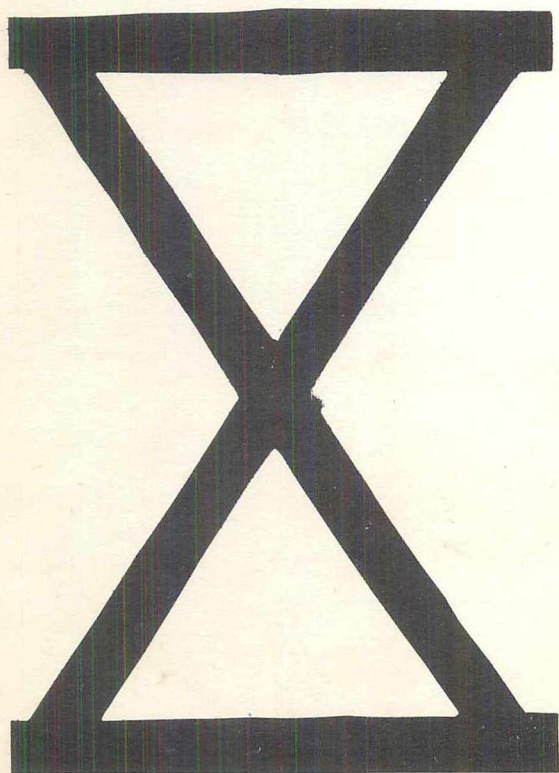
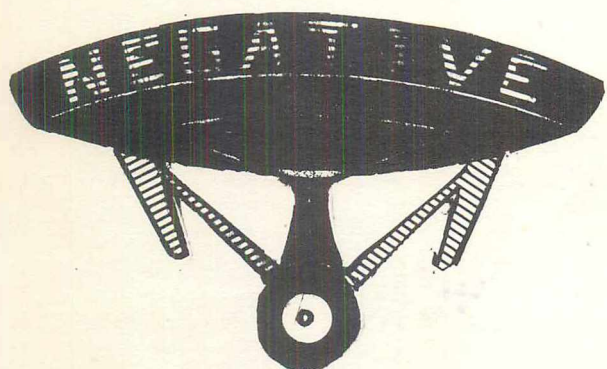


GARTH





T-Negative 10 comes from Ruth Berman, 5620 Edgewater Boulevard,  
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-----Lino: Nan Braude

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Brag Notes: a poem of mine, "Soundstage," appears in the January  
30 Saturday Reviews, another one, "Computative Oak," is in the  
March 20 SR, and a short story, "Ptolemaic Hi-jack," is in the  
Spring Worlds of Fantasy.



## ONSET

by Dorothy Jones

((In December 1966 Dorothy Jones visited the "Star Trek" set. At that time, the widespread enthusiasm for the show was still quite new. There had been few visitors to the set, and Leonard Nimoy had not yet been forced by the volume of fan-mail to give up answering his own mail. They had exchanged some letters, and she had sent him a copy of "The Elf in the Starship Enterprise," a poem written in reaction to "The Naked Time" and later published in the September 1968 If. Robert Hellstrom, Roddenberry's assistant at that time, was her guide on the set.))

As soon as Mr. Hellstrom had introduced me, Mr. Nimoy cried: "The poet! Do sit down!"

So I did, and we chatted on inconsequentialities. Presently I asked, "May I take a closer look at those ears?"

He said, "By all means," and I did. They're a beautiful job; you have to get a foot or so away to see through the makeup where the real leaves off and the fake begins. I also got a look at the eyebrows, and couldn't tell from six inches which was real and which was fake.

ME (meaning the ears): They're plastic?

MR. NIMOY: Foam rubber, and they sit on top of the ear. Can you see the seam?

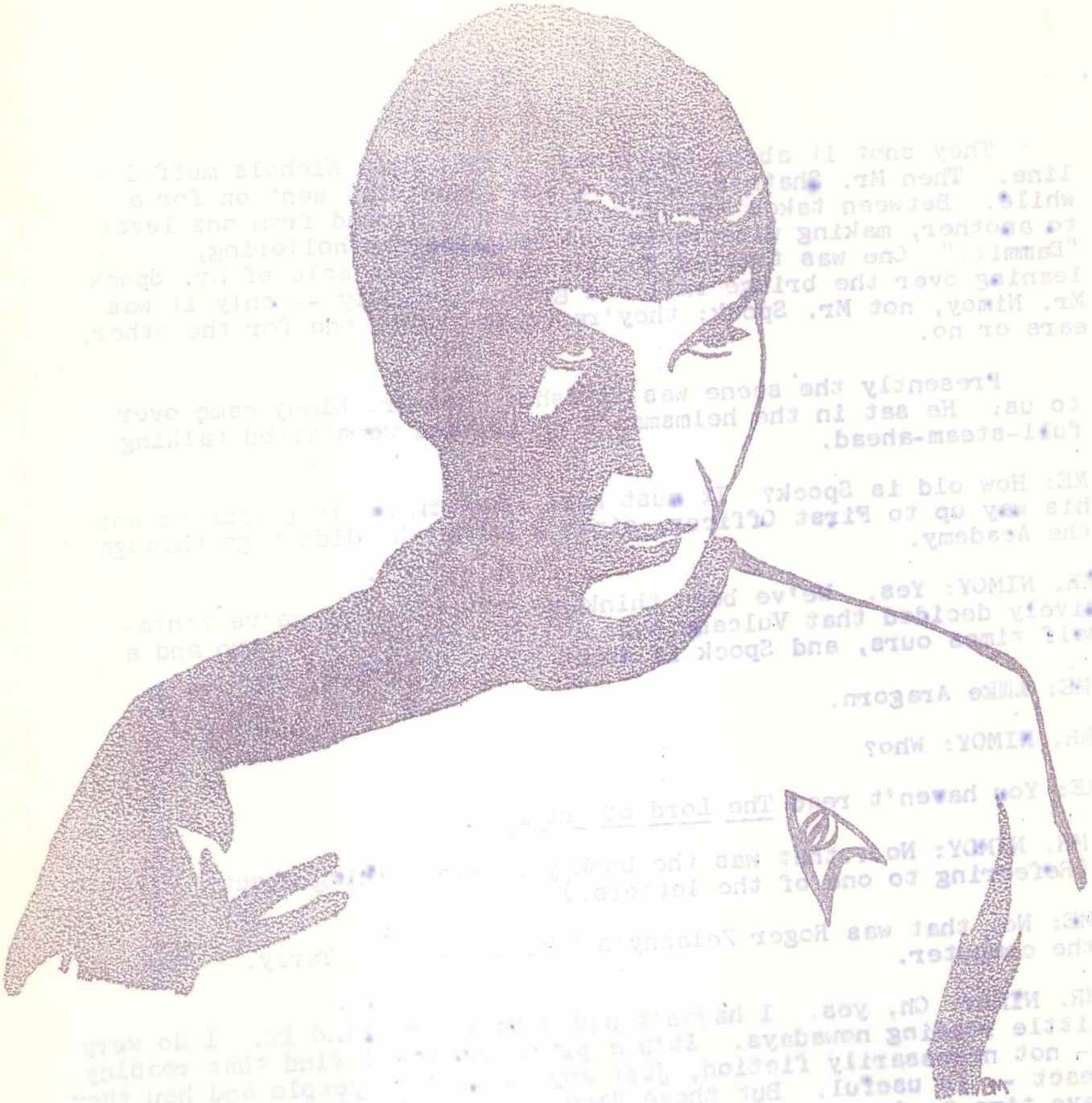
MR: I can see it now, but you can't on the screen, and I was wondering whether it was a whole artificial ear or just partly.

MR. NIMOY: No, you can't see the seam on camera. It's a beautiful job. And now everybody thinks I really have pointy ears!

MR. HELLSTROM: We tell people we hang him out on the clothesline by them.

At this point they called Mr. Nimoy to the set. Mr. Hellstrom and I tagged along, and he sat me down in the navigator's chair (not incorporated into the bridge set at the moment). The episode being done that week was "A Taste of Armageddon," and dealt with a diplomat, Ambassador Fox (Gene Lyons), who was determined to take the Enterprise to a planet full of civil war, even though the planet didn't want it. The diplomat was most believable. The uniform they had in him was not.





The scene was: Uhura tells the captain the planet is beaming a code meaning "Stay away no matter what." Fox said never mind that, they were going in anyway. The captain said, "I am not accustomed to taking part in gunboat diplomacy." Fox said, "You worry about the gunboat and leave the diplomacy to me!" And he backed himself up with a few quotations from the manual and went stalking off the bridge. Mr. Spock said, "In view of Code 710, Captain, may I suggest --" and the captain said, "Yes. Condition Yellow Alert. We're going in, gentlemen. Peacefully, I hope. But we're going in."

They shot it about ten times. First Miss Nichols muffed a line. Then Mr. Shatner muffed a line, and that went on for a while. Between takes Mr. Shatner bounced around from one level to another, making wisecracks and occasionally hollering, "Dammit!" One was treated to the unusual spectacle of Mr. Spock leaning over the bridge rail and grinning widely -- only it was Mr. Nimoy, not Mr. Spock; they're unmistakable one for the other, ears or no.

Presently the scene was finished, and Mr. Nimoy came over to us. He sat in the helmsman's chair, and we started talking full-steam-ahead.

ME: How old is Spock? It must have taken him a long time to work his way up to First Officer, since I gather he didn't go through the Academy.

MR. NIMOY: Yes. We've been thinking about it, and we've tentatively decided that Vulcans have a life span of about two and a half times ours, and Spock is about 80 or 80 years old.

ME: Like Aragorn.

MR. NIMOY: Who?

ME: You haven't read The Lord of the Rings.

MR. NIMOY: No...that was the book you were talking about?  
(Referring to one of the letters.)

ME: No, that was Roger Zelazny's "For a Breath I Tarry." About the computer.

MR. NIMOY: Oh, yes. I haven't had a chance to find it. I do very little reading nowadays. It's a pity, because I find that reading -- not necessarily fiction, just anything about people and how they react -- is useful. But these days, by the time I get home I don't have time to do anything more than eat and read scripts and go to sleep. I never have any time except on weekends. And then I only want to listen to music. I don't even want to go to the trouble of reading. I just turn on the music and let it sink in. That's one thing wrong with this: that I can't listen to music much. I have a little radio in my dressing room, but I don't get much chance to listen to it. They keep me busy here.

ME: Even though a lot of it is hurry-up-and-wait. Well, you'll get a vacation eventually, won't you?



MR. NIMOY: Yes; we'll have finished shooting this year's programs by the end of February. Then we'll be off in March and April, and start shooting again in May, if we do a second year.

ME: I'll keep looking for a copy of it, and if I can't find one I'll photostat it and send it to you.

The conversation turned to the poem.

MR. NIMOY: -- so I liked that poem, because "The Naked Time" was the one show where I had a chance to --

ME: -- spread yourself. That was really your show.

MR. NIMOY: -- to show that there was really another side to his character. Now, next week we're doing a love story for Spock.

ME: (after some inarticulate exultations) What kind of person is she? (I was thinking about -- was she human?)

MR. NIMOY: Well, the script doesn't tell too much about her. We haven't cast the part yet. I think she's more of a mature woman -- not an ingenue.

ME: Reminds him of his mother, maybe?

MR. NIMOY: Maybe. And Spock goes completely anarchic, and gives up the ship and the whole life --

ME: Well, that's what he would do, if he ever blew his control.

Later, the conversation turned away from "Star Trek."

MR. NIMOY: Where are you from?

ME: All over the state. But I live in Berkeley now.

MR. NIMOY: I've been up to San Francisco occasionally, I like it. I'm from Boston, and San Francisco looks like Boston -- the hills, the style of architecture, the fog.... So I get a little nostalgic in San Francisco. I was up there last year for the Film Festival.

ME: To see Mr. Shatner's picture about the demons?

MR. NIMOY: No, that was this year. I had a film in it last year: Deathwatch.

ME: Yes, I saw that; the University showed it in a series of new films. You can do anything, can't you?



MR. NIMOY: (laughing) Well, I try to. When did you see it?

ME: Five days after "The Naked Time."

MR. NIMOY: That was in October. Well, we showed it at the Film Festival, and then we were there for its opening, at The Movie on Kearny Street -- you know where that is?

ME: Vaguely.

MR. NIMOY: It's in North Beach. We saw it open there, and then it came down here.

ME: Have you ever been in Marin County?

MR. NIMOY: No -- I've been across the bridge to Sausalito, right across the bridge, but no further.

ME: Well, after you get past the city of San Rafael, just beyond Sausalito, you get out into open land -- farm land, mainly -- and it looks almost like an alien planet. Not now, because it's winter, and it's been raining and it's all green, but in the summer the grass dries out and gets all yellow, and it looks as if it looked that way all year. And there are only a few scrub oaks that are bent by the wind. It's very beautiful and very alien looking.

MR. NIMOY: We've been doing most of our outside shooting in a place called Red Rocks. And as the name implies, there's nothing much there but rocks, so we use that for our alien planets. But I think they've got another place for next week -- they're going to shoot the love scenes outdoors, on some farm or something. It's nice to get outside -- the first several shows we did were all done here on the set, and then we did one outdoors, and it was very pleasant.

At this point he went off to make a phone call, and Mr. Hellstrom took me to look at the rest of the sets. All I saw of Mr. Nimoy after that was a wave and a "goodbye" when I was leaving.

"Now, you've seen the show, so you know what it's about," Mr. Hellstrom said. "These are our interior corridor sets. This is the sickbay. We try not to have anything fantastic. We think we really will have hospital beds that monitor the body functions. You know about the doors -- there's someone behind them. And the Assistant Director flashes a red light to let him know when to open. Sometimes the light doesn't work, and the actors have gotten so used to the doors' opening for them that they'll walk right into the door. Leonard Nimoy took about four tries to stop putting out his hands to the doors."



# DISGUISES



hill-men "A Private Little War"



Vulcan trader and "Baroner"  
"Errand of Mercy"



c. 1970 "Assignment: Earth"



c. 1930 "City on the Edge of  
Forever"







# IN THE POINT

by Juanita Coulson

Jim Kirk nibbled on his thumbnail and glared at the view-screen, feeling more irritable by the minute. In the center of the screen, dominating it, a milky veil swam, and the stars beyond were obscured, fuzzy. Three hours, they'd almost circum-navigated the phenomenon, and what did they have to show for it? "Mr. Spock." The science officer turned toward him even as Jim swiveled his command chair.

"Nothing conclusive. Scanners continue to indicate the interference with the total spectrum is constant. It is apparently spherical, approximately 300,000 kilometers in diameter. But without a closer approach, it may be impossible to learn more."

"You suggested that earlier. But before we commit the Enterprise to a deeper probe I'll need -- "

"Captain," Sulu broke in, "it's shifted direction."

Spock bent over his sensors. "Confirmed. Field expanding rapidly -- in our direction. Loss of star field magnitude progressing geometrically."

"Reverse power, Mr. Sulu. Warp Two." The mist on the screen now crowded the corners of the viewer.

Levelly, Spock warned, "Field diameter now 800,000 kilometers and contact imminent...."

Suddenly Sulu's hands were jolted from the helm, and the entire bridge seemed to slide out from under the crew. They spilled from chairs or clutched at equipment and railings. Jim gratefully clung to the solidity of his command chair; from the corner of his eye he saw Sulu clawing at the controls, trying to execute that last, unfulfilled order.

Kirk's ears hurt, and he realized a claxon was ringing -- a claxon he could not recall having heard throughout his years on the Enterprise -- the signal of a collision.

And what was wrong with the lights? They went out completely for a split second, and when Scotty manhandled the controls at the engineering station they came back on, but with only half their earlier brightness.

Dislodged crew members were scrambling back to their posts, Uhura was monitoring departmental check-ins, Spock was once more

intent on his sensors, and Sulu finally got his hands firmly on the helm, muttering, "Those deflectors should have.... Captain, we have no control. No power."

"Everything acts frozen," Chekov complained, arguing with his own beard.

Scotty was already on the com to Engineering. "Jerry, cut out all non-essential systems. Divert power to helm. G1" us all you've got."

"Sir, we can't..."

"If we get power," Kirk said, "perhaps we can ease away from whatever....what's the problem, Engineering?"

"Severe damage in Level Three. That's why we can't feed you any power. The impact was there."

Uhura said, "Damage Control on their way."

"I would recommend all speed."

Kirk glanced over his shoulder at Spock, not liking that tone.

"To be precise, Engineering Section 68-C is the impact point. Sensors indicate both hulls have been penetrated."

For a moment Kirk was too stunned to speak, stricken, thinking of an open, possibly mortal wound in the Enterprise. "What...what did we hit, Spock?"

"We seem to have collided with nothing."





Instantly the captain was on his feet, at the railing lining the upper bridge, glaring up at the Vulcan. "Both hulls, and you say there's nothing?"

Spock blinked at the accusatory tone. "We have indeed suffered a collision, but at this point the physical nature of the other object is unknown. According to the sensors, there is nothing there. That is also, incidentally, why the deflectors failed to operate."

"Mr. Scott," from the intercom. The speaker's voice sounded strained. "Break confined to panels five and six in lower J. Oddly enough our life support seems intact. No loss of heat or air, and pressure's normal. Minor casualties."

Jim leaned over Spock's arm and punched the intercom at the science officer's station. "Can you see the break from where you are? Can you see what hit us?"

"I...yes, sir. But I think you'd better come and have a look for yourself, Captain."

"Very well. Scotty, come with me. Spock, I want some answers," Kirk insisted as he started for the turbo. "And no more 'nothing.' Some specifics."

The door closed on Spock's patiently aggrieved, "Understood."

By the time Kirk and Scott reached the Engineering Section the corridor was a tangle of Damage Control's equipment cables and wet with leakage from ruptured ductwork. They had to wend their way through a crowd of techs and staff, and the young red-haired lieutenant in charge was obviously relieved by their arrival. "I've set up monitoring on life support and this weird power drain, sir..."

"Very good. Dubois, isn't it?" Kirk said. He was remembering Scotty's increasingly laudatory record entries during the six months Dubois had been assigned to Engineering.

"Aye!" and Scotty beamed and slapped Dubois on the shoulder. "We couldn't have wanted a better man down here in a..." He paused and followed Kirk's gaze. Dubois, too, turned and then nodded.

"As Mr. Spock would say -- fascinating, isn't it, sir?"

Horrifying, rather, was the word that came to Jim Kirk's mind. A jagged tear gaped in the side of the Enterprise, glistening metal poking out into Engineering, deck to overheads across two levels. It was as though a huge invisible missile had torn its way through both hulls. And through the rent the only thing they



could see was a swirling mist -- dizzying, multicolored, corruscating, and blending in constant movement. It left a queasy feeling in Jim's stomach.

"What's this?" Scotty exclaimed over a piece of equipment Dubois cradled in his hands. "Not the whole circuit!"

"Afraid so. That's why we couldn't give you any power. Lissa, anything on the monitors?" A pretty dark-haired technician looked up from her equipment stationed before her in the hull. She shook her head, then blushed under Dubois's grin.

Spock's voice beckoned from the intercom, and Kirk hastily punched it up. "Preliminary survey: there is a constant severe energy drain in all sections of the ship, Captain."

Kirk squinted up at the feeble lights.

"Our power has been reduced by at least half."

With his other ear Jim heard Scotty telling Dubois to rig something called an RG unit, and Dubois's protests that such a thing could take hours. Then something in Spock's tone drew all of Kirk's attention.

"We have one reading of special significance. There is metallic debris in the immediate area, drifting in space."

Kirk stared unseeingly at the intercom. "From the Enterprise?"

"No. However, it is from a Federation vessel, a scout of the Avenger class. Records show a vessel of that type disappeared two parsecs distant from these coordinates, while on patrol, a solar month ago. Jim...." and Spock's voice lowered to a register that made Kirk's throat ache.

"I understand. Scotty, can you get us any maneuvering power at all?"

The Chief Engineer's eyes widened, and he shook his head emphatically. He and Dubois were still holding that piece of equipment tenderly, as if it were a wounded crewmember. "We can't. It's even worse than I thought, sir. We can put temporary plating over the breach...but moving is out of the question."

Jim left the circuit open so Spock could hear. "It's necessary to get us out of here now, to be on the safe side."

Lt. Dubois held out the broken equipment, and Kirk glared at it with annoyance. "When we hit, sir, we lost our main circuitry coupling. Feedback took out every alternate we've got. And now there's that power drain. The whole thing is useless...without that main coupling."

"Where is this coupling? What do you mean, you 'lost' it?"

Scotty held up a broken cable. "They found this leading in... in there, Cap'n." He pointed toward the opening aswirl with mist.

The briefing room was a luxury in time they might not be able to afford, but Jim thought perhaps they could all think more clearly away from that alien hole in the side of the Enterprise. But with Scotty, Dubois and Technician Hart constantly on the intercoms checking progress down at the scene, he was beginning to think it hadn't been such a good idea after all, adjourning here. McCoy drummed his fingers on the table and looked sour; he pounced on the chance to snap at Spock when the science officer arrived. "Well?"

"The debris is definitely from the USS Halcyon."

"What destroyed her?" Kirk demanded, and the others gave the Vulcan complete attention.

"Logic, and what little data we have, suggest contact with this field or area with which we have collided."

Smothering his impatience, Kirk said, "And just what is this ...field or area?"

Spock seated himself and made a steeple of his forefingers before he spoke. "I do not like to speculate, but the time factor and element of danger force me to do so. On our findings thus far, we may theorize the field is most likely an interdimensional contact point...or, more properly, an intersection point."

"Interdimensional..." Kirk whispered.

"Y' mean like that world we stumbled into where everybody had a double?" Scotty exclaimed.

"No, I do not, Mr. Scott. This is something far different, and infinitely more dangerous. We can be certain of one fact: the field does not remain constant. It may enlarge quite rapidly, as when it moved toward and collided with us. Or, it may contract."

"How much?" Dubois asked, and Lissa Hart began to look scared.

"We have no way of knowing, Lieutenant. I suggest we do not experiment by remaining hereto discover its vanishing point, as it were. Presently, this contact is maintaining the integrity of our life support; but that is insufficient reason to continue to risk the Enterprise,"

"But we can't move!" Scotty said desperately.

"We'll have the RG unit ready in three hours," Dubois offered.

Kirk looked anxiously at Spock. "Current status of the field?"

"Difficult to assess accurately, but I would estimate 750,000 kilometers." Spock lowered his head slightly and spoke slowly. "The field is beginning to contract. And as it condenses, it presents a clear and present danger to the Enterprise. If it should contract and close while we are still touching it -- we shall in all likelihood join the Halcyon as a collection of debris."

Kirk exhaled forcefully. "Then we have to get out of here."

"There is also the power drain to be considered. It hampers our efforts."

"Aye! Even if we get the RG unit in place in time, it may not function well enough," Scotty said mournfully. "The only thing that'll guarantee us bare minimum power is that coupling."

"And it's...over there. How about waldos, Scotty?" Kirk suggested. "Can't we reach into this...this other dimension and grapple the coupling and drag it back?"

The engineer looked hurt. "We thought o' that right away, Cap'n. But with the power loss waldos operate at only half efficiency. It limits the grasp we can apply. And -- weell -- even if we did close on something, we have no way of knowing it'll be the coupling. Electronic visual devices don't work over there, either."

"That is true," Spock said soberly. "We might blindly grasp something of immensely dangerous potential. And if that something were returned to the Enterprise...."

"We have to know it's the coupling," Scotty finished firmly.

Kirk pursed his lips, then turned to McCoy. "What's over there, Bones? Your bio labs got a report?"

Frowning, McCoy said, "Unlikely as it seems, Jim, there's an apparently solid floor surface of some sort and a nitrogen-oxygen atmosphere; a man could at least breathe the stuff."



"Then we can go in after it," Dubois said simply.

"Now, just a minute, young man," McCoy growled. "I said you could breathe the air. I didn't say you could live over there."

"There could be...factors as yet unknown to us," Spock added, and McCoy looked grateful.

"Temperature, Bones?"

"Forty degrees centigrade, plus or minus. Tolerable."

"The mist?"

McCoy spread his hands. "Nothing our labs can analyze. We've broken down I don't know how many specimen samples of the stuff. The bio comps just sit there and gibber."

"Understandable," Spock said. "Our physical laws would not apply. In fact, the odds against there being such an unusual similarity in atmospheric composition are...."

"Please don't," Kirk muttered.  
"McCoy, in your judgment, could a man survive over there long enough to retrieve this coupling?"

The doctor's eyes were haunted.  
"I can't say that, Jim. It's possible. But, as Spock says, there could also be things we can't even guess at."

"But if we don't try, and quickly, we could all be very very dead."

"It's gambling with a man's life..."

"Bones, we don't have any choice?"

"I know the equipment on sight, Captain," Lt. Dubois said eagerly. Lissa Hart laid a small hand on his arm, and he patted her fingers reassuringly.

"If anyone goes..." Scotty began.



"But I can't handle the reinstall, Mr. Scott. Only you could put it together in time."

"I think I'm the best judge o' that."

Kirk cut in on them both. "Gentlemen, we can't waste time debating. For all we know, the crew of the Halcyon hesitated too long. Miss Hart, contact Stores; get a safety line and rig and whatever else we're likely to need." McCoy leaned further back in his chair, crossed his arms, and glowered. Spock lowered his head till it almost touched his steepled fingers. "Now, Scotty, how big is this coupling?"

Narrowly eyeing Dubois, the Chief Engineer said, "Three kilograms, maybe a bit more."

"Small enough to carry. Good. Now, if and when we get it back, how long will it take you to put it back where it belongs?"

"Once the inputs are set, a minute, maybe two."

"And to feed power to helm?"

Scotty made a face, seeing the drift. "Another two, maybe three minutes."

"Mr. Dubois, assuming Scotty were incapacitated, how long would it take you to do the work?"

Dubois and Scotty eyed each other levelly. Mingled with respect was an undercurrent of reverse rivalry -- each trying to make the other less expendable. Finally Dubois said, "It'd take me at least five minutes, Captain."

"Ye could do it in..."

"I can't guarantee I could do it any faster. I haven't Mr. Scott's experience."

Kirk had let them have it out, appreciating Scotty's desire to take the risk on himself. But now he had to ask the question the chief engineer had obviously been dreading. "I need an honest answer...and if anything else goes wrong, I need you to get us out of here, Scotty. Can Lt. Dubois locate the coupling as well as you?" With great reluctance, Scotty nodded. "Then we'll..."

The intercom buzzed on, and Spock received a status report. They all listened grimly to the information that the field was drifting, the Enterprise with it, and that it was beginning to contract.



But it wasn't until Jim saw Dubois squirming into the safety harness that he began to experience the gut worry he'd anticipated earlier. Scotty was all efficiency now, but plainly he, too, was worried, frustrated that it would be Jerry rather than himself going into the mist. Damage Control had sealed off part of the rent, but a doorway still gaped into those swirling colors. And in all their minds was the knowledge of the risk inherent in venturing into that unknown territory.

"All set, Captain," Jerry Dubois said confidently. Lissa Hart winked up at him, then stepped back beside her monitoring equipment. Scotty nodded encouragingly to his lieutenant and grinned.

"Good luck, lad."

Jim glanced around the now-crowded engineering section. McCoy, Nurse Chapel and other medical staff waited by the doors, hoping they wouldn't be needed. And now Scotty was clearing himself an aisle directly to the coupling input, ready to install the missing unit as soon as Jerry brought it back. Damage Control stood ready to seal off the remaining gap in the hull. Uhura stood close by the mist-filled tear, a non-mechanical listening device connecting the bulkhead and her ears.

Taking a deep breath, Kirk gave the order. The safety crew began paying out the line, and Lt. Dubois stepped through the rent, walking unhesitantly.

"If we could only gi' him a com unit..."

Spock sounded tired. "Mr. Scott, you should certainly be aware that even as the alien field has a dampening effect on all sound, the power drain makes electronic equipment useless beyond the dimensional barrier. Our experimentation..."

"I know, I know!"

Uhura began relaying a running commentary from the unseen Dubois. "About five meters beyond the opening now...it's very difficult to see. He says the colors are everywhere, not thinning a bit. And there are...strange things. Things that are...he thinks he sees a break ahead. Moving ahead now. Very strange things all around. Odd sounds. Eight meters now. Ten..."

The room was as still as an operational engineering section could be, everyone intent on Uhura. Her expression was that detached one people adopt when they listen to something closely. "Twelve meters now. He thinks he sees...sees....it may be a... break...in the...the...fed...el...tu..."

"What?" Kirk said softly, stiffening with apprehension.

"Colors. Too many. Too many things. Jerry says..." and her beautiful face contorted as though she were struggling desperately to escape. Escape what? "Too many...no!" Her hands flew to her ears, and disbelief and horror took over her expression. "He couldn't...can't. CAN'T! No! I shouldn't be able to hear that frequency. I CAN'T HEAR THAT FREQUENCY! I CAN'T...." and her mouth opened in a soundless scream.

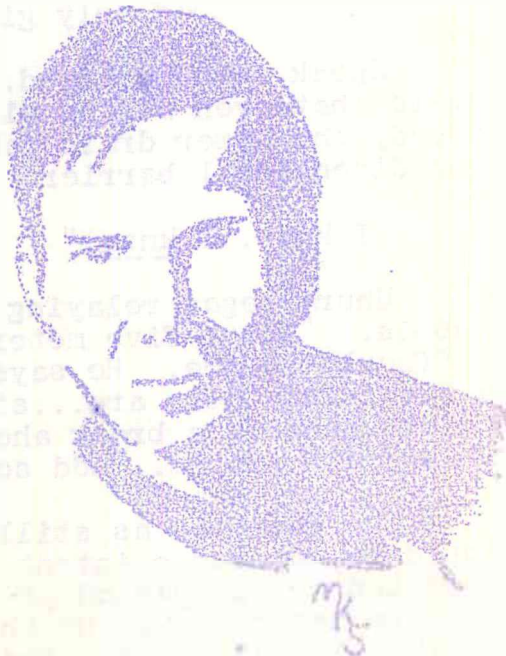
Kirk, Spock, and McCoy all moved toward her simultaneously, but McCoy and the Vulcan were closer. They lifted her bodily away from the edge of the opening. Spock gently disengaged the listening device from her trembling hands, then threw it aside with startling violence. McCoy gestured with a free hand, and Chris was there immediately with a tranquilizing hypo as Uhura collapsed, weeping hysterically.

"The line!" Scotty shouted. "It's gone slack!"

"Pull him in!" Kirk ordered. The safety linemen hand-over-handed, tugging as though there were a behemoth on the end of the cable instead of a lone human. Kirk ran to the head of their line and helped pull, expecting to see Dubois's unconscious form slide out of the swirling colors.

But when the young lieutenant appeared he was on his feet. His eyes were wide open, and his hands were clutched across his belly. Was he in pain, or trying to return to a fetal position?

His hands! Jim realized with sinking dismay that the young officer's hands were empty. The coupling was still somewhere... over there.





Lissa Hart pushed between the linemen and Jerry. Her hands framed his sweating face, but he gave no sign that he saw her. His eyes were not terror-ridden, as Uhura's had been; they were vacant. The girl shook him, lightly, pleadingly at first, then with increasing panic. It was not until she screamed that Jim had the heart to pull her away from Dubois.

\* \* \*

Except for Lissa's sobbing and Nurse Chapel's murmured words of comfort, the sickbay was quiet. Kirk wished he could drag his eyes away from the examining table where McCoy labored over Dubois's open-eyed, unmoving body. When the surgeon finally turned toward him Jim tensed in dread of the verdict. "Well, he's not exactly insane," McCoy said with bitter weariness. He held out a medical log, and Kirk looked at it numbly; Spock finally took it from the doctor's hand.

"Bones..."

"He doesn't recognize us, or anything else. Whatever he saw or experienced over there in that...dimension, it's wrecked his mentality. Wiped it out. Destroyed it. I don't know what he encountered, but you can write him off for the rest of his life."

"Which won't be long," Kirk said grimly, "for any of us." He couldn't shut out the sound of Lissa's grief, but he tried to force his mind to the greater problem. "It was my responsibility, Bones. No option. If we don't get out of here soon..."

"Aye, Captain." Scotty came in, took a long anguished look at Dubois, then squared his shoulders. "The computer's given us a hard deadline. One hour, maximum."

"This RG unit replacement?"

Scotty sighed and shook his head. "Another hour and a half."

"You did the only thing you could, Jim," McCoy said gently. "Dubois was trying for the only chance we had, and he just might have made it. You couldn't know."

"Doctor, these medical data on the lieutenant..."

"Must you, Spock?"

The Vulcan blinked at McCoy's irritation and went on, "It appears some of the hyperencephalograph readings are unchanged."

"Not the important ones," McCoy snarled.

Jim eyed Spock curiously. "What's your point?"

"The tracks which have been so disastrously affected in Lt. Dubois are largely those which are notably different in Vulcan hyperencephalographs."

Scotty stared blankly, but in the momentary silence Kirk knew he and McCoy were coming to the same appalling conclusion about what Spock was proposing. McCoy found his voice first. "We've ruined one man's mind, Spock. Do you insist we ruin a second?"

"Vulcan hyperencephalograph patterns are different on the critical factors, are they not, Doctor?"

And suddenly Lissa Hart was there, clawing at Spock. The Vulcan held her wrists and kept her nails from his face, but he stolidly bore the tattoo of her boots against his shins. Jim tried to drag her away from the science officer, wincing under her screams. "You could have gone instead of Jerry! He did it all for nothing! Nothing! It should have been you!"

McCoy's hypo hissed against her arm, and as he guided her to a chair he spoke with no-nonsense firmness. "Now listen, young lady. Quit jumping to conclusions. Jerry knew what he was doing. It was a calculated risk. For all we know then it could have been more dangerous for Spock to attempt it. It still may be," and finished off with a warning glare at Spock.

"The fact remains, Doctor, that we have little choice. There are no alternatives."

"I'm afraid you're right," Kirk agreed unhappily.

McCoy's tone was acid. "All right, Spock. Let's assume a miracle -- that you go over into that whatever-it-is, get the coupling and get back, and still end up like Dubois!"

Jim didn't say anything, but he saw the flicker of something haunted in Spock's face. He ached to speak, but held it back; after Dubois, and despite the time element, he couldn't. He looked angrily at McCoy and hoped Bones could read his thoughts: Did you have to remind him of that? We both know life without mentality is a more horrifying possibility to him than death. At least let him try it with as few thoughts as possible along that line. McCoy pouted and looked a trifle embarrassed for his remark.

Clearing his throat, Spock said, "Have I your permission to attempt it, Captain?"

Kirk waved his hand helplessly, then nodded. As Scotty and Spock hurried out to prepare, he paused for one last mournful look



at Jerry Dubois; Lissa Hart was staring down at the lieutenant, as if praying to wipe the last hour away.

Here we go again, Jim thought, watching Spock buckle himself into the safety harness. The room was not so quiet this time; there was a rustling edginess among those present. Techs dropped things, safety linemen swore at each other and stepped on each other's feet. And every so often a soft time-check report would come over the intercom. Jim turned to tell someone to shut the thing off, then saw Uhura monitoring it and thought better of the idea. She was dry-eyed now, but still looking shaky.

McCoy paused beside her, touched her arm solicitously. "You sure you're okay?"

"I'll be fine, Doctor."

"Let's hope the same for us all," Scotty muttered. Kirk managed a lopsided smile, and the engineer returned it, a bit weakly. "Aye, we'll take her right down the wire, sir."

"I believe I am ready, Captain."

Kirk was loath to waste time but wanted to delay that confrontation with whatever had ruined Dubois. "Do you think you can block it out with mental techniques or something?"

Spock's expression was unfathomable. He was thoroughly inside his Vulcan suit, and Jim knew he shouldn't try to drag him out of it, now, of all times. Finally he nodded, and Spock turned and walked slowly and deliberately toward the colored doorway remaining between emergency bulkheads. The linemen paid out the cable behind him carefully.

This time there was no running report from Uhura. They all stared at the opening, at the swirling colors, occasionally forced to look away. My stomach's turning at the sight of it, Kirk thought, and Spock's right in the middle of it. Why did I agree to let him try it? If we're going to go, the only decent way would be intact, not with Spock a mindless....

It seemed they'd been waiting for an hour already. How long had it really been?

As if in answer Uhura relayed softly, "Time check 13 minutes. Field diameter 500 kilometers..."

"And closing..." Kirk finished.

Suddenly the safety line moved, jerked from the end disappearing into that fog of colors. "That's the signal!" one of the techs exclaimed jubilantly. "He wants us to take up the slack!"

Even as they began to pull, another twitch snaked the line, more violently than the first -- then another, and another. The head safety man was nearly pulled off his feet. Thinking of unknown monsters struggling with Spock, Kirk lunged to the line and added his strength. "Pull! Everybody! Pull him back! Now!"

There was resistance, but they leaned to it. The cable was definitely coming into their hands. Just about reeled in...

"Damage Control -- ready to seal off the moment Mr. Spock is clear. Don't wait! We've got to get back on our own life support."

And then Spock was back through the barrier. But unlike Dubois his eyes were closed. His lips were drawn into a thin, grim line, and his body was stiffly rigid. Jim's memory raced back to Spock in a Vulcan trance, but it didn't look like that. It didn't look like any attitude he'd ever seen Spock assume.

"He's got it!" Scotty yelped, and Jim was brought back to the greater problem. Spock was holding a tubular metal device -- clutching it tightly.

Jim dropped the line and took Spock's hands and tugged. The only response from Spock was even more rigidity and a tightening of the muscles in his forearms. Jim's shouts made no impression.

"Captain, don't!" Scotty warned. "Be careful! We've seen what he can do. If he clamps down on it, he can crush it."

Uhura's voice, shaking, cut in: "Time eight point thirty minutes to closing."

"Bones!"

McCoy was already there. He stood beside Spock, stared at him calculatingly a moment, then held his autohypo up to dial something.

"Hurry!" Jim pleaded.

"You want me to kill him?"

"You want to kill us all? We've got to have that coupling!"

McCoy selected something, and the hypo hissed against Spock's arm. The Vulcan's eyes opened, and Jim was momentarily delighted; that look wasn't vacant -- it was stunned surprise. And then



Spock collapsed like a spilled sack of grain. Scotty caught the coupling, and Jim and McCoy caught Spock.

In the background Jim could hear Scotty's shouts to his techs. And McCoy was simultaneously yelling for a litter. Spock was ashen, his eyes once more closed, but this time relaxed, not fiercely squinted shut. Kirk felt like shaking him, or feeling for a heartbeat, if he could remember exactly where Spock's heart was. "What did you give him?"

"Something nasty. You wanted him to let go right now, didn't you? That didn't leave me too many options."

There was a great clatter from the Damage Control techs, and very little sound at all from the group around the input where Scotty sweated to install the retrieved coupling. McCoy waved to his aides as they scooted up with a rolling litter. Jim helped them lift Spock on to it; the Vulcan was a dead weight, seemingly lifeless. Kirk looked up and was struck by two particular faces in the crowd: Chris, wearing a mask of professionalism that didn't quite succeed in covering her concern; and Uhura, over by the intercom, once more on the brink of tears, staring at Spock.

"It's in! Go!" Scotty shouted. Uhura didn't move. Kirk got there in several steps and gently moved her aside.

"Helm..."

"We're registering build-up of power," Sulu's voice crackled back. "It'll take a bit to..."

"Impulse will do, Mr. Sulu. As soon as you have any indication you can move, pull us away from here."

Over Sulu's acknowledgment the chief of the Damage Control crew gave an exultant yelp. "Cap'n!" Kirk turned and looked to where the colors had been. Shiny new and somewhat unmatched plating now covered the area, and one of the techs was collecting sealing tools. There was an odd, ugly bulge where a smooth bulkhead had been, but the chief signaled it would serve.

The thrum of power from the engines began to dominate Engineering. Jim glanced to his left as McCoy and a herd of medical staff wheeled Spock out the door, but he remained by the intercom. The deck vibrated beneath his feet now, and Scotty was busy running from station to station, checking progress. Then Sulu's voice rang over the intercom, triumphant: "We've got helm control! Reversing now!"

Jim could feel the ship move, a slow, throbbing slide away from the now-hidden swirling colors, first very gently, then with gradual acceleration.

"Easy, Mr. Sulu, until we're well away..."

"Thirty-five kilometers, forty...fifty..." Chekov recited.

And then another voice interrupted -- Mr. Leslie's, Jim tentatively identified it, imagining him filling in at Spock's station. Permanently? He threw the idea aside and listened. "Field diameter one point three kilometers and closing rapidly."

"Sulu, don't get us sucked in by some undertow."

The helmsman's voice was confident. "She's handling nicely, Captain. Seventy-five kilometers..."

Leslie: "Ten meters and...it's gone!" There was a pause, and then Jim heard muffled cheers from the rest of the bridge crew. "Sensors register a kind of implosive force at the moment it disappeared -- but there was nothing there to implode."

"Like the Enterprise," Jim said, sighing with relief. "Mr. Chekov, plot a course for the nearest star base. We're going to need repairs. I'll be in sickbay."

Lissa Hart stopped him as he entered the medical quarters. She'd been beside Jerry Dubois, who still lay motionless, staring vacantly at the ceiling. That sight softened Jim's impatience, though it did nothing to quell his anxiety.

"Captain," and she was softly embarrassed, "I'm sorry for the way I acted earlier. I heard what happened..."

"I understand," Kirk said gently and started to go on. She touched his sleeve.

"I...I hope it hasn't happened to Mr. Spock, too."

Dreading to even consider that, Jim came in and found McCoy staring worriedly at the medical scanner over the examining table where Spock lay.

"Bones?"

"I don't know, Jim. I'm not really sure what I'm looking for, since his physiology is so damned unique."

"That drug...whatever you gave him?"



McCoy glanced at the scanner again, then down at Spock. "It's wearing off right now." Spock's eyes opened, no blinking. He didn't seem to see either of them. "Spock, can you hear me? This is McCoy."

Slowly, without inflection, Spock said, "I hear you."

Kirk was elated, but McCoy frowned and picked up a medical log to study. "It's intact, but is it functioning?"

"What?"

"I mean, it's possible his brain could respond to a direct question, but that -- well -- his ability to initiate thought is gone." McCoy bit off his words. "Not wiped clean. More like a lobotomy. Or a form of insanity. What did he see over there? What happened to him -- to both of them, to destroy Dubois's mind, and Spock..."

The Vulcan was still staring unblinkingly at the ceiling. "Maybe," Jim hoped, "Maybe it's only temporary. Is that possible, Bones? Like shock?"

"I don't..."

"A test? Something to focus his attention, to bring him out of it." Jim poked, softly hammering fist into palm, wondering if he were not speaking out of desperation. "Something scientific, or mathematical."

McCoy looked dubious. "One of us, think up a math problem for Spock?"

"Not a problem. A reminder of a tool he needs to use in his work -- but something he'd have to think about. Something to bring him back to...to..." He suddenly bent over Spock. "Spock, this is ...the Captain. I need...data. Give me...give me the value of pi."

The doctor grimaced disapprovingly. "That's awfully..."

Tonelessly, Spock began to speak. "Three point one four one five nine two six..."

Kirk's initial grin faded. McCoy looked bleak. "Listen to him, Jim. There's no inflection there at all. Like an automaton."

Despairing, Jim caught Spock by the shoulders. The science officer was still reciting numbers, and that recitative ability that had irritated him so many times before now plunged him into black depression. Agonized, hardly realizing he spoke, Jim murmured, "Spock..."

Those deepset eyes blinked, and then Spock looked directly at him. Jim could have sworn there was a twinkle behind that solemn gaze. "To how many decimal places did you wish me to carry..."

"Spock!" McCoy roared, obviously torn between fury and joy.

"Must you, Doctor? I assure you my hearing is quite unimpaired."

Jim shook him half playfully, weak with delight. "If you hadn't just saved the ship I'd..."

The veiled amusement went out of Spock's eyes. He sat up, then said, "But I did not, as you put it, save the ship."

"But the coupling! You went in there, found it, and brought it back."

Spock shook his head. "Perhaps I did carry the device over the threshold -- I have no memory of that -- but I did not find it. I was incapable of doing so."

Interested, McCoy asked, "What was in there, Spock? What happened to you and Jerry?"

"I doubt that I shall every be able to describe it accurately. There are no words, no terminology, for what I saw, heard, felt. I was able to block out some of it with mental disciplines. But not all. There were -- beings there. I cannot....the mind was assaulted with incomprehensible images and sensations. Colors one could taste, sounds one could smell. Round objects with sharp angles."

Captain and doctor listened and watched with fascination. Spock plainly was still disturbed by the memory, though equally plainly he was once more himself.

"It finally became impossible to refuse the impressions. And when it did, I felt myself slipping into...insanity. That is not the proper term, Doctor. But my mind refused to accept what was being received by it, and..."

"Began to cease functioning. That's what must have happened to Jerry. Only he didn't have your grace period, when you were able to shut out the other dimension for a while."

Spock's voice was husky. "Losing control was a bit like losing consciousness -- but only partially. The last thing I remember was the coupling being pushed into my hands. And then the safety line began to drag me back."



"But you..." Jim said confusedly, "you pulled on the line to signal us."

"No, Captain. They did."

"They?"

"I never really saw them, but I sensed their presence. And I sensed...an urgency. A sensation almost of desperation -- as if our contact with their world was endangering them."

"As if," Jim said, speaking faster and faster, "they were working against a deadline, too! Maybe they couldn't pull free. They had to depend on us to detach from them."

"And they got one look at Spock," McCoy snorted, "shoved the coupling into his hands and pushed him toward the door just as fast as they could. Very sensible people."

Spock's eyebrows were functioning perfectly, and he used them to express an acid opinion of McCoy's remark.

Jim turned and snapped on the miniviewer, punched up a shot of the bridge viewscreen. The friendly stars, unveiled, filled it, appearing to move aside as the Enterprise bore toward a repair station. "Yes, very sensible people. And generous. I hope they got home all right."

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#### Huckster Notes

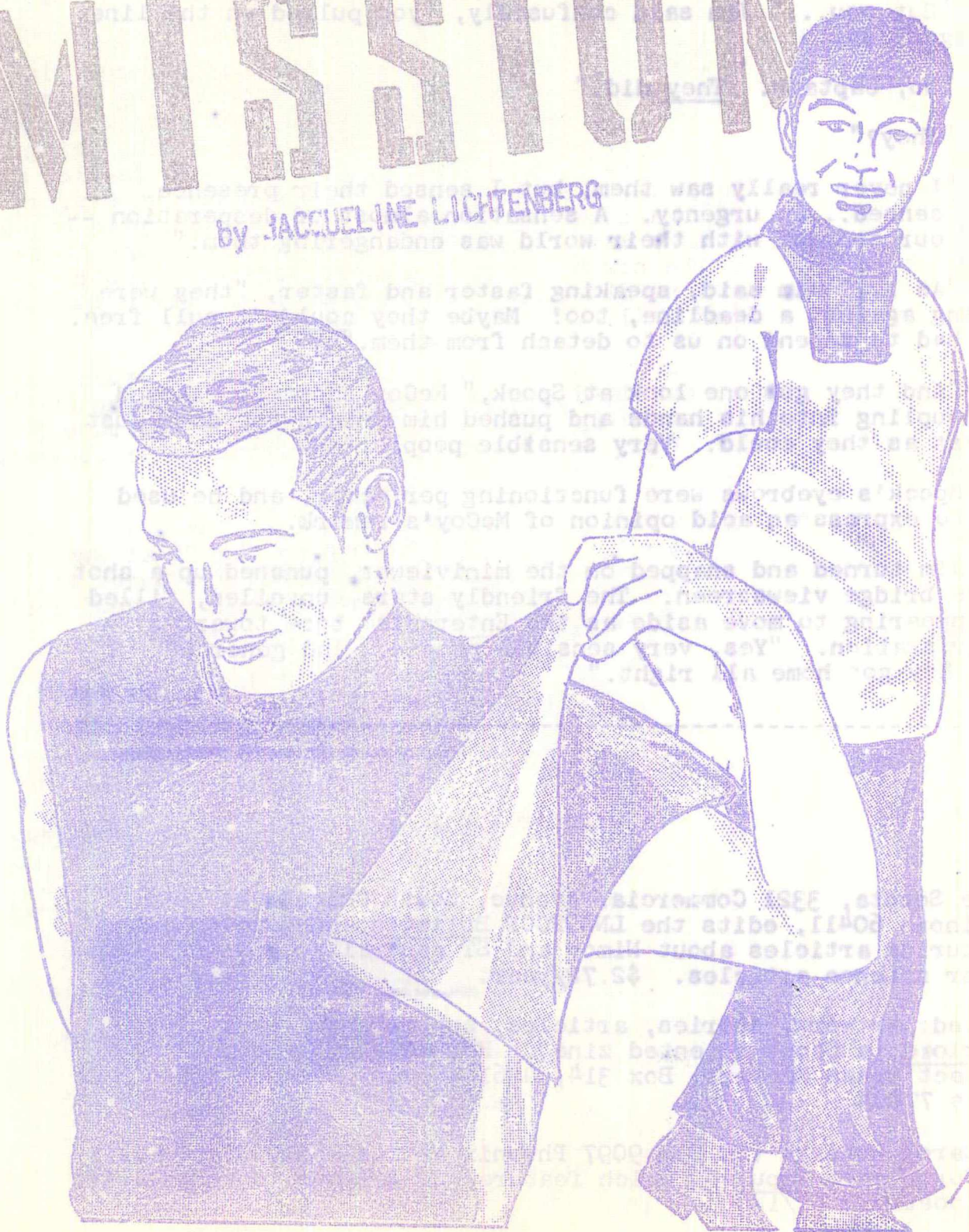
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# SPOCK'S MISSION

by JACQUELINE LICHTENBERG



AV/71



Captain James T. Kirk, still aching to the loss of his ship, drew the dry, fiery air of Vulcan's early dusk into his lungs, swung his legs up on the chaise, and leaned back to survey the veranda as the waves of memory lapped gently at the shores of his mind.

The Enterprise had been a good ship, but, he reminded himself with unaccustomed logic, she wasn't really a living being. It was the crew that gave her life; the mechanical gadget called Enterprise, NCC-1701, was a total loss, but every living being aboard had been rescued. The sacrifice had been unavoidable, and the Admiralty had already promised to give him a new Enterprise from the latest model starship to come out of the Canopian shops, and his old crew to a man. What more could he want? They'd even promised to give the new Enterprise the old registry number. With 23 commendations distributed among the crew, they'd come out of the affair very well.

The illogical ache continued. He knew it always would. But he found the pain overlaid with a strangely peaceful acceptance of the inevitable, just as Spock had predicted. He wasn't sure just when or how it had happened, but he seemed to have absorbed some of the famed Peace of Vulcan.

And he'd almost refused Spock's invitation. He'd stood on the observation deck of Starbase XII, watching the final wrecking of what was left of his ship, Bones on his right and Spock on his left; he'd said, "Well, Bones, you have several months' leave. What are you going to do?"

"I don't know. I haven't been at loose ends like this in years."

"How about you, Spock?"

"I'm going home. It will be a refreshing break in routine."

They'd stood in silence for a moment, watching the cutting torches; then Spock continued, "I still have the Kraith to return, but that will only take a few minutes. Later, I intend to visit my family's ancestral home. You were in the amphitheater near there once. You remember?"

Kirk rubbed his jaw ruefully. "How could I forget?"

"The climate is quite mild in this season. Perhaps you would like to accompany me?"

At first Kirk had just stared at his first officer, uncomprehending.

Spock continued, eyes fixed on the wall screen before them, "Mother will be trying to accept Father's death. It is a difficult thing for a human. I don't imagine that I could be of much help. She has expressed approval of you."

Kirk shook his head. It would be an awkward situation.

"I understand," Spock continued, eyeing the wreckage meaningfully, "that you also have grief to overcome. The environment is uniquely conducive to the search for inner peace." He shifted his gaze to McCoy. "I believe the doctor would find it therapeutic as well as an interesting phenomenon." Spock allowed one more hesitation before delivering the clincher, "On Vulcan, it is considered impolite to refuse a second invitation to someone's home."

Kirk had remembered then that first invitation; after Edith Keeler died, Spock had offered him the Peace of Vulcan, with the sound of silver birds against the dawn sky. So, in unison with McCoy, he'd nodded acceptance.

As the dusk thickened, Kirk let the events of the last two months flow before his mind's eye, trying to identify the instant he'd acquired this peace.

When he'd first seen the house, a sprawling, parapeted edifice of unthinkably ancient stone blending in natural harmony with the foot of the mountain range that rimmed the barren-looking valley, he'd wondered how anyone could live in such a desert. Spock had taken one hand from the aircar's controls to indicate the valley floor, "This is one of the most fertile regions on this continent. There are certain varieties of fruits grown here which are world famous. It's been under cultivation since the art was discovered."

"I don't see anything that looks like a farm," McCoy had adjusted the sunshades, squinting at the ground.

"It's not cultivated during the cold season, but the vegetation is quite vigorous if you know where to look for it."

Kirk reminded himself that 1050 was a chilly winter day for Vulcan.

Amanda had welcomed them into the surprisingly cool interior of the house, and immediately, Kirk remembered, there had been a soothing, subliminal impression of peace... almost as if it emanated from the walls themselves. Was it the faint tang of spice or incense that hung in the air? Or... He'd turned to Spock, "Subsonics?"



"No, sir, the aircooling unit is quite noisy."

Strain as he might, Kirk couldn't catch a hint of machinery noise.

Amanda had taken them on a tour of the house, which resembled an ancient European castle or fortress more than anything else in Kirk's experience. All the household services were as thoroughly automated as any starship's, but totally unobtrusive; the impression of solid age was unmarred. Living in such a house was almost like a return to the primitive...without any of the inconvenience.

First, they had descended into the basement, a huge, natural cave in the center of which was a stone table. The only light was a ghastly blue glow from beneath the table. The air was fresh and dry, but cool. As Amanda led them across the floor, they realized that the "table" was enormous. The top was level with a man's chest. Worn stone steps went down under the table to a pool of water, crystal clear but rolling ever so slightly...an artesian well, purified by blue-glowing plants.

Amanda had dipped up a cupful of that water, touched it to her lips, and ceremoniously handed the plain, triple-handled ceramic cup to Kirk. "Please accept our hospitality." She'd said it simply, in English, but somehow the words rang like a gong echoing from ages long past. He sipped the tangy, refreshingly cool water that wasn't just pure, but alive the way only the gigantic distillery of a living planet could make it. And again that Peace had washed through him. Was it the water? He'd handed it to McCoy and watched carefully, but detected no sign that the doctor felt anything. Instead, McCoy had cross-examined Spock about the source of the water.

Then, Amanda led them upward through the house, pointing out wings that were closed, areas preserved as museums, galleries devoted to the memorabilia of the xtmprsqzntwlf, and finally returned to the currently used area with an admonition not to get lost. They'd continued upward until McCoy paused on one stairway landing and huffingly asked for a rest. The combination of thin air and thick gravity proved too much for him.

"Yes," Amanda had answered, "It takes years to become acclimated. That's why your rooms will be here on the lowest level." She'd shown them into the double guest suite for off-world visitors complete with the most intricate environmental controls and, Kirk had noted with relief, standard sanitary facilities.

The rooms were ample, decorated in the severe Vulcan style which added to the stone castle impression, but private and very

comfortable. On a lectern in one corner, Spock kindled a small flame in an ornately carved, hollow sphere and said, "That you may never know confusion in my house."

And yet again, the words seemed to have a strangely haunting effect. As the water had given peace, the fire seemed to give security...the kind of security that comes with trust that no defense is necessary.

As he thought about it, Kirk could admit that these two welcoming ceremonies had done something to him, something that sensitized him to the mysteriously healing magic of this house.

After resting a bit, Amanda had shown them the remaining three upper floors. Spock's rooms were in a penthouse in the center of the spacious roof. At a touch, all four walls opened, louver fashion, to reveal a studio not unlike his quarters aboard ship, but much larger. There were three desk areas, many colorful artistic hangings of native origin, and numerous musical instruments. The ceiling was an enormous, polarizable skylight equipped with a small telescope.

They'd leaned over the parapet to view the open animal preserve where Spock had kept his sehlat. McCoy had gone wandering, and Amanda feared him lost. They'd found him behind the penthouse on the edge of an area divided into smaller areas by lines of knee-high stones that formed pathways. Each area was provided with benches and many pagoda-like housings with well-disciplined plants growing in, on, and around them. One little housing in particular attracted McCoy's attention. "What's supposed to be in here? It's empty."

"This will be the -- " Spock searched for a word. " -- place of the new Kraith."

"Like the one that was stolen?"

"No. This one will be intended for use."

Standing at the entrance to the stone pathways, Kirk had asked, "And what is this?"

"This area is called The Gardens of Thought. One comes here for private meditation. It is forbidden to speak or otherwise communicate with someone who is within the Garden."

"May I stroll through for a few minutes?"

"Please. The Gardens are always available for the use of our guests."



He had stepped onto that curving pathway, and once again he was struck with a peculiar awareness of a pulsing power combing through the tangled agonies of his mind bringing order and peace. He'd walked among the stony-looking plants and he'd even sat on some of the benches and leaned over the parapets to view the veranda where he now sat. Everywhere that peculiar Peace followed and grew stronger.

Finally, he'd shaken off the feeling and returned to his waiting hosts.

The weeks that followed were packed with activity. More neighbors than he had counted houses in the valley had dropped by to greet Spock. At first, he'd assumed they were offering sympathy at the loss of Sarek, but then Amanda had said, "I wish Spock could understand how proud I am of him when neighbors we so rarely see take the trouble to come to congratulate him."

"Congratulate him?"

She had nodded. "Oh his remarkable skill -- " she looked at his blank face " -- as a Kataytikh. I'm told he's outstanding even considering his family. He's only conducted one Affirmation, and already he's received State's Honors. Everybody is eager to touch minds with him, if only as the most formal greeting. It's the kind of thing they tell their grandchildren about."

Then one evening Spock asked them to escort Amanda to a tokiel performance in a new amphitheater up the valley.

"Aren't you going?" Kirk had asked.

"No. They are dancing the Motek...I've watched T'Rruel's Motek. I will be...unable...to view the piece again for many years. Even though she hadn't completed her rendition, she was such a genius that anyone else's would seem far too...trivial to me."

Remembering the look on Spock's face when T'Rruel had signed her composition, Kirk merely nodded. The loss of T'Rruel must be one of the pains Spock had brought to this house.

Seeing that astounding artform again, this time under the open night sky of Vulcan, had woven a mood that lasted for days.

Then one morning Spock had come in from a dawn foray into the garden to pick a fresh breakfast, and, as he reverently deposited the seeds in the box to be replanted, he announced that a large group of young people would be gathering that day for a night on the mountain, and would he and McCoy care to join them?



Kirk had accepted before he was told it would be a hike up the mountain in Vulcan's moonless night, but he hadn't backed out and neither had Bones.

A mixed group of 20 young adults had gathered through the day. Spock introduced them but obviously didn't expect the humans to remember all the names. Most didn't speak English very well, but they all knew each other and treated the humans considerably.

In the late afternoon they ate a good meal, and at dusk they set out on a trail that snaked up the nearly vertical mountainside behind the house. The Vulcans struck a brisk pace with Spock and

a girl in the lead, Kirk and McCoy fallen to the rear. Puffing, McCoy observed, "These kids are chattering like a bunch of humans on holiday and they're all carrying something, and I'll be damned if I'll ask for a respite."

After that they'd climbed with stern determination, doubting seriously if they should have come. Soon it was full dark, and several of the climbers broke out hand torches to point out the trickiest parts of the narrow trail. Two hours later, they reached the flat mesa, and everybody found seats on stones and panted for about five minutes.

Then, still chattering earnestly at one another, they'd broken into groups, and Spock came over to his guests. "Come. We're about to start work."

He led them to a circular path of low shrubs that, like all the water-conserving Vulcan plants, looked like lacy stone sculpture and showed them how to use a long probe to cross-pollinate the flowers, which strongly resembled ripe cauliflower.





"In two years," said Spock, "the fruit will ripen. I hope you will come to the harvest." And then he left them to take his place. They formed a perimeter around the vegetation and worked in toward the center.

Several hours later they stood beside a roaring fire enjoying the warmth against the night's chill desert wind which diluted the pungent smoke to a nutty fragrance. McCoy snapped his fingers. "I've got it!"

"What?"

"Why we had to cross-pollinate those plants by hand."

"Why?"

"We're above the altitude of the insects or whatever critter does the job normally!"

Spock came up behind them. "Very astute, Doctor. We maintain this patch, because, here, the natural enemies of the plant don't thrive, and the fruit grown here is particularly tasty. There's a legend that the first seeds were left up here almost three thousand years ago by a couple who sought solitude. Come. We're about to start the dance."

Kirk could hardly believe his fatigue-deadened ears, but music pealed out into the still night, and already triples in lines and circles were forming, with men and women mixed indiscriminately.

Spock showed them a step fitting the strange rhythm. Several hands encouraged them to try, and soon they were dancing with the Vulcans. It took all the humans' breath, but most of the Vulcans, including Spock, sang as they danced. Eventually, the humans had to quit, but the others danced ever more vigorously, until the fire had died to glowing embers, and dawn threw the plateau into shadowless relief, a perfect background for the skydance of the silver birds that greeted each day.

Then they policed the area, gathered their possessions, and scrambled down the snake trail, skidding, sliding, and chattering seriously...doing everything humans might do except laugh and complain. Amanda had a delicious breakfast ready, and they all retired for a delectable sleep.

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Seated on the veranda, searching the darkening sky for the first twinkling of stars, Kirk realized that had been it. Or rather, it had been the minute he woke up. It had been high noon, and the windows had closed automatically when the thermostat

kicked the airconditioner to life. He'd awakened to a frigid, normal temperature with the unmistakeable impression that he'd lost something. Had he forgotten something on the mountain?

He reviewed the whole night and finally decided that the only thing he'd lost was a tension he'd never known he had until it was gone. Had it drained out into the helping hands of the Vulcans as they'd come down that precipitous slope? Or had the walls of the house drawn it out of his weary body as he entered and felt anew that mysterious peace?

And then he realized something else. He hadn't laughed once the whole night, hadn't had one drink and not even a woman's smile, but he'd had a roaring good time, and he felt better than he had in years. He hadn't had a day's rest since he'd come to this strange house, yet he felt better rested than he could ever remember feeling before.

The feeling was still with him. It was no longer new but had grown to be a part of him. He felt totally...refreshed. Eager to accept whatever challenge life might confront him with, he rose and went through the louvre doors into the living area. Spock was in the Gardens of Thought and couldn't be disturbed; McCoy was sleeping, and Amanda was probably fussing over dinner.

He was standing, hands on hips, wondering which way to go, when the hangings parted, and McCoy peeked through an arch at the far end of the long room. "Come on." He beckoned. "Supper's ready."

"So soon?" Kirk started down the long room.

"Soon? We've been waiting for you an hour. Spock insisted. But I finally got too impatient."

Shaking his head, Kirk followed the doctor into the dining room with its oval, green stone table that always seemed warm as polished hardwood. Spock stood as they entered. "Good. Now that we're all finished here, I have something for you both." From the table before him, he picked up a tiny, ornately carved sphere on a fine chain and approached the captain with the sphere cupped between his palms. When he parted his hands the sphere had broken into an empty hemisphere and a closed one with a small hole in the center.

Holding the captain's eyes with his own, he raised the fingers of his right hand toward the captain's forehead slowly, asking permission for that contact.

Kirk nodded. The feather touch of warm, dry fingers that seemed to sink into his skull and comb the convolutions of his brain no longer disturbed him. It lasted only a moment, and then Spock took Kirk's left hand and touched the hemisphere's hole.



When Spock released his hold, a miniature, ash-gold flame sprang from the hole as he said, "That you may take with you the good that you have found here," and placed both hemispheres and chain in Kirk's hands.

Wonderingly, Kirk touched the flame and found it tinglingly cool to his finger and strangely evocative of that recently discovered peace. When he looked up, he found McCoy staring at an identical flame in his own palm. With the covers on, the spheres became handsome ornaments which they slipped around their necks before they sat down to eat.

All during the meal, eaten in the silence required by Vulcan custom, Kirk wondered about this odd gift, striving to find words to ask the questions it raised. When they'd all finished he said, "Spock, that's the first time I've known you to give a gift, and I've just realized I haven't the vaguest idea how to say thank you."

"Gratitude is unnecessary, Captain."

Turning to Amanda, Kirk said, "Surely you understand that we want to thank you for your splendid hospitality."

"Of course. But it's not customary. You were invited."

McCoy said, "I don't know about you, Jim, but I'll always consider this --" He indicated the sphere. "-- one of my greatest treasures."

"Not always, Doctor," said Spock. "It will last for several years, but not forever."

"Spock," Kirk started resolutely, "I'd hate to...well...look the gift horse in the mouth," but...what is this?" He fingered the sphere, opened it, and capped it again, watching the flame fold in upon itself as he snapped the cover in place.

"It is a part, a small part, of the heritage of my family."

"You mean," Kirk considered, "it's related to the science of the Kraith?"

"In a way."

"How does it work?"

"That I can't explain to you, Captain. Call it part of the Vulcan science-of-mind that you accept so readily."

McCoy said, "But this is mechanical."

"Not really, Doctor. Remember, I never handled both of them at once. That was to prevent accidental cross-linkage that might have proved troublesome. I had to key each to the owner's personal pattern."

Kirk said, "Is it dangerous?"

"Not in the way a Kraith can be. But don't attempt to show it to anyone who was not here with us."

Amanda leaned toward the humans. "Spock is an expert in these matters. Accept his gift, use it, and, when it's spent, discard it. But ask no further questions he can't answer."

Just then, Spock's head came around swiftly, hunting the location of a sound. "What's that?" They waited a moment, then Spock said, "Aircar. Sounds official...yes, it's a Federation vehicle."

He stood up, and Amanda followed, saying, "More company. I'll clear the table; you go receive them."

Kirk rose and suddenly, for the first time in weeks, became acutely conscious of his appearance. He looked down at the colorful Vulcan tunic and skimpy but comfortable sandals and felt undressed. These clothes were fine for lounging around an oven, but they'd never do for greeting Federation officials.

Noting with some amusement that McCoy was having the same problem, he wondered if he'd have time to change. Then he heard the car himself and decided to brash it out. The three men moved through the living room and on to the front entrance, arriving just as the car grounded on the stone and gravel rotunda that was the front approach to the house. As the car touched down, the grounds were lit by huge lamps concealed high on the stone building.

Presently the car's door opened, and a lovely young woman clad in the red Starfleet Communications uniform descended, followed by a middle-aged man in...by pure reflex, Kirk snapped to a joint-cracking brace. It was Admiral Whitecroft, the Sector Commander stationed at Vulcan Base.

As the pair approached the house, Kirk had time to appraise the young woman. She was dark-haired, deeply tanned, short, but finely shaped. She walked with a springy gait that completed the impression of youthful vitality without innocence or invitation. It was a masculine walk, but to the graceful female rhythm.

Waiting at the foot of the steps, flanked by his senior officers, no longer conscious of his appearance, Kirk considered his chances with the girl as he drew a breath to greet the admiral.



But before Kirk could speak the girl turned to Spock, rendered a casual Vulcan salute, and addressed him in what sounded to Kirk like flawless Vulcan. He examined her ears and complexion again. Could the light be playing tricks? No. She looked Italian...or possibly Greek, but not Vulcan.

Spock answered, then turned to the admiral. "Please enter and be welcome, sir. You have not interrupted. Our Peace is Complete."

When Amanda had them all installed over drinks at the table, Spock said, "Admiral, I understand that haste is your most comfortable mode, and, as host, I offer to waive the usual formalities. Please tell us what it is that has brought you here."

The admiral cleared his throat and looked at the three officers-without-a-ship who sat opposite him. "Spock, first, may I offer my sincere condolences on the loss of your father. His absence will be deeply felt by all the Federation."

"Mortality," said Spock quietly, "is the source of racial vitality."

"Yes." The admiral smoothed his thinning white hair. "I'm glad that I didn't interrupt anything, because I have work for you." His gaze slid over the three officers, then rested on Kirk. "Captain. I have a command for you. It's not a starship, but it's only temporary, and in my opinion this command is more important than any of our Starships. Interested?"

"Yes, sir. I was just beginning to wonder what I would be doing next." At that moment, Kirk realized that they'd all come to the end of their visit by mutual agreement without ever exchanging a word on the subject.

"This ship, the Hal-bird, was specially built for this mission. She's a five-man, scout-class vessel built for speed, range, and indetectibility. She has no offensive armament and precious little defense. Still interested?"

"A spy mission?"

"Right."

"Espionage is a bit out of my line."

"You've done all right in the past. But we've arranged a stiff four-week course for you with the Service's sharpest experts."

Kirk nodded, considering, then asked, "Who's my crew, and where am I going?"

Nodding at each in turn, the admiral said, "Mr. Spock, Dr. McCoy, Miss Minos here, and one other. Your navigator will be a Medeusan by the name of Thilien."

Kirk whistled.

The admiral nodded. "Top secret, of course. I forgot to mention that the Halbird is too small for the fancy navigation equipment that this mission will call for. Miss Minos has been working with Thilien for almost a year with some rather startling results. They can handle the Halbird quite well."

Kirk looked hard at the girl for the third time. She wasn't blind, and she wasn't Vulcan....

Spock said, "T'Aniyeh. You'd better explain." He pronounced the name Vulcan-fashion in four syllables: T'-an-i-ye, accenting the third.

She said, "Captain, I'm human, but I was raised nearly from infancy by a Vulcan family here on Vulcan. For some unknown reason, I don't actually need to view Thilien in order to establish a deep rapport. What we do is something rather unique...but it works."

Well, thought Kirk, I was feeling pretty cocky a few hours ago. Now I've got the challenge I wanted. He said, "And where are we going?"

"The exact co-ordinates will remain in Thilien's custody, but I can tell you this. It's deep in the Romulan Empire." The admiral patted the air at Kirk's rise. "I know it's unusual to ask a captain to command a ship when only his navigator knows the course, but you must admit that no Romulan can get anything at all out of a Medeusan...and what you don't know, you can't tell."

Kirk subsided. "Why not make him the captain, then?"

"Because he's not qualified."

Kirk thought it over and nodded. "All right. Am I to be told what we're supposed to do?"

The admiral leveled his gaze at Spock. "Miss Minos is also the best expert we have on the Romulans. She even speaks the language. She'll teach you everything you need to know to find out how they've been infiltrating Federation space and especially Federation Starbases."

Spock took this with outward equanimity.

The admiral turned back to Kirk. "Our best security has been shown to be as strong as rotten lace. We've got to find out how



and whys. Suddenly, we got a tip and a break. We can put you in the vicinity of a top-level Intelligence Conference with appropriate documents for Mr. Spock to walk right in. The conference will take place in six weeks. You'll just have time to get there."

They spent four of those six weeks in the most intensive training program Kirk had ever known. Not even the Academy had been so demanding. Kirk often groaned that he was too old for this sort of cramming, but he forged ahead day by day and soon had scoured the rust off his learning faculties and actually began to enjoy the challenge of a truly high-pressure grind. Days went by without his catching a glimpse of Spock or McCoy, and, when he did, it was usually only from a distance.

He lost track of day and night as they worked around the clock with only "four" to six-hour breaks for exhausted slumber.

Finally, the day came when they took the Halbird and headed for the neutral zone and their "final exam." The first four days Kirk and McCoy spent sleeping while the tireless Vulcan and human girl kept up the merciless pace. But eventually Kirk's reserves were replenished, and he began to take notice of his new command.

He checked out the strange bridge, poking about the computerless, navigator-helmsmanless compartment whose sole familiar feature, other than its shape, was the central free-standing console. But, he reflected sourly, this console held only the special com device and spectrum-shift decoder they'd need to keep in touch with Spock. He was wishing he could talk to Thilien when Tanya came through the door. "Captain. Have you see Spock?"

"I believe he's in his quarters. What's that you have there?"

"My...what do you call it? Lytherette? It's broken."

"So I see. What happened?"

"Oh. I guess you'd call it an accident. Excuse me, sir."

She went off in search of Spock, and Kirk decided to go share his frustrations with McCoy. He found him in the galley puttering with the autochef. "Bones. What are you up to?"

McCoy snorted. "They didn't give me a lab, they didn't give me a decent sickbay -- practically no medical supplies, and the scarcest minimum in instrumentation, so we can't give anything to the Romulans -- so where else can I better look after the health of the crew than in the kitchen playing dietician?"

Kirk sat at the tiny table wondering if indeed he had it so bad after all. Maybe he was just feeling sorry for himself.

"So, what's eating you, Jim? And what would you like to eat?"

"Nothing, really." He looked up at the chief surgeon in surprise. "That's the snappiest remark you've made in a long time. Come to think of it, how come you haven't been sniping at Spock?" He considered. "You haven't poked him in the ribs once since...well, since before I lost the Enterprise. Have you given up?"

McCoy sat down opposite his captain, folded his hands gravely, and leaned forward. "I'm supposed to be a pretty fair psychiatrist, you know."

Kirk nodded. "So I'd heard, Bones. Go on."

"Well, Spock is an odd one..."

"Hmmm. Go on."

"He's actually made a pretty stable adjustment to his situation...and there aren't many texts or research papers on human-Vulcan hybrids."

"So what changed?"

McCoy inspected the youthful face heavy with experience for a long moment, then, very quietly, he said, "T'Rruel."

Kirk waited encouragingly.

"You know, she died because of me. And Spock has never said a word to me about it. Never once. He even invited me to his home and treated me as an honored guest."

"I don't follow you. Why should blame yourself?" Kirk thought, was this why Spock had invited Bones?

"Jim. Don't you realize? Didn't you read the reports? If I hadn't tried to revive that Romulan cyborg before Spock had her unhooked from the controls of that little raider, she wouldn't have been able to take the ship up and crash it in that crevice. If that hadn't happened, Spock wouldn't have had to...well, T'Rruel wouldn't have had to die pulling my chestnuts out of the fire."

"And you feel guilty?"

McCoy thought soberly for several long minutes. "Not any more, I guess. Not really. I did what any doctor would have done. It was pure reflex. Spock worked as fast as his injured



hand would allow. It wasn't really anybody's fault. But that's not the point. Spock has never said a word to me about it."

"Is that bad?"

"No. It's good. I think. I really believe it doesn't bother him. He doesn't blame me. Not even in his human sub-conscious... if he has one. And..." his voice lowered to a penetrating intensity, "Spock was goddamned-awful serious about that girl, Jim."

"Yes. I know, Bones."

"He's been up and down that rollercoaster several times in the last few years. He's learned a lot about himself in the process. How Vulcan he is. And how human. But he's never once been really serious about a female. Take the first time...T'Pring. That was real, and it was a fiercely physical experience...but he never cared for T'Pring herself. When the need was gone, he let her go. And then there was T'Pol, back in the ice-age of that planet Sarpeidon. You did see how he was with her. There was harmony there, Jim, the kind of love. But it was largely due to the effects of the attack. It was hard, but he walked away from her. If that had been T'Ruel...he'd have stayed and died there regardless."

"I'm not sure, but I think that Romulan Commander kinda got to him where it hurt. He was so withdrawn after we let her off, I was a bit apprehensive for a while. He'd never really gotten it out of his system, if you know what I mean. He's been sensitive, even tense, ever since T'Pring. And it was getting worse, though he'd deny it a million times over. His body was waiting, ready to respond to the slightest trigger. And then came T'Ruel. To save her life, he had to wait. Then I loused it up. And he doesn't blame me. Do you see, now?"

"You no longer think he needs to admit his human emotions?"

"Well. As a psychiatrist...I just don't know. As a human being, I feel it's time to go cautiously. At least until there's been time to forget, time for him to come back to an even keel."

"Hell never forget. Besides..." Kirk fingered the golden orb hung about his neck under his shirt, then fished it out to toy with it in what had recently become a habit. "I think he's found his peace."

McCoy took his Flame from around his neck and twirled it between two fingers. "You may be right. What do you suppose this is, anyway?"

"I couldn't begin to guess. I'm not even sure I want to know."

"He doesn't carry one."

"Amanda said he doesn't need it. He can get the effect any time without props."

They sat a while in companionable silence and then adjourned to their routine tasks.

Meanwhile, T'Aniyeh stood outside Spock's quarters, clutching the remains of her lytherette to her shivering body and wishing she'd never been born. Then she shook herself out of it with a Vulcan proverb, "Misused pride is illogical," and touched the door's signal.

"Come."

She entered the cramped cubicle to find Spock seated cross-legged on the bed, surrounded by piles of tapes he'd been sorting. "Do you have a few minutes?"

Spock put his hand viewer down, unfolded himself, and stood with an ease that gave no hint of the hours he'd worked in that position. "Yes. I just finished."

"Would you..." She switched to the Low Vulcan idiom that lacked rigorous precision but was more concise than the ultra-precise High Vulcan. "I need a good lra-man."

"Obviously," Spock answered in the same mode, eying the wreckage in her arms. "What happened?"

"I don't want to answer."

He acquiesced with one eyebrow and put out a hand for the pieces. She held them out to him, and, in transferring the pile of trash, his hand brushed hers, hesitated, and closed firmly over her fingers. "T'Aniyeh. Your skin is below room temperature, and you're shaking. Why?"

She cast about and chose an English phrase for the non-literal but emphatic quality. "I'm freezing! They were so bent on building this ship with economy they didn't put in an adjustable environmental control."

"You can't -- " He switched back to Low Vulcan. " -- adjust your metabolic rate?"

She shook her head. "I don't have the physiology. My foster-father used to krobria-achk for me when I'd suffer from the heat, and he helped me up-shift when I went to the Academy,



but I made the mistake of returning home and down-shifted so easily I wasn't aware of it. And now I'm suffering. It's so bad, I can't concentrate."

Still holding her hand, Spock moved closer and looked down into her eyes. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Even if you knew the technique, which is not likely because it is an archaism that has fallen into disuse, you couldn't help me so soon after conducting an Affirmation, so what would be the point?"

"Logical. However, you can't go on like this. You'll end up in Dr. McCoy's sickbay. You still have much to teach me, and I can't afford to let you become ill." He took the remains of the instrument from her, laid them on the bed, and positioned his hands before her, saying, "My grandfather was also your foster-father's mentor. He set stiff requirements. With your permission."

"Don't. I don't want you to overextend yourself. You'll need your vitality."

"I won't strain for perfection."

"All right." She touched his fingers in a complicated caress and then guided them to her forehead as she reached for his. Presently her shivering ceased.

"That," said Spock breaking the contact, "will have to do." He closed his eyes and took a deep breath.

"You'd better sit down."

"Negative. I'm not fatigued." He turned to the mess on the bed. "I'm not expert in this, but I believe it can be repaired." He fingered the shattered soundboard. "However, I wonder if it's worth the trouble."

"To me it would be."

Seating himself on the edge of the bed to toy with the jigsaw puzzle, he said, "T'Aniyeh," picking up the thread of an old conversation, "why won't you marry me?"

She chose English intonation, "Oh, Spock," as if to say, Dear Spock, I don't want to hurt you. Then she switched to Vulcan. "That --" She pointed at the lytherette. "-- is the main reason."

He looked at the pieces in his hand. "Because I can't fix it?"

"No. Because I broke it."

He stared at the shattered instrument as if demanding an explanation from it. "Why?"

"Because I'm human...and female."

"I don't understand."

"I know. And that's why I can't marry you, even though our parents have called it a good match."

"Because I don't understand human female psychology?"

"No. Not even human males understand all that well. Because I do things like this all the time. Last night, after our conversation, I went to my room...and had hysterics." She turned away. "I'm Vulcan-trained. I can step outside myself and watch it happening. I know its chemical-physiological roots. But, nevertheless, there is no surcease but to sob and smash things, precious things, and then sob over their loss. It passes, but it leaves a tangled mess in its wake. You could never live with that. I could never ask you to. I'm too...embarrassed...by my own lack of control." She turned toward him again. "You see? We don't even have the words. I have to borrow their words to explain myself." And then, as a new thought, "Spock, why are you in such a hurry? Why do you want me? And why now?"

"You're right. There's no haste. I want you because you're the logical choice. Have I not said so, many times?"

"Yes. But you ignore the fact that my dedication to logic is strictly emotional. Listen. After T'Pring, you wrote to me, and I said wait. And you waited. And came T'Rruel. Wasn't she worth waiting for?"

"Yes."

"That's what I wanted for you. It didn't work out. Now, again, I say wait."

"I'm not terribly sanguine on hunches."

"The odds are more than ten thousand to one against there ever being anyone for me. I won't have a human. Emotionally, I couldn't bear it. And I wouldn't want to inflict myself on a Vulcan, so there's no reason for haste. If ever you want me, I'll be there."

Abandoning the smashed instrument, he rose and took her by the shoulders, looking down into her eyes somberly. "You force me to say it in words?"

"Apparently."

"T'Aniyeh. My dedication to haste is...emotional. I've been through...hell... these last few years. I need to put an end



to it while I can still think clearly and logically. There are reasons for our custom of choosing one for another at such an early age. There is a peace that can only come from that kind of commitment. The chance of someone else like T'Ruel turning up is negligible."

"Yes. But there is yet another point. You carry genes to which you are obligated. It's the purpose of marriage, the only purpose. You must have a son by a Vulcan who can raise him in the proper tradition."

"It's only required that the union be fertile. I have fathered a son by a Vulcan. He died. What I do now is my own private affair. It's my...professional...opinion that you have the tradition."

She bent her head to avoid his eyes, and then melted against him. "I'm going to cry again. Oh, Spock, I'm such a mess."

"You did Affirm the Continuity."

"Yes. But I had no right."

"I disagree."

She sobbed, "How can you!" produced a throwie, and blew her nose, burning away from him. "I'm sorry."

"Apology accepted." He paced around her in the tiny compartment that barely held the bed and a desk and chair. He dawdled long enough for her to regain her composure and then confronted her, tipped her face up, and dabbed at one last tear. His face was set in an utterly impersonal neutrality. "T'Aniyeh. Have you considered that one source of your difficulties may well be that you're not married?"

He'd adopted the syntax of Middle Vulcan, a flexible mixture of the ultra-precise and the informal. She found herself relaxing as the slightly higher level of abstraction let her answer in the abstract. "Marriage-to-a-Vulcan is not-solution."

"True. But no-marriage-at-all is-also not-solution." He came back to the informal mode for one quick statement. "If I read you rightly, you're not inclined to compromise."

She retained the impersonal mode. "True. But that-does-not-imply necessity-to-inflict-misery on someone-else."

With one appreciative eyebrow, Spock conceded formally, "Logical." He switched to English. "We'll leave it at that for now. Come, We must work. There is a great deal I don't yet understand."

They turned to Spock's piles of tapes and became two utterly different people as they bent to their task.

Thilien drove the little, nearly undetectable ship onward, through the neutral zone and deep into the Romulan Empire. Right on schedule, he informed Tanya that they were in position to jettison the warp engines and become virtually undetectable. She informed Kirk, and he tended to the mechanical details on Thilien's cue. They were now merely an impulse-driven desk as lost among the stars as a coin in a slot machine.

Except for Spock and Tanya for occasional company, Thilien was quite alone in his sealed compartment. He was not a cyborg, but he could accomplish nearly the same feats of economy. He didn't mind the loneliness, because he had much to contemplate. So he brought his passengers to their destination, informed Tanya, established the requisite solar orbit, and went to "sleep."

"Captain."

Kirk turned from surveying, for the thousandth time, his useless bridge with Thilien's "quarters" solidly walling off the forward portion. "Yes, Miss Minos?"

"We have arrived. Spock is about to leave."

"Thank you." He could suppress a note of sarcasm. "I'd like to see him off."

"Then come. He's checking out the shuttlecraft."

There were moments, Kirk reflected, when he was glad of her Vulcan background. She might be frigid, but at least she could miss, or maybe overlook, his badly chosen intonations.

The shuttlecraft bay resembled an archaic submarine torpedo room more than the spacious hangar deck of the Enterprise. When Tanya, Kirk, and McCoy arrived, Spock had just finished a last once-over of the slick but cramped one-man missile and was climbing into the padded chamber when he noticed them.

Kirk approached his friend. "Don't leave without saying goodbye."

"I had intended to. 'Goodbye' is hardly in order."

"I certainly hope not," said McCoy, "but take care of yourself. Remember, I don't have the tools to paste you back together."

"I shall try, Doctor. Captain, communications check."



Kirk, doubling as communications officer as well as engineer, went to the wall screen controls, glad that routine preparation of a command officer included grounding in every phase of ship's operations. "Ready, Mr. Spock."

Spock closed the canopy of his coffin-like cartridge and activated his throat mike. "Kirk, this is Spock; do you read?"

"Loud and clear. Do you read?"

"Clear, sir, but not loud. All channels open and functioning. Spock out."

The servo-motors drove the capsule into its launching tube, whined, whooshed, clicked, and whined again. And then the three turned away to begin the familiar agony of the professional spaceman.

Vigils were not strangers to the two men, but the girl, despite mature years, Academy accomplishments, and Vulcan training, was pacing the narrow corridors and figeting restlessly through her days long before the strain wore into her companions' feigned serenity. She couldn't even converse with Thilien, because he had withdrawn into private meditation.

Then, the morning of the fourth day, a quick burst of static resolved into a brief message. "On schedule." That was all, but it told the waiting trio that the ticklishly dangerous part of the mission was beginning. If all went as planned, it would be a walk-through. The slightest snag could spell disaster.

By midafternoon, they were all gathered on the bridge near the main com unit. The hours dripped past in an agony of minutes until, less than an hour before the next scheduled check-in, they were all counting seconds and concentrating on not holding their breaths.

McCoy broke the silence. "Tanya, you're nervous. Like all other emotions, anxiety demands expression. The release of emotion is essential to human mental health."

She sighed hugely and shook herself, favoring McCoy with a ghost of a smile. "I have often observed, Doctor, that the healthy release of emotion is singularly unhealthy for those nearest one."

"Now where have I heard that before?" said Kirk.

"Platonius," supplied McCoy.

T'Aniyeh looked from one to the other and then shrugged an eyebrow. "If you'll excuse me, gentlemen, I believe I'll go release my emotions in private." She left.

McCoy followed her with an eye and then shrugged. "Well, public or private, perhaps it doesn't make any real difference. But I'll bet she'll be back in time."

And she was. She returned 20 minutes later draped in a composure which proved somehow infectious. As the seconds ticked by they relaxed in their confidence in Spock. Then the console clock registered check-in time, and all their breathing stopped as the plus seconds oozed by to be racked up by the relentless mechanism. Ten seconds. Thirty seconds. One minute late.

"He's in trouble, Bones."

"Yes. With that infernal time-sense of his, he'd never be this late without reason."

"Our chronometer must be off," suggested T'Aniyeh.

"Not by this much," answered Kirk.

They waited rigidly, three pairs of eyes riveted on a rolling, digital readout chronometer that just couldn't be more than five hundredths of a microsecond wrong. Five minutes. Ten minutes. Kirk said, "Tanya, ask Thilien."

"Ask him what? He's asleep, but I could wake him"

"Do so. Ask him if he can reach Spock. Tell him to go to Red Alert status."

"There's nothing he could do."

"That was not a request, Lieutenant."

"Yes, sir." After a moment: "He says Spock is alive, but he can't establish more than that. He says he's been on Red Alert twenty minutes now."

Kirk grunted an acknowledgement and pounced on the board as the decoder hummed to life. "Physiological difficulty. Contracted contagious disease. Am continuing on schedule."

Kirk's hands flew to the controls before he realized they had no code for "Timecheck erroneous." They looked at each other in horror. "Bones. Could a disease foul Spock's time-sense?"

"No known disease."

"Chances that he might realize his error?"



"Mighty slim. He's depended on it all his life. He's got his mind on other problems, and he's fighting some type of infection. There's a limit even to Vulcan mental capacity."

Tanya said, "This is a precision mission..."

"I am aware of that, Lieutenant."

Tanya said, "What are we going to do?" It was a request for information, not a plea to the gods for help.

"Wait. There's nothing we can do. Unless you'd care to pray. Alert Thilien to be ready to take the capsule aboard and depart for warp-engine-rendezvous."

"Yes, sir."

And they waited. In a lip-chewing, nerve-grinding silence. Occasionally, McCoy prescribed tension-relieving exercise and somehow remembered to feed them. It was midnight by their clock, a full hour and a half past check-in when the console hummed and clicked to itself and emitted a mechanical "Secured. Debarkation imminent."

As is so often the case in a spaceman's life, the action, when it came, was so swift as to leave even the professionals helpless.

Three things happened simultaneously. The floor shifted wildly under their feet, knocking McCoy and Tanya to their knees while Kirk siezed the console to save himself; Thilien reported to Tanya, "We're being towed by tractor beams from three starship class vessels"; and the console said mechanically, "Agent captured."

Tanya relayed Thilien's message, but there was nothing



they could do. The surprising thing was that they were not simply destroyed. Instead they were transferred, gently, by Romulan standards, to a large, featureless, but otherwise not uncomfortable detention cell deep within the maximum security confines of a Romulan, free-orbiting starbase. To add surprise to surprise, they were all herded into the same cell where Spock was laid out on a hard bench in the far corner.

Then Kirk got a final shock as their captors left, and the inmate of the cell across from them rose from his bench and approached the double horizontal bars of the energy field restraint. The captain was unaware of the most unmilitary gape of his mouth.

Sarek raised his hand solemnly in the Vulcan salute. "May you live long and prosper, Captain Kirk...Dr. McCoy...T'Aniyeh."

Without the slightest hesitation, she answered, "May you not live long and prosper, Sarek."

"I thank you, daughter-of-the-tradition."

Kirk's gape widened and infected McCoy as they turned to eye the girl and then back to the ex-Ambassador.

Sarek said, "Spock is ill?"

McCoy shook himself and went to Spock. "I've no instruments," he complained, touching the Vulcan to check skin-temperature, respiration, and non-existent pulse. He peeled an eyeball, doubted the result, and shrugged. "I think he's just fighting an infection."

Sarek nodded. "The one that nearly killed me shortly after I sent the message which, I believe, drew you here. He will have it under control shortly. He'll require a transfusion of Romulan antibodies, however, to whip it completely. It's a self-immunizing disease they all contract in early childhood, when it's quite minor. It severely affects our time-sense." He eyed McCoy. "In a mature Vulcan that can be fatal."

McCoy approached the barrier to their cell and examined Sarek. "You've lost a lot of weight, Mr. Ambassador. Are you well?"

"Quite fit, now, thank you, Doctor. They wished me alive for purposes best known to themselves, so they cured me of the malady."

"And your heart?"

"Your repair job has held up quite well. I'm no longer troubled by malfunctions."



Kirk mastered his confusion. "Mr. Ambassador, we...the whole Federation thought you dead."

"But you recovered the Kraith."

"Yes, but how did you -- "

"And I was declared dead."

"Yes, but -- "

"Excellent. And Spock...?"

T'Aniyeh answered shortly in Vulcan, and Sarek's face relaxed into the closest thing to satisfaction he would allow himself. "He is his grandfather's grandson." It was the highest tribute he could pay.

During this exchange, McCoy went back to Spock's side and covertly compared the father and son. With Sarek's new figure, the family resemblance was certainly more apparent.

Kirk began to circle their cell, mentally taking inventory of their ordnance and other assets. Sum total...zero. He eyed the light fixture in the unreachable ceiling, remembering a certain impromptu laser experiment, but they were denied even subcutaneous advantages. Besides, there was no cot to cannibalize. There were no windows and no sanitary facilities. He came back to Tanya. "Our only asset is not here."

She started, "Thi -- "

"What do you think?"

After a moment, she said, "Ready and waiting."

He nodded. "Keep up the good work."

She said, "I will, sir."

McCoy called from Spock's corner, "He's coming around, Jim."

They gathered around Spock as he struggled to a sitting position, and McCoy helped him prop himself against the corner. "How do you feel?" asked McCoy.

Spock eyed the doctor sourly. "I believe I have discovered the meaning of one of your expressions. I feel lousy. I haven't conquered the creature that has invaded my body, and evidently it will be a losing battle resulting in my eventual demise. However,

in the meantime, we have a problem...one involving...." His eye fell on Sarek.

Father and son locked eyes as if they could penetrate the barrier-screens that separated them. Then Spock lowered his eyes and closed them for a moment; when he again viewed Sarek, he observed levelly, "Mother will be pleased."

Sarek answered, "She has her irrational moments. But she'll get over it."

"Indeed."

"I don't believe it!" Kirk said, looking from father to son. "You must feel something!"

Leaning his head against the wall for support, Spock slowly shifted his gaze to Kirk. He had difficulty obtaining a satisfactory focus. Finally he said, "Sir. Certainly you've not forgotten that my father hasn't Affirmed the Continuity."

Kirk and McCoy shared an indrawn "Huuh!"

Sarek said, "Spock," and continued in the crisp, ultra-precise High Vulcan which, when wielded by a master, could be unbelievably compact while not at all concise. Shortly, Spock closed his eyes to concentrate and eventually was forced to ask his father to slow down.

Kirk turned to the girl. "Lieutenant, what are they saying?"

"The referents are highly abstract. I'm not getting it all. Sarek is recounting his adventures...how he went after the thieves and got taken prisoner...how he got them to abandon the Kraith...now he's telling what he knows of the disease Spock has."

When Sarek finished, Spock remained silent, eyes closed in stony concentration. McCoy moved to his side. Sarek said, "Leave him, Doctor. He's trying a suggestion of mine."

Then Spock was with them again. "With some success, Father. Thank you." He laboriously shifted his gaze to McCoy. "Doctor, does your equipment aboard the Halbird include blood filtration apparatus?"

McCoy considered. "No. But I could improvise. Depends what I have to filter for what."

Sarek said for Spock, who was again withdrawn, "I have the requisite antibodies...but you are familiar with Spock's blood requirements. Ordinary T-Negative blood contains factors his tissues can't tolerate..."



McCoy said, "Yes..." intrigued by the problem. Then, "I think...no, I know, I can do it. That much they gave me. But it's purely academic." He eyed the energy field bars.

Spock said very softly, "Captain."

Kirk knelt beside Spock. Spock's fingers plucked at the fine chain just visible above Kirk's collar and drew the ornate sphere into the light. Across the corridor, Sarek gave a most un-Vulcan gasp. "Spock, no...you can't! Not so soon after an Affirmation. It'll kill you."

Fingering the golden orb, Spock eyed his father calmly. "Perhaps. But...does it matter? Remember, Father, I am my grandfather's grandson. He who trained me in the 670 disciplines knew my weaknesses as well as my strengths. And you yourself have said I am a throwback. I'm not very sensitive, and my control is erratic, but I have compensating strengths. However, it remains to convince the captain."

"Captain Kirk," Sarek said, "don't. He is ill. His mind isn't clear. His strength is dissipated on too many fronts."

To Spock, Kirk said, "Explain."

With a glance, Spock drew Kirk and McCoy close and spoke very softly. "We must move quickly, now, before they realize we are able to escape and before they discover Thilien...and before I am truly unable. I gave you this --" He fingered the sphere. "-- and a warning. Do you remember it?"

They nodded.

"I did not, however, give a complete warning. And now I must." His eyes shifted laboriously from one to the other. "If you give these back to me as I gave them to you, it will cause you greater pain than you brought to my home and left there. It will be what Dr. McCoy would call a psychic trauma. However, I believe that the worst of the shock will not come for at least a day or possibly two. Enough time, perhaps, to take counter-measures. You are both strong, well-adjusted personalities. In my professional judgment, this will cause you no permanent harm... if we live through it. But the immediate experience will be very like...attempting to pull one's own tooth. The Flame is a crutch. It's meant to be used to hasten and guide a healing process, and, when it's no longer needed, it is easily, even eagerly discarded. But until then...it is very dear. It is your decision. I can use them and, in the using, destroy them. But the path to the Halbird will be opened." He fell back exhausted, withdrawn.

Kirk and McCoy rose and almost in unison took the treasured gifts from about their necks. Each became lost in his own decision.

For Kirk, it was a panoramic review of each of those moments when he'd heard that singularly pure note of Peace. The Flame could evoke the taste of living water, pungent smoke on desert air, and a soul-penetrating quiet that had given him a vague insight into the life based on pure logic. It had seemed as effective in increasing his ability to reason dispassionately as the hours he'd spent exploring the Gardens of Thought.

He realized how, though he rarely viewed the Flame, he'd come to rely on that tiny instrument of sanity. His own distaste for mental crutches, chemical or otherwise, rose in him, and, though he didn't doubt Spock's word that the thing would be outgrown, he determined to part with it one way or another. He looked up.

In his own way, McCoy had come to the same decision. They turned to Spock.

The Vulcan had risen to his feet and stood swaying, one hand to the wall for support. Kirk nodded, and a second later McCoy did also.

Sarek said, "Spock, I forbid."

Spock answered softly, "Father. I am Kataytikh. You no longer have authority over my professional decisions."

Kirk again had that odd impression of reverberation down the pages, a formula uttered with a simplicity that masked far-reaching implications.

After a pause, Sarek said, "Suvil was only one of two grandfathers. This will kill you."

"I don't think so. At least not if I do it now, before I lose control to this sickness."

McCoy said to Spock, "Don't do it if it's too dangerous for you. We'll find another way."

"That is not your concern, Doctor. You will have your own problems to contend with. After, we will have to move swiftly to take maximum advantage of what I will be able to do. I presume you know the way to the Halbird."

T'Aniyeh said, "Sarek and I can find it. Thilien can guide us, because we form a triad."



"Yes," Spock said, moving out into the center of the cell, "Aniyeh?"

Fighting not to chew her lips or say something impulsive, she stationed herself at the force-barrier facing Sarek, who turned his back. It took all her determination not to implore Spock to seek another way out.

Turning toward Kirk, Spock straightened, showing scarcely any sign of the weakness that grew minute by minute. "Now."

Kirk held the orb out to Spock, who held up his hand. "No. Not like that. Remember how I gave it to you?"

"Yes. But you said you keyed it to my pattern. I don't know how to do that."

"I'll do the work, Captain. Open the sphere."

Kirk obeyed. The tiny ash-gold flame leaped.

"Good. Now damp the Flame."

"What?"

"Make it go out. Just think that it's not there."

Kirk tried. It took about 30 seconds, but the Flame flickered and died. He felt as if he'd just lost his best friend. He swallowed the first sting of tears.

"Fine. Now raise the first two fingers of your right hand and touch my forehead." Spock never took his eyes off the empty flamehole.

After a moment, Kirk remembered that Spock had next placed his fingers on the hole. He started to remove his fingers from Spock's forehead. Spock said, "No. Wait. I'm a bit slow." They stood like that for about a minute until Spock said, "Now I've got it. Take the fingers of my left hand in your right and touch them to the flamehole."

Kirk did so.

"Now, let go."

As the tiny flame blossomed from the hole again it was a full-spectrum rainbow too bright to look at. Spock muttered a Rigelian expletive, and the ash-gold returned. Taking a deep breath, he shook his head as one who has almost dropped a whole

handful of mercury-fulmanite caps onto a hot griddle and turned to McCoy. "Captain. Go to T'Aniyeh."

In the blind fog of his pain, Kirk obeyed the voice of authority. The girl gathered him in and placed a soothing hand to his forehead, somehow stemming the unreasonable flood of grief.

McCoy said, "You'll have to give me that routine slowly."

Spock held the flaming hemisphere in his left hand. "Yes, Doctor, but you will do it in reverse. Hold the hemisphere in your right hand, and damp the flame."

McCoy did so, but not with ease.

"Now, raise your left hand to my forehead."

"But don't you have to put the other one down, first?"

"No. I must cross-link them. It's tricky, and I'm not well, Doctor. Will you get on with it?"

McCoy did as he was told and waited out the eternity until Spock said, "I've got it. Now, take the fingers of my right hand in your left hand and touch them to the flamehole, release the sphere, and step back quickly."

McCoy did that and somehow ignored the overwhelming surge of emotion to watch the spectacle.

The new Flame exploded to rainbow brilliance, danced a good foot high, and then the other one joined it, and they twined to a pillar that nearly brushed the high ceiling. McCoy didn't notice when Kirk and Tanya turned nor when Sarek did likewise. They all watched Spock balancing that pillar on two small hands like a juggler. Then he seemed to bring it under control. He turned to face the energy-screens, and, as they vanished, the rainbow paled slightly.

Very quietly, without any fanfare or fireworks, the bars slid aside, and the field they generated collapsed. As soon as the last trace of restraint had vanished, Sarek plunged across the corridor and arrived at Spock's side just in time to catch him as the Flame turned soot-black and winked out, as Spock crumpled.

Supporting his son, Sarek said, "Let's go, Captain."

Now that physical action was imminent, Kirk and McCoy found they could put aside their loss and proceed to run for their lives. Kirk said, "Lieutenant, inform Thilien. Lead the way."



The party took off down the corridor, past guard posts where bodies were strewn in sudden disarray. Around corners and up and down ramps they pounded. Soon Spock recovered enough to move on his own, but it was acutely obvious to the captain that Spock was dangerously close to collapse.

Finally, they climbed around a large spiral that circled a huge, multileveled machine shop and found the Halbird's disk lip drawn up to a workbench while the rest of it was supported on a pair of runners that led to a shuttlecraft lock. Apparently, work on her had not yet started. Kirk realized with surprise that less than an hour had passed since their arrival.

The captain led the way toward the underhatch, snapping orders. "Lieutenant, inform Thilien. Doctor, take care of Spock..."

Suddenly a phaser beam whizzed and vaporized half the workbench. Before they could gain cover, a second beam brushed Sarek and Spock, knocking them spinning. Kirk and McCoy closed up while T'Aniyeh climbed in and turned to give them a hand hauling the Vulcans aboard. Several more phaser blasts snapped about them, but they got clear with no further injuries.

As soon as the hatch closed, Thilien guided the ship down the ramp, and revved his impulse engines, aiming their field at the lock. The metal vanished with a snapping explosion, and Thilien performed the same service for the outer door. Explosive decompression killed several hundred loyal Romulans before emergency doors closed, effectively immobilizing the rest.

At top impulse speed, Thilien, a master of evasive maneuvers, led the remaining Romulans a merry chase. But, while he enjoyed himself, his passengers knew virtually nothing of the events, outside of a wildly gyrating floor and occasional straining of the ship's skeleton.

McCoy helped Spock onto the sickbay's single bed, then turned to Sarek, who was at least conscious. "Are you all right, sir?" While he prepared a hypo he said to Sarek, "New stuff. Guaranteed not to upset your stomach...or so they tell me. It'll ease that phaser burn."

McCoy pressed the hypo to Sarek's shoulder and then to



Spock's and watched the life-sign indicators anxiously. Spock was younger than Sarek, but he'd sustained the greater portion of the phaser beam on top of a raging fever on top of an unknown effect of whatever it was he'd done and shouldn't have. Privately, McCoy admitted he'd never seen Spock so near death. Not even the time he'd had to regenerate a whole organ because they didn't carry a replacement for him.

Spock started to come around, and McCoy turned to Sarek. "Well? Feel like a meal?"

Sarek nodded. "Excellent, Doctor."

Spock's head tossed feverishly and then steadied as his eyes opened, and McCoy said, "How's your stomach?"

He struggled to a sitting position. "What did you give me?"

Looking dubious, Spock swung his legs off the bed. The hurt look turned to reproach as he gained his feet and tottered to the little room in the corner and closed the door. The sounds were faint but unmistakeable.

Spock returned looking weaker but enwrapped in injured dignity. He lay down again and relaxed systematically as he said, "Doctor, if you ever put that chemical into my body again, I shall have you up for malpractice. I did not offer myself as an experimental subject." Then he quietly and deliberately fainted.

Sarek eyed the doctor. "You'd better set up that filter while I try to repair some of the damage he inflicted on himself." He turned to Kirk, who'd been watching. "I'll require privacy. I must use a technique which...is quite dangerous in itself. If we both live through that, we will need that filter immediately. It may take several hours, but then I'll be free to do what I can for you both."

The humans left father and son to their battle and embarked on the all too familiar routine of waiting. The hours oozed by. McCoy finished his work. Tanya made them all eat and even prepared a meal for Sarek. She fended off Kirk's inquiries about the ship's status saying she didn't want to distract Thilien by asking idle questions.

Then, with evident relief, she told Kirk, "Prepare to hook in the warp engines."

Glad to have work for a change, Kirk pitched in and was ready to couple the final leads as soon as Thilien had them maneuvered in place. Kirk, as a spaceman, appreciated Thilien's skill in the maneuver and made a mental note to recommend him for a commendation. Then they were hurtling for the neutral zone at warp speed.



Meanwhile, McCoy was called back to sickbay; when Kirk, weary but satisfied, returned from his task, he found Spock's bed rigged with filters. A small reservoir of thick green blood was supplying a steady drip into Spock's veins. McCoy came out, closing the door behind him. "I think, but don't quote me, that he's going to live. Sarek seems in remarkably good health, too, considering."

"Thank you, Doctor." Sarek came up behind McCoy. "The active life agrees with me. It will be hard to return to the desk."

"You will return to Vulcan, sir?" said Kirk.

Sarek nodded. "Yes, gentlemen, I am now rejoined to the life-stream of my people." At their blank looks, he added, "You see, Spock is in a unique position. He is my son, and we are xtmpsrqzntwlf. He recently conducted the Affirmation which I missed. And we now had the necessity to meld in a technique ordinarily not practiced between members of the same family. To save a life, it is permitted. But merely to transaffirm, it would result in a dual death. In this case, it resulted in dual life. And now, Captain, I believe it is your turn to receive attention. I cannot recreate your Flame, but perhaps I can cue you to another."

Sarek stepped between the two men, turning them down the corridor. "Rest assured that Spock's standing invitation to you will be honored in our house all the days of my life."

----- March 1970

T Waves: Letters

From Eugene Marvinsky

I was reading W.H.D. Rouse's Gods, Heroes and Men of Ancient Greece and ran across a story quite similar to "Who Mourns for Adonais." It goes like this: Apollo built himself a temple near a sacred cave. He lacked worshippers for it, so he caused a Cretan ship bound from the coasts of Crete to come to his island. Apollo demanded that they worship him and commanded them to leave the ship, build an altar, make sacrifices, tend flocks, and play music. He also took too many brides. Familiar?

William Shatner has been cutting several commercials in Canada lately. His voice is very listenable -- I enjoy his Heidelberg Beer and Shirriff's gelatin commercials.

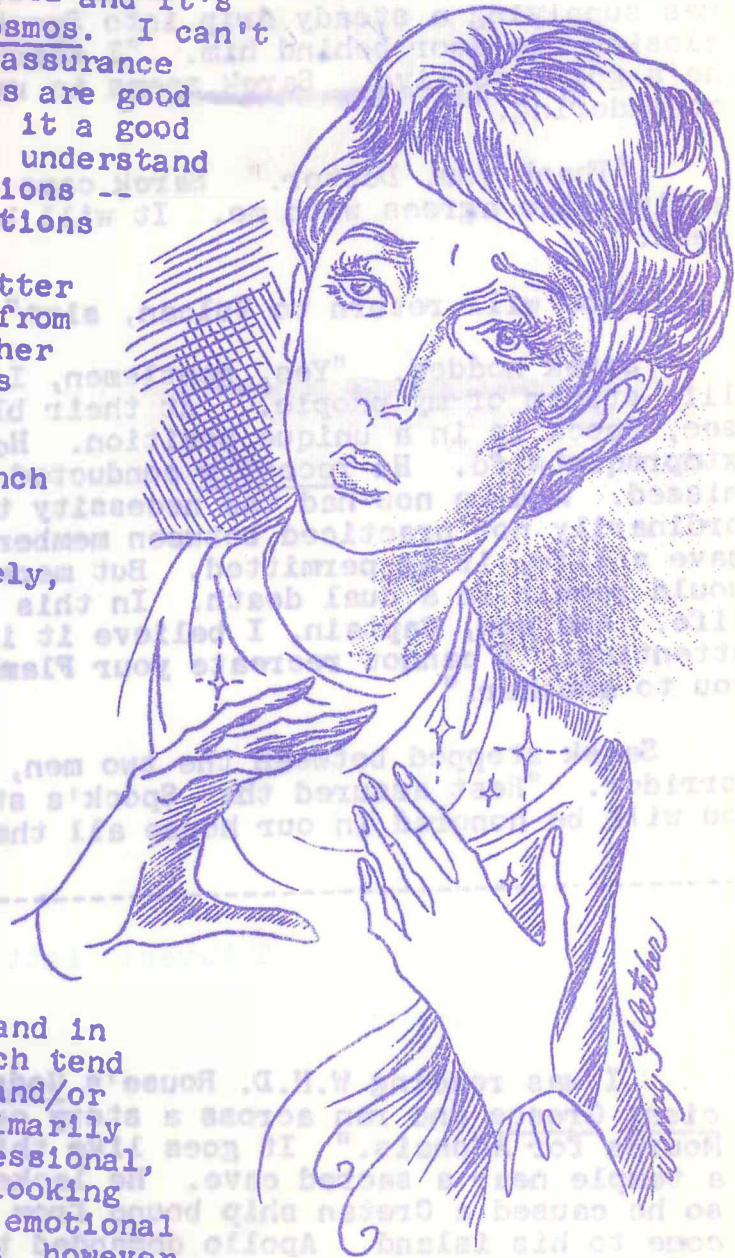


Gem

Star Trek is getting dubbed into French here in Montreal -- and it's called Patrouille du Cosmos. I can't give you authoritative assurance that the French versions are good translations -- I count it a good show when I can readily understand over half the conversations -- but secondary considerations lead me to believe that Star Trek is getting better than average treatment from the dubbers. Unlike other imports, all the credits are in French, not just the title, and both the American actors and French dubbers get cred. it. Scotty's and Chekov's dubbers have, respectively, Scottish and Russian accents -- touches I especially dig.

from Amanda Bankier

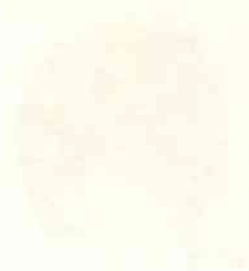
"The Rainbird" is the best of the Dorothy-and-Myfanwy series which I have seen. When you come down to it, poor McCoy has been grossly neglected as a human being, both in the show and in the fanzine stories, which tend to concentrate on Spock and/or Kirk. McCoy shows up primarily in his stereotyped, professional, psychiatric capacity of looking after Kirk's and Spock's emotional well-being. One suspects, however, that he is nearly as lonely as Spock, with resulting dramatic possibilities, which "The Rainbird" dealt with in a particularly sensitive and moving way (although certain remarks grated on my feminist sensibilities). Now if someone will deal with Uhura in the same way...?



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The Enterprise is a skateboard with delusions of grandeur.  
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1871



MARTA

