

Boz

by Kristine Kathryn Rusch

Boz woke up slowly, convinced he was hearing an ancient crooner sing "White Christmas." He pulled his pillow over his head to drown out the noise before he remembered where he was.

Space. The ship. Light-years from anything.

Christmas carols? He'd never expected to hallucinate them.

He sat up. His room was filling slowly with light. The on-board systems had been set up to mimic a typical Earth day (as if a typical Earth day had constant sunshine), and they did adjust for the seasons.

When the *Beautiful Dreamer* had been in the planning stages, the crew decided two things: that they'd remain on a 24-hour day, and they'd follow the western calendar. He didn't mind the 24-hour day, but he saw no reason to keep the calendar. He had voted against it and had been overruled, which was funny, given that he was going to be the only one awake to "enjoy" that calendar.

He sighed, rolled over, and pulled the pillow off his head. Sure enough, some twentieth century icon was singing about Christmas. Only the song had changed to "I'll Be Home for Christmas." That was a cruel joke. No one on this ship was going home again.

Not that Boz cared. He hadn't had a home in decades.

He sat up, rubbed his hand through his scraggly hair, and asked, "Computer, what's the date?"

The computer answered in its relentlessly cheerful voice, "December 25."

Christmas.

"I'll be go to hell," he whispered, and then shivered.

The music wasn't playing in the computer speakers. If it was, he would have heard it directly in his room. Instead, it sounded far away, as if someone were playing tunes down the hall.

(It actually sounded just like it used to when he lived alone in New York: Christmas music would waft at him from everywhere—his neighbor's

