

Termites in the Captain's Log

or

Meanwhile, in Another Part of the Galaxy

by Lynda Carraher©

Ah, Starfleet. Behold the galaxy-spanning organization, composed of dozens of starliners, shuttles, transports, scouts, destroyers, heavy cruisers, all crewed by intrepid young starfarers, each ready at a moment's notice to leap headlong into adventure, *to boldly go where no man has gone before...*

Does it then stand to reason that, of all the ships and crews out there in the starlanes, "the only ship in the quadrant" should *always* be the *Enterprise*?

Might there not come a moment in time, however brief, in which the *Enterprise* finds itself becalmed in the backwaters of space, with routine and boredom its only companions? A time when *other* ships, *other* crews, even (Dare we say it? Yes!) *other captains* are having all the fun, swashbuckling around the cosmos? A time when nothing is happening on the *Enterprise*, and all the adventure is going on... *meanwhile, in another part of the galaxy...*

Captain James T. Kirk sat morosely at his bridge post, listening to the familiar queeps and blips of a smoothly functioning starship. There was absolutely nothing happening, except Spock's eternal starmapping assignment.

Ensign Chra' Zykiti lashed his tail nervously from side to side and listened with all four ears. There was no doubt about it ... *something* was lurking in that swamp, and whatever it was had already destroyed half the *Revere's* landing party.

Kirk hated starmapping. In the first place, there was no conceivable way to shortcut the process. In the second place, the job of starmapping was undeniably and irretrievably the bailiwick of the science officer. And in the third place, starmapping presented absolutely no opportunity for heroics, derring-do, seduction, or the imposition of Truth, Justice, and the Federation Way on the population of some unenlightened planet.

Deep inside the engine room of the Federation starship *Republic*, a lone figure placed a small metal box far back

on a dusty shelf. *Now, he thought, let's see how high-and-mighty Captain DiMonia handles THIS little surprise package.* He pressed a switch on the surface of the box, and walked away as the high-pitched sound it made rapidly climbed beyond the range of human hearing.

"Lieutenant Uhura," Kirk said, "where's my message from Starfleet Command?"

Princess Voluptia's pointed tongue caressed her ruby lips as she surveyed the angry young Starfleet commander standing before her, struggling vainly against the chains that bound him. This one would make very interesting game indeed, she thought.

"What message, sir?" Uhura responded, a puzzled expression on her face.

Ensign Tikopi struggled through the smoke that filled the weapons room. He had to reach the shutoff valve before he lost consciousness. Otherwise, the entire ship was at the mercy of the Orion pirates bearing down on them.

"You know -- my Top-Secret, Priority One, Eyes Only message from Starfleet Command ordering us to

break off this mission immediately and respond to the latest galactic crisis."

Far out along the Spiral Arm, the Federation destroyer *Tamerlane* assumed orbit over a small Class M planet. The mysterious signals that had caused Captain Redhorse to alter her previously assigned course had ceased as abruptly as they had begun. If it was a joke, Redhorse wasn't laughing.

"Oh, *that* message." The communications officer riffled through a stack of tape ships, checked the floor around her station, took her earpiece out of her ear, shook it, peered at it intently, and then shrugged. "Sorry, Captain."

Commander Chinn was in the shower when the red alert klaxons began blaring. He kicked open the door and dived for the intercom without even stopping for a towel. Markesen had the conn, as he recalled, and he certainly had no secrets from her.

Glazer was right, Kirk thought. *Armageddon never comes when you could really use it.* His finger reached out for the buttons on the arm of his chair and stabbed randomly.

"Sweet sufferin' Mary!" Ensign O'Bannion shouted. "Look at that screen! There must be half a dozen Klingon battle cruisers comin' this way ... and somethin's chasin' *them!*"

"Sickbay. McCoy here." Kirk wasn't sure, but he thought he detected a smothered yawn in the doctor's response.

Ambassador Krr'k'xxt of the K'Hachmett Hegemony stood on its three pair of rearlegs and clicked its mandibles under the nose of the long-suffering yeoman assigned to keep it happy. "We don't give an empty egg casing for what your captain's orders are," the translator hanging from one of its frontlegs announced. "If she does not destroy the Vas'klkk ship immediately, as I have decreed, all treaty negotiations between K'Hachmett and the Federation will cease at once, and a formal declaration of war will be drawn up."

"Bones!" Kirk's voice cracked with desperation. "How are you coming with the cure?"

"There it is, Captain" Lieutenant duBois said, fine tuning the image on the screen. "The legendary planet of Tr'faal has just become a reality."

"What cure, Jim?" This time, McCoy didn't even try to smother the yawn.

Engineer's Mate Quintana knew it was going to be one of those days the moment she dropped the magnetic torque infiltrator into the transporter field and it turned into a Denebian Slime Devil.

"The cure for my fatal disease! Dammit, Bones, *I need answers!*"

"*Tribbles?*" Admiral Nogura shouted, his voice vibrating the plastiglass in the windows overlooking San Francisco Bay. "you found *tribbles* in the *what?!*"

"You had the fatal disease last time around, Jim." Kirk thought he heard the muted clink of glass against glass. "It's not your *turn* this time."

Manic laughter was not a sound normally heard within the serene corridors of the Federation science vessel *Surak*. Yet for the last three nights, something ... or *someone* had romped those hallways giggling, chortling, and whooping

with laughter while eyebrows climbed behind closed cabin doors and aristocratic Vulcan noses were looked down with disdain.

"Well, whose turn *is it*?" Kirk demanded.

The technician at the *Jenghiz'* transporter controls looked up with a stunned expression as the forms solidified on the pads. From the center pad, a mountainous man flashed a predatory smile, twirled the ends of his handlebar moustache, and announced, "Thanks for the lift, laddy-buck. Now would ye be so kind as to tell your captain that Harry Mudd is here, with the loveliest cargo of green Orion dancing girls ever seen outside the auction blocks of Sha-Boh?"

There was a slight pause, during which the sound of rattling ice cubes rolled like phantom dice across the bridge. "Umm, according to the chart, Sulu's. But he's on home leave, so somebody else will have to cope with him."

Ciara nal'Kiste remembered shouting out some kind of warning when it became obvious that she wasn't going to be able to manage a soft landing for the disabled shuttle. And that was all she remembered until some time after

moonrise when she opened her eyes to the silhouettes of rugged crags outside the ruined craft and the equally craggy silhouette of her passenger -- Commander Krueske, late of the Klingon Empire, would-be defector to the Federation, and now her only companion on this Goddess-cursed mudball on the backside of nowhere.

"Oh." The captainly finger reached out again, hovered, and descended. "Mr. Scott?"

Captain Daniel Hawk reached out and flicked the switch to darken the briefing room screen. "Well, gentlebeings," he said to his assembled bridge crew, "that's it in a nutshell. Headquarters doesn't know what it is out there that's crunching planets up like popcorn ... but they do know the *Lexington* is the only starship close enough to even slow it down before it gets to the Rigellian system."

"Aye, Captain?" Scotty's voice was crisp, his burr as sharp as ever. Kirk's hopes rose.

Ara Najarian disliked time travel intensely. It didn't matter to him whether the *Excalibur* hied its entire 190,000 metric tons around the sun for a slingshot effect, or warped its way to the Guardian planet so one disgruntled science officer could step reluctantly through that damned stone

doughnut. It still ended up with him in a damp meadow in the pre-dawn chill, with the clock running out on his attempts to find the one man who simply *must not* be allowed to participate in the imminent battle -- at least, not if Najarian wanted a Federation and a starship to return to.

"How much longer can your engines hold out?" Kirk pitched his voice low. He had a good crew, and they deserved the truth, but not if it was going to cause panic.

Chief Medical Officer Singh shook her head to keep the sweat from running into her eyes again and wished she could take the time to remove her isolation helmet. But even the few minutes it would take to do that, douse her face and neck with cold water, and suit up again were minutes she could not spare. Only she and Carruthers had been on their feet the last time she checked. If either of them fell victim to this insidious virus before she found a counter-agent, every crewmember on *Pegasus* would be dead before end of watch.

There was a puzzled silence, interrupted only by a contented, albeit mechanical, purr in the background. Then, Scott's hesitant voice: "Sir?"

The Romulan attack was swift and unexpected and devastating. At one moment, *Loki* was circling the invaders' dying ship, intent on forcing them to shield and thereby halt what appeared to be a mass-transport evacuation to the planet below; in the next instant, fiery blossoms burst from what Captain Ayisto had sworn were dead weapons.

"Your *bairns*, man," Kirk shouted, heedless of listening ears. "Your *puir wee bairns!* How much more of this can they take?"

Captain Dominic Ferelli scratched his chin reflectively and wondered again just how the devil he had gotten snookered into this particularly cockamamie assignment. He thought it might have something to do with a spectacularly successful shore leave he had spent on Wrigley's a few weeks ago, but since the details of that 72 hours remained somewhat vague in his memory, he couldn't really be sure.

"At this speed?" Scott's shrug was nearly audible. "Oh, five years or 50 billion parsecs, whichever comes first."

The shuttle dwindled to a speck and then disappeared into the vast starfield. On board the *Darius*, Lieutenant

Commander Ari ben David opaqued the observation deck's viewport and turned away. It was done; he could do nothing more but hope help would arrive in time.

"I see." Kirk sighed. He swiveled his chair, searching the bridge. There must be *something*.

It was snowing again. It had done nothing *but* snow since they had been marooned, Ensign Varyschenck thought. Soon they would have to choose between contacting the planet's Iron Age natives, in clear violation of the Prime Directive, or they would have to resign themselves to freezing to death in the barren cave.

"Mr. Chekov!" Renewed hope infused Kirk's voice. Surely he could count on the eager young ensign.

"What do you mean, you're reading life forms, Mr. Bjorg?" Commander T'Raijh looked through the science officer's viewer as if her eyes would see something different. "That ship has been a drifting derelict for 20 years."

"Yes, Keptin!" Chekov's voice cracked as sharply as clicked heels.

Lieutenant Sanchez turned toward the turbolift as the doors hissed open. "Captain Cunningham," he said, "I was just about to page you. I have a Priority One message coming in from Starfleet for you, and it's coded Top Secret and Eyes Only."

"Get down to the transporter room on the double." Kirk's words tumbled over each other in their urgency. "Help Mr. Kyle locate that problem in the transporter. *We've got to get those people off the planet!*"

"Come out, you wascally wabbit!" Fudd shouted, sighting down the barrel of the shotgun. "I know you're in there -- I can hear you bweathing!"

"Dot vas two veeks ago, sair," Chekov replied hesitantly. "De transporter is verking fine now."

"Phasers on stun only," Commander N'krume ordered as the alien invader oozed through the crack under the doorway. "Doc Schneider wants some tissue samples -- not ashes."

"You're sure about that?" Kirk demanded.

Davra, Captain Prentiss told herself, *you're a dirty old broad*. Still, it was undeniable that Lieutenant MacDermitt had the best-looking buns on the *Copernicus*. Maybe even the best-looking buns in the quadrant. She briefly considered the possibility that the gorgeous Scotsman would accept a friendly little pat in the spirit it was offered, then sighed and turned back to her fuel consumption reports.

"Yes, Keptin," Chekov grinned proudly. "I finished the tests on it myself, chust dis morning."

Quartermaster Ichigawa double-checked his count one more time and noted the figures for his inventory. He'd never had a captain who went through uniforms as fast as Shvass. If the Andorian wasn't sliding down cliffs on landing parties, he was dumping plates full of sh'mell'jha into his lap or waving his arms around with such exuberance that underarm seams popped like vashta seeds in a wildfire.

Kirk rubbed his thumb across his cheekbone reflectively. The tension of having absolutely nothing to worry about was becoming unbearable. The sound

of Spock clearing his throat ripped through the air like thunder.

This had better be important, Captain Quinn told herself as she fidgeted impatiently in the turbolift. She had just poured herself a generous dollop of very expensive brandy, at the end of a long and arduous shift, when Transporter Chief Dominquez' panicked voice summoned her to the main transporter room. She was still muttering to herself as the turbolift doors opened and she double-timed down the corridor and into the room. What she saw stopped her dead in her tracks. Looking back at her from the main transporter pad was an exact duplicate of herself.

"Captain..." the Vulcan said.

Commodore Stocker at least had the good grace to look apologetic. "I'm sorry, Jeremy," he said. "I know your crew is exhausted and your ship is on her last legs. I wouldn't ask this of you if I had any other choice, but you have the only crew in the quadrant with a snowball's chance in hell of pulling this off. And if you don't ... well, it means the end of civilization as we know it."

"I knew I could count on you, Spock!" Kirk whirled his chair around to face the science station. "Is it ... *that*

time again?" he asked softly.

"Be careful," Abraxas cautioned, and Ensign Kima had to suppress a nervous giggle. The five humans accompanying the tall Ceban were already drawn as taut as strings on a shankka. They were probably in as much danger from their own nervously held phasers as they were from any hobgoblins lurking in this planet's gloomy dawn.

The Vulcan turned away, as if torn by the opposing demands of his stoic heritage and his respect for his captain. Finally he spoke, softly and with great effort.

Why me, Lord? It was with great difficulty that Captain Ferenc Kazincy refrained from asking the question out loud. Still, it seemed like a reasonable question. Why, indeed, should his ship always be singled out when an ambassadorial party from some backwater planet no one had ever heard of decided they rated a Cook's Tour of the Horsehead Nebula?

"No, Captain." Spock's voice, velvet-soft, steel-hard, was freighted with suppressed despair. "It is ... my starmapping camera. An undetected malfunction seems to have rendered today's data unusable. Captain ... we shall have to repeat this exercise again

tomorrow."