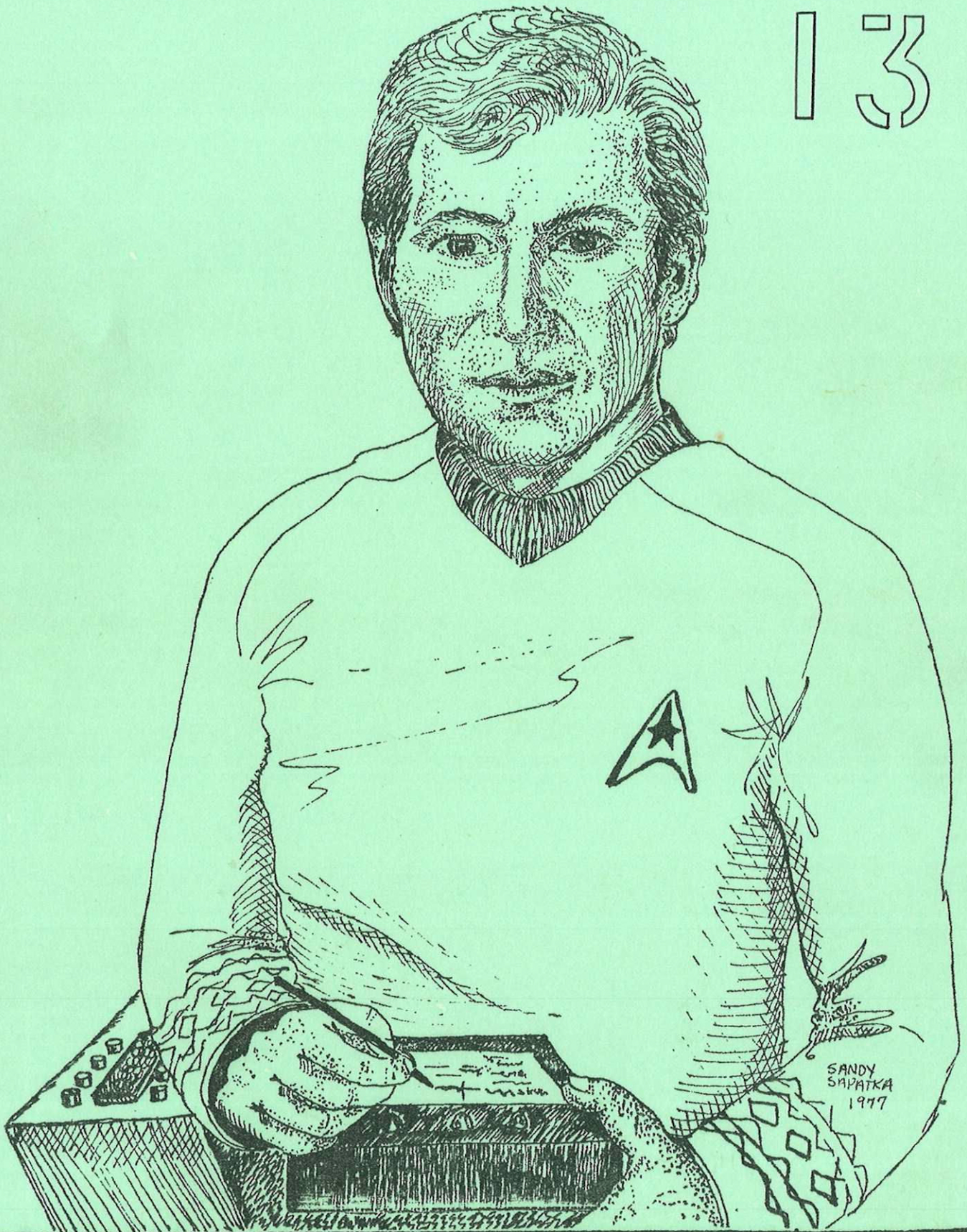
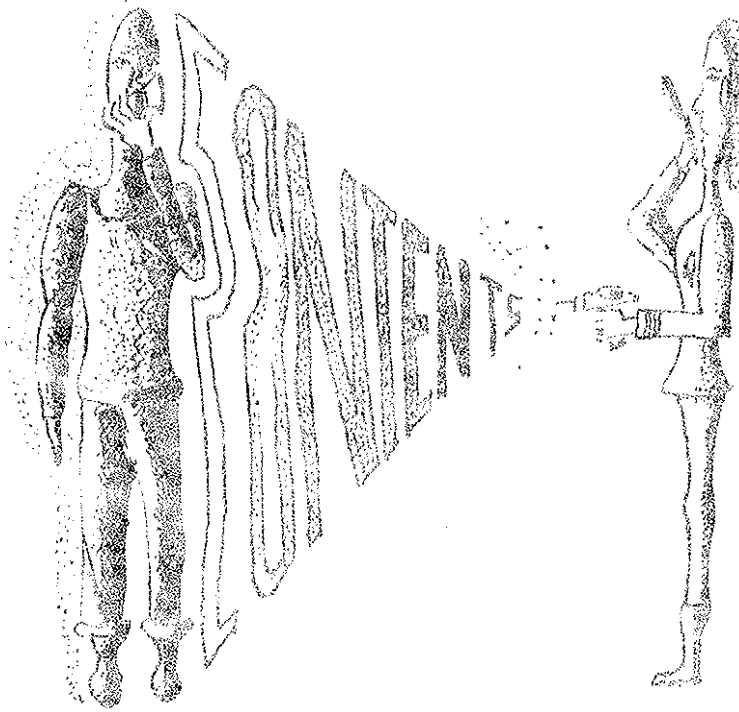


LOG ENTRIES

13





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Michael Cleaver P 2
Zena Kightley P 21
John Hall P 34, 39, 47.

Apologies to Helen McCarthy; the illustration on P 8 of LE 11 was by Helen, and somehow, I don't know how, I managed to forget to acknowledge it.

A STAG Publication.

November 1977

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Hello again, and welcome to LE 13.

Janet felt a bit superstitious about numbering this zine '13', and we did think of calling it LE 12+1, but I didn't have a stencil saying '+' for the cover, so we decided not to bother being superstitious about it after all.

I'm still looking for letters of comment. I've had a few - mostly from the States and from Marie Hietala in Finland - where are the comments from British readers? Not just saying 'I liked' or 'I wasn't too keen on', but making critical appraisal of what I'm including in the zine. There is just one thing - although all the letters I've had, and Janet too, seem to think LE 11 & 12 are among the best we've but out, Beth tells me that one or two people have said to her that they think the stories are a bit 'samey', and possibly over-emotional. What do you think? Are Log Entries stories becoming over-predictable? And if they are, what are you going to do about it? I can only print the stories that I'm sent. Our only criteria are, the stories must be about the Enterprise characters, no-one must end up dead (of the regular characters, that is) and no-one plays musical beds during the course of the story. I'm happy with the stories that I'm getting, and feel that I'm including a reasonable balance - do you agree with me? If you don't, you have to let me know - I'm not a mind reader!

There was one comment made by several people about my story Warlord in LE 11 - they felt it wrong that Spock should want to flog Zartan. I've decided therefore to give my reasons for including that scene in the story.

It was established that in the past, Vulcans were warlike and violent. It was also established in This Side of Paradise and All Our Yesterdays that Spock does have a temper, even although he keeps it under control most of the time. In the episodes, he regained control, possibly helped by his affection for the men concerned - Kirk and McCoy. However, these episodes showed that Spock does have a breaking point, which is reached by taunts, the severity necessary varying depending on circumstances. In Warlord, Spock was being taunted with Kirk's death, itself liable to be a breaking point for him. I reasoned that no-one, no matter how self-possessed, normally controlled, gentle and compassionate, could be expected to maintain that control once a certain point had been reached, and felt that if anything would break Spock, make him revert to primitive savagery, that would. There was no time for him to consider Zartan's psychology dispassionately at that time; it was only later that he had the time to reason out Zartan's motivations.

Well, that was how I saw it. If you weren't happy with that scene, does the explanation at least help you to understand why it was in?

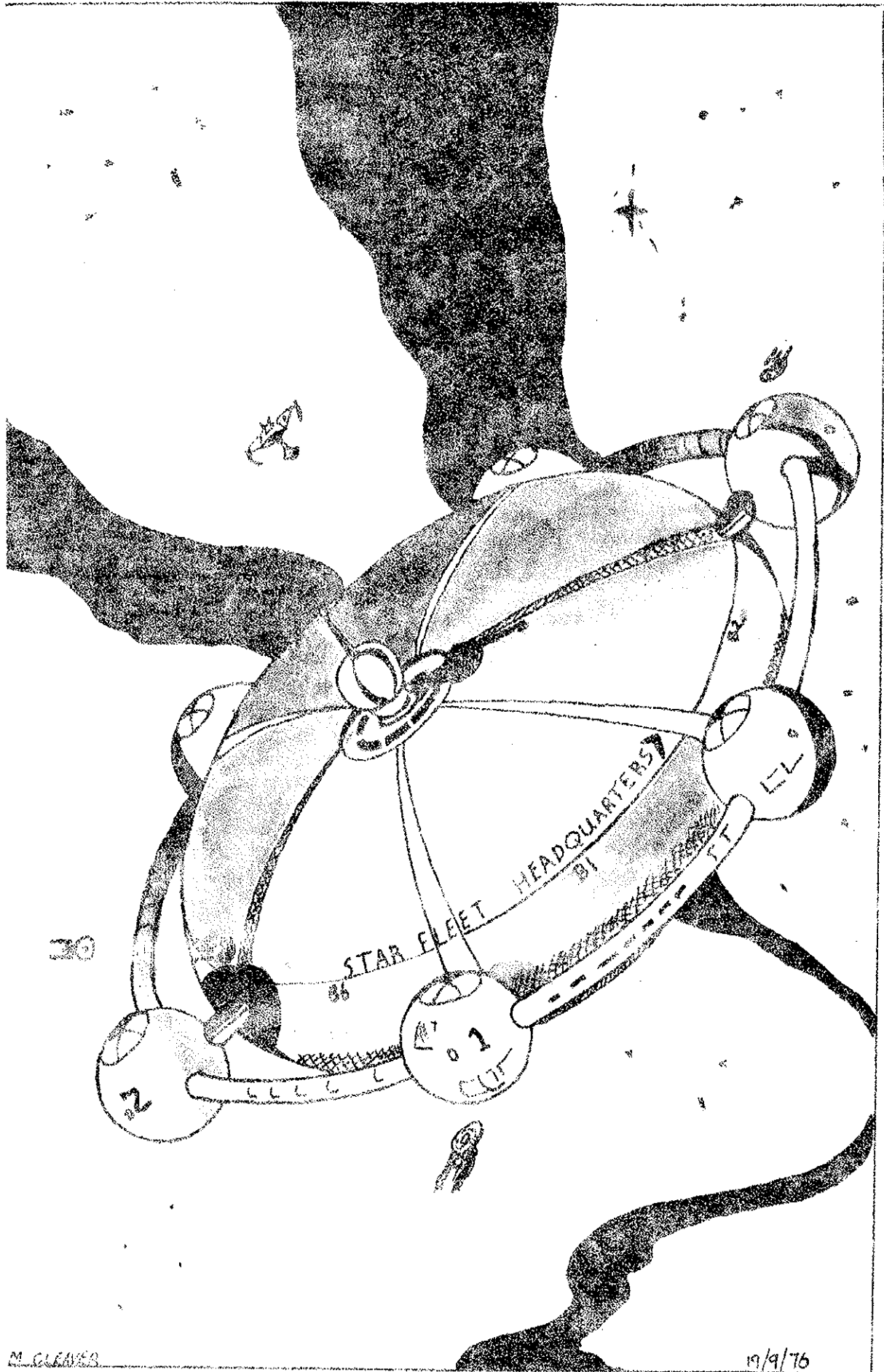
I'm not sure whether LE 14 will be ready for February or April. I'm trying to get Enterprise Incidents 2 ready for before Christmas, and if I do, LE 14 will be out in February; if EI 2 isn't out till after Christmas, LE 14 will also be delayed, till April. For it I have stories by C.E. Hall, Valerie Piacentini, Nancy Kippax, Margaret Draper, and at least one other writer - it isn't always easy reckoning from manuscripts just how much space any given story will require, and to hold the price at 80p we can't go over 59 pages.

Non-members of STAG can obtain information about new and forthcoming zines by sending a SAE (or addressed envelope and IRC) to

Sheila Clark
6 Craigmill Cottages
Strathmartine
by Dundee.
Scotland.

As always, thanks to all the people who help get this zine ready - my mother for proofreading, Janet for running off, and whatever ~~helpers~~ helpers I can coerce into helping to collate. Enjoy yourselves!

Sheila



WAR & DIPLOMACY by T.W. Francis

The USS Enterprise was on a search and find mission. A Federation Survey Ship, the Horace, had gone missing and it had fallen to the Enterprise to find it.

The incessant call of a ship's distress beacon now attracted the great Starship from the confines of warp space. As she approached the abandoned beacon, the sea of stars that was the Milky Way made a colourful backdrop.

"No debris, no wreckage," Kirk was saying. "Not even a radiation trail; if that beacon belongs to the Horace, one thing's for sure, it wasn't destroyed here, Spock." He and his First Officer were awaiting the arrival at its destination of the turbo-elevator they occupied. His next words were spoken into the wall intercom. "Mr. Scott, bring it aboard."

"Aye, aye, sir."

The elevator came to a halt and they stepped out into the cargo transporter room of the secondary hull. They crossed to the control console where Mr. Scott and a transporter technician had already begun the transport sequence. A moment later the recognisable form of a Federation distress beacon took shape on the dais.

"It doesn't look damaged, sir," Scott said. He moved to inspect it.

"Readings, Mr. Spock?"

Spock scanned the instruments on the control panel. "Transported intact. Normal radiation levels. All sub-systems functional. Tapes and read-outs seem undamaged." He activated the identification mode; scanned it, then looked towards the others as he said, "Identification confirmed, Captain. This distress beacon originated from the Survey Ship Horace."

Kirk nodded. "Very good, Mr. Spock. Run through its tapes. See what you can find and bring the salient ones to the bridge."

Spock acknowledged the order and as Kirk re-entered the elevator, Spock and Chief Engineer Scott set about the task of extracting the record tapes.

Back on the bridge, Kirk instructed Sulu to run the main screen through a 360 degree sweep at maximum magnification. He stood before it, lost in the myriad stars slowly passing his eyes. He considered. One of those star systems held the answer to the disappearance of the Horace; but which? Sensors gave no indication, no trail for them to follow. It was as if a black hole had suddenly opened and swallowed it, closing again to leave no trace of anything ever having happened. He watched the glittering jewels set in their ebony void swing round once more, before circling the bridge gallery to stand before the library computer/science station. Leaning forward, he keyed in the computer.

"Computer."

"Working," came a deep, husky female voice - the sort of voice a man only expects to hear after taking an early night with a female companion who wakens him during the night because she's feeling... well, randy. Kirk gave a mental shudder. The bridge of a Federation Starship was no place for such a voice and the diaphragm of a computer speaker definitely had no right to sound like it.

The computer had been like this ever since the Enterprise had left Cygnet 14 after docking there for repairs. The computer techs. of that planet believed computers should have personalities to ease the loneliness of space travel. Theirs being a matriarchy, they had naturally given the Enterprise's computer a female personality - vampishly female, in fact.

Kirk cleared his throat and said, "Computer... give data on Federation Survey Ship Horace. Also any information on ship's personnel and present mission."

"Working... DEAR."

Kirk grimaced and looked around but the other bridge personnel were about their tasks. Only Sulu had glanced back at him momentarily. Was that humour in those inscrutable oriental eyes? The computer hissed, drawing his attention back to it.

In an even more sexy voice, it said, "Federation Survey Ship Horace presently on loan to the Christian Latter-day Evangelist Mission of Rigel 10. Request by Mission to survey Rigel 9 for expansion of their colony. The ship would also be used to facilitate the bringing of the Word of the Lord to the Godless miners of the inner worlds... DEAR."

The computer paused, and Kirk reflected, Another whole week of this before we get the chance to return to Starbase. Spock had said it would take a Starbase's facilities to repair the damage done by the Cygnet 14 women. Somehow they had entered the computer core in their meddling; not even Spock was about to attempt to correct that without proper facilities.

The computer interrupted his thoughts. "The Horace was supplied with full Federation crew under the command of the Most High Reverend Simpleton Kase, a fully registered Command Captain, Grade 4... DEAR."

Kirk was feeling frustrated. The computer's voice was supposed to ease tension. It was not succeeding; it did the opposite, in fact.

The computer continued. "Ship reported missing two point eight standard weeks ago by the Deacon to the Christian Mission, Head Chapel, Rigel 10, one Simon John Ringer. USS Enterprise despatched to last reported position of the Horace to investigate... DEAR."

"Stop," Kirk commanded. He took in the information. If the Horace had been bound for Rigel, what was it doing here, umpteen parsecs off course? Again the computer interrupted his thoughts. "Anything further... DEAR?" it asked in a voice that was almost an appeal.

Kirk could not help but admire the skill of the Cygnet 14 computer teos; nor could he wholly forget the little brown-eyed one who came to adjust his cabin input. She had been quite a lady. He shook that thought off and answered the computer. "Yes, there is." He tried to make his voice as stern as he could as he said, "Computer, I have repeatedly told you not to address me in that manner."

"Sorry... DEAR."

Kirk sighed but persevered. "Also make further note of my request for maintenance to correct the malfunction of this ship's computer."

"Malfunction... DEAR?"

Kirk waited it out. Eventually the machine hissed a sigh and said in a voice dripping melancholy, "Yes... DEAR."

At that moment Spock entered the bridge and joined Kirk at the science station. He had half a dozen record tapes in his hand and he began to slot them into the science station's player.

"I have selected the relevant points of interest on each tape, Captain. There is, however, a discrepancy. Some of the tapes have been tampered with, edited, and blanked in places."

"Blanked, you say! By whom?"

"Unknown, Captain. But if it was Captain Kase, then... "

"It could cost him his license."

"Indeed."

"All right, Mr. Spock. Let's see what you have."

The display screen above their heads came to life as Spock activated the first tape. A large, thick-set man with light brown haloed hair, dark piercing

eyes and a beatific smile took shape and began speaking without sound. Spock adjusted the gain.

"... have lost warp power. Proceeding at sub-light speeds to nearest system. By making a planet-fall we hope to carry out repairs. Such is the delay I have decided to abandon our mission to Gamma Trianguli VI and our undertaking to bring the Lord's Word to the innocents there, corrupted by the demon Vaal. The nearest star system being..." He looked off to one side, consulting someone out of range of the visual pick-up, turning back as he continued, "... a star called Han, Earth designation Zeta Ophiuchi..." The screen broke into static and Spock changed tapes.

The thickset man appeared again; this time, though, he had lost his smile. The tape started from the beginning.

"Stardate 0585.97. Captain's Log. We are two light years from Han, drifting at the moment. The storm damage that took out our warp drive nacelle also seems to have affected our impulse engines."

Spock stopped the tape there, then wound it on for a few seconds, explaining that what followed was general engineering data. Started once more, the tape continued, "... seems such a waste of effort. We have been adrift for three standard days, running on emergency batteries. Only now have we been able to power up the impulse engines. In doing this we have attracted unwelcome attention. Sensors register a whole fleet, twenty to thirty ships, of a size equal to a Federation cruiser class vessel. Strange shapes, not known in computer banks - an unknown race. We have tried to run but sensors show they have speed in excess of warp ten. I expect the inevitable; a first contact. A new experience for me, but with the Lord's help I shall overcome my fears and apprehension."

Spock changed tapes once more. "... Captain Kase has been abducted." A woman's voice issued from the speaker and on the screen, a young ensign appeared. She continued. "They call themselves the 'Len'. We explained our circumstances and asked them if they could assist us. The next we knew, Captain Kase just vanished from his chair..."

Again Spock changed tapes and as he did so he explained. "Captain Kase was taken for interrogation. On this tape he explains what he saw of the Len vessel but most of the tape is blanked, whether by him or more possibly the Len remains unknown. However he does intimate - in the parts left intact - at the strange beliefs on the Len, beliefs he found hard to reconcile with his own Christian faith. The Len agreed, though, to take his ship in tow to Han, a star apparently at the edge of something the Len called their 'Conglomerate'. Captain Kase told the Len the nature of his ship and the fact that it came from a great Federation of worlds. This seems to have interested them. On the last tape..." Spock inserted it in the player "... we have the enigma."

The screen above their heads once more came to life. A being of crystal beauty took shape. The crystals resolved themselves into the general shape of a man. Yet it was plain to see it was not. The being scintillated with light as it rasped a greeting. Spock tied in the Universal Translator.

"Peace and light," the alien said. "I greet any who find this message. If you be Federation the following is of import. I am a Len. During the course of a patrol we encountered a Federation Survey vessel, disabled. We have taken it to our colony world of Lendar, leaving this beacon to guide any who follow, for repairs. Lendar is the eighth of many circling the star you know as Han. We have learned much of your people from the crew of this vessel. I am pleased we have differences, but we may have much in common; if so, this may serve the Len-will. I have reported on your Federation to my superiors. They have authorized me to make formal greetings and request, via this beacon, a further meeting between Federation representatives and envoys of the Len Conglomerate. My superiors feel a joining between our two peoples may be of benefit to both. If you accept our proposal then come to Lendar. There you will find your Survey Vessel."

The being dissipated into the crystal form it had first shown, and the screen finally broke into static.

"Fascinating."

"Yes, Spock," Kirk said. He turned to Uhura. "Lieutenant, inform Starfleet Command of our findings. Pass on the Horace's tapes and ask for an answer to the Len request." Uhura moved to comply as Kirk stepped down to his seat.

"The Federation High Command," Spock said, "will need more details of the Len before agreeing to any official ambassadorial talks."

"Agreed, Spock. That's why for once I'm passing the buck on up the line. A situation as important as the possible joining of two Star peoples needs the sanction of the Federation Council itself."

"Indeed, the higher echelons of government are renowned for their fickleness especially with regard to the marriage of different cultures."

"Yes. And the Len have shown a somewhat deceptive eagerness to have us join them; this speaks of an ulterior motive."

Spock nodded agreement as Kirk sat down. And at warp 2 the Enterprise began a stately passage in the general direction of the distant star Han.

Four days later Kirk received his answer. The Enterprise was to proceed to Han and if the Horace and its crew were safe, Kirk was invested with the power to open negotiations as an official representative for the Federation of Planets. Which, as a Starship Captain, was his mandate anyway, but in this particular situation he had wanted confirmation from on high. His portfolio was to gain as much information about the Len and their Conglomerate as was possible, conveying only that which he felt was essential about the Federation.

This annoyed Dr. McCoy. As the Enterprise plunged ahead at warp 6, he and Kirk were discussing the sanity of desk-bound beaurocrats, among other things, while they shared a quiet drink in Kirk's quarters.

"You know, Jim, I think they're trying to turn you into another Commissioner Ferris."

"Be fair, Bones, he had his job to do. The plague victims on New Paris needed those medicines he was responsible for. It was a diplomatic expedient he get them there before the loss of life became too great. But I couldn't leave you and Spock and the others without trying all I could to find you."

McCoy raised his glass. "And I'm grateful to you, sir, for your obstinacy." He shuddered as he remembered the disastrous mission into the quasar Murasaki 312. "I still get the shakes every time I think of those great hairy beasts banging away at our downed shuttle. Watching the roof-plates slowly buckle... horrible. What's worse, I sometimes dream of it... with Spock standing on one side continually telling me to keep calm, have no fear, he'll find a logical solution!" McCoy grimaced at past nightmares.

Kirk grinned as he up-ended the bottle of green brandy he and McCoy had been ingesting. There was a hum from the computer output behind him and the computer voice whispered, "With the next glass of liqueur you will exceed the limit you specified I monitor you for... DEAR." The voice had turned into a voluptuous gasp of concern.

McCoy inclined his head. "That's all we need, a darn machine to tell us when we're over our limit. Takes the fun out of life. Doesn't matter it sounds like the queen of all demi-monds."

"Yeah, Bones, those women of Cygnet 14 have a lot to answer for. You know,

I was quite embarrassed by this box of lust and its outbursts the other week, when I was interviewing that Captain - you know, the one whose aircraft we downed with our tractor beam."

"I wonder if he still recalls us?" McCoy asked.

"According to Spock's computer readouts we were able to beam him back, to the second, at a time just before the ship became visible to him. No, I doubt he'll know of us, which is just as well, I guess."

It was McCoy's turn to smile. "Wonder how Spock is reacting to the computer?"

"With distaste, I think."

"I've noticed he's stopped playing chess with it during his off-duty periods in the rest room," McCoy said. "He said something about it distracting him. The habit it has of... giggling."

"Yes, that would be distracting," Kirk agreed. "Also quite an effective method of attack... for a computer. How are you managing with it, Bones?"

McCoy looked wistful as he confided, "Actually, I'm going to miss my raucous morning awakenings. Still, it can be disconcerting at times."

"Yeah."

Silence descended between the two men as they took in the warmth of the brandy pervading their systems. Their peace was broken by the whistle of the intercom, followed by the shriek of the Red Alert system.

Spock's voice echoed over the ship's address system. "This is a Red Alert. Captain Kirk to the bridge. Red Alert. Captain Kirk to the bridge."

"What now?" McCoy mumbled.

"A Starship Captain's life is not a happy one," Kirk half-quoted. He clicked on the intercom. "Kirk here, on my way." To McCoy he said, "Bones, I'll need a pill to dispel the effects of this brandy."

By the time he had reached the bridge the pill McCoy gave him had worked its miracle. Completely sober he stepped down to stand by his chair as Spock vacated it.

On the main viewscreen, a tight formation of small teardrop-shaped craft was fast approaching.

"Well, Spock?"

"We are zero point five four eight of a light year from Zeta Ophiuchi. Long range sensors indicate five planets with life, though the low atmospheric temperatures makes that life vastly different from ours. The crystalline form of the Len may be well suited to this type of world. However, I issued a red alert because there appears to be a conflict taking place within the system. Each of the five life-bearing planets is under intensive attack. I estimate ninety to a hundred ships similar to those approaching, attacking each world. As we began to approach the system the group - forty in all - you now see on the screen broke away from the attack force of the outer life-bearing planet and began to close with us. As yet we have been unable to make contact."

"Thank you, Mr. Spock. Recommendations?"

"The craft you see on the screen are approaching us at warp 10."

"We can't outrun them," Kirk said without preamble.

"If they choose to attack us, as it seems they intend to do, then we must rely on our armament and defensive screens to protect ourselves."

"Do you have any information on their weaponry?" Kirk asked.

"I have no details as yet. The first engagement will provide that information."

"I trust we'll still be here to take advantage of it," Kirk said drily as he lowered himself into his chair.

Spock raised an eyebrow but said nothing. He turned and took up his position at the science station, peering deeply into his hooded viewer. Sulu was doing likewise with his armaments scanner and Chekov flexed his fingers above the phaser fire buttons of his panel.

"The nearest alien ship is now entering phaser range," Sulu reported.

Kirk spoke over his shoulder to Uhura. "Anything on communications?"

"No, sir, all channels remain clear and I get no response to the standard peace and friendship broadcast I've been sending ever since we began our approach to this system."

"Hmmm. Open up a direct hailing frequency to that lead ship and we'll give them the personal touch."

"Aye, aye sir. Channel open."

"This is the Starship Enterprise representing the Federation of Planets, Captain James T. Kirk commanding," he began. "We are on a peaceful mission into this space and mean no interference in your internal struggles. Please identify yourselves and make your purpose known."

The mighty Starship and the wave of teardrop-shaped ships moved relentlessly towards one another and the only answer Kirk received to his request was a line of high energy beams emerging, tracer-like, from the forward, blunt ends of the alien ships.

Sulu turned and said to Kirk, "I think we now know their purpose, sir."

"Indeed," Spock echoed.

"Readings on those beams, Mr. Spock. Can our shields hold them?"

"Affirmative; the energy emissions are simple laser beams. Shields will stand a massed attack but there will be a power drain if continued for long."

"We can't outwait them, sir," Chekov put in. "We'll have to hit back."

The oncoming wave of ships began to separate and to circle the greater mass of the Enterprise, like bees round a jam jar or knights jousting some mighty dragon, flickering lasers lancing out at the Enterprise's screens. A quick jab, break away, in again, jab, then out once more. Round and round they circled, like Amerinds around a wagon train.

On the bridge of the Enterprise silence had descended as all watched the fantastic sight on the main viewscreen, of ship after alien ship crossing and recrossing the view. Only the hum and peep of the instruments and the occasional situation report broke the silence.

Kirk finally reached his decision. He turned to Spock and asked, "Mr. Spock, do the attacking ships have any defensive screens?"

"Sensors register no exterior energy source other than the lasers, Captain."

"Very good, Mr. Spock. Mr. Sulu, Mr. Chekov, lock phaser banks onto ten of the alien ships and fire at will on my signal."

He turned once more to Uhura. "Lieutenant, give me a general ship to ship communications beam." He hit the stud on his chair arm and began.

"This is Captain James T. Kirk of the Federation Starship Enterprise. You have engaged us in an unprovoked attack. I must warn you we are prepared to defend ourselves if you do not break off this attack."

The open return channel held only static. Still the alien ships darted across the screen, lasers bouncing almost harmlessly away from the Enterprise's screens. Kirk continued.

"Your attack is having no effect on us. I give you five seconds to break off hostilities. If you do not, then ten of your ships will be disabled." Kirk glanced at Spock but the Vulcan was peering into his hooded viewer. "Mr. Chekov, Mr. Sulu, readjust phasers so that each target receives a glancing blow, and..." Kirk counted the five seconds in his head. Still the aliens attacked. "... Fire!"

The vibration of port and starboard, upper and lower phaser banks being fired at will reverberated about the ship. Sulu began to read off the results.

"Two hits to alien ships on the port; drifting away. Four likewise below us. Two now on the starboard and two ahead." He finally reported, "All specified targets hit, sir."

"Any response from the aliens, Lt. Uhura?" Kirk asked.

"No, sir. All channels remain clear."

"And the remaining alien ships are continuing the attack," Spock said as he once more turned to face the main viewscreen. "They have a persistence bordering on the insane."

"What sort of life readings are you getting from those ships, Spock?"

"Each ship has four life entities of an insectoid genus and the average size of each ship is about twice that of our shuttlecraft. The power to mass ratio is much greater, which explains their high warp capacity."

Still the aliens pressed their fruitless attack.

"Sulu, Chekov, lock phasers on to another ten ships. Glancing blows."

"Locked on, sir."

"Fire."

Once again the multiple vibration of the great Starship's phaser banks permeated its fabric as they fired. Once again Sulu reported, "All selected targets disabled, sir."

"A most fascinating development, Captain. The remaining ships have moved ahead of us and formed en masse..." Spock announced. Before he could say anything else the Enterprise rocked violently under the impact of twenty combined lasers.

Scott called above the din, "Shields buckling, Captain."

Spock added, "For the aliens to affect our defence screens in this way, they must be exerting a great strain on their power source."

"Mr. Chekov, lock forward phasers on those ships ahead," Kirk said, coming to his feet.

"Locked on, sir."

"Forward shield down; inner shield buckling badly," Scott said, exasperation written across his face. "If we dinna' end them we've had it, Captain."

"Understood, Engineer. Fire forward phasers, Mr. Chekov."

The two beams of energy streaked away and a second later the main viewscreen flashed white, the Enterprise stopped its mad bucking action and as the screens cleared there was a silence before Sulu reported, "Direct hit."

Spock added, "The remaining alien ships have been destroyed."

"Captain." It was Uhura. "I'm now picking up two transmissions. One, a ship's automatic distress call, from the Horace. The other is a direct sub-space communication from Lendar, the inner inhabited planet. Audio-visual."

"On the main screen, Lieutenant," Kirk said.

She complied and the view of the Zeta Ophiuchi system disappeared to be

replaced by a crystal being that changed shape into an almost-man. It said,

"Peace and light. I am Sanlen, Elder of this Len-col. We have scanned your approach to this system and noted your battle with the Isst. Please identify yourselves."

Kirk waved for Uhura to open a channel. "Captain James T. Kirk, commanding the Starship Enterprise, representing the United Federation of Planets."

"Greetings, Captain Kirk. As you are no doubt aware we are engaged in defending this Len-col from an invasion. Our defensive fleet has been drawn away by a subterfuge and our inhabitable planets are under intensive attack. We are defenceless before the Isst. Please, help us. If you come to our aid we and the Len Conglomerate will be forever in your debt."

"We are but one ship, Sanlen; our sensors register several hundred within your system."

"This we know. The Isst took full opportunity of the propitious alignment of our worlds. These being in an almost direct line of the ecliptic, the Isst were able to use the minimum number of ships to the greatest advantage. But as you say, they are many. Soon, though, they will begin to attack the surface of our worlds. Captain Kirk, the Isst show no mercy. Please - I ask again. Help us!"

"We came to your system because one of our Survey Ships reported having been brought here. Also request was made by your Conglomerate for diplomatic relations to be opened between it and the Federation. I see now why this was of some urgency to you. Can you give me more information about yourselves and the beings you call the Isst?"

"We the Len are an old race, Captain Kirk. For thousands of years we have colonised this part of the galaxy in peace, spreading our Conglomerate only where we did not interfere with other races. But a thousand years or so ago, we came into contact with the Isst. An insectoid people who, like most insects, have a need to swarm occasionally. A thousand years ago that race came under the power of a great prophet who sent them on a jihad of destruction. They obliterated half a thousand worlds before we - in High Council - took it upon ourselves to stop them. A thousand years have passed and still we fight on. We will not defeat them, this we know, but we will hold them at bay keeping the rest of the galaxy safe. We are told this is what we are destined to do, until a greater power can arise to quell the Isst horror." Sanlen shuddered to a halt seemingly at the mere thought of the Isst.

Kirk hesitated. "Before I commit this vessel, what assurances can you give me that the Horace - the Survey Vessel we came in search of - and its crew are unharmed?"

"The ship you speak of is in orbit about this world," Sanlen said. "So far, the Isst have not attacked here. But when they do I cannot guarantee its safety. The Isst attack any and all, such is the nature of their jihad."

Spock interrupted at this point. "Captain, a question, if I may?" Kirk nodded for him to go ahead. "Sanlen, I have listened to your story. May I ask if you have ever had contact with a race of beings known as the Organians?"

Sanlen's crystal eyes seemed to sparkle for a moment before he answered Spock's question. "Aye; Ayelborne, Claymare and Trefayne, the peacemakers. It is they who told us of our destiny. The Organians hate imbalance; that is why we still fight the Isst. To Organian eyes we balance the Isst perfectly. Once we tried to defy the peacemakers but we have learned our lesson. We are the weight that balances the Isst for them."

Kirk tried to swing the conversation back to the present. "To involve the Federation in an inter-stellar conflict is beyond my authority." A smile touched his lips. Jim Kirk the man was not going to watch helpless beings die if he could find half a reason to help them. He had a reason. "However - it

would appear that a Federation Survey Vessel is under imminent threat of attack. Therefore it is my duty to come to its assistance. Ergo, I must remove the imminent danger, namely the invasion fleet. If in the course of this activity I help a beleaguered planet or two, well, all to the good. You'll get your help Sanlen."

"I admire your diplomacy, Captain Kirk," Sanlen said. "Thank you." The screen blanked, to be replaced by the fast approaching blue-white dwarf that was the star Han.

Spock had descended to stand at Kirk's side. "Captain?"

"I trust you are not going to fault my logic, Spock," Kirk murmured, a twinkle in his eye.

"No, sir, but precipitate action against the Isst may be in direct contravention of the Organian balance of power between these two peoples. You may begin a new interstellar war. That, the Organians will not allow."

"I'm aware of that, Spock. Look at it this way. If we intervene here we are in effect keeping the balance even, as it were. Who knows, perhaps the Federation is the 'greater power' Sanlen spoke of as coming to aid the Len Conglomerate."

Scott had been listening intently to this and he now spoke up. "But, sir, beggin' your pardon, I dinna' see how we're goin' tae overcome several hundred alien ships around half a dozen planets. We're only one ship after all - if ye take my meanin', sir."

"It won't be easy, Mr. Scott, but I think we can do it," Kirk said as he opened his intercom to the hangar bay.

"Hangar bay. Duty officer Arex here, sir."

"Mr. Arex, how many shuttlecraft do you have ready for immediate liftoff?"

"Eight, sir."

"What's the matter with the other two?" The tone of Kirk's voice made it clear he wanted a very good reason for the others not being available.

"They are down for refit, Captain."

"How quickly can they be made ready?"

"Ten minutes and I can have them all ready for liftoff, sir." Arex was beginning to appreciate the inflection in Kirk's voice.

"You have fifteen minutes to get all ten armed, crewed and ready, understood?"

"Armed, sir?"

"You heard me, Mister. Get to it."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Kirk looked round the bridge at the startled expressions on the faces of his officers. His decisiveness was becoming razor-edged. "Stations, gentlemen. Mr. Sulu, ahead warp factor 8. Let's show the Isst - and the Len - just what a Starship can really do."

The Enterprise raced into the Han system and moved towards the outer planet under attack.

"Mr. Chekov, arm photon torpedoes. Mr. Sulu, we'll pivot round the first planet. As we swing by, Mr. Chekov, you will lay down a mine pattern right in the middle of the besieging Isst fleet. That should keep them occupied while we deal with the other fleets."

"Aye, aye, sir," came the two officers' simultaneous response.

At warp 8 the great Starship rounded Han 12, scattering a dozen photon torpedoes in its wake before racing deeper into the system. The torpedoes swept into orbit about Han 12 and hung there like a shroud of death awaiting the unwary.

The Isst fleet about that world proved to be unwary. As the Enterprise moved towards Han 11, ship after ship of the Isst detonated a torpedo and took countless of its companion ships with it into oblivion. So great was the destruction only two ships escaped, but they were so badly damaged they burned up in the atmosphere of the world they had sought to conquer as they tried to force a landing there.

At Han 11, then 10 the Enterprise slowed to sub-light and despatched five armed and shielded shuttlecraft to do battle while it sped on to the two inner inhabited worlds, Han 9 and 8 - Lendar.

By now the Isst battle-squadrons had begun to take note of the cyclonic disturbance in their midst. The remaining fleets about Han 8 and Han 9 came together and moved in for the kill.

"Sensors show over two hundred ships moving towards us, Captain," Sulu said, looking up from his swan-necked viewer.

"Two hundred and ten," Spock corrected.

"Are the photon torpedoes rearmed, Mr. Chekov?"

Chekov breathed a sigh of relief as his board showed them all being ready. "Armed and standing by, sir," he reported.

Kirk watched the oncoming mass of fairy dots scattered across the main screen. They resolved themselves into the blunt-nosed shapes of the Isst spaceships. Was there time to give them the opportunity to break away? The Enterprise was committed but the Isst, with their greater warp speed, could retreat. No. Already the Enterprise's screens were being licked by lasers.

"Lock photon torpedoes on to approaching fleets."

"Locked on, Captain," Chekov said, poising his fingers above the firing studs.

Kirk stood up. Already the Isst fleet was beginning to break apart into groups of tens and twenties, in some way locking their ships together to deliver combined laser attacks. Kirk knew there was no time to delay his next order.

"Fire photon torpedoes, Mr. Chekov; one through six."

Vibration after vibration passed through the Enterprise's structure and in a slow clinical voice Sulu read off the results.

"Three, four... all six detonated on target, Captain. I estimate at least a hundred and fifty enemy ships destroyed."

"One hundred and sixty two," Spock said quietly.

Sulu, who had returned his gaze to his viewer looked up in amazement. "It... it's unbelievable. The remaining ships are still pressing the attack."

Once again the Enterprise was surrounded by darting ships. Once again her phasers sprayed death and destruction about her. Ten minutes later as she moved towards Han 8, not a single Isst ship remained.

"I have Mr. Arex on audio, Captain," Uhura said, breaking the silence that had descended on the bridge after the last phaser found its mark. Kirk turned and hit the button on his chair arm.

"Report, Mr. Arex."

"My squadron here at Han 10 is still intact sir, but Mr. Dickenson at Han 11 has lost two craft. We've broken up the attack on the planets, but now the enemy is massing its attack against us. Shields hold up under single combat,

but Mr. Dickenson reports that when they mass together and fire their combined lasers the Isst are able to beat down our shields quite quickly. It's just as well for us they continue to attack singly. Between us we've taken out about a hundred Isst ships. It's incredible, sir, no matter how many we destroy they still come at us... "

There was a sudden silence. Kirk was about to ask Uhura to check the circuit when Arex's voice came over again. "Sir, we've just lost Umdinga-Smith, her craft just blew up. The Isst are massing, sir. Request immediate assistance."

"On our way. Mr. Arex," Kirk said. He was about to give the order that would send the Enterprise off to defend her 'children' when Uhura said, "Incoming message from Lendar, Captain - Sanlen again, sir."

The crystal being appeared on the main screen and changed once more into the almost-man. It said, "Peace and light, Captain Kirk. Our instruments tell us you have been successful in dealing with the Isst. If you take up orbit around Lendar, I shall be glad to receive you on the surface."

"That will have to wait, Sanlen. The shuttlecraft I despatched to help Han 10 and 11 are in danger of being lost. I must go to their help."

"Unnecessary, Captain Kirk. My instruments show that our defensive fleet has returned and is going to the aid of your shuttlecraft."

Kirk turned to Spock.

"Confirmed, Captain," he said. "The remaining shuttlecraft are disengaging, leaving the remaining Isst ships to the Len fleet. Mr. Arex will rendezvous with Mr. Dickenson and the remaining shuttlecraft will join us at Lendar."

Kirk nodded and turned back to the main screen. "Very well. If you will give co-ordinates, Sanlen, I will beam down with a landing party."

"Beam down?" The Len sounded puzzled. Kirk enlightened it.

"Ah, you have the trans-matte. Good. I shall give you the co-ordinates of my personal booth. Will that suffice?"

Kirk looked at his chief engineer who said, "Aye, that'll do."

"We will be there in ten minutes, Sanlen."

"I shall be waiting, Captain Kirk."

By the time the last shuttlecraft had docked with the Enterprise, now in orbit above Lendar, Kirk had another problem on his hands. They had been unable to make contact with the Horace, still only getting the automatic distress beacon; when a security team was beamed aboard they found the Survey Vessel completely deserted. This report came to Kirk as he, Spock, and two security guards awaited Dr. McCoy's arrival in the transporter room.

"No trace at all?"

"None, sir. The Horace is totally empty. There seems to have been a struggle, but no bodies," the voice from the intercom informed Kirk.

"Perhaps they have just been abducted to the planetary surface," Spock suggested.

McCoy had just entered. "And you're going to trust the Len by beaming us into their hands, Jim?"

"We'll see, Bones. Maybe Sanlen can throw some light on this mystery. Places, gentlemen." Kirk gestured to the transporter alcove. The five men took up their positions and vanished in the transporter haze.

The problems fresh on his mind may well have been responsible for Kirk

not at first noticing he was paralysed from the neck down. He glanced about him with his eyes. The other members of the landing party - still in the positions of transport - were likewise confined, held rigid by the same force. They were within a white opaque chamber.

McCoy was the first to speak - the first to find that he could in fact do so. "If this is Len hospitality, they can keep it."

Spock for once agreed. "This does seem to be an inappropriate method of greeting official representatives."

In front of them, two wall panels parted and slid into the floor and roof. Beyond stood four blobs of flesh about six and a half feet tall, surmounted by another foot of five waving eye-stalks. Halfway down there was a large slit filled with two chitinous ridges that grated together in a most unnerving way. About the creatures' bodies hung a number of appendages, too thick for tentacles, too thin for arms, that gesticulated every-which-way.

"Fascinating. The true shape of the Len, Captain?"

"Possibly, Spock."

The four apparitions suddenly changed shape into the crystal beings Kirk had come to associate with as being Len. They changed again into the almost-man shape Sanlen had adopted to communicate with the Humans. It was clear to see, though, that none of these Len was Sanlen.

As they changed, Spock continued, "Another shape-changing species. One would speculate on the evolutionary line that could bring about such developments in intelligent..."

He was interrupted by, "Ugh... Light!!! But they are ugly, R'Len," from the nearest alien.

"Susssh, P'Len," the one next to it said. "You will upset them."

Kirk found he was able to move. He stepped towards the opening in the chamber but found the nearer he got to it the harder it was for him to do so. Behind him, McCoy had dropped to the floor - so unexpected was the release - and Spock was helping him to his feet.

Kirk spoke to the aliens. "I am Captain James T. Kirk. When we beamed down here we were under the impression we were to be the guests of Sanlen. If there is some quarantine procedure, please explain. Also know that we are protected from your atmosphere by our personal life belts."

"We know who you are, Captain. You are in a confinement booth," one of the aliens said.

"I don't understand, Jim," McCoy said as he and Spock joined their Captain. "What's going on?"

The alien who had been referred to as P'Len answered him. "You are our hostages."

"Hostages?" Kirk asked in amazement.

R'Len spoke this time. "Until such time as Sanlen carries out the judgment of the court."

"Sir, may I ask how you abducted us?" Spock inquired.

The only alien who had not spoken answered this. In one of his appendages he held a small control box that Kirk took for the controls of the paralysis force in the chamber. "It was a simple matter to intercept your transport beam and deposit you here."

"I see," Kirk said. "But why?"

"We - " it was R'Lan again " - are the official ambassadors appointed by the Len Conglomerate High Council to make appraisal of your Federation. On

arrival at this Len-col we found Sanlen the Len-col elder withholding punishment on a group of out-worlders; the crew of your Survey Vessel. It is our strong conviction that the Len-will and Len-law must not be thwarted in this way. To gain your release Sanlen must execute the judgement of the court or else bring down the wrath of Homeworld and this Len-col's opposition party upon his head.

These off-worlders - Federation personnel - committed offences under Len-law. They tried to sully our people by espousing religious fanaticism. This we abhor. For a thousand years we have combated the Isst, the most religious of fanatics. Their sacred jihad has decimated our culture. We cannot allow another race to do the same. While we will respect your beliefs off-world, on any Len-col your people must respect and obey our laws. If they do not, or if they break the law, they will be punished according to the court's judgement. Do you understand this, Captain Kirk?"

"You're saying the crew of the Horace tried to preach a religion of some kind to your people?"

"Only one tried - Captain Kase. The others broke Len-law by killing a Len law official while he tried to arrest Captain Kase. This incident took place on the Horace, therefore the whole crew is held responsible. But they too have espoused the desire to... " the alien almost choked on the words "... pass on 'the Word of the Lord'."

"But I still don't understand how the whole crew could be... "

Spock interrupted him. "Captain, I have some information that might explain the crew of the Horace's reasons. I did some further research on them while we were in transit to this system and found that they all have some connection with the Christian Latter-day Mission. The said Mission's main pre-occupation is the preaching of 'the Word of the Lord' to all the heathen peoples of the galaxy. Each member is sworn to pass on that word at every opportunity."

"And the Most High Reverend Captain Simpleton Kase looked like a man who would not let an opportunity pass," Kirk concluded.

"Precisely, Captain," Spock said.

P'Len spoke. "Captain Kase was given fair warning when he boarded the ship that first found his disabled Survey Vessel. He chose to ignore the warning. If there is to be meaningful negotiations between our two peoples, Captain Kirk, your Federation must agree to respect our laws.

Sanlen is of the Moderate party that is growing up at the fringe of our Conglomerate. They would give up some of our more stringent laws when dealing with aliens. But our battle with the Isst has taught us to give no quarter where the well-being of our people and worlds is concerned."

"It is one of the Federation's main standpoints that its personnel respect the ways of any world they find themselves upon. If they do not, the Federation is not bound to try and extricate them. If the crew of the Horace did as you say, there is nothing we can do for them," Spock said.

"Damn you, Spock! Why are you always so blasted honest? We're talking about the lives of fifty men and women!"

"I understand your feelings, Dr. McCoy, but under Federation law there is nothing we can legally do for them."

"Do you, Spock? Do you really understand?" McCoy turned away.

"If you are willing to abide by our laws, Captain Kirk, agree to the punishment the crew of the Horace must receive. Then I shall contact Sanlen, inform him of what has happened and providing he carries out the sentence, you will be free to go."

Kirk was at a loss. The lives of fifty men and women were in his hands, and there seemed little he could do for them. They had disobeyed the rules of

this world. To agree to their punishment without trying to rescue them was something he found hard to do. Yet if he did try to rescue them, then any hope of friendly talks between the Conglomerate and the Federation would be lost.

"Anything I say, any concession I try to make in attempting their release, I take it will fall on deaf ears?"

"Yes, Captain Kirk - we are adamant," R'Len said.

But the lives of fifty people... Kirk's mind was made up. He made a grab for his communicator but his hand was paralysed before he could touch it. The two security guards who had seen his move tried to draw their phasers - they too found themselves unable to move.

"That was foolish, Captain Kirk," P'Len said. "Even had you achieved communication with your ship and transported away, we would have brought you back without difficulty."

Kirk shrugged in resignation. McCoy was horrified. "Jim, you can't just give their lives away like this."

"What can we do, Doctor?" Spock asked.

"Something... ANYTHING!"

"Spock's right, Bones, there's nothing we can do. Soon, Mr. Scott is going to begin sending down search parties to look for us... I suspect they would all end up in chambers like this." Kirk looked to the aliens for confirmation. They indicated that it would be so.

"The more hostages we have, the greater the pressure we can exert on Sanlen."

"What then, Doctor?" Spock asked. "Should Mr. Scott then lay waste to a city or two?"

"No, of course not, Spock, but... "

"I have no choice, Bones; I must agree to the punishment being carried out. Perhaps it will stand as a warning against others who might try the same thing. Besides, we do respect the laws of our member cultures... Remember what I said about Commissioner Ferris - it's a diplomatic expedient. Very well, R'Len, I officially withdraw any objection the Federation might have to you disposing of the Horace's crew as you see fit. But also note that I shall recommend that any further meeting between our peoples be held in space or on neutral territory."

They made no answer, but a few seconds later the being Kirk recognised as Sanlen appeared in the chamber. At the sight of the Len outside it he bowed low, and said, "Peace and light. Greetings, Elders. You are ready to release the hostages you hold?"

"You have carried out the sentence of the court?"

Sanlen looked at the Enterprise personnel before answering. Did his crystalline eyes, shimmering in the almost Human face, hold a touch of sorrow, perhaps even regret, as he said, "Yes. The sentence of the court is done."

"Then," P'Len spoke, "all impediment towards diplomatic discussion of a full and open nature is cleared away, Captain Kirk. We and Sanlen will be most happy to represent our Conglomerate as ambassadors to your Federation, should you still wish us to do so."

McCoy broke the restraints he had been keeping on his temper. "Just like that!!! As if nothing had happened! Fifty lives washed away at the nod of a head! Damn it, Jim, tell 'em the Federation wants nothing to do with them and let's get the hell out of here. Fifty people dead just because their beliefs differed from those of these self-appointed..." McCoy blustered into silence as Kirk laid a hand on his shoulder.

Sanlen had been listening to the Doctor's outburst with some interest. "We do not seek to impose our laws and beliefs upon your people off-world, Dr. McCoy. I would not personally have had the sentence carried out, because of certain difficulties it might have caused us, but you are under a slight misapprehension when you say that life has been taken. This is not so. We look upon life as sacred... although our view loses its validity somewhat when we have to deal with the Isst. They, we have found to our cost, have no respect for life. No, it is the individual personality we punish for wrongs... did not the High Elders here inform you of the nature of the punishment to be imposed upon the crew of your Survey Vessel?" Sanlen looked towards the Len outside the chamber.

"Indeed, mention was not made of the exact form the punishment was to take," Spock informed him. "So heated was the debate it appears to have been overlooked."

"Then we will show you."

How the Len trans-matte worked was a mystery to the Enterprise men, but they suddenly found themselves, accompanied by Sanlen, outside a low-slung building nestling beneath a stand of tree-like flora that stood within a rectangle of larger structures. Above their heads an atmospheric energy dome kept the noisome air of this world at bay. Sanlen explained that this had been specially constructed for the crew of the Horace; the Len, with their shape-changing ability, found the different atmosphere to be no problem. Sanlen led them towards the building.

Inside it, the noise was deafening. Fifty or so pulsating throats made known the hungry needs of fifty or so Human babies. The cribs around the walls literally wobbled on their hinges with the din.

Sanlen pulled one of the screaming forms from its crib and handed it to Spock, saying, "Reverend Kase, as he once was called."

Spock looked somewhat uncomfortable holding the struggling form, but made no immediate protest, contenting himself with returning the squalling infant to its crib at the first possible opportunity.

After the first shock, Kirk began to organise a beam-up programme for the infants. Sanlen informed him that the Len had no facility for looking after alien young - indeed, this had been his main objection to carrying out the court's order. Having been punished, they were free to go, to begin life anew... hopefully to avoid making such a mistake again.

Back aboard the Enterprise, and six hours out from Han, the sickbay was at last quiet. Fifty tums had finally been filled to overflowing by a hard-pressed nursing staff.

In his cabin Kirk had just finished his official report and recommendation that further diplomatic meetings with the Len Conglomerate was now available should the Federation High Command wish it. He keyed his personal log. "I sometimes find it hard to choose which is the more agonising, war or diplomacy, which the more frustrating. Without our capacity for diplomacy, any dispute would have to be settled by war, but what I'm asking myself is, am I a warrior or a diplomat? I find I am both and neither, which I suppose makes me just another Starship Captain, a man who has a job to do. Sometimes I don't like what the job entails... at other times the job is most rewarding. 'All I need is a tall ship and a star to steer her by'." He smiled, and patted the bulkhead behind him. The Enterprise was some tall ship...

"Will there be anything else... DEAR?" the computer asked.

Kirk's fist came down hard towards the off button of the computer terminal but slowed to a stop, before he gently brushed it off.

"No, LOVE... nothing else." He stood up and headed for the bridge.

THE GREEN LEAVES OF CYGNI II by Zena Kightley

Captain Kirk of the U.S.S. Enterprise leaned back in his command chair and tried to find a more comfortable position. Thanks to Starfleet Command however, the standard Starship Captain's chair had not been designed with comfort specifically in mind, and it was quietly defying his efforts. He was tired, as was the rest of the Enterprise crew. They had been through some pretty tough missions, but the last few months had been especially exhausting, and the crew was badly in need of a rest. Thankfully, though, they were at last on their way to Starbase 15 for some well-earned R & R.

There was just one thing. It would take the Enterprise almost a week to reach her destination, and on the way, as Starfleet Command had helpfully pointed out, they would be able, at the cost of a minor detour, to carry out a small but necessary chore. This was to consist of a short visit to Alpha Cygni II, to check up on a small party of scientists stationed on the planet's surface.

Alpha Cygni II had been discovered a few years ago, and was now being thoroughly investigated. According to the crew of the first ship to explore that particular sector, the planet possessed no intelligent life forms, only lush vegetation and a few species of lower animals which were highly unlikely ever to evolve into rational thinking beings. It also had a breathable atmosphere, comfortable temperature, and practically Earth normal gravity, being only fractionally smaller than Earth itself.

The survey team had been assigned there for one year to carry out research prior to colonisation. They had been on the planet for six months now, and for the last three months they had been completely silent. Although this was rather disconcerting, it did not necessarily mean that there was any serious trouble, as there could be half a dozen reasons for the radio silence, all of them harmless.

Still, there were seven Human beings there and since the Enterprise was the only ship in the vicinity, she would have to investigate the situation.

Alpha Cygni II grew rapidly on the main bridge viewscreen, a pleasant-looking planet blue-green with vegetation and hazy with atmosphere. There was probably nothing much wrong, Kirk thought optimistically; he wouldn't mind betting that it was just the subspace radio on the blink. Just check up on them and report back to Starfleet and then they could be on their way again to that much needed shore leave.

The helmsman's voice broke into his thoughts. "Approaching Alpha Cygni II sir." Sulu looked round at Kirk, awaiting his orders. Kirk nodded to him, his eyes still on the planet growing in the viewscreen.

"Lock us into orbit, Mr. Sulu."

There was a pause, then Sulu said, "Orbit locked in, sir."

"Thank you, Mr. Sulu." Kirk turned next to Uhura, who had been working busily at her communications board for several minutes. "Are you getting any response from the planet, Lieutenant?"

"No, sir, nothing at all," she replied, still working. "I've been trying to raise them for some time, but there's just nothing there."

"Hum," Kirk said, to nobody in particular.

Spock had been bent over his viewer for some while, scanning the planet's surface, but now he straightened up quite abruptly. "Captain," he said, turning towards Kirk.

"What is it, Mr. Spock?" Kirk asked him, detecting an odd note in the First Officer's voice.

"Captain," Spock replied quietly, "sensors show no indication of Human

life on the planet's surface." He paused, seeing the sudden look of concern on Kirk's face, then went on in answer to the unspoken question. "There are no malfunctions in the instrumentation, sir, I have checked and double checked. There is no sign of the survey team anywhere."

Kirk's face was grave. "You mean that they must be dead? All of them?"

"I am afraid I see no other alternative, sir; if they were alive they would register on the ship's sensors." Spock's face was, if anything, even more impassive than usual.

Kirk suddenly exploded into action. "Come along, Mr. Spock, we're going to find some answers. Let's get down to the planet's surface and take a look around." He was already moving towards the bridge elevator. "Mr. Sulu, you have the con."

"Aye, sir," the helmsman acknowledged, as the elevator doors swallowed up the Captain and First Officer.

The landing party, consisting of Kirk, Spock, McCoy and three security guards materialised in a level open space, quite close to some one-storey prefabricated buildings, obviously the survey team's small settlement. These were quite intact, though they appeared to be deserted. The clearing itself was apparently natural, as there was no evidence of tree felling, even though there were in fact many large trees, and an abundance of vegetation. On three sides of the settlement the trees were closely packed, forming quite an impressive forest. The trees were somewhat alien in appearance due to their enormous size and broad glistening leaves from which long feathery tendrils hung, but in general the effect was quite pleasant.

One member of the landing party, however, was not so sure about that. While Kirk was speaking to the security guards and to McCoy, Spock was gazing around him with a look of something very close to apprehension on his face. For a moment he had the strangest impression that... No, that was quite ridiculous, he told himself firmly, squashing the thought as he suddenly became aware that Kirk was speaking to him.

"If you are quite ready, Mr. Spock."

"Forgive me, Captain," the First Officer apologised. "I believe I was quite lost in thought for a moment."

"Daydreaming, Spock?" McCoy asked mischievously. "That's not like you - besides, I wouldn't have thought that Vulcans were subject to such a Human weakness."

Spock was unruffled, but nevertheless, could not help rising to McCoy's bait. "They are not, Doctor, I was merely examining the fascinating local flora. These trees for instance - most interesting. I do not believe I have ever seen anything quite like them."

"If you two have quite finished, I'd like to get this investigation under way, preferably today," Kirk interrupted, suppressing his impatience. No more was said, and the three of them moved over to the building on their right, the security detail checking out the other two huts. None of the huts yielded any significant information, only a few unfinished experiments and a fair amount of dust, so Kirk decided to take a look at the surrounding area in the hope of turning up a few clues, though he had no real idea of what he was looking for.

As they moved through the trees, Spock realised that the peculiar feeling he had experienced earlier had suddenly returned to plague him again, but it was stronger now, and no matter how much he tried to ignore it, the feeling persisted stubbornly. Also, he seemed to be the only one affected, as the others did not appear to have noticed anything unusual. It was most odd...

Without realising it, McCoy had wandered a short distance away to one side of Kirk and Spock and with some surprise suddenly found that he was practically at the edge of a rocky cliff, the edge almost hidden by vegetation. Carefully he knelt at the edge and peered downwards, then froze in horror. On the rocks far below lay seven Human bodies.

"I just don't understand it, Bones," Kirk said somewhat later in the briefing room. "It doesn't make any kind of sense. I could accept maybe one death of that nature as an accident, but seven? No, there has to be a reason, an explanation of some sort. Human beings do not just walk over the edge of a cliff like... like lemmings."

McCoy shook his head, equally baffled. "Well, Jim, I examined the bodies - what was left of them, they'd obviously been there several weeks - but I found no cause of death other than the obvious one. The fall would certainly have killed them, but exactly why they fell is another matter, and I'm afraid I don't have the answer to that."

Up to now, Spock had listened quietly to the conversation, whilst doing some serious thinking on his own. He spoke calmly to McCoy.

"I think, Doctor, that I may have a possible answer. I have formed a partial hypothesis, although I may be quite wrong as I have no hard evidence on which to base my theory, and you both may find it somewhat difficult to accept, perhaps even a little fanciful."

Kirk smiled at his First Officer. "I find that hard to believe, Mr. Spock, but any theory is better than none. What exactly is your hypothesis?"

"I believe that there is indeed intelligent life on Alpha Cygni II."

"But Spock," began McCoy, "it's already been established that there is none."

"Yes, Spock," Kirk added. "You yourself confirmed that fact when we first scanned the planet on arrival."

"I did, sir, that is quite true, but I had not then actually set foot on the planet's surface."

"Just what does that mean?" Kirk asked, oozing curiosity.

"On two occasions while on the planet's surface, I had a rather... unusual... experience. At first I thought it was a trick of the mind, imagination if you like, but the second time was much stronger, a very definite impression."

"What kind of impression, Spock?"

"The presence of another mind, Doctor," Spock replied evenly. "A feeling of someone... or something, trying to touch my mind. Intelligent life."

"But there are no native peoples or intelligent creatures on the planet," McCoy insisted, puzzled. He lapsed into silence, and Kirk also appeared abstracted, thinking. Watching his friends' faces, Spock wondered what their reaction would be when they heard what he was about to say. McCoy would probably tell him that he was off his head.

"Dr. McCoy, I was not speaking of humanoid or animal life."

"No? Then just what are you talking about, Spock?" McCoy was beginning to look a little exasperated, and even Kirk raised his eyebrows slightly at this statement.

Spock's answer came calmly. "Plant life."

Kirk and McCoy stared at him, and then at each other, then the doctor managed to stutter incredulously, "Plant life... but Spock, surely that's not possible... is it?"



The Vulcan regarded McCoy patiently. "Doctor, you know as well as I do that what seems an impossibility on one world may be quite possible, even commonplace, on another."

"That's quite true, Bones," Kirk interposed. "But intelligent plants? That's quite a remarkable thought, and maybe it's not as impossible as it may sound. We already know from the results of experiments that plants possess nervous systems, they react to light and warmth, just as we do."

Spock looked over at Kirk, pleased to find that the Captain at least had an open mind, though there was no sign of this on his face. "They also react to pleasure, Captain, and to pain."

McCoy was looking rather sceptical; he shook his head, still doubtful. "But no plant ever had a conscious, thinking mind. It's impossible."

Kirk had some reservations also, but they had seen some pretty weird creatures on different worlds, and he did not think Spock would have voiced this opinion if he was not himself convinced of it. "I don't know, Bones, I don't know quite what to think. Mr. Spock."

"Captain?"

"Just how do you propose to test this theory, if indeed it is true? How could we communicate with these... beings?"

The reply was almost immediate. "With your permission, sir, I should like to return to the planet's surface to conduct an experiment. If what I felt earlier was the touch of a conscious mind, and I believe that it was, it may be possible to make contact with it."

"That could be dangerous, Spock. We have no idea what kind of mind is involved, or what effect such contact would have on you."

The Vulcan sensed Kirk's anxiety for him, but to show this would be unthinkable. All he said was, "There is an element of risk in a great many scientific experiments, Captain. I am prepared to take that risk to discover the cause of the deaths of seven men."

The three beamed down to the original place, by the huts once used by the survey team; Kirk and McCoy looked around them, slightly uneasy this time, but Spock appeared quite composed. He moved a few paces towards the nearest trees and stood still, as if listening intently, though both his friends knew that he was not, in fact, listening with his ears at all. After a few moments he turned back towards them.

"Our presence here seems to have been acknowledged, gentlemen, I think we may go ahead now."

"Are you sure this is going to work, Spock?" Kirk asked him anxiously.

"Not absolutely, Captain," he replied candidly, "but I see no other alternative at the present time. Have I your permission to proceed?" Spock looked curiously at the Captain, as he seemed about to veto the idea, looking at his First Officer for a long moment. Then he seemed to accept the situation and nodded reluctantly.

"All right, Mr. Spock."

But Kirk wasn't the only one who was worried. McCoy moved closer, speaking hesitantly. "Spock, uh... be careful."

An eyebrow lifted as Spock stared innocently at the doctor. "Dr. McCoy, that is always my intention."

He moved away from them, back over to the towering trees that dominated all else, and assumed a pose of deep concentration, hands to temples, completely still.

After a few minutes that seemed to Kirk and McCoy more like a few years, Spock suddenly dropped his hands from his head and began to walk slowly but determinedly off between the trees. The two men exchanged puzzled glances and immediately began to follow him, keeping several yards behind.

"I wonder where he's going, Jim?" McCoy muttered as they pushed through undergrowth to follow the Vulcan through the forest. His movements were trancelike, almost like a sleep walker, yet he seemed to know which way to go. Kirk shook his head as he stumbled over a root.

"I've no idea, Bones, but I'd say something is guiding him; we'd better not lose him in this forest or it could take hours to find him again."

They pushed on until the figure ahead of them halted abruptly on the edge of a fair-sized clearing and looked around him. This was obviously the work of the men who had died, as the open space was dotted with tree stumps. A couple of fallen trees lay on the ground, their leaves withered and lifeless. Spock had begun to move out into the clearing now; moving between the tree stumps, he bent to examine one closely.

"Now what?" McCoy whispered, and Kirk shrugged helplessly.

"I guess it's up to Spock at the moment, Bones. He's obviously made some kind of contact with something, but there's nothing we can do right now, except wait and see what happens."

Spock had risen from inspecting the tree stump and was walking over to the trees again, still with the same slow but deliberate movements, oblivious of the two men who watched him anxiously. He stopped before a massive trunk and looked up towards the branches.

Kirk and McCoy looked at each other in amazement as they saw a bough, heavy with large shining leaves and trailing tendrils begin to bend downwards. It was no illusion. They watched as though hypnotised as the branch bent lower and lower until it was close enough for Spock to touch. Carefully he reached out and took hold of a broad glistening leaf in each hand. Simultaneously, two delicate tendrils purposefully came to rest on the Vulcan's head. McCoy, already tense, suddenly took a step forward, but Kirk grabbed him, pulling him back.

"Jim, I'm not sure I like this very much, I wish I knew just what's going on over there."

"Take it easy, Bones," Kirk soothed him, as much to reassure himself as McCoy. "Spock knows what he's doing, and the best we can do to help him is just stay out of it and keep calm. Whatever kind of mind or intelligence we've encountered here, it doesn't seem to have hostile intentions, or we probably wouldn't have got this far."

But the doctor was not entirely placated. "That's as may be, Jim, but the fact remains that seven men died here under very peculiar circumstances, to put it mildly, and we still don't know what caused those deaths."

"I'm only too well aware of that, Doctor, but we may have some answers very soon now... I hope."

McCoy was not making this any easier, Kirk thought, and he was almost as uneasy as the doctor about the whole experiment. Still, he managed to wait patiently, outwardly at least, until the strange communion a few yards away was ended.

Spock dropped his hands from the leaves he was holding and watched as the bough moved slowly upwards again. He made no attempt to move away, still standing staring up into the sun-dappled leaves.

An unspoken signal passed between Kirk and McCoy and they moved quickly over to the First Officer to stand beside him. Kirk spoke gently to him. "Spock?"

Spock turned, his eyes blank for an instant, then they seemed to clear and focus on his friends' anxious faces.

"What happened?" McCoy asked him with considerable relief. "Who... or what... did you contact?"

"Why, the life of this planet, of course, Doctor."

"You mean... the plants?" There was a mixture of amazement and disbelief on the doctor's face for a moment.

"Indeed, Dr. McCoy. A fascinating experience, most interesting." His eyes became dreamy and far away at the memory of the past few minutes.

"Mr. Spock?" Kirk eyed the Vulcan curiously.

"Captain?"

"Did you by any chance find out anything about how those men died?"

"I did, sir, and I will be pleased to tell you exactly what I learned, but first I think we should return to the Enterprise and leave the inhabitants of this planet in peace. Take a good look, though, gentlemen, at this clearing before we leave, for if it were not here, seven men would still be alive."

Kirk and McCoy were still trying to figure out the meaning of that cryptic remark when the three of them dissolved in the sparkle of the transporter effect.

"Well, Spock?" McCoy asked eagerly. "Are you going to keep us in suspense all day?"

Spock stared at the doctor across the briefing room table, composed as ever. "Are you suggesting, Doctor, that I am deliberately delaying my explanation in order to irritate you in some way?" He lifted an eyebrow slightly. "That would be a most illogical assumption, since Vulcans are not subject to Human... "

"Spock," Kirk interrupted him sharply, fixing both Spock and McCoy with a look of impatience. Spock raised the other eyebrow until it matched the first, and McCoy looked innocently at both men, then grinned mischievously at the Vulcan, who realised too late that he had risen to the doctor's bait yet again. He sighed inwardly and began his report.

"The trees are the highest form of intelligent plant life on the planet, Captain. They were aware of the survey team as soon as they arrived but at that time did not believe that the Humans were a serious threat to their existence." He paused. "It was some time later that something occurred which could not be allowed to continue."

"What do you mean, Spock?"

"The Humans began to cut down trees, Captain."

Fragments of truth were beginning to dawn on Kirk. "Go on, Spock, I think I begin to see what you're getting at."

"Well, I'm afraid I don't," McCoy put in, looking from one to the other. "I don't see anything particularly harmful or unnatural about that. They probably wanted to do some tests on the local timber to see what kind of a building material it would make; or maybe they just wanted to build an extra hut for some reason."

"You do not quite understand, Doctor," Spock explained patiently. "True, this action may have seemed quite harmless to the men, but to the intelligent life of this planet it was murder, and something more."

"Murder?"

"Yes, Doctor - the Humans were destroying living beings, taking life."

"That is murder, is it not?"

McCoy was at something of a loss for words. "Well, yes, I guess it is," he admitted. "But you said 'murder and something more' - what something more, Spock?"

"The fact that they felled only the smallest trees made the situation even worse. Of course, the men did not realise what a crime they were committing against the planet's inhabitants, indeed as far as they were concerned there were no native inhabitants there at all. They probably took those particular trees simply because the others were much too large for them to handle."

Kirk had listened intently to this last piece of information, and suddenly the full meaning of Spock's words hit him like a photon torpedo. He understood.

"Spock," he said slowly, as though thinking aloud. "These small trees - they were young trees, weren't they?"

"Precisely, Captain." Spock realised that Kirk fully understood now, though McCoy was still puzzled. The doctor looked at his two friends with a slightly exasperated expression; he still wasn't sure what Spock had meant.

"Would someone mind explaining to me what that's supposed to mean?" he asked wearily. "I realise, of course, that I'm probably being extremely obtuse, but I trust you'll forgive me for that - after all, I'm only a country doctor." He directed a glare towards the First Officer, who appeared not to notice. Kirk glanced at Spock and then turned to McCoy.

"Bones, Spock means that they were young trees. Don't you see? They were the young of the trees - that's what made it so bad."

"You see, Doctor," Spock continued, "the men were destroying young living beings - unknowingly, of course - but that didn't make things any better. If you saw someone kill a child, your child, how do you think you would react? You would probably attack them, you might even try to kill them. It is an instinctive reaction, and a universal one too, it seems."

"Are you saying that when the trees found the Humans destroying their offspring, they decided to make sure it wouldn't happen again? If they killed the men, or caused them to kill themselves, how did they do it?"

Spock looked gravely at McCoy for a moment before answering. "They controlled the Humans' minds, Doctor. It was... distasteful to them, but unfortunately necessary. The destruction of their species could not be allowed to continue, and they had no other weapon. They were only trying to safeguard their young, their children, and there was no other way. The Human beings could have known nothing of what happened after their minds were under control, the inhabitants of the planet made sure of that. They had no wish to cause unnecessary suffering, even though they had themselves been subjected to it. They are not killers by nature - indeed, it has never before been necessary for them to take a life, and they hope it never will again."

The doctor stared at the table top in silence for a while, deep in thought, then shook his head slowly and sadly. "All those deaths, just through ignorance. Such a waste."

Spock nodded soberly. "Yes, Doctor, a great waste... on both sides."

Kirk gazed at the planet on the main viewscreen for the last time as they prepared to leave orbit and continue on their journey. He felt sadness for the loss of life to all concerned, Human and otherwise, but brooding would do no good. He glanced round, eyeing Spock's back as he sat at his library computer station, and wondered just what the Vulcan had been privileged to experience in his brief contact with that... being. It was unlikely that he would ever know, or anyone else for that matter, as all investigations on

Alpha Cygni II had been officially discontinued as soon as Starfleet had received the report. Humans were not likely to disturb the lives of the inhabitants there again.

Kirk sighed imperceptibly; ignorance and lack of communication were all too often the combined causes of conflict and tragedy. He made an effort to shake off the sombre mood and fixed his mind firmly on the prospect of a decent shore leave, speaking cheerfully to the helmsman.

"Mr. Sulu, take us out of orbit and lay in a course for Starbase 15. I believe we have some shore leave due to us."

Sulu beamed. "Aye, aye, sir."

Down in the rec. room, however, McCoy glanced up from the novel he was reading to gaze suspiciously at a large potted plant.

GUILT DRIVE by Gillian Catchpole

Day in, day out, working to the limit
 And then beyond.
 Endless study with too little rest.
 How much could a body endure?
 It seemed I would soon know the answer.
 Not eating, not sleeping,
 Just days devoted to a single hope.
 I watched his strength just drain away
 Towards exhaustion.
 When others would have thrown up their arms
 And cried despair;
 He drove on.
 Filled with such determination,
 To think, then think again,
 Through all the mists of tired thoughts;
 To fight on whatever the fatigue.
 As time dwindled,
 He was relentless in a self destruction,
 That could only end in his collapse.
 Finally the day came
 When I could no longer stand and watch.
 I had to talk
 And maybe ease the guilt I knew he had within.
 What words would I need?
 I did not know if I could find them
 Within the confines of myself.
 So much had depended on success.
 In the moment of failure
 We'd wrongly placed the blame on him.
 Now it seemed impossible
 To convince him out of guilt;
 To halt his downward driving.
 All I could do was to let him know
 I cared and understood.
 He was not alone.
 For failing he was not to blame.
 His was a calculated risk,
 a command decision.

BAPTISM by Jean Barron

Captain James T. Kirk, newly appointed to the coveted rank of Starship Commander, U.S.S. Enterprise, eased the collar of his dress uniform and silently swore that he would never touch another drop of Saurian brandy. The farewell party held the night before by the officers and crew of his last command, the destroyer Nautilus, had been enjoyable and flattering but he was paying the price for his vanity this morning.

In an effort to ignore the pounding in his head, he stared through the forward observation window and wondered what kind of reception he was going to get from a crew who had given years of loyal service to their retiring Captain and who were now awaiting the arrival of a stranger to their ship. He had already studied the service records of each of the officers, including their personal profiles, and was impressed by the calibre of the men who were to serve under his command but how would they regard him, he mused, conscious that this aspect should not concern him but unable to throw off a vague apprehension nevertheless.

Absorbed in these thoughts, he was startled by the shuttle pilot's voice. "I have the Enterprise on hailing frequency, sir."

"Thank you." Kirk flipped a switch beside his chair. "Shuttlecraft to Enterprise. Captain James Kirk requesting permission to come aboard."

There was the briefest of pauses, then a cool expressionless voice replied, "Enterprise to shuttlecraft Jupiter. Permission granted."

Kirk relaxed slightly as though he had half-expected a curt refusal, and smiled at his own foolishness. If only his head would stop thumping and his legs didn't feel quite so shaky! But suddenly there was no more time to worry about his physical condition. Ahead of them, her graceful lines etched in silver and white against the black star-dusted velvet of space, lay the Enterprise.

In less time than it took him to straighten his uniform, the tiny shuttle had been admitted into the Starship's massive hangar deck and repressurisation completed. Taking a deep breath, he stepped out to face his reception committee.

His eyes were drawn immediately by the strangely compelling gaze of a tall figure whose blue uniform shirt bore the insignia of a science officer and whose long, elegantly pointed ears proclaimed him to be a Vulcan.

"I am Spock, your First Officer. On behalf of the officers and crew, may I welcome you to the Enterprise."

This was the impersonal voice that had granted his request to board, Kirk realised. "Thank you, Mr. Spock." His words sounded oddly distant in his own ears and he concentrated with an effort on the formal introductions that followed.

"Lt-Commander Leonard McCoy - Ship's Surgeon. Lt. Montgomery Scott - Chief Engineer."

He was vaguely aware of a pair of brilliant blue eyes, and preoccupied brown ones, then he was being escorted to the turbo-lift which whisked them to the bridge at such a speed that he was left feeling more than a little dizzy and was obliged to pause before stepping out. "This is one hell of a hang-over," he thought ruefully.

Fortunately, no-one appeared to have noticed his hesitation. Dr. McCoy was speaking in a low voice to the impassive First Officer and everyone on the bridge itself seemed absorbed in his or her own duties. He shrugged off the niggling thought that this might be a manifestation of the hostility felt by the crew. Despite his increasing malaise, he managed to murmur the appropriate phrases as each member of the bridge personnel was introduced. Faces came

and went - Uhura, an extremely attractive Bantu woman who, ordinarily, would have commanded a great deal more of his attention, having strict regard to his rank, of course; Sulu, a lithe, almond-eyed young man at the helmsman's console; Chekov, a fresh faced young ensign who grinned cheerfully from the navigator's chair; alert eyes in earnest young faces...

A voice spoke quietly close to his ear. "Would the Captain care to inspect his quarters now?"

"Thank you, Mr. Spock."

Kirk moved back into the elevator, grateful for the opportunity to rest his aching shoulders against its smooth walls and quite unaware of the calculating look in the Vulcan's dark eyes.

The Captain's cabin was as spartan as any Kirk had been used to during his career although it did offer a little more living space. Having indicated the respective positions of the intercom, a small viewscreen and a recording device that could be tied in to the Captain's log on the bridge, Spock asked politely if there was anything more he could do.

"No - thank you, Mr. Spock. I'll call when I need you."

"You will find me on the bridge, Captain."

Kirk was uncomfortably aware that there was something important he should have done and, after searching frantically through his mind, came up with the answer just as his First Officer was about to step into the corridor.

"Mr. Spock!"

"Captain?"

"Instruct the navigator to lay in a course for the planet Ardana and proceed on it at warp factor two. We're due to pick up a consignment of zienite for transportation to Starbase 4."

If Spock thought the order was a trifle belated, he gave no sign. "Yes, sir."

Alone, Kirk sat down heavily on the end of his bunk, struggling to control the nausea rising in his stomach. What a way to take over a Starship, he groaned. If Starfleet Command got to hear of this...

Unable to fight any more against the painful throbbing in his head and the numbing ache which had spread insidiously from his shoulders to his arms, he lay back and closed his eyes, drifting into an uneasy sleep.

Seconds later, or so it seemed to him, he woke shivering violently and drenched in sweat, trying desperately to identify the distorted sounds that reverberated in his ears. Red alert! Battle stations! Why hadn't he been called to the bridge?

With a tremendous effort, he dragged himself up and, as soon as the cabin stopped swaying and dipping around him, stumbled out into the corridor. More from blind instinct than anything else, he found his way to the turbo-lift, almost fell inside and gave the necessary verbal command which would take him to the bridge.

On the bridge, Spock completed a routine check at his library computer station and turned back to the main viewscreen where forward scanners were projecting an unremarkable scene of a myriad stars sliding smoothly past as the ship sped silently on its way through deep space. Sulu leaned back in his chair, smiling at a comment from the irrepressible Chekov while, at her communications station, Uhura made yet another uneventful sweep of all radio frequencies.

They all turned out of casual interest when the elevator doors swished

open and, with one exception, froze at the sight of their new Captain, wild-eyed and apparently shaking with fury, glaring from one face to the other. The exception was the imperturbable Vulcan who punched a button on the command chair panel and managed to issue a rapid command before Kirk's feverish gaze alighted on him.

"Mr. Spock!" Kirk's voice was stiff with anger. "Why was I not informed of the present emergency?"

"I beg your pardon, Captain?"

"Don't treat me like a fool, Spock! The safety of this ship and its crew is my responsibility. By what authority did you choose to ignore my presence aboard?"

Aware that McCoy had emerged from the elevator, medikit in hand, Spock moved forward cautiously. Like all Vulcans, he was extremely reserved and his reluctance to use physical contact to subdue the Captain resulted in his reactions being just a nanosecond late when Kirk suddenly swung a vicious jab at his midriff, doubling him up. Recovering instantly, he was able to restrain the fiercely-struggling figure long enough for McCoy to administer a hypo. Kirk slumped in the First Officer's arms and was carefully lowered to the deck.

"Sickbay - Dr. McCoy here. Send a stretcher up to the bridge."

During the next forty-eight hours, Kirk surfaced spasmodically from a nightmare journey in which every horror, known and unknown, pursued him across black space, inflicting a thousand savage tortures until, tormented beyond endurance, he screamed himself awake and sat bolt upright staring sightlessly across the room until a woman's hands tried to press him back on the pillows. When he thrust her angrily aside, her place was quickly taken by a taller figure whose saturnine features were vaguely familiar and who held him in a grip of steel until his threshing ceased and he fell back exhausted. The nightmare returned, pain stabbed and tore at his naked body and he babbled endlessly and incoherently, betraying his innermost fears and weaknesses, unaware of the compassionate eyes that watched over him during these his most vulnerable hours. Then, when his ravaged mind and body could take no more and he was begging for relief, relief came in the form of gentle hands cooling his burning flesh, a hissing pressure against his arm which brought merciful oblivion, and he slept.

On the third day, he swam back to consciousness and lay staring up at the dimmed light over his head, his mind a blank. A soft, clinking sound caught his attention and he turned his head cautiously to see a trim, blonde female sorting through a variety of medical instruments at the other end of the room.

"How...?" His voice came out in a cracked whisper and he tried again. "How long have I been here?"

The young woman spun round, startled, then smiled.

"You've been ill for three days, Captain. Are you in any pain?"

She's pretty, he thought and smiled crookedly to himself. I must be feeling better. "No, I'm fine, thank you, Miss...?"

"Christine Chapel, sir. I'm Dr. McCoy's assistant. I think I'd better call him." She crossed to a connecting door and pushed it open. "Dr. McCoy, the Captain's awake."

McCoy came in at once, smiling as he glanced up at the panel which was monitoring Kirk's body functions. "Well, how do you feel this morning, Captain?" His bedside manner was as bluff and cheery as any country practitioner's and Kirk responded with a weak grin.

"A great deal better, thanks, Dr. McCoy. What happened?"

"You, my dear Captain, have just presented me with my first case of Vegan Choriomeningitis, a very rare and nasty disease which nearly put paid to your career as a Starship Captain before it even started. Fortunately, you're an extremely fit man - as Mr. Spock can no doubt testify."

"Mr. Spock?" Kirk was puzzled by the twinkle in the doctor's eyes.

"Er... yes. I'm afraid that on your first day on board you kind of went berserk up on the bridge - and Spock was on the receiving end of an almost lethal punch."

Kirk groaned. "I did that? Is Mr. Spock all right?"

"As well as can be expected," replied McCoy solemnly, then, relenting as he saw the concern on Kirk's face, "You obviously don't know much about Vulcans, Captain. They're as tough as nails."

"I don't believe I care to have my physical stamina compared to such a primitive implement, Doctor," an already familiar voice protested mildly from the doorway. "Do I have your permission to enter, Captain?"

"Of course, please come in, Mr. Spock."

"I am pleased to see you improved, sir."

"Thank you, Mr. Spock. I seem to have caused a bit of a stir one way or another."

"It became increasingly obvious to Dr. McCoy and myself that there was something seriously amiss when you came aboard."

"And I thought I had a hangover," said Kirk allowing Nurse Chapel to prop him up with extra pillows. "Anyway, I have to apologise for the trouble I've caused."

"Indeed, Captain? I assume you did not contract this disease in a deliberate attempt to cause disruption aboard ship."

Kirk laughed in spite of himself. "But I did cause you some discomfort."

McCoy shifted uneasily under a swift, frowning glance from dark Vulcan eyes.

"There was no discomfort, Captain," Spock assured him, adding with devastating honesty, "the contusion is already fading and, in the absence of a second opinion, I have accepted Dr. McCoy's assurance that my rib is not fractured." He appeared supremely indifferent to McCoy who was choking on a mixture of laughter and indignation. "Something seems to be bothering you, Captain."

Kirk's face had suddenly become bleak and he spoke bitterly. "I must have made a fine impression on my first day of command."

"Indeed you did, Captain." Spock's voice was totally devoid of emotion.

"And what is that supposed to mean, Mr. Spock?"

Spock raised an eyebrow. "I thought I had made my meaning crystal clear, Captain."

At this point, conscious of a sudden, electric charge in the air, McCoy interrupted. "What he means, Captain... "

"Jim will do," murmured Kirk, still regarding Spock with a hostile light in his eyes.

"What Spock means, Jim, is that I have had one hell of a job coping with a constant stream of would-be visitors and answering endless enquiries about your condition."

"But why?" demanded Kirk suspiciously. "I was hardly the ideal Starship Commander, staggering round the ship like a madman and laying into the First Officer!"

Spock regarded him steadily for a moment, hands clasped behind his back in a stance that Kirk was to come to know well. "The standard of intelligence aboard this ship," he said at last, "is extremely high and it was not long before even the lowest ranking crewman realised that the Enterprise has acquired an exceptional man as its Captain."

A tinge of colour stained Kirk's pale cheeks as Spock went inexorably on. "In their opinion, any man who can fight off a fever which rose to such a height that it could not be measured on standard medical equipment, in order to defend his ship and crew from danger - real or imagined - cannot fail to command the deepest admiration and respect... an opinion which I am unable to fault."

Speechless but still held by the Vulcan's hypnotic gaze, Kirk fell back on his pillows, the warring emotions inside him seeming to swell his chest unbearably.

"Take it easy, Jim. You'll need some time to get over this." McCoy did not make it clear whether it was the sickness to which he referred or Spock's speech. "C'mon, Spock. The Captain needs rest."

"Yes, Doctor. However, I will call in again this evening, if the Captain permits."

"Please," said Kirk immediately. "I'd be glad of your company."

Was there a flash of some indefinable emotion in Spock's eyes, Kirk wondered, or was it the fever working on his imagination again? But the moment was gone and, suddenly, all he wanted to do was sleep.

REFLECTIONS by Susan Burr

430 -

Humans -

All busy about their tasks.

Chattering...

Bustling...

Bright...

Young...

Inpetuous...

HUMAN!

430 -

Silence -

Cold and deadly -

Wraps about me.

He is nowhere.

No effervescent smile...

Quick temper...

Sharp, delicious wit.

He pulses from every section I pace -

Strong...

Ceaseless...

Lasting...

Beyond the darkening stars.

430 -

Only HE remains!

THE EYE OF THE DRAGON by C.E. Hall

As he walked briskly along the corridor of the Enterprise towards the transporter room, Captain James T. Kirk felt very satisfied with himself. He had just completed a successful mission on the planet which his ship was at present orbiting, and was mentally planning his report.

Some romantic colonist had named the planet Cosmotania, and although the name was a little fanciful, it was not inappropriate. The place had been colonised very successfully by Humans representing all races. They were the descendants of those who had been originally Africans, Asians, Europeans and Americans. The 'coloured' inhabitants far outnumbered the 'white' people, but all lived in relatively harmonious co-existence.

It was not a Federation colony - it had been planned and developed independently. It was in an out-of-the-way corner of the galaxy, and of no strategic value, neither had it any source of riches to make it a target for aggressors. The Federation, without any great urge to cultivate it as an ally, saw no reason either to regard it as an enemy, and maintained friendly relations. Periodically, a Starship which was in the vicinity was ordered to pay a courtesy visit, and was always courteously received. The Cosmotanians had no space-flight, as their aim from the beginning was to develop their own world, but they did understand about it, for their ancestors had come there by that method, and they accepted space travellers without alarm.

As the planet was mainly 'coloured', Kirk had chosen to take with him two of his officers who would find this most interesting - Uhura and Sulu. In addition, partly because of his position as First Officer, but mostly because of his natural curiosity about anything new and interesting, Mr. Spock was included in the party.

They beamed down to the main city, called Goza, and were met by the President of Cosmotania, a distinguished-looking elderly man of negroid descent, named Darvan. He had been very pleased to show them around the fine city of Goza, and to tell them how things were going. He explained that the largest part of his world was peopled by a mixed community who managed to live and work together with peace and goodwill.

"We have also a few isolated areas," he added, "where the inhabitants are very much of one race, and prefer it that way." He pointed southwards. "Over there," he said, "by the edge of the Great Desert, there is a numerous black settlement, and up there," his arm pointed north-west towards a range of high mountains, "is a settlement that is strictly Oriental. I personally do not approve of such segregation, but it has developed over many generations. There is no trouble because of it," he hastened to add. "They do not interfere with us, and we leave them alone to run their own community in their own way. But they don't care much for visitors from outside, and resent those from other worlds."

The party from the Enterprise found it all very interesting. During the afternoon, the group split up and went to visit different areas. Kirk and Uhura had completed their visit and beamed up an hour ago; Spock and Sulu were due any moment. Kirk was on his way to the transporter room to meet them, to suggest that all four went together to the recreation room, and over a coffee discuss their impressions while they were still fresh in their minds. He wondered if they had had as interesting an afternoon as he and Uhura had done.

When he entered the transporter room, he was surprised to find that in addition to the regular Transporter Officer, Engineer Scott was there. He was busy checking dials and switches on the control console.

"Hello, Mr. Scott," said Kirk, somewhat surprised at his presence. "What are you doing here?"

"It's the transporter, Captain," replied Scotty, with a worried

expression. "There's something not quite right, but I can't quite pin it down yet."

"Mr. Spock and Mr. Sulu are due back," said Kirk. "What about them?"

"I'm in touch with them, Captain," explained Scotty. "I've asked them to wait while I test it. I've sent down several items, and I'm just going to see if they come back all right." He pressed the necessary knobs, and then slowly moved the levers. On the transporter platform, several large boxes came into view, wavering at first, then gaining substance. Scotty and Kirk moved over to examine them; they seemed perfectly all right.

"Everything seems in order now," reported Scotty.

Kirk walked back to the console and picked up the communicator lying there. He pressed the button and called down to the surface.

"Should be all right now, Mr. Spock," he said. "Are you ready for Mr. Scott to beam you up?"

"Yes, sir," answered the Vulcan's calm tones. "Energize as soon as you are ready for us."

Scotty carefully touched the correct switches, and began to move the levers. But they had hardly reached half-way, when he let out a gasp of alarm. His fingers raced over buttons and knobs, his eyes flickering over the dials, noting and assessing figures, and eventually, with a controlled haste, he eased the levers back the way they had come.

Kirk watched the complicated controls, not knowing exactly what was wrong, but sensing from Scotty's desperate concentration that he was having real trouble. Trusting his Chief Engineer to handle it if at all possible, he did not disturb him by interrupting, but waited with his inquiries until the levers were pushed home. Then he said anxiously,

"Are they all right, Scotty?"

"Aye, sir," said Scotty with a deep sigh of relief, "but I'm not quite sure where they are. I had to grab a fix on the first bit of solid ground I could latch on to, for everything was vacillating. But they're safely down again."

Kirk thumbed the communicator urgently. "Spock," he called, and was very relieved to hear the familiar calm tones as the Vulcan answered. There was nothing in the voice to betray the shock the two men had just had. One moment they had been beaming up peacefully, the next they were landing somewhat violently in totally different surroundings. One moment they had been standing on the broad steps of the Government building in Goza, the next they found themselves on a rocky hillside, lashed by a biting wind.

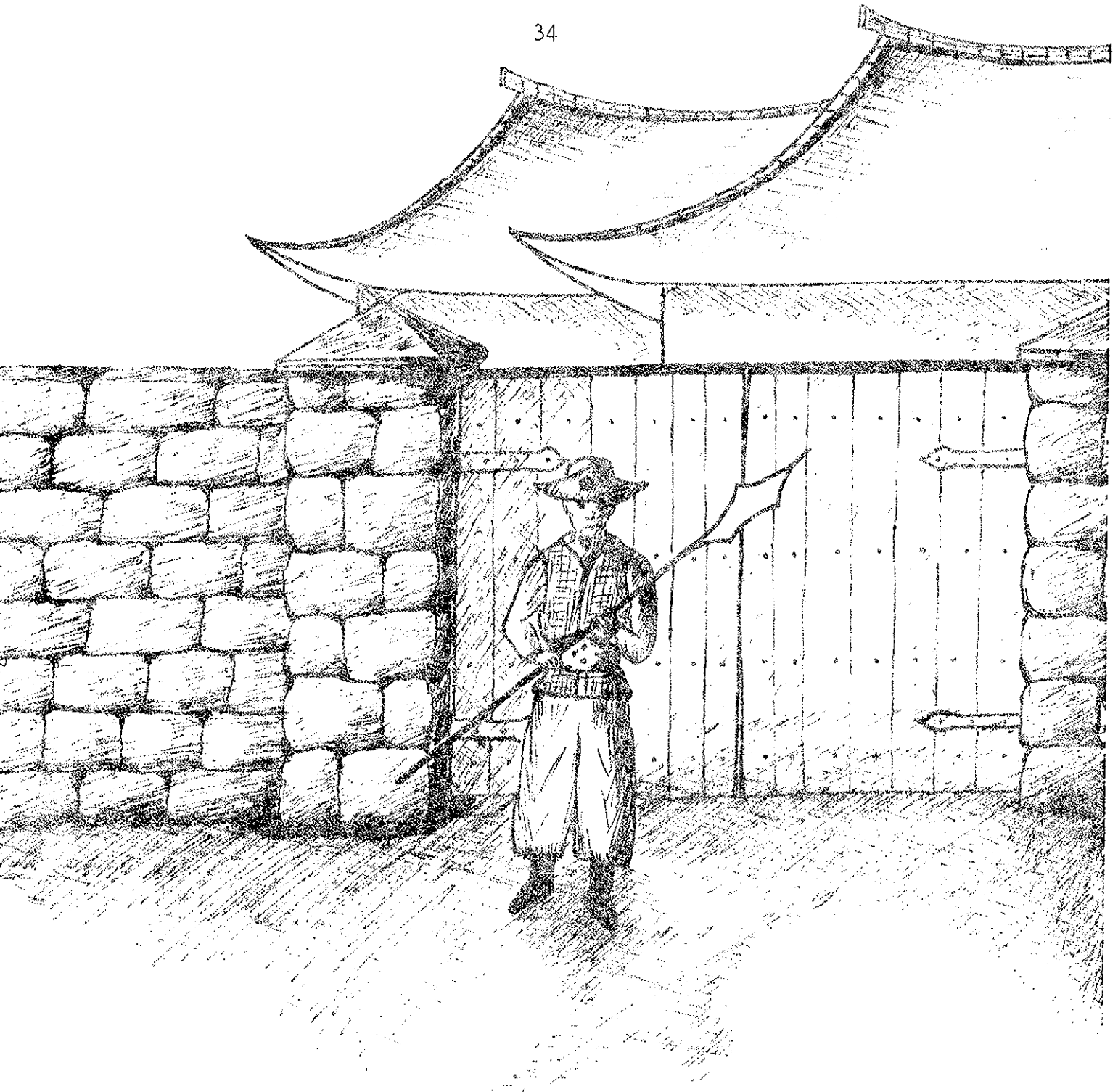
"Spock," repeated Kirk, having been reassured that both men were quite all right, "I think we'd better send a shuttle for you - the transporter will need a thorough overhaul before we attempt to use it again."

"Negative, Captain," replied Spock, looking around him at the rocky slopes on which he and Sulu stood. "There is nowhere here that a shuttlecraft could possibly land," and he described their surroundings.

"What do you suggest, then?" asked Kirk, ready to rely on his astute First Officer's assessment of his situation.

"According to the tricorder," replied Spock, "Goza is due south-east from here. If we endeavour to move in that direction, keeping in touch with the communicator, we can inform you as soon as we find any area flat enough for a shuttlecraft to put down, and alternatively, if the transporter fault is discovered and repaired before then, you can inform us of that."

"Very well," agreed Kirk, "that does seem the most feasible course of action. Go carefully on those slopes, and keep in touch," and he temporarily closed the contact.



Spock and Sulu began to make their way down the precipitous slopes on which they had so suddenly found themselves. The going was rough and uneven, so they picked their way carefully. A cold wind whistled about them, coming from the white-capped mountains that they could see towering to the skyline, and occasional flurries of sleet reduced the visibility.

Then, as one of these flurries swirled round them, and as suddenly cleared, they found themselves surrounded by a group of men, clad in rough skin clothes. Most were Orientals, some Mongolian in appearance. They crowded round the two Enterprise men, shouting and gesticulating. Rough hands relieved them of their equipment as they were hurried along a rough track. Sulu tried hard to communicate, attempting all the dialects and variations of language that he knew, but they either could not, or would not, understand. They chattered among themselves in rough guttural voices, and would not respond to his efforts. But at least their captors did not attempt to do them any bodily harm.

As they turned a corner on the rocky track, they came to a narrow cleft in the mountainside. Their rough guards hurried them into this. At the other end, they emerged into a small valley, set between the towering mountains. Sheltered from the bitter wind, it had an atmosphere of peace and calm. As they were hustled along the track that led down the centre of the valley, they could see on either side small rough huts. Curious people peered from the doorways curtained with rough hide shutters.

But the feature that dominated the whole vista was the big house set at the head of the valley. It appeared to be a conglomeration of many buildings, all set within a protecting outer wall. The many roofs, at varying heights and angles, were of greeny slate, and all curved upwards at the corners in the Oriental style, designed to protect the occupants from evil spirits who, able to travel only in straight lines, could not get past these curved edges.

The house was evidently their destination, as their captors hurried them along the path that led up towards a large wooden door set in the rough grey stone wall. There was a guard on the door, a large Mongolian, armed with a fearsome weapon resembling a pike. After a noisy conversation in which the whole group tried to join at once, he called to someone inside, and the door was heaved creakingly open.

The group passed through into a large courtyard, and judging by the sound the door was firmly closed behind them. The prisoners were hurried across the wide yard, and through a doorway at its further side. As they came through the arch of the opening, the change was so great as to be almost breathtaking. In contrast to the rough skin-clad group that had brought them here so unceremoniously, the hall they had been brought to was a place of beauty, styled and decorated with delicate taste. Its floor was a mosaic of polished tiles in blue, green and dove-grey. Carved wooden pillars supported a high timbered roof. The walls were hung with silken tapestries in peacock shades of blue and green, spiced with gleaming gold. In one corner was an ornamental pool, with a small fountain adding its tinkling to the soft sound of the many wind-chimes hanging from the pillars. In another corner there sat a huge idol, a figure of some Eastern goddess, vast and unsmiling, decorated with jewellery of sparkling precious gems in many vivid hues.

Most striking of all was the end wall, hung with a huge curtain of patterned scarlet silk. Before this were two very ornate gilded chairs, with scarlet cushions and footstools. Spock and Sulu were pushed to stand before these, and then the whole party waited... for what?

The delay gave the two Federation officers a chance to gain fuller details of something they had already realised - that almost all the people they had so far encountered were Oriental.

Both of them, quick-thinking as they were, had come to the same correct conclusion, that they were in the realm that Darvan had told them about - the area which was ruled by those of Chinese descent. How far was that from Goza? And how were they going to get back there? Would they receive help or hindrance from these people who didn't like strangers?

As they waited, the hall began to fill up. From various doorways people began to enter. Spock and Sulu watched with interest as they gathered. Most were men, all were Chinese; they were aristocratic and distinguished-looking, wearing fine silken garments and jewels. A noticeable fact was that they were all attended by servants, some carrying fans, some bowls of sweetmeats, some glasses and wine bottles - but every one of these servants was of a race other than Chinese. There were Africans, Indians, some from white races - and the other thing they had in common was their subservient attitude; they obviously feared their masters.

When the congregation had been swelled by at least twenty of these newcomers, plus their cowed servants, there came the sudden ringing tones of a gong. A hush fell upon the crowd, and all eyes turned towards a small door

at the back of the hall near the gilded chairs. The door opened, and, preceded by two Indian servants who walked backwards and bowed obsequiously all the way, two figures entered and moved slowly forward to take their places in the two throne-like chairs. They were followed by two huge Tartars armed with great curved swords, who took up their positions to the right and the left at the back of the chairs.

Both being of curious disposition, Spock and Sulu studied the figures with interest. The man was of average height and build, but seemed to have a kind of magnetism that drew all eyes. His face was Oriental, with slanting eyes and yellowish skin. He wore a long thin drooping moustache, and his well-kept hands had long, painted fingernails in the style of the ancient mandarins. A fine jade ring glowed on one hand. His clothes were very rich, black and regal purple, with fine embroidery in gold thread upon the cuffs of his over-gown. On his head he wore a plain round black cap, but the button was of gold. There was about him an air of power and menace.

Sulu's eyes were drawn to his companion. She was tall for a Chinese woman, and slender as a boy. Her clothes were of the finest silk and satin, a delicate apple-green over-gown revealing an underskirt of palest peach satin. Her dark glossy hair was piled high upon her head in an elaborate coil, held with gold pins with dangling jade beads, which tinkled gently as she walked. Her face was a classic oval, peachy-yellow, with finely arched brows and a tiny vivid mouth. But her eyes were the most striking feature. They were large and dark, with long black lashes. They were not demurely downcast, as were those of the other women of the court, but were wide open, very alert, and showing a boldness, a calculating shrewdness, that suggested that it would be unwise for anyone to deceive or cross her.

After gazing at the two officers for a moment, the man addressed himself to Sulu in a flood of Chinese-sounding language. Sulu looked at Spock and shrugged hopelessly; he could not understand a word of this particular dialect. Spock addressed the man, saying slowly,

"I regret that we do not understand your words, sir."

The Oriental threw him a look, almost as if he were surprised to hear him speak. Then he turned back to Sulu, and spoke again, slowly and painstakingly, as if he found it difficult.

"I... called Li-chang. This... my daughter... Mei-li. We... bid you... welcome to our house."

Sulu was delighted to find that he could now understand, and replied eagerly, "My name is Sulu, and this is Mr. Spock."

The man continued in his high sing-song voice. "You... travellers?" Sulu nodded, and he went on. "Where... you go?"

"We want to get back to Goza," replied Sulu.

"Long journey! You have come... long way?" questioned Li-chang.

"Further than you think!" replied Sulu enthusiastically. "We come from -" He was interrupted by Mr. Spock, who put a hand on his arm, and said in a warning tone,

"Be careful, Mr. Sulu. I think you have said enough," effectively recalling to his mind Darvan's warning.

Looking at each other, Spock and Sulu did not see the odd look that passed between father and daughter, and would not have understood the reason for it if they had. Sulu, obedient to the First Officer's instinct for caution, quelled his enthusiasm, and contented himself with saying, "We wish to go to Goza. Can you start us on our way?"

"Too late... start long journey... this day," replied Li-chang. "Rest ... eat... first. Travel another day."

This seemed only reasonable, although the delay was to be regretted. It would be longer before Captain Kirk could pick them up - unless it could be done direct from here! Thinking of this, Spock asked boldly,

"Our belongings - the small black boxes; may we have them back, please?"

Li-chang threw Spock another odd look. It was almost as if he resented being addressed by him, and when he replied, he spoke more to Sulu.

"Will ask... questions. Find soon... maybe," he said, somewhat enigmatically.

This did not sound exactly helpful, but they could really do nothing more about it without risking offending their unusual hosts.

The girl spoke now, revealing that her grasp of the English language was considerably better than her father's. Her voice was clear and sharp as she addressed herself to Sulu.

"I will show you the room you may use during your stay with us," she said. "Please to come with me."

Intrigued by the beauty of this girl, Sulu accompanied her readily, endeavouring to engage her in conversation. It did not occur to him to look back to see how Mr. Spock was faring. If he thought of it at all, he assumed that as senior officer of the party, the First Officer would be offered hospitality by Li-chang himself, and he was congratulating himself that for once the privileges of rank had worked in his favour.

Mei-li led him along a corridor, opened a large panelled door, and showed him into the room within. It was a large room, with a casemented window at the far end. A richly coloured Oriental carpet covered the centre of the polished floor, and the walls were hung with vividly-toned tapestries, most depicting Chinese warriors in combat with fierce dragons. The dominant piece of furniture was a large four-poster bed, hung with dark crimson curtains, tied back with a plaited gold cord. There were also comfortable wicker chairs, a low table, and a washstand with a large jug and basin.

Sulu was very impressed by this magnificence, and wondered idly if Mr. Spock's quarters could possibly be finer. He moved over to look out of the window. He found that it faced the further end of the valley. There was no immediate foreground, no garden - the house seemed to be built on the edge of a cliff, but in the distance, lower down, he could see a patchwork of coloured fields and grasslands, with isolated farmhouses here and there.

"Shall we return to the hall?" said Mei-li, and Sulu followed her out of the room, and back along the corridor. As they entered the hall, he could see that most of the people were still there, apart from the rough crowd of guards who had been summarily dismissed earlier on. There was a buzz of conversation, and all eyes were turned in the same direction. He looked beyond them, and was surprised to see Li-chang still sitting in his gilt chair.

"Where's Mr. Spock?" he asked the girl, for he could not see him anywhere.

"He is being punished," said Mei-li, and the malevolent tone in her hard voice raised a sudden fear in Sulu.

He pushed urgently through the crowd. Mr. Spock was there all right; he was on his knees before the huge idol, held there by the two large Tartar guards grasping his arms. His blue uniform shirt had been stripped off him, and another guard was standing over him with a fearsome implement - a bamboo cane, split in sections to the handle.

Before Sulu could stop him, the man brought it down hard across the Vulcan's bare back. The razor-edges of the slivers of cane raised long green cuts across the white skin, and must have been agonising. Another blow fell adding to the marks, but before a third could descend, Sulu had charged forward and snatched the cane from the astonished guard's hand.

"What are you doing?" he demanded, turning to Li-chang and his daughter, who had joined him.

"He spoke... too boldly... to you and to us... dared... lay hand on you," replied Li-chang in his disjointed English.

Mei-li's hard voice added, "Our servants would have died for less than this."

Sulu was about to blurt out that Mr. Spock was not a servant, but his senior officer, but something stopped him. He remembered that all here except the Chinese were servants, and very scared servants at that. So he decided to act on his own initiative instead and said boldly,

"He is my servant - it is for me to punish him if he behaves badly."

"Then do so," retorted Mei-li. "You have the cane in your hand!"

Sulu hesitated, caught by his own deceit. Mei-li threw him a contemptuous look. "You are too weak!" she said scornfully. "You cannot even control a servant!"

Sulu was in a quandary. He did not in the least wish to add to Spock's pain, but if he failed now, they might well both be killed. He looked towards Spock, instinctively seeking the guidance he usually expected from his senior officers. Spock had turned his head. His lips were tightly pressed together, and his face was pale, but he met Sulu's eyes, and gave an almost imperceptible nod.

Steeling himself, Sulu raised the cane, and brought it down firmly. He winced inwardly as more green lines were added to those already there, but forced himself to repeat the blow before throwing the cane down. Then, with a boldness he did not feel, he said,

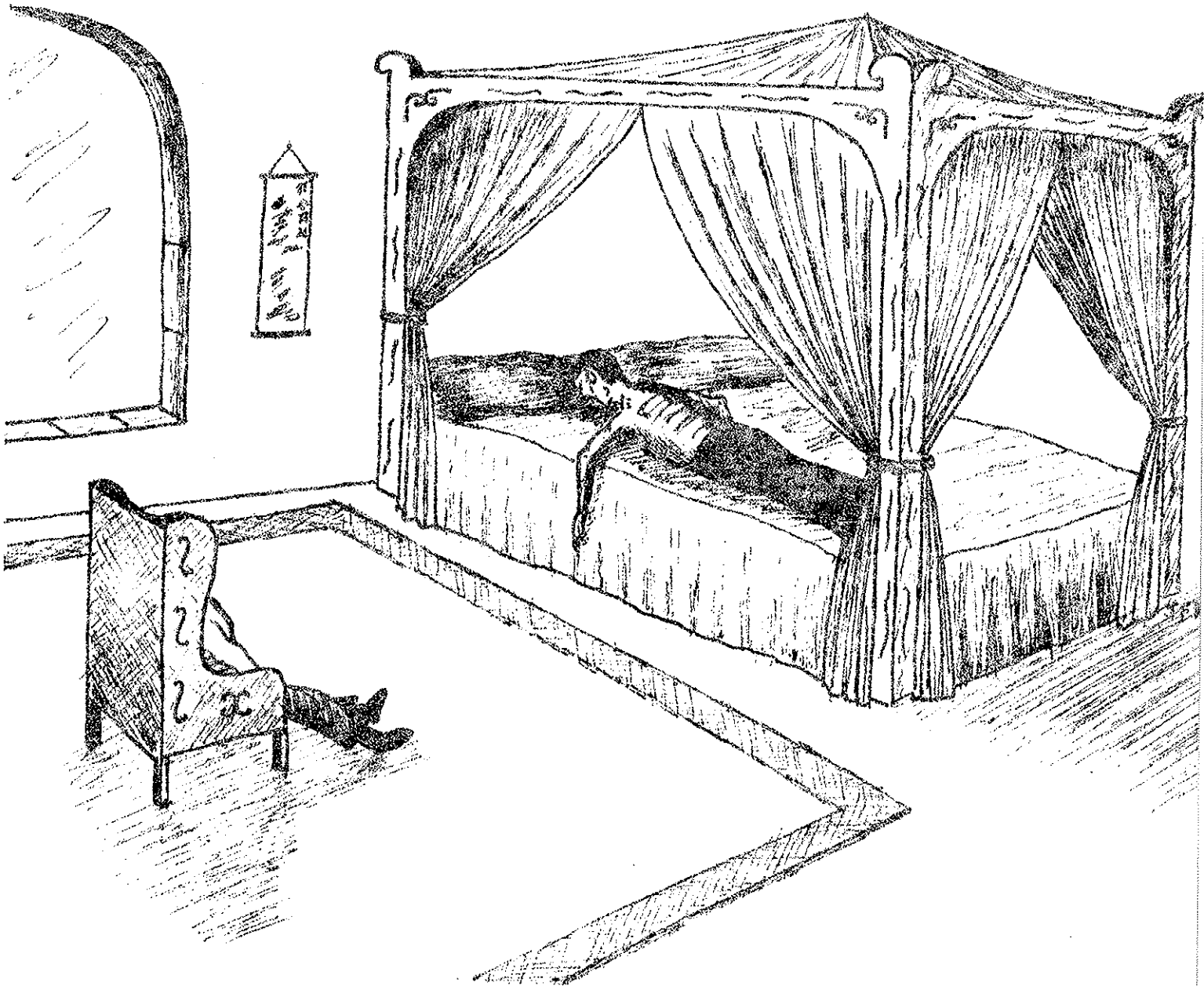
"That is enough! I will deal further with him in my own way. Please have him taken to my room."

Mei-li gazed at Sulu with an odd look in her hard eyes, thinking that perhaps she had misjudged him after all. Li-chang also was evidently satisfied, for he gave a nod to the guards, and a word in Chinese. They yanked the Vulcan roughly to his feet, and hustled him off towards the doorway to the corridor. He looked pale and shaken and did not meet Sulu's eyes. Watching him go, Sulu wondered if he would have been able to walk without the support of the guards, but he carefully kept his anxiety out of his expression. He strolled over nonchalantly to retrieve the blue shirt, and showed no hurry to follow.

The onlookers in the hall were now drifting away. Sulu resisted the urge to push through them, and charge after the disappearing Tartars and their stumbling prisoner.

As the hall emptied, servants came hurrying in with low tables, and began setting them round the room in a horse-shoe shape. Mei-li addressed Sulu again. "A meal will be served here later," she said. "You will hear the gong when it is time."

Sulu thanked her, and judging that it was now safe to leave, went off along the corridor towards his room, stifling the impulse to break into a run. As he entered the room, his heart skipped a beat. Mr. Spock lay sprawled face-downwards on the floor, very still. The reason for his stillness, however, was the point of the Tartar guard's sword tickling the back of his neck. Summoning up all the self-confidence he could assume, Sulu dismissed the guard, pointing to add weight to his words. Fortunately the man must have understood something, for he returned the sword to his scabbard and left. Sulu held himself in check till he heard the door close solidly behind him. Then he rushed to kneel beside Spock, who was slowly and carefully rising. Sulu grabbed his arm and helped him up, then clung on to him as the Vulcan swayed unsteadily.



"How are you, Mr. Spock?" he begged anxiously.

Spock did not answer his question. "I commend your initiative, Mr. Sulu," he said, "but not your enthusiasm," he added ruefully.

"I had to go through with it," pleaded Sulu. "I had to behave as if I meant it, or I think they would have killed us both. I didn't enjoy it!"

"I should hope not," retorted Spock, totally nonplussing Sulu who wasn't sure whether he was serious or sarcastic.

"Come and sit down," he said, "and I'll see what I can do to ease your back." He drew a low table close to the washstand and Spock sank thankfully onto it. Hot water had evidently been placed in the room earlier for it was still slightly warm. Using the soft face-cloth and towels, Sulu carefully bathed the fine green cuts scoring the Vulcan's back. Spock made no protest, but his involuntary wincing, and occasional sharp intakes of breath, made Sulu aware of the pain he was suffering. At last he had done all he could. Spock looked pale and exhausted and on the verge of collapse. Worriedly, Sulu supported him over to the bed and eased him face-down on to it. Spock lay still with his eyes closed, and after a while appeared to have fallen asleep.

Feeling edgy and uneasy, and very helpless, Sulu wandered over to gaze out of the window. Far down the valley a few points of light showed - it was growing dark outside, and shadows were deepening over the farms in the valley.

He looked upwards at the stars beginning to shine in the deep purplish sky, and thought to himself of the Enterprise up there somewhere. No doubt Captain Kirk and the others would be searching for any trace of them, but short of trying telepathy, he had no way of calling on them for the help they would be so ready to give, if they knew of their plight. Dispirited, he drew the heavy floor-length curtains across the window - the room was already illuminated by several ornamental lamps placed here and there. He took another look at Spock, who seemed to be resting quietly, then sank into a wicker chair, and tried to relax.

Spock woke with a start. For a moment he could not remember where he was, then an incautious movement sent a stab of pain across his back, and it all came back to him. He lay still for a moment, considering the situation in which he and Sulu found themselves. Would Li-chang help them on their way tomorrow? Would he return their communicators, so that they could contact the Enterprise? Personally, he had considerable doubts. Then, as he thought, a strange feeling came over him - a feeling that he was being watched. From where he lay, he could just see Mr. Sulu - he appeared to be dozing in a chair. Moving cautiously, and with eyes almost closed, he let his gaze travel slowly round the room, and eventually spotted it. There was definitely something odd about the eye of the blue dragon on one of the wall-hangings. He averted his eyes from it quickly and gave the matter some thought.

Then he eased himself carefully from the bed, and moved over towards Sulu, carefully keeping his back to the s y-hole he had discovered. Sulu heard him approaching and began to get up, but Spock hissed "Sit still!" at him in such a quiet but forceful way that he obeyed at once. Then Spock continued, very quietly.

"Show no surprise at my actions, and listen to my words with as stern an expression as you can." Sulu obeyed, composing his features into a severe frown. It was as well he was prepared, for Spock's actions would have disconcerted him. The Vulcan dropped to his knees, bowed his head, and clasped his hands in a very penitent attitude.

"I am sure we are being watched, but I doubt whether they can hear us at this distance. It is evident that to try to ensure our safety, we must play out the roles of master and servant, and act very carefully. We may have already aroused their suspicion by the way in which you tended me, but they cannot openly comment on that without revealing that they were watching. If they do hint at it, I suggest you try to convey the attitude that when one has only one servant, it is foolish to punish him till he is unfit to serve. That is a practical reasoning, which they may well accept."

Sulu nodded, still maintaining his sternest expression. At this point, the distant sound of a gong was heard. It was repeated nearer, as if someone were walking down the corridor sounding it. Spock got up, and reaching for his blue shirt, began with some difficulty to put it back on. Sulu itched to help him, but forced himself to resist the impulse. He walked towards the door, and Spock followed meekly behind. It opened, and Mei-li stood there. She had changed her gown for one of jade-green silk, with eau-de-nil sleeves and underskirt. She looked very beautiful, but this time both the visitors could see the underlying hardness that showed in her bold eyes.

They moved out into the corridor and along it back towards the main hall. A servant fell in about three paces behind his mistress. He was carrying two small bowls, and two white napkins, and gave one of each to Spock. Spock was ready to watch every move the servants made, and to copy them as closely as he could, so he followed sedately three paces behind Sulu.

They entered the big hall. The low tables were now laden with a varied selection of food, and piles of cushions were arranged behind them. Li-chang was already seated at the centre of the top table. Mei-li took her place on

his right, and indicated that Sulu should sit on her right. Her servant knelt docilely behind her slightly to her left. Spock copied him, kneeling behind Sulu. He soon discovered what his duties were to be. Another servant came round and filled the bowls they held with warm perfumed water. Each of the diners was served with a bowl of rice, and then helped himself to delicacies from the large bowls set at intervals. Chop-sticks were provided, but fingers were also freely used, and when these became sticky, the eater would turn to his servant, rinse his fingers in the water and dry them on the napkin before continuing his meal. Alert and watchful, Sulu and Spock endeavoured to behave as the others did. Fortunately it seemed as if their hosts considered that eating was the most important thing at this time, and little conversation seemed to be expected.

A thin rice wine was also served in tiny cups. It looked innocuous enough but was in fact pretty powerful, as Sulu discovered after taking a fiery gulp. It made him choke and cough, but he made a real effort and recovered rapidly, although he could feel his eyes watering. But nobody seemed bothered - they were all concentrating on eating greedily.

Then Sulu noticed that some of the elderly people on the far side of the room, perhaps with smaller appetites due to their age, were finishing their meal. They rinsed their fingers for the last time, then handed their rice-bowls to their servants. The servants, using their fingers, ate eagerly from the bowls, deliberately left half-full for them. Seeing this, Sulu abandoned the natural manners that he had shown up till now, and began to fill his bowl as greedily as the others around him were doing. Then he ate carefully, using the chop-sticks, and managed to leave a few pieces that were vegetable, poking them down out of sight into the rice.

Out of the corner of his eye he watched Mei-li, and when he saw her finish, rinse her fingers, and pass her bowl to her servant, he did it at the same time, hoping she wouldn't notice how generous he was being. Spock also had seen how things were done. He took the bowl, hesitated slightly, and then began to eat, pushing the food into his mouth with his long lean fingers. It would be foolish, he reflected, to deny himself the only nourishment he was likely to get because of a certain distaste for the way it was presented. Besides, it would cause further suspicion if he were to refuse it.

When all appeared finished, Li-chang clapped his hands. Half-a-dozen servants hurried in to remove the bowls and dishes and wipe the tables. They left the wine cups, and further supplies of the fiery spirit were brought in.

Then the entertainment began. It was very traditional Chinese, and portrayed a fierce battle between an ornately dressed Chinese warrior and a fearsome-looking dragon, brilliantly coloured, with shiny scales, great claws and flashing eyes. After a considerable struggle, with much posturing and shouting, the warrior triumphed, and the dragon died dramatically, rolling and writhing about the floor. It was exhilarating and impressive, and when it was finished, a ripple of applause ran round the room, in which Sulu joined enthusiastically. Then one by one, people began to get up and depart.

"Now... time... sleep," said Li-chang in his oddly-phrased English. "In morning... think about journey."

Sulu and Spock returned to their room, Spock had told Sulu where he thought the spy-hole was, but both were careful not to look in that direction. Sulu eyed the bed, then stopped, a little uncertain as to what he should do. Spock moved round till Sulu was between him and the blue dragon.

"We had better rest now," he said. "We don't know what tomorrow will bring. May I have a pillow and a blanket? The bed is yours."

Sulu pulled them off the bed and handed them to him. Sulu sat down on the edge of the comfortable mattress. Before he could stop him, Spock had come round, reached down, and was pulling off his boots for him. A protest almost escaped him, but it died as he met Spock's warning look. He climbed into the

bed and pulled the covers over; it was very comfortable. Spock went round the room and extinguished all the lamps but one. Then he returned and eased himself down on to the floor, making himself as comfortable as he could with the pillow and blanket. Soon all was quiet in the room, and eventually the watcher in the wall gave up too, and went away to make his report.

Back on the Enterprise, Kirk was getting extremely worried. It was hours since they had lost contact with Spock and Sulu. The transporter system was in a serious state of malfunction, and had not yet been fully repaired, but a shuttlecraft was ready and standing by to go to their rescue, if only they knew where to go! They had tried again and again to raise the two officers on their communicators, but got no answer. This was hardly surprising, for the two instruments were reposing at the bottom of a deep well, thrown there in panic by the guard who had been badly startled by their bleeping.

Study of the last co-ordinates they had had, had placed the pair somewhere in the mountainous region towards the area which Darvan had described to them, where the people were mainly Oriental. It was a very difficult area to take a search party, especially as night had now descended on the area. Where were they? mused Kirk. If they were still out on the mountain-side, they were in for a cold night. But if they were, why didn't they answer the communicator calls? What if they had had a fall and lay dead or injured somewhere? Kirk fretted the night away, pacing the floor, and sleeping little. If only there were something more positive that he could do. He had arranged to go down by shuttle in the morning to talk with Darvan, to discuss plans for taking out a search party, but all that would take time.

Sulu woke early the following morning. He climbed out of the comfortable bed and pulled on his boots. He walked round the foot of the bed. Spock was still fast asleep, lying face-downwards with his face half buried in the pillow. He looked so peaceful that Sulu left him to rest while he could. Moving quietly, he extinguished the one remaining lamp, and drew the curtains. They ran easily on large rings, and the slight sound they made did not disturb the sleeper.

Sulu looked out of the window. The day was clear and bright, and the green fields dotted with farm buildings looked very peaceful. Would they be able to start out on their journey today? Would their lost communicators turn up?

There was a perfunctory knock at the door. It opened, and two servants entered. One bore a large jug of water and some fresh towels which he took to the washstand, and the other, a laden breakfast tray which he put down carefully on one of the low tables.

Turning round, he saw Spock still sleeping. Grabbing the chance to mete out the kind of treatment of which he was usually at the receiving end, he lashed out with his foot to kick him awake. Roused in this unseemly fashion, Spock woke with a start, and began to move to defend himself and retaliate. Sulu was too far away to stop him, but, watching apprehensively, suddenly saw intelligence supercede instinct, and the movement was quelled before it caused trouble.

The servants left, and the Enterprise pair washed quickly and then ate. The breakfast was an ample one of oat and rice cakes, served with a liberal supply of clear honey. By placing himself strategically so that he obscured the view from the peep-hole, Sulu was able to ensure that Spock could have a fair share of the meal, and both enjoyed it. Keeping his voice very quiet, Sulu asked anxiously how Spock was feeling. He replied that he was quite all right, but Sulu noticed that he moved rather stiffly as if his back was paining him.

After a while, as no-one came to collect them, they left the room and went looking to see where everyone was. They made their way towards the main hall, as there seemed to be a murmur of sound from there. They found it was full of people. By the look of them, most were agricultural workers or farmers. There seemed to be some kind of hearing in progress. In turn, when rather roughly prodded forward by one of the guards, the men knelt in front of Li-chang, and presumably told him their problem or complaint. He made some reply, the man was hustled off, and the next one shuffled forwards.

Sulu made an attempt to talk to some of the men watching, but had no success, as no-one seemed to understand his dialect. He was just considering whether it would be politic to try to reach the front, and talk to Li-chang, when Mei-li appeared in the doorway. He turned to her.

"I wanted a word with your father," he said, "to ask about our journey to Goza."

"Father will be busy all morning," replied Mei-li. "You will have to wait till after the mid-day meal."

Sulu was a bit put out by the delay this would cause, but it could not be helped. "What about our possessions?" he asked. "Have they been found yet?"

"I will ask," said Mei-li. She spoke a few quick words to her servant, who immediately made his way through the crowd and approached Li-chang. They saw him ask the question, but Li-chang's only answer was a shrug of the shoulders, and a few terse words. The servant returned and reported to his mistress.

"He has asked," Mei-li said, "but no-one has said anything."

Sulu and Spock, although not really surprised at this, found it disconcerting. They seemed to be making no progress at all, and no-one seemed really prepared to help them, although a polite and concerned facade was being shown.

They stayed for a while, watching the proceedings, but since they could not understand a word, their interest was not held for long. Sulu turned to Mei-li. "May we have a look around?" he asked.

"I think it would be better if you return to your room," returned Mei-li. "My father will send for you when he is free."

Sulu nodded as if in agreement. As they moved off along the deserted corridor, Sulu decided it was safe to resume their proper roles, and sought a lead from Spock.

"What shall we do, Mr. Spock?" he asked.

"It seems to me, Mr. Sulu," said the Vulcan, "that we will have to make our own plans to leave here. I suggest we make cautious investigations to find a suitable way out."

So instead of retiring meekly to their room, they looked about them. Opening a door half-way along the corridor, they found a flight of stairs leading down. They descended cautiously, turning a corner, but no-one was about. Using his unerring sense of direction, Spock pointed and said,

"The doorway we entered by must be round that corner. Let us see how well it is guarded."

They moved along the side of the building and round the corner - and came abruptly upon a most astonishing sight. Lined up in the courtyard were rows and rows of fighting men. 'Soldiers' was not quite the correct word, for they wore no set uniform, but every man was armed to the teeth, and stood to attention awaiting orders from others who seemed to be in charge. And piled in great heaps in front of them, were guns! All kinds - rifles, machine guns of various kinds, and quite a few heavier pieces like field guns. Such

armaments had been banned on Cosmotania, and these must have been smuggled in illegally. For what purpose, Spock and Sulu wondered. It seemed obvious that some aggression was planned, and probably against the mixed community in the adjoining area, or even the capital city.

For a moment, taken by surprise, no-one moved. Then an officer shouted an order, several men drew their curved swords and charged forward. Spock and Sulu realised their danger - they had seen too much! There was only one way to go; back the way they had come. They turned on their heels and ran. They shot up the stairs and through the doorway. As they closed the door, they saw beside it the bar that dropped into slots to secure it, and quickly slid it into place. It would not delay the men long, but it might hold them for a bit. It would give the fugitives a chance to get to their room - the only temporary haven they knew. They could expect no help from Li-chang, for he must be involved in the plot, but it might take a few moments for the pursuers to explain what had happened, and for him to tell them in which room the strangers had been housed.

The fleeing pair shot into their room, and acting with one accord, pushed and heaved to move the heavy washstand across the door. Spock reached out and yanked the tapestry with the blue dragon, swinging it awry to obscure the peephole. Then he looked round the room. The window was the only obvious way of escape. He went over and threw it open - it was a long way down. What could they do? An idea came to his quick mind.

"We must use the old idea of making a rope of these curtains and the bed-clothes," he said, reaching up to lift down the rods on which the heavy curtains ran. He made a grimace of pain as the action hurt his back, but Sulu did not see this, for, quick to react, he was already pulling the covers off the bed, and beginning to tear them into strips. Working swiftly they knotted these together and soon had a sizeable length of makeshift rope.

The centre pillar of the window made a good anchorage point and they tied one end firmly to it, bundling the rest out of the window. They were only just in time, for at this point there came a shouting outside and a thumping at the door. Heavy though it was, the washstand would not hold long against the concerted heaves of the soldiers.

"You first, Mr. Sulu," ordered Spock. Sulu climbed nimbly onto the window-ledge, and began to climb down the rope. Spock gave him a short start and then followed, hearing as he went heavy thuds of men's shoulders against the door of their room, and the scraping sound of the washstand starting to move.

They climbed quickly down the swaying rope. It was not difficult, for the bulky knots made good foot and hand holds. Sulu reached the bottom. He grasped the end of the rope to steady it for Spock's last few yards. Looking upward, he saw heads poking out of the window far above, and heard yells from the thwarted pursuers. Then a sword flashed in the sunlight, shearing through the rope cloth. Spock came down with a rush. Sulu managed to break his fall to a certain extent, but both men fell heavily and rolled over on the ground. Sulu was quickly to his feet, and reached out a hand to help Spock up, but when the Vulcan stood up he let out a gasp, and clutched involuntarily at Sulu's shoulder for support - he could not bear to put any weight upon his left foot.

Sulu gazed at him in dismay - this was a bad blow! Spock must have damaged his leg in the unexpectedly rushed descent. It would badly delay their flight, but they must make an effort to get away from the area as fast as they could. Sulu slipped under Spock's arm so that it could rest around his shoulders, and put his own arm round the Vulcan's waist. With this support Spock was able to get along, although he was limping badly.

But the over-eager soldier up above had actually done them a good turn. By cutting the rope, he had also cut off any means of immediate pursuit.

Pursuit there would be, for they had seen too much to be allowed to escape, but the pursuers had to retrace their steps, go down into the courtyard, out of the gateway, and some way across the valley to reach a suitable place to descend. By the time they reached the base of the cliff below the window, there was no sign of their quarry, and a widespread search had to be organized. But this was noisy and vociferous as the soldiers shouted to each other. Spock and Sulu could hear their approach well in advance, and twice they passed within yards of their quarry. Once the pair crouched low amid some thorny bushes while soldiers crashed by on either side; another time they lay flat in the long grass, and heard the swish of it against the soldiers' legs no distance away.

Dodging the searchers in this way, they made their slow progress down the valley. They had decided that this was the way they must go. Those heavy armaments had not come in by the narrow mountain tracks, so there must be some easier way. Presumably it was at the other end of the valley, but how far this was they could not tell.

Evening began to fall, and they looked about for somewhere to shelter for the night. Sulu looked anxiously at Spock, for he was concerned about him. In spite of his help, Spock had been moving more and more slowly - he was obviously very tired. Sulu suspected that although the Vulcan had made no complaint, his back was troubling him. But since he could do little about it, he didn't ask.

The dark bulk of some buildings loomed out of the dusk. It appeared to be a farm. There was no light and no sound, but they approached very cautiously. They opened the door of a barn. In the dim light they could see tools lying about on the floor, overturned boxes and crates and scattered sacks.

"It looks as if they've already searched here," suggested Sulu, and Spock nodded agreement.

"I think it might be safe enough to rest here for a while," he said wearily. He pointed to a rickety ladder. "I suggest the hayloft," he said.

It was not a very dignified ascent. Spock seemed unable to put any weight on his injured ankle, so Sulu had to follow close behind on the ladder and push him up. But at last they reached the top, and flopped gratefully onto the piles of hay there.

"I've got an idea," said Sulu suddenly, and slipped nimbly down the ladder again. He closed the barn door, which made it very dark, and Spock could hear him moving about among the fallen tools. A few moments later, he heard Sulu clambering up the ladder again.

"I've propped some hayforks against the door," explained Sulu. "If anyone tries to come in, they'll fall down with a clatter, and give us a bit of warning."

"I commend your resourcefulness, Mr. Sulu," said Spock, and Sulu felt a surge of pride at the sincerity in his tone. Reaching out carefully, he pulled some of the straw over the senior officer, and then some over himself. At least they could rest comfortably for a while, and perhaps gain a bit of strength for whatever lay ahead.

Spock woke to find himself alone. Early morning light was filtering in through holes in the barn roof, and shining in a wide path through the open door. He sat up, carefully dusting off the loose straw. His back ached abominably - it felt fiery hot in places, and was obviously not healing naturally, but since there was little hope of adequate medical help for the moment, he would have to bear it as best he could. But with the added discomfort of his twisted ankle, it was very enervating, and in spite of Sulu's staunch assistance, their progress would be inevitably slowed.

He heard a sound below and looked over the edge of the hayloft floor, to see Sulu returning. He watched him climb easily up the shaky ladder and plump himself down beside him on the straw.

"I've been having a look around," he said cheerfully. "This farm has evidently been abandoned for some time, judging by the state of everything." He fished in the rough canvas bag he had slung across his shoulders. "There's not much in the food line, I'm afraid," he said, "but the pump is still working."

He produced two pottery cups, and a stoneware bottle, and poured out some clear cold water. Spock took one cup and sipped - it tasted quite pleasant, if slightly earthy. Sulu dived further into his bag and fished out two apples, handing one to Spock. They were still good and tasted crisp and sweet. They munched gratefully, glad of even such meagre sustenance.

"Have a drop more water," suggested Sulu, pouring it out. "I can refill the bottle before we go."

They drank and then Sulu repacked the empty cups and the bottle in his bag. Spock watched him, rather puxxled, for he was behaving oddly, almost diffidently, quite unlike his usual ebullient self.

"What is it, Mr. Sulu?" he asked encouragingly.

"Well, sir," began Sulu, "I've had another idea - but... " He hesitated. "I don't want to offend you... "

"Mr. Sulu," replied Spock gently. "Why should I take offence if I know none is intended? Your last idea was a good one; tell me what you have thought of now."

"You see, sir," Sulu went on more confidently, "we are rather conspicuous walking through the countryside as we are."

"Agreed," said Spock, "and I more so than you, especially limping. Go on."

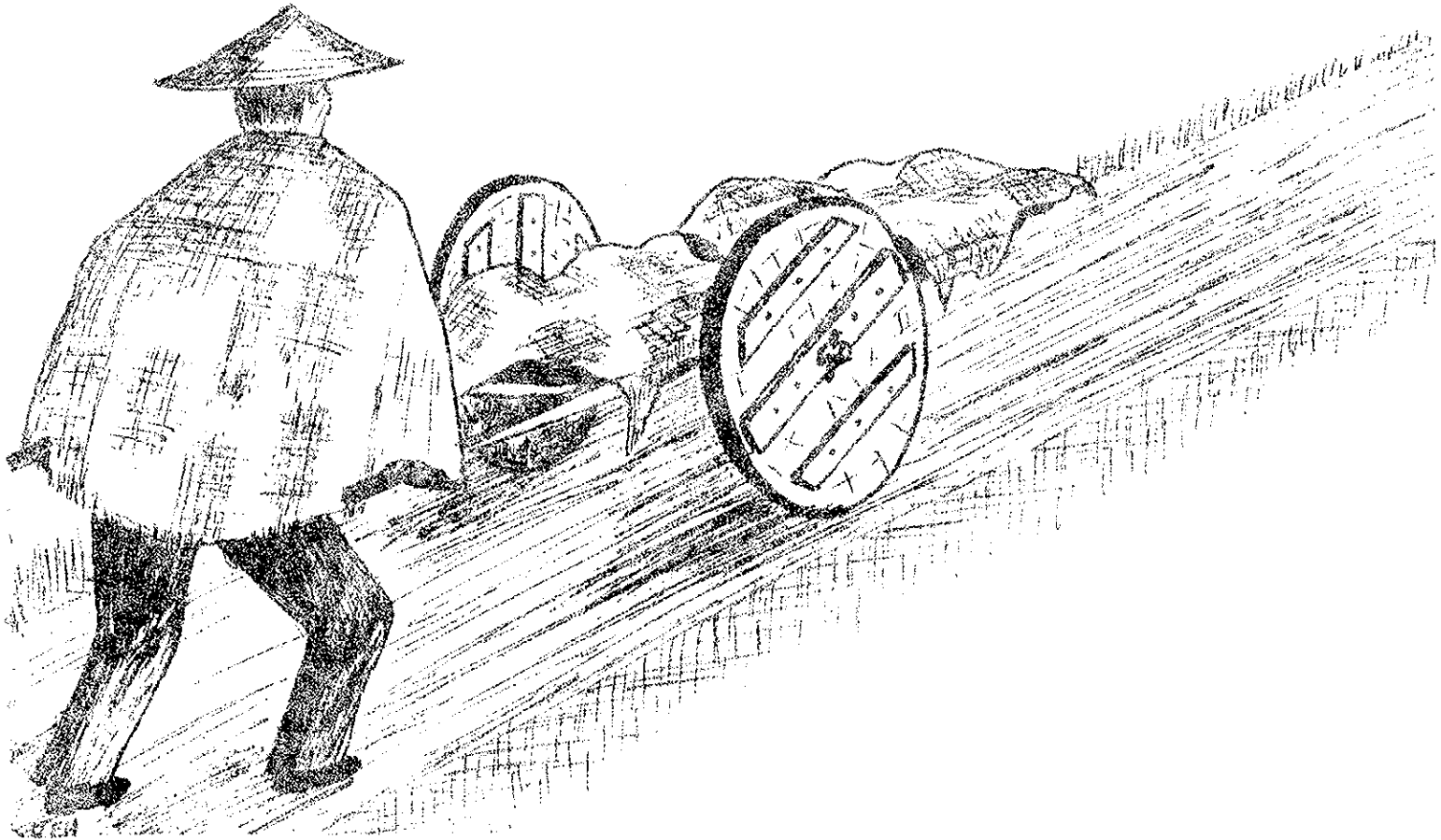
"Some old sacks would hide our uniforms," suggested Sulu. "And I have found an old coolie hat I can wear." Then he took a deep breath and came to the main point of his idea. "There's an old hand-cart in an outhouse - it won't be very comfortable, but... "

"An excellent idea, Mr. Sulu," complimented Spock. "It will certainly enable us to move a little faster."

And so, a little later, they set off on their journey again. Sulu would have been unrecognisable to his friends on the Enterprise. He had pulled his trousers outside his boots to conceal them a little, his old-gold uniform shirt was covered with a tunic made from dusty sacks, and a ragged straw coolie hat was perched on his head. He pushed a rickety two-wheeled hand-cart on which Spock lay. He too was wearing a sacking tunic, and was covered up with piles of empty sacks. It was not a comfortable ride - the cart had no springs and bounced over every bump in the rutted cart track. The sacks were dusty and smelt none too savoury. He held open a space so that he could see, and breathe freely, ready to drop it back when necessary. But the plan was working very well. Although not very steady, the cart ran easily on its big wheels, and they could move at quite a good rate. Peasants working in the fields did not even lift their heads as they trundled by, and those they met on the road never gave them a second glance.

They did have one fraught moment. A soldier lounging against a bridge, with his gun leaning on the parapet, stared idly at Sulu as he passed. Sulu's heart was in his mouth, but to have turned back would have attracted attention. So he kept his head bowed, and pushed onwards at a steady jogging pace. The soldier made no move to stop him, and returned his attention to the local girls washing clothes in the stream below.

They stopped for a rest at mid-day. Sulu pushed the cart among the trees



of a small wood, and Spock climbed gratefully down from it, thankful for a rest from the jolting. They sat under a tree and refreshed themselves as best they could with water and more apples from Sulu's bag. Then Spock climbed into his place again, and they continued their trek.

By late afternoon they were well down the valley. The whole landscape was flattening out. The mountains which had formed the sides of the valley higher up had given way to lower green hills. The cart track had now become a reasonable road, and carried more traffic. They had been joined on the way by other carts, some pushed, some drawn by slow oxen. Some were empty, some were heavily loaded with bundles and boxes and crates.

They came to the crest of a small rise in the road. Sulu, seeing what lay ahead, pulled off the track and parked his cart under a tree. He made a pretence of leaning against a fence to rest, fanning himself with his hat, but nobody took much notice of him anyway. In reality, he was watching carefully what was happening down below. The road led down to a bridge over a wide river, and on the bridge, much to Sulu's dismay, was a control post, heavily manned by guards. As each cart approached, the peasant in charge produced some sort of a pass. These were carefully examined, and the contents of each vehicle were prodded and turned over. This was a blow - they were not going to pass that scrutiny!

Traffic was thinning out now that it was growing darker. To add to their problems, it began to rain - only a slight drizzle at first, then increasing to a steady downpour. Taking advantage of a break with no-one in sight, Spock climbed down off the cart. Both of them squatted down and eased themselves in under the boards of the cart - it gave them some shelter, though rain came through the cracks. Spock had brought with him two of the driest sacks, and they made them into the hoods they had seen the peasants in the fields wearing. Their water and apple ration went round one more time, and as they ate, they talked, discussing their sorry situation.

"I think the river is the only answer," said Sulu. "We'll never get past that guard post."

They looked down towards it. Lamps had been lit in the huts, and light streamed out of the open doorways, leaving no part of the bridge unconcealed. There was shouting and laughter, and the clinking of bottles, the noise indicating the presence of quite a number of soldiers.

"It looked fairly wide," commented Spock. "I wonder how fast the current is?"

"What about the cart?" queried Sulu. "Would it make a kind of raft, to hang on to?"

"We could try it," conceded Spock, "but not in the pitch dark, I think. We must wait till first light."

They spent a very uncomfortable night, huddled together under the meagre shelter of the cart. The rain ceased after a while, but the night became colder, and the ragged sacks did not supply much warmth. In addition, the dampness on them had intensified their odour; the Enterprise men declined to hazard a guess at what they had once contained.

As the first rays of light showed over a gap in the mountains, Spock nudged Sulu, who had been dozing against his shoulder. They got up, stretching their cramped limbs. A few yards back, a gap in the hedge looked promising. They pushed the cart through, and made their bumpy way down a sloping field towards the river. Spock was still limping, but he walked beside the cart, helping to steer the unwieldy vehicle. They found a part where a grassy bank was barely a foot above the surface-level of the dark water, and carefully lowered the cart into the river. It seemed to float quite well, but they could see that they would have to be careful balancing it. Hanging on to the wheel to hold it steady, they embarked on their frail craft. First Spock climbed aboard and knelt in the centre of the boards, then as Sulu gradually edged on to the back, Spock eased his weight forward to keep it level. Spock took command of the strange insecure vessel.

"I'll lean right, and you lean left," he ordered, "and then we can use our hands as paddles."

They did so, and slowly, very slowly, they began to move away from the bank. When they were a little way out, they began to feel the drag of the current, but as it was pulling them outwards as well as downstream, they were not too concerned. With a bit of luck, it might carry them to the other side in a long diagonal sweep. And this was how it seemed to be. Soon the other bank was only yards away - the edge looked shallow and easy to climb. It hadn't been so difficult after all.

But try as they would, they could get no closer. They paddled as hard as they could, but their drift was now steadily downstream - they weren't getting any further in. Then a sound began to grow in their ears - a soft rushing noise. Spock, with his sensitive hearing, was first to realise what it was.

"A waterfall!" he exclaimed urgently. "We'll have to swim for it."

They were only just in time. They could feel the drag on the cart increasing. They abandoned their frail craft, and struck out firmly for the shore. The water was cold - the river was fed by the melting snows from the mountains - and the undertow was stronger than they had realised. But after a struggle they made it, and dragged their exhausted bodies out onto the grassy bank. They lay for a while, gasping for breath and recovering slowly.

Then, realising they must put some distance between themselves and the river before it got much lighter, they climbed wearily to their feet. They set off, aiming for the line of hedges that marked the direction in which the road used by all the carts went. It must eventually lead somewhere, and perhaps they would find someone to whom they could communicate, and ask for help.

They looked a draggled pair! Soaking wet sacking was not elegant attire, and although it dried gradually during the day, its appearance did not improve

much. But at least it made them less conspicuous. Eventually they reached the road and began to trudge along it. It was completely deserted at this early hour. They walked for over an hour, getting drier and dustier. Spock still had his concealing hood, but Sulu had lost his in the river, and was by now feeling the warmth of the sun.

Then at last came what they had been looking for - the first signs of some kind of civilisation.

The first peasant carts were appearing on the road ahead of them, and beyond them, still half-hidden in a morning haze, were the shapes of buildings. As they got nearer, they could see it was a small town.

"Let us go right into the town," suggested Spock, "and find an official we can talk to - someone who will understand when we explain who we are, and will help us to get back to Goza."

The roads were busier now, but the peasants streaming out to work in the fields took no notice of the two weary figures trudging towards them. The struggle to make a living was hard here, and left no room for thoughts of anything else. Besides, men wandering from place to place in search of work were not an unusual sight - nobody inquired too closely who they were or where they were going, or had come from; there was no time to get involved.

Soon they reached the streets and began to look about for some sign of officialdom. They found it - but not at all in the form they had expected. As they moved towards the centre of the town, the sound of voices reached them. Round a corner came a crowd of protesting peasants, driven by a group of uniformed men with upraised batons. As they reached the pair, they grabbed them roughly and pushed them into the crowd. Sulu began to protest loudly, trying to explain who they were, and that they wanted to speak to someone in authority, but no-one listened to him. The men had a job to do, and they were doing it. Their orders were to round up any stray men, and bring them to the town jail. The ironic thing was that on Darvan's orders, they were being conscripted for a specific task - to form search parties to comb the mountain area for the two missing Federation officers. But no-one had explained these details yet.

Sulu pushed his shoulder under Spock's arm, and helped him along as they were hustled onwards with the protesting crowd. "Perhaps when we get where we're going," he said, "we'll find someone who will listen."

Several more men were collected to the crowd, as they were hurried towards the main square. As they entered it, Sulu let out a gasp - he could hardly believe his eyes.

"Look, Mr. Spock," he said urgently. "Tell me I'm not dreaming!" For there, sitting in the middle of the green centre of the square, was a very familiar shape - a Federation shuttlecraft. And the registration number on its side was even more familiar - NCC 1701.

Spock looked, but made no comment. Sulu was getting worried about him - he had said little for quite a while, and seemed to be very exhausted. He was still limping badly, and Sulu was sure his back was painful too. He seemed to be needing all his concentration to keep going, and even the sight of help at hand did not rouse him. Sulu was in a quandry - if he had been on his own, he would have made a break for it, and attempted to reach the shuttle, but Spock was leaning heavily on him, and he couldn't just leave him.

Then a figure appeared walking round the shuttlecraft - a figure in a familiar uniform. Sulu recognised him - he was a personal friend. He yelled at the top of his voice.

"Joe! Joe Stellman! We're here!"

Stellman was startled. He had flown the shuttle from Goza to this little town, bringing Captain Kirk and President Darvan himself. They had come to

organise a search for the two missing officers, and had gone off to consult with the town's officials, to make plans. They had left him here, in charge of the shuttlecraft. Now, who could this be, calling his name?

He looked in the direction of the sound. All he could see was a crowd of dusty shabby peasants being hustled along by the local police.

But wait - one of them was waving like mad! He took a few steps forward, straining his eyes - could it be Sulu? Was it likely? He advanced again, and then stopped indecisively. What should he do? His orders were to stay with the shuttlecraft, and protect it from curious locals. He hadn't a communicator with which to call Captain Kirk - it had been overlooked in their haste to get here.

Then, remembering what he could do, he shot back to the shuttle at a run, climbed aboard, and pressed the communications button. In no time he was through to Uhura, who immediately contacted Captain Kirk. He returned swiftly to the square, and he and Darvan listened to Stellman's first-hand account of what had happened.

Kirk looked inquiringly at Darvan, who turned to some of the town's officials who had followed them.

"Where were those men being taken?" he demanded.

"The jailhouse," replied one instantly, "to be organised into search parties."

Led by Captain Kirk, who set a fast pace, they set off in that direction.

The group of unwilling conscripts had been herded into several large cells. The gates had been locked on them, for most were clamouring and protesting, and the guards had no intention of listening. Sulu had found Spock a space on a bench in a corner, and he sat there, leaning wearily against the wall. Sulu sat beside him, alternating his anxious gaze between the Vulcan and the outer doorway of the jail. As time went on, he began to have doubts as to whether Stellman had heard him, and was doing anything about it - surely they should have found them by now! If something didn't happen soon, he would have to try again to find an official who would listen.

Then the outer door opened, and several officials entered. With a great surge of relief, Sulu recognised Darvan, and behind him a most familiar figure in an old-gold uniform. They started looking in the cell nearest the door. Sulu leaped to his feet, and charged across to the bars, pushing men right and left in his haste.

"Captain Kirk, Captain Kirk - we're here!" he yelled. Kirk swung round and came quickly over.

"Are you all right?" he asked. "Where's Mr. Spock?"

Sulu looked round. Spock had pulled off the sacking hood, and was making his way between the other prisoners. Kirk gazed at him anxiously. He had never before seen the Vulcan so dusty and dishevelled, and he looked grey with exhaustion too. As he came slowly up to the bars, Kirk asked,

"What's been happening, Spock? Where have you been?"

"In the domain of Li-chang," replied Spock, accurate as ever. "But it is a long story, Captain."

"Tell it to me later, then," said Kirk, watching an official open the cell door.

"I will make a full report, Captain," Spock assured him, "but it is very important that I speak with President Darvan - there is something I must tell him."

Darvan was having a word with a senior official. He fished in his pocket and produced some money. "We will not need these men now," he said. "Give them all a good meal for their trouble, and let them go." He turned to the Federation men, and led the way to the outer office.

"I am very glad that we have found you, gentlemen," he said. "Now, what is it that you need to tell me so urgently?"

The others listened quietly as Spock explained to Darvan about the stock of armaments he had seen. Darvan listened intently, then commented, "Thank you indeed for the information, Mr. Spock. 'Forewarned is forearmed', as they say. I shall make arrangements to deal with the situation at once."

"Will you need any help from us?" asked Kirk.

"No, I think not," replied Darvan. "Thank you for the offer, but it is an internal matter, and we will deal with it."

"In that case, we will get back to the Enterprise," said Captain Kirk. "It looks as if Mr. Spock needs some medical attention."

They returned to the shuttlecraft and quickly took off. After a short trip they reached the Enterprise, and docked safely in the big hangar bay.

Dr. McCoy was waiting as the hangar bay doors opened, and stood watching as the party walked towards him. He noticed that Spock was limping, and greeted him, "What have you done to your leg, Spock? Better come along to sickbay, and let me have a look at it."

"And his back," put in Sulu, in his usual impetuous manner.

"Thank you, Mr. Sulu," said Spock in a repressive tone. "I shall explain the nature of my injuries to the Doctor myself."

"Yes, sir," said Sulu obediently, glad to be relieved of the task of explaining.

"What about you, Sulu?" asked the doctor.

"I'm all right," said Sulu cheerfully. "All I need is a good wash, some food and my comfortable bed for a while."

McCoy turned to the medical orderly with him. "Go along with him, Johnson," he said, "and give him a quick check over."

The pair moved off, and Captain Kirk went too, saying to Spock as he left, "I'll come down in a little while to hear your report."

Spock nodded, and walked to the sickbay with McCoy, who slowed his pace down but did not offer actual assistance, as he knew it would be declined. When they reached the consulting room, McCoy pointed to a chair.

"Sit down, Spock," he ordered. "Let's see what you've done to that leg."

Spock sat down perching on the edge of the seat. McCoy got down on one knee, lifted the injured leg and began probing gently with his skilled fingers.

"Hmm," he said at last. "I think it's just a bad sprain - no bones broken - but I'll X-ray it in a minute to be sure. Now, what about your back?"

As Spock stood up and turned, McCoy reached out his hand to feel his back, quite expecting a similar injury, a twist of sprain of some sort. Taken by surprise, Spock let out a gasp and arched his back away from the contact.

This was a bad mistake, as the pain that the movement caused him was much worse than McCoy's careful touch. He swayed and clutched at the chair back for support. McCoy grabbed his arm to support him, and with the other lifted the blue shirt. He was horrified at what he found. He let out a shout for the orderly in the next room, and with his help, got the dusty stained shirt off, and helped Spock to lie face down on the examination couch. McCoy carefully inspected the weals searing the Vulcan's back. Some had healed naturally, but others were inflamed and fiery, and patently very painful.

"What happened, Spock?" he demanded. "Who and what did this?"

"It's a long story," repeated Spock wearily.

"Then save it till Jim's here," ordered McCoy, concern for his patient fast overcoming his curiosity. The orderly returned with a bowlful of a warm medicated liquid. "I'm afraid this is going to sting some," warned McCoy, and began gently to bathe the inflamed stripes. Spock flinched involuntarily once or twice, but finding this painful, concentrated the last of his strength on remaining still.

When McCoy had finished, he handed the bowl back to the orderly, and took from him the ointment he had asked for. The salve was both antiseptic and analgesic, and as McCoy smoothed it in with gentle fingers, he could feel Spock beginning to relax. So he was not surprised, when he got to the final mark, to find that his patient had fallen quietly asleep. He covered the area with a special dressing treated not to stick, and then spread a light cover over the bare shoulders. He returned his attention to the injured leg. The portable X-ray confirmed that there were no bones broken, so he had it comfortably strapped up. The tired Vulcan did not stir through the whole procedure.

Half an hour later, Kirk came down to sickbay. "How's Spock?" he asked.

"Come and see," replied McCoy. He led Kirk to the bed, gently lifting the cover and the dressing, and showed Kirk the nasty sight beneath.

"What happened?" Kirk gasped, taken aback.

"He hasn't explained yet," replied the doctor. "We were waiting for you, and then he fell asleep. But my guess is, he's been beaten with something hard, a cane perhaps. But I'm not waking him to ask him," he insisted, "so just control your curiosity for a bit."

"I want to know," retorted Kirk, furious to find his First Officer had been so ill-treated. "Perhaps Mr. Sulu..."

"Mr. Sulu is fine and fast asleep in his bed," interrupted Johnson, coming in just at that moment with his report.

So Kirk was forced to wait for his explanation till later the next day. McCoy called him, and he went down to sickbay, to find Spock propped up in bed, a soft foam cushion easing his back. He looked much better, and on Kirk's prompting, began to tell all the details of their adventure in clear precise words. Kirk and McCoy listened without interrupting, knowing they would get a full, accurate report. As the tale unfolded, both realised how lucky they were to have both officers safely back on board - they had been in considerable danger several times.

Then Spock added a few more words. "About Mr. Sulu, Captain - I should like to make a special report."

McCoy misunderstood completely, and burst out, "You're not putting him on a charge for striking you, surely?"

Spock could not resist a bit of verbal fencing with his favourite opponent. "I would be within my rights, Doctor," he said mildly.

"Maybe," spluttered McCoy, "but I reckon he saved both your lives, several times."

"So do I, Doctor," replied Spock. "I think Mr. Sulu acted with initiative and great resourcefulness, and to put him on a charge would be..."

"I know - illogical!" exploded McCoy, realising he was being teased.

"I was going to say... unfair," replied Spock, "but to be unfair is illogical, so perhaps you are correct."

"Huh," snorted McCoy, seeing now that he had been led on. "He's better!"

"Captain," said Spock, turning back to Kirk, "I do wish to put on record my highest commendation of Mr. Sulu. His actions and behaviour did save our lives and bring us safely back."

"I'll put it in my report," promised Kirk. "And I'll have a word with him myself."

He did both, and the words he said made the irrepressible Oriental feel two feet taller - and made him so full of bounce, that he was exhausting to live with for weeks afterwards.

NEVER EASY by Gillian Catchpole

Remembrances returning,
 Cannot be forgotten,
 For they are now life.
 "It is something we do not speak of
 Not even among ourselves."
 Hide away ashamed to be seen.
 "Is it something only your planet can do for you?"
 So hard to explain, explanations far beyond ordering.
 "No Outworlder may know."
 Feeling friendship is not the Vulcan way,
 To confide such as this even to a friend...
 "In the family all is silence."
 He said that on a journey back.
 "Vulcan philosophies are demanding and difficult,
 I do not expect you to fail,
 Not if you are Vulcan
 In spirit, mind and heart."
 "In the family all is silence."
 Not outside,
 Children teasing, taunting,
 Children hurting,
 They choose their victim well,
 He outstanding filled with more than them.
 "Your father has brought shame to Vulcan."
 Earth and Vulcan, half-breed.
 Still now a half-breed?
 Yes?
 No - just a man.
 "What makes you think you're a man?
 A computer with printed circuits,
 You should be in a circus
 You point eared freak
 With the nerve to make love to a Human girl."
 Just a trick
 He knows it to be so.
 Yet in how many hearts
 Does he fear to find the words,
 To discover a penetrable pain,
 One that sears right through
 To the part of any living being
 That wants to reach out,
 That has need of love.

HIDE AND SEEK by Security Chief Baillie

Of all the officers of the Enterprise, I suppose the one who comes closest to being what I'd call a friend is Scotty. To quote our favourite Vulcan, it's logical. On any ship, the demands of discipline mean that the Captain must maintain a degree of formality with the crew, and although James T. is as nice a guy as you could wish to meet, somehow you can never forget he's the Captain. Same with Mr. Spock; and anyway, can you imagine him unbending enough to be matey with anyone? As for Dr. McCoy, well I always get the feeling he's just waiting for the chance to stick a scalpel in me - but then, all doctors affect me like that.

With Scotty it's different. He came up the hard way, through the ranks, and he's never forgotten it. We have this friendly private war going - he keeps trying to smuggle extra alcohol on board, and I'm always trying to catch him at it. At the moment, the honours are just about even. On shore leave we can both relax and enjoy an evening's drinking in the night spots. I'll freely confess he can drink me under the table any time, and be none the worse for it; I've never managed to get the better of him yet, but it's fun trying.

I suppose that's why I take such a personal interest in what happens when we put in for shore leave on Sentas. This is a favourite place with Starfleet crews; it's one of the open planets of the galaxy, and all races, including the Klingons and the Romulans, use it; as a result, the nightlife tends to be somewhat uninhibited, and our boys take enthusiastic advantage of that fact; Scotty more so than most.

Now you know by now how Scotty operates. Out in space he practically lives in Engineering - he eats, breathes and dreams the Enterprise and all its functions. Once his leave comes up, he really cuts loose, and makes his presence felt in all the bars, brothels and nightclubs for miles around. As soon as his leave's up, though, he's impatient to get back to his beloved engines.

So when I answer a call to the briefing room and the Captain tells me that Scotty has not returned to the ship, I'm really puzzled.

"You know him pretty well, Chief Baillie, did he say anything to you that might give us a lead?"

"No, sir, but there was one unusual thing; Mr. Scott and I usually have a night out together during shore leave, but this time he didn't turn up. You know how it is, I thought he'd met a girl he wanted to keep to himself, so it didn't bother me." Spock comes in at this point, and the Captain turns to him.

"Any news?"

"No, sir. Mr. Scott is not in any of the hospitals on Sentas, and Planetary Security have no record of him being arrested. I asked Dr. McCoy to check his quarters, and he tells me that he has taken most of his clothes and personal items. I am afraid it seems as though Mr. Scott's disappearance was intentional."

"I find that very hard to believe. Mr. Baillie, I want you to make a thorough investigation. I can find an excuse to keep the Enterprise here for a few more days; you have full authority to make whatever enquiries you think necessary. One restriction though; I don't want to list Scotty as a deserter - I'm sure there's some explanation for his behaviour, and I don't want him to have to face charges. Mr. Spock, I've taped a supplement to the log, extending his leave."

Spock raises an eyebrow, and I expect him to object to this highly unorthodox action, but he merely says tranquilly, "If you will let me have the tape, Captain, I will patch it in to the main log. The alteration will not be detectable, and it will be safer in case questions are asked later."

"Thank you, Spock," says the Captain, and the Vulcan nods gravely and

leaves. Kirk turns back to me.

"Get on it right away, will you, Chief? I've got a feeling about this - Scotty's in trouble."

I decide to start my investigation in Scotty's quarters. McCoy's already searched there, but he doesn't really know what to look for - I'm hoping to find something he's missed. For a time there's nothing. Scotty has really cleaned the place out, and it sure looks like he doesn't intend to come back. Then I find an address he's jotted down on a notepad - no name, but the address is in the spaceport area of Sentas. It'll bear checking, so I take it along. Then, in a box in Scotty's bedside cabinet I find about a dozen empty medicine bottles. From the labels, they once held the tablets McCoy dishes out for headaches, and other such minor complaints. He's usually very reluctant to hand out his precious pills, so I wonder how Scotty managed to get so many without the good doctor screaming from here to Vulcan. Looks like the next step's sickbay, so I head off that way.

McCoy is as taken aback as I am at the number of bottles. "I did give him some of these a couple of weeks ago," he says, "but certainly nothing like this number. Wait here, I'll check."

When he comes back he's looking grim. "He's been getting these for about a month, going round the medical staff in turn. The tablets are a standard pain-killer, readily obtainable anywhere, so no record of their issue is usually kept. But I don't understand - if he needed such massive doses, why didn't he come to me for treatment?"

"I don't know, Doctor, but I'm going to find out. I'll keep you posted."

"Do that, please, Baillie; now I'd better see about getting things tightened up around here."

So my first step hasn't really got me much further; if Scotty's ill, that could explain his absence, but Spock's already said he's not in hospital on Sentas, and he's as likely to make a mistake as I am to command Starfleet. Looks like I'll have to go down to Sentas myself, and do a bit of checking.

I find the address Scotty noted easily enough, and it turns out to be the consulting rooms of a Sentan physician, Dr. Heston. This, I think, is getting really weird; Scotty is hardly ever ill, and if he did need a doctor, surely he'd be more likely to go to McCoy, who's an old friend, rather than a complete stranger? Well, I won't get any answers staring at a closed door, so I go in; by good luck the doctor is free, and his secretary shows me in.

The offices are luxurious, elegant, and expensive; so is the doctor. When I explain the reason for my visit, he's also concerned, friendly and helpful - and I don't trust him an inch. It's just a feeling I've got; any good security man soon develops an instinct for when people are lying in their teeth, and the good doctor is putting up a virtuoso performance.

"I'm sorry I can't help you, Chief Baillie," he says. "I do vaguely recall my secretary making an appointment for a Mr. Scott, but he never showed up, and I've had no further word from him."

"Well, it was worth trying," I reply, letting him think I've swallowed his story. "If you should hear from Mr. Scott, I'd be grateful if you'd contact Security."

I decide right then that I want to know a lot more about Dr. Heston, so I go straight to the top. Chief of Security on Sentas is Dave Martin; we served together in Starfleet for a time before injuries forced him to transfer to the civilian service. He's pleased to see me when I call up and invite him out for a drink, and I don't broach the subject of Heston until I'm sure we're well away from interested ears. He sits up when I tell him what I want.

"Dr. Heston?" he says thoughtfully. "You know, I'd give ten years pay to pin something on him. He's kept his nose clean officially, but between you and me, I'm certain he's mixed up in the rackets here. There's never been anything I can prove, but he keeps some very strange company for a respectable doctor. I'm convinced he's working with the Klingons, and I do know for a fact that he's responsible for the health of the girls in the biggest chain of brothels on Sentas."

"So the Klingons come in to this," I say. "I can't see yet what the connection is, but there must be one. Look, Dave, I'm going to try something tonight, and while I'm about it I'll see what I can dig up for you."

"I'd be grateful," he admits. "Let me know if I can help out." He doesn't ask me what I intend to do, but he knows me pretty well, so I guess he reasons that what he doesn't know about officially, he can't act on.

Later that afternoon I'm sitting behind a newspaper in the entrance hall of the office block where Heston has his rooms, keeping a discreet eye open for the doctor leaving. I look up as the lift doors open, and recognise a familiar figure heading for the exit.

Think of everything you've ever heard about Klingons, double it, and you've got a rough idea of Kolmak, the Klingon security officer who's just left the building. I've run up against him a couple of times, and he's one of the nastiest pieces of work his planet has ever produced - which is saying plenty. Now, on an open planet like Sentas, it's not unusual to see a Klingon or two wandering about, but in view of what Dave Martin's just told me, a few pieces of the puzzle start slotting in to place. Just then I see Heston himself on his way out, so once I'm sure he's clear of the building, I take the lift up to his offices. The door to his waiting room presents no problems, nor does his secretary's office; the files stored there I ignore - what I want will be much more carefully hidden. Sure enough, the door to Heston's own office is much more efficiently protected than an innocent doctor would find necessary but it doesn't hold me up for too long. Heston may be all kinds of a crook, but he's a rank amateur, and I find and open his private safe without too much trouble. Seems the Klingons were so sure of his cover they didn't even bother to check his security; that's their mistake.

Most of Heston's files are no use to me, but after a quick glance I set them aside for Dave; they tie Heston into the drug racket as well as vice. The file I'm after is the one he's thoughtfully labelled 'Lt-Commander Montgomery Scott'; this I read with rapt attention, and it answers most, but not all, of my questions.

Gathering up my evidence I head back to Dave's office, and he practically offers me the key to the city when I dump my trophies on his desk; but there are only two things I want right then.

"Have Heston picked up quietly," I ask him. "I don't want word of his arrest to leak out for a while. And one other thing - have your men locate Scotty for me. I know he's still on Sentas, but he's under cover. Your boys know the set-up, and can find him a lot quicker than I can. Don't bring him in, though - I want to talk to him first."

"Consider it done," says Dave, and gives the necessary orders. While I'm waiting, I call up the Captain, and fill him in on what's been happening. When he hears about the Klingon involvement, he's all set to beam down himself but I persuade him to leave it to me.

It takes a couple of hours before one of Dave's agents reports that Scotty has been located, holed up in a seedy hotel in the less respectable quarter of the spaceport, so I head off there to finish the job.

The manager of the hotel is a rather slimy specimen who isn't too fond of Federation security men, but he's only too eager to cooperate once I've leaned on him a little. He tells me that Scotty hasn't left his room since he checked in, and shows me a bottle of whisky he's about to take up.

"I'll take it," I tell him. "And don't get any ideas about calling ahead."

Trust Scotty to hide out on the top floor of a crummy hotel with no lift. "Come!" says the familiar voice as I reach the top at last and knock on the door. I spare a glance round as I go in - the Ritz it's not, but I guess Scotty isn't too interested in the decor. He's sitting at the table, his head in his hands, gloomily surveying the corpses of the bottles he's got lined up in front of him. He doesn't even look up as I walk in, but when I just stand there saying nothing he lifts his head at last, and seems to have a bit of trouble focussing on me.

"Mr. Baillie," he says, nodding his head wisely. "I might have known. Pull up a chair, and have a drink." I think it's best to go along with him for the moment, so I do as he says.

Despite the evidence of the bottles, Scotty is stone cold sober. In his eyes there's an expression of utter desolation, and deep down, a hint of fear.

"Well now," he goes on, "and what brings you here? I thought the Enterprise would be gone by now."

"Come off it, Scotty. Can you see the Captain going anywhere without his Chief Engineer?"

"I suppose not. I haven't been thinking too clearly just lately." He reaches for the bottle again, and I can see his hand is shaking. A sudden stab of pain flashes across his face; he takes out a couple of pills, and swallows them with the whisky. After a moment his face clears. "That's better. So now what, Security Chief Baillie?"

"So now, Lt-Commander Scott, we finish the bottle." He grins, and pours us another drink. After a moment I go on. "You're in trouble, Scotty; want to talk about it?"

"Aye, why not, laddie. It'll all come out now anyway." He holds out his glass again, and I refill it - for all the effect it's having, it might as well be water. "I've got Ryton's Disease. You'll probably not have heard of it - thankfully it's very rare, but it's incurable." The fear is strong in his eyes now. "I saw a case of it once when I was in the Merchant Service - my Chief at the time - he was a good man, and a fine engineer; I've never been able to forget it. It causes complete paralysis, and eventually total sensory loss - sight, hearing, speech, everything goes; but the brain remains aware. As long as sanity holds out, a prisoner inside your own head. The Chief lasted five years, but he was a lot older than I am - I'd have longer to go. I couldn't face it, Baillie. I thought of telling Bones, but once he knew, I'd have had to resign from the service formally; all those questions, routines, all the sympathy - I just couldn't take it. Oh, I wasn't relying on my own judgement, I consulted a doctor here on Sentas, and he confirmed it. I guess I must be a bit of a coward, but I decided just to disappear from the Enterprise, have a final fling, then take the quick way out. I should've realised that someone'd come after me, but like I said, I haven't been thinking too clearly. It's too late now."

For a few minutes I can't think of anything to say. No wonder the poor guy's scared; in his shoes I'd have done much the same. I'm also feeling a bit guilty - I set out to find him with the best intentions, but it seems all I've done is to prolong his agony. Then I get to thinking about Dr. Heston, and it comes to me that there's maybe a chance after all.

"Listen, Scotty," I say earnestly. "There's a few things you should know. That Dr. Heston - besides being one of the biggest crooks on Sentas, he's a

Klingon agent. He's tied in with their security chief, Kolmak. Last night I broke in to his office and lifted his file on you. As soon as the Enterprise left Sentas, you were going to be handed over to Kolmak. You know what they'd do to get their hands on a Federation engineer. Isn't it just possible that in order to convince you to stay on Sentas, Heston faked your diagnosis?"

"It's the kind of thing you'd expect from the Klingons," admits Scotty, "but no, Baillie, I've got to face it - I had the symptoms long before we got to Sentas."

"That's just it," I break in impatiently. "You're no doctor - all you've really got to go on is your own fear. Come back to the Enterprise. See Dr. McCoy - then at least you'll know for sure, and you can decide then what you want to do."

"Aye, I could do that; if I'd been in my right mind, I'd've trusted Bones from the start. Hold on, though - I can't go back. I'm a deserter, remember."

"Oh, no, you're not," I tell him. "The Captain faked a log entry extending your leave, he was so sure there was a good reason for your absence - you can go back whenever you like."

"That's the sort of thing Jim would do; but what did Spock have to say about it?"

"Spock? Oh, Spock only patched the fake tape in to the main log to cover you in case of trouble."

"Spock did?" Scotty's eyebrows rival the First Officer's best efforts. "Well, I'll be...! Don't tell me our tame Vulcan is developing a sentimental streak."

"Oh, you know him. He'll probably tell you it would be 'illogical' to lose our Chief Engineer, or something. Mind you, there have been times when I've wondered about him."

"Me too." Scotty stands up. "Well, let's get going. Will you do the honours, Mr. Baillie?"

"My pleasure, Mr. Scott." I pull out my communicator, and signal the Enterprise; in a few minutes we're caught up in the transporter effect.

An hour later I'm sitting in the waiting room of sickbay pretending to read a magazine. Across the room Kirk has given up pretending; unconsciously he's been shredding the pages into confetti, a sure sign that he's nervous. Scotty is in sickbay with McCoy, having every test in the book run on him - plus a few that aren't if I know McCoy; and I do.

The door opens, and we both look up, but it's only Spock. I go back to my magazine, but I'm aware that the Vulcan's sharp eyes have seen the Captain's busily-working fingers. He goes over, bends down and says something that I don't catch. Jim looks up and smiles faintly; Spock touches him lightly on the shoulder for an instant, then takes the seat beside him. That's all there is to it, but the Captain's restless hands are now lying quietly in his lap.

Next time the door opens it's Nurse Chapel, who beckons us into the doctor's office. McCoy's there, beaming all over his face; and Scotty, grinning sheepishly.

"Well, Bones?" asks Kirk anxiously.

"Migraine! Plain, old-fashioned migraine! The headaches, the visual distortions - a classic case. You're allergic to something you've eaten, Scotty my lad." McCoy's voice holds its most sarcastic note, but the blue eyes are suspiciously bright. "I'm beginning to wonder what I'm doing on this ship if you're all going to start playing doctors. All you need, Scotty, are

a few chemical tests to find out what you're allergic to; cut that out, and you'll be right as rain."

"I do feel a bit of an idiot," confesses Scotty. "I'm sorry, Captain, Doctor - and thank you."

"Thank Mr. Baillie," says the Captain, turning to me. "He did all the work."

"Aye, don't I know it. Thank you, Mr. Baillie."

"Don't mention it, Mr. Scott. It's good to have you back."

"If you have all quite finished with this totally unnecessary display of emotion," says Spock, "I would remind Mr. Scott that during his absence several matters of importance have arisen, and are awaiting his attention in Engineering." And he looks totally blank when the rest of us collapse into helpless laughter.

So that just about wraps it up. McCoy's tests reveal the cause of Scotty's allergy. No, not whisky - cheese.

I hear later from Dave Martin that Heston has been put away for some considerable time, thanks to the files I lifted from his office. Kolmak has landed in all kinds of trouble, thanks to his failure to hand over Scotty as promised; the Klingons give no marks for effort.

Me - I come out of it rather well. Dave's official report gives me most of the credit for Heston's arrest; and to show his appreciation, Scotty sends me a case of genuine, ten-year-old Scotch.

In fact, apart from Heston and Kolmak, over whom I don't shed any tears, the only one to come out of the whole affair badly is that hotel manager on Sentas - somehow Scotty never did get round to paying his hotel bill.

COLOURED TRIBBLES by Nora Manning

(with apologies to the writers of 'Scarlet Ribbons'.)

I looked up and on the viewscreen
Was a heap of purring fluff
I looked up - my heart was captured
I could never see enough.
I don't care for pups or pussies
Guinea pigs are people. Why
Should I fall for gold-green tribbles
Hurtling me-wards through the sky?

If I live to be a hundred
I would sell my soul to get
Just one tribble, gold-green tribble,
Ginger tribble, for a pet.

Tho' Jim Kirk was very angry
And he's fearsome in a rage,
Tho' they'd occupied the food store
Tribbles of every size and age,
In my heart their throbs and purring
Spoke of never-ending love
Klingon-hating, Spock-preferring
Tribbles, tribbling from above.

If I live to be a hundred
I would sell my soul to get
Just one tribble, gold-green tribble,
Ginger tribble, for a pet.
