

# **Star Trek: Perchance To Dream**

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Jim Kirk moaned in his sleep; he snorted and jerked, coming suddenly to misty wakefulness. He sighed, slightly disgusted, and slumped back against the pillows, now wide awake.

"What is it?" came a slurred, sleepy voice from the other side of the bed. "...wait...don't tell me: it's the dream again. Are you okay?" A reaching hand fumbled clumsily against his chest, and he chuckled.

"Yes," Kirk answered, but that was only half-true. This was getting scary, as were the dreams. They were growing not just in frequency, but also in intensity.

He'd been having them for over a month, now. "...sorry. But never mind, honey, just go back to sleep." He checked the glowing digital clock on the nightstand; 4:35 AM. "I'm on duty in about two hours, anyway. I'll just go in early. It wouldn't hurt the night shift for me to show up unannounced, for a change."

Kirk threw aside the blankets, got up and groped his way in the dark to the bathroom. He showered and donned his uniform, and in a little over thirty minutes was out the door into the thin light of a late-spring dawn, on his way to the station. Before leaving, he stopped and checked on the kids, Jimmy Jr., 9, and his older sister, Rebecca, 11. He gave each of them a light kiss on the forehead,

whispering, "love you", and pulled their blankets up. As he walked down the dim hallway to the door, his shadowy reflection was mirrored in the glass of his several framed degrees and certificates, and his graduation certificate from the Academy, arranged on the wall.

Police Captain James T. Kirk, 36, had been a member of the Riverside, Iowa police force for just under fifteen years. He was considered something of a wunderkind, having risen through the ranks with relative swiftness.

On the way in, he stopped at Bannerman's Hometown Bakery, having to wait a few minutes until they opened, and got three dozen fresh donuts, still warm. While he waited, he perused the news vidlinks; more food riots in Omaha; sixty-three dead; hundreds injured. Millions in property damages. They'd been waiting in line for hours in the chilly rain; the government cargo train had simply run out of food. He was actually surprised that such a negative story had made it into the news, at all; things like that were usually kept quiet in the official, World Government newsbytes.

Of course, such widespread destruction would be hard to conceal and the posted article had, typically for such stories, contained the words "malcontents" and "rabble rousers". He'd heard rumors that there had been equally-destructive riots in other parts of the Unified World, but rumors were all they were. Such news from other parts of the world was routinely squelched; everyone

knew that. It occurred to him that it was odd that Bannerman's never seemed to lack for much. The baker either knew, or was greasing, someone. Maybe both. Common practice in the world, today; such was the way of things.

Having read this blurb, rioting by hungry people, Kirk glanced with rueful guilt at the warm, fresh donuts, but slid them onto the passenger seat of his patrol hovercar, and drove on.

Montgomery Scott paused in his work--a complete overhaul of the freighter's hyperdrive motivator sublight systems--sagged with fatigue, and yawned. This was usually a two-man job, at least, but nothing he couldn't handle alone. He was tired, though, and that was strange; he loved this type of thing, and usually took to it with gusto.

However, those damned dreams were taking their toll. He'd been having them for more than a month, and they were coming almost every other night, now, and sometimes even when he napped. He was losing sleep regularly. Odd dreams, they were; people he'd never met, places he'd never been, but it all seemed so...familiar, somehow. He shook his head; back to work. The chief would be along in a bit to check his progress. They had a scheduled pickup in five days on Titan, and the captain

wanted everything running smoothly because this was a new client; a government-connected client. The whole crew had been repairing, painting, scrubbing and polishing for a week, now.

Putting on such airs was a waste of time, Scott considered; the ship was a freighter; it had been in good shape, and after the client was shown around and the contract was signed, things would go back to normal, anyway. Therefore, what did it matter what the ship looked like, so long as it got the job done? Their record showed they always did, and in good time. But, that was that.

He yawned again, loudly, and shrugged. He shook his head. The damned dreams. Maybe he'd see the ship's doctor for a sedative.

Leonard McCoy was preparing a deposition; he was due in court in three hours, and had to be ready, because this was a big one. If he got this one, he'd make partner in the prestigious Atlanta law firm; he'd been told that by the old man, himself. It'd been a long time coming. He was ready, he thought, and had all his ducks in a row.

He went through the documents again, just to make sure he had everything he needed, and anything he might need, close at hand. Judge Bandy was a hard old cuss. McCoy sifted through the papers, paused, and yawned, his jaw cracking. He rubbed his eyes.

The dreams; they were starting to interfere with his everyday affairs. This had to stop. He yawned again and checked a few more documents, then placed them in his briefcase. He was as ready as he was going to be. He rose and moved to the door to go get something to eat, but saw the sofa by the window, and stood for a moment in silent indecision. At length, he set the alarm clock on the end table, and lay down for a brief nap.

"...I can't explain it, Frank," Kirk said to the heavysset, moustached man across the desk, Frank Berger, the department psychologist. "They just keep coming; faces, things, places....some kind of...big spaceship. I've never even been to space. I just don't understand where they're coming from. There are a couple that are especially disturbing, but I have no idea why; one is about a vampire creature made of...some kind of fog, and another about a huge machine that looks like an elongated funnel, and eats...planets." He laughed a strange, high-pitched laugh, and shook his head.

"It's weird, and it's getting to me." He yawned cavernously. "See? I also keep getting this term...United Federation of Planets. And..." he paused, concentrating; "Star...Fleet....?" He shook his head. "I've never heard those terms in my life. What the hell could that mean?"

"Anything else?" Berger asked, trying to coax him

into...something. At least to get him to talk some of it out; maybe he'd stumble onto something, some key word or thought.

Kirk nodded; "Sometimes I dream about wars; frightening dreams, something about people with genetic modifications....and a nuclear war; hundreds of millions dead. I know in the dream, somehow, that both were a long time ago. There's never been a nuclear war; or a war over genetics. What can it all mean?"

Berger cocked his head and shrugged; "Well Jim, I mean, come on; dreams don't necessarily 'mean' anything; some say they're your subconscious mind's way of processing the day's events, emotions and thoughts, by relaxing and watching a movie. They can be the manifestation of any number of things; stress, interpersonal relationship issues, unhappiness with aspects of your personal life. It could be literally anything. How's things on the job? At home?"

Kirk rose and moved around the office, hands in his pockets.

"Fine;" he said, "...well, nothing unusual; Jimmy's been having some problems in school; my mother's getting on in years, and has been a little sick, but that's it."

Berger shook his head sympathetically, but said, "Well, I really don't know what to tell you, Jim. If you have nothing to talk about to get it out, whatever 'it' may be, then there's not much we can do here. Tell you what;

I'll call your doctor for you, and have him prescribe you something to help you sleep. How's that?"

Kirk nodded, but was reluctant, and troubled. He'd never had to take medications to get a good night's sleep, and didn't want to start, but he was getting desperate. "I wasn't going to mention this, but what the hell...I haven't told Bonnie about this, but one dream in particular is very disturbing and I have it a lot." He bit his lip, and continued, "It's about a woman named Edith; she's very beautiful. In the dream, I'm...I'm very much in love with her, but...I know it can't last. She's...important, somehow." He shrugged. "I hear, but don't see, her get run over by a.." he squinted, and shook his head a bit; "..an old vehicle of some kind....a truck. It was long, long ago;" he shook his head; "...during the Great Depression. I'm not able to stop it; in fact, I stop someone from stopping it." He grinned sadly, and shook his head again.

Berger looked cockeyed at him; "The Great Depression? You mean like, in the 1930s Great Depression? The collapse of capitalist ideology?"

"Exactly." Kirk again shook his head and shrugged, helplessly.

He ran a hand distractedly over several antique books on the shelf; he and Berger shared a common interest as bibliophiles. His eyes suddenly widened, and he stopped on one book, in particular. He jerked it out, and gazed intently at the cover.

"What is it?" Berger asked.

Kirk held it up, cover toward the psychologist. "Baby and Child Care", he said slowly, clearly mystified, "..by Dr. Benjamin L.....Spock." He smiled triumphantly. "Frank, that's one of the names in my dream! Spock!" He waved his hand jerkily, trying to clear his thoughts.

Berger's face and brow drew into a dismissive scowl. "Jim, that man's been dead for almost three hundred years..." he said.

"Not the author, Frank," he said gruffly, "...some other...person. The name; Spock." He snapped his fingers lightly and repeatedly, staring away, his waking mind trying to grasp the tenuous threads of his dreams, disturbingly vivid as they were. "Tall...greenish-yellow skin tone...odd hairstyle, pointed ears...angled eyebrows. Weird-looking guy."

"Sounds like it," Berger said cautiously, brow rising slightly, and subtly scribbled something in the file open on his lap. Kirk's lips thinned visibly as he watched.

Spock.....

McCoy sat dejectedly at the bar and sipped his bourbon. He'd been so exhausted, that he'd slept through the alarm, and had missed his court appearance. In turn, he had also lost his case and his chance at a partnership, if not

his job itself. That was still a possibility, too.

As he sat there, he considered the damned dreams; how vibrant, and disturbing, they were. Details that he felt he knew, somehow, but had never experienced. A hairy monster with suckers on its huge, elongated fingers; something called....cordrazine? Who was 'Jim'? The only Jim he knew was a fellow attorney, but he knew, somehow, that it wasn't him.

He downed the last of the bourbon, set the glass to the worn oak bar, and motioned for another. The bartender complied.

He shook his head and sipped his drink again. What were they? What did they mean?

With no answers at hand, he downed his drink, left and headed for home, taking a dingy yellow Hovercab.

Three nights later, as all three men slept, each unaware of the other, the dreams began again. But this one was different; it was exactly the same for all of them. This dream consisted of instructions; of a vision of another planet: ashy, desolate, eternally twilit. An image of an object which was familiar and yet not; a large object they somehow knew was the originator of their torments: a broad, roundish stone formation, open in the middle. It was surrounded by tumbled ruins, eroded by time and by an

endless, forlorn wind, and which stretched to the horizon. An ancient city, a world, lost when the system's sun swelled, aeons ago.

It was the first time they all knew, for definite fact, two other names. For McCoy, Kirk and Scott; for Scott, Kirk and McCoy; for Kirk, McCoy and Scott. Recognizable faces. And a clear location: San Francisco. They were to meet each other there; a café on a pier; the compulsion now became undeniable. And they were left with a name, as well, for their tormentor: it was called the Guardian of Forever.

McCoy and Scott had it easier; neither was married. Kirk's path wasn't so easy. He considered levelling with his wife, and telling her exactly what was going on, but then, she'd probably think he was insane and have him committed. He hated to lie to her, but what else could he do? He planted some plausible alibis, at home and around the station; a moderately unnecessary trip to San Francisco, for a law enforcement seminar he'd heard about. No one thought anything of it, and that was good.

Two and a half weeks later, Kirk stepped onto the pier about which he'd dreamed several times, since. He stood for a few moments, looking out at the fog-shrouded Bay, and the blue Pacific, beyond, listening to the eternal slosh and crash of waves against the shore.

Obtaining permission from the government to travel more than 50 miles from one's home, and especially for more than a few hours or a day, required extensive red tape; veritable reams of paperwork for each person involved. Therefore, most people generally did not travel much, and so he'd never seen the ocean with his own eyes...and it was beautiful, indeed.

He moved casually to a small table outside a restaurant that closely resembled the one about which he'd dreamed. It wasn't really a warm day, overcast and breezy, and so the place wasn't crowded. He ordered a cup of coffee, and glanced around, noticing two men at another table, watching him just as unobtrusively. The faces, he saw, were the ones from his dreams. He nodded subtly; they nodded back. He estimated that they were both probably somewhere in their mid-to-late 40s.

This was crazy; why in the world was he here?

Because, he knew, the dreams were insistent; if he hadn't obeyed, he likely would have gone crazy. For real.

When the waiter brought his coffee, he nodded in thanks, took the cup and sauntered over to their table.

"McCoy and Scott, I presume?" he asked quietly, behind the rim of his cup. You never knew who was listening. Or watching.

"Aye," one of them replied in a thick Scottish brogue. "I'm Scott; this is McCoy; you're Kirk?"

Kirk nodded. "That's right; we're here because of the dreams?" he asked, even more quietly. This conversation was likely to get even crazier in a very few minutes, and he of course wanted to keep it between them. He hoped they felt similarly.

"Aye," said Scott, firmly.

"Yes," said McCoy. "Not exactly 'pleasant dreams' are they?" he added, gruffly.

"Not at all;" Kirk agreed, still not quite believing this was happening.

McCoy leaned forward; "Do you know why we're having these dreams?" he asked pointedly, his voice a harsh whisper.

"No idea;" he motioned subtly for McCoy to keep it down.

Scott smirked; "Don' worry about anyone listenin' in. He pulled aside a newspaper and indicated a small device, blinking and beeping softly. It was a "jammer"; any and all listening or recording devices within 100 meters were useless while it was in operation. Such devices, like bribery, were common, if illegal by government decree, in the modern era. Kirk looked at the small electronic device and nodded, impressed. Still, they had to be cautious. "I was hoping for some answers, myself. Do either of you recognize the name 'Spock'?" he asked, hopefully.

Both men indicated in the affirmative; the

description was generally the same, from all three. As the conversation progressed and notes were compared, it was clear that, despite the lack of overt answers, it was a relief for them just to discover that they weren't mad.

After a while, Kirk crossed his legs, folded his hands, and peered out at the roiling, wind-tossed San Francisco Bay; "So," he said to the others, "what do we do now? If the dreams are to be believed, and it seems that they are, our next step would appear to be...off-world. Way, way off-world."

The others said nothing.

"Do either of you have access to a spaceship?" he asked.

Scott nodded firmly. "Aye; I do," he said, "...bu' bein' a policeman, I seriously doubt ye're gonna like what comes next." He smiled at the Iowan police captain.

"Well," McCoy, sitting back in his chair, offered with a long-suffering joviality; "I may or may not have lost my job at the firm, but I'm still a lawyer; I'll be happy to defend you if he arrests you."

"Ye'd be in the pokey, right along with me," Scott smiled broadly.

Kirk grinned; "I think, in this case, I could be inclined to look the other way."

Over the next few days, Scott worked his wiles with several less-than reputable figures and connections

around the bustling San Francisco spaceport. After some wheeling and dealing, he informed Kirk and McCoy that he'd obtained the illicit use of an older, yet solidly-built, freighter that had belonged to a smuggler who plied the colonies out in the system. He'd been caught a few months back, and by now probably executed, by government agents. The ship was in drydock at the port, and so far, no one was interested in it. It was still considered "too hot".

Kirk called Bonnie every night, and made up stories about seminars and talks he'd attended, and had absolutely no idea how long he could keep it up. He didn't like lying to his wife, at all, but what else could he do? Also, if this pursued its apparently logical course, he wouldn't be going home any time soon, either.

There was the ship, relegated to one of the older docking bays. It was deceptively junky-looking; very unimpressive. Scott good-naturedly assured them that this decrepit appearance was quite purposeful.

He had taken one look at the engines, cooed admiringly and expressed his sincere and eternal devotion, pointing out the extreme modifications which had been made already, boosting the sublight hyperdrive systems.

Criminals always had the best stuff, he stated, to no one in particular. The dreams he'd been having were showing him how to modify these engines into

something...well, much better. It was almost as if they were more premonitions than dreams; he was even having them during his waking hours, now. Like some kind of visions. He had, in fact, dreamed of this exact ship; he saw, and somehow understood, how the engines were, and needed to be, configured, and was able to remember. He set to work immediately, and the two others helped, as they could.

They eventually left Earth, and Scott, being the only one with such experience, handled the space-faring end of matters. The rest of the modifications were made in interplanetary space, the ship on autopilot. He had stolen what he needed from his old employer's freighter, and several other vessels and parts shanties around the port. He hoped he had all of what was required.

They all noted that, once they'd left Earth, the urgency and severity of the dreams diminished greatly.

"In my dream, I saw this particular ship," Scott said, as the three ate dinner. "I did'na know why, but I was dreamin' of this ship." He tapped the tabletop with the tip of his index finger, for emphasis. "Now I know;" he shook his head in disbelief. "Whoever modified these engines had happened upon something; something no one ever thought of: a matter-anti-matter engine."

"That's interesting," McCoy said disinterestedly,

taking a sip of his beverage.

"It's ingenious, is wha' it is! Brilliant!" Scott said.

"What's anti-matter?" Kirk asked, swallowing a lump of spaghetti.

Scott gave them a brief description, in layman's terms as much as possible, of anti-matter and its properties, and the propulsion possibilities it afforded. He added that the core of the engine system was only started in its application, but the dreams were showing him how to finish the work, and implement their usage.

"Where would they come by this...anti-matter?" McCoy asked, mystified.

"Criminals..." Kirk said, jovially. "They always have the best stuff."

Something on the forward controls console was flashing, a small, electronic alert beacon sound filling the cabin.

"Uh-oh," Scott said as the three worked at the flight controls modifications. He stood from his prone position and hovered over the console, perusing the readouts.

"What is it?" McCoy asked, suddenly apprehensive at Scott's tense reaction.

"Someone's approachin'; we're bein' hailed." He

clicked his tongue. "Ach; Interplanetary Patrol Force". He pushed a button, and a male voice filled the smallish cockpit.

"...attention: this is the Interplanetary Patrol; please bring your vessel to a halt, and transmit proper documentation."

Scott did as ordered, slowing the vessel to station keeping.

"Well, answer them," McCoy said, after a moment of silence and indecision.

Scott turned and looked at him derisively; "An' tell'em wha', exactly? "Tha' we're leavin' the solar system, bound for some other world, altogether, based on some dreams we're all havin'? I'd like t'see the permits and paperwork fer tha'! Lock us up fer loonies, is wha' they'll do! If they don't blast us out o' space!"

"Well, we have to say something," Kirk said, stepping forward, his eyes scanning the console. "Which one's the communication controls?" he asked.

Scott, clearly doubting their immediate future, rolled his eyes and pointed emphatically.

Kirk thumbed the control. "This is the freighter...." He suddenly realized he didn't know the ship's designation. Reaching into the fragments of the dreams, he produced one he hoped wasn't too untoward, for the moment: "...this is the freighter DEFIANT. This is Captain

James T. Kirk. What can we do for you?" he asked, lightly.

The voice was flat and intractable, even bored. "Please transmit your proper transport and travel documentation. Verify destination and cargo."

They were clearly just harassing them; something to do.

Kirk chewed his lip for a moment; he'd naturally heard of the snobbish, somewhat haughty reputation of the I.P.F., and seriously doubted his status as a planet-bound cop from Iowa would cut any ice with these particular representatives of the law. No professional courtesy would be had, here, he was sure.

"Well, uh...we're having a bit of trouble with that, actually, at the moment." He looked to Scott and McCoy. Scott smiled ruefully and shook his head. "We are, at the moment, unable to transmit documents in such a fashion. We're not sure why." He smiled, and hoped the smile was audible in his voice. "As for our cargo and destination..."

Oddly, a dream-image slewed across his mind's eye, just then; an image of a roguish fellow, mustached, slightly overweight, balding, in a rakish hat and a rumpled, kind of puffy "pirate" shirt. Harcourt...Harry...something. Fenton? Then it was gone.

A few tense moments later, the voice came back. "Prepare to be boarded."

"Tha's it, then," Scott sighed. "We have'na go' the

proper documents fer wha' we're doin'—as if they even existed—an' we have'na go' enough money t' pay these fellas off. His face hardened. "We've nae choice..."

Kirk and McCoy quickly strapped themselves in at Scotty's behest. They beheld, with great unease, the Rube Goldberg-esque look of the conduits, components, circuits, switches and monitors Scott had adapted and patched into the flight controls console, and had, they knew, shunted down to the extensively-modified hyperdrive engine systems.

With their haphazard, ham-handed help, and working like a fiend, Scott had somehow managed to do all of the adaptations and modifications in less than a week.

He was real miracle-worker, this one, Kirk thought, admiringly.

"Alright, laddies" Scott said to them quickly, his finger hovering over the switch, his tone one of warning, "I've finished the matter-anti-matter core adaptation, modified th' engines, th' flight controls, and th' navigational electromagnetic shields and computers. I've done modifications and augmented things and done reinforcements no one ever thought of. But," he shook his head "...I jus' want th' both of ye t'know: I have no idea wha's gonn'ta happen, when I press this switch. I got all of whatever knowledge I needed to build this contraption from another set o'dreams; bu' it all fits together, an' it seems, in computer models, to work."

"Computer models..." McCoy intoned, doubtfully.

"Aye", Scott answered firmly, darkly; "there's no time for practical trial runs. No' now, especially; and really, there never was. One phrase kept bouncin' around m' head, th' whole time I was puttin'er together: "th' Cochrane Effect". I doont know wha' it means. Somethin' about a 'warp drive'; I've no idea wha' tha' means, either." He motioned to the navigational console, "I've loaded th' coordinates and information I got from th' dreams into th' navigational systems; even after all these years of space travel, I doont recognize th' applications of any of these sets o' numbers. However, it's all ready t' go."

"Well, I'm sure you did it to the best of your ability," Kirk said hastily. "And, by this time, we're certainly used to not understanding the dreams. Let's just get to it, and see this through, already. It's not like we have much choice, anyway, at the moment; time is running out."

That much was true. The other ship was moving into docking position.

"Agreed," McCoy said, choking down a wave of nausea. Neither Kirk nor he had ever left Earth for any reason, and being well past the orbit of Mars and the asteroids, even cruising along at a relative crawl, was an unsettling experience; space sickness was lurking on the fringes. Now, with the situation having gotten even direr, it wasn't doing his gastric processes any better.

"Here we go..." Scott's finger touched the switch.

While nothing overtly apparent happened within the unkempt mess wired into the flight controls, the engines suddenly throbbed, and a near-blinding, rainbow-colored flash issued from the fore viewport; suddenly, Jupiter was there, to port, relatively small in the distance; the ship dodged slightly to starboard, and missed crashing headlong into one of its more distantly-orbiting moons. Scotty ticked off the orbits of the planets; within thirty seconds, he informed them, incredulously, that they were beyond the heliopause.

McCoy literally screamed, inarticulately; he hadn't signed up for this! Careening around space like a crazy man! Dammit, he was a lawyer, not space-jockey!

Kirk just held on. The ship was shaking; not badly, but shaking. The engines thrummed threateningly, and steadily increased their rhythmic vibrations. The hull and superstructure creaked and groaned.

He tried not to think of what important items might shake loose on the old ship.

Scott, at the console, looked on as the vessel, using the data he'd input based on the dreams, automatically set a course for itself and steadied its movement, seeming to settle in for the trip. The engines, too, seemed to settle into a steady pattern.

Outside, elongated streamers, most of blue-white light, but interspersed with other colors, as well, streaked past.

"What're those...stretched-out lights?" Kirk, pointing, asked, fairly certain he already knew the answer, but asking anyway.

Scott gulped. "Stars," he whispered, awed.

They watched in utter shock as the lights, and light-years, flew by.

At length, Scott sighed, and sat back. He swiveled to face his crewmates.

"I guess tha's it, fer now." He grinned. "Gentlemen, congratulations on bein' the first Earth people t' officially leave the solar system, and not t' mention doin' it goin' faster than light. Much, much faster." After a moment's thought, he added another "much".

McCoy drew a ragged breath; "No, please...don't mention it."

Kirk smiled softly, pushing past his fluttering stomach; "I'm sure we're all honored. Where are we going?" he asked.

Scott shrugged, and slowly shook his head. "You tell me, and we'll both know," he said, smiling ruefully. He cocked his head, indicating the upgraded navigational computer. "Th' dreams...." was all he said.

The flight crew of the patrol ship only stared,

flabbergasted, mouths agape, out of the forward viewport. They had been ready to dock, the boarding crew suited up, armed and ready; then, the decrepit old freighter was just....gone.

It had disappeared almost instantly from their state-of-the-art scanners; devices with a range of nearly 5 million miles in 360 degrees. That was impossible.

"Did you see---" one of the crewman mumbled.

"No," the vessel's commander sharply interjected, cutting him off. "None of us did. Is that clear? None of us."

The commander, a 23-year veteran of the I.P.F., had seen a lot in his time in the service; natural wonders of eye-watering beauty and/or dreadful menace; mysterious space vehicles whose origin and purpose--let's say--could not be determined (after all, extraterrestrial life did not exist, by government decree. People who claimed to have had such encounters had often disappeared). This was just another mystery.

The incident was ultimately not reported; the consensus among the crew was that they wouldn't be believed, anyway. The encounter even mysteriously disappeared from the AutoLogs.

They had been traveling for about three days, Earth standard time; Kirk was silently wracked with guilt, in that

he was unable to contact his family, but what could be done? They were untold light-years away and, if he correctly remembered his Einstein from science classes in school, the relativistic effects meant that they were probably all long-dead, now, anyway, and fallen away to dust millennia ago...along with generations of his descendants.

Scott later picked up on his mood, over surprisingly good coffee in the grimy old galley. Again, Scott noted, criminals had the best stuff.

Kirk, with forced lightness, expressed his sadness, at his inability to contact loved ones, and his realization of Einstein's role in his abandoning his family so, well...so long ago.

"Well, y'know, laddie;" Scott said, reassuringly, "... if I'm readin' what the control console says, correctly, these engine modifications are, somehow—an' doont expect me t'explain it, because I canna—are somehow... circumventin' Einstein's theories. We've skipped over those rules, and are travelin' in, well...." he shrugged, "... in "real time".

Scott watched in mild amusement, as a range of emotions passed over Kirk's face. Realization that his family and friends might still be there; great relief; then, the dawning, horrifically disheartening realization that, assuming they returned home, he was going to have a lot to explain, and no believable answers.

Scott chuckled; "Are y'sure y'wanta go back?" he asked, and tugged at his coffee.

After nearly four days in space, the ship at last began to slow; the stars stopped streaking by, and settled into the unknowably-distant backdrop they were meant to be. The three gathered in the cockpit. After a bit, a planet hove into view.

"That's the place," McCoy, mystified, confirmed for them all.

Scott skillfully guided them into orbit of the ancient, gray, clearly dead world; its "sun" was but a dim cinder in the distance, barely providing light and almost no warmth to the scorched surface. It had clearly, at some point in the distant past, swelled to great size, and reduced the surface of this world, probably just far enough out in orbit to avoid complete destruction, to ash. The same thing would likely happen, one day, to Earth.

Scott used the sensors to identify a proper landing zone, not far from where they somehow knew they were to be. It would still be a hike, though.

Scott opened the "man-hatch" on the freighter's side, and lowered the steps.

He stopped them and handed each man an energy pistol; McCoy took his awkwardly. Scott smiled at Kirk.

"You know you're not supposed to have this," Kirk scolded him, amused.

"I know;" Scott replied, "...meet many space pirates on the mean streets of Riverside, Iowa, do ye?"

Kirk shrugged, and grinned. "I guess not."

Kirk was the first to disembark, his boots crunching into the gray, strangely ashy soil. It looked like crushed cement. A dust-laden, forlorn wind blew steadily; it made them cough from the gritty dust and hooted in and out of unseen crevices, creating ghostly sounds, like the tortured, unquiet souls of all the beings who had likely died here when the great cataclysm came. Of course, who could know? Maybe they were advanced enough that there was no one here by that time.

The atmosphere was breathable, and so was clearly some combination of oxygen, but it smelled...stale, somehow; thin. Looking around, Kirk saw no plant life; if the whole planet was like this, it was pretty obvious why the atmosphere would be thin and stale.

The three headed off as one, directed by a force none of them could name. As they walked, the ancient ruins around them began to grow more prominent; less sparsely-arranged. It was clear that they were entering the tumbled, craggy remains of what was clearly a large city.

"It's like looking at a civilization's bones," McCoy said, glancing around.

As they topped a rise, there it was, below; the Guardian of Forever; an oblate, rough-hewn stone torus. They started down the slight slope.

They rounded an eroded outcropping which may, at one time long, long ago, have been the corner of a large building. They approached the object carefully, suspiciously, their footsteps crunching in the ashy soil.

"Welcome!" the object boomed, glowing, flashing internally as it spoke. They all stopped, taken aback. "Do not be afraid! Come forward! Many such journeys are possible!" Again, it glowed, the internal light flashing in time with its pattern of speech.

The three stopped before it, standing several yards away. They stood silent for several moments.

"What are you?" Kirk asked, at last; "Are you a machine, or some kind of being?"

"I am both," the Guardian replied, cryptically, "... and I am neither. I...am the Guardian of Forever. Welcome, my friends; I am pleased that you were able to make the journey. Many such journeys are possible!"

"Why are we here?" McCoy spoke up, cutting right to the heart of the matter.

"You are here, Leonard McCoy, because you and Captain Kirk travelled with me before. You...and one other. Time has been altered, catastrophically; you will attempt to repair the timeline."

Kirk started slightly at these words. "What?" he stammered. "I...don't seem to remember ever...being here before..."

"That", the Guardian said, interrupting "...is because now, it never happened."

Three brows creased as one. "You should be a lawyer," McCoy said, with dark sarcasm. "You sure talk like one."

"Who was this 'other'?" Scott asked, "...and why am I here?"

The Guardian replied, "The other traveler was a Vulcan, named Spock, of whom you have all dreamt. You, Scott, are here because while you did not travel with us, you were a member of the party that came here with them. Also, your singular abilities may be, indeed have been, useful in the endeavor."

Kirk's eyes widened; "Spock! Yes. That's the name from my dream!" he blurted.

McCoy nodded in agreement. He knew the name, too; so did Scott. He pursed his lips and asked, "What's a Vulcan?"

"Vulcans are a race of beings from another world; in the former timeline, Vulcans and the people of Earth were fast friends, and strong allies. If you choose to take on this endeavor and are successful, this will realign the proper sequence of events, and allow for the repair of the

timeline. In the other timeline, Spock is a good friend to all of you; however, he was half-human. As the humans and Vulcans, now, never interacted---

"He was never born." Kirk finished.

"Exactly," the Guardian boomed. "But none of that matters, for the moment."

"Wha' is this...endeavor, anyway?" Scott asked.

The Guardian's warm tone turned flat and intractable. "Utilizing my abilities, you will travel back, through time and space, to Dealy Plaza at Dallas, Texas, November 23rd, nineteen hundred and sixty-three; the Texas Book Depository. There, you will do what is necessary, to allow for the assassination of President John F. Kennedy."

Kirk blanched; "What?!" he demanded, shocked. "You want us to facilitate in the assassination of a world leader? I'm a police officer! I won't do it!"

The others expressed a strong reluctance, as well.

"If you do not, then certain events--terrible wars, and social and political turmoil, as well as certain advances in technology and science--which must occur, will not occur, and the present you now know will be unaltered."

"What's wrong wi' that?" Scott asked sharply. "While I canna speak fer these gents, I'm happy enough wi' th' way things've turned out."

The Guardian calmly explained, "In your present timeline, President John F. Kennedy lived and served another term as President, dying in the year 2003. This resulted in a very different history than what came before.

However, in the unaltered timeline, he was indeed assassinated. The assassination of President Kennedy and America's involvement in an extended war in Southeast Asia--in Vietnam and Cambodia--which followed, were pivotal events in Earth history.

Despite their perceived failures of policy and military intervention, the actions taken by the United States in Vietnam and that region nonetheless sent a strong message to its enemies, that America was willing to stand with, and support, its allies. Instead, a policy of non-intervention and isolationism prevailed and was adopted.

Without that war in Vietnam, communist aggression and revolution went unhindered and swept across the continent of Asia, and eventually Europe and Africa, and the rest of the world, while America stood by and watched.

Eventually, America itself was undermined, and by the late twentieth century, had given in, as well, to the despotic communist ideal. The rest is the history as you now know it."

There was a pause.

"...You do not have to do this," the Guardian assured them, "...but if you do not, your world falls into a

period of tyranny which lasts to this day. Freedom of thought and deed, which resulted in the great advances I mentioned, is squelched. Earth is locked into a gray age, in which nothing of any real merit or significance occurs. While space travel eventually becomes commonplace, you, as a race, have never left your own solar system because, thanks to the strict, controlled and secretive nature of the communist ideal--and, truly, the apathy and complacency that settled in--the practical means to do so were never developed. True advancement, in any fashion, requires that freedom of individual thought and deed, as well as the desire and ambition."

"But if we do this," McCoy interjected, "then there will be the terribly destructive wars and mass death which we've seen in the dreams, and which according to you were avoided by the changes to history. Why should we want that?"

"Because," the Guardian advised inflexibly, "these horrors were the birth pangs of a great age; a future for all the peoples of Earth, of unequalled advancement and success. These shared trials of such terrible extremity bring forth a new mindset in the people of Earth; a willingness to work together and to coexist in peace; likewise, these events give rise to an aversion to tyranny, which results in personal freedoms, courage, noble benevolence and unity unlike ever before in the history of your world. True unity, of minds, hearts and spirits; not imposed unity, as it is now. However terrible the trial, humanity, at long last...learns."

Kirk put his arms behind his back and said, softly, "Nothing worth having is easy; is that what you're saying?"

The Guardian did not reply.

"How did this happen?" McCoy asked, at last, intrigued. "How was the timeline altered?"

The Guardian began, "An agent of an enemy race \_\_\_"

"An enemy of this...Federation we've dreamed about?" McCoy presumed correctly.

"Yes," the Guardian confirmed. "Agents of the Romulan Star Empire, went backward in time, and stopped the Kennedy assassin, a man named Oswald. They killed Oswald before he had the chance to fire the fatal shot. The altering of this critical event causes a shift in social and political events with drastic effects on down, throughout history."

"We would have to stop this...Romulan, and save the life of the assassin?" Kirk stated uncertainly, by way of question. His face clearly showed his distaste for the idea, not to mention his disbelief of this situation.

"Yes," the Guardian said, flatly.

Kirk the policeman was suspicious; he wasn't sure he trusted this...entity; but then, what reason could there be, to not? It had called to them; it had provided for their journey, and it seemed to want to restore a vision that

certainly seemed, well, better than the one they had lived. He trusted his instincts, though, which were now beginning to tell him that this was on the up-and-up.

The three expressed their continued misgivings, however...but somewhat less vociferously, now.

"Then none of what should be, will be;" the Guardian reiterated. "...the present will remain unchanged, and this gray age of tyranny and oppression will continue, unaltered, for your people. Your enemies would win.

You see, the Romulan Empire exists in this timeline, as well and, unchallenged, they may, eventually—in expanding their empire and in the future this altered timeline—arrive at Earth," the glowing stone torus warned. "An Earth ill-prepared, for the aggression of a warlike, space-faring race. Earth was a crucial element in the formation of the Federation, a body united in not just trade and political unions, but in defense, and in which billions upon billions of beings, of different races and worlds, exist. The aggressive, acquisitive Romulans would find all of these worlds, now individual units, and not united. And there are others; the Klingons, the Tholians, the Cardassians, the Dominion...the Borg. In the future of the previous timeline, the open ideologies and freedoms permitted by the United Federation of Planets facilitated the advancements which protected humanity and its allies from these enemies. It even allowed for the Federation to aid the Klingons in moments of dire need, and cemented an alliance that lasted, and eventually benefited both."

Silence for a moment, then, from the three.

"Well," Scott piped up, "...assumin' we agreed t' this, an' actually succeed; wha' happens, then? Wha's in it fer us?"

The Guardian of Forever then regaled them with a vibrant, grand vision for Earth and humanity, a world of possibilities which none of them, so immersed as they were in the "gray age" they had known for their entire lives, could conceive. They were told of a benevolent, democratically-run Federation of worlds, which would eventually, over generations, span the known galaxy and consist of hundreds of planets and systems, visited by fleets of powerful starships which, regularly and as a matter of course, travelled the stars, exploring and protecting the expanding frontier; a civilization which guaranteed plenty for all; of individual liberty, noble justice and fairness.

Kirk, measuring the world he knew against the one described by the Guardian, wondered at these marvels; he inhaled and considered the options.

He thought of Bonnie; of the kids. Of his long-nurtured career as a policeman. If this worked, none of that would be. His life, and the lives of these other men—of literally everyone—would likely be something else, entirely. Now that they had a context for the images in their dreams, however, it didn't seem so bad; so frightening. But, he wondered, would he even know Bonnie? Would

he/they have kids? He loved his family, and couldn't remember ever seeing them in the dreams. What of them?

"If you succeed," the Guardian, as if reading his mind (and maybe it was), said; "none of what you have known will be, and the present I described will be the one into which you return, with no direct knowledge of this one."

It did not tell them of their own, personal destinies, however, and they did not ask.

The three slowly came together, and as the dusty wind hooted through the ancient ruins, they discussed this otherwise ridiculous circumstance.

They decided, at length, that any lives and happiness they may have here, in this timeline, were worth sacrificing for the sake of humanity, and for the present the Guardian described. McCoy was the most willing of all, since his prospects were, at the moment, the bleakest, anyway.

"We'll do it," Kirk, speaking for the group, said.

"You are, in this timeline, the same noble spirits whom you were in the former," the Guardian declared.

Kirk, McCoy and Scott emerged from the mists of time, dropping neatly into a deserted, gravel alleyway.

On either side was a series of small backyards, many fenced-in with neat, white pickets of varying heights; others were of metal mesh. Some of the yards were dominated by small garages; some had laundry hanging out, wafting in the breeze. The houses faced away, toward the streets.

"I guess this is it," Kirk said, looking around in awe. Earth, 1963. Incredible.

"Wha're we lookin' for?" Scott asked, his tone hushed.

"I guess we'll know it when we see it," Kirk said, and started walking down the alley, motioning for them to follow.

Just then, Kirk glimpsed a man, lurking behind a large shrub in the yard of one small, red brick house, trimmed in white. He was clearly looking at the house, waiting for something. He was wearing period-appropriate clothing, and a knit cap. But there was something strange, yet familiar about his features; odd skin coloring; weirdly upswept eyebrows. And, Kirk assessed, using his finely-honed police instincts, his demeanor was clearly out of place. This was, presumably, a Romulan.

"You, there!" Kirk said, raising his voice. The being whipped around and scowled. "What're you doing, there?"

The Romulan faced them, and quickly recovered. "I am...awaiting a friend."

"Looking at his house from behind a bush?" Kirk asked with skepticism. "Can I see some ID?"

The Romulan paused. "Who are you?" he asked, cautiously. "You are dressed oddly."

Kirk was caught off guard. He wasn't a cop here... but he could fake it. "Never mind our dress. My name is Captain James Kirk, Dallas PD." He drew his wallet and quickly flashed his badge and ID, then replaced it.

At this, the Romulan's eyes widened. He gazed directly at Kirk for a moment, recognition clearly filling his face; he then glanced at the others, and suddenly seemed to reach some kind of understanding.

"You!" he blurted, clearly shocked. "Impossible! How are you here, now? Why must you trouble us?"

"What do you mean?" McCoy asked; he then dodged, shocked, as the being drew some sort of smallish energy weapon, and fired, a bright green bolt of energy streaking between them. The three dropped behind the garage; Kirk drew his own weapon, and fired back; the beam hit the brick side of the garage in the next yard.

"You will not stop us!" the being declared, firing once again in their direction; he took out a small device and spoke into it.

Kirk jumped out, drew a bead, and fired. The beam hit the Romulan squarely in the chest, and he fell, just as he began to dissolve into a swirl of humming, greenish

energy. The three stared in wonder, as the presumably dead being faded into non-existence.

"Where the hell did he go?" McCoy asked, alarmed.

Kirk shook his head; "I don't know, but look, he wasn't disintegrated...no ash, no residue, nothing. He's just....gone."

"These guns aren't powerful enough fer that, ana'way," Scott said, in wonder.

McCoy paused, and then said, "He seemed to recognize us. How is that possible?"

Scott, the only one among the three with any real, practical understanding of physics and science, considered for a moment, then, seeming to reach a sudden understanding of his own, snapped his fingers. He said, "From their perspective, th' timeline has'na changed, yet. Maybe they know us from th' other?" The three thought this over, for a moment.

"Who the hell were we, in that timeline, anyway?" McCoy muttered.

After a few seconds, Kirk shook his head, clearing his thoughts of this errant branch, and focusing. "If the timeline hasn't changed, that must mean this Oswald character is still alive," he said.

"What d'we do now?" Scott asked.

McCoy interjected, sharply, "We need to get to that...Texas Book Depository at...Dealey Plaza; that's where the Guardian said the assassination was to take place."

"How?" Kirk asked. "We don't even know where we're going. And how will we get there, in time?"

"Ah have an idea," Scott said silkily.

He looked slyly around, and moved into one of the open garages on the alley. He softly opened the door on an enormous old Chevy with tall tail fins, rich upholstery and an ornate-looking, off-white dashboard with wood veneer accents and overtones. Of course, it wasn't as old, in the present tense, as it was to them.

"What're you doing?" Kirk asked pointedly

"I've read about this, and seen it in verra old movies," Scott said distractedly. "Never in all my life thought I'd have a chance t'do it."

He bent, ducking under the steering wheel, and reached up under the steering column. He yanked out some wires and fiddled with them a bit, and then he sat in the driver's seat. "C'mon lads, times a'wastin'."

"You're stealing a car?" Kirk hissed, outraged.

"Sssshh!" Scott hissed in return. "Y'go' a better idea?" Scott asked, annoyed. "I'd suppose we could take public transportation," said sardonically, "...but if I recall, that took money, an' wha' money we have on us won' be

printed for another three hundred years! Get in!" he jerked his thumb harshly toward the back seat.

Kirk looked more than a little troubled, but the Scotsman had a point; circumstances were what they were, and they were extraordinary. Besides, the owner of this car had been dead for three centuries from their perspective, he rationalized, and would likely get it back, anyway. Who cared?

Kirk and McCoy slid in, Kirk in back, McCoy taking the shotgun seat.

McCoy smiled self-indulgently, as he sank into the comfortably rich, white leather seats. "This car was definitely owned by a decadent capitalist pig," he said admiringly.

Scott touched the wires together a few times; there were small, spitting sparks, and the engine roared to life. Scott smiled, twisted the wires together, and looked over the controls of the ancient contraption which really, and fortunately, didn't differ much overall from twenty-third century hovercars.

He put it in reverse, pressed on the gas pedal and squealed out into the narrow alley, slamming on the brakes, and jerking them all sharply back, then forward.

"Wee bit touchy," Scott said sheepishly, and then tried again, more gently. He turned the wheel and soon they were pointed up the alley. He slipped it into drive, and

then pressed the gas again. Again, he jerked sharply, braking, the tires chirping on the gravel; it took a few tries, but he soon got the hang of it. All they had to do was find this Dealey Plaza, wherever that was, and get there without breaking too many rules of the road, which could conceivably get them arrested.

"Easy as pecan pie," McCoy grumbled.

They parked their purloined vehicle in yet another alley; they'd stopped at a service station and asked directions. The attendant had looked them over suspiciously, but gave them the directions, nonetheless.

The alley was, luckily, deserted; but then, it seemed most of Dallas was lining the streets of Dealey Plaza, waiting for a glimpse of the president. McCoy pointed across the way; "There," he said, "That's the building; the Texas Schoolbook Depository". It was a brown-brick, cube-shaped building. "Romanesque Revival," McCoy said admiringly; "very nice." The other two looked at him, oddly. He drew himself up and replied "architecture is a hobby of mine."

Kirk smiled, then nodded; "The Guardian said to head for the sixth floor. Let's go."

"You'd think it could've just dropped us there, in the first place, you know?" McCoy gruffed. "We're not

spring chickens."

They headed out of the alley, folded into the milling crowd, and moved toward the building.

"Hold it," a voice said; a burly man in a policeman's uniform stopped them.

"What are you gentlemen doing?" He took in at a glance their odd clothing, now centuries ahead of style. His expression was the same as the service station attendant, they all noted, to themselves.

Kirk thought quickly; he grinned softly and, he hoped, disarmingly. "Just running a bit late; we'd like to get into a good position to see the president."

"Yeah, you and half the state," the large cop said, shrugging. "What's with the getups?" he asked suspiciously, grasping his gun belt, one hand on either side of the buckle.

Why did this feel so familiar? Kirk thought. A fleeting image of the dream woman, Edith, flitted by in his mind. Of a similar alley, and situation, in....New York? 1930.

"Play practice..." McCoy chimed quickly in... "we're...in a play. Just getting done; we wanted to get here. No time to change," he chuckled and said with a strange, too-wide smile.

The cop looked unconvinced. "What's the name of the play?" he asked, suspiciously.

The three looked uncertainly amongst themselves. "Uh...well, uh...'The Enterprise...of...of Mudd'! Kirk ejaculated, snapping his fingers and pointing, throwing together two words that rose unbidden in his mind. He had no idea where they'd come from. "...is the...working title...of...the play." he offered, finishing sheepishly. He smiled what he hoped, but doubted, was a convincing smile.

"The Enterprise of Mud?" the cop asked. "What the hell kinda name is that?" He shook his head. Artsy people.

"Alright;" he said, and waved his hand dismissively, "...never mind; just be careful. Don't get in the road; the Secret Service will take you down, and you don't wanna mess with those good ol' boys"

"Yessir;" they all mumbled, and moved on.

Threading through the crowd, they at last got to the building, entered, and rushed up the stairs. It was a too-long, huff-and puff affair. They had considered taking one of the freight elevators, but decided that stealth was best.

They at last emerged, quietly, onto the sixth floor, and beheld another "Romulan" person, this one oddly-dressed, and with a hairstyle and...ears, and skin tone... which resembled, they all recognized, those of this 'Spock' person they'd all dreamed of, who was supposedly their friend.

The being's clothing was rather bulky in

appearance, and had a greenish tint to the shimmering, metallic-seeming fabric. He stood quietly, and held, at arm's length, an odd-looking device, apparently a weapon; it was aimed at a man, a thin human, standing at the window, holding a rifle. They were, Kirk realized, just in time; he sighed, mentally, relieved.

"Hold it!" Kirk cried at the being, extending his own pistol. Scott and McCoy, less certain of themselves, did the same.

"Wha--?" the man at the window said, whipping around; it was then that he, himself saw the oddly-dressed being. He paled. "What's going on---?"

The being fired at him but, suddenly thrown off by the appearance of the three new arrivals, missed. The shot went awry, and hit the wall. A tall stack of heavy boxes tottered from the small explosion, and fell onto the thin human, who collapsed to the floor.

The being turned and fired at Kirk, who dodged, and returned fire; seconds passed, with energy beams criss-crossing the room. Then, nothing.

Kirk and the others peered around the corners they'd hid behind.

Oswald lay on the floor, unmoving.

They'd glimpsed that the Romulan had disappeared, evaporating into that same kind of humming, swirling greenish glow, after saying some unrecognizable

words into a small--presumably communication--device.

McCoy dropped to Oswald's side and, having been trained in first aid, gave the lanky man the once-over. He declared, "He's not dead, Jim; he's out cold, but I think he'll be okay."

"We only have a few seconds," Scott said. "One of us has got t'take th' shot!"

Neither he nor McCoy had any real experience with weaponry, and especially old-style firearms; strictly speaking, of course, guns were all but utterly disallowed in their world, for private ownership. Only the authorities had them.

It would have to be the policeman.

Unwillingly, Kirk sighed, picked up the antique rifle, and hefted it; obviously, it wasn't an energy weapon, so its wood and cold metal weight was like a stone in his hands. It wasn't too unlike an old deer rifle which had belonged to a several times-great-grandfather, however, and he had fired that gun many times.

He reminded himself, off-handedly, that it was not an antique in this period in time, and inwardly he marveled at that fact.

He swallowed his intense misgivings.

He inhaled, took the rifle in hand and sighted in the scope. In the street below, the crowd began to cheer; he looked for the motorcade.

Through the scope, Kirk saw President John Fitzgerald Kennedy. He swung the rifle a bit to his right, and saw the lovely Mrs. Kennedy in a pink suit with black lapels and her signature "pillbox" hat, also pink, smiling and holding a large bouquet of roses in pink gloved hands. The limousine slowly turned the corner and passed, the president smiling and acknowledging the crowd.

"Take the shot!" McCoy urged, harshly.

Kirk's finger rested lightly on the trigger, barely touching it; he inhaled, held it, let it out slowly, and gently squeezed. The rifle barked and jumped; he winced as he saw a spray of blood issue from Kennedy's neck.

The crowd below did not react. Yet.

To his intense anguish, Kirk saw the man lean forward in pain and shock, his clenched fists go up in front of his face. Kirk exhaled shakily, forcibly squelched the surge of raw emotion—and reminded himself that this atrocity was necessary, to restore the grand future they'd been told of—and smoothly worked the bolt, ejecting the spent shell, chambering another round. He sighted in again, and squeezed; this time it was even worse; in the scope, the side of the young president's head more or less exploded.

The horrified crowd began to bolt.

He fired once more, more or less at random, and that was enough for him; the vile deed was done. He was sure of it.

Disgusted, Kirk stepped away from the window, and dropped the weapon like a dead, rotting animal. He turned to glare at Oswald, who, awakened by the gunshots, was still on the floor and stunned; he lay staring up and around at these strangers.

"Wh-who are you guys?" he asked, wide-eyed and frightened, raised up on his elbows.

"Shut up," Kirk spat.

Though he had no idea what he was seeing, it was then that Oswald saw the temporal energies begin to swirl around them; what looked to him like wreaths of yellow-orange fire and small lightning bolts.

From the perspectives of Kirk, McCoy and Scott, the world began to dissolve.

It fell away in less than an instant, before they could even look to each other for assurance, and Lee Harvey Oswald watched, in cold disbelief, as the three men simply vanished, consumed by the fire and lightning, and swiftly fading into nothing.

Kirk's last, fleeting thought, before dissolving into the time stream, was for Bonnie and his children; in that instant, his heart ached. Then he, along with the others, was gone.

No one would ever believe this, Oswald knew; even though he hadn't fired the shots, if he lived another three hundred years, no one would ever believe the truth. No

matter; he'd intended to do just what had happened. Things would work out.

Oswald then rose, looked around, quickly packed up his rifle and scurried away, like a rat, into history. He would only live another two days.

Jim Kirk moaned in his sleep; he snorted and jerked, coming suddenly to misty wakefulness. He sat up, rubbed his eyes, and sighed, disgusted; he then slumped back against the pillows, fully awake, now.

"Lights;" he said, "...quarter bright." The lights in the Captain's Quarters came up, dimly. He checked the clock on the nightstand; 4:35 AM. He wasn't due on the Bridge for another two hours and more.

What a weird dream that was; vivid, too.

He had assassinated President Kennedy, of all things! He could still see the side of Kennedy's head, all but evaporating; he rubbed his brow and poured himself a glass of water.

He saw then that his hand was shaking; the dream was fading as his brain wakened, as most dreams do, and was quickly becoming an odd sort of tenuous after-image. But he thought, ruefully, from the knot of emotions it had left in his gut, that it would probably linger with him for the rest of the day. He wondered if he should stop and see

if Spock was awake, yet; he had a strange urge to check on him.

Well, if his day was to begin, he might as well get dressed and go up early. It wouldn't hurt the Third Watch crew for him to show up unannounced, for a change.

He showered and dressed, donning his gold command tunic, and in less than thirty minutes, was out the door and on his way to the Bridge.

And he did stop and check on Spock, who was fine.

- THE END -