

Processing

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Processing

by [SLWalker](#)

Summary

(2240) - Intake processing for Basic Training is a hell of a lot to face up to, when you're in over your head.

Notes

One of my favorite AO3 tags for this story is: *An admittedly adorable 5'8" tall stack of trauma reactions in a trenchcoat*. Which is pretty on the money.

Baltimore was blazing and it wasn't anywhere near noon yet.

Intake processing for Basic was done at Starfleet Medical's HQ, and the second Scott had stepped off the shuttle and outside of the climate controlled port with his carry-on over his shoulder (filled with the requisite socks, underwear, toiletries, two sets of civilian clothes, a small and compact bag of personal items and not much else), he knew he was in an entirely different world than the one he'd left technically five hours into the future time-zone wise, and two into the past literally.

Not only for the heat, but for the number of *people*, most of them human and most of them around his own age, and all of them crowding onto the train from the platform. The sound of them was a dull roar that was waxing and waning, a wave of movement and talking and the occasional shout to a friend, and if he could have avoided it, he probably would have.

Except avoiding it might mean turning back around and he couldn't do that.

Allegedly there were over a thousand recruits in Region 1 for this start cycle -- Scott's recruitment number was 407-534 -- and that Starfleet was just over halfway to their staffing goals for the year. He thought that there were probably a couple hundred of his fellow recruits just boarding the train to the campus, to go with the regular commuters, and even ample experience with mass transit didn't make it easier to stuff himself into some spot to cling to the overhead bar, crammed in with them like kippers in a tin.

But at least the effort to do so was enough to distract him from the twisting anxiety in his middle, wondering at what would come next.

It wasn't that Scott hadn't done his research. In fact, he'd probably done *too* much of it; he'd spent not a few hours at one of the terminals at the University of Aberdeen, or at the local library, chasing down every bit of information he could about what he was going to be faced with if he enrolled into Starfleet. He didn't have a degree yet, so he couldn't just skip right to OCS; his credit hours for the University of Aberdeen did count towards his eventual application to the Academy, but he would ultimately have to go in as a raw recruit. Provided he didn't wash out, he was at least guaranteed an enlisted rank and a chance for a commission in the future.

It was that which had him signing his life over to Starfleet and then waiting on tenterhooks for his report date.

Going into Basic didn't actually bother him. He didn't feel unequal to the physical demands of it, which Starfleet made clear right up front on their FedNet sites; he knew he was a match for whatever intellectual demands, too. It was the *social* aspect that made him anxious; the idea of

somehow being formed tightly into a unit with other people, of having to rely on them. Of having them rely on *him*, for that matter. He did all right with his co-workers at Winslow Salvage, but that was an entirely different thing than what he was going to be facing ahead; at least there, he could retreat to solitude when he needed to.

He'd spent a lot of hours pacing, trying to keep himself from calling the whole thing off in a panic. Until he was actually through processing, orders in hand, he could back out without any penalties and reapply later.

But the reality was-- if he didn't go now, he was never going to make it out.

If he didn't go *now*, something in him wasn't going to survive.

Scott fell in with the gaggle of chattering recruits as they navigated Medical HQ's huge, sprawling campus of green spaces and geometric buildings rendered in smoky reflections and tritanium, following the projected signs pointing them in the right direction, towards the main administrative offices and auditoriums. The sun was hitting his face sharply and he could already feel where he was likely getting sunburnt after leaving a rainy, cool Aberdeen, but there was nothing to be done for it but just-- ignore it and try to get through the day.

When he'd been researching all this, the various accounts written by people who had made it through Basic concluded that it was a hard but rewarding experience. That it was intense, but that they hadn't been left to founder; that they made lifelong friends and treasured memories on their way to becoming Starfleet's finest.

It all seemed a little too neat and kind to him, but if there *were* people disgruntled with the whole thing, their voices were well-buried in the noise, which left those who were cheerful and optimistic and their words of encouragement front and center.

Aye, right, Scott thought dismissively, then and now, squinting up at the building that looked a lot like the other buildings before taking a bracing breath and heading inside.

The first step of intake was so much like an assembly line that he felt not a little like a gear -- and a small one, at that -- being fit into a place no light would reach. One by one, as they reached the counter in one of six lines, their IDs were scanned, the smart card they'd all received via post prior to reporting updated itself with the various places they were expected and when, and then they were sent on their way.

Scott about groaned when he saw his schedule; he didn't know whether he was relieved to be getting that part over with early, or whether he wanted to just walk right the hell back out without looking back. But after a long moment of tense indecision, he bit down a wince and headed to the building where intake physicals were being performed.

Still, even if most exams were conducted almost entirely with tricorders and scanners, requiring no unnecessary contact or even much proximity, any sight of a doctor tended to make Scott's blood pressure spike. So, when he got there only to find himself surrounded by other recruits, all of them almost mockingly calm, and likewise surrounded by doctors--

His nerves were somewhat frayed even before he'd boarded the shuttle to leave home, let alone now. His mother wasn't home, she was in another part of the quadrant altogether, and neither his sister nor his father would have seen him off. So it was his Uncle Charlie who'd gone with him to the port, looking something mixed, both sad and proud. They didn't really talk, aside from Charlie checking to make sure he'd packed everything; Scott didn't know what to say beyond that, either.

There was so *much* that he didn't know the words for. About leaving home. About what that even meant.

And there was so much that he hoped he was leaving behind for good, too.

After a hug goodbye, though, and a tense and anticipatory shuttle ride, he landed and was instantly almost too busy to even think. The good thing, of course, was that-- well, he was too busy to think. Coincidentally, the bad thing was just the same.

He had known that it would be like this, maybe even counted on it, but the reality was more jarring than he had expected.

On the upside, without time to deal with the feelings, he was at least able to keep his mind focused on the myriad tasks associated with travel and reporting in, and get through them without balking. Until now, anyway.

If it weren't for the fact that he had people behind him in line, he would have been out of there and probably out of the building before his rational mind overrode his instincts, all of which were screaming for him to be *anywhere* else.

"You okay, man?" the recruit he'd just knocked backwards into asked, sounding a little startled.

The question at least snapped Scott back to rationality and he realized that he'd backpedaled. After a couple of breaths, he said, "Aye, thanks."

The wait was over quick, merciful or not; the processing staff had this down to a fine science. It helped that it was all conducted in one large medical bay; Scott had already learned from his research that privacy was pretty much forfeit in Basic, but oddly, it helped that he wasn't alone in there. That there were probably twenty other recruits around his age getting scanned and talked to by what appeared to be a pretty disinterested and mechanical group of physicians.

"Little anxious?" his current doctor asked, casually, consulting the tricorder.

"Aye, sir," Scott replied after a moment, trying *not* to sound thready, when he realized that he was going to have to get used to actually

answering non-engineering questions and responding to non-engineering things out loud.

He also finally noticed that he was fidgeting and promptly clasped his hands behind his back.

"Well, that's normal." The doctor didn't look up, just focused on his readings. "Skip breakfast?"

"I didna mean to," he said, and after that figured out that another 'aye' would have been a better response.

"Mm," was the reply, confirming that thought.

It was quiet after that, though. Lots of scanning, but nothing worse, and he didn't have to sit down, lie down or anything, which made it easier to live with. The instinct to bolt was still there, humming under his skin like electricity, but it was manageable. The sunlight was very bright coming in through the windows, and the fact that the clock on the wall showed it was only now coming up towards ten in the morning was kind of a shock. It felt like it should at least be into the afternoon, if not evening.

He was able to cope with and eventually even half-tune out of the number of white coats buzzing around, at least until the one that had been doing his workup came back from the centralized computer station.

"Absent a few vitamin deficiencies and a case of the nerves, you're in good shape," the doctor said, handing over a card. "That's a lunch voucher; don't skip it. Go on, git."

It took about all Scott had not to blow out a breath of relief as he took the card, tolerated the vitamin booster and then did, indeed, *git*.

His arm was still a little sore after, but Scott didn't have time to really think about that, either. Lunch could have theoretically provided a period of recuperation from everything, but it didn't; the cafeteria was packed, and even though he'd gotten a bit better about being around crowds at university, he still didn't like that much non-mechanical noise and movement. It was a bit like sensory overload; even when he was in university, he'd pack his own lunch and find somewhere quiet to eat.

It was almost too loud to think; staff and recruits everywhere and all of them talking. Not the steady harmonics of machines, but the much more chaotic patterns of living interaction. Snippets of conversation speculating on Basic, plans to take entrance exams to go into the Academy, strangers swapping names and stories with one another, a couple of them taking the chance to call home on the public comms, knowing that they wouldn't get the opportunity here soon.

Scott didn't waste much time there; didn't have much to waste anyway. After the lines, crowds and actually sitting down to eat, he barely had time to return the tray and silverware before he had to go and do the next round of paperwork.

Equipment requisition forms, transcript sign offs, background check sign offs...

That took another hour or so, but at least the knot left from the shot had gone away. He was still due for equipment pickup, a sit-down with the barber -- unless he had a religious or medical exemption, anyway -- then a check-in with the dentist--

The psychology evaluation was next, though. Scott had been dreading it, and not without reason. He knew he had to go through it, though, because Starfleet wouldn't accept anyone unstable or unhinged, and while he honestly did wonder sometimes whether *he* could be considered such, if he was, then it wasn't the kind that would interfere with his ability to be a good grunt for the service.

And he was pretty good at looking like he was put together, regardless of how together he felt.

Bracing for a head-shrink to start trying to trap him with questions or poke around in his thoughts, he headed in that direction, expecting the worst and preparing to meet it head-on.

So to speak.

It was multiple choice.

The psych evaluation was a *multiple choice test*. About two hundred questions, with four options to answer. Conducted in a large room with probably fifty other recruits at a time. No shrinks. No mind-poking.

He was *boggled* by that.

Scott wasn't sure if he was relieved by the fact that he wouldn't have to go through any mindgames a shrink would put him through, or if he was deeply disturbed that this was all the psychological screening that would be required to get into Starfleet. Even less sure because about half of the answers had no option that he felt would be appropriate, leaving him to pick the best out of what he thought were inappropriate choices.

His head was buzzing some with an annoying kind of dizziness when he finished that, as he moved onto the equipment pickup station, all while trying not to rerun too many of the ambiguous questions on that eval back through his mind. He chalked the vertigo up to the heat; it was probably getting close to twenty-nine C out, something Aberdeen nearly never saw, and the walks between the buildings were incessant.

After he stuffed his single set of uniform clothes in his carryon to wear to San Francisco the following day, he went and sat through the requisite military grooming, watching in the mirror while the barber buzzed his hair down shorter than he'd ever normally keep it and also committed crimes against his sideburns he thought probably shoulda been made illegal in the Federation charter; after, head feeling weird -- and the sunburn on his nose and cheeks and the tops of his ears smarting some -- he went back outside and consulted his smartcard.

He'd only been there about four hours; it felt like an eternity, but he was actually almost done already. The last thing he had to go through before he could sign his life over to Starfleet and pick up his transfer orders, travel voucher, hotel voucher and food vouchers was the dental appointment.

The physical had gone far better than he actually expected, given just how actively he disliked doctors. And the psych eval had been absurdly simple. And while he'd never actually been to a dentist, at least that he could remember, he figured that this would be the easiest part of the day.

"Well, I needed a vacation," the dentist, a younger guy probably about thirty, said. He was cradling his wrist and his face was a bit drawn in a grimace, but he sounded surprisingly nonchalant about it. "Maybe Bermuda this time."

The man was an officer in Starfleet, as evidenced by his blue uniform shirt and insignia. Over that, though, he wore a sort of pale blue lab coat. On first look, he was an entirely normal individual, utterly professional.

Until he turned his back to get his profession-modified tricorder.

Airbrushed on the back of his labcoat was a woman *barely* in a bikini, posed in the tropics and in the midst of dumping what appeared to be cold water on herself, with the string on the back of the bikini just come loose. If it were a sequential picture-- well, it wasn't hard to tell what would come next.

The artwork was genuinely good; if it weren't for the fact that he'd been so shocked by the fact that this guy could get away with wearing such a thing in uniform, Scott might have spent more time debating on either the model, or at least what the next picture in the sequence might be.

The dentist must have noticed that look, but he didn't offer any explanations, just chattered on about how many recruits he had already seen today (*a lot*), how good breakfast was at that restaurant off-campus (the eggs benedict were to die for), that kind of thing. He took time out in his recounting of his day to inform Scott that his mouth was in good shape, nothing needed filled, replaced or otherwise, but he'd probably have to have his wisdom teeth pulled when they came in, or they'd crowd his bottom teeth. He did suggest a professional cleaning, though, since Scott had never had one.

Still trying to grasp at how that labcoat came into existence, and how this guy could get away with wearing it (and maybe starting to speculate on the next scene that should logically come after the one already painted), Scott agreed.

And that's when it became an incident.

The first problem was that he had no idea that you actually have to *lay down* for a cleaning. Any speculation on the lab coat fled instantly when he was told to. At that point, he could have probably outright said no -- in retrospect, he should have -- but there were a million reasons why he didn't and he wouldn't have had words to explain why he didn't even if he'd been asked.

So, he did as he was told, but his heart was jackhammering painfully against his breastbone even then. Because it was one thing to be on your back under a piece of equipment, working, where you were shielded from above, but it was a whole other thing anywhere else. *Especially* if there was someone standing over you.

There was never any good that could come from that kind of position, not ever. It was the kind of thing that he so deeply, instinctively avoided that it wasn't until he actually *was* on his back that he realized he was terrified.

Part out of a desperate kind of willpower and part out of fear, Scott froze still for all of fifteen seconds, but then the dentist reached over him to get the sonic cleaner, and the next thing Scott knew, he was across the room with his back to the wall, the dentist was holding a wrist and he had no clue how he got from the chair to where he was.

It was silent for about a minute, a tense silence at least in half of the room, a somewhat baffled one in the other half.

It was broken when the dentist declared that he needed a vacation.

"All right. The horror stories aren't true," the dentist continued. "We don't use drills, we don't yank teeth unless there's a very good reason and then we replace all the important ones with lab-grown matches. We don't happy-gas people or poke them with needles full of novocaine anymore, we never use pliers and root canals are a thing of the very distant past."

Still trembling a little from the adrenaline rush, Scott had to blink at that a few times, running the words back in his head until he could get them to form into language. It was only after another half minute or so of trying to comprehend what was being said that he realized that the dentist was trying to address a more common fear. But instead of trying to explain to the contrary, he just nodded, a bit dumbfounded.

"You'd think our reputation would have gotten better after, oh, centuries." The dentist tried carefully flexing his wrist, then winced. "You must've heard some real doozies."

There was no reply to that: Scott hadn't, actually. As far as he'd figured, you only went to a dentist when you had a real problem.

"So, the sonic cleaner is absolutely painless, it takes about a minute and a half overall, and you could always just tell me to knock it off if it bothers you." The dentist grinned, kind of wryly. "As opposed to making me."

"Sorry," Scott finally said, automatically. He didn't quite remember what he'd done, but it was pretty easy to piece together. *There goes my career*, he thought. *Assault on a superior officer. Didn't even sign the final paperwork, yet.*

"Still want your teeth cleaned?" the dentist asked, jarring Scott out of his rather fatalistic notions of careericide.

In the end, the answer to the labcoat was apparent when the woman depicted on it came in to take over; on her coat was the dentist, in a somewhat less compelling but similarly depicted scene. Turned out they were a husband and wife team.

And it also turned out that it was far, far easier to hold still when she was one doing the work, partly because she was beautiful and smelled nice, and partly because she just didn't register as the same kind of threat.

"Sprained wrist," the dentist had said to her, with a shrug. "Perfect time to go to Bermuda, honey. Put in the paperwork."

The processing part finally ended with Scott staring for about ten seconds at the final form he'd need to sign his name on to commit to Starfleet; once he did that, there was no way for him to turn back without some kind of trouble. But then, a little dazed and feeling only halfway in his skin, he signed off and set the stylus down, pushing the whole thing back across to the officer sitting there.

"Welcome to Starfleet, recruit," they said, like they'd already said that a few hundred times that day, checking him against the system and then transferring the first real orders he would get as a member of Starfleet to his card, along with all the vouchers he needed to get to San Francisco the following day.

"Thanks," Scott said back, maybe the thirtieth word he'd spoken the entire day, as he took his card back and walked back out, pausing once he was outside to lean against the wall in the shade, close his eyes and just bloody *breathe*.

All right. All right. He was Starfleet's problem now.

He stayed there for a little bit, still kind of dizzy and now queasy too, but mostly he was reeling because it had been the oddest day of his adult life to date. Somehow both orderly and chaotic, he didn't feel anything like he had at the beginning of it. And he still hadn't honestly processed most of it. It didn't quite feel *real* yet.

For something that didn't seem real, it also seemed like it had been more like a year since he'd put Aberdeen to his back, instead of only hours.

He finally pried his eyes back open and looked at his smartcard, finding the directions to his hotel room; after a short, dazed ride on the transit system, he was unlocking the door to his assigned room, setting his luggage next to it, then locking it when it slid closed behind him.

He leaned back against it, letting the cool air wash over him and cut the heat radiating off of his face some, waiting there until his breathing was even and the weird queasiness and dizziness had again faded to the background. Then he finally opened his eyes to take in his environment.

The room was nice. Not very big. Lots of pastels. But it looked clean and comfortable. For someone who had slept rough under bridges and who had also slept in five-star hotels while trailing on his mother's heels, there was something incredibly *soothing* about the simplicity and shelter of it. There was not much more to it than a bed and a bathroom, and a screen to watch the news on, but it was--

It took Scott a moment to actually realize that little rush he felt. And to figure out why it was a *good* kind of rush.

--it was his. This room was his.

Just for the night, admittedly. And he knew that he'd be stuck living with far too many other people when Basic started, because everyone lived in barracks where quiet and privacy were pretty much forfeit. He wasn't really looking forward to that.

But this room was his. The door lock responded to him alone. Even if it was just for the night, the room didn't belong to his family. It was *his*. By all accounts, the first place he would ever rest his head that was.

And at that realization, he smiled.

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