

Star Trek: TOS (#13) – “The Wounded Sky”
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Back Cover:

A pretty alien scientist invents the intergalactic inversion drive, an engine system that transcends warp drive – and the USS Enterprise will be the first to test it! The Klingons attempt to thwart the test, but a greater danger looms when strange symptoms surface among the crew – and time becomes meaningless. Now Captain Kirk and his friends face their greatest challenge – to repair the fabric of the universe before time is lost forever.

Summary:

In the final year of the original historic five-year mission, we find Captain Kirk in his quarters, waiting rather impatiently, to discover whether or not the Enterprise has been selected for the singular honor of becoming the first ship and crew to take a journey outside our galaxy – to another – using the “Intergalactic Inversion Drive”, a radical new propulsion system created by the Hamalki, a race of crystalline spider-like beings. The inversion drive technology is a product of the “creative physics” practiced by the natives of the Hamal star system, and as such “magically” allows a ship to bend space-time and transit immense distances almost instantaneously by utilizing “de Sitter” space, a meta-etheric medium-like “overspace” that contains not only the standard universe but countless others. Although Kirk is frightened by the possibilities (and dangers) the new drive might bring, he is optimistic about the Enterprise’s chances (his is not the only ship vying for these honors), but bracing for the worst. And just when he’s concluded talking himself up, down, and up again (the political infighting and announcement delays has frayed everyone’s nerves), a communiqué comes in from R.S. Halloran, Vice Admiral Starfleet Command.

TO: JAMES T KIRK, COMMANDING NCC 1701, UNITED SYSTEMS STARSHIP ENTERPRISE, IN COMA B PATROL SECTOR. SUBJECT: T’PASK-SIVEK-B’T’KR-K’T’LK ELECTIVE MASS INVERSION APPAREATUS. BODY: YOU ARE DIRECTED TO ABORT PRESENT PATROL, WHICH WILL BE ASSUMED BY USS HENRIETTA LEAVITT. WHEN RELIEVED YOU WILL PROCEED WITH ALL DUE HASTE TO SHIPYARDS AT HAMAL/ALPHA ARIETIS FOUR/STARBASE 18 FOR INSTALLATION OF PROTOTYPE APPARATUS IN ENTERPRISE—

The Enterprise had been selected!

“YEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEAHHH!” (Kirk)

Alpha Arietis (also known as Hamal) is a Class K star with a system in orbit that contains at least four planets, including Hamal IV, a Federation member world and the homeworld of the Hamalki. It is also the site of the fortified Starbase 18 orbital facility, an oblong-shaped space station orbiting some 200 kilometers above the Hamalki homeworld.

Indicative of the native inhabitants' unique alien architecture, the starbase is decorated with elaborate golden spires, crystalline objects and mirror finish metal surfaces.

As ordered and a little celebratory thanks to Mr. Sulu, the Enterprise puts into port at Starbase 18 for retrofitting. Kirk reports to Commodore Katha'sat, a dear friend of his, at the starbase and the two revel in their friendship. In *its* office – neither a he nor she; Katha'sat is a hest, native to the planet Rukhbah V, and is a tall and almost skeletal-thin bipedal hominoid (though with extra knees and elbows) with greenish-bronze skin, a long, gaunt face with “large, gentle eyes” either green or golden in color – Kirk is introduced to K't'lk, the Hamalki scientist who invented the new drive, and finds her equally as alien as he does their engineering.

As a sentient arachnid species, the Hamalki by contrast, stands a meter tall and has twelve legs attached to a rounded central abdomen. Its chitinous body is mostly transparent, and polished to mirror smoothness, except for needle-fine spines on top of the abdomen. The abdomen itself has a slender ridge on top that contains twelve eyes, giving the Hamalki 360-degree vision. The Hamalki, who already have longer than normal life spans by nature, are able to transfer their memories into new hatchlings before death, allowing them to pursue projects over several lifetimes. K't'lk is no different; she's been working on the drive for four lifetimes now and is, understandably, eager to being the process.

Once retrofitted, the Enterprise's mission is clear, and somewhat ambitious: travel to the Magellanic Clouds just outside the Milky Way in order to place navigation beacons for future extra-galactic voyages using the new technology, and, of course, explore the surrounding space.

The Chief of Astrocartography – Lt. Mayri Sagady – and Ensign Niwa Awayth-mane ri d'Hennish enu-ma'Qe (an ailurin from Sadr, a bipedal built wiry and slender, standing two meters high, has a silky ash-blonde mane, platinum plushy fur) are busy making necessary changes to chart the course, but no one on board the Enterprise – including Scotty and Spock – understand how the drive actually functions. K't'lk gives a demonstration in Engineering, explaining that the space the ship enters into contains no time; therefore, one experiences nothing while in de Sitter space. However, in that instant flash Kirk does experience something, but it happens so fast and in zero time that he dismisses it quickly, with the possibility that his nerves are a little more freyed than he thought.

Meanwhile, with the installation of the drive complete, the Enterprise prepares to make its first jump near Acamar (also known as Theta Eridani), a star system composed of two stars that appear as one when viewed from Earth, 120 or so light years away. But, naturally, the Federation isn't the only political body interested in the Inversion Drive technology – it has captured the Klingon's attentions too. And just as the Enterprise prepares to get underway, a number of Klingon ships warp into the vicinity, ambushing Kirk – the KL8 KAZA, KL 96 MENEKKU, KL66 ENEKTI, KL14 KJ'KHRRY, KL 55 KYTIN, KL02 AMAK, KL 782 OKUV and KL 94 TUKAB.

“WARP INGRESS! WARP INGRESS!”

Extremely outgunned, Sulu proposes something called Bova’s Recourse, takes the helm, and puts the Enterprise through the same paces that he performed in an ill-fated combat simulation run on the rec dec earlier the following day... hopefully without the same result (the destruction of the ship). Sulu shakes the Klingons after using a number of g-force maneuvers, leading them directly into the corona of 109 Piscium. After leaving the Klingons in the dust, the Enterprise makes its first jump, resulting in the star going inexplicably nova.

The Enterprise jumps 5,700 light-years to Zeta-10 Scorpii, a Wolf-Rayet type star. As there’s not one in the whole Federation or within range of the longest long-range survey, Spock surmises the Enterprise is already a long way from home. Unbeknownst to anyone on the ship, the use of the drive destabilizes space-time on a fundamental level, creating a rift or tear through which another, external, Universe penetrates. And disturbing yet, though not voiced, is the fact that Kirk once again felt... something... during the inversion, which is not supposed to be possible.

With the first jump satisfactorily complete, the Enterprise pauses to check for structural integrity. While they wait, Kirk retires to the galley for nourishment and is joined a few moments later by Spock. There Kirk confides in his first officer about his experiences during the transit and Spock, “relieved”, confides the same in return. The Vulcan voices an amazing memory whereby he finds himself “on” a planet where each time a certain comet blazes in the skies, the inhabitants have war. But since the Enterprise broke the comet into fragments on its patrol, the comet comes as a rain of shooting stars, the sign of peace. Kirk, on the other hand, finds himself inside the “mindset” of his ship – living and breathing it as if he were it.

Concerned, they visit McCoy in Sickbay. But McCoy is just as puzzled as similar incidents have been reported from several crewmen all over the ship. Confronted with this paradox, Kirk still presses the mission forward, albeit cautiously. Meanwhile, in Engineering, Scotty detects something odd. One of the nacelle supports is damaged at the molecular core but none of the damage control computers have detected it. With K’t’lk’s help, the damage is repaired and the Enterprise prepares for the next jump. Meanwhile, Kirk entertains K’t’lk in his quarters and has a most interesting conversation on cultural matters, with some of the truly weird, alien concepts of their society.

The way that they link love, death, birth, rebirth, and building is resonant, even when we meet only K’t’lk. The Hamalki, her species, are not the least bit like humans. Their physics is flexible, their customs and religion aren’t. K’t’lk speaks lightly of holy wars, and the fact that when Hamalki mate, the male dies, gives the darker aspects of their society without making them seem evil. To the Hamalki, not only is rebirth a physical rather than strictly religious part of life – K’t’lk herself has been dead and born again several times before. As she speaks to Kirk she weaves one of the most intricate crystalline pieces Kirk has ever seen, and gives it to him.

When the Enterprise ends its next jump they are where they wanted to be – 101,120 light-years from DG Magellanic Minoris and 100,800 lightyears from Rigel. The longest jump yet was completed and once again the crew experienced oddities during transit that could not, as yet, be explained. This time, however, K't'lk has also experienced these “visions” and cannot as yet explain them. While the Enterprise is checked out after the latest jump, most of the senior staff makes their way to the Observation deck to get a glimpse of the Milky Way galaxy from the outside looking in. Meanwhile, Astrocartography is busy charting a most unique phenomenon and summon Spock to see for himself. For they have readings from the Lesser Magellanic that indicate either the Universe in this part of space is blowing up, or stuck.

Spock discovers that the area of space scanned has lost all entropy, therefore causing weird things to happen to this part of space. Unfortunately they're still too far away to understand what is going on, so K't'lk recommends another jump to put the ship in the vicinity of the weird effects so as to study and gather data. Although risky, as the ship will need to travel 102,000 lightyears – the longest jump yet - the senior staff agree.

The ship makes its jump and the crew experience yet more hallucinations. Unfortunately for Kirk, this time, his hallucinations (Klingons attacking the ship) become quite real in the sense that whatever happens to him in this transit seems to affect his body physically. With Kirk on his way to Sickbay and Spock in command, they have reached their destination... and it's a venerable soup of mess outside the ship.

A few hours later and the senior staff are once again in the briefing room. K't'lk has disturbing news regarding the data collected thus far. It seems the area of space is without entropy because it is being invaded by another universe, one that lacks entropy. Furthermore, this anomaly will consume the known universe – eventually – unless the Enterprise figures out a way to stop it. And why must they? Because they caused the anomaly in the first place, by using the Inversion drive. With K't'lk suggesting they could create a pocket of entropy around the Enterprise and penetrate the anomaly to try and somehow close the rift between universes. In order to do that, however, they'll have to jump there... using the drive. Okay, and off they go.

The ship enters the aentropic space and at the same time the crew enters the transitory hallucinations, living now in that world. Experiences from personal lives across the crew are lived out. The entire crew assembles in this world and makes a trek to the Anomaly in this world. But in doing so the barriers between whom they are and their virtues are breaking down. Visible now are the core of who the people are. What has Kirk gotten the crew into now?

The crew reaches the summit where the source of the aentropy originates from. There they find... a thing. A sphere... that just might be intelligent. Spock and those who are telepathic amongst the crew try and make contact with it, to disastrous results. It swats them away like flies.

The thing knows not what it does, however, as it was not previously aware of others or of itself. The first contact scared the Anomaly. We taught it consciousness, then pain. Subsequent contact teaches the Anomaly about Others, about creation, about Entropy. In a sense, the crew's contact gives this Anomaly, who previously was not self-aware, the ability to be so. And now that it is self aware it does not want to be alone in its universe!

In its attempt not to be placed back in darkness, the Anomaly lashes out, almost destroying the Enterprise in the process. McCoy, whose virtues are compassion and healing, step up and debates the Anomaly's actions with itself. He simply asks them if they want their first two acts since achieving sentience to be the attempt of murder and then to succeeded at it.

The one thing McCoy never mentions to the Others is that should they destroy the Enterprise, they will destroy themselves. As he tells Kirk, "I wanted to see if They really had that much divinity – or what the humanities take for divinity – in Them." Had McCoy failed in teaching the Anomaly this lesson the Enterprise would surely been destroyed, taking the Others with it. "And it's a good thing, too. What could we unleash on any universe that would be worse than a God that wasn't godly?"

Through great pains, Kirk and company convince the Anomaly that it must return to its universe because should it not do so, it will destroy this one, and thus commit Murder. Now comprehending what it is like to Murder, to lose life, the Anomaly agrees to return to its own Universe. With the game of life given to this new universe, the Anomaly will not be lonely. Therefore, K't'lk arranges to weave new laws for the universe using her "creative physics" and it seems all will be well. K't'lk begins to "sing", creating the physical laws that will bind that universe and the life created within. As she begins to finalize her creation, Kirk, Scotty and others realize something is amiss: she must give her own life for his universe to begin, something she's known now for quite some time and set-up through her equations. Although the senior staff objects, there's not much anyone can do. Once the universe is born, K't'lk disappears... and the crew mourns.

After using the drive for short bursts so as not to damage the universe again, the Enterprise finally returns to Federation space, Sol sector, Earth. Although tired, beaten and tried, the crew's spirits are lifted when they see that every starship available throughout the Federation has come to welcome them home, a venerable collection of types, species and colors. "There are the ships of Enterprise's class (Surak, Isshasshte, Intrepid, Tao Feng, and Kennedy). Battleships like Inaiu, Arizona, Divine Wind, and Dataphda. "Light cruisers" with names like Malacandra and Constellation, Constitution, Sadat and Bohamme Richard. Even alien-crewed 'visitor' ships of Fleet were there, to his amazement – Sorithias and Mor'anh Merin'hen, Na'i'in and Sulam and Kame."

Kirk wonders how Commodore Katha'sat was able to get Starfleet to agree to this kind of assembly; he is set at ease. "Jim, WE are Starfleet. A fact which sometimes gets lost over at the Admiralty..." They all wanted to be present to honor the Enterprise for a job well done.

When the Enterprise pulls into port, Scotty frantically calls the bridge claiming to finally understand Hamalki physics and knows now what went wrong – he could fix it! Kirk tells his engineer to write up a report for consideration, meanwhile, Kirk retires to his quarters to attempt to put the mission into perspective: their gains and their losses. As he does so, his eye catches the crystalline object that K't'lk weaved for him while Kirk entertained her here. Picking the item up to examine it further, Kirk is taken aback when he senses movement and drops it, shattering the precious gift. But out from the shards of the broken item pops a small spider-like creature calling immediately for Mt'gm'ry – it's K't'lk's daughter-self and she too knows what's wrong!

As the miniature K't'lk sprints down the corridors of the USS Enterprise, the crew succumbs to jubilation... all is not lost.

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