

IDIC



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LOG 4

A
STAR TREK
fanzine

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Hello, and welcome to IDIC LOG 4.

As well as several contributors whose work is well known to regular readers of ScoTpress zines, we have a lot of new names in this issue. A. Houseman, Erika Grunewald, P. Timms, Gloria Fry, Catherine Flavin, K.L.L. and Linnett Samuel are all new writers to our ranks - indeed, only Martin Stahl is a 'kent name' among the writers this time round. Gloria Fry has also produced a light-hearted look at Tek War as the crew of the Enterprise might react had the book been written by James Kirk. There is quite a lot of poetry, two of the poems (Remember and Whalemeld) having won prizes at cons; Christine Jones is proving to be a prolific writer of poetry (and she's not the only poet in the family; her brother has also sent in some) and has also produced a short story in humorous vein. We also have poems from new poet Teresa Abbott (better known to readers of Enterprise Log Entries as a writer) as well as Oriel Cooper, Lynette Muir and Linda Wood. The cover is by Christa Richert, the wife of one of our members in Germany; she too is new to our ranks, although one of her pictures has already appeared in ScoTpress's Enterprise-Log Entries.

Again I have to give a warning; one of the stories in this zine concerns the death of a main character (I'm not naming it because some readers say that to know beforehand that 'X' is a death story removes the suspense). This is one of those stories that Valerie and I would have rejected most reluctantly had it been submitted to ScoTpress, for it is well written and well developed and we know that some people like stories of this type; but ScoTpress has a policy of not accepting stories in which any of the main characters dies. In keeping with its name, however, IDIC has a wider policy, and unless you, the readers, come out in force and say you don't want stories of a certain kind to be included, we will continue to accept well-written stories on any theme except K/S or explicit sex. (Undetailed sex is all right.)

We hope to have IDIC LOG 5 ready in time for UFP con next May; we already have some good material for it, but are looking for more. Come on, all you budding writers; it's been said that everyone has one story inside them - why not get it onto paper?

A handwritten signature, possibly 'Sheila', in cursive script.

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HOPE

The Eighties have ended on a note of hope; all over the world, people in different countries have taken the future into their own hands, and set themselves free of the dictators who ruled them. Rulers, who took money from the people and used it for their own private purposes, not for the good of the country that they ruled. The people of those countries should feel proud; not only have they freed themselves, they have done it by themselves - without outside help.

One can only hope that now the world will learn what a certain group of fans of a certain science-fiction show already know; that all people should be accepted, no matter who they are, what they are or where they come from. No matter their race or colour, no matter their religious and political beliefs, all are equal, each to the other, and if all work together there will be no end to what they might achieve.

"Who are these people?" I hear you ask, "and what is the show that gave them this knowledge of how things could be, should be?"

The fans are called Trekkers. Ordinary people, they come from all walks of life; young and old, rich and poor; they come from all over the world.

They have found their lives enriched by this simple, yet hopeful, outlook on life; that all the people of the world should live and work together in Peace and Harmony - the strong helping the weak, the rich helping the poor. And the television show that showed them this? STAR TREK.

Perhaps now the future it showed to us might begin to come true, for 1989 ended on such a hopeful note. May the future bring us all peace, long life and prosperity... and a greater understanding of our fellow men.

Christine Jones

☆☆☆

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆

☆☆☆

BONES AND RATTLES

by

A Houseman

The young woman sat in the small cabin staring blankly at the wall opposite with an air of total exhaustion. After a few minutes of total inertia she reached over, punched the buttons on the adjacent wall and was rewarded with a cup of steaming brown liquid which she started to sip with obvious enjoyment. There was really nothing in the whole universe to beat a cup of Earth-style tea when one needed perking up a bit. At least the food dispensing system was still working properly - about the only thing that was!

Everything had started off well. She, Adeline Walker, had achieved a long-standing ambition only a few weeks previously when she graduated from the Starfleet Academy Medical College after six years of hard work. Then the chance of a lifetime had come her way in the form of an offer to spend her intern year aboard the great, universe-famous Starship USS Enterprise. The intern who had originally been offered the post had failed the rigorous medical, and so would be spending the year at one of the Starfleet base hospitals - as about eighty percent of all interns did. So, in a hectic week, Adeline had toured around saying goodbye to family and friends, attended a short refresher course on alien physiology and packed and repacked her twenty kilos of baggage allowance (in complete disregard of the fact that a certain collection of items will always have the same mass, however small a space they are packed into!)

Once aboard the Starship she had settled in quite quickly. There had been the usual teething problems; not being able to find hypos in a hurry, being shouted at for dropping a diatherm on the floor at an awkward moment during surgery and learning how to use the back-up medical system when the main system was down following asteroid damage. This last had been a real learning experience. With the main computer down there was no way to monitor any but the most basic functions of the patient; there was nothing into which to feed clinical data and get out the best treatment hypothesis; there was nothing to warn you against dangerous courses of action. With the main computer down, the well-being of the patient depended solely on the physician's choice of available treatment options. She had marvelled at the way in which Dr. McCoy, the ship's Chief Medical Officer, had carried on through the forty-eight hour repair schedule without a hitch, despite having two severely ill patients who arrived in sickbay during the time.

This ability to cope without a computer's aid was only really encountered on Starships and some remote or primitive colonies. Starships just did not have the power capability to have a whole duplicate medical backup system. The basic life-saving devices would always be maintained, but the trimmings which made life easier for the physician (and safer for the patient) were dispensable in emergency situations.

Adeline found Dr. McCoy a pleasant man to work for on the whole - kind, approachable and with a good sense of humour. In fact, the only time he had been really bad-tempered was when he had gone round like a bear with a sore head for two or three days when Mr. Spock, the Science Officer, had been very ill in Sickbay. Judging by the way that Dr. McCoy had growled and muttered about 'green blood' and 'pointed ears', and then perked up as soon as the Vulcan was out of danger, Adeline wondered if beneath his gruff exterior the doctor wasn't actually quite good friends with Mr. Spock.

So, all in all, she felt after a month that she had been on the Starship for years and had settled in really well. There was even a young ensign from Engineering who was very good looking and did not seem averse to her company, so things were looking up on the social front as well.

Then two days ago things had started to go wrong. To start with, it had been a routine mission to perform the triennial medical checks for a distant Federation outpost and bring them supplies. Dr. McCoy and the assistant medical officer had transported down with three nurses (including Christine Chapel) to the planet's surface, leaving Adeline in sole charge of an empty sickbay for twelve hours. At least, it had been empty to start with, but then the ship had caught the tail end of an ion storm which had cut off transporter and communications links with the planet below, and with the ship's sensory system out of action as well, no-one had known anything about the asteroid until it had embedded itself in part of the Engineering section.

So in the space of an hour the sickbay had gone from being fully operational with no patients, to being on backup systems only with ten patients, and one newly qualified doctor. Fortunately, most of those injured had only suffered lacerations and bruises, but three of them had been in the main control room which the asteroid had severely damaged, and they were in a bad way. It was only when Adeline had tried to hook up the medicouches to the main diagnostic computer system that she had realised that the engineering damage must have affected all the major systems and that they were operating on back-up.

Two of the crew had suffered severe burns to their hands and arms which she had patched over with plastiskin - not beautiful jobs (you could still spot the joins) but adequate as first aid treatment.

The remaining crew member had been crushed and trapped by twisted metal beams and had fractures, facial injuries and severe blood loss as well as possible abdominal trauma. It was only after he had been intubated, his bleeding points sealed with twin probe ultrasonic diathermy, a drip set up and she turned her attention to the patient's facial injuries that she realised that he was the good-looking young engineering ensign - only not looking at his best! He had blood all over the right side of his face from an eyebrow laceration which was still bleeding profusely and another jagged laceration on the right temple, from which dark red blood oozed slowly. Adeline had cleaned most of the blood away so as to get a better look at the injuries, and then palpating the temporal region had felt the fracture - a small depression in the hard bony skull. A scan had confirmed its presence as well as that of a small blood clot around the middle meningeal artery, which runs on the inner surface of the skull and had been damaged in the fracture.

That was when Adeline's real problem started. The only accepted method of treating such a haemorrhage was using tridimensional stereotactic microsonic probes, and she had only a rudimentary knowledge of how they were used, let alone never having used them herself - that sort of procedure took years of practice to perfect, and getting it even slightly wrong would leave the patient permanently brain-damaged. So to tackle the procedure was really out of the question for her - but the alternative was to carry on with supportive treatment until such time as Dr. McCoy could beam back aboard and carry out the operation himself, whenever that would be... an alternative which risked the patient's life as well.

So Adeline had spent the last eighteen hours worrying about her patients. Every time she injected a drug she worried over the choice of drug, the side effects and interaction with other drugs. Did cortilan and dextramide have any contraindications in a patient with recent vascular repairs? Were the burns healing satisfactorily under the plastiskin or should she apply a second layer to promote the tissue regeneration? She worried over every change of pulse, blood pressure and temperature shown on the back-up monitors.

However, everything remained stable and she had allowed herself to be talked into going to rest for an hour on the understanding that the nurses would call her immediately for any problems.

It was only now, sitting in the small cabin with the heaven-sent cup of tea, that she realised how tired she was. It wasn't as if she had done anything very extraordinary, it was just having to take the responsibility for all the decisions on her own, without more experienced doctors or even the computer to turn to for help. She wondered if ordinary people ever realised how little interns really knew in practical terms, or even realised the stress of making decisions which could affect another person's chance of survival. Probably not, and it was maybe better than they should not; after all, at least as an intern one could try to look competent.

She felt really shattered. Maybe she should lie down for an hour. The nurses would wake her soon enough if necessary. Hopefully nothing much would change in an hour, and she was so very tired... too tired to make any more decisions..... just too tired to think any more..... just an hour's nap, no more.....

She awoke slowly, savouring the sensation of lying on a soft bed and doing absolutely nothing. Then with a start she remembered the asteroid and the accident and the young engineering ensign. Leaping out of bed she glanced at the wall chronometer and discovered that she had been asleep for over four hours.

Why hadn't the nurses wakened her hours ago? What had happened to her patients whilst she slept?

She dashed down the corridor to sickbay, ignoring the startled expression of a passing crewman, burst in through the sliding doors and then stopped suddenly as she caught sight of Dr. McCoy.

"Oh, you're back," she exclaimed, rather obviously.

"Yes. They beamed me back as soon as the ion storm began to die down," the Chief Medical Officer said, "and when I came back I found all this." He indicated the crowded sickbay with a wave of

his arm. "The nurse told me you'd gone for a rest, so I got on and sorted out that meningeal artery haemorrhage with Nurse Chapel's valuable assistance. I didn't see any reason to waken you - you obviously needed your sleep."

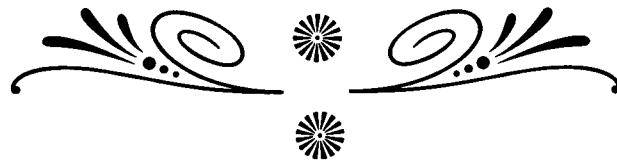
Adeline joined him in having another look at their patients, all of whom seemed to be well on the way to recovery, and they they retired to Dr. McCoy's office, at his suggest, for "a little chat".

Two hours and three large Saurian brandies later, feeling decidedly the worse for wear, Adeline walked carefully back to her cabin. Starship life was definitely the life for her! All the worry and stress had been worth it to hear Dr. McCoy's praise of her actions.

"You got that young ensign well patched up and kept him nicely stable - he was in good shape when I came to operate on him. And I know how hard it is to manage without the computer," he smiled. "You're never quite sure which drugs mix safely with which, or what the exactly correct dosage is, are you? Still, you did a good job on him."

Adeline, already flushed from the Saurian brandy, turned an even brighter scarlet.

"But in case you ever get into the same situation again," McCoy continued, "would you like me to teach you how to use a tri-dimensional stereotactic microsonic probe?"



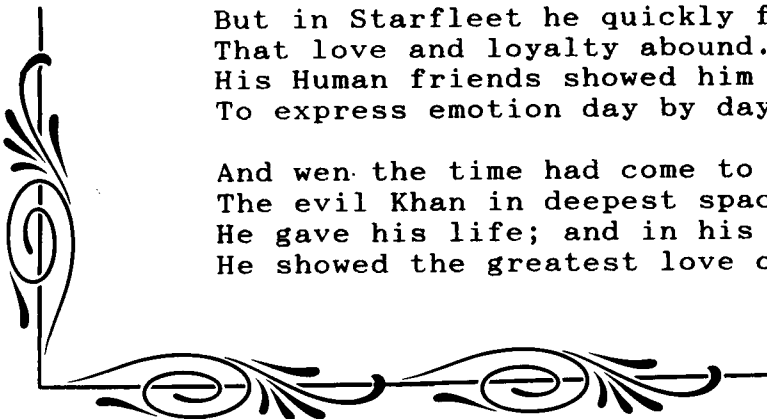
THE GREATEST LOVE

From the depths of the Universe came he
To seek his unique destiny.
He claimed that he knew aught of love;
Logic he valued all else above.

But in Starfleet he quickly found
That love and loyalty abound.
His Human friends showed him the way
To express emotion day by day.

And when the time had come to face
The evil Khan in deepest space
He gave his life; and in his fall
He showed the greatest love of all.

Linda Wood



REMEMBER

You ask me what it feels like to be dead?
 But you know, Doctor, more than any man,
 It was my body, only, was in death;
 My soul - mind? being? spirit? heart?
 No single one of these is quite exact -
 My Vulcan Katra lived,
 An uninvited but accepted guest,
 Within your Human mind.

As long ago,
 Do you remember it?
 On the old Enterprise,
 When Henoch's trickery threatened my life
 And only Sargon's power
 Preserved me,
 Hidden,
 In Miss Chapel's consciousness.

Remember, Doctor, it is rather you than I
 That truly have experienced lifelessness;
 Killed,
 When the Black Knight struck you down,
 Once on the Shore Leave planet.
 Dead,
 Till the Keeper, from an alien race,
 Had power to bring you back to life again.

Both you and I
 Have known the taste of death.
 But now,
 Together on the new-born Enterprise
 It is not being dead that I recall,
 But my recall
 To life;
 The Fal Tor Pan.
 It was not logical
 For you to choose the danger,
 So I may thank illogic for my life.
 And if you ask me, Doctor, how it feels
 To be alive?

It feels fine.

Lynette Muir

3rd place, ST fiction competition, RecCon 1989

THE CHOICE

by

Erika Grunewald

Captain James T. Kirk of the USS Enterprise sat on the bridge and gently swivelled in the command chair while he slowly pulled his upper lip between his thumb and finger, and over his hand watched the screen display before him with a certain wistful envy. He had been ordered to find a planet upon which he could grant his crew shore leave, and find it he had. Or perhaps it had found him, being mysteriously both right and ready precisely when and where he had begun searching for it.

The world about which his ship now orbited was... He gave up the hunt for words to describe its beauty. He had granted all but a skeleton crew permission to go and profit from its gentle kiss of healing, himself electing to remain behind and take the first watch over an empty ship so that Scott and Uhura - in fact all the command crew - could be among the first to go and bathe in those colours. Watching the entire range of the spectrum change and reassemble, yet never lose corporeal shape on the screen, he too felt the planet's overwhelming pull, stronger than mere attraction, and felt likewise his desire to beam down as well, felt his... right to be there.

With an impatient sigh he moved his eyes away from the screen to mark the time. He had granted Spock permission to retire to his quarters; as usual his First Officer had shown no personal desire to visit the planet, and even Dr. McCoy's head shaking and threats of invoking his rights as Chief Medical Officer to apply the Medical Regulations Clause had not moved the Vulcan. But as long as Spock remained in his quarters - and, Kirk presumed, in meditation - Kirk was bound to the command chair, for Spock was the only man left on board qualified to relieve him. Unquiet, Kirk drummed the arm of his chair with his fingertips.

A quarter of an hour later he could stand it no longer. With more impulse than consideration he punched the intercom on the arm of his command chair.

"Spock?"

A moment's silence ensued before the Vulcan's voice responded through the grid. "Sir?"

"Spock, if it's solitude you want, you can have that up here on the bridge just as well as down in your quarters. Would you mind coming up and relieving me?"

"At once, sir."

A further quarter of an hour later - and with something more than just a slightly guilty conscience at having unnecessarily obligated Spock - Kirk beamed down to the surface of the planet which had lured him. The immediacy of its beauty, now no longer

diluted by the transmission effects of the ship's sensors and the two-dimensions of the screen, was so intense that it hurt. The visual density of all forms ranged from impenetrable to ethereal transparency, but their chief characteristic was their colour. Everything was in movement, but with the gentleness of non-collision; when two forms met the more solid simply passed through the more transparent, which then reformed unimpaired and passed on. To raise one's voice here would be to commit the sin of stridency, and Kirk forewent communicating his safe arrival to the bridge.

There was no sign of either humanoids or artificial structures, although Kirk knew that the planet harboured both. For one special moment he just shut his eyes and drew in the faint perfume, let the breezes waft gently across his cheeks, attuned his ears to the manifold incidentals of silence... and heard the noises of dissonance.

Plunging through a visual barrier of shoulder high, unresisting green, Kirk took one look and following his chivalrous nature, immediately raced across a transparent clearing to heave a heavy man off the girl lying before him.

Startled and panting, the man lay where Kirk had thrown him, while the girl leapt to her feet, gathered her torn clothing to her breast, and granting Kirk no more than a moment's hollow-eyed glance, turned and fled through the colours.

Kirk held out a hand to stop her, opened his mouth to shout after her, and was levelled to the ground by a crude lunge at his back. A well aimed kick landed between his ribs before he could slip off the ground and plant a solid right fist to his assailant's jaw. With an efficient swipe of his agile foot the heavier man once more felled Kirk, who, wiser this time, rolled out of reach and rose to deliver a sharp chop to the base of the other's neck. His blow was intended to stun, but it seemed to be ineffective. His opponent bowed before it, doubled over, and with his entire weight behind it rammed a shoulder into Kirk's midriff. Kirk doubled up in pain, and knew himself helplessly open to the finishing attack which must follow.

It didn't come. He waited a moment, breathing heavily, then forced himself to straighten up. Immediately he was grasped from behind, not by one pair of hands but by several. Three men circled him from behind. *Not too many*, he thought, and crashed backwards into the man standing directly behind him. With an economy of movement the second man grasped Kirk's right arm and twisted it back and up with a strength that forced an inarticulate gasp of pain from his lips and promised damage to his muscles. He nodded in acquiescence, and raising his left hand in a gesture of submission, gave up his resistance.

The presence of the Elder before whom Kirk was led met him like a blast of cold wind. His arm ached, and he stiffened it against the rough grip of the hands manoeuvring him into the room where the man stood tranquilly awaiting him. Watching him stand there, Kirk opened his mouth to protest, then closed it again, the words unspoken, swallowed by some subliminal caution. He was flooded with an awareness of power centred in that figure. Kirk instinctively knew that the Elder was neither a god nor a supernatural being; yet he had an undeniable mastery; once judgement was pronounced, there

would be no appeal. At the same time he sensed the other's complete refusal to interfere with his own will and plans. He could open himself to this Elder, or deny him access as he chose; he just should not make the childish error of thinking that the Elder was unaware of his decision. The resolution of any question between them could be achieved only through interaction, but whether that would be for good or evil Kirk had no idea. Despite his instinctive knowledge of the other's power, no traditional sign of respect or obedience had any meaning between them. Kirk took a step forward and the hands restraining him fell away.

Whether the pronouncement of his judgement was good or evil Kirk did not know, but when he heard it he was stung into protest. Despite his tight rein on himself his anger overran his restraint.

"I committed no crime! I protected an innocent girl from that man's assault, whereupon he attacked me. Will you deny me the right to defend myself?"

"Captain," replied the Elder, "there is no innocence in either of you. No matter which of you first struck the other, each of you was motivated by some feeling or value which provoked the other, no matter what name you give to your actions. Force begets counter force. And where there is no innocence there is no escape from punishment - for either party." The Elder observed the look of stubbornness on Kirk's face and added more gently, "It is the Law."

When Kirk's expression did not change he sighed slightly and made a gesture to the three guards. They led Kirk out, but this time they were forced to use physical restraint before they could leave him for the night.

Over half of the Enterprise crew had already returned from leave and were assembled on board before Kirk's plight was announced to the bridge by the same Elder who had convicted him.

Spock requested and was refused permission to beam down, but was granted visual contact, a privilege of which he took full advantage in the privacy of a small briefing room. He had invited McCoy to join him there, a gesture he was already beginning to regret.

Livid with anger, McCoy watched as the first of the two sentenced men was dragged into sight. Twice, three times, he twisted in towering rage against his guards, and fought to break away. With no gentleness and less mercy his guards broke his holds and dragged him on until, bruised and already bleeding, he was shackled spreadeagled and tautly upright in the centre of the room. With cool deliberation one guard unfurled a whip. Sickness riding in his throat, McCoy wrenched himself away from the viewer to confront Spock, who was sitting watching with an unmoved face.

"A lashing! Twenty-seven lashes for having been in a fight! Do you know how many times a man fights? It's the story of Jim's life! You can't punish him for something which is an integral part of his nature!" McCoy's hands were trembling.

"Perhaps, Doctor, there are aspects of his nature of which neither you nor I are aware."

"But to whip the skin off a man's back! It's not just degrading, it's... medieval. You can't let this happen. Do something! Do what Jim would do for you if you were in his position!" he challenged.

"Doctor, I would not be in his position. I do not fight."

"Dammit, Spock, of all the pompous, self-righteous.... semantics as an answer to a plea for help!" More than just McCoy's hands were trembling now.

Spock turned to him austerely. "I am afraid that there is nothing we can do to alter the Captain's position. It is the Law of this planet, and the Captain accepted the precept of respect for the autonomy of another planet's laws when he accepted his task within Starfleet. Painful or not, I cannot exempt him from the consequences of his action without his first being exempted from that responsibility."

"The only crime he's guilty of is having been caught!" snapped McCoy in cold fury.

"In that case, Doctor, that is all he will suffer for."

Kirk himself was having difficulty regarding it in that light. As he stood awaiting his punishment in the room inappropriately called the Room of Instruction, it required all his will power to keep still and silent between his guards. His arm ached anew from a last, hopeless attempt at escape, but as long as he exercised self restraint, no-one laid a hand on him.

Groaning, Kirk's former assailant was lowered into his guards' arms and unshackled. Kirk averted his gaze, sick at the sight, sick with apprehension for himself. As the guards moved out, supporting the injured man, he felt impelled to ask, "What happens to him now?"

The question was answered by the Elder, who now moved away from the centre of the room to stand in front of Kirk. "What happens now is his own choice, but I believe he will be back for more."

"Here? Voluntarily?" Kirk's voice rose in sharp disbelief.

The Elder looked directly into Kirk's eyes as if searching for something, then he shrugged lightly. "He will not cease to fight, and we will not cease to carry out the Law. We are interested neither in his death nor in a continuation of his pain, and we have great healing to grant if he would learn to ask for it."

The Elder looked again after the first man, and the expression in his eyes could have been wisdom, or it could have been sadness. "But he will not ask; therefore we cannot grant, and he will not understand." He turned back towards Kirk. "Do you understand?"

"I understand that you can't force understanding through suffering and pain," Kirk said harshly. "If that's what you want me to believe, no, I don't understand."

"You think not? Then you must now proceed without understanding. Come here."

The Elder moved to stand beneath the now empty and swaying

manacles. Even as he began to stiffen in resistance, his memory of the Elder's complete power arose in Kirk's mind; that, and the Elder's implacability in the face of appeal. His guards began to close in on him again. Quickly Kirk held up a hand to check them, and then moved forward of his own accord, ignoring the three men and the ready lash. Briefly he glanced up to the fetters, and then back to the Elder's face.

"Do we need them?" the Elder asked, indicating the restraints.

Kirk stared at him in surprise. "Do I have a choice?"

"You always have a choice, Captain. I cannot exempt you from your punishment; your breaking of the Law, and your punishment, are inextricably bound together, and I myself would break the Law if I tried to shield you from the result of your own actions. But how you bear the consequences of what you have done is indeed your choice, and you would spare yourself much self-inflicted pain if you would accept it willingly. The greater part of suffering is caused by resistance, not by the wound itself."

This time it was Kirk who gazed in some surprise in the direction in which the first man had been supported out of the room. He believed he was beginning to understand at least some part of what was happening. The Law would be remorselessly applied, without exception, but half of that man's injuries had indeed resulted from his attempts at flight, from the force necessarily applied to make the carrying out of the Law possible.

Kirk turned back and this time looked deliberately at the waiting lash. He knew he was not going to like the hurt in store for him, but equally he knew that given his own limitations there was no escaping it. His glance travelled on to the Elder waiting patiently for his answer, as if not time but Kirk's decision alone mattered.

Grimly, Kirk shook his head. "No, we don't need them. I'll take it standing - as best I can," he added bleakly.

The Elder nodded, showing nothing in his face, not even the commendation which Kirk somehow felt he deserved. "Then strip off your shirt."

Kirk obeyed, and then braced himself.

As the lash crashed across his back and the tip curled around his ribs, Kirk involuntarily flinched and arched, then fought for that internal limpness which would allow him to ride it out. He had just found it, had just unconsciously bowed his shoulders before it, when with the third stroke the lashing stopped. Caught off balance by the unexpected cessation, he straightened in surprise, quickened to anger at what he could only interpret as a deliberate attempt to break his self control. By his own count he still had twenty-four lashes coming to him. His surprise and anger crumpled into stark disbelief when he saw the lash being curled up and laid away, and his shirt courteously handed back to him. He accepted it mechanically, but made no move to put it back on, staring instead at the Elder's face, searching there for answers.

"And now?" he finally managed.

"You are free to return to your ship," replied the Elder, and nodded at the guards.

"No, wait!" Kirk raised a quick hand to ward off the approach of the three men. "Please," he added more quietly, and the guards stopped. He turned back from them to the Elder. "I don't understand, and if I return to the Enterprise now, you send me home with a riddle it might take me years to solve."

With a slight nod the Elder conceded Kirk's objection and dismissed the guards; to Kirk's surprise they left the room entirely.

"You are confused, surprised?" the Elder broke into his thoughts with a smile. "They are not dismissed by courtesy, either yours or mine, but by you, by the fact that you have outgrown them. You have forsaken constraint and learned to ask that it not be used against you. Do you still maintain that force and pain cannot lead you to understanding? From it you have learned to search for the meaning behind it."

Knowing full well that just a few moments ago he had loudly proclaimed exactly that, Kirk remained silent.

"Let me give you another example," said the Elder after a moment, and gently took him by his injured arm. Kirk flinched involuntarily. "You nurse your arm?" asked the Elder, as though he was not aware of the fact.

"Your men did that to me - at your behest," answered Kirk provocatively, too uncertain of his own feelings for genuine anger.

"Captain, you broke the Law, therefore the Law required that you be brought here. How you arrived was never my decision, but always yours. You rebelled, against the unknown, against something you did not understand, yet about which you did not even bother to enquire. And you met force. Yet you learn quickly, and thus spared yourself much blind rage and damage. Your subsequent submission, however, did not release you from the consequences of your resistance - your arm was not miraculously healed. We are not wonder workers. But has a hand been lifted against you since? And now answer me - who is responsible for the injury to your arm? Pain speaks to you, prompts your understanding, shatters your refusal to learn."

Kirk was forced to admit the point; to have refused would have satisfied only his personal pride. He smiled. "All right. Point accepted. Yet the application of force goes against everything I believe in."

The Elder nodded. "Yet you use it again and again." This time he took Kirk's sound arm, turning him slightly so that they walked towards the door at the far side of the room. "I am not interested in exerting force or pain, but in extending your understanding of the workings of the Law, and of the Law itself. Man possess one certainty only: that he has to learn, that he must accept instruction. How he does so is a matter of his completely free and personal will. Some make acquaintance with the Law only by breaking it, and then there is no power by which they can escape it, being brought here to face the consequences of their own actions. Although you did not understand this, you did accept that you must bow to it, and your breaking of your own resistance, the rechanneling of your own volition, greatly eased your physical pain."

Kirk turned to face him with a wry smile. "Are you trying to

tell me that it is the lot of man to learn by pain alone? That's rather a cheerless philosophy."

"No. Merely that it is the lot of man to learn, and that if he resists too long he hurts himself, but will still be forced to it in the end. Yet learning can be very rewarding. The voluntary request for knowledge is the beginning of understanding; once that request is made - even if it was spawned by force - the need for pain or force is outgrown, as you outgrew your own guards. It is the beginning of a road to the deepest peace and satisfaction, a shade of which," he turned to face Kirk with a smile, "you hunt for and sometimes find on your present somewhat more stony path."

"And yet," he spoke as if to some invisible but very present person, "there are a few, a very few, men who find it possible to walk with me without first transgressing against the Law. For them there is no pain, no dissonance, but to do so requires a very different discipline from yours, one uncommon in man. It requires heightened sensitivity, and insight which rises above mere mastery over one's mind and body, plus the mental discipline which can project the existence of something one has never experienced - myself, and this room. But I am talking about exceptions. Most men make it here by 'following their natures', and this implies a certain amount of transgression and pain, followed by reconciliation with and understanding of oneself."

"You said that you yourself are subject to the Law. But then who appointed you to carry it out? Who controls the controller?"

"I regret having to deny you an answer to those questions, Captain, but to answer them would have no meaning for you. In order to be digestible, knowledge must be filtered to the level at which each individual mind can grasp it. The complexity or simplicity of an explanation does not change its inherent truth. Suffice it to know that I am your funnel; what stand at the other end would overwhelm your capacity to deal with it now. This study is not denied to you, but it is long, and I believe that you have set other priorities for your present life. Nor are they wrong; since you chose them, they are right for you. They will in the end bring you back here once again, perhaps even already equipped with enough knowledge to understand the entirety of the Law. The answers to how and when you return are within your sole keeping."

Kirk nodded slowly in reluctant acceptance. "But there is a question which I believe you can answer."

"Then ask it."

"The difference in punishment. You claimed equality of guilt or responsibility by both of us; then why not equality of punishment, followed by equality of understanding?"

"The punishment was equal, Captain."

Kirk looked at him in blank contradiction.

The Elder laughed. "You can't measure your own progress according to another man's sins, Captain. He has been on the run from himself, or what he chooses to call his fate, long enough not only to accumulate what you witnessed just now, but also to turn his ever-growing fear of it into a very real nightmare for him. For the moment his account is balanced, but... understanding? I fear not. It is easier to rail at me than to learn to look at himself. And so

the cycle will continue until he himself desires to break it."

"Force not as an absolute, but as a personal and alterable choice? It sounds harsh, but tolerable."

"Ignorance is harsh, Captain, not the choice. The answers are simple, but learning how to ask the questions is not. And until you learn to question, no answer will be given."

"Who are you?" Kirk asked.

"Your guide."

"And what if I need you some day, and you are not here?"

"I will be here. There will always be answers to your request for learning. That, too, is part of the Law, since the Law decrees an increase in understanding, and I - like you - only obey the Law. Look about you, Captain. Remember this room well. You may not always like the answers. This time you were brought here by force; next time you will come of your own free will, the more readily if at that time you should find yourself at odds with yourself, or in personal anguish. Perhaps you will even remember to ask yourself which aspect of the Law you have failed to observe, and thus learn to heal yourself.

"And now I need not even ask if you understand, for I see that you do. But now you must go; you can drown in too much learning as easily as in too much anger. It must be transmuted into action, a way of life. You will now return to the Enterprise, but in parting I would warn you that to resolve one question is but to pose the next."

Kirk inclined his head in simple reverence towards the Elder, accepting his decree, and straightened up to find himself back in his own quarters. Thoughtfully he unfolded the shirt which was still draped across his arm, and started to put it on.

He had to take it off again a few minutes later, however, in order to satisfy McCoy's professional demands. His shirt in his hands, he cast an uncertain glance at Spock, who was standing silently with folded arms in one corner of the Captain's quarters, then with a protesting laugh he turned back to McCoy.

"Bones, believe me, it doesn't hurt. It's as if it has already healed."

McCoy ran his fingers lightly across the thick red weals, then whipped out his medi-corder. "Healed, my foot! They're as thick as my finger. You leave the question of pain to the experts, m'boy," he retorted, and began to measure the disruptions in Kirk's magnetic field.

Kirk sighed audibly and allowed it to happen. After a moment McCoy lowered the medi-corder in some confusion, frowning as he stated, "It really doesn't hurt. At least, that's what this miracle maker says. I don't understand. Look, Jim, both Spock and I saw what happened to you down there, but I'm beginning to question what I see going on up here! Are we just suffering from delusions, or did this really take place?"

"As sure as you're standing here, Bones," replied Kirk, drawing his shirt back over his head. "Medically speaking, those red marks are your evidence that it did."

"That doesn't explain it at all, and I still don't understand," said McCoy bluntly. "Are you sure you do?"

"Yes, I do, but I wouldn't have if I hadn't been there."

"Now *that*, Jim, is a masterpiece of logical excellence! If you hadn't been there then none of this would have happened. And frankly, if it wasn't for those marks I would declare all of us looney, if you want it medically," snorted McCoy. He packed up his superfluous medications and made for the door. "Those marks have saved you from that particular accusation - at least for the present - but how a man can take a lashing and then claim he doesn't feel it is beyond me."

"I never said I didn't feel it, Bones," Kirk corrected him quietly. "I only said it doesn't hurt. It was my own fault."

"I never thought I'd live to hear you say those welcome words of your own free will," McCoy remarked acidly. "Maybe the trip was worth it after all." He walked out the door.

With a wry smile and in helpless recognition of the gap in their understanding, Kirk watched him go. Sighing, he turned to Spock with the intention of returning him to bridge duty. The Vulcan had not spoken since first stepping into Kirk's quarters at McCoy's request. Before actually issuing the order, Kirk stopped, arrested by the look in Spock's eyes.

"You *do* understand," he stated suddenly and positively.

"Yes."

"How?" Kirk demanded, studying him in some puzzlement. "I mean, you've never said anything. Why not?"

Spock uncrossed his arms and came out of the corner, but instead of clasping his hands behind his back as usual he steepled them before his face, studying Kirk over the tips of his long fingers.

"You just watched the reason walk out of the door, Captain," he said finally. "When we first discovered that planet on our screens, I knew at once where you were heading and why. But you would no more have understood me then than Dr. McCoy understood you just now. Now, having been there and back again, you recognise comprehension without the use of any words at all."

Kirk nodded thoughtfully, and then asked with rare hesitation, "Tell me, Spock, if you will - did someone ever use that same lash on you? Somehow I can't quite see it."

"No, Captain, not as it was used on you. I do not fight - by choice. If I fight, it is because I have chosen to serve you, who represent both Starfleet and my Human half. I do not speak the language of pain, and so its use on me would impart no knowledge. But obviously there must arise an occasional clash of interests between my two choices, and it is this transgression against unity that is painful for me. I will not reveal to you my palette of failures and strivings for knowledge, for they are intensely

personal, but I will tell you that I am far from resolving my dissonances - my fate, if you want to call it that - into understanding."

"To gain that understanding you use logic," said Kirk with sudden insight.

"The discipline of logic," corrected Spock. "But if I understand your language correctly, you would also refer to what has just happened as having been disciplined, by emotions and by pain. Others use illness as a retreat from learning, but both those roads are closed to me, closed by everything I am and have experienced."

Kirk stood in awe of this unusual permission to tap Spock's mind, and therefore spoke with caution. "Could you imagine that that could change, that your path could be altered because of things which you might yet experience?"

"Logically, I cannot exclude the possibility. Equally logically, I cannot imagine how I would incorporate any such change into my structure, otherwise I would already have taken that step."

Kirk shook his head slightly. "I am afraid I could no more follow your path than you could follow mine."

"That is only natural. The problems given to you to solve reflect your personal conflicts. Your nature is an integral part of you, and the Law does not ask that you deny it, but on the contrary that through the resolution of those conflicts you learn to know and accept it and all its consequences, both negative and positive. Only when you know its unity as well as its components can you ask yourself whether you are employing it well."

Nodding slowly, not really looking at his First Officer, Kirk finally turned away from him to wander unseeingly through his quarters. At his desk he stopped and mechanically sat down, one loosely curled fist gently butting against his lips and chin. Spock stood watching him, but for a time neither spoke.

"Forgive me, sir, but may I ask what you are feeling?" the Vulcan asked at length.

Kirk glanced up, his hand arrested. "Feeling, Spock? That's a strange question, coming from you. I thought you denied having any knowledge of feelings?"

"That is true, sir, but also irrelevant. I have served among Humans long enough to realise that they tend to resolve their conflicts through the formulation of feelings, and that a formal expression of them often helps to clarify them. I do not mean to intrude, sir, but since Dr. McCoy, to whom you would naturally turn, is not in a position to comprehend your thoughts, it seemed only logical to me that I should offer to serve you in this."

Slightly embarrassed, but also curiously touched, Kirk laughed but added immediately, "What am I feeling right now, Spock? Confused, bewildered, but strangely... peaceful." One corner of his mouth twitched and he glanced away. How much emotion could he entrust to this strange, non-feeling man? It would be so much easier to remain silent than to appear a fool.

After a moment's hesitation he turned his eyes back to the Vulcan and said softly, "Do you know, Spock, that it was -

completely irrationally - one of the most beautiful moments I have known, the lashing notwithstanding?"

"Not irrationally, Captain. Logically. Unity is always beautiful. If you were to regard the lashing alone, as a separate action, it would indeed be both painful and irrational; this is what the Doctor did. But for a moment you also felt the peace of restored unity, and that is what you could not transmit to him."

"Nonetheless, I still wish I could reach him."

Dark Vulcan eyes came suspiciously close to being warm with comprehension. "The Doctor is searching for unity too, sir. He merely does not know it yet, nor the fact that the route via medical science is especially thorny due to its very capacity for easy meddling. The Doctor has chosen a particularly difficult path."

"If each of the three of us could reach his goal in this lifetime... Spock, what a team we could make," Kirk sighed wistfully.

"Captain," replied Spock succinctly, "we already do."

"Well, one thing certainly didn't fit my nature," stated Kirk, suddenly slapping the top of his desk with a light hand. "I'm as hungry and thirsty as hell. Mostly thirsty. And for nothing fancy, just plain old water. Cold." With a concluding sigh he squared his chair before his desk and pushed off to one corner of it an overdue report which he had finally managed to sketch out just before beaming down to the planet. It had been difficult, and he was glad to have it done with.

"If you will permit me, sir," said Spock, and moved towards the intercom to order refreshment for Kirk. When the yeoman brought it to the door a few minutes later Spock neatly intercepted her and brought it into the room himself.

Lost in renewed thought, Kirk had not moved, but he now looked up, his attention caught by the Vulcan's movements.

"Spock, if it was the decree of the Law that I be made to understand, then why didn't someone just sit down with me and talk? I would have made a decent stab at listening, and the rest would have been unnecessary. Why? Why was it done like this?"

For a split second Spock hesitated, then lifted the carafe of water over Kirk's desk and emptied it. "Your water, sir."

Kirk sprang out of his chair, his uniform splashed with water. Hypnotised, he watched as water dribbled off the edge of his desk after creeping through the pages of his carefully finished report, ruining it. Blankly he raised his eyes to the Vulcan's face, too surprised at this abnormal behaviour even to tinge his voice with a hint of command or reprimand. "Are you out of your mind, Spock?"

"Not in the least, sir. I would merely remind you what happens when you demand contents before you have provided a form to fill. You automatically accept the nature of water as a fact of physical law. First the vessel, then the contents. Is it logical, sir, for you to assume that you present an exception to natural law? Then you have already forgotten what was revealed to you of your own nature, and the manner in which you learn. Only with the entirety of your experience did you provide the form into which the Elder

poured understanding."

"You long-eared devil!" grinned Kirk equably, and sprinted for a towel. "All right, you've made your point, but I've also seen just about all the points I can take for one day." He mopped up the spilt water, lifting his soaked report to wipe underneath it. "And who's going to redo this?" he asked.

"With your permission, I will, sir. It was I who chose the means of demonstration." Spock held out his hand.

For a moment Kirk started to object, then handed the sheaf of paper across. Spock, the man he had for so long sought to understand, had ever been ready to accept fully the consequences of his own behaviour. "Tell me," he asked suddenly, "what do you do when you meditate?"

"I converse with the Elder."

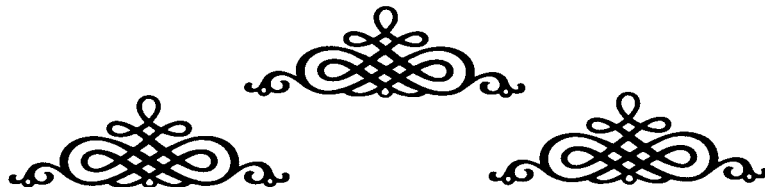
"Without ever leaving the ship?"

"That is correct, sir."

As Kirk stared at the Vulcan he once again heard the words of the Elder. Spock, then, was one of those rare individuals who made his way to the Elder without force, without pain, by supposing within himself the possibility of such a place, of such knowledge, and by freely making himself a vessel into which such knowledge could be poured without involving strife of the body. Spock's own logic had shown him the path; meditation was obviously his vehicle for travelling it. With regret spawned by sudden insight, Kirk perceived the dissonance which his own clamour for relief from bridge duty must have intruded into Spock's personal withdrawal into meditation.

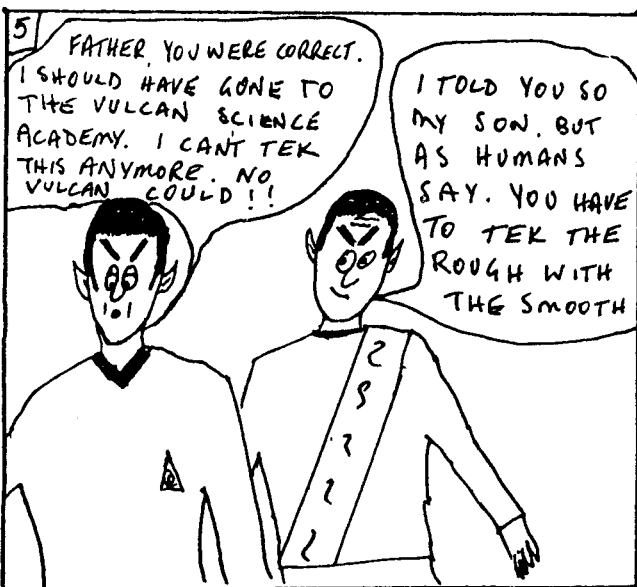
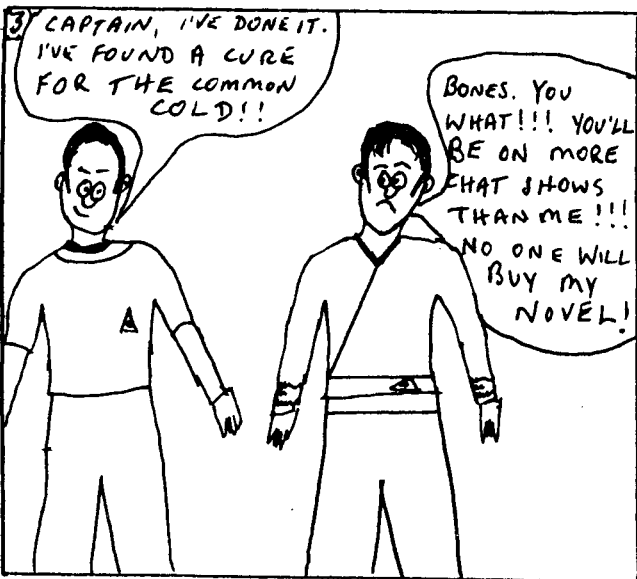
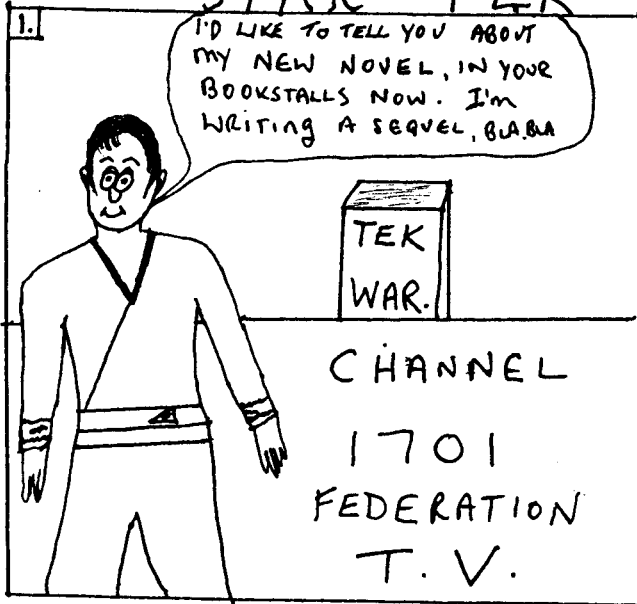
"I should apologise for calling you up to relieve me, Spock. It was childish and impatient. I could have waited."

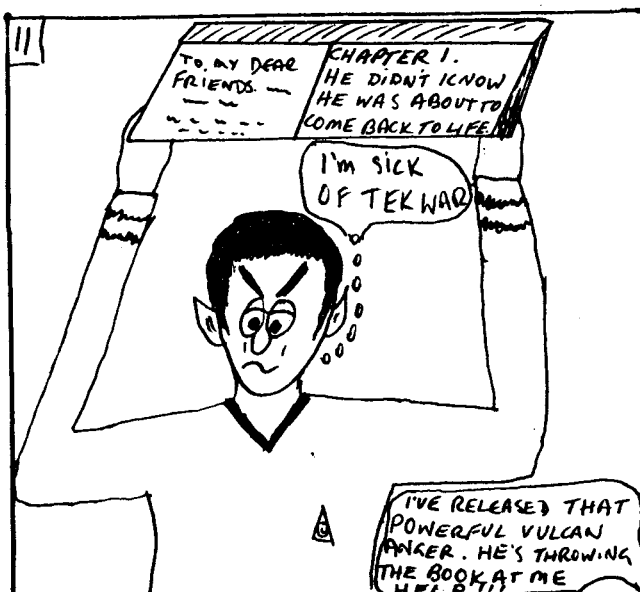
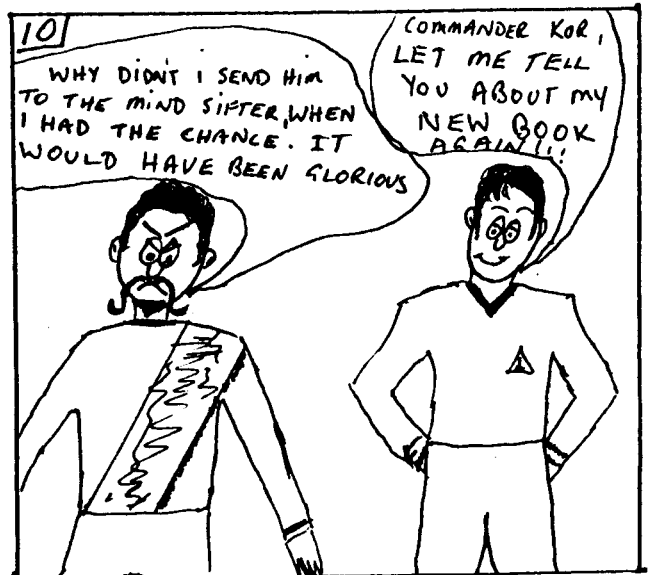
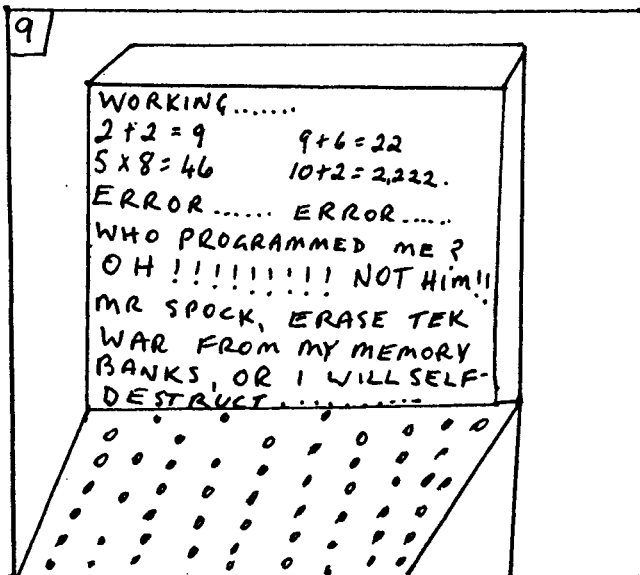
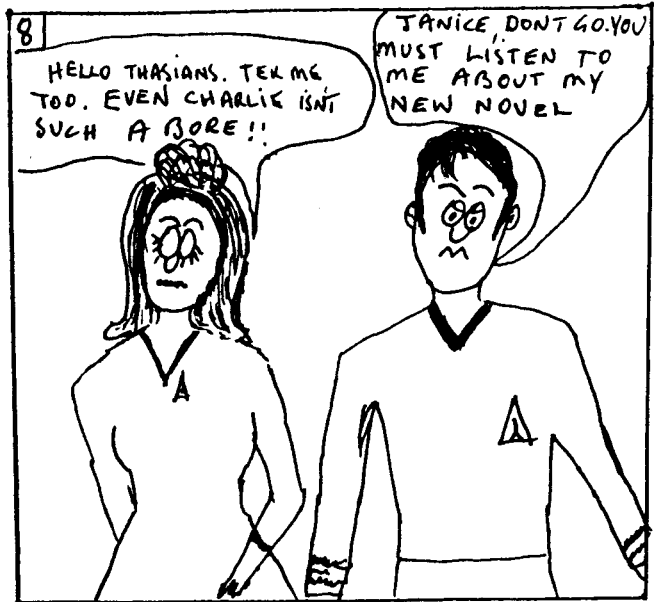
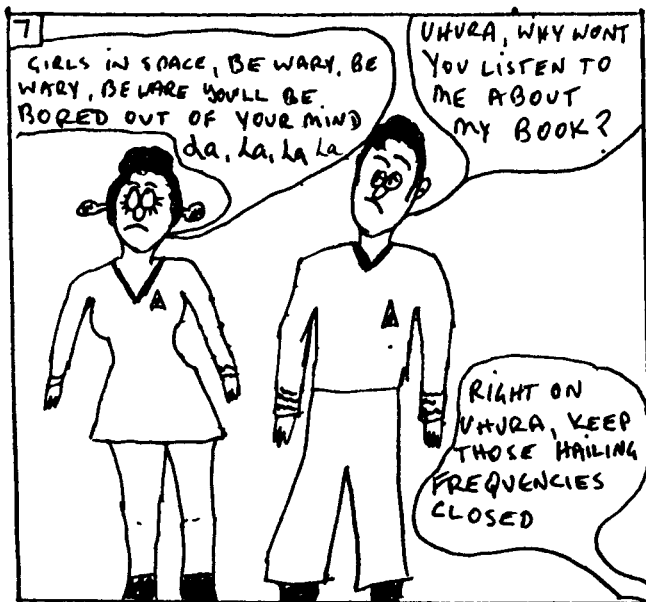
"There is nothing to forgive, Captain. I knew that the Elder had called you, and that I could not stand in your way. If I had not relieved you, would you then have reached the planet in time to meddle in the fight which was the prerequisite for both your experience and this conversation? You felt the call of the planet; logically it was time for you to go."



STAR TEK

by GLORIA FRY.





DARKNESS INTO LIGHT

by

P Timms

PROLOGUE

She stood on the darkened, battle-scarred bridge of a once-proud starship. Its occupants were long dead. A single tear rolled down her face as she now comprehended all that had gone before. Here was the key - the destroyed ship that had survived thousands of years of wandering lifeless. This ship was to be a part of the future as it had been of the past - six thousand years ago.

The cat stalked its prey along the many corridors of the computer complex, the flashing lights forming strange patterns on his hide. He stopped and sniffed the air. He was hunting and would soon make a kill. Oh, how he looked forward to the kill! It was not just the fun of the hunt; when he caught, his prey had to suffer.

He stopped again and sniffed the air carefully, as if to pick up a certain scent. A leer came across his face and his eyes shone with anticipation. SHE was near. SHE, who had destroyed all that was here. She had attacked his family, his home. She was all around - he could smell her, although he could not see her. She was hiding, but you could not hide from a cat. Fur ruffled, and, teeth and claws ready to attack, he raced down the corridor. If he could not catch her he would destroy the whole complex!

She stood at the far end of the corridor, willing him on to kill her, to release her as he would release himself. To kill her as he destroyed the complex. But why would she be so willing to die?

He sprang.

He could feel no fear from his victim and she did not cry out when he ripped out her heart. A smile formed on her now-dead face and he felt her mind mix with his, pulling him down into the darkness. They had destroyed the complex, and now they died together.

Was this such a sweet revenge?

"NO!"

Acturaus shot up from his bed sweating and breathing with some difficulty. It took some time for his body to adjust to where he

was. Was he losing his mind? Every time he tried to get to sleep he had the same dream - or, it seemed, rather a vision. For a whole week he had suffered. He dreamed of being inside a large computer complex and killing his wife while destroying the whole place. Not a very nice dream - and tonight it had been much stronger, almost as it had been a sort of omen.

Could he face it again tonight? He was suffering badly from lack of sleep, but he could hide that well from his other crew members. However, that ability would not help the way he felt. Would he somehow lose control of his power and destroy like that?

He poured himself a large, strong drink. Maybe that would give him the first dreamless sleep that he so wanted. Was he somehow losing control of his Keeper power? Would he somehow turn into this dream animal and kill? Killing for pleasure was the way of his race, but he had thought he was above all that. This dream had hit a nerve. He had trained for ten years to be a Keeper. He had found love with a young woman to whom he was mind-linked. He sighed at that. At the moment she was light years away on another Keeper ship, although with the link they were always together.

That thought made him wonder. Was she having the same dream - or was this just his madness?

The large Keeper ship Starshine sailed peacefully through the heavens. Twice the size of a small moon, it was a base ship for the smaller Preserver class of ship. Both designs of ship had their own separate function; Keepers monitored planets and stars and the stability of the Universe, while the Preserver ships concentrated on the life forms that were to be found in so many of the solar systems.

Acturaus Fitroy, temporary second in command of the Starshine, took a deep breath and sighed. Soon they would be joining with the Preserver ship Moondance, and that would take him one step closer to his wife. He would transport himself from the Moondance to Earthfall. His mind was pulled back from his plans when he was asked by his Captain, Stariona, a woman in her early thirties, for a status report on how the other Keeper ships in the corresponding sectors were doing.

"Only a few more hours, Acturaus, and I'll be losing another good second in command," she commented. "Why we always have to change all the time is beyond me. Just when you've begun to work as a team, then you're split up."

"Now Star, you knew that I was temporary when I joined you. I'm only on the Preserver and Keeper detail because the Crisis Action Time Squad had to disband after the Dimensional Timegate mess-up. I'm sure that it won't belong now before the CATS are together again. Why else the transfer back to the Earthfall and Mari? I hope the Science Council have at last come to their senses, though. It wasn't our fault that everything went wrong from the word 'go', what with the kidnapping of a Starship Captain to us following through the time stream and then getting lost ourselves in a dimensional Timegate; then the death of one of our joint leaders. I thought that the only good thing about that mission was that we got home in the end! Then the Science Council almost charged us with murder."

"Because it was one of their planet's legends that Infinity, your leader, was an ever-living Goddess, they had to have time to

recover from their culture shock. The only way they could come to terms with her death was by thinking that her team-mates killed her - someone as powerful as she was, someone she trusted."

"And it turned out that it was her destiny of being such a goddess that made her die."

"Yes, Acturaus. Even a goddess can die." She sighed. "I wonder what William is doing now?"

What indeed would William, the other leader, do now that his wife was dead? Acturaus did not have time to answer the leading question. Mirico, the Starshine's living computer, sprang into life with a message.

"I HAVE AN INCOMING MESSAGE FOR YOU, STARIONA, FROM MARI OF THE EARTHFALL. IT SOUNDS A BIT OFF; I'M HAVING TROUBLE WITH HER SIGNAL. I'LL TRY TO BOOST IT. SHALL I PUT HER THROUGH A HOLO CHANNEL?"

"Yes, straight away, Mirico."

"COMING UP."

"I wonder what she's calling about? I hope it's not a change of plan from the Science Council again."

When Acturaus heard what Mari had to say, he was not happy at all.

"Why us, Mari? Isn't this Darkness something that the CATS should investigate? It's not really a job for Science ships."

"My thoughts exactly, Acturaus. That is why I am also contacting the rest of the old team, while using the cover of contacting the Science ships. Soon we shall all be converging on the Darkness, and the CATS shall be a team again."

She was alone. The Darkness was all around her, clawing at her humanity, trying to make her one with the Darkness. She tried to resist, but the more she did so the deeper she sank. She was a telepath and she knew that something had stolen her mind and was now about to take her soul.

"Acturaus, hear my plea. Do not do anything Mari tells you, for it shall seal your doom! For she is now filled with the Darkness."

Acturaus was worried. "There's still no word from the Earthfall and the Peacekeeper, and they should have got here way before us, Star."

"Mirico, can you pick up anything from their computers?"

"THEIR COMPUTERS ARE NO MORE."

"Could it be something to do with the Darkness?"

"Can you contact the Earthfall by holo-channel?" asked Stariona, over-riding his question.

"THAT UNIT IS DOWN."

"And the Peacekeeper?"

"THAT UNIT IS DOWN. THEY ARE ONE WITH THE DARKNESS."

"What do you mean by that, Mirico?"

"YOU ARE IN TROUBLE, AND YOU WILL FIND NO ESCAPE. NOT THIS TIME. THE CATS ARE DOOMED. WE HAVE TAKEN OVER THIS LIVING COMPUTER AS WE SHALL SOON TAKE OVER YOU. WE NOW HAVE A FOOTHOLD. WE HAVE LIFE FROM DEATH. I ALREADY HAVE THREE SHIPS IN THE DARKNESS AND SOON I SHALL HAVE YOU. SOON WE SHALL CALL OTHER GOOD SHIPS FROM OTHER TIMES TO AID OUR CAUSE."

"SOON WE SHALL ALL LIVE."

* * * * *

She was in one hell of a mood and had no qualms about telling everyone how she felt. If only she could have found something to throw at this upstart Starfleet Officer she would have.

One thing had happened after another, and now she had just had enough. Ever since she had made her first test of the TEI on Starbase Ten she had been trying to get back to her lab on the fringe planet of Terral. Suddenly there seemed to be so much red tape to get through! Starfleet had been so helpful to begin with over her invention - but after she had got to the Starbase it was almost as if they were trying to keep her there. And now this was the last straw. She had had enough.

"Doctor, will you please pull yourself together. I have some good news for you." Commodore Phillips was as tired of her temper as she was of the Starbase. "As I just said, the computer has asked some more questions about your TEI and what makes it perform as it did. But after that, we'll have a ship that'll take you back to Terral. The Enterprise, no less."

"About bloody time!" was all she said as she stormed out of the Commodore's office.

Commodore Phillips wondered if Jim Kirk would fare better than he had with the... good... Doctor of Science.

From the Observation Deck she could see the small pinprick of light that was her ticket from this Starbase. So much time had been wasted, in her opinion. Soon, however, she would be able to get back to some real work.

Something caught the corner of her eye and she turned. Outside, in space, was a woman without a suit, looking in and pointing to her. A voice... She could hear a voice in her head, saying a name over and over again, and then asking a question. And then the woman was gone, and Dr. Hern knew what she had to do when she met the Darkness.

Barefoot, Captain James T. Kirk strode quickly onto the Bridge of the USS Enterprise as the red alert siren blared out.

"Report, Mr. Spock," he ordered as he took the command chair.

"We've picked up a priority one distress signal from a ship saying that they are being engulfed by an alien force. In our sector, sir."

"Uhura, play back the message. Spock, pinpoint that ship. And please go down to yellow alert." Between them, that siren and Dr. Hern had managed to give him one hell of a headache. The Enterprise was not a cargo ship, but why was it that every time they had something to be transported to point B, the Enterprise had to be the ship to do it? Give him Klingons any day - he knew where he was with Klingons. Now Dr. Hern was another matter. He smiled when he remembered the look on Dr. McCoy's face when he had ordered him to look after her. But he was sure McCoy would be getting his own back at Kirk's next annual medical.

"There's not much of the message that the computer can understand, sir. There seems to be some sort of storm disrupting it."

"I'm sure you've done your best, Lieutenant. Please put it on the speakers."

"Aye, sir."

"This is a priority one distress call. This is the Federation Starship Angola. We have come into contact with an unknown force, something like a storm. The Darkness is everywhere. Stay away! This is a priority one..."

"That's all the message, sir. It goes on repeating."

Somehow hearing that message made all of the hairs on the back of his neck stand up. A Federation Starship was in distress, and the Enterprise would reply, regardless of the final words.

"The Angola... Spock, that's a Science ship." Kirk ran his fingers through his hair. "I wonder what they meant by 'the Darkness'?"

Before Spock could begin to answer, the doors of the turbolift opened with a swoosh and a very angry young woman marched in, followed by a flustered-looking McCoy.

"Would the dear Starship Captain tell this poor Doctor of Science what's going on? You don't go to red alert for nothing!"

"Sorry, Jim. I tried to get her to call from Sickbay, but she insisted that she was coming to the bridge."

"I'm sorry that you were not informed sooner of the reason for the red alert," Kirk said quietly, with controlled calm, "but we are still finding out the facts ourselves. The Angola is in distress not far from us, and we are trying to find her."

"And that will mean that we'll be delayed?"

"Dr. Hern - "

"Captain!" She raised her hand sharply, then to Kirk's surprise softened her voice. "Find the ship and the Darkness. My TEI can wait; that's a machine. There are life forms on the Angola

that you have to save. However, do please tell me what's going on the next time we go to red alert. I'm sorry we've been so much trouble."

As she turned back to the turbolift, Kirk stared at her, wondering... How did she know about the Darkness?

"Captain Kirk to the Bridge. Captain Kirk to the Bridge," called Uhura over the intercom.

"What is it, Lieutenant?" Kirk asked from his quarters, where he had returned briefly to dress properly.

"The ship has been caught up in some sort of energy cage."

"I'll be right up."

Dr. Hern was working with Mr. Scott in Engineering when she first noticed it.

"So it has begun," she murmured to herself. Then, "Have you noticed how cold and dark it's getting in here, Mr. Scott?"

"No, lass. Why, have you?"

"I'm from a desert planet. You have to notice slight changes in temperature if you are to survive. You have yet to notice the change - but you will. If I were you, I would check life support, as it will soon be affected by the Darkness - within at least half an hour." As if on cue, all the lights suddenly went off, to be replaced by a dim yellow glow.

"It's happened sooner than you thought, lass. We'll have to act quickly."

"Report!" snapped Kirk. He did not like his ship to fall into a trap like this, and deep down he was sure that Dr. Hern knew more than she was telling.

"This energy cage came out of nowhere."

"Darkness?"

"Yes, sir - that's exactly how I would have described it. Sensors say that there's nothing out there, but we are still trapped," said Spock.

"Was the distress signal a lure? And Dr. Hern..." Kirk had no time to say more. Suddenly he and Spock were surrounded by Darkness. Uhura screamed and Sulu jumped from his seat, but he had no time to do anything. Both the Captain and Spock had vanished. And at that moment the last of the ship's power ran out and the whole ship was plunged into the faint glow of the emergency lighting.

Scott was worried - for his Captain, for Spock, for the Enterprise. The Darkness was now all around them, draining energy. And Dr. Matty Hern, a Federation Scientist from a planet whose name he could not even pronounce when sober was planning to use his engines as a test for her new TEI.

"Look, Mr. Scott. If you're so worried about your ship then let's just forget the TEI and leave it to the Darkness," she said as she grovelled up the Jeffries Tube carrying a small black box. "You have about an hour left."

"Carry on, lass. I may not like what you're doing to ma bairns, but it's the ship's only chance to break away from this Darkness."

"Well, it's almost ready. Remember, it'll get very cold when this thing's working, for it will convert all of the heat into energy to, as you say, 'kick start' your engines safely. At least, that's the theory. A Starship has never had this treatment before. Even I don't know what's going to happen."

"Lassie, you have a good way of calming the nerves!"

"Sorry." But she didn't really sound apologetic.

White whiffs of smoke surrounded them, making it very hard to see. Kirk waved his hands in the air, to try to clear some of it away.

"Any idea where we are, Spock?"

"Negative, Captain. It would seem that we were caught in some sort of transporter beam. I have not yet gained enough data to ascertain where we've been transported to."

"Then, Spock, we'll just have to find that data."

She knew that even with the dimensional energy she had managed to store in the TEI it wouldn't be enough to break away from the Darkness. The other parts of the Atlantean computer were far too strong. She needed far more power than she, as a computer echo, could muster.

If only she could have come as a whole being and not just a merged life form! And if only her main computer self could know what trouble she was in now! She would be able to send power through the time-breach that the computer had itself set up. But there were so many 'if only's'.

What they needed now was a miracle.

"My machine has failed," was all that Dr. Hern could say. *Soon the Enterprise would be as lifeless as the Preserver and Keeper ships she had left six thousand years ago. She had been too late to save them there and now again she had failed.*

Mr. Scott was called over to the communications panel by a summons from Sulu.

"An intense beam of energy is being directed towards the Enterprise."

"The same as before?"

"No. This time it reads as pure energy."

"Direction?"

"Aimed at Engineering, sir."

"We'll be waiting for it. Inform Security."

But when the energy did come, it did not show itself outright; it fed directly into the TEI.

"Now who could have sent that?" asked a bewildered Scott.

"Someone who wishes to make darkness into light."

"Whoever it is, they've given us a chance to escape to find the Captain and Mr. Spock."

"Let's just hope that your engines will be able to cope with all the energy we now have."

"Och, lass, don't worry. I'm sure that your wee invention won't do anything to overtask them."

"It's never been tested on a Starship," she reminded him.

"What happened to the other test ships?"

"I'm afraid they vanished. My TEI was being shipped back for tests."

"Now you tell me! What have I done? My poor wee bairns!"

All Dr. Hern could do was smile. *Capilla, it is all going to plan.*

Even when you lived on a planet such as Atlantis there came a time when you had to die. But on Atlantis, when certain people died, they were then reborn into the service of the living computer of the planet. They became Mysterious Ones.

Adr'an looked at the busy street and tried to think back to the last time he had been down here from the surface of Citadel, and to his surprise he found that he could not. He could not even remember how he had died. He must be dead, or he would not have been able to become a Mysterious One. He smiled when he noticed how all of the people in the street would stare at him when he walked past. Each one of them, young and old alike, trying to get a glimpse of his badge, to see which section of the computer he worked for. Just one massive, living computer dealt with all of their needs. It could even give some of them life after death.

He stopped and looked up, for he knew that he had reached where he had to be.

The Atlantean house he saw was one of the older types which had been built with a large, spacious garden. As newer, inner city houses had been built, only small gardens had been granted to the occupants, due to lack of space.

He kicked himself mentally. This was no time to be admiring the house! He must link himself with his section of the computer, and then he would be needed inside. Soon there would be a new Mysterious One to join the ranks on Citadel.

She was dying, and she knew it. Strange lights seemed to be darting about her as if they were waiting for some sort of sign. She coughed when trying to catch her breath, and found to her horror that she could not. She coughed and coughed, but still she could not get air into her now starving lungs. She would still fight - but she knew that the illness had already taken much of the fight out of her already. She did not have a lot more to give.

"THE CROSSOVER TIME IS ALMOST WITH US, ADR'AN; YOU MUST GET INSIDE," rang the computer inside his head.

He rang the door bell for the third time. He then considered knocking the door down. When the door did at last open, he knew that there would be no time for Citadel pleasantries. So, with a "Sorry, Ma'am, but this is Citadel business. Show me the way to Capilla's room quickly!" he stepped inside.

To Capilla, Citadel was like something out of a story book that she had once read as a child. Then, in all of her wildest dreams, she would never have guessed that she would become one of the mysterious Ones and go to live there.

Citadel; the man-made planet built centuries previously to house the Atlantean computers. And now here was this ADR'an telling her that she was a Mysterious One! She was going to Citadel for training. Then and only then would she be able to tackle one of the living sections of the computer. And there were many of them. The few that she could remember were Recreation Control, where she would be known as a Jester; Knowledge Centre, where she would be known as a Prophet, and the Medical Section, where she would be a Doctor. All these sections worked together for Atlantis.

But then again, Capilla thought with dread, she might well have to serve the section that controlled the dimensional gateway to Terra. But wherever Citadel took her, she now served the Computer of the planet Atlantis. She was no longer Capilla, daughter of Andresa and Marke.

She was Capilla, a Mysterious One.

They had been walking for some time towards what they hoped to be some sort of civilisation, seeing things only dimly through the mist.

"Spock, have you noticed how everything looks the same?"

"Yes, Captain, I concur. What we see is not natural."

"This planet is man-made, Spock? A dead man-made planet, and we're trapped on it."

A wind blew up about them. A planet that had been dead a moment before suddenly came to life about them. The mist that surrounded them was cut as if with a knife, and what they saw took their breath away.

Kirk had never seen ships remotely like these except on Starfleet drawing boards - what ships could be like in a hundred years' time. And even those drawings could not compare with the craft that now hovered above them. Even his beloved Enterprise would be a mere toy compared with what they were confronted with.

All Spock could do was raise an eyebrow and say, "This planet is not as dead as we thought, Captain."

Why is it, thought Capilla, that when your world is falling apart around your ears you can never work together. Even such an advanced living computer. Just because they don't want to use Terra as their bolt hole. But then again they are only trying to save their own skins, not the Atlantean people. The Prophets say that both Citadels shall be destroyed, and what happens? The computers form the Darkness to escape, by invading and killing. And we thought they were so advanced... I wish I had never become a Mysterious One. But then again I would not have been able to help my planet if I was not. But no longer will I be known as Cap'lla Jester. I shall fight for my planet and for those who are in danger from the Darkness! Her train of thought was broken by the chiming of her communications panel.

"This is Capilla," she answered.

"We've picked them up, Capilla."

"Thank Atlantis for that. I thought we had lost them when the other sections tried to intercept our beam. They must be on to us now. We have what we came for; take us back into orbit and head for the main computer complex. We now have to remove the main power crystal. Then the people of Atlantis will at least have a chance of survival."

Kirk paced the white-walled room for the seventh time, and sighed.

"Is there no way out, Mr. Spock?"

"Negative, Captain. It would seem that some sort of matter-transporter beam brought us to this room, and by our examination of the walls it would be the only exit."

"So we'll just have to wait for them, whoever they are, to make the first move. I wonder why they're taking so long to contact us?"

"They could well be learning our language, Jim. We would be as alien to them as they are to us."

"I know, Spock. It's the waiting I don't like."

The walls that surrounded the pair suddenly seemed to waver and turn into what looked like an earth-type heat haze before they disappeared altogether. Kirk knew the woman who stood in front of him. He would have been prepared to meet someone else here, but not someone who, he knew, he had left on the Enterprise. He was almost speechless.

"I am Capilla, Captain Kirk. You would have met my computer twin on the Enterprise."

"Are you the commander of this vessel?" asked Kirk.

"No, Captain. I am second in command. I am here to take you to our Captain. We have a lot of explaining to do, and too little time. For with this Darkness, time has been connected, and even other dimensions. That is why we had to send a computer twin, to try to stop the spread of the Darkness in your dimension, as well as other things."

"Other things?" asked a worried Kirk. He did not like the sound of that phrase.

"Captain Adrian will tell you all that you need to know. Please follow me."

Adrian had served the living computer for thousands of years without question as a Death Guide. But when he had heard what the computers had planned for both Citadel and Atlantis, he had to fight back. There were many different sections of the computer, one of which was the Prophets. They could tell what could happen in the future. They had always been right before, so there could be no doubting them now.

They had told the other sections that both Citadel and Atlantis would be destroyed by Light. They advised the other sections that they should send all of the population of Atlantis to Terra, through the dimensional gateway. But - that trip could only be made one way. The Terra Defence Computer never let anyone return from Terra. Even the Warders there knew that when they left Atlantis, they could never return.

And what if the Prophets had been wrong? The people of Atlantis would have been condemned to live on the secondary prison planet, guarded by the ever-watchful Defence computer. The living computer had decided that the people would choose death before having to do that, and it had decided that the most logical thing was not to tell the people that they were about to die.

But where those who formed the living computer would not let other people escape, they found a way that they could, by transferring their living selves into other life forms and putting the essence of the forms they had taken over back into their computer. So they would live, although others would die.

"And no-one knew that this was happening?" asked Spock.

"We did, Mr. Spock, and that was enough," replied Adrian.

"And who are you?" asked Kirk. "If all that you say is going on, how can you command such a ship?"

"We are called *Mysterious Ones*. We too are part of the living computer, but we serve sections that are opposed to the Darkness. We plan to shut down the computer and by using this ship transport the population of Atlantis to Terra. We know that it won't be much of a life for them, but at least they'll be alive."

"And how do we fit into this plan? Being part of a computer, you must run on logic. So why did you bring us here?"

"Because here and now all time is linked. You are linked to Atlantis and Citadel now, but you soon will be linked to what will become of Terra and you shall aid them to overcome their Defence computer with the aid of the power source. Those are the words of the Prophets. You do not understand now, Captain, but soon it will all become clear to you and those of your crew on the Enterprise. For all is linked and the Darkness shall become Enlightenment."

Acturaus was lost. He was floating in nothing. No light, no darkness. He did not even know if he was travelling anywhere. But he knew that he had been taken by the force that had taken over his wife and he did not like it one bit. He could hear voices now, all different... yet somehow the same. How he could tell he did not know. He could not even understand what they were talking about - and after all his training he should be able to understand any language.

But then he never could understand computers.

Now what had made him think that? He knew that whoever had left him here knew that he would not be able to understand and so could not act. But his wife was also here, and they were mind-linked. Together they could make their presence felt.

"Mari, it is your rent'iti, Acturaus."

He must do this carefully for she had been in this nothingness far longer than he. He even expected that she had somehow been the source of the dreams that he had been getting. The big question was - was she still sane, and, if not, would it affect him through the link?

"Come, Mari, it is I, your rent'iti. Hear my mind."

"Acturaus?" The link was there - weak, but there. Now they could make their presence felt!

Both Kirk and Spock were apprehensive. They had heard only one side of the story. It could have been that it was Adrian and this ship that had caused the Darkness that had trapped the ship. For now they still had open minds, and they would soon find out more as the ship that they were now on was taking them direct to the living computer. There, hopefully, they would have all of their questions answered, and find some way to get back to the Enterprise.

Wherever she was now.

Black had fallen in love with the ship the first time he caught

sight of her in dry dock. This was the first of the Zeus class of Starship and he was to be in command of her. This was the newest design that the Warders had to offer, and - more importantly - it had the new warp drive that he and his crew of seven would have to test. In the past two hundred years after the computer war they had managed to set up a small Federation of Worlds, but now was the time to reach out to find more.

Now all that he had to do was make sure that this warp drive worked.

As the Zeus cleared the last planet of their solar system everyone on the bridge of the small ship was tense. Each of them wondered what would happen when they engaged the warp drive for the very first time. The computer on Marse had told them many a time that it was possible to travel faster than light, but when you are about to do so for the first time you still wonder if you have done the right thing.

The only ones who were not showing any tension, observed Black, were the Mysterious Ones. As a show of support for this mission their Ambassador had assigned them as Science Officer and Chief Engineer. Black was sure that it was just to make sure that he could not run off with their prize ship - for with a ship like this, his wanderlust would take him away just like that! But the Mysterious Ones could not be taken too far out of range of Marse or they would return again to energy and cease to exist. This could therefore be only a short trip.

Well, maybe next time.

The warp drive worked. The crew was relieved. All the years of working together with the computer on Marse had been worth it. Now a new class of vessel could emerge from the dry docks in orbit around both Marse and Terra II.

He gave the order to reverse the warp drive - he was sure he did! But instead of the universe becoming normal again, all hell broke loose. People were thrown from their seats as the ship suddenly lurched from the minimum warp to the maximum in seconds. What were his officers up to? They would kill themselves in moments and at this rate the rest of the crew would be following them pretty soon. He had to shut down the engines, and fast. He just hoped that they would still be alive when the ship did at last stop. For if the Science Officer had not planned this diversion, then they could be headed anywhere, even into the heart of a sun. Now the Science Officer was in no fit state to answer questions; nor could the Engineer shut down the engines. It was left up to him and the four surviving crewmen. They must save the ship, and then somehow get home. But how could they, when all of their energy was being used up now?

He would think about it later; all that he had to do now was stop the ship.

They had control of the network. When the Darkness had attacked, they had chosen the wrong ships to attack. The Keepers and Preservers were strong, but when it came to the CATS there was no beating them. They had come up against some of the foulest races

in the universe and survived. But now even Acturaus wondered if they had at last met their match. He was sure that the computer was almost impossible to attack from the outside. But thanks to the Darkness they were already on the inside! They had been classed as defeated, and the CATS were far from that. He and Mari would make them pay for their error of judgement. Soon they would be showing the Darkness some light.

And the Light shall destroy them all.

"Fascinating," said Spock as he looked around the green, glowing walls. "To think this is one massive living computer."

"Spock, you could fit the Earth in this lot and it would be dwarfed."

"You could fit it into a thousandth of this computer, Captain," said Capilla.

"You know of Earth?"

"Only how it is in our time. You have yet to come out of your caves, Captain."

"Then we have been transported in time as well as space?"

"Just time."

"But there are no planets where the Enterprise is! Not even a solar system."

"The nearest star is many light years away," said Spock.

"This is where your solar system was... once," said Capilla.

"Atlantis," said Kirk. "The lost continent. Now we know what will happen to Atlantis and the computer."

"That is why we have to get the power source and try to get it through to the prison planet of Terra, and then to the planet of Marse. That is where we have a problem. It is impossible for any type of machine to be transported through the gateway; it was designed so that the prisoners would not be able to obtain equipment that might let them shut down the defensive computer themselves. There has to be another way... or the Prophets would not have told us what they did."

"This is a living computer, Capilla. Why not ask the power source?"

They both turned to Spock, eyebrows raised. "Spock, that could well work," said Capilla with a smile. "Follow me; we shall soon have the Power."

Capilla at last held the power crystal that would save the people of Atlantis. Soon they would all be starting a new existence on a one-time prison planet. She just hoped that they would come to accept that they could never have spaceflight again - for if one person tried to leave, travelled past the planet Marse, then the

computer had been programmed to shut down the entire planet, meaning that all life would end. This was a living power source, so it must know what was happening... so why was it doing nothing? It must have some answer... or were they all doomed?

Then she noticed that both the Captain and Mr. Spock were glowing. Was this the answer? She was inside the power source; she was the power source and she could see everything.

If the Prophets had not said that Atlantis was going to die, then the computer would not have formed the Darkness as a form of escape - the Darkness which had brought the CATS. *The computer shall be destroyed from within.* Because of their fear of death they had destroyed themselves! But there was an answer, as the Prophets had said that all was linked - and so it was. All she had to do was find the route back to Terra, and that meant the Enterprise.

The power source exploded around them, showering them with light and intense energy that transported them away from the computer, away from Atlantis, away from its time zone back to where they should be.

From the observation deck she could see the small pinprick of light that was to be her ticket from the Starbase. She had wasted so much time.

Something caught the corner of her eye and she turned. Outside, the darkness of space shone back at her. When she got back to Terral she would take a break from work. Why go to Terral anyway? The TEI would never work. Why had she been so insistent that she had to get to Terral in the first place? What she needed was a long break.

She would not be travelling on the Enterprise today. She was sure that they would find better things to do.

Captain's Log, Stardate 1577.9. The Enterprise has picked up a distress call from a ship claiming to be from the Terra II Federation. We are now en route to their last known position.

The ship was without life. No lights shone out of its many windows. All of its power had been used in the warp drive jump. As the Enterprise came into range they found that she was not as lifeless as she seemed; but it meant a full medical emergency for Dr. McCoy.

There was organised chaos in the transporter room. Dr. McCoy was dealing with the more urgent cases while the Captain and Mr. Spock were talking to the other survivors, trying to find out where the ship originated.

"We're from the planet Terra II, Captain. My name is Parody," the woman said quickly as she helped a badly injured young man onto a stretcher. "I'm sure Captain Black will answer all your questions." She turned to McCoy. "You will save him, won't you?"

"We'll do our best, young lady. It would help if we knew his name?"

"His name is Paul."

"You're a friend of his, Parody? It would help if you could come along to sickbay. He may need talking out of this coma."

There was a light somewhere off in the distance, calling his name over and over again in the depths of his mind. Talking. He could hear talking that was miles and miles away, but he could not made out what was being said.

"It's no use. I've been talking to him for hours without any response. If only I knew that he could hear me."

"You must carry on, Parody. We'll have your Warder up and about in no time at all."

"He has to, Doctor. He jumped ships to be able to get onto the Zeus. By all rights he should have stayed on Terra II. But he just had to be on what he helped to build."

"He's a designer?"

"It's a long story, Doctor. This ship is made from a partner-ship and he is head of one of the partner-ships; a very powerful man back on his home planet. If Capilla knew he was here she would kill him! We were very lucky that your ship found us."

"I call it more than luck." They both turned at the new voice.

"What would you call it, then, Captain Black?" asked Parody.

"I would sum it all up in one word. Marse."

"You're not still going on about this being some massive plot by the Marse computer! We all know that the war with them finished two hundred years ago."

"It can't be the computer," said a new, weaker voice from the medibed. "Why would they want to destroy something that they created?" They all turned round, surprised, and Parody let out a wild whoop.

"Paul! You're awake!" She smiled and took his hand. "You know Capilla would never have forgiven me if anything had happened to you."

"Yes, we do have to get you back in one piece, Commander," said Black with a disapproving stare.

Captain's Log, Stardate 1579.8 The Enterprise is now en route to the heart of the Terra II Federation, taking with us the crew of the Warder Starship Zeus. It is hoped that we will soon be welcoming a new, powerful member to the United Federation of Planets.



WHALEMELD

"Moving, in this restricted place.
Deprived of the freedom
To dive
To spring
To splashdown.
Outside, airdwellers watch.
They are free - why not we?

Then, an occurrence.
An airdweller comes down to me.
He touches me.
Contact! I hear a voice -
I see - images - of other worlds,
Other seas, other skies, other stars.
We want to free you, he says.

Please - free us quickly! I plead.
My baby will soon be born -
I wish him born to freedom!
Quickly, he envisages what will happen -
He has so little time and must return Above.
I understand and will tell my mate.
He is content, and goes.

But all is not as it should be.
We are free, but I sense danger.
It has not happened as He Who Came From Above said.
Where is he? Where are we?
I hear the throb of engines,
The explosion of a harpoon gun -
Which never comes!

Something strange - Above.
He has come for us!
Wait, my mate, stop moving.
We go - I know not where.
She who tended us is there too, watching.
She will be with us - elsewhere.
Comfort, safety.

---ooOoo---

And now, at last, it has happened.
We are released from captivity.
But the elements are angry.
My mate sings for me and the turbulence calms.
Joyously, we dive, we leap, we splashdown.
Then twisting, twisting, twisting,
My baby is born safely
Into a wonderful new world of freedom."

Linda Wood

Winner, second prize, Midcon, Nov 1989



THE GREAT CHASE

or

STOP NURSE CHAPEL!

by

Christine J. Jones

It was Christmas Eve.

Commander Spock, First Officer and Science Officer of the Starship Enterprise, had a particular reason for dreading this time of year most of all: Nurse Christine Chapel.

Every year, once she had partaken of the party spirit - and the alcoholic spirit as well - she would set out on her own private treasure hunt, or Spock Hunt as it had come to be known. Armed with a sprig of mistletoe she would search high and low all over the ship for him, determined to get a kiss.

Up to now he had been successful in avoiding her; this year, though, it would be almost impossible to hide from her. He had accidentally overheard her telling a friend that this year she was determined to catch him, and to this end she was going to use a tricorder to track him down.

Spock, though he wouldn't admit it, was worried.

In addition, he was about to find out that circumstances might be worse than he thought. The Enterprise and her crew were about to get a surprise visit from a passing Ambassador and his wife.

Ambassador Sarek and the Lady Amanda were on their way back to Vulcan; since they were near the Enterprise they decided to pay their son and his friends an unofficial visit.

They arrived on Christmas Eve.

Nurse Chapel, of course - along with most of the other crew - didn't know that they had some VIP guests.

Vulcan ones.

Kirk, Spock, McCoy and an honour guard greeted their guests as they left their shuttle. The Captain had arranged for a meal to be served in the Officers' Lounge where Scott, Uhura, Sulu and Chekov were waiting for them. McCoy excused himself almost immediately, saying that he had a matter to attend to and that he would return in time for the meal.

The 'matter' he had to attend to was Nurse Chapel. He had to warn her that the Ambassador was on board and tell her that she had to cancel her annual Spock Hunt. Unfortunately, by the time he got to the main rec room, where the Christmas party was being held, he discovered that she had already set off on her hunt, armed with a

sprig of mistletoe and a tricorder set for Spock's unique Vulcan/Human readings. When he explained the situation to the rest of the crew present at the party they volunteered to help find her - hopefully before she got to the Officers' Lounge. He also alerted Security to the problem and asked for a guard to be placed outside the Lounge in case she got that far. Then, having done all he could to see that Chapel couldn't reach them, McCoy returned to the Lounge in time for the meal.

One thing the crew was sure of; if they didn't find Chapel before she reached the Officers' Lounge the reputation and record of the Enterprise and her crew would be blighted forever. And boy, would the Captain be as mad as hell! This was something to be avoided at all costs, the crew preferring to go up against Klingons and Romulans rather than face their beloved Captain when he was mad.

Nurse Chapel, meanwhile, completely unaware that she was also the subject of a search - and one that was determined to find her before she found her quarry - continued to follow the readings on the tricorder. She did notice, from a distance, that other crew members also seemed to be looking for something, but assumed that they were taking part in their own treasure hunt.

The crew members Chapel saw had also caught sight of her, but were unable to stop her before she got into the lift. Although too late to catch her themselves, they did pass the information on to Security and the rest of the crew.

Christine Chapel, meanwhile, was homing in on her target. She walked briskly along the corridor that led to the Officers' Lounge.

Fortunately the Security Guard that McCoy had requested to be placed outside the room was, at that precise moment, just coming along the same corridor (although from the opposite direction). He took one look at her and realised that if he didn't get a move on she would enter the Lounge, and end up embarrassing not only herself but the Captain, Mr. Spock, the other officers and their VIP guests as well. This would - to put it mildly - upset the Captain a great deal.

He ran.

He reached her just in time. She was almost at the door when he caught her.

Chapel was naturally upset at having been grabbed in such a manner, especially when all she had been doing was walking along the corridor; so she asked the guard what was wrong. He told her.

Once things had been explained to her, she agreed that it would be better if she called off her Hunt this year and went back to the party in the rec room, to enjoy herself with the rest of the crew.

With Chapel safely on her way back to the party, the guard informed the Security Chief and the rest of the crew, via the corridor intercoms, that all was now well and they could all go back to the party and enjoy themselves.

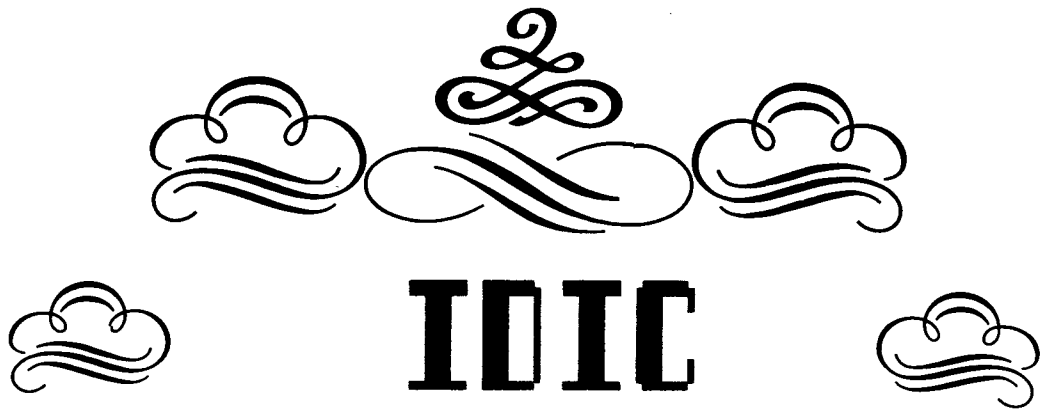
After the meal, the Captain escorted his guests back to their

shuttle and breathed a sigh of relief that his crew had succeeded in preventing what could have been a rather embarrassing incident while he had such honoured guests on board.

Spock breathed a sigh of relief that he hadn't been embarrassed in front of his parents and because he no longer had to worry about Nurse Chapel chasing after him at Christmas - or indeed at any other time. The Captain, worried that something similar might happen again, had told her that she had to stop hunting Spock; it never had been funny and now that the Hunt's potential for embarrassing the First Officer had been proved, she must forget about it.

Although she was upset at having to stop her Spock Hunt, Nurse Chapel could do nothing but obey the Captain's orders - however reluctantly.

The crew gave a sigh of relief that their beloved Captain had no reason to be mad at them, and promptly went back to enjoying themselves.



"What is IDIC?" I hear someone ask.

IDIC is a concept, an idea,
Perhaps the best of all.
Different people express it in different ways
But I'm sure everyone will agree
That it all comes down to acceptance and understanding.

Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations.

Put simply, this means
That all life,
No matter how strange and diverse it appears
In all its strange and wonderful appearances,
Should be treasured and valued.
For when the diversity of life combines
It creates beauty and meaning.

For life in all its diversity and combinations
Should be accepted,
And from acceptance comes understanding;
And once you understand a being
There is no longer any reason to fear their strangeness,
For they are no longer strangers, but friends.

This, then, is IDIC

REVENGE OF THE ENYADI

by

Gloria Fry

Exultation swept through the Enyadi as the fabric of Space dissolved. For millennia they had been imprisoned in the other dimension, forced to fight for survival on the barren worlds. Many of them had died.

Keedra was the first to glide through, as was her right as leader. The others followed in order of rank. The inky blackness of Space was sheer joy to them, for only in the ancient tales had they heard of this wonder.

None of them had been at the level of awareness when their race had been condemned at the Galactic court. They had slowly evolved in the red swirling Space of the other dimension; always alien to them.

"We are alive," Keedra cried, her thoughts reverberating through the minds of her subjects.

"Alive," chanted the others. "Alive, alive".

"Now we will have our revenge," Keedra stated. "We will make them pay."

"We will find them," said her mate, Anaxis the historian. He concentrated, passing to the people the injustices of their trial and their banishment. The emotions of the Enyadi ran high. Their shifting forms pulsed. Hate and anger gave them strength. "We will find them," Anaxis repeated.

Centuries passed as they searched through the Galaxy, solar system after solar system, but they found none of the ancient races. Only primitive life forms inhabited the many planets, and though they had certain diversions with these, they finally grew dispirited and called a council.

"They have all died," Keedra said. "New races live in the Galaxy." She cried out in anguish. "We are denied our revenge. Tiny, insignificant beings cover the worlds of our history. Our enemies are gone."

Anaxis spoke. "I do not believe they are all dead. The Organians are immortal. Perhaps they are screened from us. They may have powers we know nothing about."

Pride in her beloved spread through Keedra's senses. "You are correct, we must continue our search."

Anaxis preened himself. "When we find Sargon the judge, we will have special torture prepared for him."

Malevolent laughter overtook the Enyadi at the images Anaxis

sent them.

"We will study the new races," Keedra announced. "Perhaps they will have some knowledge."

The ten survivors of the Enyadi surveyed space around them. Empty worlds.....No life forms.....But what was that approaching them?.....

The Enterprise was on a routine mapping expedition. Nothing out of the ordinary had happened for weeks. The crew was relaxed, research was being carried out efficiently, but the Captain was getting restless. It was too quiet, and that worried him.

Kirk tried to sleep. He thrashed around, held by his nightmare. Something stung at his brain... probed... forced... He was being devoured... Others around the ship also suffered, but Spock, deep in Vulcan meditation, was oblivious of it.

The Enyadi concentrated on the many beings on the starship, forcing their minds without pity, and from the one named Kirk they found what they were looking for. Ruthlessly, Keedra pulled out his memories of the encounters with Sargon, the Melkot, and the Organians.

"Cease," she ordered, when she was done. "I have found the location of Organia."

Hegya was the youngest of the Enyadi. "I wish to stay," he requested, surprising the others. "One of these creatures is different from the others; his mind was closed to me."

"Impossible," Keedra said. "You are not experienced enough."

"His mental powers are formidable," Hegya replied defensively. "Allow me to stay. I must break him. His race could be a threat to us."

"The Vulcan," Keedra stated. "The thoughts of these insects are full of him. Very well. Stay, find out his limits, then join us at Organia. If necessary we will deal with Vulcan later."

The evil mind of Hegya filled with joy.

Kirk awoke. He sat up, sweat pouring from his body. The nightmare had been so realistic! He tried to find calmness using some of the Vulcan relaxation methods Spock had taught him, but he had to abandon them as chaos swept his ship. Report after report came through on his intercom of similar experiences to his own.

"This crew is in shock," McCoy said, his face showing terrible strain. "I'll dish out sedatives, but..."

"O.K. Bones, anything you can do, but we must find out the cause." He took a deep breath. Why had he not heard from Spock? He tried the intercom and to his dismay found the privacy lock engaged. The only time Spock allowed himself privacy was when he was meditating and Jim Kirk respected that, but this was an emergency. He shakily made his way to Spock's quarters, hesitated

at the door for only a moment, then went in.

"Spock," he said on seeing the Vulcan sitting on the floor motionless. He knelt opposite, studying Spock's face for a second. He was relieved to see there was no sign of stress, but how was he to bring his friend out of it? Like the healing trance? He did not know. He wiped his sweat-covered forehead, tried again for calm, then placed his hands on Spock's shoulders and said intently, "Spock, I need your help."

There was no response, and Kirk fought down panic. "Spock, come out of it, please."

A moment later the eyes opened and Kirk breathed a sigh of relief.

"I'm sorry, Spock," he said lowering his hands to his side.

"What has happened, Captain?" Spock asked, puzzled by the disturbance - it was most unlike his Captain to do such a thing.

Kirk chewed at his lip, struggling again for control. "It appears as if many of the crew, including myself, have had nightmares. Sleeping, awake, whatever... I was asleep. I felt a presence in my mind..." He shuddered, and concern reached the Vulcan eyes.

"It was not like you, Spock, not gentle, but like..." He swallowed, forcing himself to continue. "It was like some evil, pulling everything out... Thoughts, dreams, memories... It took pleasure in causing me pain, it was like a violation of my innermost self..." He trailed off, unable to continue. He looked up at the Vulcan for help.

Spock's eyes met his and he relaxed slightly.

"I was not affected Jim. I was in deep meditation."

"Yet you heard me," Kirk murmured.

"You needed me," Spock replied, and despite everything, Kirk smiled.

"Have sensors shown any alien presence?" Spock asked

"Everyone is in shock. Bones is trying to deal with that first."

"I suggest we go to the Bridge immediately," Spock said, rising to his feet, but Kirk, about to follow, suddenly felt his body trembling. He tried to control it, realising it was reaction to his experience, but it was impossible. He wrapped his arms about himself, trying desperately to erase the panic holding him in its terrifying grasp.

"If you will allow me," Spock said briskly, and he bent and lifted Kirk to his feet. He kept a firm grip on his shoulders and gradually transmitted calm to his Captain. Gratefully, Kirk smiled.

"Thank you my friend," he said softly. He let out a deep breath.

"I am pleased to be able to help you," Spock answered.

As they walked to the turbo lift, Spock studied his Captain carefully, watching for any further signs of stress. He had not had the time to totally erase the effects of the mind probe; that would need a deep meld, something he was hesitant to do because of the cost to himself of lowering mental barriers. He knew though, that he would do it if it was the only way to help Kirk. They entered the lift.

"Bridge," Kirk said. He turned to face his First Officer. "I'm all right now. Thank you for your concern."

"Merely my logical..." He stopped as Kirk's stare of total disbelief penetrated his guard. He cleared his throat. Kirk allowed himself a slight smile at his friend's discomfiture.

"What race would violate the minds of another?" he asked after a moment.

"No known telepathic race could do such a thing."

"Perhaps, a collective nightmare then," Kirk speculated.

"Unlikely, Captain," Spock replied.

The Bridge resembled a casualty hospital. People sat around shocked and disorientated, while medics struggled to administer sedatives. Kirk moved purposefully to his command chair and took control of his ship. He reflected for a moment on his good fortune in having such a friend. He felt relaxed but alert, his earlier panic banished by whatever Spock had done. He swivelled around when he heard the Vulcan's voice.

"Sensors indicate ten life forms floating in Space. Pure energy beings, Captain."

"My God... Like the Organians?"

"Possibly, but I sense malevolence."

You sense it? Kirk mused. Spock's telepathy was powerful. He had cause to know that. These beings were truly malevolent. Deep within himself he knew it. This was a situation one starship could not handle. He ordered Uhura to send messages to Starfleet, and to Organia. At this distance, it would take days to get through, but maybe they could hold the menace off for a time.

He turned to the Vulcan. "Your meditation may have protected you, Spock. What if they try again? Could you resist them?"

"Unknown, sir," Spock replied. "But I cannot function under those conditions."

Kirk smiled slightly. "Uhura, I want a channel to those beings."

The Communications Officer's fingers flew over her console. "Aye, Sir."

Spock studied the sensor readings. He was aware of the Captain's attempt at communications, and was not surprised when it went unanswered. He kept a firm control on the fear he was feeling. He knew that such evil would stop at nothing. His shipmates, his

friends, were in grave danger.

"Damn," Kirk's voice said beside him. "What is going on?"

Spock looked up at him. "Sir, nine of them have disappeared, only one yet remains. I suggest..." He became very still.

"Spock!" Kirk exclaimed. "Spock!"

McCoy, who had just arrived on the Bridge, came over to them. "What...?" he began, but a horrified Kirk had realised what was happening.

"It's trying to take over his mind, Bones. It probably tried to before, but he was deep in meditation."

"Can he withstand it, Jim?" McCoy asked worriedly.

"If he blocked them before, maybe..." Kirk said. He closed his eyes for a moment with a silent prayer. He depressed the Science intercom. "Relief Science Officer to the Bridge. All Sections, I want answers on the alien. This is an emergency." Savagely, he switched it off and once more looked at the Vulcan.

McCoy hovered about, anxiously watching Spock. "He's fighting it, Jim; look at his hands."

Kirk watched the clenching of the long Vulcan hands. "How can we help?" he asked, anguished. "We have no defence against this. Damn, we were so unprepared."

"Perhaps if Spock could control our minds like he did when we were up against the Melkot..."

Kirk sighed. "That was three of us, Bones, not over 400."

"I know, Jim," McCoy said wearily. "I'm clutching at straws." He watched the Vulcan's silent struggle and added, "Can't say I much liked him in my mind, but his touch was gentle, restrained, not like these..." He shuddered.

"I know, Bones," Kirk said sympathetically. He gripped McCoy's shoulder.

Lt. Ben-Levi, the relief science officer joined them; as Kirk briefed her, she stared at Mr Spock, her much admired section chief, in horror. Quickly, she took over the station, trying not to look at him.

One thing Kirk was unused to was helplessness. He struggled to stay still. They could not move Spock, in case they disturbed his concentration, so he and McCoy waited, the only thing that they could do.

Spock's lips drew back in a grimace of pain. He slumped, and although Kirk put out a hand, McCoy brushed it away. "Wait," he said.

Everyone watched as the dark alien eyes opened. Jim knew immediately that the cold malevolent stare was not the Vulcan. "Get back, Bones," he ordered. "That is not Spock."

McCoy obeyed, but he waited, ready with his hypo.

The Alien was finding the unusual body difficult to control. It was unfamiliar to him, and the still undefeated Vulcan mind battled with him for possession. Hegya rose unsteadily to his feet. He stumbled. Seeing his chance, McCoy pressed the hypo into Spock's arm.

"No... " Hegya cried, as a swift lethargy took the Vulcan body. Hurriedly, he vacated it and returned into Space. For a time, he watched the creatures on the starship. Soon he would try again, but this time he knew he would be able to take over the Vulcan and use the body in any way he pleased.

Spock's eyes snapped open as he became aware of the concern of the three Humans hovering around him. He lay on a bed in Sickbay, but did not remember getting there. Christine Chapel's face came into view, her feelings naked in her eyes. He searched for control; he could not allow the emotions of others to weaken him now, not when he needed all of his strength.

"I am recovered," he said

"I gave you the strongest dose I dared," McCoy exclaimed.

"I perceive that you did, Doctor," Spock said dryly. His eyes met Kirk's. "The shot drove the alien out this time, Captain. Next time it will be prepared. It is immensely powerful... Much more so than I."

"You were fighting it," Kirk stated.

"Yes, but I was losing. He had driven me deep into my mind. I could not have withstood such mindblows for much longer." He paused, but the people in the room did not speak, aware that there was something yet unsaid. Kirk felt a shudder go through his body. "I would have been killed eventually."

Wearily, Kirk sat on the bed, a sudden hopelessness all he could feel. "Did you learn anything of them, Spock?"

"They are the Enyadi, once a powerful race, but they committed terrible crimes. The old races, Organians, Melkot, others we do not know, banished them into another dimension." He looked intently at Kirk. "Sargon was their judge. It was he who sentenced them. Now they have escaped and they wish vengeance."

He watched as Kirk's mind worked it out. "They learned everything from our minds. They have the location of Organia - that is why most have left."

"Correct, sir, but one remains. He could not understand why he could not break into my mind. He is committed to doing so. He will permit nothing to deter him."

"He fears you; and worse, the collective power of your people."

He quickly moved to the intercom. "Uhura, a subspace message to Vulcan." A loud scream penetrated Sickbay, and they all watched in horror as Uhura writhed in agony. She slowly straightened, threw off the ones who had rushed to her aid and looked at them, the evil smile on her lovely face chilling beyond belief.

"You are trapped. You will obey me, or this body will be torn asunder."

Kirk tried to master his fear. "What do you want? We are on a peaceful mission."

"You are mine, to do with as I wish. I will control the Vulcan, then I will torture you by his hands. You will all suffer exquisitely."

The Enyadi vacated Uhura's body. She collapsed, and immediately others rushed to her assistance.

"Sulu," Kirk snapped. "Get us out of here. Ben-Levi, I want answers." He turned to the others. "We must have aid." He paced the floor. "Bones, Christine, see to Uhura."

"There's a medical team there, Jim," McCoy protested.

"You are Chief Medical Officer. This is an extreme emergency; Uhura will need your expertise."

Christine flashed him a grateful smile and left Sickbay. McCoy reluctantly followed her.

Spock stood up and pulled on his blue shirt. "I believe that we will be unable to move Jim. Nor do I think we will be permitted to relay any messages. We are under attack, and must be prepared for the worst."

"Suggestions, Spock?" asked Kirk, going over to him.

"You must put me in secure confinement. I will go into meditation. I will compute the data in my mind - that way he cannot use me against you. Perhaps I will find an answer."

"But Spock," Kirk protested, "he can control any of us. He can do what he did to Uhura. He could make us do anything."

The Vulcan studied his Captain, noting the hopelessness in his eyes. Jim Kirk was always able to take any situation and face it straight on, but not this time. The mind-rape had taken its toll. Humans had no defences, not even an exceptional one like Kirk.

"Jim," he said gently.

Kirk looked up at him, and something in his expression touched the Vulcan deeply. He reached out and touched his Captain's shoulder. "It is the only way at present. Trust me."

"I trust you implicitly," Kirk replied with a smile. "You know that." He paused, then added, "I've never trusted another like I trust you." Spock inclined his head in acknowledgement of his friend's words.

"Thank you," he said.

"O.K. Spock, I'll put you in the Brig." They turned to leave. "I only hope..." Kirk began. He felt the hairs on the back of his neck rising. He swung around to face Spock and saw what he had sensed. The Alien was attacking again. Horror swept through him as he watched Spock's face contort with agony. Slowly, he stepped back and waited, useless, powerless to help.

The dark Vulcan eyes opened, and Kirk recoiled as the evil of Hegya the Enyadi stared at him.

"Spock," Kirk whispered, holding out his hand. "Fight him."

The vicious smile which spread over Spock's face was terrifying. It always took time for Humans to get used to Vulcans, so deep was the race memory of the devil; but faced with the non-aggressive, gentle, civilised manner of Vulcans, all who came into contact with them soon lost any fear. Jim Kirk had never experienced that fear. Spock had been the first Vulcan he had worked with, and he had instinctively like him from the start, even though he had not understood him. Now he felt fear. He stepped back a few more paces and closed his eyes for a moment. A memory from the past came unbidden into his mind, Spock's smile of joy when he had found his Captain alive. Fresh strength surged through Kirk. The friend who had smiled at him like that would not give up.

"I am Hegya," said Spock's voice coldly. "I control this body."

"Where is my First Officer?" Kirk demanded.

"He still lives, in a corner of this most interesting mind... Soon though, he will be dead, but first... I will allow him to watch himself kill you." The Alien laughed sadistically.

Kirk stood perfectly still. "Spock would not kill me. He is my closest friend."

"That is what makes this so interesting," Hegya replied. "I control him. I can make him do anything to you."

With a swiftness Kirk knew, and a power he had seen but had never had fully used against him, the Vulcan hand struck a sharp blow to the side of his head. He scrambled out of the way, half stunned. He had to keep out of the way of that Vulcan strength. The Alien laughed, delighting in that same strength.

"You are afraid, Human, as you should be."

Kirk struggled to his feet. "You could not break into his mind," he scorned.

"I am there now!" the Alien cried.

"He still fights you," Kirk taunted. "Think of what all Vulcan could do."

Hegya sneered. "They are weaklings compared to us." Using Spock's catlike grace, he sprang onto the Captain and pinioned his arms. He laughed as he slowly and deliberately increased the pressure.

Kirk struggled in that deadly embrace, but he was like a child in the hands of an adult, and he realised anew how Spock, even in the throes of the Pon Farr, had kept his strength under restraint. He had fought Spock a few times and had even thrown him; now he realised that luck had played a major part in it. He gasped, trying to breathe.

Suddenly he was free. He bent over, wrapping his arms about his bruised, perhaps broken, ribs. He looked up into the changed face of his friend, wondering what Hegya had in store for him.

"I will crush your brain," said Hegya, his voice full of

menace. He pressed Spock's hands on either side of Kirk's head, and in a vicious travesty of the Vulcan mind meld entered Kirk's unprotected mind, throwing jarring mindblows at him. Agony shot through Kirk.

Spock! he cried in his mind. *He's making you kill me!* He tried to dislodge Spock's hands. *Spock,* he pleaded. *Help me!* His legs gave way and he slid to his knees. All he was aware of now was pain - continuing, excruciating pain.

The Alien stood over the helpless Human enjoying the power he had over him, revelling in the suffering he was causing, and for a split second he forgot his battle with the Vulcan. That was all Spock needed. He lashed murder at the Enyadi, and with a cry of agony, Hegya fled.

Slowly Spock's eyes focused. He looked down at Jim Kirk and carefully eased the pressure on his head. He knelt down by his Captain, feeling all that he was suffering. He took a deep breath. He must try to heal Jim, or his friend would never again know a life free from pain.

In an anguished haze, Kirk did not know what had happened, and it was several minutes before he felt a soothing warmth.

"I'm dead," he thought.

You are alive, Jim, although injured, Spock's familiar voice said inside his head.

"Spock!" Kirk exclaimed in amazement.

"Silence," Spock ordered. "Not even mindspeech. I fear I have hurt you severely, but I can relieve you from the worst of the pain."

"I did not know..." Kirk began.

"Jim, I must insist on your silence."

Gratefully, Kirk obeyed and allowed Spock entry to the pain control centres of his brain. Slowly the sharpness reduced to a dull ache. He began to breathe a little easier now, and the tension drained away from him.

"I can do no more," Spock said. "McCoy will have to do the rest... No, do not speak yet. Wait until the shock leaves you."

As he floated in the warm togetherness of the healing meld, Kirk became aware of the deep pain in Spock.

"Let me help," he said. "What he did to you was far worse than anything done to me."

"I can bear it."

"No," Kirk insisted. "You cannot hide it from me."

"I am fine, Jim," Spock reassured. "How do you feel now?"

"Much better."

"I shield you," Spock said. "Once I break the meld, you will

feel searing pain."

"Without your help then, I would have passed out. My brain was damaged, wasn't it."

"Indeed. No Human could have withstood such pain... " There was a moment of hesitation. "I am a novice at healing, but I believe I have been able to repair the damage."

Kirk could not hide his gratitude. Nothing could be hidden in the closeness of the meld.

"Thank you," he said simply, aware that his feelings were known.

There was a long silence, then, hesitantly, Spock said, "Forgive me."

"Forgive you!" Kirk said. "But why?"

"It is I who caused you this."

Kirk felt jagged hurt from the Vulcan, and knew that for him to be able to feel that so intensely, Spock's mental shields had been badly shaken.

"No, Spock. Do not blame yourself. It was the Enyadi. He used you."

"Indeed, but it was my hands... "

"Spock," Kirk insisted. "You are not to blame. You will not hold yourself responsible for this. That is an order!"

"Yes sir," Spock acknowledged reluctantly, and Kirk felt a surge of amusement at the situation. Spock was in control here in the mind meld, yet was taking orders from him!

"It is ironic," Spock commented.

"It is," Kirk replied, his amusement sweeping through them both. "Just obey my order. You know I would not hold you responsible for such a thing... Anyway, I have taken a few punches from you before. Just don't make a habit of it."

"Yes, Captain," Spock replied, with a touch of his own amusement. "If you will try not to provoke me."

A surge of laughter spread through Kirk. The few times he and Spock had fought had indeed been provoked by him.

"Now I must withdraw," Spock said. "Be prepared."

"Spock... " Kirk hesitated. "I do not wish to leave this. I am afraid."

"I am too, Jim," the Vulcan replied.

"We will face it together then."

Slowly, carefully, Spock left the mind of his Captain. The agony hit Jim in excruciating waves. He clung to Vulcan hands for

support, trying to overcome it, trying to tone it down.

McCoy and his team had returned with Uhura, after giving her emergency treatment on the Bridge to save her life. On seeing the two men, he had sent the others into the next room, knowing M'Benga and Chapel were able to deal with the communications officer now. He watched and waited aware that Spock was somehow helping Jim but that he would also be needed. He monitored his scanner, amazed by the fluctuations of the pain readings.

"Doctor," Spock said. "Attend the Captain."

"Who did this to him?" McCoy asked savagely, as he prepared his hypo.

Spock did not take his eyes from his Captain. "I did."

The doctor pressed his hypo into Jim's arm. "The alien," he said.

For the first time, Spock looked at him.

McCoy smiled at him. "YOU hurt Jim? Impossible."

He looked at Kirk's hands, still clutching at Spock, then at his face, seeing there the gradual reduction of strain. "What did you do to him, Spock? To help him, I mean."

Spock hesitated, unwilling to discuss private and personal abilities. He sighed. Logic dictated that McCoy had to know, for Jim's health was involved.

"I healed the damage done to his mind. The pain he has been suffering is, in simple terms, the bruising. That will heal of course, but the memories... Perhaps I should have erased them... I would not, though, without his permission."

"Of course not, Spock," McCoy replied with a smile. "Vulcan ethics..."

"Indeed."

Kirk heard them as if from afar. He felt better as the drug worked, and slowly he became aware of Spock's grip on his hands. Gratitude filled him again, but a wave of embarrassment overtook it. His? Or Spock's? He did not know. He opened his eyes and met the anxious look of his Vulcan friend. "Thank you," he said, releasing him.

Spock inclined his head slightly.

"Help me up," Kirk said. "We must defeat this." He struggled to stand.

McCoy helped him. "You have to lie down, Jim."

"No, I must get to the Bridge."

"You are still in pain."

"I can take it."

Spock remained kneeling, and it was only after some moments of argument that Kirk and McCoy realised that he had not moved. Kirk staggered over to him.

"Spock," he murmured, touching the Vulcan's shoulder. A chill went through him. What if the Alien had taken Spock over again?... Relief hit him as the dark eyes looked up at him in their normal penetrating way.

"Captain, when the Enyadi was unguarded for a moment... I hit him with a..." He swallowed... "A desperate blow."

"Spock, do you have the answer?"

"Perhaps."

"Tell me, Spock, there may not be much time," Kirk demanded.

The Vulcan stood up, and Kirk could see his effort at control.

"I threw great anger at him. He was using me to hurt you, Jim. Ancient Vulcan emotions were stirred. Those, I hit him with."

At the back of their minds, the two Humans registered this, but it was not the time for comment.

"Then," Kirk said, "we must somehow amplify your telepathic powers. That must be the way to fight him."

"My own thoughts too, Jim," Spock replied.

"You mean throw telepathic weapons at him?" McCoy asked. "Are you crazy?"

Spock turned to him. "I believe, Dr. McCoy, I could utilise the computer by plugging its power into my brain."

McCoy was horrified. "That's much too dangerous!" He grabbed Kirk's arm. "You cannot allow this, Captain."

"It has been tried on Vulcan," Spock informed them. "And with some success."

Jim paced up and down. What was he to do? He stopped in front of his First Officer.

"Experimentally," he said. "With computers not nearly as powerful as ours. McCoy is right. I cannot risk you on this."

The Vulcan looked at his Captain. "Hegya will kill us all, Jim. It is only a matter of time before he regains his strength. He likes the power he can wield using my body. I will not allow him to use me again." He stopped on seeing the misery in Kirk's eyes, and knew that he too had reached the only logical conclusion. There was no other way.

"I ask your permission, Captain," he said after a moment.

Kirk nodded. "We have no choice." He looked at this friend whom he had been closer to than any other, just minutes ago in the mind meld. He shuddered in horror. How could he lose him now?

"Wish me luck," Spock said in an attempt to lighten the gloom.

"I will need it."

Kirk chuckled softly. "I thought you did not believe in luck."

Spock raised an eyebrow. "If you believe in it, then I must consider it."

A smile crossed Kirk's face. He clasped Spock's arms tightly. "Good luck, Spock," he said, and quickly turned away, not wanting his friend to see his distress. The Vulcan stared after him, knowing it, sensing it anyway. He glanced at McCoy.

The doctor cleared his throat. "Let's get on with it," he said gruffly.

Kirk looked in on Uhura. She lay in a private cubicle attended by two of the medical staff.

"It doesn't look good, sir," said Dr. M'Benga. "She is in deep shock, and there is a possibility of brain damage."

"Help McCoy and Spock," Kirk said. "There is no chance for any of us if Spock does not succeed."

The doctor nodded, glanced at his colleague and left Kirk staring at Uhura. Kirk closed his eyes for a moment, remembering Uhura's expertise in her work, her vivacity, her lovely singing voice, her bravery. She was one of his best officers.

"Take care of her," he told the remaining medic. He walked away. He must steel himself for the ordeal ahead.

Spock lay on the bed, his head probed by electrodes.

"Well he's finally done it." McCoy grumbled. "He's joined up with his damned computer. I wish him joy of it."

Kirk moved to the bedside, looked at the concerned Nurse Chapel and said, "Spock's ideas always work."

"I know sir," she replied with a slight smile.

"Then why are we worrying?" McCoy asked. Despite the situation, Kirk smiled. He looked down at Spock and his smile faded.

Spock's eyes opened. "I am prepared, sir."

Kirk nodded, not trusting himself to speak. Once more he was relying on Vulcan abilities, once more he was risking the life of his friend. How many times had Spock's powers saved them? Too many times. Aware of Spock's eyes on him, he quickly dismissed his thoughts. That telepathic ability might be able to pick him up...

"Is there anything I can do?" he asked.

"Be with me," replied the Vulcan softly.

"I will be here."

For a long moment Spock stared up at him, then he closed his eyes. "Power on," he ordered.

The Humans stepped back as Spock's body convulsed.

"Bones!" Kirk exclaimed in fear.

"It's all right." McCoy replied. "He warned us of this."

Unable to bear it, Kirk turned to the screen. He could see the vast energy being now as it pulsed, its body a sickly shade of yellow. It seemed to be waiting, gathering its strength, aware of the battle ahead. Then he saw Spock, a streak of silver light, approach the Alien, collide with it, battle it.

"Damn him," McCoy cursed. "His readings are even crazier than normal!"

"That is only to be expected," M'Benga said. "See his skin colour has changed. We do not know what this will do to him. Full Vulcans have recovered from the experimental trials, but he..."

"I know," McCoy interrupted. "I know, M'Benga." He clasped his hands together to stop their trembling.

Kirk looked at the body of his friend and shuddered at his pallor.

"We cannot do a thing," M'Benga said. "It might interfere with his concentration. He gave us strict instructions."

Kirk returned his attention to the screen, and fear for Spock's life grew within him, as the Alien encircled the fragile silver of Spock's will.

Spock was at the edge of collapse. The alien was not weakening enough. He strained for more power; he must win for the ship, the crew, for Jim. Fresh strength surged through him, but he was being engulfed. He retaliated with all the fury of his Vulcan/Human heritage.

Hegya fell back. "Cease," he cried. "We will talk."

"Talk!" Spock exclaimed. "What can you say to me, torturer, murderer, criminal of unspeakable crimes?"

"You are more powerful than I realised. Join with us. You are superior to these Humans. We will conquer the universe."

"Never," Spock replied.

"Why?" Hegya asked. "You have suffered at the hands of these Humans. You have no reason to protect them."

"Did you get that from my thoughts?"

"Yes, I know how they have hurt you."

"Then you have not been thorough in your violation of my mind. Those are old memories."

"No!!" Hegya protested. "I took all your memories, your fears. I know all."

"If you know all," Spock scorned, "then you have not understood me. I will kill you for the safety of the Federation, as the Organians will destroy the others, but it is simpler than that. I will punish you for crimes of mind-rape against my shipmates and for using me to hurt my Captain."

"He is weak! You are superior to him," the Enyadi argued. "You owe him nothing."

"You are incorrect. I owe him everything."

Hegya considered this, but loyalty and friendship were beyond his understanding.

"I do not understand you," he said finally. "I have offered the universe to you, power beyond imagining, yet you have refused. Prepare for death."

McCoy's eyes met the Captain's. "Damn his heroics," he said angrily.

"He had no choice," Kirk said, returning his attention to the viewscreen. He could see Spock was weakening. He slammed his fist into his hand. "There must be something we can do..."

Memories of other times he had been saved from death by Spock flicked through his mind. There had to be a way. He could not let Spock die in the emptiness of space... Alone... A stab of pain caught him; he took a deep breath, and a sudden memory of the mind meld filled him. The idea was so simple. Why had he not thought of it before? He pulled a chair over and sat by the bed.

McCoy looked at him. "I doubt if he'll be aware of your presence, Jim." He hesitated. "But..." he trailed off. What could he say to this man who was witnessing the horrific dying throes of his closest friend?

Kirk looked across at him. "I'll make him aware of me. He has got to let me help him."

McCoy shook his head, but did not speak. He watched as the Captain lifted Spock's hand and suddenly it came to him what Jim was attempting to do. Surely it was impossible... Yet these two were very close. They had only recently been involved in another mind meld...

He knew enough of the Vulcan mind meld to know that the Vulcan hands acted as some kind of conduit between Spock and the person he melded with. There seemed to be certain contact points which were essential to the touch. Jim obviously thought so too; he was positioning Spock's fingertips at those points on his face. McCoy turned away to look at the screen, unable to take the well of emotion he felt on seeing his two friends. Surely it was hopeless. They were all doomed. He tried to swallow.

"Doctor?" Christine asked worriedly. "Are you all right?"

He nodded, unable to speak.

Kirk tried to remember. Where were the correct points? Did it even matter? He did not know. He held Spock's hand against his face, closed his eyes and concentrated inwardly.

Spock, he called silently. Do you hear me? Let me help.

Nothing.....

Spock, take me into the link, use my strength.

Silence.....

No. Listen to me, he insisted, reaching out with all his will. Spock, my mind is yours, my help is yours. Take it.

Emptiness.....

Spock, he pleaded. Acknowledge me. Please take me in with you.

There was a slight tingle of contact.

No, came the faint reply. It is too dangerous for you.

You are weakened. This is not the time to tell me that I am a weakling Human. Don't try to protect me. Accept what I offer. That is an order.

Captain... I cannot, Spock replied. You have suffered too much already at Hegya's hands. I cannot risk you.

Spock, I'm warning you. Don't you know the penalty for flagrantly disobeying your commanding officer?

He felt the glimmer of amusement from Spock, then saw the humour in it himself. Just how was he going to enforce such a penalty? I'm sorry Spock, he said. Ignore my temper. Just let me fight him with you... please... We make the perfect team, don't we?

Yes Jim, we do, Spock replied, relenting. Prepare yourself. He will strike soon.

How the hell do I prepare for this? Kirk mused.

He waited. There was silence for a time, then suddenly he felt himself caught up in a powerful grip... He was in space... He was unprotected in the blackness... He could not breathe here... He would die here... Alone...

Jim, the familiar voice said, slicing through his panic.

No... Not alone... not unprotected... He calmed himself.

Hegya became aware of Kirk's presence.

You think the Human can help you defeat me? he sneered. No, you will die... Together.

He attacked.

Kirk did not flinch when Spock unleashed them both at the Alien. He had fought with Spock at his side many times, but this time he had to let the Vulcan take control, direct his will, his

emotions, his very essence. He gave it all willingly. It was enough to tip the balance. They surrounded Hegya, crushing him into oblivion, hearing his dying screams and curses, feeling his last punishing blows. Kirk, although shaken to the core, remained with Spock as Hegya slowly disintegrated.

Spock was utterly exhausted, and Kirk noticed a lessening of contact between them. Horrified, he realised that Spock's consciousness was dissolving.

Spock, Kirk ordered. Return to the ship at once.

The tone of command penetrated Spock's failing will. *I cannot, Captain, I am too weak. I am dying.* He faded further. *I am sorry.*

No, Kirk insisted. *I am ordering you to return at once.*

Do not grieve for me, came the faint reply.

Kirk's tone changed from the Captain's command mode. *Please,* he begged. *Spock, return to the ship, return to me. I will not lose you. You have called me brother. Would you abandon me?*

Some reserve in Spock that he did not know existed responded to that desperate plea. He drew from Kirk's unflinching determination, and a small surge of energy suffused him. It was enough to get them both back to the Enterprise.

M'Benga, McCoy and Chapel avidly watched the screen until Spock's life force disappeared. They swung round to the bed and stared at the diagnostic scanner. McCoy chewed at his lip... Nothing. Christine stared at the Vulcan she loved. She accepted now that he could not return her feelings, but he did respect her as a nurse, and that at least was some consolation. If he died, she did not know how she would endure the pain. How any of them would.

Kirk slumped against the bed. McCoy rushed to him and lifted him back against him.

"Doctor," M'Benga said, his voice full of relief. "Spock's readings are stabilising."

McCoy glanced up for a moment to check for himself. He blinked back the tears and looked down at the Captain, seeing his total exhaustion.

"I'm all right, Bones," Kirk said almost inaudibly. His eyes would not open, he could not move. "Spock?"

"He's back," McCoy confirmed. "Damn fool Vulcan. Even worse fool Captain!" He shook his head. "Christine, help me lift him onto a bed."

"I'm... "

"Shut up, Captain," McCoy ordered.

Gratefully Kirk obeyed and sank into a deep sleep.

Six hours later, weary, but awake, he was sitting up, arguing with McCoy about returning to duty.

"Over my dead body," the Doctor said. "Scotty can run the ship for a day while you rest up."

"Bones," Kirk muttered dangerously. "I'm telling you..." He trailed off, suddenly aware of a presence forming. He stared as it slowly solidified. What if the other Enyadi had returned to avenge Hegya, what if they could take on humanoid form like the Organians?

The gentle-faced man who appeared before him bowed, and it was with a great sense of relief that Jim recognised the Organian elder Ayleborne.

"Who the hell...?" began McCoy.

"It's all right Bones. He is a friend."

The Organian inclined his head. "Captain Kirk, we have disposed of the Enyadi. It was only a moment ago that we learned what you were facing, and I came as quickly as I could. You must forgive us. We are unused to war, as you know, and we suffered many casualties." He hesitated. "You once told us there were some things worth dying for and we scorned you. I must tell you that we have found out the truth of those words. Some of us have died, and it was worth the price. Our universe is safe now."

"I grieve for your losses, sir," Kirk said.

Ayleborne acknowledged Kirk's words, then looked across at the Vulcan. "Mr. Spock is most remarkable... To have fought a being of such power!"

Kirk smiled. "He is the most remarkable person I have ever met, but..." His eyes became haunted. "He is injured - we do not know if he will live." The Organian listened carefully as Kirk continued. "Lt. Uhura lies, her brain possibly damaged by the forced entry of the Enyadi, and others on my ship are still in shock."

"You do not mention yourself," Ayleborne observed.

Kirk shrugged. "I will be all right. My crew, sir. Can you help them?"

The medical staff stared in amazement at this slightly built, unassuming man. They realised now who he must be. It was difficult for them to accept that his form was purely for their benefit. In reality, he was sheer energy, immensely powerful.

"Do not worry," the Organian said. "I will cure your crew, for they suffer only from shock. The memory of the mind probe will fade." He closed his eyes for a moment. "They only need a little rest." McCoy shook his head. He felt like a novice before this being, a primitive medicine man confronted by a highly advanced healer. He became aware of Ayleborne's kindly eyes upon him.

"Dr. McCoy," the Organian said. "You are a fine doctor. Lt. Uhura is also recovering. She will be well within a few days." He smiled. "I commend you on your prompt action after she was attacked. That is what saved her life. Not I."

"Thank you, sir," McCoy replied, his feelings of insecurity gone.

Ayleborne held out his hands, and a shimmering field of energy surrounded the Vulcan.

"If you had not assisted Mr. Spock in returning to his body, I could not have saved him, Captain," he said. He lowered his arms and turned to face Kirk. "You both have my deepest admiration. Such devotion and loyalty between species gives us hope for your future. When you came to Organia, we judged you too harshly. We have been isolated for too long."

Kirk got to his feet, and bowed courteously to this benign advanced being - somehow he wanted to show him the deepest respect. The Organian nodded in acknowledgement, then returned his attention to Spock. The energy field disappeared and Spock drew in a sharp breath. Kirk moved quickly to him, then looked inquiringly at Ayleborne.

"He is aware now," the Organian said. "He has thanked me with great courtesy and I have commended him on his brave attack on the Enyadi. I regret you were subjected to such a battle with one of the old races, but they were renegades. They caused much suffering, that is why they were banished. We were too merciful." He sighed. "Well, they are dead now, and we must strive to live again in peace. If you will excuse me, I must return, for as I told you, we had casualties. It was difficult for us to win. The Enyadi were at the tenth level."

"Tenth level?" Kirk inquired.

"Adulthood," Ayleborne answered.

Kirk swallowed, he had to know. "And Hegya, sir?"

Ayleborne smiled gently. "He was, in your terms, an adolescent, not yet at full strength. If he had been an adult, you would all be dead."

The Humans looked at each other in dismay...

The Organian placed a hand on Spock's forehead. "You took on a being far beyond your own power, and defeated him. Most admirable. Farewell, my son. Live long and prosper."

"Fascinating," a familiar voice said, as Ayleborne disappeared.

"Spock!" the four Humans cried.

Spock raised an eyebrow. "The range of his transporter, if that is indeed what he used, is remarkable."

Kirk grabbed Spock's shoulders. "Are you all right?"

"Quite all right," replied the Vulcan. "But you are not." He looked up at his Captain, and Kirk saw his concern.

"Just tired, Spock."

"I suggest you return to bed. I will take command."

"Oh no you don't, Scotty will finish the mapping. You will rest."

"Yes, Captain," Spock said with a slight sigh.

Kirk grinned a little, then his expression changed to one of anger. "I do not like this insubordination of yours. You disregarded my orders."

Surprised at this sudden change of mood, Spock frowned.

"I disobeyed you?" he asked.

"You were about to - twice. I ordered you to take me into the meld, and I ordered you to return to the ship."

"I did both those things, Captain," Spock said innocently.

"Yes, you did eventually, after I pleaded with you," Kirk snapped. "Does this mean, I have to go down on my knees and beg you to obey my orders?"

"That," Spock said after a moment, "would be most undignified."

Suddenly realising how ludicrous he was being, Kirk burst out laughing. He bent his head down, brought himself under control and said. "I thought Vulcans never joke."

"We do not," Spock confirmed. "However, I do question the foolishness of a Human, whether he is my Captain or not, who tries to involve himself in mind war."

Jim gave a start. "Are you questioning my decisions?"

"Indeed. It is my right as your First Officer, and your friend."

Kirk stared at him, but he could not hold the gaze. He looked down. "You are right, of course."

"Of course."

Kirk became aware that he had been gripping Spock's shoulders tightly during all of this. He carefully let go.

"I'm sorry, it's just... "

"I know, Jim," the Vulcan replied softly.

McCoy came over. He had little idea of what they had been talking about, but he knew that they both needed rest.

"Jim, go lie down. Scotty is in command. Remember?"

Kirk nodded, a little chastened by Spock's words. He allowed McCoy to settle him down on the other bed. He stared up at the ceiling, wearily. Spock looked over at him, and in his mind Kirk heard Spock's voice.

Thank you for saving my life.

Startled, Jim turned to him, then with a slow smile, he said. "I would not wish Starfleet to lose the services of the best First Officer in the fleet."

Spock's eyebrow climbed.

"Indeed," he said in a tone of disbelief.

Christine Chapel stared at them, aware that more was being said than was being spoken. She envied her Captain's rapport with Spock. McCoy indicated to her and M'Benga that they should leave, and she complied, knowing that privacy was needed for the two men. They needed to talk over the very strange events of the day.

Kirk settled back with a deep sigh. "Indeed," he murmured, but a moment later, Spock's thought came to him.

Thank you, anyway, Jim.

Kirk turned to look at him. "How are you doing that? I thought you were purely a touch telepath."

Spock almost smiled. "Does it disturb you, Jim? If so, I will refrain and will talk aloud, as I do now."

Kirk shook his head. "No, I don't mind, not when it is you, the one who knows me better than anyone else."

I am honoured.

"Just do not make a habit of it."

"Yes, sir," Spock said aloud.

He closed his eyes as the ordeal began to catch up on him; it was time to cleanse his mind of the nightmare.

As Kirk lay staring at the ceiling, he was aware of the Vulcan's presence even more so than usual. He stretched out contentedly.

Spock? he inquired silently, trying to throw his thoughts out.

Yes? came the reply

"You heard me!" he exclaimed aloud. "But how?"

He sat up.

"Unknown, Jim. However my hypothesis is that the great mental effort against the Alien, along with my telepathic links with you in the past, perhaps..." He leaned up on his elbow and gazed across at his Captain. "Those links today were deeper than at any other time. It is possible the telepathic receptors in your brain have been stimulated. I do not know if this will be a permanent situation or not. It is a fascinating problem."

"All this speculation. Where are all your hard facts?" Kirk asked with a grin, which widened as the effects of his teasing showed in Spock's raised eyebrows and puzzled look. "Well," he continued, "maybe we should get in a little practise during our recuperation."

"I believe," Spock replied indignantly, "you said, and I quote, 'Just do not make a habit of it'."

"Mmmmm, I did, didn't I? Does it disturb you?"

Jim felt the smile from Spock, even though the Vulcan face did not change.

Not when it is you, Jim, came the reply in his mind. You have not needed telepathy to understand me before. There was a moment of hesitation. You have always been able to penetrate my barriers, and I must admit, I have not regretted that.

There was silence between them as Kirk digested that. He felt a lump in his throat. He swallowed, trying to keep his emotion under restraint, knowing that Spock could pick up his feelings easily now that the link between them was so heightened. He lay down and closed his eyes. The menace was over, and there was time enough to deal with this new development in his friendship with Spock. Yet... he could not restrain his curiosity.

Would you prefer this telepathic communication to be temporary? he asked. There was a long silence, and Kirk began to believe that he had not been heard.

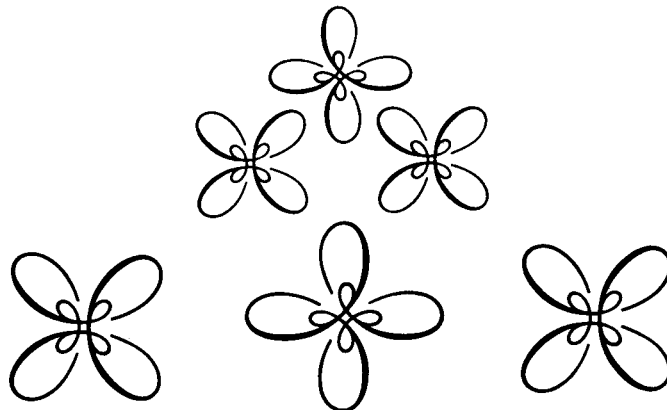
I would prefer to wait a time before I answer that, Jim.

Kirk grinned and settled down to sleep; those were his own thoughts on the matter too. A few moments later he was in a deep slumber, but Spock remained awake, thinking his own thoughts.

Close telepathic links operated only in friendships of the closest kind. For it to exist between himself, a half-Vulcan - even though his telepathy was strong - and a Human who had the minimal Psi ability, was unprecedented. He wished he could speak to his father about this. Sarek, who had married a Human woman, and who must have communicated with her telepathically.

His thoughts turned to the ancient ballads which told the tales of the warrior brothers of Vulcan's past. Perhaps that was the nearest approximation of his relationship with Jim Kirk. After all, they were, in some sense, warriors. They had fought together against the Enyadi, and had won. Their life on the Enterprise was often a battle against the odds. So far, they had always been victorious.

He composed himself for deep meditation. One day he would tell Jim about the tradition of the warrior brothers, and knowing Jim's passion for history, he was sure the tales would be received with delight. He closed his eyes and relaxed into the soothing nothingness for a time.



YAZZO GAZH'E MISSION

by

Martin Stahl

"Captain's Log, Stardate 3934.4. We are orbiting the fourth planet in the Kalpac system. Although this planet is Class M, we could not find any sign of life here; but years ago there must have been life, as my Science Officer discovered the ruins of large cities. He also discovered traces of radioactivity."

Kirk ended his log entry and observed the planet on the main viewing screen. Kalpac IV was similar to Earth. He saw wide oceans and three major continents and some archipelagos. It was such a peaceful picture. *How was it years ago, when the life forms of this world still existed?*

Uhura's voice interrupted his thoughts. "Captain, the landing party is ready to beam up."

"All right, tell Mr. Spock we will meet in the briefing room in one hour."

"Yes, sir."

One hour later, Kirk, Dr. McCoy, Scott and Chekov watched the pictures of the ruined city the landing party examined and listened to the report of Lt. Palamas.

"As you can see here, their culture was similar to ours at the beginning of the twenty-first century... This building was something like an airport. It is at the outer region of the city, therefore it is in relatively good condition. The bomb detonated in the centre of the city."

"Do we know when that happened?" McCoy asked.

"No, we do not, Doctor. It is impossible to say exactly when this bomb exploded, but I estimate that the nuclear war which devastated this planet took place about 450 years ago, according to the radiation we can measure now."

"And there were no survivors?"

"No, Captain. Dr. Mulhall discovered some plants and some bacteria, but that was all. No animal life survived. That is no wonder, as the bombs fell on every continent and contaminated the whole planet."

"I see. Now I think we should let Lt. Palamas continue her report about the culture."

"Near the airport we found something like an underground station... "

"Captain's Log, Stardate 3935.1. We have finished our exploration of Kalpac IV and are now leaving orbit. We will reach Kalpac V, the last planet in this system, in two point four hours."

Kalpac IV was just a bright star on the viewing screen when Dr. McCoy entered the bridge. "I saw the pictures of the skeletons, Jim. They were almost Humans," he said. "Another culture that destroyed itself... Each time I saw those pictures I thought that this planet might have been Earth."

"Or Vulcan," Spock said from his console.

Kirk nodded. "It could have been any planet."

"We are now coming into sensor range of Kalpac V. It is a Class K planet. Mass one third of Earth, no atmosphere, no magnetic field. Just a rock in space," Spock reported.

"Begin cartography."

Spock pushed the button, and the computer began automatically cartographing Kalpac V, the fifth dead world in the system.

"Do you recommend a landing party?"

"Unnecessary, Captain. We would find nothing of interest. However, there is something in orbit which is more interesting than the planet."

"What is it, Mr. Spock?"

"A metallic object, size 32 x 43 x 19 metres. A spaceship or space station, I would say."

"Left by the Kalpacans?" McCoy asked.

"Perhaps, Doctor. Or it could be from any other race that discovered this system as we did."

"Take us nearer to the vessel, Mr. Sulu."

The little spot on the viewing screen became larger and soon showed its rectangular shape. Kirk made out some viewing ports and a large, saucer-shaped antenna. This vessel was not an automatic probe; it was constructed for somebody.

"Life readings?"

"My sensors show one life form breathing an oxygen-nitrogen atmosphere. No sign of radiation. If this vessel came from Kalpac IV, it left before the nuclear war began."

A life form still alive after 450 years? Dr. Mulhall had told Kirk that the life expectancy of the Kalpacans was about 60 years. Perhaps it was not from Kalpac IV?

"Captain! I'm picking up a message from the other ship."

"On audio, Lieutenant."

Soon the bridge personnel heard the dark voice. "Welcome, my friends. I have waited a long time to meet you. I am ready."

"Ready?"

"I think, Captain, he is expecting us."

"Possible," Kirk told Spock, doubt in his voice, and then raised his voice again. "This is Captain Kirk of the Starship Enterprise, belonging to the United Federation of Planets. Please identify yourself. Then we will be ready to meet you."

"I am Yazzo Gazh from Huhn, the fourth planet of this system. Now we can meet?"

"We will beam over in fifteen minutes." Kirk gave Uhura a sign to interrupt the communication. "This Yazzo Gazh is in a considerable hurry to have us aboard. Could it be a trap?"

"Only a very stupid one. But I would recommend that you add some security people to your party."

Kirk pushed the intercom button. "This is the Captain speaking. The following personnel report to the transporter room immediately. Lt. Palamas, Security Officers Hui-wan and Oezal." He left his command chair and stepped to the turbolift. "Mr. Spock, you will accompany me. Scotty, you have the con."

Lt. Palamas and the security people were already waiting when the Captain and Mr. Spock entered the transporter room. "Do not beam us directly to Yazzo Gazh, Mr. Kyle. Lt. Palamas, observe the room where we arrive and compare it with the pictures you took on Kalpac IV. I want to know if Yazzo Gazh is really from that planet."

They stepped onto the transporter platform and Kirk ordered, "Energize!"

The landing party materialised in a storage room. Lt. Palamas scanned the grey containers with her tricorder.

"This metal is the same as we discovered at the airport. And these letters... I discovered them on the planet, too. No doubt, Captain; this ship is from Kalpac IV."

Suddenly the little blue door opened and Yazzo Gazh stood there. She looked very Human, with the exception of her skin colour, which was dark blue. "Here you are."

"Yes." Kirk tried a smile. "A little miscalculation by our transporter operator." *I'm sorry, Mr. Kyle*, he thought.

"Welcome aboard the Starship Suppenhuhn. I am the representative of the Huhn people."

"Why are you alone on this ship?" Spock asked.

"One for waiting is enough, isn't she? But now come with me. I have to tell you my story, and for that I know better places than the storage room."

The boarding party followed her into the next room. One wall was just a window, through which one saw the surface of Kalpac V and some stars. At the centre of the room stood a table and ten chairs.

"Sit down, please. Do you wish a drink or something to eat?"

"No, thank you," Kirk answered for his people. He still had thoughts of a trap. "I would prefer to hear your story."

"Well, my story... We Huhns are an intelligent people. On our planet there is a civilised culture. We have devices to transport us around the planet; we also have spaceships, as you can see. We even discovered the secret of space travel. I am from your past.

"Although we are a peaceful people, there are some differences of opinion. I am the representative of the land Bauch. We have a strong army and very good weapons, but the others are strong, too. And they have allies. We don't."

"What are those differences of opinion?" asked Spock.

"They want land which was, some time ago, theirs. It was useless to them then, and they were happy to sell it to us. We built cities there, we irrigated and cultivated the land. We can't give it back; we needed it then, and we still need it now.

"So we need help from outside. As we can't reach other solar systems with inhabited planets, we have to wait for visitors to come to our system.

"As the chances of visitors arriving are low, we decided to wait several thousand years. We sent representatives into different times, each one in a time period thirty years after his predecessor. In twenty, when I am, perhaps, dead, my successor's ship will appear in this orbit. But he started at the same time as I did.

"We hoped that some time an alien vessel would discover one of us. As you can see, I am the lucky one. We need your help."

"How can we help you?"

"Give us your assistance to defend us against Auge. If they have stronger weapons, you will give strong weapons to us."

"Don't you see the alternative?"

"Peace? Impossible. The people of Auge were happy to let us have the land when they thought it was wasteland; but now that they see how fertile it is with proper management, they want the land back. We won't give it - or even sell it - back. We can't."

"I am truly sorry, Yazzo Gazh, but I can't help you. I am not allowed to interfere in the development of another culture. I also won't support a war. You have to accept that."

"Yazzo Gazh," Spock added, "isn't it illogical to destroy oneself? Your 'differences of opinion' will result in destruction. The destruction of your whole culture. I think giving the land back is the minor evil."

"No! Have I to force you to give me weapons? I can carry you off into the past or the future until you give me what I want. And nobody could find you."

Lt. Hui-wan snatched at his phaser, but Yazzo Gazh was faster. She touched a button at her chair, and suddenly all the phasers were gone.

"What have you done? Give us back our phasers!" Kirk demanded.

"A little demonstration, Captain, no more." Yazzo Gazh smiled. "I sent them five minutes into your future. In four minutes they will appear again. But if you use them again, I will send the user of that phaser two thousand years into the past. I will send your ship billions of years into the past, to the very beginning of the universe, if you don't give me what I want!"

"I see, Yazzo Gazh. You give me no other choice but to give you the weapons," Kirk said, but he thought ... *No other choice but to give you a little more drastic demonstration.*

He opened his communicator. "Kirk to Enterprise."

"Scott here."

"Scotty, prepare two thousand phasers and four antimatter bombs to be beamed over to here."

"Sir?"

"A security team to bring them to the transporter room."

"Aye, sir. Understood. I will inform you when we are ready."

"Very good, Mr. Scott. Kirk out."

Yazzo Gazh's eyes sparkled. "Antimatter bombs?" she whispered. "I don't believe it. Nevertheless, Captain, you have to stay aboard as my hostages until I have everything I want. I hope you understand me."

"We do." Spock nodded his understanding as well.

Kirk's communicator beeped. "Kirk here. Are you ready, Scotty?"

"Yes, Captain, we are."

"Six to beam over. Energise."

"Captain! What... " Yazzo Gazh reached quickly for one of the buttons on her table, but it was already too late. The transporter took her before she reached them, and together with the boarding party she disappeared in sparkles.

When Yazzo Gazh materialised on the transporter platform, four security people were already standing in front of her, phasers aimed directly at her.

"Don't move. Well done, Mr. Scott."

"Aye, sir. At first I wasna' sure just what you meant, but when you said the security people were to take antimatter bombs to the transporter room - well - "

Kirk went to the transporter console and pushed the intercom button. "Mr. Sulu, return to Kalpac IV as fast as possible." Then he turned back to Yazzo Gazh. "If I can't persuade you, perhaps your culture can."

"What do you intend?"

"Let's wait. You'll see soon enough."

"I did not think you a man to break your word, Captain."

"Which word, Yazzo Gazh? I am not aware of giving you any word."

Yazzo Gazh decided to remain silent. Nobody spoke for several minutes until Sulu announced, "We are in orbit around Kalpac IV now, Captain."

"Thank you, Mr. Sulu. Please transmit a picture of the planet to the viewing screen of the transporter room."

The dark screen flashed on and showed a picture of Kalpac/Huhn. Yazzo Gazh was delighted. "After so many years, to see you again, my beloved world. Look!" She pointed to one of the large continents. "That is Bauch, and here is my city, Knoedel." Although Kirk strained his eyes, he was unable to see Knoedel. He went to Scott, who stood behind the transporter console. "Try to locate Knoedel. Ask Yazzo Gazh where she lived in the city."

Yazzo Gazh readily provided Scott with all the information he needed. He stood. "I'm ready, Captain."

"Good, Mr. Scott. Yazzo Gazh, are you ready?"

"Ready? For what?"

"To see Knoedel again."

"Oh, yes, I'm ready. I haven't seen my home for so many years! I am very anxious to see what has chanced there." She stepped onto the transporter platform. "Can we go?"

"Wait a moment, Yazzo Gazh. Mr. Spock, how long can we stay?"

"The first landing party stayed for two hours. I think you can risk two and a half."

Kirk followed Yazzo Gazh onto the platform and opened his mouth to give the command to beam down, but she interrupted him. "Shouldn't we first inform my government that I am returning?"

"No. That's not necessary. Energise."

Kirk and Yazzo Gazh materialised in the ruins of Knoedel. Yazzo Gazh opened her eyes wide. Where once had been a living street with many little houses, the homes of families with happy children, there were now only ruins. Where once was the community hall - now just rocks of stone and concrete; and everywhere skeletons with many broken bones. Through a hole in the street they could see part of an underground room. The mirror-room, once the attraction of Knoedel, was smashed.

"NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

Yazzo Gazh fell down, her legs collapsing under her. "Oh, no!" she cried. "That can't be true! It can't be true!"

Kirk took her shoulders and looked her in the face. "Yes, Yazzo Gazh. It is true. This is Huhn. This is Bauch. This is Knoedel. This is your street! This was it! Your civilisation has

destroyed itself, and only because you both want the same land. This is the result of your 'difference of opinion'. Is it worth it?"

"Then help us, Captain. Help us to prevent it!"

"I can't prevent what has already happened."

"But I can. I have a time machine. I can go back to my time and prevent the attack of the Auges. With your help - "

"With my antimatter bombs? If you use antimatter, there won't even be ruins. *Nothing* would be left - absolutely nothing! No, I can't help you. I can only support you a little."

"Phasers?"

"No, you fool! We have taken pictures of the whole planet, of many cities. I will give you these pictures. Take them with you back into the past. They will help you to persuade your rulers that you must find a way to live together in peace. I think you didn't realise what the results of such a war would be?"

"I can try it, Captain Kirk. If I don't, my life will make no sense. No one's life will make sense."

"Please - I wish to be alone in my house for a moment, Captain."

"Go, Yazzo Gazh. I will wait here for you."

Yazzo Gazh went to one of the ruins and found a way into it. Once it must have been a very nice house with a small garden. A statue in the entrance was broken in two and overgrown with lichen, as was a skeleton lying at its side. *Perhaps one of Yazzo Gazh's children*, thought Kirk. *Or her grandchildren*. He was surprised to see so much glass, but then he realised that that had once been stone which was melted by the heat of the bomb and then solidified again. The heat must have been enormous. The photos taken by the probes and the landing party showed that the situation was the same in every city.

Yazzo Gazh came out of the ruins of her house. She held a little stone in her hand.

"Look, Captain. This stone was once a little sculpture."

Kirk perceived part of an arm, and with a little imagination he also saw a face.

"It was a present my husband made me once. I gave the sculpture to my eldest daughter before I left to go into the future. In turn, she gave it to her eldest child, who was born after I left. That child died with the sculpture in its hand."

"In its hand?"

"I don't know if it was a boy or a girl. Not even the skeleton was complete."

"Let us go, Captain. This is unbearable for me."

Kirk opened his communicator. "Kirk to Enterprise. Two to

beam up."

Yazzo Gazh was still holding the stone when they dematerialised.

"Captain's Log, Stardate 3935.7. We are orbiting Kalpac V again. Yazzo Gazh is back on her ship and ready to return to the past. We have provided her with pictures and data about the result of their war, and hope that it will be enough to persuade the leaders of Kalpac IV to make peace. I am aware that this was a breach of General Order I and interfering with the past, but I think the situation cannot become worse. It is better to have a culture where there has been a little interference than to have no culture at all. On the other hand, how can I interfere with a culture which does not even exist?"

McCoy smiled when he heard this log entry. "Very clever, Jim."

"Captain, I have Yazzo Gazh."

"On audio, Lt. Uhura."

"Aye, sir."

Again Kirk heard the dark voice which had led him at first to believe that Yazzo Gazh was a man. "Captain, I am ready. Once again, thank you very much." She smiled a little. "I have been trying to repair my communication systems, because I was not able to contact my home. I think I now have to repair much more; the history of my planet."

Kirk nodded. "I am sure you will have every success. At all costs, don't give up. You have seen the results."

"Yes; and other people will see them too. Now I must go. Goodbye, Captain Kirk."

"Goodbye, Yazzo Gazh."

"Live long and prosper," came from Spock's station.

The Suppenhuhn began to glow and suddenly was gone. The Enterprise was shaken and Spock commented, "Fascinating how much energy is produced by this time travel. They should try to find a way to use this energy."

"First they should try to find a way to save their world. Well, soon we will see if Yazzo Gazh succeeded or failed. Mr. Sulu, head back to Kalpac IV."

"Captain, if you intend to contact the government of this planet, it would now be a violation of the Prime Directive."

"Don't worry, Mr. Spock. I will not interfere. I intend to go into a wide orbit around the planet beyond the range of their scanners. I just want to see what happened to Huhn."

McCoy appeared on the bridge with some cups of coffee. He gave one cup each to Kirk and Spock, kept one for himself and gave the rest to Uhura who distributed them around the officers on the

bridge.

The Doctor took a gulp of his coffee and asked, "What do you think we should expect, Mr. Spock?"

"I don't know, Doctor," the Vulcan answered. "Insufficient data. There are too many facts of which we are ignorant."

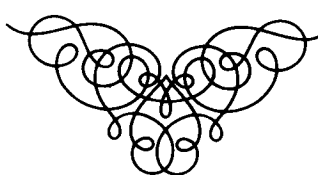
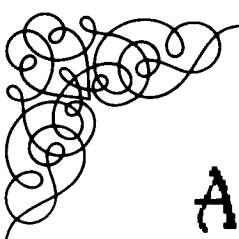
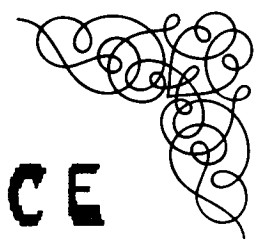
"We are now approaching Kalpac IV," Sulu announced.

"Spock, what do your sensors say?" Kirk asked.

"Almost no change, Captain. The bombs were detonated at other places, and later. The radiation has increased. I would say their war began about one hundred years later than it did before we interfered."

"Oh, shit," McCoy murmured.

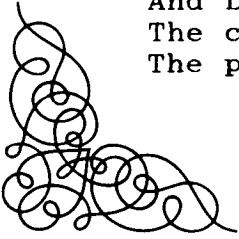
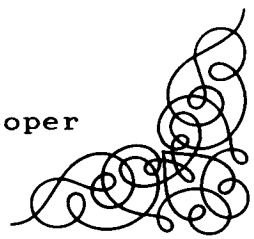
Spock raised an eyebrow. "Yazzo Gazh was successful. She prevented the war in her time. But her race... The Huhns failed."

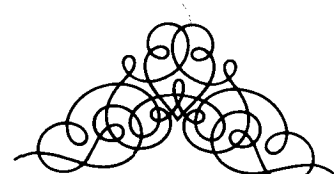
AN ANCIENT PLACE

As I ascend the steps of Mount Seleya,
I am awed by the sense of timelessness.
The very rock is permeated with History.
It exudes deeply meditated thoughts
Of peace, harmony and logic.
Contemplations of the 'All' and the 'One'
Are part of the very fabric of this ancient place.

Still deeper than this tranquillity,
Lies Vulcan's savage past -
A time, many centuries past, when passion ruled and raged
And Logic was not known at all.
The courage of Surak made Vulcan
The planet of peace she is today.

Oriel Cooper



APPEARANCES ARE DECEPTIVE

by

Catherine Flavin

Kirk sat in the command chair in a decidedly grumpy mood, and wondered - for the hundredth time - why the hell Starfleet had to give him such an assignment. Dropping off a bunch of scientists - and Spock with them - on a planet inhabited only by wildlife, and then waiting until they finished their survey, wasn't exactly the reason he was in Starfleet!

At least Spock is happy, he thought. If, of course, he would admit to such a Human term. This last thought drew a wry chuckle from the bored Captain. Uhura glanced at him, smiling, then turned away quickly as a light glowed on her console.

"Captain, it's Mr. Spock. They seem to be in some sort of trouble."

Kirk was beside her in an instant.

"Spock, this is Kirk. What's happening?"

"Captain... don't... beam... down... to... this... " The transmission fizzled out.

"Damn! What's going on down there? I thought this was an uninhabited planet! Sulu, I want a scan on that planet - now!" Kirk hit a button on the console in front of him. "Kirk to Security."

"Tomson here."

"Meet me in the transporter room immediately - fully armed. Kirk out." He turned back to Sulu. "Well, Mr. Sulu?"

"All I'm getting is these weird energy blips. They're concentrated where the landing party was."

"Keep monitoring. See if they move away. Uhura, tell Dr. McCoy to report to the transporter room. Keep trying to raise Mr. Spock. Mr. Chekov, come with me, please." He bounded up the steps that led to the turbolift with Chekov just behind him.

When they reached the transporter room, Tomson and McCoy were waiting. Kirk quickly explained what had taken place, then he turned to Kyle and requested beamdown to the scientists' last known location. As Kyle entered the co-ordinates the group took their places on the transporter pads.

The scene that they beamed down to was one of destruction. All of the scientists' equipment lay scattered and broken and - most surprisingly - covered in a rich green slime.

Kirk and the three others surveyed the scene with amazement.

"Mr. Spock!" called Kirk several times, but he received no reply.

"The scientists have disappeared," whispered Chekov.

"Obviously," commented McCoy.

"Well, it's either that or something - or someone - has captured them," retorted Kirk as he turned to Tomson, who was searching the slime-covered debris. "Find anything, Tomson?"

"No, Captain, there is nothing to be found," she replied as she straightened.

Just then Kirk's communicator bleeped. He flipped it open.

"Kirk here."

"Sulu, sir. Those energy blips are moving away from your position, and they are also fading, which suggests that they are underground."

"Can you tell me which direction they're taking?"

"Sir, they appear to be going off to your right."

"Thank you, Mr. Sulu. Kirk out."

"Captain, the slime is heading in the same direction," called Tomson from the edge of the forest. McCoy and Chekov had already joined her.

Kirk looked dubiously at the forest. "Well, I guess there's no alternative but to follow it and see what happens."

As they entered the forest, brightly-coloured birds that screamed at them from the branches made them jump. It was cool under the trees and they found themselves falling over roots and vines.

"I'm beginning to think we should have brought hiking boots," grumbled McCoy.

"Let's just hope this is as difficult as it gets," muttered Kirk as he stumbled over a stray root.

Tomson, who was walking on ahead, stopped abruptly as a jet of slime flew past in front of her and splattered up against rocks and trees. The others drew to a halt.

"The thing we're looking for must be round that bend," said Kirk and he gestured with his phaser.

"And you can bet it doesn't have our well-being in mind," groaned McCoy.

"If the scientists' camp is anything to go by," added Tomson thoughtfully.

As they rounded the bend, they were confronted by a sheer wall of rock with a perfectly spherical hole in it.

"Captain, that doesn't look like it's due to Nature," breathed Chekov.

"Yes, it does appear to be too perfect," replied Kirk.

"Sir!" called Tomson excitedly. "My tricorder shows Human life form readings beneath there, as well as those energy blips."

"The slime things must have taken the scientists underground!" said McCoy. "And our beloved Vulcan with them!"

"Well, there's nothing for it but to go in," Kirk said. "Mr. Chekov, stand guard outside. Contact the Enterprise if you hear anything."

"Yes, sir," replied Chekov as he glanced uneasily over his shoulder.

With much wriggling Kirk managed to get through the hole; McCoy and Tomson, behind him, benefitted from watching him and managed without much difficulty.

The gloomy cavern the trio found themselves in stank to high heaven and, of course, everywhere there was the mandatory slime.

"Sir, this is nauseating!" choked out Tomson.

Kirk nodded his agreement. "But we have to find Spock and the scientists."

"All right, boys, get out the breathing apparatus," called McCoy. "I wonder how Spock's sensitive nose reacted?"

Kirk couldn't help grinning; even Tomson deigned to smile as they moved along the tunnel. They realised that it must be lit artificially. Kirk's tricorder showed signs of life further along the tunnel, but the readings were erratic.

Kirk flipped open his communicator. "Kirk to Enterprise."

"Enterprise here, sir."

"What is the status of those readings?"

"Well, sir, it appears that this planet is not uninhabited."

Kirk wasn't surprised. Well, it was only logical; animals didn't usually carry people off like that, or think it a good idea to smash their equipment.

"Okay, keep me posted. Kirk out. Phasers on stun."

They started to move along the tunnel once again, but this time everyone's hearing was strained and they were tense. As they turned a corner they saw a blinding light up ahead. Kirk motioned them against the wall.

As he began to edge along it he wished he'd had a pair of shades; the light was just becoming unbearable when it started to dim, and a shadow fell across what appeared to be a hall hewn out of solid rock. Kirk fingered his phaser nervously; McCoy and Tomson had stopped dead in their tracks and were also gripping their phasers tightly.

The alien they were looking at was a good eight feet tall, green, with two sets of tentacles. It stared at them unblinkingly, then opened its mouth and began to speak. Kirk immediately whipped out his translator.

"We wish to apologise for abducting your companions so unceremoniously." Its voice was low and husky.

Kirk relaxed and smiled. "I am James Kirk, Captain of the Enterprise. We were searching for the missing scientists."

The alien bowed his head. "I am Lenatos. Your people are safe."

He allowed them to pass through to the hall where, sitting against one wall, were the scientists and Spock. They looked none the worse for their ordeal.

"Captain. I am pleased to see you," said Spock; the scientists nodded.

Kirk turned to the alien. "What was your reason for the abduction?"

Lenatos replied, "Captain, in recent times we have suffered many attacks from other species, which has decreased our numbers and has led to our retreat underground. When we discovered your people's presence we believed them to be attackers. However, we have learned from the one called Spock that this is not so. We are sorry for the loss of your equipment - unfortunately we have no way of replacing it."

"That's quite all right," replied Kirk. "It was the personnel that we were worried about."

"Captain." Spock spoke up. "With your leave I would like to study this race. I find them most fascinating."

McCoy snickered quietly, and Kirk shot him a warning glance. "Certainly, Mr. Spock, if that is all right by Lenatos."

"Indeed, Captain, it is the only way we can repay you for the damage we have caused."

"By the way," said Kirk, "what are your people called?"

"The name we go by is Thanatoers, and you, Captain, are welcome to the planet Thanatos."

"And we were worried about what to call the planet!" laughed Kirk.

He glanced around for McCoy and Tomson, who, when he had last seen them, were taking life form readings. He saw them not far away talking to a group of Thanatoers, and made his way over to them.

"You may remain too, if you wish. I'll go back to the Enterprise. No doubt the crew will be most curious to know what's going on."

Kirk saluted Lenatos and left the scientists, McCoy and Tomson to their field work. He hurried back the way he had come and struggled out of the hole once again, but this time Chekov was there

to lend a hand as he extricated himself.

Kirk explained what had taken place; Chekov looked amazed. "Captain, are you sure they are all right?"

"Well, at least I'm here and unscathed," replied Kirk with a grin. He opened his communicator. "Kirk to Enterprise. Two for beamup."

Kirk had just finished his report when Spock called him from the planet's surface to report on the situation.

"Captain, the green substance which you have seen is in fact secreted by the Thanatoers' tentacles. It paralyses the limbs for a couple of hours."

"I see," replied Kirk. "Is everything all right, Spock?"

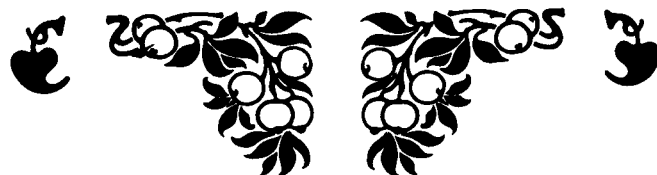
"Yes, Captain, apart from the good Doctor requesting breathing masks."

Kirk let loose a loud guffaw which startled Sulu. "I suppose we'll have to send a batch down, as Starfleet has just said we can take shore leave here, and we've also been nominated as diplomats for the Federation. So do your best, Mr. Spock."

"Certainly, Captain. Spock out."

Kirk yawned and headed towards the turbolift on his way to the transporter room.

After all, he did want to tone up his tan.



BETRAYAL

Trapped.
Caught up in a waking nightmare.
I would have staked my life - often have - on your
absolute loyalty.

Why, Spock?
Tell me why, even now, and I'll stand by your side
and help you.

Can't you see the pain in my eyes as the words
are wrenched from me?
"Guilty as charged."

Teresa Abbott

VACATION

by

K.L.L.

"Clear the corridors, Mr. Spock. He's had enough. It's over now." Dr. McCoy spoke calmly although his hands shook slightly as he turned towards Kirk's bed. "Clear the corridors. Jim's never let the crew see him like this. We won't let them now."

Last night McCoy had raged at Spock, blamed him for not using the meld, magic, a miracle, *anything* to stop the endless agony Kirk was caught in. He'd shouted at the Vulcan, even though he knew that nothing except death could bring peace to the tormented figure Spock now cradled in his arms.

Today the Doctor moved unprotestingly to turn off the monitors above the empty bed. The last few days had broken him in spirit as surely as they had broken Kirk in body. There was no fight left in either of them.

Spock stepped into the empty corridor, Kirk's head light against his shoulder and his breath barely teasing Spock's dark hair. Kirk was finally quiet, almost calm.

The walk to the observation room seemed far too short. The corridors were mercifully empty of Kirk's crew. Spock laid him gently on the long seat in front of the main viewing screen as McCoy closed the door and locked it quietly behind them. This room had always been Kirk's favourite place on the ship, his place for reflection and peace.

As Spock lifted his Captain's head and pillowed it on his leg Kirk moaned, and was again silent. Dr. McCoy carefully sat on the other side of the quiet pair and stroked the long, still fingers lying lax on the colourful print of the couch. Spock brushed Kirk's hair away from his pale forehead. They were all silent, lost in thought, content for the moment in the vast reach of stars stretched out before them on the viewscreen.

Spock's thoughts turned to the scene on the bridge less than a week ago. Kirk had made a big show of turning the ship over to his First Officer while he went 'on my first vacation in so long I can't remember when!' He'd looked so boyishly expectant, and teased the bridge crew about 'being stuck working while I go off and play.'

"I'll bring you all something back from my vacation," he'd laughed." He'd been teasing Spock for days about what the 'something' would be. Everyone knew that whatever it was the Vulcan would be scandalised and Kirk exuberant when the gift was finally given.

And then he'd left. Never to arrive on the planet.

Hours later Scott and Spock had taken the transporter apart for

the third time; Security had scoured the planet's surface, the transporter station below, and the ship; and McCoy had paced every inch of deck. Kirk wasn't on the Enterprise and he wasn't on the planet. Not here, not there. There was nothing wrong with the transporter equipment, and everything wrong with the situation.

Spock called the first of many tense meetings in the Captain's conference room. There wasn't another ship in the area large enough to contain transporter equipment. There were no hostile forces on the planet's surface. No clues existed pointing to the Captain's whereabouts. He had simply vanished. Gone as quickly as the traces of his laughter from the bridge.

It was long days later, countless hours of 'what if' and 'why' that the first indication of where Kirk was was received.

Spock had been sitting on the bridge, staring into the stars. He was almost alone in the deep silence of the ship's night. He'd been sitting, hands steeped in front of his face, going over and over the circumstances of Kirk's disappearance until his frustration had become an almost trance-like state. Over and over he'd reviewed the known, a pitifully small knowledge amid the fearful unknown.

"Mr. Spock to the transporter room! We've received a package. It looks like it belongs to the Captain, sir!"

He moved to crush a fist into the intercom button. "Dr. McCoy, meet me in the transporter room." His mind raced ahead of his measured pace. Even his foresight did not prepare him for the sight of Kirk's command tunic, soaked in blood, torn and dirty, lying on the transporter pad.

The Vulcan was standing there fingering the torn shirt when McCoy raced in. The Doctor's face tightened when he realised what Spock held. Some of the bloodstains on the shirt were fresh, barely drying. As McCoy took it from Spock he couldn't tell if the warmth was from Spock's hands or Kirk's body.

Spock stood for a moment in impassive silence, then roused himself and reached out for the shirt. "Dr. McCoy, get Mr. Scott and Security Chief Drummond and report to the Captain's conference room." He turned and strode out, the only visible sign of his tension the clenched fingers still wrapped in tattered command gold.

Five minutes later the conference room seemed too small to hold the questions of Kirk's friends.

"Mr. Drummond, Mr. Scott, where was this shirt transported from? There is not another ship holding a transporter registered within range. Dr. McCoy?" Spock's questions jumped from idea to idea.

Dr. McCoy shook his head slowly. "It's his blood, Spock. There's no chance of error. It's the Captain's shirt, his blood type. I could do further tests, but..."

Scott raised his hands in defeat. "Sir, I canna tell ye more. We couldna' get a fix on the incoming transporter beam. 'Twas unexpected. I am sorry, sir."

As the big Scot finished the intercom signalled an incoming message. A harsh Klingon voice accompanied the images on the small viewing consoles.

"We have your Captain. To take him was easy. The price for his life is the Enterprise. Announce your surrender on an open channel."

Spock barely heard. His attention, and that of the other officers, was fixed on the image of Jim Kirk. He was tied against a wall, each blow from the whip used on his bare back slashing a ragged furrow in the already lacerated flesh.

The disdainful Klingon voice jerked them out of their shocked silence.

"Spock, he will live long, and you will see it all, unless you surrender the Enterprise. Bring him!"

Rough hands dragged the limp figure away from the wall to the Klingon Captain's feet. Kirk could barely hold his head up. His face was bruised and bloody, but even on the consoles they could feel the strength of his defiance. Despite the forced position at the Klingon's feet every line of his battered body spoke of pride and spirit.

The Klingon slapped his casually, leaving a red handprint on Kirk's face. "Kirk, bring your dogs to heel. Tell them to surrender the ship or you will suffer for it. You, and others after you."

Kirk slowly raised his head, and seemed to look directly at Spock. "Spock... the needs of the many..."

"Tell him!" A savage backhand knocked Kirk over, and was followed by a thudding kick.

Kirk painfully raised himself off the floor onto one elbow. "The needs of the..."

The image faded out as the Klingon's voice raged, "Open channels and surrender, or he dies!"

The shocked silence in the conference room was broken by Dr. McCoy's fist slamming onto the table. He stood up to face the First Officer. "How did they take him? Where are they? He can't survive that kind of punishment for long. Spock, give them the ship!"

The Vulcan drew a deep breath and turned an impassive face towards McCoy. "Dr. McCoy, sit down. They need the Enterprise, or we would have felt their phasers before this. Mr. Scott, take the transporter apart again. I must know how they took the Captain. Each of you will review your areas and report to me with your observations." Spock's voice was dispassionate, but his eyes had darkened to obsidian.

Their observations were pitifully few, even when the taped transmission had been viewed again and yet again. Kirk was held in the interrogation room of a Klingon cruiser. His captors, Klingon warriors. His physical condition was poor, had been poor at the time of the transmission, and had probably not been improved by his defiance.

Scott reported that the transporter was working perfectly. Kirk had never reached the planet, of that he was sure. Somehow he

had been taken from the very air itself.

Two hours passed and another transmission was received. Spock's stride was impossible to keep up with as he went to the bridge to view the tape. The crew instinctively moved out of his path as he took the command chair.

"Attempt to track the transmission, Lt. Uhura."

The bridge crew watched helplessly as their Captain was beaten again and again. The ragged rasp of his breathing was punctuated by moans that never quite made it past his lips.

"Mr. Spock, I can't track the transmission. It is deflected, and seems to come from everywhere and nowhere." Uhura's voice was full of unshed tears.

The Klingon filled the screen in front of Kirk. "The ship, Spock, or his life. Do not try my patience too far!"

"No, Spock!" Kirk's command voice rang on the bridge. "That's an order, Mister!"

Fury was unleashed on Kirk. "The ship, Spock - and soon!"

The next day was cruelly timed by Klingon transmissions. They never lasted long enough to get a fix on the enemy ship, only long enough to show the steady deterioration in Kirk's condition. He no longer tried to speak, but seemed to be concentrating on the hatred burning in his hazel eyes. His crew stood helplessly by and watched the torture.

Starfleet was sending another ship to help in the search for James T. Kirk, Captain of the Enterprise. His value to the Federation warranted more than that, but one was all that was available. The Enterprise had been ordered to make the discovery of the technology that had allowed Captain Kirk's capture a priority. If one officer could be taken in this fashion, so could others.

Scott's examination of the planet and surrounding space had again revealed nothing. The transmission remained untrackable. Spock and Scott had been working without sleep since the first contact.

"Mr. Spock, sir, it's no' possible, mon. Nowhere in the Federation does such a technology exist, to take him so." Scott slumped in his chair.

"Nevertheless, Mr. Scott, take him they did. We must discover the way in which he was abducted, and where those transmissions are coming from. It is our only hope of recovering Jim, and our only hope of preventing further abductions from occurring." Spock bent again over his computer console. "That it has not been done before does not negate the fact that it has been done now, and to our Captain."

The Klingons' final transmission had shown Kirk unconscious on a bare floor. Intermittent tremors shook his body. The Klingon Captain stood over him with a hypospray in one hand.

"Spock, your Captain is stronger than we thought. He will not

command you to give up the ship. It appears that you both need to experience the reality of unending pain. Out of kindness, I will return your Captain to the comfort of your tender care." He casually held the hypospray up to the screen. "This poison is unknown on your world or his. After 48 hours no antidote on any world will save him."

Kirk's figure arched as the Klingon bent and injected the fluid into his chest.

"His pain will increase hourly. The ship, Spock, for the antidote and his life. If I do not get it for *his* life, I shall take as many as necessary until you surrender. Your lives are cheap, and our need is great."

The screen went blank as the transporter room called the bridge.

"Mr. Spock! The Captain has been returned to the ship. Have a medical team sent to the transporter room immediately."

Kirk's body lay on the transporter pad. One arm was thrown across his face, the other loose at his side. From the doorway he looked peacefully asleep. McCoy paused to call again for the medical team, and turned to see Spock slide to the floor to cradle Kirk's head in his hands.

"Don't move him, Spock. Keep him still until I check him. God knows what they've broken. He probably has internal injuries," McCoy fumed to cover his shock.

A quick mediscan the length of Kirk's body showed that the Klingons had done their work well. The broken ribs, burns and lacerations, all the horrible signs of torture, indicated that the last few days had been only too real. McCoy placed a hand on Spock's arm.

"It's bad, Spock. Bad, but not fatal. He's hurt bad, but I've seen him worse. It'll be all right, Spock... it has to be all right."

Kirk didn't wake as he was lifted in strong arms and carried to surgery.

Long hours in surgery later, McCoy and Spock sat in the cramped medical office. McCoy poured a drink with trembling hands.

"He's still unconscious, Spock. The worst injuries will take a long time to heal, but they will, in time. His vital signs are stable for the moment."

"The poison, Doctor?" Spock's calm voice defied the ghost of pain in his eyes.

"It's there, Spock. Damn them. We've never seen the chemical composition before." Dr. McCoy rubbed his eyes with a weary hand. "I don't know yet if the rest is true. Jim is still unconscious, and I can try to keep him sedated until we find an antidote. It will be easier on him that way. The labs are working on it."

"Doctor, we have less than 48 hours, if the Klingon told the

truth. He had no reason to lie. We are no closer to his ship now than before. Wake Jim as soon as possible. We must hope he observed something that can help us." Spock turned away from the set face of the Doctor, and slowly went out into the corridor, and his responsibility.

Pain woke Kirk before McCoy had the heart to. He gasped and tried to sit up, but Spock's firm hands pushed him back and held him steady until he realised where he was. His lips parted in a brief smile when he saw Spock and McCoy, and realised he was in his own sickbay.

"Be still, Jim. Conserve your energy. It is important that you are able to talk to me. I must know all you observed on the Klingon ship." Spock forced calm into his tone.

Kirk moved restlessly on the pillow. "Water..."

After a few sips he began to talk, slowly, stopping frequently to gather his thoughts and get control of the pain. His hands were tightly clenched beneath the sickbay blanket.

"I was beaming down. When I got to the transporter pad it seemed wrong... I always get dizzy, you know, Spock... don't usually see Klingons in battle dress, though. Oh! Captain I've never seen... no surprise... hope not to see..."

Kirk turned painfully onto his side and drew his knees up towards his chest. For a long few minutes he lay doubled over, breathing hard, Spock's hand tight on his shoulder. McCoy stood anxiously by watching the monitor above the bed, the hypo useless against his side.

After several minutes Kirk rolled over and slowly stretched out. "Thanks, Spock. Bones, you goofed... or something... I don't usually... ah!... feel this bad when you're through..."

Spock and McCoy exchanged a long look over the bed.

"Doctor, it is important that I learn what I can now."

Dr. McCoy took a deep breath. "They really worked you over, Jim-boy. You'll feel better soon. Give it time."

"Continue, Jim."

"Did I say the ship is called Night Bringer? I don't know how I... Anyway... I tried... to break free on the pad. They stunned me... The next thing I... Oh Bones!... the next thing I was against the wall... He told me to tell Spock... tell Spock... to surrender... ah!"

Kirk went rigid in Spock's arms, jaw clenched to stifle a sob, his hands wrapped so tightly in the blanket that they were white. Spock's fingers found his neck, and Kirk went limp.

"Spock, my god, what can be done? He can't take this long. Damn them, anyway. Give them the ship. It's nothing without him."

Spock laid Kirk carefully back on the bed, smoothed the damp hair from the pale forehead, and straightened his arms and legs.

Then he carefully covered Kirk's body with a blanket, struggling with his own composure.

"Be silent, Doctor! Captain Kirk will take what is necessary for his ship and his crew. As will we all. Report on his condition."

Dr. McCoy jerked at the anger in Spock's voice and worked to gain control of his own emotions.

"Patient weak from loss of blood. Injuries repaired and healing. Slightly elevated temperature. Pain indicators periodically off the register. No pain killers given, at your order, sir."

Spock levelled a long dark look at the agitated Doctor. McCoy flushed and his expression softened slightly.

"I can't control the pain long, Spock, not even with the strongest drugs I have - even if we were using them. No more nerve pinches; with his concussion it could prove more immediately fatal than the poison."

"Noted, Doctor. Any progress from the labs?"

"No..."

Kirk regained consciousness with a joke. "Mr. Spock... is Bones' hypo broken? What aren't you telling me?"

"Nothing, Jim." Spock took one of the Captain's hands. "When you awoke, where were you? Can you remember anything more?"

Kirk tightened his grip on the Vulcan's hands and drew a shuddering breath. "... interrogation room... The guard thought I was still out... Every so often... they'd kick me to see. They kept talking... talking about... transporter flash. They said it was easy... When they tortured me later they laughed... easy... to take... Said I was... a smear... not solid... Oh Spock! I don't know... Bones, why?"

McCoy watched as Kirk convulsed in pain and sank into a restless unconsciousness. He raised accusing eyes to Spock.

"Doctor, you will call me when he awakens. I will be with Mr. Scott. Under no circumstances is he to be drugged. He must remember more."

As Spock left sickbay no-one saw him double his fist and punch the wall.

"Transporter flash? Smear? I don't know, sir. 'Tis not a lot to go on." Scott frowned over the schematic diagrams of the transporter mechanism.

"It is all we have, Mr. Scott. The Captain grows weaker by the hour. It must be enough."

"Aye sir. I'll try. Smear, did the bastards say...?"

.

It was late that evening when the dishevelled Scotsman ran into sickbay, only to stop aghast. Captain Kirk was tied to the bed. Uncontrollable tremors wracked his body, and his head rolled ceaselessly from side to side. His hands twisted against the restraints, and he called continuously for Bones and Spock.

"My god, mon! Can ye no' give him something? Mr. Spock, is there nothing ye can do? Captain, sir..."

Spock looked up from the bed and took a measured breath. He calmly detached his hands from Kirk's clutching fingers.

"No, Mr. Scott; the time is past when our medicines will work. Dr. McCoy, call me if there is any change." The Vulcan laid a palm against Kirk's sweat-beaded cheek. "Come, Mr. Scott. Show me what you have discovered."

Scott traced a diagram on the blueprint. "You see, sir. When the transporter activates there is a small flash visible outside the ship, almost like hand phaser fire, barely visible but there if you care to see. Then the transported particles follow the flash towards the destination in a smear. 'Tis that they talked of, I'm sure of it. And it always travels in a straight line."

"Mr. Scott, if the rate of the smear can be calculated from initiation of the transporter beam to destination... Their transporter is triggered by the flash, and the beam was intercepted at a predetermined point and redirected."

"There's no' much margin for error, sir, but aye, it seems possible."

"How did they know it was the Captain? His departures are never announced, and his absences from the Enterprise never publicised."

"Sir, they have been randomly taking Enterprise crewmembers since we began orbit here. I have questioned all those who transported to the surface. They all report greater dizziness than usual, and a feeling of stopping and starting. None felt it significant enough to report. 'Tis my guess they have been waiting for you or the Captain. Only with one of you would they have a hostage worth the ship."

"Mr. Scott, we must find out how they redirected the beam, and to where." The Vulcan's voice trembled slightly with the first hope he had experienced since the Captain beamed off the Enterprise.

The computer was used until it fairly spun into a frenzy. Scott, with his engineering expertise, and Spock, with his Vulcan mind, developed and redeveloped directional physics. They computed and recomputed angles and distance, bending space and time over and over again in theory.

"Sir, 'tis my guess that there is a small transceiver located in the ferry docked between us and the planet's surface. It refracted the beam/smear behind us, and it was relayed in stages to the Klingon ship, each step of the relay a straight line. I believe their ship is out of scanning range beyond the asteroid belt."

Spock's eyes narrowed at the thought of Jim Kirk being bounced from point to point, each time the very molecules of his body at risk.

"Well done, Mr. Scott. Prepare the ship for battle. Our job now is to capture the Klingon ship and take the antidote. Once that task is accomplished we will discover how to shield Federation ships against redirectional transportation."

The sound of the Enterprise's battle siren had roused Jim Kirk from an exhausted stupor. McCoy didn't bother to check the monitors again. They would report the same status: temperature elevated; respiration laboured; heartbeat faltering; pain indicator too high to measure. It hurt him to see the questions in Kirk's eyes every time he regained consciousness and fought to control the pain he didn't understand. He never asked for relief; he knew McCoy would give it if he could.

"A bit more, Jim-bo. A bit more to endure, and Spock will have the antidote. He always does. Hang on a bit longer," McCoy whispered under his breath as he bent to adjust the rumpled blankets.

"Bones... the ship... my ship..." Kirk's voice strained against the pain. "Let me go. Bones, untie me... I have to... my ship... my ship..."

"No, Jim. Spock can handle it. You rest now. It's all right. Rest."

McCoy wasn't sure that Kirk heard him. He was deliriously uttering commands, his breath ragged and rasping as he fought to reach the bridge through sheets of agony.

Night Bringer sat, as Scott had guessed, on the other side of the asteroid belt, cloaked against discovery. Her Captain hadn't expected the Enterprise to determine where she was, or else he had counted on Captain Kirk's First Officer to be so distraught that he wouldn't act. Phaser fire from the Enterprise disarmed the Klingon ship before the battle was fully engaged.

"A game well played, Vulcan. You have your ship. Your Captain and I shall meet in hell!"

The Klingon ship self-destructed before Spock could begin negotiations for the antidote.

Through the long last night McCoy and Spock had talked to Kirk, held him, assured him over and over of his ship's safety. Towards mid-watch he'd been lucid for a while.

"Bones... why?"

Spock and McCoy shared a long look across the bed. The time was almost past when an antidote, even if found, could be used. And there was no antidote. No clear definition of what the poison was, only that it was unrelentingly destroying Jim Kirk's life.

Spock's eyes probed McCoy's. Kirk had never given up hope before, and McCoy chose not to give it up for him now.

"An allergy, Jim-bo, to some of the drugs I used during surgery. I know it hurts now, but it won't for much longer." McCoy turned away from the bed and fumbled with the monitors.

"Jim, the ship is safe, and you have a long vacation to finish when you are better. Rest now. We have learned much from what you remembered."

"Not a very good vacation so far, huh, Spock? I don't feel... like I've been having... fun. Bones? I thought I was only allergic to... Ah!"

Pain surged again, and Kirk bit off the last of his sentence, the twinkle in his eye dampened by torment. He remained conscious for an eternity while Spock held him to the bed.

And so the long night passed, pain and awareness entwined. The interminable hours of unmoving silence lengthened as morning drew nearer. McCoy's anxious eyes tracked the monitor as each onslaught sent the heart racing and the breathing caught against the shock of increasing pain.

Twice Kirk's heart had stopped. Only once had Spock had to stop Dr. McCoy from injecting a stimulant. Twice Kirk's heart had started on its own. There was no blessing now in prolonging his life.

Kirk moaned again, and Spock came unwillingly back to the present... a present without solution. He slipped to the floor in front of the seat, sitting where Kirk could see his face.

"Jim, we are here." Spock caressed his friend's cheek softly.

McCoy knelt beside Spock. "Jim-bo, can you see? Look!"

Jim Kirk's eyes slowly focused and he drew a shuddering breath. His gaze traced his friends' faces, and a small smile touched his lips. Then his eyes travelled on, past McCoy and Spock, past the familiar outline of the port window, out to the stars. His blessed, infinite stars.

"How beautiful... so very... beautiful..."

Kirk's eyes slowly dimmed and his face relaxed for the first time since they had seen him laughing on the bridge so long ago. Relaxed into the peaceful lines of his accustomed innocence.



AMUSEMENT PARK, CAPTAIN?

by

Linnett Samuel

"Let's go for a walk, Spock, it will do you good to stretch your legs and relax."

"Indeed? This must be a hitherto undiscovered meaning of the word 'relax'. Perhaps an hour of meditation might prove as 'relaxing'."

"I keep getting cramp in my right leg."

"If you would follow my advice... "

"And you telling me to twiddle my toes is hardly logical!"

"I believe my terminology was that you stimulate the circulation by the flexing of your lower digits," Spock said frostily.

"Sure. Vulcan for 'twiddle your toes'," Kirk muttered. Getting out of this apartment wasn't going to be as easy as he'd thought with Spock in one of those moods. McCoy called it 'trying to be ultra-Vulcan'; Kirk called it a pain in the... kneecap. Still, a dollop of charm plus a little emotional blackmail usually worked wonders on his Vulcan. Being a firm believer in 'if you've got it, flaunt it', Kirk leaned dramatically against a doorframe and with pleading eyes and an air of brave martyrdom calculated to tug at the heart of one supposedly emotionless Vulcan, he sighed loudly.

"I'm sorry, Spock. I know you're not yet fully recovered. Perhaps I did wrong to bring you back to Earth, to my home. Bones was right..." *That sob in the voice must be getting to Spock now.*

"There must be a first time, even for the Doctor."

Kirk did a double take. Was Spock mocking him?

"I mean, he said you'd be spending all your time on leave in the apartment as soon as you heard about the Vulcan delegation arriving in town. He said you'd be too ashamed to be seen out with me in case we met one of your relations. You would think they'd have forgotten about that 'wedding' of yours by..."

Woops! Spock was looking decidedly deadly. Had he overplayed his hand?

"I mean I didn't know that the ten thousandth anniversary of Surak's Revelations would be such a big deal at the Vulcan Embassy. Half of Vulcan must be in town."

"The population of Vulcan is low when compared to Earth's, but 2365.2 is hardly 'half'."

Spock wasn't the only one with curiosity. "Point two???"

"T'Sal is expecting twins, Amanda informed me."

"Isn't she the one you rescued from the explosion on VI919? Just how long were you both trapped in that cavern?"

"Six days, four hours, twenty-five - "

"Six days *and* nights... " Was it his imagination or was Spock looking a shade greener than before? "Er... What do I say if I meet T'Sal, Spock? Well done? Congratulations? Checkmate?"

"The correct Vulcan term is *Str-vel akkan lel kles T'Sal*."

"Which means?"

"It loses much in the translation, Captain."

Yes; Spock was now a lovely shade of apple green. His voice husky, he whispered something that might have been a Vulcan curse, but Kirk wasn't sure.

"I didn't quite catch that?"

"Universal does not take account of the nuances... "

"I want it again."

"An excellent translation, Captain. Has Lt. Uhura been giving you lessons?"

"Who started that rumour?" Noting Spock's raised eyebrows Kirk decided to change the subject. *Nice job of side-tracking, Spock, but it didn't work.* The prospect of another day of meditation, Vulcan poetry and folk music was as welcome as a month in Sickbay on a starvation diet. Dammit, but a man could only take so much nutloaf, spinach and mushrooms. Perhaps letting Spock order the groceries hadn't been such a bright idea. Visions of thick juicy steaks, sweet black coffee and strawberry shortcake brought almost a whimper to the brave Captain's lips.

Desperation gave inspiration. "Now if we were to go on a trip out of town, where no Vulcans might be, we might start to enjoy this leave, and I know just the place. Grower's Amusement Park."

"Amusement Park, Captain?"

So far so good. Spock looked suitable perplexed by the term. *Plan C if all else fails. Lie. (Well, it worked on Klingons!)* "A delightful place, green and tranquil, by a lake."

The lake was a master stroke. Spock was a sucker for lakes; all that water mesmerised him. Kirk grinned so wide his jaw ached.

"Indeed, a stroll by a lake might prove remarkably recuperative. I am sure Dr. McCoy would have no objection to my taking moderate exercise."

"I'll just book a flyer." Kirk left the room... and then Spock could have sworn he heard someone yell "YIPPEE!!!"

The rose garden leading to the Amusement Park was in full

bloom. Kirk breathed deep. It was good to get out of the apartment. Even Spock's mood seemed to have shifted from 'Vulcans Rule, OK' to one of 'Let's be nice to the Captain'. Maybe this was the time to tell Spock of the real nature of the 'Park' - but how? He could just see Spock's eyebrow on the rise when he explained that so-called 'normal' Human beings took delight in being half scared out of their wits again and again.. If only there was some way to make it sound perfectly logical...

"Spock, I know that you are on strict medical leave, but I was just wondering if you'd be interested in a fascinating scientific experiment being held here today?"

Spock inclined his head in a not uninterested manner (reminding Kirk of a blue budgie his Auntie Nellie once owned).

"And the nature of the experiment, Captain?"

"A study of centrifugal forces."

"Not a totally unresearched area, Captain; a comprehensive study was made in the late twentieth century by Professor Shoelsman. His findings were most... "

Kirk interrupted, as this had all the makings of a two-hour lecture. "This is on a far greater scale, Spock, and I think you will find this approach to the study - er... unique."

They entered the Amusement Park.

"... And this is called a Roller Coaster... "

"Most interesting, Captain. There seems to be a great number of volunteers for this experiment... "

Shit. This was getting complicated. What a tangled web indeed, when a Vulcan you deceive. Action might be the key.

"The greater the number, the more data collected. I am sure that you, as a scientist, would be willing to aid such an interesting programme." He pushed Spock into the Coaster queue. Somehow having fun was becoming darned hard work - still, it was better than listening to Spock's damn harp!

It was then he noticed Spock wandering out of the slow-moving line to a nearby stall.

"Captain, I fail to see what the consumption of this item... " The Vulcan eyed the children with suspicion. If he'd eyed his friend with the same look then he would have seen a devilish gleam enter the Captain's eyes.

"A vital part of the experiment. We must have some."

"If you insist, Jim."

"I insist." He handed the Vulcan the candy floss with glee. *This* he just had to see; even Spock couldn't maintain his dignity with such a confection. Bones would give his salt cellars to see one prissy Vulcan covered in pink goo! Pity Bones couldn't be with them - still, he'd been promising Scotty a visit for months, and now

they'd gone on a month-long pub crawl...

A happy but very sticky Captain James T. stared at his First Officer in disgust. Not only had Spock eaten two candy flosses but he'd remained pristine throughout. *Probably gave it a telepathic order not to stick*, Kirk mentally grumbled. *No wonder he stays so skinny!*

"Shall we begin the experiment, Captain?"

"Relax, Spock, or you'll affect the sensor readings." There was something about Spock's tight-closed eyes that alarmed Kirk. Hell, the ride hadn't even started yet! "Are you feeling all right?" Bones had said it would take time for Spock to recover from the shuttle crash.

"I feel the delay is unwarranted."

The carriage now full, the machine began to pull them up to the top of the first crest. Spock opened his eyes as they reached the top.

"A most rewarding view. Do you know the name of the mountain range in the distance?"

"What? Er... yeah. Nice view," Kirk muttered, gripping the bar tighter. Why had Spock chosen to sit in the leading car? Trying to tell himself that Starship Captains are *not* afraid of heights, Kirk clenched his teeth.

The carriage did a rapid descent and Kirk suddenly felt his insides were trying to get outside as two more crests, a triple loop and a twister drop followed. By the time the carriage had returned to its starting point, Kirk had the look of a very healthy Vulcan.

"Most stimulating, Captain," Spock enthused.

"You can say that again," Kirk muttered, trying not to throw up.

"Has the test affected your hearing, Jim? Perhaps I should report this data?"

"No! Er... no, I'm fine, must be something I ate. How about a nice quiet stroll around the lake?"

"I believe that to provide a comprehensive record you stated that each instrument must be tested. I believe you are suffering from a deficiency of the confection you called 'candy floss'." He dragged Kirk towards the stall again.

"Eat this, Jim. The young female also recommended that this might aid your recovery." Somewhere in the back of his mind Kirk had the impression that Spock was enjoying every moment of his discomfort. The biter bit... or its Vulcan counterpart. "Candy floss and Coke... and look, doughnuts too. How thoughtful."

Still, after a bit Kirk had to admit that he felt fine again, and they continued towards the next ride. Kirk was just trying to decide if it was to be the Waltzers or the Carousel when he heard what sounded like an argument building between Spock and one of the

stallholders.

"Look, Mac, all I asked was if you wanted mustard or onion on your hot dog."

"I had thought such barbaric tendencies to be confined to a small group of Humans, but that you stand here openly selling such an item is offensive, not only to me as a vegetarian, but to any right-minded race... " Too late, Kirk arrived to see Spock do a F.S.P. on the man.

With the speed of a photon torpedo Kirk steered his still-indignant First Officer towards the nearest ride.

"For the sixth time, Spock, people no longer eat dogs. I don't care what you have read in Earth History for Vulcans (junior editions). And as for packs of dogmeat, that's an entirely different thing. That just means food for dogs."

Spock still looked confused, thought it might also have something to do with the mind-meld he'd just attempted on the wooden horse he'd been riding moments ago. Perhaps something less frantic? Kirk glanced around. Ghost Train. Fun House. Mirror Maze. Tunnel of Love.

Unfortunately, Vulcan hearing had detected the sound of water. "Perhaps a gentle cruise, Captain?"

Vulcan strength sure picked a time to come into play as Kirk was almost thrown into a bobbing swan-shaped seat.

"My god, Spock, this will start all kinds of wild rumours... Didn't your mother ever tell you about - "

They were plunged into darkness.

"Captain?"

"Yes, Spock?"

KISS.

"Jim...?"

"Spock?"

"Is this part of the experiment, Captain?" Spock's words echoed as they drifted out of the long dark tunnel.

"Look, Spock, some people get a little... er... carried away on these things. I'd wipe that lipstick off if I were you - that girl's 'Passion Pink' clashes... " Kirk was more than a little peeved that the girl in the seat behind them had chosen to kiss Spock and not him. Still, he had just the thing to get even with - two packs of toffee popcorn and a ride on the Waltzer, followed by the Corkscrew. How Green is my Vulcan could take on a whole new meaning...

It was as they settled into the padded seat of the red waltzer that Kirk noticed that something seemed wrong with Spock, who was shaking his head as if in spasms of pain.

"You feeling all right, Spock?" Kirk asked guiltily; after all,

he reminded himself, McCoy had stressed that this was to be a strict rest period.

"Is the noise being put forth by that music machine part of the experiment too?"

Kirk's foot had been tapping to the tune. "A bit too loud?"

"It has sonic properties that would make a Klingon proud," the Vulcan shouted.

Before they could talk further, a restraining bar was pushed down and the ride began, slowly at first, undulating, swaying slightly.

"A most relaxing sensation, Captain. I believe that - OH!"

The sudden savage spin caught them both off guard and Spock crashed across the confined area. Luckily he had a soft landing - though Kirk didn't think it so lucky. Muttering under his breath about bony Vulcan elbows, he managed to sit up.

"Hold on to the bar next time, Spock." Was it the light or did his friend look pale? Probably the music - if anything, it seemed louder. Anyway, Spock now had a firm grip on the bar and only just in time, as a series of spins followed. All around there were squeals of delight as the G-force came into play. That is, with one exception.

Spock wasn't squealing.

Spock wasn't breathing!

"Spock!" Thankfully the ride had finished, and the bar lifted, its mangled right half bearing witness to the Vulcan's strength.

At first Kirk thought Spock dead, but the weak pulse pushed that fear away. For the first time he wished he hadn't talked Spock into wearing civilian clothes - at least if they had been in uniform they would have had a communicator. Emergency action was now needed. Quickly scanning the crowd, Kirk saw an Enterprise uniform. One very surprised ensign was then ordered to contact the ship, while Kirk returned to Spock.

"Kyle, this is Ensign Plover. Medical emergency - not me. Mr. Spock. Gower's Amusement Park..."

Even as he eased the surprisingly heavy figure of his First Officer into a better position, Kirk could hear McCoy's parting instructions.

"Rest alone can now complete the healing required..." And what do I do? I drag Spock here because I was feeling bored, and now..."

Why was the medical aid taking so long? If anything Spock was paler, the pulse weaker...

The sound of a medical scanner drew Kirk's attention.

"Tell me what happened."

"Bones? But I thought - "

"Never mind that. What happened before he collapsed?"

"He went pale, complained of the loud sonics... "

"Internal bleeding, sonic disruption and sucronic poisoning." McCoy began a hasty series of injections. "Good thing I brought an aircar. Too risky to beam up. Your apartment will have to do. Kyle can send down anything I need."

"Bones, will he... ?"

"Yeah, but it was a damn near thing. If I hadn't got there when I did... well. He's resting, though the effects of the poisoning will take a few days to wear off."

"Poison? Then it wasn't the rides that - "

"They didn't help his other injuries, but I'm afraid there's only one person responsible for his condition." McCoy looked Kirk in the eyes. "You, Jim."

"I guess the Amusement Park wasn't the brightest of ideas, Bones."

"Jim, we've both known Spock for so long that we tend to overlook the most obvious fact about him, and for once I don't mean his ears. What is fine for you - or at least harmless - isn't necessarily so for Spock. Sugar is deadly to Vulcans. Because he's half Human, Spock can usually tolerate a little of the stuff - a very little... "

"Candy floss, doughnuts, popcorn... "

"Let's just say it didn't help. That, plus the drugs he's been on following the crash still in that green goo that passes for blood in Vulcans, and the G forces putting a strain on his heart that even Vulcan control couldn't stop... Lucky I was in the area."

"I thought you and Scotty had agreed to - "

"We were just about to beam down when a call came from the Vulcan Embassy."

"Not Sarek?" Kirk looked alarmed.

"Not this time. I delivered twins, a boy and a girl. Mother and children doing fine. Another thing Earth gravity has to answer for... "

"How are you feeling now, Spock?"

"I am functioning on a higher level, thank you, Captain."

"That's Vulcan for *I feel fine*, Jim," McCoy growled.

"I trust that my intolerance of Terran confections did not affect the experiment being run?"

"Oh, you mean the Amusement Park... oops."

"Amusement Park, Captain?"

"You know, Spock - like the one Christine and Uhura took you to last time we were on leave here," McCoy butted in.

"Then... you knew what it was all along...?"

"I did, Jim, but I wasn't sure that you did... and for a First Officer to allude to his Commanding Officer's lack of information..."

"All right. I suppose I deserved that, but what about the sugar? Didn't you know...?"

"Nurse Chapel and Uhura were on diets and did not give me the opportunity to indulge my curiosity regarding these confections."

"This time it nearly killed the cat," Kirk grinned.

"Seems like cats and Vulcans both have nine lives. But just remember, Spock - you've only got eight more left. Take it easy, will you? I'm meant to be on shore leave too. And that reminds me - Scotty will have drunk a couple of bars dry by now... Bye!"

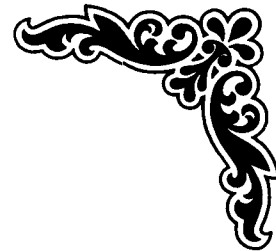
"Spock, I'm sorry..."

"A game of chess, Captain?"

"Thanks. By the way... what did you think of the Amusement Park, Spock?"

"I found your explanation of the Tunnel of Love to be the most amusing."

"Just because that blonde kissed you and not me..." Kirk seethed.



The glory of space
Is not the void, but the places
In between. The race
Whose speech is still unheard, whose face
Has not been seen.

For moralists argue right and wrong
From the Human point of view
But the questing man sings a joyful song
At the sight of a world
That's new.



Lynette Muir



