

STAR TREK / Dickens



**Where No Dregan
Has Gone
Before**

by
MDBruffy

Author's note

For those few that might have read Dickess- Volume One: Prisoner of the Past, the following story takes place several decades after the events in that book.

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Teaser

The United Triangle Alliance

The planet Dragoon

Salmak Cove was located on the eastern end of Tipan Island- the same island that served as home to the planet's capital city of Liminien.

It was at the cove that the home of Aierowen Dickess- second-in-command, aid and advisor to the current head of the Alliance Security Force was to be found. At this hour, Chief Dickess was the only one still awake, the household staff and the children having gone on to bed some time ago.

At the moment, the Chief was to be found in the den, seated in a chair, her dorsal easily fitting into its slot, watching one of her favorite Twentieth century videos. The ancient collection itself was now stored behind glass at the family museum, their stories having been transferred to the house computer several decades ago.

Her large brown eyes were on the room's viewscreen as the starship's first officer faced off against the commodore they'd found aboard a wrecked ship.

Then, communications with the wrecked ship was restored and the first officer's captain was heard. “..Get me Mister Spock.”

Arrow watched, her antennas sending shadowy number fives dancing on the den walls as the confrontation continued. The commodore was determined.”...If you have anything to say, you will say it to me.”

The captain was equally determined. “There's only one thing I have to say to you, Commodore: Get my ship out of there.”

Arrow watched as the story continued to unfold. She'd watched it a hundred times over the years and never tired of it. She nodded as Spock relieved the commodore. She leaned forward in her seat just as she did when she was seven years old, when the captain got the wrecked ship moving. She felt the tension as the ship sailed toward the cone-like machine and certain destruction- and then relaxed as the captain was finally beamed off just as the ship exploded, destroying the machine in the process.

As the credits came up on the screen, she spoke to the den's computer. “All right, DC. That's enough. Think I'll go on to bed.”

“Acknowledged, Arrow. Good night.”

Leaving the den, Arrow found her way upstairs, past the family's rooms to her own, where she undressed and slipped

beneath the sheets and among the cushions that make up her bed.

Seems she no sooner closed her eyes, than the sound of an intercom whistle was heard- followed by a voice:

“Chief Dickess, please report to the Main Briefing Room for landing party detail. Chief Dickess, please report to the Main Briefing Room for landing party detail.”

Sitting up, Arrow slowly rose from the bed and as she did so, the lights came up- revealing a cabin just like the ones in her video collection. “Not possible, “ she whispered. “I must be dreaming- “

The door buzzer went off, startling her. Quickly reaching for a robe that lay across the foot of the bed, Arrow pulled it on as the door buzzer sounded again. “How do I- ?” then she remembered. “Come.”

The door slid open to reveal her visitor and her large eyes went wide. “Chief, you were summoned to the Briefing Room for landing party detail.” One Vulcan eyebrow rose. “Is there a problem?”

All Arrow could do was stare at the Vulcan science officer in speechless shock.

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Act One

Spock watched Arrow for a moment. “Chief? I asked if there was a problem.”

She turned away as she finished tying her robe shut. “Yes, there is. But I can’t explain it, because I don’t have all the answers.”

The Science Officer stood before her, his hands behind his back as he spoke. “Perhaps if you were to share what information you *do* have- ?”

Arrow spoke without facing him. “I was home watching a video. Then I went to bed- and the next thing I know, I’m being paged for the landing party.”

Spock folded his arms across his chest as he studied her. “You contend that you have *not* been serving aboard this vessel for the past year as Head of Security?”

Now she turned to face him. “That’s *exactly* what I’m saying- and there’s only one way to prove it.” She stepped toward him. “A Vulcan mind-meld.”

Spock lowered his arms as he studied her closely. “What you are suggesting is not something to be taken lightly.”

“I know that,” she replied. “I also know it’s the quickest way to start getting any answers.”

Spock considered this for a moment before nodding. “Very, well. With your permission?” She nodded and he reached out to touch her face. “My thoughts, to your thoughts...”

After several moments, he lowered his hand and Arrow blinked as the contact ended. “I suggest you get dressed. We must speak to the captain.”

The Main Briefing Room

Captain James T. Kirk fought to keep the scowl off his face as he and the rest of the landing party sat round the table and continued to wait. It was several more moments before the door split and slid open to reveal Spock and Arrow- dressed in the red uniform of Ship’s Services. The captain’s words held a sharp edge to them. “Well, Mr. Spock, Ms. Dickess- nice of you to join us.”

“My apologies, sir.” Spock replied. He then glanced around the table before meeting Kirk’s gaze once more. “Captain, I request that the rest of the landing party wait outside.”

“Is privacy that important, Spock?”

“It is.”

Kirk looked around the table and nodded. Once he had done so, the other members of the landing party rose and left the

room. As the door slid shut, the captain looked to his first officer. “Well?”

Spock waved the Chief to a seat as he himself sat down at the table’s computer terminal. “Captain, the Chief and her world do not belong in our reality.”

The confusion this brought forth was clear on Kirk’s face. “What are you saying? That she’s from some other dimension? She’s been on board for over a year.”

“No, Captain, Arrow corrected. “I haven’t.”

“She’s correct, Jim,” Spock added. “At her request, I performed a mind-meld. She...arrived in our reality less than thirty minutes ago. In her native reality, we exist only as fictional characters in an electronic story format known as a ‘TV series’.” He turned to the computer and activated it. “Computer: Fictional Library. Any and all listings connected to Chief Aierowen Dickess.”

“Wor-king,” answered the device. Arrow could hardly hold back her smile as she compared this machine with DC. “Narrative series. Twenty- first century fiction. Title index on screen.”

Kirk and Arrow both leaned forward in their seats. “This is insane,” Arrow muttered. “Those are the code names for our security case files.”

“It would appear, Chief, “Spock concluded, “That in our reality, they are also the titles in a series of short story narratives about *you*.”

Kirk cleared his throat. “All right, Spock. Any ideas on how or why this happened?”

“Not at this time,” Spock replied with a trace of confusion in his voice. “No cosmic distortions have been detected- which may simply mean that the one that caused this, is of a type we’ve never encountered.”

Kirk shrugged and looked to Arrow. “Well, Chief -“ He spread his hands apart. “- Welcome aboard.” He looked from one to the other. “Recommendations?”

“This is so strange, “Arrow noted as she shook her head. “I grew up watching these stories- *your* stories. Even though we’re total strangers to each other, I feel as if I know you.” She met Kirk’s gaze. “I can’t believe this is an accident – or some fluke of nature. There’s a hell of a lot more going on here than we’re aware of.”

Spock nodded. “Agreed.” He looked to the captain. “Of all the beings that could have *accidentally* arrived on board, the Chief has her own unique knowledge of us and her own reality as well.”

Kirk looked down at the table top as he spoke. “ The only option I see is to continue as if this conversation never took

place- To simply continue as is, until another piece of the puzzle presents itself.”

“Agreed.”

Arrow nodded. “That’s the only choice I see.”

The only human in the room nodded. “Very well then.” She watched as the man reached for the intercom in front of him. “This is the Captain. landing party personnel may now return to the Main Briefing Room.”

As the crew members filed back into the room, the curiosity on their faces was clear. But the questions remained unasked. They knew if the secret meeting concerned them or the mission, the captain would say so.

Once every one had resumed their seats, he began. “Last week, the Federation lost contact with Sigma 9.” He looked to Spock. “Mr. Spock?”

“Sigma 9 was colonized fifty years ago, by the planet Andor,” Spock stated. “True to form, the Andorians have been somewhat reluctant to supply any information beyond the fact that they’ve lost contact.”

“It’s the usual story,” Kirk added. “We’re the only ship in the sector so we get the job of finding out what happened. With no contact with the colony, we’ll beam down with full gear and phasers on stun.”

Arrow leaned forward at this. “Captain, you said “we”? You’re not beaming down.”

Kirk leaned back in his seat as looks of shock passed through the landing party. “Chief-“

“*Captain,*” Arrow replied with the same tone she would have used with an Alliance Security Force captain in her own reality, “You said it yourself. We have no contact with the colony- no way of knowing what’s going on down there. As such, it’s an unknown- and the last place the ship’s captain should be.”

“I’ve beamed down with the initial landing party before, “ Kirk stated.

Arrow nodded. “And came damn close to getting yourself killed more than once. If I’m head of security aboard this ship, that means I’m responsible for your safety. You’re not beaming down till I know it’s safe.”

A heavy silence settled over the briefing room. Those present who had been on board since Kirk assumed command could not remember anyone ever challenging his decision to join the landing party. His place on the party had always been taken for granted.

Spock’s calm voice broke into the stillness. “Were Dr. McCoy present, he would no doubt be cheering.” He turned to meet Kirk’s gaze. “In this instance, I must agree with the Chief.

Until we know more, we cannot compromise the safety of the ship's captain.”

Kirk stared down at the briefing room table. Arrow could tell that he was quietly seething. He was the classic man of action and disliked being kept out of things. It was equally clear that he wasn't going to argue the point in front of the crew. “We'll arrive tomorrow morning. Beam down will be at 0900 hours. Dismissed.”

As everyone filed out, he called out. “Spock, Chief.” They both paused as the rest of the landing party left. No one said anything till the door closed.

Kirk met Arrow's gaze- and she cut him off. “Don't even say it. I told you- I *know* you. You put your life on the line to many times when it wasn't necessary. Do I have to quote chapter and verse?”

“We all die sooner or later, Captain. There's no sense crossing that bridge till you have to. “She glanced at Spock. “Now if you'll excuse me, I'm going to try to get some sleep before we arrive- although I doubt I'll succeed.”

She then left the room- and the two friends- in silence. Kirk was first to break it. “Spock- “

“She *is* correct, Jim- as Dr. McCoy and I have tried to tell you many times.”

“We’ve lost contact with colonies before and it’s turned out to be nothing more than faulty communications gear.”

Spock nodded, conceding the point. “ And then there was the case of Cestus II and the spores, Tycho IV and-“

“Point made, “Kirk stated, cutting him off. “Keep me informed of what goes on down there.”

“Acknowledged.”

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Act Two

From the Diary of Aierowen Dickess:

Standard year: Unknown.

When I was growing up, I enjoyed watching these stories and wished I was part of this crew. When I got older and reached a position of command, I knew I could relax with them and watch someone else make the decisions for a while.

Now, my dream has been turned into a nightmare as I find myself trapped in a reality where these stories have form and substance and a life of their own.

How and why was I brought here- and how do I get home? Spock said that I and my world don't belong- meaning that Dragoon has been pulled into this as well.

How? Why? These two questions keep beating at the inside of my brain, demanding answers I just don't have.

End entry

Captain's Log; Stardate 4309.7

A simple investigation into the loss of contact with Sigma 9 has turned into a larger mystery than we had expected.

From the crew's point of view, Chief Aierowen Dickess has been on board for the past year, serving as Head of Security.

Only last night, has evidence begun to surface that this is not the case- that reality has been altered in some manner to make room for the Chief and her world.

Why- and for what reason? Is Sigma 9's silence part of all this? Hopefully upon our arrival will we be able to find the answers...

As the *Enterprise* settled into orbit around Sigma 9, the Main Transporter Room was a busy place as Kirk stood by the console to see the landing party off.

Spock and Arrow were on the front transporter pads. Arrow glanced around the chamber as Kirk turned to Chief Engineer Scott, who was to operate the console. "Energize."

As the transporter's hum rose and the process took hold, Arrow's eyes grew wide as she slowly faded into nothingness.

Once the platform was empty, Kirk looked to Scott once more. "Is the second landing party ready?"

"Aye, sir- as ordered."

"Have them report here, immediately."

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The surface of Sigma 9 was a cross between Earth and Andor. Browns and Greens stood next to blues and whites as the city buildings rose up into a sky of pale violet.

Arrow took a deep breath as the transporter released her and the party and quickly felt around to make sure everything had arrived- the way her luck's been going a missing antenna wouldn't have surprised her. Once she was sure she was all there, she looked around to see the landing party already taking readings. There were no andorians- or any one- to be seen.

“Spock to *Enterprise*.”

She turned at the sound of his voice to hear the captain reply. “Kirk here.”

“No traces of the andorian population, Captain. In fact, there are no traces of anyone other than ourselves.” He met Arrow's gaze. “We will begin checking the surrounding structures for some sign of the population. Spock out.”

With his communicator returned to his belt, Spock and Arrow moved off together, both with phasers in hand. The weapon felt strange to Arrow- not as heavy as the energy pistols of her own reality.

The whistle of Spock's tricorder was the only sound as they walked. Then the First Officer's communicator bleeped and Arrow watched as he took it in hand. “Spock here.”

“Hernandez, Mr. Spock. I’m two blocks east of you. I’ve come across signs of a fire-fight. Scorched marks, dried blood, charred debris- but no bodies.”

“Understood, Lieutenant. Continue your search. Spock out.” He glanced at Arrow as he put the communicator away. “Ideas, Chief?”

She just shook her head as she looked around the area. She shrugged as they reached a building. “We don’t know any more than we did when we beamed down.”

Turning toward an open door, Spock’s reply was one word: “Indeed.”

They had just entered the main lobby of the building when the sound of a transporter filled the air- heralding Kirk’s arrival with a four man detail. Arrow’s brow lowered at the sight of him. She’d forgotten how stubborn he could be. “What the hell are- ?”

“You’ve had forty-five minutes, Chief. Nothing’s attacked you or eaten you. Therefore I judged it safe for the captain to beam down,” Kirk met her gaze without hesitation. “If you want to file a protest at a later time, you’re free to do so.”

She shook her head in disgust. “You stubborn- “ She was well aware of the four security guards. But she returned Kirk’s gaze with an equal amount of steel in her own.” I’ll file that protest when we get back to the ship- *If we do. Sir.*”

He nodded. “Granted.” He then looked to Spock. “Status?”

“Unchanged. We were about to move further into the building.”

Kirk looked to the guards. “It seems quiet- but stay alert. Just because nothing’s happened yet, doesn’t mean nothing will.”

Arrow thought that was something a certain captain should have kept in mind, but like Kirk, she wasn’t going to argue in front of the crew.

Kirk nodded to Spock and the group moved on. Finding a flight of stairs, they took them and as they reached the second floor, Arrow sniffed the air- then sniffed again. “Mr. Spock, do you- ?”

“Yes.” He checked his tricorder. “Just down the hall.” He looked to the captain. “A large amount of biological material- but not living tissue.”

Kirk tightened his grip on his phaser and the group moved on. None of the others saw Arrow swallow nervously as she became very aware of the red uniform she was wearing. They had only taken a few more steps before Kirk could also smell the stench.

For Arrow, the stench was combining with a nightmare memory that caused her stomach to tighten with growing dread. She continued down the hall with the captain on one side, Spock on the other and the four guards bringing up the rear.

Spock's tricorder led them to a specific door. Arrow glanced at each of them before she opened it.

The smell of cooked flesh was immediately overwhelming. Kirk and the guards covered their noses even as Arrow looked away from the body mounted on a spit over smoldering coals. But her eyes fell on more bodies lying on various tables with arms, legs heads removed- some were even gutted like fish.

She confronted Kirk. ***“Get back to the ship! In fact recall everyone- NOW!!”***

There was no time to question her. The tone in her voice was enough. He took his communicator in hand-

- and aliens charged into the room from the door at the far end, firing as they came. One guard screamed as an energy burst tore into his chest, killing him instantly.

Arrow, Kirk, Spock and the three remaining guards dove for cover, their phasers coming to life.

Alien chittering and chattering filled the air as the invaders pressed their charge. It was only as one of their shots exploded against the table Arrow was ducked behind that she finally accepted who the aliens were. Using a moment they couldn't afford, she fought to remember how, then set her phaser to overload- before throwing it into the midst of the alien horde. The resulting explosion took out their entire half of the room.

Arrow, Kirk and the guards coughed as they were joined by Spock in regaining their feet. Kirk's first words were for Arrow.

“Wasn't that a bit drastic, Chief?”

“No,” was her sharp reply. She ignored Spock's raised eyebrow as she continued. “Get us back to the ship, Captain-*Now.*”

“Why?” he asked. “What did we interrupt?”

Arrow's gaze took in the ruined room and the bodies as she replied with one word: “Lunch.”

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Act Three

From the Diary of Aierowen Dickess:

Day Two in the “Star Trek” Universe.

It’s clear now, that I didn’t end up here by accident. The threat to this Federation is very real- and a danger to this entire reality. To my knowledge, no one aboard the Enterprise has ever faced a threat like this before. They’ll get themselves killed trying to negotiate when there’s only one response that will work:

Fight till you win- or until you die.

End entry

Arrow paced her cabin in overwhelming frustration. Kirk had given everyone ten minutes to get cleaned up before reporting to the Briefing Room.

She shook her head. How did *they* end up here?

How did *she*?

“Well, I guess it’s time to give you some answers.”

She closed her eyes and shook her head. The final piece of the puzzle had finally arrived. She turned to face him. “Aren’t you about seventy-eight years early, Q?”

He stood there, leaning against the room divider, dressed as she'd seen him in all those later generations of stories. "On the contrary, Chief. I go where and when I like."

"Disrupting the lives of everyone you come across in the process," Arrow stated. "Why drag Dragoon into this? Once I knew what the situation was, I would have come." She stepped toward him. "In fact, now that I know you're involved, I have to wonder why you're not dealing with this yourself? All you have to do is snap your fingers and the problem would be solved."

"The Q are not all-powerful, Chief," He said. His eyebrows shot up. "Close- very close. But there are limits. Our mutual enemy comes from a reality so far removed from ours- and yours- the Q have no effect on them. It was the Continium's idea to find someone who knew about these beings and 'fit them in'."

Arrow sighed and shook her head. "All you had to do was explain. Put Dragoon back and let me be me."

"Of course, of course." He snapped his fingers and in a flash of light, Arrow found herself in her own green and yellow uniform.

"I'll have to tell Kirk and the others about you," She told him. "That's the only way to explain all of this. What I don't understand is why you're concerned with *this* time period. Surely the Federation beats them off by Picard's time."

Think so?" Q raised his hand. "Let me give you a little glimpse of the future, Chief." Another flash of light and Arrow found herself and Q standing in a wide plaza- the concrete cracked and pitted. Everything in sight was in ruins, overgrown, blackened and abandoned. "We're eighty years in the future," Q told her.

"What planet?" She asked as she turned to face him.

"Earth," Q answered. "In fact, we're standing in front of what's left of Starfleet Command."

Arrow's eyes went wide as she looked at the nearest building- and saw what was left of the Starfleet emblem from Kirk's era hanging crooked, blasted and rusting on a shattered wall.

"Now do you understand the gravity of it?" Q asked as a gust of wind blew dust around their feet. His voice seemed to echo in the silence of this future dead Earth. "If they're not stopped in Kirk's time, Picard and his crew *will never exist.*"

Another flash and Arrow found herself standing outside the Briefing Room doors. With a sigh, she stepped through to find Kirk, Spock, Mr. Scott and Dr. McCoy. "I assume everyone knows how things stand now?"

Kirk waved her to a seat as he nodded. "We know who you are, Chief. But the rest is still a mystery."

“And mysteries give you a stomach ache,” Arrow noted. Ignoring McCoy’s smile, she continued. “I can give you some answers, now.” She sighed and then told them about Q- being careful to keep all references to the Next Generation out of the conversation. “...As for why he brought me here, that story’s a lot uglier.” She activated the intercom in front of her. “Computer, display the visual scan of the aliens that attacked us on Sigma 9.” The table top monitor came to life and as soon as the aliens appeared, Arrow said, “Hold. Transfer this image to the view screen.”

As the view screen at the end of the room came to life, Arrow rose from her seat and stepped toward it. Her eyes were on the image of the insectoid aliens as she spoke. “ Their race is called the Mascott. Thing is, they’re no more native to this reality than I am- Hell, they’re not even native to mine.” She turned to face the four officers as she continued.

“Centuries ago- millions of centuries ago- in a reality far removed from either of ours, the Mascott home world suffered a massive world-wide drought that killed off most of the vegetation and lower life forms. For a while, they tried to buy the food they needed from other star systems, but those worlds either couldn’t or wouldn’t sell them enough. Eventually, it got so bad, they fell back on another option- a lottery.”

“My god,” McCoy whispered.

Arrow nodded. “You guessed it, Doctor. The losers were fed to the winners and over the decades that followed, the Mascott became a race of cannibals. Eventually, it got to the point, where there wasn’t enough of their own race to feed off of. They began raiding any spaceship that wandered into their star system.

“One day, a ship with the technology to cross the dimensional barriers entered their system.” Arrow met Kirk’s gaze. “That was the first race the Mascott totally consumed. Ever since then, they would arrive in a reality or dimension, their scouts would set up a base or two and once they were established, they’d call in the rest of their people.

“Think of a cloud of Earth locus. They move in, eat everything that lives, then move on to the next dimension- leaving only the husks of once living realities behind them.”

“Any chance we can communicate with them?” Kirk asked. “Show them how can feed their people?”

Arrow shook her head. “No- for two reasons. First, they are so far from their native dimension, that their home world is a legend- a myth- to them. They live and die on their ships and in whatever reality they’ve invaded. The second reason, is that they’ve been feeding off of others for so long, the current generation wouldn’t know or understand any other way.

“I’m afraid, Captain, your only option is to fight- and fight to win.”

She sighed. "I don't know which version of the Mascott these are. The last time my reality encountered them, they discovered a compound we called "The Venyan Mist"- it destroys metal-technology. Once it's been exposed, a metal object's reduced to rust in a matter of minutes. They released it into the atmosphere of every Alliance world." Arrow's words grew softer with the memory- and more bitter. "By the time they released the counter-agent, we were reduced to fighting them with weapons taken from museum display cases.

"It was years after the war ended on Dragoon, before we recovered enough of our technology to make it back to Drega Luna- our moon- where we discovered that one of our lunar bases had survived. Without their manufacturing base, it would have taken us centuries to recover."

Arrow glanced at the screen, then turned to the officers. "Based on the future Q showed me, I think we have to assume the worse."

"Do you know the formula for the counter-agent?" Kirk asked.

Spock spoke next. "If we can get it into the atmosphere of a targeted world before they can release their mist, it will never have a chance to take effect."

Arrow nodded. "I know how to make it."

Scott had the next bit of news. “Problem is, Mr. Spock, we donna know which world they’ll hit.”

Arrow’s antennas bounced about as she sat back down. “They usually infest places with a large population – hotels, resorts...”

Kirk looked to Spock. “Risa.”

The Vulcan turned to the computer and checked. “It is the closest world. Two days away at warp six.”

Arrow nodded. “The ones down on Sigma 9 were a rear guard- stationed there to deal with anyone that came to investigate the colony’s silence.”

Kirk activated the intercom in front of him. “Kirk to bridge.”

“Bridge. Sulu here.”

“Best course for Risa, Mr. Sulu. “ He met Scott’s gaze. “Warp seven. Kirk out.” He then turned to Arrow and Spock. “Chief, Spock, I want that counter-agent ready for release as soon as we enter orbit. Dismissed.” As everyone started out, Kirk called out. “Bones?”

McCoy turned from the door. “Yes, Jim?”

“I want you to put together a medical team- six crew plus yourself. You’ll follow the landing party. Full medical gear- expect casualties.”

McCoy stepped toward him. “You sound like you’re expectin’ a major campaign.”

“I hope it won’t come to that.” Then he met the doctor’s gaze. “But I want to be prepared- just in case.”

His friend nodded. “We’ll be ready when you are.”

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Act Four

As the *Enterprise* sped toward Risa, Arrow wandered the corridors, exploring this vessel in a way she never dreamed possible, seeing sections of it she'd only seen on a view screen in images centuries old.

She'd spent the past hour in the science labs with Spock re-creating the counter-agent for the Venyan Mist. Now as the ship's systems began mass-producing it, all they could do was wait.

She turned a corner and found herself on the observation deck. For a long moment, she looked down on the hanger deck, taking in the sight of the *Galileo II* as it sat poised and ready for flight at a moment's notice.

Turning, she stepped over to a viewport and looked out at the passing stars, allowing the sounds of the ship to settle over her.

From the Diary of Aierowen Dickess:

Day Two; Second Entry.

All the answers have come, action's been taken and plans made. The question now is, will we be in time to save Risa?

The Mascott. Of all the races, why did have to be them? If we fail to stop them here, where will they strike next? Andor?

Vulcan ? Earth? Or another colony? It's strange to be thinking of this reality as real in terms of the lives that could be lost.

In my reality, these stories have come to mean so much to so many over the centuries...I can't stand by and let this existence fall to the Mascott.

Can't- and I won't.

End entry

A short while later, found Arrow looking around as she stepped into Sick Bay. “Dr. McCoy?”

“In here, Chief.” She entered the recovery ward to see him giving final instructions to his staff. He turned to her as the others left. “Thanks for comin’ in.”

“What’s the problem?”

“The captain wants medical attention available on the surface when we get to Risa- a whole emergency medical set-up.”

Arrow shrugged. “From the stories I’ve seen, I don’t remember him taking that kind of precaution before- but then you’ve never faced this kind of situation before.”

McCoy nodded. “When your acquaintance –Q- put things to right, he wiped out all of our Dregan medical knowledge- if we even had any to begin with. Since there’s a good chance I might

be trying to save your life in the next forty-eight hours, it might be a good idea if I had some idea of what I was dealing with.”

Arrow had to smile at the note of frustration in the doctor’s southern tone. “Bet you said the same thing to Spock first time you met.”

“Didn’t have to,” McCoy replied as he led her to the exam room. “My predecessor, Dr. Piper already had everything on file...”

He waited while Nurse Chapel helped her change into a hospital gown, then he took a scanner in hand as she lay down on the examination table. He looked up at the monitor as he moved the scanner over her. “...cartilage, huh?”

Arrow nodded. “The dorsal’s an evolutionary left-over. Whenever children of mixed-blood are born, it doesn’t even form- not even when the Dregan factors are dominant.”

The doctor shook his head as the scans continued. “You’ve got a lot of scar tissue, Chief.”

“I’ve seen my share of conflict: wars, police work, twists and turns in reality. Sometimes, I try to think back and I just shake my head and wonder how in the hell I ever got from point ‘A’ to point ‘B’.”

“You say the Mascott can’t be reasoned with?” McCoy asked while he checked scans and took new ones.

“Not while they think they have the upper hand,” Arrow told him. “I’ll give you another example. Think about the best mint julep you ever had- or a glass of good red wine. The Mascott look upon Human AB- blood in the same way.” She shook her head. “The only way to make them listen is to defeat them first.”

At that moment, the ship’s intercom came to life. “This is the Captain. The following personnel will report to the Main Briefing Room at 0900 tomorrow morning prior to serving on landing party detail.” He then went on to read off a list of names that included McCoy’s and Arrow’s.

The doctor shook his head as Arrow sat up. “Sounds like he’s takin’ the whole security section.”

“We’ll probably need them,” she replied. “Especially if this nest is like the ones I’ve encountered. Numbers are their edge. Their one strategy is to overwhelm their opposition. Our numbers *have* to be greater.” Her eyes narrowed slightly, then she left the exam table and crossed to the nearest intercom. “Dickess to Captain Kirk.”

“Kirk here.”

“I have an idea about tomorrow’s operation, Captain. May I come by your quarters?”

“Yes, Chief. I’m there now.”

“I’m in Sick Bay. I’ll be there in ten minutes. Dickess out.”
She glanced at McCoy as she headed for the dressing room.
“With any luck, Doctor, your scans won’t be needed.”

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Captain’s Log; Stardate 4308.10

We’ll reach Risa within the hour. Long-range scans show nothing unusual, but Chief Dickess informs us that Mascott bases are usually located underground- as such, they’ll be shielded by rock. Which means we may have to assume orbit before we can detect them.

Chief Dickess has informed me of her conversation with Dr. McCoy about the Mascott preferring to overwhelm their enemies by sheer number. She recommended we attempt to cut off the source of their re-inforcements. It’s a sound idea and I’ve passed it along to Mr. Spock for consideration...

On the bridge of the *Enterprise*, Kirk pushed the button on the arm of his command chair, shutting off the log recorder. It was only a moment later that the turbo lift doors opened with their customary “swish” to allow Arrow to step out. “Chief? What brings you to the Bridge?”

“Simple curiosity, Captain,” she replied as she stepped down beside the command chair. “I figured this might be the only chance I’ll have to see it in real life.”

They both smiled and Kirk shook his head. “Incredible. Fictional in one world and real in another.” He nodded and indicated the bridge. “Feel free.”

“Thank you.”

Sulu spoke up then. “Captain, there’s a ship approaching – he’s traveling at Warp 1.95.”

In a move Arrow had seen a hundred times, Kirk looked over his shoulder to Uhura. “Open a channel.”

“I’ve been trying to raise them, sir. No response.”

The ship shook violently, nearly knocking Arrow to the deck before she could grab the railing.

“Raise the shields,” Kirk ordered. “Go to Red Alert. Spock?”

“Enemy vessel has passed us,” the science officer reported as he studied his viewer. “Analysis of their attack shows energy based weapons- *not* phaser technology- and no shielding technology detected.”

Kirk turned to the helm. “Sulu- main phasers. Go for their engines and weapons. Chekov, come to course 297, mark 3. Sulu, stand by.”

Arrow listened and watched- and her eyes grew wide- as Sulu's combat targeting viewer rose up out of his console. She could almost feel the ship turn as it came round to the course Kirk had ordered. When the Captain spoke, it was one word. "Fire."

Two beams of brilliant blue sliced through space- each aimed at a different part of the enemy ship as it began to turn away.

Both beams struck their targets with near blinding flashes.

"Enemy's hull is intact, Captain," Sulu replied as he checked his viewer. "But he's not going anywhere."

Spock had the next bit of news. "Mascott life forms confirmed, Captain."

From where he'd been standing by the engineering console, Scott had the next question. "Will ya be sendin' a boardin' party over, sir?"

Kirk thought it over, then glanced at Arrow as he replied. "Negative. Their environment's intact; there are no gravity wells or spacial distortions in the area." He shrugged. "We'll pick them up on the way back. Helm, put us back on our original course and speed."

"Spock, status of the counter-agent?"

"In the tanks and ready for release, Captain."

"Scotty, any damage?"

“None, sir.”

The captain nodded. “Good work everyone. Sulu, arrival time?”

“We’ll reach orbit in fifteen minutes, sir.”

Arrow had the next question. “Captain, the stories I’ve seen, never went into a lot of detail about your ship’s technology. How close do we have to be in order to get a detailed scan of the planet?”

Kirk looked to the science station. “Spock?”

“We will be close enough to begin scans in five minutes, Captain.” Spock continued to watch his scanner. “Details coming in now.” He studied his readings before he spoke again. “All surface scans match those on record. Various Federation races...” he looked over at the command chair. “All surface scans are normal.” He turned back to his viewer. “Commencing sub-surface scans now.” He was silent for a moment. “One anomalous reading north of the planetary capital- near one of their largest resorts.”

Arrow nodded. “That would fit.”

“It is located one half kilometer beneath the surface. We have the entrances and tunnels mapped and located.” Spock studied his information for a moment more. “Reading fifty Mascott life forms. “He then looked to Kirk. “And one hundred Federation life forms.”

“The Mascott’s livestock,” Arrow stated. “Captain?”

“Half a kilometer,” Kirk noted. “We can beam through that.” He looked to the Vulcan’s station once more. “Slight change of plans, Mr. Spock. Your science team will beam in and go for their communications and dimensional equipment as the Chief recommended. But the primary assault team will join up with me and the Chief in rescuing the prisoners. The remaining teams will continue as ordered.”

“Acknowledged.”

Kirk then turned to Engineering. “Scotty, the ship’s yours. Release the counter-agent into the atmosphere as soon as you enter orbit. Then do whatever’s necessary to protect the ship. The *Enterprise* comes first- is that clear?”

It was clear Scott didn’t like that last order, but he nodded. “Aye, sir- and good luck.”

“Thank you,” Kirk replied as he left the command chair and headed for the turbo lift. “Spock, Chief- ?”

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Upon arriving in the Main Transporter Room, they found the security guard waiting with phasers for everyone and a tricorder for Spock. McCoy and his medical team stood to one side with their equipment.

Kirk's words were for the security detail as he checked his phaser. "Make sure everyone understands. I want phasers set to stun. We want to defeat the Mascott. You only shoot to kill as a last resort."

Transporter Chief Kyle spoke up from where he stood behind the control console. "We've entered transporter range, sir."

Spock's group went first- followed by Kirk and Arrow's.

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Once she'd materialized, Arrow again felt the need to make sure everything made it. Now, she understood why Dr. McCoy was so reluctant to use the transporter. When she looked around, she found that- true to the stories- they were in a large cavern, with several branches leading off of it.

One of the security guards was scanning with a tricorder. She then pointed down one of the tunnel branches. "Federation life forms in that direction, Captain." Her brunette hair shifted about her shoulders as she faced Kirk. "Mascott readings, too, sir."

Taking his phaser from his belt, Kirk checked the setting, glanced around at his people and then met Arrow's gaze. "Let's go."

As they headed down the passage, they moved carefully, quietly, listening for any sound that would tell them the Mascott

were coming their way. Still, it was Arrow with her more sensitive antennas that heard it first and she shoved Kirk aside as an energy burst burned through the spot where he'd been standing.

Energy bursts and phaser beams filled the passage as the two sides clashed. Kirk and Arrow both took out Mascott left and right as a scream filled the air and a security guard fell dead from an energy burst to the chest.

Kirk's communicator beeped and he took it in one hand even as he continued to fire with the other. "Kirk here."

"Spock, Captain. The communications gear and dimensional equipment are now off-line."

As the Mascott's numbers grew and the aliens pressed closer, Arrow heard Kirk reply. "Good, Spock. He fired again, taking one Mascott while two took its place. Now if you'd just hurry this way, I'd appreciate it."

"On our way. Spock out."

"Kirk out."

Arrow shook her head as she stunned down another Mascott. True to form.

Spock's team appeared from one of the side tunnels and somewhere an explosion was heard- one of the other teams had managed to breach the base. Their arrival distracted the Mascott

engaging the combined group and both Kirk and Spock were quick to take advantage. The remaining aliens were quickly stunned down and the Captain then led the charge into a larger chamber where the Federation prisoners were being held in a large corral-like structure.

There were more Mascott here, but additional Starfleet forces began to arrival from other branch tunnels as the Mascott found their own tactics turned against them. Even then, when Kirk offered them the chance to surrender, they refused and tried to fight on- until security stunned the last of them down. “And now, Captain?” Spock asked.

Kirk nodded to one side. “Let the prisoners out and put the Mascott in. See how they like the view from inside their own corral.”

The Vulcan nodded and was soon directing efforts to do just that.

As he did so, Kirk turned to Arrow. “Well, Chief, I assume this ends their invasion?”

Arrow nodded as she looked around. “Yes. When they don’t signal for the rest of their people, it’ll be assumed they didn’t survive the cross-over and their race will look for an easier reality to invade.”

“Which means it’s finally time for you to go home.” They both turned to see Q leaning against one wall of the chamber in

a Starfleet uniform suitable for the era. The only difference being an embroidered “Q” on his chest instead of an *Enterprise* delta shield. “I assume you *do* want to go home, don’t you?”

Arrow glanced at Kirk and over to where Spock was dealing with the prisoners. To stay and work with these people...”It’s tempting,” She admitted. “But I have a family to raise and my own reality to see to.” She held her hand out to Kirk. “Take care, Captain.”

“Thank you, Chief.” This Human then tilted his head and his smile lit up the cavern. “Drop in again sometime.”

Arrow laughed and in a flash of light, both she and Q were gone.

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Epilogue

She stood in her own bedroom. Going by the clock by her bed, only five minutes had passed. Her robe billowed slightly as she turned to find Q standing near the balcony doors in his usual Next Generation uniform. “Well, Chief, you saved the universe.”

“I did have some help.” She stepped toward him. “There was more at stake than just your reality, wasn’t there? The Mascott’s next target was *our* reality, wasn’t it?”

For a moment, Q didn’t answer. Then he nodded. “Yes.” He stepped toward her. “I am going to say something to you, I’ve never said to Jean-Luc:

“Thank you.”

In his customary flash, he was gone, even as a second flash appeared on the bed. Arrow’s eyes went wide at the sight of the red Starfleet uniform she’d worn, a hand phaser and...a data disc. She took the disc in hand as Q’s voice filled the air. “A few mementos of your trip.”

She looked up, then down at the uniform and phaser. When she brought her attention back to the data disc, her eyes widened slightly as she read the title:

Star Trek: Adinfinitum

The Mascott Invasion

“Oh he couldn’t-“ She stopped herself and nodded.

“Yes he could.”

She quickly crossed to the video-tel on her dresser and slid the disc into its play-back slot. A moment later, she was watching herself standing in the middle of a Starfleet cabin.

She just smiled and shook her head.

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