

# Curses Jihkarr, Foiled Again!

*By Lynda Carraher*

It wasn't really his fault, Chekov thought. How could he possibly have known?

After all, when you meet a pretty girl in a bar -- especially in an Omegan bar -- and she gives you that special look; when she accepts the drink you send over and smiles an invitation; when she tickles the nape of your neck on the dance floor and whispers in your ear that she'd like to be alone with you... Well, what else do you do?

He thought the hostel clerk's surprise was just because the girl was so fresh, so pretty; or maybe the clerk had never before seen a lady with a blazing sun tattooed on her palm and a red dot tattooed on the tip of her little finger. Chekov never had.

Not that it mattered. Within thirty seconds after they shut the door behind them, he had much more interesting things to look at.

It was at absolutely the worst possible moment that the door crashed open and three very large, very irate Omegans came charging into the room.

Chekov scrambled to retrieve his pants and his dignity; the girl yelped in outrage as two of the intruders yanked her

upright and hauled the dress down over her head, and the third Omegan stood like Moses returning from the Mount, waving his arms and bellowing at the top of his lungs.

"Blasphemy!" he roared. "Blasphemy that thou darest profane a novitiate of Makai!"

"Spatz Makai!" the girl snapped. "I'll do what I want, and I never wanted--"

"Quiet, woman! Thou hast broken thy vows for the last time!" The Omegan took a menacing step toward Chekov and held up his hand like an avenging angel stopping celestial traffic. Chekov saw the flash of a sun in his palm, surrounded by a corona of red dots on each fingertip.

"Hear me, thou foul and licentious despoiler! Know that thou has incurred the wrath of great Makai! May the beams of thy house shake and fall into dust, and may thy brethren weep at thy coming, for thou art accursed as was Jhikarr!"

"Now, wait a minute," Chekov put in. "I think--"

No one ever heard what he thought, for at that moment, the minions of the law arrived in force. Still protesting loudly, Chekov was hustled barefoot to a waiting skimmer. As it turned out, there was plenty of time for one of the patrolmen to return for Chekov's boots and shirt, for the skimmer refused to start.

When they finally reached the small jail of the city of Randar, it was amazingly quiet for a facility serving a

metropolis of half a million souls. It was exceedingly difficult to run afoul of the law on Omega, since those few things which were actually illegal could generally be settled with a small bribe. Therefore, the admitting officer was somewhat out of practice.

That was the only reason Chekov could come up with to explain why the identicom should go up in a crackle of blown circuits when they shoved him into its field.

The officer muttered something that sounded like "Spatzing computer," and prepared to take the necessary information down with a stylus and a record tablet. He got as far as the charges against Chekov and looked up impatiently.. "Well? What are you charged with?"

"I really don't know, sir."

"You must have done something, Ensign. Perhaps If you just explained ... briefly." He laid the stylus down and flexed his cramped fingers.

"Vell, there vas this girl., you see--"

"There usually is."

"-and she ... ah ... came to my room--"

"They usually do."

"--and ve vere ... ah ... you know ... and then these three men came charging in, yelling about nowitiates and Makai and somebody named Jhikarr--"

The officer's hand moved toward a switch, and he roared

for the jailer. "Get this man out of here!" he demanded when a sleepy-looking Omegan appeared.

"Lock him up, and for Makai's sake, don't go near him until somebody comes from his ship!"

As Chekov was escorted away by a jailer who looked suddenly wide awake and sorry about that condition, he was sure he heard the admitting officer muttering something about the Curse of Jhikarr. Or maybe he was just cursing.

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Captain James Kirk slowly drummed his fingers on the desk and regarded the ensign standing before him. Finally he sighed, crossing his forearms on the cluttered surface, and said, "Ensign Chekov, would you just explain one thing to me?"

"Sir?"

"At any given moment, in the city of Randar, there are approximately one thousand perfectly legal, perfectly respectable ladies of the evening plying their trade. With odds like that, Ensign, why did you have to seduce a nun?"

"A *vhat*?"

"A nun, Chekov. A novitiate of Makai."

"But I didn't know--"

"The tattoo is a sign of their faith -- like a crucifix on Earth, or a shaved head on Rigel. It also means they're off-limits." He glared at the miserable young officer. "Didn't I see your signature on the shore leave protocol sheet?"

Chekov avoided the captain's furious gaze. "Yessir," he murmured.

"But you didn't read it before you signed it, did you?"

"No, sir."

Kirk pulled open the bottom drawer of his desk, took out a tape deck, and tossed it on the desktop. "I suggest you do so now. In your quarters. Where you will remain until I get this thing straightened out. *Have .you got that, mister?*"

"Yessir."

"Dismissed."

Kirk watched the thoroughly chastened young Russian slink away, and sighed again. He should have listened to Spock and not Bones, he decided. Turning his crew loose on a planet like Omega at a time like this was the height of poor judgment, if not outright stupidity. It would have been better to risk a mutiny by denying his space-weary people the fun and games they knew awaited them planetside.

The freeport of Omega was not only a garden of delights, it was also a hotbed of intrigue. That was the prime reason Starfleet wanted them in the Federation -- to get a firm

hand on the reins and to put a stop to the troublemaking of the Klingons in that sector. It was also the prime reason the Klingons wanted Omega to remain exactly what it was.

The vote was coming up in less than 48 hours, and even though the Makaitlan priesthood had no official vote in the decision, it had plenty of clout. No matter that a preliminary investigation showed that the lady in question had grown bored with celibacy before; one hint from the high priest that entrance into the Federation would mean the routine seduction of novitiates by visiting Fleeters, and the merger would be dead as an asteroid.

Worse yet, it might mean closure of the port to Federation vessels.

Kirk didn't want to think what might happen to his career if one of his men was responsible for that.

There was no way out of it -- he was going to have to tell the Ambassador what had happened. He couldn't let her walk into today's meeting unprepared. He keyed open the intercom.

"Biolab Six," came a voice in reply. "Subito here."

He scowled at the speaker. "This is the Captain. I was calling Ambassador Fiorenza's cabin."

"Sorry, sir. Must be a bad circuit in the main board."

Subito signed off, and Kirk tried again, reaching the main rec room, the gym, and the dilithium recharging station in rapid succession. He slapped the intercom switch

impatiently and got up. He'd just have to go over--

The thought was abruptly terminated as his shin came into sudden and sharp contact with the opened desk drawer.

Hopping on one foot and grasping the throbbing limb, he made his unsteady way to the door, wiping away tears with his free hand. He smacked into the firmly closed doors full tilt, and sat down on the deck with more speed than grace.

"What???" he muttered, rubbing first his nose and then his shin. He got up and tried again, more cautiously this time.

The doors remained shut.

He pounded on them in an ancient Terran rite that called for the firm and immediate application of brute force to any balky piece of machinery.

The doors remained shut.

Still hobbling painfully, he made his way back to the desk. He opened the intercom again. "Lieutenant Uhura--" he began.

"Biolab Six. Subito here."

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"I just can't figure it out," Kirk said to the headless torso that lay full-length on the deck of the bridge. "First the intercom, then the doors."

The torso pushed itself out from under the communications

console and became Science Officer Spock. "There seems to be -- a great deal of -- dust in the -- relays," he said, getting up. "But I cannot -- imagine how--"

"Mr. Spock, are you all right?"

"Yes -- sir," the Vulcan replied.

"Why are you talking that way?"

"What -- way?"

"THAT way, dammit!"

"I seem to be -- afflicted by arrhythmic -- spasms of the -- diaphragm, producing involuntary inspiration and -- closure of the glottis," he said.

"I think he has the hiccups, sir," Uhura offered.

"Do Vulcans get the hiccups?"

"Apparently."

"Well, see if you can get McCoy up here to give him something. How long have you had them, Spock?"

"Approximately three hours and -- sixteen minutes, Cap -- tain."

"Hold your breath," Kirk suggested.

"My mother always said to take a spoonful of sugar," Sulu volunteered, turning from the helm.

"No, no, you drink a glass of lukewarm salt water while counting to ten," Uhura corrected.



"I have no intention of doing any such thing," Spock said firmly, looking as mortally offended as it was possible for him to look.

"Uhura," Kirk reminded her, "just get McCoy up here, please."

Uhura made a hopeless gesture at the disemboweled communications board, shrugged, and started for the turbolift. She was cautious enough to wait for the doors to open before she stepped through them.

"What about this mess?" Kirk asked. "How long will it take to get the board back in operation?"

"Only a few minutes, Captain. But we must determine the source of the contamination." He crossed to his own station. "Computer," he queried.

"Working."

"Run a check on the ventilation system and produce a particle count on solid contaminants."

The computer hummed silently for a few seconds. "Behold the young ensign named Chekov," it said. "The *Enterprise* he'll make a wreck of. / For you cannot run far / From the Curse of Jhikarr / So pity unfortunate Chekov."

Both Spock's eyebrows threatened to disappear completely beneath his neat bangs. He looked at Kirk as though the captain had been responsible.

Kirk backed into Uhura's empty chair and sat down

unsteadily. "Limericks?" he said. "The Curse of Jhikarr? What's that got to do with anything?"

"Psycho-- kinesis," Spock said, almost to himself. "Of course."

"Of course what? What's going on here?"

"It's Mr. Chek -- ov, Captain. Jhikarr was a -- figure of Makaitian -- deistic mytholo -- gy who was doomed to be -- followed by catastrophe for of -- fending Makai."

"Bull," Kirk pronounced with finality. "You don't believe that any more than I do."

"No -- sir," Spock admitted. "But the Makaitians have a his -- tory of experimentation with -- psychokinesis." He rubbed at the base of his breastbone; the spasms were becoming painful. "They may have found -- some way to make the ema -- nations of the subconscious -- produce physical reactions."

"That's pretty far out, Mr. Spock."

"Remember Parmen of Pla -- tonius?"

Kirk considered that one in silence, broken only by the Vulcan's spasmodic hics. Even subconsciously, Chekov wouldn't... But he had come on the ship at about the time Spock's affliction began. He frowned, and crossed to the computer station.

"Maybe it was just your voice," he suggested. "You really do sound a little odd."

Kirk repeated Spock's request for a check on the ventilation system. The computer hummed busily for a few seconds and then responded with another limerick. This time, the subject was the captain himself, and the content dealt with certain intimate -- if slightly exaggerated -- aspects of his love life.

Somebody giggled.

It was not Kirk, who blanched and then delivered an order in a somewhat strangled voice. "Mr. Spock," he said, "unplug that thing"

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"And, you should have heard the one it made up about Mr. Spock," Sulu said with a grin. "By the time he got it shut down, it had taken a crack at everybody on the bridge!"

Chekov covered his face with one hand and gave a muffled groan. "It's all my fault," he wailed.

"Oh, come on, how could it be your fault? You weren't anywhere near McCoy when he..." Sulu trailed off, but not quickly enough.

"When he what?"

"Well ... he was going to give Mr. Spock a muscle relaxant to cure his hiccups--"

"Mr. Spock had the hiccups?"

"Didn't I tell you?"

"No."

"Oh. Well, anyway, McCoy said he must have figured the dosage for kilograms and then set the hypo for pounds. Anyway, the dose was about twice what it should have been, and boy, was Spock ever relaxed! They carried him off on a gurney."

Chekov made a sound like a moose in labor. "You better go, before it gets you, too," he said.

"I'm not worried. Why should you be?" Sulu was quite sure Chekov had nothing to do with the helmsman's chair coming apart under him just before the end of watch. It had been squeaking for some time, after all.

"No, please. Just go away."

Sulu patted his friend's shoulder. "Well, if it'll make you feel better--"

"It vill."

"Okay. But don't worry; this'll all work out. You'll see." Sulu left, doing a little two-step as the doors tried to nip him on the way out.

Chekov sat for some time, debating. He knew he was confined to quarters, but the longer he stayed here, the more terrible things were bound to become. Maybe he could find that priest and get him to remove the curse. There seemed to be no other solution.

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Once, back in Randar, he dithered a bit, not sure quite where to begin his search. An observer could have followed his path away from the transport station by the spontaneously cracked window in the control booth, the fallen puff pastries in the bakery down the street, the toppling of Omegan figs from the vending carts in the plaza, or the slidewalk that ground to a clanking halt when Chekov stepped off it to reenter the hostel where it had all begun.

The clerk's attention was diverted by the large holograph that fell from the wall as Chekov entered, but when he looked up from the mess, his reaction made up in vehemence what it lacked in promptness.

"You again! Are you trying to wreck my place? I heard about you, you ... you ... Jhikarr. Now, beat it!"

"I'm looking for that priest," Chekov said firmly. "You must have called him."

"Of course I called him," the clerk snapped, grabbing for a stack of occupancy reports as they slid off the counter.

"All I need is to have Dakleesh on my back. But if you think I'm going to tell you where to find him--"

Chekov looked innocently at the ornate chandelier in the lobby. "I vonder how firmly that's anchored?" he said, almost to himself. "It would certainly make a mess if it fell,

wouldn't it?"

The clerk turned an interesting shade of puce and backed away from the counter, trapping his foot momentarily in the wastebasket. "On the docks," he blurted. "It's a big pyramid-shaped building with the sun of Makai on it. But don't tell him I told you!"

"Thank you," Chekov said. He left without waiting to see if the swaying chandelier was going to fall or not, and began to whistle softly as he made his way toward the docks. Maybe this curse thing wouldn't be so bad, after all. It was obviously just a matter of learning how to handle it.

There was a subtle change in the streets as he moved from the center of the city toward the docks. It had less to do with the minor disruption caused by his passage than it did with the landscape itself. Faces became less open, less friendly, and the movements of the pedestrians took on a kind of scurrying quality that spoke of secretiveness and unfriendly intent.

Most of the dock area was considered by the residents to be part of the Kiingon domain, and the gentle ministrations of that motley band of sneaks, spies, and general double dealers kept the Omegans away unless they had business there.

Chekov was unaware of that. He had stopped reading the protocol report on the planet when he got to the part about Makaitian influence, and he was so intent on locating the

pyramid-shaped building that the change around him went unnoticed.

Also unnoticed was the fact that he was being followed by three Klingons. The information that one of the *Enterprise* crewmen had fallen afoul of Dakleesh had been received with considerable interest. It was definitely to their advantage that the breach not be healed. When Chekov spotted the blazing sun on the wall of the Makitian temple and headed toward it, the time had come for direct action.

They quickened their pace, two of them bracketing the young ensign and lifting him several inches off the slidewalk with firm grips on his elbows.

Chekov's protest died in his throat when he felt the unmistakable touch of a disruptor's muzzle in the general region of his third lumbar vertebra.

"There must be some mistake," he ventured.

"You bet, *p'kless*, and you made it."

Chekov knew enough, Klingoni to recognize he'd been mildly insulted, but it did not seem prudent to point that out.

"No, I was only going--"

"To bribe one of the priests. We know. I don't think that's a good idea. Not with the vote so close. Besides, I heard you Fleeters have some stupid thing called the 'Non-Interference Directive'. We're only protecting you from yourself, you see."

Chekov was not sure he wanted to be "protected". He was even less sure of it when they stepped off the slidewalk and ducked down a dark and smelly alley. He struggled against the iron grips on his elbows, but with his feet still in mid-air, he could make no decisive move.

The Klingon who had been behind him moved ahead of the two escorts to apply a palmed device to what looked like a very ordinary, weather-beaten back door. It slid back with a smoothness that belied its shabby exterior, and they entered a maze of hallways, passages, and steps.

It was some time before they applied the seat of his pants firmly to a chair in a small room and left him alone.

He did not remain alone for long.

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Kirk sighed and rubbed at the knotted muscles in the back of his neck. The conference with Ambassador Fiorenza was not going well. She took it as a personal slap that one of Kirk's men had put his foot into a very finely-calibrated piece of diplomatic machinery. The assurances of McCoy and Spock, also in on the conference, that Chekov had disobeyed orders and was being disciplined, too did little to change her mind.

Kirk was just about to suggest that they break for dinner when the intercom beeped at him. At least, the communications system seemed to be working again, he



thought, as he opened the channel.

Uhura's face told him it was bad news before she ever opened her mouth, and he wondered what system had gone haywire on them this time.

"I'm getting a message from Omega," she said. "And, Captain -- it's from Captain Koloth."

Kirk raised a speculative eyebrow. He hadn't known Koloth was lurking around in this mess. That complicated matters considerably. "Put it on visual, Lieutenant."

Kirk shut his eyes in momentary frustration when Koloth's image appeared. It was upside down. Koloth seemed unaware of his somewhat undignified appearance. He immediately launched into a well-prepared speech.

"Captain Kirk, we have one of you spies here, and--"

"Not mine, Koloth. We don't have any."

"Come now, let us not mince words. Is this one of your men, or is it not?" The camera pickup swung in a dizzying arc to display a gold-shirted figure sitting in a chair. It took Kirk a minute to identify him, and then he had to turn his head sideways to do it. He restrained an urge to just put his head down on the table and cover it with his arms. The figure, undeniably, was Chekov.

"That man is in Randar in violation of orders," Kirk said. "If you will turn him over to the Omegan authorities, they--"

"Will bow to your bribes, of course, and set him free immediately. I am afraid it is not that simple, Kirk."

Koloth did not look afraid at all. He looked rather pleased with himself, if Kirk was translating the upside-down expression correctly. "You will withdraw your representatives from the Omegan debate, and leave orbit at once. The Federation will withdraw its ridiculous and illegal pressure to force Omega into chains."

"Captain Koloth--"

"You have thirty of your minutes to comply, Captain. Otherwise, we shall remove all your espionage plans from this young man's brain, along with whatever sentience he may possess ... and present the documented evidence of Federation treachery to the Omegan council."

The screen went abruptly dark as Koloth terminated his message, and Kirk used the word that had been scorching the tip of his tongue for some time. The "documented" evidence would be faked, of course, but the destruction of Chekov's mind would not be. The Klingon mind-sifter was not a gentle weapon, and Koloth's threat was not an idle one.

He rubbed again at the nape of his neck. When they got Chekov out of this... An errant and particularly evil thought tiptoed across the front of his brain, popped into his mouth, and escaped into the room.

"I suppose," he said, "we can't just leave him there."

Spock's chest was still sore, but Vulcans do not hold grudges. "It would hardly be fair," he said. "--to the Klingons." Well, not permanent grudges.

Kirk gathered up his wits and his legs. "Bones, come with me. Spock, you'll have the con."

"Captain," Spock pointed out, "we have no idea where the Klingon headquarters are located."

"I know that, Mr. Spock. We'll just follow the sound of collapsing buildings."

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As it turned out, he was not far from wrong. The landing party beamed down on the Omegan docks, amid a great chaos. Omegans, Klingons, and various other aliens seemed intend on leaving the immediate area as quickly as possible.

Striding through the midst of the crowd was a tall, robed Makaitlan priest, followed by several assistants. The tall man's basic dignity was somewhat marred by the condition of his robe, which was scorched, and that of his face, which was smudged. Also scowling.

On a hunch, Kirk approached him. "Your Eminence," he said silkily, "is there some way in which we may be of assistance to you?"

The priest looked Kirk up and down, made a face as if he

had just bitten into an underripe plomeek, and then drew himself to his full two-point-four-meter height.

"You may inform Captain Koloth -- if you can find him in that ... dungheap -- that he is to remove his men from Omega in one *kaphek*. If he does not, I shall not be responsible for the consequences."

Kirk turned his head and moved one shoulder forward in the Omegan gesture of respect he'd so carefully rehearsed. "It will be my great honor to do so, your Eminence." The turned head allowed him to smile, ever so slightly.

The priest strode on haughtily, and Sulu, grinning like an Oriental Cheshire cat, skittered up to Kirk.

"According to the head apprentice, that was Dakleesh, Captain. Koloth invited them to the Klingon headquarters for what he called 'an important announcement'. Seems there was a slight grease fire in the kitchen. Followed by a liberal dousing of all the dignitaries with extinguisher foam. Followed by--"

"I get the picture," Kirk said with a grin. Then he sobered. "I hope that 'important announcement' doesn't mean Chekov..." He trailed off, unwilling to voice it. "They said thirty minutes."

"Koloth likes to hedge his bets," McCoy reminded him.

"If they've--"

He was interrupted by a shivering rumble that started at a subterranean level and rose like a noisy muffin. A

particularly ratty souvenir shop across the street swelled like an enraged Tellarite puff-buck, shuddered momentarily, and then the front wall peeled away neatly to reveal a most remarkable interior.

At ground level there was indeed a souvenir shop, but above it was a suite of rooms, elaborate with a conference table, a row of chairs, a Klingon banner ... and two slightly disheveled figures. One of them was Koloth.

The other was not.

Even from street level, ten meters away, Chekov's grin flashed like a beacon. He raised both arms above his head like a victorious boxer, and yelled out -- "The Curse of Jhikarr strikes again!"

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They did get the pair down safely, after a few nervous moments when an erratically-functioning rescue skimmer threatened to topple the remainder of the structure.

The rescue team scratched their collective heads over the various phenomena and theorized that the flames from the kitchen had ignited gases in the sewer and that the resultant explosion had shaken loose the poorly-constructed front wall of the building.

Chekov knew better. When Koloth found out he was holding the main figure in the seduction scandal, he planned to offer an appropriately grisly punishment in

return for Dakleesh's influence in the council vote.

"I varned him something awful vould happen," Chekov said. "And it did. And If I go back to the ship again ... face it, Keptain -- I'm jinxed."

"Not any more, you're not." Sulu, after dropping his bombshell announcement, stepped forward and opened his fist. Resting serenely in his palm was a misshapen glob of smoky lucite, strung through with a slim chain guaranteed to produce a decorative green line around the neck of any wearer.

It was not the aesthetics of the thing that gave it its questionable appeal, however. Deep within the cloudy pendant, a diminished but recognizable sun of Makai attempted futilely to shine through.

"I got this from one of Dakleesh's assistants," Sulu announced. "He guarantees it as a counter-charm against the curse."

Kirk started a pronouncement about the silliness of the whore thing, and then stopped. By this point, he would have gladly accepted a casting of Chekov's horoscope or the predictions of the I Ching, if it would banish the ensign's gloomy outlook.

Chekov latched onto the lumpy pendant as if it were a survival bubble and he was floating in deepspace with his oxygen supply gasping its last. His gratitude would have been laughable had it not been so obviously sincere.

He wore the decidedly non-regulation ornament under his uniform shirt faithfully, and pointed to the cessation of calamity as proof of its power. He even went so far as to credit it with the Omegan council's decision to become part of the Federation. And he had a sneaking suspicion that it was the pendant that limited his punishment to an official reprimand and the cancellation of his accumulated shore leave.

He was therefore considerably upset two weeks later when he stripped down for a midday shower -- the chain did indeed have a tendency to make his neck take on the same hue as Mr. Spock's -- to find the charm missing.

He pulled his uniform on hastily and took off -- neck-ring and all -- to find Sulu. He had to know the name of the Omegan who had supplied the pendant in the first place, and get a replacement, fast, before *Enterprise* came apart at the seams.

Sulu, cleaning up the last tasty morsels of a piece of lemon meringue pie in the otherwise empty mess hall, was not disturbed. He just grinned and invited Chekov to sit down.

"But you don't understand! I've lost it! Sulu, you've got to get me another one, before--"

"Just calm down, will you? Want a piece of pie?"

"No, I don't want a piece of pie! I want you to *do* something!"

"I already have." He licked a stray particle of meringue off

his thumb. "Look, Pavel, I've got a confession to make. I didn't get that pendant from an Omegan. I swiped it from that souvenir shop. It was just a piece of junk jewelry that got melted in the fire, that's all. It didn't have any more power than that phony curse did."

Chekov did sit down then. "But .. but ... all those things that happened--"

"Coincidence, that's all. Plus a good dollop of Powell's Law. McCoy explained it to us. You tell a person often enough that something awful is going to happen to him, and eventually he believes it. McCoy says that makes you tense up and things that should be automatic get to be major decisions until you're just an accident looking for a place to happen."

Chekov considered this for a moment, almost convinced. Then he changed his mind. "What about the computer?"

"Just a glitch somewhere. Somebody with time on their hands playing games with the word bank and not clearing it right."

"Can that happen?"

"Can it happen? Listen, on my first deep space trip, I got so bored I spent four days using an engineering computer's graphics display to design the perfect woman. I thought I'd cleared it. It popped up six months later when the Fleet Admiral was making a class-one tour of the ship. I spent the rest of that trip in the engine room, polishing brass with



a toothbrush."

Chekov grinned and rubbed reflectively at the annoying green line around his neck. "Vell," he said finally, "if you think so..."

"Pavel, old friend, you have absolutely nothing to worry about." He got up and stretched. "Come on, I'll whip you at a game of handball."

"Fat chance! I've got ten credits says I'll destroy you."

"You 're on."

The two men left the mess hall. There was silence for a few minutes in the empty room, and then a servo-port whimpered softly and produced, one at a time, forty-seven pieces of lemon meringue pie.

THE END