

When sorrows come

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When sorrows come

by [cupidsbow](#)

Summary

When sorrows come, they come not as single spies, but in battalions.

or

A complete and accurate history of the tragedy of Tarsus IV, including the identity of the previously anonymous Survivor One.

Warnings given in the End Notes.

Notes

Thank you so much for the awesome prompt, natsinator, and for this in particular:

"you can feel free to go hogwild with creative format-- I love things like in-universe newspaper articles, epistolary fic, weird POV, approaching situations from a new angle, fake histories, other characters gossiping about [requested character] instead of them actually appearing, literally whatever your heart desires haha."

I hope you like it.

Image Credit: The image attributed to Dr Sarah Poole-April was created by an AI in Google's Colaboratory.

Beta: Black_Samvara you rock. Thank you.

Author's Note: Tarsus IV is one of my all-time favourite fanfiction tropes in Trek fandom, and it was such a pleasure, albeit a melancholy one, to add my take on it.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

The Tarsus IV Massacre: 50 Years On

by Samantha Moulton, reporting from Tarsus IV

This week marks fifty years since the Tarsus IV massacre, a tragedy that left a lasting scar on Federation culture, and profoundly changed our colonial policy. The Federation Times reviews what we have learned from this dark moment in history.



An artist's impression of the outskirts of New Anchorage, Tarsus IV, covered in fungus, on the day the relief ships arrived, 2246 (Source: Dr Sarah Poole-April).

In the summer of 2246, a famine was ravaging Tarsus IV. As it took hold, 207 people died in riots and thefts brought on by food-shortages. That number was dwarfed when nearly 4,000 were executed by order of Governor Kodos in a misguided attempt to save the rest of the population. Overall, half the population of Tarsus IV died. Only nine survivors – all children – had ever seen Governor Kodos' face. They have since become known as the Tarsus Nine due to their identities being kept secret as a safety measure.

Since the massacre, a disproportionate number of the survivors have died of suicide, famine-related medical complications, and violence. But the after-effects of the tragedy don't stop there – the events on Tarsus IV have affected everything from serious matters such as the

probationary process for Federation membership and how interplanetary emergency relief is organised, to more frivolous matters such as inspiring holodeck shows of varying degrees of melodrama and popularity.

The questions that have been asked ever since are: How did this happen? And how can we stop it from ever happening again?

This feature story commemorates the lives lost, as well as those bereaved and displaced. It reflects on what the tragedy of Tarsus IV has taught us about the warning signs of a colony in trouble, and how to ward against such events in the future.

The colony of Tarsus IV was established in 2228 on a type M planet in an out-of-the-way solar system on the border between the Alpha and Beta Quadrants. It was a peaceful community made up of an eclectic mix – former-Starfleet veterans of the Earth-Romulan War, a diaspora of intertwined families who identified themselves as of Okinawan descent, various others disaffected with mainstream Federation culture, and perhaps most importantly, an Order of religious refugees known as The Children of the Drum.

In those early days, the colony was successful and had grown to a population of around 5,000 within a decade. It officially became a probationary member of the United Federation of Planets when the first technocratic planet-wide government was formed in 2240, at which time a small Starfleet outpost with little more than a token staff was established, just enough to keep the administrative lights on and run vacation-cum-training camps for cadet-track children of serving Starfleet officers -- a program called Fast-Track to Space.

It was by all accounts an idyllic world, its unspoiled beauty just starting to attract tourists, and perhaps it would have been nothing more than an exotic vacation spot, and a footnote in the Federation's long and storied history, if not for the devastating solar flares that irradiated nearby Epsilon Sorona II in 2245, leading to a mass evacuation of that planet's barely-established farming colony to their nearest feasible neighbour, Tarsus IV. Overnight, the population nearly doubled to 8,000 souls, and it stretched the existing infrastructure to near-breaking point.

What happened next is largely lost to history – we merely know the bones of it. The Sorona refugees planted seeds they had brought with them, and those seeds reacted catastrophically with the ecology of Tarsus IV in the form of a fast-growing fungus. It's unclear if the seeds were affected by radiation, contaminated with fungal spores from some other source, or just incompatible with the Tarsus IV ecosphere. No scientific records remain from that time, because the colony's data was destroyed by the fleeing Governor.

What we do know comes from after the fact. Chief-Medical Officer of the *Enterprise*, Dr Sarah Poole-April, was one of the first responders post-massacre, and headed up the team that tackled the fungus. Poole-April started her medical education in veterinary science before becoming a xenomedical expert. She spent her career fighting to save endangered non-terrestrial species from extinction, particularly animals. It's ironic then that she is best known for killing off the fungal infection on Tarsus IV – a feat her team managed within 21 days of taking the first sample. It's still considered one of the most elegant and successful pieces of genetic engineering ever done. At the Starfleet inquiry into the events on Tarsus IV, she testified that, "We found no evidence that the fungus was a bioweapon," and that it

“responded well to the standard fungicidal techniques pioneered by T’Les of the Vulcan Science Academy.” She didn’t speculate on its possible origins, but confirmed that its genetic ancestry was not indigenous to Tarsus, which made eradicating it much easier.

Eighty-year-old Widelene Mahiz, one of the few surviving Soronan refugees, wrote in her memoir, *A Life Amongst the Stars*, “Tarsus was a beautiful world when we arrived, and the people were lovely to us. The rescue ships had given us pop-up prefab kit homes and basic supplies, but we were all so bewildered by how fast everything had happened. Many of us were still recovering from the radiation treatment. Before we could even worry about anything, The Children of the Drum turned up, assigned us land, and built everything for us. It was like magic. We were so happy and hopeful after that. We planted our seeds with full hearts, wishing for a better life and to give back to our new friends. And then we had to watch the crops rot in the ground, watch that rot spread like cancer... it was horrible. I can’t even put it into words. My wife killed herself because she couldn’t stand it. The massacre is the bit that everyone remembers about Tarsus IV, but the suffering started well before that.”

Despite what Mahiz says about receiving a warm welcome, the reality was more complex. While The Children of the Drum made the best of the situation, in keeping with their philosophy, many Tarsians were angered by the Federation relocating the Soronan refugees there without even asking permission. Ben Mori, a ten year old at the time – one of the first generation to be born on Tarsus – remembers there was a general dislike for the newcomers. The adults in the neighbourhood all complained to each other about them, and it was echoed in schoolyard rough and tumble between Soronan children and his Tarsian peers. This friction was just one of the many contributing factors that led to the tragedy that followed.

The Soronan fungus caused a blight which swiftly spread across the planet, devastating both crops and native vegetation alike. By mid-2246, the inhabitants of Tarsus IV were facing starvation. It’s unclear why the call for help was delayed so long, but a distress call finally went out to Starfleet once it was clear the colony would not survive until the next scheduled delivery of provisions. Starfleet immediately began putting together humanitarian aide. However, the estimated arrival time was not for several weeks, and with famine already taking effect, the situation was quickly becoming volatile and chaotic.

This is where the infamous Kodos “the Executioner” enters the story. Adrian Kodos was a member of The Children of the Drum. The Order were dedicated to the precepts of science, purity, and utilitarianism, along with a healthy dose of isolationism. They were instantly recognisable due to the stylised personal protective clothing they always wore in public, in particular the colourful breathing masks that covered their faces. One of the oddest parts of the Tarsus IV story is that so few people knew what Kodos looked like. It seems improbable given the technology available even fifty years ago. But this was why – he and his Order didn’t show their faces in public, and had lived nomadic lives outside of the Federation mainstream before settling on Tarsus IV. There were limited records of them before they settled on the colony, and they ensured there were very few kept within the colony as well. The Children of the Drum were a significant power block on Tarsus IV, and heavily influenced the political choice to run the government as a technocracy, as well as the ways in which citizens were counted and recorded for the colony census. Tarsus IV was one of the few colonies that allowed ID cards to require only DNA, rather than the combination that is more commonly used on Federation planets of DNA, image, retina or fingerprint scan.

Federation law has since been changed as a direct response to this obvious security weakness, and citizens are now required to have three-point identification once they reach adulthood.

Not much is known of Kodos prior to his installation as Governor, and there is only one poor-quality image of him from that era, although it's unknown when or why it was taken. There is some speculation it was from a performance of *King Lear* and that he is wearing make-up, prosthetics and a wig. What we do know is that he was a teacher, a lover of literature, a dramatist, and a hard-line utilitarian, even by the standards of the Order. He regularly volunteered as a casual tutor, holding drama workshops during the vacation camps run by Starfleet for cadet-track youths, and by all accounts was a charismatic, popular and well liked teacher. It was during an incident in one of these workshops that several students saw Kodos' face. He took his mask off to give emergency medical aid to a student, Dona Eames, while waiting for a medical team to arrive. Ironically, just two months before he ordered the massacre, he was nominated for the prestigious Order of Ferenginar by Gabriel Lorca, the Starfleet base Commander, in recognition of his volunteer work in the Fast-Track to Space program, and for his successful efforts to save young Eames. Eames went on to become one of the Nine survivors who had seen his face, and was identified in the inquiry as Survivor Four – "He had scary eyes," is the line that jumps out from their transcript. Eames was later murdered by Kodos' daughter, Lenore Karidian, as part of an attempt to conceal Kodos' survival and new identity.

Little else about Kodos' story has survived. Why did the Ruling Council vote no confidence in Governor Gisela Ribiero and replace her with Adrian Kodos? How did he escape Tarsus IV? How did he establish himself as Anton Karidian, the leader of the itinerant acting troupe, the Karidian Company of Players? What was the name of his daughter's mother, and how was Lenore Karidian raised? There are no clear answers.

Whatever the Ruling Council's thinking when they elected him Governor, what followed Kodos' rise to power was a brief window of hope for the colony. He responded to the rioting and theft with firm leadership, issuing swift and decisive directives to enact martial law and strict food rationing. This worked to settle the population and halted the civil unrest. His directives quickly took a darker turn, however. He and his supporters, made up largely of extremist members of The Children of the Drum, stole the weapons housed in the colony's Starfleet encampment, and overthrew the Council.

Whether there was enough food for the whole colony to have survived until relief arrived is another unknowable factor of the story. Kodos thought there was only enough food for half of the colony to survive, and rather than leave it to chance, he split the colony into two groups based on a theory of eugenics which was considered racist and outdated even fifty years ago. One group comprised those he deemed valuable to the colony, and the other those he decided were a waste of resources. Those in the latter category included most of the Soronans, Kodos' own detractors, and those who had seen his face, including the children from the Fast-Track to Space program. With hindsight, it's clear that he realised he might need to disappear, and was trying to improve his chances.

Both groups were herded into separate locations in New Anchorage. One heard a rousing speech about how they would all survive if they followed the rules, and the other... The other heard one of the most chilling speeches ever given since the establishment of the Federation:

The revolution is successful, but survival depends on drastic measures. Your continued existence represents a threat to the well-being of society. Your lives mean slow death to the more valued members of the colony. Therefore, I have no alternative but to sentence you to death. Your execution is so ordered. Signed, Kodos, governor of Tarsus Four.

These words come to us from Survivor One's testimony. Much of what is in the public record about the Tarsus IV massacre comes from his anonymised testimony during Starfleet's investigation of the event. It's also how we know that Kodos and his brute squad used stolen Starfleet phaser-cannons to execute the 4000 colonists considered unworthy of survival. The soldiers were focusing their fire on the adults first, likely because they thought they were the more dangerous targets. In the chaos that followed, fifteen children, led by Survivor One, escaped through a small vent they knew about from games of hide and seek they had played in happier days. Most of the children who survived said they would not have made it out without Survivor One leading the way.

While most of the children who escaped that day were members of the Fast-Track to Space program, not all were, and not all knew Kodos personally. A handful were children of colonists, and were unable to identify him – afterwards they were publicly listed as Tarsus survivors, although not identified as escaping the massacre. Thomas Leighton, Survivor Two of the protected Nine, was the only child with a foot in both camps – he was both a colony child and in the Fast-Track to Space program and had seen Kodos' face. He was also the oldest child to escape, and the last of them to make it out of the vent. Severely injured by phaser fire to the face, he was forced through the vent by his two older brothers who were too large to fit. They both perished, as did his parents.

The other survivors were all smaller and younger, the youngest being three-year-old Eliana Moulton, whose mother used her body as a shield, allowing the children more time to escape. As they fled, Survivor One organised the children to help each other over the rough terrain heading into the mountains, but he was the one who carried toddler Eliana all the way to their hideaway.

That toddler was my mother.

My childhood was full of adventure stories of a dashing Starfleet Captain saving young Elia from improbable dangers – like the time, armed only with a sharpened stick, he killed a “monster” who was trying to eat her. With the hindsight of adulthood, those happy adventure stories carry an entirely different tone.

My mother and the other escaping children fled to the Yama mountains just outside of New Anchorage, which were seamed with sensor-inhibiting minerals. Because they couldn't be found via sensor, Kodos offered his soldiers food bounties for the bodies of the “rebels”, as he dubbed them. There are several gut-wrenching accounts in the official Starfleet records of the children being hunted for sport. It's a credit to Survivor One's talent for strategy that thirteen of the fifteen children survived to be rescued by Starfleet.

One account of that time comes from Thomas Leighton. He was posthumously revealed to be one of the Tarsus Nine by his wife Martha. Testifying as Survivor Two, Leighton said, “I'll never forget the bloody things Kodos did. At first it felt like something that wasn't possible. I couldn't believe it. I was walking, I was alive, my brothers and parents were gone, my face

hurt, nothing made sense. Everything felt like a dream. We slept on the ground. We drank out of a puddle. We ate bugs. I held a little kid's hand after one of those monsters stabbed her, and she died. She died right there in the dirt. It was all completely unreal. If it wasn't for [Survivor One] I don't think I would have tried to live. I'll never forget what that butcher did."

Leighton died trying to bring Kodos to justice. He was another of Lenore Karidian's murder victims, in her attempts to cover up her father's crimes.

In the days after the massacre, those who had been deemed worthy of survival were unaware of the fate of their brethren. Historian Ben Mori explains what it was like. "Everyone knew something was wrong, but we were all too afraid to speak. The Children of the Drum were patrolling, and they had phasers, and no-one had seen the Starfleet officers in days. There was a heavy sense of dread that even I could sense through the self-involvement of childhood. The one time I tried to ask mama what had happened to our neighbours, she put her hand over my mouth and held me close. She whispered that I needed to be good and not ask questions. It scared me. I had nightmares for years about saying the wrong thing and being shot. I know now, of course, that our neighbours, the Wiegands, were murdered by Kodos along with so many others, and dumped into the mass grave like so much garbage. It's easy to think that those of us on Kodos' 'worth saving' list had it easy when you contrast our fate to that, but it didn't feel that way. We were afraid. Everyone who survived that day has a similar story. We were all traumatised, and we all live with the guilt that eats at us for surviving."

After the distress call went out asking the Federation for help, Kodos implemented a planet-wide communications blackout so no-one could inform Starfleet of his next actions. This ended up doing the very thing he'd been trying to avoid – it raised concerns amongst those organising the relief effort. Credit goes to Commodore Stone, commander of Starbase 11, for acting on this realisation. He was the one who noticed when the colony couldn't be contacted and ensured the relief effort was expedited.

His efforts were successful. The relief ships arrived weeks earlier than anticipated.

The first ship to arrive was the *USS Narbonne*, shortly followed by *USS Enterprise*, and then the Vulcan cruiser *Sh'vhal*. They arrived just six days after the massacre.

When Starfleet arrived, Kodos and his soldiers destroyed the colony's computer system and databank and fled to the same Yama mountains that had helped the fleeing children days before. The mountains stymied the search for him, and he used the time to shed his religious garb and identity. We know now that he faked his death by swapping his own DNA profile with his aide's, and leaving behind a body charred beyond recognition. Years later, Anton Karidian was revealed to be Kodos by Dr Thomas Leighton, along with then-Captain James Kirk, and Survivor Six, Lt. Kevin Riley. Kodos died at his daughter's hand before facing justice.

With his death, the chapter of history related to the massacre of Tarsus IV was finally closed. However, many questions remained, and they have helped keep the story of Tarsus in the public consciousness for the past fifty years.

One of the most enduring and popular mysteries of the events on Tarsus was the identity of Survivor One. At once the most secret and yet most famous survivor of Tarsus IV, Survivor One has long exercised the popular imagination. His testimony has been taught in schools throughout the Federation, and his deeds have inspired countless retellings. This week, in a scheduled declassification of Starfleet documents to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Tarsus IV massacre, the name of Survivor One has finally been revealed. Admiral James T. Kirk, it turns out, is the widely romanticised Survivor One. Best known for captaining the Starfleet flagship, *USS Enterprise*, Kirk was just thirteen years old during the summer of the massacre. It seems almost fitting that Survivor One, who has become such an icon of popular culture, should actually be Kirk, an heroic figure even without this added legacy.

Five decades ago, the massacre on Tarsus IV galvanised Federation society. It was met with horror. Shock. Disbelief. Those in power declared nothing like it would ever be allowed to happen again.

Since then, some have argued that although Kodos' was cruel, he was also entirely logical and utilitarian, and if relief had not arrived early he may well have saved 4000 lives. The general consensus is that he was a psychologically flawed and unstable man, and there can be no reasonable justification of his actions. No matter how utilitarian his thinking might have been, Kodos showed little real care for his people, and such care is a governor's first duty. Over 4000 citizens died at his hands, and those who survived were deeply traumatised, as were many of those not on Tarsus at the time who nonetheless lost loved-ones.

In searching for an explanation for Kodos' choices, we must look back to the pre-Federation days of Old Earth to find authoritarian rulers with similar legacies of massive harm. Kodos' lack of empathy for his people, partnered with his hands-on, task oriented, and punishment-driven leadership style are taken straight from the playbook of the Old Earth "strong men". History has shown that the best way to deal with these kinds of autocratic rulers is twofold. Their aides and counterparts must lay bare the truth about how flawed their plans are, and if that doesn't stop them, to speak out even more loudly afterwards so that their legacy cannot be distorted into something noble. At the same time, solidarity and kindness must be shown to the people suffering under their rule, as this will help undermine their power base.

Today, Kodos is widely condemned, and those on Kodos' "worthy of survival list" are recognised as victims alongside the few remaining survivors of the massacre. Even so, many argue that not enough has been done to reveal Kodos' flaws. They argue that he is still a figure that potentially offers a seductive template for others with similar tendencies. Only time will tell whether they are right.

After the *USS Narbonne* and the other relief ships arrived at Tarsus IV weeks ahead of schedule, life was slowly pieced back together. Support poured in from many Federation programs and charity drives. While many of the surviving colonists took up the offer to leave and be resettled elsewhere, a surprising number of them stayed. Today, Tarsus IV is a thriving member of the Federation. New Anchorage is a modern metropolis, filled with the shadows of the past, but forging ahead into a new future. The fungus has been eradicated. The mass grave has been turned into a memorial garden. The colony is once again a tourist spot, albeit for vastly different reasons.

When I arrived at New Anchorage for the anniversary celebrations, I was greeted by a bright, modern spaceport, a far cry from the desolation in the holo images of Tarsus IV shown over the years. On the monorail into the city centre, we first passed the Tarsus Memorial Museum, an imposing building that repurposes the house of worship once used by The Children of the Drum, then the brand-new wing of the Leighton Memorial School, and finally the lush, sprawling, Garden of Remembrance right in the centre of the new business district. You wouldn't know this was the site of an infamous atrocity without looking closely at the plaques that adorn so much of the city.

Beneath the everyday tranquillity of modern Tarsus IV, the traumas of the past linger. Says Ben Mori, "A few weeks ago there was an unseasonably early frost, and looking out at the world covered in white, my first instinct was to flee to the shipyard and get off the planet. I know the other survivors felt it too – I could see it in their faces."

The remembrance celebrations taking place here for the anniversary are hopefully part of the path to healing these old wounds. Many of the remaining survivors and their families have made the pilgrimage; they are telling their stories and remembering those who are gone. And for the first time since the massacre, Survivor One himself is back on Tarsus IV to help lay these ghosts to rest. At dawn, Admiral Kirk will open the new Pool of Reflection to commemorate those who survived. As he gives the Remembrance Day address, the pool will capture the first rays of the rising sun, bringing new light to the heart of Tarsus IV.

Tomorrow: A tell-all interview with Admiral Kirk on surviving Tarsus IV.

For more on this moment in history, read Samantha Moulton's new book, The Four Thousand: Crisis on Tarsus IV.

Survivor One's Story: Admiral James T. Kirk Remembers

Chapter Notes

The same warning notes apply for this chapter.

by Samantha Moulton, reporting from Tarsus IV

As the Federation prepares for the Tarsus IV anniversary ceremony in New Anchorage's Garden of Remembrance, Samantha Moulton of The Federation Times spoke to Admiral James Kirk about the summer that changed his life.

If you ask someone on the street to name a Starfleet Captain, the odds are good that they will name James T. Kirk. He's had one of the most successful and high profile careers in the fleet. It was full of firsts. First to beat the unbeatable Starfleet Academy test, the *Kobayashi Maru*. First captain to meet his doppelganger from a mirror universe. First to go on a successful mission through time. Not to mention all the First Contacts he's made. He captained the flagship, *USS Enterprise*, for an historic five-year exploratory tour which kept him in the headlines and the popular consciousness for years. Upon return to Earth, at just 37 he was promoted to Rear Admiral and became Chief of Starfleet Operations. He took this on after the notorious attempted coup d'état of the Federation government by Starfleet Vice Admiral Vaughan Rittenhouse. Kirk is credited with cleaning house, and re-establishing Starfleet as an institution worthy of respect. With that taken care of, he spent the next few decades ping-ponging between captaining the *Enterprise* and serving in Starfleet high command. While there are official announcements explaining this oddity, the popular explanation is that Starfleet let him do what he wanted, so he wouldn't get bored and retire early. One can hardly blame them if that is the case. Over his long and successful career, Kirk has gained a reputation for strategy, charisma, and an almost uncanny ability to charm. Although he's now retired, interest in his career has recently been reignited by the popular holodrama exploits of starship Captain Jacob K. Temple of the *USS Endeavour*. It's so commonly known that Kirk is the template for the character that, as Kirk puts it, with a wry smile, "Even Spock called me 'Jacob' the other day." Spock, of course, being Kirk's best friend and First Officer on the *Enterprise*, who has his own counterpart on the show – T'Bon, the half-Orion, half-Vulcan Science Officer.

Given just how popular Kirk is, it's difficult to believe that he could become even more famous in retirement than he was at the height of his stratospheric career. And yet it turns out he is also the iconic Survivor One of the Tarsus IV massacre, a long-held secret identity that has exercised the popular imagination for decades.

What is it like to be outed as the man behind one of the most popular mysteries of our time?

“Well, it was never a mystery to me,” Kirk points out, “so I didn’t dwell on it much over the years. I understand why people are so interested now, but the real heroes of Tarsus IV are Captain Korrapati and the *Narbonne*’s crew who were first to arrive with aid, Dr Poole-April who led the *Enterprise* team who destroyed the fungus, and the Vulcans on the *Sh’vhal* who treated the psychic trauma so many of the survivors suffered. Between them, they saved so many lives. I was young and lucky, but that’s about it. They were the right people in the right place at the right time. They don’t get enough credit for what they did.”

It doesn’t feel like Kirk is attempting false modesty, and it’s true enough that the crews of the three ships arrived with aid that saved thousands of lives. Still, Kirk’s being somewhat disingenuous here. It’s not every thirteen-year-old that not only survives a disaster of the scale of Tarsus IV, but helps a dozen other children to survive too.

“And thank God for that.” Kirk leans forward, every line of him earnest. “I’d rather thirteen-year-olds were focused on school and their latest crush, not fleeing for their lives. Disasters can happen to anyone – that’s the reality of it. Whether you’re three, thirteen, fifty, or a hundred and fifty if you’re a Vulcan. No matter who you are, sometimes you find yourself in a bad situation. I got lucky on Tarsus IV. A lot of good people didn’t. I think it’s human nature to want to celebrate those lucky breaks when they happen, but all I remember is being hungry, afraid, and angry. There was nothing heroic about it at the time.”

I’m pretty sure the families of the children he saved would disagree.

Kirk sits back in his chair when I say that, and just looks at me for a moment. He’s not silent because he’s caught without something to say – he’s thinking. It’s fascinating to watch that famous brain at work. Suddenly it’s not so surprising his best friend is a Vulcan.

It doesn’t take him long to figure it out. “You’re Elia’s daughter,” he says, looking pleased. “She told you about me?”

I confess that she did, many times.

He stops protesting his lack of heroism as I tell him that, to me, he *was* a hero. My mother would never have survived if he hadn’t carried her away from the massacre and protected her for the week that followed.

“Elia was a sweet kid,” he says. “I’m really glad I could help her. Send her my love, won’t you.”

I agree I will. I ask what that week was like from his perspective.

“I was a kid.” He looks away from me, out the window towards the Garden of Remembrance, which is visible from the hotel we’re talking in.

“I didn’t take it seriously at first. I was busy having fun and getting into mischief, and I didn’t care all that much about missing a few meals. Even the coup was exciting at first. I trusted the adults to take care of me and keep me safe. We knew Kodos from the Fast-Track to Space program, and he was a teacher we all liked, so I trusted him too. When they rounded us all up for the town meeting – that’s what they called it, a *town meeting* – all us kids from the

FTS were horsing around and having fun.” His gaze flicks to me. His eyes are electric, and I wonder if this is how people felt during his First Contact missions, this overwhelming sense of *feeling*. He goes on: “I don’t really know how to describe what happened next. I heard Kodos’ speech, and it seared into my brain. It was like I stopped thinking and went to a really calm place where I knew exactly what I had to do. In the second before they started shooting, I told the others to grab any kids they could and get them to the vent. All of them did what I said, no hesitation. I grabbed a kid called Vicki and her sister Jean.” His gaze shifts back to the window. “Vicki didn’t make it. She was shot while we were running for the vent. Jean made it out though, she made it all the way to Rescue Day.”

“I stayed in that calm place all the time we were on the run. I remembered that one of the colonists had lost a cow, and they couldn’t track its chip in the mountains. So I took the kids there. We’d done some survival training during FTS, and I’d been in the Scouts, so I knew how to cover our tracks and set up a camp and find water. There wasn’t much to eat, but I knew how to catch stuff in the river back home, so when we got desperate, me and a few of the older kids risked going down to the Tama river. It was still in the mountains and we thought it might be safe if we were quick. That’s when one of Kodos’ murder squad found the younger kids back at camp. We were lucky she was greedy for the bounty, and didn’t call it in right away. She murdered Freddie and stabbed Alice and was about to attack Elia. That’s when we got back, and I killed her with a stick I’d sharpened for spearing fish. We thought Alice might make it, but she died as Tommy was bandaging her up. We left the bodies behind and fled further into the mountains. Starfleet arrived the next day.”

Kirk gestures at the window and what lies outside it. “You know the rest of the story.”

I wipe at my eyes with my fingers – I forgot to bring tissues. Kirk pulls out a clean handkerchief and hands it to me. It smells like pine washing powder as I wipe away my tears.

He gets up and orders us drinks and waits patiently until I’m calm again.

I understand now why Kirk is so adamant that he’s not a hero. He is, of course, but I understand why he doesn’t want the label.

Research shows that most people in an emergency stand by and do nothing, and the greater the number of people involved, the less likely anyone will act. It’s known as the Bystander Effect. People look for cues from those around them before deciding how to act, and often that leads to no action at all. Psychologically, the reason for it is that it diffuses responsibility. If everyone acts the same way, no-one is to blame for what happens. Being the one who steps forward and says, *I am responsible for helping others*, makes an enormous difference in an emergency situation, but it also makes that person a potential scapegoat. Kodos took advantage of this psychological effect when he separated the two groups. Those on the “worthy of survival” list didn’t see what happened, so there was nothing to make them panic or take any hasty action. Kodos added some intimidation to the mix, and as a group they bunkered down and waited. We know from testimony that some of those who were condemned to die acted heroically in their final moments, helping the children to escape. But Kirk was the oddity: the one who took action, galvanised others, and saved lives.

When the *Narbonne*’s rescue party arrived, they had no idea what they were beaming down to. They found a mass grave, a traumatised population who had been cowed into obedience,

and thirteen even-more traumatised children who had survived in the mountains for a week by helping each other.

Kirk made all the difference in the world to those twelve children he took under his wing. He was the one who stepped forward and took responsibility. It's something he's done over and over again during his career, but it can't have been easy for a thirteen-year-old to stand against the adults he'd trusted.

After we finish our tea, I change the subject, wanting to end on a lighter note. I've always been curious about that infamous apple Kirk supposedly ate when he beat Starfleet's unbeatable test, the *Kobayashi Maru*.

Kirk looks rueful. "Yes, it's true I ate an apple." His eyes glint with humour as he adds, "Here's a scoop for you. I ate it to spite Kodos."

I must look as sucker-punched as I feel, because he explains, "It was only a few years after Tarsus when I entered the Academy, and I was pretty angry to be given this test that ends in everyone dying no matter what I did. I refused to accept the no-win scenario. A part of me has always thought that if the adults on Tarsus had done something sooner, Kodos would have failed before he could kill *anyone*. It didn't have to end in a massacre. There was a way to win, just not one a thirteen-year-old could accomplish.

"But I wasn't thirteen anymore by the time I had to take the *Kobayashi Maru*. So I beat that twice-damned test to spite every adult on Tarsus, especially Kodos. And taking a big old bite of an apple while I did it seemed like the perfect symbolism." He laughs at himself. "A bit on the nose really, in hindsight. I was a bit of a hothead back then."

Kirk's aide comes in then, and we wrap up the interview. He gives me a warm hug, and urges me again to pass his regards to my mother.

I walk out of the room feeling rather dazed, and almost stumble into Ambassador Spock. He very kindly picks up my dropped recorder and escorts me to the turbolift.

As I step into the turbolift, I say more to myself than to the Ambassador, "Is he always so *much*?"

Just before I'm whisked away, the Ambassador says, "Such has always been my experience."

For more on this moment in history, read Samantha Moulton's new book, The Four Thousand: Crisis on Tarsus IV.

End Notes

Warnings:

First-hand descriptions by the survivors of the Tarsus IV massacre and aftermath.

Many traumatised characters speaking about their trauma.

Mentions of war crimes, such as mass graves, murder bounties, intimidation, etc.

The injury and death of several named children characters, but not in graphic detail.

A killing in self-defence is briefly described.

Several murders are mentioned.

Suicide is mentioned.

Famine and food are mentioned.

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