



LOG ENTRIES

34

contents

Time Does Fly by C.A. Abbott	Page 3
A Matter of Diplomacy by Josie Timmins	Page 7
In Love We Trust by Verna May Long	Page 20
The Decision by Patricia Keen	Page 34
The Velvet Sky, The Jewelled Stars by Linda Green	Page 36
Mind Snatch by Mark G. Gregory	Page 37
Captain James T. Kirk by Gillian Catchpole	Page 52

Artwork - Cover by Sandy Sapatka
Page 2 by Mark French
P27, 31 by Roo

Editor - Sheila Clark
Assistant Editor - Valerie Piacentini
Typing - Valerie Piacentini
Proofreading - Sheila Clark
Printing - Janet Quarton (and James T.)
Collating - Sheila's Chain Gang - Lorraine Goodison, Alison Rooney, Cory King,
Hilde McCabe, and all the others who asked what they could do to
help.

A STAG Publication.

STAG Committee - Janet Quarton (President), Sheila Clark, Beth Hallam,
Sylvia Billings, Valerie Piacentini.

Log Entries 34, price £1.10 inside the U.K., is put out by the STAR TREK
Action Group and is available from -

Sheila Clark
6 Craigmill Cottages
Strathmartine
by Dundee
Scotland.

Foreign rates - U.S., \$5.50 (£2.50) airmail; Australia, £2.75 airmail;
Europe and all countries surface, \$3.50 (U.S.) or £1.50. If you pay by
dollar cheque/bank draft, please add \$1.00 per total order to cover bank
charges.

All rights are reserved to the writers and artists. Anyone wishing to
reprint any of the material herein is asked to obtain permission in writing first.
It is understood that this only applies to original material herein, and that no
attempt is made to supercede any rights held by Paramount, NBC, BBC or any other
holders of copyright in STAR TREK material.

(C) STAG August 1980. 400 copies.

Hello, and welcome to Log Entries 34.

First, I must apologise for the increase in price - this is due to a 10% increase in the cost of stencils, paper and ink. Inflation spares no-one, I'm afraid.

Sheila has already mentioned that because of the very high standard of many competition entries, some of the non-winners are really excellent stories in their own right. This issue, we feature two of them.

"A Matter of Diplomacy", by Josie Timmins, was an entry in the competition about strange happenings on the Enterprise. The part of King Berridas would have taxed even Karloff's ingenuity.

"The Decision", by Patricia Keen, came in response to our request for the reason why Spock went back to Vulcan. This competition, in particular, was very difficult to judge.

For Stagcon in April '81 we have planned an innovation - the fiction and poetry winners will be announced at the opening ceremony. The winning stories and poems will be printed in a zine which will be on sale at the con; commended stories will also be included. To allow for printing, the closing date for the competition will be in January. There will be no entry fee.

We are obviously hoping for a large number of entries, so if you have any ideas, please start writing!

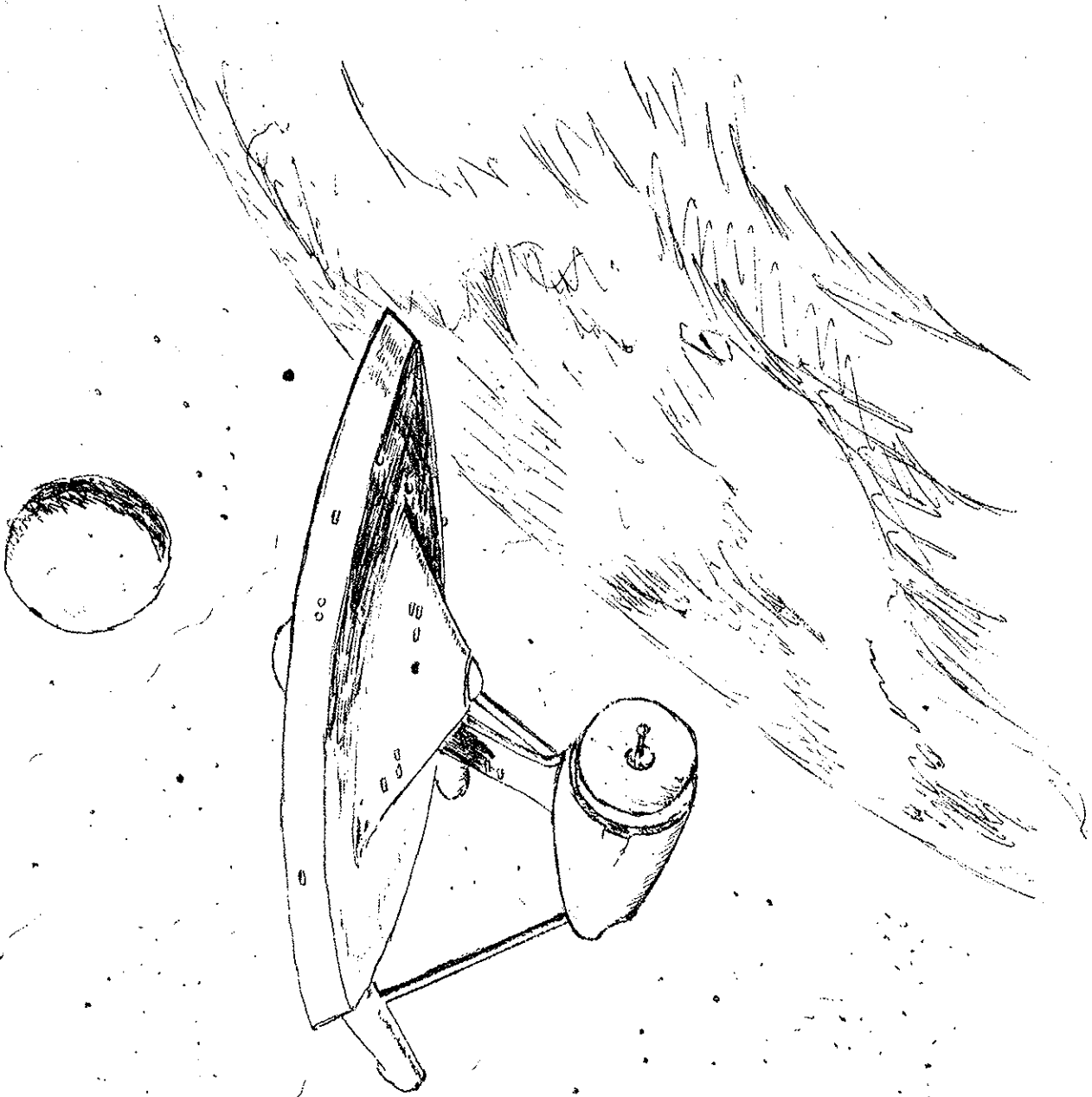
For entry forms and full details, please contact :

Mrs. Sylvia Billings, 49, Southampton Rd., Far Cotton, Nothampton.

Please enclose a stamped addressed envelope.

Now, I'll leave you to enjoy the zine. Happy reading,

Valerie



1951
H. H. H.

TIME DOES FLY by G. A. Abbott

The Enterprise was on a special scientific expedition to enter a split in the fabric of space. The ship moved closer towards the split; no stars were visible inside it - it looked awesome, like the mouth of a subterranean cavern.

Captain Kirk was sitting in the command chair studying the picture on the main viewing screen. His concentration was broken when he realised that Mr. Sulu was speaking to him.

"Sir, we'll be entering the split in two point seven minutes."

"Thank you, Mr. Sulu. Put us on yellow alert."

Lights flashed throughout the ship to signify yellow alert.

As the Enterprise entered the split it seemed to hit a brick wall. The ship suddenly lurched forward as if knocked onto the tip of the saucer-shaped hull. Mr. Sulu flew over the top of the helm console, but was unhurt. Kirk immediately ordered full damage reports to be made and any repairs carried out.

"Mr. Spock, analysis please," requested Kirk.

"Sir, it appears that the ship hit a 'door' in space and sprung it open; sensors now show that the door has closed, which means we are trapped. However, it is not as simple as that. Apparently the split was also a time warp. We are now two thousand years into our own future."

Captain Kirk was about to say something when Mr. Sulu interrupted.

"Captain, a ship has just appeared on the screen."

"Can you identify it, Mr. Sulu?"

"No, sir."

"Red alert, Lt. Uhura."

"Aye, sir."

Klaxons rang throughout the ship as members of the crew ran to their stations to prepare for the danger that the red alert signified.

The ship on the screen had a long, flat body with a long protruding neck with a head on it that resembled the head on a Klingon battlecruiser.

"Sir, they're hailing us on standard Federation frequencies."

"Put it on audio please, Lt. Uhura."

"Aye, sir," replied Lt. Uhura.

"You will identify yourselves, or be destroyed," were the first words that boomed out from the bridge's various speakers. The voice was strong and resonant.

"This is Captain James T. Kirk, commanding the Federation Starship Enterprise."

Kirk was about to say something else, but was cut off by the voice, which said, "Identify your point of origin."

Kirk explained, "We are from the planet Earth." Once again he was cutt off before he could finish his explanation.

"Ycu will surrender to us."

"Mr. Sulu, prepare main phaser banks, but do not fire until I give the order."

"Aye aye, Captain," replied Sulu.

Captain Kirk then proceeded to answer the last statement that the voice had made.

"I will not surrender this ship to you. We are on a peaceful mission and mean you no harm, but if you persist in your harassment we will be forced to defend ourselves."

The voice boomed out again, sounding irritated this time. "Either you surrender now, or we will use force."

"Mr. Sulu, fire main phasers."

The blue lines of pure energy shot across the viewing screen and hit the alien ship dead on the nose. A few seconds later the voice spoke again.

"That was very foolish."

That was all the voice said before Mr. Sulu said, "Sir, all systems failing, we're losing power in the warp engines. Only essential systems are now functioning properly."

"Mr. Spock, have you any explanation?"

"Sir, it seems, according to information collected before the sensors ceased to function, that we are the victims of a highly effective disablement beam, which stops all functions except those essential to the preservation of life."

"Can you neutralise this beam?" asked Kirk.

"No, sir, not without more information on its structure, which due to the failure of the sensors is now impossible. I suggest therefore that we spend our time trying to talk our way out of our present situation."

The voice boomed out again. "Captain, you are now powerless, your ship has been neutralised. Your ship will be impounded, and you and your crew will be transported to the detention centre on Varta II where you, Mr. Spock, and your ship's engineer Mr. Scott will be questioned. It will then be decided what your future is, depending of course on your answers to our questions."

The detention centre was the only building in the immediate area. It was semi-circular, its walls were what looked like wood, yet then again it looked like stone. This puzzled Kirk - he knew he'd seen this substance before, yet he could not recall where.

The room, or rather cell, to which they were taken was empty apart from three bunks along one wall. The room was fairly big, and again the walls were made out of this strange substance. Kirk didn't waste any time in getting Mr. Spock's analysis.

"Mr. Spock, what do you think these walls are made of?"

"This substance seems familiar, yet I cannot... Ahh! I remember where I have seen it before; do you remember when we were on the planet Takos? We had just beamed down to do a routine science analysis check on the planet, when there was an earth tremor, and the ground split open about two metres in front of us. When we went to the edge of the split we noticed that the planet was not what it seemed; it had been artificially made. There was about five metres of top soil, and the rest as far as we could see was made up of this substance."

"Yes, I remember now, because our tricorders could not get any readings on any frequency setting."

Just then the door slid open and they got the first good look at their jailer. It was a humanoid form, yet it had slight tendencies to look more like a Romulan or a Klingon. It stood about two metres away from them and in line with the door, as if it was frightened and ready to run and the first sign of aggression from its prisoners. It spoke in its strange, very deep, resonant voice - not the kind of voice you'd expect from a being that looked so fragile.

"Kirk, Spock and Scott, you will follow me."

It turned smartly and walked out; Kirk Spock and Scott looked briefly at each other, and followed.

They were led to a room similar to the one they had left previously, except that it was larger. There was a bench in the centre with four beings seated

behind it. In front of the bench were three chairs.

The being on the far right said, "Please be seated."

Kirk, Spock and Scott sat down.

"You claim that you come from the planet Earth. Do you still wish this to be included in the records of the trial?" said the being that had shown them into the room.

"I'm afraid I don't understand; we do come from the planet Earth, so why should we wish this fact to be hidden?"

"Let me explain, then, Captain Kirk. The planet Earth was destroyed one thousand six hundred years ago when its own satellite - I believe it was called Moon - was hit by an asteroid. This threw the satellite off its axis and it crashed into the Earth, which was also knocked off its axis. Because of this the Earth spun closer towards the sun and eventually disintegrated."

It took a few minutes before Kirk fully understood the implications of what had just been said.

"Do you still wish to keep up this pretence, or are you going to tell us the real reason why you have entered this region of space?"

Kirk requested that Mr. Spock should answer that question, and his request was granted after a discussion between the beings on the bench.

Mr. Spock stood up and began to explain. "May I begin by insisting that we do in fact originate from the Earth, everybody that is except myself. I originate from the planet Vulcan. However, I will now explain how we got into this situation. We were sent by the United Federation of Planets on a scientific expedition to investigate a natural phenomenon that had occurred. It was a split in the fabric of space, and the thing that made it so unusual was the fact that our sensors could not pick up anything when we probed the split. It was as if the split was where nothing existed, a dead universe. However, when we entered the split it became apparent that this universe was inhabited. Sensor readings showed that the split was in fact a door into the future, an airlock between what is, what was, and what will be. That is how we got into this area of space."

"Very good, Mr. Spock - I admire the way you tell stories."

"May I inform you of the fact that every word I spoke was the truth, and also of the fact that Vulcans do NOT lie."

"How can you expect us to believe your story when you don't have one fact to support it? The facts are, as I see them, that you were sent here by an intelligent life form to sabotage something," said the being that had been sitting quietly at one end of the bench.

"May I have a word in private with Mr. Spock?" requested Captain Kirk.

"Yes," replied the first being.

Kirk and Spock began to whisper. When they had finished Captain Kirk stood up.

"You are, as we believe, the judges of this court. We have got all the evidence you need to prove that what Mr. Spock said was true, but to present our evidence we request that the court adjourns to the Enterprise."

"What is the source of your evidence?" asked one of the beings.

"It is the ship's memory banks. The memory banks record everything that happens whilst we are on our mission."

"How do we know that you have not changed the memory banks to fit your story?"

"The memory banks cannot be adjusted as they record everything that happens on board the Enterprise - therefore they would also record the person who adjusted the memory banks. They are also locked into the alarm system on board the ship, so any attempt to change the memory banks and that's it - there are

phaser points covering every part of the ship's bridge. Once the alarm goes off, the phasers fire, and anyone on the bridge would be killed. There is no way to short the alarm, or switch it off - if you check the circuit diagrams of the ship you will find that this is true."

"Very well, we will transport to your ship to hear your evidence."

On board the Enterprise the judges listened to the memory banks, and also watched them. When the memory banks had been heard they all transported back to the detention centre to hear the verdict.

"Captain Kirk, Mr. Spock and Mr. Scott, we have decided that due to the efficiency of a ship such as yours, particularly its memory banks, you were not lying and you have told the truth all the way through this trial. I believe therefore that we owe you an explanation about what has happened in the two thousand years that you have missed.

We are partly Human, but we also have Romulan and Klingon ancestors. After the destruction of Earth the Federation collapsed due to the lack of organisation caused by the loss of so many main offices. The Klingons and Romulans didn't waste any time in finishing off the last of the Federation's ships such as yours. After they had completed this they turned on Federation outposts, almost completely destroying the Human race.

However, against all odds a few survived and in time they interbred with Romulans, Klingons and others. Wars raged for two or three hundred years until another Federation was set up. We are its chief judges. It works as well as yours did, and although it is at times more uncivilized I believe it will last until eternity. You are welcome to move into the cities and take up residence, or you can go to one of our outposts."

"Thank you for the offer, but we would just like our ship back so that we can, if possible, return to our own time," said Mr. Scott, who had just sat back and listened all through the trial.

"If that is all you want, then we say goodbye. You may return to your ship at any time you want to now. You will find your crew waiting, and also your ship in perfect working order."

Captain Kirk got out his communicator and requested that they be beamed up at once.

Once on the bridge they got to work on finding a way back to their own time.

"Mr. Spock, have you come up with an answer to our problem?"

"Yes, Captain."

"Well, don't keep it to yourself."

"It is all a matter of time, sir. In exactly two days three hours and forty-three minutes the split will reopen for twelve point two minutes, at which time we will be able to pass through into our own time."

The Enterprise made the journey safely. Unwillingly Kirk, Spock and Scott all kept the promise they had made never to tell anyone what they were told in the courtroom - not even Starfleet Command.

+++++

SPOCK : I can't leave you, Christine!

CHAPEL : Does this mean you're falling in love with me at last?

SPOCK : No, it means that you are standing on my foot.

+++++

A MATTER OF DIPLOMACY by Josie Timmins

The smartly-dressed little man who stepped from the shuttlecraft and walked briskly towards Kirk and Spock had all the self-assurance of a veteran Federation diplomat. Kirk moved forward with a smile of greeting.

"Welcome aboard, Ambassador. May I present my First Officer, Mr. Spock?"

Ambassador Crabbe looked up at the two men and returned Kirk's smile with a slight twitch of his own lips. Smiling was a habit he'd almost forgotten over the last three years.

"I'm very pleased to meet you at last, gentlemen, but..." He looked over his shoulder towards the shuttlecraft where a movement was discernable, and then lowered his voice to a whisper. "I must remind you that this voyage may be difficult, and tact and diplomacy are **absolutely** vital. Please make every allowance for your passengers."

"We are well-used to dealing with aliens, Ambassador." Kirk tried not to feel annoyed, but he had already been lectured on this subject when he had contacted Crabbe the previous evening.

They turned back to the shuttlecraft where something that looked like a small mobile wigwam had emerged, and was now kneeling with its face touching the deck in an attitude of homage. Another wigwam was descending. It was brightly coloured and about the size of an eight-year-old child.

Ambassador Crabbe's small stature had been an embarrassment to him during his long career, but for this last mission he had been perfectly suited. He escorted the wigwam towards Captain Kirk.

As the introductions were made Kirk found himself studying a very strange little alien. The tent-like garment, which completely hid the body and limbs of the man, was woven in stripes of blue, red and yellow. A matching conical hat almost hid the creature's head, but the visible part of the face was decidedly repellent. It seemed to be made of crumpled brown leather, and the gleam in the narrow black eyes was hostile.

Trying to look pleasant, Kirk said, "Welcome aboard, Your Eminence. We hope to make your journey with us both happy and comfortable."

The Zungu's gravelly voice came from a slit hidden in the folds of his face.

"We do not look to you for happiness or comfort, Captain Kirk," he said abruptly. "The priests of Klopsi are used to hardship, and happiness is of no concern to us."

Kirk's smile remained fixed. "Then I trust you will find your accomodation satisfactory, sir."

"Our needs are very simple, Captain. We will cause you little inconvenience."

The little man's eyes glittered and bored into Kirk's head. The look triggered off a buzzing in his brain which stopped the moment the Zungu transferred his gaze to Spock's face. There was a silent pause, and then,

"You are not like these others. You have the power - the power of the mind."

"To a limited extent only, sir," Spock replied quietly.

Kirk looked from one to the other in bewilderment, but at that moment there was movement behind them and they all turned to look at the shuttlecraft.

The small wigwam - who was actually another priest - was still in his position of homage, and two more were climbing from the shuttlecraft door. Between them they carried a litter bearing a round object covered with the same brightly coloured cloth that the priests were wearing.

"Behold - King Berridas!" intoned the Zungu, and bowed deeply. Crabbe also inclined his head, while Kirk and Spock stood to attention.

"Now we can proceed," said the Zungu, without further comment.

It was a strange procession that made its way slowly through the ship to Deck 6 where the priests of Klopsi were to be housed. Spock led the way, followed by the litter bearers with their burden. After them came the Zungu and his acolyte - the little priest who had so willingly pressed his face to the floor - while Crabbe and Kirk brought up the rear.

The crew had already been warned that important visitors were expected that day, and those who met the procession behaved extremely well in the circumstances. Aliens were not an uncommon sight on the Enterprise, but there was something definitely odd about these particular aliens. The oddest thing of all was the coloured ball being borne so reverently on the litter. Kirk knew only that 'King Berridas' was the greatest king ever to govern the Klopsi people. He had been dead for over 400 years, and it was his mummified remains that were inside the ball. Apparently the mummy was a gift to the Federation from the people of Klopsi. Kirk hoped that Ambassador Crabbe would be able to throw some light on the situation. For the life of him he couldn't imagine what the Federation would do with a mummified king.

After a brief inspection of the cabin, the Zungu declared himself satisfied with the accomodation. The fact that four priests and a mummy would be sharing accomodation intended for one adult bothered Kirk, but that was what the Zungu had specified, and he was unwilling to risk another rebuff.

"We do not wish to be disturbed, Captain," croaked the High Priest. "We require only that water and raw fruit or vegetables be placed at our door each day. There should be no need for further communication between us."

Kirk covered his feeling of intense relief at this news with a look of disappointment. "I had hoped that Your Eminence would honour us with your presence at dinner tonight. My senior officers are looking forward to meeting you."

The Zungu was not deceived. "We do not look to you for company, Captain, and your people will be more comfortable without our presence." He turned away, and a furious Kirk found himself facing a closed door.

"Steady now, Captain," murmured Crabbe, pulling him further down the corridor. "The Zungu does not mean to be rude - it is just his manner. He is very much against Klopsi joining the Federation."

Kirk took a deep breath and straightened up. "If you say so, Ambassador, but the sooner we reach Starbase 17 the better."

"A mere eight days," soothed the Ambassador, "and your part of the journey will be completed. You may even be spared any more meetings with the Zungu. The priests are likely to remain locked in their cabin for the duration of the voyage, and I will act as intermediary if they should need anything."

Kirk and Spock escorted Ambassador Crabbe to his quarters further down the corridor. Kirk smiled down at the diplomat.

"You have a difficult job, sir, and I do not envy you this particular task."

Crabbe permitted himself a wry smile. "I have suffered the Zungu for three years now, Captain, and we are still a long way from Federation Headquarters. But diplomacy will conquer even the High Priest eventually - I'm sure of that."

With the Ambassador safely in his cabin, they made their way to the turbolift. As the doors opened and the two men stepped inside Kirk felt a hefty blow in the middle of his back, and he staggered forward, hitting the back wall of the lift with his shoulder. Shaken for a moment, he suddenly realised that Spock's arms were holding him up, and he was asking what had happened.

"Spock - I don't know how - but I was pushed!"

"There was no-one else around, Captain. Perhaps you tripped?"

"Dammit, Spock, I do know the difference! I was pushed." He rubbed his shoulder thoughtfully. "Well, it felt like being pushed..."

He refused medical attention, saying that he was merely bruised, and returned to his own quarters. But he was puzzled all the same.

Ambassador Crabbe was a changed man when they met him later at dinner.

"Gentlemen, I can't tell you how good it feels to be among civilised people again after three years of incarceration on Klopsi! I admit my exile was self-imposed, but the Federation wanted Klopsi and I knew I was the man for the job. Other men had tried and failed, but I knew I would succeed eventually."

McCoy grimaced. "If what I've heard about the Zungu is typical of the inhabitants of Klopsi, Ambassador, I wonder if it was worth all the trouble?"

"The Zungu is a law unto himself, Doctor. The majority of the people are hard-working and amiable. Besides which, Klopsi is a positive treasure house of rare minerals - useless to its own simple farmers, but of inestimable value to the Federation."

"How simple are the people?" pursued the doctor.

"Theirs is an unmechanised society, but they are far from primitive. Four hundred years ago King Berridas founded a centralised world government which works exceedingly well. A ruling Council of Ministers is elected by the people, with the King as figurehead. If the Council is at deadlock over any issue then the King may intervene. On the whole Klopsi is an admirable place. There are no class distinctions, although the Royal Family does have special privileges."

"Where do the priests fit into society?" asked Spock.

"Ah..." Crabbe shook his head sadly, "there we have the one anachronism. The priests act as religious ministers and political advisors. They are above the law. They are considered specially blessed because they have the 'gift of the mind'. In other words - they are telepathic."

Kirk's face cleared on hearing this. So that was what the Zungu had meant about Spock.

Ambassador Crabbe continued, "Any child, male or female, who shows telepathic ability is allowed to join the priesthood. Their training is intense. The priests of Klopsi rarely speak to each other - they communicate solely by thought waves, even over long distances. Some members of the Royal Family also have the gift. I have seen King Tulo locked in mental battle with the Zungu, with not a word being spoken until one has given way."

Spock had been listening to this with great interest. "There is friction between the King and the High Priest?"

Crabbe grinned. "All the time, Mr. Spock. You see, King Tulo gained the throne when his two older brothers died in a tragic accident. The Zungu had both of the young men under his influence, but hadn't bothered much about the third son. The result is that Klopsi now has a young King with a mind of his own, and the Zungu has little control over him."

"Was it the King who recommended that the Zungu should be Klopsi's first delegate to the Federation?"

"Right again, Commander. Tulo persuaded the Council, and the Zungu found himself unable to refuse. It was put to him that nobody was as qualified as himself to represent the people of Klopsi. And then, of course, there was the matter of King Berridas' mummy."

Kirk said, "That is what I don't understand, Ambassador. Why has the Zungu brought the mummy with him?"

"Because Berridas is revered almost as a god on Klopsi, and his spirit is believed to reside in his mummified body. King Berridas is considered to be the greatest treasure that Klopsi possesses, and that is why Tulo persuaded the people to send it to the Federation as a gift : to show how anxious Klopsi is to join the United Federation of Planets."

"Very touching," grinned McCoy. "Presumably it was also put to the Zungu that nobody else but the High Priest was fit to look after such a sacred object on the journey?"

Crabbe returned his grin. "Exactly. Tulo is a very bright young man. He has managed to get rid of his arch-enemy, and has convinced his people that the spirit of King Berridas will guide the Zungu in his work as a Federation delegate."

"So the Zungu has been completely out-maneuvred," said Kirk. "No wonder he's out of temper."

"His Eminence is usually out of temper," sighed Crabbe. "I have a long, hard journey ahead of me."

The following day Ensigns Clay and Perry were walking along the corridor of Deck 6, when Clay gave a yell and pitched forward, hitting his face against the wall as he fell. As the startled Perry bent over his friend anxiously, Clay opened his eyes and cried out at something he apparently saw over the other man's shoulder. Perry looked round, but the corridor was deserted.

"What's the matter, Clay? What happened?"

"Didn't you see it? That round thing? That awful face?" Clay's eyes were wide with fright, and his fingers gripped his friend's arm painfully.

"There's nothing there now, Clay. Come on, we'd better get you to sick bay - your head needs attention."

Later that day there was further confusion in the same corridor when Maintenance Technician Bertolini was hurled into the air by the force of an electric shock. Two passing crew members who rushed to his aid were puzzled to find him slumped against the wall nursing his burned hand, but staring with a look of horror down the empty corridor. They helped him to sick bay while he rambled about a 'thing with a face' that had vanished as he stared at it.

The next day a young yeoman in a distressed condition was helped to sick bay. She had spilt a tray of hot drinks over herself and had scalded her chest. What really seemed to be upsetting her, though, was something she claimed to have seen in the corridor.

Doctor McCoy locked himself up in his office for a while, then went to find Kirk. When he walked into the Captain's cabin, followed by Spock whom he'd met on the way, Kirk was in the act of changing his shirt and examining the bruise on his shoulder.

Noticing the bruise, McCoy said in mock reproof, "You've been trying to walk through walls again, haven't you? I keep telling you - the Captain has to use the door like everyone else."

"Actually, it was a wall that did the damage," grinned Kirk. He pulled on a fresh shirt and said, "What can I do for you both? Something wrong, Bones?"

"Could be. I want you to look at something - my sick bay register for the last two days, to be precise. Not the first entry, that's all right - it's the last three I'm concerned about." He gave a running commentary as Kirk read. "Ensign Clay fell in the corridor and has a bump on his head, but he'll survive. Bertolini received an electric shock, but he was lucky. He's shaken and has a burnt hand but he'll be all right in a couple of days. Yeoman Lister scalded her chest when she upset a tray of hot drinks over herself. They're only minor burns fortunately."

Kirk looked up, puzzled. "So the crew are getting careless - is that what you're trying to say, Bones?"

"No, Jim. There's a lot more to it than carelessness. For a start, all three accidents happened on Deck 6, within twenty yards of the cabin where your passengers are hiding."

"Coincidence, surely? Things often happen in threes - it's one of those curious facts of life."

"He~~re~~ me out, and then see if you still think it's coincidence. All three crewmembers deny they were careless. Lister says the tray was jerked out of her hand. Bertolini says he had switched off the current when the wire he was holding became live, and the current was still switched off when someone else had a look at it after the accident. And Clay says he fell because he was pushed hard from behind."

Startled by the last sentence, Kirk glanced quickly at Spock. The Vulcan, however, was looking at the doctor with unconcealed interest.

"Doctor McCoy - did Yeoman Lister say why she was carrying a tray of hot drinks down that particular corridor?"

McCoy's eyes sparkled. "That's another strange thing. She says she doesn't know where she was going with the drinks - or who they were for. Nor does Bertolini know why he was checking wiring in that corridor. He should have been on Deck 4."

"Sounds like I've got an absent-minded crew as well as a careless one," muttered Kirk. "Is there anything else we should know, Doctor?"

A faint blush crept up from McCoy's neck and began to spread. "Well, there is something else, but you'll never believe it."

"Try me," said Kirk patiently. Spock said nothing, but he was looking serious.

"Well..." began McCoy, and then hesitated. "Er... all three of the victims told me, quite independently, that at the moment of the accident, or just after, they saw the mummy of King Berridas staring at them in the corridor."

Kirk's lips twitched slightly. "Bones - are you telling me that we've got a rampant mummy loose on the Enterprise?"

McCoy's blush deepened. "No, Captain. I am telling you what three injured crewmen told me in good faith. And I believe them - they are neither over-imaginative nor hysterical."

"How did they know it was the mummy? Had any of them seen it when it was brought onto the ship?"

"The whole crew knows what it looks like, Jim. There can't be any mistaking it."

Spock said thoughtfully, "Doctor, when you say the mummy was 'staring' at them - is that the word the crewmen actually used? I ask because the mummy is roughly spherical in shape, with no noticeably distinctive features."

"Each of them said the mummy had a face. The eyes were closed, but it seemed to be staring at them."

"Ambassador Crabbe may be able to give us more details about the mummy, Captain."

"What do you think, Spock? Is it possible that a creature which has been dead for 400 years may still possess some sort of power?"

Spock lifted an eyebrow in surprise. "Captain, if strange occurrences are taking place on this ship, it is surely more logical to look to the living rather than to the dead."

"You mean the Zungu and his not-so-merry men? They haven't left their cabin since they boarded."

"They are known to be very able telepaths. They should have no difficulty in creating images in susceptible minds. Doctor - I suggest a comparison of the victims' medical histories might prove interesting."

McCoy grinned triumphantly. "I've already done it, Spock. There is just one area in which the three are alike; they all have a slightly higher than average E.S.P. rating. Nothing dangerous, of course, but measurable all the same."

Kirk and Spock understood the doctor's implication. Since the tragedy of Gary Mitchell, Starfleet had been wary of employing personnel with high E.S.P. ratings on deep space vessels.

Spock looked satisfied. "That could make them more receptive to telepathic communication, Captain."

"But what about the accidents themselves - the live wire, the mishap with the tray, etc? Has the Zungu the power to manipulate objects as well?"

"Ambassador Crabbe said nothing about telekinesis, but it is a possibility. However, I think it more likely that the telepathic ability of the priests is strong enough to make the victims cause the accidents themselves - as if under hypnosis."

McCoy interrupted fiercely, "Jim, all this talk is getting us nowhere. Those priests are obviously evil - so what are you going to do about them?"

"What can I do, Doctor? We may have our own opinion as to what caused the accidents, but we haven't a shred of evidence that the Zungu is responsible."

McCoy was furious. "Jim, there have been three accidents in two days - are you going to wait till someone is killed?"

"Four accidents, actually," replied Kirk softly.

"Four?"

"Shortly after the diplomatic party came aboard I was pushed by unseen hands - just like Ensign Clay. That bruise on my shoulder was the result of it. The only difference is that I didn't see any ghostly apparition."

"Then you must do something, Jim. At least get through to them that we know what's going on. It might make them think twice before they do any more damage."

"I shall do what I can, Bones. Spock - I want that corridor on Deck 6 kept clear for the rest of the voyage. Any crew members with quarters there will have to double up. Meanwhile I shall have a few words with Ambassador Crabbe."

"Understood, Captain. But may I suggest that you speak to the Ambassador in the most crowded place you can find? The Zungu has known him so long that he will certainly be able to track his mind wherever he goes. The confusion of other minds in the same place may prevent him listening in to what is said."

"Point taken, Spock."

Ambassador Crabbe was somewhat surprised to find that Captain Kirk wanted to speak to him in the middle of the recreation room. He was even more surprised when he realised what Kirk wanted to talk about.

"Ambassador, I'm very interested in the mummy of King Berridas. That round shape is rather unusual, isn't it?"

"The Klopsi kings have always been mummified in the foetal position, Captain, and as they are small people to begin with, the result is a ball-shaped mummy."

"Interesting. Er... have you ever seen the actual mummy, Ambassador? Does the outer covering come off at all?"

Crabbe looked puzzled, but answered, "I have seen the face of Kirk Berridas - that is all that is visible of his remains. Part of the cloth can be removed to reveal the face. Do you want to see it, Captain?"

"No, no not at all. But would you mind telling me what it looks like? Are the eyes closed, for instance?"

"It looks rather like the Zungu, and the eyes are closed," replied Crabbe shortly. "Captain - is there some reason for these questions?"

Kirk smiled. "None that need worry you, Ambassador." //Yet!// he added under his breath.

The visit to the recreation room was valuable to Kirk in another way. Snippets of overheard conversation told him that the mummy's appearances on Deck 6 were causing a sensation. It was also clear that there was general uneasiness about the accidents. There was little superstition among the crew as a rule, but Kirk knew only too well how quickly rumours could spread.

The 'accident' that occurred the following day was not fatal, but extremely worrying in its own way. A crewman was flung violently across a corridor by an unseen force, and broke his arm as a result. Once more the mummy appeared and disappeared. The disturbing aspects of the incident were : firstly - the young man's plight was seen by many of his fellow crewmen; secondly - the incident took place on Deck 5; and thirdly - the man had absolutely no special mental powers of his own.

"Now will you do something, Jim? The crew are scared half to death!" McCoy was really angry - and with good reason, thought Kirk.

"Steady on, Bones. I've already asked the Ambassador to come and see me. I intend having the mummy moved to one of the cargo holds."

"What good will that do? It's the High Priest who's causing the trouble - not the mummy."

"It may help the morale of the crew, Bones, if they know the mummy is out of the way. Don't worry, I intend to deal with the Zungu as well."

Ambassador Crabbe was very concerned about the events that had been taking place on the ship, but was furious when he heard what Kirk intended to do with the mummy.

"Captain - do you want a diplomatic scandal on your hands? Do you realise what an insult it will be to the people of Klopsi? They believe the spirit of Berridas lives on in his mummified body. You cannot treat it as cargo! It is an outrageous suggestion."

"Ambassador - I will risk any number of diplomatic scandals if it will help the safety and morale of my crew. My people come first. By moving the mummy I hope to upset the Zungu's plans a little - and I need your help to get through to him."

Spock asked quietly, "Ambassador, do you agree that the Zungu and his priests are the most likely source of the disturbances?"

Crabbe sighed and calmed down a little. "Yes, Commander. I have seen nothing myself, but I have heard that their powers are formidable. All the same, you cannot accuse the High Priest of playing malicious tricks without sound evidence."

"I don't intend to, sir," said Kirk grimly. "But I do intend to make him realise that we know what's going on."

"Then you had better let me do the talking, Captain. I am used to handling the Zungu."

"That's fine, sir, providing you say what has to be said."

"Ambassador," put in Spock quickly, "we do not understand the reason for these disturbances. What does the Zungu hope to gain by them?"

Crabbe was genuinely surprised. "I should have thought that was obvious. He hopes to make you return to Klopsi."

"There's absolutely no chance of that," said Kirk.

"I know that, Captain, but the Zungu does not. He is accustomed to getting his own way by fair means or foul."

"What good will it do him if the ship does return to his own planet?" asked McCoy.

"He will convince the people that Berridas is against Klopsi joining the Federation. He will tell a fine tale of how Berridas so upset the Enterprise that the brave Captain was forced to bring the delegation back. And the people will believe him. They won't find anything strange in a 400-year-old mummy causing havoc on a Starship. They know that the spirit of Berridas still lives."

"But it's too late," objected Kirk. "Klopsi has already joined the Federation. Everything's signed and sealed."

The Ambassador sighed. "Not quite everything, Captain. There is another signing ceremony when we get to Federation Headquarters. Until that is completed, Klopsi has every right to withdraw from the agreement. That is why it is vital we do not upset the Zungu."

There was a gloomy silence for a moment, then Spock said, "Ambassador, you must know a great deal about King Berridas. In your opinion, would he have been for or against Klopsi joining the Federation?"

"Oh, he would have been in favour - there's no doubt about that," replied Crabbe with complete conviction. "Berridas believed that unity was strength. Having united the peoples of his world, he would have been most interested in a union of planets. The Zungu, of course, holds the opposite viewpoint."

When the deputation of Kirk, Spock, McCoy and Crabbe arrived at the Zungu's cabin they found their first problem was gaining admittance. The Zungu informed them politely, through the locked door, that he had no wish to speak to anybody so they must go away. A furious Kirk was all set to send for cutting tools, but Crabbe calmed him down and began to 'softsoap' the High Priest. It worked. Kirk had to admit that Crabbe could indeed be very diplomatic, and knew just how to handle the difficult little alien.

Unfortunately, good relations stopped the moment the Zungu heard the intended fate of the mummy. Even his three accomplices raised their ugly heads in outrage.

The Ambassador explained, "Your Eminence, four of Captain Kirk's crewmembers have suffered injuries in accidents which cannot be explained. Each time a vision of King Berridas has been seen. The Captain means no disrespect, but feels it is essential that the King is moved to a safe place out of the way of his crew. He assures me that a fitting resting place will be provided, and has no objection to your priests attending the King."

A crafty gleam appeared in the Zungu's black eyes. "If King Berridas is disturbing the ship, Ambassador, there must be something very wrong. The King has no voice - he must make his feelings understood in other ways. It would seem that this journey is not to the King's liking."

Crabbe replied silkily, "King Berridas was too wise a king ever to use force to get what he wanted."

"He no longer has any choice," countered the Zungu. "Mark my words, all of you: the spirit of King Berridas is against Klopsi joining the Federation - he has proved that by his actions. If you value your ship, Captain, you will do well to heed my warning."

Kirk's eyes met the Zungu's, and he distinctly heard a voice in his head saying, //Turn back to Klopsi - there is great danger ahead...//

The voice was suddenly cut off, and Kirk was aware of a faint buzzing on the edge of his consciousness. The Zungu turned sharply away and glared at Spock, but the Vulcan gazed steadily ahead and appeared not to notice.

Disturbed and very annoyed by the intrusion into his mind, and by the implied threat in the Zungu's words, Kirk decided it was time for plain speaking. Before Crabbe could make a diplomatic reply he said coldly,

"Your Eminence - this ship is on its way to Starbase 17, and there will be no turning back. I don't believe that King Berridas is responsible for the incidents that have upset my crew, and I intend to investigate them thoroughly. It is my belief that someone aboard this vessel is trying to bring the name of King Berridas into disrepute. That person had better take care he doesn't go too far!"

With that he left the cabin and had reached the turbolift before an indignant Crabbe had caught him up.

"Well done, Captain! You have probably ruined any chance of settling this affair peacefully!"

"Ambassador - if the Zungu wants a fight, I am ready for him. In the meantime I would be grateful if you would assist with the removal of the mummy. I want it out of that cabin within the hour."

Part of one of the cargo holds was quickly partitioned off and made comfortable. Then the procession of priests and mummy made its way through the ship to take up its new residence. There were no further incidents that day, and Kirk was ready for sleep by the time the ship settled down for its night-time period.

However, sleep when it came was dream-ridden and troubled, and Kirk eventually decided he would be better off awake. He couldn't shake off a vague feeling of uneasiness and dread, and finally went to Spock's cabin. The Vulcan, who was awake and fully dressed, showed no surprise at seeing him.

"Spock, I'm going to the cargo hold to see what those priests are doing - and I'd be glad of your company."

"I have been trying to reach their thoughts for the last few hours, Captain. They seem to be in communion with each other. I get an impression of great power being built up. It is very disturbing."

They made their way through an almost silent ship until they reached a small room used by the Officer in charge of the cargo deck. Viewing screens gave an instant picture of every part of the separate cargo holds, and it was the work of a moment to find the section they wanted.

The priests were sitting in a circle in front of the mummy. Their eyes were closed and their arms stretched out, hands touching. It was the first time either Spock or Kirk had seen their hands, which were brown and claw-like with only three fingers.

Kirk was going to speak, but Spock's face had taken on an intent and very serious look. After a minute he turned off the view-screen and they left the room.

"What is it, Spock? What are they doing?"

"They are concentrating very hard, Captain, building up great reserves of mental power. I do not know what they are planning, but..."

"But we are in for a firework display," finished Kirk. "Spock - how can we stop them without blowing up this whole diplomatic farce? That's what the Zungu would like, but I'm damned if I'll give him the satisfaction!"

"There are two possibilities that have occurred to me," said Spock unexpectedly. "But they both have serious drawbacks."

"Never mind the drawbacks - just give me your ideas."

"Destroy the mummy," said the Vulcan calmly. "Without King Berridas the Zungu no longer has an excuse for his tricks."

"We can't destroy the mummy, Spock! We'll bring down the wrath of the Federation and the Klopsi people on our heads!"

"Naturally, I meant accidental destruction, Captain."

"Accidentally-on-purpose, you mean? It won't do, Spock, although it's very tempting. If anything at all happens to that mummy while it's on my ship, I'll lose my stripes. What was the other idea?"

"We are trying to fight mental power, Captain. The unconscious man cannot use his mind..."

Kirk grinned. "Knock them out? Great idea! Unfortunately, even if we managed to keep the priests sedated for the rest of the voyage, this is only the first leg of their journey. At the end of it we've to hand them over to another unsuspecting Starship crew. It's a cure for the disease we want, not just its symptoms."

Spock looked down at his fingertips. "I think I may know an old Vulcan cure, Captain, but we will need the good Doctor's help first."

"I don't think we'll have any difficulty there, Mr. Spock."

Fifteen minutes later McCoy, still in his night-wear, was holding up a small bottle of transparent liquid.

"I think this will do the trick, gentlemen. It's odourless, tasteless, and works like an angel's lullaby."

Spock was cautious. "It may work like an angel's lullaby on a Human, Doctor, but will it have the same effect on a Klopsi priest?"

"Just once, I'd like you to have some faith in me, Spock! I studied the Klopsi physiology when the delegation came aboard. They may not look much like us, but their internal arrangement is very similar."

"Then all we have to do is intercept the water jug in the morning," said Kirk.

When the tray of food and water was taken to the priests a few hours later the three conspirators were watching on the viewscreen. They waited, but the priests remained in the same position.

"Why don't they drink?" asked Kirk nervously. "They must be thirsty by now."

Spock said, "They may need very little liquid refreshment, Captain. We must be patient."

Again they waited. Spock was concentrating hard. Then he turned to the others.

"I believe power has reached maximum. Something must be happening on the ship."

Kirk went to the door. "I'll go and find out - and while I'm at it, I'll get the heating turned up in there."

"Take great care, Captain. There may be danger."

Spock and McCoy remained to watch, but the priests still made no movement. McCoy was feeling nervous.

"Do they know we're here? Can they pick up our thoughts?"

Spock shook his head. "Their thought impulses are not directed towards us, Doctor."

A moment later McCoy froze. "Spock - what will we do if one of the priests drinks the water first and the others see him pass out?"

Spock raised an eyebrow. "That is a very good question, Doctor. I suggest you find a convenient plague you can diagnose on the spot, then we can quarantine the remaining three and continue with our plan."

McCoy relaxed a little. Below them, the four priests stirred.

Kirk had only just left the room when Uhura's distressed voice called him from the nearest intercom.

"Captain - I'm speaking to you from the intercom on Deck 2. The bridge controls are red-hot. We can't touch them."

Kirk groaned - it had obviously started.

"Have you contacted Engineering?"

"Yes, sir. They've got the same problem. The auxiliary control room is also affected."

"All right, Lieutenant, go back to your post and I'll be with you in a few minutes. I'm going to Engineering first. Kirk out."

In the middle of the huge engineering room a group of technicians stood helplessly staring at the ranks of controls they dared not touch. One of the engineers had the emergency medical kit out and was spraying a dressing onto Scott's burned hands. The Chief Engineer looked up in bewilderment as Kirk entered.

"Captain - there's something very peculiar going on. Every piece of equipment is red-hot, but nothing's being damaged."

Kirk glanced at the Engineer's hands. "Apart from you, it would seem, Mr. Scott."

"When Uhura called and told me about the situation on the bridge, I managed to switch down to sub-light speed."

"Good man, Scotty. Now, I want somebody from Life-Support to show me how to turn the temperature up in Cargo Hold 5."

"Captain - you'll burn yourself badly!"

"I'll chance it," said Kirk grimly.

He approached the console and stared at it. "The controls are not hot," he repeated over and over again. "It's just another of the Zungu's blasted tricks!"

Anger gripped him and he pressed his hands on the console. There was no burning sensation - no pain. Triumphantly Kirk raised the temperature of the cargo hold several degrees and then, spitefully, turned it even higher.

The engineers were staring in astonishment. "Captain..." faltered Scott.

"It's all in the mind, Scotty. Just another of the Zungu's tricks. Hopefully we'll be able to put an end to it soon."

He went out and left the bemused Engineer staring at his hands. "Then why have I got blisters?" he asked of no-one in particular.

Kirk went up to the bridge to find the same scene of helplessness. The crew were sitting with folded arms, knowing by the radiated heat from their consoles that it wasn't safe to touch anything.

Kirk went over to the helm and laid his hand on it confidently. It was cold. Sulu gaped at him, but Kirk's attention was suddenly caught by the course setting.

"What's the meaning of this, Mr. Sulu? Who authorised this course change?"

Helmsman and Navigator looked at each other and then at Kirk. "Why - you did, sir. You said we were returning to Klopsi."

"When was I supposed to have said that?"

"About fifteen minutes ago, sir - just before the controls became hot."

"Mr. Sulu - I passed the con to you over an hour ago and I have only just returned!"

Bewildered faces looked at him, and then Uhura spoke up. "Captain - we all heard you alter course. I could have sworn you were on the bridge." She sounded sick with embarrassment.

Kirk moved the controls and put the ship back on its original course with Sulu, still completely baffled, watching him.

"Don't worry about it, Lieutenant. Nobody's to blame." He stopped at the door of the turbolift and looked back. "Mr. Spock and Dr. McCoy are working on the problem."

In the cargo hold the increased heat was beginning to get to the Klopsi priests. McCoy and Spock saw them shifting uneasily in their thick garments.

Then one of the little men picked up the water jug and poured out four glasses of the doped water. McCoy held his breath, but all was well - with one movement the four glasses were drained, and a few seconds later four little bodies toppled over into peaceful sleep.

Kirk rejoined them just as they were hurrying down into the cargo hold, and explained what had been happening on the other decks.

When McCoy bent over the priests and declared them to be out cold, Spock said, "Their power should be broken now, Captain, if you wish to check with Engineering and the bridge."

Kirk went to the nearby intercom and returned smiling. "Everything's back to normal. It's up to you now, Spock."

The Vulcan knelt by the body of the High Priest and placed his fingers at certain precise points on the leathery face. Then he said, "Doctor, I want him brought back almost to consciousness, and then put back to sleep again on my command. If he reaches full consciousness put him out straight away."

McCoy nodded and prepared a minute dose of cordrazine.

Kirk was beginning to feel uneasy and reached out to touch Spock's arm. "Wait a moment, Spock. You aren't going to mind-meld with that creature, are you?"

With a look of complete understanding the Vulcan said gently, "Don't worry, Jim. I am merely opening a channel so that I can speak directly to his mind." He nodded to McCoy, and the doctor emptied his hypo into the Zungu's arm.

Almost immediately, it seemed, the eyelids began to flicker. Spock closed his eyes and let his mind, his voice, and the light pressure of his fingertips probe deep into the shadows and half-light of the Zungu's consciousness.

"Listen to me," he said softly. "It is Berridas who speaks. Listen to me. Listen to the truth of what I am saying. It is Berridas who speaks. Repeat my words: I am the Zungu/ High Priest of Klopsi/ Servant of Berridas/ Servant of King Tulo/ I live for the good of my people/ I will take my people into the United Federation of Planets/ It is for the good of my people/ It is the will of Berridas/ It is the will of King Tulo/ I swear to obey."

Slowly, and hesitantly at first, but becoming firmer and surer, the Zungu's crackly voice repeated Spock's words. Then Spock glanced at McCoy, and the doctor put the priest back to sleep.

Kirk looked anxiously at his friend, whose face was strained. "Are you all right, Spock? Did it work?"

He was given a reassuring nod. "I had to fight him, but he seems to have accepted my words. We will not know for certain, of course, until he awakes. Now then, Doctor, if you are ready we will deal with the next one."

By the time Spock had finished with all four priests, Kirk was wet with perspiration. Part of the reason was that the cargo hold was baking hot - he had forgotten to ask for the temperature to be turned down - but mostly it was the strain of mentally encouraging Spock in his struggle with the priests. For a struggle it had most definitely been - Spock was exhausted, and couldn't hide it.

McCoy checked the priests and said they would probably sleep for several hours.

"Are we going to leave them here, Jim, or put them back in their cabin?"

Kirk smiled wearily. "We'd better leave them. If the Zungu wakes up and realises that someone has been touching his sacred person, we'll be right back where we started." He picked up the water jug and glasses. "I'll move the evidence and send fresh supplies down here - and I must get that heating turned down."

As they left Spock said, "I think it might be best if I am here when they awake, Captain. I shall know immediately if the treatment has worked."

"If it hasn't worked, Spock, and the priests remember what happened - do you realise we could be up on a charge of assault?"

"Yes, Captain - and the charge would be correct," was the calm reply.

Hours later, when Kirk was in full command of his ship once more and the Enterprise was speeding towards her destination, there was a call from Spock in the cargo hold.

"Captain - His Eminence the Zungu regrets any inconvenience he may cause, but requests permission to take King Berridas back to his cabin. Apparently the heat of the cargo hold is detrimental to the well-being of the mummy."

Kirk's lips twitched. "I'm very sorry to hear that, Mr. Spock. The mummy must be protected, of course."

Spock lowered his voice. "I have the Zungu's assurance that there will be no further problems concerning the journey to Starbase 17. It seems King Berridas has changed his mind about the Federation."

"Well, I'm delighted to hear it. By all means arrange the removal, Mr. Spock. I shall come down myself in a few moments."

Kirk reached Deck 6 in time to meet the procession, led by Spock. As the litter-bearers carried the mummy into the cabin a rather pungent odour wafted past his nostrils. Obviously heat wasn't good for Klopsi mummies. Poor King Berridas - how he had suffered in all this.

The Zungu stopped in front of Kirk and his black eyes were as scornful as ever. "Captain - this journey to your Starbase is becoming very tedious. I did not expect that, as a delegate to the Federation, I should be obliged to walk half the way!" Once again the door was slammed on Kirk.

Ambassador Crabbe had been walking behind the Zungu; now he looked up at Kirk and smiled. "The rest of the trip should be uneventful, Captain. I knew diplomacy would win through in the end, although I'm not sure what it was that changed the Zungu's mind."

"It was obviously something you said yesterday, Ambassador. The Zungu must have slept on it and decided to cooperate."

He grinned across at Spock - and found his smile reflected in the Vulcan's eyes.

+++++

McCoy : What seems to be the trouble?

Uhura : I have a pain in my right side.

McCoy (after examination) : You have acute appendicitis.

Uhura : Don't get personal, Doctor, just tell me what's wrong.

+++++

Uhura : Shuttlecraft No. 9 reports ready to dock, Captain.

Kirk : But we only have 8 shuttlecraft.

Uhura : Shuttlecraft No. 6, are you in trouble?

+++++

Young Jim Kirk was the teacher's pet - she couldn't afford a dog.

+++++

IN LOVE WE TRUST by Verna May Long

The cramps started as a vague discomfort, small niggling pains that slowly built in intensity until it took a real effort to hide them. He put his hand under his tunic and rubbed his stomach. The skin felt tight and distended slightly.

He shifted his weight, hoping it would ease the cramps, but they continued to grow worse as he tried to concentrate on what the Standard Bearer Teoka was telling him. Perhaps he should have left this mission to a subordinate as Spock had suggested. Suggested? More like demanded. So uncharacteristic, as anger flashed in the back of the usually emotionless eyes like summer lightning.

Why the anger? There was some danger to be sure when contacting unfamiliar races and setting up alliances, tribal customs to learn, taboos to beware of, inadvertently hurt feelings to be mollified as both sides struggled to learn of the other. But Spock's reaction to his beaming down was out of all proportion. He'd just have to have a quiet talk with him when he returned to the Enterprise, find out just what was bothering him, and try to smooth it out.

He suppressed a heavy sigh. Spock had come to mean so very much to him - but he was always there, hovering over him, not even aware that he was over-solicitous as his innate compassion urged him to help the one man who was closer to him than any other.

Kirk understood and knew Spock couldn't help himself; but the sense of being guarded was even worse now since the letter had come yesterday morning from Peter telling him that his grandmother had died. The letter (Peter had chosen this way over a Stargram because he couldn't bear anyone else reading it before Kirk did) was almost four months old, and Kirk hadn't known that his mother was gone, hadn't been able to attend her funeral since he'd been half-way across the galaxy. Spock knew he was upset, that he hadn't had time to fully adjust to the news or even to realise that his mother would no longer be there.

Spock had almost openly argued with him about being a part of this mission, but he had needed to be alone, to get away from all the emotional pressure brought to bear on him by Spock, and by McCoy too as both men tried to comfort him, and unwittingly only made the pain worse. Neither man realised he had to face this pain alone. Later he could let them share it, but first he had to accept it himself. No-one could help him do that, and McCoy's and Spock's well-meaning but fumbling attempts at succor were tearing him apart.

Kirk had beamed down with one aide, and an almost suffocating sense of panic as his two friends joined forces in their disapproval of his actions. He would go to them later and apologise to Bones and let him pour a couple of drinks; and Spock would listen in his quiet calm way as Kirk talked out his pain and regrets. Both men would understand his need to be alone for a while.

They were seated ritualistically around an open campfire, Martin to his left, the Standard Bearer Teoka to his right, and the rest of the council forming a complete circle around the dancing flames. Everything had been going fine up until now. There had been the ceremonial drink of wine to bind their friendship. Kirk looked at the wooden goblet he still held in his hand and knew with chilling certainty that he should never have tasted its contents.

//Damn! Would McCoy ever chew him out!//

He looked at Martin. The man's face wore a strained expression and sweat stood out on his forehead. Martin's arms were pressed tightly to his midsection, his goblet on the ground in front of him... empty. Kirk was aware that Martin had followed his Captain's example and drained his goblet. Through no fault of his own the Lieutenant was becoming a very sick man if Kirk's own stomach was any guide. //Damn!//

"Are you all right, Lieutenant?" Kirk asked as Martin smothered a gasp of pain.

"No, sir," Martin replied through set teeth. "My stomach hurts something awful."

"Is there something wrong, Captain?" Teoka asked. "Is your man feeling unwell?" His eyes were edged with worry. First contacts were important, and this Federation would be a great boon to his people. What could be wrong? He looked at his advisors and they met his eyes with a shrug. None of them were sick.

"My aide seems to be in some distress, sir. I must get him back to the ship. If you will excuse us with my most profuse apologies? I'll have someone come to you that can speak for me," Kirk replied, holding himself straight although cramps gripped his insides with an iron fist.

"May we help, Captain?" Teoka asked, his heavy-lidded eyes half closing. "If it is the result of something happening to him because he is on our planet, perhaps our small skills at healing could help him."

"I'm sure it's nothing, sir. Thank you for your concern. We have a doctor on board who has handled many such cases as my aide's. If your doctor would care to stand by, I'm sure Dr. McCoy would be more than pleased to consult with him if he runs into anything unforeseen," Kirk replied as he helped Martin stand up.

"I will have our physician informed of what has transpired, Captain. Please know that our thoughts and prayers are for his speedy recovery."

"Thank you," Kirk said as he helped Martin move out of the circle and away from the council members. Martin bit his lip and grunted in pain. Kirk tightened his arm around him, trying to give him as much comfort as he could. "We'll be on board soon," he said soothingly. "Just hold on."

"Yes, Captain," Martin whispered, trying to straighten up. His first assignment on the Enterprise and it had to end this way. And with the Captain yet! He'd be transferred out as fast as they could manage it.

Kirk took out his communicator. "Kirk to Enterprise. Transporter room."

"Transporter room," came Lt. Kyle's voice.

"Beam us up, Mr. Kyle. Have Dr. McCoy meet us. Lt. Martin and I are suffering from severe stomach cramps."

The pain was radiating out from his stomach, and it was only through his strength of will that he kept it from showing on his face.

The blessed release of the transporter beam only lasted a few seconds, and as it ended the pain drove him to his knees with a choked moan. He heard Bones cry his name through the roaring in his head, and felt the doctor's concerned hands on him as the hardness of the transporter platform met his back.

"Martin!" gasped Kirk. "See to him."

"He's being taken care of, Jim," McCoy said as he helped the orderly put Kirk on the gurney. "What happened?"

"The pains started in our stomachs about 15 minutes ago," Kirk gasped around the cramps. The pain was spreading down his legs and up into his chest, ripping and tearing its way through the blood and tissue in its way.

"Did you eat anything, Jim?" McCoy asked. The mediscanner showed some type of poison - extremely potent and fast acting.

"No, no food, but..." He couldn't breathe. Pain tore him open as it spread inexorably into his shoulders. Bones had asked a question. Had to answer. "Drink."

"Couldn't have been that, Jim," McCoy protested as they reached Sickbay and transferred the two men onto examination tables. "Not as careful as you are in checking things out."

Martin moaned softly and Kirk looked over at him, the pain in his eyes not all from the cramps, and McCoy frowned suspiciously.

"You did check it out, didn't you, Jim?"

"No," came the whispered answer.

Pain filled his arms and moved into his neck. A machine was attached to one arm and Kirk heard the soft whirr of a motor. The pain eased, but only infinitesimally. He was being submerged in a universe of intense prolonged agony that filled every fiber of his being. The pain reached into his brain and he fell tumbling and twirling into a bottomless abyss.

Voices were talking and they filtered through to him slowly. He tried to open his eyes, but the effort was too much for him. His body felt heavy and the muscles useless as he tried to move and found this also took too much effort.

"He almost died, Spock. It was so close I still feel sick to my stomach. The filtration helped keep some of the poison out of his system, but another couple of minutes..." McCoy's voice stopped meaningfully. "That stuff really worked fast. The natives have apparently built up an immunity to it over the centuries until it doesn't affect them. It's in all their plants, barely perceptible until it's distilled down as it was in the wine they drank. Wouldn't have been dangerous any other way. The amount in the water and food is small, and normal consumption would cause nothing more than a stomach ache or diarrhoea. That's why it wasn't found out before. The wine is used on very special occasions and there's no other alcohol on the planet."

"Is he all right now, Doctor?" The flat, emotionless sound of Spock's voice was frightening to the still groggy man on the bed.

"Yes. He'll be out of action for a while, but he's all right. At least, as far as I can tell. The lab is still running tests on the wine he drank. It's tricky stuff. Their own doctors don't have anything on it, but they sent me all the berries I wanted that it was made out of. They're really upset that this has happened to Jim because of something they gave him to drink. And do you know the really tragic part of this? Only a couple of minutes with a tricorder and none of this would have happened. Jim and Martin wouldn't have had to fight for their lives at all."

Kirk found his eyes would open after all. Two faces came into focus slowly. McCoy's showed signs of the severe strain he had undergone, but Spock's face was exceptionally blank, his eyes dark bits of obsidian.

"How do you feel, Jim?" McCoy asked when he saw Kirk's eyes were open. He looked at the panel reading to answer his own question. Now that Kirk was out of immediate danger he found his anger rising again.

Kirk found it took several false starts before he could get any words out.

"Martin? How is he?" The words had been hard to remember, and it took even greater concentration to understand what McCoy was saying.

"He's fine now, but no thanks to you if he had died. What in all that's holy possessed you, anyway? You were the senior officer down there. It was your duty to see to everything," McCoy grated, anger warring with the relief he felt. "Of all the stupid, addle-brained things you've ever done, this has got to be the worst. Drinking something without checking it out... of all the moronic, imbecilic..." McCoy's voice trailed off as he paused to catch his breath.

"Captain?" Spock said as McCoy paused, his eyes on the man on the bed. There was no softening of eyes or features, no sign of what Spock was thinking. Kirk reluctantly brought his eyes to bear on his First Officer and his soul cringed at the blankness in Spock's eyes.

"Did you drink on that planet before you ascertained if it were safe to do so?"

"Yes, Spock," came the truthful reply, although Kirk's voice was shaking.

"That was indefensible, Captain. You had no right beaming down in the first place. It should have been left to a subordinate."

Kirk looked at his stern-eyed First Officer, seeing the hurt and anger behind the Vulcan's eyes. "And to so blatantly ignore the basic tenets of safety

on an alien world cannot go uncharged."

"What do you mean, Spock, 'uncharged'?" McCoy demanded, not liking how this conversation was going one bit.

"I am bringing charges against the Captain, Doctor," Spock said flatly.

"No, Spock. You can't do that!" McCoy protested.

Kirk's eyes were closed and he lay unmoving except for his quickly rising and falling chest. The panel readings reflected the changes - but in little jerks that neither man saw as they faced each other at the foot of the bed.

"I can and am, Doctor."

"On what grounds, Spock?"

"Idiocy, if it were possible," the Vulcan spat out. "Not delegating responsibility, not following proper safety precautions, causing the lives of two Star Fleet officers to become endangered, being responsible for two valuable officers' loss of time and experience where it is badly needed. Shall I go on, Doctor?" Rage shook him like a storm, blowing along his nerves with frightening speed, inundating his mind. Love, compassion, even anger, these emotions were part of him now, but this all-consuming emotion that pushed out cool logic and clear thinking... never had he experienced it before and he found it extremely distasteful - and impossible to control at present.

Kirk struggled to sit up as if feeling Spock's supercharged emotions. "Spock." He fell back on the bed with an agonised moan as pain knifed through him.

"Lie still, Jim," McCoy ordered as he put his hand on Kirk's shoulder. He could feel the tremors shaking Kirk's body and glanced worriedly at the panel above the bed. Heart rate... respiration... pressure... all too high, much too high.

"Spock, get out of here. Get out now!" he ordered angrily.

"Spock... Spock!" Kirk gasped as he struggled to sit up again, but found himself too weak as his mind spun in ever-widening circles. He felt the hypodermic spray against his shoulder and the voices faded away.

"Did you have to do that to him after all he's been through?" McCoy demanded as he glared at Spock, forgetting his own angry tirade a few moments before. "Wasn't his mother's death enough for him to bear right now? Do you have to add to it?"

The Vulcan stared impassively back at the angry Human. "He cannot be allowed to repeat what has happened. He must learn to be more careful."

McCoy stared at him intently for a moment before he nodded knowingly. "You blame yourself, don't you? That's what's wrong, isn't it? Jim almost died, and you blame yourself for not being there to stop it."

Spock stared at him stonily before his eyes returned to the man on the bed. "He must not take such chances with his life. He must be made to see."

"How will forcing this into a Hearing help help him, Spock? Won't it just ease your own conscience?"

"Perhaps, Doctor," Spock admitted softly, and McCoy frowned. He had expected Spock to answer him bitingly that Vulcans didn't have a conscience or some such words, or to ignore him completely, but this quiet admitting of a conscience, of an emotion, he didn't understand.

"He didn't do it deliberately, Spock. His mother's sudden death really shocked him. He just wasn't thinking clearly. My god, Spock, he's only Human, and Humans aren't perfect like Vulcans. They make mistakes."

Spock lifted his eyes from the bed to the panel above it. McCoy knew it wasn't the panel the Vulcan was seeing, but the torture-racked body that had beamed up from the planet, for Spock had been in the transporter room. McCoy had

caught only a glimpse of the helpless terror that had appeared on Spock's face when Kirk had collapsed, and he suddenly knew that Spock was facing a greater crisis than he had ever faced before.

"I try to help him, but he will not let me protect him," Spock whispered. He was being torn apart. Vulcan? Human? What was he? Neither one nor the other. Each half fought for supremacy inside him.

Jim, I cannot handle this alone. You have to help me. You started to show me how to be Human. You must be here to continue, or I am lost.

"He's his own man, Spock," McCoy went on, not realising the raging battle that was taking place within the man standing so quietly beside him, unaware of the fear that had become a living, breathing part of him. "You couldn't feel the way you do about him if he weren't. What's wrong with you, anyway? Jim's been hurt before and you didn't go off the deep end."

Spock turned his eyes towards the Human as if realising where he was, and the cover slammed down over his eyes again. "I am needed on the bridge, Doctor. Please notify me if there is any change in the Captain's condition."

Spock turned and stalked out of Sickbay, the proper Vulcan once again, leaving McCoy with a dozen questions rushing through his head. What was happening? Spock had never reacted this way before, indeed, he had never reacted at all to McCoy's knowledge.

McCoy meant to keep an eye on Spock, for he was suddenly more worried about him than about Kirk. The Vulcan's exterior appeared to him to be showing cracks that told the discerning doctor that pressure was building up to a terrible force inside him. Kirk apparently had touched a part of the Vulcan that had never been touched before, and which once having been touched, was proving unstable. McCoy shook his head and thought of an old Earth fable. Maybe, like Pandora's box, this part of Spock should have stayed locked away.

Sounds came muzzily to him and he finally recognised them as the indicators on the panel over the bed. He tried to move, but the aching pains were still in his arms and legs, and he decided to wait. He opened his eyes and looked around the dimly-lit room.

There was something he had to do, someone he had to talk to. Who? Spock! He had to see Spock. He forced his legs over the side of the bed, ignoring the pain that came with each movement. He clung desperately to the bed, clenching his teeth as the room rocked under his feet.

The floor heaved under him and the doorway wavered blurrily, but with grim determination Kirk pushed himself away from the bed and staggered out of Sickbay and into the corridor.

He had to talk to Spock. He could still see the Vulcan's eyes burning into his soul, hear his voice - so cold, so unforgiving. Spock.

The corridor was dim, but whether it was his eyes or the regular night-time lighting he wasn't sure. His legs ached abominably, and each step he took was a triumph over the fatigue and pain filling every atom of his body.

The sound of the buzzer woke Spock from the light sleep he had fallen into. He frowned slightly. Who could be trying to see him at this hour of the night? He wanted to ignore it, but knew it had to be important, so he reluctantly went to the door and opened it.

"Jim!" he gasped. Kirk looked at him, tears of exhaustion wet on his cheeks. He had one hand on the wall beside the door and was leaning tiredly against it; sweat stained the Sickbay coverall he was wearing, and his hair was matted to his forehead.

"Spock, I had to see you," Kirk gasped.

Spock caught the falling man before he hit the floor. Kirk laid his head against Spock's shoulder with a sigh, his breath coming in short painful gasps. Kirk's body was trembling, and Spock could feel how ragged the Captain's heart-beat was as the valiant heart tried to cope with this added strain.

"You should not have left Sickbay, Jim," Spock scolded as he laid Kirk on his bed.

Kirk clutched at one of Spock's hands, holding it tightly as he tried to talk, gasping for air as his lungs struggled to supply him with enough air for breathing and talking.

"Must talk to you. Explain..." Kirk said breathlessly. He closed his eyes, panting quickly as blackness threatened.

Spock shook his head. "Explanations are not necessary," he interrupted. "You should have been more careful. If you had died... Why will you not listen to me? I told you not to go. I told you." A feeling of tenderness replaced the anger within him as he watched Kirk's struggles. With it came a deep, almost physical longing to hold him, to keep him safe and protect him from himself. "You were so close to death, and I could not help." Frustration rang loud and clear in his voice.

"I'm sorry," Kirk whispered. Pain was becoming the center of his universe again as it grew remorselessly second by second.

"I must get McCoy, Jim," Spock said as he gently disengaged his hand from Kirk's frantic grip, going to the wall communicator. "Spock to McCoy."

After a short pause the doctor's weary voice answered. "McCoy here."

"The Captain is in my cabin, Doctor," Spock said shortly. "He needs your help."

"What!" McCoy exclaimed. "How did he get there?"

"He walked, Doctor." Spock's voice was clipped. His rage was back, pushing out the calmness he had managed to achieve before Kirk appeared.

"What! That's not possible!" McCoy protested.

"Nevertheless, that is what he did."

"Damn!" came softly over the intercom. "I'll be right there. Keep him warm and as quiet as you can."

Seconds later McCoy hurried through the door and knelt beside the semi-conscious body. Spock was standing by the bed, staring at Kirk - an unmoving statue. McCoy took a quick reading and shot the contents of the hypospray into Kirk's arm.

Kirk opened his eyes and looked into the doctor's angry face. He stifled a moan of anguish. He couldn't handle any more anger now. The emotion pulled at his small store of strength like a sponge soaked up water. He closed his eyes wearily, and let the drug take him into its welcoming darkness.

"Why, Spock?" McCoy demanded. "What was so important that he walked all the way here from Sickbay?"

"You will have to ask the Captain that, Doctor," Spock replied. "I cannot tell what is in another's mind."

McCoy muttered under his breath about stubborn Vulcans and equally stubborn Humans as he ran his hands expertly over Kirk's body. His mouth made a straight line as he found a stiffness in Kirk's midsection that didn't belong. Kirk moaned softly even under the drug he'd been given.

"Carry him to Sickbay," McCoy said as he stood up. "There's no sense disturbing anyone else at this hour."

Spock picked Kirk up gently, almost as if he were afraid the man would break into tiny pieces. He didn't look at the pale, drawn face, tried not to feel the helpless trembling in the body he carried that was echoed deep inside his own.

Jim had been far too weak to be exerting himself the way he had done. Now he'd had a relapse. If he didn't rec.... STOP!... Spock's feeling of guilt intensified. It was all his fault. He had known Jim was upset. He should have stayed by his side.

McCoy led the way to Sickbay, mentally measuring the distance the Captain had covered. How had he done it? And why? He shouldn't even have been able to get out of bed, let alone travel the distance between Sickbay and Spock's quarters.

Spock settled Kirk back on his bed and the panel immediately lit up, the indicators climbing erratically.

McCoy adjusted the hypospray and shot it into Kirk's arm, and the readings began to steady. Kirk opened his eyes and McCoy smiled as reassuringly as he could. No time for recriminations now. He would wait to demand why Kirk had risked further injury to go to Spock when Spock could have been sent for.

"Go back to sleep, Jim. You'll feel better when you wake up."

"Spock?" Kirk whispered.

"Here, Captain," Spock said as he came up on the opposite side of the bed, hands clenched behind his back.

"He's got to rest now, Spock," McCoy interrupted before Kirk could say anything, and Spock turned to go with the sight of Kirk's agonised eyes burning into the back of his mind.

"Spock... wait!" Kirk called softly.

"I will return later, Captain," Spock promised, and continued out of the room. He stopped in the middle of the next room. He was trembling so badly he was sure that some outward sign of it must show. He must resolve his dilemma somehow. He would have to learn to accept Kirk's precipitous leaps into danger, or... make him obey... find a way to check him... somehow... force him to be more careful. It would be for his own good. He would be safe then...

Spock's thoughts ground to a halt. Kirk wouldn't bend his will to another. These thoughts were... illogical. But there must be a way. He would have to find it.

"He'll be all right now, Spock," McCoy said as he came into the room and sat down heavily. "Still don't know how he made it to your cabin."

"He is a man of strong will, Doctor, as we both know. He must be... controlled."

"How do you mean - 'controlled'?" McCoy demanded. The look on Spock's face was one he'd never seen before, and he was sure he didn't want to see it again. It told a tale of grim determination, and McCoy was sure it boded the Captain no good.

"Perhaps I used the wrong word, Doctor," Spock relented, cool control slamming down over his face. "Your language is still difficult for me at times."

"In a pig's eye!" McCoy commented to himself as he watched Spock leave Sickbay with a frown. Jim was going to be in for a fight of some kind when he fully recovered, of that McCoy was sure.

Spock walked quietly to the bridge. Kirk's mission had been interrupted, and the application for admittance to the Federation must still be completed and signed and made ready for Starfleet's acceptance. He beamed down without a moment's hesitation after contacting Teeka. The Captain would be safe aboard the Enterprise under McCoy's care, and he felt the hard knot of tension inside him begin to loosen.

McCoy checked Kirk's condition one last time. The readings were still stabilized, and Kirk was resting quietly. The stiffness had left the Captain's stomach, although the area remained tender. It worried the doctor, but the mediscanner showed no irregularities. He left orders for him to be called at the slightest change in Kirk's readings and walked slowly to his quarters, almost stumbling in fatigue. He had been by Kirk's side for over 56 hours, and was almost out on his feet.

Kirk opened his eyes reluctantly, almost afraid to face McCoy or Spock again. He sighed thankfully. No-one was standing guard over him, angrily waiting for him to open his eyes. He didn't blame them, but it was hard enough to think, to unscramble his thoughts, without them yelling at him, McCoy vocally and Spock through his thoughts. Kirk didn't have to hear Spock's anger to feel it.

His stomach was hurting, but since it was only a slight discomfort he ignored it. Spock was probably down on the planet finishing the interrupted meeting. McCoy, Kirk hoped, was getting some well-deserved rest. He had looked so tired.

He became more aware of his stomach. It felt... funny. Not really hurting, but a strange unpleasant discomfort. He took some deep breaths, trying to steady his suddenly racing heart. The indicators over the bed didn't move, didn't set off the alarm McCoy had set if Kirk's readings changed radically. He was going to throw up. He knew it, but before he could move his stomach heaved.

McCoy had been unable to sleep as an uneasiness filled him. He headed for Sickbay to check on Kirk one more time, to satisfy himself that all was still well. He couldn't explain the continued tenderness in Kirk's midsection, and it haunted him. He had just entered Sickbay when he heard a choking sound. He rushed to Kirk's side as black vomit spewed out. McCoy recognised it as old blood and hit the emergency button, bringing two nurses and Dr. M'Benga on the run.

"Get the O.R. ready. We've got to operate now. He's haemorrhaging," McCoy ordered as the first nurse hit the doorway, her hair dishevelled but eyes alert.

Bright red blood was frothing from Kirk's mouth and a transfusion was set up as he was rushed into the operating room.

Spock stirred almost restlessly as Teoka stood holding out the completed application, duly signed, to show all his people. Many new and exciting things would begin to happen to them now, and only a few dissidents were not looking forward to these changes eagerly.

"No, throw it in the flames!" a voice cried out. "We do not need the help of outsiders!"

"Krill, what is the meaning of this interruption?" Teoka demanded angrily as the man pushed his way through the people. "The council decided."

Krill pushed his way into the circle of the council to stand directly before the Chief, eyes blazing. "There are those of us who will not accept this alliance, Teoka."



"That is your privilege, Krill; however the rest of us do wish it, and it will be done."

Spock stood silently watching the two men. "Perhaps I could help, sir," he said. "Just what is the difficulty with the alliance?"

Krill turned to face him, apparently not having noticed him before. An expression of distaste crossed his face as he turned back to the Chief.

"You converse with this alien? The other was acceptable, but this one is not."

"He is First Officer, second only to the Captain of the Enterprise. Would you have a menial come down to talk about so important a thing?" Teoka demanded.

Krill looked at Spock again, his mouth twisting harshly. "First Officer! Better he and all of them were dead than allow this mockery. It is an insult!"

"Krill, you will show proper respect or suffer the consequences!" Teoka warned.

Krill stared at him, his face a mask of anger. "Why did you not wait until the other could come back? I would have raised no objection then, even though I think this alliance is wrong. Many of the others feel the same as I on this, Teoka. He is not like us!"

Teoka stared at the man in front of him as if unsure what action to take. A second man approached, placing his hand on Teoka's arm.

"He is right, Teoka," the man said. "You must wait for the Captain to return to finish the ceremony. The council has discussed this, and all agree. Krill should have waited for me to tell you, but since he did not it is best you know what the council has decided before you go any further."

Teoka looked at the newcomer, then sighed heavily. "All right," he agreed. "We will wait for the Captain." He looked at Krill harshly. "The alliance will be formed, Krill. Nothing can stop it."

Krill nodded. "Deal only with your equal, Teoka, and I will raise no further objection."

As Teoka turned toward Spock, the Vulcan caught a glint of cunning and triumph cross Krill's face before it was quickly hidden. If the racial overtones of the conversation upset him none of it was allowed to show on his face.

"Mr. Spock, I regret we must wait with the final portion of the ceremony until your Captain can be present." Teoka's face was angry and embarrassed at Krill's accusations. "Some of my people still carry prejudices."

Spock nodded. "I understand, sir. Peace must be kept even if it means a delay in the negotiations. I'm sure Starfleet will understand. Captain Kirk was resting when I beamed down. I'll contact the ship and find out just when he can beam down, if you wish."

"Thank you, Mr. Spock. That would be most appreciated. I do not think too much of a delay would be advisable. Krill usually does not give in so easily."

Spock removed his communicator. "Spock to Enterprise."

"Enterprise. Scott here," came the immediate reply.

"Negotiations require the Captain's presence. What is his status?" There was a perceptible hesitation. "Mr. Scott?"

"The Captain is in surgery, Mr. Spock."

Spock was sure his face showed no sign of it, but a shock ran through him. Surgery? "What happened, Mr. Scott?" he finally managed to say around the constriction in his throat.

"Dr. McCoy hasn't been able to tell us anything except that the Captain had a relapse of some kind, Mr. Spock."

"Alert the transporter room, Mr. Scott. I'll be beaming up shortly."

Spock turned to Teoka, who had a concerned look on his face. "Your Captain is still in danger, Mr. Spock?"

"I'm sure it has been taken care of by now, sir," Spock replied calmly, although he felt every nerve in his body screaming. "I'll beam back to the ship and apprise you of his condition as soon as possible."

"Thank you, Mr. Spock. May the help of our Gods and yours make what you want be true," Teoka said soberly.

Spock heard the words but paid little attention to them as he felt the transporter take him. He materialized on the deck of the transporter, pausing only long enough for the unsettling phenomenon of reintegration to disperse, then he headed directly for Sickbay.

Spock waited, standing in the middle of the room, his eyes on the doors leading into the operating room where McCoy still had the Captain.

What had happened? The nurse he had first approached said the Captain started to haemorrhage and, if McCoy hadn't happened to be there, could have died if prompt action hadn't been taken. She knew nothing more, so Spock waited for McCoy.

Time passed slowly, but his thoughts raced at light speed. Again Kirk had almost died, this time while aboard the Enterprise and in Sickbay under McCoy's care.

Something had been said about a malfunctioning panel. It hadn't warned the staff when the Captain experienced his first difficulties.

Was there nowhere he could keep Kirk safe?

His thoughts screamed to a stop.

No, there was not. Not even on board the Captain's own ship surrounded by his friends. He felt something give inside himself and tears welled behind his eyes. Together or apart. On board ship or on a strange planet. It made no difference. He held back the tears, but there was a suffocating feeling inside him. He found it hard to breathe and felt drained of all energy.

"Spock?" came a concerned voice, and he looked lethargically at McCoy. "Are you all right?"

"The Captain?" Spock whispered. The Human inside him was screaming in frustration as the Vulcan tried to subdue him.

"He'll be all right. The wine acted like a corrosive when it mixed with his stomach acids. It ate pinpoint holes in the lining of his stomach. As small as they were they would have healed naturally with no problem, but the strain of getting to your quarters caused several of them to tear. He was bleeding into his stomach all this time, and we didn't know it. I thought it was funny, but the mediscanner didn't show anything, and when the stiffness went away I didn't think any more about it. It turns out the mediscanner was defective - both my hand one and the bed panel. The chances of both going out at the same time are millios to one," McCoy said in frustration. "I should have used another, not relied on just one. Jim could have died because of my negligence."

Spock looked at the doctor in surprise, realizing McCoy was blaming himself when in reality it was no-one's fault.

No-one's fault? Not even his!

He put his hand on McCoy's shoulder. "No, Bones, it was not your fault. You saved his life. If you hadn't been so **alert** Jim would have died."

McCoy raised his eyes to meet the dark alien ones, and saw the warmth and compassion in them. He smiled slightly. "You were blaming yourself, weren't you?"

"Yes, but the fault lies on no-one. We must both accept the fact that Jim could be taken from us at any time, and live with it."

McCoy sighed heavily. "No way to keep him safe, Spock?"

"No way, Doctor; except, perhaps, that by our continued vigilance we can save him sometimes from himself."

"No more thoughts of controlling him, Spock? That wouldn't have worked anyway, you know that."

"I know that now. To control him would be to kill him mentally. That is as unacceptable. We must help each other to keep him as safe as possible - at least, as safe as his unbound spirit will let us."

"Help each other," McCoy repeated softly, never taking his eyes from Spock's face. Spock had never asked his help before. "Yes, I'd like that. It's time we started working together for his sake, isn't it?"

"Bones, Spock, you know the Federation wants this alliance, and the only way for it to be completed is for me to go down and finish it," Kirk said flatly.

The argument was getting them nowhere. Spock and McCoy had been at him for over an hour trying to change his mind.

"Dr. McCoy has said you are not strong enough," Spock replied.

Kirk sighed heavily. "It won't be for very long. Teoka said all that remains of the ceremony is the ritual drinking of wine. No, not the planet's wine this time," Kirk said hurriedly at the look of protest on both faces in front of him. "A safe wine from the ship. My gift for the ceremony to bind the planet and the Federation."

"Jim..." McCoy began, willing to keep trying.

"I'm beaming down and that's the end of it, gentlemen," Kirk said, anger back in his eyes. "That application must be gotten back to Starfleet now. The planet is important to the Federation, and any more delays could be catastrophic."

Kirk sat up slowly, swinging his legs over the bed and standing experimentally.

"Jim!" McCoy warned.

"I'm beaming down, Doctor. I'm going to my quarters to change clothes, then I'm beaming down. Teoka is waiting for me. He warned that further delay could be dangerous."

"Captain..."

Kirk came to a stop beside Spock, looking him in the eyes. "I'll be all right, Spock," he said sympathetically at the worry in those dark eyes. "What could happen in the short time I'll be there?"

Spock remained silent, but the look of cunning and triumph he had seen cross Krill's face filled him with unease. Kirk was waiting for an answer, but there was none he could give. Nothing substantial he could say to stop him.

"Can't Spock at least come with you, Jim?" McCoy asked.

"No, I asked. Teoka apologised for the reactions of some of his people to Spock, but his beaming down with me could defeat my going down. It'll be all right. I'll be there and back before you know I'm gone."

Spock and McCoy exchanged long looks as the Captain strode out of Sickbay.

// Stop him?//

// Stop him!//

Kirk changed clothes, silently hoping that the ceremony was as short as Teoka had said, for he didn't think he would last through a lengthy one. He still felt weak, and shouldn't have over-ridden McCoy, but that application was more important than one man's comfort. It could make a vast difference to the Federation of that planet became one of them, not only for its strategic position between the Romulans and the Federation, but because of the people. They were extremely knowledgeable, gifted people and the Federation would vastly profit from them just as the planet would profit from the Federation. It had to be done.

He headed for the door and ran into it! It didn't open! Damn! What a time for it to malfunction. He went to the desk. "Kirk to Maintenance."

"Maintenance here.
McCormick speaking."

"This is the Captain. The door to my cabin is stuck, and I'm due down on the planet. Get someone up here immediately."

"Yes, Captain. Someone's on the way."

"Kirk to bridge."

"Bridge here," came Spock's voice.

"The door to my quarters is stuck, Mr. Spock. Please inform Teoka that I'll be there as soon as I can."

Kirk paced for a few minutes before he realized that he would just wear himself out so he sat down at the desk, staring impatiently at the door that refused to open. He had never heard of it happening before. Why him? Why always to him? The table communicator buzzed.

"Kirk here."

"McCormick here, Captain."

"Yes, McCormick. What's wrong with my door?"

There was a perceptible pause, as if McCormick were trying to think of the best way to put it. "There's nothing wrong with your door, sir."

"What do you mean, nothing's wrong? It won't open."

There was muffled talking and the intercom went dead. Kirk stared at it in surprise, but before he could do anything the door to his quarters opened and McCoy and Spock entered, to stop just inside the door. Kirk rose to his feet and faced them.

"How did you get the door unstuck, Spock?" Kirk asked, puzzled.

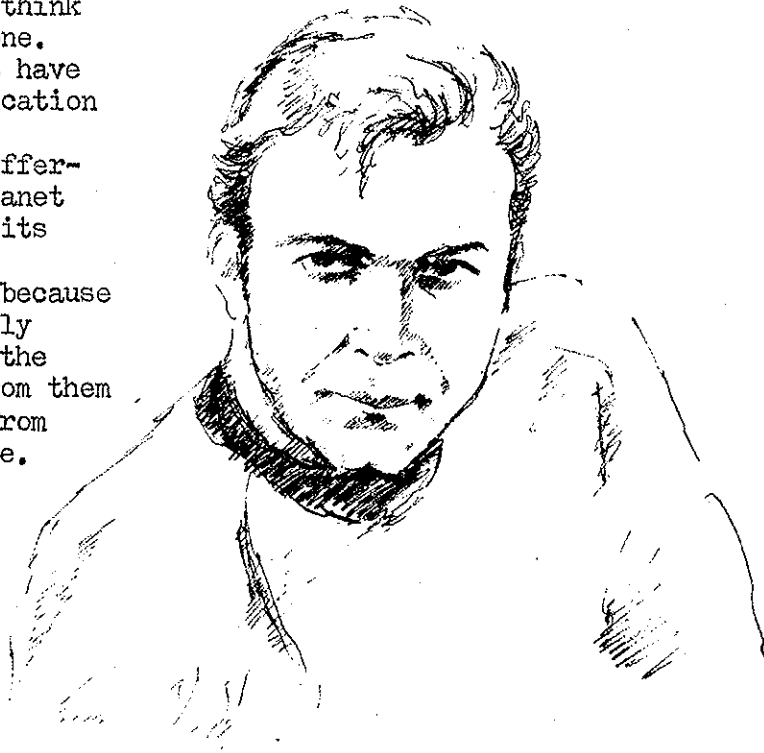
"It was never stuck, Captain," Spock said calmly.

"Never stuck?" Kirk asked, realization dawning on him slowly. "Explain."

"I had the computer lock the controls."

"You - what?" Kirk demanded, astonishment on his face.

"I did not want you to beam down, and could think of no other way to delay your departure."



"You didn't want..." Kirk's voice faded, speechless at the audacity of what Spock had done.

"Jim, we were worried. We don't think you should beam down," McCoy explained.

Kirk pulled his eyes away from Spock's face to look at the doctor. Anger washed over him and he took several deep breaths before he said anything, trying to calm himself.

"You were part of this, Bones?" he asked, his voice low, trembling just slightly.

"I didn't know what he was going to do, but I'm backing him one hundred percent," McCoy replied, meeting Kirk's angry eyes.

"I'm beaming down to the meeting with Teoka," Kirk said evenly, his face expressionless. "When I get back I'll expect both your Requests for Transfer on this desk within half an hour. Is that understood?"

"Jim!" McCoy exclaimed. "No!" McCoy looked at Spock, but the Vulcan appeared unable to move, shock showing clearly on his face. Neither man had expected this reaction.

"I cannot have my officers directing my actions, Doctor. There are things I must do, even if you think they're wrong. What you've done was mutinous, Spock, and cannot be forgiven," Kirk said as he looked at his First Officer. Even through his anger he felt compassion for the Vulcan's distress, but to lock him in his quarters like an erring child was too much even for him to forgive.

"Now, if you gentlemen have no further objections, Teoka is waiting for me." Kirk walked steadily out of his quarters, his anger remaining behind in the room like a silent wraith.

McCoy watched Spock worriedly. The Vulcan hadn't moved since Kirk had pronounced his verdict, for verdict it was, condemning them all to a life of loneliness. "Spock! Spock, come out of it!" McCoy said as he shook him.

The Vulcan met the doctor's eyes, but McCoy saw only panic in them. "What have I done?" Spock looked dazedly around the room. "Jim is going to send us away. He will be alone with no-one to protect him."

"We'll talk to him when he gets back, Spock. We'll make him see why we did it. He'll understand."

Spock's eyes cleared a little. "Yes, perhaps we can talk him into keeping you, then he will have someone beside him."

"He needs both of us, Spock," McCoy objected. "You more than me, I think."

Spock shook his head. "I have... miscalculated. My act was unforgivable, as he stated. An act of mutiny." Spock clenched his trembling hands. "He will not forgive that as I cannot."

"You acted out of his best interests, Spock. Surely he'll realize that when he gets over being angry. It was no act of mutiny, but an act of love."

"Mutiny for whatever reason cannot be condoned, Doctor," Spock said formally. "I am needed on the bridge until the Captain returns. I will then hand in my resignation."

"Resignation? Why resignation, Spock?"

Spock paused by the door. "Starfleet would be unbearable once I left the Enterprise. I have no wish to serve on another ship."

"Or under another Captain, Spock?"

Spock didn't reply, but continued on out the door and to the bridge.

Kirk was back in Sickbay, none the worse for wear although he was tired from the excitement.

"One of the men against the alliance tried to kill me but Teoka was ready for him. He'd had guards staked out looking for the man or his henchmen. The minute one was spotted he was taken and locked away. The leader came the closest to performing the act, though. If Teoka hadn't spotted him at the last minute and leaped for him, I'd be dead. He had a Romulan phaser set for kill. If he'd had the chance to use it I wouldn't be here now."

Spock and McCoy had been listening in stunned silence. Spock had been right to be worried, McCoy thought. Spock hadn't said a word since he'd entered Sickbay, hadn't moved at all during the Captain's report.

"Spock told me about the man, Jim. Said he'd had the impression the man was going to try something when he demanded you beam down to finish the signing," McCoy explained.

Kirk looked at his First Officer. Spock kept his eyes on the floor, his hands behind his back.

"Why didn't you tell me, Spock?"

"I had no proof, only speculation."

"Vulcans don't have intuition, Spock?" Kirk asked, almost teasing.

"Indeed, Captain. I have made this ready for your signature," Spock replied slowly as he handed Kirk a folded paper.

Kirk looked at it, then carefully and precisely began tearing the paper into tiny bits. "Request denied, Mr. Spock," he said simply. "I need you here."

"Captain..."

"I'll hear no more about it. I know why you acted as you did. This time I'll let it pass, but if anything like it happens again - no matter what the reason - I'll rewrite this for you and submit it." He picked up a pile of the tiny bits and let them fall through his fingers. "That goes for you too, Bones. I must have implicit trust in my officers." The threat in his voice didn't need explained, and McCoy dropped his eyes.

"Captain..." Spock tried again.

Kirk looked at him steadily. "Aren't you due on the bridge, Mr. Spock?"

Spock shut his mouth and inclined his head. "Yes, Captain." He turned to go, pausing briefly beside McCoy.

"Vulcans are not perfect, Doctor," Spock said softly. "We make mistakes, but we do learn by them."

"You really shook us up, Jim," McCoy said as Spock disappeared through the Sickbay doors.

Kirk looked at him before he shook his head slightly. "Not as badly as you did me. I won't tolerate it again, Bones. Remember that." Kirk closed his eyes with a deep sigh. "I'd like to rest now."

McCoy watched for several long minutes until Kirk's breathing evened out and he knew he was asleep. The full impact of what he and Spock had done hit him, and he grabbed the end of the bed as his legs threatened to give out.

Mutiny. Insubordination.

They had nearly driven Kirk beyond his capacity to forgive, had almost dug a chasm between them that could never be bridged. He controlled his trembling enough to make it into his office before he all but fell into his chair. He reached for the bottle of brandy in the desk and filled a glass to the brim, swallowing it all before he paused for breath.

//So close. So very close.// He shuddered and filled his glass again. He could still see the long empty years that had threatened, empty of Kirk and Spock and Starfleet, for he couldn't have served under another Captain either.

He set about deliberately, purposely, to get drunk.

+++++

THE DECISION by Patricia Keen

The hand that replaced the white knight on the table had a slight tinge of green. The body to which the hand belonged, having deposited the fallen chess piece, turned abruptly and marched away from the table. Clenching his fists, a Human gesture which was not performed unconsciously, the Vulcan activated the door lock of his quarters, an act he had not performed for many years.

Something would have to be done, he mused. A conclusion needed to be swiftly sought. Spock moved silently around the room, neither touching nor seeing the familiar objects around him. He was aware only of a selection of random thoughts, and a build-up of useless psychological energy within.

Such a mood was dangerous for him, and had caused the unusual extreme of locking the door to his quarters. Unable to allow the risk of being seen in such a disturbed state, Spock was willing to take the risk that someone would find his door locked. Fortunately, it was unlikely that at this hour of the evening he would have visitors. Kirk had left some time earlier, unaware of his friend's well-disguised discomfiture, McCoy was unlikely to visit, and there was no-one else who would try his door. Everyone respected his privacy too much, a situation for which he had often been grateful, although just occasionally he found it hard to bear.

Now that a decision had become not only necessary, but vital to his existence, Spock found himself in such a disturbed, frustrated state of mind that meditation was impossible. Somehow he had to calm himself sufficiently to permit a close critical scrutiny of the past five years. Five years in which so much had happened, and which had changed him so much.

Finally finding himself able to sit down, Spock began to review the life he had led during that - for him - brief period of time. A feeling of claustrophobia overwhelmed him as he recalled the variety of events.

Captain Pike had certainly been an able Captain, but able as he was he had not been able to arouse more than the strong sense of duty with which Spock had been brought up, a sense of duty that had made the young Vulcan officer a loyal follower, willing even to allow his own career to be placed in jeopardy as a final act of loyalty to his former Captain.

But that period had come to an end at the start of the last five-year mission. It had been a prelude, the first act of an unfolding drama; a drama that Spock, even at this time of crisis, had a strong suspicion would come to fruition whatever he might or might not do.

Predestination aside, that idea was illogical. And that, basically, was the problem - Humans were illogical. They did not consider either logic, or a determination to behave or think logically, to be a relevant part of their lives.

McCoy continually ribbed him about his logic, and used the slightest discrepancy to great effect at the Vulcan's expense. For the past five years Spock had found himself able to deal adequately with such mild verbal abuse; many times he had even enjoyed the intellectual stimulation of this well-accepted and even expected game. But now the joke was wearing thin. It was difficult continually to find an acceptable logical reply when one's mind was split between wanting to laugh at the Doctor's idiocy, and screaming with pain at its own amusement. The split between his genetic makeup was growing stronger all the time.

When Captain Pike left the Enterprise Spock had found himself promoted to First Officer under a new, young, Human Captain. A new Captain for a new five-year mission; away from both Earth and Vulcan, far away, on a mission which required the utmost from the crew as a single working unit.

But if the mission required a lot from the crew, then it required the absolute devotion of her young Captain. Spock had soon found that the Captain was quiet, at times mildly introverted, at other times quite extroverted. A Captain who kept himself in touch with, but nevertheless part from, the majority of the crew. As such Kirk needed to rely on his officers for company, and he had soon discovered a quiet officer who kept himself very much to himself, who worked hard, and who enjoyed playing chess.

Spock was mildly amused as he considered himself at that time. Despite the years he had spent in Human company since leaving Vulcan against his father's will, both at Starfleet Academy and more recently under Captain Pike on the Enterprise, the Spock who first attracted the attention of the new Captain was still in many ways brash and disinclined to empathise with Humans. What Kirk had seen in him at that time Spock couldn't imagine, but then Kirk had been younger too. Over the past five years they had grown up together. Many times Spock had had cause to bless this period of understanding and friendship with the Human. But now things had changed; he was in danger of straining the pleasant relationship that had grown up between them. In order to avoid a painful split such as the one he had had with Sarek, he would have to tread carefully when mentioning a permanent farewell. For to return to Vulcan was becoming the only way out of his emotional situation. Meantime he would have to return to his now-accustomed act of unchangability.

It was at moments like this that over the past few months Spock had found himself wishing for the tranquility of the state of Kolinahr. Many years previously, while still a small child tormented by his friends, Spock could remember seeing Master Sunar. The Grand Master had been accompanied by lesser Masters of the Kolinahr disciplines. At the time he had been struck forcibly by the air of calm acceptance and intellectual accomplishment that the Masters had radiated. Even at that early age Spock had envied their calm and sense of presence. Now, so many years later, Spock found himself again in need of peace, and the opportunity to undertake intellectual advancement on his own terms.

So it was that gradually the concept of undertaking the disciplines of the Kolinahr formed in Spock's mind. As time passed towards the end of the mission and the triumphant return home (which was well publicised by Starfleet) Spock found himself continually re-assessing the Human habits he believed himself to be forming. Continually on guard for the slightest hint of emotion - caught like an illness from the infectious Humans - Spock spent the time of the return journey to Earth illogically longing for the time when he would again stand on Vulcan sand.

Once there he felt that the discipline of Kolinahr would remove all vestiges of the Human half of his character. Then at long last he, Spock, the product of a Human mother and a Vulcan father, brought up in a Vulcan household as a Vulcan child - then he would truly be a Vulcan. A Vulcan on the planet of his birth.

Despite his own choice at an early age to follow the ways of his father's people, and despite his Vulcan appearance, Spock had always been regarded as Human by all full-blooded Vulcans. Since his earliest childhood he had been mercilessly taunted about being Human by his peers. Then, as a youth, deciding to enter Starfleet and be a Vulcan among Humans rather than a Human at the Vulcan Science Academy, he had been accused of being Human by Sarek, his own father.

During his period at Starfleet Spock found himself considered very much a Vulcan by the Humans he worked with; however some, though accepting his Vulcan ancestry, wanted to change him, make him into the Human he had no wish to become, and which he had long worked hard to avoid.

Now the time to say farewell to Kirk, McCoy, and to Humans in general was drawing nearer. Soon would come the time when Vulcan itself would beckon him to a harsh if profitable future. Once the challenge of the Kolinahr had been accepted, then there would at last be a chance to leave Earth and Humanity behind, and to finally prove himself a Vulcan. A Vulcan among Vulcans.

But what was more important was that such associations as to the nature of his racial being would no longer be relevant. Race had no relevance in a transcendental state such as could be achieved through a perfect devotion to logic - such as was the Kolinahr.

Now nine Vulcan seasons had passed, and it was the hour before Vulcan's twin suns turned the sky to its familiar vermilion hue. This time Spock's desire to meditate was rapidly fulfilled, and he felt the physical and psionic peace that he had so long sought.

Carefully, on this most important of days, Spock searched for any last

vestiges of the Human side to his character and personality.

It was as he turned to say a goodbye to Earth and all it stood for that V'Ger called. A call which, along with that thought-wish of Kirk's, re-awoke the Human within him and lost him the peace of the Kolinahr for ever.

Master T'sai removed her fingers from the face of the one who knelt before her. In that brief time of mindmeld during the Kolinahr ceremony she had relived the half-Human's thoughts, and she knew that he had failed - that Spock could never be a Vulcan.

Dropping the symbol of success onto the ancient carved floor of the Place of Gol, T'sai intoned, "Your answer lies elsewhere, Spock." Then she turned and left, followed by the two lesser Masters.

Spock was alone again.

Picking up the dropped medallion Spock turned to face the sky, and what lay beyond. And the future. No full-blooded Vulcan would ever understand, but if he had been Human he would have wept.

Spock was a Vulcan - and his face was dry.

+++++

THE VELVET SKY, THE JEWELLED STARS by Linda Green

The boy turned away.
The night air was cold, and the window
Had to be closed.
But still his eyes were drawn.
The sky was velvet dark, and studded
With the jewelled stars.

A sigh escaped him.
He was young, so young, and all the stars
Were First-born of Creation.
The hazel eyes shut tight.
Imagination's ecstasy would serve -
The boy was soon in Starflight.

A call - His mother.
"Jim, are you in bed yet?" With a sigh
He turned, climbed into bed.
The "Goodnight" drifted over him.
Again he sighed, for he was young, and yet
His sleep was full of dreams.

The velvet sky was peaceful.
Yet all the stars were questioning; How long
Before the boy became a man?
They watched him from the darkness.
Soon his sleep was quiet, untroubled, for he knew
As they knew, where his future lay.

+++++

Chapel : How old would you say the Captain's new yeoman is?

Uhura : Oh, somewhere in the middle flirties.

+++++

McCoy : Don't you know my consulting hours are from 9 to 12?

Security Guard : Yes, but the Klingon who shot me didn't.

+++++

MIND SNATCH by Mark G. Gregory

Captain's Log, Stardate 8001.31 The Enterprise is in orbit around Phania III, a newly-discovered planet which preliminary surface probes indicate to be a rich source of Cytocyeate, a rare drug which in its refined form will halt the terminal disease Miphronnitis. The drug is urgently needed due to an outbreak of said disease on the Ellerby Colony. End log.

Captain Kirk stared at the large screen before him and mused. A pleasant little planet, similar to Earth, but generally colder and with a lesser gravity. Perhaps if there was time before the ship was scheduled to leave some badly-needed shore leave might be arranged...

"Mr. Sulu, orbital status, please."

Sulu answered without looking around, continuing to monitor his board. "At present, Captain, 30,000 Km above the planet's surface. We'll be directly over one of the Cytocyeate deposits found by the Geology section."

Satisfied that all was well, Kirk turned to Spock, who was currently studying a text in higher mathematics, a form of escape from the emotions that were constantly around him.

"Mr. Spock?"

The Vulcan looked up, instantly alert. "Yes, Captain?"

"Landing party is to beam down to Phania III at 0100 hours ship's time. Party is to consist of myself, you, Dr. McCoy, and Geologists O'Havy and D'Moto. Type 1 phasers will be..."

"Captain!" Sulu interrupted, puzzlement in his voice, "There's some strange energy anomaly growing on the planet's surface. It just appeared out of nowhere."

Kirk was worried. Evidence of unnatural energy emission was totally unexpected. He turned to Spock.

"Spock, find out what it is. I want a complete sensor scan and analysis. We're not moving until we know what it is."

There was a pause while Spock bent over the hooded viewer on the library computer and absorbed all the incoming data. He checked, then turned to Kirk.

"It would appear, Captain, that the energy source detected by Mr. Sulu is a form of transporter energy, and it appears to be sufficiently powerful to dwarf our own. It seems that our appearance on the scene initiated the release of energy. Sensor scans also show that the machinery releasing the energy is fully automated, and located exactly 29.24 Km below the surface of the planet."

Kirk considered Spock's evaluation. It could be nothing, but cynical experience told him it was trouble.

"Is there any danger from it, Spock, in its present form?"

Spock answered, "No, Captain, there is no evidence to suggest that the energy could have any adverse effects on the ship or crew. However, data supplied does suggest that if we use our own transporter the resultant energies may interact and prevent the materialisation of anyone or any object put through it."

"Well!" exclaimed Kirk. "It appears that there's not going to be any landing party after all. Lt. Uhura, inform the rest of the landing party of the fact, and contact Mr. Scott in Engineering; have him check Mr. Spock's theory about the transporter."

It was a difficult situation. It was vital that the drug supply reach the Ellerby Colony within two weeks or there would be 30% fatalities at least - and that meant possibly seven million men, women and children dead. There just had to be some way to get at the Cytocyeate deposits.

Ordinarily in a situation such as this he would have made use of one of the shuttlecraft, but en route to Phania III from Starbase 14, Ensign Roly had contracted a peculiar form of space sickness ; he had set all the Enterprise's shuttlecraft on automatic pilot and had launched them into deep space to explode once they had reached a critical velocity. Unfortunately Ensign Roly had sealed his own fate when in his madness he neglected to don a life-support belt before the shuttlebay doors opened to let in the cold vacuum of space.

Kirk remembered the incident with regret, but breaking off from his morose train of thought addressed Spock.

"Any additional data on that transporter energy, Spock? Maybe it's gone and we can get down to Phania III and do what we came here for."

"Negative, Captain. The energy is still apparently the same... Wait! Sensors are beginning to register an unexpected surge of power..."

"Heading?"

"It appears to be directed at the ship, Captain."

"Screens up, Mr. Sulu!"

"Screens up, Captain."

Spock concluded, "To be exact - the bridge."

Suddenly Kirk stood rigid; a yellow nimbus of shifting energy completely enveloped him. It turned white and faded into opaqueness, then totally disappeared.

Spock blinked. Kirk was no longer there.

Six hours had passed since Captain Kirk had disappeared, and Spock found himself in the ship's main briefing room watching the tense faces of the rest of the bridge crew, as well as Lt. Commanders Scott and McCoy.

Spock spoke. "Computer."

"WORKING."

"Following is an investigation into the unprecedented disappearance of Captain James T. Kirk, Commanding Officer. Record."

The mask-like face and the controlled voice betrayed no emotion as Spock continued. "Gentlemen, you have been briefed. You are all familiar with the circumstances leading to Captain Kirk's disappearance. As yet no information leading to his whereabouts has been uncovered, but it is assumed that he is somewhere on the planet below."

"Or in the planet," interrupted Dr. McCoy.

"Quite, Doctor. Or, as you say, inside the planet. Any suggestions, Mr. Scott?"

Lt. Commander Scott was uncomfortable at the disruption of ship's routine, and did not like the present situation at all.

"Well, laddie, I've been considerin' the problem, an' it's tricky. You see, it's ma theory - and I ken it's no' the best - that the Captain has been snatched away by yon alien transporter. If we're to get the Captain back we're goin' to have to go for the machine and put it out of action - ayē rememberin' it could whisk another one of us awa' at any moment."

"Thank you, Mr. Scott. Your theory runs along similar lines to mine. It seems a plausible train of reasoning, and so I have already taken steps to act on it."

The discussion went on for another hour before it ended, and McCoy stopped Spock as he was about to leave the briefing room.

"Well, Spock, just how do you plan to get Jim back?"

Spock eyed McCoy warily, but knew he would sympathise with the loss of Kirk.

"Simple, Dr. McCoy. We are beaming down to the planet."

McCoy was exasperated. "Damn it, Spock, do you really expect this to work? It's bad enough having my molecules scrambled all over space by our own transporter, but now by an alien one as well! I give up!"

McCoy was referring to Spock's plan. He and Scotty had discovered the frequency of the alien transporter field, and with a little improvisation and much modification had aligned the Enterprise's transporter frequency with its alien counterpart, thus setting up a resonating field that allowed them to make use of the alien transporter via their own, and then beam down to the same spot to which Captain Kirk had - presumably - been transported.

In reply to McCoy's question Spock answered calmly, "Doctor, your constant exhibition of excessive emotion never fails to astound me. It is indeed unfortunate for you that you are not gifted with the Vulcan ability to control your own emotions. Of course it will work. Mr. Scott and I have thoroughly satisfied ourselves as to the feasibility of tapping into the alien transporter." Spock raised a questioning eyebrow as if to challenge McCoy to continue with his sarcasm.

They stood in the main transporter room waiting for Scotty and two Security guards to arrive to accompany them to the planet. McCoy looked at Spock, sensing his anxiety. After the first few years with Spock as First Officer of the Enterprise McCoy had finally, after numerous psychological studies, begun to understand Spock's mentality, and could tell to some extent when he was acting under stress. Now was one of those times.

God! thought McCoy, He's as worried as I am!

He watched Spock as the Vulcan carried out last-minute adjustments to the transporter. "What do you think we'll find when we beam down there, Spock?"

"Impossible to guess, Doctor. Suffice it to say, however, that we are beaming down into a cavern of sorts. You have your phaser, I hope? There is a high probability that the landing party may run into some kind of trouble - I would indeed regret your being incapacitated before we find the Captain."

McCoy was trying to figure out whether or not to feel insulted when Scotty and the two Security guards entered the transporter room.

"Hello, Scotty," greeted McCoy. "What do you make of this crazy idea?"

"I dinna ken whit tae think, Doctor, but we've got priorities and we must get the Captain back. It's a funny business, and I for one will be glad when it's all over."

Spock checked that the transporters were completely aligned, then left it to Kyle to supervise the beam-down.

"Ready, gentlemen. We shall be beaming down immediately. Be prepared for any eventuality, and have your phasers set on stun."

He stepped onto the transporter platform where the other four had already assembled, and took up his position.

"Energise, Mr. Kyle."

"Aye aye, sir." Kyle's fingers slowly began to move the three levers that would disassemble the landing party's component atoms, and reassemble them inside the interior of the planet below.

Spock, McCoy, Scotty and the two Security guards materialised within a gigantic chamber. Spock had been right - it was similar to a cavern, but there the resemblance ended. The walls were smooth and well-lit; they soared up several hundred metres to meet at a common point in the centre.

The five men surveyed the chamber, and noticed that all round the walls were rectangular cases, the outlines of their contents undefined and indistinct.

Spock moved towards the nearest, followed by the remainder of the landing party. McCoy was the first to break the silence.

"What do you suppose they are?" His question was directed to everyone in

general, but surprisingly one of the Security guards answered him.

"I think I know, sir," said Delsax, a recent addition to the crew; he was a native of Canston, a frontier planet.

Spock turned to him. "Would you enlighten us, Mr. Delsax."

"Yes, sir. While I was a Security cadet at the Academy I was interested in xenoarchaeology, and I once came across a text that dealt with the extinct race that had once existed on Treblevia. Archaeologists who had studied the ruins on the planet had come across a device which was supposed to carry out the same function as a Suspended Animation Unit does. Tests were carried out on laboratory animals, and it was discovered that while this device kept the body preserved perfectly, it also severed the mind from the body, leaving it virtually a vegetable." He paused, trying to remember more. "One more point, sir. There was a footnote with the text - something about the discovery of another device which could return the mind to the body. Unfortunately one of the scientists on the project realised the implications of such a device and destroyed it, wiping out any usefulness it might have had. The text was several hundred years old, about the time of the Eugenics Wars. That's about it, sir."

Spock considered the information and reached a conclusion. "If what you say is correct, Mr. Delsax, then these may be duplicates of those devices; and judging by their apparent condition it appears that they are still functional and contain life-forms within. Will you confirm, Doctor."

Spock and Scott moved towards the next case while McCoy stepped closer with his medical tricorder and took the necessary readings. He fiddled with the controls for a moment then rechecked his findings, concerned about those he was getting. Something was wrong - very wrong.

"Spock, Scotty, come here! I want your opinion."

As Spock approached McCoy handed the tricorder to him. The Vulcan raised a quizzical eyebrow. "Is there something wrong, Dr. McCoy?"

"You bet your cotton socks there is, Spock! Check my readings and see what you get."

Spock aimed the tricorder at the case, took the readings, and studied the. "Fascinating!" he muttered, half to himself, half to the others.

"Well?" asked McCoy.

"There is some discrepancy here indeed, Doctor. The life-form in this particular case registers as dead, but the case is still functional." He paused to consider. "It might be more enlightening if we were to open the case."

Spock's hand moved towards the opening mechanism, but was restrained by McCoy, who looked at him with worry in his face.

"Do you think this wise, Spock? We don't know what to expect. I think we should leave it."

"You are correct of course, Doctor. Shall we move on?"

The landing party began to explore more of the cavern's circumference when Scott noticed something. "That's odd!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, Mr. Scott?" Spock responded.

"Have you noticed that as we move further on the capsules appear to be in better condition. If you look over there," he pointed to the other side of the chamber, "the capsules are old and dirty, most of them have cobwebs. But if you look forward," and he indicated in front of them, "the reverse is true. They seem to be in better condition, as if..."

Suddenly they heard a noise. "What was that?"

"Look!" whispered Scotty. "Over there!"

They looked in the direction he pointed. Ahead of them two large doors were sliding aside to reveal another room beyond, and out of it trundled a small robot truck carrying a capsule identical to the ones that dotted the circumference

of the cavern. They ~~darted~~ quickly behind the nearest capsules to conceal themselves and watched the truck's movements. It moved slowly to the end of the line of the newer looking capsules and discharged its burden into a groove in the wall, locking it into place. The truck then turned and headed back towards the doors through which it had come, and the landing party silently began to follow it.

As it drew close to the doors Spock and the two Security men began to run faster; the doors were steadily closing, and Spock realised they would not reach them in time.

"Quickly!" he ordered. "We must try to reach the doors before they close."

The landing party moved even faster, with Spock and Security guard Thompson in front. Suddenly Spock tripped and fell, but Thompson continued to run on. The others had begun to fall behind and were slowing down, having realised that they would be unable to reach the doors before they closed.

Thompson, unaware that Spock had tripped and that the others had fallen behind, reached a spot exactly ten metres from the doors when a beam of energy lanced out from the cavern wall in front of him, hitting him squarely in the chest. He folded and was flung in the air, to land with a sickening thud on the hard floor.

By this time Spock had regained his feet and was turning to Thompson with McCoy close behind. It was obvious from the unnatural angle of his head that the guard was dead, but McCoy confirmed it. His face was creased with anxiety as he turned to the others.

"Dead! Dead before he hit the ground. What the hell got him - it disrupted his whole cellular structure!"

Thompson's chest was a mess; most of his trunk had been blasted away, and what was left showed signs of massive burns and bruising.

Scotty replayed the readings taken during the accident. "It's a form of laser energy, similar to that used in the late 21st century to destroy the nuclei of defective cells in brain tissue."

"Whatever its nature, Mr. Scott," Spock added, "it is evident that it is lethal. Such a device would be incorporated as a precautionary measure, a defence to prevent anyone entering the room beyond the doors." He turned to McCoy. "Doctor, contact the Enterprise and have the corpse beamed up for an autopsy. It will be interesting to learn the exact capabilities of the energy beam."

McCoy glared at Spock, his face red with suppressed fury. "Is that all it is to you, Spock? A corpse? A man has just died and you act as if it were some laboratory experiment. Blast you, Spock - and damn your insensitivity!"

Spock answered with his usual coolness. "Doctor, you will discipline yourself. Remember that you are still my subordinate. Thompson's death was unfortunate, but the fact remains that he is dead, and there is nothing we can do to bring him back to life. Carry out your duties, Doctor - that is all that is required of you."

Scotty interrupted. "It's a pity that Thompson's dead, Doctor, but now is no' the time to grieve. He was a good man, but Spock's right - we've got to be objective for the time being. I suppose we should see what was in that capsule the robot truck brought through."

"My thoughts entirely, Mr. Scott. Mr. Delsax, you will accompany us. Doctor, there is no need for you to remain on board ship. Delegate the autopsy to one of your staff and then report back. You will be of much more use down here."

Spock, Scotty and Delsax moved off towards the newest capsule while McCoy took out his communicator to contact the ship for beam-up.

The three men reached the new capsule and stood close, observing it. Spock and Scotty took initial readings with their tricorders while Delsax stood to one side and drew his phaser, assuming a stance of readiness. Scotty noticed this but said nothing - it was the mark of a good Security man to be constantly alert.

Spock glanced up from his tricorder and motioned to Scott. "Readings indicate that the life-form within this capsule is alive and apparently humanoid. Mr. Scott, will you release the lock mechanism; I will continue to take tricorder readings."

Scott nodded and stepped forward, reaching out to release the lock. Slowly the front of the capsule swung open to reveal a transparent rectangular block of material which housed a body.

Spock stared at it, not believing what he saw. Scott looked closer, as did Delsax.

"It's Captain Kirk, Mr. Spock! The Captain's been placed in suspended animation!"

Scott looked from Spock to Delsax, and then again at the capsule.

"My God!" he whispered.

Minutes went by and the initial shock passed as the three men accustomed themselves to the situation. By this time McCoy had completed the round trip to the Enterprise, and was already materialising beside them. He was still fuming at Spock's callous attitude, and was about to confront him when he saw Kirk's body in the capsule, as pale as death.

"What...?" He looked at Scott for an answer, and when none was forthcoming, turned to Spock. "Spock, what's happened? Why is Jim in the capsule?"

Spock, very aware of McCoy's worry and concern for their mutual friend, answered. "It would seem that the Captain was beamed to the surface as a prelude to being placed in one of these capsules." Spock turned to look again into the capsule, and continued, "Doctor, please employ your tricorder and determine the Captain's state of health."

McCoy quickly took the readings. "He's in perfect health, but there's no brain activity. Even in such a state there should be slight traces." He looked at Spock, deeply concerned. "Spock, his mind's gone! He's a living vegetable. We can't bring him back to consciousness without causing massive shock and possible death. If we're to bring him back to consciousness we have only one course of action. Somehow we must restore his mind. And Spock - there's a time limit. We have just 48 hours."

"Explain, Doctor."

"It's a well-established fact that - contrary to the layman's belief - the mind and the body are interdependent on one another. While the mind, or what we think of as the non-physical part of an individual's brain, may be able to survive without the body for any period of time, the body cannot survive indefinitely without the mind. If Jim's mind is not restored soon, he'll die - already decay is apparent. If the same thing has happened to the life-forms in these other capsules then that explains why they are all dead."

Scott, who was still recovering from the recent shock, tore his eyes from the capsule which housed Kirk's body, and looked at Spock.

"Well, Mr. Spock, what are you going to do?" His accent was noticeably absent under stress.

Spock considered for a moment. "It would appear that our first objective is to locate the machinery that runs this complex. From what I saw beyond the doors ahead I would estimate a 98% probability that the machinery - or at least the central nexus - is to be found there. Therefore we must find a way in, and it is obviously out of the question to repeat our previous attempt. Your opinions or suggestions would be more than welcome."

The four Enterprise men lapsed into silence, thinking. Silence prevailed for a few moments until Scott spoke. Already an idea was beginning to form at the back of his mind.

"I have an idea, Mr. Spock. It's a bit tricky, but it stands some chance of success."

The others listened intently. "Continue, Mr. Scott," Spock intoned.

"Well, look about ye - dae ye no' see anything o' significance?"

Everybody glanced around the cavern; none of them had any idea of what Scott was talking about except Spock, who was rapidly catching up with Scott's train of thought.

"Of course, Mr. Scott - the capsules and their attendant life-support machinery."

"Exactly," said Scotty, pleased that someone knew what he was talking about. "Now, Dr. McCoy claims that all the other beings in the capsules are dead, so if we destroy their life-support systems there'll be no cause for alarm. See how they're in parallels of five? If we destroy some of the units - exceptin' the Captain's, o' course - it's logical to assume that there will be repair systems to fix any damage. Once these repair systems appear on the scene we'll use that chance to get through the doors."

Delsax had a question. "But how? We saw what happened to Thompson - we can't risk the same."

"But that's just it, laddie. Usining our tricorders we can pinpoint the locations of the laser mounts - there's bound to be more than one - and put them out of commission. Once that's done we wait until the repiar systems show up, and then when the doors are opening we fuse them to the floor with our phasers. Simple but effective. Any questions?"

"Just one, Scotty," said McCoy. "What you suggest is all very well, but have you considered what might happen even if we do manage to get through those doors? Suppose there are more laser mounts to take pot-shots at us?"

"An illogical assumption, Dr. McCoy," interrupted Spock. "The presence of any defence system within the room beyond the doors is extremely unlikely. If one was present it would afford a risk of destroying the intricate machinery within."

"Couldn't you have just said it'd be safe?"

"I did, Doctor."

"Okay, I suppose it's our only chance, so we had better get started."

Spock indicated five capsules. "Fire phasers at the five capsules preceeding the Captain's. At the count of three, fire. One... two... three. Fire!"

The four men aligned their phasers with the target and fires simultaneously. Four intense blue-white beams of phaser energy lanced out, disintegrating the life-support units and blasting a good portion of the rock behind them away. Once they were certain they had totally destroyed the units they ceased fire and inspected the damage.

"The damage is extensive, and should be sufficient to arouse the attention of any repair system. Our first concern is to conceal ourselves and wait. Mr. Scott and Mr. Delsax, you will both fire phasers to fuse the right-hand door, taking care that your phaser beams do not destroy any of the machinery beyond the doors. Doctor, you will come with me. We will concentrate our fire on the right-hand door."

The two pairs of men separated, moving off to their respective positions. They did not wait long before the large doors slowly began to move apart to let through two six-wheeled vehicles with various optical and radio antennae protruding from their gleaming surfaces.

In their concealed position Spock spoke to McCoy. "Apparently these are the machines that will repair the damage we caused. It would seem that the doors are only opening sufficiently to let them through. Doctor, get ready - I am about to give the order to fire. FIRE!" he shouted, loudly enough for the others to hear.

Once again four beams of blue-white light lanced out. Almost immediately the beams touched the doors they began to close; but not nearly fast enough, for the phasers were already fusing the metal doors to the floor. The doors ground to a halt, no longer able to move, with less than a metre between them. The repair

vehicles remained oblivious to what had happened and continued with their work. Spock noticed this, and assumed that they were only programmed for repair work and nothing else.

The four men stepped from their places of concealment and began to advance on the doors. When they reached a point twelve metres from them they stopped.

Spock turned to Scotty. "Mr. Scott, would you locate the laser mounts, please."

"Aye aye, sir." Scotty aimed his tricorder at the wall, scanning it. "There are three in all, Mr. Spock. I'll give the coordinates for each one. The first is twelve metres, bearing 87° , angle of elevation 7° ."

With almost mechanical accuracy Spock aimed his phaser at the coordinates given to him and fired. There was an abrupt explosion, then silence. Subsequently Spock neatly and efficiently destroyed the other two laser mounts.

Once Scotty confirmed there was no possibility of danger to them, the Enterprise men stepped forward into the large room before them.

Like the cavern behind them it was circular in shape, but instead of a dome-like ceiling it was flat here, and approximately six metres from the floor. In a series of rows were various machines or computers each with flashing lights as evidence that they were still working. The room was filled with the sound of relays snapping into place, and the occasional whirr of tape movement.

"Fascinating!" murmured Spock, eyeing a prominent computer to their left. "Obviously the central control terminal." He moved towards it. "In all probability this computer is the control board."

He studied the computer intently for a few moments, and then pressed a series of buttons. Instantly this initiated a response from the computer in the form of an electronic whistle, followed by the sliding back of a small disc, revealing a large black stud, the pressing of which presumably started some unknown process.

McCoy and Scott joined Spock; Delsax was on guard at the doors. Scotty looked at the board Spock had been operating with a critical glint in his eye, while McCoy, not knowing much about Federation computer technology, much less its alien equivalent, just looked on with curious interest.

"Mr. Spock," said Scott, "as we came through I noticed a bank of computers on that far wall which bear a remarkable similarity to Federation data banks, and Mr. Delsax commented that it's almost a duplicate of the computer series that held the minds of the aliens in that text he read. It might be worth trying to tie the information stored there into the Enterprise's computer. Chances are the Captain's mind is locked in the wee beastie."

"Quite unnecessary, Mr. Scott. I have been attempting to fathom the operation of this board, and I believe I am now fully conversant with it. It is possible to obtain the information we require via this computer. Observe."

Spock pressed the black stud, and instantly a small screen flickered to life, depicting a floor plan of the room they were in. On the screen there were block diagrams showing the various computers in the room, each one colour-coded. Below the screen was a set of buttons, each with a different colour, corresponding to the computer it represented on the screen. Spock pressed the button that corresponded to the data bank, and the picture on the screen changed to show another diagram; there were several small rectangles arranged in a circle, and each rectangle was split up into five segments. Apparently these represented the capsules in the cavern behind them. There were ninety rectangles in all, eighty-nine of them dark, but the ninetieth was flashing on and off at what seemed to be a decreasing rate.

Suddenly the full implication of what they saw on the screen hit McCoy. "Oh God!" he said in a strangled whisper. "Do you realise what we've done? Do you know what that means?" he pointed at the screen. Spock and Scotty were beginning to guess the awful truth.

"I'll tell you what it means," continued McCoy. "We've as good as signed Jim's death certificate. When the light is on on the capsules, the monitors indicate he is still alive; but when the light dies so does Jim. When we destroyed

the capsule's life-support units they must have all been connected to a main governor, so we also affected the life-support unit on Jim's capsule. Unless we do something soon he'll be dead within hours."

Spock reacted quickly, his decision already made. "Doctor, before... when my brain was stolen by the Matriarchs of the Sigma Draconis system, you placed my body in a life-support unit. Can we do this to the Captain without any more risk to his life?"

McCoy rubbed his chin, considering. "I don't know, Spock. I'm not sure. Perhaps it's possible to transfer his body from the capsule... Hell! We haven't any choice, it's his only chance. First, though, I'll need a medical team down here to help me remove his body and keep it alive."

Spock was relieved that Kirk had a chance - a small one, granted, but still a chance.

"Contact the ship, Doctor, and order what you need. Mr. Delsax, accompany Dr. McCoy to the Captain's capsule. Mr. Scott and I will remain here."

"Aye aye, sir," acknowledged Delsax.

Both McCoy and Delsax moved off back to the large cavern in which Kirk's body lay. McCoy took out his communicator, and flipped it open. "Enterprise, McCoy here. Come in."

"Yes, sir?" responded Lt. Uhura.

"Lieutenant, contact Nurse Chapel and Dr. M'Benga. Have them beam down with two orderlies and a life-support unit. We've found the Captain, and we'll be beaming up soon. This is not for general release among the crew - I repeat, it is not for general release. McCoy out."

There would be an interval of a few minutes before the medical team beamed down, so the time could best be employed by re-opening Kirk's capsule. Once they had opened the transparent shield between them and Kirk a blast of cold air struck them. They looked at Kirk's naked body; already there were signs that his temperature was rising. His breathing was gradually increasing in pace, and the skin tone was becoming more and more flushed.

McCoy dared not let him regain any semblance of consciousness - not that it would be consciousness in the normal sense, he reflected - so he produced a hypo of general anaesthetic and injected it into Kirk's arm.

Beside the capsule the familiar whine of the transporter began to grow in pitch, indicating that the medical team was already in transit. Within a few moments they had fully materialised, and the whine of the transporter faded away.

McCoy immediately began to issue directions to maintain Kirk's life functions while they transferred his body from the capsule to the life-support unit. It was not a complicated task, but they took their time, making sure at each step that all was still well. Once the job was complete McCoy again took out his communicator to contact Spock.

"Spock, we've transferred Jim to the life-support unit and we're going to beam up now. Do you need me back down here once I've got Jim in the ship's main life-support unit?"

"Spock here, Doctor. Negative. Remain on board ship. Mr. Scott and I are beginning to make progress with the computer. We have made some important discoveries."

McCoy replied, "Okay, Spock. McCoy out." He paused to check Kirk again, satisfying himself that everything was as well as could be expected considering the circumstances, then he contacted the Enterprise. "Enterprise, come in, please."

"Lt. Uhura here, Doctor. Ready to beam up?"

"Yes, Lieutenant. Inform Mr. Kyle we'll be coming through transporter room XR 2 - it's nearer Sickbay. Have all corridors from there to Sickbay cleared of personnel - and Lieutenant... tell Kyle to beam us up easy. I don't know what effect transport may have on the Captain. McCoy out."

"Yes, sir. Enterprise out."

On board ship Kyle's fingers deftly began to operate the transporter. He watched the alcove and saw the ghostlike outline of the medical team begin to form, then shimmer, before it vanished altogether.

Realising that something was drastically wrong he checked the board for any tell-tales. The gauges indicated that energy was being used by the transporter, but obviously with no results. It was as if the transporter beam had been intercepted, then deflected. He decided to check with the bridge.

"Bridge, Kyle here. I've got some kind of trouble with the transporter, and it's preventing beam-up. I think there might be something on the planet blocking our beam. Can you check?"

On the bridge Sulu, who was in command in the absence of the senior officers, turned to Chekov. "Mr. Chekov, see if the sensors are picking up anything that might explain the transporter malfunction."

Chekov bent over the hooded viewer, coaxing the library computer to divulge the required information. He answered, "There is a force-field, type unknown. It covers a substantial radius with the landing party located at the centre; it seems very strange that we did not detect the forcefield when it first appeared."

Sulu considered. He never really enjoyed having to assume command, for when he did anything and everything seemed to happen. He pressed the button on the command chair that would link him with the transporter room.

"Mr. Kyle, I'm afraid you won't be able to use the transporter for some time. Sensors indicate a field of energy of some kind on the planet. Stand by - the bridge will inform you if and when the force-field disappears. Meanwhile we're at an impasse. Bridge out. Mr. Chekov, tie in an alarm circuit in case the field drops. We may need to beam up the landing party fast."

Chekov turned to the board to comply. "Right away, Mr. Sulu."

Sulu next turned his attention to Lt. Uhura. "Uhura, see if we still have contact with the landing party."

"I'm afraid not - I've already tried. The field is blocking signals on all frequencies. They're totally isolated."

This last piece of news gave everyone on the bridge grave doubts as to the final outcome of the landing party's plight.

Meanwhile in the planet's interior McCoy and the rest of his medical team had realised that something was wrong if the Enterprise couldn't beam them up. Perhaps a transporter malfunction... but then why the radio silence as well? The breakdown of primary and secondary systems in both transporter and communications was certainly no coincidence - at least, he was not going to accept it as such.

The situation was becoming desperate now as far as Kirk was concerned; the batteries in the portable life-support unit would only last a few hours, so they were, in effect, back at square one. With no replacements the batteries would soon be exhausted - leaving no power for the life support unit.

McCoy considered the problem, and decided that the only thing to do was to see if Spock had any suggestions. "Spock?" he said into his communicator.

"Spock here, Dr. McCoy. Is everything satisfactory on board ship?"

"No, Spock - we haven't even beamed up yet. Something's wrong, I guess."

"Have you tried your communicator?"

"Yes, that's no good either. Spock, we've got problems - big problems. Consider. The batteried powering the Cpatain's L.S.U. were only designed to last a few hours. He'll die if we don't get him to Sickbay - and we can't beam up. Got any ideas? The situation is critical."

There was a pause while McCoy waited for Spock's answer. "I have a possible solution, Doctor. It involves a high degree of risk, but it should work. I am hesitant even to suggest it, but in the current circumstances and with no other solution in the foreseeable future it is our only chance of restoring the Captain to full consciousness. Can you and your medical team join Mr. Scott and me. Spock out."

McCoy turned to the rest of the medical team. "Okay, Spock wants us in there." He indicated the room he had only recently left. "Follow me."

"Do you think it can be done, Spock? It doesn't seem right, somehow. What you are proposing may kill him."

"There are no alternatives, Doctor. If my suggestion is not carried out Jim will die - and that, Doctor, is a fact. It is his only chance for survival."

McCoy was torn between his desire to help Kirk, and the possible breach of medical ethics that arose from Spock's suggestion. While he and Delsax had been in the cavern behind them Spock and Scotty had located the computer that housed the storage tapes - the same tapes that had Kirk's engrams imprinted on them. They had discovered the manner in which the engrams could be re-impressed into Kirk's brain.

In Spock's own words, "The idea is basically a simple one. It has been theorised for centuries that anything that is known to exist can be recorded if the means by which to do it can be found. As in the present case - this computer annex you see before you can and does record the engrams of the individual's brain; it then translates these engrams into a sophisticated computer code which is incredibly complex in form. Once this is done, the computer then imprints this code onto a special kind of tape which is then stored in its data banks."

Previously Spock and Scotty had been able to retrieve the tape on which Kirk's engrams were imprinted.

Spock was finding it hard to convince Dr. McCoy to agree. Of course, he could understand the reason for his hesitation, but he also realised that it was imperative that they should waste no time.

The rest of the medical team remained silent while McCoy made his decision. Although Dr. M'Benga and Nurse Chapel were well qualified to make such a decision, they both knew that the final word rested with Dr. McCoy. When it came down to it, it was he who was responsible for the welfare of any crewmember, especially the Captain.

McCoy's face twisted with indecision; then, finally, "Okay, Spock, you win. Let's try it."

Spock was visibly relieved. "Thank you, Doctor. Mr. Scott, please prepare the Captain."

"Yes, Mr. Spock." Scott motioned the medical team to bring the Captain nearer while he activated the console before him, punching the necessary sequence that would bring the tape on which Kirk's engrams were to be found.

There was a click, and then a small cassette, alien in appearance, popped out of a slot. Scotty took it, placing it into another slot which was similar to the first. Immediately the light flashed, indicating that the computer was now ready to carry out its function.

McCoy watched as Dr. M'Benga and Nurse Chapel prepared Kirk. They placed his body on a high couch with the tubes that maintained his body functions still attached to him.

Now came the final moment, the point of no return. Scott looked to McCoy, waiting for the order that would start the process.

"You can start the thing now, Scotty."

Scott hesitated for a second, and then threw the switch. Immediately there was a response from Kirk; a low moan escaped his lips and his eyes began to move under his eyelids.

Nurse Chapel was monitoring Kirk with her medical tricorder while everyone else looked on with concern. It was already apparent that the machine was beginning to fulfill its function, that of restoring Kirk's mind to his body.

Kirk's moaning continued, with the occasional twitch or spasm of a muscle, indicating that he was beginning to return to consciousness. Unnoticed by the others, a frown was beginning to spread across Nurse Chapel's face, finally turning to a look of grave concern.

Dr. McCoy, there seems to be something wrong. For a few moments I got a reading indicating a decrease in brain activity... It's starting again! It's as if..."

McCoy acted quickly. "Let me see." He practically snatched the tricorder from her. "She's right, Spock. Jim's beginning to slip. He can't hold on, he can't retain the input for some reason. That blasted machine's killing him!"

Frustration and anger set in. Frustration at his inability to help Kirk, and anger because it had happened in the first place. Then an idea struck him, and he turned to Spock.

"Spock...?"

The Vulcan had already guessed what McCoy had in mind. "The mind-meld, Doctor?"

"Yes, Spock. Could you? It may be his only hope."

Spock nodded. "I am ready."

He visibly straightened, beginning to concentrate his thoughts to achieve the correct state of mind. He reached with strong but firm hands and placed them on Kirk's face. The others could see the effort he was applying to establish mental contact with Kirk. He began.

"I am Spock. You are James Kirk. We are becoming unity; our minds are as one. We are one mind. My mind is your mind; we are together in our minds. We are now one mind."

Spock was totally oblivious to the others, and sweat was beginning to trickle from his brow. He continued.

"James Kirk. Listen to me. Draw on my strength. Draw strength from my mind. We are ONE."

Even now Kirk was beginning to show visible signs of recovery, but Spock carried on.

"James Kirk, fight against death. Fight! Take my strength and become whole once more. We are one. We cannot die as one mind. Fight!"

Suddenly Spock broke contact, unable to sustain the effort mindmelding involved. He seemed to be in a severe state of shock; he looked around as though he recognised nothing, and then his eyes rested on McCoy, tried to focus, but failed.

"Spock, what's wrong?"

"Nothing, Doctor," he stammered. "The Captain will recover. However... I fear that... I am about to... lose consciousness..."

With that he swayed and fell into the waiting grasp of the two orderlies, exhaustion etched across his long face.

Scotty was the first to react. "Dr. McCoy, I think you should check the Captain now. He seems to be on the verge of regaining consciousness." He reached for the wires that were attached to Kirk's head from the computer, first checking that the tape had completely run its course. Satisfied, he removed them.

While McCoy and M'Benga started to examine Kirk, Nurse Chapel knelt down where Spock lay and took his pulse.

"Mr. Spock's all right, Doctor, he's just in a state of severe shock."

She had the orderlies place Spock in a comfortable position, and then she began to administer the necessary stimulants.

Spock was certainly going to recover, but what about Kirk? The answer to her unasked question came as Kirk's eyes opened.

"Jim!" cried McCoy with a peculiar blend of excitement and relief. "Jim! You're all right! You son of a ... We weren't sure you were going to make it." Kirk tried to move. "Stay still till I finish checking you out."

Kirk was still dazed, and very puzzled. He glanced around him, his confusion deepening. "What...? What's going on? Where am I, Bones?"

"You don't know?"

"No," came Kirk's reply. "The last thing I remember was Spock saying something on the bridge, and then... Wham! Nothing!"

"You were snatched from the bridge by an alien transporter system, and then incarcerated in a cryogenic L.S.U. by the automatics down here. After we figured where you'd been transported to, Spock organised a rescue party to beam down. We eventually found you - and believe me, we had a problem reviving you!"

"Spock... Spock! Where is he? Is he here?" Kirk looked around and saw Spock unconscious on the floor. "Is he all right?"

"He's okay," McCoy answered soothingly. "I said we'd had problems reviving you - well, things started to go wrong and you began to slip. Spock used the mind-meld to help you. It took a lot out of him, but he'll recover quick enough. That damn Vulcan stamina of his, you know."

Kirk was gratified that Spock was all right - the last thing he wanted was a dead friend. He turned his attention to Scotty, already feeling his faculties returning to him.

"Scotty, can you give me an update on our status?"

"Aye, sir. The main problem's over now, but we've got another - how to get back to the ship. Dr. McCoy said earlier that any transport capability or chance of communication was out. It's my theory that there's some sort of screen surrounding this complex which blocks any incoming or outgoing signals. If we can find the source and put it out of action we can contact the ship and beam up."

Kirk considered. "Any idea where the shield generator is, Scotty?"

"Aye, Captain, I have a notion. All the evidence seems to suggest it's yon machine." He indicated a small, squat computer inset into the wall. To the untrained eye the computer looked very unimpressive, but to Scotty it was obvious that it had an important function.

Scotty walked over to the computer and pointed to a gauge. "Look, Captain. I canna tell whit these alien squiggles mean, but it's evident that the gauge shows that energy is being used somewhere. When we first got in here the gauge was showing no reading, but shortly after Dr. McCoy last contacted the ship I noticed the reading climb to its present level."

Kirk took it all in. "Couldn't we just pull the plug, Scotty? The computer seems to be independent of the others."

Scotty answered, "It's no' as simple as that, Captain. We'll have to find another way."

"Hey! I've got it!" exclaimed an excited McCoy. The others turned to listen.

"What is it, Bones?" asked Kirk.

"I'm not sure, Jim - it's only an idea. Scotty will know if it'll work or not. Scotty, from the little I know about the physics of force-field phenomena, they are all generated by pulse synchronisation - that is, they are all basically pulses of energy immediately followed by another and so generating a force-field. Am I right?"

"Aye, Doctor - but it's a bit of an oversimplification."

"Is it possible to slow down the rate at which these pulses are emitted so that we can get a signal to the ship and beam up between the pulses?"

"It's an idea, Doctor, but it won't work - we wouldn't be able to slow the pulses down enough to get a signal through, ~~much less beam up~~. But you've given me an idea. There might be another way to contact the ship. I could see if it's possible to control the regularity of the pulses and use the shield generator as a transmitter. We won't be able to achieve voice contact, only a code - and that will be just so much static unless those on the bridge can recognise it for what it is. Anyway, it's worth a try."

"Good man, Scotty. Go to it."

It was four hours later that Scotty and Spock completed the necessary alterations to the computer. Spock had regained consciousness earlier and had been able to assist Scotty, effectively speeding the work. Finally they finished the last alteration.

"Finished, Captain. We should be able to send a signal now."

"Okay, Spock, Scotty - go ahead!"

Immediately Spock began to transmit the message for help, repeating it continuously.

Kirk crossed his fingers. "Let's hope it works."

Back on board the Enterprise the bridge was in a turmoil of excitement.

"Mr. Sulu," called Chekov, "I'm getting an altered reading from the sensors on that force-field. Its strength remains the same, but its phasing is irregular."

Sulu sat up, alert. He crossed to the science console. "Let me see. Yes, you're right." He studied the new readings. "There's something odd here. Uhura, are you getting anything through your station?"

"Only irregular static, probably white noise generated by the alien force-field. Just a side effect."

Sulu thought hard. "Maybe," he said to himself. "Just maybe. Chekov, I want to play a hunch."

"Yes, Mr. Sulu?"

"Get the computer to plot a wave diagram of both the readings from the force-field, and the white noise Uhura is getting through her station."

"Aye aye, Mr. Sulu."

Sulu watched the screen. The computer was projecting two wave diagrams onto it. "Now superimpose them."

As this was done everyone on the bridge saw that they matched exactly.

"As I thought," muttered Sulu. "It's a code. Lieutenant, do you recognise the pulses as any sort of code?"

Uhura studied the screen. "Yes, Mr. Sulu, now that you mention it, I do. At the Academy we had to learn every code ever known to have existed. It appears to be a very simple code that was used on Earth several centuries ago - some planets still use it. It's called Morse Code."

She turned to her board. "I'll see if I can decode it." In a few minutes the answer came. "Yes, Mr. Sulu, I was right, it is Morse Code. The message reads, 'ENTERPRISE. DIRECT PRIMARY PHASERS AT FORCE FIELD. FULL STRENGTH DISRUPTION. ATTEMPT TO OVERLOAD FORCE FIELD. END OF MESSAGE. SPOCK.'"

"Verify that, Lieutenant," said Sulu.

"I have, sir. The message continually repeats itself."

Sulu made his decision. "Ensign Tanson, arm forward phasers, full power. Lock onto the force-field and fire on my order." He contacted Engineering.

"Engineering."

"Engineering, Gabler here, sir."

"Gabler, we're going to fire forward phasers. Be prepared to divert as much power to them as you can. Bridge out. Okay, Ensign, fire phasers 1 and 2."

"Phasers 1 and 2 fired, sir."

Immediately two immense beams of phaser energy shot from the ship's hull, tearing through space, making contact with Phania's atmosphere, and passing through it to strike the force-field.

"Any effect on the force-field yet, Mr. Chekov?"

"Yes, sir, it's showing signs of strain."

"Maintain phaser fire, and tie in a circuit to halt firing as soon as the shield collapses."

The powerful barrage of phaser fire continued remorselessly for several minutes, and as each second passed the force-field grew gradually weaker until finally it winked out of existence.

Success was theirs, but they had other things to contend with as well.

"Lieutenant, see if we have contact with the landing party."

"No need to, Mr. Sulu, they've already contacted the ship and are requesting beam-up. I'll contact Chief Kyle."

"Okay, Lieutenant, I'll be in the transporter room if I'm needed."

By the time Sulu reached the transporter room Captain Kirk and the others were already aboard.

"Welcome back, Captain." Sulu fairly radiated pleasure at seeing Kirk again. "We were worried. What happened down there, Captain?"

Kirk smiled, acknowledging Sulu's welcome. "You'll find it all in the report, Mr. Sulu. Right now I'm going to my cabin for a shower and change of uniform."

"No you're not, Jim. It's Sickbay for you, I'm afraid."

"But..."

"No 'buts', Jim. Remember, your health is my responsibility."

"Okay, Bones, you win. Sickbay it is," Kirk smiled, resigning himself to the inevitable.

Spock addressed Kirk. "With your permission, Captain, I will now resume my duties."

"Okay Spock, you can go."

"Oh, but he can't," interjected McCoy. "He hasn't been certified fit yet - so Spock, it's Sickbay for you too."

"Dr. McCoy, I hardly feel that..."

"Don't argue, Spock. You're going to Sickbay for a checkup with Jim."

Spock began to protest.

"Don't even try, Spock," sighed Kirk. "Bones rules supreme. He's really enjoying this - aren't you, Bones?"

Spock eyes McCoy. "Indeed, Captain, I believe you are right. The good doctor does seem to enjoy giving us both orders."

McCoy, exasperated, cried, "Why Spock... You'll see just how much I'm enjoying this when I run every test in the book on your Vulcan hide. Oh yes - you'll see, all right."

Upon conclusion of the affair of the mindsnatching computer, and of course the delivery of the Cytocyeate to the Ellerby Colony, the Enterprise was currently en route to Omicron, the pleasure planet. It was during the trip that Kirk cornered Spock in a quiet area of the recreation room.

"Well, Spock." Kirk eyes him. "A satisfactory conclusion to an unsatisfactory course of events. There are a few things that are bothering me, though. If, as you say, the computer 'stored' the individual's engrams, why didn't we find any tapes containing the minds of other beings?"

"Simple, Captain. Let me elucidate. Ordinarily, every time the computer 'snatched' an alien's mind it would commit it to tape and then store it. However, the mechanism that should have removed the tape already used and replace it with a blank tape was defective. The tape was never replaced, and so each time the computer snatched a mind it would erase the previous being's engrams and replace them with those of its next victim. As a result, the alien's body would perish."

"But from what I gather from Bones, the bodies of the victims should never

have died, because after all it was still only a form of suspended animation they were in."

"Yes," answered Spock, "that is one point that offers some speculation. We will never be certain, but we can assume that the computer's builders never foresaw that their process would be used on other beings with adverse effects. After all, it was used without ill effect on themselves. As to why the Treblevians ever decided to set up the computers just to abduct alien minds - there does not seem to have been any reason behind it."

"At least," said Kirk, "they don't represent a danger to space-faring races any longer. The Federation is cordoning off the planet with a beacon and a space station; once that's done, I expect research teams will be moving in. All that aside, Spock..." Kirk grinned, aware that the Vulcan could sense what was coming next, "I want to thank you for what you did on Phania III."

"Captain, I..."

Kirk waved him aside. "You don't have to admit to anything, Spock. Bones told me the enormity of the risk you took to save my life." A crafty twinkle came into Kirk's eyes. "Your decision to fuse your mind with mine wasn't motivated by emotion by any chance, Spock?"

Spock raised an eyebrow, feigning surprise. "Indeed not, Captain. What facts led you to such a conclusion? My decision was based purely on logic, not on an emotional outburst as you surmise."

Kirk smiled inwardly. He knew that Spock would never admit to feeling an emotion, so he let the subject pass.

"Whatever the reason, Spock, I'm glad you did it."

Spock stood up to leave, and allowed a slight smile to form on his lips.

"So am I, Jim. So am I."

+++++

CAPTAIN JAMES T. KIRK by Gillian Catchpole

"Enjoys the challenge of fresh problems - adventure.
While pressures are such that he needs to relax
Would easily be bored
In a less active, demanding job."

Dr. Leonard McCoy, Senior Ship's Surgeon.

"Vigorous in the training of his crew
He maintains a strict but easy discipline.
Severe with stupidity that endangers the ship,
He expects high standards, giving praise where due."

Sulu, Chief Helmsman.

"Few people resist his easy-going charm
Or find it difficult to respond.
He smiles so disarmingly you have to relax,
Talks so enthusiastically you have to answer."

Janice Rand, Yeoman.

"I admire how he copes with the unexpected.
Training helps, but his energy and purpose
Inspire confidence, ease tension,
Make you believe in your own ability."

Pavel Chekov, Ensign.

"Possesses an agile, forceful mind
Capable of concise assessment.
Commands decisively in a crisis
Combining strength of will with creative thought."

Commander Spock, First Officer.

"Cares deeply for the safety of his crew,
Bitterly regrets any loss of lives.
Many times he has risked his own
To ensure the safety of his ship."

Lt. Uhura, Communications Officer.

Planet-Hop Media gratefully acknowledges the following :

Starfleet Command, for granting us permission to record this edition of "Portraits", and for the release of data concerning the edge of the galaxy phenomenon, silicon life on Janus VI, and the Organian Peace Treaty.

Captain Kirk, for his co-operation in allowing us access to his personal record file.

The officers and crew of the USS Enterprise, for their assistance and hospitality.

NOTE. The above is only an extract. Complete transcripts available from

PLANET-HOP MEDIA

Price 3 Credits.

+++++