

LOG ENTRIES

28



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A STAG publication

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Log Entries 28, price £1 within the U.K., \$5.50 (£2.25) US airmail, \$3.50 (£1.50) US surface abroad, is put out by the STAR TREK Action Group and is available from

Sheila Clark,
6 Craigmill Cottages,
Strathmartine,
by Dundee,
Scotland.

Foreign orders - if you pay in dollars, please add \$1.00 per cheque to cover bank charges incurred in processing foreign currency cheques.

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Hello again, and welcome to Log Entries 28.

I feel I must start with an apology for the stapling in LE 26. (I couldn't make such an apology in LE 27, because of course they were put out within a week of each other so that both would be ready for Terracon '79, and all the stencils were cut before I discovered I had a problem). Quite simply, I ran out of staples.

In theory, that shouldn't have provided much difficulty. Granted the shop always has to order the staples from Glasgow (the price we pay for having a heavy-duty stapler that doesn't take standard Rexel staples) but they're usually through within a week, so I didn't worry too much. Only they didn't come. The only size I could get was 17mm long in the leg (we usually use 12s) I had no alternative but to use these for LE 26, even although on most copies this meant the legs went right through, curled up and came right back through the entire thickness of the zine again, and still stuck up a couple of millimetres as well. I managed to get 2000 12s for the following week and our next collating session, but at the moment I'm still waiting for 8000 which have now been on order for three months, as near as makes no difference. Fortunately, one of the two shops I tried did get in some 8s, which are long enough though not quite as secure as I like, and Nikkie Moore managed to pick up one box of 12s in Falkirk for me, so I do have some staples in hand. I say I tried two shops, but it would be more accurate to say that they were the only two shops of all the ones I did try that dealt in the make of staple I wanted; in my hunt I think I went round every stationer in Dundee.

I said that there would be a dragon story by Tina Pole in this issue (when I announced the winners of the competition in N/L 37) but in fact I ran out of space, so Tina's story will appear in LE 29. The winners of the two competitions involved were the story by Pamela Dale and the poem by Nora Manning.+

As you will all know by now, the post office has decided to pluck the goose once more and is putting another 20% onto postage. Anyone ordering the zine before the end of January will get it for 95p, but after that we'll have to raise the price by at least 5p to cover the extra postage. Sorry. What the rise will do to foreign rates we don't know yet. When the rise was announced, only internal percentages were mentioned, but I think it'd be too much to hope for that foreign rates would remain untouched. My local postmaster thinks the foreign rates will go up too. Let's just hope that our friendly (?) post office will leave postage rates untouched now for a while.

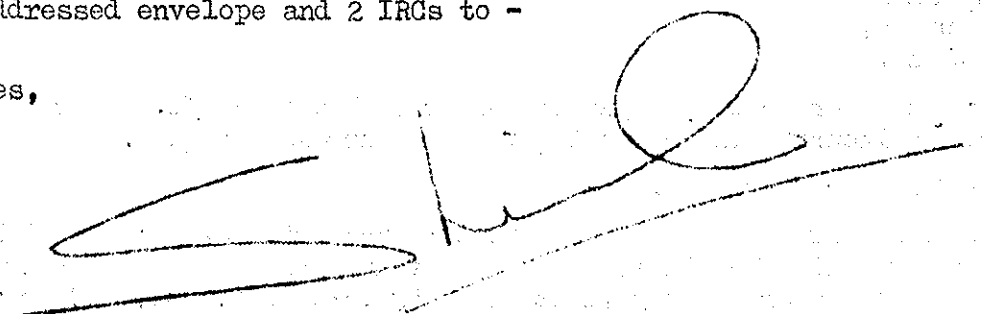
In spite of Admiral James T. Kirk's statement at the beginning of STAR TREK - The MOTION PICTURE novelisation, we are still looking for Kirk-bonker./trauma stories. (I know some of you reading this may not have seen the novel yet - when you do, you'll see what I mean).

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Enjoy the zine!

December 1979



+ I just realised that I forgot to say - most of the contents of this issue are from the competitions in N/Ls 34 & 35.



THE MINES OF MORVI by Pamela Dale

Scotty couldn't be dead. Leonard McCoy refused to believe it, there was no way he was going to accept that his friend was dead. Died in a space collision, perhaps, but killed by his beloved engines, definitely not. Whatever Governor Hudin said, he couldn't believe that Scotty had been burned to death in an explosion caused by a short circuit. As he reached for the brandy bottle, there was a knock on the door.

"It's open."

McCoy didn't really want to see anyone, but it was probably Jim Kirk who was knocking, and would keep on knocking until he was answered. He looked up to see a miserable Shonni Griffiths, and waved him into a chair. The acting Chief Engineer sat down and buried his face in his hands. Here's another of us who can't believe Scotty is dead, reflected McCoy, pouring out another drink and wrapping Shonni's hand round the glass.

"He can't be dead," Shonni finally said. "Perhaps if we had his body I could accept it - but in any case I feel there's something wrong."

"Something wrong?" queried McCoy. "What do you mean?"

"I'm not sure, just little things. You know how I can pick up emotions - well, there's something funny going on down there. It's difficult to explain, but I thought I ought to tell you - you know about this damned receptive telepathy of mine."

"Pity your foster family aren't anywhere near - and have you said anything to Mr. Spock?"

"No, he's been too busy with the computer malfunction - in any case, it's only feelings, not facts. I got the distinct impression that everyone down there was madly overacting."

"As if they'd invented the mechanical fault?"

"Could be, or they were covering up something. There really was damage to the life support plant - but is it beyond possibility that the Governor is behind the black market drugs racket?"

"Shonni!"

"You think it is... I suppose it was just a wild theory." Shonni sipped the brandy and looked, if anything, unhappier than before. McCoy gazed thoughtfully at the tousled engineer who had been brought up by a family of Ilsmyian telepaths in the Confederation and Empire of Worlds, somehow developing a gift for receiving strong emotions.

"Morvite is such a rare drug that it's possible that the Governor could be involved in illegal mining - that could be the reason we haven't found any trace of unauthorised mining. The Captain's convinced the rumours are false and that any black marketeering doesn't originate on Morvi. I didn't like the Governor, but that doesn't make him a crook. I only went down on the original trip so I don't know much about Morvi."

"It's a depressing place - you haven't missed much. The capital's one of these new cities, thrown up in a hurry to house traders and diplomats. Once the Federation discovered that Morvite reduces ageing, the planet was made a full member immediately - before the Klingons got here." Shonni sounded cynical, most unlike his usual sunny self. To the worried doctor it sounded more like one of his own comments; giving him quite a shock to hear the engineer put his own thoughts into words.

"But you and Scotty worked down there for days with Mr. Spock," he prompted, part of him still the professional psychologist trying to make Shonni talk out his grief.

Mr. Scott called Carols and me down when he saw how big a job it was. The

Morvian engineers don't know a great deal about the plant but they worked hard under instructions. Mr. Scott was furious at the way they'd neglected the life support plant - said they weren't fit to have one. I wouldn't go as far as that, but I'm surprised there wasn't more damage, they can't have done any maintenance. That's when we saw a lot of the Governor and his pals, each time I looked up one of them was peering over my shoulder. Mr. Scott was very rude to the Governor after he'd fallen over him for the third time." Shonni paused, ran his fingers through his tousled hair. "That's when I started receiving these impressions. We'd nearly finished when there was that panic over the warp drive, so Mr. Scott sent the two of us to sort it out...then they said he was dead. I still can't believe it."

"And you won't, staying here with me, because I don't either." McCoy knew that Shonni still could not block out other people's strong emotions even though his family had tried to teach him. "Take these pills and go to bed. Stay out of Engineering."

"You're actually leaving here without Scotty?" McCoy sounded incredulous, turning to face Jim Kirk.

"There's nothing else we can do. The black market trade doesn't start here, we must go to Crestos where the refineries are."

"What does that matter - it's Scotty I care about. I've still no valid proof that he's dead!" shouted McCoy, thumping the desk with a clenched fist.

"Governor Hudin showed us the burned out room and we've buried the remains," said Kirk gently. "What more can we do?"

"I still don't know whether it was Scotty. They could easily have faked an accident, their laws prevent any autopsy."

"But what reason could Governor Hudin have?"

"What reason?" yelled McCoy, finally losing patience. "We're looking for illegal mining - perhaps Scotty saw something he shouldn't... You're taking all this very calmly - you say there's nothing fishy going on when your Chief Engineer has been mysteriously burned to death!" He headed towards the door, knowing if he stayed he would say something he would regret.

For once James Kirk could not see how grief-stricken McCoy was, and misguidedly said, rather coldly, "We're leaving orbit - I'm sure you have some patients to attend to."

McCoy's never stable temper reached flash point and he lashed out, "Would we be leaving so quickly if it was Mr. Spock down there?" With that he marched out and stamped down the corridor. His temper didn't abate as he marched aimlessly around the Enterprise. The crew, taking one look at his face, gave him a wide berth - the ferocious look on his face losing nothing in the telling as the grapevine spread the story.

To his surprise his furious pacing brought him to the transporter room. His anger was now directed towards Governor Hudin, and he didn't relish apologising to James Kirk. Shonni's suspicions made more sense the more he thought about it, when a sudden idea came to him - why not beam down and prove Shonni right? If he could test the spurious bones or better still find Scotty...

"Beam me down to the usual co-ordinates, Lieutenant," he said to the engineer on duty.

"But - sir..." protested the young transporter engineer.

McCoy drew himself up, his eyes cold blue with fury, and snapped, "Don't argue, lieutenant!"

Unhappily, the engineer set the controls and Dr. McCoy dissolved in a cloud of sparkles.

Before McCoy had time to orientate himself in the unfamiliar room, a sharp blow on the back of his head knocked him to the ground. Through a painful haze, to his horror he felt a hypospray injecting something into his arm. His first idea was poison but as he tried to guess which one, he rapidly lost consciousness.

McCoy opened his eyes and closed them hurriedly, knowing that the face he saw in the pale light was an hallucination. Someone whispered in an unknown tongue, then gentle hands raised him into a half sitting position.

"You can open your eyes - though it won't do a lot of good, this torch is on its last legs." At the sound of the familiar voice, McCoy knew he hadn't been mistaken. Yet what Mikel Marronen of the Imperial Navy was doing on this planet defied speculation.

"Mikel - what - why?" he managed to stammer, his tongue feeling twice its normal size, his mouth dry and tasting of flannel.

"Elie, pass me that cup... Drink some of this, Leonard. Once the effect of the drug wears off, you'll be fine."

The lack of light didn't appear to restrict Mikel's actions because he unerringly poured a little water into McCoy's mouth without spilling a drop. In the flickering light he could see Mikel's tired drawn face, all eyes and dishevelled hair.

"Where are we?" he managed to enunciate clearly once his mouth was lubricated.

"The mines of Morvi, where else? The torch is going to give out any minute, so I'd better introduce you to the rest of us. Elie is our secret weapon." The light illuminated a pale blue face framed by navy and blue striped hair. "They think she's blind, but that's only in daylight. At night she can see perfectly. This is my captain, Loryn Despard." The light was lowered to reveal a haggard shadowed face with fever bright turquoise eyes.

"He's ill, what's happened?" demanded McCoy, but his limbs wouldn't obey his urgent need to reach the sick man. Mikel switched the light off.

"You can't do anything until the paralysis wears off. I'll save what's left of this light for you to examine him by. To cut a long story short, we were disabled by an ion storm and captured by the Klingons. They sold what was left of us to the Morvians."

Determined to get a full story later, McCoy accepted this bald tale, only asking, "Have you spoken to Shonni?"

"Yes, so I know why you're here. If we'd only known that the Enterprise was in orbit, none of this would have happened. But I'm afraid the strain of shielding Loryn and keeping in touch with the fleet has drained me so much, I hadn't the energy to make any telepathic sweeps... Shonni thinks it's a good thing you'll have to stay down here, Jim's fighting mad - at you and Governor Hudin. By the time he's settled the Governor he'll have forgotten what you did."

"Mutinied, more like." McCoy felt ashamed of himself now that his anger had faded. "I'll be lucky to escape a court martial. Do you know where Scotty is?"

"No. Until I spoke to Shonni I had no idea he was here. But we'll look - from our experience of the Governor, if he said Scotty was dead he will still be alive."

"I'll go. They have a closely guarded prisoner, I heard the guards talking - they think I'm half witted as well as blind," Elie's voice came out of the darkness, prettily accented and slightly lisping. There was a slight rustling, then McCoy realised that the girl had gone.

"If Scotty mends their machinery, they'll kill him, won't they?"

"Not necessarily, he would probably end up down here with us - which is living death." Mikel paused and added more cheerfully, "What you don't know is

that help is coming. Jim is already in contact with Admiral Lesev on board the Charybdis. When we were captured we were told to stay put until IBN could organize a commando raid. That should be within the next few days if Jim shuts his eyes to their presence within the Federation."

"If he's as mad as you say, he's more likely to join in. After all, we were sent to clear up any illegal mining."

"I think you can rely on our commandos to do that for you! Try to sleep, you'll soon be able to move. I'd like you to examine Loryn before we start work."

He ached in every bone and every joint. Physical work didn't suit him, that was certain. Maybe it was just old age. Hudin and his associates might have expensive mining equipment but the hard work of loading, sorting and waste disposal was mainly done by a dwindling band of half starved prisoners.

"It isn't for long. Look on it as a rest cure," commented Loryn, watching McCoy trying to find a comfortable position for his aching body.

"Rest cure! I feel fit for nothing but a wheelchair. I must be getting old. ... Do you feel any easier? I must check on your progress before the lights go out."

Resignedly Loryn lay still and allowed McCoy to dress his festering wounds, only half listening to the doctor's muttered comments about the Klingons' ancestors. "Tell me something, Leonard, and an honest answer, please. Do you think I'll ever be fit enough for active service?"

McCoy was torn between being completely honest by saying he doubted Loryn would ever command a ship again and giving him some hope by saying he didn't know enough of Perlisi anatomy. Loryn took his silence to mean the worst.

"I should have died with the others."

McCoy caught the whispered words, instantly regretting his moment of indecision. "You won't be bedridden, but I don't know enough about your people to make any other promises. As far as I can see there is no reason why all these wounds shouldn't heal, but it will take time. I'll tell you more when I get you into sickbay - remember I haven't seen you in anything even approaching daylight. I'm still amazed that whoever relieved me of my communicator left the medikit. At least I can keep pumping antibiotics into you until they run out."

"I'll probably prove allergic to Federation drugs." Loryn still sounded fatalistic. "If only I could walk, Mikel's doing far too much."

"Don't worry about him. Ilsmyians I do know something about, and Mikel is as fit as can be expected in such circumstances. My scanner won't give any sensible readings for Ellie but she says she's only tired."

"Being without her eyeshields will be affecting her eyesight. Where are they anyhow?"

"No idea. Mikel said they'd be back shortly."

"Probably getting some food for us. You'll have seen how living in these conditions has reduced some of our fellow prisoners to little more than animals. The reason Mikel is so tired is that he's constantly shielding me. Only those who still resist Hudin know I'm alive. I wonder sometimes whether he's told INB of the conditions down here, how much he's having to do for us."

"Another telepath could see for himself - just recommend him for a medal when you get back," McCoy suggested, pleased that the opportunity had arisen. Mikel had told him earlier that he had already filed a recommendation with the Imperial Navy Board that Loryn should receive a gallantry medal. When the Klingons realised that the use of the mind sifter triggered an instant destruct mechanism in all Imperial Naval officers, they resorted to the time honoured methods of torture. Ignoring Mikel and Ellie as being too junior to bother about,

they killed two senior officers before concentrating on Loryn, captain of the scout ship Shiraz.

At that moment the lights went out. Their captors allowed them a couple of hours of dim light morning and evening but kept their slaves in total darkness the rest of their non-working life - apparently to discourage sabotage and escape attempts. The current damage to the machinery that Scotty had been kidnapped to repair had been started by imaginative sabotage on the part of two engineers from the recently captured merchant vessel Trinidad.

"Here's your supper." Mikel announced his arrival, knowing that McCoy hadn't become acclimatised to living in the dark even after three days in the caverns. A pottery bowl was placed carefully in McCoy's hands, leaving him the task of eating the unpleasant stew with his fingers and the help of a piece of hard bread. Trying not to smell the noxious mixture, he pictured a plate of chicken, potatoes and vegetables and somehow managed to finish the meagre rations.

"I'm not recommending this hotel for the 'good food guide'," he commented, watching the darker shape he knew to be Mikel. From his movements he guessed that the Ilsmyian was making Loryn swallow some of the stew. A patch of darkness drifted silently across the cavern floor, then clambered more noisily towards their refuge. None of the prisoners below realised that Elie had just walked through their groups, and McCoy knew that her audible approach was deliberate. As always her first glance was for Loryn, but then her velvet scaled hand caught McCoy's wrist and attention.

"He's still alive, Leonard, but that brute Hudin has just told him that the Enterprise has gone."

"Did he say that Jim was told Scotty was dead?"

"Not him. He said that Captain Kirk knew that he was a prisoner and had abandoned him." Elie's sensitive hearing had enabled her to hear the cruel words, leaving her to imagine Scotty's desolation.

"Scotty'll never believe Jim would do that." McCoy felt a little better, but his gloom returned as Mikel said gently,

"You already know how convincing Hudin can be... But don't be too discouraged, you can tell him the truth shortly. By one o'clock we must be out on the surface, which means we must rescue Scotty before then. I'm sorry Elie couldn't get near enough to tell him we were here, then he'd know now that Jim hadn't left him to die... I'll tell you what I suggest we do, but if anyone has a better idea, say so."

"What's that awful row?" whispered Mikel in Elie's ear.

"Sounds like a small war," she replied. "Don't say those idiots from the Trinidad have jumped the gun."

"They were still in the main cave organising those still capable of obeying orders."

"I think I know what it is," said McCoy with a sigh, having made out a few words. "Somebody's just riled Scotty - he loves a good fight."

"That's all we need!" Mikel sounded exasperated. "At least there's no need to whisper, nobody could hear a thing over that racket. I doubt it anybody'll be watching the corridor either - lead on, Elie."

They rounded the next corridor, faint light showing where the corridor veered to the left. The sound of battle grew nearer, the three listeners expecting to see it boil over any minute into their dark refuge.

"It must be your friend, his prison is just round that corner," said Elie, releasing McCoy's hand now that it was possible for him to see. He found it

incredible that Elie could see perfectly in pitch blackness but was totally blind in bright light.

"You wait here, Elie, we'll go see if he needs any help... From what I remember of Scotty, I would never associate him with a good brawl."

"You only saw him on the Enterprise - on shore leave he's got a reputation that stretches from one end of the Federation to the other." McCoy smiled reminiscently as he recalled some of his friend's wilder moments. He cautiously followed Mikel towards the light, but he needn't have bothered to be so careful. No-one was interested in anything but taming the fighting mad engineer.

"You have to admire him," McCoy said softly, picked out a bearded guard sneaking up behind Scotty and moved quickly to land a satisfying punch on the enemy's jaw. Mikel stood silently watching his friends tackling the six men still on their feet. He knew he wasn't fit enough to knock over a fly, but before using his telepathic weapon he thought both men would benefit from a chance to work off some of their anger and humiliation. When the enemy was reduced to four and Elie was dancing up and down with impatience in the shadows, he decided that it was time to put an end to the fight. The first McCoy knew that Mikel had taken a hand in the proceedings was when his opponent suddenly yawned and staggered, finally dropping to the hard floor, fast asleep and snoring. Scotty at last caught a good look at his helper.

"What kept ye? I've been waitin' on ye for days."

"I like that - I quarrelled with Jim, got hit on the head, then worked as a slave in these mines, and all you can say is 'What kept ye?!' yelled McCoy, then added anxiously, "Are you hurt?"

Scotty inspected his bruised knuckles, torn shirt and the enormous guard unconscious at his feet. "It wis a bonny fecht, but he wis only a bit laddie..." He broke off as Mikel stepped across a body to join them. "I can't be seeing things, but where've you come from? I understand now why these last few collapsed. What's happened, Mikel, ye look terrible?"

"We've just been slaves for some considerable time, but tonight is the end for Governor Hudin. Come and meet Elie, she managed to find you in all this maze of passages."

They hurried Scotty back into the darkness, where they stood talking to Elie until Scotty's eyes were attuned to the pitch dark corridors. Used to the idea of the many varied life forms who served with the Imperial Navy, he was intrigued rather than alarmed at the idea of a humanoid blue-scaled biologist and envied her night sight.

"We must get back to the cavern. If Bert and Franz have lost control we are going to have a young riot on our hands." Mikel was worried about the ability of the two engineers from the Trinidad. "Elie, you'd better take Scotty to the surface. Leonard and I will go on ahead. Leonard must see to Loryn while I help the Trinidad."

"Leave Loryn with me. I shall be very slow, I'm only just beginning to see in the dark. Loryn can't be hurried, I shall have to carry him - just warn your commandos to watch out for us!"

"Put me down for a moment, you need another rest. I can stand for a little while." Loryn gripped McCoy's shoulder and sounded determined.

"Don't worry, I can manage."

"Don't be ridiculous, put me down." Loryn's voice was quiet, but for the first time McCoy heard the voice of the captain of the Shiraz. Without arguing further he propped Loryn against the wall and flexed his tired back muscles.

"I wonder how the others are getting on?" he asked, worried in case the

Trinidad officers had not been able to corral the rest of their fellow prisoners.

"It'll be touch and go - but if the Trinidad can hold the others until the commandos arrive, there won't be much trouble." Loryn paused, then seized McCoy's arm. "Too late - listen."

In the distance they could hear the familiar baying of the terrified slaves. Both instantly understood the cause. The Trinidad had lost control. When this happened during working hours the guards quickly restored order with their whips, but Mikel and the Trinidad's crew had no weapons.

"They're coming this way, Leonard. There's no way we can outrun them, so you must leave me. I will only hold you back. I'm not having your death added to those of my crew." Loryn gave McCoy a push, but the doctor stood his ground.

"I'm not leaving you, let's get that clear. There must be somewhere to hide. Your eyes are better than mine in this darkness, can you see a ledge?"

Loryn knew when to hold his tongue. He could see that the stubborn Southerner had made up his mind to die with his patient. Reflecting that it was a pity he wasn't McCoy's own Captain and could order him to safety, he looked up at the corridor walls searching for one of the many ledges or caves.

"There's one." He pointed across the passage. "About four feet up. Not much of a refuge."

"Let me get you up there before they get here. They're mindless animals, rushing aimlessly along the corridors. If they don't see us, we'll be safe." McCoy lifted the light body and carried him to the foot of the wall. "Now, I'll lift you up, try and roll on to the ledge."

This was going to be the tricky part of the operation, McCoy decided, he wasn't sure how much strength Loryn had left in his frail damaged body. With a struggle he managed to hoist the Perlisi onto his shoulders, spurred on by the ever nearing savage howls. Loryn grunted in pain but successfully reached the safety of the ledge, leaving McCoy to scramble after him with the help of several projections in the wall. He sat up and reached into the darkness to find Loryn.

"Where does it hurt?"

"Just general, nothing special," lied Loryn. "We've a few minutes left - now it's my turn to help. My planet's best known for its relaxation techniques - you must know that you will want to cough or sneeze out of sheer nervousness. I haven't time to teach you anything so I must do it for you if you permit?"

"I didn't know you were telepathic?"

"I'm not. It's only relaxation techniques."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Lie down where I can reach you - that's it. Just let your muscles relax, and think of something else."

While Loryn's fingers gently massaged the back of his neck, McCoy let his mind wander away from the horrors of Morvi to the magnolia shaded verandah of his old family home, almost smelling the heady scent borne on the evening air. In the distance he could hear the faint sounds of a pack of animals thundering past. If he had had the energy to peer over the edge of the ledge, he would have seen dozens of semi-naked, hairy men running mindlessly, all brandishing sticks or some other weapon.

"You can sit up now, they've gone."

To McCoy's surprise he found he could move, all the tiredness gone from his body. "I presume you can do that for yourself mentally?"

"After a lot of training. INB finds it useful to have some officers who can stay motionless for hours... When we get back to the Enterprise will you examine Elie, she was terribly ill soon after we came here. I think it's psychological

rather than medical, but I'm not sure. You never can tell with the Korlissi."

"What happened to her?"

"That's even more difficult to explain. The Korlissi are unlike any other race in the Empire. Several races have developed from reptiles, but only the Korlissi produce young at will by a rearrangement of their genes. That's the best I can say, I'm no biologist. Well, when our fellow prisoners thought she was female, there were several attempts to rape her. The last time caught her by surprise, and to her horror her ancient racial instincts protected her. Korlissi were once snakes and still have their poison fangs, but they are conditioned from birth not to use them - a little like the way I believe Vulcans suppress emotions...you'll know by now that Mikel has told us about you all... The man died in agony, Elie collapsed, but no-one has approached her since. They're frightened of Mikel's telepathy...I'm sure that's the only reason we're still alive."

"Does Elie seem to be acting more or less normally now?" McCoy wasn't sure he could help a Korlissi in need of mental care.

"I think so, but you'll have to ask Mikel. Elie will tell you about Korlissan biology, she was the Shiraz' life science officer."

McCoy paused, wondering whether this was the best time to break some unpleasant news.

"Talking of sex..." he began, but was interrupted.

"I know, but it's not quite the disaster you imagine." Loryn touched his hand reassuringly. "Thank you for having the courage to tell me. I know what the Klingons did to me, but they had never seen a Perlisi before. I may never sire a child, but I can still give birth - we are completely bisexual. To become female I just rearrange my body chemistry - look, I'll demonstrate."

"Not now you won't - you need all your energy to stay alive." The prime duty was to save life; it was instinctively uppermost in McCoy's mind, although he was fascinated by the little he had heard about both the Perlisis and the Korlissi.

Loryn laughed softly. "Perhaps you're right. It will have to wait until later. I can see the scientist warring with the old time physician!... Listen, I think they're coming back this way. Once they've gone we can try to get a little nearer the surface."

Both men listened attentively, McCoy's less sensitive hearing finally hearing the wild pack howl. He shivered, wondering if they would ever be able to rehabilitate the prisoners once the Governor and his minions had been defeated.

"Leonard, they're chasing someone. It's either one of Hudin's men or one of ours - so what do we do?"

"Let's see who it is - in any case everyone will be too busy running to notice us." McCoy sounded definite and peered over the edge to see if there was any sign of lights. As the sound of pursuit grew nearer, he finally saw the faint glow of a torch in the distance.

"Any minute now. I can see a light," he whispered to the silent Perlisi. The light grew stronger, flickering from side to side as its bearer ran for his life ahead of the hunting pack. Then round the corner raced a familiar red-shirted figure.

"Shonni, up here!" called McCoy urgently. "There are footholds, take my hand and I'll pull you up."

Shonni stopped dead, looked wildly round, then caught sight of McCoy in the beam of his torch. With part of his attention on the pursuing hunt, he shinned up the wall and was hauled over the edge to land in a heap on top of McCoy and Loryn.

"Where've you come from? Give me that communicator," demanded McCoy, not really listening to Shonni's hurried explanation of how Mikel and Elie had been rescued and that Captain Kirk had sent out search parties for them. Instead he seized the communicator and flipped it open.

"Enterprise, this is Dr. McCoy. Three to beam up and I want a medical team immediately."

"Yes, sir." Even as the transporter officer's voice faded, the three men materialised in the same tangled heap on the transporter platform.

"Get up, Shonni, let Dr. M'Benga get to Loryn," demanded Mikel, hauling his foster brother upright. Meanwhile McCoy was fending off both Jim Kirk and M'Benga.

"I'm all right. It's Loryn. Shonni and I fell on top of him... Get out of my way, you can wait in my office... Chris, take blood and tissue samples, I want to know what drugs we can give him. Tell the lab I want the results now. Jim, is there an Imperial Navy doctor available?"

"I'm afraid not, you're on your own."

McCoy didn't even wonder why there was no doctor with the fleet, he just said over his shoulder, "Mikel, what do you and Elie know about the Perlisi?"

"Elie's the biologist, she'll help you... If you are desperate, I'll try and reach his mind."

"You've done enough. I doubt if you could even control a flea. Find Elie, and don't you dare use telepathy with Shonni until you've slept... I'll meet you in sickbay."

"Gone, what do you mean gone?" demanded McCoy, confronting Kirk across Loryn's bed. "Are you telling me that the Imperial Fleet had gone before we beamed up with Loryn - is that why there was no doctor?"

Jim Kirk sighed, recognising the signs. McCoy was working himself up into a state of righteous indignation. "They knew all their personnel were safe. Their best telepath assured me that you could cure Loryn without the help of their specialists. He said he had great faith in your capabilities," he said, trying to smooth the doctor's ruffled feelings. "It was a commando fleet - and they have no authority to be in Federation space."

"The commando fleet never stays long, they always leave others to do the clearing up," put in Mikel, defending what appeared to be a callous abandonment of three Imperial Navy officers.

"It is our job to clean up Morvi. Starfleet are sending specialists to help the prisoners and technicians to oversee the mining. A new Governor has been appointed to replace Governor Hudin and new elections are to be held. We are staying here until all this help arrives, then we'll take Loryn, Mikel and Elie to Starbase 27 where an Imperial vessel will collect them."

"Captain, Mr. Spock would like you to go to the bridge," said Christine Chapel, putting her head round the door.

"I'll be back." Kirk hurried after her, leaving Mikel and McCoy with Loryn.

"Don't blame the fleet, Leonard, it's common practice. They knew we were safe, and there was trouble elsewhere," said Loryn quietly, guessing that McCoy was still soothing gently.

"It's not the fact that they left, but they should have left a doctor," retorted McCoy. "There was no need to risk your life, even if they thought I could cope."

"Take it as a compliment," said Mikel cheerfully, heading for the door.

"Come back here. Now that Loryn's better, I think it's time you told us what happened after we left you."

Mikel grinned, knowing that McCoy had been bursting with curiosity for

several days.

"Thought I was going to get away with it. Not a lot happened. Elie took Scotty to the surface with no problems and delivered him to Jim and Spock. They wouldn't let her go back to look for you until one of the Charybdis' doctors could find her some goggles. By that time, the commandos had reached Trinidad and myself. The prisoners had all gone storming off and I was worried about you both."

"We were quite safe. Leonard wouldn't listen to me and refused to leave me behind."

"Did you expect him to?"

Loryn chucklād. "Not really, not after what you had told us. What happened then?"

"We joined Jim and Scotty on the surface, leaving the commandos to mop up the rest of Hudin's mob. I could locate Loryn easily enough to indicate the general direction, but how Shonni got separated from the rest of his team is going to remain one of life's mysteries." This time Mikel did manage to escape before either of them could think of another question. The Perlisi lay back against his pillows, his face still bruised but the weals and burns were fading. McCoy regarded him thoughtfully.

"I'm glad I never saw the full extent of your injuries until we reached sickbay." He paused and said quietly, "Don't tell anyone, but I think I would have given up hope if there had been enough light to see."

"I always knew that, and it was your hope that gave the strength. Just as your determination to save a stranger has given me the courage to face the future. You don't have to spell it out for me, Leonard, I know that I shall never command a ship again. My beautiful Shiraz is gone, but she went in glory. Perhaps it's best to retire at a moment of triumph. I'm going to hate a shore command, while dreaming of the stars."

"Don't look at it so negatively, Loryn," McCoy protested, resolving to get Jim to talk to him. "You're young - and at the moment a hero. INB is not going to forget the Shiraz, so make a success of your shore command and return to the stars as an ambassador."

"I hadn't thought of that. This treaty between the Empire and the Federation will need all the support we can find. Catpain Despard is on his way to become Admiral Despard, Ambassador to the Federation."

"In that case, the future ambassadorial representative of the Splendour Enthroned had better catch up on his sleep," laughed McCoy as he closed the door behind him.

Surveying the carnage strewn around,
Scotty stood in splendid wrath.
"Aye, Captain, Ah'm on ma way,
Jist as soon's Ah get oot o' ma bath."

* * * * *

Kirk: What do tribbles do best?
Spock: Arithmetic.
Kirk: Arithmetic?
Spock: Yes: add, subtract...and multiply.

* * * * *

McCoy to M'Benga:.. You're fine - how am I?

It was one of those jobs that Kirk hated;
 'Twas his seventeenth journey to Babel
 With Ambassadors many and varied
 Who all wanted to sit at his table.

And they argued and quarrelled and quibbled
 About everything under the sun
 (Or the suns), save Ambassador Sarek
 Who just looked down his nose at each one,

And the envoy from Saurian Major
 Who was blessed with a nature so sweet
 And a manner exceedingly charming -
 He was really a pleasure to meet.

He was also exceedingly handsome
 Though he wasn't exceedingly tall;
 Everyone said, of four-foot-high dragons
 He was quite the best-looking of all.

Everyone liked the Saurian Envoy,
 So when Kirk found him stretched on his bunk
 Quite flaked out, he at once called the doctor,
 And McCoy at once said, "Jim, he's - drunk."

They were only six hours out from Babel;
 And right after the first formal greeting,
 The Saurian Envoy was scheduled
 To be Chairman of a vital meeting.

And if he wasn't able to do it
 The whole conference was shot to hell.
 "Oh how did he get drunk?" Kirk said, anguished,
 "And why pass out on my bunk, as well?"

Spock put on his Sherlock Holmes hat then
 And said he could unravel the plot
 For the Envoy had been in the cabin
 Of Commander Montgomery Scott.

Who'd been giving a private Burns Supper
 (And how did Spock know that? This way;
 Scott had asked him to help with the music.
 He'd declined - he didn't know Scots Wha Hae'.)

He deduced that the Envoy had staggered
 To Kirk's room, leaning much on the walls.
 He said this was a triumph of logic,
 And McCoy said that logic was - something rather rude.

"But can you bring him to for the meeting?"
 Moaned poor Kirk. "In reply to your question,
 I'm a doctor, no expert on dragons.
 I'd be glad of some helpful suggestion."

Thus McCoy. Now Uhura was passing
 And these words quickly started her thinking.
 She said, "Gentlemen, you have a problem;
 What to do when a dragon's been drinking.

"I've a new telepathic transmitter
 Which can search a dimension or two
 Where perhaps we could find dragon experts
 Who would soon solve your problem for you."

She linked Kirk to Dimension - McCaffrey
 And to Fern, where the Harpers shall stand.
 Robinton was most charming and helpful,
 Said if anyone knew, F'lar would.

But F'lar shook his head in some sorrow
Said the chance of his helping was slim
For he never had seen a drunk dragon
(Though his Mnementh had seen a drunk him.)

And moreover, he said, anybody
Who let dragons get drunk was a fool,
And he bade Kirk farewell in a manner
That was rather decidedly cool.

So they tried getting through to Earth-Dickson
Though Kirk's hopes of assistance were flaggin'
And he spoke for a while to a namesake
Who had actually been a drunk dragon.

Jim the George, though, said he's no idea
For when drunk he had just slept it off
So he couldn't say how to rouse dragons
Who had had too much whiskey to quaff.

Now Ambassador Sarek, close followed
By Amanda, had come on the scene
And was gazing in disapprobation
On the dragon so drunk and so green.

But Amanda smiled kindly upon him
As if she saw drunk dragons each day
And then into the ear of Uhura
Some soft words of advice she did say.

"Oh, Uhura, I'm frightened," Kirk whimpered,
"They will bust me to Yeoman for this
If we can't wake him up." But Uhura
Only smiled - gave the Envoy a kiss.

Said, "Wake up, dear" - he woke in a moment
As if suddenly freed from a spell
While Kirk kissed the hands of Uhura
And the feet of Amanda as well.

"Mother, tell me by what form of logic,"
Spock enquired, "did you pull off this coup?"
And "My wife," Sarek said, sternly tender,
Just how you knew the right thing to do

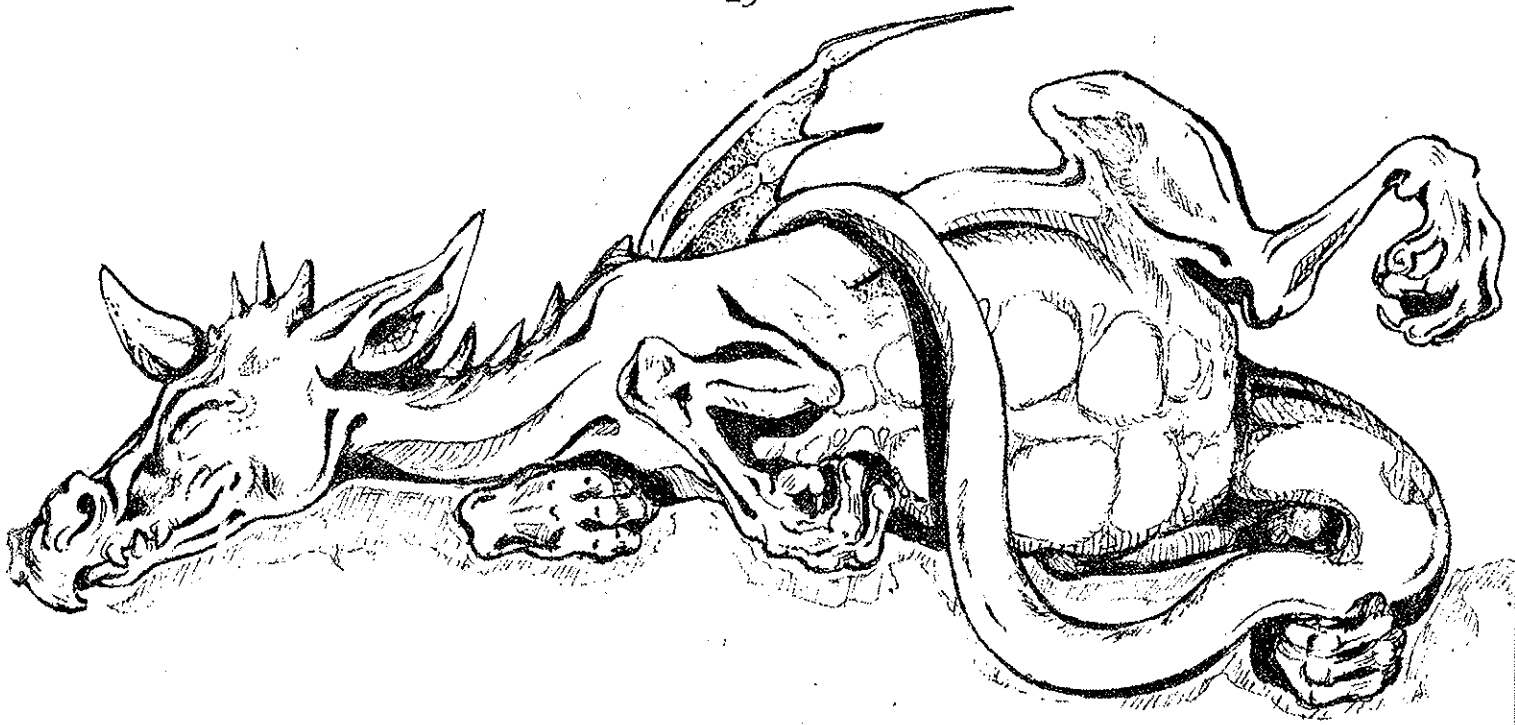
"Pray explain." "It was easy," she answered,
"As all know who have read fairy tales
Evil dragons are nasty and cruel
And their hearts are as hard as their nails.

"But good dragons are sweet, kindly creatures
Perfect gentlemen, they are in fact,
So when asked by a beautiful lady
For a favour - at once they react.

"The effects of your lack of such knowledge
Could have led to an outcome quite tragic
For your future careers, so from now on,
Don't forget, boys, that dragons are magic."

"That's illogical," murmured her husband
And "Illogical," muttered her son,
But "Quite right," said the Saurian Envoy,
"And I know best." And this story's done.

Kathleen Glancy



SPOCK AND THE DRAGON by Nora Manning

Commander Spock,
 On Deneb IV,
 Obeyed his orders
 To explore,
 Tricorder at the ready.
 Until he stopped
 In great surprise,
 He really couldn't
 Trust his eyes,
 In fact, he felt unsteady.

A dragon lay
 Beneath the trees.
 Its scales moved slightly
 In the breeze
 With sound like
 Sea-washed pebbles.

Spock sat him down
 Upon the ground,
 Since one swift glance
 Sent all around,
 Showed he was solitary.
 His crewmates,
 I need hardly say,
 Had quickly gone
 The other way
 Expecting him to follow.

But Spock, as curious
 As a cat,
 Had not thought
 For a moment that
 Discretion might be better.
 He settled down
 His watch to keep,
 Until the dragon,
 Deep asleep, should
 Next decide to waken.

The Dragon
 No doubt felt his gaze,
 And raised one eyelid
 To appraise
 This most unusual person.
 For on the rare occasions
 When, she'd happened
 To encounter men,
 They'd left with loud commotion.

But this one only
 Only sat and stared,
 As if her secret thoughts
 He shared, and unsuppressed emotion.

So lost in deep accord
 They stayed, while past
 The hours trickled -
 Until she rolled upon her back -
 To have her tummy
 TICKLED.

YESTERDAY - TODAY AND TOMORROW? by Jayne Turner

Yesterday my life was well arrayed
 tidy compartments O neatly labelled
 the future well mapped out
 already planned.
 I was to follow in my father's footsteps
 as his father's before him.
 I had been taught to believe
 this was the only way
 to live my life.

Today I stand before you
 yesterday's memories before me.
 How can I tell you that I am an
 outcast
 here among my own people.
 I do not know if you will understand.
 I have no wish to be against you
 but my place is not here.

Forgive me, for pride compelled me to stay
 silent.
 And as we parted strangers
 when asked for my reasons,
 I do not know if I shall return.

For tomorrow - tomorrow I reach for the
 stars.

Sulu: Did you have a good leave?
 Chekov: Terrible - it rained every day.
 Sulu: So how did you get the sun tan?
 Chekov: That's not a tan - that's rust.

DRAGONSPAWN by Teresa Hewitt

Captain's Log, Stardate 7906.14:

The Enterprise is once again on course for Pharis, the third planet in the Beta Cariensis system, to pick up Mr. Spock whom we left ten days ago in order to temporarily add his skill to the research team of the Federation colony there.

Kirk snapped off the log and swung himself out of the command chair, heading for sickbay. He was feeling a definite sense of elated anticipation at the thought of Spock's return. It had seemed strange, somehow, without the Vulcan's steady presence on the ship. He knew, too, that he wasn't the only one who felt so - Spock had, in his quiet way, become such a vital part of the Enterprise team. The door of McCoy's office slid shut behind him. Kirk grinned. "Hello, Bones," he said.

McCoy looked up from the pile of papers on the desk. "Blasted medical reports!" he grumbled. Kirk made a pretence of backing out. "Well, as I can see you're enjoying yourself, Doctor, perhaps I'd better leave you to it."

"No, no," said McCoy hastily, sweeping the pile aside. "All distractions welcome, Jim. Have a drink?"

Kirk accepted, and sipped the strong liquor, making a face. "God, Bones. Have you slipped my yearly tetanus shot into this?"

"Now, Jim, that's just pure old five star, home-distilled hooch," drawled McCoy. "Get it down you - it'll put some colour in your liver." He looked closer at Kirk, the suppressed air of excitement clearly visible in the half smile that constantly played about the Captain's lips. "You're looking mighty pleased with yourself today, Jim. You can't be looking forward to the return of our two-legged calculator, can you? I think the whole place has seemed a lot jollier without him glooming round quoting logic all the time."

"Now, Bones, I know you don't mean that. You've been quite lost without Spock to gibe at - probably find you've lost your edge without your daily sarcasm exercise."

McCoy gave a gruff cough. "Suppose I have missed him, in a way. Don't you tell him that, though," he added hurriedly.

"Oh, Bones, I shouldn't dream of it," said Kirk innocently. "Anyway, you can tell him yourself. Care to join me in the landing party?"

Orbit around Pharis was achieved shortly afterwards. Kirk hailed the leader of the colony there, and the smooth features of Kraadnaal, the Ambassador-in-Chief, appeared on the screen.

"Good day, Ambassador," said Kirk with a smile.

"Welcome, Captain Kirk," acknowledged the Rigellian.

"Is Mr. Spock all ready to leave; Or is it going to be difficult to tear him away from his research?"

"Captain," interrupted Kraandaal, his yellow eyes darting rapidly from side to side in a nervous gesture, looking anywhere but at Kirk, "there is - we have - a slight problem. Beam down as soon as possible and I will explain."

"Problem?" repeated Kirk, the first glimmerings of tension beginning to seize at his guts as he looked sharply at the man's pale, worried face. "Where is Mr. Spock?"

"An explanation when you have beamed down to my office, Captain," said Kraandaal hurriedly. Before Kirk could say more, the screen went blank.

McCoy joined the Captain in the transporter room five minutes after the strange message. "What the hell's happened now, Bones?" said Kirk, frowning. "Did you see how worried that man looked?"

"Aw, it's probably nothing Jim. Probably they had to put him in solitary confinement - couldn't take a minute more of precision and logic."

All right, so he knew it was a rather feeble variation of the old old joke - but he thought Kirk might have pretended a little amusement, at least. But the Captain seemed hardly to have heard.

They materialised in Kraandaal's office. The Administrator rose to greet them, was about to motion them to sit down, but Kirk had no time right now for trivial formalities and cut in - "All right, what's this problem? Where is Mr. Spock?"

McCoy knew it was just Kirk's urgent anxiety for Spock's safety making him sound so curt. He hoped the Administrator knew that too... The man had risen to his full seven feet and stood over them. "I am sorry, deeply so. that I have t this news for you. Mr. Spock is dead."

The room had gone very still. McCoy noticed how still it was; as if frozen in time while the planet and all around them went on spinning remorselessly, oblivious to the statues within this place where time had ceased. His next thought was that Rigellian's fingernails chanced from pink to blue in moments of stress; he looked to see if the Administrator s had, but his hands were clasped out of sight behind his back. I'll have to nip round behind him, McCoy thought, and began to giggle; then the realisation that he was verging on hysteria shocked him out of his meditations. He looked first to Kirk, who was grey faced, staring at the Administrator. God, the shock had been so sudden, so unexpected, and Kirk? looked on the verge of collapse. McCoy pushed him into a chair, the donning of his professional role helping a little to suppress his own thoughts. "Have you any brandy, man?" he snapped, unrepentantly, at the Administrator, who was looking shaken himself at the impact his admittedly undesirable news had had. Brandy was fetched, but Kirk didn't touch his glass, just looked up and stared again at Kraadnaal.

"Where's the body?"

"I'm afraid - there wasn't a lot left." He looked unhappily at Kirk and McCoy. "Was he a personal friend of yours, gentlemen; This has been such a shock to you..."

Kirk ignored this. "How did it happen?"

Always uneasy in the realms of emotionalism, the Rigellian was glad to get back to the factual. He cleared his throat. "It was on the fifth day after he arrived, Captain. Commander Spock was collecting rock samples some three miles from base along with two of my scientists. When they did not return I sent out a search party. They brought back - the remains of the men. Apparently they had been attacked - and almost completely devoured - by some large predator; there are several varieties on this planet. As I said, there was very little left for identification. But I'm afraid there can be no doubt, no doubt at all, that all three died, Captain. Scraps of Mr. Spock's uniform were identified, stained with Vulcan blood; and of course we made a thorough search of the surrounding area in case a wounded man had managed to crawl away and hide. But we found nothing, I'm afraid."

Kirk and McCoy listened in silence, a frightening sense of hopelessness descending on them. "I see," said Kirk at last. "We'll want to see where it happened - have a look round - just make quite sure..."

"Of course, of course, Captain," said Kraandaal, relieved that Kirk seemed to have recovered his normal poise. He himself had been deeply shocked at the news of Spock's death; not from any particular liking for the man, but because it had happened while Spock was under his authority. Although he felt, and rightly, that he could not be held responsible since it was unusual for predators

to come within five miles of the colony - they had quickly learned to avoid Man and his deadly weapons - and the men had been armed. No, it had just been extraordinarily bad luck, and he had realised Kirk would be upset, even distressed, at the loss of such an excellent first officer. But he had not expected, could never have been prepared, for the plethora of expressions that crossed Kirk's face at the news, until the man's whole body had seemed charged with a horror and desolation that had chilled even the stoical Kraandaal. And to a lesser degree, McCoy had shown the same reaction.

Shrugging these thoughts off, he sent for the few possessions Spock had had with him, and then, tactfully, showed the two men into a small room and left them alone, saying he would be back in half an hour to take them to the scene of the predator's attack.

Kirk began, slowly, to open the sterile plastic bag containing Spock's clothing, taking out a shredded blue tunic, streaked and splattered with unmistakable green blood. He held it absently in his hands, staring into space. McCoy could bear the oppressive silence no longer. "Jim..." he said softly.

"It's too early to talk about it, Bones," said Kirk, very quietly. "I can..."

McCoy understood. "Had we better - call the ship?"

Kirk sighed. "No - not yet. Not until - " Not until I'm forced to accept that this time there is no escape.

McCoy got two cups of strong coffee, into which he slipped, surreptitiously, some of the brandy Kraadnaal had thoughtfully left with them. They sipped at it in silence. "After all we've been through, Bones... All these years, we've outwitted so many enemies, saved each other's lives... I thought I'd always be there to save him..." said Kirk suddenly, viciously. "And he ends up as lunch for some bloody brainless dinosaur with me far away - and we didn't even know, Bones! We didn't even know - that's what hurts most - that five days ago..."

During which featureless meal, or routine reading of which monotonous report, was Spock being bloodily torn apart in some monster's huge jaws... It was a horrifying thought. "Steady, Jim," said McCoy, taking his arm quickly in a firm grip. After a minute Kirk opened his eyes, took a deep breath and shook his head as if to clear it.

"Sorry, Bones." His voice became at once brisk, as if he was slightly ashamed of his lapse.

"I understand, Jim. I was...fond...of him, too..." McCoy briskened his own tone, then. They'd need control, to face the coming hours - days, months...

A discreet knock at the door. Kraandaal entered. Kirk was still clinging on with one white-knuckled hand to Spock's torn and bloody shirt, but he relinquished it slowly as McCoy gently took it from him.

They sat in the hoverbuggy in silence as it swiftly covered the rough ground. The Administrator had tried to talk about the research Spock had been doing before ... and then moved on to less touchy topics; but meeting with little response from the Enterprise men had himself finally lapsed into silence. They reached their destination - a large sandy area with the occasional weird tropical-looking tree, large rock formations, over which the binary suns of Charis beat down fiercely, giving everything two shadows.

"So hot!" thought McCoy, wiping his forehead. "Wouldn't Spock just have loved this!" He caught Kirk's eye, and knew he was thinking the same.

The Administrator led the way to a clump of rocks. "There's not much to see now," he said in an apologetic tone, as if Kirk and McCoy would have been better pleased with a pile of gory souvenirs. "But this is where we found - the bones, and the signs of a scuffle."

Indeed, there was nothing to see at all - the sun and high winds had scoured the stains, made the place of Spock's death unmemorable, unmarked.

"Did you analyse the bones?" asked McCoy, sharply.

"We thought there was no need," said Kraandaal. "It was quite obvious what had happened, gentlemen. I understand your concern, of course; but if Commander Spock had by some chance managed to beat off a vicious carnivore, which obviously took them by surprise since they presumably had no time to use their phasers with any effect, he would then have been able to contact us for help, as his communicator was found here, virtually undamaged. And don't forget we searched the area thoroughly and found no trace of a wounded survivor. I'm afraid you will have to accept it - Mr. Spock is dead."

McCoy sighed. "I guess you're right."

He walked back to the hoverbuggy with Kraandaal. They sat and waited for Kirk, who was squatting by the rocks, his head bowed, letting a handful of the hot black sand trickle slowly through his fingers. Finally he rose and walked slowly back to join them, without a backward glance.

Back in the little office Kraandaal had shown them to before, the two men discussed what to do. "No point in staying here, Bones," said Kirk in the curious curiously flat tones he had adopted since their visit to the desert. "I'll call the ship - should've done it before, but I wanted - they'll be wondering - "

A beep from the intercom. "Captain Kirk? Sorry to disturb you. If you could join me in my office for a moment - "

They stood in the anteroom. McCoy cleared his throat loudly, but it went unheard in the loud debate going on in Kraandaal's office.

"Dicane, I beg you to retract this foolish tale. Do not bother Captain Kirk with it. He has been deeply upset by this man's death - apparently the two were friendly. To confront him with this incredible hallucination can only cause him more distress," came the rasping tones of the Administrator.

"I know what I saw!" answered a lighter, forceful voice, which hurriedly added, " - with all respect, Administrator."

In the silence of the apparent impasse within, McCoy cleared his throat again.

"Ah, come in, gentlemen. I hope I haven't kept you waiting." It was a question - how much did you hear?

"Just arrived this very second," lied McCoy cheerfully, his mind buzzing with the questions raised by the fragments he had heard. There was a tall skinny black lieutenant standing stiffly at attention beside Kraandaal.

"This is Lt. Dicane, gentlemen," said the Administrator, his voice dry. "He has insisted, against my advice, on the right to disclose to you certain - well, you will see. I feel it only fair to warn you, Captain, that Dicane is a - supposedly - reformed alcoholic - his word has not always been impeccable."

McCoy bristled on the young Dicane's behalf, for the unthinkingly cruel humiliation. Kirk too, the ever-perceptive, shook off a little of his apathy to smile at the young man as he sat down. "At ease, Lieutenant. What is it you want to tell me?" His voice was warm, encouraging; yet weary despite himself. Must keep my mind on now - not think of - him...

Dicane relaxed immediately, and shot Kirk a devoted look. "Captain, it's an honour to meet you, and Dr. McCoy. I was sorry about Mr. Spock - all of us who worked with him were. But I've just come back from a research party; I got to the top of that volcano out there - it's extinct, of course - and I looked over the edge into the crater. What I saw - " He broke off for a moment, looking rather uneasily at the Administrator, whose face was studiously expressionless.

"Carry on," said Kirk gently. "If it was Mr. Spock's body you saw, I would - very much like to recover it."

"No, sir, it wasn't that at all. I - heard Mr. Spock's voice, sir, coming

from what looked like a cave about ten metres down."

"What!!" It was McCoy who broke the silence. Kirk remained pale and rigid beside him. "Were you sure," said McCoy more calmly, "quite sure that it was Spock's voice?"

"Oh yes; it's unmistakeable, and besides, he was saying, 'Fascinating. I find your attitude most illogical!'"

"That's Spock!" bellowed McCoy, leaping to his feet, then, looking round at the three still figures, clearing his throat in embarrassment, sat down again.

"I feel your exuberance may prove a little premature, Doctor," said Kraandaal drily. "You have not yet heard the rest of Dicane's story - which you may feel nullifies the worth of his dramatic opening lines."

Dicane swallowed, but spoke steadily enough, looking straight at Kirk. "I -- realise this is going to be difficult for anyone to believe, but after I heard Mr. Spock's voice, a - creature - came out from the cave onto a ledge in front of it. It had a pair of black trousers in its mouth, and then it dropped them over the edge, turned round and went back into the cave. Then I hurried back here. That's all."

All! McCoy was still struggling to make sense out of the story when Kirk said, "What sort of a creature, Lieutenant?"

Dicane was obviously ill at ease. "It looked - well, exactly like a dragon, sir."

Into the stunned silence came Kraandaal's rasping voice. "You see, Captain? I'm afraid - young Dicane here must have been...mistaken. Had you been drinking, Dicane?"

The young man clenched his fists. "No, sir! I haven't touched a drink since - the events you know of. I'm not saying it was a dragon, but that's the nearest point of reference that I have. I did hear Mr. Spock's voice, and I know he was in that cave four hours ago."

"Well," said the Administrator. "The story can easily be checked out - if Captain Kirk thinks it worthwhile. Personally, I tend to the view that Lt. Dicane was subject to - " he hesitated and looked down " - let us give him the benefit of the doubt and say 'a touch of the sun'."

McCoy hated the man. But more than the hate, there was a shining surge of golden hope lending strength to his grief-clouded mind. He looked at Jim - and saw it in his eyes too. Despite Kraandaal's doubts, the two Enterprise men trusted the young, upright negro and felt he was telling the truth.

"We'll leave at once," said Kirk. "We'll need kit, provisions - if I may prey upon your hospitality, Administrator - ?"

"Well, Kirk, if you insist; do not expect too much, I beg you. But naturally, I will be pleased to supply you with anything you require. You'll need a guide - may I suggest Bowen, my right-hand man - "

"But Kirk interrupted. "I can't think of anyone better than Lt. Dicane. If he would be willing - "

The look of gratitude on Dicane's face was noticeable; and the Administrator flared his large nostrils, vexed.

An hour later, Kirk, McCoy and Dicane were on their way to the foot of the volcano. Kirk had called the Enterprise before setting off, saying they had been delayed, but giving no details. No point in launching the bombshell of Spock's death until this last, desperate chance had been checked out. The Captain was still not saying much, and McCoy respected his need for silent meditation, from time to time unobtrusively running an eye over him, guessing that Kirk felt much as he did - a strange sense of unreality, here in this limbo, where on the one

hand one could not accept the fact that Spock was dead; and on the other, unable to believe that there could be a chance that he was still alive.

"Dicane," he said abruptly. "Why does Kraandaal hate you?"

Dicane turned from the front of the buggy. "Hate me, sir?" he said in tones of mild surprise. "Oh, he doesn't hate me - he's like that with everyone. If you've a weakness, he makes sure you know he knows all about it, just to keep you on your toes."

"Humph!" snorted McCoy. "Doesn't sound like the ideal man to run a colony to me. Running people down and undermining their confidence in front of strangers."

Dicane shrugged. "You get used to it. When Commander Spock arrived, the Administrator had all those who'd be working for him into the office individually so that he could inform Mr. Spock of our limitations. I suppose he meant to help Mr. Spock - anyway, he just listened politely, then when he got us alone he said that he'd judge us on what he saw for himself, not on what he'd been told. That boosted our morale no end - he was so fair, and I think we all worked well for him."

McCoy was most gratified at this praise of his and Jim's friend, and beamed. Although he delighted in teasing Spock, to outsiders he defended him staunchly.

They reached the volcano and began the ascent. Halfway up the hoverbuggy had to be halted owing to the increase of vegetation, and the climb was continued on foot. "Dammit!" grunted McCoy as he scrambled after the more athletic forms of Kirk and Dicane. "I shouldn't have come if I'd known this little delight was on the cards. I'm not a mountaineer, you know, I'm - "

" - a doctor!" finished Kirk, turning to look back at him with a slight smile.

McCoy glared. "'Getting too old for this sort of thing' was actually what I was going to say." Inwardly he was pleased at Kirk's teasing - at least all this was taking his mind off his grief - but there'd be a heavy price to pay if Dicane was wrong...

The climb seemed never-ending. The two suns were beginning to give McCoy a headache as he toiled on, and sweat was running freely down Dicane's polished ebony back. Kirk was quite a long way ahead, eager for, yet half-dreading, the moment when he would reach the top, and might be forced to see his new, fragile hope shatter and unleash a terrible grief.

He came to the edge of the crater at last, and looked over - and immediately dropped flat on his stomach, not daring to move, but a beautiful, warm feeling of joy beginning to creep over him just the same...

...For there was Dicane's dragon, all right; lying on a ledge, ten feet long, hard green scales covering its back, a soft white belly underneath, a long sinewy tail, two large wings, fearsome looking claws, pointed ears...unbelievable. But, strange and wonderful though it was, it deserved no more than a cursory glance, for also - there was -

Spock.

Beautiful sight. Spock, alive, and apparently unharmed. Kirk, hearing Dicane and McCoy scrambling up behind him, reluctantly removed his gaze just long enough to hiss at them, "Keep down! Don't make a sound!" and then he returned to the scene below, trying to interpret what he saw. McCoy and Dicane flopped on their stomachs beside him. Somewhere on the fringe of his consciousness he heard McCoy's sharp indrawn breath, felt the hand grasp his shoulder, sharing his joy. But all his attention was channelled now on Spock. Alive. Not lost to him.

But what was going on down there? Spock was lying face down, naked, squirming slightly as the huge dragon licked his body with a rough-looking tongue. Was it about to eat him, preferring its prey live? and clean? Kirk spared a quick regret for Spock, that his natural Vulcan dignity should be subject to such an experience. McCoy was drawing his phaser, but Kirk stopped him. They couldn't be sure of not hitting Spock from here, with the beast almost on top of him.

Kirk risked a quiet call down to Spock and was rewarded by seeing the Vulcan body tense and struggle to turn over. The dragon, surprisingly, permitted this, simply continuing its long rasping licks on the side now uppermost, beginning at Spock's feet. Spock's gaze searched the rim of the volcano and finally came to rest on the three heads gazing down at him in wonder. The flash of joy that lit his eyes as he saw Kirk warmed his Captain's heart, but Spock quickly smoothed his features off into the typical neutral expression.

"Mr. Spock," called Kirk softly, happily, unable to repress his grin. "You're - very - out of uniform."

"My apologies, Captain. The creature will not permit me to clothe myself."

"Get away from it, Spock," called McCoy. "Just far enough so we can shoot - "

"She is not to be harmed, Doctor," said Spock quickly. "The species is totally vegetarian - and completely harmless to man."

As if in confirmation of Spock's words, the creature turned to look at the source of the noise; its large obsidian eyes passed over Kirk, McCoy and Dicane in obvious disdain; it turned its back contemptuously and resumed its thorough licking of Spock's body. McCoy couldn't resist as he looked down at the patiently resigned Vulcan. "Has she taken a fancy to you, Spock? Maybe she's not quite the cute computer you were saving yourself for, but let me be the first to wish you happiness..."

"Doctor," interrupted Spock. "The puerility of your humour never fails to fascinate me. However, on this occasion I must disappoint you. Within this cavern are the creature's eggs. She believes I am an infant of the species, prematurely hatched."

Kirk, McCoy and Dicane looked at each other, the dragon, and Spock - and began to howl with laughter, born partly of their relief at finding Spock alive and safe.

"And it is just as well that she is under this misapprehension," continued Spock, unruffled by the mirth above, but slightly incoherent as the eager tongue moved to flick lovingly and thoroughly over his face. "Or I should certainly have been eaten by a large carnivore - which was the unfortunate fate of my companions."

Kirk wiped the tears of laughter away as he looked down at his dragon-adopted friend. "Yes - just how did you escape, Spock?"

"I shall explain later, Captain, but for now, I am safe here. This creature sees itself as my mother, and as you can see, doubtless regards you at present as some inferior species come to admire the beauty of her infant."

McCoy snorted loudly.

"If I try to join you, or you me, she will then see you as a threat, and may react with aggression."

"She couldn't do much if we just had you beamed up, Spock," objected Kirk.

The creature had finished its ministrations, and Spock ventured to stand up - only to be affectionately slapped down again by a large claw. "She does not understand why I have such un-dragonlike tendencies such as getting to my hind legs," explained Spock, rather breathlessly, from the ground once more. "Also, I am examined daily to see if, I suspect, my scales are beginning to develop. So far I have been rather a disappointment, and not yet managed even one."

The dragon pushed Spock unceremoniously onto his stomach and began a kneading movement with her claws on his shoulderblades. "And what's she doing now, Spock?" said McCoy, interested.

"Really, Doctor," came Spock's peevishly muffled reply. "Surely even you can see she is stimulating my wing buds in order to promote the growth of my flight equipment?"

There seemed to be no answer to that. Kirk felt sure Spock could see the

humour in the situation as well as they. "All the same, Spock, much as you're obviously enjoying this, don't you think we'd better beam you up now?"

But Spock seemed remarkably resistant to the suggestion. As he pointed out, for the dragon's 'offspring' to disappear in a shower of sparkles might well cause her undue distress - and she had saved his life. He had examined the eggs - there could only be a few hours before they hatched out now, and she would not miss him when she had others to care for. And also, he would prefer not to be beamed up in his present state of undress - Kirk and McCoy smiled involuntarily at the vision of a still dignified, but totally naked, Spock arriving in the transporter room - perhaps the Captain, if he did not mind the delay, could use the time to return to the base and procure for him a clean uniform?

The said Captain, exulting in Spock's return from the dead, was in no mood to deny him anything. It was agreed that they should come back in three hours armed with clothes for Spock, in the hopes that the eggs might have hatched by then, thereby distracting the fond mother from the oddity in her family.

Kirk and McCoy were fairly bubbling with happiness and relief on the return journey - and also, of course, with gratitude to Dicane, who shared in their pleasure. "And it'll be one in the eye for that nasty Rigellian, too," said McCoy, in disgust.

"You really hated him, didn't you, Bones? Yes, he'll have to eat his words now, admit there is a dragon-like species on the planet, apologise to Dicane - "

"I doubt it'll be quite like that, sir," said Dicane in wry amusement. He'll have conveniently forgotten he was ever against the idea of going..."

And so it proved. In fact, Kraandaal nodded sagely and benignly at the news that Dicane's story had been verified, and that they had found Spock under the protection of a dragon; and managed skilfully to leave them all feeling very grateful to him for persuading them to listen to the story he had wheedled out of a reluctant Dicane.

That was, until they got outside his office, stopped and stared at each other in disbelief, realising they'd truly been had. Still, nothing could spoil their mood now. Three hours later found them once again climbing through the scrub and scree up the side of the volcano, Dicane still staunchly at their side.

"Why don't you put in for a transfer, Dicane?" asked Kirk, pausing for breath and to wipe his sweating brow. "You could maybe get onto the Enterprise - if you wanted, - that is; I could put in a word for you - "

"Captain, that's a really nice thing to say," answered Dicane, obviously touched, and continuing rather shyly, "and I'd be happy to try for the Enterprise - only Kraandaal just called me into his office, an hour ago - said he'd decided to retire (he's 102, you know) and he thought I might be the man to take over, at least temporarily, to see how it goes... It's the chance I've been waiting for - it's only a small colony, you see, and with one promotion on Kraandaal's recommendation, now the place is established and settled in, I think I could take it on..."

"I'm sure you could," said Kirk immediately. "Good for you - and for Kraandaal. He must have some judgement, at least, in recommending you to take over, and knowing when it's time to retire. I wasn't very impressed by his character-- but it looks as if he's redeemed himself somewhat."

They came again to the edge of the crater and peered cautiously over. This time there was a very different scene on the seethingly busy ledge below. The female dragon stood amid a mass of crawling, squeaking baby dragons, watching them proudly, cuffing one fondly with her big claw, sweeping others into line with a swish of her tail, licking any that came within reach. Bits of broken green egg-shell were everywhere. Spock himself sat, disregarded, forgotten, to one side.

"I can see why she made her mistake," muttered McCoy, nudging Kirk.

And indeed, Spock's bare greenish-pale skin was not unlike the immature not-yet-scaled flesh of the dragon's young; he had the same number of limbs (though to be sure he lacked any sign of a tail), his shoulder-blades might just pass for the prominent knobs on the babies' backs from which the wings would later sprout; yes, all in all it was easy to see how a short-sighted maternal dragon might have enfolded Spock to her heart...

Kirk called down to Spock who looked up immediately. He threw down the uniform which his first officer began, thankfully, to don. Suddenly, the mother dragon, alerted by the movement, noticed him, now clad in his blue tunic and black trousers. She stared. Looked up at the three men above. Back at Spock. Down at the little creatures scuttling at her feet. And back at Spock. The suspicious machinations of her kindly reptilian mind were almost visible as she finally arrived at the right conclusion. Her back arched with disgust and indignation as she realised that the strange child she had nurtured with such loving care was no more than one of these peculiar, ugly bipeds. Slowly, majestically, she turned her bulky body away from Spock and gathered her little ones to her with her forearms, waiting with great dignity for all non-dragon personnel to remove themselves.

"I think you just got your marching orders, Spock!" yelled Kirk.

An eyebrow was raised. "Indeed, Captain."

Several hours later the Enterprise was once again powering her smooth way through black space. Kirk entered sickbay and perched on the edge of the restless Spock's bed. "Is he letting you out of here soon?"

"I do sincerely hope so, Captain, as he can find nothing wrong; however, the good Doctor is obviously deriving so much pleasure from having me here where I cannot escape his sarcastic witticisms that I think he will be loath to release me."

Kirk grinned. Then he lowered his voice and looked at Spock very seriously, reaching out to touch his arm very lightly. "I - really thought I'd lost you, that time."

Spock's eyes softened in response, and he gave Kirk the very slight smile he reserved for his captain. "Yes. I - thought of you - you see, I could not know about Dicane's hearing my voice, and I imagined the Enterprise would have left when my presumed death was reported to you. Escape was impossible - the creature would not let me out of her sight - and I did not know for sure she would lose interest in me when her own young hatched. I thought I might never see you again - and I wished I had told you...that I value your friendship, more than I can say."

They looked at each other for a moment, and then Kirk leaned forward a little. "Spock - I - "

Just then the door shot open and in bounced McCoy, rubbing his hands. "What's all this, then? No secrets in my sickbay," he boomed, grinning wickedly.

Kirk heaved an inward sigh and smiled ruefully at Spock. So it wouldn't be said this time after all...well, perhaps it didn't need to be. "And you should have seen Bones, Spock!" he said loudly and cheerfully. "When he thought you were dead, he was so upset his hand shook too much for him to raise his third medicinal brandy to his lips."

McCoy looked nonplussed for a moment; then he assumed a stiff pose with his hands held behind his back. "Merely my most logical concern that the Enterprise should not be inconvenienced by the loss of her first officer..." he intoned deeply.

Kirk laughed delightedly and even Spock raised an eyebrow in acknowledgement. "Yes, you can go, Spock, you're fit enough apart from a few scratches. But I think you owe it us - think of all the climbing we had to do - to tell us just how you came to be adopted by a dragon."

Spock swung his legs off the bed to assume a sitting position. "We were working in the desert when we were attacked by a pair of large cat-like predators. They took us completely by surprise, and my companions were killed almost instantly.

My phaser malfunctioned and I was unable to defend myself. The dragon was flying overhead as my shirt was ripped away by one of the creatures, by back being scratched in the process. The dragon evidently noticed the scene below, and here is an interesting thought for you, Doctor, the very attributes you mock the loudest undoubtedly saved my life. Seeing my ears, and the colour of blood on my back, her mind preoccupied with the eggs she had recently laid, her maternal instinct came to the fore, roused by my vulnerability and my similarity (such as it is) to the young of her species. She swooped down, took me in her claws and flew with me to her cavern, where she cared for me very considerately until you appeared. The species is a fascinating one - with a most interesting resemblance to the fabled creature of Terran fancy - I wonder if - "

Kirk and McCoy exchanged a glance. "Well, Mr. Spock, no doubt our friend Dicane will make thorough research into the species one of the first of his new projects. D'you know, Bones, I'm considering sending Spock back to Pharis....."

Spock looked at him with suspicion.

".... His affinity with, his similarity to the species, must make him invaluable to any serious student of the animal, wouldn't you say, Bones? After all, he's almost a member of a dragon family - sort of a big friendly uncle to all those babies..."

Spock sighed. It would be a very long time indeed before they let him live this one down.

THOUGHTS UPON A SUMMER'S DAY by Jayne Turner

How different I have found this life.
I knew it would be hard
For you kept nothing from me.
I was prepared,
As any woman can be
When coming from her homeland
to the birthplace of her husband.

While not easy I now understand
How your way is a better way
than ours.
Though so many times I have had to turn away
so you would not know how unwittingly
I had been hurt.

You will not know how often I have
cried myself so silently to sleep
as Humans sometimes do.
When things go so often against them
and people are cruel
without meaning to.

And yet time passed and it became easier.
No thoughtless words come from my lips.
I stand as grave and calm as any Vulcan wife
beside you,
and forget the gay and sparkling girl
I once knew.

Spock advises: an apple a day keeps the doctor away - if aimed right.

RESURRECTION by Josephine Timmins

"I'm sorry about your patient, Bones." Kirk's voice was gentle and very sympathetic, "But our orders are to go straight to Parker's planet. Obviously someone is taking these black market rumours very seriously."

McCoy shrugged. "No matter," he said flatly. "The lad could die at any time. It makes very little difference to him whether he dies in my care or someone else's."

But Kirk knew it mattered to McCoy. He had rarely seen the doctor so depressed as he was over the tragic lab accident that had wiped out the life of the youngest crewman on the ship. McCoy had tried everything to save him but the boy was dying. They had been making for a Starbase hospital when the Enterprise received an urgent assignment to Parker's Planet. After discussing the matter with McCoy, Kirk had changed course - but very reluctantly.

Now they were sitting round the briefing room table with Spock, preparing to discuss the forthcoming assignment.

Kirk said, "What about this miracle drug, Solanite. Do you know anything about it, Bones?"

McCoy tried to look interested. "Only that it is a fairly recent discovery and all sorts of ridiculous claims are being made about it. Apparently it slows down the aging process to dramatically that immortality is assured. That is - providing the side effects don't kill you."

"What side effects are those, Doctor?" asked Spock curiously.

McCoy looked irritated. "Anything you like - there are sure to be some. Obviously this sort of drug takes years to test thoroughly, and corners are cut in the rush to be first on the market with it. The trusting public buys it and finds out later that it blocks the kidneys or curdles the blood. Solanite will be just like its predecessors." He stopped - aware that his voice had risen sharply and that the others were watching him closely. "Sorry," he said sheepishly. "It's just that I believe in quality rather than quantity, and too many people can't cope with the life they have already."

Kirk murmured his agreement, and then, as he had nothing further to ask, released the doctor to go back to his patient.

As the door closed behind McCoy, Kirk and Spock exchanged a glance but said nothing. Bones would work his way out of his depression eventually. In the meantime there were orders to fulfil; an investigation into strong rumours that the mineral, Solanite, was finding its way on to the black market where it was fetching an incredible price. They studied the data displayed on the desk screen.

Parker's Planet was a small place with a sparse population which was mostly employed in the various mines under its surface.

"It shouldn't take long to sort this business out," said Kirk. "So far, Solanite has only been found in one place - and that's the largest of the mines in the middle of the main city. Correction - the only city."

Spock looked less confident. "The Solanite is supposedly being sold in its raw, unrefined state, which suggests that another source of the mineral may have been discovered."

Kirk groaned. He should have known Spock would find an awkward angle on what he had hoped would be a reasonably simple assignment. "Well, we'll have to wait and see. The Governor of Parker's planet is expecting us and it seems he has a job for you, Spock. He has a computer he needs fixed."

The Vulcan arched an eyebrow. "Are there no computer technicians on the planet already? What sort of computer is it?"

Kirk grinned at his friend's bemused expression.

"Sorry, Spock, that's all I know. You'll have to contain yourself till we get there."

By the time they reached Parker's Planet Kirk had decided that Mr. Scott would be a useful addition to the landing party, so three glittering shapes solidified at the top of the steps in front of the main administration building. Almost immediately they covered their noses and screwed up their faces in disgust. The air had an acrid, chemical smell quite unlike anything they had ever experienced before.

The administration building enjoyed a higher position than the rest of the city and the Enterprise men had a good look from where they were standing. It was a depressing sight; a city of shapeless houses built of bilious-yellow stone. Dusty gardens, brown trees and a background of ochre-coloured hills completed the picture.

Scotty muttered something - obviously his low opinion of Parker City - but fortunately his hands muffled his words and what he said sounded foreign to the other two.

The admin. building was the grandest edifice in the area. Somebody had once seen a picture of an ancient Greek temple and decided to copy it in the local yellow stone. The result was not a success. From a doorway hidden behind massive pillars a youngish man rushed to meet them.

"Welcome to Parker's Planet, gentlemen. My name is Abelson - I'm the Governor's assistant. Mr. McCullough is expecting you."

As they removed their hands from their faces to return his handshake, Abelson blushed slightly and said, "Sorry about the smell. It comes from the soil and the rocks. But you do get used to it after a while."

He escorted them to a large first-floor office - all imitation wood panelling and simulated leather chairs. There was nothing artificial, however, about the overwhelming, almost emotional welcome they received from the Governor of Parker's Planet.

McCullough was an enormous man with a round, cherubic face, who all but hugged Kirk to his bosom as he cried, "Gentlemen, I can't tell you how good it is to see you! Service from the Federation at last!"

"Service?" queried Kirk as he extricated himself from the Governor's embrace and backed off. Spock had already put as much distance between himself and this embarrassing Human as good manners would allow, and even Scotty was sidling out of the way.

"Oh, I know the real purpose of your visit, Captain," McCullough laughed. "But we can soon settle that little matter. If Solanite is getting to the black market, it must happen after it has left the planet. No, the really serious problem is that computer out there - standing idle because the Federation refuses to send me someone who understands it. The largest, most important mine on this planet has been running on emergency power for two weeks; production is down to a trickle, and all because the computer that controls the whole set-up has developed a fault. A scared look suddenly came into his eyes. "I suppose one of you is a computer expert?"

"That's Mr. Spock's department," said Kirk, indicating his first officer.

A huge smile once more split the Governor's face and he advanced joyfully on the hapless Vulcan. Spock's horror of being touched was well-known to Kirk and Scott, and together they moved to intercept the giant.

"Mr. Scott is also something of a technical wizard, Governor," said Kirk hurriedly.

"Aye," agreed Scott. "Between us Mr. Spock and I should be able to get your computer ticking again."

McCullough beamed at them. "Parker's Planet will be ever in your debt, gentlemen."

A relieved Spock joined the conversation. "I find it difficult to understand, Governor, why a planet like this has no-one suitably qualified to maintain vital equipment."

McCullough's smile faded. "It is just one example of how badly this planet has been treated by the Federation. We are adequately covered for general maintenance but have nobody qualified to deal with a major computer fault. We are one of the oldest mining planets of the Federation, but until the properties of Solanite were discovered we were considered relatively unimportant. Now that Solanite is the medical sensation of the decade our security strength has been doubled and we merit the attentions of a Starship!" The flash of anger passed and once more he was smiling. "No offence intended, gentlemen. I'm wasting your valuable time. If you'll follow me..."

He led them through the back of the building and a small courtyard. They emerged in front of a pair of massive gates inscribed with the words 'U.F.P. DORADO MINE' - Manager K. ANGELO'.

Steering them past the security guards, McCullough led them towards the Head Office, proudly pointing out features of interest. The building which housed the troublesome computer was, at fifteen years old, the most modern structure in the yard. As the Governor talked the reason for his pride in the mine became clear. It seemed that McCullough had come to Parker's Planet as a young miner and had worked his way up to manager before going into politics eight years ago. "Nothing goes on in this mine that I don't know about," was his confident boast.

In the office they met Kurt Angelo - a wiry little man with a harassed expression - and a young man who was introduced as Bell, the chief computer technician. He greeted Spock and Scott with a mixture of relief and awe, and after repeating several times that he couldn't find anything wrong with the computer and couldn't understand why it wasn't working, he was persuaded to escort them to it.

Kirk sat down with McCullough and Angelo while facts and figures were explained to him. McCullough did most of the talking with Angelo nodding in agreement. Kirk was no expert but it was obvious that production at the mine was excellent and security very tight. He was invited to spend the next day touring the mine and production plant to check everything for himself.

"This is a vast place," said McCullough. "Mining has been going on here for 150 years. Some of the tunnels are completely worked out; in fact we were running the mine down when the boffins discovered Solanite. The mineral itself has always been there, but as no-one could find a use for it we just left it. Now that it's turned out to be so valuable, we are re-working all the old galleries."

So far, Solanite had not been found anywhere else on the planet, but Kirk collected a pile of geological maps to show to the experts on board the Enterprise. If they could suggest other areas where the mineral might logically be situated, he would have to widen his field of investigation. His heart sank at the thought.

Just then the door opened and the other three entered. "Any luck, Spock?"

The Vulcan turned to McCullough and Angelo. "Your technicians were quite correct, sir. There is no fault in the computer itself."

"Then what's wrong with the damned thing?" cried McCullough. "Why doesn't it work?"

Spock indicated a wallchart which displayed the underground layout of the mine. A transparent overlay showed the surface arrangement of buildings. "The computer house stands above a recent tunnel extension," he pointed out. "And that appears to be the reason for the computer failure. The ground beneath the building has become unstable - there are quite noticeable cracks in the base of the

structure." From the looks on the faces of the other men it was obvious nobody else had noticed any cracks.

"Would that really affect the performance of the computer?" asked McCullough. "I thought they were made of stronger stuff."

Spock gave him a look of infinite patience and explained, "This mine is controlled by a highly complex but badly designed piece of machinery. It will not function unless all parts maintain a state of equilibrium. The base of the building is too shallow to protect the computer from subsurface vibration and earth movement, with the result that the delicate links between its interdependent parts have been severed. In short, gentlemen, your computer is sinking into the ground."

Silence followed - and an unspoken question hung in the air. Spock answered it. "The whole structure will have to be moved to stable ground."

McCullough, Angelo and Bell stared at each other, aghast.

"We haven't the staff to dismantle the computer and put it together again," wailed Bell, looking pleadingly at his superiors.

"We have," said Kirk immediately. He turned to his Chief Engineer. "Can your men take care of the job, Scotty?"

Scott grinned. "Aye, Captain, no problem."

"See to it, then." Kirk picked up the charts they had been studying. "I'll take these back to the ship for expert opinion, Governor, and return tomorrow morning."

On his return to the Enterprise Kirk went first to sickbay, where the young crewman's empty bed told him all he wanted to know. McCoy's voice behind him said, "He died a few hours ago."

"All right, Bones." Kirk looked at the haggard face of the doctor. "You did all you could. Now will you please try to get some rest?"

McCoy grinned weakly. "How can I rest when the three commanding officers of this ship are cavorting about on a mining planet? Jim, will you do me a favour and promise to take care of yourselves? No more accidents - please?"

Kirk squeezed his friend's shoulder reassuringly. "Don't worry, Bones, there will be no trouble this time."

Kirk returned to the planet next morning in a happier frame of mind. The geological department on the Enterprise could find no other likely deposits of Solanite, so it looked as if he could confine his investigations to the Dorado mine.

He was greeted by the Governor - as he had feared - like a long-lost son, and was whisked away on the promised tour. Scott and his engineers were already hard at work so Spock went with the Captain. The Vulcan was no mining expert but his powers of observation were superior to Kirk's, and if anything shady was going on down below Spock was more likely to spot it.

They were a party of four - McCullough and Angelo were doing the honours. McCullough in overalls and a hard hat was an impressive sight, dwarfing the manager and obviously in charge of the expedition. The tour of the mine and processing plant took up most of the day. Kirk quickly got bored with the sameness of the tunnels, but he was determined to see every inch of the place and McCullough was just as determined that he should see it.

The really interesting part of the tour was a tunnel which led off from one of the worked-out galleries in the oldest part of the mine. The tunnel was short and widened out into a sort of cave blocked at the far end by a roof-fall of

enormous rocks. The cave was a positive graveyard of ancient mining machinery and equipment. Kirk and Spock were fascinated, though the functions of the various machines were mostly lost on them.

"Like a museum, isn't it?" chuckled McCullough. "Some of this machinery is 150 years old - the original equipment of the mine. We store it here purely for sentimental reasons. Nobody ever sees it."

"I know somebody who would love to see it," said Kirk. "Mr. Scott is fanatical about machinery of all kinds. You must bring him down here when he has finished with the computer."

Angelo and McCullough exchanged glances. "That can easily be arranged," said Angelo.

Spock indicated the roof-fall. "When did that happen?" he asked.

"Oh, long ago - eighty or ninety years," said McCullough. "It was a bad accident, men died, and after that this part of the mine was closed down."

By the end of that day Kirk was convinced of one thing - if Solanite was finding its way onto the black market, it wasn't coming from the Dorado mine. From the rock face which cradled the deposits of Solanite to the containers of processed mineral, the system was almost completely automatic and security was very tight.

McCullough grinned triumphantly. "There you are, gentlemen. I told you there was no truth to those runours."

At the computer house, a tired but satisfied Scott reported that work was progressing well and that another day or so should see the computer functioning again. He was delighted to hear about the subterranean museum and leaped at Angelo's offer of a private visit before he left the planet.

Kirk spent the next day on the Enterprise making out his report. He decided, however, to wait till they left Parker's Planet before sending it off.

The following morning he beamed down with the others to see the final checks made on the computer. McCoy decided to go with them - his curiosity about the 'smelly' planet and its larger-than-life Governor aroused by the conversations he had heard over the last few days.

The computer worked like a dream. There was a celebration drink in the manager's office then Scotty left for his trip down the mine. He wanted to take McCoy with him to 'broaden his education', but the doctor smiled and declined the offer. "One piece of metal looks very much like another to me, Scotty. Go and enjoy yourself. Take care."

Then he wondered why he had said that. Scott didn't need reminding about the limits of safety - and there was no danger in this joyride. All the same, he didn't return to the ship with Kirk, but stayed with Spock, who was watching the workings of the computer.

Kirk was in his quarters when the intercom buzzed urgently and Uhura's strained face appeared on his desk screen.

"Captain, there's been a message from the surface. Mr. Spock says there's a fire at the mine; Mr. Scott may be involved."

Kirk had reached the door almost before she finished speaking.

He beamed down behind a confused crowd standing round the main entrance to the mine. Pushing through to the front he found McCoy and Spock standing mute and tense. When Spock saw him he said, "An alarm sounded twelve minutes ago. According to the computer there's a fire on the fourth level - in the exact spot where the machinery is stored."

"And Scotty?"

"We don't know, Jim. The rescue team has gone down - McCullough went with

them. They told us to stay here."

They waited for what seemed like hours, then smoke-stained figures at last appeared in the mine entrance. Kirk searched for one particular familiar face but saw only Kurt Angelo supported by the strong arm of McCullough. Then the figures moved forward to reveal what was behind them - and Kirk's heart plunged to his boots. Two men carried a stretcher, and whatever was on that stretcher was completely covered up.

McCoy went to the stretcher and lifted the sheet. He replaced it hurriedly. Ashen-faced, he stumbled back to his colleagues who reached out to steady him. "Jim - there's hardly anything left of him," he whispered.

McCullough came towards them holding out a small piece of metal, black and twisted. "This was found near the body," he said.

Spock took it from him. "The remains of a communicator," he said simply.

They all went into the manager's office where Kurt Angelo himself was slopping brandy into a glass. His face and hands were black and his clothing was scorched.

"What happened down there?" asked Kirk, refusing a drink and trying, with great difficulty, to sound matter-of-fact.

Angelo shook his head wearily. "I wish to God I knew, Captain. The lighting is poor down there and I left Mr. Scott with the machinery while I went to fetch a couple of portable lamps from the main gallery. I hadn't been gone five minutes - I was on my way back with the lamps - when there was an explosion and a sheet of flame. I was hurled to the ground. If I'd been any closer I wouldn't be here now. I managed to pick myself up and sound the alarm then I ran back with extinguishers to fight the fire. Mr. Scott didn't have a chance - it was an inferno!"

Blacking out the image from his mind Kirk said grimly, "But how did it happen? What caused the explosion?"

Angelo and McCullough exchanged a glance and then the manager said, "Gas. It must have been gas seeping through from the old part of the mine. We get it occasionally and it's highly combustible. Normally the computer keeps a check on it by a network of sensors, but of course the computer has been out of action for a while. The slightest spark can ignite it. I can only think that Mr. Scott moved one of the machines. Metal striking metal - particularly rusty metal - that might do it."

It was the turn of the Enterprise men to exchange glances. Spock said, "Mr. Angelo, you may be correct in your assumption, but in Mr. Scott's defence I should like to point out that it is most unlikely that such an experienced engineer would interfere with unfamiliar machinery - especially underground. Mr. Scott would have been well aware of the risks."

McCullough gestured helplessly. "We may never know what caused the fire down there, gentlemen. It's a mess - part of the roof has caved in. But I can assure you that a thorough investigation will be held."

Kirk stood up. "Thank you, Governor. I will leave it to you to inform Starfleet Command when your inquiry has reached its conclusions. Unfortunately, the Enterprise cannot remain here any longer as our work is finished. Dr. McCoy will arrange for Mr. Scott's body to be transported to the ship, and I will take a copy of Mr. Angelo's statement for our own records."

Their business completed and with all crewmen back on board, Kirk and Spock took their leave of the Governor of Parker's Planet. McCullough was obviously extremely embarrassed by the tragedy but seemed genuinely sorry to see them go. For his part, Kirk could only feel a deep longing to get back into open space.

It was only when he was back on the Enterprise that Kirk realised how shocked he was at Scotty's untimely death. He had been such a good friend; not as spiritually close as the enigmatic Spock, nor as affectionate and concerned as McCoy, but just as loyal, just as reliable, and just as willing to lie down and die if his Captain gave the word. How he would miss that mixture of cheerful good sense, utter dependability, and fierce pride which made Scotty a man to have by your shoulder in a crisis.

And what of the Enterprise? Who would look after her now? How often had it been Scotty's willpower and technical wizardry that had got her safely home and saved the lives of over 400 people;

Kirk sat in his command chair and stared unseeing at the unattractive little planet on the viewscreen - making no move to leave orbit. There was silence on the bridge; Sulu and Chekov were sitting with heads slightly bowed, each wrapped in his own thoughts; Uhura was red-eyed, clutching a handkerchief and defying anyone to speak to her; Spock's face was expressionless as ever, but his complete stillness told its own story. Kirk knew that corridors and rooms all over the ship would be as hushed as the bridge, and if a ship could weep - the Enterprise was weeping now.

In sickbay, a rather embarrassed Nurse Chapel murmured, "I know it sounds foolish, but it just doesn't look like Mr. Scott."

She flushed pink but met Dr. McCoy's stare steadily. On the face of it, it was a foolish remark and in very bad taste - the charred remains on the table couldn't possibly look like anyone. But Christine Chapel was too experienced a nurse and too fond of Scotty to be anything other than serious, and what she was saying echoed a faint doubt in McCoy's own mind. Nobody had thought to question the identity of the body - but there was one way of settling the matter.

"Fetch me Mr. Scott's medical file, Nurse."

Kirk was irritated when the call came for him to go to sickbay immediately. He had just been about to shake off his mood and give orders to break orbit. However the excitement in the Doctor's eyes roused his curiosity, and he sat down in McCoy's office obediently.

McCoy said, "Look at this, Jim - it's Scotty's dental chart. Pay particular attention to the upper jaw... Now look at this. This is the upper jaw of the body we brought from the planet."

With Spock looking over his shoulder, Kirk studied the two illustrations; they were different.

"That isn't Scotty's body," whispered McCoy, his eyes gleaming.

"Then what the devil's going on down there!" blazed Kirk.

McCoy had no doubts at all. "It's obvious, Jim. Somebody has gone to a great deal of trouble to make us believe Mr. Scott is dead."

"But it doesn't make sense. Why should anyone want to abduct Scotty?" asked Kirk, looking to Spock for enlightenment.

Spock considered for a moment and then replied. "Mr. Scott is one of the best engineers in Starfleet - experienced in the construction and maintenance of all types of machinery. It could be that his talents are required by men who cannot approach him openly, and who need him enough to contrive his apparent death. Such desperate measures suggest we are dealing with very dangerous men."

Kirk slammed his fist on the desk. "Black marketeers! We've been conned, gentlemen, and I've a good idea by whom!"

Spock nodded his agreement. "Either Governor McCullough or Mr. Angelo - they were the only ones who knew about Mr. Scott's visit to the mines."

"They are probably in it together," said Kirk. "McCullough said himself that nothing goes on in the mine that he doesn't know about - and he wasn't joking."

Well, big as he is, he's got some explaining to do."

As he stood up McCoy put out a restraining hand. "Wait, Jim - if you go rushing back down there you'll be putting Scotty's life in danger. Let me go and ask the questions: I've got something here that could be useful." He took a small bottle out of his pocket and showed the label to Kirk.

"'Veritacitin'. Isn't that the 'truth' drug there was a lot of fuss about some years ago? I thought the medical profession considered it unethical to use it?"

"Not as unethical as leaving a colleague to die," replied McCoy quietly.

Kirk snapped, "There's no question of that, Bones - and you know it."

"I'm sorry, Jim. I know you'll move heaven and earth to find Scotty, but unless we know where to look it could take forever. And they'll kill him for sure if they think we're on to them - they've got nothing to lose." He fingered the bottle and added, "I got this stuff on the black market ages ago - intending to analyse it. I never expected to use it but it could mean the difference between life and death for Scotty. And I'll tell you this, Jim, if Scotty does die needlessly I'll resign from the service and go and be a simple country doctor. Because quite frankly, life in Starfleet seems to be more about death than anything else."

McCoy's outburst went straight to Kirk's heart. He knew exactly how the doctor felt - he'd experienced the same despair many times in his own career. He knew also that Scotty's safety was doubly important to McCoy because the two men were 'mates' - they shared the same outlook on life and liked each other's company.

"All right, Bones, go and find out what you can. But you are not going alone. Take Spock along with you."

McCullough got quite a shock when the two Enterprise men materialised without warning in his office, but he recovered himself quickly and greeted them with his usual warmth. While Spock positioned himself near the door, McCoy explained smoothly the reason for their return.

"Sorry about this, Governor, but it's an emergency. Two of our engineers have suddenly developed symptoms of Rigellian fever. Obviously the disease was not picked up on this planet, but it is vital that everybody connected in any way with the recent operation at the mine is given the antidote."

McCullough had never heard of Rigellian fever, but was quickly convinced that it was highly contagious and very deadly. He was more than ready to be inoculated first.

As McCoy withdrew the hypo he watched the Governor's face anxiously and then smiled with satisfaction as the big man visibly relaxed.

"Makes you feel rather good, doesn't it?" murmured McCullough happily.

"That's right, Governor. Now, while you are in such a good mood, you are going to tell us exactly what happened to Commander Scott."

McCullough stiffened and his eyes bulged. He tried to fight the uncontrollable urge to speak what was in his mind but failed utterly. With a gasp the words came out: "He's in the mine - in the old workings." He stared at McCoy in horror. "What was in that syringe? What have you done to me?"

McCoy pressed on. "Whereabouts in the old workings - show us a map."

As if propelled by an invisible force, McCullough opened a concealed drawer in his desk and took out a faded map. The drawer also contained a gun, but he judged it wiser not to touch it as Spock had appeared silently at his elbow armed with a phaser. Miserably he stabbed a finger at the map. "There," he said. "He's unharmed - at the moment."

All three beamed back to the Enterprise where the rest of the story was quickly told. McCullough had come into possession of the old map when he was manager of the mine. The map showed a ventilation or escape shaft from the abandoned workings which did not appear on more modern maps. When Solanite suddenly became so valuable, McCullough had realised that an untapped source of it was lying forgotten behind the blocked tunnel, and that if the old shaft could be found a very profitable side line might be started.

With Angelo's help he had located the shaft and explored the workings. The Solanite was there in quantity, but they would need help and machinery to get at it. Angelo had found three ex-miners eager for dishonest riches, and between them they had smuggled some rather antiquated machinery into the old tunnels. They had been producing raw Solanite for some time now and selling it to one of McCullough's shady contacts.

The Governor obviously had a grudge against the Federation for its ungenerous treatment of Parker's Planet in the past, and seemed to think that defrauding it in this way was quite justifiable. Kirk was in no position to make judgements, and anyway his only interest was in getting Scotty back safely.

The engineer had been abducted on account of his talent with machinery - as Spock had suggested. The mining machinery had finally collapsed and nobody in the gang knew how to fix it. It looked as if the operation would have to finish until Captain Kirk had given them the answer by describing Scott's genius with all things mechanical. The 'accident' had been simple to arrange - Angelo had taken care of that - while McCullough had acquired a body from the local mortuary. Both men had assumed the body was too badly burned to be identifiable.

McCullough, having given up the fight to resist Kirk's questions, poured out the story almost with relief. When he admitted that the three miners were at that moment in the old workings with Scott, Kirk decided to trap them all in the act. He was going to take just Spock and two security men, but when McCoy pleaded to be allowed to see the venture through, he agreed. Before they left the bridge, Kirk said to Uhura,

"Lieutenant, if we're not back with Mr. Scott inside two hours, start levelling that mine bit by bit."

McCullough was horrified. "Captain, that's wanton destruction - there's absolutely no need for it!"

Kirk smiled grimly. "Not if you behave yourself, Governor."

They beamed down to a bleak hillside on the far side of which, and completely out of sight, lay the Dorado mine and Parker City. The terrain below them was flat, barren and uninhabited - ideal, as Spock pointed out, as an unofficial landing site for a ship.

McCullough agreed. "It's all quite simple; at the exact time that the legal Solanite is being loaded and shipped out, our buyer lands here and collects the illegal stuff." He roared with laughter. "All the Federation security guards are busy watching the spaceport while the real business goes on behind their backs!"

He led them to the concealed entrance to the mine and picked up a powerful torch from a ledge. The others were already equipped with torches. One of the security men was left to guard the entrance.

They climbed down the shaft quite easily although it was narrow and steep in places. McCullough's bulk so filled the passageway that Kirk couldn't see anything in front of him, but the Governor had been warned to stop in good time for them to arrange their plan of action, and Kirk's phaser pressed against his neck was a constant reminder of this.

They passed several tunnels on each side of the shaft before McCullough stopped and switched out his torch.

"We're here," he whispered. "There's no way out but up this shaft."

They could hear voices echoing in the distance. "Is there any cover?" asked Kirk?

"The darkness is all the cover you'll need. Only the far end of the tunnel is lit so they won't see you till you are right on top of them."

Kirk nodded to McCoy. "Guard him, Bones. If he even looks as if he's going to move - stun him."

With Spock and the security guard behind him, he began to feel his way in the pitch blackness to the bottom of the shaft and along the tunnel. They kept to the walls, but it was obvious they were invisible to the quartet of men in the brilliant light at the far end. They stopped close enough to see and hear what was going on, but far enough away to be out of sight.

The three miners were sitting round watching a familiar red-shirted figure who was squatting on the ground surrounded by bits of machinery. Kirk's heart lifted when he saw Scotty. The engineer was dirty and dishevelled but obviously unbowed.

"Part of this machine is missing," he was complaining. "Ah canna fix it if it's not all here. And these arnae the right tools for the job anyway."

The largest of the miners pointed a lethal-looking weapon at Scott. "There was nothing missing from that machine till you took it to pieces," he snarled. "You're wasting time. Get on with the job - use the tools you've got."

Worried that Scotty might push the big fellow too far, Kirk stepped into the light. "Is this what you're looking for, Mr. Scott?" he asked loudly.

The miners whirled round but the big one had no time to use his gun. He dropped to the ground - stunned by Spock's phaser. The other two were unarmed and surrendered quietly to the security man. Scott grinned delightedly at his friends.

"Captain...Spock...you're a sight for sore eyes! I was beginning to think you'd forgotten about me."

Kirk squeezed his shoulder reassuringly. "Sorry we took so long, Scotty, but we didn't realise you were missing." He smiled at the engineer's baffled expression. "We'll explain later. Now come on before a certain doctor bursts a blood vessel with impatience."

It was much later before he did get a chance to explain. After they had returned to the ship with their prisoners, Spock was despatched to collect Kurt Angelo, and then Kirk had to arrange for the deputy manager to take over the mine, while Abelson, the Governor's very shocked assistant, was instructed to mind the shop till a new man could be elected.

Scotty's grin faded when he heard about the burned body and realised how close he had come to being left behind on the planet. It was a nasty business and upset him far more than he cared to admit. But he recovered his good spirits in true Scotty fashion and took Chapel and McCoy off to celebrate with one or his most treasured bottles of whisky.

The Enterprise warped out of orbit and Parker's Planet vanished from the screen. Kirk leaned back in his chair and sighed with relief. He was pleased that the black marketeers were locked up, and happier than he could express that Scotty was back from the dead, but he was far from satisfied with his own handling of the affair. He had been fooled so easily by that big, smiling con-man McCullough, and had almost lost a dear friend into the bargain. No - he had no reason to congratulate himself.

Spock was standing at his shoulder. Without actually looking at his first officer, Kirk said, "Spock - if I ever start getting too big for my boots in

future - just say 'Parker's Planet' to me, will you?"

"'To err is Human', Captain," quoted Spock. And then, only too aware that his own part in the episode had been less than inspiring, added softly, "But Vulcans do it too."

JUST BETWEEN US... by Rita Oliver

This is me and I am sad,
 Reading by a warm yellow lamp,
 A tear upon my lash,
 My cheek hot and damp.
 My thoughts are in a turmoil,
 I sadly think of Lazarus,
 For all time, till the end,
 Locked away with Lazarus.
 It frightens me, yet I only glimpse
 The barest of his torment.
 Do you think me foolish
 To loose my tears for print?
 No. Not fiction and not you.
 And no, it is not foolish,
 Not at all a foolish thing to do.
 To lose myself in another world,
 Is better, it must be,
 Than to bear it silently,
 Tight and deep within me.
 Instead I read of a refuge,
 Where men and times are wild.
 Did you also weep where I wept,
 Did you chuckle where I smiled?
 I am pleased, it's hard to say this,
 Doubting my sanity as I do,
 But I am pleased I share
 That other world with you.
 I used to go there on my own,
 I believed that it was wrong,
 I thought that jeers and laughter
 Would follow me ere long.
 But now that world is almost real,
 It almost has no end.
 You don't jeer or laugh at me,
 For you go there too my friend.
 It may be sentimental;
 But I'm glad we share our dreams,
 I don't feel such a madman
 When my mind goes to extremes.
 Sharing takes away the guilt,
 And the thought that dreams are wrong,
 But it's them that keep our grip on life,
 Makes us know where we belong.
 I know there are those who'd laugh at us,
 They would think we are quite mad,
 They are wrong, it is their loss,
 At that I feel quite sad.
 Because we've found a way to speak,
 To share each other's minds,
 I think we are perhaps happier, saner, luckier,
 Than the whole damn rest of mankind!

GENERAL ORDER NUMBER 1 by Doreen C. Dabinett

Captain's Log. While investigating the Tarrot System we sighted a Klingon ship. It has now disappeared without trace and we can only assume, as it was seen in the vicinity of the fifth planet, there must be something there to interest them. I have decided that it is imperative that we try to find out what the Klingons are after, and to this end I sent down a Survey Party. We have not heard from them for ten hours and must assume they have met trouble. I now have to decide whether to send a further party to the planet, especially considering General Order Number 1.

Kirk thumbed off his log and shot a quick glance at Spock. He knew the First Officer didn't agree with his decisions so far, and would agree even less if he sent anyone else down to the planet. Kirk heaved himself out of his chair and began to prowl up and down. "Any news, Uhura?" he asked for the umpteenth time.

"Sorry, sir, no." She knew how worried he was, especially when Spock didn't agree with him. Command could be very lonely, but he was man enough to back his own decisions against the devil himself if he had to, but even so, she knew how he hated to argue with a friend.

He stopped pacing abruptly and looked at the Vulcan. "Meet me in my quarters in ten minutes, Spock."

"Yes - " a slight pause " - sir."

Back to formalities, thought Kirk with a sigh, and looked at Uhura. "Ask Dr. McCoy to join us, please, Lieutenant."

"Yes, sir." The doors closed behind him.

Kirk lay on his back and closed his eyes, trying to empty his mind. A few minutes' break could work wonders, he knew. He'd almost succeeded when the buzzer went. "Come," he said but didn't move from the bed. He opened his eyes and saw Spock looking at him from the door. "Sit down, Spock." The Vulcan obliged, his face like stone. "For God's sake, do you have to keep this up?" he demanded.

Spock's face didn't alter except to go colder, if that were possible. "I do not know what you mean, Captain."

"Look, I know you don't agree with me all the time, but..." The buzzer interrupted him. "Oh, damn. Come in!" he yelled.

"Sorry, Jim, am I interrupting something?" McCoy could feel the atmosphere.

"No," Jim replied quietly. "I guess Mr. Spock and I have nothing more to say to each other."

McCoy looked from one to the other, perplexed; his two best friends didn't often quarrel, but when they did! They were both so stubborn. He sighed, wishing there was something he could say to ease things. He straddled a chair and turned a quizzical look on Kirk who was now sitting on the side of the bed. McCoy could read the tormented look in Kirk's eyes.

"We've lost contact with Sulu's party," he stated finally, "for over ten hours now."

"Ten hours and twenty-five minutes," Spock corrected automatically.

Kirk nodded and went on. "I sent them, Bones, I can't just leave them there."

"Captain, General Order No. 1 is quite..."

"All right, Spock, I know!" interrupted Kirk angrily.

"If you had listened to me, sir, this would not have happened."

"Spock!" McCoy snapped. "You're not helping!"

"There should be no need to 'help', Doctor."

"Shut up, both of you," he sighed. "Thanks anyway, Bones."

"What do you intend to do, Jim?" McCoy asked, finally.

"Do, Bones? Go after them, of course!"

"What?" Spock's mask almost fell. "You must realise you made a mistake; sending a further party will only make matters worse," he said, almost with anger.

"I did not say I would send a party, Mr. Spock, nor do I intend to."

The Vulcan nodded, giving McCoy a satisfied glare. "Good," he murmured.

"I'm going myself."

"What?" It was McCoy's turn.

"And no-one, and I mean NO ONE, Spock, either goes with me, or follows, no matter what happens, and that's an order. If you don't hear from me within 12 hours you leave orbit, and don't come back."

"Jim, I'm volunteering..." McCoy began.

"No, Bones, thanks." Kirk grinned ruefully at the Doctor.

"Captain, I hardly think heroics is going to..." Spock began.

"No. You said it, my friend, believe me it's not heroics, but if I've made a mistake, well, I'll find out about it. I sent them down there." He punched his fist into his palm. "I'll rest for an hour, then I want you to give me a stim-shot, Bones. I need to keep going for 12 hours; after that, well, it won't matter much anyway." He looked at the Doctor. "Don't argue, Bones, please," he pleaded quietly. "Now, if you don't mind, gentlemen?" He lay down on the bunk, one arm over his face.

McCoy shook his head. "I'll be by later, Jim."

"Thanks, Bones." The door shut. Kirk didn't look around but rolled onto his face, his head resting on his arm. He dozed for a while then the intercom above his head whistled. He raised a weary arm and switched it on. "Kirk here!"

"Bones here, Jim, sorry if you'd dropped off..."

"No, no chance of that, I'm afraid," Kirk admitted.

"I don't like the idea of you going down on your own, Jim."

"Neither do I, Bones, but I'm over a barrel." He paused. "Spock's probably right and I can't damn him for that, but equally I won't leave them there...I couldn't live with not knowing," he said softly.

"I know, Jim, but one day that conscience, or heart, of yours will get you killed," McCoy informed him sourly.

"You're probably right, Bones, but unlike Spock I'm only Human," Kirk sighed.

"You don't like arguing with him, do you, Jim?"

"No. No, I don't. Especially when I'm not sure he isn't right! Anyway, don't forget that shot."

"All right, Jim. Rest now."

McCoy had just finished speaking to Kirk when the door buzzer went.

"Come."

Spock stood there. "May I come in, Doctor?" he asked formally.

"Yes, sit down, Spock." The Vulcan complied. "Well?" McCoy demanded.

"What can I do for you?"

"I'm worried about the Captain."

"So you should be!"

"I don't understand, Doctor." The Vulcan looked puzzled.

"No, maybe you don't, Spock."

"The Captain had no right to go against General Order No. 1; he sent six men down there, and now he is going to risk his own life. It's not..."

"Logical," McCoy finished for him. "I thought you'd outgrown all that, Spock."

"One can't throw off the habits of a lifetime," Spock murmured.

"No, I guess you can't. I'm sorry." The Doctor paused. "He is the Captain. He felt it was right to send that party. He also feels he can't desert them now, but you've manoeuvred him into a corner; he won't risk more lives. The only one he feels justified in throwing away is his own!"

The Vulcan stared at McCoy. "I did not mean to..."

"No, Spock, I don't suppose you did, but you know what Jim thinks about you, and I don't mean just your advice either." McCoy banged his desk. "Damn it, man, Command is bloody lonely anyway, and if he can't rely on his best friend to stand by him, what's left?"

"I don't..." began Spock.

"Can't you see he's admitted you were right? If he wasn't admitting that, Spock, he'd have an armed squad going down there right now." McCoy glared at him.

Spock nodded. Of course he was right. "I'll go and speak to him," he said.

"No, let him rest. He needs it - and you won't make him change his mind. Not now."

"Maybe not, Doctor, but I have to try."

"Well, if you must, but if he won't change his mind, at least make your peace before he goes. He has enough on his mind," he said gruffly.

The Vulcan nodded slightly and left.

The buzzer went at Kirk's door. "Come." He didn't move from his bunk as the door opened, expecting Dr. McCoy.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, Captain."

"Spock, I'm really not in the mood for another..."

The Vulcan interrupted. "I simply want to talk."

"O.K. I can't sleep anyway. Sit down."

Spock sat. Kirk rolled on one elbow and surveyed his friend. "I'm glad you've come," he admitted softly.

"Jim," Spock began. Kirk was surprised - he'd been formality itself for hours. He cocked his head and watched the Vulcan calmly. "Sulu's party should never have gone down, but your going alone isn't going to help matters either."

"In your opinion," Kirk said coldly.

"Yes." He paused. "In my opinion."

Kirk sat up. "Mr. Spock, contrary to what you think, I stand by my decision to send that party down."

Spock raised an eyebrow. He realised he'd used the wrong approach. Humans, he sighed to himself, and this Human in particular, could be most stubborn at times.

Kirk jumped to his feet. "I'm still the Captain." He turned and glared

angrily at his First Officer. "In twelve hours you'll be able to make the decisions, Spock; until then you'll follow mine."

"Jim, don't be..."

The buzzer went yet again. "Come!" said Kirk quickly.

McCoy walked in. "Don't tell me I've done it again?" he said, looking from one to the other.

"No, Bones, Mr. Spock was just going. Have you got that stim-shot?"

"Yes, Jim."

Spock walked slowly to the door. "You blew it, eh, Spock?" McCoy murmured. The Vulcan didn't answer as the door closed behind him.

"What was that about, Bones?" Kirk asked.

"Spock can be insufferable at times, Jim, I know, especially when he's right, but he does worry about you, though he'd never come out and admit it."

"When he's right, Bones? Not you, too?" Kirk demanded.

"Well, I'm only the Doctor around here, but..."

"But nothing, Bones. Give me that shot."

McCoy obliged. "Don't be pig-headed, nobody expects you to be right all the time."

Kirk strode to the door and left without a word. McCoy sighed and followed.

Kirk called into wardrobe and then made his way to the Transporter Room. McCoy and Spock were both there when he arrived.

Kirk turned to Spock. "I have entered full details in my log." Spock inclined his head gravely in acknowledgement. Kirk walked purposely to the transporter position without further words to his friends, his jaw set firmly.

McCoy coughed slightly. "Good luck, Jim."

"Thank you," Kirk murmured, his eyes momentarily meeting the dark alien ones of his friend, before they passed to McCoy and finally to Lt. Baxter at the controls. "Energize!" he said crisply. As he beamed down, Kirk was mentally wishing he could explain to his friends the certainty he felt, in his bones, intuition possibly, a feeling that Sulu and his party were in a lot of trouble and the Klingons were mixed up in it somewhere.

McCoy looked at Spock. "It's going to be a long twelve yours." The Vulcan didn't answer.

The fog was swirling all around him when Kirk materialised, cold and clammy. He strained his eyes to see, but it was impossible. Annoyed with himself for not checking the weather conditions, he set out in a northerly direction. He stopped. In the distance he could just make out a humanoid figure. It was at least eight feet tall. He moved cautiously towards it. One minute he was standing on the ground, the next he was held aloft, his feet dangling. He tried to wrench himself free, but could not. Twisting round he looked up into the cold metallic smooth face of a robot. It moved - Kirk felt the movement - but it was smooth and soundless. The arms of the eight-foot giant held him easily, and Kirk realised the foolishness of attempting to force an escape. He relaxed and tried to see something through the fog. Finally, he made out what appeared to be a group of buildings, he wasn't sure. They came to an entrance, natural or otherwise, Kirk didn't know. They began to descend. The air grew warm and heavy. It was pitch dark, no lights anywhere. Kirk realised the robot probably had a built-in ultra violet source, and could 'see' in ultra violet. How far they descended Kirk didn't know, but he knew suddenly they'd arrived. He heard the click and smooth sliding of heavy doors opening, and his captor carried him through.

Spock looked up as the buzzer went at his door. "Come." It opened and Dr. McCoy stepped through.

"Mind if I come in, Spock?"

The Vulcan indicated a chair. "What can I do for you, Doctor? I am busy."

"What are you going to do about Jim?"

"Do? I don't understand."

"You can't just sit here for twelve hours, Spock!"

"My orders were explicit, Doctor."

"And of course you'll carry them out, leave orbit and forget him, right?" McCoy snapped angrily.

"Doctor," the Vulcan said with patience. "Apart from our prime directive, the Captain saw fit to send Mr. Sulu and a party down there, and now he's gone himself. Also he left definite orders for non-interference." He gazed quietly at McCoy. "What would you have me do?"

"Spock, it's Jim we're talking about. He's your friend."

"An emotional approach is not going to help matters, Doctor. We are both Starfleet officers..."

"My God, you're a cold fish, Spock. I thought you'd got over all that."

"Over, Doctor?"

McCoy was trembling with rage. "You know what I mean," he shouted. "I'll go down myself..."

"No, you will not, Doctor. I am in command here under direct orders from the Captain, and you will not beam down - even if I have to put you in the brig. Is that clear?" His voice was ice cold.

"Perfectly." McCoy almost spat the words out. "Showing your true colours, eh?" he grated.

"What do you mean? I will not take..." Spock began darkly.

"Why, what are you going to do, Spock? Put me on report?"

The Vulcan took a deep breath. "Please try to control yourself."

"Control myself?" McCoy started, and stopped. He saw the look on the Vulcan's face, which was still in the shadows, the look he'd been trying to hide. "Spock," he said softly. "I seem to have a gift for putting my foot..."

The Vulcan averted his face. "It is all right, Doctor."

"Mr. Spock, it's not all right. I'm a fool."

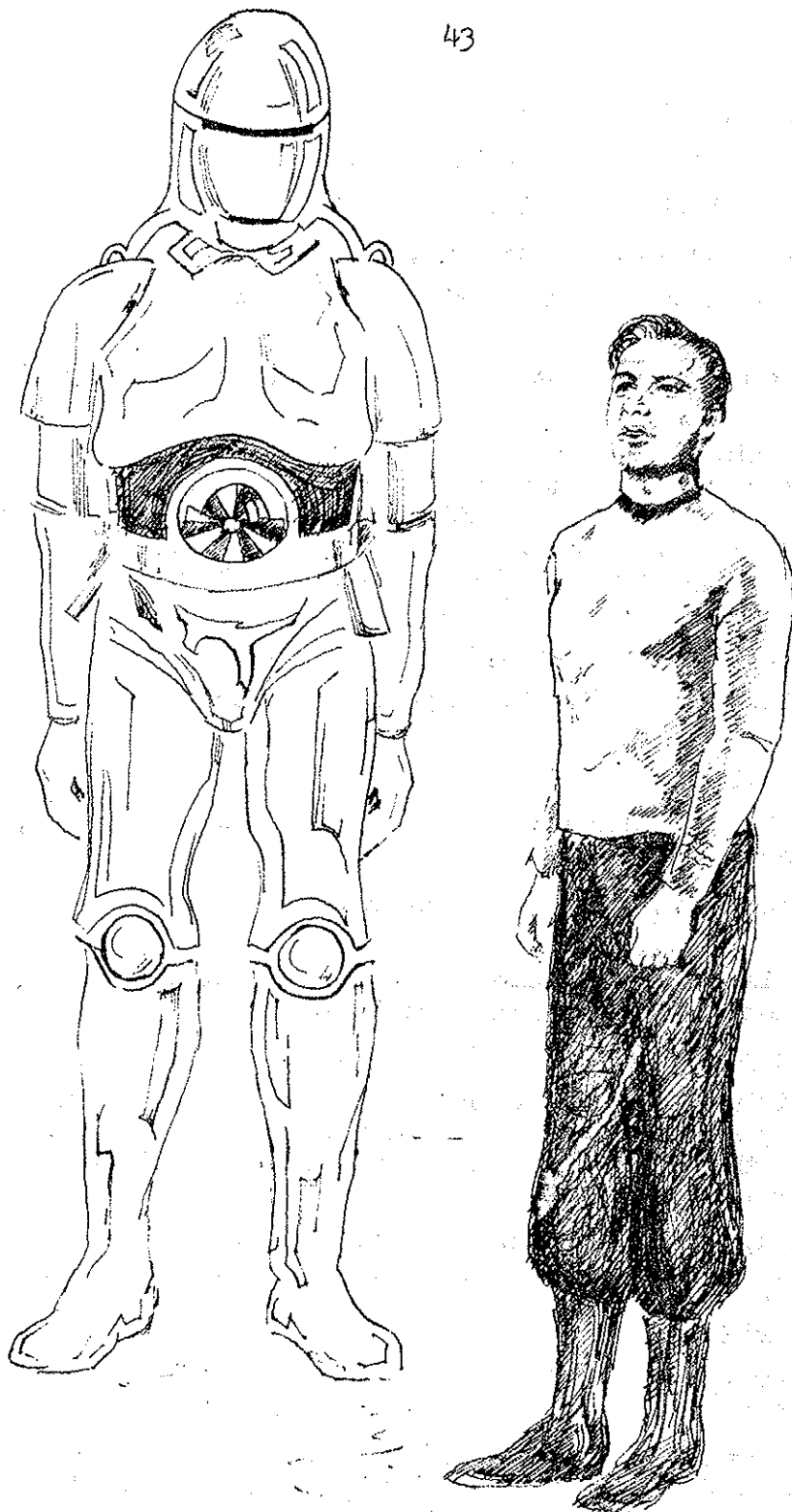
"I won't argue," Spock said quietly.

McCoy grinned. "I deserved that. What do you really intend to do?"

"I am under direct orders from the Captain for another ten hours and twenty five minutes. After that, I am in command." He raised an eyebrow.

McCoy nodded. He knew what the Vulcan meant, and he wasn't too sure he'd wait for the time limit either.

The robot deposited Kirk quite gently onto his feet, and he gazed round, slightly surprised. It was a very large laboratory. Two more robots were working at a long table; the one who'd just brought him in stood motionless behind him. Kirk shivered slightly, he still couldn't help feeling repulsed by these cold lifeless metal creatures, illogical though it was. He admitted it was one of the few things he almost feared, and about which he could still have nightmares. He took a firm grip on himself, and took an experimental step forward to



see if his captor would allow him free movement. Nothing happened. He turned and deliberately looked up into the metal face. "Who are you, and why have you brought me here?" he demanded. No response. "Where are my men?" he asked firmly.

"Your questions will be answered in due course, Captain."

Kirk spun round to where the voice had come from. A tall blond handsome man stood at the far end of the room. He had not been there before, and there was no door that Kirk could see. Kirk walked slowly forward approaching the man, whose skin was tanned a golden brown, and whose blue eyes watched him in turn.

"Why am I here?" Kirk asked again.

"For your safety, Captain. We could not protect you on the surface."

"Protect me from what?" he asked. "And where are my men?"

"Unfortunately, we could not reach the other Humans in time. They have them."

"They? Who are 'they'?" Kirk insisted.

"I think I had better explain, Captain."

"Yes, I think you had. By the way, what is your name?"

"I do not have a name in the strict sense of the word, but you can call me Abner."

"And what about the peasants on the surface, are they anything to do with you?"

Abner shook his head. "There are no peasants. We merely project an image of a simple culture to stop interference from people like yourself, but it is only a projection." Abner paused and continued. "We have been on this planet for thousands of your years, Captain. Our people found other planets that were more to their liking and apart from a few technicians - " and he indicated the robots " - they left behind, no-one remained."

Kirk nodded. "But you stayed," he murmured.

"No, Captain. Let me finish. A year ago a strange craft came into our Space."

"Klingons!" Kirk stated.

"Correct. Their leader is called Kaleef. We welcomed them, and at first everything appeared well, but..."

"But then they took over," Kirk interrupted. "It's the usual pattern. I've heard of this Kaleef."

"Yes, that is true. They have taken many of our technicians and are altering their programming." He shuddered visibly.

"Why didn't you fight back?" Kirk demanded.

"Against living beings?" Abner looked appalled at the suggestion. "Our people built many safeguards into the robots, as you call them. The most important of all is that no robot may harm any living or thinking creature. There are many other rules too."

"Sounds good," Kirk admitted. "But it's allowed you to get into this situation hasn't it? What changes are the Klingons making to the robots?" He gave a harsh laugh. "Let me guess. They're taking away the robot aversion to causing harm - am I right?"

"Yes," Abner agreed quietly. "Our Series III robots - " he pointed to the eight foot giant " - are practically indestructible."

Kirk looked at Abner. "I can understand them, especially from what you've told me - but what about you?" He looked in Abner's face. "You aren't restricted like them, and you must have armaments here of some kind, or at least the capability of making weapons and launching an attack?" He stared at the handsome face. Abner still did not betray his feelings. Spock might learn something from his facial control, he thought absently.

"I apologise, Captain, I thought you realised. I am a robot too," Abner said simply.

Kirk was no Vulcan - his face showed his shock. "I'm sorry, I should have realised." Kirk studied him carefully; perfect, no-one would ever guess. Even the moistness in the eyes... He shrugged. "Well, I'm not bound or tied by any rules, Abner. We'll soon get these Klingons sorted out. The planet doesn't belong to them, they've no right here."

"I'm sorry," Abner said gently. "Do I understand that you intend to use force to achieve their withdrawal?"

"Yeah," Kirk grinned, "and how. They don't understand anything else, believe

me, especially Kaleef, if I'm not mistaken." He stopped at the horror on Abner's face.

"I cannot allow you to do harm to another living creature, Captain."

It was the Human's turn to look shocked. "You'd stop us?" he demanded. "We're living creatures too, you'd have to use force against us then, wouldn't you?"

"Only sufficient to stop you attacking them," Abner agreed softly. "We do not wish to harm you either, but do not feel the small amount of force necessary to restrain you will hurt you. However, it is preferable to having you killing each other. But even the small amount of force necessary will do irreparable damage to some of these units." He spread his arms wide.

Kirk felt his temper rising. "All the potentials carefully weighed, eh, Abner?" He could almost hear the wheels clicking over and knew he was stymied. How could you reason with a machine whose thought patterns ran along pre-ordained lines. He was obviously not capable of initiating free thought any more than the other robots. "What do you intend to do with me, then?" Kirk asked finally.

"Keep you here where you will be safe," Abner stated.

"I must communicate with my ship. My crew will be worried," Kirk pleaded.

"No, it is better you do not speak to them. We have been monitoring your communications. You have left instructions for your ship to leave orbit in eight hours' time. That is good." Abner pointed to the door. "Please go through, Captain. You will find food awaiting you."

Kirk walked through with as much dignity as he could muster, knowing he would only be carried there like a baby should he refuse. One of the giants followed him in and took up a silent vigil at the door. Kirk walked to a table laden with food, but could not bring himself to eat. For a while he tried talking and questioning the robot, but gave up. It answered, but unlike Abner had a very limited vocabulary and only answered 'yes' or 'no'. Kirk lay down in frustration and finally slept.

Spock looked up as the door opened to admit Dr. McCoy. "I see you're ready!" McCoy looked at the Vulcan and cleared his throat. "Take care down there, Spock." He paused a little, embarrassed. "I don't want to lose both of you," he admitted huskily.

Spock's dark eyes gazed at him thoughtfully. "Why, Doctor," he replied gently, "I thought you know, I'm like the proverbial 'bad penny'." He raised a slightly challenging eyebrow as he turned to the door. He didn't hear the Doctor silently pray that for once the Vulcan was right.

Spock transported down, and straight into a robot's arms.

Kirk heard the noise inside the room he was in, and knew a fight of some description was taking place. He asked the robot what was happening; it was silent for a moment then said, "We are being attacked," but didn't move.

"Go help them," Kirk said.

"I must protect you, Master."

"You can protect me better by going and helping your..." He searched for a word. "...Companions," he finished. The robot was silent. "What's your name?" Kirk asked.

"I have no name, Master. My number is Z270 364."

"Right. Well, I'll call you 27." Kirk didn't want for an answer. "How do you know what's going on out there?" he demanded.

"I am aware," the robot answered simply.

Kirk nodded. "Of course," he murmured. "I should have guessed. You're all in radio communication with each other." Kirk looked with speculation at the robot. "I wish to leave this room," he stated.

"I cannot permit it, Master. It would be too dangerous for you out there."

"Who's fighting who?" Kirk demanded. Stupid question, he thought. Of course Abner and his robots against the Klingons' robots - they'd never be fighting the Klingons themselves. Abner at least seemed aware of their potential evil, but would still not go against his prime directive to preserve life, Klingon or otherwise. He suddenly realised that all had gone quiet outside. "What's happened, 27?" he asked at last.

"They come, Master."

"Who comes?" Kirk asked, dreading the answer.

"The other Masters," the robot replied. The doors opened and a tall Klingon strode through. Kirk had never seen him before, but he had no doubt in his mind that this was Kaleef. His reputation was as bad as Kor's for ruthlessness.

The Klingon was arrogance itself. "So!" He surveyed the Human with contempt. "You are the famous Captain James T. Kirk?" he said silkily.

"So!" replied Kirk in the same tone. "I take it you are the infamous Commander Kaleef!" He saw the flush of temper cross the Klingon's handsome face. "And what have you done to me men?" Kirk demanded harshly.

"You will find out shortly, Captain." The Klingon strutted around the room and turning to 27 smashed his chest plate with his fist. "Outside, boy, with the others," he ordered. The robot hesitated momentarily as though he was receiving instructions from another source, which in all probability he was, thought Kirk, remembering the intercommunication between the robots, and finally 27 turned and left the room.

The Klingons who had followed their leader into the room now took up positions on each side of Kirk. Kaleef grinned tightly. "You will accompany me, Kirk. We will talk later."

The Klingons grabbed his arms and hustled them out. Abner was standing in the outer chamber. "Do something!" Kirk begged as they passed, but the robot's face was completely devoid of expression.

The room he was taken to was big and well lit with a large fire at one end. Kaleef came in from another entrance and sat on a throne-like chair that was quite obviously not of Klingon origin, Kirk noted idly as his eyes raked the room. They riveted on the line of men shackled to the far wall.

"Sulu, are you all right?" he called.

"Aye, sir, at the moment," Sulu replied quickly, his eyes shining with renewed hope as he looked at his Captain. Kirk swore silently. They were all looking at him with that 'thank God it's the Captain, he'll sort it out' look in their eyes.

"Come closer, Captain, I need a few answers," Kaleef grinned.

"You'll get nothing from me!" Kirk snapped.

"No? Captain!" he laughed. "We'll see."

"We are not at war, Kaleef. I demand you release my men," Kirk began.

"You demand? You can demand nothing, Kirk," Kaleef replied.

"The Organians will not - "

"The Organians, Captain, are like old women. They will believe whatever we want them to believe."

Kirk shook his head. "You underestimate them," he said firmly.

"No, Kirk, we know them. Like you they are soft, too used to the good life, no struggle left in their lives, not like we Klingons.- struggling, striving, true warriors."

"Where have I heard that before?" Kirk said sarcastically. It fell on deaf ears.

Kaleef poured a drink into a tall glass. "Would you like a drink, Captain?"

"Not till you release my men and tell me what this is all about," Kirk declared.

The Klingon laughed, genuinely amused. "You do not understand the position you are in, Earther," he said softly, using the derogatory term employed by aliens who hated Humans. "However, I will show you how hopeless it really is." He turned to a guard. "Release them," he said casually, pointing to Sulu and the others. "Then return them to their ship." He grinned at Kirk as they were prodded out. "Your ship cannot move, Captain. I am simply having them removed from one prison to another."

"What do you mean?" Kirk rasped.

"Mean, Captain?" He drank deeply before he continued. "We have found a storehouse of knowledge here, Kirk. These tin soldiers - " and he laughed contemptuously " - that they left to guard this planet are pathetic creatures, they don't fight, only serve." He paused. "The weapons and power on this planet are far in advance of anything the Empire - or your Federation - has, and now I have it all! I can wipe out your ship with the touch of a button - would you like me to show you?" he asked.

"No. No, I wouldn't," Kirk said quickly.

"Good, then we understand each other, Kirk." He emptied his glass. "Not to business." He stretched languidly. "You will order your men to obey my orders."

"Never," Kirk replied.

"Oh, but you will, Captain. I need your ship to carry - " he grinned slyly " - certain merchandise from here to the Empire by the quickest route, which is through Federation space. You can think up a good excuse for Starfleet Command, Captain, and no-one will question your presence."

"I'll see you in hell first," Kirk stated.

"No, Kirk, but if you don't, you'll see your First Officer there!"

Kirk started. "What do you mean?"

"I'll show you," Kaleef replied. He pressed a button and a door behind him opened and Spock was brought in between three Klingon guards.

"Are you all right, Spock?" Kirk demanded.

"Perfectly, Captain," he replied formally.

"One of you is going to break, Captain, and I don't much care which one."

"What do you mean?" Kirk whispered.

"Well, my dear Captain, it's simple. Either of you will do, the Captain or the First Officer. One of you will take the ship, the other will remain here, as my guest."

"You're mad!" Kirk gasped. "We'd die first."

"I'm afraid not, Captain, but you'll wish it was that easy." Kaleef hesitated. "I have already put my proposals to the Vulcan. He gave me the same answer." Kirk smiled at Spock. "But we will see," Kaleef said ominously and he looked at Spock. "I cannot understand how you, Commander Spock, coming from Vulcan, can stand these Earthers!"

"I am half Human," Spock replied.

"Yes, but not to be seen, Spock. You look Vulcan, you act and think Vulcan, and you have chosen to be called a Vulcan!"

Spock nodded agreement.

"Yet you serve on a Human ship and call this Earther 'friend'." He stroked his chin thoughtfully. "Strange." He looked at both Kirk and Spock for a long moment. "Perhaps you are not all that you seem, Spock? We will see!" He signalled his men. "Fasten the Vulcan to the wall." The complied quickly. "Take the Human out there where his friend has a good view." He chuckled and Kirk felt a cold shiver run down his back. He knew what was going to happen.

He looked at the Vulcan's expressionless face. "No matter what, Spock," he said firmly, "don't do it. That's an order."

Kaleef stepped up to him and slapped his face with the back of his hand, drawing blood from the corner of Kirk's mouth.

Kirk realised that Spock hadn't replied.

Kaleef grinned at him. "Fasten him up," he ordered. The Klingon guards stepped forward. Kirk saw a bar suspended from the ceiling in the middle of the room; it was lowered while his hands were tied to it and then raised so that his feet only just touched the floor.

"The shirt." Kaleef gestured mildly and the nearest guard moved over and tore it from Kirk's body.

"If you'd asked, I would have removed it myself," Kirk stated quietly.

"Kaleef!" Spock said suddenly. "Starfleet will only take notice of the Captain, not the First Officer."

"You wish to change places with him, Vulcan?" Kaleef grinned. "I am sorry. You would be able to hide the pain, the Human will not. You will hear him scream to you to help him. You will see and hear it all, Vulcan - he will beg!"

"In a pig's eye," Kirk said softly. "Don't give in, Spock - I want your word." The Vulcan remained silent. "I want your promise," Kirk demanded.

Kaleef laughed.

"Spock!" Kirk's voice was strangled. The Vulcan nodded slightly and Kirk sighed in relief.

"Before we begin, Commander Spock, I will tell you exactly what is required of you. It is really quite simple. You will take the Enterprise to where I tell you and then return here. If you do this the Captain will be spared unnecessary pain."

"And when we return?" Spock asked.

"You will be allowed to leave with the Captain," Kaleef stated.

"Spock, you know he's lying," Kirk said firmly. The Vulcan didn't answer.

"Well," Kaleef sighed, "since you leave me no alternative, gentlemen, we must see how brave our Captain is." He sat down. "You are well trained in Starfleet, Captain, and unfortunately we do not have Kor's truth sifter here. However, we do have certain little surprises of our own." He nodded to someone behind Kirk's back. "We will start with a few older, more primitive methods first, just to soften you up, Captain."

"Get on with it," Kirk grated, knowing the suspense and build-up were all part of Kaleef's psychological strategy.

"Patience, Captain, it will start soon enough," he said softly. "And you will wish it hadn't."

The whip cut into his back viciously. It came without warning and Kirk almost cried out but managed to stifle it.

"Good, Kirk, very good. My compliments," Kaleef said with a slight touch of admiration as the whip cut into Kirk's back several times more. Kirk managed to keep the pain from showing on his face, knowing that Spock's eyes were watching him. Kaleef held up his hand. "Enough. I don't want you to get bored, Kirk."

His body reverberated with pain, suspended from his now lifeless arms. Kirk concentrated all his effort on keeping his face calm; through half closed eyes he watched the Klingon guard bending over the fire. So that's next, he thought, a small knot of apprehension in his stomach sending a wave of nausea through him, and he fought hard to keep it from reaching his face.

Kaleef smiled. "You have a choice, Earther. We brand the Vulcan, or you brand yourself."

"Myself?" Kirk whispered. "How?"

"Undo one hand," Kaleef instructed. A guard stepped forward and complied. Kirk felt the blood tingling through his numb muscles as his arm fell to his side. After a moment or two he flexed his muscles and fingers. "The choice is yours," Kaleef said coldly. "But if you try anything, Kirk, he dies." And he pointed at Spock.

The Vulcan looked at the Human's calm face which, he knew, was maintained only for his sake. "Captain, no!" he said tensely. Kirk looked grimly at him.

"Don't worry, Spock," he said with more certainty than he felt.

The Klingon came towards him with the iron, white hot from the flames. He held it out.

"Well, Kirk?" Kaleef demanded. Kirk took it. For a moment he considered throwing it at Kaleef, but remembered the threat against Spock, and knew that the small momentary satisfaction would not compensate for what would happen to the Vulcan.

"No, Jim," Spock said again.

"Sorry, my friend, I can't oblige," Kirk said softly. "Any particular place?" he asked, with an effort at sarcasm.

"Obviously I wouldn't expect you to destroy your looks, Captain." Kaleef paused. "I too like the ladies," he said with meaning. "The chest, perhaps?"

Kirk took a deep breath and purposely looked at Kaleef to keep his eyes from meeting Spock's. Also it helped him to concentrate on the hate he needed to stop the pain from registering on his face. Apart from Spock, he didn't want to give the Klingon any satisfaction either.

Spock felt the muscles in his face jumping, and controlled it savagely, his eyes not leaving the Human's face, knowing the reason Kirk would not meet his eyes. He watched silently, not letting the emotion which he could not deny show on his face. They all watched in fascinated horror as the Human placed the red hot iron to his chest, the smell of burning flesh filled the air and it was the iron hitting the floor that allowed the Vulcan to release his breath as Kirk lost all sensation and passed out, his body suspended by his wrist.

"Let him down," Spock snarled.

"Does it bother you, Vulcan? Are you prepared to agree?" Kaleef smiled. "You can stop all this - it's entirely up to you."

"No, Spock." Kirk's voice was weak as he straightened up. For the first time his eyes met the Vulcan's

Kaleef strode over and twisted Kirk's free arm up his back and jerked his head around to face him. "Heat up the iron," he instructed the guard. "Very good, Kirk. I never thought you Earthers had it in you. My congratulations - the Vulcan could not do better." His voice was genuinely admiring. "I don't like breaking a man like you, but I swear I will, and you'd better believe me." His alien eyes bored into Kirk's hazel ones.

"I believe you'll try," Kirk murmured. "But you believe me, you won't succeed."

"Then you'll die," Kaleef stated evenly.

Kirk nodded his head slowly. "That's right, Kaleef. I'll die."

The door opened. "No, you will not die."

All eyes turned to face Abner. He had two giant robots behind him. Kaleef laughed loudly. "You can't do anything, Robot, your programming won't allow it."

Abner stepped forward. "No," he agreed. "But they can," and he indicated the two giants who walked purposely forward. "You altered their programming yourself," Abner told Kaleef quietly. Kaleef retreated before them, the other Klingons flanking him.

"Stop!" he ordered. "I am your Master! Stop!"

They ignored him, their red eyes glowing. Kaleef and his fellow Klingons drew their disruptors.

"Do not try," Abner warned them. "You will die - and you cannot hurt them."

Kaleef was no fool. He nodded. "Put them away," he instructed sharply. Abner did not speak, but he had obviously communicated with the other robots. They pushed Kaleef and his men, very gently, Kirk thought, to where Spock was chained. The Vulcan was released and they fastened up the Klingons. Spock moved quickly to Kirk's side. Abner released his wrist from the bar. Kirk had to lean heavily on Spock as his legs gave way. The Vulcan picked him up effortlessly.

"Put me down, Spock," he said quickly. "I'll all right." The Vulcan ignored him and carried him to Kaleef's chair. "Thanks," Kirk murmured, Spock nodded, and examined Kirk's wounds. "What about the Klingons?" Kirk asked Abner.

"The others are back on their ship, Captain, as these will be shortly."

"But how did you do it?" Kirk demanded.

Abner held up his hand. "A moment, please, Captain." He looked at the two giants who turned wordlessly and unfastened the Klingons and escorted them out. "I have sent them back to their ship. He will be told that if they come here again we will destroy them along with their ship."

"I thought you couldn't hurt living creatures?" Kirk interrupted.

"That is correct, Captain. However, we can bluff."

"My God - that was dangerous!" Kirk murmured.

"Not really," Abner replied. "Kaleef tampered with the programming on several of our units, but our true masters built other safeguards into the circuits. It was the tampering which brought these safeguards into play."

"Yes," Kirk agreed, "but you weren't tampered with. Surely if the robots had tried to do harm to even the Klingos, you would have had to stop them?"

Abner nodded. "True, Captain, and that is where the bluff came in. You knew that, but they did not."

"I'm glad they didn't," Kirk replied quickly.

"Jim," Spock interrupted. "I feel you should return to the ship and see Dr. McCoy."

Kirk looked at the Vulcan. "I think you're right, Mr. Spock," he agreed quietly, knowing the Vulcan could see the pain he was trying to hide.

"I am sorry you came to harm on our planet, Captain," Abner stated. "I trust your next visit here will be more pleasant."

Kirk smiled. "I'm sure it will be, Abner," and he instinctively held out his hand. The robot's hand was like warm living flesh, it closed to the right

degree of firmness and then released Kirk's hand gently. The Human was surprised that he did not feel repulsed by it, nor even strange, in talking to this machine like a living entity. He turned to Spock.

"Let's go and mind the store," he grinned. "As the peasants on the surface are only a projection, and don't exist at all, at least I haven't violated the Prime Directive." He looked at Spock with a twinkle in his eye. They both knew that no apologies were necessary on either side. The Vulcan extended his arm and Kirk took it gratefully as Spock spoke briefly into his communicator and they sparkled out.

DREAMS AND MEMORIES by Gillian Catchpole

Cry no more,
 Let tears be dried forever.
 It is right to find fresh life in a new awakening.
 Earth, most pleasing of planets, I alone remember you.
 One by one have the others chosen to forget,
 For them time slowly faded out your beauty
 While inside of me did it intensify.
 Outstretch your arms,
 Summon the wind,
 Abandon your dreams and depart from sorrow.
 The aging memories of fear and adoration
 Could no longer be supported by the hope of your return.
 I still dream of your love, my children,
 I alone will rejoice at your arrival.
 Have faith in your renewal,
 Entrust your spirit to the wind,
 Be carried homeward to the stars.
 Why my children must I wait so long?
 The ancient pleasures together we can restore,
 As I protect so shall you worship.
