

**Star Trek (#06) – “The Starless World”**  
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Back Cover:

*Captain Kirk encounters Klingons and nocturnal creatures known as Strangers and the sun god himself in a journey of incredible suspense... Inside the hollow shell of a strange, remote planet Kirk and the Enterprise crew discover a planet within a planet... energized by a white dwarf star... a planet like a lost Eden populated by a race of small, gentle, furred bipeds... a planet falling toward a black hole to spectacular peril and inescapable doom...*

Summary:

While the awesome spectacle of the Galactic Core weaves a spell over the ship's crew, the hushed atmosphere aboard ship is more nerve-racking to Kirk than relaxing. Their assigned mission is going well – over fifty-seven black holes have been charted and there's been no sign of the Klingons, denouncing rumors of renewed activity by the Empire in this sector. But just as Captain Kirk is about to relax, the Enterprise encounters a Federation shuttlecraft moving toward them about eleven light years from the last reported location of the USS Rickover, lost in this area of space more than 20 years earlier. Identified as one of the Rickover's shuttles, contact is made and the single occupant identifies himself as Jesus Christ. His real name is Thomas Clayton, a Starfleet Academy classmate (and prior roommate) of Captain Kirk's. Clayton was expelled for cheating (by stealing an exam), having been turned in by Kirk. Clayton was a space traveler who had gone missing not long after being expelled from the Academy. But what was he doing out here?

When asked to explain his whereabouts since his reported disappearance, he either ignored the question or else spoke of different matters entirely. For the most part, Clayton raves like the worst imaginable religious fanatic. He insists that he is the chosen son or favored profit of a deity named Ay-nab. According to him, “the people” will be destroyed in the very near future. He admitted owning and operating an interstellar trading ship. He told of the terror he had felt while adrift in the void. Unfortunately, when asked to elucidate he went on to describe how he was rescued by the passage of Ay-nab and went to dwell in the paradise of Lyra under the watchful eye of the god. He said nothing concerning the USS Rickover or how he came to be in possession of one of its shuttlecraft. Kirk had planned on disregarding Clayton entirely – until control of the Enterprise's engines was seized by an as-yet-unexplained outside force... a force, Clayton insists, that is now taking us to meet his god.

The Enterprise then finds itself drawn toward an object in space, which as they are drawn closer turns out to be a Dyson sphere, which Clayton represents as the home of Ay-Nab.

A Dyson sphere is a construct of planetary material, such as the entire material of a solar system, in a single sphere around a sun. The engineering involved in such a terraforming scheme would be tremendous, and any race that could actually accomplish it could probably migrate to another star system with more ease. The world would completely surround the star, and be in perpetual daytime. The people would then live on the “inside” of the planetary material, always facing the star, and away from the galaxy “outside”. Such a world would be almost immeasurably vast, with room for many continents and many oceans, and so large that you would not be able to see the other side of this “world”.

The Enterprise is drawn through a gap in the sphere, to the inside of the fantastic world. There are few signs of life, but a Klingon ship is also detected in orbit. The Klingons are represented by a very young officer, who is belligerent but holds no real threat as it has become increasingly apparent that the Klingon battle cruiser that precedes the Enterprise in orbit fails to possess the ability to transform the threats of the crew into action. An engineering analysis of the Enterprises’ own weapons system discovers that the ship's phasers are also no longer functional.

Despite the enormous size of the sphere and the large amount of vegetation, there is only a very small colony of intelligent humanoids. Kirk, Sulu, and a total landing party of 6 beam down to the surface to find some odd natives – a race that is similar in appearance to white, furred chimpanzees. Contact is made when one of the humanoids is attacked by a large bear-like creature and Kirk beats it off with a stick. The rescued creature is female and introduces herself as Ola; she immediately wants Kirk to become her husband – part of a right-of-marriage based on being saved. Kirk politely refuses and the Enterprise crew immediately attempts to learn about the forces that took control of the Enterprise.

*“Captain's log, Stardate 6533.9. This is being recorded by Science Officer Spock, temporarily in command of the ship. Primary among my own endeavors has been an attempt to obtain a computer projection capable of solving the major paradoxes of this planet. Unfortunately, my results have been more disturbing than illuminating. The computer stubbornly insists that any total solution must be predicated upon the assumption that the internal sun of Lyra is a conscious and powerful deity. It is my hope that additional input will force an alteration in this projection.”*

Ola, takes the landing party to meet Domo, the matriarch of the Lyran village of Tumara. There they learn more of Ay-nab, the living star-god, but not of what it may want with Kirk, his ship or crew. To make things worse, Chekov computes that the course of the sphere will take it into a black hole in four days. In order to escape, Kirk must find a way to communicate with Ay-Nab, either directly or through his worshippers. When Spock and McCoy are kidnapped and brought to the surface by Clayton, the mystery only deepens.

Kirk must race against time to find out who or what is Ay-Nab, and how to free the Enterprise.

The Klingons too are quite anxious to escape the planet and have attempted to bargain with Kirk for his cooperation. Captain Kree concocts an elaborate scheme that he is carrying a denounced princess, heiress of the throne of the Klingon Empire. And if Kirk should help her, he might gain favor for the United Federation of Planets. At first Kirk goes along with the plight for help – what’s to lose? – as the Klingons suggest they have stolen a cache of weapons that work on this world. But a later demonstration shows the weapons will not work in the shadow of Ay-nab, and Kirk casts away the Klingons just as unable to help him as them.

Like the gods in Earth mythology, Ay-nab is a demanding god, feeding on the soul energy of humanoids. Once the god has consumed a certain amount of soul energy from a humanoid, they enter a living dead state not unlike that of a vampire. Extremely powerful, they only come out at night and can barely communicate. Events lead the Enterprise crew to believe there may be some truth in the beliefs of this world as Kirk comes across men the Lyrans call “The Strangers”. Among these captured spacefarers are Alhamisi Uhura (Uhura’s father), Clayton, and the crew of another Starship vessel – The USS Rickover, confirmed by the assignment patch insignia consisting of five interlocking circles on their uniforms.

And despite the run-ins with the Strangers and the oblique attitude of Domo, things turn for the worse when Uhura turns up missing. She is lead away by the shadow of her father to the “Resting Place”, where “The Strangers” go during the daylight hours. Concerned about dying and beholden to Kirk for saving her life, Ola reluctantly takes Kirk to this resting place, where Uhura is found and rescued. And in a last-ditch effort to save his ship and crew, Ola shows Kirk how to contact Ay-nab (through meditation); he tries to convince the star-god (Spock prefers to think it might be a super-computer rather than a biological intelligence) to let them live. But then...

*“Captain's log, Stardate 6537.7. A short time ago, accompanied by several of my senior officers, I watched on the bridge viewscreen as an entire inhabited planet disappeared inside a black hole. The event was no more cataclysmic than the snuffing out of a lamp. One moment Lyra floated in space; the next, it had vanished. As to what actually transpired, opinions differ. I have spoken to Ola concerning her future. Ola says she very much looks forward to finding a new home, an attitude that pleases me. Lieutenant Uhura's recovery continues to proceed at a satisfactory rate. According to Dr. McCoy, she will retain few memories of her ordeal on Lyra. Shortly after the obliteration of the planet, I accepted a call from Princess Kyanna, who informed me that she would soon be returning home. I still have no way of knowing how much of Princess Kyanna's story of treachery and rebellion is true. From her eagerness to return home, I'd guess that most was told me as a lie.”*

As the Enterprise continues on its way, Spock receives a message from Ay-nab: he and his children are well.

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