

lamp...."

Schilling felt a chill, remembering what he had seen.

There was no expression on the old man's face now. Firelight danced in the eyes, which no longer seemed blue.

When Nagasaki began to rise, gray and lifeless, the old man's smile returned. "Yes. Oh yes." It was euphoric, Schilling saw.

The chill came again.

"That's God we're looking at there, Danny," the old man said, and the voice was different now—deeper, a strange harmonic quality to it. "The power and glory of the universe, Danny. The hearts of stars. The eye of God. We will never get any closer to Him than that."

The old man was looking at him, waiting, and Schilling forced himself to nod at last.

"And the fourth Angel," the voice said suddenly, "poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire."

Schilling stared at the face before him, and from the corners of his eyes watched the flowers of Eniwetok bloom, slowly, like pale roses in a film he had seen once as a child. Later there would be France's first test, equatorial Africa, 1952. Then the reactor sabotage in Pakistan, two hundred thousand dead or dying, in '89. Then Libya's single 15-k device against Chad, only two years ago. And then, once more, like a symphony's close, Bikini—the ocean rising toward the sun, the screen burning, the old man's face burning.

As he watched the flowers of Eniwetok open, it happened.

The old man chuckled. He said:

"You know, Danny, when I was a boy in the green hills of Missouri—"

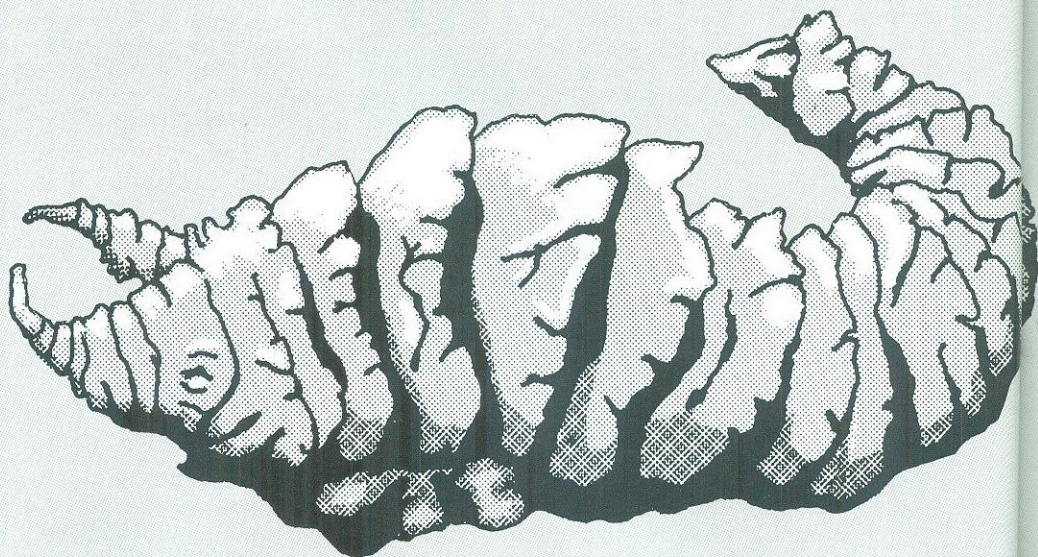
Schilling stopped breathing.

"—there was a man by the name of Gilly Williams—ran a store in the Irish Wilderness up there—and the day we all got the news that The Bomb had ended the war, you know what he said?"

The room had begun to pulse with light, and Schilling knew it was the optical nerve, oxygen not reaching it. Would an anxiety attack follow, after so many years? Would something small like this be what stopped him tonight?

"He said, 'It's like creation backwards, Johnny.' Isn't that beautiful? 'Like creation backwards.'"

Schilling made himself breathe,



CETI EEL

By Pete Rogan illustrated by Dennis Bailey

Star Trek

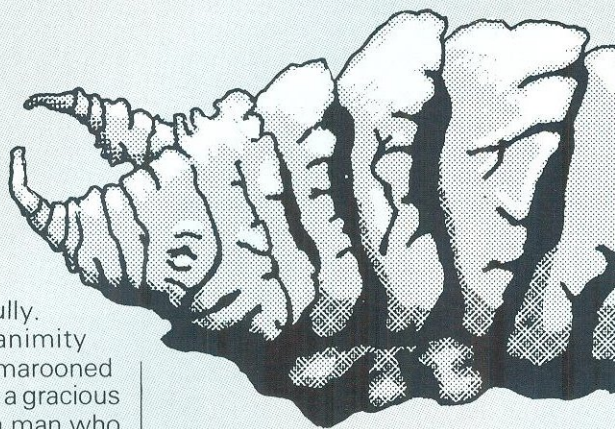
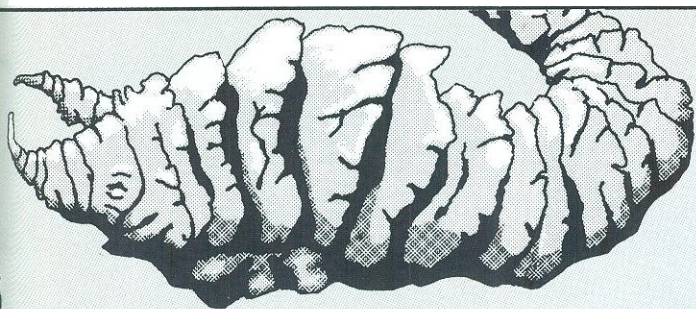
Gaming Material

Few creatures known to the Federation inspire more horror and repugnance than the so-called Ceti Eel *Surgito cetiensis marcusii*, apparently the only surviving higher life-form of Ceti Alpha V. In spite of its small size, it is one of the most repellant and feared animals known. Everything about it recalls madness, terror, and "the black of death beyond space" that Firin of Marcus writes of.

Ceti Eels come from a planet so removed from the normal routes of commerce and places of habitation in the Federation that even the world's death went unnoticed. The Ceti Alpha system was discovered and noted on

Federation survey charts dated Stardate 2/0411, like 1422 other systems that year. It had one marginally Class M world, exactly how marginal is not known. The original surveyor's note did not explain, no close scan was made, and by the time the world was next surveyed it had been all but totally destroyed.

Ceti Alpha VI, the next world out from the sun, did not even rate classification, let alone a scan that might have revealed its instability. Had only the opportunity for geologic study been lost there would have been no tragedy. But only a few years after its discovery Ceti Alpha V was settled by Khan Noonian Singh and his followers, genetically-modified refugees from Earth's Eugenics Wars, who were found drifting in space by the Heavy Cruiser *Enterprise*. They were



revived and promptly tried to seize control of the ship, unsuccessfully.

As a gesture of magnanimity Captain Kirk ordered them marooned on a habitable world. It was a gracious and ironic gesture, giving a man who failed to capture a starship an entire world to dominate instead.

The irony would come back to haunt Captain (later Admiral) Kirk. Less than half a solar year after Khan and his group were landed, Ceti Alpha VI exploded. Exactly what happened may never be known, but apparently the explosion caused Ceti Alpha V to shift its orbit, and draw closer to its sun. Planetary ecologies are fragile things, and with the shift in orbit coupled with meteoric bombardment from the debris the surface of Ceti Alpha V was rendered lifeless. Only by inconceivable effort did Khan's colony survive. In the struggle for life on the ruined planet, they encountered the Ceti Eel.

In appearance the Eel is almost comical. Adults may be only 40 centimeters long, their bodies bulging to a diameter of 20 centimeters, tapering to a pointed, lumpy tail. Their skin is deeply corrugated, giving them an appearance like a concertina, and their limbs are slight and flipperlike. Only the head betrays the Eel's dangerous nature. Below two widely-set reptilian eyes on a small but thick-ridged skull are two massive, powerful mandibles, flanking a tiny sharp-toothed mouth with hingeless serrated jaws and an extendable inner suction tube. Dissected Eels reveal that the head is only the smallest part of the feeding apparatus. The mouth parts and mandible ligament joints take up fully 20%

of the creature's body mass. It is little more than a mobile mouth.

The Ceti Eel lives below the blowing sand that now covers the planet. Apparently, it swims through the grit using its flipperlike legs, tapered tail, and a kind of creeping flexion similar to that used by Terrestrial earthworms. Using this unorthodox propulsion it can attain a respectable speed, and in soft sand can easily outrun a humanoid. It apparently feeds on anything it can find, including its own kind. The Eel approaches silently, covered by the wind and blowing sand which obscures any sign of its passage just below the surface. It strikes very quickly, driving its mandibles into its prey with shocking strength, and pushes its penetrating mouth parts into the victim through skin, scales, pelt, or pres-

Lambs of God...

made the first hints of parasthesia leave. He made his muscles move. It was like a dream, a nightmare where you couldn't run, couldn't get your legs to work, but he did it. He got up slowly, steadying himself, and as calmly as he could asked the figure on the couch if it wanted something from the portable bar which the aide had set by the door. The figure shook its head.

The old man had never been a boy in Missouri.

One of the others had, Schilling knew—one of the five killed that day at Arlington by the terrorist's Ingram machine pistol had once been a boy in Missouri, had once known a man named Gilly Williams. The profiles had taken him over a year to compile, but he had done it, and he knew them all. It was that day at Arlington, he knew now, that the transfer had taken place, that the creature had moved from a body struck down in daylight before cameras and dignitaries and the gravestones of fifty thousand soldiers, to a new body.

He removed the little gun and its pneumatic syringe from his jacket on the chair, and loaded it, hands shaking.

When the figure still did not turn, he stepped toward the couch.

The voice—deep and harmonic—said suddenly:

"You don't need to do that, Danny."

The old man's arm snapped around then, impossibly—flailing out, trying to find him with blind fingers even as the head remained where it was, wide blue eyes on the screen, reverent, unblinking.

Schilling aimed, aimed again through the nightmare of the arm, and wondered if his own heart, the full half century of it, would make it—through the fear, the catecholines, the parasympathetic overload. He aimed. He aimed again.

The arm found him—syringe still in the chamber—the fingers like steel wrapping his free wrist and the little bones, so slow to heal, breaking instantly, pain lighting up his entire side.

The figure's head was backlit now, a cloud behind it, and Schilling fired into a darkness he could only pray was neck.

The syringe disappeared.

Through the haze of pain he heard it explode at last.

Was PCP the right choice? Was ►

Lambs of God...

twenty grams the right dose? It was a heavy-animal tranquilizer, yes, but this was a human body—wasn't it?

The steel around his wrist let go. The arm began to cartwheel through the air, the other one joining it, the head finally coming around to face him. The figure stood up, jerked like a doll, its left hand sweeping the floorlamp up and away, and as it crashed to the floor, Schilling saw its eyes. Backlit though it was, the face as dark as night, he could see its eyes.

They were pink and beautiful, and burning.

Just beyond the door the guard called out.

The figure was swaying. The arms were beginning to lose their strength. The figure's back brushed the screen as it began to turn a slow 360 degrees.

"Everything's fine!" Schilling shouted. "Just two clumsy old goats." He tried to sound drunk.

The guard did not answer, waiting.

"You pick it up, Sir," Schilling shouted, laughing, slurring it all. "You knocked it over."

Just beyond the door the footsteps began to recede.

When the figure collapsed on the rug, Schilling went to it, stood over it until the spasms stopped, and then knelt beside it.

With the manual syringe he injected the sodium amytol directly into the basilic vein. The body did not flinch.

Would it work? Amytol was the standard veridical, but should he have used something like haldol to hold it down as well?

As he watched, it began again, as it had that night a year ago, the two of them in the rose garden, the old man turning as if surprised, the face for the briefest instant different—

The body remained human, but began to shimmer like oil on water—iridescent, pink and beautiful—and he understood why the physicals, not even the MRIs and PETs and eegs, had revealed a thing. The body was human. The shimmering was not. It was nothing their medicine would understand.

The eyes blinked up at him.

"Why? Schilling said, leaning over it.

Lips moved, as if attached to strings. The eyes stared back at him like cloudy marbles.

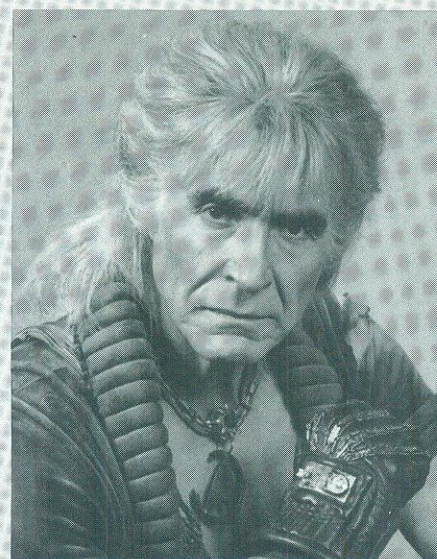
"They are so beautiful," the lips

Ceti Eel...

sure suit. Once it seizes its prey, it cannot be dislodged except by destroying the entire animal. The Eel feeds by injecting a highly-efficient enzyme into the tissues, liquifying them quickly, and then sucking them out through the tube. Dr. Carol Marcus, who studied the animals *in situ*, estimates that the Eel makes six to ten injection-suction cycles a minute while feeding, apparently recycling its supply of enzyme, and does not stop feeding, if undisturbed, until it has ingested up to one-and-a-half times its own body mass of food. This may take all of five minutes, after which it burrows into the sand, going more than ten meters down if it can, to rest in a state of torpor and digest its meal.

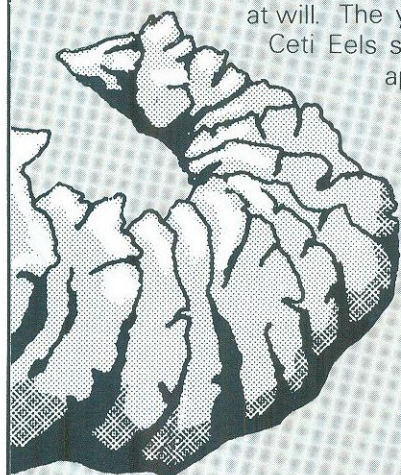
So little is known about the Eel that even its means of reproduction are not fully understood. Dr. Marcus postulates that the Ceti Eel is a true parthenogenetic animal, having no sex and reproducing offspring

at will. The young Ceti Eels simply appear



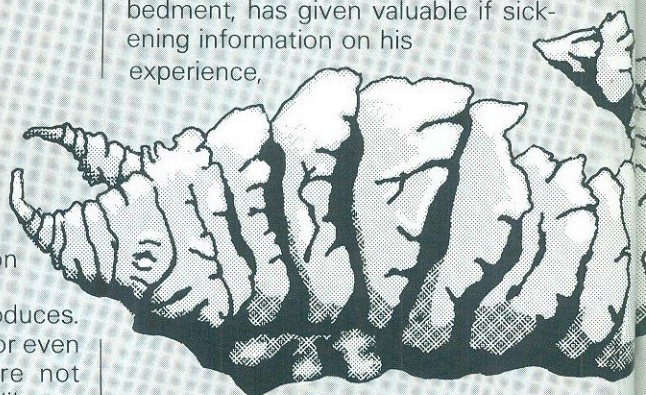
such as an ear or nostril. Like the adult, it feeds through liquification of the host's tissues, but because of its smaller size and slower feeding, it can exist embedded in its host for some time. The digestive enzyme, Dr. Marcus has found, has the ability to suppress an organism's higher pain reflexes. If an animal suffers an attack from a Ceti Eel of any size, the first injection of enzyme immediately quiets it, rendering it powerless to resist the attack. The enzyme does not eliminate pain; it merely takes away the victim's ability to react to it. And the Eel's attack is always extremely painful.

Lt. Commander Pavel Chekov, the only known survivor of Ceti Eel embedment, has given valuable if sickening information on his experience,



between two of the corrugations on the parent's skin, protected from abrasion by the corrugations and the natural body slime the Eel produces. Ceti Eels are not mammals, nor even monotremes; the young are not nourished by any special bodily secretions, like milk, but feed directly on the flesh of their parent. How long they do this, and at what stage or size they leave the parent, or even whether such feeding causes the parent's death, is all unknown.

The young of the Ceti Eel will feed on any living organism, if it can gain entry into the body of a host through a break in the skin or a natural opening



including the effect Khan sought when he intentionally inflicted Ceti Eels on him and his commanding officer; the suppression of will. Once the young Eel was implanted, it became impossible to disobey semi-hypnotic orders given by Khan without causing extreme agony. The pain was so intense that Captain Terrell suicided when he refused to kill

on Khan's order. Significantly, Lt. Commander Chekov withstood the attack, and the Eel spontaneously left his body.

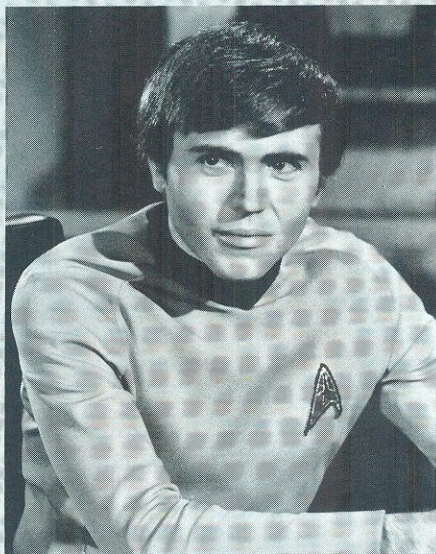
For this reason, Dr. Marcus believes that the Ceti Eel may leave a host when its will to resist becomes too strong. Had Captain Terrell been able to withstand the pain, he too might have survived. Dr. Marcus also noted that when the Eel exited Chekov, its victim was unconscious and unable to resist. It may well have sensed that its prey was dying, and hence could no longer be used for food.

The Ceti Eel's savagery and its subterranean habitat may account for its survival up to now, but Dr. Marcus believes that it is only a dying remnant of an already lost alien environment. The hardy Ceti Eel, with its ability to turn anything it finds into food, even intelligent life-forms many hundreds of times its size, is doomed. Without a green biosphere the geology of Ceti Alpha V will quickly strip the atmosphere of oxygen, even as the density of the atmosphere increases, and the few remaining life-forms will slowly die. But this may not have to be the case.

Life is tenacious. The few life-forms left on Ceti Alpha V, mostly microscopic or imported organisms, may eventually produce a new biosphere on the world of a different order. Even in its new orbit the planet receives less radiation from its sun than Vulcan, a Class M planet, does. Because of these factors, Dr. Marcus feels Ceti Alpha V offers an unparalleled chance to study the recovery of an almost totally devastated ecology.

No one was present on
Terra billions

of years ago to see the change from a carbon di-oxide to an oxygen-based ecology, which killed off millions of life-forms. But on Ceti Alpha V a comparable change is going on now. A more complete study of the planet could produce irreplaceable data on planetary ecologies unobtainable anywhere else in the Federation.



Such a study may solve a disturbing question about the Ceti Eel: If so vicious an animal survives so many years after catastrophe, and does well, then what does it feed on? In the last drying ocean-basins, or under the cracked mudflats at the poles, or in the muck of lost and buried vegetation, do other life-forms still hang on, waiting to be discovered?

No one can yet be sure. Star Fleet has ordered Ceti Alpha V quarantined until further notice, and the final report on the Ceti environment has been classified.

Alien Creature Record

Ceti Eel/Small unknown omnivore
STR—85 END—60 DEX—65
Mentation Class: Reactant
AP: 9 Combat Skill Rating: 40
Damage: 1D10+4
Armor: 6



Star Trek is a trademark of Paramount Pictures Corporation used by FASA Corporation under exclusive license. Star Trek logos and ships used with the permission of FASA Corporation.

Lambs of God...

said. "They are as close to God as we will ever get, Danny."

The voice was like four or five voices harmonizing. There were words Schilling could not understand.

"This—" Schilling stammered. "This is what your kind believes?"

"It is not a matter of belief. It is light. It is lovers of light who cannot die. It a child of the stars who cannot go home. It is a universe you will never understand, Danny."

The lips stopped moving. The body was nearly still, pulmonary and cardiac rates next to nothing, only the shimmering there. Schilling understood then how long the creature had been on this planet, the centuries and centuries, cut off from its own kind, wanting to go home—

To the hearts of stars.

To the eyes and heart and jaws of God.

To a death any immortal would dream of.

Must your kind, Schilling asked, take others with it ... when it dies?

I do not remember. It has been so long, Danny.

We can help you, John. We will have the science to take you home if you can wait a little longer. It does not have to be death.

They are the same. You do not understand

Think of us then, John....

I have and always will.

Schilling argued, it seemed to him, for hours, and when he stopped, it was because the creature would no longer answer him.

He thought of the winter that would come, of the bodies the recombinant technicians were trying to make even now at Harvard, at Humana, at his own Johns Hopkins, to withstand that terrible winter, to lie in cryogenic sleep for years and wake to a new world, and how these bodies could not possibly be ready in time. He thought of Arlington, where the old man had lost a wife and son and four close friends—his predecessor among them—and how these deaths had only made the election a greater landslide. He thought of his own family, how Jana would be reading in the living room, how she would, as always, wait up for him, the house warm and full of light, and how far the children's cities always seemed to him, too far for a father's love. He thought of the 82nd Airborne now in Pakistan, the walkout in Geneva