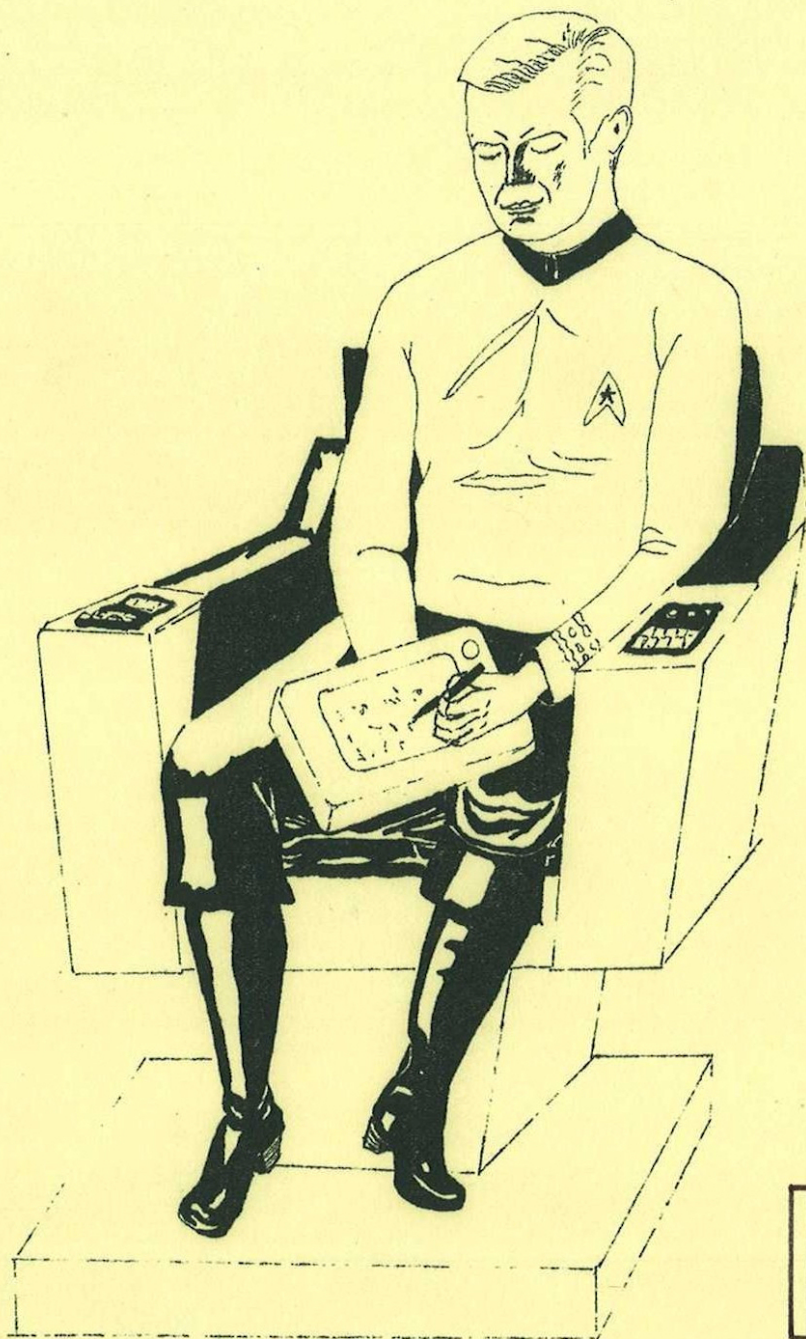


# LOG ENTRIES



# LOG ENTRIES CONTENTS

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Hello everyone, and welcome to Log Entries 11.

I said once before that it seemed no time at all since I wrote the last editorial; I can say it again this time and know that it's the absolute truth, for I did the last one less than ten hours ago! Which leaves me very little to say for this one...

You might wonder why I'm doing the editorials for two zines in the one day. The answer is easy - the con. I got so carried away putting stories onto stencil, knowing that I'd a lot to do, that I suddenly found I'd done enough stencils, not just for two zines, but a story for inclusion in LE 12 as well! But getting the stencils done isn't the same as getting them run off, and of course this one will be coming out two months after LE 10.

I must apologise for the two blank sides between pages 47 and 48. This was done deliberately in fact; when the picture was run off, we discovered that the black was shining through rather more than we liked, and we were afraid that it would interfere with the clarity of print on the backing page. We therefore decided to print the two sides on separate sheets of paper, and it should be easy enough to stick them together if you want to.

LE 12 should be another good zine. For it I have a story by Jennifer Guttridge; also stories by Simone Mason, Lesley Coles and Gloria Mitchell. Somehow, the last two issues have worked out low on poetry; with luck, there'll be a little more poetry in this issue too.

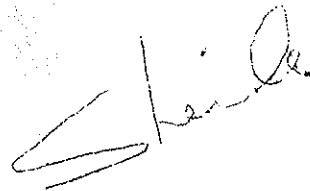
Non members of STAG can obtain information on forthcoming zines by sending a stamped addressed envelope or addressed envelope and IRC to  
Sheila Clark  
6 Craigmill Cottages  
Strathmartine  
by Dundee  
Scotland.

I'd like to thank my mother, who did some of the proof-reading, and Valerie Piacentini, who came through for a weekend to discuss stories and ended up being given some proof-reading as well. (Zine editors are known for making use of their friends!) Also Janet and our over-worked duplicator Freda for running off the stencils.

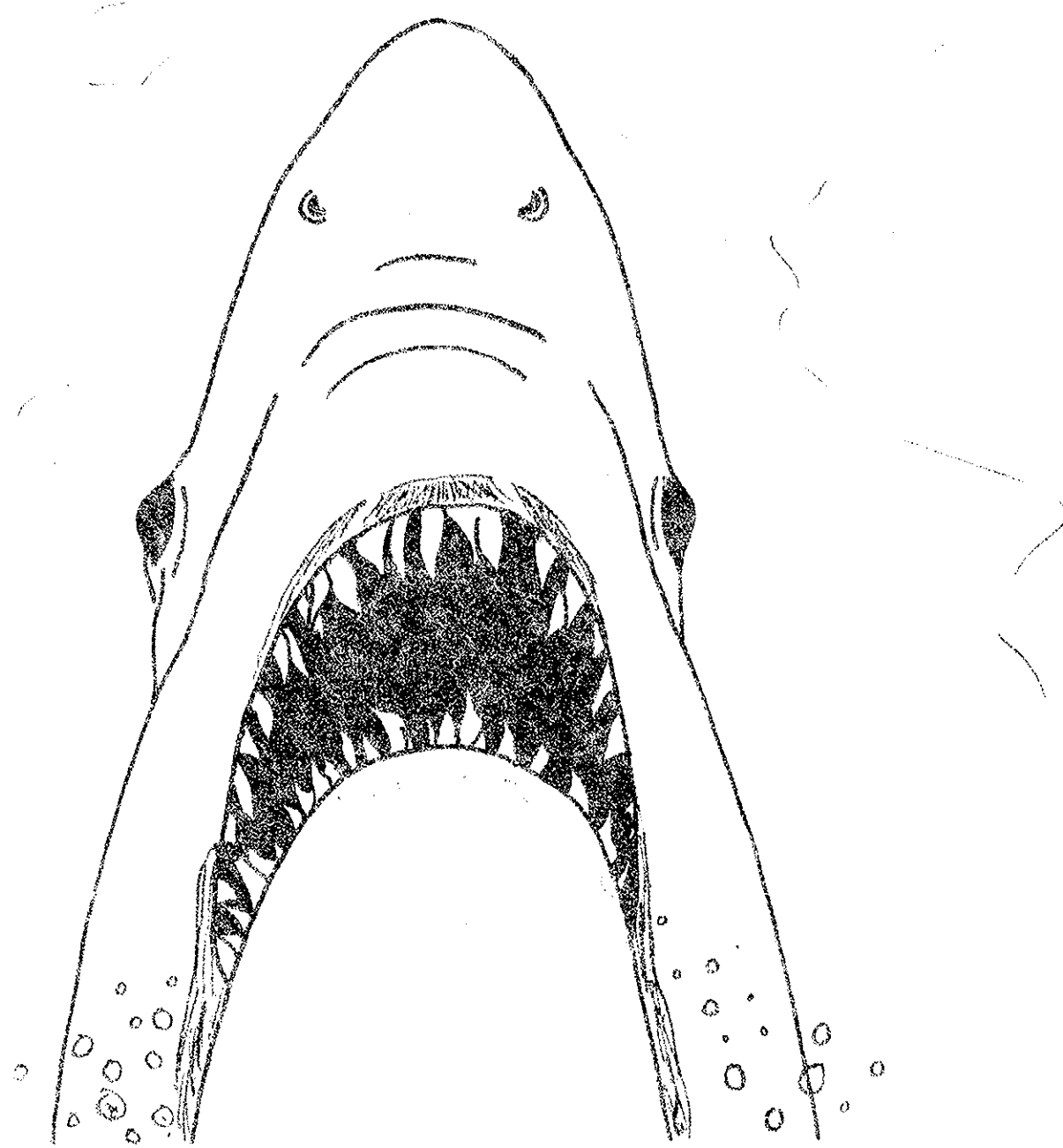
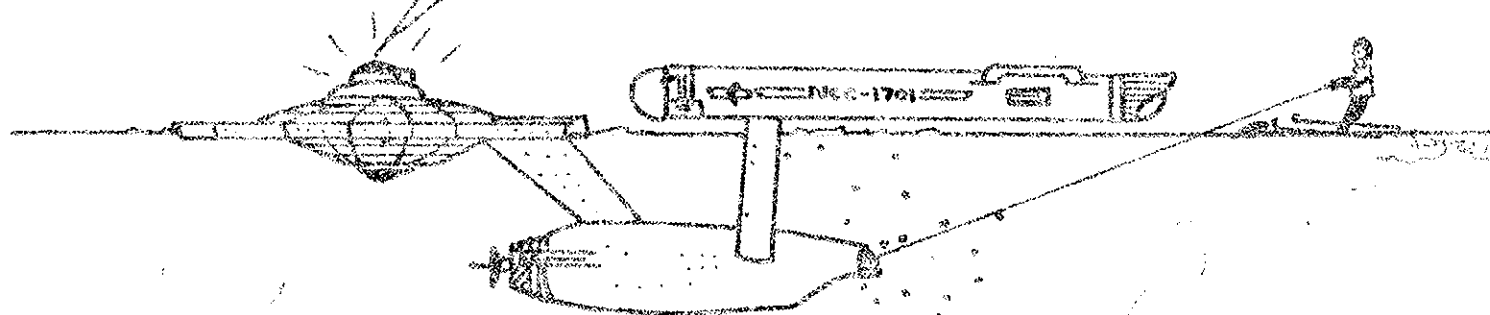
Contributions of stories, poetry or artwork are welcome, and submissions from non-members get the same consideration as stories from members.

I think this is a good issue - I hope you agree with me. Read, and enjoy!

September 1977



THE CAPTAIN SEEMS  
TO ENJOY WATER  
SWINGING DOESN'T HE  
SPOCK?



THE WARLORD by Sheila Clark

"The Governor of the colony on Dryad is calling you, sir," Uhura reported.

"On audio, Lieutenant," Kirk ordered.

A worried-looking face appeared on the screen. "Captain Kirk, we request your assistance. The native Dryads are a highly aggressive species, and they're getting very restless. I'm afraid of trouble. We're an agrarian settlement, so we're not in a very good position to defend ourselves. The natives have their own territory - the area we're in was desert, unsettled by them, useless until we irrigated it. Part of the treaty we drew up with them was that we wouldn't try to take over their traditional lands. Nor have we. But I think they'll accuse us of doing so, because they - some of them - are looking enviously at the rich farmlands we've created. They outnumber us quite considerably, and if they attack us, we'll be wiped out."

"I can't remain indefinitely, sir."

"I realise that, and I don't ask you to. But a display of strength on our behalf would help very much. They might not call our bluff."

"I see. All right, I'll send down a security detail. Show off our strength."

"One or two of our men are missing, Captain. Could your party inquire about them?"

"That's easily done. Kirk out."

The Captain glanced round at his First Officer. "You heard that, Mr. Spock. What do you make of it?"

"I believe his fears may well be justified, Captain. As I recall, the original survey on Dryad did indeed describe the natives as extremely belligerent. We might avert trouble for the moment, but a major clash does appear to be inevitable, assuming the Governor is not taking fright at shadows. I would recommend a small military base to be assigned here."

Kirk nodded as Spock continued. "How large a party will you send down, Captain?"

"A dozen men should do. I'll command it; I'd like to see these native Dryads for myself before I make any recommendations."

"Captain, would it not be advisable, in view of the Governor's fears, to permit me to accompany this landing party instead of you?"

"No, Mr. Spock. I need to form my own conclusions."

\* \* \*

The planet's gravity was fractionally higher than Earth normal, but not sufficient to occasion any great hardship to any of the landing party. Kirk looked round. They had selected a landing area at random; and they had arrived little more than a mile from a large castle. In appearance, it was very little different from any Terran castle of the middle ages; and it was surrounded by cultivated fields, though the crops were unlike any that would ever have been seen in such a setting on Earth. A few natives, female by their general appearance, were dispiritedly working among the crops.

They headed towards the castle; and were barely half-way there when they were intercepted by a group of men mounted on what looked like horses. The beasts had fairly obviously come from the Human settlement, either traded or stolen.

Kirk moved out in front of his men as the Dryads hauled their mounts roughly to a skidding stop.

"What do you want here?" the leading Dryad asked. "This is outwith your territory, Human." His accent was harsh, grating.

"Some men are missing from the Human settlement," Kirk replied. "We are from the Federation Starfleet, come to look for them."

"Soldiers?" The leader laughed harshly. "How many?"

"Enough," Kirk replied evasively.

"A good tale," the Dryad growled. "I have heard of your Starfleet. But I cannot believe such an organisation would bother to send men to search for such a small group of your kind as came to live on our land. I believe you are men from the settlement, dressed to look like soldiers, trying to fool us." He stared insolently at Kirk, then sneered as he let his eyes move over the small group, outnumbered by his men by nearly two to one.

He snapped an order in his own tongue, a guttural cacophony of sound. His followers raised crossbow-like weapons, and Kirk's men fell, riddled with bolts, before they had time to do more than reach for their phasers. Kirk himself remained untouched.

"Now you will come with me," the Dryad purred, "and tell me all the little secrets of the settlement's defence."

Kirk shook his head.

"Search him," the Dryad continued. One of the natives dismounted, to run quick rough hands over Kirk then hand over the communicator and phaser.

"That's all, oh Zartan."

Zartan handed back the communicator to the man. He seemed familiar with the device. "Get rid of it."

The man battered it with a stone, without success. Eventually he simply scraped a hole and buried it. Meanwhile, Zartan examined the phaser.

From the way he handled it, he was clearly, if not familiar with it, aware that it was a weapon. "See if they also have these weapons," he said at last, indicating the dead men. In a moment, other phasers were offered to him. He turned his attention back to Kirk.

"How do these weapons work?"

"I will tell you nothing." Mentally, Kirk blessed the standing order that phasers be set to stun force under normal landing party assignments. Zartan could do little damage with them.

Zartan smiled unpleasantly. "I think you will, my friend. I think you will."

\* \* \*

Kirk was taken to the castle, and left under guard for a short period before being taken along several passages and down some stairs to an extremely well-stocked torture chamber. There, he was fastened spreadeagled to a wooden frame, the purpose of which was not immediately clear, and left again; to think about what was in store for him? He tried to put the thought out of his mind. Spock would soon become alarmed at his failure to report; his dead crewmen might soon be found; Spock would certainly investigate the castle. But would Spock find him? He had already seen enough of the place to realise that a rabbit's warren would be as a child's toy to the maze of tunnels and levels here. Of course Spock would find him; let Spock once suspect that he was here, and Spock would find him if he had to tear the entire building to the ground, stone by stone, to do it.

Eventually, after a wait that Kirk was sure was actually of less duration than it seemed, Zartan came to him.

The Dryad studied him consideringly. "Well, Human? Will you tell me all I want to know, or must I force the information out of you? How do your weapons work? What are the settlement's defences?"

Kirk shook his head. "You won't win," he said. "My men will come. You cannot defeat us."

"I have already defeated you," Zartan pointed out.

"One skirmish - one surprise - doesn't constitute a victory," Kirk replied. "In the long run, we will win."

"Your people are soft," Zartan said. "Your men till the fields like women. You do not know the ways of war."

"We do," Kirk answered. "We simply prefer peace."

"Peace is for children and weaklings. I did not become the Warlord of the district by being a weakling. And when the other chiefs see my success, they will flock to follow me, and I will become the Chief Warlord."

"What will they do when you fail?" Kirk asked.

"I cannot fail. Now - tell me. The defences?" He held a knife to Kirk's throat.

The Human closed his mouth, staring defiantly at the Dryad.

"You hope I will kill you quickly if you defy me? No. There is a better way."

He turned and crossed to where an assortment of whips hung from a stand. He selected one, heavy and many-thonged.

It whistled down across Kirk's back, cutting through the material of his shirt, cutting into his skin. Kirk bit his lip against the agony, determined not to give Zartan the satisfaction of hearing him cry out. The whip fell again and again and again. At last Kirk lost consciousness, and hung limp against the frame.

When he regained his senses and raised his head wearily, Zartan was waiting, watching, patient.

"Will you tell me now?"

Kirk remained obstinately silent. Zartan raised the whip again.

\* \* \*

Eventually, Zartan seemed to realise that he had failed. He turned away. Two guards came forward in response to his gesture as he hung the whip up again. Kirk had not even realised that they were there.

The Human was barely able to move as they released him; they had to support him for a moment. Then his obstinate will-power came to his rescue; he would show them he was no weakling. He forced himself erect, forced himself to walk at least reasonably firmly towards the door.

Outside, an officer waited. He led the way through tunnels, down stairs, deeper and deeper into the depths of the castle. Despite the drain on his physical condition of the pain, which forced him to concentrate almost completely on where he was putting his feet, Kirk found himself wondering just how many centuries of building and excavating and tunnelling the rock on which the castle stood had gone into its construction.

They passed heavy doors - doors with tiny openings set at eye level. Behind some, voices were moaning or occasionally screaming or openly sobbing. Few of the voices uttered words that he could comprehend; those few were crying out for mercy.

At last the officer stopped. For a moment, Kirk wondered why; at

that point in the corridor, there was nothing - no door or any other opening. Then one of the two guards moved forward another few steps, and bent to a ring set near the edge of one of the huge stones that paved the floor. He pulled, and it swung upwards, heavy and awkward, on a creaking hinge.

An appalling stench rose from the hole, and Kirk understood why the senior man had remained a little way away. The guards forced him forward, not giving him time to move of his own volition, and made him sit on the edge. Then, without warning, he was pushed. The hole was pitch dark; he could not see how far he had to fall, and the thump as he hit the ground very awkwardly knocked the breath from him and wrenched his torn back.

He gasped, and choked on the foul air, but he knew that his nose would soon become accustomed to the stink. Less easy to bear was the pain in his back. The trapdoor above him thudded shut.

Gradually, he realised that some light was seeping in from somewhere. As his eyes grew accustomed to the dim twilight, he tried to make out details of his prison.

He could neither see nor reach the roof. Well, that was understandable, he thought. The cell was several feet wide; by experiment he discovered that if he lay down with his feet touching one wall, his outstretched hands touched the other. And he could take fully a dozen paces from one end to the other.

He soon discovered the source of the smell. He was sharing the cell with two bodies, one just beginning to decay, the other in an advanced state of putrefaction. He had little doubt that this was intended to be his fate; to be left here to die of starvation, then rot, to add to the torment of some other unfortunate victim. Or perhaps to die of cold and a gangrenous back and blood poisoning. Germs must be rife here, despite the cold, or the bodies would not be decaying so enthusiastically, and the remains of his shirt, still hanging in tatters from his neckband, would be useless to protect his back or keep it clean. Spock would search for him; he had no doubt that Spock would find him. But would Spock find him in time?

\* \* \*

On board the Enterprise, Spock waited anxiously. Time passed slowly.

"The Captain should have reported in by now," he said at last. "Lt. Uhura, try to contact him."

Uhura obeyed. After a few moments, she turned back to him. "Captain Kirk does not respond, Mr. Spock. Neither do any of the men with him."

"Sensor scan of the landing area," he ordered. There might be a simple explanation, of course, but... He was aware of an unpleasantly familiar feeling of tension. Why did Kirk so often insist on running headlong into a dangerous situation?

"Nothing, sir," Chekov replied, raising his head from the scanner. "The landing area and the ground for a mile around are bare of life. There are one or two scattered life form readings about a mile from the landing area, probably workers in the fields."

"I'm going down to have a word with the Governor," Spock decided.

\* \* \*

On the planet's surface, he was shown immediately into the Governor's office. The Governor rose to meet him.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Spock," he said. "I didn't expect this visit. Have you news for us?"

"Our men are missing," Spock told him bluntly. "Twelve men, with



Captain Kirk in command. Whatever happened to them must have happened very suddenly, or the Captain would have managed some sort of report. As acting commander of the Enterprise, I am prepared to give you all the assistance you require, for as long as you require it. Since the native Dryads appear to have overcome an armed party, they will be feeling very confident; a major clash, soon, must occur. We'll remain until then; our weapons should settle matters decisively."

"If they have captured your men, they will have taken possession of their weapons," the Governor said quietly but anxiously.

"A dozen hand phasers, and the natives have no knowledge of how they operate," Spock replied. "Against the Enterprise's phasers, those will be useless."

\* \* \*

Spock returned to the Enterprise to face the inevitable conflict with McCoy. He must remain in control of himself, he knew, and it would not be easy. Why could Bones never understand that he must act according to what his command training told him was best, and not according to the dictates of his heart? Bones knew almost as well as Jim did how deeply he was affected by emotional considerations when either of them was involved, even although he was successful in hiding his feelings from everyone else. He sighed, for he understood only too well that Bones did realise why he could not mount an immediate rescue operation - too many lives might be lost without the Dryads learning a lasting lesson; their first duty lay in protecting the settlement and leaving it safe from future attack. Bones simply had to express his own frustration, and in typical Human fashion he did it by turning on a friend whom normally he would have died rather than hurt. And all Spock could do to help him was permit him to do so without fighting back. But it made it that much harder for Spock to maintain his outward impassivity.

Reluctantly, but knowing he must face McCoy, he left the transporter room and headed for sickbay.

\* \* \*

The expected attack did not come for several days. The Enterprise, in synchronous orbit above the settlement, had her phasers trained on the ground between it and the Dryad lands, and security men, armed with phaser rifles, guarded much of the perimeter of the settlement.

The attack itself was short. In the first onslaught, some of the defenders were hurt by crossbow bolts before the Enterprise could fire her phasers, but then the phasers, set on stun force, fired, and the attackers collapsed. Those at the rear, out of range, fled in terror, obviously believing their comrades dead.

"Even when they discover they're only stunned, the psychological effect should be the same," Spock commented. "As far as they're concerned, the Federation has some magic weapon that can strike them down, not one at a time, but all at once. I do not think they will risk attacking again."

The fleeing Dryads led them straight to Zartan's castle. Spock led the pursuit. The settlement was safe now; now he could obey his heart, and search for Kirk.

There was no defence of the castle. Zartan, hatred twisting his face, met them. With difficulty, he humbled himself in what was an obvious ritual of surrender... handing over a phaser as he did so - a traditional surrender of what he clearly considered a valuable weapon. He could not have declared his guilt more clearly.



"Mr. Sulu. Keep him under guard," Spock ordered. He glanced round. "Search the place thoroughly," he instructed. "There are settlement men missing as well."

He joined the search, too anxious to wait for news. The search brought out two or three of the missing colonists, all showing signs of ill-treatment. Then Spock opened a door, and walked into the torture chamber. His lips tightened in distaste.

He returned to the upper hall where Sulu guarded Zartan in time to meet the first of the men reporting back. All the dungeons had been searched. All the surviving prisoners - some of them Zartan's own people - had been released. There was no sign of their missing landing party.

Spock turned to Zartan. "Some of our men are missing. What happened to them?"

"They were killed when I found them trespassing on my land."

"Their leader. He alone wore clothes of a different colour - the colour this man is wearing." He indicated Sulu. "Was he killed too?" Spock's voice was bleak.

Zartan sneered. "He refused to obey me. He was flogged."

"And?"

"He died." Zartan sounded pleased. For the first time, he smiled - a gloating, unpleasant smile.

"His body?"

"Fed to my hounds."

Spock felt an atavistic surge of rage. He fought it, aware that it was pointless being angry with a man who was obeying the mores of his own culture, knowing that his fury was directed less at the man's cruelty than at his callous gloating. He was glad that he could tell them Kirk was dead, his body fed to a pack of Dryad hounds. Spock tried telling himself that this gloating was also a facet of the culture; but his telepathic mind, sharpened by his emotion, caught a flash of triumph from the native's. This was no cultural reaction! It was the spite of a sadistic egoist seeking revenge for his defeat.

Spock deliberately relaxed his control, let his rage mount.

"Mr. Sulu," he said, and the cold viciousness in his voice made the Oriental look sharply at him. "Take - this - " he indicated Zartan " - to the torture chamber two levels below here. Lash him up for a flogging."

Sulu realised that this was no time to protest, and signed to his men. Spock followed them.

As Zartan was lashed up, Spock stood looking over the whips. Sulu crossed to him. "Mr. Spock," he said. "You can't do this. Captain Kirk wouldn't want it. It won't help - " He broke off, seeing it was hopeless.

"No, Mr. Sulu, it won't help," Spock said, his rage now channelled though still intense. "But it might teach this - " he indicated Zartan again, violently, " - not to gloat about it. That's enough, Mr. Sulu," he went on, as Sulu opened his mouth to argue, and the helmsman retreated unhappily. It was not that he cared what happened to Zartan; but he suspected that Spock, once he regained control of his temper, would be bitterly ashamed of his lapse, and he did care for his senior officer.

"Ready, sir," one of the security men reported.

Spock turned, picking up the heaviest whip. It was the one, had he known, that Zartan had used on Kirk.

He raised it, judging his distance.

A quiet voice said from the door -

"Don't, Spock."

The Vulcan whirled. Kirk stood there, swaying, supported by two of the men who had been searching the castle.

Spock stared at him for a long moment, hardly able to believe his eyes. Then even as he sprang forward, Kirk's legs failed and he collapsed. The Vulcan was just in time to catch him. He lowered Kirk gently to the ground, supporting him. Kirk, his face twisted with pain, leaned his head against Spock's shoulder.

"I knew you'd come," he whispered, then coughed - a hoarse, racking cough.

Spock reached for his communicator.

"Spock to Enterprise... We've got the Captain. I'm beaming up with him now. Have Dr. McCoy standing by in the transporter room... Mr. Sulu - take over here." Sulu barely had time to acknowledge the order before his senior officers shimmered out of sight. Then he turned to the men who had found Kirk.

"Where was he?" Not in one of the dungeons, that he knew.

"In a hell-hole on the lowest levels," he was told. "It was sheer luck that we found him, too. We were talking about old castles back on

Earth, and thinking how alike the design was to them, when we realised that maybe this place would have a pit on the lowest levels too. So we went back down to look for one."

"It was lucky you knew something about old castles," Sulu said. He regarded his prisoner. "Let's get him untied; we'll put him where he had the Captain. That should hold him all right."

\* \* \*

Kirk was conscious when they reached the Enterprise, but only just. He materialised coughing dreadfully, and McCoy, hearing it, leaped forward. He checked Kirk quickly. "No time to wait for a stretcher," he said. "Help me carry him."

"I'll take him," Spock said firmly. He swung Kirk up into his arms, and followed McCoy. By the time Kirk had been laid on a bed in sickbay, he was unconscious and breathing harshly and with considerable effort, and coughing a great deal. McCoy reached for a hypo, gave Kirk an injection; then a second.

"His back," Spock said.

McCoy glanced at him, helped him to roll Kirk over, and drew in his breath sharply as he saw the mess that was Kirk's back. Raw, suppurating cuts, many oozing blood, many angrily inflamed, gaped up at him.

McCoy gave Kirk yet another injection, smeared ointment gently over the maltreated back, then laid a piece of lint over it.

"He hasn't much chance," he said dully. "He's terribly weak."

"What exactly is wrong?"

"Blood poisoning. Double pneumonia. A touch of pleurisy. A slight degree of starvation. I don't think he's had any food since he was taken prisoner. While it's only been about a week, the drain on his strength has been considerable, and the over all effect is much greater than if he'd been physically sound."

They looked at each other, their eyes mirroring their worry.

\* \* \*

The slow hours passed. McCoy never left Kirk's side; Spock only to check with Scotty that the Enterprise was all right and with Sulu and the Governor that matters on the surface were satisfactory.

"He's not responding to the drugs," McCoy said at last.

"Why not?"

"How the hell do I know?" The spark of temper vanished as quickly as it had appeared. "It's impossible to say for certain. The blood poisoning's clearing up, the pleurisy's not bad... it's the pneumonia. It's always possible that this is a native bug that produces symptoms similar to pneumonia and not the illness we know."

"Can you find out?"

McCoy nodded. He went through to the lab, leaving Spock alone with Kirk. The Vulcan touched Kirk's face gently; shocked at the febrile heat in the Human's skin, he drew his hand away again. McCoy came back gloomily.

"The colony haven't had any cases of anything like this," he said. "And they say that if it is a native bug, the natives won't have any cure; they have some limited surgical knowledge but no medical knowledge at all."

\* \* \*

During the evening of the second day, the fever seemed to become worse.

"This can't go on," McCoy said unhappily. "Either the fever will break soon or he'll die. Trouble is, he doesn't seem to be fighting any more. He fought to remain alive in the dungeon, but when he saw you, and knew he was safe... I don't know if he even remained conscious long enough to recognise me, but he'd know you'd get him to me as quickly as possible. He knew he was safe; and he trusts us completely. So he's stopped fighting to stay alive. Oh, not deliberately - it's a subconscious thing, because he relies on us, trusts us... He's completely relaxed - too completely. Because if he doesn't fight... Spock - could you do anything with a mind meld? Persuade him to struggle?"

Slowly, Spock shook his head. "No," he said.

"You've done it before. Or don't you want him to survive? Do you see yourself as the new Captain of the Enterprise, promoted for your success here?" Even as he spoke he knew how reasonlessly cruel he was being.

The atavistic mood, never wholly dissipated, gripped Spock again. "If he dies," he said, "I'll go back down there and take Zartan to pieces with my bare hands."

McCoy looked at him in amazement. He had never heard Spock speak in such a vicious tone. Some instinct - awareness of how unfair his last words had been - kept him from comment.

"Zartan?" he asked quietly.

"The man who held him prisoner. He told me Jim was dead... died under his whip. I had him lashed up for a flogging, but Jim came and stopped me. But if Jim dies after all... no-one will stop me."

There was silence for a moment. Then Spock realised how completely he had betrayed himself. Wooden-faced once more, he said stiffly,

"You will, of course, inform me if there is any change in the Captain's condition, Doctor. I will be on the bridge." He headed for the door.

And then McCoy realised fully just what he had done. He had finally broken Spock's control. Perhaps he had offended Spock beyond forgiveness. But he had to try. With a rush, he reached the door before the Vulcan.

"Spock... I'm sorry. I didn't mean that. Humans... under stress, Humans often hit out at whoever's nearest, it doesn't mean... " He looked at Spock's face, and received no encouragement. Pride stiffened his back. "At least accept my assurance that what was said will go no further, sir." He turned, and walked stiff-legged towards his desk. Behind him he heard the door slide open, then shut again.

He sat at his desk. "I should never have said that," he said to the unresponsive instruments. "I'm well-served if it has cost me Spock's friendship."

A strangely gentle hand came down on his shoulder. He turned.

"Spock!"

"I know you didn't mean anything, Doctor," Spock told him quietly. "It just took me a moment... Now you know why Vulcans dare not permit themselves emotional release," he added wryly. "Our emotions - in particular, our tempers - can still be violent."

McCoy nodded. "I didn't think it was possible to make you so angry," he replied. "But what I said was unforgivable; I know you want him to live."

"There is a reason why I cannot meld with him, Doctor. If he was conscious, even raving I could contact him. If he was unconscious but not raving, I could contact him. But unconscious and raving - no. I have not

got sufficient telepathic strength to push through the delirium. If I were a full-blooded Vulcan, perhaps then I could manage... but my Human blood weakens my telepathic ability. If I were to try, I could be trapped in his delirium. It is more... sensible to wait. Perhaps as the illness progresses and he becomes weaker his raving will cease, and then I will be able to do something."

McCoy nodded. "Yes, I understand," he said quietly.

They returned to the muttering, sweating figure on the bed, and stood looking down at him helplessly.

"Spock," McCoy said.

"Yes, Doctor?"

"Sometimes... familiar voices will penetrate an unconscious mind. If, instead of watching him in silence, we were to talk..."

"We must try."

So as they maintained their vigil, they talked. They talked themselves hoarse. Afterwards, neither of them was able to remember what they spoke of - it wasn't important. All that mattered was they kept on talking.

Suddenly, McCoy became aware of silence from the bed. He broke off in mid-sentence, automatically looking up at the diagnostic panel. The readings had levelled off - low, but steady.

"Is he...?" Spock began.

"He should be all right," McCoy replied. "He's weak, but he's sleeping normally."

\* \* \*

Kirk slept for some hours, and as he slept the readings gradually rose to more normal levels. After a while, Spock persuaded McCoy to rest too, promising to wake him if the readings began to slip downwards again, and continued to watch alone. He could relax too, now, not quite meditating but allowing his mind to fill with a quiet content that he found strangely restful, although he had never been able to understand why, knowing only that it was a by-product of his friendship with this one Human who lay there so still.

At last Kirk stirred, and tried to raise his head. Spock held him down.

"Rest, Jim."

"I'm all right - just tired," Kirk said. He still sounded sleepy. But he made no further attempt to sit up; it seemed to satisfy him that Spock was there.

The Vulcan moved to the next bed, and shook McCoy awake. The surgeon glanced over at Kirk, and sat up at once, studying the panel.

"You'll do," he said cheerfully. "Twenty-four hours, and you'll be almost as good as new."

Kirk nodded. "Spock..."

"Yes?"

"Don't answer this if you don't want to... but why were you going to flog Zartan?"

Spock hesitated. He and McCoy glanced at each other.

"Even Vulcans get angry sometimes," McCoy said lightly.

"He was gloating about having killed you," Spock said slowly.

"What I don't understand, though," McCoy put in, "is why he didn't tell

you the truth when he realised what you were going to do."

"For all he knew, it was the truth," Kirk said. "I was certainly left there to die."

"No," Spock said. "The man was a sadist. We had beaten him. He wanted revenge. When I asked him about you, it gave him a weapon he could use. Mental cruelty. By threatening him, I was actually showing him how successful his cruelty was. Every lash would have been a triumph to him."

McCoy stared at him in horror. "You could be right, Spock... but what a warped way to think. What will happen to him now?"

"According to the customs of the planet, the Governor told me, we - that is, the Federation - have the right to take over his lands; a defeated aggressor has no rights. However, there is the treaty that specified that we would not try to take over the natives' land. He suggested that we make it clear that we hold to the treaty, and give the land back to Zartan's oldest son. Zartan himself... I believe we should simply release Zartan, to live on the charity of his son. It would be the most severe punishment we could inflict."

"You mean by humiliating him?" McCoy said. "Because it would show that we don't consider him a serious enough danger to... to execute?"

"Precisely, Doctor."

Kirk nodded. "I think that you're right, Spock; and it would be an object lesson to the others, too; the Federation is so confident of its strength that it can afford to leave potential enemies alive. See to it, will you?"

"Yes, Captain."

Kirk yawned, and closed his eyes. His friends looked at each other once more.

"He'll be all right, Spock," McCoy said.

"In that case, I will go and carry out my orders. I will be in my quarters if I am needed."

McCoy watched the Vulcan stride out, and then he too yawned. In spite of his sleep, he was still tired. He returned to the bed he had so recently left, and closed his eyes again. A moment later, a quiet snore disturbed the silence.

\*\*\*\*\*

SCOTT - A MAN OF METTLE by Helen Sneddon

Montgomery Scott was a real despot  
 When it came to running the ship,  
 Sniffing brandy bungs with his iron lungs  
 And shooting lead from his hip.  
 He would mesmerise his steely eyes  
 On the swell of his copper pot  
 And with real brass neck would watch Star Trek  
 - And be riveted to the spot.

He tried to drum up some platinum  
 In a manner less than deft,  
 Got a bit intense and short of cents  
 When he hadn't a nickel left,  
 He made a play for a rise in pay  
 And was positively turned down flat,  
 For eating jujubes in the Jeffries Tubes,  
 - And you can't zinc lower than that.

\*\*\*\*\*

LAST DAYS by Wendy MillerPART ONE

"Such a pity that this is all doomed." Kirk surveyed the beauty of Terrana Six, the cool, friendly forest which stretched away to the distant range of golden mountains. There was a lake, still and deep as a pearl, reflecting the red light of the huge sun which hung low in the sky.

"There's nothing we can do about it," McCoy said, busying himself with his tricorder. He was not blind to the beauty of the sixth planet of the great star Terranus. But he was more interested in the star itself, the great red sun which would soon explode into a giant nova. When that happened the world on which they were camped would be burned up like a feather in the fire. The Enterprise had been ordered to study, at close quarters, what happened to a star in the last few days of its life.

They had chosen the sixth planet because it was the nearest one to the star that would still sustain life.

"Where's Spock?" McCoy said suddenly. "I don't remember seeing him for a while."

"I think he's studying our equine friends again."

The doctor frowned. "You know, Jim, it's unusual for Spock to get so attached to anything - I didn't know he had it in him. I just can't understand it."

"It must be because they're so like Old Earth horses. I think they pose more of a scientific problem to Spock than an emotional one. I can hardly believe it myself that a planet billions of light years away from Earth could've evolved a life form so similar to one of our own."

"It does make you wonder," McCoy agreed. "But, unfortunately, we don't have the time for Spock to study them further." He pointed upwards, indicating the large sun. "When that sun goes nova in a few days' time, this planet will be burned to a crisp and all the 'horses' with it."

\* \* \*

The creatures did look like real horses. Spock was watching a small herd of them from a grassy bank overlooking a canyon, not far away from his friends.

There were mares and a few colts, each grazing on the luscious blue-green grass which carpeted the canyon floor. One of the more venturesome of the colts had climbed on to a terrace not thirty yards from where the science officer lay, where a patch of young, clover-type growth afforded a tempting morsel.

Cautiously, the Enterprise man got to his feet and approached the young animal, his palms extended upwards in front of him. The colt was so engrossed in his grazing that he failed to see Spock coming towards him.

Spock was an arms-length away from him when his foot slipped on a stone and he jerked forward clumsily. This sudden movement attracted the attention of the colt who flung up his head and gazed at the Science Officer with head held high.

Spock half expected the small creature to run, but it did not. Instead, after staring at him for a long moment, trembling a little, it shook its mane and carefully approached him. Spock held very still while the small creature sniffed his hands, then gently he dropped to his knees and stroked the glossy neck.

"Remarkable," muttered the Science Officer to himself as the colt nudged his arm affectionately. He noticed that in fact the small creature had two coats, rather like a bird's down and its outer covering of coarser fibres.



The colt's outer coat was a fiery silver, while the inner was jet black.

Both man and horse were so amazed at this newfound friendship that neither of them noticed the four large winged shadows which slowly swept over the canyon and finally brushed the terrace. What occurred next badly startled them both.

The four winged, faintly ape-like 'men' came gliding down on a strong current of air. They passed low over Spock's head before sailing down the terrace. There was, at that moment, a startling interplay of sunlight and shadow as a wisp of cloud drifted past the doomed sun. Other drifts of vapour followed; and so intermittent were they that it was difficult for Spock, flattened into the ground, to determine at first which were cloud shadows and which were those of the bird 'men'.

The colt however was in no doubt.

After his first glide over the terrace one creature gave a gruff bark like that of a dog and turned back in to the air streams. It was that call which excited the others, and in a matter of seconds a concerted attack was made at the defenceless foal.

The poor creature's tortured screams tore at Spock's brain as he

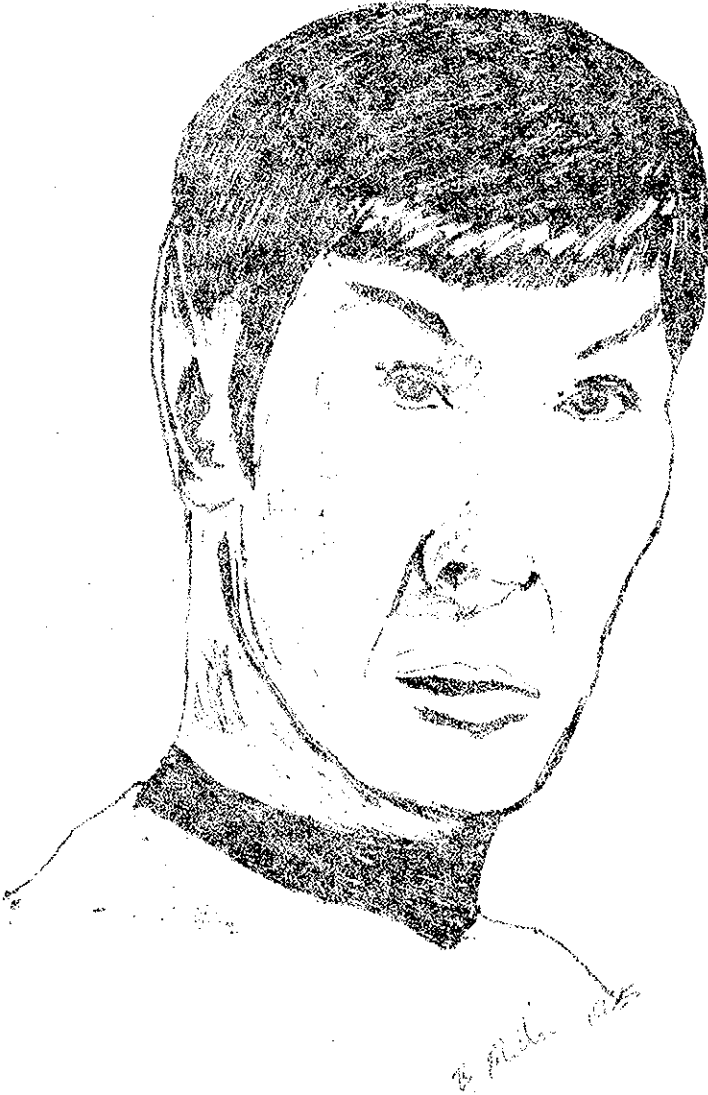
made a dash for the shelter of a large slab of rock which jutted out sharply from a small rise. Once in safety he grabbed for his phaser - meaning to drive the four inhuman assassins away - but the action was futile. He noticed the small metallic glint of something on the ground where he had been lying a moment before and realised the weapon must have fallen from his belt as he made for the shelter.

He made as if to go for it, but one of the creatures had seen him, and leaving its companions to finish off the foal, it dived for him, its talons dripping bright crimson. Spock flung himself back under the overhang, but not before the creature's talons had torn a deep gash in his shoulder.

With a gasp of pain he reached for his communicator. "Spock... to Captain Kirk. Acknowledge... Acknowledge..." All that answered him was a blast of static. He adjusted a minute control on the instrument's voice panel and spoke again. "This is Spock. I am under attack. Acknowledge!"

His attacker gave another guttural squawk and came at him again, its talons outstretched, its lips drawn back over savagely pointed fangs. The creature's face was foamed like that of a hydrophobic animal. Its glide over the terrace wall was one of restrained power, coupled with deadly intent to drive its prey from the security of the overhang under which it was sheltering.

Fortunately for Spock, the creature, now joined by its companions, had difficulty in reaching him. Whilst the upper part of the wall shelved outwards, the ground below sloped at an inward angle, with the result that he was fully protected from any attempted assault from above. Moreover, the shelving wall shut off the flow of air currents and made it necessary for the creatures to



beat their wings clumsily to and fro.

They thus lost the impetus that had characterised their glide along the edge of the terrace. They could only penetrate the acclivity for a short distance and then swing about to make another attempt.

As he watched them, their wings beating just a few feet from his face, Spock gradually became aware that he was dizzy. Fumbling with his communicator he spoke, almost frantically, into it. "This is Spock. Captain, come in please. I am under attack! Repeat - I..."

The dizziness came again and with it a knifing pain in his stomach which made him retch and left him gasping, slumped against the rocky wall.

If he had but looked upwards at that moment he would have seen the creatures hovering expectantly above him as if they knew, and expected, what was about to happen. The foal had been lucky, he had died too quickly to feel the pain of the creatures' tearing talons and to know the agony of their venom. But Spock knew it and it took all of his Vulcan heritage to keep him from crying out in pain as the poison tore through him as swiftly as death itself.

He managed to keep upright as alternating waves of dizziness and violent pain drifted over him. Gasping into his communicator, "Captain... please... acknowledge... Jim!" Finally he gave an inarticulate cry and slumped forwards, blackness engulfing him. Above, the creatures closed in.

Suddenly, a woman appeared out of thin air in front of the unconscious Spock. She was tall, slim, dressed in a long robe which shimmered with red and gold lights. She was also exquisitely beautiful. At the sight of her the four attackers, as if she were some sort of demon out of hell, gave a cry of terror and flew off over the hilltop.

The girl looked around her, at the herd of horses below who seemingly hadn't known a thing about the drama that had occurred above them, a sadness coming into her large eyes when she saw the bloody pool on the grassy ground a few feet in front of her.

"Poor Karas," she said softly. "And so young."

Then, turning, she knelt to examine the First Officer; gently she ran a hand over his forehead, disregarding the stickiness which covered her fingers.

"I am sorry I could not allow you to speak to your friends. But I wish to know you further. You interest me." Smiling, she stood and closed her eyes. She and Spock vanished into a crimson haze.

\* \* \*

Meanwhile, back in the clearing, McCoy, Kirk and a security team were busy loading their various instruments into the miniaturizer. This last was Scotty's brainchild - a machine capable of reducing matter into its smallest form - and Kirk, as yet unused to its function, was watching their portable computer shrink to the size of a box of matches.

"Pity we can't send the horses through this contraption," he mused. "We could save the whole kit and caboodle."

"Sure, but what kind of mess would they be in when you tried to integrate them?" McCoy said. "There wouldn't be enough to fill a bucket. You can't mess around with atoms of a living creature in that way. Scotty's preliminary test proved that. I lost God knows how many mice and guinea pigs that way trying to refine the process, but it's no good, it just won't work. Still, it was a nice thou..."

Kirk's raised hand stopped him in mid-sentence. "Listen!"

McCoy strained his ears trying to catch the faint sound which his Captain had heard. Only silence reached him. Then, suddenly, he heard the barking of some wild animal and a high-pitched squealing coming faintly from the direction

of the other side of the wood.

"What in heaven's name is that?" he asked.

"I don't know, Bones," Kirk answered. "But whatever it is, it's coming from the direction of Spock's last position. Come on, let's find out!" He turned to the four security guards who also listened intently, a puzzled frown on each of their faces. "Carver, Malone. You come with us. Jennings, McKimbo, you stay here and get the rest of the instruments packed and beamed back on board. Tell Mr. Scott we may need to be beamed up - fast!"

As the four men moved off the two remaining guards hurriedly stuffed the remaining gear into the miniaturiser.

\* \* \*

"Phasers on stun," whispered Kirk. They were crouched behind a large thorn bush on the edge of the small hillock on which Spock had been positioned. Everything in the surrounding area was deathly still; even the chattering birds had ceased their trilling - only the small herd of Terrana horses showed there was still life on the planet. They were grazing peacefully enough in the canyon below them; every now and then a shrill whinny drifted up to the four men on the still air.

A magnificent stallion stood on the very edge of the herd, his beautiful proud head casting a watchful eye over his domain. His mane and tail were silvery grey - almost white, but his coat was a blue so rich it seemed it must have been stolen from heaven itself.

Carver, forgetting the situation for a brief moment, gave a low whistle and nudged Malone in the ribs. "Isn't he something, Mike?"

"He sure is, almost too good to be... Hey, what's that?" His wandering eye had caught sight of a large patch of sticky redness on the grass in front of them. "Captain, it looks like blood! And there's no sign of Mr. Spock."

Striding out into the clearing, dangers forgotten for a time, McCoy and Kirk knelt at the side of the crimson mass. A skull, picked clean, the dead caverns of its eye sockets staring back at them, sat in the centre - a few long silken silvery hairs were scattered around.

"This is what we heard," said Kirk, disgust in his voice. "Someone's had a party."

"But what could kill anything so quickly and leave so little, Captain?" asked Malone.

"I don't know, Ensign. We don't know what kind of predators exist on this planet - not all of them anyway - anything could've done it, anything at all. Starfleet records don't have much on this godforsaken place, the only survey done was fifteen years ago and even that wasn't complete."

"Wasn't complete?" McCoy asked. "Why?"

"Both the scientists on the mission and their crew were found dead by a rescue party that was sent after them when they didn't send their monthly report to the Science Centre on Vulcan."

"How did they die?" McCoy looked up from his tricorder readings.

"No-one knew. There wasn't much left of them when the rescue party found their camp. And something had... had..." He shuddered. "Something had chewed up their bodies into pulp."

"Christ!" muttered McCoy, his face sick. "And now Spock's disappeared."

Kirk nodded, straightening and stretching aching muscles. "Carver, Malone. Take a look round. See if there's any sign of Spock, but don't go far! And keep your eyes open for anything that's more belligerent than a fly!"

The two security men moved off, phasers in hand. As McCoy stood up his heel caught something and turning he saw a phaser almost hidden in the grass behind him.

"Jim!" he almost yelled. "It's Spock's phaser!" He stooped to pick up the weapon and turned it over in his hand. "It isn't damaged - what's it doing here? Spock wouldn't just throw it away!"

Kirk had spotted something under the overhang of a large, flat boulder. Stopping when he recognised what it was, his face went deathly white. "Bones." It was hardly more than a whisper.

A sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach, the Doctor ran over to stand by his Captain. "It's his communicator," he said. "And there's blood on it - plenty of it." He dropped to his knees and ran his tricorder over the small instrument.

"It couldn't be an animal's?" Kirk was clutching at straws, and he knew it. He expected McCoy's answer:

"No, Jim, it's not. Life on this planet is carbon based, same as Earth. This blood's copper based - and besides, who else do you know with green blood?" He wasn't joking - his voice was gentle. "It's Spock's, Jim. T-negative."

"You're sure?"

"Yes, I'm sure."

Kirk closed his eyes, half hoping that when he opened them again he would find that all this had been nothing more than a bad dream. But it was not so; when he opened them the communicator was still in McCoy's hands.

Just at that moment the communicator beeped. Flipping it open he muttered, "Kirk here."

It was Carver. "Captain, we've found something." There was a queer tone to his voice that McCoy did not like.

"What is it?"

"I think you'd better see this for yourself, sir."

"We'll be right there. Where are you?"

"About five hundred metres to your right. Back in the woods."

It took a matter of seconds for Kirk and the Doctor to reach the two security men. "O.K.," Kirk demanded. "What've you got?" Both men glanced at Dr. McCoy. Suspecting the worst, he nodded.

"It's over here, sir," said Carver. "Behind that large tree," He led them over to what looked astonishingly like an oak tree, its trunk gnarled and crooked, and gestured behind it. "There, sir."

Kirk walked round the trunk, and Doctor on his heels. What he saw over Kirk's shoulder turned his stomach. There, on a patch of bare earth, lay Spock's blue tunic - or at least, half of it. It was torn to ribbons, and, worst of all, it was drenched in his blood.

Kirk leaned heavily on the tree, his hands over his face.

"This damned planet," muttered McCoy heavily, laying a hand on Kirk's shoulder. "This damned murderous planet!"

\* \* \*

He was drifting up through a maze of images and drifting colours; movement was not his, but he could feel a gentle softness about him which warmed his cold flesh. There were voices, distant and hazy - he could not understand their words, but they were calling him, that he knew. One voice, soft and feminine, came suddenly clear.

"Spock!" it said. "Do you hear me?"

He was too tired to answer, but the voice was insistent and came again. "Spock! Do you hear me?"

He managed a slight nod.

"Listen to me. Listen and know... You are safe, safe with us. There is nothing to fear. You befriended one of our kind, therefore you are one with us. Awaken. Spock, open your eyes. See us!"

He could not disobey that command. Slowly, with heavy lids, he opened his eyes slowly; green light shocked his pupils, then a shadow fell across him and he was able to open them properly. He was looking into gentle brown eyes, liquid like a doe's, topped by dark sweeping lashes and wreathed by a shining mass of ebony hair.

She was beautiful, like a breath of spring. He smiled and her eyes sparkled like gems. Shocked, he assumed his normal impassive expression and the doe eyes frowned. "Why are you so ashamed of a smile?" she asked.

"It is not - my way," he said in an unsure voice.

"I do not understand." She stood up, and for the first time he noticed his surroundings. He was lying on a pallet, soft with animal skins, in the centre of a large arena-like room. Overhead, a green, circular light shone with lustre and his awakener was pacing the ground by the side of him. He was dressed, not in his own uniform, but in some sort of white coverall. He wondered what had happened.

"Your clothes were damaged by the creatures who attacked you," she said. "So I disposed of them. They weren't very pretty, anyway."

Spock frowned and testily pushed himself up on one elbow to face her. He was still dizzy, but no matter - it would pass. That, somehow, he knew. He also knew now that he was in a cave, not a room, and that the shining light came from the sun cascading down through a net of long grass fifty metres above them. The girl was speaking.

"Why do you say 'it is not your way'?" she asked. "Is it not every creature's way to be happy?"

"Not for my people," he answered. "Hundreds of years ago, our planet faced destruction because of base emotions - hatred, envy, greed..."

"Love?" She came and sat by his side.

"Yes, that too. We found it a better way to shut out emotions and so make a peaceful life for all."

"I do not think I care for your way - Spock."

He swung his legs off the edge of the pallet, careful not to kick her, and tested his weight. He was amazed to find his legs worked surprisingly well. "How do you know my name?"

She gave him a smile. "While you were sick we shared many things."

"Have I been ill long? I don't seem to recall..."

"Ten of your days. You suffered from a lochn-ta wound. We thought you would die - you lost a lot of blood; but my father saved you. He would not permit you to die!"

"Your father? I would like to thank him. But tell me, where are we?"

She got up and took him by the arm, leading him to the cave entrance. Pushing aside a curtain of vines she gestured outside.

"See, our land. Torie, the land of freedom!"

The view was breathtaking. The cave was set in a mountainside that swept

down to a crystal clear lake. The huge red sun hanging low in the Eastern sky cast a crimson ribbon over its surface. Round its edges were trees of every description, seemingly from all the planets in the universe, and seemingly too of all the colours of God's creation - lemon, azure, gold, violet, emerald green and other subtler shades for which no name has ever been found. And most wonderful of all were the people who abounded there. They were all young, healthy and laughing and each had the same dark hair and shining eyes as his companion.

Spock was aware of the girl smiling up at him, then blue and black particles spun before him. There was a sense of darkness, of impossible distances and unimaginable speed. And then, slowly, a figure took shape. A man, thought Spock, one of extreme wisdom.

He was tall, as tall as Spock, wide shouldered and confident. Not much older than I, thought Spock, and this was strange too, for the man's eyes were heavy with the knowledge and experience of great age. His eyes also spoke of great power.

"Welcome to Torie, Commander Spock," he said. "I am Uaan."

Spock began to recover from his bewildered stupefaction and put his hand to his head. There had been the attack of the bird 'men', a blow. That was it. A concussion, now hallucination.

The man shook his head. "No, Commander. This is all real. My people's existence won't be suspected by your race or your friends for a hundred of your life times. Perhaps never."

"We ran a computer check on this world and all the others in this sector. Not one revealed an intelligent life form."

"We can camouflage our existence from your archaic sensors."

Archaic, thought Spock. He thinks we're backward.

"As you are," said Uaan. "And I should not toy with you. Behold our city!" He waved, and a dazzling panoramic view of a city engulfed the Science Officer. It could be nothing else. Human, undoubtedly, made for people. But how could people make such things? Dazzling shapes, iridescent under a calm and brilliantly crimson sky, but shapes which changed with every moment. Colours, spangling and shifting like living things, and then turning back into more shapes as tiny hovercraft darted amongst them, to hang and then become absorbed.

Spock knew without question that he was looking a billion years into the future of every race in every universe. Even as he thought to ask the dazed questions which sprang into his mind, the city became part of a shifting, more subtle panorama. Uaan's face shimmered into his vision and the landscape once more sprang into being around him.

He looked past the man. Crimson was the predominant hue of Torie. Crimson sky and a crimson sun that hung darkly over the shimmering lake. Something clicked in his brain. The sun - of course - it was to go nova in a few days' time!

"We are in no danger, my son." Spock looked at the man who called himself Uaan. Telepathic. "Try to adjust, Spock. It is true. I do read your thoughts and I brought you here."

"My father carried you here when you were dying from the loohn-ta wound. It was he who saved your life."

"Hush, Leonie!" said Uaan sharply. "Our guest will think we require thanks."

Leonie. So that was her name, thought Spock. Beautiful. He saw the girl's father give him an amused glance.

"I do thank you," he said. "Very much. But tell me, where are my friends?"

"They believe you are dead. They have returned to your vessel. But do not concern yourself, we will inform them of your safety - for the moment, my daughter wishes to show you our hospitality. Rest a while. I will speak with you later. There are many things to talk of."

The Torian vanished. One moment he was there, the next he was gone. Leonie took Spock's arm and led him smiling into the cave. She took him almost to the back, then, passing her hand over hidden circuits in the rock face, she brought him to a halt. With a grinding noise, slowly the huge slab disappeared into one wall. The light which then filled the cave was dazzling. When Spock's eyes had become used to the glare he saw before him a long, sweeping ramp, leading down into the very city he had seen through Uaan's powerful mind, into the very heart of the mountain itself.

In that moment all thoughts of his friends and the planet's approaching doom left him and the beautiful sight before him filled his mind. He allowed Leonie to lead him down the ramp into the subterranean city of Torie, and the rock door ground shut behind them. Once more the cave was plunged into darkness.

\* \* \*

## PART TWO

Spock knew what it was like to be happy. The hours - days? passed in a slow and dazzling procession, each minute bringing its own new wonder. Leonie was by his side as he explored Torie.

"Spock, see - we project our image of the city and when we find a new way of expressing ourselves we can alter it. You could learn, Spock. You have the intelligence and you can develop the skills."

It seemed to Spock that he was travelling through a veil of crimson mist. Tractor beams took him high up above the city and its glorious towers. Below, he could see its people casually wandering through flowering gardens. Every now and then one of them would drift away from his friends to soar through the crimson air on his own private dream.

"It is a world of dreams," said Spock. "It has the texture of reality, but it is tenuous. It changes so quickly - shape, colour, quality! I see it and then can't take in the shapes. I can't imagine how I could begin to create anything so beautiful."

"If you stayed with me you would have time to learn! We don't have your brief span of life, Spock. Why, my father has lived for over five of your centuries and he is still a young man. We have a dozen of your life-times ahead of us. And the stars too! I can show you how to fly far out beyond any Galaxy you know - take you to universes where life is still being created. Only say you'll stay!"

"What of my friends aboard the Enterprise?"

"They would understand, they would not deny you the happiness which is every creature's right."

Spock felt the girl's love wash through him like a tide. It filled him with a warmth he had never known before.

"I have to believe you," he said. "I have to believe that this is true. I know that I have your love, Leonie, and I hope you will understand when I say I cannot return it."

For a moment a sad smile came across her beautiful face. Then suddenly she said, "Come, Commander Spock, let me show you to your quarters. There is food ready. Everything is as you would wish."

He followed her. A floor swimming with mosaics led to a hazy, glowing shape. As they approached, the shape took on solidity. And then it was an exact replica of his own quarters on the Enterprise. The table was laid for one.

"Your powers are truly remarkable," he told her as he walked round, fingering the oriental-like ornaments. "I wish I had more time to study them."

"You could, if you wished," she reminded him.

"I can no more stay here than you, Leonie, could come back with me to the Enterprise."

"I'll come!" She grasped his arms, and detaching himself gently, Spock said,

"No. It would be the worst kind of imprisonment for you. However much you cared for me the day would soon come when your mind ranged into regions where our narrow intellects could not follow, and you would be alone. I am bound to my people - you must not be."

Leonie was weeping. Spock took a step towards her. Her deep, dark eyes were awash with misery. He reached out and ran a hand down her cheek. The skin was warm and soft. He looked beyond her through the open door. Torie had changed; the towers were rounder, softer now. In that moment Spock had a brief insight into the ways in which it was possible to dream such things. He could learn, that he knew.

"Daughter!" said an authoritative voice. Uaan was there, subdued and watching them with a worried expression. "You shouldn't speak to the Commander so. He must return to his friends, you know that. When our time comes he must go or we will not be able to save him."

"I know, father. It's just that I... I... "

"I read what is in your mind, child, and I am sorry. But as Spock has told you, it cannot be!"

Spock looked at her sadly, then turning to Uaan he said, "Sir, there are a few questions I would like to ask about your city, if I may."

"Certainly," the Torian said. "But please, eat your food."

As Spock and Uaan sat down, Leonie, in a flood of tears, vanished into a soft crimson mist.

\* \* \*

Kirk shifted uneasily in his command chair, trying desperately to relax, but its designers had not intended it to be comfortable. The effort was worthless. Flicking a switch on the console and setting the dial for cross-room pickup, he stood up and walked round the bridge.

"Captain's Log stardate 5549.1. Four search parties are still searching the planet for my First Officer. It is unlikely however that there will be a Mr. Spock to find. We have received reports of large, flying mammalian creatures existing on Terrana, which seem to be totally without intelligence and kill cruelly without reason. The search parties have seen what they can do to a Human body as we have lost Ensign Malone to them. I am therefore giving all parties another twenty-four hours to complete the search before I am forced to order them back on board. Terranus is due to nova in two days."

He punched the 'off' button and turned to Uhura. "See that Starfleet receives that as soon as possible, Lieutenant."

"Yes, sir. Shall I code it?" He shrugged, heading for the door.

"You needn't bother, there's no-one to hear. I'll be down in sickbay if I'm needed."

As he disappeared through the door Sulu and Chekov exchanged worried glances. Uhura sighed. "That sure isn't the Captain Kirk I know," she told them. "He'd never have said that. Never in a million years."



She swung round in her chair, and punching Code Four she began to transmit the message.

Sickbay was deserted. Kirk found Scott, McCoy and Chief Kyle picking at food at a table in the recreation room. Getting a tray himself he joined them.

"I'm a little sick," McCoy said as he sat down. "I still can't believe what we saw on that planet. I saw Malone's body reduced to so much mush. I sometimes wonder what I'm doing here. For as much as I can do, with all my technology, for something like that I might just as well go back to stone knives and bearskins!" He shoved his plate away angrily.

"Take it easy, Bones," Kirk told him in a quiet voice. "There wasn't anything to be done - not for Malone - not for..." He stopped, unable to continue. Then Scotty said,

"Captain, do you think Mr. Spock's alive down there? I burned out three scanners running checks on his phaser and communicator and every time I couldna' find a single thing wrong with them. I canna see why he didna' try to contact you or the Enterprise. It's a mystery, and that's a fact. All I can guess is that someone, or something, didn't want him to."

Kirk did not answer his Engineer at first but arose, his meal yet untouched, and walked over to the observation hatch. Pressing the operating button he watched the metal shutters slide back to reveal the planet rotating slowly below them. Somewhere down there, Spock's alive, I know he is, he thought. He did not know how he knew - he just did, it was almost as if someone had told him.

"Yes, I do think Spock's alive, Scotty," he said finally. "He's somewhere on Terrana and we've got to find him."

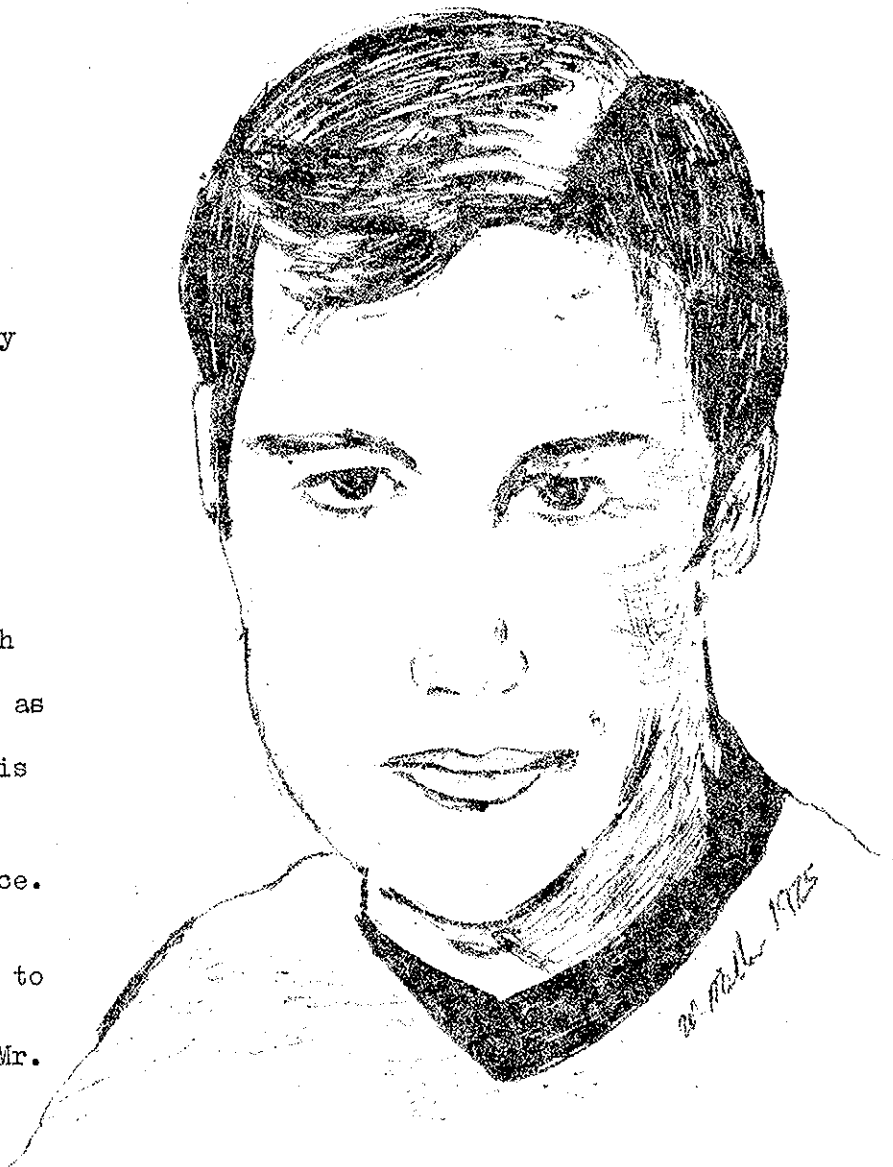
"That's a hell of a tall order, Jim," said McCoy. "That's one big planet down there. Even if we knew where he is - which we don't - it still might be too late. He's wounded, how badly I can only guess. But he can't last much longer. Remember, it's nearly eleven days now since he disappeared."

"If only we knew for certain," muttered Chief Kyle.

"Captain James Kirk?"

At the sound of the strange voice the four Enterprise men whirled. Standing in the doorway was a robed man of indiscernable age. He had the air of a person of great wisdom and knowledge. The air around him seemed to shimmer constantly with a crimson aura.

"Who are you?" asked Kirk, on a level with the stranger almost before the



question was out of his mouth. "And how did you get on my ship?"

The man raised a hand. "Do not be concerned, Captain. I am here, that is obvious - it should be enough."

"Did you beam up?" The Captain realised the stupidity of the question only after he'd said it; if the stranger had beamed up, he would have been stopped by the transporter room guards. Unless... "What have you done to my men?"

"They are unharmed, Captain, and I have no use for your transporter mechanism. I have my own methods."

"And what are they, may I ask?"

"Captain, please! I came here to give you a message concerning your friend Mr. Spock. Do you wish to hear?"

Kirk was dumbfounded. At the Captain's silence the stranger continued, "Your friend is safe with my people."

"Is he hurt?"

"He was, but he is well now. He is a guest of my daughter's and will be returned to you shortly."

Kirk felt an overwhelming sense of relief, which was echoed fervently by his three friends. "Thank you, er..."

"Uaan," said the man. "Citizen of Torie."

"You mean there's a city down there?"

"Yes. You are wondering how your instruments failed to detect it? We have shields to protect it from prying eyes."

Kirk nodded dumbly. "We must get your people off right away, Uaan. They are in terrible danger. Your sun..."

"Is going nova," Uaan finished.

"You knew?"

"Of course. We have known for many of your months."

"Then in heaven's name why are you still here?" demanded McCoy.

"We are in no danger, Doctor. When the time comes, we are ready."

Kirk couldn't help wondering what he meant by that.

"We have powers beyond your dreams, Captain. No harm will come to us, believe me. And yes, we do possess telepathy - among other accomplishments."

Nothing like blowing your own trumpet, thought McCoy. Uaan gave him an amused glance.

Isn't it a Human right to do so, Doctor?"

Kirk smiled. "When will you return Spock to us?"

In front of the Captain's amazed eyes the man Uaan slowly dissolved into mist. "Soon," came his echoing voice. "Soon." The four Enterprise men were left to stare at an empty space.

"I saw it but I dinna believe it," said Scotty in an amazed voice, shaking his head. "Just like a spook!"

"He is a teleporter also, it seems," McCoy told him.

"I wonder what Spock's doing," said Kirk. "And exactly where he is." Puzzled, he sat down hard in a chair.

Leonie was leaning back against a downy cushion in the room she had brought into being, its milky colour reflecting that of her face. Spock, sitting very erect, was saying,

"Yes, we Vulcans pride ourselves on our logic."

"Also on complete control of your emotions?" she asked.

"Emotions only interfere with logic," he told her firmly.

"Is that why you take a mate only once in seven years?"

"The mating cycle is biological. At that time the mating drive outweighs all other motivation."

Leonie moved her head from the pillow and rested it against his shoulder. He looked down at the silkiness of the ebony mass, its fragrance in his head, and their eyes met. "Can nothing disturb this cycle?"

The Vulcan logician cleared his throat. "Exceptional feminine beauty is always - disturbing."

"Vulcan eyes seem to be very disturbing too," she whispered. Just as she was about to kiss his cheek there came a resounding explosion, which shook the air, and seemed to come from all directions at once. Spock sprang from the couch and ran for the door.

Outside, the Torian people were standing stone still, each wondering about the source of the sound.

"The time is nearly upon us," said Uaan's voice. "It is written in the ancient texts that it would be heralded by a great noise."

Spock turned to see the Torian standing by his daughter, an arm about her waist. She was clearly frightened, but her father was calm, unafraid. "The sun?" asked Spock.

"Yes. It will soon be time for us to leave this world. The sky begins to grow dark and the wild creatures are gone."

"Gone? Gone where?"

"To their new home, as we must also." He started to herd his daughter towards the door. Spock stepped outside and watched them walk into the street. Uaan at once released Leonie and closed his eyes, standing with arms held high.

In the Science Officer's head a voice was saying, \*My people! Listen to me. Our time has come. We must leave our homes and find the new world which is promised to us. Go quickly and do what you must. Peace go with you.\*

He turned back to Spock and spoke. "You must return to your people."

"Tell me, where is your new world to be?"

"Somewhere that men will never find. In another universe. We will teleport ourselves there as have the wild creatures."

"Even the animals have power?"

"Some, but all have the ability to reach our new home."

Spock couldn't imagine anything he'd ever heard as being so unbelievable. Lower life forms possessing ESP.

"You are puzzled, Commander? Let me explain - come with me and I will show you the secrets of my people."

He waved an arm. Spock's vision blurred. When it cleared again he was standing on the very same hillside where he had been attacked. It was darker now, though, and the wind blew in sharp gusts sending dust into his eyes. He could feel the ground shivering under his feet. He looked around for Uaan and Leonie. They were not there. But below him, in the canyon, were a pair of the horse-like creatures grazing on the lush grass - strange, he thought, all

the creatures are supposed to have gone. Apart from them, there wasn't a sign of life; not even a bird disturbed the trees to one side of him.

"Uaan!" he yelled. "Where are you?"

"Here, Commander." The voice startled him. It came not from Human lips but from those of the larger of the creatures below him. As he watched it, it resolved itself into the familiar form of Uaan.

Spock slid down the slope, sending rocks tumbling before him, to reach the Torian. "You - I do not understand." He pointed to the beautiful golden-coloured mare which stood a little way behind Uaan. "And that is Leonie?"

Uaan nodded. "Yes, it is she. You see, Commander, hundreds of your centuries ago there existed on this planet two races of people; one peaceful - the other cruel, brutal. The violent race was always killing the other. So our ancestors, not wishing to harm any life form, not even their enemies, devised a means to end the killing. Over a period of many years they developed the power of their minds till they were, as we are now, in total control of their very existence. They decided that they should read the minds of the Leanders - their foes - and to appear to become a creature they would not wish, or would not dare, to kill. Something larger, more fierce perhaps than themselves. Their method proved successful, so to protect themselves further they decided that if ever aliens came to their world they should not see them but creatures they would not wish to harm, as you did. The Leanders finally destroyed themselves."

"But why did you reveal yourselves to me?" Spock asked.

"The small one you befriended and tried to protect was one of us. He was young, only a child, and had not yet learned proper control over his powers - he could not transform himself quickly enough to save himself. And even though you too could not help him, it was obvious to us that we had been mistaken in our belief that all races other than our own were hostile. When you were injured, we had to help you."

"There have been others before me. The survey party fifteen years ago - they were killed."

"That incident was unfortunate, and gives us great pain. But we did not know then what we know now. We were too afraid to help them overcome the loohn-tas. We are sorry."

Spock was about to reply when the ground shook violently and he was thrown to the ground. He could feel the air rippling round him like a living thing.

When at last everything was still he got to his knees and saw Leonie, in Human form, now crumpled on the grassy floor. She was so still she might have been dead, but Spock, hurrying to examine her, found that she breathed, though shallowly. Her face was terribly white and her skin cold to the touch. Uaan, standing helplessly nearby, looked at him with abject pleading in his eyes.

"Help her, please. She is dying."

Spock was puzzled. "You can heal. Can't you do anything?"

"No, Commander, I cannot."

Spock slipped his arms under the girl's unconscious form and gently lifted her. "Take us to the Enterprise," he told the Torian. "Dr. McCoy may be able to help her. But it is not logical that you can do nothing. You have shown me some of the powers you possess. You healed me when I was dying, she told me."

"You are vastly different to us, Commander. Even with our powers we are vulnerable in many ways. Leonie was in the midst of transformation into Human form when she fell. This is a process that must not be interrupted, else it is fatal. And even we do not have the power to stop this degeneration once it begins."

"Then quickly. Take us to the Enterprise."

Before Uaan could move, however, the air sparkled in front of them, coalesced and finally resolved itself into the forms of Kirk, McCoy and two security guards.

Kirk smiled when he saw Spock, not seeing for a moment the dying girl.

"Spock!" burst out McCoy. "You pointy-eared freak, I ought to have known nothing would've dared to..." He noticed the girl in Spock's arms, and at the same moment Kirk did too.

"What's happened?" he asked.

"My daughter dies," said Uaan. "Help her, please."

Quickly, after taking a brief look at the girl, the Doctor flicked open his communicator.

"McCoy to Enterprise. Seven to beam up. Medical emergency."

\* \* \*

"I still don't understand how you knew where I was," said Spock. They were in McCoy's office. Kirk, sitting at the desk, smiled.

"We were scanning the planet when we picked up life form readings - yours and the Tarians'. We were just about to beam down anyway to come looking for you. Uaan told us that he'd send you back soon, but we didn't know how soon that would be and we were getting worried."

"Uaan has been on the Enterprise before?"

"Yes, didn't he tell you?"

"He said he would let you know I was alive. But I didn't think he would deliver the message personally."

The sickbay doors swished open and McCoy appeared framed in them. He looked drawn.

"How is she?" asked Kirk.

"She's dying, Jim," he said sadly.

"Do you know what it is?"

"Not exactly, but as far as I can make out it's a slow sort of degeneration process."

"Isn't there anything you can do?"

The Doctor shook his head helplessly. "Her brain is severely affected - beyond hope of reversal - God knows how she still manages to talk; a Human would be a vegetable by now. She must want to live very much, for some reason."

"Does her father know?"

"Yes, he's with her now, but..." He turned to the Science Officer. "She wants to see you, Spock."

Quietly, without speaking, Spock walked into sickbay. Leonie's gasps of pain hung in the air as he entered. He smoothed her blazing forehead. Uaan stood by her bedside in a state of misery. The life indicator panel readings above her were very low, but her weary eyes only gazed at Spock.

"I... am glad you are here. Is my time short?"

"Very short," whispered Spock, an uncharacteristic quiver in his voice. His mind was in a whirl. He should not be feeling like this - not such a sense of loneliness and despair. And he felt something else too. Was this what his friends called 'love'? Somehow, the idea didn't seem as repulsive as it should.

"I hoped to make you love me." She smiled wanly. "It... began like this, didn't it. You and I. Except you were here... I'm glad you aren't here now. We knew it could be, right from the start, didn't we - but there just wasn't enough time. I wish you could love me... I... "

She gasped under a spasm of pain. Then she lay still, expressionless. Suddenly, with a slight cry, she raised her arms to embrace him. The delicacy that had given her such grace in health now gave her too much fragility in his arms. He willed her with all his might to recover.

"I am not afraid of death... I am not at all afraid," she murmured softly against his shoulder. "It's only that now I wish I could be... with you... forever... "

She gave a gentle sigh. Her voice sank. Gently, Spock laid the beautiful head on the pillow.

Kirk and McCoy, at the open doorway, exchanged glances as Spock bent to kiss the dead face. Quietly, so quietly that no-one heard, he whispered,

"Forever would have been a long time. Leonie... I loved you."

Uaan, by his side, was saying, "My poor child, she always did reach for the stars." Blindly, he laid a hand on Spock's shoulder.

\* \* \*

The ship was many hours away from the dead star, heading for its next assignment. The news of Spock's safety had now reached the ears of everyone aboard and there was a general feeling of well-being in every member of the Starship's crew - everyone, that is, except Spock...

"What will you do now, Uaan?" asked Kirk. They were in the briefing room. Spock, now back in uniform, was seated by the small video viewer set at one side of the table, watching the stars flying past. Kirk and Uaan sat at the table itself deep in conversation.

"I will find my people, Captain. It is where I belong, and we have much work ahead of us - building a new Torie."

"I wish we could have had more time to learn about your civilisation, Uaan. I would have liked to have seen your city."

Uaan stood up, nodding. "Your Mr. Spock will no doubt tell you all there is to know - my daughter spent many hours showing him our world." He turned to the Science Officer. "Remember Torie, Commander," he told him. "In the days when you see a new star system for the first time, think of us."

Spock did not look up.

"Goodbye, Captain - Mr. Spock. We shall not meet again." Uaan's eyes blazed, the crimson haze engulfed him. Through it, the last Kirk saw of him was a hand raised in a gesture of farewell.

Kirk thought of the hidden city, and then of Spock.

"Spock," he said gently. His friend looked up slowly. "I think I can guess at some of what happened down there. But I won't ever mention it unless you do first. Is that what you want?"

"Yes," Spock said, in a voice so sad that Kirk was shocked. Maybe time would dim the image of the beautiful girl with the dark, doe eyes and gentle manner - and Torie, the city of dreams. Maybe the daily routine and the unremitting bustle of life on the Enterprise would help him forget.

He hoped so, without really believing it.

"There are a few things I want to ask you about the city itself," Kirk said as they headed for the corridor. But not yet. They'll keep. As long as you're with us."

Spock closed his dark eyes. "I am," he thought, all the way.  
 But the sadness persisted. That, and the ache of loneliness.

\*\*\*\*\*

A DARK AND LONELY SPACE by Gillian Catchpole

They say the universe is wide,  
 Its boundaries too far to understand,  
 Its entirety beyond our simple minds;  
 But the distance between the heart and voice,  
 That too can seem so vast,  
 A lonely space where a man can hide himself away.

The words so logically spoken  
 Are ones he is allowed to say.  
 A meaning precise for a measured effect,  
 An exactness where analysis is strictly correct,  
 An unbreakable rule to state only the facts.  
 Working by his side I often think  
 How easy it is to become a fool,  
 To hear the voice and think it is the man.

Below this surface world of black and white,  
 The constant threat of changing hues,  
 The imprisonment of worried tones.  
 So carefully buried down depths of dark,  
 That none may see and know the truth.  
 To preserve his outward look of calm,  
 The mask adjusts concealing all behind,  
 Shutting out the light  
 I want so much to give.

Sometimes I sense distress,  
 So painful is the sight I cannot look his way.  
 Feelings that ache to be heard, rise up, engulf,  
 To form on lips that can make no sound,  
 So silently are swallowed down  
 To a place that's safe from curious eyes.  
 A dark and lonely space to hide away,  
 Where none can see his total shame.  
 There are no words, no simple touch,  
 To ease such personal suffering,  
 To share his silent agony,  
 For even as a friend,  
 I cannot reach the depths of space.

\*\*\*\*\*

WHAT IS A STAR? by T.G.Z.C.

Lost in the vast immensity of Space  
 A solitary planet whirls around  
 The lonely star that spawned it.  
 No other sparks of life show near,  
 And to a child living upon that world  
 The question is unanswerable -  
 What is a star?

\*\*\*\*\*

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED by Ginna La Croix

The furnishings told a great deal about the occupant. To the casual observer they would appear strange, imposing, and uninviting. To the educated, they would suggest a certain culture, showing the influences which shaped and guided it, the veiled walls, the flickering light at the bottom of the guardian, the various articles about the room which suggested a warlike race.

He was there. There was an unearthly stillness about this man watching the flickering flame. It danced on his features, now highlighting a delicately pointed ear, now the dark hair finely sculpted to the shape of his head, now the high, arched eyebrows over brown eyes that never once wavered from the light that rose and fell in front of him. The greenish tone of his skin was emphasized by the odd light. His absolute immobility only added to the effect of his satanic appearance that many found so disturbing.

Commander Spock, Vulcan First Officer, Science Officer of the U.S.S. Enterprise, had been motionless for many hours. It was the custom of his people to meditate, an aid in following their philosophy of non-emotion. For Spock, who was also half-Human, this meditation was a necessary part of his existence. Human emotion was not as easily controlled as Vulcan and he needed these quiet moments to deal with the two conflicting natures that often threatened to surface, unbidden and unwanted. For, fight as he would to present to the universe a being who was the Vulcan ideal, time and again these feelings would surface and betray the inner man.

This was one of these times - and again the cause was Captain James T. Kirk, commanding officer of the Enterprise, the one man in the universe to whom Spock had made a deep, yet silent, commitment.

\* \* \*

The cause of Spock's concern was also sitting motionless but for a much different reason. Tousled brown hair and sleep-filled hazel eyes made him appear young - too young to be the commander of a Starship. He was in obvious pain. The broken ribs, only partially healed when he had been released from Sickbay that morning, were making sleep almost impossible. In his attempt to get comfortable, Kirk had banged his side on the edge of the bed. Suddenly wide awake, he held his aching ribs until the pain subsided and he could lie down again.

The giant Starship was silent, manned by night personnel. Kirk had almost succeeded in falling asleep when the intercom at the head of his bed rang.

"Kirk here."

"Message coming in from Starbase 12, sir. Priority one."

"On my way. Contact Mr. Spock, Dr. McCoy and Engineer Scott - have them report to the bridge. Kirk out."

Minutes later, Kirk arrived on the bridge. Spock and Scotty were there ahead of him. McCoy was last to arrive, grumbling about the ridiculous hour and trying to pretend that he wasn't studying the Captain. He noted that Kirk was still pale and there was an unusual sagging to his shoulders, but he didn't seem in distress.

"Message ready, sir."

"Put it on visual, Lieutenant."

The image of Admiral Wicker appeared on the screen, his face drawn. The situation was obviously an unpleasant one.



"Captain Kirk, we have just received a message from the troop ship Normandy. They have been attacked by the Haver fleet not far from the Haver home planet. They have taken Admiral Peter West and left the Normandy crippled. We have help on the way for the ship, but you're the closest help for Admiral West. The area around the Haver home planet is still disputed space so the Federation has no clear legal grounds for the presence of a Starship. If you're involved in any fighting - you're on your own."

Kirk and Spock exchanged glances, each fully aware of the danger that could lie ahead. Kirk looked back at the screen, knowing that his face reflected the grim look that he saw there.

"We'll do our best, sir. Kirk out."

"Peter West," said McCoy. "Wasn't he just elevated to Under-Secretary of the Cabinet?"

"He was, Doctor," answered Spock. "I presume he was on his way to Starfleet Headquarters to take up his new duties."

"Yes, well, obviously he didn't make it," said Kirk. "Spock, what do we know about the Havers?"

"Not much, Captain. They are a warlike, barbaric people. Their ships are archaic by our standards, powered by nuclear energy but possessing surprisingly sophisticated weaponry. They often stage raids on Federation outposts, choosing to plunder and steal rather than to bargain for their needs. Federation vessels that have encountered them report that they are shrewd fighters and show no mercy."

"Great," said McCoy. "For this I got out of bed?"

"I think we had better adjourn to the briefing room, gentlemen," said Kirk. "We need a plan - fast. Mr. Chekov, plot a course for Haver. Mr. Sulu, Warp 6 as soon as possible." Looking at his three senior officers, he continued, "Shall we go?"

\* \* \*

Kirk looked around the table. The situation was bad but he knew there were no better qualified people to handle it than those sitting in this room.

"You know the situation, gentlemen. Opinions?" As always, his first glance was at Spock and, as he knew they would be, the Vulcan's dark eyes were looking directly at him. "Mr. Spock?"

"The Normandy ascertained that the Havers didn't take Admiral West to their home planet but to one of its satellites. They obviously expect some attempt to rescue the Admiral - almost surely in the form of a Starship. I would suggest sending the Enterprise to Haver as a decoy and a shuttlecraft to the satellite."

"They wouldn't have a chance!" blurted Scotty. Spock raised an eyebrow at the engineer's outburst but almost immediately focused his attention back on Kirk. The Captain had not reacted to Scotty's outburst but was obviously turning Spock's suggestion over in his mind. Then he seemed to come to a decision.

"Agreed, Spock. But the shuttlecraft crew will only have a slim chance so we can't risk many people." He looked around the table, then continued. "I'll take the Columbus, Scotty and Bones will come with me. Spock, you'll be in command here. The Havers will be expecting you - you'll have to be careful. Stay long enough to let your presence be known, then get out. We'll leave the locational beam open on the shuttlecraft so you can find us. Hopefully, we'll be in orbit but, if anything goes wrong, you may have to come to get us."

Spock's expression told Kirk that his First Officer didn't agree with his Captain's delegation of duties but he gave Spock no opportunity to argue.

"You have your assignments, gentlemen. Scotty, get the Columbus ready. We'll leave as soon as possible."

The group broke up. Kirk picked up some charts and started to leave, then noticed that McCoy was still sitting at the table, gentle and concerned eyes quietly analysing Kirk.

"Well, Doctor. What's troubling you?"

"At the moment, the Captain of the Enterprise. Jim, you've been out of Sickbay for what - fourteen hours? You were badly hurt in that rock fall on Darien VII. If you remember, I almost ordered a medical leave for you. Captain, I am seriously considering that leave to be ordered now."

"Bones," said Kirk gently. "I appreciate your concern, but we don't have any command pilots to spare on this mission, and we don't have time to order up replacements. I promise I won't stand at the bottom of any cliffs. Satisfied?"

"No, and I would get Spock to replace you except he was probably hurt worse than you. It never ceases to amaze me, whatever happens to you, he always manages to be in the thick of it. Well," he rose wearily, "I suppose I can keep you patched together long enough to find Admiral West. But, please Jim, take it easy?"

\* \* \*

Spock met them on the flight deck. "An additional message just received from Starfleet, Captain - coded and scrambled. Admiral West was carrying the new defense plans for this entire sector of the Federation. Starfleet does not think the Havers suspect this, but if they should manage to acquire those plans... "

"... then we will be at war, Spock; a bloody, dirty war that could go on for years." Kirk rubbed his eyes, trying to will away the tired, defeated feeling that was plaguing him. A fleeting hint of worry crossed Spock's face, but when Kirk looked up, the Vulcan's mask was once again in place.

"All right, Spock," he said reassuringly, "we'll get West. Take care of yourself. Get the Enterprise out of this in one piece."

"I shall attempt to do so, sir. I trust you will do the same."

Kirk lightly touched Spock's arm and turned for the shuttlecraft. Spock watched the slightly limping stride, his worry increasing as the Captain entered the small ship. Then he left quickly for the bridge. This affair was going to be difficult, and it was going to get that way soon.

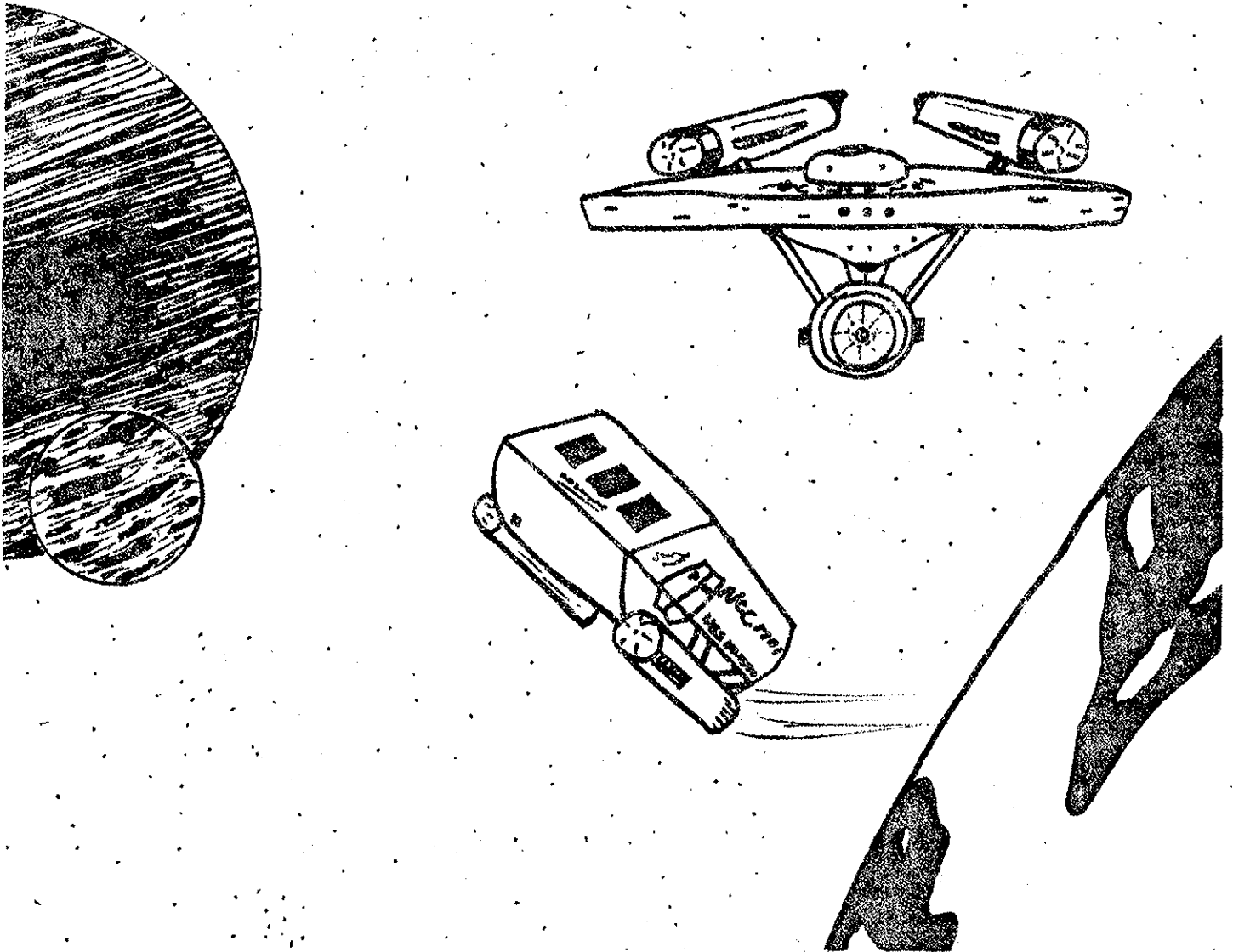
\* \* \*

The shuttlecraft left the Enterprise and was soon approaching Havershangt - one of three small satellite bodies in orbit around Haver. Kirk was studying the sensor readout of the small sphere. The report didn't sound very inviting - mountainous terrain and a frigid, windswept climate. There seemed to be only one inhabited area on the surface. Few life forms were registered, but one of those was distinctly humanoid.

"I don't suppose anyone is expecting a shuttlecraft, but we had better land under cover and go the rest of the way on foot," Kirk suggested. "With the mountains for cover, it should be fairly easy to land undetected."

"How far do we have to walk, Jim?" said McCoy with a bit of concern sounding in his voice.

"Shouldn't be too far, Bones. There's a sheltered area not too far from the settlement. Shouldn't be more than a mile or so."



"That's good. I joined the service as a doctor, not a marathon specialist."

Kirk smiled but made no comment, and missed the real reason for his friend's grumbling. McCoy was worried, really worried. He knew his Captain wasn't up to much physical stress, and he had a feeling that a lot of trouble lay ahead of them.

They landed in the sheltered dip that had shown clearly on the sensors. Scotty handed out the phasers, McCoy got his medical kit, and they left the protection of the shuttlecraft. Kirk involuntarily coughed as the cold air hit his lungs. The sudden intake of breath alerted McCoy to the pain the damaged ribcage was still causing. Recovering quickly, Kirk waved McCoy away before the Doctor could get his medi-scanner out.

"I'm all right, Bones. Scotty, how far?"

Scotty was studying his tricorder. "Just over that ridge, Captain, about one kilometer."

"Good. We'll approach under cover. Don't do anything unless I give the word. Let's go."

No guards seemed to be posted near the small group of buildings. The tricorder showed only one building to be occupied. They approached it silently.

Looking in the window, Kirk saw four Haver guards. Further down, Scotty discovered Admiral West in a smaller room. After a whispered conference, Kirk waved Scotty around to a side entry and motioned McCoy to come with him. They burst into the room catching the guards by surprise. They were quickly disarmed and Admiral West released from the adjoining room.

"Well, well," said West. "Jim Kirk! You are the last person I expected to see here. Did you and that big ship of yours get lost and wander into hostile territory?"

"Not quite, sir," grinned Kirk. "I take it you are unharmed?" West nodded. "And you still have... "

"Yes, those have not been discovered, Jim, you can rest easy."

Kirk turned to Scotty. "Take a quick look around, make sure there are no other Havers. We'll meet you at the shuttlecraft." Scotty slipped out the door. Kirk turned his attention back to West and McCoy who were busy tying the aliens. McCoy stood up to survey his handiwork.

"It'll be good to get back to the Enterprise, Captain," he said. "How do you think Spock's doing?"

"Knowing Spock, Bones, he has things under control."

\* \* \*

But Spock didn't have things at all under control. The Enterprise had approached Haver cautiously, knowing that they were expected. They were met by a show of force which the ship handled without too much difficulty. But, as they started to retreat, they were ambushed by three large warships and only the Enterprise's superior speed and weaponry had kept the fight even.

The Enterprise was gradually forcing the other ships back. Taking advantage of the situation, Spock ordered Chekov to plot a course back to the satellite bodies.

"I think we have spent enough time as a diversion. Mr. Sulu, I want some distance between us and the Haver warships. Implement Warp 8."

As Sulu moved to obey, there was a blinding flash and everyone on the bridge was flung off their seat. The ship heaved with the strain of righting herself from the combined phaser blasts of the enemy warships.

Spock shook his head. His vision was blurred, the result of a sharp connection with the bridge railing. Running his hand across his forehead, he saw it was covered with blood. Cautiously, he rose and looked around. All personnel were returning to their stations except for Chekov, who was lying motionless beside the navigation console. Sulu was fighting to get the Enterprise under control. Spock hit the communicator on the command chair.

"Sickbay, send a team to the bridge immediately."

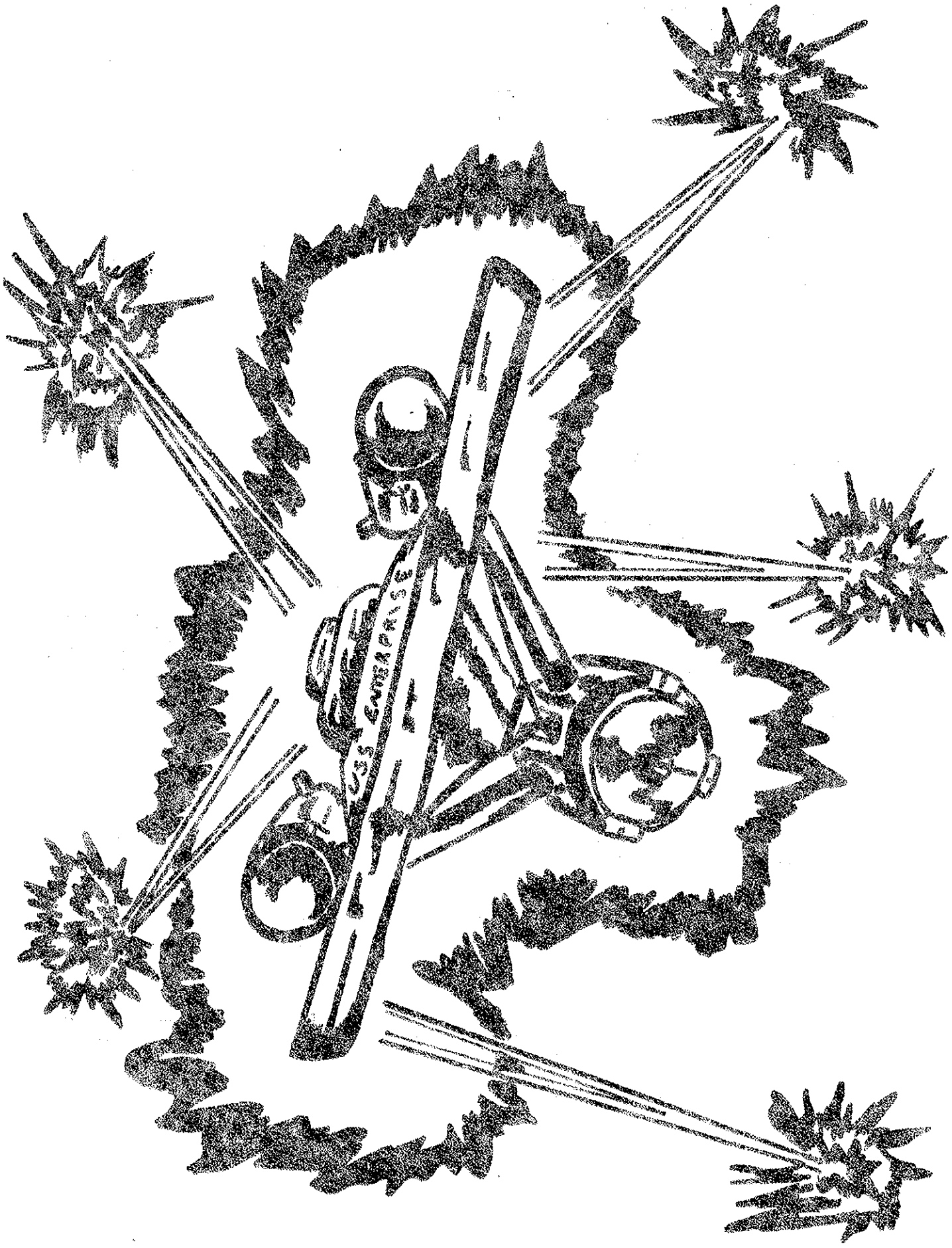
He quickly checked the navigator. Satisfied there was nothing he could do, he attempted to contact Engineering but there was no response.

"Lt. Harmon, get down to Engineering - find out what is going on."

Harmon limped hurriedly into the turbo-lift, a nasty gash showing through a tear in his trousers which he didn't notice in his concern to find out what happened.

"Mr. Spock," said Sulu, "I can't hold her. Something has happened to the controls - and the Havers are coming at us again. We can't take another combined blow like the last one. Our shields are completely down on the starboard side."

Spock slipped into Chekov's seat and checked the photon torpedoes - the system seemed undamaged. Sulu counted down the seconds as the distance



between the Havers and the Enterprise narrowed. He glanced at Spock, his normally cheerful face drawn with worry. The Vulcan had his eyes glued on the viewing screen, his slender fingers poised - then they moved and the ship shuddered as the torpedoes departed. A blinding glare flashed on the screen. As it cleared, two of the Haver warships were stopped in space, one listing badly. The third had disappeared.

The medical team arrived on the bridge. Dr. M'Benga treated Spock's head wound as the report came in on the almost total destruction of the Engineering section. Seconds later, Lt. Harmon made his eyewitness report from the site of the disaster.

"It's a mess, sir. Half the panels are burned out. Impulse engines are completely destroyed. We have warp drive, but instrumentation shows that the power flow is uneven. I don't know how long it will take to repair."

"Can we get enough power to navigate?"

"We'll do our best, sir. Harmon out."

"Chekov has a concussion, Mr. Spock, but no other serious injury. Just a matter of time now."

Spock nodded, his mind already miles away. They were stuck in space, time length unknown to repair engines. Jim Kirk and the others should be leaving Havershangt. The Enterprise was going to be late for the rendezvous. If a Haver warship should intercept the shuttlecraft, the landing party had little hope of survival. Spock decided to go to Engineering to see exactly what was going on.

As he walked through the corridors, repairs were in full swing. Most sections were in operational readiness, but he discovered that reports concerning the Engineering section had not been exaggerated. He listened without comment to Lt. Harmon's assessment of the needed repairs. Scotty's assistant knew his job well, and the Vulcan saw there was nothing he could do to help. If he would admit to the feeling, he was frustrated when he left Engineering. He could only imagine what was happening to the landing party - he had no idea if they were successful in rescuing Admiral West, and no-one knew when the Enterprise would be capable of returning to the satellite.

\* \* \*

As West and McCoy finished securing the Havers, Kirk walked over to the door, ready to go out and join Scotty. As he opened it, the room exploded in action. He was driven back to the far wall by two men, the taller one wielding a stout club. He hit Kirk viciously across his side, across the ribs that had only just begun to knit together. Kirk staggered forward, only to get hit again, and dropped to the floor with a quiet moan. West and McCoy had leaped forward instantly, only to be felled by a phaser blast.

\* \* \*

McCoy was hazily aware of being shaken. He tried to open his eyes and was surprised that he could. After a second, the room came into focus. Then he staggered to his feet. It was Scotty who was doing the shaking.

"You all right, Scotty?"

"Aye, Doctor. No permanent damage."

McCoy turned to Kirk who was lying, unconscious, on the floor. Picking up his medical kit, he quickly ran the scanner over Kirk's prone form. Scotty saw the frown and wisely asked no questions.

"Help me raise him up, Scotty," said McCoy.

"How is he?"

"Not good. He had three broken ribs. Those were reinjured, and two more

along with them. Some internal bleeding - why he hasn't punctured a lung is beyond me. He's got to stay absolutely still until we can get him back to the Enterprise." As he spoke, he taped Kirk's ribs as tightly as he dared.

There was a quiet cough from the door. Looking up, McCoy and Scotty saw the commanding officer of the Havers. He was very tall, long black hair pulled back from his face. His complexion was a light purple - narrow yellow eyes gazed expressionlessly at Kirk lying on the floor. Lifting his eyes, he looked around the room. The vacant expression on his face made McCoy shudder.

"Your Captain, he is not well?"

"No, he's not," snapped McCoy. "He needs medical treatment immediately."

Kirk stirred and opened his eyes. The Haver commander looked at him coldly and continued, "I came to tell you that we have removed Admiral West to a better location. Oh, yes," he said as an afterthought, "your shuttlecraft has been disabled, and, by now, your Starship has been destroyed..."

"No, not the Enterprise..."

"Jim, don't get up!" But McCoy was too late. Kirk staggered to his feet and was hit immediately by a phaser blast and crumpled to the floor. McCoy was brought up short by the same phaser.

"You are staying here," continued the Haver commander as though nothing had happened. "There is no heat, no food - no way to get off the planetoid. You will die, slowly, painfully. Maybe it will teach the Federation to stay out of Haver territory."

The hours dragged by. The three men huddled on the floor, trying to keep warm. McCoy had checked Kirk and found that his fall had caused one of the broken ribs to press against his left lung. The irritation was causing the lung to fill with fluid. Kirk drifted in and out of consciousness. They tried to make him comfortable but there was little they could do. McCoy debated with himself on the risks of performing surgery where they were. He didn't have the required equipment, no sterile conditions, no blood for transfusions if they were necessary - but he knew he might have no choice.

Scotty got up and started walking in a vain attempt to get warm. Kirk moved restlessly.

"He's worse, isn't he Doctor. Can't you do anything?"

All McCoy's pent-up worry let loose. "If you think you're so smart, why don't you try opening his chest in this filthy place - let in all sorts of infection. Sure, I could set his ribs and almost surely kill him in the process. Is that what you want?"

Scotty went a dull red but didn't answer. McCoy was immediately sorry for his outburst. "Scotty, I..."

"Forget it, Doctor. I had no right to say anything. I know you're doing everything you can."

McCoy walked over to the window, his frustration visible in his movements. "He's developing pneumonia, Scotty. I'll probably have to drain that lung. That might give us a little more time." He hit his fist against the window frame, debating on the best course of action.

As he hit the frame, Scotty saw the wood around the window give slightly. Grabbing the table, the only article of furniture in the room, he smashed it against the wall. McCoy stared at him in amazement.

"Doctor," said Scotty, "I think you have just shown us the way out." He took the stout table leg and blow after blow hit the window frame. For a few minutes, nothing happened, then there was a loud crash and Scotty hit it with all his strength and his momentum sent both of his arms straight through the sharp edges.

McCoy was in immediate action. "Quick, Scotty," he ordered, seeing the severed artery. "Clamp this on your arm." He worked quickly, but had a bit of trouble keeping up with the blood flow. However, ten minutes later he finished sealing the last wound.

Scotty looked ruefully at his arm. "So much for my contribution," he said.

"No permanent damage, Scotty," said McCoy, "and it got us out of here." He cleared the rest of the debris out of the broken window. "Stay with the Captain," he said as he boosted himself through the opening. "Don't let him move around. I'm going to see what is going on."

There was no sign of the Havers and none of the other buildings seemed to contain anything useful. McCoy ran to the shuttlecraft - if it wasn't entirely destroyed, he could get the survival kits. At least that would keep them going for a while. As he clambered over the last of the boulders, he stopped in his tracks. There were people gathered at the shuttlecraft and those people were dressed in Starfleet uniforms. McCoy gave a yell and thundered down to the group.

"You certainly took your sweet time to look in on us, Spock. We need the Enterprise badly." Seeing Spock's rising eyebrow, he continued, "West was here; we lost him. Jim's hurt. It's serious... "

Spock grabbed McCoy hard by the arm, making the doctor wince. "The Captain - how ... "

"He was badly beaten by the Havers, Spock. Broken ribs, internal bleeding, and he's developing pneumonia. I've been able to keep him comfortable, but he's slipping. I've got to get him to Sickbay!"

Spock turned to the security guard standing beside him. "Have you been able to contact the ship?" The young ensign shook his head. Spock looked at McCoy. "They must have run into some problem to take them out of orbit."

McCoy frowned. "Well, we'd better get back to the Captain and Scotty." He ducked into the shuttlecraft and came out with one of the survival kits. If they couldn't get Kirk back to the Enterprise immediately, at least he could keep him warm.

On their return, a phaser took care of the locked doors. Although Spock had been warned about the Captain's condition, it took all his Vulcan control to keep his expression impassive. Kirk was very pale, his face and hair drenched with sweat and his breathing extremely laboured. But he was conscious.

"Spock... " A painful spasm of coughing followed the word.

"Jim, don't talk - we're taking you back to the Enterprise... " A warning shout from the other room sent Spock and McCoy running out into a melee of Havers and Enterprise personnel. McCoy was flung to the floor. Spock put up a tremendous struggle but was overpowered. As McCoy was hauled to his feet and shoved over to where the landing party had been herded, he saw the Haver commander being helped up.

"I had heard of the strength of the Vulcans," he said, rubbing the back of his neck. "Up until now, I had not experienced it personally. My compliments, sir. You are a worthy adversary."

Spock said nothing. After sizing him up, the Haver turned his expressionless eyes on the others. "So, once again we have the Federation. My information appears correct, you did destroy our ships. Your Starship is obviously as dangerous a fighting vessel as it is reputed to be, but we failed to see any sign of it as we approached the planet... " Turning quickly, he struck Spock across the face. "Where is it, Vulcan?"

Spock stood silently, a trickle of green running from his mouth. "No, I didn't think you would give me an answer. But I know a way of getting you to



talk." As he spoke he walked over to the door that McCoy had closed behind him as he entered the room. He flung it open, his weapon at the ready. The room was empty!

"What happened to the Captain?" Spock and McCoy exchanged glances -- Kirk's physical condition would not permit him to go far.

"It is of little matter," continued the Haver. "We found an interesting item when we searched Admiral West a short while ago -- certain defense plans. When I get those back to Haver, they should make interesting reading. We..."

A loud explosion interrupted him and he motioned his men outside to investigate, leaving himself and a lieutenant to cover the Enterprise crewmen. Then there was a shout and the sound of running feet, another blast, and total silence.

The Havers looked uneasily at each other. "Lieutenant, go and see what has happened."

The man departed and the minutes dragged past. There was no sound from anyone in the room. Many escape plans passed through the minds of the Enterprise personnel but Spock was covered by the phaser in the Haver's hand and it never wavered. Clearly, if any of them moved, it would cost Spock his life. Then footsteps were heard mounting the steps to the building. The door opened slowly, forcing everyone in the room to focus his undivided attention on it.

"No, it can't be..." The sentence broke off as a phaser blast hit the Haver full force. He crumpled where he had been standing at Spock's feet, but the Vulcan was no longer there. Three quick strides brought him to the door where he caught Jim Kirk as he also lost consciousness, and gently lowered him to the floor.

"Quickly, Doctor," he ordered, but McCoy needed no urging. Grabbing his medical kit from the other room, he was running to the Captain when suddenly there seemed to be people everywhere.

"It looks like the Cavalry just arrived," grinned Scotty as he watched a large contingent of Enterprise personnel pound across the compound. As Sulu ran up, Spock got to his feet.

"Mr. Sulu, have the Captain and Dr. McCoy beamed aboard immediately -- medical emergency. Mr. Scott, go with them. Security team, come with me. Mr. Bolton, stay here and keep an eye on this prisoner."

The hum of the transporter was sounding as Spock headed across the compound. A quick check of the area showed the results of the fight. The other side had fared very badly.

"You seem to have arrived in time, Mr. Sulu," said Spock. "We certainly needed the help."

"But we had only just beamed down when we met you at the compound, sir. Whatever happened here happened with no help from us."

Spock stared at him. If the landing party hadn't ambushed the aliens, then there was only one other answer -- but that wasn't possible -- not in the condition he was in!

\* \* \*

The Enterprise was on its way to Starfleet Headquarters. Mr. Scott was shaken when he saw the condition of his engines, but under his expert guidance Mr. Harmon and his crew were getting the warp drive stabilised. Chekov had been released from Sickbay suffering from a slight headache but otherwise none the worse for wear.

Spock and McCoy were sitting in the Sickbay, the latter totally exhausted. In the past hour he had almost lost Kirk twice -- only the Captain's stubborn resistance got him through the operation.

Sulu arrived, accompanied by a tall figure. Spock rose to his feet - McCoy was too tired to try.

"Admiral West," said Spock. "You are looking well, sir."

"Yes, thanks to the quick action of the Lieutenant here. Doctor, how's Kirk? Would it be possible to see him?"

"He's alive, Admiral. You can see him, but only for a few minutes. He's not very strong."

The five of them moved to the next room. Kirk was lying motionless, his chest heavily bandaged. Sensing their arrival, he opened his eyes.

"Hello, Jim," said West. "Excuse me for saying so, but you look even worse than the last time I saw you. What's he been doing, Doctor, staying up too late at night?"

"No, ignoring my advice to take a rest leave."

"Cut it out, both of you," said Kirk. "Be serious. No-one will tell me what's been happening."

"I could say the same about you," replied West. "Lt. Sulu said you made a one man assault on the Havers and probably should have died in the trying as you were rather battered before you started."

"Never mind that. What happened?"

"The Haver ship has been destroyed, Captain," replied Sulu. "We were orbiting the planetoid, having traced the shuttlecraft's locational beam back there. Mr. Spock had beamed down with the landing party when our sensors showed the presence of a Haver warship and it was beaming something down to the surface. On a hunch, I had the sensors check out the possibility of Admiral West being aboard. Life readings for one Human registered, so we beamed him aboard..."

"You stole him right out of the Haver ship?" said Kirk in surprise.

"Yes, sir," grinned Sulu. "Then we challenged the Havers. There was no verbal response, but they did fire. Uh... we had damaged shielding so were forced to fire back. We must have hit their nuclear pile - she blew up with the first phaser hit."

"And, fortunately, the defense plans were blown up with them," added West, "so that is no worry now." Noticing Kirk's attempts to find a comfortable position, he went on. "How do you feel, Jim - and be honest."

Kirk smiled. "I think I'll live."

"Live!" spluttered McCoy. "You have five broken ribs and a punctured lung, thanks to your fool heroics! Do you have any idea how dangerous a stunt you pulled down there?"

"Bones, I had to do it. They had you at something of a disadvantage. I peeked through the door after you left, and saw Spock with that phaser pointed at him. I was afraid he would do something foolish." He smiled fondly at his First Officer. "So," he continued, "I got your hypo spray, injected what I hoped was a proper amount of Rzhat, which I remembered you saying was the best pain killer you had ever run across, and left through the window. It was a simple process to set some explosives I found and get your captors to chase after me." Touching his side gingerly, he said, "Running across the compound was not the easiest thing I have ever done. When the explosion came, I discovered I had miscalculated the strength of the blast and was knocked off my feet. I must have passed out, because the next thing I knew, a big Haver was standing over me. I guess he thought I was dead because he bent over me with his phaser within easy reach. I grabbed for it and in the struggle it was fired - fortunately directed at him. It took me a few minutes to get to my feet. I honestly don't remember what happened after that. When I woke up

again, I was here."

"And here you're staying," said McCoy firmly. "Come on, everybody - out!"

"See you later, Jim," said West. "I know better than to argue with a ship's surgeon." With a cheerful wave, he and Sulu left.

"We should be at Starfleet Headquarters in 14.3 days, Captain," said Spock. "The Enterprise is still only capable of warp one..."

"Yes," interrupted McCoy, laughing, "and I don't know who hurts more, Scotty or his engines."

"Doctor," said Spock, "that is a completely illogical statement. Engines cannot feel pain."

Kirk started to laugh, but was brought up short by a gasp of pain.

"Well," said McCoy, "you must be feeling better if you can laugh at an idiotic statement from your First Officer."

"Doctor," said Spock icily, "I fail to see how you can find a logical statement idiotic."

Kirk sank down into the pillows and closed his eyes. He didn't think he could stand another argument between the perennial combatants.

McCoy felt Kirk's pulse, then looked at the readings on the panel above the bed. Nodding to himself, he turned to the Vulcan standing beside him.

"Come on, Spock. I've got some Saurian brandy in my office and I think we could both use some. Jim's already asleep and I don't know about you, but my nerves are shot. We almost lost him back there."

"And now, Doctor?"

"Now?" Looking at Kirk, he answered in a slightly shaky voice. "It will take time, but he's got all the time in the world. He'll be all right."

Kirk heard a quietly released breath from the Vulcan and felt a warm hand gently brush a stray strand of hair from his face.

"Doctor, I believe I shall join you for a brandy. As you said, recent events have been trying."

As Spock and McCoy walked side by side out of the room, the ghost of a smile crossed Kirk's face. The touch of a hand and the tone of a voice had done more for him than could any medicine - and the knowledge of a friendship from two men that was too deep ever to be expressed. Darkness settled in; a soothing, quiet oblivion; a healing sleep.

\*\*\*\*\*

THE FAILURE by T.G.Z.C.

They failed him at the Academy, kicked him out  
 During the second year. He could not understand  
 Their reasons; his results were always good,  
 His marks the highest seen for many years.  
 In fitness he excelled, he swept the board  
 In the sports day at the end of his first year.  
 He was polite and courteous, gave his seniors  
 All the respect that was their due; and never  
 Bullied or belittled those unfortunates  
 Who lagged behind him in their daily tasks.  
 And yet they failed him for one vital flaw.  
 Aliens come in many shapes and sizes -  
 He was afraid of ants.

\*\*\*\*\*

ULTIMATUM by Valerie Piacentini

## PART I - ULTIMATUM PRESENTED

As the Enterprise settled into orbit around the shore leave planet Marnon, Kirk stretched luxuriously in the command chair. It had been a difficult and dangerous mission - leave would be more than usually welcome. Turning in his chair he smiled at Spock, and received in response the barely perceptible narrowing of the eyes that told him the Vulcan shared his anticipation.

Instead of their usual camping trip they had booked in to one of Marnon's most expensive resort hotels. Kirk was looking forward to the change, to the recreational facilities offered, and to sampling the galactically-famed luxury of the hotel.

The stand-by crew came aboard, and as soon as they had handed over, Kirk and Spock made their way to the transporter room and beamed down to the planet. After saying goodbye to McCoy and Scotty, who had made their own arrangements, they set off for the hotel. As they registered the desk clerk handed a packet to Spock.

"A message for you, Commander, sent to await collection."

Kirk could not help noticing that the envelope came from Vulcan, and he recognised the distinctive handwriting of Spock's father. He felt vaguely uneasy - experience had taught him that any communication from Sarek usually meant trouble, and Spock needed this rest as badly as he did.

They had already planned to spend the afternoon sailing, and to Kirk's relief Spock made no reference to the letter when they met again in the hotel foyer. The hours passed pleasantly, and Kirk soon found himself relaxing after the strain of the last few months. He always enjoyed Spock's company, and was delighted when they had the chance to be on their own, away from the demands of their duties.

After dinner Kirk remembered that he had not yet replied to a letter from his nephew, and returned to his room to do so, arranging to call for Spock in an hour's time, when they would go out and explore the town.

His letter despatched, he was about to head for Spock's room when he stopped, and smiled; he had a much better idea. Finding a quiet corner he sat down, closed his eyes, and concentrated.

Some time ago he and Spock had been stranded on the planet Derran \*; he had suffered from total amnesia, and in order to protect him, Spock had been compelled to establish an unusually close mind link with him. Their rescue had been so long delayed that the link had become permanent, and since then Spock had been training him in its use.

Though he would not have admitted it even to himself, Kirk had been a little afraid when he had learned that the link could not be broken; he had not fully understood its nature, and had believed that he and Spock would always be in contact, fully aware of each other's thoughts and emotions. Gently, patiently, Spock had reassured him, showing him that the link would only operate when one of them wished to contact the other; it required a definite concentration to establish contact, but now either of them could do so easily. During the training they had come to understand each other as they never had before, and as he grew more familiar with the link, Kirk's hesitancy and uncertainty vanished - he could now claim admission to Spock's mind in the certain knowledge that he would be welcome.

\* See 'The Wheel Turns' by Valerie Piacentini, available from STAG.

This time, however, he met with no response. Instead, he came up against a solid, impenetrable barrier; for some reason, Spock was shielding his mind against him. Seriously worried, he made for the lift, and was soon knocking on Spock's door.

"Come!"

The usual permission to enter was a relief; he had begun to fear that Spock would not admit him. The room was lit only by cloudy moonlight, but as his eyes became accustomed to the dimness he could make out the Vulcan's slim figure curled up in the window seat. He crossed the room, and to his surprise Spock reached for his hand, pulling him down beside him. For some moments neither spoke, then,

"What's wrong, Spock?" Jim asked quietly.

"You know that I had a message today from Vulcan - from my father?"

"Yes, I saw it. I hope it's not bad news?"

"That's what I want... what I must explain to you. It is... very difficult." He paused, and turned to look at Kirk; his face was in shadow, his eyes hidden, but Kirk knew that the Vulcan could see his face clearly.

"For some time now, I have been under great pressure from my family... my father wishes me to return to Vulcan; he... he intends to arrange a... a new marriage for me."

Kirk made no answer. He felt... he did not know how he felt. Suddenly the two of them were alone in the universe - everything else was somehow unreal. He tried to speak, but no words came; his throat seemed dry and paralysed. Spock went on.

"As you know, my family is of some importance on Vulcan. My father writes that T'Pau is... displeased... because I am still unmarried. He has the authority to arrange a match for me, and demands my consent."

"And if you refuse?"

"If I refuse, I can never return to Vulcan; my family will reject me. Sarek presents me with an ultimatum, Jim; Starfleet - or Vulcan."

At that moment full moonlight flooded into the room, lighting Spock's face with a terrible, revealing cruelty. He was unprepared, and the sheer misery in his eyes brought a cry of protest to Kirk's lips. He caught at Spock's hands.

"Don't, Spock! I can't bear to see you like this. Is there nothing you can do to change Sarek's mind?"

"Nothing; he is determined."

"But it doesn't mean you have to leave Starfleet; you can go through with the marriage and return, as you would have done if you'd married T'Pring."

Spock stirred restlessly. "Think, Jim. You know what is involved in a Vulcan marriage. When I was bonded to T'Pring we were children; although the bond held, and drew us together, I was able to erect defences against its going too deep. We never really knew each other - perhaps that is why she rejected me. Now that I know what it is like to be linked to someone who understands and cares about me as a person, I know that I could not tolerate a permanent link with a stranger... who could not even begin to comprehend the... the problems I face as a half-breed. You have never intruded, have always respected my... emotional reticence; I fear that a Vulcan wife might not. In addition, among Humans, I have learned... many things... that a full Vulcan could never understand. You must know... I cannot risk... forgive me, I can say no more."

Kirk understood. Gently he laid one hand on Spock's cheek, and in response felt the Vulcan's fingers touch his face. The barrier Spock had erected between them fell, and their minds linked.

Between these two lay much that because of Human pride and Vulcan reticence would never be put into words; only in their linked minds would its existence be acknowledged. Time ceased to have any meaning - they had entered their own world where race, tradition, upbringing no longer existed, and they stood face to face.

When at last they broke the link, nothing had been resolved. Kirk gazed down at their clasped hands, his heart heavy with dread.

"How long do you have to decide?"

"Not long; Sarek is waiting for my answer."

"You - you will tell me, won't you, Spock?"

"I give you my promise - as soon as I decide, I will tell you."

They parted, and Kirk returned to his room, but he did not sleep. He could not forget his last sight of Spock still sitting in the window seat, his dark head tilted against the glass as he stared up into the night sky.

\* \* \*

## PART II - ULTIMATUM REJECTED

Kirk was called early in the morning with a message from the spaceport commander which required his personal attention. Leaving word for Spock, he went to the base, where to his fury he was detained for most of the day. It was evening when he returned to the hotel, and called Spock's room; there was no reply. Kirk was concerned, but not seriously worried - probably the Vulcan had gone off alone to think. He tried to reach him by mind link, but the barrier was back; obviously Spock wanted no distractions while he reached his decision. Kirk was so tired that despite himself he fell asleep, and did not waken till morning. There was still no reply from Spock's room and, seriously alarmed now, he questioned the desk clerk. The Vulcan had left the hotel early the previous day, and had not yet returned; he had left a letter for Kirk with instructions that it be handed to him only when he inquired about his First Officer. Returning to his room Kirk opened the letter with shaking hands; as he read it, the words blurred before his eyes.

"Forgive me, Jim. I have received another message from Sarek - he demands an immediate answer, and I have none to give. Not only is the marriage he proposes impossible for me, he also insists that I return permanently to Vulcan. I cannot give up Starfleet, yet my Vulcan blood is too strong to accept exile. I do as I must. I will not insult you by telling you not to grieve for me, but it may help you to know that my greatest joy has been in knowing you. May you live long, Jim - and prosper."

He must remain calm; perhaps it was not too late. Returning to the foyer he questioned the desk clerk again. Spock had left the previous morning, hiring one of the hotel's air cars. It had returned some hours later under automatic pilot, so no-one knew where he had gone. After some thought the man remembered that Spock had been interested in the vast Ardan Desert just outside the city. Mention of the desert struck a responsive chord in Kirk's memory, and increased his fear. There was probably nothing he could do, but he must try. He pulled out his communicator.

"Kirk to Enterprise - beam me up at once."

\* \* \*

McCoy, who had spent the previous evening drinking with Scotty, was finally aroused by the frantic knocking on his cabin door. Muttering angrily he stalked across to open it, composing on the way a blistering attack on the idiot who insisted on waking a hard-working doctor at unsocial hours; but the distraught figure that stumbled into the room banished all trace of levity.

As his doctor, McCoy had seen Kirk in many moods he would have hidden from anyone else - angry, apprehensive, indecisive, even afraid. Never until now had he seen him almost incoherent with grief and fear.

Applying an old-fashioned remedy he slapped Kirk hard across the face several times, and was rewarded by seeing the Captain pull himself together.

"Thanks, Bones. I'm sorry - I just couldn't seem to help it."

"Here - drink that; not another word until you do." He watched as Kirk drained the brandy, then took the glass from shaking fingers.

"Now - what's wrong?"

"Bones - it's Spock. He's going to... to kill himself."

"Spock? You must be mad! He'd never... "

"Believe me, Bones, I know." Kirk buried his face in his hands; when he raised his head again his eyes were wet.

"I can't explain all of it, even to you. It was Sarek... he's arranging a new marriage for Spock, and wants him to return to Vulcan. It would mean he had to leave Starfleet... or face perpetual exile from Vulcan. It was... an impossible choice. He told me once... on Vulcan, there's a form of suicide... he's gone into the desert alone... with no water... to die! We've killed him, Sarek and I; between us we... tore him apart."

For a moment McCoy stared uncomprehendingly, then realisation dawned.

"Oh my God! Jim, I understand."

He sat down on the bed beside Kirk, holding him as the tears came.

"God help you both! Is there nothing you can do?"

"If I find him in time, perhaps. Scotty's scanning the Ardan Desert for him now. I made some inquiries before I left Maroon, but he'd been gone too long."

"And if you do find him?"

"I don't know... but if it's too late... how do I go on, Bones?"

There was no answer to the pitiful question; McCoy could only hold his friend, giving what comfort he could by his presence. At least he could ease the strain of waiting; he reached for the medical pouch he always had with him, and administered a sedative. Making Jim comfortable, he dressed quickly and left for the bridge, where an unusually grim-faced Scott sat in command. At the sensors Chekov worked busily; the air of tension was electric. Uhura and Sulu were in their usual places, doing what they could. Although none of them knew what had happened they were aware that they worked for Spock's life, and that was all they needed to know - time was their enemy, and they could not afford to fail. Hours passed with no result, and McCoy's sense of foreboding grew stronger - how to tell Jim?

Then at last Chekov turned with a cry of triumph. "Got him! At least, I have a fix on the approximate area."

Returning to his quarters, where Kirk still tossed in uneasy sleep, McCoy stood for several minutes watching his friend, his blue eyes clouded with concern.

Despite his utter confidence in Spock, he had always mistrusted the mind link; it was not natural for Humans, he had always maintained, and had watched with anxiety the subtle changes the establishment of a permanent link had made in his friends. Perhaps, he admitted, that anxiety was tinged with a degree of jealousy that they shared something he could not, but at this moment, his concern was purely for Jim. Gently, insidiously, the linking had grown deeper since their return from Derran, until the emotional state of each man was almost unconsciously reflected in the other. He had seen for himself how the conflict that had driven Spock to suicide had affected Kirk - he was afraid now of the damage that the severance of the link by Spock's death would do to Jim's mind.

There was nothing he could do - it was up to Jim now. With a faint sigh he reached out to waken his friend.

\* \* \*

"Shall I beam down with you, Jim?"

McCoy and Kirk stood in the transporter room with Scott at the controls; the doctor wanted no other witnesses when the Captain returned.

"No, Bones; I've got to go alone. If he's still... alive, we have much to say, and not even you have the right to hear. If it's... too late, I... I want to be... alone with him... for the last time."

"I understand; but don't worry, Jim - he's only been gone two days. Vulcans can last a lot longer than that without water, even in the desert."

"I know, but he's very determined. His strength of will has saved us all more than once. He knows I'll be searching for him - he might... make certain... I' too late."

"I'll wait until I hear from you; if you need me, call, and I'll come."

Kirk touched the doctor's arm lightly. "You always do, don't you, Bones?" He stepped on to the transporter platform. "Energise, Scotty."

\* \* \*

The desert sun beat down with almost physical force as Kirk materialised on the sand. He looked round, and sighed. Somewhere in this jumble of rocks and sand was Spock; the sensors reported that he was still alive, but something in the composition of the rocks confused the readings, and this was the closest he had been able to come - the rest of the search must be conducted on foot. Delaying no longer, Kirk began to climb, watching anxiously for the flash of blue he hoped, yet almost feared to see. It was an effort to move in the intense heat but he kept going, pausing only to wipe the sweat from his eyes.

He should have brought water, he realised very quickly; he was getting thirsty already. In his anxiety to leave the ship he had not thought of it. Then as he stepped through a gap in the rocks, sunlight glinted on water - a small pool trapped in a hollow. Kirk hurried forward eagerly and knelt, only to draw back in disgust - the water was stagnant, evil-smelling. He was about to call McCoy to send down a flask when he noticed something that drove all discomfort from his mind. In the mud at the pool's edge was the clear impression of a hand - a hand with long, slender fingers. He scanned the ground eagerly - someone had knelt here at the water's edge; had leaned over the pool; had... drunk of that poisonous water? He prayed not. Beyond the handprint further tracks on the sand showed where someone had retreated among the rocks. Rising to his feet he followed swiftly - every instinct told him to hurry... hurry!

He could have wept with disappointment when the tracks faded at last



on stony ground. Kirk looked round frantically; which way now? It was - 'logical' - that the Vulcan would conceal himself to further hinder the search he knew would be made. That low cliff - perhaps there was a cave? He drove himself on, but despair was in his heart as he thought of that poisonous water, and his own words to McCoy - had Spock 'made certain'? It seemed he had been stumbling among those nightmarish rocks for hours when

"Jim."

That so-familiar voice; but the tone was one that of all men only Jim Kirk would recognise.

"Where are you?" And that tone, only the Vulcan had ever heard.

"To your right - between the rocks."

Spock was lying propped up against a boulder; he was pale, but otherwise seemed normal. Kirk felt his heart lift until he noticed the unhealthy sheen of sweat on Spock's face, and the feverish glitter in his eyes. Without knowing how he got there, he was on his knees at Spock's side, pulling out his communicator.

Spock's reaction was as fast as ever; with one hand he caught Kirk's wrist, with the other he took the communicator and tossed it away. It lay well beyond Kirk's reach, and he could not break the grip on his wrist.

"Let me go, Spock, I must call Bones."

"No. I cannot permit you to do so. It will not be long now."

"So you did drink some of that water?"

"Yes... I knew you were following me, and I had to be sure; it seemed ... the only way."

"Please, Spock, don't do this." It was a moan of agony.

"I must. I have... considered carefully. The conflict has become too much for me, Jim. If... what we shared... means anything to you, be merciful. Let me go."

"Is that really what you want?"

"It is what I must do. I can go on no longer, torn between my Human and Vulcan blood. If I could choose one without regret... but I am - as I am. Help me, Jim. Let me go."

"I don't know if I have the courage; how do I go on, without you?"

"You are... the Captain of the Enterprise. You will do as you must, as I do. I have never... asked anything of you, Jim... until now."

"I'll try... to do as you wish; but don't send me away - let me be with you, as long as... "

"That is why I called to you; I confess, I wanted you with me... at the last. Forgive me for that."

"It would be so much harder... to know you were alone."

Deliberately Kirk slipped his arms round the Vulcan, cradling the dark head on his shoulder. He was very calm now, his own decision made. No argument could turn Spock from his chosen course - he accepted that, as he supposed he must have done all along. Well, his own mind was clear at last; the weight of the phaser was suddenly comforting against his hip...

They sat in silence for a long time. Each had considered reaching for the mind link, but had rejected it for his own reasons; Spock, to spare Jim the pain he suffered as the poison crept through his body, Jim for fear the Vulcan should read his intentions.

Suddenly Spock shivered, and Jim's arms closed tighter around him.



"Spock! Is it... time?"

"I believe so." The slender fingers brushed Kirk's face lightly.

"Jim, I... I want... "

The slim body shuddered and was still; the dark head was suddenly heavy against Kirk's shoulder; the slanting eyes closed slowly. Jim made no sound, only gathered the Vulcan closer, burying his face in the silky hair. He remained so for a long moment, then lifted his head and looked down into the still, secret face, at the silent lips, their last words forever unspoken now. With an unsteady hand he clumsily smoothed the dark hair.

"Goodbye, Spock, my..." His voice broke on a sob.

Without taking his eyes from the Vulcan's face, one hand reached purposefully for the phaser at his hip.

\* \* \*

A few feet behind Kirk, McCoy moved swiftly, silently closer. He had become uneasy when the Captain failed to call in, and all attempts to contact him remained unanswered. He remembered Jim's expression as he left, and his concern grew. There had been something in those eyes...

McCoy had hesitated, wondering how to act for the best. Impossible to break in on what might be Kirk's last meeting with Spock; equally impossible to leave that grief-stricken man alone with the body of his friend. As time crawled by with no word he came to a decision at last, and beamed down to where he believed Kirk to be. There was only the communicator lying on the sand, and he realised what must have happened. From behind the rocks came the low murmur of voices, but he was too far away to hear what was being said. When the voices fell silent he moved forward to find his friends, rounding the rock in time to see Kirk lay his cheek against Spock's hair.

His heart heavy with unshed tears, McCoy came closer, and watched with horrified understanding that deliberate movement of hand to hip. He moved faster than he had ever done in his life - Kirk's fingers had scarcely closed around the butt of the phaser when the hiss of a hypo against his shoulder sent him sprawling forward across Spock's body. If was better so, McCoy thought, for the effects of the severance were even graver than he had feared - at that moment, Jim Kirk was not quite sane. He turned to the Vulcan, scanner in hand. After a moment,

"Scotty! Three to beam up - fast!" Urgency, and a desperate hope, echoed in his voice.

\* \* \*

Slowly, unwillingly, Kirk regained consciousness. He was in sickbay - McCoy's doing, he supposed wearily. Frantically he fought to cling to the comforting, friendly blackness where this... pain... did not exist. It was impossible; he was forced back into a grey, leaden world from which sunlight, laughter, hope had suddenly vanished.

What now? he thought. How do I go on, without Spock? Never again to look into those dark, alien eyes that had seen so deeply into his soul; never again to share that silent communication that said so much more than mere words; never again to feel that touch on his hand, on his mind, to see that face, expressionless to others, to him the mirror of a thousand changing moods.

He was alone now; strange... he had never before realised the utter desolation of that word. A low moan of agony broke from his lips and he buried his face in the pillow to shut out a suddenly empty world.

A hand on his shoulder, a voice speaking urgently in his ear.

"Jim, wake up! Wake up, damn you!"

He opened reluctant eyes. "Bones. Why did you interfere? You should have left me with... him; we could have been... together."

"Jim, listen to me. He's alive. I don't know how, but he's alive."

A sudden surge of hope. Kirk sat up, his hands gripping McCoy's arms, staring into the vivid blue eyes.

"You're sure? Don't lie to me, Bones - I can't take it."

"See for yourself. He's alive - barely."

Kirk swung his feet to the floor. Clinging to McCoy for support he moved to the next bed. Spock lay unmoving, pale and silent.

"A healing trance?"

"No, I've never seen him quite like this before, I don't know what's wrong. I got the poison out of his system - he should have come round by now."

"Then why hasn't he?"

"I think - but I can't be certain - that it's a deliberate refusal to respond; he seems to be willing himself to die. I can't reach him, Jim - perhaps you can."

Kirk touched Spock's face with trembling hands. Now, if ever, the link must be made; closing his eyes he summoned every ounce of concentration, willing Spock to respond. He encountered - blankness. No way to reach him - he would not be recalled. Kirk looked up with agonised eyes.

"He won't let me through. He's determined to die, I know it. I can't reach him, Bones."

"I'm not sure... The indicators rose a little when you touched him... You must be getting through somehow. Keep trying - I don't think he'll let go as long as you stay with him."

Kirk sat down on the bed, holding Spock's hands tightly, every nerve concentrated in the effort to break the barrier; he was not even aware when McCoy left the room.

The surgeon had gone to his office, where he called Uhura. There was one slim chance for Spock's life. Once before Sarek of Vulcan had responded when his son was in danger; if a message could reach him in time, he might come again, and if anyone could break Spock's defences, it would be he. Vulcans did not respond to emotional appeals, but his son's life must be of some concern to him - surely he would make an effort to avert the tragedy for which he had been partially responsible?

His message despatched, McCoy returned to sickbay, where all his skill was needed to sustain Kirk's strength. As long as Jim could hold on, McCoy believed, Spock would live; if that tenuous link was broken, however...

\* \* \*

### PART III - ULTIMATUM RECONSIDERED

On beaming aboard the Enterprise, Sarek noted with some surprise that he was received by Lieutenant-Commander Scott. This was unusual - an Ambassador of his status was usually greeted by the Captain. He did not, of course, feel insulted, but it was... strange; Captain Kirk was usually meticulous about such matters.

As he exchanged the usual formalities with Scott, he made no reference to the reason for his visit - he might have been paying the most routine of courtesy calls. Scotty's well-renowned temper was roused by this seeming indifference to the fate of the man he was proud to call a friend, but he held it firmly in check.

As they passed along the corridors to sickbay Sarek noticed that the ship seemed to be unusually crowded to be in orbit round a shore leave planet. Very few seemed to be actually on duty, but stood talking in small groups wherever he looked. Curiosity was the one emotion Vulcans had totally failed to eliminate; turning to Scotty he said,

"I understand that the crew was granted shore leave, Mr. Scott?"

"Aye, that's right, sir - and a grand planet it is, too."

"Yet I observe that the ship seems to be remarkably well-manned; are

you having some technical difficulties?"

Scotty stopped in his tracks, staring at the Ambassador with astonishment.

"Well, wid ye credit that!" he exclaimed at last. "Ambassador, I'm thinking ye could be doing with a few home truths!"

He swept Sarek into the lift, and called it to a halt between floors.

"Right, now we'll no' be interrupted. Listen, man, for years I've had it dinned intae me that Vulcans are supposed tae be intelligent - I'm beginning tae wonder if ye'd ken whit a dug wis if it ran up and bit ye! So ye're wondering why so many of the crew are on board - well, I'll tell ye. As soon as they heard about Mr. Spock they began drifting back, a few at a time - I reckon they're nearly all here now. Oh, they ken fine there's nothing they can do, but they just want to be here. I don't suppose you'd understand, but it so happens that we're all worried sick about that stubborn, pointed-eared son of yours!"

"Please go on, Mr. Scott," Sarek said quietly as the Engineer fell silent, suddenly realising what he had been saying to one of the most influential men in the Federation.

"Aye, well... They tell me that emotion doesn't mean much to your people - I canna pass judgement on that; but I know my own crew. They don't feel much like fun and games at the moment - Spock's too important to them. Open your eyes, man... or your mind... or whatever; take a good long look at this ship, and for once in your life, try to realise what Spock is!"

Sarek eyed Scott considerably; despite himself, the appeal had shaken him. On his previous visits to the Enterprise he had recognised with well-concealed pride the respect his son commanded from these Humans. And... he was curious. Closing his eyes in concentration he opened his mind and scanned the Enterprise. It was as Scott had claimed; from every corner of the great Starship, from every man and woman on board, one thought, one prayer, was uppermost - Spock must live. It seemed that a great tidal wave of prayer, hope and - yes - affection flowed through the ship to where his son lay. He had never thought that a Vulcan could inspire such devotion in Humans. Visibly shaken, Sarek opened his eyes.

"I think," he said quietly, "that you had better take me to Captain Kirk."

\* \* \*

As Sarek approached his son Kirk released his hands and stood, head bent, in silence; under Sarek's compelling gaze he looked up at last, and the Vulcan made an involuntary movement of protest. The silent agony in the hazel eyes reminded him of a trapped animal he had once seen, and released out of compassion. No-one should suffer so, he thought, but this man would not accept pity; the tragic gaze demanded positive action - how should he respond? Kirk stepped forward, his hands held out helplessly.

"Sarek, I beg you... help him."

"Tell me what had happened."

He knew already, but wished to hear how the events appeared to Kirk. The words were unimportant - he listened to the quiet, desperate voice, watched the changing emotions on the expressive face. This was not the James Kirk he had known, vital, decisive, assured; this was a stranger, the haggard face and broken voice eloquent testimony to a grief Sarek would never admit to recognising. As Kirk finished his explanation, Sarek began to speak.

"Captain Kirk, I realise that this is difficult for you to understand, but I cannot do as you wish. My son has made his decision, and we must abide by it. He was presented with a choice between his duty to Vulcan, and his duty to Starfleet. Rather than be compelled to do so, he had elected to terminate his existence in the traditional manner. It was a... logical decision.

He has the right to take his own life - I cannot interfere."

Gone now was the grief, the dumb suffering; the hazel eyes blazed with anger, and the voice shook with hatred rather than sorrow.

"Logic! I'm sick to death of that word! Spock's dying, and you dare - you dare stand there and talk to me of logic! You may choose to forget that he's your son... I can only remember that he's my friend. I've always honoured him for his loyalty to Vulcan, never sought to change him. Oh, I don't pretend I've always succeeded, but at least I've tried to understand what he is - have you? You've always rejected his Human side, demanded more of him than you would have done if he'd been fully Vulcan. Couldn't you see what you were doing to him? If he dies, Sarek, we killed him, you and I, as surely as if we'd used a knife. I can accept my share of the blame - can you? We asked too much; Human or Vulcan - we couldn't accept that he is both. We forced him to choose, and he could not. A logical decision? Never! We drove him to his death; perhaps you can forgive yourself - I know I never will. We both knew - and made sure he knew - what we wanted from him; neither of us bothered to ask what he wanted!"

The anger drained away in the face of that impassive calm. Kirk shook his head helplessly and moved back to Spock's side. As his bitter grief, all the sharper for the loss of the small hope he had allowed himself, closed around him again he took Spock's hands in his, as though trying to infuse some of his own will to live into that silent figure. Totally absorbed in Spock he had almost forgotten about Sarek, and was vaguely surprised when the quiet voice spoke behind him.

"Captain Kirk, that is one error of which you could never be guilty; I believe Spock's wishes have always mattered to you. I confess, you have given me much to consider - your appeal, emotional though it was, contained much truth. I will need time to reflect upon your words. With your permission, I will go now to Spock's quarters; he would have returned there to make... certain preparations before he left for the desert. There will be letters which I must study before I make my final decision."

Kirk nodded absently; it was doubtful if he had taken in Sarek's words. His whole being was centred on sustaining that frail thread of life. Intuitively, he knew that McCoy was right - somehow his mind was touching Spock's. The Vulcan would not respond, but neither would he permit himself to die while that frail link existed, fearing that the violence of its severance would damage Kirk's mind. And Kirk knew, as McCoy could not, that Spock was waiting, waiting for sheer exhaustion to dull Kirk's watchfulness. He must sleep soon, and the instant his vigilance was relaxed, Spock would be gone.

\* \* \*

McCoy met Sarek at the door to sickbay.

"If you permit it, I will come with you."

Sarek inclined his head gravely. As they walked along the corridor he waited for yet another appeal from the surgeon; somewhat to his surprise, it was not forthcoming. Only when they stopped at the door to Spock's quarters did the doctor break his silence.

"Sarek, while you are deciding what to do, here's one more thing for you to consider. When I found Jim down on Marnon, he thought that Spock was dead; I was only just in time to stop him blowing his brains out."

Satisfied that he had Sarek's full and somewhat startled attention, McCoy went on bitterly, "That bloody mind link! It's going to be hard enough losing Spock, but this...! They're linked now, even though Spock won't respond, and when he dies, God alone knows what will happen to Jim! It's not one life I'm fighting for back there, but two. How does that square with your Vulcan reverence for life?"

Favouring Sarek with a long stare from those incredibly blue eyes McCoy turned on his heel and left. Sarek watched him go before he entered his son's quarters.

It was as he had anticipated. Spock's preparations had been thorough, methodical, Vulcan; he had expected no less. On the desk lay his formal declaration of intent to take his own life, the cold, traditional phrases written with a steady hand. A neat pile of envelopes contained his personal farewells; to his mother, to Sarek himself, to Captain Kirk, to Dr. McCoy. Sarek touched the last two curiously, wondering what his son could have found to say at such a time to these so-emotional Humans. Not even to himself would he have admitted that he was delaying as long as possible the moment when he would have to open the envelope that bore his own name.

At last he unfolded the letter. He was not quite sure what he had expected, Vulcan formality or Human emotion; like his son, it was a blend of both. Quietly, simply, Spock explained his action, offering no excuses, attaching no blame, accepting the situation as he saw it. His farewell to his father was touched lightly with affection, deeply with respect. As he read his son's words, Sarek felt a sudden fierce pride. He recalled the words Kirk had hurled at him.

'Human or Vulcan... he is both!'

For the first time Sarek understood that what he had feared might be a weakness in Spock had become in fact his greatest strength. He possessed indeed his mother's warm humanity, but tempered by his father's teaching he was free from all the baser Human motives; his simple, transparent goodness shone out in every word. Now Sarek could admit that perhaps he had been wrong; he must consider carefully.

\* \* \*

The Starship seemed to hang suspended in time and space. The entire crew had returned now, and wandered the corridors aimlessly, getting in the way of the maintenance staff. From the bridge personnel down to the rawest crewman they hung about the rec. rooms, gathering in small groups, talking, reforming, waiting, endlessly waiting. Still no word from sickbay - it was strange how unreal the ship seemed without that quiet presence on the bridge.

At Spock's bedside Kirk and McCoy still waited. The world had contracted to that pale face, to the barely-flickering glow of the life indicators. McCoy glanced at the Captain; Jim could not hold on much longer - he was plainly exhausted, kept going only by a will-power that in its way was as great as the Vulcan's. He had often wondered idly which of them had the stronger will - now it seemed he was about to find out. It was a battle neither could win. If Spock died, McCoy knew without doubt Jim would surely follow; yet if Kirk succeeded, and somehow drew Spock back, the original problem would remain - Spock would still be faced with that impossible decision. If only he could help...

He looked up as the door opened and Sarek returned. Jim followed his gaze absently - he had forbidden himself to hope for any help from that quarter. This time, as Sarek approached, he did not move away, and the Vulcan saw with no surprise that his son now rested in the Captain's arms. The hazel eyes surveyed him with an unnatural, hopeless calm, and Sarek felt an unaccustomed guilt that Kirk had carried this burden for so long. It was that guilt that lent an unusual gentleness to his voice as he said,

"Captain, I have considered your words very carefully, and although I have no right to interfere with Spock's decision, I am prepared to do so. However, I must warn you that there is no guarantee that I will succeed. Spock's suicide seemed to him a logical solution - even if I succeed in reaching him, I do not know if I can persuade him to reconsider."

Renewed hope flared in Kirk's eyes. "If there's any chance, any chance at all, we must try. Please, do what you can."

He relinquished his hold and stood up, his hands lingering for a moment on Spock's shoulders before he stepped away from the bed. Taking his place, Sarek reached for his son's mind, and was astounded at the resistance he encountered; he had not thought that Spock's defences were so strong - nothing he could do broke through his guard.

His eyes moved to the indicators over the bed; they had dropped alarmingly in the short time since Kirk had released his hold - obviously the Captain's presence made a difference. Was it possible, Sarek wondered, that Kirk could succeed where he had failed? Not alone, of course, his mind was not strong enough, but perhaps with help...

Sarek beckoned McCoy aside. "Doctor, I have failed to break Spock's defences - his mind is shielded from me; the Captain must try to reach his Human side. A Vulcan can be turned from suicide if he is given a logical reason, but we have none to offer - we must rely on emotion. You know more than I about such things - have you any suggestions?"

McCoy thought for a moment, then answered slowly. "Perhaps if he could be made to realise how his death will affect Jim - I told you what happened when I found them - if he knew for certain that his death would mean Jim's, it would bring him back, I'm sure."

"We must try it, then. I will lend my power to the Captain's mind, and let him make the link; if you will recall for me how you felt then, I will draw on your memory, and using the Captain's mind as a channel, present the image to Spock. If he reacts as you believe, he will enter a healing trance, and the danger will be over."

McCoy nodded his understanding, and moved to stand beside Sarek, who explained to Kirk what he intended to do.

"I am aware, Captain, that you have some experience of the mind link; reach for it as you would normally do, and I will supply the power your mind lacks. Are you ready?"

"Yes."

Kirk's lips were white, but his hands were steady as he laid them on Spock's face.

This time, it was easier; his own wistful appeal, strengthened by Sarek's power, enabled him to slip through Spock's defences, deep into his mind.

- Spock, answer me, please. -

- Jim, you should not have done this; it is too late. Leave me. -

- I cannot. I... need you. -

Sarek had been waiting until Spock's attention was fully occupied with Kirk's presence in his mind. While he waited he had been drawing on McCoy's memory and emotions; now he linked them to Kirk's, and with irresistible force sent the image crashing into Spock's unprotected brain. Jim's grief and desolation, McCoy's agony of mind, were shown to him in all their naked cruelty. Most horrifying of all, he was forced to see that despite the barriers Spock had thought sufficient to protect him, Jim too had been trapped by his conviction that only death would release him from his conflict. The link had gone deeper than either had realised; he saw through McCoy's eyes Jim's attempt on his own life, and understood at last that for his friend's sake he must live - Jim's sanity, if not his life, would not survive the severance of the link. The shock of comprehension was devastating. Spock's cry of anguish snapped the contact instantly; Kirk would have fallen but for McCoy's arm around him, and even Sarek staggered and had



to clutch the bed for support.

After that one convulsive shudder Spock again lay unmoving. McCoy helped Kirk to sit on the next bed, then turned back to his patient. He worked busily for a moment, then glanced across at Sarek.

"The healing trance?" he questioned.

"Yes. The Captain has succeeded. Spock will awaken in a few hours. Now, if you will forgive me, I would like to rest."

"Yes, of course. Nurse Chapel! Oh, there you are. Please conduct Ambassador Sarek to the guest quarters. I'll see you later, sir. By the way, Nurse, tell the crew there's no word of Mr. Spock yet - we'll see how he is when he comes round. Jim, I want you in bed - now!"

McCoy was back in top form, issuing orders, comments, instructions on all sides. Within a very short time he had Kirk sedated and asleep; sickbay was very quiet now, and peaceful after the tension of the last few hours. McCoy sat down, his watchful gaze moving between his two sleeping patients. He was still uneasy about what would happen when Spock awoke, but for the moment it was enough that he had decided to live.

\* \* \*

#### PART IV - ULTIMATUM WITHDRAWN

"I said no, Ambassador, and I meant no!" McCoy's blue eyes flashed dangerously as he faced Sarek across the desk in his office. "You will be informed when Spock is well enough to be visited. I'm still in charge here, and I won't have my patients..." He broke off as the intercom sounded. "McCoy here. Yes, Nurse?" He listened for a moment. "I'll be right there. Excuse me, sir; I won't be long." Nodding abruptly to Sarek he left the office.

After a moment the Vulcan rose and moved to the door; it was slightly ajar, and he could see directly into sickbay. Spock's bed was clearly visible from this position. As he had expected, his son was not alone; Kirk sat with him. Each held the other's face between his hands - obviously their minds were closely linked. Sarek could not bring himself to interrupt that silent communion - indeed, he should not have been witnessing it at all - but he had a decision to make. The question of Spock's future still had to be resolved. He wanted his son to return to Vulcan, but he had now seen for himself the depth of their commitment to each other's interests; he had not thought that so close a link was possible with a Human. He had learned enough to realise that to insist on Spock's obedience would destroy not only his son, but Kirk too - so strong a link could not easily be broken.

As he watched the two men drew apart, their hands resting now on each other's shoulders. Their eyes met, and held; after a moment Spock said very quietly,

"You understand now, Jim?"

"Yes. There's... no way to say it, is there?"

"Only in our thoughts."

"What will you do now?"

A faint sigh, that scarcely reached the unseen listener. "I must go back... to Vulcan. I can't fight any more, Jim; Sarek is... too strong, and I am... Vulcan, after all. The marriage... I will do as best I can." Then, urgently, "But you must live, Jim. Promise me."

"I will, somehow. At least I'll know that you're alive."

\* \* \*

"Congratulations, Sarek. You've broken him at last - quite an achievement, isn't it?"

The Vulcan turned to meet McCoy's accusing stare. "Yes, you've won. But tell me, is it worth it? I don't know who you'll take back to Vulcan, but it won't be the Spock we all know and - yes - love. You'll have your Vulcan son at last, but you'll have to forgive me if I mourn for the man you've destroyed. Then there's Jim - oh yes, he'll survive - but he'll be different too. I think I prefer him as he was."

Sarek had intended to protest, to deny the doctor's words, but he could not - they were true. The Spock who returned with him to Vulcan would not be the same man who had written that letter he had read such a short time ago. To survive the future Sarek had planned for him, Spock would have to kill his Human side, finally and completely - it would not be an easy death. He thought of Amanda - what had he been about to do to her, and to the son she had given him? He was fiercely proud of his son - he could admit that now to himself, if to no-one else - yet had been prepared to destroy him, to force him to conform to an artificial ideal. For a moment he visualised a totally Vulcan Spock, and knew that he had deceived himself - he wanted his son as he was.

That knowledge enabled him to meet McCoy's eyes. "You are right, Doctor. Will you permit me to speak to Spock now? I should be glad of your presence - both you and Captain Kirk should hear what I have to say."

McCoy searched his face, then pushed open the door. As their footsteps came closer, the two men looked up; slowly Kirk reached out and laid a reassuring hand on Spock's arm. The gesture was not lost on Sarek. He spoke quickly.

"I ask forgiveness, Spock. I find that I have made a grave error of judgement."

Hope flamed in the hazel eyes; fearful of betraying emotion, the dark eyes were quickly veiled.

"It is not easy to admit to a mistake - I have made one. I sought to make you something you are not. Captain, you spoke the truth - I valued Spock's humanity, yet almost destroyed it. You are free from all pressures, Spock. It is my wish now that you select your own way in life. T'Pau must learn, as I have learned, that you are not to be judged by wholly Vulcan standards. If you decide to return to Vulcan, you will be welcome; if you prefer to remain with Starfleet, you have my permission, and my blessing. It may sound strange to you, Spock, but in this matter, choose as your heart directs you."

There was no need to ask for Spock's decision in words; the quiet joy in the dark eyes said all.

"I am content. Now I must return to Vulcan. Live long, my son - and prosper."

As he turned to go, two hands detained him.

"Thank you, father."

Sarek inclined his head, and turned to Kirk.

"Sarek... thank you... for everything."

The Vulcan hesitated, then lightly touched the hand that lay on his sleeve.

"Goodbye, Captain. I... wish you well. Doctor, perhaps you will accompany me to the transporter?"

Somehow the news had already spread through the ship. As he walked the corridors with McCoy, Sarek could sense the overwhelming joy and

gratitude from the Humans he passed. He could understand now the position Spock held in the hearts of the crew - they had instinctively felt what it had taken him so long to see, Spock's unique and very personal goodness and honesty.

In the transporter room he exchanged farewells with McCoy.

"Goodbye, Ambassador. And from all of us... thank you."

"I should thank you, Doctor. You have enabled me to correct the wrong I did my son. Farewell."

As the shimmer of the transporter died away, McCoy turned back towards sickbay. Like Sarek, he too had finally come to realise what the existence of the link meant for Kirk and Spock. It was at once hazard and safeguard, danger and security, rendering them vulnerable, yet granting to both these lonely men the sanctuary of each other's mind where fear, loneliness and pain would be quietly met and healed.

The price of such a friendship was high - few would be prepared to pay it - but they had considered the risks worth while, knowing the value of the unity they shared. And in his heart, McCoy could only approve their choice.

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