

Star Trek: TOS (#05) – “The Prometheus Design”
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Back Cover:

Captain Kirk and his crew are on a mission to investigate the mysterious wave of violence that has overtaken the Helvans — revolutions, mass riots, horrible tortures. But this chaos is all part of an experiment by an unimaginable power that soon grips even the crew of the Enterprise... Captain Kirk is plagued by violent hallucinations and removed from command. Spock takes charge but his orders seem irrational — even cruel. Unless the terrible power can be stopped, not only the Enterprise, but an entire galaxy will be ensnared in the deadly grip of... The Prometheus Design.

Summary:

The Enterprise has been dispatched to investigate a mysterious wave of violence that has gripped the Helvans – revolutions, mass riots, and horrible scenes of torture. In order to investigate this phenomenon, Kirk and company disguise themselves as native Helvans (which have horns on their head) and seek answers among the crowd. When Spock receives a telepathic call from Kirk under duress, he fears for the worst - Kirk may be dead. When the rest of the landing party meet up with Mr. Spock, something even more puzzling and alarming is made known: McCoy, Uhura and Chekov all have lapses in their memories as they went about on the planet's surface; lapses with a vague, overwhelming feeling of horror and shame. A scuffle nearby betrays the position of Admiral Kirk, who is promptly rescued by the landing party and beamed up.

Onboard ship, things do not progress any better. Kirk has nightmares of alien beings in control of his mind, and an unexpected traveler pays them a visit via a fast Federation Scout: a one Admiral Savaj, and he's there to strip Kirk of his command. Starfleet has become aware of Kirk's mental state and projects that there may be other fleet Captains under alien control unawares; the rapport between the command crew of the Enterprise appears to be the only detector of this possibility. Therefore, Spock is placed in command, albeit reluctantly.

Savaj, from Vulcan, is an Admiral for life, joining the star service the moment Vulcan became a member. His career is unprecedented; he became fleet-commander of the all-Vulcan wing of Starfleet, which opened up thirty-two percent of the now explored galaxy. He is a scientist of galactic renown, with medical discoveries credited with saving millions and work in the linguistic community that formed the basis of the Universal Translator. He's taught at Starfleet Academy, at the Vulcan Sciences Academy, and on Earth. Savaj is also highly decorated, with top Starfleet honors. But the last 10 years of his life is a mystery; and he seems to hold a latent hatred toward humans.

With Spock in command, the Enterprise returns to Helvan.

But Spock in charge is not an improvement, as his orders seem to be just as irrational and cruel – he introduces the Vulcan code of behavior on ship and seems to delight in knocking Kirk down a few pegs. There is a great deal of philosophical debate between Spock, Savaj and Kirk over whether the superior intellect of Vulcans means that they should never be subservient in the chain of command. To further demonstrate the inferiority of humans, Spock and Savaj engage in a series of Vulcan combat calisthenics and Kirk understands that his level of accomplishment in that arena is that of a mere child (even though Kirk has been under the tutelage of Spock). A demonstration with Kirk is done in front of several of the crew, further humiliating Kirk. And even though he has been relieved of his command and must obey Spock, Kirk sometimes fails to follow those orders, sometimes for benefit and other times with negative consequences.

When an attempt on Spock's life is had, it becomes clear something foul is afoot. But this attempt seems to bring out the very phenomenon Starfleet had been studying: a phenomenon that Savaj knew all about - a phased ship. A second attempt at taking life - this time Savaj's - places the ship on high alert. The Enterprise returns to Helvan a few hours later and Spock and Savaj beam down. On the surface they are captured and placed in an experiment; Kirk disobeys orders to rescue them. In the process they are able to obtain an alien prisoner. Kirk, however, is broken further for the attempt and confined pending punishment. But yet another attempt on Spock's life at the full view of those on the Bridge, lands Kirk in further hot water - he's the only logical suspect; Kirk has the motive (being stripped of command) to commit such a crime. Kirk is further broken when he interrogates the prisoner on his own behalf.

Kirk learns that incident of violence affecting the Helvans (and now the Enterprise) isn't a natural phenomenon, it is an experiment supervised by the Designers, an advanced intelligence exploring the connection between violence and human need for greatness, attempting to answer the questions: can the human drive to achieve greatness exist in a totally peaceful environment, and whether it's exactly those destructive things that are inseparable parts of the human race? In their own way the Designers are attempting to solve the age-old "Promethean" question of good versus evil. As such they have taken over Kirk's mind, summoned the Enterprise, and put them through their paces. Kirk is the attempted murderer after all, but under alien influence.

The story reaches its climax when Spock, Kirk, McCoy and Savaj go through a final test by the Designers. They learn that the danger to the galaxy is due to the callous way in which experiments have been carried out on living creatures. For centuries, humans have been torturing small animals in the name of medical research, but without regard to how much they have suffered. In the end, the abducted are able to escape because Kirk is able to change his pre-determined pattern of aggression, a result the Designers thought impossible. The test ends when the Designers retreat to consider these results, sparing Kirk, Spock, the Enterprise and the entire Galaxy.

Back on board the Enterprise, Kirk once again assumes command and the ship warps out of orbit, all has returned to normal.

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