

*Captain's log, stardate 68363.1:*

*The Bellerophon has been dispatched to check in on the research team on the planet Sopan VI. The team has been cataloging vegetation on the arboreal planet that has some of the oldest living trees ever documented. They failed to send their last scheduled progress report and now are not answering comms.*

*K'danz, out.*

"THAT is a lot of green," said Commander Tom Paris, leaning forward toward the main viewer from his seat in the first officer's chair. The image of Sopan VI from space showed a remarkably verdant planet.

"Approximately ninety percent of the planet's surface is covered with temperate forest vegetation," said Lt. Commander T'Var from her position at the science station. The Vulcan science officer arched an eyebrow. "It is a fascinating ecosystem."

"How so?" asked Captain (Carrie) K'danz, commanding officer of the *USS Bellerophon*.

"Starfleet's initial surveys show an abundance of plant and insect species, but no vertebrates," T'Var replied. "It is not a unique evolution, but it is very rare."

Turning toward the ops station, K'danz saw her Chief Operations Officer Xin Zhadesh working intently at the controls. "Any communication coming from the planet, Mister Zhadesh?" she asked.

"None, Captain," Lt. Commander Zhadesh replied, the shaking of his head causing his long white hair to sway back and forth. "There are no power readings at all. It appears the survey camp's main and auxiliary power are both off-line."

"Sensors are detecting two active humanoid life-signs," T'Var reported. "But there are also some unusual readings."

"Only two?" Paris asked, rising from his seat. "There were thirty people assigned to the survey team."

"What do you mean unusual, Commander?" K'danz asked.

"I am also detecting what appears to be another fifteen individuals who appear are being kept alive by some sort of external life support," T'Var said.

K'danz looked once again at her operations officer and said, "I thought all power was offline. What's running the life support system?"

Zhadesh verified his readings and confirmed, "No power systems that I can detect are functional."

"There is more," T'Var interrupted. "The beings on life support are ambulatory."

"How in Hell is that even possible?" asked Marine Major Michael Drake, the *Belle's* tactical officer.

"Unknown," T'Var replied. "My readings show little biological activity in those individuals. Virtually no brain activity, minimal to no respiratory or cardiac function."

K'danz looked at her first officer, then at the bright green planet displayed on the main viewscreen.

"What the hell is going on down there?" she asked.

Space, the Final Frontier...

These are the voyages of the starship *Bellerophon*!

Star Trek: Bellerophon

"Ve'takula" by Chris Post

“We need to talk to someone down there,” Paris said. “Captain, let me take an away team and find some answers.”

“No,” K’danz replied. “I’m not going to send anyone down until I have a better idea of what they’re heading into.” The captain then cocked her head toward the ceiling as she said, “Bridge to transporter room.”

“Transporter room here,” came the reply.

“Sensors are detecting two humanoid life-signs down on the surface,” K’danz said. “Coordinate with Doctor Cuomo and beam them directly into an isolation field in sickbay.” K’danz did not wait for a reply before then saying, “Bridge to sickbay. Prepare to receive two patients, condition unknown.”

“Aye, Captain,” Dr. Bob Cuomo replied. Once her orders had been acknowledged, K’danz stood from the captain’s chair.

“Tom, you’ve got the bridge,” she said, taking one last look at the green planet on the viewscreen before heading for the turbolift. “Commander T’Var, please join me in sickbay.”

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“The woman is Commander Tanya Rowe,” Dr. Bob Cuomo, the *Belle*’s Chief Medical Officer, said, pointing through the observation window of his office to a middle-aged human woman laying on a biobed behind the isolation field in the next room. “The child,” he added, gesturing to his other patient, “is David Noble, son of Lieutenant Commander Steven Noble.”

“Steven Noble was on the survey team. One of their senior exo-botonists,” T’Var said, recalling his name from the mission file she had reviewed before the *Bellerophon* had entered the Soplan system. “Rowe, on the other hand, was not a part of this survey mission.”

“Officially, she’s not a part of any mission,” Cuomo said, bringing Rowe’s medical file up on his desktop display. The captain glanced at the display.

“Starfleet R&D?” K’danz said shaking her head. “What are they doing all the way out here?”

“Well, she was hysterical when she beamed in, raving about having to go back, so I had to sedate her,” Cuomo said. “I don’t know the full extent of her mental trauma, but it may be a while before you can question her.”

“And the boy?” K’danz asked, looking at the youth, who couldn’t have been more than five years old. “What is his condition?”

“My brief examination revealed a bite wound and pronounced fever,” Cuomo said. “We immediately cleaned and treated the affected area, but it proved particularly difficult.”

“Why is that?” T’Var asked, her curiosity piqued.

“The flesh around the bite was necrotic,” Cuomo replied. “It was difficult for the dermal regenerator to overcome.”

“Anything else?” K’danz asked.

“Actually, I was just about to look at his bloodwork when you came in,” Cuomo said, turning to bring the data up on his desktop display. “What the devil!?”

“Is that what I think it is?” K’danz asked, glancing at the monitor screen over the doctor’s shoulder.

“Remarkable,” T’Var added.

“Captain, I think you need to call *Home Plate*,” was Cuomo’s only reply.

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“Carrie, I understand your frustration, believe me,” Rear Admiral Val’ri Raijah said over subspace. “The Typhon Sector is my AOR, but R&D answers to Admiral West. Jonathan’s *supposed* to give me a heads up when they’re in the area, but it seems that information isn’t making it through to me.”

“Val, it’s not just the secrecy,” K’danz said. “This type of research is dangerous and probably illegal.”

“And you’re sure about what you saw?” Raijah asked. K’danz nodded in reply. “I’ll take this up with Command, but I don’t want to make false accusations.”

“Trust me, Doctor Cuomo has confirmed this is a cybernetic nanite virus,” K’danz said. “I don’t understand the science fully, but T’var and Doctor Cuomo say the virus appears to be native to this planet and could explain why

there are no vertebrates here. In the wrong hands – and I’m not entirely certain there are any right ones – this could be an extinction level weapon.”

“Send me the data you have so far and I’ll start my report,” Raiajh said. “Now, what about other survivors?”

“We think they may also be infected,” K’danz said. “I want a little more information before we go down to the surface.”

“Keep me updated,” Raiajh said. “*Home Plate*, out.”

K’danz deactivated the comm screen on her desk and turned to look out the window at the planet below. It seemed so lush and peaceful from space. Unspoiled. It made her blood boil that someone would come to manufacture a way to ruin it.

“Sickbay to the Captain!” came the voice of Dr. Cuomo. “We have a medical emergency!”

“On my way,” K’danz replied, already moving toward the door.

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“We’re losing him,” Nurse Cassie Silvers called out. She was monitoring the patient’s vital signs, all of which were failing.

“Give him twenty-five cc’s of Inaprovaline,” Cuomo ordered, his voice coming in the sort of forced calm adopted by those in charge of emotional and chaotic situations. “Follow that with fifteen cc’s of Cordrazine.”

Two brief hisses could be heard as the nurse pumped the proscribed drugs into the patient’s carotid artery. “No effect,” Silvers replied, her voice cracking. She had seen death before in her time in Starfleet Medical, but never a child. “Cortical stimulator?” she asked, almost pleading.

“No,” Cuomo sighed, looking at the flatlining displays. “Call it. Time of death: 1500 hours.”

Leaving Silvers to finish charting their attempts to save the boy, Cuomo turned and left the ICU, heading back to his office where Captain K’danz was waiting.

“What happened?” she asked. “How?”

“Captain,” Cuomo said, slumping exhaustedly into his seat, “I have never seen anything like it in all my years.” He wiped his face with his hand and then began to bring up various readings on his display. “Here,” he said, pointing at the screen. “The virus began to replicate at an exponential rate. It attacked the heart and lungs, then his other organs before moving through the nervous system and into the brain. Once it got there, everything shut down.”

The doctor and the captain sat silently watching the display as it detailed the systematic attack the virus had made against the child’s body. Suddenly, the silence was shattered by a piercing scream from the next room. Jumping up to look through the observation window, the pair was horrified to see the boy sitting up and grappling with the nurse. As she struggled to get loose from his grasp, Silvers pleaded with the boy.

“No David! David! Don’t!” she yelled in panic. “Help ME!!”

Cuomo and K’danz rushed into the intensive care unit just as Silvers’ screams cut short into a low gurgle.

“My God!” Cuomo exclaimed as the boy turned to face him. The youngster’s mouth and chin were dripping with the dark crimson of Silvers’ blood. Cuomo quickly came to grim realization that David had bitten her throat out.

With one fluid motion, Cuomo pushed the captain back into his office and sealed the door. He then began to address the boy the way one speaks to an unfamiliar dog.

“Easy there, little guy,” he said. “I’m your friend, Doctor Bob.”

The boy glared at him with dead-looking eyes. He rose up to a crouch on the biobed and made a growling hiss from the back of his throat.

“Sickbay to security,” K’danz called out through the intercom on Cuomo’s desk. “We have an emergency in sickbay. Dispatch a team immediately.”

“Security team en route,” came the immediate reply.

“Hey there, David,” Cuomo was saying softly as he eased his way toward a nearby hypospray. “I’m not going to hurt you and I don’t think you want to hurt me.”

As if in response to the challenge, and with savage ferocity, the boy leapt from the table, knocking solidly into the doctor and sending them both tumbling backward to the floor. As he fell, Cuomo managed to grab the sprayer off the nearby tray and pressed it against the boy’s neck. There was the familiar hiss, but the sedative had no effect. Cuomo cried out as the boy’s teeth sank into the flesh of his arm. Again and again, he applied the hypospray, but it did nothing to stop the attack.

Meanwhile, K'danz was looking for something – Anything! – she could use as a weapon, but the office was filled only with tools of healing. In desperation, she grabbed a medical field kit. The hardened case was about thirty-five centimeters by twenty-five and nearly fifteen centimeters thick. It would be awkward, but K'danz knew she could use it as a bludgeon until security showed up with phasers.

Turning toward the door, K'danz involuntarily let out a short gasping cry. Outside the door, peering in through the glass, stood Nurse Silvers. Blood stained her uniform and her trachea was exposed. Her eyes were lifeless, but her body was animated. She began to claw and pound at the office door. K'danz was trapped!

As Silvers continued her assault on the office door, the main door to the sickbay swooshed open and the four-man security detail came in with phasers drawn. When Silvers turned on them with a snarl, the men fired. The phasers, set on stun, had no effect and Silvers completed her attack, biting into the neck of Lieutenant Sevek. The Vulcan quickly broke loose of Silvers' grip and pushed her away.

Dialing their phasers up, the security team fired again, but once more there was no effect. Maneuvering to stay out of Silvers' grasp, the men looked to their captain – still trapped in the CMO's office – for guidance.

“Do it!” K'danz ordered gravely. “And save the doctor!”

The men wasted no time, resetting their phasers to max power and firing. In quick succession Silvers and the boy were vaporized. As calm finally returned to the scene, K'danz left the office and ran to Cuomo.

“Bob, are you okay?” she asked.

The doctor had two savage bites on his arm. “I've been better,” he said with an expression equal parts smile and grimace. “Was anyone else bitten?”

All eyes turned to Sevek.

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“I am infected,” Cuomo confirmed, looking at the test results. “But Mister Sevek is not.”

“Why?” K'danz asked.

“It could have something to do with genetics,” Cuomo answered. “Perhaps the copper content in his Vulcan blood? There are just too many factors to say for sure at this time.”

“What can we do for you?” K'danz asked.

“I've got the computer trying to match the virus to any known antivirals in the database,” Cuomo replied. “I'll start myself on the best match and take it from there. ...And hope for the best.”

“You seem surprisingly calm, Doctor,” T'Var said. “Considering.”

“Oh, trust me, my nerves are fully on edge on the inside,” Cuomo said. “But risk of infection from your patients is something doctors have had to deal with since the beginning of time.”

“An occupational hazard,” T'Var offered.

“Precisely,” Cuomo agreed. “Now, Captain, if it's alright with you, I'd like to have a little chat with our other patient.” K'danz looked over at the still-sedated Rowe.

“Certainly,” she said. “I've got some questions of my own.”

Moments later Cuomo was administering a hypospray. Within seconds of the device's hiss, the woman's eyes began to flutter.

“She'll still be groggy,” he advised. “I think bringing her around slowly is the best idea.”

“Bill?” Rowe murmured. “Did you get lab power back on?”

“The power's on,” Cuomo said gently. “What happened?”

“I don't know,” Rowe answered, shaking her head. “There must've been a containment breach. Oh Bill! It was terrible!”

“Commander Rowe, I'm Doctor Robert Cuomo,” the doctor said slowly. “You are aboard the starship *Bellerophon*.”

“What?!” Rowe exclaimed as she tried to sit up, but made it only as far as propping herself up on her elbows. “Where is my staff? I need to go back for them. They are my responsibility.” Rowe was growing agitated, looking back and forth between Cuomo and K'danz.

“No one is going anywhere until I have some answers,” K'danz said firmly. “I'm Captain K'danz, commander of the *Bellerophon*. Now what were you doing down there on the surface?”

“It's...,” Rowe began.

“Don’t give me ‘It’s classified’,” K’danz cut the woman off, expecting the typical answer. “Whatever it was you had going down there has already led to the death of one of my crew and another is now infected with a nanite virus.”

“The virus is here?” Rowe said, shaking her head, eyes closed tightly. “We’ve got to go back to my lab! Before everyone here is dead.”

“Commander Rowe,” K’danz said forcefully to get the researcher’s attention. “What is this virus? Why did you create it?”

“Immortality,” Rowe answered with a laugh that devolved into a body-shuddering cry.

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K’danz took a look at the men and women assembled before her. Lt. Commander T’Var, her chief science officer and Lt. Sevek of security; both Vulcan. Lt. Commander Xin Zhadesh, the *Belle*’s Efrosian chief of operations and Lt. Th’Kera, an Andorian from the *Belle*’s engineering division.

“As I’m sure you’ve heard, members of the survey team, as well as our own Chief Medical Officer, have been infected by an alien virus,” K’danz said, matter-of-factly. “The virus is lethal but is made more devastating because it has been engineered with nanite technology.”

“What the...?!” Th’Kera exclaimed.

“It gets worse,” K’danz continued. “Those infected and killed by the virus become reanimated by the nanites. Those affected are very aggressive, even homicidal.”

“Ve’takula,” Zhadesh said, more to himself than anyone.

“Excuse me, Mister Zhadesh?” K’danz said, raising an eyebrow.

“It is an old legend from Efros Delta,” Zhadesh said. “It means ‘death walkers.’ There were supposedly the walking corpses of those cursed by their decision to resort to cannibalism.”

“Well, call them whatever you like, but there are fifteen of them down there on the planet and they are between you and the R&D computer we need to access,” K’danz said. “You need to restore power to the computer and get all of the research data transmitted to the *Belle* within the next hour or it may be too late to save Doctor Cuomo.”

“What about the other infected personnel,” Sevek asked. “Should they be subdued?”

“There appears to be nothing that can be done to save them at this point,” K’danz said shaking her head. “They’re already dead, they just don’t know it.”

Zhadesh could sense the apprehension in Th’Kera as the captain spoke.

“Captain,” he said. “I do not object to this assignment, but may I ask why we specifically were chosen and why a larger security detail was not included?”

“Biology,” K’danz replied matter-of-factly. “The virus, despite the tinkering R&D did, has no serious effects on species from planets with extremely hot or extremely cold climates. You are the *Belle*’s complement of eligible crew from such climates with the relevant skills required for this mission.”

“I see,” Zhadesh said with a wry smile pulling the edges of his mustache. “When do we beam down?”

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“It looks like a war zone,” Th’Kera said, a look of nausea sweeping across her face.

The description was apt. Everywhere there were signs of destruction and carnage. Equipment was smashed and destroyed, blood collected in pools on the ground or was streaked and drying on counters and walls.

“Why didn’t we just beam into the lab?” the Andorian asked.

“When the main systems went off-line, a containment protocol went into effect,” T’Var explained. “Nothing goes in or out except through the main door.”

T’Var and Zhadesh scanned the area with their tricorders. Neither received results they considered favorable. The life-signs they could detect were faint and intermittent at best.

“Everyone stay sharp,” Zhadesh said quietly. “With the quality of these readings, the other victims could be anywhere.”

In the distance an agonized howl echoed through the corridors. T'Var confirmed their location and pointed the way to the lab and its computers. Sevek took the lead, followed by Th'Kera and T'Var, with Zhadesh bringing up the rear. The group had only gone about twenty meters when suddenly a pair of infected crewmen appeared in front of the away team. Sevek fired a burst from his phaser taking out the first, but before he could change targets the second was on him.

Sevek braced for the creature's attack, but it did not come; the creature stopping just short of touching him. Sevek and the infected crewman, whose face was torn and disfigured, simply looked at each other as though each was studying the other. Everyone stood, for the moment too stunned to move. Then suddenly the crewman sprang at T'Var. Sevek raised his phaser and fired, vaporizing the infected man mid-leap. There were more noises; howls, roars and screams coming from the corridors around them.

"I suggest we move on," Zhadesh said in a hushed whisper.

Moving quickly and quietly through the base, the away team managed to reach the lab doors. The blood splattered doors were jammed closed and the control panel was unresponsive.

"I guess I'm up," Th'Kera said with a slight smile. Popping open the panel, she set about pulling items from her engineering kit. "This will open the door halfway, but I've got to save the rest of the battery to power the computer."

"Halfway is enough," Zhadesh said, adjusting the grip on his phaser as his eyes scanned up and down the hall. "Just do it, if you please."

Seconds later the door slid open. Almost immediately, an infected female lab technician slammed through the opening, crashing into Th'Kera and knocking her to the ground.

"I do not have a clear line of fire," Sevek called out as he tried to reposition himself. At almost the same moment a second crewman came through the door, banging its way past the Vulcan security officer and lunging at Zhadesh.

Th'Kera cried out as the technician's teeth sank into her shoulder, tearing both the uniform and the flesh beneath it. As Zhadesh struggled against the creature that pounced at him, T'Var peered inside the lab. She spotted two more crewmen who appeared to be feasting on laboratory animals.

Sevek attempted to perform the Vulcan nerve pinch on the crewman attacking Th'Kera, but it did nothing to still the woman. Switching tactics, he grabbed the infected woman by her jumpsuit collar and pulled with all his Vulcan strength. Despite the effort, he managed to create only a small distance between Th'Kera and the snarling creature. The move was enough, however, to allow Th'Kera to draw and fire her own phaser, vaporizing the infected woman. Meanwhile, Zhadesh found himself in a superior position with the crewman that had attacked him, having pinned the man to the ground. Unfortunately, it took all of his efforts to hold down the creature, which was thrashing and biting wildly. He was left without a hand to reach for his phaser, let alone bring it to bear.

"Commander," came the voice of Sevek from behind him. "When I say go, roll to your left! ...Go!"

Zhadesh did not question the plan and sprang to his left as soon as he heard the signal. The air was filled with the crackle of phaser fire and the scent of ozone filled his nostrils.

Catching their collective breath, the two men looked to T'Var, who used hand signals to indicate the two remaining lab technicians inside. Nodding, Zhadesh and Sevek slipped inside and quickly dispatched them both.

"Still nine left," Zhadesh said to Sevek. "Strange that they do not seem interested in attacking you."

"They do not appear to attack their own," Sevek said. "Perhaps the nanites have a means to detect the virus in my system."

Zhadesh nodded and went back to check on the rest of his team.

"She is stable," T'Var said, looking up from where Th'Kera lay on the floor. "The bite missed the major arteries."

"Good," Zhadesh said, nodding. "Call the *Belle* and have them beam her out. I'll try to get the computer back online."

"I'm... not going anywhere," Th'Kera said weakly. "My mission... was to restore power to the computer... and that's not finished."

"You are not well," Zhadesh said. "You need medical attention."

"With respect, sir, we don't have time... for you to figure out how to... patch in the new battery," the Andorian engineer said, sitting up. "Let me do my job... and then we can all go back to the ship."

Zhadesh sighed. Th’Kera was right and time was slipping by. He extended his hand and helped the engineer to her feet. Within minutes and with some subtle coaxing from the Andorian, the computer was online and relaying its data to the *Belle*.

“Incredible,” T’Var said as she reviewed the data being transmitted on the screen of her tricorder. “The researchers here had hoped to use the virus to introduce alien DNA into human hosts. Had it worked, human lifespans might have been extended by millennia.”

“Millenia?” Zhadesh asked, the doubt thick in his voice. T’Var nodded, pointing to some of the data on the display screen.

“According to the research databanks, insects on this world live centuries, plants for a thousand years or more,” she said, tapping the panel to enlarge the section about the virus. “This viral sample indicates that it is nearly one million years old.”

“Sickbay to away team,” came a voice over the away team’s combadges. “We’ve got what we need, you’re clear to leave.” The message was punctuated by screams from the hallway.

“Not a moment too soon,” Zhadesh said. “Away team to *Bellerophon*. The containment shield has been lowered. Four to beam up.”

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*Captain’s log, supplemental:*

*Planet Sopan VI, a verdant paradise, is now under quarantine. The viral contamination will likely remain hazardous to humans and most other Federation member species for thousands – if not millions – of years.*

*Nurse Cassie Silvers’ official cause of death will be recorded as acute viral infection. Her next of kin have been notified.*

*Doctor Robert Cuomo is currently recovering from his exposure to the nano-virus, although damage to his heart, lungs and nervous system were quite severe. The antiviral therapy nearly came too late and he is lucky to be alive.*

*Lieutenant Sevek and Lieutenant Th’Kera, two of my crew members also exposed to the nano-virus, were not technically infected, but remain carriers despite the antiviral therapy that cured Doctor Cuomo. They have been re-assigned to Medical Starbase 12 to undergo additional treatment.*

*K’danz, out.*

Captain K’danz sat in the chair behind her desk in the ready room, her chin resting atop her entwined hands, as she silently stared at her latest log entry.

“Computer,” the captain finally said aloud. “Label all Captain’s logs from this stardate as classified. Send copies to Admiral Raiajh at *Starbase 719* with a level 4 encryption.”

As the computer complied with her orders, K’danz got up from behind her desk and stepped toward the front of the ready room, where she watched the green planet circling below until the *Belle* broke orbit and headed toward the darkness of deep space, jumping to warp a few moments later. How many times, she wondered as the stars streaked by, would it take before people learned that just because they *could* do something, it did not necessarily mean that they *should*?

**The End**