

STAR TREK PHASE II

CALM BEFORE THE STORM



A Star Trek Phase II Novelette by
GLENN E. SMITH

Star Trek Phase II:

Novelette #5

“Calm Before the Storm”

Glenn E. Smith

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How to Get the MOST out of These Stories

1. Watch “In Harm’s Way” (just because). www.stnv.de/ihw
2. Watch “To Serve All My Days.” www.stnv.de/tsamd
3. Watch “World Enough and Time.” www.stnv.de/weat
4. Watch “Blood and Fire, The Movie.” www.stnv.de/baf
5. READ “Friends and Foes.” www.stnv.de/novels
6. Watch “Enemy Starfleet.” www.stnv.de/esf
7. READ “True To His Oath.” www.stnv.de/novels2
8. Watch “The Child.” www.stnv.de/tc
9. READ “The 11th Hour.” www.stnv.de/novels3
10. Watch “Kitumba.” www.stnv.de/kit
11. READ “The Enemy of My Enemy.” www.stnv.de/novels4

and finally...

12. READ THIS ONE! www.stnv.de/novels5

The following events take place after the live-action episode

“Kitumba” www.stnv.de/kit

CHAPTER 1

Captain's log, stardate 2756.1: Enterprise is on her way to rendezvous with the dreadnought U.S.S. Alliance near the Romulan neutral zone, where we will once again bring Colonel Finnegan and his MACOs aboard, this time to carry out a classified mission...

Actually, to carry out a black ops mission to the Romulan home world—the kind of mission that normally falls under the purview of Section Thirty-One. That mission: infiltrate the military confinement facility where our guest, Tal-Shiar Sub-lieutenant D'Vahn Charvon, claims that her older sister, now a former commander in the Star Empire's space fleet with whom we have some history, is being held.

A black-ops mission. After all my crew has been through with Section Thirty-One and the Copernicus, and in the nearly three months since then, a black ops mission is just about the last thing I want us to get involved in. To be honest, I can hardly believe we're actually going ahead with it. When I offered Sub-lieutenant Charvon our assistance in freeing her sister in return for her cooperation, I never for a moment thought Starfleet Command would actually approve my idea to carry out a covert mission to break her out. I expected Command to choose diplomacy instead. In fact, I only developed that plan to satisfy the sub-lieutenant. Now I'm stuck with it. I can only hope that everyone comes out of it alive. The Romulans don't take kindly to those they perceive to be enemy spies.

Captain James T. Kirk switched off his log recorder and stood up from his desk. It was 0720 hours, ship's time. He'd already dressed, except for his gold command shirt, which still lay folded on the foot of his bunk. The alpha shift had already posted, but Kirk wasn't needed on the bridge this morning. The rendezvous with the *Alliance* wasn't due to occur for several hours yet, and besides, his First Officer, Commander Spock, was already on duty up there. He was certainly capable of handling anything routine that might come up and would call if the captain needed to be made aware of anything.

He started pacing back and forth across his living quarters. After he and Finnegan's MACOs had found Charvon, the Romulan spy who'd posed as Ambassador Sarek—they *still* hadn't persuaded him to identify himself—and the Section-31 agent—they were still waiting for Starfleet Command to confirm his identity—from the surface of that planet and had taken them into custody, he'd intended to ferry them directly back to Earth and turn them all over to the authorities there. *Enterprise* had already set sail in that direction, in fact, but then, once more trying to pass themselves off as Klingons, a Romulan battle fleet had crossed into Federation space at the Klingon neutral zone and attacked the dreadnought *Federation*. The whole sector had gone on alert and the battle had been joined. *Enterprise* had immediately diverted there, along with a number of other Starfleet vessels. Sub-lieutenant Charvon had proven instrumental in accessing valuable intelligence regarding the Tal-Shiar's Section-31 co-conspirators from the computers aboard the *Talon*, Commander Tal's warbird, and the rest was history. Now, time was of the essence. They didn't have time to go to Earth first. They needed to get to Romulus as soon as possible and rescue Charvon's sister before someone decided to execute her just to get it over with.

Kirk had spent much of his spare time since Admiral Nogura personally approved the covert mission studying up on everything Starfleet Intelligence and the library at Memory Alpha had to offer on the Romulans—military intelligence reports of varying degrees of reliability, history and culture, language...whatever he could dig up—but he needed to take a break from that for a little while. Sometimes information overload could be as bad or even worse than a lack of subject matter knowledge. Sub-lieutenant Charvon had been some help, but she'd strictly limited what she was willing to share, pending the rescue of her sister. He'd tried to read something for pleasure every so often to rest his brain, but had found it difficult to concentrate. His thoughts had kept wandering back to the upcoming mission.

Maybe he'd go on up to the bridge for a while after all.

"Bridge to Captain Kirk," Spock's voice called over the speaker on his desk.

Kirk stepped over to his desk and opened the channel. "Kirk here."

"Captain, it is precisely zero-seven-twenty-three hours and Ensign Kirk has not yet reported for duty."

It wasn't like Peter to be late. In fact, he often showed up for duty fifteen to twenty minutes early. "He hasn't called in?" Kirk inquired.

"Negative, sir," Spock replied, *"and Doctor McCoy has advised me that the ensign has not been to the sickbay."*

Kirk drew a deep breath and exhaled slowly. Reporting late for duty without notifying anyone as to why was a serious breach of standard procedure, but his nephew might have had a legitimate reason for it, though he couldn't imagine what that reason might be. At any rate, there was no point in getting angry until he knew for sure that there was a good *reason* to get angry. "All right, Spock, I'll take care of it. Thank you. Kirk out." He closed the channel, then asked the computer, "Computer, location of Ensign Peter Kirk?"

"Ensign Peter Kirk is in the observation lounge," the computer replied.

The observation lounge. Kirk sighed. The last time he'd met Peter in the observation lounge, Peter had just lost Lieutenant Freeman...Alex...the man he'd loved and had intended to marry. That was almost three months ago and Peter had been doing relatively well since then. He'd mourned, of course, and still did from time to time, but Bones had been keeping an eye on him and so far had been declaring him fit for duty on a regular basis. He'd been performing his duties admirably and had even been known to have fun from time to time. Kirk sincerely hoped that nothing had changed.

He grabbed his shirt off of his bed and pulled it on, then left his quarters and headed for the lounge.

The door swished open ahead of him and Kirk marched into the lounge, straight past the antique wooden sailing ship's wheel standing just to his left and across the room to the large twin rectangular windows—the same windows through which he and Peter had watched the *Copernicus* burn up—where he found Peter, in uniform, standing with his hands folded behind his back, staring out into deep space, apparently lost in thought. He stepped up beside his nephew, then glanced around the room to see if they were alone before he spoke. There were two others there, sitting and talking at one of the tables, but when Kirk's eyes met theirs and held their gaze for a moment, they promptly got up to leave.

“Ensign Kirk,” Kirk said, looking back at his nephew as soon as the door had closed behind them, “you’re almost half an hour late for duty. Care to explain?”

Peter looked at his uncle as though he’d only just realized that he was standing there. “I’m sorry, sir,” he said. “I didn’t realize I’d been standing here that long.” He turned toward the door, but Kirk reached out and grabbed him gently by the arm to stop him before he could walk away.

“The bridge can wait a few more minutes,” he said. Then he asked, “What’s going on? Thinking about Alex again?”

A familiar look of sadness and loss crossed Peter’s features and he dropped his gaze to the deck. “I’m always thinking about Alex, Uncle Jim,” he admitted. Then, after another moment, he raised his eyes back to meet the captain’s gaze again and continued, “But no, Alex isn’t the reason I’ve been standing here for the past...thirty-five or forty minutes.”

“Then what is the reason?”

Peter turned back to the windows again and the captain let go of his arm. “Today’s the day, Uncle Jim,” he replied.

“The day?” Kirk inquired, not knowing to what Peter was referring.

Peter looked him in the eye once more and explained, “The day my fifteen-year old self boards that spaceliner that’s going to slip back in time five years on its way out to Harbor Colony tomorrow.”

“Ah,” Kirk responded. Now he remembered. According to what Peter had told him on the very day he signed aboard the *Enterprise* as a newly minted ensign, he’d boarded the spaceliner heading for Harbor Colony on this very day, as it prepared to depart Earth’s orbit. Somewhere in deep space along the way, the vessel had encountered some kind of temporal anomaly and, unable to alter course in time, had slipped back in time. They’d arrived at that same point in space approximately five years earlier, well before Captain Christopher Pike had turned command of the *Enterprise* over to her newly assigned captain, in fact. The whole incident had been classified ‘Top Secret,’ of course, in accordance with all the new laws and regulations pertaining to time-travel and temporal incursions, and Peter and everyone else onboard—fortunately, no one had been seriously injured—had been sworn to secrecy, as had the entire crew of the Starfleet vessel that had found them. Peter had grown up on Earth while at the same time his younger self lived with his parents on Deneva, and at the age of twenty had entered Starfleet Academy to follow in his uncle’s footsteps.

“I know what you’re thinking,” Peter told him.

“What am I thinking?”

“Actually, I’m kind of surprised you never asked me,” he added. Then he answered his uncle’s question. “You’re wondering why I never took steps to prevent what happened on Deneva—why I didn’t try to save my parents and all the others from the parasites.”

“No, I’m not,” Kirk told him, shaking his head. “You were under strict orders. I know that, and I understand.”

“But I could have saved your brother,” Peter pointed out. Then he turned his gaze back out into space and added, “I could have saved them all.”

“And had you done that, you would have changed the future from that point forward,” Kirk pointed out. “Maybe you could have saved your parents. Maybe then your younger self would have grown up with his parents, but we can never know for sure. By saving them and

the rest of the Denevan colonists you might just as easily have unwittingly paved the way for some other catastrophe to occur somewhere else.” That probably wasn’t very likely in this particular case, Kirk knew, but if telling him that helped to make Peter feel a little better, then it was worth it. “Peter,” His nephew looked at him once more. “The fact that we can never predict what events may or may not change for the better or for the worse is precisely why those temporal laws and regulations exist.”

“I know,” Peter admitted with a snigger. “Mister Daniels told me that over and over, about a hundred times.

“Mister Daniels?” Kirk inquired.

“One of the scientists who spent time with us after our time slip,” Peter explained. He gazed back out into space. “Some kind of expert temporal theorist, or something like that. At least, that’s what we were told.”

“Did he give you reason to believe otherwise?”

“Not really, but he did spend *a lot* of time with us. “Part of me always suspected he was some kind of undercover agent Starfleet sent in to shadow us and make sure we all kept our oaths.”

“These days, that wouldn’t surprise me,” the captain remarked.

“It’s funny when you think about it, though.”

“What’s that?” Kirk asked him.

“You were already serving as captain of the *Enterprise* when you saved my life on Deneva, when I was thirteen. Then, a couple of years later when I was *fifteen*, I found myself in high school on Earth, *before* you were captain of the *Enterprise*.”

Kirk grinned. “Careful, Peter,” he quipped. “You could give yourself a headache just thinking about this stuff.”

Peter grinned back at his uncle. “I think I already did.”

“Stop by sickbay on your way to the bridge. Doctor McCoy will fix you up.”

“What was it like...becoming captain of the *Enterprise*?” Peter suddenly asked him, out of the blue. “What was your first mission?”

Kirk gazed at his nephew for a moment, then pointed out, “That *is* a matter of record, Peter,” reminding him of what he should already have known. “You can review my reports in the ship’s library.”

“I know, but...I’d rather hear it from you...if that’s okay, sir.”

Kirk drew a deep breath and exhaled slowly, hesitated for another moment, and then stepped over to the communications panel in the wall by the door and thumbed the button. “Kirk to Spock.”

“*Spock here, Captain,*” came the Vulcan first officer’s reply almost immediately.

“I’m with Ensign Kirk now. Everything’s all right. Can you make do without him for a little while longer?”

“*Affirmative, sir. There are no pressing needs requiring his presence at this time.*”

“Good. We’re in the observation lounge if we’re needed. Kirk out.” Kirk thumbed the button again, closing the channel, then gestured toward the nearest table. Peter joined him there and they sat down across from one another. “Sure you wouldn’t rather just read all the reports for yourself?” he asked.

“I’m sure, sir,” Peter assured him. “As long as you don’t mind.”

“All right.” He paused for a moment, got comfortable as he gathered his thoughts, and then began, “It actually started *before* I took command, at the Aldebaran Colony...”

* * * * *

Doctor Walter Carlson had been serving as chief research engineer at the Aldebaran Colony’s warp research facility for more than ten years. A starship enthusiast since childhood and a warp systems engineer since the day he graduated from M.I.T. and earned the right to call himself one, he’d dedicated his entire professional life to the research and development of new generation warp drive technologies that might improve the warp system capabilities of the Federation’s numerous classes of warp-capable vessels, Starfleet and civilian alike. For the past three and a half years he had been proudly leading a team of scientists and engineers whose goal it was to develop a brand new warp system configuration that would, if all went well, be installed into the next generation of Starfleet’s ships of the line.

He ran his fingers repeatedly through his thinning gray hair while he wandered around the large laboratory—actually, compared to some of the labs he’d worked in, this one was quite massive—watching over several members of his team as they made final preparations for the test. He couldn’t help but feel excited. Today was the day—the first full-power test of that radically new warp propulsion system.

He stopped wandering and turned in toward the center of the room and stared at the huge assembly that had been their center of attention for so long—the brand new, radically different in design, warp intermix core, supported by a virtual spider web of framework reinforced by a low-level structural integrity field. Today was the day they were finally going to fire that thing up. It really was a enormous assembly, much larger than the standard warp cores currently in use throughout the fleet—a core roughly spherical in design, with one pair of semi-transparent cylindrical assemblies running into it vertically from above and below and another, narrower single one protruding from one side and out through one of the walls. Beyond that wall, he knew, that assembly turned directly upward and ran up and out through the building’s roof. Its purpose was to channel the energy created in the core out of the lab to be safely dispersed into space.

“What’s going on in here?” Doctor Carlson heard an all too familiar voice bark from behind him. He sighed and briefly raised his eyes to Heaven—why him?—and then turned around to find the portly project manager, Mister Harold Farmington, waddling up to him—a man who always wore the most expensive suits that credits could buy but still somehow managed to look scruffy with his unkempt and artificially colored ring of thin black hair that ran around the back of his head from one ear to the other uncombed, as usual, and at least a second day’s worth of whiskers shadowing his bulbous face—a man who probably didn’t know the difference between a warp core and a fishbowl—a man with whom Carlson was very quickly losing all semblance of patience. “You should’ve had this beast online, purring like a house cat by now, Walter!”

Walter? Of all the nerve! Since when had he given Farmington the right to call him anything but ‘Doctor Carlson?’ It wasn’t like they were friends, for God’s sake. Clenching his jaw, Carlson paused for a moment to be sure that he maintained control over the tone of

his voice when he spoke. Then he calmly replied, "I'm concerned about..."

"I *know* what you're concerned about and I don't care!" Farmington shouted at him as though Carlson were a child whose father had caught him misbehaving. "We're already *way* behind on this project! I don't want any more delays, *Doctor*! Get it done or I'll find someone else who can!" Without giving Doctor Carlson a chance to say anything more, Farmington turned his back and waddled out.

"So the Denebian slime-devil is threatening our jobs now?" asked Tom Barker, one of the senior-most researchers on Carlson's staff as he stepped up beside him watched the door close behind Farmington with him.

"Mine anyway," Carlson replied. "He didn't say anything about anyone else's." Then his tone filled with unbridled sarcasm as he added, "He's good friends with *Her Highness*, the governor. He can do whatever he wants to do."

"I heard they're *more* than just friends," Barker told him.

Carlson looked his colleague in the eye for a moment, but then decided to leave his remark well enough alone. Getting mixed up in Farmington's personal life was the *last* thing we wanted to do. Besides, the mental picture it painted was just too disturbing to think about. "Come on," he finally said. "Let's fire this thing up before he throws us all out of here on our backsides."

"I'd like to throw *him* somewhere," Barker replied, scowling.

Once he and all of his fellow researchers took their stations at the various controls consoles, Carlson addressed them as a group. "All right, everyone, this will be our first full-power run-up, so take it slow and easy. I don't want any small, careless mistakes causing an accident. All right, eyes on consoles." He waited, glancing around to make sure everyone was ready, then called out to each one in turn. "Antimatter containment?"

"Steady at one-hundred percent," the responsible engineer reported.

"Matter and anti-matter valves?"

"Valves unlocked and ready," another replied.

"Flow regulators?"

"Regulators set," a third engineer reported.

"Intermix chamber?"

"Chamber clear. Shielding active."

"Energy collection and dispersal systems?"

"Field absorption active," yet another engineer reported. "Energy collector satellite in position. Emitter targeted. All air and space traffic diverted. Airspace is clear."

"Ready to go, boss," Barker told Carlson, looking up at him.

"Prepare to engage," Carlson replied.

"Standing by."

Carlson drew a deep, deep breath, then exhaled very slowly. If something went wrong during this test, anything at all, it was going to set their work back at least several months. That would upset the prissy governor and Farmington would likely blow a gasket—probably give himself a heart attack...which wouldn't be that great a loss as far as he was concerned. Carlson closed his eyes in silent prayer, drew another deep breath, and then gave the word. "Engage warp system, and let's try not to blow up the planet."

"Engaging warp system..." Barker affirmed, "...now." He threw the switch.

As the warp core pulsed to life, Carlson and the others watched as the matter and anti-matter began to flow through the vertical cylinders toward the spherical intermix chamber, looking like two undulating clouds of glowing, blue-hot plasma through the frosted interior containment surfaces. Then, as each engineer made whatever slow and steady adjustments to their instruments that circumstances might have required, the flow speed began to increase steadily with the power level and the plasma clouds grew even brighter.

“Ten seconds to warp bubble formation,” Barker reported.

“Dispersal systems ready,” the engineer at that station added.

“Initiate on my mark,” Barker instructed her.

“Standing by, sir,” she replied.

“Four...” he began, counting down, “three...two...one...*mark!*”

The engineer manning the collection and dispersal systems controls console threw the switch, activating the system, and the narrower, horizontal cylindrical assembly immediately pulsed to life with contained warp energy, bleeding it from the intermix and funneling it out of the lab through the wall and up toward the roof. “Energy flow holding steady at ninety-six percent capacity,” she reported.

Outside, high above the lab—high above any other structure in that part of the city, in fact—the cylindrical dispersal assembly protruded through the duranium-reinforced roof and delivered the raw warp energy into a large spherical collector—essentially, a secondary warp core—to which it had been molecularly bonded. Like the actual warp core in the lab below, the collector began to glow an undulating blue-white as the plasma energy built up within it and grew steadily brighter until it approached full capacity. Then, suddenly, when it could not possibly contain any more and maintain an acceptable safety factor, it released that energy through an auto-emitter assembly atop its crown as though it were an erupting volcano—actually, the rate of release *was* carefully controlled and monitored—directing it skyward, shooting rapidly expanding holes through layer after layer of thin white clouds into space in a single, constrained stream of superheated plasma that seemed to crackle like lightning and rumble like thunder at the same time.

High above, that deadly stream of raw energy struck the large, magnetized collector plate of a pre-positioned satellite high in geosynchronous orbit. The satellite in turn collected that energy and then, redirecting it away from the planet, dispersed it into deep space.

“Energy flow level increasing slightly,” the engineer on the dispersal systems controls reported. “Now at ninety-seven percent. Still within predetermined green safety window for this test.”

“Keep calling it, please,” Carlson instructed her. “If it hits ninety-nine percent, shut it down immediately.”

“Understood, Doctor,” she replied. Then she started calling it out every couple of seconds. “Ninety-seven point six...ninety-seven point nine...ninety-eight point one... Leveling off again,” she then reported, obviously relieved. “Looks like we’re going to be okay.”

“T’ plus thirty seconds,” Barker announced.

In orbit, the energy stream grew more powerful as its levels rose and continued to bombard the satellite's collector dish to be redirected into deep space. Dozens of millions of miles away in the near opposite direction, the orange-giant Aldebaran sun pulsed briefly as a massive solar flare erupted on its surface and arched nearly three-quarters of the way across its face.

"Wait a second," one of the engineers called out suddenly—the one who had been assigned to keep an eye on all solar activity leading up to and for the duration of the test. He magnified the image of the Aldebaran sun on his main monitor and spotted the massive flare dancing across its surface, then took some quick scans and verified that a number of smaller flares were also erupting as a result of the disturbance.

"What do you have?" Carlson inquired impatiently.

"I'm seeing a marked increase in solar flare activity," the engineer reported.

"The folks at the observatory assured me not two days ago the sun was in a quiet phase," Carlson complained as one of the astronomers who'd been standing by in case of just such an occurrence hurried over to that station.

"Maybe it was, sir," the astronomer replied, "but it sure isn't quiet now. I'm seeing a series of enormous eruptions here."

"Holding steady now at ninety-eight point... *Disregard that!*" the woman on dispersal systems shouted. Ninety-eight *nine!* Ninety-nine six! *One-oh-one point five!*"

"Shut it down!" Carlson yelled. "*Shut it down!*"

"I'm *trying* to shut it down, sir!" she yelled back as her fingers danced frantically over her controls. "The system isn't responding!"

The energy streaming into the collector plate grew in intensity until it surpassed the satellite's specifications for maximum tolerances. It quickly overloaded and eventually blew out the dispersal units. Without those units to direct the outflow, streams of raw warp plasma instantly began shooting off into space in randomly varying directions. The satellite began to tumble in its orbit as a result and the distant solar flare activity continued to increase, creating wave after wave of subspace distortion that radiated outward from the sun like ripples on the surface of a lake into which a stone had been thrown. Minutes later, the first of those waves struck the satellite, stressing its frame. Then, one after another, successive waves continued to strike it, twisting and distorting it until its structure could no longer hold up under the strain, and it finally exploded.

With nothing left to catch with it, the energy stream emanating from the surface of the planet shot freely out into space for only one brief moment longer before the next series of distortion waves struck, warping and distorting it, bending it first in one direction and then in another...and then another, all of them random and unpredictable. It struck a communications satellite, destroying it instantly. It carved a gash across the surface of one of the distant moons—thankfully the smaller, uninhabited moon of the three. And then, under the assault of a series of three quick waves that struck one right after another, it turned back on itself and began traveling down along its own length toward the planet surface as a sort of feedback.

“Solar flare activity is increasing exponentially!” the astronomer shouted.

“We’ve just lost the satellite!” one of the engineers added.

“Chamber pressure increasing!” the engineer on the chamber threw in.

“*Shut this damn thing down, right now!*” Carlson screamed, half-panicked.

“I’m *trying!*” Barker assured him. “It’s not responding!”

“*Chamber overloading! Approaching critical!*”

“Evacuate the lab!” Carlson ordered as he rushed over to the wall. He slapped the large red button, sounding the alarm. “Everyone out!” he shouted as the klaxon began to wail. “*Now! Go! Go! GO!*”

Everyone abandoned their station and ran for the emergency exits. There was nothing more they could do. The lab and all their years’ of work was going to be lost, very likely along with most of the building.

The distortion wave-induced energy feedback raced down the length of the beam and into the collector. For the next few brief moments nothing happened, but then, suddenly, one massive explosion of searing energy and blinding light engulfed that entire region of the city.

CHAPTER 2

“My God, Uncle Jim, that’s...that’s horrible,” Peter remarked. “The entire city? I can’t imagine how many people must have been killed or injured.

“Not the *entire* city,” Kirk corrected, “but a large portion of it. And you’re right, the numbers of killed and injured were staggering. Prior to the recent Romulan attack on Babel, the Aldebaran disaster was the costliest disaster in Federation history in number of lives lost.”

“And this happened *before* you took command of the *Enterprise*?”

“Shortly before, yes,” Kirk confirmed. “I was back at Starfleet Branch Headquarters aboard Starbase-One, hanging around in one of the small dressing rooms in the auditorium’s backstage area, waiting for the Change-of-Command ceremony to start...”

* * * * *

Commander James T. Kirk sat at the computer terminal in one of the small backstage dressing room and tugged down on the medium-brown V-neck dress jacket that he’d been urged to wear over his gold-tan standard duty command shirt. Truth be told, he would have worn it *without* being urged to do so. After all, it wasn’t every day an officer got promoted to captain and took command of a *Constitution*-class heavy cruiser starship all in one ceremony.

“*U.S.S. Enterprise onboard library computer accessed,*” the computer informed him. “*Record located. Playback standing by.*”

“About time,” Kirk quietly griped as he pulled a blank record cartridge from inside his waistband. He slipped the cartridge into the slot and turned on the monitor, then told the computer to, “Begin playback and save record to external cartridge.”

An image of soon to be *former Enterprise* Captain Christopher Pike’s quarters aboard the starship appeared on the monitor. The lights appeared to be low, as though the room were reflecting Pike’s no doubt somber mood. Pike himself, a handsome man of about forty-five with dark brown hair and light blue eyes that drew one’s attention right to them, was standing with his back to the closed door, gazing at a beautiful painting of a nebula that was hanging on his wall. His half-filled duffle and a pile of folded clothing were sitting on the foot of his bed. For a moment Kirk thought that the computer might have mistakenly pulled up a still image rather than a record tape, but then Pike’s door buzzer sounded.

“Come in,” Captain Pike said.

The door swished open and disappeared into the bulkhead, and Pike’s Vulcan science officer, Lieutenant Commander Spock, stepped in. Like Pike, the Vulcan was wearing a command-gold shirt, which didn’t make any sense to Kirk until he recalled that Captain Pike had appointed him first officer as well, shortly after he signed aboard the *Enterprise* again for Pike’s second five-year mission.

He stopped just far enough inside the captain’s quarters to allow the door to swish closed behind him, then stood straight with his hands behind his back and stated, rather than asked, “You asked to see me, Captain.”

“Yes I did,” Pike confirmed as he finally turned to face his first officer. “Starfleet has

decided to reassign me to duties commensurate with my promotion to fleet captain.”

Spock stood in what, if he were human, Kirk could only have described as stunned silence, as though the news had been totally unexpected. Then, after a few brief moments, he asked, “You’re leaving the *Enterprise*?”

“Unfortunately, that’s part of the deal,” Pike replied. “Does that surprise you?”

Spock seemed almost to flinch as he raised one eyebrow. “It is...unexpected, sir,” he clarified, verifying Kirk’s suspicion. “You have often spoken of how proud you are of this vessel and her crew.”

Pike took a single step closer to the Vulcan. “I’ve served as commanding officer of the *Enterprise* for almost thirteen years, Spock. I’ll always be proud of her and her crew, but two five-year missions of deep space exploration are enough for *any* starship commander.”

“I realize that these last few years have been trying for you, sir, however...”

“It’s time, Spock,” Pike proclaimed, interrupting. “I’ve had enough of being out here on the front lines—of deciding who lives and who dies.”

Spock paused briefly, probably to consider what his captain had told him, then asked, “When will the change-of-command ceremony take place, sir?”

“Today,” Pike bluntly replied. “In a few hours, actually.”

“So soon? That’s rather sudden, is it not?”

Pike turned his back on his first officer and stepped over to his bed. “I didn’t want to say anything until I felt sure of my decision to accept.” He started stuffing the loose clothes into his duffle. “We’re on our way to rendezvous with the scout *Aeolus* at Starbase-One. Her captain, Commander Kirk, has been selected to...”

“Commander James T. Kirk?” Spock asked, interrupting, a hint of what might have been displeasure briefly flashing across his face. “That arrogant, undisciplined cadet who...”

“Yes,” Pike confirmed, facing Spock once more, obviously knowing exactly to what the Vulcan had been about to refer. “Is that a problem?”

Spock hesitated just long enough to rein in his momentary emotional slip, then stated in a very neutral tone of voice, “I do not believe that he is the most logical choice.”

“Why not?”

Spock stepped up to his captain and stood directly before him. “Captain, when James Kirk returned to the academy after the incident aboard the *Republic*, he did so with an almost obsessive voraciousness to succeed.”

“And he excelled in every area,” Pike pointed out. “He’d been promoted to ensign as a first-year cadet and had just been awarded the Palm Leaf of Axanar. He was...motivated.” When Spock only stared at his captain, Pike explained, “I’ve had the opportunity to read his academic record in depth.”

“Then you are no doubt aware that he also earned the distinction of being the only cadet to ever defeat the *Kobayashi Maru* test,” Spock presumed. “To this day, the unorthodox methods that he employed to achieve that feat remain...questionable, at best.”

“You disapprove of Kirk’s selection?” Pike asked him directly.

“I believe that your successor should be a person whose integrity is beyond reproach, as yours has always been,” Spock replied.

“So you would choose someone else,” Pike concluded.

“I would,” Spock readily confessed. “However, the choice is not mine to make, and I

do not believe that Starfleet Command would find my opinion on the matter to be relevant.”

Pike grinned, then turned back to his bunk and resumed filling his duffle. “No, I don’t suppose they would. Mister Spock, you’ve been a top-rated and fiercely loyal officer since the day you joined my crew in cadet silver-gray. I’ve come to consider you one of my closest friends. I hope you’ll show Kirk that same loyalty.”

I shall endeavor to do so, sir, provided that he endeavors to earn it,” Spock told him.

“Glad to hear it,” Pike replied as he finished filling his duffle and zipped it closed. “Every starship captain needs to know that he can trust his first officer.” He paused briefly, then faced his first officer and friend once more. “For the record, Spock, you should know that I submitted *your* name for this command, but for whatever reason, Starfleet Command feels Kirk is the better choice, at least for now.”

“Thank you, Captain, but as you know, I have no desire for a command of my own. I prefer to concentrate on pursuing my scientific duties.”

“As you have so often reminded me.”

The intercom whistled, and a woman’s voice followed. “*Bridge to Captain Pike.*”

Pike stepped over to his desk and thumbed the button on his communications panel with a *click*. “Pike here.”

“*We’re approaching Starbase-One, sir.*”

“Acknowledged. On my way.” Pike closed the channel and then faced Spock again. “Mister Spock...”

“It has been my honor to serve with you, Captain,” Spock said.

“And mine to have had you by my side as first officer,” Pike replied. And with that, he led his Vulcan first officer and friend out of his quarters.

The recording ended. Kirk pulled the cartridge out of the slot and then sat back in the chair. Spock, the Vulcan, wasn’t going to make his decision any easier. Still, *he* was the new captain, not Spock. The choice was his to make.

He stood up and slipped the cartridge back into his waistband, then stepped out into the hallway where he found Gary waiting for him. Lieutenant Gary Mitchell and he had been friends almost since the day they met at Starfleet Academy. Kirk had been a newly promoted lieutenant junior grade, fresh off the boat from his first training voyage aboard the Starship *Republic* and serving as an assistant instructor at the time, Gary a fellow cadet. They had developed a close friendship, and when Kirk took command of the *Aeolus*, he’d called in a few favors and gotten Mitchell assigned to the ship with him.

“So?” Mitchell inquired.

“He seems to be open-minded enough,” Kirk opined, “and he did say that he prefers his science duties to command. I think it’ll work out.”

“I hope you’re right, Jim. I’ve heard Vulcans can be pretty uptight.”

They walked out onto the stage together—the curtains were closed, so no one in the audience could see them—where they met up with Captain Pike and Lieutenant Commander Spock, both of whom were wearing their dress jackets as well. Kirk extended his hand toward Pike as he approached. “Captain Pike,” he said in greeting. “Pleased to meet you, sir.”

“Commander Kirk,” Pike returned as he grasped and shook Kirk’s hand, though he gazed at Mitchell as he did so.

Kirk pulled his hand free and then gestured toward Mitchell. “Allow me to introduce

Lieutenant Commander Gary Mitchell. Mister Mitchell is transferring to the *Enterprise* with me to serve as my chief helmsman and first officer.”

Spock didn’t appear to have been fazed at all by the news, but Pike looked decidedly displeased as he only briefly shook Mitchell’s hand.

“Pleased to meet you, sir,” Mitchell said.

“Mister Mitchell,” Pike replied neutrally. Then he looked back at Kirk and told him, “Lieutenant Commander Spock, *my* first officer—first officer of the *Enterprise*.”

“Mister Spock,” Kirk acknowledged, nodding to the Vulcan. Vulcans didn’t like to be touched, so he made no attempt to shake his hand.

“Commander Spock has served with distinction as first officer of the *Enterprise* for the past five years,” Pike pointed out with obvious emphasis.

Kirk and Mitchell exchanged quick, knowing glances with one another. Then Kirk looked at Spock and told him directly, “No reflection on you, Commander, but I need a first officer who I already know well. Besides, I have it on good authority that you prefer your scientific duties over those of command.”

“Your information is correct, sir,” Spock replied.

“It always is,” Mitchell told the Vulcan, grinning.

“I would like to keep you on as my second officer and chief science officer,” Kirk told him then, ignoring Gary’s comment and saving the Vulcan from having to respond to it. Or, perhaps saving Gary from whatever that response might have been. After all, Vulcans might not have had a sense of humor, but they were certainly *not* slow-witted. “That is, if you wish to *remain* aboard the *Enterprise*,” he added.

“I do, sir,” Spock assured him, “and I find your offer to be quite satisfactory.”

“Good,” Kirk replied, smiling. “I’m pleased to hear that.”

All four men fell silent when they heard the admiral who was currently out on stage addressing the audience say, “What better way to bring that chapter of his career to a close?”

“You’ll be introduced momentarily, Captain,” Spock said to Captain Pike, lowering his voice. “I should take my place.”

“Right,” Pike agreed. “Go on.”

As Spock walked off, heading for the far side of the stage, Mitchell nodded to Kirk and started heading in the opposite direction. “Sir.”

“See you afterwards, Gary,” Kirk told him, lowering his voice as well.

Pike glared at Kirk. “That was a pretty cold-hearted thing to do, Kirk,” he declared harshly though quietly as soon as Mitchell had walked out of earshot. “Mister Spock has served aboard the *Enterprise* under me for something like a dozen years. He’s a damn fine officer and he deserves to keep that X-O billet.”

“I’m sure he does, sir,” Kirk calmly replied, “but I need someone who knows me and can accurately anticipate my orders.”

“Mister Spock can do that as well as anyone, and better than most.”

“But he doesn’t know *me*, Captain, and I don’t know him.”

“I think he knows you better than you realize.” Pike waited a moment, giving Kirk a chance to respond to that, but when Kirk didn’t say anything more, he told him, “You’re making a big mistake, Kirk.”

“All due respect, sir, it’s my mistake to make,” Kirk pointed out. “The *Enterprise* is

my command now, or will be in a few minutes. Besides, Spock is a Vulcan. It's not like my decision can have hurt his feelings."

"He's half human," Pike stated matter-of-factly.

Kirk hesitated. He hadn't known that about Mister Spock—he'd always thought that Starfleet's first Vulcan officer was a full-blooded Vulcan. He certainly looked like one. No matter. Kirk had made his decision. "Nevertheless, my decision stands," he said. "Mitchell is my first officer."

"With all of that in mind," the admiral on stage said, raising her voice—no doubt Pike's cue, "it is with great pleasure that I introduce to you Captain Christopher Pike of the Starship *Enterprise*."

Pike drew a deep breath and sighed. "I really hate this part," he admitted aloud.

"I don't blame you, Captain," Kirk replied as Pike turned and walked off.

Applauding along with the audience and the five officers present to represent the crew of the *Enterprise*, who were sitting in a row of chairs well behind and to one side of the podium—Chief Medical Officer Doctor Mark Piper, who doubled as Head of Life Sciences, Assistant Chief Engineer Lieutenant Montgomery Scott, Navigator Lieutenant Lee Kelso, and Head of Astrosciences Lieutenant Hikaru Sulu—the admiral turned from the podium toward Pike as the captain stepped out onto the stage in front of the curtain and approached her. Pike thanked the admiral and shook her hand as soon as he reached the podium, then replaced her behind the podium when she stepped away to go take her seat on the end of the row, leaving one empty chair between her and those other *Enterprise* officers.

Pike gazed out over the audience for a few brief moments and then pulled a sheet of paper out of his waistband and smoothed it out on the podium's surface while the applause began slowly dying down.

"Thank you, Admiral," he said, speaking loud enough to be heard over the lingering applause. Then, when the last of that applause finally did fall silent, he began in earnest. "Mister President, Commander of the Fleet, ladies and gentlemen... It has been my distinct honor over these last twelve years plus to serve as commanding officer aboard what I will always regard to be the finest starship in the fleet. During those years, I have enjoyed the distinct privilege of serving with some of the finest officers and crew in Starfleet. In some ways, those years were the best years of my career, while in others, perhaps, they were the worst. But, as I look back over them now, I am forced to acknowledge that whether at their best or at their worst, they were definitely some of the most fulfilling years of my life. So, in the end, I count them all as good."

An aide entered quietly from backstage and approached the admiral, whispering into her ear as Pike continued, "But, as they say, all good things must come to an end. So I step aside now as commanding officer of the *Enterprise*, and I look forward to a new chapter in my career. And as I do so, I know that I leave her and her crew in capable hands." He raised one arm toward the stage entrance while the admiral and her aide continued talking quietly behind him. "Mister President, Commander of the Fleet, ladies and gentlemen... I present to you the commanding officer of the scout ship *U-S-S Aeolus*, Commander James T. Kirk."

Like the admiral had before him, Pike turned and applauded with the audience as Kirk

approached from backstage. The two officers shook hands as Kirk joined Pike at the podium, then stood facing one another as the applause died down once more.

“*Fleet* Captain Christopher Pike, I hereby relieve you, sir, as commanding officer, Starship *U-S-S Enterprise*.”

“*Captain* James T. Kirk, I stand relieved.”

Pike faced the audience again and gestured toward Kirk, said, “Ladies and gentlemen, I present Captain James T. Kirk, commanding officer, *U-S-S Enterprise*,” and the applause resumed immediately. Then, while Kirk took his place behind the podium and looked over the audience, smiling with appreciation, Pike walked back and took a seat in the last empty chair in the row, beside the admiral, who had just finished speaking with her aide. The admiral stood up at that same moment and approached Kirk.

“Captain Kirk,” she said, stepping up beside him as he was just about to start his speech. She held her hand out over the microphones to block them, then leaned in a little closer to his ear and told him, “We have an emergency situation at the Aldebaran Colony. I need you to head out there immediately. I’ll give you all the details in your mission orders.”

Kirk acknowledged the admiral with a quick nod—truth be told, he was glad to have been saved from having to deliver the speech that he’d only thrown together yesterday—and then backed well away from the podium, not wanting the microphones to pick him up as he pulled his communicator out from under his shirt where it had been attached to his waist, flipped it open, and called, “Captain Kirk to *Enterprise*.”

“*Enterprise*,” the response came immediately. It was the same woman he’d heard on the record tape. “*Lieutenant Uhura here, sir.*”

Kirk gestured toward the officers seated on stage, signaling them to stand up as he approached them. “Lock onto my signal and beam up all *Enterprise* personnel currently at this location. Then locate all other officers and crew and have them beam aboard immediately as well. Looks like our five-year mission begins right now.”

CHAPTER 3

U.S.S. Enterprise ship's log, stardate 1209.5, Captain James T. Kirk commanding. Foregoing the standard turnaround period between five-year missions for the time being, Enterprise has departed Starbase-One well ahead of schedule and is enroute to the Aldebaran system, where a massive explosion has devastated a large part of one of Earth's oldest and most populous colonies, reportedly caused by what is being described as some kind of solar disturbance.

Having shed his dress jacket, Captain Kirk sat proudly in his command chair, like a king upon his throne, in the center of the bridge aboard his new assignment, the *Constitution*-class heavy cruiser *U.S.S. Enterprise*, holding the tricorder in his hand and recording his log while Yeoman Andrea Jones—or was it Smith? Jones. He felt sure it was Jones—stood to his left and waited. He could have recorded it directly into the computer interface mounted to the right side of his chair on the gooseneck, of course, but then he wouldn't have needed Jones to stand by beside him. She was a pretty one, with near shoulder-length blond hair that curled inward toward her neck at the ends and bright blue eyes, and though she didn't seem to smile a whole lot, she was still nice to gaze at. Lieutenant Nyota Uhura, the very lovely young communications officer who'd answered when he called over to the ship from the starbase a little while ago, was still manning her station, her gold tunic seemingly adding a glow to the already warm hue of her smooth, dark skin, and the Vulcan, Lieutenant Commander Spock, was busying himself at the science station. Kelso had taken over navigation and Gary was standing behind the helm at the shoulder of a thirtyish-year old blue-shirted science officer named Alden, who Kirk understood had recently qualified as a communications officer and had expressed an interest in cross-training to the helm as well.

A good idea, Kirk realized...officers cross-training into multiple departments. That could go a long way toward improving overall efficiency.

"Our orders are twofold," Kirk continued. "First, assist the responding hospital ships in any way we can as soon as they arrive in orbit. Second, investigate the scene and the cause of the explosion and try to determine whether or not any more Federation colonies might be in danger." He paused briefly and watched while Mister Spock stepped down to the helm and handed a tablet to Mitchell, then continued, "Personal note: This emergency response mission kicked off mere seconds after I officially assumed command of this vessel. While I welcome the opportunity to observe my new crew in action, I do wish the circumstances weren't so grave." Looking at the tablet that Spock had handed to him, Mitchell stepped back to Kirk's right. "I can only hope that this isn't a sign of what the future holds in store for us when our regular five-year mission begins."

Kirk switched off the recorder and handed the tricorder to his yeoman. "Make sure my personal note stays in the official log, Jones," he told her.

She flashed him a slightly disapproving look and replied with a sigh, "Yes, sir," then left the bridge while Mitchell stared at Kirk with a stupid grin on his face.

"We're clear of the station, sir," Alden reported. "Ready for warp."

"Ahead warp factor seven, Mister Alden," Kirk ordered.

“Ahead warp seven, aye, sir,” Alden acknowledged as he entered the commands into his board.

Still grinning at him, Mitchell held the tablet out to Kirk, but Kirk said, “Not here.” Then he stood up, said, “Come with me,” and headed for the turbolift. Mitchell followed, as ordered, and Kirk quietly asked him, “What’s with the smirk?”

“Your yeoman’s name is Andrea *Smith*, sir,” Mitchell replied as they stepped up behind Uhura’s station. “Not Jones. Smith.”

Kirk glanced over at the science station. “Mister Spock, you’re with us.” Then, as the Vulcan approached, he looked down at Uhura and said, “Lieutenant Uhura, call Doctor Piper and the chief engineer to the briefing room.”

“Aye, sir,” she replied.

As Kirk led Mitchell and Spock into the lift, he heard Uhura make the call.

In the briefing room, Kirk sat at the end of the roughly oval polished wood-grain table opposite the doors with Mitchell to his right, still holding onto the tablet, and Mister Spock to his left. Doctor Piper had arrived and taken a seat to Spock’s left, and they all looked toward the doors when they parted to admit Chief Engineer Commander Craig Carwyn, who had been unavoidably delayed for a few minutes.

“All right, Gary,” Kirk began while Carwyn took a seat in the chair beside the first officer. “What’ve you got for us?”

“Latest update from the Aldebaran Colony governor’s office, sir,” Mitchell replied. He dropped his gaze to the tablet and started reading aloud. “Total population as of the last census, approximately a quarter-million settlers. So far...” He stopped suddenly and sighed, nearly choking on his words, then tried again. “So far, forty-eight thousand and fifteen have been confirmed killed, sir.” The others at the table, except for Spock, of course, sighed with the awful news. “Eighteen thousand and seventy-three confirmed survivors within the blast radius, many of them injured,” Mitchell continued, “leaving almost eighty-four thousand still unaccounted for.”

“My God,” Doctor Piper muttered. Then he looked at Kirk and said, “We’re going to need a lot more help down there, Captain.”

Kirk clenched his jaw and swallowed hard, then licked his lips. Those numbers were nothing short of staggering. “The *Comfort* and the *Sanctuary* are on their way,” he advised the doctor, forcing the commanding officer within him to take over for the man. “The *Mercy* will be diverting as soon as possible. But we *are* going to be the first ship on the scene, so your staff needs to be ready to go as soon as we get there, Mark.”

“They’ll be ready, Captain,” the doctor assured him.

Kirk turned his gaze to the ship’s chief engineer. “Mister Carwyn, all reports indicate that buildings are down all around the periphery of the blast radius. If you have any qualified heavy machinery operators on staff, I’m sure the local authorities will be able to use their help.”

“A few, sir,” Carwyn advised him. “I’ll see to it.”

“Thank you.” Kirk then turned his eyes to Mitchell and asked him, “Any more on the explosion itself, Gary?”

“Not yet, sir,” Mitchell replied. “We still only have the various districts’ preliminary reports to go by.”

“Mister Spock,” Kirk continued, turning to the Vulcan, “According to those reports, colonial authorities are blaming the explosion on unusually strong solar flare activity. I’m not a scientist, but I have to say I find that explanation to be dubious at best.”

“As do I, sir,” Spock advised him.

“I’ll want you to investigate it from every angle you can—geological, meteorological, industrial...even Klingon attack if that appears at all plausible.”

“Understood, sir.”

“I don’t want to leave any stone...”

The intercom whistled, interrupting Kirk, and Kelso’s voice followed. “*Bridge to Captain Kirk.*” He sounded a little...confused.

Kirk pressed a pair of rocker switches hidden beneath the edge of the table in front of him. “Kirk here. Go ahead, Lieutenant.”

Kelso’s image appeared on the large wall screen, looking every bit as confused and unsure as he sounded. “*Sensors are picking up something directly ahead, sir...I think. I can’t actually be sure.*”

“Problem with your instruments, Mister Kelso?” Kirk inquired.

“*No, sir. At least...I don’t think so. It’s like there’s a...a ripple in space, but it’s...it’s not exactly...there, sir.*”

“Switch to your backup circuit, Mister Kelso,” Spock instructed him.

“*Already tried that, sir,*” Kelso told him. “*Same readings.*”

Kirk stood up and reached down to the switches as the others started to stand up with him. “We’re on our way. Kirk out.” He closed the channel, then led the way out.

“Guess it’s time to bid our scouting days a fond farewell, Jim,” Mitchell remarked as they walked out into the corridor.

“Nothing, Mister Kelso,” Uhura was saying as Kirk, Mitchell, and Spock stepped out of the turbolift and back onto the bridge.

“Report, Mister Kelso,” Kirk ordered as he stepped forward, toward the center seat, while Spock headed for his station and Mitchell headed...wherever.

Kelso turned in his chair and looked back at the captain. “Sensors are still pinging on something, sir, but whatever it is, our deflectors can’t see it.”

“Can you confirm that, Mister Spock?” Kirk asked the Vulcan as he sat down.

The Vulcan stood and peered into his scope, which emitted a shining blue light across his eyes. “Confirmed, Captain,” he said after a moment. “However, my scanners *are* reading a large spatial disturbance at the edge of their range, directly ahead.”

“What kind of disturbance?”

“Unknown, sir,” Spock replied as he made some seemingly minor adjustments to his instruments. “Scanners are unable to lock onto anything long enough to provide dependable telemetry. The phenomenon appears to phase out of existence with each attempt. Captain...” He paused for a moment, then stood up straight and turned to the captain. “Our closing speed with the disturbance is precisely one warp factor above our current velocity.”

Kirk spun his chair around far enough to look directly at Spock. “*It’s approaching us* at warp factor one?” he asked, hardly believing his ears. “It’s traveling along a straight line from the Aldebaran Colony, I’ll bet.”

“You suspect this phenomenon is what devastated the colony,” Spock concluded.

“Seems pretty likely to me, Mister Spock, if in fact it is traveling along that course.”

Mitchell stepped up beside Kirk’s chair as Spock replied, “To me as well, Captain, but without more conclusive data I cannot definitely...”

“Whatever it is, I suggest we give it a wide birth, sir,” Kelso said, interrupting and drawing Kirk’s attention.

“I concur, Jim,” Mitchell told him before he could respond to Kelso’s suggestion. “I know our orders include investigating the cause of the disaster, but if that’s it we can always chase it down later.”

“Agreed,” Kirk said almost immediately. “The colony is our number one priority.” He turned back to the science officer, “Launch a sensor probe, Mister Spock,” and then back to navigation and the helm. “Mister Kelso, plot a course well around the disturbance. Helm, alter course.”

“Captain,” Uhura called out, “all subspace communications just went down across the board. Interference from the disturbance.”

“Confirmed, sir,” Spock offered. “Probe telemetry now verifies subspace interference emanating from the disturbance.”

“Mister Alden, give it all the room it wants,” Kirk ordered.

“Aye, sir. Increasing...”

The ship suddenly rocked to starboard, spinning Kirk’s chair and forcing everyone to grab hold of their consoles to keep from falling.

“Alden, back us off!” Kirk shouted.

“Trying, sir!” the student-helmsman replied.

The ship rocked back to port and Kirk had to throw his arms up to shield his face when the helm-nav console exploded with a spray of sparks and flames, throwing both Kelso and Alden to the deck. “Uhura, get the medics up here!” he shouted as Mitchell took over the helm, slapping out the flames with his bare hands.

“Emergency medical team to the bridge,” Uhura called into her board without wasting any time to acknowledge the order. “Med team, to the bridge.”

“Helm functional, Captain, but I can’t disengage the warp drive!” Mitchell reported. “Navigation is down!”

“Full reverse, Gary!” Kirk ordered. “Back us off!”

“Trying to, sir!”

Kirk punched the call button on the arm of his chair. “Kirk to Engineering!”

Engineering had taken a lot of damage in those few seconds. Those panels that the engineers fighting the fires hadn’t reached yet were still in flames and a drifting and slowly dissipating cloud of blue-white smoke that smelled of ozone half-filled the cavernous room. Engineering Ensign Sentell was busy providing first-aid to Commander Carwyn, who lay on his back in the center of the deck, badly injured—a ceiling strut had broken loose and fallen

across one shoulder, striking him on the back of his head and knocking him to the deck, where the strut still lay across his back, too heavy for Sentell to lift alone. Having somehow heard the new captain's call over the din, Lieutenant Scott quickly finished putting out the fire he'd been fighting and then hurried over to the nearest intercom panel and punched the button to respond.

"Engineerin', Lieutenant Scott here, sir! Commander Carwyn is badly hurt, Captain! We'll be takin' him to sickbay in a moment!"

"*Not you, Mister Scott,*" Kirk told him. "*You're my acting chief engineer now. I need someone up here on the double to repair the navigation console.*"

"Aye, sir! They're on their way!"

Scott closed the channel and then turned and shouted at the first two people he saw—a junior officer and a technician. "You," he shouted at the officer, "over there! Help Sentell with the chief! You," he followed up, turning his eyes to the technician. "Bridge navigation is out! Take care of it!"

Mitchell's fingers danced over the damaged helm controls with precision like those of a concert pianist, searching out the answer to a question that Kirk hadn't had a chance to ask him yet. "I can't reroute navigation up here from auxiliary control, Captain, but it appears to be fully functional down there," he reported.

"Send a navigator down there on the double," Kirk ordered.

Mitchell looked back over his shoulder at Kirk. "I *am* trying to find one, Jim."

"You're trying to..." Had he heard Gary correctly? "We do *have* another navigator aboard this ship, don't we?"

"I...don't know for sure," Mitchell admitted regretfully.

"Captain," Spock called out, "we departed the starbase before all of our crew could be located and recalled. However, there is a Cadet Pavel Chekov onboard fulfilling his current training cruise requirements. He is majoring in stellar cartography at the academy, but he has performed admirably in navigational pre-tests as well."

"Assign him, Spock, but I want a qualified navigator with him if we have one, even if it's someone who doesn't normally man the post."

"I'm a qualified navigator, sir," Uhura volunteered, drawing Kirk's quick attention, "and with communications down..."

"Go, Lieutenant," Kirk told her.

"On my way, sir!" she replied, up and turning toward the turbolift doors. They opened ahead of her and she had to step aside as a pair of medical technicians rushed out, but then she was on her way. The doors closed behind her, and as the jump-suited medics hurried past the engineering station, it exploded, barely missing them when they quickly ducked out of the way and dropped to their knees beside the injured navigator.

"Gary!" Kirk shouted, pointing toward that station, now in flames.

"I'm on it!" Mitchell replied as he jumped up from the helm and then rushed around to the front of the console before hurrying to port, to avoid interfering with the medics.

Spock stepped over to the communications station and opened an intraship channel. "Lieutenant Hikaru Sulu, report to the bridge immediately."

“How are they?” Kirk asked the medics as Spock made his way to the helm.

“We need to get them both to sickbay, sir,” the senior medic replied. Then he turned his attention back to his work.

Kirk punched the call button on the arm of his chair. “Sickbay. Doctor Piper, report.”

Moments after the ship had rocked so violently, sickbay had quickly fallen into a state of organized chaos. Medics were tending to patients on every diagnostic bed they had, in some cases two or even three seated on the same bed. Injuries ranged from minor bumps and bruises to broken bones and bloody noses. Ensign Kyle, who’d simply banged an elbow on his panel and lost the feeling in his lower arm, sat in a chair off to one side, patiently waiting his turn to be treated.

“*Sickbay, report!*” he heard the captain demand over the comm.

Kyle looked around the busy facility, realized that no one else had heard the captain’s call, or at least no one who wasn’t too busy to answer it, and then got up and walked over to answer it himself. “Sickbay, Ensign Kyle here, sir. Doctor Piper is in surgery...I think.”

“*How bad is it down there, Ensign?*” the captain’s image on the monitor asked.

“Pretty busy, sir,” Kyle replied, looking around the sickbay once more as he did so. “Looks like a lot of people got hurt. No fatalities that I’m aware of, though, sir.”

“*All right. Have Doctor Piper call the bridge as soon as possible.*”

“Aye, Captain.”

“Kirk out.” He thumbed the button as he stared at Lieutenant Sulu, who had just taken over at the helm. Much like Mitchell’s moments ago, the blue-shirted astroscientist’s fingers danced over the controls as though he were playing a piano concerto, and mere seconds later the *Enterprise* dropped out of the rough ride at warp and flowed into smooth sailing at sub-light speed. “Mister Mitchell?” the captain called.

“Fire’s out,” Mitchell reported. “I’m taking damage reports and assigning damage control teams now, Captain.”

“Mister Spock?” Kirk then called, *still* staring at the back of Sulu’s head.

Spock looked over at Kirk and immediately realized what was on his mind. “Mister Sulu is a well-qualified and accomplished pilot, Captain.”

“I can see that, Science Officer,” Kirk replied. “What just happened to us?”

“The disturbance appears to be some sort of gravitic energy field travelling through subspace like a wave, creating ripples in the fabric of subspace itself. Judging from the effect it had on our vessel, I believe the field is constantly shifting and highly unstable.”

“You don’t say,” Mitchell remarked.

“We tried to avoid it,” Kirk pointed out, looking up at the screen and ignoring Gary’s pointless comment. “Why did it pull us in?”

“It did not pull us in, Captain,” Spock corrected. “It came to us.”

Kirk looked over at the Vulcan. “All right, Spock. Why did it come to us?”

“I cannot be certain, sir. Nor can I yet be certain of why it drifted away from us as soon as we dropped out of warp.”

“Do you have a theory?” Kirk dug.

“Not at this time, sir.”

Kirk sighed as he looked ahead once more. “Mister Sulu.” The temporary helmsman looked back over his shoulder at him. “Figure out which way it went and then flash the fleet. Then take us to the colony, warp seven.”

“Aye, sir.” The younger man complied, but as soon as he engaged the warp drive, the ship started rocking violently again.

“Sulu, cut power!” Kirk shouted.

“Trying, sir!” he assured the captain. “No response!”

“*Scott to Captain!*”

Kirk punched the button. “Kirk here!”

“Captain,” the acting chief engineer shouted, holding onto the edge of the console as he stared up at the large status board, “the warp core is on a fast build-up to overload!”

“*Can you vent the excess plasma?*”

“No’ fast enough!” Scott assured him. “She’s gonna blow in less than *two minutes!*”

“*Can’t you speed up the venting rate?*”

“Captain Kirk, if I could speed up the rate I would o’ done it already!” the Scotsman declared impatiently.

“*What if we engage the warp drive at maximum power—no build up? Will that do it?*”

“Aye, that’ll do it, sir!” Scott replied a little sarcastically. Who did this baby-faced captain think he was, anyway? “Or it’ll blow us straight to hell that much sooner!”

“*We’ll have to chance it, Mister Scott. Do it.*”

“Do it, sir?” Scott asked, hardly able to believe his ears. “Just like that?”

“*No choice, Engineer! Do it! Kirk out.*”

“Captain,” Spock said calmly as soon as Kirk had punched the channel closed, “even at full power, our chances of pulling away from the disturbance are...”

“Don’t ever quote me odds, Mister Spock,” Kirk said. “If we can’t pull away from this thing, then we’ll fly the *Enterprise* right down its throat and shoot out the other side—let our momentum do the work.” The Vulcan raised one eyebrow...whatever that was supposed to mean. Looked like the Vulcan was surprised...if that was even possible. “Mister Sulu, as soon as we’re bow-to-center of that thing, punch it—full power, maximum warp.”

“Aye aye, sir.” And only a moment later, “Here we go, Captain.”

“Everyone hold on!” Kirk warned.

Sulu pressed the controls. The engines surged and pulsated and the *Enterprise* started tossing and turning and shaking, her lights dimming and flickering and flaring and then dimming again. Consoles once more exploded into sparks and flames and people were tossed violently to the deck. The *Enterprise* pitched and yawed and rolled and then fell into the center of the nearly invisible spatial disturbance as though she were slipping into a wormhole. The image up on the main viewscreen jumped to an aft view as bolts of energy like lightning began dancing between the twin nacelles. Fountains of superheated plasma spewed from the vents like steam from cracked pipes, growing brighter and brighter as they grew larger and stronger until the screen suddenly went black.

The *Enterprise* continued pitching and rolling out of control, her decks rumbling as she plunged through the disturbance at steadily increasing warp velocities. While the other officers and crew on the bridge struggled to return to their stations, Science Officer Spock grasped his scope and held on tightly as he peered into it. “Warp seven point nine!” he reported, shouting loud enough for Kirk to hear him over the cacophony. “Now approaching the center of the disturbance!”

“Nacelles overheating!” Sulu added, holding onto the helm console, his chair laying on its side on the deck beside him. “We’re still venting plasma! Velocity now warp eight point six and still increasing!”

“*Captain, she’s gonna fly apart!*” Scott shouted over the comm.

“Hold her together, Lieutenant!” Kirk ordered in response.

“Warp nine point three!” Sulu shouted.

“*Captain Kirk! She’s gonna blow!*”

Kirk looked over at Spock, who immediately looked right back at him, almost as though he’d sensed the captain’s gaze. “A few more seconds, Captain,” the Vulcan told him. Then he gazed back into his scope, and those few more seconds later said, “*Now, Captain.*”

“Cut warp drive, Mister Sulu!” Kirk ordered, once more staring at the back of the younger man’s head. “All stop!”

The ship rumbled and shook and some of the crew who’d managed to return to their stations fell to the deck again. Then, suddenly, the ship stilled and they were sailing smoothly through normal space. Kirk glanced around the bridge. Some of his crew were busy putting out the last few small console fires, but it didn’t appear as though anyone had been seriously injured, fortunately.

“Gary, take damage reports,” he ordered.

“Aye, sir.”

“We have emerged from the distortion phenomenon, Captain,” Spock reported.

“That fact is fairly obvious, Mister Spock,” Kirk replied.

The Vulcan stepped up to the railing behind his station, hesitated for a brief moment, then said, “Your order to fly through the phenomenon was one of reckless desperation.”

Kirk turned and met the Vulcan’s accusatory gaze. “It worked, didn’t it?” he asked, challenging that accusation.

Spock raised an eyebrow again—that *had* to mean he was surprised. Maybe Vulcans weren’t so devoid of emotion after all...or maybe that was just his human half peeking out. Then he turned back to his station without uttering another word, and Kirk couldn’t help but grin with satisfaction as he leaned slightly to his right and pressed his ‘call’ button. “Kirk to engineering. Report, Mister Scott.”

“*Energy levels returnin’ to normal and stabilizin’, sir. It’s a bloody miracle we’re in one piece, I can tell yeh that.*”

“Then I guess I’ll know who to call on if I ever need another one,” Kirk replied. Then he asked, “What’s our condition?”

Mister Scott glanced around to find his fellow engineers, some of whom had been injured but able to stay at their posts, going about their duties, tending to those who needed

help and picking up the pieces of the heavily damaged equipment. He sighed, then answered, "Could be a bloody lot worse, sir...I suppose. I'll need a few hours to repair the nacelles. We can be underway again in about four to five hours, I think."

"*You have two hours, Lieutenant,*" Kirk advised him.

"Two hours!" the engineer griped. "Captain, I cannot..."

"*You have to,*" the captain told him, interrupting. "*Those colonists at Aldebaran are counting on us to get there and help them.*"

Scott sighed again. "I'll have to take the mains offline, sir."

"*Whatever it takes, Mister Scott.*"

"Aye, sir. Miracle number two, coming right up. Scott out." He closed the channel, then muttered, "Damn near blows up the bonnie lass the first time he sits down in the center seat. He'll never last."

Kirk turned his chair and looked over at Mister Spock, who had taken a seat at his station. Then he stood up and turned his gaze to the fill-in helmsman and said, "Well done, Mister Sulu."

"Thank you, sir," the lieutenant replied, looking back over his shoulder at the captain only briefly.

That done—Kirk had learned a long time ago that a quick pat on the back for a job well done always went a long way—he approached Spock's station. "Mister Spock, were you able to collect any usable data on the distortion field while we were sailing through it?"

"Affirmative, sir," Spock replied, facing the captain, who was resting his arms on the railing. "However, I will require some time to analyze it thoroughly before I can provide you with an accurate report."

Kirk glanced briefly around the bridge once more, then said, "Well, it appears we're not going to be doing much else for the next couple of hours. Analyze as thoroughly as you like, Mister Spock."

"Yes, Captain."

The Vulcan called up the data as Kirk returned to his chair.

CHAPTER 4

Captain's log, supplemental: The warp drive has been repaired and is back online, and we have resumed course for the Aldebaran Colony. As luck would have it, our dash through the heart of the disturbance shot us forward only slightly off course, so we're now only minutes away from the Aldebaran system. Special commendation to Acting Chief Engineer Lieutenant Scott, who headed up repairs in the chief engineer's absence and saw to it that they were completed in less than half the time he'd originally estimated they would take. I don't know how he did it, but he did it.

Kirk switched off the tricorder and handed it back to Yeoman Jones—uh...Smith, who looked him in the eye as she took it from him—he could get lost in those pools of blue if he had the time—almost grimacing rather than smiling. What was it with her, anyway? He turned his chair slightly, his eyes lingering on her as she started walking away. “Transmit that to Starfleet Command immediately and attach it to the mission record as well,” he told her. Then he faced forward again as she acknowledged the order. Whatever her problem was, he had more important things to worry about at the moment.

A few feet in front of him, the technician repairing the navigation console had just finished his work and was busy collecting his tools. Two other technicians were still working on the engineering station, and Mitchell was looking over Sulu's shoulder at the helm.

“Up and running, Captain,” the lone technician told him, pausing briefly by his side on his way out.

“Thank you, Crewman.” Kirk thumbed his ‘call’ button as the crewman walked off. “Kirk to auxiliary control.”

“Lieutenant Uhura here, sir.”

“The bridge navigation station is repaired, Lieutenant,” he informed her. “You and the cadet report up here on the double.”

“On our way, sir.”

Kirk closed the channel, then looked over at the science officer. “Mister Spock, what has your analysis told you so far?”

“It appears as though ours was not a random encounter, Captain,” the Vulcan replied. “Evidence so far suggests the ship's warp field actually attracted the phenomenon to us.”

“How?”

“I do not yet have a conclusive answer to that question, sir. However, the evidence that I mentioned is quite compelling.”

Kirk got up and walked over to the railing at the science station again. “To what evidence are you referring?” he asked.

“When we crossed the event horizon, for lack of a more appropriate term, and began traveling through the phenomenon, that portion we left behind essentially attached itself to our warp field and folded in upon itself to form what resembled the early stages of a fledgling wormhole, though it lacked sufficient energy to coalesce beyond the spatial distortion phase. Essentially, it followed us through itself. I have never encountered anything like it before.”

“What created it in the first place?”

“As yet unknown, sir, but as you indicated earlier, Aldebaran authorities are blaming the explosion on unusually strong solar flare activity. That would seem to be the most logical place to start.”

“You don’t seem very convinced of that, Mister Spock,” Kirk observed.

“The data I collected has so far told me very little about the phenomenon, Captain, but I doubt that it was a byproduct of solar flare activity alone. Aldebaran is a K-five-three-class red giant star. It has exhausted its core hydrogen fuel but is not yet hot enough for helium fusion to commence.”

“What are you saying...that it’s impossible for Aldebaran to produce solar flares?”

“Impossible? No,” the Vulcan replied as Mitchell quietly joined Kirk at the railing. “Over a long period of time, Aldebaran’s core temperature has steadily increased as a result of rising gravitational pressures caused by its expanding diameter. Therefore...”

“What’s its diameter now, Spock?” Mitchell asked him, interrupting. Kirk threw him a questioning look, so he started to explain, “Given our current condition, its gravitational influence...”

“Understood,” Kirk told him.

“Aldebaran’s current diameter is forty-four point two times that of the Earth’s sun,” the Vulcan stated in response to Mitchell’s question.

“Swell,” Mitchell said.

“In answer to *your* question, Captain, it is possible that Aldebaran flared, but it is highly unlikely that any solar flare Aldebaran might have produced would have been intense enough to cause the explosion in the colony. Like flares produced by your own Earth’s sun, the worst they might do is interfere with communications and perhaps the local power grid. In addition, no solar flare on record has ever been known to create a phenomenon such as the one we encountered.”

“That doesn’t mean it *can’t* happen,” Mitchell pointed out.

“What exactly are you driving at, Mister Spock?” Kirk asked.

“As I indicated, sir, our ship’s warp field attracted the phenomenon to us. There is a warp propulsion research and development facility located near the center of the Aldebaran Colony’s northern quadrant.”

“Wait a minute,” Mitchell said. “Are you saying those people blew *themselves* up?”

“I am saying that however unlikely such an occurrence might be, *if* a sufficiently intense solar flare were to erupt, say on the order of X-twenty-three or larger, and *if* a sufficient amount of coronal mass were to be ejected, and *if* that mass were to come into direct contact with a naked warp field or raw energy intermix, then a subspace distortion phenomenon such as the one we encountered might be created...theoretically.”

“That’s a lot of *ifs*, Mister Spock,” Kirk pointed out.

“Indeed,” the Vulcan agreed.

Kirk and the others turned their eyes toward the turbolift as Lieutenant Uhura and Midshipman Chekov stepped out onto the bridge. Uhura went directly to the communications station at took her seat, but Chekov, a short, slightly built young man, stood in place.

“All right,” Kirk said. “Stay with it, Spock.”

“Approaching the Aldebaran asteroid field, Captain,” Sulu reported.

Kirk looked forward and then headed back to his chair while Mitchell started walking to the helm. A distant, barely visible asteroid field stretched across the width of the screen, pretty densely packed, relative to most other such fields he had ever seen. The much more distant red-giant star Aldebaran appeared as little more than a red point of light near the screen's center. "Slow to impulse, Lieutenant."

Mitchell tapped Sulu on the shoulder as Sulu complied with the captain's order, then said, "I'll take the helm now, Lieutenant." Sulu surrendered the station and headed aft.

"Communications are back online, Captain," Uhura reported.

"Try to hail the colony, Lieutenant," Kirk ordered.

"Aye, sir."

As Uhura complied with his order, Kirk spun his chair around to face the cadet, who was still only standing just outside the lift alcove. "Cadet...man the navigator's station."

A smile quickly found its way to the cadet's face and he replied with an enthusiastic, "Aye, Keptin," as he hurried forward.

"*U-S-S Enterprise* calling Aldebaran Colony, come in please," Uhura was calling over subspace. "Yes, this is the *U-S-S Enterprise*. Request you... Aldebaran Colony, come in. I lost you. Are you there? Aldebaran Colony, please respond." She turned to face Kirk and reported, "Captain, subspace communications *are* back online and I did make brief contact with the colony, but I lost them again almost immediately and now I can't raise them."

"Keep trying, Lieutenant," Kirk instructed her. "I'd like an update on their situation before we arrive if I can get one."

"Aye, sir."

On the screen, Aldebaran looked the same as it had earlier, but the asteroid field had begun to loom large. The motion of individual rocks was now evident. Those directly ahead, as well as those on the periphery to a lesser extent, were drifting erratically in their orbits compared to the rest, colliding with each other and careening in all directions as though some outside force had disturbed them.

"What the hell?" Mitchell muttered.

"Mister Mitchell?" Kirk inquired.

Mitchell looked back over his shoulder at the captain. "Jim, the Aldebaran Belt is relatively dense compared to most others, but it's supposed to be one of the most stable in all of Federation space as well."

"Raise the shields." Kirk turned to the science officer. "Mister Spock?"

"I believe the phenomenon we encountered likely exited the system directly through that area," the Vulcan opined, staring at the screen along with everyone else.

"Then you believe that phenomenon *did*, in fact, cause the explosion at the colony?" Kirk asked him.

"I believe it very likely, sir," the Vulcan replied.

Mitchell looked to his left at Chekov and asked him, "Think you can plot us a course through there that won't get us all killed, Cadet?"

"Of course I can, sir," the cadet assured him, returning his gaze as though he'd found the first officer's question insulting. "I have done it dozens of times." Then he grinned and added, "I could do it with both eyes closed."

"You've been here before?" Mitchell asked him.

“Aye, sir.” He looked forward again. “On the simulator at the academy.”

Mitchell glanced back at Kirk and found him grinning, then turned his eyes forward again and said, “Try it with your eyes *open*, Cadet.”

Small bits of shattered asteroid pinged off the forward shields as the *Enterprise* sailed into the field, creating brief blue-white flares of energy that resembled the twinkling lights on a Christmas tree.

“Arm phasers,” Kirk ordered. “Take out any asteroids that pose a threat to the ship.”

As it turned out, Mitchell only had to fire at a couple of large ones, and only enough to slightly alter their trajectories. After a few minutes, the *Enterprise* emerged from the inner edge of the field, back into clear space.

“Well done, Cadet,” Kirk said.

“Thank you, Keptin,” Chekov replied.

Mitchell looked over at the cadet. “Yes, well done, Cadet,” he agreed, his tone filled with sarcasm. “If not for you, I might’ve flown us right into an asteroid and killed everyone.”

“Anytime you need the help, sir, I am happy to provide it,” the young man returned, drawing another grin from Kirk that he didn’t even try to hide when Mitchell looked back at him again.

“Approaching the colony, sir,” Mitchell reported, no doubt making a mental note of Kirk’s expression to call on later. “*U-S-S Comfort* is already on station.”

“Standard orbit, Commander.”

“Aye, sir.”

Mitchell faced his board again and guided the ship into standard orbit well behind the hospital ship. Then he confirmed, “Standard orbit, sir.”

“Thank you.”

“Radiation levels throughout the colony fall well within safety limits, Captain,” Spock reported. “Decontamination systems appear to have functioned adequately.”

“Miss Uhura,” Kirk called, turning toward the communications officer, “any response from the colony yet?”

“No, sir,” she replied. “I have contact with the *Comfort*, but still nothing with anyone from the colony.”

Kirk faced forward again and stared at the image of the planet on the screen. “Doesn’t anyone down there have a communicator?” he asked, low enough to make it pretty clear that his question was a rhetorical one. Then he said, “Mister Mitchell, show me the colony.”

“Aye, sir.”

On the screen, the image zoomed in on the planet surface to reveal that the colony’s entire northern quadrant bore a strong resemblance to Hiroshima after the 1945 atomic bomb strike that had brought an end to the second world war on Earth.

“Oh my God,” Kirk muttered. Then he asked, “Mister Spock, are you sure about those radiation readings? The decon systems in that area had to have been knocked out by the explosion.”

“Radiation levels are slightly higher in that area, Captain,” the science officer replied, “but prevailing winds across the region are blowing steadily in a generally northern direction at eight to twelve kilometers per hour, carrying with them a significant amount of decon agent from the central and southwestern districts of the city. Short-term exposure will cause

us no permanent harm, should the need arise for us to visit whatever remains of that warp propulsion R-and-D facility.”

“What remains of it?” Kirk inquired. “Are you telling me there’s actually something left of it?”

“Quite possibly. Scans of the rubble around its location indicate that its structure was duranium reinforced and radiation shielded. It is possible that some of the subsurface levels survived the blast, even if it was ground-zero, as I suspect.”

“How can that be when so much of the surrounding city was destroyed?”

“Based on the pattern of the blast damage, that destruction appears to have radiated outward and upward from the facility deep beneath ground level,” Spock explained. “That is consistent with my hypothesis, as ground-based warp reactor testing is always conducted at least two-hundred meters below ground level for safety reasons.”

“Duranium-reinforced or not, Mister Spock, if your hypothesis is correct, then that building was sitting right on top of ground-zero. Surely it would have taken the brunt of the explosion.”

“Unless some structural feature or outside influence forced the blast outward rather than upward,” Spock clarified.

“Outside influence?” Kirk asked. “The distortion phenomenon we encountered?”

“Possibly. We do not yet have sufficient information on which to form a conclusion.”

Kirk stood up, still staring at the image on the screen. “We’ll avoid that area for the time being,” he decided. “I’ll lead the first landing party and determine where best to deploy our people.” He started walking toward the turbolift. “Mister Mitchell, you’re with me.”

Spock walked over to the lift as well and stepped in front of the captain, blocking his path. “Captain? *You* are beaming down, sir?”

“Get used to it, Mister Spock,” Mitchell told him. “Captain Kirk is a hands-on kind of commanding officer.”

“I am quite used to that, Mister Mitchell, I assure you, but I was hoping...”

“Lieutenant Uhura,” Kirk said, turning his gaze to the communications officer, “Have Mister Scott, Doctor Piper, and the security chief meet us in the transporter room, then join us there yourself.”

“Aye, sir,” Uhura replied as a slight grin found its way to her lips. “Thank you, sir.”

“Mister Spock,” Kirk said, turning his attention back to the Vulcan, “the ship is yours for the time being, but you’re clear to beam down if and when you need to in furtherance of your investigation.”

“That will be as soon as I have completed and analyzed my preliminary scans, sir,” Spock informed him. “I will want to visit that R-and-D facility...if there is anything left of it.”

“Wherever your investigation leads you, Mister Spock,” Kirk acknowledged as he and Mitchell stepped around the Vulcan and into the turbolift.

In the transporter room, Ensign Kyle and a technician were busy bringing the system online when Kirk and Mitchell, who’d picked up a tricorder, walked in. “Mister...”

“Ensign Kyle, sir,” Kyle informed the captain as he and the first officer approached the front of the controls console.

“You were in sickbay earlier,” Kirk recalled.

“Yes, sir.”

“I want you to set us down directly inside their Emergency Operations Center.”

“Aye, sir.”

The doors swished open behind them. Kirk and Mitchell looked to find Doctor Piper, Lieutenants Scott and Uhura, and Security Chief Lieutenant Commander Wilkers walking in. Piper and Uhura each had a tricorder slung over one shoulder and Wilkers had what looked like four small black boxes in his hands—communicators and something else that looked brand new, which he offered to the captain and first officer. “Here you go, sirs.”

Kirk and Mitchell both took one of each device. Kirk attached both of his to his belt without a second look, but Mitchell only attached his communicator while he just gazed at the newer device. “What the hell is this?” he asked.

“New type-one phaser, sir,” Wilkers replied. “Type-twos haven’t been issued yet.”

Mitchell shrugged his shoulders and then attached the weapon to his belt as he and the other five members of the landing party stepped up onto the transporter platform. As soon as all six of them were in position, Kyle and the technician set the beaming sequence. Then Kyle looked up at Kirk, awaiting the order.

“Energize,” Kirk ordered.

Kyle grasped the three parallel slides with both hands while the technician activated the beaming sequence, then pulled those slides toward his body and watched while the six members of the landing party faded away in the golden sparkle of the transporter beam.

CHAPTER 5

The landing party materialized in a facility roughly the size of the ship's gymnasium equipped with older-looking computers, communications consoles, and other equipment that no emergency operations center should be without. The facility had obviously sustained some damage, presumably as a result of the explosion, and some of the consoles appeared to have been jury-rigged to others to form a sort of ad hoc network, but it was apparently far enough away from ground-zero that the damage hadn't been too severe and the facility remained at least partially functional. At least a couple of dozen men and women were either manning the functioning consoles or moving about between them, all under the supervision, Kirk noticed, of Governor Sandra Vanderford, who was at that moment standing over someone's shoulder, staring at a monitor screen.

Kirk glanced behind him to find that he and his party had materialized in front of a large blue tarp that appeared to have been hung hastily from ceiling to floor, probably closing off the area of the facility that had sustained the worst of the damage. Then he faced forward again, just in time to see Governor Vanderford take notice of him and start to approach. She was an attractive enough woman in her early forties with slightly longer than shoulder-length blond hair and large brown eyes, but the expression on her face was anything but cordial—understandable, as she *was* in the middle of dealing with a disaster.

"Captain...?"

"James T. Kirk of the *Enterprise*, ma'am," Kirk told her, offering his hand.

She glanced down at his hand for a moment, almost as though she were offended by it, then finally took it into hers and said, "Welcome to the Aldebaran Colony, Captain Kirk," as she shook it, "...that is, what's left of it." She pulled her hand free. "I'm Governor Sandra Vanderford and I'd like to thank you up front for whatever assistance you can provide."

"We'll do whatever we can for you, Governor," Kirk assured her. "I assume this is your Emergency Operations Center?"

"What's left of it, yes," she replied. Then she gestured toward the tarp hanging behind the landing party and added, "The rest is back there with all of our best equipment, which is all useless now. That part of the roof caved in on it. If you'll follow me?"

She started leading the party around the facility, allowing them to get a good look at what was going on. "Medical personnel from the *Comfort* took over casualty ops about an hour ago," she told Kirk. "Their chief surgeon is running a triage in the south wing of the Starfleet Veterans' Hospital next door."

Kirk turned to Doctor Piper, but before he could say anything Piper told him, "That's where I'll be, Captain," and then started toward the exit.

"Thanks, Mark."

"We're running all other operations from here as best we can," Vanderford continued, "but that's proving to be quite the challenge."

Kirk turned to Scott, Uhura, and Wilkers and told them, "Find your counterparts. Help them out however you can." They walked off to comply, and Vanderford, Kirk, and Mitchell resumed the tour.

"Anything more on the exact cause of the explosion?" Kirk asked the governor.

“Not yet,” she replied. “All we know for sure is that unusually strong solar flares acted as the catalyst.”

Kirk made a purposeful effort not to look or sound suspicious when he asked her, “Solar flares *alone* caused all that destruction?”

“Of course not,” the governor replied as though she were speaking with someone of an obviously inferior intellect. “I said they were the catalyst. They obviously interacted with something in the northern district and caused *that* to detonate, but we don’t yet know what that ‘something’ was.”

“Something at your warp propulsion research center, no doubt,” Kirk stated evenly, watching her carefully to gauge her reaction. He had little doubt that was the case, and he was beginning to think the governor was trying to hide something for some reason.

“Not possible,” she said, shaking her head. “That facility is...*was*...too well shielded, from within *and* without. Some of our Aldebaran Sciences Institute professors believe it was something at the fuel cell factory a block east of there.”

Kirk and Mitchell exchanged brief glances of doubt with one another. Then Kirk said, “Fuel cells taking out almost a quarter of the city? I find that hard to believe.”

Vanderford stopped, turned, and stared at Kirk with an air of superiority as he and Mitchell stopped with her. “Captain Kirk, you may not be aware, but the Aldebaran Sciences Institute staff boasts six Nobel Laureates, five Zee-Magnees Prize recipients, and two Vulcan Science Academy valedictorians. You’ll pardon me if I choose to defer to what *they* believe.”

“Of course, Governor,” Kirk acquiesced, “but I’d like their findings forwarded to my science officer as soon as possible. Putting a fresh set of eyes on the data can’t hurt.”

“I was told you were here to assist us with rescue and recovery, not to investigate the accident.”

“My orders cover both areas,” Kirk informed her. “Now, about those finding...”

“I’ll have them forwarded to your ship for you, though I don’t know what you think your Starfleet science officer might find that my whole team of scientists hasn’t.”

“Thank you.”

“And now if you’ll excuse me, Captain, I have more than eighty-thousand citizens still missing. I need to get back to work.”

“I’m assigning personnel to help your people with the search,” Kirk told her as she walked off.

Mitchell leaned in closer to Kirk and asked, keeping his voice low, “Is it me, Jim, or did she suddenly turn evasive on us?”

Kirk thought it over for a moment, then answered, “She *is* dealing with a lot right now, but...”

“I know, but that was pretty abrupt.”

“I agree,” Kirk had to admit, “and I *do* get the feeling that she’s hiding something important, but...”

“But what?” Mitchell asked when Kirk didn’t finish his thought.

“That’s Sandra Vanderford, Gary—very likely the most popular colonial governor out here. She’s been elected to five consecutive five-year terms on the strength of her reputation for honesty and straight talk and getting things done when others couldn’t.”

“I’d have voted for her on looks alone, Jim,” Mitchell quipped. Kirk eyeballed him.

"I'm just saying, something doesn't feel right."

Kirk stood silent for a moment, thinking, then asked, "Where's that warp propulsion research center from here?"

Mitchell switched on his tricorder, took a few seconds' worth of readings, and then replied, "About twenty kilometers northeast. Not reading any life signs in the area, but that doesn't necessarily mean anything from this distance, given the amount of interference I'm getting from the background radiation."

"Is it safe enough for us there?"

"I wouldn't plan an overnight camping trip for the crew, but whoever you're planning on sending up there should be okay for at least a few hours."

"A few hours," Kirk repeated under his breath. Then he took out and flipped open his communicator and called, "Kirk to *Enterprise*. Transporter room."

"*Kyle here, sir.*"

"Mister Kyle, is there a relatively safe area *inside* the warp propulsion research center that we can use as a beam-in point? Someplace where the radiation levels are lower than the surrounding area, where we can spend as much time as necessary?"

"*Stand by, sir.*"

"We, Jim?" Mitchell asked Kirk while they waited for Kyle to come back. "*You and I* are going up there?"

"I think it's time we took a close look at things, Gary," Kirk replied. "What we know and what we're being told doesn't add up."

"*Captain, I can put you down in a stairwell about eight meters below ground level. That appears to be the cleanest and the most structurally sound area.*"

"Beam Mister Mitchell and me there immediately. Then coordinate with Doctor Piper and the others on where our people can be most helpful and start beaming them down."

"*Aye, sir.*"

"Kirk out."

"Captain," Lieutenant Uhura called as he put his communicator away, approaching him and the first officer from behind, "do you have a moment?"

"A quick one," he told her. "What is it, Lieutenant?"

"Off-world communications didn't fail on their own," she reported. Then, as Kirk and Mitchell began to beam away, she added, "They were intentionally cut off."

Kirk and Mitchell materialized on a stairwell landing in a heavily damaged industrial facility dimly illuminated by emergency lighting, only some of which seemed to be functioning. The flight of stairs directly in front of them led up, while the flight to their left led down.

"Did Lieutenant Uhura just tell us that off-world communications were *intentionally* cut off?" Mitchell asked.

"Yes, she did," Kirk confirmed.

"Well, isn't *that* interesting?"

"One thing at a time, Gary," the captain told him. Then he looked up the flight of stairs in front of them, and Mitchell's eyes followed.

"Lights are working...more or less," the first officer observed. Dust still drifted in the

air, but the stairs themselves were relatively clear of debris.

They moved to their left and looked down the other flight of stairs. The damage below appeared to be more severe. The stairs were littered with small bits of debris and the walls had caved in just beyond the next lower landing, cutting off access to the next lower flight and whatever part of the facility lay beyond. However, there was a heavy-duty door standing to the left side of that landing that appeared to be unobstructed...at least on this side. "Blocked past the next landing," Kirk observed aloud.

"Right," Mitchell acknowledged. "I guess we're going up?"

Kirk looked at his friend and nodded, then led the way.

Three or four meters beyond the top of the stairs, they came to a closed heavy-duty door—a reinforced blast door from the looks of it. Kirk tried unsuccessfully to pull it open while Mitchell took readings with his tricorder.

"Kyle wasn't kidding, Jim," the first officer observed. "This area's sound, relatively speaking. Duranium reinforcement and radiation shielding are preventing me from getting any solid readings beyond that door."

"Help me try to open it," Kirk ordered.

"Wait a minute, Jim," Mitchell protested as he switched off his tricorder. "Radiation levels might be a lot higher out there."

"Mister Spock said that short-term exposure wouldn't cause us any permanent harm," the captain reminded him.

"Well...how well do we really know Mister Spock?"

Kirk glared at him, and Mitchell joined his captain. They pulled and pulled as hard as they could, but the door simply would not budge. "You sure it doesn't *push* open?" Mitchell asked, only half-kidding.

Frustrated, Kirk pulled one more time...and this time the door slammed open and he and Mitchell fell backwards as sunlight flooded into the entryway. "Pretty sure."

"Funny," Mitchell replied. He recovered first and looked out through the door as he climbed to his feet. "My God, Jim!" he exclaimed. "Look at it!" Then he switched on his tricorder again and resumed taking readings out through the doorway.

"'My God' is right," Kirk agreed, staring out through the doorway as he, too, rose to his feet. Then he stepped slowly forward, only stopping when he reached the outer doorway.

A sea of destruction, of smoking rubble and refuse—all that remained of the above-ground portion of the building combined with God knew how many others, filled the land for as far as the eye could see. Broken bits and pieces of plastisteel wall, transparent aluminum, burned out vehicles, and office furniture were scattered everywhere. Those structures beyond not completely destroyed nonetheless lay in ruin—skeletons raising from the ashes of death. Just as it had on the bridge viewscreen earlier, the northern sector of the city looked like Hiroshima after the bomb.

"Almost ten years in the fleet," Kirk remarked. "I've never seen destruction like this." He took a step outside, but stopped when Mitchell spoke up.

"I wouldn't go out there if I were you, Jim."

"Radiation?"

"Yup. I don't think it's as safe as Spock's readings indicated."

Kirk looked back at his first officer and asked, "How bad is it?"

“Well,” Mitchell started to answer, looking at his readings, “I don’t think you’ll start cooking anytime soon, but the levels are *definitely* higher than Spock’s instruments on the bridge indicated.”

“How much higher?” Kirk inquired as he walked back to him. “Is it harmful in the short-term?”

“Piper’s the doctor, Jim,” Mitchell remarked. “I’m not sure.”

Kirk sighed. “All right. Let’s see what we can find downstairs.”

They went back inside and struggled with the heavy-duty door once more, this time to close it and seal it behind them. “A portable power source might have been a good idea, Jim,” Mitchell commented.

“Take longer to hook it up than it is for us to push the door closed,” Kirk countered.

“But a lot less effort,” Mitchell came back.

As soon as they finally did get the door closed and sealed again, they turned and started back down the stairs.

“Like you said in your log, Jim,” Mitchell said, changing the subject as they stepped down onto the landing where they had beamed in and then started down the next flight of stairs, “I hope this isn’t indicative of what’s in store for us over the next five years. I, for one, signed on to explore and discover.”

“I couldn’t agree more,” Kirk told him. “Though, technically, we haven’t started our five-year mission yet. The ship still has her post-mission overhaul to go through before we *officially* set sail.”

“I know, but...” Mitchell fell silent for a moment as they stepped down onto the lower landing and spotted the small sign fastened to the center of the heavy-duty door at eye-level, which read ‘Monitor Center.’ The stairwell turned ninety-degrees to the right and disappeared under the hard-packed rubble after two or three steps. “...you get where I’m coming from.”

“And like I said, I couldn’t agree more,” Kirk told him. Then, turning his attention back to the matter at hand, he read, “Monitor Center.” Then he said, “If there was something going on here at the time of the explosion, there should be records of it in there...assuming they survived. Let’s go.”

He and Mitchell worked together without either of them having to suggest they do so, and had a much easier time opening this door than they’d had with the other one. They walked in and found the monitor center to be a single large room—a cross between the ship’s engineering section and the old NASA Mission Control that Kirk had seen in old photographs from the twentieth-century. Like those in the stairwell, those emergency lights that were still functioning were glowing dimly at best. All of the panels and controls consoles that he could see were dark, but overall, damage to the room appeared to be only minor to moderate, and as far as he could see there wasn’t anyone else there...alive or otherwise.

“None the worse for wear, considering,” Mitchell commented.

“Try to power up a console and call up their records,” Kirk told him as he pulled out his communicator. “I want to know what they were working on here.”

Mitchell picked a console at random and walked over to it while Kirk flipped open his communicator. “Kirk to *Enterprise*.”

“Enterprise. *Scott here*.”

Kirk stared at his communicator as though it had done something to offend him.

“Mister Scott?” he asked. “What are you doing back onboard? Where’s Mister Spock?”

“He called me back to the ship and left me in command, sir,” Scott explained. *“Said he needed to beam down. I have a status update for yeh, if yeh want it.”*

Kirk recalled that he had given Spock his approval to do that, then said, “Go ahead.”

“We’re deployin’ engineerin’ and medical personnel now, but I’m holdin’ back on sciences ‘til Mister Spock tells us where to...”

“Right here if we need them,” Kirk told the engineer, interrupting, “but not yet. Keep them on standby for now.”

“Aye, sir.”

“We’ll be in touch. Kirk out.” He closed his communicator and put it away, and as he approached Mitchell he noticed that his first officer had successfully powered up the console. A series of reports, graphs, and schematics were flashing across its main monitor screen. “What’ve you got, Gary?” he asked him.

“I’m into their project files,” Mitchell replied. “There was a warp core test scheduled that would have been in progress at the time of the explosion.” He pointed up at the screen, at the detailed schematic of a large vertical cylindrical device with a larger sphere in its center and a narrower, horizontal cylinder attached to that on one side. “Look here. Looks like they were testing a new design.”

“Hm. Spock’s theory is starting to look a lot more like fact,” Kirk muttered. Then he looked at Mitchell and asked, “Have you found any actual evidence to suggest that that’s connected to what happened?”

“Not so far, Jim,” Mitchell told him, “but then I only stumbled onto *this* by accident. This database has got more security around it than the Romulan neutral zone.” He looked at Kirk. “You know, Spock’s supposed to be some kind of computer genius. Maybe we should call *him* in here.”

“That will not be necessary, Commander,” Spock told him. Kirk and Mitchell turned together and looked to find that the Vulcan had just walked into the room, tricorder slung over his shoulder, and was approaching them. “My investigation has already led me here, as I expected it would.” He stopped and stared at Mitchell. “If you will allow me, Commander?”

“What?” Mitchell asked. But then he realized what the Vulcan was asking of him and he stepped aside. “Oh, right. Be my guest.”

Spock stepped up to the console and got to work. “The personnel at this facility were developing a new starship warp core design, as Commander Mitchell just indicated, and it appears that a test was, in fact, in progress at the time of the explosion. Curious.”

“What’s curious?” Kirk inquired.

“I am unable to access any of the administrative records related to the research that was being conducted here.”

“Is that so unusual?” Kirk asked. “I can think of any number of reasons why...”

“The records to which I refer are not normally secured to this extent,” Spock told him, interrupting, “and, in fact, are required to be readily available for inspection upon request by any authorized authority.”

“I want to see those records, Mister Spock,” Kirk told him as though that might make them magically appear.

“I am endeavoring to access them, Captain,” Spock assured him. “I believe that I can

disable the network security protocols and..." A checklist-type report suddenly appeared on the screen. Spock gazed at it for a few moments, then said simply, "Interesting."

Kirk sighed quietly. "Mister Spock..."

The Vulcan looked at him, then explained, "This document lists all safety measures that Federation law requires be in place prior to commencing the live-testing phase of any high-energy project. Each is marked as having been complied with."

"That's a good thing," Kirk concluded.

"It would be," Spock agreed, "were it accurate."

"Explain," Kirk coaxed.

"Internal records—that is, those records maintained by the engineers themselves as their work progresses—indicate that a number of those laws were ignored."

"Ignored?" Mitchell asked.

"On whose authority?" Kirk added.

"On that of the program director," Spock replied. "Under his signature, installation of a backup power source for antimatter containment and mandatory redundant energy shielding around the intermix chamber were both waived. Nevertheless, authorization to proceed with the test appears to have been given."

"Why would someone with enough experience to serve as R-and-D program director authorize such blatant violations of industrial safety laws?" Mitchell asked as Kirk took a step away.

"I believe I have just found the answer to that question, sir," Spock told him. "This document also cites a communiqué from Governor Vanderford in which she adamantly warns the director against pushing the limits of the project's budget."

"What?" Kirk asked, turning to face his officers. "Are you telling me that tens of thousands of people died because Governor Vanderford cut corners on a dangerous research project to save a few credits?"

"No, sir," Spock replied. "I am telling you that the evidence I have uncovered thus far indicates that the governor was concerned about expenditures relating to the project, and that a number of mandatory safety protocols were ignored. Whether or not the governor herself is responsible for those contraventions and ultimately for all of the deaths that resulted is for a court of law to decide."

"Mister Spock, we're talking about one of the most beloved and upstanding governors in all the Federation colonies. I sincerely hope that's not the case."

"As do I, Captain," the Vulcan agreed, "but the evidence at hand seems to suggest..."

"Can you tell what happened?" Kirk asked him, pointing up at the energy flow graph on the screen. "What *exactly* caused the explosion?"

Spock touched his fingertip to the screen, pointing at one specific point. "According to this, the engineers were less than one minute into their first full-power matter/antimatter intermix test when an uncontrolled and catastrophic release of energy occurred."

"Why?" Kirk asked. "How did the energy escape?"

"The absence of key safety measures resulted in the creation of an insufficiently shielded raw warp field. That, combined with an apparent failure to disperse the energy stream directly away from the sun as well as from the planet, apparently initiated a sudden marked increase in solar flare activity and drew significant amounts of coronal mass and x-

ray energies directly *to* the energy stream. That stellar mass, together with the combined energies, overloaded and detonated the warp core.”

“And created that distortion phenomenon we encountered,” Kirk concluded.

“In all likelihood,” Spock affirmed.

Kirk started pacing again. “So, the governor and her professors were at least partially correct,” he surmised. “The solar flares *did* have something to do with the accident.”

“Yes,” Spock confirmed, “but the increase in flare activity was a result of the test, not the underlying cause of its failure.”

“I had a feeling she was hiding something,” Kirk mused.

“Perhaps she was simply mistaken,” Spock offered.

“Or both?” Mitchell questioned. Then, when Kirk threw him an odd look, he said, “Well she *is* a politician, Jim. They *always* talk out of both sides of their...heads.” He paused for a moment, and then added, changing the subject, “It’s a miracle this entire hemisphere wasn’t wiped out.”

“Indeed,” Spock agreed. “This building’s design may be the only thing that prevented that from happening.”

Kirk took out his communicator again. “Save every record you can find as evidence, Mister Spock,” he ordered. “We’ll need to turn them over to the authorities.” He flipped open his communicator and called, “Kirk to Wilkers.”

“*Wilkers here, sir;*” the answer came after a moment.

“Report.”

“*At the moment my team is assisting Colonial Police in securing the perimeter around a roughly one-block area that was pretty badly damaged. Emergency crews are entering all the buildings, carrying out search and rescue operations. Our engineers are helping however they can.*”

“Very well,” Kirk replied. “Pass your present duties off to your second. I want you to find the governor and hold her wherever you find her. Sit on her if you have to. I have some questions for her.”

“*Uh...yes, sir.*”

“Captain,” Spock interrupted, scanning the area with his tricorder, “I have discovered one additional contributing factor that helps to explain why the destruction was so relatively limited compared to what it potentially could have been,” Spock reported.

“Stand by for a moment, Commander,” Kirk told the security chief. Then he asked the science officer, “What is it, Spock?”

“The chief researcher refused to allow more than one-half the standard test amount of matter and antimatter to be used in their first test.”

“At least *someone* had some sense,” Mitchell remarked.

“Perhaps not quite enough, Commander,” the Vulcan responded. Then he continued, “There is a substantial remaining supply of antimatter stored somewhere within this facility, and it appears as though containment is slowly failing as we speak. I estimate zero-point six hours to cold-mix annihilation.”

“Can you stop it?” Kirk asked him urgently.

“Doubtful, given the level of security built into these systems.”

“Commander Wilkers, belay my last orders,” Kirk barked into his communicator.

“Begin emergency evacuation of the planet surface, all crew and colonists. Kirk out.” He closed his communicator with a snap. “Let’s get out of here, gentlemen.”

They hurried back out into the stairwell. Kirk led the way up toward the landing and Mitchell followed, but Spock stopped suddenly at the base of the stairs, angling toward the hard-packed pile of rubble. “Captain, I hear something,” he reported.

“That’s my heart pounding, Mister Spock,” Mitchell proclaimed.

Kirk heard Spock’s tricorder. He stopped halfway up the stairs and looked back to find Spock holding the device out toward the rubble and walking slowly in that direction. “What do you hear, Mister Spock,” he asked as he started walking back down the stairs.

“I’m not sure yet, Captain,” the keen-eared Vulcan replied.

Mitchell joined his captain and both men stopped and stood beside Spock while the Vulcan crouched down in front of the rubble, still gazing at the readings on his tricorder. A foot and a half or so of hollow metal conduit was sticking out of the rubble, angled slightly upward.

“Mister Spock, we have a city to evacuate,” Kirk reminded him.

Spock grasped the conduit with one hand and looked up at his captain. “Sir, I believe someone is tapping on this conduit, but I am unable to scan for life signs through the rubble.”

Kirk sighed, then flipped open his communicator once again. “Kirk to *Enterprise*.”

On the bridge of the *Enterprise*, Lieutenant Scott had been pacing the deck in every possible direction and happened to be right beside the communications station when the call came in. He reached across the startled on-duty communications officer and answered it himself. “Scott here, sir.”

“Scan the area directly below us for life signs, Mister Scott.”

Scott raised his eyes to the young officer who was currently manning Commander Spock’s station and told him, “Fire ‘em up, laddie,” as he approached him. Then, when he stopped by the junior science officer’s shoulder, he gazed at the data the station was receiving and reached down and opened the comm channel there. “Readin’s are fluctuatin’, sir, but it looks like between six-hundred and six-hundred fifty separate sets o’ life signs concentrated about ten meters below yeh, all human or humanoid.”

“Start beaming them out of there now!” Kirk ordered. *“Use the cargo transporters if you have to! We’re losing antimatter containment here!”*

“This is Kyle breaking in, sir. Something down there is interfering with the system. I can’t lock onto anyone but you three!”

“Gentlemen, we’re going to lose half this continent in about half an hour!” Kirk warned them. *“Are you telling me that six-hundred more people are going to die and there’s nothing we can do about it?”*

CHAPTER 6

Kirk slapped his communicator closed, put it away, and then pulled out his phaser as he stepped closer to the rubble, where Spock was still crouching, one hand on the conduit. “Captain,” Spock said as Kirk adjusted the setting on his weapon, “I must caution you against using your phaser.”

“There are people down there, Mister Spock,” Kirk replied, “and we don’t have time to shovel them out by hand.”

“Whatever element in the rubble is interfering with my tricorder scans and the ship’s transporter may be an unstable one,” the science officer advised. “You could detonate it, or at the very least you might collapse loose debris in on the people trapped below.”

“And if we don’t try, they’re just as dead,” Kirk countered as he lowered his phaser’s power setting. Spock stood up and moved to one side, out of the way, with Mitchell. “They’ll move when they hear the phaser.”

“Assuming, of course, that they are not too badly injured to move.”

Kirk hesitated for a moment—Spock might have had a point, but time was not on their side—then fired his phaser at the center of the rubble, holding the trigger for a steady beam. Seconds later, Mitchell’s phaser beam joined Kirk’s, the two striking the rubble one just above the other. That small area in the center of the rubble began glowing red.

“You going to stand there, Mister Spock,” Kirk asked, “or are you going to help us rescue those people?”

Spock raised an eyebrow at Kirk, then joined in, adding his phaser to theirs. All three maintained fire, striking the rubble in three places near the center, forming a vertical pattern. The area glowing red expanded quickly to roughly two meters tall by about a meter and a half wide, then began shifting to a hotter orange. Then it grew yellow-hot, and then white-hot. Finally, Kirk stopped firing and then ordered, “Cease fire.”

Spock and Mitchell stopped firing as Kirk put his phaser away. The area of the rubble glowing white-hot turned semi-transparent behind the fading bright yellow-white light. Spock and Mitchell put their phasers away as well as the light faded to reveal a large, roughly oval-shaped vertical hole leading into the dark area behind the cave-in. Several inches of rubble around the opening continued glowing a dark orange. It was cooling, but slowly.

Kirk started creeping toward the hole and looked back at his officers as he pointed at the door to the monitor center behind them. “Get back in there and find a way to boost antimatter containment—buy us some time,” he told them. “Call in anyone you have to, but get it done. We need all the time we can get.”

As Spock and Mitchell headed into the monitor center, Kirk rushed in through the still-glowing hole in the rubble, being careful not to touch the edges, which had only cooled to a dull orange-red so far. “Hello?” he called out.

“Help me, please,” someone responded weakly from just ahead, very nearby.

Though he could barely see anything in front of him, Kirk rushed forward, found the man, helped him to his feet, and half-carried him out into the stairwell, coughing from the all the dust inside, communicator in hand. The man was a lab worker, judging from his attire.

“Thank you,” the man managed to say before he, too, started coughing.

Kirk flipped open his communicator as he eased the man down onto the floor where he could sit with his back leaning against the wall. "Kirk to..." He coughed, then tried again. "Kirk to *Enterprise*."

"Scott here, sir."

Kirk straightened, turned his back to the wall, and then fell back against it as he spoke. "We broke through." He coughed again. "Try to get a lock." His knees buckled. He tried but failed to resist as he started sliding down the wall, and holding the communicator up in front of him became increasingly more difficult.

"Kyle here, sir. There's still too much interference. I can't get a lock more than a meter or two past the threshold."

Kirk landed hard on his backside beside the now unconscious lab worker. "Then we'll need...as many rescue and...medical personnel...with breathers...as you can find...sent to this location...immediately." The hand holding his communicator dropped to the floor and he started sliding sideways, away from the lab worker, quickly losing consciousness.

"The evacuation has us spread mighty thin, sir, but I'll send yeh who I can," Mister Scott advised.

Kirk slid sideways to the floor, barely conscious and unable to hold himself up.

Up on the upper landing that was serving as the beam-in point, three figures began to materialize in the transporter beam. Seconds later, three of the ship's engineers, a lieutenant and two ensigns, were standing there. The lieutenant took in his surroundings quickly, then started leading his men down the stairs. "You two report to the first officer," he ordered. "I'll check in with the captain."

As soon as they reached the lower landing, the ensigns hurried into the control room to find Lieutenant Commander Mitchell while the lieutenant, having just spotted the captain lying seemingly unconscious on the ground against the wall, rushed over to him. "Captain!" he shouted with urgency. The man might not have been Christopher Pike, but he was still the commanding officer. The lieutenant knelt down at Kirk's side and gently shook his shoulder. "Captain, are you all right?"

Kirk raised his head and looked up at the lieutenant, groggily, then pointed more or less toward the door to the monitor center. "Help Mitchell and... Go," he mumbled.

"Yes, sir." As he hurried toward the monitor center as ordered, he spotted Doctor Piper hurrying down the stairs and pointed back at Kirk. "Doctor, the captain's hurt!"

Doctor Piper hurried to Kirk's side and knelt down, broke out his medical scanner, and ran it over him. Then, having determined what the problem was, he injected Kirk in the shoulder with a hypo filled with a drug to bring him back to consciousness.

Kirk lifted his head and looked at Piper, clear-eyed, as the color slowly returned to his face. "Mark."

"You'll be fine in a minute, Jim," the doctor told him.

Kirk started to sit up, but Piper stopped him easily with a hand on his shoulder. "No you don't," the doctor said. "Not for a few more seconds at least." Then he started running his scanner over the lab worker whom Kirk had brought out.

"The...evacuation?" Kirk asked.

“Progressing,” Piper reported. “*Comfort* is taking on the injured and most of the other civilians. *Enterprise* is taking on all the Starfleet personnel who were stationed here—about half a dozen medical doctors and a psychiatrist, along with a handful administrative types.”

Kirk watched while Piper injected the worker, then saw that up on the upper landing two more figures had started beaming in. They coalesced into a pair of rescue personnel from the *Enterprise*, both wearing protective clothing and breathers. They hurried down the stairs and passed Kirk and Piper on their way in through the hole in the rubble.

“Help me up, Doctor,” Kirk ordered.

Reluctant to do so, Piper nonetheless helped Kirk to his feet. “I don’t want you going back in there, Jim,” he warned. “Too many subterranean gases choking off the oxygen.”

“You’ll get no argument from me, Doctor,” Kirk replied as he stepped around Piper and started walking toward the monitor center, right into the path of another Starfleet doctor and three medical technicians who had just come down the stairs. The doctor, who was busy slipping his breather into place and wasn’t watching where he was going, ran right into him, eliciting grunts from both of them.

“God sakes, man!” the doctor shouted angrily. “Watch where the blazes you’re going down here!” And with that, he led his team in through the hole in the rubble.

Kirk watched after him. “Was that... Was that Doctor Leonard McCoy?”

“*Comfort*’s chief surgeon, yes, sir,” Piper confirmed as he pulled his own breather out of his medical pouch. He pulled it on, adjusted the fit, and then headed in through the hole as Kirk headed for the monitor center.

Kirk approached Spock and Mitchell, who were still busy at the console.

“Wish we had better news, Jim,” Mitchell told him.

“Problem?” Kirk asked.

Spock turned to face him and reported, “In addition to numerous redundant security protocols, this network employs an almost totally customized operating system. Most of the deviations from standard have no logical basis, and that is making our task quite difficult to accomplish.”

“Mister Spock, if you fail to accomplish your task, thousands upon thousands more people are going to die...including us,” Kirk reminded him.

“I am aware of that, Captain.”

“All right, Mister Spock, I’m here,” came a Scottish brogue from behind them. “What can I do for yeh?”

All three men turned to find Lieutenant Scott approaching, and Kirk found himself momentarily speechless.

“I need you to work on restoring antimatter containment while I attempt to break through the various levels of system security and gain access to the required files ahead of your progress,” Spock replied.

Before Scott could respond, Kirk found his tongue. “Who did *you* leave in command of my ship, Mister Scott?” he asked. “Cadet Chekov?”

“Of *course* not, sir,” Scott replied defensively. “I called Lieutenant Uhura back to the ship and left *her* in command.”

“Alacrity is of the upmost importance, gentlemen,” Spock interjected.

Scott stepped forward and joined the Vulcan in his work while Kirk, speechless once

more, headed for the door.

Kirk emerged to find the area outside the monitor center half-filled with dozens of victims of the cave-in, many of them injured. As Piper and several others tended to some of them, others were being beamed away in groups, while rescue workers were bringing more of them out of the darkness as quickly as they could.

Doctor Leonard McCoy yanked his breather off as he emerged from the rubble with an angry look on his face. "Swear to God, you want anything done right..." He stepped over to the bottom of the stairs and shouted up at a pair of med-techs, who were descending the stairs as fast as they could without dropping the large emergency medical packs they were carrying. "Hurry up with those damn packs! They should've been beamed directly here first thing!" He kept shouting, even as they moved past him and headed in through the hole in the rubble. "What, is this your first day?" Then he stepped up to Kirk and got right in his face and glared at him, pointing toward the sky. "You're the captain of that starship up there?"

"That's right. James..."

"We've still got almost six hundred people left down that toilet bowl," he went on, pointing back toward the hole in the rubble, "most of them hurt, and damn little time to get them out!"

"I'm aware of that, Doctor," Kirk replied, a little irritated by the doctor's attitude.

"Well are you just going to stand there with your thumb up your ass, or are you going to call your ship and start helping the *Comfort* beam these people the hell out of this mess?"

Kirk glared at McCoy as he pulled out his communicator and flipped it open. "Kirk to *Enterprise*."

"*Uhura here, sir.*"

"Coordinate with the *Comfort* and start helping with the beam-out from my location."

"*But...we're already doing that, sir,*" the lieutenant reminded him. "*You gave that order almost...*"

"Thank you, Lieutenant. Kirk out." He closed his communicator and asked McCoy, "Are you happy now?"

McCoy grimaced, then turned away and headed back toward the hole in the rubble. "Two ships can't beam people out any faster than this?" he complained.

Kirk walked back over to Piper, who was holding his communicator in his hand as he knelt in front of the patient he had been treating. "Customs and courtesies isn't exactly his strong suit, is it?" he asked rhetorically.

"Maybe not," Piper offered, "but he's one hell of a surgeon, I can tell you that."

"You can cancel the evacuation, Jim," Mitchell said as he approached them.

Kirk turned to him and asked, "You stopped it?"

"And reversed it," Mitchell confirmed, nodding. "Scott's people are transferring the whole rig up to the ship now to secure it properly."

Kirk raised his communicator as a transporter beam took up Piper's patient. "In that case..." He flipped it open as Piper stood up. "Kirk to Wilkers."

"*Wilkers here. Go ahead, Captain.*"

"The immediate danger has been averted, Commander," Kirk told him. "Cancel the evacuation and then meet me at the E.O.C."

"*Understood, sir.*"

Mitchell and Piper took a step back from Kirk while Kirk made an adjustment to his communicator. "Kirk to transporter room."

"*Kyle here, sir.*"

"Beam me to the E.O.C., Mister Kyle."

"*Aye, sir. Energizing.*"

Kirk beamed into the E.O.C, once more with his back to the hanging tarp, to find Governor Vanderford's people going about their work as urgently as before. The operation as a whole looked much as it had earlier, if a little less chaotic, except that a handful of Colonial Security officers had joined the party. They were scattered throughout the room, apparently keeping a watchful eye on things. As soon Kirk spotted the governor—she was hovering over someone's shoulder, scolding him for who knew what—he stepped forward and called to her. "Governor Vanderford."

Vanderford turned and looked at Kirk, wearing a pleasant, polite smile on her face. "Captain Kirk," she began. "I'm told we owe you our thanks for averting a second disaster. We obviously still have a long way to go with our rescue and recovery efforts, but I'd like to thank you for all your help."

Kirk stopped in front of her and glared at her. Her smile faded quickly. "Governor, the disaster that destroyed the northern district was *not* the result of random heavy solar flare activity. The flares were a result of a number of safety precautions being bypassed on your warp core project. But you already knew that, didn't you?"

"I don't have the slightest idea what you're talking about, Captain?" she claimed, putting on an obviously false air of innocence.

"My officers have found evidence that the engineers working on that project violated several Federation safety laws in order to keep expenses down."

"I had no knowledge of that," she insisted.

"You were pressuring them over budgetary concerns."

She clenched her jaw and her eyes narrowed. "Are you accusing me of something... *Captain?*" she then asked, her tone challenging.

"No, I'm not, Governor," he replied. "Any *formal* accusations will be made by the prosecutor's office."

Vanderford started to lose her cool. "How *dare* you!"

"You suppressed vital information about the explosion. If my officers weren't so good at their jobs, that act would likely have led directly to the second disaster we just averted. Do you deny pressuring the program director to cut costs by ignoring several safety precautions, *knowing* that those precautions were required by law?"

"I do *not* have to explain myself to *you*, Captain!" she declared.

"No, you don't," he agreed. "But you *will* have to explain yourself to Federation civil authorities."

"Who the hell do you think you are?"

Lieutenant Commander Wilkers stepped up to Kirk's side, and when Kirk next spoke, Vanderford's people looked on in shock. "Governor Sandra Vanderford, by authority of the Federation Council and Starfleet charter, I am hereby placing you under arrest. The charges

are withholding vital information during an official investigation, circumventing Federation laws, and multiple counts of negligent homicide.”

“You cannot arrest me!” the governor shouted. A pair of the Colonial Security guards started to approach.

Kirk turned to Wilkers. “Commander.”

Wilkens took a step toward Vanderford, but the security guards stepped forward to block his way and glared at him. “Don’t even think about it,” one of them warned.

Wilkens and Kirk both drew their phasers and glared back at the guards. “I suggest you stand down, gentlemen, before you get hurt,” Kirk told them. “These phasers are a brand new design and I’ve heard the stun setting can be a little glitchy.” The guards looked at one another briefly and then backed off. “Commander.”

Wilkens took Vanderford by the arm—she tried to pull away, but he held on—as Kirk flipped open his communicator. “Kirk to *Enterprise*.”

“*Uhura here, sir.*”

“Three to beam up, Lieutenant—one detainee in temporary custody. Have some guest quarters prepared for short-term use.”

“*Aye, sir.*”

Vanderford looked at her guards as the transporter beam began to take her, Kirk, and Wilkens, and shouted, “Get me the best lawyer you can find.”

CHAPTER 7

Several hours later, Kirk, Mitchell, and Piper sat comfortably, conversing over coffee in the ship's briefing room. "I really am okay with it, Jim," Mitchell assured the captain. "He knows this ship and her crew a hundred times better than I do. Besides, I'm no administrator. I'd rather just fly the ship and leave all the paperwork to you and your fellow bookworms."

"There is no *paperwork* anymore," Piper pointed out.

"You know what I mean, Doc."

"Fair enough," Kirk replied.

"So...any word on what's going to happen to the lovely lady governor?" Mitchell then asked, changing the subject.

"The lieutenant governor tells me they're holding her in confinement pending trial," Kirk replied. "The prosecutor is already building a pretty solid case against her based on the evidence you and Mister Spock collected."

"It's a shame to see such a brilliant career end like that," Piper chimed in.

Kirk turned his eyes to the doctor. "I agree, Mark, but justice must be served." Then he asked, "What did you want to see me about?"

"Doctor McCoy."

"What about him?"

"You should have seen how he had that makeshift triage running at the hospital. The man's amazing."

"Are you asking me to recommend him for a commendation?" Kirk asked.

"I'm suggesting you consider him to replace me as your C.M.O. when I retire."

Kirk sighed—he'd known Mark for some time now and he really liked the man—then asked, "Are you sure you really want to hang it up, Mark...after we finally just got assigned to a ship together?"

"Have you any idea how long it's been since I last saw my daughter, Jim?" the doctor asked in return. "She's in Starfleet *herself* now, if you can believe that—just been assigned to Starbase Eleven."

Kirk grinned. "My God, Mark, are you really that old?"

Piper harrumphed. "I'm older. Anyway, McCoy's aboard this ship right now, seeing to Commander Carwyn, if you want to talk to him."

"Why aren't *you* tending to Carwyn?" Kirk inquired.

"Commander Carwyn has a severe, life-threatening upper spinal injury, Jim. What he needs, Doctor McCoy is much better equipped to provide," Piper answered honestly and without hesitation. "I don't have half the experience in spinal injuries that he has."

"All right, you win. Have him come see me." Piper stood up and marched toward the exit, apparently intending to go and fetch McCoy immediately. Kirk thought about stopping him—about putting it off until later, but then let him go and turned his attention to Mitchell. "So where are the officers we took aboard?" he asked his old friend.

"All but one of them were medical doctors, Jim," Mitchell advised him. "They've gone over to the hospital ships."

"And the one? The psychiatrist?"

“Elizabeth Dehner,” Mitchell told him. “For the moment she’s decided to stay here and do what she can for the surviving colonists, but she’s putting in a request to Starfleet Command to be reassigned to the *Enterprise* when we launch after the refit.”

Kirk sighed and rolled his eyes. “Just what we need aboard our new ship, Gary,” he said sarcastically. “A shrink.”

“Just wait ‘til you get a look at her,” Mitchell remarked, grinning. “You won’t mind so much.”

Kirk was about to respond to that, but then the door buzzer sounded. “Come.”

The doors slid open and Doctor McCoy walked in. “You wanted to see me, Captain?” he asked.

Kirk gestured toward the chair that Piper had previously occupied and said, “Have a seat, Doctor.”

“Sorry about what I said down on the surface,” McCoy told him as he sat down. “I was a little...”

“Don’t worry about it, Doc,” Kirk said. “You were under a lot of pressure. I’m not looking for an apology.”

“You’re not?” McCoy asked. “Then why am I here?”

“Doctor Piper’s going to retire sometime within the next year or so. He suggested I consider you to replace him as C.M.O. of the *Enterprise*. I trust his opinion implicitly and I already know you...sort of. Starfleet just assigned me command of this ship and I’d prefer to staff it with people I already know...or sort of know.”

“I see. Well, I appreciate the offer, sir, but I don’t think I can accept it.”

“Oh? May I ask why?”

McCoy drew a breath to answer, but hesitated for a few moments. Then, apparently having decided to be completely honest, he said, “My recent divorce didn’t exactly endear me to my daughter. In her mind I went from being absent to avoid fighting with her mother to being absent because Starfleet keeps sending me away. One thing about being assigned to the *Comfort*...we don’t often stray too far from the core of Federation space. That allows me to spend more time with her...relatively speaking.”

“I see,” Kirk said, parroting the doctor. “Well, you don’t have to make a final decision right now. Mark still has a while to go. I’ll check back with you later, if that’s all right.”

“Sure,” McCoy agreed. “I’ll look forward to hearing from you.”

“Thank you, Doctor.”

McCoy stood and turned to leave, but then looked back over his shoulder and said, “And congratulations on making captain, sir. I always knew you’d make it sooner or later.” He almost grinned. “Felt it right down to my bones.”

“You and your bones,” Kirk quipped.

As the doctor left, Spock, Scott, Sulu, and Cadet Chekov walked in together.

“I swear, it’s like Grand Central Station in here,” Mitchell remarked as they all seated themselves around the table.

Kirk looked first to the Vulcan. “How are things down on the surface?” he asked.

“Efforts continue,” Spock replied. “Arrival of the additional hospital ships has greatly improved efficiency.”

Kirk then addressed everyone at the table. “As soon as we break orbit I intend to head

straight back to Earth and make sure this ship gets the overhaul she's due. In the meantime, I've made some decisions regarding personnel." He turned his eyes to the engineer. "Mister Scott, Commander Carwyn is being transferred to the *Mercy* for treatment pending medical retirement. I'm promoting you to lieutenant commander and appointing you chief engineer. You'll supervise the overhaul."

Scott grinned, obviously very pleased. "Aye, sir. Thank yeh, sir. I would like to go see the commander off, if yeh can do without me for a little while."

"By all means, Commander. You're dismissed." Kirk turned to Lieutenant Sulu as the new chief engineer left the room. "Mister Sulu, you showed me something on the bridge. You haven't been a full lieutenant long enough for me to promote you, but I'd like you to consider splitting your time between running your department and manning the helm. And if you ever decide you want to transfer to the command track, I'll be happy to sponsor you."

"Thank you, sir," Sulu replied. "I'll give that some thought."

Kirk turned next to Spock and said simply, "Lieutenant Commander Spock."

"Sir?" the Vulcan prompted.

"Mister Spock, you're more familiar with this ship and her crew than Mister Mitchell and I put together. I'm restoring you to the first officer billet, effective immediately."

Remaining stoic as always, Spock replied, "Captain, I respectfully request permission to remain in the science officer's billet."

"All right," Kirk agreed. "I did promise you that billet when you agreed to remain onboard. How would you feel about serving as science officer *and* first officer?"

"I do not believe that would fall into line with standard operating procedures, sir," the Vulcan opined.

"My ship, my rules, Mister Spock," Kirk countered. "We're breaking new ground."

Spock raised a single eyebrow, then replied, "Very well, sir."

"And as my first officer, I have two standing orders for you," Kirk continued. "First, keep apprised of Doctor Leonard McCoy's status over the next year or so. I'll want to contact him when it comes time to select a replacement for Doctor Piper."

"Indeed. I believe Doctor McCoy would be a valuable addition to the crew."

"I'll be sure to tell him you said that. Second..." He looked over at Cadet Chekov, but continued addressing his new first officer. "I'd like you to follow Midshipman Chekov's progress at the Academy closely. As soon as he graduates I'll want your recommendation as to whether or not I should have him assigned to the *Enterprise* permanently."

"Very well, sir," Spock replied, while Chekov started smiling like a schoolboy.

"That's all, gentlemen. Let's go home."

* * * * *

"I didn't even know Doctor McCoy *had* a daughter," Peter told his uncle.

"Joanna," Kirk told him. "He doesn't talk about her very much. His marriage didn't end well and his relationship with his daughter has been a pretty tumultuous one."

"Then I won't pry. I assume the governor eventually stood trial?"

"She did," Kirk confirmed. "She was convicted on multiple counts, but I don't know

where they sent her, or for how long.”

“I remember hearing about the disaster at Aldebaran Colony,” Peter told him. “I never realized it was that bad, though.”

“It was, and all because someone tried to save a little money.”

“*Bridge to Captain Kirk*,” came Lieutenant Uhura’s voice over the intraship.

Kirk stood up, walked over to the comm-panel on the wall, and thumbed the button.

“Kirk here.”

“*We’re approaching the rendezvous point with the Alliance, sir.*”

“Standard hail, Lieutenant. I’m on my way.” He closed the channel and looked back at his nephew. “Let’s go, Peter. Duty calls.”

END

AUTHOR'S NOTE

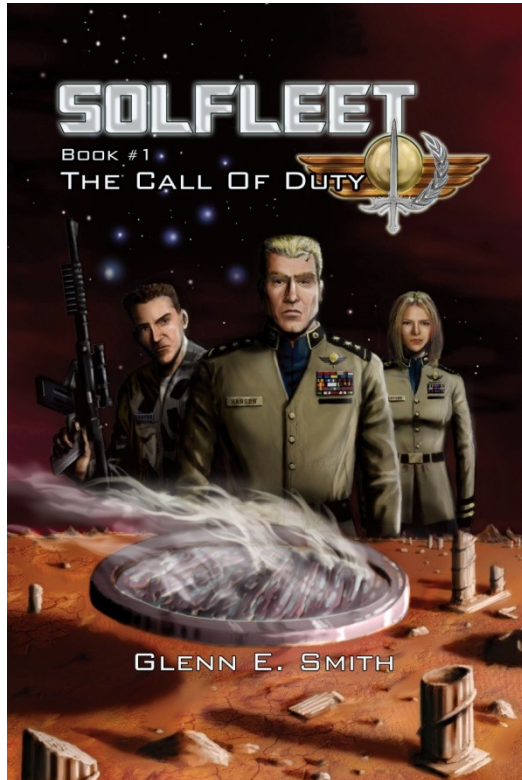
I originally wrote the “first voyage” portion of this story as a live-action episode script for the *Star Trek: New Voyages* fan series after Executive Producer James Cawley personally called me and requested that I do so. As James explained to me at the time, he had recently watched the (then) new J.J. Abrams *Star Trek* film and, shall we say, had been less than impressed by it, as had many of us. Anyway, he asked me to write a *good* origin story for our production. In response to that request, I scripted a version of the story that you just finished reading that did not include the opening or bookend scenes with Peter Kirk. However, after reading the script, James advised me that the episode would be far too expensive for us to film on our fan film budget. All of the *Enterprise* sets that appear in the story, in particular the bridge, would have to be completely redressed to look like the Captain Pike era *Enterprise*. James had done that before for the first production episode, “In Harm’s Way,” and he told me that he was not prepared to go through that again.

Instead, James decided to go forward with David Gerrold’s “Origins: The Protracted Man,” which, unknown to me at the time, he had also solicited for the same reason at roughly the same time. How that episode was going to avoid the very same problems—it *also* would have taken place aboard the Pike-era *Enterprise*—I had no idea, but that was James’ issue to deal with, not mine. As for *my* story, I decided that if it wasn’t going to be produced as a live-action episode, then I would adapt it for publication as a multi-issue arc in the *Star Trek Phase-II: Illustrated* comic book that I had started writing somewhere along the way. As it turned out, “Origins: The Protracted Man” was never completed, but at the time it was still scheduled to be released at some future date, so I had to work around the idea that Cadet James T. Kirk had once visited the *Enterprise* while she was under the command of Captain Christopher Pike, which the more anal-retentive fan-boy part of me kept reminding the more mature part of me violated TOS canon. In addition, *New Voyages*’ version of the history of the relationship between Kirk and McCoy was rather vague and undetermined at the time, at least to my knowledge. Actually, the official canon version remains pretty vague as well.

Well, as you probably know by now, assuming that you even knew of its existence in the first place, the *Star Trek Phase-II: Illustrated* comic didn’t last very long. That is why I’m writing these novelettes. These are the continuing voyages of the Starship *Enterprise* that would have been presented in the comic, had it continued. I had already finished writing most of them when the comic ceased to exist and I don’t want them to never see the light of day.

Finally, because the “Origins: The Protracted Man” episode was never completed, this story now ignores whatever new material might have been presented in that episode had it made it to the screen. However, Kirk’s and McCoy’s history—how long they have known each other, *how* they know each other, where they met, etcetera—remains vague. I did this intentionally. It is enough to know that they have crossed paths before, somewhere, *somewhen*.

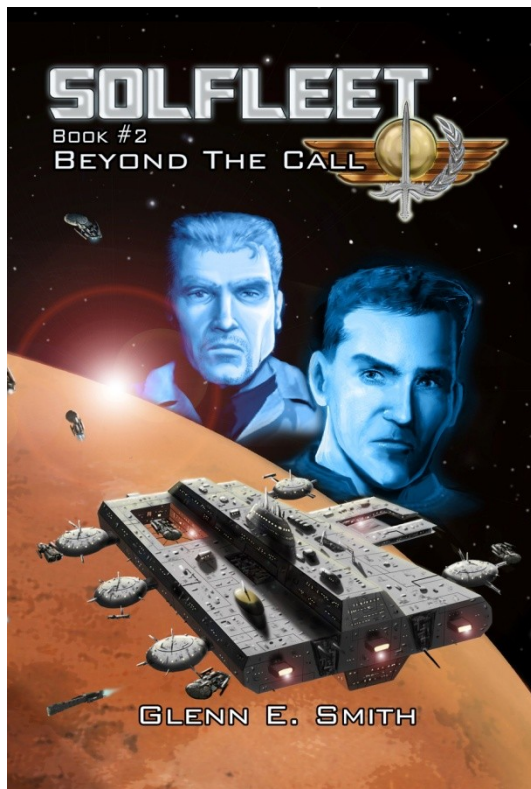
BOOKS by GLENN E. SMITH



SOLFLEET: THE CALL OF DUTY

As the "Solfleet" series begins in Book #1... The enemy is advancing quickly while the Coalition falters. The time for desperate measures is at hand. One possible solution lies in an ancient and mysterious alien device known as a Portal—a doorway into Earth's past. The Earth Security Council believes that if a key event in history can be prevented from ever happening, then the ultimate outcome of the war can be changed in the Coalition's favor. Theoretically. But theories have a way of being wrong. With no way to predict the results of such a mission with any certainty, Admiral Icarus Hansen, chief of Solfleet Intelligence, a man haunted by actions he has taken in the past, must decide whether or not to go forward with the mission anyway, knowing that whoever goes might never be able to return home.

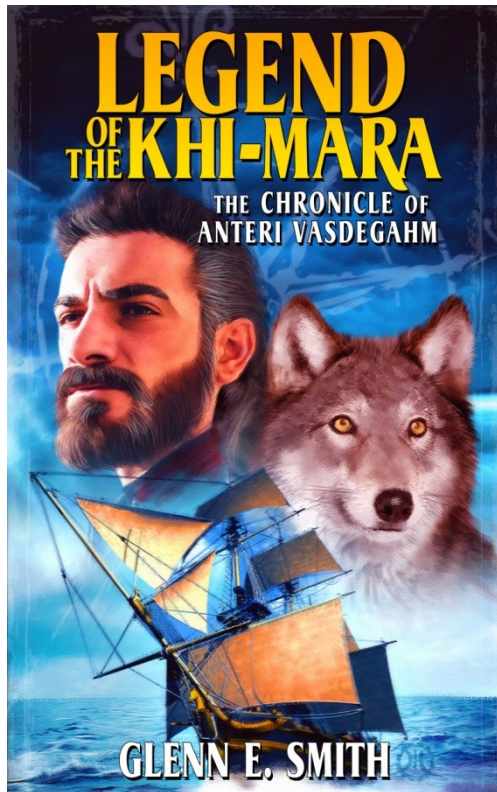
Available in trade paperback at CreateSpace, Amazon, B&N, and other book retailers. Also available as a Kindle eBook at Amazon.



SOLFLEET: BEYOND THE CALL

As the "Solfleet" series continues in Book #2... Solfleet Intelligence Special Agent Dylan Graves has passed through the ancient Tor'Roshan device known as a Portal and traveled 22 years into Earth's past. His mission: Infiltrate the staff of the Mars Orbital Shipyard and ensure the vessel suspected of being instrumental in the destruction of the starcruiser Excalibur in that time period remains docked there. Prevent the destruction of the Excalibur, thus altering specific events in the future and hopefully changing the outcome of the war against the Veshtonn Empire—a war that Earth and the Coalition were on the verge of losing. It is a vital mission, one that he must complete successfully. But altering some events without interfering in others proves more difficult than he ever expected, and time after time he finds that his mere presence has influence, whether he wants it to or not. But still there is the mission.

Available in trade paperback at CreateSpace, Amazon, B&N, and other book retailers.
Also available as a Kindle eBook at Amazon.

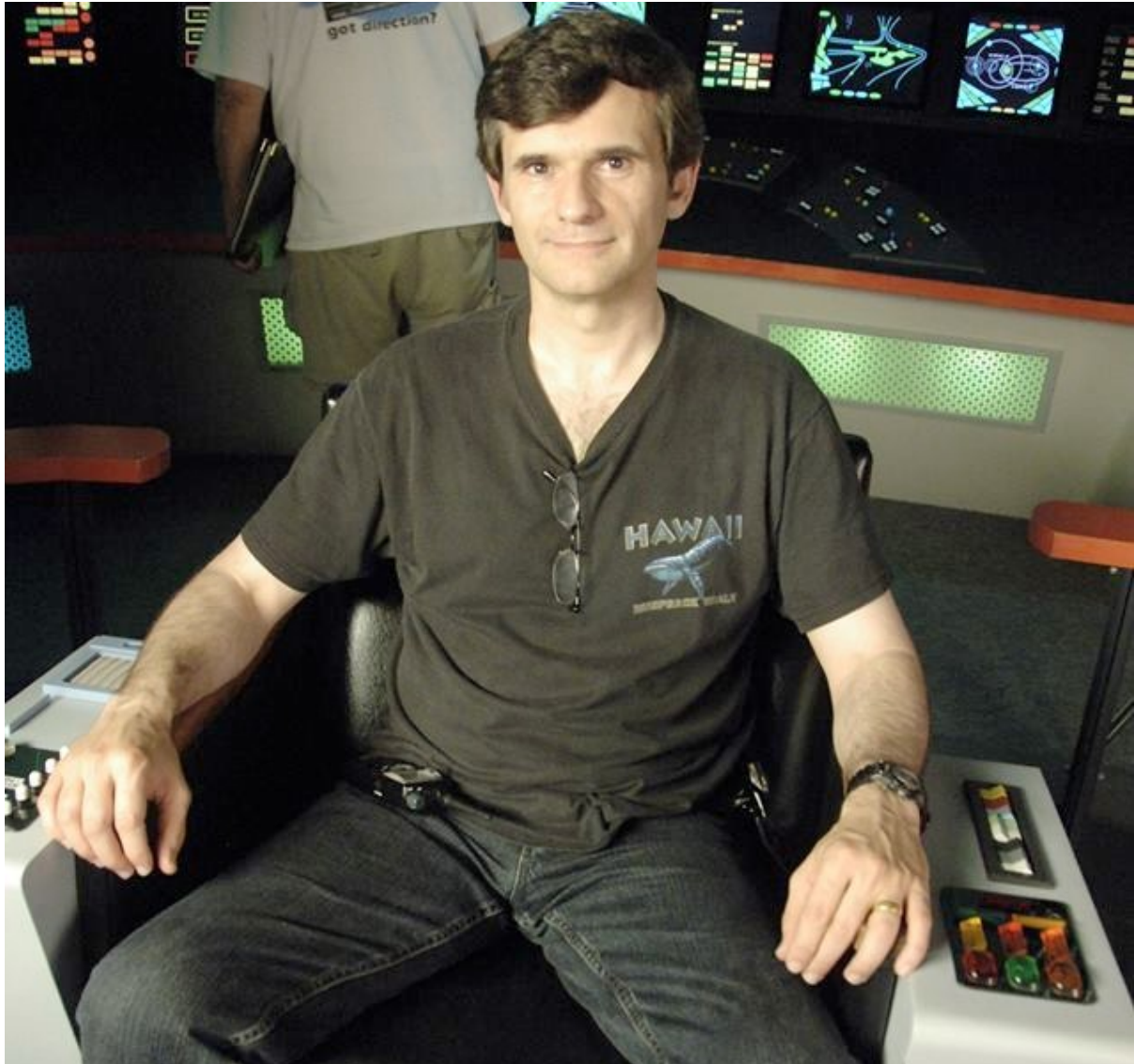


LEGEND OF THE KHI-MARA: THE CHRONICLE OF ANTERI VASDEGAM

Book 1: More than a thousand years ago, rare gems known as Khi-Mara served as sources of great magical powers for those gifted few born with the ability to harness their energies...according to legend. Now, his wife having been murdered and his young daughter having been cursed by the ancient warlock NaRhumas, Anteri Vasdegahm, former Captain-General in the Republic of Lugator Navy turned privateer, searches for one of those legendary gems with the hope that when he finds it, he will then be able to employ a practitioner of the ancient magical arts and have the curse lifted from his daughter forever. Unfortunately, not all ancient magic is benevolent.

Available as a Kindle eBook at Amazon.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Glenn E. Smith is the author of the continuing “Solfleet” military science-fiction and “Legend of the Khi-Mara” fantasy series of novels, and writes the upcoming comic series “Sentient” for Dragon Phoenix Media™.

He joined the Star Trek New Voyages/Phase-II production crew in 2007 for the filming of the episode “Blood and Fire,” during which he served as a production assistant and bit player. He also served as Second Assistant Director for the filming of the episode “Enemy: Starfleet” and First Assistant Director for the filming of the vignette “Going Boldly” and the as yet unreleased episode “Bread and Savagery.” Glenn scripted two episodes for the series as well. Unfortunately, production of additional episodes was halted before either of them could be considered and/or scheduled for production.

ABOUT NEW VOYAGES: PHASE II



In the mid-1960s, one science-fiction series was made that would later become the most popular Sci-fi series in the world: Star Trek. What started as a simple television series went on to develop into a massive franchise of 726 TV episodes, 12 movies, many novels, dozens of computer games and other products. However, The Original Series (TOS) was only made for 3 seasons before the show was axed back in 1969.

James Cawley had already built the bridge, sickbay and several other sets from the original blueprints, when he teamed up with the director Jack Marshall and a number of fans whose aim it was to create the missing two years of the original five year mission under James T. Kirk.

The Star Trek New Voyages team started to create new episodes, based on the original series, to continue where Kirk and his crew had left off when their series was cancelled. They even numbered their episodes as the fourth season and released 11 new episodes (including the Pilot from 2003) and five vignettes, with three additional full episodes filmed, yet not released.

The series was made as a fan film project under the direction of James Cawley, who also played James T. Kirk in the New Voyages: Phase II incarnation until mid-2012 when Cawley passed on the iconic role of Captain Kirk to the professional actor Brian Gross. James continued to helm the show as Executive Producer, making costumes etc.

As this was a fan-film project, we could only work with actors who volunteered their time. This made it necessary to recast a number of actors since production began in 2003. There have been two "James T. Kirks" (James Cawley and Brian Gross), three "Mr Spocks" (Jeffrey Quinn, Ben Tolpin and Brandon Stacy), two "Dr McCoys" (John Kelley and Jeff Bond), three "Lt Uhuras" (Julienne Irons, Kim Stinger and Jasmine Pierce), five "Pavel Chekovs" (Jasen Tucker, Walter Koenig, Andy Bray, Jonathan Zungree and Brian Tubbs) and four "Hikaru Sulus" (John Lim, George Takei, J.T. Tepnapa and Shyaporn Theerakulstit). [See our cast list for full details.](#)

The production values are so high, that several of the original actors and crew have decided to join in and help them create the episodes. This includes Walter Koenig (Chekov) and George Takei (Sulu) who were able to resume their original roles in this fan-series. Other original guest stars include BarBara Luna, Eddie Paskie, John Winston and Mary Linda Rapelye as well as Denise Crosby ("Tasha Yar", TNG) and Bill Blair who originally starred

in DS9). Original writers have also worked on the series including D.C Fontana and David Gerrold.

The visual effects for “Come What May”, “In Harm’s Way” and “Center Seat” were made for us by Doug Drexler under the alias “Max Rem”. Doug is known for his work on TNG and all subsequent Star Trek Shows and he even designed the “Enterprise NX-01.”

Also on board were, Daren R. Dochterman, known for his work on the Director's Cut of “Star Trek: The Motion Picture” DVD. For us, he worked on the opening title sequence and also provided “retro” visual effects for Mind-Sifter.

Joel Bellucci provided the visual effects for Blood and Fire and was then also joined by Pony Horton. Pony is probably the only VFX artist who actually worked with the original VFX artists that made the original series. This includes Hugh Wade, Frank Van der Veer, and Barry Nolan who taught Pony directly how to make the various effects, including the transporter. Pony took on the role of VFX Supervisor for Kitumba and later episodes.

Finally, Tobias Richter joined the team in 2009 who is well known for his beautiful space related visual effects. His work can be seen in Enemy Starfleet and all later episodes. Tobias is Germany’s top CGI-expert working from his Cologne based company, “The Light Works”. www.thelightworks.com

On June 23, 2016 - CBS released new [Fan-film guidelines](#) which made it impossible for us to continue making new episodes. It was decided to close Star Trek New Voyages and open our sets to the public as The Star Trek Original Series Set Tour under license from CBS. www.startrektour.com

Although the production of new filmed episodes has ended, Star Trek New Voyages episodes will remain online through our Star Trek New Voyages International website and fan-club.

As we can no longer make new fan-films, we have started to release a series of new stories in eBook form (PDF and Kindle), written by New Voyages crew member Glenn E. Smith. These stories were initially released in 2014 and are based on the New Voyages timeline. They are now being re-released as a way of providing additional stories to our fan-base around the world.

STAR TREK ORIGINAL SERIES SET TOUR



If you ever wanted to experience what it would be like to visit the set of Star Trek: The Original Series, now is your chance. Star Trek super-fan James Cawley is honoring the 50th anniversary of the iconic franchise with the opening of his meticulously designed TOS set tour. Located in historic Ticonderoga, New York, and under license by CBS Consumer Products, the set tour brings memories to life by allowing fans to boldly go and tour the sets of the legendary Starship Enterprise.

Stage 9 at Desilu -- now Paramount Pictures -- in Hollywood comes back into focus, as the sets have been re-created exactly as they were laid at Desilu during the original run of TOS. Visitors can step onto the soundstage and be transported directly back to 1966. Additionally, beginning later this month, visitors will enjoy guided tours, photo opportunities and an immersive experience into the world of the classic television series.

Cawley started creating the sets in 1997 after receiving a copy of the original set blueprints from TOS costume designer William Ware Theiss. He then spent 15 years researching, crafting and refining his set replicas alongside other dedicated fans and craftspeople, including Trek alumni and fellow fans prop fabricator Ed Miarecki and concept designer and SFX supervisor Daren R. Dochterman.

Pouring over stills and frame captures from TOS and sourcing vintage materials and antiques, Cawley ensured that even the smallest details were accurately and lovingly reproduced. This spanned from an array of props to set decorations. The result is a stunning achievement offering the most complete and accurate reproduction of the original TOS standing sets.

“To me, there is no other franchise around that is more enjoyable and more socially relevant than Star Trek,” James Cawley said in a statement. “I’m very thankful for all the support I’ve received on this project and can’t wait to begin welcoming my fellow fans this summer.”

For more information about James Cawley’s Star Trek: The Original Series re-created sets and how to tour them - go to www.StarTrekTour.com

NEW VOYAGES FAN CLUB

New Voyages Fan Club

What is this Fan Club, what can I expect?

The New Voyages Fan Club has been setup to provide our fans with access to additional downloads, information, posters, etc. We are celebrating the series and adding to the information and downloads about the series from our archives.

Here are some of the free perks available for members of our new fan area:

- Exclusive 16:9 Widescreen edition of Mind-Sifter to watch online or download
- Hi-res downloads of our HD episodes - see the episodes in even better quality
- Downloadable DVD-images (ISO) for all our episodes, complete with extras, subtitles and even artwork
- High-quality Poster and picture downloads
- Wallpaper with pictures of our ships, etc.
- Our exclusive newsletter for fans
- And more to be added in future.

More details can be found on our website. Membership requires registration and is free:

<http://www.stnv.de/fanclub>

NEW VOYAGES: PHASE II EPISODES



This is a list of episodes in the order they were released (although not necessarily the order they were filmed). Please note that the episodes take place in a different order to that of the timeline when they take place. A list of [episodes in chronological order](#) can be found in the next chapter.

Clicking the episode title will take you to the respective episode page on our website. There, you can watch the trailer, get additional information and download or watch the episode online. Of course this only makes sense if you are reading this with a computer, tablet or smartphone. If you are using a Kindle with e-ink display, then what you can do on our website will be limited.

[Episode 00: Come What May \(Pilot\)](#)

After receiving a distress call, the USS Enterprise, commanded by Captain James T. Kirk (James Cawley), is assigned to investigate an intruder attacking the Primus IV colony. Once there, the crew encounters a strange alien life form that can produce visions of personal events displaced in time. These visions may hold the key to better understanding the threat they are about to encounter.

[Episode 01: In Harm's Way](#)

In an adventure that spans centuries, Captain Kirk fights alongside a U.S.S. Enterprise from the past to stop the devastating "Doomsday Wars" that should never have happened. In a universe forever changed by those events, the crew of the Enterprise must once again battle the powerful juggernaut known as the "Doomsday Machine."

Episode 02: To Serve All My Days

While a Klingons ship is threatening the Enterprise and Captain Kirk needs Chekov on the bridge, but Lt. Chekov is incapacitated with a debilitating disease that is causing him to age rapidly... a disease for which Dr. McCoy can find no cure.

Episode 03: World Enough and Time

A Romulan weapons test goes awry and snares the Enterprise in an inter-dimensional trap. Lt. Commander Sulu returns to find himself 30 years out of place and the key to saving the crew of the Enterprise as the precarious grasp on their own dimension begins to slip.

Episode 04-5: Blood and Fire – Parts 1 and 2 / Movie

Pursued and damaged by repeated Klingon attacks, the crew of the Enterprise must respond to the distress call from a Federation research ship. In a matter of hours the ship and crew will be consumed by a nearby star and the crew of the Enterprise will be consumed by an mysterious horror that threatens both ships as the Klingons watch and wait. The horrific story finds a battle damaged Enterprise caught between an incurable contagion that threatens to overrun the galaxy, the pull of a dying star, and Klingons poised to attack. Like all of the best Star Trek episodes, “Blood and Fire” finds the Enterprise crew facing their own human fears and failings as they have to weigh the costs and decide how much personal risk to take in order to save the people around them.

Episode 06: Enemy Starfleet

Attacked while exploring a new sector of space, Captain James T. Kirk and his crew find themselves thrust in the middle of a war. The USS Eagle, lost eight years before, is now in the clutches of a woman who bends starships and their captains to her will and has been reverse engineered into a fleet that is bent on domination and genocide. The Enterprise may be the only ship able to stop the Peshan homeworld from falling to Aleria and her enemy starfleet.

Episode 07: The Child

While the Enterprise passes through a strange energy cloud, a mysterious light force enters the ship and impregnates Ensign Isel who, within days, gives birth to a baby girl, Irska. The child grows up at a tremendous rate and while she appears to be human, it is feared she could endanger the ship after a strange alien spacecraft appears and puts everyone in jeopardy....

Episode 08: Kitumba

"Kitumba" depicts the Enterprise on a suicide mission to the heart of the Klingon Empire. Pulled in every direction by warlords and people that have their own agenda, the Kitumba suddenly finds himself confronting his very enemy: Captain James Kirk and the Enterprise. The choices he makes will resonate through the galaxy for years to come.

Episode 09: Mind-Sifter

When the crew of the Enterprise is forced to accept the death of Captain Kirk, Spock and McCoy must come to terms with their own grief, but when Spock discovers a plot by the

Klingons to send Kirk back in time in order to destroy the Federation, it will take all the courage and abilities of the crew of the Enterprise to rescue their beloved Captain in time before he succumbs to the horrific torture of the Mind-Sifter.

Episode 10: The Holiest Thing

Captain James T. Kirk's (Brian Gross) first encounter with the charismatic scientist Doctor Carol Marcus (Jacy King), who is specialized in Terraforming. Carol is the woman who one day will mother Kirk's son David and also break his heart. Doctor Marcus is leading a terraforming project on Planet Lappa III that goes horribly wrong and devastates the planet. Was it her fault? Or is a mysterious black market operation behind the catastrophe? Kirk and the crew of the refitted, USS Enterprise, investigate.

Vignette 01: Center Seat

While Sulu was away at Command Training, Lt. Desalle has made himself comfortable with the responsibility of running the Bridge of the Enterprise when Captain Kirk is off duty. Upon Sulu's return to Enterprise, he is dismayed to find Desalle in the Captain's chair hardly paying Sulu any mind. Once Sulu re-asserts himself as the XO on the bridge, he takes the Ship out for a shakedown based on his homework from Command Training ...

Vignette 02: No Win Scenario

After being pitted against Kirk in a Klingon version of the “no-win scenario,” Kargh would hunger for the day when he and Kirk would meet for real. His hunger is soon satisfied!

Vignette 03: 1701 Pennsylvania Av.

What would it be like if president Richard Nixon was a big Star Trek fan? Nixon was elected US-president in both 1968 and 1972, but he had to resign after a scandal broke about members of his staff bugging meetings in the Watergate hotel in Washington, D.C., and recordings of the president's activities lacked 18 minutes that were never recovered.

Vignette 04: Going Boldly

A memorial service is held for lost crewmembers while the Enterprise is being refitted for new adventures. Introduces Brian Gross as James T. Kirk.

Vignette 05: Timeline Restored

Two Enterprises meet from different timelines. Can our Enterprise repair the timeline that had gone adrift in time?

EPISODES IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

Our episodes were not made in the same order as they take place on the timeline. So to help you work it out, here is a list of our episodes in chronological order according to stardate (where available) and/or events in the episodes. A list of [episodes in the order they were released, can be found here](#).

Please note that this does cause some paradoxes as the Enterprise gets a refit with new nacelles in Going Boldly, as can be seen in The Holiest Thing, yet the stardate puts The Child much later with the old round nacelles. Kitumba logically takes place after "The Child" despite its stardate. For these reasons, we have placed The Child and Kitumba just before Going Boldly to better fit it in with the events and actors seen in the episodes. Two episodes also include flashback scenes from after the 5-year mission (World Enough and Time as well as The Holiest Thing), but we have not taken that into account.

Vignette 03: 1701 Pennsylvania Av. (Stardate: 20.07.1969)

What would it be like if President Richard Nixon was a big Star Trek fan? Nixon was elected US-president in both 1968 and 1972, but he had to resign after a scandal broke about members of his staff bugging meetings in the Watergate hotel in Washington, D.C., and recordings of the president's activities lacked 18 minutes that were never recovered.

Vignette 02: No Win Scenario (Stardate: Unknown)

After being pitted against Kirk in a Klingon version of the "no-win scenario," Kargh would hunger for the day when he and Kirk would meet for real. His hunger is soon satisfied!

Episode 00: Come What May (Pilot) Stardate: 6010.1

After receiving a distress call, the USS Enterprise, commanded by Captain James T. Kirk (James Cawley), is assigned to investigate an intruder attacking the Primus IV colony. Once there, the crew encounters a strange alien life form that can produce visions of personal events displaced in time. These visions may hold the key to better understanding the threat they are about to encounter.

Episode 09: Mind-Sifter (Stardate: Unknown)

When the crew of the Enterprise is forced to accept the death of Captain Kirk, Spock and McCoy must come to terms with their own grief, but when Spock discovers a plot by the Klingons to send Kirk back in time in order to destroy the Federation, it will take all the courage and abilities of the crew of the Enterprise to rescue their beloved Captain in time before he succumbs to the horrific torture of the Mind-Sifter.

Episode 01: In Harm's Way (Stardate: Unknown)

In an adventure that spans centuries, Captain Kirk fights alongside a U.S.S. Enterprise from the past to stop the devastating "Doomsday Wars" that should never have happened. In a universe forever changed by those events, the crew of the Enterprise must once again battle the powerful juggernaut known as the "Doomsday Machine."

Vignette 01: Center Seat (Stardate: Unknown - Between IHW and TSAMD)

While Sulu was away at Command Training, Lt. Desalle has made himself comfortable with the responsibility of running the Bridge of the Enterprise when Captain Kirk is off duty. Upon Sulu's return to Enterprise, he is dismayed to find Desalle in the Captain's chair hardly paying Sulu any mind. Once Sulu re-asserts himself as the XO on the bridge, he takes the Ship out for a shakedown based on his homework from Command Training ...

Episode 02: To Serve All My Days (Stardate: 6031.2)

While a Klingons ship is threatening the Enterprise and Captain Kirk needs Chekov on the bridge, but Lt. Chekov is incapacitated with a debilitating disease that is causing him to age rapidly... a disease for which Dr. McCoy can find no cure.

Episode 03: World Enough and Time (Stardate: 6283.4)

A Romulan weapons test goes awry and snares the Enterprise in an inter-dimensional trap. Lt. Commander Sulu returns to find himself 30 years out of place and the key to saving the crew of the Enterprise as the precarious grasp on their own dimension begins to slip.

Episode 04-5: Blood and Fire – Parts 1 and 2 / Movie (Stardate: 6429.2)

Pursued and damaged by repeated Klingon attacks, the crew of the Enterprise must respond to the distress call from a Federation research ship. In a matter of hours the ship and crew will be consumed by a nearby star and the crew of the Enterprise will be consumed by an mysterious horror that threatens both ships as the Klingons watch and wait. The horrific story finds a battle damaged Enterprise caught between an incurable contagion that threatens to overrun the galaxy, the pull of a dying star, and Klingons poised to attack. Like all of the best Star Trek episodes, “Blood and Fire” finds the Enterprise crew facing their own human fears and failings as they have to weigh the costs and decide how much personal risk to take in order to save the people around them.

Episode 06: Enemy Starfleet (Stardate: 7232.5)

Attacked while exploring a new sector of space, Captain James T. Kirk and his crew find themselves thrust in the middle of a war. The USS Eagle, lost eight years before, is now in the clutches of a woman who bends starships and their captains to her will and has been reverse engineered into a fleet that is bent on domination and genocide. The Enterprise may be the only ship able to stop the Peshan homeworld from falling to Alersa and her enemy starfleet.

Episode 07: The Child (Stardate: 9717.7)

While the Enterprise passes through a strange energy cloud, a mysterious light force enters the ship and impregnates Ensign Isel who, within days, gives birth to a baby girl, Irska. The child grows up at a tremendous rate and while she appears to be human, it is feared she could endanger the ship after a strange alien spacecraft appears and puts everyone in jeopardy....

Episode 08: Kitumba (Stardate: 2623.3)

"Kitumba" depicts the Enterprise on a suicide mission to the heart of the Klingon Empire. Pulled in every direction by warlords and people that have their own agenda, the Kitumba suddenly finds himself confronting his very enemy: Captain James Kirk and the Enterprise. The choices he makes will resonate through the galaxy for years to come.

Vignette 04: Going Boldly (Stardate: Unknown)

A memorial service is held for lost crewmembers while the Enterprise is being refitted for new adventures. Introduces Brian Gross as James T. Kirk.

Episode 10: The Holiest Thing (Stardate: 7713.6)

Captain James T. Kirk's (Brian Gross) first encounter with the charismatic scientist Doctor Carol Marcus (Jacy King), who is specialized in Terraforming. Carol is the woman who one day will mother Kirk's son David and also break his heart. Doctor Marcus is leading a terraforming project on Planet Lappa III that goes horribly wrong and devastates the planet. Was it her fault? Or is a mysterious black market operation behind the catastrophe? Kirk and the crew of the refitted, USS Enterprise, investigate.

ABOUT US

Star Trek New Voyages: Phase II, International is a small non-profit team dedicated to preserving the legacy episodes and running the fan-club. We started out in 2008 as the New Voyages download mirror for UK and Germany providing subtitles for the episodes in English and German. We expanded our operations to run the website in four languages (English, French, German and Spanish) with a team of translators for subtitles in up to 13 languages. We also organized the showing of our episodes in European conventions. With the closure of New Voyages in the USA, we took on full responsibility for maintaining the existing episodes while the production team turned the studio into an official set tour. We are now in the process of continuing to release more New Voyages episodes as free eBooks.

We are responsible for the following resources:

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