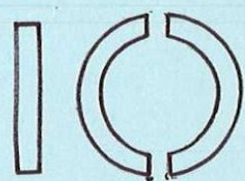
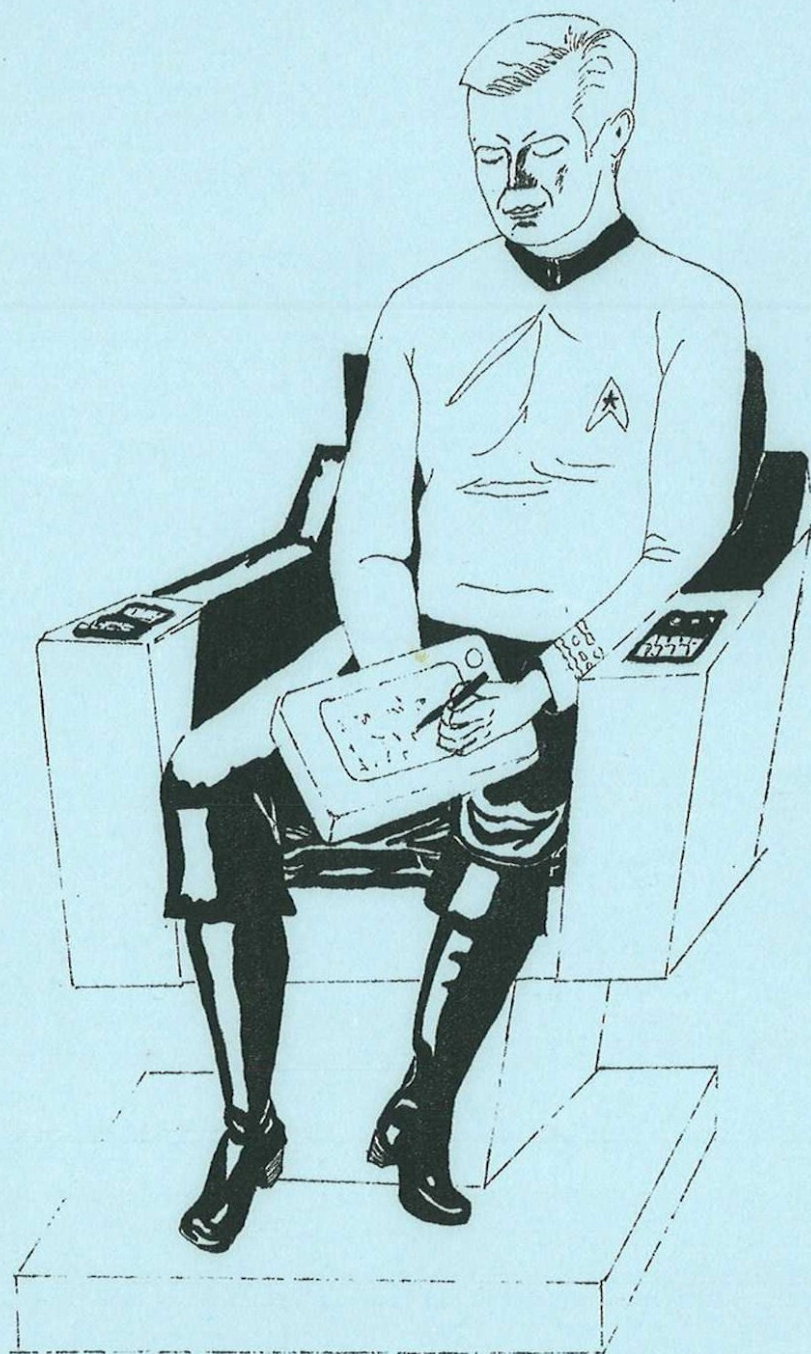


LOG ENTRIES



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Hello again, and welcome to yet another offering from STAG's chief masochist. Believe me, you have to be a masochist to edit a zine. There are evenings when I have story ideas dancing jigs inside my head, practically performing Wooden Horse manoeuvres to get out and on to paper, and I have to squash them back in because that evening's quota of stencils must be done, or I have submissions to read, or even... well, there was the entire evening recently that I spent searching frantically for an illustration I'd mislaid, with absolutely no luck - only to find it the next evening exactly where it should have been in the illustrations folder... (the illo in question isn't going to escape again - it's safely onto stencil and will be in LE 11, a lovely Spock by Beth.)

As you'll see from this issue, though, I need more artwork - urgently. LE 11 will be more fully illustrated, though still sparsely compared to what I'd like, and I'll be putting out at least two singles soon unillustrated, not from choice but because I can't get the illustrations. The artists who do send me work do sterling service, but like the rest of us live a twenty-four hour day and must spend part of them earning their living or studying, and no-one can do without sleep! Surely we've got some more artists out there! And although the next three Log Entries are pretty well made up, I'm always looking for submissions from new writers as well as the regulars.

I'd be glad of letters discussing stories we've printed, too - if I could get some I'd put in a letter column. Positive suggestions, reasons for liking or not liking a story theme or the way it's been developed. We get quite a lot of letters saying "I liked..." but not saying why. If I know the kind of stories you like best, I can try (no promises, but I can try) to provide them.

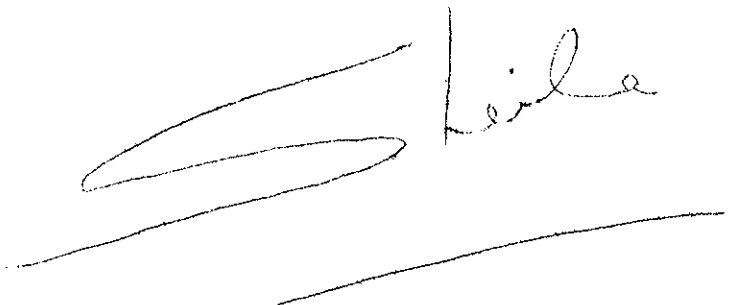
LE 11 is, in my opinion, going to be a good issue, with items by Valerie Piacentini, Wendy Miller, Ginna la Croix (a U.S. writer whose work has appeared in several zines over there), Helen Sneddon and the very first story I ever wrote for Janet. Valerie's story, although complete in itself, follows on chronologically from her story The Wheel Turns, with Kirk discovering that while his permanent mind link with Spock is very rewarding, there are unsuspected dangers in it...

But that's for next time. LE 10 stands before you. I hope you enjoy it.

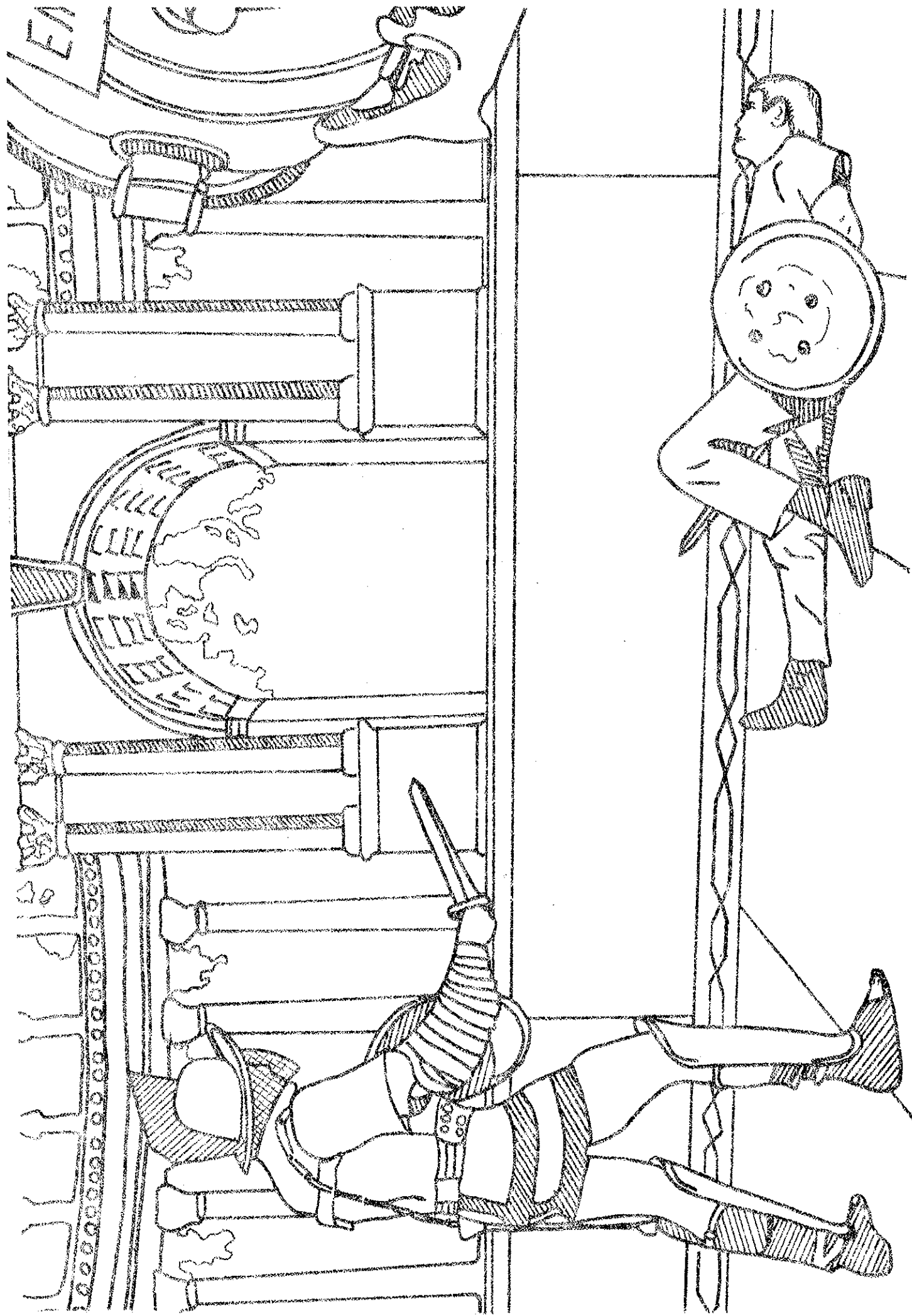
Thanks are again due to my mother for doing the proofreading. Janet insists that I should also thank Freda, the duplicator, for working so hard - although she couldn't do anything without Janet doing the running off. Thanks, Janet. Janet and I will be doing all the collating this time, too. Guess who isn't looking forward to it!

August 1977

Sheila Clark
6 Craigmill Cottages
Strathmartine
by Dundee
Scotland

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sheila'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

There wasn't room for this anywhere else... The names you should find in the puzzle are: Kirk, Spock, McCoy, Scotty, Enterprise, Vians, Minara, Gem, Lal, Thann, Linke, Ozaba.



MONSTERS OF THE MIND by Simone Mason

The Enterprise's senior officers were assembled in the briefing room and hearing from Captain Kirk the details of their next mission.

"We shall soon establish position around Planet Hugor, whose application for membership of the Federation is being favourably considered in view of its ideal position for a badly needed Starbase in this quadrant. The Starship Lexington, which made contact, reported friendly inhabitants, but her commanding officer was disturbed by the fact that vast areas of the planet were out of bounds to everyone. The Lexington was on a mission to deliver urgent supplies and did not have time to investigate, so it is up to us. Ambassador Sarek is on his way to negotiate on behalf of the Federation, and by the time he gets here, we should have some answers for him."

"We'd better, or it would not be logical!" said McCoy.

"No, it would not," agreed Spock. "There could be very simple explanations for the out of bounds areas, but one fact established was that they were inhabited."

"Yes," said Kirk. "It looks as though the Hugorians segregated part of their people, but why? We'll have to find out without upsetting them if possible, the Federation needs a Starbase on this planet."

"What are the Hugorians like?" asked McCoy.

"Humanoids, very similar to Earth people," answered Spock. "Yellow skin, hair a mixture of green and white, flat nose, six fingers on hands but no toes. You will find the few internal differences on tape, Doctor."

"So they were not cagy about themselves, then!"

"No, Bones," said Kirk, "they were open and friendly, except about those out of bounds areas."

"Criminals kept there, perhaps?"

"Possible, or incurably ill people. We'll have to see. Landing party will be Mr. Spock, Dr. McCoy and myself. No phasers, we cannot show such distrust. Mr. Scott, you may receive a message from Ambassador Sarek announcing his time of arrival. If so, please let me know."

"Yes, sir."

They dispersed and Kirk held his First Officer back.

"Spock, I am concerned about this strange situation. To beam down in an out of bounds area would seem logical, but it could be detected and upset the Hugorians, apart from being dangerous if criminals are kept there. While we are investigating, see if you can sense anything from their minds when I try to open them up about the thorny subject."

"Understood, Captain."

* * *

The three officers beamed down and were welcomed by Razal, leader of the Hugorians, and his ministers. There was no doubt of their friendliness, and a small crowd acclaimed the landing party.

"We are very thrilled at meeting another race similar to ours, Captain Kirk," said Razal, "and will collaborate fully with your Federation. We no longer feel so alone and isolated."

"The Federation is pleased to establish a Starbase here, and an Ambassador is on his way to negotiate terms."

"Oh! Aren't you here to negotiate, Captain?"

"No, not exactly. There is one point we would like answers about, sir, and that is the out of bounds areas."

He saw Spock touch Razal's shoulder lightly as though by accident, to establish contact for sensing thoughts, but was unprepared for the wild reaction as the alien screamed and shouted -

"He is one!"

A couple of guards nearby reacted with lightning speed and knocked the Vulcan down unconscious, then put his hands behind his back and handcuffed them.

Kirk and McCoy, too stunned to react fast enough to stop anything, now came to life as McCoy rushed to Spock while Kirk seized Razal roughly and shouted,

"What is the meaning of this? Why did you attack my First Officer?"

"And take those things off him, you barbarians!" said McCoy, trying vainly to take the handcuffs off, then running a quick check on the blow which had knocked the Vulcan unconscious.

"Captain, please," said Razal. "I can understand your reactions, but you should thank us."

"You must be insane! Thank you for hurting one of my officers?"

McCoy got up and came back to Kirk. "He is all right, Jim, and will come to soon."

"Captain," said Razal, "you obviously did not know that your First Officer is an unhuman monster."

"Monster yourself!" exclaimed McCoy in anger. "He is no more a monster than I am..."

"Bones, careful!" said Kirk. "Sir," he added to Razal, "my First Officer is a very gentle and peaceful being, you are making a mistake."

"No, Captain, we are not. He deluded and fooled you, but we are not easily fooled. You did not know that he is a thief, did you?"

"A thief!" exclaimed Kirk, completely baffled.

"Yes, Captain, a thief of other people's thoughts, a disgusting parasite existing only by preying on minds and driving them to madness. You did not know that, did you, Captain?"

"No, he did not," said Spock, now back to consciousness and getting up.

Kirk looked at him and followed his lead. "No, sir, I did not know."

"Jim," said McCoy, "you can't..."

"This is no time to be illogical, Doctor," said Spock sternly.

"Be quiet, Bones," added Kirk softly, "handcuffs would be no help to anyone."

McCoy nodded, understanding at last, and the Captain asked, "Please explain how you knew about my First Officer being a monster?"

"I will, but first he must be rendered harmless."

"I won't have him killed!" exclaimed Kirk.

"No, no, Captain, we are not barbarians! Just a device to protect ourselves."

Two guards approached Spock, one carrying a small computer-like machine, the other a metal ring which he put around the Vulcan's head, making sure it went across his forehead.

Kirk felt tense and afraid, and saw Spock shake his head to ask him not to intervene. The machine was switched on after being linked to the ring, and Razal shouted excitedly, "Now!"

The Hugorians looked at the Vulcan with an expectancy Kirk and McCoy could not understand, then they saw Spock become tensely rigid, beads of sweat on his forehead.

"They are torturing him!" said McCoy in a whisper, "we must do something!"

But what? thought Kirk desperately, cursing his mistake at not bringing phasers. Then Spock screamed, a scream which tore into the Captain like a knife as he ran with McCoy and caught the Vulcan falling unconscious. Kirk took the ring off, and stared aghast at the deep burn underneath while McCoy got his kit out, saying in a fierce whisper,

"There are monsters here all right, only not where they think!"

"He screamed, Bones!" said Kirk in an agonised voice, his ears still ringing with the dreadful sound.

"And you think it doesn't worry me too?" said McCoy, his throat tight. "God knows what they did to him!"

Razal was watching them with pity. "It is always disturbing to discover that someone you trusted is a monster. I understand how you feel, Captain Kirk."

"I doubt it!" said Kirk, getting up after putting Spock's head gently in McCoy's lap. "I am afraid there is little point in any negotiations - the Federation does not tolerate torture. So we'll go back aboard my ship and report accordingly."

"But there was no torture here, Captain, only poetic justice!"

"Barbaric is the right word, and justice is not the right word at all."

"You don't understand, you are not familiar with monsters as we are. Come to my residence, Captain, and you, Doctor, and I will explain."

"Jim," said McCoy, "I would like to take Spock back to the ship, his mind could be injured."

"It is not, Doctor," said Razal, "and you can't take him back. He belongs to the out of bounds areas now. Put that ring back on him..."

"I won't!" shouted McCoy with indignation.

"Look," said Kirk to Razal. "Up to now you have given us no proof or explanations. We are willing to listen, but on condition that my First Officer stays with us for the time being."

"As you wish, Captain, he is harmless for the moment."

The Hugorian led them to his residence, Kirk and McCoy carrying Spock, and showed them to their quarters as guests. They laid the Vulcan on a bed, demanded the removal of his handcuffs, then settled at a table with Razal, who told his story.

"Once, we were only one kind of people, our kind. Then a natural disaster occurred as an extremely large meteorite collided with our planet and brought havoc and devastation. Our population survived, if much reduced, and soon increased again, but some of us were no longer human beings. A mutation had occurred, and a minority became monsters, stealing thoughts and using them as their own, living a parasitic existence at the expense of others, driving some of their victims to despair and suicide or madness. We had to protect ourselves, and developed the ability to detect such monsters by mere physical contact. We also had to learn how to deal with them, and we are not barbarians, we could not kill our own people. So we gave part of our planet over to them to stop their preying on us. They all wear that metal ring so that we can detect their presence should they try to enter our areas. We have developed machines to

detect and read their thoughts, and we now keep them well in check. We are also able to detect and read their thought transmission at any range."

"I see," said Kirk, cursing himself for having asked Spock to try to detect thoughts. "But why did you hurt my First Officer?"

"The thought-detector does not normally hurt much, all we did was try to steal thoughts from his mind as he tried to steal from mine, using the ring connected to the machine."

"And did you succeed?"

"Not really. We read very little from his mind, which shows how dangerous he is. We shall have to kill him if he proves disruptive in the out of bounds areas. Now, Captain, you can understand that we only protected ourselves against your First Officer and you should thank us. I am sure the Ambassador will be grateful that we removed such a threat from your fleet."

"Oh, no," moaned McCoy. "The Ambassador!"

"Sir," asked Kirk, "may I contact my ship to find out if he has arrived?"

"Yes, of course, Captain. I hope you'll understand that all your communications will be monitored. We have to be careful until the negotiations are complete."

Kirk nodded, and contacted Mr. Scott who told him that Ambassador Sarek would arrive shortly and beam down from his vessel directly to Hugor. Kirk pressed the red button on his communicator, hoping the Chief Engineer would understand that the danger was for Sarek, not them. The Scotsman had clearly misunderstood, when a security team materialised, and Kirk sent them back, saying he had pressed the red button by error.

* * *

Razal left them to rest while he assembled his ministers and prepared for the negotiations, and McCoy asked urgently, "Jim, what are you going to do? We can't let Sarek come down..."

"No, we can't, and yet how can I stop him? We are supposed to wait here."

"Captain," said Spock's voice faintly.

"How do you feel, Spock?" asked Kirk, rushing to him with McCoy. The Vulcan tried to sit up, and fell back against the Captain and the Doctor trying to help him.

"I apologise, Captain," he murmured as they laid him down gently.

"What can we do to help?"

"You are helping, Jim."

Kirk and McCoy realised they were each holding one of Spock's hands and he was gripping them so tightly that they exchanged a look of fear. For the Vulcan to admit to needing help and physical contact was unheard of, and indicated how hurt he was.

"He's in pain, Jim," said McCoy, "but it's nothing physical. We must get him back to the ship."

"Illogical, Doctor. I am about to discover what goes on in the out of bounds areas."

"No, Spock, you can't!" exclaimed Kirk.

The Vulcan was trying to get up again, and they helped him. "I am partly recovered now, Captain."

"What did that ring and machine do to you?" asked McCoy gently.

"It was a mind probe with the force of all the Hugorians present behind

it. I could not repulse everything completely, and the main emotion transmitted was hate. I regret that I distressed you by screaming, Captain..."

"Don't, Spock!" said Kirk, his throat tight, while McCoy shuddered.

"You must never admit knowing I am a telepath, Captain, or the Starbase will never be accepted. Vulcans can always be asked to keep away."

"But your father? He is arriving any minute!"

"Yes, I know. There is only one thing to do - I will try to contact him telepathically."

"They can detect thought transmissions!"

"Does it matter? They know I am a telepath. I will transmit only Vulcan words or symbols; they won't be able to understand."

The Vulcan concentrated, beads of sweat appearing on his face, then relaxed. "I reached him, Captain. His ship is just establishing orbit, and he will await your instructions or explanations before doing anything."

"That's a relief, anyway," exclaimed Kirk.

"Jim, you must let me be transferred to the out of bounds areas. We have to find out if those telepaths are monsters or victims."

The Captain nodded reluctantly. "Logical, I suppose. But if they are monsters, they could kill you."

"I shall be one of their own kind, so why should they?"

"Spock, you are in no state to get involved in fights or wars," said McCoy.

"There is no other solution if we want the truth, Doctor."

"Bones, put a tracking device into his arm. We can always beam him up then, even though he can't contact us. You could contact your father, though."

"I should not, Captain, or it will become obvious to the Hugarians that I have at least one accomplice aboard your vessel."

The Doctor had implanted the device and they had no time for further talk as Razal came in with guards.

"That monster betrayed you, Captain, and sent a weird message to someone. Could he have an accomplice aboard your ship?"

"There are none like him aboard," said Kirk truthfully.

"I hope so for your sake! Now, I am sure you are going to be reasonable and let him be taken to the out of bounds areas."

The Captain nodded and one guard approached with the metal ring.

"No, you can't torture him again! I won't have it!"

The ring will only allow us to keep track of him and will not hurt, Captain. It is not connected to the thought detector."

Spock took the ring and put it on himself. "It does not hurt, Captain."

"Take him away," ordered Razal, "and make sure he walks all the way."

Handcuffs were again used and the guards pushed the Vulcan outside as Kirk and McCoy watched him leave, barely concealing the deep concern they felt for his safety.

"Now, Captain, I expect the Ambassador has arrived, and we can start to negotiate," said Razal.

"I will contact my ship to find out, sir."

Mr. Scott answered, and Kirk asked, "Has Ambassador Sarek arrived?"

"Captain," said an even voice Kirk recognised as Sarek's. "New circumstances require your presence aboard your ship."

"Right. Beam us up in one minute. Kirk out. Sir," he added to Razal, "I apologise. I expect the Ambassador has been unavoidably delayed and I have to go aboard to receive instructions from Starfleet. Do I have your permission?"

"Yes, of course, Captain. Please keep us informed."

* * *

Once aboard the Enterprise, Kirk gave a concise synopsis of recent events to Ambassador Sarek and added, "All we have to do now is to find a way to contact Spock without detection."

"The solution is simple, Captain. I will be beamed down to the out of bounds areas and contact him," said Sarek.

"I can't let you do that, sir, your life would be in danger. I will beam down."

"Illogical, Captain. If the people there behave in a similar manner to their jailers, you will find yourself in the situation Spock was in, and perhaps be executed as a spy."

"While you can be accepted as one of them. Yes, I do see that sir, but..."

"It is settled then, Captain. Provide me with a communicator. I can also contact my vessel telepathically should the need arise."

"Sir, McCoy and I will beam down with you. I don't think Starfleet would leave me my rank of Captain for long if I allowed an Ambassador to walk into danger without help."

"It is your decision, Captain. I believe you can trace Spock's position exactly?"

"Yes, sir."

"If we beam down as near to him as possible, he can co-operate with me to protect you. Will our arrival be detected?"

"We don't know, sir. Let's hope not!"

They went to the transporter room and Kirk instructed Mr. Scott to have someone permanently on duty to beam them up at their signal.

"And fast, Scotty, we could be in a tight spot!"

"Yes, sir, we'll stand by."

* * *

Armed with communicators and phasers, they materialised in the middle of a village and Kirk pointed. "Spock is in that direction, probably in that house."

"I cannot contact him, Captain," said Sarek.

Several natives, all wearing a ring, approached them cautiously and one of them stepped forward and asked, "Are you the men from the stars?"

"Yes," said Kirk. "We are friends of Spock."

"He told us that you might come, but you are not like us, he also told us that. You are, sir," he added to Sarek. "May I touch you?"

Sarek offered his hand, and the native touched it, but withdrew it quickly with a cry.

"Please accept my apologies," said Sarek. "I did not realise your mind was open."

"How could it be anything else? But you wish to see Spock - come with me. He is still weak, I am afraid, and we are worried; there is hurt in his mind."

They stepped into the small house and the native led them to a low couch where the First Officer lay apparently asleep. Sarek sat on the bed and touched his son's face. The effect was immediate. Spock moved violently, trying to get away until he opened his eyes and then he seized his father's hands and stammered, "No, go away, why..."

"Captain, hold him still while I try to help, please."

Kirk and McCoy made the Vulcan lie down again and Sarek kept his hands on Spock's face for a while, then induced a deep sleep in his son and got up, his voice not quite as steady and toneless as usual.

"Captain, I do not know how aware these Hugarians are of their cruelty towards the telepaths here, but if they do not know, they should be told; and if they do know, they are the monsters."

"Jim, look here," said McCoy in a choked voice. The Doctor had lifted the cover from Spock, showing a mass of green welts and cuts on his chest. "And his back is the same - those people are savages!"

Kirk looked away, his fists tight with impotent rage, then went back to Sarek. "Sir, I seem to have been unable to protect your son, and I am deeply sorry..."

"You had no choice, Captain, and it would be illogical to blame you."

"Nevertheless I would never have let him stay here had I known how savagely he would be treated."

"The physical injuries are not important, Captain, we can, as you know, master some of the pain. What disturbed me was the mental torture inflicted on Spock, and his mind is still affected. I suggest that you and I try to find some answers from the so-called 'monsters' here."

"Yes, sir, I agree. Dr. McCoy can stay with Spock."

"Please call me should he wake up and show signs of stress, Doctor."

"Yes, sir, I will."

Kirk and Sarek went out, but the Captain soon came back.

"The natives can't bring themselves to trust me, Bones, all they can do is tolerate my presence because Sarek vouched that I am Spock's friend, but they will talk freely to a Vulcan, so I left him to get the answers."

"It looks a nasty situation, Jim, and I know who the monsters are."

"So do I! Can you imagine how hurt Spock must have been for Sarek actually to show concern? I blame myself..."

He was interrupted by a native rushing in. "A raid, hide quickly, follow me!"

He took them inside a wall where a narrow corridor allowed concealment, and ran outside again as guards invaded the house and went to Spock. Kirk and McCoy took their phasers out and aimed through a small air grille.

"On stun, Bones. I won't let them hurt him further."

But the guards left after a quick check and the native let them out.

"I hope they did not find Ambassador Sarek," said Kirk worriedly, going to Spock who was waking up. "How do you feel?"

"Jim, Father should not have come..."

"He wanted to and helped you. Tell me what happened since you left us."

"The guards brought me here and I was helped by the natives, but..."

"How did you get all those wounds on your back and chest?" asked McCoy.

"It was done with whips on the way here to show me what would happen if I tried to escape."

"Bunch of savages!" said McCoy in a furious tone, "and they dare talk of monsters!"

"They have some excuse, Doctor, even if it ceases to be logical by now."

"Tell us what you found out, Spock," said Kirk. "If you can, that is," he added, seeing that the Vulcan had shut his eyes and his hand was gripping Kirk's tightly. "Bones, he is in pain!"

Sarek came in, walking at a fast pace and put his hands on Spock's face for the mind meld. The Captain saw concern on his usually impassive face, with fear.

"Sir, is he all right? I'll have him taken to the ship immediately if..."

"No, Jim, I can manage now that Father has helped me," said Spock, opening his eyes. "It is more important for you to know the situation here. Father, you tell him."

"I have met the leader of the telepaths, Captain," said Sarek, leaving his hand on his son's forehead. "A native named Stekene. And I have talked to several others, and as you can imagine, I made sure they were telling the truth. It could be said that the present situation is the telepath's fault, and they are aware of this. When the ability started to develop, the people involved did not know how to use it, and many did abuse the aptitude for their own ends. They did not know how to shut their minds either, so were soon detected, and the persecution started. This made the telepaths aware of their danger and they managed to stop all abuse of their ability, but it was too late, and from then on, any disaster or unexplained event was blamed on them and reprisals taken, not in a manner I would call civilised. Soon the present system started, with all the telepaths in out of bounds areas grouped in small villages of about a hundred, and the ring to trace them at any time if necessary."

"Does the cruelty still go on?" asked Kirk.

"Unfortunately, yes, Captain. You see, they have a low level of telepathy and have difficulty shutting their minds. The ring makes it difficult and the thought detector is so painful that it is easier to keep the mind open. Some have, however, managed to reach more control and higher levels, but live in fear of detection. There are regular raids and hunts to capture several natives and subject them to the thought-detector. If a strong telepathic native is subjected to it, he goes insane."

"My God!" exclaimed McCoy with horror. "Spock was..."

"My son will recover, Doctor," said Sarek, "our disciplines and telepathic strength helped him. The natives have not reached our level of mind power and control yet, and will never be able to unless we interfere."

"I should not have let them do this to you, Spock," said Kirk, his voice shaking with rage and sorrow.

"You could not have known, Jim, none of us knew then. The worst was not the probe so much as the hate behind it, so much hate! I apologise, Father, you found my mind in a poor state of control."

"Quite understandable in the circumstances, and I was gratified to be able to help you. But to go back to the situation here. As I said before, Captain, we have to find out if the Hugarians are being deliberately cruel, or are just plain ignorant. I regret that the choice of myself as Ambassador was so plainly illogical."

"You helped your son, sir, so there was some purpose. It is up to me to

find out if I can, and I have to tell them of their cruelty."

"The Federation will never negotiate unless they take measures to stop it. If they don't, we shall have to consider the problem of how to help the telepaths, move them to another planet if necessary."

"Yes, I see what you mean, an enormous task! How many are there?"

"Approximately 500,000, Captain - quite a task, as you say. My planet would help to the maximum of its ability, persecution of a minority is abhorrent to us."

"And to the Federation."

A native rushed in looking agitated. "Sarek, you must leave, and all of you. Another raid on this village will take place soon, we have sensed it."

"Captain Kirk, this is Stekene. Were you able to fathom the reason behind the raid?" asked Sarek.

"I think they detected your beaming down without understanding what it was, and they fear Spock because he resisted the thought-detector. They might want to kill him or make us talk about him."

"A most unsatisfactory situation," said Sarek quietly.

"We'll all beam aboard my ship," said Kirk, taking his communicator out.

"No, Captain," said Sarek. "If they don't find Spock, this village will be burnt and the people tortured to death."

"We shall be tortured anyway," said Stekene. "At least save yourselves so that we don't suffer for nothing!"

"Why should you suffer for us?" asked Kirk, moved by the native's concern.

"Spock suffered for us in order to come here and try to help; we are in his debt, and want to protect his father and his friends."

"I will not save my life at the cost of anyone's suffering," said Sarek. "In fact, let the Hugorians take me. The finding of an unknown telepath would make them ignore the natives and would effectively ruin their chances of negotiating with the Federation."

"No, sir, I can't allow that," said Kirk firmly, "much as I appreciate your wish to save these people. I will draw the hunt away from here, and once captured - well, I had to see the Hugorians anyway. They'll have some explaining to do."

"Captain, they could kill you in the chase," said Spock.

"They won't," said McCoy. "I'll go with him, and we have phasers."

"No, Bones, the phasers stay here."

"Illogical, Captain," said Sarek. "I could not kill..."

"They don't have to kill, sir, they can stun only. Stekene, this is a communicator. If Spock and his father are in danger, turn this dial and shout, 'Beam up!'."

"I object, Captain," said Sarek.

"Please, sir, we have not much time, and it is my duty to protect you. Spock, give me your ring."

"No, Jim," said Spock, his voice full of horror. "They'll go after you to kill you if they think you are myself. I am confined to this village."

"Then that should draw them away from here all right! So much for Razal and his truthfulness! He assured me they never killed 'monsters'."

"They don't, Captain," said Sarek. "They drain their minds through the

machine, and the result is death from exhaustion."

"A subtle difference, no doubt! These Hugorians get worse and worse! Bones, take that ring off Spock and put it on me, then we'd better run."

"Captain," said Sarek, "take one phaser and I will keep the other. Spock could not use one accurately."

"You're right, sir, I'll take it. Come on, Spock, don't be difficult, hand over that ring."

"Selfish, that's his trouble!" said McCoy. "He wants all the heroics for himself and thinks I can't look after you as well as he can."

Spock was looking at his father who nodded. "I am willing if the Captain agrees."

"Jim," said the First Officer, "let Father establish a mind link with you, then we'll know what is happening and could help if necessary. I regret that I am unable to do it myself at the moment."

"I will understand if you refuse, Captain," said Sarek. "It is not easy to tolerate a link with a complete stranger, even if I endeavour to be as unobtrusive as possible."

Kirk was moved, understanding only too well that it had been difficult for Sarek to accept the idea, and yet he had not hesitated.

"I am honoured, sir, and Spock's father cannot be a complete stranger to me."

He made his mind as blank and emotionless as possible and prepared for the contact when Sarek's hands touched his face gently. Kirk felt a strong impact, immediately softened, then a light and delicate touch as the linkage took place. Having expected cold strength, he felt only gentleness and concern not to hurt his mind.

"You don't have to control your emotions on my account, Captain," said Sarek, withdrawing his hands. "They are a part of Humans I have accepted long ago."

"Yes, of course, sir, thank you. Now, Spock, that ring, please."

The First Officer took it off and handed it to his Captain. "Take care, Jim, and you... Bones."

"Only fools die young," said McCoy jovially to hide his emotion. "Let's go. Jim needs all the physical exercise he can get."

"May you succeed in your task," said Sarek softly as they left under the guidance of Stekene, who took them to the edge of the village and pointed in the direction of the border. "Sooner or later, you will be pursued. Avoid running in that direction, or it would be 'illogical', as Spock would say."

"Thanks, Stekene. Anything wrong?"

"No, I was only remembering that it was here we were allowed to take Spock away from his tormentors. We had been made to watch all the way from the border and the guards were furious because he never cried out no matter how hard they struck. It was only here that he fell at last. I managed to catch him and made a tentative telepathic contact so that he would know he was among friends, but his concern was for us. He wanted us to leave him in case the guards had not finished their torture. I shall never forget that first contact with a Vulcan - the gentleness, the concern..."

"That is Spock," said Kirk with emotion. "Thank you for helping him. Go back now, Stekene, and keep safe."

"May you be safe also!" said the native. He ran back to the village and Kirk and McCoy were soon aware of pursuit.

"Let's give them a good run, Bones, perhaps they need physical exercise too - and I want to draw them as far as possible away from Spock and his father."

Shots were fired at the fugitives, and McCoy protested, "I thought you said they wouldn't kill!"

"You heard Sarek - they torture to death. So don't worry, they won't shoot to kill."

"That's a relief - they'll wound us and watch us bleed to death, no doubt!"

The chase lasted a couple of hours, and when they saw that they were near another village, Kirk and McCoy veered off hastily so as not to involve it, and managed to hold out until they were well away from any natives.

"Do we have to go on running?" gasped McCoy, out of breath. "We want to be taken to Razal, so it's 'illogical' to continue!"

"You're so fond of logic when Spock's not about that you even talk like him, Bones. But you're right, we might as well be taken now, before we're exhausted."

They slowed down and were soon surrounded by guards.

"We surrender," said Kirk, throwing his phaser down and putting his hands up. This did not stop a couple of guards from seizing him and knocking him down unconscious. McCoy shouted,

"We surrender! Why... " Then he also was knocked out and they woke up in a cell, lying on the bare floor.

"These Hugorians get positively revolting once you get to know them," said McCoy. "Are you all right, Jim?"

"Yes, only a bump on the head."

There was no sign of anyone around, so the prisoners could only wait. They managed to get some sleep, but were wakened about an hour later by savage kicks, handcuffed and led to a large room where many Hugorians sat in rows. Razal was in front and exclaimed in disbelief,

"Captain Kirk! Dr. McCoy! What is the meaning of this? Why are you wearing the metal ring? You can't be... "

"No, I am not what you call a monster, this ring is my First Officer's."

"Oh, I see! He forced it on you to try to evade us! Take it off him, and the handcuffs, and free the Doctor too."

"No, I wish to keep the ring."

He let the handcuffs be taken off, though, as Razal said with reproach, "You should not have gone into the out of bounds areas unescorted. It is not safe."

"I felt safer there than here!" said Kirk. "Sir, it is time we did some plain speaking. You and your people are ill-treating and torturing the telepaths, or thought-stealers as you call them. The Federation will never negotiate with your planet while this goes on."

"What are you talking about, Captain? Why should the fate of monsters..."

"They are not monsters," shouted Kirk, exasperated. "They are different, as my First Officer is different, and it does not justify ill-treatment and torture and murder!"

"We only protect ourselves and retaliate when necessary..."

"That may have been true in the early days, but it is no longer so, and you should know it. If you did not, I am telling you now. The telepaths deserve to live decently as you and I do."

"They misinformed and fooled you, Captain."

"They did not! Do you think anyone can enjoy the hunts you have against them, the raids on villages?"

"The hunts are only to weaken them before they go to the thought-detector."

"Why should the telepaths go to the thought-detector when they're already imprisoned in the out of bounds areas?"

"Captain, they exaggerated and deluded you."

"They did not. How could they fool another telepath? My First Officer will testify to the Federation if necessary."

"Why should the Federation take notice of him?"

"Why not? The Ambassador is also aware of the situation - and is my First Officer's father, so he is unlikely to advocate your cause."

"I don't understand... Do you mean to say that Ambassador Sarek is also a monster?"

"He is not a monster," said Kirk tiredly. "He is what we call a telepath, as all Vulcans are, and a highly esteemed Ambassador. My First Officer is also highly esteemed and respected, and has never tried to take advantage of his telepathic ability. The Federation is composed of many races, and we accept and respect the differences, we do not persecute them."

The Hugorians were clearly shattered by his words, and Razal said without his usual assurance, "It is possible that we made a mistake about your First Officer, Captain, but he did try to steal my thoughts."

"On my instructions, because I had to find out the truth about the out of bounds areas."

"But you denied knowing..."

"Yes, and I sincerely regret it, believe me! But Spock was trying to protect us from your hate by incurring all your enmity, and saw his chance of infiltrating the out of bounds areas to find out the truth."

"You mean to be fooled by monsters!"

"He could not be fooled by them, and neither could his father," said Kirk with a patience he was far from feeling. "I fully accept their account of what goes on there; I know they would not lie to me - I trust them implicitly!"

"You would take the words of monsters against our own!"

"If the 'monsters' are supported by my First Officer and his father, yes, I would, especially after I sampled the hospitality you reserve for people you don't like!"

"They are not people, and we don't kill them."

"And you think that is enough, don't you? It gives you the right to torture provided you don't kill! I have to tell you that the Federation will never negotiate with your planet unless you stop all persecution and live in harmony with the telepaths."

"The Federation has no right to interfere in our internal... "

"It has every right to protect people in need of help."

"Captain, could we perhaps meet Ambassador Sarek and explain our situation?"

"I will not let the Ambassador near any of you until I am sure of his safety. In fact, if you want to meet him, I suggest my ship, where I can keep an eye on you."

"We would not dream of harming a Federation envoy."

"But you harmed my First Officer."

"We did not know you were aware of... "

"Would it have made any difference?"

"All this is a great shock to us, Captain, and it is possible that alien thought-stealers - or, rather, telepaths, as you call them, are different from our own and are not monsters."

"That is a step in the right direction anyway," Kirk was saying when he heard Sarek's voice in his mind, with a start. The Vulcan had kept the link so unobtrusive that Kirk had forgotten about it."

Your idea of a meeting on the ship is good, Sarek was saying, * but ask for Stekene and a delegation of telepaths to go aboard at the same time for it is their planet also.*

Kirk repeated the request aloud and Razal was taken aback. "We'll never accept that!"

"Then there is no point in going on. May I collect my First Officer and go back to my ship?"

"Yes, we accept his release, but the monsters... May we have time to consider your proposals, Captain?"

"Yes, the Ambassador will await your answer aboard my ship."

* * *

Kirk and McCoy were escorted as far as the border, and refused any further escort, finding the village again easily. They were pleased to see that Spock was much better; in fact, the Vulcan insisted that he was fully recovered.

"I will release the link now, Captain," said Sarek.

Kirk submitted to the light touch and felt tiredness hit him like a blow. A strong hand supported him as he exclaimed, "You helped me! I never realised it... Thank you, sir."

"The least I could do, Captain, and I trust you did not find the linkage an embarrassment."

"Not at all, sir."

"Being polite, Jim?" asked McCoy in a whisper, making Kirk sit down.

"No, Bones, his mind was gentle and friendly. I enjoyed the experience."

"Before we beam up, Captain," said Spock. "We are concerned - Stekene and his friends could be in danger."

"Tortured to be made to refuse our invitation?"

"Exactly, Captain."

"Right, we beam the whole village aboard. We'll go last of all."

"A very good idea, Captain," approved Sarek.

Kirk called Mr. Scott and told him to get busy as they rounded up the villagers and beamed them up in groups until only Stekene was left. He beamed up with the Enterprise officers and Sarek.

"We couldn't accommodate all of them," said the Chief Engineer, "so the Vulcan ship collected about twenty-five."

"As long as everybody is accommodated, Scotty, that's fine. Now we wait. I'll make my report to Starfleet, and you'll want to report too, sir?"

"Yes, indeed, Captain," said Sarek. "I will go back to my vessel."

"If you will accept our hospitality, the cabin next to Spock's is empty and you will have all facilities to send any messages or reports you wish."

"Thank you, Captain, I accept."

"Spock - sickbay," said McCoy.

"Now don't start being illogical, Doctor. I am recovered and... "

"Please, Spock, it will reassure us," said Kirk gently. "Only a checkup."

The Vulcan complied and McCoy pronounced him fit for duty - with reluctance, telling him to rest but sure the First Officer would take no notice, as in the past.

* * *

The Enterprise was rather crowded with the telepaths from Hugor, but they showed interest in the ship and fraternised with the crew, and no incident or antagonism developed, to Kirk's relief, as they waited for Razal and the Hugorians' decision.

Starfleet and the Federation sent messages, agreeing with Kirk's and Sarek's reports to maintain the defence and protection of the telepaths, and to be kept informed of further developments in the unusual situation.

* * *

Stekene had developed ties of friendship with Kirk and McCoy as well as Spock and Sarek, and the Captain was moved when the alien came to his cabin later that day with tears in his eyes.

"My people are actually free from fear here, Captain. We did not know living could be so attractive."

"I am glad, Stekene."

"However, we cannot remain here for ever. To go back will be dreadful, and yet I can't abandon my people. Sarek said Vulcan would welcome us, but not all of us, we are too many."

"We'll find a solution, don't worry - we all want to help. Are the telepaths on the Vulcan ship happy too?"

"Yes, Captain, they are studying techniques to help us become stronger. I must join them now. We have to try to help ourselves."

He left for the Vulcan ship and Kirk went to the bridge to see if there was any news from Hugor. There was none, but Spock said after a while,

"Captain, I can detect a transmission from Hugor, but cannot identify either its nature or object."

"Directed at us, Spock?"

"No, sir."

Kirk called the Vulcan commanding officer, who said they had also noted the phenomenon but could not explain it.

"Are you all right?"

"Yes, Captain Kirk, and so is my crew. Captain - the native Stekene is on his way back to your ship in a shuttlecraft."

Kirk thanked the Vulcan and turned to his First Officer. "Keep alert, Spock, we haven't heard from Razal yet, and we should have by now. I'll call him soon if he doesn't - "

He was interrupted by Sarek's entrance. The Vulcan approached Kirk.

"Captain, are there very ill patients in sickbay?"

"Not that I know of, sir, why do you ask?"

"I sensed pain and suffering just now, but could not locate its origin. I regret that I cannot be more explicit."

"Thank you for telling me, sir, I don't like... "

It was Stekene's turn to arrive on the bridge, and the alien said bluntly, "Captain, I request that my people and myself be taken down to Hugor immediately. You had no right to deprive us of our home."

Kirk stared, too stunned for words, and heard Sarek say mildly,

"This is illogical, Stekene... "

"Keep out of this, and don't touch me!" said Stekene with such viciousness that even Sarek betrayed a slight shock as Kirk exclaimed with deep-felt anger,

"That is no way to talk to someone who helped you! Are you ill? What is wrong?"

"Nothing is wrong, Captain, we want to go home."

"Captain," said Sarek. "I think I know... " He never finished as Stekene whirled on him armed with a phaser and fired before anyone realised what was happening.

"Now do we go down, Captain?" asked Stekene coldly.

Kirk felt in the grip of a nightmare as he called McCoy and a medical team urgently and saw Spock kneel by his father's motionless body with horror.

"Spock... "

"He is not dead, Captain," said Spock tonelessly.

McCoy rushed in with his team and looked at the scene unbelievably, then knelt by Sarek, his voice shaking with anger. "Jim, let's get away from these barbarians, they are all the same! And after the aid the Vulcans gave them... They aren't worth helping!"

"How is he, Bones?"

"Jim," said McCoy in such a horrified voice that Kirk paled. "The phaser was set to kill."

The nightmare is getting worse, thought Kirk desperately as McCoy added, "Ambassador Sarek will live, but no thanks to that murdering maniac! Just as well he's a rotten shot!"

Kirk turned to Stekene, dominating his rage with an effort, and saw that the native was trembling violently. The Captain prepared to leap at him to take the phaser away when Spock shouted, "No, Jim!"

The First Officer approached the native slowly, staring into his eyes and talking in a low voice. "Don't, Stekene. I know, and I understand. You must have help."

The phaser fell as the alien collapsed screaming, and Spock tried to touch his face, saying urgently, "Jim, a Vulcan doctor please, I can't do much."

Kirk gave the order to beam one to the bridge and the Vulcan appeared within seconds and joined Spock, finally managing to stop the screaming and Stekene become unconscious.

"I've heard of unselfishness, Jim," said McCoy, "but this is ridiculous! Those two Vulcans are ignoring Sarek to attend to his murderer!"

"My father's would is only physical and you said he would live, Doctor. I took your word for it."

McCoy and the Vulcan doctor followed the two unconscious patients being taken to sickbay and Kirk asked his First Officer, "Do you know why Stekene went mad?"

"Yes, Captain, and we have not much time to think of a solution. You remember that transmission from Hugor, and father sensing pain?"

"Yes."

"The transmission was to Stekene, through the thought-detector, telling him that unless all the telepaths came back to Hugor, the villages would all burn in a huge fire as though by a natural disaster. He had to obey to save his people, and had orders not to tell us. Father guessed that the pain had come from him, so Stekene fired the phaser, but not to kill. He does not understand the mechanism and thought it was on stun only. When McCoy said it had been set to kill, Stekene was so horrified that he nearly became insane and wanted to kill himself."

"How long have we until they start the burning of the villages?"

"Five to six hours, Captain, at the most."

* * *

Kirk assembled his senior officers as well as the Vulcan officers in his briefing room to discuss the new situation, and was amazed to see Stekene come in, looking haggard but resolute.

"Captain, I shall understand if you reject my presence here, but all I ask for is a chance to make amends for my crime. Sarek is not blaming me, but I blame myself and should have trusted you with the truth. Spock told you what happened, and you are aware that my people must go down to Hugor. We cannot let the villages be burnt."

"What will happen to your village when you go back to Hugor?"

"I don't know, Captain, but we must go. We have no choice."

The door opened, and Sarek came in, followed by a quiet Vulcan doctor and an irate McCoy. "Jim, tell that stubborn... I mean, tell the Ambassador that he shouldn't be up and about."

"Sir, are you sure you should be here?" asked Kirk, who knew enough about Vulcans to be able to read the strain Sarek was under.

"Irrelevant, Captain, the fate of 500,000 people is more important than my health. Have you informed Starfleet of the latest development?"

"Yes, sir. It is my opinion that the Hugorians will never accept the telepaths as anything but monsters, so we should evacuate them, and I have asked for transport."

"I agree, Captain, and have had a similar request sent to the Federation and my planet."

"Then we'll get results," said Kirk, knowing that no-one would dream of accusing the level headed Sarek of panicking unnecessarily, so his demand should be complied with quickly. "But we have the problem of the lapse of time before we evacuate, and Stekene's people could go down to torture and death."

"We could go with the telepaths," said the Vulcan commanding officer.

"Yes, I agree," said Sarek. "The whole Vulcan crew should beam down to Hugor, spread as evenly as possible, in order to organise the evacuation. The problem is for the plan to remain undetected, as the thought-detectors could easily read telepathic communications."

"Stekene," asked Kirk, "do you know where the detectors are?"

"Yes, Captain."

"Good, you will draw us a map and my officers and I will endeavour to neutralise them. However, Razal and his people will make things difficult, and... "

"Captain," said Sarek, "I will go down in my official capacity of Ambassador to have talks and perhaps convince the Hugorians of their error, and I will insist on no persecution during the negotiations. Razal will probably agree and keep to it, knowing that the Vulcans would inform me telepathically of any cruelty."

"Yes, you would effectively bind their hands, but for how long can you hold out?"

"As long as necessary, Captain. Please contact Razal and ask his agreement to my visit and my conditions."

Kirk went to the bridge to comply and McCoy followed him worriedly. "Jim, he'll kill himself! He should be in sickbay."

"He's the telepaths' main chance, Bones, and he knows it. Do you imagine that whatever we said would affect his decision?"

"No. He's stubborn, like his son."

"It runs in the family," agreed Kirk with a smile.

Razal was delighted by the Ambassador's proposed visit. "Captain Kirk, I assure you that he will be most welcome and we'll think of him as the Federation representative, not a monster. We have now accepted that alien thought-readers are not necessarily like our own."

That's a relief, anyway, thought Kirk as the Hugorian continued,

"I expect the thought-stealers you kidnapped will be released?"

"We brought them here for protection, and they will be beamed down shortly after the Ambassador. However, they will be under Vulcan protection and a full contingent of telepaths will make sure there is no persecution anywhere during the talks. Do you agree?"

"Provided the interference is only for the duration of the negotiations, yes, we agree."

"Right, we shall beam down shortly."

A crew of Enterprise officers and men moved over to the Vulcan ship to man it while the Vulcans joined the telepaths, and Sarek beamed down with Kirk, Spock, McCoy and Mr. Scott, as well as a security guard of four whose orders were to protect the Ambassador at all times.

* * *

Razal kept his word. Sarek was welcomed and any revulsion well hidden, which relieved Kirk's anxiety a little, but he reinforced his orders to the security guards for extreme vigilance nevertheless.

The Captain showed interest in the Hugorians' scientific achievements and was taken on a visit of the technical labs with his officers. Their enthusiasm flattered the Hugorians, and Kirk approached the aim of their visit. "We are fascinated by your thought-detectors. Could we please see them? Have them explained?"

This was agreed and they were taken to the Centre and were shown and had everything explained in detail, the Hugorians not suspecting their purpose and flattered by their attention.

Spock and Mr. Scott beamed back to the Enterprise to devise some means of neutralising the detectors and arrived at a solution after several hours of intense work.

"Those small disruptors should not be detected, Captain," explained Spock, "at least not until after the evacuation is completed. They will keep thoughts and traces of the metal rings flowing in even if the rings are taken off, feeding in past information from the detectors themselves."

"A work of art, sir," said the Chief Engineer, "even if I say so myself! But then the concept was Mr. Spock's idea."

"The practical side was all yours, Mr. Scott."

"Never mind the compliments now," said Kirk, "we must put them into place. I'll ask for another visit because we were so impressed."

The plan went without a hitch, and each detector was duly provided with a disruptor stuck to its back, after which Spock was able to inform the Vulcan commanding officer that the rings could be taken off, and telepathic communications were now safe.

* * *

Meanwhile the negotiations proceeded, not in accordance with Razal's or his people's inclinations as Sarek made it plain that the Federation disapproved of the telepaths' status and wanted them treated as full citizens of Hugor. It soon became evident that even Sarek's logic could not destroy so many years of prejudice; the telepaths were monsters, not proper people. The Ambassador then offered to have them removed to another planet, and this provoked dismay.

"They want to go on hurting and torturing them," said Kirk to Spock in a whisper. "It has become an entertainment they can't do without. We have no choice but to evacuate. The Federation will have to forego its Starbase here."

"It seems that way, Captain," agreed Spock.

That evening they went to see Sarek and Kirk wondered how the Vulcan was going to hold out as McCoy was refusing bluntly to give any more stimulant.

"Doctor," said Sarek patiently, "if I stop the negotiations, a mass revenge on the telepaths will be put into operation. I can sense the hate building up all the time."

"Against you, sir?" asked Kirk.

"No, against the so-called monsters here who are being held responsible for anything not going as the non-telepaths wish. Spock, make sure the evacuation is complete when it takes place, anyone left behind would have to endure the pent-up hate..."

"I will make sure, father."

"Isn't it time transport arrived, Jim?" asked McCoy with his usual impatience. "What are those morons up to not having some ships here already? How long will it take to evacuate?"

"Approximately ten days, Doctor," said Spock, "provided we get a constant supply of large vessels."

As though on cue, Uhura contacted Kirk. "Message from Starfleet, sir, Operation Exodus is well under way."

"A most appropriate name," said Kirk with a smile. "Spock, go aboard and take charge, will you? I realise you would prefer to stay with your father, but you are the best qualified officer to..."

"Yes, Captain, I will beam up immediately."

He went to his father and touched hands briefly, then took out his communicator as Kirk whispered, "We'll look after him, Spock, don't worry."

"I won't, Jim, he is in good hands," replied the Vulcan just before disappearing into the shimmering glow.

* * *

Kirk's and Sarek's reports and demands for transport had indeed stirred things up in the Federation. A general appeal had been launched to save 500,000 people and all Starfleet vessels not on vital missions had been diverted to Operation Exodus. Vulcan had mobilised every ship available and many other member planets had responded in the same way. So it was not long after the First Officer beamed back to the Enterprise that ships of all sizes and denominations started to arrive. The Starship Lexington with Commodore Wesley was the first, and Spock offered to give command of the operation to a superior officer, but the Commodore refused.

"You are Kirk's choice. That's all right with me, Commander. Just give instructions and we'll obey. My ship is on minimum crew and will accommodate four hundred people if they don't mind a little overcrowding."

Spock established a permanent telepathic link with the Vulcan commanding officer on Hugor and the evacuation started as village after village was transported aboard a ship. The telepaths were to be taken to a newly-started Vulcan colony of about only 50,000 people, and after their settlement, the Vulcans would withdraw to another uninhabited planet the Federation would have provided by then. Under Spock's efficient command, Operation Exodus was going very smoothly and quickly with a regular supply of vessels arriving in an orderly fashion under the First Officer's directions, and taking whatever number of telepaths they could accommodate, most ships being, like the Lexington, on minimum crew to transport the maximum number of passengers.

* * *

In the meantime, the negotiations were proceeding, but Razal and his people were not accepting any of Sarek's proposals regarding the telepaths and were getting impatient at the lack of result concerning the Starbase they wanted in order to be able to travel to other worlds. The Ambassador was near collapse and Kirk and McCoy were full of respect for the indomitable courage which made Sarek go on with his task at the expense of his life. The doctor no longer argued, and provided the stimulant every day while cursing the slowness of the evacuation. Kirk did not hurry Spock however, knowing that the First Officer was fully aware of his father's condition and would be doing everything in his power to accomplish his task as rapidly as possible.

They did what they could to help Sarek, and realised how near collapse he was when he accepted their help without protest. They also noticed during the day that the Vulcan had to wipe sweat from his forehead several times throughout the discussions. But he never faltered in front of the Hugorians and they suspected nothing.

"Jim," said McCoy tensely, "he will soon reach the point where nothing will save him! Can't you hurry Spock?"

"No, Bones - he has enough on his hands and will probably finish in a state of exhaustion. Do you imagine he is taking time off at all?"

"No, I don't suppose he is. Sorry, Jim, it's so frustrating to see a man kill himself slowly, and be unable to stop the process!"

"You're becoming fond of Vulcans, Bones! I'll have to tell Spock," teased Kirk, to lighten the conversation.

But McCoy did not rise to the bait. "Vulcans like Spock and Sarek are worth far more than many Earthmen I know."

"Yes, Bones, I agree. All we can do is help and hope."

* * *

At last Spock contacted Kirk in the middle of one night. "Captain, Operation Exodus will be completed within five hours at most."

"Good. Please remember the full scan I requested to make sure that it is finished."

"Yes, Captain."

By the time they got up, Kirk received the confirmation and rushed to Sarek's room with McCoy to tell him the good news. They found the Ambassador still in bed.

"I know, Captain, Spock told me telepathically. The Vulcan crew beamed up last and the scan revealed no life anywhere in the out of bounds areas. It may be just as well; I do not know if I could have got up today."

McCoy ran a quick check, and saw a large pool of green blood under Sarek's body with a start.

"I apologise, Doctor, but I could not stop the flow of blood to the injured area any longer... "

"Please don't apologise, sir," said Kirk, trying to control the emotion in his voice. "You held out as long as necessary."

"Jim," said the doctor in a strained voice, "I must take him to the ship. He needs a blood transfusion NOW."

"I should take my leave of Razal..."

"I'll explain, sir," said Kirk. "You beam up with McCoy."

"There is just one thing," said Sarek, his voice so weak they had to bend over him to hear. "I do not want the telepaths to know. Should I die, Stekene would go through life with a burden of guilt which would be illogical when he never meant to kill me - and did not. The Hugorians did."

"It will be done as you wish," said Kirk, trying to clear his throat. He gave the necessary instructions to Spock, and his throat still felt tight as he pulled McCoy aside. "Do all you can, Bones. The Vulcan doctor will help. Go now, quickly - I will see to the explanations and excuses for Sarek's departure."

"I'll save him if it's the last thing I do, Jim. Those monsters are not worth one hour of his life."

The Captain saw them beam up with relief. Everyone was safe! and he hoped that Sarek soon would be.

* * *

Kirk went in search of Razal and explained that the Ambassador had been taken ill and deeply regretted having to stop the negotiations. Razal pressed several controls on his desk and answered with a shrug.

"We were getting nowhere with him. The Federation should never have sent what you call a telepath. Can we expect another Ambassador soon, Captain?"

"It is not up to me to decide, sir. All I can do is transmit your request to the Federation."

"Please do, Captain, anyone as long as he is not a Vulcan. Ambassador Sarek could only see those monsters and the talks would never have succeeded."

"I will go back to my ship now, sir," said Kirk, taking his communicator out.

* * *

Mr. Scott welcomed him, and Kirk asked, "Where is Spock?"

"Sickbay, sir. His father is all right now, but it was touch and go."

The Captain went to the bridge and ordered Uhura to send a message to Starfleet recommending that Planet Hugar be off limits, then went to sickbay where he found three beds occupied by Sarek, Spock - and Amanda, all asleep. He saw to some routine matters and went back a couple of hours later. McCoy put a finger to his lips and led him to his office.

"They're all right, Jim. I had to give Sarek two transfusions, and Spock was exhausted after being on duty non-stop throughout Operation Exodus, but insisted on giving his blood, so he's still weak. His mother arrived aboard one of the Vulcan ships in a state of acute anxiety and practically collapsed with relief when I was able to tell her that her husband would live. She's under sedation."

"I'm glad the ordeal is over for them."

"Sarek should come to soon. Better go back in."

They found Spock awake and helping his father's return to consciousness with the required slaps.

"Glad to let him do it!" muttered McCoy. "I never fancied hitting an Ambassador!"

A message from Uhura came for Kirk, saying that Razal wanted to talk to Sarek.

"I can guess why," said McCoy, "and I won't have my patient..."

"May we have the call here, Doctor?" interrupted Sarek. "Razal cannot harm me from Hugar."

Kirk gave the necessary orders and the small surgery screen showed the Hugarian in a state of fury.

"Vulcan, you tricked us! What have you done with the monsters?"

"It would be logical to thank me for removing monsters from your midst," answered Sarek without the slightest hint of irony.

"You stole them for your own ends and the Federation will be informed..."

"Sir," interrupted Kirk, "the Federation knows and collaborated in the evacuation of the telepaths. Vulcans are not to blame."

"They are to blame, and we'll never forget. You came in friendship and betrayed us, Captain Kirk - we won't forget that either, and deeply regret our inability to take revenge. Our curse and hate for Vulcans and for you will be everlasting."

The screen went dark and Kirk shivered. "I'm glad to be here, and not down there!"

What will happen to Hugar now?" asked McCoy.

"They will need an outlet for their cruelty and hate," answered Spock.

"So they will turn on each other," added Sarek, "and unless they realise the danger, Hugar will not be inhabited within a few centuries."

"What a waste," sighed Kirk.

"Agreed, Captain," said Spock. "An illogical waste due to an excess of emotions."

"For once I agree with you," said McCoy.

"Did I hear you correctly, Doctor?" asked Spock, one eyebrow raised.

"You did, Spock. Excess in anything is bad, and it applies to emotions too."

"I see my son's influence has started to have an effect on you, Doctor," said Sarek. "With time, you might even become a logical man."

"That is a speculation I cannot share, father," said Spock.

"Neither can I," said Kirk with a laugh. "But I think we all agree that it is a relief to forget Hugor and its self-destructing cruelty."

He called the bridge. "Mr. Scott, take us out of orbit and away from that charming planet called Hugor, and may we never see it again!"

ZARABETH by Gillian Catchpole

They have returned,
 Some time ago I think,
 How long I do not know.
 I know only that I am alone,
 Truly alone and lost forever.
 Where once acceptance might have smoothed my life
 Sadness now presses me down.
 I no longer have the spirit
 To defend myself,
 To guard against attacks of gloom.
 Self-pity walks with me,
 Leading me, moulding me,
 My companion and perhaps my end.

* * *

Those precious moments so quickly gone,
 Have renewed my despair
 And deepened my sorrow.
 I seek rest from futile rememberings,
 I long for a peace
 Which I am forever denied.
 What hope can be given to a woman like me,
 Wishing for a man who has yet to be born?

Hidden in the square are twelve names connected with the episode 'Empath'. These names may be read from right to left, left to right, top to bottom, bottom to top, or diagonally.

Z V E Z I R P R E T N E
 O A M P V R S E K R I K
 E I L I I Y M N I S P N
 G S A C N K S O R N V I
 U N I R A A L C C R S L
 S C O R C V R L O D F L
 G P U C P N N A H T S U
 R S O V M R Y L B C T A
 Z P M C O Y E V O K O Y
 S H C O K R U T F L B E
 M O Z A B A Y T N O P R
 Y V B F F C U L M E G K

????????????????

THE POOL by Sheila Clark

Ever since the day when he first realised that his wife, whom he loved passionately, cared nothing for him any more, Dr. Leonard McCoy had been subject to fits of depression; days when it seemed that nothing would ever go right again, days when it seemed that no-one cared what happened to him; days when it seemed that nothing he did was of any use to anyone. His professionalism kept his depression from ever harming his patients, but in his less despondent moments he often worried that one day it would, that one day his judgement would fail, he would make a terrible error in evaluating a case, make the wrong diagnosis and a patient die. It made him irritable, edgy, brusque; and as his marriage plunged deeper and deeper into the depths of failure, he became more and more irascible.

To give her her due, Sarah had married McCoy full of hopes for the future. What she had failed to understand, right from the start, was his need - almost a compulsion - to help others. And gradually - almost unconsciously - she had become jealous of his involvement with the sick, the injured. To protect herself from the hurt of feeling herself of so little importance to him, she had withdrawn, turning to others for the love that - without his realising it - she felt he was withholding from her. By the time her husband realised what was happening, it was too late. Too late to do anything to save their marriage. Too late for anything but an acrimonious separation, each blaming the other, a separation drawn out beyond the limits of endurance by the wrangles over the custody of their daughter, whose own life was rendered almost unendurable by the constant altercations between her parents. The eventual divorce came as a relief to all three. Sarah was granted custody of the child; and McCoy, for Johanna's sake, chose not to apply for the right to see her, feeling that it would only unsettle her if he did.

Once the divorce was final, McCoy realised fully, for the first time, just how much it had meant to him to have someone there, someone who loved him... the realisation that she did not, after all, care, was shattering. He had never felt so alone.

It was in an attempt to escape from the past that he decided to join Starfleet, knowing that his qualifications would assure him of a good position. Assigned to the U.S.S. Enterprise, McCoy had at first been slow to relate to anyone again - even to the ship's Chief Engineer, a man he had known in the past and whom he thought of as a friend. Until the day that Captain Kirk had risked his life to save that of his withdrawn and apparently self-sufficient Chief Medical Officer. To his own surprise, McCoy had found himself glad to respond to the Captain's offered friendship; and while he had initially been a little jealous of the ship's First Officer, who was the only other person on the ship with whom Kirk could - and did - relax fully, slowly he discovered proof that the Vulcan, far from being the cold unemotional machine he pretended to be, was a warm, affectionate being who needed friendship even as McCoy himself did, and who was as afraid as McCoy was of having his affection rejected - from a different, but equally valid, reason. Scotty, too, had proved to be an even better friend than McCoy had ever realised.

Yet, in spite of the many proofs of their friendship that he had been given, McCoy still had occasional fits of depression; mornings when he woke from a nightmare in which the black demon of loneliness and despair threatened to overwhelm him, shaking, terrified, convinced that no-one really cared... On such days he normally shut himself away in his office with a set of research results, while he tried to persuade himself that he was just imagining things. Usually he failed and did not regain emotional equilibrium until he had slept again. However, he could at least persuade himself that by doing so, he was avoiding bothering others with his moodiness.

The Enterprise swung into orbit around the uninterestingly standard M-class planet that sensors had indicated as the only sizable mass orbiting the red dwarf sun, having with difficulty negotiated the massive asteroid belt that separated the small world from outer space.

"Report, Mr. Spock."

"Standard M-class planet, Captain... oxygen-nitrogen atmosphere, pressure and gravity within .05 of Terran norm. Temperature ranges from sub zero at the poles to a possible maximum of 18 degrees celcius at the equator. Extensive plant cover, no animal life... correct that, indications of simple mobile life forms, possibly annelid or arthropod..."

Kirk smothered a faint sigh. Worms and shrimps weren't important... oh well, it was the Science Officer's job to inform him of all the facts, no matter how insignificant, and if anything ever went wrong, Spock always felt unnecessarily guilty about it if he had failed, even at Kirk's express request, to give a completely full report.

"Any sign of the missing scout ship?" It was the only reason they were here; to search for the missing Diana, lost these last two months and this her last reported position.

There was a short pause.

"There is a metallic trace, Captain... indications of a depleted power source... it could be the scout, although I fail to understand why, if it is, there has been no distress signal activated; automatic distress carries its own power supply and so the failure of the main system should not affect it."

"Even automatic distress requires someone alive to set it going," Kirk said grimly. "Give the co-ordinates to the transporter room. Uhura, call Dr. McCoy and two security guards to accompany us. You have the con, Mr. Sulu. Mr. Spock..."

* * *

Self-incarcerated in his office, gripped by one of his now rare fits of depression, McCoy received the call from the bridge with a complete lack of enthusiasm. He knew he should be pleased that Jim wanted him along instead of one of the almost equally qualified and fully experienced biologists on board, but the monster of emotional insecurity that Sarah had spawned hissed discouragingly in his ear - It's not you they want but your knowledge...

It seemed to both Kirk and Spock that McCoy was unusually quiet when he joined them in the transporter room. Kirk guessed that the Doctor was annoyed at being dragged away from whatever he was doing, and grinned to himself at his friend's brusqueness. It wouldn't last long once Bones got down to the surface. Once they had checked out the Diana, and discovered what had happened to the two-man crew, they could start exploring the life forms here. Bones was sure to find those worms and shrimps absorbing.

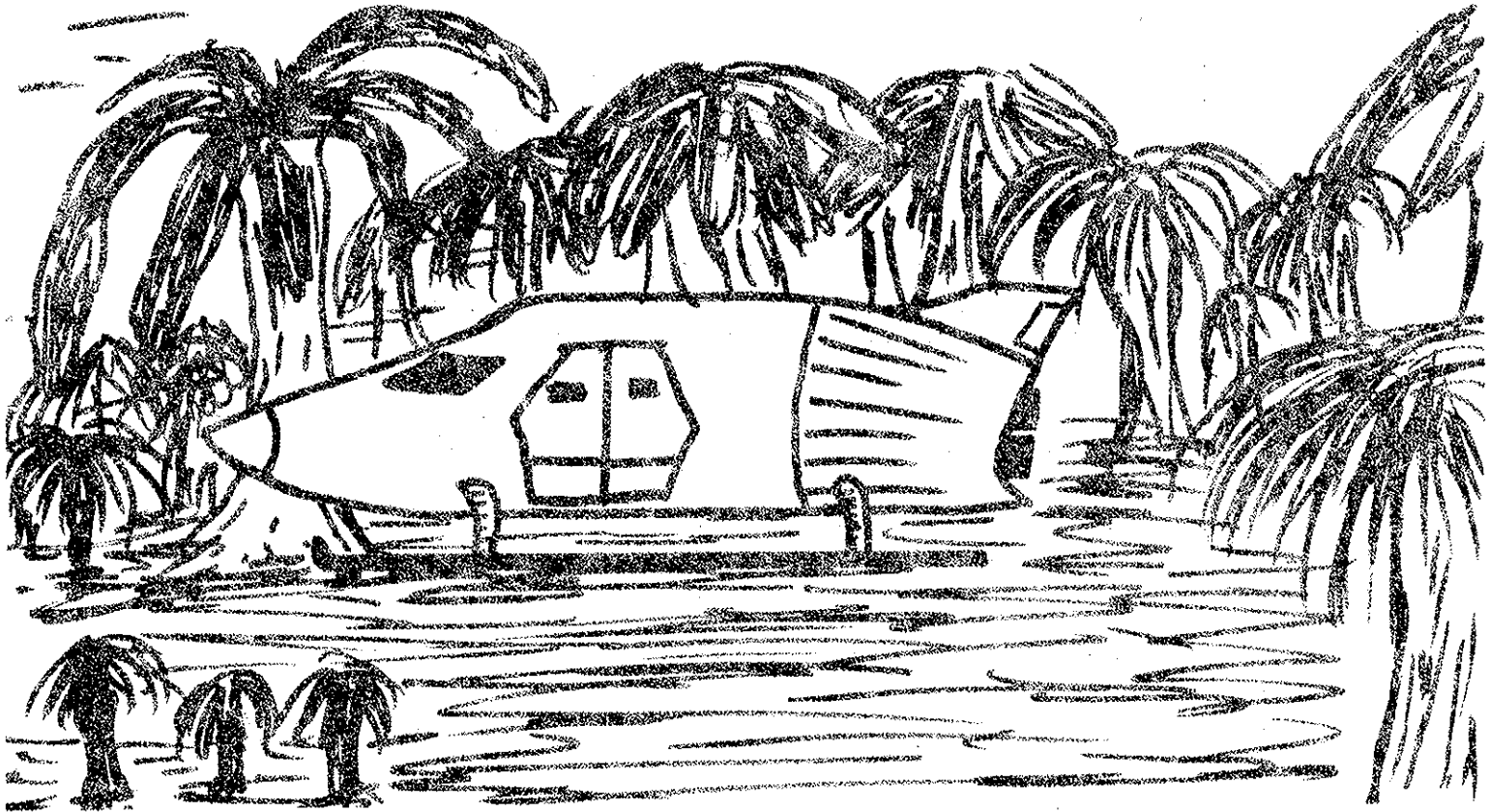
* * *

The scoutcraft sat where it had landed, in a solitude rendered more noticeable by the almost complete silence. The only sound was the faintest rustle as the leaves of the nearby trees stirred slightly in the gentle breeze. Kirk glanced at his Science Officer, who was busily occupied studying his tricorder, knowing he would get a report as soon as there was one to be given.

"The craft appears to be undamaged, Captain," Spock said. "I would say the vessel landed normally for a survey. The power sources are low merely because of the length of time the vessel has been unused."

"Then where's her crew?"

Spock swung the tricorder round with careful deliberation. "They are



nowhere within tricorder range, Captain. I can detect only the five of us."

"Bodies?"

McCoy stirred himself into action, and he joined Spock in scanning for dead men, while Kirk flicked open his communicator.

"Kirk to Enterprise."

"Enterprise. Scott here."

"We've found the scout, Mr. Scott, undamaged but with depleted power. Send down someone to service her and get her flying again."

"Aye, sir. Right away."

As Kirk put the communicator away, Spock said slowly, "Captain, there is one thing..."

"Yes, Mr. Spock?"

"The last reports from the scout indicate that the two men of the crew were not on amicable terms," Spock said slowly. "They had applied for reassignment on their return to base; they were finding it increasingly difficult to operate in harmony. It may be that in fact there is a malfunction of the ship, and that the men, finding themselves stranded here, chose to separate."

"Surely they would stand a better chance of survival if they stayed together," Kirk protested. "Besides, they would be more comfortable remaining with the ship." He glanced at the guard who had just come from checking inside the Diana. "Report, Mr. Porrok."

"Nothing, sir," the guard replied. "Everything inside there is normal."

"Personality clashes could have reached a point where murder was done," Spock said hesitantly. "To judge from my study of Human psychological behaviour."

"Bones?"

"It..." McCoy swallowed. Reassignment... divorce... "It's possible. But if they had applied for reassignment, they both knew... they both knew that they wouldn't have to put up with each other for much longer. Under those circumstances... it's unlikely."

"Unlikely... but it's possible?"

"Yes. It's possible," he affirmed.

There was an uncomfortable silence while Kirk considered the implications. "If murder was done... and the murderer chose to disappear... Spock, could we find one life form on the whole planet?"

Spock shook his head. "The traces would be so minimal, Captain... we might. We might not. I can give no positive guarantee."

"Let's look round anyway, and see if we can turn up anything," Kirk decided. As he finished speaking, the transporter hum announced the arrival of the engineer to check the stranded scout.

* * *

Contrary to Kirk's expectation, McCoy's mood did not lighten, and Kirk found himself watching the surgeon surreptitiously, wondering what was wrong. He noticed Spock doing the same, and realised that the Vulcan must be very concerned to allow his attention to be distracted from his work. At last, as McCoy moved away from the immediate vicinity of the scout, eyes fixed on his tricorder, Kirk drifted across to join his First Officer.

"What do you make of it?" He deliberately made his question ambiguous, and knew instantly, from Spock's response, that he had been right.

"Something is worrying Dr. McCoy."

"Yes, but what? He was O.K. last night, and he hasn't had any external messages - and he's not the man to get upset over being pulled away from one job to do another."

Spock nodded. "I thought at first that he was pretending to be - he would do that - but even as we search for traces of the missing scouts, we are making discoveries about the ecology of the planet, and he is exhibiting no enthusiasm over these discoveries - normally, he would."

Subconsciously, Kirk noted that Spock had revealed an understanding of McCoy that ordinarily he would have denied possessing, and set that also with the evidence of Spock's concern about the doctor.

They were interrupted by a muffled splash from McCoy's direction, and swung round to see what had caused it. The ship's doctor had vanished.

Spock reached the bright green patch whose otherwise smooth surface was marred by an uneven hole just ahead of Kirk. None of the other men appeared to have heard anything - they continued working as before. A short distance from the hole, the green carpet was shaking, heaving as if something below was trying to surface.

"McCoy!" Even as he spoke, Spock dived into the hole, disappearing into the shadowed obscurity of the water. Kirk waited anxiously; the agitation under the vegetable mat had subsided, and he guessed that McCoy was now unconscious. It strained his willpower to the utmost to remain where he was instead of diving into the hole to help Spock look for their friend, and if it had been open water he would have succumbed; as it was, he realised that one of them had to remain on dry land. He would give Spock

another minute, he decided, then call the men for help.

But the minute was only half gone when the sleek dark head surfaced, a brown head held close to it. Kirk reached down and pulled the unconscious McCoy on to dry land.

* * *

When McCoy regained consciousness, his first awareness was of a pain in his chest, then secondly of a mouth covering his. Air was forced into his lungs; as the mouth lifted, McCoy grunted. His head was lifted gently and pillowed on something softer than the hard ground. He opened his eyes and looked up at two faces watching him, concern and affection in both pairs of eyes. There was nothing to indicate which of them had been giving him artificial respiration.

He choked and coughed, retching. Four gentle hands steadied him as he rolled over.

At last he stopped coughing up water. The burning pain in his chest had eased a little. They helped him to turn onto his back again, and his head was pulled back against Kirk's arm. McCoy could see now that Spock was soaking, and knew who had risked his life to save him. He smiled up at them, their open concern banishing the mood of utter despondency that had been threatening to overpower his judgement and common sense, knowing that thanks were unnecessary and would only embarrass them.

"All right, Bones?"

McCoy nodded.

"What exactly happened, Doctor?" Spock asked. "Surely your tricorder detected the presence of water?"

"That's the odd thing," McCoy said. "It didn't... not more than minimal moisture. But something made me go over there..." He sounded puzzled. "I've just realised, Jim. I didn't fall in. I jumped. There was something there... something that... that called to me. It seemed to promise... to promise something good - something that I wanted... but I can't remember what it was..."

Captain and First Officer looked at each other. This...mysticism...wasn't McCoy as they knew him.

"I heard nothing, Doctor."

"I don't mean literally called, Mr. Spock." McCoy sounded faintly exasperated. "It was... inside my head, attracting me..."

One eyebrow lifted consideringly. "Interesting. I sensed nothing."

"Neither did I," Kirk put in. "Nor, I imagine, did Porrok or Hwang." He glanced towards the guards, still studying the surrounding terrain.

Spock hesitated. "Doctor..."

"Yes?"

"Doctor, when you beamed down, you were in an abnormal state of mind, were you not?"

A reluctant nod answered him. "I was... a bit depressed. No particular reason."

"Whereas none of the other members of the landing party were concerned about anything."

"Spock, I know I was feeling low, but I certainly wasn't feeling suicidal."

"I did not intend to suggest that you were, Doctor. But your disturbed

state of mind might have made you susceptible to some influence to which the rest of us were immune."

"Spock, are you trying to say that whatever influenced Bones might have influenced the scouts?" Kirk asked.

"It is... possible," Spock agreed. "A tricorder scan of that pool might be informative."

He stood, offering a hand to pull McCoy up. Startled, McCoy accepted the help as Kirk also scrambled up. As they turned to face the pool, McCoy hesitated, but then he relaxed as he realised that the strange compulsion that had gripped him had gone.

Spock aimed his tricorder at the water.

"...there is something there," he said. "A trace of... not intelligent thought, but rather... instinctive reaction, feelings... hunger predominating..." He turned a dial. "Now getting readings on two humanoid bodies... little but bone remaining."

"Whatever it was did attract them," Kirk said, revolted.

"What sort of life form could it be, though?" McCoy asked.

"It appears that the entire pool is the entity," Spock replied, not very helpfully. "Perhaps something like an amoeba, consuming its prey by assimilating it..."

"Are there any others?" Kirk put in.

Spock aimed the tricorder in a wide circle. "Not within scanning range. Nor is there any positive way of knowing if it is a new life form developing or an old one degenerating - although I would suspect the latter as being the more likely, considering the level of the rest of the life forms on this planet, and the creature's method of attracting its prey."

"Well, at least we know what happened to the scouts," Kirk said gloomily as his communicator bleeped.

"Kirk here."

"Dirak, sir - the scoutship is ready for takeoff."

"Fine, Mr. Dirak. Take her into orbit - we'll assign you a partner and get her back to Base."

"Aye, sir."

Kirk looked round, and shivered. "Let's get back home," he said. "There's nothing we can do here."

The figures shivered out of existence... letting the little world and its deadly entity return to their endless solitude.

I.D.I.C.

Infinite Diversity in infinite combination,
 Truth and beauty in infinite variation,
 Strength and honour, a constant inspiration,
 All this, and more.
 So why is war, what is the justification?
 Hate and fear,
 Oh what a sad deterioration
 In such a colourful, kaleidoscopic configuration.

Anne and Caroline.

FIRST CONTACT by Margaret Draper

Captain Robert Bennett, Commander and sole crew of the United Earth Survey Ship 'Pallas', sighed wearily and dragged out his pocket recorder.

"Log entry timed - " he glanced at the chronometer on his suit " - 21.50 hours, this fifth day of November, 2033. Planetoid fifteen of the Sirian System duly surveyed; some deposits of iron ore, no other noteworthy features." Planetoid 15 - fifteen hunks of airless, lifeless rock he'd checked out in the month, each as barren and uninviting as this one. "Join the Space Service and see the wonders of the Galaxy... "

He sighed again. One last stupid regulation to fulfil and he could leave this forsaken slag-heap. Out with the telescopic flagpole and - "I claim this planet in the name of Earth."

"Well, really."

Bennett almost fell over in surprise. What the hell... there wasn't another survey ship within light years! He'd been out too long...

"Just what we needed - primitives. Three days behind schedule already thanks to the auxiliary drive going like that - and now we have primitives trampling around the middle of the sterile test area. And what She's going to say when she hears - I suppose we couldn't just pretend we didn't notice?"

No doubt about it - that exasperated voice was coming from his own suit radio. But how? And where from? Now there was a second speaker - a formal, authoritative tone: "Your attitude is unreasonable, Loza. Even were it not for our standing orders, logic would dictate our making contact with other races capable of space travel - if only to avoid this sort of situation. Moreover, he can hardly be as primitive as he sounds, for there are no inhabitable planets in this system, as you know. And interstellar flight demands a certain technical sophistication, at least."

Bewilderment and alarm in Bennett's mind were gradually being replaced by mounting annoyance. Just who did these disembodied speakers think they were? He spoke abruptly into his suit mike.

"I'm Captain Robert Bennett of the Earth ship Pallas. Who are you? And where are you? And who are you calling 'primitives'?"

There was a slight pause; perhaps the speakers hadn't realised he'd been listening. The answer when it came was quite unflurried, however.

"My name is Sasak; we are in orbit about - ah - 'planetoid 15', I think you called it, Captain; look upwards and away from the sun and you may even be able to see us - you can detect objects visually, I assume? 'Primitive' - I regret my colleague's rather hasty words; obviously they are not entirely accurate. I would estimate your present degree of civilisation to be class 2 at least - possibly even class 3."

As if that made it any better! But now the first shock was over, Bennett's sense of humour was beginning to return. Of all the ridiculous situations... he looked up, trying to spot the other ship. That must be it - like a star passing rapidly across the sky near the horizon.

"I can see you! But - I still don't understand a lot of things. How come you speak English, for a start? And where on earth did you spring from?"

There was another silence, then a rather puzzled reply. "Earth? English? Ah - Captain, are you an oxygen-breather?"

"Yes," replied Bennett, equally puzzled.

"Excellent. Then you'd better come aboard; that will be more convenient for us all."

"Now wait a minute..." began Bennett, then broke off in alarm. A tingling feeling had come over him, and to his terror his whole suit began to sparkle and dissolve. But then it steadied and - hey! HEY!

"You can remove your helmet, Captain; it is quite safe to do so."

Bennett suddenly realised how foolish he must look, standing there with his mouth open; he shut it hastily and swallowed hard, trying to recover his bearings. For the bleak, twilight, rocky terrain that had surrounded him moments before had incredibly turned into a small, brightly-lit room. And as for the other occupants - well, he never had done things by halves, had he? Not just the first man to contact another intelligent race - oh no, he had to go and find two. At least, he assumed it was two different races; one shortish, squat, coppery brown and the other - holy smoke, those ears!

"Something the matter, Captain?"

"N-no, I... er... I think I'd like to sit down." He did so with a bump, on the edge of the little platform he'd been standing on, and desperately tried to recover his poise. As representative of humanity, the impression he gave these two was crucial. With what he hoped was a nonchalant air, he glanced at his suit gauges; well, at least the pointy-eared one was right there. Nitrogen-oxygen outside, thinnish but breathable - unless his instruments had gone crazy too. Cautiously he unsealed his helmet: air, real air!

"I trust you find the atmosphere satisfactory."

Bennett started slightly and glanced at the wall on his left. The voice had come from there, though it looked as if the short - er - creature had spoken. As if his mind had been read (maybe it had?) the other continued, "Universal translator. I'm Loza; this is Sasak. You are from... 'Earth', I think you said? What star system - no (as Bennett opened his mouth to reply) not the local name. Here, show us." As he spoke he was flashing various star charts up on a wall screen, most of them hopelessly unfamiliar to the Earthman. But wait a minute - that looked something like the view from Alpha Centauri.

"Stop. That one, there. Yes, there it is, Sol. Third planet."

"Indeed." It was the pointy-eared one, Sasak, who spoke. "And your people have had space flight for... 76.087 Solar years, I believe."

"Yes, that's right," replied Bennett, astonished. "You've been observing us, then?"

"Naturally we are interested in developing races. And your planet has rather been - drawing attention to itself. We noticed considerable violent activity some thirty years ago. Who were the invaders?"

"Invaders?"

"You mean - you were fighting among yourselves?" The speaker's face was expressionless and the tone was almost so too, but Bennett felt suddenly ashamed.

"The... Genocidal War. We... anyway, it was after that that the Declaration of Global Unity was made. We've been at peace ever since." His own voice was defensive.

"Really. Thirty years. And since then, you've colonised the Alpha Centauri system and you're claiming this asteroid belt too, if I understand you correctly."

"That's right," said Bennett proudly.

"May I ask whether you intend to mount guard over it, or merely patrol it? And have you consulted the Klingons? I understand they regard this as within their sphere of influence."

"Klingons? Who are they? I've never heard of them," said Bennett, floundering.

"You are fortunate," remarked Loza, drily. "Then may we suggest that you take a little more time to consider before indulging in - er - Empire-building?" Then, as Bennett ruffled visibly, "After all, it's a big galaxy, Captain. Plenty of rocks for everybody." His tone was almost coaxing, as of one humouring a child.

"I - you're right. It's a stupid regulation; should have been dropped way back. I'm sorry."

The two aliens glanced at each other. "Interesting," commented Sasak, softly.

"Yes - definitely class three, I should say. You were right."

"But thirty years! Every race has to take the step; a pity that their social and technical stages are so disparate, however. Excuse me, Captain; I must report to the Ambassador." Sasak turned and disappeared through a doorway at the back of the room.

"Ambassador?"

"Yes - of Vulcan." Seeing Bennett's blank expression, Loza grinned faintly - at least, the Captain hoped fervently it was a grin.

"Perhaps we should apologise too; but you understand we have to be careful about new races. Especially warlike ones, as yours seems to be. Anyway, Sasak's from Vulcan too; they're class 5, you know. I'm from Catoas - Rigel V, that is. We're only threes, like yourselves, but we're due for regrading soon, I hope."

"And who decided on this classification?" Asked Bennett, a little belligerently.

"The Vulcans, I believe."

"Naturally! Nothing like setting up your own ladder and putting yourself at the top."

"Oh no, not the top. The scale goes up to twelve so far."

"Twelve!" Bennett was shaken.

Undoubtedly that was a grin on Loza's face. "It's a very old galaxy, too."

Another wall speaker interrupted him.

"Captain, the Ambassador wishes to meet you." It wasn't a request.

"Come, Captain."

Bennett was ushered into the presence; this of course must have been the 'She' Loza had spoken of earlier. And the capital letter he'd unconsciously given the word was certainly justified. Very straight-backed, very formal: and were all Vulcans this poker-faced? Bennett felt as if he'd been caught out misbehaving in class; ridiculous!

"I am T'Pau of Vulcan, Captain. And your name is - ?"

"Robert Bennett, ma'am. But," with an attempt at lightness, "most people call me Bob."

"Why?"

Oh boy. "Well - it's sort of - friendlier that way, isn't it?" T'Pau said nothing. "Shorter, too," continued Bennett desperately.

"Indeed." That killed that topic. "Sasak has told me of your people. He considers them an interesting study."

"Well - that's - nice of you to say so." Bennett was floundering again. "We'd be very pleased to - ah - try to come to some sort of arrangement with you people. I think. I mean, we seem to be the new boys round here, don't we?" Those cold eyes were boring into him. "I'm - er - sorry about that field experiment I messed up. I didn't know... "

"That is of little moment." Loza stirred as if in protest, but T'Pau swept on, "Your ignorance excuses you. But your belligerent claims to possession of this region of space, your recent internicine wars: these things are more serious. Captain," her voice rang out suddenly, "there has been peace in our sector for two centuries - peace between race and race. We settle our differences not by battle but by civilised discussion. And your race must not disturb that peace."

"We're not aiming to start wars. We've had peace and unity among ourselves for more than thirty years now!"

"That is good, Captain. But Vulcan alone has known these things for over two thousand years."

Bennett blinked. Two thousand - maybe class 5 was modest, at that.

"Yours is a young race, but you show promise. Thirty years - Captain, you may contact me in a hundred years' time and, if your planet's present rate of social progress is maintained, Vulcan should welcome you as an ally."

"A hundred years? Me? I'll be dead by then!"

"Dead? But you do not look more than eighty. Are you unwell?"

"I... "

"I believe the Captain's species is one of the shorter-lived ones, T'Pau," said Sasak gravely. "Unfortunate. That would explain much of their turbulence, and also their lack of progress in certain fields. But they do show progress, as you said. Possibly a shorter settlement period would suffice?"

"Perhaps." But her tone was dubious. "Very well, Captain. We will contact you again. Live long, and prosper."

It was a dismissal; Bennett was glad to make his escape.

"Don't worry; Vulcans always affect people that way to begin with," said Loza in a friendly tone, outside the room. "But you'll get used to it - in time."

"Get used to it? You think they'll make contact again soon, then?"

"Certainly - or you will. You sound like an up-and-coming species to me - though a bit pushy, of course!"

They were back in the original room again now. Bennett cast a longing look round at the control panels, but if Loza noticed he pretended not to. The Captain sighed once more and, reaching for his helmet, stepped back onto the platform.

"Farewell - er - Bob." That was Sasak returning. "It has been most interesting meeting you."

"Thank you; I could say the same! Goodbye."

The shimmering was beginning again, but Bennett could just catch the last few words: "Fascinating. Barbarous in many ways, of course, but... "

Then he was back on the empty planetoid, and of the silver ship there was no sign.

FIRST ALIEN ON MELEX by C.E. Hall

As Captain Kirk stood on the transporter platform of the Enterprise, ready to beam down to the planet Melex, he had no premonition of the disturbing events that were to come. On either side of him stood Mr. Spock and Dr. McCoy, the proper companions for such a mission. All were resplendent in dress uniform, as this was a formal courtesy visit to a recently-colonised, rapidly developing world. Before leaving the ship, Kirk had asked Spock to find out what was known about the planet, and with his customary efficiency, Spock had researched the computer banks and come up with the meagre details available.

The planet was class M, and 2.7 times larger than Earth. It consisted of 70% land mass, the remainder being three small inter-connected seas. The land was poor and not very fertile, except in areas near the mountains, which gave some parts a greater rainfall, but it was very rich in mineral deposits, and when these were fully developed, would become a very prosperous world. With this end in view, it had been settled by a large group of colonists and their families, whose passage there had been supported by large business interests with an eye to future profit. As yet the Federation had no treaty with the inhabitants, but Federation starships had paid courtesy visits, and had been well-received, finding the people reasonable and well-disposed. The Enterprise was about to make another of these calls.

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They beamed down into the main administrative building in the city of Tralos, prepared to meet the Melexian Council and their leader, President Careswell, to whom Kirk had already spoken. They found this group of people awaiting them, but as they materialised and took solid form, Kirk became aware of an odd expression creeping over the faces of those before them, as their gaze flickered slightly to his right.

President Careswell hesitated for a moment, then stepped forward to Kirk.

"May I have a private word?" he said in an agitated tone.

This was not the formal greeting Kirk was expecting, and somewhat surprised, he allowed the Melexian to draw him to one side.

"Your companions?" said Careswell anxiously.

"First Officer Spock and Ship's Surgeon McCoy," elucidated Kirk helpfully, indicating each with a wave of his hand.

"First Officer Spock," repeated Careswell. "Captain, could he be beamed back to the ship?"

"Why?" exclaimed Kirk, astounded at the request.

"Because he's an alien, isn't he?" whispered Careswell.

Kirk began to bristle, suspecting something here that he didn't like. His reply was very quiet and stiff with suppressed anger.

"Mr. Spock is a Vulcan, yes," he said. "But he is also my second-in-command, and..."

"Please, Captain Kirk," protested the President, feeling Kirk's resentment. "It is not as you think. Will you listen while I explain the very delicate situation we are in at the moment."

Kirk, somewhat mollified by Careswell's earnestness, agreed to listen. But first he turned back to Spock and McCoy, who were still standing where they had beamed down, endeavouring to hide their puzzlement.

"Gentlemen," he said. "Will you please wait for me a moment?" Both men nodded solemnly, responding to the look in Kirk's eye, which said, 'Just do

nothing till I give you the lead.'

Kirk turned back to the President and prepared to listen. He hoped the explanation would be a good one, as he disliked prejudice, and knew himself to be even more resentful when it concerned Mr. Spock.

"Captain Kirk," the man began hesitantly, "I am not a xenophobe, as you obviously suspect. Before I came here, I had met many aliens, and liked most of them. I especially respect and admire Vulcans, who have many fine qualities. But just at the moment we have an explosive situation on our planet, and his presence might just be the necessary spark to cause trouble."

Kirk looked puzzled. The idea of his self-controlled Mr. Spock causing a commotion, unwittingly or not, seemed slightly ludicrous.

"I will explain," continued Careswell. "You see, our planet has great potential - with the mineral resources here, we could become a very prosperous place. But recent surveys have shown that we are seriously under-populated. To become an economic success we need a much bigger work-force, and we have tried to procure this by seeking to attract further colonists. Life here is hard, but the rewards will be great - eventually. But our efforts have not met with the success we wanted."

He hesitated, coming to the awkward bit. "Up till now, all of our inhabitants have been Human. But now the suggestion has been made, that as we cannot augment our population sufficiently with Human immigrants - we should consider admitting aliens. The suggestion has aroused a great emotional outburst, and feelings are running very high among certain sections of the people. I myself am in favour of admitting aliens to swell the work-force. In fact, I know that some races would be excellent for the task, better than Humans for some jobs. Most of my Council agree, subject to suitable controls and regulations. One or two, who have never met an alien, are a bit difficult."

Kirk thought carefully about the problem. He now understood the President's anxiety, but his wider experience, including visits to places where aliens were in the majority, led him to see another side of the picture. At last he spoke, choosing his words with care.

"I do see your difficulty, President Careswell. Thank you for explaining it to me. I could order Mr. Spock to return to the ship, and he would go at once, without question, for he is a loyal and obedient officer. I shouldn't much like giving him an explanation later, but he would accept it without rancour, for he's essentially a reasonable man. But," he added thoughtfully, "it could be a mistake, a show of weakness on your part. You say some of your Councillors have never met an alien - well, now's their chance! Mr. Spock is an excellent ambassador for his race. Although sometimes I feel as if our behaviour offends him, he never reveals it, and by our criteria, his behaviour and manners are impeccable. I think he might well impress your wavering Councillors."

"Captain Kirk," mused Careswell, "you are very shrewd. I believe in this matter you are longer-sighted than I am. Thank you. How do you suggest we proceed?"

"Return to the formalities," said Kirk. "Make no reference in any way to the fact that Mr. Spock is an alien. If he is accorded the proper respect due to him as a senior Starfleet officer, everything should run smoothly."

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And so it did. Kirk returned to stand with his officers, giving them no word of explanation, even though he could see that McCoy was seething with curiosity. If Spock, with his sensitivity, had some inkling of the cause of the delay, he let his expression reveal nothing of his thoughts.

President Careswell made the formal greetings to the party, and Kirk replied equally formally. They were then introduced, in correct manner, to

the rest of the Council, as Captain James T. Kirk of the U.S.S. Enterprise, Commander Spock, First Officer, and Lt. Commander McCoy, Ship's Surgeon.

The tone of the whole proceedings was thus set, and so it continued throughout a busy day spent touring the Administrative Buildings. They listened to speeches and reports, saw films and slides, inspected displays of plans and models and machines, all designed for future development and expansion.

As the day wore on, Kirk was pleased to see that things were going just as he had hoped. Without any conscious effort, Spock was impressing the Council members. His interest, comments and intelligent questions about each one's special department were winning their respect, and before long they had totally forgotten that he was an alien, and were deep in absorbed conversation, answering his questions and explaining new developments and plans.

The evening was to be a social one. A large banquet had been arranged to which had been invited people from all walks of life, representatives of all the business activities of this developing world. Many people would be there, and those who could not be present would be able to watch the proceedings, the entertainments and the dancing on the local T.V. network, which, although it was very poor as an entertainment medium as yet, was highly developed as a portrayer of the latest news to all members of the hard-working population.

The Starfleet officers had been offered the hospitality of the Presidential Palace, and after their busy day were conducted to luxurious adjoining rooms, to wash and rest before the evening performance began.

McCoy lost no time in knocking on the connecting door and coming in to Kirk's room. His curiosity was still simmering. He had not had a chance all day to assuage it. He came straight to the point.

"What was all that about when we arrived, Jim?" he demanded. Kirk laughed.

"I thought your curiosity was killing you," he said, and went on to explain things to McCoy, adding as he got to the end of the tale, how pleased he was at the way things were working out.

"Does Spock know what's going on?" McCoy asked.

"I don't know," said Kirk honestly. "I haven't had a chance to tell him in so many words, but you know how quick on the up-take he is. I've a feeling he's got a good idea, even if he doesn't know the exact details."

At that moment there was a knock on the other connecting door, and in response to Kirk's call, Spock entered. He had evidently taken care of the essentials first, and looked immaculate as usual, making the others feel a little untidy and dishevelled after the day's tour.

"Any orders, Captain?" he inquired formally.

"No," replied Kirk. He had already been in touch with the ship, checking that all was well there, and also passing on the President's suggestion that parties of the crew should in turn make visits to the planet, where the Melexians would be glad to offer their hospitality.

"About this morning, Spock..." began Captain Kirk diffidently.

"Yes, sir?" replied Spock stiffly, giving him no help at all, by failing to indicate how much he knew or suspected.

You can be jolly irritating sometimes, thought Kirk to himself. Then taking the bull by the horns, he told him the whole story, concentrating on putting just the facts of the current situation, and avoiding stressing what he felt was a personal insult to the Vulcan. But evidently Spock did not see it that way, for when the recital was finished, he merely said,

"Do you wish me to withdraw and return to the ship, sir?"

"No, I jolly well don't!" exploded Kirk. "I could have ordered that before if I'd thought it was a good idea. You're my First Officer, and I want you beside me, where you should be. I won't let prejudice win. Besides, you've done what I wanted you to do."

"I have?" said Spock, raising one eyebrow. "How, Captain?"

McCoy snorted his exasperation.

"Why, by appearing impervious to their attitude, and impressing them with your knowledge," he snapped. "Don't you always?"

"It isn't a conscious act, Doctor," replied Spock blandly.

"I wonder," said McCoy.

"Stop bickering, you two," ordered Kirk, "and let's enjoy the Melexian hospitality. They seem to be arranging quite a welcome for us."

If only he had known, the events of the next days were to give quite a different meaning to those words.

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Kirk woke slowly, and lay revelling in the unaccustomed luxury of a large double bed and a huge room. His quarters on the Enterprise were adequate, but the feeling of space here was a real pleasure, only surpassed by the knowledge that the light and air coming in through the wide-open window were real, and not produced artificially by some machine. He stretched lazily, tucking his hands behind his head, and thought about last night's party. It had been very good! The hospitality had been lavish and the company stimulating. And they had some pretty girls on Melex - that little red-head in the tight green dress, for instance. Pity there wouldn't be time to get to know her better.

He turned to more serious thoughts. His companions had done well too. Dr. McCoy had turned on the charm, as only he could, and his wit had delighted many. Spock had been great as well. Without pandering to the prejudice that he knew existed, he had managed, by his courtesy and impeccable manners, to disarm some of the unreasoning hostility that was there at the start of the evening. The event had been covered by the local T.V., and if the camera had concentrated more than it should on a dark head with unusually-shaped ears, the cameraman could hardly be blamed. The question of aliens was a very heated and topical one, and the chance to observe one, here on their own planet, was too good to be missed. For the most part, his viewers were equally interested.

But, in a small room on the outskirts of the city, one man scowled blackly! Zoltan was not pleased with the success this Vulcan was having. It did not suit his plans at all. This planet of Melex was going to be a source of great wealth when it was properly developed, and Zoltan intended that he, and he alone, should control that wealth. But his plans for the overthrow of the President and the Council were not sufficiently advanced as yet, and if they went on with their plans to bring in an alien work-force, Zoltan would be completely foiled.

So Zoltan had worked hard to raise the voice of protest. He had gathered to his support quite a large group of youngsters. Needless to say, he hadn't given them his real reason for opposing the entry of aliens. He had fed them with a lot of talk about keeping Melex only for Humans, about keeping their race pure and un sullied by alien elements. How easy they were to deceive and arouse - how easily led! He laughed to himself evilly, then returned to the problem in hand, as the screen showed the Vulcan in earnest conversation with Barton, head of the biggest mining company on the southern side of Tralos. Blast him! He was meeting all the most influential people. Zoltan cursed the ill luck that had brought the Enterprise here just at this precise moment, with an alien as senior officer.

Something must be done about it. But what? He schemed and plotted all evening, keeping his eyes glued to the set, and scowling darkly every time the cameraman returned his picture to focus on the gleam of a blue dress uniform, and a solemn saturnine face.

At last a chance remark by the President gave him an idea. It was just a simple announcement that the President would be taking his guests in the morning to watch a display by the children at the Tralos Senior College. Ah-ha, this could be his chance!

The Presidential party and his guests were assembled in the main hall next morning, ready to walk over to the College. Careswell was telling Kirk about the state of transport on Melex. Within the city, people walked everywhere. There was no public transport system, but distances were not great. There was as yet no factory that produced vehicles - other things had come first. The very few ready-built trucks that had come over with the first settlers were now priceless relics, owned by the bosses who worked at the far out mines. Attempts had been made to copy them, but making them individually caused them to be so costly that only those who had to have transport to far out workings could afford them. Many were owned jointly by groups of workers. There's an ideal opening for someone, thought Kirk. Start a car factory. I wonder what the fuel situation is like? Before he could inquire further, it was established that the whole party, about twenty in all, was now present, and so they set off.

The President led the way with Captain Kirk. Spock was close behind, talking to an industrialist he had met the night before, and McCoy was somewhere near the rear, chatting to the President's wife, who was quite taken with his charm. The walk was an informal affair - there wasn't a great deal of ceremony on Melex. A guard of honour accompanied the group, ranged in a rank on either side, but their function was mainly to prevent the on-lookers and those going to the same function from pressing too close upon the Presidential party. It would never do if they were to arrive late because they had got stuck in the crowd. So with the soldiers to help, the party managed to keep a steady pace in the centre of the throng, each talking amicably to those nearest him. There was a cheerful noisy hubbub.

Then suddenly all was changed. A sudden crack rang out - the noise of a shot! The walkers stopped short, and the crowd was stilled in surprise. In to the silence, a voice shouted loudly.

"Death to the alien!" Two more shots rang out. Kirk heard a stifled gasp from somewhere behind him, and swung round. He could hardly believe what he saw. A couple of yards behind him, Spock was down, sprawled in the dusty roadway! Instantly Kirk was kneeling beside him, gazing in alarm at the dark stain spreading from a hole in the blue shoulder. But more ominous was the bright green trickling from under the dark hair, and down beside the closed eyes.

McCoy pushed his way through the thunder-struck group with little courtesy, and crouched beside the Vulcan. He did not have any equipment with him, but his fingers were swift and certain. First he moved the damp dark hair from the temple and felt cautiously. Next, he tore the already-ruined shirt further, and examined the wound in the shoulder. Then, with the concern easing out of his face, he lifted a limp hand and checked the Vulcan's pulse. He smiled into Kirk's worried eyes.

"Easy, Jim," he said reassuringly. "It's not as bad as it looks, He's not dead, and not likely to be either." He pointed to the head wound, the sight of which had caused Kirk such apprehension. "That's no more than a bad crease, fortunately - though a fraction more..." He stopped short, no need to worry Jim with how near a thing it had been.

President Careswell and the rest of the party was gathered about them now, genuine concern on all their faces. That such a thing should have

happened to a guest, and to one they had all come to respect so, even on such short acquaintance. The President had sent some of the soldiers charging off to seek the gunman, but they were to be unsuccessful - Zoltan was long gone.

Having checked with McCoy that it was all right to move him, Careswell ordered his soldiers to carry the Vulcan back to the Palace. A message was sent to postpone the College Display, and the whole party retraced its steps.

Spock was carried up to his room, and the President sent his own doctors to join McCoy there. Kirk was summarily ejected, in spite of his protests, and spent an anxious hour pacing his room. He felt very guilty about the whole thing. Why hadn't he listened to Careswell and sent Spock back to the ship? Then this would never have happened. And he thought he had been so clever and diplomatic! - so subtle, and all he had succeeded in doing was endangering his friend's life.

McCoy opened the connecting door. Kirk rushed over to him.

"How is he?" he demanded.

"Come and see," said McCoy cheerfully. Kirk rushed past him into the room just as Careswell was admitted at the outer door. Together they went to gaze at the patient who was resting comfortably on several pillows in the big bed. Spock's shoulder was swathed in bandages, his arm was supported in a sling, and a white band encircled his head. But the pallor of shock was gone, and he seemed to be sleeping quite normally.

"He's fine," reported McCoy. "He'll have a painful shoulder for a day or two, and a considerable headache. But I'll soon cope with that when I get him back up to sickbay."

Kirk felt very relieved at McCoy's positive words, but the next ones from the President surprised him.

"Doctor," said Careswell slowly, "is it essential for Mr. Spock's recovery that you take him back to the Enterprise?"

McCoy in turn was surprised, but answered the question. "No, not really. He'd do equally well where he is. But why?"

"Dr. McCoy, Captain Kirk," said Careswell, drawing them to one side away from the bed. "This time I want to make a suggestion. I am deeply grieved by what has happened to Mr. Spock, as are all those who have met him, for we had come to like him, but we think we could turn the situation to advantage, and make use of it for some very successful propoganda."

"How?" asked Kirk a little cautiously. Spock's safety was his first concern now, and he didn't want to put him at risk again.

"We could use the T.V.," suggested Careswell. "We could tell what has happened, and how shocked and grieved we are. We could interview people who had met Mr. Spock and ask their feelings. We could talk to members of your crew about him. I think a lot of useful information could be spread."

Kirk considered carefully. After all this was really only an extension of his original aim. "Well," he said at last, "all right - if it is well-handled."

"I make one stipulation," put in McCoy. "No-one interviews Spock - certainly not for a day or two - and then only if he agrees."

Careswell looked a little crestfallen at this, but agreed. After all, even if the Vulcan were not to appear personally, at least he could visit him daily, and then make a personal report.

And that was how things went. McCoy hovered round Spock, but what kept him busiest was protecting the Vulcan from the over-anxious attentions of Careswell's doctors. Spock recovered rapidly, much to Kirk's relief, though McCoy insisted on keeping him in bed to rest for a couple of days. Knowing

how best to treat himself, he slept a great deal, and declined to watch the television which the President had insisted on having installed for him. Perhaps it was just as well that he did not watch, though Kirk and McCoy would have been interested to see his reaction to the programmes put out. The President and several of the Council made appearances, each expressing their admiration for Commander Spock, and deploring the attack upon him. The two Enterprise men found some of it rather fulsome and effusive. But they agreed in being very proud of the showing of the various crew members who were interviewed.

In spite of considerable anger among them about what had happened, there had been no incidents with the local people - no arguments or fights to spoil the atmosphere. When interviewed, most of them said about the same thing - that although they found Spock's alien appearance and ways strange, they had learned to accept him, and had now come to respect and admire him. Some said forcibly that although they didn't really understand him, they trusted him implicitly. Engineer Scott made a good impression by declaring that when it came to his precious engines, Mr. Spock's judgement was the only one he would admit to be as good as his own.

The one person who was not pleased with all this was Zoltan. His plans had gone entirely wrong. Instead of eliminating the Vulcan, he had given him even more publicity. Public opinion was being conditioned in a way which did not suit Zoltan at all. If a scheme to introduce aliens were mooted now, it would undoubtedly be well-received and supported. What could he do about it? He suspected that some of his young followers were wavering, as they waited for some decisive action from him - some further sign of the leadership that had swept them along with him.

Then unwittingly Careswell himself gave him the clue to further action. He was a constant visitor to Spock's bedside, much to McCoy's annoyance, and went on T.V. every evening to tell his people of the patient's progress. This evening he was passing on a bit of information that he had learned that afternoon. He had been telling Spock that he had once before met a Vulcan who had impressed him - Ambassador Sarek. Spock had volunteered no comment, but the irrepressible McCoy had had to say that Sarek was Spock's father. This news delighted the President, and he could hardly wait to pass it on. Zoltan listened with interest. So, apart from being a high-ranking Starfleet officer, and valued aboard the Enterprise, this annoying Vulcan was an Ambassador's son, was he? That could be very useful. He mused to himself as he paced restlessly up and down his room, his alert, evil mind rapidly formulating plans. Then as things began to crystallize, he left abruptly to gather together some of his followers and put them to work.

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Spock lay on the big bed, propped up against a pile of pillows. He rested easily, half-dozing, enjoying the quiet hour before supper. After the meal, Captain Kirk and Dr. McCoy usually joined him for a couple of hours, and the Captain would talk extensively about what they had been shown that day. It was all very interesting, but what he liked best was just their company. It was becoming rather irksome to be stuck here in bed, but McCoy had only allowed him up for short spells as yet, and he hadn't left his room at all.

A slight noise reached his sensitive hearing - it sounded like a door. He opened his eyes, but there was no-one there. There were three doors in the large room - the outer one, the connecting door to Captain Kirk's room, and a small locked door in a corner behind a curtain - he had no idea where that led. He turned to look in that direction, and was astonished to find that he had visitors - unexpected ones! A dark-visaged bearded man, followed by several young fellows, advanced on him. Zoltan snatched a cushion from a chair, and threw himself upon Spock. His intention was obvious, and Spock resisted the smothering cushion with all his strength. He had almost succeeded

in throwing the man off, when hands grabbed his uninjured arm and held it. He felt the sharp prick of a hypodermic needle, and then blackness rushed in on him.

Breathless with the exertion, Zoltan stood back. Then he issued swift orders. The young men swathed the silken bed-cover round the limp form on the bed, picked him up between them, bundled him out of the small door, and down a steep flight of stairs.

Zoltan knew all the back ways in the Presidential Palace. He had worked there for several years, before he was dismissed for his unreliability and insubordination. Under his guidance the party proceeded unchallenged and eventually emerged from a small door into a deserted back yard. An ancient canvas-topped truck waited there. Zoltan climbed in beside the driver. The young men heaved their burden unceremoniously into the back, and clambered in after it. The engine sprang quietly to life, and the truck stole out of the yard, on to the empty street. It left the city by the west gate, and set out across the desert tracks.

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Spock woke slowly, not knowing where he was. A cautious attempt to move proved unsuccessful. He soon discovered that he was lying on an iron frame bedstead, his ankles tied to the bottom rail, and his wrists to the bar behind his head. He would not have been in discomfort were it not for his injured shoulder. But the unnatural position pulled at the wound, and the anguish was considerable. He set his mind to control the pain, and his expression gave no indication of it. He didn't intend giving any satisfaction to his captors, who were seated round a table a few yards away, talking noisily together. He turned his head slightly to study them. Apart from the one older, bearded man, the rest, male and female too, were youngsters. The older man was holding forth impassionedly, and the young people seemed to be fired with his enthusiasm, and were hanging on every word.

As if suddenly aware of his gaze, a girl swung round towards Spock. Seeing that he was now awake, she got up and came over to look at him. He met her curious gaze steadily, his dark eyes betraying no hint of his discomfort. But he could do nothing about the beads of perspiration that were making his dark hair cling damply to his forehead. She looked a little more carefully, a concerned frown on her pretty face.

"Zoltan," she called. "He's awake, but I think something's wrong." The dark-bearded man rose and came over, followed by most of the youngsters.

"Zoltan," she repeated, "I think he's in pain."

"Don't fuss, Sheena," replied Zoltan callously. "He's a Vulcan, and Vulcans don't feel pain." He turned away, and returned to his seat at the table. The others went with him, except the girl. She looked anxiously at Spock.

"Is that true?" she asked. "You don't feel pain?"

"Not exactly," replied Spock. "We can control pain by mental effort."

"Oh," said Sheena, and thought about it for a bit. She was very puzzled and perturbed. Zoltan had told them frequently that aliens were stupid creatures, vicious and mindless, but this one was not! Apart from the odd ears and eyebrows, he was not so different in appearance from a Human, and he obviously had intelligence. Zoltan had lied to them, and influenced them by his lies, too. It worried her, as did the obvious untruth that aliens didn't feel pain.

"There is something wrong, isn't there?" she persisted.

Spock decided to admit it - perhaps he could win some assistance from this girl.

"It's my shoulder," he said. "My position irks it."

Concern showed in the pretty face before him. Her hand came out to move the neck of the blue hospital tunic he was wearing, and she eyed the bandages this revealed.

"I'll see if I can do anything," she said. She went back to the table, and tried to speak to Zoltan. But he would not listen. He ranted and raved at her, telling her to sit down and be quiet. Frightened by his manner, she sank down on the bench by the table, shooting a regretful apologetic look at Spock's way.

Spock closed his eyes, eased his position as much as he could, and put up a strong mental block to shut off the discomfort. He lay quietly, listening to Zoltan's impassioned address. The more he heard, the more his first impression of the man was confirmed. Zoltan was a very dangerous man - a megalomaniac, who would stop at nothing to achieve his ends. His gift of language had evidently influenced these young people. How long would it take them to see through him? To realise that he was just using them?

He heard Zoltan outlining his plans, telling of the demands he was going to make upon President Careswell and the Council in payment for Spock's safe return. He also spoke grandiosely of the ransom he was going to seek from the Federation, and from the Vulcan Ambassador. Spock raised an eyebrow at this, as he imagined the reaction this would provoke.

Then Zoltan stood up, quite a dramatic figure.

"I am going back to Tralos," he declared, "to make my demands known. I shall return later." He strode out of the room, and after a few moments, they heard the roar of the truck engine dying away in the distance.

Sheena came over to look at Spock again. She turned to a tall young man who had followed her.

"Peter," she said agitatedly, "it's not fair to keep him in pain - it's inhuman."

"What can you do about it though?" answered the boy. "If you untie him, and he gets away, Zoltan will... "

"I won't let him escape," protested Sheena, and thought for a moment. Then she came back to the bedside. "I can't release you altogether, Mr. Spock," she said, "but if that arm were down by your side it would be easier, wouldn't it?" Her slim fingers fumbled with the knots and released his left wrist. She brought the arm down and secured it there with a loop of the rope around his waist. The return of circulation brought agony, but he resisted it without a sound, and gradually the pain eased. It was certainly a more comfortable position, though it had done nothing to facilitate his escape, as he had hoped it might.

Peter came over with a cup of water.

"Are you thirsty?" he asked. Spock nodded, and the boy carefully lifted his head, tipping the cup to his lips. He drank gratefully, and an encouraging thought went through his mind. At least there was a touch of compassion in these young people - they weren't as hard and fanatical as Zoltan. He might yet enlist their help. He must choose his time and his words carefully.

Since he could do nothing else, Spock lay still and conserved his strength. His thoughts turned to his companions in Tralos. His disappearance must have surprised them, and no doubt they were doing all they could, with President Careswell's help, to find him. On some planets it would have been easy - the Enterprise's sensors could have been set to seek him out, and would have worked systematically till they had located him, but Melex was different. It was so very heavily endowed with mineral and chemical deposits, that the sensors would be over-loaded with readings, and would need a lot of adaptation to cut out the interference. Unfortunately, the one best-equipped to do that work was himself. Mr. Scott would no doubt attempt the task, but he was an

engineer, not a scientist, and would need to research information that he, Spock, carried in his head. So the job would take time.

The youngsters sat round the table, talking and playing cards. There were ten of them, four girls and six boys, the oldest of whom could only be in his early twenties. Just the kind to be fired with Zoltan's feigned patriotic zeal, and his expressions of high-flying ideals. Just the age to believe in them fervently, without realising that Zoltan himself did not, and was just pretending.

It was some hours before Zoltan returned. They heard the sound of the truck's arrival, and a moment later he came striding into the room. He looked very elated. He had delivered his ultimatum to the President and the Council, and had revelled in the sense of power this had given him. So far he had remained anonymous, but when he contacted them again and they were forced to accede to his demands, he would reveal himself, and glory in the powerful position he would then hold.

He strode over to look at his valuable prisoner, a sadistic gleam in his eye. When he saw the Vulcan's altered position, he was furious.

"Who did this?" he yelled angrily.

Sheena tried to stand up to him, more boldly than she felt. "I did it," she admitted. "I saw no reason to keep him in pain. When we give him back, they'll ask him how he was treated and..."

"Give him back?" Zoltan let out a roar of hard laughter. "Sheena, what a baby you are! I've no intention of giving him back. I'll keep him alive till the Council agree to my demands, in case they insist on seeing him, but once I have what I want, I shall very much enjoy putting an end to him!" He looked down at his victim maliciously, and added, "I must think of some personally satisfying method."

The faces in the room were a study. Zoltan's, filled with cruelty - the youngsters, with varying expressions of shock, dismay and fear - and the Vulcan's - completely impassive. He alone was not surprised - he had suspected all along that Zoltan would behave in this way."

Zoltan looked at Spock again, and was chagrined to find no trace of fear in the steady dark eyes - no sign of fright at his threats. It annoyed him intensely, for it undermined his power over the youngsters. Without warning, he lashed out a vicious back-handed blow that caught the Vulcan hard across the face. Although with his quick reactions Spock had anticipated it, he was unable to move to ride it to any great extent. Half-dazed, he could taste the saltiness in his mouth, and feel the slow trickle of blood from a cut lip. But no sound or reaction escaped him.

Frustrated by this lack of response, Zoltan turned away, calling the others to him, and went to sit at the table. One of the lads produced a small wireless, and after some twiddling of the knobs, picked up a transmission. It was part-way through a news report, and Zoltan swelled with pride as he heard the man say that the Council was holding an emergency meeting to consider the demands of the one who was holding the Enterprise's First Officer. The speaking was followed by music, and they switched off.

The girls meantime had been preparing a meal, which was then consumed amid much noisy talking, mainly from Zoltan. Even Sheena, who was the bravest of the girls, did not dare suggest that the prisoner should be fed, although several times she cast an anxious eye in his direction.

Eventually Zoltan stood up. "I am going now," he said, "to accept the Council's capitulation to my demands." And with these grandiose words, he swept out.

Half-dozing, Spock was awakened by a cold wet touch at the corner of his mouth. He opened his eyes to find Sheena trying to bathe away the trickle of

blood that had dried there.

"Your blood is green?" she said wonderingly.

"Yes," agreed Spock, "but just like you, I bleed when I am hurt." He had added these words deliberately to press home an advantage that he felt he had gained with this sensitive girl.

"Sheena," called the boy named Peter. "Come back over here, please. We want a conference."

The young people were gathered round the table, looking very serious. Sheena joined them, and an earnest conversation began.

They kept their voices low, and they were far enough away that it was only a low murmur, but with his sensitive hearing, Spock heard more than they knew. Needless to say, they were discussing Zoltan and his plans, and whether they were willing to go along with them. Most of the opinions were of dissent, which, if Spock were given to feelings such as hope, would have cheered him.

At last a decision seemed to have been reached. Peter, who by common consent seemed to be the leader and spokesman, got up from his place, and trailed by the others, came over to where Spock lay.

"Mr. Spock," he began. "We have decided that we can no longer go along with Zoltan. We suspect he is verging on the insane, and we are afraid of him." The others nodded in agreement, supporting his words. He went on. "If we release you, and take you back to Tralos, please will you put in a good word for us?"

"I can say that I feel you were badly misled," said Spock honestly, "and that you did not ill-treat me."

The boy nodded his thanks. As his hands began to untie the rope holding Spock's injured arm, others were busy with those at his other wrist and his ankles.

When he was free, he sat up slowly, flexing his cramped right arm to restore the circulation. He swung himself off the bed, carefully fighting the dizziness caused by his prolonged enforced horizontal position. He moved over to the table and sat down on one of the benches. The others also took their places. Sheena came to Spock's shoulder.

"I'll get you something to eat and drink," she said, and produced bread and cheese and milk, which Spock consumed gratefully. He did not say much during the meal, but listened intently as the others talked, and quietly assessed the individual characters. Apart from Sheena, the other girls were rather quiet, each looking to their respective boyfriend for a lead. The boys obviously looked to Peter as the decision-maker, so it was to him that Spock directed his question.

"What are your plans now?" he asked.

"We will have to wait till Zoltan gets back," said Peter. "Then we shall overpower him, take the truck, and drive back to Tralos."

Spock nodded - it seemed a sensible plan. He had learned that they were at a tormalite mine, owned by Zoltan, that was a good way out into the desert. That was why Zoltan was away so long when he went to the city. As they waited for his return, the Vulcan studied the card games that the young people played to pass the time. His quick mind soon assimilated the rules and moves in the different games. Some he found futile and illogical, dependent on chance alone, others appeared to require some skill and judgement, and seemed more worth while.

But as time wore on, interest in the games began to flag, there were repeated and more frequent glances at chronometers, and everyone's ears were strained to pick up the first sound of the engine of the returning truck -

but it did not come!

One of the boys produced the little radio that they had been listening to earlier. At first there was only music on it, then there was an interruption. An announcer's voice said,

"Here is a newsflash! Tralos police announce that they have detained a man suspected of the assassination attempt on the Federation Officer, Commander Spock. He may also be involved in the subsequent kidnapping of this officer, but he refuses to disclose any information, or assist the police in any way." The announcement ceased, the music returned, and the youngsters looked at each other with varying expressions, thinking about the implications of this news.

"If Zoltan isn't coming back," said one girl, in a frightened voice, "we are stuck out here."

"And there's no food left," added Sheena. "Zoltan was going to bring back further supplies when he came."

"Surely he'll tell the police where to find us," said the youngest girl, beginning to look a little scared.

"I doubt it," said Peter, with a wisdom beyond his years. "I think he'd abandon us without a qualm, rather than give in to police questioning."

Spock was inclined to agree with him. The fate of these youngsters and himself would count for nothing with Zoltan, who would rather die, and glory in being a martyr, than concede defeat. Such was the man's obsession with personal power, that he would throw away eleven lives without a second thought.

"Is there no means of communication?" asked Spock.

"No," replied Peter. "Zoltan wanted to keep this place secret, and so he deliberately had nothing installed, in case it betrayed his presence."

"What about the wireless?" queried Spock, his quick mind exploring all possibilities.

"No good," said the boy who owned it. "It's only a simple receiver."

"May I look?" asked Spock. The boy handed it to him, and showed him how to take off the back. Spock surveyed the circuits within, but the boy was right - there was nothing there that he could adapt with enough power to reach any distance. He returned it regretfully to the lad, and thought again.

"It looks as if we shall have to walk back," he said at last.

"It's a long way," said Peter. "It will take us several days, and it's all rocky ground and desert - and the heat will be great during the day."

"Can't we wait, and hope that they'll find us?" suggested one of the girls, daunted by the thought of the formidable journey.

"If we do that," protested Sheena, "and rescue doesn't happen, we will all be too weak with hunger to attempt it."

"Couldn't the strongest of us go?" suggested Peter, "And send help back for the others?"

"That wouldn't work either," said Sheena doubtfully, "for if they failed, those left behind would not know, and by the time they realised it, they'd be too feeble to set out themselves. I'd rather make the attempt together with the rest than sit here waiting to starve."

"Surely," said Spock, his reasonable tone helping to subdue the rising panic, "if we travelled at a steady reasonable pace, and rested up during the fiercest heat of the day, it should be possible."

"I've got a compass," volunteered one boy, "and we should be able to follow the tracks of the truck part of the way."

So it was decided that the attempt should be made, and Peter and Sheena

began to organise it. There was no food left - the last scraps had been consumed during the evening before they had realised that Zoltan wasn't coming back. But there was water, from a natural well. So they set to, to fill every portable container. Rope handles made plastic boxes and tins into useful carriers, and soon there was some sort of receptacle ready for each member of the party to carry. They would use the water from the more cumbersome vessels first, and then abandon them when they were emptied.

Then, as Spock moved from his place at the table to look more closely at a hand-drawn map pinned to the wall, Sheena suddenly noticed the special problem which he had been turning over in his mind for a while.

"Mr. Spock," she cried, "You've got no shoes!"

It was true, of course. When Spock had been snatched from his room at the Presidential Palace, he had, at McCoy's insistence, been resting. He was fully dressed, in the casual hospital blue trousers and tunic, for he had been up during the day, but had slipped off his boots when he lay down on the bed. His kidnappers had either not noticed, or more probably had disregarded the fact.

"It's rough rocky ground," continued Sheena. "You can't possibly walk it in just those," she added, gazing at the thin cotton socks he was wearing.

"No," agreed Spock. "I was just going to look for something to utilize as protection." The others joined in the search, and eventually came up with a piece of waterproof canvas, evidently used as packing for some supplies. Borrowing a knife, Spock carefully cut the stuff into long strips. Two of these he bound neatly round his feet and ankles in figure-of-eight fashion. The other strips he rolled up tightly and tucked into his belt as spares.

By the time all the preparations were made, it was growing light outside, and it was decided to make a start, to try and cover a good distance before the heat of the day. So the party set off, each carrying some sort of water container filled at the well. To start with, the direction to take was obvious. The rutted tracks left by the truck led straight towards the only pass through a low ridge of dark craggy hills. It was rather a silent party, each member busy with his or her own thoughts of the daunting journey ahead. Peter, with his natural qualities of leadership, led the way, with Spock and Sheena close behind him. Spock was glad to see that he instinctively set a regular steady pace, which, while ensuring reasonable progress, would not too quickly exhaust the weaker members of the party. Even so, it took them over four hours to reach the pass through the hills. In the dry heat of the desert landscape, distances were deceptive. By this time all were tiring, especially the girls, and as the heat of the day was increasing, they searched for a suitable place to rest. They found a deep overhang which would provide shelter for them all, and so angled that its shade would increase as the sun moved round overhead.

Gratefully, they set down their water-containers, and sank down on the sand to rest. Spock found a space where he could sit with his shoulders against a smooth rock wall. He leaned back wearily, glad of its support. Although he would not have admitted it asked, he was finding the journey more tiring than he had anticipated, probably because of his recent injuries. He checked the bindings round his feet. They were already showing signs of wear. At this rate, even with the spares, they would not last till they reached Tralos. He unwound them and replaced them again, altering the position of the worn areas.

When she had recovered a little, Sheena produced a supply of paper cups and carefully doled out a small ration of water to each of the travellers. Spock took his and sipped it slowly. Under normal circumstances Vulcans could go without food and water for a considerable time without too much discomfort, but he saw no reason why he should decline his share and risk worsening his condition. It was not as if they were short of water - they had carried

sufficient with them. If rationed sensibly, as Sheena seemed to be doing, it should last them satisfactorily, all the way.

As he drank, he eyed the youngsters around him. A little rest was quickly restoring them, but the three youngest girls, and two of the boys, had found it hard going. And they had only done a small part of the journey as yet. He was beginning to have serious doubts about their stamina.

After about three hours, Peter roused them briskly, and reassembled the party to go on again. As they left the comfortable shade of the rocks, the heat struck at them, but gradually as they walked it cooled a little, and was more bearable. Peter had the map, and another lad the compass. They consulted together about the route. As they cleared the range of hills the ground became flatter and sandier. The wind had obliterated the tracks made by the truck. Spock was content to leave the planning to the youngsters. With his accurate sense of direction, he had already assessed from the map and the position of the sun the route they must follow, and as long as the youngsters did not deviate from it, he would not interfere.

With only a short stop for a further ration of water, they continued their trek, plodding steadily onwards as the sun went down, and the double moons of Melex rose to light their way.

The cool of the evening was followed by the chill of the night, and Spock, among others, found this more uncomfortable than the heat. They quickened their pace, and made good progress, but hunger and lack of sleep were beginning to take their toll. The leaders kept having to stop and wait for the tail-enders to catch up.

The morning sun rose clear and bright. Before them was another low range of hills.

"When we reach those," declared Peter, "we'll find some shade and stop to sleep for a while." This cheered the party, and they pressed on with more heart. In just over an hour they reached the craggy rocks, and although the sun was not yet high, they searched for a place to rest. This was more important than progress at this stage. At last they found a good overhang which gave a patch of cool dark shade with enough room for them all to lie full length. Soon most were relaxed and falling asleep, tired by the continuous walking. They were normal healthy youngsters, but the unaccustomed sustained exercise was proving trying.

Although he did not have the same need to sleep, Spock decided that it would be practical to do so, and strengthening too. Easing himself into a comfortable position, in spite of the hardness of the ground, he relaxed completely, 'switching himself off', as only he knew how.

He woke refreshed some hours later to movement around him. The refuge had not been so well-chosen this time, for the progress of the sun was causing the area of shade to shrink now, and one by one the sleepers had had to rouse themselves and move in closer. Now the only way for them all to be comfortable was for the whole party to retreat and sit with their backs to the rocky wall. The sun was at its height, so they could not move on for a little while. Sheena passed round the water ration again, and the group sat talking and watching the heat shimmer as they waited.

Sheena, who was sitting beside Spock, suddenly asked,

"Mr. Spock, have you met a lot of aliens?"

"Indeed I have," he replied.

"Would you tell us about them, please?" she requested eagerly.

So Spock began to describe the various peoples he had encountered in his wide travels. Gradually the other voices subsided, as the youngsters began to listen. Soon they were rapt and enthralled. Spock described for them some of the stranger creatures, such as the rock creature of Excalbia,

the Gorn and the similarly reptilian Krataks, the salt creature that could take Human form, the hugely maternal Horta, and the harmless but prolific tribbles. He told them of the nebulous formless entities like the Companion, the lights of Zetar, the gaseous creatures that thrived on hate and fear. And then he went on to describe those that they would be more likely to encounter one day - the various humanoid species. He told them of the black and white Cherons; of the ones of unusual appearance like Tellarites, Andorians, Tholians; of those with strange powers like Organians, Melkotians, Kelvans and Vians. He described the dangerous ones like the warlike Romulans and Klingons. And as they hung on his every word, he added finally,

"And, of course, Humans."

"We're not aliens," protested Sheena, laughingly.

"You are to me," said Spock, unsmiling as usual. "I am a Vulcan."

There was a silence as the youngsters thoughtfully assimilated this.

"I never thought of it like that," admitted one of the girls, voicing the thoughts of most of them.

"Well, then, Mr. Spock," said one of the lads. "Tell us about Humans."

Honesty, complete honesty, to the exclusion of tact and diplomacy, was one of the Vulcan's failings.

"As a race, I find them unremarkable," he said. "Although differing racial sections give some variations in colour, they are not as striking in appearance as many others I have seen. Physically, they are inferior to most, including Vulcans. Mentally they are average, better than some, vastly lesser than others who have great powers of intelligence."

The youngsters exchanged looks, rather taken aback, as he continued. "I greatly deplore their aggressiveness and love of violence. They frequently behave irrationally - acting on impulse rather than thought. Their better qualities, though, are adaptability and persistence and an insatiable desire to learn."

"It sounds," said Peter, "as if you don't think much of us at all."

"I think humanity has a long way to go," said Spock solemnly. "My judgement is somewhat impaired by the fact that my mother was an Earthwoman, and therefore I have inherited some Human traits - but I have done my utmost to eradicate these."

"Don't you like any of us at all?" cried Sheena. "You work with Humans, don't you?"

"Yes indeed," replied Spock, "and I am learning more about them all the time." He was silent for a moment, thinking about the crew of the Enterprise, and the place he had found there - among Humans.

"I must admit," he said slowly, "that I have found some Humans to have very special qualities, and these few have impressed me, and gained my admiration and respect."

There was silence for quite a while after that as each one toyed with their own thoughts. The young people were trying to come to terms with the hard fact that here was someone who had met many other races, and considered theirs as inferior - a difficult thing for lively young Humans to take.

Spock's thoughts were different. He had done a lot of talking about things in his memory, and suddenly the oddest feeling had swept over him - a wish, no, almost a longing, to be back aboard the Enterprise, and setting forth with the familiar crew about him, to new experiences. Just at the moment, the ship seemed a very long way away.

Captain Kirk and Dr. McCoy were getting desperately worried. Spock had been missing for nearly five days now. When McCoy had entered his patient's room and found him absent, he had not been unduly concerned. He knew that Spock was becoming irked by the inactivity. It was also possible, he suspected, that he could be suffering from delayed signs of concussion, and had just wandered off. But a search of the Palace had failed to bring any trace of him. Neither had a wider search of the whole town, carried out diligently by the President's men.

Then had come the ultimatum from Zoltan, and their fears for his safety had increased. Now Zoltan himself was in Melexian hands, but no degree of threats or persuasions could make him reveal the Vulcan's whereabouts. He was refusing to speak, and glorying in the attention he was getting. Kirk would have liked five minutes alone with him - but when he saw him, he realised that it would do no good; the man was insane with his desire for power.

Careswell was sparing no effort to find the missing Vulcan, both on his own account and for reasons of prestige. He and his men were instituting searches all over the countryside, visiting all the outlying mines and workings in turn. Up in the Enterprise, the sensors were being adapted to make a detailed scan, but the work was taking time, and as yet there were no results.

Kirk and McCoy were with President Careswell in one of the command posts, set in the outer wall of the city. Some of his men were indicating the areas they had searched, and marking them off on a large map. Every metre would be meticulously covered - there must be some news soon!

Then a lookout in the tower above shouted to his officer.

"Sir, I can see something - out in the desert!"

The officer shot to the window with his binoculars.

"What is it?" asked Kirk eagerly.

"I'm not sure," replied the man. "So let's find out." And he led the way to the steps down to the door. They emerged into the heat sweeping in from the open desert, and shielded their eyes against the glare of the fierce light. In the distance the heat shimmered and wavered the dark rocky hills, and the dusty desert stretched out towards the town.

Coming towards them they could see a group of people. They trudged wearily, fatigue in every line. Some clung for support to their comrades, and most staggered uneasily as they came. In the lead limped a tall figure in dusty blue, supporting the limp form of a girl over his shoulder. The troops broke into a run, closely followed by Kirk and McCoy, and the President. By the time they reached the group, a soldier had relieved the Vulcan of his burden and was laying her gently on the ground. Now that help was at hand, many of the others had sunk wearily to the sand, too tired to take the final few steps to safety.

Kirk charged forward, filled with relief.

"Spock! Spock!" he yelled excitedly.

The figure turned weary eyes towards him. For a moment a glow of pleasure at his welcome lit the dark depths, then they glazed suddenly, as the Vulcan's knees began to buckle. Kirk moved the last few steps swiftly, and closed his arms round the sagging form, lowering him gently to the ground, and pillowing the dark head against his shoulder. McCoy came to kneel beside them, checking with the medical scanner in his hand.

"He's O.K., Jim," he said reassuringly. "Just exhausted - nothing a good night's rest won't help."

Spock stirred then, opening tired eyes, and realising where he was, tried to get up. Kirk tightened his arm around the dusty shoulders and restrained him.

"Lie still, Spock," he ordered.

The President came fussing over to them. "Commander Spock," he exclaimed. "Are you all right?"

"President Careswell," said Spock, "please do not be too hard on these young people - they have suffered enough. They realise they have been used and misled - and they did not illtreat me."

"Well," said Careswell, "since you speak in their defence, I will listen to them. How they are treated will depend on the attitude they show now."

Spock nodded, satisfied. The President was a fair man, and would keep his word. The youngsters would be given a chance to explain, and they could be quite articulate.

He tried again to free himself from Kirk's support, but Kirk, having seen a group of soldiers approaching with stretchers, would not let go.

"Relax, Spock," he insisted, "and let us look after you now."

Some hours later, Kirk knocked on the communicating door to Spock's room and went in. McCoy was just turning out the bedside lamp, but Kirk caught a glimpse of his friend, relaxed and comfortable in the big bed, and fast asleep.

McCoy came over and reported to him in a low voice. "He's fine, Jim," he said. "The crease on his head is almost healed, the wound in his shoulder is also progressing very well. By the morning, he'll be none the worse for his abduction, except that his feet are sore and blistered from walking so far on that rocky surface without boots. I'll keep him in bed for a couple of days, for they'll heal better if he keeps off them. It'll be a good excuse to make him rest," he added with a wry smile.

Kirk was reassured, and felt happier than he had for some days. He had been blaming himself bitterly for all that had happened, and thinking that it was his attempt to organize things that had brought Spock to harm. But not things looked a lot brighter. He had just spent some time with President Careswell listening to his plans. He wasn't too happy with them - he felt a strong desire to be away from this place and back on the Enterprise as soon as possible - but since Spock had not really come to any further harm, he agreed to co-operate.

Next morning when he entered the room, a servant was just removing the breakfast tray. Spock was sitting up in the big bed against a pile of pillows, looking quite himself again. McCoy joined them just as Kirk was explaining things.

"The postponed display has been rearranged for the day after tomorrow," he said. "And I'm afraid you're going to have to put up with being the guest of honour, Spock, but if you can bear with that, we'll be able to leave straight after. It won't be too much of an ordeal, will it?"

"If you think it diplomatic, I shall endeavour to cope," agreed Spock, but his expression - or rather, lack of it - suggested that the idea did not really appeal. "But I confess that I shall be gratified to return to the Enterprise soon."

"So shall I," responded Kirk and McCoy almost in chorus.

There was a knock on the door. McCoy went to open it and returned, followed by a man bearing a basket filled with fruit, which he placed on a bedside table. Kirk and Spock gazed at it in surprise - with the difficult growing conditions on Melex, this was an expensive and luxury-class gift. McCoy held the card that had accompanied it, and read the words aloud, in an almost awed voice. "With gratitude, to the first alien we ever met. We hope he will not be the last, but we shall always remember the Vulcan who taught us so much."

He handed it to Spock, who almost smiled as he read the ten signatures upon it - with Sheena's and Peter's at the top of the list. It would be a souvenir of a strange adventure - and of the beginning of a new era for Melex and its people.

ORDEAL by Valerie Piacentini

Beyond any doubt, Kirk thought, this room had been expressly designed to remove any lingering feelings of hope. The walls had been painted a drab unrelieved green, the monotonous surfaces broken only by a narrow window which looked out onto the blank wall of the building opposite, and by two heavy doors. Through one of these he had entered - how long ago was it? - with his two friends; through the other he would soon pass - alone. It seemed that the fear and hopelessness of the uncounted numbers who had preceded him through that door lingered heavily in the air, mingling with a distinct, indefinable aroma that was almost, but not quite, familiar.

Across the room, McCoy leaned against the window, gazing out at the grey leaden sky; he turned now, feeling Kirk's gaze on him, his blue eyes filled with pain and regret. Somehow Kirk found the courage to smile, to silently tell his friend that of course he understood; in the medical kit were drugs that would relax him, place a barrier between his conscious mind and the Ordeal that was to come, but even on this primitive world the presiding Technician might detect their presence, and all would be lost. The Enterprise would not return for another forty eight hours, and despite all his efforts, the Ordeal could be postponed no longer.

The doctor's face grew hazy as the pain mounted higher; he felt sick, dizzy - he fought for control, knowing that he must not fail now. One final effort, one last test of endurance - if only he could hold on!

A strong, gentle hand caught his, slim fingers touched his face lightly, and the pain receded a little; he looked up into dark, anxious eyes that studied him concernedly. Kirk sighed with relief and relaxed for a moment against the strong shoulder, enjoying the temporary respite, but all too soon he pulled away. This mission had been hard on all of them - his own mysterious fever, McCoy's broken wrist - even Spock had not adapted too well to this world. If only the Enterprise had not had to leave them! Still, too late for regrets now, it was almost over. The illness of the other two had been a great strain on the Vulcan, and for this reason Kirk had forbidden Spock to link with him, but as usual he had set his concern for his Captain above his own welfare, giving his last reserves of strength to help Kirk endure what was to come. The selflessness of that giving increased Kirk's determination - he would survive this Ordeal, for if he broke, if he betrayed himself, both these valued friends would suffer, Spock most of all.

The sinister door opened at last with a suddenness that took them all by surprise; a white-robed Technician stood there, silently motioning Kirk to follow. He rose obediently, hesitated, glanced at McCoy; the blue eyes tried to smile encouragement, but were dimmed by an apprehension he could not conceal. Kirk found that his hands were shaking, and he clasped them together, trying to conceal the evidence of his fear; a warm, strong hand closed over his fingers for an instant, stilling the trembling, and with one last look into the compassionate eyes Kirk turned and followed the Technician. As he crossed the threshold he glanced back in time to see Spock rise to greet McCoy, who had crossed to him, instinctively seeking to share his support at this moment. He need not fear for them, he thought, for they would comfort each other as they waited; only he must somehow find the courage to go on alone, to pass through the Ordeal without betraying himself.

* * *

A short stretch of corridor - too short, he could have wished it longer - then the white-robed figure beckoning him through yet another door, thick, heavy, close-fitting; he shuddered, knowing the reason for its weight - screams would be muffled by the heavy wood, not reaching the room where the others waited. But unhearing, they would still know, would live every second of torment, each stab of pain with him.

The chair waited; unresisting, he allowed himself to be guided into its metal and leather embrace. There was no point in fighting now, and delay would only prolong the agony. Out of the corner of his eye he glimpsed the flash of metal, and resolved not to look. Useless; despite himself his head turned and he surveyed with dreadful anticipation the shining instruments laid out in readiness; needles, wickedly pointed; razor-sharp blades; probes to seek relentlessly for jagged nerves. Shuddering, he looked away, only to see the final, barbaric refinement of cruelty - over the chair a mirror had been hung, reflecting now his own apprehensive eyes; all too soon it would show him in graphic detail exactly what was being done to him. In this place of shining metal and glass and leather, Human flesh and blood seemed suddenly very fragile. A hand touched his shoulder, pushing him back so that he lay half-reclining; a head moved into sight, mercifully blocking his view of the mirror; cold grey eyes looked impersonally into his.

"Now," said the Technician, calmly, "it begins."

* * *

The needles first, sinking deep into cringing flesh, not in themselves intolerable, but holding the promise of pain and terror to come; then other, nameless instruments, probing, twisting, tearing until only the most supreme effort of will held him still and silent. Beneath his hands the leather of the chair was worn smooth and shining by the convulsive grip of previous victims; others had survived this, so could he - but nothing had prepared him for the indignity, the humiliation of the pain those skilful hands inflicted.

He thought that his suffering only confirmed the conclusion that the survey team had reached - this planet was ripe for first contact. Advanced though its people were in many ways, this hideous survival from a more primitive age argued forcefully that the teaching of the Federation was needed to banish the Ordeal from the lives of its citizens.

There was a moment's respite as the Technician paused to confer with the Attendant who assisted him; all too soon the brief consultation was over, and his tormentor resumed the merciless probing, shredding nerves already strained almost beyond endurance; with humiliation he felt tears sting his eyes, tasted blood in his mouth, and dug his nails savagely into the palms of his hands - anything to keep himself from breaking down, from betraying himself and his friends.

His friends! Think of them, he told himself firmly; think of Bones and Spock, waiting there in an agony of apprehension. They depend on you, they trust you - you can't let them down now! They understood and shared his dread, and their own suffering would be no less than his as their imaginations lived every second of exquisite torment with him. How much longer would this Ordeal last? Surely it must be almost over?

The Technician leaned closer; in his hands... something... reflected the bright glare of the overhead lights; the waves of sick pain crashed to an intolerable level, tearing him apart... it was no use, he could hold on no longer... "I'm... sorry..." he managed to whisper; then consciousness finally, mercifully, fled.

* * *

In the drab, green room McCoy paced restlessly, fighting the urge to barge through that ominous door, to find Jim, to... to what? Snatch him away, somehow end the pain? He could try that, and in the attempt betray their identities and their mission. The Technician had him now, and he must wait; even if he got Jim away, his broken wrist would render him powerless to help his friend; and if the Technician got one look at his drugs and instruments, he would surely become suspicious, might even recognise them for what they

were, aliens in this place. But to let Jim suffer God alone knew what barbaric indignities... The quiet voice broke in on his thoughts.

"Doctor, this restlessness serves no useful purpose. You would do better to remain calm - Jim will need you when... when this is over. Try to be patient."

"Patient! Like you, I suppose!" McCoy snorted. "Don't you understand... don't you know what they're doing to Jim in there?" He broke off abruptly as a dreadful suspicion occurred to him; Spock's voice had held a familiar note.

"You're linked!" he said accusingly.

"Yes, Doctor." Spock's voice was the merest thread of sound.

"But Jim expressly forbade..."

"I had to disobey; I could no longer bear... his suffering. He does not know - he will believe he fainted - but I felt... his pain, his fear. He will survive this without speaking - that is all that matters; do not... shame him... by telling him of the link; he was... so tired, so ill..."

"So are you, Spock." McCoy touched the Vulcan's shoulder; the velvet-dark eyes reflected all too clearly the pain of the Ordeal, and he could feel the very slight trembling in Spock's body that betrayed the strain he was feeling.

"I did not believe," the deep voice went on, "that such... barbaric practices still existed."

"We can't blame these people, Spock," McCoy commented sadly. "It's their way, they don't know any better... perhaps one day..." He straightened, resumed his aimless pacing. "Oh God, how much longer!" he burst out.

Silence. He looked across at Spock, saw the Vulcan suddenly slump in his chair, his hands covering his face.

"Spock!" McCoy bent over the motionless figure. "What's wrong?"

Slowly the tense hands dropped; the dark eyes gazed into his, alight with unconcealed relief.

"It... is over," Spock said simply.

* * *

The opening door brought both men to their feet, tense, expectant. The Technician entered first, followed by an Attendant bearing Kirk's unconscious body in his arms. As they started forward the Technician said,

"Your friend is in shock; he will recover shortly."

He motioned to the Attendant, who laid Kirk on a couch; a moment later the three men were alone.

* * *

Kirk awoke slowly; his first thought was instant recognition of the strong arms that held him comfortingly, his second, that the searing agony had subsided to a dull ache that was fading even now. He opened heavy eyes to see the two dear, familiar faces gazing down anxiously.

"Spock! Bones! What happened?" he asked weakly.

"You fainted, Jim," McCoy's voice answered. "Don't worry, it's over." He shot the contents of a hypo into Kirk's arm. "Just something to help you get on your feet again - we've got to get back to the pick-up point, and we have some rough going ahead. Jim, I'm sorry I couldn't give you anything to help you through this, but you know the risk; if you'd relaxed under the drug you might have let something slip..."

"It's all right, Bones - I understand." Kirk grinned with affection -- McCoy had been so worried. And Spock? Kirk knew him well enough to sense his concern. He met the dark eyes reassuringly.

"I feel fine now," he said. "But Spock - I didn't betray us, did I?" He could not conceal the anxiety in his voice, the fear that he might have said something while unconscious that would have revealed who and what they were.

"No, Jim, you did not; the Technician suspects nothing - as far as he knows, you were just another victim of his instruments of torture."

Thankfully Kirk relaxed, resting his head against Spock's shoulder, allowing himself the luxury of this comfort while McCoy's drug took effect. At last he raised his head.

"Come on, let's get out of here," he said, looking back with a shudder at the firmly-closed door. "Let's go home."

* * *

As they retraced their steps McCoy stopped abruptly, pulling Kirk round to face him.

"Before we leave, I've got just one thing to say to you, Captain James T. Kirk," he growled.

"What's that, Bones?"

"Next time you decide to go tearing off on this sort of mission, for Pete's sake make sure your medical checks have been completed first - an abscessed tooth's no joke on a planet where the practice of dentistry is still in its infancy!"

TRIBBLE by Elvis Klingon

If you're looking for tribbles
 You came to the right place.
 If you're looking for tribbles
 Just look right in my place.
 They are born in a trice
 And enjoy a good snack.
 Won't you ask Cyrano Jones if he'll please take them back.

They're not evil,
 Their middle name is harmony.
 They're not evil,
 But won't you please get them off me.

I ain't never looked for tribbles
 I just ain't no fan.
 I don't want no presents
 From that Cy Jones man.
 They're only made out
 Of flesh, fur and bone,
 But every time I see one it really makes me moun.

They're not evil,
 Their middle name is harmony.
 They're not evil,
 But to a Klingon they're misery.

Translated by Anne Snell.
