

## **The Adventure Continues.... Infestation**

**By Tom Hudspeth**

The section of space known as "The Triangle", where the Federation, Klingon and Romulan star empires all meet, is a place where civilizations and egos clash. It is a contested, and congested, area of space, with commerce vessels and warships roughly equaling each other.

Near the end of the Dominion War with the inhabitants of the Gamma Quadrant, the newly re-forged alliance of the United Federation of Planets and the Klingon Star Empire, decided to build a project to protect both of their interests in the Triangle, and to re-supply their ships in the war against the Dominion.

That project was Starbase 410, a giant "Guardian Class" space station. Located near the "ram qul", or Night Fire, nebula, and integrating the latest in Klingon-Federation technology, it was a totally self-sufficient bastion of peace, and a guardian of civilization in the troublesome "Triangle", where tempers were often short, and trigger fingers even shorter.

Lt. Commander Brian Starr deflected the incoming Bat'leth with his sword and spun on the ball of his foot, executing a perfect draw cut to the left across the Klingon's belly. Reaping wheat. As the Klingon doubled over, Brian chopped down through his neck, decapitating him. Splitting wood. Brian scarcely paused, one enemy down, as he confronted the next onrushing alien. This one foolishly held his Bat'leth above his head for a downward cut. At the last second, Brian sidestepped his foe and delivered a cut across his back, severing the Klingon's spinal cord. Beating rug. On came the next attacker.

In a small portion of Brian Starr's mind, he sensed the next attack, figured out the probable tactic the enemy would use, and came up with a way to counter it and deliver a killing blow. This analysis was completed, and the proper actions put into motion, without conscious thought. For him, time had slowed. Brian had reached the "One", a meditative state the people of his home planet, Avalon, had developed after years of personal training and combat.

Avalon was an earth colony that had been settled by people who revered the ancient chivalric codes and feudal society of old medieval Europe. The men, if born into the nobility, were trained from a young age to fight. They were taught to protect women and the weak. Brian and his brothers had been schooled in the ways of courtly manners, treating women as delicate beings who might break if treated too roughly. The women were taught to be submissive and proper ladies, with schooling limited to what they needed to know to run a household. Unfortunately, while creating excellent fighters, the society was also prone to chauvinism, stoicism, and machismo. It often left the men with no clue how to handle off-world women.

While in the state of "One", Brian Starr ceased being just a Lt. Commander in Starfleet, and became an almost perfect killing machine, almost tireless, his weapon and body as "One". A Klingon first lost his arm, and then on the follow-up swing, his life. Drawing water.

"Let your conscious thoughts go," Brian's instructor had always told him, "that's why it's called the 'One'".

"Fine," young Brian had replied, "I'll stop thinking".

"No," came the calm reply, "just let your mind relax and take you on a journey of discovery. Your thoughts will trace the roots of your problems and open your mind up like a flower to new solutions. You will perceive the world with the eyes of an eagle, the courage of a lion and the wisdom of an Owl."

He could still think in this state, and right now his thoughts were unusually clouded. The clarity of thought he usually reached would not come. Brian deflected another Bat'leth and drew his sword over his opponent's belly, this time to the right instead of the left. Sowing grain. This put him within thrusting range of the next Klingon, just as

he had planned. Pitching hay. But then, he mused, his thoughts were never clear when he thought of Lt. Commander S'ena.

They had last served together aboard the U.S.S. Judith A. Resnik some years ago as ensigns fresh out of the Starfleet Academy, but he had never forgotten her. Half human and half Orion, it seemed that she had inherited the best from both worlds. Physically, S'ena looked like her father's Orion half: green skin, lustrous hair, supple body, and dancer's legs. She had also inherited his Orion pheromone system. She unconsciously emanated her feelings by smells. Smells which could have an affect on most animal life forms. Mentally, she took after her mother's human half: intelligent, witty and friendly, but withdrawn, with a strange empathy for plants and animals. All together, she was what any man could wish for, including Brian Starr. Unfortunately, that was part of the problem, every man wanted her. Brian couldn't conceive of her still being unattached. The only reason he had had any success at becoming her friend on the Resnik was because he had resisted his body's urges to take their relationship any farther. It hadn't been easy for him to resist her, but one by one, he had watched as all the other men on the crew tried, and failed, to win her heart. This helped steel him to control his desires, and it paid off. Eventually S'ena approached him, and confided that she appreciated what a good friend Brian was. She liked him because he had never made a move for her! That of course told Brian that he never could make a move, or he would destroy the friendship he had worked so hard to forge. It was while caught in this delima that they both received orders to different starships, but he had never forgotten her soft dark eyes, sexy smile or winning personality.

The Klingon's were still coming, but this time they came in a pair. His mind noted the disparity. Brian faked towards one, stepped towards the other, thrust him in the heart, (as if Klingon's had a heart, he mused). Gathering eggs. The remaining Klingon, seeing an opening in Brian's guard, leaped forward, only to die by Brian's sword as he drew it out of the first Klingon, waited until the second Klingon was committed, stepped aside, and decapitated him. Storing dishes.

He hadn't seen her again until today, and then only by chance on the promenade. He was sure she hadn't seen him. When he tried to catch her, she disappeared into the crowd. He wasn't sure how to approach her now anyway. He'd only recently been assigned to Starbase 410, and they worked in different departments on the large starbase. It was no wonder that they hadn't run into each other sooner, but he had been on board a month before finding out she was here. Usually, she was in all the gossip when she first came aboard. The men wanted to know how to meet her, and the women wanted to know how to beat her. Brian hamstrung a Klingon, sweeping floor, and thrust him in the back when he fell over. Churning butter.

When had they stopped writing each other? It must have been right after Wolf 359. Other than to ensure each one was alive, times had been too busy since then, first with the Borg, and then with the Dominion. They had lost touch. Maybe....

"T'Pina to Commander Starr"

The "One" burst like a bubble. Suddenly time returned to normal with a vengeance. Klingon blows rained down around Brian like a flood. It was all he could do to defend himself. First, one blow got through on his leg, then another on his side. As pain gripped him, his sword out of position, he looked up to see his deathblow.

"Computer! Freeze program!" Brian yelled.

All movement in the holodeck stopped. Hoards of computer generated Klingons stood ready to kill or be killed. Many lay still as if dead already, which is what they would have been had they been real, instead of holographic images.

"Starr here, Captain."

"I need to see you as soon as possible about a discrepancy in one of your reports."

"I've been exercising, I'll need to shower and change."

"Fine, I'll expect you at my office in 12.6 minutes. T'Pina out."

The planet culture of Avalon didn't allow for using expletives, but Brian could begin to see the need for them in space.

"Computer, end program." He said as he rushed from the room.

Lt. Commander S'ena's new assignment to Starbase 410 was both good, and bad, she reflected. On the one hand, she would miss the weekly opportunity she had on a starship to see strange plants and animals on every new planet. She already missed the camaraderie of the friends she had left behind. But on the other hand, she could make all new friends on the starbase, and her new private lab was actually state-of-the-art, and big! She had lots more room for her pets and projects. Many of the plants and animals she had brought with her were settling in just fine.

Her hexcat, Catastrophe, or Tass, for when he wasn't in trouble, which was rare, was making himself right at home investigating and generally getting in everybody's way. Most people now just avoided her lab when they knew he was there. If you can imagine a normal terran feline with an extra set of legs and an even higher amount of curiosity, you can get close to what a hexcat is like to have around. Throw in faster speed, suction cup footing for ducking around corners, and the ability to climb flat walls at a run, and you can see why few people keep them for pets. Still, he was well behaved for S'ena, and fun to have around.

The one creature she was worried about was the new one she had picked up at Deep Space 9. The bartender there had called it a tribble, and had warned her not to feed it much. She had found out why before she even got to the station! She was only just able to lower the tiny creature's metabolism in time for it to re-absorb the dozen offspring it was about to give birth to.

It was also the reason Captain T'Pina, the station's Executive Officer, had assigned her duties as Quarantine Officer for Starbase 410, since tribbles, it turned out, where: 1. Extinct and 2. Considered by Starfleet to be dangerous. Well, the first had obviously been wrong, and she was still investigating the reasons for the second. Captain T'Pina had lectured her about the transport of dangerous creatures, and had told her to bone up on the appropriate Starfleet regulations, since she had just volunteered for the job of inspecting all plants and animals brought onto the station. Well, S'ena couldn't think of a better job for her!

S'ena picked up and stroked the soft ball of fur. Even though it's metabolism was still slowed, it cooed in a pleasing manner. How could something so nice be considered dangerous? Sure, they bred faster than space herpes, but she figured she could fix that if she tweaked a gene here and swapped a gene there....

She put the creature carefully back into its cage and reached for her data padd. Yes, she thought, take a gene from this creature, add in some random variations. Of course she couldn't experiment on her original subject... Now S'ena regretted her earlier decision. Well, first thing she had to do was make more subjects. Fortunately, that didn't look like it would be a problem, or take that much time....

Brian Starr arrived at T'Pina's office in exactly 12.5 minutes. Silently congratulating himself on beating her time estimate, he chimed her door.

"Enter" came a crisp and proper Vulcan response.

The door opened to reveal Captain T'Pina in her usual pose, hunched over her computer terminal reading reports. A debilitating engineering explosion during the attack at Wolf 359 had left her permanently injured, though nothing showed except for a limp, and the cane she used to get around. Not a bad trade for the lives of the crew on the ship she had saved. Unfortunately she had to give up normal shipboard activities, so instead of resigning from Starfleet, she accepted a desk job at Starbase 410. Now she kept the large station fed and supplied from her desk. Not unlike a spider in the middle of its web, Brian thought. She looked up and acknowledged Brian's presence with an arched eyebrow.

"I see you are early."

"Yes Captain, how can I help you."

T'Pina handed Brian a data pad. On it was his report on a grain shipment of quadro-triticale the starbase had received yesterday. It was scheduled to be moved to General K'batlh's Klingon Battlecruiser, the I.K.V. Hegh qaD, over an hour ago. The Battlecruiser was permanently assigned to Starbase 410 as part of the Klingon-Federation alliance. The General was supposed to take it to K'Dorn, a Klingon world on the border with Cardasian space. Not a glorious mission, but a necessary one for the war ravaged planet of K'Dorn.

T'Pina then handed Brian a second data padd, this one a report from the Hegh qaD written in Klingon. Brian looked up at T'Pina questioningly.

"Press the translator key Commander."

"Oh, yes." Brian hurriedly complied.

The Klingon script disappeared and was replaced with Federation standard words and symbols. Brian quickly scanned the document.

"This report shows a volume discrepancy of 100 kilos." Brian said.

"How would you explain it?" T'Pina asked.

Brian thought for a minute. "I would suggest a sensor or transporter miss-alignment, either here or on the Hegh qaD. Since I know that isn't the case with the station's equipment, I checked it out prior to beaming the grain to the hold, I would guess the Hegh qaD's equipment is faulty."

"And if I told you the General felt the same way about his equipment as you feel about yours?" T'Pina asked.

"Then if neither set is at fault, I would have to say that someone or something stole the grain from the hold. But why only 100 kilos?" Brian wondered.

"I don't know, but I want to know. K'Dorn needs every grain of quadro-triticale we can send it and more." T'Pina said. "There will be more shipments coming in and I want this matter settled before the Commodore gets back from her away mission."

"Can I ask the nature of the Commodore 's mission, Captain?"

"No, you may not." T'Pina said curtly. "I want that report as soon as possible, dismissed."

"Yes ma'am." Brian said as he turned for the door.

"And Commander."

Brian turned at the doorway.

"Had you taken the extra .1 minute to check yourself in the mirror before you left your quarters, you would have seen that your comm badge was upside down. Attention to detail has saved more starships than trying to impress a superior."

"Yes ma'am."

Sheepishly, Brian turned and left the office. The day was not going well...

Deep in the bowels of the space station, in places that normally never heard the sound of human footsteps, Brian roamed. Hold A127-D87 should have been right around the corner after A127-D88, but the sadist that designed Starbase 410 wasn't going to let Brian off that easy. He knew he should have just transported straight to the hold, but T'Pina probably would have thought it a waste of energy. As if a starbase the size of 410 couldn't spare a little energy for just one transport. Well, two, if he wanted to get out again.

Eventually, Brian found the correct hold one level down. He spared a moment to note that whomever originally placed the designation placards on the cargo holds, did so with the horizontal position before the vertical, instead of the galactic standard of vertical before the horizontal. Of course, they would all have to be changed.

Oh, joy, he thought. One guess as to who T'Pina will find for that thankless chore.

"Computer, open the airlock on hold A127-D87 please."

"Please enter authorization code."

"Starr 2B-R0-2B"

"Confirmed."

The airlock slid open with a hiss as the air inside the hold equaled with the pressure of the air in the hallway. Brian's hair ruffled in the slight breeze. The interior of the hold was dark and cavernous.

"Lights"

Instantly the storage area was filled with bright light, revealing every corner of the now empty hold. Brian stepped in and walked to the middle of the hold. His footsteps echoed in the huge cavernous space. Taking out his tricorder, he started his examination. The floor showed the faint traces of the transporter pad buried in it. The walls were smooth and solid. As he crossed back towards the center, he felt a slight breeze. Brian looked up into the bright lights.

"Computer, dim the lights by 35% please."

Instead of bright and sunny, the lights dimmed as if a cloud had passed over the sun. In the roof of the hold were light panels and ventilation shafts.

Well, he thought, I'd better look up there too.

Brian stepped back into the hallway and retreated down it to a maintenance room.

Once there, he found an antigravity platform, and some tools used to change the light panels. When he returned to the cargo hold, Brian clipped the remote control to his waist, and turned on the platform. The platform rose off of the floor about 3 centimeters, and its telltale status lights blinked green. Brian stepped onto the platform and gave the command for it to raise.

One by one, Brian inspected the light panels and ventilation shafts for security and tampering. He could not find anything wrong, except for a bit of dried slime on one of the shafts. Taking his tricorder from his waist, he scanned the remains of the slime.

Later, back in the occupied sections of the station, Brian approached the Xenobiology department. As he neared the doors to the lab, they opened to reveal... S'ena!

He stopped dead in his tracks and gaped. At sight of him, she ran forward and jumped into his arms, giving him a very unprofessional hug. Her pheromones engulfed him and he felt immense pleasure and happiness.

"Brian! It's so good to see you again! It's been sooo long! How long has it been? Did you miss me? When did you come aboard? I've only been here a week. Are you stationed here? Won't it be great to work together again? I can't wait to show you...."

Brian stood in awe. She was as beautiful now as she had ever been, if not more so. His mind, unable to function with the surprise, slipped into the "One". But the unconscious portion of his combat skills could only come up with nonsense as well. Running rabbit. Panicked chicken. Spitting kitten. One by one, ludicrous plans flowed uselessly through his mind. How embarrassing. Brian could hear, as if from a far distance away, a conversation.

"Quick, do something!"

"She's cheating! She's using her pheromones!"

"Well, I don't know what to do."

"He won't respond."

"He is too responding, just not the right way!"

"If you've got any ideas, I'll try them."

"This is not a combat situation!"

"Uh oh!, she stopped talking and wants a response."

"What did she ask?"

"How should I know?"

"Check the short term memory!"

"Oh, yes. Nope, won't work either. It shut off at the same time as he saw her."

"He's got to say something!"

As the shock of seeing, and smelling, S'ena so suddenly began to wear off, Brian slowly realized that the conversation was taking place inside his head. Shut up both of you! he thought to himself, I'll handle this now.

When S'ena felt Brian stiffen from slipping into the "One", she released him and took a step back. When he didn't respond to her questions she started to pout, that always put men on the defensive and let them know she needed attention right away. She didn't understand, most men would have been drooling for her by now, Brian just stood there, gaping, like a fish.

"Yes!" Brian finally said, taking a chance that that was the correct response.

Apparently it was, because S'ena stopped pouting and began to smile again.

The small voice in the back of his mind yelled, "Great! Now follow up by saying something complementary!"

Brian released the "One", and decided honesty was the best policy.

"I'm sorry, I was just so surprised by your beauty, that I couldn't think for a minute. I'm still shook up. When did you say you got here?"

S'ena's elation was plain to see. He still likes me!, she thought. Then she turned mother hen.

"Well come into my lab and sit down for a minute." She said as she grabbed his arm and ushered him inside.

The lab was full of cages and plant growth trays. All forms of alien creatures and plants squeaked, squawked, trilled, whistled, honked, eked, screeched, and made a few other sounds that weren't even in Federation Standard yet. S'ena sat Brian down in the only chair, and began to dance around the lab, going from one tray or cage to the next, in an effort to calm her charges.

As Brian began to relax, a heavy weight suddenly descended upon the center of his back, pushing him to the floor. He rolled with the fall and came up in a defensive crouch. Sitting comfortably on Brian's former chair was Catastrophe, looking as if he had been there for a long time. He hissed at Brian as if to say, "This is my chair, you can't have it!"

"Sorry, Tass." Brian said. "You can have it, I'll just make myself comfortable right here on the floor." Brian sat down on the floor and stared at Tass, trying to intimidate him.

Tass began to wash himself.

"Oh Brian, you're so thoughtful," S'ena said as she returned. "But really, he's just a hexcat, you shouldn't move for him. He'll just get spoiled."

S'ena picked up Tass, gave him a quick hug, and shoed him on his way. The hexcat glared at Brian, as if it was his fault!

Brian picked himself up off of the floor and looked at S'ena. Her big soft eyes threatened to pull him into the depths of her soul. No! That was the surest way to lose her.

"I thought you were serving on the U.S.S. Layton." Brian said.

"I was, until the Dominion put her into dry-dock. What about you? What brings you to this neck of the galaxy?"

"Same story. The Harrington took one too many hits during the retaking of Deep Space 9, only she wasn't salvageable. A lot of good friends died."

A depressing silence lingered over the two of them as they both reflected on comrades lost and gone forever.

S'ena, never one to be sad for long, said, "No silly, I meant what brought you to the Xenobiology Lab? Did you come looking for me?"

"Yes, I mean, no. I saw you yesterday on the promenade, but I couldn't catch you in the crowd. I should have figured out where to find you, but in reality, I came here to find out what this substance is." Brian showed S'ena the scraping of slime he had collected.

"Well, what have we here?" S'ena asked as she took the sample.

"I had hoped that you could tell me. My tricorder says it's biological, but can't decide if it's plant or animal."

S'ena placed the sample on a slide, and placed it under a more powerful sensor unit. She took a few readings and suddenly stiffened.

"Where did you say you got this sample?" she asked seriously.

"Down in one of the cargo holds, why?"

"Was it on the floor, or near any cracks?"

"It was at one of the ventilation shafts."

"Oh no!" Sena exclaimed. "Computer, Initiate Quarantine Procedures C-7!"

"What is it S'ena? Just what is this stuff?"

"This station just came down with a case of..."

"SPACE HERPES!?!?" Lt. Commander K'SQqwa SuDs'qan'ya, a Klingon serving in Starfleet as Starbase 410's head of station security, yelled. "Are you serious!"

"Without a doubt." S'ena said at the senior staff briefing.

"What are your suggestions Commander?" T'Pina asked.

"Well, I've already instituted quarantine procedures C-7..."

"And boy is everyone mad!" quipped Major Madia Amme of the Bajoran Militia.

"...and that means that no one and nothing can beam off the station." S'ena finished.

General K'batlh growled, "Captain T'Pina, I and over half my crew are stuck on this station! My transporters aren't working for some reason, and I can't run a Battlecruiser from the middle of a starbase! What would happen if we were attacked? Who is going to deliver the grain to K'Dorn?"

T'Pina gave the Klingon General a cool stare. "General, are you implying that your crew can't maintain your ship without you? Are you suggesting that they aren't trained? Do you lack confidence in your warrior's ability to handle the situation without you?"

"No! My crew is the finest in space and I'd put them up against any other ship in the galaxy, Cardasian or Federation."

"As to your questions," T'Pina continued, "When Commander S'ena implemented the quarantine procedures, transporter inhibitors came on all over the station. That is why your transporters aren't working. Now they can only be turned off by the Commodore, Commander S'ena or myself. If the station is attacked, the Hegh qaD can fight or flee, as the General commands." T'Pina's demeanor softened as she turned back towards K'batlh. "Personally, I hope she stays."

"The Hegh qaD would never run from a fight!"

"Good, that settled, what about the grain?"

"Captain," Madia answered, "Most of the transports bringing the grain can just continue on to K'Dorn. We'll have to pay some heavy bribes, but the traders will chance the run if they know they'll be paid extra. As for the shipment of quadro-tritcale on board the Hegh qaD, provided it's not still infected, there are some old cargo containers still in far station orbit that the Hegh qaD could transport the grain to after they inspect it. Then, the U.S.S. Rage could put a tractor beam on them and take them to K'Dorn. It may take an extra day, but the grain would get there. As you may know, the Rage was just returning from DS9 when the quarantine protocols went into effect, and was not affected by them. The Rage could then stay at K'Dorn to inspect, or help guard, future shipments."

"Good Major," T'Pina said, "With the General's permission...?"

"Granted."

"Fine, that's taken care of. Now, Commander S'ena, what kind of contamination are we looking at?"

"Well, space herpes have an unknown planet of origin. They are part plant and part animal. Boneless, they are able to squeeze through cracks like water, leaving a trail of slime behind them. They average in size from a 3 to 15 cm. They are asexual, reproducing by dividing in half, and they breed like, well, like space herpes. They absorb anything biological in nature, and can metabolize materials that would normally prove toxic. Sensors can't pick them up, but tricorders can if within 2 to 3 meters. They can't be deliberately beamed out, poisoned, stomped or cut to pieces. Federation protocols suggest using tricorders to locate them, and phasers to burn

them, in a deck by deck search. But remember, all we need to do is miss one to wind up right back in the same situation."

"Quarantine procedures C-7 instituted force fields around most of the important vulnerable systems and allow for us to use the automatically activated intruder alert systems," K'SQqwa SuDs'qan'ya added. "With your permission, Captain, we can activate the sentry phasers. That ought to get a few of them."

"We could equip some repair droids with tricorders and phasers to patrol the places we can't get to." Lt. John Cole suggested.

"Those sentry phasers aren't Federation policy, are they?" Major Madia asked.

"No, they were put in at the insistence of the Klingon engineers," K'SQqwa answered, "But the Commodore didn't fight against it."

"Have we found out how the space herpes got on to the station?" T'Pina asked.

"Captain," Brian spoke up, "As you might have deduced, they came on board with the first shipment of quadro-triticale. This is the reason for the 100 kilo volume discrepancy."

"The trader has been notified, and ordered to return here for decontamination. We have also notified DS9 and all Federation aligned ships in the area." Madia added. Brian nodded at the Bajoran Major and continued. "They ate some of the grain, and then one or more escaped through the ventilation shafts."

"You mean some of these things could be on board the Hegh qaD?" K'batlh started.

"No! At least we don't think so. Our transporter records indicate that probably none were beamed over, but the organisms are not exactly easy to find on sensors."

"I'm going to have my crew check the ship." The General growled.

"We might as well plan with the idea that the Hegh qaD is contaminated as well."

T'Pina said.

Commander K'SQqwa looked up. "Could we use the transporter to get rid of these things?"

Brian shook his head. "No, unfortunately so far, we can only detect them after transport has taken place by examining the transport logs. But I think we could re-align the internal sensors to look for the slime trails, and then transport whatever was at the end creating them."

"Commander Starr," T'Pina decided, "I want you to get with the transporter chief and work on that. I'd like to find a way to get the General and his crew back to their ship, and a way to decontaminate any future grain shipments. But unless there is an emergency or an attack, I'm not going to authorize the termination of the transport inhibitors."

"Understood Captain."

"Commander K'SQqwa, I want you to start recruiting for a deck by deck decontamination. Since they aren't going anywhere until this mess is cleaned up, with the General's permission of course, equip his men with tricorders and phasers. That should keep them entertained and speed up the process."

General K'batlh nodded his head in agreement. "Exterminating vermin is not exactly a fit job for a true warrior, but my men will cooperate."

"Commander S'ena, I want you to see to the programming of the tricorders and then work on the station sensors. I refuse to believe that these things can't be picked up somehow."

"Understand this Ladies and Gentlemen, the Commodore will be back within the week, and I don't want to have to tell her she can't come aboard her own Starbase. Dismissed!"

Back in the Xenobiology lab, Catastrophe was intrigued. The container with the soft furballs, that the big one wouldn't let him play with, was filling up. The big one had been playing with the original furball and wouldn't share it. Ok, fine with him, but when she appeared with more furballs, and put them in the container with the grain, that was just too much. She should have shared then, Tass thought.

Now the container was filling up and Tass was waiting to see how full it could get before it burst. Curiosity was eating him alive, and finally he decided not to wait any more. He sauntered up to the cage and "accidentally" knocked it over the side of the table.

When the cage hit the floor it came open, spilling furballs everywhere. Oh, joy! Oh, rapture! Tass thought excitedly as he jumped down into their midst.

Suddenly, the mass of furballs started shrieking. To the hexcat's sensitive ears, it was almost incapacitating. Tass jumped out of the pile of furballs, and back on to the table. From there, he leaped to the wall and ran to the far corner where the walls met the ceiling. Huddled in the corner he reconsidered his position on furballs as play toys. The big one can keep them all if she wants!

Hunger. Move. Sense. No food. Move. Plant=food. Eat. No food. Hunger. Move. Sense. Move.

Slowly the tribbles covered the lab, eating everything that they could find, except for the sharp slashing hexcat in the corner of the ceiling, and the things in cages they couldn't get out. Where they found food, they ate and multiplied. When they could find no more food, they found ways out of the lab and into the rest of the station.

Hunger. Move. Sense. No food. Hunger. Move. Sense. No food. Hunger. Move. Sense. No food...

In the dark pathways of the huge Guardian Class starbase designated 410, there is a lot of room to roam without meeting anyone or anything. There are hallways, jefferies tubes, turbolifts, corridors, ventilation shafts, conduit lays and numerous other ways to get around, depending on your size. Some places are big enough to park a shuttle craft in, and others, only a Webley could go. But given large enough numbers of two different types of vermin, eventually one type will meet the other. It is only a matter of time.

So when the space herpe came up the airshaft in search of food, and the tribble came down the shaft in search of the same, it was little surprise that they found each other. It was just bound to happen.

Figuring it was just another food source, the herpe jumped at the tribble, but what the herpe couldn't have known was that this was no ordinary harmless ball of fur, but a S'ena genetically modified ball of fur! Somewhere in its new genetic makeup was buried something which changed the modified tribble from a harmless creature.

Move. Sense. Enemy? Plant? Plant=food. Part plant. Food!

What followed next was a titanic struggle, though miniature in scale, as the space herpe tried to absorb the tribble, while the tribble merrily ate the herpe. One of the random variations S'ena hadn't planned on was the awakening of a recessive gene which relaxed the sphincter muscles at the beginning of the tribbles stomach. This allowed the stomach acids to leave the tribble's stomach, which was located adjacent to its mouth. Once the acids were in its mouth, the tribble spat them out. Things started to digest before they even got into the tribble's mouth, a big time saver for a creature whose primary purposes in life were to eat and breed! And once they learned how to direct the acid spittle towards what they wished to consume, it didn't matter that they were slow. The longer it took for them to reach their target, the more digested it was!

Learned Doctors, Scholars and Professors from all over the known galaxy will admit that while nothing breeds faster than space herpes, nothing is more voracious than a tribble. Perhaps if the space herpe had divided, it might have conquered by using numbers against the tribble, but history will note that in the contest of the vermin of the galaxy, the tribble comes out on top!

Move. Sense. More food. Hunger. Move. Sense. Hunger. Hunger.

Mar'Peth was convinced that he was being wasted as a Klingon warrior. Didn't that patak of a Commander qu'bang LoDnI' realize how great a warrior Mar'Peth was?

Why, the Commander should bow down before Mar’Peth and beg for mercy, which Mar’Peth would grant by either killing her quickly, or taking her as his mate. Then Mar’Peth would assume qu’bang’s position in command as was his right. Soon he would be recognized by General K’batlh as a true warrior, and be given a ship to command as his own.

But until that happened, he was searching for vermin on a Federation Starbase, instead of ripping the throats out of Jem’Hadar. Now where was the next bit of scum? Mar’Peth did have to admit that the little herpes made for good target practice. They were small and fast. And it didn’t hurt that he got to shoot phasers at the guts of a Federation Starbase. Oops, missed that one. Too bad about that power panel, heh, heh.

Huh, now the Federation tricorder Mar’Peth was using to find herpes was malfunctioning. Instead of a small life force indicating a plant and animal mixture, it reported a large animal right around the bend in the corridor. Well, something different, Mar’Peth thought. At last, something I can sink my dagger into.

Mar’Peth put away the tricorder and drew his d’ktahg. He cautiously approached the corner and looked around it in to the next passageway. Standing in the middle of the corridor was the biggest ball of fur he had ever seen.

Sense. Enemy. Screech! Screech!

The reason Klingons hate tribbles so much is not just because they are soft and serve no purpose, (the tribbles, not the Klingons), but because of the screech they make when they perceive an enemy, (that, and the discomfoting rash they cause). Somewhere in the Klingon prehistory, there must have been a creature that made a sound very similar to that screech, which Klingons aggressively had to kill. (Don’t they aggressively kill everything?) Similar to the human fight or flight syndrome, Klingons just had to kill the little balls of fur. They couldn’t help it. They could fight the impulse if they needed to, but they all felt the same basic desire to destroy the things. When the large tribble started screeching, Mar’Peth was only doing what Klingon evolution had taught him, attack! D’ktahg in hand, Mar’Peth leapt upon the tribble and started to cut it to shreds.

What Mar’Peth didn’t, or couldn’t, have known was why the tribble was so large. Besides being stuffed with the remains of many space herpes, this tribble was about to give birth to more tribbles, which were also ready to give birth. It’s mutation had caused it to form into a colony of tribbles. His efforts to slice the large tribble into little pieces only gave the new tribbles an easier way out. The more he cut, the more came out. The more that came out, the more that perceived an enemy, hence the louder the screeching became.

One must understand that in their native environment, tribbles banded together for protection from their enemies. The larger their number, the more effective was their sonic defense. Singly, or in small numbers, they were easy prey, but get enough of them together and, well, you had better have hearing protection.

Unfortunately for the great Klingon warrior Mar’Peth, he had no such hearing protection with him. The noise first deafened him, and then it burst his eardrums. Still, Mar’Peth took quite a few with him before he passed out in the middle of the pile of tribbles. Hungry tribbles. Carnivorous tribbles.

T’Pina’s comm link chimed. “T’Pina here.”

“Well, I just received word from the Hegh qaD that it is infected with space herpes.” General K’batlh said to T’Pina. “May I kill that Lieutenant Commander Starr now for sabotaging my Battlecruiser, or would you like me to make it Federation legal by holding a trial before I kill him.”

“I fail to see how Commander Starr could have known about the space herpes before they infected your ship, and I still find him useful at the moment. Perhaps you could wait until the Commodore gets back. I know she would want to be present for any killing of Starfleet personnel you may have to perform.” T’Pina answered back.

"Very well, I won't kill him...now. But be assured, he will atone for this insult to me and my ship. K'batlh out."

T'Pina took a moment to think. She thought she knew K'batlh well enough by now to dismiss any chance of finding Commander Starr's body not breathing, at least not from his orders. But she also knew that Klingon pride would mean that sooner or later, someone would atone for the embarrassment to the General and his ship. Starr had better watch his back for a while, she concluded. I'll have to warn him.

T'Pina's sensitive hearing caught the soft sound of cooing coming from the airshaft. It was a sound she had never heard before. It was relaxing. Perhaps a small animal had gotten stuck there. She had to find out. Grabbing her cane, she stood and walked to the office air vent. Sure enough, just inside, where the air pressure built up to squeeze through the vent, was a small furry creature. It cooed nicely as the air brushed over its body. T'Pina's normal stiff Vulcan facade relaxed for a second, and she detached the vent cover. Reaching in, she gently picked up the creature and brought it into the office.

"T'Pina to Commander S'ena. Please report to my office."

"Yes, ma'am." Came the tired reply.

When S'ena arrived at T'Pina's office, she found the creature curled up in T'Pina's arm, gently being petted. Surprised by the situation, they both pretended it hadn't happened. T'Pina handed over the tribble quickly, but reluctantly.

"Here, I think you should handle this." T'Pina said.

"Now how did you get out of your cage?" S'ena said to the little furball.

"You know what I told you about tribbles. You will have to keep it under control, or we will be forced to get rid of it. I can't have it running around loose on the station.

Especially now with trigger happy Klingons running amuck."

"Yes, ma'am. I'll find a better cage for her. I just can't imagine how she got out of the one I had her in."

"While you're here, how are you doing on the sensor upgrades?" T'Pina inquired.

"General K'batlh just informed me that the Hegh qaD is also infected."

"Oh no, what a shame." S'ena replied, actually sad about the news. Brightening up, she continued, "I believe I may have found a way to track the space herpes enough to locate them and transport them out of the station, but I need a little more time. It seems that based on their normal rate of propagation, the sensors must not be picking them all up. I can only find about half of the number I should have, but the station sensors still insist that the total life force of the starbase is growing by leaps and bounds. I need to resolve this disparity before I can be sure we can find all of the space herpes."

"Well, give your results to Commander's K'SQqwa and Starr. Maybe we can make a little headway before they swamp us."

"Yes ma'am."

"And Commander..."

"Yes, ma'am?"

"Keep that creature under lock and key from now on."

"Yes, ma'am."

S'ena took the soft tribble back to her lab, unconsciously stroking and reassuring it the entire way. Oh, well, she thought, I've been working on the sensor problem so long that I need a break anyway, and nothing is more refreshing than being with my plant and animal friends, especially Catastrophe! They were probably all hungry by now.

The thought of her lab made her steps lighten and her stride lengthen. But when the doors of her lab opened before her, the scene was quite different from what she expected.

"By all the Gods!" S'ena exclaimed in shock.

The room was a complete mess. Cages and plant trays were laying spilled everywhere. S'ena hurried from one to the other, inventorying the damage, and helping where she could. Most of the animals were just upset, but all of the plants were, well, just gone. Uprooted whole. Not a root left. Tears in her eyes, she continued her search. Eventually she found Catastrophe in the corner of the ceiling, stuck to the wall.

"Come down Tass, it's alright now, mommy's here." She told him.

Tass hissed at her and growled.

Surprised, S'ena was taken aback. Catastrophe hadn't done that to her since she found him as a kitten. She approached him closer. Tass spat again and tried to climb even further into the corner. The tribble screeched at the hexcat in return.

"No, wait, you're not hissing at me. You're hissing at the tribble." S'ena's eyes got bigger with surprise. Why should Tass be afraid of a tribble?

S'ena stopped stroking the ball of fur and held it up towards Tass. When Tass became more agitated, S'ena pulled it back. She put the tribble back into the crook of her arm.

A second later, she felt immense pain from where the tribble rested in her arm.

Violently, she flung the tribble away from her. It landed softly, bounced a few times, rolled to a stop and started looking for food. S'ena looked at her arm. Green blood and bubbling acid welled from where the tribble had been resting. In pain from the wound, she quickly scanned her arm with a tricorder, and neutralized the acid with a spray. Slowly, the pain ebbed away as she put a bandage around her arm.

That's never happened before, she thought, at least not according to the Starfleet records. Slowly, comprehension, and revulsion, dawned in her mind as she looked around the lab again. Tribbles were everywhere. Tribbles that she had genetically modified in an attempt to make them safe. Somehow they had gotten out of their cage, where they would have been contained, and had ravaged her lab, eating, no killing, all of her plant friends. And now, looking at her bandaged and bloody arm, she thought, they must be ready to eat again!

Slowly, she reached up and pulled Catastrophe off of the wall. He huddled in her arms like a frightened kitten. S'ena carefully made her way to the lab doors. The tribbles moved toward her in an ominous way. When she heard the lab doors swish open behind her, she turned and ran out, yelling, "Computer, seal off the Xenobiology Lab! Don't let anyone else enter without my authorization."

In hind sight, S'ena admits that the first thing she should have done was go to Captain T'Pina. It would have been the proper procedural thing to do. Instead, for some reason, she sought out Lt. Commander Brian Starr in the transporter control room.

Brian had just entered modified operational codes for the transporter, when S'ena entered the room.

"Brian! Something terrible's just happened." She cried as she dropped Catastrophe and rushed into his arms. "I went back to my lab, sob, and they were there, and I was so scared...sob."

Brian took her by the shoulders and gently held her. Her natural Orion pheromones were doing strange things to his body, and his cultural desire to play the hero and protect a female wasn't helping either. Together, they were almost too much to handle. If he was going to fall prey to one of them, he decided, then he'd pick the one least likely to do harm. He concentrated on the chivalric codes he was taught as a child. Harm none weaker than oneself, he remembered. Serve and protect women. The Codes gave him strength. As much as he desired to continue holding her, she was obviously panicked about something. After S'ena seemed to calm down a bit, he gently pushed her away.

Even Tass, Brian noticed, was upset. He had made a bee line to the upper corner of the ceiling, and tried to hide in the shadows there.

“S’ena, what happened? Start from the beginning.” Brian tried to say softly and calmly to the frightened girl. “What did you find in your lab? Who was there? The space herpes? I didn’t think they had made it to this part of the station yet.”

S’ena seemed to calm a little at his questions. Her Starfleet training finally starting to kick in, she began, “The lab was trashed. All my plants were gone. Most of the animals were still safe in their cages, but I don’t know how long that will last. Brian, we’ve got to save them!”

“Save them from what, S’ena?”

“The tribbles, Brian!”

“Tribbles, what are tribbles?”

“I was doing some genetic experiments on a life form I picked up while on DS9. It was so cute and harmless, I couldn’t figure out why Starfleet said they were dangerous.”

“You were conducting experiments on a dangerous life form?”

“No, well, yes...Oh Brian, it was so cute and cuddly, and Starfleet records said they were extinct, which was obviously wrong. I thought they must have been wrong about them being dangerous as well. I thought I could fix them so they would be safe, only the space herpes thing started, and the tribbles got out, and now all my plants are dead, and the tribbles are going to eat my animals if we don’t do something soon!”

“All right, all right.” Brian reassured her. “The transporter can’t be used until it’s checked out. Lets go back to your lab and see what we are dealing with.”

“Starr to Transporter Chief. I’ve finished the modifications. Can you check them out while I see to something?”

“Sure, Commander.”

Brian turned to S’ena, and then nodded at Catastrophe. “Do you think he’ll be alright alone in here?”

“I know one thing, he won’t go back to the lab yet.”

“Fine.”

Together they left for S’ena’s lab.

The call found General K’batlh sitting at the desk in the quarters assigned to him during his stay on Starbase 410. Designed by Federation and Klingon engineers, it hosted the best comforts of both worlds. Not so luxurious that a warrior would become lazy, but efficiently designed to relax and rejuvenate. Adequate was the term K’batlh would have used if asked. High praise indeed, coming from the battle scared veteran.

“Commander qu’bang to General K’batlh.”

The Klingon General put down his drink and pressed the comm button. On the desk monitor K’batlh could see Commander qu’bang, his senior ranking aid on station at the moment.

“K’batlh here, report.”

“Sir, still no sign of Mar’Peth, and we’ve discovered something else...”

“Yes...” It wasn’t like qu’bang to hesitate, K’batlh thought.

“Sir, the men report killing tribbles sir.” At this the General sat up straighter in his chair and glared at the monitor.

“TRIBBLES! I thought they were extinct!”

“Yes, Sir, so Klingon High Command told us.”

“I want this understood clearly qu’bang, you are to instruct all of our warriors to stop hunting space herpes, and start hunting tribbles, now! I want every single one of those detestable furry vermin destroyed. I don’t care what it costs. Is that understood, qu’bang?”

“Yes, General!”

“Good. K’batlh out.”

The General took a moment to reflect on his next actions and what the consequences could be. The Empire had spent a lot of time and effort on this station,

and K'batlh honestly liked the Federation personnel he had worked with while here. In fact, he was stationed here with the intention of avoiding problems such as he was about to start. Shaking the thoughts from his head, he regretted what he must do, but a true warrior never shirks from his duty, even if he finds that duty distasteful.

"General K'batlh to Hegh qaD"

"Yes, my General."

"Secure this line..."

Brian Starr and S'ena reached the doors to her lab. Brian took out his phaser, and nodded to S'ena.

"Computer, open the doors to the Xenobiology lab." S'ena said in the general direction of the doors.

"Doors can only be opened after receipt of proper authorization code."

"S'ena, OIC-U-R-MT-2"

The doors opened and Brian stepped into the doorway with his phaser pointing the way. Inside, he saw the chaos which reigned in the lab, but no fearsome monsters to shoot. Instead, some little furry creatures slowly crawled around in aimless patterns.

"Ahh, S'ena?"

S'ena was all business once back in her lab again. She brushed past Brian and went to a lab computer console. Giving the cute fuzzies a kick away from her, she accessed the lab computer.

"Ahh, S'ena?"

"Just watch them, Brian. This will only take a minute."

Brian walked into the lab, pointing his phaser at one after another of the harmless looking creatures. He was beginning to feel a little silly, but he trusted S'ena, so he continued to watch them. The tribbles ignored him.

One was getting a little close, so Brian aimed his phaser at it and said, "Watch it little fella. I don't want to have to use this on you."

"Oh, Brian, put that thing away. You're going to hurt yourself. I'm sure you're not going to need it right away, and if you do, I think you can out draw a tribble. Just make sure they don't get too close to us while I'm downloading these files."

"Fine." Brian said, a little confused. These little furballs were the reason S'ena was so upset? No, Brian corrected himself, it wasn't the furballs themselves, but what they had done to her plant friends. As Brian looked around, he couldn't see a single leaf or root left. Brian thought it was a shame. S'ena used to have quite the collection of rare alien plants. Many were on the verge of sentience.

One tribble, it seemed, was still trying to eat the peat moss that S'ena used to bed some of the plants, Brian noticed. Across the lab, a Kaferian rabbit chattered maddeningly at a tribble that was climbing the side of its cage.

S'ena looked up at the noise, and turned to another computer console. Across the room, the tribble on the cage suddenly flew through the air with a squeal, as the cage shimmered with the look of a forcefield being placed around it.

"That should keep the animals safe." S'ena said smugly.

Then she went over to a small container where a single tribble waited.

"To think, all of this was started by you." She said to the original unmodified tribble.

"Well, I'm going to put you into stasis for now."

S'ena touched some controls under the cage, and the tribble inside stopped moving and floated up into the center of the cage. It was now invisible to time and the rest of the universe.

Turning back to the first console, S'ena pulled out a memory chip and said, "Come on hero, let's get back to the transporter room and finish off these monsters once and for all."

Lieutenant Laura-Jean Morris was standing a normal watch in Ops. Other than the constant damage reports from the computer and maintenance personnel about phaser damage caused by Klingon space herpes hunters. And the continued

bickering from Intergalactic Traders wanting to drop off and pick up cargoes from the now embargoed station. And everything else Ops normally had to contend with. Oh, sure, just another boring day in paradise.

Morris was beginning to look forward to the end of her shift. Another check on the chronometer showed she still had a half an hour to go. Ensign Laura Shepherd had reserved the holodeck, and they were going hiking in a mountainous region on old earth. Shepherd swore Morris would love the park. She thought Shepherd had called it Yosemite. She wondered who it was named after and why.

Suddenly Laura-Jean's board lit up like a celebration. Someone on the Hegh qaD had just started powering up their weapons. Laura-Jean quickly scanned the surrounding area of space. If the Hegh qaD was powering up weapons, there had to be a good reason. Frowning, Laura-Jean couldn't find an enemy on approach. Maybe one of the Traders, she thought. No, none of them were doing anything provocative. A few were even braking station orbit. Ah, that must be it. The traders must have done something to offend the Klingons, and the Hegh qaD was getting ready to stop it from getting away.

"Hegh qaD, this is station Ops, report, why are you powering up weapons?"

Laura-Jean didn't know which of the Traders the Klingons were mad at, but she felt sorry for them already. Few things could stand up to a Klingon Battlecruiser, and Intergalactic Trader ships weren't on that short list. As powerful as the starbase was with its new modifications, Laura-Jean didn't think even it could take the pounding the Battlecruiser could put out for long.

Well, she'd know who the Klingons were mad at soon enough, the disrupters were almost online.

"T'Pina to Ops, report!"

"Morris here. The Hegh qaD is powering up weapons, ma'am. I've hailed them, but haven't gotten a answer."

"And who are they aiming those weapons at, Lieutenant?"

"I'll know in a second..." Laura-Jean checked her sensors, "Their aiming them at US!"

"Shields up, now!" T'Pina said.

"Shields up, ma'am!" Morris quickly raised the station's powerful shields. Then she noticed something else. "The Klingons are not firing."

"Our weapons status?"

"I'm bringing them up now, ma'am."

"I'll be up there in a minute...Call me if anything changes. T'Pina out."

"General, will you please tell me why the Hegh qaD has powered up her weapons, and chosen to aim them at us?" T'Pina asked in a calm voice.

"Captain T'Pina, how nice to hear from you again so soon." General K'batlh said smugly. "The Hegh qaD is only following my orders. You need not be alarmed...yet. My warriors have reported the presence of tribbles on this station, and we are just carrying out standing Klingon High Council orders. Rest assured the Hegh qaD will power down her weapons after we have eliminated this threat to the empire."

"I fail to see how one tribble can be a threat to the empire, General." T'Pina answered back.

"One tribble! One tribble! There's no such thing! Besides, all it takes is one tribble to breed into a million tribbles, Captain. I want you to know this, the Klingon High Council's standing orders are specific. My warriors, myself, and this station, are all expendable if we can't destroy every single one of these little ecological monsters. The Hegh qaD has its orders to fire on this station until every single tribble is dead if we fail. Even now, my warriors are searching the decks for them." The general paused. "Of course, if you just turned off the transport inhibitors, we could beam them out into space where we could destroy them all at once."

"General, you know I can't do that because of the space herpes menace."

"Well, Captain, there we have it. We both have our orders from above. Now if you will excuse me, I have tribbles to kill. K'batlh out."

"T'Pina to senior staff, briefing in 10 minutes."

T'Pina was already in the briefing room, located just off of Ops, when the last of the Senior Staff entered.

"Very well, let's begin. Commander K'SQqwa."

"The Hegh qaD still has her disrupters powered up and aimed at us. Our shields and weapons are also powered up and ready, though not aimed. We are ready, but we're not trying to provoke anything. All special weapons are prepared and ready for deployment if need be. If the Hegh qaD does start something, I assure you Captain, we will finish it."

"Thank you Commander. Preferably it won't come to that. Commanders S'ena and Starr?"

Brian looked at S'ena, who nodded at him, and he began. "We've isolated a way to transport the tribbles..."

"TRIBBLES!" K'SQqwa interrupted.

"...off the station all at once," S'ena continued, "and we think we have found a way to do the same to the space herpes, but we're not sure. We just can't explain why the new sensor alignment refuses to pick up all of the space herpes that we know should exist."

"Excuse me," Major Amme Madia asked, "But did I miss something here? Just what are tribbles?"

"Ecological nightmares worse than space herpes. They were eliminated by the Klingon home fleet," K'SQqwa answered "or so we were lead to believe."

S'ena corrected K'SQqwa, "Tribbles are, or were, an extinct animal lifeform.

Consisting of little more than fur and reproductive systems, they are considered by the Federation to be dangerous because of the speed at which they reproduce.

Omnivores, they eat any form of biological matter they can find. They are soft and furry in appearance, and weigh anywhere from a few grams to as much as 20 kilos when about to give birth. When stroked, they emit a soft coo most humanoids find comforting and relaxing, and when frightened or confronted with an enemy, they screech at levels which, at high enough levels, can burst your eardrums and render one unconscious, though the last is just scientific speculation."

"My father spoke of the hunt for their homeworld." K'SQqwa injected. "The tribbles had made it back to a Klingon agricultural world. Not only did they eat everything on the planet, but the loss of the crops caused starvation on several more worlds. When the Empire sent ships to investigate, the whole process started all over again with infected ships infecting more planets. Entire worlds were stripped of vegetation. Those monsters almost destroyed the Klingon Empire. The High Council declared war on them and hunted them into extinction. They were sure they had gotten them all. In over 40 years there hasn't been a single sighting of one until now. I would pay good latinum to find out who is responsible for releasing them from whatever hapless plane of hell they came back from so I could kill them once and for all."

The room was stunned into silence for a minute by K'SQqwa's pronouncement.

Finally, Lt. John Borda, Chief Science Officer, spoke up. "I believe I may have the answer to our problems, if I may Captain?" T'Pina nodded for him to continue.

Borda activated the monitor on the wall. It showed the outline of the station with red spots near the bottom, where the majority of the cargo holds were, and green spots at the top, where most of the living quarters and labs were.

"With the new sensor alignments that Commander S'ena gave me just before the meeting, I've accessed sensor logs from the beginning of the crisis, and I believe I may have found an answer. Here is the view of the sensor logs yesterday, taking in account the new data, when the space herpes first started making their appearance."

The green dots disappeared, and the red dots shrank down to a quarter of their previous size. "If I speed up the spread of the contamination..." The red dots began the long journey up the station, increasing in volume to fill the lower half of the starbase.

"Now, I'll add in the spread of the tribbles..." The green dots started in the middle of the upper section of the station, near the labs, and multiplied until they filled the upper half of the starbase schematic.

"And this happened about six hours ago..." The green dots on the monitor met the red dots and started to overwhelm them. "I'll let this continue to the current time." On the monitor, the green dots continued to spread over the red dots, obliterating them quickly. Soon, only a handful of red dots remained near the bottom of the station outline.

"It seems that the tribbles were taking care of our space herpes problem. Unfortunately, the Klingons abandoned their hunt for space herpes, and began hunting the tribbles, which is why the space herpes have launched a comeback." The green dots began to disappear randomly on the outline, and the red dots started to proliferate rapidly.

"My suggestion is to: A. Stop the Klingons from killing tribbles, which will B. Allow the tribbles to eat all of the space herpes, and then C. Beam the tribbles off of the station." Borda concluded.

"That's why we couldn't find all of the space herpes, the tribbles were eating them!" S'ena said.

"But how is this possible? I thought tribbles were too slow." Lt. Laura-Jean Morris asked.

S'ena answered, "I was performing some genetic experiments on the tribbles when they escaped the lab. Space herpes are part plant and part animal. When the genetically modified tribbles met the herpes, the tribbles just thought they were another form of food. They seem to have randomly developed the ability to spit their stomach acids at targets up to a meter away. With a ranged weapon available to them, it didn't matter if they were slow." S'ena turned to T'Pina, "I'm sorry Captain, I should have been more careful."

"We can deal with lab protocols later, Commander. Right now we have to convince the Klingons to stop hunting tribbles."

Lt. Commander K'SQqwa spoke up. "That won't be easy. We can't force them to stop, and I don't think we can talk them into it. Heck, we armed them! They've been happily, merrily shooting up the lower half of the station!"

"What if..." Brian spoke out loud to himself.

"Yes, Commander Starr?" T'Pina asked.

"Sorry, just thinking to myself, but what if we could give the Klingons what they wanted, and got rid of the space herpes at the same time?" Brian stood up and crossed over to the monitor, which still showed the outline of the station with the green and red dots growing. With his finger, he drew a line at the junction of the mushroom shaped cap of the station.

"We know that the upper sections of the station, where the Promenade, Ops, offices, labs and living quarters are, are free of space herpes, but full of tribbles."

Brian then pointed at the lower section. "We also know that the lower section is where the Klingons, the tribbles and the space herpes are battling it out. What if we transported all of the tribbles from the top section down into the lower section. The Klingons would then have tribbles to kill, and the tribbles would then be where the space herpes are. Both the Klingons and the tribbles would have what each one wants most, prey and food."

"But what about the transport inhibitors?" Major Madia asked.

"The transporter chief and I were talking about that." Brian answered. "It seems that the inhibitors are located on the hull of the station to stop transport to and from the

station. True, they largely stop transport inside the station near the surface, but barring that, nothing would stop us from transporting from one spot inside the station to another spot inside the station. We could simply transport the ones we know we could reach to spaces far enough away from the hull for them to materialize, say the core of the spine near the bottom."

"Where the space herpes and the Klingons are." T'Pina finished. "Well done crew. Let's make it so."

Someone snickered.

Down deep in the space station, near the lower spine, the Klingons were surprised to find the mother lode of tribbles. Word spread out among the Klingon forces that they had found the center of the tribble infestation. Every Klingon onboard Starbase 410 soon converged on the core.

The phaser power packs ran dry, and still they fought on. Covered with fur and tribble blood, using knives and sometimes bare hands, the Klingons carried on the melee of death. Tribble bodies stacked up. The few Federation helpers soon begged off, too tired, or disgusted, to continue. But the Klingons fought on.

For their part, the tribbles didn't die easily. They were able to gather enough numbers to incapacitate some of the Klingons and hold their own, at least until the Klingons could get fresh phaser power packs.

And the space herpes? Well, they were caught between the Klingons and the tribbles. Innocent victims of a war they could have, should have, won, if not for the rock and the hard place they were stuck between. The genetically modified tribbles and the phaser wielding Klingons were too much for them. Their hiding places got fewer and fewer, as tribbles hunted them down and Klingons rained destruction.

"Well Captain, that was the last one." Lt. John Borda said as the last red light went out on his monitor.

"Are you sure? Leave no room for error." T'Pina reminded him.

"Yes, ma'am, I'm sure. There are no more space herpes on board the station. The tribbles have eaten them all."

"Very well then. Computer, secure from quarantine procedures C-7." T'Pina said.

"Please enter authorization code."

"T'Pina, IC-B4-U."

"Confirmed."

"Lieutenant, are the transporter inhibitors off line?"

"Yes ma'am, all transport inhibitors are now off line."

"Very good. Lt. Morris, get me General K'batlh."

A minute passed, before the General's tired visage filled the main Ops viewer.

"Yes, Captain," K'batlh growled. "What can I do for you? I'm busy."

"General, you might like to know that the station has secured from quarantine and you may now beam back to your ship."

"I can? What about your space herpes problem?"

"The space herpes have all been taken care of General. There are no longer any on the station."

"And the Hegh qaD?"

"I'm sorry, General, but with shields up and weapons armed, we can't ascertain the status of the space herpes problem on board your battlecruiser, but I would surmise it to be quite severe by now."

"You have found a cure for space herpes, haven't you? What about the tribbles?"

"General, you may continue to kill as many tribbles as you want. But if the Hegh qaD powers down her weapons and lowers her shields, we can do the same, and once we do that, we can transport every one of the tribbles anywhere you wish." T'Pina answered.

"And you'll take care of the space herpes problem on the Hegh qaD?" the General asked hesitantly.

"Of course, General. If that's what you want. What are allies for, if not to help each other."

"Then it's a deal! I'll have the Hegh qaD power down her weapons immediately, then you can cure my space herpes." Once again, the General seemed hesitant to speak. "I'm surprised Captain. I would have thought you might have tried to avenge yourself for the trouble we've caused."

"General, Vulcans find revenge to be very illogical."

"Yes...well... K'batlh out."

"Ensign Morris, status on the Hegh qaD?"

"She's powering down her weapons and shields, Captain."

"Captain," Borda reported, "The sensors indicate that the Hegh qaD is full of space herpes. The Klingons must have tried to cut them up."

"Irony, however, is something even Vulcans can appreciate" T'Pina said to the now empty viewer. "Commander Starr, commence with the transport of the space herpes cure to the Hegh qaD, as per the General's request."

"Yes, ma'am!"

Brian was back in the holodeck, once again fighting Klingons. When sleep eluded him, he had made his way here to relax and work out his feelings for S'ena. The "One" was with him as he killed simulated Klingon after another. Serving soup. Splitting wood. Churning butter.

He wondered, after seeing the Klingons in action, if his program was good enough. Could he really beat a live Klingon? Or was he fooling himself with smoke and mirrors into believing he was invincible.

Brian heard the holodeck doors open, then close. Out of position, he hadn't seen who had come in. A dangerous circumstance for whoever had, as the program was designed to assign attackers to who ever didn't belong in it.

"Computer, freeze program."

Brian only just blocked the incoming Bat'leth with his sword. The program was still active!

"Computer, end program."

Once again, the computer generated Klingons kept coming.

Someone has taken over control of the program and locked out my voice commands, he thought. Presumably, they would have disabled the safety overrides as well. That alone would be enough to kill me, Brian concluded, unless someone came along and turned off the program from the outside. Why let me know by opening the doors?

Spreading sheets, followed by making bed.

That's it! They weren't sure that the program would kill him. Someone could still save him. They had entered the program to make sure he died. But why hadn't the program attacked them as well? Beating rug.

Brian chanced a quick look around. No, all he saw were Klingons, no other fights.

Either the mysterious killer had changed the program more than Brian thought possible without restarting it, or....The killer was Klingon! Of course! The program only attacked people who didn't belong in it. It would accept a live Klingon in place of a holographic one any day. One of these guys was a ringer! Gathering eggs.

Brian had no reservations about killing holograms. The computer could always make more. But real people? Not unless it was unavoidable. The Chivalric Codes of Avalon, and Starfleet regulations, forbade killing unless it was absolutely necessary. Brian had to figure out which Klingon was real, while fighting for his life. Then he had to disable them without killing them, or getting himself killed!

Yeah, right, maybe while he was at it, he could bake a cake too. Kneading bread.

Well, it was a plan, he decided. Let's try it. Pitching hay. First, identify the imposter.

At any one time, Brian was surrounded by three to five adversaries. The computer would send them at him one or two at a time, depending on complex algorithms Brian

himself had written. Splitting wood. They took in account the position of Brian, his weapon, the Klingons and their weapons, some Klingon cultural preferences about attacking single opponents, Brian's fighting ability and random chance variables. If three Klingons attacked him at once, he thought, one would be the imposter. Brian also thought he would die. He was pretty sure that he couldn't take out three Klingons at once. Well, he prayed, let's not have that happen. Sowing grain. If two Klingons attacked at once, they would attack together. The computer just naturally coordinated their attack. Brian hadn't worked that out of the program yet. For some reason the computer didn't send two independent attacks at him at once. If they didn't attack fluidly, complementing each other, that meant that one of them probably was real, the ringer not knowing what the hologram would do. Storing dishes.

The most likely way the imposter would attack was singly, Brian decided. It fit the Klingon code of honor more. That was if this attacker had any honor. The attacks generated by the computer came with regularity. Not always the same, but Brian had set a minimum time limit between attacks. If an attacker started too early, he would give himself away, and if he started too late, the computer would send in another on cue. The killer must start near the end of the time limit before the computer initiated an attack, Brian thought. Sweeping floor, followed by churning butter.

But which one was he? Serving soup. So far the Klingon adversaries had been coming forward like normal. The "One" gave him some relief from exhaustion, but he couldn't keep it up forever. The tension Brian felt from knowing one of the attackers was real was going to tire him out alone.

Was it that one over there? Making bed. Brian hadn't been attacked from that quarter for the last three passes. If the killer wanted to study him, he might show up as the only Klingon not to attack him right away. Brian meet eyes with the Klingon. No, he wasn't the attacker, just random chance that he hadn't attacked yet.

What about that one? He looked too eager. Drawing water. No, it didn't feel right. Of course! Brian finally grasp the answer, feel! Brian stopped trying to guess which attacker was the real Klingon. Reaching inward, Brian let his heart decide.

A Klingon Warriress, two behind the one on the right. Brian had never written that much detail into his program. Breath, sweat, nervousness, anger, the visual clues were obvious to Brian now, where a few seconds before he would have been fooled. Brian then did something he hadn't done since he first wrote his exercise program, he attacked! He had always figured, why attack when the computer always sent in the next opponent right away? This time, Brian had a reason, to finish off the real Klingon before the holo-Klingons finished him. The computer obliged him by sending him attackers from that direction. The real Klingon first looked surprised, then eager, then she too pressed through the Klingons in front of her to confront Brian.

The two warriors met with a clash of weapons, Bat'leth versus medieval sword. Klingon versus human. Reaping wheat, blocked! Drawing water, blocked! This warriress was good! Almost too good for Brian to take. She seemed to know what Brian was going to do. Of course! The warriress had watched, and seen, most of Brian's attack moves. Brian needed something that he hadn't used for a while, yet wouldn't outright kill his opponent, or get himself killed in the process. Sweeping floor, blocked!

The Klingon's superior strength was beginning to tell. Not only was she blocking Brian's attacks, but she was counter attacking as well. Brian's "One" kept him from falling to the effects of his exertions right away, but his opponent was fresh. Brian realized that if the stalemate continued, sooner or later, his flesh would give out. If someone didn't intercede, then time was on his killer's side!

Brian let his conscious mind reach back to his early days of training. During that time, his teacher had introduced him to many different forms of combat, from many different worlds, including the Klingon way. Most of Brian's combat moves were a

combination of European and Oriental sword fighting techniques, with some hand to hand instruction from the schools of Starfleet Academy and life.

The Klingon's Bat'leth techniques largely resembled the terran quarterstaff and two-handed sword methods, plus a few original moves due to it's smaller size. Its advantage was that it could hook an opponent's weapon, maybe even breaking it between two of its prongs. The Bat'leth's disadvantage, and Brian's advantage, was that it couldn't thrust as well as Brian's sword.

Brian decided on a plan of action. When the time was right, he threw his sword up for a striking blow. The warriorress sent her Bat'leth up to block the downward stroke. Brian abandoned his sword attack, and ducked down below his opponent's upraised arms to throw himself at the Klingon's chest. They both rolled to the floor. Brian lay where he fell, facing away from the killer. The warriorress, seeing her chance, jumped up off of the floor and rushed Brian's still form, anticipating an easy kill.

Brian waited. The timing must be right or I'm dead, he thought. Tightening the grip on his sword, Brian could hear the rushing footsteps of his doom. In the slowness of the "One", they sounded like his own heartbeat. Boom, Boom, Boom.

Suddenly, Brian spun where he lay, stretching his arm and sword out in front of him straight toward the oncoming Klingon. In slow motion, the tip of Brian's sword met the armored chest... and penetrated. The forward momentum of the onrushing warriorress carried her down the length of the blade, as if her chest were its sheath, piercing her heart and settling home.

The fact that she was probably dead didn't phase the Klingon warriorress. With her Bat'leth raised high for Brian's deathblow, she ignored the sword and continued her final stroke, perhaps not even knowing she was doomed. Brian let go of the sword and grabbed the first thing that came into his hand... another Bat'leth from a fallen hologram! He quickly raised it in a blocking maneuver that almost didn't make it.

On his knees, holding the holo'Bat'leth above him, Brian looked up into the face of his attacker. The Klingon warriorress grinned at him and pressed down. Brian could feel her hot breath and see the fire in the warriorress' eyes. As Brian's arms began to fail under the relentless power of the Klingon, he asked, "Your name, Warrior, so that I may find you in hell."

"I will tell you, weak earther, so that you may fear me even in the afterlife. K'iHqas sutai LoDni'." The Klingon growled. "Never again will you dishonor General K'batlh." Suddenly, the warriorress' strength left her, her body finally failing her at last. She fell to the side with a surprised look in her eyes, to have victory suddenly torn from her grasp by betraying flesh. Brian fell beside her, the "One" gone, and his energy used up. The holographic Warriors just stood there and looked on, as if watching the death of their hero.

K'iHqas, looked at the sword hilt sticking out from her heart and gasped, "What...?" and the fire went out of her eyes. The holographic Klingons then did something Brian hadn't programmed into them, they began to howl, lamenting the loss of a true warrior.

The computer's voice, out of place among the slain, came as a surprise. "Program terminated." Everything except Brian, and K'iHqas' lifeless body, disappeared.

"Computer, emergency transport to sick bay!" Brian said as he grabbed K'iHqas. Brian finally had his answer. While he could kill a Klingon, he felt he may never match them in warrior spirit.

Back in her lab at last, Lt. Commander S'ena had one more task to accomplish before she could begin to rebuild. Floating in it's stasis field was the original tribble she had gotten from DS9.

"I know that you are dangerous. I certainly don't like what your children did to my plant friends, and the Klingons would kill you on sight." She told the unknowing creature. "But it's not your fault. The Klingons want to make you extinct again, and I can't imagine a galaxy without your kind in it any more. As long as you remain in this

stasis field, they can never pick you up on sensors. I'll keep you until a day comes when I can find a home for you, where you, and all of your proper children, can live naturally."

With that, S'ena took the stasis container and hid it in a storage facility in the lab. Safe, dark, hidden, secure, until...

Later, on the promenade, S'ena saw Brian walking ahead of her. She caught up to him and said, "I thought you were going to be using your exercise program this afternoon."

"No, a Klingon I met and I are going to wait until we can get together and write a new program. She'll teach me some new tricks, and I'll see if I can teach her a few of mine in return."

"Oh, her huh." S'ena said disappointedly, "I guess you don't have time for old friends?"

"MiLady, I will always have time for you."

The Adventure continues....