

Star Trek (#04) – “Planet of Judgment”
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Back Cover:

Never before had the Enterprise been betrayed by its own technology. Never before had their systems, instruments and weapons failed to respond. And never before had Kirk, Spock, McCoy and the rest of the crew faced a total breakdown of science and sanity...until they stumbled on the mysterious world that couldn't exist... A world orbited by a black hole and ruled by chaos - where man was a helpless plaything for a race of beings more powerful than the laws of the universe.

Summary:

The Enterprise is on the last few days of a four-week assignment to deliver Dr. James Atheling to the planet Academy, where he will become the Dean of Starfleet's College of Sciences there. The crew's morale seems high in spite of the four-week detour and Captain Kirk thinks he has been successful in promoting the feeling that the Enterprise is on vacation, rather than having been forced into a mission that he feels a transport or scout could have accomplished. Perplexed at a man important enough to shanghai a month out of a heavy cruiser's schedule, Captain Kirk retires to the recreation room for a bit of breakfast after pulling a double duty shift on the bridge. He finds Dr. McCoy there.

McCoy baits the captain about why he's keeping the crew on edge by performing repeated drills and scenarios, and Kirk informs McCoy that when the Enterprise puts in at Academy, the ship will probably be subject of a Class 1 inspection by Commodore Martin Lawrence, chief of Starfleet Flight Training. Also in the mess hall is Professor Atheling, who is having a heated debate about Earth literature with two Enterprise science officers – Andre Charvat and Sharon Follett – both of whom had the professor as an instructor at the Academy and have come to admire him quite a bit.

Captain Kirk no sooner finishes his breakfast before being paged by Mr. Sulu, who took over for the weary Captain on the bridge. The sensors of the USS Enterprise detect the presence of a rogue planet in space, orbited by a mini-black hole that radiates sun-like energy. Since the system seems to contravene all known scientific laws, and assuming the system to be an artificial construct, Captain Kirk is compelled to investigate, postponing their arrival at Academy indefinitely.

Anomaly (so named by Lieutenant Commander Charvat), is a Class-M planetoid measuring only 11,000 km in diameter and has two large oceans situated in the Polar Regions, separated from each other with a large ribbon of land encircling the equator. No artifacts suggesting the planet is or ever was inhabited by intelligent beings were found by the Enterprise but the planet appears to have a very active, almost Mesozoic, ecology; much of the land area is jungle. It's noted that the surface and seas are aswarm with creatures man-sized and larger.

Their investigation is temporarily put off when the landing party attempts to beam down and the transporter fails to materialize them. Mr. Spock and Dr. Atheling (who is an expert on non-thermal sources of bosons and tachyons) believe that the failure of the transporter must somehow be allied with whatever forces allow Anomaly's micro-star to exist. With curiosities piqued and not to be denied, the landing party bearing Kirk, Fosset, Charvat and a couple security men dispatches to the surface via shuttle; however, when they reach the planet, the shuttle's engines cease to function and much of the equipment brought to investigate (and protect them on) the planet also no longer functions. They have become trapped. Furthermore, they've seemed to attract the attention of the local animal population, which immediately attacks.

Captain's log, Stardate 6134.2: This is being recorded by Science Officer Spock, temporarily in command. We are unable to communicate with Captain Kirk and his team, although they appear to have landed safely, and precisely at the selected location. It seems unlikely that Captain Kirk would have long remained on the surface of the planet, once it was plain that he could not communicate with the Enterprise. Therefore, both he and the crew are dead or disabled, or the shuttlecraft is unable to lift. When our orbit brings us again over the landing site, Mr. Sulu will determine by biosensor whether they are alive. Since the translator, communicators, and shuttle engine are mutually independent systems, the probability of all of them malfunctioning at the same time is vanishingly small. The inescapable conclusion is that they have been influenced by some outside meta-system.

In an attempt to solve some of the planet's mysteries Spock postulates that while the scanners detect a number of sentient creatures on the planet, they are born and die in the span of the scan. To what end no one knows. A few hours later, Spock dispatches a rescue mission when telescopic observation of the planet indicated the presence of a forest fire at the landing party's location. Kirk and party set the fire in order to clear the tall grasslands area in which they landed, which they hoped would provide easier access to a nearby river for water and increase safety by decreasing cover for the inhabitants. The shuttlecraft lands safely, but communication with this craft is also lost. Lieutenant Bill Hixon leads the rescue party to save Captain James T. Kirk as a member of ship's security. His full body armor, helmet, and Type I Ray Gun save him from one of these strange life-forms (a giant eagle). A few hours after that, Spock leads the final rescue mission attempt and becomes trapped on the surface in turn.

Even with more than four shuttlecrafts as part of the compliment, the crew continues to come under pressure of the planet's strange inhabitants. Crewman Huff narrowly avoided being eaten by a plant, thanks to Hevelin; however, he befell the plants' wrath instead. And Ensign Bounds was shot in the head by the locals. Although he survived this wound, he was later shot in the neck and later died while receiving care aboard the shuttlecraft.

“UNABLE TO PROCEED/ AIRCRAFTS (SHUTTLES) SERIOUSLY DAMAGED/NOT SAFE TO LAND HERE/SOME CREWMEN or ONE CREWMAN DEAD.”

Following Commander Spock's orders should he be unable to rescue the landing party, the Enterprise proceeds on its way to Academy, to advise Starfleet Command of the situation and receive new orders. Scotty and Sulu do so reluctantly.

Meanwhile, down on the planet's surface, Anomaly's dominant inhabitants show themselves as mentally capable humanoids by attacking the crew with bow-and-arrow. Two more crewmen are wounded - one seriously, which will require primitive surgery. And despite of General Order Number One (the Prime Directive), Kirk orders the rest to go after them. Hixon's security detail is able to capture one of the inhabitants, which is described to be a brown shaggy beast of a man with no eyes. But no sooner do they have him, they lose him: the alien steals one of the phasers and stuns the entire landing compliment. While incapacitated, the eagle-like creatures that had been fended off previously, and was circling overhead unsure, descended upon the party. Hixon was mortally wounded and the man whom McCoy needed to perform surgery on, died.

Later that night, Lt. Hixon is mysteriously called away by the locals, who remove his ears, eyes, thumbs, tongue, genitalia and nose. The change makes him "happy" as he can now perceive the universe in vastly different ways than normal Humans; the change makes him the instrument of communication between the Humans and the Arivne, a Vulcan religions term expressing interdependence, or even unity, between matter, energy, and thought, which the people of Anomaly adopted this as their name. As Hixon explains to Kirk what he is now morphing into, he becomes overwhelmed with the "clatter-clatter" of human thoughts and sends most of the compliment away, leaving only Spock, McCoy, Follett, Atheling, Charvat and Ybarra on scene.

The Arivne are troubled by the advance of a belligerent race called the Irapina, who are from the Sagittarius Arm of the galaxy. Heading toward the United Federation of Planets in four planet-sized ships, they dominate all species in their path. The Irapina appear a cross between an insect and a centaur – Four legs with three joints covered in shiny black chitin; bodies of shiny brown, green and blue; the thorax had black bristles and a scorpion-like tail; two arms, and a head. The arms are mechanical looking, ending in tentacles with one arm bigger than the other. Each of the four elbows has a hooked claw. The head is triangular with bubbly red eyes.

The Arivne know they are not immune to the Irapina's conquest but have been given a perplexing opportunity: to help and be spared. Arrival is estimated at one thousand years, give or take a hundred, due to their distance: approximately twenty-five thousand light years away. The life span of some Irapina is as long as two thousand years, which is sustained by a social-class created as organ harvesters, and with the invasion force consisting of ten billion of the ruling class, the chances of the invasion force dying out before reaching Federation space is quite low. The Irapina are highly telepathic, which allows them to reach out across the galaxy; however, while the Arivne act for self preservation, they are also skeptical of the deal. Thus Dr. McCoy, Spock, and the others must participate in a series of trials that will determine not just their survival, but that of the Federation – they're teaching tools to the Arivne to help them understand deception and decision making.

The first is reliving a particular tragedy in one's life, one that forced the person to make a certain decision about his or life. Spock is made to relive the ponnfar incident in which he had believed he had killed Captain Kirk. McCoy is made to relive the day his wife left him and ran off with his daughter, Joanna; McCoy decided then to join Starfleet. Sharon Falset was forced to relive the sad painful time when she had to choose between having a baby and staying in Starfleet; she chose an abortion. Andre Charvat went back to Academy days to a morning when he woke up to find that his roommate had committed suicide; Charvat had reported him for cheating the day before. And Roasly Ybarra relived the terrible floater accident (a type of car) that killed her entire family after she refused to go on a picnic with them when she was 10 years old. Atheling was forced to relive a moment when he cheated on an exam, getting the only perfect grade; a moment which made him become an expert in the field of differential equations, the subject of the exam.

The second is reliving a particular betrayal in one's life. For Spock, it was a moment in his youth when he was accused of breaking a particular piece of equipment, even though it was not his fault. McCoy was on shore leave and placed his trust in an individual he met at a bar that ended up thrusting a dagger in McCoy's back, leaving him for dead. Falset was taken back to the abrupt end of her first love - ended because of lies her supposed best friend had told the boy, to steal him. Charvat relived a moment when a superior took credit for six month's of his work. Ybarra, on the first trip away from home, placed her trust and possessions with a friend who disappeared with them. And Atheling, reliving a memory from his young childhood about being left alone at night when the power went out.

On the Enterprise, Scotty is both surprised and relieved to see Kirk on the ship. Scotty fills Kirk in on their progress toward Academy and in getting help to Anomaly as soon as possible when it is discovered that they are nothing more than part of a farce cooked up by the Arivne - messages to Starfleet have been getting out but have been grossly incorrect. Rather than pleading for help, it is reported that the Enterprise has come under the duress of an alien disease, which makes those infected believe in a delusion that they've visited a rogue planet inhabited by a race of superior telepathic humanoids. What's worse, those who were forced to stay behind are declared dead in this farce, tying Kirk's hands quite neatly. Faced with the prospect that even if they reached Academy no one would believe them, they turn round and head back to Anomaly in the hopes of rescuing Spock and the rest of the crew from the clutches of the Arivne.

But as soon as the Enterprise arrives at the previous coordinates of Anomaly, they're immediately contacted by a Captain Mohammed Tafari onboard the Federation destroyer Lysander. Starfleet indeed received the fictitious messages from the Enterprise and ordered to have the Enterprise towed in. Kirk attempts to reason with Tafari, but Tafari believes Kirk has succumbed to the supposed delusion of the rogue planet. Before Tafari can maneuver his ship to tow the Enterprise, the inhabitants of Anomaly appear to him, halt his advance and bring Kirk back to the surface.

The Arivne have determined by examining Spock and the others that the Irapina will likely betray them, therefore, Dr. McCoy, Spock, and Kirk must participate in the final series of trials. For if they can best the Irapina in this mental playing field, the Irapina just might be convinced that the Federation is too powerful to conquer and move on elsewhere. After fighting on such battlefields as a pirate ship (Kirk) and inside a star (Spock), the Enterprise senior staff prevails. And rather than invade the Federation in a thousand years, the Irapina will shift their flight plan and will be calling upon the Romulan Empire instead.

“Captain's Log, stardate 6142.4: Fortunately, the Lysander's subspace radio resumed working as soon as ours did; to they could partially corroborate our story. At least they won't be waiting for us with straitjackets. Scientists on Starbase 4 may be able to detect the Irapina fleet, as far away as that, because of the great mass of their vehicles. I confess I will be relieved if our experience can be confirmed by an outside agency, one too far away to be influenced by the Arivne.”

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