



The Southern Cross Writers' Block

The writer's club of the USS Southern Cross
(The USS Southern Cross is a correspondence chapter of the SFI)

Short, Short Stories

The Writers' Block Project Number Two

April 1, 2008



To start off activities for the year, the "Writers' Block," the writing club of the Southern Cross, concocted for itself a little project as a way of getting our feet wet with writing, and perhaps start writing some more installments of the club's RPG story after we get our *go* back.

Anyway, the premise of this little project is that everyone who participates will have to write a short, short story.

No epic tales, at least for now: a "short, short story" is really just a conventional short story, but a really short one – nothing more than five hundred words.

Also, so that there would be a theme, this time around, the stories will use one common idea as their starting point: A five-man away team just returns to the Southern Cross via transporter, except that one of the team members is missing.... Dum-dum dummm!!!

As an added incentive, there is a standing bet that, whoever submits the last will have to buy everyone a round of drinks. You can bet all the participants started sending in their short stories tout suite!

This also marks the second official publication of the PBS – the Southern Cross's newly-created press bureau.

So far, there have been seven entries, and they have run from humorous to thought-provoking, but all of them with a definite Star Trek flavor, and are all Southern Cross-centric. Kirok starts off this set with the story, *Bel-sToth*. In it he posits a question that is unique to planetary missions via transporter – *what if the person that has returned with you is an impostor*. In a take-off from stories like *The Andromeda Strain*, Mark Russell's story, *Outbreak*, deals with the possibility of accidentally exposing the crew to an alien disease. In *You and Your Five*, Donna Reid asks, what if one of your friends is changed in a very fundamental way – would he still be the person you knew. In *The D-5 Protocol*, Bruce II delves into the intricacies of transporter technology. In *Limited Supply*, Bruce O'Brien pokes fun at Gene Roddenberry's little plot trick called the "Red Shirt." Sandy Mutter writes a little drama involving 24th century social norms in *Mail Order Bride*, and I wrote a short homage to one of my favorite Star Trek TOS episodes.

A few of the real-world members of the Cross are also either featured characters, or are featured via cameos. In future, maybe the Writers' Block can continue this custom, if ever the "Short, Short Story" becomes one of its staple forms of fiction. If I may say so myself, there is one common thing to all of them, which I hope also continues – that they all continue to be interesting reading!



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Bel-sToth

By Kirok of L'Stok



Bel-sToth collapsed and struggled for long seconds to analyse the messages that were bombarding it's consciousness. The roughness beneath its ...knees? Warmth on ... skin? The wrappings that encased the vessel ... fabric? Yes! A uniform! The subconscious knowledge that it had inherited with the vessel told it that these were senses.

Bel-sToth was an expert explorer though and had many 'first contacts' to it's credit. It's enhanced consciousness was more than able to quickly gain control of the motor-nerve neurons of the vessel and send out the necessary instructions to ... smile.

"Are you all right, Lieutenant?"

I had turned quickly at the first sound of the young lieutenant beside me crumpling to the deck. Transporters sometimes gave you a 'bumpy ride' but seldom anything but the smallest discomfort. Someone collapsing after transporting was surprising.

I hated surprises.

My world was one of order amongst chaos, this was why I lived my life by regulations. Cause and effect - you followed them conscientiously and you could be sure of the result: order.

"Yes ... thank you." Lieutenant Val Envers looked up with eyes that for a fleeting second were alive with confusion, doubt and ... something else?

"Just ... dizzy." her voice was a little weak, uncertain.

Regulations had an answer: any sign of an adverse reaction had to be referred to the Chief Medical officer. It was 'overkill' since it was impossible for even the smallest microbe to be brought on board because the Transporter automatically compared their bodies, cell for cell, with the pattern buffer readings from when they were beamed down. No microbes, hidden weapons or imposters - not even my identical twin could beam back in my place!

"You know the drill, Lieutenant, present yourself to Sick Bay immediately. Do you want me to call an orderly to help you?" Val was a strong willed woman who I'd grown to like. No nonsense. Straight as a die. Totally predictable. A CO's dream. Val looked up again and smiled as she shook her head. I cut her some slack.

"OK. Report back to your station after Sick Bay."

The entity that called itself Bel-sToth continued smiling as the alpha male of the group left the room. There was a small degree of sexual attraction in the vessel's memories of the one it thought of as Stone. It filed that away for future study. Bel-sToth's whole existence revolved around information and, as it's people had long-ago discovered, the easiest way to learn about a new, alien species was to ingest the consciousness of a specimen.

The entity they called Val had struggled momentarily as it was ingested but it had been powerless to stop the process, paralysed as it was in the transporter beam that carried it through hyperspace. Such a strange name: hyperspace. These strange - what was the word? - solids seemed to have little knowledge of the realm of chaos that their transporter beam carried them through.

In it's own way Bel-sToth was smiling too. How innocent these solids were and so ... the words were coming easier now ... salty.

[EndSnip]

Outbreak

By Mark Russell

Mark pondered the thought as he stepped down off the transporter pad, glancing briefly at the remaining 4 members of his away team. How was I going to explain to Captain O'Brien why Sam was not returning to the ship?

Later that night, while working on his away team report, Mark couldn't shake the memories of when it all began...

It was back on at planet survey mission, Etas V. Sam came into contact with a strange life form. After a brief check over with the Doc, he was deemed fit for duty. Soon enough the away team mission became a distant memory. Mark and Sam were able to get back to the holodeck adventure they'd been putting off for weeks.



That's when it first happened. Sam's skin started to flush a shade of green. He felt ill and when the Doc scanned him, she found Sam's DNA was changing.

After several days of committed work, the Doc was unable to reverse the process. During this time the Captain had ordered the ship back to the Etas system in an attempt to discover a method of reversing what his son was becoming. All attempts to learn more from orbit had failed. An away team of 6 was formed to search the planet's surface for clues. It was thought that if Sam were apart of the away team it may slow down the DNA merging. By that stage Sam no longer appeared human and had become quite viscous. It seemed soon there would be no hope for the Ensign.

The mission went terribly wrong. Sam escaped on the planet and the ship's sensors were unable to identify his life sign due to the DNA changes.

Mark was forced to return to ship with the remaining away team members.

Mark finished the report and presented it to the Captain in his ready room. "Here is my away team report, sir!"

Although it was only a small gesture, Mark knew the Captain would feel easier hearing the details from his son's closest friend.

"I felt it best you should read my report first, sir."

With a deep breath, the Captain responded.

"Take a seat Mark. I guess I can't run from this forever."

Mark pulled back the nearest seat and sat down facing the Captain across his oversized desk. Now that he had the Captain's complete attention he found it hard to find the right words. He opened his mouth to speak when something strange caught his attention. The Captain's skin flushed green for a moment.

"Captain, are you alright?"

"I could say the same to you, Ensign."

Mark looked down at his hands and noticed them turning green. He looked up with a shocked expression on his face only to see the same look on the Captain's.

Before he could say another word a transmission came through on the Captain's commbadge.

"Doctor to the Captain. It appears we have an outbreak."

You and Your Five

By Donna Reid



We had been to a newly discovered planet and although we had taken every precaution and followed all protocols, something had gone wrong. We had to get back to the 'Cross – now.

As I dissolved in the familiar tingle of the transporter beam I thought, once again, “this is going to be tough to explain”.

As the six of us materialized on the platform, I could see the transporter operator’s puzzled expression as he checked his instruments.

Finally, I resolved enough for my hearing to return.

“Sir, I think we have a problem” the operator addressed thin air.

“What sort of a problem?” the thin air replied.

“Well, sir, I don’t think over the comm channel this is the best way to explain this: it would be better if you came down and had a look for yourself.”

“I’m on my way.”

The operator had taken the precaution of enveloping the transporter pad in a quarantine force field so I was unable to step down from the pad.

The transporter room’s doors opened and Colonel O’Brien entered.

“What seems to be the problem?” I could see him give the transporter pad a cursory glance on his way to the transporter console.

“Well, sir, we sent out a six-man away team but only five have come back”.

The Colonel looked shocked. He turned once again to the transporter pad and did an quick and obvious count, and then address the transporter ensign again.

“Well, ensign, there are six people on the pad. Nobody *seems* to be missing.”

“I’m sorry, sir, you’ll have to look at this.” He motioned to the console he was facing. The colonel stepped around to have a look.

“I’m not suggesting anyone is actually missing, sir, it’s just that Ensign Shirt *was* a man. Now, he’s a woman!”

D-5 Protocol

By Bruce Mutter

Umbra checked his body after completely materializing inside the transporter room. The fact he had to use this mode of transfer grated on him, as he totally despised beaming technology.

Satisfied everything was where it should be, he checked his medical tricorder. The information was still intact.

The mission of the Southern Cross was less important to him than the information he held. Returning from the M-class planet, he was pleased with what he found – he had found life forms in a pool of standing water. They were the size of amoeba, with replicating triple-helix DNA strings. The implications to the medical world were nearly immeasurable!



Research was needed to understand how it's possible for a life form to have a triple-helix DNA string, maybe eventually to find a way to splice it with a double-helix string. It could well be possible to make patients that currently needed mechanical devices to perform natural functions whole again - the third string might be able to fix defective genes.

As Umbra put away his tricorder, he turned at the sound of confusion. He noticed the discrepancy – why were there only five of them? Weren't there six that beamed up? This only confirmed his belief in the 'hit and miss' of beam technology.

Technicians onboard the vessel started spouting incomprehensible technical phrases around him - statements like 'form buffers' and the like spewed from them as they tried to determine what had failed.

That type of tech-speak was always lost on Umbra. "*Me Thag, you Thuck,*" that was communication. A corrupted, descending, doppler algorithmic matrix? That was not communication - that was just in-house tech gibberish.

"D5 Protocol in place!" the technician looked confused. What in hell is a 'D5 protocol?' She worked the keyboard a few more times

"It's locking me out – Delta Five is the Captain's personal over-ride. It means that if we continue, we WILL lose the crewman. I need the Captain's over-ride!"

Umbra perked up at the over-ride "May I be permitted to view the console?"

"Intriguing," he said after looking at the console for a while. "I am now attempting to view the streaming input to the re-integrator". Millions of lines of 0's and 1's filled the screen. He took it all in and, at some point, understood what had happened when the stream changed into strange, Asian-looking glyphs.

"I believe I understand what has happened," he said as he typed in his corrections. Somewhere in the back of his mind the symbols made sense. "I am now establishing a link with the new re-integration routine I have entered."

Everyone watched as the missing member of the team re-integrated onto the platform.

Umbra turned to the astonished team, which were staring back. "I will note and log this in my paper as it is important." Apparently, trinary DNA is not replicatable with common teleportation technology.

Stepping back onto the transporter platform, Umbra asked the missing team member, "did you by chance step into the pool we saw for any reason?"

The member nodded yes.

"That explains your delay in teleportation: Some of the alien amoeba creatures on your boots confused the transporter, but it saved your information in the re-integrator buffer. I was able to remove the alien data from the buffer."

Limited Supply

By Bruce O'Brien



Lieutenant Reid stood before her Commanding Officer and tried her best not to look him in the eye.

“So, what is your answer this time Lieutenant?” he sighed, exasperation clear in his voice.

“Well, I’m sorry sir,” Reid responded. “One minute Crewman Stewart was there and the next minute he was gone in a cloud of dust...”

“You realise that that is the sixth crewmember you have lost in two weeks, Lieutenant,” the CO said, raising an eyebrow in Reid’s direction.

He began entering data into his console.

“Well, luckily these weren’t Marines, Lieutenant, but as we are down to our last two Red Shirts, I would ask you to be more cautious on your next away mission. That is all - return to your duties.”

Mail-Order Bride

By Sandy Mutter

D'Riana looked over at her fellow teammates. Ja'rod and Samuel were putting the finishing touches on packing up their gear while Kalana, Peter, and Warren were waiting at the pick up zone. "Hurry up you slackers! We've three minutes before the transporter beam is supposed to pick us up." The away team had been on the planet for three days on a training exercise. "We'll be on mark. Don't get your hackles up." Samuel said as he picked up the last bag. He and Ja'rod walked over to join the rest of the Southern Cross' away team. A beep went off on D'Riana's communicator. "Six ready to beam up." "Confirmed," came Ensign Lionel's voice. The next instant, the away team's bodies became digitized and promptly reappeared on the transporter pad aboard the Southern Cross. Rather that was what was supposed to happen; unfortunately Ensign Kalana failed to reappear with the rest. Upon taking note of this fact, Ja'rod strode quickly over to the console where Ensign Lionel was frantically working the controls. "What happened? Where is Ensign Kalama," asked the engineer as he began double-checking the transporter records. "Proceed to the medical bay for check ups. We'll sort this out," D'Riana ordered the rest of the bewildered away team. As the rest of the team left the transporter room, D'riana tapped her comm. badge and proceeded with reporting in to the bridge. "Lt. D'Riana and Alpha team are back with just a slight problem." "What is the problem, lieutenant," came the reply. "Ensign Kalana seems to have been lost during transport. Ensign Lionel and Ja'rod are addressing the problem as we speak," reported the Klingon lieutenant. "Report back with any progress," came the voice over the comm. "Confirmed," Adriana said and tapped the comrade as she proceeded over to the console to check on progress. "Report."

"There was a second beam directed at Kalana that overrode ours," Ja'rod said bluntly. "We've triangulated the co-ordinates to the far side of the planet."

"Can you tell who did this?" D'Riana asked.

"Negative, ma'am," Ensign Lionel replied.

"Send all information to the bridge and let them know I'm on my way there."

D'riana headed toward the door. "Ja'rod, continue and proceed to the medical bay. And this time, don't break Umbra's arm."

Shortly, D'riana entered the bridge. "Did the information arrive?"

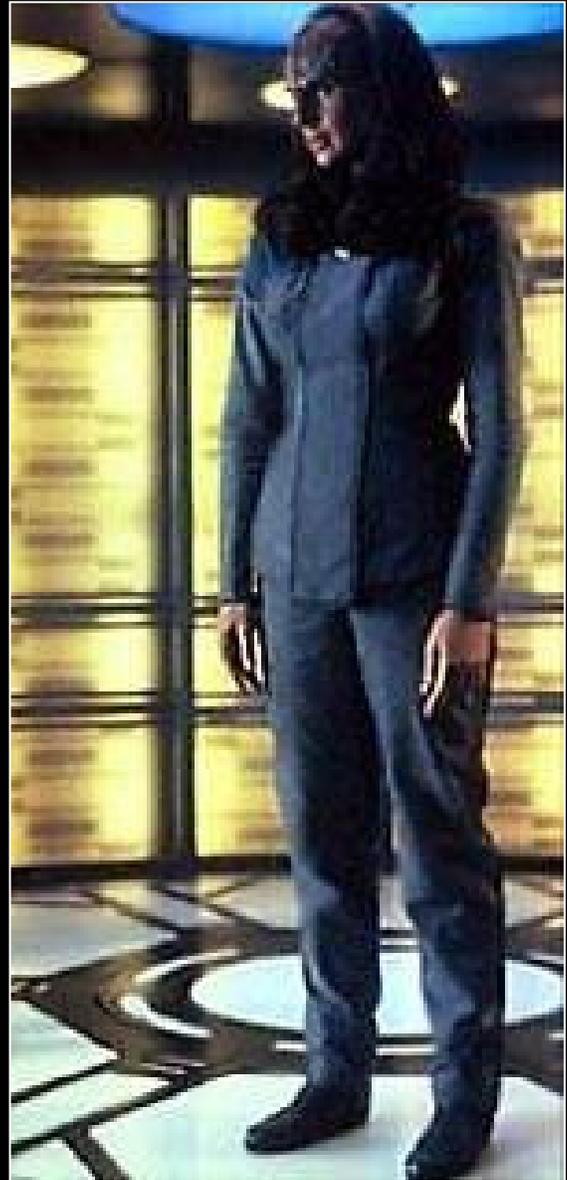
"Yes, Lieutenant. We've scanned the far side of the planet and found an ion trail bearing 221 by 52." Olivia replied.

"We have also sent out a subspace transmission requesting the return of our crewmember."

"Requested," The Klingon said under her breath. She continued aloud, "Any replies to the request?"

"Coming in now, Ma'am."

"This is the captain of The Imperial Heron. Be advised that your ensign Kalana is now in my protective custody. We are enroute to Boguna IV to bring our Prime Leader his new bride. You may follow and join in us the festivities, But do not attempt to interfere with the customs of Kalana and the Prime Leader's people, as we will consider that an act of war."



Fizz What?!

By Burt Gabot



In keeping with the "syndicate" that Captain James Kirk had brokered more than a hundred years ago, the Federation had been visiting Sigma Iotia II once every solar cycle. And it was just the Southern Cross's luck that it was their turn this time around.

Although Colonel O'Brien, the Ship's Master, would probably not use the word "luck."

After a fairly-smooth away mission, the Cross's five-man team was beamed back from the surface of the planet one crewman short... And O'Brien was currently grilling those that *did* return, trying to get at the bottom of it.

And six frustrating hours into the "debrief," the ship's XO came into the conference room and cleared his throat.

O'Brien looked up at the XO and groaned at his expression.

"I don't want to hear it, Number One!" O'Brien said. Being ship's master is just not what it's all cracked up to be, he mused. I'd rather go back to a corps assignment than have to deal with ... *this!*

"Well, sir," the ship's XO, Commander Smith said, "we have about thirty irate Iotians out in cargo bay twelve, brandishing early-model phase-pistols, demanding the ship."

"Eh?"

"They say they own the ship. That they won it fair and square, and they want it."

"Eh?" O'Brien repeated, still uncomprehending.

"Umm, perhaps I can explain, sir?" Lt. Bruce Mutter (affectionately called Bruce Two by the crew) timidly replied, much humbled after a blistering debrief from the Colonel.

O'Brien turned back to the medical officer. "Don't tell me this is your fault, too, Bruce!"

"No, sir!" he said. "It's Ensign Gabot's fault!"

"Where's he then? Why didn't he beam up, with the rest of you lot, instead of that... person?" he gestured at a lovely, raven-haired beauty wearing a very tiny red dress, high heels and nothing else.

"Sir, the young lady was the ensign's companion for the evening. He lent her his commbadge, and that's why she was beamed up instead of him."

O'Brien's eyebrow was raised, not unlike a Vulcan.

"And what were you people mucking around with the natives in the first place!"

"Ummm, playing Fizzbin, sir..."

"Playing what!?"

"It's a card game, sir. It's almost like a national pastime."

"And?!"

"And he was losing badly, sir. He needed a stake."

O'Brien shook his head, trying to think of a way out of this.

"Wayne," he said, gesturing the XO close. "I need to learn how to play Fizzbin, and try and win the ship back..."

Wayne nodded. "I wonder what possessed Burt to gamble away the Southern Cross."

"Too much San Miguel Beer, I think," Bruce said.