

STAR TREK: Captain in a Bottle

a work of fan-fiction by
Commander Joe

Chief Engineer's Log, Stardate: unknown

If I had one bar of gold-pressed latinum for every time the Captain sends the crew into another one of those danged emergency drills, I could probably purchase my own pleasure planet. Every single time the Red Alert sounds, more than half of my Engineering staff become damage control personnel, manning their general quarters stations, leaving me with less than a skeleton crew to keep the engines running at peak efficiency should we need to make a quick and dramatic exit from whatever scenario the bridge crew got us into. Those danged drills.

And the worst part is, you never know if it's a drill or the real thing when the klaxon starts sounding. You automatically and unhesitatingly run to your duty station, quick as can be, ready for battle. Or for emergency repairs. Or to be sent on some rescue mission. Or... Those danged drills. They take all day, and that doesn't help when you've got a Level 3 diagnostic to run, or a damaged Heisenberg compensator to fix, or a magnetic phase inducer to realign, or a plasma conduit to have re-sealed, or... And hardly enough people to do it all with. I know the crew needs the practice, of course. Everyone has qualifications to meet, and we need to be efficient and prepared for whatever the universe throws at us. But still, I'm expected to be a miracle worker. What I need is two of me.

“Computer. Delete that entire log entry.”

The last thing I need is for the Captain or the XO to see a record of me complaining about my job. Oh, well. I still need a clone of myself, though. These drills drive me a dozen dimensions of delusional sometimes.

The sound of the Captain's voice filled the metallic air of the Engineering Deck. “Red Alert!” The all too familiar klaxon then blared, echoing off of the bulkheads.

Oh great. Here we go again.

As officers and crewmen hurried to their posts, the red foreboding glow of an alert illuminating and dimming control panels and corridors, I lost my footing and fell as the deck shuddered beneath my feet.

Well, well. So this is not a drill after all.

“The Artesia has been engulfed in a temporal anomaly. Please...”

The voice of the Captain trailed off unintelligibly, replaced by a few seconds of static, and then eery silence.

“Report!” I yelled, knowing that I had at least one other engineer nearby, looking at a display console, as was I.

“Commander, we're adrift. We've lost all communications with the bridge crew, and with all decks above our own,” my Assistant Chief Engineer stated.

The console in front of me corroborated his findings, and included an entire sensor schematic of the outer hull. The bulkheads were buckling. All of them. As if the ship itself had become one with some kind of wave-like phenomenon. Conduits were ruptured, sparks flew everywhere. But the biggest mystery of all was the wavy pattern consistently and quite visibly pulsating throughout the ship.

“Computer,” I shouted. “Analyze hull deformations. What is happening?”

“Unable to comply.”

In desperation, I lamented loudly. “Well, thanks for nothing then, you good-for-nothing!”

“Please do not address this unit in that manner.”

Reminding myself mentally to disable the personality component of the ship's main computer, I began to give orders to the few Engineering staff I had available, in an attempt to establish some semblance of order amid the chaos surrounding us. "Use tricorders. Fan out and scan the surrounding bulkheads for stress fractures and other abnormalities. Let's find out how badly damaged we are, people!"

It was bad. "Hull ruptures on decks 2, 3, and 5. Emergency bulkheads are holding, emergency force fields are standing by in case those bulkheads fail. We also have micro fractures on every deck. We're venting atmosphere."

Using my comm badge, I tried to contact the bridge once again. There was still no response. "We need to get this information to the bridge," I stated pointedly.

"Assuming they're all still alive," my assistant then said, his face awash with pessimism.

"Well, we still are, Lieutenant," I replied, "and we have life support, which means the ship is still largely intact. Scan for nearby life signs and try to establish communication with them. Let's let our shipmates know they aren't alone."

While we scanned for any signs of our comrades and while attempting at the same time to assess the damage to the ship, despite sensor outages and a sassy main computer, a female Ensign standing near the warp core shrieked in sudden surprise.

"Commander!"

As I turned in response to look in her direction, I saw a someone standing next to her that I did not recognize. At least, I didn't recognize his uniform. But his face. That, I recognized. It was my face. It was scarred, perhaps

weather-beaten, but it was unmistakably MY face. And since I had no twin sibling, there could only be one other explanation. Or so I thought.

“Intruder in Main Engineering!” I yelled.

The female Ensign, a recent transfer from the Security department looking to broaden her career, reached for a phaser that she had hidden in an unknown location nearby, perhaps a secret compartment underneath a railing. Strange, I thought. Storage of energy weapons was prohibited on the Engineering Deck, especially near the warp core. “I’ll discipline her later,” I thought to myself. She held the phaser at the ready, aimed at our unannounced visitor.

The visitor with the modified visage of mine wore what was clearly a Starfleet uniform. But it was different. His accoutrements included a vest with a pocket full of various small tools, and badge that resembled my own comm badge, but slightly different in appearance. His face, my face, despite its subtle differences, displayed a look of confusion at his current surroundings. Seeing the phaser leveled directly at him, however, quickly brought him out of his befuddlement. “Get that thing out of my Engine Room,” he barked.

“That’s MY Engine Room,” I corrected, away from his field of vision.

He turned and saw me, and then suddenly the contraband phaser set to stun was no longer needed; he fainted, crumpling to the deck.

Several minutes later, he came to. The phaser was now in my possession; I relieved the Ensign and informed her that she was now a nurse, tasked with caring for her new patient. She scowled in protest, but understood why. Her scowl disappeared, however, when her “patient” stood up, staring directly at me.

“That uniform... Where am I?” he said.

“You’re aboard the USS Artesia. I’m Commander Joe -”

“I know WHO you are,” he interrupted. But you are not me. And this is NOT the Artesia.”

“Perhaps things might make a bit more sense if you tell us who YOU are,” I replied.

My doppelganger slowly responded. “You know my name already. I'm Captain of Engineering aboard the battlecruiser Artesia.”

“Battlecruiser?” I asked.

“Yes. We've been at war with the Cardassians for nearly a century now. You MUST be aware of that.”

I looked him in the face, and stated the truth. “The Cardassians, what's left of the Cardassian Union, anyway, are our allies. We too fought them, once in a war against them alone, and also in the Dominion War, but they became our friends at the end of that war and we've been at peace ever since.”

His eyes widened as he finally realized that he was no longer in his own universe. Wherever home was for him, it was a very different place.

“The war has gone very bad for the Federation where I am from. There is devastation everywhere. I won't go back!”

“You are among friends here, sir,” I said, extending a hand out in a gesture of acceptance. He then shook my hand with an expression of gratefulness to be away from the nightmare he lived in a different lifetime. “But right now we have an emergency of our own to deal with, and we can use your help,” I continued.

As the hours went by, he spoke of how his version of the Artesia also encountered a temporal anomaly, and that his ship was heavily damaged with a massive loss of life aboard. But, his ship had already sustained significant damage from its encounters with the Cardassians, and was in no shape to survive the anomaly. Our ship, it appeared, fared much better.

The Captain of Engineering was a wealth of information, even if that information didn't come from our universe. The Obsidian Order, the secret Cardassian intelligence agency, had apparently been working on a method to send massive invasion forces across vast distances using a mythic stone from the planet Bajor called "The Orb of Time." The experiments were met with only limited success, but the final mission of the Battlecruiser Artesia had been to intercept the Order and take possession of the mysterious Orb. The Orb, or a weaponized version of it, was used against my lookalike's ship, which somehow brought him to us. Only, instead of throwing him forward or backward in time, he instead was transported to an alternate universe. Ours.

Transported.

"What if we utilize the ship's transporter to create a quantum singularity of our own? It would be different than whatever it was the Obsidian Order was working with, but with your help, we might be able to simulate an anomaly of our own to rid ourselves of this..." I said, as I pointed to the waves rippling through the bulkheads around us.

"It could work," my double replied. "In theory. But it could send me back, or even destroy us, given the amount of damage this ship has already sustained."

Undaunted, my idea persisted vocally. "If it's the only chance we have to save the ship, then I say we give it a try."

The Engineering Captain gave me a look of approval. "You're the Chief Engineer here, Joe. You make the call."

"Oh, no," I said in reply. "You're clearly the senior officer here."

Putting a hand on my shoulder, he said, "Going back to my universe would surely be a death sentence. But we all know the risks that go with this uniform. Or yours. Let's get it done."

"Aye, Captain," I said, knowing that I would have readily made the same

decision myself.

The work took hours. But it progressed steadily. We called a meeting of the few technicians we had available, and the rest proceeded according to plan. The plan, of course, went just as we had discussed. Using a Jefferies tube, we accessed the main transporter room, and even made contact with some of our shipmates in the process. We still could not contact the bridge, or most of the other decks within the ship, but the plan was now in motion.

We delicately routed warp power to the transporter power grid, without overloading it, and used a modified transtator, a work of sheer brilliance on the part of my Captain counterpart, to channel the raw energy into a stasis field we erected within the transporter room. In turn, we would transport the new quantum field into the space surrounding the ship. We never transported energy before, but the working principle was the same as the matter-to-energy-to-matter technology that the transporter itself was designed for.

There was, of course, a catch to all of this. The transport of the quantum energy field could only be energized from within the transporter room, while the field was briefly stable within the jury-rigged stasis field on the transporter pad. There was also a danger to the operator of the transporter itself.

Immediately volunteering, I instructed my Assistant Chief Engineer on things to do upon my demise. The Captain of Engineering, however, placed his hand on my shoulder once again.

“Commander, I would rather die than face the possibility of being thrown back into my own reality. At least let me go out the way a Captain of Starfleet should. Let me do this.”

Knowing that is exactly what I would have done in his position, I consented, slowly nodding.

Still without working communications aboard ship, our comm badges essentially useless, the Engineering Captain of the Battlecruiser Artesia produced one of the tools from a pocket in his vest. Pockets. That's something members of our Starfleet haven't had on their uniforms since the days before the Federation was founded.

He produced an old-style communicator, complete with a flip-up mesh antenna.

“We still use these in my Starfleet. They are more versatile than you might think.”

It didn't take long to tune my comm badge to the lower band frequency used by the communicator. Although there was a substantial amount of static interference, we nevertheless established two-way working communications. I took the communicator; he took my comm badge.

The Captain of Engineering proceeded to the Jefferies tube, and began the long climb toward the transporter room, but not before turning toward me one final time and winking his eye.

The old communicator was on the work station before me, opened. Through the white noise of lower band sub-space static, I heard my own voice speak to me.

“All ready Commander. It's been an honor.”

“The honor was all mine, sir,” I said, with a tear in my eye. “Energize.”

At that moment, every bulkhead, every deckplate, every part of the ship seemed to glow the familiar blue tint of energy-transport. Then, normal. Very normal. The ripple effects, the shuddering of the ship, the glowing hue of the red alert signal, all of it, had stopped.

A bosun's whistle sounded throughout the USS Artesia, followed by the voice of the Captain, our Captain, insisting that all department heads check in and report the status of their condition.

One other thing was also gone. My doppelganger. There was no trace of him. It was as if he hadn't even been here at all. But he was. I looked down at the near-century old communicator. What would be a relic in my universe, a workhorse in the universe it came from. And now, I couldn't bring myself to close it.

I don't know if he died instantly, or was sent back to his side of the Cardassian temporal anomaly to face a much slower ending. But one thing was for sure; he saved our ship while sacrificing himself in the process. This communicator will be his memorial. I will make sure of it.

The End

