

FANDOM SHRUGGED

not by Ayn Rand

Who is Jean-Luc?"

The *Enterprise's* senior officers were on the holodeck for their weekly game when the question arose. Deagna Troi was a counselor whose fierce intelligence and ambition overshadowed her lithe beauty and made many a man sorry he had underestimated her. She had acquired three of the game's four railroads and was trying to build herself an empire. Everyone who landed on one had to pay out seventy-five holocredits. When they complained she merely shrugged. "I earned these railroads," she would declaim, "and you are perfectly free not to roll the dice and land on them. Monopoly is the name of this game, and I am not ashamed to turn a profit."

William Riker was six-feet-three, with a strong brow and a resolve to match. A strong Will, Deagna sometimes jested. Riker owned the Rearding Railroad, but bad luck in his past had set him directly to jail and he was hurting financially. Deagna kept offering exorbitant sums for the Rearding but Riker refused to sell. Instead he stood on the Community Chest on his next roll and talked for eleven uninterrupted and unparagraphed pages about private property and the privileges of ownership, but Deagna tuned him out until he summed up: "The man who acquires through the sweat of his brow knows what it truly is to own," he proclaimed, ignoring her offered fistfuls of holocredits.

“You could own me, Will,” Deagna pronounced. “The strong woman is the woman who can relinquish control to the man who treats her like the bitch she really is. Sell me the Rearding.”

They were on the upscale end of the holo-board, walking toward her swanky Park Place holo-penthouse. He was wearing his metal tophat and she wore her silver thimble. In the distance were the computer-generated lights and sounds of the Boardwalk. Beyond that floated a red arrow and the word GO.

“I know your feelings for me,” Riker held forth, “and that is why you must promise not to hate me for the things I will be compelled to do.”

Deagna didn’t understand, and over the next several turns it became clear that Riker had negotiated a secret deal with Data and Worf whereby they were paying him *not* to sell the railroad, in order to curtain Deagna’s profits. In return Riker was included in the secret partnership of commercial holo-factories being erected along Baratic Avenue—low-rent districts they were renovating. Deagna hated when her turn took her through this area. There was a crumbling old shuttle factory containing remnants of some kind of revolutionary warp engine. It was a sinister area populated by an illiterate and filthy holo-proletariat begging for money and food. Holograms or not, nothing disgusted Deagna more than poor starving proles.

Deagna felt betrayed by Riker, and said as much to Data when he went honking by in his shiny aluminum Italian sports car during his turn. Data merely shrugged. “Who is Jean-Luc?” he asked rhetorically, and flicked his cigarette butt out of the speeding car.

The question bothered Deagna. The mysterious identity of the true captain of the *Enterprise* was a source of constant speculation. Some said he was an alien. Some said there was no captain at all, but legends of his exploits persisted—a new one every week. Deagna felt that Commander Riker

was the real power behind the *Enterprise*, and that many of the Federation regulations that had been passed to allow officers of inferior ability to rise in the ranks had been his lackey Data's doing. Until recently Deagna had been proud of the fact that the people who ran the ship were better and smarter than the mewling helpless followers around them, and these elite used to enjoy gathering to drink expensive synthehol brandies and chortling over the useless and lifeless automatons over whom they had dominion.

But now there was something wrong with the ship, something no one had ever named or explained. And it had all begun with the question, "Who is Jean-Luc?"

Deagna bent to recover the cigarette Data had discarded. It was a brand she had never seen before: plain white, with the United Federation of Planets logo stamped in gold near the butt.

It was Worf's turn now and he came by glowering as he pushed his squeaking chromium baby carriage. Worf was the tallest of the men and had the strongest brow, and naturally Deagna was very attracted to him. But the Klingon dealt in securities, and he had altered the game programming to allow himself to prosper in an illicit weapons trade based at his holdings on Khitomer Avenue. Deagna was certain he was the force behind the Short Line wreck she had suffered two turns ago. Earlier Worf had earned 100 holocredits by winning a beauty contest.

"They have changed the rules again," Worf grumbled. "The holocredits we are using are no longer based on the hologold standard."

Deagna was immediately alarmed. "Sell me your 'Get out of Brig Free' card," she demanded.

Worf glowered. "You are the same as everyone else aboard this ship," he proclaimed. "No one speaks as much as declaims." He went on for another ten pages but she tuned him out until he finished: "The man who speaks in anything other than trite aphorisms is a selfless man. True

leaders are self-made men.”

“Hardly a tribute to unskilled labor,” she replied wryly.

Now Riker came by in his metal top hat. Deagna was still stopped on the Hydrogen Works. The computer had wiped away a scenic forest, strip-mined, and blasted away holomountains to build this skeletal framework belching smoke. What a testament to human ambition, Deagna thought as she admired its vomiting smokestacks. Her heart swelled at this emblem of productive industry. Then Riker dinged his pewter hat politely at her and pointed out the Riker Industries logo on the factory wall and she glowered. “This is my utility,” he boasted. “Pay up.”

“You can’t build your own utility,” she protested. “It’s against the rules.”

“The man of industry makes his own rules.” He started to go on for another eight pages, but suddenly the gaming landscape faded around them, to be replaced with the bare white walls of the holodeck. At opposite corners stood Data and Worf.

“Computer,” Data commanded, “restore Monopoly Program C47.”

The computer did not respond.

In the center of the holodeck a figure appeared. He wore officer’s colors and captain’s rank. He was short, slight, bald, and distinguished. Despite the fact that he was not tall and did not have much of a brow, there was a fierce intelligence and ruthless determination in his eyes that made Deagna want to give herself to him completely so that he could subjugate her in the way of a man who knows a woman’s place in the world.

“For dozens of missions now,” the figure spoke in an English accent, “you have been asking yourselves, Who is Jean-Luc? Well ... you know those ‘captains of industry’ you hear so much about? I am one of them. Let me tell you exactly how I am so much better and smarter than all the rest of you....”

He lectured for seven entire episodes about his superiority, and about how the worst kind of people in the galaxy were smart people who disagreed with him. He told everyone that the way to fix their interstellar economy and government was to stop having emotions because emotions were for animals and any idiot could have them, but smart people just disregarded them. “I swear,” he concluded, “by my career and my love of it, that I will never act the part of another man, nor ask another man to act the part of mine.”

Those receiving his voluminous diatribe might have transformed the Federation—but by this time they had either fallen asleep or switched to *Baywatch*.

ALL THE PRETTY HUMANS

not by Cormac McCarthy

The turbolift and the sound of the turbolift stopped with a soft sloughing and the doors hissed open for him to enter the bridge and hissed shut again when he had. The floor muted his nonhuman footfalls. In his trim mustard-colored Federation uniform the android stood on the bridge so palely looking at his crewmates working. He looked at Worf at his Security station. He looked across the curved expanse of railing. The baldheaded captain seated in his chair polishing his English tacksaddle. To the captain's left and to his right, Counselor Troi and Commander Riker. Lastly he looked at the viewscreen before them out of which hurtled blindwhite specks of gas accreted over aeons from the echo of their making as if the ship itself summoned their pinprick light from the increate dark ahead of it, white dwarf and red giant and contact binary, born of the act of forging through hyperspace itself, parsec on sector on quadrant filling the screen to sideslip by as if in passing all the matter of Creation were relegated to entropy, to history, to memory. Then he turned and went toward the captain. This was not flying. This was not flying.

The bald man looked up when the android stood before him. Yes Mr Data?

Captain. One our shuttlecraft is missing.

Missing?

My guess is the Vakerans we were conveying to Bamanos Two snuck by our security subroutines. I would be willing to bet my favorite Deadwood City holodeck program they erased any record of the craft being removed from the bay.

Which shuttlecraft, Mr Data?

Rosinante.

Your favorite, wasn't it, Will?

Yeah. She's a good shuttle. He began rolling a cigarette.

How long ago, Data?

Eleven hours, fiftyseven minutes. Give or take.

Riker spat on the deck. Out of sensor range by now. Hell, Cap'n, they're probably long gone across the Neutral Zone.

Very well, Number One. You and Mr Data know what to do.

In the shuttlecraft bay Data checked his phaser and the charge of his phaser and he checked the engines and the level of the dipsticks and he saw they all were full and that his phaser was set on stun and he returned it to its velcro holster and saw to their provisions because who could say how long they might be gone or how far? Not man or god or computer or even space itself, for these are distances not measured by any tricorder or sensor, which was why the fullness of the phaser charge was so important a thing.

In the pilot's chair Riker powered up the console and stroked the controls with familiar hands and under his breath he spoke to the skittish craft in the way of men born to pilot machines, and he told the navigation console where they were going and what they were looking for and never did he doubt that the shuttlecraft understood, for such machines though not alive in the way men are alive or even in the way of animals or Ferengi nonetheless share a common soul which was created for space travel by the will of men and never were these machines more alive than when they were ploughing the overwrought dark and led by the firm commands and hands of those who built them and knew them

and loved them well.

Scout, you're cleared for departure. Soon as you cross the Border you'll be on your own, Will.

Always was, Cap.

They flew all day into the eternal night continually losing and regaining the *Rosinante's* ion trail leading into the Neutral Zone into which all men stared and few men dared for when they fared they came out scared from that place there. Riker set the autopilot and patted the console and spoke to it reassuringly in a language Data thought unseemly as at the replicator he rustled up beans and Vegan tortillas and bitter Martian High Mountain coffee. Riker ate in silence while Data watched his reflection in the forward port like the ghost of a machine. Soon Riker wiped his plate clean with his tortilla and flung his coffeegrains in the replicator and Data set the environmental controls to emit a soft muted crackle as of a campfire and Riker fully reclined his chair and slept covered by his thin electric bedroll while Data kept the watch, and while Riker slept he dreamed of ion trails in the cold vast reaches crossing and recrossing and nearly dispersed, the remnants of shuttlecraft passed long before, etheric disturbances of ancient battles hard-fought, and won, and disengaged, and as he tracked them with his Academy skills hardlearned he found them all, dozens of them capering, cavorting, nacelles alight and nosing and dodging, all the pretty shuttlecraft flying in that ether which is space itself and which cannot be spoken of but only written about to critical acclaim and prestigious awards.

He awoke to steady beeping and Data's voice. The android was smoking a cheroot and staring out the port. Company, Commander.

He sat up. Who?

Ferengi Marauder. Been hailing us.

On screen.

The grinning illsculpted face of an unwashed Ferengi with crooked teeth filled the comm screen and Riker felt his own face go hard. He had in his time encountered many Ferengi, and always his face went hard.

Ooday ousy eeksay omulansray, umanhay?

Negative, Ferengi, we are seeking a stolen shuttlecraft. Not Romulans.

The Ferengi turned to one side and spat. Iarlay! Ouyay areyay pyingsay!

Amesay otay ousy. End transmission.

Data cut the signal. Commander, I got me a sensor ping shows a decaying warp-coil field signature just like what you'd expect from a shuttlecraft engine turned off in the past ten or twelve hours.

That a fact? Riker spat. The *Scout's* deck was by now slightly moist with expectorant. Where they stabling her, Mr Data?

Cargo bay of that Ferengi ship.

Open a channel.

When the Ferengi appeared again Riker turned his head and spat. Ferengi vessel, you are in possession of our stolen shuttlecraft. Now, I'm sure you didn't know no better when you bought it, but it was stolen from us all the same.

The peasant Ferengi face turned to one side and spat. Oh, no, no! Ees no Federationale sheep! Ees Ferengi shuttle. Ferengi!

Then I guess you won't mind showing us your ownership papers.

The Ferengi squinted and showed his crooked brown teeth. Papers? We don't got to show you any steenking papers!

Data looked up from his console. They are powering up their weapons, Commander.

Eet ees a small thing, thees matter of a shuttlecraft. The Ferengi made a brushing motion. What ees thees thing? Onay attermay. The Ferengi told them it was not given for

men to know the ways of shuttlecraft. He told them he himself had seen shuttlecraft that would not operate for men who sought them but would respond without complaint to those who claimed them. He said space was big and stars were many. He mentioned a dusty little moon he visited certain summers as a child. There was a one-eyed Norsican, a giant lizard, a bowl of bright green eggs. He quoted from the King James Bible and from Carlos Castañeda. He claimed the Federationales were Vakerans and had the souls of Vakerans. He talked a great deal about a great many things, and Riker said yes, yes, he understood, all the while nodding and not looking away while Data transported over to the looming vessel directly onto the flight deck of the shuttlecraft in question and powered it up and took off and headed back in tandem with Riker out of the Neutral Zone and away from the Border and back toward the *Enterprise* patiently waiting like a thing extant before the expanding universe itself had burst to being, and the Ferengi, still speaking of the importance of shiny buttons and hygiene and shuttlecraft etiquette and the metaphysical and existential matters with which all illiterate and uneducated peasants are preoccupied, never noticed until they had gone and left behind them only the unpleasant odor all humans left in the noses of Ferengi.

Riker and Data gave the shuttlecraft their head and ran them till their warp cores were lathered and frothing, and they let go the navigation controls because given free rein a shuttlecraft will always find its own way home.

Commander Riker in his faithful *Scout* contacted Data on the recovered *Rosinante* and congratulated him on a job well done.

Oh, shucks, Commander. It were not nothing.

Riker frowned. In the background he could hear music. What's that you're playing, Mr Data?

Aaron Copland, Commander. It seemed appropriate, somehow.

About the Author

[Steven R. Boyett](#)'s novels include [Ariel](#) and [Elegy Beach](#). He wrote an uncredited draft of *Toy Story 2* for Pixar/Disney. Shorter works have appeared in literary, science-fiction, and horror magazines, newspapers, and comic books. He has been a professional martial-arts instructor, paper marbler, and editor. As a DJ he created the globally popular [Podrunner](#) and [Groovelectric](#) mix series, and has played clubs and conventions around the world.

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