... And A Star To Steer Her By

by TMar

Summary

Nighttime on board the Enterprise.

Notes

I wrote this in January 1992. That was a prolific month for me! :)

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Nighttime on board the Enterprise. Much quieter than "daytime", but still one can hear the noises of crewmembers talking to each other, reporting to one another through the ship's communications, some off-duty and wandering the corridors in search of something to do, some in recreation areas enjoying themselves, some silent with only their panels to beep...

If one wants to, one could always sit and look at the stars, either by putting them on the viewscreen or looking through a viewport. A window on the universe...

Somehow, at night, the stars look different. A certain science officer might point out that the stars never change; rather, it is the attitude of the person which changes with the passing of solar time. Solar time does not exist in space, of course, but most life forms need constancy and so, like all other ships with predominantly humanoid crews, the Enterprise has artificial day and night.

At night the corridors are dimmed and there is a hush over the ship. People even walk in a less noisy way, as if trying not to wake the many crewmembers who are asleep after their shifts. It doesn't matter that each cabin is almost soundproofed so that outside noises don't disturb the occupants, it's the thought that counts.

At night the bridge is quiet, too. The screen displays a starfield most of the time, and though the
lights are not dimmed here, the "feeling" is one of peace and tranquility which comes with the night. Perhaps the captain will stalk around the bridge if he's feeling restless, perhaps not. The crewmembers on night duty shifts are used to the senior staff peeping in every so often to be reassured that everything is functioning smoothly.

But the stars... back to the stars. People watch them a lot more at night than during the day. It may be a humanoid predisposition to think of the stars as things one doesn't see during the day, so often the most beautiful starfields are ignored while it is day on the Enterprise, but admired during the night.

Very few people know where their home star is when they are on the ship. The computer can, of course, provide a schematic layout of where the ship is and where a certain star is, but no one bothers as space is so big it really doesn't matter. One cannot see constellations on the ship, either, at least not the ones which are visible from a home planet. Terrans can often make out the Pleiades and other bright stars, but will not know their relation to Earth.

A certain science officer can always cite the exact direction of any star or planet from the Enterprise's position in the galaxy, but people don't ask him that often because they fear it will make him insufferable, and anyway the computer has that information.

So to the people on the Enterprise, it is as if they are afloat in a great cosmic ocean, dependent on mechanical means to navigate and get where they are going. Like the ships of old, the Enterprise carries many supplies for its crew, and everyone on board lives day-to-day as if the Enterprise IS a world in itself. And for the people who live much of their lives on board, it is.

One can see this most at night, when everything is quiet. People want for nothing. Sport, entertainment, a stroll among flowers, a friendly game or two, a quiet lounge - everything is there, used with reverence like it all would be on Earth late at night.

Strangely enough, many people seem to find the Engineering deck to be the most peaceful place of all. There is nothing to do there if you are off-duty, but the hum of the engines has a hypnotising effect, and the semi-darkness of the engineering deck makes one feel totally tranquil and very happy to be alive. The engineer doesn't mind if people "crash" in Engineering as long as he can bother them every so often to discuss the latest formula he's found or enthuse over some adjustment he's made to the dilithium crystal chamber. People who come to Engineering at night are used to this, and it's a good way to make friends.

Sickbay, too, is quiet, the lights dimmed, the only sound being the body-functions monitors of a patient or two who might be spending the night. Unlike the engineer, the doctor doesn't like the patients to be bothered, so Sickbay is not a good place to crash, unless one is up for a quiet chat and kind word.

Even the turbolifts seem hushed at night, though this is merely an illusion. A certain science officer would say that the sound put out by the turbolifts does not change, and the same amount of energy is expended to operate them in the night as in the day. But the turbolifts seem far more intimate and - yes -smaller at night, strangely enough because people are usually in them alone. They do not seem to be the businesslike, efficient, bright modes of transport that they are during the day.

Nighttime on the Enterprise. A wonderful time to be awake, to marvel at how different it all is. For some reason, no alien "god-like" entities get interested in the ship when it is nighttime. The Federation's enemies are probably all sleeping too. All too soon it will be over and then daytime will be upon everyone.

All will remember the peace of an artificially created and yet very real night, all will remember the beauty of the stars, and all will be glad to be aboard a special ship where each person is part of a
much larger family. Everyone will go back on duty - Sickbay will light up, Engineering will begin to bustle, and the bridge will come to life. Yet it will be in aftermath of another lovely night's peace.

Nighttime on the Enterprise. It happens once every twenty-four hours. No two nights are the same, and yet in memory they all blur into peace and tranquility. As do the mornings.

Good morning, Captain. Good morning, Captain.
'Morning, Spock. 'Morning, Number One.

And the adventure continues...

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