

“SciPAC 7”

Part 3

Captain Jack Tracer sat alone on the darkened bridge of his ship, SciPAC 7.

It was the ship's night. Tracer thought it funny that this tin can in the middle of unpopulated space still followed the diurnal schedule of the little blue planet of his ancestors. It was even funnier because only two of the five crew members were human, and neither of them even came from Earth.

On many a night over the past two years, he had sat on this bridge and looked out at the stars. But never before had he felt the weight of command so heavily.

Tracer had told Kira to take her time returning to active duty. Honestly, he didn't know why he bothered to be on duty, either. The ship was taking care of itself, and as long as they were pinned behind the asteroid by the stellar storm, there was nothing for him to do.

The star's radiation storm had lasted longer than expected. Silek was revising his mathematical model of the star's behavior to obtain a new, hopefully more accurate, prediction.

Tracer finally hauled himself out of the command chair and went back to his cabin to read. Moments after he had settled into his chair, the door chimed. "Come," he said, and the door slid open to admit Kira.

She had healed well, though there were still marks on her face. She paced back and forth through the empty space in his cabin, obviously struggling to phrase whatever she wanted to say.

He waited patiently. After a little while, she stopped pacing and looked at him.

"Do you want to play Might & Mages?" she asked unexpectedly.

They had spent a large portion of their off duty time in the past two years playing collaborative simulation games. That one was her favorite. But they hadn't played since Silek had joined the crew.

He guessed she had a problem she wanted to discuss but didn't feel ready yet. So he nodded and set up the game.

Many hours later, their avatars conquered the last of the monsters.

"Just like old times," Tracer said as the game shut down. She started pacing again. He sighed. "Talk to me, Kira."

"Silek and I are having a... disagreement."

Ah. Lovers' quarrel, he thought.

"He won't touch me. Ever since.... He thinks we may have triggered *pon farr* early by...." She searched for the right word, "overindulging in each other's company."

Tracer nodded. Silek had told him the same hypothesis yesterday. "And you disagree?"

She hugged herself. "I understand the logic of it. I understand why he doesn't want to put the baby at risk. But I feel...." She stopped as she squeezed her eyes shut against tears. "I feel like he doesn't love me anymore."

Oh, boy. "Kira, I think he does."

"Are you saying he's doing the right thing?"

Now it was Tracer's turn to pace a bit. "I'm not exactly an unbiased observer here. This is the safest thing for the baby."

"The baby... I think we should talk about that. How involved do you want to be with raising the child?"

He stopped pacing and stood in front of her. "As involved as you'll let me be," he said. "I'll even raise him alone if you and Silek don't want him."

"Him?"

He shrugged. "Or her. I'd love either just the same."

She smiled. "I want to be a part of his or her life, too. It won't take a leap of logic to know that you're the father, so there's no point trying to conceal it. We'll register the birth accurately so that you'll have legal parenting rights."

Tracer was relieved. Kira raised an eyebrow.

"Did you think I was going to try to keep you out of your child's life?"

He shook his head. "Not really. But I did fear the possibility."

"I was afraid you wouldn't want a baby."

"Are you kidding? I've always wanted to be a dad. Of course, this isn't the way I expected it to happen."

She paused a moment, then looked into his eyes. "Why didn't we ever fall in love?" she asked quietly.

He shrugged again. "When we started this mission, I fully expected to. You're smart and beautiful. And I do love you, you know. I just never... fell."

"I know exactly what you mean."

"I think it comes down to the fact that I'm not Silek and you're not Ann."

"Silek came back to me. Do you think you and she might --?"

"No. I can't let myself entertain that thought. The last time I saw her was at her wedding. To my brother." Kira nodded understandingly. "Last I heard from them, they had two kids and another on the way."

He looked at his feet. It was very distracting to think of Ann. He ruthlessly crushed the thought of something happening to his brother, enabling him to step in at Ann's side. Ann didn't love him. It would be worse to be with her than to be alone.

Kira was standing silently, looking at him with a strange longing in her eyes. He swallowed nervously. "Did you know Silek wants me to sleep with you?"

Kira did a double-take. "Did he actually ask you to?!"

"Yesterday. He's worried about your 'physical needs.'"

She pressed the heels of her palms against her eyes. "I can't believe he did that. I already told him that was a bad idea." *Good. At least he had asked her first.*

"I don't think he understands the concept of jealousy," he said. She nodded. "Of course, you do. Is that why you're here?"

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Are you trying to make Silek jealous?"

She started to deny it, then stopped and thought. "I don't know. That would be manipulative of me, wouldn't it?"

"Yes."

She paced again. "I don't know what to do. I love him, and I need

things from him, and he's not giving them to me, and I feel like there's something wrong with me."

"There's nothing wrong with you, Kira."

She was struggling to keep from crying, but tears leaked from her eyes. It was heartbreaking. "Please hold me," she said. "Please. Just hold me."

He cared about her too much to resist comforting her. He took her in his arms. She buried her head in his shoulder.

It was late and he was tired. He guessed she was to, so he helped her sit down on the couch. She finally let her emotions run their course. He continued to hold her as she wept quietly. He was very angry at Silek. Surely, he could at least comfort his wife like this. The tears finally subsided. Kira had fallen asleep.

He sighed. He should take her back to her own cabin. He wondered what a Vulcan would look like in a jealous rage.

Kira shifted in her sleep. Her hand brushed up to his neck.

His vision snapped to black. He was sinking. He struggled to breathe.

* * *

Am I a ghost?

Tracer was in a small, familiar room. There was a couple covered by a sheet in the throes of passion on the bed.

He had practiced lucid dreaming enough to know that this wasn't a dream.

What was it Silek had said to Kira? Something about natural telepathic ability. He wondered if perhaps Kira had mind melded with him.

But he could not sense her presence. She had been asleep. Maybe she hadn't entered into a dream state yet.

He looked around and recognized the room. It was Kira's room back at Starfleet Academy. He must be in her memories.

The couple finished their mutual release and pulled aside the sheet. It was Kira and a man that Tracer didn't recognize: a young, athletic man that looked like a career Starfleet type.

The man sat on the edge of the bed and dressed with a steely expression. Kira pulled the sheet around herself. "What's wrong, Harry?"

"Nothing."

"Are you angry at me?"

"No."

Kira watched him stand and put his shirt on. "You're angry at something."

"You wouldn't understand, Kira. You don't have my kinds of problems in your world." He turned to her sharply. "Do your friends even know I exist?"

She looked at him guiltily for a moment before shaking her head.

He leaned against her window and looked out over the dark campus. "Of course not. It's not like we're dating or anything, is it?"

"You'll be graduating and leaving Earth in two months, Har. I'll be on a different ship six months later. It would be completely illogical for us to be dating. We'll probably never see each other again."

Harry closed his eyes. "I know."

Kira slid out of bed and went to his side. "Did you really come here tonight just for sex?"

"Sure. That's all I'm good for, isn't it?"

"Why won't you talk to me? Aren't we friends?"

Harry's eyes narrowed. "Are we? Other than that one time, all we ever see each other for is that." He gestured at the bed.

"I thought that's what we agreed to at the start," Kira said quietly. "No obligations, no commitment. You were glad to have it that way. 'Too good to be true,' you said."

"Are you sleeping with anybody else?"

Kira blinked at the abrupt question. She shook her head slightly. "Why do you care?"

He turned away from her. "It sounded like a perfect deal at the outset. No buying dinner, no forgetting anniversaries. Nothing tying me down. But it turns out commitment is a two-way street. If I'm not giving it to you," he said, "you're not giving it to me, either."

"I made it clear that I wanted to avoid emotional entanglements,"

she said flatly.

"I remember. Just needed to get the stigma of virginity off your psych profile so you could get into your precious SciPAC program." Tracer was surprised. *Where did she get that idea from?* "Perfectly logical," Harry said bitterly. "Any man would do."

Kira reached out and laid her hand on his cheek. "Not true. I was very lucky the night we met. I had no idea what I was doing. What are the odds that the first guy who hit on me would be so... nice. And so handsome."

Harry relaxed slightly. "Ah, you almost had me going until that last bit."

Kira smiled. "I'm serious, Harry. The first time was for the psych profile. But only the first time."

He looked into her eyes. Kira breathed in sharply. It was clear that he loved her but she didn't love him. Harry read it in her reaction.

He turned away sadly. "I can't see you anymore, Kira. You're smart and beautiful and really, really sexy." He glanced back at her. "And it's killing me that I'm not good enough for you to fall in love with."

"It's nothing about you, Harry. I wouldn't let myself fall in love with you."

"I know." Harry headed for the door, but paused on his way out. "But the thing is... you shouldn't be able to help yourself."

* * *

This had to be Vulcan.

Though Tracer had never been to the fiery planet, the landscape certainly matched descriptions he had heard.

Kira sat on the ground, counting grains of sand.

This, he recognized as a dream.

Kira, he said firmly. *Wake up.*

She looked up at him and smiled broadly. She jumped up and threw her arms around him. The sands of Vulcan were suddenly replaced by the walls of her cabin. They fell onto the bed. She kissed him.

Tracer gasped. Her sleeping mind was inside his. *No*, he said. *Stop!* He struggled, but had no idea how to stop the telepathic intrusion.

To his relief, she pulled back on her own. She looked at him with large, sad eyes. "You don't want me," she said.

"Kira, it's me. It's really me. Wake up, dammit. You've pulled me into your dreams."

Kira blinked. "This is a dream?"

"Yes. You melded me or something. I don't know how to get out."

Kira looked around. "I don't know how to wake up."

Tracer was very frustrated. "You should have practiced lucid dreaming, like I asked you to," he snapped.

She raised an eyebrow. "I usually wake shortly after I realize I'm dreaming." They waited. "But apparently not this time." She looked around. "Not here," she said, and waved her hand. Her cabin was replaced by a beautiful beach with brilliant blue waves. *Earth*. "Lucid dreaming is like being a god, isn't it?"

"Kira, just tell yourself to wake up. You can do it."

Kira's eyes narrowed in concentration. Nothing changed. "Wait, I think I know. Usually, I'm excited to realize I'm dreaming. That wakes me up."

Tracer nodded. "Well, do something exciting, then."

He suddenly realized his feet weren't touching the sand. She was floating gently a few feet higher than him, holding his hand. They flew smoothly over the beach, skimming over the waves and dipping their hands in the water. This was too much fun for him to mind that she wasn't waking up.

After awhile, they landed on the sunlit beach again. "Not exciting enough, apparently," she said.

They sat on the sand. Tracer tried to think of something else to try. She looked at him suddenly.

"Make love to me."

"What?"

"It's just a dream. It's not like we're really doing it. Besides, I think you'll wake me quickly."

Tracer paused. This was morally dubious. But, knowing Kira, it probably would work.

The beach was instantly lit by moonlight, and a soft blanket was underneath them. He was lying on top of her, and her skin felt as wonderfully soft as he remembered.

He struggled to remain in control, but his lust was fed by hers. *This isn't real*, he reminded himself. He couldn't believe how good it felt. *Not real.*

Kira moaned. Tracer gasped. He could feel her pleasure in addition to his own. This must be what it was like when she and Silek --

Suddenly, he was in his own body again, back on the couch in his cabin. Kira convulsed in his arms. Her eyes didn't open.

"Kira?" Careful not to touch her skin, he checked her breathing. "Kira, wake up." She didn't respond. "Please wake up."

Panic gripped him. "Computer, get me Silek."

After a moment, the computer's voice said, "Silek is not responding to communication requests."

"Patch me through. It's an emergency. Silek, I need your help. Come to my cabin immediately."

There was no response. Perhaps something was wrong with him as well.

"Where is he?"

"In his cabin," the computer's voice answered.

Leaving Kira on the couch, Tracer ran to find Silek as fast as his legs would carry him.

* * *

Tracer skidded into Silek's cabin. *So that's what a Vulcan looks like in a jealous rage.*

Silek sat in meditative position on the floor with a tense jaw and clenched fists. He did not move as Tracer entered. He seemed to be oblivious to the outside world.

Tracer struggled to catch his breath. "Silek, something's wrong with Kira," he panted. "She won't wake up."

That got his attention. Silek's eyes snapped open and he was gone almost before Tracer knew what was happening. Vulcans could move fast when they wanted to.

Taking one last restoring breath, Tracer sprinted after him.

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When he got back to his cabin, Tracer was relieved to see Kira on her feet. But Silek stood just inside the doorway, watching her pace back and forth. He gestured for Tracer to keep his distance.

Kira seemed to be mumbling to herself incoherently.

"What happened?" Silek asked quietly.

"She fell asleep and I think she mind melded me unintentionally. What's wrong with her?"

Kira pounded her wrists on her ears as if trying not to listen to the demons whispering to her.

"She has sustained an injury of the mind. Much as a person who is athletically untrained would injure himself if he suddenly ran a marathon, Kira has hurt herself by overextending her telepathic abilities."

"Can you help her?"

"I will try. But I am not a Healer. And," he added, "she won't let me touch her."

That was ironic. "If you had been more willing to touch her earlier, we wouldn't be in this position."

Silek looked at him sharply. "You know why I didn't."

"Yes," he replied. Cocking a thumb in Kira's direction, he said, "but I think that you missed something important in the risk equation."

Silek's mouth formed a thin line. "It's difficult to account for human females," he said stoically. He stepped towards Kira.

She whirled to face him. "Don't come near me!" she shouted. "You cold-hearted bastard. I won't let you hurt me again!"

It wasn't Kira. Not really. But Tracer could see her words cause Silek pain.

"You used me," she continued. "I wish you'd never come to this ship. You selfish... reptile! Threw me away like a rag when you were done with me." Silek stepped closer. "Go away! I hate you." She clenched her fists and spat, "I hate you!"

Silek stopped edging towards her as if he could not bear to hear anymore.

"Kira," Tracer said, "let us help you."

She turned to him venomously. "Oh, look who's on his side. What a surprise. The spineless hacker!"

Tracer recoiled. "What did *I* do?" he asked defensively.

"What *do* you do? A nerd with delusions of grandeur. No wonder Ann rejected you." *Oh, that hurt.*

"You cannot reason with her, Captain. That part of her mind is not working right now."

Kira resumed pacing and muttering to herself like a madwoman.

"I'll go get a sedative," Tracer said, but Silek shook his head.

"You will not be able to get close enough to administer it. Not without endangering her."

Tracer felt completely helpless. "We can't just leave her like this."

Silek gave him a well-of-course-we-can't look before turning back to Kira.

He sank to his knees and spread his palms in supplication. "Kira."

"I don't want to hear it."

"Please forgive me."

"Shut up."

"Please. You are so beautiful."

She clapped her hands over her ears. "Liar, liar, liar!"

"I have never lied to you, Kira. And I never will. Listen to me. You are beautiful."

For some reason, the words seemed to upset her. She sank to her knees, weeping. Tracer was completely confused.

"I need you, Kira. I love you. I want you."

Kira shook with tears. "You don't want me," she sobbed.

"I do. Let me show you. You are the light in my darkness. The water to my thirst."

Tracer finally guessed what Silek was doing. Since Kira's reason was out to lunch, Silek was talking directly to her emotions.

"Beautiful and strong, like a Sunfire bloom on the mountain. I long to shelter you, though I know you do not need me."

She stopped crying and sniffed. "I do need you," she said softly. "I

let myself need you, because I thought you loved me."

"I do love you. I will always love you. I promise." He moved towards her again. "Please let me hold you. I need you so much." She let him approach.

He gently wrapped his arms around her and held her. She closed her eyes. He spoke softly to her in Vulcan and stroked her hair. Then he slid his finger behind her ear.

For a long time, they were still. Silek's face twitched with concentrated effort. Finally, Kira's eyes opened. She looked mortified. "Silek, I'm so sorry!" She looked at Tracer. "I'm so sorry."

Silek smiled lovingly at her and shook his head. "It wasn't your fault." He ran his fingers through her hair. "Trust me, I understand." She threw her arms around him and they hugged each other.

"Ahem," Tracer said. "I would make a quiet exit, but this is my cabin."

Kira smiled. Silek helped her up. Instead of leaving, however, the Vulcan turned to Tracer. "Captain. I'm sorry."

"For what?"

"I was angry at you last night. But it is unfair of me to be angry at you for doing something I asked you to do."

"I didn't sleep with her."

Silek blinked with confusion. "What?"

"I mean last night. Obviously, she's pregnant, so I did once. Sleep with her, that is. Though neither of us actually slept that time, and last night she did but I didn't."

Silek looked completely confused.

"I don't think you're clearing things up, Jack," Kira said.

Tracer shrugged. "Well, I'm just a good-for-nothing hacker, after all." Kira looked pained. Tracer waved his hand dismissively. "Forget about it. Not your fault."

She turned to Silek. "I didn't come here last night for my 'physical needs.'"

"You wanted to get away from me."

"Yes," Kira admitted. "Being with you was making me feel so..."

unwanted."

"But you understood my logic. For your own safety, I wouldn't let myself want you."

Kira smiled sadly. "Yes. But, you see, *I felt* that if you really loved me, then you shouldn't be able to help yourself."

Silek touched her cheek. "It would appear that my research did not fully prepare me for life with an actual human female."

"Are you kidding?" Tracer said. "Human men still haven't figured out how to live with them!" Kira mocked kicking him in the shin. He dodged playfully.

Silek took Kira's hand. "I will adapt. But you have to tell me how you feel. Help me understand."

Kira nodded. "I did warn you that marrying me would be difficult."

"Yes, you did." He pulled her close.

They were cuddling again. "I don't mean to be rude," Tracer interrupted, "but I haven't slept in over twenty-four hours."

Silek and Kira muttered apologies over each other as they headed towards the exit.

Before the door even shut behind them, he was falling onto the bed. *What a night.*

But before he fell asleep, the comm whistled urgently. "Captain," said one of the engineers. "We need to talk to you. Can you come to Engineering?"

The engineers had never asked him down to Engineering before.

"I'll be right there," he replied, reluctantly heaving himself out of bed. *Why oh why*, he asked himself, *did I ever take this job?*

* * *

The hypospray delivered a mild stimulant to Tracer's blood and he felt much better. "Thank you, Lieutenant." Kira nodded and packed the instrument away.

Tracer turned to the rest of his crew. "Alright, folks, here's the situation. Thanks to the efforts of our engineers, we now know that Starfleet has dispatched a rescue ship to look for us that should be here in two days. Good work, you two." The engineers accepted the praise

graciously. Filtering the message out of the barrage of noise had been no easy task. "In addition, Silek's new simulation model predicts that the star's radiation storm will go on for years. So now we face a challenge. It seems likely that the rescue ship will not be able to locate us in our current position because of the interference with long range sensors. All communication channels are blocked for the same reason. How do we ensure that they don't leave without us?"

Tracer sat down. This felt like one of the hundreds of exercises they'd done back at the Academy. Only this time, their lives depended on their success.

"Is there any way to collect or generate enough power to punch a message through the interference?" Kira asked.

"Doubtful," Silek replied. "Drowning out the power of a star would take the power of a star."

"Can we move to a better location?" Tracer asked. "Take our protective rock with us, perhaps?"

Silek consulted rapidly with the engineers. "Yes," he concluded, "but not fast enough to reach a position where the rescue ship could see us."

They thought of more ideas, but nothing that would work. After a few hours, they were all getting frustrated, so Tracer called for a break.

Silek questioned the wisdom of the interruption. "Logically, we should continue working on the problem to maximize our chances of success in the limited time we have."

"It doesn't work that way for humans, Mr. Silek. Sometimes, stepping away from the problem for a short time helps you approach it from a new angle."

Tracer got something to eat. Kira and Silek followed his lead. The engineers, predictably enough, used the break as an opportunity to check on the engines.

Kira swallowed a bite of food and said to Silek, "I told you they'd send a ship."

Tracer quirked an eyebrow at them. "You thought Starfleet would leave us for dead?" he asked Silek.

"The star is unstable. The odds of us being alive are low. It is not logical to risk the lives of another crew for such a mission."

"Well, lucky for us, Starfleet looks after its own."

Silek paused hesitantly. "Kira does not intend to remain in Starfleet after the child is born."

Tracer shrugged. "Neither do I."

Silek was surprised. "You are willing to leave Starfleet?"

"In case you hadn't noticed, none of the crew of this ship is your average career Starfleet type."

"But you are a captain --"

Tracer snorted. "Do you actually take that seriously? The captain of what? This ship can literally fly itself under normal conditions. Of the four other crew members, one's not even in Starfleet and two told me that they like me because I don't pester them. Kira's the only one in the universe who really thinks of me as a captain. And she's just as qualified for the job as I am."

"That's not true," Kira said. "You have seniority."

"I have one additional year at the Academy! There are no normal parts of Starfleet where anyone is a captain right after graduation. But career Starfleet types don't join SciPACs. So they use what they have." Tracer stirred his food around his plate. "All I really am is a computer scientist who happens to be a decent pilot, with boyhood fantasies of being one of the heroes in the stories I used to read."

Kira shook her head. "Nonsense. You're a natural leader. It was clear from the very first project we did together."

Tracer smiled at her. She really did believe in him. More than once, it had buoyed him through his self-doubt. He couldn't bear the thought of disappointing her, and it repeatedly made him try again when he otherwise would have given up.

"Well, hopefully I can leverage that into a nice, civilian job. One where I'm not about to be killed by an unpredictable star every other day. I've had enough of that for one lifetime."

"On the brighter side," Silek said, "it's helped you prepare for when your child becomes a teenager."

Tracer and Kira stared at him. "Did you just make a joke?" Tracer asked.

"Given that the expected response to a joke is laughter, I would say no."

Grins spread slowly across both human faces. "You did make a joke."

Kira shook her head. "What are they going to think when you go back home? Mark my words, I'm going to be blamed for this." Silek patted her hand.

"Are you planning to settle down on Vulcan, then?"

"No," Silek said at the same time that Kira said, "Maybe." They looked at each other. "We plan to go to Vulcan for awhile," Silek continued, "so that Kira can receive telepath training. But I don't think it's a good place to raise a human child. Vulcan is a harsh world."

"It's better than growing up on a space station in the middle of nowhere," Kira sniffed.

"Well, I'm flexible," Tracer said. "I'll go wherever you two go. Then I'll be able to see the kid every day." He smiled. "I'll take him camping and teach him everything I know. He'll be flying his own ship as soon as he's big enough to reach the controls."

Kira paled. "We'll need to talk about that more later."

The engineers returned. It was time to go back to their more imminent problem.

They sat and looked at the tidbits of calculations from their earlier discussions, hoping for new ideas.

Tracer wondered how long the rescue ship would search. The radiation storm would prevent it from entering the star system. The question was how the other captain would react when faced with no conclusive evidence. Would he go with the logical assumption that *SciPAC 7* had been destroyed? Or would he wait for a complete sensor sweep? Was there any chance that his crew would ferret out a tiny distress signal in the noise?

Suddenly, Kira slapped her hand on the table. "We're trying to solve the wrong problem," she announced. "We don't need to get a

message to the other ship. We just need to let them know we're here. We just need them to be able to see us."

"Signal flare," Tracer said. Kira nodded. The others were not familiar with the old mariner tradition, so Tracer explained it.

"A photon torpedo," Silek proposed. "Modified to reflect a range of frequencies..."

"... would shine like a beacon on long range sensors!" Kira said excitedly.

They all looked to Tracer. "Let's do it," he decided. "Only we'll send three photon torpedoes."

Silek's eyebrow raised. "Increasing the probability of one being seen?"

"No, although it will do that, too" Tracer answered. "Three of anything is a traditional code for human outdoorsmen."

"A code for what?"

"HELP!"

* * *

The combined skills of the crew made short work of designing and building the modified torpedoes.

Tracer gave the order, and the torpedoes streaked into space.

"Beacons are operating as expected," Kira reported.

Tracer looked at the sensor readings and saw the three bright spots clearly on the chaotic background. "Well done, everyone. The rescue ship should arrive tomorrow and be able to locate us."

Kira smiled at him. Hopes were high.

For the next several hours, everything seemed almost normal as the crew went about its business.

Tracer tapped his fingers on the command chair. What if it didn't work? He would feel better if they had a backup plan. The only other option they had come up with was taking their protective rock in tow and heading towards the nearest space station. At impulse speed, it would take about twelve years to reach a place where they could send Starfleet a subspace communication.

He tried to imagine such a journey. He didn't like the idea of his

child growing up inside this tiny ship. A child needed fresh air, and sunshine.

He wondered how long he should wait here before attempting such a departure. A few days, he thought.

The computer signaled for attention.

"Incoming communication!" Kira said excitedly.

"Where is it coming from?" Tracer asked.

Kira tapped her console. "An unmanned shuttle is approaching our position, broadcasting a recorded message."

"The rescue ship arrived early?" An unmanned shuttle would be able to travel through the barrage of radiation safely.

As Kira listened to the message, a huge smile spread across her face. "You'll never guess who they sent." She pressed a button and the message played for the entire bridge.

"-- have seen your signal and communicated your position to Starfleet. Hold your position and await instructions. This shuttle is programmed to return with your reply. Repeat. *SciPAC 7*, this is a message from the *U.S.S. Enterprise*. We have seen your signal and communicated your position to Starfleet. Hold your position --" Kira turned the message off.

Tracer beamed. "Lieutenant Kira, open a channel." She complied and nodded to him. "*Enterprise*, this is Captain Jack Tracer of the Federation science vessel *SciPAC 7*." He glanced at his crew. "We sure are glad to see you...."