



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.

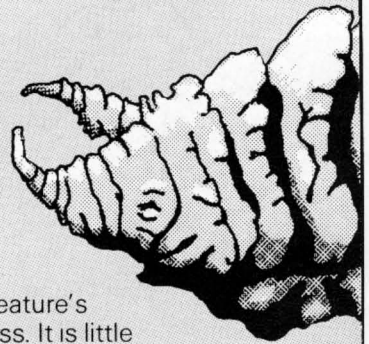
The irony would come back to haunt Captain (later Admiral) Kirk. Less than half a solar year after Khan and his group were landed, Ceti Alpha VI exploded. Exactly what happened may never be known, but apparently the explosion caused Ceti Alpha V to shift its orbit, and draw closer to its sun. Planetary 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.

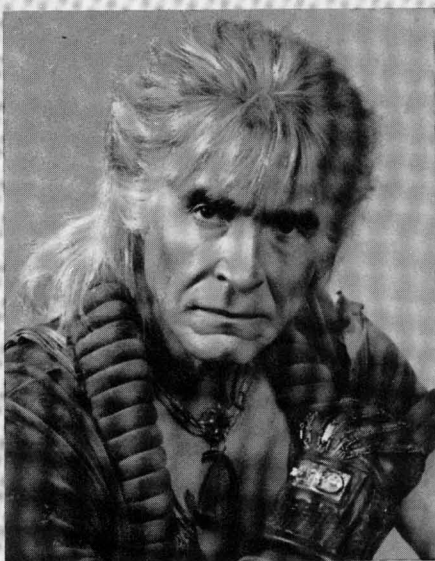
The Ceti Eel lives below the blowing sand that now covers the planet. Apparently, it swims through the grit using its flipperlike legs, tapered tail, and a kind of creeping flexion similar to that used by Terrestrial earthworms. Using this unorthodox propulsion it can attain a respectable speed, and 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-



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



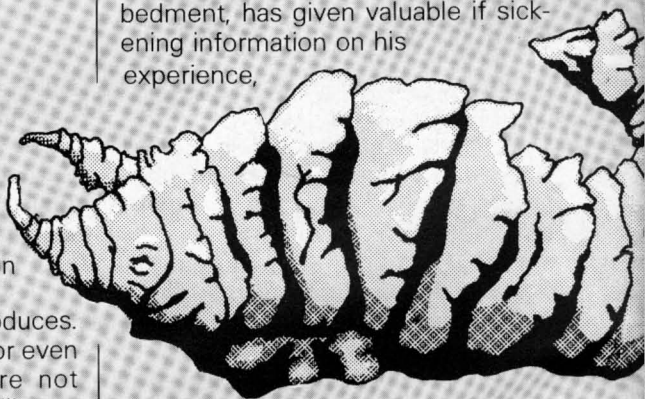
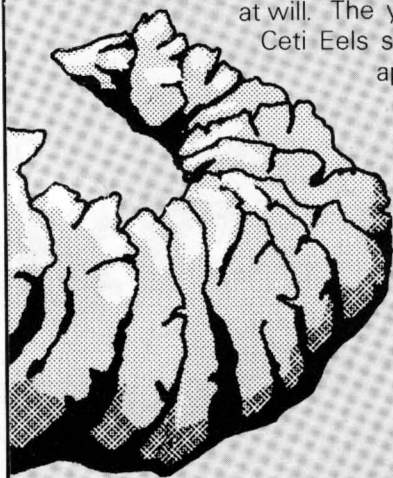
such as an ear or nostril. Like the adult, it feeds through liquification of the host's tissues, but because of its smaller size and slower feeding, it can exist embedded in its host for some time. The digestive enzyme, Dr. Marcus has found, has the ability to suppress an organism's higher pain reflexes. 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.

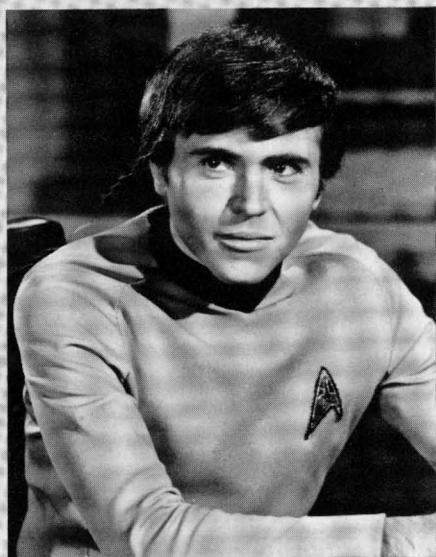
For this reason, Dr. Marcus believes that the Ceti Eel may leave a host when its will to resist becomes too strong. Had Captain Terrell been able to withstand the pain, he too might have survived. Dr. Marcus also noted that when the Eel exited Chekov, its victim was unconscious and unable to resist. 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



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