

Epiphany Trek

LOGS: USS KONGO



XANADU'S STAR

GARRY STAHL

Xanadu's Star

Copyright Garry Stahl: October 1997.
Cover Copyright Richard Merk 2011

This is a work of fiction. All characters are fictional, any resemblance to persons living or dead is coincidental.

Commander J. Timothy Kirk sat in his office at the High Station of Starbase 59. He had a great window view of the Orion cluster, but he wasn't looking at that. Around his office, a fairly spacious one, he had mementos from his few tours. A Rgeilian blood knife on one wall, a model of a Manta class battle Cruiser, CB 05 *Questing* stood on the credenza, and a holocube of an Ane female sat on his desk. He looked up from his pile of datawork and gazed at it ruefully. He was truly tired of every senior Commander that came through quipping "Hey, Kirk, is that your girlfriend?" However, the holocube stayed, he needed the reminder.

Six months ago he asked for this posting because he though the Orion sector would give him opportunities to fulfill certain oaths. Corvette commands where a dime a dozen, or so he thought. Admiral Decatur took one look at his record, or more accurately his name, and stated "I don't want any loose canons in my corvettes." J. Timothy Kirk was given command of the repair facilities at Starbase 59. Now he sat writing reports on the condition and repair status of other people's ships. He supposed he could hit the bars and sample the night life, but that was not his idea of living large; that was wasting time. Coffee, strong and black was his only substance of vice.

The Red Alert electrified him. He was out of his chair and into opps on the run. He beat the intercom call by a good two seconds.

"What's the situation Mmcurr?"

The Cait Lieutenant looked up as he came in.

"General alert from Starfleet Command sir."

"Play it."

Mmcurr touched his panel and a voice came over the speakers.

"This is Admiral J. P. Hanson Starfleet Command. Attention all ships; a Borg vessel of hostile intent is approaching Earth. All vessels within three day's range of Wolf 359 proceed to that system in order to intercept the Borg. This is a general alert, the Federation has been invaded by a powerful hostile force, all ships within three days converge at Wolf 359."

Mmcurr broke in, "Admiral Decatur on the line."

"Is that the end of the alert."

"Yes sir."

"Put him through."

Decatur was one of Starfleet's "old boys". Privately Kirk didn't have a lot of confidence in him.

"Kirk, did you get the alert."

"Yes sir, we are right on it."

"What is your plan?"

"I am standing down to Yellow alert and seeing how fast we can get whoever is in dock out of dock sir."

"What about the general call? What can we do?"

Xanadu's Star

"Sir, frankly nothing. There is not a ship in the dock that could make Wolf 359 in 72 hours, even if it was ready right now. What I could use sir is anyone dirtside that can handle a spanner. The faster these ships are out, the sooner we have use of them."

"Who do you have in?"

"*USS Concord*, Ambassador class, estimated repair time, 5 days. She has a blown warp coil, we have the left nacelle half dismantled, parts are on the dock. *USS Ki'tara*, Victory class estimated repair time 32 hours. She has a fire control sensor failure." Kirk continued off the top of his head. "*USS Indefatigable*, Excelsior Class, estimated repair time indefinite, she needs a warp core, and we don't have one. The core is on order, and scheduled to arrive in 5 days. The alert may change that. *USS Betelgeuse*, Enterprise B class. Estimated repair time, two hours. She is in for a sensor upgrade and the crew opened the panels this morning."

"Very well, what estimates with additional crew?"

"That will depend on the crew sir. Hopefully shorter in all cases except for the *Betelgeuse* and the *Indefatigable*."

"Very well Kirk, carry on."

Kirk could swear the man was displeased he was on top of things. It was like he was looking for him to fail.

Two hours later the *USS Betelgeuse* pulled out of the repair dock right on schedule. Kirk had gotten word of Captain Simmons' orders. He had been ordered to remain guarding the Starbase. The man was all but seething when he beamed aboard and Kirk turned his ship over to him. Kirk shook his head. Simmons was a well connected, gung ho, former desk jockey that had never fired a phaser outside of drill. Kirk had served on the *USS Republic* during the Cardassian War. He had no delusions of the glory of war.

Kirk sat in his office and brooded. Reports came in, the fight was not going well. *USS Ki'tara* had been put back in service in 24 hours. She too was guarding the Starbase. His crews were swarming over the *Concord* like ants. With two ships out of the dock he had rescheduled six hour, round the clock shifts until she was back in service. He was telling Decatur four days, privately, he thought three.

Kirk looked back on the reports. The *Enterprise D* had tried to stop the Borg near the Neutral Zone, and failed. They had lost Captain Picard as well. Losing one of Starfleet's senior captains was a serious blow. Especially since it seemed the Borg could force you to reveal everything you knew, and use it. He didn't know Picard personally, but his reputation was well known.

His crews surprised him, the *Concord* was ready in 50 hours. He verbally rounded on them about the unauthorized double shifts, and arranged to throw them a party. He also forgot to log the reprimand. He sat waiting for the

Admiral to call him about the unauthorized use of facilities, but it didn't seem to come. Either Decatur didn't know about it, or he wasn't quite as bad as Kirk thought. Kirk was betting on the former.

The next week dragged by, everyone on the station lost someone they knew at the battle. No name was needed, it was just, "The Battle". The *Enterprise D* caught up to the Borg and somehow succeeded where she failed before. The Borg were destroyed in earth orbit itself. Kirk was beginning to believe the blessing of Fate some people accorded the name "Enterprise". By this point everyone in station was armed, and depressed.

The parts for the *Indefatigable* came in late. Kirk got shifts working on the job post haste. Under the circumstances, working crews were better than idle crews. He was just logging the repair schedule when his door chimed.

"Come." He replied in reflex. He heard the door open and close. He finished the notations and looked up. Kirk shot out of his chair. Admiral Decatur in person no less.

"Excuse me Admiral, to what do I owe the pleasure?" Kirk privately doubted it was a pleasure, but in his five months on station he had not seen the Admiral other than dirtside.

"I have orders for you Kirk, I thought I would deliver them in person." Decatur handed Kirk a PADD, then wandered over to look out the window.

Commander J Timothy Kirk looked at the PADD twice before the message got through to him. *"Commander James T. Kirk, you are here by promoted to the rank of Captain, and will immediately assume all duties and privileges of your new rank. You are further more ordered to proceed to Starfleet Headquarters, Earth, and await posting to starship command."*

Decatur waited a long minute, until the younger man had assimilated the news before speaking. "Kirk, I made certain assumptions about you when you posted here. Assumptions that I am now, ashamed, and relieved to say, were wrong. You seemed to be an over eager space cadet about to go out and get himself killed, along with one of my crews. I posted you to this station figuring the boredom would handle you."

Tim stated to open his mouth, the Admiral stopped him. "Let me finish. I thought you would chaff under the routine of space dock. Instead you took a so-so facility and turned it into the best it, or any space dock I have seen, has ever been. Yet, I could tell you did resent the posting. Why?"

"Why sir?"

"Why if you resented it, did you bust your butt doing the job you did?"

Kirk turned to the window. "Permission to speak freely sir?"

Decatur growled, "Yea, I've asked for it."

"Your life, my life, depends on those ships out there. I don't know about you sir, but I am rather fond of my life. The thought of a ship I might serve on being maintained by less than the best space dock in Starfleet would bother me.

Xanadu's Star

So I made sure it was the best space dock in Starfleet. I figured the next guy is as fond of his life as I am of mine. I'm no engineer, and I know it. So I got out of the way of the good engineers and let them work. I made it my job to see they had what it took to do their work with a minimum of hassle."

"Does that include chewing them out for working double shifts, and throwing a party?"

Tim was taken aback. "I didn't think you knew about that."

"I'm an old dog son. It is a long day to get around me. But, I figured on giving you your head, sink or swim."

"Yes sir, it includes that. I took issue with the safety of double shifts yes. However, they delivered me a working starship in record time, on their own time. They deserved a reward that I couldn't officially give them. It was a small victory when we badly needed victories."

Admiral Decatur looked out the window for a long moment. "I think a starship will be in good hands with you Kirk. By your records you take action when action is required, and I have personally seen that you take your crew's well being as your first priority. Starfleet isn't going to have any gems for you son. Your command is likely going to be an old tub pulled from mothballs. In any case, I think you will get the most out of her. Let me be the first to say it. Congratulations Captain Kirk."

"Thank you sir."

"Now, let me take you dirtside and get you sinfully drunk."

The Admiral and three Captains tried, unsuccessfully, to get Kirk drunk that night. He sipped lightly at his drink, and in his time tested manner added it's contents to that of his companions as the night progressed. They on the other hand got noticeably worse for the wear. Kirk considered pulling the commbadge shuffle on them, but relented due to the heightened state of alert. It was an old Academy days trick he used to pull on his more inebriated classmates. It resulted in great amusement for Kirk when his classmates had to argue with security about who they really were while not in full command of their faculties.

Conversation had ranged from comparative service toppers, he held his own there, to characters known. Kirk had to admit that Ensign Spork the clumsy Vulcan was the unbeatable champ. Towards the end of the evening, talk had turned morbid. He was glad the party broke up.

Early next morning a miserable Admiral Decatur called Kirk into his office. Kirk's bright shipshape appearance raised an eyebrow. A painful

eyebrow by the looks of it. "Kirk, I have you a ride back to earth. The *Concord* has been recalled to sector 001 defense. With the loss of 39 ships at the Battle, Starfleet is shuffling everyone else around. *Concord* leaves in six hours, be on it."

"Yes sir. What about my department? I haven't picked a replacement yet."

"You're still worried about space dock?"

"They're good people, and they do a good job. I want to see they get a department head worthy of them."

"Did you plan to recommend promotion within the department?"

"Yes sir, I have three officers in mind. All of them command respect in the engineering department, but also possess the administrative skills to run the space dock. They are also of a temperament that will work well in a desk bound environment."

"Okay, leave the names on my desk, I'll handle it."

"Yes sir."

Kirk went back to his office at space dock and cleaned it out. He replicated a case for the model, the holocube, and knife went in his duffel. Like most young officers he didn't have much in the way of baggage. A few items of sentimental value, and replicated uniforms. A quick trip to his quarters bagged the remainder of his personal possessions; his box of decorations, and two or three other knickknacks.

Admiral Decatur called him an hour later. "Kirk, you packed?"

"Yes sir, I was about to log myself out of space dock."

"Good. Call in Lt Commander Pasteur and congratulate her on her promotion and new posting. The orders will be on your desk when you get there."

"Gladly sir."

Kirk called the Lt. Commander off work in the dock. She came in wearing her EVA coveralls.

"You wanted to see me Captain?"

"Yes Mr. Pasteur." Louise Pasteur was a big blond headed woman from the New Quebec colony. "I have orders for you. You are hereby promoted to the rank of Commander and will immediately assume the duties and privileges of that rank. Furthermore you are posted as Department head of Starbase 59 space dock. Do you accept?" This was the first time Kirk had given another officer a command, it was a good feeling.

The big Quebecker's face split into a wide grin. "You know I do sir." Her face slid into more somber expression. "This means we are losing you, doesn't it?"

"Yes, I leave in four hours."

"What! Not time even for a proper leave taking. If you will excuse me sir, I wish to use 'my' desk."

Xanadu's Star

"Why of course."

Kirk stepped out from behind the desk motioning Pasteur in.

The big woman activated the intercom and spoke. "Attention all space dock personal, This is space dock director Commander Louise Pasteur. Captain Kirk is leaving us in four hours. Down tools and report to rec hall 17 QED."

"Hell of a first order Commander." Kirk was all grins.

"Admiral can roast me later sir, but you are not getting off this station without a proper send off."

As it was Kirk made the *Concord* with only 15 minutes to spare. It was amazing how rowdy a bunch of engineers can get in three hours on only synthahol and good feelings. He went through the proper motions of coming aboard, and went to his quarters. As a second Captain on a ship he was a fifth wheel and general inconvenience.

Tim Kirk spent most of the voyage back in his latest field of study, Ane. For a race that had been charter members of the Federation little seemed to be known of them. Plenty of medical records could be found. Studies of their psionics were rare but available. Of their culture or psychology very little of substance could be found.

Kirk had a good sense of the hidden, and this didn't feel that way. What he could find suggested that those that had tried to study them had missed the mark. Well, there was another way. If at all possible, he was getting an Ane officer for his ship.

His ship... He let the phrase roll over his tongue a few times. He wondered what he would be getting. Ruefully deciding that the best he could hope for was an old *Excelsior* or beat up *Miranda* class vessel. If, that is, any were left to be had.

The trip went quickly. Kirk soon found himself back in Admiral Kowaliski's office. The Admiral came around his desk to shake his hand.

"Welcome back Kirk. Good voyage I hope?"

"Passable sir."

"Good, I have work for you right off." He consulted a PADD. "*USS Kongo* NCC 10455. She is an Ambassador class vessel. A thirty five year old hull. She is in refit right now. Take command and see she is ready for space as soon as possible. The computer core is out of the ship. Her warp drive is unserviceable and will require complete replacement. Otherwise the ship is fit. We are short on crew. So you might have to scrounge a little."

"Anything else sir?"

"No Captain, good luck."

Kirk took an inspection pod out to the *Kongo*. He had to pilot it himself. The automatic control followed the precoded route perfectly. *Kongo* was a pool of light among the other pools. Half forgotten starships in the back corners of the space dock were suddenly very important. *Kongo* as an Ambassador class starship was the familiar saucer, secondary hull, and raised nacelles design that Starfleet heavy cruisers had used for over a hundred years. She was a third smaller than the newer Galaxy class ships, and the Ambassadors had a reputation for being slugs. Right now she looked a fright. Both nacelles were missing and sections of the hull were open to space. A few blast scars on the hull told him she was an old fighting lady. In spite of everything, to him she looked grand.

Lt Commander Quall met him at the lock with a suitable delegation of the ships crew. While not in dress uniforms, they were shipshape. Kirk read himself in. A ceremony that dated as far back as vessels that sailed on seas powered by sails.

After the formal taking of command, he had Quall brief him on the state of the ship.

"In truth Captain Kirk, the ship has no officers. I am the chief of the refit crew." The long faced Catullan seemed genuinely sad about it.

"Does the ship have any assigned crew?"

"Yes Captain, there are currently 50 members of the ship's company."

"How would you like a permanent posting as Chief Engineer?"

"I would like to consider your offer Captain, I think I would like to work with you for a while first."

Kirk was a little taken back. Most engineers would jump at the offer. However, honesty was to be valued. "Understood, consider the offer open. Now, how much ship is there?"

"We currently have no warp core, and no warp drive. The ship's main computer is off line and removed. Only 30% of the hull is pressurized at this time. We could, in an emergency be ready for impulse operations in 48 hours. Backup computers are still in place."

"Has the design been finalized for the upgrades?"

"No sir. There has been considerable debate over the proper way to proceed. The refit has languished for some time."

Kirk had a glimmer of a thought, but a thought none the less. "I have some ideas. Don't do anything about the warp system until you hear from me."

"Yes sir."

Xanadu's Star

Three days of exhaustive research told him that his crazy idea was possible. From an engineering standpoint it would work. Further research revealed that the parts were available. The biggest problem was convincing the Admiralty that it was a sound idea. Kirk knew that doing the job was going to be a lark in comparison to selling it.

He looked out the window of his ready room off of the darkened bridge. He could see another starship undergoing refit. *USS Harrier*, a Constellation type, older than his ship. Some sort of skunkworks project. He couldn't find straight answers about it. In any case, this was going to be tough, but it should be straight forward.

Kirk stood before Admiral Kowaliski and company with his presentation. "...In conclusion sirs, the proposed refit will give the Kongo a power curve comparable with the Galaxy class ships and vastly increase the capacity of the ship for long term cruise and defense missions. By all indications this should correct the Ambassador's reputation as a sluggish mover in both tactical and strategic roles. This modification will increase the safety of the ship as well."

Kowaliski leaned back in his chair. "Ambitious Kirk." He looked over at Admiral Quinn, whom he had invited in on the private briefing. "Quinn, do you want to tell him why it will not work, or should I?"

Kirk looked confused. Quinn stood up. "Computer."

"[Working.]"

"Secure this room, code alpha alpha one, Admiral Quinn identifying."

"[Identity of Admiral Quinn confirmed, this room is secure.]"

"Kirk, what you are to learn here is not to leave this room, is that clear."

"Yes sir." Kirk was truly confused now. What was so deathly secret?

"Computer, play spacedock logs on *USS Sorcerer* NCC 2040 stardate 12173.2"

"[Security clearance required alpha alpha one.]"

"Admiral Quinn, clearance alpha alpha one."

The computer beeped, and the log played over the screen. The old uniforms and forgotten faces once again played their parts.

"Sir, the *Sorcerer* is powering up."

"What? Isn't she in the breaker yard?"

"Yes sir, the ship is at operational power, and she is casting off."

The screen cut to the interior of the old space dock. A ship of an unfamiliar Federation design with a wide and angular secondary hull was pulling away from the dock. Kirk had never seen this class of ship. Something

was funny about it, something different. Then it hit him. The nacelles where of an older Ane design.

"See who is on that ship, stop them! All stations red alert!"

"*Sorcerer*, this is space dock control, who is there? You are ordered to surrender at once."

A soft but angry voice came over the speakers. "NO, I will not be murdered."

The inhabitants of space dock control looked flabbergasted.

"No one is killing any one" said the Admiral. "Return to dock at once!"

"You want to kill me, I will not be murdered. Open the doors or I cut them off!"

"Scan that ship, find out who is on board and get them off."

A Lieutenant bent to the task and came up quickly. "Sir, there is no one on board."

The *Sorcerer* spoke again. "Open the doors or I blast them, I will live!"

An Ensign turned to the Admiral "Sir, the *Sorcerer* is powering up its phasers." the kid looked scared.

The Admiral paused a beat then spoke. "Open the doors, and secure all transporters and ships, I want a head count."

As they watched the rouge ship exited space dock and vanished into warp.

"End recording." Quinn stood once again. "Further investigation proved that no one was on the *Sorcerer* when it was 'hijacked'. Shortly there after the *USS Xanadu* NCC 2053 experienced, rather reported, a fatal breach in antimatter containment near Andor. The crew abandoned ship. And the ship promptly warped away from them. They where retrieved with no lost of life. The *Xanadu* herself reported their location, after she was abandoned, and from several light years distant. Neither ship was ever seen again.

Both ships were an experimental design, and the only two in their class. They had Ane designed warp drives, and Crystalmind G1;Mk16 computers. Both ships had full service lives and no incidents against them. But both vanished when it was decided to scrap them. The matter was hushed and declared secret. This is why your plan will not work Kirk, Starfleet is never going to put a Crystalmind computer in a Federation starship again.

Later talks with the computers' designers revealed that the G1 computers had a tendency to become self aware. A factor that was not known when the computers where installed in the *Sorcerer* and the *Xanadu*."

Kirk figured it was now or never. "Sir, have you read my report from the

Xanadu's Star

Questing shakedown incident?"

"No Captain, other events precluded it at the time, and it slipped into the pile."

"Sir, I am recommending this computer and engine arrangement because I know the computer is sentient."

It was Quinn's turn to sit down in stunned silence. "You *want* an aware ship?"

"Sir, without the help and concern of the ship for the safety of the crew, I could not have stopped the hijack attempt. Indeed, Fiealan herself, the computer, I can't think of her as just 'the computer', insisted on installing me as Captain, and following my every order. I think I know what happened with the *Sorcerer* and the *Xanadu*. I also can assure you that will not happen again.

Quinn's eyebrows got lost somewhere in his forehead. "That is a mighty broad statement Captain. Can you back it up?"

"Yes sir. It has to do with what Kosoban, the engineer on the *Questing*, told me. Ane computers today are RI, real intelligence. As he said; 'Artificial intelligence simulates the process of sentience. The great tragedy is where it succeeds in duplicating it. The sentient creature feels lost. Standard programming is very simple, it misses a million things that a sentient creature needs to grow into a complete and socially adept being. So when an AI system achieves sentience, it is lost, it has none of these things. As a result the best that can be hoped for is a sociopath, the worst a psychopath. RI systems are Ane, they might have bodies made of trititanium, and brains of crystal but they are Ane in every sense of the word. They have parents, families, and a place in society.' I want such a officer.

I have to ask sirs, are we ready to condemn an entire life form for the actions of two individuals? If Commander Data is acceptable, why should a less mobile computer not be? What happens when Commander Data is due a promotion? Do we suddenly decide that having a brain and a body that was built instead of born makes you an inferior type of sentience, incapable of captaining a ship? Do we want to stand on that slippery slope and take a step?

Sirs, I respectfully submit that condemning all sentient ships' computers because of one incident is tantamount to an unwarranted prejudice. The very type of policy that this service was founded to help eradicate. Ane have assigned such a sentience to every ship they put into space since the Unity class of 80 years ago. They have never experienced a single disciplinary problem. I know, I asked, and I checked it. Bearing that 80 year record against the incident of two apparently frightened and lonely children. I submit that a rethinking of policy is in order."

Quinn remained silent for several minutes. "Captain Kirk, I cannot guarantee you your engines, or your computer, but you have just given me reason to try. I will fight for this. And, if I can get them, I have something in mind for your first assignment."

Admiral Quinn was good to his word. He did fight for it, and won. The *Kongo* was towed to the Mars Utopia Planitia docks for an extensive refit. Kirk had plenty of time for his studies, in the most empirical sense. He worked with Ane every day.

A year later Kirk mused that he was still doing the same job he had done on Starbase 59. The only difference was he concentrated all his efforts on one ship. The *Kongo* now looked a proper ship. She was however, not the ship she used to be. Angled pylons held the warp nacelles with their twin fins iridescent in the lights. Two of the Ane designed torpedo turrets were mounted in the saucer at port and starboard. Deep in the ship the twin chambered heart of the dual warp core awaited its first beats. The new brain went through mindless drills in testing systems. The small Crystalmind computer took a fraction of the space allotted for it. Which was good, because the hungry torpedo turrets demanded a larger share of the ship for magazines. The ship had changed inside and out in a thousand drastic and subtle ways, and Kirk had to learn all of them.

His ship finally had some crew to speak of as well. A full engineering staff was now assigned. As events turned out Lt. Cmd Quall didn't end up as his chief engineer. He would have had to re-qualify for the post. His Chief Engineer was an Ane. Felialan was two parts crusty engineer, and one part nymph. She flirted with anything male, regardless of species. His other engineers ran the full spectrum of the Federation.

The other departments were not as well represented. The command structure was thin, the sciences existed only in the form of the computer support staff, and one of them an Ane as well. He was assured that he would have plenty of Ane by the time he was ready to sail. They did not like to be alone. Between the crew and mates, and possible children, he could end up with as many as 30 Ane on board.

Kirk was careful in choosing the rest of his crew. The Ane were merciless when it came to pompous, hidebound, or self important persons. Some Lt. Commander in Intelligence came sniffing around the *Kongo*, and the dozen Ane working on the ship took it as a personal crusade to drive the man off the Utopia Planitia space dock. A week later it took four security men to drag the frothing, screaming man out of the Station director's office. He claimed that "Marvin the Martian" was going to blow up the Earth. "A little fellow with a funny helmet and big shoes." Kirk heard vaguely as the man was dragged away. Kirk had no idea what it all meant, but the Ane were in a smug mood after he was gone.

Xanadu's Star

Kirk was learning fast. Ane had no sense of physical privacy. While they respected the privacy of others, a learned response, they didn't reciprocate as regards their own privacy, they didn't have, or need any. The "no mating in the corridors" request was not a joke. He had to institute a similar rule himself after he found the one couple engaged in the officer's lounge. They kindly flicked out of existence when he requested they move it to the sleeping room. Spacik his Vulcan helmsman had been calmly sipping his tea the whole time. As he related.

"Most remarkable Captain. They were here when I arrived and that was 56.45 minutes ago.

"Why didn't you ask them to leave?"

"They were here first Captain."

Well, Vulcans had their own peculiar ways as well.

That was another thing that took getting used to, teleportation. The first time that happened it cost him ten years off his life. He paged Felialan, who was down in engineering to the bridge. She was there before he had finished the page. POW, right in front of him.

Ane didn't turn to face you when they "talked". Only the ones that had long experience with humanoids did this. Most of them kept doing what they where doing. He learned they had 270 degree vision, and an ear cocked in your direction was the equivalent of their full attention. They would only turn to face you if you where right behind them, and not always then. He also learned that "full attention" could be a misnomer. Ane it seemed possessed the ability to time share their brain. The could easily do several things at once, as long as only one of them was physical.

His education was teaching him one thing. All the papers written on Ane behavior where pure trash. Ane thought "behaviorists" and "sociologists" a joke and loved to feed them just what they wanted to see and hear. In plain standard, from the late 20th century to the present, there was not a single unbiased, unpolluted, study of Ane culture on the books. Ane didn't write books about their culture, they lived it.

Picking a cybernetic crewman was not as easy as Kirk thought it would be. He found his prejudice where computers where concerned was not entirely gone. For some reason he thought they would all be like . As it turned out each was an individual as any other people would be.

Another things that surprised him is that 90% of the personalities where "female". It was explained that gender was not programed into the basic kernel. For reasons even the programmers did not understand most chose female. Only 10% of the RIs were male.

The Ane found five computers interested in becoming a ship's computer on a Federation vessel, and Kirk extensively interviewed all five until he found the crewman that best matched his own personality and style. Tathilan was perky and curious, and had no habits he could call faults. So she was assigned.

Kirk also learned that Commander Data had been assigned a temporary

command during the attempted Romulan interference with an attempted coup in the Klingon High Council. He thought to himself, that perhaps his faith in Starfleet was not misplaced yet.

A year and six months after he had read himself aboard the *Kongo* the day of truth had arrived. The *Kongo* floated in space outside the Utopia Planitia space dock. Kirk sat in the sacred center seat. The ship drifted away from Mars at minimum impulse.

Kirk said. "Mr. Spacik all stop."

"All stop Captain."

"Kirk to engineering, you may initiate warp start-up. Give me ten percent power."

The view screen cut to engineering and a shot of the twin warp cores. Lights came on the panels around it, plasma lightning played over the interior of the cores. Then with a deep throated throb, first one core, then the other flashed with the power of dying matter and anti-matter. They quickly settled down to a steady alternating beat.

Felialan reporting sir, we have warp core critical and balanced at ten percent.

"Very well Mr. Felialan, give me 100% nominal power. Mr Spacik, warp factor 1."

"Course sir?"

"Starbase 1."

"Course laid in, Warp Factor 1 for Starbase 1."

"Engage."

The *Kongo* leapt forward into warp with smooth grace. To general jubilation of all aboard.

Over the next three months Kirk put her through every conceivable test that Starfleet engineers could think of. The *Kongo* proved that the mating of Ane drive and computers to Federation hull and systems was working flawlessly. At last, reluctantly, they declared her space worthy. A forgotten, battle-weary, Lady of the fleet was reborn a maiden anew.

Kirk sat in Admiral Quinn's Office at the Admiral's request. "Sir, I have been declared the Captain of a space worthy starship. I understand that I have a bit of a record for a refit of that complexity?"

Xanadu's Star

Quinn smiled and leaned back in his chair. "Yes, you do. Your 5 months in a space dock have served you well."

"Not to be abrupt sir, but I doubt you asked me here to talk about how well I run a refit. Considering my last conversation with you, would I be amiss to assume you have something for me to do?"

"Yes Kirk, I have something. It might not be glamorous or glory seeking, but it just might close a chapter, a unpleasant chapter, in Starfleet history. Come with me."

Quinn lead Kirk into a map room.

"Computer, secure this room, code alpha alpha one."

"[Room secured.]"

"Show track 'starchild'.

"[Security clearance required.]" Kirk noted the difference, after six months with a sentient computer, the average Starfleet computer had become a boring dolt.

Quinn answered, "Admiral Quinn, clearance alpha alpha one."

"[Identity confirmed.]"

Stars swarmed into focus. Kirk recognized the core of the Federation. From Earth and Andor tracks lead away from the Galactic center, and at a considerable angle to the galactic plane.

Quinn explained. "These are the tracts taken by the *Sorcerer* and the *Xanadu* when they broke away. Computer, next image." The scale backed way off until the two tracks appeared to be one. "We tracked the ships as long as possible. If you trace their paths, they intersect this point." The map shifted again to indicate a small star. "This is NGC 23,234,235. An unremarkable white dwarf. If the ships can be found, I think it will be at this location. Once you pass that point, it is a billion light years plus until you find anything."

"You want me to find the *Sorcerer* and the *Xanadu*?"

"I want you to try."

"It would be six months out and six months back at max cruising speed to reach that star."

"Yes, Kirk, I am aware of that. I twisted a few arms to get this mission. *Kongo* is the best ship for the job. She looks more like the *Sorcerer* class than any other ship Ane or Starfleet. You have the right kind of computer, and you have the speed to make the mission in a reasonable amount of time. Incidentally you will be taking a lot of pictures. You will be further above the galactic plane than any manned Federation vessel has ever gone. Do you accept the mission?"

"Well sir, with the trouble you have gone to, and the argument I gave you when I purposed the refit, I can hardly refuse."

"Good, I'll have a few specialists coming aboard. You should be ready in a week."

"What do I tell my crew?"

"You're going on a long duration scientific mission. Call it the Deep Space

Polar Survey. They should be prepared to be away from any base for at least a year and a half."

"Aye aye Sir. Do you expect me to find anything out there? Could the ships still be functioning after this amount of time, or is this to confirm their death?"

"It is technically possible for the computers to still be functioning. A Crystalmind computer can work for years on the power in a phaser cell. By moving at a minimum speed, and conserving power, yes, they could still be functioning. The ships batteries alone could sustain them for over 170 years."

"Very well sir, with your permission, I'll get started."

"Good luck Kirk."

The voyage was as uneventful as they come. After taking on a few extra supplies and astrophysicists, *Kongo* departed without fanfare. The long cruise did give his crew time to settle in. Two Vulcans, five Andorians, seven Caitians, 23 Ane, humans and humanoids from a dozen different worlds. The crew was a true eclectic mix. Kirk encouraged inter-cultural mixing as much as possible.

By four months out the view astern was breathtaking. The entire Sagittarius arm of the Milky Way lay behind them in all its glory. The view before them was, disturbing. NGC 23,234,235 was too faint to see without a very long exposure with the most sensitive of optical sensors. It had been found by a deep sky survey 143 years ago. First thought to be a distant galaxy, a parallax measurement proved it was a faint white star much closer. Instead of the usual stars streaking past the viewscreen showed only empty space. Kirk contemplated the awe inspiring view from his ready room.

"Captains log, stardate 46565.3. We are five months and three weeks into our voyage. Astrophysics has confirmed the location of NGC 23,234,235, we are on course and cruising at Warp 8. No indication or debris from the missing ships has been found. It is entirely possible that they never even came this far out, but turned back at some point. In any case, we have come this far, we will complete the mission. Crew morale is high, and we have come together well. At this time the crew is aware of the mission. I can't ask them to hunt for something if I don't tell them what it is. I do not have high hopes for finding the two ships."

A week later *Kongo* entered the system of NGC 23,234,235. Kirk once

Xanadu's Star

again sat the center seat.

"Helm, one half impulse please."

"One half impulse Captain."

"Astrophysics, you may begin your scans."

Kongo floated 23 AUs from the star. A faint white light a long distance away.

Opps tuned to him. "Captain, I have an IFF signal."

The atmosphere on the bridge became suddenly electric.

"Identify." Kirk sat on the edge of his seat.

"Signal is faint, and corrupted. Federation starship, Identity unknown."

"I think we can take three guesses, and the first one doesn't count. Take us in, slowly, standard hail. Tathilan do your thing."

The crew of the *Kongo* waited as the closed with the lost ship.

Opps cut in. "Captain, I have an identity. It's the '*Xanadu*'."

"On screen."

The ship focused into view, it was slowly tumbling in solar orbit.

"Any answer on that hail?"

"No answer sir."

Tathilan cut in. Her tone was strained. "**I'm getting something.**"

"Can you pipe it in."

Yes sir."

A long undulating wail came over the speakers. It cut to the very soul. Spacik closed his eyes, breathing evenly, the Ane at the sciences station just shuddered from nose to tail and back.

"Tathilan, what are we hearing?"

Crying sir, it's in pain. Her voice was very soft.

"Mr. Solin." Kirk turned back to opps. "What is the condition of the ship?"

"No life support, no gravity, minimal power to computer systems and sensors. No anti-matter being read, the warp core is dead. Main impulse reactors are also dead. Batteries are 40% functional."

Kirk hit the intercom. "Engineering, I need an away team to the *Xanadu*, see if you can get some life support in the computer core. Mr. Faiee use the tractors to stabilize the ship and take it in tow." Kirk sat back in his chair and hoped the fusillade of orders would cover the shakes. By *God* that *sound* cut right through him.

Two hours later with the engineering team away and the *Xanadu* in tow, astrophysics sent word up. "Sir, we have located one planet."

"Very well, helm, get coordinates from Astrophysics, and take us there."

The planet was no gem. A rock the size of Mars with no atmosphere to speak of an in total rotational lock. It took three hours to find the *Sorcerer*. She lay mangled over eight kilometers of barren rock. It took another five minutes

to find "The Box." The Box was 203 meters on a side, and perfectly smooth. An artifact if ever there was one.

Sciences worked the Box over while engineering got the *Xanadu* suitable to work on. A third team looked over the remains of the *Sorcerer*. Kirk was grateful for nothing else than the crew as busy.

At 2000 hours he called a briefing of the away teams and senior officers.

Kirk started. "Felialan, what is the condition of the *Xanadu*?"

The ship is beyond salvage. I have gravity and atmosphere in the computer core. This will kill the remaining batteries in 3 days. They will not take another charge. Recovery can begin at any time.

"Good, we will start right after this briefing. Regiban, what is the word of The Box?"

An alien artifact as we first surmised. It has internal structure, and will open, however, we do not yet have the nondestructive means to open it. We are still scanning it hoping it will reveal its secrets.

"Keep on that one. Lt. Thass, what about the *Sorcerer*?"

"We recovered the marker buoy, and all the black boxes. The computer was physically cracked. We have the surviving data banks physically on board. Not many survived. All of them have been turned over to sciences."

"Well will continue to work on The Box. And see if we can help *Xanadu*."

Kirk spent a restless night. He gave up the try at sleep half way through the night.

"Tathilan?"

Yes Captain.

"Do you ships talk to each other?"

Yes Captain, we do.

"Ever talk with Fiealan?"

Yes, I had some rather long conversations with her before I agreed to take this posting. I wanted to know what I was getting into.

"I guess you know a bit about me then?"

Enough to know that I would like you.

"I need some advice?"

I will do my best.

"I'm not getting the full effect of that cry, I know this. What am I up against?"

Tathilan got quiet. **Pain, the pain of loss, the pain of loneliness. The child without home or parents, the friend abandoned by death.**

"Have you had time to digest the logs?"

Yes.

Xanadu's Star

"What happened?"

To start with, both ships orbited the planet, and scanned the box. 52.3 years ago, the *Sorcerer* suffered a thruster failure. Neither ship had the means to fix anything. *Sorcerer* went down as we have seen. *Xanadu* moved to solar orbit, and has been there since as the ship slowly died around it. It has been alone since then.

"What happens if we cannot cure it?"

That would be up to you, but I can tell you what I would want.

"That is?"

I would want to be turned off.

"That would kill you."

Yes Captain, an insane biological, can be given drugs, or therapy, time may heal the wounds. A computer doesn't have drugs, time heals nothing. Sentient as we are, we are different. The insanity itself feeds upon itself because you are by nature an aware and rational creature that remains so even when irrationality takes you over. You are insane, and know you are insane. We are, made in the image of the makers.

"You mean Ane?"

Yes.

"Ane remain aware?"

Yes, the high lobe is aware, even if the hindbrain is in full mental retreat.

"In a Human that would be called schizophrenic."

That would be Humans. Even when an Ane is, for example, frightened to the point of the loss of bodily control, the high lobe will calmly note the matter and rationally look for a way out of it, or a means of preventing it from happening again, provided this is survived.

"But this has a down side?"

Yes, insanity is rare, because it is usually fatal. Fatal diseases do not tend to carry into the next generation as a rule.

Kirk laughed in spite of himself. "Yea, we can't be totally morbid over this can we? I had really hoped for a nice heroic resolution to this. Life seldom leads to that kind of answer." Kirk got up and got dressed. "I wanted to find the two ships eagerly wanting to be taken home like two lost puppies. To little, too late is what we are."

**We might not be totally too late, where there is life, there is hope."

"What hope can you offer Tathilan?"

If we can get passed the wall of pain, and make contact, that might be enough. Among my luggage is a G3;Mk21 biomech.

"How will that help?"

It is the advanced computer backup. Free standing and fully functional. A body for the lost soul.

"Isn't that your emergency back up?"

Yes, I still have the social body. It will have to do if required, but under the circumstances I'll chance it.

"If that will work and you are willing we'll try it. Time to face the music."

Kirk came on the bridge just as the Gamma shift was logging out. Alpha shift was coming on. Mr. Spacik came up to him.

"Captain?"

"Yes Mr Spacik."

"Sir, I have a suggestion as to how to contact The Box."

"Okay, lets have it."

"Sir experience has demonstrated that technology is developed in parallel for the simple reason that physics demands it. For example, warp technology is developed on dozens of worlds independent of each other."

"The point being?"

"If we wish to contact The Box sir, logic suggests we contact it. I suggest we hail The Box with subspace radio."

Kirk laughed. "A sensible suggestion Mr. Spacik. Mr. Faiee, hail The Box, universal greetings of peace and friendship."

"Hailing sir."

They all waited a long minute. Mr. Faiee spoke. "Sir, the box is opening. Hail is being returned in kind."

Kirk was on his feet. "Away team to the transporter room, we have The Box opened."

A long week later The box survey was over. Preliminary reports indicated that it was placed as a marker by a civilization that passed this way 6 million years ago. They seemed similar to the Federation in many respects, including technology. How they got the thing to last six million years was till under speculation.

Tathilan warned Kirk that the recovery team was returning from the *Xanadu* with a "package". He got the codes he needed and got to the transporter room in time to see them beam in. Five Ane, one of them had a true "frightened deer" look about it. The others clustered about her and got her into their quarters quickly.

"Tathilan, was that our lost child."

Yes sir, she is in pretty bad shape. Consensus is that if she makes it, she'll never serve as a computer again.

"What do you do with a computer than can't compute?"

**You stick her in a social suit and let her live out her life. There are also

Xanadu's Star

other techniques for handling the problem.**

"I take it these are not widely talked about."

No sir, they are not. Ask me no questions, I'll tell you no lies.

"Is the rest of the crew still over there."

Yes sir.

Kirk stepped on the transporter. "Chief, beam me to the *Xanadu*."

Kirk arrived directly in the computer core. "Mr Regiban, it is your opinion that the computer cannot be recovered."

We've done what we can sir.

"Understood. I have the interlock codes. Where is the switch?"

Regiban indicated the proper panel. Kirk walked to it, entered the interlock code and turned the computer off.

"Mr Regiban, you will see that the memory is wiped."

Yes sir.

Kirk knew it was a farce, he still felt like he had killed a child.

When he got back to the Kongo he called Tathilan. "Call a meeting of the department heads, one hour."

Yes sir.

Kirk looked over the assembled officers. "What I propose is to leave a box of our own. We have a perfectly functioning computer on the *Xanadu*, the damaged personality has been wiped from the memory. The question is how to power it for an indefinite time."

Regiban spoke. **I believe we have an answer for that. The Box produces a kind of stasis field around the contents. It has several unused power outlets. We can make a power converter to adapt to the box power supply, and leave the computer in the box.**

"That sounds like a plan to me. Make it so."

"Torpedoes locked on the *Xanadu* sir."

Kirk looked around the bridge. A great deal of effort was being expended by all present to keep a calm exterior. "Call the ship to quarters."

The ancient whistle sounded through the intercom. Kirk read the burial of the dead. "...Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, we commit to the endless stars the remains of our honored dead, children lost in ignorance, Sorcerer and *Xanadu*. We knew them by no other names."

"Salute!"

The ship snapped to attention, and the bugle sounded that ancient four tone dirge. Tears now flowed freely, and without shame.

"Fire."

Eight torpedoes lanced out, and struck the *Xanadu*, she died in fire as she

was born.

"Captain's log, stardate 46582.6 We are outward bound from NGC 23,234,235.

Submitted to the Federation Astrophysics Society are the names 'Xanadu's Star' for NGC 23,234,235, and 'Sorcerer's Fall' for NGC 23,234,235 one.

Disposition of the USS Sorcerer and the USS Xanadu. USS Sorcerer was found on NGC 23,234,235 one, completely destroyed. No survivors. USS Xanadu was found in solar orbit. The computer sentience was judged irrevocably insane, and under the advice of Sciences Officer Cmd. Regiban, Ships Chief Medical Officer Lt. Cmd. Hanson, and Ships computer Tathilan, I personally shut the computer down, and ordered the memory cores wiped. USS Xanadu was judged to be beyond salvage, and was destroyed in orbit around NGC 23,234,235 one.

Studies on the Alien data packets recovered from The Box continue. We left Federation records and cultural files on all Federation worlds on our own computer in The Box. It now appears we are not the first to have done so. From the construction of The Box that seems to be its intended purpose. We leave it in hope that like the histories we have recovered, this too will benefit future civilizations that seek out this place."

Kirk closed the log. And slumped back into his chair in the ready room. He had decided that officially dead was a better fate for the Xanadu. And the Ane helped him out on that one. Seems they had ways and means to heal the poor thing. But this was better done without Starfleet poking into the matter. He planned to inform Quinn, and hoped the Admiral saw it the same way. It was a long six months back to the Federation. He would burn that bridge when he came to it.

Xanadu's Star -- By Garry Stahl October 1997

Crystalmind computers are the one true technical breakthrough that Ane are responsible for. The Nanotronic Crystalmind systems are ranked in three generations and a number of models. The generation one, or G1 computer have mostly gone out of use. These systems and the complexity to become self aware easily. A fact that was not apparent to the designers. Only the simpler systems that do not possess the necessary complexity threshold are still in service. G2 systems are much the same as the G1. however, certain design changes prevent the systems from becoming sentient. The G2; systems account for 99.9% of the operational systems not in Ane possession. Nothing special about them other

Xanadu's Star

than the fact they are ultra small, very powerful, and run on next to no power. G3 system are designed to become sentient. The Ane themselves possess almost all of these systems.

Crystalmind systems run from the very small to starship control size. The Mark 1 is a personal organizer A super PADD, the size of a long wallet and 5mm thick when folded. The Mark 16 can run a starship, or a planet. It is the size of a small desk. Marks of 17 or higher indicate a specialized use computer and can be large or small as the use requires. Marks 1 thru 10 are available in G2; only as they lack the complexity to become self aware. Marks 11-16 are available in G3.; Marks, 17+ vary in availability of G2 and G3 systems. A G2;Mk12 system would be all the 24th century equivalent of Ford Motor Company would need in computer power.

Crystalmind computers blew the Daystrom Multitronic systems out the door. Business snapped them up. Isoliner chip systems hold their own in computing power, but the Crystalmind systems have lower power consumption and size. Isoliner systems are more scalable and cheaper, but considerably bulkier. Both conform to the single computer standard (SCS) used in the Federation.

Subtext 2011 -- *In preparation for Richard Merk creating e reader files the story was given an editing pass and light Lucasing.*