

The Officer Exchange

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The Officer Exchange

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Summary

"From that one spaceborne Tribble, a whole colony was bred! Klingons everywhere cried out in pain!" - Unofficial Literary Challenge 19: In the early 25th century, Captain McCary of the U.S.S. *Tsunami* helps the Klingon Captain, Sigon, fight a vicious infestation of deadly alternate universe tribble.

Notes

Author's notes: This was written in January 2016, as part of the Star Trek Online Forums Unofficial Literary Challenge #19, and connects to events from LC 64: The New Frontier.

Unofficial Literary Challenge #19: Prompt #1: In which one of your bridge officers is selected to serve a tour on a ship from the opposing faction.

Unofficial Literary Challenge #19

"The Officer Exchange"

The *Steamrunner*-class U.S.S. *Tsunami* dropped out of warp in the H'atoria sector like some kind of space-traversing mechanical conglomeration.

Approaching the Klingon *Bird of Prey* I.K.S. *Rotog*, Captain McCary and Commander Morris beamed over to its dank, sterile Bridge of dread.

"Thanks for answering my distress call, Captain," Starfleet officer, Deborah, said, turning from her seat at tactical. The entire area was full of unconscious Klingons, blood drenching the floors like a badly handled meat processor. "Apologies for the mess."

McCary crossed his arms. "Have the targs finally rebelled?"

"No, sir. The targ supply has run out due to it being Beast Appreciation Month," she replied. "This, I have no idea what's going on here. Sorry, sir, but it appears my progress in the exchange program has been a failure."

In a bustle, Captain Sigon exited his ready room and joined them. "Utter baktag! Your Lieutenant has been more than exemplary!" he defied. "I just ordered her to the Messhall this morning for early drinking, as we all know, from Riker to Jadzia episodes, that that is the only circumstance one can truly bond with a Klingon."

"I am quite drunk, sir," Deborah admitted in her usual deadpan tone, betraying no intoxication whatsoever.

McCary looked at her, bewildered, then away. "Never mind. What can *you* tell me, Captain? And please, let this not be an obvious Arin'Sen revenge story. Despite the justice they'd be serving tenfold by your repetitive enslavements."

"I know! I even offered them the idea of that, but, alas, their bones are as brittle as Ferengi knee caps." Sigon sighed. "No, it all started this morning: We had just completed our usual hit-and-run on your Starbase 234 when suddenly systems throughout the *Rotog* went haywire. Next thing I know, my night-shift Bridge crew is taken out— My existing BOFFs are fine, though, for continuity's sakes."

The Captain turned to him in complete shock. "Whoa! Are you serious right now? You know we're not supposed to break the fourth wall!"

"Puncture wounds." Morris interjected, examining one of the unconscious Klingons. "Looks like some-*thing* was responsible for this."

McCary sighed. "Damn the Federation's on-again off-again relationship with the Klingon Empire. We send acronym text-based transmissions with pictorial faces and smiling feces and you never respond. Fine. For the sakes of my Lieutenant, we'll check things out— But no Warrior's Anthem! The group synchronicity elicits forced camaraderie."

Walking down the eerily dark corridors with flickering lights, McCary, Morris and Deborah pulled hard on keeping their wits about them. Following closely behind, Sigon held his disruptor at the ready.

"Whatever has got this ship is emitting high-energy interference," Morris reported. "Internal scanning and your mercury vapor, phosphor coated tube lights have been severely affected."

Sigon replied, "When it comes to deck lighting technology, we Klingons are centuries behind."

Then, grunting sounds and wheezing breaths snapped its way to their senses but it was too black to see what was making it. For Sigon, the scent was clear.

"He is Klingon!" Sigon identified. "Bekk Tars, if I'm not mistaken."

McCary shone his palm beacon into the corridor. "Don't move! We're investigating first-hand rather than by proxy-hologram which would make much more sense."

"Heegghhhh," Tars uttered through his own bodily pains as he was lit up. Patches of brightly colored fur had grown, unnaturally out from himself all over his body. "UGGH!"

A surge of agony shot him to his all-fours. The group ran over to check on him. "It's.... fur?" Morris examined. "It looks like Tribble fur?"

"Feels like it too," Deborah added, petting a furry patch coming out of Tars' shoulder armor. "Err, that's the blood wine talking," she explained quite soberly as McCary and Morris looked at her quizzically.

McCary perked up. "You know something, Lieutenant. Tell us the truth about what's going on here."

"Sir, this exchange program has confused my loyalties," Deborah admitted. "The truth is, Sigon ordered me to secrecy over his murderous hunting objectives. We'd been chasing a prey for days, and instead of sleeping were sent to the Messhall to drink."

Sigon stepped around. "It was important to me that we differ ourselves from the Hirogen somehow, those warrior rip-offs! As a one-fourth Klingon yourself, Captain, I'm sure you understand."

"You see, earlier this year, the U.S.S. *Phoenix-X* visited a parallel universe completely occupied by Tribbles in space," Deborah explained. "When they returned, unbeknownst to them, a single, solitary Tribble was brought back and escaped."

In the dark, McCary could have sworn he heard purring. The thought of it sent chills down his spine.

Sigon continued: "From that one spaceborne Tribble, a whole colony was bred! Klingons everywhere cried out in pain! With your officer's help, we've been tracking them throughout the sector."

"Then it's clear," McCary finished. "My Tactical officer appears to have switched allegiances. Oh, and these spaceborne Tribble are fighting back."

Flashing his palm beacon around, he unintentionally revealed the group to be completely surrounded by angry, self-aware, parallel universe Tribble.

"AaaH!"

The fuzballs then began buzzing in unison. Their adorable vibrations converted through the universal translator. "*Your non-space, combat-buff Tribble are a failed evolutionary variation descended by the ancient one, Trebbly, one of our own.*"

"*He/she was sent to your universe eons ago to facilitate Tribble Space. We must ensure this original goal continues!*" another proclaimed. "*All of your space are belong to us!*"

Sigon pulled out his disruptor. "The Empire will not bow to these puffy-veQ! We stand for roughness, hard looks and the generational-tangents that made us that way! Destroy their cute little faces!"

But the Tribble were faster and leapt onto each of the humanoids, biting into McCary's skin. Morris tried to pull out his phaser but was taken down by a flurry of fuzz. Deborah's neck was pierced and bloody, while Sigon fired his disruptor until his hand was covered in furry fury!

"The Tribble have got us! If Bekk Tars is any indication, their venom re-sequences our DNA. We'll soon become one of them!" Morris cried in

agony.

Debroah struggled with her miniature attackers, pulling one off her face. "Captain! When we confronted these spaceborne mothballs, it was the Tribble themselves that explained to us how they got to our universe... one, giant Tribble."

"The Mother Tribble!" McCary realized through his fight. He struggled to glimpse what looked like an overly humanoid-sized ball of fur, emerging at the other end of the corridor.

Deborah added, "It's the one that traveled here with the *Phoenix-X*."

Under continual attack and the pains of transformation, McCary rolled his fur-building physique over to his fallen phaser, and crawled his way toward the Mother Tribble.

"Enormous hair monstrosity, I wish to discuss your terms of surrender," McCary offered, aiming his phaser.

To that, all the small Tribble scurried away to the sides in fear. The Mother Tribble vibrated in response. *"I am known as Tribblone and our purpose is reproduction. Not to destroy others. These transformations are a biological confusion."*

"Your self-impregnating Tribble-venom is selfing us into Tribble! As such, I propose a non-aggression pact," McCary suggested. "We leave you alone, and you stop converting us into one of you."

The dimly lit, giant fuzz-machine cooed in agreeance. *"It is done. But we will occupy all of known space eventually. We have already permeated your universe with utmost adorability!"*

"SQUEEEEE!" Through the dark, the little creatures all leapt back into the fur of the Mother Tribble while she, herself, re-merged into the darkness.

The lights in the corridor then flickered on. Deborah, now part-fur, took out her tricorder and read it. "It's leaving the ship through one of the ports... Like the *Rotog* just coughed up a hairball."

"Well, it's clear now your treasonous ways were a product of pure investigative drive in service of the unnatural— a reflection of the *Tsunami's* own efforts," McCary breathed, appeased, while checking out his own partial trans-fur-mation. "Is anyone as ichy as I am?"

Sigon got up and tore the growing fuzz from his neck. "It is not the last we've seen of those fluff-multipliers. And your insidious diplomacy has triumphed over my destructive war-mongering. But this remains a win for the unchecked Klingon genome none-the-less! Thanks."

"So, is the only reason your species goes on because of us?" Morris asked.

Captain Sigon shrugged. "Probably." As the group made their way back to the Bridge, he continued, "To that, I foresee this as the start of a wondrous relationship!"

Entering the Bridge, McCary, Sigon, Deborah and Morris discovered all the unconscious Klingons replaced with large, lumpy-ovals of fully-converted, fur-drenched Tribbles. The nightshift having completed transformation did not bode well for the four.

"Well, it was fun while it lasted!" Sigon corrected. "Warrior's Anthem anyone?"

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