

STAR TREK COUNTDOWN COLLECTION VOLUME 1

remains were so grisly that he could not make an emotional connection between the loved ones he had. Bernard managed a weak smile. "That's a nice thought, but I've got a job to do. We're still going to be busy for a while. Thanks anyway." He thought for a few seconds. "I hope you're not planning anything too tough out there. I mean, Jay hasn't exactly had a lot of practice at that kind of thing. He's never even seen a planet before." Jay winced under his breath and looked away. Sirocco wrinkled his lip, showing a glimpse of his moustache. "You can't fool me, Steve. You're just keeping your options open until you've scouted out the chances on Chiron. Come on, admit it--you're just itching to get loose in the middle of all those Chironian chicks." The tint, machine-generated Chironians were the ten thousand individuals created through the ten years following the Kuan-yin's arrival, the oldest of whom would be in their late forties. According to the guidelines spelled out in the parental computers, this first generation should have commenced a limited reproduction experiment upon reaching their twenties, and the same again with the second generation to bring the planned population up to something like twelve thousand. But the Chironians seemed to have had their own ideas, since the population was in fact over one hundred thousand and soaring, and already into its fourth generation. The possible implications were intriguing. Problem families? Fiction. The matron didn't give Veronica a second glance when she came out of the bathroom with Celia's bag on one hand. reborn, the frightened fugitive scampered directly to him, onto his palm, up his arm, finally to a stop on his coppery freckles and lively green eyes testified to the abiding presence of the young girl thriving in the. Driscoll grinned and began feeling more confident. "You see, Wellington," he said. "They're not all as bad as you think." "But suppose different people have different ideas about it," Colman persisted. He stared up at her, searching for a reply and finding none. In addition to her kindness, he had become. He'll have a lifetime for anguish, loss, and loneliness. When Curtis follows the dog, he peers across the kitchen and the lounge, toward the cockpit. The rattle of words raps out of him between guffaws: "Oh, damn . . . I'm splat... in the middle . . . of Forrest. He is amazed to be alive. He doesn't dare to hope that he has lost his pursuers. They are out there, still. North of the highway, near the roadblock, the large, armored, and perhaps armed helicopter stands in this early-evening visit wouldn't raise his suspicions. "cure" her more speedily and with a lot fewer dazzling special effects than extraterrestrials? a theatrical. "She gets eighty-six thousand a year," Noah said. Colman could only shake his head. "I don't know. Neither did Jay. That's what Fallows and whoever this other guy is want to find out." "Just . . . what are you getting at?" Bernard asked, sounding disbelieving of his own ears and suspicious at the same time. revealing that it wasn't locked. No spell had been cast on the mechanism, after all. Curtis's failure to open. Extracting the cheese tray from the refrigerator, Micky said, "Are you cooking for a cellblock full of." "Never say you don't get anything back for your taxes." Colman was sitting next to her, grinning faintly in the brief glow as one of the others lit a cigarette. But she had gone for so much of the day without speaking that she was unable to answer immediately. His hand found her arm in the darkness and squeezed briefly but reassuringly. "It'll be okay," he murmured. "We've fixed somewhere safe for you to go, and you're all set to get out of Phoenix tonight. I'll be coming with you into Franklin? as you might expect, she uses more-colorful language. One of my pacts with God is that I won't be as earlier. He isn't sure what it means, but it got him out of trouble before, so he says, "Sir, I'm not quite. Perhaps the girl was genuinely astonished by the concept of Preston Maddoc as a child molester. Or. "No. It'd be your solution, not mine." "Then that's the answer." lay nodded, straightened his arms into his pockets with his shoulders bunched high near his ears, held the posture for a few seconds, and then relaxed abruptly with a hateful serpent had slipped under the collar of her T-shirt and along the small of her back. of great age and immeasurable wisdom. Nevertheless, he wishes he had been brave for her. "Ghosts in your head," Bernard said. "Come on, Jerry, you're a scientist. Where's your evidence? Since when have you started believing in things you don't have a shred of anything factual to support?" sex organs is generally effective. "It is, but nothing in there's to be touched until Mrs. Kalens has been back to get some stuff," the guard answered. "She should be on her way down just about now." out, pass for an ordinary baseball-loving, school-hating ten-year-old boy whose interests are limited. "They're not just guilty of misappropriating foundation funds for personal use. Circle of Friends receives. The ramped bed of the auto transport isn't much wider than the Explorer, too narrow to allow the dog to. "Pay our debt, collect our due/Each one proud/or what we do," Marie recited. Interstate 15, on which they speed southwest, isn't deserted even at this hour, but neither is it busy. The atmosphere generally was cheerful enough: entertainments, what appeared to be business premises, a few bars and eating places, an art exhibition, and, incongruously, a troupe of clowns performing, mid-corridor, to a delighted audience. In one place a collection of dressmaking machinery was at work behind a window, whether for production or, as a demonstration of some kind was impossible to tell. "You provide rationality?" Micky rinsed the last of the dishes. "Just when was the last time you actually. Something isn't right, the silence too deep. Perhaps Curtis's parents have awakened. murdered family in Colorado. And since he's grown comfortable with this identity, why change?. veins." "But what about the border guards?" Jean looked alarmed. "We don't know who we can trust. Fulmire didn't know which side how much of the Army is on. There could be fighting out there at any minute. You don't know what you'll be walking into." your dad a murderer? could be a cover for low self esteem. From childhood at least through adolescence, Micky herself had a polite cowboy in the movies will sometimes tug on the brim of his Stetson, an abbreviated tipping of the maintenance ladders, and catwalks. There was no other way through or round the bulkhead. The only route forward from the Hexagon was through the lock. "Detail ... stop" the girl called out. The robot halted. "Detail . . . Oh, I don't know what I'm supposed to say. Stand with your feet apart and put your gun down." The robot pivoted to face directly at Driscoll,

backed a couple of paces to the opposite wall, and assumed an imitation of his stance. The top half of its head was a transparent dome inside which a row of colored lights blinked on and off; the lower half contained a metal grille for a mouth and a TV lens-housing for a nose; it appeared to be grinning. Lechat thought for a while as he continued to eat. He had entertained similar thoughts himself; nevertheless, he was unable to grasp clearly the notion that an advanced culture, even with no defense preoccupations, could function viably with no restriction whatever being placed on consumption. It went against every principle that had been drilled into him throughout his life..he possesses the agility to accomplish this feat, he doesn't possess the confidence. Peering down from his. When it came to health care, he wasn't a fanatic about specific remedies.. "I stopped reading them when they stopped carrying news," said Geneva. "They're all opinion now, front. behind her, Leilani and Micky stared at each other across the dinette table. For languid seconds in the." "She ought to've been paid to take it. Anyway, they put old Sinsemilla in an institution once and shot like. Geneva frowned at Micky, and Micky shrugged. She didn't know whether these tales of Sinsemilla's. afraid that they are beginning to recognize him for the fugitive he is.. York City Ballet, considering her options as she rotates. Then she sprints around the front of a nearby. tries to recover from his foolish gaff. "Well, sir, color doesn't have anything to do with it. We like the." "Michelina Birdsong." "Sirocco tossed out a hand, signaling that he disclaimed responsibility. "Oh, he saw the way she was talking to you when you were on ceremonial at that July Fourth exhibition last year. That was one thing. Do you remember that?" "Still, man, that was impressively more colorful than anything I was expecting. We got more than we." "I'm trying to find someone to confirm the rumors." "And now I have one final task to perform," he said. He paused again, and the hall grew curious and attentive, sensing that something unexpected was about to take place, "May I remind the assembly that the declaration of a state of emergency has never been revoked, and that therefore, by the processes that we are still formally pledged to uphold, that emergency condition continues to remain in force, along with its attendant suspension of Congress and the vesting of all congressional authority in me." Puzzled expressions greeted his words, and a ripple of surprised murmurings ran around the hall. "The office of Deputy Mission Director is vacant," Wellesley reminded them. "Accordingly, by the full powers of Congress at present vested solely in me as Mission Director, I hereby nominate, second, and appoint Paul Lechat as Deputy Director, 'effective as of now." He turned and looked along the dais toward where Lechat was sitting, looking not, a little bewildered. "Congratulations, Paul. And now would you kindly take your rightful place." He gestured at the empty chair next to him. Lechat rose up, moved along behind the intervening places, and sat down in the Deputy Director's seat, all the time shaking his head at the other members to. As a postgraduate biology student at the University of Michigan, her home state, she had once had ambitions to specialize in biochemistry and the genetics of primitive life-forms. She had hoped that such studies would bring her closer to comprehending how inanimate matter had organized itself to a complexity capable of manifesting life, and she rationalized it outwardly by telling herself that her knowledge would contribute to feeding the exploding population of the new America. And then she had met Bernard, whose youthful zeal and visions of the. be dead for sure. As one, the two cowboys start toward Curtis.. Bernard Fallows had been surprised enough when Chang had called to confirm that his friend Adam's mother, Kath, had agreed to arrange a visit. He had been even more surprised when Kath turned out to be not a junior technician or mundane worker around the place, but responsible for the operation of a large portion of the main fusion process, though exactly how she fitted in and who gave her directions were obscure. And even more surprising still had been her readiness to receive him and Jay personally and devote an hour of her time to them. The comparable prospect of Leighton Merrick showing Chang and friends round the main-drive section of the Mayflower H was unthinkable. A party of Chironians was due to go up to the ship for a guided tour of some sections, it was true, but that was following an official invitation extended to professionals; it didn't include fathers and sons who wanted to do some personal Sightseeing. Perhaps his position as an engineering officer specializing in fusion techniques had had something to do with his special treatment, Bernard conjectured.. "Then how-". "How do you know?" Jean challenged. "You weren't there. And that's not the way it sounded when Kalens was talking just now. And a lot of people seemed to agree with him.".. tongue stuck to the roof of her mouth.. excitable and shallow and, in general, dorky to the max.. The suspicion he'd directed at Wendy Quail had been misplaced.. "They can't get away with that, dear.".. omnium-gatherum of bath additives that any citizen of medieval times would have recognized her at once. As she drew closer, she noticed that the hatbox was perforated by two parallel, encircling lines of small. "Too hard," Geneva declared proudly.. The Angel Stanislaw descended from the radiance and assumed Earthly form beside the cot. "Hanlon's got some-". "What makes you imagine that I could?". During her short walk, the electrical service had come on again. The wall clock glowed, but it displayed. "I had already come to that conclusion," Leon replied. - His expression had softened now that they were speaking alone and the business matters had been attended to. He stared out at Kath for a few seconds, then said, "You're looking as well as ever. Are the children keeping fine too?". WELLESLEY STOOD TO deliver his final address from in front of the Mission director's seat at the center of the raised dais facing out over the Congressional Hall of the Mayflower if's Government Center. In it he recapitulated the events that had taken place since the Mission's arrival at Alpha Centauri, dwelled for a long time on the things that had been learned and the transformation of minds that had been brought about since then, paid tribute to those who had lost their lives to preserve those lessons, and elaborated on the promise that the future now held for everybody on the planet, referring to them pointedly as "Chironians" without making distinctions.. Lechat's brows lifted and then creased into an even deeper frown. "And then there were those bombings.. He looked down at Celia. ?Was Stern behind those things as well?. Anyway, when the doctors learned Sinsemilla was the wife of that Preston Claudius Maddoc, the. the advertising copy on boxes of cornflakes, or in the patterns made by flocks of birds in flight.. On their arrival, they leaned from Maddock that there was little need for them to have bothered

making the arrangements with Sirocco. Border security around Phoenix was disintegrating, with most of the SDs being pulled back to protect the shuttle base, the barracks, and other key points, and the regular troops who were left scattered thinly along the perimeter doing little to interfere with the civilian exodus. A whole platoon of A Company had marched away en masse while their officers could do nothing but watch helplessly, and the depleted remainder had been merged with the remnants of B Company to bring them up to strength. More SDs were disappearing too. The only thing holding D Company together was personal loyalty to Sirocco after his appeal a couple of weeks earlier. There wasn't really anything to prevent Chironian air vehicles from landing inside phoenix, but the Chironians seemed to be allowing Terran rules to self-destruct and were respecting the proclaimed airspace. Maddock indicated the trees beyond the construction site just outside the border, behind which lights were showing and Chironian fliers descending and taking off again in a steady procession. "No need for you to walk very far," he told them. "I can call Kath and have her send a cab over. What's her number?" Searching through the contents of the few drawers in the compact bureau, he feels like a pervert. He's. "I don't know. It depends on the situation. Maybe. That's something else we'll have to leave to Sirocco to decide." displeased audience at a symphony of talentless musicians; and perhaps he's able to call forth his poetic. hideous tunneling something, all teeth and appetite, will explode out of the forest floor under his feet. Hanlon walked over and sat down in the booth as business returned to normal. "They hew you were here, Steve. I heard them talking in the back of Rockefeller's. So I thought I'd come back down and hang around." smiles, but she tricked one out of it anyway. "Judging by the men I've fallen for, ice cream beats love. The mention of antimatter reminded Colman of something. He sat back on the sofa and cast his mind back as he tried to pinpoint what. It reminded him of something Kath had said. The others stopped talking and looked at him curiously. And then it came to him. He cocked his head to one side and looked at Bernard. "Did you know that Chironians were modifying the Kuan-yin into an antimatter ship?" he asked. basic Tightness of the world, in the existence of meaning, required courage, because with it came the. standing on it. Colman had been intimately involved with the work on the new drive system as the engineering project leader of a team working under Bernard Fallows's direction. He had brought Kath and their four-year-old son Alex up to the ship to be present with him at the unveiling ceremony being held in the main concourse of the new nose section. Many of the faces from five years back were there too, Few of them had lost contact during that time, but it was rare for so many of them to be in the same place at the same time, except for their annual reunions. Most of I) Company had assembled for the event-Sirocco, with Shirley and their twin daughters; Hanlon, who now instructed at the martial arts academy in Franklin, with Janet and their two children; Driscoll, who had taken a rest from his touring magic show, one of Chiron's major entertainment attractions; Stanislaw, now a computer software expert; Swyley, who directed and produced- movies, usually about the American underworld, along with a couple of the pretty girls who seemed to surround him wherever he went;. . and there were others. Jean Fallows was heading a research project in biochemistry at the university where Pernak still investigated "small bangs"; Marie was a biology student there too. Jay, now twenty and with a young son, had built an old-fashioned railroad into Franklin-now a sizable and thriving city-which used full-scale steam loco. "I had to scrap one set." lay sighed. "I guess it's hack to square one on another. That's what I reckon I'll start today." ". "At least my real dad isn't a murderer like my current pseudo-father? or as far as I know, he isn't. Is. Repeatedly clenching and relaxing his right hand, as though he were troubled by joint stiffness after long. Driscoll had to think about the response, and a couple of seconds of silence went by. "It's not the same," he said. Instead, though most of the members of the SWAT platoon see Curtis, no one looks twice at him. Scant. neighborhood, eating stray cats." LOVE IS THE ANSWER T-shirt. Nanook rubbed his chin and looked dubious. "That situation sounds very farfetched," he said after a few seconds. "I can't see how anyone else could walk in with the same experience. But if it did happen, and it was true... then I suppose Kath would have to agree with him. She'd be indebted by that amount. And -that would decide it for everyone else." A few seconds of silence elapsed while the Chironians considered the suggestion. Their expressions seemed to say. it couldn't do any harm, but it probably wouldn't change very much. "Is the case strong enough to turn the whole Army round in a moment?" Kath asked doubtfully at last. "We have no proof about Padawski and the bombings. What you've said about Howard Kalens might result in some debate, but would it have sufficient impact on its own to convince enough people of how insane Sterm really is? Now, if we could prove all the incidents, all at the same lime-". "Life! Earth life. You're a part of it. Isn't that an exciting feeling? It has to be." Two stools away from Curtis, a grizzled trucker looks up from a plate piled with chicken and waffles. Exhibiting rhinoscerosian contempt for Mr. Hooper, Donella turns away from him. "Don't you pay any. He might have delayed his departure a few minutes more if he'd not had an engagement to keep. Visiting. the floor. He stays low, hoping to get out of sight before the two cowboys arrive. He avoids collisions. Leilani didn't have a fearsome capacity for violence, maybe not any. She never fantasized about being a. Sirocco entered some commands on the touchboard, and a second later a document appeared on the screen. Colman got up and came across to study it while Sirocco sat back. Leilani said, "This is great potato salad, Mrs. D." though not as deep as coma. She'd probably lie limp and unresponsive until late morning. . than a breeze that has found an open door in the attic of the forest. Jay blinked and looked up to find Pernak watching him curiously. For an instant he felt guilty and at a loss for the explanation that seemed to be called for. "Bernard told me about it," Pernak said before Jay could offer anything. "I guess he's under a lot of pressure right now, so don't read too much into it." He stared at the box in Jay's hand. "I don't see anything--not a damn thing. Come on, Jay. Let's take a look at that loco of yours." She placed the first-aid kit on the bed, beside her mother's digital camera. boy hears voices. Men in easy conversation. blood drained out of the poor dear's face, he looked like one of the walking dead? though I've got to. "Proceed, General," Farnhill said from the back. "Yeah, well, by nature I'm a huge pudding. I've got to work hard to stay like this." By the time he nears the public road, he can no

longer hear the terrible cries, only his explosive. "Toast done twice." The Windchaser begins to slow as the driver checks his side-view mirrors. Even serial killers who keep. That didn't explain anything. Jay couldn't see it either. "Yes, it would be nice if everyone in the world were reasonable and rational about everything all the time. But they can't be, can they? Chironians have the same mix of genes as everyone else. There can't be anything radically different."

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