

Star Trek: TOS (#28) – “Crisis on Centaurus”
Pocket Books | March 1986

Back Cover:

Massive computer malfunctions are plaguing the Enterprise when Kirk suddenly receives a shocking message from Starfleet Command: Centaurus has been bombed and annihilated; thousands are dead. Give whatever help you can. Centaurus is a beautiful, peaceful planet, home to many Humans – including McCoy's daughter Joanna. The crew risk beaming down to investigate, but Kirk is thrown into a deadly struggle between violent enemy terrorists and vengeful Centaurians. Now Lt. Uhura, left alone in command, must jeopardize the crippled Enterprise to save Centaurus, Kirk – and Joanna McCoy!

Summary:

The USS Enterprise is in no shape to perform. The ship, besieged by failure after failure, is virtually crippled when all primary and backup systems fault simultaneously. Fighting to get the ship back under control - with gravity outages, run-away spheres of hot liquid floating about the ship, malfunctioning doors, erratic communications - the Enterprise receives a priority distress call from Starfleet Command. Coded "Hellfire", the news is grim: the city of New Athens, the capital of Centaurus (a Federation world in orbit around Alpha Centauri, Earth's closest neighbor) has been annihilated in an awful anti-matter explosion. Although the ship's computers have run amok, Enterprise is the only ship in interception range. And with the planetary government in shambles, Kirk has no choice but to accept. Complicating matters for the crew: several were born on Centaurus and have family there, none so close to home as McCoy's daughter, Joanna, who is pursuing her medical career there.

As the ship limps to Centaurus, Jim reminisces about the time he met Joanna and Leonard McCoy - he was serving on the Farragut under Captain Garrovick at the time and became gravely wounded in the ship's final battle with the Pirates of Epsilon Canaris III. His mangled leg leads him to be transferred to Starbase 7 for medical treatment under the care of one Dr. Leonard McCoy. During his long recovery, McCoy and Kirk took to each other; as soon as Kirk was pronounced fit, McCoy invited him to his home planet: Centaurus. Kirk fell in love with Centaurus right away; purchasing a vast swath of land in a valley he later named Garrovick Valley after his fallen Captain. There he built a simple log cabin, a place he could return should he ever need a respite from the hustle and bustle from Starfleet. And now he wondered whether Centaurus would continue to be his sanctuary.

The ship no sooner settles into orbit that they pick up an automated signal on a low-frequency band urging a notice of non-pratique (Starfleet code 710): ships, do not approach! The reason is not immediately clear, but debris in orbit around the planet provides the first clues, as Spock speculates they may be the remnants of relief ships sent from Earth but were not located upon arrival.

Furthermore, just as communications are established with President Eriksson at the interim government's offices in McIverton, the Enterprise discovers the reason behind the warning: the planetary defense system has gone hay-wire (destroying everything in orbit: ships, satellites, and other orbital facilities) and has now launched an attack on the Enterprise! The Enterprise gets its shields up just in time and survives the attack. No worse for wear, the Enterprise sets out to complete its mission as best it can. With Uhura left in charge, Kirk & Spock descend upon Centaurus in separate shuttlecraft. Spock and Chekov with a crew of three take Columbus to the planetary defense control center in an attempt to rein the system in, while Kirk and Sulu take Galileo to McIverton to meet with President Eriksson and his ragtag staff.

Spock is able to complete his task with relative ease - gaining access to the central system and outsmarting its malfunctioning computers by tricking them into launching an all out annihilation attack on Alpha Centauri, the star-system's sun. And with all the missiles off-world (and on track to be absorbed by the star without so much as a hiccup), the notice of non-pratique could be lifted, allowing ships with aid to re-approach the planet. With their primary task complete, Spock takes the Columbus to New Athens to help with the recovery efforts there and perform his secondary task: search for Joanna McCoy.

Kirk and Sulu, on the other hand, do not fare nearly as well. In speaking with Eriksson, they learn the original explosion was caused by Isidore Holtzman, a university physics professor turned radical politico and leader of the League for a Pure Humanity. The group had but one purpose: a new agenda for Centaurus - pulling out of the Federation and expelling all non-human citizens from the planet. Their politics existed on the fringe of society until most recently; Holtzman threatened the destruction of New Athens if his movement was not allowed proper voice. The government never thought Holtzman would make good on his word, or use an anti-matter device, and are now out for blood.

Unfortunately Kirk must somehow break the word to them that his orders, which he intends to follow regardless of his personal feelings on the matter, are to extradite the terrorists to Earth to be tried in a Federation court. The remaining members of the League understand all too well they will be executed on the spot if they surrender to the Centauran authorities; therefore, they've turned to Samuel T. Cogley, attorney at law (on planet for other work) to plead their case with Kirk. Cogley in turn contacts the Captain to arrange for his clients' extradition; however, two of the planetary leaders - Burke and Perez - expected such contact and had the two followed back to Kirk's hotel. When Kirk agrees to meet them for Sam's sake, the Centauran authorities act, forcing Kirk, Cogley, and a drugged Sulu (done so by the planetary government to slow Kirk down in the event he would do what he is now doing) to flee in a ground-based flitter.

With the Centauran government's intentions understood and now on the run, Kirk and Cogley pick up the terrorist group and fly off to Kirk's cabin in Garrovick Valley. His hope: the Captain's communications unit (which is a powerful communications tool) will punch through the radiation and get word back to the Enterprise that his task is complete, and to offer enough cover to be rescued from the planet's surface. The party arrives save and sound but there is no solstice here for Kirk.

Kirk's cabin offers little in the way of creature comforts or cover, as the Centauran government uncovers the connection between the land and its owner, and sets out to confront him. Come morning, Kirk and Company find themselves completely surrounded by Burke's men. Meanwhile, although the radiation from the original explosion is still causing communication problems, Kirk manages get a signal out from the unit in his cabin, before the unit burnt out; Uhura recognizes the significance of the signal, and with McCoy's knowledge of Kirk's property, they work out where he is. By that time Kirk and the others are under siege from forces directed by Burke and Perez, and it's looking grim. And just before Kirk is about to give up and call it a day – and turning over his prisoners to the planetary government body, Spock takes the Enterprise down through the atmosphere and drives off the attacking forces.

Joanna McCoy is found alive and well in New Athens, helping out the sick and injured as best she can, and is reunited with both her father and her "Uncle Jim" Kirk. As the Enterprise is relieved by the USS Hood, sending the ship on its way to Starbase 7 for much needed repairs, the terrorists are taken into Federation custody. On the way, Spock re-visits the Enterprise's own computer malfunctions and discovers the root-cause: it seems the Enterprise traversed an area of space occupied by a small black hole of no more than the size of a marble. The ship's passing through it at that time (and speed) caused the damage seen in the computer banks. Spock finds it fascinating but Kirk, well, he's relieved that the Enterprise will soon be back to its good old self again.