

"Visit to a Weird Planet Revisited" By Ruth Berman

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The director counted off seconds to himself while his actors stood transfixed on the Transporter platform in attitudes of heroic attentiveness. "Action," McEveety said.

William Shatner stepped forward briskly, and the camera panned around to follow him. His foot slipped, and he stepped down with a thud.

"Cut. Oh, God," said McEveety. It was becoming more a genuine prayer than a simple curse by now. Shooting had not gone well that day, and on top of everything else, he had a small herd - or horde - he wasn't sure which word fit better - of visitors. Normally, he'd have thrown them out, but they were high-up something-or-others, and he always felt hesitant about telling the producer to take his guests and get out.

"Sorry about that," said Shatner.

"Well, it wasn't your fault." McEveety sighed.

"The blame's a foot," said Shatner solemnly, then chortled at his own joke.

McEveety winced. "Take five while I recover from that," he said and went into a huddle with the cameraman. Slips aside, he still wasn't satisfied with the smoothness of the pan.

Leonard Nimoy went to his chair and plunked down. One visitor came up and asked for an autograph, saying how much she liked Mr. Spock.

"Thank you, thank you!" said Nimoy, as cordially as late-afternoon sleepiness allowed, and pumped her hand vigorously. When he had signed the autograph, however, he excused himself and opened his script to check his lines.

The fan watched reverently for a moment, then wandered off to request other autographs.

Shatner chatted with the visitors, finding it easier to relax in conversation than in sitting still, and DeForest Kelly joined James Doohan (waiting patiently behind the Transporter controls) for a quiet gripe-and-grumble over the odds against their finished at a reasonable hour.

After a few minutes, they're called back to the Transporter, & dutifully stiffened themselves into the *beaming* pose.

The clipboard slammed, McEveety counted the seconds needed to cover the special effect, and said hopefully, "Action!"

But the hope that this take would go right was promptly spoiled.

For a moment the actors wondered if they were fainting; there were spots before their eyes and they felt dizzy, as if they had been kneeling and then had stood up too quickly. But their vision cleared, and they were still standing on the Transporter platform.

Shatner, hoping to salvage the take, stepped forward and said authoritatively, "Scotty, get a report on that power source and meet me in the briefing room."

"Power source, Captain?" said the man behind the panel in a tone of utter bewilderment.

"There goes the take," muttered Nimoy disgustedly. "What's the matter with you, Jimmy?"

"The captain's all right, to all appearances, but begging your pardon, Mr. Spock, are you?"

Nimoy suddenly noticed that they were in a room with four walls and a ceiling, and with no camera or lights around (except for normal room lighting, apparently coming out of concealed ceiling panels). Nimoy dropped characterization and broke into a wide grin as he looked around "Beautiful!" he said. "Whose idea was this? Justman's?" This mock-up must have cost a mint. How'd you get us here?"

"I...I think there's something wrong," said Kelley.

"Aye, Doctor, there is that, seemingly."

"How about dropping the accent?" said Nimoy.

"Mr. Spock!" Lieutenant-Commander Montgomery Scott blazed with righteous indignation.

Kelley spoke quickly. "Captain, will you give me a hand getting him to Sickbay?" Shatner nodded, and they each took one of Nimoy's arms, prepared to hustle him out into the corridor. By this time, however, he too had counted up the costs of scene design and construction. James Doohan could have gone on improvising in the tones of outraged Scottishness all day without breaking, but Matt Jeffries just didn't have the budget to have built the room they were in.

The door swooshed open at their approach, and all three knew, even before they got past it, that they were on board the Enterprise. The pneumatic door-sound was supposed to be added by Glen Glenn Sound. They had never before heard it in real life. The door swooshed shut behind them, and they stood still for a moment, feeling totally lost.

"Nice going, De," said Shatner, trying to recover some poise. "Now, how the hell do we find the Sickbay?"

"Go to the elevator and say 'Sickbay?'" suggested Kelley.

"Yeah," said Nimoy, "that's right, they work on voice commands, don't they? Sorry I blew it."

"Well," said Shatner, "if it weren't impossible, it's exactly the sort of thing Justman would pull."

"Sort of thing you'd pull, as far as that goes, if you thought you could break me up," Nimoy grumbled.

The elevator obediently took them down a few levels. Fortunately, they found the Sickbay a few doors away, saving them the embarrassment of being caught reading the labels beside the doors. Kelley shivered at the sight of the familiar room. He picked up a diagnostic instrument. It looked just like its counterpart, but it was heavier than the salt shaker. He cocked it experimentally at Nimoy. It promptly emitted a wavering whistle, and he dropped it.

Shatner and Nimoy burst out laughing. The tension eased a little. "Well, it's, you know, spooky," Kelley complained, restoring the instrument to its place in what he had always thought of as a glorified medicine cabinet.

"You mean 'Spooky,'" said Shatner.

"Wait'll we get on the bridge, and see how you feel," said Kelley, ignoring the pun.

"Say, Leonard, tell me what goes on in that viewer of yours, okay?"

"We're not going to pretend we really are those guys are we?" said Nimoy.

"Why not?" asked Shatner wickedly. "No, you're right," he said, thinking better of it. "Scotty would be the senior officer, wouldn't he? Let's go back and-"

Something buzzed. It took Shatner a moment to identify it as the sound effect - no, the sound - of the intercom. He stepped to the table and flicked the intercom switch with the nonchalance of long practice.

"Kirk here," he said to the face that appeared on the screen.

"Captain, we're under attack," said Sulu.

"On my way," said Shatner, & switched off the intercom. He stood, wondering what he was waiting for, & realized it was a director to say "Cut." He looked helplessly at the others & shrugged. They headed for the door together.

The elevator took them to the bridge on their command. Shatner was startled by the size of the bridge. It took him several steps to get to his chair, not the few he was used to. It seemed strange to sit down and stare at a main viewscreen with a picture already on it. It showed a typical view of stars-and-planet. The planet showed flat black-they were over the night side. There were no larger lights that might be moons or other planets. Shatner found the loneliness of the dull-black-on-deep-black sight depressing.

Kelley crossed to a point behind the chair and stood there wondering, not for the first time, if the doctor really had any business being there.

Nimoy went to Spock's station and looked into the viewer. To his disappointment, it was dark. He suspected that the dial on the side turned it on, but realized it would look odd if he tried it and it was wrong. He sat down in Spock's chair, feeling useless, and glanced at the others, wondering if they felt as ill-at-ease in the masquerade as he did. They at least were real humans, if not real Star Fleet officers, whereas he might be spotted as a fake alien.

"Report, Mr. Sulu," said Shatner crisply.

"Smart-ass," muttered Nimoy, unable to keep himself from resenting Shatner's (seeming) confidence in his ability to keep up appearances. He spoke a little louder than he meant to, and drew a look of shocked disbelief from Uhura. He raised an eyebrow in a typically Spock look of surprise at her, and she turned back to her board, wondering if she was hallucinating. Nimoy, suddenly feeling better, turned a Spockishly cool look of expectancy on Sulu.

"Nothing the deflectors can't handle, Captain," said Sulu. "The Klingons are trying to warn us away."

"That doesn't seem like the Klingon thing to do," Shatner commented.

"There's the treaty," Kelley said doubtfully, and was relieved to see both Sulu and Chekov nod in agreement.

"Still no claim made to the planet by the Klingons, sir," Uhura said.

Chekov shifted uneasily in his seat, obviously on fire with some kind of curiosity. Shatner was afraid that he'd have no hope of answering anything the young man might want to ask of Kirk. He reflected however, that a question might contain in its phrasing the answers to some of the questions he could not ask. "Yes, Mr. Chekov?" he said.

"Was there anything on the planet's surface to explain Klingon interest, Captain?"

Shatner hesitated. He didn't know what Kirk and his landing party might have found. But he couldn't very well say yes, so.... "No."

"Illogical, Captain," said Nimoy.

Shatner turned around in his chair and stared.

Nimoy continued. "If the landing party found nothing, it does not necessarily follow that there was nothing there to find."

Shatner went on staring, and clamped his teeth shut over the giggle. He sat quite still, except for the jerking in the muscles at the back of his jaw.

Nimoy stared back and felt his own control going. "Further research is indicated, Captain," he said quickly. He knew that hastiness was wrong for Spock, but he had no choice. He headed for the elevator without waiting for permission. Once inside, he leaned against the far wall, let his head droop against his chest, and laughed himself out of breath.

Caught on the bridge, Shatner held himself rigid and tried to distract himself with thoughts of the Klingon menace. The ploy took sudden effect as it occurred to him that he could actually get killed by Klingon phaserbanks or photon torpedoes, or other equally improbable gadgets. "Uhura," he said, "try hailing the Klingon captain."

"Aye, sir," she said, and played a little medley of electronic bleeps on her board. "Ready on visual," she said after a moment.

Shatner turned his head back to face the screen and marveled as the picture blurred out, came back into focus, and showed him the familiar gray, armorial uniforms. To his surprise, he found the face above also familiar. "Commander Kor!" he said.

"Not exactly," Kor said. "My rank is now equivalent to commodore. Perhaps the Federation does not appreciate your true worth, Captain."

"Perhaps," said Shatner, smiling affable. Even if he had felt a truly personal interest in the insult, he would have been distracted by the sight of Kor's aide. Kor had the common dark skin and bifurcated eyebrows, but the officer behind him had light skin and unbranched eyebrows. The two were clearly from different races of the same species. "Fred Phillips should be here," Shatner said to Kelley.

Kelley nodded, remembering Phillips's anguish at discovering he'd done inconsistent makeups on Klingons the second time they used them.

"Indeed?" said Kor. "And who is Mr. Phillips?"

"Well," said Shatner, "let's say he's a student of the Klingon face."

"A spy," said Kor thoughtfully. "Inactive, I assume, or you would not reveal his name."

"Yes," said Kelly, "by now he'd be dead." His feet were beginning to hurt from standing so long after a hard day's work, so he went to Spock's chair and sat down heavily. Kor mistook the weariness for emotion.

"Mr. Phillips was a friend of yours, gentlemen?" he said with mock sympathy.

Shatner grinned. "Yes. But tell me, Commodore, do you generally use peaceful vessels for target practice? You fired at us, I believe?"

"Scarcely that, Captain," Kor said. "Call it a salute. We have both, after all, been exploring this planet - I have reported it to the Empire under the name of Kahless. If you have not thought to give it a name of your own, perhaps you would do well to adopt this one."

"But that could be a transparent trick?" Said Shatner. There was a pause, while the translation devices footnoted the pun for the Klingons and Kirk's crew puzzled over the captain's unusual turn of humor.

"Hostility can be a spur to endeavor," Kor said at last. "My scientists have found nothing of value on Kahless, I admit, yet your interest in it has caused me to report to our governments that I claim it for the Klingon Empire. If you wish to dispute the claim, of course, we must arrange for arbitration. Unless you care to return my fire?"

"I'll take it under consideration," said Shatner. He detected a real enthusiasm for battle in the Klingon's offers. "Kirk out." The screen blurred back to its picture-postcard view.

"They must have found something!" exclaimed Chekov.

"Not necessarily, Ensign," said Shatner. He tried to think of a way to get more information. "De...." he said softly, finding himself at a loss.

"Who got-" Kelley started out. He paused to rephrase it, to suggest that he knew the answer. "After all," he said firmly, "who got here first?" Surely someone on the bridge had the temperament to answer rhetorical questions.

"Wery true, Doctor," said Chekov.

Kelley spread one hand out toward Shatner in a you-can't-win gesture. He halted it midway as Chekov went on, "But, then, why did they wait to exercise right to claim, when they had clear priority?"

"An excellent question, Mr. Chekov," said Shatner. "I think it merits discussion."

He stood up and nodded at Kelley. "Bones...." He turned to Uhura. "Lieutenant, have Spock and Scotty meet us..." He hesitated, wondering if he could figure out a way to find the briefing room. "...in Dr. McCoy's office."

Nimoy was already there when they reached Sickbay. He would have preferred the privacy of Spock's quarters, once he'd gotten over his spasm of laughter, but he couldn't remember what level it was supposed to be on, and so had gone back to a place he was sure of finding. Nurse Chapel had come in once, looking for Dr. McCoy. Nimoy, covering for his fellow impostor, had said that the doctor was helping investigate the current Klingon problem.

Then it occurred to him that he had better cover for himself too, so he'd said he was also researching the problem and asked to be left alone. By then he was curious enough to want to try looking into it himself.

Shatner and Kelley found him seated at McCoy's table, staring intently into the viewer.

"What're you doing?" asked Kelley.

"Looking at the landing party's report," said Nimoy.

"What?" said Kelley.

"How?" said Shatner. Both men crowded around to look over Nimoy's shoulder. The viewer showed a shifting scene, taken during daylight hours. Apparently whoever held the tricorder was turning in a circle. The view went around from sparse meadowland reaching out to khaki-colored mountains, to dry sand blowing in a heavy wind and ocean beyond, and across a high-water mark to set sand and a wide bay of bright blue. A seagullish, sandy-yellow bird swooped into view, grabbing some kind of mussel from among the sea creatures caught out on the wet sand. A crab scuttled away from the bird's attack, and made it to the safety of the water. Meanwhile, the view kept turning, sweeping rapidly across the bay, and coming back up past wet sand and dry sand to the meadow.

"All it needs is a boardwalk," said Nimoy dreamily.

At the meadow, the view had stopped, becoming a still picture. Nimoy touched a switch, and the screen cut to a computer print-out of information on the life forms present.

"You've really got the thing under control," said Shatner admiringly.

The door opened.

Nimoy said, "Well, I called the computer on the intercom and asked how to run this thing, that's all."

"Amnesia, Doctor?" Scott asked Kelley, staring at Nimoy with deep pity.

"Sit down," said Shatner. "You're in for a shock. We're not who you think we are."

Scott, without moving, examined them minutely. "Aye," he said. "It's a brilliant job, but I can see where the ears went on. May I ask why you're telling me this?"

"We need your help," said Shatner.

"Do you now?" said Scott. He had slowly been moving his hands down. One hand suddenly came whipping up with a phaser in it. "You're three to one, but I'm armed," he said softly. He would not have been carrying a phaser aboard ship normally, but they had been on yellow alert since discovering the Klingon ship, and Kirk had phasers issued generally before beaming down with the landing party.

The three actors couldn't help grinning at first. It was difficult for them to believe that the little object he was pointing at them was a weapon, not a prop.

Scott was surprised at their reaction, but did not let it stop him from backing toward the intercom.

"Wait a moment," said Kelley. "What do you think we are?"

"Klingon spies," the accusation provoked open laughter, and Scott halted in surprise.

"Scotty, this is going to be hard for you to believe," said Shatner.

Scott nodded grimly. "I agree," he said.

"We're actors," said Shatner. "We come from the past-the past of another universe entirely, I suppose. Damnit, it's a TV series," he said, throwing his hands out at the room around them. "This room's a set; the ship's a model; we're actors in a science-fiction show."

"It's like that script where we went into a parallel universe where the Enterprise was run by cruel people, sort of like pirates," said Kelley helpfully.

"The ISS Enterprise of the Terran Empire," said Scott. "I was there."

"That's the one," said Nimoy. "Where Spock had a beard."

Scott jerked his head over to stare at Nimoy. "That detail wasna in the captain's report."

He sighed, shook his head and put the phaser back on his belt. "Well gentlemen, and if you're not them, then where are they?"

The actors looked at each other. "Back at the studio?" asked Kelley.

"Probably," said Shatner. He turned to Scott. "They're in Los Angeles, California, in the twentieth century. We think."

"A multi-parallel, space-time inversion," said Scott. "It's a pretty problem. I'll do what I can to find a way to reverse the situation, but you gentlemen had best stay away from the bridge meanwhile. There's no call to alarm the whole ship, especially at a time like this."

He started out, muttering. "If the paraspatial anomalies...."

"Er...Scotty," said Shatner hesitantly, "could you at least tell us what's going on? What is all this about the planet?"

Scott stopped. "So you truly dinna know? Well.....no more you would." He looked grave. "It's like this: these Klingons have found a star system. It isn't much of a system for anything we can see - no strategic importance, one star, one planet, no satellites, no minerals to speak of - but there they are and no signs of budgin', although they wouldna claim it until it looked as if we might. you took - that is, the captain took a landing party down to investigate the planet."

"Have you looked at the reports they sent up while they were on the surface?" asked Nimoy.

"No, I had to deal with the Klingons while the reports were coming in. And after that...." Scott shrugged. "I wasna aware that I was in command. If you'll excuse me, there's work to be done." He turned to go.

"What if Kor wants to talk to the captain again?" asked Shatner.

"Aye," said Scott thoughtfully. "And, at that, I could keep a closer watch on what you're up to if you're on the bridge."

"We've done a pretty good job of playing our parts so far," said Kelley tartly, resenting the implications of a close watch.

Scott looked at him closely, then nodded. "thank you, gentlemen," he said and left.

"Back to the salt mines," murmured Shatner.

The three started out the door. As they passed the table, Nimoy leaned over to turn off the viewer.

Shatner watched him thoughtfully. "Why did you ask if he'd seen the reports?"

"Oh, I dunno, Bill. Somehow I got the feeling he hadn't, but..."

Kelley winced as the door swooshed open for them and closed behind them. The noise was getting on his nerves.

Chekov looked up hopefully as they came back on the bridge.

"No conclusions, Mr. Chekov," Shatner told him. On impulse, he added, "Do you have any theories?"

Chekov looked pleased to be asked, but shook his head. "No, Captain. What would anyone want with that moonless, peopleless...."

"Moonless?" said Nimoy.

"Yes, Mr. Spock," said Chekov. "Observations of system....."

"But it has tides." Nimoy had grown up in a coastal town, and liked to sail with his family. He knew what a lunar tide looked like. "Check the coastlines, and you'll see."

"They could be solar tides," said Uhura. She looked over at Nimoy for an opinion on the suggestion. Nimoy, lacking Spock's scientific training, was quite unqualified to give any such opinion. He sat still, trying to think of a way to avoid answering.

Shatner recognized the danger and used Kirk's authority to get around it "That's a possibility," he said. "Chekov, let's see you test it."

Chekov left his post and came over to Spock's station. Nimoy made room for him and the young man bent over Spock's equipment. Nimoy gazed over his shoulder, trying to look critical.

"Solar influence not great enough to account for tides," Chekov reported a minute later. "Lunar influence seems necessary."

"Very good, Mr. Chekov" said Nimoy judiciously.

Chekov, however, looked unhappy. He worked a few moments more, then said, "Perhaps you should check me, sir. Sensors show nothing in position indicated for moon by tidal action."

"Unnecessary," said Shatner quickly.

Chekov smiled sheepishly, pleased and a little surprised at winning unqualified approval from his demanding superiors.

"Perhaps.....an invisible moon," mused Shatner. "Sounds like Romulan work."

Uhura said, "But these are Klingons - " She broke off, reconsidered, and ended her sentence "- and they have an

alliance with the Romulans."

Sulu jumped in excitedly, "And we know the Romulans have been working to improve their cloaking devices. But the power involved in blanketing a whole moon....!"

"Well," said Shatner, "just goes to show what researchers will come up with, left to their own devices."

"Very funny," said Kelley. "Now what do we do, go steal the new, improved cloaking device?"

There was a silence, during which the three actors realized that the junior officers thought it quite possible that they ought to try just that.

"It's an engineering advance," said Shatner when he had his voice under control. "Uhura, locate Scotty and tell him what we've uncovered. I want his opinion."

A moment later Uhura had Scott's image on one of the smaller viewscreens. A Transporter console, with some of its panels open, was visible beside him. His irritation at being interrupted faded out as Uhura briefed him.

"No wonder they had to claim the planet," he said when she was finished. "If they'd gone on squatting there with no pretense of interest, it would ha' dawned on us in the end that they had to be interested in something else." he grinned suddenly. "Well done....Captain."

Shatner grinned back. "Any suggestions on how Federation gets hold of the new cloaking device?"

"How the Federation....Oh, I take your meaning," said Scott, realizing that Shatner wanted to know what Kirk would do and if he ought to do it. Scott shook his head. "We'd maybe do best to let them think we're fooled. Given the hint, our scientists can find the way to do what they've done. We'll have the advantage of knowing what they know - and beyond that, the advantage of their not knowing that we know." He hesitated and then said slyly, "For the matter of that, sir, I think I could show you a bonny trick of disappearing, if you'll meet me down here."

"Very well, Scotty," said Shatner casually. "Kirk out." He nodded to Nimoy and Kelley. "Gentlemen...."

Scott hadn't been able to tell them exactly where *down here* was, but they assumed it was the same Transporter they'd appeared in. After a little confusion in finding the right level, they located it easily enough.

"But, Captain," Scott was saying as they entered, "we've got to pull you back in the next five minutes, before the anomaly shifts." He glanced sideways at them. "And I've got three gentlemen here very anxious to go home."

"Right, Scotty. Set it up, and we'll get onto the platform. Kirk out."

Nimoy and Kelley shot quick looks at Shatner to be sure he really hadn't spoken. Shatner himself felt a little unsure. He found it upsetting to hear his own voice coming out of someone else's mouth.

"Ah....gentlemen...." Scott nodded at the Transporter.

They hurriedly placed themselves back on the little circles.

Kelley asked curiously, "Do you really think they shouldn't try to steal the cloaking device?"

Scott shrugged. "That's my opinion. The final decision'll be up to the captain." The fact seemed to please him.

The room faded out, and when it came back, the fourth wall was gone. Hot lights blazed down at them through a nonexistent ceiling. All three sighed with relief.

Shatner stepped forward and said eagerly, "Gene, you will never believe where we've just been!"

"Cut!"

Another take ruined. The director gave up and called a halt for the day.