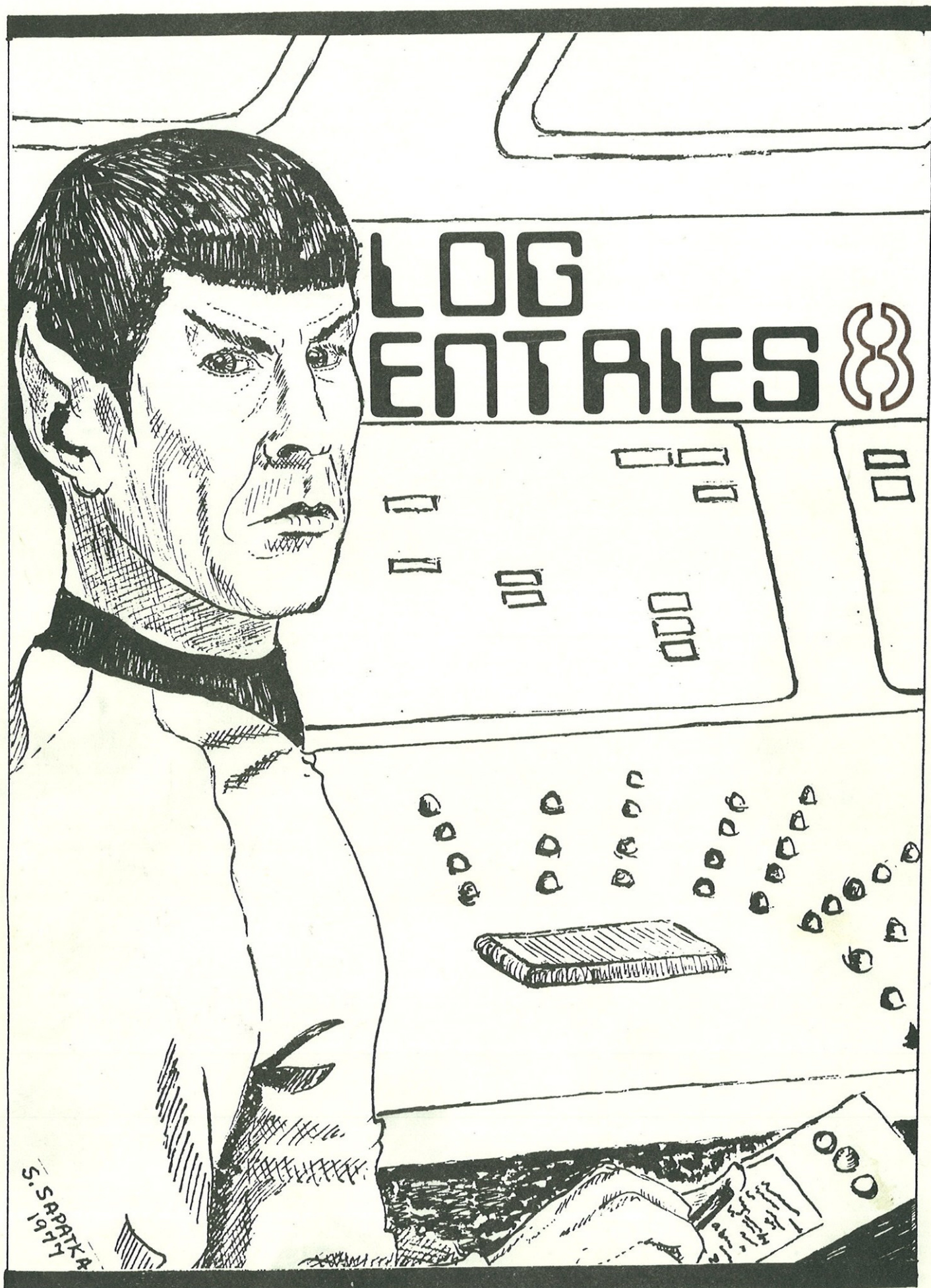




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Hello again, and welcome to Log Entries 8.

Thanks for the comments some of you have sent in, not only on Log Entries but on our other zines too. It's nice to know you've been enjoying our offerings... So far, I haven't had any letters saying 'Such and such was terrible, I don't know why you printed it!' even though some comments have been on the theme of 'I didn't think that particular development was likely, but I quite liked the story.'

When you come to think of it, although only a few stories have been written as 'Alternate Universe', all ST stories are, in their own way, alternate universe, written according to how the writer sees the characters and their interrelationship. Some of these interpretations are close to our own, some are far removed. But all are valid, in their own way.

An editor's job isn't always easy, and one of the hardest jobs - for me - is accepting a story on a theme that I find emotionally unsatisfying, because it is well written and I know someone out there will like it.

We've tried to improve reproduction of illustrations this time, and we've finally splashed out and bought a good, heavy-duty stapler, guaranteed foolproof. I just hope it's Clarkproof as well - I have a gift for chewing up staples that is unsurpassed this side of Vulcan!

Meanwhile, I'm getting stories ~~ready~~ for Log Entries 9, which I hope will be ready about the end of May/beginning of June. In line for it are 'The Cleansing Fire', a Baillie story by Valerie Piacentini, who is undoubtedly one of our best writers; 'In The Bag' by T.W. Francis, a light-hearted follow-up to 'A Piece of the Action'; the winner of the newsletter competition for a story in which Spock beams up wearing a grass skirt, string of beads, a flower in his hair and carrying a small wooden trumpet...Most of the entries produced remarkably ingenious reasons for the situation.

Non-members of STAG can get information on new zines by sending a SAE or addressed envelope and International Reply Coupon to
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6 Craigmill Cottages,
Strathmartine,
by Dundee,
Scotland.

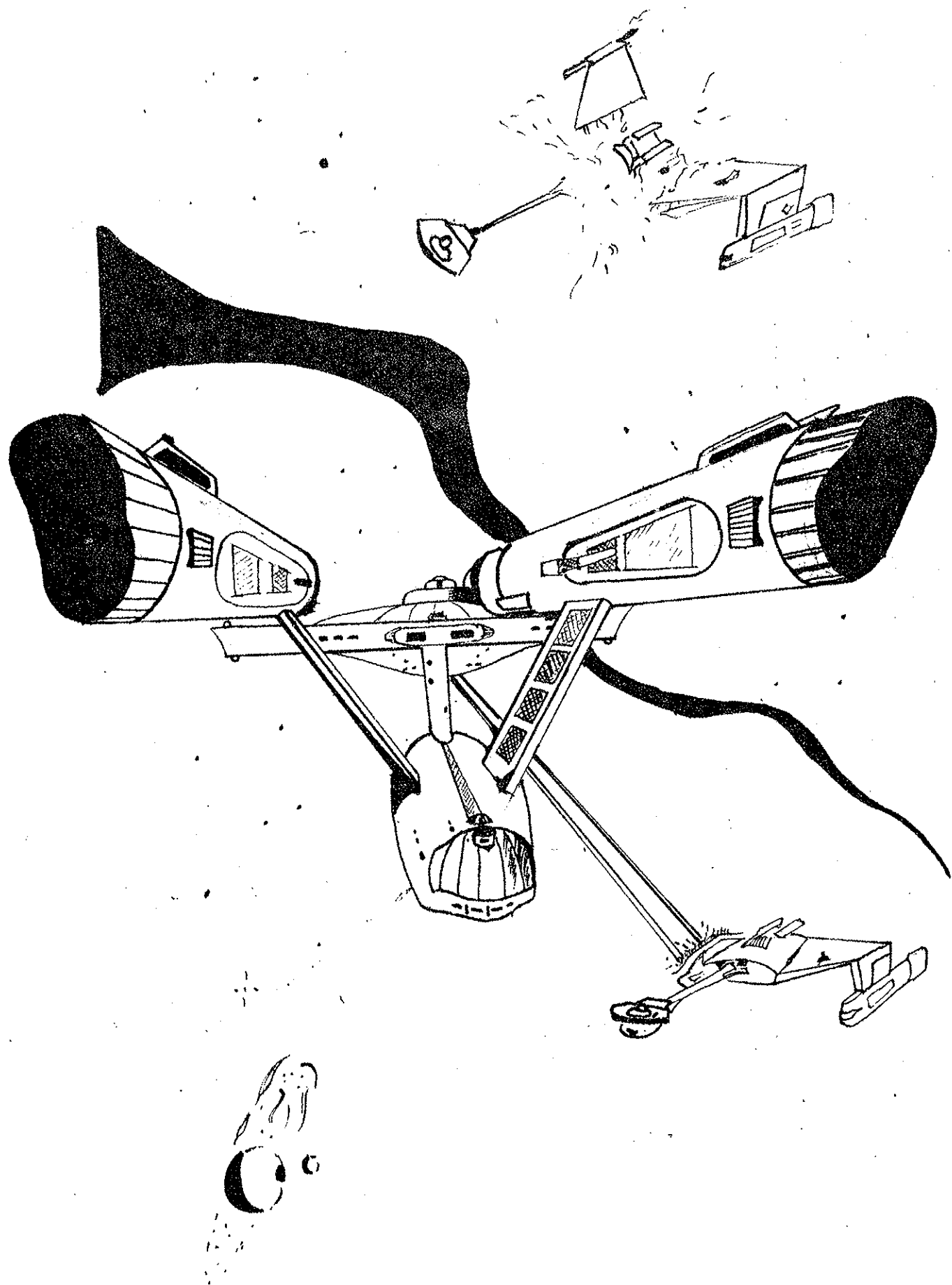
At the moment, reprints of Log Entries 2-6 are available (or will be very shortly) and there are still a few copies of Log Entries 7 left. We've been asked if we'll be reprinting Log Entries 1 - sorry, no, we won't. It was put out as a limited edition of 100 copies, and we then destroyed the stencils. And while I could re-do them, it would take fully a week, and I'd rather spend the time doing stencils for a new zine.

Finally, I'd like to thank Peter Grant and Brian Topping, who have agreed to come and help me with the collating, and my long-suffering mother, who I conned into doing the proof-reading for this zine. She soon learned what she'd let herself in for... We think there's one typo slipped through - she spotted it, and then we couldn't find it again...

But enough of me. The zine stands before you, ready and waiting to be read.

March 1977

Sheila



THOSE BLASTED KLINGONS! by Donna Nixon

Captain Kirk stood drumming his fingers impatiently on the Transporter console top. "Where in the name of heaven and earth is he?" he snapped, more to himself than to Mr. Spock, who was standing near by.

"Here," said McCoy, entering the room. "Sorry I'm late."

"Come on then, let's get moving."

The three Enterprise officers, accompanied by three security guards, stepped on to the transporter platform.

"Energise," Kirk told transporter chief Kyle.

"Energising."

The men were replaced by shimmering stars, then vanished altogether.

They rematerialised on the planet far below. It had a temperature of above eighty degrees Celsius, but despite this it had a vegetation of lush green grass, trees, and shrubs. Most of the planet's surface - almost two thirds - was covered by water.

Large seams of a silvery metallic element had been discovered there by a Federation Scout Ship. The ship had lacked the equipment to make a full analysis of the metal, but it was thought to contain the same structure and valency as platinum - only it was quite a bit stronger and lighter.

The Enterprise, being in the area, had been assigned the job of analysing the ore and sending a full report back to Starfleet. This would have been easy enough but for the fact that a Klingon ship was in orbit around the planet too.

Kirk looked round as they materialised. "Let's get started," he said. "I don't want to be down here any longer than is necessary."

The work, though not strenuous, was tiring in the heat. Only Spock seemed unflustered. He worked as steadily as usual. After a while, Kirk groaned, and wiped a hand across his forehead. Spock looked up.

"Captain, I suggest that you and Dr. McCoy return with the guards to the ship. It is clear you cannot stand long periods down here."

"If anyone goes back to the ship, we all go," said Kirk. "One person alone could be in considerable danger."

"But Captain, I could..."

But whatever Spock thought he could do, his companions never found out. From out of the silence came the sound of a phaser. Spock stiffened as the beam caught him, and fell, rolling back and coming to an abrupt stop against a rock. Kirk, McCoy and the guards, caught unaware, fell too before they could begin to look round for their attackers.

From out of the shrubbery came six Klingons. They crossed to the unconscious men.

"This is the Captain," said one, hoarsely.

The youngest member of the party moved to where Spock lay a little apart from the others. "Why not take this one?" he demanded. "He's hurt. His back's bleeding pretty badly. His Captain will feel...emotion? if he thinks he's hurt and a prisoner. After all, they don't think like we do."

The leader of the party considered for a moment. "Get these ones into the shade." He pointed to the Humans. "Keer is correct. Humans are weak. We'll take the Vulcan. Get moving!"

"Yes, sir."

The subordinates set about moving the unconscious men into the shade. The

action was not motivated by any kindness; the Klingons knew that the heat might kill the Humans if they were left exposed to the direct sunlight, and it was no part of their Captain's plans to kill...

The leader heaved Spock over his shoulder, noting that he was also bleeding green from a deep gash near one eye. Then he pulled out his communicator, ordering his party to be beamed aboard his ship.

McCoy was the first to regain consciousness. He was lying on a diagnostic bed in Sickbay. Groggily he propped himself up on his elbows.

Nurse Christine Chapel hurried over to him and handed him a glass of vile-smelling, pale yellow liquid, shooting a glance up at the body function panel as she did. "How do you feel, Doctor?"

"All right." He drank the liquid, and pulled a face. "Ugh! Terrible now that I've drunk that stuff."

Christine smiled, "You can get up. It's not good for the crew to see you lying there."

McCoy rolled off the bed. He crossed to where Kirk lay, glancing at the third, empty, bed as he went. "What about the others?" he asked.

"The guards are next door. Mr. Spock wasn't there when you were brought aboard. Mr. Scott left a search party down there, and he's also continuing to search from the ship. But Doctor...we know Mr. Spock's hurt - there was blood not far from where you were found."

Kirk began to stir, and Christine went to fetch a glass of the yellow liquid. As she handed it to Kirk, the wall intercom beeped. McCoy crossed to it.

"McCoy here."

"Is the Captain conscious yet?" It was Uhura's voice.

"Yes, Lieutenant."

"The Klingon ship is calling, sir - Commander Koloth commanding."

"He's on his way." Kirk was already heading for the door.

On the bridge, chief engineer Scott vacated the command chair as Kirk entered. As he sat, Kirk ordered,

"Put Koloth on, Lieutenant."

She nodded and turned to her console. On the main viewing screen, the head and shoulders of Koloth took form.

"What do you want, Koloth?" Kirk asked, making sure he got the first word.

"To do a barter, Captain... a little exchange."

"What sort of barter?" snapped Kirk.

"Your First Officer, Captain...for the planet below."

Kirk had not yet realised that Spock was missing, and Koloth's proposal took him completely by surprise. He turned to the library computer station. Sure enough, Chekov was there, not Spock. Kirk turned back to the screen.

"How do I know you do have Spock there?"

"Just take my word for it, Kirk. You have twelve hours to consider. Koloth out." The image faded.

Kirk stood up, his face ashen. "Lt. Uhura, contact Starfleet and tell them what's happened. I'll be in the briefing room. Bones, Scotty, you come with me. Mr. Sulu, you have the con."

He moved to the elevator, McCoy and Scott behind him.

The answering message from Starfleet turned out to be very simple. They were not to accede to Koloth's demands, nor were they to attack the Klingon ship. The Klingons were to be given no chance to claim that the Federation had started anything.

Kirk sat staring at the now blank screen. "Just like that," he said bitterly.

Aboard the Klingon ship, Koloth exchanged an equally bitter glance with his second in command. The twelve hours had passed, and still Kirk had not surrendered. "They've called our bluff," he snarled. You might as well return the Vulcan to the Enterprise. He's of no use to us now. We can't start anything - the Organians would soon stop us."

Korax saluted sharply and turned to leave.

In the Klingon sickbay, Spock was strapped securely to a bed. His back hurt terribly and his head ached. He had been given no medical attention at all; the only attention he had been given was by a Klingon who had kept him from entering into a healing trance. The Klingon's methods were brutal, and each time he was shaken his back hurt intolerably. Waves of searing pain flashed through his mind, and he found it increasingly difficult to focus on anything. Slowly but surely, his sight was failing. He was thankful when at last true unconsciousness overtook him.

He was brought back to consciousness a few hours later by the feeling of someone pulling him roughly to his feet. He opened his eyes but could see nothing, and his legs gave way under him. Once again, he sank into oblivion.

When he came to again, he could hear voices faintly penetrating the agony in his head and back. Something was holding his eyes shut...then he realised that the voices belonged to Kirk and McCoy. His eyes must be bandaged. He concentrated.

McCoy was saying, "... all I can. I've cleaned the cut on his head, and we'll just have to wait and see how his eyes react. I've managed to stop his back bleeding, but he lost far too much blood - and we don't carry enough of his T-negative Vulcan blood to give him a full transfusion, so I've had to make it up with plasma. There's also extensive damage to the spine - one nerve in particular is pretty badly mangled. Still, with any luck, he'll heal all right."

"Yeah, sure. With any luck!" Kirk sounded bitter. "I just wish I could begin to understand all this. When they went to all that bother to get him in the first place, why suddenly hand him back, just like that, then go?"

Spock had tried to remain silent, but now a coughing fit gave him away. Kirk and McCoy promptly forgot their conversation and bent over him.

"Easy, Spock, easy." McCoy was fussing as usual.

Spock tried to speak, but his mouth and throat were too dry. McCoy, realising this, went to get a drink for him. He came back with a glass of a milky coloured liquid, and put a hand behind Spock's head to lift him very slightly. He put the glass to Spock's lips. Spock swallowed and promptly choked. McCoy pulled the glass away. When the coughing fit had subsided, he allowed Spock to drink again.

"Try not to move too much, Spock. You could start bleeding again, and you can't afford to lose any more blood. Just lie as still as you can."

"Captain..."

"Yes, Spock?"

"What happened?" His voice was barely a whisper from beyond the grave.

"The Klingons just gave you back, Spock. Don't worry. You'll be all right."

Spock opened his mouth to speak, but before he could utter a sound, his body visibly relaxed. He was asleep again, the sedative in the drink being most effective. Kirk looked at McCoy. His face was drawn.

Throughout the next seventy-two hours, Spock spent most of his time sleeping. Christine asked McCoy for the job of looking after him. McCoy granted it readily. Spock needed twenty-four hours a day care, and much though McCoy would have liked to tend to the Vulcan himself, he knew he could not forget his other duties.

By the fourth day, Spock stayed awake long enough to demand to know what was happening. McCoy told him concisely, making no attempt this time to minimise the extent of damage to Spock's eyes and back. As McCoy finished, Spock murmured, "Oh," and drifted off to sleep again.

McCoy watched him for a moment, then turned to Christine, yawning. "It's time I went off duty, I think - if I don't, I'll fall asleep on my feet."

"Goodnight, Doctor. I'll call you if there's any change."

She watched the Doctor leave, then turned back to Spock. She was puzzled - why didn't he put himself into a healing trance? Unless...since he was only half Vulcan, might this injury be beyond his ability to self-heal? She looked down at him. His face was a deathly white under the bandages that covered his eyes, the pallor contrasting sharply with his pitch black hair. She checked the body function panels. One or two of the dials had quickened, some had slowed, but all were still far from their Vulcan norm.

She checked the glucose drip that was still Spock's source of nourishment, and decided to renew the bottle. The movement woke Spock. He stirred slightly.

"I'm sorry. Mr. Spock. I didn't mean to awaken you."

"It's all right, Christine," he murmured. He was still hardly aware of what had been happening to him over the last few days, and he didn't even realise he'd just used his nurse's first name. Sleep claimed him again.

It was six days before Spock could eat properly instead of being fed intravenously. But as soon as he began to eat solid food, he began to pick up. His back was healing well, helped by the fact that McCoy, afraid that Spock might make a sudden sharp movement and harm it again, had strapped him to the bed. He found it rather uncomfortable having to have the bed tilted slightly before he could eat, but he made no protest, realising that McCoy was right. Awake, he could be certain of lying still, but sleeping, he could very easily move involuntarily - and he still fell asleep very readily. And the readings on the body function panel were at last beginning to steady. The dials were nearly all up to Vulcan norm.

The next nine or ten days passed slowly for Spock. He got used to everyone speaking to him as soon as they entered the door, and he had plenty of visitors. Chekov came frequently, to tell Spock of all the latest computer activity. At first McCoy hadn't been too sure about the wisdom of this, but he soon realised that it did no harm, and in fact, gave the Vulcan something to think about. So it was with some surprise that Spock heard someone come in who didn't immediately speak in order to identify himself.

"Who's there?" he asked curiously.

"Just Christine and me," McCoy's voice told him. "I want to check your back."

He took the cover off the bed and unstrapped the bands that had held the Vulcan immovably for all those days. "Don't try to move," McCoy warned. "We'll

roll you over."

He was turned gently on to his side. "Good," McCoy said. "It's healed beautifully." They helped him roll onto his back again. "Right, now, Spock, let's see you move your legs."

When nothing happened, he said, a little impatiently, "Well, come on, Spock."

"Doctor." Spock's voice sounded strained. "I can't move my legs."

"Christine, let's get him sitting up. Careful, though - lift him gently - that's it."

They eased Spock, very carefully, into a sitting position with his legs over the edge of the bed. The Vulcan tried again. Finally,

"It's no good, Doctor. They won't move."

McCoy lifted one leg and placed it carefully across the other. Then he hit the knee sharply. The response was minimal. He picked up his scanner and ran it over Spock's body carefully. "You should be able to move, Spock. The damage is almost completely healed, the nerves are functioning - not as well as I'd like, but you should be able to move your legs all right."

"But I can't, Doctor."

McCoy grunted. He nodded to Christine, who laid Spock down again and then arranged the cover over him, while McCoy crossed to the wall intercom.

"Sickbay to bridge."

"Kirk here. What is it, Bones?"

"I want to see you right away, Jim. It's about Spock."

Christine suddenly felt the need not to see Kirk's reaction to this news. She looked down at Spock. "Are you hungry, Mr. Spock? Would you like some plomik soup?"

"Please."

As she left, Kirk entered. "What's wrong, Bones?"

"Come in to the office, Jim. Spock, if you want anything, just call."

The Vulcan nodded, but he knew that at the moment, all he wanted was to be alone for a few minutes.

In the office, McCoy sank exhaustedly into his chair. Kirk sat down opposite him. "What is it, Bones?"

"Jim, I decided to begin getting Spock back onto his feet today. Only I can't. For some reason, he can't move his legs. There's no earthly reason that I can see for it; the damage to his spinal nerves is healing perfectly. Now I've come across this kind of thing with Humans - they're so convinced they've been crippled that they can't move, but a Vulcan isn't likely to suffer from that kind of psychological condition. So I must assume that there's still some physical damage that I've missed."

"Is there no chance?" Kirk asked dully.

"How do I know? I can find no damage...for what that's worth." He paused. "I think the best thing for him is a short leave on Vulcan."

Kirk nodded slowly. "The entire crew is due a month's R & R when we get to Base Four, while the ship gets a major overhaul." He thought. "We pass reasonably close to Vulcan before we get there, too."

"Do you think there's any chance that we could get our leave on Vulcan?"

"Who'll need to go?"

"I'd like to go, and Christine of course, since she's looking after him. He'd probably like to have you along too."

"I'll see what I can do. Starfleet owes us something after all - it was they who insisted we do nothing to rescue him."

As he passed through Sickbay, Christine was feeding Spock plomik soup. She looked up as Kirk entered.

"Want some, Captain? Now that he's got it, Mr. Spock's decided that he isn't hungry after all."

"Yeuch! Certainly not!" said Kirk, wrinkling up his nose at the thought. "That stuff doesn't agree with my digestion at all!"

Christine smiled, then turned her attention back to Spock.

"I have eaten sufficient," Spock said obstinately.

"No you haven't," Christine told him. "And if you don't eat, I'll have to start feeding you intravenously again," she threatened.

Kirk grinned, and left.

"Come on, Mr. Spock." How she ever managed to get Spock to finish the soup, she never knew. She felt sure it must have been cold by the time he had finished.

Spock leaned his head back against the the pillow. He was rather pale, and, as Christine had just proved, he still wasn't eating normally. Even a small bowl of plomik soup was too much for his failed appetite. Christine said nothing, but she shook her head slightly as she removed the pillows and settled him down again.

As he entered the bridge, Kirk said, "Lt. Uhura, put me through to Starfleet Command."

"Aye, sir." There was a short delay, "I have Admiral Komack, sir."

"On the screen, Lieutenant."

Kirk put his case briefly, knowing that Komack disliked lengthy explanations.

"Hmmm." The admiral thought for a moment, then turned to speak to someone off the screen, turning off the audio signal as he did so.

After what appeared to be a hurried discussion, he resumed contact. "Who will be accompanying your First Officer?"

"Dr. McCoy, Chief Nurse Chapel and myself."

Komack nodded. "Permission granted. Your Chief Engineer will bring the Enterprise on to Starbase Four for her overhaul after dropping you off at Vulcan, and return for you after a month. If Mr. Spock is still incapacitated at the end of that time, he will be invalided out of active service, although he may continue in an administrative capacity if he wishes."

"Thank you, Admiral."

"Admiral Komack, Starfleet, out."

Kirk stood as the picture faded. "Mr. Chekov, set course for Vulcan. Mr. Sulu, you have the con. I will be in Sickbay." He only half heard the acknowledgements, cut off as the elevator door closed.

On entering Sickbay, he found it empty save for Spock, who was lying very still.

"Spock," he said softly.

There was no reply. Kirk smiled gently, and crossed to McCoy's office. The doctor looked up from a desk covered in tapes.

"Well?" he asked.

Kirk nodded. "We can take Spock for shore-leave on Vulcan. We're headed there now." He glanced back towards the Vulcan. "He's sleeping - at least, I think he is. He didn't say anything when I spoke to him coming through Sickbay."

"Sleep's the best thing for him, really. I only wish he'd eat more. He's getting as skinny as... as..."

"As an old-fashioned hypo needle?" Kirk suggested, grinning.

"Maybe a little far-fetched, but... yes, I suppose so. I'm having Scotty put together a wheel chair. As long as he doesn't install a warp drive to it, we'll be okay."

Scott stood behind the console in the Transporter Room. Spock sat in the wheel chair, his legs wrapped in a blanket. He felt better dressed in uniform instead of the white hospital gown. His eyes were still bandaged. Beside the chair, Christine turned to Scott. She said nothing, but indicated silently that they should get Spock into position. Between them, they lifted Spock on to the Transporter platform. As they did so, the doors opened, and Kirk and McCoy came in.

"Scotty, you know exactly what to do, don't you," said Kirk.

"Aye, sir, I know. Have a good time."

Kirk and McCoy took their places on the platform. "Energise," Kirk ordered.

The engineer moved the levers and the four dematerialised in a shimmer of stars.

They rematerialised on the planet Vulcan far below. Christine took the brakes off Spock's chair and grasped the handles.

They had materialised in a huge courtyard. The floor was made of large white flagstones. A fountain played in the centre of it. The house which surrounded the yard was a large two-storey building with white walls and a red roof. A door opened at the far side of the yard, and Spock's mother appeared.

"Welcome," she cried. She was in her fifties, tall, slim and still remarkably pretty.

Kirk held out his hand. "I am pleased to meet you again, Mrs. Sarek."

"The feeling is mutual," she said warmly. She exchanged greetings with McCoy and Christine, then turned to her son. She took his hands in hers, tears coming into her eyes. Spock sat rigid, but gripped his mother's hands tightly. It showed her clearly how he felt.

She released his hands, resolutely controlling herself. "Come," she said. "Sarek is away at the moment - at a conference. He should be back tomorrow."

She led them into the house, through a large airy hallway and into a lounge. It was comfortably furnished in Vulcan style.

Amanda was an excellent hostess, warm and friendly. By the time the sun began to sink, Kirk, McCoy and Christine felt they had known her all their lives.

She led them to their rooms, which were upstairs. The sole way to get Spock up was for someone to carry him. Kirk took Spock in his arms while McCoy carried the chair. At the top, McCoy put the chair down, and Kirk lowered Spock gently into it. Christine draped the blanket over him.

Kirk's room was next to Spock's - McCoy and Christine were opposite. They said goodnight, and Amanda left them.

Christine took Spock into his room, closing the door behind her. She helped him to undress and wash, then into bed. Then she pulled the covers straight. She sighed softly as she straightened.

"What's the matter, Christine?" asked Spock. "Am I too much trouble?"

"Goodness, no, Mr. Spock. I'm just tired. Do you want anything?" Spock

shook his head. "All right, then. Call if you do - I'm a light sleeper. Good-night."

"Goodnight, Christine."

But if Spock did call that night, Christine never knew, for she slept very deeply.

Next morning she awoke feeling quite refreshed. Her first thoughts were of Spock. She scrambled out of bed and got ready as quickly as possible. She made her bed then hurried over to Spock's room. She knocked at the door.

"Come in."

She entered. "Good morning, Mr. Spock."

"Good morning, Christine."

She helped him to sit up, then turned to get his clothes. It took about half an hour to get Spock ready. By the time she had finished, she heard McCoy and Kirk talking in the corridor.

She opened the door, and wheeled Spock out into the passage.

Sarek didn't arrive home until late that evening. When he did arrive, he said nothing about Spock's condition. He did, however, seem to study the visitors quite carefully.

On the fifth day, Sarek called Spock and Christine into his study. Amanda stood behind him as Christine wheeled Spock into the room.

"I have been observing you closely since I came home," Sarek began without preamble. "I notice that every time you require help, it is always Nurse Chapel you turn to. Spock, if you are planning something you think I am likely to disapprove of, I'd like to know it."

"What do you mean?" Spock asked, a hint of suspicion entering his voice. "I am not aware of 'planning' anything."

"You are not considering marriage?"

"Marriage?" Spock said sharply. "No, I am not. Why should I? And why should you think it?"

"You have been depending on Nurse Chapel a lot lately, and according to Dr. McCoy and Captain Kirk, your attitude towards her has changed since Dr. McCoy assigned her to look after you."

"Dr. McCoy didn't give me the job, sir," Christine put in. "I asked for it."

Sarek gave a slight nod. "I merely wish you to know that if you are contemplating marriage, I am not opposed to the match."

"Father, the thought of marriage has not entered my head. Why should it? Besides, it would not be logical to marry in my present state; I would be nothing but a handicap to a wife. I am merely giving Christine gratitude for her attention. I have never considered her as a possible wife."

Sarek looked at the girl. "Is this true, Christine?"

"Yes, sir, as far as I know. He has made it... quite plain."

"All right. You may go."

Christine turned Spock's chair and wheeled him out.

"Take me into the lounge, Christine," Spock said. "I want to talk to you."

Silently, she obeyed.

"I regret if I embarrassed you there, Christine."

"You didn't, Mr. Spock."

"It's nothing personal, Christine; I do not intend to marry. If I did... Do you understand?"

"Yes, Mr. Spock." Her voice held no trace of bitterness. To change the subject, she said abruptly, "Would you care to go for a walk?"

"Thank you, Christine. I'd like that very much."

Spock sat alone in the living room, aware of a terrible feeling of hopelessness. His back no longer hurt, but he just could not move his legs. McCoy had suggested that it was caused by fear because he couldn't see. Fear? He was a Vulcan! But was McCoy right?

The door opened and someone entered. "Who is it?" he asked.

"Only me." It was Christine. "Do you want to go out for a while?"

"Just into the garden, please."

In the hallway, they met McCoy. He advanced on them. "Take him back into the lounge, Christine. I'm going to take the bandage off his eyes."

"Yes, Doctor."

She stood behind the chair, and put her hands gently on Spock's shoulders. "Nervous, Mr. Spock?"

"A little," he admitted quietly.

McCoy began to unwind the bandage.

When the bandage was off, Spock still sat with his eyes closed. Small marks left by the bandage were all that disfigured the handsome face, and they would fade over a few days.

"Come on, Spock, open your eyes." McCoy's voice was very gentle.

The Vulcan obeyed. Everything was blurred, out of focus. He closed his eyes again, then opened them once more.

"Well, Mr. Spock?" Christine asked.

"Captain Kirk and my mother are standing by the door," said Spock calmly.

For the next minute, he was the only one who was calm. Amanda blinked back tears. It would never do to cry. "Now you must try to walk again."

McCoy checked Spock's eyes. "Your sight's not what it used to be," he said honestly. "But it's as good as most Humans."

Spock nodded. "Take me up to my room, please."

Alone, he sat for a while staring out of the window. Then he resolutely gripped the arms of the chair, concentrating fiercely. For a moment he thought he was succeeding, then he realised that it was only the strength in his arms lifting him. At last, he relaxed, feeling it to be hopeless.

Christine gave him about half an hour alone before she returned. She had fully understood that he wanted solitude to recover his composure fully - it must have been quite a relief, finding that he was not blinded after all. But her insight was not enough to let her realise that he had wanted to attempt to stand immediately - but had chosen to do it alone because whether he succeeded or failed, it would strain his already brittle control unbearably. Now, she came in briskly.

"Right, Mr. Spock. Next thing is to get you on your feet again."

He shook his head. "I've tried often enough," he said. "It's hopeless."

"No it's not," she said, patient to the last. She went to fetch a glass of water. Spock took it gratefully. Afterwards, she laid the empty glass down and said, "And not another drop do you get until you can at least move your legs."

The threat didn't work.

Next morning after breakfast, Christine carefully wrapped Spock in his blanket and took him out towards Vulcan's Forge - the name the Humans had given to the Sas-a-shar Desert.

Spock seemed strangely talkative. Every so often he would point out a particular object that held either childhood memories or even sentimental value, strange as it seemed. Christine smiled secretly to herself. Her experiment in psychology seemed to be succeeding.

The shade of the hills was welcome to Christine, whose eyes were aching from the bright light and who was feeling the heat by now. "Do you want to go further?"

Spock nodded. She said cheerfully, "You'll soon be walking these hills again."

"Will I?" His voice was doleful.

Christine decided to leave the subject for the moment. She took him quite a way into the hills, picking a careful way round big boulders but finding the going not too difficult. Finally, they ended up in a cul-de-sac. Steep walls rose on three sides. She applied the brakes, and sank on to a boulder. Lying back, she closed her eyes.

She remained there for about ten minutes, during which time she occasionally opened her eyes to glance at Spock, who was sitting quietly, his eyes shifting from thing to another. From somewhere nearby came a high-pitched scream. Spock stiffened instantly, knowing full well what had made the sound. A le-matya - a leather-hided creature similar to a Terran mountain lion, a creature with poisonous fangs. Christine, who didn't know what it was, ignored it.

Suddenly, Spock caught sight of the le-matya on a ledge far above, poised to spring, baring vicious-looking teeth. It was staring straight at Christine.

As the animal crouched lower for the spring, Spock yelled "Christine!" As she sat up, puzzled, the Vulcan, impelled by sheer desperation, leaped from the chair and pulled her from the boulder. They both fell to the ground as the le-matya sprang. Its target gone, it overshot the boulder and fell, striking its head on the far wall of the canyon.

Spock raised his head to see where the le-matya was, knowing that he could do no more. He let out his breath in relief when he saw it lying there. With an effort, he sat up.

Christine scrambled to her feet, her face pale. "Mr. Spock," she gasped. "I know that when you do things you don't do them in halves - but really, this is ridiculous."

Spock seemed to smile slightly. "I regret if I hurt you - but if the le-matya had bitten you..."

Christine looked over to the dead animal, and shivered. Then she looked directly at Spock. "I knew you would be able to walk if you tried hard enough."

The blood had drained from Spock's face now. Vulcan or no, reaction had set in; the narrowness of their escape had left him comparatively unmoved, but the shock of discovering that he was not, after all, paralysed, was considerable. For the first time, he accepted McCoy's diagnosis that his affliction had indeed been psychological, perhaps aggravated by the length of time that he had had to lie completely still.

Christine had little difficulty in lifting Spock on to the boulder; then she maneuvered the chair to his side, and carefully eased him into it.

Back at the house, she took him straight up to his room - at his request. Sarek, just back from a meeting, obligingly carried his son up the stairs while Christine carried the chair. At the top, he put Spock back into it. The younger Vulcan knew what his father was thinking; but he simply said,

"I am trying to walk, father." Then Christine wheeled him into the room.

Inside, she removed the blanket once more. "Right, Mr. Spock," she said silkily. "You are going to walk if it kills me."

Once again Spock gripped the arms of his chair. This time he was successful. Christine smiled encouragingly. With his feet planted firmly on the ground, he let go of the arms of the chair, relaxing a little. Christine took his hands.

"Do you want to try to walk now?"

He looked at her. "We've got this far, we might as well go all the way."

She slipped an arm round him to steady him. He leaned a lot of his weight on her, and managed an unsteady step. Then another.

He was sweating from the effort by the time he reached the other side of the room, but he persisted, continuing until he returned to his chair. He sank into it thankfully, then to Christine's utmost astonishment, he chuckled slightly. She stared at him. "What's up with you?" she asked.

"Nothing, Christine. Only... this time last week, I thought I would never be able to see or walk again."

At lunchtime, Spock almost begged Christine to let him walk down. At first unwilling to let him overtax his strength, finally she relented.

Going down the stair was a slow business, and he began to be afraid that one of the others would appear on his way to carry him before they reached the dining room. He still had to lean on Christine for support, but it was worth it to see the faces of the others as they looked at him. Only Sarek sat motionless, giving no sign of his feelings. But there was approval in his eyes.

After lunch, McCoy took Spock up in his arms. The Vulcan struggled protestingly but McCoy was firm, and Kirk added his authority to the doctor's. Spock was not to overdo things. McCoy carried Spock upstairs. Amanda stood up to follow, but Sarek prevented her. "Wife, let them be alone for a while. Friends are what he needs at the moment, not parents."

She nodded and sat down again. Sarek extended his hand, and put his first and second fingers to hers.

Upstairs, McCoy laid Spock on his bed. Taking out his tricorder, he passed it over Spock's body. It hummed softly, as if to itself.

"As long as you don't strain yourself trying to do too much too soon, you should be fine," he said cheerfully.

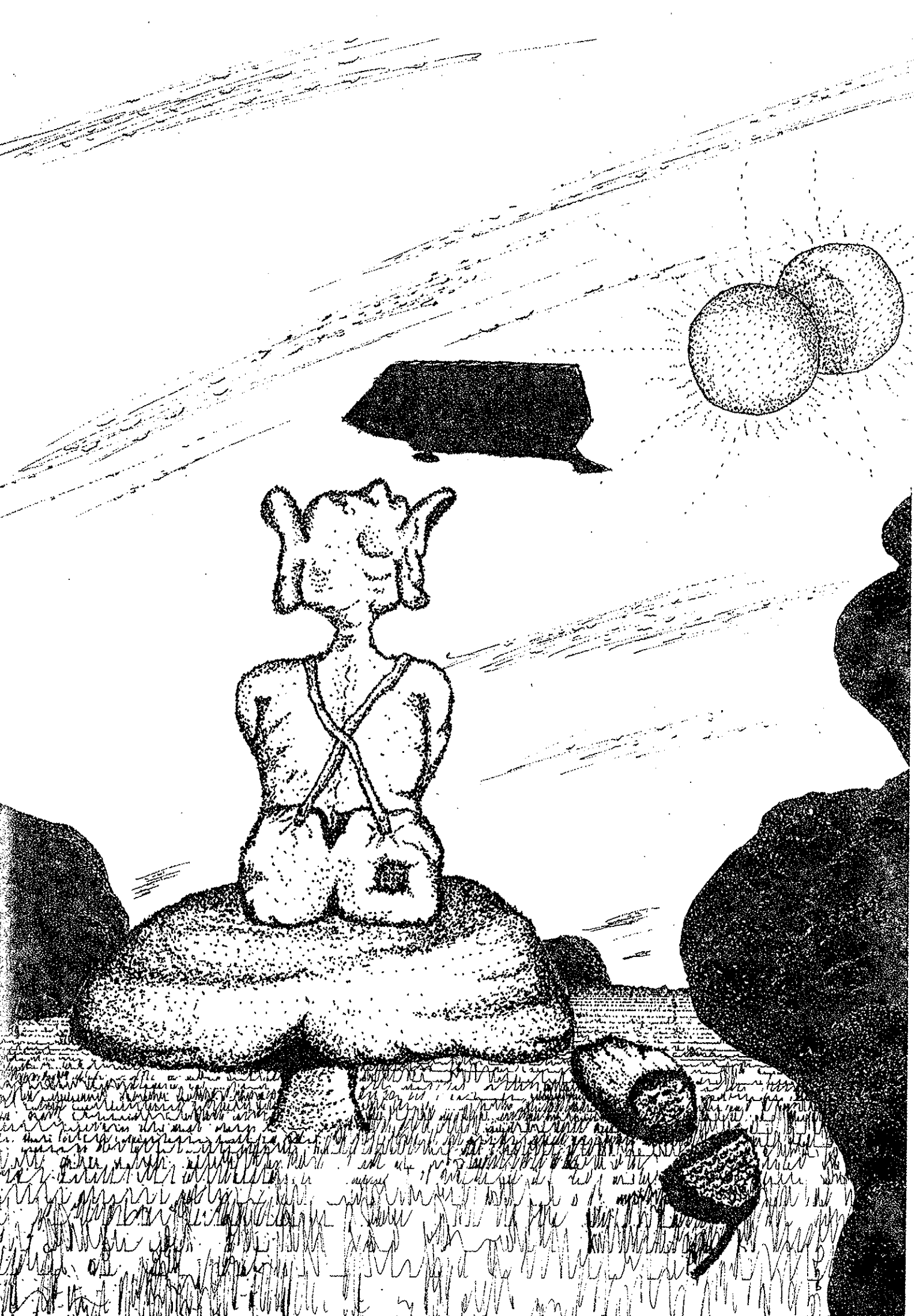
"What happened, Spock?" Kirk asked.

Christine and Spock exchanged glances.

"That's a secret," he replied.

ENSIGN: Doctor, I keep thinking I'm a spaceship.

McCOY: Well, come down off the ceiling and I'll see what I can do.



ONCE UPON A TIME... by Sue Bradley

The Enterprise was scanning one of the smaller outer planets, that had only recently come to light, in a solar system that was relatively new to the Federation.

Mr. Spock gave the all clear as regards the atmosphere, etc., of the planet, and then found himself making up the landing party. This consisted of Mr. Sulu, Captain Kirk, Mr. Spock and two security guards. They went in a shuttlecraft, as the transporter was malfunctioning.

The shuttlecraft landed in a leafy glade. No-one could believe their eyes. All the flowers were so small, and perfectly shaped, with delicate leaves around them. They grew like a carpet underfoot, with fine velvet moss between the plants themselves. The trees were the usual size, and seemed a little dull compared to the delightful flowers. All very similar, their grey trunks were crowned by dark green leaves. But they contrasted very effectively with the floral carpet.

Mr. Sulu was already down on his knees taking readings, a huge smile on his face. A botanist's dream come true - a myriad of totally unknown flora, and in so many colours too.

"Well, Mr. Sulu, it seems you were rightfully included in our landing party today," Kirk remarked to Sulu.

"I certainly am, Captain, I wouldn't have wanted to miss this for anything!"

Mr. Spock too had begun his own tricorder readings, while the guards were content to look around at this tiny paradise.

"Any signs of life, Mr. Spock?" Kirk asked the Science Officer.

"Yes, Captain, I have detected some interesting readings. They show items I've not seen before..."

"Fair enough, Mr. Spock, let's go and investigate, then we won't be kept guessing any longer." Kirk motioned the guards to bring up the rear, as Sulu, he and Spock went ahead.

"It almost makes me feel guilty, having to walk over these beautiful flowers," Kirk remarked to Sulu at his side.

Mr. Spock had walked a little distance from them, and seemed to have found something.

"Captain, over here. It would appear to be a path, but a very miniscule one. We will at least be able to follow it."

Kirk and the others came over, and sure enough there was a tiny little path, no more than six inches wide. It was a clear line through the carpet of flowers, so was obviously well used.

"What kind of animals would make that, Spock?"

"I cannot tell yet, Captain, they are very small and I still can't get an accurate reading."

"Just keep trying, Spock."

The landing party was following the tiny track now. It led between the grey tree-trunks over a little hillock and they were looking down into a small valley. There were even more types of flowers and plants for Sulu to marvel over - which he did without any prompting. They walked further down and found the flowers were sparse here. They gave way to a silvery green grass that felt as soft as thistle-down.

"Captain, I have located a life-form - it is three hundred yards in front of us." Spock pointed in the direction.

"Right - Spock, Sulu, let's make our way over. You stay here, please, Lt. Rodgers, Ensign Taylor." Kirk indicated to the security guards where he wanted them.

Soon the ground became scattered with small yellow and red toadstools. Where Spock said the readings were coming from brought them right into the middle of a ring of bigger toadstools.

"Why, Captain, it looks like fairyland!" Sulu couldn't resist saying. Kirk was about to agree with him when a little snicker of laughter sounded from the direction of one of the bigger toadstools.

Kirk put his fingers to his lips, bidding the others to be quiet.

"Hello, is anyone there?" Kirk called out. There was silence for a minute, but whoever or whatever was hiding became overcome with curiosity.

"Hello, why here I am!" The owner of the voice jumped up before them, and seated himself on the toadstool he was hiding under.

The men could scarcely believe their eyes. For the voice belonged to what could only be described as a gnome. He was dressed in a small outfit of short brown dungarees, with a little orange top similar to a t-shirt. His little feet were brown as berries on the soles where he had hardened them by going without any form of footwear. He looked just as if he had come from a children's fairy tale, with a little bald head and a wizened face, plus two very bright eyes full of laughter and mischief.

"My name is Donjo. I am very pleased to meet you."

Kirk and the landing party stood in astonishment, but Mr. Spock was the first to find his tongue.

"We are pleased to meet you, sir. We are from the Starship Enterprise. This is Captain Kirk, Mr. Sulu, Lt. Rodgers and Ensign Taylor. I am Mr. Spock."

The little man started his laugh, pointing at Spock. "Why, you are one of the pixies, surely?"

"Indeed I am not, I come from the planet Vulcan," Spock said stiffly. He pointed to the sky; Donjo followed his glance. "Do you know that people live on those tiny points of light in the sky?"

Kirk meanwhile could scarcely keep himself from laughing. What a shame Bones wasn't here, he wouldn't have missed the gnome calling Spock a pixie for anything!

"I have heard that people - giants like you all are - live on worlds far away in the sky. Come, you must tell me of your worlds and the ship you travel in."

Kirk smiled. All the landing party were still regarding Donjo with incredulity.

"Do you live all alone here, Donjo?" Sulu asked him.

"Why no, there are other jolly folk like myself, off gathering berries and honey. You may be lucky and see our fairy folk too, they fly high above but come here for food. Did I not hear one of you say the word 'fairyland' shortly after you arrived in this glade? The pixies live up in the hills."

Kirk nodded, unsure how he was going to tell Donjo about the legends on Earth.

"Yes, you did. Donjo, you may find this hard to believe, but on the world I come from, we keep tales of your folk to tell to our children."

Kirk could see a question forming on Donjo's lips. "What are children?"

"Why, they are our offspring; our race would die if we didn't produce children," Kirk answered as best he could.

"We never die, none of us ever do. But come now, let's see if we can find some of the others. They should be back with all their baskets of berries any time now."

Donjo led them further down the little glade, to where there were plenty of fallen logs and tree stumps for the landing party to sit on. Over their heads they caught a few flashes of colour, like humming birds, so fast they flew. It was the fairies, but they weren't stopping this time. Their silken wings hardly registered in the minds of the crew, as they darted over their heads. Down the path came the sound of merry voices, and round a corner came a little group of gnomes. All were dressed very similarly to Donjo. They stopped dead in their tracks as they came face to face with the Humans.

Donjo jumped up quickly. "Do not be afraid, these giants are our friends."

His words had the desired effect; the gnomes smiled and began to put their baskets down. These were filled to the brim with beautiful shiny red and brown berries. The little folk had done a fair day's gathering, Kirk reflected.

"Now my folk have returned, I will get you some refreshment!" Donjo jumped down and disappeared.

"What do you make of all this, Mr. Spock?" Kirk asked, a look of amusement on his face.

"Absolutely fascinating, Captain."

"I suppose I should have guessed that. Ah, here's Donjo back again."

The little gnome was carrying some tiny cups on a tray. "These are the biggest containers I could find. I do hope they are adequate for you all to sample our nectar?" Donjo looked a little apprehensive.

"Yes, of course they are." Kirk handed the cups round. They were rather like the small Chinese tea cups that you sip from.

"Mmm, it's delicious."

"Lovely and sweet."

"Interesting."

"Delightful."

"Yes, it is." All the crew enjoyed the nectar, from their comments.

"I must tell the ship about all this. Our communicators as well as the transporter are out of order. We'll have to return in the shuttle. We will be back in about half an hour."

"I will look forward to it, and our fairy folk may be persuaded to meet you then."

"Perfect, Donjo, we are all looking forward to it. I'll bring our ship's surgeon with us, he won't want to be left out again!"

Donjo came back with them to the shuttlecraft. He seated himself on a large toadstool for the best view.

Spock had the shuttle ready and took off for the Enterprise. As it sailed overhead, Donjo waved to his new friends, then watched the shuttle fly from view.

Kirk felt something repeatedly tugging at his sleeve. His heavy eyes managed to open at last. When they did, he sat bolt upright.

"Bones? Oh! - didn't we go back to meet the fairies then?"

"Fairies, Jim?"

"Yes - don't you remember? Spock will, the gnome thought he was a giant pixie!..."

Kirk looked in amazement at McCoy, who had now been joined by a curious Spock.

"That was some hangover, Jim. Perhaps you'll heed me next time I tell you

when you've had enough Rigellian wine."

"That was some dream, Bones. Strange, but I rather wish it had been true, after all."

"You wish you'd met the fairies, eh?" Bones sat down on Kirk's bed. "You must tell me about it, Jim. Even Spock's interested!"

"Here goes, then." Kirk made sure he had their avid attention. "Once upon a time....."

THE NIGHT WAS DARK AND STILL by Sheila Cornall

The night was dark and still
As I stopped on top of the hill
And stood gazing at the velvet night
Bejewelled with stars so bright
Just me and my thoughts - alone.

My unspoken wish drifted to the sky
And very shortly, by and by,
With a shimmering and silver hum
An image had come
And I was no longer - alone.

The moon peeped through the trees
And danced on the gold braid on his sleeves
Although he was mostly hidden from view
I knew the uniform was blue
And we were - alone.

I guessed he wouldn't stay long
For he didn't really belong
There was much more than a line
Between his time and mine
I'd soon be again - alone.

A hand caressed my cheek
And lips didn't have to seek
While the breeze stirred and played
And whispered through the disappearing silver haze
I was once more - alone.

The night was dark and still
As I walked down the hill
The stars continued to jewel the sky
And all I could do was sigh
The dream was mine - alone?

KIRK: You have just beamed down to an unknown planet and see a large hairy monster approaching you. What steps do you take?

CREWMAN: Large ones in the opposite direction, sir.

* * * * *

Would you call a space magician a flying sorcerer?

LEGACY by Valerie Piacentini

Through the dimness of the artificial night he prowled the corridors of the Enterprise, his restless feet awakening no echoes in the hushed ship as his cat-like tread carried him soundlessly past the quiet rooms where the Humans lay asleep. There was no such rest for him - in his alien mind, his alien heart, grief and a sense of overwhelming guilt struggled for supremacy.

Jim was dead.

This time there would be no last-minute miracle, no sudden awakening from a nightmare - Jim was dead, and Spock could not weep for him.

With his own hands he had prepared the Captain for burial, as though in this way he could somehow placate the demon of guilt that mocked him, refusing all assistance as he closed the sparkling eyes for ever, smoothed the fine hair, folded the expressive hands. Scotty had read the burial service - he knew he could not trust himself for that - and he had stood in frozen silence, his dark eyes fixed unblinkingly on the pale face, certain that he could feel the condemnation of the assembled crew.

Then - it was over. The Humans had withdrawn in small groups, to comfort themselves and each other, but he was alone - there was no-one who cared enough to comfort the Vulcan half-breed. McCoy had paused for a moment, touched his arm, murmured some meaningless words, but he had turned away, afraid to meet the accusation in those blue eyes; that would be the hardest thing of all, for McCoy had been right. If only he could go back, re-live that argument again.....

"Isn't there any word from Jim yet, Spock?"

"Doctor, impatience serves no useful purpose. Neither the Captain nor any member of the landing party answers the contact signal, and I have his order that no-one else is to beam down without his direct permission. Nor is it possible to detect any member of the landing party by sensor, as this race resembles Terrans so closely as to be indistinguishable."

"Then what do we do, Spock? Jim's already seven hours late reporting in."

"We wait, Doctor. In accordance with the Captain's last order."

And they had waited. Waited through long, agonising hours until every Human on the ship was stretched to breaking-point, their nerves on edge. Spock himself was frantic with worry, but concealed it behind his usual impassive expression. However much it cost him, he would not disobey Jim's direct order.

It should make a difference that Spock was right, McCoy thought wearily, but somehow it did not. When another twelve hours had crawled by at last, he made his way to Spock's quarters, determined to make the Vulcan listen. His carefully-prepared arguments were not needed - Spock had already decided to act.

"Doctor, I know you cannot understand why I do not disobey Jim's direct order; you must accept that I cannot. However, one thing I can do; the landing party do not answer the contact signal, and Jim has forbidden a rescue party, but he did not forbid me to contact his mind."

"His mind? Is that possible? He's so far away, you don't even know where to start."

"I can start at the beam-down point, and scan from there. It may take some time - if I can locate him I will endeavour to learn where he is; be ready to take a note of any coordinates I may be able to give you."

The Vulcan sat, composing his mind and body in utter concentration, before he sent his formidable mind searching for his friend. It was not enough to scan for a Human mind - the natives' thought patterns were so similar to Human that only

Jim's own mind would do. He poured himself totally into that search, for there was no other way. After many hours, when even he had begun to despair, came very faintly an answering touch on his mind.

- Spock? -

- Jim! Are you all right? -

- No, I'm...hurt, quite badly, I think. -

The contact was slightly stronger, but still terribly faint.

- May I come for you? -

- No! It's a trap. The others are all dead... they think I am too... they're waiting, expecting a rescue party... you'd be killed at once. -

- I have your position now, Jim; I can beam you up... -

- Hurry, Spock. I must report, and...I don't think I've got much time... -

McCoy had already noted the coordinates Spock gave him; pausing only to alert sickbay, the two men hurried to the transporter room, arriving just as Kirk appeared, lying unconscious on the platform. There was no time to wait for a stretcher; Spock lifted him and carried him to sickbay, where the frantic activity bore witness to the gravity of Jim's condition. At last McCoy stepped back from the bed.

"It's no use, there's nothing I can do. He's lost too much blood... I can make the end easier, that's all..."

He swung round to face Spock, the blue eyes hard. "It's your fault, you inhuman freak! If we'd got him back a few hours ago, I could have saved him. You and your bloody obsession with duty! You've killed him!"

"No, Bones." Jim's voice, faint but determined, brought them both round to the bed. "Spock obeyed my orders - he had no other choice. You can't blame him."

McCoy met Spock's eyes. "Sorry," he said gruffly. "I know, I just..."

"That's all right, Doctor, I understand. Jim, what happened?"

"As I told you, it was a trap; the natives already have an alliance with the Romulans...they'll kill anyone from Starfleet who lands there...we didn't have a chance...they thought I was dead, too. They...they were watching...waiting for a rescue party...they took the communicators, so I couldn't warn you...if you'd come for me, we'd have lost even more men..."

"Don't talk any more, Jim - save your strength..."

"Why? I heard what you told Spock. It's all right, just...stay with me, both of you."

They had sat silently, one on each side of the bed, each holding one of Jim's hands; there was no need for words, each understood how the others were feeling. Jim's breathing grew slower, quieter; suddenly he gave his half-smile.

"Spock, do you remember...?"

His voice stopped suddenly; Spock caught his breath as McCoy leaned forward.

"It's...all over, Spock," he said, very quietly.

The Vulcan shuddered, and covered his eyes with his free hand.....

That had been three days ago. Now... he became aware of a sudden frantic need to be alone, to conceal himself from curious or sympathetic eyes. As the door of his quarters closed behind him he stumbled to the desk, to sit with his head buried in shaking hands.

The message from Starfleet lay in front of him - he had forgotten it; he read it again with mounting horror and disgust. The Enterprise was his, if he should

choose to accept. With something approaching panic he swept the message to the floor. To take Jim's ship - that would be the final betrayal, as though he had callously stolen the body of the only man who had ever really been his friend... the man he had killed.

A hand touched his shoulder, a familiar voice, strangely husky, called his name. "Spock, please...I want to apologise. I...do understand, you know. You did what you had to do, I can see that. It's part of your burden, as it was part of Jim's...you can't always act as you would wish to. Forgive me?"

He swung round in his chair, raising his head to meet the blue eyes, reddened now with weeping. And I can't even cry for Jim, he thought sadly. He was aware of a feeling of compassion - McCoy had suffered too. Fleetinglly he touched the hand that lay on his shoulder.

"Sit down, Bones."

McCoy sank into the chair opposite, and the two men surveyed each other frankly. There was no need for pretence, for concealment here - each felt the other's grief, and it was almost a relief to acknowledge the shared sorrow.

"Spock, it's been three days; you can't go on like this. You haven't eaten, and I'm sure you haven't slept."

"Have you, Doctor?"

There was no need to answer; they knew each other so well now. McCoy stirred restlessly. "I know, I keep telling myself...Spock, we must go on somehow."

"Just tell me how!"

McCoy's eyes widened; he had never heard such bitterness in the quiet voice. He would have spoken, but Spock went on. "I was lonely, but I did not know it; I knew nothing of happiness, but I knew nothing of grief. Then...HE...reached out to me; he taught me...many things - friendship, joy, laughter. I learned...so much...and just as I was beginning to - to respond...he...left me alone again. He awakened my Humanity, and showed me its joy; now I must learn...to live...with its sorrow."

"Do you regret it? Spock, I know...how impossibly difficult...it has been for you; but think...wasn't it worth it?"

So faintly that the doctor was scarcely sure he heard it, Spock sighed. "Yes...it was worth it. Never to have known him...but now...I am more alone than before."

"You are not." McCoy's hand reached out to touch Spock's. "I know...I can never...take Jim's place, but...we both loved him, and he...loved us both. It would please him if we could...comfort each other. Then - there's the Enterprise. It was...part of Jim, it always will be; don't refuse the command, Spock. As long as we're both here, on his ship, Jim will still be here too. It's what he would have wanted - you know that, don't you?"

The dark eyes were very troubled as they met McCoy's. "I know. But...I might fail him."

"You never failed him while he lived, not even at the last. We need you, Spock - all of us. We need your strength, your wisdom, your...love; and...I think...you need us too. Don't turn back - don't betray the Humanity Jim taught you. If you do, you'll be killing Jim all over again. I'll help you...if you'll let me; but I need your help too. We both owe him so much. Shall we try to repay him - together - by doing as he would have wished?"

"You are sure? I thought that...perhaps...you would wish to leave. I cannot be...like Jim...but I would welcome your friendship."

"You have it, Spock; you've always had it, I guess. You'll need someone to talk to sometimes, and so will I. Can you trust me enough?"

The dark eyes closed slowly. He had dreaded this meeting, wondering if McCoy still blamed him for Jim's death, if he had only accepted him for Jim's sake. He had wanted - so much - McCoy's understanding. He looked up; the blue eyes met his with concern and affection.

"Bones, I..."

His hands reached out blindly, were caught and held firmly. The long withheld tears came at last, and he wept helplessly.

There was no need for words - McCoy knew his decision already. They would go on together, sharing the legacy their friend had left them - their love for each other, for Jim, for the Enterprise. And that love would carry them through the long years until, somehow, somewhere, they would again stand face to face.

SILENT LOVE by Margaret Bertram

You call me the Companion,
 Don't you know
 That I am more than that?
 When you arrived, so close to death,
 There was no thought
 Except the wish to help
 To make you well and end your suffering.
 But gradually there was a change
 When I enveloped you,
 A glittering cloud.
 There was emotion -
 More than that, was love.
 Oh Human friend
 Why don't you understand?
 And yet
 I fear that true awareness will bring pain
 And separation.
 So let us just remain the way we are,
 And though I long to hear you say
 The magic Human words
 "I love!"
 I'll be content,
 Remaining what I'm now -
 A friend, companion
 Ready to be called, to help.
 And never shall you know
 That the mysterious glitter you can see
 Is nothing but my tears -
 A rainbow-shower of tears
 Of love unanswered -
 Love that dare not speak.

KIRK: Mr. Spock, since none of the sensors are working properly, how can you be so certain that the planet we are orbiting is uninhabited?

SPOCK: Quite easily, Captain. I ordered the landing party to begin their survey by digging a hole. Since nobody arrived to watch them, it is clear that the planet must be uninhabited.

KIRK: Very well, Mr. Spock. Carry on.

NESSIE by Gerry Downes

"Well now, what did ye think of the Inverness castle today?" Scotty asked of no one in particular as they set up the evening camp.

"A swordsman's dream," answered Sulu. "I've never seen so many ancient weapons in one place before."

"Suits of armor, and tapestries, all tucked away in that old fortress," sighed Ducharme. "What romantic days they must have been." She carefully pulled a dinner packet from the campfire and tested it. "Supper's ready."

"Good, I'm starved." Chekov hurried over and drew his out. "Wacationing is hungry work."

"Aye," agreed Scott. "But it's worth it to see this grand auld country. T'was a fine idea to spend our leave here, Mr. Sulu." //And a fine chance to show these kids just who knows his history// he thought.

"Yes, I don't even mind all the hiking." Sulu joined the others and began eating. Between mouthfuls, "I'm almost sorry we have to report back tomorrow."

"Well, this is a lovely spot for a last night camp." Lt. Ducharme folded her empty packet carefully and put it back in her pack. She began pouring coffee for everyone. "The lake over there is so beautiful, and the colors of that sunset tonight," she sighed again.

"There's stories about that peaceful lake." Sulu finished and reached for his coffee. "Tales of a strange creature that lives out in the water."

"Surely ye dinna believe such foolishness, lad," Scott protested. "Monsters on earth in this day 'n age."

"They're probably all gone now, but people used to think there was something like a pleisiosaur that somehow managed to survive the ice ages."

"Tales to frighten children," Scott snorted. "I for one am goin' for a walk down by yonder loch. Anyone care ta come along?"

"Sorry, Scotty," Ducharme answered first. "My feet refuse to take another step tonight."

Sulu and Chekov both shook their heads. "Not me." "No thanks."

"The younger generation's gettin' soft," Scott grinned. "Save me a bit o' room by the fire, then. It's chilly on towards mornin'."

"Call us if you find a monster, ve'll come rescue you," Chekov promised.

"Ah, I'm sure I'll manage somehow, dinna worry."

It was a beautiful night for a walk. The stars and moon gave plenty of light and Scotty followed the path to the lake easily, humming softly to himself. The lake surface was smooth as glass, a dark liquid mirror reflecting the stars like jewels from its depths. He followed the shoreline and after a while climbed up on a large rock that was half in and half out of the water.

He looked from the lights in the water up to the lights in the sky. Yes, Earth was nice to visit, but it would be good to get back to his engines. He had enjoyed himself, true enough. But the Enterprise was his real home and she was out there waiting for her engineer. He turned from the water and stood up to climb down. Then he heard a faint splashing and something large and hard nudged his back!

"Quick now," said a low voice right behind him. "What isss your name and your busssinesss here?"

Scotty stood very still. "Lt. Commander Montgomery Scott and I was just admirin' the loch and the stars." The pressure left his back.

"Very well," said the hissing voice, more pleasantly. "May I call you Montgomery?"

Scotty turned round and looked into a glowing amber eye larger than his hand on a meter long head attached to a slender curving neck that broadened out as it disappeared under the dark water. He took a small step backward and nearly slipped. "Call me whatever ye like," he stammered, regaining his balance. "What manner o' beastie are you?"

"I am the monssster of Loch Nessss, of coursse," the dragon answered. "You can call me Nesssie, if you want to," he added politely.

"Ye oughtn't ta sneak up on a mon that way," Scott said, recovering somewhat. "Ye gave me quite a start."

"I'm sssorry, Montgomery. It isss necesssary for me to hear a human ssspeak a few wordsss before I can tell if it isss sssafe to approach."

"How is it ye'r speakin' ta me?"

"The wordsss are not correct?" the dragon asked, slightly confused.

"What I mean is," Scott sat back down on his rock, curious now, "how is it ye can talk?"

The dragon laughed a small rumbling laugh. "I sssee. Long ago, many humansss ussed to come to the lake to look for me. We...I had plenty of time to learn ssspeech. I ssspeak ssseven different languagesss," he said with pride.

"Ye started to say we," Scott ventured. "Are there many more of ye?"

"A misstake, Montgomery. It hasss been ssso long sssince I ssspoke to a human." He saw the man reaching inside his coveralls. "What are you doing?" he asked, his crest rising in alarm.

"Calm yourself, Nessie," Scott reassured him. "I only thought to hae a drop o' whisky. It seems ta be a good time for it."

"SSScotch whissky?" the dragon hissed hopefully.

"Aye," Scott drew out his flask. "How do ye know about Scotch?"

"Three, or wasss it four?, centuriesss ago, another party of ssseachersss came looking for me. They were well sssupplied with refressshmentsss, and I managed to bump into their boat and a few bottlesss accidentally fell overboard. They were very excited about sssighting me, but with the sssmell of all the whissky they ssspilled, I don't think they were believed."

The dragon's long forked tongue licked delicately at his fangs. "Would you... ssshare sssome with me, Montgomery?"

"O'course," Scott answered, taking off the cap. "If you're sure now ye like it."

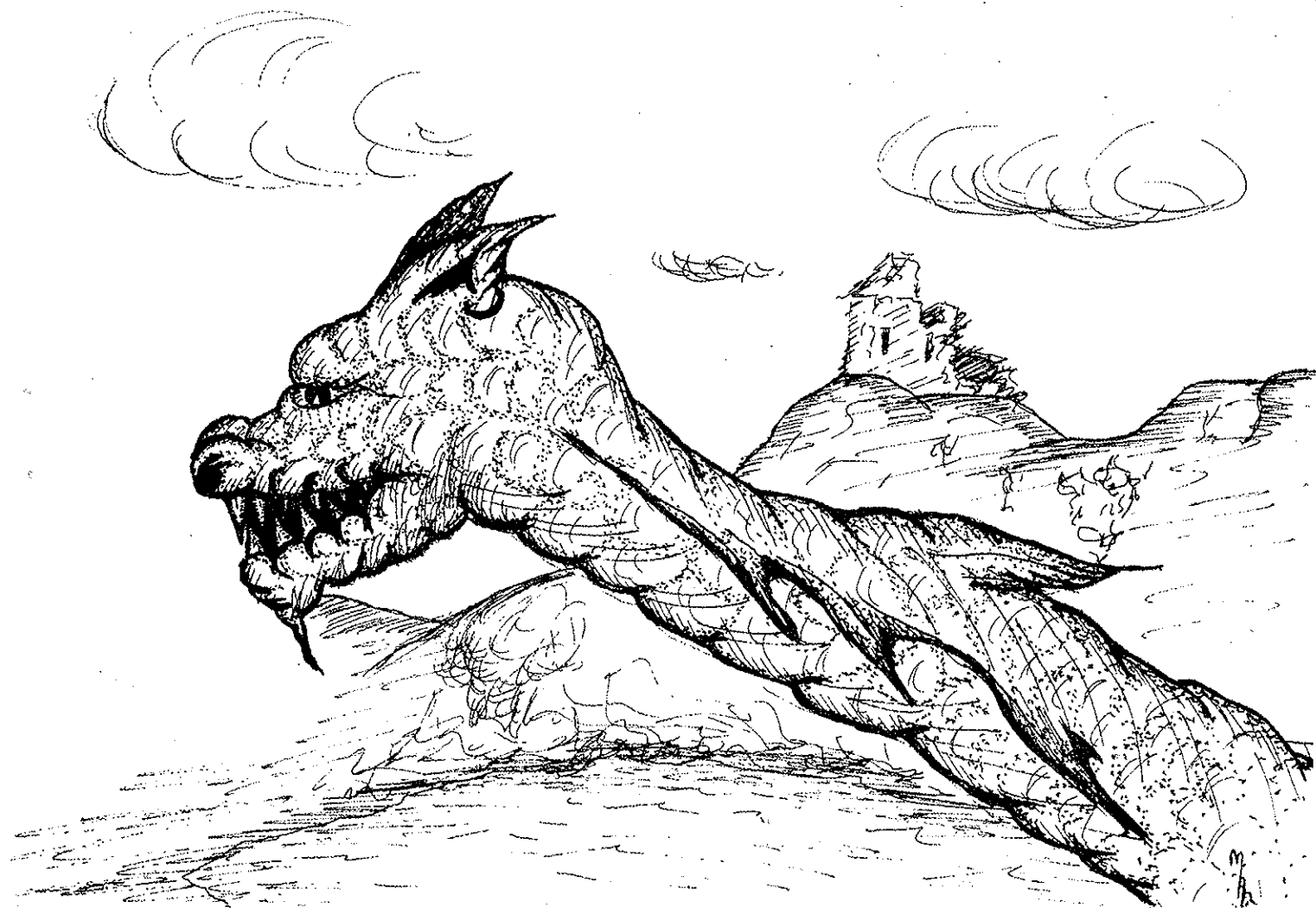
"Oh, yesss." The dragon leaned his great head forward and opened his mouth. Scott looked at the teeth in the gaping jaw and took a quick pull on the flask himself for courage. Then he carefully inserted his hand between the front fangs, poured in a healthy amount of whisky, and quickly withdrew his hand.

The jaws closed with an audible click as the dragon rolled the lovely liquid around with his tongue. Then he swallowed slowly. "Ahhh," he sighed blissfully. "Thank you, Montgomery."

"Well, now, if you're the only one here, Nessie, dinna ye get lonesome?" Scott helped himself to another drink.

"Yesss, sssince Litket and Meryn passssed on, it hasss been lonely. They fought consstantly, but even argumentsss are conversssation of a sssort." The dragon opened his mouth for another drink, and Scott poured in the remaining contents of the flask.

"Litket and Meryn? And who were they, now?" Scotty asked.



"I'll be happy to ssstay and talk with you, Montgomery, but explaining iss thirsssty work. I don't sssupposse you have any more?" The dragon sounded wistful.

"I do, back at the camp. If ye dinna mind waitin', I'll go and fetch it."

"I'd be very pleasssed to wait, Montgomery."

Scotty scrambled down from the rock and headed towards the path. Once he glanced back, and saw the dragon's neck and head silhouetted against the dark water, scales gleaming silvery in the moonlight. Back at the campsite, he looked at his sleeping shipmates and shook his head. 'Scotty, ye must be daft, talkin' and drinkin' with mythical beasties.' But he pulled the half-liter of Scotch out of his pack anyway and headed back for the lake.

"Nessie, where are ye?" he called in a loud whisper as he approached the rock.

"Right here," the dragon answered, his head and neck rising almost soundlessly from the water. "I alwaysss hide underwater when I'm waiting, for sssafety. Force of habit," he apologised.

"I brought the Scotch." Scotty held up the bottle and poured the dragon another mouthful. "Now, then," he sat back down on the rock and took a drink himself, "who were Litket and Meryn, and what happened to them?"

So the dragon talked with the man, explaining about his relatives, and about how a few of the long-lived dragons had always been at Loch Ness, showing themselves often enough to keep a few curious people around, once people had appeared on the scene. He told of their peculiar empathic semi-telepathic abilities, by which they had avoided those people with savage thoughts, and about the underwater cave, filled

with dragon bones from the time of the beginning. After the big change, Litket and Meryn had been so despondent and upset that they had gone in there one day and not come out, leaving himself alone. After that he had stayed hidden, sleeping for months on end, as was a dragon habit, waking only a few times a year to tend to necessities, like eating.

"What was this change ye speak of?" Scott asked, as he poured another round.

"About two and a half centuriesss ago," the dragon answered when he had swallowed, "the sssearcherssss became ssserioussss. SSScientissstssss even came in a sssubmarine! They planned to capture ussss and dissssect ussss!" His voice trembled with the remembered horror of it. "We hid, of coursse. But one evil man brought depth chargesss, figured our bodiesss would float to the sssurface. It wasss a terrible time, Montgomery." A tear rolled from one shiny eye. Scotty hastened to give him another drink. After a moment, the dragon went on. "Litket and Meryn were sssso sssad to think humanssss had come to thisss, they couldn't go on. It wasss the firssst time they ever agreed on anything." He began to cry in earnest.

Scott petted the great head and made comforting sounds. When the dragon had calmed down they shared another drink. "It wouldna' be like that now, Nessie. Men have travelled the stars, and made friends with all kinds of creatures out there. If ye revealed yourself again, people wouldna' harm ye, and ye'd have company to talk to."

"It'sss not much fun when humanssss know for sssure that I'm real. They alwayssss enjoyed it when they were uncertain...it can be fun to be ssscared sssometimesss, when you almosst know the creature can't really exissst." He opened his mouth for another drink, and Scotty poured one in. "Sssometimesss whole familiesss would come. I like children...they never thought it wasss odd to talk to a dragon..."

After a little silence, Scott passed the bottle again, and began to hum, then sing, an old Gaelic folk song. To his surprise, the dragon joined in when he came to the part about all the different cows, hardly hissing at all. Just at the end of the song the dragon belched loudly, and little orange-red flames flickered out of his mouth.

"Oh, excussse me!" the dragon exclaimed selfconsciously, the flames coming again. "Alcohol doesss that to me sssometimesss." He burped once more. "I believe I have a touch of heartburn." He lowered his head and took a drink from the lake-water. Little wisps of smoke curled out of his nostrils. "Ah, that'sss better."

"Perhaps ye've had enough to drink, Nessie," Scott suggested.

"Nonsssenssse, Montgomery, the evening'sss young yet." To show he wasn't drunk, he started to sing a bawdy tavern song. Scotty laughed, remembering the last time he had heard it, and joined in. They stopped for drinks in all the appropriate places. The song went on for rounds and rounds, each verse getting more obscene than the last and they collapsed with booze and laughter long before the end.

"Ah, Nessie, you're a bonny, bonny dragon," Scott managed to gasp out. "What a night!"

"Montgomery, I am a little tired. Would you mind if I take a ssshort nap?" The dragon carefully settled his huge head on Scotty's lap, filling it to overflowing and effectively wedging him against the rock, and began to smore softly.

"'Course not, laddie, the bottle's empty anyway." Scott leaned his head on the dragon's neck, at the soft place just behind the ear-membranes. He could feel the creature's pulse beating steadily. It gradually slowed to deepening slumber, drawing Scotty along to sleep.

A chill morning fog drifted through the campsite. Sulu shivered and woke up. He was adding logs to the fire when he noticed Scotty's sleeping bag was still rolled and tied. "Chekov! Ducharme! Wake up!" He shook them awake.

"Vat is it at this hour?" Chekov grumbled.

"Scotty didn't come back last night. Look!" Sulu gestured to the eloquent sleeping bag.

Chekov dragged himself up and examined Scott's things. "Vell, the bottle's gone from his pack. He probably fell asleep down by the lake."

"I'll put the coffee on while you two go find him," Ducharme offered. "If he slept out in the open, he's going to be cold and stiff."

Chekov automatically picked up a tricorder and he and Sulu started on the path to the lake. Wisps of fog swirled around their feet.

"Watch your footing, Pavel, it's hard to see the ground in this."

After a while they heard water gently lapping the shore, then Chekov got his boot wet and they knew they were at the lake. The water's surface was covered with the swirly fog. "Vitch vay now?"

"Here's some footprints on this side. Look's like he went to the left. Come on." They could see the tracks just often enough through the mist to know they were on the right trail.

A huge rock loomed up out of the fog. Both men stared, speechless at the sight of Mr. Scott asleep with a dragon's head on his lap! Sulu came out of it first. "Quick, Pavel, your tricorder."

Chekov brought it up just as the dragon woke up with a start at the sound of a strange voice. The monster raised his head so abruptly that he cracked Scotty on the chin, and he woke up yelling, "Here, now! What's goin' on?"

"Pleassse, Montgomery, not ssso loud," the dragon pleaded, his huge head swaying nearer the men on the beach as he tried to focus bleary eyes. He had a dragon-sized headache.

Sulu took a hasty step backward and bumped into Chekov, who slipped and fell. The tricorder splashed into the lake.

"Wait, Nessie, it's all right," Scott called to the dragon. But the creature was already swimming away, almost out of sight in the fog. Amazingly fast for a beast that size.

While Sulu and Chekov brushed themselves off, Scott climbed down from the rock and fished out the tricorder. His finger hit a button and it made a faint skrilling sound. "Och, I'm sorry, Mr. Chekov. The box was wet and my hand must've slipped. I'm afraid your tape's erased."

"Mister Scott!" Chekov snatched away the tricorder and checked it over, then swore. "You newer had an accident vith a machine in your life!"

Scott held his head as Sulu joined in. "Now we've no record of one of the most fantastic discoveries on the planet!"

"Easy, lads," Scotty begged. "Quieter, please. Ye can still file reports when we get back. I'll back up your story. O' course, it is a verra foggy mornin', and I have had a great deal to drink....."

"No one vould belief us, Mr. Scott," Chekov mourned, shaking his head.

"We'll be laughed off the Starbase," Sulu added gloomily.

"Not everyone will laugh, lads. Maybe a few curious folks will start comin' here again, and give a poor lonely beastie someone to talk to." He saw their puzzled expressions. "Well, it's no fun if ye already know all the answers," he explained. "Let's go back to camp, I really need some coffee this mornin'."

FOOD..... by Fiona James

Hunger.....

I have never had a proper meal.

Once there were many of us, long ago. But the seas began to dry up, and we were forced to climb on to dry land.

The beings who lived on the land feared us, and sought to kill us. We could not understand - we did not do them any lasting harm. We only needed a little from their blood, salt that they could easily replace.

It was to protect ourselves that we developed our hypnotic ability. The land creatures were not easily tricked; we had to learn to maintain an illusion for many days.

At first, it was not too difficult to survive. We could still obtain food from the sea, and there were many land beings. We required very little food from any one. But as the world became drier, the land creatures began to die out, and food became more and more scarce.

As the land beasts died, my people also died. It had been easier for us to survive than for the land creatures; we needed salt, but they needed fresh water. And rain had long since ceased to fall. There were those who believed that 'rain' was a myth, an imaginary attribute of a Utopia invented to relieve the misery of every-day living.

When the last of the land creatures died - and all their vast technology could not save them - it meant death for my people too. We had come to depend too greatly on the blood salts of these creatures. The salt in the sea had become too concentrated even for us, and we had no way of diluting it.

We tried to adapt - we really did. But we could not. We had waited too long.

Now only I am left. I have never eaten properly...but it takes a long time for the people of my race to die.

I smell...fresh salt!

Yes!...there - the creature so closely resembles the descriptions of the beings among whom we lived...its blood salt must be edible!

I must get near to it.....

Ahhhhh. For the first time in my life.....I am full-fed.

I did not mean to kill...but food...at last...

The other being wants to kill me...defence...adopt the shape of the dead one, and then, perhaps...

He understands!...He gives me salt...I must not feed from him - it might kill him, and then there would be no more salt...

Strangers!

Food...so much better than those salt tablets...

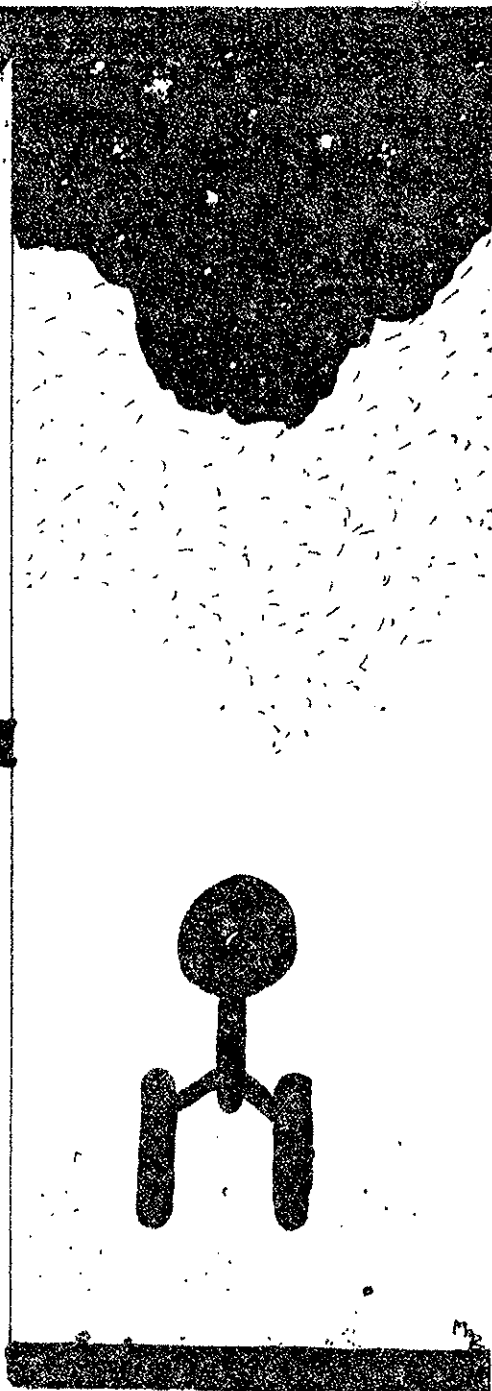
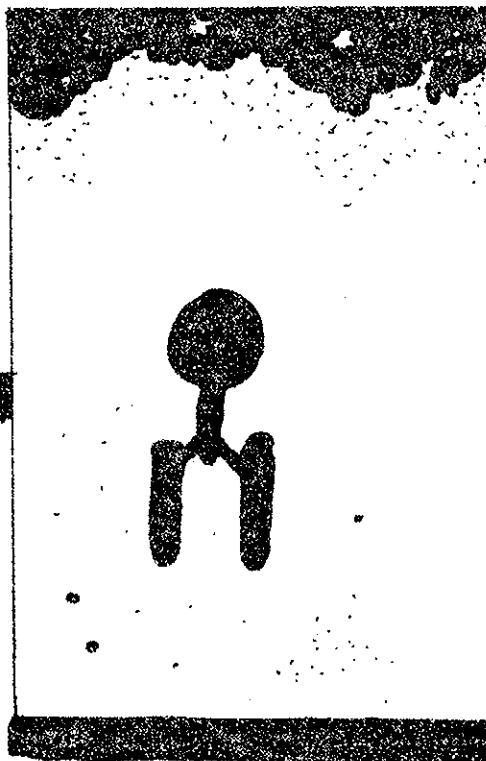
Food.....

Food.....

Ahhhhh.....



THE STORM



The Enterprise was making her way back to Starbase Four after a routine but very exhausting mission, so that the crew could have a short but well-earned rest. Captain Kirk sat back in his command chair, relaxing while his crew carried out their duties with the efficiency that had made the Enterprise the best ship in the Fleet.

Suddenly, Commander Spock looked more intently into the scanner, and then raised his head as he turned towards Kirk. "Captain, sensors indicate the approach of an ion storm."

"How serious is it, Mr. Spock?"

"It will be upon us inside fifteen minutes, sir," Spock replied evenly, as if the proximity of an ion storm was an every-day event.

Kirk nodded acknowledgement, reflecting how easy it was to appear imperturbable when his First Officer always remained so calm, whatever the danger. "Standard procedure," he ordered. He wondered who was on top of the duty roster, to draw the dangerous task of manning the observation pod, his mind involuntarily going back to the day when it had fallen to Ben Finney.

The alert light was flashing yellow now, warning the crew of the impending danger. For a few minutes things continued as normal, while only Spock's alert position as he bent over the scanner showed, along with the flashing light, that anything was wrong. Then the Enterprise shuddered as the leading edge of the storm hit her.

The buffeting, slight at first, gradually increased in severity.

"Charge building up to intolerance level in the pod," Spock warned.

"Evacuate pod," Kirk ordered, his finger poised over the button to jettison the pod the moment it was empty. Several seconds passed, then Uhura reported, "Ensign Walsh reports pod empty, sir."

With an inner sigh of relief, Kirk pressed the button, feeling rather as bomb experts might have done centuries before after successfully defusing a bomb.

"Pod has failed to detach, Captain!" There was the faintest trace of strain in Spock's voice.

"What?!!!" Kirk pressed the jettison button again.

"Still attached, Captain."

Kirk agitated the button frantically, aware that there was nothing else he could do. If the electric charge in the pod reached a certain critical level, the Enterprise herself would be in great danger.

"Released, Captain." Spock's voice was cut off sharply as the ship jerked to a violent shock. Standing as he was, he had no opportunity to save himself but went flying. Other crew members were flung violently from their seats.

Kirk lay still for a moment gathering his thoughts. The pod had broken free just in time, he realised. The charge building up inside it had reached the critical point and it had exploded, too near the Enterprise for comfort. However, it could have been worse.

He began to push himself up, and bit back an involuntary yelp of pain at the sharp stabbing agony in his side. The sensation was one he had experienced before - he knew that he had at least one broken rib and that unless he was very careful the broken end could very easily penetrate a lung. Someone came to help him. He glanced up, expecting to see that it was Spock, only to discover that it was Chekov. The ensign helped him into the command chair.

"Report, Mr. Spock." It was an automatic request. Only when it failed to produce an answer did anyone realise that Spock still lay where he had fallen, out cold. Kirk made an automatic movement to go to him, but the renewed stab of pain convinced him that it would be unwise. "Lieutenant, call Dr. McCoy," he ordered. "Then get me a damage report."

"Aye, sir." Uhura turned her attention to her console. After a minute, she looked back. "Mr. Scott reports serious damage to the warp engines, sir. He recommends cutting warp drive and operating on impulse power only while he effects repairs."

Warp drive damaged - operate on impulse power only in this storm? Kirk only half registered that the rest of the ship had escaped with relatively little damage while he considered the implications and the problems that would arise. The ship would be unable to make any headway against the storm, she might even be carried along with it, only able to maintain the minimum of stability. Kirk's every instinct rebelled at leaving himself so helpless, but he realised that he had no choice. If Mr. Scott felt it had to be done, under these circumstances, it had to be done. Wearily, he punched the intercom button.

"Cut warp drive, Scotty."

"Aye, Captain."

The ship was flung sideways by the force of the storm before Sulu managed to steady her. Strain showed clearly on the helmsman's face as he fought the controls.

The elevator doors slid open and McCoy entered, two orderlies close behind him. He was rubbing his head.

"Next time you decide to shake the ship up, you might give the crew a word of warning," he growled.

He went to the prone Vulcan and ran a scanner over him. Kirk watched anxiously, torn between concern for his ship and concern for his friend. The slight tightening of McCoy's lips was warning enough that something was seriously wrong.

"What's wrong with him, Bones?" Kirk asked as the surgeon straightened up.

McCoy directed the orderlies to take Spock to sickbay. Then he turned to Kirk.

"He has a fractured skull. There is some depression - I'll have to operate to relieve the pressure. Unfortunately, Vulcan healing abilities won't work on this particular injury, because the fracture is right over the spot that controls that ability. This time, he'll have to depend on me. What about you, Jim? Uhura said you were hurt too."

"Think I've cracked a rib," Kirk said off-handedly. McCoy wasn't fooled. He checked the Captain's rib cage.

"Two ribs broken, and severe bruising," he said seriously.

"They'll have to wait, Bones," Kirk said quietly. "There's no-one to take over. Spock's unconscious and Scotty's needed in Engineering. I can't hand over to a junior in these conditions. I'll take it easy, but I must stay on the bridge."

McCoy looked at Kirk unhappily, knowing that the Captain was right. "I'll send someone up to strap your ribs," he said, resignedly.

The strapping brought some relief, but it was undoubtedly simplest to sit as still as possible in order to minimise the pain. Unfortunately, that was not easy to do, as the continued turbulence of the ion storm shook the ship, often violently, and its occupants had to tense their muscles and strain their bodies as they fought, sometimes vainly, to remain in their seats. Without warp power, the ship could make no headway, no attempt to fight her way out of the path of the storm. And as Kirk had feared, she was in fact being carried backwards, slowly, by the increasing force of the storm.

A slow hour passed. Kirk became increasingly worried; surely McCoy had finished with Spock by now! Surely he knew how anxiously Kirk would be waiting for news of his First Officer's condition!

Chekov, from his assumed position at the library computer, said tensely, "Captain, we're being drawn backwards faster. It's as if we've been caught in the gravity field of a giant star - but Captain, there's nothing there."

Kirk felt the blood draining from his face and the sudden rush of adrenalin that made his heart beat faster. He had heard of such phenomena, so rare that he had never thought to encounter one. And it had to be now, of all times, with a disabled ship caught helplessly in the grip of an ion storm, and his Science Officer injured, that he should do so. A gravity well!

"Lieutenant - " he began.

"I'm sorry, sir," Uhura said, before he had time to continue. "There's no way I could push a signal through the static."

No, Kirk thought fiercely. The Enterprise isn't going to become just a statistic, one of the ships that vanish without trace! There must be a way out.

Although he knew that Scotty would be working at top speed and would tell him as soon as the engines were ready, he punched the intercom button.

"Kirk to Engineering."

There was a brief pause before an answer came.

"Scott here." The engineer sounded strangely weary.

"How's it going, Scotty?"

"We'll be almost an hour yet, Captain. There were a lot of wee components damaged, and it's a slow job replacing them."

In an hour, the Enterprise would be inextricably caught and trapped in the gravity well. He had to think of a means of escape long before that. If only he could call on Spock for advice!

The Enterprise shook violently once more as she was flung sideways by a sudden eddy. Kirk was thrown hard against the arm of his chair, and gasped at the pain

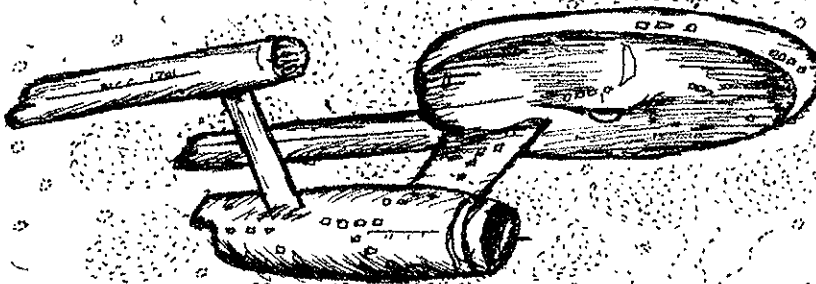
from his broken ribs. Every breath he drew thereafter was agonising.

There had to be some means of escape from this trap. Had to be. Kirk racked his brains while the overworked impulse engine strained to hold the Enterprise in position against the ever-increasing pull of the gravity well.

In sickbay, McCoy fought for Spock's life, hampered by the frequent, irregular jolting. The sweat of extreme tension beaded his face, and he was forced to call one of the junior nurses to stand by with a swab to dry his face every few minutes. This was even worse than a previous occasion in which he had performed a vital operation on a Vulcan, for the storm had already lasted much longer than the Orion attack had done. Besides, the heart is a surprisingly resilient organ, far more so than the brain. A slip in a heart operation might be repairable, but in a brain operation - if such a slip didn't kill Spock, it could well do worse, damaging his brain and leaving him at best insane, at worst an idiot, able to remember that he had been brilliant but completely unable to remember his previous knowledge - or relearn it. With an effort, McCoy forced his mind away from the discouragement of this thought, and concentrated on his hands.

A very similar thought had entered his Captain's head. Suppose, it said, that Spock has died? That Bones was thrown off-balance at the wrong moment and Spock's brain injured so severely that it killed him? If that happened, Bones might decide to wait until the storm was past to report it.

Resolutely, Kirk refused to consider the possibility, and concentrated on the



problem of escaping from the trap the ship was in.

Speed was the only thing that might help - and speed was the one thing they didn't have. Unless -

"Mr. Sulu - one hundred and eighty degrees about. Head straight for the centre of the gravitational pull. On my order, sharp port ninety degrees."

"Aye, sir."

The starship swung round, far less gracefully than normally due to the steady buffeting of the storm, and began to move closer to the invisible gravity source, slowly at first then with ever-increasing speed as the pull intensified. Faster and faster - she reached the speed of light, then passed it, and still Kirk waited. Faster, faster, until -

"Now, Mr. Sulu! Port ninety degrees!"

The ship's bodywork groaned in protest as she turned on to the new course. The gravity well pulled at her. Sheer impetus drove her on, however, for a good distance before the force of gravity slowed her sufficiently to overcome her attempted escape and draw her steadily backwards again.

"Position, Mr. Chekov."

"We have gained nearly five thousand kilometers, Captain," Chekov replied.

"Not enough to break free, though," Kirk commented. However, he was reasonably satisfied with the result of his experiment. He could repeat the maneuver as necessary until the warp drive was repaired, then use the extra speed of the warp engines to break free altogether.

Kirk eased himself back in his chair, trying vainly to find a comfortable position. Now that the engines were repaired and the ship out of danger, he was free to seek attention for his own injury - but the thought of the interminably long trip to sickbay was off-putting. At least here he could sit still, where it only hurt when he breathed.

The elevator door slid open, and McCoy entered. The surgeon looked tired but cheerful, and Kirk felt the last of the tension drain from his body.

"Spock?" Although he knew the question was not needed, he was unable to refrain from asking it.

"He'll be O.K. The operation took a lot out of him, though, it took much longer than it should have done, and he'll have to stay in sickbay for a bit, of course. Now, what about you?"

"Pretty sore," Kirk admitted.

"Hmm." McCoy checked the injury. "What have you been doing, Jim? This is much worse than it was."

"Hit it off the chair," Kirk said.

McCoy nodded. "Uhura, get sickbay to send a trolley up. You're relieved of duty, Captain, on medical grounds. You're going to spend the next two days in bed."

"It's not that bad, Bones - "

"If you think I want a patient as restless as you cluttering up my sickbay, you can think again," McCoy told him. "I'll throw you out just as soon as I think it advisable.. For the moment - you're confined to bed - in sickbay."

Kirk grinned. "Yes, sir!"

McCoy was not fooled. "And you'll be good. Or else - !"

"You like having us both in sickbay," Kirk accused.

"No, I don't - but at least when you're there I know you're not doing anything silly."

The elevator door slid open again to reveal the medical trolley. McCoy supported Kirk on to it.

"Take the con, Mr. Sulu," Kirk said as he was wheeled out. He lay back and relaxed. He would never admit it, of course, but it would be pleasant to lie back and rest for a couple of days, especially with Spock to keep him company.

As the door slid shut behind the Captain, Sulu grinned over at Chekov.

"Come on, Chekov - let's get back to Starbase Four as soon as possible."

"Course laid in, Mr. Sulu."

And the Enterprise headed for home.

HARP STRINGS by Janet E. C. Hall.

Harp strings, speak for him tonight.

In that nebulous non-time
Between the end of one day
And the start of the next,
When he can call the hours his own,
Give him the means to freedom denied him
During the working day.
Be the voice
For his human half which demands expression;
For to his Vulcan half
Words of emotion are taboo;
Face, tone, posture - all must be
Quite neutral.
Yet inside
The thwarted feelings
Cry out and must be heard;
Harp strings, be their vehicle tonight.

Through you he can reveal
That which openly he must deny possessing:
The satisfaction of a job well done;
The relief when a demanding situation is resolved;
The pleasure of friendship; the fear
Of failure, unacceptance or rebuff;
The pain of a jibe or taunt, from
A thoughtless word meant in jest;
The loneliness, the bitter aching void;
The homesickness with no chance of resolution;
The uncertainty of not knowing;
The caring; the compassion;
The quiet love.
Through you he can say,
To a world which doesn't listen
And couldn't understand,
What otherwise he could only think.
Reach out, communicate -
Touch the hearts of those who
Otherwise would pass unheeding by.

Harp strings, don't let him down:
Speak for him tonight.

DEARLY BELOVED by Janet Ellicott

"The price of a virtuous woman'," Sulu quoted inaccurately, "'is far above rubies'. There's some more somewhere. 'Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing'. These old writers certainly had something."

"What is that?" McCoy demanded.

"The Bible, Doctor, full of good advice. It even tells a man how to look after his wife."

Chekov gave him a look that spoke volumes and walked out in silence. He decided to walk to his cabin and find time to think. Thinking was easier when he was doing something, even wandering mechanically about the ship. He thought back to that morning on the bridge. Captain Newman had asked his old friend Kirk to take over an assignment he couldn't handle. His ship had an important delivery to make and no more time to waste. Besides, he didn't have the necessary personnel. The natives refused to deal with anyone who couldn't speak Russian, and they had instruments that would detect even the use of a hearing aid let alone a language computer. No. Natives wasn't the right word for them. They were Earth colonists originally, fugitives from a Russia that would never again be a Glorious Nation ruled by an autocratic Czar.

How they had escaped the notice of the Federation was a mystery. But they finally had been noticed and the Federation had seen the danger. They sent men in to negotiate but they were the wrong men. The Enterprise took over from Bill Newman's ship.

There were only two Russians on board the Enterprise, and Valentina was only half Russian. Still, she did speak the language, and that was the important thing. She beamed down at Chekov's side.

Almost immediately, a force field encircled the planet, cutting them off entirely from the Enterprise. They were given black furs to protect them from the cold, and black horses to ride. The black stood out strangely against the paler colours around them.

It was fortunate that they both knew how to ride. No-one thought to ask them, and the journey was long. Neither of them could understand why they had been asked to beam down so far from their destination. Perhaps the Enterprise was not meant to find them again.

Their welcome at the end of the trip was unnerving. For a start, their destination was an exact replica of the Kremlin and the guards around it could easily have come from Earth, the Earth of the 1970s and 80s, when space travel was young, and interstellar travel still a dream. They were taken to a glass coffin. Valentina almost choked when she saw it. Lenin's body had been displayed to his people like that, but who was the saviour of these people? The inscription bore only the man's name, Vladimir Tolstoi, and two dates, presumably those of his birth and death, 1985-2047.

"Who was he?" she asked.

"He said he'd discovered the secret of interstellar travel," Chekov answered, after a moment's thought. "But his ship never returned to Earth."

"He found this world," their guide told them. "Russia is nothing now, a mere puppet in a puppet world. New Russia is great. Come with me."

He took them to a vast underground assembly hall. Much of the city was underground, presumably to hide it from the prying eyes of the Federation - its founder must have realised that they would eventually be found. The hall was packed from wall to wall with people, all of them adults. They were later told that a whole continent had been set aside for education and training. All the children of the world were there, safe from the dangers of experimental laboratories and the questions of any visiting off-worlders.

Chekov and Valentina glanced apprehensively at each other.

"Our new Czar!" Someone yelled. The cry was taken up all around the hall. "Long life to the Czar! Czar Pavel!"

Chekov opened his mouth to protest. Valentina saw quickly that he would bring about the death of both of them. There was only one way to stop him. She stepped up to him and gave him a big kiss. Surprised though he was, Chekov was still young enough to enjoy the kiss. Valentina's action was approved in another quarter too. The crowd hailed her as their Czarina.

When they finally escaped from the crowds, they were taken to luxurious quarters - but they were separated and guarded. Their surroundings were only the bars of a gilded prison.

Valentina found her quarters well equipped with books. She spent all that first night reading.

Chekov was brought to her quarters for breakfast. He stared in disbelief at the books scattered where Valentina had dropped them. Books were not among the things he had been offered.

"What did you find out?" he asked her.

"Enough to keep me awake all night. To all appearances, these people want to return to a Russia that never really existed. They forget the poverty and filth outside Moscow and the slums inside. They think only of what made Russia great. They sent men into space, Pavel, spent millions on the space programme, while men were in prison for daring to speak against the system, even for worshipping God. These people think only of the cosmonauts and the generals and the men who made them great names, men who came years after the last Czar.

Tolstoi was a scientist thrown out of the space programme. According to these books, his colleagues were jealous of his capabilities. At any rate, he developed an interstellar ship. There was no warp drive then, of course. Four generations were born and died on his ship. They preserved his body to show to future generations."

"Why did they give you these books? I had none."

"Tolstoi left a book for his people, a kind of Bible. He said they were to wait for the leaders he would send them. As far as I can make out, there was a second ship scheduled to leave some five to ten years after the first. It never arrived - possibly it never left Earth. The second ship was to carry the fore-runners of the new leaders of these people. Tolstoi believed that absolute power corrupts. He wanted a couple bred to rule, a man and a woman. She was to be both a great scholar and a warrior accomplished in battle without weapons. He was to be a leader of men and a scientist. They believe us to be that couple."

"I'm not a scientist!"

"You're not exactly an idiot, Pavel. You'll pass."

"But you're not..."

"I am. I can take on most men and beat them. I even know how to apply the Vulcan neck pinch. As far as I can see, there's only one flaw."

"Yes?"

"We're meant to be married."

That seemed their only loophole but, unfortunately, they weren't the only ones to spot it. Later that morning, Chekov was taken to a cathedral in the centre of the city. He waited anxiously to see why the crowds had come, some thought of a coronation in his mind. He soon found out. There was a terrific cheer as Valentina entered the cathedral. She was dressed completely in white, and gave him a smile that left him in no doubt as to where they stood.

"I won't go through with it," he hissed in English.

"There are only 50,000 people out there," she answered in the same language. "It can't be binding off planet."

After the ceremony, they were taken to the outskirts of the city. What appeared to be a small airfield was in reality an underground spaceport. They were surprised at the ships it contained, and knew then that they were not meant to rule the planet. They were meant to lead their troops into battle, probably against Earth itself!

Their marriage had one good point. They were now allowed to be alone together. In fact they were ordered to be alone, in order to found a Royal Dynasty. Valentina proved very good at hiding Chekov's absence.

It took him three days to locate the generator for the force field. Rather, one of the generators. They were spaced evenly around the planet. Still, one was all he needed, just to lift the force field long enough for Kirk to notice and take appropriate action. There was no way he could get a message to the Enterprise - their communicators had vanished during the first night, and to ask for one would definitely be asking for trouble. No-one would be fool enough to trust him that much - not until he had proved his trustworthiness - but he had seen one way out. It was risky, but he knew Valentina would go along with him. And if they failed, there was still one course open to them. They could always kill themselves. Without leaders, the invasion force couldn't leave.

He asked for - and was given - a guided tour of the defence systems. It was obvious that, while the New Russians were capable of destroying the Enterprise and taking Earth, their own defences were pitifully inadequate, consisting mainly of the force field. They had just never, it seemed, envisaged an attack.

Valentina wasn't idle while he was out. She discovered early on that their quarters were bugged, but she also discovered the one place their conversation could not be overheard. After his tour of the planetary defences, Chekov lay beside Valentina on the bed and told her what he'd discovered. Valentina wasn't as excited as he'd expected. In fact, she was serious, too serious.

"There was a Council of War while you were out," she said.

"Without me?"

"They wanted you out of the way. They're ready, Pavel. We leave in the morning!"

Fortunately, Valentina had something else up her sleeve. She dragged Chekov into a party and saw to it that everyone got well and truly drunk. Everyone but herself and Chekov...he never did discover how she managed to keep his glass filled with water. At last, everyone was asleep. They waited for what seemed like hours, surrounded by snoring soldiers.

Eventually, Chekov led the way out of the house. He smiled as he thought how easy it had been to steal a spaceship and use it to nullify the forcefield. Kirk had taken over then, and sent down the troops he had summoned when he lost contact with the landing party. The Admiral, when he came aboard, seemed quite satisfied that Chekov had succeeded in lifting the forcefield. He hadn't expected even that.

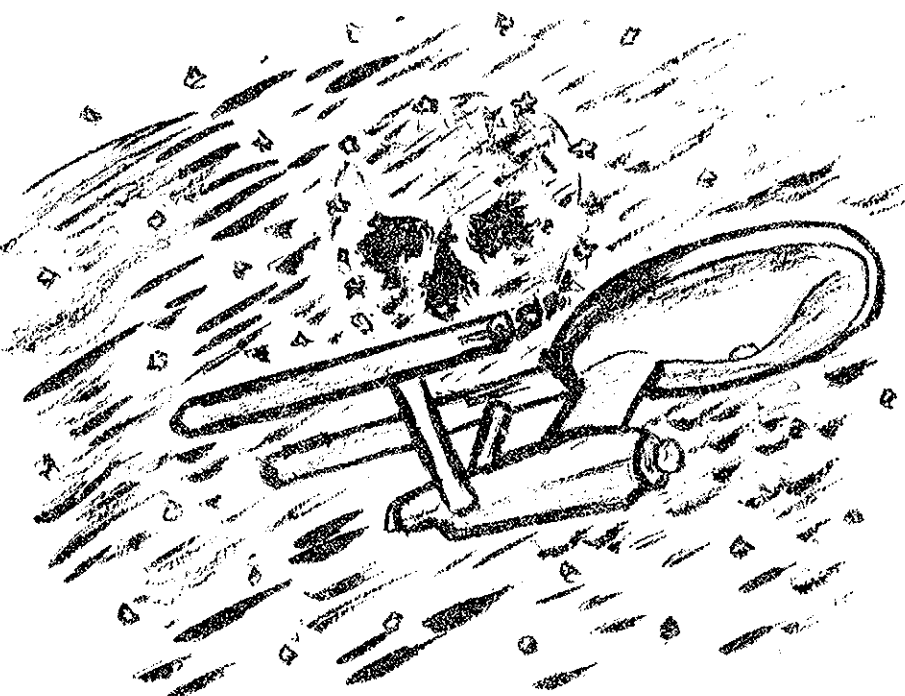
Kirk was waiting in his quarters. "They told me you were coming here."

"I wanted to be alone for a while, Captain. Is there news?"

"Unfortunately, yes. You'd better sit down. As far as Starfleet Command can determine, you were under no actual physical compulsion to go through with the marriage ceremony. Therefore it must be considered legally binding."

"But we can be divorced?"

"No, Mr. Chekov, you can't. I'm empowered to marry my crew, but divorces are only obtainable on Earth. We have three years before we return there. I suggest you get used to the idea. You're a married man."



Cause of Death - UNKNOWN

by Sheila Clark

There was little of interest in the entire solar system of the star generally known as 'Variety' by Starfleet personnel. The only interesting aspect lay in the single quality that had given the star its popular name. None of the planets was of any value to the Federation, either for farming or for mining; none was inhabited by any sentient species. However, an automatic recording station was sited on the fourth planet. There was no regular pick-up of the records, which measured the sun's variations and radiation - it was one of many such stations dotted around Federation space on planets that should have been suitable for exploitation but weren't. Any Starship that happened to be in the vicinity stopped off for an hour to pick up the records, make sure there were plenty of tapes in the recording machines, then left again, and the results were duly sent off to Starfleet along with the ship's regular routine reports.

The ship that was passing on this occasion was the Enterprise.

Spock was busy; some other, more important, results that they had picked up recently had to be processed, and he was buried deep in them. Kirk decided to leave his Science Officer to get on with it, and beamed down himself with two of the ship's junior scientists. To satisfy the book, he also took down a security guard, Brewster, even although he knew full well that there would be nothing for the man to do.

It was an uninviting world. Vegetation must have existed there at some time in the distant past, for there was a breathable atmosphere; but there was no longer vegetation or even water on the arid globe. High mountains interspersed with deep, deep valleys covered much of it; in other areas the ground was flat, the unevennesses levelled off by windblown soil. The recording station stood on an outcrop of rock overlooking one of those windswept desert plateaux.

The landing party materialised to find a howling gale whipping sand round the station. Lightning flashed eerily in a cloudless sky; thunder echoed hollowly round the mountains behind the long, low building, reverberating from peak to peak. Lieutenant Yates gasped and clapped a hand over his eyes as sand blew grittily into them. His scientific colleague grasped his arm and led him towards the door of the station. Kirk and Brewster followed, staggering slightly as the wind buffeted them. Lightning forked down to hit the ground a few yards from them, and they smelt an indescribably unpleasant stench of burnt earth.

The force of the wind rushing into the space left when the lightning burned up the oxygen in its path knocked all four men flat. They staggered upright again, all very conscious that they had been fantastically lucky not to have been hit, to stumble on to the door.

Inside, they relaxed in the grateful calm of shelter. By now all four had gritty eyes, and their first concern was to remove the grains of dirt irritating them. Yates and Udo then turned to the banks of machines lining one of the walls.

Kirk watched them as they moved along the row, subconsciously noting their performance as they pulled out tapes, checked that everything was operating properly, then replaced the used tapes with fresh ones. He also noted approvingly how Brewster, fully aware that here there was no danger for him to guard against, moved forward to offer the scientists his help, passing new tapes to them as they were required and taking the recorded tapes from them to let them proceed more rapidly. Satisfied that his men were performing competently, Kirk went forward too.

Outside, the thunder continued to rumble, muffled slightly now, however, by the walls surrounding them. The building shook ominously as lightning hit it. Kirk automatically glanced up at the roof, a little nervously, but the men who built the place had known what they were doing, and the structure was sound; and of course there was no way that the lightning could set fire to stone, he reminded himself.

The two young scientists moved steadily on, and the pile of recorded tapes grew larger. Udo handed Brewster the last tape, took the replacement and turned back to help Yates finish the check. Brewster began to gather up all the tapes ready for the beam-up; Kirk reached for his communicator to give the order, anxious to leave this nerve-racking environment as quickly as possible, willing his young officers to hurry up. A further bolt of lightning hit the wall. Sparks flew from the machine the men were checking. An unearthly green light flooded from it as its check-light flared brilliantly, dazzling them. Tapes scattered as all four instinctively and automatically threw up their hands to shield their eyes. Kirk's communicator skittered along the floor with the tapes. He paid no attention. Why was he feeling so dizzy? His physical discomfort occupied his mind to the exclusion of almost everything. He was only partially aware that the other three were similarly affected. Faintness overcame him; he dropped to one knee to steady himself, but in vain. Udo and Yates were already prone; as Kirk collapsed to join them, Brewster also fell. The green light also intensified, flaring even brighter, then with a sharp crackling that only just stopped short of being an explosion, it snapped out, leaving the four bodies illuminated by the ordinary lighting.

Scotty, left in command since Spock was so busy, relaxed tiredly in the Captain's chair. It had been a long day...routine maintenance first, then three very junior ensigns to get their first assessments - and that had been a more than usually exhausting experience, since one of the three had been overcome with nerves and fumbled clumsily at a test job that Scotty knew he should have been able to do with his eyes shut; and another, who had looked quite promising, turned out to be barely competent after all, knowing the theory perfectly but being able to perform the practical part of the test only just well enough to avoid being failed. Fortunately, the third had wholly lived up to his promise - for Scotty had then taken the others and gone over and over with them the practical work they had found difficult until both were confident with it. Now he had the con... Oh well, nothing much could happen here. Standard orbit, routine mission well within Federation space... He suppressed a yawn. He should be off duty now... It would be pleasant to sit back in peace and comfort in his quarters with the latest technical journal and a glass of whisky, he reflected - in half an hour or so, when the Captain was back...

The half hour passed, and a few more minutes with it. He glanced over to Uhura.

"Any word yet from the landing party, Lieutenant?"

"No, Mr. Scott."

"Give them a call. See if everything's all right. They're a little overdue..."

"Aye, sir... They don't respond, Mr. Scott."

Scott swore, briefly but comprehensively. Uhura went on, "I'm getting nothing but severe static - there must be a storm down there. It's possible that a communicator signal isn't managing to get through."

The Chief Engineer looked a little more cheerful. He thought briefly, estimating times, then punched the command chair's intercom button.

"Scott to Mr. Spock."

There was a brief pause, then, "Spock here."

"The landing party's a mite overdue, Mr. Spock, but Lt. Uhura can't pick up anything but static when she tries to contact the Captain. Shall I send down a shuttlecraft to collect them?"

"An excellent idea, Mr. Scott. Spock out."

Even with the more powerful equipment available to them, the two-man crew of the shuttlecraft lost contact with the Enterprise not long after they entered the planet's atmosphere.

"Bet the Captain's mad," Zelinski suggested.

Wallis chuckled. "Ever been on a landing party with the skipper when something like this happened?"

"Once. I never knew he could get so annoyed about anything."

Wallis nodded. "I've known him longer than you, sport. He can be as patient as...oh, as a chunk of rock when he's up against people, and it's a battle of wits - but when the elements turn against him and there's nothing he can do, a man like him can't stand knowing he's absolutely helpless to change matters..."

"Yeah," Zelinski agreed... "There's the station."

"They must still be inside it."

"Well, can you blame them? Look at the way that soil's being whipped up. There must be a proper gale blowing down there."

A gust of wind caught the shuttlecraft. Wallis wrestled it straight again. It was relatively easy to compensate for the wind, however; although gusting slightly it came steadily from one direction in an undeviating line.

They swooped down to land close to the station door. Zelinski looked at Wallis, sitting almost triumphantly at the controls, and grunted.

"I suppose I've to go out because you're the pilot."

Wallis grinned at him. "Well, I've done all the work so far."

Zelinski muttered something under his breath and opened the shuttle door. Soil blasted in and stung his unprotected face and hands. He swore sharply, and then dived out. Wallis closed the door and waited. But his colleague reappeared, alone, almost immediately, beckoning. He looked shocked. Puzzled, Wallis joined him, and followed him back into the station.

Together, they stood staring down at the four motionless figures.

Zelinski shivered. "I think they're dead."



Ignoring the scattered tapes - someone from the science department would have to come down anyway to finish checking the recording computers - Wallis and Zelinski carried the four bodies out to the shuttlecraft. Zelinski went back one last time to fasten the door; then they took off, gaining height as rapidly as possible.

McCoy, with a medical team, met them in the hangar deck. He rushed the bodies to sickbay.

Spock entered just as McCoy was straightening dispiritedly. The surgeon looked round, his discouragement showing in every line of his body. Spock bit back the query he had been about to make, substituting another.

"Dead?"

Unhappily, McCoy nodded. "I don't know why. There's no sign of injury on any of them. It's as if they just lay down, went to sleep, and died peacefully in their sleep. I'll try an autopsy... but I'm not hopeful of finding anything significant." He looked over the four bodies again. "Christine - take the Captain, Brewster and Udo down to the morgue. We'll need to retain their bodies, at least until I can come up with some reason for their deaths," he added, almost apologetically, to Spock.

As Christine Chapel moved to obey, McCoy nodded to his orderly, who shifted the fourth body - that of Lieutenant Yates - through to the lab.

"I'll let you know as soon as I get any results, Spock."

"I will be on the bridge, Doctor."

The Vulcan looked once at the face of his dead Captain, then turned and left unhurriedly. Outside, he stopped for a moment. The corridor was empty. He permitted himself the luxury of shutting his eyes for a brief second, his mouth twisting in grief; then he straightened himself. His face resumed its normal impassivity. He strode firmly to the elevator.

He paused as he moved on to the bridge. Every eye seemed to be fixed on him. He hesitated, then made his decision. The bridge crew deserved to know first, before he made the general announcement to the ship - even although it meant that he would have to say, twice over, the words that even now were sticking in his throat, the words that he would have given everything he possessed to be able to deny.

"The members of the landing party were all dead when the shuttlecraft landed," he said quietly. "Dr. McCoy is attempting to ascertain the cause of death."

There was a single sob from Uhura, cut off short. It nearly broke Spock's desperately-held composure. His face like stone, he moved to the command chair as Scott came to his feet. "Give me shipwide intercom, Lieutenant."



"Aye, sir." Uhura choked back another sob as she obeyed.

"Attention all hands. This is Mr. Spock. It is my unpleasant duty to inform you that the Captain and his landing party are dead. The cause of death is as yet unknown. Science department; Mr. Carstairs, take a shuttlecraft and go down for the record tapes from the recording station. Check that all computers are processed. Spock out." He stared blindly at the backs of the men at the helm/navigation console. "Mr. Chekov. Compute course to the nearest Starbase."

"Yes, Mr. Spock."

McCoy straightened wearily and moved away from the neatly dissected body to wash his hands. This, of all his tasks, was the one he most disliked; the final butchery, carried out to discover the cause of death, with only the barest chance that his findings might ever help him in future. And on this occasion, it had been a futile exercise. Life processes had ceased; and he had discovered nothing, nothing at all, that might explain why.

His hands dry, he reached for the intercom. This was not going to be easy - he might as well get it over with.

"McCoy to Spock."

"Spock here. What have you learned, Doctor?" A stranger might have thought that Spock was speaking of someone he barely knew; but McCoy had learned long since that when Spock sounded most unfeeling, it was when he was, in fact, at his most emotional.

"I haven't found anything, I'm afraid. There was no indication of any injury, no damage to any internal organ... The only suggestion I can make is that since brain impulses are basically electrical in origin, the violence of the storm on the planet's surface short-circuited the brain. It's not a theory I like, in fact as a diagnosis I dislike it extremely; but since there's no sign of any internal or external injury, and everything just stopped working, it does suggest that something did, in fact, arrest all brain activity."

"Hmmm." Spock considered the surgeon's words. "Radiation - even solar radiation masked by a planet's atmosphere - can have some strange effects, Doctor. You will log it tentatively that the effect of the storm or solar radiation on their metabolism was the cause of death?"

"Yes. Nothing else I can do."

"Very well, Doctor. Thank you."

McCoy punched off the intercom. An orderly was just finishing tidying up the autopsied body. "You might as well put him in the freezer too, Corso."

"Yes, sir." The phlegmatic orderly wheeled out the body.

The days passed slowly as the Enterprise moved steadily nearer to Starbase 5. Everyone on board was depressed. Their work didn't suffer, they were too well self-disciplined for that, but off duty in the rec rooms, little groups gathered to talk in solemn voices. There was some gloomy speculation about their new Captain; would Spock get the post, or would he be passed over in favour of someone else? The general consensus of opinion was that Spock would be preferable to any other Captain.

McCoy seldom left sickbay. He spent the hours going over and over the useless autopsy results, comparing the readings there with Yates' living readings, and finding no anomalies. Occasionally he just sat, staring at nothing. There was nothing he could have done; the men were dead when they were brought aboard; but he still felt he should have been able to do something.

Spock never appeared outside duty hours. He came on to the bridge, remained

till his watch was over, apparently relaxed - perhaps a fraction quieter than usual - but showing nothing else. When he left the bridge, he went straight to his quarters and remained there till it was time to go on duty again. It was some days before McCoy realised that the Vulcan had eaten nothing since Kirk died. The surgeon hesitated about interfering, but only for a moment; then his sense of duty took him to Spock's cabin.

He had to buzz twice before he got an answer.

"Come." It sounded unenthusiastic; he would gladly have retreated, but he knew he had to do this.

Spock was sitting at his desk, fingers steepled. He looked up, however, as McCoy entered.

"Well, Doctor?"

"No, it's not well, Spock. Have you eaten anything recently?"

"I am not currently hungry, Doctor. If I were, I would eat."

"Why aren't you hungry?"

"Vulcans do fast on occasions, Doctor, as you already know. Our reasons... vary."

"What possible reason can you have now? Spock, you're acting Captain. You need all your strength. You can't afford to waste any of it by starving yourself."

"Doctor, I am not starving myself. I am undergoing a periodic fast - something that is customary to my people."

"When they are...under stress," McCoy said slowly, remembering a previous fast. "What stress are you under, you living computer?" He knew he was being cruel; but if that cruelty broke Spock's iron self-control, it would have served its purpose, even if Spock never subsequently forgave him for it. "We're headed straight for Starbase 5 - and while the circumstances taking us there aren't routine, the flight itself is. So what are you worrying about?"

"I do not wish for command, Doctor. That I am now the ultimate authority on the ship is something I find...disturbing. In a disturbing situation, a Vulcan is unable to eat. If he does...he cannot retain the food in his stomach. It would be illogical for me to eat. The food would be wasted."

"Come off it, Spock. You know you're perfectly capable of taking command - "

"I do not wish for command, Doctor," Spock repeated.

"Spock, will you stop being so damned evasive!" McCoy exploded. He put his hands on the desk and leaned over it accusingly. "You wanted command all right before you ever knew Jim. It was only after that that you began to claim you didn't. You can't deny it."

"It was after I became second-in-command to Captain Kirk that I realised I am more suited to such a position, Doctor."

"Tcha!" With an effort, McCoy restrained the obscene expletive that rose to his lips.

"Besides, would you really wish for me as the next Captain of the Enterprise, Doctor?" Spock added, a little wily.

"Yes, I would, dammit! And so would all the rest of the crew!"

"The... 'devil you know', Doctor?"

"If you care to put it that way."

Spock looked steadily at him. "In this instance, Doctor, the devil you know would not make a satisfactory Captain."

"Are you trying to deny your own capability? I thought you had a very complete appreciation of your own worth."

"I have no illusions regarding my own ability, Doctor. I know what I can do effectively and well. I do not consider I have the capacity to become a wholly effective Starship Captain...as you yourself have pointed out to me in the past."

"In the past...the situation was not always the same," McCoy admitted. "But this time..." He sat down wearily and buried his face in his hands. "Oh, God," he mumbled. He looked up tiredly. "Spock...the ship needs you. If Starfleet offers you the Captaincy...you must take it. You're not betraying Jim if you do. You'll be carrying on his work, the way he would want you to do."

"I don't want it!" It was an explosive, gasping whisper.

"I know," McCoy said, gently now. "What you want is to be Jim's second-in-command. But you can't be that any more. He's dead. There's just one thing; if you take over, in a way it would be like continuing to be Jim's second-in-command, for you would be continuing his work in the way he would do it. You would only be betraying Jim if you refused to do that."

"I can't," Spock said, despair clearly audible in his voice. "I don't have the gift for command that he had. I could have succeeded any other Captain I can think of - except him. I don't have his Human insight, or - "

"You are the man he would have chosen to succeed him, if he had ever had the occasion to choose," McCoy said quietly. He was silent for a moment, then went on. "Spock. Once before, we thought him dead - lost with the Defiant. Do you remember the message he left for us?"

Spock nodded dumbly.

"He told you to ask my advice if you wanted to know the Human reaction to a situation. It wasn't needed that time. We - you - got him back alive. This time..." His voice broke. "This time we have his body...for all the good it does. I haven't even been able to find out what killed him!..."

"You cannot blame yourself, Doctor. There was nothing you could have done."

"I know. All I can do...is offer you advice when you feel you need it - as he told me to do. And at this moment - I advise you to accept the Captaincy if it is offered to you. Please, Spock."

The Vulcan looked at McCoy, his face strangely gentle. "Very well. If I am offered the position - and it is by no means certain that I will be - I will accept it. But I will...need you beside me, Doctor."

McCoy nodded. "I'll stay with you. Now - now that that's settled, will you come and eat?"

Slowly, Spock shook his head. "I can't. Not yet. I must still...learn to accept that Jim is dead. Strange... I was certain that I would feel his death... in my mind, as I did when the Intrepid died. But I did not. I know he is dead, but I cannot believe it. It is...illogical."

"No, Spock. It's Human. You can't believe it because you don't want to believe it. I don't either. But it has happened, and we must accept it."

"Do you think I don't realise that?" Spock gave a long, shuddering sigh. "Please, don't say anything more on the subject. Let me come to terms with it in my own way."

They were still three days from Starbase 5 when Starfleet contacted them urgently. Admiral Komack's face stared gravely from the viewscreen.

"The colony on Beta Piscium 12 reports that it is under attack by a hostile race, believed to be neither Klingon nor Romulan. You will divert to assist the colonists."

"Admiral," Spock put in. "I am compelled to remind you that at present the Enterprise has no Captain - "

"Mr. Spock, you have an excellent record," was the firm reply. "You are highly experienced and overdue for promotion. Success in this mission will ensure your promotion to Captain of the Enterprise. You will proceed as ordered. Admiral Komack, Starfleet, out." The viewscreen blanked out, then the normal display of stars appeared.

Spock closed his eyes for a moment. He had already concluded that while Kirk's body was still on board, he would be unable to accept his loss. Little though he relished the thought of an autopsy on Kirk, it had been almost a relief to realise that in three days they would be able to hand the bodies over to the Starbase medical section to see if the doctors there could find something McCoy had missed. Privately, Spock considered it unlikely that they would. Now they would have to retain the bodies for an indefinite period.

"Mr. Chekov, plot a course for Beta Piscium."

".....plotted and laid in, sir."

"Execute."

The great Starship swung gracefully onto her new course.

"Warp factor six, Mr. Sulu."

"Warp six, sir."

Skillfully concealing the wearied resignation that he felt, Spock went over to his neglected station at the library computer, wanting to check out details on the threatened colony.

It was a planet of an A-spectrum sun, swinging round its primary in a wide orbit estimated at 98.4 standard years. The ruins of a high-level civilisation had been found on it, but it was not certain how old they were; probably about a thousand standard years. The ruins were not extensive, being very localised in small pockets; and among the ruins, there were indications that the race, sparse though it appeared to have been, had had space-flight capacity. Some skeletons had been found, of a tall humanoid race with a rather large cranial capacity. It was considered possible that the inhabitants had in fact also been colonists from some unknown planet but that the colony, for reasons unknown, had either died out or been abandoned. The latter was perfectly possible - with a year almost a standard century in length, it was probable that as yet unrealised difficulties or insoluble problems might arise. The planet seemed fertile; it appeared to lack specific seasons, having a reasonably temperate climate round a wide belt that covered at least half of it, since its axis was a bare degree from the vertical. An experimental farming colony had been set up on it that had so far more than paid its way.

But it was dangerously near the edge of Federation controlled territory, close to unexplored space. Now, it seemed, that unexplored space had spawned a race that attacked strangers on sight. Spock suppressed a tired sigh. Why were so many intelligent races so bloodthirsty? All right, Vulcan had had its violent past, too; but Vulcan had overcome it. Why had so few other races? Surely their civilisations were advanced enough to permit them to agree to differ with other races. He passed on to study the reports recorded by Uhura regarding the attacks.

So far, the only thing that had saved the colony on Beta Piscium 12 was the wide dispersal of its settlers into many small communities, and the fact that there seemed to be only one attacking ship. It had picked off one or two communities, although most of the inhabitants of these had been out in the fields working and had escaped; but many of its attacks had, strangely enough, been aimed at the ruins. It was as if the crew of the attacker could recognise the ruins as centres of habitation but could not detect that they were no longer in use. Interesting. That must mean that the attacker's sensor equipment was not as accurate or as sensitive as the Federation's. What was the comparative level of their other equipment, though?

The enemy vessel was large. It was rocket-shaped and rather longer than the Enterprise. Sensors indicated that it was in fact powered by rockets - although it was a very sophisticated rocket; the vessel did not lack maneuverability. As the Enterprise swung round Beta Piscium 12 towards it, it reacted swiftly, moving into a defensive position.

"Open a channel, Lieutenant," Spock ordered.

"Hailing frequencies open, sir."

"This is Commander Spock of the U.S.S. Enterprise, representing the United Federation of Planets," Spock announced. "You have attacked one of our colonies. Please state your reasons."

Only the faint crackle of static broke the silence.

"They don't respond, Mr. Spock," Uhura said.

"U.S.S. Enterprise to alien vessel. Please identify yourself."

The silence continued unbroken. Spock raised an eyebrow.

"It would appear that they do not desire contact," he said unnecessarily. "Close the channel, Lieutenant."

"Aye, sir."

The Vulcan Acting Captain stared unseeingly at the viewscreen. Now what? His orders were to assist the colonists. How could he even begin to do so if the enemy refused to make any contact? How could he make any decisions when he only knew one side of the situation?

"Signs of energy readings building up on board the enemy ship, Mr. Spock," Chekov reported from the library computer sensors.

"Deflector shields on maximum, Mr. Sulu." That at least was a decision easy to make.

"Shields on maximum, Mr. Spock."

"Power readings now very high," Chekov continued. He had barely uttered the last word when the ship shook violently.

"Mr. Chekov?"

"Power readings now minimal...but beginning to rise again, sir," Chekov reported. "All shields holding."

Spock's eyebrow lifted considerably. A weapon, probably similar to a phaser, but whose rays were invisible. How had this alien race managed it? It took a decided effort to drag his mind from contemplation of the accomplishment and back to the problem of how to counteract it.

"Power nearly at firing level again, sir," Chekov put in.

Unfortunate, Spock thought. But he had to defend Jim's ship.

"Fire all phasers, Mr. Sulu."

... "All phasers fired, sir."

"No damage, Mr. Spock," Chekov announced. "Their shields are holding." Then, almost without a pause, "Their power readings are at firing level again."

"Stand by for their attack," Spock said quietly. Moments later, the ship shook again. "Damage, Lieutenant?"

"All decks report no damage, sir," Uhura relayed from the reports reaching her. "One casualty in engineering."

"Shields still holding firm," Chekov said jubilantly. Then, gloomily, "Their power levels are beginning to rise."

"Hmmm. Do they have any other weapon, I wonder?" Spock mused. "It would

seem illogical to continue using a mode of attack that has been proven ineffectual if a second method is available... Mr. Sulu. Arm photon torpedoes."

"Armed, sir."

"Power level increasing rapidly, sir," Chekov said.

"Fire one."

"One fired, sir."

"Direct hit," Chekov reported unnecessarily. They could see the hit in the viewscreen. "No damage."

"Fire two."

"Two fired, sir."

"Missed," Chekov reported.

"Fire three."

"Three fired."

"Another direct hit," Chekov said. "No damage. Their power is at firing level again... Our shields are holding steady, Mr. Spock." A pause. "Their power level is holding steady too. Minimum power."

"Possibly they have decided that our defences are too strong...or else they have a further weapon they now wish to try," Spock said. "We cannot pierce their defence either, however. Is this the situation that Humans would call a 'stand-off'?"

"Yes, sir," Sulu answered.

Spock nodded. "Disengage photon torpedoes. Stand by to fire phasers again if they attempt another attack. Lieutenant Uhura, open a channel. They may accept contact this time."

"Hailing frequencies open, sir."

"This is Commander Spock of the U.S.S. Enterprise. What is your reason for attacking us?"

The resulting silence could almost be felt.

Since it seemed obvious that the enemy vessel was not going to attack again, at least not at once, Spock left Scott in command and went to his cabin to think over the matter in privacy. It required a conscious effort before he managed to relax sufficiently to permit his subconscious to begin considering the data.

One thing he realised clearly at last; McCoy had been right. He owed it to Jim to continue with his work; to keep the Enterprise 'the finest ship in the Fleet' - and perhaps it would be easier doing so than accepting a new commanding officer to whom he would, as a Vulcan, automatically give his loyalty. To see someone else in Jim's place...no. Disinter his ambition from the unmourned grave where he had buried it the first time Jim had smiled at him in open friendship. But - first he had to solve this problem. This was the test of his ability to command as Jim had done.

He considered his options. One ship against one ship, evenly matched, evenly armed, evenly defended. They had already proved that martial force was ineffective in these circumstances. He could ask for help...but that would be to admit defeat. Quite apart from his prospects for promotion, to admit defeat would betray Jim, and that he would not do. If the enemy ship sent for reinforcements, then... but they had not broken radio silence. Might they be expecting reinforcements anyway? Unlikely. Until the Enterprise arrived, the alien vessel had been master of the situation...

Evacuate the colony? Spock shook his head. That also would be a surrender.

But what other course of action was open to him?

He rose wearily. Leaving the cabin, he paced deliberately along the corridors, choosing not to use the turbolift because that would take him to his destination so much quicker; and he was strangely reluctant to reach that destination. But at last his unwilling feet carried him to the ship's morgue.

He slid Kirk's body out of its freezer compartment and stood looking down at it, not really seeing it for the image in his mind of a Kirk alive, alert, active and smiling affectionately.

Jim, he thought. *Jim, in this situation, what would you do?*

Spock emptied his mind completely, hoping that here, standing beside his dead Captain's body, some inspiration might come. He stood there for a long time.

Slowly, so slowly that at first he didn't realise it was not his own reaction, his mind registered an awareness of cold. A cold so intense, so numbing, that it blanked every other thought out of consciousness. Spock shivered involuntarily. Yes, it was cold...but not as unbearably cold as the thought indicated. He glanced round to see who else had entered, but he was still alone. Alone except for the body beside him.

Kirk? Kirk's thoughts?

Spock reached down, and without any of the revulsion a Human might have experienced at the thought of touching a corpse, he placed his fingers to the Captain's head, reaching out with his mind.

Jim?

The thought was faint, hardly more detectable than it had been without the physical contact.

Cold.....

Jim.

...Spock? Help me... so cold...

Spock lifted the stiffened body easily. He turned to the door.

McCoy looked up from the autopsy report that he was studying for the fiftieth time, his fatigue-reddened eyes blinking as his gaze focussed on the Vulcan's burden. Spock crossed to a bed and placed his Captain's body carefully on it.

"Are you out of your Vulcan mind?" McCoy asked irritably. "Why on earth - "

"Doctor, I have detected coherent thought in the Captain's mind - "

"What!"

" - He is aware of intense cold... I believe that he is alive and that by some chance the freezing process in the morgue acted to suspend animation as if it had been done deliberately in a hospital to rest a sick patient's metabolism - "

"Yes, I know why we use deep freezing procedures," McCoy growled. After a moment of stunned disbelief, he had moved quickly, and he was already spreading a thermal blanket over the prone figure. He touched the switch to activate the diagnostic panel. The needles jerked fractionally upwards.

"Alive all right... if we can keep him alive..." McCoy muttered.

"Doctor, I suggest we fetch the bodies of Mr. Brewster and Mr. Udo. They also might be in a state of suspended animation."

"Yes, of course." McCoy moved to the lab door. "Corso, Ossowski. Go and get Brewster and Udo from the morgue. Be careful with them - they may be alive." He returned to Kirk's side, his face still showing near disbelief.

Spock looked down at Kirk's face for a moment longer, his expression strangely gentle.

"Prognosis, Doctor?"

McCoy shook his head. "Too soon to say, Spock. And even if he lives, he may not recover fully. He's been frozen rather longer than recommended. In addition, there was no respiration discernable for several hours prior to freezing - and no pulse, therefore no circulation. There may be brain damage. There may not."

They were interrupted by the orderlies wheeling in the other two bodies. McCoy hurried to attend to them. He pulled blankets over them and flicked the switches. The needles on the panel above Brewster jerked and slid upwards slightly. Udo's panel remained obstinately unmoving. McCoy reached for a hypo.

Spock watched him for a moment then glanced back at Kirk. Knowing himself to be unobserved - McCoy and both orderlies were fussing round Udo's body - Spock reached out quickly and touched Kirk's face lightly, fleetingly. Then he turned towards the door. He still had a problem to solve.

He headed back towards the bridge. He had already been away from it for far too long - much longer than he had originally intended.

Scott looked round as Spock left the elevator and rose to let the Vulcan assume the command chair, aware of a slight feeling of relief that he was no longer in the hot seat. The lack of response from the enemy ship was unnerving, even although Scott was not a nervous man. Perhaps that was what the aliens were wanting - to upset their opponents by making them nervous.

Spock sat down gratefully; his legs were feeling strangely weak.

"Present status, Mr. Scott?"

"No change, sir. They've made no hostile move, but they've made no attempt to contact us either."

"That is hardly surprising, Mr. Scott. If they had been prepared to talk, they would have responded to our signal."

Scott watched sympathetically as Spock steepled his fingers and contemplated them. Then he moved over to the engineering station. There might be very little concrete assistance he could give the Vulcan, but he could at least be there, on the bridge, offering moral support. Little though Spock might show it, over the years Scott had come to realise that the Vulcan did in fact appreciate the silent sympathy and support of his friends.

What would Jim do? Spock thought. He could, of course, stall, wait until Kirk regained consciousness and leave the decision to him... provided Jim was then mentally active enough to make a decision... but that would be the coward's way out. Spock's stubborn pride refused to consider it. Besides, there was Jim's declared opinion of Spock's abilities... and, seemingly, the crew's, if McCoy had been telling the truth. The Vulcan knew that he didn't want to betray that opinion. He wanted to be able to report to Jim that he had found a solution to a problem the Captain didn't even know existed. Even if that solution was the one Jim himself would have found... especially if it was the solution Jim would have found.

What would Jim do?

Spock thought back over some of the situations Kirk had contended with. He had used bluff often... but Spock suspected that, with the best will in the universe, he could not carry out a successful bluff. Even if he could... what bluff could he use in this situation? If the aliens would only accept contact...!

Wait, though. Although the aliens had not responded to his attempts at communication, it was almost certain that they were, in fact, receiving the signal.

"Open a channel, Lieutenant," he ordered pensively.

"Hailing frequencies open, sir," Uhura said, a hint of tired frustration in her voice. He noted it, with a touch of sympathy. He also was experiencing some irritation at the aliens' continued refusal to talk.

"This is Commander Spock of the U.S.S. Enterprise calling unidentified alien ship. It is obviously clear to you that our vessels are of comparable power and that we are in a state of impasse. It must be equally clear to you that this situation cannot continue indefinitely. We have a claim to this planet in that we have established a colony on it. There was no indication of any other colonisation, but if you feel you have a prior claim, we are prepared to discuss it with you."

"No response, sir," Uhura said, in a tone that indicated that it was exactly what she had expected. Spock nodded. It was what he had expected as well.

"We must make them listen, then," he said.

"But how, Mr. Spock?" Scott exploded.

"By beaming someone over on to their bridge," Spock replied calmly.

The bridge crew stared at him as if he had suddenly sprouted a second head. He looked over to the library computer. "Mr. Chekov - can you pinpoint their bridge?"

"I think so, sir..." He bent over the sensor intently.

"Mr. Spock - wouldn't it be better to beam one of them over here?" Scott asked.

"We could, of course, do that, Mr. Scott," Spock admitted. "But what guarantee would we have that we had, in fact, locked on to an important member of their crew? Even on their bridge, we might pinpoint someone no more important than a yeoman bringing in a standard report. In an attack situation, such a crewman would become highly expendable - a pawn whose importance is negligible. No, we must send someone over. And since I am the ranking officer here, the task must be mine. If I fail... If I fail, we will know we are dealing with a totally intractable race, probably as dangerous as the Romulans, and you must inform Starfleet of that fact."

Scott looked searchingly at Spock. A few hours ago, he would have said that Spock was suffering from a death wish, but there was a subtle difference in his attitude since his last absence from the bridge; he clearly did believe that this was the only way to reach a solution - and what he said was true. In the absence of a trained diplomat, the ranking officer present was the one empowered to make diplomatic decisions.

"Have you found the co-ordinates yet, Mr. Chekov?" Spock went on.

"I think... yes, Mr. Spock."

"Inform the transporter room. Mr. Sulu - I will inform you as soon as I am ready to beam over. Drop the shields on my signal, and re-establish as soon as transport is confirmed." Mentally he was hoping that the aliens' shield could be penetrated by their transporter. If not - scratch one idea and try to find another.

"Aye, sir."

"Mr. Scott, you have the con."

"Good luck, sir," Scott said quietly. Spock looked straight at him for a moment without replying, then turned and entered the elevator.

His first thought on materialising was that it was no wonder the attacking ship was so large. Himself tall enough to tower over most of the Enterprise's crew, he was dwarfed by the huge alien standing near by. He stared in a fascinated silence at the aliens, only half aware that they were studying him as intently.

The aliens were fully eight feet tall. They were humanoid, without in any way resembling a Human. Their scaly bronze green faces were topped by

crests of varying magnificence; several carried their crests flattened against their heads, but the standing alien carried his high, flaring wide in proud display. His lidless eyes blinked as a nictating membrane passed over them. Spock's first coherent thought was that this race was of reptilian origin rather than mammalian.

"Who are you?" the alien asked, utter bewilderment in his voice.

"Spock of Vulcan, representing the United Federation of Planets."

The alien's scaled face was incapable of frowning, but the angle of its head was eloquent. "I do not understand," it said.

"You thought we were someone else, perhaps?" Spock asked.

"Yes... My apologies, Spock of Vulcan. But..." The puzzled voice trailed off.

"But?"

"We received your earlier communications. We did not believe... This world is the home planet of my people. How can you have a colony here?"

"There was no sentient life on the planet when Federation scouts found it," Spock said, almost sympathetically. "Only ruins almost a planetary century old."

Shock showed on the alien face, immobile though it had appeared to be. "So old?"

"That is our estimate."

The beautiful crest drooped, giving an impression of utter hopelessness. "This is the home world of my people," the alien repeated. "Three to four generations ago, there was a war. Our ancestors were of a less technologically advanced race and were defeated, their country overrun. Those who were not content to become as slaves were forcibly deported to another solar system which had only recently been discovered - and was known to have little of value to the conquerors. A few liberal-minded of the conquerors were exiled too, for daring to suggest that even the conquered had rights. They were our first teachers... We taught ourselves technology, urged on by the need to win back our own land, and at last succeeded in developing spaceflight. My ship came to reconnoiter, and seized the opportunity offered us to attack... but now you tell me we have attacked your people, who have done us no harm... It makes us as bad as those we thought we fought."

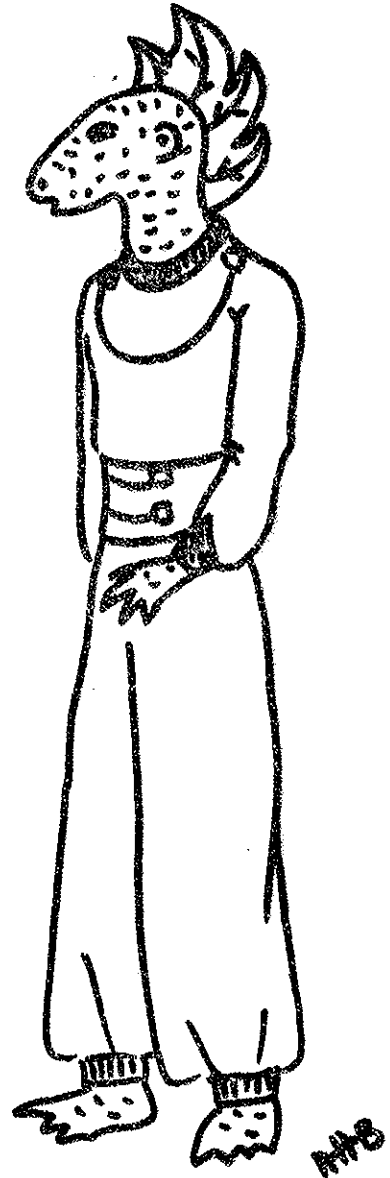
"No," Spock said. "You had no way of knowing that the present inhabitants of the planet are no longer those you sought. And while the desire for revenge is no longer a thing my people ever experience, historically we were warlike and I do understand it. All we ask is that you meet us now with open minds."

"We will do so." The crest lifted slightly.

"And since the colonists also have a viewpoint, I suggest that we meet on the planet with their leader."

"Willingly."

"I will speak with them, and let you know time and place. Will you now



contact my ship and ask them to beam me back on board."

The crest lifted a little further. "Gladly. And until our next meeting, Chavex of Mlexa bids you farewell."

Spock was greeted aboard the Enterprise with an exuberance that at first surprised and then touched him. He had never realised before that he was actually liked; and the discovery that his fellow officers had actually been worried about him was somehow warming.

He went first to the bridge; ordered Uhura to contact the leader of the colonists so that he could arrange a meeting with the aliens, then, that done, he told her to relay everything to Starfleet - including the information that Captain Kirk was alive.

"Alive?" The bridge crew stared at Spock in utter amazement.

"Dr. McCoy is unsure as yet how fully the Captain will recover, however. Mr. Scott, carry on. I will be in sickbay."

In the solitude of the elevator, Spock allowed himself a luxurious stretch. The tension across his shoulders that he had not permitted himself to notice relaxed slightly. Provided Chavex of Mlexa proved trustworthy...

He put the matter to the back of his mind as he entered sickbay. McCoy was bending over one of the beds - and looking very unhappy.

"Doctor?" Spock was suddenly anxious again.

The surgeon jumped. "Oh, it's you, Spock. What do you mean, creeping in like a cat?" He had regained control of his facial muscles, and a Human might have wondered if he had imagined the expression on McCoy's face. The Vulcan knew he had not. It was a revelation to him. McCoy, ashamed of emotion?

"There was one casualty in engineering during the battle, Doctor. How is he?"

"Oh, Jarrold. He fell down the steps. A broken leg and a few bruises. Nothing serious. His pride's hurt more than anything else."

"And the Captain?"

"Hasn't come round yet but his temperature's nearly back to normal. The readings all look satisfactory."

"Good. What about the other two?"

"Brewster's responding well, but Udo's definitely dead." McCoy did sound depressed, Spock thought, his keen ear catching the trace of weariness in the surgeon's voice. Odd. Certainly, Udo was dead and McCoy hated losing a patient, but since Kirk - and Brewster as bonus - were alive after all, he would have expected McCoy to be delighted, bubbling over with the vehement exuberance that Spock regarded with amused tolerance.

"What is it?" Spock asked softly.

"What is what?" McCoy asked, too quickly. Spock looked at him with a quiet patience that defied the bluster, and McCoy found himself unable to meet the Vulcan's eyes.

"Tell me," Spock insisted. "Is there... is Jim still in danger?"

"Under the circumstances, until he actually comes round, I won't know. I told you - there could be brain damage. The readings look all right, but that isn't conclusive."

Spock still looked directly at him, patiently waiting, instinct telling him that there was more to McCoy's depression than fear for Kirk.

"That isn't all, is it?" he asked gently.

McCoy gave in. "No."

"Tell me, then. You've said to me in the past that it helps to share your troubles. Try your own prescription for once."

McCoy took a deep breath. "It's Yates, Spock."

The Vulcan waited.

"I keep thinking... Was he really dead, like Udo - or did I kill him when I performed the autopsy?"

The impact of the question hit Spock like a douche of cold water. There was no easy answer, no real reassurance that he could give.

"All your diagnostic aids reported Mr. Yates dead, Doctor," he said at last. "If you do not believe your instruments, you might as well give up practising medicine."

"Those same diagnostic sensors reported Jim and Brewster dead too, but they weren't."

"The odds on such an occurrence happening once are very high. The chance of the situation repeating itself are incalculable - "

"But it did. Jim - and Brewster. That's two."

"And for it to happen three times... No, Doctor, I am convinced that it could not have occurred three times, even all at once. I am sure in my own mind that Mr. Yates was indeed dead when he was brought aboard."

"Are you, Spock? Are you really? Or are you just being...kind?"

"I would not lie simply for the sake of what you call 'kindness', Doctor. I am convinced that Mr. Yates was dead."

"All right. Then was the autopsy itself necessary?"

"What killed Udo and Yates and left the other two apparently dead?" Spock asked.

"I don't know."

"Was there any way you might have found out?"

"Only by performing an autopsy," McCoy admitted.

Spock looked down at Kirk's relaxed face. "The Captain might be able to shed some light on the matter once he regains consciousness," he suggested.

"If he's capable of coherent thought at all," McCoy said gloomily.

"I believe he will be. Even unconscious and frozen, his mind recognised me and communicated with me. I think it likely that he has escaped permanent injury."

"I hope you're right," McCoy said fervently.

"Let me know as soon as there is any change in his condition. I will be in my quarters."

"Yes, of course." McCoy put aside his depression long enough to register that the Vulcan looked tired. Little wonder... but he was at least going to his quarters - hopefully to rest.

The doctor watched Spock leave. His face resumed the unhappy, haunted expression he had been wearing earlier. Had he killed Yates? He would never know.

Unhappily, he sat down between his two living patients, and waited quietly for them to regain consciousness.



NICE WHILE IT LASTED.... by Caroline Nixon

Two rather morose figures were standing in the transporter room. Just lately, life had lost all its sparkle, unless one counted the purely electronic brand of tinsel and glitter.

The man in the gold shirt heaved a sigh eloquent with patient martyrdom.

"Wonder where Bones has got to, Spock."

"I do not care to speculate, Captain. Recently..."

But the First Officer's words were interrupted by the precipitate arrival of the missing medical officer, young tech. in tow, muttering apologetic excuses about late laundry deliveries.

"No security guards, Jim?" McCoy asked, as they took their positions on the disks. "This is an unexplored planet, after all."

"What's the point, Bones?"

"Yeah, what's the point."

They materialised on flat terrain, the ground beneath their boots resembling an emerald green oriental carpet, intricately patterned with wild flowers in jewel colours. A light, warm breeze rippled the grass and wafted delicious scents to four sets of unappreciative nostrils.

The Enterprise team exchanged uneasy glances.

"So far, so good." Kirk was first to break the wary silence.

"Sure, but the suspense is killing me," said McCoy, carefully pessimistic.

"I too am somewhat apprehensive as to what the script-writers have in store for us today," said Spock, siding for once with his friendly adversary.

"One bright spot," Kirk insisted. "We didn't disintegrate in the transporter beam."

"Illogical, Captain. We are needed for next week's episode."

On overhearing Spock's words, the young tech, who had been standing quietly at a respectful distance from his superiors, suddenly found the courage to speak.

"It's all right for you regulars - sir," he croaked. "But survival rates for small part characters is practically nil."

"Calm yourself, Ensign," Spock rebuked mildly. "At least you are not obliged to respect the same dialogue week after week. If I find myself required to say that word once more," and his voice was thick with distaste, "I shall go into Klee-fiah."

"What word, Spock?" said McCoy, blue eyes wide with innocence.

Black Vulcan eyes glittered dangerously.

But Kirk's optimism refused to be defeated. "At least there's no female for either of us to be involved with, Spock," he grinned, and his First Officer conceded the point solemnly but appreciatively.

McCoy, however, was still not satisfied.

"Yes, Jim," he said complainingly, "but this week it might have been my turn. It's been a long time, you know, since, 'The World Is Hollow'."

Spock had become bored with the conversation, and was moving cautiously about, scanning with his tricorder.

"No intelligent life forms," he announced, "but a few animals and birds are indicated."

"Man-eating-owl-tigers and pterodactyls, I expect," McCoy commented gloomily.

"Hardly, Doctor. They appear more of the order of Terran mice and finches."

"I don't get it," said Kirk, musingly. "No ion storms, no Klingons or irate sub-human tribesmen - fauna harmless, flora non-pernicious - there's got to be a catch somewhere." A sudden suspicion made him take out his communicator to test-call the ship, but Uhura was still opening hailing frequencies beautifully, as usual.

They finally decided to make a cautious survey of the immediate area, sticking together, of course. They had been caught that way too many times before. They passed through a copse of fresh-smelling trees and breasted a rise. Beneath them was silver sand and a sea of liquid jade.

"I don't believe it!" Kirk's voice was husky with emotion. "Look - a beach for me to walk on!"

"Well, what are we waiting for?" grinned Bones delightedly. "Let's get walking," and he started off down the gentle slope.

The sea was lapping gently, spreading its lace over the soft sand, which was scattered with tiny shells, rosy as a baby's fingernails. Kirk bent over to dabble a finger in the water.

"One moment, Captain. The 'water' may in fact be some deadly acid," Spock cautioned. But it was only friendly old H_2O .

Kirk sat down on a rock. "Bones, you and the young ensign here go and check those rock pools for unusual fauna," he directed lazily, finally letting the gentle sun relax his body. "But don't go out of hailing distance."

"Aye, sir."

McCoy and the ensign moved off, disappearing behind the nearby rocks. Spock stared in amazement as his Captain began to remove his boots and socks and roll his trousers up to his knees.

"What are you proposing to do, Captain?" he asked curiously, suppressing an urge to raise an eyebrow. Cliche it may be, but it was after all an almost involuntary thing with him.

"I'm going to paddle, Spock," Kirk answered, and then, seeing the Vulcan did not understand the term, "you would call it 'immersion of the podal extremities in an aqueous medium for recreational purposes'." Two steps from the brink, he paused and looked round, widening his eyes questioningly.

"No, sir. No crustaceans are indicated."

Kirk splashed up and down for a minute or two, a look of quite fatuous bliss on his face.

"Come on in, Spock," he urged. "The water's lovely. Go on, the ebb and flow of the water between your toes boosts the circulation and is conducive to a receptive mental state."

The Vulcan complied, carefully placing boots toes together, socks neatly rolled and tucked inside. He joined his Captain, parading solemnly up and down. Though if he were in a state of fatuous bliss, it wasn't observable on his impassive countenance.

"Feels good, eh, Spock?" Kirk was expanding his chest to maximum capacity, taking in great lungfuls of sea air.

"It is pleasant, Ca-" Kirk shot out an arm to steady his friend, who had slipped on a sly tongue of rubbery sea-weed.

"Hey, perhaps that's it, Spock," laughed Kirk. "You fall in the water and get pneumonia, and Nurse Chapel gets to nurse you and give you plenty of blanket baths!"

Spock's face didn't slip as he answered:

"Please, Captain, we are a family show."

They left the water and strolled up and down the beach for a while, feeling the crunch of powdery sand between their toes, basking in the peace. Two friends in perfect empathy, minds communing without the need for speech. Almost before they remembered to worry about McCoy and the ensign, they were joined by the other two, tricorders full of interesting biological data.

McCoy smirked when he saw the bare feet and rolled up trousers of his superiors. "Going to play sand-pies, Spock?" he taunted.

The Vulcan shook his head, seriously. "Unfortunately, Doctor, I lack the requisite receptacle. You wouldn't happen to have one with you, by any chance?"

Kirk's communicator bleeped.

"Captain, you're five minutes late for progress report. All goin' well down there?"

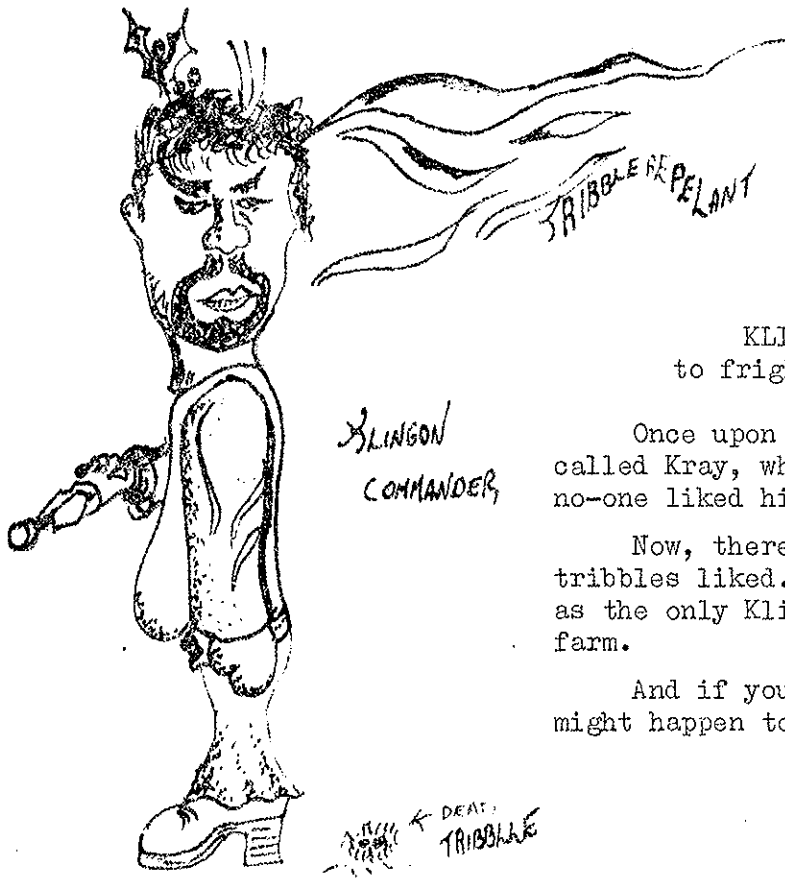
"Couldn't be better, Mr. Scott. We can log this place as well worthy of further investigation. But you had better beam us up now. I have a stack of reports waiting for me," said Kirk, with a singular lack of enthusiasm.

"And I have data to correlate from the nova we observed last week." Spock too sounded strangely reluctant.

"Ah, well, it was nice while it lasted," sighed McCoy, taking a last look round at the tranquil scene before him.

As the transporter whine began, they heard an evil laugh grow, and fill the sky, and a leering voice jeered,

"There's always next week!"



KLINGON FAIRY TALE to frighten good children

Once upon a time, there was a Klingon called Kray, who was kind to everyone. So no-one liked him very much.

Now, there was something about Kray that tribbles liked. So Kray is known to history as the only Klingon who ever kept a tribble farm.

And if you're not bad, the same thing might happen to you!

* * * * *