

ONE SMALL STEP

A STAR TREK: GRISSOM PREQUEL ADVENTURE

BY SEAN PAUL TEELING



THE YEAR 2282

Having maintained his flag aboard the U.S.S. Enterprise NCC-1701, Admiral James T. Kirk retired, albeit briefly, from Starfleet in 2281. It was a time of relative peace for the Federation, just before the escalation of the Klingon/Federation tensions which would ultimately lead to paranoia and conflict in the mid-2280s. During this peaceful time, Starfleet was able to return to its role of scientific exploration, first contact, and maintaining the tenets of the United Federation of Planets. Many are the stories of Starfleet missions during this time, among them, some of the adventures of the U.S.S. Grissom NCC-638.

Stardate 8006.5

Captain's personal log. U.S.S. Grissom, Stardate 8006.5 J.T. Esteban commanding. My command may be a 'small' vessel, but I have to admit I'm constantly amazed at the amount of equipment you can cram into an Oberth-class ship. No space is wasted, no nook or cranny left empty or unused. My friend Lawrence considers the Oberth class 'beneath him' and can't comprehend why I accepted command of Grissom back in 2280. However, he forgets this vessel has an illustrious history, and upon her launch in 2270 from the Copernicus Fleet Yards, she was intended for the captaincy of none less than Commander Spock. If she's good enough for Spock, Larry, she's good enough for me!

Many of Grissom's current crew are nearing the end of their tour of duty, and next year, 2283, will see many new officers aboard. I have my eye on a number of potentials at the moment. (sigh) It's Christmas Eve, but with the divorce from Monica just gone through, I really don't feel like celebrating. I might just join the crew in the mess hall later, but, for now, I'll just see how it goes.

Captain Jonathan T. Esteban concluded recording his personal log and turned to look at the star field passing the conference room windows, as the U.S.S. Grissom sped through space at warp. This was a new chapter in his life he thought to himself. Newly single, a budding relationship with a beautiful Andorian woman, and a new crew roster in the not too distant future. The Grissom had been assigned on a routine diplomatic mission, covering for the Enterprise, which was currently at Spacedock. Her mission was to transport Ambassador Robert Fox to the planet Elas.

A veteran Federation diplomat, Fox had been instrumental in the U.S.S. Enterprise's mission to Eminiari VII in 2267. His current mission was a courtesy call to the worlds of Elas and Troyius, located in the Tellun system. Troyius occupied an orbit beyond Elas, its inner neighbor. On Stardate 4372.5 the Enterprise, under the command of James T. Kirk, had helped broker stable diplomatic relations between both planets by facilitating the union of their respective ruling houses. That facilitation and this current courtesy visit by Ambassador Fox were both driven by the Tellun system's proximity to the Klingon Empire, and the fact that dilithium crystals, called 'radans' by Troyians, were common on Troyius.

As Esteban pondered these thoughts, the conference room door buzzed, heralding the arrival of Ensign Paul Hewson, who entered on Esteban's command. Hewson had been aboard the ship for only a short time, but had proved to be an excellent addition to Grissom's small crew complement.

Hewson stood to attention. "Sir, sorry to interrupt, but Security Chief Mueller felt it would be good experience for me to lead the landing party to Elas from a Security perspective. I'd like to check to see if you have any special instructions or requirements?"

Esteban rose from his seat and walked around the large conference table, in the habit of walking as he talked business. "Other than ensuring that Ambassador Fox is safe

and his security needs are met, I have no specific instructions, Mr. Hewson. I expect this to be a routine diplomatic mission.”

Hewson shifted uncomfortably on his feet. “If I may, sir?” he ventured, seeking to voice his opinion.

Esteban restrained a smile. This Hewson fellow was certainly one to be watched.

“Go ahead, Mr. Hewson.”

“Sir, this mission is unusual for Grissom; we are, after all, by designation, a science vessel. I would remind you the Oberth class was designed for the study of astronomical phenomena and data gathering missions on stars and planets, and during her service, and indeed your tenure as Captain, this vessel has primarily stuck to that protocol. Therefore, being cautious with regard to the Ambassador’s safety and our nearness to the Klingon Empire is foremost on my mind.”

Esteban continued to pace slowly around the spacious conference room.

“Indeed, Mr. Hewson, all you say is fact; however, we serve at the pleasure of Starfleet and the President of the Federation. Your caution is commendable, and I understand your anxiety, but since the V’Ger incident, the smaller ships of the line have had to pick up the slack from the heavier cruisers. Why don’t you draft a proposal for me on how you intend to carry out your landing party mission, and I’ll review it.”

Hewson flushed and coughed nervously. “Thank you sir, I will. And sorry to have bothered you.”

“As you were, Mr. Hewson,” said Esteban, allowing himself again a small smile to set Hewson at ease. The ensign nodded, and took his leave. Esteban looked after him as he left, and once again thought he was someone to watch.

Paul Hewson sighed as he left the conference room. Here he was, eager to impress, yet sounding like a rookie. He hoped his captain didn’t think too badly of him. He checked in with Security Chief Mueller, and advised of his drafting of a proposal for his landing party. Mueller seemed amused, but said all was in order. Hewson paid a courtesy call to Ambassador Fox, ensured he was comfortable, and asked Yeoman Hiro to attend to the Ambassador’s needs.

With those tasks completed, he then made his way to his shared bunkroom for his scheduled break. The door to the three-berth bunkroom closed and he sat down heavily on his bunk.

Then the door opened again, and in walked Ensign Mark Atkins, whom Paul had served with aboard the U.S.S. Potemkin. Part of Starfleet’s current *modus operandi* was the rotation of junior personnel across vessels on a more frequent basis, and not just cadets, to ensure that Starfleet crews had practical field experience and could be more freely assigned. It was a headache for the administrators in Starfleet Command, but it was felt necessary by top brass. Although things were relatively peaceful in the

quadrant currently, this was not a time for complacency, and Starfleet was using the opportunity to invest in its 'human' resources.

Mark Atkins was completing a three month stint aboard Grissom, where he had been working on communications arrays in relation to stellar mapping. In the future, for peace time, Starfleet hoped to provide an actual stellar cartography suite aboard its vessels. Atkins was next scheduled for assignment to Starbase 67 to hone his skills in structural engineering. For cadets, keeping a huge starbase active was no mean feat, and it would be a good learning curve for Atkins..

Atkins sat down beside Hewson on his lower bunk. Hewson shifted uncomfortably.

"What?" asked Atkins, mockingly, arching his eyebrow and smiling.

Hewson scowled. "Nothing. Do you have to sit so close?"

Atkins put his arm around Hewson's shoulder. "Hewson, I've been chasing you for over nine months now, you could acknowledge that you are interested, I've followed you across the quadrant, mate, and wrangling assignments ain't easy you know!"

Hewson sat back and removed Atkins arm. "I *am* interested, and you know I am attracted to you, it's just that my career is just starting, and I want to make a good impression aboard Grissom."

Atkins stood up.

"Look Hewson, you're not going to find another good looking, intelligent, Australian like me in this galaxy, at least not without some serious work on your part. All you need to do is take one small step, and we can be a couple."

Hewson now stood as well, turning his back on Atkins, who began to rummage in his locker.

"Look, it'll never work. Long distance relationships never do."

Atkins grabbed Hewson by the arm and spun him around, holding him by both arms and looking directly in his eyes.

"I can hack the long distance, Hewson," he said and kissed him firmly on the mouth.

Then he stood back, releasing the blushing Ensign. "Okay, Hewson, I'm outta here. I'm due to report in to old doubting Thomas (*this was a name the current crew gave Esteban who believed that 'seeing was believing'*), and so the ball's in your court. One small step mate. One small step..."

Hewson looked after Atkins for a moment as he left the bunkroom, and then began to undress for his shower.

Some hours later, the Grissom entered orbit of the planet Elas, her small form glistening in the sunlight. Grissom was just one of many ships in orbit, since Elas had become a major staging area in the quadrant, with orbital space stations supplying traders with dilithium crystals which had been mined, refined and transported from Troyius. This had been an early policy move by Majestrix Elaann, the Dohlman of Elas and her husband, the ruler of Troyius, to foster working relationships between both planets and encourage travel between the two worlds. Another part of their policy was that the new royal court would be based on either world at different intervals. At the moment, Elaann and the court were sitting in the world's southern hemisphere; hence the Grissom's visit here, rather than to Troyius. The Dohlman's husband was currently off world.

Security Chief Mueller stood in the transporter room alongside Captain Esteban, who nodded his head slightly to Ambassador Fox.

"Ambassador, may your first visit be worthwhile and hopefully brief. We'll be here for a number of days, but we hope to have you back aboard for Christmas lunch tomorrow. Chef Brennan is cooking up a storm, I believe."

Ambassador Fox smiled sardonically. "I should imagine that to leave Elas would be seen as discourteous to our hosts, but the thought is appreciated, Captain."

Esteban laughed out loud. "I suppose you're right. Good journey." Then he turned to Mueller and said "Energise," watching the landing party disappear in a shimmer of golden atoms.

The team consisted of Ambassador Fox's party and Grissom crew members. The Ambassador's party included his major domo (a Caitian male named Briscus), his secretary (Hermione, a human female from the lunar colonies) and a member of the Diplomatic Press Agency, as well as Lyndra Dean, a young Andorian female, who was accompanying the Ambassador to record this historic visit. From Grissom, there were Hewson, two other security officers, and Dr. Martin Pulaski, Grissom's soon-to-retire Chief Medical Officer.

The party materialised on a balcony hewn of a reddish stone, protruding about six levels up on a pyramid structure, overlooking a sprawling city of low-lying buildings, which stretched as far as the eye could see into the intense heat of noon, broken only by the silver line of a snaking river, heavy with river traffic.

Hewson was vaguely distracted for a moment, thinking how much this city looked like Luxor, in Egypt, where he had vacationed once as a teenager, but then his mind snapped back to duty. He took point and stood slightly to the left of the Ambassador, his security team covering him from behind. Six members of the Elasian Royal Guard, in their short red togas, draped in gold decor, stood holding ceremonial spears. They parted, and the form of Elaann, Dohlman of Elas and Majestrix of both Elas and Troyius, appeared in the gap they made.

She was beautiful. All of the men in the party gasped and stood silent. Hewson had seen pictures of the Majestrix and seen snippets on the Federation and Proxima News

Networks over the years. Elaan had aged gracefully. She was greying at the temples and had some lines around her fine mouth and eyes, but she looked proud and haughty and again, beautiful. Lyndra Dean coughed, and the men were woken from their reverie.

Ambassador Fox stood forward formally and made a deep bow. "Majestrix," he said. "On behalf of the United Federation of Planets, I bring you greetings and humbly request your hospitality for the duration of our visit."

He finished his bow and stood back. Nobody moved, and then the Majestrix's features broke into a thin smile.

"Ambassador, your greeting follows our Elasian traditions well, you are a welcome guest. I think you will find that I have mellowed over the years since I first encountered your Starfleet."

She stood back and the Royal Guard beckoned for the landing party to follow them. As Ambassador Fox reached the Majestrix, she took his arm and walked beside him.

"Now tell me, Ambassador, how is James Tiberius Kirk?"

Lyndra Dean suppressed a laugh. The Majestrix was obviously not aware of Kirk and Fox's somewhat turbulent relationship following the events on Eminiar VII. Or perhaps she was, as she seemed to be enjoying Ambassador Fox's blushing. Hewson noted this too. The Majestrix was some woman.

As Hewson and the landing party made their way into the Pyramid, J.T. Esteban was sitting in his ready room with Grissom's helmsman Andre Bryce and Security Chief Mueller, enjoying some Christmas fare. The meal was being served by Captain's Steward Absalon Jensen, who quietly and efficiently circulated between the 3 men.

"Grissom won't be the same without you aboard, Mueller," said Esteban between mouthfuls of steaming plum pudding.

"Thank you Captain, but the fjords of Norway call to me. I think I have earned my retirement. And besides, you have me until we complete this current mission."

Norwegian Charles Mueller, who had been Shipboard Security Chief aboard Grissom for five years, had had a long and distinguished career, and had served aboard the U.S.S. Enterprise under Captain James T. Kirk during her historic five year mission.

Esteban paused in eating. "Well, you will be missed, you and Dr. Pulaski both. Losing two key command staff is not going to be an easy adjustment."

Mueller nodded his appreciation. "Thank you again, Captain, but you'll survive; this ship has many good years ahead of her yet."

"I like to think so," said Esteban, finishing his ice cold glass of lemonade and putting his glass down. "And we'll also miss *you*, Mr. Bryce," he spoke directly to Grissom's helmsman.

Bryce was soon to transfer to the U.S.S. Gallant, under the command of Captain Bearclaw, again as helmsman. He had been a very popular member of Grissom's crew and a firm favourite of Esteban's for a future command position.

"Thank you, sir," said Bryce, also pausing in his meal, "but I'm looking forward to some shore leave with my daughter, Nancy, in advance of the move to Gallant."

"Ah, the vagaries of parenthood," laughed Mueller. "Not something I am sorry I did. My eldest is at Starfleet Academy this year. I think he'll eclipse me."

Esteban sat back in his chair, replete "He'll have to be one hell of a man to eclipse you, Charles."

Before anyone else could speak, Jensen interrupted.

"I'm sorry Captain, but it is 20:00 hours, ship standard time, and the crew Christmas party has started in the rec room. You did ask to be reminded."

"Ah yes, thank you Jensen, we'll be there directly."

Esteban stood and Bryce and Mueller followed. Esteban turned to Jensen. "Leave this and come join us, Absalom."

Jensen, a man of strict routing and formality, blushed. "Thank you, sir, but I have to finish tidying up; it wouldn't do to leave a mess."

Esteban smiled. "That's an order, Jensen."

Jensen nodded. "Yes, sir... thank you, sir."

Esteban left to join his crew in the rec room. 'Happy Christmas, JT,' he thought to himself.

It was well into the New Year before Ambassador Fox completed his diplomatic mission on Elas. The Majestrix simply insisted that the Ambassador take a tour of the planetary capital and its famous edifices, including the Kobalian temples at Ercu, the famous archaeological ruins of Rian, and the Lutra hanging gardens. She was a splendid host, and the haughty people of Elas proved to be friendly and accommodating, indeed Paul Hewson was propositioned by several stunning males and females for 'partnering.'

However, Hewson was in bad form, and was preoccupied. He couldn't quite figure out what was wrong with him, thinking it was the heat, and missing Christmas, and being, quite frankly, bored. That was until the day, January 8th, as Hewson would later recall, that Esteban came planetside at the invitation of the Ambassador, and amongst his landing party was none other than Paul Atkins.

As soon as Hewson saw Atkins materialise, he knew he had to talk to him.

However, the intervening hours stretched ahead and Atkins was kept with Esteban and his party. Hewson felt something akin to an itch; an itch he could not scratch. For his part, Atkins seemed preoccupied with his visit, and completely ignored Hewson, apart from a brief wave when he caught his eye.

Although not a person whom his friends would describe as emotional, Paul Hewson was now completely overwhelmed with frustration. Dr. Pulaski, ever vigilant, noted Hewson's discomfort.

"Hewson, you seem tired, why don't you take a short break, we're almost finished up here, and the Ambassador has indicated we will be returning to Grissom shortly."

Hewson, always on duty, shook his head. "Thank you, Doctor, but I've had my evening break, and I'd rather finish out my shift."

Pulaski put his hand to Hewson's ear and whispered, conspiratorially, "Fine. However, your colleague Malden can relieve you, and I note that Ensign Atkins is at the Fire Temple plaza. You can see him from here..."

Hewson blushed furiously, coughed, and then regained his composure.

"Thank you, Doctor Pulaski. If Malden can cope, perhaps I will take a stroll."

The sun was setting over the Temple of Fire, and people were pausing to look at the spectacle. The orange stone of the temple, riveted with dilithium fragments, was alive with light and looked like it was on fire, and the effect was magnified by the large water pools at either side of the edifice. Mark Atkins sat on a low wall, his uniform collar unbuttoned, a breeze blowing in his blond hair. He was lost in the moment.

"Hello, Mark," said Hewson, coming to sit beside Atkins.

Atkins kept looking at the fiery spectacle in front of him, building to a crescendo as the sun began its final descent into the horizon.

"Hello, Hewson. It's beautiful, isn't it?"

Hewson sat beside Atkins, moving in closer so that their knees touched. "Yes... yes, it is," he said slowly.

Atkins ignored this contact and kept his eyes on the disappearing sun, the crowds at the temple were beginning to disperse.

"Well then, Hewson," he said. "Have you something to say for yourself?"

Hewson swallowed, took a breath and began to speak hesitantly. "Yes, I, er, well, I just wanted to say, that I... I missed you. I missed you a lot actually."

Atkins turned to Hewson, his eyes piercing Hewson's own. "Are you telling me you're ready to take that one small step?"

Hewson put his right hand to Atkins face, touching him softly. "Yes... I guess I am."

Atkins kissed him passionately, and fiercely for a time, before coming up for air.

They broke apart and sat in the vestigial warmth from the sun, their hands entwined. Hewson's communicator beeped. He flipped it open to answer it, smiling at Atkins.

"Hewson here."

The voice of Dr. Pulaski came across the speaker. "Better get back here, gentlemen. We're moving out. I hope you both enjoyed the sunset."

Hewson laughed aloud, something he was not akin to doing. "Yes, sir, we are coming – and yes sir, I think I can safely say, we did enjoy it. Hewson out."

Atkins stood and began to walk toward the congregating landing party. "Come on then, mate, I've got some free time scheduled aboard, and your duty roster is finished, so we've got a lot to talk about."

Hewson sighed contentedly and then followed Atkins.

Sometimes the hardest thing to do was take one small step, but now, he was sure, he had made a giant leap of his own. What the future held he could not know, but for here, for now, he was content.

▲ BASED ON *STAR TREK* CREATED BY GENE RODDENBERRY

▲ EDITED BY BODO HARTWIG - FORMATTED BY RICK PIKE

▲ VISIT STAR TREK: GRISSOM ON THE WEB AT:

<http://startrekgrissom.com>