



UFOP: Starbase 118 Writing Challenge

July & August 2014

Fashion

The winner of our May & June Challenge, Brian, aka Lieutenant Ren Rennyn, offers the following prompt:

I'm rewatching TOS, and got to "Is There No Truth In Beauty?", where (spoilers) Dr. Miranda Jones' elaborate dress turns out to be a sensor web that allows her to "see." It got me thinking about how fashion is used in sci-fi, whether as a plot device, or to set the scene, define a culture, or place us in a certain time.

There are plenty of ways an entry for this Challenge could unfold, and in addition to Brian's example of Dr. Jones, I'll offer these inspirations from TNG, courtesy of io9: [Seasons 1-3](#) and [seasons 4-7](#).

Many of our Challenges have posed an open-ended, often-moralistic question as their inspiration, but this is even more open-ended than those, since fashion can be taken in so many different ways. Or, as my *New Oxford American Dictionary* says, *a popular trend, esp. in styles of dress and ornament or manners of behavior; a manner of doing something; to make into a particular or the required form.*

Without further ado, the "Fashion" Challenge!

Fashion Story Collection

["Fatal Mistake"](#)

Judges' Comments

Jalana Laxyn

["Dress Greens"](#)

Judges' Comments

Irina Pavlova

["Fashion Misunderstanding"](#)

Judges' Comments

Idril Mar

["Dressed to Kill....."](#)

Judges' Comments

Hannibal Parker

["Re: Implementation of a New Fleetwide Uniform"](#)

Judges' Comments

Atherton Grix

Fatal Mistake

(Jalana Laxyn)

((A cell, somewhere))

:: The darkness surrounding Claire was heavy on her shoulders. She could grasp it, almost, before her fingers slipped through the thick black soup that embraced her wholly. Raising her hand she could not even see that, so Claire's mind began to wander, wondering if it was even still there. Was any of her body still there or was her spirit just in a void between lives? ::

:: A sudden beam of blinding light drilled its way into her eyes, pain flooding through her as she instinctively threw herself to the floor - there was a floor that was a good sign of not being in the void - and covered her head with her arm. Good that was still there as well. Claire had shut her eyes tight to block out any of the light, as light was pain. ::

:: Voices came closer, undefined sounds that she could not make any sense from. What language was that? Her badge pressed against her chest, it was still there, why did it not translate? Where was she, that Starfleet had not encountered it enough to adapt to their patterns? How did she even get here? ::

:: Last Claire remembered was sitting in the ship's bar of the USS Potemkin, off-duty, having a drink with her colleagues and talking about the mission that did lie ahead. They had noticed some strange energy readings and had theorized - mostly just fooling around - where they might have come from. It had been a while after that she had left for her quarters. A dizzy feeling had made walking difficult and Claire had assumed that she had possibly one too many to drink. But then things got really bad and she had hit the floor just a few steps behind her quarter's door, missing the couch by a few inches.::

:: And that was it, she had woken up in darkness, the same unchanging darkness she still was in. Well, the darkness before the light had cut through it. The sounds, or voices as Claire thought they were, had come closer, worry flooded her, the not knowing where she was and who they were. Afraid that the light would hurt her again she kept her head low, maybe nobody saw her when she did not see them. Such a childish thought. ::

:: It did not work of course. When Claire felt the touch on her arm she almost jumped. It did not feel like skin, more like leather and it pulled her up without much effort. Squeezing her eyes shut, now that the arm-cover was gone, she could feel cool breath on her face. Curiosity spread in her body and carefully she peeked through a thin slit, as she raised the lids just a little. ::

:: The light came from behind the person so she only saw a dark shade. The voice, now only one close to her and coming from the person holding her arm. Would they understand her? She was not sure but she had to try. ::

Claire: Where am I?

:: Again those sounds. Hissing, gnarling, clacking. Claire had no doubt that he was trying to talk with her, but there was no way she could make sense out of what came out of his mouth. For some reason she was sure it was a he, maybe she was wrong, but she would possibly not find out. When he turned his head she could see scales in the shade that fell on his face. That would explain the leathery feel. ::

Claire: Please, I don't know what I am doing here.

:: She hated not knowing if he understood her or not, even more than not knowing what he said. Another voice came from behind him, covered by the big face in her view. ::

Claire: I do not understand you. Why am I here?

:: She had to try, maybe they had heard her language before. What a glimmer of possibility, but she would never know if she did not try. From behind the one in front of her Claire could hear beeping sounds, they sounded familiar, but still strange. Almost like the sounds that came from pressing buttons on consoles. ::

Reptile man: Hrane ioan trema.

:: Claire's blue eyes darted to the one holding her when she could hear a change in the noises he made for words. They did not sound just as foreign anymore, but still a language she did not understand. The reptile shook his head and she heard more beeping from behind. She looked him over as much as she could, the light not hurting that much any more. He wore something in a steel blue, it looked like leather and metal, but she could not be too sure. ::

Reptile man: G'Tak one tira... ::Claire shook her head slightly and the beeping continued while the man spoke more until finally... :: ... will be eliminated.

Claire: :: Her eyes grew wide:: What? Eliminated?

Reptile man: This is the right one. ::Turning his head to her:: You will be eliminated.

Claire: But... but why? I do not even know how I got here.

Reptile man: Your ship entered our territory. It was scanned and violations against the law registered.

Claire: Which law?

Reptile man: Our laws of course. You broke the law, you will be eliminated.

:: A thousand questions swirled in Claire's head like a tornado. When had they entered the territory of these reptiles? Nothing had been on the star charts and they had just been on the way to their mission. Which law had she broken and could she explain them that she had no idea? Would that matter? If she was here, were there more of the ship or was she the only one? She was not a diplomat, she had no idea how to deal with those situations, but she hoped to find answers by asking the right questions. But what were the right questions? ::

Claire: I was not aware of your laws.

Reptile man: That does not matter.

:: He let go of her arm and Claire dropped back to the ground like a sack of potatoes. He stretched his legs

and as he raised she saw that he was really big. ::

Claire: Please, let me explain...

Reptile man: No explanation needed. Your mockery will not be tolerated. You will meet your ancestors within the hour.

:: He started to walk towards the door, the place where the light came from. It was so bright it was hard to see something of him. ::

Claire: At least tell me what my crime is.

:: The other reptile joined him at the door, standing behind to block some of the light, so she could see him somewhat better. He was tall, green scales covering his body, at least the parts she saw, and he wore a steel blue uniform. The other wore a uniform as well, but it was of a pale purple. Maybe to represent their department or rank, Claire thought. His eyes were piercing red and she wondered how she had not seen that before. He watched her for a moment, looking her over and if a reptile could show emotions she could interpret, she could have sworn that his showed disgust. ::

:: He took a step back and the door began to close. She almost thought that she would not get an answer, but just as the last gap brought a hint of light into the room she heard him. ::

Reptile man: You are mocking us, you will die. Because ... you are wearing green.

:: Then darkness came. Not only in the room, pitch black and swallowing, but also in Claire's heart. Who would have thought that choosing this one dress would have such consequences. She stared into the void, into the nothingness that surrounded her, getting a hold of her insides beginning to crush them under the weight of the knowledge what would happen next, because she had chosen a certain completely irrelevant dress to wear::

:: Feeling the salty traces of her despair run down her cheeks she hoped, prayed to any deity that would listen even if not her own, that she was found, so this shimmer of light had not been the last she ever saw.

::

"Fatal mistake"

Writer's Character: Jalana

Comments from Judge 1 (Character Cassandra Egan Manno)

I'll admit that, upon my first reading, this story was a heartbreaker. Poor Claire, the kidnapped kindergarten teacher, sentenced to death for wearing green! Where this story could have been preachy or ham-fisted, however, it's pleasingly abrupt; I thought the end, which ends without rescue or execution, but with Claire alone and despairing, is incredibly strong and incredibly gutsy. Well done! I also like the scope of the story: There's no galaxy at stake here but, as many stories did this time around (and I love that they did), the major stakes are personal and manifest in monologue or dialogue. Claire, with the unknown lizard alien, jogs between the two, and the result is a pleasing but distressing story about what happens to a Starfleet officer when there is no rescue at the end of the day. Very strong stuff!

Claire's fear and despair are written very convincingly, and I'll admit that my only sticking point in this story is that they might have been too convincing for the ultimate reveal that Claire's sin was that she wore green. The crime seems too cartoonish because of its buildup, and I'd challenge this writer to think about her strengths (emotional writing, character creation, pacing) and question the decision of the crime's reveal. For example, I could see a story in which the first thing Claire understands is that she's been sentenced to death for wearing green. As a result, she not only despairs but has to grapple with the absurdity of the situation, and I think that recognition (of absurdity) would make this story even stronger. The Federation may be all about IDIC (the Vulcan philosophy of Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations), but some of that starts to look exceptionally absurd when seen close up, especially when it tries to kill you.

Comments from Judge 2 (Character Ren Rennyn)

This story, with its twist ending, could be compared to a Twilight Zone-style tale, where the resolution is unexpected and unjust, leaving the reader off-balance at the end. The identity of the main character, not a Starfleet officer, but a teacher, is smart and effective. Claire was brave enough to join a mission to deep space, but didn't sign up for something like this. I instantly felt for her, and the tragedy of her end is enhanced by this.

Claire is disoriented by darkness, bright lights, and untranslated speech. The alien speech had me just as disoriented, putting me into the story to sense what Claire must feel. It punctuated her thoughts, adding layers of confusion. More could have been made of Claire's growing ability to see and identify details, but it forms a strong line through the story as it stands, up to the moment her fate becomes clear. The identification of colors - the aliens' blue and purple uniforms, their red eyes - cleverly foreshadows the final surprise without giving it away.

There are a few spelling and grammatical errors, particularly in the use of run-on sentences. These could easily be improved by some light editing. The creativity and strong use of details in this story had me on the edge of my seat throughout.

“Dress Greens”

(Irina Pavlova)

Everything had changed. 219 years had passed, people grew old, withered, and died. Buildings were built, treaties were signed and wars were fought. Irina had changed herself, though not nearly to the extent everyone else does over such a long period of time. There were red flecks in the whites of her eyes, while the lustrous deep yellow gold of her hair was now more of a platinum blond, bleached in the same ultraviolet radiation that had long since fried all of the cones in her eyes and reduced her vision to black and white, with a somewhat limited pallet of grays.

Thirty-nine members of USS Columbia’s away team had shuttled down to Kjenta II from their ruined hulk of a starship all of those years ago, and now four of them were back. There were nine others who had survived the whole time in stasis, including Irina’s own four-year-old daughter Katya, and now, today, they were to be presented back into a universe that had long since abandoned them.

It was a strange sort of occasion, originally scheduled as a eulogy/funeral type ceremony to mark the loss of a much more modern ship, the Sovereign-class USS Discovery-C through the very same Aurix wormhole that had claimed the far smaller and more primitive NX-class Columbia two and a quarter centuries earlier. Something about Discovery not having working comms prevented anyone from notifying Deep Space 285 until a few hours before their arrival, and the funeral was quickly changed to a welcome home party, again more for the benefit of the Discovery crew and their families who thought their loved-ones dead than for anyone on the Columbia, most of whom having been forgotten long ago.

Captain Waltas had ordered everyone in both crews to wear their finest dress white uniforms, and for the crew of the Columbia, that meant 22nd century uniforms. Waltas wanting to show off his treasure or something like that. Being a marine, Irina’s dress uniform was green rather than white, but the idea was the same, fancy and stiff with all of the frills.

Irina stood in front of the mirror as she looked at the two uniforms laid out on the bed. One was crisp and new, only worn on three occasions and perfectly preserved across time in the cold vacuum of space that was her quarters on the Columbia. The other, not a dress uniform at all, was the clothes she had worn her last day on Kjenta II. The pants and undershirt were marine issue, but faded, sewn, patched and more recently thrashed by bullets, road rash and more than a little of her own blood. The leather flight jacket also had bullet holes and blood stains, but the thick hide had stood up to the road rash with only some abrasion and discoloration at the left shoulder and back.

Standing at the mirror in her underwear, Irina desperately wanted to put on the ruined pants and jacket and walk out onto the stage as she really was, damaged goods, faded and worn by time with the color long gone. Just like the uniform pants and marine flight jacket, she remained obviously military, yet also wild, even savage.

It was strange the things one remembered. As Irina put the dress uniform pants on, she had to give a bit of a tug as the material stretched a bit to conform to legs far more muscular than those that had worn them before. She was almost the same height, generally the same shape. Her waist was only an inch bigger around, while her thighs and biceps had each grown a bit more. She stood a little over an inch shorter than when the uniform had been made, now a few tenths over 5’6”, instead of a few below 5’8”,

but had gained a full 100 lbs in bone and muscle density. The uniform fit, mostly on account of the synthetic fibers it was woven from and their expansive properties.

Uniform on, Irina proceeded to attach the various and sundry ribbons, medals and insignia until she was so festooned with militaria as to look more like the old recruiting posters than the woman marooned for 219 years on that inhospitable rock. She looked, civilized.

Some other things besides Irina's weight and physique had changed, including some additions to the uniform. There was a modern 24th century purple heart medal, alongside the two 22nd century versions, not to mention the rank of marine captain instead of first lieutenant. Irina thought it funny she was going to what was originally a funeral wearing a rank that was awarded to her "posthumously" in 2172.

Uniform complete, the last pieces were shoes and gloves, which she'd had new ones made on Discovery. The inch and a half of height she'd lost to Kjentia II's high gravity were made up with non-regulation 2 1/5 inch heel, with regulations the furthest thing from her mind. She'd spent some time trying to put her hair into a neat and professional bun like she used to wear it, but her left hand wasn't cooperating with her right due to nerve damage she'd suffered when their shuttle crashed so long ago, and in frustration she just let it hang, though cut now to shoulder length instead of mid-back as it had been on Kjentia. She wore no makeup, which combined with the wild-looking straight hair and the ever-present red flecks in her gray eyes presented an image somewhat different than that of her personnel photo. Of course, Irina couldn't see any of the colors, including the one red and one green sock that to her were the same shade of medium gray, and didn't care if anything was out of place or incorrect anyway.

Dressed, Irina made her way to the small antechamber to the large auditorium where the ceremony was taking place. She looked at each of her 11 surviving shipmates, all of them wearing Starfleet uniforms while she as the lone marine rather stuck out, even in Irina's monochromatic vision. The 8 officers revived from stasis tubes kept looking at Irina's mismatched socks, while the other three who had survived the ordeal on the planet and were every bit as colorblind as she, didn't notice. Mismatched socks or not, nobody in the small room said a word.

Waltas spoke over the PA system telling tales of bravery and sacrifice and other such nonsense. He made the empty promises of how the federation in all its benevolent nicety niceness would be so very nice to the Columbia survivors and help them transition into this wonderful, enlightened and yes, nice century where everything was flowers and unicorns and feces no longer stunk. Then as the applause died down, Waltas' voice took on a more triumphant and less somber tone.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I now present to you the crew of the USS Columbia, Naval Construction Code number Zero-Zero-Three." There was thundrous applause, which died quickly as Captain Waltas raised his hands. "Lieutenant Commander Graciela Solis, chief medical officer. Lieutenant Rebecca Moore, assistant chief engineer. Lieutenant Michael Thomas, assistant chief science officer."

The names were called one by one, and each was followed by the loud applause that to Irina's sensitive hearing sounded almost like gunfire and despite her knowledge of what it in fact was, her heart still was beating fast and her hands sweating more than she would like.

When she was alone in the room, Waltas spoke again. "Lastly, Marine Captain Irina Pavlova, Chief of Security."

Irina walked out onto the stage and felt every one of the ten or twelve thousand eyes on her, heard the applause increase in volume and frequency. Her heart beat faster and she fought the overwhelming urge to run. Two steps, three. The incessant applause wouldn't stop. Twelve steps, thirteen, left face, halt. She stood there at attention, her fists clenched so tightly her knuckles cracked, adding to the staccato horror.

Waltas spoke again. "Ladies and gentlemen, true pioneers."

The audience all stood up and cupped their hands as they clapped, the roar deafening. Irina could feel her grip on reality slipping as she her eyes started darting about, looking for the nearest exits, the path of least resistance while her rational mind tried desperately to keep her feet from moving.

She couldn't hold it anymore, and pushing through Crewman Saunders Irina bolted from the small formation as the applause suddenly came to a stop in sync with her motion. She didn't look back, just quickly closed the 15 feet to the side door, veritably threw the security guard out of the way as she slammed against the door and found that the push bar was quite locked, but the wooden door itself was no match for almost 200 lbs of fast-moving marine desperate to get out of the room.

Irina wasn't sure how far she'd run, only that she'd gone through about three more doors and finally found an empty room where she could stop and try to get her wits about her. She had no idea how long she just stood there, and while she knew there were people on the other side of the door she'd come in through, they were, thankfully, not crowding in. Finally the door did open, but it was a familiar face to come in.

"Come on back, Irina, its fine now."

"What's fine Grace? Did the 24th century pack up and leave? There's no going back, and I'm afraid to go forward."

"I know" Graciela Solis said as she walked up right in front of Irina and held out her hand. "Come on back, we're all afraid to go forward, but we have to do it anyway."

"Its different for you, you slept through it."

"Yes, I slept through it. You didn't. But as you said, there is no going back, but you can, you must go forward. If not for you, then for your daughter. Katya needs you, and from I heard from the Discovery's team that went down there to get you, I think this century might need you as well."

"We are over 200 years out of date, they don't need us to be anything except museum exhibits."

"Your wrong. The machines get bigger, faster, more powerful, but its always the people behind them that make the difference. Don't ever forget, we were picked for Columbia because we were the best that Earth had to offer. I'd wager we still are."

"And if they don't give us a chance to show it? If they put us out to pasture?"

“Don’t let them. If you run and hide your fears will come true, but if you go back out there and face the future, somehow I’m sure you’ll get another ship, maybe even one of your own someday.”

“I’m a marine, we don’t get ships.”

“Rewrite the rules then. You kept everyone alive on that planet all those years. You kept Captain Waltas and his crew alive when went down to rescue you. I have a hard time believing the Starfleet of the 24th century would be stupid enough to throw that away.”

Irina just listened, while her eyes kept going back to the door. Finally she unclenched her fists, took a deep breath and locked her gaze on the Columbia’s doctor. “Okay Grace, we’ll try it your way.”

With that, the two women walked out of the supply room, back through the personnel and finance offices and finally to the main hallway and back into the auditorium. The security guard at the broken door shot her a dirty look, but Irina just smiled and walked past him, and out into the seething mass of humanity and other species.

Comments from Judge 1 (Character Cassandra Egan Manno)

Wow! I've read and reviewed several stories involving Irina and her struggles to assimilate into times and places unfamiliar to her, and I think this may be the finest entry I've read. The titular focus that allows Irina to access her thoughts and feelings, her dress greens, are a clever gateway for the storytelling, and there's an emotional depth here that I appreciated and seems entirely warranted by Irina's situation. The recitation of Irina's vital statistics -- her height, her weight, even the height of her shoes' heels -- compare favorably with other post-war writing I enjoy, most notably with Tim O'Brien, specifically his often-taught short story "The Things They Carried."

In future stories of Irina -- and I hope there are many more to come! -- I would strongly urge the writer to continue uncovering her emotional underpinnings. I found the sections when Irina was most cerebral, dealing in her own mind without lots of external action, to be the most effective way to explore those underpinnings, and I thought that, again, her inspection of her uniform and her awards, as well as her reactions during Waltas's speech, to be very fine. However, I was a little disappointed when she actually ran from the hall. In my mind, it would have been more effective to watch Irina think about running away, but not actually doing it -- because she is, after all, an experienced professional, and she would know that such an action would accomplish nothing -- but I want to see, in the story, the fruition of that realization.

I was a little distracted by some common mistakes (comma splices or omissions, confusion with its/it's, your/you're, etc), so I would recommend running future stories through spelling and grammar checks to ensure that the presentation is the best it can be!

Comments from Judge 2 (Character Toni Turner)

Irina Pavlova hit new heights in characterization and descriptions in this story of a woman surviving 219 years and finding herself dumped into a virtually new world. The only thing that had stayed the same was that she was a Marine. But a Marine whose fear of the alien world made her reluctant to step into the future.

The descriptions of the only uniforms she had were so vivid, I could visualize them. I imagined the physical changes of her body made her uncomfortable. But despite all the struggles, in the end, she faced the future for her child

Kudos on a nice piece of work, Irina. Well done!

"Fashion Misunderstanding"

(Idril Mar)

K'tal looked at the Trill man, his mouth slightly open in shock.

"You want to know *what*?" he said.

"I said I want to know about the forehead thing. If I help you, you tell me," Azulay said matter of factly.

He was stuck. He had to have the Trill Ambassador's help procuring the wine for his wedding, but the subject of the foreheads was not something that his people talked about ever. The prohibition was especially strict when it came to non-Klingons. He resolved to put it off as long as he could.

"Deal, but I decide the place and time."

"On your honor?"

"Yes."

The Trill man died only a few weeks later and K'tal thought he was safe, the secret of his people protected from the deal he had made with the Trill man. He had mourned Azulay's passing, but secretly thanked fate that he did not have to talk about his people's secret shame.

That was, until that fateful day in San Francisco, almost three decades later.

K'tal suppressed a groan. Whenever he met with Joanna Wilde, the meetings always took interesting turns. This would likely be no different. It wasn't that he disliked her, really, but she was... well... too human.

"Liaison Wilde, it has been far too long," the Ambassador said, taking the woman's hand in his own gnarled one.

"K'tal," Joanna said with a smile, "I'd like you to meet my future daughter-in-law and Starfleet officer LtCmd Idril Mar."

The Klingon turned towards her and nodded in greeting. Why was it that the name sounded familiar?

Idril smiled, knowing he had no idea who she was. "Ambassador. You're looking a little older and a little more round in the middle, but good overall."

The Klingon responded in his gruff voice. "I'm sorry, you have me at a disadvantage. Do I know you?"

"We've met before," the Independence's Chief Engineer said with a smile, "but it has been about 25 years."

She could see the recognition dawn on his face.

"Mar... the Trill. Ah yes, how could I forget?" He slapped Idril on the shoulder. "You are looking much more attractive these days. Obviously the 25 years have been kinder to you than to me." He patted his rather rotund belly with a laugh.

The redhead chuckled. A couple hours later, the two old friends found themselves at the bar, sharing a bottle of bloodwine and memories. The Trill's new host, though, seemed to be a much less capable drinker than the one with whom he had been friends.

"Sho... I remember a promish you made to Azulay," Idril slurred out.

"Oh? I remember no promise. Enlighten me, Mar."

"The shmooth heads," she said.

"What?" K'tal make a puzzled face, even though he knew exactly what she was talking about.

"A censhury ago, lotsh of Klingons had shmooth heads you know, no ridgeshes or bumpies," she giggled. "How come you guysh had shmooth heads?"

His demeanor changed from the boisterous and laughing to much more serious. "That is a complex story, Mar, and one we do not share."

"A promish ish a promish, my old frend," Idril slurred and slapped the Klingon on the shoulder.

He sighed and took a long drink off his mug of bloodwine, then poured another.

"I know. You must swear to never tell another."

"I schwear."

"Well, it began with the *Enterprise*."

"Kirksh ship?"

"No, before that. Archer's ship, the first one."

Idril looked puzzled, but stayed quiet.

"The Empire was at war with the..."

"The Shooliban. Yesh, yesh but what does thish have to do with the forehead bumpies?"

"Well, remember, that Archer was the first human that the Empire had come across. His dealings with the Suliban impressed many on QonoS." K'tal nodded, almost to himself. "He was seen as cunning and skillful and, incorrectly I might add, it was assumed the Archer was indicative of all humans."

The Trill woman, still a bit fuzzy, repeated her question. "What doesh thish have to do with the forehead

bumpies?"

"Remember, that only a few years after first contact, war broke out between Romulus and Earth as well." The Ambassador took a drink of his wine, then continued. "For more than a century, even the Vulcans had been unsuccessful at taming their more aggressive cousins. They were considered one of the greatest threats to the Empire, an existential threat. Now consider that, within a few short years, Earth crushed the Romulan war machine and ended their threat to the whole quadrant. An epic victory. Some, especially among the youth, looked at the humans and saw a mighty warrior culture, one worthy of emulation in every way. Food... clothing... even literature."

The Klingon dropped his voice to a whisper.

"Some whisper that the Empire organized a time-travel expedition to plant a translated Shakespeare in our history so that we could claim him as our own." Idril hiccupped, then giggled at the notion.

"Even after we and Earth began our own war, the fascination continued."

By this point, the drink and the heat in the room were obviously getting to the woman, and K'tal reached over to save her from falling unceremoniously off the chair. Joanna Wilde would not have appreciated her future daughter-in-law coming back with bruises.

The drunk engineer waved off his help. "Ok, ok... sho the kidsh liked Earth. Why the smooth headsh?"

"Then, in the late 2200s, cosmetic surgical practices began to be available on the homeworld. It became popular to... alter one's appearance to look more... human."

The Independence's Chief Engineer just gawked at the Klingon, her mouth open in shock. Then it began, a quiet giggle at first, but slowly building into full-out hysterical laughter. For more than a few minutes, everyone in the bar stared as K'tal shifted uncomfortably on his seat, wishing he was anywhere but in front of the manically laughing Trill woman. Idril fell off her chair and the thump on her backside seemed to sober her up a bit, at least so much as allow her to start catching her breath.

"So you're shaying... it... it was a *fad*?" she gasped out.

"A fad," the Klingon admitted.

"And when you realized that humanity wasn't a warrior cultushure..." she started, climbing back into her chair unsteadily.

"Imagine our disappointment," he finished.

Idril's mind was awash with images of dour Klingon warriors in blue jeans and bright orange mohawks and slipped into a fit of drunken giggling again.

K'tal sighed, getting up and walking over to the bar to get a new bottle of bloodwine. When he got back, the redhead was passed out on the table. He poured another drink for himself and contemplated the evening's revelations.

The next morning, Idril woke up on a couch that she recognized as one of the ambassadorial suites. Her head, though, felt like it was trying to hold in an out-of-control warp core.

"Uuuuuuuugh," was the only sound she could manage.

"Here. Drink." The voice, soft as it was, still set her head ringing. She took the drink: water with lemon in it. "You handled your wine much better when you were Azulay."

"I was fifty pounds heavier and male," she replied, wincing at the sound of her own voice. "And I drank more than, too." She took another sip of the lemon water, and opened her eyes the tiniest crack that she could manage. "I don't remember anything from last night after we got to the bar. We were talking about something, weren't we?"

K'tal shrugged and responded without skipping a beat.

"It wasn't important."

"Fashion Misunderstanding"
Writer's Character: Idril Mar

Comments from Judge 1 (Character Ren Rennyn)

Here's an engaging story that capably combines personal characterization with established Star Trek canon. There are several elements at play here - Klingon history, Kirk and Archer references, and use of a well-established 118 character - that could easily overpower or confuse the story. Instead, the elements are well-balanced and used to good effect. Without knowing a great deal of Mar's established history, I have enough of a sense of her that the story entertains me without interruption. References to canon play their part without stealing focus. Klingon and Trill characteristics are explained in brief where they effect the story, feeding the reader information as needed, leading to the final joke. The story works for me as a Star Trek fan, and would work for a non-fan as well.

The third-person narration is told mostly from K'tal's perspective, but a couple of times, it shifts to Mar's perspective in a way that can be jarring. Smoothing this out would take the story all the way from sim style to short story style, Either way, it's an entertaining story and well told.

Comments from Judge 2 (Character Sal Taybrim)

I admit I am a fan of lighthearted stories. I find they often put less focus on flowery writing and get to the nitty gritty of plot and character development than the dark and brooding stories.

I found this an enjoyable little story arc. Tightly written and amusing. I found the language was clear and the descriptions clean. It is a good, solid entry to the challenge.

To make this story better, I would love to see a stronger development of K'tal as a Klingon. I admit I found myself wondering what species he was at first because he didn't really seem very 'Klingon Warrior.' A good strong characterization would not only make this story shine brighter, but could bring out even more comedy. I also think you could explore the relationship K'tal had/has with both Mar hosts. Develop how well he knew Azulay and how he reacts to Idril. These relationships and the development and humor that comes from them could bring their piece from a good story to a great one. Or in other words – character development is the difference between a story that I am glad I read, and one that I want to read all the sequels to.

Dressed to Kill.....

(Hannibal Parker)

((Luxury Quarters, Stargazer Hotel, Orion))

Her feet were exquisitely pedicured in the French style, her long, muscular body tanned honey brown, her curly blonde hair streaming down her naked back to just below her shoulders. A jeweled belly button ring hung from her pierced navel, and aqua blue eye shadow, matching her dress, was meticulously applied. Her long, tanned legs were freshly shaved, and she looked down at the four inch stiletto aqua blue sandals lying at the foot of the bed, giving the six foot woman an even more towering presence.....

She scented her body with a combination of fragrances...one from Risa, one from Earth (Paris, more specifically), combining with a special oil from Orion itself. The fragrance was designed to be intoxicatingly powerful to the right male who took in the subtle fragrance...to others, she would just smell good. Designed to not lose its allure for several hours, the woman was sure sometime that evening, she would ensnare her prey.....

Her aqua blue mini dress lay on the bed. The halter top dress was tantalizingly short, with a deep, plunging neckline which ran down to just below her navel. Her only lament was that she had not been blessed with the most impressive bustline, but the realization that a bigger bust would tend to get in the way of her other activities, it was a trade off she could live with. They were not huge, but constant training ensured that they were perky, divided, and noticeable. Two-sided tape had proved its worth over the centuries, and as she slipped the wisp of a dress over her head, she applied it to the areas needed to keep her breasts obvious, and in place.

Her fingernails were also aqua blue, just slightly longer over her fingertips...no false nails here..her hands allowed her to do the occasionally delicate work she did, so long false nails were a burden which was unneeded.

A perfect, understated dash of aqua blue eye shadow adorned her eyelids. Standing in her bare feet, she looked in the mirror. Another regret crossed her mind. Here she was, checking in under an assumed name, in a dress she would never wear again, to charm a man she had grown to hate. Months of careful surveillance involving several operatives were going to culminate tonight in her administering the most harshest of penalties to a man who was responsible for the deaths of hundreds of Federation citizens and Starfleet personnel. That was not her regret...her regret was that she would have loved to have worn it for the massive, brash, but gentlemanly Special Forces Marine Hannibal Parker. A month ago, they met in a bar, took out four Nausicans, then spent a fantastic three days together. Kamela had never believed in love at first sight, but she knew that weekend was special. While they made no special plans, she knew they would find each other again.

Putting on her high heel sandals, Starfleet Intelligence operative Kamela Allison was now ready to take

on her assignment...a very nasty-tempered human from Alpha Centauri by the name of Phineas Tredeau...but it wasn't his temper which interested SFI...it was his appetite for his willingness and ability to sell prohibited weapons to those not friendly to the Federation which had to be terminated with extreme prejudice...Tredeau had few weaknesses, but one was his Achilles' heel...his desire of beautiful, tall, blond women. On a planet of beautiful women, where sex was as easy as saying hello, Kamela was the perfect bait. She knew where he was going to be...cultivated intelligence had made sure he would be in the club across the street soon. He was known to be punctual, but she had planned to make her entrance after he had eaten and was enjoying the scenery of semi-naked women and the opportunity to make a deal...an activity she would circumvent permanently.

Grabbing her aqua blue clutch purse, Kamela headed out into the night...she would not return here when the deed was done. No matter how careful she was, she could leave no traces of her presence and would make her escape to the Federation embassy, then off the outlaw planet. There would be no DNA, no fingerprints...only the lingering odor of her fragrance would be the only acknowledgement that she had ever been there. Cutting off the lights, Kamela headed out the door, her heels clicking on the marble floor.....

"Dressed to Kill....."

Writer's Character: Hannibal Parker

Comments from Judge 1 (Character Cassandra Egan Manno)

This story takes the Challenge's topic and runs with it! The story chooses for quiet reflection for its short length, and it eschews dialogue entirely, a choice I was excited to see this writer had made! Well done! The colors here are sumptuous, and the repetition of colors and color-related words -- aqua blue and tanned, notably -- immediately create the evocative atmosphere (tropical, vacation, even paradisaical) I think the writer had in mind.

I'll admit that the story's description of Kamela left me a little uncomfortable. She appears to be less of a character and more of an object for the unthinking consumption of the reader; it's notable that the only time in which we get to see her thoughts, outside of physical descriptions of her, are when she's thinking of a pair of men (Parker and Tredeau). I can see shades and flashes of Kamela as a competent professional -- an SFI agent, a very respectable and professional position -- but I would like to see her thoroughly explored as a character, not as an object. I would challenge the writer to put her in a situation in which there are no romantic moments or thoughts of love or seduction involved. How will she respond? What sort of intelligence agent is she? Show us the character beneath the blue and tan and I will happily follow you!

Comments from Judge 2 (Character Sal Taybrim)

This entire piece feels like one long gratuitous camera-pan up a half naked woman's body that is oh so prevalent in today's action movies. (Except in some Marvel movies where they pan up, say, Thor's naked chest so the ladies get their cookies, too...) So I am of a mixed mind of this: it takes the theme and runs with it, making the intentions extremely clear. I like clarity, and I like it when a story can clearly communicate what it is and what it is doing in a short space of time. On the other hand I found myself a bit bored with what seemed like a typical titillation trick and wanted to see the actual action and characterization of the story. You know, the good parts where the seduction and subsequent assassination happens, or we find out about what makes Kamela tick.

My biggest problem with this story is the sixth paragraph. It should be the most engaging part of the story, the part where it brings everything else together and binds it into her motivation for this intensive fashion focus. But the language falls apart. This paragraph is very difficult to read. There are too many pauses, run-on sentences and rambling narrative. Right in the area where you need to punch your readers with the *raison d'etre*. Re-writing this to make this paragraph concise and focused would really help tie to this story together, as well as emphasizing the idea that Lieutenant Allison is doing this for a reason: her mind is focused, clear and every bit up to this part has been meticulously planned for this very good reason.

Grammar Nazi quibble: Way too many ellipses. Seriously, three is all you need unless you're going to start writing in ASCII. Also, don't use ellipses when a comma will do, it breaks the flow of your writing.

Re: Implementation of a New Fleetwide Uniform

(Atherton Grix)

To: Department of Fleet Logistics, Star Fleet Head Quarters, Earth

From: Commander Fia Eckelson, Star Base 118

Star Date: 239108.20

Re: Implementation of a new Fleet wide uniform.

Sir,

Since the beginning of this year, I have had the duty of commanding the Public Relations and Workplace Efficiency Think Tank based out of Star Base 118. While I will not bore you with the details of the day to day operations of the think tank I would like to bring one of our latest projects to your attention as I believe it worthy of fleet wide implementation. This project centers around a complete overhaul of uniforms that Star Fleet personnel are required to wear while on duty.

Before I continue, I will stress that I am recommending a new uniform scheme rather than removing the concepts of uniforms from the fleet. Uniforms play too much of a vital role even in civilian workforces to be discarded by Star Fleet. With that said it is the opinion of my think tank that from both a public relations and efficiency standpoint that the current generation of Star Fleet uniforms is lacking in many regards. With an ever evolving fleet which has many new but sorely implemented technologies at its disposal, it is believed that implementing a uniform scheme along the lines of what the proposal outlines will keep the fleet going strong into the future.

Attached to this transmission you will find the complete proposal and supporting research in addition to holographic mock-ups of focus tested next generation uniform concepts. As I quickly came to expect of the Public Relations and Workplace Efficiency Think Tank, the proposal and supporting material is nothing less than completely thorough as well as painstakingly pieced together.

For that reason it would be fairly redundant for me to go into too many details that you will undoubtedly read soon so I will just mention the following. The proposed changes are made on the premise that while the current standard day uniform is rather well designed. It was however primarily designed with day to day duties aboard a starship or on an M-Class planet in mind. What it doesn't allow for is the rapid and unpredictable nature of Star Fleet. One minute three crew men are on a shuttle run, the next they are stranded in a desert dressed in that same day uniform which is rather ill-suited to deserts (the least of which is because the base fabric color is black). Like with most reported cases of such occurrences, those stranded did not have access to the appropriate specifically designed uniform to best much the terrain they would be visiting.

No uniform created will ever be completely adaptable to any environment especially when used by members of Star Fleet but advances in bio-polymer based synthetic fabrics and even imbedded technologies such as communication equipment would turn that near disaster that I mentioned above into a not so bleak scenario. In that light the proposal also details other computerized technologies that can built into the next generation uniform that will undoubtedly enhance the way members of Star Fleet operate.

During my time with the think tank I have heard some farfetched ideas but this one is something that I can wholeheartedly get behind. I hope that the rest of your department does the same. If you require clarification on any part of the proposal please contact me. I will be more the happy to oblige as will my team.

Yours Sincerely,

Commander Fia Eckelson
Commanding Officer
Public Relations and Workplace Efficiency Think Tank, SB118

"Re: Implementation of a New Fleetwide Uniform"
Writer's Character: Atherton Grix

Comments from Judge 1 (Character Sal Taybrim)

This one is interesting because it completely breaks from the normal forms and puts the action into the tone of a first person letter. At base I think this is a very interesting structure. I like the tone, I like the idea of a story communicated in correspondence. The writing is very clean and easy to read.

The problem? It is much too short. There is no story structure that is uncovered in this piece, and no characterization. We don't get a feel for Commander Eckleston – while the letter keeps the same professional tone throughout I found myself asking questions like 'is she obsessive? Is she pedantic? Has she posed these changes before? Do her colleagues like her or dismiss her as a harpy always pressing the same topics over and over again...' There is so much potential in this story that remains unexplored.

If you like the correspondence format, consider the following ideas to strength your storytelling within the piece:

1. Write a much longer letter. Make the personality writing the letter of the sort where she/he will rant, rave/lecture/somewhat recap the story to this point. How many times have new uniforms been proposed? What prompted the proposals? What is Commander Eckleston lost a child to a problem with the current duty uniform and was seeking to correct this or she is obsessive about bio-polymer fabric because she developed the technology....
2. Write a correspondence with several letters that develop the plot. How the letter is taken by the person receiving it matters a lot to a developing plot.

Always focus on what the story is – this becomes your plot. Make sure your story, no matter what form it takes – tells a story. If it just sets a story up, your audience will keep scrolling down, looking for the next installments and get disappointed when they don't show up!

Comments from Judge 2 (Character Toni Turner)

Mr. Grix's offering was refreshing due to the unusual format. I think we all tend to forget that letters can tell a story as well as manuscripts. But in this letter, I think that mark was missed. While it did make me want to see the new uniform and promised that the attachment would show it, I was disappointed that, alas, the attachment didn't materialize.

Although the reason the "Think Tank" had come up with the idea was clear, I found myself wanting to read more about the hazards of the current uniform, or better, Commander Eckelson's personal tribulations with it (e.g. Did it ride up in embarrassing places? Did women have to tape the necklines to prevent fall out? Was static cling a problem? Were the skirts too short/too tight or pants too floppy?).

The point is, it was a well written letter, but it missed the chance to be a great story, when there was so many stories to be told. Having said that, I loved the format, and Grix's writing style, and would like to see more of it. Keep up the good work!