

Visit to a weird planet

or the inside story behind the antagonism of a certain network toward a certain segment of the population

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The mission had been long & hazardous. Capt. James T. Kirk breathed a sigh of relief as he stood ready to beam back aboard the Enterprise, First Officer Spock on his right & Dr. Leonard McCoy on his left. He paid little attention to the familiar sensations of the transporter, for he's thinking of a leisurely meal, a hot bath to soothe his aching muscles, & then . . .

Feeling himself once more in one piece upon the transporter platform, Kirk stepped forward -- and stopped in astonishment. "What the devil's going on here?"

The opposite wall of the transporter room was missing! Tangles of wire snaked across the floor & hung from the ceiling, men in strange costumes stood about, & Kirk's view of what might be behind the missing wall was blocked by a monstrous piece of machinery that seemed to be pointed directly at him. Hot, intense lights nearly blinded him.

"What have you done to my ship?" he demanded.

"Cut!"

A tall man stepped toward Kirk with an air of controlled irritation. "Bill, that's the third time you've blown that line! It's . . ." he looked into a sheaf of varicolored pages, "Scotty, get a report on that power source and meet me in the briefing room. You're not even close to the script!"

Script? Kirk stared at the man, who shoved the multicolored manuscript into his hands, saying, "Now go get this scene straight once and for all so we can strike the transporter!" He turned to the men and the huge machine and began issuing further instructions.

Bewildered, Kirk looked down at the manuscript. "Star Trek," it said, "____ by _____. Leafing through it, he saw that it's written in the form of a play, & the characters speaking were mostly Kirk, Spock, & McCoy! The latter two, in reality, were by this time looking over his shoulder from either side. Without speaking, Kirk led them away from the group of men, into a more secluded portion of what they'd now see was obviously not the U. S. S. Enterprise. They were in a huge, high-ceilinged room strung high with electrical equipment & cluttered low with what seemed to be bits & pieces of a Federation starship. "What do you think, Spock?" Kirk asked when they were out of hearing of the strangers.

"I don't know, Captain. As yet there is insufficient information to formulate a reasonable hypothesis."

"Well, then, what would be your guess?"

"Vulcans do not guess, Captain. We form conclusions from established fact."

"Of course." Kirk knew Spock had a tendency to quibble over semantics to give himself time to think. "What I meant was, what would be your tentative hypothesis?"

Spock studied the room for a few moments, then took the manuscript from Kirk and leafed through it again. "Based on the fragmentary historical records from your late middle twentieth century Earth and what we have seen here so far, I would say that through a multi-parallel space-time inversion we have been accidentally transferred into a television studio filming a futuristic space adventure series, which by Roddenberry's Law of Parallel Evolution is identical to what has actually, or I should say will develop in our time."

"Fascinating," murmured Kirk, although it was uncertain whether he was referring to Spock's hypothesis or to the pair of scantily-clad young women wandering past them.

Spock, however, ignored the second possibility. "Yes, Captain, and quite interesting."

"Poppycock!"

They turned to the third member of the party, Spock already on the defensive. The doctor was the only man who could consistently arouse an emotional response in the Vulcan, although Spock would have hotly defended his reaction as logical. The two men were the best of friends. "Do you have any logical alternative to suggest, Dr. McCoy?" Spock's look of superiority showed that he had anticipated the doctor's silence.

After a moment Kirk said, "Then by the non-interference directive we must not reveal our true nature."

"You're both out of your minds," McCoy observed sadly. "Or perhaps we all are, since we seem to be in a madhouse."

"Yes, Doctor," Spock agreed. From the point of view of these people we would be considered mad were we to reveal ourselves. We have no logical alternative but to follow the non-interference directive."

"All right," said Kirk. "They apparently assume we are actors. We'll go along with that until we can get our bearings -- probably the rest of the day."

McCoy suddenly broke into his rare impish grin. "I'll be anxious to see what happens at the end of the day, when Spock tried to take off his makeup!"

Before Spock could answer, Kirk said, "Bones, help me figure out what scene they're doing. I'd better learn the lines. Spock, see if you can find your way outside and look around; try to find out exactly where and when we are. McCoy and I will try to bluff our way here."

They found the scene which they had beamed into. "No wonder they're upset!" Kirk observed. "I have that one line and that's the end of the scene." He turned a few more pages. "You're in the next scene, Bones. Better learn your lines."

"I'm a doctor, not an actor!" grumbled McCoy; then, satisfied with having lodged his protest, he settled down to study the script.

Looking around, Kirk noticed a small group of people being guided around the set by a gorgeous blonde. He stepped behind a computer, which turned out to be an empty shell. From this vantage point he watched the group approach McCoy. "Oh, Penny," gushed an elaborately coiffured matron to the statuesque blonde, "I'm just so *thrilled* to be allowed

to see the *actual program* being filmed! Oh! There's Dr. McCoy!" Her voice rose to shrill squeal on this last, and the two teenagers with her looked embarrassed. McCoy stood up uncertainly.

Penny, the blonde, introduced them, and McCoy could hardly get out a how-do-you-do before the woman was off again. "Dr. McCoy, I just can't believe I'm meeting you in person!"

"I'm certain of that," replied McCoy, but she continued without a pause.

"You're my very *favorite Star Trek* person, and I don't think it's fair that you never get the girl. If it were *me*" she began with a conspiratorial wink, but was interrupted by a bored-looking man, apparently her husband.

"All right, Gladys, let the man get back to work."

"Oh, Albert!" she said petulantly, & returned her attention to McCoy. "Doctor, I know this is the wrong time to ask, but I've been having this back trouble . . ." and she launched into a long description of her symptoms. Kirk noticed McCoy fingering his medikit, & decided it was time to interrupt.

Just as he joined them, though, the woman finished her tale of woe and McCoy drew himself up and said, "Madame, may I suggest that you have been consulting the wrong kind of doctor?"

"What?" she asked uncertainly.

"You'd better watch out, De" laughed Penny. "There are laws against practicing medicine without a license."

At this point a teenager in the group shoved a piece of paper at Kirk & said, "Will you autograph this, Captain Kirk?"

"Uh, all right," Kirk replied, & scribbled "James T. Kirk" with the pen that was thrust into his hand. This resulted in a flurry of papers & pictures being thrust at both him & McCoy, & several minutes spent merely signing their names. At one point, the woman named Gladys got close enough to Kirk to begin, "Oh, Captain Kirk, you're my *favorite Star Trek* person, & --" at which point her husband dragged her away.

"This is so *exciting!*" said the teenage girl who completed the party. "But I did hope we could meet Mr. Spock."

"Yeah, where is Mr. Spock?" asked the boy.

Never one to miss a cue, Spock appeared at that moment through a door at the other end of the room, breathing hard, his hands over his ears, and his face registering the Vulcan equivalent of bewilderment. His shirt was torn, the Star Fleet insignia missing, and a fresh bruise was turning his left cheek an inhuman green.

"Spock!" cried Kirk, as he and McCoy broke away from the group of tourists to run to their friend.

Spock immediately reverted to his usual unemotional attitude, and said, "Don't go outside, Captain! Or you, Doctor. There's a crowd of people out there protesting against something called Nielsens."

"How did you get involved?"

"I didn't realize at first that there was any connection between those people and this program. Their signs read 'Cancel Stamps -- Not Programs' and 'Help Stamp Out Nielsens.' Also 'NBC is a Klingon Conspiracy.' I intended merely to walk past them, but the moment they saw me, they attacked."

Attacked!"

"It was most illogical, Captain. They seemed more admiring than angry, yet they kept pulling at my clothes & ... well, several people seemed to be under the impression that my ears were detachable. I'm afraid I lost both my communicator & my phaser."

"You *idiot!*"

The words were an explosion from a man running over with a fresh shirt for Spock. "Don't you know better by this time? Going outside in costume! Here!"

He shoved the shirt at Spock, who apparently decided it was best to remain silent, and began stripping off his torn uniform top. The man continued, "You *know* how much those communicators cost. And the phaser! Fred!" he called suddenly, and another man came over, carrying a tin box. "Fix him up," the first man instructed. "I've got to go brave the mob, see if we can get the equipment back."

"Watch the ears!" were Fred's first words as Spock began casually pulling the new shirt over his head. "They want to start shooting again soon. What *happened* to you?" he demanded as he got a good look at Spock's cheek.

"A minor mishap."

"Sit down. Minor indeed!" Fred opened the box to reveal an array of makeup, chose a bottle of flesh-colored fluid, and began dabbing it over the bruise. "We'll have to light you from the right until this heals."

Spock submitted to the makeup, McCoy went back to studying the script, & Kirk, letting his curiosity get the best of him, slipped out the door Spock had entered. He had to try several corridors before finding one that led outside, but the mob was there as Spock had described. Apparently they'd swallowed up the man who had gone for their equipment; he's nowhere to be seen. Kirk noted with a wry smile that Spock had diplomatically not reported all the signs in evidence: they're several proclaiming "Mr. Spock for President," while a small one said, "Kirk for Vice-President: The Sooner the Better."

Seeing the man who had gone after Spock's equipment worming his way back through the crowd, Kirk hurried back onto the set. He had no sooner settled down than the man burst in & shoved the communicator at Spock. "Here," he said angrily. "Some kid ran off with the phaser, which is coming out of your salary!" He stomped off, & Spock stared after him, his eyebrows raised quizzically.

Just then Penny returned, this time with a telephone trailing a long cord. "Leonard," she called as she approached, "call for you."

"For me?" asked McCoy in surprise.

"Not Leonard McCoy," she said impatiently, "Leonard Nimoy!" & shoved the phone at Spock, who took it hesitantly.

Just then the big man called, "Bill, come here and try that line again before we shoot it," and Kirk had to go off.

The last thing he heard was Spock saying into the phone in a puzzled voice, "Sandi Who?"

The rehearsal was fine, Spock and McCoy were called over, but just as they were prepared to shoot, someone noticed that under the lights the bruise on Spock's cheek showed right through the makeup.

"All right, you three take ten while we rearrange the lights."

Kirk, Spock and McCoy were standing off to one side watching the elaborate arrangements, when suddenly Kirk's communicator chirped. Surreptitiously he shook it open. "Kirk here."

"Captain! We've found ye!" Scotty's voice came through cheerfully.

"What happened?" demanded Kirk.

"Well, sir, it seems there was a multi-parallel space-time inversion. We've managed to find a para-spatial anomaly that will allow us to pull ye back, but --"

"Hold it, Scotty," whispered Kirk. "There's something going on here."

Penny, the blonde, was back, this time with a small radio. "Hey, everybody! Listen to this!"

"Penny . . ." the big man began impatiently.

"No, this is important, boss," she insisted, and turned up the volume.

". . . word yet on the President's decision. In local news, the NBC television studios here in Burbank have been attacked by a teenage boy with what appeared at first to be a toy ray gun. Eyewitnesses report that a few minutes ago several teenagers carrying signs saying 'Save Star Trek' appeared on Alameda Avenue across from the NBC building. One of the boys stepped forward, pointed the gun at the building, and shouted, 'Here's what we'll do if you don't renew *Star Trek*! Witnesses say a peculiar beam emerged from the gun, melting the antenna and part of the roof of the NBC building. The boy dropped the gun, and the teenagers scattered in all directions."

All around the studio people were staring at one another and growing paler by the moment. The newscaster continued, "A late bulletin from the police states that they have confiscated the weapon, but cannot identify it. None of the teenagers involved have been apprehended, and witnesses disagree as to the description of the boy who did the shooting. Meanwhile, on the political trail"

Penny snapped off the radio, and for a moment there was dead silence. Then everyone began talking at once. Kirk took the opportunity to speak into the communicator. "Scotty, did you hear that?"

"Aye, Captain. I can get a fix on that phaser and destroy it."

"Good work."

"But Captain, we've got to pull you back in the next five minutes, before the anomaly shifts. And I've got three gentlemen here very anxious to go home."

"Right, Scotty. Set it up, and we'll get onto the platform. Kirk out."

The big man was trying to restore order, but once he did there were still the lights to be adjusted, and the minutes were ticking away.

"Two minutes, Captain," murmured Spock.

Kirk suggested, "Why don't we all get on the platform, and then you can adjust the lights on Spock."

"Good idea," said the big man, and Kirk breathed a sign of relief.

They stepped forward, but just at that moment the boy who had been with the group of tourists came running up. "Mr. Spock! I want your autograph!"

"Whatever for?" was Spock's reaction.

"Please, Mr. Spock!" The boy held out a book and pen to him.

"Give it to him, Spock!" said Kirk. "Hurry!"

"What shall I write?"

"Your signature!" said McCoy. "And get on the platform!"

Spock scribbled something, and took his place beside Kirk. "Thirty seconds," he whispered.

"The light's okay now," said the big man. "Let's shoot it."

The boy was staring at his autograph book. "Hey! How do you pronounce this?" he demanded.

"Xtmpersqzntwlfb," said Spock.

"Quiet on the set! Lights! Camera! Action!"

The people watching the scene being shot were later to ask one another if at that moment there didn't seem to appear a slight shimmer about the three figures, as if the transporter really worked. And then, the Captain stepped forward, just as the script called for, and said . . . "Gene, you will never believe where we've just been!"

"Cut!"

It was almost a sob. "That's it! Forget it! I've had it! I can't take any more today!"

The big man slowly crossed the room, people clearing an aisle for him in sympathetic silence. The three men on the platform stared after him in bewilderment.

"Now what would make him do that?" asked the Captain.

"Search me," replied the Vulcan. "Just tired, I guess."