



"ANOTHER PIECE OF THE ACTION"

a **STAR TREK** teaser

By: *Richard G. Russo*

"Now entering the Sigma Iotia system, Keptin."

Captain James T. Kirk let out an audible sigh as he sat back in his chair, allowing yet another spurt of apathy to escape him. He stared blankly at the view-screen ahead of him, then letting his mind wander to missions of yore as the hulking form of the Class-M planet slowly came into view. This planet looked like any other to him: the majority of its surface was appeared painted the blue-green color of salty ocean water, while the rest was blanketed in browns and whites, the colors of land and cloud. And like those countless other worlds he had visited, this one too looked quite peaceful and serene drenched in the blackness of space. Yet this world hid its troublesome colors well.

It seemed like an eternity since anyone had spoken a word about the second planet in the Sigma Iotia star system or about the events that had transpired there, and it was most certainly an adventure Kirk was keen to forget. And yet it always seemed like something from his past would rear its ugly head just when he had thought all was well, when there was calm once again in the career-minded waters that James T. navigated.

An old-style radio signal sent by the U.S.S. Horizon – an Earth-based starship of the Daedalus-class that made contact with the planet's inhabitants over a hundred years ago – had been received and Starfleet tasked the Enterprise to follow-up on its mission. Kirk's job was a simple one: call upon the Iotians and report on their current cultural situation, no doubt tainted by the lack of the "non-interference" directive now in place. But what he and the Enterprise found upon arrival was something no one prepared for.

"Captain?"

No one knew, of course. The radio wave had taken that long to reach the nearest Starbase and by the time the Enterprise showed up at Sigma Iotia II, its peaceful planetary government had already come under siege and became one mimicking the criminal underworld of Prohibition-era Earth. The metamorphosis dumbfounded Kirk; how could such a profound transformation have taken place in such a short period of time? What unintended major influence on the society had the Horizon caused?

After interacting with the inhabitants, Kirk found what caused the mayhem: a book, left behind by the crew of the Horizon a hundred years before, changed this planet's socio-political structure for all time. No longer were these citizens part of a peaceful, unindustrialized society; they suddenly distorted into a cruel, violent race of people bent on controlling each other's territories.

"Jim?"

His mission then changed. No longer could he simply check-in on the Iotian situation; he had to help them and repair the damage the Federation inflicted oh so many years before. And he would. In doing so, a unique solution came to mind: rather than fight and demand a complete and sudden change, Kirk worked with the mob-boss system

in play and forced an absolute takeover of their entire planet-wide gangster organization. In a real sense The Federation became top-boss of Sigma Iotia, taking the reigns of power from independent territorial groups and folding them under the power the Enterprise and “the Feds” represented--

“Keptin? Are you alright?”

“Hmm?” murmured James Kirk, shaking off his troubling thoughts. “Quite alright Mr. Checkov. I just never thought we’d be back here again. Of all the adventures we’ve been on and all the worlds we’ve visited ... we warp back here: Sigma Iotia of all places...”

“This is not the gin joint I wanted to walk into today, Jim,” McCoy said in agreement, his comment passing without further notice.

But it didn’t end there. Once Kirk took control of the planetary government, thereby cutting him and “The Federation” in for their fair share, he had to think of some arrangement by which the inhabitants would keep their part of the bargain. He did, and the Federation’s part was thus: it was to send a ship every year to collect their “cut” and make sure the elected leaders kept everyone in line – not by force, but by democratic rule. But no one had come by within the last two years.

Until this very moment.

And now there have been two Federation starships to pass this way: The U.S.S. Hermes, now missing after reporting in at Sigma Iotia; and the U.S.S. Enterprise, tasked to find that missing starship. And that was two too many Starship’s for Kirk’s liking.

“Slow to Impulse power Mr. Sulu, and be on the lookout for the Hermes.”

“Aye sir,” Sulu confirmed, swiveling around in his chair to meet his console. “Sub-light speed.”

The ship’s strained hulk slowed upon command then, whining and creaking and singing a macabre song as she did so, hardly in any shape to be gallivanting across the cosmos at the high-warp speeds the Enterprise had been ordered to travel. Battling with a Romulan Bird-of-Prey at Outpost 14 near the Neutral Zone just prior to this call left her engines severely over-taxed and the hull, along with its crew, bruised and scraped. The Romulans were most definitely on the offensive these days, Kirk noted, and he wasn’t sure how much more abuse his ship could take on their behalf.

What sparked such a show of power in an empire barely heard from was beyond him; all Kirk knew was that the added attention was tearing his ship and crew apart. Outpost 14, the garish asteroid inhabited starbase, was only one in a string of scrimmages on the Neutral Zone recently, and the Enterprise’s fifth defensive mission in the prevailing weeks. Kirk knew of at least one other attack in the vicinity of the Neutral Zone - that at Beta Camus II - which was just as costly to man and equipment.

Jim Kirk drew up then, shifting in his seat. “Let’s do this by the book; Start your scan Spock,” he ordered; then, turning to his communications officer next, asked her to try and raise the lost Hermes on all frequencies.

Both offices snapped to their tasks immediately, but it was Uhura who began to report her findings first. “I’m sorry Captain,” Uhura sighed, after exhausting all available channels. “No reply on sub-space frequencies, emergency channels or normal wave networks.”

“Keep the channel open anyway,” Kirk murmured. “If Ross is out there, he may make an attempt to ask for our help at any time.”

“Aye sir,” Uhura acknowledged, and placed a hand to the bud buried in her left ear, a signal that she was continuing to monitor the frequencies present in the warp-field induced world of sub-space communications.

“The Hermes is a scout-class vessel if memory serves – single nacelle?”

“That’s right Sulu,” answered Kirk, looking solemnly at the star field on the view screen, silently hoping to catch a telltale white flair that could be a re-directed beam of sunlight from the highly polished surface of the Hermes. “It follows the same design as a Destroyer.”

“Then if she’s here, we should definitely be able to detect her. And if she’s not, why she couldn’t have gotten far,” Sulu said matter-of-factly.

“But if she were attacked,” Ensign Checkov added, “could she have dived herself?”

“Adequately enough, Pavel,” said Kirk gently, but doubting his words. “But she wasn’t well-armed. If she got into a skirmish out here, who’s to say? The chances wouldn’t be good.”

“What was she doing out here anyway?” McCoy chimed in behind Kirk, wanting to know. “This system is far from any established freight lines and other trade routes, even for a Federation scout vessel. What business did a Scout have here?”

“The Hermes was on her way to meet us at the Outpost, Bones.” Kirk answered without meeting the Doctor’s gaze. “She detected something abnormal and stopped to investigate and she hasn’t been heard from since.”

McCoy sighed stressfully and lowered his voice then, leaning closer to Kirk’s ear, “Do you think the Iotians could have anything to do with this?”

James T. glanced up at McCoy but said nothing. “What if they discovered how to dismantle the Communicator, what if they—”

Kirk waived him off with his hand; this was not a conversation he wanted to have with his friend just now. He knew the Sigma Iotia system held a closet full of skeletons for McCoy also, but the moment to reflect upon them was not this moment. Further, and Kirk didn’t want to admit it, the thought of Iotian involvement had crossed his mind.

“What about it Mister Spock, anything on your scanners?”

“Working Captain,” said he, as the Vulcan’s features became a wash in a swirl of blue. “I detect no ships in the immediate vicinity, except for the Enterprise.”

McCoy harrumphed, disliked being ignored.

“We know the Hermes was here. Can you tell if the Hermes left the star system and if so where she may have gone?”

“I can try, Captain. Each ship leaves a mark, a stain if you will, and if I can find...” he started to say, but sighed and corrected himself a moment later. “Nothing, Jim. If the Hermes did leave the system there is no signature of it. The system is flooded with ionizing radiation, which is interfering with my scanners,” the Vulcan reported dryly. “If she did engage her warp engines I cannot trace in what direction she may traversed, nor can I say with any certainty where she may have gone under Impulse.”

Kirk grunted.

“I am picking up a sizeable amount of debris at the far end of the system, however,” Spock said, his eyes still glued to his scanners. “Quantity and composition suggests it could be the hull remains of a freighter or a scout-class starship.”

Kirk looked up and let his forehead purse downward in a frown.

Spock rose and faced his captain then, understanding his consternation. “It could be the Hermes, Jim, another starship or a group of space-born alloys. I am unable to say with any certainty. There’s not much available to analyze to any concrete conclusion.”

A hush fell across the bridge of the Enterprise, a silence so profound that the bleeps, beeps and points of the Enterprise’s various machinery, scanners and viewers could be heard loudly over all else – both a deafening and maddening cacophony of sound.

“Dear god, Jim...” McCoy interjected into the silence, pacing behind Kirk’s command chair, but no one seemed to notice.

“And what of Sigma Iotia II’s only moon, Spock?” Kirk almost blanched at asking. “Starfleet reported the Hermes stopped to check out something unidentified on its surface. Are we close enough for a surface scan to see what they might have found?”

“Attempting to scan for that now,” Spock replied, returning to his scanners, but they told him nothing tangible.

“Another sizeable deposit of metallic mass – unnatural; possibly a vessel of some sort – but of an alloy I can say with certainty is not from a Federation vessel; however, the metal has been treated to super-heated temperatures – possibly bombardment from space, or a breach of containment upon collision with the surface – therefore, I am unable to extrapolate its true, original composite.”

“Damn,” cursed the Captain. “A lot of questions, but no answers, Mister Spock. Could that be what attracted Ross’ attention? What else could have been so noteworthy to make an unscheduled stop here?”

“Perhaps I may now have the answer to that, Captain,” said Spock.

“Explain.”

“Scanners have now traced a strange energy source emanating from the planet’s surface, of a type which I am unfamiliar,” the Vulcan stated plainly, and lifted his eyebrow in surprise.

Kirk swiveled his chair in the direction of his science officer - in such a lightning-quick fashion - he almost lost his balance. “What?”

“What?” McCoy echoed. “How is that possible?”

“The energy pattern is definitely artificial,” he reported, rounding the red railing and stepping down from his elevated platform to join McCoy and Kirk at the command post. “And it is on a scale and type the Iotians should not have.”

It was Kirk’s turn to cock an eyebrow. “We definitely have something now, don’t we Spock?”

“Indeed,” he replied.

Captain Kirk rubbed his day-old stubbed chin and looked up at McCoy.

“Mother of pearl,” McCoy sighed nervously. “They did it. You told me they would, and here we are. They found that damned communicator I left two years ago and learned how to harness its power. They wanted a piece of our action, Jim, and they got it. With the power of the Transtator—”

“What *is* he going on about?”

“A cock-up, Mister Sulu,” The Doctor bellowed at him, throwing up his arms in exasperation. “And just look what happened. They destroyed the *Hermes*!”

“Doctor McCoy,” Spock interrupted quickly, “As I have stated on many occasions: you must learn to govern your passions. The *Transtator* may be the basis for our entire technological array, but it is one component of many. I could no more build a *Phaser* out of it than a *Tricorder*.”

“But what other explanation do you have Spock?” McCoy barked, exasperated. “You saw how they reacted to the book the other ship left behind. Imagine what they could have done with the communicator’s technologies these past couple of years. Why Jim, I could be responsible for an even worse cultural contamination than the *Horizon*’s crew ever inflicted!”

“Highly unlikely Bones,” Kirk interjected quickly, hoping to quell his outburst. “Tell him Spock.”

Mr. Spock stood stoically, however, lips pressed together. “While the bright and imitative *Iotians* could have learned to master the power systems behind the communicator’s technology and create a wave like the one we detected from such a derivative device...”

McCoy became visibly pale.

“... That kind of advancement should have taken decades. It is highly improbable, Doctor.”

Silence befell the bridge once again, as everyone took in what the Vulcan stated, but only for a second.

“There is one way to find out for sure,” Spock said at last.

Kirk knew what the Vulcan was suggesting: pay a visit to the *Syndicate*. “Should we risk it?”

“We’ve learned what we can here. I see no other alternative at this time.”

“You’re not really going to go down there, are you Jim?” McCoy asked.

The Captain heaved a sigh and turned back round to Uhura and nodded slightly to her, giving her the unspoken signal to reach the *Syndicate*’s offices and alert Bela Oxmyx and Jojo Krako, if they were, indeed, still alive, that the Federation was about to pay them a visit.

“I see no harm in it Captain since we will, in a sense, be keeping our end of the bargain--”

“Of course you don’t, Mister Spock,” McCoy snipped, folding his arms and leaning back against Kirk’s seat. “You’re not the one who screwed up and caused all this mess! What court do you have to face judgment at, Spock?”

Spock raised his brow.

“Look Jim, I already know what’s going through that skull of yours and I don’t think we should go down there and muck around. You know what happened the last time, Jim, and I’m not keen to repeat it.”

“We don’t know anything yet Bones. Besides, I’m going to need you...” Kirk rose from his chair and made his way to the turbolift. “Gentlemen.”

“Oh no. I’m staying right here. You go. I’ve had my fill.”

But Kirk knew better. “Uhura, have Mister Scott report to the *Transporter* room; Mister Spock and I *and* Doctor McCoy will be beaming down.”

“Figures...”

The door wooshed shut, leaving McCoy and Spock to catch the next car.

* * *

Within moments the three men materialized in a ball of swirling molecules inside a stately decorated room in what was now known as Syndicate National Headquarters. And standing before Kirk as his form came to its final shape, were the figures of Bela Oxmyx, First Lieutenant in this Federation-supported dictatorship, and Jojo Krako, Second.

Jim Kirk smiled warmly and widely; spotting the two gray-haired gangsters turned statesmen and walked toward them with an extended hand. “Why Bela, Jojo! It’s been a long time, eh?” Koik—er, he meant Kirk – said in greeting. But to his surprise, neither of the men moved from their hard stances nor did they look particularly amiable to be greeting them.

“Bela, Jojo... what gives, eh? I comes all dis way to sees yas--”

“Alright youse guys, youse freeze too!” someone behind the crew yelled, garnering their attention.

Kirk, Spock and McCoy followed the voice and slowly pivoted in its direction.

“No monkey business now,” said the Iotian, “Or I’ll burn ya with this heater!”

Kirk was already beginning to formulate the exact distance the gun would fly upon his kick when Spock suddenly added, “Captain, I don’t think that would be wise,” anticipating his move.

“Why not?” Kirk grumbled, his features visibly sagging in deflation.

“Look at what he is holding,” he simply stated.

Both McCoy and Kirk wasted little time and turned to scrutinize the Iotian. When their eyes fell upon the sharp reliefs of a sleek, compact hand-held weapon, Kirk looked back up at the Vulcan in horror.

Spock, on the other hand, could only muster a cocked eyebrow at the scene.

“Why, Jim, that’s a *Romulan* disruptor...”

The Iotian, as yet unidentified, grinned toothily. He seemed to know the heater he was holding was quite a fancy one indeed, and also knew the three Feds he now held hostage with it were quite afraid of the weapon.

So much the worse for Kirk, shocked into inaction, but never silence. “You don’t suppose he knows how to use that, do you?” he asked to either of his comrades.

“Of course he does, Captain Kirk. We’ve trained him quite well,” another voice echoed as a new figure entered the room. This new figure stopped and laid a gentle yet firm hand upon the shoulder of his Iotian subordinate, but never turned his attention away from the three Enterprise crewmen. “Tepo here is an excellent marksman with our weaponry.”

Captain James T. Kirk startled in surprise as the shadowy figure stepped into the brightly lit room and he captured a look at the man behind the deep voice that addressed him. It shocked him to the core to realize who had spoken – it was a Romulan!; there were no mistaking the features: high cheekbones, swept-back eyebrows, straightforward-combed hair, pointed ears but most of all... emotion. His face must have registered more of a shock than Kirk realized because the Romulan, whoever he was, stood there with a smug grin of satisfaction.

“Jim, I can’t believe my eyes!” McCoy blinked, beside himself. “Am I hallucinating? Pinch me, wake me up from this nightmare!”

Kirk would have liked to pinch himself.

The Romulan looked over the room and was visually pleased with what he found. “Why I have been blessed with not only the two high-ranking officers of this Syndicate, but also three unexpected guests: Captain James T. Kirk, Mister Spock of Vulcan, and Doctor Leonard McCoy – the main officers of the Federation Starship Enterprise. And,” he thought to add, “the most wanted men in the Romulan Star Empire. The punishment for your crime, I’m sure you know, is not very pleasant.”

Kirk, of course, knew of the crimes they were charged with committing against the Romulan Star Empire, and the consequences entailed if ever caught. Stealing a cloaking device directly from a Romulan ship was a bold move by Kirk and Starfleet, and their escape was an even gutsier move. But by doing so they condemned themselves to a very unpleasant (and probably very public) death if ever caught and taken back to Romulus or Remus.

“You have me at a disadvantage, sir,” was all Kirk could think to say. “You are?”

“I am Mendek,” the Romulan stated.

But Kirk did not hear the rest of the words that followed, allowing his thoughts to trail off to a battle he and the Enterprise partook in that became known as the Austir V incident. It was there he battled a Romulan Commander known as Mendek - one of the most cunning starship statisticians he’d ever seen - and one he barely got away from. *Could this be the same Mendek*, he wondered?

“But if you don’t mind Captain we’re going to dispense with the pleasantries. My men here are going to relieve you of your phasers and communicators.”

Neither of the three men resisted, rather they held up their hands as their token of surrender and watched silently as two of Tepo’s men came and confiscated their equipment and pocketing said items for their commander.

“And now, I must get back to business gentlemen,” said the Romulan. “I apologize for breaking up the reunion, but…” and he raised his own Disruptor and pointed its barrel directly at the Captain himself. Tepo and his other two henchmen flanking him focused their attention upon Spock, McCoy and the leaders of the Syndicate. “I shall now relieve you of consciousness. Consider yourselves my prisoners.”

Mendek fired first, sending the Captain of the Enterprise sprawling to the floor.

McCoy, frightened for his life but just as equally scared that he and mis-placed communicator may have somehow caused this mess, looked the Romulan Commander square in the eye before Tepo and his men took up suit right after, taking him, Spock, Oxmyx and Krako down with disruptor fire…

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