

Star Trek: TOS (#32) – “Chain of Attack”
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Back Cover:

While mapping a series of gravitational anomalies, the USS Enterprise is suddenly hurled millions of light-years through space, into a distant galaxy of scorched and lifeless worlds...into the middle of an endless interstellar war. With no way back home, the crippled starship finds itself under relentless and suicidal attack by both warring fleets! And Captain Kirk must gamble the lives of his crew on his ability to stop a war that has raged for centuries -- and ravaged a galaxy...

Summary:

As we open, the Enterprise is currently investigating a series of gravitational anomalies similar in nature to the disturbance that swallowed up then spit them out in the Mercan system, an abode of life existing in the void between the Sagittarius and Orion arms of the Milky Way Galaxy, some time previous (re: "The Abode of Life", TOS #6). Their mission now: chart the newly discovered anomalies and determine if similar gateways exist at their cores and if so, chart their nature and destination. To that effect a number of probes have been dispatched producing varied results, but so far the Enterprise has confirmed the existence of some form of spatial anomaly present in at least six of the disturbances. To help with the effort, they have aboard one Dr. Jason Crandall, the scientist who developed the very sensors the Enterprise was now using to chart these anomalies. Although attached to the Enterprise as “official observer”, he has been a handful since the mission began three weeks ago – restless that the Enterprise crew is no closer to understanding the phenomenon producing them.

When sudden changes to an anomaly, identified as the seventh, occur causing it to wink out of existence, Dr. Crandall suggests they pull the plug on the mission and return home, but the crew never get a chance to contemplate taking that action as the anomaly reappears and swallows the Enterprise whole, transporting it to another point in space! Instead of the sparse stars of home, the ship finds itself surrounded by stars that number by the tens of thousands!

At first the Enterprise crew determines they are near the Shapley Center, an area of the galaxy some five thousand parsecs from their previous location. But upon further analysis, Spock determines the Enterprise is no where near the Shapley Center and, in fact, may not even be in the Milky Way galaxy. His best guess is that the Enterprise is some several million parsecs away from home. And with no way to find the “gate” that sent them there (it disappeared), the Enterprise must cope with the fact that they may be stranded there for all eternity. The crew isn’t able to contemplate that fact long either as sensors indicates a space-faring vessel of some kind not far off. The Enterprise rushes to investigate, but finds the object with difficulty and with technology far removed from Federation standards. When that object detects Enterprise and attacks with lasers, its own engines overload and the smaller vessel explodes.

Left alone once again, and without much else to go on, the Enterprise begins to investigate the surrounding area for any clues to the gates and, of course, how to return home. Since the surrounding space is packed with stars with a number of planets in orbit, the Enterprise lays in a standard spiraling exploration course to visit each one in turn. But each system they visit tells the same story: worlds ravaged by orbital bombardment ranging from 6 to 30 thousand years ago. If anyone had been out there they're long gone. On the fifteenth day of being trapped in this new galaxy, the Enterprise comes out of warp in a new system and immediately detects some semblance of life: a space craft similar in technology to early Federation craft, with five life forms aboard.

The Enterprise tracks the craft with ease and when attempts at contact are made, hostilities ensue: the small ship immediately goes on the offensive. When the smaller vessel realizes their laser weapons, while taxing to the Enterprise's shields, are not enough to overpower the ship, press their engines to overload. The combined power of that detonation in close proximity to the Enterprise would indeed inflict damage. The Enterprise detects this and warps away. In doing so the smaller ship's engine overload comes to a halt. This intrigues the Enterprise crew – "Have they had to do that before?" – who sit far enough away to watch.

The actions of the small vessel attract five other vessels of similar size that rendezvous with and pick it up, as if belonging to the same faction. Kirk watches as these ships, six in all now, fall into alignment and go in search, presumably for the Enterprise. Kirk is weary - even with primitive laser weapons, the sheer number of barrages and kamikaze-like threats could conceivably do the Enterprise in, so the Enterprise maintains its distance. But then another vessel appears nearby, alone, immediately gaining the attention of the six vessels. The moment their flight paths converge a fight breaks out between them – the six vessels attack the one – and Kirk is compelled to act lest he lose an opportunity to discover the circumstances in this part of the universe. The single newcomer is disabled, but so are three of the other faction ships. Kirk rushes in to save the single ship, beams aboard four survivors (suspended in transport) and watches as the attacking posse regroup and retreat.

Captain Kirk, now taking the mission to the next level, meets McCoy in the Transporter Room. Although probably hurt in the attack, Kirk insists that full security measures are put in place: they'll beam the survivors in one at a time, assess the situation, and then continue. The first alien is beamed aboard. At first glance all is well, but the moment he regains consciousness all hell breaks loose: a personal self destruct mechanism is activated (by grinding his teeth together), which not only incinerates his own body, but also gravely injures an orderly. After recovering, Kirk decides to bring in the other three, completely sedated, so that something can be learned from the encounter. Each then is brought in, completely unconscious, and later disarmed – a dental device of some kind – and then left to recover in Sickbay.

A few hours later, one of the remaining three aliens regains consciousness in Sickbay; Kirk attempts to get him to speak so that their language can be learned by the Universal Translator, but the alien is steadfastly refusing to communicate. Therefore, in an attempt

to try anything to get the alien to trust him, Kirk orders the alien's restraints to be undone. Kirk hopes that if the alien is allowed to walk about and mingle, perhaps he would start talking. Unfortunately the opposite occurs – the alien grabs up Kirk and threatens to snap his neck (all without uttering a sound!)

Security reacts most swiftly, stunning the alien and rescuing the Captain, but this bodes ill for the rescued aliens. No worse for wear, though, Kirk has all three confined to quarters, the brig handsomely dressed as a state room, rather than a jail cell. Once again Kirk hopes that the more comfortable the aliens are made, the more cooperative they will become – and speak. This too fails, so Kirk decides to take them all on a tour of the Enterprise – from bow to stern and all points in between. When the alien tour group reaches the bridge, a holo-facsimile of the Enterprise's journey so far, and events that have transpired since arriving in this part of the universe, is played for them. The aliens witness the deaths of their comrades and react with almost human-like emotions. In fact, the aliens themselves are quite human-like; with slight physical differences (they're shorter, bald with slit-like mouths). The video does as intended: it elicits a vocal response from them, who begin to speak between themselves, which in turn allows the Universal Translator to get a rudimentary feel for the language.

A few minutes later, when sufficient vocabulary has been built, Kirk turns to them and says “we are not your enemies.”

That commands the alien's attentions, which at first do not believe but do come to accept Kirk as their non-enemy, if nothing more. They introduce themselves as Tarasek, Radzyk and Bolduc of the race Hoshan, and they are at war with the Destroyers – the ones who have destroyed a thousand worlds or more, but whose identity is an unknown (other than they were the ones who attacked earlier.) Kirk hopes this level of trust and communication will help them find a way home and he broaches the subject of the gates with them; however, the Hoshan haven't heard of the gates either, but they want the Enterprise to use their vast powers to destroy the Destroyers. Having witnessed what the Destroyers have done first hand, and in desperate need of the Hoshan's help, the crew of the Enterprise agrees – in theory – to observe the Destroyers and then take action. But one thing still nags Kirk: the technology of the so-called Destroyers is no better than the Hoshan's – how could they have devastated those worlds?

An opportunity with the Destroyers comes soon thereafter: a newly detected Hoshan ship is found to be on a flight path that will cross with that of a Destroyer. Although the crew agrees with taking action to protect the Hoshan ship, Kirk hesitates – what if they're wrong? Seeing this hesitation and wondering why Kirk would fail to act on a course so obvious, Dr. Crandall who, throughout the last few days has been quietly cultivating an anti-Kirk movement start on board ship, seizes the moment to evoke the authority granted to him as a member of the Federation Counsel, and removes Kirk and Spock from command, firmly placing McCoy in their stead. He then calls for Mr. Sulu to fire upon the Destroyer ships and help the Hoshan in their war efforts.

But Crandall's attempt at mutiny is thwarted when McCoy spots the weapon Crandall is holding is set to kill, rather than stun. McCoy, then working under the pretence of following Crandall's orders, begins the process of removing Kirk from his seat, but then directs Crandall's attention to something on the view-screen, something which the man obviously neglected before taking action. This is a ruse, however, to allow Spock to get the drop on him long enough to administer the Vulcan Nerve Pinch. Crandall is then rendered neutral and life on the Bridge – interrupted for a mere moment – returns to normal. The Hoshan, which bore witness to this exchange, tell Kirk that no one will truly accept them as friends if they don't destroy the approaching Destroyer vessels. Kirk has the aliens thrown off the bridge and the Hoshan ship is left to its own devices, while they discreetly follow the Destroyer ships.

After about six hours of observations and waiting, the crew attempt to get the Destroyer's attention to perform the same task they did with the Hoshan – run in and transport any crew aboard that might be reasoned with. After gaining the Destroyer's attention by sending them one of their own outdated ident codes, an attack ensues. But the Enterprise is swift; it rushes in, takes charge, and beams aboard the ship's lone crew member. It, like the Hoshan, is humanoid but appears to come from avian stock. The Destroyer is immediately taken to Sickbay to deactivate the self-destruct mechanism it possesses and is then left to regain consciousness. When he does so, he begins to chirp and flit like a bird, talking and chatting away with ease. The Universal Translator has no trouble defining the rudimentary language of his race and at once Kirk is able to speak with the alien. This confrontation goes much more smoothly than that with the Hoshan, as the newcomer wishes not to offend (and believes he is dead). He is Atragon, member of the race called Zeator, and his race are at war with The World Killers, to which he, like the Hoshan, has mistaken the Enterprise to be. When Kirk shows him what has happened to him, by use of the same technique used on the Hoshan, he begins to comprehend that Kirk and the Enterprise are not his enemy. Later Kirk shows him an image of a Hoshan ship, which the avian-newcomer pronounces as their enemy, the World Killers.

This revelation is startling. Kirk has members of two alien races aboard who think the other are the ones who are responsible for the devastation on the Slaughtered Worlds. The Zeator story is remarkably similar to that of the Hoshan - they started out exploring space around them and ran into the devastated worlds. There they were attacked, forced to retreat home, develop better defensive weapons, then return again. This unending cycle of warfare had kept the war going for a number of years for both sides. Thus Kirk decided the best thing to do would be to get the two alien parties on board his ship to meet. They did and while it went as well as thought, which wasn't well at all, it was the first necessary step.

The second step was to once again grab the attentions of a Hoshan and Zeator ship so that the Enterprise's intentions could be heard over a wider audience - this time, Kirk would provide both the Hoshan and the Zeator the means to communicate with each other and invite them to send representatives to speak with him. While both confrontations didn't run smoothly, they were fruitful: representatives from both worlds agreed to come to the Enterprise and use it as a platform for tentative talks between the races. Things seemed to

be looking up, until it was known that both parties brought a sizable amount of ships with them. And just when the delegates were preparing to beam aboard, they turn on the Enterprise in unison, attacking with all their might as one massive force.

The ships, numbering four to five dozen, were too much for the Enterprise to handle at once - and without shields. Before Sulu could raise the shields Dr. Crandall, who had been allowed back on the bridge (following his earlier recantment of his behavior), disrupted Sulu long enough for the first volleys of laser-fire to hit the ship. While Spock was able to restore the shields and warp the ship away from the armada in mere seconds, the damage had already been done - the Hoshan and Zeator have the Enterprise on the run!

With their peace negotiations all for naught, the Enterprise finds itself with little options except to return to the area of space the gate deposited them in and check on an anomalous reading Spock picked up deep under a nearby planet's surface. First though, they must slip through the combined Hoshan/Zeator blockade. They are able to, however, and when the Enterprise returns to said planet they find the antimatter power source detected earlier now at full power. Sensor readings now show approximately 1,000 lifeforms, humanoid in nature, living in the underground structure. And then, before communications could be established, transporter activity is detected and the ship dissolves around them.

The crew find themselves in a huge, sterile room, but nevertheless together. Their equipment - tricorders, phasers, translators, medical equipment, computers, and anything else portable - accompanied them and were lying not far in a secluded pocket surrounded by an energy field. Attempts to get at the equipment fail, however, as a vacuum exists on the other side of the barrier. Before long Kirk is beamed away from his crew to a holding chamber that is similar to a transporter pad. Images of their equipment are displayed before him and Kirk realizes that their captors are trying to communicate with them by learning what words they associate with what objects. During the session Kirk learns the name Aragos, but is not sure whether this is his "captors" name or the name of the race. Kirk consults with Spock on return to his crew and he believes he's heard the term before, but cannot associate where.

In turn other members of Kirk's crew are taken for similar language lessons: Scotty, Spock and, unfortunately, Dr. Crandall. But Mr. Spock's lessons prove more fruitful, as he uses his mental telepathy to touch the Aragos. Through the link he is able to force their captors to release he and Dr. Crandall, which in turn grants Spock access to their transporter equipment. Spock uses what he has observed and beams both to where he approximates the equipment has been stored. He is successful, however, he was beamed some fifty feet away from the pile of equipment while Dr. Crandall was well within range. Now it all came down to Crandall -- would he set aside his differences and help the Enterprise crew be saved? He would. The mind-link between the Aragos and Spock also included him, which gave him a unique perspective on his life up to that moment and how he had acted thus far. So, he grabbed a translator but before he could throw it to Kirk on the other side of the field, the alien transporter took Spock and Crandall back to the

control room. But there something miraculous happened, it began instantly translating the alien's speech! At once Spock remembered where he heard of the word Aragos: back in his own Galaxy there was a planet-bound race by the same name near the gate they had discovered. And once that discovery had been made hostilities were dropped. The Aragos female addresses herself as Ckeita and the Enterprise crew are welcomed.

It turns out that the gates were known to the Aragos centuries ago, who then were a spacefaring race. They sent an expedition out through the gate but it was never to return home. They too were stuck in this part of the galaxy and after exploring the surrounding worlds (finding the same devastation), they returned to this one to escape an attacker. With their ship destroyed they had no choice but to stay. The technology on the world far surpassed their own but they were able to use it to their advantage. One advantage was a complete link with the computer system installed. Another was the means to enter hypersleep, which they used to sustain their population. They were awakened, then, when Enterprise passed through the gate.

Using the technology and knowledge within the planet's computers, the Enterprise is able to detect the gate's existence and once again pass through it and go home. But not, of course, without one last confrontation with the Hoshan/Zeator fleets who set up a blockade around that area of space. The Enterprise punches through it and returns home leaving behind an uneasy truce between the two waring races.