment field in place?"

"Yes, Captain. What do I do next?"

"Just keep the field up. And don't do anything else. Don't take any 'initiatives.' I'll send security to the transporter room. Janeway out."

The captain swiveled in her chair toward

Tuvok. "Commander, take a security team and get down there. And don't let the containment field drop until you check out the situation and call me.

"Aye, Captain," was Tuvok's reply.

Castro could tell the man was tall. Close to 190 centimeters. He had very dark brown, almost black hair, deep brown eyes and was clean shaven with a square jaw. He wore a blue short-sleeve, three button v-neck shirt with a soft collar. The top button of his shirt was unfastened. His pants were dark black and he was wearing low-cut shoes Castro didn't recognize. *If he's human, Castro thought, he's definitely Caucasian. I've seen clothing like that in a library book somewhere. It looks like something someone would wear hundreds of years ago. I'd swear that's a Terran crocodile or alligator in the left breast area of that shirt. Maybe this guy likes reptiles.*

Castro and the man stared at each other as Castro tried to make out the lettering under the small reptile image on the man's shirt. *Roman letters, thought Castro, possibly English. S...A...N.....D...I...E...G --*, read Castro. The man turned slightly and Castro could no longer make

out the letters.

Then the man rapidly shook his head as if to clear it, and blinked twice, trying to orient himself. "I don't believe this!" were his first words. "A moment ago I was in the simian exhibit and now I'm -- ." A flash of recognition struck him. "Can this be happening? I actually think I know where I am."

"Just keep still and keep quiet until security gets here," commanded Castro to the tall man who was surrounded by two chimpanzees, two orangutans and a gorilla.

"Federation starship! I recognize your uniform and rank, Lieutenant," said the man, ignoring Castro's order.

"I said keep quiet!"

"Relax, Lieutenant. I'm no threat. This can't be a gag or a dream. I know I'm really here. From your uniform I'm guessing this is the 24th century! I would pinch myself, but this is real!"

What an odd thing to say, thought Castro.

The man then asked, "We're aboard a Starfleet vessel, right?"

Castro searched for something to say. "You may get your answer when security gets here."

The man continued to move his eyes around the transporter room with a wide gaze. "This is unbelievable, but I'm beginning to understand what just happened. What is your name, Lieutenant? Mine is Allen. Allen Rendon."

"I don't want to tell you again to shut up!"

Rendon looked around himself at the five apes who were making no attempt to leave the transporter pad or even test the containment field they had no way of knowing was there. "Well, Lieutenant," he said to Castro, "you seem to have stolen five simians from the San Diego Zoo." Then he glanced around the room with its 24th century technology and smiled. "But, I guess the statute of limitations has long run out." Then he pointed to himself. "And on kidnapping, too," he added with a chuckle. Rendon was so fascinated by the surroundings, that the "how-do-I-get-back" question was the farthest thing from his mind.

Castro spoke again. "For your information, Mr. Rendon, or whoever you are, my actions have already drawn a verbal reprimand from the captain."

Castro then became silent as the transporter room door hissed open and Tuvok and two

security crewmen quickly jumped through with phasers drawn. Rendon's countenance immediately changed from awe to cognizance. The smile that had been on his face actually became wider. He stared at the Vulcan security chief. "Wow, I must be on *Voyager*! Commander Tuvok!" he announced.

Confusion crossed the Vulcan's face. The man was not familiar to him. "How do you know this?" he asked in his usual calm Vulcan tone.

"Believe me, Commander," he started to say, then thought about it. "...on second thought, you probably wouldn't believe me!"

Tuvok paid no attention to his remark. "Can you tell me who you are and where we beamed you from?"

"Please don't point those things at me. I'm not armed and I'm not going to do anything. You're just making me nervous." Tuvok lowered his weapon and indicated for the security guards to do the same, but knew he could quickly raise his phaser again and fire it, if the situation called for it.

Rendon continued, "This is going to be a little hard to explain. I'm just now beginning to

understand for myself what's happened."

"You can begin," said Tuvok, "with the truth."

"All right, I don't expect you to believe this right away. In fact I'm not completely certain that *I* believe it! Anyway, my name is Dr. Allen Rendon. I am from the early 21 century, which you may or may not know."

Tuvok raised a single eyebrow. "Indeed," then he said: "Go on."

"I am a simian zoologist with the University of California at Los Angeles. I was working at the zoo in San Diego doing research in the ape display." He looked at the animals at his side. "For reasons I don't understand, it appears you beamed me and my five friends here aboard your ship. I don't know if you've come back in time somehow, or if you brought me forward...but I guess I can't deny I'm here."

"Nor can I," said Tuvok. "You say you are from the 21st century. How do you know about us?"

"That *will* be hard to explain. May I speak to Captain Janeway? I mean, I assume Kathryn Janeway is your Captain."

Tuvok tapped his communicator badge but continued to eye Rendon. "Tuvok to Captain Janeway."

Janeway answered, "*Go ahead, Commander.*"

"Captain, it appears we have beamed aboard someone who appears to be human. He claims to be from the 21st century. And he is asking for you...personally."

"*What did you say?*" Janeway was incredulous.

"He appears to know who we are, Captain, and his is asking to see you."

"*All right, Lieutenant. Bring him to my Ready Room right away. Under guard! And, I suppose it's all right to have Castro transport those monkeys to the Doctor in Sickbay.*"

"Right away, Captain," was Tuvok's reply. Castro dropped the containment field which came down with a short buzz. "All right, Mr. Rendon --"

"*Doctor Rendon,*" he interrupted.

"Doctor Rendon," repeated Tuvok, saying the word "doctor" in an almost sarcastic manner. "Let's go." he said gesturing toward the door with

his phaser.

Rendon stepped off the pad. Castro brought the containment field back up. Rendon followed the Vulcan and his two guards out the door. It hissed behind them. Rendon turned his head to look back in the direction of the sound of the door in amazement. "Wow!" was all he said. Tuvok could not understand Rendon's brief comment.

Janeway had just finished speaking to the Doctor, who was in Sickbay, when her door alarm chirped. "Come in," she said.

With the two guards, that had been with Tuvok, posting themselves outside Janeway's Ready Room, Tuvok motioned for Rendon to enter as the door hissed open. Rendon stepped in and immediately began to stare around the room in amazement. Janeway looked at him in confusion.

"He has been...how shall I put?" Tuvok searched for a word. "Gawking...at everything."

"I'm awestruck, Captain," Rendon offered.

"Captain, may I present *Doctor* Allen Rendon." Tuvok had rolled his eyes upward slightly on the word "doctor." Then he added, "He appears to have knowledge of *Voyager*. How, I am unsure."

"Thank you, Commander Tuvok. That will be all," said Janeway. Tuvok left the Ready Room, leaving Janeway and Rendon alone. "Okay, Doctor...if you *are* a doctor. I'm told you're from the 21st century."

"Which tells me you are either in your past and don't know it, or you brought me forward," said Rendon.

"This is the 24th century."

"Alpha Quadrant?"

"Sir, if you're from the 21st century, how do you know the galaxy is divided into quadrants?"

"I think I may know a great deal more than that."

"You obviously don't know you're in the Delta Quadrant."

"Delta Quadrant," repeated Rendon.

"You're still stranded."

"Yes, we're stranded. But how do you know that?"

"Well, Captain, if you're confused, there are still some things that confuse me also. If I'm in the 24th century Delta Quadrant, how did you beam me here from Earth?"

"We beamed you through a wormhole that

was open to the Alpha Quadrant. But listen, I'm supposed to be asking the questions," the Captain reminded him.

Rendon ignored her. "Can you check to see if maybe the wormhole is not only over space, but time as well?"

"The wormhole has collapsed. There were gravimetric and temporal distortions in the wormhole before it closed up -- if that means anything to you."

"I understand, Captain. Was it enough to create a portal to the past?"

"Who knows? You say you're from the past. We can possibly find out, you know." She tapped her communicator badge. "Janeway to Ensign Kim."

"Kim here, Captain."

"Mr. Kim, I want you to study the sensor logs and check the gravimetric and temporal disturbances that were discovered in the wormhole by our probe. See if there's any indication the other end of the wormhole was in a different temporal period."

"Captain, that may be pretty hard to determine."

"Just do what you can, Ensign. Janeway out." She turned to her guest. "All right, Rendon, have a seat. She indicated a chair. "Let's have the whole thing." She sat down behind her desk.

"You may not believe it when I'm done."

"I already don't believe it. But let's have it anyway."

"Okay, Captain, here goes. First me. My name is Allen Rendon. I am a professor of simian zoology at UCLA. I was in San Diego, California doing routine research on gorillas, chimps and other primates at their zoo. Then a bright blue light enveloped several of the apes and me. I heard a high-pitched whine and everything outside the blue light began to fade and the next moment the room where I materialized faded into view."

"Go on."

"I was very confused for a moment. Then when I looked around the room, and the lieutenant standing behind the console, things began to fall into place -- what had happened and where I was. Even though my brain was still trying to tell me the next-to-impossible -- if not totally impossible -- had occurred, I knew I wasn't dreaming. I was also fairly sure it wasn't a hallucination."

"What do you mean 'impossible'? And how do you know so much about us?"

"As I said, I believe I know quite a bit."

"*How?*" Janeway was losing patience.

"This is going to be really hard to explain.

In fact, I'm not sure I *can* explain it. It's going to take a really open mind on your part."

"I'll try," she said, not sure of how easy that would be.

"Well," began Rendon. "I don't know how to put it. Parallel universe...alternate reality...twisted timeline. I've even heard a theory that popular fiction established in one existence can create reality in another." Then he, resigned, said: "I just don't know."

Janeway was confused, but adamant about getting an explanation. "Well? Just spit it out, Mr. -- excuse me, *Doctor* Rendon."

"Okay, here goes. Like I said, I'm from the past. I just don't know if I'm from *your* past."

"Why do you say that?"

"Where I'm from, Captain, lots of people, maybe hundreds of millions, know about Voyager. Which would mean that many, many people you might beam up from my world would know. I

would think it would be less coincidental than one might think."

"How is that possible, Doctor?" Janeway didn't emphasize Rendon's title.

"In the past, in *my* past, there is something known as the *Star Trek* -- how can I put this -- legend...lore...depiction. I don't know exactly what to call it."

"*Star Trek* legend?" What the blazes is that?

"It started in 1966 as a television series."

"Television? I read about that in elementary school history."

Rendon went on. "Initially, the series wasn't very successful. But then in the 1970s old episodes of the series became quite popular. The series told the story of the 23rd century Starship *Enterprise* commanded by Captain James T. Kirk."

"I've heard of Captain Kirk," interjected Janeway.

"In my world, there were later motion pictures and novels and eventually another series about the 24th century *Enterprise* commanded by Captain Jean-Luc Picard."

"I know Captain Picard," offered Janeway. "Not well, but we've met. Although at this point I must say your story really sounds crazy."

"I'm sure it does from your point of view, Captain. But let me go on."

"Oh, please," said Janeway almost mockingly. Rendon ignored her tone.

"Another series came out in the 1990s featuring the crew of *Deep Space Nine*. Then a few years later, there was a series about *Voyager* that ran for seven years. There were also novels about *DS9* and *Voyager* and the other *Star Trek* series. Not only that, but there used to be conventions."

"Conventions?"

"Yes, where thousands of people gathered to share the legend. That was a name for people who follow this franchise. They were called "Trekkies."

"Trekkies," repeated Janeway in a tone of pure skepticism.

"I guess you could say I am...or was...one of them. Although many of us preferred the term "Trekkers."

"Trekkers..." said Janeway nodding in

condescension.

Rendon continued. "Then, there was another series about the 22nd century Enterprise. Then there were more motion pictures."

Janeway was now probing Rendon's story. "And this 22nd century Enterprise was commanded by -- "

"Captain Jonathan Archer."

"Okay, so you know some of our history and current information. You could be from an alien ship and tapped into our logs somehow."

"I'm not an alien, Captain. I told you I don't understand how to it explain it myself. Maybe Roddenberry and Berman had future premonitions."

"Who the devil are Roddenberry and Berman?"

"Gene Roddenberry was the creator of *Star Trek*. He died in 1991. Rick Berman was his protégé who took over the various series."

"And you say these guys accurately predicted Earth's future?"

"Captain, I don't know what the explanation is. I'm doing the best I can to tell you what I know."

"This whole thing sounds pretty thin to me," said Janeway.

"All right, Captain. Let me give out a few of the finer details. Just tell me what I have right. I'm relying on the official *Star Trek* canon."

"Just hit the highlights. I really don't have much time for this. We have a crisis on our hands."

"Really, what?"

"It's not any of your business, Dr. Rendon," said Janeway, giving her guest the benefit of his title. "So just continue your story, but as I say, keep it short."

"All right, here is some of what I know...or at least I *think* I know. You are Kathryn Janeway, captain of the Starship *Voyager*. You were stranded in the Delta Quadrant by an entity known as the Caretaker." I can't say how long ago because I don't know the current stardate."

"53957," said Janeway, half trying to humor Rendon and half trying to be helpful.

"Near the end of the sixth season," Rendon muttered to himself.

"Come again?"

"Never mind. It just means it been about

five-and-a-half years that you've been stranded in the Delta Quadrant."

"Go on," Janeway urged.

"Your First Officer is a native North American named Chakotay." Rendon pointed to the left side of his forehead. "Has a tattoo about here. Your chief engineer is a half-human, half-Klingon woman named B'Elanna Torres. She, Chakotay and several others of your crew once belonged to a para-military group called the 'Maquis.' Then there's Tom Paris, a penal colony fugitive who is your pilot. Tuvok, who I have already met, is your tactical officer. Ensign Harry Kim is at the ops position. Seven of Nine, a former member of the Borg collective, is in astrometrics. Your mess hall cook is a Talaxian named Neelix. He once was very close to an Ocampa named Kes. She's no longer on board. Your chief medical officer has no name. He's a hologram and you simply call him "The Doctor"."

"All that information could have been accessed by breaking into our logs."

"What about Molly?"

Surprise crossed Janeway's face. *Is there anything about Molly in the ship's computer?*

Maybe something in a letter home before we were stranded in the Delta Quadrant, she thought.

"You know about Molly?" she asked.

"Molly's the Irish setter you rescued from the dog pound."

"You may have found something about that in our logs."

Rendon sighed. It was time to play hardball. "Do the logs contain information about Mark?"

Janeway's eyes widened. "What do you know about Mark?"

"The man who were close to when you left Earth. I really don't want to go into detail about personal relationships. That really *is* none of my business."

"You've asked me to keep an open mind. I'm reserving judgment until I've heard more," said Janeway, glad that Rendon didn't want to pursue the line.

"Shall I tell you about your encounters with the Hirogen, the Borg, or tell you how the Doctor got his mobile holo-emitter when you visited 20th century Earth and discovered technology from the 29th century? I can tell you that you're an

insomniac...probably from your overindulgence in coffee. I know about all your current technology...phasers...transporters...tractor beams...shields...subspace radio...tricorders...the Holodeck...."

"Stop right there!" Janeway commanded. "I don't have the faintest idea who you are or why you're here. For all I know you're a shape-shifting telepath, who intercepted out transporter beam and came aboard for who-knows-what purpose."

"I'm not a shape-shifting telepath. I'm from the 21s century. My name is Allen Rendon and because of my affection for *Star Trek*, I know who you are. And believe me, Captain, the fact that I'm here is almost as hard for me to grasp as it is for you. Otherwise, how could I know about Mark?"

"I exchanged several personal messages with Mark before we were stranded by the Caretaker. They were encrypted, of course. But you may have worked out a way to unravel the encryption somehow."

"I wouldn't have the slightest idea how to do that," he replied. Then Rendon had an idea. "How about this, Captain. Let Mr. Tuvok perform a mind meld on me. Would that convince you?"

"Mind melds are not to be done at someone's whim."

"Captain, can we do it...just this one time? I know you'll be convinced."

"I don't know." Then Janeway thought for a minute. *Maybe Tuvok could get to the bottom of this.* "Okay, Rendon, I'm willing to give it a try." She tapped her communicator badge. "Mr. Tuvok, would you step into my Ready Room?"

"Acknowledged," he replied.

Within seconds the Ready Room door hissed open and Tuvok appeared. "Yes, Captain?" he asked.

"Mr. Tuvok, our guest here has requested you to perform a Vulcan mind meld on him. Would you be able to determine if he's a telepath, or if he's...forgive me, Doctor...telling the truth?"

"Mind melds are not to be done at someone's whim," said the Vulcan.

"Those were my exact words to him. But if you can determine if he's...well, who he says he is, I think a mind meld might be in order."

"Captain, I can determine whether he possesses telepathic abilities, but as to whether he is being honest with us, I will not be able to tell.

He may be skilled at masking the truth."

"Well, do it anyway. He's willing,"

Janeway replied.

Tuvok turned to Rendon. He spread the fingers of his right hand and began to place them on Rendon's left temple and left cheek. "This will not cause you physical pain."

"Other than a terrific headache...if you're like me," Janeway interrupted.

"I know," acknowledged Rendon. He closed his eyes.

"My mind to your mind, my thoughts to your thoughts," began Tuvok slowly but deliberately.

For what seemed to Rendon like hours, but was more likely about a minute, Tuvok's mind remained locked with the man standing before him. Then the Vulcan broke the meld.

Janeway turned to Tuvok. "Well?" she asked.

Tuvok said, "Captain, he is no telepath. As we shared thoughts, it appears he either believes what he's telling you, or he could be skilled in the art of prevarication."

"And you can't tell," said Janeway.

"Affirmative, Captain. It is as I said before I began the meld. I cannot determine which is correct. I would suggest the best course of action is that he be checked over by our chief medical officer. That could determine his true physical nature."

"Sounds good to me," replied the Captain. "Take him down to Sickbay. Tell the Doctor to give him a thorough going-over and see if he's human." Rendon shrugged. Tuvok then escorted Rendon out of the room, as Janeway tapped her comm badge. "Janeway to the Doctor."

The doctor came on the comm screen in Janeway's Ready Room immediately. *"Captain, after consulting with Lieutenant Castro, we've decided there is no way at this time to transport the photo-virus off the ship. There are currently 76 small containment fields in various areas of the ship isolating this thing. But, the disease moves rapidly and if we were to drop the force-fields for the slightest nanosecond to use the transporter, I believe the virus would likely spread before we could get it off Voyager. Also, Captain, the menagerie you sent to Sickbay has arrived. I have them in containment. I'm most anxious to begin*

testing my serum. And I guarantee I won't harm our furry little friends." He looked at the gorilla. "Well, four little friends...and one very large one. Best case scenario, I'll be able to determine if the serum is the correct one. At the very worst, it will do nothing to hurt these creatures. Otherwise, I wouldn't conduct such experiments. History paints a pretty dark period about 400 years ago when laboratory animals had to endure all sorts of torture at the expense of so-called medical advancement."

"Doctor, are you aware there was a humanoid that was beamed aboard with those monkeys?"

"Yes, Lieutenant Castro mentioned it."

"And, Doctor, were you able to determine that those apes were actually Terran?"

"Yes, I was...and they are of Earth origin."

She looked at the comm screen, determined to get to the bottom of their little mystery. "Our visitor still might be an alien intruder disguised as a human. I don't want to throw him in the brig outright. He says he's human. If he is human, I need to know if there's some way we can determine if he's from the 21st Century as he

claims. If he is telling the truth -- and I'm not even close to be convinced he is -- maybe we can figure a way to send him back. And if not, if we're stuck with someone who is from the past, we'll have to find out how to keep him, which may be just as difficult." The Janeway thought, *It can't be that I'm actually swallowing this cock-and-bull story!*

The Doctor replied, "*Captain, I believe I can determine beyond any doubt if he's human, but I'm not sure if I can determine what century he came from, but I'll try.*"

"Good. Mr. Tuvok is on the way down to Sickbay with him. I hate to keep him behind a containment field, but it seems the only sensible way." Then she addressed Rendon in absentia. "All right, Mr. Trekkie. Let's find out who you *really* are."

"*Uh, Captain, can this wait until I've conducted the experiments?*" the Doctor interjected. "*I mean, helping the affected members of the crew would seem to be a priority.*"

"Of course, Doctor," Janeway replied and then she admonished herself for being caught up in the mystery of the ship's latest visitor. Concluding the communication with the Doctor, Janeway

reclined backward in her chair, interlacing her fingers and placing her hands behind her head. She sighed deeply.

Chapter 3

Janeway was only aware that she had drifted off when her communicator buzzed. She checked the chronometer. It revealed she had been napping almost an hour. Even though she sometimes didn't sleep well at night, it wasn't really normal for her to snooze in the middle of the day as sometimes happens with those experiencing occasional insomnia. She chastised herself for dropping off to sleep. *I must have been more exhausted than I thought*, went through her mind. *Then again, getting out of bed at 0300 hours as I did this morning didn't help.*"

She pressed the communicator. "Janeway here."

The Doctor's face came on her screen. "Captain, I have some terrible news. Ensign Vickers is dead."

"I thought you said the virus wasn't fatal."
"I was wrong. Many people think we physicians play God. Unfortunately, we're not deities as my grave mistake shows." His voice dropped in the most serious of tones. "I'm truly

sorry, Captain. I'm also sorry to report the tests on the primates was inconclusive. The animals are all right, but I have no further way to safely test the serum."

"Keep trying, Doctor," Janeway encouraged him.

The Doctor turned off his comm unit and walked over to the sickbay bed where Tom was laying. He was conscious but in a delirium. "He's still not making much sense," the Doctor said, and then added with a dry tone: "if he ever did." Tom was perspiring more than ever now, yet his fever refused to break. His head was rolling from side to side.

Tom continued to mumble through the fever. *Still hot...still sweating...never felt so much water...got to swim...B'Elanna...got to think...where am I? Where is Captain Proton? Where is Arachnia? Coordinates laid in, Captain...back in the penal colony...Dad, I'm sorry...Vickers...what was that light? Got to keep the Flyer stable...game of Paresi Squares tonight...mustn't miss it...B'Elanna will be furious...*

The Doctor rubbed his bald pate with the tips of his fingers and muttered to himself, "If I try this serum on Tom, he could have a very different reaction to the simians -- which was no reaction at all. It could be fatal. Then, on the other hand, if I do nothing -- considering what happened to Mr. Vickers -- such inaction would definitely be fatal.

"Tom!" shouted the Doctor, trying to bring Paris around. The Doctor slapped his hands together. Then he shook Tom lightly. "Tom!" he called again. The Doctor took the hypo spray from a tray by Tom's bed. With a gentle hiss he applied a stimulant to Tom's neck. It quickly rushed from his carotid artery to his brain.

The medicine seemed to swirl through Tom's mind. *Not as dizzy...where am I? Sickbay?*

"Tom!" the Doctor called again. To Paris the name sounded like it had been shouted from the rim of Scieri Canyon on Rigel IV and echoed off its three-thousand meter deep floor.

Echoes...Tom...Echo...I'm Tom.... He started to come around. In the swirl of images he recognized the Doctor.

"Doc...is that you?" He started to rise up and then his still dizzy head caused him to think

better of it.

"Keep still, Mr. Paris. I gave you a general stimulant. How are you feeling?"

"This is the sickest...I've ever...been...in...my life. No second place. That flash of light...Vickers...we started getting sick."

"Yes, yes, I know Mr. Paris."

"Has anybody else...?"

"We have 27 cases so far. So far it has only infected the humans on the ship."

"And Charlie?"

"He didn't make it."

"And the others? And...me? Am I...next?"

"Everyone else is still with us. Try to hang in there, Tom. I'm still trying to get to the bottom of this."

"Is there a treatment? A cure?"

"I thought I was onto something, but results were inconclusive when I used it on the test animals."

"Test...animals?" Tom was still trying to force his words out.

"Don't worry about it, Mr. Paris. Just try to hang in there."

"Doc, have you tried it on a human?"

"No, I haven't."

"Doc, you've got to try it on me."

"I haven't made that determination yet, Mr. Paris. It's your life we're talking about."

"Yes, my life. Isn't that what it boils down to? If Charlie died without treatment, I figure if you don't do something, I'm a goner anyway."

"Are you giving your physician medical advice? I don't even know if there are side effects."

"Please, Doc. I don't care...anything would be...an improvement. Please give me a shot...."

"I really shouldn't do what you say since I'm not sure your mind is sound right now."

"Doc, please!" Tom begged. It was the request of a dying man.

"This may be against my better judgment...and my ethical subroutines," said the Doctor as he finally acquiesced. He grabbed another hypo spray and injected it into Tom's neck. "Of course, I'm probably only hastening the inevitable."

"It's okay, Doc," said Tom closing his eyes in some kind of resignation.

The Doctor looked up at the bio-monitor.

Then he picked up a medical tricorder and began to scan Tom's body with the wand, checking the data against the bio-monitor. From all appearances, Tom's bio-signs were beginning to stabilize.

Tom opened his eyes again. His head was clearing. "Doc, I'm starting to feel better." He started to rise up.

"Go slowly, Mr. Paris. You've started feeling your oats but you still need to rest."

The serum was working. Within a couple of minutes, it had wiped all traces of the photo-virus from Tom's system. He sat up. "I really feel fine, Doc. It looks like your potion works."

The Doctor scanned Tom again with the wand of the medical tricorder. "It looks like you're back to normal. There doesn't seem to be any side effects either."

Tom was feeling his old self again. "I'm starting to get hungry, Doc."

"An obvious sign that the treatment is a success. Another testament to my medical prowess. Pasteur would be proud."

"Don't get full of yourself, Doc. You've still got others to treat."

"And now I wish I'd tried the serum on Ensign Vickers," said the Doctor, reversing himself, no longer stroking his ego, but realizing what might have been a mistake for not attempting to treat Vickers.

"Don't beat yourself up either, Doc. Can you replicate enough serum to treat the others?"

"I believe so, but it will be close. This is really going to tap our medical replicator reserves. We must transfer the serum to the various areas of the ship where the photo-virus is contained. I believe that will eliminate it in the same manner it will treat those who are suffering from it. You may assist me, Mr. Paris.

After contacting Captain Janeway and bringing her up to date on the success of the treatment for the photo-virus, the Doctor and Tom Paris began working quickly to replicate the serum and administer it to the few victims in Sickbay. All the stricken humans began to respond as Paris had.

As he worked, Tom continuously reminded the Doctor of how hungry he was.

"It is my guess," said the Doctor, "that all

those who we treat will experience the same hunger as you, Mr. Paris. I suppose it's time I made a house call. I'm going to the cargo bay and treat the crew members there. I suggest you go to the Mess Hall and tell Mr. Neelix to prepare for some starving people. A strange side effect of the serum. I'll send them there as soon as I'm sure they are able to walk.

"You don't have to tell me twice, Doc." I'm on my way to chow down."

Tom quickly headed out the Sickbay door.

"Computer," commanded the Doctor, "transfer the EMH to Cargo Bay One." He shimmered and then vanished from Sickbay.

Within minutes the Doctor had injected the serum into the cargo bay victims. Then he announced, "Computer, transfer the EMH back to Sickbay." When he had totally materialized in his office, he tapped his communicator. "Doctor to Captain Janeway."

She responded immediately. "*Yes, Doctor.*"

"Captain, I've got good news and bad news concerning the photo-virus. The good news is, all our remaining patients have responded to the

treatment. Recovery is quite rapid, I might add. They are all just about back to their old selves and I've neutralized the photo-virus that was being contained in the various areas of the shop. The bad news is, I can't replicate any more serum. The medical replicators appear to be tapped out for the time being. We'll just have to hope this thing doesn't hit *Voyager* like it did the *Flyer*."

"We're not detecting it on sensors. But that might not mean anything. The EM pulses from this nebula are affecting our sensors."

"Captain, I'm not an engineer, but I believe it would be possible for Engineering to adjust the modulation of our shields to block an attack from this particular photo-virus."

"Good idea, Doctor. I'll get B"Elanna on it right away." The Captain then informed the Doctor that Seven of Nine's "lightning rod" was drawing the EM pulses away from *Voyager*, and then added only. *"Janeway out."*

At that moment the Doctor turned to find a security guard standing sentinel over a strange man. The Doctor looked at the guard and spoke. "I assume this is the fellow we beamed aboard with the simians."

"Yes, Doctor," the guard replied.

"Commander Tuvok and I got here with this guy about ten minutes ago. The Commander left me to watch over him until you returned. I put him behind a medical containment field."

"You are relieved crewman. I don't believe an armed guard watching our guest is necessary...as long as he's behind the containment field. And speaking of fields, can you ask Mr. Tuvok to initiate a containment field in Cargo Bay Two so we can transport these apes there and get them out of..." he stroked his scalp, "my hair -- so to speak."

"Right away, Doctor," the crewman said. Then the guard left Sickbay, using his communicator to alert Tuvok.

The Doctor turned to face Rendon. Rendon was now pacing back and forth behind the containment field. He was either impatient or a little bored. The Doctor wasn't sure which.

"Hello," the Doctor said to him. "I assume you are aware Captain Janeway wants me to fully examine you to see if you are human."

"Yes, I understand. Examine away. By the way my name is Allen Rendon."

"You're not showing any signs of apprehension, Mr. Rendon. I would expect you should."

"Well, first of all, I conduct medical examinations all the time myself," he said. "But it's mostly on non-humans. I'm a zoologist," he added. "Actually, I am just plain fascinated by all of this. Being aboard *Voyager*, I mean. I still find it hard to believe I'm really here. I'm not sure I'm not dreaming this."

"Did you pinch yourself?" asked the Doctor in a sarcastic tone.

"I thought about it."

"Or course," the Doctor muttered.

"Doctor, all my life my dreams have not been very vivid. In fact, I'm one of those people who don't even remember them 99 percent of the time. This is not a dream."

"Well, have a seat." The Doctor indicated he wanted Rendon to sit on an examination bed behind the containment field. "This will not hurt," he assured him.

"I'm aware of that," Rendon said.

Upon hearing of the miraculous recovery of

Tom and the other crewmembers, Janeway left her Ready Room and went to the Mess Hall. The Doctor had informed her of the infected crew members' new appetite that had seem to increase at warp speed. Once inside the Mess Hall she saw Tom and several other crew members seated at the dining tables. Tom sat at a table with three others who had recovered from the photo-virus. He was sat facing away from the kitchen, but looked over his right shoulder as Janeway entered the room. "Hey, Neelix," he said impatiently, "how much longer do we have to wait?"

"Just about one more minute, Tom," the Talaxian replied. "You know I'm doing this on very short notice. But not to worry. My very special Talaxian stew is just about finished. You're going to love this." Ordinarily, Tom would have turned up his nose at concoctions from Neelix's home planet in favor of a cheeseburger and french fries, but this time he was hungry enough to eat Klingon *gagh*.

Janeway approached Tom's table. "Glad to see you're in the pink again, Mr. Paris," she said.

"It was unbelievable, Captain. I have never been that sick. In fact I was afraid."

"Afraid of dying?" she asked.

"No, I was afraid I wouldn't!"

Janeway smiled and used the time it took Neelix to complete his specialty to tell Tom about Rendon. Just as she was finishing up, Neelix brought a tray of four bowls of Talaxian stew and began to serve the foursome at Tom's table. "This is going to be really yummy, folks. Eat up," he said. Tom grabbed a spoon and began to sip the steaming contents of the bowl. His nose and taste buds didn't even consider what would otherwise to a human be a questionable flavor." "Some for you, Captain?" Neelix asked.

"No, thank you, Mr. Neelix." She was hungry, but not famished like Tom and his companions. She would have to be a lot hungrier, she told herself, to give the Talaxian stew a try.

Just then, B'Elanna bounded into the Mess Hall. "Tom!" she exclaimed. "I heard you're going to be okay! How are you feeling?"

Tom smiled. "Like it never happened. The Doc's serum was a winner. Looks like everyone else is going to be all right also." Then his smile vanished. "Except Charlie Vickers."

"Charlie Vickers? He was with you on the

Flyer, wasn't he?"

Tom stared down at his bowl of stew.

"Yeah, he didn't make it." Tom looked up at Neelix and changed the subject. "Anything else to go with this?" he asked the Talaxian. "Maybe some bread? Maybe a whole loaf?"

"I'll see what I can scrounge up," Neelix replied.

"B'Elanna looked to her right and spotted Janeway. "Oh, Captain. I didn't see you. I guess I was too concerned about Tom. We're working to adjust the ship's shield grid to filter out a possible attack by the photo-virus. The Doctor supplied Engineering with everything he had on the virus. I've got four people working on it, but there's no way to tell how long it's going to take. I mean, I'm pretty sure we can do it, but since we've never done it before, I just can't give you an estimate on how much time it will take to get it done." Then she added: "But we're working hard. I guess I'd better get back down there."

"Thanks, B'Elanna. I know if it can be done, you'll find a way to do it." Janeway watched as B'Elanna turned and quickly left the Mess Hall.

The Captain's communicator badge

suddenly chirped. She quickly tapped it open.
"Janeway here."

"It was the Doctor's voice. *"Captain, the computer said you are in the Mess Hall. I trust Mr. Paris and the others are eating their fill."*

"They're eating Talaxian stew and not protesting?"

"*They must be hungry,*" he replied.

"*Anyway, Captain, I thought I would let you know the results of my tests on Dr. Rendon,*" then he added, "*if he is a doctor.*"

He continued. "*He is human. One hundred percent. Shape-shifters I am familiar with are able to change their outward appearance, but are unable to duplicate the internal organs of the species they are replicating. I've looked inside and he has everything he should have, minus a gall bladder.*"

"A gall bladder?" Janeway asked.

"*It was surgically removed at some point,*" he said and then turned up his nose, "*by a...ugh...scalpel.*"

Janeway and the others shivered.

"*Scalpels were standard surgical devices hundreds of years ago. Then again, it could have*

been some emergency procedure in a place where modern instruments were not available."

Janeway asked, "Anything else?"

"He does have three teeth that been filled."

"Teeth that have been...what?"

"Filled, a treatment for tooth decay. That would also be consistent with the 19th through the 21st Centuries. And then again, it could have been on a planet with limited technology."

"Like Earth three hundred or so years ago?" asked Janeway, not sure if she were defending Rendon's claims.

The Doctor sidestepped Janeway's question. *"He also has minute traces of hydrocarbons in his lungs. I can tell you that was a real problem during the 20th century and well into the 21st. It's from breathing burned fossil fuels from industrial machines and vehicles. It's amazing homo sapiens ever survived."* The he added, *"That's about all I can tell about his possible origin."*

"All right, Doctor. Keep him in containment for now. I'll get back to you. Janeway out." She tapped off her communicator badge and turned to Paris. Neelix was still standing at the table.

"What about the traces of hydrocarbons in his lungs?" Tom asked.

"All that means is that he's lived on a planet with petroleum-based energy. All we can be sure of is that he was in the southwestern part of North America when Castro beamed him and his simian friends aboard. That *doesn't* mean he didn't spend time elsewhere in the galaxy -- in our century!"

"Why is it so important to find out what century he's from, Captain?" asked Neelix.

"Because if he's lying about where he's from...or to be correct, *when* he's from, we can't trust him. For all we know he could have somehow intercepted our transporter beam and is perhaps spying for a group that could attack us. Maybe someone found a way to locate a human in the Delta Quadrant and press him into their service."

"And sent him to southwestern North America?" asked Neelix with a questioning look.

"Who knows? Anything's possible," said Janeway.

"So," Neelix went on, "you don't believe his story about how he knows so much about *Voyager*?"

"Let's just say it's a pretty wild tale. I'm not saying it isn't true. But I want to know more about this Rendon," the Captain said to Tom. "If he's really from the early 21st century, he would have been born in the 1970s or later."

After a moment's thought Janeway added, "Tom, you're our resident expert on the 20th century. Why don't you check this guy out? He claims to know about us through something called the *Star Trek* legend. Ask plenty of questions."

"Never heard of *Star Trek*, but I think I could nail him if he is not from the 21st century. If he is, I'd like to get to know him better," replied Tom hopefully.

Janeway tapped her communications badge. "Janeway to Sickbay. Doctor you said you have finished examining our guest?"

"Absolutely, Captain. And he's fit as a fiddle," was his reply. *"As I said he's obviously human. That much is certain. As for his claim of being from the 21 century, as I said, I can't...."* His voice trailed off.

"Don't worry about that, Doctor. I'm sending Mr. Paris down to you. Please release our visitor to his custody. Janeway out."

She looked at Tom. "Get down there and escort him to your quarters. That way you can have some privacy. Give him the 'once over' and let me know what you find out."

"Aye, Captain. Don't you want me to go to the Armory and check out a phaser?"

"It's probably not necessary. But don't let your guard down completely. If there's the slightest hint of a problem with this guy, alert Security."

Tom rose from his chair and turned toward the Mess Hall's main door.

"So, I'm about to be grilled," said Rendon as he and Paris strode down the corridor toward Tom's quarters.

"Nervous?" asked Tom.

"No, just amused. Ask me whatever want. I understand your apprehension and I don't mind playing along."

"We're not playing," Tom said as the door of his and B'Elanna's quarters hissed open when the two approached.

"Does it open like that for just anyone?" asked Rendon.

"It responds to my bio-signs...or B'Elanna's. Everyone else has to ring the bell."

"So that's how it works. I always wondered."

Tom ignored the remark. *The jury's still out on you, fellow...way out!* Tom mused. He pointed to an empty chair that he had pulled out from under a small table. "Have a seat. Something to drink? *Seven Up* or *Sprite* perhaps?" Tom was using a slight bit of subterfuge to probe Rendon, knowing the two soft drinks were existent as far back the 20th century.

"You have those programmed in your replicator?"

"Oh, sure. All the 20th and 21st century soft drinks. You want 'caffeine' or 'caffeine free'?"

"Trying to trip me up already, Tom? Those particular soft drinks don't come with caffeine."

"I'm impressed! You still want one?"

"You got Coke? And yes I know it comes either way. "'Caffeine free' if you can do it."

Tom stepped toward the replicator. "Coca-Cola Classic without caffeine...one cup of Bolean tea, medium sweet."

"No Romulan ale?"

"Don't try to be funny, Mr. Rendon," said Tom as the two drinks materialized in the replicator.

"It's *Doctor* Rendon," the tall man corrected.

"Whatever," said Tom.

Tom handed the Coke to Rendon and sat down across the table from him and added, "Now, shall we get to it?"

"Fire away. I'm pretty good at trivia."

Tom ignored the boast and began the inquiry. "Okay, who won the first Super Bowl?"

"I don't follow football."

"How convenient. Any sports you do follow?"

"Well, baseball. I'm a big fan of that. Especially the Dodgers."

"Okay, who won the 1997 World Series?"

"I was afraid you'd try to catch me by asking about the 1994 Series which wasn't played due to a strike." Rendon paused. "Uh, '97...let me think. The Florida Marlins in seven games over the Cleveland Indians. Why 1997?"

"I was reading about it recently. And you got it right. Now what was the 'Internet'?"

"I'm beginning to feel like I'm in a World War II movie and you're checking to see if really an American."

"Basically the same thing. Now, what about the 'Internet'?" Tom repeated.

"We call it...or I guess you'd say *called* it the 'Information Superhighway'. It was the linking of government, business, library, military and personal computers that happened in the late 20th century. You could access almost any information, conduct business, play games...."

"Okay, so far so good." Tom took a sip of tea. "What was a 'CD'?"

"A small optical disc usually containing recorded music or computer data."

"Wrong!" announced Tom with a hint of glee. "'CD' stood for 'Certificate of Deposit,' a type of banking investment," said Tom, "back when they had money," he added. "I never heard of a CD being an 'optical disc'."

"Check the computer, Tom."

"Huh?"

"Check the computer."

"Okay. Computer, define 20th century term 'CD'."

"The computer chirped, then began to vocalize the request. *"CD -- Certificate of Deposit. A 20th and 21 century banking term. Usually a low risk, low interest investment of a predetermined period of time."*

"Aha!" shouted Tom with a gloat. "Gotcha!"

Rendon was calm. "Ask for a second definition."

Tom dropped his smirk. "Computer. Is there a second definition?"

The computer gave the answer. *"CD -- Second definition. A small optical disc usually containing recorded music or computer data."*

"My turn to say 'aha,' Tom."

"Don't be so cocky. I'm still not satisfied. Who was the U.S. Vice President under President Bush? The first one, the last two."

"Last two? I only know of two altogether."

"George H. W. Bush, the first one...the father and grandfather, then his son, George W., and then George P. Bush, the grandson, the 50th president."

"That would have been after I left Earth."

"Well, anyway," said Paris, "who was he?"

"Bush?"

"No! The first one's vice president."

"That pretty remote information for a 24th century pilot that thinks he knows the 20th century."

"He was a distant relative," admitted Tom.

"Dan Quayle."

Tom's eyes lit up, surprised to hear the answer. "Spell it," he challenged.

"Why? He couldn't!" said Rendon, jokingly remembering the former Vice President's difficulty with spelling.

"You're probably right," said Tom, remembering the family stories told him by his father. "Now," Tom continued. "Who or what was 'Howdy Doody'?"

"A black and white, er...uh, monochrome puppet show on television...about thirty years before my time," said Rendon, slightly annoyed. "I've never seen it."

"I've got a couple of episodes in data storage," bragged Tom, momentarily forgetting he was involved in an interrogation that would possibly expose an imposter that could threaten *Voyager's* security.

"Oh, that's right. You and B'Elanna have a

TV!" He pointed. "Right there."

"Don't do that, Rendon. It's spooky. The personal information I mean."

"Sorry. Speaking of monochrome, before you ask...Captain Proton was never a movie serial or TV show or anything like that. The good Captain is your own concoction."

A look of resignation washed across Tom's face.

"Okay, maybe you've sold me. I'll call Captain Janeway and tell her you might be the real McCoy."

"A reference to Dr. Leonard McCoy?"

"Who?" asked Tom. "Never heard of him."

"Leonard H. McCoy, M.D.," offered Rendon. "Also known as 'Bones.' Chief Medical Officer of the 23rd century *U.S.S. Enterprise*...commanded by Captain James T. Kirk."

"Kirk I've heard of. But how could you know that? It baffles me how you know events from the 23rd century and not know who was the 50th President of the United States."

"The *Star Trek* legend. Like I told Captain Janeway."

"Oh, yeah," said Tom, still not totally sure if he believed Rendon's story. Then a flash of inspiration struck Tom. "Computer!" he barked with renewed delight. "Search Federation historical records. Twenty-third century."

"Don't tell me you're going to check *that*?" asked Rendon.

"Humor me. Computer, *U.S.S. Enterprise*. Commanded by Captain James T. Kirk. NCC-1, 7...uh...uh...."

"NCC-1701," Rendon prompted.

"Oh, yeah, right. NCC-1701. Who was the CMO?"

The computer's answer was immediate.

"U.S.S. Enterprise. *Listing Chief Medical Officers in chronological order: Phillip Boyce, M.D. -- "*

"Just one," interrupted Tom. "Was there one named McCoy?"

"Affirmative. CMO Leonard H. McCoy. *Assigned Stardate -- "*

"Never mind, Computer," said Tom halting its answer. He scratched his head. "Son of a gun! I think I believe you, Dr. Rendon...of the 21st century." Tom stood. "Welcome aboard the Starship *Voyager*," he said extending his right

hand to shake Rendon's.

"You would not believe how I feel to be here, Tom. It's beyond words. It's like the first time you ever walked onto a holodeck. Even better! This is real!" Rendon looked around Tom's quarters. "And in 3-D color," Rendon chuckled. "And yet I don't know if I'll get used to the idea that I'm here."

"You're here," Tom assured him, and then smiled. "Well, nothing left to do but call the Captain," he said, reaching down to grab the cup of tea and downing the last swallow as Rendon finished his Coke.

Chapter 4

"I'll bet you'd like to look around the bridge," Tom Paris said to his guest.

"Wow! Are you kidding?" replied Rendon. "I got a glance when Tuvok took me to Captain Janeway's Ready Room. I really didn't see much. Can you really take me there?"

"I'll see what I can do." He tapped his communicator badge. "Paris to Captain Janeway."

"Go ahead, Tom."

"Captain, I think we really have a man from 21st century Earth on our hands."

"All right, Mr. Paris. Now what do you suggest we do with him?"

"Well, for a starter, Captain, he really seems excited to be aboard *Voyager*. I thought maybe I'd give him a brief tour of the ship, and then bring him up to the bridge for a few minutes."

"To the bridge? Are you serious? Tom, we're at Yellow Alert. We've been taking electromagnetic strikes, possibly from that nebula."

"Aren't the shields holding, Captain?" Tom

asked.

"Yes, but if something happens and we lose them, we could suffer structural damage, and should Seven's 'lightning rod' fail, we would be open to an attack by the photo-virus that hit you and Mr. Vickers in the Flyer."

"Captain, you know the Doctor said I'm completely over the effects of the virus," Tom reminded her, then said, "I'll be able to make my regular duty shift in 30 minutes. If I bring Dr. Rendon up to the bridge a few minutes before, he can stay with me until then. He's on the level Captain. I promise I'll be responsible for him."

"Then what do you suggest we do with him after that?"

"I don't know," said Tom. He hadn't really thought that far ahead. "Maybe Tuvok or Chakotay could take him somewhere."

"I'm not going to the brig!" protested Rendon. "I haven't done anything!"

"Relax, Dr. Rendon. Nobody said anything about the brig," Janeway replied.

Rendon leaned toward Tom's communicator badge. "Sorry, Captain, I guess I got a little worried about the possibility of that."

Janeway paused a brief moment to consider things and then said, "*Okay, Tom, bring him up here. In the meantime, we'll try to come up with a plan for doing something with him.*"

"All right, Captain. We'll see you shortly. Paris out." He turned to the tall man. "Okay, Dr. Rendon, let's go,"

"Call me Allen." Rendon was now feeling less formal in Tom's presence.

The door to Tom's quarters hissed open and the two stepped into the corridor.

"Okay, Allen. There's really not time to tour the whole ship. Is there anything you'd like to see specifically?"

"My brain is overloading with anticipation! I'm like a kid in a candy store. I want to do everything! I want to see the Holodeck. I want to taste replicated food."

"You already had a replicated Coke," Tom reminded him.

"Yeah, but solid food -- like a steak. And what about a sonic shower?"

"I can understand that, after hanging around those apes."

"No, it's not that. I just want to sample all

this 24th century technology."

"Okay, we've got a few minutes. How about the Holodeck?"

"Oh, wow, yes! Lead on."

The two began walking down the corridor, Rendon following Tom's lead as Tom started to make small talk. "So, the Captain tells me that where you're from, *Voyager* is a TV show. Is it still in...uh...what do they call it? Production?

"No, its original run ended in 2001. Several years ago from my perspective."

"Well then, obviously you've seen the whole thing. Are there...." Tom searched for a word. "Reruns?"

"Continuously! Mostly on cable television."

Tom said, "I've heard of that. Like TV signals sent by satellites."

"Similar," Allen replied.

Then Paris turned curiously serious. "So I guess you know whether we get home or not."

Rendon stopped in his tracks. "It didn't cross my mind that you or anyone else would ask that."

"Well? Do we get home okay?"

"I can't tell you, Tom." Rendon thought for

a moment. "It might upset things. You know, the space-time continuum."

"We call it the Temporal Prime Directive. Can't you give me a little hint?"

Rendon successfully kept any emotion from his face or tone of voice that would give Tom a clue. "You know better than that, Tom."

"Come on, Allen. Just a little idea."

Rendon was firm. "No, Tom."

The two entered a turbolift. "Holodeck One," ordered Tom. The lift began to rise. "You said you wanted to eat replicated food. That's probably because you haven't eaten any and you don't know the difference."

"Why do you say that? I thought the replicator made food that tastes like the real thing."

"It's supposed to. The designers and manufacturers claim it does, but believe me, I can taste the difference. *Everybody* can taste the difference!"

The turbolift door hissed opened.

Tom indicated to Rendon the way out of the turbolift and into the corridor. As they began to

walk, a thought struck Tom. "You know, Allen, you don't seem to be worried about the possibility of being stuck in the 24th century." It was the first time the thought had crossed Rendon's mind. Tom continued, "I mean, isn't there someone back in your time who might be worried about your disappearance? Did anyone see your transport? You have family? Friends?"

"Not really. No one was around when I beamed up and back home I pretty much kept to myself. No family either. I am an only child, the son of two only children. Strange, huh? My grandparents were long gone when I was born and both my parents have also been gone for several years. No uncles, aunts or cousins either. Very small family."

"What about a wife? Girlfriend?"

"Oh, I've dated off and on, but never was serious about anyone. I'm pretty much a lone wolf."

"Wouldn't they miss you at your job?"

"Oh, I'm sure. They would probably file a missing person report. But after a while, of course, they'd move on without me. I'd just be one of many, many missing persons cases that was

never solved. Like Jimmy Hoffa, Judge Crater, Amelia Earhart...oh, I forgot...you met *her*.

"That was an episode, too?"

"One of the best. It was called 'The 37s.'"

As they arrived at the Holodeck Tom pressed a keypad button on an eye-level panel just to the right of the doors. "Computer, run program 'Paris Grease Monkey One-alpha'." He turned to Rendon. "It'll take a few seconds to load."

While they waited, Rendon sighed, "Well, so much for the replicators. What about the sonic showers?"

"Most people like them," replied Tom. "I'd rather have a hot water shower with lots of soap. Or even a long soak in a tub. To me, that's really getting clean."

"Well, so much for technology," Allen resigned. "Maybe things really haven't advanced so much."

"Program loaded. Enter when ready," announced the computer. The doors pulled back with a deep mechanical groan. Rendon stared inside at a 20th century auto mechanic's garage complete with a green and white Chevrolet sports car with its hood fully up.

Rendon's eyes widened with amazement.

"And then again technology *has* advanced."

Tom smiled, amused at Rendon's astonishment. "What do you think, Allen?"

"Wow! I mean, wow! I've see this on the television program, but that's nothing like really being here!" He stepped into the Holodeck scene and stroked his hand along the body of the vehicle, then turned to Tom. "A Camaro. I haven't see one of these in years. And the one I saw wasn't in this good condition. 1967?" Rendon couldn't remember the exact year of Tom's car in the *Voyager* series.

"It's a '69. You can tell it's a 1968 or later by the side lamps. They weren't on the '67."

"I guess you know the 1960s better than I do, Tom."

"The thing is," said Tom, "I didn't program it to be complete. I put most of it together by myself."

"I'll bet that took a while."

"Well, we have been on *Voyager* over five years."

"And you got everything to fit?"

"Oh, I had a little trouble at first. The

computer's historical data banks were a little short on the technical specifications. But then I got some help."

"From whom?" Rendon was wondering who besides Tom in this century would know anything about a Camaro. Tom slipped into the driver's seat.

"Not who...what." He reached toward the passenger's front seat and produced a solid rectangular object about 25 centimeters long and six centimeters wide on its four shortest sides. It was golden and shiny, and almost glowed on its own. Rendon looked inside the car to see it. "This is colonite!" he announced.

"Sounds like a lower bowel infection."

"Very funny," said Tom sarcastically.

Rendon dropped the smile from his face. He could tell Tom was serious about the object.

"What does it do?" Rendon asked.

"Watch this." said Tom as he walked to the work bench about two meters away from the Camaro, taking the colonite with him. He placed the colonite on the work bench and picked up two tubular pieces of metal. One appeared to be an exhaust manifold and the other pipe that connected

the manifold to a muffler. He tried to place one tubular end inside the other, but they clearly did not fit. There was at least one or two centimeters difference in diameter between the two. Rendon could see the discrepancy.

"Now, watch the magic," announced Tom. He began to rub the colonite first against the pipe with the smaller opening and then the manifold which had a larger opening. Instantly, the smaller opening began to enlarge, without any physical effort on Tom's part. Within seconds, Tom stopped rubbing, set the colonite down and slipped the two tubular ends together. It was a perfect fit. "Voila!" Tom said with delight. He then set the completed assembly down and picked up the colonite block.

"That's incredible!" said Rendon excitedly.

Tom began to explain. "I got this thing about a year ago on Canabulous Prime, in a street market. When the vendor explained how it worked, I was skeptical, but I figured I'd gamble by offering something in trade to see if maybe he was right. He was. And all it cost me was a ball point pen I had replicated. He was fascinated by that. They don't have analog writing instruments

on Canabulous Prime. All writing is voice-to-text on computer screens."

"How does it work?" queried Rendon.

"It emits some kind of energy and makes any alloy...steel...titanium -- you name it -- expand or contract. It works on all metals and polymers, manufactured, replicated...even holographic. That's why I've used it here. It seems to have a sense of how much it needs to make an object grow or shrink to make them fit together. It's a heck of a timesaver. Sure beats trial and error in getting the Holodeck to create auto parts at the right size when you don't have the original specs. It's pretty marvelous for any technology."

"And you keep it here in the Holodeck. I assume it's not a hologram itself."

"It's real. And yes, I keep it here."

Rendon walked around to the front of the car and peered under the hood. As he did, Tom sat down behind the driver's seat and reached to his right to put the colonite away.

Rendon was still checking out the car's engine when he asked, "What happens when someone else uses the Holodeck...with another program? Do they see it?"

"No, it's still here, but I've written this program to mask the colonite from view if another program is running." Tom got out of the Camaro and shut the driver's side door.

"You can't keep it in your quarters?"

"The radiation it gives off interferes with the TV."

"What about storing it someplace else on the ship?"

"I hadn't thought of it. The Holodeck just seemed like best place to keep it. I haven't really told anyone but B'Elanna about it. And I didn't tell her where it is. It's really not a secret. B'Elanna doesn't care and it just never came up in conversation with anyone else. And I don't really want anyone disturbing it without knowing what it is or how it works. It seems to be just fine here."

"What if someone stumbles over it, you know, stubs their toe...even though it's masked?"

"The program doesn't work that way."

Rendon didn't pursue his line of questioning further. With his 21st century knowledge, he probably wouldn't understand Tom's explanation anyway.

"Besides," Tom said jokingly, "even if

someone did stub their toe on it, we could always use a dermal regenerator and one of the Doctor's analgesic creams."

Rendon grinned and added, "Oh, the technology of the 24th century."

Then Tom realized his duty shift was drawing near. "Hey," he said, "we need to head towards the bridge."

Tom turned to Rendon, but before he could speak, a massive shudder hit *Voyager*.

The shop shook violently for at least five seconds. Both men lost their footing. Tom was able to grab the work bench and stay on his feet, but Rendon fell to his hands and knees. Then the violence stopped.

"Computer!" Tom called out. "Authorization Paris Rho-Kappa! Did something just hit the ship?"

"Insufficient shielding currently exists to protect from electromagnetic pulses. Shields are down to 35 percent. The probe previously launched to attract electromagnetic pulses is no longer operational."

Tom reached down to pick Rendon off the floor. "You okay?" Tom asked. Rendon nodded.

"Come on!" said Tom excitedly. "We've got to get to the bridge! Computer end program and save!" The garage faded into four walls of holo-emitters. The Holodeck doors rumbled open and the two dashed into the corridor which was already flooded with pulsating light indicating Red Alert. The klaxon was sounding loudly in time with the flashing red lights as the two ran down the corridor toward the turbolift. The turbolift door did not immediately open when they arrived.

"Oh, man! Blast it!" shouted Paris.

"Malfunction?" asked Rendon.

"No, it's in use! It'll take a few seconds to clear."

After those few seconds, that seemed like a eternity to Tom, the door hissed open and the two jumped inside. "Bridge!" shouted Tom.

Chapter 5

Tom Paris and Allen Rendon leaped out of the turbolift onto Voyager's bridge just as another thunderous jolt struck the ship.

"Mr. Tuvok, report!" Captain Janeway barked.

"Forward shields are the only ones holding at this time, Captain," Tuvok declared, "but they are now down to 24 percent. We have minor structural damage reported to the outer hull of the ship's aft section. Sickbay reports six casualties, all minor injuries."

The comm on the captain's chair chirped and a female voice came through. "*Seven of Nine to Captain Janeway. It appears the lightning rod I launched earlier is no longer working.*"

No kidding, thought Janeway. She kept the thought to herself. It was no time to share sarcasm with the crew. "Acknowledged, Seven," she said. Then Janeway turned to Harry. "Mr. Kim, what about the photo-virus itself?"

"Sensors detect flashes of light coming from the nebula," reported Kim, "but fortunately we

haven't been struck by the photo-virus yet."

"We're sitting ducks for that thing, Mr. Kim," Janeway responded. "Get those shields back up!"

"Working on it, Captain."

"Mr. Paris!" cried Janeway. "Take your station! And somebody get Rendon off the bridge."

"Let me stay, Captain," Rendon protested. "I know how to stay out of the way."

"All right," resigned the captain, looking around for someone who could escort Rendon from the bridge, but finding no one who was not busy. "You can stay put, but keep out of everyone's way, and *don't touch anything!*"

Before Rendon could react, another violent shake hit *Voyager*. Rendon was knocked to the floor. Kim was also felled behind his console. It was all Janeway and Chakotay could do to stay in their seats. Tuvok held his console and remained on his feet.

"Captain, I've restored shields back up to 81 percent," Kim informed, scrambling to his feet. Just as he did, a blinding white light hit the ship.

"Report!" shouted Janeway.

"We have taken a direct hit from the photovirus, Captain," said Tuvok, "but the shields have prevented it from getting past the outer hull."

"If we get a one-two punch from another EM pulse and then the virus, we're in major trouble," said Janeway. "Route all available power to the shields."

"Captain, I'm getting some new information from the sensors," offered Kim.

"Let's have it!"

"Captain, this is incredible! The source of the electromagnetic pulses is not the nebula."

"What?" cried the captain.

"It's a ship! It's been moving in and out of the nebula. It appears to be only about five meters long. No life signs aboard."

Tuvok pressed a sequence of contacts on his panel that allow him to view Kim's data directly.

"Captain," he said, "the craft appears to be automated."

"Can we get a phaser lock on it?" the Captain asked.

"Negative, Captain." said Tuvok. "I have tried to get a lock, but it appears the ship is on a computer-generated evasive maneuver program. It

is moving around erratically and much too quickly for either our phasers or photon torpedoes. I've been able to locate the vessel's database. That could tell us something, but I'm not sure we can interface with it."

"Let's get Seven on it." Janeway said as she pressed a keypad button on her comm. "Janeway to Astrometrics."

"Seven of Nine here, Captain."

"Seven have you been monitoring bridge activity?"

"Yes, Captain. I am attempting to connect to the alien ship's database. I believe I am getting something."

"Report back when and if you have anything of substance. Janeway out."

Another tremendous jolt hit *Voyager*. This time everyone on the bridge hit the deck, but got quickly back to their positions.

"We can't take much more of his!" shouted Janeway.

"And it's moving too evasively to get a weapons lock," Tuvok reminded her.

"Captain," cried Paris. "Let me take the *Flyer* after that ship. The *Flyer* is much more

maneuverable than *Voyager*.

"Don't be absurd, Mr. Paris! That would be too much of a long shot."

"Really, Captain. It may be our only chance. I know I can do it."

"And have the *Flyer* get hit with another photo-virus in the process?"

"Captain, we got hit by the virus the last time in the *Flyer* because Charlie and I didn't have the shields up. The virus wasn't detected by the *Flyer's* sensors. I can have the shields up this time. If I can outrun the EM pulses, I know I can track this ship down and destroy it."

"What happens if you *do* get hit by the photo-virus again?"

"I've already thought of that. I asked the Doctor after I recovered from the virus. He said anyone who survived an initial infection would have an immunity if attacked again."

Once hearing this, Janeway didn't hesitate. "Okay, Tom, go!"

Paris jumped from his chair and started for the turbolift.

"Let me go with him," begged Rendon.

"Not in a million years, Dr. Rendon. You

stay put. In fact, it's probably best you stay here on the bridge where I can keep an eye on you."

"Captain, I'm not going to cause any trouble."

"You bet you're not," Janeway said. "And I'm going to make sure of that. Even if I have to pull off a boot and hit you with it." Janeway's threat was really an idle one.

"Yes, Captain," said Rendon slightly offended.

The Captain's comm chirped again. "*Seven of Nine to Captain Janeway.*"

"Report!"

"Captain, I was able to download the automated ship's database. It appears to have been constructed by a race that call themselves the Karalami. They are known to the Borg as Species 1549. This ship was built some two centuries ago and was apparently designed to keep certain species, including humans, out of this sector. Obviously they realized humans would travel to the Delta Quadrant someday and designed this vessel to emit the photo-virus when their sensors detected one of the species they did not want here."

"Understood, Seven. Let us know if you find anything else."

"Acknowledged. Seven of Nine out."

"Captain, the *Flyer* is away," reported Kim.

"Voyager to the Flyer," called Janeway.

"Tom, be careful."

An EM burst hit the *Flyer*. *"The thought had occurred to me,"* was Tom's slightly caustic reply.

The *Flyer* began to buffet. Tom started to maneuver his ship as perhaps no other pilot could. Even though the automated ship was jerking its course in a manner that appeared extremely unpredictable, Tom was still able to match course and speed.

The vessel darted into the nebula, but Tom was able to follow it in. With its automated defenses, the vessel now tried to evade Tom's pursuit by reversing itself and heading back out of the nebula into open space. In and out. In and out. Tom stayed with it.

"I've got a phaser lock on it," cried Tom over the comm.

"Come, Tom," muttered Rendon under his breath. "Blast that thing out of the Galaxy."

Tom fired. A stream of phaser energy poured from the *Flyer's* bow directly at the small vessel.

"*Direct hit!*" yelled Tom.

"No effect!" shouted Harry.

Tom fired again and again. The phaser beam from the *Flyer* continued to strike the vessel. "*The shielding on this thing is incredible!*" reported Tom.

"It is not shielded at all, Captain," Tuvok said. "For some reason, the alien ship is impervious to phaser fire."

Then Janeway ordered, "Mr. Paris, adjust phaser frequency and fire again." Tom did.

"*It's no use, Captain. Regardless of whatever frequency I use, it's having no effect. I've about exhausted the Flyer's phaser banks.*"

"Captain," said Kim, "it looks like the device is able to absorb phaser fire no matter what we do. But I think I can construct an explosive device that would operate beyond the frequency range of our phasers. If we put it on a class one probe and get it near the automated vessel, I think we could destroy that thing."

"Do it!" commanded Janeway.

Kim said, "I need to get down to Engineering and work with B'Elanna to build it."

"Go!"

Harry sprang from his station and jumped into the turbolift.

Chapter 6

For the next twenty minutes, Harry Kim and B'Elanna Torres worked quickly to construct the explosive device Kim had designed. Tom, in the *Flyer*, continued to chase the device into and out of the nebula.

"Even though my phasers are gone, I'm going to stay with this thing. Something's got to happen," said Tom over the comm hopefully. *"If -- can -- close enough -- get -- starboard side -- --."* Tom's signal was beginning to break up. EM interference from the automated ship was tearing up his transmissions.

Three more EM strikes slammed into *Voyager*. Tom had taken a couple of hits himself, but his shields were holding. Shortly after the third strike on *Voyager*, another blinding light flashed. It was the photo-virus!

"Shields at 63 percent, Captain," reported Tuvok. "The shields continue preventing us from being absorbed by the photo-virus, but a few more EM attacks and shields will be ineffective."

"And the Doctor has no way to replicate any

more serum," Janeway reminded him. "We've got to destroy that thing now!" She hit her comm. "Ensign Kim, how are things going down there in Engineering?"

"Captain, we're having a devil of a time trying to construct this thing." reported Kim. *"I have some parts of it replicated, but just can't seem to make it work."*

"I'm coming down there, Ensign. You have the bridge Chakotay." With that, Janeway jumped from the captain's chair and exited the bridge through the Turbolift.

Five more minutes went by. There was another jolt by *Voyager* in reaction to an EM hit. Paris continued to follow the trajectory of the automated ship.

Another jolt.

By this time both Tom and the *Voyager* crew were beginning to get used to being tossed about. It seemed they were able to recover more quickly than before, although occasionally someone on *Voyager's* bridge lost their footing and had to pull themselves up from the deck.

Janeway arrived in Main Engineering where B'Elanna and Harry were working feverishly. The

Captain was surprised to find Neelix there when she arrived.

"I thought maybe there was something I could do," said the Talaxian. He had brought a large container of all sorts of strange mechanical devices. "There are some of the things I managed to scavenge before I joined *Voyager*. Some of these items I've had on my ship for years. You know what you humans say, Captain, 'waste not, want not.'"

B"Elanna had already rummaged through the container. "None of this junk is going to help," she snarled.

Neelix hung his head in disappointment.

"If we had some creconium, I could get these parts to go together," Kim said, pointing to the half-constructed explosive device.

"We're out of time!" Janeway snapped.

"The problem is," explained Harry, "creconium is only theoretical. I've never really seen any."

"What does it do?" asked the captain.

"Theoretically, creconium adjusts the structure of objects at the atomic level to change their shape or size...theoretically."

"Can we replicate it?" Janeway wanted to know.

"We don't have the molecular information to do that," was Kim's reply.

"Wait!" Neelix interrupted. "I think I've heard of various substances that do just that...right here in the Delta Quadrant. There recollium, plebescite, colonium and its similar alloy, colonite."

"None of which we have. Right, Mr. Neelix?" asked a frustrated Janeway.

Then a light went on in B'Elanna's brain. "Colonite!" she exclaimed. "Tom has some!"

Janeway's eyes widened. "What?"

"He got it on Canabulous Prime...when were we there?"

"Must have been at least a year ago," Janeway recalled. "Where is it now?"

"It's not in our quarters. He said he couldn't keep it there for some reason. Something about interfering with that audio visual device from 20th century...that thing called a television. I think I last saw the colonite on Holodeck One. Tom was using it to build that land vehicle...that Camaro. Maybe it's there."

Janeway looked puzzled. "It's on the Holodeck?" "It's not a holographic device is it?"

"No, he masked it in his...uh...Grease Monkey program."

"Grease Monkey? What the devil is that?" Janeway inquired.

"A grease monkey is a mechanic that builds and maintains land vehicles that use petroleum-based lubricants and fuel. The program is labeled 'Paris Grease Monkey One -alpha.' If we go to Holodeck One and run the program, the colonite might be right there."

Janeway tapped her communicator badge. "Janeway to Chakotay. Get down to Holodeck One and run 'Paris Grease Monkey One-alpha.'"

"*Captain?*" Chakotay puzzled.

"Do it! I'll tell you what you're looking for when you get there." Then she turned to Torres. "B'Elanna, stay here with Harry and try to get this thing constructed." Then she added, "By the way, B'Elanna, exactly what *is* Chakotay looking for?"

Janeway dashed out of Main Engineering and headed for the bridge, leaving B'Elanna, Harry and Neelix still trying to put Harry's device

together.

As she strode through the corridor, Janeway stayed in communication with Chakotay, describing the colonite block just as Torres had explained it to her. In the meantime another huge quake was felt throughout the ship. Another EM pulse.

Just as Janeway popped out of the Turbolift and onto the bridge, Tuvok had some grim news.

"Captain, what is left of the shields is showing rapid dissipation. I have lost communication with Mr. Paris due to the electromagnetic interference. I estimate we have five minutes to take action against the automated ship...if that is possible."

"Understood," she said opening the comm. "Janeway to Chakotay. Did you get that program running? We've got only a couple of minutes to find the colonite block and get it to Engineering."

Chakotay was now in the Holodeck, looking about at what was certainly an unorganized scene. Primitive 20th century tools were strewn everywhere. Some drawers on the work bench were opened partially, others were closed. There were several small toolboxes on the floor, three on

the bench, and even one balanced on the left front fender of the Camaro on top of a protective mat.

"*Captain, I'm in Mr. Paris's holographic garage, but I don't see the object you described. It's a jumbled mess in here.*"

"Wait a moment, Commander," Janeway said as she pressed a keypad button on her comm. "Janeway to *Delta Flyer*. Tom?"

There was a reply, but it was only a crackle.

She tried again. "*Voyager* to Tom Paris!"

Then a word or two began to slip through the static. "*Fly -- -- ahead -- -- boost -- --.*"

Blast it! thought Janeway.

She tried again.

"*Go -- ahead -- --.*"

"Tom! We're constructing an explosive device we think will destroy the automated ship, but we need your colonite. Chakotay's got your Grease Monkey program running, but we can't find the block. Where is it?"

Tom's transmission began to severely crackle again. "-- -- -- *Captain.* -- -- -- *Camaro -- -- -- in the glove box!*"

Janeway called the *Flyer* again. "Mr. Paris! What is a 'glove box'? Is it part of that automobile

you've been working on?"

Tom's signal was now completely gone.

Janeway realized there was no time for an extensive search. Things seemed to be at an impasse.

"Captain!" Rendon spoke up.

"Dr. Rendon, don't ask any more questions.

This is an emergency and we're running out of time. If you don't shut up, I'll have Mr. Tuvok remove you from the bridge."

However Rendon could not be silent.

"Captain, it just occurred to me that you people don't know what a 'glove box' is. It's a storage compartment in the car directly before the passenger seat in front."

Janeway spoke into the comm. "Did you get that, Commander?"

"Yes, Captain. Which one is the passenger's seat?"

Rendon spoke again. "It's the one that's not behind the steering wheel," he said, hoping it would be pretty obvious to Chakotay what he was referring to. "There's a release button. Press it and the compartment should open."

Chakotay slid into the vehicle, reached to

his right and pressed the button. The glove box sprang open to reveal the glowing colonite block.

"Got it!" Chakotay called out excitedly.

"Tuvok, beam it directly to Main Engineering," Janeway ordered. She pressed a comm keypad button. "B'Elanna, Harry, You've got just four minutes to get that explosive device assembled and get it to that automated ship."

"Captain, we are going to attach it to the probe and launch it toward the automated ship. We can detonate it from here," B'Elanna explained.

"Do it!" cried Janeway.

Rubbing the colonite on several of the parts, B'Elanna was shortly able to get the explosive device completed as Harry went to a console and pressed the keypad and tried to pinpoint the automated ship's position. *"Captain,"* he called out, *"the way that thing is moving, I'm not sure I can get our explosive close enough to destroy the vessel."*

"Just get it as close as you can, Harry," she said, and then added, "and we'll hope for a miracle."

B'Elanna launched the probe, now fitted

with the explosive, toward the automated ship. Then a horrible thought crossed her mind. *Oh, no Tom! Could he detect the probe and get far enough away from the automatic vessel to keep the Flyer from going up with it?* B'Elanna could only hope and pray.

The probe streaked toward the automated ship. Another EM pulse struck *Voyager*.

"The shields are gone, Captain." reported Tuvok.

Janeway cried, "Where the devil is that explosion? It should have happened by now. We're out of time!"

Another burst of light went out toward *Voyager*. But this time it was not the photo-virus.

It was an explosion that occurred just one meter from the outer hull of the automated ship.

Everything went quiet. And then a single sound. It was Janeway's comm opening with a chirp. *"Paris to Voyager. I saw the probe headed for the automated ship and so I backed off. I managed to get about a thousand kilometers from it when the big boom happened. Nice shooting guys. I'm headed back to Voyager."*

In Main Engineering, B'Elanna breathed a major sigh of relief. Tom was safe.

On the Bridge, Tuvok delivered the best news Janeway had heard all day. "Captain, all EM pulses and all traces of the photo-virus are gone. The automated ship has been completely destroyed. Evidently, the EM bursts were meant to disable an enemy's shielding so the photo-virus could be delivered. We are now receiving only normal background radiation from the nebula. It appears the nebula was never the source of the electromagnetic interference." He raised an eyebrow. "It seems we can make our way around the nebula at...our own leisure."

Janeway smiled. "We got our miracle!" she said.

Epilogue

Captain's Log, Stardate 53962.3. It's been two weeks since the strange device emitting the photo-virus was destroyed. All of the damage to Voyager from the electromagnetic strikes has been repaired and all crew members who were injured have completely recovered. Note special posthumous commendation to Ensign Charles Vickers. He gave his life in the service of this ship and Starfleet. And our eternal thanks to Dr. Allen Rendon of 21st century Los Angeles, California. Had he not let us know what a 'glove box' was, we would not have made it. He saved the ship and crew. To show our gratitude, I have allowed him more or less the run of the ship. He appears at times to be overcome with fascination. He, in his own limited way, is trying to soak up all the information on Voyager he can. He explained to me that back in the 21st century he used to pilot small aircraft as a hobby. He has asked Mr. Paris to give him lessons in the Holodeck on how to

operate Voyager's helm. Of course it doesn't seem possible with his limited 21st century knowledge that he could be of any value as a member of this crew. So the problem is, we can't really keep him, but we don't exactly know what to do with him. As bright as he is, I still believe it will be impossible to train a person from his century in the technological ways of our world. While he knows the names of all our technology, he would probably never understand fully how things work.

In her Ready Room, Janeway's log dictation was interrupted by a chirp at her door. "Come," she said.

It was Neelix. "What's on your mind, Mr. Neelix?" asked Janeway as he entered the room.

The Talaxian approached the Captain's desk and spoke. "Captain, I've been thinking about Dr. Rendon."

"I think we all have."

"Well, I think I know what we can do with him. I was down in Astrometrics going over some start charts with Seven. We found a class-M planet about six light years from here. I remember it from my early days traversing the Delta

Quadrant. It's the fourth planet in the Razakaan system."

"Inhabited, I presume."

"Oh, yes, Captain. Although I've never been on that planet, the information I was able to gather from my ship's own database showed it to have a pre-warp civilization, but post-industrial...the kind of world Dr. Rendon came from. The planet has a population of maybe 100-million. If memory serves, the people are peaceful and friendly with an appearance much like humans. And here's the really interesting part. There are lots of open wildlife areas. Seven says her scans seem to indicate a vast variety of animal life."

"Dr. Rendon should hear this." Janeway tapped her comm badge. "Janeway to Rendon."

The reply from the tall man's new comm badge was quick. "*Yes, Captain?*"

"Allen, can you come to my Ready Room?" By now Rendon was on a first name basis with most of the crew.

"On my way, Captain." By now, Rendon knew the way.

In less than two minutes, Rendon was

standing next to Neelix before Janeway, who then told Rendon about the class-M planet. "Allen, as you yourself have admitted, it would be very difficult to reeducate you in our technology. And barring any miraculous wormholes, you would spend years, maybe the remainder of your life, traveling back to Earth with us. And even after we arrive, even if we do get home in a shorter period of time, you'd be relegated to an Earth more than 300 years too advanced for you. On the other hand, this planet -- Razakaan IV -- may be just perfect. In fact, its main feature is its abundance of animal life."

"I'm intrigued, Captain," Rendon told her. "The opportunity to study what could be thousands of animal species never before seen by humans, even in this century, would be a zoologist's dream."

Neelix turned to Rendon and said, "You'd have to blend in to their society. I have information on that in the database on my ship."

"We could be there in a couple of days," said Janeway. "It would be just enough time for you to bone up on their culture."

"It sounds like a tremendous challenge,

Captain," said Rendon, "but I'm sure I could do it," he added optimistically.

"It would also be a fine new home for your five primates," added Neelix. Then the Talaxian grinned. "Besides, they're probably getting tired of replicated bananas."

"Okay, Captain," said Rendon. "I'm ready. Let's do it."

"Here's a PADD with the information of the people of Razakaan IV," offered Neelix. "You do know how to work a PADD, doctor?"

"Tom showed me."

With that, Rendon, turned to Janeway.

"Permission to leave and go to my quarters, Captain?"

"You don't have to ask, Allen," Janeway smiled. "You're not officially a member of the crew, you know."

Rendon made a slight grin and left the room.

Exactly 48 hours later Rendon was standing with Captain Janeway on the bridge, although Rendon wasn't exactly sure why the Captain had called him there. Kathryn explained. "We are

about to arrive at Razakaan IV, and Mr. Paris and I have a little surprise for you."

Tom looked at Rendon. "You've been doing so well on the Holodeck with the standard helm program, that I thought you might ready to try the real thing."

It was all Rendon could do to keep from letting his mouth fly wide open.

"Tom's convinced me," Janeway said. "With over 50 hours on the Holodeck, you have my blessing. Of course, Tom will be standing right behind you."

"You want me to pilot *Voyager*?" Rendon was shocked.

"Have a seat, Allen," said Tom, standing up and taking one step back from the helm. Rendon slid into the seat. "Just like we've done several dozen times on the Holodeck," Tom assured him.

"Janeway tapped the comm. "All right, everybody, the time has come."

Within seconds the turbolift door hissed open. Rendon looked back over his shoulder to see B'Elanna, Neelix, the Doctor and Seven of Nine step onto the bridge to join Harry, Tuvok and Chakotay who were at their posts.

The Doctor was the first to speak. "As one Doctor to another, I want to say congratulations and all the best in your new life."

Harry spoke next. "Well, doctor, thanks to you, I know what a 'glove box' is. Thanks for your help."

Then it was B'Elanna's turn, "Q'pla! I usually don't speak Klingon, but Tom said I wouldn't have to tell you what that means." Rendon smiled, knowing the word for "success" had been spoken many times on the various *Star Trek* series.

Neelix and Chakotay also expressed their best wishes. Tuvok looked down to Rendon at the helm. He raised one hand and separated his fingers in the traditional Vulcan salute. "Live long and prosper, Dr. Rendon. Logic would dictate that you will do both on this planet. You are a resourceful man."

Seven was next to speak. "Doctor, I understand it is customary to wish a departing friend a fond farewell. In doing so I wish to say that I have no doubt you will...adapt...to your new environment."

There was almost a party-like atmosphere

on the bridge. Harry, Chakotay, B'Elanna, Neelix, the Doctor and Captain Janeway were all smiling. Tom laid a hand on Rendon's shoulder. "Go get 'em, Al!" he said.

Janeway said, "Once we establish orbit, Allen, I'll have Mr. Tuvok escort you to the transporter room where Lieutenant Castro will beam you down to the planet's surface. We'll try to pick a discreet area to place you and your five fuzzy friends." Then Janeway added, "and this time I've warned Castro not to beam up *anything* unless she checks with me first."

"Captain," said Rendon, "I want to thank you for these last few days. To say it's been beyond description would be the understatement of the century...this or any other."

Turning back to the helm, Rendon looked up at the main view screen. "Captain, we have arrived at Razakaan IV," he said.

"Standard orbit," commanded Janeway.

Rendon's fingers flew over the helm keypad exactly the way Tom had instructed him, and as he had practiced on the Holodeck. *Voyager* slipped flawlessly into a standard orbit around the planet.

"You're doing well, Allen," encouraged

Janeway. "You know, the irony of this has just struck me."

"How is that?" Rendon asked.

"Well, as I understand it, in your world there are perhaps millions of Star Trek fans," she smiled, "but I'll bet you're the only one to pilot a real Federation starship!"

Rendon didn't reply -- but he had a smile that was a light-year wide.