

Halfway to Starlight

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Summary

In the Kelvin timeline, Pike considers the engineering crew before the launch of the *USS Constitution*.

Captain's Log, Stardate 2245.130. The Constitution is in final preparation for its deployment. Today the first of the crew comes aboard—our engineers, who will bring our ship to life, in every way.

Commander Christopher Pike, the first officer of the *Constitution*, looked down the line of engineers, resting on their rucksacks. It was going to take hours to shuttle them aboard. But it was a pretty day in San Francisco, and the crew was somberly soaking in the sunshine. For engineers in particular, this was the last of any starshine for eighteen months.

Pike mentally went down the rows, reciting the names and bios of the crew ... Yun, first deployment. Motlanthe, first deployment. Bowman, sixth deployment. There was a lieutenant ostensibly in command of this ten-man squad, but his eyes were closed.

Pike studied the lieutenant—Montgomery Scott, first deployment. This kid, with four doctorates in his pocket, was the author of the entire warp curriculum at the Academy. Just 23 years old, his name was getting kicked around alongside Einstein and Cochrane. Starfleet Engineering didn't want him here, but his scores gave him the right to request an assignment.

To his credit, he wanted the *Constitution*. But Pike wasn't convinced it was a good fit. There were whispers of a garrulous—but troubled—genius. And after getting his personnel file, Pike believed it. There was a medical waiver into Starfleet, which Pike didn't have access to, and an accommodations for disability plan, which he did. It didn't take reading between the lines to see the shadowy shapes of mental illness.

The 23rd Century did well at treating mental disorders. That whatever afflicted Scott required waivers and accommodations was ... Well. Pike was of two minds on the subject. There was grit in requesting deep space. But Pike wondered if the young engineer might not fit better in a shipyard research division.

Bowman leaned back to talk with Scott, and Pike paused, eavesdropping. "First deployment, Lieutenant?" Bowman asked.

"Aye," Scott admitted, sitting up and opening his eyes. He'd been *asleep*, Pike realized with a start.

"Nervous?" Bowman asked.

Scott shrugged. "I suppose I should be, but I'm really nae."

The crewman gave him a light cuff on the shoulder. "That's the spirit, sir."

Scott glanced around them, and frowned at the morosely hunched shoulders of his squad, then elbowed Bowman conspiratorially.

"How many computer engineers does it take tae change a light?" Scott called.

"How many?" someone asked gamely.

"None. That's a hardware issue," Scott answered. The squad groaned, and he asked another. "An engineer, physicist, and statistician are trying to hit a target at 400 meters. The physicist's equation lands them 100 meters short. The engineer adjust for defects, and the next shot is 100 meters long ... 'Bullseye,' the statistician exclaims."

There was more groaning. “What’s the sexiest equation?” Scott asked.

Before Scott could drop the punchline, another engineer walked through the line, and Pike held his breath, because ...

“The warp equations,” Lt. Stamets said, looking down at them. “Because they are full of fucking holes. It’s a funny joke,” he said witheringly, and stalked off.

“The hell is his problem?” Scotty asked, his eyebrows raised at the unexpected hostility.

“That’s our resident genius,” Bowman said carefully. “Lieutenant Stamets.”

“Ah. The ‘connected universe’ paper author,” Scotty said slowly. “And he *is* a genius. His maths are ...” he petered off, staring at the retreating back.

“And that comment means *you’re* Scott,” Bowman said. “I wondered if you were him.”

Scott just shrugged. “Scotty is fine, unless there is someone listenin’ who cares about ranks.”

Another shuttle launched above their heads, and they shuffled forward another two meters. Scott leaned back on his rucksack again, asleep in moments. Pike was a little worried about that because—it was uncanny, but the lieutenant was also in danger of getting his shoelaces tied together or a mustache drawn on his upper lip.

Except Bowman leaned in protectively, and glanced up at Pike with a smile.

Pike returned it, then looked up into the sky. He closed his eyes to enjoy the heat of Earth’s sun. And chuckled at the bad engineering jokes being murmured cheerfully up and down the line.

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