

B. JACKSON

T-Negative 26, March 1975, from Ruth Berman, 5620 Edgewater Boulevard, Minneapolis Minnesota 55417. Comes out irregularly.

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reasons why you may or may not deserve
this pearl with price:

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You paid 50¢/one or \$2/five; sub ends#

Back issues are 75¢/one or \$2/three.
At present, #'s 1-11, 19-25 are avail-
able. I'll be reprinting others later.
Available for \$1 is a booklet of T-N
artwork by Courtney, Faddis, Andres,
Austin, Bush, Coulson, Franke, Jain,
Lofthus, Oberdieck, Tollin, Barr, and a
couple photo-pages.

As I've just put out a one-shot, it
seems an appropriate time to mention
my non-ST publications. The one-shot
is "Rime Royal, poems in praise of mon-
archs," \$1 plus 25¢ postage, for the
Middle Kingdom of the Society for Crea-
tive Anachronism; nothing of particular
ST interest in it, but some well-known
ST fans contributed to it, including
Paula Smith of Menagerie, Sherna Burley
formerly of Spockanalia, and me. I
also have copies of SHsf Fanthologies
2 & 3 (articles about Holmes by sf
fans) for 50¢ each; #3 included Pris-
cilla Pollner's "Holmes was a Vulcan."
No is my general sf/fantasy zine, 35¢
each or \$1/three.

T'Pau reads Georgette Heyer...A.B.

A Capital Ship
by Anne Braude and Ruth Berman
(to the tune by the same title)

Oh, a capital ship for a stellar trip
Was the U.S.S. Enterprise:
No Klingon force could stay her course,
Despite repeated tries.
The men at the helm would overwhelm
Every alien attack.
Even NBC, though reluctantly,
Has had to bring it back.

CHORUS:

Then blow ye winds,* heigh-ho, *solar
Star Trekking we will go. winds,
We've got a fix on Star Base Six; of
So let the engines roar. course
Sing ho! for our gallant crew,
For Spock and the captain, too,
And out we tripped with a Roddenberry
script,
Where no man has gone before.

The captain sat on a stately plat-
form, with buttons at his hand,
And a good seatbelt was all he felt
Was lacking to command.
When the engineer let the good ship steer
With pitching aft and fore,
The gallant crew would get pitched, too,
All over the good ship's floor.

CHORUS:

The ship's first-mate, although sedate,
Would sometimes run amok
And attempt to harp on a lirpa sharp
(Which has no strings to pluck).
So they turned aside, or he would have
died
And went to his Vulcan home,
Where seldom is heard an emotional word,
And saber-tooth sehlats roam.

CHORUS:

Composed of sand was that favored land,
With druidlike rocks on high,
And chimes discordant sounded a mordant
Music to kill men by.
The bride she came, and her lover the same,
And T'Pau with officialdom's stamp,
But Stonn was stunned when T'Pring him
shunned
And chose Kirk for her champ.

CHORUS:

They wielded lirpas with deadly purpose,
They twined the dread ahn-woon,
And Spock was winning when Bones's sinning
Stopped him from what he was doin',
For the doctor cheated, and thus defeated
The seemingly fatal fight,
And they warped away on the same star-day
A few times faster than light.

CHORUS.

SLEEP NOT, DREAM NOT

BY C.R. Faddis

Sleep not, dream not; this bright day
Will not, cannot last for aye;
Bliss like thine is bought by years
Dark with torment and with tears.

-- Emily Brontë (1846)

Dr. McCoy bounced up and down on the balls of his feet, pleased with himself. "Well, Jim, how's it look?" he asked eagerly.

Captain Kirk blinked uncomprehendingly at the bright splashes of color along one entire wall of sickbay: animals and plants of many worlds made a curious cheerful two-dimensional garden. "This is what...this is why you wanted all that paint made up?" Kirk blurted, hands spread in amazement.

McCoy grinned. "You like it, don't you?"

Mr. Spock walked up to the wall to inspect the painting closer. He folded his arms and faced McCoy with a stony face. "Frankly, Doctor, I would not have believed you competent to produce this. I believe you missed your true profession...a house painter," Spock said with ultimate Vulcan blandness. "In addition, this decor is not starship regulation."



McCoy blew up. "Dammit, Spock, supergraphics happens to be a lost twentieth-century art!"

Spock raised his eyebrows. "Indeed? How unfortunate that you see fit to revive it."

"Now, listen, you rat-faced steeple-earred --"

"Bones, Bones," Kirk interrupted mildly, "it's just beautiful, and you can keep it here as long as you want; but tell me, why this, er, creative urge all of a sudden?"

McCoy regained his composure and folded his hands behind him. "Boredom, Jim."

"Boredom, Doctor?"

"Screaming yellow boredom, Mr. Spock!" McCoy snapped. "We've been star-charting for five months, now, and the biggest emergency we've had in Sick-bay was the cold that Kevin Riley caught while he was adjusting the computer's air-conditioner. And he's so damned healthy otherwise that we couldn't even make the cold last the whole week."

"Surely, Doctor, you could engage in more profitable pursuits than the gaudy, inaccurate depiction of Auralian gazelles and Gerroldian epiphytes."

McCoy thrust his chin right up to Spock's face. "You could come in for a face lift!" he growled.

Their argument was cut short by the bleep of the ship's intercom. "Bridge to Captain Kirk."

Kirk punched the button. "Kirk here."

"Sensors have picked up a ship in the star system we are approaching, sir," Chekov's voice reported.

"On our way," Kirk replied. He began to leave, turned instead to McCoy. "You can come with us to the bridge, Picasso, if you promise not to bring your brushes."

The main bridge viewscreen displayed a star with four planets, imperceptibly growing larger as the Enterprise approached it cautiously at sub-light speed.

"A white star, Captain, being charted now as NN4-P32," Spock reported

from his station. "Four planets and a pulverized asteroid belt. The second planet is Class M."

"What about the ship?" Kirk demanded.

"Orbiting the Class M planet, Captain," the Vulcan reported, then straightened suddenly and faced Kirk, eyebrows up. "It is a Klingon starship."

"I thought this was an unexplored sector!"

"Evidently, not to the Klingons," Spock said coolly. He turned back to his sensors.

"Yellow alert, Lieutenant," Kirk told Uhura.

"What would the Klingons be doing so far from their playground?" McCoy wondered aloud.

"Rumor has it they've actually been spending some time on research lately," Engineer Scott ventured. "But if they are, you can bet it's weapons-research and not star-charting."

"Most curious," Spock announced from the sensor board. "Energy emission appears to be minimal -- barely enough to maintain orbit and life-support systems." He looked up, his face unreadable. "I believe the ship is deserted."

Kirk scrambled over to Spock's station and studied the readout.

"Correction. There is one life-form reading aboard, but the readings are poor, as though the entity were shielded."

"A Klingon?" Kirk demanded.

"Impossible to tell."

Kirk went back to the command chair. "Hailing frequencies, Lieutenant."

"Open, sir."

"This is Captain James T. Kirk of the Federation starship Enterprise calling Klingon Empire starship. Are you in need of assistance? Please reply," Kirk said.

Dead silence.

Kirk scowled and repeated the message.

Nothing.

"Speculation, Spock?" he asked his First Officer.

"Insufficient data, Captain. How-

ever, the Klingons are not on the planet. Sensors report no sentient life forms."

Kirk's frown increased. "They're not on the planet, they're not on the ship. Except one. What about the other planets?"

"Negative, sir."

"No shuttlecraft?"

"Negative."

"Well," Kirk said, "We've tried knocking, now we'll have to go over and ask. Spock, Bones, Mr. Chekov, to the Transporter room."

McCoy shifted uneasily. "Do I have to go, Jim?"

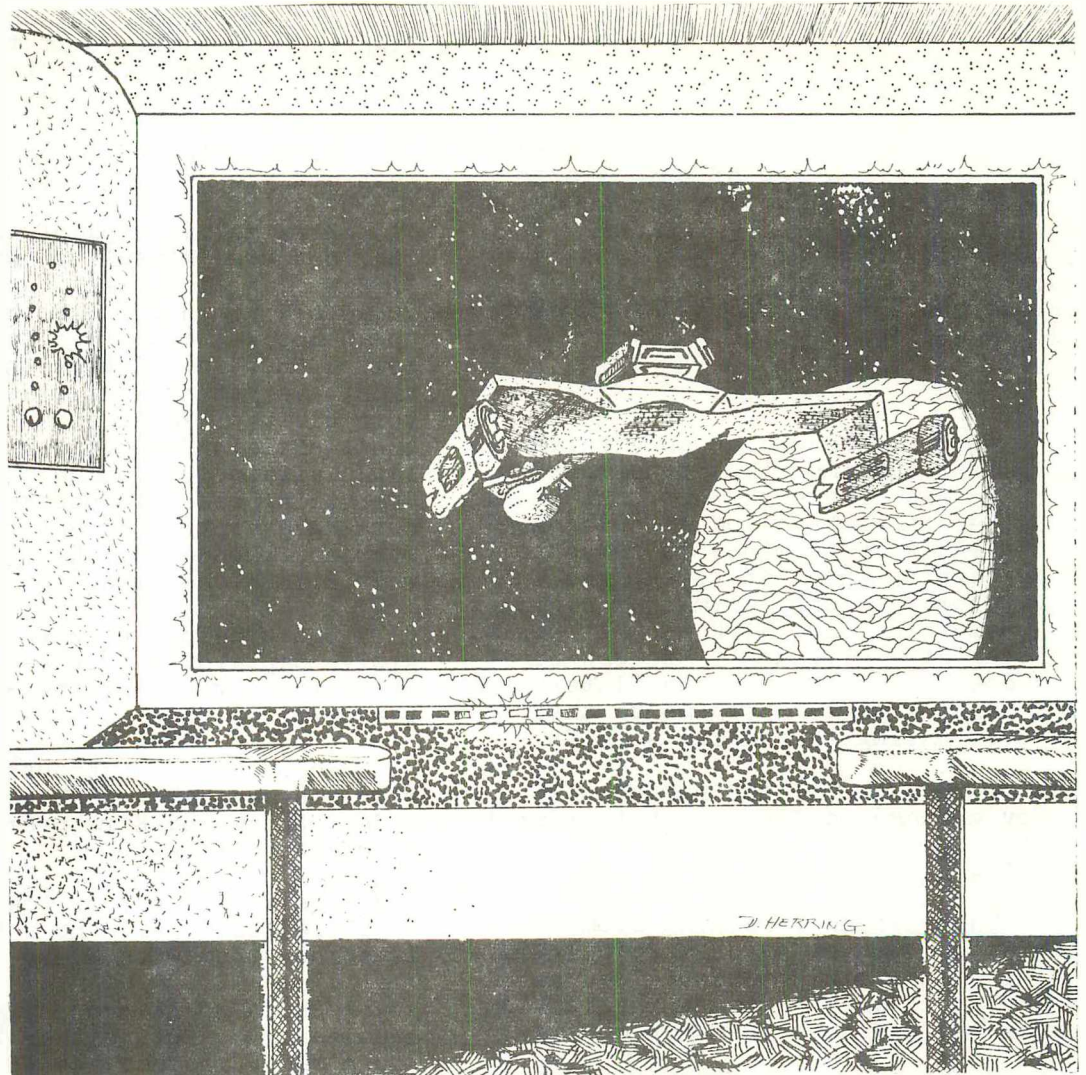
Kirk looked at him, surprised. "Yes, Life Sciences Officer, you have to go. -- I thought you were bored!"

"I was," McCoy groaned, "but Klingons give me hives."

The Enterprise boarding party materialized on the Klingon vessel's bridge amidst sprawled heaps of decomposing corpses. The stench was disgusting, and it was all they could do to keep from gagging.

McCoy knelt beside an officer's body and ran his medi-scanner over it. "Been dead almost a month," he reported. "This one was murdered. Skull fractured with something heavy."

Spock inspected the control panels with his tricorder. "The ship is completely functional, with the exception of the ship's library -- it has been deliberately erased," he reported. "I am recording the captain's log for decoding when we return to the Enterprise."



Kirk nodded and squatted beside McCoy, who was examining a particularly gruesome cadaver. "We've seen something like this before, Bones. What do you think?" he asked.

McCoy pursed his lips, frowning. "It's not anything like we've experienced, Jim. I checked right away. No unknown or even unusual microbes or chemicals. Maybe they just got into an argument. These look like straight-forward murders and suicides to me. I'll be sure after I run some autopsies."

"Suicides?"

"No doubt of it," the doctor said. "This man took good, old-fashioned cyanide. The vial is still here in his hand."

"The life-form readings are coming from a lower deck, sir," Chekov reported.

Kirk and McCoy rose. Kirk flipped

his communicator open. "Kirk to Enterprise."

"Scott here, sir."

"Beam over a biological retrieval team to pick up a few of the Klingon corpses on the bridge for Dr. McCoy. Contamination-security procedures, Scotty, and track us with the transporter; we're going to investigate the last survivor," he said. "Mr. Chekov, lead the way."

Ensign Chekov was young, very young, for the important functions to which he was frequently put, but he had qualities of courage and intelligence that Kirk was determined to force to early development. At times, the budding future starship commander seemed to resist forcing, but Kirk knew it was all a matter of environment. He saw to it that Chekov went on all the "interesting" landing party assignments that occurred during the ensign's shift.

At the fore of the party, now, Chekov glanced up from his tricorder in front of a heavy, sealed door. Several decaying Klingons lay at its foot.

"The reading is coming from behind this door," Chekov said, carefully ignoring the putrid corpses. Then he looked up in surprise as a realization struck him. "It is the ship's brig, sir!"

A perplexed look crossed Kirk's face. "Phasers on stun, gentlemen," he ordered, and gestured to Spock.

The Vulcan turned the palm switch on the lintel, and the door slid back into the wall silently. The light inside was dim. Kirk stepped inside the narrow opening and immediately collapsed to his knees, screaming, all his muscles quivering.

Spock and McCoy grabbed his legs and hauled him back into the corridor. McCoy waved his mediscan, checked its readings, and put it down. He took Kirk by the shoulders and shook him energetically. "Jim! Snap out of it! You're all right," McCoy yelled.

Kirk, eyes squeezed tightly shut in terror, trembled uncontrollably. McCoy glanced up at Spock in alarmed bewilderment, then cuffed the captain across the face with the back of his hand. "Get a hold of yourself, Captain Kirk!" the doctor demanded.

Kirk grimaced, but opened his eyes, fighting for sanity. It took several shuddering breaths, but then he shook his head and seemed recovered.

Spock gripped Kirk's arm. "Captain, what did you see?" he asked urgently.

Kirk grimaced painfully, still panting, not sure himself of what he had seen. "I saw...an old woman," he gasped. "Just...an old woman...looked human." He looked up at Spock's concerned face, calmed himself. "But when I took the second step inside, everything went black, something terrible -- like death -- like -- like I can't explain," he insisted. "All at once I was afraid. I couldn't control it. Everything else disappeared and there was nothing except -- except the fear." He stopped, thunderstruck. "Spock! Is that what killed the Klingons?"

Spock helped Kirk to his feet. "Possibly, Captain, but it seems unlikely. We are not experiencing those effects here in the corridor."

McCoy stood just outside the door with his medical tricorder pointing inside. Spock and Kirk peered over his shoulder.

Age peered out of the humanoid's face -- incredible age. And a dreadful sadness. It struck them with awe.

"She's no Klingon, Jim," McCoy said, needlessly. "But neither is she of any known race, and her age is in the order of thousands of our years."

Kirk forced himself to study her, though a part of him shuddered with the associative memory. She had not moved one frail-seeming muscle since he'd first seen her, as if she were catatonic. Her hair and skin were so pale as to be nearly transparent, an effect that was accentuated by her unadorned black caftan-like robe. She looked very human, but she had no visible ears, and her eyes were without color, like two glass globes. Four long fingers and two opposing thumbs terminated each hand. Age creases radiated across her skin like estuaries on a primeval tide-flat.

"She certainly looks harmless," Kirk said, swallowing. "Spock, what do you make of this?"

Spock, a man who lived by the laws of Logic, suggested the logical course. "Captain, we should attempt to communicate with the entity."

Chekov produced the portable Uni-

versal Translator, but Kirk passed it to Spock and gestured.

Spock adjusted the settings and spoke into the receiver. "We mean you no harm. We are members of the United Federation of Worlds. Is it permitted to communicate with you?"

The woman remained unmoving.

Spock reset the adjustments and tried again, without result, then shrugged and handed the Translator back to Chekov. "Either she cannot, or will not, communicate with us, Captain."

McCoy was thoughtful. "Jim, she's probably been here at least as long as the Klingons have been dead," the doctor said. "Her readings are very low by human standards, and I don't think her race differs physically from ours that significantly. If I'm right, she needs care and nourishment, and I'd like to take her to the Enterprise and see what we can do for her."

"How do you propose to care for a patient, Doctor, whom you cannot even approach?" Spock pointed out.

"How do we know she's even the source of the fear that Jim experienced?" McCoy countered. "She certainly doesn't look pleased about her situation."

"She may have been startled by our sudden appearance after she was alone for so long," Chekov added. "It could have been a reflex, something her species evolved for protection."

Kirk smiled grimly, studying the wiry ensign. "Are you offering yourself as an experimental animal?" Kirk asked.

Chekov blanched and swallowed, realizing he'd talked himself into trouble. "Yes, Captain," he said unsteadily.

Spock looked up from his tricorder. "Contraindicated, gentlemen. I must be the experimental subject. As a human, I shall experience the primal fear, but as a



Vulcan, I will be able to stand outside of it and logically probe its nature," he said reasonably. By his even tone, he might have been selecting his breakfast rather than offering to risk his sanity.

"I don't like it, Spock," Kirk told his friend. "But it is logical."

"Well, at least find something to tie around your waist, Spock, so we can pull you out if we have to," McCoy said.

Chekov looked around and then drew his phaser, cutting a length of overhead cable. Sparks flew from the shorted ends for a moment, and then the circuit-breakers cut the power. "This is part of the inter-ship communications system," Chekov assured them. "The Klingons won't be needing it."

Spock accepted the cable and looped an end around himself. Then he stepped into the room. "One step does not bring one into the influence," he said.

He took another step and stopped. His face showed no change from its normal stoicism, but his fingers curled into fists. "The influence begins here," Spock said tightly. "It is intense, a fascinating impression of impending doom. I can control it, however."

"Spock, come on back now," Kirk pleaded.

"Illogical, Captain," Spock said. "I cannot determine whether the humanoid is the source of this influence if I do not probe it farther."

He took another step, and his knuckles whitened with strain.

"The impressions become more insistent as one approaches the humanoid," he said impassively. "The fantasies are quite threatening. It is difficult to maintain mental discipline, to concentrate on reality and not to become engulfed by the fear."

"The prime computation indicates that the humanoid is indeed the source. However, if another step increases the intensity, all reasonable doubt should be removed."

"Spock, don't!" McCoy begged, but too late.

Spock took half of his intended step and went limp.

They pulled him into the hall by the cable, and McCoy examined him anxiously. The doctor was preparing a hypospray of stimulant when Spock opened his eyes and sat up without assistance.

"Astonishing," he said clearly.

"Spock, are you -- "

"Quite all right, Doctor," Spock assured him. He rose and undid the coil of conduit. "I was forced to eliminate all mental activity to avoid becoming overwhelmed by the influence, Captain," Spock apologized. "The Klingon prisoner exhibits a staggering, and quite undeniable, telepathic capacity. It is utterly unlike any I have ever experienced, and it is telepathic only in a very loose sense: there was no communication, but rather a selective elimination of conscious activity."

"Speak English, Spock!" McCoy grumbled.

"The experience does not readily reduce to simple components," Spock said evenly. "As plainly as I can explain it, the impressions of terror that I experienced were not projected thoughts. Rather, the influence of the humanoid suppressed the rational processes and external senses of normal consciousness, exposing the subject to personal and primal fears."

"She can make us have waking nightmares," Kirk said, awed.

"The analogy has some validity," Spock agreed. "However, her field of influence is limited. It is possible, but not likely, that her power was the cause of the mass death around us. I do not believe that a person caught in her sphere would be capable of the conscious effort required to commit murder or suicide."

Kirk rubbed his chin thoughtfully, then turned back and gazed through the brig doorway. "She's in here, alive, unharmed, and the Klingons are dead. She may not have caused it, but she might know what caused it," he mused. He turned to McCoy. "Could she have brought some disease aboard?"

McCoy shook his head. "I can't tell for sure without at least a blood test, and we'll never get close enough for that," he sighed. But the medical tricorder didn't find any unusual microbes in the Klingons.

"Let me take her back to the ship,

Jim. It's my opinion that she's disoriented and in shock, and once she's given good treatment and made comfortable, she'll drop her shield and give us some answers. There's no reason she can't: her vocal cords seem functional."

Kirk peered across the room at the ancient face etched with tragedy.
"Opinion, Spock?"

"It is an acceptable risk, Captain, but I would suggest confinement at this time. Perhaps our own brig could be made into a convalescence room. Should the humanoid harbor undetected weapons or disease, that deck could be most readily sealed off without impairing the function of the ship," he said.

"Bones?"

McCoy nodded. "She'll be easier to care for over there than here. It's a reasonable compromise. But, what I'd like to know is, how do I treat a patient I can't get within ten feet of?"

James Kirk, starship commander extraordinaire, was a reasonably young man with a mind made wise beyond his years. In the name of his Federation and within the realm of his intense sense of morality, he had been explorer, ambassador, warrior, scientist, observer, killer, healer, father of his crew, wed to his ship and its mission. He'd bled, wept, and sacrificed himself endlessly to his command, and if it made him seem sometimes callous, sometimes cruel, it also made him worthy of the uncommon loyalty he inspired in his crew. The Enterprise was a remarkable ship because of it, and survival often depended on it.



The captain sat in his briefing room, poring over the reports of the landing parties as they were projected on the table viewscreen. Spock's sensors had not been in error about the absence of sentient life on the Class M planet: the entire humanoid population lay dead and decomposing upon it.

Annoyed, Kirk slammed his hand down on the TERMINATE tab and looked around the table at the survey teams: Haines, Sulu, M'Benga, Katzu, Riley, Scott, and Uhura. They looked as tired as Kirk felt.

"All right," he said. "A Class M planet full of dead men. A neolithic culture, no technology worth mentioning. No unusual metals, minerals, drugs, or anything else to lure the Klingons. Tell me about these deaths on the planet, Dr. M'Benga. Did they die like the Klingons?"

M'Benga folded his hands tightly in front of him. "There was no evidence of violence, sir," he reported. "Nor of disease. It appeared to me as if everyone simply went home to bed and died."

"No survivors?"

"The old woman is of their race," M'Benga said. "No one else survived."

"Maybe the Klingons poisoned them," Scott suggested.

"No evidence of it," M'Benga insisted.

"All right, let's try a different tack," Kirk said. "What did the Klingons want?"

"The old woman," Uhura ventured. "She does have unusual telepathic powers."

"That's a possibility," the captain agreed. "But it's not in the Klingon line. I suspect, rather, that they were holding her hostage for something. For what?"

No one had a theory.

Kirk slammed his fist on the table. "You missed something!" he snapped. "I want to know what the Klingons wanted on that planet! I want to know what killed them! What killed the whole population below? Why is the old woman the only one left, and why did the Klingons have her aboard? You people are specialists. Get your teams together and run through your data again. Go back to the planet if necessary. But I don't want to see you again until you come up with some answers!"

The research team members suppressed their mutual groans and began to file out.

"Not you, Scotty," Kirk called. "I want to hear about the Klingon vessel."

Scott reclaimed his chair. "There were no surprises, Captain," he reported. "Their technology is par with our own. The really useful information would have

been in the computer banks, but they're as blank as a dead man's eyes. All bits set to zero. The only other source would be the Klingon Captain's log. Hae ye talked w/ Mr. Spock?"

Kirk nodded wearily. "He's been running what we have through decoding programs for three days, but the log was sabotaged, probably by the captain himself. I'd probably have done the same, if I'd been in his condition. All we have of it are bits and pieces."

"Negative, gentlemen," Spock's voice announced from behind them. The Vulcan took a chair and punched commands into the tabletop viewscreen. "We now have some small amount of data from the Klingon log," he explained. He began to read from the screen. "An entry dated 45 days ago: 'The Nal is aboard.' Dated 43 days ago: 'Nal uncooperative...unable to coerce...unusual restlessness.' Dated 41 days ago: 'Uncontrollable hostilities...depression...two suicides...tranquillizers...Nal unapproachable.'"

"There are similar entries, Captain, but I believe these samples sufficient to deduce the sequence of events. The Klingons, for unspecified reasons, kidnapped the Nal -- the humanoid now residing in our brig -- probably with the intention of extorting some item or information from either the Nal or her people. Within two days, symptoms of agitation appeared among the Klingon crew. In another two days, direct violence had broken out. At about that time, the Nal erected her emotional barrier, which surrounds her still."

"The last entry made in the captain's log occurred on the seventh day after the abduction of the Nal. It consists of paranoid gibberish, obviously the ravings of an acutely disoriented mind."

"Captain, it is my strong suspicion that the Nal used some power to destroy the Klingons. She may be as great a danger to us."

"I thought you said her influence had definite physical limits," Kirk said worriedly.

"Indeed, Captain, but she is not now in the identical condition in which she might have initiated the power. She is weaker."

Scott shifted, agitated, in his seat. "Wait a minute, Mr. Spock," he interrupted, "you yourself said that a person in the auld lady's sphere couldn't be competent to kill himself, let alone another."

"Correct, but consider that we understand only the barest structure of the nature of her power. We don't know what the scope of her influence would be in full health. Neither can we guess what the intensity would be. Her control could have considerable subtlety."

The captain massaged his forehead, concentrating. "Have -- have any symptoms of restlessness been occurring on the Enterprise, anything unusual?" he asked.

"Felks are a wee bit tired, Captain," Scott admitted, "but I've no seen anything I'd describe as hostile. After all, we've gotten little enough sleep over this affair. It's decidedly creepy, sir."

"May I suggest, Captain, that we consult the one person who should know of such things?" Spock said.

Doctor Leonard McCoy was a man with his fingers on the heartbeat of the Enterprise. He was possibly the only person on the ship who knew everyone by name. He made a point of it, since he was required to exhaustively examine each new crewmember as he or she was assigned to the ship. McCoy was the Enterprise's internal ambassador, chief surgeon, and psychiatric counselor. He kept the peace, more than anyone, between some 430+ persons of wildly divergent cultural backgrounds and personalities, all of whom were jammed together in the confines of the starship for indefinite but often lengthy periods of time. He was a man with a yoke of responsibility as great as or greater than the captain's. McCoy met it with a consistent humanity. He relieved the tension by tipping a little brandy, breeding roses in the ship's herbarium, and needling his favorite Vulcan. But now he was weary, and he had no humor for games. He rubbed the back of his neck tiredly and gestured at the stack of scrawled notes on his desk.

"Three fist-fights, one hair-pulling incident, and twelve crying-jags in one day," he told Kirk and Spock.

"I guess I have been working them a little hard lately," Kirk said hopefully.

"Nonsense. It's just that nobody's been able to get a decent night's sleep, not even a nap. I've been doling out tranquilizers and sleeping pills like cotton candy. How've you been sleeping?"

"Not very well, come to think of it," Kirk admitted. "But I've had a lot on my mind."

"Uh huh. Do you really sleep?"

"Well, I doze...."

"And then you toss and turn, you can't get comfortable, you can't turn off your mind. If you do sleep, you wake up almost immediately, and you never feel rested. Is that how it goes?" McCoy asked. "How about you, Spock?"

"I have not endeavored to sleep since we discovered the Klingon vessel," Spock said. "I have been occupied with various immediate problems."

McCoy waved his arm in disgust. "Then you're the only one who hasn't had any symptoms...."

"I did not say that, Doctor!" Spock said sharply.

McCoy and Kirk gaped at him.

"Specify," Kirk demanded.

"My patience and my ability to concentrate are deteriorating at a rate not attributable to a normal lack of rest," the Vulcan said evenly.

McCoy waved Kirk and Spock to sit. He took another chair, blinking his eyes wearily, then leaned forward, studying the First Officer. "Spock, do Vulcans dream?" he asked.

Spock's normally blank face registered surprise. "Vulcans...experience...subconscious fantasy during sleep," Spock admitted. "It is not a voluntary activity."

"Nor for our species," McCoy said. "Hnnnnnn...."

"Bones!" Kirk cried. "What are you driving at?"

McCoy shook his head. "I'm so tired I'm not sure I'm thinking straight. But I've got a hunch, or the beginning of a hunch. Let me work on it awhile."

"By the way, while you're here, those tapes are my autopsy reports on the Klingon cadavers."

Kirk waved them away. "Just tell me the gist of it," he pleaded.

"Normal, healthy dead Klingons," the doctor grinned, "except for one thing: their bloodstreams were saturated with tranquilizing drugs -- enough to turn a whole fleet of Klingons into milksops. They shouldn't have been capable of biting their nails, let alone suicide or murder."

Spock might have frowned. "Permit me to change the subject for the moment," he said. "What is the status of the patient in the brig?"

McCoy sighed. "She's getting weaker by the hour. She won't eat anything we offer her. She doesn't move. And everytime we try to rig something to take a long-range blood sample, it's nightmare time. She can extend her telepathic range for a few moments, but it has weakened her so much each time that I've given up on getting blood for the time being. Her shield range has diminished to a little over nine feet, but that's ninety light-years for an intruder."

"Have you given thought to using a robot to procure the blood sample?" Spock asked.

McCoy had an instinctive distrust of things mechanical. "We want to cure her, not scare her to death!" he protested. "I still think we could communicate with her if we could get through that barrier. It's too bad we don't have a full-blooded Vulcan."

Spock went white. He rose without a sound and left through the corridor door.

Kirk swung on McCoy. "That was uncalled for, Doctor!"

McCoy dropped his head in his hand. "My God, who'd have thought -- ? Well, we're all out of sorts. I didn't mean it the way it came out," McCoy explained contritely.

Kirk stood, color rising in his face. He pointed at McCoy, his finger shaking with rage, then gestured at the door through which Spock had disappeared. "You apologize to Commander Spock!" he roared.

"Well, of course I will," McCoy said affably.

Kirk reached across the table and collared McCoy, pulling him up. "Right now, Mister!" he bellowed.

Amazed and a little frightened, McCoy pulled Kirk's hand away. "Jim!" he exclaimed anxiously.

Kirk unclenched his hand and stared at it, his face blank. Then he groaned and dropped into the chair, shaking his head miserably.

McCoy grabbed for his mediscan and ran it over Kirk.

"Bones -- I -- "

"Shhhhhh," McCoy urged. "Jim, you're exhausted. I've had luck dispensing sleeping pills so far; I'm going to prescribe some for you."

"I know, I know," McCoy interrupted before Kirk could protest, "but at the moment, Spock is still in better shape than you are. Do you want to go back up to the bridge and blow up at someone else?"

Kirk managed a grim smile, accepting the two pills McCoy handed to him. "Doctor's orders?" the captain asked resignedly.

"Right now," the doctor said.

McCoy gestured, and the security guard nullified the brig's force-field door long enough for the doctor to enter. Nurse Chapel rose as he came in, and McCoy waved her back to her chair, gazing across the room to the corner where the Nal sat. "Has she moved?" he asked.

Christine sighed impatiently. "No, Doctor. No change. Nothing at all for the three hours I've been sitting here," she said tightly.

McCoy took his gaze from the Nal long enough to study his head nurse. He saw the lines of fatigue in her shoulders, and reached across to press her arm comfortingly. "You're worn out, Christine," he consoled. "Would you like to hit the sack for a few hours? You should take two of the synthacodins and get some sleep."

Christine squared her shoulders. "I'm all right. Doctor, thank you."

McCoy smiled to himself. Christine was a trooper. "Well, get on out of here, you've been bored long enough," he told her with mock gruffness. He noticed how the tranquilizers he'd downed had improved his sense of humor. But it had taken such a strong dose, he thought.

Chapel hadn't moved from her post. "I have another hour before I'm due to be relieved," she told him.

"I'm relieving you," McCoy said in his best "no nonsense" voice. "When you get upstairs, see Dr. Brinkerhoff for your tranquilizer shot. The whole crew is getting them. Captain's orders."

Christine rose obediently, stretching unobtrusively. "I'll go and help out," she said.

"Good," McCoy said. "Me and the grandmother here have some talking to do."

The nurse smiled and signaled for the force-field to be lifted. McCoy followed her to the doorway.

"You men wander on down the hall a way," he told the guards. "Not too far to worry Mr. Spock, but far enough to give this room some privacy."

When they were out of sight, McCoy turned and looked at the Nal in silence. If possible, she seemed thinner, frailer, her sagging face more mournful. She sat in the exact pose in which they'd discovered her.

McCoy glanced at the floor, scrutinizing the congruent arcing chalk lines that marked the slowly receding sphere of her influence. He looked up at her again. "You're killing yourself; you know that, don't you?" he said aloud.

No response.

McCoy noticed the long-handled instrument that Scotty had rigged for the purpose of taking a blood sample over a thirteen-foot span. It still stood inside the door where its last unsuccessful operator had put it. "I'll bet no one has tried to use this for a while," McCoy said conversationally. "No? It won't hurt a bit, I assure you. At least not very much and only for a second. You'll let me take a few drops, won't you? It could help us both."

He hefted the unwieldy poles and cables, and positioned himself to ease the rig, with its slapshot and test-tube end, into the range of her power. He began, by inches, to push it toward her, soothing her with conversation as he worked.

"There's a Translator installed above you, you could talk to us anytime you like, you know," he told her. "We aren't like the Klingons, we don't want to take anything from you. We'd like to help you, if you'd let us."

The end of the pole was a mere yard from her exposed arm. McCoy forced himself to move it by micrometers. Slowly, gently, without threatening motions....

"You're causing a great deal of discomfort to our crew," he told her. "I don't think you mean to, or you wouldn't if you knew how we feel about Klingons."

A foot to go!

"We have a pretty certain picture of what you did to the Klingons now," he droned. "Not that we blame you. Not after they brought death to your people...."

McCoy had an instant's impression of an hysterical wail, a disconsolate pain, a transparent face wiped clean of age but twisted in unspeakable grief. Something screamed "NO!" in his mind, and the black nightmare swallowed him.

Spock and M'Benga were kneeling above him when McCoy came back to himself. He blinked, savoring the return to familiar, solid realities.

"You should be censured for attempting such a dangerous task in solitude, Doctor," Spock was saying. "We had difficulty reviving you."

McCoy raised his tingling fingers, saw blood at his palm where his nails had bitten in. He stilled his trembling with an effort. "So censure me, Spock," he said unsteadily. "I got within inches of her. Inches! I'd have made it, too, except that I said the wrong thing at the crucial moment."

Spock helped him up. "That is illogical," the Vulcan told him.

"No, I'm not mad yet," McCoy insisted. "I was talking to her, and she was listening! If she hadn't been, Spock I'd never have gotten the slapshot more than a few feet into the field, and you know it. But I was telling her about how we didn't blame her for what she did to the Klingons, especially after what they did to her people, and that upset her again. That's when she zapped me."

"We do not know that the Klingons did anything to her people," Spock reminded him.

"That's beside the point," McCoy said. "I want another shot at her."

Spock regarded McCoy as he would have studied a rutting Gehrian cerberus. He motioned for the doctor to follow him down the hall and into a storage cabin. Inside, he turned and faced McCoy. "You believe that you have communicated with the Nal?"

McCoy nodded vigorously. "In addition, she can change her age, or at least her apparent age. For a brief moment before the nightmares took me, I saw her as she is, or thinks of herself as being. She was youthful! Even beautiful. And she screamed 'NO' at me."

Spock's eyes narrowed as he studied McCoy. He was silent for a long time. "Is that all, Doctor?" he said finally.

McCoy groaned. "I know what it sounds like, Spock, and you wouldn't be Spock if you didn't think it, but I know what I saw," he said.

"You are responding to intuition, Doctor, not to logic," the Vulcan told him solemnly.

"Mr. Spock," McCoy said icily, "I have earned seven degrees in Psychology, and I am a ranking Starfleet physician with sixteen years of starship experience. If I am 'responding to intuition,' then it's some of the damdest finest medical intuition that you're likely to find!"

Spock's eyebrows tilted up in surprise. "I hope conceit is not a criterion of your profession, Doctor," he said levelly. "However, if you find it valuable to hold one-sided conversations with a cataleptic, you have my permission to continue, so long as you do not endanger yourself as you have by attempting to enter her sphere of influence."

"Spock, listen to me. The Nal's condition is worsening. Her power is weakening. You might be able to get through to her now. I've seen you accomplish a proximity mind-meld before -- you wouldn't have to get inside her field," McCoy argued. "We might be able to save her life. Or our own. It's worth the risk!"

Spock was thoughtful. "Your suggestion is intriguing," he admitted. "However, the captain is in drugged sleep, and I cannot relinquish command to make an attempt. You will have to discuss the matter with Jim when he awakes."

McCoy scowled. "That won't be for another eighteen hours, with any luck," he complained, "and by then you will be due to take some pills and sleep yourself."

"I am not in need of sleep," Spock said.

"You will be."

"And yourself, Doctor?"

"I'm an old hand at catnapping."

McCoy made his rounds, checking on the rising tranquilizer doses necessary to maintain reasonable stability; stopping at Kirk's cabin to assure himself that the captain had indeed taken the sleeping pills; and then he found himself back at the brig.

This time, when the nurse left, the security guards wouldn't budge: Spock's orders. McCoy had them turn on the sound disrupter, but told them they were welcome to watch.

For long minutes, he gazed across the room at the waxen form, still motionless in the corner. "I'm sorry about... reminding you about your people," he told her. "I didn't realize how much it affected you. I wasn't even sure you knew."

He noticed that a new chalkline arced across the floor six inches inside the last one he'd seen.

"I wish you'd eat or drink something," he said. "I know that you do eat and drink. I assure you that what we've offered you is compatible with your diet."

He didn't mention that he'd gotten that data from Dr. M'Benga's autopsies of the Nal's dead people.

Silence.

"We'd like to know why the Klingons abducted you. Not because we want to pick up where they left off. It's just that we could be in a terrible position trying to explain to the Klingon government that we found one of their starships full of dead men; they're going to think we killed them if we don't have some good, hard evidence. It could lead to war. Billions of deaths."

"Do you know how I feel about death? I'm a physician, I've seen more death in my lifetime than most men would see in a dozen. It still sickens me. It hurts me, right here," he said, spreading his fingers over his heart. "I feel helpless, a real despair, a little like what you're feeling. But I survive it. I have to, to be able to help the living. I'd try to help you if you'd let me. You could at least talk to me."

The Nal sat like a plaster statue, seeming devoid of life. McCoy frowned and rubbed his eyes. "My tranquilizer dose is wearing off," he muttered. "Maybe Spock is right, maybe I'm off my nut thinking that you understand my babbling."

He rose to go.

The waxy-pale crone's features shifted and flowed before his eyes. "WAIT!" a voice cried inside McCoy's head.

He froze, waiting. For a moment, he saw the sad-faced girl again, but ripples of distortion confused his brain with unseeable colors. He shook his head and the vision disintegrated.

Am I going mad? he wondered. He stumbled to the doorway. The two security guards let him out.

"Did you see it?" McCoy demanded. "Were you watching?"

The crewmen shook their heads, mortified. "We didn't see anything unusual, sir," they told him.

McCoy groaned, left without another word. He retrieved the duty nurse and went up to Sickbay. "Anything new?" he asked Dr. Brinkerhoff.

Brinkerhoff grimaced and pointed wordlessly into the Sickbay ward. McCoy knew what he was going to see before he saw it: a room filled with the gamut of unarmed-combat injuries.

He walked up to Lt. Sulu, who was getting his blackened eye treated. "Sulu! Run into a door?" he demanded.

"No, sir," Sulu said tightly.

"That's right, no swinging doors on this ship. Well, what did you run in to?"

Nurse Chapel, who was manufacturing an eyepatch from a roll of bandaging, couldn't suppress a giggle.

"Come, now, Lieutenant," McCoy prodded. "I've got to fill out a report; I need the facts. What happened to your eye?"

Sulu flushed. "Lieutenant Uhura happened to it, sir," he bristled.

Christine's giggle was echoed around the room. McCoy found that he couldn't keep a straight face either. He put a hand out to clap Sulu on the back, and felt himself grabbed and tossed head over heels at the other patients. He landed with a jarring crash that sent his brain reeling. Dimly, he heard a fist-fight raging. By the time he was helped to his feet, Sulu had been felled by Christine's faithful hypospray.

"How much did you give him?" McCoy groaned, rubbing his scalp.

"Five cc's of synthacodin," Christine said unsteadily. "Are you hurt, Doctor?"

"No, I'm all right," he insisted, "but better strap Sulu onto a bed and keep an eye on him, Nurse." He looked around at the other patients. "Anyone else who can't hang onto his sense of humor will get the same thing," he warned.

He strode into his office and took out his cache of brandy, decided against it. Not with tranquilizers. He noticed that his hands were trembling; he'd soon be useless as a surgeon. His staff seemed about to drop from exhaustion. I feel like hell myself, he admitted.

Wearily, he reached across his desk to drop a tape cartridge into his viewscreen: M'Benga's reports on the autopiles from the planet. I need more data before I try again, he thought. After a moment, he popped M'Benga's report out of the viewer and rummaged around until he found the cartridge he'd ordered from the medical library. He pushed it into the viewer's slot and wrinkled his brow with intense concentration as the title appeared: A Treatise on Vulcan Techniques of Emotional Suppression.

When James Kirk strode back on to the bridge of his ship after twenty hours of enforced sleep, he felt no better for it. That portion of his crew still on their feet had either a dreary, lackluster look of tranquilization, or the taut, haunted look of long strained self-control. Some thirty crewmembers were being confined for their own protection. And Spock and McCoy were arguing lustily on the bridge.

Spock rose smoothly from the command chair as soon as he saw Kirk, forcing a truce in the brushfire, but Kirk saw the flush across McCoy's face, the tightlipped stoniness of Spock's. Kirk suddenly realized he was getting a terrific headache.

"Jim!" McCoy said with false cheerfulness. "How do you feel?"

Kirk took the command chair, waved McCoy to shut up. "Never mind me," he growled, "what's going on with you two?"

Spock pulled himself very straight, staring across the room with his hands behind his back, staring at nothing in particular. "We were having a disagreement, Captain," he said stiffly.

"I could see that," Kirk said impatiently. "McCoy?"

"We were discussing my desire to attempt to communicate with the Nal, Captain," McCoy said formally.

"Has she been talking?"

"Negative, Captain," Spock answered. "However, Dr. McCoy claims to have received privileged 'impressions' of the Nal's desire to communicate. He believes that he can achieve that communication through physical contact, despite the continued potency of the Nal's mind-seizing field. I was attempting to explain the illogic of such an attempt to the doctor when --"

Kirk swung on McCoy. "You want to just walk into that thing?" he demanded.

"Jim, I think I could do it. Or Spock could," McCoy pleaded. "She's a lot weaker now."

"Dr. McCoy was drawn into the field once while you were sleeping, Captain," Spock reported. "Dr. M'Benga resuscitated him only with the greatest effort."

"She's not that strong anymore, Spock! And she knows me now," McCoy snapped.

"You suffered palpitations of the heart, Doctor," Spock barked back. "You nearly died."

"Everybody on this ship is going to die if we don't start getting some answers soon," McCoy sputtered angrily.

"We are getting answers!" Spock roared.

Kirk grabbed both of them by their nearest arms. "That will be enough!" he bellowed. "Doctor, get off my bridge. And I expressly forbid you to try entering that mind-field. Do you hear me, McCoy?"

McCoy stood fuming for a moment, then stomped into the turbo-lift without a word.

Kirk slumped back into the chair.

"Captain, Dr. McCoy's idea is not without merit," Spock said in his normal voice, "but he is not the proper subject for it. I --"

Kirk waved Spock to silence. "You're in no shape for it, either, Mister. Besides, I need you here," the captain ordered. "You said you were getting answers. I want to hear them."

Spock nodded, returning to his library terminal. "The display coming on to the main screen is a vector analysis of the positions of the deceased humanoids on the Nal's planet."

Kirk squinted up at a Mercator's projection of the planet's surface, with tiny elongated specks spread across it, all aligned toward a central point. It reminded Kirk of patterns of iron filings delineating fields of force around a magnet.

"Because of the occurrence of deaths primarily inside of dwellings, the first landing party surveys failed to discern this peculiar arrangement of corpses. All vectors lead to a single point," Spock said. "Here."

The map dissolved into a scene with a minaret-like building at center.

"The Nal's people developed a written language with many variants of one mother tongue," the Vulcan continued. "A wealth of writing was found on the walls of this central place, which seems to have been the primary seat of political or religious power."

"Have you deciphered the language?" Kirk asked.

"The computer has been unable to do so thus far, but I expect an approximate translation will be forthcoming within 48 hours. We should then have sufficient data to deduce the answers to our most pressing questions."

Kirk straightened with interest. "You think the writing can tell us who the Nal is, or what the Klingons wanted?" Kirk said incredulously.

Spock rose from his library viewer. "It is likely that it can even explain what happened to the Klingons and the natives," he said.

"But do we have 48 hours?" Kirk groaned. He looked around the bridge at the skeleton crew: an inexperienced yeoman at the communications board, a deathly-ill looking Chekov at the helm, no one at Navigation, Lt. Riley with glazed drugged eyes at the Engineering panels. Even Spock's blank face was only a facade of coolness. Kirk waved for Spock to approach.

"It may be necessary to transport the Nal off of the ship," Kirk said quietly.

"It is Dr. McCoy's opinion that in her weakened condition, the Nal could not survive another such move, and I am forced to agree. In addition, we have no guarantee that her effect upon ourselves would diminish over distance," the Vulcan said.

"Then you don't think it would be advantageous to transport the crew down to the planet either?"

Spock's eyes narrowed. "Until we have more data, we cannot be certain, but I am doubtful. The Nal's people died while she was confined in the orbiting Klingon ship," he reminded, "several thousand kilometers above the planet's surface."

Kirk looked up in puzzlement. "You think the Nal killed her own people?" he asked.

"Let us say, sir, that I have a strong suspicion that she was the agent, however unwilling."

Kirk forced himself up on wobbly legs and stared through the eyes of the viewscreen at the slowly revolving cloud-streaked planet below. "We may have to destroy the Nal in order to survive ourselves," he said, agnast at the realization. "It's a choice we can't make."

"Indeed, Captain," Spock said gravely, "it may come, finally, to that."

McCoy sat musing in a turned-around chair in the brig, with his body bent over to rest his arms on the chair back. The chalk-marks on the floor were like the ripples of a stone cast in a stream, but approaching rather than receding from their source. It was a little over six feet now to the Nal from the innermost chalked arc.

The Nal sat as she had been sitting, but a slow change had come over her face in the last hours, and McCoy knew the look better than anyone: her grief-frozen expression had become tempered with a new pain, and it was plainly physical. She was beginning to die.

McCoy continued to stare at her in miserable silence. He could not help her, not if he couldn't touch her, and Kirk had forbidden him to try. The captain had no actual legal authority to prohibit a ship's physician from attending any patient, but McCoy did not relish the idea of defying Kirk. What was more, he knew that Spock was right -- the odds of reaching the Nal through her terrifying barrier, without becoming insane or deceased, were extremely small. And if he did make it, what assurance did he have that there would be anything that he could do for her? How could he know that she wouldn't kill him if he touched her? But the thought that plagued McCoy most was the realization that her death would be the best thing for the ship. The idea galled him.

"I don't want you to die!" he snapped at her.

"Sickbay to Dr. McCoy," a voice demanded from the intercom.

McCoy stood up stiffly and activated the vidscreen that had been temporarily installed in the brig. Nurse Chapel's face appeared on it.

"Yes, what is it, Christine?"

"Theda Yamashita was just brought to Sickbay, Doctor. She slashed her wrists," Christine said, her face brimming with sympathy. "She's dead. I thought you'd want to know."

McCoy moaned and slapped the off switch, letting himself sag against the wall. Poor Theda! he thought, remembering her gentle, trusting face. He'd been treating her for depression for six months since the death of her husband, an astrophysicist, in the Tiepolo I affair. I thought she was adjusting, but I should have known she'd be the first to suicide.

A sudden sound from behind him spun McCoy around. The Nal had collapsed to the floor. McCoy froze in astonishment as her appearance shifted before his eyes: young! old! young! She raised her agonized face to him.

"Medical team to the brig!" McCoy yelled into the intercom. He shouldered his medikit, then waved the anxious security guards back to their posts and stood at the innermost chalked semicircle, thinking furiously.

"Let down your barrier!" he pleaded with her.

Can not..., the voice in his mind screamed. Help -- me -- !

"All right," McCoy decided. "All right! I'll try, God help me."

He hesitated, striving for the inner serenity that the Vulcan techniques required. His mind was too filled with anxiety. Concentrate, dammit, he told himself. There is no fear. Fear is the mind-killer. Fear is the little-death. It was the litany from one of his favorite novels, and it seemed the right words here. He felt himself detaching himself logically from his emotions. His own surprise at his success almost undid it.

I can do this, he insisted. I can do it, for at least a little while.

He stepped into the nightmare, thinking he knew now what to expect, but it was a fresh terror. Fear is the mind-killer, he concentrated, filled with cold desperation. He could see her hand raised to him, two feet from his own out-stretched fingers. He inched himself forward, forgetting everything except the need to join hands. Twelve inches, ten.

A flurry of noise and voices invaded his concentration. Startled, his fragile mental barricade disintegrated. The madness pounced on him.

One of the security guards who had rushed into the brig hit the vidscreen button. "Security to Captain Kirk!" the man yelled.

Spock and Kirk stood outside the brig door and gazed solemnly at the tableau of McCoy's and the Nal's crumpled forms within the mind-seizing field. They lay as though dead, McCoy's fingers gripped tightly in the Nal's, forming a grotesque frozen pas de deux.

M'Benga finished his long-range medical scan of McCoy. "Dr. McCoy's life readings are now identical to the Nal's," he reported, "but he doesn't seem to be caught in the mind-field anymore. I suspect they're in some telepathic rapport and she's protecting him."

Spock studied the scene grimly. "I cannot comprehend how a person of McCoy's emotionalism could cross that field without becoming deranged," he said.

"I knew he was going to try it," Kirk berated himself. "I should have taken measures to prevent it."

M'Benga shook his head, his kind face showing anguish. "I doubt if you could have stopped him, Captain," he said. "He's been studying the Vulcan emotional suppression tapes for two days; he must have been planning this, or at least expecting to have to try it."

Spock's sober expression dissolved into astonishment, but before he could comment, a groan from McCoy interrupted.

As they watched, the doctor's form stirred, and he sat up shakily, his hand still entwined in the Nal's. He looked dazed.

Kirk opened his mouth to call, but Spock shushed him, watching intently.

McCoy leaned over and helped the Nal to sit up, supporting her weight against him. He reached over with his free hand and swept her hair from her eyes, patted her head consolingly. He scrutinized her face intently, and the Nal slipped her fingers from his, brushing gently up his palm until her hand encircled his wrist. He closed his own fingers around her wrist, never taking his eyes from her.

Kirk stirred uncomfortably at witnessing what was, without question, an intimate personal encounter.

Abruptly, the doctor flinched, his appearance of profound serenity washed out with pain. He reeled with its intensity.

Kirk could not contain himself. "Bones!" he cried. "What is it?"

McCoy heard his captain's voice as though through a thicket of soft, ferny foliage that damped out most sound. The attack was passing; he could feel the Nal's aspm of pain diminishing, subduing his own. He concentrated on the memory of the pain, attempting to dissect it, to discern its organic origin.

Mental impressions bombarded him, and he tried to shut them out, but the Nal's anxiety was demanding. You must let me think my own thoughts, he pleaded gently, and he felt her withdraw a little.

I brought my medikit, he reminded himself. He found his mediscan and switched it on, trying to make sense of the readings that seemed to shimmer before his eyes through desert heat waves. What he saw nearly brought panic. Moving with frustrating slowness, he managed to turn the scanner's beam on himself. It confirmed his fear.

I've got it too!

As soon as McCoy had announced, in struggling, broken sentences, that he had contracted an unknown disease from the Nal, Kirk had ordered the brig sealed off, waiting only to receive the vital blood samples that McCoy managed to roll into the reach of the medical team.

Now, hours later, Kirk sat alone in his briefing room, trying to piece together the answers he needed to save his crew. Programs that had been written by the Federation's greatest linguistic theorists were beginning to puzzle out the language of the minaret and hint at its secrets.

Kirk had thought it odd, before, that the planet's neolithic culture provided none of the usual outlets for recreation: no games, no athletic facilities, no theatres, no houses of pleasure, no pets, no decoration -- no obvious artifacts that could be used for entertainment or leisure. Now, one astonishing clue explained this remarkable deficiency: the primary entertainment on the Nal's planet was dreaming. Her people spent every moment of leisure in sleep, probably spending two-thirds of their lives in sub-conscious revelry, and bothering to awaken only long enough to participate in certain necessary activities such as agriculture, tool-making, shelter-building, the propagation of the race, and the like.

At the nexus of the planet-wide dreaming was a Controller, one who, by genetic selection and an exclusive fetal diet, was the creator and regulator of everyone's dreams: the Nal!

Kirk turned and glanced across the room at the row of vidscreens, three of which silently relayed the activities of three rooms: the bridge, the brig, and the medical lab. He rose and went to the screen revealing the lab, punching

the audio button. "Mr. Spock, I need a minute of your time," he called.

Spock put down whatever he'd been working on and came over to the screen. "Yes, Captain?"

"How's it coming?" Kirk asked worriedly.

"We are still running the blood analyses," Spock reported.

Kirk sighed, then pursued his original questions. "The Nal was the planet's Dream-Maker of sorts," he told Spock's image. "Do you think that she could prevent someone from dreaming too?"

Spock put up a finger to request waiting, and bent over the library-computer's terminal. In another minute, he straightened and faced Kirk with a grim look. "I believe that you have uncovered the substance of Dr. McCoy's 'hunch'," he said. "I scanned the medical library for references pertaining to cessation of dreaming. The phenomenon of dreaming is well-researched, but the condition of not dreaming is not well understood, there having been little contemporary experimentation in it. What is known indicates that a forced curtailment of dreaming has adverse effects on conscious activity: irritability, fatigue, decrease in ability to perform complex mental or physical tasks, depression, and a multitude of psychosomatic symptoms, including inability to sleep despite exhaustion."

"That's it, Spock!" Kirk laughed. "We found it! She stopped our dreams."

Spock looked thoughtful. "To understand the cause is not a counteraction of the effect," he warned. "We can not make ourselves dream; we can hardly achieve sleep."

"What if we drugged everyone and forced sleep?" Kirk suggested.

"Probably ineffective," Spock answered. "Your own condition was not significantly improved by enforced sleep. Moreover, my condition continues to deteriorate despite my personal ability to avoid sleeping, and hence dreaming, over long periods. I suspect that the Nal's effect on our sub-conscious activities is more pervasive than we can understand."

"However, our danger is diminishing by the hour as the Nal approaches death, for her influence must die with her," he added.

Kirk frowned and switched off, thinking furiously.

The Nal's power ended with her death. But bound to her as he was, McCoy would die with her, of whatever sickness was ravaging them. What was more, the weapon that the Klingons had crossed half the galaxy to steal was sitting down in the brig. Despite killing the Klingons, the Nal was an innocent, responding to danger with what had to be a defensive reflex. She was no vicious demon, no avenging angel of death.

We have no right to kill her, Kirk thought to himself, heading for the bridge. In fact, it's our moral obligation to try to save her, regardless of our own danger. Bones knew that. But we were too distracted to listen.

Kirk stepped into the turbolift, nodding to the overwrought-looking Security chief going up too.

I'll call and discuss this with Spock when I get to the bridge, he thought. Saving the Nal must be our priority effort. In the meanwhile, all non-essential personnel would probably be safer on the planet. It's a risk, but it's one we'd better take. This crew is on the verge of dementia.

Spock watched the multitudinous test-results scan past on the computer's readout, and he found himself irritated at his decreased reading efficiency. His brain could impress the words and numbers at a much greater rate than his mind could comprehend them, a discrepancy that was wasteful. Worse, his advancing emotional instability was draining his capacity to impersonally evaluate the data. Yet he did not take his eyes from the scanner for a moment, for the disease had to be identified and an antitoxin found, not only for the Nal and McCoy, but in case the disease was indeed contagious and become epidemic on the ship.

Someone shook his arm insistently, and he looked up to see Nurse Chapel, her attractive face contorted with emotion and exhaustion.

"Mr. Spock, didn't you hear us call?" she cried. "Captain Kirk has been hurt!"

Spock was instantly on his feet. "What happened?" he demanded of Chapel as she raced beside him.

"I'm not sure, but there was a fight on the bridge," she panted. "Dr. Brinkerhoff called down to get the burn unit set up, and to prepare for surgery."

They rounded the corridor to Sickbay, and had to stand aside as several orderlies rolled a gurney through the door.

"He's dead," M'Benga announced, waving his mediscanner.

"Who was it?" Spock demanded.

"Heysoos Littlecloud, the Security chief," one of the orderlies reported. "He mind-crashed, tried to kill the

captain, sir, but the telemetry panel blew up in the struggle and Heysoos got the worst of it."

"Get that out of the way!" Dr. Brinkerhoff bellowed as he helped pull another cart out of the turbolift. Through the hovering medical team, Spock got a glimpse of the braid on the scorched sleeve.

They hurried through the door and lifted Kirk carefully onto the surgical bed as Brinkerhoff prepared a hypospray and M'Benga ran the mediscan.

"-- Spock --" Kirk gasped.

Spock pushed next to the bed, accepted the captain's bloodied fingers, and leaned close. "I am here, Jim," he said steadily.

Brinkerhoff poised with the hypo, but Kirk shrugged away from it with an effort. "-- Wait -- important," he insisted. "-- Priority, Spock -- Beam -- everyone --"

"Understood, Captain," Spock assured. "I will see to it immediately."

Dr. Brinkerhoff grimaced at the life-readings panel, then threw Spock an ominous look.

"-- Save -- Nal," Kirk mumbled anxiously. "-- Save -- them --"

Brinkerhoff would not wait any longer. He jammed the hypospray against Kirk's throat, and the captain went limp.

Spock stepped back from the bed, giving way to the surgical team. He noticed M'Benga's hands trembling, but forced himself to turn away, going to the intercom. "Spock to bridge."

"Uhura here, sir," the familiar voice said wearily.

"Relay my voice to all hands," he ordered.

"Tied in, Mr. Spock."

Spock took a deep breath. "Attention all hands. This is the First Officer. I regret to announce that Captain Kirk has been seriously injured, and I have taken command. The captain's last conscious order was to initiate the transportation of all non-essential personnel down to the planet surface. All off-duty personnel will now proceed to the Transporter Room to beam down, to be followed by all on-duty nonessential personnel. Essential personnel will include myself, the helmsman, communications officer, Chief Engineer, Transporter chief, and all functional biomedical personnel. Spock out."

He turned and took one long look at the huddled medics and the hovering life-monitor readings. Then he went back to the lab.

There was a breath of home in this alien place where McCoy walked. The trees were earth-like, the exotic insects and sounds were from planets McCoy had visited -- a place made out of his favorite dreams and fondest memories. The sun was deliciously warm on his back, but the breeze was still cool and damp and sweet-smelling in this forest of the morning. He turned to admire his companion, the silken woman, the cornflax child, so pale that the rays of sun passed through her skin, giving it a glow like a buttercup held under a child's chin.

She gazed at him solemnly and spoke, but her words formed within his head, not from without: Are you pleased?

You can make it seem very real, he admitted.

Your race has no Dream-Maker?

McCoy thought about everything he knew of the nature of human dreaming, so she could scan it.

Yes. I see it. You humans have no defense against a Dream-Maker. I regret that I can not change what is.

She did not possess the strength to remove either the general dream-inhibition, or the proximity nightmare-barrier. The illness had robbed her of control.

You are very beautiful, McCoy. I do not wish you to die with me.

You won't die! They'll find a cure, depend on it.

The sickness kills me. True. But it only hastens the desired inevitable.

McCoy's mind rebelled at what it perceived. It is immoral to desire death when life is possible!

Yes, McCoy, in your culture. My culture is dead. I am my culture. My people could not live without my presence. Now, I die to join them.

The pain began to build in his heart again. Don't tense up! We can ride it if you relax, he insisted. Breathe deeply.

I am afraid.

So am I. Trust me, I know how to handle these things. We've got to roll with it, not fight it.

It was selfish of me to expose you to this, McCoy! I did not know that I could no longer break the link.

Never mind, I can take a little pain. I think.

It is so terrible!

We can take it.... Easy.... It will crest soon. Soon. Oh God!

Chief Engineer Scott sometimes seemed like a uni-dimensional person. His primary interest was his primary function: the operation and maintenance of the engines and hardware of the starship. But he was no automaton; he loved his Highland heritage, even carefully preserving his accent among the regulation diet of bland English aboard; he loved alcoholic beverages, especially the fiery Scottish blends; he loved Robert Burns, and was a closet-poet himself; and he loved James Kirk, who was his friend as much as his captain.

But Spock, who did not clutter his mind with emotional trivia, saw Scott as the uni-dimensional efficient Engineer. The Vulcan was astonished to find Scott before him with tears streaking his wide, gentle face. Spock rose from the lab table. "The captain is dead?" he said apprehensively.

Scott put a hand to his face, but shook his head. "Not yet," he sobbed, "but he may be soon enough."

Spock led Scotty to a chair, making him sit. "Explain," he requested soothingly.

Scotty wiped his eyes with his arm and sniffled. "I wish tae God I'd triple-checked the circuitry-leads on the telemetry panel, Mr. Spock, I knew it wasna a good fit. The captain is lyin' there in Sickbay, full o' bits o' metal, and the doctors can scarcely hold onto a scalpel, let alone tae use one! And puir McCoy is near dead in the brig. We're goin' tae lose both o' them!"

Spock absorbed it and reached inside of himself desperately for balance. "Perhaps not," he told Scott quietly. "McCoy does not have the actual disease, and if we can synthesize an antitoxin for the Nal, the symptoms should also disappear in McCoy. The Nal's association with the doctor should have impressed upon her our good intentions and the urgency of our situation and once cured, she should be capable of nullifying her influence. Surely M'Benga and Brinkerhoff can keep Jim stable until they are sufficiently rested to function competently."

Scott looked up at the Vulcan hopefully. "Aye, maybe. But can we synthesize the cure soon enough to save McCoy? The auld lady's losing ground by the hour."

"If the ship does not require your immediate attention, you would be most welcome to join the biologists in the Pharmacology Lab. They have what I believe is the appropriate formula, but it is a tedious manufacturing process. Perhaps your engineering experience will enable you to suggest shortcuts in the procedure," Spock offered.

Scott was on his way toward the Pharmacology Lab. "The telemetry panel can wait," he called over his shoulder.

It did not occur to Spock that he had achieved a significant advance in his capacity to deal compassionately with human problems. He merely reverted his attention to the data he had been scanning when Scott had interrupted, as though the conversation had never happened. He noticed, though, that fatigue and worry were continuing to drain him; he could barely keep his eyes focused on the screen, and some part of him desperately wanted to be both in Sickbay and down in the brig.

Spock stared blankly at the hypospray filled with brackish-looking liquid that Scott held up to him.

"The anti-toxin, Mr. Spock," Scott said with weary triumph.

"Maybe the anti-toxin," Dr. M'Benga cautioned.

Spock nodded dully and took the instrument, starting to leave.

"Mr. Spock, let me go with you," M'Benga asked.

"Your patients need you," Spock said.

M'Benga grabbed Spock's arm. "Sir, Dr. McCoy taught me nearly everything I know about space medicine. Please tolerate my emotional need to help him."

"Aye, you may need us," Scotty appealed.

"Come," the Vulcan said.

Scott neutralized the brig's force-field and let them inside.

McCoy and the Nal lay slumped against the cot, their hands and their minds tightly locked. The approach of death, like their agony, was obvious. McCoy's face was nearly as colorless now as the Nal's. The mind-field extended out a mere fifty inches from them.

"Dr. McCoy, please try to understand what I am telling you," Spock said. "I have a hypospray with a possible antidote to the Nal's disease. She has a form of the common

Klingon childhood illness, ramondino. You do not have it, Doctor; humans are immune to ramondino. The only possible explanation of your symptoms is neuro-empathy: the mind-link has influenced your nervous system. There is no organic cause for your symptoms. Is it possible for you to break the telepathic bond?"

After a long minute, McCoy shook his head weakly.

"They're dying by inches," M'Benga warned, his eyes glued to his mediscan.

"If you can not disengage, we are left with no choice but to try the serum," Spock said. "Do you think you are still capable of administering the injection if I roll the hypospray into your reach?"

McCoy was taut with suffering, and the voices seemed impossibly far, but he managed a stiff nod.

Spock set the safety on the hypospray. "Do we have a back-up quantity of the formula if I miss?" he asked M'Benga.

"Don't miss," M'Benga said flatly.

Spock nodded, taking steady aim. He did not attempt to mask his tension -- the others were as fatigued as he.

Each simple muscle contraction had become an ordeal over the hours, even the autonomic actions of the diaphragm in respiration. So it took a long, long time for McCoy to reach out his arm, stretching his fingers to touch the hypospray, tightening them to grasp it, drawing it back toward his chest into his narrow range of focused vision.

Will it ease the pain? she inquired.

It should if it works, he thought feverishly. My hands shake so and my arms are so weak that I'm not sure I can do this.

A stream of raw fear poured into his mind: her fear, but confused impressions that were toned strongly with physical pain and less so with regret, grief, love. He shuddered, still trying to position the hypospray.

Don't -- distract me, his mind pleaded. Don't be afraid, don't let yourself be. Read my confidence: we can trust these men, we can trust this serum.

He thought he had his hands almost right, the business end of the hypospray touching her ancient arm.

NO, no! This is wrong; you're old, I have to inject this in your carotid artery.

He forced his trembling arms higher.

How much they love you, she told him. I sense their emotions, their fear for you. Her mind suddenly filled up with amazement and gratitude. They truly wish my recovery, as well as yours!

Of course they do. McCoy thought to her. They are moral men. They don't murder.

Guilt roared through her into him; guilt felt like a damp chilling draft. I have murdered. They should wish to destroy me.

No, it was accidental; you didn't have the strength to control the dream-inhibitions, you must accept that. No one can hold you responsible for that.

He snapped off the safety on the hypospray and heard it hiss against her neck. Curiously, it felt as though it had done the same against his, but he knew it was the disorienting double-sensitivity of the mind-link. He tried to still his own thoughts, to explore her sensations as they responded to the influx of serum. There was a diminishing of physical pain, of the ravaging excessive metabolism. He waited warily.

McCoy, the sickness lessens.

Yes, I think it is. I can feel the drug moving through the arteries like a living flame, surging through the capillaries, refreshing the cells, dissolving the invaders. This is incredible!

McCoy, McCoy, it will not save us! I die. I am removed from my people, my poor lovers, cast away to death without my faculty. The sickness, though it departs, has hastened death, and I can not refuse it. Now, my power is too little even to separate us. Forgive me. I love you, stranger-but-not-stranger, but I can not release you. It is too late!

M'Benga, teeth gritted with tension, shook his mediscan with disbelief. "This can't be right!" he cried. "It must be out of adjustment!"

Spock pulled the instrument out of M'Benga's hands and checked its settings, then closed his eyes painfully. "The readings are accurate," he said in a dead voice. "They are at the point of death."

Scotty blanched, all the anguish and fatigue and terror of six near-sleepless days overwhelming him. "You said the serum was working!"

"It was, I swear it," M'Benga insisted, weeping openly.

Scott groaned, then whirled on Spock. "At least save McCoy!" he implored. "You can go that far and pull him out by force."

Spock shook his head slowly, letting it hang down dismally. "I can not. I am no longer capable of it, nor will duty permit me to risk myself thus while I am in command of this vessel."

Scott's eyes were wild with grief. "Weel. I'm no in command of anything!" he roared, gathering for a leap into the mind-field.

Spock caught his shoulder and sent him to the floor with a clumsy nerve-pinch. For a moment he looked down at Scott with indecision, his mind racing. "Dr. M'Benga," he said suddenly, "I require a short-term powerful stimulant. I will reach McCoy and try to hold on to him. My length should permit you to hold on to my ankles from outside the influence of the field. Draw us out, Doctor; I will not be capable of moving myself."

M'Benga nodded, adjusting another hypospray.

"Hurry, Doctor, the Nal's encephalon readings are dropping sharply; she, and McCoy with her, will be dead in another moment."

The hypospray hissed. M'Benga dropped it and stooped, grasping Spock's ankles forcefully.

Spock felt the first surge of energy from the stimulant, but dared not wait for its full effects. He stretched out his arms and let himself fall face-forward into the field, aiming to land within grasp of McCoy's torso.

As he fell, he noticed a curious impression of lack of gravity, as though he were falling in water, very slowly. Then he realized that the nightmare field was gone. He twined his arms desperately around McCoy's waist, and was seized by the mind-meld.

Three minds touching each other; two dimming. Such pain, this death, but not pain in only the flesh. No. Pain of guilt, of loneliness, of unspeakable grief. My poor people! Take me with you, accept me! I cannot bear this life. Would that I had died for you, instead of you, my innocents!...

The room, the brig, coalesced around him, and Spock sat up, reorienting himself to the reality of it.

Under his arms. McCoy lay on the floor, his body wracked with terrible sobs, an overwhelming grief that he could not encompass. M'Benga knelt beside them, his face solemn, still wet with tears. Scott still lay unconscious from the nerve pinch. Beyond, in the far corner, the Nal lay in a desolate heap, her thin limbs sprawled, her fossil face slack. It required no physician, no mediscan, to read the message of that inert form: she was dead.

M'Benga put a hand on McCoy's shaking shoulder, but McCoy was in shock. Spock looked from M'Benga to McCoy.

Wordlessly, with an instinct that he had not known he possessed, Spock gathered the weeping McCoy into his arms and offered what comfort he could.

They slept, some 430 persons, with the delicious abandon of utter exhaustion, and when they were recovered, they left the star NN4-P32 behind and headed for another. But for a while, there was a general somberness, and it worried the man whose job it was to worry about such things. McCoy ordered ship-wide therapy, putting the chemical-stores department into a tizzy while the curving corridors of the Enterprise acquired the appearance of white-washed fences immediately after the invention of the crayon.

Kirk was sitting up in a travi-chair in Sickbay when Spock entered.

"Captain, it is gratifying to see you up and about. I have a complete report now, with recorded evidence, of the entire affair of the Nal's planet."

"Very good, Mr. Spock," Kirk said in a little less than his usual voice. "I'll read it later."

"Don't bother the captain while he's in therapy!" McCoy's voice called from his office.

Spock peered curiously at the brush-strokes that Kirk had been applying when he had entered. The paint was running in places, but its intended subject was clear enough to anyone who had experienced puberty. Spock leaned over, pointing to a vital area.

"You forgot the left nipple, Captain," he said affably.

Kirk was nonplussed, but McCoy came out of his office to pinch-hit. "Spock, how've you been dreaming lately?" he demanded.

"I dream while sleeping, Doctor," Spock answered smoothly. But before McCoy could explode, he added. "I am interested in the general epidemic of graffiti and finger-painting which has spared no wall in common-access decks of this ship. Of each crewmember that I have questioned, I have received the same answer: Dr. McCoy ordered it."

McCoy grinned broadly. "Mandatory therapy," he admitted. "It took you long enough to get up the nerve to ask!"

"Nerve. Doctor, had nothing to do with it," Spock said. "The value of this peculiar therapy escapes me, however."

McCoy reached over Kirk's shoulder and retrieved a brush and a tube of paint. "Here," he said, handing them to Spock. "Try it. Paint whatever you dreamt about last night."

Spock eyed the brush dubiously. "I fear my dreams cannot compare with the captain's," he said, putting the brush down. "I must decline."

McCoy thrust the brush back at him. "You can't escape that easily, Spock," he laughed. "It's my official therapy program, and even you have to follow it. Doctor's orders. Besides," he added, winking at Kirk, "I want to know what goes on in that thick Vulcan head when your damned Logic isn't in control."

Spock actually seemed distressed. He looked to Kirk for assistance, but the captain shrugged with mock resignation.

"Doctor's orders," he echoed.

Spock took a determined grip on the brush, squeezed out some paint, and drew a vague outline, then began to fill it in. It was immediately apparent that he was sketching two portraits. One began to take on his own features, the other, McCoy's. "I have been experiencing what you so colorfully describe as 'nightmares.' Doctor," Spock commented as he worked.

The two faces were now entirely identifiable as McCoy's and Spock's own. The Vulcan picked up a final brushful of paint and carefully drew a round, human ear on his own portrait, then Vulcan ears on McCoy's. He put down the brush. "If you gentlemen will excuse me, now," he said, "I must return to my duties on the bridge."

"Wait a minute!" McCoy cried. "I want to know what the hell this thing means!"

Spock stopped just inside the door and faced McCoy with a vague look of smugness. "Why, Dr. McCoy," he said innocently, "only last week you reminded me of your seven degrees in Psychology and your sixteen years of deep-space medical experience. I leave the interpretation to your excellent 'medical intuition.' Good day, gentlemen."

A Puzzle
by Jackie Franke

System of Dilithium-rich planets:

1 17 25 32 11 24 35

Vulcans pinch this:

28 10 18 20 29

Force-field
protects by: 11 9 16 30 13 1 7 32 34 6

Onlies' term for joke: 15 5 34 30 2 19

With "Omega";
(2 wds.) 7 23 21 12 26 14 25 4

Gladiator-slaves: 3 8 22 27 31 26 33

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22

23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35

Limerick
by Teri Howard

This tale of McCoy I just heard
(I know that it sounds quite absurd):
He argued with Spock
And went into shock
When he found that he'd got the last word.

Stonn_needs_chicken_soup -- AB

