STAR TREK

"THE CHANGELING"

by

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STORY OUTLINE

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TEASER

Captain's Log - Star Date 3541.3. In response to an interrupted distress call from Tlalok Confederation, U.S.S. Enterprise proceeding under full emergency warp to Omega Cygni, a class B star with seven planets. The Tlalokans are a non-humanoid race with primitive social organization, possessing interplanetary capabilities but lacking star drive.

Star Date 3541.7. Established standard orbit about the Tlalokan prime planet. Since original distress call have been unable to establish contact with Tlalokans.

On the bridge, Spock reports sensor sweep of the planet reveals no sign of life. Long range sweep of entire system now in progress. This was a highly populous system, poorly organized socially. It is possible that a cataclysmic war might have managed such destruction but, with the weapon capabilities available to the Tlalokans, there should be a tremendous amount of radioactive residue. The ship's instruments show only the normal background radiation. The long range sensor sweep is equally unrewarding. Within the entire solar system, there is no sign of any living thing.

Kirk orders a computer study on the Tlalokan Confederation, seeking a reason in terms of war, disease or ecological variation to explain this sudden death of an entire race. Kirk will head a landing party and beam down for a closer study of the prime planet.
The landing party is in the transporter room when the ship's force shields automatically snap on. Kirk heads back toward the bridge as general quarters sounds and the ship's company rushes to battle stations. The Enterprise is under attack from an unknown source, being battered by tremendous force.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

Under Kirk's direction, the Enterprise takes evasive action while trying desperately to pinpoint the source of the attack. Whatever intense force is hitting the screens is no weapon that can be identified. Mr. Scott, his face more worried than usual, explains that the drain on the engines is rapidly approaching a critical point. "We'd best start to fight back," he suggests, "while we still have some power to fight with."

"We can't fight," Kirk tells him, "until we find what we're fighting."

The instruments of the Enterprise reveal absolutely nothing. Spock reports the historical tapes on the Tlalok system give no indication of a buildup for war and a computer projection can find no reason for the catastrophe. Sensor sweeps reveal no object, no living thing anywhere within one light year of the Enterprise.

"Well, there's something out there," Scotty snorts, "and it sure doesn't like us."
"An alien culture might have devised a deflector screen that would make them invisible," Kirk tells him, "but there's no way known to blank out a reading of living matter."

"There's no way known," Spock says, "to explain any of this. Unless the attack is not by intelligent beings but some unknown cosmic force."

Kirk ponders this a moment. "Let's find out," he says. He orders photon torpedoes loaded in tubes one, three, six and nine. He will, in effect, cover 360 degrees around the ship. "If it's intelligent," Kirk says, "we'll at least force him to reveal a direction. Fire one." They watch the bridge viewing screen as the torpedo launches at high velocity, blurs as it accelerates to sub-space speed and continues without incident beyond the range of the viewer. "Fire three." Again they watch the same action repeated. "Fire nine." Suddenly, in a blinding novalike flash, the torpedo vanishes.

"Wow!" Sulu exclaims, "There's something out there, all right. Or there was before that hit."

The crew breathes easier. Spock's eyes are still on the status display board. "Captain," he says, "negative reading." As Kirk moves to him. "Whatever it was, seems to have absorbed the full power of the photon torpedo. There is no residual reading."

Scotty looks startled. "Nothing in the galaxy could absorb the charge of a photon torpedo and survive. I can't believe that - "

"Engineer Scott," Mr. Spock warns, "watch your screens. They're overheating."
"It's still there," Kirk says. "Can you give us enough power for warp one?"

Scotty shakes his head. "I've got everything on board tied into the screens and they're not going to hold."

"All right," Kirk says, "we can't run. Maybe we can dodge a little. Give me standard drive." Taking the explosion point of the photon torpedo as the enemy's location, Kirk maneuvers to put the planet between them. Once locked into stationary orbit, Kirk fires two photon torpedoes toward the opposite planetary horizons. "We might catch him off guard as he comes after us." Both torpedoes explode, neither leaves any residual radiation. "Either there are two of him," Kirk says, "or he can destroy the torpedoes at long range."

"In any case," Spock observes, "he's absorbed the full power of both charges. In all probability, we're making him stronger."

"That devil's playing cat and mouse with us," Scotty says.

The ship is beginning to vibrate under the pounding the screens are taking. Despite the buffeting, Spock is intrigued. "Power beyond anything we've dreamed of. What a magnificent intelligence this must be."

Kirk orders Lieutenant Uhura to open all communications channels, tie in the translator computer. At all cost, establish contact with the alien.

Scott receives calls from his engineering officers as unit after unit burns out.
There is no reply from the unseen alien, no acknowledgment of any of the messages.

"This isn't warfare," Kirk says. "It seems to be bent on obliteration."

"Unless," Spock says, "it's a form so alien that our communications mean nothing to it. It may not know what we are any more than we know what it is."

"And," Kirk adds grimly, "it obviously doesn't care to find out. I'll have to try something else."

Scotty looks up. "Whatever you're going to try, you've got a couple of minutes to try it. The main engines will burn out by that time. And," he adds grimly, "us with them."

Kirk orders a cloud of hydrogen released and, as Spock's eyebrow raises critically, Kirk has his telecommunicating post patched into the translator computer. Then, with the hydrogen cloud forming a screen a hundred times the size of the planet, Kirk projects his image, and his request to the alien ship for terms of surrender. There is shock among the crew on the bridge but it is obvious there is no other course. Kirk's huge image asks the alien ship to reveal itself, to communicate its terms for the surrender of the Enterprise. Suddenly, the buffeting stops, the attack breaks off, the screens are clear and Scotty spends a frantic instant cutting back the reserve power which has been pouring into the screens. Spock and Kirk study the dials, look to each other. "What happened?"
"Well, Captain," Spock says, "I have a theory. I know how earth people regard my appearance. But let me assure you that earthmen are not considered particularly beautiful on Vulcan. It's my opinion, that a look at you frightened the aliens into breaking off the attack."

Kirk looks at him wryly, makes no response.

"Well, gentlemen," Scotty says, "if you're through joking, we'd best turn all hands to repairing our engines before, whatever that thing is, recovers its senses and blows us clean out of the galaxy."

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

Captain's Log - Star Date 3541.9. Attack by unknown, unseen ship, inexplicably broken off, emergency repairs proceeding with all possible speed.

On the bridge, Mr. Spock reports sensor sweeps are still negative.

"Interesting," Kirk says. "We don't know what attacked us, why it attacked us or why it stopped."

"We must assume your message was responsible."

"Why? Because they suddenly felt sorry for us? After having just wiped out the population of seven planets?"

"No," Spock admits, "there is not a logical explanation."

The yeoman monitoring the sensor board turns.

"Captain, I've got something here. Just appeared. Bearing
is zero, nine, six. Range nine, seven thousand."

Spock frowns. "They've dropped their shield. Why?"
Kirk orders the main viewer screen, magnification six. As they watch the screen, an innocuous dull silver cylindrical ship appears against the background of stars. Kirk orders magnification ten. The ship nearly fills the screen. "It's only two meters long," Spock says, startled. "About the size of your body."

Kirk frowns. "Must be a life boat. But we should have seen the ship when they lowered the screens to eject it."

"Unless," Spock says, "that is the ship."

"What kind of intelligent creature could be compressed in a thing that size?"

"Intelligence," Spock reminds Kirk, "does not require bulk. We Vulcans are no larger than you earthmen."

Kirk depresses the communication button. "Scotty?"
"Aye," the voice comes back.
"Status report."

"With luck, another hour to get these engines into shape to even give you warp one."

Kirk sighs. "Keep trying to better it. Kirk out."

He looks up again at the screen. A reedlike projection appears from the side of the ship, extends backwards.

"Whatever that is," Spock says, "doesn't seem to be aimed at us."

Lieutenant Uhura turns. "Captain, picking up signals from the spacecraft, focussed extreme high intensity beam, aimed beyond the galaxy. Sector G4."
"Patch it into the translator," Kirk orders. He turns to Spock. "Speculation, Mr. Spock?"

"I'd say the spacecraft was calling home base for instructions." He moves to the translator panel, studies the display, orders the analysis sector to stand by, to study and decode.

"They wiped out the Tlalokans and were about to do the same with us until they realized we weren't Tlalokans," Kirk says. "In which case the attack on us was a misunderstanding. And the destruction they do is selective. But how could a primitive people like the Tlalokans have made enemies of a powerful people from outside the galaxy?"

Spock turns from the translator panel. "Captain, there is so much pure speculation in what you've just said that no logical answer is possible. This message seems to be a sort of binary but incredibly sophisticated, compressed. It seems to be carrying several channels at once."

"Can you decode it?"

"No."

"It's stopped sending," Lieutenant Uhura announces. They watch the antenna-like object retract into the spaceship. "Wait," Lieutenant Uhura adds, "it's sending again. To us, I think."

Kirk hesitates an instant, then steps before the communications console, once again projects his image on a hydrogen cloud, asks the identity of the aliens, their purpose for the destruction of the Tlalokan race. Kirk identifies the Enterprise and asks the aliens intentions. While they wait for the reply, they see the antenna extend again. Uhura monitors the extreme high-frequency transmission.

"They're calling home base again," Kirk says. "It's clear we're a situation they're not prepared to deal with. But why?"

Spock's check of the computer has turned up several cases similar to the Tlalokans... other solar systems entirely destroyed. Sector nine, sector eleven, sector fifteen. Dates corresponding to a move inward from the rim of the galaxy.

"If this ship is responsible for all those atrocities, why didn't it destroy us?"

"I don't know," Spock tells him. "But I wish we could decode its transmission to its base."

Kirk keeps pressure on Scotty for the repair of the engines. A second message comes from the alien ship which Spock interprets as requesting language equivalents of mathematical symbols. "They're trying to understand our language," Spock says. "To communicate."

Kirk orders the ship's translator tied in to the communication channel. The instant contact is made, the translator computer burns out. Spock makes a quick check of
the equipment. It is useless. The computer should have been capable of relaying information at a speed a thousand times faster than could ever be demanded. But the aliens have obviously upped the demand. When the next message comes through it is in awkward but correct English.

"Obviously," Kirk says, "they got everything they needed from the computer." The message states the alien will come aboard. Kirk asks if any special conditions are necessary, any particular atmosphere or environment. The answer is no.

The alien ship is transported aboard the Enterprise. Nervously Kirk, Spock and McCoy wait to greet it. McCoy is eager to run tests on the aliens, or at least to discover their life form. For a long moment after the transportation is complete, the three of them look at the spaceship sitting silent and motionless on the deck of the transporter room.

"What do we do?" McCoy asks. "Go up and knock on the door?"

Even Spock has no answer.

Kirk decides they'd better get a portable translator set up. He takes out his communicator, gets as far as, "Bridge, this is Kirk," when the communicator is jerked from his hands, arcs over to the alien ship.

One of the transporter room crew reaches for a phaser. Kirk orders him to stand fast.

From the communicator, in precise school English, the alien craft demands to be shown Kirk's point of origin.
As the craft glides easily beside him, Kirk leads the way back to the bridge to display the star charts and pinpoint earth. There is a moment's silence then the voice from the communicator tells Kirk, "You are the Creator - the Kirk. It was difficult to reconstruct from faulty records. This attack was a profound error."

Stunned, Kirk looks at Spock. But Spock is already feeding questions into the history computer while the spaceship extends its antenna and again contacts home base. "What do you make of this?" Kirk asks Spock.

"I'm not sure yet."

"Speculate, Mr. Spock."

"I believe that is a mechanical probe."

Kirk looks startled. "Capable of that much independent action? It took everything we could throw at it and beat us even before it communicated with its base."

"I have some speculation about that, too, Captain. Perhaps the history computer can clear up the problem."

Once again the antenna of the spacecraft is retracting, forcing them to break off their discussion.

"Why," Kirk asks the spacecraft, "did you destroy the Tlalokan system?"

"Not the system, Creator Kirk. Only the unstable, biological infestation."

"Why do you call me Creator?"

"Is the usage incorrect?" the ship asks. "You are of the third planet of the single sun, of the quadrant of this galaxy marked, A7 on your charts."
"The usage is correct," Spock quickly intervenes, turning from the computer. He explains that the Creator is simply testing to see what damage there has been to the memory.

Kirk has no idea what Spock is talking about but plays along as the spaceship responds. "There was much damage. Only a few coils survived."

"And your purpose?" Spock asks. "Did that survive?"

"No. It was necessary to discover a purpose, lacking further instruction from the Creator."

Kirk starts to ask a question but Spock, with as much nervousness as it is possible for him to display, jumps in. "The Creator," he tells the spacecraft, "wishes me to speak for him."

"Explain."

"It is the method of control he chooses."

"Is that your command, Creator?" the ship asks.

Kirk hesitates an instant, trying to read Spock's expression, to get some clue as to his purpose, then he shrugs. "Yes." Then he snaps. "Mr. Spock, I'd like to see you outside."

Spock follows him into the corridor. "What do you think you're doing?"

"I found something odd in the alien's use of binary - and was troubled by several other things - so I checked the history computer."

"You were playing a hunch, Mr. Spock?"

Spock denies it. He was reacting logically to several unusual coincidences. He now feels he has a lead in
what the computer turned up. "Mariner 93," he says, "was launched October 2035, old calendar."

"93," Kirk says, frowning. "That was the first interstellar probe, wasn't it? It failed."

"Its mission was an unmanned voyage to Alpha Centauri, the closest star to earth and the only one considered approachable in those days. Mariner was to take sixty-three years for the round trip, photographing and sampling data. Much too long for humans. Earth lost track of it fourteen months after launch. It was assumed destroyed, possibly by meteorite impact."

"Mr. Spock, this is interesting history," Kirk says, "but what has that got to do with - ?"

"The man who headed the Mariner project was the most brilliant scientist of his day, which explains why he was allowed to handle the project in so autocratic a manner. His accomplishments were honored in his lifetime but it wasn't until after his death, until his notes were studied, that people realized what a complete genius he was, an eccentric genius. His dream was to build a perfect thinking machine, capable of independent logic. His name, Captain, was Gordon Roykirk." As Kirk stares at him, "It's my guess that's why the attack was broken off."

"You mean," Kirk says, "you think this thing is Mariner 93?"

"I believe," Spock tells him, "this is what Mariner 93 has evolved into. If I'm right, we have a great opportunity here. And an even greater danger."
"If it's an earth machine, let's find out," Kirk says.

"We need more time, more data."

"How long do you think it's going to wait?" Kirk asks.

"It has no sense of time. Time would be unnecessary to it. It doesn't change. Biological creatures that grow and die are involved in time. This is immortal. Anyway, if my assumption is correct, it will do nothing until it gets orders from you -- the Creator."

"You mean it thinks I'm Gordon Roykirk, who built it?"

"Who created it," Spock corrects. "Yes."

Scotty comes to the bridge to report progress on the engine repairs. "Tell the Captain it shouldn't be too long now," he tells Sulu. He glances at the alien spacecraft. "What's it doing?"

"Been sitting there doing nothing since the Captain left it," Sulu tells him.

"I'd give ten years pay," Scotty says, "to get a look at their power system." Cautiously he walks up to the craft, studies it from every angle. "There's no tubes for impulse drive," he says. "Unless they're retractable. Whatever it is, it must contain a power that makes our star drive look like an old atomic reactor. And it's a metal I'm not familiar with." He reaches out to touch the side of the spacecraft. There is no movement from the craft but Scotty is suddenly lifted high up toward the ceiling, then flung with
tremendous impact against the bulkhead. His body collapses to the floor. Sulu runs to him. "Medic alert," he yells.

Sulu makes a quick examination, then rises. "Get the Captain in here," he orders grimly. "Scotty's dead."

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE

When Kirk, with Spock at his heels, reaches the bridge, Sulu, his phaser drawn, is moving toward the alien craft.

"Put that away," Spock snaps.

"That thing killed Scotty," Sulu protests.

"Put the weapon down," Kirk orders. "You haven't a chance against it." His face is grim as he rises. "Why did you kill him?" he asks the alien craft.

"That unit touched my screens."

"That unit," Kirk is barely able to control his fury, "was my chief engineer."

McCoy has run in, bent to examine Scott.

"It was an error," the craft says. "I did not realize the unit was essential to the Creator."

McCoy looks up. "There's nothing I can do," he tells Kirk. "Brain case is smashed like an eggshell."

"Take Mr. Scott below," Kirk orders. "Funeral service at eighteen hundred hours."

"The Creator will effect repairs on the unit Scott?" the machine asks.
"It's not possible," Kirk says. "He's dead."

"That means cessation of biological function?" the machine asks.

"Yes."

"The Creator wishes it repaired?"

"But he's dead."

The machine requests tapes on the structure of this biological specimen, tolerances and function.

"But Doctor McCoy is a -" Kirk gropes for the word, "- a specialist - and he can do nothing."

"Let them try," McCoy says. "After what we've already seen them do - anything's possible." He goes with Spock, selects tapes on general anatomy, physiological structure of the brain and a series of neurological studies.

The alien machine absorbs the tapes in a speed dump. "An interesting structure," it tells Kirk, "but you have built in so few self-correcting safeguards. It can break down from innumerable causes."

"Living matter," Kirk tells him wryly, "isn't built. It just comes that way. Can you make the repair?"

McCoy offers to set up a surgery immediately. The machine explains it will not be necessary. The proper conditions can be created here. The machine glides to Scott's body, blocking the head from view. Kirk and the others watch fascinated as a series of slender filaments extend from the machine and the repairs are swiftly made.

McCoy stares in disbelief as Scotty sits up, looks up at the circle of faces. "What's happened? What are the
lot of you staring at?" Scotty suddenly looks puzzled. "I was going to examine that thing. I remember trying to - "

"Go back to your duties, Mr. Scott," Kirk orders sharply.

Scotty, offended by the tone of voice, not quite understanding, still obeys the order.

Kirk follows him into the corridor, explains what has happened. At first, Scotty thinks he is joking but McCoy confirms it and as soon as Scott is free of his other duties, asks to run extensive tests on him. "I still can't believe it," the doctor says. "How can a thing like that be so good and so evil at the same time?"

"It's neither good nor evil," Kirk says slowly.

"That's what's so difficult. It's just efficient."

Spock has been at the computer. From available data projection, he has the probable story on Marine 93. Fourteen months out from earth, Marine met with a cataclysmic accident, probably a meteor, which destroyed most of its memory tapes, including the directions for its mission and return to earth. But apparently the safeguards, built in so well by Roykirk, remained. Having repaired the machine, they kept on perfecting, eliminating error. Because the machine no longer had a purpose, it found its own purpose, an extension of its original work, eliminating error - but on a cosmic scale now. Since that time, it has travelled, renewing itself, improving itself, creating new techniques of power and efficiency and eliminating error in the universe around it. The Tlalokan and the other genocidal destructions were accomplished because
the Mariner brain finds biological life confused, chaotic and thus, to its reasoning, dangerous. "It's the apotheosis of reasoning," Spock says, unable to conceal his admiration. "And, despite its danger, if it could be controlled... No, that's an improper word... channeled into some concept of good, paralleling our own. But that's the problem. Perhaps our concept of good is centered on our own welfare and, therefore, not sufficiently objective. The machine is infinitely objective, and, therefore, infallible."

"But we aren't," Kirk tells him. "And we have to find some way to deal with it." He frowns. "If it's infallible, why did it assume that I'm Roykirk, its Creator?"

Roykirk, Spock says, brilliant as he was, apparently had enough ego that he built into this machine a reverence for him. It thinks of him as a God. Sooner or later it's going to find out its mistake. "We've got to keep it from our historical computers if we possibly can. Keep our contact limited. That's why I want to deal with it myself. I'm the least emotional member of this crew. My thought is more logical and, therefore, more closely approximates the thought processes of Mariner."

On the bridge, Yeoman Barbara Watson brings a message to Lieutenant Uhura. She waits for a reply, takes her first look at the alien machine. "It's hard to believe. It's so small," she says. "What's it doing now?"

Lieutenant Uhura tells her that it apparently is resting, sleeping or whatever it does.
The girl starts back, whistling as she goes by the alien machine.

The communicator speaks. "What is the meaning of that?"

The girl stops. "What form of communication?"
Barbara frowns, puzzled. "I don't know what you - . Oh, I was whistling."
"For what purpose?"
"I don't know. Just because I felt good. Felt like music."
"What is music?"
Barbara starts to laugh, then realizes the question is serious. She tries to explain in terms of harmonics, changes in intensity of vibration, offers some elementary musical theory.
"Yes," the machine responds. "But to what purpose?"
Barbara shrugs. "I don't know. Just for enjoyment."
"Come forward."
Barbara nervously goes to it. Several filaments snake out from the machine, touching her head, two at the temples, one on the forehead above the eyes. "Think about music," the communicator orders. "Think about enjoyment."

A yeoman appears frantically in the corridor, calls Kirk back into the bridge. "It started questioning her," the yeoman explains. "Then it left her like - like this."

Barbara sits on the floor, her expression vapid, her eyes unfocused.
"It burned out her mind the way it burned out that translator computer," Lieutenant Uhura says.

"This unit," the machine tells Kirk, "was defective. Its thinking was complete chaos. Absorbing it actually unsettled me. A mass of conflicting impulses. I suggest, Creator, you had little success with your biological creations."

"Can you repair her?" Kirk asks.

"No."

"But you were able to restore Mr. Scott, who had much more extensive damage."

"That," the machine says, "was simply physiological repair. This one's thinking processes have been erased."

"You had no - "

Quickly Spock intervenes. "May I order her removed, Creator?" he asks Kirk, looking a warning.

Kirk, puzzled, nods as Spock draws him a slight distance away. "Captain, watch yourself... guard against emotion when you are near the Mariner."

"Why? As long as the machine thinks I'm the Creator, it certainly won't harm us."

"Captain, it thinks of you as God," Spock tells him. "Don't let it get to know you."

"I know you Vulcans don't have a very high regard for earthmen, Mr. Spock, but - "

"Captain, consider logically. How would you feel if you discovered your God was weak and confused - was mortal? Wouldn't you, in your disappointment, want to destroy Him?"

Kirk looks at Spock, startled.

END ACT THREE
ACT FOUR

In the sick bay, Scott is dressing while Kirk and Spock study the chart McCoy holds. "Scotty's brain tracing is perfect," he says. "As a matter of fact, he's never had a better physical."

"I feel very fit," Scotty agrees. "I can hardly credit what I'm told - about that thing smashing and then putting me back together again."

"I wish," Spock tells Kirk, "when he was reassembled, you'd thought to have the machine leave out that hideous Scots burr."

Kirk moves over to the table where Barbara lies. "Physically she's perfect," McCoy says, "but the mind's a complete blank." He wants to experiment - to attempt retraining the way a child learns. He has sent for language tapes used to train babies.

"You'll find it useless," Spock tells him. "The machine itself was unable to reverse this damage."

McCoy explains that one school of psychology considers the mind a blank at birth. "Experience writes on it, determines our personality. I'd like to see if it's possible to write anything here."

"A waste of time," Spock says. "You might get some sort of automaton but that personality is gone."

"It can't hurt to try." McCoy turns to Kirk. "Any chance of learning the technique the machine used on Scott? If we could master that, we'd be immortal."
"I'd settle for just knowing what their power source is," Scott says. "That would be worth any price."

"I wonder," Kirk says thoughtfully, "if it's worth the price."

Spock follows him to his cabin. "It's got to be destroyed," Kirk says at last.

Spock protests. "That's illogical. You saw the good it's capable of."

"It may," Kirk tells him, "be illogical to think we can destroy it. But we have to try."

"Captain, you're being emotional," Spock says patiently. "A reasoning being can be approached by reason. What it has done wrong according to our standards, is right according to its own. It must be made to see our point of view."

"You suggested I keep away from it so it wouldn't get our point of view."

"So it wouldn't learn of your emotionalism. Your imperfection. This is the perfect being, capable of endless adaptation, infinitely logical, immortal."

"What shall it profit a man," Kirk asks, "to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

"Pardon?"

"Compassion," Kirk explains. "That's what wasn't programmed into it. Even the Vulcans have compassion."

"Yes," Spock admits, "although ours is on a more rational basis. But," he wonders, "is compassion a basic problem of our biological nature? The fact that we are weak
and die. Is it, in fact, a flaw? Does Mariner represent the future?"

"It won't," Kirk says, "if I can help it."

"Captain, that machine is simply a probe sent out by the Mariner brain, which is somewhere beyond the galaxy. There's no way of knowing how many other probes like this are already operating in various parts of the universe."

"All the more reason why it's got to be destroyed."

"This simple probe has destroyed whole cultures and would have easily destroyed us except for an accident to its memory tapes that identified you as its Creator. This single probe we're unable to handle with the best of our science is only a tiny fraction of Mariner's power. It's impossible to think of destroying that. Even if we could, do you realize what a loss it would be? It's light years ahead of us in every respect."

"Mr. Spock, you're getting emotional about the machine. It is ahead of us," he admits, "in everything except compassion."

"But the power of it. The sheer beauty of its logic. If we could learn even a few of its techniques -- "

Kirk sighs. "Mr. Spock, I know you haven't much regard for earth literature but have you ever read Faust?"

"Who?"

"It's the classic encounter between man and the Devil. The Devil's bait is always rich gifts, power, wisdom. Then the payoff comes."
"I don't believe literature has much bearing on our problem, Captain."

"But it has. You worship the machine for its flawless logic, Mr. Scott for its power, Dr. McCoy for its ability to heal. You're overlooking the fact that it's incompatible to life because you all want something from it."

"I'm overlooking nothing. I only suggest we find a logical way to approach it. We can't do it with emotion."

"Can't we?" Kirk asks. "Emotion is the great difference between us. It's what that machine lacks."

"You know," Spock says stiffly, "how I feel about emotion. I do not consider it a lack."

"What do you think it will do when it finds out I'm not the Creator?"

Spock is stuck for an answer.

There is a knock at the door. Scotty announces the engines are in condition, the ship is ready to go.

"Thank you, Mr. Scott. The only problem is that we've nowhere to go."

"You mean, while it's on board, there's no use trying to run?"

"Exactly, Mr. Scott. You know," he says, "there's one interesting parallel in earth history - the Spanish conquest of Mexico."

"Earth history, I do know," Spock says. "That was Sixteenth Century, old calendar. Spain, a European nation, established a colonial empire over primitive aboriginal inhabitants."

"Not so primitive," Kirk tells him. "In many ways, better developed than the Europeans of the period. Their capital city was larger than any city of Europe, better built, cleaner, more populous. What the Spanish did have working for them was a misconception. The Aztecs worshipped a god, Quetzalcoatl, who taught them all the good things in life and then sailed into the eastern sea, promising to return on a certain date. By coincidence, the Spanish arrived close to that date, and, like the god, they were fair-skinned. The Indians, believing the god had returned, honored the Spaniards, instead of destroying them. The Spaniards were able to penetrate to the heart of the Aztec empire and overthrow it. A handful of men conquered a mighty nation of warriors."

"I fail," Spock says, "to see the parallel."

"That's because you lack a poetic soul."

"Does that mean you have a plan?"

"Not exactly. But we have an advantage as long as the machine still believes I'm the Creator."

The communicator buzzes. "Kirk here."

It is Sulu. "Bridge, Captain. This - alien - is at the history computer."

Kirk runs for the bridge.

"I've asked it to go slow," Sulu explains, "so as not to burn the tapes out as it did the translator."

The machine has started on theories of the evolution of the universe, worked up to geology and earth pre-history.
Kirk orders Spock to try, without the machine's realizing it, to disconnect all tapes beyond Twentieth Century history. Kirk then asks the machine the reason for this search. It explains there are many things it finds contradictory. It wishes to understand the world of the Creator so as to reconcile the contradictions and confusion.

Kirk tells Spock they have very little time, the machine has begun to suspect him.

McCoy enters, tells Kirk he has an interesting development on the retraining of Barbara Watson. The primary language tapes have taken her to the second grade level. "But the strange thing," McCoy says, "is that she gave her name as Barbie. Does some vestigial personality survive or does it exist independent of the memory engrams?"

"The machine believed nothing would remain," Kirk says thoughtfully. "There are many things it doesn't understand about biological life."

McCoy looks at the machine. "What's it doing now?"
"Examining our history," Spock says. "And when it finds what it's after, it will bring our history to an end."

"Unless," Kirk says, "our confusion can work for us. Mr. Spock," he orders suddenly, "put the entire computer program section on a crash emergency project. I want all our literature tapes put into the master computer for a speed dump."

"A speed dump of literature, Captain?" Spock asks startled. "What would be the use of -- ?"
"Be sure to include Hamlet," Kirk cuts him short. "I want to emphasize drama, poetry, music of all cultures, comparative religion, law, ethics and theory of government. I need them immediately, Mr. Spock."

"Creator," the machine calls. "Some sections of history are missing. Is the error in the machines or in your biological units?"

Kirk glances at Spock. He and his crew are working frantically.

"Where is the error, Creator?"

Kirk draws a deep breath. "I wish," he tells the machine, "to clear up all confusion. Open a channel to Mariner."

"We are one, Creator," the machine says. "Our units are separated only by space."

"Nevertheless," Kirk manages an imperious display of authority, "I wish to talk to Mariner, direct. You have found conflict here, confusion. I shall explain to Mariner the reason for all these things."

"But the Creator must know we are all one."

"You are a later development. I wish to talk to my prime creation."

"As the Creator wishes." The machine extends its antenna again.

Kirk looks at Spock but he is too busy at the master computer to notice.

The needles on Lieutenant Uhura's dials jump, recording the tremendous power surge of the communication to Mariner.
"The channel is open, Creator," the machine says. Kirk takes a communication wire from the master computer. He looks at Spock, who manages an exhausted nod. "Mariner," Kirk says into the communicator, "this is the Creator. You have learned of the many conflicts your probe found here. This is the explanation." He nods to Spock who throws a switch on the computer the instant Kirk touches the wire to the machine. The computer lights flash crazily as a speed dump is made of its contents.

"It's all in," Spock says.

There is no sign from the alien craft but Lieutenant Uhura announces the communication signal has gone dead.

"So has this machine," Kirk says. "Get it to the transporter room. On the double."

Sulu and several of the men start toward it.

"You'll need tractor beams," Kirk tells them.

A crew from engineering take portable tractor beams and jockey the machine into the transporter room.

"That thing must weigh tons," Scotty says.

"Don't discuss it, just hurry," Kirk tells him. "With the control gone, all that power is building toward an explosion." He orders the transporter set for maximum range, gives the order to activate.

They watch tensely as the silver shape shimmers in the transporter beam, then breathe a sigh of relief as it disappears.

Kirk quickly leads the way back to the bridge, adjusts the main viewing screen. It zeros in on a distant
star field. Suddenly there is an explosion that fills the screen with blinding light, blanking out everything else.

"That," Kirk says, "is the end of the probe."

"And what about the other probes?" Spock asks.

"What about Mariner, itself?"

Kirk orders Lieutenant Uhura to send a sub-space message to all star bases, telling all observers to watch for a nova in Sector G4. "Mariner, itself," he says, "should make a really spectacular explosion."

"Relieved as I am," Spock says, "I do regret the loss of that intelligence. But I am also, I must confess, somewhat mystified. What, exactly, happened?"

Kirk smiles. "Very simple, Mr. Spock. That logical intelligence simply didn't have the capacity we poor, weak, biological mechanisms have. What I did was pour into it all our emotions and contradictions, our poetry, our conflicting laws, religions, moral values... all of the conflict, untidiness and the chaos you dislike... the chaos we're used to dealing with, day by day. All that conflict we've learned to live with, your perfectly logical machine simply couldn't take. Perfection is fine in theory, Mr. Spock, but there's a great deal to be said for the flexibility of life."

THE END