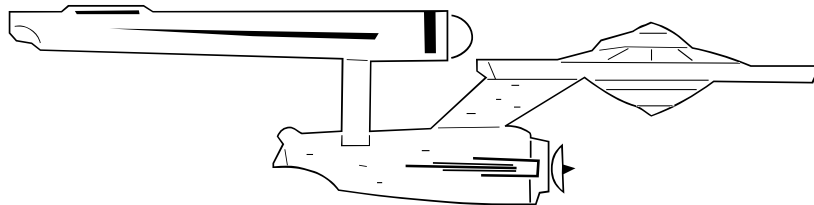


# ***STAR TREK***



## **“END OF THE LINE”**

**WRITTEN BY ADAM COLLINGS**



STAR TREK is the property of CBS Television and Paramount Pictures. STAR TREK was created by Gene Roddenberry. The 'Guardian Of Forever' was created by Harlan Ellison. This is a work of unauthorised fan fiction.

All Star Trek series (including Enterprise) had the opportunity of a grand finale episode, with the exception of the original series. This is my experiment in writing a finale episode for Star Trek The Original Series.

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## PART ONE

### *CAPTAIN'S LOG. STARDATE 6872.4*

*Our five-year mission has come to an end. The enterprise is en-route to Earth where she will undergo a refit before heading out for another tour. Emotions are mixed among the crew, as we face the possibility of saying goodbye to some familiar faces.*

Captain James Kirk sat staring at the computer monitor display on the conference lounge table. He was not in the mood for writing mission reports. He had always enjoyed seeking out new life and new civilisations, but not the paperwork that went with it. He reached for his coffee mug and began to take a sip, only to discover the mug was empty again.

Kirk began to stand out so he could get another drink when the ship's intercom whistle sounded. "Bridge to Captain Kirk."

Kirk pressed the talk button. "Kirk Here."

"Sir I have a private transmission for you from Admiral T'Pol."

"Thank you Uhura. Put it through to the conference room."

Kirk sat back down as the display on his monitor switched from his mission report to his private communication from the Admiral. He read through the message. As he did a bittersweet smile slowly crossed his face. He cleared the message from the screen and pressed the intercom button again.

"Mister Spock, would you mind joining me in the conference room for a moment?"

The dis-embodied voice of the Vulcan first officer came through straight away. "Acknowledged Captain."

It was only a matter of moments before the doors swished open and Spock stepped inside. Kirk looked up at him and smiled. "Mister Spock, come in and sit down." The Vulcan approached the large

conference table but failed to sit, choosing instead to stand beside a nearby chair with his hands behind his back. "I have been in communication with Starfleet Command about a very important matter. I have just received a communique from Admiral T'Pol and I'm delighted to inform you that she has accepted my recommendation to promote Lieutenant-Commander Spock to the rank of Captain and given command of his own starship.

Spock raised his eyebrow. Kirk stood and extended his hand. "Congratulations Captain Spock. You will be a great loss to this ship, but nobody I know deserves this more than you."

Spock considered for a moment before begrudgingly accepting Kirk's hand and shaking it. Kirk could feel the tension in Spock's grip and remembered that Vulcans disliked physical contact.

"Thank you for your recommendation Captain. I appreciate the faith you have put in my abilities. I will give this offer due consideration."

Kirk gave his friend a bemused look. "You have to consider it? It's every officer's dream to have their own command."

"Let me simply say Captain, that over recent weeks I have been considering my options for the future. Our mission has come to an end and I must now choose my next path."

"I see. Well I certainly hope you will give this offer very careful consideration Mister Spock. I don't want to see you go, I would be lost without you, but I think this is best for you, and for Starfleet."

"Requesting permission to return to my duties Captain."

"Dismissed Mister Spock."

Kirk watched his first officer turn on the spot and stroll purposefully out the door.

Kirk stepped out of the turbolift onto the bridge and surveyed it slowly. He wondered how much longer he would see this family all together. Uhura and Spock were seated at the communications and science stations respectively to his right. At the front of the bridge sat Chekov and Sulu manning navigation and helm. To his right was Will Decker at an auxiliary ops console and Scotty at the Engineering station. "Mr. Sulu, what is our E.T.A to Earth?"

"Thirty-Six hours Captain."

Kirk nodded. He hated the idea of returning home. He knew that his crew needed some shore leave, and his ship needed a tune-up but the last thing he wanted to do was take it easy when there was still so much more unexplored space to chart.

Kirk made his way over to the console where Decker was working. He quite liked the young man. Kirk had requested his transfer to the *Enterprise* a year ago. He had felt a certain amount of responsibility for the death of Will's father, Commodore Matthew Decker. Since that time Kirk had made it his personal quest to take the younger

Decker under his wing. If Spock decided to accept his promotion to Captain, Kirk was hoping to make Decker his new first officer.

"Mister Decker, report on current crew readiness."

"Eighty percent Captain. All departments working at satisfactory levels."

"But?" Kirk let the word hang.

"But there have been a number of instances of crew members turning up late to their shifts over the last several days."

"I see. It appears some of the crew already have their minds set on shore leave. Take a message for all department heads Mister Decker. I want it clear that just because we are on our home, that is no excuse for being sloppy with our duties. We are still a Starfleet vessel on active service. Is that understood?"

"Yes Captain."

Kirk turned to address Scotty, who he now saw was sporting several days worth of facial-hair growth. "Mister Scott, how long before you start shaving again?" he asked with mock-disapproval.

"Ah I just thought it was time for a wee change Captain. I think it makes me look more nautical. Do you think it suits me?"

Kirk chuckled. "Well to be honest Mister Scott, I think it's a bit much."

"Really Sir? Perhaps if I reduced it to a goatee, or maybe a moustache."

"Maybe. Report on the status of the engines."

"They couldn't be in better condition Sir. Are you sure the *Enterprise* has to undergo a refit? It's not like she's falling apart?"

"She may be a good ship Scotty, but she's also been out on the frontier for five years. Technologies have changed. You know that."

"Aye, they can invent as many new gadgets as you like, but you can't bring a good ship down Sir."

Kirk smiled. "She'll still be your baby Scotty, she'll just have a little face-lift and a hip replacement."

Kirk made his way toward his command chair.

"Captain, I am detecting some unusual readings on the scanners."

Spock said from the science station.

"What kind of readings Mister Spock?"

"It is a energy signature, similar to that which we encountered on the Guardian's planet."

"The Guardian of Forever?"

"The same."

"Is it a time disturbance?"

"No Captain. There is no evidence of any temporal distortion. It is simply an energy signature. It may indicate the presence of technology created by the same civilisation."

"Where is it coming from?"

"Thorus IV."

"Isn't that a pre-industrial world?" asked Checkov

"Indeed Ensign. Our dealings with the Thorissians in the past has indicated no presence of advanced technology on their world."

"Sounds like it might be worth a look. What do you say Mister Spock?"

"We are on our way back to Earth Captain."

"Quite true, but I don't think Starfleet would object to one last adventure before we bring the mission to an end, especially when there's a chance to gain a greater understanding of guardian technology."

"Quite logical Captain."

Kirk turned to the navigation console. "Mister Checkov, lay in a new course for Thorus IV."



## PART TWO

### *CAPTAIN'S LOG. STARDATE 6872.8*

*The Enterprise is in orbit of Thorus IV, a pre-industrial world that has not been visited by a Federation starship in almost a century. We have detected an energy signature that suggests a device of great technology, greater than the inhabitants of this world should have. We are beaming down to investigate.*

"Remember, this is a pre-industrial world, which means the prime directive is in full force." Kirk strode to the navigation console at the front of the bridge. "Mr. Checkov, has your reconnaissance revealed any potential difficulties we will have fitting in?"

"There should no serious problems Keptin. The planet hosts many different cultures. Clothing and customs is very diverse."

"Then any indigenous people we may encounter will likely pay little attention to our uniforms," Spock said from behind Kirk.

"Exactly Mister Spock."

"Good job Ensign. I want you to accompany us on this mission. Please report to the transporter room and have Doctor McCoy meet us there."

"Aye Keptin." Checkov's face lit up with glee as he hurried for the turbolift.

Kirk turned to Spock once the doors had closed. He's turning out to be a very fine young man. If he performs well on this mission I plan to give a promotion to Lieutenant Junior Grade.

"Such a gesture seems fitting Captain. Ensign Checkov has become more proficient in the last four years."

"High praise from you Mister Spock."

Kirk turned to Scotty who stood dutifully beside the command chair. "You have the bridge Mister Scott. Try to keep her in one piece."

"I always do Sir."

The air on the surface of Thorus IV was a lot more humid than the environmentally controlled decks of the Enterprise. McCoy disliked an overly humid climate. Concerns over weather were quickly dismissed however when McCoy took in the view from the hill where they had materialised. He let out a slow whistle. "Quite some Scenery Hey Mister Spock." The Vulcan simply raise his eyebrow. McCoy chuckled to himself. He took great joy in ribbing the ship's first officer. Spock was just so damn. Predictable.

Below them in a small valley sat a village. McCoy stepped toward the edge to take in a closer look. All around the village, there seemed to be people. Many were lying on the ground or on mats. It was difficult to tell from this distance but it seemed like the site of some kind of outbreak. "Jim, take a look at this."

Kirk took his place beside the doctor and looked over the edge. "You see that Jim. I'd say a lot of those people down there are sick, maybe dying."

"That's terrible."

"We should go and take a closer look."

"That is not our objective Doctor," Spock said, interrupting

"Forget our objective. Those people could be suffering."

"Mister Spock, can you locate the source of our energy signature?" Kirk asked, changing the subject. Spock consulted his tricorder which emitted a high-pitched whine for a moment. "I am unable to obtain an exact fix Captain. The device causing disruption to our instruments."

"Is that the same disruption that prevented us from beaming down any closer than this?" Checkov asked.

"That is correct Ensign."

"Well, if we can't detect the alien device on sensors we'll have to go about this the old fashioned way."

"The old-fashioned way Jim?"

"Yes Doctor. We're going down to the village to ask for directions."

As they approached the village a mild stench began to make itself known. The closer they got the stronger it became. To McCoy it smelled like the stench of death; as a doctor, he knew it well.

"Jim I'm becoming really concerned about this place."

"I know what you mean Bones. These people do not look well."

As they entered the outskirts of the populated area they were greeted by a middle-aged man with a long beard and a simple tunic.

"Welcome to our village travellers. I am Sultor. May your day be filled with hope and happiness. I would offer you more but as you can see resources are very limited here."

"Thank you for your kind welcome. My name is Jim Kirk and these are my companions. We have travelled a great distance, from a land named Earth. Our ship is at sea."

"Sailors, well you are doubly welcome Sir. You must have many exciting stories to tell."

"Just a few. Please, tell me about the people here. Is it some kind of plague?"

"An epidemic I'm afraid. The plague comes from the guardian."

"The guardian?"

"Yes. The Guardian of Everything. Have you not heard of it?"

"We have heard of it. In fact, we have come in search of it."

Sultor shook his head gravely. "It is unwise to seek out The Guardian of Everything. Little good can come from it. The Guardian is mean-hearted and powerful. He offers nothing but death."

"Then why do you stay so close to Him? I meant it?" Checkov said.

"The reach of the Guardian is infinite. Many have tried to escape his reach, but none have succeeded. This land is fertile, and the plants around have some healing properties. That is why so many come here, in hopes of a cure."

"Sultor, I'm curious. Why do you think the Guardian is responsible for your sickness, and why would he do this to you?"

"No one can understand the ways of the Guardian, but it is said that he is quite mad. I think he takes pleasure in inflicting suffering on those weaker than himself."

"Would you mind giving us a moment alone Sultor. I need to talk with my colleagues"

"Not at all Jim Kirk. The hospitality of the village is yours, but unless you are sick we have little to offer you."

Kirk stepped away and the others followed him. "So what do you think?"

"Curious Captain. The Guardian of Everything obviously sounds like an entity similar to the Guardian of Forever. Yet, it's actions are very different to what we are familiar with."

"Yes. The Guardian of Forever was there to simply serve it's purpose. It had no agenda and it certainly didn't inflict suffering on anyone."

"We should proceed, but with caution."

McCoy spoke up. "Jim, I want to stick around here and help Sultor. I could do something to help alleviate the suffering of the people here."

"You're forgetting Doctor, this world is under the influence of the Prime Directive. We cannot interfere."

"Dammit Jim these people are sick. Besides, if the sickness comes from the Guardian then someone has already interfered."

"We do not know that for certain yet Doctor."

"You green-blooded..."

"Enough!" McCoy was annoyed that Kirk's interruption to his intended triade again Spock but he kept silent for the Captain to speak.

"Mister Spock is right. We have no definite answers yet; and we won't get any standing around here. We need to find this Guardian and learn more about it." McCoy opened his mouth ready to protest. "However," Kirk said, stopping his objection before it started. "I will allow Doctor McCoy to stay here so long as he offer basic humanitarian aid only." Kirk looked directly into McCoy's eyes. "You will not use advanced Starfleet medical technology. Is that understood Bones."

McCoy begrudgingly nodded.

"Alright, the rest of us will set off as soon as Mister Sultor over here can give us directions."

Montgomery Scott shuffled uncomfortably in the command chair on the bridge of the *Enterprise*. It wasn't that he was uncomfortable with the idea of command. His daily duties as chief engineer required him to command others. His problem was not being on the bridge, this was the command centre of the ship which he so dearly loved. His problem was simply being absent from engineering for long periods of time. He missed his engines. Nobody else would understand such a thing, and that didn't bother Scott in the slightest. He was an old-fashioned engineer, a member of a dying breed.

"Report Mister Sulu."

"Maintaining geosynchronous orbit Mister Scott."

"Keep it up Lad." Scott began to tap his fingers on the armrest. From her communications console Uhura giggled. "You seem bored Mister Scott."

"Aye Lass. It's not there isn't enough to do here, I don't mind the peace and quiet, I just prefer to spend it with my engines."

Uhura giggled again. "Well maybe something dangerous will fly past to take you mind off it."

Scotty glanced at the chronometer on his armrest and then turned to face the communications officer. "Aren't you due to go off duty Lieutenant?"

"In about two minutes Sir, yes. You're not trying to get rid of me are you?"

"No, I just don't want to hold you here any longer than you need to be."

"Well, according to *my* calculations Mister Scott, you were due to go off duty half an hour ago."

"Be that as it may Lass, I'm in Command. Sometimes the acting Captain has to work extra hours."

"Well I understand that, and I'm sure Captain Kirk would be impressed, but you haven't eaten anything since your shift in engineering have you?"

Scotty snorted. "Ah, you're as bad a my mother, checking up on me are we?"

Uhura stood and strolled in a way that looked almost seductive to Scotty until she was standing next to him. "I'll tell you what Sir, if you agree to meet me in the mess hall for dinner later on I'll stop harassing you."

Scotty sighed. "Very well Lass. If it will get you off my back I'll meet you in the crew lounge at oh-eight hundred for a meal."

"See you there Sir." With that Uhura turned on the spot and headed for the turbolift.

As the doors closed behind her Sulu chuckled. I'd keep an eye on her if I were you Sir. It seems that Lieutenant Uhura has her eyes on you."

"Ah nonsense Lad. She's just being overprotective of her commander. I think it's a female thing; women hate to see a man who is not taking care of his dietary requirements."

Sulu smirked slightly. "Believe that if it makes it easier for you."

Scott allowed himself a slight smile before making his face serious and businesslike. "You just wipe that smirk of yer face Mister Sulu, and don't you forget that you're addressing a senior officer."

"Aye Aye Sir," Sulu said ,seriously, but with just the tiniest amount of humour. Scott smiled inwardly. It was good to have a close bond of friendship with his crew mates, even if times like this required him to command them.



## PART THREE

The hike from the village to the Guardian's location was proving to be more tiresome than Kirk had expected. The directions given to them by Sultor seemed accurate so far. The closer they got to the alleged home of the alien device, the more their instruments failed to operate. At this point it would be difficult to get a comm. link to the Enterprise

Checkov walked ahead of them both, his phaser hanging on his hip, close to his hand. Kirk knew that the weapon would do no good in all this interference, no matter how quickly the Ensign could draw it, but nevertheless it was pleasing to see how eager Checkov was to protect his superiors.

Spock walked silently beside Kirk, barely showing a sweat. "Spock," Kirk began, not knowing quite how to broach the subject.

"Yes Captain?"

"When you said you were considering the options for your future this morning, what did you mean?"

"Precisely that Captain. I am considering what I plan to do next with my life when this mission is over."

"But you're obviously not taking it for granted that you'll stay in Starfleet."

"No. I am not."

"I thought you were happy here Spock? You have become one of the finest officers I have ever known. You have acceptance and the respect of your peers. Why would you want to walk away from that?"

Spock hesitated a moment before speaking. "Working in Starfleet has been a very good experience for me. It has advanced my career, and I have learned a great deal about the universe, and other cultures, including Humanity. Yet, it has not helped me to discover who I am."

"You know who you are Spock."

"Do I Captain? All my life I have struggled with a divided identity. I have always identified as a Vulcan, I was raised in the Vulcan culture, yet I am half human. One of the reasons I joined Starfleet was to explore that aspect of my existence"

"But you don't feel that it has helped?"

"I am still uncertain of who I am Captain. There is something in my life that I am missing and I do not know what it is."

"Well pardon this if it sounds insulting Spock, but you haven't exactly embraced your humanity, even during your time in Starfleet. You have endeavoured to hide from it, and be as Vulcan as you can possibly be."

"I really am not comfortable discussing this with you Captain."

"Well if you can't discuss it with me who can you discuss it with? I'm your best friend afterall."

Spock paused. "That is true."

"So what are you considering?"

"I have been in discussions with Sarek."

"Your father? I thought you two didn't speak."

"Our communication has become slightly more frequent in recent years. He has managed to obtain for me a scholarship to study with a Vulcan master in the discipline of Kohlinar."

"What's that?"

"It is the achievement of a state of being where all emotions are purged, and one is truly able to act on logic alone."

"Are you sure that's what you want?"

"It is an option that I am seriously considering."

"Spock, I don't want to sound pushy but that sounds like a step in the wrong direction. You're just hiding from your humanity again."

"There is no need to insult me Captain. I would except such a comment from Doctor McCoy."

"Sorry."

"I have been unable to come to terms with my human side. My father always believed it to be a weakness and I am beginning to agree. I may not be able to come to terms with my humanity, but the achievement of Kohlinar will allow me to finally control it."

"By suppressing it?"

"Indeed."

Kirk walked on in silence again, not certain what to say next. The quiet was interrupted by Checkov.

"Keptin, I believe the alien device we are seeking is just up ahead."

"I really am grateful for your assistance Leonard McCoy. We are always in need of more gifted care-givers around here."

"Well, I'm happy to help, and please just call me Leonard."

"Very well."

McCoy leaned over a patient who was lying on his back on the moist grass, with only a threadbare blanket between him and the ground.

"How long has this patient been sick?"

"About two years. He only arrived here at our village recently."

"And what are the symptoms?"

"It begins with headaches and shortness of breath. Soon the body goes into a fever and vomiting follows. From that point onward, pain and weakness of various forms afflict the body and over a course of about three years, the body simply shuts down."

"And you believe it is caused by the Guardian?"

"Yes. In fact He has taken credit for it at various times. Some of those who have been sick have claimed to hear his voice in their heads, but that may be just delusion."

McCoy opened the patients eyelids wider and examined them carefully.

"Leonard, I heard your Captain refer to you as 'Bones'. What does this mean?"

"Oh, it's just a nickname."

"A nickname?"

"Yes. A name used between those familiar with you, usually used to denote friendship."

"I see. May I call you Bones?"

"Sure, if you want."

"I would like that a great deal."

"Say Sultor, would you mind giving me a moment to examine this patient. I work better alone when I have to concentrate."

"Certainly Bones. There are many others that require my assistance in any case, and you seem to be well acquainted with your task now."

As Sultor walked away McCoy discretely pulled out his medical tricorder and began to scan the patient. Jim would not approve, but Jim was not here, and what he didn't know wouldn't hurt him. As he moved the scanning node over the man's body he watched the display carefully. What he saw made him hold his breath. "Oh my."

Kirk was fascinated by what he saw as he came over the crest of the hill. Sitting atop a small platform of ancient bricks was a large three-dimensional polyhedron made of stone. At irregular intervals, the various faces of the shape displayed moving images of different scenes. Some were of stellar phenomena or stars that Kirk did not recognise. Others were planet-bound scenes. The device was simple in its appearance yet it evoked a sense of awe.

Spock said simply one word, "Fascinating."

"Have you ever seen anything like it Mister Spock?"

"Only the Guardian of Forever Captain, yet that was significantly different."

"I wonder what all these places are that it is showing?" Checkov asked.

"I don't know Ensign, but I'm sure it is safe to say that they are not within Federation space. Do you think the device can communicate verbally?"

"The Guardian of Forever did, so I would suggest that it is likely Captain."

Kirk stepped forward. "Guardian, I am Captain James T. Kirk of the Federation Starship Enterprise." The Guardian said nothing. "We have come here to learn more about you. We detected your energy signature in space." Again the Guardian said nothing.

"Guardian," Spock said. "What is your purpose?"

"I have no purpose." A loud booming voice emanated from the device, and it glowed brightly as it spoke. "I am the Guardian of Everything."

"That's a very impressive title for someone who has no purpose."  
Checkov pointed out.

"I am beyond your comprehension. You are nothing."

"Do not underestimate our powers of comprehension Guardian."  
Spock said, sounding a little too annoyed for a typical Vulcan.

Kirk decided to try a different strategy. "Guardian, who build you?"

"I was created in eons past, by entities that no longer exist."

"So, it is in fact a created mechanism," Spock observed.

"Indeed Mister Spock. Guardian, are you aware of an entity known as the Guardian of Forever?"

"Enough questions. You are unworthy of me. If you cannot interface with me then I have no use for you. Be gone or face my wrath."

"When you say your wrath, you refer to the sickness that you have inflicted on the people of this planet?"

"The sickness is their own. They suffer it because they are unworthy of me."

"Commander, there appears to be something strange happening to the on-board computer network."

"Explain Mister Sulu?" Lieutenant-Commander Will Decker stood from the Captain's chair and stepped down to stand behind Sulu.

"There is a lot of traffic that I can't explain, and it seems to be corrupting ship-board systems."

"That is very odd. Can you determine where it is coming from?"

"I'm afraid not Commander, but I'm having to isolate the helm from the network just to ensure that our orbit is not compromised."

"Maybe it's an invasive program from somewhere."

Decker returned to the command chair and pressed the intercom button on the armrest. "Bridge to engineering."

"Engineering here," came the voice of one of Scotty's officers.

"We've detecting some unusual activity in the *Enterprise* computer system."

"Yes Sir, we've just noticed it ourselves. We're attempting to analyse the problem now. Would you like us to call in Mister Scott?"

"No, Commander Scott has enough on his plate, besides he's on his way to a well-earned meal. Investigate the problem and inform me immediately if any crucial systems become compromised."

"Aye Sir."

Scotty entered the crew lounge and immediately spotted Uhura. She was seated at a large table with a stringed instrument in her arms. Several crew members, mostly male, were sitting around her listening to her play. As she spotted Scotty she gave him a little wave.

Scotty moved over to the food dispensers and quickly made a selection. He waited a moment until the small compartment opened and took his roast beef from the unit. He could see Uhura had moved to a small table for two and already had what looked like some kind of pasta dish. Scotty took his seat opposite her.

"Well Lass, as promised here I am. Resting and replenishing my own energy reserves."

"I'm very glad to see it Scotty."

"I see you've been entertaining the troops again."

"Well I do love to sing. I wouldn't mind you teaching me a few more of those Scottish tunes."

"I'd be happy to. When we're not so busy of course."

"Well I imagine there will be plenty of time when we reach earth."

"Are you kidding Lass? I'll be busier than ever. The Enterprise begins a refit the moment we go into orbit."

"And Starfleet has offered you shore leave."

"Aye, but I canna leave the *Enterprise*, not when she needs me the most. Besides, I don't want just anybody messing with my ship. If she has to have an upgrade, I wanna make sure it's done right."

"Oh well. I suppose somebody experienced should really stay around to supervise the bridge upgrades, particularly the new communication sub-system. Maybe I'll stick around as well."

"Why would you do that Lass? You've been looking forward to this shore leave for months."

Uhura looked down at her meal for a moment before looking Scotty directly in the eyes. "Isn't it obvious Mister Scott? So that I can be with you?"

Scotty fumbled with his fork, and searched for words. "Ah, what do you mean Lass?"

"I mean I like being around you Scotty. I enjoy your company."

"Yes, but..."

"And I wish there could be more between us."

Scott didn't know what to say. He was taken aback by Uhura's blunt honesty.

"I ah, I don't know what to say Lass."

"Well, Mister Spock would say there are two logical options. One would be to say 'I care for you too Uhura,' and the other would be 'I'm sorry but I don't feel that way.'"

Scotty sighed. "I suppose you're right."

Uhura smiled. "You're really not that good with women are you Scotty."

"Well, I've had the odd romance in my life, but to be honest I'm more at home with my engines. I understand engines."

"So, how do you feel?"

"Well, I'm not quite sure Lass. To be honest I never considered um, such a thing, to be a possibility. I mean I thought you were way out of my league."

"In what way?"

"Well, you're so young, and uh, pretty, and..."

"Yes?"

"Well, popular."

"Scotty, I may be pretty, but you're a handsome man, and as for being young, well this is the twenty-third century. You and I could both live to well over a hundred. What's ten or fifteen years?"

Scotty coughed and took a sip of water. "Well um, you've given me a lot to think about Lass. Obviously there is no doubt that I find you a fine attractive woman, and I do enjoy your company."

"Then what's the problem Scotty? I'm not under your direct command so it can't be that."

"Well, uh."

Scotty was interrupted by the whistle of the comm. System.

"Bridge to Commander Scott." It was Will Decker's voice.

Scotty pressed the intercom button on the table. "Scott here."

"Sir, I think you should report to the bridge. We are experiencing some computer problems and security violations. I think something is trying to break into the *Enterprise*."

"On my way. Scott out." He stood to leave. "I'm sorry Lass, we'll have to continue this later. You might want to come up to the bridge yourself."

Uhura nodded, her professionalism taking over. "Acknowledged Sir."

Kirk's communicator beeped. The Guardian had been silent for about ten minutes. Evidently, whatever it was occupying itself with had caused it to lose interest interfering with their technology. The captain flipped the lid open and spoke. "Kirk here."

"Jim it's me. I've found some startling results by examining these people."

"What is it Bones?"

"I've found evidence of an unusual element. I believe it's the same material that the Guardian was constructed from. Jim it's in their blood streams and it's poisoning them."

"Tell me Doctor, how did you discover this?"

The doctor hesitated. "I scanned one with my tricorder Jim. I did it discreetly."

Kirk pulled an annoyed face, which he knew McCoy would be unable to see. "How do you think the substance got inside them?"

"I'm not sure. I want to beam one of them up to the Enterprise. I can perform more tests in sickbay."

"Are you sure that's necessary?"

"Jim it's obvious these people didn't build the Guardian, and even if they did then they are advanced enough for the prime directive not to apply. That thing up there on the hill is messing with these people. Their culture has already been greatly interfered with. I have a responsibility as a doctor to do what I can to help them."

Kirk looked at Spock who gave a slight nod. "Agreed. Take one and only one Doctor. Please try to be discreet about the transport, no need to alarm people by vanishing into thin air before their eyes."

"No problem Jim. I'll tell Sultor that I want to take a patient back to my ship at sea. Once we're out of eyesight I'll contact the *Enterprise* and ask for beam-up."

"Very well. Proceed Doctor."



## PART FOUR

Nurse Christine Chapel put down her PADD with a start as she heard the doors of sickbay slide open. It was doctor McCoy and he was pushing a patient on an anti-grav stretcher. She felt like a kid who had been caught with her hand in the biscuit barrel. Chapel had not yet told McCoy of her plans to apply for the Starfleet School of Medicine upon their return to earth, and the PADD help her application letter.

In all honesty, Chapel was not sure how McCoy would feel about it. She hoped that he would be excited by her desire to become a doctor, but then he always spoke openly about how he would hate to loose such a good nurse as herself.

"Nurse, please help me with this patient. I'll need a bio-bed set up and the research lab cleared.

"Yes doctor."

She walked over to the nearest bio-bed and activated it's systems. The system came up ready to accept patient details. Since the patient was clearly not a member of the *Enterprise* crew she entered him as an alien civilian. "What is the patient's name Doctor?"

"I don't know. Just list him as a John Doe."

"Acknowledged." Chapel finished her data-entry and moved to assist McCoy in moving the man from the stretcher to the bio-bed. The man was not heavy, he seemed to be under-nourished.

"All right Nurse. I want a complete physical workup and blood-chemical analysis."

"Right away Doctor." Chapel began her work. It appeared that her application to medical school would have to wait.

Scotty entered the bridge and took his position at the engineering console rather than reliving Will Decker at the command seat. He brought up an analysis of the computer network and began to analyse the problem.

Uhura, who had followed him out of the turbolift had taken her position at the communications console. "Mister Scott, I am detecting a high-band subspace transmission emanating from the planet, near the coordinates where the away team beamed down.

"Do you think that might be the cause of our problems Lass?"

"Very likely Sir. It is directed straight at the *Enterprise*. This is an energy signature like I've never seen before."

"Well, I for one have had enough of uninvited visitors. Perhaps we should shut it down."

"But Sir," Decker piped in. "We don't know what that will do. It might cause more problems than it solves."

"That is possible Lad, but I'm not prepared to just let this thing have free-reign in our computer."

At that moment the lights in the bridge dimmed and then raised again. The intercom beeped and an anxious voice from engineering reported. "Bridge, the intruder has gained access to our primary systems. Engines, life support, weapons."

"Well Mister Decker, the debate is now moot. We canna let this thing access life support or armaments." He pressed his intercom control. "Engineering, I want you to isolate the communications array and shut it down completely."

"Aye Sir."

Scotty strode over to the centre of the bridge and stood beside the command chair. "You are relieved Commander."

"Aye Sir."

Decker stood and returned to the Ops station, in a manner that seemed almost reluctant.

A moment later Uhura reported. "Sir, the signal is gone."

"And the intruder appears to be out of our computer systems," Decker added.

"Good. Let's monitor everything closely."

Kirk and Checkov had been continuing to attempt to engage the Guardian in conversation while Spock scanned with his tricorder. So far the Guardian had refused to speak any further.

"Captain, I am detecting an increasing power surge in the Guardian. It is approaching hazardous levels. I recommend we move to a safer distance."

"Good idea Spock."

They turned and began to walk away briskly. As they did a humming noise began to emanate from the alien device. The further away they got, the louder and higher pitched the noise became. When Spock indicated to them that they had reached a safe distance they turned to observe the Guardian. It was now glowing with bright red light, pulsating with energy.

"Spock, any theories?"

"The Guardian appears to be building up toward some kind of energy release Captain."

At that moment, a giant bolt of energy burst forth from the Guardian, and shot up into the sky.

"Captain, incoming weapons fire. It's some kind of directed energy and it came from the same coordinates as Uhura's message."

"Thank you Mister Sulu. Red alert. Raise shields and prepare for evasive action."

A second later the bridge shook violently with the weapon impact.

"Damage Report!"

"Shields down the seventy percent Sir," Decker reported. "Minor buckling to the hull."

"Is there further weapons fire approaching?"

"Not yet Sir."

"Mister Sulu, all ahead full thrusters. Mister Decker, take weapons."

"Aye Sir." Decker stood and moved to relieve the officer sitting at the navigation console next to Sulu, where the phasers and torpedoes were controlled from.

"Another incoming beam Sir."

"Evasive action Mister Sulu. Decker, return fire. Full Phasers."

A narrow beam of directed phased energy burst force from the *Enterprise* and headed down toward the surface of the planet.

From their distance they could see the Guardian firing weapons at what they assumed was the *Enterprise*. Kirk was frantically trying to raise the ship but so far had not been able to get through.

"Incoming weapons fire Keptin!"

Kirk looked up to see a phaser blast come down from the sky toward the Guardian. It was a direct hit. The alien entity absorbed the energy to no effect.

"Fascinating Captain. The Guardian seems impervious to a Starship's weapons."

The Guardian let out a noise that almost sounded like a ferocious scream. Then three energy burst came forth from the device and sailed up toward space.

On the bridge of the *Enterprise* Decker started in disbelief at his console. "Sir, our phasers had no effect." He turned around to face Scott. "Perhaps we should fire a torpedo. That contains enough firepower to flatten a city.

"No Lad. Have you forgotten that Captain Kirk and the landing party are down there?"

"But we can't be certain they are within torpedo range of the hostile."

"And we can't be sure they aren't either."

"Well we have another three blasts heading out way Sir. Do you want to just sit here while the *Enterprise* is destroyed around us?"

"As you were Mister Decker. Continuous phaser fire at the hostile. Mister Sulu we could really use some fancy evasive work right about now."

"I'll see what I can do Sir."

Kirk had never felt so frustrated in his life. His ship was in danger, and he was down here watching it happen, unable to do anything to help.

"Options Mister Spock."

"Limited Captain."

"But there must be something we can do."

"The Guardian has proved impervious to the *Enterprise* weapons. There is little we can do with hand phasers to stop it.

"Perhaps we could disrupt the Guardians power source Keptin."

"Unlikely Mister Checkov. I am as yet unable to determine if the Guardian even has a power source."

"Gentlemen, I am not going to just sit here and watch my ship get destroyed." Kirk drew his phaser and snatched Spock's tricorder out of the Vulcan's hands. Before Spock or Checkov could protest, Kirk started heading toward the Guardian.

The *Enterprise* shook like Scotty had never felt it shake before. The force knocked him from the Captain's chair to the floor just behind Decker. Decker himself face-planted into the navigation console and how sported a large bleeding gash on his forehead. Red alert klaxons blared across the bridge.

Scotty smelt the odour of burning technology. He turned around to see smoke and flame pouring out of the engineering console at the back of the bridge. Uhura was already on feet, with a fire-suppression device attempting to extinguish it.

"Report!"

"I can't get any readings Sir," Sulu admitted.

"I think the ODN relay is down Captain," Decker reported. "That means most of our data lines..."

"I know what it means Lad."

At that moment the intercom whistled. "Engineering to bridge. I don't know how to tell you this Sir, but we just lost our starboard nacelle."

"What do you mean lost?" Scotty asked.

"I mean it's gone sir. That last hit completely destroyed it."

The bridge shook again, more gently this time, with a deep rumble. The computer voice spoke. "Warp core fracture."

"Commander Scott," the engineering officer on the intercom said. "I estimate we're about five minutes away from a full warp-core breach."

Scott looked around the bridge with a piercing sadness in his heart. It had come to this. He pulled himself out the reverie quickly so that he could act.

"Understood Lieutenant. Eject the core. It's our only option to survive."

"Aye Sir."

Scott stood and began to pace the bridge. He had loved this ship for years. He had nurtured it and tended to it like a child or a lover. Now it was falling to pieces around him and there was little he could do about it. Ejecting the core would prevent the ship from exploding, but they would be completely defenceless against an enemy they had no hope of defeating. He turned to Uhura who was now back at her communications console.

"Lass, send out a signal toward the source of the weapon fire, 'we surrender'."

Uhura looked at him with hopelessness in her eyes, before beating it back. "Aye Sir."

"And then transmit an emergency distress signal on all subspace bands."

When Kirk reached the Guardian, all was quiet. The alien entity was no longer fire bolts of energy and had returned to displaying images of far-away planets on its faces.

"Guardian, what have you done to my ship?" Kirk demanded.

"Your ship is unworthy of me. You are unworthy of me."

"In what way?"

"You are all too primitive I cannot interface with you or your ship. You are worthless. I have no further interest in you."

At that moment the Guardian began to glow with an intense light. "Begone!" immediately, a burst of white energy came forth from the

Guardian and blasted Kirk backwards. He lost consciousness for what must have only been a few seconds. As he lie on his back, his body aching, Kirk felt a strange tingling feeling going through his body.

"Engineering to bridge."

Scotty pressed the intercom control. "Go ahead."

"We are ready to eject the core Sir."

"Proceed."

Scotty watched the crackling view screen as the technological heart of the *Enterprise* began sailing away from the rest of the ship, toward open space. It continued to shrink as it got further and further away. Finally, the anticipated end came. The warp core erupted in a blinding display of light. It was gone, and the *Enterprise* was completely dead in space.

Decker stood and faced Scotty. "Sir, I don't want you to take this the wrong way, but given the ship's current state, and your expertise in engineering, perhaps you should consider reporting to the engine room and relinquishing command of the *Enterprise* to me."

Scotty fumed inwardly at the arrogance of the brilliant young man, but made himself settle down. This was not the time for a clash of egos. "As you were Mister Decker. Captain Kirk entrusted this ship to me, and as long as it can still maintain it's crew I intend to take responsibility for it."

"Aye Sir," Decker said.

"Now, for the moment you have the bridge Lieutenant-Commander. I am going to the engine room, but I expect you to report to me. Am I understood?"

"Perfectly Mister Scott."



## PART FIVE

*“Acting Captain's Log. Stardate 68823.7 Chief Engineer Montgomery Scott in command. The Enterprise is dead in space. We have lost our starboard nacelle and the warp core has been ejected. We are at the mercy of an alien being on the planet which seems to be quite mad. For the moment it has stopped its attack on us. We don't know why; but for now, all our energies are focussed on keeping the ship together so we can stay alive. As for Captain Kirk, Spock and Checkov, we hope they are okay, but we don't know for sure.”*

Kirk rubbed his forehead as he walked down the incline toward the village. After he had met up with Sock and Checkov they had decided that the vicinity of the Guardian was too dangerous. They had been trying to contact the *Enterprise* at regular intervals but so far had not been able to get through. Spock had reported that there was no interference coming from the Guardian at present. The only explanation could be a communications failure at the Enterprise's end; or the *Enterprise* could have been destroyed. They did not know which it was.

“Not only does my ship get attacked, and I get thrown through the air by that energy beam, but now I'm getting the mother of all headaches.”

“Perhaps you should take a rest Keptin.”

“No Mister Checkov I'll be alright.”

“Captain, I believe we should consider planning our next move.”  
Spock said.

“Our next move Mister Spock is to regain communication with the ship.”

"Captain, I must point out the possibility that the *Enterprise* was destroyed."

"We have no proof of that Spock, and until we do I will have no talk like that. Do you understand?"

Kirk looked into the shocked expressions on both Spock and Checkov's faces, and realised that he had just snapped at his first officer. "I'm sorry Spock. I didn't mean to speak to you like that."

"Understandable Captain. You are undergoing severe stress, and you are after all, only human."

Kirk chose not to bite at the statement, like Bones would. Instead he pulled out his communicator and flipped the top open. "Kirk to *Enterprise*."

He waited a moment but was answered with nothing but static. Just as he began to close the communicator he heard Uhura's voice come through faintly. "This is the *Enterprise*."

"Uhura, you have no idea how wonderful it is to hear your voice."

"It's good to hear from you too Captain. We were concerned. The entity that attacked us was close to your location."

"We're fine. What's the status of the ship?"

"The situation is grim Sir. We have lost a nacelle and had to eject the warp core, but the alien seems to have lost interest in attacking us."

Kirk hesitated a moment. "Then the ship is pretty much adrift."

"We are maintaining our orbit with thrusters, and have sent a distress call. It shouldn't take long for a Starfleet vessel to receive it."

"Understood. Please put me through to Doctor McCoy."

"Aye Sir."

McCoy was pouring over data on his terminal when the intercom whistled. "Bridge to Doctor McCoy." He pressed the talk control.

"McCoy here."

"Captain Kirk for you."

"Jim, what's going on down there?"

"It was the Guardian Bones. It was firing at the *Enterprise*. We think it was trying to interface with the ship somehow."

"Well that makes sense. Scotty said that something was trying to tap into our computers."

"The status of your patient Doctor."

"Well I think I've figured out how to combat the alien material in his body. I can annihilate it using a specific form of radiation, a little like the way Doctors used to treat cancer hundreds of years ago."

"That's good news. Have you administered the treatment?"

"I'm afraid it's too late for that. He's dead Jim."

"But you think this treatment could be used on the others on the planet?"

"Well it depends how long ago they were infected. The material poisons them slowly. In the case of the man I beamed up here, there was simply too much damage to repair."

"Alright. I'd like to get you back down here on the surface Bones, as soon as Scotty can get the transporters working."

"Alright. I'll see you there."

Kirk closed his communicator and stashed it away on his hip. He turned to his first officer. "All right Spock. What do you think we're dealing with here?"

"An intelligence, highly erratic and emotional. I would even dare to say unstable. The Guardian does not seem to act on logic at all."

"But isn't that unusual for a machine Mister Spock?" Checkov asked.

"Ordinarily yes. Most computers or artificial intelligences are programmed to follow logical rules that do not change under differing circumstances. I find it illogical that the creators of the Guardian of Everything would have designed it to be so erratic."

"I think the wilcard here Spock, is that the Guardian is more than just a machine, it's a sentient being as well. It thinks and feels just like any life form"

"That is true, and it has been in existence for a very long time."

"I wonder Spock, the Guardian keeps talking about wanting to interface with others. It's almost as if it is lonely."

"All machines require maintenance Captain. The Guardian has obviously been lacking that for a longer time than we can comprehend."

"And if this machine truly is sentient, and without maintenance, then it's possible that its problems go beyond the mechanical. Perhaps it needs psychological assistance."

"You think the Guardian is going mad Keptin?"

"I think that the long eons of neglect have left this being in a poor state of mental health."

"But how would we reason with it?"

"It does not seem to respond well to reason."

"Perhaps Doctor McCoy could treat it?" Checkov suggested.

"I doubt it would pay any more attention to him than it did to us. No there must be some other way of reaching it."

"Captain, while the Guardian was attacking the *Enterprise* I was able to conduct some scans with my tricorder. It seems that the Guardian's attention was too focussed to block out technology."

"Did you find anything interesting?"

"I did detect some faint energy readings coming from underground, a distance from here."

Kirk looked at the tricorder's screen. "We'd have to pass through the village to get over there. We should talk to Sultor. Perhaps he knows something about what we'll find there."

Scotty stood in the engine room, looking at the vast void that once housed the warp core. As he looked at it he thought of the many good times he'd experienced working on its systems. In the end he knew it was just a warp core, and should have so much emotional resonance for him, but he had poured his heart and soul into maintaining the ship's systems. He'd felt pride at every extra bit of power he'd coaxed out of the engines. It was something only a chief engineer could understand.

"Scotty?" He turned around to see Uhura approaching. She stopped next to him and put an encouraging arm around his shoulders. "I wanted to know if there was anything that I could do to help."

Scotty sighed. "No Lass. I think my staff have everything under control for the moment."

"She was a good ship wasn't she?"

"Aye. That she was."

"She she'll continue to be so. The *Enterprise* was scheduled for a tune-up anyway. It may be more extensive now than originally planned, but this ship isn't a write-off just yet."

"I know that." He began to pace nervously. "You know Lass, it's not just the engines that bothering me. It's not the fact that we had to eject the core or that we lost a nacelle that upsets me."

"Then what is it Scotty?"

"It's the Captain. He trusted me. He put me in command of this ship and I let him down."

"You really think that?"

"I can't return the ship to him in one piece. I failed Uhura. I couldn't protect the *Enterprise*."

"That doesn't sound like the Scotty I know. You did everything that was humanly possible Scotty. The captain will understand that."

"Aye, I hope so. I just hate the be the one who led this ship into its last fight."

Kirk listened as Spock described their intended destination to Sultor.

"Ah, Captain Kirk, I would not go there. That is an ancient and sacred place. It is said to contain things that are too dangerous and powerful for anyone to be entrusted with."

"Thank you for your concern Sultor, but we think we might find something there that will teach us more about the Guardian, and perhaps how to prevent it from hurting people any more."

"Well you will find the entrance to the ancient chamber in the place you describe. The opening is protected by a large stone door. Proceed if you must but please be careful."

"We will." Kirk grimace and grabbed his head as he said the words. His headache had increased to a steady throbbing that was becoming quite distracting.

"Captain, are you all right?"

"Let's just say that I'm looking forward to the time when Bones can beam down and give me something for the pain. Let's move out."

It seemed surreal to Sulu, sitting here at his console, the bridge burned and trashed all around him. The battle was over but its evidence was all around him.

His console began to emit a steady loud beep. He checked the alarm immediately and motioned for Decker's attention.

"Sir, it appears the alien device is opening fire again."

"Evasive action Mister Sulu."

"The weapon fire is not heading toward us Sir. It's on a long-range trajectory out of the star system."

"Can you extrapolate the exact target?"

"I believe it is headed toward Tholian Space."

Decker let out a long sigh. "That could be a problem. If the Tholians get attacked by a weapon launched from Federation Space they might launch an immediate retaliatory strike."

"Another bolt has just been fired. This one appears to be headed toward the Klingon Empire."

"Mister Sulu, I think our troubles are only just beginning."

Kirk and his landing party had almost reached their destination by the time they heard from McCoy. Kirk pulled out his communicator and flipped it open as the sound of the beep.

"Jim, Scotty thinks he can finally beam me down to your location."

"Good Doctor. We've been waiting for you. Transport to our coordinates immediately."

The doctor cut the connection and a moment later he appeared beside them in a twinkle of light.

"Jim I've got a message for you from Scotty. It seems the Guardian has started indiscriminately firing destructive weapons all over the galaxy. The latest report puts a small fleet of Tholian ships on their way here, and the Klingons will probably be right behind them."

"Then we better solve this thing quickly."

At that moment, Checkov came running out of the ticket. "Keptin, I have found the doorway that Sultor was talking about. We've found what we were looking for."

"That's good Mister Checkov." Kirk winced as he said the words. McCoy wasted no time in withdrawing his medical tricorder and scanning the Captain. What he saw shocked him to the extent that he didn't speak for a moment.

"What is it Bones?"

"Jim, I'm afraid I have bad news. You have been infected with the same material as the locals on this planet."



## PART SIX

Kirk approached the doorway that Spock and Checkov had now managed to open. Doctor McCoy followed behind fussing over him with his tricorder.

"Do you have any idea how you got infected?"

"The Guardian hit me with some kind of beam that through me across the ground. Perhaps it also infected me with the alien particles."

"Jim I really think I should get you back to the ship."

"Is there really anything you can do for me Bones?"

"Yes. If I can find a way to remove these particles from your body then I can treat you. You haven't been affected long so there hasn't been much damage done to your organs yet; but the longer you wait the worse you will get."

"Doctor, we may be facing an interstellar war on multiple fronts unless we can stop the Guardian from doing what it is doing. Completing our mission is our first objective. After that you can worry about me."

"Jim, I'm your doctor. I..." Kirk cut him off with the wave of his hand.

"What do we have Mister Spock?"

"We have gained access to the chamber Captain. My readings indicate the presence of advanced technology inside."

"Then by all means let's go take a look."

They entered the chamber, Checkov first, then Kirk, Spock and McCoy. The inside was surprisingly bright for a cave, yet there was no indication of any light source. There was only a small amount of technology in the room. Most of it was centered around a small platform near the far wall. Like most guardian technology, it was

spartan. There was little in the way of readouts or controls, but on the platform sat what looked like some kind of head apparatus.

Spock began to scan their surroundings with his tricorder but after a moment he looked at Kirk blankly. "Captain, I am unable to interpret what I am seeing. This technology is clearly highly advanced."

At that moment, a bright light appeared before them in one corner of the chamber. The light formed itself slowly into a rough approximation of a humanoid face. Then it began to speak.

"Travellers. Welcome to my chamber. This message has been left for those who will come in eons future."

"Who are you?" asked Kirk.

"I am one of those who were. We Existed in this part of space in your distant past, but our civilisation has long-since ended."

"I am Captain James T. Kirk of the Federation Starship Enterprise. We came here on a mission of peaceful exploration and discovered your Guardian."

"I know that. I also know that the Guardian is causing you problems. Eons past, we constructed two Guardians in this part of space, the Guardian of Forever, to protect time, and the Guardian of Everything, to protect space."

"Protect in what way?" Spock asked.

"In ways beyond your current level of comprehension."

Spock raised his eyebrow but said nothing.

"Your species is not currently able to interface with the Guardians, but we have left the obelisk you see before you as a safety measure. It will allow your kind to communicate with the Guardian in the same way my people once did."

Kirk looked toward the platform with the headset.

"This is all I have to say. I wish you success in your quest." With that the glowing face vanished.

"Well, that sure was a whole lot of help," McCoy said.

"Bones."

Checkov approached the platform. "Keptin, permission to try the device."

"I think I'd rather do that myself Mister Chevok."

"Out of the question Jim. You're not in good shape, and you're too vital to the ship. Let Checkov try it, that's his job."

Kirk saw that it was going to be difficult to talk the doctor around from that point of view so he simply nodded at Checkov. The ensign picked up the headset and placed on his head. Then they waited.

Nothing happened. After a few moments Checkov removed the headset. "Perhaps there is some way you have to activate it."

"No." Kirk said. "You're not compatible."

"But Jim I thought the alien said this device was supposed to make us compatible."

"It is, but only to those who have the alien particles."

"What?"

"Think about it Bones. The Guardian has been infecting the people on this planet, desperately trying to find someone to interface with, but it hasn't worked. He probably pumped them full of more than they could handle."

Kirk stepped toward Checkov and took the headset from him. He then placed it on his head.

Immediately everything changed. Kirk's surroundings went completely white. Then bright splotches of colour appeared and disappeared at random. Kirk took a moment to orientate himself. He found that he was floating, but he could move himself through this environment by will alone. He began to move, searching for something, anything.

After a short time Kirk saw an object that looked like the Guardian of Everything.

"Guardian, can you hear me?"

"James T. Kirk. You are interfacing with me."

"Yes I am."

"How is this possible? You were unworthy."

"I am worthy now. I am using a device left behind by your creators."

"I have sought another being to interface with for so long. It has been a difficult path."

"You are not alone any more Guardian. I am here."

"You will stay here with me."

"I cannot stay here with you forever Guardian. I just want to help you understand the people that you are hurting."

"I need another!"

"I understand. No life form likes to be alone; but there is another. Don't you know of the Guardian of Forever?"

"I do remember that entity. I has been lost to me since ages past."

"It is still here in our galaxy. You have begun to malfunction, that is why you cannot locate it."

Kirk began to drift away from the Guardian, hoping that he might be able to interface with the other alien being. It took longer but he began to find himself being instinctively drawn toward the Guardian of Forever. Soon he was staring at the familiar stone ring.

It spoke in its booming voice. "I am the Guardian of Forever."

"Guardian. I require your assistance."

"James T. Kirk. How is it that you are communicating with me in this manor. You are not yet sufficiently advanced for this."

"I am using alien technology. Please, I need you to come with me and talk to the Guardian of Everything."

"The Guardian of Everything is deficient It has become unstable in all it does. It is not fulfilling its purpose."

"But you can help. You can assist him to regain his purpose, his sense of connection."

"That is not my purpose."

"No, but maybe it's not, but you're the only one who can do it. Why do you think your creators made two separate Guardians. Couldn't they have made one of you to fulfill both purposes? For whatever reason, they made you separate, and able to communicate. That's because all life forms need community. It's not good to be alone. Right now your counterpart needs you, and you are the only one who can help."

Back in the cave McCoy scanned Kirk's body nervously. So far his vital signs had remained stable but there were too many unknowns in this situation for his liking. Spock stood with his hands folded, a typical lack of emotion over his face.

"How much longer do you think this is going to take?" Checkov asked.

"It is impossible to know Ensign, but We can say that Captain Kirk will do everything in his power to succeed."

The turbolift doors opened and Scotty stepped out onto the bridge. Decker was seated in the Captain's chair but stood to relinquish it as soon as he saw Scotty approach.

"Report our status."

"No change Sir. Long-range sensors indicate some activity near Klingon Space but we can't tell if they have launched any ships to come here or not.

"And the Tholians?"

"Bearing down on us quickly Sir. They'll be in the system in a few minutes."

"Sir, in our current state, the *Enterprise* cannot possibly defend itself."

"At least we have the shields back online lad. Wait until the Tholians drop out of warp and then raise them."

"Sir, unless we can manoeuvre and return fire shields won't help us for long."

"I know that Mister Decker, but we can only do what we can do. If you have any other suggestions to make I'll be glad to listen."

"I'm sorry Sir. I don't currently have any suggestions."

Kirk once again saw the Guardian of Everything drifting into view. He could also see the Guardian of Forever. Immediately they began to make some kind of noise. It seemed that they were communicating with each other, very rapidly, and in a language that Kirk did not understand.

Finally the Guardian of Forever spoke again in English "James T. Kirk. I will be able to assist The Guardian of Everything."

"I thank you James T. Kirk, for helping me find one that I could interface with."

"I will show the Guardian of Everything what it should do. We have both been gathering data for eons. They is much we can learn from each other. It might take an eternity to explore all we have to offer. We will both be able to fulfill our purposes."

"Any what are those purposes?"

"Unfortunately you are not yet able to understand. Perhaps in several more centuries you will be able to begin to comprehend the purposes for which we were created."

"That will be an exciting day for my species."

McCoy was startled to see Kirk suddenly remove his headset. "Jim, are you okay? What happened?"

"I was successful Doctor. The Guardian is going to be okay, and it will stop attacking people and planets."

"What about the Tholians?"

Sulu glanced at his instruments and exclaimed in alarm. "Tholian ships just dropped out of warp. They're in an intercept course, full impulse, weapons running hot."

"Shields are up," Decker reported.

"This is it lads," Scotty said. "I kind of wish I had a nice glass of scotch for this moment."

Uhura glance at Scotty. A mixture of a thousand emotions going over her face.

Suddenly the Tholian shops vanished. They simply vanished into nothing. The bridge crew all started at the view screen in amazement. What had happened?

The intercom beeped and the Captain's voice came through. "Kirk to Enterprise."

Scotty pressed the button on the arm of his chair and happily returned the greeting. "Scott here Captain. What happened?"

"The Guardian has returned the Tholians to their own space, and explained everything. He assures us that there will be no more trouble from them."

"And the Klingons?"

"Them too. The Guardian can be rather convincing when he wants to be."

"Are you ready to beam up then Sir?"

"Are we ever."



## PART SEVEN

*Captain's Log. Stardate 7009.2*

*The Enterprise has returned to Earth, but not under its own power. We are being towed via tractor beam by the USS Intrepid. Still, hopes are high and our homecoming is just as triumphant as I thought it would be.*

Kirk looked at the image of his home planet on the view screen. It had been years since he had seen Earth. It would be nice to spend a little time there and catch up with family.

"Captain," Uhura said. "We are receiving a message from the Intrepid."

"On screen Lieutenant."

"Captain Kirk," the Intrepid's captain said. "We are now in range of Earth. Since your impulse engines are back on line I thought you might like to take the last leg of your journey un-assisted."

Kirk smiled. "I would like that Captain."

"In that case I will dis-engage our tractor beam. Intrepid out."

Kirk smiled and addressed the helm. "Mister Sulu, set course for Earth, half impulse."

"Aye sir."

And the *Enterprise* sailed home.

Starfleet headquarters was just as busy as Kirk remembered it. The facility hadn't changed much – the décor was a little different, and the uniforms worn by most of the populous were unfamiliar, but the people continued to swarm like bees in a hive.

Kirk reached his destination, Admiral Nagura's office. He announced himself to the Admiral's receptionist, a young Ensign, and was quickly shown in.

"Captain Kirk. Welcome home."

"Thank you Admiral. It's still a little hard to believe that I'm actually back."

"Don't worry. You'll find your land legs again in no time." The Admiral stood and offered Kirk a glass of crystal clear water. Kirk declined. "Let me be the first to congratulate you on a mission accomplished and a job well done. During the last five years the *Enterprise* has pushed the limits of human understanding and advanced the cause of the Federation."

"Thank you Sir. It has certainly been the best five years of my life."

"Good to hear it Kirk, because in recent weeks there has been a lot of discussion around here concerning your future, and it is my privilege to inform you that you are hereby promoted to the rank of Admiral."

Kirk stared open-mouthed at Nagura for a good ten seconds.

"Admiral?"

"That's right Jim. It turns out that you've seen more and experienced more in this last five years than most of the officers currently in Starfleet Command. You have practical knowledge that we need here on Earth. Your wisdom, in understanding alien cultures, studying stellar phenomena and the business of managing a Starship will prove invaluable to the Admiralty."

Kirk took a small walk about the spacious office, trying to take in what he had just heard. "I don't quite know what to say Admiral."

"Well I can see that this is quite a surprise to you Jim, but it's not as if I'm looking for a speech. It will all sink in over the next few days." Nagura extended his hand to Kirk. "But allow me to welcome you to the Admiralty."

Kirk took the hand and shook it firmly. "Thank you Sir."

Nagura sat back down in his chair. "Now, as your first official duty Admiral Kirk, I would like you to make a recommendation regarding the appointment of a new captain for the *Enterprise* to oversee the ship's refit."

Kirk sat in the seat opposite Nagura's desk. "Well, my first choice would clearly be Mister Spock, however I believe he has just officially handed in his resignation from Starfleet."

"Yes, I was quite disappointed to receive it."

"So in light of that, I think that Willard Decker would be an excellent choice."

Nagura stroked his chin. "He's a little young isn't he?"

"So was I when you promoted me to Captain, and quite frankly, to Admiral as well."

"Yes. Talent knows no age, but you were certainly an exceptional young man." Nagura sat up straighter in his seat. "However, if you feel that you see that same potential in Decker that I saw in you then I'm inclined to trust your judgement. That is why you're here after all"

Nagura stood and Kirk did the same. "Well Jim, there'll be a full briefing on your new duties at oh nine hundred tomorrow, but I'm sure you'd like to get settled in. Your office is just down the hall and you'll find your new uniform waiting there."

Kirk gave as genuine a smile as he could muster. The uniforms he had seen officers wearing around headquarters today looked more like pyjamas to Kirk than effective work-wear.

"Good day Admiral Kirk."

Kirk hadn't walked more than half-way to his office when he heard a very familiar voice behind him. "Jim."

Kirk turned and smiled at the sight of his friend. "Bones, what are you doing here?"

"I've been looking for you. I have something I need to tell you."

"Oh? It's not about my health is it?"

"Oh no, all the tests I conducted show that you have suffered no long-term damage from the Guardian's 'interface particles'. It seems I was able to remove them in time."

"Good. So what is it?"

"Jim there's no easy way to say this. I'm leaving."

"Leaving where?"

"Leaving Starfleet Jim. I'm resigning."

"What? But why Bones? You know this is the life for you."

"Jim I've always been a doctor first and a Starfleet officer second. Hell I only joined the fleet to run away from the pain when my wife left me."

"But,"

"Jim this last five years have been an amazing experience. They have advanced my experience as a physician and healed a lot of personal hurts, but now I have a new direction."

"Which is?"

"I'm going back to Thorus IV."

"The planet with the Guardian?"

"Yes. Jim, Sultor's people are still suffering. There are a lot of dying people who were affected by the Guardian, and their medical resources have been so strained trying to combat that problem that their general medical services have suffered considerably. There's a lot of poverty and a lot of pain over there, and I have the power to do something about it."

Kirk said nothing. First Spock, now McCoy. It seemed that his friends were slowly slipping from his fingers.

"I've put in a proposal to the Federation Medical Corps. They've agreed to launch a mercy mission to Thorus IV. Several other doctors and myself will be going there for long-term service. It will take several years to help the Thoruns get their society back on track. Jim, don't you see, this is giving me a purpose beyond myself. I feel like I've finally atoned for my past mistakes and now I can contribute something worthwhile to the universe."

"I thought you were doing that through Starfleet."

"I was, but that part of my life is over now. This is something I have to do."

"Well, I guess if I can't stop you, I should send you away with my blessing."

"I was hoping you'd say that."

Scotty had always enjoyed marveling at the sight of the Golden Gate Bridge. As an old-school engineer he appreciated the work that had gone into designing it centuries ago. Those engineers did not have any of the modern instruments that were available to him, yet they had made a structure that was both functional and beautiful.

Uhura seemed to be less interested in the view than he was. They had come here to spend a little time together.

"You know Scotty, we never did finish that conversation we had in the mess hall on the *Enterprise*."

Scotty sighed. "You're right Lass, we didn't."

"So, I'm still waiting for your answer."

"Uhura, I think you the finest woman I have ever known. You're beautiful and funny and talented."

Uhura smiled.

"But I'm not sure I can really give you what you deserve right now."

Her smile began to fade.

"You see Lass, I'll be working double-time on the *Enterprise* retrofit over the next year or so. She's going to be my date for the moment, and I wouldn't want to make you feel like you had to share me with another woman.

"Scotty, the *Enterprise* is not a woman. That's your job, and I'm committed to mine just as much as you are to yours. That doesn't mean we won't have time for each other."

"Maybe that would work and maybe it wouldn't Lass, but I just don't think that I can take that chance. I'm sorry but I can't offer what you're wanting right now."

Uhura looked away for a moment, and then turned back to him.

"Well, if that's your answer I have to accept it, but I'm not giving up on you Scotty. I just hope that some day you will see what you're passing up." With that she turned and began to walk away.

Scotty exhaled loudly. "Aye Lass, I know. I certainly know."

The bridge of the *Enterprise* was more boisterous than usual when the lift doors slid aside for Kirk. As soon as he stepped out he heard Sulu announce "Admiral on the Bridge."

"Oh be quiet," Kirk scolded. "It's just me."

He had decided that the bridge of their beloved ships was the perfect place for the crew's break-up party. They were not all moving apart but the end of a five year mission was certainly reason to celebrate.

Kirk spotted Chekov and immediately strolled over to him. "This is going to be informal, but there is one official role I would like to do, my last as Captain of the *Enterprise*. He handed a rank sleeve to the ensign. "Mister Chekov I hereby promote you to the rank of Lieutenant Junior Grade. Your performance over the last several years has been exemplary You've earned this."

Chekov beamed back at him. "Thank you Admiral."

Kirk turned and grabbed a glass of Saurian brandy from the table that had been set up next to the Captain's chair with drinks and nibbles. "Now everyone, please enjoy yourselves."

Across the other side of the Bridge Scotty approached Will Decker. "Sir, I just heard about your appointment." He extended his hand. "Congratulations Captain."

Decker accepted the shake. "Thank you Scotty. I hope this won't cause any hard feelings, now that our roles have essentially swapped."

"Nay Lad. I'm sure you'll make a fine Captain, you're got the best to learn from." Scotty chuckled and took a swig of his scotch. "Besides Lad, how do you know they didn't offer me the job first, but like you say, my place is in the engine room." With that Scotty winked at his new captain and walked away.

Kirk stood behind his chair, the one which had carried him for five years, and surveyed the faces of this crew – his family. Spock, McCoy, Scotty, Uhura, Sulu, Checkov, Chapel, Rand, Kyle and Decker. It would be hard to give up these close relationships, but all was certainly not over. Kirk raised his glass and called for attention.

"My friends, the human adventure is just beginning"

His crew responded. "The human adventure."

And with those words, they toasted the future, whatever it would bring.

Written by Adam Collings. 2008.

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