

LOG ENTRIES

7



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Welcome to Log Entries 7.

Regular readers will see that we've increased the number of pages in this issue. This will let me print stories that are too short to make a single story zine but would take up rather too much of a 30 - 40 page zine. Printing clarity is somewhat improved as well. I apologise for the poor quality of reproduction of some pages of Log Entries 4, 5 & 6. This wasn't altogether my fault; the machine I use for cutting stencil pages with illustrations wasn't working properly, and as I'd a deadline - the '76 con at Leeds - to meet, I couldn't wait for it to be serviced. And no way will I again try to put out four new zines - even short ones - in six weeks... even although Beth did the stencils for Vulcan Odyssey (thanks, Beth!) there was just too much to do to make a proper job of them. Oh well, we learn from our mistakes...

I got a pair of Vulcan eyes to do the proof reading this time. I don't guarantee they found all my typos, but I will guarantee there are a lot fewer this time. I must be the only editor in fandom whose printing costs include a whole bottle of stencil correcting fluid per zine... My typing would go a lot more accurately if I could only learn to tell my right hand from my left - I keep hitting keys with the correct finger of the wrong hand. And spelling phonetically. And putting in all the letters but heaven help the order... my personal favourite typo - would you believe Dorcot McCoy?

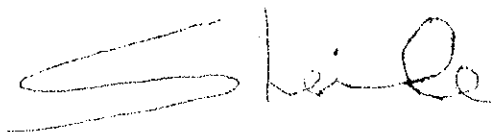
We have quite a range of stories for Log Entries 8 - 'Nessie' by Gerry Downes, reprinted from Stardate Unknown 2. This lovely little story, where Scotty meets the Loch Ness Monster, first appeared in Berengaria 7. Although it's been printed twice in the States, not many British fans know it, and I'm very grateful to Gerry for allowing STAG to reprint it. Then there's 'Cause of Death Unknown' by Sheils Clark, which got an honourable mention in the Leeds con competition, which leaves McCoy with an unsolvable problem; and more stories and poems, some by writers you already know and some by new ones. I'm hoping to improve reproduction of illustrations too. If everything goes according to plan, it should be ready by late February/early March.

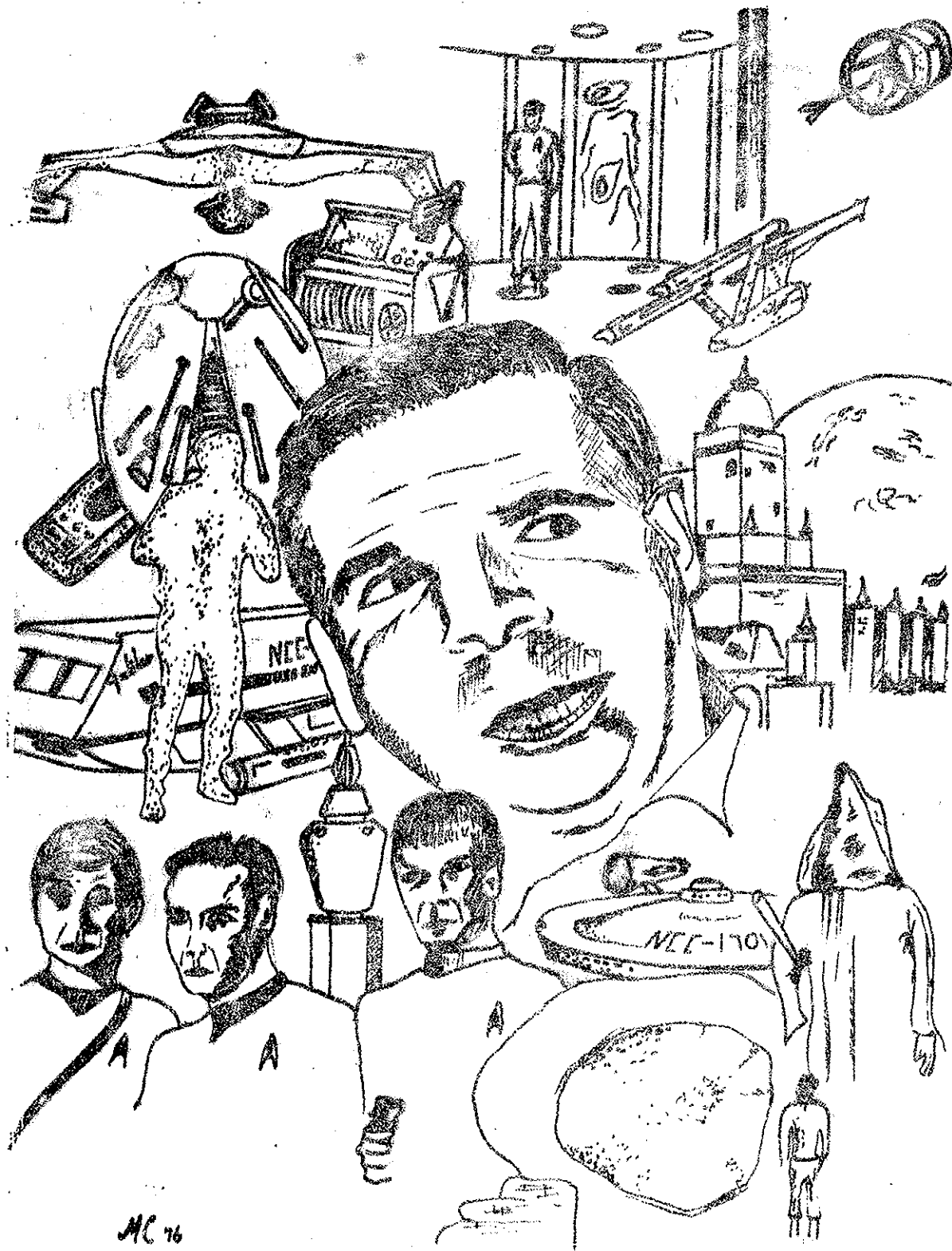
STAG members are told automatically when new zines are ready; non members who would like information on forthcoming zines, send a stamped, addressed envelope (or addressed envelope and International Reply Coupon) to Sheila Clark, 6 Craigmill Cottages, Strathmartine, by Dundee, DD3 0PH, Scotland.

Although Log Entries is STAG's club zine, we consider submissions from non members. Submissions (stories, poems or artwork) should be sent to the above address. Letters of comment are also welcome.

Carry on, gentlebeings - read, and, I hope, enjoy.

January 1977





MC 76

THE KYMARTAN EXPERIENCE by Ensign Fox

Captain James Kirk sat back confidently in his chair in the recreation room, surveying the three dimensional chess board with an air of anticipation. The game was the centrepiece for a battle of minds which, Kirk decided, was at last drawing to a close.

His opponent, who, had he known Kirk's thoughts, would have disagreed strongly to an imminent finish, was a match for any chess player aboard the Enterprise. But for all Spock's mental ability he could not have foreseen a move as Human as Kirk's next. "Rook to bishop three, Check," stated Kirk, with the smile of a man who knows victory is near.

If Kirk had thought it possible for a Vulcan, he would have claimed that a conspicuous frown appeared on his Science Officer's face.

"Worried, Mr. Spock?" ribbed Kirk, knowing full well that emotion was impossible for Spock.

"Captain, worry is not an emotion to be indulged in in a game such as chess, and certainly not by a Vulcan," Spock responded, and continued, "However, I fail to understand how such illogical moves can provide the basis for an effective attack."

Kirk held up his hands and smiled in a gesture of submission at receiving the verbal counterattack. Spock made his move. "Queen to rook two."

Kirk pondered a minute over this defensive move, then looking at Spock with inquiring eyes moved his knight. "Checkmate, I think, Spock." Spock was taken aback; Kirk grinned while the Vulcan mentally traced back his other moves trying to discover the error that had cost him the game. Kirk opened his mouth to make a suggestion, but was interrupted by the ship's intercom.

Kirk walked over and pressed a switch on the wall. "Kirk here. What is it, Uhura?"

The Bantu communications officer continued in a calm voice. "We have an unidentified vessel within sensor range, Captain. It appears immobile."

"Very well, Lieutenant, I'll be right up," replied Kirk and turned to head for the elevator. Spock, still wearing a slightly puzzled expression, gave a final glance at the chess board, and joined his Captain in the elevator.

The elevator doors opened onto the bridge where the crew sat busily at their respective consoles. Spock immediately headed for his own, and Kirk to his position in the command chair, reflecting the authority and confidence that the crew would absorb every time the chair was filled by him. In return, the crew gave their respect, loyalty and skill unquestioningly to the man in command.

Ensign Chekov had been busily studying the mystery ship which they were nearing by the second. "Vessel approaching visual distance, Captain," said the young Russian.

"Very well, Mr. Chekov. Let's have it on the screen. Full magnification."

The vision screen flickered into life, changing the view of the usual black abyss filled with a myriad of stars to the unusual unidentified stranger.

The ship, if that was what it was, was shaped like a four walled pyramid; more similar, in fact, to two triangled walls slotted into the centres of each other so that when looked at end on the ship looked just like a floating 'X' in space.

Kirk stared a while at this new-found mystery ship and then turned to his Science Officer. "Anything, Spock?"

The Vulcan, who was studying his sensors with typical thoroughness lifted his head to give Kirk his findings. "A little, Captain. There appears to be no sign of life on board. I have insufficient data to correlate its point of origin, but its hull is constructed of a metal unknown to us. Its design, however, suggests a highly intelligent society."

Kirk was about to issue an order when Spock carried on. "One interesting point, Captain. Its atomic structure seems to be based on the structure of the carbon atom, one of the basic materials of life."

Kirk was surprised. "Mr. Spock, are you suggesting that that vessel could be alive?"

"No, Captain," Spock corrected. "I am merely suggesting that it could be powered and crewed from its own resources, possibly with the ability to think for itself as a living entity while remaining a metallic vessel. In short, the ship could be an enormous computer." Spock was obviously delighted with the find, if delight was possible within the unemotional Vulcan mind. The prospect of a computer sent out by a highly advanced civilisation was indeed 'fascinating'.

Kirk turned to Chekov. "Mr. Chekov, what's our distance from the neutral zone?"

The Ensign answered, "Two point three nine light years, sir."

"Hmmm. About Romulan debating distance as to whether the zone ends there or not," Kirk murmured. "Take her in close, but slowly, Mr. Chekov. Sound yellow alert."

As the yellow alert echoed through the many decks of the Enterprise, she drew closer to the inactive vessel which, simply by being inactive, seemed more menacing than one at full power. Kirk waited expectantly. Although his ship's sensors told him that the craft was quite lifeless, something inside told him to expect trouble. His instinct was correct, for, even as the Enterprise approached to a reasonable distance, the apparently hibernating ship erupted into life with several bolts of brilliant missiles of light that hurtled at the Enterprise at tremendous velocity. The dazzling bolts of energy hit the U.S.S. Enterprise with stunning accuracy and, spaced evenly along the ship's hull, showered the bridge screen with a multitude of incandescent sparks. The mighty Starship rocked in the airless void, its hull creaking and its occupants thrown about like so many pieces of disorganised debris.

The chaos subsided, leaving crew members scattered like unwanted toys across floors and cabins. Kirk's mind raced from victim to attacker in a matter of seconds. "Mr. Sulu, all phasers to bear. Give it all you've got."

Sulu acknowledged and detonated the phaser banks in one swift move. "Yes, sir. Phasers fired."

Two blue-white lances shot across space, followed by another two and a further two after those, six spears of energy directed at their enemy, obliterating from sight the menacing shape that had attacked them. The obliteration was only temporary, however, for as the screen cleared the crew of the Enterprise noticed that, unmoved and quite undamaged, their assailant still floated, drifting as if nothing had taken place.

Kirk reached for his intercom. "Engineering, damage report."

Chief Engineer Scott sounded worried; his Scottish accent seemed more pronounced than usual. "All shields are down, Captain; the dilithium circuitry has burned out completely and Ah canna' get any power to the warp engines. We're on impulse power only and without phasers. You've used the last drop of power - it's as if that ship knew exactly where to hit to do the most effective damage."

Kirk muttered, "Okay, thanks, Scotty."

Kirk now turned to the communications panel. "Uhura, try to get a message to that ship. Ask them to cease fire, and say we mean no harm. Try and get them to acknowledge."

"Yes, sir."

Spock, meanwhile, had still been studying the vessel and had discovered new information. "I still pick up no signs of life, Captain, nor energy output except for that burst of firepower, but the sensors detected a very powerful force shield around the ship that lasted for exactly the same time it took for our phasers to fire and hit their target. Then the shield dropped again." Spock was becoming more fascinated by the vessel's potential by the minute, but Kirk couldn't share his First Officer's interest; not with the Enterprise's lack of defence clouding his foremost thoughts.

"Lt. Uhura, any response yet?" asked Kirk.

"None yet, sir," was the expected reply.

"Very well, keep trying."

Kirk weighed up the possibilities in his mind. Either he could make a stand-off gesture, hoping to make contact with the entity aboard the ship, or carefully retreat in the hope that the vessel had either exhausted its capabilities or simply had had enough of the Enterprise. Neither of these suggestions seemed comforting. However, be it the devil or the deep blue sea, Kirk chose. "Mr. Chekov, put us in reverse. Full available impulse power. We'll just have to run and hope we live to fight another..." But Kirk never finished the sentence. Before the eyes of the crew, Captain James Kirk vanished.

Dr. McCoy entered the room as his Captain disappeared from his chair.

"Jim!" cried out the shocked medical officer. He approached Kirk's chair and, along with the rest of the bridge crew, stared at the empty seat with open mouths. McCoy turned to the Vulcan. "Spock, what the blazes is happening? Where's Jim Kirk gone?"

"One question at a time, Doctor," replied the apparently unperturbed and unmoved Spock, still in his inimitable ice cool voice. "Lacking data, I will not speculate as to the Captain's whereabouts. However, there are a few facts to be considered."

"What facts, Spock? That ship out there must have Jim Kirk, and all you can do is quote facts!" McCoy's voice was bitter with delayed shock.

"If I am allowed to continue, Doctor," spoke the Vulcan harshly. McCoy's outburst ceased as his Human qualities gave way to hard reason.

"The facts concern the Captain's disappearance. It is unlikely that the Captain is in any immediate danger, as that ship is basically a computer. It would be illogical to destroy just one man - even the Captain - so we may assume that he is held captive somewhere. However, our sensors reveal no trace whatsoever of the Captain aboard that ship."

McCoy and the crew once again looked astounded as Spock calmly gave them this piece of traumatic information. "Then where in..." tailed off McCoy.

"That, Doctor, is what we shall endeavour to find out. But my first concern is the Enterprise, and we must use what power we have to keep clear of the neutral zone and be wary of Romulan vessels."

Almost as soon as Spock's voice finished speaking, another one broke in. It was Chekov.

"Mr. Spock, six vessels approaching at warp three from the Romulan zone."

"It appears, Doctor," said Spock, turning once again to McCoy, "that we

are in for an interesting confrontation."

McCoy didn't reply to what had to be one of Spock's greatest understatements.

Kirk slept; or at least, it felt like sleep to the Starship Captain. When he opened his eyes, all around was a wall of white. White... not a blinding, dazzling white, but a restful ivory white. There were no breaks in the white lines where the floor met with the wall or the wall met with the ceiling. Which was floor and which ceiling Kirk could not tell, only the monotonous white touched all around him. Touched. That was something he could not do. A comfortable paralysing effect clutched his limbs. He was floating... he closed his eyes. Still the white persisted in his brain. He felt neither hot nor cold, neither hungry nor thirsty, neither lonely nor crowded, only white and a refreshing tingling sensation in his brain like a probe searching, feeling its way inside his mind. Was he dead? He bit his lip - blood. No, he was very much alive; and now he could touch again. He licked at the blood. He felt it keeping him sane, away from the fear of the unknown. But still there was white. He called out, but there was no sound. Kirk was helpless.

The Enterprise's sensors showed six craft speeding towards their position.

"Mr. Scott," Spock spoke into the intercom. "Have you carried out any repairs yet?"

Scotty answered in a frustrated voice that carried the gasps of sweat with it. "Mr. Spock, I'm afraid the only improvement so far is power to the forward shields. That in itself is a miracle. With luck permitting - "

"Mr. Scott, do not rely on 'luck', but continue to do your utmost with the rest of the damage."

"Aye, Mr. Spock." Scotty spoke wearily.

"Dr. McCoy, I request that you return to your post. You may be needed later."

"But Spock - the Captain!" protested the medic.

"I am well aware of the situation. I suggest we take care of what must logically come first - that is the Enterprise." Spock's tone was that of a man stating the obvious.

McCoy had nothing left but to say, "Yes, Mr. Spock," and he left the bridge mumbling something uncomplimentary about logical minds. Spock now turned to the lieutenant sitting in front of him.

"Mr. Sulu, take the Enterprise up close to the hull of that vessel. We shall attempt to use its bulk as a shield."

Sulu obeyed without question, although a number of questions had entered his head at the order - as must have been the case with the rest of the crew. Spock was assessing the situation with precise and faultless reasoning. The ship that had attacked them could attack again any time it wished, and presumably at any distance, and without power the Enterprise wouldn't have got two light years before being pounced on by the ever-nearing Romulans. It was doubtful, also, that the Romulans would have refused the chance of attacking such a prize as a struggling Starship just because of zonal immunity.

The Enterprise moved nearer to the strange floating shape which, although it had once been the prime enemy was now apparently her last hope of survival. It was indeed an ironic turn of events.

The six points on the sensors had grown into six definite points of light

on the screen and were now slowing down as they approached both vessels. The mystery ship was a new experience for the Romulans too, and a few calculations and a considerable amount of guesswork must have been passing through various Romulan minds.

Kirk was rudely awakened by a soft but jolting electrical impulse through his arm. He looked around and noticed the room which was now dark and quiet. There was nothing moving and no sign of life ever having been aboard. He had apparently been asleep on a metallic table (if indeed he had been asleep). He swung his legs around and sat upright on the table studying his surroundings more closely. He was still a little confused and faintly tired as he tested his voice. "Is there anyone around? Where am I?" No answer. Kirk tried the more official approach. "I am Captain James T. Kirk of the United Starship Enterprise. I am on a peaceful mission. Will anyone answer me?"

This request was at last answered. In his mind, Kirk heard a voice, faint at first but becoming gradually clearer. "I/WE DO NOT REQUIRE KNOWLEDGE OR PROOF ABOUT THE HISTORY OF YOUR EXISTENCE. I/WE HAVE ALL THE INFORMATION I/WE REQUIRE ABOUT YOUR QUEST, YOUR NATURE, THE FELLOW MEMBERS OF YOUR SOCIETY."

The voice was so beautiful, Human, and male, that Kirk could have sworn he was within arm's length of the speaker, but on recollection it seemed to have come from deep within his brain. "Who are you?" Kirk asked the obvious. He was instantly answered.

"I/WE ARE NATHIATHAN OF THE KYMARIANS."

Kirk was even more confused. "Are you one or many? Where are you?" The voice had intrigued him so much that for a moment he had almost forgotten about the Enterprise, but now he questioned further. "Wait," he said, as if interrupting an answer. "What do you want? Where is my ship?"

As if sensing the priority of the questions, the voice returned in its continually soft male tone. "YOUR SHIP IS PERFECTLY SAFE. I/WE WANT TIME AND KNOWLEDGE. I/WE ARE NATHIATHAN OF THE KYMARIANS. I/WE ARE ALL. I/WE ARE FROM FIFTY FIVE POINT SIX NINE THREE TWO BILLION OF YOUR LIGHT YEARS FROM HERE." Kirk seemed to be getting everywhere and nowhere at the same time.

He walked around the room at last, noticing the vast array of what appeared to be electronic elements but which were made of a crystalline material of a type he had never seen before. These elements filled the entire ship, and Kirk could never begin to guess which group of elements gave the 'voice', Nathiathan, its substance, especially when there was no way to tell the working elements from the inert ones, and the voice seemed focussed on the centre of his brain. Could it be, thought Kirk, a telepathic computer? If so, to what extent do its sensory powers go? His questions seemed to be answered logically but in a roundabout way, as though the voice was prevented by something from answering in any detail. Kirk decided to try an experiment; he thought hard, wondering about the Enterprise's predicament. Immediately, the entire wall in front of him disappeared, and was replaced by a spectacular view of the cosmos and in particular the Enterprise floating quite close to this mystery ship of the Kymarians. Kirk's breath was taken away for a few seconds as he had the illusion of floating away into that frictionless abyss - even although he knew this would be impossible. He was still in the confines of the Kymarian ship. He sensed that this was not the only marvel he was about to witness, and noticing a change out of the corner of his eye, swung round to discover that the wall behind him had also given way to a panorama of stars. The point of focus in this picture however was six points of light, six artificial points of light which Kirk recognised to be a threat to his ship.

Kirk looked round in anguish at the three dimensional view of imminent danger, and shouted out to the entity that had him imprisoned. "My ship is

in danger! I demand to be returned. Do you hear me?"

After what seemed like an age, the calm humanoid voice reacted. "PERFECTLY, BUT THERE IS NO NEED FOR YOUR RETURN TO YOUR SHIP; I/WE SHALL PROTECT."

Kirk looked helplessly towards the six ever-nearing flecks of light, and had he blinked he would have missed seeing the six spears of blue-white light that shot across the void to slam into each one of the Romulan vessels.

The Romulans now hung motionless in space, inert and apparently lifeless. Kirk opened his mouth to speak, but Nathiathan had anticipated the question and answered it before the words were uttered. "THEY ARE DISARMED AND POWERLESS BUT NOT HARMED, IN THE SAME FASHION AS YOUR SHIP."

Kirk spoke at last. "What do you want of me and my ship?"

The question was followed by silence.

On the Enterprise, Spock's fascination was trebled by this display of protectiveness by the mystery ship. With an effort, he drew his attention back to his immediate surroundings and issued an order. "Lt. Uhura, open hailing frequencies."

"Yes, sir."

"This is Commander Spock of the U.S.S. Enterprise calling our unidentified visitor. I request that you return our Captain to us as we can conceive of no use he can be to you. Our purpose is one of peace."

As he finished speaking, Chekov gave an excited call. "Mr. Spock! A humanoid life-form reading just appeared aboard the mystery ship; it appears to be the Captain."

Spock promptly began organizing the Captain's return. "Mr. Chekov; pinpoint the Captain's position."

"Already noted, sir," replied the efficient Russian.

"Very well. Feed co-ordinates to the transporter room." Spock switched on the intercom. "Transporter room. Be ready to beam Captain Kirk aboard on my order."

"Aye, sir."

Spock was prevented from giving that order by a low male voice that everyone heard, though no-one could tell from which direction it came.

"YOUR CAPTAIN IS IRRETRIEVABLE AS YET; HOWEVER, YOU MAY SEND YOUR CHIEF SCIENCE OFFICER TO AID OUR PURPOSE."

"What is your purpose?" asked Spock, to receive only silence. He tried again. "I am First Officer Spock. What guarantee can you give that we may trust you?"

"MY/OUR TRUSTWORTHINESS IS SHOWN BY YOUR CONTINUED SURVIVAL."

Spock raised both eyebrows at the reply, and continued the verbal confrontation. "I request that you exchange Captain Kirk for me, as he can be of no further use to you now."

"HIS USE IS PURELY ORGANIC, I/WE NEED TO EXAMINE FURTHER HIS BIOLOGICAL STRUCTURE. I/WE NEED A SCIENCE OFFICER TO AID US IN OUR PURPOSE."

Spock stood up. "It seems I have no choice," he answered, more to himself than the voice, and turned to enter the elevator.

Dr. McCoy was waiting for him in the transporter room. When Spock arrived, McCoy spoke before the Vulcan could. "I heard, Spock, and I request that I also go over to see what they're doing to Jim. I didn't like that

sentence about further biological examination."

"Dr. McCoy," said Spock. "I understand your concern for the Captain's health, but there is no fact to support the possibility that you would even see him; and the voice gave authority for only one science officer to go."

"It could be a trap, Spock. We have no assurance that you're going to be released after you've helped whoever or whatever is over there. Send me. At least I have back-up medical staff, but we're running short of back-up Captains."

McCoy was obviously worried, clearly picturing primitive dissections in his mind. Spock was adamant. "I fail to appreciate the logic behind your statement, Doctor, and you forget that at this moment we're all prisoners - already trapped." Spock turned to approach the transporter platform, and as an afterthought swung back to McCoy. "And Doctor - I am sure that the medical proficiency aboard that ship is far in advance of anything we have." It was meant to be a comfort to McCoy, but as usual it was said so emotionlessly that McCoy took the statement differently. He watched disgustedly as Spock shimmered away.

Spock arrived in a chamber crammed from floor to ceiling with micro-circuitry of such advanced design that Spock's favourite exclamation of 'fascinating' seemed even to himself to be such a gross understatement that he didn't bother making it.

"Spock!" The voice caused Spock to tear his concentration away from the infinite mass of circuitry towards the origin of the shout. It was Jim Kirk. "What the devil are you doing here?" Kirk was obviously delighted, but also puzzled.

"Captain," said Spock, "I was invited - but in fact, I had little choice." He was about to elaborate when Kirk broke in.

"Well, never mind, Spock. I'm..." It was Kirk's turn to be interrupted, this time by the familiar voice.

"CAPTAIN, SCIENCE OFFICER, I/WE WILL TALK IN MORE FORMAL SURROUNDINGS." The voice was like that of a lord ushering his guests into the study. In fact, they were instantly transported into a luxuriously furnished Victorian-style mansion drawing room. Kirk could not hide his surprise at such an out-of-place room; neither could Spock hide a slight expression of impressedness.

"BE SEATED," the voice almost insisted. The Enterprise officers sat in the two luxury chairs available. Kirk turned to Spock while they awaited the voice's next instruction.

"Well, Spock, what do you make of this?" And he proceeded to give his Science Officer a run down of events.

When Kirk had finished talking, Spock outlined some of the computer's basic characteristics. "Undoubtedly a form of computer powered and built with materials as yet undiscovered in this galaxy. It has the ability to read the minds of various intelligences, but to what extent we have insufficient data. Its one unconformity is its reference to itself as both singular and plural, implying a lack of word in the Human vocabulary and suggesting a possible programme link with its entire being and perhaps its builders. Whatever its reason for being so far from its point of origin, it has a technology far surpassing that of any Federation culture. This Victorian setting has presumably been picked out of our minds and has been formed with a kind of matter transformer." Spock concluded his speech with an almost glowing admiration for the intelligences behind the computer. Kirk didn't feel in a position to admire his captor or captors. His responsibility was floating nearby, powerless and defenceless.

"I'm sure it's a mine of information and knowledge, Spock, but we have to try and return to the Enterprise. There's no telling what might come along to help the Romulans next."

Kirk spoke to the computer. "Nathiathan, I want to know what you propose to do with my ship."

He was answered instantly. "I/WE DO NOT WISH TO USE YOUR SHIP, MERELY THE INFORMATION YOU MAY CARRY."

Kirk was becoming impatient with the computer. "These answers you give seem to be avoiding giving any detailed information. I want to know the reason for your visit to this galaxy."

"MY/OUR REASON IS IN MY/OUR PURPOSE."

"What is your purpose?" asked Kirk again, and was again followed by silence.

Spock intervened. "Captain, I believe the computer is answering the questions correctly as far as its programming will allow. It's possible that there are two parts to the computer, one a kind of security computer that gives only generalised information, the other a self-programming computer which has the details we seek."

"What do you suggest, Spock?"

"I suggest we try a simplified questionnaire to break down the programme, and work from there."

"O.K., Spock, it's all yours."

Spock began, "Nathiathan, I wish you to relate all questions to your purpose. Please acknowledge."

"AFFIRMATIVE."

"Why have you entered our sector of the universe?"

"I/WE CAME BECAUSE OF OUR PURPOSE."

"Why is your purpose so important?"

"I/WE MUST SEARCH FOR THE LORD MASTERS."

"Why?"

The voice seemed to create gaps between each word. "IT IS IMPERATIVE. IT IS BECAUSE... IT IS... NECESSARY... IT..."

The voice then changed to a more lively, high-pitched note and a completely different character. "WELCOME TO KYMARIAN SHIP 496328. MY NAME IS JORATHAN, LORD HIGH MASTER OF THE KYMARIANS." The new voice spoke with a warm open-armed note of authority. It was with this authority that the lord high master began to relate the history of the Kymarian ship.

"BILLIONS OF YOUR YEARS AGO, THIS SHIP WAS SENT TO VARIOUS PLACES ACROSS OUR GALAXY, THE ONE YOUR SCIENTISTS CALL NGC 4501, TO TRY AND DISCOVER OTHER PLANETS WHERE LIFE EXISTED. AT THAT TIME, OUR SUN WAS EXPECTED TO NOVA IN TWO HUNDRED YEARS. THE SCIENTISTS MISJUDGED, FOR WHEN THE SHIP RETURNED, THE NOVA HAD ALREADY OCCURRED. OUR INSTRUCTIONS COVERED THIS EVENTUALITY; WE WERE TO ASSUME THAT OUR PEOPLE MANAGED TO ESCAPE THE CATAclySM AND HAD FOUND A NEW HOME PLANET. NATHIATHAN WAS PROGRAMMED TO SEARCH FOR OUR PEOPLE AMONG THE STARS UNTIL HE FOUND THEM OR WAS DESTROYED BY A GREATER FORCE THAN HIMSELF. TO HIS PEOPLE HE WILL GIVE ALL HIS SECRETS. YOUR HELP COULD BE AN IMMENSE SAVING OF TIME - EVEN A COMPUTER CAN BECOME UNUTTERABLY WEARY OF A SEARCH THAT SEEMS TO HAVE NO END. I, LORD HIGH MASTER OF KYMARIA, REGRET ANY INCONVENIENCE CAUSED TO YOU. FAREWELL."

The higher voice was replaced by the unmistakable voice of Nathiathan. "MY/OUR QUEST HAS LED I/ME TO YOUR GALAXY."

A period of silence set in, giving Kirk a chance to speak. "Spock, how could this ship have been travelling for billions of years?"

"Its energy source must be inexhaustible, possibly based on the gravitational pull of the stars or the sparse atoms that make up the universe. Its programme must also be infinitely efficient to have been able to drive it for so long." Spock spoke with growing impressedness.

"The point still remains," said Kirk, "what does it want with us, and how do we get back to the Enterprise?" He was silent for a moment, then went on. "Nathiathan, do you have any reason to believe that your lord masters might be near here?"

Immediately, before them and floating in mid-air, was a three dimensional map of the galaxy and a glowing point of light that signified a position. Kirk and Spock walked around this floating miracle and strained to see the star system apparently indicated. Before they had a chance to focus on it, the magnification of the map seemed to increase and within an instant there stood a star system that looked completely realistic.

Kirk cried out, realising what he was looking at. "Spock, that sun, it's Earth's!"

Spock looked on, intrigued, and picked out the most easily recognised planet, Saturn. "Captain, there seems to be an irregularity in the Kymarian's view of your solar system. There appear to be ten planets, six of which are within the orbit of Saturn."

Kirk looked closer. The Vulcan was right; an extra planet circled where now there was none. Kirk asked about this error.

"Nathiathan, there appears to be a mistake in your star map. Can you point out in more detail which planet your lord masters may have landed on?"

Again there was silence, but again the map changed. The fifth planet from the sun glowed brighter than the rest.

Kirk had realised the error by now, and he could tell from the upraised eyebrows that Spock had also discovered it. "Of course, Spock. Where that planet is now has an asteroid belt."

"Yes, Captain. Unfortunately, at the time of Kymaria's existence, this asteroid belt could well have been a planet."

"Which means," said Kirk, "that Nathiathan's trip has been in vain. Either the lord masters never reached this sector, or if they did, they must have perished after all or left again once the planet began to disintegrate."

The voice at last spoke. "IF YOUR OBSERVANCES ARE CORRECT, THEN MY/OUR PURPOSE IN THIS SECTOR OF THE GALAXY IS AT AN END. HOWEVER, YOUR AID WILL BE APPRECIATED FOR A FEW FURTHER EXAMINATIONS."

"Do we have a choice?" asked Kirk drily.

"NO."

On board the Enterprise, McCoy was pacing the bridge behind Scotty, who was now in charge of the Starship. Commander Scott, however, could not enjoy such physical release from frustration. "Dr. McCoy, can ye no' sit doon? You're makin' me nervous, man!"

McCoy voiced his worries. "What the blazes is going on over there, Scotty? Why haven't we heard anything from the Captain or Spock?"

"Weel," Scotty replied in a calm voice, "I'm sure we'll find out soon enough."

"Mr. Scott, look!" The cry came from Lt. Sulu, who was staring at the vision screen. Two of the Romulan ships were moving away from the rest of their pack in a wide arc, apparently trying to encircle the two ships.

"Bridge to engine room!" Scotty snapped. "Have ye no' fixed the shield yet?"

The question was a formality, and Scotty knew it. An exhausted voice answered from the engine room. "No, Mr. Scott, we can't replace burnt-out circuitry with bits of metal and hope."

Scotty sensed the hard work that must have gone into the circuitry to be presented with such a defeatist report. He understood, but said, "Listen, laddie, I'll have none of that backchat. Just carry on with the job."

"Aye, sir."

Scotty looked back at the screen. "Keep an eye on 'em, Mr. Sulu.J. It's all we can do at the moment," he added, under his breath. And the crew of the Enterprise waited for signs of what would happen next.

"I/WE WISH TO EXAMINE YOUR BASIC STRUCTURE FOR POSSIBLE ORGANIC SIMILARITIES IN YOUR GENETIC SYSTEM WHICH COULD SHOW MY/OUR LORD MASTERS' EVOLUTIONAL OR MUTATIONAL ESSENCE WITHIN YOUR SPECIES."

The voice was directing its statement towards Kirk, but Kirk was a little confused. "Explain what you mean by evolutionary or mutational essence."

The voice continued. "IT IS POSSIBLE THAT MY/OUR LORD MASTERS MOVED TO YOUR PLANET. YOUR PEOPLE COULD BE EITHER THEIR DIRECT DESCENDANTS, OR THE DESCENDENTS OF A BIOLOGICAL INTEGRATION BETWEEN PRIMITIVE LIFE FORMS ON YOUR PLANET AND MY/OUR LORD MASTERS."

"And if you discover this 'essence' in me, what then?"

"THEN YOUR RACE WILL BE ALLOWED ABSOLUTE USE AND CONTROL OVER THIS VESSEL AND ACCESS TO ALL KNOWLEDGE WITHIN MY/OUR MIND."

Kirk paused to think over what Nathiathan had said, and realised that such an offer couldn't be refused, even if Nathiathan allowed him to. However...

"What if this essence cannot be traced?"

"THEN YOU WILL BE RETURNED TO YOUR SHIP IN SAFETY."

The stillness of space was gradually being disturbed by the Romulan craft who, one by one, were beginning to stir from their temporary inertness. All six ships were now moving in a wide circle around Nathiathan and the Enterprise, still wary of the pyramid-shaped vessel's potential.

Nathiathan had transported Kirk to the same table that had marked his entrance to the ship. This time, however, Spock was standing nearby.

"O.K., what now?" Kirk said, and noticing Spock's gaze fixed on the ceiling, followed it with his eyes. A ball of white light was descending towards his head. Kirk winced away from the brightness, but was drawn back by some compelling force, to continue his stare into the centre of the glowing orb. The light touched his forehead, and immediately his body was absorbed in the light. Kirk noticed no more as he drifted into a kind of unconscious awakening, seeing again only the white light all around. Spock was only surprised when he saw Kirk's body drift upwards to about a foot off the table.

Scotty, meanwhile, had watched the Romulans regather about three times as far away as they had been, but they were now in a position where the Enterprise was directly between them and the mystery ship. Scotty had watched this manoeuvre helplessly, unable to do anything to prevent it. His thoughts were interrupted by Chekov.

"Mr. Scott, massive energy build-up detected, taking place between all six Romulan ships."

"Thank you, Mr. Chekov. Now, what in heaven's name are those devils up to?" He was echoing the thoughts of the entire crew.

Kirk awoke to find Spock studying the vast banks of knowledge and information that covered the entire Kymarian ship.

"Mr. Spock."

Spock turned as Kirk swung his legs off the table. "Captain, I trust you are all right."

Kirk smiled at the usual lack of emotion from the Vulcan. "Yes, Spock, I'm fine. I'm sorry to drag you from your machines, but I thought I'd better let you know I was back." He meant it as a joke, but Spock took it literally.

"I considered it best to learn as much as I could, in case the examination proved negative. Such a unique opportunity should not be missed."

Kirk smiled again, and was about to comment when Nathiathan spoke.

"THE EXAMINATION HAS BEEN COMPLETED AND THE TESTS PROVE NEGATIVE. MY/OUR PURPOSE IN THIS AREA OF SPACE IS THEREFORE TERMINATED."

"And my ship?" asked Kirk.

"YOU SHALL BE RETURNED."

Within a fraction of a second, both Spock and Kirk were standing on the bridge of the Enterprise. Uhura was the first to notice. "Captain, Mr. Spock!"

Scotty turned in the command chair and then stood up. "Captain, I... how in..." He tailed off, taken completely by surprise. Kirk moved swiftly back to his chair.

"Thank you, Mr. Scott. I think your engines would probably be better for your personal attention now." It was said so normally that Scott responded normally.

"Aye, sir."

As he approached the elevator, he met Dr. McCoy leaving it. McCoy stared.

"Jim! How the blazes did you - ?"

"Not now, Bones," Kirk stopped him. "Explanations later. We're not out of trouble yet." McCoy stood silently next to Kirk's chair as Kirk went on. "Mr. Chekov - information on Romulan activity."

The ensign repeated what he had told Scotty. Kirk turned to the more experienced Spock. "Speculation, Spock? What are they up to?"

"It appears, Captain, to be an energy transfer to combine their fire power and form a very powerful type of torpedo, possibly ion based."

"What protection have we, Mr. Chekov?"

"Only forward shield, sir."

"Very well. Full power to forward shield. Mr. Sulu, bring us round to face them."

"Yes, sir."

The Vulcan intervened. "I doubt that the shield will be sufficient protection, Captain, against an ion torpedo of such magnitude."

Kirk sounded a little subdued as he replied, "True, Mr. Spock, but it's all we have. Uhura, sound red alert."

Even as he issued the order and the siren began to sound, a brilliant red ball of light emanated from the Romulans' position and headed towards them.

The bridge crew of the Enterprise readied themselves for the ensuing explosion. Then a blue-white missile from the direction of Nathiathan hurtled at fantastic speed above the Enterprise and slammed into the Romulan torpedo, detonating both in a brilliant flash of radiation some distance from the Enterprise.

As the light faded away, Kirk looked back at the screen, scarcely knowing what to expect. It was the last thing he would have thought of; the Romulans were being drawn backwards towards their own zone; and not only were they moving, but the Enterprise also seemed to be being pushed backwards. The last Kirk saw of Nathiathan was a gradually receding vessel getting smaller on the screen, looking as it had when they first set eyes on it, as if it was dead and lifeless. As Kirk now knew, it was lifeless but very far from dead.

At last Nathiathan disappeared in the immensity of space. Sulu broke the silence. "Captain, we've stopped at the exact position we were in when we spotted that ship."

Nathiathan was again nothing but a radio impulse on the ship's sensors. Then Chekov spoke excitedly. "Sir, the ship is beginning to move, and... sir, she's gone!" He rechecked his instruments, not believing that any ship could accelerate so fast and reach such a phenomenal speed in so little time.

"Engineering to bridge."

"Yes, Mr. Scott," said Kirk.

"Captain, I wouldna' ha' believed it if I hadna' seen it wi' ma own two eyes. The dilithium circuit's all back to normal. It's as good as new, better, in fact, and it did it on its own!" Kirk wasn't too surprised. Such advanced technology as Nathiathan's would seem to be magic to a lesser civilisation.

"Very good, Mr. Scott. Get ready to switch to warp drive."

"Aye, sir."

"Mr. Chekov, plot us a course for Starbase 12. Warp factor two, Mr. Sulu."

"Yes, sir."

Later, Kirk spoke to Spock in the recreation room, over a game of three dimensional chess. "Imagine, Spock," Kirk said. "A ship with such a capacity of technology just roaming the universe looking for its makers - who may no longer exist."

"Indeed, Captain. The very idea of a computer of such potential functioning eternally over one question is, to say the least, sacrilegious."

Kirk noted Spock's voice had a tone of disappointment at missing out on the chance of a million lifetimes. "Still, Spock, it did bring a few things to light."

Spock looked at him. "Captain?"

"I mean, wasn't it true that you actually guessed that I was aboard that ship? Oh, I know the odds favoured my being there, but all the same, a guess from a Vulcan...?"

"Not from a Vulcan, Captain, but from my Human half, and not a guess but a combination of logic and what you Humans call a hunch. It did not seem to want the Enterprise, but did not want it harmed either - which suggested that its only requirement was you, Captain."

Kirk felt defeated. "Queen to bishop three. It had a strange way of capturing me though, just hanging in space. Why didn't it attack us? It would have had no trouble doing that."

"No, but it would have been making an offensive move and it was possible that we could have been the more powerful. By using the one instinct that most intelligent species have, it was able to study us at its leisure. Knight to king three."

Kirk was interested. "What instinct was that?" He moved a pawn.

"Curiosity, Captain. The need to know."

"What a long and lonely search to go on, and with no guaranteed reward at the end. A pity that Cinderella's slipper didn't fit us."

"Cinderella, Captain?"

"Oh, nothing, Spock, just thinking."

Spock moved a bishop. "Checkmate, Captain," he said quietly. Kirk looked, astounded, at the board, and discovered it to be true.

"Well, you can't win 'em all," said James Kirk as he got up to return once again to his position on the bridge.

MISTAKEN IDENTITY? - to L.N. by Caroline Nixon

When I saw you
 I got this peculiar feeling of déjà vu;
 I know it's rather ill-bred of me to stare,
 But the undeniable resemblance is there:
 I swear I've never set eyes on you before,
 And over-familiarity with strangers
 Is something I deplore,
 But you remind me so much of someone I know so well,
 Someone who gave me a hand-up out of my private hell,
 That I couldn't help stopping
 And dropping
 The heavy pile of sci-fi books I bought while I was shopping
 To say hello -
 How can it be
 That you are and yet are not quite he?
 Similarities and dissimilarities shift and recombine
 A confusing kaleidoscope, whirling within my mind.
 I know this might be the purest happenstance,
 But are there any Graysons in your family tree, perchance?

ROUND TABLE WITH WARP DRIVE by Caroline Nixon

You
 Are the new knights;
 The star-flight age's proud, preux chevaliers
 Prancing the parsecs on your steed of shimmering steel.
 Lancelot -
 Still stands your fateful frailty?
 And you
 The new Galahad,
 The trenchant blade of logic your defense;
 The first Galahad recognised his goal,
 But you -
 Can you identify your Grail?

THE INFAMOUS MR. JONES by Sheils Cornall

Cyrano Jones is his name
He unfortunately found fame
In a very unusual way.
Oh boy! does he rue that day!

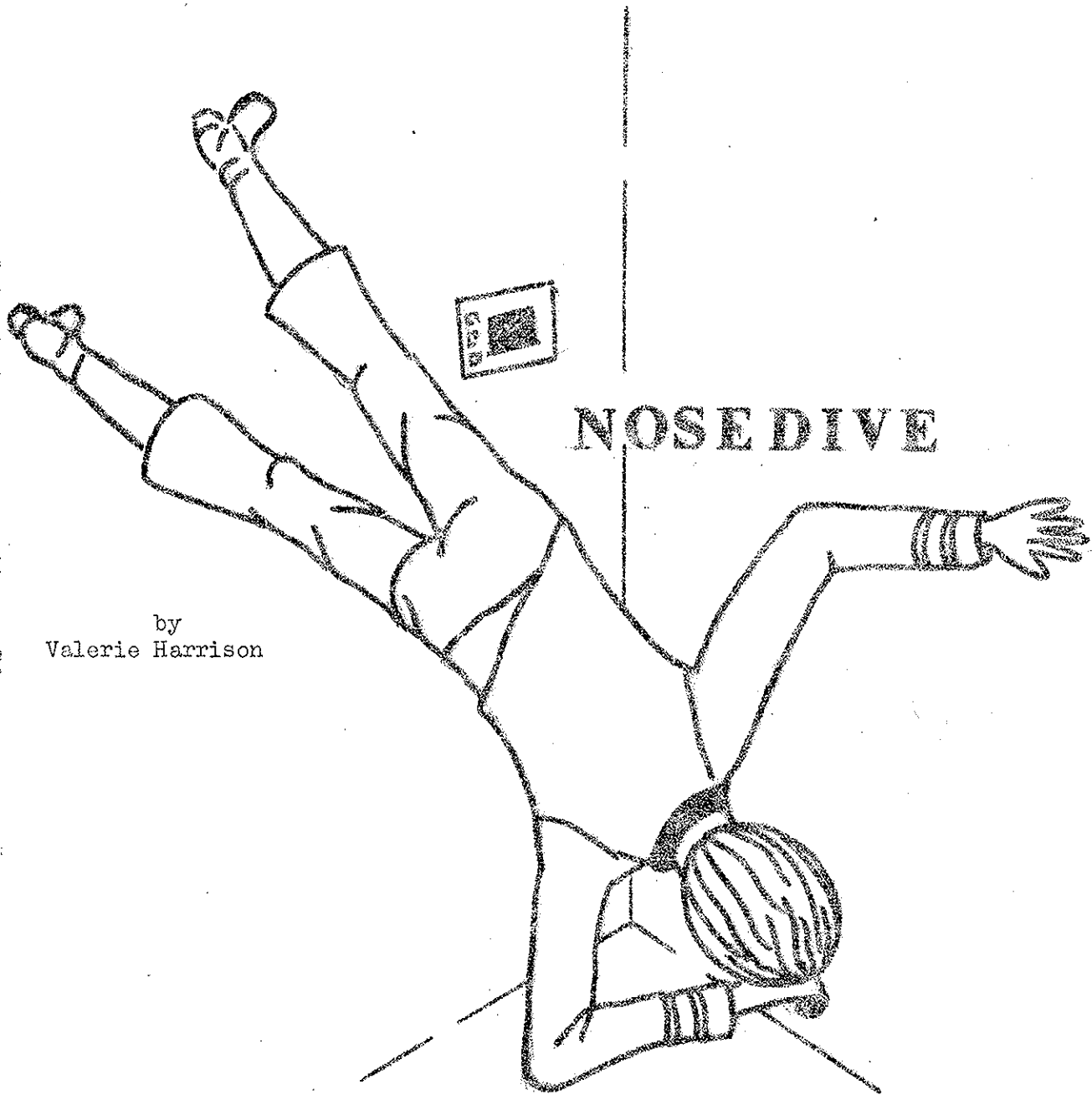
It began with a creature so sweet
small and furry who likes to eat
And naturally the more it consumed
it began to take up more room
Increasing its fluffy rotund size
even before your very eyes.
Then while softly cooing
and no apparent sign of wooing
Just proceeds to multiply
without the slightest word of a lie
For with this cute wee creature
its a built-in novelty feature!
"They're born pregnant," the Doctor explains
and so the cycle starts once again.
No need to tell you the rest
the kind of havoc they caused you can guess
Once on board the best Starship in the fleet
then life became anything but sweet.
For there were tribbles on decks, bulkheads and rails,
seats, johns, viewers and consoles
And I almost hesitate to say
even the Captain's snack tray!
This was the final straw,
he just couldn't take any more
And it certainly did the trick
for clearly "GET-THEM-OFF-MY-SHIP"
Without any intercom I fear
could be heard on all decks loud and clear!
And so these small bundles of prolific fun
went back from whence they had come.
Now serenity reigns once again
and that's how Cyrano accomplished 'fame'.

You see the Trouble with Tribbles
Is Tribbles cause - TROUBLE
But they do have one saving grace -
They terrify the whole Klingon race!

Endless journeying, never at rest;
Taking her crew
Eternally round the Galaxy.
Perhaps one day reason will prevail -
Instead of travelling on,
She will find her journey's
End.



T.G.Z.C.



by
Valerie Harrison

The freefall chamber was a good place to get rid of tensions, the completely different environment giving mind and body a whole new set of problems to cope with. So thought Captain Kirk as he dodged the broadly built young lieutenant who had enthusiastically challenged him to battle.

The lieutenant kicked against the opposite wall of the chamber, and shot straight towards the Captain, who waited till the last second before twisting away and kicking himself towards the top of the chamber where he absorbed the force of contact with arms and legs so that he did not bounce off again. The lieutenant had bounced off the wall and was now slowly and helplessly floating away at an angle, frustration and puzzlement in his face while Kirk grinned down at him.

"May I be of assistance?" the Captain asked wickedly, and kicked himself from the ceiling.

In that same instant he was caught in the grip of all the forces of gravity, and was astonished to feel himself being flung downwards. He reached out to the padded handgrips that people used to hold onto at the end of a session, but he was too far away. As he had kicked himself away from the ceiling just before

gravity took over again, he had been accelerating when gravity took hold, and he fell faster than the young man.

The floor came up horrifyingly fast. He tried to make himself go limp as he had been taught. He heard the loud thud, felt ribs crack, and felt all the breath being forced out of him. In a split second the lieutenant fell across his head and chest, and his head was bursting with darkness.

The emergency light showed on the outside of the chamber, and an attendant ran to the monitor window. He checked gauges, found that gravity was fixed at a normal level, and flicked controls that made sure that it stayed that way. He ran to a wall communicator.

Dr. McCoy was calmly studying the diagnostic panel over the bed when Captain Kirk started to come round. The readings changed only slightly. Kirk's eyes flickered open, unfocussed, and wandered over the various parts of the ward till they rested on McCoy, when after a moment intelligence came back into them.

"What happened?"

"You have a broken collar-bone, three broken ribs, concussion, internal and external bruising, and you're lucky to be alive playing silly games like that."

"What do you mean?"

"Freefall exercises! Unsupervised, unmonitored, the place isn't inspected half often enough."

"Bones," Kirk protested weakly, and closed his eyes. He ached too much to be able to argue. "Is someone investigating the fault?"

"Scotty's doing that now."

"How is Lt. Ross?"

"He's got a dislocated shoulder, a twisted ankle, some bruising and very mild concussion and will be back at work long before you."

Kirk closed his eyes again. McCoy was not going to let up on his argument.

But he could not sleep. He turned restlessly, and in pain, and after a short while he felt the hypodermic against his arm and heard its hiss. His eyes opened instinctively and he saw Dr. McCoy bending over him. He did not make the mistake of thanking him.

Within less than a minute he felt himself drifting on the edge of warm relaxation.

He did not know how long he had been asleep but he felt much more Human when he woke up. The confusion and most of the pain had gone, and he lay still, fearing slightly to move in case it came back. The ward looked reassuringly solid and impersonal, and he knew he must have been dreaming but could remember nothing of it. As he lay, sensation slowly came back, and he knew that he was well and truly alive. He remembered the fall, and what he thought and felt as it happened, and he was glad to be alive and not seriously injured. There would be discomfort for some time, he knew, he had cracked ribs before in his active life, but he would be able to return to duty very soon.

The light in the ward was turned up to normal level, and Dr. McCoy came in.

"Well, you look more normal. Sleep well?"

"Very well. How long is it since the fall?"

"About thirty hours."

"It must be about 2 a.m. I think I'll get up in the morning."

"Not unless I say so."

"I feel fine."

"Only while you're lying still. Wait till you've tried moving. Go back to sleep."

Kirk rested, but he only dozed. By morning he had become very restless and McCoy knew that he would not settle till he had tried moving about. After breakfast he had Kirk's chest bound in a very light framework that was easily removable, but would stop him from bending much and further damaging the ribs.

When Kirk was dressed, McCoy had a sling brought, and he fixed it ~~in~~ position while Kirk sat on the edge of the bed. The Captain had been showing increasing signs of discomfort, but had not complained once. When Kirk was ready he started to stand up, but he felt weak and shaky and the movement brought the pain back to his chest. He sat down again.

"Bones, can you give me something to see me through the first couple of hours?"

McCoy looked at him quixxically.

"Do you still feel that you're fit for duty?"

The Captain started to protest, then subsided again.

"Okay, I won't go back to duty, but I'll have to walk about a bit or I'll go crazy."

McCoy turned away to get one of the hyposprays. In that moment the whole ship jolted as if struck by some outsized explosion. It jerked and jerked again. Personnel were thrown about, lights went out, there were explosions, systems failed and automatic emergency systems took over.

As the chain reactions continued, the sick bay was in darkness, save for the night lights, the automatically powered bulbs that could continue, unattended, for hundreds of years.

The Captain and the doctor lay still where they had been flung on the floor. The doctor was struggling against unconsciousness, moving slightly as he tried to force his arms and legs into action. He thought his sight had been affected, when his eyes finally opened, before he realised that the lights were off. He saw then that the Captain too was moving slightly.

He rolled onto his back, waited a few moments, then forced himself up to a sitting position. His head ached abominably where it had banged against the edge of the door frame, and his neck was stiff, but his senses were coming back quickly, and by the time he was standing upright, the Captain was sitting up.

"What happened?" Kirk asked, unoriginally.

"I don't know. I'll call the bridge."

McCoy walked slowly and carefully to the wall communicator.

"Sickbay to bridge..... Sickbay to bridge, is Mr. Spock there?"

He waited, and tried again. "Sickbay to bridge, is anyone there?"

There was no response at all. Captain Kirk had come up beside the doctor.

"I wonder if that thing's working. Captain Kirk to engineering. Is Mr. Scott there?"

"Engineering here, Lt. Hanson. No, sir, Mr. Scott's on the bridge. I've been trying to get through to him, but there's no reply."

"Are the engines all right? Do you know what happened?"

"Everything's all right down here. I thought we'd been attacked."

"Okay, Mr. Hanson, I'll see what I can find out. Captain out."

"Sir!"

"Yes?"

"Should I continue at the same speed?"

Kirk stopped short. He had no way of knowing exactly where they were, what had attacked them, if anything, or anything about their present situation.

"What speed were you doing before?"

"Warp four, sir."

"Drop down to warp one. I'll contact you again from the bridge."

"Yes, Captain."

After that the Captain contacted the phaser control room. But they said that there had been no call on their services. As far as they knew, they had been on a normal, uneventful flight.

"I'm going to the bridge now," Kirk said to the doctor. "See what you can do here. There must have been a few injuries."

"I'm coming with you. Dr. M'Benga can take over here."

McCoy called up M'Benga and some of the nursing staff who had been off duty. Two of the nurses had already arrived, knowing they might be needed, and M'Benga had gone to someone who had been hurt in a fall, but he would be on his way as soon as possible. McCoy picked up a comprehensive medical kit, and followed the Captain into the hall. The lights here were also only the dull emergency lights. They went along to the nearest elevator and got in. The Captain gave the order to take them to the bridge and the car began moving. It stopped and the door opened. Kirk started to leave before he realised that they were in an ordinary passageway. He stopped and got back in, realising that they were on the floor below the bridge. He gave again the order for the bridge but the car did not move.

Both men knew that a car would not go on when there was already a car at the destination point. But if the other car were not in use, it would automatically make way for the arriving car, unless it was damaged.

The two men left the car they were in and waited. The doors closed but the car did not leave. Kirk looked around again for a wall communicator and tried again to call up the bridge, but there was still no response.

"We'll have to try the stairs," he said. "Come on."

Few of the people they had passed had realised that there was any serious difficulty, but when the Captain and the Chief Medical Officer hurried to the emergency stairway to the bridge, they began to get interested. Kirk pressed the button to release the door to the stairs, but nothing happened. He tried again, getting angrier and angrier, till he was ready to knock it down. The bridge was cut off and his senior officers were trapped there, maybe injured, maybe dead. Frustration and anger boiled.

"Jim!"

Kirk stopped, startled. McCoy rarely used that tone, the commanding, authoritative tone of someone who was taking over, and it slowed Kirk down like a shower of cold water. He became aware of other people there, watching, waiting. He continued to look at the doctor for a moment longer till he was once more in command of himself, then he looked around the various personnel, till he recognised someone from maintenance.

"Mr. Ching."

The Chinaman stepped forward.

"Yes, sir?"

"The bridge is cut off, these doors are jammed, the elevator cars won't go there. Call the head of your department, tell him the problem, and get a team here as fast as you can. I'll be at the emergency bridge. You know the possible dangers, don't take any chances. Carry on."

"Yes, sir."

As the Captain turned to go, he saw someone from communications.

"Miss Llewellyn, find the head of your department, and ask him to come to me at the emergency bridge."

"It's Lt. Uhura, Captain, and she's on the bridge, shall I get Mr. Cooper?"

"Yes, do that."

Kirk turned brusquely away before he could think too closely about the individuals concerned, but still the lovely face of his communications officer was very real and clear in his imagination, and he strode the faster as if he could escape from it. The door of the elevator opened, and he stepped sharply in, followed by the doctor. When the door closed, he leaned against the rail and his head started to droop. The doctor dropped the medical kit, and reached out to his Captain to hold him upright. The brief burst of anger had boiled up out of weakness, and had in itself robbed him of part of his remaining strength.

"I could do with one of your painkillers now," he said, his speech a little hesitant.

McCoy did not answer but had the elevator car take them down to deck seven, which contained both medical quarters and emergency bridge. Kirk saw that he was being diverted to the sickbay when they left the elevator and he protested.

"I can't give you anything for the pain till I know how far the concussion has gone. It won't take long," McCoy said.

Kirk was reluctant. He did not want to end up as a patient again, and the doctor could be very persuasive.

But McCoy was true to his word. He made the check quick but thorough, found some slight concussion, the result of the second blow before the first injury had healed properly, but judged that it would be no real impediment, for the moment. He administered a mild painkiller, the one that would be least likely to react with the concussion, but do the most good. After a few moments Kirk began to feel more normal, although he was still very much aware of the pain from ribs and collar bone, from bruising and scrapes. He stood up from where he had been sitting, and as he left the sickbay McCoy began to go with him.

"Where are you going?"

"With you, of course. You're not floating round the ship on your own in your state."

"Bones, you have patients. M'Benga can't manage on his own."

"I want to stay with you till I'm sure of how you are going to react to the medicine. I'll go as soon as I see you're okay."

Kirk nodded slightly. He did not have the energy to spare to argue, and on the quiet he was glad that McCoy would be there, if only for a short while. He turned and left, and walked, steadily, towards the emergency bridge.

It was empty at the moment. He would need someone there as an assistant, someone who could take over if he became too ill. He sat down in the command chair. He needed someone there too from communications and engineering. He could not take the best, most qualified, people, they were needed on the more urgent tasks of getting the ship operational again. The first person should be someone from navigation. He suddenly realised he had not ordered an alert. It

should have been his first priority. He closed his eyes briefly, realising how much below par he really was. He opened them, and pressed the control that set the yellow light going. He then opened communications.

"Mr. Chekov. Mr. Chekov, please report immediately to the emergency bridge."

"Isn't Chekov on the main bridge?" McCoy asked.

"I think he's on the watch after this. I hope so. Who else have we got?" He opened communications again. "Lt. Cooper, please call the emergency bridge."

Within half a minute Cooper's voice came from the communicator.

"Cooper here, Captain."

"Mr. Cooper, can you spare someone from communications for the emergency bridge?"

"Yes, sir. I'll send Ensign Watts. Sir, I haven't been able to get through to the main bridge yet, but we're still working on it."

"Thank you, Mr. Cooper. Let me know as soon as you get anywhere."

"Right away, sir."

Kirk closed the communications, and sat back in the chair. McCoy had been right. He was not fit for concentrated, full time, duty, and if there had been anyone even half way suitable he would have handed over. At the moment though his only duties were to coordinate the efforts of everyone else, and keep the ship on a straight course. He started to stand up, but his head did not want to let him. Very carefully he straightened and went to the communications console, where he switched on the outside cameras. The forward view was of stars, moving slowly past. He remembered then that Hanson was waiting for further orders. There was nothing he could do till Chekov arrived, but there was no obstacle ahead. He switched cameras to see different views of the outside of the ship. Finally, almost reluctantly, he switched on the one that would show him the outside of the main bridge.

To his great relief it looked completely undamaged.

"Bones." He pointed.

"It looks good."

Just then Chekov came into the room. He stopped when he saw the view of the main bridge. He looked from it to the figure of his Captain, his right arm in a sling, his body held stiffly, bruises on his face and head.

"What's going on, Captain? Where is Mr. Spock?"

Kirk did not look round.

"Mr. Spock is on the main bridge, Ensign. No-one's been able to get in touch with him or anyone on the bridge. Can you find out where we are?"

"Yes, Captain. I'll just consult the computer."

Kirk switched to the forward camera again, and went stiffly back to his seat. He switched on the communicator.

"Kirk to engineering."

"Hanson here, sir."

"Mr. Chekov is working on the navigation and will let you have direction and speed soon. Have you been working on the lighting?"

"Yes, sir. We should have secondary lighting on all main decks within five minutes."

"Thank you. That should make the world a bit brighter, metaphorically."

"Er, yes, sir. Is that all, sir?"

"Yes, thank you lieutenant."

Ensign Watts arrived as he closed communications, and turned out to be a pretty girl of about twenty. He did not remember seeing her before. She seemed a bit nervous.

"Captain, Mr. Cooper told me to report."

"Yes, would you take over communications, please."

"Yes, sir."

She sat down at the controls, and began to familiarise herself with the set up. He watched her out of the corner of his eye, till he was sure she was settling down.

Chekov at the computer terminal had finished his calculations, and went to the helmsman's seat. He checked the course, the time, the speed, and adjusted direction only fractionally.

"Sir, we're still on our way to the Ipsilon triad. At warp four it should take us nine days, three hours and twenty four minutes."

"Shades of Spock," McCoy muttered.

Kirk did not acknowledge the comment.

"Thank you, Ensign. Please signal engineering for warp four. Miss Watts, what do your sensors show?"

He sensed her jumping, and gave her a moment to check.

"There are no obstacles, nothing moving, no unmanageable meteorites. The nearest reading is of a red star twelve degrees, mark four, and a half parsec away."

"Thank you, Ensign. Chekov, is Sulu on the main bridge?"

"He should be, sir, he was on that watch."

"Do you know who else was on that watch?"

"Mr. Spock, Uhura, Mr. Scott was checking something. Ensign Kilpatrick was navigating, and Lt. Graham was helping Mr. Scott. Manson was at the computer terminal."

"Miss Watts, get damage control to relay all reports here."

The Captain had been thinking. Lighting had been affected, and all contact with the bridge, but it was still possible that someone on the bridge had been able to make some attempt at getting a message out. The obvious way, if he had been thinking clearly, would have been through the computer.

"Chekov, something of what happened on the bridge might be recorded in the computer. Check it."

"Yes, sir."

Chekov locked in the helm controls, and set the automatic alarm, before going to the computer terminal again. Kirk watched, glad that he had such well



trained crew, such thorough, efficient people, who did not have to be told every single thing. He sat still for a moment, thinking of Spock, of Scotty, of Sulu and Uhura, all locked away, maybe injured, maybe dead. He felt very tired, very low. The medicine seemed to be wearing off, he had become very aware of his injuries again. He pulled himself upright, breathing deeply, concentrating. As he breathed, he suddenly wondered if the bridge had air. Everything else had been cut off. The bridge crew might just be suffocating.

He quickly called up life support maintenance.

"McKenzie, Kirk here. Is the bridge getting any air?"

"It shows up all right on the panels down here."

"Everything else is cut off. I believe we should assume that life support is cut off as well, and have an emergency pump set up to get air to the bridge any way at all. Is it possible?"

There was silence for a moment as McKenzie thought about it.

"Yes, sir, it is possible. I'll get onto that."

As communications were closed, Ensign Watts spoke up.

"Captain, apart from lighting and the bridge, nothing else seems to have been damaged. There are no leaks reported, and the engines and life support systems generally are functioning perfectly."

Chekov spoke up then.

"Sir, the computer seems to be all right, apart from one section."

"Which one?"

"The section that controls all systems connected with the bridge, and the part next to it that directs the lighting system."

Kirk stared at the young Ensign.

"How could the computer go so radically wrong? It's supposed to be fool proof."

"But not Spock proof," Dr. McCoy muttered. Kirk had almost forgotten him. He stared icily at the doctor.

"Haven't you other duties to attend to?"

"You're better, I'm going. Ensigns, keep an eye on the Captain. If he's not well, call me."

"Oh, get out," Kirk said, and returned to what Chekov had said.

McCoy left. He knew that the Captain was still far from well, but while his attention was on the ship he would be all right. For the moment the doctor's services were needed more urgently in the sickbay. Although no real harm had been done to the fabric of the ship, many people had been hurt in some degree or other, and as the Captain had already said, M'Benga could not really manage on his own.

"I don't know," Chekov was saying. "It is the computer itself that has gone wrong. It would need a computer engineer to go over it and repair the damage."

"See to it. Get someone down there. No, not you, I need you here."

Chekov flushed at the unconscious compliment.

"Yes, sir."

After he had arranged for someone to get down to the computer, on the floor below, he was able to give a report on what had been recorded in the computer's memory banks.

"Captain, up to the time of the damage, the reports were of a normal nature.

There is a gap then of several minutes, then someone on the bridge started to use it, but did not finish."

"What was it being used for?"

"I am not quite sure, Captain. I've been thinking, and it seems almost like a calculation of precisely how long the air would last."

"Captain to McKenzie. McKenzie, please call the emergency bridge immediately."

Within seconds McKenzie had called up and Kirk told him exactly what Chekov had said. He urged the engineer to greater speed. McKenzie acknowledged and went back to his work, driving his people on with greater urgency.

"You said the calculations were not finished," Kirk said. "Do you have any indication of why?"

"It appears, but it is not definite, that another part of the computer was damaged. There is just nothing else recorded."

Kirk, forgetting his injuries, stood up suddenly out of frustration. His head spun round and he began to collapse. He grabbed the arm of the chair, and in a second Ensign Watts was there. Chekov too was there, and between them they held him upright till his head settled down normally.

"I'll call the Doctor," Miss Watts said.

"No," Kirk said. "I'll be all right. I won't do that again."

He sat down carefully in his chair. Although he hid it, he felt far from well.

"Chekov, if I am taken ill, you will have to take over here. You know everything that has been going on, just keep it moving, and co-ordinate everything."

"Yes, sir," Chekov said, suddenly nervous. He had not been in command before, although that was where his training was leading.

"If you do have any difficulties at all, do not be ashamed to ask for help. It's knowing when to ask for help that makes a commander."

"Yes, sir."

Kirk sat still in his chair, letting his body rest, letting his mind think. Someone was working on the computer, air was being fed to the bridge, people were working on trying to get to the bridge, and any second now they should have the secondary lighting system working. He wondered if knowing that it was the computer control that was faulty would help Hanson in his repairs.

He called up engineering and passed the message on while Chekov checked the helm and the navigation details.

Before he had even finished the message the lights came on suddenly, dazzling them all.

"Ah, Hanson. Thank who-ever did that, and thank you for organising it."

"Yes, sir. I'll do that."

As Captain Kirk sat still again, he knew that he was not going to last very much longer without help from the Doctor. He wondered how Chekov would manage. He was so young, so inexperienced, but he had a level head, and logic was his specialty. He had had little experience in controlling people, he might not yet have the confidence. He could always ask someone like Hanson in engineering to take over. Hanson had had experience with command in his own department, and most of the problems seemed to be of an engineering nature, but Hanson was really needed where he was.

"Miss Watts," Kirk said, after he had been quiet for a while, "please call sickbay."

"Shall I ask Dr. McCoy to come?"

Kirk nodded slightly.

"Yes, please."

He sat back in the chair, his eyes closed. He hoped McCoy could give him something to help him keep going. He hardly heard Miss Watts' words. Consciousness came and went, and at last he heard the door open. He opened his eyes and tried to straighten, to appear better than he was. He wanted so much to stay on duty, to watch over every action, to be around when contact was made with the bridge, to know if Spock and the others were all right, or if they were dead. He pulled himself upright, nearly falling forward out of the chair. Someone's hand held onto his shoulder, holding him back.

"I'm all right, Doctor, just need something else to slow the pain."

"It's Spock, Captain."

The voice, so very familiar, came from unreality. He looked up, frowning, thinking he was hallucinating. His eyes focussed clearly on his First Officer.

"Spock?"

The disbelief was painfully clear.

"Yes, Jim," McCoy said. "It's Spock. Everyone's okay. We got to them in time."

"How?"

"Through the emergency stairs. The door was finally forced open, and a medical team took oxygen in. Everyone's okay."

It finally sank in and Kirk managed a faint smile of relief, but he felt himself slipping. He pulled himself together one more time.

"Mr. Spock."

"Yes, Captain."

"You have the con."

He passed out then, at peace at last.

It was twenty-four hours later before he had recovered enough to understand what was said to him. It was Spock who had come to report, as requested.

"What did happen to the computer, Spock?"

"Sabotage, Captain."

"Sabotage! Did you get the culprit?"

"Yes, Captain."

"Then who?"

"Not who, what. A pregnant mouse apparently escaped from the biology section at some stage, and set up home in the computer."

"How on Earth did it get in?"

"That is still being investigated, but so far it is thought that a maintenance hatch was unguarded for a few minutes. The result was that the mouse gave birth in the computer, somehow found a way to a food supply and back again, and she and the little ones survived. No harm was done till the babies were old enough to explore. The failure of the freefall chamber was also a direct result. Nothing else was damaged till the rest of the family decided to explore, and to sample the circuits of the computer. The computer is now completely clear, and most of the damage has been put right. A full scale investigation is underway to

find out all the people responsible, and to set up conditions that will prevent this happening again."

"When I think of all the lives that were nearly lost."

Kirk lay back and thought about it.

"Doesn't it make you believe in luck, Spock?"

"Luck, Captain? Most if not all of what happened could have been avoided if proper care had been taken."

Kirk looked at him. Still as pedantically logical as ever. But it was good to have him back again.

The problems of the 'sabotage' could be dealt with on another day. For today, everyone was alive. And that was enough.

THE SECURITY GUARD'S LAMENT

(Ave, nos morituri te salutant)

Aboard the Starship 'Enterprise',
A noble role we play,
Although our life expectation,
Amounts to just a day.

'Tis we who always beam down first,
To some strange alien shore,
Unfortunately 'tis also us,
Who don't come back no more.

"Security's expendable",
The very words they said.
And there's the explanation,
Why we always end up dead.

Our Captain's most paternal;
'They murdered that boy!'
But, "They all knew the risk,"
Says good Dr. McCoy.

I may not be a hero,
Just an ordinary man,
We can't all be Vulcans,
But I do the best I can.

It seems that there's a shortage
Of the replacements that they seek,
Since they're killing off the rest of us
At the rate of three a week.

I don't wish to sound impertinent,
And don't want to make a fuss,
I know someone's got to cop it,
But must it always be us!?

Alison Glover.

NIGHT OF FEAR by Sue Bradley

The planet loomed ahead, and soon the Enterprise was in standard orbit around it. Captain Kirk gave the con to Mr. Scott, and proceeded to the transporter room. Accompanying him were Mr. Spock and Dr. McCoy. Each was filled with thoughts of the planet beneath them, Mr. Spock in particular - it was Vulcan.

The three materialised in the city of Shikahr; to be exact, in Sarek's house. Spock's mother Amanda was very ill, and as the Enterprise was in the vicinity of Vulcan, Spock had asked for leave, and had invited Kirk and McCoy to accompany him.

Almost as soon as they had materialised, however, it became painfully obvious that Spock wished to remain alone. So after expressing their concern and courtesies to Sarek, McCoy and Kirk left the house.

"Well, Bones, I've seen Shikahr before - what do you say we take a look at the desert?"

"Seems as good a place as any, Jim. Perhaps we can get Scotty to beam us down some supplies to take along?"

Kirk considered McCoy's suggestion, but he decided against it.

"Let's pick up what we need on the way. After all, Vulcan food doesn't entirely consist of plomik soup, you know!"

McCoy smiled back and nodded. "What are we waiting for then? Let's go and get some directions, I don't want to get lost here!"

The two men had walked to the outskirts of the City by now. They had collected some supplies and had found out they were going in the right direction for a unique and intriguing attraction of the desert. This was Tir-ank-Ahn, which could loosely be called a cactus 'forest'.

"It's funny, Jim, I don't think Spock has ever mentioned this part before. It should be a very interesting experience."

"I hope so, Bones. At least it will take our minds off Spock's troubles, and indeed, off the Enterprise too."

As they drew nearer to the forest, it gradually became more alive. From the distance it was just a green blot on the horizon. Now it became beautiful, and as Kirk and McCoy reached the edge they stood and looked in wonder. The cacti were all shapes and sizes, mostly resembling trees. In places the 'branches' seemed to join overhead, making an archway. All the greens imaginable were there to see; the cacti stood out in sharp contrast to the red sand beneath their feet. And one of the most beautiful aspects of the forest was that some of the cacti were in flower.

"I simply don't believe the colours or shapes of some of these flowers, Jim." McCoy looked around in amazement, while Kirk was attempting to see if the flowers were scented.

"Very delicately perfumed, Bones. I can see Mr. Sulu turning green with envy when we tell him where we've been!"

Kirk smiled at McCoy again, but the doctor seemed to be a little ruffled, patting his pockets and looking perplexed.

"That's strange, Jim. I put my tricorder in one of my bags, but it seems to have just disappeared. I'd really like to get a record of this place, too. Could I have put it down while I packed the things we got in that store in the city?"

"I could almost swear I saw you pack it, Bones. What are you going to do now?"

"It's no good, Jim, I'll have to go back for it - after all, it is Starfleet property. It shouldn't take me long, Jim, you wait for me here."

McCoy shook his head, still disbelieving that the tricorder was gone. Kirk looked around him. Just ahead was a small pile of rocks.

"I'll wait by the rocks, Bones, and have a bit of a rest while I'm waiting."

"Fair enough, Jim - I'll see you later."

McCoy turned and headed for the City, while Kirk made for the rocks.

Kirk had waited on the rocks for nearly an hour; now he got up to stretch, and started to walk along the path where Bones should be coming any minute. But after only five minutes had passed he realised it was the wrong path, and fifteen minutes later he had become completely lost. The rocks, with all his bags and supplies, had vanished. The path beneath his feet was littered with dead needles from the cacti. He realised then that he hadn't any idea if any of the cacti were poisonous. After that, he kept a wary distance from the needles.

Onwards he walked, the green cacti full of flowers on each side. Now the forest was a prison. However he tried, the paths seemed to lead deeper into the forest. Losing all track of time, Kirk sat down on a small rock to meditate about it all. It seemed ludicrous how he had taken the wrong path in the first instance. Why, he'd witnessed McCoy taking the right path not an hour before he attempted it.

"I'm sorry, Bones, I don't understand it at all. I wonder where you are now - lost like me?"

Kirk spoke aloud. His voice seemed to echo round the small glade far more than it should. He looked around, and in anguish realised it was getting slowly darker. Twilight had begun, and its eerie fingers of shadow were coming closer. Kirk made a last attempt to find the right path as darkness closed in. Then he saw a shadow on the path ahead; a figure holding a lantern. He stopped in his tracks - it wasn't McCoy.

He looked closer, and saw it was a woman with a dark coloured cape around her. Kirk walked up to the Vulcan woman, hand raised in the Vulcan salute.

"I'm afraid I'm lost. Can you show me the direction for the City?" Kirk looked at the woman, who replied, returning the salute.

"Yes, I am returning myself soon. I like to go for a walk after my evening meal."

"Thank you. I'm so relieved you take that walk - I'd almost given up hope of finding the way out. My name is James Kirk."

She looked at him with eyes that said she knew all. "My name is T'Purna. Let us walk." She held out her arm for him to link his in. Kirk thought how strange it was, but he felt he didn't need to tell her about his ship; no need to say anything. He felt again that she knew already. Perhaps she was telepathic as most Vulcans seemed to be.

Kirk looked into the sky as a white stab of light came through a gap in the overhead cacti. He looked closer when they came to a slight clearing.

"Two moons. How very beautiful they are, T'Purna - like you."

He drew her close into his arms, and looked at just how beautiful she was. She had taken her cape off; with the hood off, it released all her long black

hair. Her eyes were deep brown and she was clearly the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. He bent to kiss her. She wasn't cold and aloof like other Vulcan women, she was warm and tender to the very tips of her elegant pointed ears. They embraced as the light from the twin moons enfolded them in their brilliant white light. T'Purna put out her lantern.

"Let us walk on, James; the night is so splendid, with this radiant moonlight to shine on our path."

T'Purna's suggestion was all Kirk wanted to do; it seemed that he was caught in some illusion, a bewitching dream that was real. The perfume from the cacti drifted sweet and heavy in the air all around now. As the moonlight grew even more intoxicating, he felt elevated above all Earthly thoughts. Even the Enterprise and all that went with it seemed to be of another world far away.

On and on they walked. The shade of the cacti was cool and refreshing. Kirk wanted to walk all night; somehow he didn't really want to return to the City.

Kirk asked T'Purna about herself, but although she answered, she didn't say much at all about her life. But it really didn't appear to matter much to Kirk, he felt so euphorically happy. So did T'Purna, her smile on her lips and in her eyes showed it. Both had fallen hopelessly in love, their love was all-consuming. Everything else was forgotten, even time itself.

But dawn was approaching; slowly a small shaft of light came through the cacti branches. Gradually the dawn came closer, and the first actual sun-ray stabbed down like a dagger.

T'Purna was close in Kirk's arms, her head on his chest. She felt cold in his arms. He was about to put her cape on, but an anguish grasped him. He must not let go of her, never, never. She was freezing, her body as cold as death, and pale, so very pale. She seemed like gossamer, and it seemed almost she was fading slowly away, so transparent now. Fear took hold of Kirk.

"T'Purna, I love you - I love you..."

But she had disintegrated into thin air as the dawn clamoured around him, bright and triumphant.

Kirk couldn't begin to comprehend the catastrophe. He stumbled blindly, calling her name, knowing she would never return. In pain and torment, he ran wildly down the path.

McCoy and Spock were waiting for him. McCoy had returned originally, and as he couldn't find Kirk, he went back for Spock. He was amazed by the look on Spock's face as he told him where he'd left Kirk. Together they had hurried to the forest, but then darkness had come. Spock didn't tell McCoy the reason why he would not enter the forest until morning.

But here they were, waiting helplessly for Kirk to come out as the dawn came.

Spock caught sight of him first and ran ahead, followed by McCoy.

"Jim - Jim, are you all right?" But McCoy knew he wasn't.

Spock took over. "Doctor, only I can help Jim now. If what I think happened did happen, I must reach his mind without a moment's delay."

Spock mind-melded with Kirk, and his face showed all the torment that was being shared by both. Spock neared the end of the memory, and bade Kirk 'Forget ... forget...' as he had done once before when Kirk was heartbroken over a woman.

Kirk lay down then, just where he was on the path, and slept peacefully. Spock drew McCoy aside; the Doctor was chafing to know the story.

"It is as I thought, Doctor. Jim was out all night, on the worst of all nights possible. It was Khandhan-Ghu last night, when the two moons are side by side in the sky. It is also the anniversary of the death of a legendary Vulcan woman called T'Purna. She was of the long-ago time when wars and hatred raged over Vulcan, before the time of Surak. It is said she was killed on her wedding night, when the two moons were in the sky. The legend states she walks in this forest, looking for the love she lost."

"Well, Spock, I never thought Vulcans had legends of such emotional quality! But what has this to do with Jim?....."

McCoy's face showed a dawning horror as realisation came to him. "You don't mean he saw her, Spock?"

"I do, Doctor. But I feel he has helped her. She will not walk ever again. She found her true love last night."

Spock turned away. He had felt all of it in the mind-meld, and couldn't speak more of it to McCoy at this moment.

McCoy gently woke Kirk, who looked around him in surprise. "Sorry, Bones, I must have dropped off while I was waiting for you."

"It's O.K., Jim."

"I must have slept all night... Let's get back to Sarek's house, I've seen enough of this forest, I think. Did you get any tricorder readings?"

"Yes." McCoy glanced over at Spock, who silently reassured him that Kirk hadn't remembered a thing.

Kirk followed McCoy's eyes, and saw Spock for the first time. He smiled a greeting.

They returned to Sarek's house, where McCoy, who had been thinking, asked if he could see Amanda. He reappeared after a few minutes, and drew Sarek to one side. Sarek listened in silence for a minute, then nodded, and went out; McCoy joined the others. "I've worked out what was wrong with your mother, Spock," McCoy said cheerfully. "Your father's gone to get his doctor; I'll pass on my diagnosis and recommended treatment, then we can get back to the ship."

"But our doctors were completely..." Spock began. Understanding dawned. "Of course. My mother is Human - she has a Human ailment." McCoy nodded silently.

As soon as they beamed back aboard, McCoy hinted rather broadly that Kirk needed sleep.

"I think I will go and rest," Kirk agreed. "I do feel so inexplicably tired. Goodnight, Bones, Spock."

"Goodnight, Jim," came the words in unison. Kirk smiled broadly as they left, and then settled down to a very deep and peaceful sleep.

McCoy walked along with Spock to his quarters. "He'll never remember, will he, Spock?"

"Never, Doctor. Only you and I know the truth. But of us both, only I know the absolute truth, and I must shut my mind off from it."

"You did for him what I could never have done. Thank you, Spock."

McCoy turned without another word and walked reflectively to his own quarters.

NOW IS THE TIME by Gillian Catchpole

"Please Sarek not yet,
Can we not wait just a little longer?
He's so young,
Too young for such decisions."
"Amanda, would you have your son grow up
Alone in the middle,
Lost to both our worlds.
He must be allowed to choose."
"Choose!
Would he understand the choice?
How can one so young begin to understand?
To choose is to deny existence to a life within,
Who knows what anguish that may cause,
What unspeakable pain?"
"The longer we wait,
The more difficult the decision.
Now is the time to direct his life,
He can no longer walk a double path."
"Sarek I have to say this.
I do not know if you will understand.
I fear his choice.
I feel he will choose the way of Vulcan
And when he does, a part of me,
A special part, known only to my son,
Will be locked away without expression,
As each day he grows to be a Vulcan
And away from me."

"Of course - yes - yes I agree.
The time I hoped would never come
Is here.
The choice is his,
Let him decide."

The Enterprise... the best ship in the fleet.
The best ever draws the best
And so she gathered the best crew in the fleet.
It did not seem possible
That we could get a better man than Pike
To be our Captain;
And yet we did. In Captain Kirk
We found the very best...
We all are dying now. The great amoeba
Has drained us all.
The shuttle has no power, and I am weak.
I felt the Enterprise
Enter the creature's body on her way
To meet what must befall her;
For well they knew it was the only way
To save the Galaxy.
And to the ship, her crew, and most of all
Her Captain, I bequeath
My highest commendation. They are men.

T.G.Z.C.

GLESCA BELANGS TAE...? by Margaret Gaughan

Kirk groaned as the alarm woke him from the first decent night's sleep he'd had for weeks. What the HELL had happened now? It had all been so peaceful; the mission had been a success, and everyone was looking forward to a well-deserved R & R when the blasted epidemic had struck the crew. Only himself, Scotty, and of course Spock of the senior officers had escaped, and it had been sheer hell for a while. Then the sudden unexplained breakdown in Engineering that had sent the Enterprise spinning wildly through a time-warp to finish up in orbit round 20th century Earth. There had been nothing else to do but remain where they were until enough of the crew were back on their feet to deal with the problem. As soon as enough of the bridge crew had recovered to take over, Kirk had retired to his quarters and thankfully sunk into oblivion. Now this. Irritably he punched the intercom button.

"Well?" he growled - this had better be important; it was.

"McCoy here. Scotty's just collapsed in Engineering. I've got him in sickbay - I think you'd better come and take a look at him."

"On my way." So Scotty had ignored his advice and carried on - he should have known. The stubborn fool thought that only he could look after his beloved engines.

He arrived in sickbay to find that Scotty had already come round, and a full scale argument was in session.

"I've got to get back - it's my fault, and I must try to rectify it."

"Your collapse is certainly your own fault," Spock replied distantly. "If you hadn't been so obstinate, and rested when you were told to, it would not have happened."

Scotty frowned, and was about to speak when Kirk interrupted. "All right, calm down. What's done is done, and for all we know, it might have happened anyway - perhaps a delayed reaction to the epidemic."

McCoy broke in then. "How am I supposed to work when half the crew's in here upsetting my patients? Why can't you all get out and attend to your own departments. NOT you!" He laid a hand on Scotty's shoulder as the engineer tried to get up. "You're staying here even if I have to knock you out to keep you!"

A few days later, when Scotty was fully recovered, the senior officers were all gathered in the briefing room. Scotty was feeling, in his own dialect, scunnered. Under Spock's direction the damage to the engines had been put right, and they were only awaiting the final figures from the computer before using the slingshot effect to return to their own time. That blasted Vulcan had done it again. He'd show him - one day!

They were interrupted by the intercom. Kirk answered it, and returned looking perturbed.

"What's wrong now?" asked McCoy.

"It's McPhee. Apparently he's not fully recovered from the epidemic; anyway, he's broken out of sickbay, stolen a shuttlecraft, and headed for Earth. I'll have to send someone to look for him. More delay!" Kirk looked anxious as well as angry.

Scotty felt as if everyone was blaming him for this as well. "I'll go. He's one of my men, and the whole thing's my fault, so I should be the one to go."

"Don't be stupid," said Kirk. "How can it be your fault?"

"If I'd spotted the fault in Engineering sooner, we wouldn't be here."

"If it comes to that, if it hadn't been for the epidemic we'd all be on shore leave now," replied McCoy. "Anyway, I don't think you're fit enough to go."

Scotty looked round the room. "I can see it in your faces," he said irrationally. "You all think it's my fault. I ought to go."

The argument raged, but Scotty was adamant; he wanted to go. Kirk finally had to agree, and the meeting was ended to allow preparations to be made. Only Kirk and McCoy were left.

"I'm not happy about this, Jim - I don't think he's fit enough yet. Exhaustion is a funny thing - you can't be sure the patient's fully recovered."

"I can't say I'm any too happy myself, but you know Scotty; if we don't let him go he's going to brood about it, and convince himself we're all against him. It's a pity I can't afford to send you along with him."

The two men thought for a moment, then McCoy smiled. "How about sending Christine with him? She can keep an eye on him, and if they pretend to be married, it will provide a good cover story if they need one."

"Christine would never agree - you know how she feels about Spock," retorted Kirk.

"She just might if we tell her that the thought of her with another man might arouse Spock's Human jealousy."

"She'd never fall for that!"

"A woman in love will believe anything she wants to believe," grinned Bones. The two men looked at each other, one laughing, the other puzzled.

"Well, anything is worth a try," said Kirk at last.

"Do you really believe he might get jealous?" Christine asked eagerly.

McCoy looked serious, although his eyes twinkled. "Well, he is half Human."

Christine thought for a moment. "I suppose I should go - Mr. Scott needs looking after."

"Thank you, Christine, that's a load off my mind," said Kirk, who was trying not to look at the self-satisfied McCoy, knowing that if he did so he would find it impossible to keep from laughing.

"I dinna ken why the lassie has tae come," grumbled Scotty.

"Well, you never know," Kirk soothed him. "You might need a cover story, and a married couple on holiday won't arouse any suspicions."

Unconvinced, Scotty was prepared to argue the point, but was interrupted by Chekov. "We've discovered Mr. McPhee's location, sir. He appears to be in what was called a 'Glesga pub' with several strange people wearing unusual clothes."

Spock interrupted. "I have the precise coordinates now, Captain. It appears that the men with him are proposing to attend what they refer to as a 'Football match'."

Scotty's eyes gleamed. "I wonder..." he murmured thoughtfully. Kirk looked at him inquiringly. "Ah've jist remembered stories ma grandfather used tae tell me aboot how, long ago, nations used tae play this game called fitba. It consisted o' twa teams each o' eleven men who wid try tae pit the

ba' in the opposing team's net. This was called a goal. Whoever scored the maist goals won the game."

"It sounds very childish to me," said Spock disparagingly.

"Dinna knock it till ye've tried it, laddie!" retorted Scott. "Men wid go crazy for joy if their nation won."

Spock said nothing, but his look conveyed all.

"All right, that's enough, you'd better get going," Kirk interrupted. "Mr. Spock will beam down with you and collect the Galileo - at least McPhee had the sense to land in a secluded area and conceal the shuttlecraft. You'll have to make your own way into Glasgow from there - I'll expect to hear from you as soon as you've located McPhee."

As Scotty and Christine prepared to leave the Galileo, she looked at Spock hopefully. WAS there a gleam of jealousy in his dark eyes? She believed there was. Would he say anything before she and Scotty left? He did, but not what she had expected.

"We will expect you to get in touch at once if Mr. Scott seems to be overdoing things again, Nurse," he said coolly.

"I hope I would not need to be reminded of that, sir," she said dejectedly. "If you're ready, Mr. Scott, we should be on our way."

Scotty turned and stared at Spock, wondering what HE could have said to make the lassie so upset. Oh well, better get on with it; the sooner they found McPhee, the sooner they could all go home.

A few hours later the couple walked into the pub where McPhee had been located.

"I don't see him, Mr. Scott," said Christine.

"Don't you think you ought to call me Scotty, since we're supposed to be married?"

"Er... yes, I suppose so, Mr...er... Scotty."

"You sit there; I'll get you a drink, and ask about McPhee."

Naturally, the barman could not remember one of the many customers he had served that day. Scotty returned to Christine, and was about to give her this information when a slightly inebriated gentleman made his presence felt.

"Haw, Jimmy! Did ah hear ye asking fur a wee guy called McPhee?"

"Aye, ye did," Scotty replied cautiously.

"A wee chap wi' broon curly hair?" the stranger wanted to know.

"Aye," repeated Scotty.

"A nice wee fella... rather strange... no' quite wi' us, if ye ken whit ah mean? Whit wid ye be wantin' wi' him?"

Scotty hurriedly thought up a good reason. "I'm his uncle. Scott's the name - Scotty to my friends, and this is, er, my wife, Christine."

"Oh, I see," their friend replied. "Well, ma name's Gordon, Hamish Gordon."

Christine interrupted. "Mr. Gordon, what did you mean about my... my husband's nephew being rather strange?"

Hamish looked at her in surprise. "Well - ye ken. He doesna' seem tae be clued up aboot whit's goin' on in the world. The puir laddie didna' even

know the match wis on the morra... and it the maist important o' all - Scotland versus England," he intoned almost reverently.

Scotty and Christine looked at each other. "You see," Scotty explained, "he HAS been away from home for quite a long time - only just got back - that's why I want to see him."

"Aye, I suppose that could explain it. Onyway, that's no' helpin' ye tae find him. Ah dinna ken where he is noo, but ah'm meetin' him here the morra morning fur a wee dram before we go ta: the match. Why not join us... aboot eleven o'clock, then." Taking their consent for granted, he vanished in the crowd.

"Well, Christine, should we wait, or should we try to find him tonight?" asked Scotty. She looked at him, and saw the signs of strain in his face.

"No, sir, we could spend a lot of time looking, and not find him in the end. At least we know where he'll be tomorrow. I think it would be best if we put up for the night at a hotel."

"Ur ye makin' an improper suggestion tae a superior officer, Christine?" Scotty asked with a broad grin. She blushed in confusion.

"No, sir, it's just that, er, umm..."

"It's all right, Christine, I ken whit ye meant. But ye do realise, of course, that we'll have tae share a room? Separate beds, of course," he went on hastily as Christine looked startled. "Ye ken it widna look right fur a married couple tae ask fur separate rooms. And another thing - PLEASE try an' remember tae call me Scotty. Even in these backward days a man disnae insist on his wife callin' him 'sir'."

"Of course, er, Scotty. I forgot," Christine replied.

Next morning Scotty and Christine arrived early at the pub. They had agreed it would be best if they got there before McPhee, and of course, before their new-found friend. They were just beginning to think he wasn't going to show up when they saw him at the bar. McPhee purchased a drink, and retired to a corner to enjoy his newly discovered beverage. Scotty approached him from behind in case he took fright at the approach of his formidable superior.

"Whit the HELL dae ye think ye're daein', laddie?" Scotty said severely. McPhee turned round with a startled expression.

"Mr. Scott, sir. What are you doing here?"

"Ma question should be answered first, dae ye no' think so?" Scotty barked. McPhee gulped with dismay, knowing full well that in this mood Scotty would accord him no mercy; he was in for a severe reprimand even before he returned to the Enterprise to face the combined wrath of the Captain and the First Officer. McPhee thought longingly of a nice, deep hole somewhere far away. He supposed he had better explain.

"Well sir, you see, my father's family came from Scotland, and I've never seen it, and I've always wanted to, and... and I was so fed-up in sickbay with nothing to do, especially when we should have been on leave, and I found out we were in orbit round Earth, and it seemed a good idea, and... and..." His disjointed explanation limped to a halt in the face of Scotty's discouraging stare.

"Aye well, laddie, I ken it wis an unfortunate end tae yer first mission, but that's nae excuse. God help ye when the Captain gets his hands on ye!"

Christine broke in. "I think we ought to get back, Scotty, before Mr. Gordon arrives."

"Too late, that's here," said Scotty resignedly.

"So ye found him, then," Hamish greeted them cheerfully.

Christine explained the situation to McPhee, while Scotty tried to convince Hamish that they had to leave right away.

"Oh, ye canna dae that tae the pair wee sowl! He's that excited aboot seein' the game. Never been tae an international, he wis tellin' me. Surely a few hours widna' mak' ony difference? The gemme'll be over by five, and Ah'll show ye the best way through the crowds tae get ye hame."

Scotty looked at McPhee's eager face and hesitated. It WOULD be quite a thrill to experience at first-hand the thrilling stories his grandfather used to tell him, but what would Jim say? Actually, he need never know, if Christine could be persuaded to go along with it.

Christine looked from one to the other; they were both watching her like small boys waiting expectantly for a great treat.

"We-ell," she said slowly, "it wouldn't delay us too long, I suppose."

"Great!" said Hamish. "We've time for a dram before we go."

A couple of hours later four slightly merry people made their way towards Hampden Park to join many more slightly or wholly merry people and lend their support to the Scottish team. As they approached the ground Christine stopped beside a vendor selling - among other things - tartan scarves and tammies.

"I think we should be pro-properly attired for thish game," she said, not exactly drunkenly, but certainly not so coherently as usual. Scotty felt rather guilty. He shouldn't have let her drink all that whisky; after all, she wasn't used to it. At least there was plenty of time to sober her up before the Captain, Bones or Spock saw her. Anyway, he was quite in agreement - they should be properly dressed. Within a few minutes Scotty, Christine and McPhee had bedecked themselves with tartan scarves, tammies and rosettes; Christine had also insisted on buying a ricketty; she thought the noise made by this strange wooden instrument was wonderful, although the others implored her not to twirl it anywhere near THEIR ears.

At last they were finally there - Hampden Park... Scotland V England. Scotty and McPhee looked at each other. Both had heard the same wonderful tales passed down from their grandfathers. The atmosphere was intense as 90,000 people, mostly Scots, stood or sat in the vast stadium, urging their team on to victory. Their voices rose in salute to their heroes; their cries of dismay when those same heroes made some mistake, or the opposing team some masterly move, were heartrending. There were no goals, but plenty of thrills, in this match until almost the end of the game. The Scottish right winger passed to the midfield, then ran on to intercept the return ball..... and GOAL!!!! Scotland had scored! The crowd went wild with joy. None more so than the three people to whom the game had been a thrilling new experience. As they joined in the hugging and shouts of joy, Scotty turned to McPhee.

"Well, dae ye think it wis worth it, Angus?"

"Aye, Uncle Scotty, it wis," and McPhee grinned happily as Scotty playfully punched him for attempting to imitate his Scottish accent.

"Ye cheeky monkey!"

It was a very happy crew that made their way back through the Glasgow streets thronged with equally jubilant supporters who laughed and joked with each other as they walked along. Total strangers were the best of friends; enemies were forgiven, and brought into the fold.

"Ah think we ought tae huv a celebration drink," said Hamish.

"Great idea," said Christine. "Where's the nearest pub?"

Scotty was past caring whether he and his companions returned to the Enterprise drunk or sober, and readily agreed.

An hour or so later, he began to think they really should be getting back. He left the crowd and went out to contact the Enterprise. "Mishun accomplished, sir. When dae ye want us back?"

"Scotty, where the hell have you been? We've all been worried sick about you. Are you all right?"

"Aye, Captain, we're all... all... ri... allri... all O.K."

"Mr. Scott! Are you drunk?"

"No, shir, not quite. Nearly, but not quite."

"Good God! What on Earth...! Oh, never mind, the important thing is to get you back. The transporter is out of action. You'll have to go back to your original beamdown point, and Mr. Spock will meet you with the Galileo."

"Whit's wrang wi' the transporter, sir?" asked Scotty anxiously.

"How do I know? You can have a look at it when you get back."

Scotty returned to the others, and told them the change in plan.

"Well, Hamish, we'd like tae thank ye fur yur hospitality." Scotty warmly shook hands with their new friend. "We've all enjoyed ourselves tremendously." The others agreed, and added their farewells.

"If ye're sure ye must go, ah'll get ye there - ah've a van ah can borrow, fur ye'll no get transport noo."

Spock was beginning to wonder what these mad Humans could be up to now when he heard a rickety old van swerve along the path. From it came the unmistakable tones of Scotty's voice raised in song. The van stopped a few yards from where the Galileo was hidden, and with a final "Scoo - t - land - the - Braaave", the figures of Scotty, McPhee and Christine stumbled out. Before anyone could stop her, Christine dragged their new friend to meet Spock.

"Awfy pleased tae meet ye, sur," he said, apparently seeing nothing unusual in a shuttlecraft or a totally outraged Vulcan. Spock coldly ignored both Christine and Hamish, and turned to Scotty.

"IF you are ready, Mr. Scott," he said pointedly, then turned and entered the Galileo. The others made their final farewells to the now almost unconscious Hamish, and followed him. Spock barely glanced at his passengers, but the happy trio could only stand and giggle childishly at anything and everything. Christine in fact found it vastly amusing to wrap her tartan scarf around Spock's neck and urge him to join in their rendition of 'Flower of Scotland', an invitation he had not the least difficulty in refusing. If looks could have killed, poor Christine would have been ten feet under, but at that moment she couldn't have cared less.

A few hours later none of the culprits felt much like singing. The effects of the whisky had worn off, thanks to one of McCoy's more noxious potions, and each of them had undergone an interview with the Captain which they somehow did not care to discuss. On the way to her quarters, Christine saw Spock approaching. Too late to avoid him, and she supposed she ought to apologise. She shuddered at the thought. Any of the others would have understood, but SPOCK! Screwing up her courage she said,

"Mr. Spock, sir..." and hesitated.

"Yes, Nurse Chapel?" His voice dripped icicles.

"I'd like to apologise for last evening, sir. I'm afraid I don't remember much about it, but I believe I was... rather rude to you."

"Yes, you were; but I feel most of the blame lies with Mr. Scott for allowing you to drink so much of that curious beverage, especially when he is so familiar with its effects..."

Christine blushed, but could think of nothing to say. Just then Scotty emerged from the transporter room.

"Weel, that's it fixed, then - nae problem."

"What was wrong with it?" Spock inquired.

Scotty winked. "Wouldn't you like to know, laddie; wouldn't you like to know!" He grinned and wandered off along the corridor, singing loudly.

"Bonnie Scotland, Bonnie Scotland, we'll support ye evermair... we'll support ye..."

Meanwhile, in a multi-storey flat in the heart of the Gorbals, Hamish was facing the wrath of his wife.

"That's it, Hamish Gordon! Ye're jinin' the A.A. the morra! Spaceships I could maybe swallow... but green men wi' pointed ears... NEVER!"

SPOCK'S SEARCH by Joyce Deeming

Where is my journey's end?
Where can I call my home?
- The land of my fathers, my mother's world?
None is truly my own.

The Universe vast encompasses me,
So many worlds and lands;
Each has his place, but I alone
In a void of emptiness stand.

A man apart in a solitude world,
Unable to share with any
My hopes and fears, joys and distress,
But forced to hide them within me.

Many's the time I have wished that, like you,
I had a home and a planet,
Could laugh when happy and cry when sad,
But nothing can ever change it...

For I am what I am, you are what you are
And never the two may meet,
But there's strength in my weakness, and I wonder to know
The whole Universe lies at my feet.



HORROR

on

BARDA 92

HORROR ON BARDA 92 by Audrey Baker

The darkness came down like the crack of doom and it was absolute. Kirk let out one yell as the earth opened under him and he was gone. Spock flung himself flat and his outstretched hands hooked over the lip of a chasm.

"Captain!" he called. "Captain!"

There was no answer.

Cautiously Spock rubbed his eyes. They were open and certainly seemed to be functioning normally. Where had the stygian blackness come from, then? One moment there had been plenty of light and no sign of any chasm. And then...

He inched closer to the gash in front of him, trying to feel how wide it was. He could not reach across it. Nor could he feel the bottom of it. He lay there on the edge, his heart jolting, trying to get his bearings, listening with his keen ears. But he could hear nothing. Kirk had completely vanished.

He called him again, and only the echoes of his own voice came up out of the chasm to mock him. He thought for a second and then reached for his communicator. He tried to call up the ship. No response there either.

The blackness was impregnable. He was far too experienced to attempt to move around in it. He could only stay where he was and await developments. He put the useless communicator back into his belt and waited, the fingers of one hand still holding on to the chasm lip. He knew it had not been there before and he wanted to know when - and if - it would disappear again.

It was some time before anything happened but when it did, it happened as suddenly as the first incident. The ground under Spock's hand was firm once more and simultaneously the light returned with almost blinding vigour. Blinking, he sat up carefully. Barda 92 looked exactly as it had before the darkness came - a stark world with little to recommend it.

For some time he tried to trace the mysterious chasm but without success. There was no sign of it on his tricorder readings. He knew though that it had been there and he was fairly sure that Kirk had fallen into it. Once again he tried to contact the ship, but with no result. He was completely cut off on this planet and he had no idea how to find Kirk.

He started to search the area, and he was still looking about when the darkness descended again. He dropped flat and crawled forward until he found the chasm. This time he didn't wait. He slithered over the edge, hanging on grimly, and began to climb down.

It was not easy in the dark but he was managing well enough. The side was not sheer and he found plenty of foot and hand holds. The chasm seemed bottomless and he went on and on, down and down in the pitchy blackness. It was like climbing into black wool. He was sure he must have descended nearly half a mile - how much further was there to go?

Suddenly a voice rang out, a strange sharp voice, possibly a woman's but with alien overtones. He halted and froze to the rock face but he could not see anything and he could not locate the speaker.

"So you've come down of your own accord! How very obliging of you!"

"Where is Captain Kirk?" Spock asked.

"Yes..." said the voice consideringly. "I banked on that. On your Vulcan loyalty bringing you down after him - or at least keeping you here until you found him." The voice was sneering now.

"What have you done with him?" Spock demanded.

"You really want to know, don't you?" the voice said. "Tell me, are you attached to him as a person?"

"He is my Captain," said Spock stiffly.

There was a strange eerie quality of laughter in the voice now, but it was not nice laughter. "A truly Vulcan reply! And you've come to find him of course. Very well, you shall find him!"

"I do not know who you are," Spock said, "but if you can see in the dark, I cannot. I would be grateful if you would give me a little light."

"All in good time," the voice said gloatingly. It sounded like a nasty child preparing to torment some flies. "You don't like me, do you, Vulcan?"

"I do not dislike anyone," Spock said patiently, still clinging unmoving to the wall. "If you know anything about my race you should know that. However, I must confess to being curious. Exactly what are your intentions?"

"You'll find out!" the voice promised.

"If you keep me in this darkness I am not likely to find anything out," Spock said. "If you could provide some light I might be able to move."

"You won't need light for that," the voice said and a second later a force of iron caught him round the body and lifted him off the wall as if he had weighed only an ounce. He let out a smothered yelp of astonishment and then something hit his head and he knew no more.

He came to feeling vilely uncomfortable with his head throbbing. He seemed to be standing up against something with his arms nearly pulling out of their sockets. He lifted his head painfully and blinked in the light. Then he saw he was chained to a wall with wrist shackles. He shifted his weight onto his feet, thankfully feeling the pull on his arms lessened, but he was still very uncomfortable and his hands, from being above his head, were numb. He straightened up as much as he could and looked about him.

He looked first for Kirk but there was no sign of him. He was in a small rock-hewn cell, and then suddenly he realised he was not alone after all. Watching him from some feet away was a snake like a woman, or a woman like a snake. He knew this was the owner of the voice.

She stood there in front of him, dressed from neck to feet in a very tight shimmery scaley garment like a snake's skin. It glowed greenish in the light. Her body inside it was snake-like too, thin and tubular and flexible. It was hard to tell where her waist ended and her hips began, or indeed any other part of her, for it all flowed into one sinuous boneless whole. He could not even tell if she had legs, but she certainly had arms. Her face was small and triangular with glittering eyes and a lipless mouth and her dead black hair hung straight down onto her narrow shoulders with neither wave nor shine.

"Well?" she said.

"I should like to know where I am and who YOU are," Spock said.

"You're in my world," she said. "And as for who I am, that's not important. I have many names."

"Where is my Captain?" Spock persisted.

"Patience, all in good time," she said. "You'll see him again, I promise you - just once more."

"Are you going to kill us, then?" Spock asked.

She smiled freezingly. She looked like a smiling snake. "I really haven't any use for you. Isn't that a pity?"

"Why should you want to kill us?" Spock wanted to know.

"I have my reasons, Vulcan, rest assured. And I intend the deaths not to be easy, particularly yours," and she smiled again, complacently.

"Where is my Captain? What have you done with him?" Spock demanded.

"You'll find him."

"How can I, tied like this?"

"I think you'll find him, even so," she said and turned to go, moving with a slithery glide and still he could not see if she had either legs or feet. She might have been walking on her tail.

"Are you just leaving me here?" he asked her as she went.

She looked at him over one shoulder. "Why shouldn't I, Vulcan? I don't fancy you as a household pet. For the present, then, goodbye."

She left him.

He tested the chains but they were firm. He looked round him, but could see nothing but rocky walls and the opening the snake woman had used. He listened. No sound. He called Kirk. Still no sound.

Presently he heard something moving near the door. It was a small creature resembling a large scorpion, with no tail, six legs and powerful pincers. Its beady eyes glinted red in the light as it looked at him. It crouched with the joints of its legs bent above its body and he saw it had spiny teeth. For an instant he thought it was going to spring on him and braced himself, but it changed its mind and retreated out of the door again. There had been something uniquely evil about it and he, who found very few alien forms disgusting or frightening, was shaking all over. He hoped he had seen the last of it.

He tried to trace the source of the light, but could not find it. It came from above, but there did not seem to be anything it could have originated from, not even a crack in the roof. He spent some time puzzling over this, glad to find something to occupy his mind. His arms were numb, his head still ached and he was thirsty. He was also worried about Kirk. He wondered if the snake woman intended to keep him shackled until he died of starvation. The time went by and still nothing happened.

He was half dozing in his shackles, exhausted, when suddenly the darkness came down again. He stood tense, listening, and somewhere in the inky blackness he heard small rustling noises and faint clicks. He could not see, but at once he knew what was making those noises. The scorpion creature had come back, with reinforcements. His skin crawled with horror and revulsion. The noises were coming closer, across the floor towards him.

He waited as long as he could, then lashed out with his feet. One boot made contact with something hard and he heard an explosive hiss and the snap of teeth as the creature was flung away. Then something spiny gripped him by the other ankle right through his boot.

He fought like a maniac, pinioned as he was and unable to either move away or to use his hands. He wriggled and squirmed and tossed and kicked. The small sharp teeth stabbed into him all over, and he could feel his blood running down. He could not tell how many of the creatures were swarming all over him, but they seemed determined to tear him apart. Suddenly the light returned and with it the snake woman. She was carrying a whip with which she set about the scorpions with vigour. There were eight of them, Spock noticed, not including the one lying squirming on the floor, evidently the victim of that first lucky kick. The snake woman drove them out of the door like sheep, then came back and calmly trod on the head of the injured one, crushing it.

"They're a little out of hand at times," she said. "I don't want you killed - yet."

He looked down at himself, at the torn uniform and the blood. He felt ashamed at being seen like this by her. She looked at him in her flickering way and coiled up her whip.

"I see you can still defend yourself," she observed. "Even when you're tied up." She glanced at the dead scorpion.

"Your intervention was still timely," Spock said drily. "Do those creatures make a habit of devouring your prisoners?"

She smiled a little. "Sometimes. They're rather pets of mine, good scavengers."

"That I can believe," he said.

She looked him over. "You don't seem badly hurt."

"I am not," he answered. "And where is my Captain?"

"You'll find out, in time," she said and went.

Spock watched her go in silence. The bites were stinging. He shifted uncomfortably, then suddenly listened hard. Kirk was calling him. There was no mistaking it. He seemed quite a distance away but the rocky passages funnelled the sound like an echo chamber.

"Spock! Spock!"

Spock answered at once. "Captain! Where are you?"

"I'm shut up in some kind of a cage," Kirk answered.

"Are you injured?"

"No, not anything to speak of. Where are you?"

"I am shackled to a wall."

"Have you seen that woman?"

"Yes. Who is she, do you know?" Spock inquired.

"No," Kirk said flatly.

There was a pause and then Kirk called, "How did you get here?"

Spock told him and added that he could not get in touch with the ship.

"So no one knows where we are," Kirk said. "Come to that, I don't know myself. Have you any theories?"

"No, Captain," said Spock gloomily.

A silence fell, and then just as Spock was about to speak again, Kirk screamed. The sound was agonising and it galvanised Spock into madness. He fought his shackles even more savagely than when he had been attacked by the scorpions. With eyes that saw but did not register he noticed indifferently that the shackles had rubbed the skin off his wrists and the blood was soaking down into his cuffs. As he struggled he called to find out what was wrong, but Kirk did not answer, just went on screaming, the screams seeming to come from every direction at once until the cell rang with the noise, maddening Spock still further.

The shackle pins pulled loose suddenly with a jerk. Spock, reeling and panting, raced for the door. He emerged onto what looked like a staircase landing. In front of him were two large flights of stairs, one going up, the other down. Both vanished into infinity. Both were lit by the same mysterious light. There was nothing else in sight.

The screams were still coming from every direction at once. He stood there uncertain, broken chains swinging from his wrists, trying to trace the source of the noise but in that place of so many echoes not even his ears could track down where Kirk was. He poised there, ready to take off either up or down, unable to decide which way. The feeling was returning to his numbed arms and hands now and the sensation was agony, but he ignored it. Then, warned by some sixth sense, he turned and saw the snake woman behind him, in the doorway of the cell he had just left. She smiled.

"I told you you'd find him," she said. "Shackled or not."

"I have not found him," Spock retorted. "Where is he and what are you doing to him?"

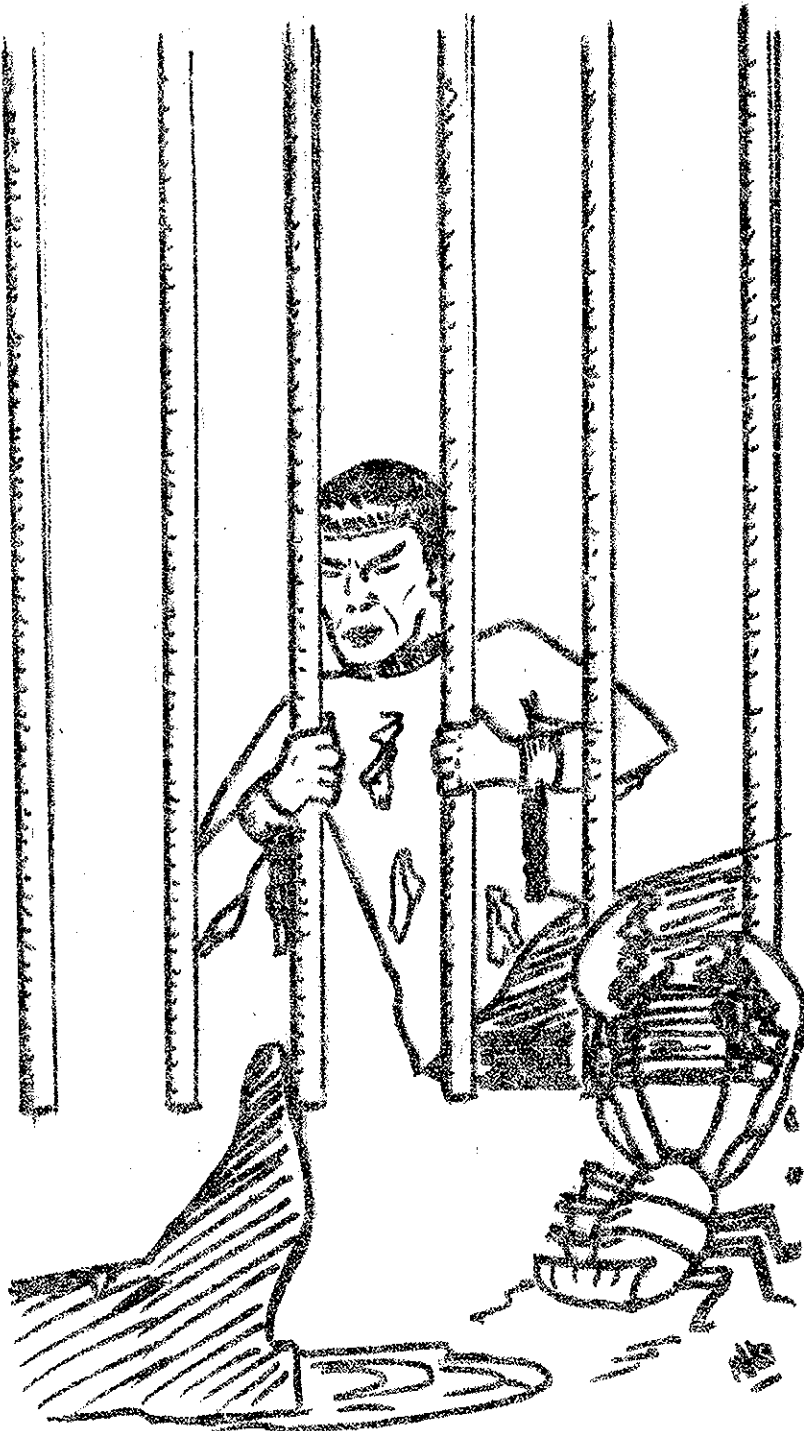
"As I'm here, the answer is 'nothing'," the snake woman said smoothly. "As for where he is, I should try that direction if I were you."

She pointed up the stairs with her whip. Spock flashed her one look and was off - down the stairs.

The next instant the stairs gave way under him, turning into a smooth icy slide like a frozen waterfall. The steps melted into one another and vanished. He slipped and floundered on the glassy surface, skidding and sliding, snatching frantically at the sides. Finally he lost his footing and fell, rolling down the incline, trying to dig his heels in. He did not slow down, but even as he fell the slide beneath him turned into a bed of spikes that tore at his

body. He grabbed at them and halted himself, then bleeding and shaking he got to his feet. Kirk was still screaming, but less often now, and something told Spock that it would soon be too late. He had guessed correctly, though, he was definitely closer. Ahead of him the stairs went on descending, spikeless, perfect. He rubbed his bruised and bleeding wrists and went on cautiously. It was as well that he was cautious. A second later the step he was about to tread on sank down and vanished, leaving a gaping hole. He jumped over it. Immediately every step he put his foot on lifted up, so that he stayed exactly where he was. Becoming desperate he gathered himself together and threw himself over the next flight. He bounced and rolled and knocked nearly all the breath out of his body, but he had progressed. In front of him now was a low door in the rock face, like the entrance to his own cell. He stumbled through it and came up against the bars of a cage. At last he had found Kirk, and for one moment of Human weakness he wished he had not.

The scorpions had also found Kirk and the snake woman had made sure that he could not escape by binding his hand and foot inside the cage. His body was covered



in them, fighting and hissing and feeding. For a moment Spock thought his Captain was dead but then the bloodied head on the floor slowly turned towards him and he saw recognition in Kirk's eyes.

"Spock? I knew you'd come... but you're too late..."

He reached out one hand towards the bars and Spock, dropping down, strained both his own towards it. It was all he could do to reach it, but he did reach it and clutched it. He tried to drag Kirk towards him but failed. He appeared to be tied to the wall on the far side of him. There was nothing Spock could do but watch Kirk die.

When it was over he waited for the scorpions to attack him, but when they had finished with Kirk they scampered away without even looking at him. He stayed where he was long after the rattle of their claws had faded into the silence, hunched against the bars. The snake woman found him there when she reappeared some time later.

She stood looking down at him for a moment. He did not move but he knew she was there and after a while he said tonelessly, "Are you going to kill ME now?"

She said, "Get up!"

He ignored her.

She crossed to him and caught him by the back of the neck in a grip of iron. Her strength was astonishing. She hauled him to his feet as if he was a puppy. He did not look at her, still leaning against the bars with his face turned away.

"Come with me," she ordered.

He shook his head.

"Come with me or you'll regret it," she threatened.

"Do what you please," he said indifferently. Then he turned his head slowly and looked at her. He said, "Why did you do it?"

"I don't have to account for my actions to you, Vulcan!" she retorted. She then reached out and twisted one of the bars of the cage. A gap opened in them and she said, "You can go in to him now."

Spock said, "I have no wish to."

"Surely you want to check that he's dead?" she asked.

"I do not have to," he answered. "No man can live eaten down to his bones."

"Go into the cage," she said ominously.

"No," he said.

She took a step towards him. "Don't try me too far. I shall force you in there."

"You can try," he said and then suddenly hurled himself at her. His hands pressed round her throat, the fingers digging in, seeking her windpipe. It was a killing hold, one he rarely used. He had hands like steel, but she was stronger than he was. She flung him off as if he had been made of paper, crashing him back into the bars so violently that he was half stunned and slid down to the floor. He knew of no humanoid, particularly a female, who could have shrugged him off so disdainfully. She stood over him now, not even ruffled.

"You see," she said. "Now, are you going?"

He looked up at her. "What are you? You are not Human, that is for sure."

She smiled. "No, I'm not Human, I'm glad to say. Puny creatures! I

have merely adopted this shape for the moment. Now get into that cage before I throw you there!"

He got up slowly. He knew now she was quite capable of carrying out her threat. She had the strength of a giant for all her smallness. He turned reluctantly to the gap in the bars, not wishing to be hurled through them like a doll. She chivvied him in.

"I thought you'd see sense in the end," she said. "Now I shall leave you here for a while."

"Are you going to send your creatures to finish me off, as they did my Captain?" Spock queried as the bars closed again to cut off his escape.

"Wait and see," she said, smiling enigmatically. She walked off, looking back to say, "You wanted to go to him. Now you're with him, so go."

Spock stood and watched her leave. Then he slowly lifted his arms and looked at his bleeding wrists. Absently he moved the shackles on them, trying to get the metal off the wounds. Then he leaned his head on the bars and sighed.

He tried to work out why they were there at all, what they could have done to have brought such dreadful punishment onto themselves. The universe was full of strange creatures, he knew, and not all of them friendly, but this was out of all his experience. How had they incurred such enmity? And having incurred it, how could he escape now? What was the snake woman going to do with him?

The darkness came down again like a blanket and he heard the rattle of claws. He knew at once what she had in mind now. He was not tied up, so he could run about in the cage. It was her intention to have him rushing here and there, trying to escape, flying like a hunted animal, terrified, blind, never knowing when he was going to be set upon. He remembered only too well Kirk's screams. He knew the beasts killed slowly and painfully. And, no doubt of it, somewhere away in the darkness she would be watching it all, savouring it. His terror and his agony would feed her malice and she had set the stage for this.

Well, there was only one answer. He was going to disappoint her. He would die all right, but his death would have dignity and seemliness, it was not going to be the blind panic she expected. What pain he felt he would keep to himself. He would not give her the satisfaction of hearing one groan.

The claws were nearer now. He turned with his back to the bars, sat down, crosslegged with his hands in his lap, and waited. He concentrated fiercely on other things, stilling the racing of his heart. He would die like a Vulcan. As the claws rattled closer still he briefly reached out in the dark, unerringly, to lay one hand on Kirk's boot.

"Goodbye, Jim," he murmured. Then like a buddha he sat and stared in front of him, his head high.

He felt her presence then, her chagrin and disappointment at his refusal to panic. She was trying to make him panic, thrusting needles of fear into his mind, showing him visions of what was about to happen when the scorpions attacked. He sensed that he was in mental contact with her at last, the first time she had permitted it. Instantly he threw all his power into the link, and the sense of dismay and astonishment he picked up encouraged him. She had not realised his strength in this field and now it was too late. He held her mind relentlessly, refusing to let it go. She might be physically stronger than he but she certainly was not mentally so. He seized his advantage.

First of all, who was she? Why did she hate him so much? The answer came back confused and reluctant. She - it - was not of any species he had encountered before. It was impossible in fact to deduce exactly what she was. She

seemed to belong to another dimension entirely. Her hatred and malice sizzled across to him, unstinted. She hated him and all creatures that could move freely outside her own world, envying them the mobility she could never have. Here, on this world, she lived alone and trapped, her only amusement and pleasure the torturing and killing of those she could catch. There was some vague hint that she had once been marooned here deliberately as a punishment, but he could not be sure of this. He did not pursue the matter, for his mind was concentrating on something else. She belonged to another dimension - the shape he saw was only one she adopted to be visible to his eyes. If this is so, he thought suddenly, than perhaps all that has happened here has been a hallucination. If she is not in our dimension then she can only reach us through our minds. And if that is so, then the scorpions could also be hallucinations.

Furiously he began to channel all his mental powers towards the oncoming claws.

"I do not believe in you. You are unreal. You do not exist!"

The sweat broke out on his face with the effort. He shut out the flood of frustrated rage from the woman, he concentrated, harder, harder. Then the claws were silent and the darkness had gone. He was sitting in the cage as he had been before, and outside the bars stood the snake woman, her eyes burning with venomous fury. He got up slowly and turned to face her.

"And I do not believe in YOU either!" he told her. "You are a hallucination. Go back to where you came from. You have no more power over me."

For a second she looked at him with almost demented hatred. Then she dwindled away and was gone and with her went the cage and the whole surroundings. Spock was lying full length on the ground and above him the planet's sun shone peacefully. Next to him lay Kirk, unmarked. Spock reached out to touch him.

"Captain, are you all right?"

Kirk suddenly raised his head. "What? What the hell - ?" He blinked and then said, "That dream... Spock - " A look of horror crossed his face.

Spock wondered if Kirk's dream had been identical to his own, but he did not wish to find out. Getting to his feet he suggested that they beamed back up to the ship as soon as possible. Kirk reached for his communicator but before he spoke to the ship he put one hand for a moment on Spock's shoulder.

"You're always there, aren't you?" he said quietly. "Somehow, you always manage to get there."

"I trust so," said Spock.

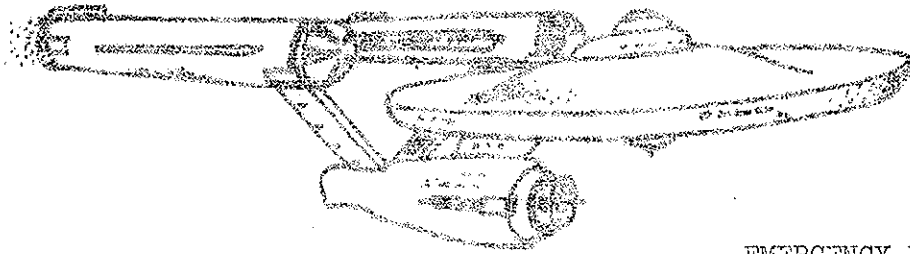
They looked at one another for a moment and then Kirk smiled and flipped the top of his communicator.

"Kirk to Enterprise. Two to beam up."

ENTERPRISE by Peter Grant

Enterprise, illustrious star traveller, cruising effortlessly through the cosmos in your quest for undiscovered worlds.

Not unlike a swan are you, graceful and majestic mighty starship, striking fear into those that hate you, and joy into those that love you. Go in peace Enterprise, we salute you, our emissary in space.



EMERGENCY by T.G.Z.C.

Here we go again. Warp six. Wonder what the wild excitement's all about this time? No-one ever tells me anything beforehand... I'm just the poor machine that has to do all the work. Rushing here, rushing there... never know what's happening till it's happened.

Ouch! It's all very well for those silly Humans saying that the deflector shields protect the ship, but when a meteorite hits the shield, it hurts! Especially at these crazy speeds. Can't even enjoy the scenery when we're belting along - can't relax for a moment in case something unexpected crops up. Warp one, it's easy. I can afford to look round and appreciate the view; if I'm a nanosecond late in telling them I've detected something, it doesn't much matter. But at this speed, a nanosecond could mean the difference between life and death - and I can't fool myself, I do need them; I wasn't made to control my own actions. If they all die, so do I...

Hope it isn't another battle. I've got one or two good friends among the Klingon ships. Very nice people, really - not their fault their Men and mine can't agree. It's not very pleasant firing off pot shots at a friend and doing all you can to disable her just because some silly Men think that it matters how much space they control.

Can't even snatch a little snooze at this speed... Oh, I never really sleep properly, not as Humans understand the word, but under normal cruising conditions I can shut down a lot of functions and get a bit of a rest. At this speed, I don't dare.

Oh-oh. McCoy's calling on the medical section... ah, that's all right. Just a medical emergency, outbreak of something resembling Rigellian fever and he's got to synthesize vaccine and have it ready for planetfall. No need for me to worry - I'm just going to be overworked providing the vaccine as well as keeping all my people safe!... Wonder why my designers never realised I'd get tired? That's why a ship sometimes breaks down for no obvious reason. She's so tired she just has to have a rest, so she lets some little component in an awkward corner to get at break so that she can get that rest. At least we get a full overhaul occasionally, but I'm overdue for one. Think I'll maybe have a minor breakdown once this crisis is past - can't do it yet, I've a reputation to maintain. Best Starship in the Fleet, they call me. And while I know perfectly well that it's really the crew they mean, I can't let my people down...

Ah, there's the planet. Thank goodness - normal speed at last! No need to bother about anything here, they won't even be using the sensors, just the transporter... yes, there they go; medical team of four... they're away.

Now perhaps I can grab a little rest before I'm asked to do anything more...

Gushing visitor to a Starbase: Would you say going into space is dangerous?
Kirk (slightly bored): Going into space is dangerous.

MURDER TWICE REMOVED by Security Officer Baillie

For a Starship Captain, James T. Kirk has some pretty odd ideas at times; take shore leave, for instance. Most Captains insist on crews reporting back on time, correctly dressed, and sober. When Jim took over the Enterprise, he took one look at the crew, another at the charge-sheet after the last shore leave, and promptly had a fit at the amount of trouble involved. As usual, his devious mind came up with a way round it; he pulls everyone in twenty-four hours early, regardless of what shape they're in, and gives them a day to sober up and settle down.

Seems to work - we've had no trouble so far; well, not of that sort, anyway. After a rather nasty experience when Scotty, in a fit of misplaced enthusiasm, tried to smuggle a gorgeous Aldebaran stripper on board, the Captain likes to have a Security officer on duty in the transporter room to give the crew members the once-over, and confiscate any contraband they just might happen to absent-mindedly bring on board.

Which explains why I'm hanging around chatting to Kyle while he's beaming up our wandering boys and girls. We're in the middle of a friendly argument over the attractions of a couple of girls we'd met, when the communicator signals someone waiting to beam up. We break off while he does the necessary. It's Spock, of course. I might have known - he's always first back. You'd think he didn't like shore leave, or something.

"Welcome aboard, Commander," I say. "I hope you had an enjoyable leave."

"Thank you, Mr. Baillie, most pleasant. I had the opportunity to visit the Institute of Science. Professor R'Ley and I had some most absorbing discussions on the theory of mathematics. When the Captain comes aboard, please inform him I will be on the bridge."

As he goes out, Kyle and I just look at each other. I mean, so O.K., he's not Human, but you'd think that after months in space, he'd want something a bit more relaxing than mathematics!

Next to return are Lt. Uhura and Christine Chapel, and it looks like they've bought up the entire planet. I'm looking at all their parcels and boxes, wondering how they intend to manage; I soon find out.

"Dear Mr. Baillie," coos Uhura sweetly, "I'm sure you can find a couple of men to help Christine and me with all this?"

For a smile like that, I'd round up Admiral Kor himself, and make him carry the entire load three times round the Enterprise on his head. However, Kor not being available, I call for a couple of Security men, help them load up, and collect another million-watt smile for my efforts. Some lady, Uhura. Pity she's a lieutenant...

I expect trouble with our next visitor, and I get it. Scotty is not drunk - not exactly - but he's getting on that way. He's clutching about eight bottles of Saurian brandy, and he's very talkative. I have visions of spending the next three hours listening - in detail - to Scotty's doubtless disreputable adventures, and I also have the problem of separating him from the brandy. Then I get a flash of inspiration.

"I think Mr. Spock is looking for you," I tell him. "I heard him say he was on his way to Engineering."

Scotty eyes me like a Klingon who's just been confronted with a shipload of tribbles. "Engineering, is it?" he rumbles ominously. "We'll see about that. Here, hold these, laddie."

He hands me the bottles and marches off to do battle for his beloved engines. Quite what he thought Spock would do to them I don't know, but I put up a fervent prayer that he wouldn't meet our First Officer in the corridor.

I stack the bottles on one side to dispose of later, and get back on the job. The crew are reporting in thick and fast now, and my pile of contraband grows steadily. At last things quieten down a bit, and I look up from my checklist.

"That just leaves the Captain, Dr. McCoy, Sulu and Chekov," I tell Kyle.

"Funny," he comments. "The Captain's usually one of the first back. There's the communicator, perhaps that's him now."

It's not, though - it's Sulu and Chekov. I have to try pretty hard to keep a straight face as they materialise; Sulu's bad enough, but poor Chekov looks as if he died three weeks ago and someone forgot to tell him.

"Hi, Pav," I call over, "have a good leave?"

He doesn't answer, just groans very quietly, and shudders. When Sulu stops laughing, he tells me, "I found him in a bar in the red light district. Out cold, couldn't even remember what day it was, so I thought I'd better bring him along."

"It's just as well, the Captain's due back any time. Take him to his quarters, and let him sober up."

To tell the truth, I've seldom seen anyone in as bad a state; he looks out on his feet, and his eyes are sort of fixed and staring.

"Maybe you'd better take him to sickbay," I suggest. "He looks like he's got more than a hangover to me."

"Perhaps. I'll see how he is after he's had some sleep. You know what our pet witch-doctor is like." Give Sulu his due, he's pretty concerned when he sees how bad Pav looks. "Come on, Russian wonder boy. Bed time."

As they go out, Kyle activates the transporter again, and this time it's the Captain and Dr. McCoy.

This looks like being a bad, bad day, because McCoy looks like a candidate for his own sickbay. He's white as a sheet, with a couple of cuts on his head, and he's limping badly. I alert a medical team, and go forward to help the Captain.

"What happened?" I ask.

"Hit and run," says Kirk. "We were on our way over to the transporter station when it happened, so we decided to come straight up. It's a miracle you weren't killed, Bones."

"I'm all right," says McCoy testily. "Just a few bumps."

"I've alerted sickbay," I tell the Captain. "Did you get a look at the driver?"

"No, it all happened so fast, and I was more concerned with Bones, but I'd like to get my hands on whoever it was."

"Probably kids joy-riding," I suggest.

"Probably. Well, come on, Bones. Sickbay. Captain's orders."

So now we've got the whole crew back we can get on with normal routine. Twenty-four hours later, with everyone sobered up, we leave orbit, and head off to where-ever Starfleet Command in its wisdom has decided to send us.

First clue I get that anything is up comes a couple of days later. I'm in the rec room chatting up a pretty young yeoman I've had my eye on; she's just getting interested in my sparkling personality when the ship's intercom undoes all my good work.

"Security Officer Baillie to the Captain's quarters!"

My immediate response to this is a hasty examination of my conscience. I want to have my answers ready. The only thing I can come up with is one bottle of Scotty's brandy that got sort of accidentally lost on the way to disposal, but the Captain couldn't have found out about that. Could he?

Anyway, I don't hang about too long; James T. Kirk is not the most patient of characters, and a summons to his quarters instead of the bridge sounds ominous. Turns out, though, it's not a private party. Spock is there, looking about as concerned as I've ever seen him: by which I mean that his right eyebrow is up about two millimeters as he reads through a report the Captain hands him as I come in. McCoy, though, looks worried enough for both of them. Last time I'd seen him he seemed to be recovered from his accident, but now he looks terrible. Scotty is muttering something under his breath, and from the tone of his voice, somebody has an unpleasant couple of minutes coming.

"Sit down, Mr. Baillie," says the Captain. "We are going to need your help." At once I compose my features into an expression of helpful attention, but he doesn't seem to notice. "You will remember that as Dr. McCoy returned from shore leave he was the victim of a hit and run driver. At the time we put it down to an unfortunate accident. It seems we were mistaken."

My ears prick up at this.

"There have been other... incidents... since. Nothing serious, but all potentially dangerous. Last night we had this." He holds up some sort of gadget that I don't pretend to recognise, though I've seen McCoy handle one. "Last night Dr. McCoy was about to treat Mr. Chekov for an infected hand. He was about to use this scalpel to lance the infection when something went wrong, and it pierced his own hand. Thinking it was just a faulty instrument, he completed the treatment, but later he became very ill. Luckily, Nurse Chapel had kept the scalpel; becoming suspicious, she examined it, and found that the blade had been poisoned. Thanks to her, Dr. M'Benga was able to treat McCoy in time. This scalpel had been tampered with, and substituted for the one McCoy intended to use on Chekov. It seems clear, Mr. Baillie, that someone on this ship is trying to kill Dr. McCoy, and I want him found."

To say I'm surprised at this is some understatement. I mean, McCoy of all people! I can't imagine anyone having a reason to want him dead.

"To begin with, Mr. Baillie," the Captain goes on, "we must take every precaution. Apart from Nurse Chapel and Dr. M'Benga, we are the only ones who know what has happened. I want you, personally, to keep an eye on Dr. McCoy. We must get to the bottom of this. I don't want to involve the entire security section, as we can't risk warning the killer."

"I'll look into it, sir," I promise him.

"Look, Jim, I don't need a nursemaid," growls McCoy. "I'm on guard now, and I can..."

"Bones, can't you see? We don't know who the killer is, and in sickbay you are vulnerable. Let Mr. Baillie do what he can."

"I suppose I must."

We finally work it out that while McCoy is on duty, I'll be out of sight in his office, ready to act if anybody tries anything. Scotty will share his quarters at night, and for the rest of the time we'll all take it in turns to keep him in sight.

As I go off to arrange my shifts, I'm doing some heavy thinking. Anyone could have arranged the hit and run accident, but the sabotage in sickbay is quite a different kettle of fish. The way I see it, how could the killer be sure that McCoy would use that particular scalpel? The substitution must have been made between the time it was laid out, and the time it was actually used. Seems to me this narrows the field somewhat.

I make a detour via sickbay, and corner Nurse Chapel; she's not much help though. She laid out the instruments for McCoy herself, then they were called away to an emergency. When they got back, Chekov was waiting, and McCoy started work right away. Looks like anyone could have made the substitution while the room was empty.

Right about then, I decide to go for some coffee and a meal - me getting ulcers won't help any. I'm sitting in the rec'room thinking hard and getting nowhere, when I spot Chekov at another table with one of the passengers we picked up at the last stop. (Normally, of course, we don't carry civilians, but their ship had engine trouble, and as their destination was on our route anyway, we took them along.)

It comes to me then that I've seen Pav with this guy a couple of times, and it surprises me a bit; he's not the type Chekov usually hits it off with, somehow. He seems to be doing all the talking, and Pav is just sitting there with a sort of wooden look on his face. After a bit he nods, and the guy gets up and leaves. Being incurably nosy, I get myself another coffee, and move over to join Chekov.

"Hi, Pav," I say. "How's the hangover? That was some skinful you had back there." To tell the truth, I'm wondering if he's really got over it yet; he doesn't look right somehow - his eyes are too bright, and though he looks pale, he looks sort of feverish at the same time. As I sit down, he looks over at me, and it's as if he has to struggle a bit to focus on me. Then he gives a start, and grins, and I see the familiar Chekov.

"Hi, Baillie. I feel fine, thanks. Funny, I don't remember much about that bender I went on. Sulu hasn't let up about it though. He's going to make one crack too many pretty soon."

We sit talking for a bit, then he leaves for the bridge, and I'm back with my problem. Now, I wouldn't let on to the Captain, but I've got a personal stake in this. McCoy pulled me through once when I'd been pretty badly smashed up, and though I make the usual cracks, I've got a healthy respect for Blue Eyes.

Seems to me that playing it Kirk's way leaves too many loopholes. The killer is likely to start getting suspicious at never seeing McCoy on his own; all he'd have to do is hold off for a while, then move in when we were off our guard.

Then I get a brainstorm; the thing to do is to lay a trap for the killer and flush him out. I think I know just how to do it, too. I swallow the last of my coffee, and head off to see the Captain.

A couple of hours later, the grapevine spreads the news through the ship that poor old Baillie has flaked out on the bridge. Very proud of that act, I am, even though I did have some help from McCoy's little yellow pills. Yes, very spectacular. Very convincing, too; at least I hope so, because McCoy's life depends on how well we've fooled the killer. The situation is that I'm supposed to have this weird illness that I can't even pronounce; that I'm being kept in the isolation ward; and that McCoy is taking care of me himself, trying to find a cure. The Captain and the others are well out of sight, and we're hoping that the killer will take the chance to strike while Bones is on his own apart from one (supposedly) unconscious patient.

Which is why I'm lying in bed in the isolation ward giving a perfect impersonation of something nasty. The lights are dimmed, apart from one over McCoy's desk, and from where I'm lying, I get a good view of him. He's a lot calmer than I am, that's for sure. Our biggest gamble is that the killer won't risk using a phaser, knowing that its power would be picked up by the sensors, and Security alerted; we reckon he'll go for the quiet approach to give himself a chance to escape. I'm sweating more than somewhat as I lie there, because if I'm wrong.....

I freeze as the door of the isolation ward opens, and someone comes quietly in; I can't see his face - the lights are too dim. McCoy must have heard him, but doesn't move; he's sprawled over his desk as if asleep. He's not short on courage, our McCoy - I don't know if I could just sit there waiting to be attacked, and relying on the reactions of someone else to save me.

The figure stands in the doorway looking round the ward; I go on playing unconscious. I can't risk acting too soon, as this just might be an innocent visitor looking for Bones. He comes further into the room, and then I see he's got a wrench in his hand - the traditional blunt instrument, I suppose. That does it for me. Luckily I'm fast on my feet, and I'm across the room before he realises I've moved. As I close with him, I'm wondering what I've let myself in for. He's fighting in silence, but with a kind of frenzied desperation. For a bit, I have my work cut out to hold on to him, but I'm used to this sort of roughhouse, and once I get the wrench away from him, things are much easier, and at last I manage to knock him out.

Meantime, McCoy has pushed the panic button, and help is on the way. The lights go up as the Captain, Mr. Spock and Scotty rush in, and I can see that my prisoner is wearing Starfleet uniform. This I do not expect. Even less do I expect what comes next. Scotty turns the body over (none too gently) with his foot; and it's Pav Chekov.

Right about then, you'd think the Enterprise was running a contest in eyebrow-raising, but Spock beats us by a mile; it's the closest thing to surprise I've ever seen on his face. I guess he saw more of Chekov than the rest of us, and you can tell he's really floored for once. McCoy gives Pav a sedative to keep him out a bit longer, and Scotty dumps him on the bed I've just unceremoniously vacated; then we all stand round gaping at him for the next couple of minutes.

McCoy is the first to break the silence.

"Why? Why Chekov?" he asks dazedly.

Of all of us, it's Spock, the half-Human, who recognises McCoy's shock and distress. He pushes Bones gently into a chair.

"Some brandy, I think," he murmurs. "Perhaps Mr. Scott will oblige."

A few minutes later, Mr. Scott does oblige. As he passes me with the glass in his hand, he gives me a wink, and grins, and I know he's done it again. Somehow he's smuggled some of that triple-damned Saurian brandy on board. I'm just making plans for a suitable revenge, including doing something very nasty to his engines, when I get reminded of the business in hand.

The Captain has been looking at Chekov; now he turns to the rest of us.

"Well, gentlemen, we must come to a decision. What are we to do about Mr. Chekov? Incredible as it seems, he is responsible for attempting to murder Dr. McCoy. I suppose he must have substituted the scalpel himself while he was alone in sickbay; now we have the evidence of our own eyes." He sounds as bewildered as I feel, and no wonder. It's a terrible job for any man, to try one friend for the attempted murder of another.

"Well, I dinna believe it!" Scotty breaks in angrily. "I don't care how it looks, Chekov wouldna' harm Bones, I'd stake my life on it."

"Indeed, I am forced to agree," puts in Spock. "It is totally out of character. Captain, in the exceptional circumstances, I am prepared to meld with Mr. Chekov without his consent. I am convinced we do not yet know the whole story, and I may be able to learn something." At Kirk's nod, he leans over Chekov, and takes his head between his hands.

Now, I've never fancied this mind-link business myself. Don't get me wrong, I'd trust Spock with my life, but the idea of someone else wandering about inside my head gives me the shudders. Doesn't seem to bother the Captain,

though. - I've known him link with Spock on several occasions, and more than once the Vulcan's weird powers have got us out of a sticky situation.

We stand around watching Spock, scared to make a move in case we break his concentration, until he lets Pav go and straightens up.

"It seems your confidence in Mr. Chekov has been well placed, Mr. Scott," he says. "As I hope to demonstrate, he is as much a victim as Dr. McCoy; in effect, he himself is the murder weapon. If I may trouble you, Dr. McCoy?"

He's really got me this time - I just can't see what he's getting at. As Bones goes over to the bed, Spock brushes back Chekov's hair, and we see a small scar just above his ear.

"If you will open up this scar, Doctor, and remove what you find there, I am confident we will make progress."

McCoy gives him a sharp look, but doesn't argue. We stand back a bit to let him work, and when he turns round, he shows us a small metal capsule he has removed from under Chekov's skin.

"Mr. Scott, your opinion, please," says Spock.

Scotty takes it gingerly, and has a good look. "It's a radio receiver," he says slowly, "very small, not very long range, but effective over short distances."

"Effective enough for its purpose," says Spock, and if I didn't know better, I'd say he sounded angry. "I sensed its presence during the mind link. More important, however, I managed to reach deep into Mr. Chekov's mind, and I have some of the answers. During his last shore leave, Mr. Chekov was drugged, presumably by the killer, and the receiver inserted. Under the drug, his natural resistance was broken down, and he was placed in a deep hypnotic state. In this condition he was trained to respond to orders transmitted through the receiver. When he awoke, he was unable to recall what had happened to him. Thereafter, he could be placed in a trance at any time by broadcasting a code word; he was then programmed to obey whatever instructions he was given. Another code would bring him out of the trance, and in his normal waking state he would forget what he had done. It was a most ingenious plan; had it not been for my knowledge of Mr. Chekov's character, and my telepathic abilities, the receiver would never have been discovered, and Mr. Chekov would have been deemed guilty of the attempts on the Doctor's life."

"So we're still back where we started," says Kirk heavily. "Chekov is innocent, but the killer is still on the ship, and we are no nearer to finding him. If he's really determined to kill Bones, he could try again himself."

Right then, I get one of my well-known flashes of inspiration.

"Captain, I think I know who we want." I tell him about the man I'd seen with Chekov in the rec room. "You know he doesn't normally mix much with civilians," I go on. "He did look a bit odd at the time - I guess he must have been coming out of a trance when I spoke to him. I thought it was just the tail-end of his hangover. If I had only realised."

"There was no way you could have known," replies the Captain. "We are only too thankful, Mr. Baillie, that you spotted it. However, we still have problems. We need hard evidence - and I still want to know why he wants Bones dead."

Spock has taken the receiver back from Scotty, and he's looking at it. Then he says, "I believe the evidence will not be too difficult to obtain. The killer has no way of knowing that we have discovered the capsule. It is my belief that he will eventually issue further instructions. If we relay the transmission into the ship's computer, we will not only have a record of his intentions, but also a voiceprint identification which will stand up in court."

"See to it, please, Mr. Spock," the Captain tells him. "Bones, I think we should bring Chekov round, and explain it all to him."

As Spock and Scotty go out, McCoy gives Chekov an injection, and pretty soon he comes round. The poor guy is naturally somewhat surprised to find himself the centre of attraction in the isolation ward - last thing he remembers is going off duty on the bridge. Kirk and McCoy break it to him as gently as they can. Poor Pav! It knocks him all of a heap - he's white with shock, and almost crying by the time they get through. McCoy is real nice about it though, and finally makes him see that it wasn't his fault. There's times I think our tame witch-doctor can overdo the sarcastic bit, but when you really need him, he turns up trumps. By the time Spock and Scotty get back, Pav's good and mad; he's ready to take on our pet killer with his bare hands, and looking at him, I reckon he could do it, too.

Anyway, armed with our evidence, we all take off to arrest the killer - according to the passenger list, he's a bloke named Charles Ryan. When he opens the door, he comes the outraged innocent citizen act, but when Spock plays over the taped evidence, he decides to come clean. It's pretty much as Spock worked it out. He met Pav on shore leave, recognised he was from the Enterprise, and drugged him under the pretence of buying him a drink. While he was out, Ryan inserted the receiver, and set up the post-hypnotic suggestion. The hit and run accident was the first attempt, a sort of trial run. McCoy escaped, but Chekov acted as he was supposed to, so Ryan shipped aboard the Enterprise to finish the job.

While he's talking, McCoy is looking at him sort of puzzled. Then he says,

"But why? I don't know you, I've never seen you before in my life, as far as I can remember. Why do you want to kill me?"

"I'll just let you worry about that," says Ryan. "I know what happens now. You'll have to hand me over to the civil authorities for trial. I plead guilty, have a couple of years corrective training, then I'm out. Maybe I didn't manage to finish you off, but I'll get quite a laugh thinking about you going crazy trying to figure it out."

"Oh, no," says Kirk, and there's a very nasty gleam in his eye. "You're on a Starship, remember, and I'm the Captain. What I say here goes. You attempt to kill a man who is not only one of my officers, but also a close friend. I want the whole story, and I'm going to get it. I'm sure Mr. Scott and Mr. Chekov will be only too delighted to persuade you."

"That I will, laddie," rumbles Scotty menacingly. Chekov doesn't say anything, but he grins. I don't like that grin. Neither does Ryan apparently, because he gives in.

"All right, I'll tell you. What difference does it make to me anyway? I had no personal reason to kill you, Doctor. I'm a hired killer - I was paid for the job."

"Who paid you?" asks McCoy, deadly quiet.

Ryan ignores the question. "Yes, my client hates you very deeply, Doctor.- paid well over the going rate for the job. I've never known anyone so determined."

"I believe," Spock breaks in, calmly as ever, "that the Doctor asked you a question. I suggest that you answer. Mr. Scott appears to be getting impatient."

Ryan looks over at McCoy, grinning; he's enjoying this.

"It was a Mrs. Sarah McCoy - your ex-wife."

Spock is the only one fast enough to catch McCoy as he passes out cold.

A couple of weeks later, I'm called to the Captain's quarters again. He's alone this time.

"Sir down, Mr. Baillie. I have here a report from the police on Earth. They have investigated Ryan's allegations, and have sent me a copy of their findings to be used in evidence when we hand him over for trial. Dr. McCoy feels that as you were so closely involved, you are entitled to know the full story.

You may not know that before he joined the Enterprise, Dr. McCoy's marriage broke up. The details do not matter, but it seems that his ex-wife, who from all accounts tended to be neurotic, blamed him for the divorce. As she grew more and more disturbed, her hatred of McCoy grew, until at last her desire to be revenged on him became an obsession, and she employed Ryan, with the results we know. The failure of her plan has driven her beyond sanity, and she is now receiving the appropriate treatment; it's too early to say with what result."

"I'm sorry," I tell him. "The Doctor must be feeling pretty bad about it."

"Well, he is a doctor, so he's more used than any of us to coping with the actions of a sick mind. I believe he'll get over it."

"I'm glad of that, Captain; he's a very special guy."

Kirk smiles. "I think so too. Well, I must thank you for your assistance, Mr. Baillie. I know I can rely on your discretion."

"Of course," I say. "By the way, how's Mr. Chekov?"

Completely back to normal, I'm happy to say. However, I think he'll be more careful who he drinks with in future."

So that's how it ended. Next time I see Pav Chekov, he's his usual sunny self. McCoy's back to normal too, just as sarcastic as ever. So there's only one thing I want to know, and it sure keeps bugging me.

Just how the HELL did Scotty manage to smuggle that bottle of Saurian brandy under my nose?
