

Star Trek: TOS (#36) – “How Much For Just the Planet?”
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Back Cover:

Dilithium. In crystalline form, the most valuable mineral element in the galaxy. It powers the Federation's starships... and the Klingon Empire's battle cruisers. Now on a small, out-of-the-way planet named Direidi, the greatest fortune in dilithium crystals ever has been found. Under the terms of the Organian Peace Treaty, the planet will go to the side best able to develop the planet and its resources. Each side will contest the prize with the prime of its fleet. For the Federation – Captain James T. Kirk and the Starship Enterprise. For the Klingons – Captain Kaden vestai-Oparai and the IKS Fire Blossom. Only the Direidians are writing their own script for this contest – a script that propels the crew of the USS Enterprise into their strangest adventure yet!

Summary:

The USS Jefferson Randolph Smith (NCC-29407), a geologic prospector Sulek-class Federation starship under the command of Captain Tatyana Trofimov, has just found an extremely large cache of Dilithium deposits on the planet Direidi, but so have the Klingons. Delegations are sent to Direidi by the United Federation of Planets (Kirk and the Enterprise) and the Klingon Empire (Kaden of Klinzhai) to negotiate for mining rights (neither is able to openly fight against the other because of the “Organian Peace Treaty”.) Due to the terms of the treaty, both the Federation and the Klingons must show that they are the most efficient at developing the world or renounce their claim on it to the other party. The inhabitants of the world get a small say in the matter. This planet's inhabitants try to make the most of their small say. Both parties find the inhabitants to be very strange indeed.

What follows from here is a very different, yet appealing Star Trek adventure. It almost play's like a sitcom, putting Captain Kirk in situation's you would not normally expect to see him in.

The book is purposely silly – the inhabitants' actions are seen as strange by the starship crews, but this strangeness is passed over blindly (diplomats, as they are in this case, ignoring native customs that do not necessarily match their own). So when someone breaks into a song--yes, a song--the crews take it in stride, even in one case matching the operetta with a little Gilbert and Sullivan of their own. There are several subplots, in which individual groups of the crews are teamed up to undergo different “movie” experiences: Kirk's is a screwball plot (how apt, considering his way with the opposite sex); Scotty and Chekov are involved in a golf duel; McCoy and Sulu become captives of the people that time forgot; and Uhura gets to play femme fatale in a detective noir. Only Spock is left out, as he commands the ship overhead. This is wise, because his logical orientation would suffice to “destroy” the irrational illusions created by the inhabitants.

So we get Kirk and the Klingons in a riotous quasi-musical Busby Berkely-type comedy production culminating in the intergalactic pie-fight. In the end, it turns out that the inhabitants have set everything up according to "Plan C" - Comedy. All of the adventures the two crews encountered were designed to soften them up so that they wouldn't mine the whole planet, but would be willing to work with the inhabitants and each other.

The book has occasionally been called the sequel to "The Final Reflection"; actually, it is no such thing. It could have been the sequel had Paramount granted John M. Ford free rein to write another novel about the Klingon culture he had so meticulously developed in his first Trek novel. Instead, Paramount had begun to exercise tighter control over pro-novelists' creativity and this book was Ford's response to such stifling. And by Kahless' Hand did he have fun with it! "How Much For Just the Planet" is not just a spoof of Star Trek, but a spoof of Paramount itself with lines such as: "... Scott's eye was caught by an unusual constellation: a ring of stars haloing a distant peek. 'Look at that, now. Doesn't it awe you a little? To think there might be a higher power than us, arranging maters?'..." (To understand this jab, think of the Paramount logo). Another of the notable things about the book is the number of real-life people who wound up as characters, such as: Diane Duane (as Princess DeeDee the First), Peter Morwood (as Pete Blackwood), Neil Gaiman (as Ilen the Magian), Pamela Dean (as Pam), Janet Kagan (as Janeka), Ann Crispin (as Lieutenant 'Ann'), and Ford himself (as the Stage Manager).