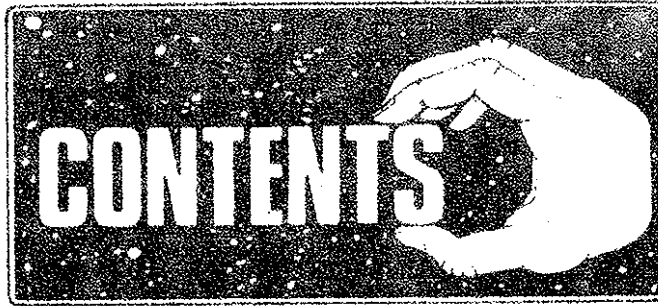




LOG
ELECTR
SUES

43

a STAR TREK
fanzine



CONTENTS

For a Split Second	by Jo McConnell	P 3
Logical, Mr. Spock?	by Lynette Percy	P 25
Checkmate	by Josie Rutherford	P 26
Marooned!	by Ann Preece	P 28
First Watch	by Meg Wright	P 49
Silent Love	by Susan Meek	P 50
Spock's Mystery	by Linda Hughes	P 51

Illustrations

Sandy Sapatka Cover
Roo P2, 11, 16
Ann Humphrey P28, 32, 42

Editor - Sheila Clark
Assistant Editor - Valerie Piacentini
Typing - Valerie Piacentini
Proofreading - Sheila Clark
Printing - Janet Quarton & James T.

Collating - Sheila's Chain Gang - Frances Abernethy, Lorraine Goodison,
Cory King, Hilde McCabe, Allison Rooney.

A STAG Publication.

Log Entries 43, price £1.15 inside the U.K., is put out by the STAR
TREK Action Group and is available from

Mrs. Sylvia Billings
49, Southampton Rd.,
Far Cotton,
Northampton
England.

Foreign Rates - addressed envelope and 2 IRCs for details.

(C) STAG August 1981 350 copies

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 applies only 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.

Hello, and welcome to Log Entries 43.

My first task this issue is to extend my apologies to Linda Hughes, whose story, "The Lesson", appeared in Log Entries 42. Somehow, when typing out the contents page, I forgot to include Linda's entry. I'm sorry about that, Linda - it was a good story.

This is also something of a goodbye, because this is the last issue of Log Entries I'll be doing for STAG. After this the club zine will be Federation Outpost, and will be put out by Sylvia and Cilla. I'm sure you'll want to join with me in wishing them every success - I won't wish them luck, because they don't need it, but I hope that those elusive random factors operate in their favour.

Finally I'd like to say thank you to all of you, readers and contributors alike, who've made my involvement with STAG and Log Entries so much fun.

Oh yes. And a special thank you - I think - to Sheila and Janet, who got me into this madhouse in the first place.

Valerie

P.S. When we announced that we were giving up STAG, a lot of people expressed regret that Log Entries would be terminating, so we have decided to continue putting it out by Scotpress, changing the title to Enterprise - Log Entries to denote the change of publisher. Enterprise - Log Entries 44 will be ready concurrently with this issue.



FOR A SPLIT SECOND by Jo McConnell

Captain James Kirk stared down at the barren, lonely planet. Sensor sweeps had revealed no life and no evidence of any long-dead civilisation. There were only rocks, dust, and complete silence on the surface of this planet.

From behind him a voice interrupted his thoughts. "The geology survey team are analysing their samples in the lab, Captain. I believe I shall be able to obtain the data I require alone."

Kirk smiled at his First Officer and eyed the unchanging picture of the planet on the viewscreen. "Oh, I don't know, Mr. Spock. It must be years since I played with a rock analysing kit. Would you have any objection to me joining you?"

The Vulcan was about to reply when the doors swished open and McCoy marched onto the Bridge.

"All right, Chekov. Avoiding check-ups, keeping away from Sickbay and me... No-one escapes the deadly McCoy on this ship, you know. I'm armed and ready to take you by force." He waved an empty hypo menacingly and began advancing towards Chekov.

Kirk grinned. "Forget it, Bones. How do you fancy a joy-ride down to the planet?"

"That thing!" McCoy glanced at the viewscreen. "Jim, I could have more fun doing an autopsy."

"Yes, I did notice the sadistic pleasure that you seem to take in doing autopsies, Doctor."

Yes, McCoy decided, eying Spock, what about a joy-ride down to the planet. He was feeling on top form today.

McCoy was beginning to wonder if this had been a good idea. Spock had disappeared, and Kirk was sitting on a rock away in a world of his own. Still, do him good, he reflected. What the hell were Medical Officers supposed to do in this Godforsaken place? Why hadn't he thought of bringing the monthly reports down with him?

Chekov, at the computer station, was idly watching the sensors showing Kirk, Spock and McCoy when one of them disappeared. He rapidly rechecked his instruments.

"Mr. Scott, something is wrong with the sensors. I'm only getting two life readings, sir, both Human."

The bleep of Kirk's communicator brought him back to life. "Kirk here, Scotty. What's the trouble?"

"Oh, it may be nothing, Captain, but is Mr. Spock there with you?"

"Behind those rocks, Jim." McCoy answered his unspoken question. "All that Vulcan self control, and he couldn't wait 'till we got back to the ship."

Kirk grinned.

Scott, who had heard the interchange, butted in. "I think you oughta find him just the same, Captain. Mr. Chekov can only pick up two life readings, yourself and Dr. McCoy, sir."

McCoy was already heading for the outcrop of rocks, and Kirk followed. "I'll get back to you, Scotty."

They ran together, following the trail of footprints which ended at a sheer rock face. A mound of rocks was piled at the foot, pebbles and dust still falling from above. Kirk skidded to a halt, taking in the situation immediately.

"Rockfall! Dig him out, Bones!"

"I'll call the ship, get..."

"No time - he'll suffocate!"

Kirk was already clawing furiously through the rocks and dust. McCoy threw down his medikit and joined him.

* * * * *

Spock first became conscious of a sharp pain in his head, then down his neck and across his shoulder. He rubbed his neck with his hand and felt his own blood warm between his fingers. He opened his eyes. The sky was blue, as before, but he was lying on grass. A hand touched his arm and he looked up, expecting to see Kirk or McCoy. Instead he was looking into the eyes of a woman. At first he thought she was naked, with silver skin, but she was wearing a close-fitting silver suit. Her hair was long and silver-grey, and her eyes were deep and dark, somehow tragic.

"Lie still - you have been injured." The spell was broken. She stared at him uncertainly, not sure of his reaction.

"Who are you?"

She smiled. "I am Chamois Scalanas, a doctor, commander of the medical centre."

She signalled to two others, who gently lifted Spock and began to carry him across a stretch of grass towards a building. He tried to lift his head, but his neck was stiff, and his shoulder was extremely painful. Was it broken?

Spock remembered collecting samples at the base of the cliff. He had heard the movement of the rocks above him and had looked up in time to see the landslide coming. A falling rock had struck his shoulder and thrown him against the rock face, but he had disappeared through it, and landed on the grass.

Not, however, before he had caught a glimpse of the creature that had stared down at him from above. His eyesight had blurred, but he felt sure it was an animal, not a rock or a figment of his imagination.

If the creature had started the rockfall then its intentions were certainly not peaceful, and the Captain and McCoy were still where he had left them. They would have no reason to suspect that he was doing anything other than quietly surveying. He must go back.

Spock sat up and swung his legs to the ground. They gave way beneath him, and he was left kneeling on the grass.

"I must go back!"

"You cannot go back," the woman answered. "The portal is one way. Now rest, or you will injure yourself further."

"My friends," Spock said. "I have two companions with me."

"They are unharmed. They are searching for your body under the rocks." She touched his arm with an instrument.

"No!" he cried hoarsely, and struggled to get to his feet before unconsciousness came. He collapsed onto the grass.

* * * * *

McCoy struggled to his feet, panting. "I've reached dust, Jim. If Spock is still under there we're going to need help." He flipped open his communicator, leaning his free hand on the rock face. The next thing he knew his arm was being sucked into the rock. Too astonished to do anything he simply stared at himself as he disappeared through the rock face, only struggling to his senses in time to call out to Kirk.

"Jim!" Kirk was still digging. "Jim, help!"

Kirk whirled round. "Bones?"

McCoy was gone. He stood up, instantly taking in all around him. There was nowhere McCoy could have gone - he had simply vanished.

In desperation Kirk cupped his hands. "Bones!" he yelled across the gully. Only an echo answered him, mocking. 'Bones... Bones...Bones...'

The wind whistled around the rocks, the only sound breaking the silence. McCoy's communicator lay in the dust. Kirk's mind was racing. A doorway! He ran his hands along the rock to the point where McCoy had been standing. There was a sudden sucking feeling, and he fell straight through the rock on top of McCoy.

"Nice of you to drop in, Jim."

"Sorry, Bones. Where the hell are we?"

"I think I can answer that question."

They stood up, to be confronted by a tall man, about forty, with greying hair. Kirk fought to control an urge to demand the return of Spock, and forced himself to be courteous.

"We are in search of a friend of ours."

"Yes, he is here, but he has been injured by falling rocks. He is at present undergoing medical treatment. Come, I shall take you to him, and answer any questions you may have on the way."

Kirk glanced at McCoy. The stranger seemed cooperative enough, anyway. He introduced himself and McCoy, and learned that the man was the commander of the Triada complex, but he was only interested in seeing Spock - alive and well - before continuing to extend diplomatic courtesies.

He walked across the grass towards the complex side by side with the commander. McCoy, falling in behind, was observing the gardens all around them. He finally butted in.

"Tell me, Commander, where are we exactly?"

"In the valley behind the mountains, Doctor. You have not moved anywhere."

"A complete sensor sweep of this area revealed no life," Kirk stated.

"Yes, Captain, because you were in the same place, but not the same time."

"Explain."

"You are actually 0.5 microseconds in the future, Captain. Your ship is now in the past. When you did your sensor sweep we were not here."

"And when we passed through the portal we passed... into the future?"

"Yes, Captain."

"And when we go back through the portal the process is reversed?"

"No, Captain."

"What do you mean, 'No', Commander?"

"I mean there is no way back through the portal."

Kirk was silent as they entered the complex.

Spock lay unconscious in a room similar to the Sickbay aboard the Enterprise. McCoy was in deep consultation with a girl who claimed to be a doctor. Kirk paced back and forth along the wall, feeling too agitated to keep still. Spock had been injured, though apparently not seriously, and they were unable to contact the ship.

Kirk had flipped open his communicator in the gardens, and again whilst

walking along the corridor. If the Commander had noticed the action, he had ignored it. Why? Because they really were a split second into the future? Were they here by accident, or was it intentional? And if so, for what purpose? And finally, perhaps most important of all, was there really no way out?

He turned to look at Spock, and was greatly relieved to see the Vulcan sitting up and displaying distaste at McCoy's attempts to examine his neck.

Ignoring McCoy, Spock rose and walked over to Kirk, McCoy trailing behind him.

"Spock, I told you to... Oh, what's the use!"

"How is he, Bones?"

"Well, Chamois here assures me that the bone is repaired. The only problem is that they have no blood anything like Spock's, but his body should have made up any loss by tomorrow."

"If we stay until tomorrow, Bones."

"What exactly is our present situation, Captain?"

"I'm not sure that I really know, Spock. I suggest we seek out the Commander and discuss our present 'situation', as you call it, with him. Perhaps Dr. Scalanas would be kind enough to escort us?"

The Commander was waiting for the party when they arrived. They seated themselves around a circular table and waited as the doctor cleared a few items. She sat down and shook out her hair, glancing worriedly at the Commander.

"Well, Captain Kirk, I am afraid that you pose rather a problem here. I don't know how you came to be at the entrance to the portal, or where you came from, but there is nothing I can do now that you are here." He paused. "Where did you come from?"

"Dr. McCoy and I are natives of the planet Earth, Mr. Spock is a Vulcan."

The commander shook his head. "I am afraid that means nothing to me, Captain. We are from a double star, natives of the first planet, not the second." He touched a switch on the table and the surface lit up to reveal star charts. The Commander indicated two small specks of light in the centre.

"I believe I know part of that system, Commander," said Spock. "We have never traveled into the system, but I have seen detailed photographs." He paused, and looked at Kirk. "I believe that double star you indicate was destroyed by an implosion. Is that correct?"

The Commander looked slowly from the face of Dr. Scalanas back to Spock. "It has been a long time since we left our home planet, Mr. Spock, and as you can see it is a long way away. We have never been in contact since we left."

Kirk decided to change the subject rapidly. "Tell me, Commander, why did you leave your home planet, travel for millions of miles, and then settle on a barren planet like this?"

The Commander was silent for a moment. He ran his hand down his face, and Kirk noticed the tiny lines around his eyes, yet he was not that old.

He must be the same age as me, he thought to himself. Yet he carries a constant worry, you can see that in his face. He felt a sudden compulsion to know more about this strange man.

"We came here to colonise the planet, Captain. We had with us samples of all the plant and animal life from our world. Unfortunately much of this died during our journey. We also brought with us the machine that we used to disrupt the time field in this area. We moved one hundred square kilometres 0.5 micro-seconds into the future and in doing so destroyed our equipment. It was intentional. The central core of this complex holds us in the balance."

"And if you turn it off? Would we return to where we came from?"

"I am afraid not, Captain. That in itself is a paradox. We are in the present now, and to go anywhere else in time is to go backwards. If we were to turn the machine off we would go backwards in time extremely quickly because we are in a void."

Kirk looked at Spock. "How quickly, Commander?"

The Commander smiled. "I know what you are thinking, Captain, but to just 'hop off' after 0.5 microseconds would be impossible." He paused. "In fact, we estimate from experiments that we would travel backwards at the rate of over 100 years per minute. There is no possible way to slow that process down."

Kirk looked back at Spock. "Well, Mr. Spock?"

"If everything the Commander says is true, Captain, I believe we are in fact trapped here."

The party fell silent, Spock because he was thinking, Kirk because he was worried, and McCoy because he was lost. He looked over at his fellow doctor. She had been silent ever since Spock had declared that their home planet was no longer there.

"Well, I guess these things are beyond us medical folk."

She smiled back at him. "It has always been beyond me, Dr. McCoy. I just live here." She stood up and reached her hand out to him. "Come, I believe they are trying to find some empty sections for you to inhabit."

McCoy jumped up. "Come on, Jim. The rooms are ready."

The Commander sighed. "Go ahead, Captain. We have plenty of time to talk."

They were given a room in the far corner of the complex. It was large and light, with three bunks placed in a triangle. Dr. Scalanas stood in the centre.

"I'm afraid it was the best we could manage for now. However, Captain, if you would prefer to sleep somewhere else because of your rank, I expect we could..."

Kirk cut her off. "It doesn't matter."

She gave him an unreadable look and backed towards the doorway to survey the three of them together. She watched them for a moment, then smiled at the three of them and left.

"I don't think she knows what to make of us. Especially you, Spock, falling onto their lawn and pouring out green blood. The poor girl must have been terrified."

"On the contrary, Doctor, she said I was a fascinating being, and has asked me if I would object to a comprehensive study."

"Don't worry, Spock - I expect the novelty will soon wear off."

Spock chose to ignore McCoy and instead sat down on one of the bunks, facing Kirk, who was deep in thought.

"Damn stupid thing to do!" said Kirk.

"What, Jim?" McCoy asked blandly.

"Yes, Captain, it was not wise to beam the key personnel down to an unknown planet alone."

Damn that Vulcan! thought McCoy. Anyone could see that Kirk was about to indulge in his favourite pastime, self criticism, and Spock was going to help him along.

"Rubbish, Jim! We've done it hundreds of times before. There was no life on this planet, no possible danger. We were in contact with the ship, and all three of us were armed." He put his hand down to his belt. Yes, they were still

armed. He had forgotten that.

Spock raised an eyebrow. "And what do you intend to do with that, Doctor?"

"Hell damn it, Spock, I don't know! I was just pointing out a fact!"

Kirk surveyed them both tiredly. "Stop it, Bones. I think we can assume that we are in fact trapped here for the time being, but there is no situation you can't think your way out of, given enough time. I think we must also conclude that Mr. Scott will have search parties looking for us, although if they find us they'll be no better off than we are. I don't think the Commander wants us here, and I think he would send us back willingly if he knew how, but there is something about this whole thing that doesn't quite click."

"Click, Captain?"

"Yes, click, Mr. Spock. Fit into place. The Commander strikes me as more of a military man, not a scientist. Why would they want to travel all this way and set up a small colony carefully hidden in time?"

"I don't know, Jim. But the Commander did say that we have the complete freedom of the complex. Why don't we take a look at some of this marvellous machinery and see if we can't tamper with it?"

"I doubt if that is a very scientific approach, Doctor."

"No, Spock, but I think Bones has a good starting point. I suggest that we go and have a closer look at this portal."

They got up to go, but Spock remained seated, suddenly quiet.

"What is it, Spock?"

"I believe I have just remembered something crucial, Captain. I thought of it while we were with the Commander, but I did not think it wise to mention it then."

"What's the matter, Mr. Spock?"

"The rock fall which caused me to pass through the portal, Captain. I do not believe it was an accident. Before I threw myself against the rock face I am sure I saw a creature of some sort on top of the cliff."

"Are you certain, Spock?"

"Yes, Captain. I remember it clearly now. It was dark brown in colour, and did not resemble any animal I have seen before. And... it was definitely intelligent."

"What makes you say that, Spock?"

"It was holding a weapon."

The three figures stepped cautiously through the doorway and out onto the lawn. The dusk was still and silent, the air warm. Without speaking they walked slowly across the grass towards the rocks.

Kirk felt a growing uneasiness, and fought to dismiss the feeling. It was an ordinary summer evening in a quiet garden, but he could feel the tension in every muscle. He took a deep breath and relaxed. Huge clouds were forming, dark and portentous. An animal scurried across his foot, and he jumped into McCoy.

"Take it easy, Jim. If you think you're developing a phobia about mice, let me know."

Kirk grinned. "What are you whispering for, Bones?"

McCoy fell silent and Kirk relaxed, releasing the tight grip he had unconsciously taken on his phaser. They proceeded to the entrance of the portal.

As Kirk had assumed, it was guarded. The guards, however, stood motionless, and took no interest in the activities of Kirk, Spock and McCoy. Briefed beforehand, thought Kirk. He made a mental note of the fact that the guards faced the rock and not the complex.

Spock was studying the rock intently. It appeared to be nothing but rock, and Kirk felt disappointment at this discovery. He had expected a force-field or barrier of some kind, but this gave nothing to work on. It was as though there was no entrance there at all.

Above the rocks were cliffs, but the complex itself was surrounded by large areas of grass and bushes. The gardens sloped upwards, slowly in some places and more steeply in others. The slopes became wild-looking hills, over which strange bushes grew in abundance.

"Beautiful, is it not, Captain? Our own valley hidden in the depths of the universe. The recluse's dream."

Kirk turned to face the Commander. "You fear the outside universe?"

The Commander studied the distant hills. "Yes, in a way perhaps I do, Captain. I fear the knowledge that gives men the power to destroy life and conquer worlds. The universe is full of evil."

"Which is overpowered by the good. If you fight it, and do not hide from it."

"Do you think I hide?" He paused, deep in thought. "Yes, perhaps I do; but in my way, I fight." He looked back at the rock. "Examine it all you please, Captain. You will be here a long time, and as I said I fear the knowledge... and I fear to pass it to others." He turned and walked into the dusk. Kirk stood in silence.

"What was that all about, Jim?"

"I don't really know, Bones." He retreated back into silence until interrupted by Spock.

"It does appear that there has been a timeslip of this whole valley, and I fail to see how we can leave - that is, until we understand the technology of these people, Captain."

"Do you think you could understand the workings of this system, given time, Mr. Spock?"

"Affirmative, Captain."

The following morning saw Kirk, Spock and McCoy in their quarters. They had decided that each would investigate the area he knew best. It was mutually agreed that Spock would study the main computer complex, eventually leading to the time shift system.

The Vulcan sat stiffly on the edge of the bed. Kirk surveyed his friends. Spock looked pale, but none the worse for his accident. He was obviously anxious to begin his study of the computer.

McCoy was finishing his cup of the stuff that just missed being coffee. "Don't blame you for not touching this stuff, Spock," he muttered. "Bet it puts hairs on your chest. I'll take it down to the labs and analyse it. I assume I'm studying the labs and the Sickbay, Jim? Apart from the people that's about all I'm qualified for."

"That will do fine, Bones. The answer lies in the people as well as in the computer. Walk around and talk to everybody. See if they are willing to offer any information."

"What about Spock's creature, Jim? Do you think it's wise to mention that we know about it?"

"I'm going to start by studying the Commander, Bones. I'll confront him

with it when the time seems right. I don't know whether or not the Commander has told the people that their home planet is no longer there, so I wouldn't mention that fact to anyone, either."

"Okay, Jim. We could meet for lunch and compare progress."

"Good idea, Bones. Agreed, Spock?"

"Agreed, Captain."

The three fell silent. There was nothing more to say, yet nobody moved. Finally Spock rose and departed, agreeing to meet them at a set time. Kirk and McCoy sat for a moment in silence.

"Don't worry, Jim. The ship isn't in any danger."

"We can't know that, Bones. Spock's creature was on the outside of the portal, you know. Scotty will conduct a thorough search, but if he finds nothing he'll be forced to leave. If he finds that creature he'll assume it is responsible for our disappearance."

"That creature must have been on a ship, Jim. There was no life on this planet when we scanned it, and we can rule out the possibility of its coming from here if nothing can get out."

"I think it's time I had a talk with this Commander, Bones. He has as good as admitted that he hasn't told us the truth. I think it's time he did. You see what you can find out in the Sickbay. Try chatting up that doctor."

"I already had that in mind, Jim. See you at lunch."

"Yeah, see you at lunch, Bones."

* * * * *

The alien space ship hung in orbit like a tiny black hole in the vastness of space. Scotty had been tracking it ever since its appearance from the dark side of the planet, just before they lost contact with the Captain's party.

Since their disappearance almost ten hours ago the alien ship had done nothing. Four search parties had returned from the surface of the planet. The last three had found nothing more than the first - all equipment lying where the missing men had left it, and only footprints in the dust leading to the rocks mentioned in the Captain's last message.

There was a pile of rubble. McCoy's medikit and communicator lay only a few feet apart. No footprints led away from that spot.

Scotty didn't like it. He didn't like it at all. He had ruled out anything destroying only Human tissue. The Captain and Spock must still have their communicators and phasers, and McCoy a phaser, because despite intense searching they were not to be found. Yet if they had been captured, why had their captors not also taken their equipment?

Scotty had been down to the planet himself, an act against all Starfleet regulations. He had stayed only a few minutes, trying to re-enact the Captain's last moves. Always, he came back to the barren spot in front of the rock face.

He studied the fallen equipment where it lay. It revealed nothing. Scotty remembered an ancient tale his father had once told him, a tale of a sea ship, the Mary Celeste.

The Captain's last words ran through his mind. 'I'll get back to you, Scotty.' Scott had the uneasy feeling that he might not.

He returned to the ship, to find that their status was the same. There was no reply from Starfleet. He doubted that there would be. This time he was on his own, and the thought worried him.

Uhura had sent repeated messages to the alien ship. They had received no reply, in fact no reaction at all. Scott sensed hostility, but the aliens had made no hostile moves, and his feelings were no justification for an attack on

a perhaps harmless alien vessel.

Chekov watched Scott impatiently, until he could stand the tension no longer.

"Mr. Scott, they could be torturing the Captain. They might even have killed him. Why don't we do something?"

"Patience, Laddie. Are you still trying to raise that ship, Lieutenant?"

"I have just repeated the message, sir, through the translator. They are receiving the signal, they simply will not reply."

"Move us in a little closer to that ship, Mr. Chekov."

"Now you are talking!"

"Slowly, lad - we don't want to provoke a fight. Leave all hailing frequencies open, Lieutenant."

"Aye, sir."

* * * * *

McCoy grew more and more intrigued by the young doctor as the morning wore on. She was keen to show him all the equipment, and was especially interested to know all about the three.

"I have lived here for five years, and have never met any strangers, except..." She stopped.

"Except who?"

"Well, I suppose you will know soon enough. There was only one other person who ever strayed through our portal. I believe he was shipwrecked on the surface of the planet. He had been alone for some time before he found us, and was in a bad mental condition even then. He could not adjust psychologically to the idea of being trapped here. He went mad."

"What happened to him?"

"Well, we trusted him completely, and gave him the freedom of the complex,



but he tried to destroy it, and in doing so committed suicide. He tried to activate a certain mechanism, and he was killed."

"You mean they shot him?"

"Oh no, we didn't kill him. I could have helped him. The machine was armed to kill." At the worried look on McCoy's face she reassured him. "Don't worry, Mr. Spock will get nowhere near it, and even if he did he would not make such a foolish mistake." She smiled. "There I am analysing your characters already. Do you mind?"

McCoy sat down. "No, I suppose not. I must confess to doing the same thing myself." He studied the girl. "And what's a girl like you doing in a place like this?"

She looked puzzled, and McCoy laughed. "I mean, what are you doing here? Why did you come?"

"As the Commander told you, we came here to colonise the planet."

"And?"

"And nothing. Just live here. It really is a long story. A world destroyed by wars..." She paused. "We had to leave. We brought specimens of wildlife and flora to start a new world."

McCoy got up and walked over to her. "That's not the truth, is it?"

She backed away from him until she stood against the wall. "It is the truth. I do not lie to people who do not use force to gain answers."

"Then it's not the whole truth?"

"No. But I tell you the truth when I say you cannot leave. The Commander does not wish you to know the truth, for your own safety. I see no harm in telling you the truth now, but the Commander says wait. There is no harm in waiting if you cannot leave, now is there? It is only until we know you better."

McCoy lifted his hand to scratch his head. At once the girl turned pale and shrank back against the wall. As she screamed he suddenly realised that he had terrified her.

"Hey, I wasn't going to hurt you! I've never hit a woman in my life. I wouldn't hurt a fly."

She relaxed and looked into McCoy's deep blue eyes. Then she said quietly, "I'm sorry - that was stupid of me. For a moment I thought you were somebody else." She sat down. "I owe you an explanation."

"It doesn't matter."

"Yes it does. It's all right, really."

McCoy punched in the numbers for some of the coffee-like substance, and handed it to her. She smiled at him.

"I have been subjected to torture to extract information. When I was rescued, to help me, all memories of the incident were removed from my mind... with my permission, of course. It's just that things trigger it, and I see flashes. It doesn't happen often. It had nothing to do with you personally. Can we forget it?"

"Yes, of course."

"I'm..." She spat back into the cup, and burst out laughing. "What did you press?"

"11/2. What did I do wrong?"

The more she looked at him the more she laughed. "That's a medical dispenser, and this is blood plasma. I can see you will have to have a course of lessons before you can work with me. What do I call you, anyway?"

"Well, my friends call me Bones."

"How did you get a name like that? Do you specialise in orthopaedics?"

Lunch, when compared with the mornings of the three, was uneventful. Spock was heartily eating a plateful of the local salad, Kirk was eating the local steak, and McCoy was cautiously picking at a plateful of colorful vegetables.

They had each given an account of their morning, and towards the end of the meal a general discussion had got underway. Each had discovered something they had not known previously, and Kirk felt confident that the pieces would fit together in time.

He himself had been to the top of the nearest hill and had found the edge of the complex. Spock had agreed to look at it later and give an opinion. McCoy had discovered that there had been another person who had strayed through the portal and had been killed while tampering with some part of the computer. This information would at least serve as a warning to Spock. Spock himself had discovered an annexe circuit leading to another computer in a different part of the complex. Questioning the technicians had led only to evasive answers, giving Spock no idea of the computer's whereabouts.

Kirk pushed his plate away and leaned back thoughtfully. "I would consider that to be of paramount importance, Spock. The very fact that they don't seem keen to discuss it suggests to me that it is something they'd rather we didn't know about. I think we should do some private searching of our own later on."

"Agreed, Captain."

The three fell silent. Kirk looked at his watch, which was faithfully showing ship's time. After a moment he took it off and placed it on the table. He looked up, and Spock's eyes met his for a moment.

"Mr. Scott will be forced to leave tomorrow, Captain."

"Unless he has run up against your creature, Spock."

McCoy turned to Spock. "We Humans are not as adaptable as you Vulcans, Spock. It'll take you a long time to get Jim and me to accept that we could be trapped here. I mean, you have to look on the bright side of things. We're together, and we're not in any danger at the moment. Jim, you must stop looking so miserable or you'll offend our hosts."

"At this moment, Bones, I don't give a damn if I offend our hosts."

McCoy turned to Spock. "Of course, it's obvious that our Captain is having withdrawal symptoms after being forcibly separated from his ship."

Spock's face never moved a muscle. "Indeed, Doctor?"

Kirk found himself smiling.

"I know it's hard to face, Jim, but the Enterprise just might be able to make it to the nearest Starbase without us, umm?"

"Point taken, Bones."

McCoy rose and headed for the door. He flashed a reassuring smile at Kirk. "Be in the Sickbay if you want me, Jim."

"Shall I take a look at that barrier on the hill this afternoon, Captain?"

"Yes, that's not a bad idea, Spock. Then get back to the computers. I want to get out of here as soon as possible, and not just for our sakes. I think Scotty might be in trouble."

Spock nodded. "So does the doctor. He just will not say so."

Kirk smiled. "You've got it, Spock."

As the Vulcan rose and left Kirk saw the Commander enter and sit down at a far table. He walked over and joined him.

* * * * *

The interior of the alien ship was a good deal darker than that of the Enterprise. The thin brown person who sat in the centre was horribly deformed. He was peering at the image of the Enterprise shown dimly on a small screen at one side of the room. He turned to the person behind him.

"Halt their advance. Send a reply to their message. Tell them the truth. Give them no cause for suspicion. Tell them that we hunt the people in this colony. Tell them also of the time shift. This knowledge will be of no use to them."

The other spoke. "It is possible that they found the complex by mistake. The scout party reported that the aliens appeared to have no knowledge of the portal."

"It makes no difference. The usual procedure still applies. We are set to attack the complex?"

"A time longer."

"To break down the time shift and remove the divine weapon should take only three times at most. They should put up no resistance if we act quickly."

"And the Captain of the alien vessel?"

"Kill him with the others. The vessel Enterprise will be destroyed with the destruction of the complex. Do not waste armament now. Send them the message."

* * * * *

Kirk was just leaving the dining area and walking down the corridor when he ran into McCoy.

"Jim, I think I may have stumbled on what we're looking for. I went down the wrong passage on my way back to Sickbay. At the end of it there's what looks like an elevator, but it has a guard outside."

Kirk paused in thought for a moment. "What would they want with an elevator if there's only one floor? Come on, Bones."

When they reached the corner of the corridor Kirk stopped McCoy. The guard was standing motionless, but was none the less alert to everything around him. Kirk wondered whether guards had been needed before their arrival. He thought not.

"I doubt if we're going to get past him peaceably without a few alarms going off to alert the Commander, and I don't want to give them the chance to change anything down there before we see it."

"You're going to stun him?"

"We don't have a choice, Bones."

"Well, they aren't going to like it."

"That's a pity! If we find what I think we might down there, then I should say we'd be justified in our actions."

Kirk walkèd around the corner and fired one burst at the guard, who slumped against the wall instantly. With McCoy's help he dragged the guard into the circular lift and the doors closed automatically behind them.

"What happens now?"

"I don't know, Bones. I don't see any controls for working this thing."

"Me neither."

"Do you think it might be...?" He paused in midsentence as the doors slid silently apart.

The sight that met their eyes was of a vast man-made cavern the size of two or three shuttlecraft decks aboard the ship. It was dimly lit compared with the rest of the complex. Kirk stood for a few moments while his eyes

became accustomed to the twilight and then stepped cautiously forward. McCoy followed. Every step echoed around the giant room, the only sound breaking the silence. The walls were metallic in appearance and bare of any machinery. This was in the centre of the floor, a mass of screens and dials. Kirk walked slowly forward. McCoy spoke from behind him, his voice unconsciously lowered to a whisper.

"Jim, the doors have closed behind us."

Kirk whirled round to see that the metal doors of the lift had slid silently together, leaving a hairline join. The two exchanged glances, and with phasers in their hands crossed the floor to the circular control panel in its centre.

"I think we've just found Mr. Spock's auxiliary computer, Bones, and the central core that holds time in the balance."

He looked over the two control panels. Both were clearly activated, as they were completely lit up. They both had the same screens that were around the rest of the complex, the ones activated only by the Commander's fingerprints. Kirk pointed these out to McCoy.

"Yes, I've seen them before, Jim." But McCoy's eye had fallen on another control panel. It was the same as the first two, but with one major difference - it was in total darkness. "Jim, come and take a look at this."

As Kirk moved to McCoy's side the doors of the elevator parted in silence.

"What do you make of that, Jim?"

Kirk examined the control panel carefully. "I don't, Bones. It's a control panel of some sort, with a delay timer switch. At a guess, I'd say that only the Commander could activate it. The dial is set to record unlimited amounts of power." He walked slowly around the silver box that was connected to the control panel. It had a set of alien symbols on one side, but had no visible joints, and no possible means of opening it that Kirk could see.

Kirk looked again at the symbols. "I wish Spock was here."

"Let me have a look, Jim." McCoy peered closely at the symbols. One set was black, the other white. "Well, that looks like a skull and crossbones to me," he offered hopefully.

Kirk shook his head. "I don't know, Bones."

"The white bush is the symbol of peace, the white man is growth and prosperity, the white circle is the creation of worlds, and the ten stone blocks are the divine laws of all men." The Commander and Dr. Scalanas walked up behind them.

The Commander continued, "The black beam is death by violence, the black man is cell death, the black circle is the destruction of worlds, and the broken stones are the breakdown of the moral laws of man. The yellow people below the symbols are us, Captain, the two hundred people of this complex who have stolen the divine weapon and will die to save the rest of mankind."

Kirk faced the Commander, but it was McCoy who spoke first. "So this is nothing but a weapon." His comments were directed more to the girl at the Commander's side than to the man himself. "Somehow, I had thought better of you."

"We didn't build it, and we aren't going to use it. While we have it here nobody else can use it. I said it was a long story. Two planets side by side, both evolving and developing at the same time. All they could do was fight. Their technology stayed level, so neither planet could ever win. We would have destroyed each other."

The Commander continued, "Their government developed the ultimate weapon and carried out tests on the surface of their planet and ours. The mutant population are the result. When they had perfected their weapon they prepared



to launch it. It cost over a million lives to build, Captain, and would have claimed another one hundred and fifty million had it been launched at our planet. We have captured it, and here it will stay. It is the only one of its kind, and no other can be made while we have it here. You say the two planets have been destroyed. Perhaps they attempted to build another, and it brought about their destruction. I don't know, Captain, and I don't care. All I know is that they are a ruthless and

murdering people. Put it this way, Captain Kirk. You say that you represent a Federation of worlds, that peace is your main concern. What do you think these people will do if they have this weapon? They will head for your Federation of peace and destroy it!"

"I doubt that, Commander."

"You underestimate them, Captain. I have fought with them many times, but this will be their last battle. One ship followed in pursuit when we left our galaxy. We have the time barrier, but that will not deter them. They will seek us out and attack this complex. We have few weapons, but we have the one that matters. When they come, and are in the complex, I shall detonate it."

Kirk paused for only a second. "You'll take us with you!"

"I didn't ask you here, Captain. I'm sorry."

Kirk and McCoy stood for a while in silence before Kirk said, "You won't have to wait much longer, Commander. They are already here."

"What do you mean?"

"They are already here, outside the complex. One of them attempted to kill Spock before he found the portal."

"They know where the entrance to the complex is?"

"By now I should say they do."

The Commander turned and headed for the lift. Kirk followed him. McCoy could see no alternative but to do the same.

The evening was still and warm, as it had been before. The atmosphere felt just as portentous to Kirk, who silently followed the Commander across the lawn. The Commander had allowed only the four of them to leave the complex. He had sealed the main doors behind them, to be opened only on receipt of his or the doctor's fingerprints.

They headed cautiously towards the portal. There was no sign of any life, and no sign either of the two guards, until they came close. The two bodies lay side by side on the grass, horribly mutilated. Across their chests were the black symbols of destruction and cell death burned into their skins.

As McCoy looked on, horrified, Dr. Scalanas leaned forward from behind him to examine the two bodies. She ran her fingers over the symbols and the deeper holes in their chests where their hearts had been. The Commander asked no questions, but she turned to answer him.

"Killed with a heat ray, a time ago... by them."

"Go back to the complex, Chamois. Take the Captain and Dr. McCoy with you. Go straight across the main lawn, and shoot to kill anything that moves in those bushes. Seal the doors behind you."

"Etoin, please come with me."

"There are three female technicians in the seed storing caves. They are unarmed, and they are not warned. I will bring them back. Don't be afraid, Chamois. Go. I will meet the armed guards there."

It was then that the realisation hit Kirk like a blow. "Bones, Spock went up to the top of the hill. He didn't come back!"

"Has he got his phaser?"

"No!"

"I'll come with you, Jim."

Kirk was thinking rapidly. "No, Bones. You go with Dr. Scalanas."

"Jim..."

"Don't argue, Bones - she might need help. I'll warn Spock." The Commander had already set off up the hill. Kirk turned to follow him. "See you later, Bones."

McCoy stared at the rapidly disappearing form and muttered to no-one in particular, "Be careful, Jim."

It took Kirk only a few minutes to catch the Commander, and together they climbed the hill, taking care to remain behind the cover of the many dense bushes.

"The hills will be full of them now, Captain. Personally I doubt that my people will be alive, but I shall not return until I find them."

He said nothing about Spock, and Kirk remained silent. They climbed onwards slowly as Kirk tried to remember which hill Spock had had in mind. He was beginning to think that perhaps coming after Spock was not such a good idea. Perhaps the Vulcan would make his own way back unaided. But he was without a weapon, and up against an enemy that killed on sight. That anybody could kill without reason was incomprehensible to Spock, and Kirk shuddered to think of the Vulcan calmly stepping out and trying to talk to the aliens.

In front of Kirk the Commander slowed to a stop and turned to survey the surrounding hills. Below in the valley Kirk could see the complex; the sun glinted off the roof and shone on the surrounding rich green grass, but up on the hill the sun was lost to the shadows and the wind blew cold.

Kirk fought to suppress his shivering and the mounting panic he felt at the lonely scene. He sensed that the Commander was feeling the same way as he

sat beside Kirk surveying the land with a small rectangular device Kirk guessed to be binoculars of some kind. He handed them over to Kirk, pointing out to him the grain storage caverns over on the far hill. Kirk carefully scanned the rest of the hills. There was no sign of any life. After a moment the two rose and set off for the far hill.

It was a good half hour before they began to approach the cave they sought. The Commander entered with caution, weapon drawn. Kirk was about to follow when something caught his eye. He walked over to the bush, and for a moment thought that the body was Spock's; but as he cleared away the bush he realised it was a young woman. Her clothing had been ripped away, the symbols were right across her body, and a hole had been burned through her chest.

Kirk turned away from the sight. The Commander leaned against the rock at the mouth of the cave, visibly pale.

"I can only find two people, Captain."

"There's another one over here," Kirk said quietly. God, where was Spock?

"I see no trace of your friend."

"No."

There was a noise behind them, and both men whirled instantly. It was the two guards the Commander had sent for. They saluted him and stood awaiting his instructions, but the Commander moved over to consult Kirk. He had begun to respect Kirk's decisive and calm manner. He was not used to having another man who was prepared to share the responsibility, and he had found comfort in the fact that it was Kirk who was with him.

"What do you think, Captain?"

"I think we must split into two groups and search both faces of this hill. Then we'll have to head back to the complex. We must face the fact that darkness will soon be upon us, and we can't hope to search in the dark."

"Yes, I must agree with you, Captain. That does seem to be the most logical course of action."

Kirk winced involuntarily at the likeness to Spock's turn of phrase. What if darkness fell, and he hadn't found Spock? Would he go back to the complex alone? He dismissed the thought. He would find Spock. It seemed like hours since he had left McCoy, although it was only two or three. Still, the doctor would be getting worried by now...

His thoughts were interrupted by the guard as he reported on the situation at the complex.

"We think there are about 30 or 40 of them surrounding the complex. They are systematically burning their way through the outer walls, sir. They are into Cell One already."

The Commander turned to Kirk. "I can't delay in getting back to the complex. I'll take Johansin here, and search for another two hours, but no more. Valain, go with Captain Kirk and do everything he tells you. I'll see you at the complex in two hours, Captain."

Kirk nodded as the Commander turned and was gone. He faced his guard. The man returned his gaze with a hint of fear. Kirk shot him a reassuring smile and they began to search.

* * * * *

McCoy was more than worried. He paced back and forth like a caged animal. He felt that he was caged. The small room in which he was confined was becoming increasingly claustrophobic. Dr. Scalanas had brought him here shortly after their return and had ordered him to stay there. She had convinced him that the Sickbay was not in a secure part of the complex, and that as a visitor he had to be protected. Apparently the enemy were attempting to burn their way

into the building.

The room McCoy had been ordered to stay in was apparently a small meditation room near the centre of the complex. It had no windows, only one door, and no furniture of any kind, only a mat on the floor. In desperation McCoy decided that the floor would have to do, and shoving the mat behind him he sat down, leaning against the wall.

For the thousandth time in the last hour he looked around the four walls. In the far corner was a sink with a shower-like thing that turned on the water when you got within two feet of it. He had spent a good ten minutes looking for the sensor that worked it, but he had finally given up. Trying in vain to keep his mind on other things he studied the pictures painted on the walls. They were of nothing that he could make out, only coloured tunnels that seemed to go on for ever. He wondered what Spock would make of them.

Spock. Was he with Jim? Perhaps they couldn't get back in. It was the inactivity that McCoy couldn't stand. In the corner of the room lay one of Dr. Scalanas' portable medical kits. She had promised to send minor injuries to him, but no-one had appeared.

That had been over two hours ago now. For a moment of insanity McCoy thought that he must be the only one left alive. He quickly dismissed the thought and got up to walk over to the sink, where he rinsed the sweat from his hands. He was just about to pick up the medical kit and leave when the door swished open and the young doctor walked in. McCoy almost pounced on her.

"Is there any news of the Captain and Mr. Spock?"

She leaned against the wall. "No. The Commander and your friends have not returned."

"Have many people been hurt?"

"No. They either escape or die - there is little in between." She paused, deep in thought. "I wonder if the Commander will return. I don't know why he went. The destruction of everything is imminent."

McCoy gritted his teeth. He was beginning to find her single-minded pessimism annoying. "Now listen to me, young lady. The Commander went because he retains something of what's known as fighting spirit. You think of nothing but..."

"You don't understand. They must not get away. We must all die to stop them."

"There must be another way!"

"There is no other way."

McCoy opened his mouth to argue and she leaned forward and kissed him. He was silenced. She turned to leave.

"Wait a minute. What did you come for?"

"I wanted to see you again, and to tell you that when the alarm sounds you must go to the central core of the complex... I have to go now. I will send your friends to you if they return, but I doubt it."

"Let me assure you that the Captain and Mr. Spock are highly trained and..."

"I'm sorry. Your faith is very strong, but things will soon end for us." The door opened as she approached, and she stood keeping it open. "I have to go. Please stay here. I will send your friends when they return." She stepped backwards and the door closed silently.

McCoy decided to wait a few moments before trying to leave. He could not keep his thoughts from Jim and Spock even for those few moments. His mind wandered over the things the girl had said. Jim and Spock had certainly pushed their luck very far in the past, but why should this time be any different? Yet they all knew that sooner or later...

Well, he was not going to wait any longer. He turned to the door. Right, now to initiate some action! The door did not move. Damn! He kicked it with childish fury, but it did not even shake. He turned and furiously resumed pacing his cell.

* * * * *

Dusk fell over the valley and damp mist formed in patches on the grass as cold air met warm ground. Kirk's mind was in a well-controlled panic as they made their way back to the complex. They had painstakingly searched miles of the hills and were now forced to return as the sun disappeared behind the hills.

Kirk and his companion had seen evidence of the alien intruders everywhere. The tame and trusting animals that filled the hills lay dead in their hundreds. The more Kirk saw the more sickened he became. The killing was senseless and... illogical. There was nothing to be gained.

And what of Spock? His first reaction would be to talk to the creatures. Kirk had a vision of Spock walking out to meet them, only to be...

Yes, from what he had seen they would certainly kill him. He fought to dismiss the thought. Despite the evidence of the aliens' presence they had not yet come face to face with any. Kirk's guard, Valian, however, was constantly tense, and kept his gun in his hand at all times. Kirk was a little more calm. A little.

As they made their way down the hill under cover he could see the mass of the complex spread out before them. They climbed downwards into the larger bushes beside the complex. From their vantage point they could see the complex clearly, and as Kirk looked over to the main doors he saw the enemy.

Before he could study the scene two of the creatures walked round from behind the bush at his side. Obviously startled at seeing Kirk they grabbed for their weapons, but he was faster. Firing from the hip he stumped the first and swung towards the second, but not before the alien had fired a red bolt of flame. Stunned, it collapsed onto the grass, but behind Kirk Valian lay motionless. He choked once, and then lay still. Kirk remained with him for only a moment, then, appalled, he returned to the cover of the denser bushes.

The creatures appeared to be trying to blast their way through the side of the building. There seemed to be about twenty that Kirk could see, and their attention was focussed on the task at hand; they obviously did not expect anyone to be outside the complex. Kirk looked back at the two he had stunned. They would be out for another five minutes or more.

Looking across at the complex he saw a small side door in the wall. It was a straight run across the grass, but he would have to be quick - once he broke cover he could not help being seen. The fingerprint panel was beside the door. Useless! Without the Commander he could not hope to get in.

He turned back to the clearing and cautiously sat down, his phaser covering the two aliens. He would have to wait. The surrounding bushes were silent. Nothing moved; not even the constant chatter of the birds and animals could be heard.

A twig snapped in the bush behind him. The sound was barely audible, but Kirk whirled round in an instant. He was levelling his phaser straight at Spock. He was so tense he almost fired, but Spock seemed only mildly surprised at seeing him.

"Spock! Where the hell have you been?"

"Here, Captain, for the last hour. Why do you wish to know?"

Kirk shook his head wearily. "Never mind, Spock."

"Any attempt at communication with these creatures appears to provoke instant hostility. I therefore decided that since I am unarmed, the most logical course was to..."

He stopped suddenly and listened, motioning Kirk to get down. They crouched together, listening. Kirk could hear nothing, but if Spock thought that... The Vulcan raised his hand and pointed through the leaves. One of the creatures was standing over the body of Kirk's guard, carefully burning the alien symbols into the man's chest. Smoke began to rise as he worked, and the foul smell filled the night air.

Kirk, horrified, raised his phaser and stunned the alien with one burst. He stood up and walked into the clearing, forgetting only for a second what he had learned previously - that the creatures worked in pairs. The error almost cost him his life, for the moment he stepped from the cover of the bush the second figure raised its weapon and fired. The red bolt was aimed at his heart, but he was shoved violently, and it went through his shoulder. As he lay on the grass gasping in pain Spock stood beside him, calmly facing the creature unarmed.

Kirk grabbed for his phaser, which had fallen to the grass, but his right arm refused to move. He caught it in his left hand and fired, but the alien had already aimed and fired at Spock, and even as it fell stunned the Vulcan was lying on his back fighting for breath.

Kirk knelt beside him, forcing himself to look at Spock's chest. There was a neat hole in the centre, from which green blood welled up and spread rapidly across the front of his shirt.

Kirk felt panic as he fought to remember first aid, but he could think of no way of stopping the blood flow. Spock was choking, so he raised his head and let it rest against his chest. The Vulcan choked and coughed up blood alarmingly as he fought to breathe. Kirk had never seen him panic, but he was clearly close to it now.

"Spock... it's all right. Just breath slowly. In and out, slowly... That's it. Just take it easy. You're all right."

The words were more to calm himself than Spock, but the Vulcan relaxed slowly against Kirk's chest, and his breathing dropped to a shallow gasp.

"Jim..."

"Just keep still. Don't move."

"Jim... It is better for me to die. You will not be alone, but I... You were my only friend."

"Spock, you won't die." He regretted the words the moment they were said. How stupid to insult a Vulcan with a lie. "I'm sorry."

Spock was too weak to say anything. He simply lay in Kirk's arms, relaxed and breathing so very slowly.

Kirk could not stop panting. He looked frantically behind him at the door. He had only to pick Spock up and run, but they would never get there. So near and yet so far. So bloody damn far!

His anger subsiding, he gazed out across the hills. The sun had set, but the valley was not yet in darkness. The sky was blue-black, but he could see no stars... and somewhere out there was his ship. He had forgotten about it. And now he did not care.

The arm he kept around Spock was numb with cramp, but his right arm was strangely warm, and he could not move it. He looked down at his hand, and saw for the first time the blood that dripped from the ends of his fingers, forming a small pool in the grass. He could feel no pain. It was coming from his shoulder, he realised, running down his arm. He ignored it, and looked back to the sky.

He felt strange. No crew to think about. Soon the stunned creature would awaken and... kill him? He did not care. McCoy was safe.

Spock was beginning to feel cold, and his arm ached painfully now. He

knew that the Vulcan was dead, but he did not want to put him down. He laid Spock carefully on the grass; his skin was cold, damp and grey, but his expression was peaceful, almost smiling. He was going to raise an eyebrow, and...

No, not this time.

Kirk sat back, watching, until a hand pulled at his shoulder. He turned to face the Commander, who had taken in the scene from behind Kirk. Shooting an apologetic glance at the Captain when he saw Spock, the Commander started to help Kirk up.

"I'm sorry. Are you hurt? Come on - we can make a run for it. Get up."

"No."

"No? Kirk, they're right behind me. I don't have time to play games with you."

"I'm staying here," Kirk said reasonably, firmly.

"There's no room for cowardly sentimentality."

At the word 'cowardly', Kirk stared. Then the Commander hit him.

"GET UP!"

Something in Kirk snapped as he jumped to his feet and got ready to run for the door. The Commander pushed him forward.

"Go!"

He started to run, and stopped. Spock's body! They were not going to have that. His mind now back in action he grabbed the phaser and rammied the dial up to the top of the scale.

The Commander ran back to him. "What the hell...?"

Kirk fired, and Spock's body vapourised. The next two creatures to appear from the bush went the same way, then he turned and ran blindly towards the door. They would shoot him in the back... but no. He reached the door, and then he was on the other side. It closed silently behind him. He leaned against the wall, not sure if he could move. Without speaking, the Commander left him.

The young man who pulled at his arm was insistent. "Captain Kirk? I have been ordered to take you to Dr. McCoy, sir. Can you walk?"

"Of course I can walk!" he snapped.

The young man stood his ground. "Will you please follow me, then, sir?"

Kirk stepped away from the wall confidently, and almost collapsed. The man at his side caught him, then took his arm and led him along the corridor for what seemed like miles. They stopped at a door which he opened with a magnetised key, and pushed Kirk through. The door closed behind him and he leaned against the wall.

McCoy leaped to his feet and ran to him. "Jim! Are you all right? My god, look at you! What happened? Where's Spock?"

Kirk just stood against the wall with his eyes closed. He could see colours as his head swam. For a moment he thought he was on the floor, but he could feel the wall behind him. His head was bursting, and his lungs and shoulder were agony, his stomach turning over.

McCoy continued, "It's not like Spock to leave you in a state like this, Jim. No, don't tell me - he's with that bloody computer. Can you stand there while I..."

Kirk opened his eyes and locked McCoy's gaze. His eyes filled and blurred his vision.

"It's all right, Jim - I'll give you a shot." But sensing it was more than that he stood silently, supporting Kirk against the wall. He had never seen the Captain like this.

"Spock is... dead, Bones."

McCoy looked at the floor, noticing for the first time the deep olive stains across the front of Kirk's shirt. His concern for the Captain pulled him together rapidly.

"It's okay, Jim. Just sit down slowly. That's it. I'll get you that shot."

McCoy worked quickly and silently on Kirk's shoulder, trying to give no indication in his face of what he was feeling. When he had finished he sat down next to Kirk, who was still sitting motionless. He could not feel his arm at all, and deep breaths were so painful he only took in shallow gasps.

"What happens now, Bones?"

"You stay right where you are. You're in shock, Jim."

"I didn't mean that, I meant, what happens to us? The creatures are into the complex by now."

"I don't know. They have some kind of stupid master plan. They told me to go to the cavern when the alarm sounds. I've been locked in here for hours, so I don't know what's going on."

Kirk tried to move, and the room swam. He leaned back against the wall and drew his hand across his forehead, surprised to see that his hand was shaking. His shirt was soaking, green, warm and sticky. He looked at it, and his stomach turned over again. He stood up and barely made it to the sink in the corner before he was violently sick. Afterwards he splashed water on his face, letting it run down his neck. McCoy was at his side.

"I'm sorry about that, Bones."

McCoy forced a smile. "Jim, I've seen more patients being sick than even..." He stopped. He'd almost said, 'than Spock could calculate'. "I'm sorry, Jim."

"It's okay, Bones." Their eyes met.

"You feel better?"

"Much." They sat down together, and Kirk was silent for a long time before he said, "You have a right to know what happened, Bones."

"If you want to tell me, Jim."

Hesitantly, he told McCoy everything. McCoy said nothing.

"It was my fault, Bones. I froze... I got him killed."

"I don't believe that, Jim."

"You weren't there. You don't know what happened!"

"I know you, Jim."

Kirk put his head in his arms, faking exhaustion. He fought to keep his breathing steady. He couldn't let McCoy see him cry...

But Bones had never been easily fooled. He put his hand on Kirk's shoulder and gripped it tightly. That shattered his control completely.

It was only twenty minutes later that the alarm sounded. The door of their small room opened and an armed guard stood facing them, motioning them out of the door.

Seeing no other course of action they rose and followed him to the central

complex.

The cavern was now brightly lit, and filled with the inhabitants of the complex. They were all sitting cross-legged on the floor and facing the column in the centre. Not one of the two hundred looked up at the entrance of Kirk and McCoy.

The Commander stood at the third control panel. It was now lit up, and emitted a barely audible low-pitched whine. Kirk walked slowly up to him.

"What are you going to do?"

The Commander turned to face him. "They have filled the valley and the complex. Our mission was to take the weapon from them and hide it. Now they have found it, but they are not going to have it."

"I fail to see how you are going to stop them."

"I would have thought the answer was obvious. I shall activate it before they get here."

"And destroy the whole planet?"

"To save the universe from them - yes. This was our mission. We are all prepared to end it this way."

Kirk turned on him. "If you blow up this complex your time displacement no longer applies - and MY SHIP IS ORBITING THIS PLANET!"

"Captain, I shall turn off the time displacement. We will continue backwards in time until the weapon implodes. They will be destroyed, and we will die, but your ship will be unharmed. As for you and Dr. McCoy, you were not really here to begin with. You may return to your own time, you may not - I cannot say. I'm sorry."

He turned to face the people, and then laid his fingertips on the panel in front of him. "Activation completed. Implosion in three minutes."

Kirk and McCoy exchanged glances. "Can't we stop him, Jim?"

"I'm not sure we should, Bones." He looked around him at the people, the cavern, and the Commander. "We don't belong here, Bones. It's not our fight."

The Commander laid his fingertips on the next panel. The cavern was plunged into darkness. "Central core shut down."

Kirk reached out and touched McCoy beside him. They could see and feel nothing. A second ticked by, then another, and after that there was nothing.

* * * * *

Captain James Kirk stared down at the barren, lonely planet. Sensor sweeps had revealed no life and no evidence of any long-dead civilisation. There were only rocks, dust and complete silence on the surface of this planet.

From behind him a voice interrupted his thoughts. "The geology survey team are analysing their samples in the lab, Captain. I believe I shall be able to obtain the data I require alone."

Kirk smiled at his First Officer and eyed the unchanging picture of the planet on the viewscreen. "Oh, I don't know, Mr. Spock. It must be years since I played with a rock analysing kit. Would you have any objection to me joining you?"

The Vulcan was about to reply when the doors swished open and McCoy marched onto the Bridge.

"All right, Chekov. Avoiding check-ups, keeping away from Sickbay and me... No-one escapes the deadly McCoy on this ship, you know. I'm armed and ready to take you by force." He waved an empty hypo menacingly and began advancing towards Chekov.

Kirk grinned. "Forget it, Bones. How do you fancy...?"

"Captain!" Chekov interrupted him. "The planet, sir. It's... GONE!"

All eyes turned to the screen. It showed nothing but stars. All eyes turned to Kirk.

"Analysis, Mr. Spock?"

He half turned towards the First Officer, and his heart missed a beat. Sweat broke out all over him. He had felt... a terrifying premonition of death. For a split second he had felt sure that when he turned round... Spock would not be there.

The voice spoke from behind him. "Fascinating, Captain."

He turned to see Spock peering into his viewer.

"Records show that the planet was destroyed by a massive unexplained catastrophe over six hundred years ago. What caused us to see it now I do not know." He frowned.

"What is it, Spock?" Kirk asked, hoping that the Vulcan could put his strange feeling into words.

"I feel that there is something more I should add about the planet, but... I cannot remember what it is."

They both looked to McCoy, who was also frowning, but not for long. His expression changed, and he proceeded to break up the whole Bridge by seizing Chekov and dragging him screaming towards the elevator.

LOGICAL, MR. SPOCK? by Lynette Percy

You see things of beauty,
But can you find it in you
To know?
You behold many changes,
But there are no colours to your sight;
No glow.
You watch the joy of youth,
But do you know what drives them
To succeed?
You see the wonder of love,
But do you feel the warmth
Of spirits freed?

Your fathers banished feelings
To live by order and logic -
In the cold.
But are you really like them,
Or do you know the emotions
That you're told?
Though you try to hide it,
Those who see the Human in you
Believe
You feel the warmth of loving,
And care about their friendships...
And grieve.

Kevin Riley : Hey, anybody know the address of the Home for Retired Security Guards?

Kyle : It's at 999 Letsbe Avenue.

CHECKMATE by Josie Rutherford

The watch had just changed and Captain Kirk, now off duty, was in the turbo-lift with his First Officer.

"How about a game of chess, Spock?" he said. "We haven't played for a couple of days, and I'm in the mood to give you a real beating."

"Perhaps later, Captain," the Vulcan replied. "For the present I have some research which I have been attempting to complete for the Federation Scientific Conference being held on Starbase 6 next week. I have two papers which still have to be written up, and I would prefer to finish them before giving you the benefit of my undivided attention."

Kirk smiled, and shook his head slightly. He knew his friend spent most of his spare time researching, or studying something or other, but he had seemed unusually tense lately. A game of chess would perhaps have relaxed him a little, and also given the opportunity for some private conversation. However, he decided not to press the matter, knowing Spock could handle most of his own inner tensions, and only said, "All right, Spock - I can wait. I'll have a shower, go and get something to eat, and I'll meet you in the rec room in... two hours?"

Spock nodded agreement. The elevator doors opened and the two men stepped into the corridor that led to their respective quarters.

Leila was on the bed in her quarters trying to sleep. She turned over onto her back for what seemed like the hundredth time, but though her body was tired her head ached from the turmoil of her thoughts, and she knew that sleep would evade her as it had done since she had come aboard the Enterprise. Every time she closed her eyes images of Spock filled her mind, memories which could not be ignored or forgotten. She knew the Vulcan was off duty, probably in his quarters. If she could see him, talk to him...

She rolled off the bed, went to the door; she hesitated, then, her decision made, she peered out into the corridor to make sure it was empty before she quickly made her way to the turbo-lift.

She found the corridor leading to Spock's quarters without difficulty, but as she approached the door her determination wavered and she stood uncertainly outside. Then the voices of two approaching crewmen spurred her to action, and she pressed the buzzer.

Spock's voice said, "Come!" The door slid open, and Leila stepped inside.

He was sitting studying his desk viewer and did not look up immediately. Leila stood silently, unsure of what the Vulcan's reaction would be, thinking that she shouldn't have come, yet at the same time wanting to be near him.

Then Spock raised his head, and his eyes widened in surprise as he saw her.

"I know I shouldn't be here," Leila mumbled before Spock could say anything, "but I have to talk to you. I can't eat or sleep or even think straight any more. I want to try to tell you..." Her voice shook so that she couldn't say anything else. She tried to smile, but her mouth became a tight line which looked more like a grimace.

Spock noted Leila's increasing agitation. She was very tense, her eyes glittered unnaturally, and her breathing was extremely rapid and shallow.

He said, "It is completely illogical for you to attempt to continue our relationship. I have already explained that what was between us is now in the past. I was not responsible for my actions..."

"Don't lie to me, Spock," Leila whispered. "Me, of all people. I've never believed you don't have feelings. You do - you did down there at the

colony. You can't deny that." She moved closer to him.

Spock stood up and walked round the desk, putting it between Leila and himself.

"What are you afraid of, Spock?" she asked. "Showing how Human you really are?"

He shook his head. "Emotion is alien to my race..." he began to say, but stopped, seeing the look on Leila's face.

Tears began to stream down her cheeks. Sobbing like a child, she came round the desk, looking up at him with such a lost, pitiful expression that Spock, for once, was lost for words. As he reached for the intercom to contact Sickbay Leila threw herself towards him, and her arms came up around his neck. She pressed her face against his chest, and Spock could feel the trembling of her body and her rapid heartbeat.

"Please don't send me away!" she cried. "I love you!"

Slowly, the Vulcan disentangled himself from Leila, and holding her away from him at arm's length said gently, "You must realise that what you wish for is not possible. I cannot be other than I am - A Vulcan by birth and training. I regret the distress I have caused you. Now, let me contact Sickbay. Dr. McCoy will help you. I obviously cannot."

Leila pulled away from him and collapsed onto the floor, sobbing hysterically. "So you think I'm sick, do you? You're the one who's sick, not me. Not me!"

When Spock moved to lift her, Leila backed up against the cabin wall. Still crying, she screamed, "No, don't touch me! If you can't love me, don't touch me! I don't want your... Vulcan pity!"

Then to Spock's amazement she began to laugh. He went to her, and quickly applied the nerve pinch. As she fell forward into his arms, Spock decided that he could help her, more than McCoy or a rehabilitation colony could. He lifted her, carried her over to the bed, and sitting beside her moved his outstretched fingers to the pressure points at the side of her head.

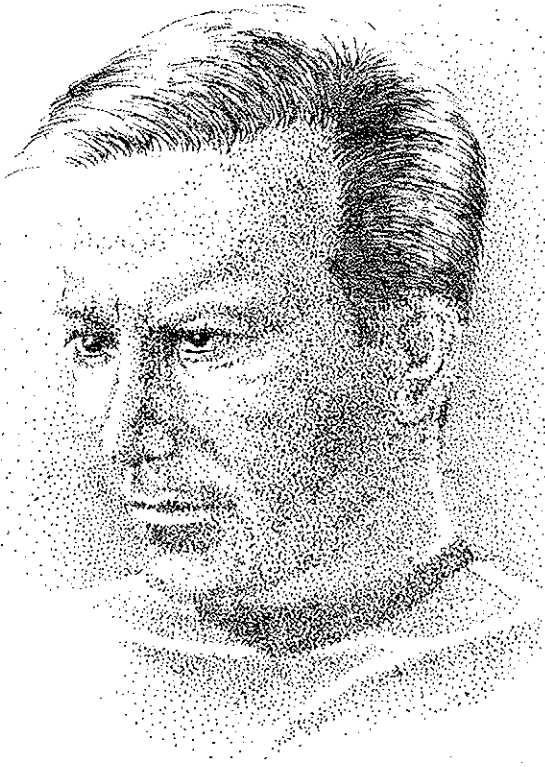
Later Leila awoke in her own quarters. She stretched lazily, feeling refreshed and relaxed. I must have fallen asleep after all, she thought. It seemed to her that she must have slept for a long time, though actually only three hours had passed. She vaguely remembered having had a strange dream. Something to do with the ship's First Officer. She shrugged, and put it from her mind - she didn't even like the man, he seemed so strange and cold. She shivered slightly, as if a chilly hand had touched her, then slid back under the cover and fell asleep again.

The ship's First Officer was playing chess with his Captain, and playing very badly. His mind was only partly on the game. Spock knew that Leila's mind was calm and clear now. The memories which troubled her had been erased, as they must now be erased from his own thoughts.

Kirk moved a piece across the board, said, "Check!" smugly, and leaned back in his chair, watching the Vulcan staring pensively at the game.

Spock was still thinking about Leila. He felt a pang of... regret? What if he had been able to return her feelings? He put that thought from him, leaned forward, and moved his queen. 'If', he decided, was a question best left unanswered.

"Mate, I think," Kirk said.

MAROONED! by Ann Preece

Kirk leaned back in his command chair, yawned, and stretched. Everything was normal, quiet, routine almost to the point of boredom, a definite change from the arduous demands of the last few weeks. The Enterprise was on course for Starbase 11, where the crew could enjoy a well-deserved and long overdue rest. Their last mission had been difficult and dangerous, both physically and mentally, and had taken its toll on the crew.

Kirk let his gaze wander over the Bridge. Sulu and Chekov, at Helm and Navigation respectively, were talking quietly to each other while keeping watch over their controls; behind him, at Communications, Uhura sat with her chin cupped in her hands, a dreamy, far-away look in her eyes, and her mind on matters far removed from the Enterprise. To a casual observer only Mr. Spock appeared to be his usual alert self, but to someone like Kirk, who knew his friend well, even the Vulcan was beginning to show signs of strain.

Yes, Kirk mused, they were a good crew. It was time they enjoyed a spell of shore leave away from the worries of hostile aliens, menacing forces and diplomatic conferences. He was confident that this time he would be able to persuade Spock to join him - even he needed a rest from duty.

Kirk's thoughts were interrupted by a persistent beeping from Uhura's station, a sound which rudely shattered the peace on the Bridge. Immediately alert, all day-dreams forgotten, Uhura's busy hands flew over her console, pressing switches and dials. She listened intently for a few seconds, and then turned to face Kirk.

"Priority message coming in from Starfleet Command, Captain."

Inwardly, Kirk groaned. A priority message from Command Headquarters could mean one thing only: trouble. And Kirk had had enough of that over the last few weeks to last him for a long time.

Resigning himself to the inevitable, he ordered, "Put it on visual, Lieutenant. Let's find out what they want with us this time."

The stars on the viewscreen were instantly replaced by the friendly features of Admiral William Henderson, and old friend of Kirk's.

"Hello, Jim. It's been a long time."

"Bill! This is a surprise - it must be at least five years since we last met. How has life been treating you? I see you're an Admiral now."

"Can't complain, Jim," Henderson replied, smiling. "Although there are times when I'd willingly change this desk job for one more trip in space. Care to change places with me?"

Kirk grinned. "Thanks for the offer, Bill, but no." Then he became serious. "What can we do for you? I take it this isn't a social call?"

Henderson shook his head. "I'm afraid not, Jim. I'll come straight to the point. Does the name Egonia mean anything to you?"

Kirk thought for a moment. "I don't think so... no, wait a minute. Weren't the Egonians involved in a civil war some time ago?"

The Admiral nodded. "Yes, and it lasted for a period of twenty years, ending with the total destruction of both sides. By the time the Federation heard about it, it was too late to do anything. Egonia itself is now a stark, barren world, incapable of supporting life - or so we thought."

Henderson paused, then continued slowly, "Over the past few months, certain Federation vessels have disappeared in the area around Egonia. Starfleet Command is of the opinion that someone is using the planet for their own purposes, and there are fears that either the Romulans or the Klingons are involved. This is where the Enterprise comes in. Your orders are to proceed to Egonia at once, and..."

"Just a minute," Kirk interrupted angrily. "I realise that this is important to the Federation, but we've just returned from one long, arduous mission. My crew is tired, my ship needs a complete overhaul... Bill, do me a favour - give us a break. Surely there's someone else you can send?"

"Unfortunately, no, there isn't; and even if there was, we wouldn't send them." Henderson's tone was apologetic. "I understand how you feel, Jim, but try to look at it from our point of view. We're dealing with an unknown situation; from what has happened so far it could become extremely difficult, to say nothing of being dangerous. For something like this we need the best man and the best crew - we have them both in you and the crew of the Enterprise. I'm sorry, Jim. If there was some other way..."

"It's all right, Bill - I understand. Sorry I flew off the handle like that. Put it down to tiredness."

Henderson smiled. "Think nothing of it, Jim - I'd feel exactly the same in your position. Well, I think I've given you all the relevant details - the rest of the information has been fed into your computer banks. All that remains is for me to wish you luck, and remember Jim - we're counting on you."

Henderson's face was replaced once more by the normal view of familiar star patterns.

"Transmission ended, Captain," Uhura announced softly from behind the command chair.

"Thank you, Lieutenant. Mr. Sulu, lay in a course for Egonia, warp factor six."

"Aye, sir." Sulu hurried to comply with the request.

Kirk left his chair and moved to stand by the Communications console. "Uhura, contact Engineering and Sickbay and have Mr. Scott and Dr. McCoy meet us in the Briefing Room. Coming, Mr. Spock?"

The two men hurried from the Bridge.

The Captain and his three senior officers remained closeted in the Briefing Room for some time.

"Well, gentlemen," Kirk said, "that is the situation we now find ourselves in. I'm afraid that our scheduled stop at Starbase 11 will have to be postponed - at least for the time being." He glanced around the table before continuing, "Now that Mr. Spock has acquainted you with all the relevant information, can I have your opinions?"

Dr. McCoy was the first to speak. "I think you already know how I feel, Jim. As Chief Medical Officer it's only natural that I should have the welfare of the crew at heart. In my opinion, these orders couldn't have come at a worse time. The morale of the crew is at a low ebb, their efficiency has been impaired by the burden of over-work. To inflict another mission on them, and

in addition a possibly dangerous one... Well, I wouldn't like to predict the outcome. Although..." and he smiled, "I think there's one person in this room who isn't too upset that our original plans have been altered. What do you say, Spock?"

Spock raised an eyebrow. "Really, Doctor, I fail to see what that has to do with our present situation."

"Come on, Spock - admit it! You're quite relieved that our R and R has been cancelled, aren't you?"

"On the contrary, Dr. McCoy, I was... looking forward, I believe is the appropriate term... to a period of rest and recreation myself."

"Spock! I don't believe it! Why, that's..."

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen!" Kirk interrupted, trying to inject a note of annoyance into his voice, and failing - miserably. He couldn't stop himself from smiling; no matter how serious the situation, his two friends could always be relied upon to enter into one of their famous arguments. "Can we please get back to the matter in hand? Are there any other comments?"

He caught the attention of his Chief Engineer. "Scotty? You've been very quiet. Have you anything to say?"

Scotty shrugged, a worried frown crossing his face. "I don't like it, Captain - I don't like it at all."

"Neither do I, Scotty. And, I think I can safely say, neither does anyone else in this room; but as you can see, our hands are tied." He hesitated for a moment, and then added, "Well, if no-one has anything further to add, I'll outline my plan. Once we enter orbit around Egonia, Mr. Spock and I, together with two Security guards, intend to beam down to the planet's surface and..."

"Jim! You're not serious?" The exclamation came from McCoy.

"Bones?"

"You and Spock are not seriously considering beaming down to that planet alone, without the support of a back-up crew? You have no idea of the dangers you could be facing."

"I appreciate your concern, Bones, but that's precisely why Spock and I must go alone. Until we discover exactly what we are up against, I cannot take the risk of jeopardising more lives. Surely you can see that? We'll make contact with the ship at regular intervals, and at the slightest sign of trouble we'll radio for help. As soon as we find out what is happening on Egonia I'll reconsider - but not until then." He surveyed his senior officers once more. "Is there anything else?" he asked.

McCoy opened his mouth to argue further, and then thought better of it. He knew from past experience that when the Captain was in this mood it was useless to argue. He'd try again later.

"Well, then, I suggest we return to work. There's nothing further to be done until we reach Egonia. Thank you, gentlemen - I'll see you all later."

The three men followed their Captain from the room.

The Enterprise entered orbit around Egonia approximately six hours later. A sensor scan revealed one area which gave back readings which differed slightly, but inexplicably, from the norm, and for lack of anything else to go on, Kirk decided that this would be their beam-down point. Leaving Chief Engineer Scott in temporary command, Kirk, Spock, and two Security guards, Mendez and Rogers, took up their positions on the transporter platform.

"I see you're still determined to go ahead with this fool-headed scheme?"

Kirk glanced across at the figure framed in the doorway. "'Fraid so, Bones.

I wish there was some other way, but..." He shrugged.

"Can't you...?" McCoy began, then, "Oh hell, what's the use! You'll go whatever I say. Just see that you take care of yourselves, do you hear?"

Kirk was touched by the doctor's obvious concern. "Don't worry, Bones, we intend to. And remember, I'm counting on you and Scotty to look after things until this is over." He turned to his First Officer, who was waiting patiently alongside. "Ready, Mr. Spock?"

"Affirmative, Captain."

"Then shall we go? Energise, Mr. Scott."

The room was filled with the familiar hum of the transporter.

"Good luck, Jim," muttered McCoy as the four figures shimmered and disappeared from view.

For a long moment McCoy stood and stared at the empty platform, a worried frown creasing his rugged features, his blue eyes troubled. He murmured softly to himself, "I hope they know what they're doing." Then with an almost imperceptible sigh, he turned to Scotty. "Come on, Scotty, you heard the Captain - we've got work to do."

The desert plain on which the landing party materialised confirmed the information provided by the library computer. Egonia epitomised a world totally devastated by years of senseless warfare. Stark, barren, even the native plants and animals had long since given up the struggle to survive on such a desert world. And it was hot - almost suffocatingly hot.

Spock had moved to one side, scanning the area with his tricorder, but no life-forms registered. There was nothing and no-one to be seen.

Kirk gestured to his First Officer to join him. "Feel like a walk, Mr. Spock?"

"Captain?"

Shielding his eyes from the glare of the sun, Kirk pointed to a mountain range several kilometers in the distance. "I have a feeling that the answers to some of our questions could lie in that direction."

Spock remained silent. He had long since ceased to question Kirk's 'feelings', knowing that the Captain's intuition had often proved correct in the past - he hoped that Kirk's judgement would prove sound on this occasion.

Instead he remarked, "I concur, Captain, since my tricorder has failed to register any life-form readings within this immediate vicinity."

Kirk called over to the two Security men. "We'll head in that direction. Keep your eyes and ears open. We're on unknown ground, and we don't want to take any chances."

Rogers and Mendez nodded and fanned out, phasers at the ready. Kirk and Spock followed, and the four men began to walk resolutely towards their distant destination.

The mountain range proved to be further away than they had estimated, and they hadn't covered many kilometers when the planet's merciless sun began to make its presence felt, adding to their already growing discomfort. What wouldn't they have given for a cool drink, or a few moments rest in the shade away from the oppressive, almost unbearable heat. As they pressed on, Kirk thought longingly of the delights of Starbase 11.

Progress was slow, and tiring. Spock, ever mindful of his Captain's welfare, threw a worried glance in Kirk's direction. Although physically fit, Spock knew that the heat was making progress difficult for Kirk, sapping his strength.

Kirk caught a glimpse of the worried expression on Spock's face, and although no word passed between them he could read the unspoken question in his friend's eyes, Are you all right?

How many times, and on how many different occasions, had Kirk heard that question, both spoken and unspoken? He felt a sudden surge of warmth for this quiet, controlled man whose friendship had come to mean so much to him. He nodded briefly, and gave his friend what he hoped was a reassuring smile.

"It's okay," he said quietly.

Worry was replaced by relief as Spock turned once more to concentrate on the dusty, seemingly interminable journey, and they continued on in silence.

Nothing impeded their progress - Egonia was, to all intents and purposes, a totally lifeless world.

At last the endless journey across the hot, dry plain came to an end, and the Enterprise men found themselves standing at the foot of the forbidding rock face to which their walk had brought them. Kirk glanced around anxiously, but still there was no sign of life, no sound, and no movement of any kind.

Spock stepped back, his gaze fixed on an obscure point of reference about halfway up the mountain side; his keen eyesight had detected the entrance to a carefully-concealed cave. Touching Kirk's arm to attract his attention, he pointed upwards.

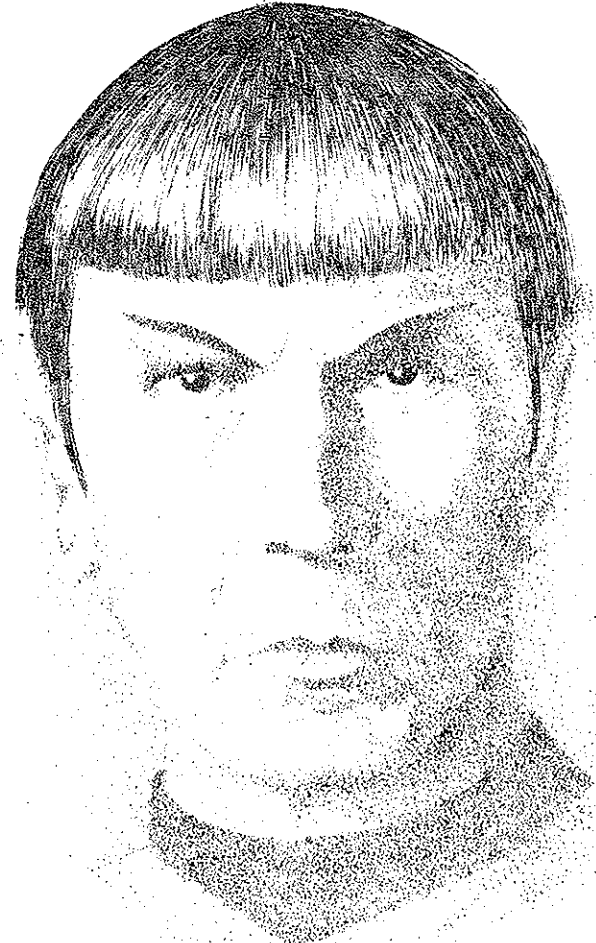
"A cave, Captain - halfway up."

Kirk's gaze followed Spock's pointing finger, and he nodded. "Seems as good a place as any to begin our search," he said, although inwardly he groaned at the prospect before them. Mountain climbing, in any shape or form, had not been a favourite pastime during his days at the Academy, and under these conditions, and in this heat, Kirk fervently wished that there was another course of action open to him. But there wasn't. He would have to 'grin and bear it'.

He called across to Rogers and Mendez. "Mr. Spock has noticed a cave situated about halfway up - it seems an appropriate place to start searching. But whatever you do, take care. The climb looks straightforward, but I don't want you to take any unnecessary chances. The last thing I want is a couple of casualties on my hands. Besides," he muttered to himself, "Bones is already mad at me - it wouldn't take much for him to be able to say, 'I told you so'."

Only Spock was close enough to hear the last remark, and he said nothing, merely raised a questioning eyebrow. Kirk grinned, somewhat sheepishly, and moved to begin the ascent.

Wearily, Kirk climbed. The journey across the desert had weakened them more than they had realised, and it was with increasing effort that they



forced themselves upwards, only Spock appearing unaffected by the conditions. Dust-grimed, soaked with perspiration, his tired limbs aching under the strain, Kirk almost envied his friend's seemingly tireless energy. The Vulcan climbed effortlessly, with apparent ease - even the heat did not seem to worry him unduly.

Spock had taken the lead. Now, he turned to call back over his shoulder, "We are almost there, Captain."

Was there just a hint of encouragement in the well-modulated voice? As though Spock was really saying, "Come on, you can do it. Don't give up now."

Kirk looked up to see his friend standing on a wide ledge. He steeled himself to cover the last remaining meters, and noticed with gratitude that Spock was extending a willing hand, coupled with a silent plea of, "Let me help you."

Willingly, Kirk took the proffered hand, and felt strong arms pulling him to safety. Leaving his Captain to rest for a moment, Spock moved away to assist Rogers and Mendez, who were also experiencing some difficulties. Within minutes the four men were standing in the entrance to the cave.

Kirk faced his two Security men. "Mr. Spock and I will investigate the interior of the cave. I want you both to remain on guard here. At the slightest sign of trouble we'll contact you, but be on the alert at all times. I know we haven't found any evidence of other inhabitants as yet, but that doesn't mean to say that we are alone here."

As he finished speaking he pulled out his communicator and flipped it open. "Kirk to Enterprise. Kirk to Enterprise."

There was no reply, the only sound being a burst of static. Adjusting the controls, he tried again.

"Kirk to Enterprise! Come in, Enterprise!"

This time he was rewarded by the familiar sound of his Chief Engineer's soft Scots burr. "Scott here, Captain."

Relief flooded through him. The last thing he wanted was to be stranded on this hot-house of a planet. "Scotty, what happened?"

"I'm not sure, sir. We had a little trouble receiving your transmission. Just for an instant there appeared to be interference from the planet's surface, although our sensors have detected nothing out of the ordinary. Everything appears to be all right now. How are things with you?"

"Everything's quiet down here at the moment. We've discovered a cave, which we hope will provide some of the answers we're looking for. Mr. Spock and I intend..."

Kirk's speech was cut off by another, louder, burst of static. Adjusting switches only served to increase the volume of noise.

"Scotty! Scotty!" he shouted - to no avail.

He motioned to Spock to test his communicator. Spock did so, to be greeted by the same sound.

"Interesting," Spock remarked. "It is almost as if someone does not want us to contact the ship."

Despite the heat Kirk suddenly felt very cold. Involuntarily, he shivered. The thought that someone could interfere with their communications system was not a pleasant one. He did not want to dwell on the possibility that perhaps they were being watched - had been watched - ever since they arrived. The sooner they completed this mission and left, the better, he thought. At the moment, however, there was little they could do - the Enterprise was there, somewhere, but there was no way the crew could be contacted.

With a sigh of resignation Kirk replaced his communicator on his belt.

Perhaps there was a simple explanation for the sudden loss of contact; perhaps the planet's atmosphere was causing the interference; then again, perhaps there was a fault in the communications system on the ship. Whatever it was, Kirk knew he could rely on Scotty to try his hardest to rectify matters.

Meanwhile, there was no sense in waiting. They might as well continue with their plan. Silently, the Captain and First Officer moved towards the cave.

* * * * *

The scene on the Bridge of the Enterprise was one of intense activity. Uhura tried in vain to re-establish contact with the landing party, while Scotty peered anxiously over her shoulder. Each minute seemed like an hour, yet he knew that Uhura was trying her best. At last he could contain his anxiety no longer.

"Anything at all, lass?" he asked.

Uhura turned a troubled face to her superior, her shoulders slumped in defeat. "Nothing, Mr. Scott," she replied, a note of desperation in her voice. "I can't understand it - one minute they were transmitting clearly, the next... nothing at all. It's almost as though a force field of some kind is successfully blocking any attempts we make to contact the Captain. But if that's the case..." She paused, unwilling to voice such a thought.

"Aye, lass," Scott finished soberly, "if that's the case, then the Captain and Mr. Spock are marooned down there, and there's naught we can do about it."

* * * * *

Approaching the cave, Kirk and Spock peered in. At first they could see nothing, as their eyes, accustomed to the bright sunlight, had not yet adapted to the gloomy interior of the cave.

Cautiously, they moved inside, thankful that at least in here it was cool, and grateful to escape the brilliant glare of the planet's sun. As their eyes adapted to the half light they glanced round anxiously, and found... nothing. Kirk felt overwhelmed with disappointment. Having come this far, he had felt confident that, at last, they would begin to find some of the answers to their questions. He was unprepared for such emptiness.

The cave was roughly spherical in shape, with no hint of any openings or concealed passageways. The walls, instead of being rough and jagged as one would expect, had been smoothed down, and - which was even more interesting - were covered with strange signs and symbols, a legacy undoubtedly remaining from bygone days.

Spock moved to examine the symbols, his innate curiosity aroused by the unfamiliar patterns. Kirk crossed to join him.

Engrossed in their discovery, the two men failed to notice that a part of the rock face behind them had slid quietly open to reveal five robed figures. Silently, they closed in on the unsuspecting Federation officers.

Kirk was suddenly aware that he and Spock were no longer alone. He turned sharply, and the sight of the silent figures momentarily stunned him.

Rousing himself almost immediately, he shouted, "Spock! Look out!"

But the warning came too late.

Instantly, they were surrounded. Before they could move to defend themselves, strong hands had pinioned their arms behind their backs, and they were roughly dragged, struggling, through the opening and deep into the mountain side. One of the robed figures pressed a lever and the panel closed silently behind them.

Thus, when Rogers and Mendez, having been alerted by Kirk's shout, entered

the cave at a run, they found no-one at all. It was as though Kirk and Spock had never existed.

Hurriedly fumbling for his communicator a panic-stricken Rogers tried desperately to contact the Enterprise, hoping - yet not believing that he would receive an answer.

"Landing party to Enterprise! Landing party to Enterprise!"

At first he was met with the same static they had experienced before, but almost instantly it cleared, and he heard Uhura's welcome voice answering his call.

"Enterprise here." Uhura sounded almost stunned with disbelief. She couldn't believe that they had regained contact with the landing party after such a long silence.

Rogers' voice came over the air, trembling with barely-controlled panic. "I must speak to Mr. Scott!"

"Just a minute, Mr. Rogers."

The silence was broken seconds later by the comforting sound of Engineer Scott's voice, safe and secure. "What's happening down there, laddie?"

"Mr. Scott, you must help us! It's the Captain and Mr. Spock! Sir, they've disappeared, and..."

Scotty could hear the mounting hysteria in Rogers' voice. He interrupted sharply, "Get a grip on yourself, man! This is no time to go to pieces!" He paused, allowing the distraught Security guard time to pull himself together, and then continued, more quietly this time, "Now, try again. Tell me slowly and clearly exactly what has happened."

Rogers took a deep breath before recounting the events of the last few minutes, finishing with, "But Mr. Scott, there was only one way out of that cave, so how could they vanish like that? What's happened to them? And why?" He fell silent.

Scotty said nothing. He couldn't - for he too was asking the same questions... and he was unable to find the answers.

Eventually he spoke. "Stay exactly where you are. Let me have the coordinates for the area, and I'll have a landing party with you in ten minutes. Enterprise out."

Scotty turned to meet Uhura's dark, troubled eyes. He placed a comforting hand on her shoulder.

"Don't worry - we'll find them," he said reassuringly. It was a reassurance he was very far from feeling.

"Who will we find?" asked a voice from behind.

Scotty looked round and came face to face with Dr. McCoy. He swallowed - this was going to be difficult. Choosing his words carefully he quickly imparted the upsetting news to the doctor.

The reaction was as expected. McCoy launched into a verbal onslaught which would have made Kirk cringe had he been near enough to hear it.

"I knew it! I knew there'd be trouble! I tried to persuade him... but he wouldn't listen. And now this has to happen. That stubborn, hot-headed fool..." He broke off, turning away in a vain attempt to hide his concern, control his mounting anxiety.

But who was he kidding, he thought. He couldn't fool anyone - not Scotty... least of all himself. Regaining some semblance of control he turned to Scotty, an apologetic look on his face.

"Sorry, Scotty. I shouldn't have exploded like that. It's just that..."

"I know, Leonard," Scotty interrupted softly. "You don't have to apologise to me. I know how you feel." He turned to Uhura. "Uhura, would you arrange for a Security team to meet us in Transporter Room 1, please?" Then turning to the worried man beside him he said, "I think our presence is required elsewhere, Doctor. Let's go and find them."

Silently the two men left the Bridge and headed for the transporter.

* * * * *

On Egonia the objects of their concern were being taken deeper into the mountain side. In spite of their present predicament Spock glanced around curiously, making a mental note of the direction in which they were travelling, and storing the information away for future reference. It was quite probable that this information would prove invaluable when the time came for them to escape, and he wanted to be prepared. He did not wish to compute the odds against them should they lose themselves in the maze of passageways while finding their way back to the cave.

They continued on, their destination as yet unknown. They had long since left behind the rough, rock-hewn pathways which had led them from the cave. Now their footsteps resounded on a smooth, metallic surface, and Kirk caught sight of his reflection in the metal-lined walls. Lighting was provided by fluorescent strips positioned at intervals along the ceiling, thus proving that a certain amount of power was being provided by an underground generator of considerable size.

As they moved deeper into the planet's interior, it became obvious to the two men that Egonia was being used as a base for a technologically advanced culture. But by whom? And for what purpose? Kirk felt that he would receive no answers from their captors. The robed figures had not uttered a sound at any time during the journey. Kirk's one attempt at communication had met with a wall of silence and a back-handed slap that had almost sent him reeling. He was, therefore, in no hurry to repeat the experience. His questions would have to wait until later.

Almost without warning the corridor came to an end, and the two men and their 'escorts' found themselves in a central complex, obviously the core of this unknown civilisation. Kirk had sufficient time to catch a brief glimpse of a conglomeration of machinery before he and Spock were hustled, none too gently, from the area.

As they continued onwards they passed several individuals, Humans, all dressed alike in what appeared to be regulation overalls. But what made a lasting impression on Kirk was the fact that each person wore the same blank, expressionless look on his or her face. It was as though each one functioned as an automaton. Who were these people?

Kirk felt that he had remained silent long enough. He had to find answers to some of the questions teeming in his brain. Twisting sharply, he successfully wrenched himself free of the strong arms holding him. Darting forward he caught the shoulders of one of the passing Humans, and turning the man round to face him, shouted, "Who are you? What are you doing here? What's happened to you?"

He was met with the same impenetrable wall of silence. The man before him turned vacant, impassive eyes to meet Kirk's questioning gaze. Without uttering a word he freed himself from Kirk's grasp and, slipping away, had soon disappeared into the sea of grey uniforms.

A brutal blow to the back of Kirk's head sent him sprawling to the ground; a vicious kick was aimed at his side. Through a haze of pain he heard sounds of a struggle, and then Spock's voice, filled with undisguised concern, filtered through the darkness which threatened to engulf him.

"Jim! Are you all right? Please, let me help him..."

But the hands which dragged him to his feet were not the gentle hands of

his friend, but the rough ones of their captors. Barely conscious, he allowed himself to be pulled into line; and they continued on their way.

For Kirk, the rest of the journey was a blur. He was vaguely aware of being thrown into some kind of cell, and a metal door slamming behind him. Then the blackness came up to meet him, and he lost consciousness.

Lifting Kirk carefully, Spock carried his friend over to a rough couch which would have to serve as a makeshift bed, and settled him as comfortably as he could. A cursory glance around their prison told him all that he needed to know - there was no hope of escape. He settled back to wait for Kirk to regain consciousness, conserving his strength for whatever danger still awaited them.

While he waited, he had time to think. He could only hope that Kirk was not too badly hurt. If only McCoy was with them. Spock shook himself mentally. Such a line of thought was highly illogical - two of them in this predicament was quite sufficient, without involving the good doctor.

The hours passed slowly. Eventually Kirk stirred and groaned. Instantly Spock moved to his side. Kirk's eyes fluttered open, and when his vision cleared he found himself meeting Spock's dark eyes. The familiar features were unshuttered; gone was the mask behind which Spock tried to hide his emotions, and in its place concern for his Captain and his friend was clearly written for Kirk to see.

"How do you feel, Jim?"

Kirk tried to sit up, and winced as a stab of pain shot through him. He gave Spock a wry grin.

"Very sore, and very bruised. How long have I been out?"

"Several hours."

"Has anything happened?"

Spock shook his head. "No. In fact, I was beginning to wonder if our captors had forgotten about us."

Even as Spock finished speaking there was the sound of heavy footsteps in the corridor outside the cell.

"What was that you were saying?" Kirk asked.

The door opened to reveal - four officers of the Imperial Klingon Guard!

Totally stunned by the sight which confronted them - neither man had been prepared for such a revelation - Kirk and Spock were ordered from the cell. Almost at once they came to a halt outside another metal door, and one of the guards activated a switch on the wall. The door slid silently open.

The two men were unceremoniously pushed through the opening and found themselves in a room similar to the one they had left seconds earlier. It was empty save for a table and chair in the centre. Behind these stood a tall, commanding figure, his back turned towards the Enterprise men. He turned slowly, and Kirk and Spock came face to face with the unmistakable features of a Commander of the Klingon Empire, the deadliest enemy of the Federation.

"Come in, gentlemen, come in. I must apologise for keeping you waiting. I am afraid that I was otherwise engaged when news of your arrival reached me. We have been monitoring your every move since you came to Egonia, so as you can see, your arrival was expected."

"Are we to understand that you were the one responsible for our inability to contact the ship?" Spock asked.

The Klingon nodded. "I see you are most perceptive. It was a necessary action, but you will be able to contact your ship later - when I give you my permission." He glanced across at the four officers. "You have done well, to capture no less a personage than a Starship Captain and one of his senior officers. Such an action will not go unrewarded." Turning once more to the two prisoners he continued smoothly, "But how rude of me - allow me to introduce myself. I am Korak - Commander Korak - of the Imperial Klingon Fleet. And you are...?"

With armed guards watching their every move, Kirk felt that evasion was useless at this point in the proceedings.

"I am Captain James T. Kirk of the U.S.S. Enterprise. This is my First Officer, Commander Spock."

At the sound of Kirk's name a flash of recognition crossed Korak's face, and a malicious smile twisted the corners of his mouth.

"Ah yes, the redoubtable Captain Kirk. I have heard much about you - your name and reputation are well-known on my world. It is gratifying to know that one who has caused the Empire so much trouble is now safe within my 'protective' custody."

Something in Korak's tone sent a shiver down Kirk's spine. What had he meant by that last remark? Kirk, however, was in no mood for threats, veiled or otherwise, and he was fast running out of patience.

"Can we dispense with the chit-chat? If you have been monitoring us, as you claim, then you will know why we are here."

A look of feigned innocence crossed the Klingon's face. "I am at something of a loss to understand what you mean, Captain."

"Don't play games with me, Korak," Kirk retorted angrily. "You know what I mean. What are you doing here? What possible interest can a backwater world like Egonia have for the Klingon Empire? What is the meaning of all this?" Kirk made a sweeping gesture with his arm to encompass their present surroundings and the complex beyond.

A dangerous light gleamed in Korak's eyes. "Haven't you learned that it is dangerous to interfere in matters which are none of your business?" he asked.

"None of my business?" exploded Kirk, his anger boiling over. "Federation ships have disappeared in this area, and you say it's none of my business! I want answers, Commander - and I want them now!" He slammed his fist on the table.

At Kirk's outburst two of the Klingon guards had moved forward to restrain him, but Korak halted them with a wave of his hand.

"You forget, Captain, that you are not in a position to demand anything of me." A sly grin spread slowly across his features. "But no matter. You say you want answers? Very well, I shall provide the answers you seek. However, you will find that the information I give you will prove useless, for when I have finished with you you will be transported to the Empire - as a willing slave."

Totally taken aback by this revelation, Kirk stammered, "A... a slave?"

"But of course. You are not so naive as to believe that once I have told you of our purpose here we would be so foolish as to let you and your friend go? No, Captain. You were not aware of it at the time, but the instant you set foot on this planet you relinquished all your rights to freedom. Such a pity - had you arrived a few days later you would have found... precisely nothing. As it is..." Korak laughed, but it was a laugh totally devoid of mirth. Then he sobered and continued, "Fortunately for us, our work here is almost completed, so what I am about to reveal to you cannot harm us in any way. I believe you called Egonia a 'backwater'? That is true, to a certain

extent, but it is not a fact that has worried us unduly. Rather, it has helped our mission here. We needed somewhere relatively close to the Empire from which we could carry out our operations, yet far enough away that our actions would not arouse the suspicions of our enemies, namely the Federation.

Neither you, nor the Romulans, had shown much interest in the planet, the Egonians having been left to their own devices, so it was decided to use Egonia for our own purposes. We had heard, of course, of the civil war which had continued intermittently for many years, but we felt that this would not harm our plan in any way. In fact, it would serve to keep people away from the area.

When we arrived over a year ago we found few survivors. The..."

"But," Kirk interrupted, "there were no survivors. We were informed that the entire population of Egonia had died as a result of this war."

"Not so, Captain. I am afraid your information has proved incorrect. I can assure you that there were survivors. When we arrived they came to welcome us to their world, believing that we had come to help them. They were eager to show us this underground complex they had designed. As you can imagine, this complex was ideally suited to our needs. It was an easy task to take control - there was little opposition to us - and we were able to... persuade... the Egonians to work for us."

Kirk cringed at the use of the word 'persuade'; he knew, only too well, the Klingon methods of persuasion.

"Their help has proved invaluable to us," Korak continued. "We are quite convinced that the time will soon come when the Empire will be at war with the Federation for the last time - we want to be prepared for that eventuality. With our technology, and the new weapons we have designed and built, the glories will be ours. This will be a war to end all wars, and one which the Federation cannot hope to win."

"Haven't you forgotten something?" Kirk reminded him. "Any action by the Klingon Empire against the Federation contravenes the Organian Peace Treaty. Surely I have no need to remind you of the consequences of such an action?"

Koral laughed. "But Captain, no-one knows of our presence here. Our mission has been conducted with the utmost secrecy."

"The Federation suspects that something is going on here - has been going on for some time," Kirk retorted.

"Suspects, yes. But suspicion is one thing - proof is quite a different matter."

Kirk glanced uneasily at Spock; it was a look that did not escape Korak's notice.

"I see that you are worried - you have every reason to be. If we are successful in our plans, it will mean the end of the Federation as you know it. You see, Captain, Egonia has been used by us as a base in our programme of re-armament. Certain new weapons have been designed by the Empire, and have been constructed here, in this very complex in which you now stand. If this work had been conducted on our own world it might have aroused the suspicions of the Federation. At least here we have been able to work undisturbed - well, comparatively undisturbed."

Korak paused, allowing the two listening men sufficient time to digest this information. Spock asked the question that had been troubling both himself and Kirk.

"The missing Federation vessels - are we to understand that you arranged their disappearance?"

The Commander remained silent. Spock nodded. "Your very silence confirms

this to be true."

"What happened to them?" Kirk asked.

"Happened?" queried Korak.

"Yes, Commander. What did you do to them?"

"Why, nothing, Captain. They came to Egonia of their own volition."

"I find that very hard to believe," Kirk said.

"I assure you that it is the truth... although I will admit that they may have been attracted by our distress call."

"I think you'd better explain, Korak," snapped Kirk. "Why did you lure innocent people to Egonia?"

"Simple, Captain. We needed extra man-power if our mission was to be completed in time. Those of our people who were not involved in the actual construction of weapons were involved in the transportation of the armaments to the Empire, and although we had the assistance of the Egonians it was not enough. Then, some months ago, our scanners detected a ship in the area; we investigated, and discovered it to be a freighter ship of the Federation. With the aid of a hastily rigged distress signal, a landing party was lured to the planet's surface. They were captured - just as you were - and brought here. When their colleagues failed to make contact, more landing parties followed.

It was the answer to our problem. As more ships were detected, the same thing happened. We persuaded them that it would be better for them if they gave their allegiance to us instead of the Federation. It proved a difficult task, but eventually most of them agreed. A few, however, were not convinced - unfortunately, they paid a high price for their stubbornness."

Realisation growing stronger with every word Korak uttered, Kirk asked the question to which he already knew the answer.

"Those men out there... they are Federation men?"

"They were Federation men. Now they owe their allegiance to me and to the Empire. Don't you find it rather ironic, Captain, that your people and your ships should be used to assist with a plan that can only mean the destruction of their world? You should be proud of them - they have proved to be excellent workers; they are loyal, obedient... and subservient. My willing slaves. I control them - as I will control you."

"Never!" Kirk spat out. "You won't get away with this, Korak!"

"And how do you propose to stop me? You forget that you are now my prisoners. There is no escape. Soon you will not be in a position to oppose me."

"What have you done to them?" Kirk muttered through clenched teeth.

"I have drained their minds," Korak stated simply, as though it were an every-day occurrence. "We have a useful device for such purposes - perhaps you have heard of it. It's called the mind-sifter."

Kirk stiffened. The very mention of the mind-sifter conjured up nightmarish pictures of victims completely broken by that inhuman device. Set at high levels of intensity a Human being could not hope to survive such treatment. Kirk had seen such victims - Human vegetables forced to live out a tortured, insane existence until death provided a welcome release. He looked across at Spock, and knew that the Vulcan was remembering the occasion on Organia when he had been subjected to the horrors of the mind-sifter. He had resisted it then, but he had no wish to repeat the experience.

"Well, gentlemen," the Klingon remarked, "I see by the expressions on your faces that you have heard of our little 'toy'." He moved towards Spock, his face alive with anticipation. "I have not had occasion to use the mind-sifter on a Vulcan - the experience should prove... interesting. Take him

away and prepare him."

"No!" Kirk shouted. "I won't let you do this - it's barbaric!"

"I am touched by your concern for your fellow-officer, Captain, but sentimentality is not a weakness of mine. Do not attempt to interfere. As you can see, you are outnumbered. Why not admit that you are beaten? This is one fight you cannot possibly hope to win."

"Never, Korak. I'll do everything in my power to stop you."

"An idle threat, Captain - what harm can you possibly do us? A glorious future awaits the Klingon Empire, and no-one, not even you, Captain Kirk, can thwart us this time." He turned to his officers. "Take the Vulcan to the interrogation room, and take him..." he nodded towards Kirk, "back to his cell."

The guards moved towards Spock.

"There is no need to restrain me. I am quite capable of walking without any assistance from you."

Helplessly, Kirk could only watch with fear in his eyes as his friend walked, unhurried, to the door. For a moment Spock paused in the opening, his dark eyes meeting and holding Kirk's gaze in a silent message of reassurance. Then he was gone.

Unresisting, Kirk allowed himself to be led back to the cell, worry for Spock having replaced his desire to fight.

* * * * *

On the planet's surface the second landing party was engaged in yet another fruitless search for their missing Captain and First Officer. It was one of many such searches, and Scotty knew, in his heart of hearts, that this one also was destined to fail. They had been on Egonia for several hours, and were no nearer finding Kirk and Spock.

The search party emerged from the cave, and Security Chief Thompson shook his head at Scotty's unspoken question.

"Nothing, sir."

Dejectedly Scotty turned away. He felt so helpless - there was nothing more he could do. He heard a sound from behind, and turned as a hand was placed on his shoulder.

"Anything at all, Scotty?" asked McCoy, for the umpteenth time that day.

Wearily, Scotty shook his head. "I just don't understand it, Len. I've lost count of the number of times we've searched that cave, and each time we've drawn a blank. What could possibly have happened to them? How can two men just disappear like that? It doesn't make any sense."

"Nothing makes sense on this god-forsaken planet," muttered McCoy angrily. He moved away from Scotty and headed for the cave.

"Len, where are you going?" shouted the Chief Engineer.

"I'm going to take another look round in there, that's where I'm going."

"What good is that going to do?"

"I don't know, Scotty. But I do know that I'm tired of sitting around out here with nothing to do, waiting... thinking... Scotty, I feel so damn useless! If I don't do something soon, I'll go mad."

Scotty smiled, understanding how the doctor felt. "If you don't mind a little company, I'd be happy to join you."

Without another word McCoy entered the cave, hoping that this time they might - just might - find something that the previous search parties had overlooked.



Leaving Scotty to study the strange symbols that had attracted Spock's attention earlier, McCoy began to examine the opposite wall, immediately struck by its smooth appearance. Hope rising, he began to feel very carefully along the length of the wall. Then, he felt it - a seam so unobtrusive that it was almost impossible to see with the naked eye.

Excitedly he called across to his companion. "Scotty! Over here! I believe I've found something."

Instantly Scotty was at his side, running his hand along the almost invisible join. "There must be a concealed passageway behind there - that accounts for the sudden disappearance of the Captain and Mr. Spock," he said. "But we're going to need high-powered cutting equipment if we're going to make any impression on that." He gestured at the rock face.

Quickly, he contacted the Enterprise. Within minutes an engineering team had arrived on the scene and had begun the arduous task of cutting through solid rock.

* * * * *

Driven almost to the edge of despair, Kirk paced his cell like a caged animal, his concern for Spock growing with each passing moment. In sheer frustration he slammed his hand against the metal door of his

prison - a futile gesture, but it did much to alleviate his pent-up emotions.

Wearily he sat down on the edge of the couch and buried his face in his hands. It was hours since Spock had been taken away by the guards. Where was his friend? What was happening to him? If only he could see him - know that he was all right.

Then from outside the cell, heavy footsteps reverberated in the corridor. Instantly alert, all tiredness forgotten, Kirk leaped to his feet. He waited, hardly daring to breath, as the door was opened and Spock was unceremoniously thrown in his direction. As the door closed again Kirk moved swiftly forward to catch his friend as he crumpled to the floor.

"Spock..." He murmured brokenly. "What have they done to you?"

Mercifully, the Vulcan was physically unharmed - but what of his mind? Pushing such a harrowing thought away, Kirk carefully lifted Spock in his arms and carried him over to the couch, settling him comfortably. Then, sitting down, he reached out with an unsteady hand and gently touched his friend's face.

Spock's eyes opened, instantly alight with recognition, and soundlessly his lips formed the name, "Jim."

Relief flooded through Kirk, and he gripped his friend's shoulders. "Spock... thank god! I thought..." He paused, not wanting to give voice to his fear that Korak had succeeded in his plan to break the Vulcan, a plan

which, if successful, would mean the end for them both.

"I know," Spock said quietly. "But there was no need to worry. I resisted their mind-sifter once; fortunately I was also able to resist it this time."

"You are sure that you're all right?"

Spock nodded. "Quite sure, Jim. I must admit to feeling a little weak, but otherwise I am unharmed. But we must escape from here. Korak's first attempt to control me has failed. This had angered him, and it will not be long before he makes another attempt. If he fails a second time, he will turn his attention to you - and you could not possibly hope to resist such treatment. Jim... I cannot stand by and watch that happen to you. We must escape."

"Don't worry, Spock; somehow we're going to get out of here. The next opportunity that presents itself..."

Kirk paused - Spock wasn't listening to him. Instead his attention was caught by a sound outside the cell.

"I believe they are returning," he said quietly.

The door opened. An order was snapped out. "Take the prisoners to the interrogation room! Commander Korak awaits them there."

Roughly, Kirk and Spock were dragged to their feet and hustled from the cell. Kirk surveyed their escort with an expressionless eye. The enemy was slipping up - only three guards had been sent to bring the two captives to Korak. This would, perhaps, be the only opportunity they would have to escape - they had to try.

With a cry of "Now, Spock!" Kirk leaped forward and dealt the surprised Klingon nearest to him a crushing blow to the stomach; the guard crumpled to the floor deeply winded, and Kirk turned his attention to the next attacker.

Spock, meanwhile, had despatched his guard with a well-executed Vulcan nerve pinch, and then turned to see how Kirk was faring. It was obvious, from the scene that met his eyes, that his Captain required no assistance from him. Kirk had succeeded in rendering the third Klingon unconscious. The element of surprise in their attack had worked in their favour.

Without a moment's hesitation Kirk and Spock retrieved two fallen disruptors and ran desperately in the direction they had been brought the previous day. They had to put as great a distance as possible between themselves and the guards quickly, and they also had to find the way out of their prison. To hesitate now would mean certain capture, and neither man welcomed the thought of being taken back for further interrogation.

Already their pursuers were gaining on them; there was the sound of voices, heavy footsteps resounded in the passageway behind them. The noise of the scuffle had alerted the Klingons in the immediate area sooner than they had expected.

So intent were they on finding their way out of the maze of passageways, they failed to notice the Klingon officer behind them. He had left the main contingent and continued on ahead. For a brief second he caught a glimpse of Kirk's gold shirt before the two men rounded a corner and disappeared from view. The Klingon's eyes were alight with anticipation as he hurried to shorten the distance between them.

The two men came into view once more. Stealthily the Klingon came up behind, weapon at the ready, his mind full of the rewards he would receive when he delivered the prisoners to his Commander.

Spock's keen hearing detected a sound behind them. He turned in time to see the Klingon take aim with his weapon and fire at Kirk.

Frantically he tried to push his friend to safety, but he was a fraction too late; the blast hit Kirk, and with a cry of pain he slumped to the ground.

Taking aim with his weapon Spock fired at the Klingon, temporarily stunning him. Immediately the Vulcan dropped to his knees at Kirk's side, concern showing on his face.

"Jim!"

Thankfully the weapon had not been set on kill. Kirk tried to move, but failed.

"Spock...?"

"It is all right - I am here," came the soft voice.

"Spock... it's my right side... I can't move!" There was a note of panic in Kirk's voice.

Spock spoke quietly. "Try not to worry, Jim - it is the effect of the disruptor blast. The paralysis is only temporary, and will wear off in a few hours. If I help you, do you think you could stand? It is imperative that we leave this area without further delay. Now that Korak has discovered that we have escaped, he will undoubtedly send more men after us."

Kirk nodded, and with Spock's help was able to drag himself to his feet. They moved forward, their minds filled with one thought - escape. They had to find their way back to the cave. It was their only chance of being found by the Enterprise.

They trudged on for what seemed like hours, moving slowly, Kirk's injury impeding their progress. Several times he stumbled, and would have fallen had it not been for Spock's strong support. Grimly, he pushed himself on.

Vaguely, they were aware of voices and footsteps behind them, but eventually these faded as they put a greater distance between themselves and their pursuers.

Fighting the effects of the painful blast had begun to tell on Kirk. His breathing became laboured, and he felt so tired it was an effort to put one foot in front of the other. Yet he knew that if they paused, even for a second, they were in danger of being recaptured.

Spock had been watching Kirk closely for some time. The shadows under his eyes, and the lines of pain etched around Kirk's mouth had not escaped his notice. He knew that it was up to him to suggest that they rest, before Kirk pushed himself to the very limit of his endurance.

He glanced round for a suitable resting place, and saw one to the left of their present pathway. Hopefully, the surrounding rocks would hide them from view. He guided Kirk over, and settled him as comfortably as he could.

"We will remain here for a short time. Try to rest."

Kirk nodded thankfully, too tired to argue, too tired to point out the dangers which faced them if the Klingons were to find them.

The two men were silent for a long moment, each lost in his own thoughts. Then Kirk spoke.

"Spock... I've been thinking. Leave me here. I'm no use to you like this - in fact, I'm slowing you down. It would be far more logical if you were to go on alone, try to find help... at least one of us would have a chance of escaping."

"No." Although Spock had not raised his voice, Kirk could sense the determination in that one word. "How could you ask me to do such a thing? Surely you know by now that I would never..."

Kirk could see the hurt in Spock's eyes. "Spock, please - see reason. I'm only a burden to you. You must leave me - that's an order!"

Spock's dark eyes surveyed his Captain's face, and he said quietly, "I am sorry, Jim, but that is one order I cannot obey. To expect me to do so

would be unreasonable. We leave here together - I am not leaving you behind." He stared intently at Kirk. "If our roles were reversed, and it was I who had been injured, would you leave me?"

Kirk did not have to speak. The look in his eyes was there for Spock to read. You know I would not.

"Jim, you know that, whatever the danger, I would never leave you here." Spock began before continuing slowly, hesitantly, "You have taught me so much, given me so much. You offered friendship; you showed me that I need never be alone again. If anything was to happen to you I..." He turned away, struggling to control his emotions. Perhaps he had said too much.

Kirk reached out and squeezed Spock's shoulder. Imperceptibly the muscles relaxed, the tenseness disappeared. So deep was the empathy between them that words were often unnecessary. Yet Kirk wanted his friend to know that he understood completely. He knew what it had cost Spock to reveal so much of his inner self.

"My Vulcan friend," Kirk said softly. "What have I done to deserve such a friend as you?"

They fell silent, each man savouring the warmth of feeling which existed between them.

All too soon the silence was rudely shattered by the sound of footsteps in the distance, footsteps which grew dangerously near with each passing second. They knew that they could delay no longer - to do so would mean certain recapture.

With one swift movement Spock was on his feet. "They are gaining on us. We must move on."

Leaning forward he helped Kirk to stand, and supporting his Captain's weight with his own lean frame, they moved cautiously forward.

They had long since left the complex behind. Now, as they climbed upwards in what Spock hoped was the right direction, their pathway was rough and strewn with rocks and boulders which made progress slow and difficult. Several times Spock paused, surveying the area ahead for remembered landmarks before continuing on. Not once did Kirk question the Vulcan's judgement. Indeed, his confidence in Spock was unwavering; he knew, without any doubt, that his friend would lead them to safety.

Nor was that confidence misplaced. After another brief pause Spock leaned forward and whispered, "I believe we are almost there. If I am correct in my assumption, the entrance to the cave should lie around the next bend."

With renewed strength they hurried on. There was not a moment to lose - already Korak's men were closing in on them. The knowledge spurred them on.

They rounded the bend to be greeted by a most welcome sight - Scotty and his men had just succeeded in their task of cutting through the solid rock which separated the outer cave from the inner passageways.

"Captain! Mr. Spock!" Scotty exclaimed, hardly daring to believe the evidence of his own eyes. Then relief was replaced by concern as his gaze rested on Kirk. Explanations would have to wait until later.

Urgently, he called over his shoulder, "Doctor McCoy! Quickly - we need your help."

Kirk barely remembered taking the remaining steps. He was vaguely aware of gentle arms lowering him carefully to the ground. Brilliant blue eyes peered anxiously down at him.

He heard Spock's voice, soft, quiet. "Take care of him for me, Doctor."
McCoy's voice, questioning. "Spock - where are you going?"

"There is a matter of great urgency which requires my attention."

"But Jim needs you."

"I know - but he will understand."

The voices began to fade there was the hiss of a hypo, and the welcome darkness of unconsciousness claimed him.

* * * * *

Kirk regained consciousness several hours later in the safe, peaceful haven of Sickbay. Struggling against the sleepiness which threatened to hold him, he opened his eyes, and as his vision cleared he searched the room for the one person he knew would be there.

"Spock...?" he murmured softly.

And as before the well-loved voice came back. "I am here."

"Thanks," Kirk said simply.

Spock looked at him quizzically.

"You brought us out of there... If it hadn't been for you..."

"Hush, Jim." Spock placed a restraining hand on Kirk's arm. "Try not to talk - you need rest. Besides, there is no need to say anything."

"But it's true," Kirk persisted. "I wouldn't have made it without your help. How can I ever repay you...?"

"To know that you are safe - that is the only payment I require."

Simple words, yet they contained a warmth and sincerity which could not be doubted, and the dark eyes which met Kirk's gaze were smiling.

"Spock..."

"Now then, what's all this?" came a familiar voice from the doorway, and McCoy entered the room, shaking his head in exasperation. "Spock, I'm surprised at you! Disturbing my patient like that." But the tone of voice was belied by the warm expression on his face.

"Spock isn't disturbing me, Bones." Kirk was quick to leap to his friend's defence, and McCoy, whose keen gaze had taken in the peaceful scene at a glance, was forced to agree.

"No, I can see that," he said softly.

Changing the subject, Kirk turned to Spock. "Everything all right?" he asked.

"Affirmative, Captain," replied Spock, returning to formality.

"Haven't you told him yet?" McCoy interrupted.

Puzzled, Kirk asked, "Told me what?"

"You mean you haven't told him how you captured Korak and his associates almost single-handed?"

"Really, Doctor, you do have a tendency to exaggerate matters. It was not like that, as you very well know," retorted Spock.

Kirk chuckled inwardly, enjoying the familiar bickering. Could he detect a note of annoyance in Spock's voice? He saw the playful gleam in McCoy's eyes.

"Well, I just thought..." McCoy began, and then stopped when he saw the warning look on Kirk's face. "All right, Jim - I won't say another word," he said, grinning.

"Try to ignore him, Spock," Kirk advised, a smile pulling at the corners of his mouth.

"I do try, Captain, but it is extremely difficult at times," replied Spock.

McCoy wasn't going to take any more of this. He interrupted hurriedly, "Will you two stop talking about me as though I wasn't here?" he asked indignantly.

"Okay, Bones, we'll call a truce. Carry on, Spock," Kirk said. "What happened after we reached the cave? I must have blacked out, because I can't remember much about it."

Spock nodded. "That is correct. You were unconscious when I left, but once I knew you were safe with McCoy, Mr. Scott and I took a Security team into the passageway. It was imperative that we find Korak and put an end to his plan before he attempted to escape. It would have been so easy to lose him in the maze of passageways.

We had not travelled far when we came face to face with our pursuers - the Commander was with them. I do not think that I have ever seen anyone look as surprised as he did. I was the last person he expected to see walking towards him."

Kirk laughed, imagining all too clearly the expression on Korak's face.

Spock continued, "I had given our coordinates to Chief Kyle. Once we had restrained Korak and his men and brought them to the surface, I contacted the Enterprise and they were beamed aboard. I had arranged for a suitable reception committee to meet them on arrival.

With the Commander safely in our custody we returned to the central complex. It was an easy matter to apprehend the remaining Klingons. We also confiscated the weapons which were under construction - Starfleet will require proof of the Empire's plan."

"Where is Korak now?" Kirk wanted to know.

"In the brig. Security Chief Thompson has informed me that the Commander is already complaining about his treatment - I do not think that he is particularly impressed by our hospitality."

"I bet he isn't!" McCoy chuckled.

"What of the others?" Kirk asked anxiously. "Our men? The Egonians?"

"They are being well looked after. Before leaving I arranged for a medical team to remain with them until they can receive more permanent help. When I notified Starfleet of the situation, I took the opportunity to ask for medical personnel to be sent to Egonia as soon as possible."

"What are their chances?"

Spock shrugged. "I would not like to say. They will be given the best treatment Starfleet can provide. To use one of your own sayings, we shall have to 'wait and see'.

We are now on course for Starbase 11, Captain, as originally planned. On arrival our prisoners will be handed over to the authorities. I do not think we shall be hearing from Commander Korak for a very long time."

Kirk nodded. "I agree, Spock. Not only has he to answer to the Federation for his treatment of our people, but he has almost violated the Organian Peace Treaty, and interfered with an alien culture. We will never know what progress the Egonians might have made had they been allowed to develop in their own way, especially now that the war has ended. By the time he has answered to Starfleet for his actions, he'll wish he'd never set foot on Egonia."

"And," Spock reminded him, "do not forget about the Klingons themselves. When he is returned to the Empire he will not receive an enthusiastic welcome. It is a well known fact that they do not tolerate failures."

"The sooner we reach Starbase 11, the better I'll like it," Kirk commented. "I have no wish to renew my acquaintance with Korak. When I think what could have happened..." He shuddered.

"Try not to think of it, Jim - it is over now."

"I know - thanks to you," Kirk smiled.

After a short pause McCoy glanced across at Spock. "Spock... you haven't forgotten your promise?"

"No, Doctor." Spock stood up, preparing to leave.

"Promise? What promise?" Kirk asked, his gaze switching from one friend to the other.

McCoy spoke. "Spock promised me that once he knew you were going to be all right, he'd get some rest. He's been on his feet for hours now, and as I reminded him, if he's not careful he'll end up in Sickbay too, suffering from exhaustion. Spock as a patient is the last thing I need at the moment - Lord knows, he's difficult enough to live with when he's healthy!"

Spock, however, chose to ignore the last remark.

He must be tired, Kirk thought, if he can pass up a chance to argue with Bones.

Before leaving, Spock turned to his Captain. "I will see you later, Jim," he said, his voice softening as it always did when he spoke to Kirk.

Kirk nodded. "Go and rest. And Spock... thanks for bringing me home."

Spock inclined his head slightly and moved to the door.

Silently Kirk and McCoy watched the tall figure leave the room. Once Spock had left, Kirk glanced up at the doctor.

"Did you know that if it hadn't been for Spock we might not have made it back to the cave?" he asked.

"I guessed as much," replied McCoy.

"When I was injured by that damn blast I asked him - almost pleaded with him in fact - to leave me, and try to find the way out by himself. He wouldn't... He was prepared to endanger himself rather than leave me..." Kirk fell silent, too choked to say anything more.

"That doesn't surprise me in the slightest," McCoy said softly. "Ever since he came back on board he's resisted all my attempts to persuade him to rest. As soon as he'd fulfilled his duties he came here, to Sickbay. He hasn't left your side since - not until he was sure you'd be all right."

Both men fell silent, thinking with affection of the quiet man they were proud to call 'friend', and remembering the occasions in the past when Spock had been prepared to sacrifice his own life in order to save theirs.

Settling himself comfortably against the pillows, Kirk murmured softly, "He's quite a guy."

And although McCoy didn't speak, Kirk could see by the expression on the doctor's face that this time, at least, Bones agreed with him wholeheartedly.

Sulu : Can I make an appointment to see the doctor?

Chapel : Sorry, he's just gone off duty.

Sulu : Good. When do you expect him to be off duty again?

FIRST WATCH by Meg Wright

Ensign Chekov pulled his shirt down nervously as the turbo-lift slowed to a halt. His first spell of duty on the Bridge of the most famous ship in the Fleet, and to make things worse, under the eyes of those two almost legendary officers, Captain James T. Kirk and Commander Spock. He gulped back his fright as the doors opened, stepping out on legs that seemed no longer his. The Bridge was quiet, only the hum of the equipment endlessly maintaining the great ship broke a silence that seemed, impossibly, to swell as he hovered uncertainly.

The Captain was over at the Library Console, looking over his First Officer's shoulder, but he straightened to nod a welcome.

"Good morning, Ensign."

"Good morning, sir." Oh, God, his voice had cracked! It hadn't done that in years.

The Communications Officer looked up from her console and gave him a brilliant smile and a wink. "You're nice and early, Mr. Chekov," she whispered conspiratorially. "Making a good impression?"

He gave her a sheepish grin and went down into the well, tapping the navigator on the shoulder. "Relieving you, Mr. Farrel."

The older man gave a pleased grunt and stood up. Chekov slid into the vacated chair and listened to the take-over report with apprehensive concentration. It seemed to be straightforward, but he'd better check it all again just to be sure.

He flicked over the console, hearing in his mind the calm voice of the Vulcan in the training sessions. Memory of that voice calmed him down and the world seemed to steady around him.

Certain at last that all was well, he relaxed in the seat, to find that Sulu had taken over the helm, and was watching him.

"Not bad," the helmsman said, grinning broadly. "Not bad at all. You only checked it over four times. They told me I went over it seven times before I looked up."

Chekov gave him a wavering smile, wondering if he'd ever be able to speak in such a normal voice. Most likely he's be reprimanded for inaudibility.

"Mr. Chekov!"

He nearly shot off his chair. "S-sir?"

Kirk was in the command chair now. "Position, please, Ensign."

"246.218 parsecs out of Benecia, sir, heading 24 mark 312."

The words were out before he'd had time to think - had it been correct? Worriedly, he checked the console. Had that last decimal point been right? No-one had corrected him. Perhaps Commander Spock had been too busy to listen.

The hours ticked slowly away. Routine. No surprises. A hand touched his shoulder.

"Relieving you, Mr. Chekov."

End of watch? Blindly, he realised that others were moving towards the turbo-lift, and he followed them, stumbling awkwardly up the steps.

Standing in the lift with Uhura, Spock, Captain Kirk - he, Pavel Chekov, going off watch with those three. Daring, he lifted his eyes to find Kirk watching him, amused.

"It gets easier, Ensign," he said kindly. "Doesn't it, Spock?"

Uhura gave a stifled giggle as Spock raised an eyebrow in mild surprise.

"Well, it does for the rest of us," Kirk told him. "I'll never forget my own first day on the Bridge. I messed up the course change, and had us 28 light years off course before I realised. Boy, did I ever want to die!"

Chekov's jaw sagged in amazement.

"Strange how fallible Humans can be," Spock said, poker-faced. "A pity you didn't train under a Vulcan, Captain, or your own performance might have been as satisfactory as Mr. Chekov's."

"Th-thank you, sir!"

The eyebrows moved infinitesimally.

"You don't thank him," Kirk translated, "or if you do, it's only for your own satisfaction." He grinned at the Vulcan. "Mr. Spock never praises, he only states the case as he sees it."

Chekov caught the teasing tone, and looked from one man to the other. Suddenly the friendliness in the small elevator seemed to gather him in like a pair of warm arms. And he was a part of it, a part of the Enterprise team.

SILENT LOVE by Susan Meek

Love is an emotion with many forms.
One that must have constant reassurance,
Affection shown openly for security to be realised,
Even a love that shows itself by opposition,
That needs the stimulation of constant conflict.
But there is also a love...

That is not spoken.
Its expression is in its silence.
It is not always necessary
For a heart to be worn on the sleeve.

A tiny gesture, a slight touch,
Even the miniscule raising of an eyebrow,
A smile not shown on the face,
But still reflects in dark and hazel eyes.

A silence can say,
"You are needed. You are welcome.
Here you can find a home."

When for years
Troubles and dangers have been shared,
When losses have been faced,
And triumphs gained side by side,
There comes a point
When a trust is discovered,
A complete understanding of differences grows.

A richness is gained,
A depth;
When minds have joined
Words become superfluous.

This is not only love -
It is empathy;
It is silence...
And yet it is the perhaps the greatest love of all.

McCoy to Spock : Drink this potion of bat's wing, lizard's tail, and dragon's blood. If that doesn't work, take two aspirins twice a day.

SPOCK'S MYSTERY by Linda Hughes

Captain James T. Kirk was sitting in his chair on the Bridge of the Enterprise as usual when the mystery started. First Officer Spock got up slowly and walked across the deck to stand beside Kirk. There was nothing unusual in that, so Kirk continued to read the report in his hand. The Vulcan coughed, somewhat selfconsciously, making Kirk look up.

"May I have a word with you in private, sir?" Spock stood stiffly, suppressing a look of pain which didn't fool his commanding officer - they had served together far too long for Kirk not to notice.

Kirk stood up. "Take the con, Mr. Sulu. I won't be long." He motioned for Spock to follow him into the turbo-lift. In the privacy of the lift, Kirk looked at Spock.

"Do you want to tell me here, or in my office?"

"It won't take long, Captain." Spock took a deep breath. "May I respectfully request transportation to my home planet, sir?"

Kirk's eyes widened in surprise. "Why do you wish to go home, Spock?"

Spock swallowed. "I'd rather not say, sir."

Kirk closed his eyes and slumped against the elevator wall, bringing a hand up to his forehead as realisation hit him.

"Dear god!" he groaned. He was remembering the last time Spock had asked to be taken home. Poor Spock had very nearly died on the journey there, and when they had arrived he had almost killed Kirk himself in the fight that had followed the ceremony. It had been Spock's marriage ceremony, when he and his wife had been drawn together by a force which had reached Spock across the galaxy. The marriage had been broken, Spock's wife, T'Pring, preferring Stonn, another Vulcan. She had chosen Kirk for the Challenge, and Spock, driven by an ancient force of violence, had nearly killed his commanding officer and friend, who had been unused to the strange weapon he had been given to defend himself.

As the elevator stopped Kirk stood up straight and prepared to alight. Spock stood back to allow his Captain in front of him.

In Kirk's office Spock stood rigidly in front of the desk.

"Sit down, Spock."

"No, thank you, sir."

Kirk, trying to be kind, ordered him to sit in the chair facing the desk. Spock obeyed, sitting cautiously on the edge of the seat.

"All right, Spock," Kirk said gently, turning to press the intercom button. "Mr. Chekov, how long will it take us to get to the Eridani system at maximum warp speed?"

Kirk waited, glancing back at Spock, who moved uncomfortably.

"Three weeks and four days, Captain."

Kirk winced. "Very well, Mr. Chekov. Lay in a course, Warp Factor 8, dropping to Warp Factor 6 in three hours time."

"Aye, sir."

Kirk pressed the 'off' button and walked towards Spock.

"Thank you, Captain."

"Now, Spock," Kirk looked sympathetically at his friend. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"No, sir."

"How long have you got?" Kirk asked with a sinking feeling.

"It is not urgent at the moment, sir. I think I can make it."

Kirk sighed with relief. "You'd better go to your quarters and rest. Would you like Nurse Chapel to make you some Plomeek soup?" Kirk knew that this was the Vulcan's favourite food, and that Christine Chapel had made it her business to be the only person on board who could cook it the way Spock liked it.

"That will not be necessary, Captain. I breakfasted not long ago, and my appetite has not diminished."

Kirk thought this rather strange. Last time, Spock had gone completely off his food, but maybe it was going to be different this time. Being the first hybrid Vulcan, even Spock had not been able to tell, previously, what would happen next time - if, indeed, there would be a next time.

But apparently there was to be a next time, and it was happening right now. Kirk fervently hoped that it would not be as bad as it had been a few years ago. He did not like to see anyone suffer, least of all Spock, who over the years had become a closer friend to him than his brother had been. Kirk looked up compassionately as Spock rose and walked awkwardly towards the door.

"I think I will rest for a while, sir, if you don't mind. I will return to duty after lunch."

"As you wish, Spock. Take as long as you want - you know what's best for you."

Kirk sat alone for a few minutes, trying to think of some way to help Spock, but eventually he gave up. Not being a Vulcan, he had no idea of what to do. He only knew how he felt when faced with the Human version of this problem, but that was not even remotely similar to what Spock was feeling now. He felt very inadequate. Coming to a decision he got up and headed towards Sickbay. One thing was certain - Dr. McCoy had to be warned.

Spock entered his cabin and locked the door. Walking across to the bed he undid his trousers and lay down. He knew he hadn't gained any weight, but the trousers were becoming increasingly uncomfortable. The pain had dulled to an ache, and he crossed one foot over the other. This made him gasp as a fresh bout of agony seared through him.

"I feel no pain." He tried to concentrate on the Vulcan way of blocking out pain, but it didn't really work. He was beginning to wonder how long he could go on like this. The Captain knew something was radically wrong, and soon everyone would know that their First Officer was ill. His tremendous pride would not let him go to McCoy, who would only make some scathing remark, and Spock knew that he could not take the doctor's jibes - he was too depressed.

Strange, that - a Vulcan shouldn't be depressed... but perhaps it was his condition. After all, Humans became very emotional when anything went wrong in that department, and he had to face the fact that he was half-Human.

The days passed, and Kirk became very worried about his friend. It was obvious that Spock was in a great deal of pain, and Kirk felt so helpless.

Spock was beginning to feel anxious that he wouldn't make it to his home planet; they were now two weeks and five days away, and only this morning someone had accidentally knocked into him in the corridor, and he had almost passed out with the pain. It had made him feel quite sick.

Kirk had suggested that he go to see Dr. McCoy; perhaps the doctor could find some form of tranquiliser that would help. But Spock had almost bitten his head off, he had been so angry. The Captain had promptly gone to Sickbay to report the incident. Both he and McCoy were somewhat puzzled at the Vulcan's reactions, since they had been there with him the last time, and Spock must have known that they understood what he was going through.

"I really don't understand what's come over him," the exasperated doctor said to Kirk later that day. "I've got tranquilisers and pain killers here, and I'm sure one of them would help him." McCoy sat at his desk, head in hands. "I daren't go to his quarters again. Only last week he bawled me out - he was in a terrible temper. I tried ordering him to report to me, but he wouldn't come. Jim, something has got to be done; if it isn't, he'll kill himself. I'm only frightened that I'll go in there one day and find he's used that awful dagger he's got hanging on the wall." McCoy shook his head sadly.

"Well, Bones, I'll give it a couple of days, and if he's no better I'll order him to report to you. He'll have to obey me - I'm his commanding officer, and I'll use force if necessary."

As it happened this was not necessary, because the next morning the whole problem was resolved. Spock was at his station on the Bridge, standing beside his chair, as he had taken to doing for the last few days. Kirk sat in the command chair, glancing occasionally in Spock's direction to make sure that he was still upright, and not flat out on the deck. Kirk had kept the ship moving at the maximum speed possible, which meant altering the speed from time to time, as the warp drive engines could not keep up Warp 8 for very long.

"Alter speed, Mr. Sulu. Warp Factor 6," Kirk ordered.

Sulu moved to press the button, but someone was passing behind him at that very moment and nudged the Helmsman's arm. Sulu's finger hit the wrong button, and the ship gave a lurch.

"Ahhhhhhhhhh!" The scream was the most horrifying noise Kirk had ever heard. Spock was on the deck, doubled up in pain.

"Get Dr. McCoy!" Kirk shouted as he leaped out of his chair and vaulted the rail to get to Spock. The Vulcan gave a teeth-rattling shudder, groaned, and passed out.

Kirk paced the office in Sickbay. What was McCoy doing in there? He and Nurse Chapel had been with Spock in the Intensive Care Unit for over 30 minutes, and Kirk was walking round in circles like a demented animal. He was imagining all kinds of terrifying things happening to poor Spock.

Five minutes later McCoy emerged, beaming.

"How is he, Bones?" Kirk grabbed McCoy by the shoulders and almost shook him, he was so anxious.

"He'll be all right now, Jim. He's just putting his trousers back on. I've told him to go and rest for today, but he'll be back to normal by tomorrow."

Kirk could hardly believe his ears, but as if to confirm these statements Spock appeared in the doorway, relief showing in every line of his face.

"Spock!" Kirk choked.

"I am recovered now, Captain. Thank you, Doctor."

When Kirk had calmed down enough to speak he asked, "What was it?"

McCoy's face grew serious. "Something that could sound very funny, but in fact was extremely painful. If this ever got out he'd be the laughing-stock of the Fleet, so it's not going to get out - is it, Jim?"

Kirk shook his head, bewildered. "But, what was it?"

McCoy procrastinated again. "He's been in terrible pain for nearly three weeks, and he wouldn't come to me because he thought I'd laugh at him. Said he was going to see some Vulcan specialist."

Kirk had had enough. "For god's sake, Bones, tell me what it was!"

Spock lowered his head in embarrassment.

"Just about the biggest boil I ever saw!"
