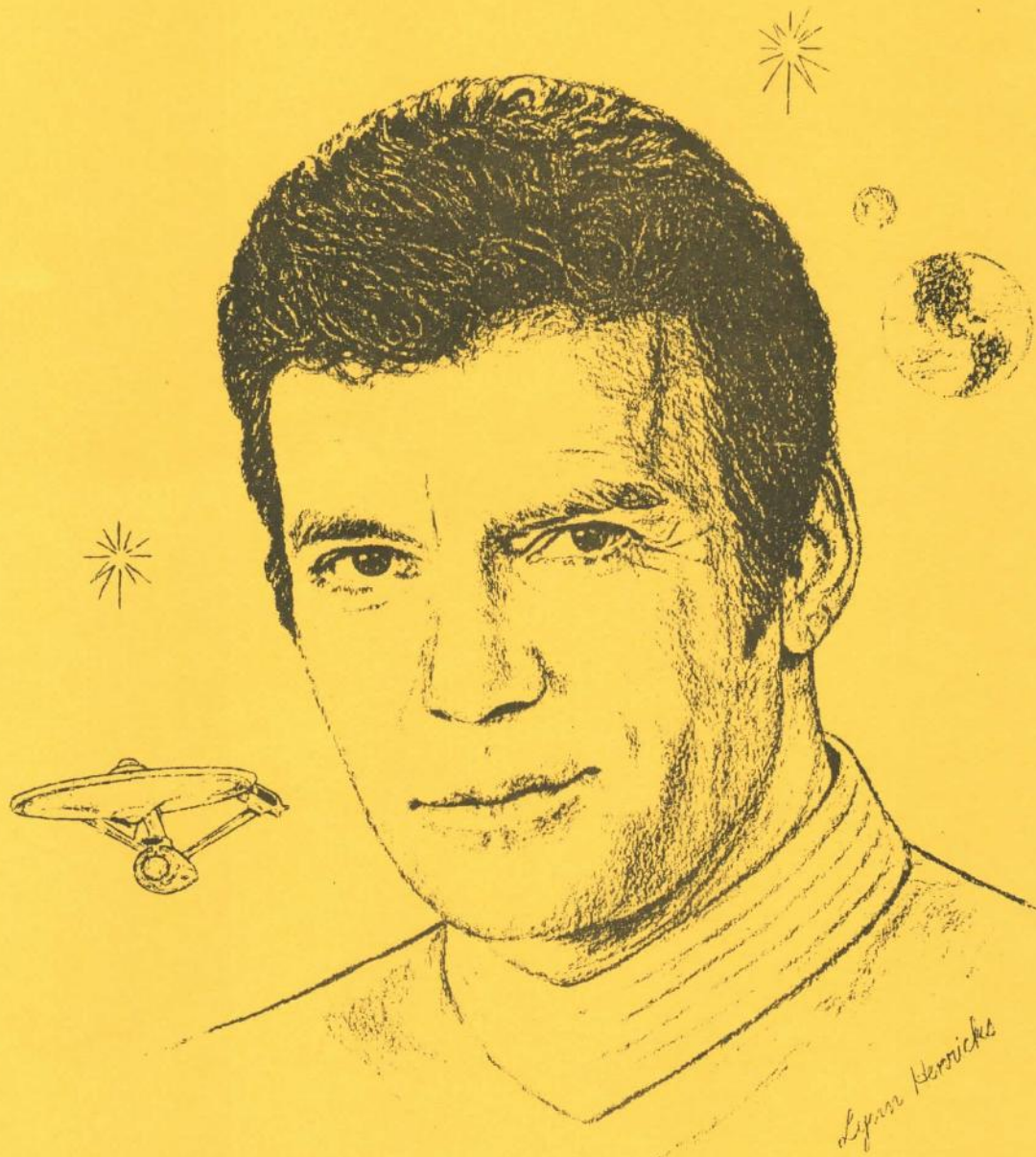


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1D1C LOG 15



a
Star Trek
fanzine

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JMM
2000

TRANSIT GHOST

by

P. Spencer

At the end of the corridor, a door was framed with blood-red light.

Felith H' Mayn' Uhl stopped instantly, her antennae uncurling in fear, attuning themselves to the most distant of frequencies. Her Andorian danger senses set in motion a prickly uneasiness. The light seemed to bleed through the edges of the door to the junior officer's quarters. She knew of all the wide spectrum of races who served aboard the Enterprise, but none who required an environment such as that.

Cautiously, she crossed the polished metal surface of the floor toward it. The black lettering above the security pad read D-51. She felt an icy flush in her stomach and wondered why, then she realised - there were only fifty crew quarters on D deck. Denying her growing fear, she reached out slowly, tapped the door chime on the pad, backed away and waited.

Almost immediately, the door began to creep open at a fraction of the normal speed. A bizarre metallic grating noise filled the air. The red glow had faded, and beyond the opening was a blackness thick as oil. She worryingly tugged at her lower lip. Was this a Human 'practical joke'? If so, it was disturbing her, awakening her warrior's instincts that ordinarily lay slumbering. The noise ceased, and the silence which followed seemed to flow out and wrap itself around her like a cloak. It eroded her patience.

Steeling herself, she strode to the foot of the door and called out. Her voice startled her with its closeness - it was as if she had shouted in a tiny enclosed room. As she waited for a reply, her heartbeat gradually became heavier and more pronounced. Her eyes were wide and alert. Impulsively, she smelled the air, and found it oddly clean and crisp. She took a hesitant step through the opening.

She yelped in surprise as the floor actually yielded to her boot. There was a vague, milky light which gave scant illumination. Staring downward, she could make out a layer of dense, glistening snow. She whirled around - but the entrance had totally vanished.

Suppressing the panic that threatened to surge, she cried out for help. This time her yell spun off across a vast arctic landscape. Above the distant horizon, the bloated orb of a moon, its surface ravaged and seared rock, glared with a pearly incandescence. The sky was like black ash. The featureless plain of frozen snow swept away in all directions. The stillness and silence were absolute, and began to slowly eat away at her spirit, trying to possess her. It was surely the most lonely place she had ever experienced.

As time stretched on, she found she was forced to walk toward the moon to generate warmth and to prevent the desolation from closing in on her. At first her eyes were moist with fatigue and the joints of her exoskeleton felt sluggish, but as she started to feel the bite of cold she became more animated. Her legs pistoned and she pounded her arms back and forth against her sides. Is this Unashaail's punishment? she wondered. The Knowing Force was relentless, like the desert which it inhabited, unforgiving with harsh penalties for failure; and yet, she had not neglected her seasonal worship in the meditation pit, had not become lax in her adherence to the lore of the two Forces. She couldn't believe that such a vista could be created by a lesser Force, however. It bewildered her. Her thoughts ran in unending, pointless circles, slowly and inexorably being absorbed by the chill.

Suddenly she felt the sting of pain across her cheek, and reached up to touch the cold skin. Her fingers came away with a grain of ice. She raised her eyes to the sky, and watched as an immense curtain of

hail began to descend. From the lifelessness, too, a breeze had emerged, gusting irritably. She hugged herself in what seemed like a senseless attempt to engender heat. How long was she going to be in the wasteland, Great Unashaail? Until sunup? For eternity? Or was her spirit trapped in the plane of an evil lesser Force, between states of existence? It seemed that there was no way she could escape this horrifying purgatory.

Without warning her left leg plunged through the snow. She was jerked forward, her arms flailing through the air, and hit the ground with a jarring impact accompanied by pain that flared but died quickly. Allowing herself a moment to gather her awareness, she lifted her head from the ice and gently rubbed the bruise on her jaw. As the hail spattered across her, she was racked with shivers. Eventually she pulled her boot free - and realised that it had been dipped in red Human blood up to her knee.

She scrambled against the ice, climbed unsteadily to her feet, and saw with growing revulsion that more blood was welling up from the puncture made by her leg. The panic took her. Andorian panic was a frenzy of motion, her hands clawing at nothing, her heart hammering against her chest at alarming speed, her eyes rolling as if she were going to collapse. Hindered by the high wind that streamed against her body, she fled. Whereas before the weather had almost been easy-going it was now cruel. The gale strengthened, hurling clouds of hail at her like hundreds of tiny projectiles, striking the exposed skin of her face and hands. Her antennae had curled up against the cold, but were protected by a tough lining of cartilage. She felt as if she was held in syrup, her eyes slits, struggling through the veritable blizzard that had arisen. Tears of effort spilled down her cheeks, and she shrieked her defiance at the sky. She could barely see a few metres in front of her. Under her feet, the ground had become a sheet of wafer-thin ice, blood sloshing horribly beneath the surface. She could break it at any moment and drown. Her thoughts were obliterated by pure instinct, the drive of self-preservation.

She dropped to her knees, exhausted, numbness absorbing the pain of cut skin. She silently pleaded for forgiveness. For a moment, the hail seemed to disperse directly ahead, and the roaring of the wind died a little. Could her prayers have been answered? Hope gave her the energy to raise her head.

It was then that she noticed the humanoid figure standing a few metres in front of her.

Rubbing her swollen eyes, she gratefully gulped in breaths of empty air, glancing around herself. They seemed to be within an unseen dome in which the weather was calm. She now had no doubt that she could not be in a physical place.

The intruder was a Human male, his eyes without pupils and glistening like the ice, staring into the far distance. His skin was a pasty grey, stretched tightly over jutting, angular features. He was bald save for a plume of white hair draped over his shoulder. He was clad in a grey tunic, trousers and boots.

"Help me, please," she said, her voice sounding hoarse and forced.

At first she believed either he hadn't heard or was ignoring her, for he stayed motionless, watching the night. Finally his gaze fell on her. She offered her right arm to help drag her from the ground.

Suddenly his expression turned to one of sheer hate. Grimacing, he bared gleaming teeth, his face filling with fury and pain. She realised then that he had been concealing something behind his back all the time he had been there. Now he brought it out into the dim light. She drew in her breath sharply and snatched back her arm, recognising it as a highly illegal Orion pirate weapon. He gripped a short handle of lightweight black metal. Across its orb-like head were fitted a dozen arched blades, like tiny scythes.

He advanced, thumbing a button on the handle. A tiny, droning noise began to emanate from it as a motor was energised within the orb. The blades slowly spun on a deadly elliptical path. She sagged, the strength long flooded out of her, and cursed herself aloud for failing Unashaail. His shadow pooled about her, and she hoped he would make her death mercifully clean and quick. She couldn't look at his face, so followed the glimmer of the weapon as he raised it above his head, and the blades having picked up speed were now a

whirl of silver.

Before he brought it down across her throat, she screamed.

Felith's eyes flickered open. The pupils expanded to swallow any available light. She felt the comfortable foam of her single bed, and found herself gripping handfuls of silver sheet. The computer sensed that she was awake, and soaked up the darkness of the room with an amber glow kind to her vision.

Her senses were still in turmoil from the nightmare she had experienced, frighteningly vivid, and tried to persuade her that a life-threatening danger was still present despite the banal safety of her surroundings. She was stiff and hot, and tugged the sheet away from her body. Cool air generated by the bed began to evaporate the sweat from her pores.

She leaned over to peer at the datapad on the wall next to her bed, and tiny phosphorescent figures informed her that it was nearly half a standard hour until her shift started. Like all members of her race, she was a very light sleeper, only achieving pure rest during prayer. She always awakened intermittently during the night. But strangely, on this occasion she had slept heavily and without interruption. Perhaps her spirit had needed to flush out evil, its battle represented by the dream.

She was, without doubt, tense. The Enterprise was currently in high orbit around the planet Zeta Cancri IV. It was there that around a decade ago she had endured one of the darker moments in her life - the loss of eight humanoids in a transporter accident. Sudden, freak solar activity had corrupted the signal patterns of five prisoners and three security guards, while they were being transferred to the penal colony on the planet's surface. She had felt helpless and desperate at the console, and there had been nothing she could do to save their lives. They had all been lost in transit.

Today she was to be part of an inspection team consisting of four other officers and herself, representing Starfleet in their tour of the new Daystrom Laboratories complex. Though initial funding had been given years ago, these were the final stages of the agreement for a substantial grant. She knew she would find their projects fascinating, and was looking forward to meeting supervisor Dr. Richard Daystrom, but her enthusiasm was dampened somewhat by the feeling of guilt which gnawed at the back of her mind.

She slid out of bed, naked, and stepped through into the bathroom. The prickly heat was thankfully fading. She glanced at herself in the disc-shaped mirror. Her classical, silky-white hair, marred by a lock of gold, was dishevelled, her face drawn and her cobalt-blue skin slightly pale. She laughed after a long-suffering sigh. Opening the shower doors, she stepped inside. After the panels closed the sonic waves began their work, rippling her flesh and rustling her hair as if it were home to a hundred crawling insects. Sinking back against the wall, she closed her eyes and mulled over her list of questions.

Starfleet's main concern was that the projects, being inherently experimental - if not quite obscure in nature - would have limited practical application. Some of the documentation released by the Daystrom Labs, however, looked very promising. She was particularly intrigued by their proposal for IM, 'Intelligent Memory'. Through a mainly self-governing process, the trilithium-based backing store would selectively give sustaining boosts of energy to desired datafiles. Since files recorded upon IM could never be permanently erased, only reduced in priority, this multiplied the storage capacity of the medium a hundredfold. In one unit of IM, countless terabytes of data were being projected. Felith's duties on board the ship

were supervision of front-end storage and retrieval, which was why she had been picked for the team - she only wished the workings of her own mind were as economical as the machines'. She let herself drift, only to rein attention back in again when images from the nightmare threatened to loom.

Eventually finishing her shower, she dressed and collected the things she needed for the three-day inspection. Team conferences had taken place days before, and the group was to meet promptly in the shuttlecraft bay at the beginning of her shift. Before setting out she ate a small breakfast of flaky honar biscuits from the synthesiser and a glass of nectar. The planet's location was near the border of Tholian territory, and as such considered generally 'need-to-go', but was far enough away from Klingon and Romulan space for the Federation to feel comfortable in assigning high security data to the Labs. It had a single barren satellite, half its own size, and was in the middle of a winter which lasted for many standard years. Obviously, she had conjured an imaginary version of it for her nightmare.

She locked her quarters on the way out, one of the few aboard the Enterprise who did so habitually, as it was frowned upon. She blamed it on her natural Andorian suspiciousness and a nasty burglary of her childhood home back on Andor. It was middle morning ship-time. The illumination was yellow-tinged and bright, and the corridors were busy with crew going about their duties. Her quarters were in the forward section of the primary hull, below the bridge, and the journey to the shuttle bay was a few turbosh shafts away. Stepping into the first elevator, she smoothed her maroon tunic and adjusted her Lieutenant's pin. Nervous, an Andorian? Impossible!

She was the last of the team to arrive in the spacious shuttle foyer. One of her fellow computer supervisors, the Human Tessa Reardon, stepped forward to greet her. She had a youthful, fresh-faced appearance despite her many years in the service, and a moderate spread of auburn hair that caught the light.

"Ah, Felith!" she said in her naturally musical voice. "Eaten any good spiders lately?"

Felith tilted her head characteristically, and smiled back. Reardon was trying to put her at ease in a back-handed way. "They are called J'Hutt, Tessa, and they bear little resemblance to the Terran spiders you speak of."

"Whatever you say, my friend." The Human grasped her arm and lowered her voice. "Wonder what that crackpot Daystrom's really like?"

"Crackpot', Tessa?"

"You know - crazy. Noodle-doodle. Wacko."

Felith laughed, a heavy chuckling sound. "Are you going to behave yourself down there?"

"Me?" Tessa replied innocently. "I'm tact personified!"

Felith glanced over at her other team members. They would be led by Commander Spock. She very much respected, as did they all, the serene Vulcan, and in particular his A-7 computer classification. Felith's was a mere C-11. The remaining two were both Human men, identical twins in fact, with close-cropped chocolate-brown hair and stocky builds. They worked along widely differing lines in the information technology sphere.

The shuttle journey to the planet was short but quite pleasurable as the small craft sank

from space the colour of dark blue ink into the dull, cloud-swollen atmosphere. Since the accident, Starfleet had decided not to take any chances again and forbade the use of the transporter in the Cancri system. Visits to this, the only habitable planet, were scarce in any case. Since the incident Felith had become one of the relative minority who disliked the transporter - not only was she unsettled by the experience, there were also disquieting religious implications in its matter/energy transference method.

Arriving at the shuttle terminal on the planet's surface, she immediately recognised Richard Daystrom and his party of senior staff. He was an imposing presence, tall and lanky, with a short crop of coal-black hair and wide-set eyes. He was wearing a black lab jacket, with a couple of maintenance tools and a stylus poking out of its wide chest pocket. He smiled broadly as Spock approached.

"Greetings, Dr. Daystrom," said the Vulcan. "We have been anticipating the tour with great interest."

Felith watched Daystrom's reaction. Though it wasn't a surprise inspection, the staff of the base had no idea who comprised the five-person team.

"I'm sure that you'll all be impressed by my work," replied the computer scientist, unconsciously leaning forward to offset his height. His voice was a soft baritone. He seemed unaffected by this encounter with one of the officers involved in the disastrous M-5 installation ten years previously. She knew all too well of the incident in which the controversial new 'personality engram' method had been implemented, producing a machine which did not perform in a logical manner. Daystrom had always been at the forefront of this technique, relying on his reputation as a revolutionary to press the method on sceptical Starfleet executives. It had ended in countless deaths, and the doctor had soon after suffered a serious nervous breakdown. However, after a long period of rehabilitation, he had begun new work in earnest in an attempt to prove to the UFP that he was rational again, and that his ideas were feasible. He had suddenly found success with the implementation of a limited 'environment simulator', which combined holographic images with real matter to interact with users. Shortly afterwards, he had founded the Daystrom Laboratories on Zeta Cancri IV. Devoting his time to pure research and starting with a handful of dedicated personnel, he had soon accrued a sizable work force. Since then two years had passed. Though he had never been popular with Galactic Media, in Starfleet's eyes he had finally overcome the tragedy of the M-5.

When her turn came, Felith shook hands lightly with Daystrom and smiled. "Lieutenant Felith. I hold the post of storage and retrieval supervisor on the Enterprise."

"You're an Andorian, aren't you?" he said distractedly. "I haven't seen one of you for years."

She bit back an angry reply and instead forced herself to join her team at the door. She had no doubt he had retained all of his arrogance and thoughtlessness through the rehabilitation. His technical genius was matched only by his inflated pride.

"Now that we've all been introduced," he said loudly, "would you all follow me into the lecture theatre, please."

He led them down a bland corridor, lit from above by glowing bars and carpeted with a deep layer of beige fabric. Holo-paintings hung from the walls at regular intervals. Her gaze lingered on one, which portrayed the blasted surface of an ancient wasteland. Violent winds scooped up yellowish mounds of sand and flung them into the sky, forming clouds through which twin suns glared angrily. For part of what was obviously an attempt to soften the

soulless air of the buildings, it was a curiously harsh choice.

The circular theatre was lined with half-rings of padded white chairs. In the centre of the podium was a multi-purpose computer terminal atop a falsewood bench, behind which was an expansive wallscreen. Daystrom gestured for them all to sit and strode over to the terminal.

Felith took a seat next to Tessa, while the supervisor voice-activated the machine. As the wallscreen came alive, he turned to face his audience and began a short discourse. She had to admit he was a commanding orator. He told a concise and effective description of the Labs' major projects including IM, the psionic transtator, the Mk II environment simulator, the transporter biofilters and the new suite of A1 starship combat programs. Strangely, however, she felt that her initial excitement had dimmed somewhat, diluted by the harrowing nightmare... and something else. Her uneasiness of that morning had subtly returned to her, and she couldn't quite explain why. The simplest answer would be residual guilt from the accident, but somehow that seemed too dismissive. It was as if the Human from the dream was still with her - undetectable to all but her own subconscious. Involuntarily, she glanced around the theatre. Daystrom appeared to have the other team members' complete attention. Then why was she probing the shadows like a vulnerable, inviting prey?

Gradually the talk drew to a close, and the last of the wallscreen images melted away.

"Now," he said, "we'll begin the tour."

As they all filed out of the chamber, Reardon nudged her. "Just love to practise imploding a few K't'inga class cruisers, huh?" Felith stared at her blankly. "The version 3.1 battle software...? Forget it. Felith, what's wrong with you today?"

The Andorian found herself unable to reveal her fears. "I am fine."

"Fine?" Reardon prodded her chest. "You're acting like someone's hunting you."

Felith stopped, catching her breath. That was exactly how she felt. "As you said, Tessa, I've been eating too many spiders."

But the Human refused to make light of the situation. "I'm sorry, but you're not your sturdy, disciplined self."

"Please do not provoke me, Tessa."

Reardon shrugged. "Hey, don't get physical."

Felith frowned as her friend walked on ahead, offended by her stiff tone. She had been unnecessarily harsh, but the Human seemed to be getting close to a truth she apparently felt she had to protect. The nightmare had affected her deeper than she had imagined. She would endure it for the tour, try to calm herself, then go for counselling once back on board the ship.

Their first stop was a large lab partitioned off down the middle by a sheet of transparent aluminium. Beyond the sheet was a tightly-controlled environment filled with a weak ultra-violet light. Atop a desk in the centre was an array of sensors like bristling needles, surrounding a small black cube. An operations bench was attached to the partition with a row of mobile chairs. A small group of technicians were already present, their black tunics blending them into the background like shadows. One of them, a dark-haired Terran Oriental, stepped forward. His smile went some way toward softening his rough, chiselled features, and his eyes were a vibrant blue.

"This is one of our project administrators, Dr. de la Pena," announced Daystrom. "If you will continue, Doctor..."

De la Pena signalled to one of the technicians, a male Caitan with crimson and gold fur. The Caitan took a seat at the ops bench, his fingers moving swiftly over the pattern of colour-coded keys. The bench filled with bright text. He looked up to nod at the administrator.

"This is the lab in which we are testing the new psionic transtator," said de la Pena, his voice crisp and with little inflection. "You've all undoubtedly used the mental impulse pad. It's a sound idea for a peripheral, but unfortunately has a poor response time in practice. The receptors simply aren't sensitive enough.

"Not only have we vastly improved the psionic reception, we have installed a small number of nodes in the current standard version transtator."

He paused, glancing at each of the team as a murmur rippled through them. This had been listed as a possibility on the Labs' documentation, but never a verified fact. *Could they have been withholding information for the 'right time and place'?* Felith wondered wryly.

"I would like to ask for two volunteers to help demonstrate the properties of this new model - a psionically-talented person, and a non-psionic control."

This could be the very thing to draw her thoughts away from the dream, to almost literally 'take her mind off it', as the Humans said. She stepped forward, smiling despite herself. "I'm Lt. Felith. The Andorians are among the least psionically-gifted in the Galaxy."

"And the other?" asked the administrator.

"I believe I am the logical choice."

"Thank you," said de la Pena as Spock joined Felith, and addressed the seated Caitan. "Activate the wallscreen."

A square section of black wall behind them suddenly pulsed white, and a picture formed across the surface. It was a computer simulation of a statistical model, an area of wooden pins, lined at the bottom with a series of ten pockets. A metal ball was suspended above the middle point of the top row of pins.

"This program," said the administrator, "is driven by a CPU based on the psionic transtator. When it begins its run, each of a number of metal balls will travel through the pins on a random path until they drop into one of the pockets below. In an ordinary situation, the resulting pattern of balls would be statistically average. However, I would like Mr. Spock to use a light telepathic influence on the path of each ball. You may start when ready, Mr. Spock."

Felith watched as Spock's already impassive features imperceptibly became more empty of expression. She knew the Vulcans didn't ordinarily like to flaunt their naturally strong psionic ability, but this required the bare minimum of effort and she was sure he had performed a number of such exercises before.

Sure enough, only a few seconds had passed before the ball dropped neatly into the model and was propelled along a path inclined to the left. A quiet clacking of metal-on-wood could be heard as it struck various pins. It was quickly deposited in a pocket marked number 1, the one furthest to the left. Instantly, another ball appeared at the original position, and it

too began its obviously influenced descent.

When all the balls had been dealt with, every single one occupied pocket 1. Felith heard Tessa whistle softly behind her.

De la Pena turned to her. "If you will, Lieutenant?"

The pockets were cleaned of balls as Felith laughed gently. "I wouldn't know where to start, Doctor."

"Just relax your mind, let your attention wander toward the model, and focus on the path of a ball. The resultant pattern should be statistically average."

She gave a mental shrug and deliberately looked away from the wallscreen. Drawing in a breath, she called on images of the vast mountain ranges of her planet - the rising dust, sunlight gleaming off the crags, the quality of light at sundown like orange syrup. It relaxed her. She had once run from home, lost among the jagged peaks, not weeping from fear but hot and furious at her own stupidity. Through sheer doggedness she had found her way back. It was then that she learned that there was great strength in anger.

She realised the ball had already dropped into pocket number 4, and a second was on its way. She painted the ball's trajectory through the pins inside her head. At first it seemed to have a fixed goal, heading for one of the left-middle pockets, and tried to intensify her concentration. After that failure, she sensed that no effort was required for the task, but calmness. The third ball appeared and fell.

At once, she felt a horrible prickling in the flesh of her neck, spreading up into her brain and down her spine. Chillingly, she was convinced that she was going to be cut down from behind.

She whirled. Save for Spock, the team's expressions turned to surprise as she urgently searched the shadows. Dread again touched her heart. She realised then that the technicians and Enterprise Officers weren't looking at her, but at the screen.

The balls were flashing through the pins at a rapidly accelerating rate, the noise turning to a fast clattering.

"What's happening?" snapped the administrator in bewilderment. "L'rann, program diagnostic!"

The Caitan scanned the screens of the ops bench and shot him an astonished look. "The transtator is being bombarded with powerful psionic waves from another source!"

"You mean, neither Lt. Felith or Commander Spock?"

"No, Doctor," he said, his voice becoming high-pitched and trilling *with anxiety*. "No one in this immediate area."

"Then who...?" De la Pena murmured. The program was being looped over and over, the balls now travelling so fast they were solid lines of silver. Felith's throat went dry, her eyes slowly widening.

Suddenly she caught a glimpse of something beyond the partition.

Tearing her gaze from the model, she stared through into the controlled environment. There were two eyes, glistening like ice, barely visible in the pockets of shadow permitted by the UV light. They were watching her. They bored into her brain as surely as metal drills.

"No..." she muttered, a low growl. "No!"

"Lt. Felith?"

It was Spock's voice, sharp and concerned. She took a pace back, ignoring him, and pressed against the wall. She raised her arm shakily, pointing to the transtator lab.

"Terminate the program," said de la Pena, his voice distant, as if he were speaking from the end of a long hallway. Felith found herself frozen, every fibre of her body paralysed with terror. She let the shock wash through her, and over her, electrifying in its intensity. Her nightmare was here. It had the power to defy reality.

A name floated up from the depths of her subconscious.

"Jacob!" she gasped, and fell into an ocean of blackness.

As soon as she awakened, Felith could sense the threatening atmosphere. The room seemed unnaturally still. She felt claustrophobic despite the spacious layout. Colours were deeper, clarity of vision was sharper, every sound instantly noticeable - every symptom of heightened awareness.

She was in a simple medical bay of some sort, in a comfortable bed fitted with a Diagnostic Display Unit. The pulse of her heartbeat was monitored by the cardiographic programs. She found the fast, steady sliver of brightness that crossed the screen somehow reassuring. Something told her she was in no immediate danger, but that it was on its way, like a dark onrushing tide.

Alerted by the medical computer, the Doctor quickly arrived and after informing her she'd collapsed from shock and was in the Labs' medical centre, left to notify Spock and Daystrom. She allowed herself to relax for a moment, the colour of her skin turning from pastel grey to grades of dark blue once more. They entered the room shortly afterwards, the supervisor wearing a frown and seeming nervous compared to the Vulcan's air of calmness. She didn't wait for the inevitable questions about her health and state of mind.

"What d'you think happened, gentlemen?"

Their hesitation was significant. At last Spock spoke, his voice thoughtful. "After you collapsed, Lt. Felith, the burst of psionic activity ceased. In the hour since that time, however, Dr. Daystrom's sensors have detected a low-level background of psychic vibration. We cannot pinpoint the source, as it envelopes the base like a cloud."

"The tour is off, I assume."

Spock nodded. "The other members of the inspection team have been transported back to the Enterprise. I am in command of a new party which includes Science Officers in addition to a small number of Security Guards."

Daystrom's lips thinned, as if he was frustrated by the interruption in his research.

"And I'm still here." She let the statement linger.

"Yes," said Spock. "I believe you are the focussing element in this disturbance."

"You mean I'm the cause?"

"Not necessarily." He steepled his fingers in thought. "Why did you say the name 'Jacob' prior to your collapse?"

For an instant the name seemed familiar, but as soon as she concentrated, it had gone. Only a frustrating blankness remained. "I'm afraid I don't know why. It feels like I once knew, but have now forgotten."

"Then what made you faint?" Daystrom said.

She paused, going over the fragmented memories she had of the incident. "I remember the computer simulation... and the eyes."

"Eyes?" Spock prompted her.

She began nervously tugging at her lower lip. "I saw two eyes staring at me from inside the controlled environment. Me, alone. They were like ice."

The more she remembered, the more she became afraid. Beneath the sheet, she fisted her hands to stop them from shaking.

"No one else saw these eyes you speak of," said Daystrom irritably. The Vulcan silenced him with a frosty look.

She leaned back against the padding. "What's our next step?"

"We will be conducting an investigation," said Spock, "aided by Dr. Daystrom and his staff. The Enterprise will remain in orbit during this time. If there are any psionic occurrences you are to report immediately to me."

"Of course, Commander," said Felith. They rose to leave. "Commander Spock... what really happened in the lab?"

"I do not know, Lieutenant."

Dr. Daystrom was not in a very pleasant mood.

This was undoubtedly the most disturbing thing that had happened to him for years. Ever since he'd founded his Labs on Cancri IV, he'd expected failure, often experiencing uneasiness and loss of confidence. Then projects got off the ground, personnel began to drift in, and over the months he developed a quite excellent upward success curve. Those negative feelings had no choice but to dissipate in the face of such encouragement. He knew he was the driving force behind his Labs - he inspired his scientists, impressed the tight-fisted Federation executives. It was almost like the old times when he'd been a young genius, always in the public eye, producing breakthrough after breakthrough, jeered at by his rivals but letting his work speak for itself. After duotronics, he'd even once been called 'the father of modern computing'. Now everything was proceeding with a smoothness that never failed to surprise

him.

That was why he felt jittery and impatient. Those old emotions were being dredged up from the sea bed of his mind. Not only did the interruption have to happen at the time of the inspection team's visit, disrupting his activities and those of his staff, it was also an unexplained mystery involving that elusive science psionics. A breakdown in the main computer, the Prime, he could deal with - something rational, at least. This was simply annoying. Unheard of.

Heading toward central ops, he noticed a figure kneeling before the wall, holding a metallic object which he recognised as an engineering tool used for major power couplings. The stranger was about to use it on a large mating socket in the wall.

"What are you doing?" Daystrom called out sharply.

The figure ignored him, and as he grew closer he realised it was a Human wearing an old-style, bright red Starfleet uniform. His brow furrowed in puzzlement. What was this, a fancy dress party? The man applied the triple-pointed instrument to the socket.

Suddenly there was a dazzling burst of light, as powerful as the glare from Cancri's suns. It condensed into a beam and cut easily into the man, vaporising him in an instant. Daystrom's hand flew across his eyes and he smelled an ugly metallic odour.

The beam was still present, a tube of yellow fire now connected to the socket. Daystrom knew exactly what it was. His mind went completely numb, as if a layer of ice had grown across it. It had found him. The thing that had, for a time, plagued him, eaten away at the core of his soul. It had come for him. He stepped forward, staring ahead into the shadow, moving with a chilling calmness.

As he walked into the dense blackness, unfamiliar sounds at the edge of hearing began to become more defined. There was the faint but steady vibration of a ship's engines, voices in nervous conversation... and something else - the audible output of a computer, shrill bleeps and quiet chimes.

The shadows unfolded like a billowing cloak, allowing him to cross into the domain of his nightmare. He found himself in the large, darkened engineering core of a Constitution-class Starship, with its grilled panels, banks of red-metal operations desks and monitoring stations. The beam which had killed the engineer was a power flux, linked between the socket and a fat block of dark metal near the far wall. Daystrom made his way toward it. He felt lightheaded, uncaring, his limbs almost floating as if gravity was below Earth norm. The air was thick and cloying.

As he approached it the M-5 unit seemed to become bloated, and he tasted bile. He reached out and traced a finger across its black surface, experimentally. Then he snatched it back, seared, as the metal's temperature abruptly soared. Slowly he looked down at his finger where the skin had been burned raw.

He circled the unit like a cautious animal. The upward-facing ops panel consisted of an array of old-style controls and a small display disc, where patterns of colour flowed back and forth, a visual representation of its processing. The machine had self-sustaining defence capabilities which included an energy shield that was currently inactive. He took his old place at the machine's console and spent a few moments gazing at the displays. He felt nothing - or, rather, a hollowness where part of his mind had been somehow deadened. For some years the Multitronic Unit series had encompassed his life. He had become bonded to the machine,

acting as its guide and teacher - its father - finally seeing the pure satisfaction of the first successful dry runs. That bond had been abruptly severed when his computer had been the instrument of murder and destruction on a terrifying scale.

Painful memories of that time cut into his brain and lodged there, shards of glass. Images assailed him - the near-pleading voice of Commodore Wesley, his face pale with shock and glistening with perspiration; Kirk furiously spelling out to him the deaths caused by the M-5, trying desperately to get a handle on the situation; the childish glee in his own voice as he callously laughed over the destruction, and the horror he secretly felt that he could do such a thing.

The M-5 was awakening. Luminescent red blood ran down its sides, bubbling up from cracks that were appearing in its surface. The disc patterns turned green and crimson with insane anger. The shield crackled into existence, a transparent dome, faintly distorting the air like heat waves. A loud droning sound began to fill the entire engineering level.

"M-5 tie-in," Daystrom yelled.

"M-5," responded the computer. Its voice was as before, but heavier, more rasping.

"Do you know me?"

"M-5. Daystrom, Richard. Originator of duotronic systems. Father of modern computing. Murderer of sixteen hundred men and women."

Daystrom sagged back against the wall, guilt pouring into his mind. "A mistake. It was all a mistake."

The unit wrenched itself out of the floor, uprooting cables and wiring and sending out arcs of energy that expended themselves across the shield dome. The buzzing noise was now deafening.

"I didn't kill them," he panted. "You did. Who am I?"

"M-5. I am you."

It advanced upon him, dripping blood that was boiling in the contained heat. The display disc was a single eye, filmed with silver ice and glaring in its intensity. It used the short metal columns which previously connected it to the floor as legs, walking jerkily forward, stomping the floor and punching through to leave square-shaped prints. With each step his heart hammered faster, an inner scream building in his throat.

"M-5," he said, his voice strangled, "I command you to stop."

Its shield was cleared. Blue-white forks of energy clawed outward, melting his flesh and face. The unit barrelled through him, the unstoppable metal structure effortlessly crushing his body into the wall.

An instant later, it was gone.

Daystrom found himself hunched up against the wall of the Labs' corridor, shaking uncontrollably, his skin grey.

In the medical bay, Felith lurched bolt upright.

She had been attempting to rest, letting the strength return to her body, soaking up the fear and dread with calming relaxation techniques, having refused a sedative. Piercing anxiety had prevented her from falling asleep, though in any case she dared not lest the presence reappear. The time lengthened toward a standard hour. The place seemed peaceful, but she knew that she need only reach out with her mind to touch the cloud of disembodied force that she could sense, despite her lack of psychic ability.

And then, half-dozing, she had felt that terrible gaze on her.

She forced herself not to look up. There was an Enterprise guard posted outside the door, she knew, who could be alerted at any time by a voice command to the comm-panel. Through her naturally excellent peripheral vision she noticed the diagnostic computer tracking the sudden increase of tension in her body, undoubtedly alerting the Doctor in her adjacent office. She had the unshakable feeling, however, that they could do nothing to help her if they tried, that she was isolated and helpless among friends.

She swept back the sheet and swung her legs off the bed. For a moment, she froze, moaning as a wave of dizziness came and passed. She took a step forward, arching her back to allow the joints of her exoskeleton to lock into place. Despite her fear, she could at least make herself ready. She allowed herself to search the bay. Aside from a variety of beds, sensing devices and instruments, it was empty. The light was total, so no eyes could stare at her from shadows. And yet, she knew he - Jacob - was there.

"Where are you...?" she murmured softly, trying to focus in on the location of the presence.

Then she knew.

Her back was itching, goosebumps rising in her flesh and her antennae stiffening. A humanoid shadow was cast under her feet, stretching out toward the door, impossibly tall. In one hand was the black shape of the Orion saw-axe from her dream.

"Guard!" Felith screamed, just before a large, coarse hand covered with black tattoos pressed over her mouth and nose. Her yell turned to a muffled shriek. She watched with horror as the thing slowly raised its saw-axe, its heavy buzzing filling the air, gleaming brightly as the blades spun.

Before she could act, both the Doctor and the Security Guard entered the bay. Almost immediately, the Guard's eyes bulged in shock. He fainted, dropping his phaser, clawing at his throat as he fell as if to wrench away an invisible attacker. The Doctor held up her hands, warding off evil. Her movements painfully slow, fighting against unseen pressure, she retrieved the weapon from the floor. Paling with terror, she fired clumsily, the muzzle spitting a bright orange stun beam which dissipated harmlessly against the wall. Then she too collapsed, her eyes rolling back into her skull.

Gratefully letting animal instinct wash through her, Felith slammed her elbow into Jacob's stomach. Though it was like hitting a solid rock face, she heard him cry out with pain - a distant, tortured howling sound. The instant he released her, she jerked out of his way and sprinted toward the door. It was all happening too quickly for her mind to absorb.

Out in the corridor, she found it empty and silent. She realised with frustration she had no idea where she was. Penschraail, give her strength!

Then he formed: standing at one end of the passage, his eyes glittering and the rest of his body vague smudges of blue and white in the shape of a man. The saw-axe head was a slash of silver.

Whirling to face him, the anger boiling up from inside, she spat a curse in the crudest level of her own tongue.

As an answer, he began to metamorphose, his head expanding, lips stretching back to allow teeth to grow into white spears, tongue becoming black and bloated like a slug, the flesh of his abdomen merging with his legs to flow outward and fill the breadth of the corridor. It was as if he were a gigantic serpent with a grotesquely Human face. He wriggled forward, reaching for her with pathetically useless stump-like limbs.

Screaming her denial, she swung around and fled in the opposite direction, conscious of only one ultimate goal - to escape. Pure instinct seized her, driving her on, the corridor stretching on endlessly, a ribbon of metal beneath her feet. Doors flashed past, numbered meaninglessly, offering no way out. Panting with effort, she tilted her head against her shoulder, listening intently. Jacob was behind her. Death was behind her. She could hear disgusting swilling of his blood fluids and the rough, brushing sound of his flesh being dragged along the floor, like a flurry of desert sand against metal.

Nearing a two-way junction, she suddenly tripped over her own feet and was sent sprawling. She hit the floor badly and felt a hot, slicing pain brand itself across her tongue as her jaw slammed it into her teeth. Blood began to pulse down her chin. What little resolve she had possessed now died. It was over. She couldn't run, could never escape. The weight of dread was almost crushing her spirit. On pure physical terms she was enduring - but it was as if her mind was being sucked away from within, every private hell intruding into reality instead of being safely caged in her subconscious. Why was this happening? Why was she being relentlessly pursued? Who was Jacob, the creature who was so powerful, so untiringly furious toward her? If this was a punishment from Unashaail, then let it take her. She squeezed her eyes shut and waited, her tongue swelling in her mouth, her arms twisted under her chest.

It was then that she realised the air around her had changed.

Beyond the sharp, metallic taste of blood, she could actually sense the flavour of the spices of her homeworld. She smelled the stewed meat of the giant lumbering Sl'hoar. Inquisitiveness began to entice her thoughts away from Jacob. She realised she could feel warmth on her body. Gingerly extricating her arms, she opened her eyes a little. A band of dusky red split the darkness. Mystified, she rolled over onto her back, and opened them the rest of the way.

She found herself staring up at the desert sky of Andor. She could hear the sounds of a nearby settlement - gravelly voices of the elders and piping voices of young ones, the hissing of ground vehicles as their anti-grav units churned the hot sand; the clacking of mechanics and the distant wailing of the airborne Black Travellers.

Felith climbed to her feet, aching and bruised, but mentally strong once more. She couldn't quite recall what she had been doing on the ground - beyond that point was a blurring uncertainty that frightened her. The easiest path was to avoid that area of her memory. She had no idea how she had arrived there, but that didn't particularly concern her.

The home of her childhood lay ahead of her, a small town named after the elder Mulinz who had bravely led the most recent Water War despite overwhelming odds. It consisted of a rigidly-patterned web of streets, dwellings complex layers of brick panelled with solar energy collectors. A dust-covered road led up to

the loosely-patrolled town perimeter. She began to approach it.

It was an unusually cool evening, winds blowing in from the south like unwanted intruders. The light was the rich crimson of dusk, scattered by specks of sand driven by the wind. The sun was just above the buildings, behind the stone tower of the Watchers, like a bowl filled with liquid gold. Veils of reddening cloud seemed to be drawn toward it. As she entered Mulinz, a sleek vehicle sped past like a giant metal projectile, its surface gleaming. A cloaked Watcher eyed her curiously, his features gaunt and ill-looking, his hair heavily streaked with grey. She turned to hold his gaze as custom required, since Watchers were supposedly able to sense and evaluate guilt in such an exchange.

Perhaps her family were home - hewn from ancient stone, their dwelling was unique, its ceilings and walls elaborately painted, its multi-floored structure beautifully untamed. She would enjoy sleeping in her old chamber and gazing at her town from the tiled roof. It was at the opposing end of Mulinz, but it would be a pleasing walk. She felt as if she belonged there, and yet, that she was a stranger. She put the conflict aside.

She made to pass a group of little ones, scuffling amongst themselves, but one of the oldest noticed her and left his friends to run clumsily forward. The boy had a naturally defiant expression, his jaw jutting outward, his hair chalk-white. He was wearing a magenta-coloured robe patterned with red circles.

She smiled down at him. "What do you want, child?"

He grasped the fabric of her cloak and tried to pull her closer.

"There's a stranger here!" he said, his voice shrill with anxiety and excitement.

She frowned, glancing around. "Where?"

"Over there!" he said, pointing toward a dark corner, under an arch that led to a narrow alley. Sure enough, a tall figure lay crumpled in the shadows. She found something odd about him - then realised. He had no antennae. An otherworlder.

She patted the boy's head affectionately and gently pushed him on. "Go along to your friends, now."

As the child dashed away, all his concern lifted, she strode confidently across the road and toward the brick arch lettered with white. Approaching, she saw that the otherworlder was a Human male, his knees pulled up to his chest and his head drooping. He was wearing a black tunic that she found strangely familiar.

"Do you need counsel, Human?" she called out crisply.

At once he stared up at her, his eyes wild, and Felith wondered if he was insane or ill. She crossed under the arch and into shadow.

"What is troubling you?" she said, this time her voice soft and uncertain. Did she know this Human? It was baffling. "Are you called... Daystrom?"

"Fel - Felith," he mumbled, low and incoherent. "Felith. Andorian."

"Ubushaail's influence," she breathed. "I do know you!"

"The M-5 unit is here," he said. "I killed them all!"

She took a pace backward. The blurred part of her memory was beginning to sharpen in definition, releasing a truth she didn't want to know.

"I created it," Daystrom said, growing louder, "therefore I am responsible."

She spun. Beyond the clouds of dust, the sky was turning a metallic grey. The light was rapidly losing its reddish tint, becoming more plain and artificial every moment. In the main street, people were aging, their hair falling out in clumps, their wrinkled skin stretching tighter over bone, their eyes and cheeks sinking, their bodies becoming skeletal forms. Sounds of activity melted to nothing.

Buildings crumbled and decayed, panels lacing with cracks and smashing, foundations exploding outward at accelerating speed, as if time itself were being carelessly toyed with. Winds suddenly roared, sweeping back the sand from the stone, demolishing the roads into rubble. The skeletons that littered the town dissolved into white powder.

"This is illusion!" she screamed. "Unreal!"

The arch began to disintegrate and threatened to collapse on them both. She yelled at Daystrom to run, her voice raw with anger. When he failed to shift, she grabbed his arms in an attempt to bodily drag him away. But it was too late.

The entire structure fell apart, spraying dust and fragments. She threw her arms up over her head in a uselessly protective gesture. But instead of falling, the jagged pieces ascended toward the sky.

The remains of the road and dwellings joined them, sucked into a vortex of sand, brick and stone. As she looked up, she felt jolted with shock. A black, pulsating maw had grown in the sky, and the twisting tunnel was sucked toward it. Through all the destruction, she and Daystrom were left utterly untouched. Somehow flying masonry avoided them, whirls of dust kept away from their eyes. The whole process barely took a standard minute. The desert became part of something else; a solid wall of metal, its surface smooth grey. It was as if she were witnessing a holocaust on her planet.

Though its departure had been subtle and slow, the corridor was back upon her with a suddenness that jarred her grip on reality. She felt as if all things she had ever known were meaningless, that the so-called real world could be dismissed and recalled in an instant.

She sagged against the wall, her head cupped in her hands, shaking and weak. The pain in her tongue returned, but she had stopped bleeding. She tasted salty perspiration. Eventually she lowered her hands, and began methodically to probe every aspect of her surroundings. She had to be totally certain that this too was not a fiction. The first thing she noticed was Daystrom, still kneeling down, weeping silently. Blood pulsed from his palms where his fingernails had dug in. He had obviously suffered another breakdown, no doubt instigated by Jacob. *Like the Doctor and the Guard*, she realised. They had all been incapacitated for a reason. Also, a glance at the labels on the doors were enough to tell her that she was in a different section of the Labs from where she had fallen. The corridor was wider but shorter, and ended at a door marked 'vehicle stores'.

She went over her memory of the illusion while she had the chance. It was just like the nightmare she had experienced - vivid, still fresh, painful to re-live; colours almost luminescent, the voice of the child who had spoken to her oh, so clear. She could even still remember the gritty scent of the spices. It felt like any strong dream, pieced together from images, feelings and memories, but somehow enhanced to become more and more lifelike - overpoweringly so, in fact. In the illusionary Mulinz, she had intended to walk to her mother's home. Obviously, the steps she had taken there had not been completely imaginary. While she was crossing through the town, in reality she had been walking through the base, toward some unknown destination. And then came the appearance of Daystrom - a piece of reality intruding on fantasy, popping the bubble in result. So she was being led somewhere, or rather forced. And all those who stood in her way were dealt with. *Jacob's powers*, she decided, *lie only*

in influencing the mind, the inner self. His physical presence was non-existent.

The crawling sensation of her flesh suddenly returned. She could hear the laboured breathing, the heavy footfalls. The time had come to test both her theory and her resolve. As Jacob turned the corner of the corridor, she stood her ground.

But it wasn't Jacob who confronted her.

It was a horror from her early childhood.

An Andorian, as tall as the ceiling, strode inexorably toward her. She remembered him with painful clarity. He had invaded their home in Mulinz one night, his body pumped full with illegal narcotics, driving him into an animalistic state. He had begun smashing the place with his bare fists when her father and her eldest brother retaliated. He had taken a dagger from his robe and stabbed her father in the face.

As her father lay dying, he had brutally slammed her brother into the wall, and advanced upon her. While his expression had been impassive through the murder and destruction, only when their eyes met did it turn to a nauseating grin. She had cowered, tears streaming down her cheeks, shaking, waiting for death. Then her mother, Hanith, shot him in the head with their only weapon, a hand disrupter.

Now he was here, alive again. He was grinning, greenish foam dripping from his mouth, brandishing the dagger, its serrated edge glittering. He was going to do to her what he did to her father. His eyes were not dark with evil, but radiating a cruel brightness.

Feeling the shock like a blow to the stomach, she spun and leapt toward the door at the end of the passage. She became a child once more, helpless and terrified - only this time Hanith was not here to save her. As she reached the door, it parted and she dived through, just before the horror's arms swiped at her shoulders.

Landing heavily on the other side, she jumped to her feet without stopping to draw a breath. The chamber was occupied by a single SnoKat and a group of smaller sleds. In the far wall was a large exit door. She forced herself to stop. She had not tested her theory! However, though she couldn't be physically harmed, it was quite possible she could be driven insane by Jacob. A refuge was needed, someplace to which his power couldn't be extended. Perhaps a temporary respite would be provided by travelling into the wintry landscape outside the buildings. Spock had stated that the psionic force enveloped the base only, after all.

Searching through lockers, she found and hastily pulled on harsh weather gear - a self-heating jacket and padded white undershirt with thickly-lined trousers. The SnoKat was a silver-white, snub-nosed shape of metal squatting on anti-grav runners. Finding it unlocked, she climbed inside.

She had been trained in the use of ground vehicles, but was out of practice, so was depending on the auto-driver to guide her most of the way. Through the wide, transparent aluminium viewport, she could see the doors directly ahead, promising freedom. The guidance board boasted an array of controls, a third of which were totally unfamiliar to her. Opposite it were twin, heavily padded black chairs. Toward the rear of the Kat was an empty storage section.

She took the driver's seat and opened the power feed circuit. Behind the grooved control stick, a set of display screens began to list messages. The thrumming of the engines built toward a steady whine. At last she felt hopeful, that she had accomplished a minor triumph,

and a smile was difficult to suppress.

"Auto-driver on," she said clearly.

Answering, the Kat became buoyant on the anti-grav field, the chamber through the viewport dipping slightly. External visuals, each at an opposing ninety degree angle, appeared in front of her. The computer accessed the doors and they hissed slowly open. The light seeped through, pure and day-bright, accompanied by a flurry of snowflakes driven by heavy gusts of wind. Like Vulcans, Andorians were unaccustomed to freezing climates like this, and Felith was no exception. She was enduring and resilient, but still hoped fervently that she wouldn't have to leave the safety and warmth of the vehicle. Snow would unsettle and damage her.

The Kat eased into motion, through the opening, and as that automatically closed, glided gently into Zeta Cancri IV's icy vista.

For a few moments her view was obscured by a cloud of snow and hail, bouncing harmlessly off the port or dissolving into liquid when melted by the heating system. She had no idea where she was going. In her research she had gone briefly over the history of the world, but not of its geography, nor of the nature of the Labs' immediate surroundings. However, she still experienced a 'mental twinge' of sorts, a warning that Jacob was present. She tried to avoid the thought that there was a possibility of his following her. The wind changed direction, and the snowfall was snatched away from the port.

The sky was like a vast wall of dull, grey rock. Blue-white fork lightning pulsed occasionally from the clouds, seeking her. Beneath it were the southern hills, huge white humps layered with frosted, snow-covered shells. Hidden within them were clusters of natural-growing vegetation. During the summer, the hard, fibrous shells would flake quickly away under the heat, allowing the foliage to spread freely into bristling towers of greenery. She remembered the holos of this beautiful place. However, she had no time now for daydreaming. She would make for the edge of the shell forest, and rest there to give her some breathing room.

Reaching for one of the controls, her hand plunged through and into a bank of blue flesh.

She screamed, wrenching it out, blood splattering from her fingers and across the viewport. The entire guidance board was transforming. A coating of flesh grew over the metal, veins and arteries popping up from under the surface, rhythmically pulsing. Under the grip of fury, she seized a handful of it. It felt horribly warm and alive. She yanked with all her strength, and with a sucking, tearing sound it came away. The steaming ropes of intestines began to slide out into the light.

Her jaw dropping with shock, she let go, and prepared to flee into the snow.

Then she stopped.

A calmness rushed through her body, and all her muscles relaxed.

"Unreal," she said softly, and repeated it over and over, like a chant. She closed her eyes. "Unreal. Unreal."

When at last she looked again, all was as it should be.

Her theory seemed to be correct. She had defeated Jacob's influence on her mind. She would not allow herself to be controlled. Her eyes drawn to the nearby forest, her mouth thinned into a grim smile and she ordered the auto-driver to continue.

A quarter of a standard hour later, Felith frowned and put the Kat on suspension mode. The vehicle had travelled smoothly up the slope of one of the larger hills, and was nearing the top. Ahead was a domain of upland moor fronted by the alien-looking forest. The instruments had just registered an impact from under the belly of the SnoKat, and she had felt the walls briefly shake. There had, at least, been no damage - possibly it was due to a jagged rock piercing the antigrav field. Feeling familiar enough with the controls and regaining in confidence, she navigated the final part of the rise, avoiding rocky patches buried under thick snow. The Kat was at last urged over the crest of the hill and onto flatter land.

Suddenly, there was a small explosion of rock and ice from directly in front of the vehicle, sending a gushing spray of white across the viewport. Panicking, Felith swung the Kat askew, hitting the cleaner control at the same time. As the snow turned to water and the shards of rock clattered off the metal surface, she saw something large, pale and segmented pass across the viewport and disappear beneath it.

It had to be one of the creatures native to the land. She cursed herself angrily for not researching further into the planet itself - then paused. Could this be yet another illusion of Jacob's? Closing her eyes, she explored her mind, sending out thoughts like probes. The mental twinge had gone! The sudden taste of inner freedom was delicious. It was as if her very spirit had been cleaned. She felt a fresh burst of determination.

She snapped at the computer to increase speed by one third. There was a lingering screech of protest from the structure as the thrust units demanded more power. The creature had seemed to be a giant worm of some sort, judging by the segmentation of its body, perhaps half as big as the Kat. The vibration side-effect of the antigrav field could have confused it, yanked it away from more yielding prey. Glancing back at the storage compartment, she wondered if there was a service laser supplied with the vehicle - if she couldn't outrun it, she might have to kill it. If it was the field which was causing the iceworm to attack her, then cutting its power could cancel the attraction. But there was no guarantee, and there was also the chance it might return when she re-started the SnoKat to travel back to Daystrom Labs. There was of course the escape option of going back on foot - but she knew she'd collapse before she reached the Labs.

There was a buffeting impact against the metal underside, jerking her forward against the console. Clutching the jutting grips at either side of her chair, she ordered the computer to step up the speed by another third. Will of the Forces! She despised her hunter, Jacob, and that hatred was irreversibly linked with terror. But the most infuriating element was her enemy's lack of physical presence. He had set all these events in motion. Was this new attack his, too? Everything she did amounted to nothing against him! She would be hitting the shell forest at any moment, however, and was dependent on the iceworm ceasing its pursuit then, though the auto-driver was untrustworthy among the shell-domes.

The domes loomed through the viewport, bigger than she had envisaged, each distinctive in form, their colours ranging from pallid yellows to rich, dark browns. They were anchored by thick coils of roots and patterned with hard ridges. As the vehicle entered the forest, coasting cleanly under the fifty-metre-high growths, the quality of light altered. It became saturated with ochre and gave rise to heavy pockets of shadow. Ordinarily, she would have stopped to admire the shells, but this was far from an ordinary situation. Levelling off the acceleration a little, she began to find it a straightforward matter to pick her way through the wide spaces between the massive trunks. Gradually the shells seemed to tighten, pack into

clusters, the spaces becoming narrow and awkward. Protruding roots jabbed the Kat's sides with occasional annoying shrieks.

Eventually the growths closed in on her like advancing walls. She could go no further. Grateful for the respite, she leaned back into her seat and wiped her mouth. She was sweating like a Tellerite in a steam bath. She laughed, shaky and nervous. The Kat was silent save for regular prompting beeps from the guidance board. She sensed the forest around her, oppressive and dark. *What will they be doing back at the base?* she wondered idly. Treating Jacob's victims, analysing and examining, monitoring her progress. In other words, nothing of consequence. Spock had been right - she was the focussing point. Jacob's actions revolved around her. Feeling the bite of alarm, she searched her mind once more, slowly, meticulously, narrowing her eyes as she did so. But of him there was no trace.

Then she noticed something in one of the external displays, and leaned closer.

The ground behind the Kat was being split open from under the surface, as something burrowed toward her with frightening speed. It tore through heavy roots, spraying dark earth and snow into the air.

Lunging forward, she clumsily fed the thrust units too much opening power and the engines wailed, plunging the Kat on into the forest. Almost immediately, a forty-metre-high trunk and shell filled the viewport, causing her to cry out in surprise. She clawed at the board for the auto-driver's crash prevention procedures. Just as she could make out the hexagonal panels on the dome's surface, there was an ugly rattling noise. The vehicle scraped past the trunk. Red telltales blinked on and off, and in a maddeningly patient and careful tone, the computer informed her of the damage. As she manoeuvred it away from the obstruction and toward a clearer passage, the grating noise faded.

Then it was upon her. Again she was thrown forward against the board. Tiny needles of energy crackled across the controls, and the lighting flickered. Staring over her shoulder, she saw to her amazement that the floor of the rear compartment had been driven upward, as if from the blow of a gigantic hammer. Warning messages listed themselves on the board, threatening power failure. The computer did not respond to her desperate order to engage the auto-driver. She had to get out, or she would be trapped. She lowered the speed as far as she dared without inviting the iceworm's attack.

She had no time to hesitate. Leaping from her chair, she pressed the door's keypad and it slid open. She was caught full in the face by an unbearable blast of cold air. The ground, spattered with white and carpeted with a layer of brown, glided slowly past. Any time now, the Kat would inevitably hit a dome trunk. She jumped.

She landed gingerly, gasping for breath, the blood rushing through her head. Turning, she watched as the SnoKat floated past her, its white shape sharply defined in the murkiness, heading toward an impenetrable bank of domes. Of the worm there was no sign.

She walked shakily away, shivering vainly for warmth. Hard, blackened flakes shed from the domes littered the ground, splitting beneath her boots. The smell of the alien forest was everywhere, gritty and cloying, yet somehow sweet. Above her, through the spaces between the shell domes, there was a weak light from the steadily-shifting storm clouds. It would be night soon, she knew, and even that vague illumination would disappear. Even now the blackness gathered under the domes in drapes. She did not fear the dark at all, and as well she didn't, for in the forest it would be total; but she did feel claustrophobic amid the huge shells. She had to escape into open land. There was, of course, the possibility of rescue, for it would be relatively easy to track her life sign - however, she didn't underestimate Jacob. He

had stopped them before and she had no reason to believe that he would free them now.

Abruptly, she realised she could hear a rumbling sound. She whirled, her breathing quickening, instinctively falling into a defensive stance. She wasn't ready -

Thick earth and splinters of rock erupted ahead of her, forcing her backward. The iceworm rushed out of the ground. Its ashen body oozed a colourless lubricant, and it was covered with lethal-looking spines. Its over-sized head segment lolled, facing her in an eerie gesture, its mouth ringed with row upon row of jutting teeth capable of chewing through solid rock. For a single moment that seemed to stretch on endlessly, they confronted each other, frozen, she staring at the steaming mass of its form and feeling crazily that it might be trying to ask her something.

Ripping herself out of her petrified state, she sprang, fleeing into the forest. Behind her, unbelievably, she could hear the gushing of the earth and the loud cracking of rock as it sliced onward. What senses did it possess to make her noticeable above all else? She guessed it was not carnivorous - this world contained only the briefest scattering of animal life. Then why her?

It had to be Jacob.

She'd defeated his influence on her mind. She felt only a relieving emptiness away from her own thoughts. Could it be that he was trying something from a different angle?

Suddenly, from the east, a SnoSled raced out of the shadows and into the dim light. The rider, a tall Vulcan, lifted his hand palm-outward.

"Do not run!" came his clear shout.

She was cold, hungry, and very tired of running. Feeling nothing but resignation, she skidded to a stop, pressing a hand across her heart as if it would ease her strained gasping. Turning, she waited.

Incredibly, the iceworm burrowed straight past her and into the darkness.

Spock drew the Sled to a halt directly in front of her. His black hair was tinged with white and disarrayed from the wind, and he looked gaunt. He gestured to the back seat.

"Climb on, Lieutenant, quickly."

Drained of strength, but energised with fresh hope, she took her place behind Spock and strapped herself in.

"What... do you know?" she asked, her voice low with tension.

"I have been monitoring your progress," he said, "ever since you left Daystrom Labs. I believe you are being forced to a destination known only to the psionic presence."

She nodded. "That's the conclusion I came to, too. I've defeated Jacob's hold on my mind - his powers are restricted to influencing that."

"The creature pursuing us, then, is controlled by him."

She shook again, and rubbed the heating pads against her skin. "By Unashaail, it's cold.

Neither of us is going to last long in this kind of climate."

The Vulcan eased the Sled onward, gripping the twin control sticks, then opened up more energy for a slow acceleration. The giant shells loomed.

They heard a nearby wrenching noise, and Felith looked over her shoulder. The iceworm was chasing them, yes, but its speed was roughly matching theirs - something she'd not noticed before. It was guiding them, manoeuvring them in a set direction, despite the fact that it was apparently a non-sentient animal of little intelligence. It was possessed somehow, like she had been, perhaps driven by terror, or fooled by overpowering images. Jacob might even have been able to directly control the creature's minuscule, instinct-shackled brain. At last he could affect her physically. So in her short confrontation with the iceworm moments before, it could have inflicted serious harm upon her, and didn't. He really needed her, didn't he!

"I feel helpless," she admitted to Spock. "He's always one step ahead of me. But there's a more real reason why I despise him. We Andorians value our freedom, freedom of the spirit above all else, and he's tainted that. I cannot allow myself to be controlled."

"Then do what he wants willingly," said Spock simply. "You have proven to yourself that you can defeat his influence. You no longer need to combat him, unless your life is threatened."

She blew out her breath. "Maybe. Maybe that's the only way."

"There are others at the base who would be grateful for your co-operation. The presence does not attack you alone."

"Yes," she said. "I'd started to forget that. It's easy to feel isolated out here."

Shortly, they emerged into a small clearing, filled with dying light, in the middle of the forest. The cloud bank far above them had broken, exposing purplish blankness studded with the occasional star. The domes were like gigantic, shadowy watchers, pressing no closer than an unseen ring in the heavy snow. Spock glided the Sled to a stop at the edge. He slowly scrutinised their surroundings. For some reason, the cold now seemed to be less intense.

"It appears that the creature has left us," he said eventually. Startled, Felith half-turned and stared into the forest behind them, now flooded with blackness. "It would be logical to assume that we have arrived at our destination."

She listened, the silence travelling across the ground in a wave, quickly engulfing her. It was the kind of silence in which you could hear imaginary whisperings, the kind of stillness that almost had texture. The air was alive with static charge.

Then she felt a sudden tugging in the depths of her consciousness.

"It's here," she said. Her voice seemed to intrude on the quiet.

Spock looked at her, his eyes dark. "What do you wish to do?"

"What do I wish?" she echoed incredulously. "He's the one... "

Her sentence trailed into nothing. Standing in the exact centre of the clearing, around twenty metres away, was Jacob. His form was fuzzy and indistinct save for the eyes, burning

outward pure silver.

She swung herself off the Sled. "Don't follow."

Her boots sank into the snow as she walked. She could see only her enemy. The rest of her world seemed to melt and flow into itself, like running oils. His touch in her mind this time was vague, careful. Perhaps he had learned that she would do what he wanted only of her own free will. As she approached, his body became less and less defined, merging with the shadow to leave only his eyes. The first time she had seen them, in the transtator lab, she had recoiled. Now she felt ready to face him.

She knew what she had to do. Letting her eyes droop shut, she calmed herself, granting her cutting fear and deep-rooted anger the permission they needed to slip temporarily away. The silence of the clearing swept through her.

Beneath her feet, the snow turned to a hard, unyielding surface. The quiet reverted into the steady, ever-present hum of a Starship, a sound that always became unnoticeable background when she was aboard. Her eyes were still closed, but she could see vividly. She was on board the Enterprise - standing in the corner of one of the personnel transporter rooms.

However, it was a disturbingly different ship. Consoles were of the old Duotronic-A design. There were three Security Guards and five humanoids standing on the transporter pads. The Guards' uniforms were the now-obsolete bright red tunic and black trousers, with rank patterned in gold on their sleeves. The others were clad in featureless grey jumpsuits, their hands held inside lightweight but unbreakable metal bands.

Among them she recognised Jacob.

He looked healthier than the images that had assaulted her - his face was flushed with an angry red, his eyes a watery green. The plume of white hair hanging from the bare skin of the back of his head was unmistakable. He didn't see her.

"You're one of them," she said, feeling her lips mouth the words but hearing no sound. "One of the prisoners!"

Then she saw the transporter operator.

She went rigid with disbelief - it was as if she had floated from her own body and was staring at herself. Andorians aged slowly compared to Humans, but even so she marvelled over how much younger she seemed. She was apparently experiencing the events of a decade ago over again!

Then return of her guilt at the accident was sudden and overwhelming. *You condemned those people to death!* Her mind screamed. Giving in to her desperation, she tried to move in the vain hope that she could somehow prevent her younger self from beaming them into oblivion. But she was completely paralysed. Her mouth went slack as a queasiness filled her stomach.

It was too late. The younger Felith's fingers slid the conversion field controls upward, and the bodies of the people on the platform were gradually suffused with gold light. As they dissolved, eaten away by the phosphorescence, the thousands of sparkling points sputtered and died. The platform was empty and silent.

Then, she found herself plunging through sunlit space. She heard a frightening shrieking coming from all around her, and realised with dread that it was Jacob. She was

following his descent toward the planet. A sudden raging rush of hard radiation from the smaller of the twin stars had corrupted the other signal patterns, erasing their existences with agonising slowness.

She (Jacob?) entered the atmosphere of Zeta Cancri IV. Veils of milky cloud gave way to a thick, boiling storm bank. Fingers of lightning flashed. It was as if the world was at war with itself. Speeding through a cloak of vapour, she emerged on the other side, away from the heart of the storm and into empty air. Below her was the seemingly endless moorland. She could see the clustered patches of forests and the tiny shapes of a settlement.

Jacob's pattern had been seized by some unknown force, and was being pulled inexorably down toward one of the forests. There was no way he could escape. He plummeted toward the place where, in reality, she was standing. The clearing.

Suddenly she was underground, her vision invaded by solid rock and clay, as if she were being buried alive. The force which had saved him from extinction now caged him, unseen tendrils closing on him and trapping him just as surely as metal bars would have held his now-vaporised physical body.

Faced with eternal imprisonment, a hell that he could never be released from, his spirit screamed. To Felith, the never-ending shrieks were deafening, but would always go unheard to those on the surface. For a long time he raged. Since his body was gone he felt no emotion, but his essence suffered horribly. He sensed that this was a mistake, it was a place never meant for a Human, but this only worsened his torment.

Eventually he learned to sleep, to purge every flicker of thought from his mind. He created an artificial oblivion for himself and sank gratefully inside it. The insanity could not reach him there. Felith felt a wave of time pass.

Like a fitful sleeper, he occasionally awakened, but never for more than a few moments; although he had no real concept of time any longer. Everything became dreamlike and unreal to him. The only focus he had was Felith's face - his goaler. Over the years he had used her face to personify the force who had done this to him, locked him away forever.

When she returned to the planet ten years later, he sensed her. It was enough to pierce his slumber. Racked with fury, he hammered at his prison. That was when he found he could project himself outward, flex the fingers of his mind. The connection to Felith's mind was finally made. But his powers were not without their price - with each use, a terrible fiery pain consumed him. And the agony worsened as time passed. The only compensation was his ability to cruelly inflict harm on others. He used his memories and their own, a distorted image of his physical body, and the saw-axe he used to commit sadistic murders when he was alive, so long ago.

He soon realised, however, that the ultimate vengeance would be to force his goaler to set him free.

Felith blinked. Her mind quickly sealed itself against the imagery Jacob was about to drive into her on a whim. She felt reality focus around her, the hardening snow under her feet, the sharp edge of the freezing wind, the silence. She was back in the clearing.

"...lith. Lieutenant Felith, can you hear me?"

"Spock," she breathed, swinging around. He had walked closer but was standing behind her, at an almost respectful distance. "He's here. Right under us. Imprisoned...."

"And he wishes you to release him from this imprisonment?"

She nodded slowly. "I think so."

Carefully, she told him the rest. His face seemed to darken with every word.

"Perhaps my tricorder will yield more information," he said. She stepped back as he reached into his jacket and drew out a small, hand-held sciences tricorder. Holding it outward, he adjusted its controls and waited.

"I am receiving no energy readings of any significance," he said eventually. "Was the information he gave you clear?"

"Hardly. It was more like a dark vision or nightmare than anything else." She sighed. "He's here, that's the only thing I know for sure. It's written indelibly across my consciousness."

The Vulcan again consulted the tricorder. The sudden sound of high-pitched bleeping was sharp in the unnatural quiet. "I do detect a cave of some sort, part of the underground structure of the area. But there is no way to enter it unless we drill our own entrance through the rock."

"We must," she said. "That's all the evidence I need."

During nearly three standard hours that passed, Felith and Spock used the SnoSled to travel back to the Daystrom Labs. After being treated against the effects of the merciless weather, they found Dr. Daystrom and a number of other personnel including Enterprise Guards recovering from the rape of their spirits. While at the base Felith had just enough time to recall files on the history of the area, and the penal colony that had eventually fallen into disrepair and had since been removed. Searching through the inmate records which existed far along the data tree, she had used the name 'Jacob' as a parameter to find him, adding 'Human male'.

The result had been Inmate 349, a John Jacob Thorne. He had been a particularly dangerous serial killer, travelling through the Galaxy using hidden identities to escape from the authorities. Apparently he had gone unseen for years - later to be discovered serving on a lumbering Orion pirate vessel. With a shudder, she realised that must have been the place he had found his grotesque weapon.

His status description was short, recording his death as an accident when his signal pattern had been lost in transit from the guidance beam of the USS Enterprise NCC-1701, Captain James Kirk commanding. The incident was dated 7812.09.

They gathered a party of Science and Security officers, and by the time they arrived back with the energy drill and its equipment it was night. Using the structural readings derived from scanning the caves, they found the most appropriate cutting point. The rock was melted away easily from the ruby-coloured particle beams. When a Security Officer confirmed the integrity of the forced entrance, and that the interior air was breathable, they made their way carefully downward.

They played torch beams about the chamber, and Felith gasped. It was almost indescribably beautiful. The reddish rock walls were plated with interlocking crystal panels,

which refracted the beams wherever they touched, filling that point with amber-gold and unfocused spots of pure white. As her gaze travelled across the cave, she was awed to discover that there were carvings in the crystal that covered the walls and ceiling. The bizarre, unnatural scenes depicted battles of some nature. One faintly recognisable picture showed a serpent, its body comprised of many-sided polygons and tails of blocks.

"Fascinating," she heard Spock murmur.

She stepped slowly forward, her eyes fixed on the unshakably alien art forms. Above her head, suns rose over a plain of molten rock that almost seemed to shift and flow. Where her beam met the surface, it turned hot orange.

"How could something so beautiful be a cage?" she wondered aloud.

"Commander," called one of the science officers, his voice amplified in the almost required hush. "There are some structures over here that couldn't possibly have been formed naturally."

Felith joined Spock as he strode across the wet ground. Why did the crystal remain hidden from Federation sensors? A sweep of the planet was always necessary - surely something like this would have been detected, a chamber built by alien intelligence. 'Built' seemed far too crude a word, however. She imagined a clear fluid seeping over the rock and solidifying.

Abruptly, their torch beams spilled across a dozen crystalline flowers.

That was her immediate impression, at least. They were like growths, spiralling stems that emerged from the rock to intertwine with each other. Dense, filament-thin webbings filled the spaces between. They turned the beams an intense bluish-purple.

In the centre of the cluster was a single rod of jutting crystal.

Realisation dawned. Jacob was trapped here with these others. His body was gone, but by some unfathomable technique, his essence had been preserved. Preserved accidentally. This was a prison. And that middle structure was the spirit's anchor.

"By Penschraail," she said softly. "This is a Tholian place, isn't it?"

Only Spock heard her correctly, and she had to repeat her statement.

"That seems a logical assumption," he said. "We are, after all, quite close to their somewhat vague border, and I believe their body-form corresponds to the mineral in this chamber. It seems to confuse my tricorder - it is almost as if the crystals attached to the walls attempt to emulate the rock beyond."

"Then that's why it's always gone unnoticed," Felith said. "Maybe this planet has been forgotten by the Tholians. And those structures - they are like storage bottles for spirits."

The Vulcan raised both eyebrows at that.

"It is at least conceivable," he agreed. "The mineral's crystal lattice is obviously incredibly complex."

"I think they purposely discarded and concealed this place. It's a cage. For their most

terrible warriors, maybe. Look at those carvings - they're of battles and death. They killed them and shackled their disembodied minds, but must have respected them, or they would never have made all this."

"And Jacob?" Spock said.

"He was a mistake. That centre crystal - it focuses the power that keeps them all here. It drew in his pattern by pure chance, and that also contained his basic self."

Without seeking permission from Spock, she stepped carefully between the flower-like objects until she was standing close to what she now thought of as the 'anchor'. Once more she found herself closing her eyes, as she reached out and ran a finger across its smooth surface.

Instantly, a cold emptiness surged through her. She looked up. Jacob was there, his hands and face pale smears, his eyes filled with a light like the glow from the planet's moon but far more dazzling. The lingering drone of his saw-axe began to sound. He raised his arms in a gesture that would have almost been imploring, had it not have been for the Orion weapon clasped in his left hand.

"There!" cried Felith, stabbing a finger at the shadows. All but the Vulcan returned a baffled look.

Suddenly he was walking toward her, his mouth twisted with burning hatred, spittle dribbling from his lower lip. His was grimacing as if with revulsion, and his cheeks flushed red.

"Release him," she mumbled, forcing herself to be coherent. "He must be released from here!"

Before she realised what was happening, Spock had smoothly pushed her aside, and was touching the crystal spirit-anchor.

"My mind... to your mind..." he murmured unhurriedly.

Jacob stepped through the bewildered-looking Science Officer obstructing him, his image melting into the body until it steadily emerged unscathed on the other side. The spinning hooks on the centre orb of the saw-axe glittered, and his jaws opened in a silent scream of despair. He repeatedly slashed at the empty air, until the weapon was just a streak of silver.

"...thoughts... to your thoughts... to your thoughts..."

At that moment she felt not fear but pity. The killer had been denied even the freedom of the inner self for an entire decade of her time, something which was unthinkable to an Andorian. They believed that when the physical body died, the essence of each person was passed over into either the dark, violent domain of Unashaail or the eternal calmness of Penshraail. A fate such as Jacob's would be unbearable.

"...thoughts... to your thoughts... to your thoughts..."

And then Jacob shuddered to a stop, a look of pain crossing his features.

Squeezing his eyes closed, he held the saw-axe high above his head then brought it down across his own face. The nose and cheeks were instantly torn open, blood gushing from

the ragged flaps of muscle in great streams. His ruined lips parted to utter a bubbling, agonised shriek. Lifting it again, he swung it into his neck. The blades eagerly slit the flesh and buried themselves deeply. The blood sprayed from his rent throat.

Her vision swimming, Felith dragged herself back from the darkness of unconsciousness. She felt strong enough to build a mental shield against the images. Spock's words, though they were no longer audible, reverberated in her head. Jacob's tugging at her mind had painfully intensified, like cutting claws, but it was quickly fading.

"Go," she managed to say. "You are not held in this cage any more. Go."

The pressure eased at once, and she felt a wave of relief course through her, as if she had just been doused with cold water. At last, John Jacob Thorne had gone. Focussing, she sought out Spock, breathless and exhausted.

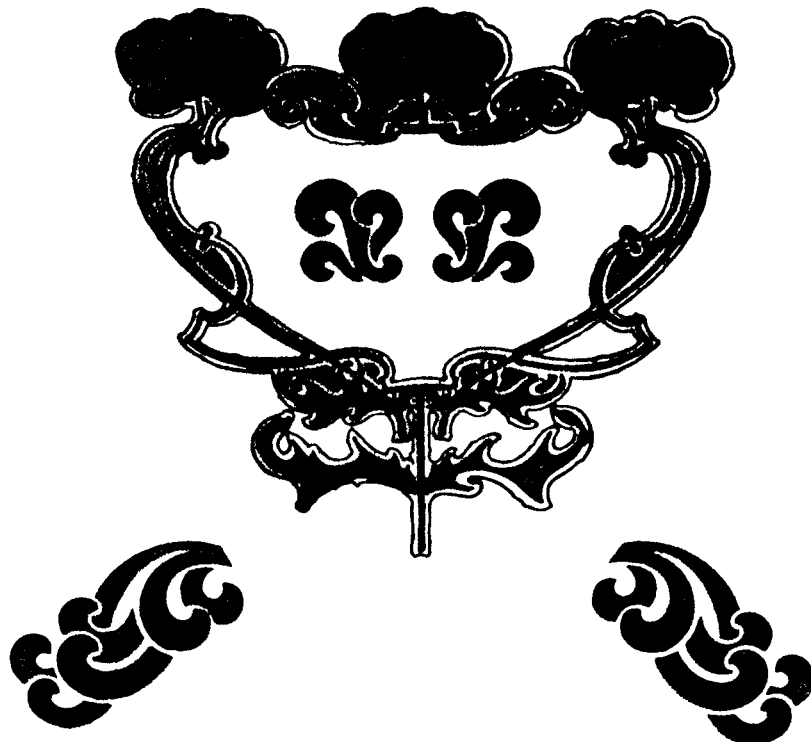
He was supporting himself against the crystal, his eyes pricked with moisture, and his face drawn and pale. She motioned to help him stand but, as he too regained his senses, he straightened slowly.

"Thank you," she said quietly. "You have set him free. You mind touched...?"

He nodded. "I was able to define and extricate his presence from the... the others. This process was indeed difficult."

She smiled at his understatement. "It was, Commander, but I think his final, brief joy at his departure was clear."

Leaving the chamber, she stared at the scenes and imagined, feeling a strange kinship with those who had crafted them. She would not be coming here again. Joining the rest of the party, Felith stepped out into the moonlit snow.



THE RETURN OF THE SWAN

by

P.C. Timms

Sequel to Darkness Into Light - IDIC Log 4

I look up into the night sky and I know that I am still alone. Alone now, as always. I have cried out to the stars for what now must be thousands of years. I have cried out for justice, cried for revenge, but no-one has come. The mighty creatures that once danced the Dance of Life throughout my many worlds have gone. Creatures that once played on the many shores have long since departed forever.

No longer does the slim white bird with the mighty wings dip and swim. Nor does it play and talk. No, nothing now talks to me. For now I am alone, so alone.

Has something heard my call? Something is coming to me. The white wings shine in the star light as it sails ever towards me. A mighty swan is at last returning to me. It has been so long since this white bird has sailed on what had once been many strips of water. Now this white bird is returning to me, and soon the rest of the animals that I once played with will come. Soon I will not be alone.

The Starship Enterprise had again been called away from her course. What had once been a mapping mission had been changed by a message from Starfleet Command. Captain Kirk began to wonder if his ship would ever complete just one restful mission without either the Romulans or the Klingons doing something. For now, though, the maps and this mission would have to wait. Another ship would be sent some time to this dead sector of space. No life had been found here and he expected that no life would be found. All that Uhura had been picking up was the static from the long dead sun that continued to hold on to three cinders that had once been the outer planets of a system. He could see no other reason for another ship to come out to this dead part of the universe. Kirk would be surprised if Spock would be able to find any of the four main elements even light years from here. No earth, air, fire, or water to be found here. The Enterprise turned from its course towards the dead system and went on its way to new adventures.

The swan had gone.

No, please come back. I look up into the night sky and I am so alone. So alone. Please come back to me, I'm so alone. Please

Space can be a very dark and menacing place to travel in if you are alone. No-one can hear you if you speak, as there is no sound. The only light is from stars that could be light years apart. Not one living thing could ever hope to survive but for a few seconds in its deadly clutches. For centuries it was known as the final frontier. An unbreakable barrier. A sea so deadly that no-one or nothing would be able to cross. But the lights in the sky would always beckon to the adventurer in all of the intelligent life that found itself on many worlds, always wanting to see what was out there.

Spock, his Vulcan friend, was watching him intently as he tried not to frown as he

examined the three dimensional chess board. It was telling him that the best thing he could do at this moment was to tip over his king, but he had a very stubborn streak that would never say die. There had to be a way out that he had just not seen. But all he could see was no hope. He was just about to lose his queen, and that would then leave his king wide open. He had been playing this game for so many years now that he had thought he had found a system that would at last work, but still he could only beat Spock about one every three or so games. There had to be some way out of this.

Doctor 'Bones' McCoy watched his two friends from the far side of the crowded Recreation Deck of the newly refitted ship. There was a party atmosphere at one end of the room as about fifty of the off-duty engineers, with Mister Scott, were welcoming a young female ensign aboard. Sickbay would be dishing out many a hangover remedy; he had been told by Nurse Temple that they were already taking bets on the number that would be in the queue. He took a sip of his light drink and smiled. In space you could be alone, but never on the Enterprise.

Ensign Fanx was not at all happy. How could he have done this to her? If there had not been so many people around her she could well have murdered DeSalle were he stood. His French blood had been getting the better of him, and now the drink was getting to her. What she wanted to know was how he and Scotty had managed to pull it off without her knowing. She was in Security, and walking into the middle of her own party had been the first thing that she had known about it all. They both would be lucky if they saw their next birthday. That was if she remembered this party, and that she did not want to do, for at the moment all that she wanted was to be alone, and that was something very hard to do when Lieutenant DeSalle happened to be on the same ship. This old family friend was soon to become an ex-friend to her. As the room started to spin and the walls started to turn a strange shade of green she wondered what else would happen tonight.

Three months later Kirk was sure that he had been here before. Spock, his half-Vulcan friend, was watching him intently, as usual. Kirk tried not to frown as he examined the three dimensional chess board. His mind had not been on the game at all, and he was sure that Spock knew this, but did not want to ask.

There was something that he had forgotten, something that he had been about to do before this game, something that he had not done, and he bet that Spock knew. If he asked him he would tell him, but one thing that he was not going to do was to inform his First Officer and the rest of the crew on the Recreation Deck that he had forgotten something trivial. Yes, he knew that it was not important but it was still there at the back of his mind.

Kirk pushed his hair off his forehead as he looked at the game. No, his mind had not been on the game at all. He could now do one of two things. One was tip over his king and be done with the game. But then he had a very stubborn streak that would never say die. The other way out, that made him smile deviously, was to call red alert, but that would be a somewhat suspicious move, calling a red alert in the middle of the Rec Deck One. He picked up his white knight and moved it onto the upper level. A bad move, but the best that he could do. Now his queen was wide open to Spock and soon that would lead him to the king and the end of the game.

Spock glanced over his Captain's shoulder as he noticed who was coming into the Recreation Room and raised his eye-brow, then quickly went back to the game in hand.

Doctor 'Bones' McCoy watched his two friends from the far side of the now crowded

Recreation Deck. So much for those two, able to relax with a game of chess. Thanks to old Jimbo he had been given the task of entertaining the visiting delegate from the Shade Foundation for the evening. It would have been all right if it had not been like talking to a brick wall. All he had asked her was what she did at the Foundation and then wham, she was saying nothing. Not even if she wanted anything to drink. So he had given up on a job that he would not even wish on a Klingon. All that McCoy knew about this woman was that she had the same title as him; now even if she told him her life story, he would not want to know.

Doctor Mattie Hern was not at all happy with Doctor McCoy. He had asked one question, that one question that only the Captain was to know. Was he the one that she had been told to look out for, the one who would find the way? So much had happened to her since she left her home planet of Xenny, but the one thing that she had not learned was how to deal with Humans.

Scott had recognised the black and gold uniform of the Shade Foundation the moment Doctor Hern had come into the room, and it made him curious as to why she was on board the Enterprise. He had heard rumours and scuttlebutt about a device that the Foundation was working on, something that he thought was called TEI, a device that would convert all types of heat into instant warp energy. A source of unlimited power, from a limited heat supply. Something that to him was impossible. A smile flickered on his stern features; he would enjoy talking this over with the young woman, who in his estimation was only in her late twenties, not like the other members of the Foundation that he had met on his travels. Her hair was jet black and to him was cut back too far, almost making it look as if it had been shaved.

"You win," was all that a somewhat disheartened Spock said as he tipped over his King. He had been so distracted by the game that he just could not concentrate. Something here was not quite right.

"Your mind was not on the game tonight," said a concerned Admiral and friend to Spock, James Kirk. No, this was not right. Spock blinked to try to clear his head.

Kirk tipped the king over somewhat harder than he meant to and it started to roll back towards Spock. "You win, Spock."

Spock picked up the piece before it could topple off the top of the five tier chess board.

"Your mind was not on the game, Captain?"

Kirk could not quite place the distraction that he had felt throughout the game, but it was almost as if while he had been here playing chess with Spock, he had also been in another time, still playing chess, but winning.

Mattie shivered as she walked towards the bar. She could feel that the Darkness was coming towards the Enterprise; if she could feel the disturbance in all of the other times then soon the Humans would be able to as well. It had worked well on the other Enterprises in the past and future, but in some her counterpart had not even been allowed on the Enterprise. At least here she was free to act. The Darkness would not be adding this Enterprise to its fleet.

Ensign Zee-Lang watched as Doctor Hern walked over to talk with Scott. He knew that tonight she would talk to him about her TEI. Not like with the other times where she had tried to work alone. Here the force of the Light could win. But then even when the game was stretched into multi-times there still had to be a balance between the two powers. This game

between the Darkness and the Light would soon be coming to a head in this time, and the Shade Foundation would be right in the middle. The game would end and then it would be up to the two powers what was to happen on the day after. He left the rec-room; he was not due to enter things until much later on in this multi-chess game.

Mattie Hern had been one happy girl. She had had a very happy childhood, or so she had thought until the night she had been visited by the power that called itself the Light. Then she knew that what she had to do had nothing to do with staying on her lovely blue-green world of Xenny. She was to become a Doctor of Science and join the Shade Foundation. She would leave her home-world with one of the greatest inventions the galaxy had known, a device of great power that would save illusions of lives that as yet did not exist in this dimension. She was told that this also was to take a lot of time; this was not something that was going to happen to her overnight. She would have to be very patient and wait for the Light to return. Even at the age of three, Mattie Hern would always remember her first visit.

She told no one for six years, for she knew that no-one on her farming world would believe her. Six years was a long time to keep a secret, but what could she say? The Light had not told her that much. She had never heard of the Shade Foundation; even her older brother, who was in Starfleet, had not heard of such a Foundation. Then one night when she was out tending her family's flock of sheep she had another visit and she knew all. Even with this six year gap she knew that this was part of the same power that had come before. Now it was a part of her. It filled her with its knowledge and power. No longer would she be stuck with pigs and sheep. No longer was she just a small player in the game. She was the Games-Master. Or so she thought until sixteen years later.

Her ship smiled at her. This was in all purposes her ship, the very first ship that would carry her TEI. The TEI would be the breakthrough that Starfleet had been waiting for. She, Mattie Hern, would give it to them. They all wanted it. She could almost see them waiting in the background, the Klingons and Romulans, always lurking in the shadows. Waiting, but always wanting to be the strongest and fastest in their part of the galaxy. But now it was time to show them where the real power was. Yes, she and the Shade Foundation would show them all who was the strongest.

He stared at the little square black box and did not smile. The tall, almost elf-like man looked puzzled at the make-up of the box that was called the TEI. To him this was not going to be all that simple. This was no Therma Device as Doctor Hern had been claiming. The Shade Foundation had been right to let her work here, for here they were more or less on their home ground. But still this was a surprise to him; this was not something that he expected to find at this time, in this time. The Darkness and Light were changing the very fabric of time. Had he the right to try to change things back? Goodness knows, even if he tried he wondered if he could. Had things been changed, or were they how they were meant to be? Should the Foundation be pulled into this massive chess game that was played by a dying computer from another time? The Foundation had in his opinion stayed out of this game for far too long. The time-shift from the time of Atlantis had been so well planned by the computer that it had lost almost no power by the time it joined with Mattie Hern. Now he and the Foundation were about to be pulled into the game that would determine what would happen to the rest of the power that had once been one very large living computer. He knew that if he wanted to find out more then he would have to probe this small box of tricks. As he touched the TEI a voice reached him from behind.

"So you wish to find out how it works, hmm?" asked Mattie in a low voice. She smiled as he jumped at her presence. "So, thought that you were alone, Lane?"

Lane's eyes widened at this comment. How did she know his name? He had not used it

when he had been in this time. "Not tonight, not any night," she continued. "That box is my ticket out of here and I don't plan on anyone, or anything, taking it from me."

"I don't want your box, just to know how it works. Why would I want to take it?"

"To sell to the highest bidder, what else, Lane?" She smiled at him, but he could see from her eyes that the smile went no deeper.

Somehow he knew that he was being toyed with, but not by Mattie. The power danced around her, playing her like a highly tuned instrument. As it played with him. He would see if he could somehow effect the power, for he knew if he did not try then events would still go on, time would be changed even more, and... Well, it was worth a try.

"Mattie, what would I do with the money?" said Lane. "Money for which I have no need? I can click my fingers for anything and everything that I could wish for. The Universe is but my chess set, you my pieces." He was beginning to enjoy baiting her.

"We both know another Games-Master has joined the game, Lane."

"Do you control it, Doctor, or does it control you?"

"That's for me to know and for you to find out."

"Then is the game to your liking, or are you trying to change the playing area?"

"We're placing new players for the Game of Life."

"But in doing so, you've destroyed... killed," he murmured, concerned.

"Have we, Lane? Only time'll tell."

"Yes, I'll make sure that time'll tell me all," he said.

"Then go, and find your new place in this game."

"You think that you control me?"

"The Darkness and Light control you all, Lane," Mattie said with such a coldness that it took over his whole heart for a second.

All he could see and feel was the Darkness coming from the Doctor. He had to find another time to jump to, to get away from the Darkness that was eating at him as it had been eating and using Mattie Hern. Then at the last moment he felt it, a faint echo of the Light power that he knew that he had to follow if he and the Shade Foundation were to survive to join in the new Game of Life. The newer power was not coming from the Doctor. This was the link, the link that he had been waiting for, the link between the TEI and Mattie Hern. As he left Doctor Hern he felt himself merge with the power that had called itself the Light. This power was not controlling him, just leading him on.

Doctor Hern smiled to herself as she watched the viewscreen. This was the final stage of her TEI project. Soon it would be tested for the very first time on the Science Ship USS Angola. For years she had been working on it on the fringe planet of Terral. The Game went on.

Bar Ten-Six hummed with the chatter of drinkers even at the late hour of one in the morning. Starbase and ships' gossip always passed quicker the later the hour. Many races from many worlds from the Federation could get almost anything that they wanted to drink from the Starbase computer. Some had come to celebrate, many at this late hour only came to forget.

Doctor Mattie Hern looked down at her eighth drink and wondered if she should even consider drinking it. Tonight she had wanted to get drunk, she wanted to forget. She wanted to forget the thirty lives that she had killed, murdered, but all that she could do was stay sober, even with the drinks that she had been throwing down her throat. According to the regulars on the first you went numb, on the third you could be classed as brain dead. It had not affected her at all, she could still see the Angola fold up on itself and then disappear. No explosion, no nothing. Not one trace that Starfleet could lock onto. Thirty lives that had been killed by her TEI. She should have been with them, she should have prevented this tragedy. She was to blame. She would make sure that Starfleet Command got the first ship, the fastest ship back to her computer-base on Terral. And she would make sure that nothing and no one would stand in her way.

She was in one hell of a mood and she had no qualms about telling everyone how she felt. She had been stuck for two whole weeks at this Starbase and still they were asking questions about her TEI. Questions she could have answered better on Terral. If she could have found something to throw at this upstart Starfleet Officer she would have.

"Doctor, will you please pull yourself together! I've got some good news for you." Commodore Dalglish had become as tired of her temper as she had of the Starbase. "Soon you'll be on the Enterprise, going back to Terral." Let Jim Kirk try to deal with her. Then he could get back to some real work.

So the Darkness and Light moved onto the Enterprise with Doctor Hern. It was while transporting her and her TEI that the Enterprise was caught into the Darkness energy cage. It was here that Captain Kirk and Mister Spock were taken by the Light to the living planet of Atlantis.* For this computer had been the birth of both the Darkness and the Light. As it moved from one dimension to another, to survive it merged with the Masters of Time. And the universe as well as time had been changed.

Scott was worried. The Darkness had attacked and trapped the Enterprise. An energy cage of unknown origin had surrounded the ship. They were in the grip of some unknown power. Already this power had already taken the Captain and Spock from the ship, and now it was draining the life from his beloved Enterprise. He had no answers and soon he would have no time to find them. Nothing to improve. Nothing that could help them break out of the Darkness. He was called the Miracle Worker, but now he was in need of a miracle himself.

Doctor Hern ran her hands through her short black hair as she stared up the Jefferies Tube. This was the place that it had to happen. She knew that this was the place that the new power would first show itself. This was where her TEI would have to be placed. Then and only then would they escape from the Darkness. She had been warned of the coming of the Darkness by the lady of the Light, Capilla.*

Now thanks to her help the Enterprise and her crew would be free. All that she now had to do was to somehow convince Mr Scott that she and her TEI could do that very deed without blowing everything up.

(*See Darkness Into Light, IDIC Log 4)

"Look, if you're worried so much about your ship, let's leave it to the Darkness!"

"No," said Scott. "You carry on, lass. Connect your TEI. I may not like what yer doing to me bairns, but it's our only chance of getting out of this Darkness."

"But in doing so there is a risk of the TEI freezing all of us to death before it starts to work."

"There's a risk for everything when ye're in space. We're already dead, lass, even without your TEI. No more harm can be done that hasn't already been done."

After hours of work Mattie Hern hit the TEI using all of her remaining energy. All of the work, all of the promises that the Light had given her, all the lives that she had thought that she would save from the Darkness, it was all for nothing. The Darkness had won and the Enterprise was doomed.

"My machine has failed me, Scotty. The only thing that can save us now is a miracle."

It was at that moment that Scott was called over to a communication panel by a summons from Sulu on the Bridge.

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

"Does it read like the Darkness?"

"No, sir. This time it's pure energy."

"Direction?"

"Aimed at Engineering."

"Then we'll be waiting for its arrival. Inform Security."

The new power was splitting Lane up, scattering up amongst the stars and then pulling him in. Somehow he knew that if he did not survive this change then neither would the Masters of Time. He had to find the route of the Darkness and the Light.

"Who could have sent this power?" asked a bewildered Scott as they watched it feed directly into the small black box that was the TEI.

"Someone who wishes to make Darkness into Light."

"Whoever it is, Mattie, has given us a chance to escape and to find our missing Captain and First Officer."

"I just hope your engines'll be able to cope with all of this new power."

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

"This has never been tested on a Starship before."

"What happened to the first test ship?"

Mattie was about to reply to his last comment as the whole of the ship seemed to shiver, almost as if it too was feeling the cold that the Darkness gave. The whole of the floor of Engineering was now following suit, throbbing with the new-found power that was flowing through its veins.

"Can it cope?" she asked as around her all hell seemed to break loose. The ship was being split up. She could feel the power from her going out to the ship in its time of need. She could feel its pain as it was scattered. Then with an abrupt suddenness, that made her cry out, the ship and Scott were gone and she was falling, not through space as she would have assumed, but into what looked like some sort of pit. And to her surprise she was not the only one falling. She could just about make out other people falling around her. She was not alone in her fate. What that fate was she did not want to think about.

Scott was falling down a rabbit hole, that he knew. Had he fallen asleep? Was this some sort of mass hallucination? As he could see, he was not alone. Some crewmembers even gave a wave as they floated past on their backs.

"Help!" Uhura called as she went past. Yes, he was sure that this was just one very bad dream. He would wake up in the morning with one hell of a hangover and find that they were still at Starbase 10.

Doctor McCoy was tired.

The shower had been so good, refreshing, and so warm. But now he had to get back to work. There were still so much paperwork to catch up with. It was not just Starship Captains who had that trouble to contend with. As he got dressed he noticed how cold it was beginning to grow in his quarters. He would have to call up to the Bridge, but as he tried to leave his quarters he found his way barred.

"Doctor, you are needed elsewhere!" said a deep, almost familiar voice. Then the room about him wavered and vanished and he was face to face with a white rabbit.

"Not again!" said McCoy, rubbing his eyes just to make sure that he was seeing things correctly. "And what, may I ask, are you doing here?"

"You may well ask, McCoy of the Enterprise. I wish I knew; it's no fun being stuck as a rabbit."

"Then you're not 'The White Rabbit'?"

"I have never been a white rabbit, and hope I would never again have to think back to my childhood."

"Was it that bad?"

"There are certain things that I did that I wish to forget."

"Nothing to do with white rabbits, was it?"

"Doctor, I need your help, not your sarcasm."

"Well, why didn't you ask? Let's hop off and you can tell me all about it."

Humans - who could ever understand them, or their humour? Or could it be that he was as scared as he was. Trying to find his way. He had no idea where he was, even if he was a friend or a foe. Maybe he did understand.

"Have we met before?" asked McCoy. Lane wondered if he should tell him. It could well make matters worse.

Not that things could get much worse than they were at the moment. But the way things had been going lately for him he would rather let questions like who he was lie for the moment.

"I think I may have met you when I was younger. But I've met many people on many planets."

"A diplomat?" asked McCoy while scratching his head. "I don't remember ever meeting a six foot rabbit before who claimed to be one."

"I'm not a rabbit. I just seem to be stuck as one. A slight problem." McCoy wondered what a major problem would be.

"Well, Mister, so you have a name or do I have to call you Buggs?"

Lane knew very well that if he were to start lying from the very beginning then things could very well go downhill, and when he was found out then all of his hopes would come crashing down around him. What he needed now was help and trust from the crew of the Enterprise, and that could not begin with a lie. He had just begun to open his mouth when their surroundings again wavered and they found themselves in a large ornate dining room. The table was laid for dinner with large candles burning in gold candelabra. The main thing that dominated the room was the large fire-place, and above this was a large ornate mirror. Even as they both looked around they noticed that the mirror was beginning to crack.

The Enterprise was lost, not destroyed. This was the only thing that Mattie Hern knew. This was something that both the Darkness and the Light were telling her. What amused her was that for once, without knowing it, both of the opposing powers were agreeing on something. To go on, the Enterprise had to be found.

Scott looked out on a wondrous sight. A purple sun shone down on gentle pink rolling hills. In the far distance a lone white tower shone out to him like a beacon.

"What have you done to my engines, the ship?" He was not amused at all with what he saw, for he did not see an alien tower in an alien landscape. He knew what he could see in the distance and it was not just any tower.

Ensign Fanx opened her eyes, expecting to find herself back in her quarters. She had had such a strange dream. It had been all DeSalle's fault. She still had the hangover to prove it. She stretched and sighed, pulling her body to the limit. She knew that she would have to be on duty soon. No extra minutes sleep here. She needed to be awake and alert. And when she saw where she was she knew that to survive she had to be alert.

The deep ditch was wet and smelt to high heaven of things that she could not name, but

that had already made her feel sick. How had she managed to sleep here thinking it was her quarters? All that she could think was that the drink had been the cause. But what of this so-called dream? Had she fallen down a rabbit hole? But then why would that land her here? She pulled herself up to find that she was starting to sink down in the mire that was at the bottom of the ditch. She had to get out to see what was out there, to try to find her crewmates and her ship. Plus a change of uniform!

Lane was here in this world, but then again, he was not. He and his power had been cut up and separated, as had the Enterprise. Each part of his character had been represented, from a white rabbit right down to a Biggles-style Dragon Rider. Whoever had done this had made a mistake, for each of the characters knew about the whole. They all knew how to return, to join up. So they still had the power, they would just have to work at getting out of the dream-like dimension. But to the Darkness and Light this was all part of the game. He was still being played with. They knew the move that he was going to make even before he did. They had been right from the start, the Masters of Time were masters no longer. They danced now to a different tune. This was an end to thousands of years of their control, and he wondered what would be their fate at the end of this game. It was all up to him to determine the outcome.

The Dragon Rider looked down at the distant landscape that was far beneath him. He felt as if he was one with the elements every time he flew with his dragon, Tre'laneth, always flying to aid all of those damsels in distress, or just saving the planet now and again. They both just loved being the hero of the hour, every hour. Soon he hoped that they would be flying off together with that damsel in distress. But that was in the near future, now he had to deal with the present. Both he and Tre'laneth were hungry. Yes, they would stop at their favourite place.

Ensign Fanx looked out at the strange landscape with mud dripping out of every crack of her uniform. The strange green-like muddy mass was sticking to her hair like glue. The worst bit was that she did not have any idea of what this mud was made up of. Would it stink when it started to dry, or would it poison her? Without any of her science equipment she could not tell. Only time could now tell that. She looked out into the distance and was sure that she could see part of the Enterprise hull sticking up like a large white tower. What had happened? She knew that she had to get to that place, as the tower was somehow a key to why she had fallen down a rabbit hole. But the tower seemed so far away, and now she was feeling wet and cold. How would she ever make it so far?

As she began to walk away from the trench she had fallen into she glanced back and noticed that the trench was one of many that joined up and made some sort of pattern. As she traced each back to a much larger hole she began to have a bad feeling about what had made these holes. It was almost as if she had fallen into a large footprint. She did not want to meet whoever made this much of a hole.

Mattie Hern looked at the tower.

"If this is part of the Enterprise, Mister Scott, then where is the rest of it? And what's happened to the rest of the crew?" she asked as she looked up at the white tower that had once been a part of the Enterprise warp engines.

"Lass, I've got nothing more to go on than you have. But something tells me the answer's here, with this tower."

"Inside?" asked a somewhat hesitant Doctor Hern.

"Aye, lass, inside this tower."

The answer was inside the tower, and inside the tower were Doctor McCoy and a white rabbit that answered to the name of Lane and who knew that the mirror had to be broken for them to escape. But here and now he had not enough power. The other parts of his character would have to join him inside the tower, but that could well prove a problem, knowing the size of one of his characters. When they all met up it would not just be the mirror that would get broken.

As soon as McCoy had seen the fireplace and the mirror he knew where he was. Gothos. If he was here then could Trelane be behind all of this? Could he again be playing with them as he had done during the first year of the five-year mission? If that was the case his fear rose for both Kirk and Spock. Nothing had been heard of them since they were taken when the Enterprise first came into contact with the cage of Darkness. Where Trelane was involved anything was possible.

"Do you know of Trelane?" McCoy the rabbit as he walked towards the mirror for a closer look.

"Who? I'm Lane."

McCoy stopped and turned, his eyes wide with astonishment. The white rabbit faded from view and there was an almighty crack from behind him as the glass of the mirror was cracked from top to bottom. He went to turn to see what had happened to the mirror but he suddenly found that he was not in the chamber any more but standing outside the white tower with Scott and Doctor HERN.

"Doctor, where did you spring from?" asked a surprised Scott.

"I've been back to Gothos. Now where are we?"

"Are you all right?" asked a concerned Doctor HERN. "What has happened to you?"

"I've just had a visit from Trelane."

"That spoiled brat, Doctor? So this is his doing! If I get my hands on him!"

"I know what he's done to the ship, Scotty, but what has he done with Jim and Spock?"

The Dragon Rider flew over land and sea, mountain and hill, through wind and rain, hail and snow. He had to get to the white tower. Then and only then would the power be released, the power that would reform and release them. It was during this time of daring do that he spotted her, a damsel in distress, and a wet and very muddy one at that.

"We've got to land, Tre'laneth. She's headed for the tower as well."

"That's fine for you to say, 'Biggles', but I'm the one that has to do the landing! Why did the might of my power have to be represented by a dragon?"

"A very fat one if I may say so."

"You were the one that made me fly everywhere. You and your flamboyant tendencies. I had to eat just to keep up with you."

"We've all got our faults, but now we know what we have to do to end this part of the game, thanks to the mirror."

"Well, brace yourself, for you're coming in to land now whether you like it or not."

"Land or crash?" asked 'Biggles' through clenched teeth.

There was nowhere to run, nowhere to hide. There was a very large, very dangerous-looking pink dragon coming straight at her and she did not know what to do. This was something that she had never found in her training manual. She knew about pink elephants and how to get rid of them, but not pink dragons. And this one was just about to do a nose dive just ahead of her. Whatever this dragon was at it did not know how to land. She just hoped it had enough control that she would not get flattened as it came towards her on three and then on two legs.

After taking three trees and putting a new hundred metre trench into the landscape it at last came to a halt about fifty metres from where she had stopped. The dragon, for that was the only thing that she could call such a thing as this, lifted its large nose out from the mound of fresh earth and sneezed and coughed and spluttered as he tried to rid himself of all of the earth he had swallowed as he had created his new runway. It was then she noticed that she was not alone with the dragon; there was a man in black leather riding gear some metres back trying to untangle himself from one of the fallen trees. Had he come with the dragon, or had he just been in the way of the landing? She ran to find out for he could well be in need of some medical attention.

As 'Biggles' tried to untangle himself from the tree he could not help thinking that this was not at all how it was meant to be. He was the one who was to rescue the damsel in distress, not the damsel rescue him. He looked down at the ground that seemed too far away. How was he to get down from here without losing more face?

That problem was solved as with an almighty crack the branch that had been holding him gave way, and he hit the ground with a crash. He was sure that he would not be able to sit down for at least a month. But as he saw the woman who was coming up to him all the pain was nothing. 'Biggles' pulled himself up and smiled. If only he had a rose to give this beautiful damsel.

They stood together watching the sun come up. In the distance they could both see Tre'laneth, who was taking an early morning dip with the other wild beasts who had come to help him wash. They both wore little, as the weather never changed. They were never hungry, never thirsty. The land never let them want for anything. They had been told of the wonders of this dimension. Time stood still, no one ever died. They would always be together, never to be apart. At peace with all forever. This could all be theirs.

"No!" 'Biggles' called. "Time must always go on! This is a trap! We always have to go on!"

They were both flying with Tre'laneth towards the white tower.

"What the heck was that? What happened to us back there?"

"A bribe to stop us moving to the tower."

"Us live together as man and wife?" asked a puzzled Fanx. "I only just met you."

"But the power warped both our thinking. We almost did not come out of the other side. I'm sure that Tre'laneth was the one that got us both out of it."

"I told you that we shouldn't land!" said the deep voice of the dragon. This made Fanx jump so much that she almost fell off. 'Biggles' had to smile at this as he pulled her back on board his saddle.

"Sorry, I forgot to introduce this other side of me."

"Other side?"

"When we get inside the tower I'll tell you all."

"You're taking a dragon into that tower?"

"Don't worry, as you've seen we've no problem parking."

"Any spare parachutes?"

"What are parachutes?" asked Tre'laneth. "You're quite safe. We have to destroy the tower so we can all leave."

As they flew she began to wonder why all of this had happened. What had been the cause of this Darkness that had trapped the Enterprise? And had this man, or being, been the cause?

"Do you know the Darkness?" she asked.

All that he would tell her as they flew on was that the Darkness was around her as it was around him. "Your fate is intertwined with mine when it comes to the Darkness and the Light."

"Light?"

"Wherever there is Darkness there has to be Light."

"Are you trying to say that they're part of the same power?"

"Different sides, but yes, they are from the same power."

"And you, where do you come into this?"

"I'm about to become one with this said power."

"Or, so he hopes!" rumbled Tre'laneth from below. "This has all been a game to the Darkness and Light."

"A game? Some sort of test?"

"It's the game of survival, Ensign Fanx."

"Call me Fanx, you're being so formal."

"Well, Fanx, when we destroy the tower all that I know is that I'll be transformed. All of the Masters of Time'll be transformed so that the Darkness and Light will be able to survive in this dimension."

"Masters of Time?"

"Our version of the Darkness and Light. What will happen when we merge is any one's guess."

"What'll happen to us?" If the tower was about to be destroyed what would happen to this dimension and the entire ship's crew that were stuck here? Fanx was suddenly very worried.

"I have seen the future, Fanx, and this never happened."

"But what of the Captain and Mister Spock?"

"At this moment they are with the Light. When we all meet, they will be sent back to the ship."

"But will they remember Atlantis?"

'Biggles' smiled at this comment from her.

"See, Fanx, already the power is telling you things that only it knows. With your help in the near future the process will be complete and a new power will be born."

"But what of Atlantis?" Fanx asked. She had to know, but the tower was dead ahead and she knew that she had run out of time for answers. In seconds she would be back asleep in her quarters, hangover and all. Nothing would have changed. Nothing would have happened.

Gateway, the second moon of the planet Terra II, was a wonder to behold. The U.S.S. Enterprise had been in orbit around it for three days and still they were finding out more about its workings. Spock was fascinated by how the old and new workings had been merged together. Some of the machines were so old that they must have been left behind by what had once been the population of Atlantis, now a long-dead race from another time as well as another dimension.

This was once, Spock assumed from the name of the moon, one end of the dimensional gate that the Mysterious Ones had told them about when they had been trapped in the living computer on the planet of Citadel. They had been told then that the trip was only set for one way, but it would be fascinating if they could somehow get it working again.

Commander Paul Metcalfe had been dreading this moment the whole of the voyage back. It had been a rash move in the first place that had made him jump ships so that he could be on the Zeus on her maiden voyage, the first time that the warp drive was to be used by the Terra II Federation. They had worked for years with the Marse computer for the moment, and he was not going to miss it for anything. He was the Commander of the Wanders of Terra II and he had been determined to go, whatever the Mysterious Ones of Marse had said. They never told him all the things that they were up to. Now it was his turn.

That had been a fine thought at the time. Now it would seem that he could well have put

his foot in it, for when they had arrived back into their own system, not one word was uttered from Marse. It was as if the Mysterious Ones were giving him and his rescuers the cold shoulder. Even the Ambassador for the Mysterious Ones was nowhere to be found, and he had expected that she would have been the first one to tell him off. It was almost as if they just did not want anything to do with the Enterprise.

The small shuttle had taken many hours to reach its destination, and for once in his life Glen David wished that it had taken a bit longer. He had been enjoying some well-earned shore leave on the fringe planet of Fanx, but now he had been recalled by the Marse Computer. Sometimes he wished that his family history was not tied up so closely with that of Marse. He had been set apart, almost from birth, from those on Terra II. He was the living link between the two planets. Somehow way back in his family history the link was forged between Marse and Terra II, and it could never be broken. Every member of the family from then on knew everything that was happening on Marse. They were the living agents who could work outside the confines of the living computer. And now the computer needed his aid again. So much for his rest. Soon he would be finding out what mission they would be sending him on.

Parody had found it strange that she could not get into contact with the Marse mainframe computer. It was almost as if it had shut itself off. Before she had left Gateway the base had been buzzing with Mysterious Ones; now she could not find one. Well, so much for her showing Captain Kirk and Doctor McCoy how the Marse computer worked, for she could not even get it to operate. She expected they wondered now if anything would work for them. First the Zeus malfunctioned and now the Marse computer was well on the way to blowing a fuse.

"I'm sorry about this, gentlemen; it would seem that the Marse computer is too busy with other matters. They have cut off all communication with Gateway and Terra II." Then she had another idea of what they would like to see. "Gateway is also the top recreation spot in this neck of our Federation. Have I got things to show you!"

They came to the end of a long ornate corridor and found themselves by a large foreboding door. Kirk looked up and down it, as if trying to remember where he had seen it before.

"This is an old part of your base?" asked McCoy as he noticed some of the markings on the door. "This looks like Latin on the door."

"Latin? Is that an art form?" asked Parody as she peered at the door for a closer look.

"No, it's a language." Kirk pointed to the door. "Look, here it is. Bones, you're the doctor, you deal with more Latin words than I do."

"Well, we're not about to go into a hospital, that's for sure, Jim."

"Is it used for recreation, Parody?"

"Yes, Captain. We speak to the door ..."

"And it talks back?" asked McCoy. Both Kirk and Parody glared at him.

"Please do carry on, Parody, and do call me Jim. Not Captain all the time. Let the Warder part of you go."

"Thank you, Captain, - er... Jim." She blushed slightly at her mistake. She cleared her

throat and continued. "Now as I was about to say, before you both managed to put me off, we tell the door where we would like to go, and for how long, and it'll take you there."

"Anywhere?"

"We've found that it doesn't actually take you there, but shows you what it would be like there, so yes, it could take you anywhere, Jim."

"I know what she's talking about, Jim. We've got them on our newer ships, Parody"

"We call them holodecks," continued Jim Kirk. "Not so advanced."

"We don't hold a conversation with our doors, thank god," grumbled McCoy.

"Then you've got them in your Federation?" So much for thinking that she was going to show them something new. Kirk sensed her disappointment at what she had just learned, so he gave her one of his winning warm smiles.

"We would love to see inside your holodeck, Parody." Jim took Parody by the arm. "Now where should we take this lovely lady, Bones?"

"Well, it would seem the best thing to do if we ..." He never got any further with that topic of conversation as at that moment his communicator sprang into life. "No rest for the wicked," he said as he answered the call from the Enterprise. After a few moments Jim and Parody found themselves alone.

"A pity that Bones had to be called back up," said Jim, not minding at all. Now he could give Parody his undivided attention. He was sure that he and Bones had been fast becoming a double act when it concerned Parody. But now flying the flag for the Federation could well mean something special. Parody too was thinking along the same lines.

Spock had been studying the old computer complex for some hours, and was still at a loss. How it managed to work at all was a wonder to him. So much had been by-passed over the years. Things that had broken down that could not be repaired had just been left in place, as if they could somehow repair themselves. It was almost as if the people of Terra III wanted to save everything that they created, even if it had stopped working six thousand years ago. They would find a new job for anything. If they had managed to save the Zeus he was sure that they would have found another use for the ship if they could not repair her. Then to his surprise, one of the oldest of the machines that he had been sure had been by-passed started to grind into life. It started to gain power, but then cut out, somehow never getting to full power. But soon he was sure he would get it working as it should. Soon he would have a study piece of machinery that dated back at least six thousand years.

At Kirk's command the doors responded by opening very slowly.

"Is this part of the complex used often by you Warders?"

"We come here as often as we can. Jim, you should have these on all of your ships."

The doors suddenly stopped dead, and Parody stared open mouthed at what she saw

through them, for what was on the other side was not what the Captain had ordered. All that they could see was a bright all-consuming light. They had to cover their eyes as the light suddenly erupted from out of the room and engulfed them both.

"Does this happen often?" asked Jim Kirk as the light seemed to pick them both up from the floor and pull them into the centre of the room. Behind them the doors slammed shut. Machines then stirred into life, machines that had been unchecked for thousands of years. Now, thanks to Spock, the machine had the right amount of power to work with.

They were nowhere and everywhere all at once. Powers were being used around them that had been unchecked for thousands of years. The use of this machine had even been forgotten by the Warders of Terra II. Now both Jim Kirk and Parody were getting first hand experience of what the machine could do.

The power was growing by the second. Kirk could feel that they were being pulled apart, being broken down into sub-atomic particles. This was not a painless experience. Something was dreadfully wrong, this was no holodeck.

"Parody, hold my hand!" Kirk ordered. Whatever was happening to them the last thing that he wanted was for them to be split up. He felt something brush his right hand, but then it was gone. He was falling, over and over, tumbling out of control in space. The coldness attacked his body, cutting into him like daggers of ice. Every one of his nerve endings cried out. He knew it would soon be all over for him. His last thought as darkness overcame his mind was for Parody. He never did remember the landing.

The ground was damp, but not too cold, his subconscious told him. Quite soft, too. There was something that he should be doing, not sleeping, but the ground was so soft, so inviting. And what was that he could hear? Bird song - he could hear bird song on the Enterprise? Enterprise. The name struck a cord deep down in his mind. Spock, the Enterprise.

"Parody!" He shot up, now fully awake but still somewhat disorientated at what had happened. The only good thing that he did find was that his uniform was still intact. Where he was, how to contact the ship and get home, was another matter.

William Ha'vanna was not at all pleased with the news that he had received from the Science Council. He had been called back to the time-sphere, light years from his ship and his wife, to be told the news that could well be the end of the entire universe. If, that was, these so-called men of science got their own way. They had begun to talk again about their portal for time travel. When a race started to talk about changing time, then things would just get from bad to worse. He had seen this many times and on many worlds as a member of the Shades. He had not thought that he would ever again see the Masters of Time begin to think that they could travel in time. Not after what had happened the last time.

He was addressing the main body of the Science Council, but that would not deter him. He would always speak his mind when it came to the up-keep of time.

"You set up the Shade Foundation to stop all transgression of time. You are about to transgress. You're about to break all your own rules."

The leader of the Council, a man called Theral, tried to stifle a yawn. William had been going on and on about this. How he had found out about what the Council had planned he would like to know. Ever since he had arrived back at the time-sphere he had been going on

and on about the horrors of changing time. But this time they would make sure that it would be different. This time only good would come from it.

"William, think of all of the races that we could save. All of the ones that the *Keepers* and the *Preservers* could not reach in time. All"

"All of the races that you could destroy, Theral? You would begin to play at being a god," William cut in. "But who would you destroy, who would you save? Would you destroy all of the bad races that exist now? But then how do you define bad? One man's enemy is another man's friend. What would you do? All that you would be doing would be seeking revenge. Revenge cost me dearly in the past, Theral. Now how much are you willing to let it cost you?"

"We know the risk of it, William, and we don't think that the price is too high."

"All of this could well mean your death, Theral."

"And what do you mean by that, William?"

"Infinity saved your planet once, Theral, when it tampered with time. Don't expect her to be there to bail you out again."

"Then you would suggest to the Council that we should scrap the whole idea?"

"No, just to change it a little. Keep on using the time portal as a viewer, as you've always done in the past. This time-sphere is outside of the very fabric of time itself. You'll be able to watch all of the races that have discovered, or are discovering, time travel for the first time."

"They could also change the course of time. We would watch them cause the time ripple that would destroy us all."

"That's why the Shades need to have the power of time-travel."

"You have, and we don't?"

"We plan to stop the time ripple, not cause it, Theral. All races must learn not to meddle with the power of time. Until then Infinity and the Shades will be needed."

"You want to play cops and robbers throughout time as well as space. What about your other duties to the *Keepers* and *Preservers*?"

"Theral, you and your Council made us a team apart from them. They can take good care of themselves. You called us a time squad and that is what we are to become."

"You will stop all time meddlers, William. That's what we almost became. We almost started down that road. It's so easy when you see so many wars, so many deaths."

"You must remember that good, as well as bad, can come from a war. Who are we to judge?"

"You'll have the backing of the Council on this, William," remarked Theral.

For the time being that was. There was too much to be gained from this time travel. But

the Council had managed to form the one team that could, and would, stop them. They would not be able to work inside this time-sphere without William and Infinity knowing. Infinity had been with the Higher Masters almost as long as their planet, but now to Theral she was fast outstaying her welcome. The sooner he could find a way to disband the time team the better. But for now his dreams of conquest of time would have to wait.

Infinity stood alone at the centre of what had once been a mighty sun millions of years before, but now was nothing more than a white dwarf. Not very far up on the sun scale, but it was warm enough for her. So much had happened to her since she had decided to leave the time-sphere to explore the universe. Inside the time-sphere she would have had all of the time in the universe to watch the universe, and to think. Now it had been a long time since she had been able to stop and think, to put her thoughts together.

She had been called Infinity, Never Ending, but was that only because of the time-sphere? Had she been aging ever since she left the Council and the time-sphere? Was it now only the Science Council that would never die? Also there was the question of the time-sphere itself. Infinity had not made it, so who had? Who had put her inside the sphere? Was it as she had done to the Council, had someone in the past saved her by placing her outside of time? If only she could remember the events that had happened before the sphere. The one thing that she did know was that she was not a prisoner, as the moment she wanted to leave the sphere, she did just that. Also, she knew that she could survive outside the sphere, unlike the Higher Masters. Being outside of time was the only thing that was keeping their planet from being blown up.

She glanced out of the sun at the surrounding universe and smiled. She was now living *with* time, not outside it. She still did not know what fate she had sealed for herself by leaving the sphere, but for now she was happy. She was now *making* history, not watching it. That was something that the Higher Masters could not do now, and for that she would shed a tear for them. She wondered what the future had in store for her and her team; who she would meet; what new races would they discover who had the power of time-travel. But that was in the future, and she would soon have to deal with a husband with a very bad temper. She would return to her new home, to her new family. With a flash of intense white light that lit up the entire system she teleported herself to her family the Shades.

Quette Base had been too quiet for Acturaus to sleep. When he found himself with a lot of time to spare he found that it somehow upset his body clock. He wondered if it could be something to do with the base itself, but he was not at all sure. The word *Quette*, he gathered, meant 'outside of time'. He wondered if the time-sphere and this base could be somehow connected. All that he knew was that there could be something here that upset his cat-like senses. He rubbed his eyes as he watched the base's time-portal and tried not to yawn. He pulled himself up from his desk. He could not win with his base. When he had to work, his body wanted to sleep, but when he wanted to sleep, he could not. He turned back to the time-portal. Something had called him to this machine, and before he retired he would find out what. Had a new race found a way to travel in time? If so, why had they not been informed by the Council? But however hard he tried he knew that his body was yelling at him to go back to his bed.

Or was it the time portal that was affecting him? When he was in the time-sphere he had the same feeling. Infinity had told him that this was not a sphere, but a sort of limbo, not in any universe, but with many windows that would look out onto all of them. Never *in* a

universe, but touching many. The Masters of Time were also in that limbo. Could it be something that they were doing to the time-stream? What were the Science Council up to?

"All time is linked, Acturaus." A voice spoke to him that seemed to be everywhere and nowhere at one and the same time. "There's nothing to fear from the Council and the time portal. For where there is Light there has to be the Darkness."

Acturaus shook himself; he had to have been asleep. Someone had spoken to him, not just on the outside but right into his mind. He was mind-linked to his wife, Mari, but this was not her. The strangest thing was that he knew the voice. He knew that Infinity had just told him the strangest news. All that he had to do now was to work out what it was all about.

The Shades had at last received their second time ship from the Masters of Time. Now at last they could start chasing all of the transgressors, the job that they had been formed to do. All that they waited for now was the return of Infinity and her small strike team from the 20th Century. Then at last the Shades would be go!

Turner Williams never did like the past. Earth past in particular. It was not that he did not like the thought of time-travel. It was just the thought that he was living someone else's life for them, taking over a body that in ten hours from now would be cold and very dead on a slab. That thought always left him feeling somewhat sick in the pit of his stomach. Having no control over what was going to happen to you... Even when it was not exactly *you*, he did not like the thought of not having a future. He did not even like his name in this time; it made him sound as if his parents had transposed his names. He had enjoyed it more when he was one of the Borg.

Turner started at the security guard at the gate of Trans-World Airlines, and was sure that the guard was looking through him as he spoke. What a place!

"Look, Mister, I'm here to collect a Mr Emit. Will you let me in?" he asked for a second time.

What were people in this time eating? Or it could well be in the drink, he thought when he at last got to his friend's desk and looked into what had at one time had been a cup of hot coffee. From the desk opposite a young woman by the name Viv waved at him and gave him a sickly grin. How Simon had managed to work with such a woman amazed him. During this mission he had had to find out the hard way that she left a lot to be desired. As a parting gift he had even had the thought of buying her some shares in Tippex. At the rate she was using the substance she could well give the firm profit on her own.

Turner looked at his watch. They had to take these body shells to the right place for the connection, then they would be back to Infinity. If that did not happen then this entire mission would be a wipe out and the whole of this strike-team would be in danger of not being able to transfer back into their own bodies.

"Any idea where he could have got to, Viv? He's going to miss all his travel connections at this rate."

The door opened just behind her and a young man of about twenty-five walked through; he did not look at all happy.

"I've just had a phone call from Gene."

Now Gene was the body that Infinity was in; if she called then it could only mean big trouble for this time. No, Nineteen ninety-one would not be a good year for them.

"We're going to be somewhat delayed, but we should still be able to make the flight home." He beckoned towards his office; what he now had to say he did not want Viv to hear. Turner was sure that he did not want to hear it as well, but he followed none the less.

"I've never known you to have an urgent phonecall before, Simon," he said as he walked through the open door. "What is it, the suppliers run out of Tippex?" he asked with a wry grin.

"No, it's to do with the connection tonight."

Simon closed the door behind them.

"Something has happened to the Moondance?" The Moondance was one of the smaller Preserver ships that had only just been converted into a time-ship.

"No, they've been monitoring the time-lines in this era and all of the readings have just gone off the scale."

"Oh, brother! So much for us getting back to our own times. Sometimes I wish that the Shades had never found us."

"Turner, if you had not been found you would be dead."

"I'm dead on my feet now, Simon"! grumbled Turner.

The forest was quite dark by the time they got to it. Transport in this era left a lot to be desired. As they had both thought that they would have been long gone from this time they had had to resort to the number 92 bus that from the amount of fumes it produced had managed to kill off half of the forest that they were about to search. Even the weather was against them finding anything at all. Just as they reached their stop the first spots of rain were starting to fall.

As the bus pulled away from the two young men a transformation took place. No longer were they both normal men from planet Earth, they were from a place that was outside of time. They were Time-Agents, sworn to stop any race from transgressing the laws of time. Now someone from outside of this time zone was somewhere in the Forest of Dean, and it was their job to find this transgressor before any damage was done. So far the Moondance had reported no fluctuation in the time-lines, but they would have to hurry or they themselves would be the transgressors. For each man there was a time to die; that was the connection the Moondance had to keep with. That night they would have to go back to their own times whether they liked it or not.

"Have you a fix yet, Turner?"

"The time disturbance is very near. We'll have to be very quick with our introductions, Simon."

"I know the car that's to hit us is only ten minutes away."

"Can you give the location to the Moondance? With the weather like this we could be yards from him and still miss."

"Wait, look, is that who I think it is through that gap?" Turner was somewhat amazed at who he saw.

"Well if it is, it's not the first time he's travelled in time."

"Our meeting has long been overdue." Turner was looking forward to the next few minutes.

"No time for the meeting down here, we'll be cutting it too fine. Stun him, then the Moondance'll be able to pick him up. Just stop him before he changes anything!"

Acturaus looked down at the time-unit and did not like what he saw. Ever since it had been placed on board he had been watching, waiting for this moment. He was getting readings where he should not be getting them. None of his race could understand computers, and this time-unit was well beyond him. No time-unit manuals had been given when this was installed on the Moondance. He hoped that his wife would be sensing his mounting concern and come up to the Bridge, then hopefully work this out.

"There's nothing to fear from destiny, Acturaus." Infinity was speaking to him again, but why to him and not to her husband William?

Ten minutes later, Mari came onto the Bridge looking bleary eyed. Her long red hair was tied up haphazardly into a make-shift pony-tail that looked as if it could well fall out at any time. Mari was from Earth, a far flung planet even for the Science Council, and not at all civilised. But she, like the others, had been taken by the Masters of Time and had been changed. They were no longer part of their races. First they had been trained as either a *Keeper* or *Preserver*. Now they were the Shade Foundation.

"What's up?"

Before he could answer Mari there was such an intense flash of white light that for some moments neither of them could see. When they did recover they found that no sound at all came from the time-unit.

"What the heck was that, Mari?" asked a still dazed Acturaus.

Mari, who was just rechecking all of the data, did not want to say. She did not at all like the answer that she was being given by her main computer. She pulled at her hair, twisting it around her fingers as she spoke.

"I believe that we have just witnessed the death of a goddess that we knew as Infinity."

Acturaus swore to high heaven at this news and when he did at last calm down he asked the main question that would have to be asked.

"What do we tell William, the Masters?"

Mari was close to tears when she had to give the next part of the news that she had been given. Her hair was now in tatters, but she did not care one bit. Everything was gone with Infinity. The window to this universe, to the sphere was gone. What had happened to the

Masters she had no idea. What all this would mean to them they were sure that the *Keepers and *Preservers* would tell them. All that Acturaus knew was that all time was linked, and somehow the Masters of Time were behind all of this. All time was linked; all that he had to do was to find someone who knew when all of this started.

When the Enterprise had come to the aid of the Warder ship Zeus, the United Federation of Planets had hoped for a new and powerful ally. Numerous trade treaties had been signed, but Terra II seemed cautious about forming a firmer link. They just did not want to join the U.F.P. During many negotiations it seemed that the stumbling block was with the Mysterious Ones of the Marse Computer. As they jointly ran the Terra II Federation if they said no to anything then there was nothing that the Council of Terra II could do about it. That was, until now. The treaty that they asked for now would still give their Federation independence, but if the U.F.P. ever needed any aid they would help. All that was needed now was for the treaty to be signed.

"Are you sure that they don't want the Enterprise to go to Terra II and pick them up?" a bemused Kirk asked Admiral Dalglish.

"No, Captain." The Admiral was as puzzled as Kirk but he was not going to tell him that. "You're to meet the Warder Starship Shadow at the edge of their Federation. You're then to take their ambassador, with his party, to the planet of Perni. The Marse Computer has told us that it is conducting a delicate experiment and does not want any Starship in the area of its complex. Now, as you are well aware, Captain, there are two ambassadors to Terra II, Commander Paul Metcalfe of the Warders and Capilla of the Mysterious Ones."

Now where had he heard that name before? Kirk frowned.

"Don't worry, Captain; the way that Marse has been against the treaty I'm sure that they won't be sending Capilla. Just in case I'm downloading all her information. Not much. We know more about the Romulans than we do about the living computer of Marse. And Captain, remember that we could well be reading this all wrongly. That's why I'm sending the Enterprise. Good luck, Captain."

Somehow Kirk knew that this was not going to be a straight forward mission.

Kirk looked at the chess game and knew that he had done this before. He was looking at the same mistake, a mistake he had made years ago, and now if he did not correct it then he would again lose to Spock. Kirk sighed. His mind had not been on the game in the first place. The call that he had received from Admiral Robson had somewhat perplexed him. Starfleet's actions often confused him. But this Terra II Federation was playing one hell of a chess game when it came to wanting to join the Federation. It had been almost five years now since they had first come into contact with this small but powerful group of planets. They were still finding out things about them, and one of the things was that they did not want to join up with the Federation. Kirk had had a long chat with the Warder Commander some five years ago, and he had seemed quite willing to travel to the conference planet of Perni to sign a long-standing treaty with them. But then there had been a message from the other party in their Federation, the massive computer planet that they called Marse. Then and there the treaty was put on a back burner. They had said that the 'time was not yet right'. What the Mysterious Ones were waiting for, Kirk had no idea. But somehow deep down he knew that the right time was going to be pretty soon.

The Marse Computer knew that soon the power of the Light that was growing on the Enterprise would be ready to face the Darkness. Soon the end game would start anew, and the result would be the birth of a new power in this dimension. They knew that they were the result of the game, and so they had to wait for the right time to meet with the Enterprise.

For she was the Light that would join with the Darkness. Two sides of the same coin. Not opposites on a chess board but soon to be one of the same side. Soon they would become the Mysterious Ones of Marse. The game went on, but the computer knew the result, for the result was already history. No matter how hard anyone tried history could not be changed for long. Time itself would not allow it. This game of life was part of time itself. Soon it knew that the Mysterious Ones and itself would have to move on. As they had once left Atlantis they would soon leave Terra II. They just hoped that the people and Warders would understand that they were no longer needed. Not as a living computer to a prison planet.

They were a new power, a combined power. No longer Darkness, no longer Light. They were in the middle. More like in the shade. They knew that soon they would have to move outside time, to try to work out just who they were and who they would be in the future. The only thing that they did know was that they were going to change. They would no longer be a mere computer, they would be alive and free of all duty to the planet of Atlantis. All that they had to do was to think of something to do with that freedom. It was now two hundred years since the power was merged and they were still thinking, but for now the game still went on around them. But soon it would be over and they would have all the time in the world to think. Outside of time they would have all of Infinity to think things over.

The meeting had been tense. Both parties did not want to give way on the matter.

"Look, Commander, I know that the Council of Terra II don't want the treaty with the United Federation of Planets. They think that the Marse Computer will be around to protect them. Nothing lasts forever. We've helped you to gain your space-flight. We had a shaky start with the war, but that was over two hundred years ago and was due to the defence programme that was inbuilt. But now we have a whole universe to explore, friends to gain. The U.F.P. are friends, Paul. I know that people are still afraid of anything that is out there ever since they landed on Marse for the first time. They think they would somehow start another war. There'll be no war with this United Federation of Planets. One of us has to go to Perni to sign this treaty."

"They did help us with the Zeus, and I do agree with the treaty, Capilla. But what I didn't like is the way the Council has acted about it. Sending out messages saying that it was the fault of the Marse Computer, that it was they who did not want to join the U.F.P. But being a Warder does have an advantage, Capilla," said Paul with a grin on his face. "This power hasn't been used for a long time, but if they say no to the Perni trip, I'll just over-ride them with my vote. And when that message gets down the grapevine it'll stop them dragging their feet."

"Then we should start getting somewhere at last."

"Yes, someone should at least get to Perni."

"One of us, Paul, but which one?"

"Let's sleep on that one. It's too late to decide something like that."

Capilla smiled as the thought formed in her head. "Your place, or mine?"

But the next morning they had still not decided which one was to travel to Perni for the treaty meeting.

"Look, I know that my ship was to be up-graded to the Ambrosia Class, but it is still my ship, and I shall take her just to show that so-called Council that the Marse Computer means what it says. Our task is almost over here, Commander. We were but the Warders of a prison planet. The prison is no more. Not that everyone wants the bars to go away."

"They like the way of life, protected by an all-powerful computer. Heck, Capilla, that could be one of the reasons they don't want the treaty. They could think that the Treaty could be the first step in a computer shut down, moving the prison into the real world. But you do know with all these rumours about the Computer being against the treaty, you have to go to Perni. And I do now how you love to mix with new people."

They embraced and kissed. "But you have to be careful. I'm sure that the Council'll have another dirty trick up their sleeves."

"Don't worry, Paul. The Computer does have a few surprises left."

"Like what, Capilla?"

She laughed and pulled away from him. "Now that would be telling!"

Capilla had had the same dream night after night since the Shadow had left Terra II. Tonight she was not to escape.

She crept stealthy along the many dusty corridors of the pyramid. This was the Power Pyramid. How she knew that she did not know. The power pulled her on, she could not stop, no matter how hard she tried. Soon she had lost all sense of direction, but she was still pulled on. Then she was very surprised to find herself in a sun-lit room. This was unlike the other dreams. In them she had never reached anywhere. She had just been pulled on and on. Stone sculptures, some broken, were scattered about the room. She looked around but could see no in-let for the sun. Was this the Power she could feel? The Power that had been pulling her on?

Then one of the sculptures caught her eye and for the first time she knew where she was, and found that all she could do was scream. She then knew that someone was waking her, taking her away from the dream. She would not find anything more out tonight. She was not sure that she wanted to find out any more. What she had seen was bad enough.

"Ambassador?" asked a worried Clarity. "Are you all right? I heard you cry out."

Capilla pulled herself up from the depths of her warm bed and looked into the concerned eyes of the young Warder.

"Don't worry, Clarity, it was just a dream."

"Another one? That's four nights in a row that I've had to wake you from a nightmare." She sat firmly down on the bed. There was something more to these dreams, something that Capilla was not saying. "Is there something that you'd like to talk about?"

"There's never anything much to talk about. When I awake, I forget. It could even just be a shadow of something they're running on Marse."

"Could they be trying to tell you something?"

"If so they could've used a more direct route. I wish Paul was here. He would know."

"You know that he had to stay in Command of the Warders."

"I know. How far are we from the Enterprise?"

"We'll meet up with them in two days, Capilla." Two days and then she would know, for she was sure that the answer to her dreams would be found at the end of her journey. On the Enterprise.

Clarity tugged at her Warder dress uniform and winced. "I'm sure that the computer's given me a size too small. I feel as if I've been trussed up."

Captain Adams turned from checking his own uniform and smiled. "You do look a bit red. But there's nothing wrong with the uniform. As I recall you've said the same thing every time you had to wear anything decent. And then when your mother and I had managed to get you into anything decent it didn't stay so for long."

"Yes," Clarity blushed. "I do remember the time I got myself stuck up a tree when I was about to meet the new Warder Commander."

"And he ended up helping to rescue you. Now are you all set? The Enterprise is awaiting."

As the Warder Jet sailed between the two Starships, Capilla wondered how the Enterprise was connected with her dreams. Or was she just mistaken? Had she, as the Terrans would say, 'Taken the wrong end of the stick'.

"We'll be docking in two minutes," said Clarity.

"From this moment on," ordered Captain Adams, "we have to be on duty twenty-four hours a day. This is a new Federation we are dealing with. We have to be on our guard."

"Captain Adams," said Capilla. "Much as I respect you taking responsibility for this mission, you must remember that I'm in overall command, not you."

"Yes, ma'am." He said nothing more, but if looks could have killed...

But Capilla had turned her attention to Clarity. "I don't expect you to be on duty twenty-four hours a day. Even we Mysterious Ones have to unwind. But I do agree that all security matters must go through Captain Adams. Now have you both got all that?"

"Yes, Ambassador," they both replied.

"Good. Then I think we are at last ready to meet up with this Federation. Remember, the best way to be diplomatic is to enjoy yourself, and do mix on the Enterprise."

The two ships circled each other waiting for the first move to be taken. Neither of them

wanting to lose ground. Fanx pulled her ship sharply starboard and fired her phasers at her opponent. Capilla then knew that she had lost her last life. Her ship had been destroyed yet again. Ever since she had started playing with this Lieutenant Fanx she had always managed to destroy her ship. She had never won a game. She marvelled at how the game was played. Fanx let go of her joy-stick and laughed. In a blaze of colours the ships vanished from the playing area to leave a bare blue table in their place.

"Remind me when the Enterprise comes again to Terra II, I'll have to play you a typical 'Mysterious Ones' game."

"Are they anything like the games on the Enterprise?" asked a curious Fanx. Somehow she found that she was drawn to Capilla, and she wanted to learn more about her world. She found that she liked to be with Capilla and the one that they called Clarity. But she was not at all sure about Captain Adams. When he was around with Capilla there seemed to be an atmosphere that you could cut with a knife. She got the impression that it was the Captain who wanted to be in charge of the visit, not Capilla, and it made her wonder if there were some people on Terra II who still distrusted the Mysterious Ones, even after all this time.

"We of the Mysterious Ones are but workers of a much larger living Computer on Marse. We are not used to playing games. We are not used to the concept. But we are learning."

"Then you like the game?"

"We have to learn somewhere. And I must say that game was a welcome change. A great way to unwind."

"Would you like another game?"

"No way, Fanx!" exclaimed Capilla in mock horror. "I'll get Clarity to play you. I've lost this game too many times. And I expect that Captain Adams'll want to know what I've been up to. He's sure that I'm going to somehow vanish from this ship, and if I don't make my report to him he'll have the whole ship on alert in no time at all. I don't know where he thinks I'll be able to get to. You can't get lost on this ship, not with this crew, they'll always point me in the right direction. And your Captain Kirk! Makes me wish I could come over and live in your Federation."

Clarity looked down at the bright red and gold evening dress and smiled. At last she was able to get out of the stuffy Warder dress uniform. For days now it had been driving her mad. She was sure that she was allergic to dress uniforms. At least on the Enterprise she was not the only one who despised being, as she would put it, being 'trussed up for Christmas.'

'Poor Len,' she thought. 'At least we ladies have a choice. You have no choice in the matter. Hey, I wonder what Capilla'll wear?'

Capilla was having no luck. *Why is it the moment you are given a choice you can't decide, but when you're told what you have to wear you can think of numerous things that would look better. There should be a computer law about it! Now then ...* Capilla looked at the three dresses that she had laid out on top of her bed. *Now which one shall I wear? What a bind! Why can't I wear all three!*

"Doctor McCoy, will you please stop tugging at your uniform. Our guests will be arriving at any moment and I don't want it to look as if my Chief Medical Officer is trying to tear his clothes off."

"Sorry, Jim, but I'm sure that they've got that computer programmed to give me a size smaller than the one I asked for."

"Doctor, as I recall, that is what you always say when you have to wear dress uniform," said Spock.

"I just don't see the point of dressing up like a Christmas tree every time we entertain important guests."

"A Christmas tree?" asked Spock with one eyebrow raised.

"Something that is over-dressed and not at all practical."

"Doctor, I assumed that was how you always dressed."

Before McCoy could reply to Spock's last remark the doors opened with a swoosh to admit Capilla, Clarity and Captain Adams.

"So, Captain Adams, how are you finding life on the Enterprise? Is it anything like a Warder Starship?"

"Warder Starship Bounty. 24.3 hours since leaving the Terra II system. Captain David reporting. There is still no word from the Mysterious Ones about the massive Carrier Wave that they transmitted from their Marse Computer. The Bounty is en route to the area where the wave is to be intercepted. Thanks to the improved warp drive we shall only be a few hours behind the wave. With luck we'll be in time to help."

Captain David slowly turned from his command position and stretched his aching back. So much for the 'improved faster ships' when you could not sit down and get comfortable. He was sure that this was some Warder plot to get all the ships' captains pensioned off with back trouble.

"Any change in our status, Lieutenant?"

"Still E.A.R."

"Then I'll get some rest. Get Strange to call me if there's any change."

"Yes, sir."

"Remind him I want to be woken at least three hours before we get to the Shadow."

The ship drifted as if it was out of control. Throughout the ship all was deathly quiet. The Shadow was now a ship of death. Even the machines seemed to make less noise than they should. But even with everyone aboard her dead the ship still kept on its projected flight plan. Soon this ship of death would not be alone.

Captain David of the Bounty knew that there was something wrong the moment he was told that no contact could be made with the W.S.S. Shadow.

"What, nothing?"

"Not on any channel. It's as if they don't want to answer."

"Then they're in range?"

"For the last half an hour, sir."

"They'll have us on their scanners. Why would they not want to talk to us? Put the ship on alert and charge the shields. I don't want to be caught with a naked ship."

What good timing, thought Parody. Just when I'm back on duty we're on alert! Any earlier and I would have missed out on the action. She quickly picked up the space helmet that she always had to carry with her and ran from the room. She did this so quickly that she almost bumped into Lieutenant Commander Strange, who had just been checking the main computer. "So sorry," was all that she had time to say as she shot passed on her way to her Angel space jet. During any alert one of the four pilots had to be stationed there as the ship could be split at a minute's notice in order to surprise the attacking enemy. Instead of having one foe to contend with they would have two. As she slipped down the access tube she wondered why the alert had been called, but she knew that her onboard computer would tell her all in a moment. She was gripped by the fear that this would be one of those missions that she would not be returning from. She had known many who had died while flying a jet in space. By now her adrenalin had worked so well, she was ready for anything.

But after waiting two hours she was not so sure.

"Any life-form readings?"

"None, Captain."

"Could they have been attacked by the U.F.P?" asked Strange.

"No," answered Captain David. "It's more than likely that it's something to do with the carrier wave. Print me up a crew listing for the Shadow. We need to know more."

As he read the listing he could see what had happened to the crew. "I think that I've got the answer. All who were on that ship were Mysterious Ones. The carrier wave must have used their life energy as a boost to wherever it has to go."

"So, they've been changed back into energy again?"

"Yes, Strange. If I'm right the ship will be empty, but safe. But just to be sure we must stay on alert. Send Angel One over."

"Angel One. Immediate launch." As Strange's voice reverberated around the Bounty the ship was splitting in half, two smaller ships, one a starship, the other a jet.

"Angel One is spaceborne and operational."

"Parody, you are to proceed with the utmost caution over to the W.S.S. Shadow which is drifting 56 mark 8 from your present position. You are then to report. If you then deem it safe

to dock do so. Have you got all that?"

"E.A.R."

She could find nothing wrong with the outside of the Shadow. Nothing that could tell them any more than they already knew. The ship was dead, but there was no sign of outside damage. Whatever had happened must have occurred on the inside. To find out more she had to dock. It had been sometime since she had to use an emergency docking port on a Starship. When she had been at the Warder Academy she used to have nightmares about having to dock manually. In her mind she had to account for both the drift of her ship and the one that she was about to dock with. As she drifted closer and closer to the Shadow she was not the only one with bated breath.

"Has she docked yet, Strange?" asked Captain David as he paced the Bridge with impatience.

"It should be any time now, sir. Wait, I'm just getting another report from her about the atmospheric conditions inside the Shadow."

"Put it on the speakers, and link me with her."

"Readings indicate," said Parody from the speakers, "that the air and temperature are normal. The life-support is still functioning, but lower than it should. It seems safe to enter."

"Parody, I would like you to make your way to their main computer and order it to transfer all of its information on the carrier wave that the Marse Computer sent."

Twenty minutes later they had had no further reports from Parody, and they began to wonder if everything was all right. Captain David was just about to have Strange call Parody when they got some startling news from their computer.

"Sir, the Shadow's engines are building up to a critical level. It's going to self-destruct."

"Get Parody out of there, Lieutenant Some."

"Yes, sir." But after a few moments Some had to say, "I can't get into contact with Parody. She turned off her radio."

"That can't be. Can you trace her, Strange, with the ship's scanners?"

"Scanning now, sir." When he received the readout he could hardly believe what he was reading. "According to the scanners there is no life on the Shadow."

"Parody, dead? Was it something more than the carrier wave that killed them? Was it this U.F.P. after all? Lieutenant get Celerity to pull us out of range of the Shadow. I don't want to be caught in the blast."

"What should we do now, sir?" asked Some.

"We must run through every bit of information that we have. There must be something that we missed. We must find out about the carrier wave that's now headed for Capilla, for if it killed everyone on the Shadow what will it do to the Enterprise?"

Captain James T. Kirk smiled to himself. The dinner had gone quite well and he had enjoyed himself, something that he had not done at a diplomatic gathering in some time. He had always wished for Klingons and Romulans to turn up, but now all he could wish for was one Mysterious One and that would lighten the mood at any other gathering that he had to attend as a representative of the U.F.P. He would be quite sad to drop Capilla and her group off at Perni.

Spock had been engrossed in conversation most of the night with Capilla. He was enjoying himself also, finding out about the living computer of Marse. Just up his street. Of the group there seemed to be one who had been holding back, and that was Captain Adams. Somehow, he was sure, Adams resented having Capilla in command. He could remember himself resenting Starfleet personnel who had come on board his ship and pulled rank. He admired Adams for coping so well, even if it did dampen his mood.

Dr McCoy had found a kindred spirit with Clarity while Kirk had enjoyed talking with Captain Adams about the Warders of Terra II and how they came about. To him it seemed so different from the life that he knew in Starfleet. It whetted his appetite. He had to talk to Capilla to get the Mysterious One's story. Just when he was about to speak to her he had a call from the Bridge about the carrier wave.

"And it is definitely heading our way?"

"Yes, sir," replied Sulu. "A rough estimate shows that it originated from the Terra II system."

"But we've nothing to reach this far," said Clarity. "Could it be something from the Computer?"

"It would have been very dangerous for them to have tried anything. Is it all right if I join you on the Bridge, Captain?"

"If the wave is for you I see no reason why you can't. How far away is it, Sulu?"

As he heard the estimated time a frown formed on his face. "We'll be right up."

So much for the enjoyable evening. Whatever was coming towards the Enterprise would pass the ship in less than thirteen minutes. According to Clarity the wave did not come from Terra II. Only something from Marse could have sent it. Even then it was a danger. Whatever was coming must be important and they had to be ready.

The wave passed them, to their surprise without any effect. Nothing registered on any of the instruments. Uhura was not even able to pick up anything on her communications panel.

To Kirk it was something of an anti-climax. He had been sure that something had been sent on that carrier wave from Marse, but there had been nothing that they could put their finger on. All that he could do now was talk to Capilla and her party.

"I'm sorry," said Capilla as they left the Bridge. "I was sure something should have happened when that wave passed."

"Maybe it was not the right time for it to happen. It could have been a message just for you and you'll only receive it when you are alone."

"You've been talking to Lieutenant Fanx again."

And then quite suddenly Capilla ceased to exist.

She was here, but then again she was not. The feeling was weird. It was almost as if she had been caught between two times, or that suddenly two of her existed in the same space and time. Was this something to do with the carrier wave? But what on the Enterprise could have reacted by forming another Capilla? This was more than the computer twins that she sent to other dimensions from part of her energy matrix. This was a whole new her on the Enterprise. But where could this other Capilla be? And what did she have planned for the Enterprise?

Even before she had started her meal Fanx knew that something had happened. She called it her sixth sense. But she was sure that people would laugh at her if she told them, and if she did, what could she say? She had no proof that anything had happened to the ship. If it had been that bad there would have been a ship wide alert. Captain Kirk would never leave his crew in the dark about anything. She sighed and started to pick through her salad. She had been so hungry when she had finished her security shift. Now the sight of all this food made her feel very sick. Something had happened. But how would she find out? It was just then that the ship was placed on Yellow Alert. She had to find Capilla.

As the Warder Starship was reducing to standard speed Captain David had a strange report.

"What do you mean, we've lost the carrier wave?"

"Yes, sir. It passed the U.S.S. Enterprise and then vanished."

"Then it must have been for them. Have we made contact with them, Lieutenant?"

"Yes, sir, and we shall be docking with them in four hours."

"Very good. Did they say how the carrier wave affected their ship? What I would like to know is why the Shadow was destroyed along with one of my best operatives while the Enterprise is still up and running."

"I can't answer that, sir," said Lt. Commander Strange. "But something has happened to Capilla."

"Tell me all that you know."

Some time later

"Three minutes to docking, Captain David."

"Warder Starship Bounty is on course and ready to dock."

He stared in amazement at the size of the Enterprise. Captain David was sure that it would even dwarf the Marse Computer. No wonder that they wanted this Federation on their side. But if they were so powerful they could well be behind all that had been going on on Terra II. He would just have to wait and see.

She had said that Captain Adams was sure that she would disappear from the ship. Fanx had thought that was an impossible thing to happen. Not to Capilla. But the ship had already been searched once and now she was on her second sweep of the main cargo holds. It was there that she found her; how the other security teams could have missed her she would soon find out when she had them all report. But first she had to get Capilla to Sickbay.

Fanx stared down at the still body of Capilla and wondered how this could ever have happened. She was such a nice person, so friendly, something that always seemed to be lacking with the diplomatic corps. They never seemed to treat members of Security as living beings, just a large mass with little brains, and that was an image she hated. People in general seemed to think that Security members had all brawn and no thought patterns.

Suddenly she felt very strange, almost as if someone had just walked over her grave. It was as though the temperature in this part of Sickbay had just dropped several degrees. She should call Nurse Chapel - something else could be happening to Capilla - but she found that she had no voice. Something was preventing her from calling for help. Whatever was happening was out of her control.

Capilla was floating in nothing. It was almost as she was back in the Marse Computer. But she was far from Marse. She was the further that any Mysterious One had ever been beyond the computer. The only way that she could still exist was by using all her reserve power. Now she was surrounded by power that was so much like her own computer power, and it could have only come from one place. But Atlantis had been dead for thousands of years.

Then a voice filled her head, and to her surprise she found she was listening to herself. Then she knew what was happening. She was now inside the main power source. It had been here waiting on the Enterprise, waiting for a jump-start as it had no power after it was taken from the main Atlantis computer. It also told her how she could have survived the destruction. She was the bridge for the people of Terra II and the Marse computer in the year 2077. Somehow she had to take the power source that was now part of her to stop a war that would have ended up with the destruction of both planets. What she needed was help.

Fanx knew what she must do as she walked down to the Science Department. She had had her orders from Capilla. Now all that she had to do now was to steal a Warder Starship.

"You want me to do what, Fanx?" asked a bewildered Zee. "They'll throw us in the brig and throw away the key if they catch us."

"But they won't, my friend. Not if you can do your stuff with their computer. All I need is enough time for me to get into the Warder ship without them noticing. You have nothing to worry about, you don't have to get near the ship. All that you have to do is make sure that the Warders don't know I'm there until it's too late."

"Look, Fanx, different Federation, different computers. There's no way that I'll be able to. You steal a Starship? What would you do with a ship like that? And how would you deal with the Warder guard? You're not going to kill anyone, are you? My race will have no part in murder!"

"No one will be harmed, Zee. I hope to have the Warder guard on my side by then. Now calm down or we'll both end up in the brig before I have time to start! I thought that all you Vulcans were always calm and logical?"

"I was, Fanx, until I got involved with you!"

"That you did, lover boy. Now will you help?"

"Spock'll kill me if he finds out, but I can put a blanket over the ship sensors and scanners for about ten minutes, no more. You'll have to be in the ship and launched by that time or it'll be no go, they'll be on to you and me by that time."

"And you'll be able to cope with them after I've gone? If you're going to get into danger because of us, try some other less dangerous way."

"I'll see what I can do, but it'll give you less time and the Enterprise is sure to be able to follow you, and she is the faster ship."

"Is she, Zee? The Zeus Class may be small but they are more powerful than you can imagine."

"But I thought that the Terra II Federation had just developed the Warp Drive?"

"That was five years ago, Zee, a long time for a computer to develop. And we did say that the Bounty had the new Warp Drive. The Enterprise will be able to follow, but catch us in her tractor beam, no. We want the Enterprise, for her crew are as much part of the past as Lieutenant Fanx."

"Who are you? You're in Fanx's body but you're not her. What have you done to her!"

"I am quite safe, Zee. We're just sharing the same body for a time. It's not easy to escape from Sickbay, you know. We've a lot to do and little time. Can we both count on your help, Zee?"

Parody was dead? Clarity could not believe such bad news even from Captain David. She had had only sketchy reports from the other Bounty crew members and she had wanted to know more, for if the carrier wave killed Parody hours after it had passed the Shadow then the Enterprise could well still be in danger. But if she could work this out so must have Captain Kirk. So why was not the ship on alert? Was Parody really dead? She had to ask Captain David. Even then she could not believe it.

Parody had escaped death so many times it was so hard to think that this time she had

not made it. And she had died alone on a dead ship far from her native planet. Too far for the Mysterious Ones to take her into their ranks. She would never see her friend and teammate again. And she had been so far away she had not been able to say farewell.

She was in a very dark mood as she made her way to the Bounty, and being on guard duty did not help matters. Why have a guard? Who on the Enterprise would want to steal a Starship? It would make a mess of the treaty and could well result in another war. Not that Terra II had fought this Federation before. The last war had been with the Mysterious Ones, when they had first tried to leave their home planet. The computer had been programmed as part of a defence programme for a planet that had been dead for thousands of years. For some reason the planet of Terra II was never to be allowed to have spaceflight, so a ship from Terra II landing on Marse resulted in a war that lasted for almost ten years. Now they would always think twice before they took any action. The war had hurt them and they would not like to be hurt again.

Captain David was lost in thought. It had been some hours since he had had this report from Clarity and it would seem that the crew of the Enterprise knew as much as the Warders did about the carrier wave. But something was about to happen. He had something niggling at the back of his mind. Something was still not right. Something must have happened to Capilla, but what? Clarity must know more. After Captain Kirk had finished giving them a guided tour of his ship then he would again speak with her on the Bounty.

They were on the Bridge when it happened. Lieutenant Uhura was showing Lt. Commander Strange how the sub-space radio worked, how it could connect to anywhere on the ship, and how it could home in on a particular person. Clarity was at the helm trying to talk Sulu into letting her fly the ship. The Warder Captains were trying to work out how Spock's Science Station worked, with little success although both Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock were trying to explain. Then as they were talking all of the lights on his station flashed on and off once and then a second time, then they went out all together.

"Should that happen?" asked Captain Adams. But then they were distracted by Sulu.

"Sir, we are getting an unauthorized depressurisation of the hanger deck and the opening of the landing bay doors."

"What!" Kirk spun around surprised. "Over-ride them."

"I'm trying, sir. But I believe it's too late."

"I can now register a ship leaving the hanger bay."

"A ship, not a shuttle, Spock?"

"Sir, someone is stealing the Bounty." With that all the lights on the Bridge shimmered and reduced their glow. "I now have a malfunction on all scanners and probes. The tractor beam is also non-operational."

"Then we can't track the Bounty, Spock?"

"Not at this time, Captain."

"Captain Kirk!" spat a very angry Captain David. "My ship has been stolen while under your protection. You and your mighty United Federation of Planets! You are worse than pirates! You must find our ship, Captain, or you shall find you are at war with the Terra II Federation!" With that Captain David with his crew quickly left the Bridge.

"A war, Jim? Have we started a war?"

"According to Captain David we have, Doctor. But Captain Adams knows that we had nothing to do with the hijacking of the Bounty, thank god, and he's trying to calm him down. It gives us time to try and sort out the mess that someone's made of the ship's scanners. Spock's working on it. But what I want to know is who took the ship, and why."

"You want me to do what, Fanx? You put me into some sort of mind-lock and then tell me that you want me to fly you around the sun and sling us back to the year 2076! Even if I could fly this ship I wouldn't help you! You're nothing more than a pirate and have no doubt helped start a war with your Federation and mine. Why, Fanx? Why do it?"

"Then I'll see what I can do. Then I'm sure that we have a lot of time for you to tell me your story. But there's no way that I can use this Ambrosa Class Starship for a sling shot. I just haven't had the training."

"But I know a woman who has!"

Parody was uneasy. She had soon found that the Shadow was not as dead as she had thought. All the Mysterious Ones had been turned into energy and used in the carrier wave, but it was as though they were still here, just shadows of what they once were. The ship was living up to its name. It was very creepy even for a trained Warder officer. The sooner she reported back to the Bounty the better. The best place to do that was the Bridge; she could also tap into the computer log.

She walked through the shadow of a young officer and a shiver ran down her spine as it dissolved into space. She tried to remember that the Mysterious Ones were but part of a computer. They had not died, but the energy had been channelled into another direction. But it did not help as she thought that when she died, was that just someone switching her off?

As she arrived on the Bridge she got the feeling that something was not quite right with the ship. Something was happening to the engines. And there was someone else on the Bridge. She drew her weapon quickly, not knowing what to expect. She was the only life-form on the Shadow, so who was this?

"I am an officer of the Warders of Terra II. Identify yourself!"

The form turned and smiled. A strange light seemed to come from the form that made Parody pull back.

"Welcome to my ship, Parody. I've been expecting you."

"Is that you, Ambassador Capilla? But you're on the Enterprise. How can it be you?"

Her weapon had not wavered an inch from the glowing form. She was not at all convinced that this was Capilla; for all that she knew this was what killed the crew.

"You will be told more when I take you back to the Bounty."

"Okay, Capilla, I know that Captain David wants to know what's going on as well."

As the Mysterious One's glow enveloped her she heard Capilla say, "Captain David will never know what's going on!"

But by that time it was too late. She was being taken by Capilla to who knew where. She hoped she still had a job to come back to when this was all finished.

Kirk was in a foul mood. No one messed with his ship and got away with it. But whoever had managed this would now be light years away doing who knew what. He managed to get some information from Captain Adams about the carrier wave from Marse, but that had not helped. They knew as much as he did.

"Did the Marse Computer tell you anything?" asked Kirk. "Anything at all?"

"All that they would say was that if the Pyramid that stood still in time was to fall so would Terra II."

"And what's this Pyramid?" asked Scott, who was seated with all of the other senior officers around the Briefing Room table.

"The Pyramid that we think they're on about is in no danger, so I don't see why they had to send the Carrier Wave," said Captain Adams.

"But was it ever in danger?" asked Spock.

"I'm not that good at history, Mr Spock, but I do know that the Pyramid was discovered during the eight-year war with the Marse Computer."

"And how did this war end?"

"A peace treaty was signed in 2077."

"Who signed?"

"The Commander in Chief of the Warders and Capilla."

"Capilla was there then?!" asked Kirk.

"It has been said that she has always been with us."

"In this Pyramid?" asked McCoy.

"She is connected to it."

"Meaning?"

"The Light of the Pyramid lives through Capilla and she lives through the Pyramid. They're one and the same."

"And what year was this Pyramid discovered?" asked Kirk.

"I don't know, Captain. Captain David's the one to ask about dates like that. But he's convinced that we're all involved in a massive plot that involves your Federation. I'll see if I can get Commander Strange to find out for us. But then what?"

"Capilla is connected to the Pyramid and so are we," Kirk said.

"Darkness and Light?" asked Spock.

"Right, Spock."

"What are you two on about?" asked McCoy.

"We're on about the one-time prison planet of Atlantis."

"Atlantis? When have we been to Atlantis?" asked McCoy.

"A mind block, Spock? Preventing us from remembering until now?"

"Yes, Captain. It would seem that we could well have been used as a stepping stone."

"A stepping stone, Spock?!" asked McCoy. "What are you on about? Will you please tell us?"

"Capilla," both Kirk and Spock told him at the same time.

"You mean our Capilla?" asked Captain Adams. "You've met our Capilla before?"

"Yes," said Kirk. "When we were transported into another dimension by the Darkness."

"Then that explains it, I think."

"Explains what?" asked McCoy.

"How the Power Source from Atlantis could get to Terra II through the Marse Computer while the war was on. No machine could get to Marse without being disabled"

"And," continued Spock, "if the Power Source was also a machine then it would be disabled when it tried to get to Terra II from outside of the system. But it is a living Power Source."

"So," continued Captain Adams, a bit annoyed that Spock was trying to explain as well, "Capilla and the Source merged into one. So she would read as Human by the Computer. That'll take her past Marse. But not the ship."

"Then she'll still fail?"

"She'll crash. But they'll survive. We just never knew where the Power Source came from, Captain Kirk. But we still have Captain David to contend with. And are you going to follow the Bounty? We know where she's gone, but you're not to try to get past Marse. No

matter how far away the planet is, even on the other side of the sun the Computer'll still get you. The Computer's so strong it was a wonder that we survived the war."

"One of my crew members is on that ship, Adams, and I won't abandon him, no matter what the odds. We can't take the Enterprise, but there's always the shuttle."

"Does this means that we'll be doing the sling shot?" asked McCoy.

"Yes, Doctor. We're going back to the year 2077. Or if we can find out a closer date from Captain David so much the better. Captain Adams, you'd better go and see your Commander Strange. Then we should be well on our way."

"Will your engines take it, Captain? The Enterprise is a lot bigger ship than the Bounty."

With that comment Mister Scott went on to tell him how his engines could cope with a sling shot and how they had done so before. After that he was glad that the meeting was called to a close.

All was not going to plan.

'How had they remembered?' they asked. 'Capilla should have remained unknown to them.'

'You fixed the scanners so they could follow. The fact that they could remember Capilla was an unknown factor. Zee, this other Captain, David, must be dealt with before he can divulge his information. He already suspects too much. Capilla must fail with her plan if we are to survive. She and her Adrian stopped us on Citadel, but we still survive, thanks to the Angola. We shall have our revenge. Capilla must die, and then we can take over the Marse Computer. Atlantis will live again.'

Captain David knew that something was wrong. Who had fixed the scanners on the ship? No one, from either of the crews, knew how the Enterprise's computers worked. Capilla could have asked this Lieutenant Fanx to help. But he soon found out she was in the Security Section of the ship and had no access to the computers. Now he must find out who this Fanx knew who did. This was such a web that he could well soon find himself caught if he were not careful. Somehow he had to fix things so that if anything did happen to him someone else would know what it was that had been going on.

But that was the hard part. All that he knew was that something was wrong; he could not prove anything, or point a finger at anyone. It was only his small hope that the person who had fixed the scanners would get jumpy and would make some mistake. He must go and talk to his Second in Command about his feelings. He was sure he would have many questions that had been posed by Captain Kirk and Captain Adams. As he walked down the corridor he noticed that it was getting cold. He had thought that the temperature did not change on a Starship. He pulled his uniform closer to his body and a shiver ran down his spine. What was happening to him? He was being eaten up by the cold.

Ahead of him he could see a figure. At first he thought it was Spock, but then he noticed that this Vulcan had slightly lighter hair than the Science Officer. Then he saw his eyes, and David's knees wanted to buckle from under him. Darkness - all that he could see was Darkness. Deep, deep Darkness coming for him. Coming to swallow up his very soul. The web had closed and he was trapped. He never did remember hitting the corridor wall.

When something like this happened on his ship it made Kirk's blood run cold. Someone in his crew had tried to murder Captain David. If the stealing of the Bounty had not been enough to start a war, then this surely was. Even Captain Adams was wondering now if this was, after all, a plot by Kirk's Federation. Why, after all, would the only person who pointed a finger at the Enterprise now be close to death in Sickbay, having been found looking as though he had been three rounds with a mad Vulcan.

"This is happening on my ship, Bones, and I have no idea what's going on!" said Kirk as he sipped his drink in his quarters. "The Power Source is off the ship, so's Capilla. So who just tried to kill Captain David?"

The Darkness was here with him. He could feel it. The coldness had returned. He had to get away, he had to run. But he was a Warder; why was he scared? He had to confront the Darkness. Captain David tried to pull himself off the medi-bed, but a firm hand stopped him.

"Rest," said a voice that he knew.

"No." *Run, you must run!* screamed his mind. "The Darkness."

"Darkness?" asked Strange.

"Have to stop it." He again tried to get up from the bed. "The Darkness'll destroy us all."

"Captain, you must rest, please! You've a fever from your injuries. Calm down. I'll get a nurse to see if she can give you anything for the pain."

"Angola," murmured Captain David. "The Angola is the Darkness. Tell Kirk." He took Strange's hand firmly. "It's not the pain that causes the fever but the Darkness. It's trying to take me as it has taken the Angola. You must tell Kirk that the Angola must be destroyed. Tell Kirk, or it will take the entire ship. Trust me, Strange, you must help me. Find out from Kirk if he's found the Angola. If he has come into contact with the ship then it must prove something. How could I have known about a ship from Sickbay? Go to the Bridge. Warn Kirk!"

"I'll keep an eye on Captain David for you, Strange," said Captain Adams, who was now standing at the door of McCoy's Office. *How long has he been there? Strange wondered. How much has he heard?*

"Go, Strange, go and warn Kirk! Captain David and I have other business to attend to."

"Aye, sir," Strange quickly left Sickbay.

"Now, we will both face the Darkness together," Adams said softly.

"Yes, Adams. We are both sworn to protect Terra II."

"So has the Light and Darkness?" remarked Adams.

"The Angola?" asked a puzzled Kirk. "Give us your location."

"Don't you see us, Enterprise? We see you and we are coming to welcome you."

Kirk quickly, quietly told Uhura to cut the communication. He then went over to Spock.

"Captain, the Angola was lost years ago."

"So why is it here? No good news that it's here."

"I assume that it's here because of Capilla."

"Or to take a second crack at us?" asked Kirk. "Go to Red Alert. We'll not be taken by this Darkness."

"The Darkness is here." Strange had just reached the Bridge. "It is the Angola?"

"How do you know about the Angola?" asked McCoy.

"Captain David told me to warn you about the ship. He told me that the Darkness is trying to take him as it is trying to take your ship."

"So that could mean that we'll be attacked in two directions," said McCoy. "From the Angola and David."

"Sir," said Sulu somewhat alarmed. "I'm getting an unauthorised depressurisation of the hanger deck."

"Not again!" exclaimed Kirk. "Inform Security. Try to stop anything from leaving."

"Too late, sir. A shuttle is leaving the bay. It's Capilla's, the one from her ship."

"Only Warders would know how to work a Shadow Jet," said Strange.

"Security reports," said Uhura, "that Captains David and Adams cannot be found."

"What are those two up to? Uhura, call them back!"

"Sir, they are saying that they can't come back. It's their duty as Warders to protect and end the game. This is about the Terra II Federation. Nothing to do with the Enterprise."

"But Captain David could be in the power of the Darkness. We have to warn Captain Adams."

"I think that he knows, Captain," said Strange. "This is the only way that Adams can save David. By making him face the Darkness."

"To know what's out there," said Kirk. "So that the Darkness shall become enlightened."

Suddenly the world of the starlit sky was awash with light making the whole of the Bridge crew cover their eyes. The ship lurched from side to side and everyone had to quickly find something firm to hold onto.

"What was that!?" exclaimed Sulu as he rubbed his eyes.

"Look at the screen!" said Strange. "The whole system has gone!"

"How can a whole system go?" asked Kirk. "Was it some sort of explosion, Spock? Has the Darkness destroyed the whole of the system?"

"No, Captain, I believe it is the Enterprise that has been moved. We are now at the edge of the Perni system."

"Then we're where we should have been in the first place? But when?"

"Sir, I'm getting a communication from the Perni High Council, welcoming us. Also they hope that we had a pleasant and quiet journey."

"How can I tell them I lost the Ambassador?"

The turbo-lift doors opened and Capilla and Clarity walked in. Everyone on the Bridge turned and stared and Capilla smiled.

"Thank you for taking me to Perni, Captain. The whole trip has been somewhat of an adventure for me and my crew. Captain Adams is warming up the Jet so you won't have to use the transporter. We Mysterious Ones are somewhat allergic to transporters, being made up of energy."

"You are here, but what of Lieutenant Fanx?"

"She and Parody wanted to stay in the year 2077," said Capilla.

"It was written in our history, Captain, that Fanx helped us overcome the Marse Computer."

Captain Kirk wondered how he was going to put this all in his log. He just hoped that the next diplomatic mission that he was given was slightly more quiet. He often wished for excitement on those sorts of missions, but with you can get too much of some things. He would volunteer his ship for Neutral Zone duty; it would be a lot quieter than having a Mysterious One called Capilla on his ship.

"Is this part of the complex used often by the Warders?" Kirk was sure that he had been here before and had said the same thing to the Warder called Parody.

"We come here as often as we can." The doors in front of them suddenly stopped dead and started making a thin wailing noise.

"Does this happen often?" asked an amused Kirk with a smile.

"Old machine. I expect you'll not be working as well as this when you get to be this age."

"All I'll be able to do is make the noise." He laughed. "But I'm working well now, and I don't need a holodeck to show it." As they left the corridor neither of them noticed that they were being watched from the other side of the door. The game had finished for the computer of Marse, but for William Havanna it was only just the first round.



ALWAYS THERE

I look to my right,
And you are there;
Through good times and bad
You are always there.

When I need advice and understanding
You are always there;
When I need someone to talk to,
I know you'll always be there.

When I rage at fate and circumstances,
You are always there;
You calm my mind and soul
And are always there.

When I lost control
You were always there;
You understood and helped me,
And were always there.



When I awake in Sickbay
I know you'll always be there;
You ease my pain,
And remain, always, there.

When I need peace and serenity
You are always there;
Ready to help but never intruding,
Yet always there.



When either of us needs the other, we know
He'll always be there;
Each of us helping the other,
And always there;
Needing only to know that both will remain, forever,
Always there.

Christine Jones



IN LOVING MEMORY

by

Liz Aris

Captain's Log Stardate 3927.9

We have just completed what should have been a routine mission to leave a Federation science party and a First Contact Team on the planet Ara. This small technologically advanced but fiercely feudal planet has requested aid from the Federation in mining the large dilithium deposits found there. It is a patriarchal system with two major factions involving the current ruler and his opposition, his half-brother. The proximity of this planet to the Tholian-claimed area of space could make it ideal for the refuelling and resupply of ships patrolling this sector. The Leader seems willing to discuss the possibilities and the First Contact Team's diplomats will be furthering discussions in this area.

However a scuffle between opposition guards and what appeared to be a small child resulted in the death of Junior Science Technician Laura Gorinski, who tried to intervene and protect the child. In view of this I have decided to leave an additional security detail on the planet.

James T. Kirk

Captain. USS Enterprise.

Captain's Personal Log Supplemental

The mission to Ara is over and we are licking our wounds; the events there have affected us all deeply, especially Ensign Chekov, who seems to feel personally responsible for Gorinski's death. Her tragic demise will be with us for some time to come, and I regret not having found the time to get to know this crew member of whom my science team speaks so highly. Spock felt she would have been capable of a great deal, indeed all my officers have nothing but praise for this young woman, but none seem to have known her personally except Chekov, and I feel it too cruel to probe for details at this time.

"Checkmate, Mr Chekov," said Spock as he moved his knight up a level, effectively bracketing Chekov's king and winning the game.

"Thank you for the game, sir."

Spock inclined his head to the Ensign as he rose and crossed the room to join Kirk and McCoy, leaving Chekov staring at the chess board.

"That was quick," commented Kirk.

"His mind was not on the game," Spock answered almost disapprovingly.

"No, Spock I don't suppose it was. I spoke to both of them only three days ago; told them they were too young, to wait a while," said McCoy almost absently.

"To wait for what, Bones?" asked Kirk.

"To get married."

The three officers looked across to where Chekov sat at the chess board as still as a statue before suddenly, in a rush of movement, he stood and left.

Chekov entered his quarters in a daze. He seemed to be running on automatic, performing his duties without really thinking. Everywhere he looked he saw Laura in the little changes she'd made to the cabin since she'd moved in three weeks ago.

Scott met Sulu in the corridor outside Chekov's quarters, both apparently intent on the same purpose. They looked at each other, Sulu taking in the bottle in Scott's hand, Scott taking in the bottle in Sulu's hand.

"Great minds, lad," said Scott, "but I think tonight's my turn."

Sulu smiled at the Scotsman. "How did you know we'd been taking it in turns to keep him company?"

"For one thing, lad, never trust an Irishman to keep a secret..."

"Riley..."

"... and secondly, what else are friends for?"

Scott entered without even buzzing the door and walked over to deposit the bottle of whisky on the table. Chekov looked up.

"Now then, lad, you and me are going to have a little chat and a wee dram or two."

"Mr Scott, I'm really not good company at the moment, and I'm getting a little bored with the babysitting."

"Your friends are just worried about you. Tell you what, one drink together and I'll be off, and I'll even leave you the bottle. How's that?"

Chekov had to smile at that and he nodded his agreement as Scotty undid the bottle.

Captain James T. Kirk surveyed the Bridge. All was quiet as was to be expected on the night watch, or what stood for night on board.

"Course, Mr Riley?"

"Routine approach to Starbase 12, sir. ETA four hours."

"Maintain." Settling into the command chair Kirk began reading the reports from the

landing party on Ara. He would submit these along with his own report, based on the spoken reports they had given him on their return, to the authorities on Starbase 12. He began with Spock's.

About half an hour later when Yeoman Rand brought him coffee he had read most of them and was just starting on Chekov's. A shrill whistle sounded from where Uhura's relief was working. She looked apologetically across at the Captain and was rewarded with a fierce glare. Hurriedly she buried herself in her work. Kirk stood to leave and crossed to the communications console, where the young Andorian looked up.

"Leave a message for Mr Chekov on the computer to be delivered with his wake-up call. I wish to see him in my cabin before he goes on shift."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Oh, and Ensign, the mute button is the second left, back row."

In his cabin Kirk mused over Chekov's report. It did not tally with anybody else's; in fact it placed all blame for the incident firmly on Chekov's own shoulders. Kirk could cope with his officers feeling remorse over the seemingly pointless loss of life but he would not have reports perjured or, allow them to throw away their careers on a self-imposed guilt trip.

A tousled Chekov stood to attention before Kirk's desk next day. Kirk walked to his night stand and retrieved the report, tossing it on the desk in front of Chekov.

"What do you call this?" he asked.

"My report, sir."

"I know that, if you can call this fabrication a report." His tone softened as he looked at Chekov, who looked tired. "Pavel, I know what you're going through but believe me, blaming yourself won't help you and it certainly won't bring her back."

Chekov picked up the report and read it. He looked up at Kirk with total puzzlement in his eyes.

"Sir, this is not my report. I did not write this."

"Well, if you didn't, who did? It's your signature on the bottom."

"I wrote my report, signed it then left it on Yeoman Rand's desk. Someone must have altered it."

"Who? And why? Why should anyone want to change your report?"

"I don't know, but I swear I did not write that report."

Later, in Sickbay, Kirk was telling McCoy and Spock about the meeting, while McCoy

poured the usual 'medicinal brandy'.

"Thanks, Bones," said Kirk, accepting his. "I just don't understand it. Why should anyone want to change the report and if it wasn't changed why would he lie about it?"

"Someone with a grudge, perhaps. Maybe someone was jealous and when Laura died decided to get even? I don't know, Jim but I don't think Pavel's lying about it. It's totally out of character for him. There's always the verifier if you really want to make sure, although I'd advise against it at the moment."

"I don't think it's necessary, Bones. The whole thing is just so damned strange."

"I agree, Jim." Spock spoke quietly and thoughtfully. "Chekov's behaviour has not been normal since the incident. I had, however, put this down to your Human emotion of grief."

"A natural state for us 'Humans' when we lose someone we care about," interjected McCoy angrily.

Kirk flapped a hand at McCoy to quieten him as he leaned forward in his chair.

"What do you mean, Spock?"

"He is distracted and appears not to remember performing various tasks and duties, some with more than his usual skills."

"What do you think, Bones?"

"I think the boy is grieving for someone he loved and needs time to come to terms with his loss, but if it will keep you off his back I'll pull him in for his routine physical. For which, by the way Jim, you are way overdue!"

"Well?" demanded Kirk later as he joined McCoy for dinner.

"Physically he's fine, just a bit run down. Admitted to not sleeping very well, which is understandable. Emotionally he's a bit stressed out, a bit edgy. That's all I could get from talking to him. Psychological examinations are not normally part of a routine physical."

"But you could decide he needs one?"

"Jim, lay off. The lad feels persecuted enough over the report." He took a mouthful of coffee. "Oh, and call Spock off. He's watching him as if he's expecting him to grow two heads or something."

Kirk inspected the lettuce on his fork before deciding he'd had enough and dropped it to his plate with a clatter.

"So, if Chekov didn't write the report then we have a possible someone wanting revenge over something, who, when I don't do anything about it, may try something else to achieve his or her purpose." He shook his head and rubbed his eyes tiredly.

"Headache, Jim?" McCoy asked sympathetically. "Want something for it?" Kirk shook his head again then wished he hadn't.

Deep in thought the two men entered the turbo lift which would take them to the Bridge. Kirk gave the order which would take them to the part of the ship he loved the most, the place where he felt truly at home.

Sulu vacated the command chair as they entered. "The Starbase Commodore is requesting communications, sir. Er... he's rather irate."

"Lieutenant Uhura, put the Commodore on screen, please."

A heavy-set gray-haired humanoid appeared on the main viewer. He was red in the face, as if only just holding himself in check.

"Kirk, what is the meaning of this? I can only assume that one of your crew has a bizarre sense of humour and I can assure you that I do not find it funny in the least!"

"To what are you referring, Commodore? I'm afraid I don't understand."

"These reports that were forwarded on the happenings on Ara. Not only do they not tally, but they make my Laura look a complete dolt. Disobedience to a superior officer does not make good reading on anybody's service record, alive or dead."

Kirk looked askance at Spock, and as always the Vulcan knew the information required.

"The Commodore is Ensign Gorinski's uncle, Captain."

"I assure you, sir, that my report on Ensign Gorinski's performance has nothing but praise for the manner in which she fulfilled her duties. Her death was a tragic accident which has saddened all of those who knew her."

"And I assure you, Kirk, that you have not heard the last of this."

"Commodore, I will investigate your allegations and get back to you. Enterprise out." He swung his chair to face Uhura.

"Who sent those reports, Lieutenant?"

"Checking the records now, sir." Lights buzzed around the communications board as she bent over it tracking the recent traffic. "Reports sent by ... by Ensign Chekov, sir."

She looked across at Chekov whose face slowly drained in shock. Kirk turned to face him also.

"Well, Mister Chekov? I hope you have an explanation?"

"I I didn't send it I loved Laura I couldn't do that to her."

"Anyone see Chekov near the communications console?"

Uhura looked apologetically at Chekov as she answered, "Yes, sir. He was there as I came on watch. I asked if I could help but he just left."

"I saw him too, sir. I'm sorry, Pavel," added Sulu.

Chekov looked around him, hurt and betrayal plain on his face. He knew he hadn't been

anywhere near the console. Why were his friends lying like this? He didn't understand. He ran from the Bridge, tears stinging his eyes. McCoy went to call him back.

"Leave him, Bones. Prepare Sickbay for that verifier scan. Sulu, find Chekov and meet us there. Uhura, Spock, I want you there too. I intend to get to the bottom of this."

By the time Sulu found Chekov Uhura had already given her evidence. They entered McCoy's office and Chekov bit his lip nervously as he saw the scanner set up on the table.

"You don't believe me, do you?"

"On the evidence so far I don't have much choice," Kirk said as he indicated to him to sit in the chair next to the machine. Chekov sat.

"Please state your name and rank for the record," said Spock.

Looking very bitter and hurt Chekov looked at his superiors; Spock was impassive as usual, McCoy looked concerned and Kirk just plain annoyed.

"Pavel Andreovitch Chekov Ensign."

"Did you write the report the Captain read, signed by you, regarding the events on Ara?"

"I filed a report but not the one the Captain later showed me."

"Did you send the reports to Starbase 12?"

"NO .. I did not."

"Lt Uhura reports you were near the console when she came on duty. This is confirmed by Lt Sulu."

"I didn't send it. I'm telling the truth I didn't do it!"

"Spock?"

"Confirmed. He is telling the truth. Sulu's story was also confirmed by the verifier."

"How can they all be telling the truth?"

"Machine's bust," offered McCoy.

"No, Doctor. Bridge recordings also confirm Uhura's and Sulu's stories." Spock pressed a few buttons and a view of the Bridge appeared on the desk viewscreen. It showed Chekov crossing to the communications console and sending the reports.

Chekov slumped in his chair. After that there was no way they would believe him.

"That will be all," said Kirk, and the three officers stood to leave. "Mister Chekov, you are confined to quarters until further notice. I don't know what's going on here or what you hope to achieve, but believe me, I will find out."

Chekov followed Uhura and Sulu out. As the door closed behind them Kirk turned to McCoy and Spock.

"Could he have fooled the scan?" he asked.

"I doubt it, Captain. Despite the evidence he believed he was telling the truth."

"I'm going to have to agree with Spock." As Spock's eyebrow rose at this comment McCoy added, "Don't worry, I'm not going to make a habit of it. Seriously, Jim, that boy believed he was telling the truth. I'm scheduling that psychological exam for tomorrow. You'll have my full report then."

Chekov stormed into his quarters and flung himself on his bed. He felt betrayed and confused. Somewhere he could hear soft almost mocking laughter.

"Leave me alone. Who are you? Why are you doing this to me?"

The laughter continued and suddenly Pavel felt chillingly cold and very frightened. This could mean the end of his career. If no-one believed him, if he were charged on the evidence so far, he'd be out of Starfleet for sure. His parents would be so ashamed he could never face them again. Bitter at the people he thought were his friends and frustrated at not being able to prove his innocence, he swept the shelf above his bed clear of the ornaments and books he kept there. They made a satisfying thud as they hit the floor, smashing a small glass ornament Laura had bought him on their last shore leave. Angry with himself for breaking it he gathered up the pieces to him, not noticing as they cut into his wrist.

"Laura?" He slumped back into the corner. Laura was dead. Who was doing this? Who could hate him so? It was her laugh, softly mocking.

It was Uhura who found him later as she brought him something to eat. She glanced around the darkened room and called softly.

"Pavel? Where are you?" Then she saw him huddled next to the bed. "Lights," she called as she crossed to him. He was a small heap of gold and black and red.

"Oh, Pavel. What have you done to yourself?" She crossed to the intercom. "Medical emergency. Chekov's quarters." Crossing back to him she hauled him into the bed. Blood flowed freely down his arms and he was barely conscious. Kneeling beside him she brushed back his hair.

"Help's on its way."

"Laura was here. I heard her." He looked at her hopefully.

"No, Pavel. Laura's dead." As he shook his head at her, she continued, "Doctor McCoy confirmed it. You've got to accept it."

McCoy rushed in at this point and he and Nurse Chapel lifted Chekov to a stretcher to move him to Sickbay. As he sedated Chekov he turned to Uhura,

"What happened?"

"He was in the corner when I got here, Doctor. Will he be all right?"

"He's lost a lot of blood."

"Do you think he tried to commit suicide?"

"It looks like a possibility."

"I can't believe it. Not Pavel."

"Guilt can do strange things to people, Nyota."

"But he didn't cause Laura's death."

"I know that. You know that. We have to get him to believe that."

McCoy settled Chekov into a bed on the main ward of Sickbay and checked the transfusion attached to his arm. He looked so pale and lost. Black smudges were beneath his eyes which opened as McCoy fussed about him. He was shocked at the pain and hurt in Chekov's eyes. He looked betrayed, lost and frightened.

"How do you feel?"

"What happened? I broke an ornament, must have cut myself."

"Do you remember Uhura finding you?"

"Yes, and Laura's voice."

"Laura is dead. Accept it; grieve for her, but accept it."

"I'm going mad, aren't I? I don't remember things ... I'm just so confused!"

"You're not insane. You're suffering some kind of emotional breakdown. I'm going to run some tests, find out what's wrong, then we can put it right."

"So, what's wrong with him?" asked Kirk. McCoy had called him to Sickbay after they had settled Chekov.

"At first guess nervous exhaustion. Uhura said he kept saying he'd heard Laura. Oh, it's common enough, auditory hallucinations, most people can quote an instance of it. However it's usually dismissed by them quite quickly. I need to do some more tests. My first priority was to get him sedated. He needs rest, Jim. It's as if he hasn't slept in days."

"If that Commodore gets his way he'll get plenty of rest in a penal colony. Whatever his mental state he didn't cause her death, But this is one helluva guilt trip."

"Think he'll really press charges, Jim?"

"I'll beam over once we know Chekov's condition. Maybe I can talk sense to the other

officers. Gorinski's only one man."

"You think they might drop the charges? He's certainly in no shape for a hearing."

"I can only try. Looks like I can stop worrying about somebody with a grudge, though."

McCoy nodded glumly, and as Kirk left for the Starbase looked in on his patient once more.

Chekov was a pretty stable individual; all Starfleet personnel were. McCoy could not understand this self destruction. He shook his head and went back to his reports.

Nurse Chapel stopped near Chekov's bed while doing her rounds of the ward area. As she turned her back to him to check the monitor he rose from the bed and, as if sleep walking, walked across into the dispensary. Nurse Chapel followed curiously; he should have been under the effects of the sedative for at least another six hours. He wandered around the dispensary examining different bottles and pieces of equipment, replacing them exactly where he found them. After about fifteen minutes he returned to his bed as if nothing had happened and appeared to be totally under the effects of the sedative.

Chapel passed her report of the incident on to McCoy, who in turn related it to the Captain.

James Kirk ran a weary hand over his face as he heard Chapel's story. This was getting stranger by the minute. His discussions with the officers on the Starbase had resulted in them giving him an ultimatum. Either Chekov was handed over to face charges of falsifying official documents with malicious intent, for which at the least a guilty verdict would see him thrown out of Starfleet, or, he was to have him interned at Elba IV Medical Facilities for psychiatric treatment. Neither of these solutions seemed right to Kirk; it seemed so wrong to just hand Chekov over, as if he was letting him down.

Surely, Bones could come up with something, or maybe ... maybe Spock could help. It always helped to talk to Spock; he saw things from a different angle. Indicating to Sulu to take the con he rose to leave the Bridge, and as the turbolift's door closed on his back a murmur of voices floated back to him.

"Do you think Chekov's really flipped?"

"Couldn't take the pressure..."

The voices were unfamiliar but the words hit Kirk in the face. 'Couldn't take the pressure'. Maybe it was their fault ... his fault ... had he promoted Chekov too fast? The pressure of being part of Kirk's main Bridge team; Spock pushing for perfection, seeing a good Science Officer beneath the surface waiting to emerge. Was all this their fault? NO ... now he was getting an attack of the guilts!

Captain's Personal Log Stardate 3928.1

The events of these last few days have been very strange. Ensign Chekov appears to be suffering some sort of mental breakdown. Unusual things have happening about the ship; things moved, taken, and each time Chekov has been seen in the vicinity. Dr McCoy has him restricted to Sickbay under

mild sedation and yet at times he seems entirely rational and much his old self.

In line with orders received from Commodore Gorinski at Starbase 12 Chekov will remain in McCoy's care until we reach Elba IV, where he will be interned for medical treatment. This decision was not made lightly and was the result of much discussion with my senior officers. Chekov's illness has brought our own mortality home to many of us who know him well. How frail is the Human psyche; how easily destroyed.

Medical Log Chief Medical Officer's entry

I have observed Ensign Chekov closely over the last few days and have conducted several tests, all of which proved inconclusive. Most of the time he seems entirely rational and much his normal if subdued self. At other times he looks at us as if we were strangers to him, and indeed at times looks around Sickbay as if for the first time. My staff find this most unnerving, many things he does not remember doing. I have come to the conclusion that he is suffering some sort of mental aberration caused by the shock of Laura Gorinski's death. He is quite willing to talk of their relationship, which was closer than any of us realised; however he will not broach the subject of her actual death. I hope that the authorities on Elba can help him further, although I officially log my doubts about the decision to send him there. The medical facilities are excellent but it is primarily a centre for the care of the criminally insane, a category into which Chekov does not fall, and I wonder as to the effects of this on him. I am considering allowing him limited computer facilities to continue his studies, as he is growing increasingly bored despite frequent visits by his friends. I have stopped all sedation as he grows quite agitated at this, and its effect is limited and only increases his disorientation. He continues to be extremely fatigued.

Life got back to normal on board and their mapping mission gradually took them closer to Elba. Spock spent much of his time in studies of Ara, its customs and its laws, and was interested to find that Chekov was also logging much computer time in this area. As Chekov was the only other officer who had beamed down to the planet he was most interested to compare his observations with his own and approached Kirk on the matter of discussing it with him.

Kirk was dubious as to the objectivity of those observations but gave his consent as long as McCoy thought it was okay.

"But go easy on him, Spock."

"I understand, Captain. The Ensign's mind is disturbed and his observations may be clouded by personal judgements."

Kirk started to explain his words as Spock continued, "I will also be careful of his 'feelings'."

"Damn right you will, Spock," stated the Doctor in no uncertain terms. "He's just

starting to open up to us and hopefully come to terms with what's happened, so if you go opening up old wounds just for the sake of scientific interest, so help me...."

Spock entered the main ward of Sickbay. It was empty save for Nurse Chapel.

"If you're looking for Chekov, he's gone for a walk. Doctor McCoy said it was okay."

"Do you know where I might locate him?"

"Either the Observation Deck or Rec Room 1. That's all he has access to."

Spock tried the rec room first. It was crowded with off-duty personnel and he could hear Uhura giving one of her impromptu concerts. Glancing around he failed to spot Chekov and so strode on to the Observation Deck. It was a favourite spot for off-duty personnel, but on this occasion it was empty save for one lone figure standing at a viewing port. Spock was struck by the extreme sense of loneliness on his face, which Spock did not understand.

"The stars are so beautiful. I've never seen them like this before." He turned to face Spock; the Vulcan felt the brush of another mind on his and suddenly it came to him what had happened.

"You are not Chekov," he stated.

"No. I am Rean, first son of the Leader of Ara. I have caused problems to he who houses me. He will not let go his hold on this body."

"Chekov must be allowed to return. He will not give up his body; he is not Aran. He has a right to his life. Let me help you both. I can help you exist until a solution can be found."

"He struggles so that I cannot retain control. You must return to my planet; there is grave danger to those you left there." With that a glazed expression spread over Chekov's face and he slumped to the ground. Spock gathered him gently in his arms and carried him back to Sickbay.

McCoy grumped and harrumphed in his best bedside manner over his patient.

"I warned you, Spock."

"This was not of my doing, Doctor. If you will just contain yourself until the Captain arrives I will attempt to explain Chekov's recent difficulties."

"So, now he's a Doctor."

"Enough, Bones. Let's hear what Spock has to say. Well, Spock?" Kirk addressed the Vulcan as if to say this had better be good.

Over the next hour they sat fascinated as Spock explained how the people of Ara had the ability, upon their death, to move their consciousness into that of someone close by, much as a dying Vulcan gave up his Katra into the Hall of Ancient Thought on Vulcan. He explained that somehow the transfer had gone from Rean to Laura Gorinski, but as she herself was near death had transferred on to Chekov, dragging a little of her with it.

"So all the reports and so forth weren't Chekov?"

"Essentially you are correct, Jim. My hypothesis is that Rean used Gorinski's knowledge to attempt to be noticed."

"And Chekov knows nothing of this?"

"Consciously, no, and it does explain his not seeming to recognise people or places. I think I can be of assistance both in finding out what Rean wants and helping Chekov to resist a complete takeover. However it will require the use of the mind meld."

"Now wait just a minute. That's my patient you're talking about here. I don't know if he's strong enough for your Vulcan mumbo-jumbo," interrupted McCoy heatedly.

"How about explaining to Chekov first. I think he may be interested in what Spock has to say," Kirk put in quickly as he felt both of them bristle for one of their famous arguments.

Some colour returned to Chekov's face as they told him of Spock's findings. At least he knew he wasn't going mad!

"If you will permit, Ensign, I think I can help you control what is happening to you, and also gain information as to what is truly happening on Ara."

"Control? Can't you make him go? I'm not a receptacle for some dead man's thoughts!" He looked pleadingly at Dr McCoy. "Now you know what's wrong, can't you cure me?"

"I wish I could, Pavel," McCoy said sadly as he laid a calming hand on the Ensign's arm. "Mr Spock wants to try and contact Rean using a mind meld."

"Does it hurt?"

"There can be some discomfort to an untrained mind."

"Do I have any choice?" Chekov asked bitterly.

"Yes," answered Kirk. "I won't force this, Pavel, but we need to know, you need to know what's going on, and what Laura really died for."

Chekov looked at his Captain, looked into his hazel eyes which said 'Trust me'. After all he had been through in the last few days trust did not come easily. He swallowed and nodded his assent.

McCoy fussed around like a mother hen with one chick as they settled Chekov on an exam table so that McCoy could monitor him closely throughout the meld, both for his sake and for Spock's.

Spock had withdrawn deep into himself to prepare for such close contact with Human emotions. He now walked over. Chekov tried hard to relax. Kirk smiled reassuringly at him. Gently Spock placed his fingers on the facial pressure points that only the Vulcans or trained telepaths like them knew. Pavel started slightly at their warmth, then he heard Spock's voice inside his head, *Your mind to my mind*, and felt the touch of Spock's mind.

It was frightening yet familiar, coldly logical, just like the Science Officer. Chekov tried to relax further and gasped as he felt Spock enter his mind fully. It was the touch of the winds

of centuries, hot dry sands and ice-cold compassion for these poor Humans so tied in emotion they could not see the purity of logical thought.

To Spock it was an amazing insight into one with whom he worked so closely but *didn't* really know. Chekov was a maze of opposites; a yearning to be a good officer, to prove his worth and yet also to throw away that responsibility and rank; a constant juggling of practicality against ideals.

Spock felt his feelings towards his fellow officers; his respect for the logical aloof Vulcan; his almost filial feelings for McCoy and Scott; his trust in the Captain. His wish to be like Kirk was almost a form of hero-worship, although he saw his commander's faults. Spock also saw his friendship with Sulu and Uhura, but almost overwhelmingly his sense of loss for Laura.

Spock was dimly aware of Nurse Chapel calling McCoy's attention to the readings on the sensors but he reached on deeper, towards a dark area where he saw Chekov's recent fears of insanity, the betrayal and guilt he felt, and in the centre was Rean. He went deeper, pulling together all the fears and the guilt to make a containing barrier around Rean. Then, he reached out to Rean.

McCoy had a hypo ready as Spock broke the link. He had worriedly watched the fluctuating blood pressure and body temperature readings throughout. Chekov seemed disorientated as Spock pulled away, but as he drifted into the sedation that McCoy had given him, he seemed more himself.

Spock relayed his findings to the senior officers in the briefing room. It appeared that certain members of the Aran race were brought up to be used by the ruling class to give them, as it were, an extra chance if anything should happen to them within their normal lifespan. No one was allowed immortality, as the transfer could only happen once. Whether this was because they only had the one 'container' or because the transfer could only be made once, they did not know. The person taken over freely relinquished their own life and personality in favour of the invader.

What made them all sit up and take notice was the revelation that there was possibly an outside influence stirring up dissent. Hence the rebel opposition, whose main argument was that no-one should give up their life for another in this way.

"Amen to that," put in McCoy as Spock reached that point in his briefing. He was silenced by a look from Spock and a raised eyebrow as he continued to tell them that the outside influence was stirring up violence in a normally peaceful population.

"Klingons. It has to be Klingons," announced Scott.

"It certainly sounds like their sort of thing, Mr Scott, but where's the gain?" The Captain's mind started to fill with the details he needed to sort out for his report to Starfleet Command.

"Sulu," he said into the intercom, "change course for Ara, warp factor 5. Uhura, get me Starfleet Command. I'll take it on the Bridge."

He stood up, glad of something to get his teeth into at last, especially if it was Klingon intervention.

"Mister Spock, I'll need a full report of your findings and of your assessment of the situation on Ara for my report to Starfleet. Mister Scott, it'll be warp 5 all the way. Can your engines take it?"

"Aye, sir." Scott left for the Engine Room.

McCoy spoke up as he rose to leave. "Elba will need updating on Chekov's condition."

"Could I suggest a watch on Chekov, Doctor, especially while he's asleep. We do not know the extent of Rean's powers, nor how my barrier will stand up to them. My skills are somewhat limited." McCoy and Kirk both looked at Spock at this admission to which Spock looked uncomfortable.

The men separated to go their different ways. In the turbolift Spock and Kirk stood in silence for a while, both deep in thought. Kirk broke the silence.

"Out with it, Spock. What's wrong?"

"I sensed a great deal more to this problem than Rean was willing to impart. Something that it was vital for him to keep secret."

Kirk's frown deepened as he strode onto the Bridge. His thoughts were abruptly interrupted by the intercom's insistent wheep.

"McCoy here, Jim. Chekov's missing. He clobbered his guards."

"Bridge to Security. Locate and detain Ensign Chekov. Use minimal force. Doctor McCoy will brief you further." Kirk turned to Uhura. "Anything from Starfleet Command yet?"

"No, sir. Nothing yet."

Kirk was just accepting a welcome cup of coffee from the Bridge Yeoman when Lt Tomlinson reported in.

"We found him in the main armoury, sir." She stopped to wipe blood from her lip. "Uh... we had a bit of a discussion about him returning to Sickbay."

"I can see that. All right, Lieutenant, dismissed. You'd better let McCoy look at that lip."

As the ship assumed orbit around Ara, Kirk called his senior officers together.

"Mr Spock, anything from the Science team?"

"No, sir. Nothing has been heard from either the Science or Security teams. There is no response to our hails from any source."

"Nothing? What about Klingons?"

"There is no evidence of any Klingon ship in orbit or in the vicinity of Ara. The planet's atmosphere makes scanning for life forms difficult so we have no definite way of knowing if there are Klingons on Ara."

"There are our facts, gentlemen. Recommendations?"

"Minimal landing party with a strong Science and Security contingent," said Spock. Several heads nodded agreement.

"Very well," said Kirk. "Landing party will consist of myself, Mr Spock, Dr McCoy, Lt Tomlinson and two of your best people, and as communications may prove difficult I'll need Uhura as well. Doctor, if you will get Chekov ready?"

"Is that really wise, Jim?"

"The help he needs is on that planet, Bones. They must have someone who knows what to do."

"I hope so, Jim. He's fighting a losing battle. Speaking of battles, you look as if you've been in one. When did you last get any sleep?"

"Don't fuss, Bones. I've been kind of busy, you know."

"Haven't we all. Doctor's orders, Jim," he said as he slapped him with a hypo. Kirk straightened imperceptibly as the stimulant took effect and followed McCoy to the transporter room.

The landing party materialised in front of some large buildings in a deserted street. They made for the largest building which, Spock indicated, was where they had met the Leader the last time they'd been there. Leaving two of the Security guards outside they entered the structure. It was almost overpowering in its over-done ornateness, with too many pillars and curlicues.

They came to a halt in front of a large desk which was obviously some of form of reception area. The young woman ensconced behind it spoke without looking up.

"Name and business, please."

"Captain James T. Kirk of the Starship Enterprise, and I want to see the Leader."

Tomlinson sniggered and a groan came from McCoy.

"Hardly original, Jim." The comment earned him almost as fierce a glare as Captain James T. Kirk earned from the receptionist.

"Do you have an appointment?"

"No, but I'm sure he'll see me." He turned on the charm and smiled down at her. "Federation business."

"You'll have to wait," she said, unmoved by the charm, and glaring at them all pointed to a row of chairs. They sat down.

"Well, I never thought I'd live to see it," drawled McCoy. "A female who's immune to our Captain's famous charm."

Kirk smiled in 'a can't win 'em all' sort of shrug and began to pace the corridor. The smile soon died as he began a slow boil. As a do-er, not a talker, waiting was infuriating for

him. McCoy fussed around Chekov who looked exhausted and slumped in his chair; Uhura hummed to herself and tapped her fingers on her arm in time to the beat; Tomlinson fidgeted and Spock just sat there contemplating the architecture.

Suddenly the girl looked up.

"He'll see you now."

Kirk pulled his tunic straight and gestured for McCoy and Spock to accompany him. They were met by a small fair-skinned man who greeted them ingratiatingly.

"Captain Kirk. A pleasure to meet you at last. Mister Spock, a welcome return to our planet. May no tragedies befall your spirits and blessings be upon your house."

"And upon your house also, Leader," replied Spock in the formal greeting of the planet. The Leader gestured them to be seated.

"How may I serve?"

"Leader, an unfortunate accident has occurred to one of my crew," began Kirk.

"Yes, the girl Laura. My sincere apologies for the tragic accident in which she was involved."

"I refer to something which has happened as a result of that accident." Kirk briefly explained about Chekov.

"But this is an honour to your house, Captain. Why do you wish to undo this?"

"It is not our way to give up our lives in this manner and the present situation is causing great problems for Chekov. Leader, is there anyone on your planet who can help us?"

"But you ask me to lose my son again, he whom I thought lost once since his stupid Narat was not with him. I must consider this."

"Leader, if you cannot help us we will lose them both. Rean's mental force grows weak in the struggle with Chekov and Chekov's body grows weaker through the stress, so that even if Rean wins the mental fight the body may give up," added McCoy.

"I will consider what you have said." He gestured impatiently for them to leave.

"Leader, you must do something. Maybe one of your doctors may know something," implored McCoy.

"I will consider your arguments," he said firmly.

The men left. The interview was obviously over.

A small door opened at the back of the Leader's office and a tall figure appeared.

"Well, well, the Earthers have a problem. This could be to our advantage. We can use the residual knowledge about the Enterprise to take over Kirk's ship. It will make a fine prize for the Emperor."

"I must be careful, Kalanth. If they suspect anything or if the rebels contact them... They already have their 'contact team'."

The Klingon laughed, a humourless laugh. "A bunch of pathetic Human scientists. What match are they for the mighty Klingon forces?"

"This Kirk, he is not stupid. He may suspect something, if they speak to the rebels. Magabe is among them. She would help them, to spite me."

"Then we will find the rebels and destroy them. Already my troops are hunting the hills for their stronghold."

"And our treaty? You will make sure I stay in power? It was the bargain; as long as I am in power you get the dilithium you want."

"And the power that unlimited wealth brings. Soon I will command an army of ships bringing terror to the Human outposts and expanding the Klingon Empire."

The Enterprise party walked out into the sunshine and down the dusty street towards the science party's settlement.

"I just can't understand these people, Jim. The whole place seems kinda secretive."

"Doctor, as usual your logic escapes me. How can a physical place be secretive?"

"You know what I mean, Spock. No-one walking the streets; the place is a ghost-town."

The settlement was also deserted and had been for some days. Searching around they found no evidence of a struggle; it was as if the team had just left. Everything was as it should be; the remains of a meal sat on the table.

Kirk sent the Security men out to look around and Uhura began checking over the communications unit. Spock wandered around checking various pieces of equipment while McCoy checked his patient. Strangely Chekov seemed more alert and less tired than he had been on the ship, looking around him with interest and bristling slightly at McCoy's ministrations.

Kirk found coffee and cups and brought some over for the others. Uhura joined them, accepting her coffee gratefully.

"There's nothing wrong with the communications unit, sir. They obviously just weren't here to answer it."

"Certainly looks that way," added Tomlinson, her burly frame filling the doorway. "No sign of a struggle of any kind, just lots of footprints all leading north." She crossed to join them and helped herself to coffee.

"Another mystery. This seems to be a planet of mysteries," grumbled McCoy.

"On the contrary, Doctor. This is no mystery. The party has gone somewhere with someone. We just do not, as yet, know who with or where."

"Or why," put in Kirk.

"They have gone to the rebels, to be safe," said Chekov.

"How do you know?"

"Rean told me. It's okay, I am in control. At least, I think I am. He really doesn't want to hurt me. He just needed to get us back here. He thinks that the rebel leader Ugabe has persuaded the science team to meet with them in the safety of the caves. No-one would find them there, not even the Leader."

"But how does Rean know so much about the rebels? He is, was, the Leader's son," asked Kirk.

"His son, maybe, but like his uncle, Rean feels that the time for Narats is over. It is not the first time his father has tried to kill him, as Rean's Narat looks so much more like what the Leader feels his son should look like. Being undersized he has felt his father's resentment of his lack of physical presence since he was very young."

"Didn't stop him using you or attempting to use Gorinski like that," put in McCoy, unconvinced.

"Certain needs justify the methods used to achieve them, Doctor, but even Rean is not privy to all the rebels' secrets."

"He's beginning to sound like Spock."

"The problem is how do we find the rebels and our Science team?"

Before anyone could answer Kirk's communicator bleeped. He flicked it open. "Kirk here."

"Just a regular check-in, Captain," came Scott's voice. "All quiet up here."

"Okay, Scotty," and briefly Kirk outlined what they had found so far. "Try scanning for them. I know looking for life-signs through this atmosphere is difficult. Just do your best."

"Aye, sir." Scott sounded resigned. "Next check-in time in two hours. Scott out."

Montgomery Scott surveyed the bridge. Sulu was swivelled in his chair to face him, as was Riley at Navigation.

"You heard the man, lads. We're looking for a pile o' Vulcans through pea soup."

Smiling, they turned back to their sensor scans. Pea soup was right. The atmosphere fractured the scans, turning them into a snowy screen of static from which it was almost impossible to pick out any details. Only the fact that the landing party wore communicators enabled the ship to maintain a lock on them.

James Kirk turned to his officers, Chekov in particular.

"Any suggestions as to how we might find these rebels?"

"The caves. They are in the caves." said Chekov with more conviction than he felt. He

hated caves and he wasn't too impressed with the situation at all. He felt more in control but he still resented the small voice in the back of his head giving all the answers. He felt manipulated, and looked at his companions, trying to read their expressions and to decide how he felt about them, trying to analyse what had happened over the last few days.

They had not believed him. Well, they were right. They had thought him insane. Well, so had he. So, were they still his friends? Had they ever been? His heart told him yes but his thoughts were still very confused, and he felt so tired.

The pressure for control from Rean had eased as soon as they beamed down. After all he had made his point and got them there; now it was up to Ugabe to convince them that there was outside interference in the domestic politics of the planet that would allow the Federation to help them.

Chekov shook his head. He was so tired, but he had to see this through; to see what Laura had died for, and for himself to find someone to take this voice away. Feeling his head begin to droop he jerked himself awake and upright to hear Kirk saying,

"... the caves it is then. Mister Chekov, do you feel up to acting as guide? With Rean's help," he added.

"Yes, sir. I think so. It's not too far away, about a thirty minute walk."

The party stood, dusted themselves off and started out. The Security guards were a little ahead of the rest, with Chekov relaying directions from Rean. Very soon they reached a small rocky outcrop behind which the cave system began. Tomlinson signalled them all to stay put before she entered with the Security men. She wasn't gone for long.

"It's okay, Captain. The team is here, and the rebels, and we've just been invited to dinner."

The landing party entered the caves to find them extremely large, well-lit and comfortable. Delicious smells emanated from a cooking stove in one corner. Kirk found his stomach growling in reminder of how long it was since they had last eaten.

They were enthusiastically greeted by a humanoid of average height, dark-skinned and with a merry twinkle in his eye. As he shook his hand Kirk instinctively liked the man.

"Welcome, Captain Kirk, Gentlebeings. Allow me to introduce myself. I am Ugabe, spokesman for the alternative government of Ara." He smiled at the party and led them to the table where the Science team were already seated.

"I'm sure you have many questions, Captain, and I will try to answer them as we eat."

The group enjoyed a plain but good meal of what seemed to be a stew of local vegetables while Ugabe told them of the Leader's bargain with the Klingons.

For many years the Leader had tried to silence the growing unrest against the use of Narats and many of the other old ways of governing which ensured that the four principal families enjoyed the benefits of the rest of the population's labours. He had tried many times to kill off the movement, oust them from the planet in order to maintain his position.

When the trade agreement with the Federation was drawn up to give the Arans the technology they needed to mine the dilithium deposits, he had hoped that the Federation

would help him oust the rebels once and for all, until he learnt of the Prime Directive.

It was not until the Klingon scoutship appeared shortly prior to the Enterprise arriving with the Science team that he realised he could use this Prime Directive to his own ends. He appeased the Klingons by agreeing to supply them with dilithium mined by Federation personnel. Once he had the mining expertise he intended to sever all links with the Federation. The Federation would be helpless to do anything because of their Prime Directive.

"But if we have proof of meddling with a planet's evolution or politics by a third party we can and will intervene, but only to remove the meddlers or to mediate in a dispute," stated Kirk. "We need proof though."

"We have it, Captain Kirk," said Stepek, the head of the Science team. "Three hours ago the Klingons left by the Scoutship 'Hawk' began rounding up the rebels. We saw them ourselves. In fact, we barely escaped them as we were meeting with a woman called Magabe. She created a diversion which allowed us to escape."

"I beg you to help us rescue her, Captain," said Ugabe. "You need her to help your crewman."

"How did you know about Chekov?" demanded McCoy.

"Rean agreed to let his father's plan to kill him work this time to allow him to bring you back to help us."

"I thought you were against all this taking people over? Because that's exactly what he did or tried to do. He caused Chekov a great deal of pain and suffering. If you knew..." put in Uhura. Her normally serene face was marred by the fury she felt at the way her friend had been used. "Couldn't you have contacted us through the Science team?"

"We didn't know how you would react. The idea was for Rean to make you come back to see for yourselves. We didn't know if you would believe us."

Kirk's communicator beeped insistently and he flicked it open.

"Yes, Scotty?"

"Have you found the team, sir?"

"Yes, Mister Scott. They are alive and well."

"Well, we've a wee find of our own, sir. A Klingon scoutship. She's coming in on an approach on the far side of the planet so she'll not see us..."

"Let's keep it that way for now. We hope to deal with it from here."

"Aye, sir. Enterprise out."

Kirk looked around him and seeing Chekov nodding in the corner drew his officers away to discuss the possibilities. McCoy, with Uhura's help, settled Chekov comfortably on a couch and covered him with the furs lying there before joining the others. He didn't even stir as they moved him.

The Security personnel argued for numbers while Spock urged stealth. Kirk pondered

tactics and the rebels urged caution. The discussions went on long into the night until Kirk rubbed his eyes blearily and suggested they all follow Chekov's example and get some rest.

The following morning McCoy awoke to find Kirk, Spock and Tomlinson in deep discussion with Mister Scott still aboard the Enterprise while the Arans and the Science team were either preparing breakfast or eating it. Uhura joined him from a small cave to his left.

"There's water and other facilities through there, Doctor, if you want to freshen up."

"Umm. I don't suppose there's any chance of coffee?" he asked hopefully.

"Sorry, although there is the Aran equivalent. I'll get you some."

While McCoy attended to his personal hygiene she crossed to the stove and poured two cups of the steaming brew. Seeing Chekov was still asleep she put one aside for the Doctor and took the other one over to her friend. Shaking his shoulder gently, she tried to wake him.

"Pavel, rise and shine ..." She shook harder. "Pavel, wake up."

All heads in the cave turned at her raised voice. Kirk and McCoy were instantly at her side, Spock a fraction behind them.

"He won't wake up," she stated as McCoy turned him onto his back and ran a medical scanner over him.

"Bones?" Kirk said.

"Pure and total exhaustion, Jim. Now the pressure's off from Rean, his body has decided enough is enough. He could sleep for days."

"Can you wake him?"

"Yes, but I wouldn't advise it. I told you he'd been running on stimulants for days now. He needs rest or I won't answer for the consequences."

"Wake him," Kirk's voice was flat.

"Jim, he could have collapsed at any time over the last few days. Now he's in a natural sleep, if I wake him and he does collapse he could easily slip into a coma..."

"Wake him."

"Doctor," put in Spock, "Rean is the only person who knows the way from the caves to the palace where the Klingons have their base."

McCoy looked at them both hard for a few seconds, weighing things up, then he drew a hypo from his medical case and checking its contents injected them into Chekov's neck.

Chekov began to stir and groggily came awake to find them all looking down at him. He tried to struggle to his feet, apologising for having obviously overslept. Kirk restrained him.

"Take it easy. It's not that late. Have some coffee."

Chekov accepted the cup offered by Uhura and sipped the contents with a puzzled look at his superiors. Coffee it certainly wasn't, but it got rid of the last vestiges of his stupor and he joined them at the table.

An hour later they were making their way through a series of caves which came to an abrupt halt. Shining the torches provided by the Arans upwards they found some steps cut into the cave wall, and a trapdoor.

The Security men went first, One flung open the door while two more flooded the room with saturated phaser fire which would stun anyone up there. Then the party cautiously advanced through the door to find themselves in a cellar.

From there they split up to search the building, half the Science team and their Security men with Kirk and his officers and half with Tomlinson and her men, making about twelve in each team.

They found a group of five Klingons relaxing in a large room. The skirmish was brief though intense with phaser fire and disruptor fire intermingling in a cacophony of noise and a stench of burning furniture and flesh. The Enterprise crew suffered minimal but painful injuries while the Klingons were worse off. Outnumbered, the Klingons surrendered quickly.

Leaving McCoy to tend to the injured of both sides, Kirk and Spock left to find the Leader and confront him with his crimes. As they searched the palace without success the other team rejoined the main group, having located and freed the captives. McCoy looked up to find a tall, female Aran expertly helping in the limited first aid he could offer to the injured.

"I am Magabe, a Healer like yourself. My thanks for our rescue."

"Leonard McCoy, Chief Medical Officer of the Enterprise. It was our pleasure, ma'am."

Kirk and Spock were just ready to call off their unsuccessful search when Spock fell to the ground unconscious. He'd been hit from behind by a furious Klingon Captain who now had his disruptor aimed firmly at Kirk's midriff.

"Kirk. Once more you interfere with a Klingon trade agreement."

"Yes, Captain ...?"

"Kalanth."

"I think, Captain Kalanth, you will find that there is no trade agreement with the Arans once everything is sorted out."

"I agree. Ugabe is now the true leader of the Aran people and you will drop your weapon, Kalanth," came Magabe's voice from behind Kirk.

The Klingon's weapon wavered between the two targets briefly and Kirk swung with all his might at the arm that held the disruptor in order to deflect the blast.

With a roar the Klingon fell on top of Kirk and they struggled for possession of the

weapon. Kirk pounded the Klingon's hand against the rocks until the weapon tumbled from a nerveless grip. The grip changed to lock around the Captain's throat. The world blurred about him as his eyes bulged at the inexorable pressure on the cartilage of his windpipe; then suddenly the pressure was gone and he was able to roll from beneath the unconscious Klingon.

Chekov slumped against the wall with the large ornate candlestick he had used to club the Klingon in his hand. The disruptor blast had grazed his shoulder and had also dislodged a piece of ornate plaster moulding, which had knocked Magabe unconscious.

Spock was already climbing to his feet. He looked around him raising his eyebrows as he took in the scene.

"Fascinating," he said as he helped his Captain to his feet.

A breathless McCoy and Security team arrived on the scene. McCoy frowned at the bodies before him and went to check the unconscious Magabe.

At the rocky home of the former rebels, now the legitimate government of Ara since the Leader and his cohorts had gone into hiding, the wounded were resting until a shuttle could be sent for them. The Vulcan Science team was aiding McCoy as much as they could and Kirk sat nursing a sore neck and giving countless explanations of what had happened, especially to a worried Mister Scott who had received McCoy's request for a medical shuttle and assumed the worst.

Scott was now relaying what had happened to the Klingons.

"The Commander of the scoutship seemed awful mad when he transported his men over, Captain." The Klingons had been transported to the Enterprise brig to await their own ship.

"Well, unless they want to break the treaty they've lost this one, Mister Scott."

"You'll be beaming up now, sir?"

"No. We'll wait for the shuttles and come up on them with the rest. Can you arrange for the re-supply of the Science team? They're staying on to complete the job they came to do."

"If they'll tell me what they need I can take care of it."

Kirk passed his communicator to Stepek, who began to rattle off a list of his party's needs. Kirk turned to Ugabe and Spock, who were deep in conversation.

"I'm sorry to interrupt but Chekov needs Magabe's help."

The two men rose and accompanied Kirk to the rear of the room where McCoy was tending to Chekov's shoulder. Magabe sat looking intently at Chekov as McCoy worked. Hearing the approach of the three men, she looked up.

"He has suffered much, this one. I will help."

They looked around as Lt Sulu, who had piloted one of the shuttles down, entered the cave. He made a beeline for Uhura who stood nearby.

"Is everyone okay? Why the med shuttle? Is Pavel okay? Is the Captain..."

"One question at a time, Hikaru. Everyone is okay. The med shuttle is for the injured. Pavel is over here."

She led Sulu across. Magabe looked at them. Her old brown eyes met Uhura's and she nodded.

"You are his friends. Good. He will need you."

Chekov looked up. Everything had happened so fast; following Magabe through the palace; finding the Captain in trouble. He had debated with himself whether to follow Magabe but the little voice that was Rean had assured him he was right to do so. Surprisingly, it would be lonely when Rean was gone.

Sulu helped him to his feet and supported him as they followed the old Aran into a smaller cavern. Gently he was lowered onto a soft couch of furs and he looked up at the anxious faces around him as Magabe laid her hand on his forehead. He called to Rean in his mind, asking what was to happen. How it would feel?

Rean's voice was reassuring. He had to leave. Chekov had to get on with his life.

"Thank you," the voice said, "for giving me your friendship in spite of all I have put you through. You are so lucky to have all these good memories of friends and family. Good-bye, Pavel Chekov."

Voices swirled in Chekov's head. The Aran closed her eyes in concentration. The cave began to swim in front of Chekov's eyes and his face beaded with sweat. At the look of fear in his eyes, Uhura reached out her hand and he grasped it tightly. The noises in his head grew louder. He thought his head would explode with the noise and the pain.

His eyes rolled back and his head lashed from side to side, his body arching from the couch. Magabe interrupted her concentration to say,

"Hold him tightly. I will be as quick as I can."

Sulu grasped his friend's legs, Kirk and Spock his shoulders while McCoy held his head still. The convulsions increased and they hung on grimly, then suddenly he slumped as limp as a rag in their grip.

Magabe looked up with a tear in her eye. "Rean is gone."

"And Pavel?" asked Uhura.

"He is still there, but distant. His body is very weak and he feels very alone, so lonely. I have done what I can. It is up to you and the Healer McCoy."

"Bones?"

"He's in a coma, Jim. I'll do what I can. Let's get him into the shuttle."

The ride back to the ship was quiet. Uhura sat beside Chekov, holding his hand and singing softly. Sulu handled the shuttle as if its cargo was spun glass. Kirk sat looking out of the window staring at the stars until Spock tried to break his mood.

"Jim. He will recover."

"How can you be so sure? McCoy isn't. Anyway, why should he want to wake up considering how we all treated him. None of us believed him. He needed help and..."

"We gave it as best we knew how," put in McCoy. "He does seem to be a little stronger. Heartbeat's more regular, respiration shallow but regular."

For two days Chekov lay in Sickbay. Uhura, Sulu, Scott all took turns sitting with him, talking to him. Kirk was a frequent visitor. McCoy was beginning to debate using some sort of shock therapy to bring him out of the coma when during one of Uhura's many visits Kevin Riley, who was with her, noticed his eyelids move. He rushed to find McCoy and Uhura spoke softly and urgently to Chekov.

"Wake up, Pavel. Please wake up."

Chekov's eyes fluttered open to see Uhura's concerned face hovering above him.

"Hello. Where ...?" His eyes moved from side to side taking in his surroundings.

"You're in Sickbay, and you're going to be just fine," she replied to his unasked question. "You gave us all quite a fright. Magabe said you might not come back to us."

"I didn't want to. Not at first, but then something kept telling me I must. That I had to return to my friends."

"Rean? But Magabe said he was gone."

"No, not Rean. Although it was lonely," he tapped his temple, "in here without him. I hated him at first but then, then I think we became friends of a kind. But no, it wasn't Rean. I think... I think it was because of Laura. She wouldn't have wanted me not to come back. Oh, I know she can't come back but she'll always be here as long as I have my memories, and I have some very good memories."

"We are your friends regardless of everything, but you see until we knew what was happening ..."

"Yes. I know," he said softly.

McCoy breezed in. "So you've decided to wake up at last. How do you feel?"

"Tired, very tired, but glad to be alone in my own head again." He felt a hypo against his arm and moved his shoulder. "Ouch."

"Just keep that shoulder still for a while longer and give that burn a chance to heal."

As Chekov's eyes began to droop once more McCoy motioned to Uhura to leave. She gently removed her hand from Chekov's. His eyes opened again, slowly.

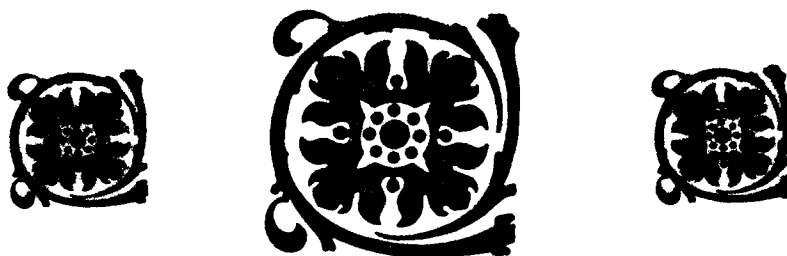
"Thank you," he muttered, "for not letting me wake up alone."

"Pavel, on the Enterprise no-one is ever alone," she whispered as she and the Doctor

moved quietly from the room.

Within the garden of my heart
 Where flowers of friendship grow
 There are blossoms of remembrance
 Forget-me-knots so blue
 And purple-violet pansies
 To tell my thoughts of you
 And roses that will always bloom
 Whatever be the weather
 Whose fragrance is the memory
 Of days we spent
 Together.

Anon.



SCOTTY

(Dedicated to James Doohan)

A Scotsman born and bred,
 An engineer like those of old;
 A man who believes that engines are more than mere machines
 And treats them accordingly.
 Whether or not it is his attitude towards them,
 No-one knows;
 But he always manages to get more
 From his beloved engines
 Than any other engineers can from theirs.
 To him they are his 'bairns'
 To be protected and defended
 Against any who would dare to harm them.
 And should anyone be foolish enough
 To insult his engines or the Enterprise
 He will readily persuade them -
 One way or another -
 Of the error of their ways.
 This, then, is Montgomery Scott;
 Chief Engineer of the USS Enterprise.

Christine Jones

EDITH

Perhaps after all
 You knew what we really were.
 Your eyes questioned silently
 Whenever you looked at us.
 Although you gave us shelter
 And aided our existence
 With the same generosity
 You extended to other Humans,
 Yet you wondered always.
 I could feel it.
 And I too... wondered...
 What manner of woman were you?
 You seemed to know somehow
 What was to come in time.
 In our time... Jim's and mine...
 But it could not be yours.
 I knew it... reluctantly
 And Jim knew it too
 Deep down in his heart.
 But he loved you
 And love makes fools of Humans,
 So he clung to half-formed hopes
 That he might yet change
 What had to be,
 If all we knew in the future
 Was to be restored.
 Until even I,
 With all my logic,
 Could not be sure
 Which he would choose
 When the moment came
 To decide forever
 The fate of centuries
 Yet to be spanned.
 Now the testing time
 Has come... and gone.
 And you, Edith Keeler?
 You are gone with it.
 As you were meant to be.
 But back in our own time
 You haunt us still.

Like Jim, I too... mourn.

Sheryl Peterson





IDIC



IDIC is a fan-run club with approximately 900 members worldwide - roughly 100 live outside Britain, half of these in America. It is run by Janet Quarton, Sheila Clark and Valerie Piacentini, all of whom have been active in Star Trek fandom in Britain for many years - Janet and Sheila since 1974 and Valerie since 1976. Sheila and Valerie are also well-known as fan writers, although neither has written anything recently.

The late Gene Roddenberry was an honorary member; and we have as honorary members several of the actors and production staff of Star Trek, including James Doohan, George Takei, Walter Koenig, Mark Lenard, Patrick Stewart, Marina Sirtis, John de Lancie, Michael Okuda and Rick Sternbach.

We put out a newsletter, usually of 100 pages, six times a year, in February, April, June, August, October and December. We say in each newsletter when the next one is due, and so far they have always sent out on time.

In the newsletters, we print news, views and reviews. We cover everything from The Cage, through Classic Trek and the movies to The Next Generation and beyond. We try to keep a balance between CT and TNG and (now) Deep Space 9 although of course only a few of us in Britain have as yet seen 4th, 5th or 6th season TNG or any DS9 (unless we attend conventions or have bought the CIC videos).

We welcome member participation. The Postbag, at 30 - 35 pages long, is a forum for (polite) discussion on anything arising from Star Trek. Articles on any aspect of Trek are most welcome, as are book and (especially) zine reviews. All we ask is that the material you send is original - ie has not been printed anywhere else.

One of our activities is the support of Guide Dogs for the Blind. We save used stamps, and ask members to send in any that they can (these are sold to dealers); we also do some fund-raising, both through the newsletters and at conventions; so far we have sponsored 4 dogs, and one of our members has donated a dog she bred. Venus, Aero and Jade have all qualified and are now working; Lindsay and Sadie are still in training.

Dues for one year (6 newsletters) are, as of spring 1993, U.K. £7.50; USA/Middle East £13.25 (USA \$23); Europe £9.50; Australia/Japan £14.50. Payment (in sterling) can be by cash (your risk, but paper money or British stamps only please), cheque (we can take bank drafts or personal cheques in dollars from America only) or Visa/Mastercard. Enquiries about the club should be sent to Janet Quarton, 15 Letter Daill, Cairnbaan, Lochgilphead, Argyll, Scotland.



