

Star Trek: TOS (#41) – “The Three-Minute Universe”
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Back Cover:

The Sackers. In all Captain James T. Kirk's travels, he has never found a race more universally shunned and abhorred. Their mere appearance causes most Federation members to become violently ill. Now the Sackers have performed a deed who's brutally matches their horrifying exterior. They have stolen a revolutionary new scientific device - murdering an entire race in the process - and used it to create a rip in the fabric of space, a hole through which another universe is rapidly leaking. Unless Captain Kirk and the crew of the Enterprise can find a way to stop the new universe's expansion, it will consume - and utterly destroy - our own.

Summary:

"The Galaxy is on fire!"

The Enterprise detects massive heat waves coming from the Zirgosian star system, a heat so intense that it melts all the survey probes sent into it. As they draw near they find that the entire star system has been engulfed in a catastrophic conflagration. Spock analyses the readings and makes the startling discovery that the heat boundaries are identical to the theoretical heat readings of this universe three minutes after the “Big Bang” and believes that another universe is “leaking” into our own. Furthermore, the wave-front of this new universe is expanding exponentially leading to only one conclusion: should this new universe be allowed its existence, it will destroy all life within this one. In the hopes of finding out more about what happened, the Enterprise heads to the nearest Zirgosian colony, Holox. When they arrive they find a strange, massive starship in orbit that can reconfigure itself, and the entire planetary population dying of some poison. One barely conscious survivor gives a terrifying message to them – “Sackers.”

The Sackers are a nomadic race so repugnant that their physical appearance makes most life-forms vomit; their smell, like rotting flesh, produces a similar reaction and their natural speech has been known to cause deafness. Coupled with a touch that can burn humanoid flesh, they have been universally shunned although trade does occur. Despite the treatment they had always been a peaceful race, it seems until now. When it is discovered that the Sackers have built an installation on the planet, Scotty and a Security team consisting of Hrolfson, Franklin and Ching go to investigate the heat source, while Mr. Spock and Lieutenant Berengaria search the now vacant buildings of Holox's main city. Things change from bad to worse when Spock captures the Gelchenite, Borkel Mershaya ev Symwid, who admits to poisoning the Zirgosian on Holox on behalf of the Sackers by force. With the Sackers now the prime suspects in what happened to the Zirgosian system - and the only ones who could set things right - Kirk realizes that Mr. Scott's party is in grave danger. But it's too late: the Sackers kill the security detail and take Scotty prisoner (using a memory probe on him to determine he is an engineer).

"AGREE TO MEETING WITH SHIP'S CAPTAIN NAVIGATOR AND COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER ONE KILOMETER DUE EAST OF DOME IN ONE HOLOX HOUR NO WEAPONS NO OTHER CREW"

The Gelchenite, who's part in the ordeal was ghastly, does provide the Enterprise crew with one redeeming quality: a transmitter sewn into his flesh by the Sackers. Dr. McCoy is able to expertly extract it and Mr. Spock able to adapt the mechanism for Uhura's study. She uses the object to help the ship's universal translator to learn the Sacker language, which no one has ever attempted to learn before. After a number of hours between she and Chekov building a common vocabulary, they make an attempt at communication. The only response: have the ship's captain, navigator and communications officer report to a spot near the heat source for further discussions. After forty-five minutes (one Holox hour), the four beam down to the appropriate spot only to be whisked away via transporter to the Sacker ship, where they instantly become ill. Now, with time running out before the other universe begins to overwhelm our own, Spock is left in command of the Enterprise in a seemingly impossible situation: his command crew kidnapped and his engineer, missing.

Onboard the alien ship, Kirk, Uhura and Chekov were taken not as prisoners, but as guides: the Sackers wish their help in the use of their ship; to train them, each within their respective fields. As such they're reunited with Scotty, who had been beamed aboard when the Sackers left the dome on the surface of Holox, which he reported was used to grow baby Sackers. The crew learn through observation and gossip that the Sackers on board are all youngsters, the adults having all died in an accident when the environmental system lowered the temperature too much. Because there are only 1000 Sackers on a ship at one given time, when one dies, he or she is immediately replaced. Sackers reproduce via a special vat of solution by which eggs are fertilized; kept at a specific temperature. No matter where they are or what they're doing, the loss is replaced.

Naming appears to be a great honor to the Sackers, as they take great happiness about being given names (generally the Sackers take on whatever name a humanoid gives them), which can be comical at times: the Sacker commander is inadvertently given the name Babe, the Doctor is given Bonesovna, the Navigator is known as Blue (for her color), the Engineer in training is given the name Mr. Green. Others include Misterma'am (the Science Officer), Pinky and Orangejuiceandwodka (thanks to Mr. Chekov). Upon receipt of a name they bounce and jiggle (their way of laughing)!

Unable to determine how to get out of the mess, Captain Kirk goes along with the sheraide, teaching the Sacker crew how to control their vessel. But when Captain Kirk discovers these youngsters are attempting to fulfill the adults' plot referred to only as The Plan - simple blackmail to force the Federation and others into giving control to the Sackers so that they can live peacefully in the galaxy (the Sackers have lost patience with trying to be nice to other races, and use this incident to force galactical government's hand) - Kirk and the rest of the crew attempt to sow dissention in the ranks. Their mission now: confuse the crew enough to to close the rift opened by the Sackers using a unit (a Baryon Reverter, stolen from the Zirgosians), kept under lock and key onboard ship.

It becomes clear to Kirk that despite their physical nature and the crimes they've committed, the Sacker children are very bright, gifted and receptive to learning; if it were not for the present situation, the Sackers might make fine members of the Federation.

Uhura has second thoughts about treating her trainees badly, Checkov doesn't want to berate Blue anymore and Kirk can't bring himself to break Babe when he has her believing she's a shoddy Captain. They falter and instead attempt to get the Sackers to listen to reason; be their friend. Since a name is so important to the Sackers and that no one knows what they are officially called, as they have not found anyone friendly enough to tell it to, Kirk attempts to follow that route. But at first it doesn't appear that Kirk will gain that knowledge either as he manages to trick them into exposing a vulnerable part of their ship, which Spock takes opportunity to attack, setting the engineering section of the Sacker ship ablaze.

This is the final diversion the crew needs and in the chaos, they escape the bridge to make way for the Baryon Reverter in the maintenance hold. Scotty notices, with much alarm, that the fire suppression systems are not kicking in as designed allowing the fire to spread to other areas of the ship, cutting off their escape route. In a last-ditch effort to save themselves, Kirk barricades himself inside the environmental control room (with his captured crew) asks Babe to surrender. At first she vehemently refuses but when Kirk tells her he's lowering the temperature all around the ship (which would freeze them to death), she relents and turns over command to him. Rescue crews, medicos and fire-fighters begin to beam over almost immediately thereafter.

Back in Command, Kirk returns to the Bridge of the Sacker ship where he meets a distraught Babe. Kirk thinks about their race, how these children despite the odds, have performed admirably, and asks once more what their race is called. Through the relationship that Kirk has built with Commander Babe and the rest of the Sacker crew, and how they are treated with respect after their surrender, the Sackers relent and tell Kirk with honor their race is known as the Vinithi. In response, Kirk honors Babe and her crew in the only way he knows how: by naming their vessel "Babe in Arms". She is both shocked and awed at the honor bestowed upon her; slowly coming to terms with what the Federation may be able to offer them.

Spock joins the Captain onboard the Babe in Arms and the two of them, with Checkov, Uhura and Scotty in tow, rush to the ship's maintenance section to secure the Baryon Reverter. Unfortunately the fires raging below decks continue to spread in spite of the Enterprise's efforts, catching Uhura and Kirk in quite a conundrum - on catwalks high above the deck with the entire mid-section of its floor collapsed into a hulk of flame! Uhura stops dead in her tracks; terrified of fire due to a previous experience in her youth that led to the death of one of her closest friends. She is able to overcome the incident, which has plagued her ever since, to help the Captain secure the Reverter. The stolen unit is then successfully used to close off the other universe and all is saved.

"Do you want me to go away and come back later when you're finished?"
(McCoy, upon finding Kirk, Spock, Uhura, Chekov and Scotty)