

Star Trek (#13) – “Death’s Angel”

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Back Cover:

Death stalks the corridors of the Enterprise. When Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock barely survived the mission to Delta Gamma Four, the deadly planet whose beautiful blue flowers destroy the mind and ravage the soul, Chief Medical Officer McCoy felt something was dangerously wrong -- just how wrong, he didn't realize. For when the Enterprise takes on the alien members of a sensitive Federation diplomatic mission, the ambassadors are murdered one by one. The angel of death is visiting the Ambassadors.

Summary:

During an away mission to Delta Gamma IV, Captain Kirk and the USS Enterprise crew encounters a field of blue flower-like organisms that they nickname “Oz Poppies” for their resemblance to the fields prominent in the ancient Terran story of “Wizard of OZ”. Unbeknownst to the away team, these organisms reproduce by discharging a vast cloud of spores, which are dispersed during astral projections by a race of indigenous telepathic mice. They become caught in a cloud of these spores; three of them perish (security officers Jameson and Matthews, and medical technician Miriam Raymond) before Dr. McCoy can combat the spore’s affects – which completely clog and pack the blood vessels in the humanoid brain. The six remaining members of the away team (including Kirk, Spock, and M'Benga) remain in an unexplained coma for ten days after the exposure. They awaken suddenly with no apparent side effects - except that four of the six crewmembers no longer dream.

Meanwhile, the Enterprise is routed to Starbase 7 to pick up a diverse group of thirteen ambassadors, led by Ambassador Sarek. The ambassadors are heading to a special meeting place which has been established in the Romulan Neutral Zone - Station Détente One - for talks to relax or ease tensions with the Romulans. As such the ambassador’s opinions were as widely dispersed as their character.

Those for détente: Sarek of Vulcan; Karhu of Hanaja (A large bear-like ambassador who intentionally magnified his ursine characteristics to appear less threatening.); Sirenia of Cetacea (An amphibious humanoid who was romantically involved with Ambassador Agnatha.); Si-s-s(click) of Gavialian (A blue crocodilian who supported the peace treaty. As is customary of his people, Si-s-s(click) enjoyed "persona games," in which he would adopt the characteristics of a specific fictional character or genre. During his stay on the Enterprise, he adopted the personas of Don Juan the romantic, Sherlock Holmes the detective, and Sam Spade, a character from an archaic Terran detective film called The Maltese Falcon.); and Telson of Manteiga (A member of the Federation Council and a grandmaster chess player who supported the Romulan/Federation treaty. He bore a strong resemblance to a three-meter long Terran lobster with a bright yellow carapace.)

Those neutral on détente: Edentata of Tandenborstel (A retiring armadillo-like ambassador who kept to himself during the entire voyage.), Damu of Chiroptera (An ambassador who reminded Capt. Kirk of a Terran vampire due to his appearance and his species' custom of taking nourishment from mammalian blood. Damu was neutral on the issue of the treaty.), Edentata of Tandenborstel (A retiring armadillo-like ambassador who kept to himself during the entire voyage.), and Hotep of Djoser (A polymorphite whose slight shape-changing abilities were directly related to the amount of energy he consumed.)

Those against détente: Agnatha of Jezero (A lamprey-like being who required a special tank to survive aboard the Enterprise.), Naja of Dalzell (A feathered snake-like diplomat who was opposed to the peace treaty, partly due to his dislike of Romulans.); Neko of Gyuunyuu (A large grey felinoid with violent tendencies who was strongly opposed to the Romulan treaty, partially because of his extreme dislike of all Vulcanoid species); Rovar of Hemiptera (An insectoid who had a strong dislike of the Romulans and therefore opposed the peace treaty.); and Spiracles, a Gyomorian (A slender, winged creature who suffered from heavy oxygen intoxication in the atmosphere of the Enterprise. His people cocoon into a chrysalis form when threatened.).

All is well - the Ambassadors debate in the main officer's lounge on Deck 4 - until a couple of days into the journey, Ambassador Agnatha is found dead of apparently natural causes.

Captain's log, Stardate 6976.5. Dr. Rigel, in her position as temporary physician, has performed the autopsy on the body of Ambassador Agnatha. She was assisted by Drs. McCoy and M'Benga. I find the results of the autopsy disturbing. There was no indication whatsoever of foul play; to all intents and purposes the ambassador died of completely natural causes. The only oddity was a high percentage of ongrene present in his blood, a chemical which is a close equivalent of the Terran compound adrenaline. Whatever Agnatha died of, he was extremely agitated at the time of his death. This fact disturbs me, and unfortunately it has caused Ambassador Sirenia to again demand some sort of investigation into the death of her friend. I have called for an official meeting of the ambassadors, the medical staff, and the Chief Engineer. I hope something useful can come of this meeting. We are less than four days away from Detente Station One; I only hope there will be no other occurrences on board my ship to mar the detente meeting. But I have my doubts that we will reach the rendezvous point without some further trouble.

Two days away from Détente Station One, Ambassador Neko is found dead in his quarters, also apparently of natural causes. Both of the deceased ambassadors were among the most outspoken opponents of the treaty with the Romulans, so a suspicious Kirk asks Starfleet for help. Starfleet places the ship under quarantine and assigns a member of the Special Security Division, Colonel Elizabeth Schaeffer, to investigate the deaths. At first she and Kirk clash on style and flair, but she is not one to be messed with.

The experimental speedcraft she journey's to the Enterprise on is rigged to act as a bomb more powerful than the Enterprise's own matter/anti-matter storage units, powerful enough to destroy the Enterprise in one fell swoop in case the quarantine was breached; she wore the trigger as a bracelet. But a trigger finger isn't the only thing that makes Colonel Schaeffer a pistol; her husband, Colonel Alexis Schaeffer, also of the SSD, is making her life difficult. While generally their assignments take them to far-off worlds and stations for months at a time (leaving only quick rendezvous generally devoid of love, just sex), Alexis arranges for their dual post on Détente One. He becomes sour when she traipses off to the Enterprise as ordered, making her life difficult. More so, with the marriage contract between the two due in two months, Alexis places enormous amounts of pressure on her to renew it (he loved her, but she no longer did), which also soured her mood. But when she begins to fall for James T. Kirk, her job and marriage becomes even more complicated and bizarre.

A mysterious creature known as the "Angel of Death" is visiting the remaining ambassadors, warning that if they do not support the peace treaty with the Romulans, they will die like Agnatha and Neko. This Death Angel appears to each ambassador in the form of the mythological bringer of death for their culture. Col. Schaeffer believes Ambassador Naja of Dalzell is the next likely target after he receives a warning from a glowing winged serpent. She spends the night guarding him in his quarters, only to witness the aged ambassador dying peacefully in his sleep. Unable to explain the apparent death-by-natural-causes, Col. Schaeffer goes on the offensive, interviewing every ambassador and crew-member who had come in contact with them, even potentially blaming sabotage by the Romulans, but...

A fourth ambassador, Rovar of Hemiptera, is torn to pieces in his quarters after giving a vehement speech against the Romulan peace treaty. Guards were present outside his door during the entire attack, but no one is seen entering or leaving. Out of options, Col. Schaeffer turns to the supernatural for an explanation. Through interviewing the remaining ambassadors, she discovers that Captain Kirk was seen outside Ambassador Agnatha's quarters shortly before his time of death. Kirk remembers seeing the two witnesses in the corridor outside Agnatha's quarters - but he maintains it was only a dream and that he was never actually there.

Captain's log, Stardate 6982.3. Col. Schaeffer has explained to me her activities during the time Ambassador Rovar of Hemiptera was killed. I am inclined to believe that she was acting in a responsible manner; she was performing her duty and following a legitimate trail. What happened to the ambassador was not her fault, and I agree with Dr. McCoy that even had Col. Schaeffer been present at the time of the ambassador's death it would have made little or no difference. We are dealing with a being of supernatural abilities. I use this term guardedly, and only with the meaning that there is nothing truly supernatural, only what we do not understand. I have, as captain of this vessel, encountered phenomena on other missions that lack adequate explanation. If Col. Schaeffer fails to capture the Angel of Death, I will request that this not reflect poorly on her record. If an agent of the SSD cannot capture this murderer, no one is capable of solving this

crime. I am faced with the continuation of the quarantine of my ship and the ambassadors therein. We have all come to realize that such a quarantine is necessary. There has been no indication of the Angel of Death on Detente One; his or her activities are confined to the Enterprise, and as such my ship must remain where it is, and my crew and the ambassadors on it targets for a being whose existence I cannot explain.

Of the six surviving members of the Delta Gamma IV away mission, only Kirk and Spock have retained the ability to dream. Col. Schaeffer interrogates Spock and discovers that he too has had a dream that was not a dream. In his case, he was engaging in sexual relations with a young female lieutenant in engineering aboard the Enterprise while she was in a dream state. Although the female had enjoyed the coupling, Spock felt incredibly guilty - thoroughly reprehensible - for taking advantage of her in such a manner.

Dr. McCoy determines that the Oz Poppies reproduce by passing spores along to a race of mice with telepathic abilities, who then deposit the spores elsewhere in the course of their dreamed travels. He and Col. Schaeffer theorize that the ability to project the sub consciousness outside the body during REM sleep was unlocked in Kirk and Spock by the infestation of the spores from Delta Gamma IV. Of the six infected crew members, only Kirk and Spock have a high enough psi factor (or esper rating) to remember their spore-induced dream travels. They believe one of the remaining four crewmen may be projecting the Angel of Death apparition without being aware of it.

“There must be peace in the Universe; there must be a détente between the Romulans and the Federation, and eventually between the Federation and the Klingons. We have had enough bloodshed. I am tired of bloodshed. I grieve at the bleeding bodies I must deal with day after day. I am the Angel of Death.”

Later, during an onboard debate about the Romulan détente, Dr. McCoy gives an impassioned speech against the treaty. Col. Schaeffer is convinced that this will result in a visit from the Angel of Death, and stands guard inside Dr. McCoy's quarters that evening. She witnesses the appearance of a white-robed Terran, whom she recognizes as an astral projection of Dr. M'Benga. As the Angel of Death, he drains the life-force from those he visits, making the death appear as if from natural causes. When he begins to inadvertently drain the life-force from Schaeffer, she screams out in mental anguish, which both Spock and Kirk hear. The two are then able to tap into their spore-derived projection abilities to create an image of a god-like being that convinces the Angel of Death to spare McCoy's life. M'Benga will be taken under the care of the SSD and given treatment to prevent the reoccurrence of the projections. And on that front, all ends well.

As for Col. Schaeffer, she has decided that while her marriage is all over but the two months, she cannot yet say yes to Kirk's proposal and returns to Détente Station One. The Romulan negotiations continue with little delay.

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