

# Tribble Maker



## A Humorous ST: TNG Adventure

By  
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**S**pace is big—extremely big. Travel takes a long time. Even a *Galaxy*-class starship like the *Enterprise* can't return to base whenever supplies are needed. Luckily, it doesn't need to do so; the ship's computers maintain transporter templates which can be used to replicate any nonliving object that might even conceivably be wanted by some or all of the 1200+ people aboard. Literally anything that has once been recorded can be copied, within the limits of mass that the system supports. Naturally the system has sensor circuits to ensure that no one orders anything dangerous or illegal. A kilo of antimatter in your delivery chamber could ruin your whole day. Naturally.

And of course nothing can go wrong...go wrong...go wrong....

The team should be the bridge officers of the *Galaxy*-class USS *Enterprise*, or another similar large Federation ship with civilian families aboard. Wesley Crusher should not be a player character.

### PROLOGUE: CAPTAIN'S PERSONAL LOG

*As part of the Federation's agreement with the Free Worlds of Klinzai, we are carrying two dozen Klingon Defense Force officers on this leg of our mission. Their duty is to observe and advise as we patrol the area claimed by the so-called Imperial Klingon States. It's strange to remember that a generation ago all Klingons would have been our deadly enemies; today, we are thankful for their help and knowledge of Imperial tactics. So far there has been no sign of any problems, and their integration with our personnel is so complete that I must continually strive to think of them as our guests, and not as members of the crew...*

### SCENE 1: BLAME THE KID, AS USUAL

Wesley Crusher is busy writing the last page of his term paper on paleontology. In an hour, at 09:10 hours, he's scheduled to lecture to the rest of his class, so he's also preparing a speech with visual aids and

other props. For someone as bright as Wesley, an hour is plenty of time to do all this; he'll probably have time to wash, too.

Wesley still likes to type at a keyboard, partly because it lets him talk while he's working, and partly because modern keyboards let him type 400 words a minute, and he can't talk quite that fast. As he works, he's talking to the computer, telling it what specimens are needed for the display, and chewing on a nice, fresh V'l'haag fruit.

At 08:50 hours, Wesley bites a piece of fruit, then tries to say "and I'll need a couple of really good trilobites to show the class." Unfortunately, the computer hears this as "a couple of really good tribble pests to show the class."

Normally the ship's computer would query this; unfortunately, it's pretty busy. A hundred or so crew have just come off watch and are ordering meals, and the computer is also handling several transporter operations, refereeing round four of the ship's four-dimensional *Star Fleet Battles* tournament, and reconstructing Holodeck C as a fair replica of Transylvania (including castles, bats, wolves, rats, and Count Dracula) for one of the more romantically inclined ensigns. Wesley's request comes at just the wrong moment and is the straw that breaks the camel's back.

Inside a massive chunk of integrated molecular circuitry, something goes "spungg." The failing circuit takes out others in a chain reaction that leaves a gaping hole in this section of the computer's logic. The system creates two authentic tribbles. They are extremely lifelike, chemically fueled replicants, microscopically accurate down to details of fur and internal organs, with pseudobiological chemical "brains" programmed to behave exactly like the real thing.

Since it believes Wesley said he wanted them as "pests to show the class," the computer has made one tiny change—instead of reproducing every few hours, they'll replicate at approximately 20-minute intervals if they can find food.

At 08:55 Wesley reaches into the delivery chamber. He expects to find a box containing four fossil dinosaur footprints, a holocartridge set up to project a few full-sized dinosaur images, some ammonites, and a couple of trilobites. Instead he finds the dinosaur footprints, the holocartridge, some ammonites, and two cute little furry balls that purr at him. He doesn't know what they are.

Wesley is going to be late if he doesn't hustle. He pulls everything out of the chamber, orders the trilobites again, puts the fur balls in a belt pouch (also containing a half-eaten macrobiotic muesli bar) to show the kids in his class, stuffs the newly arrived trilobites in the box, and heads for the door. As he gets into the turbolift he doesn't notice

something small, plump, and furry climb out of the belt pouch and drop to the floor.

At 10:20 hours, Wesley finishes his presentation, and remembers the furry things in his pouch. When he reaches inside he finds one large fur ball, five small fur balls, and the wrapper from a muesli bar. He's a little puzzled, and shows the animals to his class and teacher.

At 10:22 hours, Wesley's teacher finds the right reference in the *Federation Encyclopedia*. At 10:24, she learns that there were originally two tribbles. At 10:26, she reports the incident to security.

At this point the PCs should learn that there are alien pests aboard, in violation of Federation regulations on transporting hostile life forms. Naturally, everyone will probably assume that Wesley has somehow smuggled the tribbles aboard—with his record, he's the obvious suspect.

Give the team some time to hold an informal counseling and child-guidance session, and otherwise behave like concerned, caring Starfleet officers/mothers/Klingons/androids. Then let them realize that the other tribble is still missing, Wesley really is telling the truth, and that therefore something is wrong with the computer.

If the computer is questioned, it will reveal that it thought Wesley ordered a "couple of tribble pests," and it gave them to him. To make them useful as teaching aids they naturally have an accelerated life cycle—about 20 minutes from birth to reproduction instead of around four hours! It can't explain why it didn't invoke Federation law and refuse to create them. It also won't mention that the tribbles are designer replicants, unless it is specifically asked.

## SCENE 2: NOBODY KNOWS THE TRIBBLES I'VE SEEN

Meanwhile, the free tribble has rolled out of the turbolift and, completely unnoticed, followed the scent of food to a ventilator duct, and thence to a food synthesizer outlet in an ensign's cabin. (The ensign is busy fighting vampires on Holodeck C, and doesn't intend to be back for a few hours.) It purrs at the outlet. The universal translator built into the unit recognizes the noise as a request for food, correctly identifies the type required, and delivers a plate of Quadrottricale grain. The tribble tucks in, and soon polishes off the plate. Ten minutes later five small tribbles are busily purring at the machine.

By 10:30, there isn't enough room for all of the 600 or so fourth and fifth generation tribbles to cluster around the synthesizer. Tribbles don't fight, so the hungrier specimens head back into the ventilators. They're light enough to be blown along horizontal and vertical ducts.

At about 10:45, while the team is interrogating Wesley, security starts taking "pris-

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oners"—tribbles are turning up on four decks, with unconfirmed reports from another three.

## SCENE 3: YOU THINK YOU'VE GOT TRIBBLES?

It's time for the big "Lieutenant Worf Meets The Tribbles" scene. Just one or two—or possibly a half dozen or so—in the turbolift. Although he's spent most of his life amongst humans, Worf has normal Klingon instincts, and the tribbles don't like him either. Award experience points for good roleplaying, screaming, phasering, and scratching. When you've finished awarding experience to the tribbles, see if Worf deserves some too.

Meanwhile, the other Klingons aboard have also started to notice that there are lots of obnoxious furry critters about. It's time for the KDF officers to start clogging the intercom with requests for vermin control, antiallergy serum, and a clean ship. They aren't exaggerating; one has a serious respiratory allergy triggered by tribble fur, and there's now a lot of it floating in the ventilators. Give Dr. Crusher the job of treating him, complicated by the fact that the handiest routes to sick bay passes through the densest tribble populations.

## SCENE 4: WHAT'S SAUCE FOR THE KIRK....

By now, the team will probably be trying to find out how to deal with tribbles. There are records of previous Federation and/or Klingon encounters with the little darlings; unfortunately, all of the solutions used previously are impractical. It's possible to set a transporter to selectively pick up tribbles—75 years ago, Scotty decontaminated the *Enterprise* that way, and dumped the tribbles into a Klingon vessel. Unfortunately, there don't seem to be any hostile ships around.

Of course, it's possible to dump the tribbles into space; that's how the Klingons cleaned ship after the "Troubles with Tribbles" episode. If she is played as an NPC, Counselor Troi will point out that this violates Federation laws on cruelty to animals, and that she will suffer massive psychological trauma if she is forced to "listen" to the minds of thousands of dying tribbles. If Troi is a PC, remind her player of these facts.

It's also illegal to dump the tribbles on a planet. If it's hostile, they'll die; if not, there may be intelligent or potentially intelligent species present who might not survive a tribble plague.

A glommer (a carnivore that lives exclu-

sively on tribbles) could eat them, but probably wouldn't be able to keep up with the speeded-up reproductive cycle. Can Dr. Crusher come up with a suitable controlling agent, or Data suggest another answer? The ball's in the PCs' court.

If the team finds out that the tribbles are replicants, the moral dilemma is solved, and Counselor Troi can stop worrying about the pain of their deaths. She should eventually notice that she isn't actually picking up any emotional signals from them; admittedly, tribbles don't think much, but all life forms emit some neural energy.

If the KDF officers hear that there is any delay in dealing with the tribbles, they may feel that drastic measures are called for. Those that aren't covered with hives will head for a transporter bay and start to program it to pick up tribbles and dump them into the nearest sun. They'll use phasers (set to stun—these are *friendly* Klingons) if anyone tries to stop them.

If you're feeling really sadistic, this is a good moment for Q to turn up and point out that the Federation can't even cope with a few pathetic little animals. He stays to sneer.

### SCENE 5: RUB THE MAGIC LAMP

By now another problem starts to become apparent: The judgment circuits associated with transporter template reconstitution have failed completely! The blood-drained body of an ensign is rushed from Holodeck C to sick bay, where the duty doctor orders "a massive dose of Tri-ox compound" from the synthesizer, intending to oxygenate the patient's blood. A second later, 10 gallons of the stuff erupt from the

materialization chamber. Meanwhile, Dracula is flapping around in bat form.

Throughout the ship any attempt to order goods (such as food) from the synthesizers becomes a game of Russian roulette. Careless phrasing makes matters much worse. Maybe everything will be OK, but then again.... A crewmember who orders "a little pick-me-up" may be supplied with a normal dose of stimulant, but there's also a good chance of him getting a pair of jet boots, an antigravity pack, or a working propeller beanie instead.

Once the crew and passengers start to realize what's happening, a few will decide to take advantage. The Federation still uses some "paper" currency and coins, though the economy mostly runs on a credit basis, and most primitive worlds still use cash and regard diamonds and other easily synthesized jewels and metals as valuable. Several crewmembers will order currency from the synthesizers. Then there's the fat kid who'll order a gallon of ice cream and try to eat it, the engineer who'll order his favorite holo star (he'll get a convincing robot replica), and stamp, art, and antique collectors whose avarice or thoughtlessness outweighs their sense of responsibility.

The computer can't be ordered to repair itself, or to use other circuits to override the sensor circuits—that would cause massive logic problems (and short circuit the plot!). Encourage the team to think of asking Data to plug into the computer and monitor every synthesizer aboard (several thousand of them) while the system is repaired. If he limits the service to essential items he'll just be able to do it, though any attempt to maintain the holodecks and entertainment

systems will give him a massive "head-ache." If Data isn't a PC, he won't think of this on his own.

Soon Data will find (or report) that the number of orders is rising despite his censorship. Many of the orders seem to be requests for food, and most are for Quadrottricale and other grain. It shouldn't take an Einstein, or even a Wesley, to figure out that the tribbles are getting food from the synthesizers. With the information now available, Data should be able to calculate that there are approximately 75,000 tribbles aboard, plus or minus 2500! If food services aren't cut immediately, the next round of reproduction will lead to some of the cabins literally bursting open under the mass of tribbles inside them. Already security reports corridors clogged with furry vermin, and several compartments have rapidly stagnating air because the ventilator fans are choked with tribbles.

### SCENE 6: WHO'S BEEN SITTING IN MY CHAIR?

Every tribble story has to have a scene where several hundred fall on the captain's head and/or turn up in his seat. Combine both by having a ventilator outlet in the bridge ceiling above the captain's chair. The grille pops open and he's deluged with tribbles, preferably while debating the situation with Q.

The Klingons finish reprogramming the transporter. Unfortunately, the transporter discrimination circuits use the same logic as the delivery terminals, and their tampering may accidentally hurl members of the crew or other animals (such as the cute pet frog mentioned in the *Next Generation Officer's Manual*) into space. It won't pick up the tribbles—they aren't real, so a transporter tuned to tribble metabolism will miss them completely. This problem will also delay Dr. Crusher's attempts to control the tribbles biologically.

### SCENE 7: FADE TO HAPPY ENDING?

Hopefully your PCs will have stopped feeding the tribbles by now. If not, they will soon weigh more than the ship. If they haven't already realized that the tribbles are nonliving replicants, you may want to start giving them clues. In any case, attempts to repair the computer will eventually bear fruit. Once it is back to normal, it can soon get rid of the tribbles. It will cut off the Quadrottricale supply and create a pseudopheromone which attracts the tribbles to one of the holodecks, where they can conveniently be broken down to their component atoms for recycling.

If the team doesn't try to repair the computer, it will eventually start converting bits of the ship into tribble food. This is an extremely bad idea. If things reach this point, it's probably time for the Federation to

## Tribbles and Glommers

	STR	DEX	END	MENT	AP	DMG	Armor
Tribble	5	5	5	1	6	—	0
Glommer	10	20	10	1	3	—	1

## Possible Population Explosion

Normal Cycle (Hours)	Tribbles	Biomass (Approx.)	Fast Cycle (Hours: Minutes)
0	1	0.25 kg	0:00
4	6	1.5 kg	0:20
8	36	9.0 kg	0:40
12	216	55 kg	1:00
16	1296	325 kg	1:20
20	7776	2 tons	1:40
24	46,656	12 tons	2:00
28	279,936	72 tons	2:20
32	1,679,616	432 tons	2:40
36	10,076,696	5 kilotons	3:00
40	60,460,176	30 kilotons	3:20
44	362,761,056	180 kilotons	3:40
48	1,813,805,280	900 kilotons	4:00

appoint some new officers.

Once the crisis is over (it *is* over, isn't it?), the Klingons will apologize for their min-  
mutiny. No one should be hurt, and they  
were heavily provoked, so the captain should  
be merciful. The allergic Klingon recovers  
eventually, though he also happens to be  
allergic to the pheromone used in the tribble  
trap. For days afterward the ship will smell of  
tribbles, and engineering will have to clean  
all the air filters and purifiers.

If Q has been interfering, it's time for him  
to make a last speech then vanish. Every-  
one breathes a sigh of relief.

About 10 minutes later, the *Enterprise* is  
attacked by Imperial Klingon privateers,  
Ferengi, or whatever else you prefer, and  
the next adventure begins.

## APPENDIX: TRIBBLES AND GLOMMERS

Unfortunately for pet lovers everywhere,  
statistics for tribbles and glommers can only  
be found in the first edition *Star Trek RPG*  
rules, which are long out of print. The ma-  
terial that follows paraphrases FASA's old  
description and adds some additional  
comments. (Refer to the Tribbles and  
Glommers Table.)

*Tribbles* are inoffensive furry animals with  
one bad habit: Their asexual reproductive  
cycle is geared to their consumption of food,  
and they'll breed as soon as their stomachs  
are full. In extreme cases this can take just  
a couple of hours. On their native world

there are undoubtedly predators to keep  
tribbles in check; unfortunately, the location  
of the tribble homeworld was only known to  
a few smugglers. It's rumored that the  
Klingons found and destroyed the planet in  
the era of the Organian Peace Treaty, but  
there is no record to confirm this.

Assuming ample food supply, one ances-  
tral tribble, reproduction every four hours  
under normal conditions (every 20 minutes  
for the replicants in this adventure), and an  
average of five offspring, see the Possible  
Population Explosion Table.

Note that the table assumes that all ani-  
mals eat and breed, and that no deaths  
occur. In practice, many tribbles would be  
unable to reach food and reproduce more  
slowly or would be crushed by the weight of  
those surrounding them!

Tribbles are prohibited throughout Federa-  
tion space. It's illegal to transport them or sell  
them. That doesn't stop con men from smug-  
gling them onto human worlds. Tribbles purr in  
a manner that calms and soothes humans, and  
thus seem to be the perfect pet. The smugglers  
generally keep quiet about their reproductive  
habits and get off-world before the population  
explosion becomes severe.

Some Federation philosophers have  
suggested that an unknown intelligence may  
have originally bred tribbles as biological  
Von Neumann machines. Protein synthesis  
is expensive, but on a world with no preda-  
tors and ample vegetation, tribbles will soon  
breed an immense amount of food. Such

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worlds can be created using the Genesis  
effect, which is a prohibited weapon  
throughout the Federation. Although Gen-  
esis worlds tend to be unstable, they would  
last long enough for a useful tribble harvest.

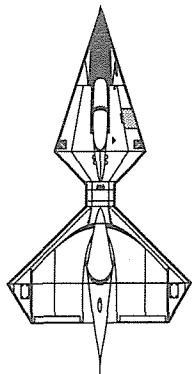
Tribbles and Klingons don't mix well; tribble  
purring makes Klingons feel ill. The feeling is  
mutual; a tribble will screech at any Klingon it  
encounters. Additionally, many Klingons are  
allergic to their fur. After their first encounter with  
tribbles, the Klingons bred glommers, genetically  
engineered predators that feed exclusively on  
the "vermin." The glommer gene structure isn't  
recorded in the *Enterprise's* memory banks. The  
Klingons dealt with their infestation several  
years before the alliance to the Federation, and  
all records are filed away somewhere in the  
vaults of the old Klingon admiralty. ♪

*At the time of writing (October 1990) the BBC  
has just begun to show the first series of ST:  
TNG in Britain. Other sources are FASA's ST:  
TNG First Year Sourcebook and Officer's  
Manual, the first edition Star Trek RPG rules,  
"The Next Generation" by Sam Bowne (Chal-  
lenge 42), and Star Trek 3 by the late James  
Blish.*

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