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**THE
STAR TREK
READER**

THE STAR TREK READER

**adapted by
James Blish**

**Based on the Television Series
created by
Gene Roddenberry**

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BOOK I

STAR TREK 2

BOOK I—*Star Trek 2*

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ARENA

(Gene L. Coon)

Captain James Kirk of the USS *Enterprise* was the absolute master of the largest and most modern vessel in the Starfleet Service, of all the complex apparatus and weaponry aboard her, and of the manifold talents of 430 highly trained crewmen.

And at the moment, he was stranded on a nearly barren artificial asteroid, location unknown, facing a tyrannosaurlike creature whose survival depended upon its killing Kirk, and equipped with absolutely nothing except a small translator-recorder useless as a weapon.

The situation had developed with bewildering rapidity. Originally, the *Enterprise* had received a call from the Earth outpost on Cestus Three, part of a planetary system on the very edge of an unexplored quadrant of the galaxy. The base commandant, an old soldier named Travers, had asked Kirk to beam down with the tactical staff of the *Enterprise*; and since things were quiet in this sector of space and Travers was famous in the Service for setting a good table, all six men had accepted cheerfully.

But the invitation had been a trap—a prerecorded trap. They had found the settlement in smoking ruins, the personnel dead. Furthermore, within minutes after its arrival the landing party was also under attack—and so was the *Enterprise*.

Evidently, the enemy, whoever he was, did not have the transporter and had no idea of its capabilities; after five minutes' inconclusive exchange of shots, the landing party was whisked away clean. The enemy ship broke off the engagement and fled, at fantastically high acceleration.

Kirk had no intention of letting it get away, however. It seemed obvious that any attempt to ambush the *Enterprise's* tactical staff and captain, and then to destroy the starship itself, could only be a prelude to a full-scale invasion. Furthermore, the unknown enemy was well armed—the damage its ship had suffered thus far had been

minor, despite its flight—and peculiarly ruthless, as witness its having wiped out 512 helpless people at an inoffensive scientific outpost simply to bait its trap. As Science Officer Spock had pointed out, that ship could not be allowed to reach its home base; presumably, as long as that unknown world was kept in the dark about Federation strength, it would hold off its next attack—thus buying precious time for a defense buildup.

The enemy seemed equally anxious to avoid leading the *Enterprise* to its home planet. It took complex evasive action, again at incredibly high speed; the *Enterprise* had difficulty in closing with her even at warp eight, two factors above maximum safe speed.

And then, suddenly, everything stopped.

It was absolutely impossible, but it happened. At one moment, both vessels were flashing through subspace at over a hundred times the speed of light—and in the next, both were floating in normal space, motionless relative to a small, nearby solar system, engines inoperative, all weapons dead.

“Report!” Kirk snapped.

But there was no damage, nothing abnormal—except that the *Enterprise* could neither move nor fight, nor, apparently, could the enemy.

“We’re being scanned, sir,” Communications Officer Uhura said.

“From the alien ship?”

“No, sir,” she said. “From that solar system ahead. Nothing hostile—no tractors or weapon sensors, just scanners.”

“Stopping us like this might be considered hostile,” Kirk said drily.

“Getting something else, Captain—a modulation of the main frequency . . .”

Abruptly, the lights dimmed and there was a low hum from the main viewing screen. The starry scene from outside promptly dissolved into a twisting, confused mass of color and lines. At the same time a humanoid voice, strong and yet somehow youthful, shook the air of the bridge. The voice said:

“We are the Metrons.”

Kirk and Spock exchanged speculative glances. Then

the Science Officer said, quite composedly: "How do you do?"

The voice's owner paid no apparent attention. It continued:

"You are one of two craft that have come into our space on a mission of violence. This is not permissible. Our analysis further shows that your violent tendencies are inherent. Hence we will resolve your conflict in the way most suited to your natures. Captain James Kirk!"

"This is Captain Kirk," Kirk said, after a moment's hesitation.

"We have prepared a planetoid with a suitable atmosphere, temperature and gravity. You will be taken there, as will the captain of the Gorn ship that you have been pursuing. You and your opponent will be provided with a translator-recorder. You can keep a record, or communicate with each other, should you feel the need. But not with your ships. You will each be totally alone, and will settle your dispute alone."

"Just what makes you think you can interfere . . ." Kirk began angrily.

"It is you who are doing the interfering. We are simply putting a stop to it—within your own violent frame of reference. The place we have prepared for you contains sufficient resources for either of you to construct weapons lethal to the other. The winner of the ordeal will be permitted to go on his way unharmed. The loser, along with his ship, will be destroyed in the interests of peace. The contest will be one of ingenuity against ingenuity, brute strength against brute strength. The outcome will be final."

With that, silently, the ship around Kirk vanished.

The first thing he saw was the Gorn. It was a biped, a reptile, a lizard that walked like a man. It stood about six feet four, with tremendous musculature, dully gleaming skin, a ridge of hard plate running down its back, and a strong, thick tail. The tail did not look prehensile; rather, it seemed to be a balancing organ, suggesting that the creature could run very fast indeed if it wished. The head was equipped with two tiny carholes and a wide mouth full of sharp teeth.

This, then, was the enemy, the raider, the destroyer of

Cestus Three. It was wearing a garment like a short robe, belted; at the belt hung a small electronic device. It wore no shoes; clawed feet dug deeply into the ground, indicating considerable weight. Shooting a wary glance down at himself, Kirk discovered that his own clothing and equipment were identical.

Kirk and the Gorn stared at each other. All around them was a rocky, barren terrain, with a peculiar gray-green sky and occasional clumps of vegetation, some of it fairly tall, but none of it familiar. The air was cold and dry.

Kirk wondered if the Gorn was as uncomfortable as he was. Probably, but for different reasons. The meddling Metrons would surely have allowed neither of them an advantage in environment; after all, this planetoid was artificial—deliberately constructed to be an arena for a trial of champions, and for nothing else.

The Gorn moved. It was closing in on Kirk. It looked quite capable of killing him with its bare hands. Kirk moved sidewise, warily.

The Gorn did not appear to want to take any chances. As it too circled, it passed close to a gnarled object like a small tree, perhaps eight to ten inches through the trunk, and about ten feet high. With a quick look at Kirk, the Gorn hissed softly, reached out, and broke off a thick branch. The move seemed to cost it very little effort, whereas Kirk doubted that he could have done it at all.

Then, suddenly, holding the branch aloft like a club, the Gorn was charging him.

Kirk sprang aside barely in time. As the Gorn passed, somewhat off-balance, Kirk swung a killing blow into its midriff. The impact nearly broke his hand, but it seemed to have no other effect. The club lashed back, knocking Kirk sprawling against the rocks.

The Gorn wheeled around, clumsily but swiftly, and pounced. Kirk, dazed, tried to counter with a forearm blow to the throat, but it was like hitting an elephant. Then the creature was gripping him like a grizzly. Kirk's arm just managed to keep the teeth away, but that grip was going to break his back.

Freeing his arms with a sudden twist, Kirk boxed the Gorn's earholes with cupped hands. The Gorn screamed and staggered back, shaking its huge head. Springing to

his feet, Kirk picked up a boulder as big as his head and hurled it at the Gorn with all his strength.

It struck the Gorn fair on the chest. The creature lurched slightly, but it did not seem to be hurt. Hissing shrilly, it bent to pick up a boulder of its own. The thing must have weighed a thousand pounds, but the Gorn got it aloft in one titanic jerk.

Kirk ran.

The rock hit behind him with an explosive crack, and flying splinters cut into the calf of one leg like shrapnel. Still hobbling as fast as he could, Kirk looked back over his shoulder.

The Gorn was not following. Instead, it was heaving up another rock. Then, as if realizing that Kirk was now out of range, it let the huge mass drop. It seemed to be grinning, although as far as Kirk had been able to see, it never wore any other expression.

Kirk looked around, panting. He seemed to be in a gully, though there was no sign that water had ever run in it—after all, there hadn't even been such a planet many hours ago. There were rocks everywhere, some of them brilliantly colored, and an occasional outcropping of quartzlike crystals. Here and there were patches of scrubby, tough-looking brush, some of it resembling cacti, some mesquite, and even an occasional stand of a large, bamboolike growth. There was nothing that looked as though it could possibly be converted into a weapon, no matter what the Metron had said.

Kirk sat down, rubbing his injured leg but taking great care to watch the now-distant Gorn, and looked over the device at his belt. It looked quite like a tricorder, but both smaller and simpler—though simpler, at least, it doubtless was not. Kirk turned it on with the obvious switch.

“Calling the *Enterprise*. Captain James Kirk calling the *Enterprise*.”

For a moment, there was no answer. Then the instrument said, in good but rather stilted English:

“You forget, Captain. We cannot reach our ships. We are alone here, you and I—just one against the other.”

He looked back the way he had come. Sure enough, the Gorn seemed to be speaking behind one raised hand.

Kirk had not, of course, forgotten that he had been

told he could not raise the *Enterprise*; he had simply wanted to test the statement. What he had forgotten was that the small instrument had been said to be a translator, as well as a recorder. He would have to be very careful not to mutter to himself after this.

After a moment, he said tentatively, "Look here, Gorn, this is insane. Can't we patch up some kind of truce?"

"Out of the question," the translator said promptly. "That would result only in our staying here until we starved. I cannot speak for you, but I see no water here, nor anything I could eat—with the possible exception of you."

"Neither do I," Kirk admitted.

"Then let us not waste time in sentimental hopes. The rules are what they are: One of us must kill the other."

Kirk hung the device back on his belt. The Gorn was right, and that was most definitely that.

He scrambled over to look at the bamboolike stuff. Each stalk was perhaps three to four inches in diameter—and, as he discovered by trying to break a section loose, it was as hard as iron. Hitting it with a rock even produced a distinctly metallic clank. Perhaps it picked up iron from the soil, as horsetails pick up calcium oxalate, or some prairie grasses pick up selenium. Useless.

He moved on up the gully, which got steadily deeper; he lost sight of the Gorn almost at once. Well, the risk had to be taken; staying where he was had gotten him nowhere.

Earthen banks, rather like bluish clay, reared on both sides of him now. One was steep, but the slope of the other was gentle enough to permit him to clamber up it if he had to.

Sticking out of the clay were the pyramidal points of a number of large crystals. Hopefully, Kirk pried one of them out. It was about the size of a hen's egg, and glittered brilliantly even under this sunless sky. The shape and the brilliancy were unmistakable: It was a diamond, and one that would have made the Kohinoor look like a mail-order zircon. And not only were there more of them imbedded in the clay, but the floor of the gully, he now saw, was a litter of them, in all sizes down to fine sand.

An incredible fortune—and again, utterly useless. None of the gems was sharp enough to be used as a

weapon point, and he had no way to cut them. Their only use was to show that this planet was indeed an artificial construction—but Kirk had never doubted that, anyhow. He would have traded the whole wealth of them for a hand phaser, or even a medieval crossbow and a quiver of bolts for it.

The gully turned just ahead. Throwing the diamond away, Kirk went around the bend. The Metron had said that there were the raw materials of weapons here somewhere, if only he—

At the next step, his ankle struck a taut vine, and he went sprawling. At the same moment there was a sharp *crack!* as of wood splitting, and then one whole side of the gully seemed to be roaring down upon him.

He rolled frantically in the other direction, but not fast enough to prevent one rock from slamming into his chest. He felt a rib break. Staggering to his feet, he ran for the nearest cover, a sculptured overhang almost deep enough in back to be called a cave. There he stopped, breathing hard and nursing his rib cage—his whole body seemed to be one enormous bruise—and inspected the snare that had almost killed him through the gradually settling dust.

It was very simple and highly ingenious: a length of stretched vine to serve as a trigger, a broken branch, a heap of carefully stacked boulders that had been freed when the branch had been pulled loose.

Above him, Kirk heard the tick of large claws on rock, and then a sharp hiss of what could only have been disappointment. Kirk grinned mirthlessly. It had been near enough. He peered cautiously out of his hole and upward, just in time to see the Gorn on the lip of the gully on the other side, moving away. The creature was carrying something long and shiny in one hand. Kirk could not tell exactly what it was, but the fact that the Gorn had a torn scrap of his tunic wrapped around that hand was clue enough. It was a daggerlike blade, evidently chipped out of obsidian glass.

Then the creature was gone, but Kirk did not feel the least bit reassured. So far, the Gorn was way ahead, not only on strength, but on ingenuity. First a snare—now a dagger.

Well, then, back to the Stone Age with a vengeance. If Kirk could find a flint point, another length of vine, a suffi-

ciently long stick, he might make a spear. That would give him the advantage of reach against the Gorn's dagger. On the other hand, would a spear penetrate that hide? There was only one way to find out.

A sufficiently large chip of flint, however, obstinately failed to turn up. All that was visible on the floor of the overhang was a wash of brilliant yellow powder.

The stuff looked familiar, and on a hunch, Kirk picked up a small handful of it and breathed on it. It gave out the faint crackle characteristic of flowers of sulfur when moistened.

Kirk grimaced. What a maddening planet. Sand of high-purity sulfur, veritable beaches of diamonds, iron-concentrating bamboos; and at the back of the cave here, outcroppings of rocks covered with a yellowish-white effluvium, like saltpeter. The only way he could make any sort of weapon out of a *mélange* like that would be with a smelter and a forge—

Wait a minute. Just a minute, now. There was something at the back of his mind—something very ancient . . .

With a gulp of hope, he ran back toward the growth of bamboolike stuff.

With a sharp rock, he managed to break off about a three-foot length of one tube, at one of its joints. The tube was closed at one end, open at the other. Ideal.

Now, the diamonds. He took up only the smallest, the most sandlike, measuring them by handfuls into the tube. He could only hope that his memory of the proportions—seventy-five, fifteen, ten—was correct; in any event, he could only approximate the measures under these conditions. Now, one of the large egg-shaped diamonds; this he put into his mouth, since the tunic did not come equipped with pockets.

Back up the gully, down and around the bend to the overhang. Into the tube went sulfur, saltpeter. Covering the end, he shook the tube until a little of the mixture poured out into his palm showed an even color, though certainly not the color it should have been.

A stone point penetrated the bamboo at the base, though it was hard work. A bit of torn tunic for a patch, and ram it all home with a stick. Then the egg-shaped diamond; then another patch, and ram again. Finally,

a piece of flint; it did not have to be large, not any more.

"Captain," the translator at his belt said. He did not answer.

"Captain, be reasonable," the translator said. "Hiding will do you no good. If it is a matter of competitive starvation, I think my endurance is greater than yours. Why not come out, and die like a warrior?"

Kirk ignored it. Shredding another piece of cloth from the tunic, he began to strike the piece of flint over it, using the translator—at last it had a use!—as the steel. Sparks flew, but the cloth would not catch. If it was non-inflammable—

"You cannot destroy me," the translator said. "Let us be done with it. I shall be merciful and quick."

"Like you were at Cestus Three?" Kirk said.

"You were intruding," the translator said. "You established an outpost in our space. Naturally we destroyed it."

Kirk did not stop striking sparks, but he was at the same time thoughtful. What the Gorn said was perhaps reasonable, from its point of view. Very little was known about that arm of the galaxy; perhaps the Gorn had a right to regard it as theirs—and to be alarmed at the setting up of a base there, and by the advent of a ship the size of the *Enterprise*. Nevertheless . . .

Smoke rose from the shredded cloth. He raised it to his lips, blowing gently. It was catching.

"All right, Gorn," he told the translator. "Come and get me if you think you can. I'm under the overhang just past where you set your snare."

There was a sharp hiss, and then the clear sound of the Gorn's claws, coming at a run up the gully. Kirk had miscalculated. The creature was closer than he had thought—and faster. Frantically he struggled to align the clumsy bamboo tube.

The Gorn leapt into view, its obsidian knife raised. Kirk slapped the burning piece of clothes against the touchhole, and the makeshift cannon went off with a splintering roar. The concussion knocked Kirk down; the semicave was filled with acrid smoke.

He groped to his feet again. As the smoke cleared, he saw the Gorn, slumped against the other wall of the gully. The diamond egg had smashed its right shoulder; but it

was bleeding from half a dozen other places too, where diamond chips had flown out of the cannon instead of igniting.

The knife lay between them. Leaping forward, Kirk snatched it up, hurled himself on the downed alien. The knife's point found one of the wounds.

"Now," Kirk said hoarsely, "now let's see how tough your hide is!"

The Gorn did not answer. Though conscious, it seemed to be in shock. It was all over. All Kirk had to do was shove.

He could not do it. He rose, slowly.

"No," he said. "We're in the same pickle. You're trying to save your ship, the same as I am. I won't kill you for that."

Suddenly furious, Kirk looked up at the greenish, overcast sky.

"Do you hear?" he shouted. "I won't kill him! You'll have to get your entertainment some place else!"

There was a long pause. Kirk stared down at the wounded alien; the Gorn stared back. Its translator had been shattered by the impact; it could not know what Kirk had said. But it did not seem to be afraid.

Then it vanished.

Kirk sat down, dejected and suddenly, utterly weary. Right or wrong, he had lost his opportunity now. The Metron had snatched the Gorn away.

Then there was a humming, much like that he had heard so long ago aboard ship, when the screen had been scrambled. He turned.

A figure was materializing under the overhang. It was not very formidable—certainly nothing so ominous, so awe-inspiring as its voice had suggested. Also, it was very beautiful. It looked like a boy of perhaps eighteen..

"You're a Metron," Kirk said listlessly.

"True," said the figure. "And you have surprised us, Captain."

"How?" Kirk said, not much interested. "By winning?"

"No. We had no preconceptions as to which of you would win. You surprised us by refusing to kill, although you had pursued the Gorn craft into our space with the intention of destroying it."

"That was different," Kirk said. "That was necessary."

"Perhaps it was. It is a new thought. Under the circumstances, it is only fair to tell you that we lied to you."

"In what way?"

"We said that the ship of the loser of this personal combat would be destroyed," said the Metron. "After all, it would be the winner—the stronger, the more resourceful race—who would pose the greatest threat to us. It was the winner we planned to destroy."

Kirk lurched to his feet. "Not my ship," he said dangerously.

"No, Captain. We have changed our minds. By sparing your helpless enemy—who would surely have killed you in like circumstances—you demonstrated the advanced trait of mercy. This we hardly expected—and it leaves us with no clear winner."

"What did you do with the Gorn, then?"

"We sent him back to his ship. And in your case, we misinterpreted your motives. You sincerely believed that you would be destroying the Gorn ship to keep the peace, not break it. If you like, we shall destroy it for you."

"No!" Kirk said hastily. "That's not necessary. It was a . . . a misunderstanding. Now that we've made contact, we'll be able to talk to the Gorn—reach an agreement."

"Very good," said the Metron. "Perhaps we too shall meet again—in a few thousand years. In any event, there is hope for you."

And abruptly, the *Enterprise* sprang into being around Kirk.

Turmoil broke out on the bridge. Ship's Surgeon McCoy was the first to reach Kirk's side.

"Jim! Are you all right?"

"To be quite honest with you," Kirk said dazedly, "I don't know. I just wish the world would stop popping in and out at me."

"I gather you won," Spock said. "How did you do it?"

"Yes . . . I guess so. I'm not quite sure. I thought I did it by reinventing gunpowder—with diamond dust for charcoal. But the Metrons say I won by being a sucker. I don't know which explanation is truer. All the Metrons would tell me is that we're a most promising species—as predators go."

"I could not have put the matter more neatly myself,"

Spock said. "But, Captain, I would be interested to know what it is you're talking about—when you feel ready, of course."

"Yes, indeed," Kirk said. "In the meantime, posts, everybody. It's time we got back down to business. And, Mr. Spock, about that explanation . . ."

"Yes, sir?"

"I suggest you raise the question again, in, say, a few thousand years."

"Yes, sir."

And the odd thing about Spock, the captain reflected, was that he *would* wait that long too, if only he could figure out a way to live through it—and when the time had all passed, Spock would remember to ask the question again.

Kirk hoped he would have an answer.

A TASTE OF ARMAGEDDON

(Robert Hamner and Gene L. Coon)

Ambassador Fox was something of a cross to Captain Kirk, and to most of his officers, for that matter. In addition to having a very high regard for his own importance—which is not necessarily a handicap in a man, provided he also has a sense of humor—he had a remarkably short temper for a career diplomat.

But the mission was his, and he had to be put up with. There was no question about the importance of that. Eminiar VII was by all accounts the most advanced planet of its star cluster, NGC 321, having had space flight for hundreds of years. Nevertheless, as of fifty years ago they had never ventured beyond their own solar system, and for a very good reason: They had been at war with their nearest neighbor. The vessel making the report, the USS *Valiant*, was listed as missing—presumably as a product of the hostilities. It was Fox's job to establish diplomatic relations with them.

It evidently was not going to be easy. At first contact with the *Enterprise*, Eminiar VII sent Code 710—a warning not to approach the planet under any circumstances. Kirk was more than willing to comply; after all, it *was* their planet, and he intensely disliked gunboat diplomacy. But Ambassador Fox insisted, and he had command power if he wanted to exercise it. He frequently did.

Kirk beamed down to the planet with Mr. Spock, Yeoman Manning and two security guards, leaving Scott, his engineer, in charge of the ship. In view of the warning, they all carried number-one phasers, in addition to a tricorder, of which Yeoman Manning was in charge.

But there was no overt hostility. They materialized in a corridor of a building that, judging by the traffic, was an official establishment of some kind, and were met solely by a very pretty girl who introduced herself as Mea Three and promptly offered to take them to the High Council. Her manner was cool, but correct.

The High Council proved to consist of four pleasant-looking men seated at a table in a large room that had in it also a faint hum of machinery, though none was evident. As Kirk and his party entered, all four rose and smiled.

"I am Anan Seven," said the one farthest to the left. "I am sorry to see you here. But you are here, and we must do everything possible to make you comfortable. Won't you sit down?"

"I'm Captain Kirk, James T. Kirk of the Starship *Enterprise*, representing the United Federation of Planets. This is my first officer, Mr. Spock, Lieutenant Galloway, Lieutenant Osborne, Yeoman Manning."

"Welcome to Eminiari," Anan said, making a formal little bow. Everyone sat, and there was a moment of silence as each party studied the other.

"Well, Captain," Anan said at last, "since you chose to disregard our warning, I suppose we must proceed to the business at hand. What can we do for you?"

"Our mission, sir, is to establish diplomatic relations between your people and mine. The Federation badly needs a treaty port in this cluster."

"Impossible, I'm afraid," Anan said.

"Oh? Would you mind telling me why?"

"Because of the war."

"You are *still* at war?" Kirk said.

"We have been at war," Anan said, "for five hundred years."

Kirk raised his eyebrows. "You conceal it well. Mr. Spock?"

"Sir," Spock said to Anan, "we have completely scanned your planet. We find it highly advanced, prosperous in a material sense, comfortable for your people—and completely peaceful. Seemingly an ideal, flourishing, highly civilized culture, which obviously should have ties with our Federation. There is no evidence of war whatsoever."

"Casualties among our civilian population," Anan said evenly, "total from one to three million dead each year, from direct enemy attack. This is why we warned you away, Captain. As long as your ship is orbiting this planet, it is in severe danger."

"With whom are you at war?" Spock said.

"Vendikar, the third planet in this system. Originally settled by our people, and as advanced as we are—and a ruthless enemy."

"Nevertheless . . ." Spock began. He got no further than that word. Suddenly the room was clamoring with a shrill, whooping siren. Anan, his face stern, stood instantly, pressing a button.

The result was astonishing. The siren stopped, but the entire rear wall of the Council room slid aside, revealing another room of the same size that harbored an installation of enormous intricacy. It was too big and too involved to take it all in at once; Kirk got a quick impression of a long bank of computers, a number of lighted graphs on the walls, a large illuminated grid that might have been a map.

"You will have to excuse us," Anan said. "We are in fact under attack at this moment. Mea, care for our guests."

All four of the council members took positions at the machinery, where several other operators were already at work. Kirk, baffled, looked first at Spock, who shrugged, and then at Mea.

"It will not last long," the girl said.

"Don't you take shelter?"

"There is no shelter, Captain."

"Are these attacks frequent?" Spock said.

"Oh, yes. But we retaliate promptly."

Beckoning to Spock, Kirk moved off into the newly revealed room—the war room, Kirk supposed. No attempt was made to stop them. At the large grid, an operator sat at a console. Flashes spattered over the grid, seemingly at random; at each flash, the operator pushed what was evidently a matching button. Kirk studied it, but it conveyed nothing to him; as he had expected, he could not read the mapping conventions of Eminiar. Beside him, however, Mea gasped suddenly.

"A hit!" she said. "A hit in the city!"

"Mr. Spock, hear any explosions?"

"None. Yeoman Manning, are you getting any radiation readings or any other kind of disturbance on the tricorder?"

"Not a thing."

Kirk turned to Mea. "If this is an attack," he said,

“would you mind telling me what weapons the enemy is using?”

“Fusion bombs,” she said. “Materialized by transporter over the targets. They are very accurate. My parents were killed in the last attack.”

Kirk flipped out his communicator and called the ship. “Mr. Scott, are you still scanning this planet’s surface?”

“Of course, sir,” Scott’s voice said promptly. “Per your orders.”

“Anything unusual?”

“Nothing, sir. All quiet.”

As Kirk put the communicator away, something buzzed on the boards before them and one of the computers extruded a card from a slot. Anan took it and stared at it, his face grim. Then he handed it to the man next to him.

“Just as it happened fifty years ago, Sar,” he said.

Sar nodded, his face sad. “We warned them.”

“Alert a security detachment. They may be needed.”

“Sir,” Kirk said, “I have been in contact with my ship, which has this entire planet under surveillance. All the time this so-called attack has been in progress, we have been monitoring you. There has been no attack—no explosions, no radiation, no disturbances whatsoever. Now if this is just some sort of game . . .”

“It is not a game,” Anan said. “Half a million people have just been killed.”

“Entirely by computers,” Spock said suddenly.

“That’s quite correct,” Anan said. “Their deaths are registered. They are then given twenty-four hours to report to the disintegration chambers. Since the immediate danger appears to be over, I can explain at somewhat greater length. You must understand, Captain, that no two planets could carry on an all-out nuclear war for five hundred years. Such a war would not last five hundred hours. We were forced to find another solution.”

“In other words,” Spock said, “Vendikar’s attack was a theoretical one.”

“On the contrary, it was quite real. It is simply launched mathematically. If it is successful, the casualties are computed, identified, and ordered to report for disposition. Theoretical? I lost my wife in the last attack. It is

sometimes hard—but our civilization lives. The people die, but the culture goes on.”

“Do you mean to tell me,” Kirk said, “that your people just . . . walk into a disintegrator when they’re told to?”

“They do. They are at war and they know it.”

“I’ve heard of some cold-blooded arrangements,” Kirk said, “but this one takes the prize.”

“It is cold-blooded,” Spock agreed. “But it does have a certain logic about it.”

“I am glad you approve,” Anan said.

“I do not approve,” Spock said coldly. “I understand, which is something else entirely.”

“Good,” Anan said. “Then you will recall that we warned you not to come here. You chose to disregard my warning. Once in orbit around our planet, your ship became a legitimate target. It has been classified destroyed by an incoming missile.”

He made a quick gesture. Kirk spun around. There were four very large uniformed men behind the *Enterprise* party. All four held unfamiliar but quite lethal-looking weapons.

“All persons aboard your ship have twenty-four hours to report to our disintegration chambers. To insure their cooperation, I am ordering you and your party held in custody against their surrender. The same thing, by the way, happened to your ship the *Valiant*, fifty years ago. Killed to the last man.”

“You are not,” Kirk said through his teeth, “going to harm my ship. Is that clear?”

“If possible, we shall spare the ship,” Anan said. “But its passengers and crew are already dead. Put them in class-one detention.”

“Class-one detention” proved to be comfortable—rather like a small, neat apartment, even to a well-stocked kitchen. This did not mollify anybody in the party in the slightest. They had not been there more than an hour when a guard let Mea in. The girl seemed subdued.

“I have been sent to ask if you require anything,” she said.

“We require a great deal. I want to see Anan Seven.”

“He is busy coordinating the casualty lists.”

"If he won't talk to me," Kirk said, "he'll have more casualty lists than he knows what to do with."

"Captain, you have your duty to your ship," the girl said quietly. "We have our duty to our planet."

"Your duty doesn't include stepping into a disintegrator and disappearing!"

"I'm afraid it does, Captain," she said, just as quietly as before. "I too have been declared a casualty. I must report to a disintegrator at noon tomorrow."

Kirk stared at her. He still found the whole arrangement impossible to believe. "And you're going to do it? What could Anan and Sar and the others possibly do if you all just refused to show up?"

"It's not a question of what the Council would do," Mea said. "If everybody refused to report, Vendikar would have no choice but to launch real weapons—and we would have to do the same. Within a week, there would be nothing left of either civilization. Both planets would be uninhabitable. Surely you can see that ours is the better way."

"No," Kirk said. "I don't see it at all."

"I'm sorry. Is there anything I can bring you?"

"Yes. Anan Seven."

"I'll convey the message. But I doubt that he'll come."

As she left, Kirk pounded a fist into a palm in frustration. Then, suddenly, he had an idea. "Mr. Spock!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Vulcans have limited telepathic abilities, don't they?"

"Yes, Captain," Spock said. "But remember that I am only half Vulcan. I could not reach Anan from here—and if I could, I would not be able to transmit a complex message, or pick one up."

"That isn't what I had in mind. I just want to plant a suspicion in that guard outside. Preferably, that we've cut a hole through the wall with some heat device they overlooked. Or if that's too complex, just a feeling that we're getting away."

"Hmm," Spock said. "I know nothing about the sensitiveness of the Eminians. However, nothing would be lost by trying."

"Good. Go ahead."

Spock nodded, leaned his head against the wall nearest

the corridor, and closed his eyes. His brow furrowed, and within a few moments he was sweating. Even to Kirk, to whom telepathy was a closed book, it was clear that his first officer was working hard.

Nothing seemed to happen for at least five centuries, or maybe six. Then there was a faint humming at the door, followed by a click. Kirk flattened his back against the wall.

The door swung open and the guard charged in, weapon at the ready. Kirk rewarded him with a crushing blow at the back of the neck; he dropped in complete silence. Kirk dragged him away from the door, retrieving his weapon.

"Thank you, Mr. Spock."

"A pleasure, Captain."

"Now, we've got to get our communicators back, and get in touch with the ship. I don't know how far we'll get without weapons; we'll need more. Mr. Spock, I know how you feel about taking life. But our ship is in danger. Do I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly, Captain. I shall do what is necessary."

Kirk clapped him quickly on the back. "Let's go."

They were perhaps halfway back to the Council chambers when they turned a corner and found themselves on the end of a queue. Kirk signaled a halt and peered ahead.

At the other end of the line was a large enclosed booth, with a control console on one side at which an armed guard was sitting, watching a light over the machine. Presently this went off, and in response to the touch of a control, a door opened in the side of the machine.

The man at the head of the line took a last look around and stepped inside. The door closed. The machine hummed; the light went on, and then off again. The door slid back.

There was nobody inside.

Kirk and Spock exchanged grim looks. Kirk made a pinching motion with one hand, and Spock nodded. Kirk walked rapidly down the side of the queue opposite the side the console and the guard were on.

"All right, break it up," he said. "Stand back, everybody."

Heads turned. The guard half rose. "Just what do you think you're up to . . ." Then he saw Kirk's stolen weapon.

He had courage. Kirk could have shot him easily and he must have known it, but he went for his own gun anyhow. At the same instant Spock, who had scuttled unnoticed down the other side of the line, caught him from behind with his nerve-pinch to the shoulder. Looking astonished, the guard collapsed. Spock scooped up his weapon.

"Excellent, Mr. Spock. The rest of you people, stand back or you'll get hurt."

Kirk leveled his gun at the disintegration booth and pulled the trigger. The results were most satisfying. Nothing seemed to come out of the weapon but a scream of sound, but a huge hole appeared magically in the machine. Sparks flew from the console, and in a moment the booth was in flames.

"All right, now get out of here!" Kirk roared. "Go to your homes and stay there! Go!"

Terrified, the remaining people in the queue turned and ran. Spock joined the Captain, eyeing the gun he had just confiscated with open curiosity, his eyebrows up. "A fascinating weapon. Is it solely sonic, I wonder? If so, how do they keep it in a tight beam?"

"We'll work that out later. Let's get out of here."

There was nobody in the Council room but Anan when they burst in. He was pouring something into a glass from a small bottle. He froze when he saw them, then smoothly resumed the motion and drank.

"Would you care to join me, Captain? You may find our Trova most interesting."

"I didn't come to drink."

Anan nodded toward the weapon in Kirk's hand. "I assume that is what you used to destroy disintegration chamber number twelve."

"Yes. A most efficient weapon—and I'm not at all chary of using it."

"That much is obvious," Anan said. "Clearly you are a barbarian."

"I am?" Kirk said incredulously.

"Quite. Why not? We all are. Surely in your history too, you were a killer first, a builder second. That is our joint heritage."

"We are a little less cold-blooded about it than you are."

"What does that matter to the dead?" Anan said.

"You have a point. Nevertheless, I don't think you realize the risk you're taking. We don't make war with computers and herd the casualties off to suicide stations. We make the real thing. I could destroy this planet of yours, Councilman. Mr. Spock, Yeoman Manning, see if you can find one of our communicators in this place."

"I already have," Spock said. He handed it over. Anan watched warily.

"Captain," he said, "surely you see the position we are in. If your people do not report to the disintegration chambers, it is a violation of an agreement dating back five hundred years."

"My people are not responsible for your agreements."

"You are an officer of a force charged with keeping the peace," Anan said. He seemed almost to be pleading. "Yet you will be responsible for an escalation that could destroy two worlds. Millions of people horribly killed, complete destruction of our culture and Vendikar's. Disaster, disease, starvation, pain, suffering, lingering death . . ."

"They seem to frighten you," Kirk said grimly.

"They frighten any sane man!"

"Quite so."

"Don't you see?" Anan said desperately. "We've done away with all that! Now you threaten to bring it all down on us again. Do those four hundred people of yours mean more than the hundreds of millions of innocent people on Eminiar and Vendikar? What kind of a monster are you?"

"I'm a barbarian," Kirk said. Nevertheless, this was indeed a nasty impasse. After a moment, he activated the communicator.

"Mr. Scott? Kirk here."

"Captain! We thought they'd got you."

"They thought so too," Kirk said. "What's the situation up there?"

"It's been lively," Scott's voice said. "First they tried to

lure us all down with a fake message from you. Luckily, our computer told us the voice-patterns didn't match, though it was a bonny imitation—you'd have enjoyed it. Then they sent us their ultimatum. I dinna have any such orders and I paid no attention."

"Good for you. Then what?"

"When the deadline was past, they opened fire on the *Enterprise*. Of course, after the ultimatum we had our screens up. I wanted to bounce a couple of dozen photon torpedoes off them for a starter—after all, the time was past when they said they were going to kill all of you—but Ambassador Fox wouldna let me. Then he wanted me to let down the screens so he could beam down to the planet and try to patch things up, and *I* wouldna do *that*. Now the haggis is really in the fire as far as he's concerned."

"Scotty, your decisions were entirely proper, and I'll back them to the hilt. I'm going to try to straighten this mess out down here. There's a good chance that I won't succeed. If you don't hear anything to the contrary from me in forty-eight hours, execute General Order Twenty-Four."

"Twenty-Four? But, Captain . . ." There was a long pause. Then Scott's voice said: "In forty-eight hours. Aye, sir. Good luck."

"Thanks. Kirk out."

"And just what," Anan asked, "does that mean?"

"It means that in forty-eight hours, the *Enterprise* will destroy Eminiar Seven."

"You're bluffing. You wouldn't."

"I didn't start this, Councilman," Kirk said. "But I mean to finish it. Now . . ."

He moved to the table and pushed the button he had seen Anan use earlier. The wall slid aside as before, revealing the war room.

"Mr. Spock, see if you can figure that installation out. Anan, you still have something to learn. Destruction. Disease. Suffering. Horror. That's what war is supposed to be, Anan. *That's what makes it a thing to be avoided*. But you've made war neat and painless—so neat and painless that you had no reason to put a stop to it. That's why you've been carrying it on for five hundred years. Any luck, Mr. Spock?"

"Yes, sir," the first officer said. "I cannot read the big

map, but the rest of it seems to be quite straightforward. This unit controls the disintegrator booths; these the attacking devices; this the defense. And these compute the casualties. They are all tied in with a subspace transmission unit, apparently so they are in constant contact with their Vendikan counterparts."

"Is that essential?"

"I would think so, Captain. The minute contact is broken, it would be tantamount to an abrogation of the entire agreement between the two warring parties."

"What are you talking about?" Anan said, in dawning horror.

"This is the key, Captain," Spock said, pointing to an isolated computer. He threw a switch on it, and then another. "The circuit is locked. Destroy this one, and they will all go."

"Good. Stand back. You too, Anan." He raised the stolen disruptor.

"No!" Anan screamed. "No, please . . ."

Kirk fired. The key computer burst. A string of minor explosions seemed to run from it along the main computer bank—and then they were no longer minor. Hastily, Kirk herded everyone out into the corridor. They huddled against the wall, while the floor shook, and billows of smoke surged out of the door of the Council room.

It took a long time. At last, Kirk said, "Well—that's it."

"Do you realize what you've done?" Anan screamed.

"Perfectly. I've given you back the horrors of war. The Vendikans will now assume that you have abandoned your agreement, and will prepare for a real war, with real weapons. The next attack they launch will do a lot more than count up numbers on a computer. It will destroy your cities, devastate your planet. You'll want to retaliate, of course. If I were you I'd start making bombs."

"You *are* a monster," Anan whispered.

Kirk ignored him. "Yes, Councilman, you've got a real war on your hands. You can either wage it—with real weapons—or you might consider the alternative."

"There is no alternative."

"There is," Kirk said harshly. "Make peace."

"After five hundred years of casualties? You're mad!"

"Maybe. But we too have killed in the past, as you pointed out a while ago. Nevertheless, we can stop. We can admit we have been killers—but we're not going to kill today. That's all it takes; one simple decision. We are not going to kill today."

Anan put a shaking hand to his forehead. "I don't know . . . I can't see . . ."

"We'll help you." He raised the communicator. "Scotty, have you and Ambassador Fox been following this conversation? I left the line open for you."

"Aye, that we have."

"Then you can beam the Ambassador down here if you want."

After a moment, there was a shimmer in the chamber, and Fox materialized, looking portly and confused.

"This is what you do," Kirk told Anan. "Contact Vendikar. I think you'll find that they're just as terrified and appalled as you are at the prospects. They'll do anything to avoid the alternative I've just given you; peace—or utter destruction. It's up to you."

Anan looked at them all, hope fighting with despair on his face. Ambassador Fox stepped forward.

"Councilman," he said, "as a third party, interested only in peace and the establishment of normal relations, I will be glad to offer my services as a negotiator between you and Vendikar. I have had some small experience in these matters."

Anan took a step toward him. "Perhaps," he muttered. "Perhaps there may be time. I have a direct channel to the Vendikar High Council. It hasn't been used in centuries."

"Then it's long overdue," the Ambassador said. "If you'll be so kind as to lead the way . . ."

Anan started hesitantly down the corridor, his steps beginning to regain their springiness. Fox followed closely. Anan said, "I understand the head of the Vendikar Council—his name is Ripoma—is an intelligent man. And if he hears from a disinterested party like yourself . . ."

His voice became unintelligible as they rounded a corner. The rest of the *Enterprise* party watched them go.

"There is a chance it will work, Captain," Spock said. "Much depends upon the approach and the conduct of the negotiations, of course."

"Annoying though he is, Ambassador Fox has a reputation for being good at his job," Kirk said. "I'm glad he's going to be good for something at last." He raised the communicator once more. "Kirk to *Enterprise*. Cancel General Order Twenty-Four. Alert transporter room. Ready to beam up in ten minutes."

"Aye, sir."

"Still, Captain," Spock said, "you took a very big chance."

"Did I, Mr. Spock? They were killing three million people a year—and it had gone on for five hundred years. An actual attack might not have killed any more people than the fifteen hundred million they've already killed in their computer attacks—but it would have destroyed their ability to make war. The fighting would be over. Permanently."

"I would not care to have counted on that," Spock said.

"I wasn't, Mr. Spock. It was only a calculated risk. What I was really counting upon was that the Eminians keep a very orderly society—and actual war is very messy. Very, very messy. I had a feeling they'd do anything to avoid it—even talk peace!"

"A feeling, Captain? Intuition?"

"No," Kirk said. "Call it . . . shall we say, cultural morphology?"

If Spock had any answer, it was lost in the shimmer of the transporter effect.

TOMORROW IS YESTERDAY

(D. C. Fontana)

The star was very old—as old as it is possible for a star to be, a first-generation star, born when the present universe was born. It had had all the experiences possible for a star—it had had planets; had gone nova, wiping out those planets and all those who lived upon them; had become an X-ray star; then a neutron star. At last, slowly collapsing upon itself into an ultimately dense mass of pseudomatter resembling—except for its compaction—the primordial ylem out of which it had been created, it drew its gravitational field in so closely about itself that not even the few dim red flickers of light left to it could get out, and it prepared to die.

The star was still there, still in its orbit, and still incredibly massive despite its shrunken volume; but it could no longer be seen or detected. It would soon be in a space all its own, a tiny sterile universe as uninteresting and forgotten as a burial jug. It had become a black star.

The *Enterprise*, on a rare trip back toward the Sol sector and Earth, hit the black star traveling at warp factor four—sixty-four times the speed of light.

It could not, of course, properly be said that the *Enterprise* hit the black star itself. Technically, the bubble of subspace in which the *Enterprise* was enclosed, which would have been moving at 64C had the bubble impossibly been in normal space at all, hit that part of the black star's gravitational cocoon that had also begun to extrude into subspace. The technicalities, however, are not very convincing. Since no such thing had ever happened to a starship before, nobody could have predicted it, and the theoreticians are still arguing about just *why* the collision produced the results it did.

About the results themselves, nobody is in any doubt.

Captain Kirk dragged himself up from unconsciousness and shook his head to clear it. This was a mistake, and he did not try it a second time. The bridge was dim and

quiet; the main lights were off, so was the screen, and only a few telltales glowed on the boards. Crew personnel—Spock, Uhura, Sulu—were slumped in their seats; Ames, the security chief, was spilled crookedly on the deck. It looked like the aftermath of a major attack.

“Spock!”

The first officer stirred, and then got shakily to his feet. “Here, Captain. What in the nine worlds . . .”

“I don’t know. Everything was normal, and then, blooey! Check us out.”

“Right.” In immediate control of himself, Spock ran a quick check of his library computer. Except for a few flickers here and there on the board, it was dead, as Kirk could see himself. Spock abandoned it without a second thought and went promptly to Uhura.

“Except for secondary systems, everything is out, sir,” he said. “We are on impulse power only. If Mr. Scott is still with us, the auxiliaries should be on in a moment. Are you all right, Lieutenant?”

Uhura nodded wordlessly and smiled at him, though it was not a very convincing smile. At the same moment, the main lights flickered on, brightened and steadied. A hum of computers and pumps began to fill in the familiar, essential background noise that was as much a part of life on the *Enterprise* as the air.

“Mr. Scott,” Spock said, straightening, “is still with us.”

Sulu sat up groggily, also shook his head, and also apparently decided against trying the experiment a second time. Kirk flicked a switch on his chair panel.

“This is the captain,” he said. “Damage control parties on all decks, check in. All departments tie in to the library computer. Report casualties and operational readiness to the first officer. Kirk out. Miss Uhura, contact Starfleet control. Whatever we hit in the Base Nine area, I want them alerted—and maybe they’ll know something about it we don’t. Mr. Spock?”

Spock half-turned from his station, an earphone still to one ear. “Only minor injuries to the crew, Captain. All decks operating on auxiliary systems. Engineering reports warp engines nonoperational. Mr. Scott overrode the automatic helm setting and is using impulse power to hold us in fixed orbit, but . . .”

“Fixed orbit around what, Mr. Spock?”

“The Earth, sir. I am at present unable to say how we got here.”

“Screen on,” Kirk said.

The screen came on. It was the Earth below them, all right.

“We’re too low in the atmosphere to retain this altitude,” Spock said. “Engineer reports we have enough impulse power to achieve escape velocity.”

“Helm, give us some altitude.”

“Yes, sir,” Sulu said. “Helm answers. She’s sluggish, sir.”

“Sir,” Uhura said. “Normal Starfleet channel has nothing on it but static. I’m picking up something on another frequency, but it’s not identifiable.”

“Put it on audio, Lieutenant.”

Uhura flicked a tumbler and the loudspeaker on her board burst out: “. . . five-thirty news summary. Cape Kennedy—the first manned moon shot is scheduled for Wednesday, six A.M., Eastern Standard Time. All three astronauts set to make this historic flight are . . .”

Kirk was up out of his chair on the instant. “The first manned moon shot!” he said. “You’ve got some sort of dramatization. That shot was back in the 1970s.”

Uhura nodded and tried another channel, but from the computer, Spock said slowly: “Apparently, Captain, so are we.”

“Mr. Spock, this is no time for joking.”

“I never joke,” Spock said severely. “At present I have only rough computations, but apparently what we hit was the subspace component of an intense spherical gravity field, very likely a black star. The field translated our momentum in terms of time—a relativistic effect. I can give you an exact reading in a few moments, but 1970 seems to be of about the right order of magnitude.”

Kirk sat down again, stunned. Uhura continued scanning. Finally she said, “Captain, I’m picking up a ground-to-air transmission in this sector.”

“Verified,” Spock said. “Our scanners are picking up some kind of craft approaching from below us, under cloud cover and closing fast.”

The loudspeaker said: “Blue Jay Four, this is Black Jack. We’re tracking both you and the UFO.”

"I have him on my screen," another voice said. "Following."

"Good, let's get this one for once."

"Mr. Sulu," Kirk said, "can we gain altitude faster?"

"I'm trying, sir, but she's still slow in responding."

"Blue Jay Four, have you got visual contact yet?"

"I can see it fine," said the second voice. "And it's huge too. As big as a cruiser, bigger maybe. It is saucer-shaped, but there're two cylindrical projections on top and one below."

"We have two more flights scrambled and on the way," said the first voice. "They'll rendezvous with you in two minutes."

"Won't be here, Black Jack. The UFO is climbing away fast."

"Blue Jay Four, close on the object and force it to land. We want it down—or at least disabled until the other planes arrive. After thirty years of rumors, this may be our first clear shot."

"Acknowledged. Closing in."

"Can he harm us?" Kirk said.

"I would judge so, Captain," Spock said. "The aircraft is an interceptor equipped with missiles, possibly armed with nuclear warheads. Since we do not have the power for a full screen, he could at least damage us severely."

"Scotty!" Kirk said into his microphone. "Activate tractor beam. Lock onto that aircraft and hold it out there."

"Captain," Spock said, "that type of aircraft may be too fragile to take tractor handling."

"Tractor on, sir," Scott's voice said briskly. "We have the target."

Spock looked into his hooded viewer and shook his head. "And it is breaking up, Captain."

"Transporter room! Can you lock on the cockpit of that aircraft?"

"No problem, Captain."

"Beam that pilot aboard," Kirk said, springing up. "Spock, take over."

The figure who materialized in the transporter chamber was a strange sight to Kirk until he removed his oxygen mask and helmet. Then he was revealed as a medium-tall,

compactly built man with an expression of grim determination despite his obvious amazement. He would have made a good starship crewman, Kirk thought . . . centuries from now.

"Welcome to the *Enterprise*," Kirk said, smiling.

"You . . . you speak English!"

"That's right," Kirk said. "You can step down from our transporters, Mr. . . . ?"

"Captain John Christopher," the pilot said stiffly. "United States Air Force, serial number 4857932. And that's all the information you get."

"Relax, Captain. You're among friends. I'm Captain James T. Kirk, and I apologize for bringing you aboard so abruptly. But we had no choice. I didn't know your ship couldn't hold up under our tractor beam until it was too late."

"Don't give me any double-talk," Christopher said. "I demand to know . . ."

"You're in no position to demand anything, but we'll answer all your questions anyhow in good time. Meanwhile, relax. You're our guest. I have a feeling you'll find it interesting."

He led the way out of the transporter room. Christopher shrugged and followed. As they moved down the corridor, he was obviously missing nothing; clearly a trained observer. When a pretty young crew-woman carrying a tricorder went past them, however, he had trouble retaining his composure. "Passenger?" he said.

"No, crew. About a fourth of the crew is female—exactly a hundred at the moment."

"A crew of four hundred?"

"Four hundred and thirty. Now if you'll step aboard the elevator . . ."

Christopher did, and was immediately startled once more when it moved horizontally instead of up or down. After digesting this peculiarity, he said:

"It must have taken quite a lot of money to build a ship like this."

"Indeed it did. There are only twelve like it in the fleet."

"The fleet? Did the Navy . . . ?"

"We're a combined service, Captain," Kirk said. "Our authority is the United Federation of Planets."

"Federation of—Planets?"

"That's right. Actually, Captain—this is a little difficult to explain. We . . . we're from your future. A time warp landed us back here. It was an accident."

"You people seem to have a lot of them," Christopher said drily, "if all the UFO reports stem from the same kind of source. However, I can't argue with the fact that you *are* here, ship and all." While he spoke, the elevator doors snapped open to reveal the bridge, with Spock in the command chair. "And I've never believed in little green men."

"Neither have I," Spock said, rising.

This time Christopher made no attempt to conceal his astonishment. *And Spock claims he never jokes*, Kirk thought; but he said only, "Captain Christopher, this is my first officer, Commander Spock."

"Captain," Spock said with an abrupt but courteous nod.

"Please feel free to look around the bridge, Captain. I'm sure you have the good sense not to touch anything. I think you'll find it interesting."

"Interesting," Christopher said, "is not a very adequate word for it." He moved over toward the communications and library-computer stations, but could not help shooting another look at Spock as he did so. Kirk did not explain; everybody else on board took the half-alien first officer as a matter of course, and Christopher might as well practice doing the same; he might be with them for quite a while yet.

"We have achieved a stable orbit out of Earth's atmosphere, Captain," Spock said. "Our deflector shields are operative now, and ought to prevent us from being picked up again as a UFO." He made a grimace of distaste over the word. "Mr. Scott wishes to speak to you about the engines."

"Very well, Mr. Spock. I know that expression. What else is on your mind?"

"Captain Christopher."

Kirk looked toward the newcomer. He was talking to Uhura; the spectacle of a beautiful Bantu girl operating a communications board evidently had diverted him, at least temporarily, from the first officer.

"All right, what about him?"

"We cannot return him to Earth," Spock said. "He already knows too much about us and is learning more. I mean no aspersions on his character, about which I know nothing, but suppose an unscrupulous man were to gain possession of the knowledge of man's certain future, as represented by us? Such a man could speculate—manipulate key industries, stocks, even nations—and in doing so, change what must be. And if it is changed, Captain, you and I and everything we know might be made impossible."

"We'd just vanish? Including thousands of tons of *Enterprise*?"

"Like a soap bubble."

"Hmm. You know, Spock, your logic can be very annoying." Kirk looked back at Christopher. "That flight suit must be uncomfortable. Have the quartermaster issue Captain Christopher some suitable clothes—tactfully relieving him of any sidearms he may be carrying in the process—and then I want to see you and him in my quarters."

"Yes, sir."

Kirk was talking to the computer when they came in; he waved them to seats. "Captain's log, supplemental. Engineering Officer Scott reports warp engines damaged but repairable. Ascertain precise degree and nature of damage, compute nature and magnitude of forces responsible, and program possible countermeasures."

"Affirm; operating," said the computer's voice in mid-air. Christopher did not react; evidently he was getting used to surprises.

"Kirk out. Now, Captain, we have a problem. To put the matter bluntly, what are we going to do with you? We can't put you back."

"What do you mean, can't? Mr. Spock here tells me that your transporter can work over even longer distances than this."

"It's not the transporter," Kirk said. "You know what the future looks like, Captain. If anybody else finds out, they could change the course of it—and destroy it."

"I can see that," Christopher said after a moment. "But it also strikes me that my disappearance would also change things."

"Apparently not," Spock said. "I have run a computer check through all historical tapes. They show no relevant contribution by any Captain John Christopher. There was a popular author by that name, but it was a pen name; you are not he."

Christopher was visibly deflated, but not for long. He stood and began to pace. Finally he swung back toward Kirk.

"Captain," he said, "if it were only a matter of my own preference, I'd stay. I'd give my right arm to learn more about this ship—all about it. It's a colossal achievement and obviously it implies even greater ones in the background. But my preference doesn't count. It's my duty to report what I've seen. I have an oath to uphold." He paused, then added pointedly: "What would you do?"

"Just that," Kirk said. "I entirely understand. You are the kind of man we recruit for our own service, and can never get enough of, though we don't have oaths any more. But unfortunately, this means that you are also of superior intelligence. We cannot risk any report that you might make."

"I have a wife and two children," Christopher said quietly. "I suppose that makes no difference to you."

"It makes a lot of difference to me," Kirk said. "But I cannot let it sway me."

"In both your trades—the pilot and the warrior—there was always an unusually high risk that you would become a casualty," Spock said. "You knew it when you married; so did your wife. You bet against the future, with high odds against you. Unfortunately, we are the future and you have lost; you are, in effect, now a casualty."

"Mr. Spock is no more unfeeling than I am," Kirk added. "But logic is one of his specialties, and what he says is quite true. I can only say I'm sorry, and I mean it." The intercom interrupted him. "Excuse me a moment. Kirk here."

"Engineer here, Captain. Everything's jury-rigged, but we're coming along with the repairs and should be ready to reenergize in four hours."

"Good. Scotty, you can fix anything."

"Except broken hearts, maybe. But, sir . . ."

"What is it? Plow right ahead."

"Well, sir," Scott's voice said, "I can fix the engines,

but I canna build you a time machine. We'll be ready to go, but we've no place *to* go in this era. Mister Spock tells me that in the 1970s the human race was wholly confined to the Earth. Space outside the local group of stars was wholly dominated by the Vegan Tyranny, and you'll recall what happened when we first hit *them*. D'ye see the problem?"

"I'm afraid," Kirk said heavily, "that I do. Very well, Mr. Scott, carry on."

"Yes, sir. Out."

Christopher's face was a study in bitter triumph; but what he said next, oddly, was obviously designed to be helpful—or at least, to establish that his own hope was well-founded.

"Mr. Spock here tells me that he is half Vulcan. Surely you can reach Vulcan from here. That's supposed to be just inside the orbit of Mercury."

"There is no such solar planet as Vulcan," Kirk said. "Mr. Spock's father was a native of The Vulcan, which is a planet of 40 Eridani. Of course we could reach that too . . ."

". . . but in the 1970's," Spock finished. "If we took the *Enterprise* there, we would unwrite *their* future history too. Captain, this is the most perfect case of General Order Number One that I have ever encountered—or think I am likely to encounter."

"The order," Kirk explained to Christopher, "prohibits interference with the normal development of alien life and alien societies. It hadn't occurred to me until Mr. Spock mentioned it, but I'm sure it would be construed to apply here too."

"Too bad, Captain," Christopher said. He was not bothering to conceal his triumph now. "Maybe I can't go home—but neither can you. You're as much a prisoner in time as I am on this ship."

"I believe, sir," Spock said, "that Captain Christopher's summary is quite exact."

It was indeed exact, but not complete, as Kirk quickly realized. There was also the problem of supplies. The *Enterprise* could never land on any planet—and certainly would not dare to land on this one, its own home world, even if it were possible—and it was simply ridiculous to even consider trying to steal food, water and power by gig

or transporter for 430 people. As for Christopher—who had already tried to escape through the transporter and had come perilously close to making it—what prospects did he have if the *Enterprise* somehow did get back to its own time? He would be archaic, useless, a curiosity. Possibly he could be retrained sufficiently to find a niche, but never retrained to forget his wife and children. To check that, Kirk visited McCoy, the ship's surgeon.

"Get him down here and I'll check," McCoy said.

Kirk put in the call. "You mean it *might* be done?"

"It depends upon the depth of his commitment. Some marriages are routine. I'll have to see what the electroencephalograph shows."

"You're starting to sound like Spock."

"If you're going to get nasty, I'll leave."

Kirk grinned, but the grin faded quickly. "If the depth of his commitment is crucial, we're sunk. He's the kind who commits himself totally. Witness yesterday's escape attempt."

Spock came in with the prisoner—after the escape attempt, there was no other honest word for it. He said at once:

"Captain, I do not know what Dr. McCoy has in mind, but I think it may be useless by now; I have some new information. I find I made an error in my computations."

"This," McCoy said drily, "could be a historic occasion."

Spock ignored the surgeon. "I find that we must return Captain Christopher to Earth after all."

"You said I made no relative contributions." Christopher said sourly.

"I was speaking of cultural contributions. I have now checked the genetic contributions, which was a serious oversight. In running a cross-check on that factor, I discovered that your son, Colonel Shaun Geoffrey Christopher, headed . . . *will* head the first successful Earth-Titan probe, which is certainly significant. If Captain Christopher is not returned, there won't be any Colonel Christopher to go to the Saturnian satellites, since the boy does not yet exist."

The grin on Christopher's face made him look remarkably like a Halloween pumpkin. "A boy," he said, to nobody in particular. "I'm going to have a son."

"And we," McCoy said, "have a headache."

"No," Kirk said. "We have an obligation. Two obligations, mutually antagonistic."

"It is possible that we can satisfy both of them at once," Spock said.

"How? Out with it, man!"

"I have the data you ordered the computer to work out, and there is now no question but that the only reason we are here at all is because we had a head-on collision with a black star. To get back home, we are going to have to contrive something similar."

"Do you know of any black stars around here? And how will that solve our problem with Captain Christopher?"

"There is a black star quite nearby, in fact, Captain, but we cannot use it because it is well out of transporter range of Earth. That would prevent our returning Captain Christopher. But Engineering Officer Scott thinks we may be able to use our own sun. It will, he says, be a rough ride, but will also offer us certain advantages. Briefly, if we make a close hyperbolic passage around the sun at warp eight . . ."

"Not with *my* ship," Kirk said coldly.

"Please, Captain, hear me out. We need the velocity because we must compensate for the Sun's relatively weak gravitational field. And I spoke of advantages. What will happen, if nothing goes wrong, is that we will retreat further into time as we reach the head of the hyperbola . . ."

"Just what we need," McCoy said.

"Shut up, Bones, I want to hear this."

". . . and as we mount the other leg of the curve, there will be a slingshot effect that will hurl us forward in time again. If this is most precisely calculated, we will pass within transporter range of the Earth within two or three minutes *before* the time when we arrived here the first time, before we first appeared in the sky. At that moment, we reinject Captain Christopher into his plane—which will not have been destroyed yet—and the whole chain of consequences will fall apart. Essentially, it will never have happened at all."

"Are you sure of that?"

Spock raised his eyebrows. "No, sir, of course I am not sure of it. Mr. Scott and I think it may work. The com-

puter concurs. Certainty is not an attainable goal in a problem like this."

"True enough," Kirk agreed. "But I don't see that it solves our problem with Captain Christopher at all. It gets him back home, but with his memories intact—and that's what we have to avoid at all costs. I would rather destroy the *Enterprise* than the future."

There was a brief silence. Both Spock and McCoy knew well what such a decision had cost him. Then Spock said gently, "Captain, Mr. Scott and I see no such necessity. Bear in mind that Captain Christopher will arrive home *before* he was taken aboard our ship. He will have nothing to remember—because none of it will ever have happened."

Kirk turned to the pilot from the past. "Does that satisfy you?"

"Do I have a choice?" Christopher said. "Well, I won't quibble. It gets me home—and obviously I can't do my duty if I can't remember what it is. Only . . ."

"Only what?"

"Well, I never thought I'd make it into space. I was in line for the space program, but I didn't qualify."

"Take a good look around, Captain," Kirk said quietly. "You made it here ahead of all of them. We were not the first. You were."

"Yes, I know that," Christopher said, staring down at his clenched fists. "And I've seen the future too. An immense gift. I . . . I'll be very sorry to forget it."

"How old are you?" McCoy said abruptly.

"Eh? I'm thirty."

"Then, Captain Christopher," McCoy said, "in perhaps sixty more years, or a few more, you will forget things many times more important to you than this—your wife, your children, and indeed the very fact that you ever existed at all. You will forget every single thing you ever loved, and what is worse, you will not even care."

"Is that," Christopher said angrily, "supposed to be consoling? If that's a sample of the philosophy of the future, I can do without it."

"I am not counseling despair," McCoy said, very gently. "I am only trying to remind you that regardless of our achievements, we all at last go down into the dark. I am a doctor and I have seen a great deal of death. It

doesn't discourage me. On the contrary, I'm trying to call to your attention the things that are much more valuable to you than the fact that you've seen men from the future and a bucketful of gadgetry. You will have those still, though you forget us. We are trying to give them back to you, those sixty-plus years you might otherwise have wasted in a future you could never understand. The fact that you will have to forget this encounter in the process seems to me to be a very small fee."

Christopher stared at McCoy as though he had never seen him before. After a long pause, he said, "I was wrong. Even if I did remember, I would do nothing to destroy a future that . . . that has even one such man in it. And I see that underneath all your efficiency and gadgetry, you're *all* like that. I am proud to be one of your ancestors. Captain Kirk, I concur in anything you decide."

"Your bravery helped to make us whatever we are," Kirk said. "Posts, everybody."

"And besides," Spock added, "it is quite possible that we won't make it at all."

"Now there," McCoy said, "is a philosophy *I* can do without."

Kirk said evenly, "We will take the chance that we have. If you'll join me on the bridge, Captain Christopher, we will at least give you a bumpy last ride for your money."

Christopher grinned. "That's the kind I like."

It was indeed a bumpy ride. Warp Eight was an acceleration called upon only in the most extreme of emergencies—although this surely classified as one—and could not be sustained for long without serious damage to the *Enterprise*. It was decidedly unsettling to hear the whole monstrous fabric of the ship, which ordinarily seemed as solid as a planet, creaking and straining around them as the pressure was applied, and to hear the engines—usually quite quiet—howling below decks.

For Kirk, it was almost more unsettling to watch the planets begin to both revolve and rotate in the wrong direction in the navigation tank, as the combined acceleration and gravitational energies were translated into motion backwards in time. Perhaps fortunately for his

sanity, he did not have to watch long, however, for the close approach to the sun eventually made it necessary to close off all outside sensors. They were flying blind.

Then the swing was completed, and the sensors could be opened again—and now the planets were moving in their proper directions, but rather decidedly too fast, as the *Enterprise* shot up the time curve. In the Transporter Room, Captain Christopher waited tensely, in full flight dress.

"Passing 1968," Spock said from his post. "January 1969 . . . March . . . May . . . July . . . the pace is picking up very rapidly . . . November . . ."

Kirk gripped the arms of his chair. This was going to have to be the most split-second of all Transporter shots. No human operator could hope to bring it off; the actual shift would be under the control of the computer.

"June . . . August . . . December . . . into 1970 now—"

Suddenly, and only for an instant, the lights dimmed. It was over so quickly that it could almost have been an illusion.

"Transporter Room! Did you—?"

But there was no time to complete the question. The lights dimmed again, all the stars in the heavens seemed to be scrambling for new places, and there was a huge wrench in what seemed to be the whole fabric of the universe.

At last the stars were stable—and the instruments showed the *Enterprise* to be doing no more than Warp One. The gigantic thrust had all been drained off into time.

"Well, Mr. Spock?"

"We made it, sir," Spock said quietly.

"Transporter Room, did you get a picture of the shot?"

"Yes, sir. Here it is."

The still picture glowed on an auxiliary screen. Kirk studied it. It showed Captain Christopher in the cockpit of his undestroyed airplane. He looked quite unharmed, though perhaps a bit dazed.

"And so we have revised Omar," Mr. Spock said.

"Omar?" Kirk said. "Which part?"

"The verse about the moving finger, sir. The poet says that once it writes, it moves on, and we have no power

to unwrite a line of it. But it would appear, sir, that we have."

"No," Kirk said, "I don't think that's the case. History has *not* been changed—and it's quite possible that we would have been unable to do anything else than what we in fact did. That's a question for the philosophers. But as of now, Mr. Spock, I think Omar's laurels are still in place."

ERRAND OF MERCY

(Gene L. Coon)

The Klingon scout ship must have known that it was no match whatsoever for the *Enterprise*—after all, the Klingons were experts in such matters. But it fired on the *Enterprise* anyhow as Kirk's ship approached Organia.

The Federation ship's phasers promptly blew the scout into very small flinders, but the attack was a measure of the Klingons' determination to bar the Federation from using Organia as a base. Organia was of no intrinsic value to either side—largely farmland, worked by a people with neither any skill at, nor interest in, fighting—but strategically it was the only Class M planet in the disputed zone, over which negotiations had already broken down. It was, Kirk thought, another Armenia, another Belgium—the weak innocents who always turn out to be located on a natural invasion route.

And the scout ship had had plenty of time to get off a message before opening fire. It had to be assumed that a Klingon fleet was now on the way, if there hadn't been one on the way already. That left very little time for negotiating with the Organians.

Leaving Sulu in charge of the *Enterprise*—with strict orders to cut and run if any Klingon fleet showed up—Kirk and Spock beamed down. The street in which they arrived might have been that of any English village of the thirteenth century: thatched roofs, a few people wearing rude homespun, a brace of oxen pulling a crude wagon. In the distance, something that looked like a ruined castle or fortress, old and decayed, but massive, glowered over the village—an odd construction for a culture that was supposed to have no history of warfare. As for the passersby, they paid no attention to the two starship officers, as if they were used to seeing men beaming down every day. That too seemed rather unlikely.

When the reception committee finally arrived, however, it was cordial enough. It consisted of three smiling, elderly men in fur-trimmed robes, who introduced themselves

as Ayelborne, Trefayne and Claymare. Kirk and Spock were received in a small room with roughly plastered walls and no decorations, and containing only a rude table flanked by plain chairs.

Spock lowered his tricorder. "Absolutely no energy output anywhere," he murmured to the Captain. Kirk nodded; the report only confirmed his own impression. This was not a medieval culture making progress toward mechanization, as the original reports had indicated. It was totally stagnant—a laboratory specimen of an arrested culture. Most peculiar.

"My government," he told the smiling Organians, "has informed me that the Klingons are expected to move against your planet, with the objective of making it a base of operations against our Federation. My mission, frankly, is to try to keep them from doing this."

"What you are saying," Ayelborne said, "is that we seem to have a choice between dealing with you or your enemies." In another context the words might have seemed hostile, but Ayelborne was still smiling.

"No, sir. With the Federation you will have a choice. You will have none with the Klingons. They are a military dictatorship, to which war is a way of life. We offer you protection."

"Thank you," Ayelborne said. "But we do not need your protection. We have nothing anyone could want."

"You have this planet, and its strategic location. If you don't move to prevent it, the Klingons will move in, just as surely as your sun sets. We'll help you with your defenses, build facilities . . ."

"We have no defenses, Captain, nor are any needed," the man called Claymare said.

"Excuse me, but you're wrong. I've seen what the Klingons do to planets like yours. They are organized into vast slave labor camps. You'll have no freedom whatsoever. Your goods will be confiscated. Hostages will be taken and killed. Your leaders will be confined. You'd be better off on a penal planet."

"Captain," Ayelborne said, "we see that your concern is genuine, and we appreciate it. But again we assure you that there is absolutely no danger . . ."

"I assure you that there is! Do you think I'm lying? Why?"

"You did not let me finish," Ayelborne said gently. "I was going to say, there is no danger to ourselves. You and your friend are in danger, certainly. It would be best for you to return to your ship as soon as possible."

"Gentlemen, I beg you to reconsider. We can be of immense help to you. In addition to the military assistance, we can send in technicians, specialists. We can show you how to feed a thousand people where you fed one before. We'll build schools and help you educate your young, teach them what we know—your public facilities seem to be almost nonexistent. We could remake your world, end disease, hunger, hardship. But we are forbidden to help you if you refuse to be helped."

"A moving plea," Trefayne said. "But . . ."

He was interrupted by the beeping of Kirk's communicator. "Excuse me, sir," he said. "Kirk here."

"Captain," said Sulu's voice. "A large number of Klingon vessels just popped out of subspace around us. I didn't get a count before they opened fire but there must be at least twenty. My screens are up now, and I can't drop them to beam you aboard."

"You're not supposed to," Kirk said harshly. "Your orders are to run for it and contact the fleet. Come back only if you've got better odds. Mark and move!"

He switched off and stared at the three Organians.

"You kept insisting that there was no danger. Now . . ."

"We are already aware of the Klingon fleet," Trefayne said. "There are in fact eight more such vessels now assuming orbit around our planet."

"Can you verify that, Spock?"

"No, sir, not at this distance," Spock said. "But it seems a logical development."

"Ah," Trefayne added. "Several hundred armed men have just appeared near the citadel."

Spock aimed his tricorder in that direction and nodded. "Not just hand weapons, either," he said. "I am picking up three or four pieces of heavy-duty equipment. How did he know that so quickly, I wonder?"

"That doesn't matter now," Kirk said grimly. "What matters is that we're stranded here, right in the middle of the Klingon occupation army."

"So it would seem, sir," Spock said. "Not a pleasant prospect."

"Mr. Spock," Kirk said, "you have a gift for understatement."

The Klingons were hard-faced, hard-muscled men, originally of Oriental stock. They were indeed heavily armed and wore what looked like vests of mail. They moved purposefully and efficiently through the streets, posting guards as they went. The few Organians they met smiled at them and moved quietly, passively out of their way.

To compound Kirk's bafflement, the uncooperative Organian council—if that is what the three men were—had provided him and Spock with Organian clothing and offered to conceal them, an offer entailing colossal risks. Then, rummaging through the discarded uniforms, Kirk demanded suddenly: "Where are our weapons?"

"We took them, Captain," Ayelborne said. "We cannot permit violence here. Claymare, remove the uniforms. No, we will have to protect you ourselves. Mr. Spock presents the chief problem. He will have to pose as a Vulcan trader—perhaps here to deal in kevas and trillium."

"They're aware that Vulcan is a member of the Federation," Kirk said.

"But harmless to the Klingons. You, Captain, might well be an Organian citizen, if . . ."

He got no further. The door flew open, and two Klingon soldiers burst in, gesturing with handguns for everyone to back up. They were followed by a third Klingon, an erect, proud man, who did not need his commander's insignia to show who he was.

Spock and the Organians retreated; Kirk stood his ground. The Klingon commander looked quickly around the room.

"*This* is the ruling council?" he said contemptuously.

Ayelborne stepped forward again, smiling. "I am Ayelborne, temporary council head. I bid you welcome."

"No doubt you do. I am Kor, military governor of Organia." He glared at Kirk. "Who are you?"

"He is Baronet," Ayelborne said. "One of our leading citizens. This is Trefayne . . ."

"This Baronet has no tongue?"

"I have a tongue," Kirk said.

"Good. When I address you, you will answer. Where is your smile?"

"My what?"

"The stupid, idiotic smile everyone else seems to be wearing." Kor swung on Spock. "A Vulcan. Do you also have a tongue?"

"My name is Spock. I am a dealer in kevas and trillium."

"You don't look like a storekeeper. What is trillium?"

Spock said smoothly, and with an impassive face: "A medicinal plant of the lily family."

"Not on Organia, it isn't," Kor said. "Obviously a Federation spy. Take him to the examination room."

"He's no spy," Kirk said angrily.

"Well, well," Kor said. "Have we a ram among the sheep? Why do you object to us taking him? He's not even human."

Kirk caught the warning glance Spock was trying to disguise and made a major effort to control himself as well. "He has done nothing, that's all."

"Coming from an Organian, yours is practically an act of rebellion. Very good. They welcome me. Do you also welcome me?"

"You're here," Kirk said. "I can't do anything about it."

Kor stared hard at him, and then permitted himself a faint smile. "Good honest hatred," he said. "Very refreshing. However, it makes no difference whether you welcome me or not. I am here and I will stay. You are now subjects of the Klingon Empire. You will find there are many rules and regulations, which will be posted. Violation of the smallest of them will be punished by death; we will have no time for justice just now."

"Your regulations will be obeyed," Ayelborne said.

Kirk felt his mouth tightening. Kor saw it; apparently he missed very little. He said:

"You disapprove, Baronet?"

"Do you need my approval?"

"I need your obedience, nothing more," Kor said softly. "Will I have it?"

"You seem to be in command," Kirk said, shrugging.

"How true." Kor began to pace. "Now. I shall need a

representative from among you, liaison between the forces of occupation and the civilian population. I don't trust men who smile too much. Baronet, you are appointed."

"Me?" Kirk said. "I don't want the job."

"Have I asked whether or not you wanted it? As for the rest of you—we Klingons have a reputation for ruthlessness. You will find that it is deserved. Should one Klingon soldier be killed here, a thousand Organians will die. I will have *order*, is that clear?"

"Commander," Ayelborne said, "I assure you we will cause you no trouble."

"No. I am sure you will not. Baronet, come with me."

"What about Mr. Spock?"

"Why are you concerned?"

"He's my friend."

"You have poor taste in friends. He will be examined. If he is lying, he will die. If he is telling the truth, well, he will find that business has taken a turn for the worse. Guards, remove him."

The guards, covering Spock with their weapons, gestured him out the door; Spock went meekly. Kirk started after him, only to be shoved back by Kor himself. Kirk could not help flushing, but Kor only nodded.

"You do not like to be pushed," the Klingon said. "Good. At least you are a man I can understand. Come with me."

Kor had set up shop in the citadel Kirk and Spock had seen on their first arrival. Seen close up, and from inside, the impression it gave of vast age was intensified. Kor had furnished one room with a large Klingon insignia, a desk, one chair, and nothing else; Kirk stood. Kor signed a document and thrust it across the desk at him.

"For duplication and posting," he said. "From this day on, no public assemblages of more than three people. All publications to be cleared through this office. Neighborhood controls will be established. Hostages selected. A somewhat lengthy list of crimes against the state."

Kirk glanced impassively at the list, aware that Kor as usual was watching him closely. The commander said: "You do not like them?"

"Did you expect me to?"

Kor only grinned. At the same time, the door opened

and Spock was thrust inside, followed by a Klingon lieutenant. To Kirk's enormous relief, his first officer looked perfectly normal.

"Well, lieutenant?"

"He is what he claims to be, Commander," the lieutenant said. "A Vulcan trader named Spock. And he really is trading in the other kind of trillium, the vegetable kind; it seems it has value here."

"Nothing else?"

"The usual apprehension. His main concern seems to be how he will carry on his business under our occupation. His mind is so undisciplined that he could hold nothing back."

"All right, Baronet, would you like to try our little truth-finder?"

"I don't even understand it."

"It's a mind-sifter," Kor said, "or a mind-ripper, depending on how much force is used. If necessary, we can empty a man's mind as if opening a spigot. Of course, what's left is more vegetable than human."

"You're proud of it?" Kirk said.

"All war weapons are unpleasant," Kor said. "Otherwise they would be useless."

"Mr. Spock, are you sure you're all right?"

"Perfectly, Baronet. However, it was a remarkable sensation."

"That's enough," Kor said, with a trace of suspicion in his voice. "Vulcan, you can go. But just bear in mind that you're an enemy alien, and will be under scrutiny at all times."

"Quite, Commander," Spock said. "I understand you very well."

"Baronet, return to your council and get that proclamation posted. Until the people know what's expected of them, it's up to you to keep the people in order."

"Or I will be killed," Kirk said.

"Precisely. I see that you too understand me very well."

Once in the street, Kirk glanced about quickly. Nobody was within earshot, or seemed to be following them. He said quietly to Spock:

"That mind-sifter of theirs must not be quite the terror they think it is."

"I advise you not to underestimate it, Captain," Spock said. "I was able to resist it, partly with a little Vulcan discipline, partly by misdirection. But on the next higher setting, I am sure I would have been unable to protect myself."

"And I wouldn't last even that long. The question is now, how do we persuade these Organians to resist? To strike back, knock the Klingons off balance, maybe until the Federation fleet gets here?"

"Verbal persuasion seems to be ineffective," Spock said. "Perhaps a more direct approach?"

"My thought exactly. Didn't I see something that looked like a munitions dump near the citadel? I thought so. All right, let's try a little direct communication."

"The suggestion has merit. Would tonight do?"

"If you have no previous engagement," Kirk said. "Of course, we're short of tools."

"I am sure," Spock said, "the Klingons will provide whatever is necessary."

"It's a pleasure doing business with you, Mr. Spock."

The guards at the munitions depot were tough and highly trained, but nothing they had yet encountered on Organia had prepared them for anyone like Kirk and Spock. Two of them went quietly to sleep on duty within a few seconds of each other, were relieved of their phasers and locked in an empty storeroom, lovingly cocooned in balancing wire.

Inside the dump, Kirk located a crate that seemed to contain some form of chemical explosive. He opened it. A few moments later, Spock appeared from the shadows.

"I have one of their sonic grenades," he murmured, "and I have improvised a delayed-action fuse. The combination should provide a most satisfactory display."

"Good. Fire away."

Spock made a pulling gesture, carefully tucked the grenade inside the crate, and ran, Kirk at his heels.

Three minutes later, the night lit up. Giant explosions rocked it, followed by strings of subsidiary explosions. Missiles flew in all directions. An immense cloud formed

over the city, its underside flickering with the fires and detonations below it.

"You were right, Mr. Spock," Kirk said when the clamor had begun to die down. "A most satisfactory display. I only hope that the council draws the moral. Obviously they can't fight the Klingons directly, but they could make Organia useless to them."

"In the meantime," Spock said. "I earnestly suggest that we find ourselves a deep, deep hole, Captain. Somehow I cannot think that Commander Kor will believe the Organians did this."

"Nor do I. Let's vanish."

Perhaps one or both of them should have anticipated Kor's next move. Two hours later, in an empty, lightless hut near the outskirts of the village, they heard a distant, buzzing whine from the direction of the citadel.

"Phasers," Spock said.

"Yes, Klingon phasers—a lot of them, all being fired at once. Odd. It doesn't sound at all like a battle, or even a riot."

The answer came rumbling down the street outside within another hour, in the form of an armored vehicle. From a loudspeaker atop it, a recorded voice was bellowing:

"This is the military governor. In the courtyard of my headquarters, two hundred Organian hostages have just been killed. In two hours more, two hundred more will die, and two hundred more after that—until the two Federation spies are turned over to us. The blood of the hostages is on your hands. The executions will be carried on until the saboteurs are surrendered. This is the order of Kor. Attention, all subjects! This is the military governor. In the courtyard of my headquarters . . ."

Kirk and Spock were silent for a long time after the lumbering vehicle had become inaudible. At last Kirk whispered, appalled: "That tears it."

"Yes, Captain. And the Organians no more know where we are than Kor does. We must give ourselves up, and speedily."

"Wait a minute. Let me think."

"But all those lives . . ."

"I know, I know. We've got to turn ourselves in. But

we've still got sidearms. Just possibly, we can force Kor to call the killings off."

"Unlikely, Captain," Spock said. "Commander Kor may be a mass murderer, but he is clearly also a soldier."

"In that case, we'll just have to do as much damage as we can and keep them busy until the fleet shows up. The Federation invested a lot of money in our training, Mr. Spock. I think they're about due for a small return."

Spock estimated the odds against making it all the way to Kor's office at "approximately" 7,824.7 to one; but surprise and the phasers—set to heavy stun force—both told in their favor. When they reached the door of Kor's office, it was open, and no alarm had sounded. They could see the commander inside, seated at his desk, hands over his face, brooding. It seemed almost possible that he did not relish butchering unarmed civilians. When he looked up and saw Spock and Kirk before him, phasers leveled, a look of interest and appreciation appeared on his face.

"Just stay seated, Commander," Kirk said. "Mr. Spock, cover the door."

"You have done well to get this far, through my guards."

"I am afraid," Spock said, "that many of them are no longer in perfect operating condition."

"The fortunes of war. What next?"

"We're here. Call off your executions."

"You have not surrendered," Kor said in a reasonable tone of voice. "Drop your weapons and I will call off the executions. Otherwise you have accomplished nothing."

"We can certainly kill you," Kirk said grimly. "You're the Klingon governor. That might put quite a crimp in your operations."

"Don't be hasty," Kor said. "You will be interested in knowing that a Federation fleet is due here within the hour. Our fleet is prepared to meet them. Shall we wait and see the results before you pull the trigger?"

"I don't plan to pull it at all unless you force me to."

"Sheer sentimentality—or at best, mercy. A useless emotion in wartime. It is not a Klingon weakness." Kor smiled. "Think of it. While we talk here, in space above us the destiny of the galaxy will be decided for the next

ten thousand years. May I offer you a drink? We can toast the victory of the Klingon fleet."

"I would suggest that you are premature," Spock said. "There are many possibilities."

"Commander," Kirk added, "we once had a nation on Earth called the Spartans—the finest warriors who ever walked our planet. They had their hour of conquest—but it was their chief opponent, Athens, who survived. Sparta knew only the arts of war. Athens was known as the mother of all the arts."

"A consoling analogy, but I think a little out of date," Kor said. "True, there is always some element of chance in a major war. Today we conquer; someday we may be defeated. But I am inclined to doubt it."

He rose. The phaser in Kirk's hand did not waver by a millimeter. Kor ignored it.

"Do you know why we are so strong?" Kor said. "Because we are a unit. Each of us is part of the greater whole. Always under surveillance. Even a commander like myself, always under surveillance, Captain. As you will note."

He waved toward the ceiling, smiling. Kirk did not look up.

"No doubt there's a scanner up there. However, Mr. Spock has the door covered, and I have you. At the first disturbance, I fire."

There was something remarkably like a yelp of dismay from Spock, and then the unmistakable sound of a phaser hitting the stone floor. Kirk whirled, trying to keep Kor simultaneously in the corner of his eye. At the same instant the door, which Spock had closed, burst open again and two Klingon soldiers charged in.

Kirk pulled the trigger. The phaser did not fire. Instead, it turned red hot in his hand. Instinctively, he threw it from him.

"Shoot!" Kor shouted. "Shoot, you blockheads!"

There were at least five soldiers in the room now, but one after another they too dropped their weapons, which lay glowing quietly against the stone. After a moment of dismay, the guards charged. Kirk set himself and swung.

He could feel the flesh of his fist sear as it hit. A Klingon grabbed him from behind—then let go with a howl.

"Their *bodies* are hot!" one of the soldiers gasped. He

was almost drowned out by a roar from the commander, who had tried to pick up a paper knife.

After that, for an eternal ten seconds, the enemies simply glared at each other incredulously. There was no sound but that of heavy breathing.

Then Ayelborne and Claymare came in. They were wearing their eternal smiles, which even Kirk had come to loathe.

"We are terribly sorry that we have been forced to interfere, gentlemen," Ayelborne said. "But we could not permit you to harm one another. There has been enough violence already."

"What are you talking about, you sheep?"

"We have put a stop to your brawling," Claymare said. "That is all."

"Let me get this straight," Kirk said slowly. "You put a stop to it? You? You mean you're going to slap our wrists?"

"Please, Captain," Claymare said. "You already know the answer. Not only your guns, but all instruments of destruction on this planet now have a potential surface temperature of three hundred and fifty degrees. Simple intent to use one renders it inoperative."

"My fleet . . ." Kor said.

"The same conditions exist upon both the opposing Starfleets," said Ayelborne. "There will be no battle."

"Ridiculous," Kor growled.

"I suggest you contact them. You too, Captain. Your ship is now within range of your communications device."

Kirk took out his communicator. "Kirk to *Enterprise*. Come in."

"Captain! Is that you?"

"Kirk here—report, Mr. Sulu."

"I don't know what to report, sir," Sulu's voice said. "We were just closing with the Klingon fleet when every control in the ship became too hot to handle. All except the communications board. If this is some new Klingon weapon, why didn't it disable that too?"

"I don't know," Kirk said heavily. "Stand by, Mr. Sulu. Ayelborne, how did you manage this?"

"I could not explain it to you with any hope of being understood, Captain. Suffice it to say that as I stand here, I also stand upon the bridge of your ship, upon the bridge

of every ship, upon the home planet of the Klingon Empire, on the home planet of your Federation. Some of my energies I share with your weapons—I and the rest of my people. We are putting a stop to this insane war.”

“How dare you?” Kor shouted.

“You can’t just stop our fleet,” Kirk said, equally angrily. “You’ve got no right . . .”

“What happens in space is none of your business . . .”

“It is being stopped,” Ayelborne said. “Unless both sides agree to an immediate cessation of hostilities, all your armed forces, wherever they may be, will be totally disabled.”

“We have legitimate grievances against the Klingons,” Kirk said. “They’ve invaded our territory, killed our citizens . . .”

“The disputed areas are not your territory,” Kor raged. “You were trying to hem us in, cut off vital supplies, strangle our trade.”

“Look here,” Kirk said to the Organians, fighting himself back to some semblance of control. “We didn’t ask you to intervene, but you should be the first to side with us now. The two hundred hostages who were killed . . .”

“No one has died, Captain,” Claymare said calmly. “No one has died here for uncounted thousands of years. Nor do we mean that anyone shall.”

“Let me ask you, Captain, what it is that you are defending,” Ayelborne added, gently, as if amused. “Is it the right to wage war? To kill millions of innocent people? To destroy life on a planetary scale? Is that the ‘right’ you refer to?”

“Well, I . . .” Kirk said, and stopped. “Of course, nobody wants war, but sometimes you have to fight. Eventually, I suppose, we . . .”

“Yes, eventually you would make peace,” Ayelborne said. “But only after millions had died. We are bringing it about now. The fact is, in the future you and the Klingons will become fast friends. You will work together in great harmony.”

“Nonsense!” Kor said. Kirk realized that he had been standing shoulder to shoulder with the Klingon and moved away hastily.

“Of course, you are most discordant now,” Ayelborne

said. "In fact, you will have to leave. The mere presence of beings like yourselves is acutely painful to us."

"What do you mean?" Kirk said. "You don't differ significantly from us, no matter what tricks you've mastered."

"Once we did not differ significantly," Claymare said. "But that was millions of years ago. Now we have developed beyond the need for physical bodies at all. This appearance is only for your convenience. Now we shall put it off."

"Hypnosis!" Kor cried. "Captain, those weapons may never have been hot at all! Grab them!"

Ayelborne and Claymare only smiled, and then they began to change. At first it was only a glow, becoming brighter and brighter, until they looked like metal statues in a furnace. Then the human shape faded. It was as if there were two suns in the room.

Kirk shut his eyes and covered them with both arms. He could still see the light. Finally, however, it began to fade.

The Organians were gone.

"Fascinating," Spock said. "Pure thought—or pure energy? In any event, totally incorporeal. Not life as we know it at all."

"But the planet," Kirk said. "The buildings—this citadel . . ."

"Probably the planet is real enough. But the rest, conventionalizations, no doubt, just as they said. Useless to them—points of reference for us. I should guess that they are as far above us on the evolutionary scale as we are above the amoeba."

There was a long silence. Finally, Kirk turned toward Kor.

"Well, Commander," he said, "I guess that takes care of the war. Since the Organians aren't going to let us fight, we might as well get started on being friends."

"Yes," Kor said. He thrust out his hand. "Still, in a way, Captain, it's all rather saddening."

"Saddening? Because they're so much more advanced than we are? But it took millions of years. Even the gods didn't spring into being overnight."

"No, that doesn't sadden me," Kor said. "I'm only sorry that they wouldn't let us fight." He sighed. "It would have been glorious."

COURT MARTIAL

(Don M. Mankiewicz and Steven W. Carabatsos)

The *Enterprise* weathered the ion storm somehow, but one man was dead, and damage to the ship was considerable. Kirk was forced to order a nonscheduled lay-over for repairs at Star Base 11, a huge complex serving the dual role of graving dock and galactic command outpost.

He made a full report to the portmaster, Senior Captain Stone, a craggy Negro who had once been a flight officer himself; Kirk had known him in those days, though not well. The report, of course, had to include an affidavit in the matter of Records Officer Benjamin Finney, deceased, and Kirk turned that in last and only after long study. Stone noticed his hesitation, but was patient. At last he said, "That makes three times you've read it, Captain. Is there an error?"

"No," Kirk said, "but the death of a crewman . . . When you have to sign these affidavits, you relive the moment." He signed the paper and passed it to Stone.

"I know. But you can't fight Regulations. Now, let's see; the extract from your ship's computer log, confirming the deposition?"

"In the other folder."

"Good . . . though it's a great pity too. The service can't afford to lose men like Officer Finney. If he'd only gotten out of the pod in time . . ."

"I waited until the last possible moment," Kirk said. "The storm got worse. We were on double-red alert. I had to jettison."

The office door swung open suddenly. A young woman was standing there—young, and pretty, but obviously under great stress. She glared wildly at Kirk, who recognized her instantly.

"There you are!" she cried. "I wanted one more good look at you!"

"Jame!"

"Yes, Jame! And you're the man who killed my father!"

“Do you really think that?” Kirk said.

“More than that! I think you deliberately murdered him!”

“Jame, Jame, stop and think what you’re saying.” Kirk stepped toward her. “We were friends, you know that. I would no more have hurt your father than I’d hurt you.”

“Friends! That’s a lie! You never were! You hated him, all your life! And you finally killed him!”

Stone, who had been discreetly pretending to study the documents, rose suddenly and moved between them. Jame was obviously fighting back a storm of tears. Kirk watched her in dismay.

“Captain Kirk,” Stone said in a voice as hard as his name, “you say you jettisoned the pod *after* the double-red alert?”

“You have my sworn deposition,” Kirk said.

“Then, Captain, it is my duty to presume you have committed willful perjury. According to the extract from your computer log, you jettisoned the pod *before* the double-red alert. Consider yourself relieved of command. A board of inquiry will determine whether a general court martial is in order.”

Kirk never saw the board. As far as he was concerned, the inquiry consisted of Portmaster Stone and a recorder, which was to produce the tape the board would study.

“Where do you want me to begin?” Kirk said.

Stone pushed a cup of coffee toward Kirk. “Tell me about Officer Finney.”

“We’d known each other a long time. He was an instructor at the Academy when I was a midshipman. But that didn’t stop us from beginning a close friendship. His daughter, Jame, the girl who was in your office last night, was named after me.”

“The friendship—it rather cooled with the years, didn’t it? No, please speak, Captain, the recorder can’t see you nodding.”

“Yes, it did. I relieved him on watch once, on the USS *Republic*, and found the vent circuit to the fusion chamber open. If we’d gone under fusion power, the ship would have blown. As it was, it was contaminating the air of the engine room. I closed the switch and logged the

error. He drew a reprimand and went to the bottom of the promotion list."

"And he blamed you for that?"

"Yes. He'd been kept on at the Academy as an instructor for an unusually long time. As a result, he was late being assigned to a starship. He felt the delay looked bad on his record. My action, he believed, made things worse. However, I couldn't very well have let an oversight of that magnitude go unreported."

"Comment by examining officer: Service record of Officer Finney to be appended to this transcript. Now, Captain, let's get to the specifics of the storm."

"Weatherscan indicated an ion storm dead ahead," Kirk said. "I sent Finney into the pod." For the benefit of possible civilians on the board, Kirk added, "The pod is outside the ship, attached to the skin. One of our missions is to get radiation readings in abnormal conditions, including ion storms. This can only be done by direct exposure of the necessary instruments in a plastic pod. However, in a major storm the pod rapidly picks up a charge of its own that becomes a danger to the rest of the ship, and we have to get rid of it."

"Why Finney? If he blamed you . . ."

"He may have blamed me because he never rose to command rank. But I don't assign jobs on the basis of who blames me, but whose name is on top of the duty roster. It was Finney's turn. He had just checked in with me when we hit the leading edge of the storm. Not bad at first. Then we began encountering field-variance, force two. The works. I finally signaled a double-red alert. Finney knew he had only a matter of seconds. I gave him those seconds, and more—but it wasn't enough. I can't explain his not getting out. He had the training, he had the reflexes, and he had plenty of time."

"Then why, Captain," Stone said, "does the computer log—yours, made automatically at the time—indicate that there was no double-red alert when you jettisoned?"

"I don't know," Kirk said.

"Could the computer be wrong?"

"Mr. Spock, my first officer, is running a survey now," Kirk said grimly. "But the odds are next to impossible."

Stone looked at Kirk long and penetratingly, and then reached out and shut off the recorder. "I'm not supposed

to do this," he said. "But—look, Kirk. Not one man in a million can do what you and I did: serve as a starship captain. A hundred decisions a day, hundreds of lives staked on every one of them being right. You've been out nineteen months on this last mission. You've taken no furlough, had virtually no rest in all that time. You're played out—exhausted."

Kirk was beginning to get the drift of this, and he did not like it. "That's the way you see it?"

"That's the way my report will read," Stone said, "if you cooperate."

"Physical breakdown," Kirk said. "Possibly even mental collapse."

"Well . . . yes."

"I'd be admitting that a man died because . . ."

"Admit nothing," Stone said. "Let me bury the matter, here and now. No starship captain has ever stood trial before. I don't want you to be the first."

"But what if I'm guilty?" Kirk said steadily. "Shouldn't I be punished?"

"I'm thinking of the service, dammit! I won't have it smeared by . . ."

"By what, Portmaster?"

"All right!" Stone said explosively. "By an evident perjurer who's covering up bad judgment, cowardice, or something even worse!"

"That's as far as you go, Captain," Kirk said, instantly on his feet, "or I'll forget you *are* a captain. I'm telling you, I was on that bridge. I know what happened. I know what I did."

"It's in the transcript," Stone said, equally hotly, "and computer transcripts don't lie. You decide, Captain. Bury the matter and accept a ground assignment—or demand a general court, and bring down on your head the full disciplinary powers of Star Fleet."

"I have already decided," Kirk said. "Turn the recorder back on."

The courtroom was stark. There was one main viewing screen, a recorder, a witness chair, one table each for prosecution and defense, and a high bench where sat Portmaster Stone and the three members of the court-martial board. The prosecutor was a cool, lovely blonde

woman named Areel Shaw, who as it happened was an old friend of Kirk's. ("All my old friends look like doctors," Bones McCoy had commented, "and all Jim's old friends look like her.") It was on her advice that Kirk had retained Samuel T. Cogley, a spry old eccentric who put his trust not in computers, but in books. He did not inspire much confidence, though Kirk was convinced that Areel had meant well.

Stone called the court to order by striking an ancient naval ship's bell. "I declare that the General Court of Star Base Eleven is now in session. Captain James T. Kirk will rise. Charge: culpable negligence. Specification: in that, on Star Date 2947.3, by such negligence, you did cause loss of life, to wit, the life of Records Officer Benjamin Finney. Charge: conduct prejudicial to the good order of the service. Specification: in that, thereafter, you failed accurately to report the same incident in your captain's log. To these charges and specifications, how do you plead?"

"Not guilty," Kirk said quietly.

"I have appointed, as members of this court, Space Command Representative Chandra and Star Command Captains Li Chow and Krasnowsky. I direct your attention to the fact that you have a right to ask for substitute officers if you feel that any of these named harbor prejudice harmful to your case."

"I have no objections, sir."

"And do you consent to the service of Lieutenant Shaw as prosecuting officer, and to my own service as chief judge?"

"Yes, sir."

"Lieutenant Shaw," Stone said, "you may proceed."

Areel Shaw stepped into the arena. "I call Mr. Spock."

Spock took the stand and passed to the recorder attendant his identity disk. The recorder promptly said: "Spock, S-179-276-SP. Service rank: commander. Position: first officer, science officer. Current assignment: USS *Enterprise*. Commendations: Vulcan scientific Legion of Honor. Awards of valor: twice decorated by Galactic Command."

"Mr. Spock," Areel Shaw said, "as a science officer, you know a great deal about computers, don't you?"

"I know all about them," Spock said levelly.

"Do you know of any possible malfunction that would cause one to recall an event inaccurately?"

"No."

"Or any malfunction that *has* caused an inaccuracy in *this* one?"

"No. Nevertheless, it is inaccurate."

"Please explain."

"It reports," Spock said, "that the jettison button was pressed before the double-red alert—in other words, that Captain Kirk was reacting to an emergency that did not then exist. That is not only illogical, but impossible."

"Were you watching him the exact moment he pressed the button?"

"No. I was occupied. We were already at red-alert."

"Then how can you dispute the record of the log?"

"I do not dispute it," Spock said. "I merely state it to be wrong. I know the captain. He would not . . ."

"Captain Stone," Areel Shaw said, "please instruct the witness not to speculate."

"Sir," Spock said to Stone, "I am half Vulcan. Vulcans do not speculate. I speak from pure logic. If I let go of a hammer on a high-gravity planet, I do not need to see it fall to know that it has fallen. Human beings have characteristics that determine their behavior just as inanimate objects do. I say it is illogical for Captain Kirk to have reacted to an emergency that did not exist, and impossible for him to act out of panic or malice. That is not his nature."

"In your opinion," Areel Shaw said.

"Yes," Spock said with obvious reluctance. "In my opinion."

The personnel officer of the *Enterprise* was called next. "With reference to Records Officer Finney," Areel asked him, "was there, in his service record, a report of disciplinary action for failure to close a circuit?"

"Yes, ma'am," the P.O. said.

"This charge was based upon a log entry by the officer who relieved him. Who was that officer?"

"Ensign James T. Kirk," the P.O. said softly.

"Speak louder, for the recorder, please. That is now the Captain Kirk who sits in this courtroom?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Thank you. Your witness, Mr. Cogley."

"No questions," Cogley said.

Areel next called Bones McCoy to the stand, and went after him with cool efficiency. "Doctor, you are, on the record, an expert in psychology, especially in space psychology—patterns that develop in the close quarters of a ship during long voyages in deep space."

"I know something about it."

"Your academic record, and your experience, doctor, belie your modesty. Is it possible that Officer Finney blamed the defendant for the incident we have just heard your personnel officer describe—blamed him and hated him for being passed over for promotion, blamed him for never having been given a command of his own, hated him for having to serve under him?"

"Of course, it's possible," McCoy said.

"Then, isn't it also possible that all that hatred, directed against Captain Kirk, could have caused a like response in the captain?"

"You keep asking what's possible," McCoy said. "To the human mind almost anything is possible. The fact, however, is that I have never observed such an attitude in Captain Kirk."

"What about an attitude generated in his subconscious mind?"

"I object!" Sam Cogley said. "Counsel is leading the witness into making unprovable subjective speculations."

"On the contrary, your honor," Areel said. "I am asking a known expert in psychology for an expert psychological opinion."

"Objection overruled," Stone said. "You may proceed."

"Captain Kirk, then," Areel said relentlessly, "could have become prejudiced against Officer Finney without having been aware of it—prejudiced in such a way that his judgment became warped. Is that *theoretically* possible, doctor?"

"Yes," McCoy said, "it's possible. But highly unlikely."

"Thank you. Your witness, Mr. Cogley."

"No questions."

"Then I call James T. Kirk."

When Kirk's identity disc was placed in the recorder, the machine said: "Kirk, SC-937-0176-CEC. Service rank: captain. Position: starship command. Current as-

signment: USS *Enterprise*. Commendations: Palm leaf of Axanar peace mission. Grankite order of tactics, class of excellence. Pentares ribbon of commendation, classes first and second . . .”

“May it please the court,” Arel Shaw said. The recorder attendant shut off the machine. “The prosecution concedes the inestimable record of Captain Kirk, and asks consent that it be entered as if read.”

“Mr. Cogley,” Stone said, “do you so consent?”

Cogley smiled disarmingly, stretched a bit in his chair, and rose. “Well, sir,” he said, “I wouldn’t want to be the one to slow the wheels of progress. On the other hand, I wouldn’t want those wheels to run over my client in their unbridled haste. May I point out, sir, that this is a *man* we are examining, so perhaps a little longer look would not be amiss. The court’s convenience is important, but his *rights* are paramount.”

“Continue,” Stone told the recorder attendant. The machine said:

“Awards of valor: Medal of Honor, silver palm with cluster. Three times wounded, honor roll. Galactic citation for conspicuous gallantry. Karagite Order of Heroism . . .”

It took quite a long time, during which Arel Shaw looked at the floor. Kirk could not tell whether she was fuming at having been outmaneuvered, or was simply ashamed of the transparency of her trick. Doubtless she did not want the court to be able to tell, either.

“Now, Captain. Despite the record, you continue to maintain that there was a double-red alert before you jettisoned the pod?”

“Yes, ma’am. There was.”

“And you cannot explain why the computer record shows otherwise.”

“No, I cannot.”

“And in fact you’d do it again under the same circumstances.”

“Objection!” Cogley said. “Counsel is now asking the witness to convict himself in advance of something he hasn’t done yet and, we maintain, didn’t do in the past!”

“It’s all right, Sam,” Kirk said. “I’m willing to answer. Lieutenant Shaw, I have been trained to command. The training doesn’t sharpen a man’s verbal skills. But it does

sharpen his sense of duty—and confidence in himself to discharge that duty.”

“May it please the court,” Areel Shaw said, “I submit that the witness is not being responsive.”

“He’s answering the question,” Stone said, “and he has a right to explain his answers. Proceed, Captain Kirk.”

“Thank you, sir. We were in the worst kind of ion storm. And I was in command. I made a judgment—a command judgment. And because it was necessary to make that judgment, a man died. But the lives of my entire crew and my ship were in danger, and *not* to have made that judgment, to wait, to have been indecisive when it was time to act, would in my mind have been criminal. I did not act out of panic, or malice. I did what I was duty-bound to do. And of course, Lieutenant Shaw, I would do it again; that is the responsibility of command.”

There was a brief hush. Areel Shaw broke it at last, turning to Stone.

“Your honor, the prosecution does not wish to dishonor this man. But I must invite the court’s attention now to the visual playback of the log extract of the *Enterprise’s* computer.”

“It is so ordered.”

The main viewing screen lit up. When it was over, Areel Shaw said, almost sadly, “If the court will notice the scene upon which we froze, the screen plainly shows the defendant’s finger pressing the jettison button. The condition signal reads RED-ALERT. Not double red—but simply red. When the pod containing Officer Finney was jettisoned, the emergency did not as yet exist.

“The prosecution rests.”

Thunderstruck, Kirk stared at the screen. He had just seen the impossible.

During the recess, Sam Cogley calmly leafed through legal books in the room assigned to them, while Kirk paced the floor in anger and frustration.

“I know what I did!” Kirk said. “That computer report is an outright impossibility.”

“Computers don’t lie,” Cogley said.

“Sam, are you suggesting I did?”

“I’m suggesting that maybe you did have a lapse. It’s

possible, with the strain you were under. Jim, there's still time to change our plea. I could get you off."

"Two days ago, I would have staked my life on my judgment."

"You did. Your professional life."

"*I know what I did,*" Kirk said, spacing each word. "But if you want to pull out . . ."

"There's nowhere to go," Cogley said. "Except back into court in half an hour. The verdict's a foregone conclusion, unless we change our plea."

Kirk's communicator beeped and he took it out. "Kirk here."

"Captain," Spock's voice said, "I have run a full survey on the computer."

"I'll tell you what you found," Kirk said. "Nothing."

"You sound bitter."

"Yes, Mr. Spock. I am. But not so bitter as to fail to thank you for your efforts."

"My duty, Captain. Further instructions?" There actually seemed to be emotion in Spock's voice, but if he felt any such stirring, he was unable to formulate it.

"No. I'm afraid you'll have to find yourself a new chess partner, Mr. Spock. Over and out."

Cogley gathered up an armful of books and started for the door. "I've got to go to a conference in chambers with Stone and Shaw."

"Look," Kirk said. "What I said before—I was a little worked up. You did the best you could."

Cogley nodded and opened the door. Behind it, her arm raised to knock, was Jame Finney.

"Jame!" Kirk said. "Sam, this is Officer Finney's daughter."

"A pleasure," Cogley said.

"Mr. Cogley," she said, "you have to stop this. Make him change his plea. Or something. Anything. I'll help if I can."

Sam Cogley looked slightly perplexed, but he said only, "I've tried."

"It's too late for anything like that, Jame," Kirk said. "But I appreciate your concern."

"It can't be too late. Mr. Cogley, my father's dead. Ruining Jim won't bring him back."

"That's a commendable attitude, Miss Finney," Cogley

said. "But a little unusual, isn't it? After all, Captain Kirk is accused of *causing* your father's death."

"I was . . ." Jame said, and stopped. She seemed suddenly nervous. "I was just thinking of Jim."

"Thank you, Jame," Kirk said. "But I'm afraid we've had it. You'd better go."

When the door closed, Cogley put his books down. "How well do you know that girl?" he said.

"Since she was a child."

"Hmm. I suppose that might explain her attitude. Curious, though. Children don't usually take such a dispassionate view of the death of a parent."

"Oh, she didn't at first. She was out for my blood. Almost hysterical. Charged into Stone's office calling me a murderer."

"Why didn't you tell me that before?"

"Why," Kirk said, "the subject never came up. Is it important?"

"I don't know," Cogley said thoughtfully. "It's—a false note, that's all. I don't see what use we could put it to now."

Stone rang the court to order. He had hardly done so when Spock and McCoy materialized squarely in the midst of the room—a hair-raisingly precise piece of transporter work. They moved directly to Kirk and Cogley; the latter stood and Spock whispered to him urgently.

"Mr. Cogley," Stone said harshly, "what's the meaning of this display?"

"May it please the court," Mr. Cogley said, "we mean no disrespect, but these officers have unearthed new evidence, and they could conceive of no way to get it to the court in time but by this method."

"The counsel for the defense," Areel Shaw said, "has already rested his case. Mr. Cogley is well-known for his theatrics . . ."

"Is saving an innocent man's life a theatric?" He turned to Stone. "Sir, my client has been deprived of one of his most important rights in this trial—the right to be confronted by the witnesses against him. *All* the witnesses, your honor. And the most devastating witness against my client is not a human being, but an information system—a machine."

“The excerpt from the computer log has been shown.”

“Your honor, a log excerpt is not the same as the machine that produced it. I ask that this court adjourn and reconvene on board the *Enterprise* itself.”

“I object, your honor,” Areel Shaw said. “He’s trying to turn this into a circus.”

“Yes!” Cogley said. “A circus! Do you know what the first circus was, Lieutenant Shaw? An arena, where men met danger face to face, and lived or died. This is indeed a circus. In this arena, Captain Kirk will live or die, for if you take away his command he will be a dead man. But he has not met his danger face to face. He has the right to confront his accuser, and it matters nothing that his accuser is a machine. If you do not grant him that right, you have not only placed us on a level with the machine—you have elevated the machine above us! Unless I am to move for a mistrial, I ask that my motion be granted. But more than that, gentlemen: In the name of humanity fading in the shadow of the machine, I demand it. I demand it!”

The members of the board put their heads together. At last Stone said: “Granted.”

“Mr. Spock,” Cogley said. “How many chess games did you play with the computer during recess?”

“Five.”

“And the outcome?”

“I won them all.”

“May that be considered unusual, Mr. Spock, and if so, why?”

“Because I myself programed the computer to play chess. It knows my game; and as has been observed before, it cannot make an error. Hence, even if I myself never make an error, the best I can hope to achieve against it is a stalemate. I have been able to win against Captain Kirk now and then, but against the computer, never—until now. It therefore follows that someone has adjusted either the chess programming or the memory banks. The latter would be the easier task.”

“I put it to you, Mr. Spock, that even the latter would be beyond the capacity of most men, isn’t that so? Well, then, what men, aboard ship, would it *not* be beyond?”

“The captain, myself—and the Records Officer.”

"Thank you, you may step down. I now call Captain Kirk. Captain, describe what steps you took to find Officer Finney after the storm."

"When he did not respond to my call," Kirk said, "I ordered a phase-one search for him. Such a search assumes that its object is injured and unable to respond to the search party."

"It also presupposes that the man *wishes to be found*?"

"Of course, Sam."

"Quite. Now, with the court's permission, although Mr. Spock is now in charge of this ship, I am going to ask Captain Kirk to describe what Mr. Spock has done, to save time, which you will see in a moment is a vital consideration. May I proceed?"

"Well . . . All right."

"Captain?"

"Mr. Spock has ordered everybody but the members of this court and the command crew to leave the ship. This includes the engine crew. Our impulse engines have been shut down and we are maintaining an orbit by momentum alone."

"And when the orbit begins to decay?" Stone said.

"We hope to be finished before that," Cogley said. "But that is the vital time element I mentioned. Captain, is there any other step Mr. Spock has taken?"

"Yes, he has rigged an auditory sensor to the log computer. In effect, it will now be able to hear—as will we—every sound occurring on this ship."

"Thank you. Dr. McCoy to the stand, please. Doctor, I see you have a small device with you. What is it, please?"

"It is a white-noise generator."

"I see. All right, Mr. Spock."

At the console, Spock turned a switch. The bridge at once shuddered to an intermittent pounding, like many drums being beaten.

"Could you reduce the volume a little?" Cogley said. "Thank you. Your honor, that sound is caused by the heartbeats of all the people in this room. With your permission, I am going to ask Dr. McCoy to take each person's pulse, and then use the white-noise device to mask those pulsebeats out, so they will be eliminated from the noise we are hearing."

"What is the purpose of this rigmarole, your honor?" Areel Shaw demanded.

"I think you suspect that as well as I do, Lieutenant," Stone said. "Proceed, Dr. McCoy."

As Bones moved from person to person, the eerie multiple thumping became simpler, softer.

"That's all," McCoy said.

No one breathed. Faintly, somewhere, one beat still sounded.

"May it please the court," Cogley said quietly, "the remaining pulse you hear, I think we will shortly find, is that of Officer Finney. Mr. Spock, can you localize it?"

"B deck, between sections 18Y and 27D. I have already sealed off that section."

Kirk hesitated, then came to a decision. "Captain Stone," he said, "this is my problem. I would appreciate it if no one would leave the bridge."

As he turned to leave, Spock handed him a phaser. "The weapons room is within those quadrants, sir," he said quietly. "He may be armed. This is already set on stun."

"Thank you, Mr. Spock."

He moved cautiously down the corridor in the sealed section, calling at intervals:

"All right, Ben. It's all over. Ben! Officer Finney!"

For a while there was no answer. Then, suddenly, a figure stepped out of a shadow, phaser leveled.

"Hello, Captain," Officer Finney said.

Kirk found that he could not answer. Though he had been sure that this was the solution, the emotional impact of actually being face to face with the "dead" man was unexpectedly powerful. Finney smiled a hard smile.

"Nothing to say, Captain?"

"Yes," Kirk said. "I'm glad to see you alive."

"You mean you're relieved because your precious career is saved. Well, you're wrong. You've just made things worse for everyone."

"Put the phaser down, Ben. Why go on with it?"

"You wouldn't leave it alone," Finney said. "You've taken away my choices. Officers and gentlemen, com-

manders all . . . except for Finney and his one mistake. A long time ago, but they don't forget. No, they never forget."

"Ben, I logged that mistake of yours. Blame me, not them."

"But they're to blame," Finney said. "All of them. I was a good officer. I really was. I loved the service like no man ever did."

Slowly, Kirk began to move in on him.

"Stand back, Captain. No more—I warn you—"

"You're sick, Ben. We can help you—"

"One more step—"

Suddenly, Jame's voice cried down the corridor, "Father! *Father!*"

Finney's head jerked around. With a quick lunge, Kirk knocked the phaser from his hand. At the same moment, Jame appeared, rushing straight into the distraught man's arms.

"Jamel!"

"It's all right, father," she said, moving her hand over the tortured officer's brow. "It's all right."

"Don't, Jame," he said. "You've got to understand. I had to do it . . . after what they did to me . . ."

"Excuse me," Kirk said. "But if we don't get this ship back under power, we'll all be dead."

"Mr. Cogley," Stone said, "while this trial is obviously not over yet, I think we must congratulate you and Mr. Spock and Dr. McCoy for a truly classical piece of detective work. Would you tell us, please, how the idea that Officer Finney was still alive even entered your head?"

"I began to suspect that, your honor, when Captain Kirk told me about the change of heart Officer Finney's daughter had had about the captain. If she knew he wasn't dead, she had no reason to blame the Captain for anything."

"But how could she know that?" Stone asked.

"She had been reading her father's papers. Perhaps she didn't know the facts, but the general tone of what he had written must have gotten through to her. A man suffering delusions of persecution wants to set down his com-

plaints. She read them; she knew from childhood the kind of man the captain is; and she's fundamentally fair and decent."

He paused and looked soberly over toward Kirk.

"Or maybe," he said, "it was just instinct. Thank God, there's that much of the animal left in us. Whatever it was, the result is that she now has back both her father and her childhood friend."

"Her father," Stone said, "will also have to stand trial."

"I know that," Cogley said quietly. "I ask the court to appoint me his defense counsel. And off the record, your honor, I have the feeling I'll win."

"Off the record," Stone said, "I wouldn't be a bit surprised."

OPERATION—ANNIHILATE!

(Steven W. Carabatsos)

The spread of the insanity was slow, and apparently patternless, but it was also quite inexorable. The first modern instance in the record was Aldebaran Magnus Five. Then, Cygni Theta 12. Most recently, Ingraham B—recently enough so that the *Enterprise* had been able to get there within a year of the disaster.

Nothing had been learned from the mission. There were no apparent connections among the three planets—except that on each one, the colonists had gone totally, irrevocably mad, all at the same time, and had killed each other. It hadn't been warfare; the people had simply fallen upon each other in the streets, in their homes, everywhere, until there were none left.

It was Spock who had suggested that there would nevertheless be a pattern, if one assumed that the long-dead civilizations of the Orion complex had fallen to the same cause. The archeological evidence was ambiguous, and besides, the peoples of the cluster had not been human. There was no *a priori* reason why they should have been subject to the afflictions of human beings.

Nevertheless, given the assumption, the computer was able to plot a definite localization and rate of spread—like an amoeboid blotch upon the stars, thrusting out a pseudopod to another world at gradually shortening intervals. If the radioactive dating of the deaths of the Orion civilizations was correct, as it almost surely was—and if the assumption was correct, which was sheer speculation—then the madness had taken two hundred years to appear on its second victim-world, less than a century to crop up a third time, and the next outbreak was due within the next month.

“On Deneva, I would say,” Spock added. “An Earth-type planet, colonized about a century ago. Pleasant climate, no hazardous life-forms. Of course, I could well be completely wrong about this, since my basic premise is completely *ad hoc*.”

"Never mind the logical holes," Kirk said. "Mr. Sulu, lay in a course for Deneva. Warp factor four. Lieutenant Uhura, tell Starship Command where we're going and why. When we break into the Denevan system, raise the planet."

But there was no time for that. The first thing the sensors showed when the *Enterprise* emerged in that system was a Denevan ship apparently on its way toward throwing itself into the Denevan sun.

"Status!" Kirk said tensely.

"He's got a huge jump on us, Captain," Sulu said. "A one-man vessel—sub-light velocity but under heavy acceleration."

"Contact, Captain," Uhura said.

"Denevan ship, this is the USS *Enterprise*! Break your heading! You're on a collision course with your sun! Fire your retros!"

From the speaker came a faint and agonized voice. "Help me . . . please . . . help me . . ."

"We're trying to! Spock, can we reach him with a tractor beam?"

"No, sir," Spock said. "Too much solar magnetism."

"Sulu, intercept. Denevan, pull back! Fire your retros!"

"Help me, please . . . take it out . . . take it out . . . please . . ."

"Skin temperature four hundred degrees," Spock said. "Rising fast."

"He's too close, Captain," Sulu said. "He'll burn—and so will we if we keep this up."

"Keep closing."

"Skin temperature now eight hundred degrees," Spock said.

Suddenly the Denevan's voice came through again, much stronger, and much changed. It seemed almost jubilant. "I did it! It's gone! I'm free. I'm free! I won—oh great God, the sun, *the sun* . . ."

The words ended in a terrible scream.

"He's gone, Captain," Sulu reported.

"Vector!" Kirk shouted. Then, as the great ship shuddered into its emergency turn, he stared blindly at the now-silent speaker.

“What did he do that for?” he said. “Even if his instruments weren’t working, we warned him.”

“Obviously suicide,” Spock said.

“But why? And Spock, I don’t think he wanted to die. You heard him. He asked us to help him.”

“Suicides are not rational,” Spock said. “By definition.”

“Mr. Spock, that may be perfectly good logic, but I’m afraid it doesn’t satisfy me. And I hate puzzles. They don’t look good on the log.”

“Captain,” Uhura said. “I’ve gotten through to Deneva itself.”

“Good, let’s hear it. Hello, Deneva, USS *Enterprise* calling.”

“*Enterprise*, please hurry!” a strong voice cried promptly. There was a blast of static. “Help us! I don’t have much time! They’ll know!”

“Another madman?” Kirk said to nobody in particular. “Lieutenant, can’t you clean up some of that static?”

“It’s solar static, sir. Should clear gradually as we pull away.”

“Hello, Deneva, *Enterprise* here. Please repeat.”

“Hurry! Hurry! They’ll know in a minute! We need help!”

There was more static. Kirk said: “We’re on our way, Deneva. What’s wrong? Please explain.”

But there was no answer, only still more static. Uhura turned in her chair. “Contact broken, Captain. I’m trying to reestablish, but I think they’ve switched out.”

“All right, Sulu. Course for Deneva—on the double.”

The landing party—Kirk, Spock, McCoy, two security guards, and Yeoman Zahara—materialized in an empty city street. There were supposed to be more than a million colonists and their descendants on this planet, nearly a hundred thousand in this city alone; yet the place looked deserted.

“Where is everybody?” Kirk said.

Spock scanned in a circle with his tricorder. “They are here. But they are all indoors. Apparently just sitting there. There is a signal center in that building across the street. It is inoperative, but the power is up.”

“All right, let’s . . .”

“Party approaching,” Spock interrupted. “Four people—make it five. Coming fast.”

He had hardly spoken when five men came around the corner at top speed. They seemed to be ordinary civilians, but Kirk had the instant impression that their faces were warped with agony. All carried clubs. The instant they saw the group from the *Enterprise*, they burst into a bestial shrieking. It was impossible to tell which of them was screaming what.

“Run! Get away! We don’t want to hurt you! Go back! Look out!”

“Fire to stun!” Kirk shouted. The Denevans charged, swinging their clubs.

“Go away! Please! They’ll get you! No! Get away from here! We’ll have to kill you . . .”

Kirk fired, followed by the others. The charging Denevans fell in a clatter of clubs. Kirk approached them cautiously. Despite the fact that they had just taken the heavy stun force of a phaser blast at close range, they seemed to be twitching slightly.

“Could you make out all that shouting, Mr. Spock?”

“Indeed. They seemed greatly concerned for our safety—so concerned that they wanted to brain us. This may not be *the* insanity, but . . .”

“But it’ll do for now,” Kirk said. “Bones, check them over.”

McCoy checked the unconscious bodies quickly, then rose, shaking his head puzzledly. “Something decidedly odd,” he said. “These people should be pretty close to being vegetables for the next few hours. But I’m getting high readings, as though their nervous systems were being violently stimulated even while they’re . . .”

He was interrupted by a woman’s scream. Kirk whirled. “Fan out!” he said. “That came from that signal center. Come on!”

The scream came again. Inside the building there was a dark lobby of some sort, and a closed door, which turned out to be locked. Kirk lunged against it.

“Open up!” he shouted. “We’re from the *Enterprise*.”

“They’re here!” the woman screamed. “They’re here! Keep them away!” Over her voice there was a heavy buzzing sound, which seemed to be rising in pitch.

Kirk and the two guards hit the door together. It burst

inward. Here was the signal center, all right, but it looked shoddy, unused. An elderly man lay unconscious on the floor; across the room, a girl was desperately holding a panel of some sort over a ventilation outlet, fighting with all her strength. As the party broke in she staggered backward, dropping the panel, covering her face with her hands and sobbing wildly.

Kirk pointed to the old man while he took the girl in his arms. "It's all right. You're safe."

She screamed again and began to struggle.

"Bones, a hypo! I can't hold her."

McCoy already had his sprayjet out, and a moment later the girl too had collapsed. "The man's alive," he reported. "Some sort of seizure, or maybe just exhaustion. I'd better get them both up to the ship."

"Right. Mr. Spock, you heard her. She called out that *they* were here. Your guess?"

"Notice, Captain," Spock said. "Rags stuffed under the door. Pieces of board jammed across the windows. As if they were in a state of siege."

"But by what? There are no harmful life-forms on this planet. And our sensors didn't pick up anything that didn't belong here."

"I am baffled, Captain."

"Bones, beam up with those two people and bring them around. I'm going to have to ask some questions. Mr. Spock, we'll go outside and resume looking around. Zahara, are you recording all of this?"

"Of course, Captain."

As they emerged from the communications center, Kirk saw one of the security men standing near a sheltered, shadowy alleyway. He moved toward the party as it appeared.

"Anything, Abrams?"

"Yes sir, but don't ask me what. Something moving back in there. Making a buzzing sound."

Kirk looked around, and then up. All the windows above him seemed to be empty, but in one there was the face of a man. His expression was a terrible combination of agony, fear and desperate hope.

"You!" Kirk shouted at him. "I want to talk to you!"

The face contorted and vanished. Kirk grunted with

annoyance. "All right, Spock, Abrams, let's go see what's back in there."

Phasers ready, they moved cautiously into the darkened alley. Almost at once the buzzing noise got louder, and something about the size of a football flew through the air over their heads. Then another.

"Phasers on kill!" Kirk shouted. But for a moment there were no more. Then suddenly Spock pointed. Another such object clung to a wall. Kirk fired.

The beam hit the thing squarely. But it refused to vanish. It simply clung to the wall for a long moment, even under the full force of the beam, and finally slipped off and fell to the earth.

They closed in warily, but there seemed to be no more of the creatures back here. Spock took tricorder readings on the downed object, which seemed to be no more than a gelatinous mass, amorphous, colorless, as though somebody had dumped a jellyfish out of a bucket. Kirk stared at it incredulously.

"What is that?"

"It isn't anything," Spock said promptly. "Not only should it have been destroyed by the phaser blast, but it does not register on the tricorder."

"It's real enough all the same," Kirk said. "And it acted alive. Can we take it along, Spock?"

"I advise against it. We have no proper equipment, and it may well be toxic, corrosive—there are a dozen possibilities."

"Whatever they are, they seem to like these shadows," Kirk said. "Let's get out back into the light. We know where we can find them if we want them, anyhow."

As they retreated, the buzzing noise began again. The next instant, one of the objects shot past Kirk and hit Spock squarely in the back, knocking him off his feet. The thing clung to him. His hands tore uselessly at his back. Then, somehow, it was gone, and Spock was lying face down in the alley.

Kirk knelt beside him. "Spock! Are you all right? The thing's gone. Can you stand?"

Spock's hands were still clutching his back. As Kirk spoke, he rolled over, his entire face working with the effort to control himself. He got slowly to his knees. Then

his mouth opened, and pitching forward, he began to scream.

Spock was in sick bay under heavy sedation; thus far, McCoy had been unable to think of anything else to do for him. In the interim, however, he had managed to revive the elderly man and the girl the landing party had found in the signal room on Deneva. The girl's name was Aurelan, the man's Menen. They did their best to answer Kirk's questions, but he found their answers difficult to comprehend.

"I know it must sound insane, Captain," Aurelan said, "but it's quite true."

Kirk shot a look at Zahara, who was recording. "You mean these things, whatever they are, have taken over the entire planet?"

"Except for ourselves," Menen said.

"There are over a million inhabitants of Deneva."

"There are millions of *them*," Menen said.

"When did they get to Deneva? How?"

"About four months ago," Menen said with some difficulty, "in a spaceship. We don't know any more than that. They didn't give us the time."

"It's a nightmare, Captain," Aurelan said. "Worse than a nightmare."

"The things don't communicate with you?"

"Oh, they communicate all right," Aurelan said bitterly. "Through pain. Once they attack you, something happens inside. We're not doctors, we don't know the details. But life is agony from then on."

Menen added, "My son told me—before he died—that they need bodies the way we need tools. Arms and legs—human beings. And once they take over, they can't be resisted. The people who tried to kill you in the street didn't want to hurt you. They wanted your help. But the things ordered them to attack you, and they had no choice."

"But why didn't they take you two over too?"

"We think they spared us so that we could maintain normal contacts with other planets and ships. They want ships, Captain. They need them. They're forcing our people to build ships right now."

"My brother, Noban . . ." Aurelan began.

"He's the man who flew his ship into the sun?"

Aurelan nodded sadly. "The creatures had him. He almost went mad from the pain. But he told us that Deneva is just a way-station for them. They mean to spread out. You see . . ." She paused and swallowed. "Their hosts become useless after a while. They go mad. And then the things need new hosts. More people. Planet after planet. They come, and they leave madness, and they go to the next . . ."

"In the name of God, Captain," Menen said, "you've got to do something!"

"I'll do what I can," Kirk said. "What about my first officer, Mr. Spock?"

"Is he important to your ship?" Aurelan said.

"Extremely," Kirk said. "And to me personally. He's one of my closest friends."

"In that case," Menen said, "kill him."

"What!"

"Kill him. Now. Quickly. Because only endless agony lies ahead for him, agony that will end in madness. If you are his friend, be merciful."

"Security calling Captain Kirk," said the bridge speaker.

"Kirk here."

"Captain, this is Ames. Mr. Spock has attacked his nurse and fled. He seems deranged."

"All decks security alert. He may be dangerous. Aurelan, Menen, you'd better get to your quarters and stay there."

They went quietly. Only seconds later, it seemed, the elevator door opened again and Spock charged out.

"Get away from the controls!" he screamed. "I have to take her down!"

Before anyone could move, he had reached the helm and had knocked Sulu down and away with one sweeping blow. The navigator and Scott leapt on him, but Spock was a powerful man; he sent them reeling.

"Security to the bridge!" Uhura was calling into her mike. "Alert! General alert to the bridge!"

Kirk joined in the melee, but they were all handicapped by the desire not to hurt Spock; the first officer had no such compunctions. They only barely managed to keep him away from the controls.

Then three security men appeared, and in a few moments Spock was held fast. "I have to take the ship down!" he panted. "I don't want to! Help me! Help me!"

Somehow McCoy was on the scene now, and elbowing his way through the crowd, he gave the first officer a shot. Spock collapsed at once.

"Get him back to sick bay," Kirk said, "and this time, strap him down."

The security men carried him out, with Kirk and McCoy following. It was a grim procession.

"Well, Menen warned me," Kirk said. "He told me that if Spock meant anything to me, I should kill him."

"Now *there's* a tomfool notion."

"Don't worry, Bones, the idea doesn't appeal to me either. But we've got to do something to help him."

"Well, I've at least gotten a start on it," McCoy said. "Come on in and I'll show you."

In McCoy's office, the surgeon showed Kirk a jar full of transparent liquid. In the fluid, a long, almost-transparent tendril drifted and twisted.

"It's a piece of living tissue of some sort," McCoy said. "Call it a tentacle. I took it out of Spock's spinal column an hour ago."

"Is that what causes the pain?"

McCoy nodded. "His entire nervous system has been infiltrated by this stuff. And far too thoroughly for conventional surgery to remove. I don't know how to get it out."

"Then if the old man is right," Kirk said, "this tissue is responsive to directives sent out by the other creatures."

"Or is it *the* creature?"

"Explain."

"By itself," McCoy said, "this stuff is just undifferentiated tissue. No organs. And I'd guess the same for the individual creatures we saw on the surface. They didn't look like things, but *parts* of things. Put them all together and—well, I'm sure they wouldn't spell 'Mother.' But that's about all I'm sure of."

"Do you know why it resists a phaser blast?"

"It's mostly energy itself—nonprotoplasmic. That's why it can fly too. A phaser blast affects it about like a stream from a fire hose would us: knocks it down, stuns it, but that's all. Now let's go look at Spock and I'll show you something else."

Spock was lying strapped down and under sedation, under the diagnostic panel.

"Watch the left indicator," McCoy said. "It's a dolorimeter—registers the level of pain. Right now it's preset at the maximum tolerance level. But if I open a channel to Spock . . ."

He moved a knob. At once, the indicator rose nearly to the top of the scale and froze there.

"That's what he's going through," McCoy said softly. "It's as though he were being consumed by fire, from the inside out. No wonder the poor devils go mad."

"And no wonder," Kirk said, "that they come to think killing each other is an act of mercy."

As he spoke, the indicator began to drop, very slowly. McCoy stared at it. "What the . . ."

Spock opened his eyes. "Hello, Doctor," he said weakly. "Hello, Captain."

"Mr. Spock! How do you feel?"

"Unwell. But these restraints will no longer be necessary. Nor will your sedations, Doctor. I will be able to return to duty."

"That's impossible," McCoy said.

"Spock, we've just seen what that pain can do to you," Kirk added.

"I regret my behavior," Spock said. "The pain greatly slowed my thinking. I did not even remember that we cannot set the ship down, on any planet. But I can control the pain now."

"How?" McCoy demanded.

"I am a Vulcan; we are trained to use our minds. Pain is only another kind of sensory input, which a trained mind ought to be able to handle."

"You're only half Vulcan," Kirk said. "What about the human half?"

"It is an inconvenience, but it is manageable. The creature—all of its thousands of parts—is pressing upon me even now. It wants this ship. But I can resist. It is not especially pleasant, but I assure you there will be no danger if you release me."

"The strongest mind in the world has to relax after a while," McCoy said. "If I put you on mild sedation . . ."

"No drugs, Doctor. My mind must be clear."

"Mr. Spock, I need you," Kirk said. "But I can't take

any chances. You stay here. Sweat it out for a while. If you can maintain control, then come back. Until then, do what the doctor says. That's an order."

Spock nodded. Then his face twitched and the dolorimeter shot up again. Closing his eyes, Spock whispered: "The mind rules. There is no pain. There . . . is . . . no . . . pain . . ."

On the bridge, Uhura had a call waiting from Starfleet. "Enterprise standing by, Commodore Anhalt," Kirk said.

"We've studied your reports of the situation on Deneva, Captain," Anhalt said. "We agree that the creatures, whatever they are, pose a clear and immediate threat to the area. It is our conclusion that, left alone, they would spread rapidly throughout that quadrant and perhaps farther. Can you tell us anything of the nature of the creatures?"

"Not yet. We're preparing to capture a specimen for analysis."

"Fine. But you are not on a specimen-collecting expedition, Captain. Regardless of the nature of the creatures, they must be destroyed—whatever the cost."

"Commodore," Kirk said, "there are more than a million innocent people on that planet. I may not be able to destroy the creatures without . . ."

"We are aware of that, Captain," Anhalt said evenly. "Your orders stand. We will expect your progress reports. Starfleet out."

The image faded. Kirk turned away from the screen to discover his first officer standing behind him.

"Spock, I gave you a direct order to stay in bed!"

"Until I was satisfied that I could maintain control," Spock said. "I am satisfied. So is Dr. McCoy."

"You're certain?"

"Absolutely."

"All right, then put your mind to work on this: How do I capture one of those creatures? They don't respond to the transporter any better than they do to phaser fire—and I'm not about to beam a man down there. I'd just beam back another casualty."

"Not necessarily," Spock said. "If the man's nervous

system were already inhabited, there would be little or nothing further the creatures could do to him."

Kirk stared at him. "I see what you're getting at," he said, "and I don't like it."

"Captain, in the same circumstances, I do not think you would hesitate for a moment. I simply claim the right to do as you would do, if our positions were reversed. I am the logical man for the job."

After a long silence, Kirk said: "It is so ordered. Be careful, and stay in constant touch with us."

"Of course, Captain."

Spock came back with two specimens—one of the creatures and a raving man. "I thought we would need somebody else who was already infected too," he said. "After all, the main problem is how to get the creature out of the body."

Aurelan reacted with shock and despair. "That is Kartan," she said. "We were to be married, before the creatures came."

She would not stay to watch McCoy testing, and Kirk could hardly blame her.

"It's the same picture, only more advanced," McCoy said. "In effect, he hardly has a nervous system of his own any more. The tissue has taken it over."

"It seems that at least we did find out what happened on Ingraham B and the other planets," Kirk said.

"No doubt about it. But what do we *do*?"

Spock came in, carrying the transparent case with the creature in it.

"Here it is," he said. "At first glance, a unicellular creature of sorts—but actually part of a creature. Its own level of activity is so low it doesn't even affect instruments. Its tremendous power is the result of participation in the whole. What it resembles more than anything else is a huge individual brain cell."

"How do you know?" McCoy said.

"You forget, Doctor, the creature has infiltrated my own system. I am in constant contact with it. I find it most annoying."

"I don't doubt that," Kirk said. "But how do we destroy it?"

"I think we have a clue. You will recall Noban, the

Denevan who flew into his sun. Just before his death, he cried out that he was free—that he had won. Apparently the proximity to the sun destroyed the creature controlling him.”

“We already know they don’t like light,” Kirk said slowly. “But how do we expose them to light of that intensity? And what good would it do anyhow? A million of the creatures are inside human bodies.”

“One was inside Noban’s,” Spock pointed out. “*Something* drove it out. But we need take no chances. The *Enterprise* has the capacity to turn Deneva into a miniature sun—a ball of nuclear energy. They would not survive that.”

“Surely not,” Kirk said thoughtfully.

“Now hold on,” McCoy said. “Are you seriously considering this? Destroying a million people whose only crime was being victimized by these filthy things?”

“Our mission,” Spock said somberly, “is to destroy the aliens—at whatever cost.”

“Not at that cost! Jim, this idea is insane.”

“These creatures are trying to spread out in the galaxy,” Kirk said. “And the Denevans are already building ships for them. Aside from the fact that I have been given an order, we do not have much time.”

“I have an alternative,” Spock said.

“Great God, man,” McCoy said, “spit it out!”

“Clearly any radiation intense enough to destroy the creatures would also destroy the people. But I think the hint we took from the fact that the creatures like shadows is a false lead. Light is a medium to them, like water is to a fish; they may simply prefer certain frequencies or levels, as some fish prefer saltwater to fresh. But consider this: If you have a free energy flow that for some reason you cannot conduct through a wire, a wave-guide or anything else of that sort, how do you direct it? Or, if you wish, disrupt it? The agency must be something that is both common and intense near a sun, yet completely harmless to human beings; remember, Noban’s parasite was destroyed *before* he was.”

“I’m no physicist,” McCoy said. “Is there such an agency, or are we just playing games?”

“Certainly there is,” Kirk exclaimed. “Magnetism!”

“That is what I had in mind,” Spock said. “Of course,

we cannot generate a magnetic field as intense as a sun's, but it may not be necessary." He paused as Aurelan and Menen came in, explained his idea again quickly, and went on: "We have your son to thank for this, Menen. But what particularly interests me is that his parasite was not forced out gradually by the gradually increasing intensity of the general magnetic field. Instead, insofar as we can tell, it was wrenched out quite suddenly. This leads me to suspect that motion is the key—that what happened was that his ship passed through the rapidly whirling magnetic field of a sunspot. *That* is an effect we can duplicate. If I am right, it will pull the creature out like pulling a tooth."

"But probably a lot more painful," McCoy said. "Maybe even fatally so."

"It did not kill Menen's son. The heat did that. In any event, we have no course available but to try. Since I am already infected, the logical thing to do is to try it on me."

"And risk killing you?" Kirk said. "Things are bad enough already."

"Captain, the strain of maintaining my mental barriers is considerable. I do not know how long I can continue. When my guards go down—as inevitably they must—I will go insane. I would rather die by the hand of a friend. Furthermore, if I am insane, I am in a position to do the maximum possible amount of damage to the ship."

"Isn't there another question?" Aurelan said. "Mr. Spock is only half human. Even if the experiment is successful, it won't be conclusive."

"I have to work with what I have," McCoy said.

"You have Kartan," Aurelan said. "My fiancé."

They all looked at her in silence. When McCoy spoke, his voice was very gentle. "The risk," he said, "is extremely great."

"If you don't find a cure, he will die a raging maniac," she replied calmly. "Do you think I want that?"

McCoy glanced at Kirk, who nodded without hesitation.

"All right," McCoy said. "Thank you. I'll do my best."

It worked nicely. The creature emerged from all sides of Kartan's body at once, as though he were being en-

closed in a balloon, and then was torn to shreds under the whirling electromagnets. He was still under sedation, but the dolorimeter promptly declined to normal level, and his face was peaceful for the first time since they had seen him.

"Congratulations, Mr. Spock," Kirk said. "And now I want you on that table, as fast as we can get Kartan moved out."

"No, sir."

"Why not? I should think you'd be eager to be rid of it! You volunteered before."

"True, Captain, but since then I have thought of something else. Do you realize that this leaves us just as badly off as we were before?"

Kirk frowned. Given the question, there was no need to explain it. There was absolutely no possibility of enveloping the whole of Deneva in such a field; Deneva's own natural field would fight it, and the *Enterprise* lacked the power to win such an invisible struggle. Nor was there anything like time to treat a million people individually.

McCoy obviously had also chased the chain of reasoning to its conclusion. "We are going to have to destroy the planet anyhow," he said harshly.

Aurelan straightened beside the sleeping Kartan. "Captain," she said. "They're my people. I grew up with them. I loved them. I've lost my brother. I don't want to lose anyone else. But I beg you, Captain, do what has to be done. Give the order."

"A million people . . ." Kirk said.

"Don't you understand?" Aurelan cried out. "There's no hope for them! Their brains are on fire! They want to die!"

Kirk stood as if frozen to the floor. "Brains on fire," he whispered. "Brains on fire. That's it. That's the answer!"

"Yes, Captain," Mr. Spock said. "That is my conclusion also."

"What is?" McCoy said. "You gentleman have lost me."

"It's like this," Kirk said rapidly. "Spock has already likened this—this composite organism to a gigantic brain. All the evidence we have points in the same direction. The individual cells are mindless, almost lifeless. It's possible, indeed it seems likely, that there is a central con-

centration of them somewhere. If we could kili that off . . .”

“I don’t see that that follows at all,” McCoy said. “The aggregate of the scattered cells could well be all there is to the brain, since we know the cells can communicate with each other. Why is it likely that there should be a concentration, too?”

“Because of the behavior of the creatures,” Spock said. “They multiply uncontrollably until they overflow a planet. Not leave it—overflow it. The original central concentration is left behind. *Ergo*, it must still be there—wherever it is.”

“And all we know about that is that it’s somewhere in the Orion sector,” Kirk said. “Mr. Spock, could the computer extrapolate the spread of these creatures backward, so to speak, and at least narrow down the possibilities to an area we’d have some hope of searching in time?”

“Of course,” Spock said. “But you have something better, Captain.”

“What’s that?”

“You have me. That is why I do not want the treatment yet. I am infested; I am aware of the creature—not just the part of it that inhabits me, but the entire creature. As we approach the central concentration, I will know.”

“Are you sure?”

For answer, Spock pointed. “It lies that way,” he said. “I know that already, even though it must be fifty parsecs away.”

“Posts!” Kirk shouted.

As they approached the critical Orion sector, it gradually became evident that not only was Spock aware of the nucleus of the creature—it was aware of him, and in some way realized that it must not allow this particular cell of itself to come closer. The pressure on Spock mounted unbearably. Though he still performed his duties, the sweat ran constantly down his face, which occasionally was twisted by a grimace that seemed to have no connection with anything he was doing or saying.

“Better let us extract that thing now,” Kirk said. “We’re zeroed in on the planet. There’s no sense in your suffering any further.”

"Sir, I would prefer to bear it just a little while longer. The final test of the theory is what happens to me—or does not happen—when that nucleus is destroyed. If the pain continues, we will know that we were wrong."

"Without prejudice to your own wishes or your will power, Mr. Spock, are you certain that there's no danger of your running amok again?"

"The danger exists," Spock said levelly. "However, I am fighting it. And I do not see how we can forfeit this test."

"I hate to say so," McCoy said, "but I think he's right, Jim."

"Very well," Kirk said. He looked at the main viewing screen, which was now showing the image of the target planet. It was utterly barren, though occasional faint geometrical patterns showed where there might once have been cities—before the creatures had come with their burden of agony and wiped them out. "It will be a pleasure to get rid of that monster. Arms Control, are those missiles primed?"

"Yes, sir," said a loudspeaker. "Two fully-armed planet-wreckers, programmed and ready to go."

"Very well. Fire one."

A streak of light shot away from the *Enterprise*. For many long minutes nothing seemed to happen. Then the planet on the screen burst into a white glare of atomic fire. The screen backed hastily down the intensity spectrum.

At the same moment, Spock screamed. Two security men promptly grabbed him; Bones had been alert for just such an outcome.

"Stop! Stop!" Spock screamed. "My world—*my life*—"

"Fire two," Kirk said grimly. The planet was already breaking up, but he was taking no chances. Another colossal fusion explosion spread over the screen. When it had died away, there was nothing left to be seen but an enormous, expanding cloud of gas.

"So we have created a new Orion nebula," Kirk said. He turned to Spock. The first officer was standing quietly in the grip of the security man, while Bones hovered nearby with a hypo.

"Mr. Spock?"

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Spock's eyes were glazed, and for a moment he seemed to have no mind at all. His face was blank, his mouth working. Then, gradually, life and sanity seemed to flow back into him.

"I am . . . recovering," he said formally. "The pain was . . . incredible . . . like nothing I had experienced before. For an instant I *was* that creature. I felt its death. But now . . . nothing."

"Now," McCoy said firmly, "we take you below and extract that thing from you. I will tolerate no further arguments on that score."

"No further arguments are necessary," Spock said. "Its purpose is served."

"Any word from Deneva, Lieutenant?"

"Rapidly getting back to normal, Captain," Uhura reported. "Menen says that the remaining creatures just wander about helplessly and seem to have almost no vitality left. To kill one, you need scarcely do more than stick it with a pin."

"Very good," Kirk said. "Mr. Spock, this may sound grandiose, but it's the truth. I think you have singlehandedly just saved the galaxy."

"No, sir, I think not."

"What could have stopped them if we hadn't?"

"Their own nature, Captain."

"Explain."

"A truly successful parasite," Spock said, "is commensal, living in amity with its host, or even giving it positive advantages—as, for instance, the protozoans who live in the digestive system of your termites and digest for them the wood that they eat. A parasite that regularly and inevitably kills its hosts cannot survive long, in the evolutionary sense, unless it multiplies with tremendous rapidity—much more rapidly than these creatures did. It is not pro-survival."

"In the evolutionary sense, maybe," Kirk said. "But evolution takes a long, long time. In the interim, you have at least saved millions of people from pain, madness and death."

"Believe me, Captain," Spock said, "I find that quite sufficient."

THE CITY ON THE EDGE OF FOREVER*

(Harlan Ellison)

Two drops of cordrazine can save a man's life. Ten drops of that unpredictable drug will sometimes kill. When a defective hypospray went off in McCoy's hand, a hundred times that amount was pumped into his body in a split second.

With a frenzied, incoherent cry, the ship's surgeon fled the bridge. Within minutes the entire ship was alerted. The library tapes on cordrazine said that at such dosages, paranoia was a frequent outcome—but McCoy knew the ship too well. By the time a search was organized, he had reached the transporter room and beamed himself down to the planet the *Enterprise* was orbiting.

The transporter had been monitoring what appeared to be a curious time disturbance on the surface of the unknown world. The settings had not been changed; whatever was down there, McCoy was now in the heart of it. Kirk would have liked to have had more information about it first, but there was no chance of that now. They had to go after McCoy. Kirk picked Spock, Scott, Uhura, Davis and a Security guard, and, of course, himself.

They materialized in the midst of extensive ancient ruins. Much of it was almost dust, but there were enough scattered sections of broken wall and piled stone to provide hiding places for McCoy.

This planet was *cold*. A burnt-out sun hung dolorously in the sky, producing a permanent, silvery twilight. It was a dead world, an ash. The ruins extended past the horizon—a city of tremendous size—but there could have

* The script for this story differed drastically in some respects from Mr. Ellison's original version, which he was kind enough to send to me. In writing this adaptation I tried to preserve what I thought were the best elements of *both* scripts; but it was tricky to manage and it is more than possible that I have wound up owing apologies all around. It was a poetic and brilliant piece to begin with; if it is a botch now, the fault is entirely mine.—JB

been no life in it for ten thousand centuries. It takes a long time for a sun to burn out.

In the midst of the desolation, one object was polished like new, drawing Kirk's eyes instantly. It was a large, octagonal mirror—or was it a mirror? Its framed, cloudy surface was nebulous, shifting. Whatever it was, it gleamed, untarnished, agelessly new. A cube, also untarnished but half-buried in dust and rubble, sat beside it. Spock aimed his tricorder at it.

"Whatever that is," Kirk said crisply, "make it the hub of our search pattern. Fan out."

The group separated quickly—all but Spock, who was drawing closer to the shining object, instead. He said, "Unbelievable!"

"Mr. Spock?"

"Sir, this one, single object is the source of all the time displacement we detected out in space. I do not understand where it gets the power, or how it applies it. It cannot be a machine, not in any sense that we understand the term, but . . ."

Kirk eyed the object. "Then what is it?"

At once, the dead air was stirred by a heavy hum; and then a resonant, vibrantly throbbing voice spoke from the object itself.

"*A . . . question,*" the voice said. "A question. Since before your sun burned hot in space, and before your race was born, I have awaited a question."

"What are you?" Kirk said.

"I . . . am the Guardian of Forever."

"Are you a machine," Kirk said, "or a being?"

"I am both, and neither. I am my own beginning, my own ending."

Spock said, "I see no reason for answers to be couched in riddles."

"I answer all questions as simply as I can."

"What is your function, then?"

"I am a time portal. Through me the great race which once lived here went to another age."

"Past or future?" Spock said.

"The past," the voice said, like a sigh. "Always and only the past. And to their past, which you cannot share. I can only offer you yours. Behold—the birth of the planet you both share."

In the mirror, there was suddenly the image of a solar system forming out of a changing, cooling fireball . . . and somehow Kirk knew that it was not an image at all, but a distant view of a fact. A moment later, they were looking at a primeval, shoreless sea; and then, suddenly, a jungle of tree ferns.

"Mr. Spock," Kirk said thoughtfully, "if that is a doorway back through time, could we somehow take Bones back a day in time, then relive that accident? Stop that hypo spitting into him?"

"We would have to catch him first," Spock said. "Besides, Captain, look at the speed at which centuries are passing. To step through precisely on the day we wish would appear to be impossible."

"Guardian, can you change the speed at which yesterday passes?"

"I was made to offer the past in this manner," the Guardian said. "I cannot change."

Egypt waxed, waned, passed. Atlantis sank. Skin-clothed barbarians suddenly became Hellenes. Spock was getting it all into the tricorder.

"It's strangely compelling, isn't it?" Kirk said. "To step through there, lose oneself in another world—"

He was interrupted by a shout and a scrambling sound. He spun. McCoy, who evidently had been quite nearby, was headed straight for the time vortex at a dead run. Nobody but Kirk and Spock were anywhere near him.

Spock dropped the tricorder and intercepted, but McCoy, his eyes frighteningly wild, twisted away from him. That left no one but Kirk, who made a flying dive; but McCoy did a little dance step of broken field maneuvering and was free. Kirk landed painfully and rolled over.

"Bones!" he shouted. "No, no!"

But he was in time only to see McCoy disappear into the cloudy octagonal frame, his body popping out of sight as though it had been swallowed. Then the vortex was as blank as it had been when they first saw it.

"Where is he?" Kirk demanded.

"He has passed into what was," said the voice of the Guardian.

"Captain," said Uhura, a little breathlessly. She had arrived on the run. "I've lost contact with the ship. I was

talking to them, and it suddenly went dead. No static; just . . . nothing.”

“The communicator is all right?”

“Yes, sir. It just seems like there’s nothing up there.”

The Guardian said, “Your vessel, your beginning, all that you knew is gone.”

Kirk felt a fearful sinking of his heart, remembering that episode when he and Spock and an archaic man named John Christopher had fought not to be noticed by the world of the 1970s. He said grayly, “McCoy has somehow changed history.”

Scott had joined the party. He said, “This time we’re stranded, Captain?”

Kirk did not answer, but Spock nodded. “With no past—no future.”

“Captain,” Uhura said. “I’m . . . I’m frightened.”

Kirk looked slowly up into the black and star-littered sky of the nameless planet, empty now of the *Enterprise*, without even a sun to give it warmth and joy.

“Earth’s not even out there,” he said. “Not the one we knew. We are totally alone—without even a history.”

“We shall have to remake it,” Spock said.

“How, Mr. Spock?”

“We will have to go back in time ourselves—attempt to set right whatever it was that the doctor changed. I was recording images at the time he left. By synchronizing just out of phase with that, I believe I can approximate when to jump. Perhaps within a month before he arrived. Or a week if we are lucky.”

“Guardian!” Kirk said. “If we are successful . . .”

“Then you will be returned. It will be as though none of you had gone.”

“Just finding McCoy back there,” Scott said, “would be a miracle.”

Spock said, “There is no alternative.”

“Scotty, when you think you’ve waited long enough—whatever ‘long enough’ might mean now—then . . .” Kirk shrugged. “Each of you will have to try it. Even if you fail, you’ll be alive in some past world, somewhere.”

“Stand ready, Captain,” Spock said. “I think the time is coming around again.”

They were standing in a seamy, down-at-the-heels city

street, with murky glass storefronts and an occasional square four-wheeled vehicle. Over one store was a large sign proclaiming:

CCC CAMPS—SIGN UP HERE

and beside it, another store with a sign that said FREE SOUP and a smaller sign with an arrow, reading FORM A LINE. Queues of shabby men in caps and shapeless coats were moving, very slowly, into both stores.

Spock said, bemused, "Is this the heritage my mother's people brag about?"

"This," Kirk said with disgust, "is what it took us five hundred years to crawl up from. Never mind that now—somebody's going to spot us pretty quickly, and our clothes aren't exactly period costumes. Let's do something about that first."

He drew Spock down the alley in which they had first popped into this world. "There's a line of clothes back there."

"I'm afraid I will draw attention either way, Captain."

"Well, Mr. Spock," Kirk said, "if we can't disguise you, we'll have to find a way to explain you. Here, put these on." He pulled down from a line two shirts, two pairs of pants, an old jacket and a wool stocking-cap.

"You might see if you can locate me a ring for my nose," Spock said. "But Captain, aside from the fact that this is theft, I do not believe we ought to change clothes out in the open. As I remember your history, old Earth was rather stuffy about such matters."

"That's right. Okay, let's march." Kirk rolled the clothing into a bundle and tucked it under his arm.

They made it back to the open street without incident. Kirk began to feel better. "You know," he said, "I rather like this century. Simpler, easier to manage. Why, I might even find I actually have a considerable talent for . . . *wump!*"

He had run squarely into the arms of a large, bulkily obvious Security-guard type. The blue-uniformed man looked them up and down, and then at the clothing bundle Kirk was shifting back and forth. At last he said pleasantly, "Well?"

"Uh, yes," Kirk said. "You are a police officer. I seem to remember . . ."

It seemed to be the wrong tack. Kirk let the sentence trail off and tried a friendly smile. The policeman smiled back, but he did not move. Behind Kirk, Spock said, "You were saying something about a considerable talent, sir?"

This was also a mistake, since it attracted the officer's attention to Spock, and especially to his pointed ears. Kirk said hurriedly, "My friend is, uh, Chinese, of course. The ears, ah, are actually easily explained. You see . . ."

The policeman remained absolutely silent. Kirk was stumped.

"Perhaps the unfortunate accident I had in childhood . . ." Spock prompted.

"In the fields, yes," Kirk said quickly. "Caught his head in a mechanical, uh, rice-picker. Fortunately . . . an Amellican missionary living nearby, who happened to have been a skilled plastic surgeon in civilian life . . ."

"Sure an' t'God that's enough, now," the policeman said. "Drop the bundle, hands up against that wall. Phwat a story."

"Yes, sir," Kirk said. As he was about to turn, he stopped and stared at the policeman's shoulder. "Uh, careless of your wife to let you go out that way."

"What?" the policeman said, raising his nightstick.

"Quite untidy, sir," Spock said, picking up the cue. "If you will allow me . . ."

He pinched the policeman's shoulder gently, and, equally gently, the policeman sagged to the pavement.

"And now, Captain . . ." he said.

"Yes," Kirk said. "As I recall, the appropriate expression is—flog it!"

Police whistles—an eerie, unfamiliar sound—were shrilling behind them as they ducked into an open cellar door. The cellar was dismal: a coal bin, an old furnace, mountains of litter, a few mildewed trunks, all looking like monsters in the dimness. They changed clothes quickly. Kirk wore the jacket; Spock pulled the stocking cap down over his elegant, dangerous ears.

Spock got out his tricorder. Nothing came out of it but

an unpleasant electronic squeal, like an echo of the fading police whistles.

The two men looked at each other over the coal pile. At last Kirk said, "Obviously this is not a game. Time we faced the unpleasant facts. Status, Mr. Spock?"

"First," Spock said precisely, "I *believe* we have about a week before Dr. McCoy arrives. But as far as being certain of that . . ."

"And arrives where? New York, Boise, Honolulu, Outer Mongolia?"

"Obviously, I do not know. There is a theory . . ." Spock hesitated. Then he shrugged and plowed on, "The theory is that time can be regarded as fluid, like a river, with currents, backwash, eddies. Like the solar-system analogies of atomic structure, it is more misleading than enlightening, but there may be a certain truth to it all the same."

"Mr. Spock, if I didn't know you better, I'd suspect you were trying to educate me."

"No, sir. I mean only to suggest that the same time current which swept McCoy to a certain place or event has taken us to the same place or event . . . Unless that is the case, I believe we have no hope."

"Odds?"

"Captain, in time there are no odds; you are pitting an infinite series of instants against an utterly improbable event. And yet . . ." Spock held up the tricorder. "Locked in here is the *exact* place, the exact moment, even exact images of what McCoy did back here. If I could hook this into the ship's computer for just a few moments . . ."

"Any chance that you could build a makeshift computer?"

"In this zinc-plated, vacuum-tube culture?" Spock said. "None at all. I have no tools, no parts, no supplies . . . I do not even know the line voltage."

"I see," Kirk said slowly. "Yes, it would pose a complex problem in logic. Forgive me, Mr. Spock. I do sometimes expect too much of you."

Spock's head turned sharply, but at the same time the overhead bulb in the basement went on yellowly and there was the sound of a door opening at the head of the stairs

to the ground floor. A young woman's voice called strongly, "Who's there?"

Both men came to their feet as the girl came down the stairs. Despite the obvious savagery of the period, she seemed quite unafraid. She was simply dressed and not very pretty, but her voice was instantly arresting.

"We didn't want to trespass, miss," Kirk said. "But since it was getting cold out there . . ."

She looked at him with cool appraisal and said, "A lie is a bad way to say 'hello.' Was it really that cold?"

"Well," Kirk said, "no. We were being chased by a police officer."

"Because . . . ?"

"Petty theft. These clothes. We had no money."

"I see." She looked both of them over. "It's the same story all over. I need some help. Sweeping up, washing dishes, general cleanup. Are you willing to work?"

"At what scale of payment?" Spock said. Kirk looked at him in astonishment. The first officer added, "I need radio tubes and so forth. Parts, wire . . . It is . . . a hobby."

"Fifteen cents an hour for ten hours a day," the girl said. "I'm not exactly wealthy, either. Will it do? Good. Your names?"

"I'm Jim Kirk. His name is Spock."

"I'm Edith Keeler," she said crisply, "and you can start by cleaning up down here."

She smiled pleasantly and went back up the stairs, leaving Kirk a little startled by her brisk, no-nonsense attitude and her utter fearlessness. At last he looked around, found a pair of brooms, and tossed one to Spock.

"Radio tubes and so on, eh?" he said. "Well, Mr. Spock, I approve. I think everyone should have a hobby. It keeps them off the streets."

The mission was a mixture of things which Kirk only vaguely recognized: part church, part dining room, part recreation area. It was furnished with tables and low benches, and there was a low dais at the front where workers dispensed soup and coffee. To one side, was a large tool box, fastened with an ungainly padlock with a dial on its face. Shabbily dressed men sat to either side of Kirk and Spock, waiting without enthusiasm. The nearest,

a small man with thin features who looked remarkably like some sort of rodent, eyed the two of them.

"You'll be sorry," he said, with exaggerated boredom.

"Why?" Kirk said.

"You expect to eat free or something? Now you gotta listen to Miss Goodie Twoshoes."

"Good evening," Edith's voice said, on cue. She was already striding toward the dais; now she mounted it. The meagerness of the audience did not seem to discourage her. She was both casual and cheerful. "Now, as I'm sure at least someone out there has said, you've got to pay for the soup."

There was some laughter. "Not that she's a bad-lookin' broad," the rodent said, *sotto voce*. "But if she really wanted to give a guy somethin' . . ."

"Shut up," Kirk said. Then, noticing Spock's eye on him, he added, "I'd like to hear this."

"Of course," Spock said, noncommittally.

"Let's start as we always do—by getting something straight," Edith said. "Why do I work, connive, and maybe even cheat a little in order to keep feeding you? I don't know. It's something that I do. But I've got no patience with parasites. If you can't break off with booze, or you've gotten out of the habit of work, or you *like* being a bad risk, I don't want you and you're not welcome to the soup."

Kirk listened with astonishment. He did not know what he had expected, but surely not this.

"Of course," she went on, "I know that every day is a fight to survive. That's all you have time for. But I've no use for a man who uses free soup as an excuse to give up fighting. To survive at all, you need more than soup. You need to know that your life is worth living, no matter what.

"Shadow and reality, my friends. That's the secret of getting through these bad times. Know what is, and what only seems to be. Hunger is real, and so is cold. But sadness is not.

"And it is the sadness that will ruin you—that will kill you. Sadness and hate. We all go to bed a little hungry every night, but it is possible to find peace in sleep, knowing you have lived another day, and hurt no one doing it."

"Bonner the Stochastic," Spock whispered.

"He won't be born for more than two hundred years. Listen."

"It's difficult not to hate a world that treats us all like this," Edith was saying. "I know that. Difficult, but not impossible. Somebody once said that hate is only the absence of love, but that's not a message that a man can absorb on an empty stomach. But there's something else that's true: Love is only the absence of hate. Empty the hatred from your hearts and you are ready for love. If you can go to bed tonight free of hatred, you have already won a major victory.

"And that's all of my sermon for today. Eat hearty, mates."

She stepped down and left the big, gloomy room.

"Most interesting," Spock said. "An uncommon insight."

"An uncommon woman," Kirk replied quietly; but Edith Keeler, coming up behind them, evidently overheard him.

"You two are uncommon workmen, Mr. Kirk," she said. "The basement looked like it had been scrubbed and polished."

Kirk thought about his days as a midshipman and at last saw some use for holystoning; but he said only, "Then we report back for more work?"

"At seven A.M. Do you have a flop for the night?"

"A what?"

Edith studied him curiously. "You're really new at this, aren't you? A 'flop' is a place to sleep. There's a vacant room where I live, two dollars a week. If you want it, I'll guide you there when we're through with these dishes."

"Indeed we do," Kirk said. "Thank you."

Like everything else, they had yet seen in this culture, the room was plain and depressing: a few pieces of scarred furniture, a sagging bed, limp and sooty curtains. Now, however, some of it was masked by the Medusa-head of wires, coils and banks of old vacuum tubes which Spock was attaching to his tricorder. As Kirk came in with a small paper sack of groceries, plus another small package of hardware, Spock said abstractedly, "Captain, I must have some sponge platinum, about a kilogram. Or

a block of the pure metal, perhaps ten grams, would be even better."

Kirk shook his head. "I bring assorted vegetables for you, bologna and a hard roll for me. The other bag, I assure you, contains neither platinum, gold nor diamonds; nor is it likely to in the future. It has just a few second-hand pieces of equipment, and those took the other nine-tenths of our combined earnings for three days to fill your order for them."

"Captain, you're asking me to work with equipment which is hardly better than stone knives and bearskins."

"We have no choice," Kirk said. "McCoy may be here any day now. We've no guarantee that there's some current in time pulling us all together. This has to work—with or without platinum."

"Captain," Spock said glacially, "in three weeks at this rate, perhaps a month, I might complete the first mnemonic circuits . . ."

There was a knock, and then Edith poked her head through the door.

"If you can go out now," she said, "I can get you both five hours' work at twenty-two cents an hour. What on earth is *that*?"

"I am endeavoring, Ma'am," Spock said with dignity, "to construct a mnemonic circuit out of stone knives and bearskins."

"I don't know what that means," she said, "but if you want the work you'd better hurry." She withdrew.

"She's right. Let's go, Mr. Spock."

"Yes, Captain, in just a moment . . . It seems to me that I saw some tools for finely detailed work in the mission."

"Yes, the man who was working on the, uh, cuckoo-clock was using them. That girl has more things going on around there than a TKL computer. Clock repair project, woodworking, the tailor shop in the back . . ."

"You were quite right, Captain," Spock said. "She is a fascinating study. Well, I am ready now. I doubt that twenty-two cents an hour will advance me far, but those tools . . ."

"Just be sure you return them."

"Believe me, Captain," the Science Officer said, "my first taste of petty theft was also my last."

The auxiliary rig to the tricorder now nearly filled the room. It looked like a robot squid constructed by a small child, but it clicked, whirred and hummed purposefully. Clearly, Spock did not like the noise—he was used to machines that made as little fuss as possible—but he wasted no time trying to eliminate it. He straightened abruptly.

“Captain, I may have stumbled onto something.”

Kirk sniffed. “You’ve got a connection burning somewhere, too.”

“I am loading these lines too heavily. But this may be a focal point in time. Watch the tricorder screen. I have slowed the recording it made from the time vortex.”

Kirk peered at the small tricorder screen. It showed Edith Keeler’s face; then the image sharpened, and he realized that it was a newspaper photo. The paper was dated February 23, 1936—six years from “now.” Over the photo was a headline: FDR CONFERS WITH SLUM AREA ‘ANGEL’. The caption read, *The President and Edith Keeler today conferred for more than an hour on her proposal to . . .*

There was a mean snap of sparks, a curl of smoke and the image collapsed. “Quick!” Kirk said. “Can you get it back?”

“Even if I could, it would not help us,” Spock said. “Something was wrong even before the short circuit. On the same memory trace, I saw a 1930 newspaper article.”

“What of it? Either way, we know her future, Spock. Within six years from now, she’s going to become important, nationally recognized . . .”

“No, sir,” Spock said quietly. After a pause, he began again. “No, Captain.—What I saw was Edith Keeler’s obituary. She never became famous. She will die this year in some kind of accident.”

“You’re mistaken! They can’t both be true!”

“I’m afraid they can, Captain,” Spock said. “She has two possible futures—depending upon what McCoy does.”

“What . . . ? Oh, I see. McCoy has something to do with her living or dying. And in his present state . . .” The shock of the notion halted Kirk for an instant, but he forced himself to go on. “Mr. Spock, did McCoy kill her? Is *that* how all of history was changed?”

"I cannot tell, Captain. Something still worse is possible."

"What, man?"

"That he might have changed history by *preventing* her from being killed."

"Get this thing fixed! We've got to find the answer before McCoy gets here!"

"And what then, Captain?" Spock said. "Suppose we find that to set things right, Edith Keeler must die? That to restore our future, we must prevent McCoy from saving her? What then?"

"I don't know," Kirk said fiercely. "But we've got to find out. Did you get the jewelers' tools all right? That box was closed with a combination lock."

"Not a proper lock, sir. A childish device in probability . . ."

". . . and he opened it like a real pro," Edith's voice said behind them. Both men spun. She spared the jury-rigged apparatus only one glance, and then turned back to Spock. "Question: Why? I want to hear only one answer. Please make it the honest one."

Spock pointed to the rig. "You have seen this work going on before," he said. "I needed delicate tools. They would have been returned in the morning."

Edith eyed him. Perhaps his alien appearance gave her less than full confidence; or perhaps the very temper of the times was against him. She said, "Gadgetry doesn't impress me. Theft does. Out you go."

"Miss Keeler," Kirk said, "if Mr. Spock said they were important to have, and that you'd get them back in the morning, you may depend upon his word."

"I'll accept that," she said slowly, "on certain conditions. Chiefly, that Mr. Kirk answer my questions. And you needn't look so innocent, either. You know as well as I how out of place you both are here."

"Interesting," Spock said. "Where would you say we do belong, Miss Keeler?"

"You, Mr. Spock?" She nodded toward Kirk. "At his side. As if you've always been there, always will be. But where *he* belongs . . . well, I'll work it out eventually."

"I see," Spock said. "Well, I'll go on with this . . ."

"I'll go on with this—Captain," Edith Keeler said, smiling at Kirk. "Even when he doesn't say it, he does."

She led the way out. In the hall, she said, "By the way, why *does* he call you Captain? Were you in the war together?"

"We . . . served together."

"It shows. And you don't want to talk about it. Why? Is it something you think you've done wrong? Are you afraid of something? Whatever it is, let me help."

Kirk took her by the arms, and for a moment came very close to kissing her. He did not; but he did not release her, either.

"Let me help," he said. "A hundred years or so from now, I think it was, a famous novelist will write a classic using that theme. He recommends those three words even over 'I love you.'"

"Your tenses are rather mixed," she said. "A hundred years from now? And where was he? Or, where will he be from?"

"A silly question, a silly answer," Kirk said roughly. He pointed at the ceiling. "From about there. A planet circling that far left star in Orion's belt."

She looked up involuntarily; and this time, he did kiss her. He was not a little surprised to find it returned.

Spock turned as Kirk came back into the room. He asked no questions, but it was clear that he would welcome some answers.

"All she said was, 'Let me help you,'" Kirk said painfully. "She's something of a saint, Mr. Spock."

"She may be martyred," Spock said. "To history. Look here."

He switched on his apparatus. "This is how history went after McCoy changed it. I picked up the thread just after you went out. See: in the late 1930's a growing pacifist movement, called World Peaceways. Its influence on the government delayed the United States' entry into the Second World War. Apparently very few people knew that World Peaceways was German-controlled. While peace negotiations dragged on, Germany had time to complete its heavy water experiments."

"Hitler and Nazism won the war?"

"Yes. Because this lets them develop the fission bomb first. Let me rerun it, Captain. You will see that there is

no mistake. And Edith Keeler was the guiding spirit of the peace movement."

"But," Kirk said, "she was *right*. Clearly, peace would have been . . ."

"She was right," Spock said, "but at the wrong moment. With the atomic bomb, and their primitive rockets to carry it, the Nazis captured the world, Captain. And after that, barbarism. The Nazi yoke was so heavy that the world tore itself apart trying to throw it off. Space-flight never did develop."

"No," said Kirk, softly, in pain.

"And all that," Spock said implacably, "because McCoy came back and somehow kept her from dying as she should have, in a street accident. We have to stop him."

"Exactly how did she die? What day?"

"I can't be that precise," Spock said. "I am sorry, Captain."

"Mister Spock," Kirk said slowly, "I believe I am in love with Edith Keeler."

"I know," Spock said, very quietly indeed. "That is why I said, 'I'm sorry.'"

"And if I don't stop McCoy . . . ?"

"Then, you save her. And millions will die who did not die in what would have been our history."

"Abstract millions," Kirk said. "A different history. But Edith Keeler is here. She's real. She deserves to live."

"And so do Scott, Uhura, the others we left behind—or ahead. Sir, you are their Captain. They are waiting for you, in the ruined city on the edge of Forever. They, and the future that nurtured you. The choice is yours."

It had to be faced; but he could not face it—not yet. There would be time to decide when the crisis came. Of course.

In the meantime, there was still Edith . . . still. Spock said no more about the matter. He was with the two of them sometimes, somehow silently supportive. At others, guided perhaps by his peculiar form of semitelepathy, he vanished at just the appropriate moment.

This time, they emerged together from the mission, but separated almost at once. Spock started away from the

twilight street, while Edith and Kirk crossed to the opposite sidewalk. Edith seemed even happier than usual.

"If we hurry," she said, "we can catch that Clark Gable movie at the Orpheum. I'd really love to see it, Jim."

Kirk smiled. "A what kind of movie?"

"That's funny," she said, looking up as if startled. "Dr. McCoy said almost the same . . ."

Kirk stopped dead in his tracks and whirled to face her, his heart suddenly racing.

"McCoy?" He took her by the shoulders, his fingers tightening until she winced. "*Leonard McCoy?* Edith, this is important."

"Why, yes. He's in the mission, in a little room upstairs. He's been very sick, almost raving, but I think he's nearly . . ."

"Spock!" Kirk shouted. "Edith—wait here for me."

He ran across the street, waving at the first officer. Spock turned back, his whole face a question; but he did not need to ask it. As the two men met in front of the mission door, McCoy came out of it.

The surgeon stopped dead in surprise, and then a grin split his face. There was a great deal of hand shaking and back thumping, with all three of them talking at once.

"Bones, where have you . . ."

"How'd you find me? And for that matter, where *are* we?"

"When Edith said 'Dr. McCoy' I . . ."

"Remarkable that you should have been that close to us . . ."

"I seem to have been sick for a long time . . ."

Kirk looked quickly back toward Edith. Her expression was mostly one of intense curiosity; but she also looked as though she felt a little left out of it all. As she saw him turn to her, she stepped out into the street.

She did not see the moving van lumbering down on her. *This was the time.* Without a moment's thought, Kirk ran toward her.

"Captain!" Spock's voice shouted. "*No!*"

Kirk froze, his body a solid mass of anguish. At the same time, McCoy's mouth opened in a wordless yell and he lunged for the curb. With a terrible flash of self-hatred, Kirk, knowing what *must* come next, threw himself in

McCoy's way, blindly, almost sobbing. McCoy stumbled. Edith cried out, and then there was the screaming shriek of brakes.

Then, silence.

"Jim," McCoy said raggedly. "You deliberately stopped me . . . Did you hear me? Do you know what you just did?"

Kirk could not reply. Spock took his arm gently. "He knows," he said. "Soon you will know, too. And what was . . . now is again."

Kirk sat at his desk in the *Enterprise*, back in uniform, staring at nothing. Behind him, Spock's voice said:

"Coordinates from the bridge, Captain."

The words meant nothing. The papers before him meant nothing. It was as though he were all but dead.

"Jim," Spock said.

The deadness did not lift, but a small thread of startlement crept through it. Kirk turned slowly.

"Mr. Spock," he said. "That's the first time you've ever called me anything but Captain."

"I had to reach you," Spock said gently. "But never mind the coordinates. Jim, on my world, the nights are very long. In the morning, there is the sound of silver birds against the sky. My people know there is always time enough for everything. You'll come with me for a rest. You'll feel comfortable there."

"All the time in the world . . ."

"And filled with tomorrows."

Suddenly, the bitterness welled up. "Not for her," Kirk said. "For us, but not for her. She was negligible."

"No, Captain, she was not. Her death saved uncountable billions of people. Both the living and the yet unborn. Far from negligible."

"And I failed her," Kirk said, groping for understanding. "I didn't save her. And I loved her."

"No. You acted," Spock said. "No woman was ever loved as much, Jim. Because no other woman was almost offered the universe for love."

(SPACE SEED)

(Carey Wilber and Gene L. Coon)

It was only sheer luck that Marla McGivers was on the bridge when the SOS came in. Officially, Lieutenant McGivers was a controls systems specialist, but on the side, she was also a historian. Probably nobody else on board the *Enterprise* would have recognized Morse code at all, since it had gone out of use around the year 2000, in the general chaos following the Eugenics Wars; but she was a student of the period (though, Kirk thought, she looked a good deal more like a ballerina).

The SOS, when answered, changed promptly to the Morse for SS *Botany Bay*, and stayed there as if stuck regardless of further hails. Homing on the message, the *Enterprise* eventually found herself drawing alongside a dark hull of a ship of the CZ-100 class. The library computer said the last one of those had been built around 1994. Clearly a derelict, its signal left on automatic.

Except that the *Enterprise's* sensors showed other equipment also still operating, over there across the vacuum between the two vessels. Other equipment—and heartbeats. They were very faint, but they seemed to be coming from some eighty or ninety sources. None were faster than four beats per minute. There were no signs of respiration.

“Aliens?” Kirk asked McCoy.

The surgeon shrugged. “You’ve got me, Jim. Even aliens have to breathe. Besides, the ship’s name is in English.”

“The English,” Kirk said drily, “were notorious for not breathing, I suppose. Mr. Spock, can you trace the registry?”

“Nothing in the computer, Captain.”

“Lieutenant McGivers, what can you tell us about the period when that ship was built?”

“Not as much as I’d like,” Marla McGivers said. “The Eugenics Wars were caused by a group of ambitious scientists—of all nationalities—who were trying to im-

prove the race by selective breeding. They were pretty ruthless about it, and before their identity was guessed, half the countries on Earth were accusing each other of being responsible for the plague of sports and monsters that was cropping up. The result was the last World War, and in the process, a lot of records were lost. I'm surprised that any ship from that era ever got off the ground."

"Well, we'd better go across and look it over," Kirk said. "Since you're a specialist in the period, you'd better be in the party. Scotty, I'll want you to inspect the machinery and see what's salvageable, if anything. Bones, you too."

"Why am I always included in these things?" McCoy complained. "I signed aboard to practice medicine, not to have my atoms scattered back and forth across space by a transporter."

"You're included because we hear heartbeats, and that is your department. Let's go."

It was almost dark inside the *Botany Bay*. Where the boarding party materialized, there was little to see but a long corridor, flanked on each side by row upon row of coffin-like drawers or canisters, each about two meters square on end, thrust into the wall. Each had a small green light blinking over it, producing eerie, confusing reflections. Kirk eyed them.

"Mr. Scott?"

"I don't make anything of it yet, sir. They look a little like food lockers—but why so many? Ah, there's a control panel."

"I've seen something like them," Marla said. "Or rather, drawings of them. They look like a twentieth-century life-support system."

McCoy applied his tricorder to the nearest cabinet. At the same moment, Scott said, "Ah, here we are!" and lights came on overhead. McCoy grunted with interest.

"Look here, Jim," he said. "A new reading. The lights seem to have triggered something inside."

Kirk did not have to look at the tricorder reading to see that. There was now a clear hum from the cabinet, and the little light had turned from green to red.

"I've got it!" Marla said suddenly. "It's a sleeper ship!"

This meant nothing to Kirk, but McCoy said: "Suspended animation?"

"Yes. They were necessary for long space trips until about the year 2018. They didn't have the warp drive until then, so even interplanetary travel took them years. We'll find crewmen in there, or passengers, sleeping, waiting for the end of their journey . . ."

"Or more likely, all dead," McCoy said. "On the other hand, those heartbeats . . . Is it possible, after all these centuries?"

Scott joined them, and in a moment had discovered that the front of the cabinet was actually a protective shield. Pulling this away, he revealed a transparent observation panel. On the other side, bathed in a gentle violet glow, was a motionless, naked man. He was extremely handsome, and magnificently built. His face reflected the sun-ripened Aryan blood of the northern Indian Sikhs, with just an additional suggestion of the oriental. Even in repose, his features suggested strength, intelligence, even arrogance.

"How beautiful," Marla said, as if to herself.

"This cabinet is wired to be triggered first," Scott said practically. "Maybe that means he's the leader."

"Or only a pilot," Spock added. "Or a doctor, to supervise the revival of the others."

"He's the leader," Marla said positively.

"Oh?" Kirk said. "What makes you think so?"

"Well . . . you can see it. A Sikh type. They were fantastic warriors."

"He *is* reviving," McCoy said. "Heartbeat up to fifty-two already, and definite breathing."

"Scotty, see if they're all like that."

The engineer went down the line, pulling off the shields and peering into each canister. "No sir," he said finally. "A mixed bag, Captain. Western, Mid-European, Near-Eastern, Latin, Oriental—the works. And all their lights are still green, as you can see yourself."

"A man from the twentieth century," Marla said, as if hypnotized. "Coming alive now. It's incredible!"

"It's about to be impossible," McCoy said, checking the tricorder again. "His heartbeat's beginning to drop back down. If you want to talk to this living fossil, Jim, I suggest we get him over to my sick bay right away quick."

"Oh no!" Marla said.

McCoy shot her a sidelong look, but he said, "I quite agree. A patient well worth fighting for. And think of the history locked up in that head!"

"Never mind the history," Kirk said. "It's a human life. Beam him over."

While McCoy worked on the sleeping man, Kirk took time out to collect more information from his officers.

"As near as I can work out their heading," said Spinel-li, who had relieved Sulu at the helm, "they must have been trying for the Tau Ceti system."

"Makes sense. It's near Sol, and there are three habitable planets."

"Yes sir, but they would never have gotten there. Their port control jets took meteor damage, and the hits put them off course, too."

"Scotty, any log books or records?"

"Negative, Captain. They must have been in suspended animation when the ship took off."

"Ship's equipment?"

"Colonization gear mainly," the engineer said. "But quite heavy on armaments. I suppose that's typical of their era. Twelve of the life support systems malfunctioned, leaving seventy-two still operating. About a dozen of those are women."

"Seventy-two alive," Kirk said reflectively. "Any conclusions, Mr. Spock?"

"Very few, Captain. The CZ-100 class vessel was built for interplanetary travel only—not interstellar."

"They tried it."

"Granted," said the first officer. "But why?"

"Possibly because life on Earth had become so unbearable during the wars."

"Captain, consider the expense, just to begin with. Healthy, well-oriented young humans would think of some less costly way of surviving—or of committing suicide. It was ten thousand to one against their making it to Tau Ceti, and they must have known it. And another thing: Why no record of the attempt? Granted that the records are incomplete, but a maiden star voyage—the name *Botany Bay* should have been recorded a thousand

times; one mention, at least, should have survived. But there is nothing.”

“*Botany Bay*. Hmm. Lieutenant McGivers tells me that was a penal colony on the shores of Australia. Is that of some significance?”

“Are you suggesting a deportation vessel?” Spock said. “Again, logically insufficient. Your Earth was on the edge of another Dark Ages. Whole populations were being bombed out of existence. A group of criminals could have been eliminated in a far less expensive way than firing them off in what was the most advanced spaceship of its time.”

“So much for my theory. I’m still waiting for yours.”

“I do not have the facts, Captain. William of Occam said that one must not multiply guesses without sufficient reasons. I suggest that we take the *Botany Bay* to the nearest Star Base for a thorough study.”

Kirk thought about it. “All right. Rig tractors for towing. In the meantime, I’m going to look at the patient.”

In the sick bay, the man out of time was still unconscious, but now breathing regularly. Marla McGivers was standing to one side, watching.

“How is he, Bones?”

“By all rights he should be dead,” McCoy said shortly.

“False modesty?”

“By no means. I’m good, but not *that* good. His heart stopped three times. When I got it going the third time, he woke up for a moment, smiled at me, and said ‘How long?’ I guessed a couple of centuries. He smiled again, fell asleep, and damned if his heart didn’t stop a fourth time, and *start up again of its own accord*. There’s something inside this man that refuses to accept death.”

“He must have the constitution of an ox.”

“That is not just a metaphor,” McCoy said, pointing to the body function panel. “Look at that. Even in his present shape, his heart valve action has twice the power of yours or mine. Lung efficiency, fifty percent better. And courage! . . . Whoever he is, or whatever, it’ll be a pleasure to meet him.”

Kirk looked at Marla, and then said quietly to the surgeon, “I can get you agreement on that.”

Apparently encouraged by the notice, Marla said, “Will he live?”

"If he gets some rest, he may," McCoy said tartly. "Beat it, both of you. This is a sick bay, not a ward-room."

Grinning, Kirk motioned Marla out and followed her. As she turned down the corridor, however, he said, "Lieutenant."

She stopped and turned. Kirk went on. "Lieutenant, if I were forced to rate your performance as a member of the boarding party today, I wouldn't give you a very high mark."

"I know, Captain," she said. "I'm sorry."

"That's not enough. At any one time, the safety of this entire vessel can rest upon the performance of a single crewman. The fact that you may find a strange man personally compelling is the worst possible excuse."

"Personally?" she said, flushing. "Captain, my second profession is history. To find a . . . a specimen from the past, alive . . . the sheer delight of anticipating what he might tell me . . ."

"More than that," Kirk said. "Men were much more adventurous then, bolder, more colorful."

She was silent for no more than a heartbeat. Then she said firmly, "Yes, sir, I think they were."

Kirk nodded. "That's better. If I can have honesty, I'll overlook mistakes—at least the first time. Dismissed."

As she left, Kirk turned to find McCoy watching him, smiling. "It's a pity," the surgeon said, "that you wasted your life on command, Jim. You'd have made a fair psychologist."

"Thanks, Bones. but command is better. It covers every other subject."

"Touché—or should I say, checkmate?"

It was only a few hours later that McCoy called Kirk on the bridge. "Captain," he said, "I have a patient with questions—and I don't mind telling you, patients like this could put medicine out of business. Can you come down?"

The big man from the *Botany Bay*, now dressed in a tunic from the stores of the *Enterprise*, was still on his bed; but he was indeed awake—vitaly awake. Kirk introduced himself.

"Thank you," the man said. "I am told I have slept for

two centuries or more, and am on board a real starship—not a makeshift like mine. What is our heading?”

Kirk was both amused and annoyed. “Would you care to give your name first?”

“No, I would not. I have a responsibility. If you are indeed a commander, you will recognize it. Where are we going?”

Kirk decided to yield for the moment; there was no point in insisting on a contest with a man just yanked back from the edge of death, no matter how arrogant he was. “Our heading is Star Base Twelve, our command base in this sector.”

“Which is?”

“I doubt that identifying the sector would do you any good. It is many parsecs beyond the system you were headed for, and our galactic coordinate system probably doesn’t correspond with the one you’re used to.”

“Galactic,” the man said. “I see. And my people?”

“Seventy-two of the canisters are still functioning. The people will be revived when we reach Star Base Twelve. We wanted to see how we fared with reviving you, first.”

“Logical and hard-headed; I approve. I do begin to grow fatigued. Can we continue the questioning at another time?”

“You haven’t answered any questions yet,” Kirk said, “except by inference.”

“I apologize,” the big man said at once. “My name is Kahn. I command the *Botany Bay* Colonizing Expedition. I think perhaps I could answer your questions better if I knew your period, your terminology and so on—perhaps something to read during my convalescence would serve. History, technology, whatever is available.”

It seemed a sensible request. “Dr. McCoy will show you how to hook your viewing screen here into our library tapes. And I think Lieutenant McGivers would enjoy filling you in on the history.”

“Very good.” Kahn smiled. “I have two hundred years of catching up to do. I . . .”

Suddenly, his eyes closed. McCoy looked at the body function panel.

“Asleep,” McCoy said. “Well, I’m glad he’s got *some* human weaknesses.”

It was not until Kirk was on his way back to the bridge

that he fully realized how little Kahn had told him. Irritated, mostly at himself, he collared Spock at the computer. "Anything?"

"Nothing about a star flight until the Alpha Centauri expedition of 2018," the first officer said. "How is the patient?"

"Arrogant—and clever. Enormously powerful. And with enormous magnetism. Not at all what I expected in a twentieth-century man."

"Interesting. Possibly a product of selective breeding."

"That had occurred to me," Kirk admitted. "If I wanted a superman, he's very much the kind of outcome I'd shoot for."

"Exactly, Captain. He is almost a stereotype of an Earthman's dreams of power and potency. And from what I can put together from the fragments of the record, just the kind of man who precipitated the chaos of the 1990s."

"Oh? I thought it was a group of scientists."

"Partly true," Spock said, "and partly, I would judge, a comfortable fiction. The scientists encouraged carefully arranged marriages *among themselves*, and applied their knowledge of heredity to their *own* offspring. The sports and monsters did not appear until after the war was well started, and almost surely were spontaneous mutations erupting from all the ambient radioactivity. The scientists stayed aloof and went right on breeding what they thought was *Homo superior*."

"Fact?" Kirk demanded. "Or just that old legend of the mad scientists again?"

"Mostly deduction," Spock said. "But the scientists existed. Not mad—not raving mad, anyhow. Dedicated men who believed their wards would grow up to seize power peaceably, put an end to war, famine, greed—a noble ambition, which of course misfired."

"And our patient?"

"One of those children. His age would be right. A group of aggressive, arrogant young men *did* seize power simultaneously in over forty nations. But they had overextended themselves; they could not hold what they seized. That much is fact. And one more thing, Captain. Are you aware that some eighty or ninety of those people were never brought to trial, were never even found after the chaos? No bodies, no graves, no traces?"

"I certainly wasn't," Kirk said.

"And they should have been found, or the authorities should have pretended that they had been found. Think of the panic among the remaining, starving war-weary people even to suspect that eighty Napoleons might still be alive. And, Captain . . ."

"Yes," Kirk said heavily. "I'm no match for you as a logician, Mr. Spock, but even I can see where that sentence is leading. You think those eighty Napoleons are *still* alive—and we have seventy-nine of them in tow, and one on board."

"Precisely, Captain."

Kirk thought about it for quite a while.

"It stands up," he said. "But what we're left with, is that we can get no more pertinent information anywhere except from Kahn himself. He's got a mind like a tantalum-lined vault, so we'll never force it out of him. We'll have to try to charm it . . . which probably won't work either. Maybe we can use the customs of his own time to disarm him. I'll see what Lieutenant McGivers has to suggest."

What Marla McGivers had to suggest was a formal dinner, attended by all the major officers of the *Enterprise*, as a welcome for Commander Kahn to the twenty-third century. She was obviously far from disinterested in the proposal, and Kirk suspected that Kahn had already made his first new conquest in the new century; but there were no regulations against romance, and in any event, Kirk had nothing better to suggest.

Marla appeared with a new and totally anachronistic hair style which went a long way toward confirming Kirk's suspicions. As for Kahn, it was impossible to tell whether or not he was charmed; he far too efficiently charmed everybody else, instead. There seemed to be no situation in which he could not feel at home, after only a few minutes' appraisal.

Then, over the brandy, it suddenly turned out at least one officer of the *Enterprise* was not prepared to recognize charm even if he were hit over the head with it. Spock said, "But you still have not told us why you decided on star travel, Commander Kahn—nor how you managed to keep it out of the records."

"Adventure, Mr. Spock. There was little else left to be accomplished on Earth."

"There was the overthrow of the Eugenics tyrannies," Spock said. "Many men considered that a worthwhile effort."

"A waste of spirit in a desert of shame," Kahn said. "There was much that was noble about the Eugenics crusade. It was the last grand attempt to unify humanity, at least in my time."

"Like a team of horses under one harness, one whip?"

"I refuse to take offense, Mr. Spock," Kahn said genially. "Much can be accomplished by a team. It was a time of great dreams—great aspirations."

"Great aspirations under petty dictatorships? Never in previous history, at least."

"I disagree," Kahn said. "One man, not many, would eventually have ruled. As in Rome under Augustus—and see what that accomplished—Captain Kirk, you understand me well. You let your second-in-command attack me, and through me, you; yet you remain silent, and watch for weakness. A sound principle."

"You have a tendency," Kirk said, "to express your ideas in military terms, Commander Kahn. This is a social occasion."

"It has been said," Kahn said easily, "that social occasions are only warfare concealed. Many prefer their warfare more honest and open."

"There was open warfare on Earth," Kirk said. "Yet it appears that you fled it."

"Not much can be done with a nearly destroyed world."

"In short," Spock said, "you were afraid."

Kahn's eyes flashed. "I have never been afraid."

"And that does not frighten you?"

"How? I don't understand you, Mr. Spock. How can a man be afraid of never being afraid? It is a contradiction in terms."

"Not at all," the first officer said. "It is a null class in the class of all classes not members of the given class."

Kahn was now beginning to look angry. Kirk, secretly a little amused, interposed. "I'm sorry, Commander, but you just pushed Mr. Spock's logic button, which has a tendency to make him incomprehensible for the next ten

minutes or so. Nevertheless, I think his question a good one. You say you have never been afraid; yet you left at the very time mankind most needed courage."

"Courage! How can one impart courage to sheep? I offered the world order. *Order!* And what happened? They panicked. I left behind nothing worth saving."

"Then," Spock said, "do you imagine that this ship, to take a simple example, was built by sheep, out of panic? I do not further impugn your logic, Commander Kahn, but I am beginning to mistrust your eyesight."

Marla, who had been completely silent since the start of the discussion, stood up so suddenly that coffee slopped in saucers all the way around the table.

"I never thought," she said in a trembling voice, "that I'd ever see so much rudeness to a starship guest."

"Was I rude?" Spock said mildly, raising his eyebrows. "If so, I apologize."

"And I," said Kirk, repressing another grin.

"I quite accept your apologies," Kahn said, also rising. "But if you will excuse me, gentlemen and ladies, I am tired. It has been a good many centuries, and I would like to return to my quarters. If you would guide me back, Marla . . . ?"

They went out, followed, at a slight motion of the head from Kirk, by every other guest but Spock. When the room was empty, Kirk said, "And McCoy calls *me* a fair psychologist! I've never seen a better needling job in my life, Mr. Spock."

"I myself am not very happy with it, Captain," the first officer said. "The human half of my make-up seems to go to sleep just when I need it most. Consider, really, how little we have learned. The man's name: Sibahl Khan Noonien. From 1992 through 1996, military chieftain of a quarter of your world from South Asia through the Middle East, and the last of the tyrants to be overthrown. And apparently very much admired, as such men go; there was very little freedom under his rule, but also there were no massacres, and no war until he was attacked by a lesser dictator of his own breed. A man of power, who understands the uses of power, and who *should* have been much admired by the people whom he calls sheep, the people who feel more comfortable being led."

"And you got all that just from what he said tonight? I would say that's considerable."

"It is not what we need to know," Spock insisted. "The main question is, why did he run away? *That* was what I was hoping to elicit from him. But he caught me at it. I do not call that very good psychology."

"I see what you mean," Kirk said reflectively. "Until we know that, we can't know what he might intend now—or what risks we might run in reviving the other seventy or so of them. We will just have to try another gambit . . . But there's one other thing. What was the point of that question about being afraid of never having been afraid? I thought for a moment that I saw what you were driving at, and then you lost me in your logical technicalities. Isn't the question what you would call a tautology?"

"No, Captain," Spock said. "But I was trying to make it look like one. I was not trying to confuse you, certainly, but Commander Kahn—and I hope that at least there, I succeeded. Fear is an essential reaction to the survival of any sentient creature. If he does not know fear, he never knows when it is sensible to run; and yet, Commander Kahn ran. Since he claims never to have felt fear, what other reason can he have had?"

"Hmm," Kirk said. "I've never seen a single sentient creature that didn't feel fear when it was appropriate. Yet he was very convincing on that very point."

"Indeed he was," Spock said. "And, Captain—that *scares* me."

Nothing Spock had ever said before had quite so stunned Kirk. As he stared at his Science Officer, the vacated, somehow sadly messy scene of the formal dinner suddenly rang with the alarm to General Quarters.

"Abrams in Security, Captain. Kahn's missing."

"McCoy here. Kahn's not here. No sign of McGivers, either—not even in her quarters. And he's not there."

"Transporter room here. We've had a guard slugged, Lieutenant Adamski is missing, and there's been a lot of power expended in the last half hour."

"Scott reporting. I . . ."

"Uhura, what happened to Scotty? Get him back!"

"Dead channel, Captain. I can't raise the arsenal, either."

"Spock, send somebody down."

"All turbo elevators inoperative. Emergency exits jammed."

The lights began to go down. "Batteries!"

"Shunted out, Captain. Also, the atmosphere's off."

"Engineering! Scott! What's going on down there? Scotty!"

And then they heard Kahn's voice. It was coming through Uhura's own board, though it was impossible to imagine how Kahn had made the crippled array speak.

"He's not able to talk with you at the moment, Captain," Kahn said. "I'm afraid your ship is mine—or rather, ours. I have almost all my people aboard her, at every key point. Everything is jammed; you have perhaps ten minutes before you suffocate. Would you like to negotiate with me?"

"Uhura, can you raise Star Ship Command?"

"No, sir, this board is a dead duck. I can't even dump a message capsule."

"Brilliant," Spock said softly.

There was only one thing left to do. "Security Five, Mr. Spock. Flood all decks."

"Bypassed, Captain. Commander Kahn seems to have been a very quick student."

"Can we go to Six?" That would fill the air with radioactive gas from the fusion chamber and kill almost everyone on board; but . . .

"No sir, we cannot. Nothing is left but Destruct. That's still alive."

"The air up there should be getting quite toxic by now," Kahn's voice said. "You don't have much time."

"What do you want, Kahn?"

"Surrender of the bridge."

"Refused," Kirk said.

"Very well. It is academic, anyhow. In ten minutes, every person on the bridge will be dead."

Nothing further was heard from Kahn after that. Slowly, the air turned foul. After a while, nobody was conscious but Kirk, and then . . . and then . . .

Kirk awoke, with considerable surprise, in the briefing room. His entire staff seemed to be with him—all weak, but all alive. They were heavily under guard by Kahn and

a group of men very like him, all carrying *Enterprise* phasers. The men from the *Botany Bay* were inarguably splendid-looking specimens—large, strong, healthy, handsome, and above all, alert.

"Very good," Kahn said. "Now we can talk. You see, Captain, nothing changes—except man. Your technical accomplishments are illusions, simply the tools which men use. The key has always been man himself. Improve a mechanical device and you double your capacity; improve man, and you gain a thousand fold. You, I judge, are such a man, Captain, as am I. You would be wise to join me."

Kirk said nothing. Kahn turned to Spock. "I am tempted," Spock said. "I admire your tactics . . . but not, I am afraid, your philosophy. And I know from history how self-appointed supermen treat mixed breeds. Let us see how you run the ship by yourself."

"You will see. My offer to you is closed. Navigator, I want you to set course for the nearest colonized planet—one with port facilities and a population which is not afraid of discipline."

"Go to blazes," Spinelli said.

"It is as I thought," Spock said. "You may know the *Enterprise* well, Commander, but your newly revived colleagues do not. I think we have a stalemate."

"Do we? Dr. McCoy, you maintain a decompression chamber in your laboratory, isn't that so? Yes, I know it is. Joaquin, take Captain Kirk to the chamber. Put him inside, and lower the pressure to zero. I trust the rest of you understand what that means. You can spare him that. All I want from you is your word that you will continue performing your duties."

"Nobody," Kirk said harshly, "is to lift a finger to save me. I so order."

"I am not bluffing," Kahn said pleasantly. "If, of course, you allow your Captain to die, you will all follow him, one by one, into the chamber."

Kirk caught Marla's eye. She was staring wide-eyed at Kahn. Evidently she had discovered something she hadn't taken into account.

There was a blare from a wall speaker, and then a babble of angry, excited crowd noises. "Kahn," said an unfamiliar voice, "this is Paul in the recreation room.

They're getting out of hand. I may have to kill a few of them."

"Do so, then."

"No!" Marla said. "I have friends there . . . Kahn, please. If I could talk to them . . . reassure them . . . There's no need to kill them."

"You may attempt it," Kahn said. "Be certain they understand that I have no compunctions about killing if I'm forced to."

The guards hustled Kirk out, with Marla in tow. Perhaps they were unfamiliar with the ship in detail, but they certainly knew their way to McCoy's laboratory. They bundled Kirk into the decompression chamber as though they were doing nothing more interesting than autoclaving a rack of test tubes. The door shut, and a moment later Kirk heard the pumps begin to throb.

For some reason, he felt neither alarmed nor resigned. His chief emotion was anger, at being put through asphyxiation twice in one hour.

There seemed to be nothing to do about it, however.

Then the door hissed and swung back. Kirk stepped out cautiously. One of the supermen, the one called Joaquin, was out cold on the floor, with Marla standing over him, a wrench held awkwardly in her hands. The other guard evidently had gone off somewhere.

"Are you all right?" Marla said tremulously.

"I think so. The pressure didn't have time to drop much. I'm glad to see you're good for something." He stooped and picked up Joaquin's phaser.

Marla grasped his arm. "Captain, please," she said.

"Well?"

"I saved your life. Promise me you . . . won't kill him."

"No promises," Kirk said, looking around the laboratory. After a moment, he spotted what he wanted; a bulb of the anesthetic gas McCoy used to capture specimens. He juggled it with pleasure. "Stay here and try not to get yourself any deeper into trouble than you are. I think I am about to bag myself some choice items for some zoo."

It was not all that easy. Before it was over, one of the supermen was dead, and almost everyone else on both sides was considerably banged up. At last, however, the

survivors from the *Botany Bay* were locked in a hold, and Kirk and his officers reassembled in the briefing room.

"Well, Mr. Spock," Kirk said, "I think we know now why they left the Earth."

"Yes, sir. To free themselves of the rabble, and start fresh. In my opinion they would never have succeeded, even had they made it to a habitable world. The man who cannot know fear is gravely handicapped."

"We are about to put that to the test. Have Kahn brought in here, please."

Kahn was brought in, under guard, with Marla behind him. Both looked at Kirk defiantly.

"At present," Kirk said, "we are orbiting a planet in a system unknown to you, and which I shall not further identify. It is savage and inhospitable, but with breathable atmosphere and land which can be cultivated. You have the following choice: To be put ashore on this world, with a minimum of survival equipment; or, to be taken to Star Base Twelve to be assigned to rehabilitation. The second choice would be rather drastic in your case, but it would enable you to fit into our society. Which do you prefer?"

"Captain," Kahn said, "I suppose you will remember that Lucifer said when he fell into the pit."

"I remember it well. I take it that's your answer?"

"It is."

"It may interest you to know that Systems Officer McGivers, given the choice of standing court martial or sharing your exile, has chosen to go with you."

Kahn looked at her and smiled. "I knew I was right about you," he said. "You have the fire. And think of this: we have what we wanted after all—a world to win." He swung on Kirk. "And, Captain, we will make it an empire. You'll see."

"If you do," Kirk said, "you'll have earned it. Guards, beam them down."

Kahn exited without a backward look, but Marla turned at the door.

"Goodbye, Captain," she said. "I'm sorry. But I do love him."

"I wish you luck, Lieutenant."

After a short silence, Scott said, "It's a shame for a

good Scotsman to admit it, but I'm not up on my Milton. What *did* Lucifer say after he fell into the pit?"

"He said, 'Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven.' Mr. Spock, clear for space. I want to get under way as soon as possible."

"Yes, Captain. What shall I do with the *Botany Bay*?"

"Hmm . . . You'd better dump it into—no, on second thought, let's keep it in tow. I suppose there are still things aboard her that the historians will want to see. At the moment, though, whenever I say 'historian' I have to repress a shudder."

"Let us think ahead, then," Spock said. "It would be interesting to come back to this system in a hundred years and see what crop had sprung up from the seed we have planted today."

"It would indeed," Kirk said. "But I'll tell you something else, Mr. Spock. I only hope that in a hundred years, that crop won't have sprung right out of the ground and come out looking for *us*."

BOOK II

STAR TREK 3

BOOK II—*Star Trek 3*

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THE TROUBLE WITH TRIBBLES*

(David Gerrold)

Nobody seems to know where tribbles come from, though obviously they are comfortable in oxygen-bearing air at Earthlike temperatures and pressures. Newborn tribbles are about an inch long; the largest one ever seen, about sixteen inches.

A tribble looks a little like a cross between an angora cat and a beanbag. It has no arms or legs, no eyes, and in fact no face—only a mouth. It moves by rolling, by stretching and flexing like an inchworm, or by a peculiar throbbing which moves it along slowly but smoothly, rather like a snail. It does, however, have long fur, which comes in a variety of colors—beige, deep chocolate, gold, white, gold-green, auburn, cinnamon and dusky yellow.

Tribbles are harmless. Absolutely, totally, completely, categorically, inarguably, utterly, one hundred per cent harmless . . .

The *Enterprise* picked up a priority A-1 distress call from deep space station K-7 within a few moments after the big ship hove into sensor range. The station orbits Sherman's Planet, which is about three light years from the nearest Klingon outpost and hence well within the Klingon's sphere of influence—or the outpost was well within the Federation's sphere of influence, depending on how you looked at it.

*Hugo Award nominee

Both sides had claimed the planet. Although it was mostly barren, its position between the two political bodies was of considerable strategic importance. In the old days, one or the other would have grabbed it, and the other would have tried to jockey him off, at constant risk of war—a pastime the Klingons enjoyed.

These days, however, there was the Organian peace treaty to take into account. Under its terms, Sherman's Planet would belong to whichever side could prove it could develop the planet most effectively.

Under the circumstances, when a priority one distress call came from station K-7, the *Enterprise* could not be blamed for making for the station at Warp Six, with all hands at battle stations.

But when the ship arrived there was no target. K-7 rolled majestically and peacefully around Sherman's Planet, menaced—if that is the word—by nothing within sensor range but a one-man scout ship which floated nearby, obviously in parking orbit.

Baffled and irritated, Captain Kirk called the station's Commander Lurry, who refused any explanation except in person. He did so rather apologetically, but this did not placate Kirk in the least. He beamed over to the station with Spock, his First Officer—with orders to Sulu to keep the *Enterprise* at battle readiness.

There were two other men in Commander Lurry's office when Kirk and Spock arrived. Kirk paid no attention to them.

"Commander Lurry," he said, "you have sent out a priority one distress call. Please state the nature of your emergency."

"Uh, Captain, please allow me to explain. We in fact have no emergency, yet."

"Then you are in trouble," Kirk said grimly. "If there is no emergency, why did you order the call?"

One of the two unknowns said, "I ordered it, Captain."

"And who are you?"

"Captain Kirk, this is Nilz Baris," Lurry said. "He's out here from Earth to take charge of the development project for Sherman's Planet."

"And that gives you the authority to put a whole quadrant on defense alert?"

"Mr. Baris," the second unknown said stiffly, "is the Federation Undersecretary for Agricultural Affairs in this quadrant."

"A position with no military standing of which I am aware," Kirk said. "And who may *you* be, please?"

"This is my assistant, Arne Darvin," Baris said. "Now, Captain, I want all available security guards to . . ."

"I beg your pardon?" Kirk said. The way this trio had of answering questions for each other was not improving his temper, and thus far he had heard nothing even vaguely resembling an explanation.

"I will try to make myself clear," the Undersecretary said. "I want all available security guards. I want them posted around the warehouse. Surely that's simple enough."

"It's simple but it's far from clear. What warehouse?"

"The warehouse with the quadrotriticale," Darvin said, recapturing the ball. Lifting an attaché case to Lurry's desk, he extracted from it a small vial. From this he poured into his palm a few small seeds, which he handed to Baris, who in turn handed them to Kirk. The Captain inspected them briefly and then passed them on to Spock.

"Wheat," he said. "What about it?"

"Quadrotriticale is not wheat, Captain," Darvin said, with an audible sniff. "It is a newly developed form of triticale."

"That leaves me as much in the dark as before."

"Triticale is a high-yield per acre hybrid form of wheat and rye," Spock said quietly. "This appears to be a four-lobed rehybridization—a perennial, also, if I'm not mistaken. The root grain, triticale, traces its ancestry back to twentieth-century Canada."

"Uh, yes," Baris said, looking a little startled.

"And it is the only Earth grain that will grow on Sherman's Planet," Commander Lurry put in. "We have a warehouse of it here on the station. It's very important that the grain reach Sherman's Planet safely. Mr. Baris thinks that Klingon agents may try to sabotage it."

"Nothing could be more likely," the Undersecretary said. "That grain is going to be the way the Federation proves its claim to Sherman's Planet. Obviously the Klingons will do anything they can to keep it from getting

there. It must be protected. Do you understand? It *must* be protected.”

“So you issued a priority one distress call on behalf of a warehouse full of grain,” Kirk said. “The only reason I don’t arrest you on the spot is that I want the Federation to have Sherman’s Planet as much as you do. Consider yourself lucky; misuse of the priority one channel is a Federation offense.”

“I did not misuse . . .”

“Captain Kirk,” Lurry interposed hurriedly, “couldn’t you at least post a couple of guards? We do get a large number of ships passing through.”

This of course was true. After a moment, Kirk said, “Mr. Spock, what do you think?”

“It would be a logical precaution, Captain.”

“Very well.” Kirk took out his communicator. “Kirk to *Enterprise* . . . Lieutenant Uhura, secure from general quarters. Next, beam over *two* security guards. Have them report to Commander Lurry.”

“Yes, Captain.”

“Also, authorize shore leave for all off-duty personnel. Kirk out.”

“Only two?” Baris said, in something very like a fury. “Kirk, you’re going to hear about this. I’m going to contact Starfleet Command.”

“Do that,” Kirk said, staring at the Undersecretary icily. “But before you put in the call, I suggest that you pin back your ears. It will save Starfleet Command the trouble of doing it for you.”

The recreation area of K-7 was small, the shops little more than stalls surrounding a central mall formed by the intersection of a number of curving corridors. Space was at a premium.

As Kirk and Spock entered the area, a number of crew members from the *Enterprise* materialized on the mall, including Uhura and Sulu. Kirk moved toward them.

“I see you didn’t waste any time getting over here,” he said. “Mr. Sulu, we have a new specimen for your greenhouse. Mr. Spock?” The First Officer handed the grain over. “It’s called . . .”

"Quadrotriticale!" the helmsman said eagerly. "I've read about it, but I've never seen any till now!"

"Come on, Sulu," Uhura said. "You can study it back aboard. Let's get in some shopping while we have the chance. Coming, Mr. Spock? Captain?"

"Well, for a few minutes, anyhow. But not for long; I suspect there are some hot messages shooting back and forth in subspace along about now."

The shop into which Uhura led them was vaguely cluttered and did not seem to specialize in anything in particular. Clearly it was one of those broker's establishments where spacemen on leave sold curios they had picked up on far planets, to help pay for their shore leaves—curios later resold to other spacemen for twice the price. This did not look like the best such shop Kirk had ever seen, but then, K-7 was not the best located of space stations, either.

There was nobody else in it at the moment but a tall, raffish-looking red-haired civilian, who had an immense quantity of merchandise spread out over the counter, and a carryall sack at his feet.

"No, absolutely not," the storekeeper was saying. "I've got enough Argilian flame gems to last me a lifetime. At the price I have to ask for them, hardly anybody on this junkyard can afford them."

"How sad for you, my friend," the peddler said. His voice was surprisingly melodious. "You won't see finer stones than mine anywhere. Ah well. Now surely you'll be wanting some Sirian glow water . . ."

"I use that," the storekeeper said in a deadly monotone, "to polish the flame gems."

The peddler sighed and swept most of his merchandise off the counter into his sack. Only one object was left—a green-gold ball of fluff.

"Ah, you are a most difficult man to reach. All I have left to offer you is tribbles. Surely, you will want . . ."

"Not at that price."

"Oooh," Uhura said. "What is it? Is it alive? May I hold him? He's adorable."

"What is it?" the peddler said, handing it over. "Why,

little darlin', it's a tribble. Only the sweetest little creature known to man—exceptin', of course, yourself."

The object in the lieutenant's hands throbbed gently. Kirk became aware of a low, pervasive sound, like a cross between the thrum of a kitten and the cooing of a dove. "Oh," Uhura said, "it's purring!"

"Ah, little lady, he's just sayin' that he likes you."

"Can I buy him?"

"That," the shopkeeper said, "is what we're trying to decide right now."

"My friend, ten credits apiece is a very reasonable price. You can see for yourself how much the lovely little lady here appreciates fine things. Others will, too."

"One credit," said the storekeeper.

Sulu put his grain on the counter and reached tentatively for the tribble. "He won't bite, will he?" the helmsman said.

"Sir!" the peddler said, making a great show of ignoring the storekeeper's offer. "There is a law against transporting harmful animals from one planet to another, as you as a starship officer must be fully aware. Besides, tribbles have no teeth."

"All right," the shopkeeper said. "Two credits."

The peddler took the tribble from Sulu and plopped it down on the counter again. "Nine," he said.

The shopkeeper eyed the animal dubiously. "Is he clean?"

"He's as clean as you are. I daresay a good deal cleaner."

"If you don't want him, I'll take him," Lt. Uhura said. "I think he's cute."

This set off another round of haggling. The two finally settled on six credits, whereupon the peddler began to produce more tribbles from his sack. Startlingly, no two were the same color or size.

"How much are you selling them for?" Uhura asked the shopkeeper.

"Ten credits. But for you . . ."

"Hey!" Sulu said suddenly. "He's eating my grain!" He swept up what remained. The tribble's purr got louder, and its non-face went slowly round and round, giving an

absurd impression of bliss. The shopkeeper picked it up, but the peddler promptly took it from him.

"Sir," the peddler said. "That one happens to be my sample, which is mine to do with as I please. And I please to give it to the pretty little lady here."

"That's right," said the storekeeper. "Ruin the market."

"My friend," the peddler said, almost singing, "once the pretty little lady here starts to show this little precious around, you won't be able to keep up with 'em. Mark my words."

Lt. Uhura put the faceless ball of fur to her face, cooing alarmingly. Kirk did not know whether to be pleased or scared; Uhura had never shown the faintest sign of sentimentality before, but she seemed to be far gone in gooiness now. To be sure, the baggy little animals were attractive, but . . .

Queep!

No, that wasn't a tribble; it was his communicator.

"Kirk here."

"Captain, this is Scott. We have a stiff message in from Starfleet Command. I think you'd better deal with it; I don't think I'm authorized."

"All right, Scotty," Kirk told his communicator. "Record and hold. I'll be right over."

"Well and good. But, Captain, that's not all, sir. Our sensors have just picked up a Klingon battle cruiser. It's closing in rapidly on K-7. I've challenged it and gotten a routine acknowledgement; but . . ."

"Who's in command?" Spock said. Kirk had almost forgotten that he was still in the shop; but as usual, he had asked the crucial question. Kirk passed it on, with a grateful nod to his First Officer.

"Commander Koloth, sir. You'll remember him from our last encounter, Captain; a real, fourteen-karat son of a . . ."

"I get the message, Scotty. Hold on—and post battle stations. Lieutenant Uhura, pick up your pet; we're back on duty."

He had hardly finished speaking before the *Enterprise's* transporters shimmered them all out of existence.

The message from Starfleet Command was, as usual, brief and pointed. It said: "It is not necessary to remind you of the importance to the Federation of Sherman's Planet. The key to our winning of this planet is the grain, quadrotriticale. The shipment of it must be protected. Effective immediately, you will render any aid and assistance which Undersecretary Baris may require. The safety of the grain—and the project—is your responsibility."

How complicated that was going to be was immediately made clear by the presence of the Klingon ship. It made no move to attack the station; that in fact would have been suicide, since every phaser on board the *Enterprise* was locked on the Klingon vessel (as Koloth, an able captain, would assume as a matter of course). Instead, Koloth stunned everyone by asking for shore leave for his men.

Under the Organian peace treaty, Commander Lurry had no choice but to grant the request. Starfleet, however, had inadvertently given Kirk a card to play, since the phrasing of the message had made the safety of the grain his responsibility. Hence he was able to order that only twelve Klingons be allowed shore leave at a time, and furthermore he beamed over one *Enterprise* security guard for every Klingon. That part of it, he thought, ought to please Baris, at least.

It did not please Baris. He did not want any Klingons on the station, period. He carried on about it quite a lot. In the end, however, it was clear that the Klingons had a right to be there, and nothing could be done about it.

Kirk stopped off at the recreation room for a cup of coffee and a breather. Scott, the engineer, was there reading a technical journal; that was his form of relaxation. Elsewhere, however, a knot of people were gathered around a table, including Spock, Dr. McCoy, Uhura and Ensign Freeman. Joining the group, Kirk found that on the table was Uhura's tribble and at least ten smaller ones; the crewmen were playing with them.

"How long have you had that thing, Lieutenant?" McCoy asked Uhura.

"Only since yesterday. This morning, I found that he—I mean *she* had had babies."

"I'd say you got a bargain." McCoy picked up one of the animals and examined it curiously. "Hmmm . . ."

"Lieutenant Uhura," Kirk said amusedly, "are you running a nursery?"

"I hadn't intended to—but the tribble had other plans."

Spock too was handling one of the creatures, stroking it absent-mindedly.

"You got it at the space station?" McCoy said.

"Yes, from the pilot of that one-man scout ship. Commander Lurry says his name is Cyrano Jones, of all things. He's a system locator, down on his luck."

"Most of them are," Kirk said. "Locating new systems on the margins of Klingon space is a synonym for locating trouble."

"A most curious creature, Captain," Spock said. "Its trilling would seem to have a tranquilizing effect on the human nervous system. Fortunately, I seem to be immune."

Watching his First Officer stroke the animal, Kirk raised an eyebrow, but offered no other comment.

"Lieutenant," McCoy said, "do you mind if I take one of these things down to the lab to find out what makes it tick?"

"It's all right with me, but if you're planning to dissect it, I don't want to know about it."

"Say, Lieutenant," Ensign Freeman said, "if you're giving them away, could I have one too?"

"Sure, why not? They seem to be old enough."

Freeman looked at Kirk. "I don't have any objections to pets on this ship," Kirk said. "Within reason. But if these tribbles want to stay on the *Enterprise*, they'd better be a little less prolific."

The tribbles, however, did not seem to get the message. Visiting sick bay the next day—another prolonged shouting match with Baris had given him a headache—Kirk found that McCoy had what seemed to be a boxful of the creatures.

"I thought Uhura gave you only one of those things, Bones. It looks more like you've got ten here."

"Average litter. I had eleven, but I dissected one. The

nearest thing I can figure out is that they're born pregnant."

"Is that possible?"

"No, but it would be a great timesaver, wouldn't it? I can tell you this much: almost fifty per cent of the creature's metabolism is geared to reproduction. Do you know what you get if you feed a tribble too much?"

Kirk's mind was not really on the subject. "A very fat tribble?"

"No. You get a whole bunch of hungry little tribbles. And if you think *that's* a boxful, you should see Uhura's. She's got about fifty, and she gave away five."

"Well, you'd better find homes for this batch before you've got fifty, too." Kirk swallowed the headache pill. "Are you going on shore leave, Bones?"

"Already been. Besides, this problem is more interesting. I understand Scotty went over with the last detachment; he'll see to it that there's no trouble. Unless, of course, the Klingons start it."

"I can't see why they'd want to do that. Koloth knows that if there is any, I'd promptly double the number of guards. If he's really after the grain, that's the last thing he'd want."

Nevertheless, after his next interview with Lurry, Kirk troubled to make a detour through the space station's bar. There were six Earthmen there, Scotty and Navigator Chekov among them. Five or six Klingons were at another table, but the two groups were studiously ignoring each other.

As Kirk joined his own men, Cyrano Jones entered the bar and also moved toward them. "Ah, friends," he said, "can I interest you in a tribble?"

He was holding one at Scott's shoulder. Scott turned toward him and found himself looking straight into the tribble's absence of a face. He shuddered.

"I've been pullin' the little beasties out of my engine room all morning!"

"Perhaps one of you other gentlemen—?" There was no response. With a fatalistic shrug, Cyrano went over to the Klingon table, approaching one whom Kirk recognized as Korax, one of Koloth's officers.

"Friend Klingon, may I offer you a charmin' little tribble . . ."

The tribble had other ideas. All its fur stood on end. It hitched itself up Cyrano's forearm with an angry spitting hiss.

"Stop that!" Cyrano said. "Apologies for his bad manners, sir. He's never done that before."

"I suggest," Korax said coldly, "that you remove yourself and that parasite as speedily as possible."

"It's only a friendly little . . ."

"Take it away!"

There was another hiss from the tribble. Korax slapped Cyrano's arm away, sending the tribble flying across the room to land among the Earthmen. Cyrano rushed to retrieve it; Scotty handed it to him without a word.

After looking from one group to the other, Cyrano, somewhat disconsolately, retreated to the bar, where the counterman was taking down a pitcher from a high shelf, and put his beast down on the counter.

"Sir! I feel sure that you would be willin' to engage in a little barter—one of my little tribbles in exchange for a spot of . . ."

The attendant turned, and upended the pitcher. Three tribbles fell out of it.

It was worse on shipboard. The corridors seemed to be crawling with the creatures. On the bridge, Kirk had to scoop three or four of them out of his chair before he could sit down. They were all over the consoles, on shelves, everywhere.

"Lieutenant, how did all of these tribbles get onto the bridge?"

"Through the ventilator ducts, I expect, Captain. They seem to be all over the ship."

"They certainly do. Mr. Spock, have a maintenance crew come up here to clean out this bridge. How many of them are there now, anyhow?"

"Assuming one creature—the one Lieutenant Uhura brought aboard—with an average litter of ten," the First Officer said, "every twelve hours. The third generation will total one thousand, three hundred thirty-one. The fourth generation will total fourteen thousand, six hundred and forty-one. The fifth generation will . . ."

"That's already enough. I want a thorough cleanup. They've got to go."

"All of them?" Lt. Uhura said protestingly. "Oh, Captain . . ."

"Every last one."

"A logical decision," Spock said. "Their breeding rate is beyond our control. They are consuming our supplies and returning nothing."

"Oh, come on now, Mr. Spock. I don't agree with you at all. They're giving us their love. Cyrano Jones says that a tribble is the only love money can buy."

"Lieutenant," Kirk said, "too much of anything—even love—is not necessarily a good thing. And in view of the fact that this all started with just one tribble, clearly the only safe number is none."

"And since feeding them is what makes them breed," Spock added, "one need only imagine what would happen if they got into the food processing machinery, or the food storage areas."

Kirk stared at the First Officer, thunderstruck. "Storage areas!" he said. "Great thundering fireballs! *Storage areas!* Lieutenant Uhura, contact Commander Lurry, and Nilz Baris. Have them meet us at the station mall. Mr. Spock, we're beaming over. Lieutenant, have Doctor McCoy join us in the transporter room—on the double!"

When the three materialized on the mall, half a dozen tribbles materialized with them. The mall did not need any more, however; it was inundated. The store where they had seen their very first tribble looked like a snow-bank of fur. The storekeeper, who had evidently just given up an attempt to sweep them out, was sitting in the midst of them with his head in his hands, close to tears.

Lurry and Baris came running to meet them—for once, without Darwin. "What's the matter?" Baris panted.

"Plenty—if what I think has happened, has happened. The warehouse, quick!"

Baris needed no further urging. They left at a dead run, kicking tribbles out of the way.

There were two guards before the warehouse door. "Is that door secure?" Kirk demanded.

"Yes, sir. Nothing could get in."

"Open it."

The guard produced a magnetic key. Nothing happened. "Don't understand it, sir. It seems to be . . ."

What it seemed to be will never be known, for at that moment the door slid open. There was a sort of silent explosion. Hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of tribbles came tumbling out, cascading down around them all, wriggling and seething and mewling and writhing and throbbing and trilling and purring . . .

They stood aghast as the mountain of fur grew. Spock recovered first. Scooping up a tribble, he examined it with clinical detachment. "It seems to be gorged," he observed.

"Gorged!" Baris gasped. "On my grain! Kirk! I'll hold you responsible! There must be thousands—hundreds of thousands!"

"One million, five hundred and sixty-one thousand, seven hundred and seventy-three," Spock said, "assuming, of course, that they got in here three days ago, and allowing for the maximum rate of grain consumption *and* the volume of the warehouse."

"What does the exact number matter?" Baris said despairingly. "The Klingons will get Sherman's Planet now!"

"I'm afraid," Kirk said slowly, "that you're right about that."

McCoy had been kneeling among the tribbles, examining them closely. At this point he looked up.

"Jim?"

"What is it, Bones?"

"Mr. Spock is wrong about these animals. They're not lethargic because they're gorged. They're dying."

"Dying! Are you sure?"

"I venture to say," McCoy replied with dignity, "that nobody on this station knows their metabolism better than I do. Yes, I am sure."

"All right," Kirk said with sudden energy. "Bones, take some of them back to your lab, and some of the grain, too. If they're dying, I want to know why. Then report back to me. I'm opening a formal hearing and investigation. Commander Lurry, I presume we can use your office. I'll want your assistant, and Captain Koloth—and Cyrano Jones, too."

"What good will that do?" Baris said. "The project is ruined—ruined!"

"Regulations require it," Kirk said. "And as for the project—well, that remains to be seen."

The scene in Lurry's office strongly resembled that moment in the classical detective novel when all the suspects are lined up and the shrewd sleuth eliminates all the obvious suspects and puts his finger on the butler. Lurry was seated behind his desk; nearby, in the visitor's chair, sat Cyrano Jones, stroking a tribble in his lap. Standing, with various degrees of uneasiness, interest or defiance, were Koloth, Korax, another Klingon aide, Spock, Baris, and McCoy, with Kirk facing them. And there were, of course, several security guards standing by. The Klingon captain spoke first:

"I had heard that you Earthers were sentimental about these parasites," he said, "but this is carrying things too far. I want an official apology from you, Kirk, addressed to the High Command of the Klingon Empire. You have restricted the shore leave of my men, harassed them with uniformed snoopers, and now summon us here like common criminals. If you wish to avoid a diplomatic crisis . . ."

"Don't do it, Kirk!" Baris burst in. "That'll give them the final wedge they need to claim Sherman's Planet!"

"Oh, as to *that* matter," Koloth said silkily, "it would seem that the outcome is already settled."

"One thing at a time," Kirk said. "Our present job is to find out who is responsible for the tribbles getting into the quadrotriticale. The Klingons have an obvious motive. On the other hand, it was Cyrano Jones who brought them here, apparently with purely commercial intent. There's no obvious connection."

"Beggin' your pardon, Captain," Cyrano said, "but a certain amount of the blame might be lyin' in sheer ignorance of the little creatures. If you keep their diet down below a certain intake per day, why sure and they don't breed at all. That's how I control mine."

Kirk stared at him. "Why didn't you tell us that before?"

"Nobody asked me. Besides, Captain, any man's com-

mon sense should tell him that it's bad for little animals to be overfeedin' 'em."

"Let that pass for the moment. We also need to find out what killed the tribbles. Was the grain poisoned—and if so, who poisoned it?"

He looked fixedly at Koloth, but the Klingon only smiled. "I had no access to it, obviously," he said. "Your guards were watching me every instant. However, Captain, before we go on—would you mind very much having that thing taken out of here?"

He pointed at the tribble in Cyrano's lap. Kirk hesitated a moment, but he could in fact sympathize; he had himself seen enough tribbles to last him a lifetime. He gestured to a guard, who lifted the creature gingerly and moved toward the door.

At the same moment, the door opened and Darwin entered belatedly. The tribble fluffed itself up and spat.

Kirk stared at it a moment in disbelief. Then, taking it from the crewman, he crossed over to Korax and held it out; it spat again. It spat at the third Klingon, too, and at Koloth. However it purred for everyone else, even including Baris—oh well, Kirk thought, there's no accounting for some people's tastes—and it went into a positive ecstasy over Spock, to the First Officer's rigidly controlled distaste. Then back to Darwin. *Hisssss!*

"Bones!" Kirk barked. "Check this man!"

McCoy was already at Darwin's side, tricorder out. He ran it over the man twice.

"It figures, Jim," he said. "Heartbeat all wrong, body temperature—well, never mind the details. He's a Klingon, all right."

The security men closed on Darwin. "Well, well," Kirk said. "What do you think Starfleet Command will have to say about this, Mr. Baris? Bones, what did you find out about the grain?"

"Oh. It wasn't poisoned. It was infected."

"Infected," Baris repeated in a dull voice. He seemed past reacting to any further shock.

"Yes. It had been sprayed with a virus which practices metabolic mimicry. You see, the molecules of the nutrients the body takes in fit into the molecules of the body itself like a key into a lock. This virus mimics the key—

but it isn't a nutriment itself. It blocks the lock so the proper nutriments can't get in. A highly oversimplified explanation, but good enough for the purpose."

"Do I mean you to imply," Kirk said, "that the tribbles starved to death? A whole warehouse full of grain, and they starved in the midst of it?"

"That's essentially it," McCoy agreed.

"And would this have happened to any *men* who ate the grain?"

"It would happen to any warm-blooded creature. The virus is very catholic in its tastes—like rabies."

"I observe another possible consequence," Spock said. "Dr. McCoy, could the virus be killed without harming the grain?"

"I think so."

"In that case," Spock said, "Mr. Darwin's attempt at mass murder has done us all a favor, and so have Mr. Jones' tribbles."

"I don't follow you, Mr. Spock," Kirk said.

"A simple logical chain, Captain. The virus without doubt prevented the tribbles from completely gutting the warehouse; fully half the grain must be left. On the other hand, the tribbles enabled us to find that the grain was infected without the loss of a single human life."

"I don't think the Federation courts will count that much in Mr. Darwin's favor, Mr. Spock, but it's a gain for us, I agree. Guards, take him out. Now, Captain Koloth, about that apology—you have six hours to get your ship out of Federation territory."

Koloth left, stiffly and silently. The tribble hissed after him.

"I hate to say this," Kirk said, "but you almost have to love tribbles just for the enemies they make. Now, Mr. Jones. Do you know what the penalty is for transporting an animal that is proven dangerous to human life? It is twenty years."

"Ah, now, Captain Kirk," Cyrano said, almost in tears. "Surely we can come to some form of mutual understanding? After all, as Mr. Spock points out, my little tribbles did tip you off to the infection in the grain—and they proved a most useful Geiger counter for detecting the Klingon agent."

"Granted," Kirk said gravely. "So if there's one task you'll undertake, I won't press charges, and when you're through with it, Commander Lurry will return your scout ship to you. If you'll remove every tribble from this space station . . ."

Cyrano gasped. "Remove every tribble? Captain, that'll take years!"

"Seventeen point nine years," Spock said, "to be exact."

"Think of it as job security," Kirk suggested.

"It's either this—or charges? Ah, Captain, you're a hard man—but I'll do it."

There was not a single tribble about the *Enterprise* when the party returned. It proved rather difficult to find out how this miracle had been brought about, but Scotty finally admitted to it.

"But how did you do it?"

"Oh, I just had the cleanup detail pile them all into the transporter."

"But—Scotty, you didn't just transport them out into space, did you?"

The engineer looked offended. "Sir, I'm a kindhearted man. I gave them a good home, sir."

"Where? Spit it out, man!"

"I gave them to the Klingons, sir. Just before they went into warp, I transported the whole kit and kaboodle into their engine room. And I trust, sir, that all their tribbles will be big ones."

THE LAST GUNFIGHT

(Lee Cronin)

As the *Enterprise* approached the Melkotian system, her sensors picked up an orbiting buoy which Captain Kirk thought it best to investigate. He had orders to contact the Melkotians "at all costs"—no explanation, just "at all costs"—but he was a peaceable man, and it was his experience that peoples who posted buoys around their planetary domains had a tendency to shoot if such markers were passed without protocol.

The buoy's comments were not encouraging. It said: "Aliens. You have encroached on the space of the Melkot. You will turn back immediately. This is the only warning you will receive."

Kirk's unease at the content of this message was almost eclipsed by his surprise in receiving it in English. The uneasiness returned full force when he promptly discovered that Spock had heard it in Vulcan, Chekov in Russian, and Uhura in Swahili.

"True telepaths," Spock summed up succinctly, "can be most formidable."

This was inarguable, as was the fact that absolutely nothing was known about the Melkotians but the fact of their existence. The orders were also inarguable. Kirk broadcast a message of peaceful intent, and getting no answer—not that he had expected any—proceeded, wondering what in the Universe a race of true telepaths could be afraid of.

When the ship was in range, Kirk beamed down to the

planet, accompanied by Spock, McCoy, Scott and Chekov. The spot on which they materialized was a sort of limbo—a place of twisting fog, unidentifiable shapes, feelings, colors. Spock's tricorder refused to yield any further information; it was as though they were in some sort of dead spot where no energy could flow, or at least none could enter. To Kirk it felt rather more like the eye of a hurricane.

Then the Melkotian materialized—or partially materialized, almost like an image projected against the fog. He was essentially humanoid: a tall, thin, robed figure, with cold pale features, a high forehead, and piercing eyes that seemed to be utterly without feeling.

"Our warning was plain," he said in his illusion of many languages. His lips did not move. "You have disregarded it. You, Captain Kirk, ordered this disobedience. Therefore from you we shall draw the pattern of your death."

"Death!" Kirk said. "For trespassing? Do you call yourselves civilized?"

"You are Outside," the figure said. "You are Disease. We do not argue with malignant organisms; we destroy them. It is done."

The figure winked out. "Talk about your drumhead court martials," Scott said.

No one heard him, for the limbo had winked out at the same time. Instead, the five men appeared to be standing in a desert, in bright, hot sunlight. As they stared, a wooden building popped into existence; then another, and another. None of them were more than two storeys high, generally with porches at the second storey. One of them bore a sign reading, "Saloon," another, "Tombstone Hotel." Within seconds they were surrounded by a town.

"Spock," Kirk said quietly. "Evaluation."

"American frontier, circa 1880," Spock said.

"And what's this?" Chekov said, holding out a gun. It was not a phaser. A quick check showed that none of them any longer had a phaser, or a communicator; only these pieces of ironware, slung low around their hips from belts loaded with what appeared to be ammunition. Their uniforms, however, had not changed.

"That," Kirk said, "is a Colt .45—perfect for the period. My ancestors came from a background like this."

"Perfect, but dangerous, Captain," Spock said. "I suggest we dispose of them."

"Certainly not, Mr. Spock. Whatever the Melkotians plan for us, it's not likely to be pleasant. And at close range, these things are as deadly as phasers. We may have to use them as such."

"Jim, that shack over there calls itself Tombstone Epitaph," McCoy said. "Sounds like a newspaper. And there's a bulletin board on it. Let's see if we can pick up a little more information."

The bulletin board carried a copy of the day's paper. It was dated Tombstone, Arizona, October 26, 1881.

"Back in time, Mr. Spock?" Kirk said.

"And an instantaneous space crossing as well, Captain?" Spock said. "I don't care to entertain the notion of so many physical laws being violated at the same time. The energy expenditure alone would be colossal—far beyond anything we've ever detected on Melkot. I suspect we are exactly where we were before."

"Then what's the purpose of this—this setup?"

"As I understand it, Captain," Spock said gently, "the purpose is an execution."

"We can always depend on you for a note of cheer," McCoy said.

There was something about the date that nagged at Kirk's mind. As he was trying to place it, however, an unshaven man came around a corner, saw the five men, and stared. Then he said:

"Well, I'll be jiggered! Ike! Frank, Billy, Tom!" He came closer. "I was afraid you weren't going to make it."

"I beg your pardon?" Kirk said.

"But I knew you wouldn't let 'em scare you away. They're a lot of hot air, if you ask me. But now they'll have to fight, after the way they've shot off their mouths."

"Look here," Kirk said. "Obviously you think you know us. But we don't know you. We've never seen you before."

The unshaven man winked solemnly. "I getcha. I ain't seen you today, neither. That's what I like about you, Ike,

you always see the funny side. And nobody can say Johnny Behan doesn't have a sense of humor."

"I'm a barrel of laughs," Kirk said. "But look, Mr. Behan . . ."

"Just one thing," Behan said. "I wouldn't take them too lightly if I was you. They may shoot wild, but they're gonna have to shoot."

As if alarmed by what he himself had said, Behan shot a glance over his shoulder and scuttled off. At the same instant, Kirk grasped the memory he had been struggling for.

"The Earps!" he said. Spock looked baffled; so did the others.

"He called me Ike," Kirk said. "And he called you Frank, and Bones, Tom, and Chekov, Billy. That's Ike Clanton, Frank and Tom McClowery, Billy Claiborne and Billy Clanton."

"Captain," Spock said, "I know something about this segment of Earth history, but those names mean nothing to me."

"Me either," McCoy said.

"All right. Try Wyatt Earp. Morgan Earp. Virgil Earp. Doc Holliday." There was no reaction. "It goes like this. In the late nineteenth century, in Arizona, two factions fought it out for control of the town of Tombstone. The Earps were the town marshals. The Clantons were lined up with Billy Behan, the County Sheriff. And on October 26, they had it out."

"And?" Chekov said.

"The Clantons lost, Mr. Chekov."

There was silence. At last Spock said, "This is certainly a most fanciful method of execution. But what did they mean by . . ."

A woman's scream cut through the still, hot air. From the direction of the saloon came a roar of men's voices and the unmistakable sounds of a brawl. Then a man stumbled backwards out of the swinging doors and fell down the steps into the street. Another man came after him like a flash.

As the first man picked himself up out of the dust, he reached quickly for his holster. He was way too late. His

pursuer's gun went off with an astonishingly loud noise, like a thunderclap, and his twisted body was hurled back almost to Kirk's feet. The second man turned and went back through the swinging doors without another glance.

McCoy knelt beside the body and took its pulse. "Cold-blooded murder," he said angrily.

"I believe the phrase," Spock said, "is 'frontier justice.'"

"I can't believe it's real," Chekov said. "It's all just some sort of Melkotian illusion."

"Is the man dead, Bones?"

"Very dead, Jim."

"Well," Kirk said grimly, "that seems to be at least one thing that's real here."

From the saloon came a burst of music—a piano, recognizable in any era—and a shout of laughter. The five from the *Enterprise* looked down at the lonely dead man, and then, in almost a nightmare of compulsion, at the saloon.

"I think," Kirk said, "we'd better find out what's happening."

"Go in *there*?" Chekov said.

"Has anybody a better idea?"

There was a bartender, a pretty and very young waitress, and about a dozen customers; most of the latter were clustered around the killer of a moment before, who sat at a table. He rose slowly as the five came through the doors.

"Ike, Tom," the bartender said. He seemed both pleased and scared to see them. Here, at least, the Clantons had some sort of friend. "Hiya, boys. Didn't think we'd see you again."

The waitress turned. "Billy!" she cried with delight, and flinging herself on the astonished and delighted Chekov, kissed him thoroughly. "Billy baby, I knew they couldn't keep you out of town."

"I didn't have much choice," Chekov said.

The girl led them toward a table a good distance away from that of the killer. "But maybe you shouldn't have," she said.

"And passed up the chance to see you? Don't be silly."

"But it's takin' crazy chances, with Morgan right in the same room."

Kirk, who had sat down, rose slowly again to get a closer look at the first of the men at whose hands they had been condemned to die. "Of course," he said. "The gentleman who kills on sight. Morgan Earp."

Earp did not move, but he watched Kirk with stony intentness.

"Captain," Spock said, *sotto voce*, "since we have seen that death is the one reality in this situation, I seriously advise that you reseal yourself without moving a muscle of either hand. Otherwise you will find yourself involved in something called 'the fast draw,' if I remember correctly. The results would be unfortunate."

Kirk sat down. As he did so, the bartender called, "You boys want your usual?"

"Absolutely," Scotty said enthusiastically. "Half a liter of Scotch."

"You know we ain't got nothin' but bourbon. 'Less you want gin."

"I don't think we've got the time for a party," Kirk said. He looked at Chekov, in whose lap the girl was now sitting. "Of any kind."

"What can I do, Captain? You know we're always supposed to maintain good relations with the natives."

"That's all right," the girl said, getting up. "I know you boys have got some palaverin' to do. Billy Claiborne, you be careful." She hurried away.

"Mr. Spock," Kirk said, "except for these handguns we're wearing, we haven't changed. Not even our clothing. Yet these people see us as the Clantons."

"I don't find that such a bad thing, Captain," Chekov said, his eyes still following the waitress.

"The day is still young, Ensign," Spock said.

"Now then, what have we got? We're in Tombstone on the day of the fight at the OK Corral, and we're the Clanton gang. Morgan Earp there will tell his brothers we're here."

"And history will follow its course," Spock said.

"It will not," Kirk said angrily. "I have no intention of letting a bunch of half-savage primitives kill us."

"May I ask, Captain, how you plan to prevent it?"

Without replying directly, Kirk got up and went over to the bar. "You, Mr. Bartender. You claim to know us."

"Ain't makin' no big claims about it to nobody," the bartender said. "Jest so happens."

"Well, you're wrong. You think I'm Ike Clanton. I'm not. I'm James T. Kirk, Captain of the Starship *Enterprise*. And these men are some of my officers. We're not really here at all; in fact, we haven't been born yet."

There was a roar of laughter from the onlookers, and somebody said, "Don't you jest bet he wishes he hadn't been."

Kirk whirled to the nearest man. "Here, you. Feel the material of my shirt." The man snickered, but complied. "Doesn't it feel any different from yours?"

"Reckon it does," the cowboy said. "A mite cleaner, I'd judge."

"Have you ever seen men wearing clothes like these before?"

The cowboy thought a moment. Then he said earnestly, "Sure. On the Clantons."

There was another outburst of laughter and thigh-slapping.

"Looka here, now," the cowboy said. "You was always a great one for jokin', Ike. But I know you. Ed here," indicating the barkeeper, "knows you. That Sylvia, she sure knows Billy Claiborne. Now, if'n you want to pertend you're somebody else, that's your business. Only, if you've turned yellow, what'd you come back to town for at all?"

Kirk frowned and tried to think, twirling his gun absently. The cowboy turned pale and backed away a step. Realizing belatedly what he had done, Kirk returned the gun to its holster and swung back to the barkeeper.

"Ed . . ."

"It's okay with me, Ike," Ed said placatingly. "Anything you say. It don't make no difference who I think you are. Your problem is—who does Wyatt Earp think you are?"

Hopelessly, Kirk returned to the table. His men looked at him strangely. What was the matter with *them*, now?

"Well, scratch that," he said, sitting down. "I can't get through to them."

"Captain."

"Yes, Mr. Spock."

"We know that the Melkotians are true telepaths. And

the Melkot said that it was from you that he would 'draw the pattern' of our deaths."

"Are you suggesting that because I'm familiar with this part of American history . . . ?"

"He looked into your mind, and selected what he considered to be the best time and place for our punishment. Yes, Captain. While you were pacing back and forth up there at the bar, I was recalling certain tapes in the computers. All unconsciously, you are adopting the true gunfighter's slouch. And a moment ago, you were handling the weapon like an expert."

"Some inherited characteristic?" McCoy said. "Ridiculous. Acquired characteristics can't be inherited."

"I know that, Dr. McCoy," Spock said stiffly. "The suggestion was yours, not mine. On the other hand, the possibility of ancestral memories—archetypes drawn from the collective unconscious, if such a thing exists—has never been disproved. And you observed the Captain's behavior yourself. As a further test, would you care to draw your own gun and twirl it, then return it smoothly to its holster, as the Captain did?"

"I wouldn't dare," McCoy admitted. "I'd be better off with a club."

"Let me make sure I understand this," Kirk said. "Do you further suggest that the Melkot is counting on me to act completely like one of these frontiersmen? To respond instinctively to the challenge of the Earps, and so bring about our—end?"

"Not instinctively, Captain, but certainly unconsciously. It's a possibility you must be on guard against."

"I'll bear it in mind. Now, has anybody any other suggestions for breaking this pattern?"

"Why don't we just get out of town, Captain?" Chekov said.

"There is no such place as 'out of town,'" Spock said. "Bear in mind, Ensign Chekov, that we are actually on the planet of the Melkots. Were we to leave this area, they would have no more difficulty in returning us to it than they did in putting us in it in the first place."

"Logic again," McCoy said. "Why don't you forget logic for a while and try to think of something that *would* work? If we only had a phaser—or better yet, a communi-

cator! It'd be a pleasure to see the faces of those Earps as we were beamed back to the ship exactly thirty seconds before the big blow-down, or whatever it's called."

"Bones, you have a point," Kirk said. "Mr. Spock, when we were thrown back in time from the City on the edge of Forever, you managed to construct a functioning computer out of your tricorder. And you've got a tricorder here."

"But we were thrown back then to the Chicago of the 1930's," the First Officer said. "In those days, the technology was just barely up to supplying me with the necessary parts and power. Here we have no gem stones to convert to tuning crystals, no metals to work, not even a source of electricity."

"He's quite right there, Captain," Scott said. "I couldn't turn the trick myself, under these conditions."

"Then," Kirk said, "it would appear that we're limited to contemporary solutions."

"Maybe not," McCoy said thoughtfully. "We have gunpowder in these shells. And surely there are drugs of some kind in town. One of the Earp crowd is called 'Doc' . . ."

"He was a dentist," Kirk said.

"Nevertheless, he must have drugs, herbs of some kind. Cotton wadding. A mortar and pestle. Alcohol—we can use whisky for that if we have to."

"What do you have in mind?" Kirk said.

"What would happen if we turned up at the OK Corral with no guns at all—just slingshots—and *tranquilizing darts*?"

Slowly, Kirk began to grin. "A fine notion. What's the first step, Bones?"

"I'll go and see Doc Holliday."

"But he's one of the opposition. We'd better all go."

"Absolutely not," McCoy said. "That would start shooting for sure. I'll go by myself, and see what I can talk him out of, as one medical man to another. And the rest of you, if I may so suggest, had better drop out of sight until I get back."

"All right, Bones," Kirk said slowly. "But watch yourself."

"I'll do that," McCoy said. "It's myself I'm fondest of in all the world."

Doc Holliday's office, as it turned out, was in a barber-shop. As McCoy entered, he had a patient in the chair. Doc Holliday was pulling; the patient was kicking and hollering. McCoy stared with fascination over Holliday's shoulder.

Holliday had evidently never heard of white coats. He was wearing a black frock coat, tight pants, a flat hat, and a string tie—a more elaborate version of the outfit McCoy had seen on Morgan Earp.

After a moment of watching the dentist sweat, McCoy said, "Impacted, I gather."

Holliday grunted abstractedly. Then apparently recognizing the voice, he leapt back, clearing his coat tail from his gun. He glared at McCoy.

"You want it now, McClowery?"

"Actually, the family name is McCoy."

"Look Doc," the patient said, looking up impatiently. "Are you going to pull it now, or—" Then he, too, recognized McCoy and turned white as milk. "Boys, please, no shootin'! Doc, put away your gun."

He tried to get out of the chair; Holliday slammed him back into it. "Sit!" the dentist said. "I ain't been through all that for nothin'. As fer you, McClowery, if you're goin' t'backshoot a medical man in the performance of his duties . . ."

"Not at all. I'm interested in medical matters myself. Mind if I take a look?" McCoy pried open the patient's mouth and peered in. "Hmm, that tooth is in sad shape, all right. What do you use for anesthetic, Preliform D? No, of course you don't have that yet. Chloroform? Is it possible you actually use chloroform? If so, why isn't the patient asleep?"

"What do you know about it, McClowery?"

"I've pulled a few teeth myself."

"I use whisky," Holliday said. "I never heard of chloroform."

"Tricky stuff, alcohol. You think the patient's too drunk to know his own name, and then there's a little pain, and bang! He's cold sober. Especially with a badly impacted tooth like that. Probably needs some root canal work, too."

"Whisky's all I got," Holliday said, a little sullenly.

"Well, actually, you don't need an anesthetic at all. Simple matter of pressure. A Vulcan friend of mine showed it to me. If you don't mind—" he took the crude pliers from Holliday, examined them, and shrugged. "Well, they'll have to do."

"Now look, McClowery . . ."

"No, you look, Doctor." McCoy thrust a finger into the patient's mouth. "There's a pressure point above the superior mandible—right here. Press it—hard, mind you—then you . . ."

He reached in with the pliers, closed, tugged. In a moment he was holding the tooth before Holliday's astonished face.

"Hey!" said the patient. "What happened? Did you—it's gone! It's gone—and I didn't feel a thing!"

"Nothing?" Holliday said incredulously.

"Not a thing."

"Where'd you learn that trick, McClowery?"

"You'd never believe me if I told you. Doctor, you're from the South, aren't you?"

"Georgia."

"Is that a fact! I'm from Atlanta myself."

"Is that so? I never knew that," Holliday said. "Now that's a cryin' shame, me havin' to kill another Georgia man, with this place crawlin' with Yankees and all."

"Actually, I could do you a favor, if I had time. You're not well, Doctor. Those eyes—that pallor—by George, I've never seen a case before, but I do believe you have tuberculosis. If I could run a quick physical . . ."

With a roar of rage, Holliday slammed his six-shooter on the table top. The patient sprang from the barber's chair and ran.

"One more peep out of you," Holliday said, "and you won't even hold water!"

"Why? What are you so mad about?"

"I may have bad lungs, but I've got a good aim!"

"Doctor," McCoy said, "if I had my kit here, I could clear those lungs up with one simple injection. One shot, twelve hours of rest, and the disease would be gone. Without the kit, it'll have to take more time."

"Time is just what you're short on," Holliday said.

"You seem like a halfway decent sort, though. Why don't you play it smart and come in with us?"

"What—double-cross Kirk?"

"No, just the Clantons."

"Can't do it," McCoy said. "But if you don't mind our parting friends for the moment, I'd like to borrow a few drugs."

Holliday gestured expansively. "A favor for a favor. Just don't expect me to shoot wild at five o'clock tonight."

It was just that casually that McCoy learned the hour of their death.

As he emerged into the street, the sunlight blinded him for a moment. Then he became aware that Sylvia was crossing the street near him, her eyes averted. He was puzzled at the apparent cut—after all, she had seemed friendly enough to the Clantons in the saloon—and then realized that there were three other men on his side of the street, lounging outside the Marshal's office. All three were wearing the same kind of outfit as Holliday, and since one of them was Morgan, it did not take much guessing to figure out that the other two must be Virgil and Wyatt Earp.

McCoy stepped back into the doorway of the barber-shop. At the same time, Morgan grinned, nudged one of his brothers, and stepped out to cut Sylvia off.

"What's the matter, honey?" he said, taking her elbow.

Sylvia tugged at her arm. "Let me go!"

"I'm just letting you get a jump on things. After tonight, there ain't goin' to be any Billy Claiborne."

Both the watching brothers tensed suddenly, their grins fading. McCoy followed the direction of their stares. To his horror, he saw Chekov coming down the middle of the street, jaw set, face flushed.

Morgan saw him too. He gently thrust the girl to one side, still holding her with his left hand. "Well," he said. "Here he is—the baby who walks like a man."

"Take your hands off her, you . . ."

Morgan abruptly thrust Sylvia away. Chekov went for his gun, but there was only one shot; Chekov's gun didn't even clear his holster. With a look of infinite surprise, he clawed at the growing red stain on the front of his tunic, and then pitched forward on his face.

McCoy was already running, and as he hit the dirt, he saw Kirk and Spock rounding a corner at top speed. Morgan Earp stepped back a few paces, contemptuously. McCoy fell to his knees beside Chekov, just in time to feel the last feeble thrill of life flutter out.

He looked up at Kirk. Scotty was there too; God knew where he had arrived from.

"Bones?" Kirk whispered, his face gray.

"I can't do a thing, Jim."

Kirk looked slowly toward the smiling Earps. Fury began to take possession of his face. McCoy heard the grating noise of the barbershop door opening; evidently Doc Holliday was coming out to join his confreres.

"Well, Ike?" Wyatt Earp said softly. "Want to finish it now?"

Kirk took a step forward, his hand dropping toward his gunbutt. Spock and Scott grabbed him, almost simultaneously. "Let me go," Kirk said, in a low, grinding voice.

"Yeah, let him go," Morgan said. "Let's see how much stomach he's got."

"Control yourself, Captain," Spock said.

McCoy rose slowly, keeping his own hand near his gun, though it felt heavily strange and useless on his hip; it occurred to him that the thing was at least three times as heavy as a phaser. "Easy, Jim," he said. "You wouldn't have a chance. None of us would."

"They murdered that boy! You think I'm going to . . ."

"You've got to," Scott said intensely. "You lose *your* head and where would the rest of us be? Not just the laddie, but . . ."

"More data," Spock said. "Jim, listen to me. We need more data."

"Smart, Clanton," Wyatt said. "Get as much living in as you can."

Slowly, slowly, Kirk allowed himself to be turned away. His face was terrible with grief.

In a back room of the saloon, Spock fitted nail points to darts; McCoy dipped the points into a mortar which contained a tacky brown elixir—his improvised tranquilizing drug. Five even more improvised slingshots lay to

hand, as did an almost denuded feather duster—supplied by Sylvia—from which Spock had fletched the darts.

"I can only hope these will fly true," Spock said. "A small hand-driven wind tunnel would help, but we have no time to build one."

"Somehow I can't seem to care," Kirk said. "Sometimes the past won't let go. It cuts too deep. Hasn't that ever happened to you?"

"I understand the feeling, Captain."

"I understand the feeling," McCoy mimicked angrily. "Chekov is dead and you talk about what another man feels. What do *you* feel?"

"My feelings are not a subject for discussion."

"There aren't any to discuss," McCoy said disgustedly.

"Can that be true?" Kirk said. "Chekov is dead. I say it now, yet I can hardly believe it. You knew him as long as I did, you worked with him as closely. That deserves its memorial."

"Spock will have no truck with grief," McCoy said. "It's human."

"I did not mean any disrespect to your grief," Spock said from behind his mask. "I, too, miss Ensign Chekov."

There was silence for a moment. Dully, Kirk realized that they had been unfair to the First Officer. No matter how often we run into the problem, he thought, we'll never get used to Spock's hidden emotional life.

Upstairs, a grandfather clock struck four. Time was running out.

"Captain, I've been thinking," Spock said. "I know nothing about the history of the famous gun battle we seem about to be engaged in. Was the entire Clanton gang involved?"

"Yes."

"Were there any survivors?"

"Let me think—yes. Billy Claiborne—*Billy Claiborne!*"

"Thus we are involved in a double paradox. The real Billy Claiborne was in the battle. 'Our' Billy Claiborne will not be. The real Billy Claiborne survived the fight. 'Ours' is already dead. History has already been changed."

"And maybe we can change it again," Kirk said with

dawning hope. "Bones, how long will that tranquilizer goo of yours need to take effect?"

"No more than three or four seconds, I think. But of course it hasn't been tested. No experimental animals."

"Try it on me," Scotty suggested. "I have an animal nature."

"Well—a dilute solution, maybe. Okay. Roll up your sleeve."

"Captain," Spock said, "may I propose that this is also an opportunity to see how the darts fly? We can put Dr. McCoy's dilute solution on one."

"Too dangerous. Slingshots can kill at short range. Remember David and Goliath."

"Vaguely. But I do not propose to use a sling—only to throw the dart by hand."

Scott ambled across the room to a bureau, on which he leaned like a man leaning on a bar, imaginary glass in hand, his hip thrust out. "How's this?"

"A prime target." Spock threw the dart, gently, underhand. It lodged fair and square in Scott's left buttock. He said, "Oof," but held the pose. They watched him intently.

Nothing happened. After five long minutes, McCoy went over to him and withdrew the dart. "It penetrated the muscle," he said. "It should have worked by now. Feel anything, Scotty?"

"Nothing at all."

"No sweating? No dizziness? No palpitations?"

"I never felt better in my life."

McCoy's face fell. "I don't understand it," he said. "Full strength, that stuff should knock out a charging elephant."

"Fascinating," Spock said.

"Fascinating!" Kirk exploded. "Mr. Spock, don't you realize that this is our death warrant? There isn't time to devise anything else!"

"It is nevertheless fascinating," Spock said slowly. "First a violation of physics, then a violation of history—now a violation of human physiology. These three violations cannot be coincidence. They must contain some common element—some degree of logical consistency."

"Well, let's see if we can think it through," Kirk said. "But there's one last chance. We may be able to violate history again. Ten minutes from now, it's all supposed to end at the OK Corral. Very well—we are not going to be there. We are going to sit right here. We are not going to move from this spot."

Spock nodded slowly, but he was frowning. The others braced themselves, as if daring anyone to move them.

Flip!

Sunlight blazed upon them from a low angle. They were in the OK Corral.

"Let's get out of here!" Kirk said. He vaulted over the fence, hearing the others thump to the ground after him, and dashed into an alley. At the other end, he paused to reconnoiter.

Ahead was the corral, with a wagon box and several horses tied in front of it. Kirk started, momentarily stunned.

"Must have gotten turned around," he said. "This way."

He led the way back up the alley. Its far end debouched onto the main street. They crossed quickly into another alley, jogging, watching the blank wooden buildings that hemmed them in.

At the end of the alley was the OK Corral.

"They're breeding like pups," Scotty said.

"Down that way . . ."

But 'down that way' also ended at the OK Corral.

"They've got us," Kirk said stonily. "The Melkotians don't mean for us to miss this appointment. All right. Remember that these guns are heavier than phasers. Pull them straight up—and drag them *down* into line the minute you've fired off the first shot."

"Captain," Spock said, "that is suicide. We are none of us skilled in the use of these weapons. Nor can we avoid the OK Corral, that is quite clear. But—very quickly—let me ask you, what killed Ensign Chekov?"

"Mr. Spock, he was killed by a bullet."

"No, Captain. He was killed by his own mind. Listen

to me, please; this is urgent. The failure of Dr. McCoy's drug was the clue. *This place is unreal.* It is a telepathic forgery by the Melkotians. Nothing that happens here is real. Nothing at all."

"Chekov is dead," McCoy said grimly.

"In this environment, yes. Elsewhere—we cannot know. We can judge reality only by the responses of our senses. Once we are convinced of the reality of a given situation, our minds abide by its rules: the guns are solid, the bullets are real, they can kill. But only because we believe it!"

"I see the Earps coming toward us," Kirk said. "And they look mighty convincing—and deadly. So do their guns. Do you think you can protect us just by disbelieving in them?"

"I can't protect anybody but myself, Captain; you must entertain your own disbelief—totally. One single doubt, and you will die."

The three Earps, side by side, black-clad and grim, walked slowly down the street, their faces expressionless. Pedestrians scurried away from them like startled quail.

"Mr. Spock," Kirk said, "we can't turn disbelief on and off like clockwork. I know you can; but we're just human beings."

"The Vulcanian mind meld," Dr. McCoy said suddenly.

"Yes, Dr. McCoy. I could not have suggested it myself; I have cultural blocks against invading another man's mind. But if you will risk it . . ."

"I will."

McCoy hesitated. Then he stepped back until his back was against the wagon box. Spock came to him, closer and closer, his fingers spreading. Face to face, closer and closer.

"Your mind to my mind," Spock said softly. "Your thoughts to my thoughts. Listen to me, Bones. Be with me. Be one with me."

McCoy closed his eyes, and then slowly, opened them again.

The three Earps had been joined by Doc Holliday. He was holding a double-barreled, sawed-off shotgun under his frock coat. He fell in step with the brothers. Funereal in look and aspect, grim and unsmiling, rhythmic as a

burial procession, they came down the street, real, the quintessence of death.

Spock's fingers moved to Kirk's face. "They are unreal—without body," he whispered. "Listen to me, Jim. Be with me. They are only illusion, shadows without substance. They cannot affect you. My heart to your heart, I promise you."

The Earps and Holliday marched on across the lengthening shadows. The shotgun barrel swung periodically under Holliday's coattails. Their cheeks were hollow, their eyes dark as pitch. The street behind them was frozen, and the sky was darkening.

"Scotty," Spock said, his voice suddenly taking on a dark, Caledonian color, as deep as that of a prophet's. "Listen to me. Clouds these are without water, carried about by winds. They are trees whose fruit withereth, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of eternity, forever."

The spectral stalkers halted, perhaps ten paces away. Wyatt Earp said, "Draw."

Kirk looked at his people. Their expressions were glassy, faraway, strange, like lambs awaiting the slaughter. With a slight nod, he dropped his hand toward his gunbutt.

The Earps drew. It seemed as though twenty pistol shots rang out in as many seconds—two shotgun blasts—another pistol shot. The street fogged with the smoke and stench of black powder. Every single shot had come from the Earps' side.

"Thank you, Mr. Spock," Kirk said tranquilly, staring into the eyes of the astonished gunmen. "And now, gentlemen, if you please, let's finish this up—fast, hard and good."

The four from the *Enterprise* moved in on the Earps. The gunmen were accustomed to shoot-outs and to pistol-whipping and to barroom brawls; but against advanced space-age karate techniques and Spock's delicately precise knowledge of the human nervous system's multiple vulnerabilities, they had no defense whatsoever. Within moments, 'history' was a welter of unconcious black-clad bodies in the dust . . .

. . . And Tombstone, Arizona, wavered, pulsed, faded, and vanished into a foggy limbo.

In the fog, Kirk became aware that Chekov was standing beside him. He had to swallow twice before he could manage to say, "Welcome back, Ensign."

He had no time to say more, for the transparent figure of the Melkot was forming against the eerie backdrop of the mists.

"Explain," the Melkot said.

"Glad to," Kirk said, in a voice far from friendly. "What would you like explained?"

"To you the bullets were unreal. To the players we put against you, the bullets were real, and would kill. But you did not kill them."

"We kill only in self-defense," Kirk said. "Once we saw that it was unnecessary to kill your players, we protected ourselves less wastefully, on all sides."

"Is this," the Melkot said, "the way of your kind?"

"By and large. We are not all alike. But in general, we prefer peace—and I speak not only for my species, but for a vast alliance of fellow creatures who subscribe to the same tenets. We were sent here to ask you to join it."

There was a long silence. And as they waited, the familiar fading effect began again—and then they were on the bridge of the *Enterprise*.

Uhura was at her post. She did not seem at all surprised to see them. In fact, her manner was so matter-of-fact as to suggest that they had never left at all.

Chekov began to react, but Kirk held up his hand in warning. Puzzled, Chekov said in a low voice, "Captain—what happened? Where have I been?"

"Where do you think?"

"Why—right here, it seems. But I remember a girl . . ."

"Nothing else?"

"No," Chekov said. "But she seemed so real . . ."

"Perhaps that explains why you're here. Nothing else was real to you."

Chekov looked more baffled than ever, but evidently decided to leave well enough alone.

"Captain," Lt. Uhura said, "I'm getting a transmission from the Melkot buoy."

"Cycle it for sixty seconds. Mr. Spock, has any time elapsed since the—uh—last time we all sat here?"

"The clock says not, Captain."

"I suspected not. Did it happen?"

"I cannot give a yes or no answer, Captain. It is a matter of interpretation."

"All right, Lt. Uhura. Let's hear what the Melkotian buoy has to say."

The buoy said: "Aliens! You have entered the space of the Melkot. We welcome you and promise peaceful contact."

"Very good. Lt. Uhura, ask them to specify a meeting place. Mr. Spock, a word with you in private, please."

Spock obediently drew to one side of the bridge with his Captain.

"Mr. Spock, once again we owe you our thanks for quick, thorough and logical thinking. But I will tell you something else. Privately, and for no other ears than yours, I think you are a sentimental bag of mush."

"Sir!"

"I heard what you said to me, and to the other men, when you were convincing us not to believe in the Melkotian illusions. Every word was based upon the most intimate understanding of each man involved—understanding—and honest love."

"Captain," Spock said, from behind his mask, "I did what was necessary."

"Of course you did. Very well, Mr. Spock—carry on."

But as Spock went stiffly back to his library-computer, the commandatorial eyes which followed him were not without a certain glitter of amusement.

THE DOOMSDAY MACHINE*

(Norman Spinrad)

Shock after shock. First, the distress call from the *Constellation*, a starship of the same class as the *Enterprise*, and commanded by Brand Decker, one of Kirk's oldest classmates; a call badly garbled, and cut off in the middle.

The call seemed to have come from the vicinity of M-370, a modest young star with a system of seven planets. But when the *Enterprise* arrived in the system, the *Constellation* was not there—and neither was the system.

The star had not gone nova; it was as placid as it had always been. But of the planets there was nothing left but asteroids, rubble and dust.

Lt. Uhura tried to project the line of the distress call. The line led through four more former solar systems—all now nothing but asteroids, rubble and dust . . . No, not quite: The two inner planets of the fifth system appeared to be still intact—and from somewhere near where the third planet should have been, they heard once more the weak beacon of the *Constellation*, no longer signaling distress, but black disaster.

The beacon was automatic; no voice came from her despite repeated calls. And when they found her, the viewscreen showed that two large, neat holes, neat as phaser cuts, had been drilled through her warp-drive pods.

Kirk called a yellow alert at once, though there was no sign of a third ship in the area, except for some radio

*Hugo Award nominee

interference which might easily be sunspots. Scott reported that all main and auxiliary power plants aboard the *Constellation* were dead, but that the batteries were operative at a low level. Her life support systems were operative, too, also at a very low level, except for the bridge area, which—as the viewscreen showed—was badly damaged and uninhabitable.

“We’ll board,” Kirk said. “The *Constellation* packed as much firepower as we do; I want to know what could cut a starship up like that. And there may be a few survivors. Bones, grab your kit. Scotty, select a damage control party and come with us. Mr. Spock, you’ll stay here and maintain Yellow Alert.”

“Acknowledge,” Spock said.

Aboard the *Constellation*, the lights were weak and flickering, and wreckage littered the deck. The three crewmen of the damage control party found the radiation level normal, the air pressure eleven pounds per square inch, the communications system shorted out, the filtration system dead. The warp drive was a hopeless pile of junk. Surprisingly, the reactor was intact—it had simply been shut down—and the impulse drive was in fair shape.

But there were no survivors—and no bodies.

Kirk thought this over a moment, then called the *Enterprise*. “Mr. Spock, this ship appears abandoned. Could the crew have beamed down to one of those two planets?”

“Improbable, Captain,” Spock’s voice replied. “The surface temperature on the inner planet is roughly that of molten lead, and the other has a poisonous, dense atmosphere resembling that of Venus.”

“All right, we’ll keep looking. Kirk out.”

“The phaser banks are almost exhausted,” Scott reported. “They didn’t give her up without a battle.”

“But *where are they?* I can’t understand a man like Brand Decker abandoning his ship as long as his life support systems were operative.”

“The computer system is still intact. If the screen on the engineers’ bridge is still alive, we might get a playback of the Captain’s log.”

“Good idea. Let’s go.”

The screen on the engineers’ bridge was in fact dead,

but they forgot this almost the moment they noticed it; for seated before the console, staring at the useless instruments, was Commodore Brand Decker. His uniform was tattered, his hair mussed.

"Commodore Decker!"

Decker looked up blankly. He seemed to have trouble focusing on Kirk. McCoy was quickly beside him.

"Commodore—what happened to your ship?"

"Ship?" Decker said. "Attacked . . . that thing . . . fourth planet breaking up . . ."

"Jim, he's in a state of shock," McCoy said. "No pressure on him now, please."

"Very well. Do what you can for him here. We've got to question him."

"He mentioned the fourth planet," Scott said. "There are only two left now."

"Yes. Pull the last microtapes from the sensor memory bank and beam them across to Spock. I want a full analysis of all reports of what happened when they went in on that planet."

"I've given this man a tranquilizer," McCoy said. "You can try a few questions now. But take it easy."

Kirk nodded. "Commodore, I'm Jim Kirk, in command of the *Enterprise*. Do you understand?"

"*Enterprise*?" Decker said. "We couldn't contact—couldn't run—had to do it—no choice at all . . ."

"No choice about what?"

"I had to beam them down. The only chance they had . . ."

"Do you mean your crew?"

Decker nodded. "I was—last aboard. It attacked again—knocked out the transporter. I was stranded aboard."

"But *where* was the crew?"

"The third planet."

"There is no third planet now."

"There was," Decker said. "There *was*. That thing . . . destroyed it . . . I heard them . . . four hundred of my men . . . calling for help . . . begging me . . . and I couldn't . . ." The Commodore's voice went slower and slower, as though he were an ancient clockwork mechanism running down, and faded out entirely.

"Fantastic," Scott said, almost to himself. "What kind of a weapon could do that?"

"If you had seen it—you'd know," Decker said, rousing himself with obvious effort. "The whole thing is a weapon. It must be."

Kirk said, "What does it look like, Commodore?"

"A hundred times the size of a starship—a mile long, with a maw big enough to swallow a dozen ships. It destroys planets—cuts them to rubble."

"Why? Is it an alien ship—or is it alive?"

"Both—neither—I don't know."

"Where is this thing now?"

"I—don't know that either."

Kirk lifted his communicator. "Mr. Spock, still no sign of any other vessel in the vicinity?"

"Well, yes and no, Captain," the First Officer replied. "The subspace radio interference is now so heavy as to cut us off from Starfleet Command; obviously it cannot be sunspots. But our sensors still show only the *Constellation*."

"How is the tape analysis going?"

"We're ready now, Captain. We find that the *Constellation* was attacked by what seems to be essentially a robot—an automated weapon of great size and power. Its apparent function is to smash planets to rubble, and then 'digest' the debris for fuel. It is, therefore, self-maintaining as long as there are planetary bodies to feed it."

"Origin?"

"Mr. Sulu has computed the path of the machine, using the destroyed solar systems detected by ourselves and the *Constellation* as a base course. We find the path leads out of the galaxy at a sharp angle. Projected in the opposite direction, and assuming that the machine does not alter its course, it will go through the most densely populated section of our galaxy."

"Thank you, Mr. Spock. Maintain Yellow Alert and stand by. Commodore Decker, you've had a rough time. I think it would be best if you and Dr. McCoy beam back to my ship for a physical examination."

"Very well," Decker said. "But you heard your First Officer, Captain. That thing is heading for the heart of our

galaxy—thousands of populated planets! *What are you going to do?*”

“I’m going to think,” Kirk said. “Mr. Spock, have the Transporter Room beam Dr. McCoy and Commodore Decker aboard immediately.”

A moment later, the two men shimmered out of existence, leaving no one but Kirk and Scott on the dead engineers’ bridge.

“They’re aboard, Captain,” Spock’s voice said from the communicator. And then, without any transition at all, “Red alert! Red Alert! Mr. Sulu, out of the plane of the ecliptic at sixty degrees north! Warp One!”

“Mr. Spock!” Kirk shouted, although of course Spock could have heard him equally well if he had whispered. “Why the alert? Why are you running? I’m blind here.”

“Commodore Decker’s planet-killer, Captain. It just popped out of subspace. Metallic body, a large funnel-mouth, at least a mile long. It is pursuing us, but we seem to be able to maintain our distance at Warp One. No, it’s gaining on us. Sensors indicate some kind of total conversion drive. No evidence of life aboard. Which is not surprising, since isotope dating indicates that it is at least three billion years old.”

“Three *billion!*” Kirk said. “Mr. Spock, since it’s a robot, what are our chances of deactivating it?”

“I would say none, Captain. I doubt that we would be able to maneuver close enough without drawing a direct attack upon ourselves. We could of course beam men aboard in spacesuits, but since the thing is obviously designed to be a doomsday machine, its control mechanisms would be inaccessible on principle.”

“A doomsday machine, sir?” Scott said.

“A calculated bluff, Scotty. A weapon so powerful that it will destroy both sides in a war if it’s used. Evidently some race in another galaxy built one—this one—and its bluff was called. The machine is now all that’s left of the race—and it’s evidently programmed to keep on destroying planets as long as it’s functioning.”

“Well, whatever happens, we can’t let it go beyond us to the next solar system. We have to stop it here. You’d better . . .”

He was interrupted by the filtered sound of a concussion.

"Mr. Spock!" a distant voice called. It sounded like Uhura. "We've taken a hit! The transporter's out!"

"Emergency power on screens. Maximum evasive action! Phaser banks . . ."

And then the communicator went dead.

"Spock! Come in! Spock!" It was useless. "Scotty—we're stuck here. Deaf and blind."

"Worse than that, Captain. We're paralyzed, too. The warp drive is just so much wreckage."

"We can't just sit here while that thing attacks our ship. Forget the warp drive and get me some impulse power—half-power, quarter-power, anything I can maneuver with, even if you have to get out and push."

"But we'd never be able to outrun . . ."

"We're going to fight the thing, not outrun it," Kirk said grimly. "If we can get this hulk going, we may be able to distract the robot, and give the *Enterprise* a better chance to strike at it. Get cracking, Scotty. I'm going to see what I can do with this viewscreen. We can't move until I can see where we're going."

Seated in the Captain's chair, Spock evaluated the damage. Warp and impulse drives were still operative. As he checked, Commodore Decker and McCoy watched him tensely.

"Communications?"

"Under repair, Mr. Spock," Uhura said.

"Transporter?"

Sulu said, "Also under repair."

"Hmm," Spock said. "Random factors seem to have operated in our favor."

"In plain, non-Vulcan English," McCoy said, "we've been lucky."

"Isn't that what I said, Doctor?" Spock said blandly.

"The machine's veering off," Sulu reported. "It's back on its old course. Next in line is the Rigel system."

"No doubt programmed to ignore anything as small as a ship beyond a certain radius," Spock said. "Mr. Sulu, circle back so we can pick up the Captain while we effect

repairs. We may have to take the *Constellation* in tow . . .”

“You can’t let that thing reach Rigel!” Decker broke in. “Millions of innocent people . . .”

“I am aware of the population of the Rigel colonies, Commodore, but we are only one ship. Our deflector generators are strained. Our radio is useless as long as we are in the vicinity of the robot. Logic dictates that our primary duty is to survive to warn Starfleet Command.”

“Our primary duty is to maintain the life and safety of Federation planets! Helmsman, belay that last order! Track and close on that machine!”

Sulu looked questioningly at Spock. It was a difficult problem. Kirk had left Spock in command, but Decker was the senior officer aboard. Spock said evenly, “Carry out my last order, Mr. Sulu.”

“Mr. Spock,” Decker said, “I’m formally notifying you that I am exercising my option under regulations as senior officer to assume command of the *Enterprise*. That thing has got to be destroyed.”

“You attempted to destroy it before, sir,” Spock said, “and it resulted in a wrecked ship and a dead crew. Clearly a single ship cannot combat that machine.”

Decker winced, then stabbed a finger at Spock. “That will be all, Mr. Spock. You’re relieved of command. Don’t force me to relieve you of duty as well.”

Spock got up. McCoy grabbed his arm. “Spock, you can’t let him do this!”

“Unfortunately,” Spock said, “Starfleet Order one-zero-four, Section B, reads, Paragraph A, ‘In the absence of the . . .’”

“To blazes with regulations! How can you let him take command when you *know* he’s wrong?”

“If you can officially certify Commodore Decker medically or psychologically unfit to command, I may relieve him under Section C.”

“I can’t do that,” McCoy said. “He’s as sound as any of us. I can say his present plan is crazy, but medically I’d have to classify that as a difference of opinion, not a diagnosis.”

“Mr. Spock knows his duties under the regulation,” Decker said. “Do you, Doctor?”

"Yes, sir," McCoy said disgustedly. "To go to Sickbay and wait for the casualties you're about to send me." He stalked out.

"Hard about and close," Decker said. "Full emergency power on deflectors. Stand by on main phaser banks."

On the viewscreen, the planet-killer began to grow in size. Decker stared at it with grim intensity, as though the combat to come was to be a personal one, hand-to-hand.

"In range, sir," Sulu reported.

"Fire phasers!"

The beams lanced out. It was a direct hit—but there seemed to be no effect at all. The beams simply bounced off.

In answer, a pencil of solid blue light leapt out of the maw of the planet-killer. The *Enterprise* seemed to stagger, and for a moment all the lights went down.

"Whew!" Sulu said. "What is that thing?"

"It's an anti-proton beam," Decker said in an abstracted voice. "It's what the machine cut the fourth planet up with."

"The deflectors weren't built to take it, sir," Spock said. "The next time, the generators may blow."

Decker paid no attention. "Keep closing and maintain phaser fire."

Spock studied his instruments. "Sir," he said, "sensors indicate that the robot's hull is neutronium—collapsed matter so dense that a cubic inch of it would weigh a ton. We could no more get a phaser beam through it than we could a matchstick. If we could somehow get a clear shot at the internal mechanism . . ."

"Now that's more like it, Mr. Spock. We'll cut right across the thing's funnel and ram a phaser beam down its throat. Helmsman, change course to intercept."

Sulu shifted the controls cautiously, obviously expecting another blow from the anti-proton beam; but evidently the monstrous mechanism had no objection to having this morsel sailing directly into its maw.

"Fire!"

The phasers cut loose. Sulu studied the screen intently.

"Those beams are just bouncing around inside," he reported. "We can't get a shot straight through."

"Close in."

"Sir," Spock said, "any closer and that anti-proton beam will go through our deflectors like tissue paper."

"We'll take the chance. Thousands of planets are at stake."

"Sir, there is no chance at all. It is pure suicide. And attempted suicide would be proof that you are psychologically unfit to command. Unless you give the order to veer off, I will relieve you on that basis."

"Vulcan logic!" Decker said in disgust. "Blackmail would be a more honest word. All right, helmsman, veer off—emergency impulse power."

"Commodore," Sulu said in a strained voice, "I can't veer off. That thing's got some kind of a tractor beam on us."

"Can it pull us in?"

"No, sir, we can manage a stand-off, for perhaps seven hours. In the meantime it can take pot shots at us whenever it likes."

On the engineers' bridge of the *Constellation*, the viewscreen finally lit. Kirk stared at what it showed with shock and disbelief. A gasp from behind him told him that Scott had just entered the bridge.

"Is Spock out of his mind?"

"I don't understand it either—I ordered evasive action. What's the situation below?"

"We've got the screens up, but they won't last more than a few hours, and they can't take a beating. As for the impulse drive, the best I can give you is one-third power. And at that I'll have to nurse it."

"Go ahead then. We've got to break up that death-dance out there somehow." As Scott left, Kirk once more tried his communicator. To his gratification, he got Lt. Uhura at once; evidently the *Enterprise*, too, had been making repairs. "Lieutenant, give me Mr. Spock, fast."

But the next voice said: "*Enterprise* to Kirk. Commodore Decker here."

"Decker? What's going on? Give me Mr. Spock!"

"I'm in command here, Captain. According to regulations, I assumed command on finding Mr. Spock reluctant to take proper action . . ."

"You mean you're the lunatic responsible for almost destroying my ship? Mr. Spock, if you can hear me, I give you a direct order to answer me."

"Spock here, Captain."

"Good. On my personal authority as Captain of the *Enterprise*, I order you to relieve Commodore Decker. Commodore, you may file a formal protest of the violation of regulations involved with Starfleet Command—if any of us live to reach a star base. In the meantime, Mr. Spock, if the Commodore resists being relieved, place him under arrest. Is that clear?"

"Not only is it clear," Spock's voice said, "but I have just done so. Your further orders, sir?"

"Get away from that machine!"

"Sir, we can't; we have been pegged by a tractor. The best we can do is prevent ourselves from being pulled inside it, for about the next six point five hours—or until it decides to shoot at us again."

"I was afraid of that. All right, I'm going to move the *Constellation* into your vicinity and see if I can distract the machine. With the power I've got available, it will take at least three hours. Is your transporter working again, too?"

"Yes, sir, but I assure you that you'd be no safer here than there."

"I'm aware of that, Mr. Spock. I just want to be sure you can beam me aboard once we're in range, so I can take command personally from the Commodore if he gives you any trouble. That's all for now. Kirk out."

Kirk set the *Constellation* in creaking motion and then thought a while. Finally he called Scott.

"How's the drive holding up, Scotty?"

"Under protest, I would say, sir," Scott responded. "But if you don't demand any violent maneuvers I think it'll stay in one piece."

"Very well. Now I need an engineering assessment. What would happen if the reactor were to go critical?"

"Why, Captain, you know as well as I do—a fusion explosion, of course."

"Yes, Scotty, but if *this* reactor were to do so, how big would the explosion be?"

"Oh," Scott's voice said. "That's easily answered, the potential is always on the faceplate of a ship's reactor; I'll just check it . . . The figure is 97.8 megatons."

"Would the resulting fireball be sufficient to disrupt a neutronium hull?"

"Neutronium, sir? You mean the planet-killer? What makes you think the hull is neutronium?"

"Because from this distance the *Enterprise* could have cut it into scrap metal by now if it weren't."

"Hmm—aye, that follows. Well, Captain, neutronium is formed in the cores of white dwarf stars, with fusion going on all around it. So I'd say the fireball would just push the machine away, rather than collapsing the hull. And sir, in a vacuum the fireball would be something like a hundred and fifty miles in diameter. That means it would envelop the *Enterprise* too—and we don't have a neutronium hull."

"That's true, but it isn't what I have in mind. Scotty, I want you to rig a thirty-second delayed detonation switch, so the reactor can be blown from up here on the engineers' bridge. Can do?"

"Aye, sir," Scott said. "But why . . ."

"Just rig it, fast. Then get yourself and the damage control party up here. Kirk to *Enterprise*."

"Spock here."

"Mr. Spock, I don't have any sensors over here worth mentioning, so I won't know when I'm in transporter range. The instant I am, let me know."

"Acknowledge. May I ask your intent, Captain?"

"Scotty is rigging a thirty-second delayed detonation switch on the impulse power reactor of the *Constellation*. I am going to pilot the vessel right down the planet-killer's throat—and you'll have thirty seconds to beam the five of us aboard the *Enterprise* before the reactor blows."

There was a brief pause. When Spock's voice returned, there actually seemed to be a faint trace of human concern in it. "Jim, thirty seconds is very fine timing. The transporter is not working at a hundred per cent efficiency; our repairs were necessarily rather hasty."

"That's a chance I'll have to take. However, it does change things a little. I'll want you to beam Mr. Scott and

the damage control party over as soon as we are in range. I'll be the only one to stay aboard until the last minute."

"Acknowledge, Sir, may I point out two possible other flaws?"

While Spock was talking, Scott came into the room carrying a small black box. Mounted on it was a single three-position knife switch—that is, one with two slots for the blade, the third position being disengaged from either. He set it down on the panel in front of Kirk.

"Go ahead, Mr. Spock, your advice is half your value. Where are the flaws?"

"First, we cannot know the composition of the interior workings of the planet-killer. If they too are neutronium, nothing will happen except that it will get very hot inside there."

"'Very hot' is certainly a mild way of putting it," Kirk said drily. "All right, Mr. Spock, to use logic right back at you, Proposition A: The planet-killer operates in a vacuum, which means most of its circuits are cryogenic. Heating them a few million degrees may be quite enough to knock it out. Proposition B: Pure neutronium cannot carry an electrical current, because its electron shells are collapsed. Hence, many important parts of the planet-killer's interior cannot be neutronium. Conclusion: an interior fusion explosion will kill it. How is that for a syllogism?"

"It is not a syllogism at all, Captain, but a sorites; however, I agree that it is a sound one. My second objection is more serious. The planet-killer is open to space at one end, and that is the end facing us. The neutronium hull will confine the fireball and shoot it directly out of the funnel at the *Enterprise* in a tongue of flame hundreds of miles long. This is an undesirable outcome."

Kirk almost laughed, although there was nothing in the least funny about the objection itself. "Mr. Spock, if that happens, we will all die. But the planet-killer will have been destroyed. Our mandate is to protect Federation lives, property and interests. Hence this outcome, as you call it, is in fact more desirable than undesirable."

"Now that," Spock said, "is a syllogism, and a sound one. Very well, Captain, I withdraw my objections."

When Kirk put down the communicator, he found Scott

staring at him ruefully. "Your sense of humor," the engineer said ruefully, "comes out at the oddest times. Well, there is your detonator, Captain. When you pull the switch into the *up* position, it's armed. When you push it down into the other slot, you have thirty seconds until *blooey!*"

"Simple enough."

"Captain," Spock's voice came again. "The *Constellation* has just come within transporter range. However, when you are ready to have your party beam over, I suggest that you leave the bridge. We do not have fine enough control to pick four men out of five, and even if we did, we would not know which four of the five until it was too late."

"Very well, Mr. Spock. I will leave the bridge; make your pickup in sixty seconds."

He got up. As he was at the door, Scott said, "Take care, Jim."

"Scotty, I don't *want* to die, I assure you."

When he returned, the engineers' bridge was empty; but Scott's voice was still there. It was coming from the communicator, and it was using some rather ungentlemanly language.

"Scotty, what's the matter? Are you all right?"

"Aye, I'm all right, skipper, and so are we all—but the transporter blew under the load. I dinna ken hae lang it'll take to fix it."

The return of Scott's brogue told Kirk how serious the situation actually was. Kirk did not even say, "Well, do your best." It was unnecessary.

The next few hours were an almost intolerable mixture of loneliness and tension, while the monstrous shape of the planet-killer and its mothlike captive grew slowly on the screen.

Yet not once in all this time did the robot again fire its anti-proton beam, which probably would have gone through the *Enterprise* like a knife through cheese; the ship was using almost all her power in fighting against the tractor ray. That, Kirk supposed, was a present given them by the nature of machine intelligence; the robot, having settled on the course of drawing the *Enterprise* into

itself—and, probably, having estimated that in such a struggle it could not lose, eventually—saw no reason to take any other action.

“Mr. Spock?”

“Yes, Captain.”

“Don’t fire on that thing again. Don’t do *anything* to alter present circumstances—not even sneeze.”

“I follow you, Captain. If we do not change the parameters, the machine mindlessly maintains the equation.”

“Well, that’s what I hope. How is the transporter coming?”

“Slowly. Mr. Scott says half its resistors are burned out. They are easy to replace individually, but so many is a time-consuming task.”

“Computation?”

“We may have a most unreliable repair done when the *Constellation* is within a hundred miles of the robot. Sir, we also compute that one hundred miles is the limit of the robot’s defensive envelope, inside which it takes offensive action against moving objects under power.”

“Well, I can’t very well shut off power. Let’s just hope it’s hungry.”

The funnel swelled, much faster now. Kirk checked his watch, then poised his hand over the switch.

“Mr. Spock, I’m running out of time myself. Any luck now on the transporter?”

“It may work, Captain. I can predict no more.”

“All right. Stand by.”

The funnel now covered the entire star field; nothing else was to be seen but that metal throat. Still the robot had not fired.

“All right, Spock! Beam me aboard!”

He threw the switch. An instant later, the engineers’ bridge of the doomed *Constellation* faded around him, and he found himself in the Transporter Room of the *Enterprise*. He raced to the nearest auxiliary viewscreen. Over the intercom, Spock’s voice was counting: “Twenty-five seconds to detonation. Computer, mark at ten seconds and give us a fiftieth of a second warp drive at Warp One at second zero point five.”

This order baffled Kirk for an instant; then he realized

that he was *still* looking down the throat of the doomsday machine, and that Spock was hoping to make a short subspace jump away the instant the robot's tractor apparatus was consumed—if it was.

"Fifteen seconds. *Mark*. Five seconds. Four. Three. Two. One."

Flick!

Suddenly, on the auxiliary screen, the doomsday machine was thousands of miles away. The screen zoomed up the magnification to restore the image.

As it did so, a spear of intolerable light grew out of the mouth of the funnel. Promptly, Kirk ran for the elevators and the control room.

A silent group was watching the main viewscreen, including Commodore Decker. The tongue of flame was still growing. It now looked to be at least two hundred miles long. It would have consumed the *Enterprise* like a midge.

Then, gradually, it faded. Spock checked his board.

"Did it work?" Kirk demanded.

"I cannot tell yet, Captain. The radiation from the blast itself is too intense. But the very fact that we broke away indicates at least some damage . . . Ah, the radiation is decaying. Now we shall see."

Kirk held his breath.

"Decay curve inflecting," Spock said. "The shape—yes, the curve is now exponential. All energy sources are deactivated. Captain, it is dead."

There was a pandemonium of cheering. Under cover of the noise, Decker moved over to Kirk.

"My last command," he said in a low voice. "But you were right, Captain Kirk. My apologies for usurping your command."

"You acted to save Federation lives and property, as I did. If you in turn are willing to drop your complaint against my overriding regulations—which you have every right to make—we'll say no more about it."

"Of course I'll drop it. But the *Constellation* is nevertheless my last command. I cannot forget that my first attempt to attack that thing cost four hundred lives—men who trusted me—and that I had the bad judgment to try it again with *your* men's lives. When a man stops learning, he's no longer fit to command."

"That," Kirk said, "is a judgment upon yourself that only you can make. My opinion is that it is a wise and responsible judgment. But it is only an opinion. Mr. Sulu?"

"Sir?"

"Let's get the dancing in the streets over with, and lay a course for Star Base Seventeen."

"Yes, sir." But the helmsman could not quite stop grinning. Spock, of course, never grinned, but he was looking, if possible, even more serious than usual.

"Mr. Spock, you strike me as a man who still has some reservations."

"Only one, Captain; and it is pure speculation."

"Nevertheless, let's hear it."

"Well, Captain, when two powers prepare forces of such magnitude against each other, it almost always means that they are at a state of technological parity; otherwise they would not take such risks of self-destruction."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning, sir, that the existence of one such doomsday machine implies the existence of another."

"I suppose that's possible," Kirk said slowly, repressing a shudder. "Though the second one may not have been launched in time. Well, Mr. Spock, supposing we were to hear of another? What would you do?"

Spock's eyebrows went up. "That is no problem, sir. I would feed it a fusion bomb disguised as a ship, or better still, an asteroid; that is not what concerned me. The danger, as such, can now be regarded as minimal, even if there *is* another such machine."

"Then if you weren't thinking of the danger, what *were* you thinking of?"

"Of the nuisance," Spock said. "Having to deal with the same problem twice is untidy; it wastes time."

Kirk thought back to those hours aboard the haunted hulk of the *Constellation*—and of the four hundred dead men on the devoured planet.

"I," he said, "prefer my problems tidy. It saves lives."

ASSIGNMENT: EARTH

(Gene Roddenberry and Art Wallace)

Kirk viewed the conversion—however temporary and partial—of the *Enterprise* into a time machine with considerable misgivings. He had to recognize, of course, that an occasional assignment of this kind had become inevitable, the moment the laboratory types had had a chance to investigate the reports of the time-travel he, Spock and McCoy had been subjected to from the City on the edge of Forever, and the time-warp the whole ship had run into when it had hit the black star.

But these two experiences had only made him more acutely aware of the special danger of time-travel: the danger that the tiniest of false moves could change the future—or what was for Kirk the present—and in the process wipe out Kirk, the *Enterprise*, the Federation itself. Hovering in orbit above the Earth of 1969, even in hiding behind deflector screens, was a hair-trigger situation.

For that matter, that was why they were here, for 1969 had been a hair-trigger year. In Kirk's time, nobody really understood how the Earth had survived it. In the terrible scramble with which the year had ended, crucial documents had been lost; still others, it was strongly suspected, had been falsified. And it was not just the historians, but the Federation itself, that wanted to know the answers. They were possibly of military as well as political interest, and in a galaxy that contained the Klingon Em-

pire as well as the Federation, they might be a good deal more than interesting.

Which explained the vast expense of sending a whole starship back in time to monitor Earth communications. Nevertheless . . .

His musings were interrupted by a faint but unmistakable shuddering of the deck of the bridge beneath his feet. What on Earth . . .

"Alert status," he snapped. "Force shields maximum. Begin sensor scan. Any station with information, report."

Immediately the telltale light for the Transporter Room went on and Kirk flipped the intercom switch.

"Spock here, Captain. We are having transporter trouble; Mr. Scott just called me down to help."

"You shouldn't be using the transporter at all!"

"Nobody was, Captain. It went on by itself and we find we cannot shut it off. We seem accidentally to have intercepted someone else's transporter beam—and one a great deal more powerful than ours."

"Mr. Spock, you know as well as I do that the twentieth century had no such device—" Again he was interrupted by the faint shudder. Spock's voice came back urgently:

"Nevertheless, Captain, someone—or something—is beaming aboard this vessel."

"I'll be right down."

In the Transporter Room, Kirk found the situation as reported. All circuits were locked open; nothing Spock or Scott could do would close them. The familiar shimmering effect was already beginning in the transporter chamber.

"For all its power," Spock said, "that beam is originating at least a thousand light years away."

"Which," Scott added, "is a good deal farther than any transporter beam of our *own* century could reach."

The ship shuddered again, more strongly than before. "Stop fighting it," Kirk said quietly. "Set up our own field for it and let it through. Obviously we'll have serious damage otherwise."

"Aye, sir," Scott said. He worked quickly.

The shimmering grew swiftly in brightness. A haze form appeared in it, and gradually took on solidity. Kirk stared, his jaw dropped.

The figure they had pulled in from incredibly deep space was that of a man impeccably dressed in a twentieth-century business suit. Nor was this all: in his arms he carried a sleek black cat, wearing a necklace collar of glittering white stones.

"Security detail," Kirk said. "On the double."

The stranger seemed as startled as Kirk was. He looked about the Transporter Room in baffled anger, rubbing the huge cat soothingly. The exotic element in no way detracted from his obvious personal force; he was tall, rugged, vital.

"Why have you intercepted me?" he said at once. "Please identify yourselves."

"You're aboard the United Spaceship *Enterprise*. I am Captain James Kirk, commanding."

The black cat made a strange sound, rather like one of the many odd noises a Siamese cat can make, and yet somehow also not catlike at all.

"I hear it, Isis," the stranger said. "A space vessel. But from what planet?"

"Earth."

"Impossible! At the present time Earth has no—" his voice trailed off as he became aware of Spock. Then, "Humans with a Vulcan! No wonder! You're from the future!"

He dropped the cat and reached for the control panel in the transporter chamber. "You must beam me down onto Earth immediately. There's not a moment to . . ."

The doors to the Transporter Room snapped open, admitting the ship's security chief and a guard, phasers drawn. At the sight of the weapons the strange man froze. The cat crouched as if for a spring, but the man said instantly, "Careful, Isis. Please listen to me carefully, all of you. My name is Gary Seven. I am a human being of the Twentieth Century. I have been living on another planet, far more advanced than the Earth is. I was beaming from there when you intercepted me."

"Where is the planet?" Kirk said.

"They wish their existence kept secret. In fact, it will remain unknown even in your time."

"It's impossible to hide a whole planet," Scott said.

"Impossible to you; not to them. Captain Kirk, I am of

this time period. You are not. Interfere with me, and with what I must do down there, and you will change history. I am sure you have been thoroughly briefed on the consequence of that."

"I have," Kirk said. "On the other hand, I know nothing about you—even about the truth of anything you've told me."

"We don't have time for that. Every second you delay me is dangerous—this is the most critical year in Earth's history. My planet wants to ensure that Earth survives—an aim which should be of no small interest to you."

Kirk shook his head. "The fact that you know the criticality of the year strongly suggests that you're from the future yourself. It's a risk I can't take until I have more information. I'm afraid I'm going to have to put you in security confinement for the time being."

"You'll regret it."

"Very possibly. Nevertheless, it's what I must do." He gestured to the security chief. The guard bent to pick up the cat, but Gary Seven stepped in his way.

"If you handle Isis," he said, "you will regret *that* even more." He scooped up the cat himself and went out with the security detail.

"I want a special eye kept on that man," Kirk said. "He went along far too docilely. Also, Mr. Spock, ask Dr. McCoy for a fast medical analysis of the prisoner. What I want to know is, is he human? And have the cat checked, too. It may tell us something further about Mr. Seven."

"It seems remarkably intelligent," Spock commented. "As well as strikingly beautiful. All the same, a strange companion to be carrying across a thousand light years on what is supposed to be an urgent mission."

"Exactly. Scotty, could that beam of his have carried him through time as well as space?"

"The theory has always indicated that it's possible," Scott said, "but *we've* never been able to manage it. On the other hand, we've never been able to put that much power into a transporter beam."

"In short, you don't know."

"That's right, sir."

"Very well. See if you can put the machinery back in order. Mr. Spock, please give the necessary orders and

then join me on the bridge. We are going to need *lots* of computation.”

The computer said: “Present Earth crises fill an entire tape bank, Captain Kirk. The being Gary Seven could be intervening for *or* against Earth in areas of overpopulation, bush wars, revolutions, critically dangerous bacteriological experiments, various emergent hate movements, rising air and water pollution . . .”

“All right, stop,” Kirk said. “What specific events are going on today?”

“Excuse me, Captain,” Spock said, “but that question will simply open another floodgate. There were half a hundred critical things going on almost every day during 1969. Library, give us the three most heavily weighted of today’s events in the danger file.”

“There will be an important assassination today,” the computer said promptly in its pleasant feminine voice. “An equally dangerous government coup in Asia Minor; and the launching of an orbital nuclear warhead platform by the United States countering a similar launch by a consortium of other powers.”

Kirk whistled. “Orbital nuclear devices were one of the greatest worries of this era, as I recall.”

“They were,” Spock agreed. “Once the sky was full of orbiting H-bombs, the slightest miscalculation could have brought one of them accidentally down and set off a holocaust.”

“Sick bay to bridge,” the intercom interrupted.

“Kirk here. What is it, Bones?”

“Jim, there isn’t any prisoner in the brig. All I found there were the security chief and one guard, both of them acting as if they’d been hypnotized.”

“The Transporter Room!” Kirk shouted. “Quick!”

But they were too late. There was nobody in the Transporter Room but a dazed Chief Engineer, and, a moment later, McCoy.

“I was working with my head inside an open panel,” Scott said, his voice still a little blurred, “when I heard someone come in. I turned and saw him with the cat under one arm and a thing like a writing stylus pointed at me.”

"A miniaturized stunner, no doubt," McCoy said.

"Well, the next thing I knew, I was willing to do anything he asked me to. In fact I beamed him down to Earth myself. Somewhere in the back of my mind I knew I shouldn't, but I did it anyhow."

There was a brief silence.

"And so," Spock said at last, "human or alien, contemporary or future, he has gone to do what he came to do—and we still have no idea what it is."

"We are going to find out," Kirk said. "Scotty, where did you beam him to?"

"That I can't say, Captain. He set the coordinates himself, and put the recorder on wipe. I can give you an estimate, within about a thousand square meters."

"If Spock and I beam down, working from the power consumption data alone, inside that thousand square meters, can you triangulate?"

"Aye, I can do that," Scott said. "It still won't be very precise, but it ought at least to bring you within sighting distance of the man—or whatever he is."

"It is also a major risk to history, Captain," Spock said.

"Which is just why I want you and me to be the ones to go; we had had experience with this kind of operation before. We can't find any answers sitting up here. Have ship's stores prepare proper costumes. Scotty, stand by to beam us down."

The spot where they materialized was a street on New York's upper East Side, not far from the canopied entrance of an elegant apartment building. It was a cold winter day, although there was no snow.

"All right, Scotty," Kirk said into his communicator. "Lock in and check."

"Correlated," Scott's voice said. "Readings indicate a greater altitude—approximately thirty meters higher."

Kirk looked speculatively up the face of the building. Once they entered a maze like that, they might pass within whispering distance of their quarry, behind some door, and never know it.

Nevertheless, they went into the lobby, found an elevator, and went up. At the prescribed heights, they stepped out into a hallway. Nothing but doors.

"Altitude verified, Captain," Scott's voice said. "Proceed forty-one meters, two-four-seven degrees true."

This maneuver wound them up in front of one of the doors, in no way different from any of the others. Kirk and Spock looked at each other. Then Kirk shrugged and pushed the doorbell button, which responded with a melodious chime.

The door was opened by a pretty blonde girl in her early twenties. Kirk and Spock went in, fast.

"Hey, what do you think you're doing?" the girl demanded. "You can't come breaking in . . ."

"Where's Mr. Seven?" Kirk said sharply.

"I don't know who you're talking about!"

Kirk looked around. It was an ordinary Twentieth-Century living room as far as he could see, though perhaps somewhat on the sumptuous side. There was a closed door at the back. Spock pulled out his tricorder and scanned quickly, then pointed at the closed door. "In there, Captain."

They rushed the door, but it was locked. As they tried to voice in, Kirk heard an unfamiliar, brief whirring sound behind him, and then the girl's voice, all in a rush: "Operator, 811 East 68th Street, Apartment 1212, send the police . . ."

Kirk whirled and snatched the phone out of her hand. "No nonsense, Miss. Spock, burn the door open."

The girl gasped as Spock produced his phaser and burned out the entire knob and lock assembly. They rushed in, forcing the girl to come with them.

Here was another large room, also elegantly furnished. One wall was book-lined from a point about a meter from the floor to an equivalent distance from the ceiling. Under a large window was a heavy, ornate desk.

There was no sign of Gary Seven or anybody else. Kirk noted that this seemed to surprise the girl as much as it did himself.

Spock went to the desk, where there was a scatter of papers.

"I'm warning you," the girl said, "I've already called the police."

"Where is Mr. Seven?" Kirk demanded again. "Spock, is she Twentieth Century? Or one of Seven's people?"

"Only Doctor McCoy could establish that, I'm afraid, Captain. But I think you will find these papers interesting. They are plans of the United States government's McKinley Rocket Base."

"Aha. So the orbital platform launching is the critical event. Now how long do we . . ."

The doorbell rang. The girl, catching them off guard, dashed for the door. Both men raced after her, Kirk reaching her first. As he grabbed her, she bit his hand, and then screamed.

"Open up in there!" a male voice shouted in the hallway outside. "Police!" Then the door shook to a heavy blow.

Spock too seized the girl. Kirk managed to get his communicator back into play. "Kirk to *Enterprise*. Wide scan, Scotty, we'll be moving. Now!"

Another blow on the door, which burst open. Two policemen lunged in, guns drawn. Spock propelled the girl away from the group toward the library door.

At the same instant, the apartment dissolved and all four of the men—Kirk, Spock, the policemen—were standing in the transporter chamber of the *Enterprise*. The policemen looked about, stunned, but Kirk and Spock raced off the platform instantly.

"Scotty, reverse and energize!"

The policemen faded and vanished.

"Fine, fast work, Scotty."

"That poor girl," Spock said, "is going to have a lot to explain."

"I know it, but we've got something much more important to set right first. Let's have a look at those plans. Blazes, the launch is scheduled in forty minutes! Scotty, look at these. Here's a schematic layout of a rocket base. Can you get it on the viewscreen here?"

"Easy, Captain. In fact, there's an old-style weather satellite in orbit below us; if I can bounce off that, I ought to get good closeups." He moved to the screen. In a moment, he had the base. An enormous, crude multistage rocket was already in launch position, being serviced by something Kirk dimly remembered was called a gantry crane.

"If we could spot your man," Scott added, "I could lock on and beam him up."

"The odds are that he is out of sight," Spock said. "Inside the rocket gantry, or at one of the control centers. I suppose he has a transporter hidden somewhere in that library of his. Otherwise I cannot account for his disappearance, seconds after the tricorder said he was there—or at least, *somebody* was there."

"Surely that base has security precautions," Kirk said.

"So did we," Scott pointed out.

"I see your point, Scotty. All right, continue visual scan, and stand by to beam us down again."

"Won't be necessary, sir. There he is."

And there indeed he was, at the top of the gantry. He had a panel off the side of the rocket and was working feverishly inside it. Nearby sat the black cat, watching with apparent interest.

"Why does he take a pet with him on a dangerous job like that?" Spock said.

"Immaterial now," Kirk said. "Scotty, yank him out of there!"

It was done within seconds. Gary Seven raged, but there was nothing he could do with four phasers leveled on him.

"Relieve him of that hypo and any other hardware he's carrying," Kirk said in a granite voice, "and then take him to the briefing room. This time, Mr. Seven, we are going to get some answers."

"There's no time for that, you fool! The rocket will be launched in nine minutes—and I hadn't finished working on it!"

"Take him along," Kirk said. "And Mr. Spock, put that cat in a separate cabin. Since it's so important for him to have her along, we'll see how well he stands up without her."

Kirk interviewed Seven alone, but with all intercom circuits open, and standing instructions to intervene at discretion and/or report anything that seemed pertinent.

There was no problem about getting Seven to talk. The words came out of him like water from a pressure hose.

"I am what I say I am, a Twentieth-Century human being," he said urgently. "I was one of three agents on

Earth. We were equipped with an advanced transporter, and a computer, both hidden behind the bookshelves in my library. I was returned to—where I came from—for final instructions. You intercepted me and caused a critical delay. When I escaped I found both my fellow agents had been killed in a simple automobile accident. I had to work fast, and, necessarily, alone. They need the help, Captain. A rival program of orbital nuclear platforms like this destroyed Omicron III a hundred years ago. It will destroy the Earth if it isn't stopped."

"I don't deny that it's a bad program," Kirk said.

"Then why can't you believe my story? Would a truly advanced planet use force to help Earth? Would they come here in their own strange, alien forms? Nonsense! The best of all possible methods would be to take Earth-born humans to their world, train them for generations, send them back when they're needed."

"The rocket has been launched," Scott's voice responded over the intercom.

"There, you see?" Seven said desperately. "And I hadn't finished working on it. If you can beam me into its warhead I can still . . ."

"Not so fast. What were you going to make it do?"

"I armed the warhead, and gave it a flight path which will bring it down over Southeast Asia."

"What! That'll start a world war in nothing flat!"

"Correction, Captain," Scott's voice said. "The rocket has begun to malfunction, and alerts are being broadcast from capitals all over the world. I would say that the war has effectively started."

"So much for your humanitarian pretenses," Kirk said. "Mr. Scott, prepare to intercept that rocket and beam it out into space somewhere . . ."

"No, no, no!" Seven cried. "That would be a highly conspicuous intervention! It would change history! Captain, I beg of you . . ."

"Excuse me, Captain," said Spock's voice from the intercom. "Please come to the next cabin."

"Mr. Spock, that rocket will impact in something like fifteen minutes. Is this crucial?"

"Absolutely so."

After checking the guards outside the briefing room, Kirk went to the cabin where Spock had taken the cat. The cat was still there, curled up in a chair.

"What's this all about, Mr. Spock?"

"Sir, I have found out why he carries this animal with him wherever he goes, even when it is obviously inconvenient. It changes the entire picture."

"In what way? Spit it out, man!"

"We have all been the victims of a drastic illusion—including Seven. The true fact is, Mr. Seven has been under the closest kind of monitoring during every instant of his activities. I suspected this and bent certain efforts to redisciplining my own mind to see the reality. I can now also do this for you. Look."

He pointed to the chair. Seated in it was a staggeringly beautiful woman. She had long black hair, and wore a sleek black dress and a jeweled choker necklace. Her legs were curled under her with feline grace.

"This," Spock said formally, "is Isis. And now . . ."

The woman was gone; only the cat was there, in a strangely similar position.

"Neither," Spock said, "is likely to be the true form of Mr. Seven's sponsors, but the phenomenon supports the story that he does indeed have sponsors. Whether or not their intentions are malign must be a command decision, and one which I must leave to your human intuition, Captain."

Kirk stared at the illusory cat, which was now washing itself. Then he said, "Mr. Scott!"

"Here, sir."

"Give Mr. Seven back his tools and beam him into the warhead of that rocket—on the double."

The warhead blew at 104 miles. Scott snatched Seven out of it just barely in time.

"You see," Seven told them somewhat later, "it *had* to appear to be a malfunction, which luckily did not do any damage. But it frightened every government on Earth. Already there are signs that nobody will try orbiting such a monster, ever again. So despite your accidental interference from the future, my mission has been completed."

"Correction, Mister Seven," Spock said. "It appears

that we did *not* interfere with history. Rather, the *Enterprise* was simply part of what was supposed to happen on this day in 1969."

Seven looked baffled. Kirk added, "We find in our record tapes that, although it was never generally revealed, on this date a malfunctioning suborbital warhead was detonated *exactly* 104 miles above the Earth. And you'll be pleased that our records show it resulted in a new and stronger international agreement against such weapons."

"I am indeed pleased," Seven said. He picked up the cat. "And now I expect to be recalled. It might save time, Captain, if you would allow me the use of your transporter. I mean no reflection on your technology, but I must get back to my own machine for the trip to—where I am going."

"Of course." Kirk rose. "Mr. Scott, take Mr. Seven to our Transporter Room and beam him down."

At the elevator door, Seven paused. "There is one thing that puzzles me. Your accidental interception, and your tracing me, and your interruption of my work—every one of those events was unplanned and should have produced a major disruption. Yet in each case, it turns out that I made exactly the proper next step to advance the business at hand, even though each time I was working blind. Does the course of history exert that much force on even a single individual?"

Kirk eyed the creature in Seven's arms which, whatever it was, was most certainly not a cat.

"Mr. Seven," he said, "I'm afraid that we in our turn can't tell you *everything* we've learned. The credit for this day's work is largely yours—and I strongly advise you to let it rest at that."

MIRROR, MIRROR

(Jerome Bixby)

The Halkan Council was absolutely polite, but its position was rock-hard, and nothing that Kirk, McCoy, Scott or Uhura could say would alter it. The Federation was not to be allowed to mine dilithium crystals on the planet. There was too much potential for destruction in the crystals, and the Halkans would allow nothing to compromise their history of total non-violence. To prevent that, they said, they would die—as a race, if necessary. The Council accepted that the Federation's intentions were peaceful, but what of the future? There had been mention of a hostile Klingon Empire . . .

Kirk would have liked to have stayed to argue the question further, but he had already received word from Spock that an ion storm of considerable violence was beginning to blow through the Halkan system—and in fact Kirk could already see evidence of it in the Halkan weather, which was becoming decidedly lowering. To stay longer might risk disruption of transporter transmission, which would strand the landing party for an unknown time. In addition, it was Spock's opinion that the heart of the magnetic storm represented a danger to the *Enterprise* herself.

On this kind of opinion, Kirk would not have argued with Spock for a second; the First Officer never erred by a hairline on the wrong side of conservatism. Kirk ordered the landing party beamed up.

That hairline was very nearly split, this time. On the first attempt, the transporter got the party only partly materialized aboard ship when the beam suffered a phase reversal and all four of them found themselves standing on a bare plateau on the Halkan planet, illuminated only by a barrage of lightning. It was nearly five minutes later before the familiar Transporter Room sprang fully into being around them.

Kirk stepped quickly from the platform toward Spock. "We may or may not get those power crystals . . ."

And then he stopped, in midstep as well as midsentence. For Spock and the transporter chief were saluting, and a most peculiar salute it was: the arms first folded loosely, then raised stiffly horizontal and squared out. Their uniforms were different, too; basically, they were the same as before, but they were much altered in detail, and the detail had a savage military flair—broad belts bearing exposed phasers and what seemed to be ceremonial daggers, shoulder boards, braid. And the Federation breast symbol was gone; instead, there was a blazon which looked like a galaxy with a dagger through it. A similar symbol, in brilliant color, was on one wall of the room, and the equipment was all in the wrong places—indeed, a few pieces of it were completely unfamiliar.

But what struck Kirk most of all was the change in Spock. Vulcans all look somewhat satanic to Earthmen encountering them for the first time, but it had been many years since Kirk had thoroughly gotten over this impression of his First Officer. Now it was back, full force. Spock looked cold, hard, almost fanatical.

Kirk dropped his hands to his belt—since he did not know how to return the strange salute—and encountered something else unfamiliar. A brief glance confirmed what he had feared: his uniform, too, had undergone the strange changes.

"At norm," Spock said to the transporter chief, in a voice loaded with savage harshness. "Captain, do you mean the Halkans have weapons that could resist us? Our socioanalysis indicates that they are incapable of violence."

Kirk could not answer. He was spared having to, for at

that moment Sulu entered the Transporter Room. His movements, his manner, were cold, arrogant, hypercompetent, but that was not the worst of it. The symbol on his breast, the galaxy with the dagger through it, had inside it also a clenched fist, around the blade of the dagger, from which blood was dripping. It was an extreme parody of something familiar; it showed that the gentle Sulu, the ship's navigator and helmsman, was now her chief security officer.

Sulu did not salute. He barked, "Status of mission, Captain?"

"No change," Kirk said carefully.

"Standard procedure, then?"

Kirk did not know what this question meant under these eerie circumstances, but he doubted that operating by the book—whatever the book might say—would accomplish much more than delaying matters, and time was what he needed. Therefore, he nodded.

Sulu turned to the nearest intercom. "Mr. Chekov. You will program phaser barrage on Halkan cities, at the rate of one million electron volts per day, in a gradually contracting circle around each. Report when ready."

"Right, Mr. Sulu." Was Kirk imagining it, or was there something thick and gloating in Chekov's voice?

"Unfortunate," Spock said, "that this race should choose suicide to annexation. They possess qualities that could be useful to the Empire."

There was the sputtering hum of an overload from the transporter. Spock's head jerked toward the transporter chief, and then, slowly, inexorably, he advanced on the man. Incredibly, the transporter chief *cringed*.

"Are you not aware, chief, that we are in a magnetic storm? And that you were ordered to compensate?"

"Mr. Spock, sir, I'm sorry. The ion-flux is so unpredictable . . ."

"Carelessness with Empire equipment is intolerable." Spock held out his hand toward Sulu, without looking. "Mr. Sulu, your agonizer."

Sulu plucked a small device from his belt and dropped it in Spock's outstretched palm. In a vicious burlesque of the Vulcan neck pinch, Spock clapped it to the transporter chief's shoulder.

The man screamed. Spock prolonged the agony. When he let go, the chief dropped writhing to the deck.

"More attention to duty next time, please. Mr. Scott, the storm has produced minor damage in your section. Doctor McCoy, there are also some minor injuries requiring your attention." Abruptly, he kicked the semiconscious man on the floor. "You might begin with this hulk."

McCoy, whose running feud with the First Officer had always had a solid undercurrent of affection to moderate it, wore the look of a man whose worst nightmare has abruptly come true. Kirk saw him balling his fists, and moved in fast.

"Get moving, Dr. McCoy. You too, Mr. Scott."

Their expressions flickered for a moment, and then both looked down. Now they knew how the Captain wanted them to play it. At least, Kirk hoped so. In any event, they went out without further comment.

The transporter chief dragged himself to his feet to follow. It did not seem to surprise him at all that the ship's doctor, who had just been ordered to attend to him, had not said a word to him. He said, "Mr. Spock . . ."

"What?"

"Sir, the beam power jumped for a moment, sir—just as the landing party materialized. I never saw anything like it before. I thought you ought to know, sir."

Kirk had already heard more 'sirs' in ten minutes than were normal to the *Enterprise* in a week. Spock said, "Another inefficiency?"

"No, sir, the settings were perfectly normal. I made my error after the party arrived, sir, if I may so remind you."

"Very well. Go to Sickbay. Captain, do you feel any ill effects?"

Kirk could answer that one with no trouble. "Yes, Mr. Spock, I am decidedly shaken up. I expect Lieutenant Uhura is too. I believe we too had better report to Sickbay for a checkup."

"You will of course report instantly if you are found incompetent to command," Sulu said. It was not a question.

"Of course, Mr. Sulu."

"And the matter of the Halkans? A quick bombardment would solve the problem with the least effort."

"I am aware of your—orders—Mr. Sulu. I will give you my judgment as soon as I—feel myself assured that I am competent to give it."

"Most sensible."

As Kirk and Uhura left, everyone again saluted—except Sulu. On the trip to Sickbay, Kirk became aware that there were more guards posted along the corridors than he had ever seen except during the worst kind of major alert. None of them were in standard uniforms; instead, they wore fatigues, like civilian workmen. All saluted. None seemed surprised not to have the salutes returned.

Uhura gasped with relief as the door of Sickbay slid closed behind them and the four people who had been the landing party were once more alone together. "What's happened?" she said in a low, intense voice.

"Don't talk too fast," Kirk said instantly, though he himself was talking as fast as he could possibly get the words out. He stabbed a finger toward McCoy's intercom. "Something in the air suggests that that thing is permanently open."

The rest nodded. It was a lucky thing that they had all been together so long; it made elliptical talk possible among them. "Now, Bones, that medical. I want you to check for likely effects. I suggest brainwaves first."

"I've already checked myself and Scotty, sir. No hallucinatory or hypnotic effects. We are dealing with—uh, a perception of reality, if you follow me."

"I'm afraid I do. Mr. Scott, do you detect any changes in the *Enterprise* which—might have a bearing on our reactions?"

Scott inclined his head and listened. "I hear some sort of difference in the impulse engines. Of course they may just be laboring against the magnetic storm. However, the difference seems to me to be, well, technological in nature, sir."

"Excuse me, Captain," Uhura said, "but I feel a little out of my depth. I felt quite dizzy for a moment after we materialized in the beams. Would it be possible . . ."

She did not finish the sentence, but instead made the gesture of someone fitting a bucket or a large hat over McCoy's intercom. The physician's eyebrows went up. He

stepped to where his diagnostic apparatus should have been, veered in disgust as he found that it had been moved, and then flicked switches.

"I should have thought of that in the first place," he said, "but I'm as confused as anybody here. Everybody used to complain that my stereotaxic screen jammed the intercoms; let's hope it still does."

"We'll have to take the chance," Kirk said. "Lieutenant Uhura, I felt the same effect. At the same time, we were in our normal Transporter Room—and then it faded, we were back on the planet, and then got beamed back to this situation—whatever it is. And the transporter chief—where is he, by the way?"

"I made him mildly sick," McCoy said, "and sent him to quarters. A nasty reversal of role for a doctor, but I want him out of Spock's reach for a while."

"Well, he mentioned an abnormal effect in the transporter itself. And there's this ion storm."

"Captain," Scott said slowly, "are we thinking the same thing?"

"I don't know, Scotty. But everything fits thus far. It fits with a parallel universe, coexisting with ours, on another dimensional plane—or maybe on another level of probability; everything duplicated—almost. An Empire instead of a Federation. Another *Enterprise*—another Spock . . ."

"Another Jim Kirk?" Scott said quietly. "Another Dr. McCoy?"

"No," McCoy said in startled realization. "An exchange! If *we're here* . . ."

"Our counterparts were beaming at the same time," Kirk said. "Ion storms are common enough, after all. Another storm disrupted another set of circuits. Now we're here; they're on *our* ship, and probably asking each other much the same questions. And coming to the same tentative conclusions. They'll ask the computer what to do. That's what we'll have to do."

McCoy began to pace. "What about the Halkans? We can't let them be wiped out, even if this is another, completely different set of Halkans, in another universe."

"I don't know, Bones. I've got to buy a lot of time. Scotty, get below and short the main phaser coupling.

Make it look like the storm blew the standby circuits. Lieutenant Uhura, get to your post and run today's communications from Starfleet Command, or whatever the equivalent is here. I've got to know my exact orders, and options, if any. And by the way, when we want to talk to each other after we're separated, use communicators, and on the subspace band only. And scramble, too."

Uhura and the engineer nodded and left. McCoy had halted his pacing before a sort of glass cage. In it was what appeared to be a large bird, affixed with electrodes. A chart hung beside it.

"What in blazes!" McCoy said. "Jim, look at this. A specimen of an 'annexed' race. I.Q., 180. Experiment in life-support for humans under conditions prevailing on its native planet—heart and lung modifications. It's alive—and if I'm any judge, it's in agony. I won't have such an abomination in my Sickbay!"

"You'll have to, for a while," Kirk said, not without sympathy. "We've got to stay in character until we can get more information. It's an ugly universe, and we don't want to do anything that'll get us stuck with it."

On the bridge, there was a huge duplicate of the galaxy-and-dagger device, and the Captain's chair had widely flared arms, almost like a throne. The man who should be Chekov was eyeing Uhura with open, deliberate, speculative interest, his intent unmistakable. Nobody else seemed to find this unusual or even interesting. Kirk went directly to her.

"Any new orders, Lieutenant?"

"No, sir. You are still ordered to annihilate the Halkans, unless they comply. No alternative action has been prescribed."

"Thank you." He went to his chair and sank in. It felt downright luxurious. "Report, Mr. Sulu?"

"Phasers locked on Target A, Captain. Approaching optimum range. Shall I commence fire?"

"I want a status report first." He touched the intercom. "Mr. Scott?"

"Scott here, sir. I have no change to report, sir. No damage to phasers."

"Very good, Mr. Scott." In fact it was very bad, but there was no help for it. As he switched out, Spock came onto the bridge.

"The planet's rotation is carrying the primary target beyond arc of phaser lock," Sulu said. "Shall I correct orbit to new firing position?"

"No."

Sulu flicked a switch. "Now locked on secondary target city."

"Mr. Spock," Kirk said. "You said the Halkans could be useful. After my visit with them, I agree."

"If they chose to cooperate. They have not."

"Lieutenant Uhura, contact the Halkan Council. We'll make one more try." Noting Spock's surprise, he added, "This is a new race. They offer other things of value besides dilithium crystals."

"But—it is clear that we cannot expect cooperation. They have refused the Empire. Command Procedure dictates that we provide the customary example. A serious breach of Standard Orders . . ."

"I have my reasons, Mr. Spock—and I'll make them clear in my own good time."

"Captain," Uhura said, "the Halkan leader is waiting on Channel B."

Kirk swung to the small viewscreen above Uhura's station. Tharn was on the screen. He looked much tired, indeed more tragic, than he had when Kirk had seen him last. Now, how would it be possible to make this sound plausible?

"It is useless to resist us," he said at random.

"We do not resist you," Tharn said.

"You have, uh, twelve hours in which to reconsider your position."

"Twelve years, Captain Kirk, or twelve thousand, will make no difference," Tharn said calmly and with great dignity. "We are ethically compelled to refuse your demand for dilithium crystals. You would use their power to destroy."

"We will level your planet and take what we want. *That* is destruction. You would die as a race . . ."

"To preserve what we are. Yes. Perhaps someday your

slave planets will all defy you, as we have done. When that comes, how will your starships be able to control a whole galaxy?"

"Switch out, Lieutenant." The screen went blank.

"Twelve hours, Captain?" Spock said. "That is unprecedented."

"Phasers off, Mr. Sulu."

"This conduct must be reported, Captain," Spock said. "You have placed yourself in a most grave position."

"You are at liberty to do so, Mr. Spock," Kirk said, rising. "Take charge. I will be in the briefing room. Inform me of any change. Lieutenant Uhura, attend me there and order Dr. McCoy and Mr. Scott also to report there. Mr. Chekov, relieve Lieutenant Uhura."

He could only hope that this flurry of orders, plus his breach of an unknown regulation, would obscure the fact that he had just called together the landing party.

"Everybody watch your step," Scott said. "They move up through assassination around here. My engine-room chief just tried for me—not personally, but through henchmen. I only got out of it because one of them switched sides."

"What about the technology, Scotty?"

"Mostly variations in instrumentation. Nothing I can't handle. As for star-readings—everything's where it ought to be—except us."

Kirk crossed to the desk and looked down at the computer tap. "Let's see what we're up against. Computer, this is the Captain. Record a Security Research, to be classified under my voiceprint and Mr. Scott's."

"Recorded," said the computer in a harsh masculine voice. Evidently this universe had never discovered that men pay more attention to a machine when its voice is feminine.

"Produce all data relevant to recent magnetic storm, and correlate following hypothesis. Could a storm of that magnitude cause a power surge in transporter circuits, creating momentary interdimensional contact with a parallel universe?"

"Affirmative."

"At such a moment, could persons in each universe, in

the act of beaming, be transposed with their counterparts in the other universe?"

"Affirmative."

"Can conditions necessary to such an event be artificially reproduced?"

"Affirmative."

"Record procedure and switch off."

A slot in the desk opened and a spool of tape slid out. Kirk handed it to Scott. "It looks like the ball is yours, Scotty."

"I'll have to tap the power for it out of the warp engines, and balance it for the four of us," the engineer said dubiously. "It's a two-man job, and I'm afraid you'd be too conspicuous, Captain. So would Lieutenant Uhura. Come on, McCoy, let's lay it out."

"I'm not an engineer," McCoy said indignantly.

"You will be. Captain, keep up our public relations, please!"

The two went out. After a moment, Uhura said, "Captain—the way this ship is run—what kind of people *are* we in this universe? I mean, what kind of people do we have to pretend to be?"

"Let's find out. Computer. Readout of official record of current command."

"Captain: James T. Kirk. Succeeded to command *E. S. S. Enterprise* through assassination of Captain Karl Franz. First action: suppression of Gorlan uprising, through destruction of rebel home planet. Second action: execution of five thousand colonists on S Doradus Nine, forcing colony to retract secession. Third action . . ."

"Cancel. Lieutenant, do you really want to hear it tell you what *you're* like?"

Lt. Uhura shuddered. "No. If the way the local Chekov looks at me is any clue, I'll probably hear that my predecessor at my post was my lover, and I got the job by knifing him. How can you run a fifty billion credit starship like a pirate vessel?"

"Pirate ships were pretty efficiently run, Lieutenant. Every man feared those above him—with the strongest at the top. Morgan took Panama with his buccaneer ships as neatly as a squadron of naval vessels might have."

"And then was stabbed in his sleep?"

“No, henchmen protected him—not out of respect or devotion, but because his abilities brought them what they wanted. Other checks and balances—other means to the same end.”

“But what end?”

“This ship is efficient—or it wouldn’t exist. Its Captain was efficient, or he’d be dead. And this Empire will get the dilithium crystals it wants—efficiently.”

Uhura’s expression remained grim. “And what do you suppose our counterparts are doing, aboard *our* version of the *Enterprise*?”

“I hope they’re faking as well as or better than we are. Otherwise, when we get back, we’ll all be up on charges.” The intercom beeped. “Kirk here.”

“Sir, I’m having trouble on this line, I can barely hear you.”

“Right.” Kirk switched off, produced his communicator, and set it to subspace level and on “scramble.” “Okay, Scotty, here I am. Go ahead.”

“We can do it, Captain. But when we interrupt engine circuits, to tie in the power increase to the transporters, it’ll show up on the Security Board. We’ll just need a second, but . . .”

“All right, wait a minute.” Kirk thought fast. “Lieutenant Uhura, this is going to be nasty. I noticed the local Chekov giving you the eye . . .”

“He made a flat-out pass at me before you came on the bridge, Captain.”

“All the better. For the sake of our getting home, could you encourage him a little?”

Uhura said slowly, “I wouldn’t pull a mean trick like that on *our* Chekov. And this one gives me the crawls. But—of course, Captain, if you wish.”

“Good girl. Scotty, Uhura can create a diversion on the bridge, which will draw Sulu’s attention, I think, at your signal. Now, everyone back to posts, before somebody cottons to the fact that this looks like a council of war.”

Uhura slipped out silently. Kirk, too, was about to go, when Spock entered the briefing room by another door, and saluted.

“Captain, a word with you, if I may.”

“Of course.”

"I should regret your death."

Kirk raised his eyebrows. "Very kind of you, Mr. Spock."

"Kindness is not involved. As you know, I do not desire the captaincy. I much prefer my scientific duties—and I am frankly content to be a lesser target."

"Quite logical, as always, Mr. Spock."

"Therefore I am moved to inquire if you intend to persist in your unusual course of action regarding the Halkans."

"My orders stand."

"I presume you have a plan. I have found you to be an excellent officer. Our missions together have been successful ones."

"I remember," Kirk said. "Perhaps better than you do."

"I never forget anything."

"I remember that too. Then you will also remember the illogic of waste, Mr. Spock. Is it logical to destroy potential workers—equipment—valuable installations—without making every effort to put them on a useful basis? Surely the Empire can afford a little patience."

"Logically, we must maintain the terror," Spock said. "Otherwise the Empire will develop soft spots, and the rot will spread."

"The Halkans made the same point. Is history with us? Conquest is easy—control is not."

"History seldom repeats itself," Spock said, frowning. "Yet I concede that no regime such as ours has ever survived the eventual fury of its victims. The question is, has our power become so vast, quantitatively, as to make a *qualitative* change in that situation? Space, as you say, is against us; its sheer vastness makes communication difficult, let alone control—I did not know you were a philosopher, Captain. We have never talked this way before."

"Perhaps overdue, Mr. Spock."

"That is more than possible. I do not judge Commander Moreau to be much of a thinker."

There was quite a long silence, during which Kirk wondered who in blazes Commander Moreau was. Most likely, the man who *was* gunning for the Captain's job.

"Sir," Spock said finally, "I have received a private

message from Starfleet Command. I am committing a serious breach of regulations by informing you of its contents. But other considerations supervene. Briefly, I have been instructed to wait until planet dawn over principal target, to permit you to complete our mission. Your delaying maneuver was of course reported to Starfleet Command by Mr. Sulu."

"And if I don't?"

"In that event," Spock said, his voice somehow both harsh and reluctant at the same time, "I am ordered to have you killed, and proceed against the Halkans, as the new Captain of the *Enterprise*. I shall of course remove Moreau too, making it appear that he was killed by *your* agents."

"Logical," Kirk said bitterly. "But thank you for the warning, Mr. Spock."

"I regret the situation. I shall remain in my quarters throughout the night—in case you should wish to contact me privately."

"Thank you again. But there will be no change."

"Sir—under the circumstances—may I express the greatest curiosity concerning your motives?"

"I'm almost tempted to tell you, Mr. Spock. But you'll understand in time. Carry on."

When he left, Kirk sat down at the table. He knew he should be back on the bridge, carrying on the masquerade. But even with Spock's odd sort of cooperation, even supposing Scotty could get them back to their own universe, that would leave the biggest problem unsolved: the fate of the Halkans in this alternate universe. No matter what happened to Kirk, McCoy, Scott and Uhura, the Halkans seemed to be destined for slaughter. And he could think of no way to prevent it.

Then the communicator beeped. "Kirk here."

"Captain, this is Scotty. I've got the whole thing rigged, with McCoy's help. I'm thinking of making him assistant engineer. But in checking it out with the computer, I discovered somethin' vurra worrisome. The two-way matter transmission affected local field density between the two universes—and it's increasing. We've got to move fast. We have half an hour at most. If we miss, we couldn't push back through for a century."

"What's the procedure, Scotty?"

"We're about ready to bridge power from the warp engines to the beams. You've got to go to the main controls and free the board, so we can lock in. Give us ten clock minutes, then you and Lieutenant Uhura create your diversion, and run like Martian scopolamanders for the Transporter Room."

"Right. Count down on the time. Five . . . four . . . three . . . two . . . one . . . *hack.*"

"Got you. Good luck, Captain."

No time now to worry about the Halkans; but Kirk worried, nonetheless. On the bridge, Sulu looked speculatively, coldly, at Kirk as Kirk resumed the Captain's chair.

"Orders, Captain?"

"Prepare to lock on to Target A. We fire at planet dawn."

Sulu smiled coldly. "I am glad to see that you have come to your senses. All this computer activity obviously has produced no alternative answer, except to make me wonder if you had gone soft. And while Mr. Spock would no doubt make an excellent captain, you were once clearly the better one. I hope you will continue to be."

Kirk was so sick at the order he had had to give that he did not bother to disguise his disgust. "You don't miss much, do you, Mr. Sulu."

"A good Security Officer misses nothing. Otherwise he would deserve to go to the Agony Booth."

Well, Kirk thought grimly, you may yet, Mr. Pseudo-Sulu. Obviously you don't know what that computer activity really was about.

The Halkan planet's image was showing on Uhura's viewscreen. Chekov was watching her, with very much the same lubricious expression as before. She looked up at the image, and then, as if to herself, said, "Just once, I'd like to think about something besides death."

Sulu shot one contemptuous glance at her and went back to watching the master board. When Scott made his power switch from the warp engines to the transporters, he would catch it.

Uhura looked away from the screen toward Chekov.

Her glance was steady for a moment, and then she looked down. Her veiled eyes suggested that she just might be persuaded to change her mind.

The navigator grinned, leaned back in his seat. His arm went out and around toward Uhura's waist.

Sulu paid no attention. And there was one minute left.
Slap!

Sulu looked up. Uhura was standing, in furious indignation. She fell back, one, two, three calculated steps toward Sulu's board. Chekov, astonishment changing to rage, was standing too.

But Sulu seemed to be no more than amused. "As you were, Chekov."

Chekov was not ready to be as he was. He seemed almost ready to attack Uhura. Kirk saw an opening and jumped in.

"Is this the kind of horseplay that goes on when I'm not on the bridge? And at moments as critical as this? Mr. Chekov, you are on report; I'll tend to you later. Lieutenant Uhura, you provoked this; proceed immediately to the Booth. Mr. Sulu, take Lieutenant Uhura's post."

"Sir," Sulu said. "Why are you also leaving?" The 'sir' was silkily insulting.

"I am going to explain personally to Lieutenant Uhura why she is in the Booth. I'll return shortly; in the meantime, follow standard procedure."

He had caught the streak of sadism and lechery in these loathsome counterparts of his crew. Every man on the bridge grinned slyly and licked his lips.

Then Kirk and Uhura were out, and running for the Transporter Room.

Spock and two crewmen were waiting for them there, with drawn phasers.

"Well, Mr. Spock? Have you decided to kill me now, even though I am following my orders?"

"No, Captain. But strange things have occurred since the return of your landing party—including some remarkable calls upon the computer, which I find sealed against me. Nothing in the computer should be sealed against the First Officer. And you are preparing to use an enormous surge of power in the transporter. That could be most

dangerous. I must ask you: where do you think you are going, Captain—you and your three conspirators?"

"Home," Kirk said.

"To the alternate universe?"

"You understand *that*?"

"Yes, Captain. And I concur. I will ask you only to gun me down with a stun charge before you leave. My henchmen here will support any story I tell thereafter."

McCoy said, "Mr. Spock, in my universe you and I often disagreed, and in this universe I hated you. But you seem to be a man of integrity in both universes."

"It is only logical," Spock said. "You must return to your universe, so that I can have *my* Captain back. I will operate the transporter. You have two minutes and twenty seconds left."

"Mr. Spock," Kirk said. "I will shave that time as close as possible. I want to ask you this: How long do you think it will be before the Halkans' prediction of galactic revolt is realized?"

Spock blinked, as if the sudden change of subject had taken him unawares. "I would estimate—approximately two hundred and forty years."

"And what will be the inevitable outcome?"

"The Empire will be overthrown, of course. A sort of federation may replace it, if the period of interdestruction is not too devastating."

"Mr. Spock. Consider the illogic of waste. Waste of lives, resources, potentials, time. It is not logical of you to give your vast talents to an empire which you know is doomed."

"You have one minute and twenty-three seconds."

"When change is both predictable and beneficial, why do you resist it?"

"Suicide is also illogical. One man cannot summon the future."

Kirk closed on this man, who looked and acted so much like his First Officer, and yet had so little of the real Spock's hidden humanity in him. "Mr. Spock, one man can change the present. *Be* the Captain of this *Enterprise*, whether you want the job or not. Find a logical reason for sparing the Halkans, and making it stick. Push where it gives. You can defend yourself better than any man in the

fleet, if you are anything like *my* First Officer, and I think you are. In every revolution, there's one man with a vision. Which will it be? Past or future? Tyranny, or the right to hope, trust, love? Even here, Spock, you cannot be totally without the decency you've shown on the—the other side. Use it, make it work!"

"You must go," Spock said. "But my Captain never said any such words to me. I will remember them. I can promise nothing else, though I will save the Halkans if I can. Now, quickly! You have eighteen seconds left! Shoot! And goodbye, Jim Kirk."

Kirk stepped onto the transporter platform with the others. He raised the phaser, set to "stun," but it was very hard to pull the trigger all the same.

Kirk relaxed in his chair, soaking in normality. Nearby, Uhura was giving poor Chekov a look that dripped icicles. Kirk himself still felt a little uncomfortable to find Sulu—the 'real' Sulu—at his elbow.

McCoy, however, evidently had not found it at all hard to readjust; his vast knowledge of psychology under stress also enabled him to understand himself. He said enthusiastically to Spock, "When I came out of the beams, Spocko boy, I was so pleased to see you that I almost kissed you. Luckily, revulsion at the very notion set in two seconds later."

"I am grateful that it did," Spock said.

"Mr. Spock," Kirk said, "Scotty tells me that had you not detected our counterparts immediately, restrained and questioned them, duplicated our calculations, and above all had them shoved into the transporter chamber all ready to make the exchange at the one precise moment, we'd have been stranded forever. I salute you; you have come through for the umpteenth time. But—how did you do it?"

"Sir," Spock said, "you know me as well as any man. But there are elements in my own heart that I do not show very readily. I had to call on them."

"Don't explain if you don't want to. But it would be useful to know how you managed it."

Spock raised his head and looked at some spot faraway in space.

"A civilized man," he said at last, "can easily play the part of a barbarian, as you all did in the other universe. He has only to look into his own soul for the remnants of the savage ancestors from which he sprang, and then—revert. But your counterparts, when we beamed them aboard, were savages to begin with—and had no core of civilization or humanity to which they could revert. The contrast was rather striking."

McCoy said, "Spock, could *you* have played the savage, if you'd been switched along with the rest of us?"

Very seriously, Spock said, "Dr. McCoy, I *am* a savage. Both here, and there. But some day, I hope to outgrow it."

FRIDAY'S CHILD

(D. C. Fontana)

Monday's child is fair of face.
Tuesday's child is full of grace.
Wednesday's child is loving and giving.
Thursday's child works hard for a living.
Friday's child is full of woe.
But the child that is born on the Sabbath Day
Is brave and bonny and good and gay.
(*Harper's Weekly*, 1887)

Even had Kirk not already known that Teer Akaar was High Chief of the ten tribes of Ceres, it would have been plain from the moment that he, Spock and McCoy materialized before the encampment that the Akaars were persons of consequence. Before each of the tents—which were on the edge of a brushy area—stood a pole bearing a family banner, and each of these was surmounted by another flag emblazoned with Akaar's tribal emblem, a flight of abstract birds.

A few tribesmen and women, wearing vividly colored robes cut in simple tunic style, stared in astonishment as the three from the *Enterprise* shimmered into existence out of nothing, and then silently ducked away into their own tents as another man stepped into view from the largest pavilion. This man's tunic was plain black, with the distinctive bird design embroidered on the shoulder. He seemed to be about forty-five, reed slim, tough as a leather quilt. Looking straight at Kirk, he put his right fist over his heart and then extended the hand out before him,

palm up. The gesture was easy to read: *My heart and all that I own are open to you.*

"I am Maab, of the House of Akaar," he said. "Our tents are honored."

"You honor us," Kirk said. Thinking fast, he made a half-bow with both hands out before him, palms up, and then drew the hands to his chest. *Your hospitality is accepted with open heart.* It might not have been the right answer, but it seemed to do.

"The High Chief awaits your coming," Maab said, gesturing toward the tent and then leading the way. They an increase in the number of 'incidents' in the past month. friendly toward the Federation, but Klingon ships had been reported in this sector, and though technically the Federation and the Empire were at peace, there had been an increase in the number of incidents in the past month. It was vital that the mission to Ceres not become an incident.

There were two men, as well as a woman, inside the tent, but Maab's full, deep bow of total subservience instantly made evident which man was Teer Akaar, a tall, broad-shouldered man in his late fifties, in a white robe with black birds. The ritual gestures were exchanged, and introductions made all around. Maab, it developed, was Teer Akaar's brother. The tall man in his late teens was Raal, the chief's son; and the kneeling young woman, who was quite lovely, was the chief's wife Eleen ("My second wife, and an honor to my house"). As Raal helped her to rise, it became clear that she was pregnant.

"Come," Akaar said, gesturing toward a table so low that it almost scraped the carpets. "I wish to hear your words about the rocks of the mountains."

Kirk motioned to Spock, who set upon the table several pieces of raw stone and the many-paged, pre-prepared formal agreement. They all sat down on cushions, except the woman, who retired to a curtained-off area, and Raal, who quietly left through the front entrance. It was getting dark outside.

"A geological survey," Kirk said, "has revealed that your world has valuable deposits of a mineral called topaline. I have been authorized to negotiate for Federation mining rights for this mineral."

"My people are herders and tradesmen, Captain," Akaar said. "We do not understand how a rock may be of value."

"You make your weapons of iron. You often trade in gold and silver."

"Iron has long been known to our weapons makers. Gold and silver came with Federation trade ships—they have little meaning to us. But they are metal, not rock such as this." He nudged the chunk of topaline ore.

"Chief Akaar, I trust you will bear with me for a long explanation. The Federation has hundreds of colonies which are mining operations, and research projects, on planets and asteroids that normally could not maintain our life forms. As your own legends hint, you yourselves are descendants of an Earth colony. Those colonists named your planet after an asteroid in Earth's own solar system, a five-hundred-mile ball of rock that was the first asteroid to be colonized—though it hasn't even an atmosphere."

"Then how is this done?" Akaar said.

"We create artificial domes under which we maintain air we can breathe," Spock said. "Topaline contains minute quantities of a metal which is essential to such life-support systems. Not only is it rare, but it must be constantly replaced."

"Why?" Maab said. "Does it rust, or wear out?"

Spock was obviously starting to explain, but Kirk held up his hand. These people had utterly forgotten the technology which had brought them to this planet, centuries ago. Nothing short of a cram course in physics would make clear to them the concept of radioactive half-life.

"Something like that," Kirk said. "And the fact that there is so little of it even in topaline means that the ore has to be transported in bulk to special refining plants."

"Then clearly it is of enormous value," Maab said. "What then do you offer for it?"

"An honest price," Kirk said, "in whatever medium of exchange you favor."

Maab leaned forward. Suddenly, he looked angry. "You Earthmen," he said harshly, "come hiding your lies behind papers of promise. Then you steal . . ."

Akaar slammed a hand flat on the table top. "Maab!"

"They have cheated others," Maab said, staring hard at his brother. "We have heard. They have no honor . . ."

"You will be silent!"

"Nay, I will not. We are not of one mind on this. There are many who do not wish this treaty."

"Leave us. You cannot speak for the tribes."

Maab arose. "I will leave. But many are not as gullible as our High Chief. We will be heard."

He turned and strode out furiously, leaving behind a thick, heavy silence. Finally, Akaar stirred uncomfortably and said, "My brother dishonors me. Yet it may be said that your history gives him some reason to distrust you."

"Our ancient history, perhaps," Kirk said. "And perhaps dimly and inaccurately recalled."

"Certainly you have done us no wrong. But Maab has heard of other places and other peoples. He uses these to speak against you."

"How has he heard such stories?"

"By truth, I do not know," Akaar said. "Earth traders, perhaps. A few come for the wool of our *zakdirs*."

"Then these are mere rumors, at best," Kirk said. "Our treaties are faithfully upheld."

"I take your word, Captain. I understand the things in this paper, and I will give it to the council of tribes this night. In the meantime, I bid you hang your weapons in my tent while you eat, and then rejoin us."

Kirk had known this was coming, for Spock had earlier made a most thorough study of the culture. But there was nothing that could be done about it. At a clap of Akaar's hands, a tribesman appeared, and the three men from the *Enterprise* handed over their phasers to him, and also their communicators, for to these herdsmen any machine seemed likely to be a weapon—especially if its custody was refused.

"I accept the guardianship of these weapons," Akaar said with singsong formality, "as an earnest of long peace between us. Keel, you will show these visitors to their tent, and have food brought them."

The meal was strange, but sumptuous, and served by a most scantily-clad Cerean girl of whom it was impossible

not to be aware. Trying not to look pointedly the other way, McCoy said, "But I thought topaline deposits on Altimara would be sufficient for another two years."

"Altimara was a disappointment," Kirk said. "The two most promising veins petered out. They'll be able to maintain full supply for all colonies for six months. By then, the mining project here has to be in full operation."

"No reserves?"

Spock said, "There is a convoy of freighters on its way now from refineries on Lorigan to the colonies in this quadrant. But it will be the last; Lorigan has been shut down. Exhausted."

"Umph," McCoy said. "These endless mineralogical assignments are dull work. And Jim, this argument between Akaar and Maab—I don't like the feel of it."

"Nor I. But it's not our quarrel. We have to abide by the Council's ruling. Clearly Maab will have a strong voice in it. If he wins, well, maybe he has a price of his own."

"You'd deal with him?" McCoy said.

"I'm authorized to deal with whoever can give this planet's mining rights to the Federation," Kirk said quietly. "I am *not* authorized to take sides in any local struggle for power, Bones."

"In that connection," Spock said, picking up a slice of some pink fruit and eyeing it as if it were an unusually uninteresting insect, "I found it odd to see that two guards were placed in front of the High Chief's tent as soon as Keel led us away from it. In addition to the usual swords and knives, these carried the boomerang-like instrument these people call the *klugat*. Such an arsenal makes me wonder whether the guards were posted to defend Teer Akaar from attack—or from escaping."

Outside the tent there was a sudden shout, then another, and then the unmistakable clash of metal on metal.

"I think we're about to find out," Kirk said, springing up. All three dashed for the entrance.

They were met outside by three tribesmen, whose swords were instantly at their throats. The encampment was a bedlam. Akaar was in the center of a swirl of combat, defending himself like a hawk at bay. He was not alone, but his party was clearly outnumbered. His son was

already dead. In the light of the campfire, Kirk could see that Maab was directing the attackers, and also prominent among them was Keel.

A *klugat* struck Akaar. He staggered, wounded in the side, blood flooding the side of his tunic. He had only two defenders left.

"Jim! We can't just . . ."

"Stand fast, Bones," Kirk said in an iron voice.

Akaar tried for his brother with one last thrust of his sword. Maab sidestepped it easily, and Akaar fell. His two last defenders, though apparently not seriously hurt, fell with him, kneeling before Maab in servile supplication.

The guards around Kirk's party prodded them forward. Maab waved Keel and another tribesman into what had been Akaar's pavilion. Then he smiled slightly at Kirk.

"You were wise not to try to interfere, Captain. This is none of your concern."

"We would have interfered if we could. We don't approve of murder."

"There has been no murder," Maab said stiffly. "We gave my brother an honorable death. This is revolution."

"I'm not interested in what you call it. However, you are not the man into whose custody we gave our equipment. I want it returned."

Maab's answer was predictable, but he did not have to give it, for at this moment Eleen stumbled out of the tent, herded at sword point by Keel and his fellow assassin. She was already frightened, but her fright became terror as she saw Akaar's body. Maab tripped her and simultaneously shoved her with the flat of his sword, so that she fell partly into the still red ashes of the campfire.

She screamed, half with pain and half with the doom of Maab's sword raised above her. Moving like lightning, Kirk slammed Maab aside, at the same time twisting his wrist in one of the very few directions the human wrist is not built to go; the sword fell. McCoy, only half a step behind, knelt beside Eleen; and with a smooth gesture, Spock scooped up the fallen sword.

Vulcans are tightly rational creatures, but in background they are a warrior race. Spock with a sword in his hand was a sight to give even a Cerean pause. They closed in with exaggerated caution.

And then, as McCoy lifted Eleen gently to examine her burned arm, all the Cereans gasped—and the woman herself, with an expression of loathing impossible to misinterpret, jerked herself free of the doctor's support.

"What's the matter with you, woman?" McCoy said sharply. "None of that, now. I'm only trying to help."

"And you have brought death upon yourself," Maab said slowly. "I would have let you go. But now . . ."

"You talk nonsense," Kirk said. "Killing an armed man who has a chance to defend himself is one thing. Murdering a defenseless woman is something else. She can't hurt you. You have the Chieftanship—you don't need her life."

"It is you who talk nonsense. Raal is dead, but this child that is to come is also of Akaar and still lives. It too must die before I may become chief—cleanly, by the sword. Moreover, Captain, by our law, only a husband may lay hands on his wife; for any other man, the penalty is death. I have not touched Eleen, nor would I have; but this your officer . . ."

"We're not governed by your law. Any charges against us will have to be brought before Starfleet Command, which will weigh them on their merits, one set of laws against the other."

"We know who would lose that judgment," Maab said. "On our world, our laws, and only our laws, prevail."

"Our ship will send a landing party to investigate our silence," Spock said, leveling the captured sword at the bridge of Maab's nose.

Maab did not flinch. "I think not," he said, with an odd, lopsided smile. "I think they will be too busy."

Kirk and Spock shot a swift glance at each other. Each knew precisely what the other was thinking. With that single, irresistible, and absolutely unnecessary brag, Maab had let slip the fact that there was more to this situation than simple tribal politics—a *lot* more.

Now had to come the hardest game of all: waiting in patience, even to the verge of death, to find out what it was.

In the guest tent, which was now their jail, Kirk, Spock and McCoy sat around the table where once they had

been fed so sumptuously. Now two assassins were on guard inside the tent entrance. Eleen sat as far away from them all as she could, a light cloak over her tunic, but even more markedly huddled behind a wall of self-imposed isolation. Her arm had still not been tended; she had refused, and now she was refusing also to show any pain.

McCoy leaned his elbows on the table and looked unhappily at his colleagues. In a deliberate hash of English, Vulcan, Old High Martian, medical Latin and Greek, and Fortran—the language used to program very simple-minded computers—he said, “Maab still claims he would have let us go if it hadn’t been for my laying hands on that poor girl. But now, apparently, we’re sunk. Why do you suppose Scotty hasn’t sent down a landing party?”

“By my calculation,” Spock said, “it is an hour past the longest time Mr. Scott would wait before taking action. No other conclusion is possible but that he has become engaged in some other duty which he considers more important, as Maab hinted.”

Since the First Officer, picking up McCoy’s clue, put out several words of this speech in the operative terms of the calculus of statement, he had to repeat it with these parts translated into Vegan before Kirk or McCoy could be sure of it; but once understood, there was no arguing it.

Kirk eyed everyone in the room with slow calculation. Then he said, slowly and in Cerean, “Bones—I think you ought to do what you started out to do before. That girl’s burned arm is still untended.”

The guards stiffened.

“Might as well,” McCoy said, also in Cerean. “They can only kill me once for touching her, after all.”

“Mr. Spock, what is your advice?”

“I believe, Captain, that the risk is defensible.”

Good; they understood each other. McCoy stood up. As his shadow fell across the girl, she looked up, and then pulled herself together. McCoy kneeled beside her.

“Your arm,” he said, very gently.

“You will not touch me!”

The guards took a step forward. McCoy reached out. Eleen promptly turned into a scratching, biting wildcat.

Somehow or other, it had occurred to none of them, in their swift and necessarily cryptic plotting, that she would also squeal. McCoy clamped a hand down hard over her mouth.

It was this, evidently, that made up the guards' minds. They lunged away from the entrance toward the struggle. Their backs were toward Kirk and Spock for perhaps three seconds. No more than three seconds later, they were decked.

While Spock disarmed the unconscious men, Kirk leaned over the girl, whom McCoy was still holding silent with grim difficulty.

"Listen, Eleen," Kirk said. "We're leaving. We can leave you behind, if that's what you want. Or you can cooperate and come with us. Maybe, just maybe, we can get you safely to our ship. We offer you the choice. Will you come with us?"

Cautiously, McCoy removed his hand from her mouth, ready to clamp it back down at the slightest intake of breath for a scream. But the girl only glared. At last she said, "I am dishonored. But I wish to live. I will come."

McCoy helped her up by the uninjured arm. She pulled away from him and stood immobile, not deigning to speak further, and waited while Spock distributed the guards' weapons to Kirk and McCoy, retaining a *klugat* for himself.

"Now," Kirk said, "let's get those phasers and communicators back."

This was not as easy in the doing as in the saying. Outside, the tribesmen were seated around the rebuilt campfire in an open square, the open end of which was occupied solely by Maab, with Keel standing in the background. Kirk and Spock approached the back of Akaar's tent stealthily, slit the fabric, and slipped inside.

While they searched, they heard Maab's voice: ". . . Only the woman lives now. All know her. And it is not only the child that dooms her."

A general rumble of agreement.

Kirk threw back a carpet over a chest. There were the belts with the communicators still on them, but the phasers were gone. Somebody in this crowd, then, knew

which was which—another oddity. He and Spock had just begun to look further when there was a mutter of movement and conversation outside, and a second later McCoy's head popped through the slit in the tent fabric.

"Jim," he whispered urgently. "The Council meeting's over. They're going to find out we're gone . . ."

As if in confirmation, there was a shout of alarm in the near distance.

The three men and Eleen stumbled through the scrub until the light from the fire and the torches was the dimmest possible glow in the distance before Kirk chanced calling a halt. Kneeling and motioning the others to cover—what there was of it in this brush—he snapped open his communicator. "Kirk to *Enterprise* . . . Kirk to *Enterprise* . . . Come in, Scotty . . . Kirk to *Enterprise* . . ."

There was no answer. Had the device been sabotaged? Kirk held out his hand for Spock's communicator, but that produced no better results.

"They are operative," said the First Officer. "It would appear that the *Enterprise* is simply out of range."

"Out of range?" McCoy said. "Where would they go?"

"The answer to that would involve a great deal of useless speculation on our part, Doctor, since we have no facts at hand. A better question is, what do we do until the ship returns?"

"No place can hide you from the *makeen*," the woman said abruptly.

"What are they?" Kirk said. "Or it?"

"There are legends," Spock said, "of a guild of assassins among the Cerean tribes—a secret society, outside the law."

"They are not outside the law," Eleen said. "They are a part of our society. Certain deaths are always—necessary."

"Criminals like us?" Kirk said. "And 'traitors' like your husband? And you?"

"Not me," Eleen said. Her voice was angry, harsh, bitter. "It is because I bear Akaar's child. I did not want it. I would kill it myself, if that would save me."

McCoy took her by the wrist, and his own voice was just as angry. "You listen to me, Missy. You're not killing

anything while I'm here to prevent it. We intend to keep both you *and* your baby alive, whether you want it or not. Hear me?"

She twisted herself free, her face contorted with anger and loathing. "You are heard. And I come with you because you will give me a few more hours to live. But in the end you will not escape the *makeen*."

"Maybe not," Kirk said. "But we sure in blazes are going to try."

By the first wash of daybreak there were ample signs that they were being followed. Kirk was almost sorry to see the intimations of dawn, for at night he had at least been able to guess how far ahead they were of their pursuers by the distant sparks of torches.

The light found them in rocky country, the foothills of a mountain range. It was chill and desolate, even in the pale gold of early sunlight. The trail they were following seemed to wander aimlessly; Kirk could only hope that this was because it was following the contours of the land, rather than being simply an animal trail.

He and Spock led the way, with Eleen close behind. As bulky as her physical condition made her, she was surprisingly fresh and strong; McCoy, puffing along behind her, looked more the worse for wear than she did.

But the day grew hotter, the slopes steeper, the footing strewn with slippery shale and broken rock. At last Eleen stumbled and would have fallen had McCoy not caught her. She still had the energy to break free of him, however.

"Stay here with her and let her rest, Bones," Kirk said. "We're going to look around. While you're waiting, treat that arm—by force, if necessary."

He moved off with Spock. Shortly, they found the trail entering the narrow mouth of a steep defile. The slopes were shale-strewn and very high.

"Nice place to get trapped in," Kirk said.

"It has advantages as well, Captain. A defensible entrance, and walls that provide difficult access for attackers."

"That may be. At least there also seems to be a way

out. If we could block this entrance, that would hold them up; they'd have to go around, over the hills."

Spock's eyebrows went up. He looked about speculatively. "The entrance is narrow enough, and there seems to be enough loose rock."

"What do you have in mind?"

"Do you remember our discussion of the kinds of weapons that might be made with a communicator in an emergency? In this instance, I think the device I called a 'sound bomb' might be in order." Kirk promptly handed Spock his communicator, but the First Officer shook his head. "Captain, it's only a chance. I would have to phase *two* communicator signals into exact synchronization. We only have three. The odds . . ."

"I'm not interested in the exact odds—only in lowering them. I'll go get McCoy's communicator."

He went back. He found Eelen's arm bandaged. He shook hands with himself at McCoy with approval, but McCoy was frowning.

"Jim, she says the baby isn't due until next week, but as far as I can tell with the few instruments I have, it's due *now*."

"Oh, brrrotherrr. Well, you've doubtless delivered plenty of babies."

"Sure. But the Cereans have been away from Earth a long time, and they've developed some differences from the basic humanoid stock—a process called 'genetic drift' that's common in small, inbred populations. And if surgical intervention's necessary . . ."

"We may not live long enough to worry about it. Give me your communicator, Bones, and come along. We're planning a surprise."

Spock worked quickly, explaining to McCoy as he went along. "I have placed these so the sound beams they put out will meet and focus on a weak point, a potential slide area. The phased beams should set up a vibration in the rocks, *beneath* the loose material. There the rock is cohesive enough so that the vibration should build to the equivalent of explosive force."

"And the whole thing," Kirk said, "will end up in Maab's lap. We hope."

"Theoretically, if the loose rock does not slide away too soon and allow the sound energy to escape as heat. In either event it will destroy the communicators."

Kirk glanced back. Tiny figures were on the horizon. Their pace obviously had picked up. These tribesmen were like bloodhounds, and the track was fresh.

"Let's go." Kirk and Spock twisted the dials of the two communicators. The dull black little instruments each began to emit a hum which rose quickly in pitch to an earsplitting screech. Hastily, the party ran up the trail into the defile.

A glance back showed that their harriers were also running. The sound had located their quarry for them.

The rising sounds merged into one intolerable note. Eleen clutched at her head, then at her belly. McCoy grabbed her around the waist, kept her moving.

The screaming note was joined by a groaning rumble of rock shaking free of its moorings. Suddenly, the screaming wail was gone, leaving a silence which only seemed underlined by the moan of protesting rock.

Then came the explosion, the confined energy bursting out of the cliffside as though an actual charge had been planted there. The rocks crumbled and fell apart, their grumbling rising to a thunder as the shale and dirt smashed down the slope.

Maab, Keel and their party were almost in the defile. They looked up as the rock slide bore down on them. After a split second of frozen terror, they wheeled and scattered like a flight of pigeons. But some of them were caught, all the same.

And in the end, the entrance to the defile was gone. Instead, there was only a massive heap of shale, boulders and dirt.

"Very nice, Mr. Spock," Kirk said, when he could hear again. "Now, we'd better push on. There's still the problem of food and water . . ."

"Not a chance, Jim," McCoy said. "We might carry Eleen—but not very far. She's started labor."

Since they had no choice, they did carry her out the other end of the defile; they did not want the *makeens* to

return the favor by dropping rocks on them from above. At the exit, the country opened out a little, and off to the right some green shrub growth and contorted young trees indicated the possible presence of water.

Kirk looked up the slopes. A peculiar formation caught his eye: several huge boulders tumbled together, with a narrow, dark opening just visible between them. Kirk pointed.

"We might take shelter under those rocks. It's probably the best we can do on such short notice. Spock, stay here while we take her up and stand guard."

The First Officer nodded, and unhooking the *klugat* he had taken from the guard, twirled it experimentally.

The hole proved to be a genuine cave. The entrance was low, but inside the roof was high enough to permit them to stand erect. It was far from spacious, however. The walls were rough and pitted, and the floor sloped. Eleen lowered her bulky body and sat huddled in pain.

"Even eighteenth-century surgeons had more to work with than this," McCoy said, "but I guess beggars can't be choosers."

"We'll be outside if you need help."

"Don't make any rash offers."

Kirk went outside to find Spock experimenting with the *klugat*. "A most unusual weapon," the First Officer said. "Observe that the cutting edge is along the *inside*. If you throw it with a snap of the wrist, thus . . ."

The whirling knife spun in flight, its silver blades flashing. It sliced into a low bush and nearly cut it free of the ground before becoming entangled.

"And if you miss, it comes back to the owner," Spock said, retrieving the weapon. "A nice instance of economy."

"We'll need the economy. We've only got two. I'm more interested in those saplings. They look resilient. We might make bows and arrows—if we only had something to use for bowstrings."

"Hmm," Spock said. "A very pretty problem. I see nothing that would serve. But Captain, I suggest that an even more primitive weapon might serve our purposes: a throwing-stick."

"What in blazes is that?"

"It consists of a grooved handle with a cupped end. The arrow is fitted into the groove with the arrowhead toward the hand and the feathered end in the cup. You swing the throwing-stick overhand, and the arrow leaves it with considerable force, on the lever principle."

"There's plenty of flint here for arrowheads," Kirk said thoughtfully. "But we have nothing to use for feathers."

"True. However, if we notch the end of the arrow and tie on a length of rag, that may afford some stabilization, on the principle of a kite's tail. And may I point out, Captain, that the only missile weapon possessed by the Cereans is this *klugat*, which has a range limit built into it by the very fact that it is designed to return to the thrower. Our arrows will fly somewhat farther—and will, of course, be quite unfamiliar to the Cereans. These advantages are small, but they may be all we have."

"You're right, Mr. Spock. Let's get to work."

As they climbed toward the cave, a cry of pain came from it.

They were practicing with the throwing-sticks when McCoy at last appeared at the cave entrance, mopping his hands. "Come on in," he said.

Eleen lay in a shadowed corner. Her light cloak was her only bed; the lower half of her long tunic had been torn off to provide a blanket for the small bundle lying beside her. She propped herself up as the men entered, but made no protest as Kirk and Spock peered down at the bundle.

Tiny fists that resembled minute starfish wriggled aimlessly. The baby yawned into Kirk's face, seeming to suggest that the whole thing had been a snap, and all McCoy's worries had been needless.

"It seems a rather average specimen on the whole," Spock said.

"You think so, Spock?" McCoy said tiredly. "Well, look again. That is the High Chief of the ten tribes of Ceres."

He picked up the baby and put it in its mother's arms. The woman took it, passively, but she said, "I do not want it."

"He's your son," Kirk said.

"I did not wish it. It was good to become wife to

Akaar. He was High Chief and had wealth. I thought because he was old and already had a son . . .”

“I don't care why you married Teer Akaar,” Kirk interrupted harshly. “You did, and you bore his son, who is now the High Chief. You're bound by honor and position to care for him as long as you live. That's your tradition as well as ours, and I'll enforce it if I have to. Bones, how soon can she travel?”

“All these Cereans seem to have remarkable stamina, and I'd say this one is strong as an ox, even now. We might be able to move as soon as tomorrow.”

“If so,” Spock said, “I suggest that we climb the ridge behind us when we leave, and move cross-country. It will be difficult, but I believe safer.”

Kirk thought about this. Maab might well have figured that they would follow the defile all the way, because of the woman. Or he might even already be moving in on them from the other end.

“Even odds,” he said “We'll try it. But first, let's get some sleep. McCoy, you need the rest most; you'll stand last guard. I'll take the first.”

He awoke to hear McCoy's voice calling his name and feeling his shoulder being shaken. As he sat up, McCoy was already leaving his side to rouse the sleeping Spock.

“Wake up, Spock. Jim, we're in more trouble. My, uh, patient has taken the child and gone.”

“She got past *you*?” Kirk said.

“She struck me from behind with a rock. We've got to have more respect for the medical profession around here.”

“How long has she been gone?”

“By the sun, I was out no more than half an hour. Her trail leads toward the defile exit. If Maab's men catch her . . .”

“I suggest,” Spock said, “that henceforth we leave the matter to tribal justice, and devote ourselves to our own survival.”

“Why, you ice-hearted, unfeeling . . .”

“The lady is *not* honorable, or charitable, or cooperative, or of much total worth,” Spock said. “Even you can see that, Doctor.”

“Yes? And what about the baby?”

“You both have a point,” Kirk said. “Granted that the lady has few shining virtues. But the baby has done nothing but come into this world. I’d like to see him get a chance to grow up in it. Let’s get going.”

They moved cautiously along the defile, keeping as high up on the slopes as the footing would allow. At the exit, they came upon an astonishing scene.

The assassins, or all that had survived the rock slide, were all there, and so was Eleen. Most of the men were staring at her in amazement, and small wonder, for she was holding out the child to Maab.

“I have the child, Maab,” she said, her voice distant but clear. “He is yours. Do as you will.”

Keel and Maab looked at each other. At last Maab said, “Why?”

“I claim nothing but my life. Take the child, Maab—but let me go free. I care not for *him*.”

Finally Maab nodded. When he spoke, his voice was sarcastic. “It is much like you, Eleen. Come with us.”

At this point, Kirk rose from cover and swung the throwing-stick, then fell flat again in the brush. No one saw him. The arrow cut through the air straight at Maab, its rag tail fluttering, and at the last minute veering and hitting another man in the leg. Evidently feathers were much better for arrows than tails were. The struck man fell, with a cry as much of surprise as of pain.

Everyone turned toward him. Spock popped up from behind a rock and threw, then also vanished. The arrow winged Keel; a red stain began to spread on his sleeve.

McCoy now appeared suddenly on the trail, just behind Eleen. Grabbing her from behind, he dragged her screaming to cover. The assassins were now beginning to realize what had happened, and made an abortive move after McCoy, but a scatter of arrows from Kirk and Spock threw them into confusion. The volume of fire was, tactically, not nearly great enough to produce such an effect; evidently Spock’s guess about the effect on morale of the unfamiliarity of the weapons had been correct.

“Bones, get out of there!” Kirk shouted. “General retreat!”

He ducked as Keel threw a *klugat* at him. The vicious scything blades slashed the air whisperingly over his head. Below, McCoy, dragging Eleen, made his way up the slope from cover to cover. Kirk slipped to another rock, rose, and threw again, and this time was rewarded with a full-throated scream. He was getting the hang of the thing.

They moved backward slowly, covering for Eleen, hampered by the baby. As they went, Spock picked up the *klugat* Keel had thrown, which had been blocked from boomeranging by a boulder. Oddly, the *makeen* were no longer following.

Back inside the more defensible defile walls, the *Enterprise* men paused to assess the situation. They were nicely trapped—and the arrows were running out.

"What did you think you were going to do?" McCoy said, glaring at Eleen.

"You heard," she said coldly. "I would trade my life. Maab will let me go—to get the child."

"Oh? Aren't you overlooking something? We were close enough behind you to surprise Maab. It might even have looked to him like you were bait for a trap. He won't trust you again, Missy—if he ever did. He'll kill you both, just to be sure."

"And of what use was this grand surprise?" the woman said with contempt. "Here he can simply starve us out."

As Kirk digested the truth of that, Maab's voice rang out.

"Captain!"

"What is it?"

Maab came forward, slowly, accompanied by two henchmen. The other assassins followed, stopping just out of arrow range. They learn fast, Kirk thought ruefully.

"A fine fight, Captain. And fought with much ingenuity. But useless, as you can see. I suggest that you put down your weapons now."

Clearly, there was no choice. "Do as he says, Doctor, Mr. Spock," Kirk said quietly. "It appears that the cavalry doesn't come over the hill any more."

Eleen pushed forward, the child held out in her arms. "Take him, Maab. He is all that prevents your true Chieftanship."

Maab signaled to a henchman, who came forward and took the child.

"I will go now," Eleen said, hopefully.

"No," Maab said. "You stand condemned for other treasons. You know the penalty for unfaithfulness."

The woman backed away in terror. "No, no! I was not unfaithful—there was no one . . ."

"There is proof," Maab said heavily. "Keel saw it done, though he did not name the man before he was slain by this alien Captain's arrow. My brother may be dead, but his honor is my honor. Let justice be done!"

"No! No!"

Eleen began to run. The *makeen* silently cleared for her what seemed to be an avenue of escape. Then a *klugat* whirled through the air. She fell, and was still.

Maab looked sharply at Kirk. "You do not protest as before."

"Your justice is served," Kirk said, fighting down his nausea. "Perhaps it was merited. But the child is a different matter. He has harmed no one."

"He lives. The High Chieftanship must be mine."

"Why? Clearly you have only sown the seeds of still more factionalism, still more assassination. What do you really gain in the end, Maab? And who else gains with you?"

"You are a clever man, Captain," Maab said reflectively. "You see beneath surfaces. Well, you are not the only ones who wish this rock in our hills. The Klingon Empire offered my brother much for mining rights. Wealth, power, a seat in their Empire. The fool chose to honor a promise made to your Federation. He did not trust the Klingons."

"But you did."

"I had to be Chief to give them what they wanted. A Klingon ship drew yours away so your men could not stop Akaar's death. You could have returned without harm if you had not broken taboo to save Eleen. She was not worth your deaths."

"She was," McCoy said, "then."

"Because of the child within her? But both die in the end. All this that followed was fruitless."

"One thing, then," McCoy said. "Let me have the boy I brought into the world. If you're going to take us out of it, I'd rather have him with me."

Maab shrugged and signaled to his henchman, who paused and then passed the child to McCoy. The remaining assassins raised their *klugats*. The resemblance to a firing squad was inarguable . . .

"Drop those weapons!"

The voice—Scott's voice—came from the lip of the cliff. With him was Sulu and a crewman. At the edge of the other side of the defile were Frost and two more crewmen—all with phasers at the ready.

"What the devil?" McCoy said.

"I would say, Doctor," Spock said, "that the cavalry has just come over the hill."

The crewmen came down, herding the assassins together. "But *how?*" Maab said. "How did you escape the Klingon ship? They were not to let you through until I signaled . . ."

"They backed off and ran when we came straight at them," Sulu said with a grin. "At first they decoyed us away with false distress calls, but when we saw through that and went right down their throats—well, their ships have speed, I'll grant them that."

Scott added, "I didn't think the Klingons were ready for a war, even to please this gentleman. Not even for topaline mining rights."

"Mr. Scott," Kirk said, "I know you for a resourceful man, but how did you find us out here?"

"When we beamed down to the main camp, we found what had happened. A lot of Akaar's followers are left; only the assassins of Maab's group went hunting you. They told us you'd escaped to the hills, we used our sensors to pinpoint you, and beamed down again. 'Twas a near squeak."

Abruptly, there was movement behind Maab and a knife flashed. Maab gasped and fell. His killer stolidly wiped the knife on the sleeve of his tunic and held it out to a stunned Kirk.

"For treason to Akaar," the man said, "and for treason with the Klingons. I now stand ready for justice."

“And who in blazes may you be?” Kirk demanded.

“I,” the man said, “am the father of the High Chief born of Eleen.”

The treaty was signed, by the father, who after a long tribal parley had been named the High Chief’s guardian-regent. What complicated tribal politics and concepts of justice produced this result, Kirk could not fathom, nor did he care any longer. It was enough for him that the man had bound himself to serve the child until it came of age.

The last surprise was the naming of the High Chief. The father dubbed him, Leonard James Akaar.

It was Spock’s opinion that McCoy and the Captain were going to be insufferably pleased with themselves about that for at least a month.

AMOK TIME*

(Theodore Sturgeon)

It was actually Nurse Christine Chapel who first noticed that there seemed to be something wrong with Spock. Nothing serious—only that he wasn't eating. McCoy, observing him more closely, saw no further sign but what seemed to be a gradual increase in tension, something that might almost have been called "nervousness" if Spock hadn't been half Vulcan. This, McCoy thought, might have been purely a subjective impression on his own part.

It wasn't. On the third day of the apparent fast, Nurse Chapel tried to tempt the First Officer with a vile green concoction called plomik soup, regarded as a delicacy on Vulcan. Spock threw the bowl at her, soup and all.

This was enough to move McCoy to suggest to Spock, a day after the soup incident and apparently without any connection to it, that it was time for his routine checkup.

The logical, unemotional First Officer's verbatim reply to this was, "You will cease to pry into my personal affairs, Doctor, or I shall certainly break your neck."

Regardless of his state of mind—whatever it was—Spock certainly knew that this would not go unreported. He forestalled inquiry by requesting a leave of absence on his home planet. On the present course of the *Enterprise*, he pointed out, a diversion to Vulcan would cost a loss of only 2.8 light-days.

Unfortunately, Kirk had to refuse him. In all the years

*Hugo Award nominee

that Kirk had known him, Spock had never asked for a leave of any sort, and in fact had refused offers; he had leave enough accumulated for six men. But the *Enterprise* was bound for the inauguration ceremonies of the new president of Altair Six—not, apparently, a vital assignment, but the orders left no leeway for side trips, all the same. Kirk suggested that shore leave facilities on Altair Six were excellent; Spock declined the offer stiffly, and that was that.

At least, that should have been that. Not six hours later, while the First Officer was off duty, Kirk discovered that the ship's course had been altered for Vulcan anyhow, on Spock's orders. Leaving the bridge in Scott's charge, Kirk went directly down to Spock's quarters.

He had seldom visited them before, but he resisted the impulse to look around. He got only the vague impression of a room simple, sparse and vaguely Oriental in decoration and mood, the quarters of a warrior in the field. Spock was seated at a desk studying a small reading screen. Kirk had the briefest of impressions that the screen showed the head of a very young girl, no more than a child, but Spock snapped it off too quickly for him to be sure.

"Well, Mr. Spock?"

"Well, Captain?"

"I want an explanation. Why did you change our course?"

"Sir?"

"You changed our course for Vulcan. I want to know why."

Spock frowned slightly. "I changed our course?"

"You deny it?"

"No," Spock said. "By no means, Captain. It is—quite possible."

"Then why did you do it?"

"Captain," Spock said, "I accept, on your word, that I did it. But I do not know why. Nor do I remember doing it." He looked straight at Kirk, his spine stiffening. "And therefore I request that you put me in confinement—securely—where I can neither see nor be seen by any one."

"But why?"

"Captain, lock me away. I do not wish to be seen. I cannot . . . No Vulcan could explain further."

"Spock, I'm trying to help you . . ."

"Ask me no further questions!" Spock almost shouted. "I will not answer!"

"All right," Kirk said evenly. "I'll accede to your request. But first, I order you to report to Sickbay, Mr. Spock. McCoy's waiting."

"I don't know how Spock exists with his kind of internal setup," McCoy said. "His normal pulse is in the 240 beats-per-minute range, his blood pressure almost nonexistent by our standards—not that I consider that green stuff of his to be entirely comparable to blood. But that's only Spock under normal conditions, Jim. As matters stand now, if we don't get him to Vulcan within eight days—or maybe only seven—he'll die."

"Die? But why? What's the matter with him?"

"I don't know," McCoy said. "All I can tell you is that there's a growing imbalance of bodily functions. As if in your or my bodies, huge amounts of adrenalin were constantly being secreted into our bloodstreams. Spock won't say why. But unless it's stopped somehow, the physical and emotional pressures will kill him."

"You're convinced he knows what it is?"

"Yes. But he won't tell me."

"He's in the solitary confinement he asked for now?"

"Yes, Jim. And—I wouldn't approach him, if I were you. It's a shocking thing to have to say, but—well, I consider him irrational."

"I'll see him anyhow. What else can I do? There's got to be an answer."

"I suppose so," McCoy said. "But Jim—watch out."

"Mr. Spock," Kirk said, as gently as possible. "McCoy gave me his evaluation of your condition."

Spock remained silent, his face averted.

"Spock, he says you'll die unless something is done. *What?* Is it something only your planet can do for you?"

No answer.

"Mr. Spock. You have been called the best First Officer in the Fleet. That is an enormous asset to me. If I have to lose that First Officer, I want to know why."

Spock stirred, and then began to speak in an almost inaudible voice. "It is a thing that no . . . outworlder may know—except for the very few that have been involved. A Vulcan understands—but even we do not speak of it among ourselves. It is a deeply personal thing. Captain, cannot you let it rest at that?"

"I cannot," Kirk said. "My ship, my command, my duty are all at stake. I require you to explain. If I must, I'll order you to explain."

"Captain—some things transcend even the discipline of the service."

"That may sometimes be true. But nothing transcends the health, safety and well-being of the members of my crew. Would it help to promise you that I'd consider anything you say to me to be totally confidential?"

Spock hesitated a long moment. At last he said, "It has to do with—with . . ."

The last word was quite inaudible. Kirk said, "With what?"

"Biology."

"What kind of biology?"

"Vulcan biology."

"You mean, the biology of Vulcans? Biology, as in reproduction? Oh, blazes! That's nothing to be embarrassed about. It even happens to birds and bees."

Spock stared at the floor. "The birds and bees are not Vulcans. If they were—if any creature were as proudly logical as we—and had their logic ripped from them—as this time does to us . . ."

Kirk waited.

"How do Vulcans find their mates?" Spock said. "Haven't you wondered, Captain? How are we selected, one for the other? I'm sure you've heard many jokes on the subject. We are so aloof, so proud, so without feeling, that we invite such jokes."

"Yes, I've heard them," Kirk said. "But jokes aside, I guess the rest of us assume, well, that it's done, uh, quite logically. Eugenically, perhaps."

"It—is not. We shield it with ritual and custom, as shrouded in antiquity as our seven moons. You humans have no conception—it strips our minds from us. It brings a—a madness which rips away our veneer of civilization." Spock slumped, his face pinched with agony. "It is the *pon farr*—the time of mating."

"But you're not a salmon or an eel, man! You're . . ."

"Half human," Spock finished, painfully. "I had hoped that that would spare me this. But my Vulcan blood is too strong. It drives me home, to take a wife in Vulcan fashion. Or else, as Dr. McCoy says, to die."

"Dear God," Kirk said. The lumps in his own belly and throat were now almost too great for him to bear. He could only vaguely imagine what it had cost Spock to tell him this much.

Was there any way out? There were three starships expected to attend the inauguration ceremony: the *Enterprise*, the *Excalibur* and the *Endeavour*. Neither of the others was within range to get Spock to Vulcan in time.

It was not that vital to have three starships at the ceremony, but the orders specified it. If Kirk disobeyed, Starship Command would . . .

Never mind. Kirk owed his life to Spock, not just once, but half a dozen times. That was worth a career. Kirk stepped to the intercom.

"Mr. Chekov, Kirk here. Maintain course for Vulcan. Warp Eight."

"Uh—yes, sir," Chekov's startled voice said.

"Kirk out."

"Captain," Spock said in a low voice.

"Yes, Mr. Spock."

"Something happens to us at this time, almost—an insanity—an insanity you—no doubt would find distasteful."

"Should I? You've been patient with my kinds of madness."

"Then—will you beam down with me to the surface of Vulcan, and stand with me? There is a brief ceremony. By tradition, the male is attended by his closest friends."

"Thank you, Mr. Spock."

"Also—I believe Doctor McCoy has also guessed the

reason behind all this, and has kept his own counsel, and my secret. I would like him to accompany us.”

“I believe,” Kirk said slowly, “that he will be honored.”

The three beamed down to a fairly level arena area. Rocks around its edges gave it a half-natural, half-artificial aspect, as if the wind and rain had carved something like a Stonehenge, or reduced a Stonehenge to something like this. Inside it, there was an open temple—two high arches of stone, an open fire pit, several huge, jade-like wind chimes stirring and chiming in the hot breeze. The rest of the landscape was drifting sand, stretching away to a distant saw-toothed line of mountains jutting up at the edge of the far horizon.

“The land of my family,” Spock said. “Our place for mating. It has been held by us for more than two thousand Earth years!” He choked, and gestured toward the temple. “This—is *Koon-ut-Kal-if-fee*. It means, ‘The place of marriage and challenge.’ In the distant past, we—killed to win our mates. It is still a time of dread for us. Perhaps, the price we pay—for no emotion the rest of the time.”

“If it’s any of my business—” McCoy began.

“You were invited, Doctor.”

“Then—you said this T’Pring you are to meet was already your wife.”

“By our parents’ arrangement. A ceremony, while we were but seven years of age. One touches the other—thus—as you have seen me do to feel another’s thoughts. In this way, our minds were locked together—so that at the proper time we would both be drawn to *Koon-ut-Kal-if-fee*.”

There sounded a distant bell, harmonizing well with the heavier notes of the wind chimes, and then figures began to appear among the rocks. There seemed to be eight or ten of them. Heading the procession, four Vulcan men were carrying someone in an ornate litter or sedan chair. Two other members of the party carried bright-colored, ceremonial objects which consisted of dozens of tiny bells attached to an ornate frame on a pole.

As they drew closer, Kirk saw that the person inside the

litter was an old woman of immensely authoritative bearing; as the litter was set down and she emerged from it, he recognized her with a shock as one of the high Vulcan elders, T'Pau, the only person who had ever turned down a seat on the Federation Council. Characteristically, Spock had never mentioned that his family was this important.

The bride walked beside her, no child now, but a lithe, graceful, beautiful woman, even by Earth standards. Behind her strode a tall, muscular and rather handsome Vulcan male; and behind him, a slightly shorter but even stronger-looking man who carried a Vulcan war ax. The rest of the procession moved in stately grace behind these principals.

Spock turned and walked to one of the huge wind chimes. Picking up a stone mallet, he struck the chimes, producing a somber male sound which was answered by the shaking of the bell banners. T'Pring seated herself on a carved rock at the temple archway. T'Pau stood in the open in front of the temple, with her back to it and the girl. The muscular young Vulcan stood next to the arch, like a big brick gatepost, while the rest of the entourage lined up in a curve behind them.

With a sudden swift movement, T'Pau raised both her arms. Spock stepped forward and bowed before her. She laid both her hands on his shoulders, as if in a blessing, and then looked beyond him to Kirk and McCoy.

"Spock. Are our ceremonies for outworlders?"

"They are not outworlders," Spock said. "They are my friends. I am permitted this. Their names are Kirk and McCoy. I pledge their behavior with my life."

"Very well." T'Pau turned to the bearers of the bell banners. "*Kah-if-fee!*"

The bell banners were shaken. Spock turned to strike the wind chimes again with his stone mallet—but at the same instant the girl T'Pring sprang to her feet and cried out:

"*Kah-if-FARR!*"

There was a gasp from the Vulcan onlookers; even T'Pau's eyes flickered in startled surprise. Spock mouthed the word without speaking it, his breathing quickening, his

eyes narrowed to slits. T'Pring crossed to him, took the mallet from his hand, and tossed it aside. Her expression was strangely contemptuous.

The Vulcan with the ax stepped forward. He looked both amused and dangerous, like an experienced executioner.

"Hey, what's this?" McCoy said. "If there's going to be hanky-panky . . ."

"All is in order," the old woman said. "She chooses the challenge."

"What?" McCoy pointed at the executioner. "With *him*?"

"No. He acts only if cowardice is seen. T'Pring will now choose her champion. T'Pring: you have chosen. Are you prepared to become the property of the victor? Not merely his wife, but his chattel, with no other rights or status?"

"I am prepared," T'Pring said.

"Then choose."

T'Pring moved regally out into the arena. She stopped by the huge young Vulcan, who straightened proudly, expectantly, but she moved away from him. Then she turned to T'Pau.

"As it was in the dawn of our days," she said, "as it is today, as it will be through all tomorrows, I make my choice." She turned again. "I choose this man."

And she pointed straight at Kirk.

"Now wait a minute—" Kirk said.

At the same moment, the big young Vulcan stepped forward, obviously outraged. "No!" he cried. "I am to be the one! It was agreed! The honor is mine!"

All at once, everyone in the marriage party seemed to be arguing, all in Vulcan. Under cover of the noise, Kirk said swiftly to McCoy, "What happens if I decline?"

"I don't know, Jim. He'd probably have to fight the young man. And in his present condition, he couldn't win. But Jim, this looks like a situation of total combat—and the heat and the air here are pretty fierce. I'm not sure you could win either—even if you'd want to."

"I'm not about to take a dead First Officer back with me. On the other hand, there's T'Pau over there—all of

Vulcan wrapped up in one package. How will it look if a Starship Captain backs off from this, afraid?"

"But . . ."

"And if I can't beat him, if I'm in any danger, I'll give up. Spock wins, honor is satisfied. Or maybe just knock him out . . ."

"*Kroykah!*" T'Pau said explosively. The hubbub stopped as if turned off by a switch.

The big young Vulcan said, "I ask forgiveness." He went back to his post by the arch, sulky, unrepentant, but no longer defiant.

Kirk said, "I accept." He threw a look toward his First Officer, but Spock seemed oblivious of everything but the ceremony.

"According to our laws," T'Pau said, "combat begins with the *lirpa*."

Two Vulcan males stepped forward, each carrying a vicious-looking weapon. At one end of a heavy handle was a circular, razor-edged knife; at the other end, a metal cudgel.

"If both survive the *lirpa*," T'Pau continued, "then combat continues with *ahn woon*, until death. *Klee-et!*"

At this command, Spock wheeled to face Kirk. His eyes blazed with blind savagery as he lifted the weapon. McCoy stepped forward.

"Nothing doing!" McCoy said. "No one mentioned a fight to the death—" his words trailed off as the executioner-like Vulcan stepped in, lifting his ax. Then he swallowed and charged on. "T'Pau, these men are friends. To force them to fight until one is killed . . ."

"Challenge was lawfully given and accepted. Neither party was forced. However, Spock may release the challenger. Spock! How do you choose?"

Spock continued to eye Kirk, scowling. There was still no sign of recognition. Then, suddenly, he shouted his answer, hoarsely, scornfully: "*Klee-fah!*"

"That's it, Bones," Kirk said. "Get out of the combat area. There's nothing you can do."

McCoy stood fast. "I claim one right for him then. Your temperature is hot for our kind, your air is thin . . ."

He was interrupted by a feint from Spock. Kirk

dodged, but Spock, slashing again with the blade, abruptly reversed the weapon and caught Kirk a glancing blow with the cudgel end. Kirk went down, rolling barely in time as Spock reversed again and slashed down hard. The weapon bit into the earth.

Kirk kicked hard at Spock's legs. Now the Vulcan was down, and Kirk was rolling to his feet. He was already sweating, and his breath was whistling in his throat. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the burly axman advancing on McCoy.

"I can't watch you both, Bones!" he shouted. "Get out before you kill me!"

McCoy held his ground. Turning back toward T'Pau, he produced a hypo from his medical kit. "Are Vulcans afraid of fair combat?" he demanded.

"What is this?"

"A high-G vitalizer shot. To compensate for temperature and atmosphere."

"*Kroykah!*" T'Pau said. Everyone froze. "Very well. Your request is reasonable."

McCoy pressed the hypo against Kirk's arm. It hissed, and the physician turned away.

Spock moved in at once. This time it was Kirk who fainted. Spock countered as if they were marionettes tied to the same string. Kirk tried again, with the same result.

With a wordless rumble, Spock launched a lightning kick at Kirk's left hand. Kirk bent aside, and catching the heel of Spock's boot, dumped him. He dived after him, but Spock rolled with unbelievable quickness, so that Kirk hit only the bare ground.

Then both were up, crouching. Spock raised his weapon as if to throw it, and Kirk tensed, ready to jump aside. Spock, however, suddenly reversed the weapon and rushed.

They came together like the impact of two machines, belly to belly, free hand holding weapon wrist, glaring into each other's eyes. Then, with a bone-cracking wrench, Spock whipped Kirk's weapon to the ground.

With two quick, stamping steps, like a flamenco dancer, Spock snapped the knife blade with a loud crack, and

then kicked the cudgel end away. He raised his own blade to striking position.

"Spock!" McCoy cried out. "No!"

They were still at close quarters. Kirk hit Spock's wrist with a karate chop. Now it was Spock's *lirpa* that went flying out of reach.

"*Kroykah!*" T'Pau cried.

Again, Spock froze. The Vulcan weapons attendant came hurrying out, carrying what seemed to be no more than two leather bands about three feet long and four inches wide. One was handed to Spock, who backed up, waiting; Kirk got the other.

"A strip of leather?" Kirk said. "Is that all?"

"The *ahn woon*," T'Pau said. "Oldest and deadliest of Vulcan weapons."

Kirk inspected it with puzzlement. How on earth was one supposed to use this thing? It wasn't long enough to be an effective whip, and . . .

Spock did not hesitate. Scooping up a jagged rock, in the same movement he converted the leather strap into a sling. Kirk understood too late. The rock caught him hard in the ribs, and he fell.

As he staggered to his feet, Spock charged him, now holding one end of the strap in each hand. Whipping it around Kirk's legs, he yanked, and down Kirk went again.

Instantly, Spock was at his back, garroting him with the strap. Kirk shifted to try to throw the First Officer over his shoulder, but something odd seemed to be happening to his muscles; they responded very slowly, and didn't move in the way his brain told them to go.

The pressure around his neck tightened. He made one last grab for Spock's hands, but never even came close. The universe darkened. Blood roared in his ears. He felt himself fall flat, blind and paralyzed.

"*Kroykah!*" came T'Pau's voice, as if from a great distance.

There was a sound of running footsteps, coming closer. Then came McCoy's voice, charged with bitterness:

"Get your hands off him, Spock. It's finished—he's dead."

It was all most peculiar. Kirk could see nothing, feel

nothing, was not even sure he was breathing. He was aware of nothing but the voices, as though he were listening to an exchange over the intercom—or attending a play with his back turned to the stage.

T'PAU: I grieve with you, Doctor.

SPOCK: No! I—no, no . . .

McCOY: McCoy to *Enterprise*.

UHURA: *Enterprise*. Lieutenant Uhura here.

McCOY: Have Transporter Room stand by for landing party to beam up. Strange as it may seem, Mr. Spock, you're in command now. Any orders?

SPOCK: I'll—I'll follow you in a few minutes. Instruct Mr. Chekov to plot a course for the nearest base where I must—surrender myself to the authorities . . . T'-Pring.

T'PRING: Yes.

SPOCK: Explain.

T'PRING: Specify.

SPOCK: Why the challenge; why you chose my Captain as your champion.

T'PRING: Stonn wanted me. I wanted him.

SPOCK: I see no logic in preferring Stonn over me.

T'PRING: He is simple and easily controlled. I calculated the possibilities were these: if your Captain were victor, he would not want me, and so I would have Stonn. If you were victor, you would free me because I dared to challenge, and again I would have Stonn. But if you did not free me it would be the same, for you would be gone again, and I would have your name and your property, and Stonn would still be there.

SPOCK: Flawlessly logical.

T'PRING: I am honored.

SPOCK: Stonn! She is yours. After a time, you may find that *having* is not, after all, so satisfying a thing as *wanting*. It is not logical, but it is often true . . . Spock here. Ready to beam up . . . Live long and prosper, T'Pau.

T'PAU: Live long and prosper, Spock.

SPOCK: I shall do neither. I have killed my Captain—and my friend.

Then Kirk's hearing went away too, and for a long time thereafter he knew nothing.

He came gradually back to consciousness in the Sickbay. McCoy was bending over him. Nearby was Spock, his hands over his face. His shoulders were shaking.

Nurse Christine came into his field of view, and turning Spock toward the Captain, gently pulled his hands away from his face. Kirk smiled weakly, and spoke in a faint but cheerful voice.

"Mr. Spock—I never thought I'd see the day . . ."

"Captain!" Spock stared down at him, absolutely dazed with astonishment. Then, obviously realizing what his face and voice were revealing, he looked away.

"Christine," McCoy said, "it might be a good idea for Mr. Spock to get some hot food in him. Why don't you feed him some of that awful plomik soup. Then bring him back here for me to run a physical on him. Go on, Spock. She'll explain it to you."

Christine led the First Officer toward the door. But just before he left, Spock said, "It is not awful plomik soup. It is very good plomik soup."

Then he was gone. Kirk and McCoy smiled after him. Then Kirk rolled his head back and wiped the smile off his face.

"You, Mister," he said, "are a quack."

McCoy shrugged. "I made a mistake. Shot you with ronoxiline D by mistake. Nobody lied. You were dead—by all normal standards. I had to get you back up here fast, or you would have been dead by *any* standards."

"Will Spock be all right?"

"I think so. I'll run a full physical on him to make sure."

Kirk started to sit up. "Where are we now?"

"Stay right there," McCoy said, shoving him back. "We're still orbiting Vulcan."

Kirk reached out and snapped on the bedside intercom. "Kirk to Bridge."

"Bridge, sir. Sulu here."

"Take us out of orbit, Mr. Sulu. Have the navigator lay in a course for Altair Six at top warp speed. Tell Scotty to pour it on—we've got an inauguration to make!"

"Yes *sir*. Bridge out."

As Kirk dropped back onto the bed, McCoy said sourly, "You know, Jim, some one of these days these ceremonies will be the death of you."

"In which case, Bones, remember: you have standing orders to bring me back to life."

BOOK III

STAR TREK 8

SPOCK'S BRAIN

The Great

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SPOCK'S BRAIN

(Lee Cronin)

The curiously elegant spaceship depicted on the *Enterprise* screen had failed to respond to any hailing frequency or to approved interstellar symbols.

Nor was its shape familiar. Scanning it, Spock said, "Design unidentified. Ion propulsion, neutron conversion of a unique technology."

Kirk said, "Magnification Ten, Mr. Chekov."

But the close-up revealed the ship as mysterious as before—a long, slender, needle-thin splinter of glow against the blackness of space.

"Well, Scotty?"

"It beats me, Captain. I've never seen anything like it. But isn't she a beauty?" He whistled in awed admiration. "And ion propulsion at that. Whoever they are, they could show us a thing or two."

"Life form readings, Mr. Spock?"

"One, sir. Humanoid or similar. Low level of activity. Life support systems functioning. Interior atmosphere conventional nitrogen oxygen." He peered more closely at his scanner. "Just a minute, Captain . . ."

"Yes, Mr. Spock?"

"Instruments indicate a transferal beam emanating from the humanoid life form."

"Directed to where?"

"To here sir—the bridge of the *Enterprise*."

People moved uneasily at their stations. Kirk spoke into the intercom. "Security guard! To the bridge!"

But even as he issued the order, a figure had begun to take shape among them. It gathered substance. A superbly beautiful woman stood in the precise center of the bridge. She was clad in a short, flowing, iridescent tunic, a human woman in all aspects save in her ex-

traordinary loveliness. On her arm she wore a bracelet, studded with varicolored cabochon jewels or buttons. She was smiling faintly.

Her appearance, no Transporter Room materialization, was as mysterious as the ship.

Kirk spoke. "I am Captain James T. Kirk. This is the Starship *Enterprise*."

She pressed a button on the bracelet. There was a humming sound. The bridge lights dimmed, brightened, dimmed again; and with the look of amazement still on their faces, Kirk, Spock and Scott went stiff, paralyzed. Then they crumpled to the floor. The humming sound passed out into the corridor. Again, lights flickered. Three running security guards stumbled—and fell. The humming grew louder. It moved into Sickbay where McCoy and Nurse Chapel were examining a patient. Once more, lights faded. When they brightened, McCoy, the nurse and the patient had slumped into unconsciousness.

Silence flowed in on the *Enterprise*.

Still smiling, the beautiful intruder glanced down at Kirk. She stepped over him to examine Scott's face. Then she left him to approach Spock. The smile grew in radiance as she stooped over him.

Nobody was ever to estimate accurately the duration of their tranced state. Gradually, as awareness returned to Kirk, he saw that other heads around him had recovered the power to lift themselves.

"What—where—" he asked disconnectedly.

Sulu put the question. "What happened?"

Kirk pulled himself back up into his command chair.

"Status, Mr. Sulu?"

Mechanically Sulu checked his board. "No change from the last reading, sir."

"Mr. Spock?"

There was no Mr. Spock at The Vulcan's station to reply. Perplexed, Kirk looked at Scott. "The girl," Scott said dazedly, "she's gone, too."

"Yes," Kirk said, "that girl . . ."

His intercom buzzed. "Jim! Jim! Get down here to Sickbay! Right now! Jim, hurry!"

McCoy's voice had an urgency that was threaded

with horror. In Sickbay the *Enterprise's* physician was trying to force himself to look at his own handiwork. Within its life function chamber, he had encased Spock's motionless body with a transparent bubble device. There was a small wrapping about the upper part of the cranium. Frenziedly working at his adjustment levers, he said, "Now?"

Nurse Chapel, at her small panel, nodded. She threw a switch that set lights to blinking. "It's functioning," she said, her voice weak with relief.

"Thank God."

McCoy was leaning back against the table as Kirk burst through the door.

"Bones, what in the name of—" Kirk broke off. He had seen through the transparency of the bubble. "Spock!" He glanced swiftly at the life indicator. It showed a very low level. "Well?" he demanded harshly.

It was Nurse Chapel who answered him. "I found him lying on the table when I recovered consciousness."

"Like this?"

"No," McCoy said. "Not like this."

"Well, what happened?"

"I don't know!" McCoy shouted.

"You've got him under complete life support at total levels. Was he dead?"

McCoy raised himself by a hand pushed down on the table. "It starts there," he said.

"Damn you, Bones, talk!"

"He was worse than dead."

"What do you mean?"

"Jim—" McCoy spoke pleadingly as though he were appealing for mercy from his own sense of helplessness.

"Jim—his brain is gone."

"Go ahead."

"Technically, the greatest job I ever saw. Every nerve ending of the brain neatly sealed. Nothing torn, nothing ripped. No bleeding. A surgical miracle."

"Spock's brain—" Kirk said, fighting for control.

"Gone." McCoy had given up on professional composure. His voice broke. "Spock—his incredible Vulcan

physique survived until I could get the support system to take over. The body lives—but it has no mind.”

“The girl,” Kirk said.

“What girl?”

“She took it. I don’t know where—or why. But she took Spock’s brain.”

“Jim . . .”

“How long can you keep the body functioning?”

“Several days at the most. And I can’t guarantee that.”

“That’s not good enough, Bones.”

“If it had happened to any of us, I could say indefinitely. But Vulcan physiology limits what I can do. Spock’s body is much more dependent than ours on that tremendous brain of his for life support.”

“I ask you—how long, Dr. McCoy. I have to know.”

Wearily, McCoy reached for the chart. “He suffered a loss of cerebral spinal fluid in the operation. Reserves are minimal. Spock’s T-Negative blood supply—two total exchanges.” He looked up from the chart. “Three days—no more.”

Kirk moved over to the bubble. He could feel his heart cringe at the sight of the paper-white face inside it. Spock, the friend, the dear companion through a thousand hazards—Spock, the always reliable thinker, the reasonable one, the always reasonable and loyal one.

“All right, then—I’ve got three days.”

At the naked anguish in his face, McCoy motioned the nurse to leave them alone.

“Jim, are you hoping to restore him his brain? How are you going to find it? Where are you going to look? Through the entire galaxy?”

“I’ll find it.”

“Even if you do find it, a brain can’t be replaced with present surgical techniques.”

“If it was taken, it can be put back. Obviously, there are techniques.”

“I don’t know them!” The cry was wrenched from McCoy.

"The thief who took it has the knowledge. I'll force it out of her! So help me, I'll get it out of her!"

It was Sulu who located the ion trail of the mystery ship.

"Look, Mr. Scott. I've got it again!"

Scott was jotting numbers down on the board in his hand. "Aye, an ion trail. It's from that ship of hers all right."

"Where does it lead, Mr. Chekov?" Kirk asked.

Chekov studied the panel at Spock's library computer. "It leads to system Sigma Draconis, sir."

"Lock on," Kirk said. "Maximum speed without losing the trail, Mr. Sulu."

"Aye, Captain. Warp six."

"Mr. Chekov, a complete readout on Sigma Draconis."

Sulu turned to Kirk. "Arrival, seven terrestrial hours, twenty-five minutes at warp six, sir."

"No mistake about the trail, Scotty?"

"No mistake, Captain."

Chekov called from Spock's station. "Coming into scanning range of the Sigma Draconis system, sir."

Alarm rang in Sulu's voice. "Captain, I've lost the trail!"

Kirk leaped from his chair. "You've lost the trail to Spock?"

"It's gone, sir. At warp six there was a sudden deactioned shift."

"No excuses, if you please," Kirk said. "All right, her trail is gone. But she was heading into this star system. She must be somewhere in it." He moved to Chekov. "Put a schematic of Sigma Draconis on the viewing screen."

The nine planets comprising the system took shape and position on the screen. "Readout, Mr. Chekov," Kirk said.

"Sun, spectral type, G-9. Three Class M planets showing sapient life. First planet rated number 5 on the industrial scale. Second Class M planet rated number 6."

"Earth equivalent, approximately 2030," Kirk estimated.

Scott broke in. "But that ship, Captain. Either it was thousands of years ahead of us—or the most incredible design fluke in history."

"Third Class M planet, Mr. Chekov?"

"Aye, sir. No signs of industrial development. Rated number 2 on the industrial scale of 20. At last report in a glacial age. Sapient life plentiful but on a most primitive level." Chekov turned around to face Kirk. "Of course, sir, in none of these cases has a detailed Federation survey been made. All the information is the result of long-range scanning and preliminary contact reports. We don't know how accurate it is."

"Understood, Mr. Chekov. There are three Class M planets, not one of which owns the capability of launching an interstellar flight. Yet one of them has obviously accomplished it."

Chekov, who had been punching up reports on the whirring computer, was too puzzled by the last one to note Kirk's irony. He compared it with what he saw on the screen before he said, "Captain, it's odd. I'm picking up high-energy generation on Planet 7."

"That's the primitive glaciated one, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Its source, Mr. Chekov?"

"It could be natural—volcanic activity, steam, any of a dozen sources, sir. But the pulsations are very regular."

"Surface readings again?"

"No signs of organized civilization. Primitive humanoids in small groups. Apparently a routine hunter-predator stage of social development."

"With very regular pulsations of generated energy?"

"I can't explain it, Captain."

Kirk turned to address all members of the bridge crew. "This time," he said, "there is no time for mistakes. We've got to pick the right planet, go there—and get what we came for. Mr. Chekov, your recommendation."

"Planet 3, sir. It's closest and the heaviest population."

Scott said, "With a technological rating of 5, it couldn't have put that ship we saw into space."

"None of these planets could," Chekov said.

"You've got to put your money where the odds are," Scott retorted. "Captain, my guess is Planet 4. Technologically it's ahead of 3."

"Yes," Kirk said. "But ion propulsion is beyond even our technology. Can you really credit theirs with its development?"

Uhura spoke up. "And what would they want with Mr. Spock's brain?"

"What?" Kirk said.

"I said what would they want with Mr. Spock's brain? What use could they make of it? Why should they want it?"

Kirk stared at her. "A very interesting question, Lieutenant. Why indeed should they want it? Planet 7. It's glaciated, you say, Mr. Chekov?"

"Yes, sir. For several thousand years at least. Only the tropical zone is ice-free—and that would be bitterly cold. Humanoids exist on it; but only under very trying conditions."

"But the energy, Mr. Chekov. It's there."

"Yes, sir. It doesn't make sense—but it's there."

Kirk sat back in his chair. Three days—and Spock's body would be a dead one. Choice. Choice again. Decision again—command decision. He made it.

"I'm taking a landing party down to Planet 7," he said.

Scott stirred uncomfortably.

"Well, Mr. Scott?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Very well. We'll transport down immediately."

Kirk had seen some bleak landscapes in his time; but this one, he thought, would take the cake at any galactic fair.

What vegetation there was scarcely deserved the name, sparse as it was, brown, crackling under the feet with hardened frost. No green, just rocks, black under the sprinkling of snow that clung to their harsh crags,

their crannies. A constant icy wind blew. He shivered, hoping that the rest of his party—McCoy, Scott, Chekov and two security guards—were as grateful as he was for their lightweight, thermal cold-weather clothing.

"Readings, Mr. Scott." His warm breath congealed in a mist as he spoke.

"Scattered life forms, widely spaced. Humanoid all right. On the large side."

"Watch out for them. They are primitives. Readout, please, Mr. Chekov."

Chekov unslung his tricorder, and went to work on the rocky plateau where they had materialized. His explorations acquired a witness. Above him was an escarpment, broken by a gulch, sheltered by an overhang of stunted scrub. A fur-clad figure, armed with a crude knobbed club, had scrambled through the gulch; and was lying now, belly-flat, at the edge of the cliff to peer through the overhang at what went on below.

Chekov returned to his party. "No structures, Captain. No surface consumption of energy or generation of it. Atmosphere OK. Temperature—say a high maximum of forty. Livable."

"If you've got a thick skin," McCoy said.

The figure on the cliff had been joined by several other skin-clad creatures, their faces hidden by parkalike hoods. They moved, gathering, from rock to rock as though closing in. Most carried the heavy clubs. One bore a spear.

"Captain!" Chekov cried. "There's someone—something up there. There—up on that cliff . . ."

"Phasers on stun," Kirk ordered. "Fire only on my signal."

Chekov looked up again from his tricorder. "I register six of them, sir. Humanoids. Big."

"Remember, I want one of them conscious," Kirk said.

As he spoke, a huge man, savagely bearded, rose up on the cliff; and swinging his club in an arc over his head, hurled it downward. It struck a security guard a glancing blow. He yelled in surprise and alarm. The alarm in the yell brought the other five to their feet.

They all clambered up to shower the *Enterprise* with rocks and clubs.

Aiming his phaser at one of them, Kirk fired. The man fell and rolled down the cliff's slope, stunned. Shouting to each other, the rest disappeared.

The prisoner belonged to a hardLeaded lot. Consciousness returned to him with astonishing swiftness. He struggled to rise, but Scott seized him with a judo hold that suggested the reprisal of pain for struggle. The man (and he was a man) subsided. He looked up at Kirk, terror in his eyes. Extending his empty hands in a gesture of friendship, Kirk said, "We mean you no harm. We are not enemies. We want to be your friends."

The terror in the eyes abated slightly. Kirk spoke again. "We will not hurt you. We only want to talk to you. Let him go, Mr. Scott."

"Captain, he could twist your head off."

"Let him go," Kirk repeated.

The man said, "You are not The Others?"

"No," Kirk said. "We are not The Others. We come from a far place."

"You are small like The Others. I could break you in two."

"But you won't," Kirk said. "We are men. Like you. Why did you attack us?"

"When The Others come, we fight. We thought you were The Others."

"Who are The Others?"

"They are the givers of pain and delight."

"Do they live here with you?"

"They come."

"Where do you see them when they come?"

The man spread his arms wide. "Everywhere. On the hunt, when we eat, at the time of sleep."

"The Others—where do they come from?"

Kirk got a heavy stare. "Do they come from the sky?" he asked.

"They are here. You will see. They will come for you. They come for all like us."

"Jim, ask him about women," McCoy said. He spoke

to the man himself. "Do The Others come for your women, too?"

"Women?"

"The females of our kind," Kirk said.

The man shrugged. "Your words say nothing."

Kirk tried again. "We are looking for a—lost friend."

"If he is here, The Others have him."

"Will you take us where we can find The Others?"

"No one wants to find The Others."

"We do. Take us to them and we will let you go."

"Captain!" Chekov, his tricorder switched to full power, was pointing excitedly to the ground. "Right where we're standing, there's a foundation below the surface! And masonry debris! There are registrations all over the place!"

"Buildings?"

"Unquestionably, sir. Immensely old and completely buried. I don't know how our sensors misread them."

"Then somewhere below us is where The Others live," Kirk said. "Mr. Scott, check it out."

Scott and a guard were moving away when a hoarse cry came from the fur-clad man. "Don't go!" he screamed. "Don't go!"

Chekov and McCoy tried to calm him. He refused calm. He pulled madly out of their hold, shrieking with terror. "Release him," Kirk said. They obeyed.

"Don't go!" The last warning was almost a sob. Then he was gone, frantically hauling himself back up the cliff. Chekov said, "What have these Others done to cause such fear?"

"We may know soon enough," was McCoy's sober reply.

"Bones, what was it he said The Others give? It was 'pain and delight,' wasn't it?"

"A peculiar mixture, Jim."

"Everything's peculiar," Kirk said. "A dead and buried city on a planet in the glacial age . . ."

"And a man," said Chekov, "who doesn't know the meaning of the word 'women.'"

"There's a thread somewhere that ties it all togeth-

er," Kirk said thoughtfully. "Right now I wish I had Spock here to find it for me. No offense, Mr. Chekov."

Chekov said fervently, "I wish it, too, sir."

"It's beginning to look as though your hunch was right, Jim. If there was a city here, maybe millions of years ago . . ."

Kirk nodded. "Then it could have developed a science capable of building that ship we saw."

"Captain, over here, sir." Scott and a security guard were standing near a spur of rock jutting out from the cliff. Under it was an opening, large enough to make entrance accessible to even one of the huge, shaggy, fur-clad men. It led into a cave. Or a room. Or something else. "I've looked inside," Scott said. "There's food in there, Captain."

"Food?"

"And a whole pile of other stuff. Some kind of cache. You'd better look, sir."

The place was about twelve feet square. It should have been dark. It wasn't. It was quite light enough to see the food, mounds of it, laid out neatly along one wall. Furs were stacked against another along with clubs, metal knives, tools, hatchets. "A storehouse," McCoy said, "for our muscular friends."

"I don't think so, Bones."

Kirk picked up a crude metal ax. "Forged," he said, "tempered. Our savage brothers did not make this." He returned to the cave's entrance to run his fingers along its edges. They were smooth. He came slowly back to examine the place more closely. Then he saw it—a light which alternately glowed and faded. It came from a small cell set into the wall behind the piled food. He waited. The light went into glow—and shot a beam across the food to a cell in the opposite wall.

"Scotty, Bones," he called. As they approached him, he barred their forward movement with an arm. The light glowed—and he gestured toward the beam. "What do you think?"

"It could be a warning device to keep those beast boys away from the food," Scott said.

"You think that beam could kill?" McCoy asked him.

"It very well might."

"How about this?" Kirk looked thoughtful. "The food is a lure to bring those primitive men into this place."

"In that case, Captain, the beam might be serving as a signal of their arrival."

"And this cave," Kirk said, "could be a trap."

"It could trap us, too, then, Captain," Chekov said nervously.

"Yes," Kirk said. "So you and the security team will remain at the entrance. We will maintain contact with you. If you don't hear from us within five hours, you will return to the *Enterprise* and contact Starfleet Command. Understood?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then return to the entrance."

"Yes, sir."

At Kirk's nod, Scott and McCoy checked their communicators. McCoy slung his tricorder over his shoulder. Then all three stepped over the beam. Kirk turned. Behind them metal doors had dropped over the cave's entrance.

"Phasers on stun," he said.

A loud hum broke the silence. Its pitch increased to a whine—and the whole cave moved bodily under their feet, descending as a descending elevator descends. It continued its smooth downward plunge; and Scott, checking his tricorder, said, "Captain, that power we picked up before—we're getting closer to it."

"A lot of power?" Kirk asked.

"Enough to push this planet out of orbit."

The whining noise was diminishing. "Natural or artificial, Mr. Scott?"

"Artificial, I'd say, sir."

"And the source?"

"Either a nuclear pile a hundred miles wide or . . ."

"Or what, Mr. Scott?"

"Ion power."

Kirk smiled thinly. Ion power—it had stolen Spock. He had to fight against an uprush of rage. Then he decided to let it happen to him. He'd use it to sharpen every sense he had. He succeeded. The door of the

cave-elevator had been fitted so deftly into it that he alone spotted it before it slid silently open. A young girl was facing them. Kirk's eyes looked for and found the button-studded bracelet on her arm. Her face had tightened in surprise and fear. But before she could stab at her bracelet, Kirk fired his phaser. She fell.

Scott stood guard while Kirk removed the bracelet. "Is she all right, Bones?" he asked as McCoy rose from her stunned body.

"I'll have her talking in a minute—if she talks."

The pretty eyelids opened. At once her right hand went to her left arm. Kirk dangled the bracelet in her face. "We've had enough of that trick," he said.

She was instantly on her feet to make a grab for the bracelet. As McCoy's firm hold convinced her of her helplessness, she said, "You do not belong here. You are not morg."

Kirk ignored that. "Take us to the one in charge," he said. "We must talk to him."

"Him? What is him?" said the girl. "I am Luma and I know no him."

"Who is in charge here?" Kirk's patience was slipping. "Where is the brain? Where was it taken? Do you understand me?"

"You do not belong here. You are not morg or eymorg. I know nothing about a brain."

"I'll say you don't!" Kirk said. "I have no time for stupid lies!"

"Jim—she's not lying. I've checked her. She really doesn't know." McCoy reslung his tricorder over his shoulder; and the girl seized her moment to make a wild dash for a door at the end of the corridor. Kirk caught her just as she reached it, but she had managed to press a photo cell built into the door jamb. Spinning her around, he barred her way through it.

"What is this place?" he demanded.

"This place is here."

"Who are you?"

"I say before I am Luma. I am eymorg. You are not eymorg. You are not morg. What you are I do not understand."

"Well," Kirk said, "they certainly seem to be in bad need of brains around here. Watch her, Scotty."

"You'll get nothing out of that one, Captain. She's got the mind of a child."

"Then she's got a sister who isn't retarded!" Kirk said. "One that she can take us to! I've had all I'm taking of these pleas of ignorance!"

He flipped the dial on his communicator. "Captain Kirk to Chekov—Kirk to Chekov. Come in, Mr. Chekov!"

There was no response. He altered the dial adjustment and tried again. "Kirk to Chekov. Come in, Mr. Chekov . . ."

"Fascinating. Activity without end. But with no volition—fascinating."

Kirk froze. A chill shook him from head to feet. It was Spock's voice, familiar, loved, speaking very slowly.

"Fascinat—" Kirk shouted into the communicator. "Spock! Spock! Is that you?"

"Captain? Captain Kirk?"

"Yes, Spock! Yes!"

"It's good to hear a voice, especially yours."

Wordless, his hands shaking, Kirk handed his communicator to McCoy. Joy in his voice, McCoy cried, "Where are you, Spock? We're coming to get you!"

"Is that you, Dr. McCoy? Are you with the Captain?"

"Where else would I be?" In his turn McCoy silently passed the communicator to Scott.

"Where are you, Mr. Spock?"

"Engineer Scott, too? Unfortunately, I do not know where I am."

Kirk grabbed the communicator. "We'll get to you, Spock. It won't be long. Hold on."

"Good. Captain. It seems most unlikely that I will be able to get to you."

McCoy spoke again. "If you don't know where you are, do you know what they're doing with you? That could help us."

"Sorry, Doctor. I have not been able to achieve any insight into that."

"They are using you for something," insisted McCoy.

"Perhaps you are right. At the moment I do not feel useful. Functional in some ways—but not useful."

"Spock," Kirk said, "keep concentrating. The use they are making of you will determine where they have you. Keep concentrating on the use they are making of you—and we'll get to you."

The door beside them slid open. Two of the shaggy men came through it. Metal bands encircled their brows. They were welded into other bands that passed over their heads and down to cup their chins. Behind them stood the beautiful passenger of the ion-propelled spaceship.

She motioned the men toward Kirk, McCoy and Scott. They didn't move. She pushed a red stud on her bracelet. The banded men writhed in torment. In a paroxysm of mixed pain and frustrated fury, they charged the *Enterprise* party. McCoy, caught off guard, felt a rib crack under the pressure of two massively muscular arms. Kirk had pulled free of his attacker's grip. He bent his back under the next maddened assault and his man slid over it into a somersault. He found his phaser, fired it—and the morg, the man, lay still. Then he felled Scott's adversary with a karate blow.

This time the beautiful lady chose to depress a yellow button on her bracelet. Kirk's phaser dropped from his hand as unconsciousness flooded over him. Like the two morgs, like Scott and McCoy, he lay still.

The five male bodies, helplessly stretched at her feet, pleased the lady. When the girl Luma joined her, the spectacle pleased her, too.

It was a woman's world under the planet's surface.

In its Council Chamber, women, all physically attractive, sat at a T-shaped table. As the still triumphantly smiling lady took her place at its head, they rose, bowed and caroled, "Honor to Kara the Leader!" Beside each woman knelt a man, sleek, well fed, docile as a eunuch. Occasionally a woman stroked a man as one pats a well-housebroken pet.

At Kara's signal a door opened. Two of the muscular kitten-men pushed Kirk, McCoy and Scott into the

room and up to the head of the table. The metal bands had now been fixed to their heads. Their masculinity caused a stir among the women; but it was the response, not of adult women, but of children on their first visit to a zoo.

Scott was the first to recognize Kara. "She's the one who came to the *Enterprise*," he whispered to Kirk.

Kirk nodded. "It's the smile I remember," he said.

She spoke. "You have a thing to say?" she asked pleasantly.

"Just one thing," Kirk said. "What have you done with the brain of my First Officer?"

"We do not know your First Officer."

"His brain," Kirk said. "You have Spock's brain."

Something registered in what passed for Kara's brain. "Ah, yes! Brain! You spoke to Luma also of brain. We do not understand."

They *are* retardates, Kirk thought. Getting through to whatever gray matter existed in that beautiful head was going to be tough. Temper, temper! he said to himself. Speaking slowly, very distinctly, "You were on my Starship," he said. "You were there to take Spock's brain. What's more, you took it. So what's this talk of not understanding what I mean by brain?"

"We do not know these things you speak of. We are only here below and here above. This is our place. You are not a morg. You are stranger."

Kirk's temper refused to heed his exhortation. "You came to my ship . . ."

McCoy put a restraining hand on his arm. "Jim, she may not remember. Or even really know. Dissociation may be complete. One thing is sure. She never performed that operation."

"If it required intelligence, she certainly didn't," Kirk said.

Kara pointed to Luma. "You hurt her. It is not permitted again to hurt anyone."

"We are sorry," Kirk said. "We did not wish to hurt."

"You wish to return to your home? You may go."

Kirk rallied all the charm he'd occasionally been accused of possessing. "We wish to stay here with you.

We wish to learn from you. And tell you about us. Then we will not be stranger."

The women were delighted. They smiled and nodded at each other. McCoy decided to toss his charm into the pot. "Above," he said, "it is cold, harsh. Below here with you, it is warm. Perhaps it is your beauty that freshens the air."

They liked that, too. They liked it so much that Scott was encouraged to say, "There is no sun. Yet there is light—the light of your loveliness."

Kirk had lost his last shred of patience. "I want to meet those in charge," he said.

"In charge?" echoed Kara.

She looked so puzzled that he added, "The leader of your people."

"Leader? I am Leader. There is no other."

Dumbfounded, Scott said, "Who runs your machines?"

Kirk drew a deep breath. "This is a complex place," he said. "Who controls it?"

"Control?" she said. "Controller?"

The shocked look on her face told him the word had meaning for her. He tried to subdue his rising excitement. "Controller! Yes! That is right. We would like to meet—to see your controller!"

Kara's fury was as abrupt as it was intense. "It is not permitted! Never! Controller is apart, alone! We serve Controller! No other is permitted near!"

"We intend no harm," Kirk said hastily.

But he had exploded a volcano. "You have come to destroy us!" Kara screamed. The women around her, infected by her panic, twittered like birds at the approach of a snake. They all rose, their fingers reaching for their bracelets. Appalled, Kirk cried, "No! No! We do not come to destroy you! We are not destroyers!" McCoy came to stand beside him. He put all the reassurance at his disposal into his voice. "All we want," he said, "is to talk to somebody about Spock's brain."

"Brain! And again, brain! What is brain? It is Controller, is it not?"

McCoy said, "Well, yes. In a way it is. The human brain controls the individual's functions." He was be-

ginning to suspect the significance of the hysteria. He looked at Kirk. "And the controlling power of the Vulcan brain, Jim, is extraordinarily powerful."

Scott, too, had realized that Kara identified the word "brain" with controlling power. "Is it possible they are using Spock's brain to—" He didn't complete the sentence.

"The fact that it is a Vulcan brain makes it possible," McCoy said.

Kirk suddenly flung himself to his knees. "Great Leader! We have come from a far place to learn from your Controller . . ."

"You lie! You have come to take the Controller! You have said this!"

Still on his knees, Kirk said, "He is our friend. We beg you to take us to him."

But the fright in the women's faces had increased. One began to sob. Kara stood up. "Quiet! There is no need to fear. We know they can be prevented." The women refused consolation. As though the very sight of the *Enterprise* men filled them with horror, they pushed their benches back and fled the Council Chamber.

Kirk made a leap for Kara. "You must take us to him!" he shouted.

She touched the red stud on her bracelet. The bands cupping their heads were suddenly clawed with fiery spindles. They stabbed their temples with an excruciating agony that obliterated thought, the memory of Spock, of the *Enterprise*, the world itself. The torture widened, spread to their throats, their chests, devouring their breath. Choking, Kirk tore at the band and collapsed. Beside him, McCoy and Scott had lost consciousness.

"I must learn what to do!" Kara cried. "Keep them here!"

Her two servant morgs hesitated. She moved a finger toward her bracelet. The gesture was sufficient. They lumbered over to the slumped bodies to take up guard positions on either side of them.

The pain had ceased. Kirk opened his eyes to see McCoy stir feebly. "Are you all right, Bones?" McCoy

nodded, his eyes bloodshot. "I—I wouldn't have believed the human body could have survived such pain," he whispered. Revived, Scott was pulling at his headband. "They're attached to us by a magnetic lock of some kind."

"No wonder the morgs are so obedient," Kirk said. He struggled back to his feet. "What beats me is how this place is kept functioning. What keeps the air pure and the temperature equable?"

"It's clearly not the men," McCoy said. "They live on the frozen surface like beasts. So it must be the women. They live down here with all the comforts of an advanced society."

"Not one of those women could have set up the complex that keeps the place going," Scott said. "That would call on engineering genius. There is no sign of genius in these females."

"They're smart enough to have evolved these headbands," Kirk said. "What a way to maintain control over men!"

"'Pain and delight,'" McCoy quoted. "I'm sure you've noticed the delight aspect in these surroundings, Jim."

"Yes. Beauty, sex, warmth, food—and all of them under the command of the women."

"And how does Spock's brain fit into this woman-commanded underground?" Scott asked.

Kirk didn't answer. The guard morgs had left them to go and stand at a corner table. On it, neatly arranged, were their tricorders and communicators. Only their phasers were missing. "Bones," Kirk said, "do you see what I see over there?"

"The equipment is only there, Jim, because the women don't understand its use."

"Gentlemen," Kirk said, "wouldn't you say that science holds the answer to the problem of recovering our equipment?"

"Aye," Scott said. "Let's go, Captain!"

They went for the morgs. Kirk gripped the jaw of one in a hard press. There was a bellow of pain. Terrified that it had been heard, the other morg looked apprehensively toward the door. Then he made a jump

for Scott. Both guards were paragons of muscular strength; but their long training in docility had destroyed their ability to use it effectively. Kirk downed his Goliath with a jab to the throat. Scott's rabbit punch disposed of the other rabbit. Scientific fighting indeed held the answer to their problem. Within forty seconds the two guards were out for the count.

Kirk hastily adjusted the high-power dial on his communicator. "Spock! Spock! This channel reached you. Come in, Spock! Kirk here."

"Yes, Captain." It was Spock's voice. "I am also here. But I begin to feel extended almost to infinity. Have you returned to the *Enterprise*?"

"No! We were just temporarily out of—communication."

"You have not been seriously injured, I trust?"

"No! Spock, have you discovered what use you are being put to? Is it medical or . . ."

"I am not sure, sir. I seem to have a body that stretches into endlessness."

"Body?" Scott blurted. "You have no body!"

"No body? But then what am I?"

"You are a disembodied brain," McCoy said.

"Really? Fascinating. That could explain much. My medulla oblongata is apparently directing my breathing, pumping my blood and maintaining a normal physiological temperature."

"Spock," McCoy said, "keeping a detached brain alive is a medical miracle. But keeping it functioning, that's impossible."

"I would agree with you, Doctor, if it were not the present fact. It seems incontrovertible that my brain *is* functioning, does it not?"

"It does, Spock, I must admit. And gladly, for once."

"How was the operation accomplished?"

"We don't know."

"Then why are you endangering your lives by coming here?"

"We've come to take you back," Kirk said.

"Back where? To my body?"

"Yes, Spock."

"Thoughtful, Captain. But probably impractical. My body . . ."

McCoy took the communicator. "Don't you think I had the sense to slap it into our life support chamber?"

"Of course. But I do not believe you own the skill or knowledge to replace a brain, Doctor. That skill does not yet exist in the galaxy."

Kirk removed the communicator from McCoy. "The skill that removed the brain exists right here. The skill to replace it may exist here, too."

"Captain, how much time has elapsed since my brain was removed?"

"Forty-eight hours."

"Sir, Dr. McCoy must have told you that seventy-two hours is the maximum my body can be . . ."

"I know, Spock. That leaves us fourteen hours."

"It seems all too brief a time to develop the required skill, Captain."

"Very brief. One question, Spock. Pain-causing bands have been fixed to our heads. Do you know how to get us free of them? They have to come off."

"I shall consider it, sir," the voice said.

"Give it top priority. And stay with us, Spock. Kirk out."

They moved cautiously out of the Council Chamber into the corridor. It was empty. Kirk spoke soberly. "As the lady said, gentlemen, we are not morg. We are disciplined men, intelligent, committed to a purpose. We will remain committed to it in spite of any pain inflicted upon us."

His communicator crackled. "I have the answer for you, Captain. Your pain bands are manually controlled. A blue button on a bracelet releases them. That doesn't make much sense but . . ."

"Oh yes, it does," Kirk said. "Thank you, Spock."

A blue button. He must remember. They were extremely color-prone in this place. The ornamented door at the end of the corridor blazed with color like a stained-glass window. It seemed to possess other qualities. Though they were approaching it slowly, McCoy's tricorder had begun to buzz loudly. With every careful step they took, the volume increased in intensity until

McCoy said, "I'm tuning out. The power is too great for the tricorder."

"Spock," Kirk said into his communicator, "do you know whether you are close to the power source?"

"I can't tell that. But you, Captain, are very close to it."

It was a credible statement. Near now to the elaborate door, they could see that its colored bosses were radiating a dazzling luminescence. They pushed it open to be faced by a wall banked with shining instrumentation. The room might have been the laboratory of magicians versed in the mysteries of some arcane technology. Another wall was a gigantic control board, topped by a helmetlike device. Near it a large black box set on a metallic pedestal was massed with photoelectric cells, all adjusted to correspond to similar cells on the control board. They flashed together in a constant interchange of energy.

Kara, her body taut, was standing before the black box, her back to them.

She heard them, despite their care. She whirled, her hand instantly touching her bracelet. The agony seared them, ripping a scream from Scott. They stumbled on, their legs rubber, their chests on fire. Kirk reached her, tore her hand from her bracelet and wrenched it off her arm. The blue button. He pressed it—and their headbands snapped. Kara gave a wild cry.

It echoed and re-echoed endlessly. Then they saw what stretched beyond the room—a vast machinery that extended for hundreds of underground miles, utterly alien, gleaming, no element in its panels and coils familiar. Awed into silence, Scott finally found his voice. "Captain, it is the ultimate. I think that is an air recirculation unit—but I'm not sure. I'm not even sure this is a hydroponic regulator. It all seems to have been contrived for life support—but it's a work of genius that is beyond me."

Kirk had his eyes on the black box. It glittered under the light rays that streamed to it from all sections of the great control board. How he knew what he knew he didn't know. He walked up to it. "Spock," he said,

"you are in a black box tied with light rays to a complex control panel."

The voice sounded very close. "Incredible!" it said.

"Spock, you said you were breathing, pumping blood, maintaining temperature. Are you also recirculating air, running heating systems, purifying water?"

"Indeed, Captain, that is exactly what I'm doing."

Kara had broken free of McCoy's grip. Frenzied, she rushed at Kirk, trying to push him away from the box. He seized her; and she sagged, screaming, "We will die! You must not take the Controller! We will die! The Controller is young, powerful—perfect!"

"Extremely flattering," said the black box.

She flung herself to the floor, groping for Kirk's knees. "Leave him with us! He will give life to us for ten thousand years!"

"You will find another Controller," Kirk said.

She was sobbing. "There exists no other in the world. The old one is finished. Our new one must stay with us!"

Spock's voice spoke. "Captain, there seem to be rather complex problems. My brain is maintaining life for a large population. Remove it—and the life support systems it supports come to a stop."

McCoy looked somber. "Jim, here his brain is alive. If you remove it from the connections that are feeding it now to turn it over to me, it may die."

"That is the risk," Spock said. "Captain, much as I long for reunion with you and the *Enterprise*, the prospect of betraying such a dependent society is disturbing to a conscience like mine."

"Rubbish!" said Kirk. "Pure rationalization. It's always provoked by a weeping woman. She took your brain out—and she can put it back!" He shook Kara roughly. "How did you remove the brain?"

"I do not know."

"She couldn't know, Jim. Her mental faculties are almost atrophied. The Controller has done all her thinking for her."

"*She took it out!*" Kirk shouted. He shook Kara again. "*How did you do it?*"

"It was—the old knowledge," she whimpered.

"How did you get the knowledge?"

"I put—the teacher on my head."

"What teacher?"

She pointed to the helmetlike device. "What did you do with it?" Kirk demanded. "Show us!"

She shrieked in horror. "It is forbidden! The ancients forbade it. Only on the command of the ancients can I know."

"*Show us,*" Kirk said.

Hysterical tears swelling her face, Kara got to her feet, went to the control board and reached for the helmet. Lifting it reverently down, she slowly lowered it over her head. Over the sobs that convulsed her, Spock's voice said, "If I may explain, Captain. She referred to the taped storehouse of knowledge accumulated by the builders of this place. It is a most impressive store. I scan it. The tapes are circuited to lead into the helmet. When placed over the head of the priestess leader, their information penetrates her mind. It is used rarely—and only when predetermined by the builders."

It was another credible statement. Under the helmet, Kara's face had changed. It had been wiped clean of her infantile hysteria. Into her eyes had come a searching look, the alertness of active thinking. Even her voice had taken on the vibrancy of intelligence. She spoke with clipped clarity. "That explanation is essentially correct. However, the Controller gives no credit to me. I deserve it. I provide the means by which the knowledge is used. Without me, Captain of the *Enterprise* . . ."

This Kara was a woman to take into account. McCoy acknowledged the difference. "That is true. Without you the miracle that has kept Spock's brain alive could not have occurred."

She bowed with dignity. "Thank you, Doctor."

Kirk said, "We all appreciate your contribution."

"Good," she said. "Then you will also appreciate your own contribution—*this* . . ."

A phaser was in her hand.

"Captain!" Scott cried. "It's on the kill mark!"

"So it is," she said. "And that is the knowledge *you* have given to me—how to kill!"

Kirk was the first to rally. "You knew how to kill before we came. You are killing Spock by keeping his brain."

She laughed. "The Controller die? He will live ten thousand years!"

"But Spock will be dead. Even now his body is dying. Soon it will be too late to restore him life."

"No. Only the vessel that once contained the Controller will be dead."

"But the body and the brain comprise a being," Kirk said.

The phaser didn't waver in its aim. Above it, her eyes were very bright. "Spare me such opinions. You will stay here quietly with me until the vessel is dead. Then we shall say good-bye and you can return to your ship."

"Your ancients are using you to murder," Kirk said.

She smiled. "Their commandment is being obeyed."

"Commandments older than your ancients' forbid murder," Kirk said.

She was shaken by the cold intensity of his voice. "Why do you not understand? My people need their Controller more than you need your friend."

A sense of the righteousness of his wrath swept over Kirk like a great wave. For the first time in his life he understood the meaning of "towering" rage. It seemed to lift him up to a great height. He extended a finger at her. "No one may take the life of another. Not for any purpose. It is not allowed."

He stepped forward. The phaser lifted. Then it drooped. Behind her, Scott quietly reached an arm over her shoulder—and took the phaser. Her eyes filled with silent tears.

"The commandment," she whispered, "should be fulfilled."

"You will help us," Kirk said. "How long does the knowledge last?"

"Three kyras," she said.

"You will restore what you stole," Kirk said.

"And betray my people? No."

"Jim—if the helmet worked for her, it might work for me." McCoy moved to Kara, lifted the helmet from

her head—and Spock's voice spoke. "The configurations of her brain are alien, Doctor. It could burn your brain right out."

"I am a surgeon. If I can learn these techniques, I might retain them."

"Bones, how long can we keep the brain functioning once we remove it from its current environment?"

"Five or six hours."

"When it's tied to our life support system, will it give us any more time?"

"A few more hours."

Spock's voice said, "I cannot allow such risk to the Doctor."

McCoy handed the helmet to Kirk. He went to the box. "Spock, Spock, didn't you hear me? I may retain the memory of these techniques to pass on to the world! Isn't that worth the risk to me? *You* would take such a risk! Would you deny the same right to me?"

Kirk said, "Take the helmet, Bones. Put it on."

Slowly McCoy lowered the device over his head. From the black box words came. "Mr. Scott, go to the left lower quarter of the control board . . ."

"Yes, sir."

"Have you located a small lever in that sector?"

"Yes, Mr. Spock."

"Depress it exactly two notches and force it sharply into the slit on the right."

A low humming sounded. As power moved from the control board into the helmet's circuitry, McCoy's hand went to his throat. His body and his face seemed to disconnect. His face glowed as though he'd been struck with some final illumination, but his body convulsed in torture. Then he blacked out and keeled over. Scott hastily pulled the lever back into its original position, then he and Kirk rushed to McCoy and gently lifted the helmet from his head. Kirk sat down, holding the unconscious body—and McCoy's eyes opened.

The vagueness in them disappeared. They began to brighten, first in wonder, then in exaltation. He gave a great shout of pure joy. "Of course—of course—a child could do it. A little child could do it!"

"Good luck to you, Dr. McCoy," said the black box.

In the *Enterprise's* Sickbay, the operating room had been prepared.

Spock lay on its sheet-shrouded table, a shield screening the upper section of his head. Behind the shield, Nurse Chapel, a look of amazement on her face, was concentrated on every move made by the surgical instruments in McCoy's rubber-gloved hands. He was working with an authority she'd never seen before in a human surgeon. She took the time to wish that Kirk and Scott could see what she was privileged to see. But they, with Kara, had been placed behind a grille.

She went to the grille to whisper to Kirk. "Captain, don't worry. It's not to be believed—the way he's fusing ganglia, nerve endings, even individual nerves almost too small to see—and as if he'd been doing it all his life."

"How much longer?" Kirk said.

"I can't tell, sir. He's going so much faster than is humanly possible."

"Time is important," he said. "There's no way of knowing how long we can count on this increased surgical knowledge to last."

Kara suddenly sobbed. Kirk placed an arm about her shoulder. "What is it?" he said.

"You will have him back. But we are destroyed."

He led her out into the corridor. "No," he said, "you are not destroyed. You'll have no Controller and that will be fine. You will have to come up from below and live on the surface."

"We will die in the cold."

"No, you won't. We will help you until you can help yourselves. You will build houses. You'll learn to keep warm by working to keep warm. You'll learn how to be women instead of hothouse plants."

"Captain Kirk!"

Nurse Chapel was at the Sickbay door. "You'd better come quickly, sir!"

McCoy had stopped working. He had backed away from the operating table. He looked sick. "I—can't. I—I can't . . ."

"He's forgetting, Captain," said Nurse Chapel.

"Bones!" Kirk called through the grille.

McCoy stumbled toward him. "All the ganglia—the nerves—a million of them—what am I supposed to do with them? The thalamus—the pallium . . ."

"Bones! You can't stop now!"

Nurse Chapel, her eyes on the life support indicator, said, "Doctor—the cerebral spinal fluid is almost exhausted."

McCoy groaned. "But—I don't know what to do. It's gone—I don't remember—no one can replace a brain!"

"But you could, Bones! It was child's play just a short while ago!"

"It's all gone, Jim. He's going to die—and I can't stop it!"

"Dr. McCoy."

Half-strangled, choked, it was nevertheless Spock's voice. They stared at the body on the sheeted table. McCoy was astounded into asking, "Spock, did you speak? How did you speak?"

"If you will finish connecting my vocal cords, I may be able to help."

McCoy rushed behind the shield. He chose an instrument. Then he discarded it, picked up another one and gave a brisk order to Nurse Chapel. Spock suddenly coughed. The voice came a little stronger. "Good. One thing at a time. Now, Doctor, try the sonic separator. No discouragement . . ."

"No, Spock—it's been like trying to thread a needle with a sledgehammer."

"No discouragement," Spock repeated. "I already have feeling, sensation. Now stimulate the nerve endings and observe the reactions. I shall tell you when the probe is correct. When I tell you, seal the endings with the trilaser connector."

Kirk spoke to McCoy. "Well?"

His answer came in a slight hum from behind the shield. Through the grille, he could see Spock's arms move, moving normally, up and down, bending normally at the elbow.

"Very good," Spock said. "Now, Doctor, please

move to reconnect the major blood vessels. Begin with the carotid artery."

His face drawn with strain, McCoy glanced over at Kirk. "Even if this works," he said, "I'll never live it down—this confounded Vulcan telling me how to operate!"

Relief swamped Kirk. They were back at the old bickering. McCoy had paused to allow Nurse Chapel to wipe the sweat from his forehead. He returned to work and Spock said, "They are sealed, Doctor."

"Are they, Bones?"

McCoy raised his head. "How do I know? He knows. I've probably made a thousand mistakes—sealing individual nerve endings, joining ganglia. The fluid balance is right but—I don't know."

Nurse Chapel was wiping his forehead again when Spock's eyelids flickered. The eyes opened. Spock lifted his head and his eyebrows went up into the arch McCoy thought never to see again. He shouted, "Jim!"

Kirk strode behind the shield. Spock was sitting up. "Gentlemen," he said, "it is a pleasure to see you again."

"Spock—Spock," Kirk said—and swallowed. "How do you feel?"

"On the whole, I believe I am quite fit, sir."

He started to get off the table. "For the Lord's sake, take it easy!" Kirk yelled.

Spock winced under a twinge of pain. "Perhaps you are right, Captain. I seem to have something of a headache. Perhaps I had better close my eyes."

"You are going to sleep and sleep and sleep," Kirk said.

Spock sleepily closed his eyes and immediately opened them in obvious surprise. "The eyelids work," he said. "Fascinating! It would seem, Doctor, that few of your connections were made in error."

"I performed a miracle of surgery on you to get you back into one piece," McCoy said.

"Doctor, I regret that I was unable to provide you with a blueprint."

McCoy turned to Kirk. "What I'll never know is why I reconnected his mouth to his brain."

Scott came out of the bridge elevator.

"Our technical aid teams have been beamed down to Planet 7, Captain."

"First reports, Mr. Scott?"

Scott rubbed his chin. "Well, sir, restoring friendly relations between its males and females won't be easy. Neither sex trusts the other one."

"How very human," commented Spock.

"And very cold," McCoy put in. "Especially the women. However, the aid parties have provided the ladies with a tool for procuring food, furs and fuel from the men."

"Oh?" Kirk turned from one to the other. "Money?"

"No, sir," Scott said. "Perfume."

"I'm not given to predictions, gentlemen, but I'll venture one now," Kirk told them. "The sexual conflict on Planet 7 will be a short one."

"I fail to see what facts you base your prediction on, Captain," Spock said.

"On long, cold winter nights, Mr. Spock—on the fact that cuddling is so much warmer than wood fires."

"Cuddling, sir?"

"A human predilection, Spock," McCoy said. "We don't expect you to know about it."

"Of course not, Doctor. It is a well-known fact that we Vulcans propagate our race by mail." He grinned.

"Spock!" McCoy shouted. "You smiled! No, by George, you positively grinned!"

"Another tribute to your surgery, Doctor. I was endeavoring to sneeze."

"Well, of all the ungrateful patients I—" McCoy began indignantly. It was with a real effort that Kirk maintained the gravity that seemed appropriate to the old, familiar, comfortable occasion. And sure enough, Spock nodded politely to the outraged McCoy and returned to his station.

In the end, Kirk couldn't maintain it. He laughed—a laugh of delighted affection. To the smiling Sulu beside him, he said, "We're through here, Mr. Sulu. Warp factor three."

THE ENEMY WITHIN

(Richard Matheson)

The planet's desert terrain had yielded an interesting roundup of mineral and animal specimens, and Kirk was busy checking the containers for beam-up to the *Enterprise* when a gust of icy wind blew a spray of sand in his face. Beside him, Sulu, holding a meek doglike creature on a leash, shivered.

"Temperature's beginning to drop, Captain."

"Gets down to 250 degrees below at nightfall," Kirk said. He blinked the sand out of his eyes, stooped to pat Sulu's animal—and wheeled at the sound of a shout. Geological technician Fisher had fallen from the bank where he'd been working. From shoulders to feet his jumpsuit was smeared with a sticky, yellowish ore.

"Hurt yourself?" Kirk asked.

Fisher winced. "Cut my hand, sir."

It was a jagged, ugly cut. "Report to Sickbay," Kirk said.

Obediently Fisher removed his communicator from his belt. In the *Enterprise* Transporter Room, Scott, receiving his request for beam-up, said, "Right. Locked onto you." He turned to Transporter technician Wilson at the console. "Energize!" he ordered.

But as Fisher sparkled into shape on the platform, the console flashed a warning red light. "Coadjustor engagement," Scott said hastily. Wilson threw a switch. The red light faded.

Materialized, Fisher stepped off the platform.

"What happened?" Wilson asked.

"Took a flop," Fisher told him.

Wilson eyed the yellowish splatterings on his jumpsuit. Some lumps of the stuff had fallen from it to the platform's floor.

"Took a flop onto what?" Wilson asked.

"I don't know—some kind of soft ore."

Scott had reached for a scanner device. He ran it over the jumpsuit. "That ore's magnetic," he said. "Decontaminate your uniform, Fisher."

"Yes, sir."

Frowning, Scott examined the console. "It acted like a burnout," he grumbled to Wilson. "I don't like it."

Kirk's voice broke in on his concentration. "Captain Kirk, ready for beam-up."

"Just a moment, Captain." Scott tested the console again. "Seems to be OK now," he told Wilson. "But we can do with a double check. Get me a synchronic meter." Returning to his speaker, he said, "All right, Captain. Locked onto you." Then he activated the Transporter.

There was an unfamiliar whine in its humming. Hurriedly dialing it out, Scott decided to warn Kirk he was delaying the beam-up. But the process had already begun. The engineer looked anxiously toward the platform. In its dazzle Kirk stood on it, dazed-looking, unusually pale. As he stepped from it, his legs almost buckled. Scott ran to him. "What's wrong, Captain? Let me give you a hand."

"Just a little dizzy, that's all," Kirk said. "I'm sure it's nothing serious." He glanced around him. "You're not leaving the Transporter Room untended to look after me, are you?"

"No, sir. Wilson's just gone for a tool."

The door closed behind them. More sparkle appeared on the platform. A figure took shape on it. When it had gathered solidity, it could be seen as a perfect double of Kirk. Except for its eyes. They were those of a rabid animal just released from a cage.

It looked around it, tense, as though expecting attack.

Wilson opened the door. Immediately sensing that tension, "Captain," he said, "are you all right?"

His reply was a hoarse growl. The double glanced around it again seeking some means of escape. It licked its dry lips. Then it saw the door Wilson had left open.

Out in the corridor Kirk was saying, "I can manage now. You'd better get back to the Transporter Room, Scotty."

"Yes, sir."

"Thanks for the help."

"I wish you'd let Dr. McCoy give you a look-over, Captain."

"All right, Engineer. I'll have him check my engines."

He didn't have far to go. At the next cross passage he collided with McCoy. "I think we need a control signal at this cor—" McCoy broke off to stare at Kirk. "What's happened to you?"

"I don't know," Kirk said.

"You look like you ran into a wall."

"Is that your official diagnosis?"

"Never mind my diagnosis! Go and lie down. I have a malingerer to be treated. Then I'll come and check you."

"If you can find me," Kirk said—and moved on down the corridor. McCoy followed his going with puzzled eyes. Then he hastened on back to the waiting Fisher in Sickbay.

The soiled jumpsuit had been discarded. McCoy cleaned the cut hand. "Like to get off duty, wouldn't you?" he said. "Take a little vacation."

Fisher grinned. And McCoy, swabbing the wound, lifted his head at the sound of the opening door.

The double spoke at once. "*Brandy*," it said.

The demand, the manner, the whole bearing of replica Kirk was uncharacteristic of the real one. Fisher's presence put a brake on McCoy's amazement. He decided to ignore the demand. "Don't go running back to work now," he told Fisher. "Keep the bandage moist with this antiseptic. Take the bottle along with you."

"Yes, sir." Fisher held up his swathed hand, smiling at the double. "It isn't too bad, Captain."

The remark was ignored. McCoy turned to the double standing in the doorway and gestured to it to enter the office. "Sit down, Jim," he said. "I think we'd better . . ."

He stopped. The double had gone to the locked liquor cabinet, its nails clawing at it. "I said brandy," it said.

McCoy stared, dumbfounded. The double was snarling now at its failure to pry open the cabinet's door. Nervous, uneasy, McCoy tried again. "Sit down, Jim."

A shudder passed through the double. A savage whisper broke from it. "Give me the brandy!"

"What is the matter with—" McCoy began. The clawing hands were lifting with the clear intention of smashing the cabinet's glass.

"Jim!" McCoy shouted.

The double whirled, crouched for a leap, its fists clenching. Instinctively McCoy recoiled from the coming blow. Then he recovered himself. "All right, I'll give you the brandy. Sit down!" But he didn't give the brandy. As he unlocked the cabinet door, he was shouldered aside—and the double, seizing a bottle of liquor, made for the door.

"Drink it in *your quarters*, Jim! I'll see you there in a . . ."

The door slammed shut.

McCoy, striding over to his viewing screen, flicked it on. Spock's face appeared. "Anything peculiar happen down on that planet's surface, Mr. Spock?"

The cool voice said, "One slight accident, Doctor, which I'm sure won't tax your miraculous healing powers."

But McCoy was too disturbed to rise to the bait. "Did it involve the Captain?"

"No."

"Well, there's something very wrong with him. He just left my office after carrying on like a wild man."

The wild man, rampaging down the corridor, suddenly had a mind to private drinking. A sign over a door declared it to be the entrance to the quarters of Yeoman Janice Rand. The double touched it, conceiving unmentionable notions—and slipped through the door. Inside, it uncorked the bottle. Tipping it up, it gulped down the brandy in deep swallows. Then it grunted in pure, voluptuous pleasure. The bite of the brandy down its throat was too seductive to resist the

impulse to swallow some more. Eyes half-shut in sensual delight, its face was the face of a Kirk released from all repressions, all self-discipline and moral order.

Kirk himself had not entirely recovered from his mysterious vertigo. Alone in his quarters, he had his shirt off, and was flexing his neck and shoulder muscles to rid his head of the whirling inside it. When the knock came at his door, he said, "Yes?"

"Spock, sir."

"Come in," Kirk said, pressing the door's unlocking button.

"Dr. McCoy asked me to check on you, sir."

Shouldering back into his shirt, Kirk said, "Why you?"

"Only Dr. McCoy could answer that, Captain."

"He must have had a reason."

"One would assume so," Spock said mildly, his keen eyes on Kirk's face.

"Well, Mr. Spock? I hope you know me next time we meet."

"Dr. McCoy said you were acting like a wild man."

"McCoy said that?" Kirk paused. "He must have been joking."

"I'll get back to the bridge now," Spock said.

"I'll tell McCoy you were here."

As the door closed, Kirk, puzzled by the interchange, reached for his Captain's coat.

On Deck 12, corridors above him, his double was feeling the effects of the brandy. But at the sound of a door sliding open, it was sober enough to take hiding in the bedroom of Yeoman Rand's quarters. It watched her enter. When she had placed her tricorder on a table, it stepped forward into her full sight.

It was not Kirk's custom to visit the bedrooms of attractive female members of his crew. Janice was shaken by his appearance in hers. She decided to smile. "This is an unexpected pleasure, sir," she said gamely.

The smile faltered at the suggestive leer she received. "Is there something I can—?" Then she tensed. The

double had come so close to her she could smell the brandy on its breath. She flushed at such male nearness, fought back an uprush of embarrassed apprehension and said, "Is there—can I do something for you, Captain?"

"You bet you can," the double grinned. "But Jim will do here, Janice."

Neither the words nor the tone fitted the image of Kirk that existed in the mind of Janice Rand. She had never seen him anything but coolly courteous toward women members of his crew. Since the day she had joined it, she had thought of him as the unobtainable but most desirable man she'd ever met. However, that was her own secret. It just wasn't possible that he was obtainable, not Captain James T. Kirk of the Starship *Enterprise*. And by a twenty-year-old, obscure yeoman named Janice Rand. He'd been drinking, of course; and when men drank . . . Nevertheless, of all the women on the ship, this handsomest man in the world had sought her out; and by some miraculous quirk of circumstance seemed to be finding her worthy of his sexual interest. She suddenly felt that she, along with her uniform, had gone transparent.

"I—Captain, this isn't—" she stammered.

"You're too much woman not to know," the double said. "I've been mad for you since the day you joined the ship. We both know what's been inside us all this time. We can't say no to it—not any more, not when we're finally alone, just you and me. Just try to deny it—after this . . ."

It swept her into its arms, kissing her hard on the lips. For a moment she was immobilized by the shock. Then she pulled back. "*Please, Captain. You—we . . .*"

The handsome face tightened with anger. She was kissed again harshly; and with a little moan, she tried to pull free. She was jerked closer. Now the kisses pressed against her throat, her neck.

"You're—hurting me," she whispered.

"Then don't fight me. You know you don't want to."

She stared into what she thought were Kirk's eyes. In some shameful way it was true. She *didn't* want to fight

the Captain's kisses. Only how dare he presume to know it?

"Shall I make that an order, Yeoman Rand?"

This time the kiss on her mouth was openly brutal. Janice, infuriated by exposure of a truth she wanted neither to know herself nor be known to anyone else, began to fight in earnest. She scratched the double across its handsome face. It pulled back; and she dashed for the door. She was grabbed as it opened—but out in the corridor, Fisher, returning to his room with the antiseptic liquid he'd forgotten, had seen the struggling pair.

"*On your way!*" It was Kirk's command voice.

Relief surged through Janice. *The Captain had implicated himself in this disgraceful scene.* If there was penalty to pay in loss of his crew's respect, he'd have only himself to blame. She screamed, "Call Mr. Spock!"

Fisher gaped at her. "*Call Mr. Spock!*" she screamed again. Fisher broke into a run. The double tightened its hold on her. Then, realizing how the witness menaced it, it rushed out into the corridor.

Fisher made it to a wall intercom. "This is Fisher of Geology! Come to Deck 12, Section . . ."

The double caught him in midsentence. Fisher was spun around to take a smashing right to his jaw. It was his turn to scream. "Help! Section 3!"

The scream came through to the bridge. Spock bolted for the elevator, shouting "Take over!" to navigator Farrell.

Deck 12 was deserted. Spock hesitated. Then, starting down the corridor, he slowed his run to a wary walk, his sharp Vulcan eyes searching. After a moment, he stooped to run a finger along a dark streak on the flooring. When he looked at the finger, it was red, wet with blood.

Its trail of drops led to the quarters of Yeoman Rand. He opened the door. She was sitting on a chair, her uniform disheveled, her eyes blank, stunned. Near her, Fisher lay on the floor. She didn't speak as Spock bent down to him. His face was a mass of mangled flesh and blood.

"Who did this to you?" Spock asked.

Fisher's torn lips moved. "Captain Kirk," he whispered. Then he subsided into unconsciousness.

Kirk asked his question very quietly. "And Yeoman Rand says I assaulted her?"

"Yes, sir," Spock said. "And technician Fisher also accuses you of assault upon her and himself."

"I've been here in my quarters for the past half hour," Kirk said.

Spock held up the nearly empty brandy bottle.

"What's that?" Kirk said.

"The bottle of brandy Dr. McCoy says you took from his office cabinet. I found it in Yeoman Rand's room with Fisher."

"McCoy says *I* took that brandy?" The whirling in Kirk's head had come back. He shut his eyes against its wheeling stars. Then he rose. "Let's find out what's going on in this ship." He moved past Spock into the corridor.

The elevator door closed behind them—and the double, a darker shadow in the shadows of a cross passage, slipped quietly out into the corridor. Panting, it pried at the door of Kirk's quarters. It got it open. Inside, the lock on the panel of the sleeping compartment caught its eye. It depressed the unlocking button. It relocked the panel behind it and fell across the bed, sighing with exhaustion. Then it buried the replica of Kirk's face in a pillow to shut out the sights and sounds of a world that hated it.

In Sickbay, Yeoman Rand was saying, "Then he kissed me—and said we—that he was the Captain and could order me to—" Her eyes were on her cold hands, safer to look at than Kirk's face. She had addressed her words to Spock.

"Go on," Kirk said.

She looked at him now. "I—I didn't know what to do. When you started talking about—us—about the feeling we've been—hiding all this time . . ."

"The feeling you and I have been hiding, Yeoman Rand?" Kirk said. "Do I understand you correctly?"

"Yes, sir." In desperation she twisted around to McCoy. "He *is* the Captain, Doctor! I couldn't just—" Her face tightened. "I couldn't *talk* to you!" she burst out at Kirk. "I had to fight you, scratch your face and kick and . . ."

"Yeoman Rand," Kirk said. He went over to her, pretending not to notice how she shrank from his approach. "Look at me! Look at my face! Do you see any scratches on it?"

"No, sir," she whispered.

"I have been in my quarters, Yeoman. How could I have been with you and in my own quarters at one and the same time?"

She wrung her hands. "But—" Her voice broke. "I know what happened. And it *was* you. I—I don't want to get you into trouble. I wouldn't even have mentioned it if technician Fisher hadn't seen you, too, and . . ."

"Yeoman," Kirk said, "it wasn't *me!*"

She began to cry. She looked very small, very young in her rumpled uniform. Kirk reached out a compassionate hand to her shoulder—but she shied away from his touch as though it might burn her.

Spock said, "You can go now, Yeoman."

Sobbing, she got to her feet. As she reached the door, Kirk said, "Yeoman." She stopped. "*It was not me,*" he repeated. But she went on out the door without looking back.

Spock broke the silence. "Captain, there is an impostor aboard this ship."

It was to be expected from Spock. Faith to the end—that was Spock. Kirk pulled his uniform collar away from his neck as though it were choking him. After a moment he went to the door of Sickbay's treatment room where McCoy had gone back to work on the battered Fisher. He was busy, of course; too busy with Fisher to look at him. But the prone Fisher looked at him from the sheeted table—and in his eyes there was open scorn.

The intercom buzzed; and Scott said, "Captain, can we see you in the Transporter Room for a minute?"

Kirk took the scalding memory of Fisher's look with him. If Spock hadn't silently joined him, he wondered

if he'd have found the courage to respond to Scott's call. Had he, too, heard the interesting details of his Captain's recent activities? But Scott's total concern seemed to be the still defective Transporter. He looked up from the console as Kirk entered. "It's a complete breakdown, Captain." He turned his head to say to his technicians, "Continue circuit testing." The meek, doglike creature collected from the planet was lying beside the console. Scott pointed to it. "We beamed this animal up to the ship, sir, and . . ."

"And what?" Kirk said.

Scott paused. "The animal is here. But it's also over there in that specimen case."

He left the console to go over to the case with Kirk and Spock. A fierce growl greeted them. Scott cautiously lifted the lid. The beast inside bared its teeth, its lips flecked with the foam of its fury. Scott hastily dropped the lid over its leap at them.

"It appears to be the twin of the other animal," Spock said slowly. "Except for the difference in temperament, they might be one and the same."

Scott had hurried back to the console to pick up the quiet creature. Stroking it, he said, "A few seconds after they sent this one up through the Transporter, that duplicate of it appeared on the platform. If this had happened to a man—it's some kind of opposite."

The intentness on Kirk's face was naked. Scott went on. "One beast gentle like this—and one savage, wolfish, this one and *that* one—some kind of ferocious *opposite*. Captain, till we know what's gone wrong with the Transporter, we dare not use it to beam up the landing party!"

"Oh, my God . . ."

The whisper was wrenched from Kirk by the force of sudden revelation. It was no impostor who was loose on the *Enterprise*. What was loose on it was his own counterpart—the dark, brutish aspect of human nature which every mortal carries within him from birth to the grave. His Cain was roaming the *Enterprise* in a mindless, murderous search for a vengeance that would appease the bitterness of years of denial—the years it had spent as a prisoner of conscience, of duty, of

responsibility. Somehow it had got free from its embodiment in him, and wearing his face, using his voice, wandering his ship, had found its release.

He gradually became conscious of Spock's eyes. The Vulcan had taken the lamb-gentle animal into his arms. Something in the way he held it stilled the turmoil in Kirk's soul. He was able to speak.

"Do you know what caused the animal to divide in two, Scotty?"

"We think we do, sir. When Fisher came up, his clothes were splashed with some soft, yellowish stuff. He said it was ore. Some of it fell on the Transporter platform. When we scanned it, we found it contained unknown magnetic elements. Maybe it caused an overload. We can't tell—not yet."

"Is the Transporter working at all?"

"Yes, sir. But to use it to bring up the landing party—they might all be duplicated like you—" He caught himself. "Like the animal, Captain."

So Scott *had* heard. "How long will it take to locate the trouble?"

"Can't say, sir."

Kirk fought for calm, for reason. "We can't just leave those four men down there. They'll freeze to death. At night that planet's temperature sinks to 250 degrees below zero."

"We're doing everything we can, Captain!"

Kirk looked at the Transporter platform. What was the secret it refused to divulge? He'd emerged from it whole, unsplit, a thousand times. Why not this last time? *What had happened?* When and how had he been divided in two halves like a one-celled organism reproducing itself? The whirling in his head was back once more. And the platform looked back at him, empty, its secret still withheld.

Spock had come to stand beside him. "About this double of yours, Captain."

Kirk started like a man aroused from nightmare. "Yes, we've got to find him. Search parties, Mr. Spock—we've got to organize search parties."

"We can't risk killing it," Spock said. "We have no

data—no way of knowing the effect of its death on you.”

So Spock understood. “Yes, that’s right,” Kirk said. “We don’t know that—but the men must be armed. All men to be armed with phasers locked to the stun setting. He’s to be taken without—if anyone fires to kill, he won’t die—it’s not the way to get rid of him . . .”

Spock noted the breaks between thoughts and words. They were disjointed, disorganized. No, there was no doubt. This Kirk was not the integrated, decisive Kirk he knew.

“It will be difficult to order the search parties to capture a being who so closely resembles you, Captain.”

“Tell them—” Kirk looked at him helplessly. “I’d better make an announcement to the entire crew—tell them what’s happened as well as I can. It’s a good crew—they deserve to be told.”

“I must object, sir,” Spock said. “You are the Captain of this ship. You cannot afford to appear vulnerable in the eyes of your crew. It is your damnable fate to have to seem perfect to them. I’m sorry, sir. Yet that is the fact. They lose their confidence in you—and you lose your command.”

Kirk pressed his forehead between his hands. “I know that, Mr. Spock. Why did I forget it?” He turned away, then stopped without looking back. “If you see me slipping again, your order is to *tell me so*.”

“Yes, Captain.”

His back stiff, Kirk walked out of the Transporter Room. In the bridge he touched the back of his command chair before he took his position in it. Command—no weakness, no fault, no hesitation. Bracing himself for the front of perfection, he flicked on his intercom. “This is the Captain speaking. There is an impostor aboard this ship—a man who looks exactly like me and is pretending to *be me*. The man is dangerous. Utmost caution is to be observed. All crew members are to arm themselves. The impostor may be identified by scratches on his face.”

The message reached the double. It sat up quickly on Kirk’s bed. “Repeat,” came the voice from the

intercom. "The impostor may be identified by scratches on his face. Search parties will report to Mr. Spock for assignment. All hand phasers will be set to stun force. The impostor is not to be injured. Repeat. The impostor is not to be injured."

The double touched the scratches on its face. Then it got up to go to the mirror and stare at its reflection. "Impostor!" it muttered to itself. "*I'm Kirk!*" it shouted at Kirk's image on the intercom viewing screen. A gust of fury shook it. It seized a metal box from the dresser and hurled it at the screen. The sound of crashing glass frightened it. "I'm Kirk," it whimpered to its reflection in the mirror. The scratches showed red, unhealed. To examine them more closely, it pushed aside a jar of medicated cream. The loosened lid fell off. The double dug its fingers into the cream, looked once more at the scratches and began to rub the cream into them. It made them feel better. It also hid the weals. The double grunted with satisfaction. It was dabbing more of the concealing cream into the cuts when it heard running sounds from the corridor outside.

When the sounds had gone, it unlocked the door. Moving out into the working area of Kirk's quarters, it slid its entrance panel half open. Wilson, carrying some Transporter equipment, was hurrying down the corridor.

"Wilson!" the double called. "Come here!"

Wilson came.

"Give me your weapon belt!"

"Yes, sir."

As he handed over the belt, Wilson saw the smeared cream on its face. But his suspicion came too late. The double had the phaser out of the belt. It struck him on the jaw with its butt. When Wilson fell, it stooped to pound his jaw with the heavy butt. Then it dragged him into Kirk's cabin. The bloody phaser still in hand, it nodded to itself—and walked casually out into the corridor.

Down on the planet's surface it was growing dark. Sulu and his three crewmen were gathering rocks to erect a wall against the rising wind. Frost had already

whitened the dismal landscape as far as they could see.

Over his communicator, Kirk said, "Mr. Sulu, how is the rock shelter coming?"

"It's a compliment to these rocks, sir, to call them a shelter. It's down to 50 below zero now, Captain."

They were not equipped with thermal clothing. It was hard to say, "Kirk out." He might better have said, "Kirk down and out." That was the truth. In his command chair, he had to steady himself against another attack of vertigo. "We've got to get those men up!" he said to Spock. But Spock was taking a report from one of his search parties. "Deck 5 Sections 2 and 3 completely covered now, sir. Result, negative. Proceeding to Sections 4 and 5."

"Acknowledged," Spock said and flicked off his audio—but only to flick it on again to another intercom call.

"Search party number eight, sir. Transporter technician Wilson has just been found crawling out of the Captain's cabin. He's been badly beaten. He says the impostor attacked him, called him by his name and took his phaser."

"Get him to Sickbay," Spock said. "Then continue your search."

"We must locate this—this opposite of mine before he—" Kirk broke off. "But how, Spock, how?"

"It is apparent, sir, that it possesses your knowledge of the ship, its crew and devices. That being so, perhaps we can foresee its next move. Knowing how this ship is constructed, where would *you* go to elude a mass search, Captain?"

For the first time since his disaster, Kirk spoke without hesitation. "The lower level. The Engineering deck. Let's go!"

In the elevator Spock removed his phaser from his belt. Without looking at Kirk, he said, "I'm setting this, not to the kill cycle, but to the stun one, sir. What about your phaser?" Kirk took the hint; and Spock said, "This thing is dangerous. Don't you think we'll need some help if we find it?"

The torture of indecision was back. Finally Kirk said, "No. If we find him, I don't want anyone else

around but you." He had stepped out of the elevator when Spock called, "*Captain!*"

Kirk turned.

Spock said, "You ordered me to tell you . . ."

"I said *no*, Mr. Spock. No one but you."

The lower level of the Engineering deck held the vast complex that powered the *Enterprise*. It was a cavern of shadows, broken by glints of gleaming machinery, its passageways narrowing, widening, narrowing again to crisscross other passages. The droning hum of its huge nuclear energizers reverberated against its metal walls. Suddenly, as he rounded a dynamo, Spock realized he was alone. He turned to retrace his steps in hope of locating Kirk again.

Kirk, unaware he had lost Spock, looked at the phaser he held at the ready. The sight of it repelled him. A suicide weapon was what it was. The life it would fell was part of his own. He replaced the phaser in his belt.

And his Cain saw him do it. Crouched between two power generators, the double had heard his approaching footsteps. Its features tensed with its curious mixture of fear and ferocity. Its phaser aimed, it moved away from its shelter for a full confrontation.

Kirk stopped dead. As he recognized his own face in the Other's face, a chill passed over him. This nameless Thing belonged to him more utterly than any name his parents had given him. The two Kirks stared at each other in a kind of trance. Then, as though he were drawn by a power as unknown as it was powerful, Kirk stepped toward his double. It raised its phaser.

Kirk spoke. His voice sounded strange in his own ears. It was solemn with the prophetic tone of a mystic suddenly endowed with an incontrovertible truth. "You must not hurt me," he said. "You must not kill me. You can live only as long as I live."

Uncertainty flickered over the double's face; and Kirk, in a kind of dream, knew he was seeing the reflection of his own new uncertainty.

Then the hesitation faded. "*I don't need you!*" the double said. "*I don't have to believe what you say. So I can kill you!*"

Its finger was on the kill trigger. Leaping, the momentum of his leap lending force to his clenched fist, Spock lunged from behind the generator to land it, hammerlike, on the double's chin. It fell. Its phaser fired, the beam striking a machine unit behind Kirk. It flared into glow and collapsed.

Spock looked down at the sprawled double. "I fear," he said, "that the ministrations of Dr. McCoy will be needed."

The fear was well-founded. Consciousness was reluctant to return to the double. Each in his different way anxious, Kirk and Spock watched McCoy as he stooped over the still figure in its bed. McCoy worked silently. After a moment, Kirk went to the viewing screen. Turning it on to Engineering, he said, "What about those Transporter circuits, Scotty? They're all checked through now, aren't they?"

"Yes, sir. And we thought we'd corrected the trouble. But now something else has gone wrong."

"*What?*" Kirk demanded.

"We don't know, sir. We're working on it. Is that all, Captain?"

Once more Kirk was unable to rally either a yes or a no. There was an uncomfortable pause. Finally Scott said, "Then I'd better get back to work, sir."

It would be darker on the planet. Kirk cried out, "Find out what's wrong, Scott! And fix it in God's name! Four human lives are depending on that Transporter!"

Scott said stiffly, "We're doing our best, sir."

Kirk leaned his forehead against the frame of the viewing screen. "I know, Scotty. You always do your best. Keep me posted, will you?"

"Yes, sir." The voice had relaxed.

Over at the bed, McCoy had completed his examination. "How is—he?" Kirk asked.

"Pulse and blood pressure high," McCoy said. He glanced at Spock. "Probably due to that sock on the chin."

"It was necessary, Doctor."

"This—creature will be recovering consciousness

soon. As I have no idea at all about its mental state, I can't give it a tranquilizer. I think we'd better bind it."

He looked at Kirk for authorization. Kirk was suddenly oppressed by a sense of suffocation. The heavy tonnage of command responsibility seemed to be crushing him. He shook his head to try and clear it of the dizziness. "Yes," he said, "all right. I just wish someone would tell me what's the matter with *me*."

"You are losing the power of decision, Captain," Spock said.

"What?"

McCoy was busy binding the double but not so busily that he couldn't direct a glare at Spock. But the Vulcan continued, cool and unruffled. "Judging from my observations," he said, "you are rapidly losing your capacity for action. There's hesitation in time of crises—loss of perception. Captain, you refuse to defend yourself. You refused to demand adequate assistance when we went down to the Engineering level whereas you should have placed yourself in guarded isolation until the impostor was captured." He paused. "You have dismissed men for less hesitation, less passivity in the face of danger."

"Make your point, Spock!" shouted McCoy.

"Point?"

"You *have* one, I presume," McCoy said.

"I am analyzing, Doctor; not point-making."

"It's the Captain's guts you're analyzing! Are you aware of that, Mr. Spock?"

"Vituperation, Doctor?"

Composed, unmoved, Spock went on. "The dichotomies inherent in the human mind are multiple," he said. "The problem of command, for instance, highly pertinent in this case. Command is a balance between positive and negative energies—an equilibrium of the forces generated by each of these energies. The proof?"

He turned to Kirk. "Your negative energy was removed from you by that duplication process. Thus, the power of command has begun to fail you. Things remaining as they are, how long can you continue to function as Captain of this ship? Finally unable to decide anything at all, will you . . ."

McCoy broke in. "Jim, give him a command! Tell him to get lost!"

"If I seem emotionally insensitive to the agony of your ordeal, Captain, please understand. It's the way I am."

"That's for damned sure!" yelled McCoy.

"*Gentlemen,*" Kirk said. In the end, always in the end, one's pain remained a private matter. The scene, however dismal, was always enacted alone. He smiled wryly at them. "I may be losing my ability to command but it hasn't entirely disappeared. Until it does, you will both kindly knock it off."

The intercom on McCoy's desk whirred. Kirk flicked it on. "Kirk here."

"Engineering, sir. We've just located that new trouble with the Transporter. Its Ionizer Unit has been mangled. Looks as if a phaser beam had hit it."

The double's phaser beam had hit it, the double, that separated part of himself. If his crewmen died their lonely death on the subarctic planet beneath him, it would be he, Kirk, their trusted Captain who had killed them.

He got up to walk to the door. "If I'm needed," he said, "I'll be in the Briefing Room."

They had lit a fire down on the planet. Black night was spreading toward them from its horizon. And the stealthy fronds of frost were creeping over the rocks of the rock shelter where the abandoned crewmen huddled together for warmth. Sulu, his lips cracked and sore, had to hold his hands over the fire before his fingers could manipulate his communicator. "Can you give us a status report, *Enterprise*? It's fallen to 90 degrees below zero down here."

"This is the Captain, Mr. Sulu. We have located the trouble. It shouldn't be much longer."

"Think you could rig up a cord, sir, and lower us down a pot of coffee?"

"I'll see what I can do about that," Kirk said.

"Rice wine will do, sir, if you're short of coffee."

"I'll check the commissariat for rice wine, Mr. Sulu." And once more it had to be "Kirk out."

He watched his hand reach out to the intercom button. He was afraid to call Scott. He pressed the button. "That mangled unit, Scotty. Status report."

"Nothing much of it left, sir."

"How bad is it?"

"We can't repair it in less than a week."

A week. One hundred and sixty-eight hours. Death by cold was said to be preceded by sleep. Alone in the Briefing Room, Kirk realized that imagination had become his mortal enemy. It showed him the planet's surface under the deadly grip of its incredible cold, its night ominous with the coming sleep of death as the blood in his men's veins turned to ice. They'd be moving slowly now if they could move at all . . .

Reality endorsed imagination. Sulu was slowed to a crawl as he elbowed himself to the dying warmth to check his phaser. He fired it at another boulder. It burst into glow. The others inched toward it; and Sulu made his frost-blackened lips say, "That rice wine is taking too long. I'm giving Room Service another call."

Nobody spoke as he opened his communicator. "*Enterprise*, this is Sulu."

"Kirk here, Mr. Sulu."

"Hot line direct to the Captain again. Are we that far gone, sir?"

Kirk struck the Briefing Room table with his fist. "Everybody but you's got the afternoon off. I'm watching the store. How is it down there?"

"Lovely," Sulu said. "We're using our phasers to heat the rocks. One phaser's quit on us. Three are still operational. Any chance of getting us aboard before the skiing season opens down here?"

The ice—maybe it would be merciful, quick. *Think*. But he couldn't think. His thoughts like comets that would not be stayed flashed through his mind—and were gone . . .

He felt no surprise to see Spock quietly lift the speaker he had dropped.

"This is Spock, Mr. Sulu. You will hold out a little longer. *Hold out*. Survival procedures, Mr. Sulu."

"As per your training program, Mr. Spock."

"Yes, Mr. Sulu."

Kirk reached for the speaker. "Sulu—just don't drift, don't lose—awareness. Sulu, beware of sleep . . ."

As Spock said, "Spock out," Kirk felt an irresistible impulse to return to Sickbay. He wasn't entirely composed of that atavism that had destroyed the Ionizer Unit. He was Captain James T. Kirk of the Starship *Enterprise*, too—and he was going back to Sickbay. Courage was doing what you were afraid to do.

The consciousness that had come back to the double was a thing of howling panic. It was thrusting madly against the net of cords that held it, the force of its screams swelling the veins of its neck. As he watched the writhing body on the bed, it seemed to Kirk that he could taste the acid of its frenzy in his mouth. How he knew what he knew he didn't know; but he knew that the double was feeling some ultimate terror it had met in the black labyrinth of its Cain fate.

"It should be calming down," McCoy said, laying a hypodermic aside. "This tranquilizer should be working now." He threw a worried glance at the body function panel. All its readings showed a dangerous peak.

The tormented body on the bed strained again at its bonds. A shudder shook it. Then, suddenly, it collapsed, its head lolling like a broken doll's.

"What's happened?" Kirk cried. The readings on the body-function panel were rapidly falling.

"The tranquilizer was a mistake," McCoy said. "Its system has rejected it."

"He's not—*dying*?" Kirk said.

McCoy spoke tonelessly. "Yes, it is."

"No," Kirk whispered. "No." He reached for McCoy's arm. "I can't survive without him and he can't survive without me."

McCoy shook his head; and the double moaned. "Afraid, afraid," it said.

Kirk went to it. "Help me," it wept. "I am afraid—so afraid."

Kirk took its hand. McCoy started forward. "Jim, you'd better not . . ."

Kirk stooped over the bed. "Don't be afraid. This is my hand. Feel it. Hold on to it. That's it. Hang on to my hand. I won't let you go."

"Afraid," whimpered the double pitifully.

Some strength rose up from unknown depths in Kirk. It was as though he had lived through just such a scene before. The words that came to him seemed familiar. "You must hold on to me because we've been pulled apart. Come back! No, you're letting go! Hold on to me. Tight! Tighter!"

He lifted the sheet to wipe the sweat from its forehead. "I'm pulling you back to me. We need each other! That's it. *Tight!* We have to hang on—together . . ."

McCoy, at the body-function panel, looked around, astounded. But all Kirk saw were the tragic eyes fixed on his in abject dependence. "No fear," he said. "You can come back. You are not afraid. *You are not afraid.* Be back with me. Be back, be back, be back . . ."

McCoy touched his shoulder. "Jim, it *is* back."

Kirk stumbled over to McCoy's desk, slumping into its chair. "Now *you* can use some brandy," McCoy said.

He gagged on the drink. Eyes shut, he said, "I must take him back—into myself. I don't want to, Bones—a brutish, mindless wolf in human shape. But I must. He is me, *me!*"

"Jim, don't take this so hard," McCoy said. "We are all part wolf and part lamb. We need both parts. Compassion is reconciliation between them. It is human to be both lamb and wolf."

"Human?" Kirk asked bitterly.

"Yes, *human*. Some of his wolfishness makes you the man you are. God forbid that I should ever agree with Spock—but he was right! Without the strength of the wolf in you, you could not command this ship! And without the lamb in you, your discipline would be harsh and cruel. Jim, you just used the lamb to give life back to that dying wolf . . ."

The double was listening, concentrated.

The intercom buzzed. Drained, Kirk said, "Kirk here."

"Spock, sir. Will you come to the Transporter Room? We think we may have found an answer."

"I'm on my way," Kirk said. He turned to McCoy. "Thanks, Bones. And keep your fingers crossed."

"Tell Mr. Spock I'm shaking all my rattles to invoke good spirits."

But as the door closed behind Kirk, there came a cry from the bed. "*No!*" The startled McCoy went to the bed. The double was sitting up. It said quietly, "*No. Everything is under control right now.*"

In the Transporter Room, Wilson was holding the mild doglike creature.

"What's that answer you think you've found?" Kirk asked.

"A way to make the Transporter safe, sir," Scott said. "We have attached some temporary bypass and leader circuits to compensate for the velocity variation. There shouldn't be more than a five-point difference in speed balance."

"Our suggestion is that we send the two animals through the Transporter," Spock said.

So that was the answer—hope that amendment in the Transporter would somehow rejoin the two halves of the animal as it had somehow cut them apart. It was hoped that his dying men could be beamed home to the *Enterprise* without risk of the fatal division. Hope. Well, without it, you couldn't live.

"All right," Kirk said. "Go ahead."

Spock took the hypodermic from the top of the Transporter console. He nodded at Scott. The Chief Engineer went to the specimen case and lifted its lid. "I'll grab it by the scruff of its neck and hold it as still as I can." He reached into the case. The snarling beast twisted and writhed against Scott's grip on its neck.

"Don't hurt it!" Kirk cried.

Injecting the shot, Spock said, "It's painless, Captain, quick. The animal will lose consciousness for only the few, necessary moments." The snarls subsided. Spock took the creature from Scott and carried it to the Transporter platform where Wilson was waiting with the other one. They laid them on the platform, side by side. Scott, at the console, said, "If this doesn't work—" He broke off at Spock's signal. He turned a dial. The

platform flared into glow. The two animals vanished and the glow faded.

"Energize to reverse," Spock said.

Scott twisted a dial. The platform flared into light again. The two animals reappeared—and the light dimmed.

Spock ran to the console. He made some adjustment of dials. "Again," he said to Scott. The process was repeated. The energizing dial was reversed. The platform broke into dazzle. As it shaped itself into substance, McCoy came in.

One animal lay on the platform.

"It's dead," Kirk said.

"Not so fast, Jim," McCoy said.

Kirk waited while he checked the limp body for heartbeat. There was none. Into the silence Spock said, "The shock—the shock of reabsorption . . ."

Kirk stumbled out of the Transporter Room.

Later, in Sickbay, McCoy gave tentative support to Spock's diagnosis of the cause of the death. Straightening up from the table that held the dead beast, he said, "Maybe it *was* the shock of reabsorption that killed it. But it would take a post mortem before we could even approach certainty."

"Why shock?" Kirk asked.

"We're only guessing, Jim."

"Yes, I know. But you've both used the word shock."

"The consequence of instinctive fear," Spock said.

"The animal lacked the ability to understand the process of reabsorption. Its fear was so great it induced shock. Other conditions that cause shock are not apparent." He was carefully examining the creature. "You yourself can see, sir, that the body is quite undamaged."

Kirk was groping for some answer of his own. "*He*—in that bed in there—felt great fear." He turned to McCoy. "You saw him feel it. But he survived it. He *survived* it!"

"Just by a hairsbreadth," McCoy reminded him. "I can hear it coming, Jim. You want to take this double

of yours through the Transporter with you—you and it, *with* it. No, Jim, *no!*”

“Four of my men are freezing to death,” Kirk said.

“But there isn’t one genuine shred of evidence to prove this animal died of fear! Shock? Yes. But fear? That’s mere theory!”

“Based on the laws of probability,” Spock said.

“Probability be hanged!” McCoy shouted. “It’s Jim’s life that’s at stake! And all of a sudden you’re an expert on fear! That’s a base emotion, Mr. Spock. What do you know about it?”

“I must remind you, Doctor, that I am half human,” Spock said. “I am more aware than you of what it means to live with a divided spirit—of the suffering involved in possession of two separate selves. I survive it daily.”

“That may be—but a piece of machinery is the problem. What do the laws of probability say about the Transporter? Is it reliable? You don’t know! It’s just more theory, more hopeful guesswork!”

Kirk said, “I am going through the Transporter with him.”

McCoy threw up his arms in a gesture of hopelessness. “You’ve got more guts than brains, Jim! Use your head, for God’s sake!”

“I’m getting my four men back on this ship,” Kirk said. “And we can’t risk using that Transporter until we know whether this animal died of fear—or mechanical malfunction in the Transporter.”

“I want to save the men, too, Jim! But you’re more vital to this ship than four crew members. That’s the brutal truth—and you know it!”

Listening, Kirk felt his weakened will sink to its final depth of hesitation. “I have to—try. I must be allowed to try. If I don’t try, their death is sure. So will mine be. I shall look alive, Bones. But I shall live as a half man. What good to this ship is a half man Captain?”

“Jim, do me one favor. Before you decide, let me run an autopsy on this animal.”

“Delay is too expensive,” Kirk said.

“At least give Spock more time to test the Transporter. And let me get the lab started on the autopsy.”

McCoy gathered up the dead animal in a sheet. "Wait, Jim, please wait." He hurried out of Sickbay.

Spock said, "I'll put the Transporter through another check-out cycle as soon as the Doctor returns."

Kirk whirled on him. "I don't need nursemaids, Mr. Spock!"

"As soon as the Doctor returns." The six words too many, Spock thought. The weakened will had finally steeled itself to decision only to meet doubt, argument, pressure. Those last six words had been a mistake.

"If you will excuse me, Captain," he said.

Kirk nodded. He watched Spock go. Half human, Spock—but you never came to the end of his aware humanity. Gratitude heartened him to do what he had to do. He was turning toward Sickbay's bed section when Sulu's voice sounded from the wall speaker.

"Kirk here, Mr. Sulu."

The voice was a whisper. "Captain—the rocks are cold—no phasers left—one of us is unconscious—we can't hold out much longer." The communicator crackled. "Captain—the cold is freezing the communicator—no time left—no time . . ."

The whisper fell silent. There was another crackle from the dead communicator. Kirk sank down on the double's bed. Four lives at risk on the fatal planet—two lives at risk in the Transporter process. There was no alternative.

The double spoke fearfully. "What are you going to do?"

Kirk didn't answer. He began to untie the cords of the restraining net over the bed. The double reached out and touched the phaser at his belt. "You don't need that," it said. "I'm not going to fight you any more. What are you going to do?"

"We are going through the Transporter together," Kirk said.

The double tensed. Then it controlled itself. "If that's what you want," it said.

"It's what I have to want," Kirk said. He untied the last cord, stepped back and raised his phaser. Staggering, the double got up. Then it leaned back against the

bed for support. "I feel so weak," it said. "I'll be glad when this is over."

"Let's go," Kirk said.

The double moved toward the door; but on its first step it faltered, groaning. It tried again, staggered again—and Kirk instinctively reached out to help it. It saw its chance. Lunging, it drove its shoulder into Kirk, knocking him backward. The phaser dropped. It stooped for it. Recovering his balance, Kirk shouted, "No, no, you can't . . ."

The phaser butt crashed into the side of his head. He fell back on the bed. The double paused to finger the scratches on its face. McCoy's medication covered them. It smiled to itself. Then it began to strap Kirk into the bed. "I'm *you*," it told him.

Swaggering, it walked out into the corridor. At its end the elevator door slid open. Janice Rand was standing inside it. At once it tempered its swagger to a quiet walk.

"How are you, Yeoman Rand?"

"Captain," the girl said nervously.

It smiled at her. "Is that a question? No, I am not the impostor. Are you feeling better?"

"Yes, sir. Thank you."

"Good."

Maybe it was her opportunity, Janice thought. She'd done this man a grave injustice. "Captain," she said, "I've wanted to apologize. If I caused you . . ."

She got Kirk's own grin. "That's a big word—'if.' I understand, Yeoman. I hope you do. I owe you, I think, a personal explanation."

"No," she said. "It's I who owe you . . ."

"Let's call it a clarification, then," the double said. "I trust your discretion. There was no impostor, not really. The Transporter malfunctioned. It seems to have created a duplicate of me. It's hard to understand because we haven't yet determined what went wrong. But what we *do* know I'll explain to you later. You're entitled to that. All right?"

Bewildered, she nodded. "All right, sir."

The elevator door opened. Politely, the double stepped back, gesturing her forward. As the elevator

moved on up to the bridge deck, it shouted with laughter. Slamming its hand against the elevator wall, it yelled, "My ship! Mine—all mine!"

The sight of Kirk's command chair intoxicated it. As it settled back into it, a frowning Farrell spoke from the navigation console. "No word from Mr. Sulu, Captain."

It ignored the comment; and Spock, hurrying over to the command chair, said, "Captain, I couldn't find you in the Transporter Room."

"I changed my mind," the double said. "Take your station, Mr. Spock." It didn't look at the Vulcan.

Spock walked slowly back to his computer. It was a very sudden change of mind for a mind that had struggled so valiantly for decision.

"Prepare to leave orbit, Mr. Farrell!"

If the order had commanded activation of the Destruct unit, its impact could not have been more devastating. Farrell stared in stark unbelief. The double became abruptly aware that every eye in the bridge was fixed on it.

"Captain—" Farrell began.

"I gave you an order, Mr. Farrell."

"I know, sir, but what—what about . . . ?"

"*They can't be saved. They're dead now.*" Its voice rose. "Prepare to leave orbit, Mr. Farrell!"

"Yes, sir." Farrell's hand was moving toward a switch when the elevator opened. Kirk and McCoy stepped out of it. There were badly covered scratches on Kirk's face but the hand that held the phaser was steady. The double leaped from the command chair. "There's the impostor," it shouted. "Grab him!"

Nobody moved.

"You are the impostor," McCoy said.

"Don't believe him!" the double shrieked. "Take them both! Grab them!"

Kirk, McCoy beside him, walked on toward the command chair. Spock, reaching out a hand, halted McCoy, shaking his head. McCoy nodded—and Kirk moved on, alone.

"You want me dead, don't you? You want this ship all to yourself! But it's *mine!*"

Farrell had jumped from his chair. Spock touched his shoulder. "This is the Captain's private business," he said.

Kirk maintained his slow advance toward the madened thing. It backed up, slow step by slow step, screaming.

"I am Captain Kirk, you ship of pigs! All right, let the liar destroy you all! He's already killed four of you! I run this ship! I own it. I own you—all of you!"

Kirk fired his phaser. The double crumpled to the deck, stunned.

"Spock, Bones," he said quietly. "Quickly, please."

Kirk had already taken up his position on the Transporter platform when they laid the unconscious body at his feet.

"You'll have to hold it, Captain," Spock said.

Kirk sat down on the platform. He lifted the drooping head to his shoulder, an arm around the flaccid waist. Then he looked up.

"Mr. Spock . . ."

"Yes, sir."

"If this doesn't work . . ."

"Understood, sir."

"Jim!" McCoy burst out. "Jim, don't do it! Not yet! In God's name, wait!"

"The console, Mr. Spock," Kirk said.

Spock's half-human part had taken him over. This could be good-bye to Kirk. At the console, he bowed his head over his treacherously shaking hands. When he lifted it, his face was calm, impassive.

"I am energizing, sir."

He saw Kirk draw the double closer to him. In the glow that lit the platform, he knew that he was seeing the embrace of an acknowledged, irrevocable brotherhood. Unflinching, Spock reversed the console's controls. The hum of dematerialization rose. There was dazzle—and silence.

McCoy ran to the platform. Kirk stood on it, alone.

"Jim—Jim?" McCoy cried.

"Hello, Bones," Kirk said. He walked off the empty

platform and over to the console. "Mr. Spock," he said, "let's get those men of ours up and aboard."

Spock swallowed. "Yes, Captain. At once, sir."

It wasn't done at once. It was twenty minutes before the Transporter platform surrendered its burden of the four bodies to the eager hands awaiting them.

McCoy rose from his last examination. "They'll make it, Jim. Those rocks they heated saved their lives. They're all suffering from severe frostbite—but I think they'll make it."

The pallor of Kirk's face suddenly struck him. "How do *you* feel, Jim?"

There was a new sadness in Kirk's smile. "What's that old expression? 'Sadder but wiser.' I feel sadder, Bones, but much less wise."

"Join the human race, Jim," McCoy said.

There was a sense of quiet thanksgiving as Kirk entered the bridge. His first move was over to Spock at the computer station. "You know, of course," he said, "I could never have made it without you."

"Thank you, Captain. What do you plan to tell the crew?"

"The truth, Mr. Spock—that the impostor was put back where he belongs."

Janice Rand approached him. "I just wanted to say, Captain, how—glad I am that . . ."

"Thank you, Yeoman." Kirk returned to his command chair. The girl watched him go. Spock watched the girl.

"That impostor," he said, "had some very interesting qualities. And he certainly resembled the Captain. You agree, I'm sure, Yeoman Rand."

She had flushed scarlet. But she met his quizzical eyes with courage. "Yes, Mr. Spock. The impostor had some exceedingly interesting qualities."

CATSPAW

(Robert Bloch)

The persistent static crackling from Lieutenant Uhura's communications panel was just the minor worry presented by the planet Pyris VII. A dark and forbidding star it had shown itself to be ever since the *Enterprise* had entered its orbit—a chunk of black granite hurled into space to no ostensible purpose, lightless, lifeless except for members of the Starship's landing party beamed down to it for routine investigation and check-in reports. That was the big worry—the absence of any check-in reports. Yet Scott, Sulu and crewman Jackson were all aware of standard landing-group procedure. They knew it required an hourly check-in from any team assigned to explore an unknown planet.

Uhura looked up at Kirk. "Still no response, sir."

"Keep it open."

He frowned at another burst of static from the communications panel. "I don't like this. Nothing since the first check-in. Scott and Sulu should have contacted us half an hour ago."

Spock said, "Perhaps they have nothing to report. Though Pyris VII is a Class M planet capable of sustaining humanoid life, our own people are the only evidence of it our sensors have been able to pick up."

"Nevertheless, Scott and Sulu are obliged to check in, regardless of whether they have anything official to report. Why don't they answer?"

Uhura adjusted a control. A look of relief came into her face. "Contact established, Captain."

Kirk seized the audio. Jackson's voice said, "Jackson to *Enterprise*."

"Kirk here."

"One to beam up, sir."

"One? Jackson, where are Scott and Sulu?"

"I'm ready to beam up, sir."

"Jackson! Where are—" A roar of static overwhelmed his words. Uhura tried to control it; and failed. "I'm sorry, sir. I can't clear it."

"All right," said Kirk. "Notify Transporter Room to prepare to beam up one member of the landing party. Have Dr. McCoy report to me in Transporter Room on the double."

"Yes, sir."

It was the measure of their anxiety that Kirk and Spock both ran for the elevator. They opened the door of the Transporter Room to the steady, throbbing hum of thrown switches.

"Ready, sir," the technician said.

"Energize!" The humming rose to a keening pitch and McCoy hurried in with his medikit.

"What's on, Jim?"

"Trouble."

The Transporter platform glowed into dazzle. Then its sparkle gathered into the full figure of crewman Jackson. He stood, stiff and unmoving, his face wiped clean of all expression, his eyes unseeing, fixed in a glassy stare. The hum of materialization faded. Kirk strode to the platform. "Jackson! What happened? Where are the others?"

The mouth moved as though preparing to speak. But Jackson didn't speak. The mouth twisted into a grimace—and Jackson, pitching forward, toppled to the floor.

Kneeling beside him, McCoy looked up at Kirk. He shook his head. "The man's dead, Jim."

Kirk stared down at the body. Its glassy eyes were still fixed on nothing. Then, horribly, the jaw dropped and the mouth opened. Out of it spoke a voice, deep, harsh, guttural. "Captain Kirk, you hear me. There is a curse on your ship. Leave this star. It is death that waits for you here . . ."

There was a moment of appalled stillness. Jackson's dead mouth still yawned open. But his lips had not moved.

At his desk in Sickbay, McCoy leaned his head on his hand. He didn't look up as Kirk opened the door. Shoulders sagged, he pushed wearily at a heap of tape cartridges in front of him.

"Well?" Kirk said.

McCoy lifted a handful of the cartridges. Then he dropped them. "These are the reports of every test I've run. There's no sign of any injury, none. No organic damage, internal or external."

Kirk was silent for a stretched moment. Scott and Sulu—they were still down there on the planet that had returned a dead man to the *Enterprise*; a dead man whose mouth had been used by that awful voice. "*Then why is Jackson dead, Bones?*"

"He froze to death," McCoy said.

Spock had quietly joined them. "That doesn't seem reasonable, Doctor," he said. "The climate of Pyris VII approximates that of Earth's central Western hemisphere during the summer solstice."

McCoy said irritably, "I know that, Spock. But reasonable or unreasonable, Jackson froze to death. He was literally dead on his feet when he materialized in the Transporter Room."

"He was about to speak," Kirk said.

"He was dead, I tell you!" McCoy shouted.

"Someone spoke." Kirk slowly shook his head. "There seems to be a good deal more to that planet than our sensors have been able to detect! With Scott and Sulu virtually marooned down there . . ."

He was interrupted by the buzzing intercom on McCoy's desk. He hit the switch. "Kirk here."

Uhura, her voice urgent, said, "Sir, we've lost all traces of Mr. Scott and Mr. Sulu. The sensors no longer register any indication of life on the planet's surface. That's Mr. Farrell's last report."

"Well," said Kirk, "that tears it." He paused. "Thank you, Lieutenant. Have Mr. Farrell maintain sensor scan." He snapped off the intercom. "Spock, Bones, get your gear together for a landing party. We're beaming down to find them."

Fog was what they found. Clammy swirls of it drifted around them as they materialized on a twilight world

of rock, barren, desolate. From the craggy knoll they stood on, no green was visible—just a gray vista of mist that moved sluggishly, only to reveal more mist, more rock, black fields, black hills of rock.

“Odd,” Kirk said. “Our probe data didn’t indicate fog.”

“Odd, indeed,” Spock agreed. “No bodies of water. No cloud formations. No variations in surface temperature. Under such conditions, fog is impossible.” He had unslung his tricorder and was taking readings.

“It was impossible for Jackson to freeze to death in this climate,” McCoy said. “Yet that’s what happened. By the way, just where are we?”

“According to Transporter Room coordinates, this is the exact spot from which Jackson was beamed up to the ship,” Spock said.

“Readings, Mr. Spock?”

“No indication of—wait! I’m picking up a life forms reading at 14 degrees mark 7—distance 137.16 meters.” He looked up from the tricorder. “Multiple readings, Captain!”

Astonished, Kirk snapped on his communicator. “Kirk to *Enterprise*.”

Static distorted Uhura’s voice. “*Enterprise*, Captain.”

“How do the ship’s sensors read now, Lieutenant?”

“All we’re getting are physical impulses from you, Mr. Spock and Dr. McCoy, sir. There’s nothing else alive down there.”

The static almost obliterated her last words. “I can hardly hear you, Lieutenant,” Kirk said. “Can you hear me?”

His communicator cracked with a crash of static. Disgusted, Kirk snapped it off and was returning it to his belt when McCoy said, “The fog’s getting thicker. Maybe it accounts for the interference.”

It was getting thicker. Fog rolled around them so dense now that they could scarcely see each other. “There has to be some explanation for the disparity in the readings,” Kirk said. “Ours are the only life forms picked up by the ship’s sensors but Spock’s tricorder registers multiple forms. Do your readings still hold, Mr. Spock?”

"No change, sir."

"Phasers on the ready," Kirk said.

Then they all heard it—a high-pitched wailing. Faint at first, it grew in volume to a mournful shrieking. "They must have heard us," McCoy whispered.

"Quiet, Bones!"

McCoy gripped Kirk's arm as he pointed with the other hand. Ahead of them the coiling fog had begun to glow with a greenish, sickly luminescence. Then it gathered, shaping itself into three cloudy faces, vaguely featured, indistinct, wrinkled by a hundred years. Elf locks of wispy white hair hung about them, their sex as blurred as their features. One of the faces spoke.

"Captain Kirk . . ."

Its long-drawn-out whine had the same creepy cadence as the wailing.

Kirk stepped forward. "Who are you?"

"Go baaack—" wailed the toothless mouth.

The mist was sending the bodiless faces in and out of focus.

"Winds shall rise," one of them whimpered

"And fogs descend . . ."

"Death is here . . ."

On a cackle of rheumy laughter, the faces suddenly came apart. Then they dissolved into mist.

Quiet, unmoved, Spock said, "Illusion, Captain." He lowered his tricorder. "They contained neither physical substance nor energy. It may have been a projection of some sort."

"Shakespeare wrote of a blasted heath," Kirk said. "And of warning witches. But why should these have appeared to us? None of us care to become the King of Scotland. Spock, did the life form readings change during that little encounter?"

"They remained the same, Captain."

Kirk nodded. "That may be part of our answer."

They moved on—and an abrupt gust of wind whistled past them. It grew stronger. It should have tattered the fog into shreds. It didn't. The stuff became clammy, more blinding. The wind now rose to a gale force that compelled them to turn their backs to it, clinging to each other for support. "Hang on!" Kirk shouted. As

though the words were some form of exorcism, the wind was gone as suddeny as it had come.

Panting, McCoy said, "That was one very realistic illusion." He drew a deep lungful of breath. Then, incredulously, he whispered, "Jim—ahead of us—there . . ."

It looked like the keep of a medieval castle. It reared itself up before them, huge, battlemented, its masonry of massive stones hoary with age. Its great oaken door, beamed and iron-bound, was slightly ajar. On one of the worn steps that led up to it crouched a sleek black cat. A glittering gold chain was hung around its neck. As they approached it, they saw that a translucent crystal pendant was attached to the chain. The pose of the cat suggested it was waiting for something. Mice, perhaps.

Spock said, "This is the source of the life forms reading, Captain. They are inside somewhere."

Kirk tried to use his communicator again, only to be defeated by an explosion of static. Once more he hung it back on his belt.

"Is this how we lost contact with the first landing party?" McCoy wondered.

"What about that, Spock?" Kirk put it to him. "Does this apparent castle have anything to do with the static?"

The Vulcan consulted his tricorder. "I would say not, sir. There's no evidence of anything that would directly cause the interference. Both the castle and the cat are equally real."

"Or unreal," Kirk said. "Some illusions can manifest themselves in solid substance. Why didn't our sensors pick up this castle? And why didn't they register the life forms inside it?" He looked up, frowning, at a turreted wall. "It could be exerting a force field that has cut off our sensor scan."

"Then it would also affect Spock's tricorder, wouldn't it?" McCoy asked.

"Would it? I'm beginning to wonder—" It was as Kirk spoke the last words that the cat mewed, rose gracefully and disappeared through the partly open door. Lost, it seemed, in some private speculation, he

watched it go. Then pulling himself out of it briskly, "Well," he said, "if Scott and Sulu are anywhere around, this is the most likely place. Come on."

Phasers in hand, they pushed the door open. A squeaking shrilled over their heads—and a cloud of bats swooped through the door, chittering, their leathery wings almost brushing their faces.

Ducking, McCoy cried, "What the devil was that?"

"*Desmodus rufus*," Spock said. "Vampire bats."

"That's an Earth species," Kirk said. The cat, moving restlessly before them, mewed again as it turned into the darkness beyond the doorway. He looked after it, the look of private thoughtfulness back on his face. "And so is the cat an Earth species. The plot thickens. Castles, black cats, vampire bats and witches. If we weren't missing two live officers and a dead crewman, I'd say someone was putting on an elaborate Halloween trick or treat."

"Trick or treat, Captain?"

"An old Earth custom, Mr. Spock. Explanation later."

The castle walls appeared to be hewn from solid rock. The cat padded silently ahead of Kirk as he and the others groped along the chilly corridor. It was dim, its uncertain light provided by occasional torches whose flames flared and ebbed above their iron sconces, cobwebbed and rusty.

"Dust. Cobwebs. Halloween is right," McCoy said.

The cat slipped around a corner into a darker corner. As they followed, the floor gave way beneath them, and they were plunged into blackness.

Kirk was the first to recover his senses. Someone with a bizarre sense of humor had arranged to place a spiked Iron Maiden right before him. The skull of the human skeleton inside it grinned at him. He refused to be horrified. What concerned him was the discovery that he was shackled to the dungeon's wall. So were Spock and McCoy. Then he realized that all their equipment—phasers, communicators, tricorders—had been removed.

"Mr. Spock . . ."

The Vulcan stirred in his fetters. "I am undamaged, Captain."

"Is Bones all right?"

McCoy spoke for himself. "Nothing broken—just a lot of bruises. What was that you said about trick or treat, Jim?"

"Curses, dungeons, Iron Maidens, skeletons. The point is, these are all Earth manifestations. *Why?*"

"The tricorder registered this castle as real, Jim." McCoy rattled his chains. "And *these* are no illusion. This place could be an Earth parallel."

"But it would be a parallel only of Earth superstition, Doctor," Spock said. "Something that exists only in the minds of men."

"Exactly," Kirk said. "It's as though—" He broke off. Muffled footsteps had sounded from the corridor outside. A key scraped in the dungeon's lock; to Kirk's astounded relief, its heavy door was swung open by Scott and Sulu.

"Scotty! Sulu! You're safe!"

There was no sign of responsive joy on either of their faces. Silent, stone-faced, Scott pulled a phaser from his belt—and leveled it at them.

"Scotty," Kirk said, "put that phaser down!"

Unmoving, unblinking, Scott maintained the phaser at aim.

"*Scott!*" Kirk shouted.

"Jim, I think they've been drugged. Look at their eyes—no nictation. They don't blink at all."

"Neither did Jackson," Spock said.

"These two are alive! Scotty, Sulu—do you know who I am?"

Sulu nodded.

"What's happened to you?" Kirk demanded.

For answer, Sulu shuffled past him to lean over McCoy. While Scott covered the *Enterprise* physician with the phaser, Sulu selected a key from a bunch he was carrying on a ring, and inserted it in the bolt's lock that bound the chains to McCoy's arms. Watching, Kirk said, "They're just taking off the chains, Bones. They're not going to let us go. Are you?"

Silence. In absolute silence, their manacles were un-

locked. At the dungeon door, Sulu motioned them into the corridor. Gauging Scott's distance behind him, Kirk whirled around to throw a punch at his jaw. The butt of the phaser caught him in the temple. As he stumbled to his knees, Spock jumped Scott and McCoy made a leap for the unarmed Sulu. But even as they touched them, their faces were lit by the sickly greenish light—and they dissolved into it.

“*Stop!*”

It was the voice that had spoken through the dead mouth of Jackson.

They stopped. The green glow seemed to have dissolved the corridor and the dungeon, too. All that was familiar was the strangeness of Scott and Sulu. They had reappeared, as unblinking, as blank-faced as before. Everything else was new.

And old. The large chamber to which they'd somehow been transported was heavy with medieval magnificence. Dark tapestries covered its walls. The flare of its sconced torches shone on the bare surface of a huge table, flanked by high-backed chairs. But Kirk's eyes had fixed on a man. He sat on an ornately carved chair, set on a dais that was canopied by a domelike structure. He was bearded, and the long robe he wore glittered with the gold-embroidered symbols of the Zodiac. The black wand he held was topped by a dazzling crystal ball. The cat was stretched out at his feet.

Kirk strode up to the chair. “Whoever you are, you've proved your skill at creating illusions. Now what I want to know is what you have done to my men.”

The man leaned forward. “Your race owns a ridiculous predilection for resistance. You question everything. Is it not sufficient for you to *accept* what is?”

“Not when one of my men is dead and two others have been turned into mindless . . .”

“Not mindless, Captain Kirk. The live ones are merely—controlled.”

Spock and McCoy had made startled movements at the man's use of Kirk's name. They were noted. “Yes, we know you, all of you. Don't we, my precious?” He lowered a hand to stroke the cat.

"Who are you?" Kirk demanded. "Why did you bring us here?"

The bearded mouth smiled. "My name is Korob. As for bringing you here, you insisted upon coming. You were warned away from here."

"For what reason?" Kirk waved a hand that embraced all the mystic trappings of the room and the man. "What is all this—farce about?"

"Farce? I assure you, it is not that, Captain."

Spock spoke. "Clearly, you are unfamiliar with your planet, Korob."

The piercing eyes searched the Vulcan's face. "What did you say?"

"No life exists on your planet," Spock said. "Mapping expeditions have charted this solar system. Their scientific surveys prove that no life forms have ever lived where you appear to live."

The cat stirred, mewling. Lids lowered over the piercing eyes. "That we are not native to this planet is of no importance," Korob said softly.

"It's important to the Federation," Kirk said. "What are you doing here?"

"All in good time, Captain." The cat mewed again, and Korob bent his head as though listening to a secret message. When he raised it, he said, "You must forgive me. I have been an inattentive host. You will join me in something with which to refresh yourselves." Followed by the cat, he rose to lead the way toward the empty table.

"That cat—" McCoy said quietly.

"Yes," Spock said. "It reminds me of certain ancient Earth legends concerning wizards and their 'familiars'—demons in animal form sent by Satan to serve the wizards."

"Superstition," Kirk said.

"I did not create the legends, Captain. I merely repeat them."

Korob turned. "You are the different one, Mr. Spock. There are no colors in your patterns of logic. You think only in terms of black and white. You see all this around you. Yet you do not believe in it."

"He doesn't know about trick or treat," McCoy said.

Korob smiled faintly. "I see." He waved toward the empty table. "But, gentlemen, please join me at dinner."

Nobody moved. Scott and Sulu made a menacing move, Scott lifting the phaser. Korob held up his hand. They both backed up to stand stock-still again. "I had hoped you would be more flexible," Korob said, "but—" He raised his wand.

The green glow grew into a dazzle, dazzling as the crystal ball on the wand's end. The room and all its objects spun in it like dust motes. It blinded Kirk. When he could see again, he, Spock and McCoy were seated at the table. A boar's head gaped in front of him. There was a platter of stuffed peacock. In the table's center a giant beef roast, browned to succulence, was surrounded by silver bowls of fruit, great plates of creamy cheeses. Massive candelabra refracted light on crystal wine decanters and golden goblets. As a display of medieval food and sumptuous service, it was a feast to be seen only by tourists who had booked passage in a Time Machine.

"How in the name of—" McCoy began.

"Not a trick, Doctor," Korob said. "A treat this time. Believe that."

"What do you want from us, Korob?" Kirk asked.

"For the moment, merely that you eat and enjoy yourselves. Please try the wine, Doctor. You will find it excellent."

"No, thank you," McCoy said.

Mewing, the cat suddenly leaped to an empty seat at the table, light glinting from the crystal pendant hung around its neck. Despite his refusal of wine, McCoy's hand reached for the decanter in front of him. He made a visible effort to pull it back—and failed. Kirk made a move toward him only to be slammed back in his chair by Scott.

"Bones . . ."

"He can't obey you, Captain," Korob said. "He will not be harmed."

Will paralyzed, McCoy poured wine from the decanter into his goblet. The cat, its crystal pendant shining against its black fur, watched steadily as he raised the

goblet to his lips. He touched it with them—and the wine burst into vivid red flames.

Clearly alarmed, Korob raised his wand. The flames subsided, and McCoy dashed the goblet to the floor. It vanished, leaving a smell of smoke in the air.

The cat hissed.

Furious, Kirk said, "If you've amused yourself sufficiently, Korob . . ."

But Korob's eyes were on the cat. "That was not my wish," he said. "I—perhaps I can make proper amends."

The black wand pointed to the table's empty plates. They filled with gems, pricelessly exotic jewels come together in their multicolored glitter from the multiworlds of the galaxy—the ruby reds of what were not rubies, the sapphire blues of what were not sapphires but the alien treasures of an unearthly star system.

"They look genuine," McCoy said.

"They are, I assure you," Korob said. "That is a masgar, Doctor—a lorinium—a pavonite. There is a fortune for each of you in the richest gems of the galaxy if you will leave here without further query."

"We are not ready to leave here," Kirk said quietly.

"Captain, you are a stubborn and unreasonable man. However, you have passed the tests."

"Tests?" McCoy queried.

Korob nodded. "You proved your loyalty by coming here to rescue your comrades in spite of warnings to stay away. Your courage was also tested. I learned you couldn't be frightened. Now I've learned that you can't be bribed. I congratulate you."

The cat mewed. Korob patted it. "Quite right," he said. "Go at once." The animal jumped from the chair and was gone through the tapestried archway at the other end of the chamber.

Kirk got up. "All right. Now that you've tested our integrity, suppose you demonstrate yours."

"Gladly, Captain."

"Begin by explaining what you've done to Scott and Sulu. How are you 'controlling' them?"

"I cannot answer that question," Korob said. "But I have sent for someone who can."

That someone entered, a tall, slim woman. Her black hair, parted in the center above her aquiline features, fell below her waist. Perhaps it was her high cheekbones that gave her green eyes an oblique look. On the breast of her red gown she wore a crystal pendant like the one they had seen on the cat.

Korob said, "This is my colleague, Sylvia."

As she approached Kirk, he became conscious of her remarkable grace. Bowing slightly, she said, "Captain Kirk, I understand you want to know what we did to your men. We probed their minds. For us it is a simple matter to probe the minds of creatures like yourself."

"Hypnosis?" Spock asked.

She ignored him to move to McCoy. As she did so, she said, "Our methods go a little deeper than hypnosis." McCoy made no comment. Eyes held by the glowing pendant, he had gone suddenly rigid, unblinking. She smiled at him. "Let me tell you what you said of the man Jackson who was returned to your ship. You said, 'There's no sign of any injury . . . no organic damage, internal or external. The man simply froze to death.'"

"How do you know that?" Kirk was watching her closely.

The green eyes turned to him. "You like to think of yourselves as complex creatures, Captain, but you are flawed. Your minds have many doors. Most of them are left unguarded. We enter your minds through those unguarded doors."

"Telepathy?" Spock suggested.

This time she answered him. "Not entirely. Telepathy does not include control. And I assure you, I am in full control of your friends."

Abruptly, Kirk lost patience with the charming lady and her conversation. Moving swiftly, he shoved his heavy chair back into Scott. Scott stumbled, losing his guard stance behind the chair. He lost his phaser, too; Kirk grabbed it from him all in that same swift, unexpected movement. Scott, recovering his balance, lunged. Kirk leveled the phaser at him. He backed up, and the phaser swung around to cover all of them—Sylvia, Korob, Sulu, Scott.

"Don't move—any of you!" Kirk said.

McCoy relaxed. His eyes blinked. Kirk motioned Scott and Sulu over to Korob, the phaser steady in his hand. "No more hocus-pocus!" he said. "Korob, I want our other weapons and our equipment. I want them now. I also want some answers—real ones."

Sylvia said, "Put that weapon down, Captain."

Kirk laughed. The green eyes didn't flash with anger. They merely regarded him appraisingly. Then, reaching a hand into a pocket slit in her gown, Sylvia withdrew from it what appeared to be a small silver toy. She left Kirk to go to Spock and McCoy.

"Do you recognize this?" she asked them.

"It looks like a miniature model of the *Enterprise*," McCoy said.

"No. In a sense it *is* the *Enterprise*."

Frowning, Spock said, "Where did you get it?"

"From the minds of your two crew members. I absorbed their knowledge of the ship."

"With what purpose in *your* mind?" Spock asked.

She moved to the table where the huge candelabra held its tall, lit candles. "In the mythology of your race," she said, "this is called 'sympathetic magic,' Captain. One may call it what one chooses. It is an interesting tool."

Kirk, still holding the phaser on Korob, spoke over his shoulder. "Lady," he said, "that won't do as a explanation."

Spock's face had grown grave. He watched her intently as she stood at the table, the candlelight throwing come-and-go shadows across her face. "Jackson," she said, "you all wondered why he froze to death in a moderate climate. How is *this* explanation, Captain? I made an exact image of him. Then I froze the image. When I knew it was frozen, he died."

"Rubbish!" Kirk said. "You can't *think* a man to death!"

"Your communicator is in the pocket of Korob's robe, Captain. Please take it."

He hesitated a moment before he obeyed. As he turned, he saw that she was holding the toy model of

Enterprise about six inches above a candle flame. "Signal your ship," she said.

He clicked the communicator open. Uneasy in spite of himself, he realized that she had lowered the silver model closer to the candle flame.

Korob said, "Sylvia—don't . . ."

The model sank closer to the candle flame; and Kirk spoke hastily into the communicator. "Kirk to *Enterprise!* *Enterprise*, come in, please. Kirk here. Come in . . ."

"Captain, it's you!" It was Uhura's voice but there was desperation in it. "Where are you? We can't . . ."

"Never mind us. What's happening up there?"

"Something's—gone wrong with the temperature control. We—can't locate it. The heat has risen—sixty degrees in the past thirty seconds. The *Enterprise* is burning up, sir . . ."

"Beef up the refrigerator units, Lieutenant!"

The voice came more weakly now. "We did, sir—but they're—breaking down . . ."

Kirk, visualizing his Starship, saw it streaking through space like a comet on fire. He imagined Uhura and Farrell, hanging onto their posts, gasping for air, their uniforms sweat-drenched. "The heat will go," he said. "I'll take care of it, Lieutenant."

He snapped off the communicator, walked over to Korob and returned it to him. "All right," he told Sylvia. "You can stop it now." He handed the phaser, too, to Korob.

She removed the little ship from the flame.

"Now that you've seen our science," Korob said, "perhaps you'd better tell us something of yours."

"I'd rather know more about yours," Kirk said. "First you call it magic. Now it's science. Which is it?"

"What would you call it, Captain?"

"Transmutation—telekinesis. You seem to have a strange ability, not just to change the molecular structure of objects, but to move them from point to point by merely willing it. What could you want with our comparatively clumsy science?"

"Ours requires machines, matter, energy, chemicals," Spock added. "Compared with your techniques, it is

imperfect and cumbersome. Then why is it important to you?"

"There are things you know that we do not. We can alter the molecular structure of matter. But you can release the energy within it."

"Korob! You talk too much!" Sylvia snapped. Recovering herself, she went on, "Besides, you three are not so specialized as those two." She indicated the motionless figures of Scott and Sulu. "That one thinks only of machines. The other's mind is full of trivia, thoughts about his collections, the physical exertions he calls exercises. But in your minds is an accumulated knowledge of worlds, of this galaxy."

"If so, in our minds is where the knowledge stays," Kirk said.

"You have used Scott and Sulu as catspaws," McCoy said. "You used them to lure us down here. How did you know we'd come?"

"They knew you'd come," Korob smiled.

"Enough of this," Sylvia said impatiently. "You will tell us what we want to know, one way or another!"

"It's a little late for threats," Kirk said. "I contacted my ship, remember? How long do you think it'll be before there's another landing party here?"

"Quite some time," Korob said. He touched the tiny ship on the table with the crystal ball of his wand. The now familiar greenish light glowed over it. When it faded, the model was encased in a solid block of crystal. "An impenetrable force field now surrounds your ship, Captain. It will not hinder orbit. It does, however, make prisoners of everybody inside your ship."

"I advise you to cooperate, Captain," Sylvia said. "Though it is simple to extract the information we want by forcible means, they are extremely painful. And they have a certain—draining effect." She waved a hand toward Scott and Sulu.

"We have nothing to discuss," Kirk said.

Korob turned to Scott and Sulu. "Take them back to their cell."

"Wait." Sylvia's green eyes moved over them, cold, icily analytical. "The Doctor will stay."

"Bones—" Kirk began.

"Don't waste your sympathy, Captain. You will be next. It really makes little difference." She turned, speaking sharply to Scott and Sulu. "Take the others away."

Korob handed Sulu the phaser. It thrust hard into Kirk's back as he and Spock were herded from the chamber.

This time his shackles seemed tighter to Kirk. His eyes fixed anxiously on the dungeon door, he moved restlessly in the chains, feeling them grind into his flesh.

"How long has it been?" he fretted.

"Twenty-two minutes, seventeen seconds," Spock said.

The question gnawing at Kirk burst out of him. "What are they doing to him?"

"Perhaps," Spock said, "the real question is '*what* are they?' They've admitted they are alien to this planet. And I find their total ignorance of our instrumentality and science most curious."

Kirk gave him an interested glance. "They also refer to us as 'creatures,' as though our species were unfamiliar to them."

Spock nodded. "The fact that everything around us seems solid and real may not be the fact. Sylvia and Korob look humanoid. But they fabricated that food and the gems. They may also have fabricated the way they appear to us. Suppose they are not biped humanoids? Suppose they've just drawn all this from the subconscious minds of Scott and Sulu?"

Kirk frowned. "Scotty and Sulu are responsible men. They are not prone to superstition." He paused to digest Spock's speculations. "But Scott, it's true, does *have* a heritage that includes castles, dungeons and witches in its lore. And Sulu—Oriental folk tales also admit the influence of ghosts and spirits."

"Children are still fond of ghost stories, Captain. Even I grew up with a knowledge of them, much to my father's dismay. Perhaps we are all subconsciously afraid of dark rooms, of spectral visions—and this is what these aliens are using to try and gain the information they want."

"But they don't want just our science," Kirk reminded him. "What they're after is knowledge about our worlds—the galaxy itself." He was about to add "*Why?*" when the key scraped in the lock of the dungeon's door.

It opened. Sulu, phaser in hand, pushed McCoy through it. He didn't resist the shove. He just stood there, unblinking, his face emptied of all human expression.

"Ah, Bones, Bones—" Kirk groaned.

But Sulu had bent over him and was unlocking his chains. Then McCoy shambled over to him. He jerked Kirk to his feet, and placing him carefully in line with Sulu's pointed phaser, kicked him toward the open dungeon door.

Sylvia's method for making an obedient imbecile out of McCoy had disturbed Korob. As they awaited Kirk's arrival in the castle's great hall, he put his agitation into words.

"There's no need to torture them!"

"They resist," she said.

"You tease them! You promise them toys and then watch them scream in pain when they reach out to touch them. It amuses you!"

She shrugged. "And if it does, that does not concern you. I get the information I want for the Old Ones; and to get it is why we were sent here."

"You must *stop!*" Korob cried. "At least, let the pain be brief!"

"You cannot command me, Korob. We are equals."

"But not the same," he said.

"No. You are weak. I am strong. That is the reason I was chosen by the Old Ones to come with you. They suspect you of weakness. I am the one they—" She stopped at the appearance of Kirk between McCoy and Sulu.

Her lips moved into a charming smile. In the voice of a hostess greeting a distinguished guest, she said, "Captain, how nice to see you. I'm so glad you have come." The welcoming smile still on her mouth, she

turned to Korob. "Leave us—and take those two with you."

Korob hesitated. Then, making Sylvia a formal bow, he picked up the *Enterprise* in its transparent casing—and left the chamber, followed by the listless Sulu and McCoy.

Kirk and Sylvia eyed each other. For the first time he sensed tension in her, a certain wariness as though she knew she'd met her match in strength. The smile he gave her was just as charming as the one that still lingered on her face. "What now?" he said pleasantly. "Do you wave your magic wand and destroy my mind, too?"

He didn't miss the involuntary start she gave at mention of the wand. He also noted how her hand had lifted to touch the crystal pendant on her breast. "There's no real damage done to the mind, Captain—just a drain of knowledge and will."

"You don't call that damage?"

"Why should I when it isn't?" she responded easily.

His eyes swept over her in the immemorial look of the sexually appraising male. "You must forgive me," he said. "I forget that you are not a woman. Perhaps not even human."

"I don't know what you mean," she said.

"All this—" he waved his hand around the room, "all this apparently drawn from our racial superstitions and fantasies. Illusion—the whole thing."

She pointed to one of the wall torches. "Put your hand in that flame and you will be burned, Captain. However created, these things are quite real. I am real, too."

"Why do you need us?" he said.

She walked over to the table. When she turned to face him again, she said, "What does your science teach you about the nature of the universe?"

He laughed. "There's nothing I enjoy so much as discussions on the nature of the universe. Particularly with charming ladies." He gave her a mocking little bow. "You didn't answer my question, you know. Why do you need us?"

"I don't need the others. Nor do you."

She spoke softly. Now she left the table to move closer to him. Human or not, she *was* graceful. "If we combined what you know and I know," she said, "there's no limit to the power we would possess."

"And Korob?" he said.

One thing she *did* know, he was thinking—how to exert sexual witchcraft. She'd laid her hand lightly, very lightly on his forearm. "Korob is a weak and foolish man," she said. "He can be disposed of. But I would find it difficult to dispose of—you."

He smiled down into the green eyes. "Or to probe my mind?"

"That would not be necessary if we mingled our knowledge," she said. "From me you could learn secrets you've never dreamed of. Anything you imagined could be yours . . ."

The hand was slowly moving up his arm. "Your—arguments are quite persuasive," he said. "Suppose I decided to go along with you?"

Her low murmur was a caress. "You would not regret your decision. Power, wealth, all the luxuries of your galaxy would be yours."

"You're a very beautiful woman," he said—and meant it.

"I can be many beautiful women," she said. The green eyes upturned to his were suddenly sapphire blue. The long black hair disappeared and became a shining tumble of blond curls. Even her red robe drained of its color to change into a creamy white that matched the flawless cream of her skin. Then the blond beauty was gone. Copper braids wreathed her head. The robe deepened to a rich bronze. She was an autumn beauty now, her cheeks flushed with the tone of autumn leaves.

"Do you like me thus?" she asked. "Or do you prefer this?"

She recovered her original appearance.

"I prefer this," Kirk said—and took her in his arms. When she lifted her head from his kiss, she was staring at him with surprised delight. "That was very—enjoyable. What is it called? May I have another?"

He kissed her again. Then he released her. "Your people will guarantee me that I won't be harmed?"

"Yes, when they come. I have only to report to the Old Ones that you will cooperate with us."

"And my friends will be restored to their former condition?"

"Of course—if you wish it."

She reached up her arms to his neck but he removed them.

"What's wrong? What wrong have I done?"

He stepped away from her. "When you took the form of a woman," he said, "you also assumed the female compulsion to talk too much. You've revealed too many secrets, Sylvia. What if your Old Ones find out you've been tricked by one of the creatures you plan to conquer?"

"You tricked me? You do not like me?"

"No," he said.

"Then you just used me?"

"Didn't you plan to use me?"

Her green eyes blazed. She clapped her hands sharply. Scott and McCoy, both armed with phasers, came through the tapestried archway.

She pointed a shaking, sharp-nailed finger at Kirk. "Get him out of here! Take him back to his cell!"

It was Korob who came to release him from his shackles.

But in spite of the phaser in his hand, he seemed hurried, anxious. Kirk and Spock watched him in tense silence as he unlocked their chains. To their astonishment, they were no sooner freed than he handed Kirk the phaser and pulled the communicator from his robe's pocket.

He spoke in a whisper. "I have broken the crystal that imprisoned the model of your ship, Captain. It was time. Your people had found a way to break out of the force field. It is difficult to control so many things. You must go now before she discovers the weapon is missing."

"We can't leave without our men," Kirk said.

Korob made an impatient gesture. "They are not

your men any longer. They belong to Sylvia. I can no longer control them—or her.”

He glanced fearfully at the dungeon door. “There was no need for any of this. We could have entered your galaxy in peace. But Sylvia is not content with conquest. She is close to the Old Ones and she wants to destroy.”

“You came in a ship?” Spock asked.

Korob shook his head. “We used a power pack.” He motioned to the door. “There’s no time to explain now. We must go. She plans to kill us all.”

Kirk and Spock had started to follow him to the door when Korob suddenly turned, stopping them with a warning gesture. They both heard it at the same time—the sound of a deep, resonant purr. Then through the open door of the cell they saw the shadow; the creeping shadow of a great cat silhouetted against the farther wall of the corridor.

“Keep back,” Korob muttered.

He drew his wand from his robe. Holding it poised, he slid into the corridor toward the cat’s shadow. But already it had begun to grow in size and was looming black, gigantic against the corridor wall. And the purr had changed. Ferocity had entered into its deep growl. Snarling, the cat now towered over a Korob whose face had convulsed with terror. He lifted his wand, shouting, “No, no—get back! *No!*”

The shadow lifted a monstrous paw. Korob screamed, crumpled, the wand falling from his hand. Kirk and Spock ran to reach him. There was an animal roar of rage as the huge paw lifted again. Kirk had barely time to seize the wand before Spock grabbed him—and slammed the dungeon door closed behind them.

A latch on its outside clanked into its slot. They were locked into the cell again.

Its door shook as some immense body pushed against it. Maddened roars rebounded in echoes from the corridor as the unseen monster-cat hurled itself against the door again. Spock shouted, “It won’t hold long against such pressure, sir!”

“Move back,” Kirk said. He aimed the phaser at the

door and fired. There was no effect. "It's out of energy," he said, examining the weapon. "She must have drained it. We could have jumped Scott or Sulu any time—and we never knew it." He glanced around the cell. "There's no way out of here."

"Only one," Spock said. "The way we got in."

Another thud shook the door. Kirk said, "This wall's too smooth to climb."

Spock had his eyes on the trapdoor above his head. "If you were to boost me up, sir, I could pull you up from there."

"It's a good eight feet. Think you can make it?"

"Ready when you are, Captain."

Kirk nodded, laid the wand on the floor, and bending his back, braced himself on spread legs as Spock climbed up on his shoulders. The Vulcan got his grip on the trapdoor opening. He hauled himself up through it, and Kirk, retrieving the wand, reached for the hand Spock extended down to him. As he found his own grip on the opening, the cell door crashed down. The cat's head, lips drawn back over its teeth, filled the empty space. It opened its jaws in a scream of rage.

Breathless, Kirk said, "That's what I call a close thing. Where are McCoy and the others?"

"Maybe we should return with weapons and another landing party, Captain."

"I'm not leaving them here," Kirk said. He moved on, and was leading the way along the dimly lit passage when Spock paused. "I don't think this is the way we came, Captain."

"Maybe, maybe not," Kirk said. "It's like a maze in here. Look, there's a turn ahead there. And we *did* come around a turn . . ."

Perhaps it was a sound, not a sixth sense that warned him. He whirled just in time to avoid a blow by the mace McCoy held in both hands. As it struck the wall with a shattering clang, Scott darted from the shadowy angle of the corridor to lift a mace above Spock's head. Spock ducked its swoop and closed with Scott, applying his Vulcan neck-pinch. It felled Scott who dropped his weapon. Spock simultaneously shouted, "Behind you, sir!"

Kirk had just toppled McCoy with a punch to the jaw. Now he wheeled, to be smashed against the wall by Sulu's booted foot. He grabbed it and brought Sulu crashing down on top of him, knocked out.

He looked up at Spock. "You were right. We *did* take the wrong turn—but at least we found them."

"I'd hardly call it that, Captain. But now that we do have them all together . . ."

The snarling roar sounded very close. The shadow of the immense cat grew blacker and blacker on the corridor wall. Its claws were extending from one enormous paw.

Kirk lifted the wand. "This," he said, "is your 'power pack,' isn't it, Sylvia?"

The cat's shadow vanished. Sylvia, dark-haired, red-robed, stood against the wall.

Kirk fingered the wand. "This crystal—and the one you wear—both serve as the source of your power, don't they?"

"The source? No, Captain, the mind is the wellspring of our power. My crystal is merely an amplifier. The wand controls much more."

"With such power at your command, what did you want of us?" Spock asked her.

"I have wanted nothing of you, Mr. Spock. Your mind is a deep well of facts. It is the people of Earth I wanted. Their minds are the deep wells of dreams—the material we need to create our realities."

"You consume the minds of others," Kirk said. "What happens to them when you've used their minds to increase your power?"

"Why do you care?" she countered. "With that wand you hold in your hand, you could reach out and shatter the stars if you knew how to use it." Her voice softened. "I offered once to share power with you. I offer again."

"No," Kirk said. "I don't know what you are. All I know is that you are not a woman. You are a destroyer."

"That's enough," she said. A phaser appeared in her hand. She aimed it at Kirk. "Give me the wand."

She extended her free hand, palm upward. "The wand—give it to me."

Kirk shrugged in surrender and held out the wand. She reached for it—and he dashed it to the stone floor. Sylvia screamed. Its crystal shattered. A blinding red light lit the corridor with the crimson of blood. It changed into the yellow dazzle of the sun. Then it was white like the light of a dead moon. When it faded, Kirk was standing on a rocky knoll. All around him was the bleak and barren surface of Pyris VII just as he'd first seen it. Only the fog was missing.

Dazed, McCoy said, "What happened, Jim?"

"That will take some explaining, Bones," Kirk told him.

Scott, recovered, said to Sulu, "Everything's vanished."

"Not quite everything," volunteered Spock.

On a rock ledge before them lay two tiny creatures, boneless, mere blobs of jelly, their bodies veined like those of jellyfish. One moved feebly. The other wavered up into the air, squeaking in a thin wail.

"Meet Korob and Sylvia in their true shape," Kirk said. "Their human shapes, like the castle and everything else, were illusion. Only the wand's crystal ball gave them an appearance of reality."

Spock's impassive face had a rare look of fascinated curiosity.

"A life form totally alien to our galaxy. If only we could study and preserve them."

The squeaking little creature was waving its transparent filaments over the now unmoving body of its companion. Soon, collapsing in on itself, it sank down beside it, its pitiful wail growing fainter.

"It's too late," McCoy said. "They're gone."

He sighed. "Illusion and reality. Sometimes I wonder if we humans will ever learn the difference."

WHERE NO MAN HAS GONE BEFORE

(Samuel A. Peeples)

Star date 1312.5 was a memorable one for the U.S.S. *Enterprise*. It marked the day of its first venture beyond the frontier of Earth's galaxy. The screen in its Briefing Room was already showing a strange vista—thinning stars etched against a coming night of depthless darkness broken only by the milky spots of phosphorescence which defined the existence of further galaxies millions of light years distant.

Kirk and Spock, a chessboard between them, looked away from the board to fix their eyes on the screen's center. It held, invisibly, an object detected by the *Enterprise* sensors; an object that was impossibly emitting the call letters of a starship known to be missing for two centuries.

Spock said, "Your move, Captain."

"We should be intercepting that thing now," Kirk said, frowning. "The bridge said they'd call . . ."

". . . any minute now." Spock finished the sentence for him. "I'll have you checkmated in your next move, sir."

"Have I ever mentioned that you play irritating chess, Mr. Spock?"

"Irritating? Ah yes, one of your Earth's emotions, I believe."

But Kirk had seen an opening for his bishop. Pouncing on the piece, he moved it. Spock's eyebrows went up.

"Certain that you don't know what irritation is?" Kirk asked.

Spock glowered at the board. "The fact that one of my ancestors was a human female is one, sir, I cannot . . ."

"Terrible, having bad blood like that," Kirk said sympathetically. "In addition to being checkmated, it could be called intolerable."

But the voice of Lieutenant Lee Kelso was speaking from the intercom. "Bridge to Briefing Room. Object now within tractor beam range, Captain."

"No visual contact yet, Lieutenant?"

"No, sir. Can't be a vessel. Reads only about one meter in diameter. Small enough to bring it aboard—if you want to risk it."

Kirk decided to risk it. It was a curious encounter on the edge of illimitable space. Curious—and just possibly informative. "The Transporter Room. Let's go, Mr. Spock," he said.

Scott was waiting for them at the console. "Materializer ready, sir, when you are."

"Bring it aboard," Kirk said.

The familiar hum came. And, with it, the platform's familiar shimmer, finally solidifying into the spherical shape of an old-style starship's recorder. Squatting on tripod legs, it stood about three feet in height, its metal surface seared, pockmarked. But it still identified itself by letters that read "U.S.S. *Valiant*"; and in smaller ones beneath them, "Galactic Survey Cruiser."

Kirk said, "That old-time variety of recorder could be ejected when something threatened its ship."

"In this case more probably destroyed its ship, sir," Spock said. "Look how it's burnt and pitted."

Kirk was approaching the platform when Scott said sharply, "Take care, sir! That thing's radioactive!"

Kirk stopped. "The Q signal, Mr. Scott."

Scott hit a button on his console. It beeped shrilly. As a pulsating glow enveloped the recorder, its antennae moved out and clicked into position.

"It's transmitting," Scott said.

"Interesting," said Spock. "I have a recorder monitoring . . ."

He was interrupted by Kelso's voice from the intercom. "All decks, six minutes to galaxy edge."

The galaxy's edge—where, as far as anyone knew, no man had ever gone before. Of course, there was no neat boundary to the edge of the galaxy; it just gradual-

ly thinned out. But in six minutes, the last of its stars and systems would be behind them.

"Yellow alert," Kirk said.

"Captain's orders—yellow alert, all decks," Kelso relayed it.

A moment later, an elevator slid open to emit Lieutenant Commander Gary Mitchell, now senior helmsman since Sulu had become ship's physicist. The promotion had won widespread approval—unnecessary, of course, but helpful; Mitchell was a popular officer. But during a yellow alert his normal chore was monitoring the artificial gravity system as well as the helm.

"Everything's in order, Jim," he said with a grin, as if reading Kirk's mind. "Kelso's voice sounded so nervous, I figured you'd left the bridge. Finish the game, Spock?"

"The Captain plays most illogically," the Science Officer complained. "I expected him to move his castle."

Kirk laughed, making a throat-cutting gesture for Mitchell's benefit. It was clear that the two were old, warm friends. In the bridge all three hurried to their positions. "Relieving you, Mr. Alden," Mitchell told the junior helmsman.

"Screen on," Kirk said. "Lieutenant Kelso, how far now to the galaxy edge?"

"Four minutes to our jumping-off point, sir."

"Alert off, Lieutenant Kelso." He turned to Mitchell. "Neutralize warp, Commander. Hold this position."

As the heavy throb of the ship's powerful engines eased, the bridge elevator opened. First to step out of it was Dr. Elizabeth Dehner, tall, slim, in her mid-twenties, a potentially beautiful woman if she had cared to be one, which she didn't. Other professional personnel followed her—senior physician, Dr. Piper, physicist Sulu, Engineering Chief Scott. Turning to Mitchell, Kirk said, "Address intercraft."

"Intercraft open, sir."

Kirk seized his speaker. "This is the Captain speaking. The object we encountered is a ship's disaster recorder, apparently ejected from the U.S.S. *Valiant* almost two hundred years ago. Mr. Spock is now explor-

ing its memory banks. We hope to learn how the *Valiant* got this far, whether it probed out of the galaxy and what destroyed the vessel. As soon as we have those answers, we'll begin our own probe. All decks stand by." He paused a moment. "All department heads, check in, as per rota."

"Astro Sciences standing by, Captain," Sulu said.

"Engineering divisions ready as always," Scott's voice said cheerfully. Nothing, not even the awesome void now before them, could check his Gaelic self-assurance for long.

"Life Sciences ready, sir," Dr. Piper's voice reported. He was temporary—McCoy was on a special study leave—and rather an elderly man for Starfleet service, but he seemed to be a competent enough physician. "Request permission to bring to the bridge my special assistant, Dr. Dehner."

Elizabeth Dehner had joined the expedition at the Aldebaran colony; Kirk had not yet had much chance to talk to her, and now was not the time. But she might be interested in the abyss now opening before them all. "Granted."

The two appeared within a minute. Kirk said, "Dr. Dehner, you're a psychiatrist, I'm told, assigned to study crew reactions under extreme conditions."

"Quite correct, Captain."

Kirk gestured at the screen. "There's an extreme condition. Millions upon millions of light years of absolutely nothing, except a few molecules of ionized gas."

Spock called from his station. "Getting something from the recorder now, Captain."

But Dr. Elizabeth Dehner had more to say. "Sir, I shall be interested, too, in how the *Valiant's* crew reacted to disaster."

Kirk eyed her curiously. Mitchell also appraised her, a little smile on his handsome face. "You want to improve the breed, Doctor?"

"I've heard that's more your own specialty, Commander," she said icily.

"Sock!" Mitchell murmured to Kelso. "It's a walking refrigerator, by gum!" She overheard him. A flush crept up and over her composed features.

Coded electronic beeps were sounding from the listening device Spock had applied to the recorder. He looked up as Kirk joined him. "Decoding memory banks," he said. "Captain's log now—reports the *Valiant* encountered a magnetic space storm that swept it back into this direction."

Kirk nodded. "The old impulse engines weren't strong enough to resist a thing like that."

Spock was leaning closer to his listener. "The storm flung it past this point . . . about a half light year out of the galaxy . . . they were thrown clear of the storm . . . then they seem to have headed back into the galaxy." He made a control adjustment. "I'm not getting it all. It sounds as though the ship were struggling with some unknown force."

The beeps grew louder. Interpreting, Spock said, "Confusion now . . . orders and counterorders . . . emergency power drains . . . repeated urgent requests for information from the ship's computer records." He stopped to look up at Kirk again. "They want to know everything there is to know about ESP in human beings!" He shook his head. "Odd, that. Very odd indeed."

"Extrasensory perception!" Kirk was incredulous. But he motioned to Elizabeth Dehner. "Dr. Dehner, what do you know about ESP?"

She went to the computer station. "In tests I've taken, my ESP rated rather high."

Kirk said, "I asked what you *know* about ESP."

She spoke with the pomp of the pedant. "It is a fact some people can sense future events, read the backs of playing cards and so on. But the Esper ability is always quite limited . . ."

Spock broke in. "Severe damage—no, make that severe injuries." His face was strained with listening concentration. "Seven crewmen dead . . . no, make that *six*—one crewman recovered." He looked up at Kirk once more. "It's the casualties that appear to have stimulated the interest in extrasensory perception. Interest is the wrong word. It seems to be driving them frantic."

Bent to the listener again, he suddenly stiffened. "No, this must be garbled. I'm getting something about 'Destruct.'" Frowning, he removed the earphone. "I must have read it incorrectly. It sounded as though the Captain had ordered the destruction of his own ship!"

Kirk turned questioningly to the department heads.

"You heard," he said. "Comments?"

Piper shrugged. "The only fact we have for sure is that the *Valiant* was destroyed."

"The fact," Kirk said, "which is the best argument to continue *our* probe. Other vessels will be heading out here some day—and they'll have to know what they'll be facing."

He strode back to his command chair. "Commander Mitchell, ahead, warp-factor one," he said. "We are leaving the galaxy."

As the *Enterprise* moved past the last stars, the bridge alarm light flashed. All eyes turned to the large viewing screen. Against the blackness of deep space a wispy pattern of colors was building up ahead of the ship.

Spock said, "Force field of some kind."

Mitchell said, "Whatever it is, we're coming up on it fast."

Kirk said nothing. Though distance from the phenomenon made certain judgment dangerous, it seemed to be some variety of impalpable barrier. Its colors were growing brighter, extending, interweaving into what appeared to a flaring, multicolored, massive curtain of pure energy. It might have been a monstrous space version of Earth's Aurora Borealis. And it was sending the bridge alarm siren into shrieks of warning.

He stared at it, hard-jawed. Its colors, radiating from the screen, rippled across the strained faces around him.

The auroral colors were blazing now. Suddenly, with a muted crackle, a circuit shorted.

"Field intensity rising . . ." Spock began.

As he spoke, the bridge lights died. For several seconds Kirk didn't notice their loss, the radiance from

the screen had simultaneously become so brilliant that hands were rising instinctively to shield dazzled eyes.

Then a blinding whip of pure white light shot from the screen. At the same moment, an entire instrument panel went out in a shower of sparks and smoke. Another promptly shorted, with an angry crackle. The whole bridge seemed to be hazed in flying sparks. Elizabeth Dehner screamed and fell to the deck, writhing as if in the grip of some uncontrollable energy. Once down, she kept on screaming. The dial needles on Kirk's command board whirled.

"Helmsman!"

But the sparks had invaded Mitchell, too. Jerking like a marionette pulled by a madman's strings, he staggered to his feet and then went rigid. With a last galvanic convulsion, he toppled to the deck, inert, unconscious. His body rolled as the ship shuddered.

The confusion mounted, shock after shock, now joined by the mindless hysteria of the alarm siren. Kirk and Spock clung to their chairs; most of the others had been jolted out of theirs.

In the end, discipline triumphed while technology failed all around them. Painfully, inch by inch, Kirk dragged himself back to his command control panel. Kelso crawled over to his. Spock, stepping over the crumpled Mitchell, took over his helmsman's station. But the battering continued. Wrenched metal screeched as the *Enterprise* fought to hold itself together.

"Lateral power!" Kirk shouted. *"Crash speed. Take her out of this!"*

Spock and Kelso wrestled with controls. Power returned to the shaking ship. The bridge lights glimmered back on. The alarm siren quieted. But many of the instrument panels were dead with their circuits. Smoke from one still drifted through the bridge.

Kirk got to his feet. "Take damage reports, Mr. Spock."

Spock relayed the order to the ship's crew—and Piper lifted Elizabeth's head. Clinging to his arm, she climbed shakily to her feet. "Something hit me like an electrical charge," she whispered. Piper left her to go to Mitchell.

"Well?" Kirk asked.

"He's alive. Appears to be in shock."

Spock made his damage report. "Our main engines are out, Captain. We're on emergency power cells. Casualties—seven dead."

A moment prolonged itself. Then Kirk said, "Perhaps we are fortunate."

"Commander Mitchell is moving, sir," Spock said.

Kirk dropped to a knee beside his senior helmsman. "Gary! How do you feel?"

Mitchell's arm covered his eyes as though the screen's radiance still dazzled them. "Jim? Weak as a kitten—but better now. I think I'll live."

He moved the arm from his eyes. Their blue had turned into a gleaming metallic silver.

No amount of technical resourcefulness could repair the damage suffered by the crippled *Enterprise*. Moving now on impulse power alone, its dim bridge lights gave everybody the measure of the havoc. Kirk, considering his burned-out engines, remembered the burned recorder ejected by the *Valiant*. Had it survived the onslaught by that merciless radiation? If it had, what happened afterwards?

On his computer station screen, Spock was busily flashing the names of certain members of the ship's personnel. Among them were those of Elizabeth Dehner and Gary Mitchell. Noting them, Kirk gave Spock a sober look. Spock hastily flashed off Elizabeth's name as she approached them.

"Autopsy report, Captain," she said. "Each case showed damage to the body's neural circuits—an area of the brain burned out."

"And you?" Kirk said. "Feeling all right now?"

"Much better. And Commander Mitchell is, too, except for the eyes. We're trying to find a reason for those. And why, of all the people in the crew, only certain ones were affected."

Spock spoke quietly. "I think we have found that answer."

"You said that tests show you have a high degree of extrasensory perception, Doctor," Kirk reminded her.

"The others who were affected have it, too. Gary Mitchell has the highest ESP rating of all."

She was clearly puzzled. "I suppose it's conceivable the Esper ability attracted some force." Then she shrugged. "But if you're suggesting there's something dangerous in that . . ."

Spock interrupted. "Before the *Valiant* was destroyed, its Captain was frantically searching for ESP information on his crew members."

"Espers are merely people who have flashes of—well, *insight*," she said.

"Aren't there also those who seem able to see through solid objects?" Spock asked. "Or can cause fires to start spontaneously?"

The question irritated her. "ESP is nothing more than a sort of sixth sense. There's nothing about it that can make a person dangerous!"

"I take it you're speaking of *normal* ESP power, Doctor," Spock said.

"Perhaps you know of another kind!" she flared.

Kirk intervened. "Do you know for sure, Doctor, that there *isn't* another kind?"

An angry disdain sharpened her voice. "I have work to do," she said. "You must excuse me." She left them to move quickly to the elevator.

In Sickbay, Mitchell, propped up against pillows, was sufficiently recovered to use his reading viewer. The eyes that followed its turning pages were as gleamingly silver as quicksilver. Kirk, entering, watched him read for a long moment. Without looking up, Mitchell snapped off the reading viewer to say, "Hello, Jim."

He hadn't even been obliged to turn his head to identify his caller. For some reason this realization troubled Kirk. He sat down in the chair beside the bed. "Hey, you look worried," Mitchell said.

Kirk forced a smile. "I've been worried about you since that girl on Deneb IV."

Mitchell nodded reminiscently. "She was a nova, that one," he said. "But there's nothing to worry about. Except for the eyes, I'm fine." He grinned his charming

grin. "They kind of stare back at me when I'm shaving."

"Vision all right?"

"Twenty-twenty."

"Nothing else, Gary?"

Mitchell looked up curiously at Kirk's tone. "Like what, for instance?"

"Do you—feel any different in yourself?"

"In a way, I feel better than I ever felt before in my life." He paused. "It actually seems to have done me some good."

"Oh. How?"

Mitchell gestured toward the reading viewer. "I'm getting a chance to bone up on some of that long-hair stuff you like. Man, I remember you at the Academy! A stack of books with legs! The first thing I heard from upper classmen was 'Watch out for Lieutenant Kirk! In his class you either *think*—or you sink.'"

"Oh, come on," Kirk said. "I wasn't that bad."

"You weren't *what*?" Mitchell laughed. "Do you remember almost washing me out?"

"I sort of leaned on cadets I liked," Kirk said.

"Man, if I hadn't aimed that little blond lab technician at you . . ."

"You *what*?" Kirk stared at him. "You mean you actually *planned* that?"

"You wanted me to *think*, didn't you? So I *thought*. I outlined her whole campaign for her."

Kirk found it hard to return the grin. "Gary, I almost married her!"

"I sort of lean, too, on people I like. She said you came through great."

Kirk, remembering, struggled with his dismay. He repeated, "Gary, I almost *married* her."

"Better be good to me," Mitchell said. He pointed again to the reading viewer. "I'm getting even better ideas from *that*."

Kirk looked at the tape on the viewer. "Spinoza?"

"That's one," Mitchell said. "Once you get into him, he's simple. Childish, almost. By the way, I don't agree with him at all."

"No?" Kirk said. "Go on."

"Go on where? So I'm finally doing some reading." The cold, silver glitter of his eyes made an uncomfortable contrast with the easy warmth of his manner. His white teeth flashed again in the charming grin. "I'm saying I'm fine! When do I go back on duty?"

Kirk hesitated. "I want Dr. Dehner to keep you under observation for a while yet."

Mitchell groaned. "With almost a hundred women on board, you choose *that* one to hang around me!"

"Think of it as a challenge," Kirk said.

The silver eyes fixed on him. "That's not so friendly, James, my friend. Didn't I say you'd better be good to me?"

The mutually gauging moment passed. Finally Mitchell shook his head in mock resignation. Then he pointedly turned back to the reading viewer. Kirk, more troubled than before, didn't speak, either, as he got to his feet and left Sickbay.

Behind him, Mitchell increased the speed of the viewer's turning pages. He read fast—a man locking facts into his mind with an incredible rapidity.

An image of the turning pages was showing on Spock's library computer screen. When Kirk joined him, they were turning so quickly that their movement was blurred. Spock said, "He's reading faster with every passing second. Is that Gary Mitchell? The slowpoke reader we used to know?"

Kirk took three paces away from the screen and returned. "Put a twenty-four hour watch on Sickbay. The fullest possible range of examinations and tests."

The results gave joy to the heart of Piper. "Perfect—perfect," he murmured as he completed his final check-up. "Such perfect health is rare." He tapped the body function panel as though it were hard to credit the veracity of its readings.

"Great in all departments, right?" said Mitchell. Bored, he spoke to Elizabeth. "Too bad psychiatry isn't an exact science, eh, Doctor? Be nice to have a dial that showed the level of a patient's sanity."

"I am aware that you don't particularly like me, Commander," she said. "But since I'm assigned here, can we make the best of it?"

"I've got nothing against you, Doctor."

"Or against the 'walking refrigerator'?"

He was openly startled. "Sorry about that." All his charm went into the three words.

"Women professionals do tend to overcompensate," she said. "Now let's talk about you. How do you feel? Tell me everything."

"Everything about what? Everyone seems worried because I don't have a fever or something." He pointed to the body function panel. "Now old Piper's gone, maybe I can make you happy by changing those readings . . ."

The panel's normal levels altered into abnormal ones. Elizabeth stared at them and back at Mitchell. Slightly shaken himself, he said, "Now the normal readings again . . ."

The levels dropped back to normal.

"How did you do that?" Elizabeth demanded.

"I'm not sure. I—just thought of making it happen. Then it happened." He eyed the panel. "It's not the instruments. It's me. Something I do inside. Hey, watch this . . ."

All the panel's levels plummeted to zero.

Elizabeth grabbed his hand. "Stop it!" she cried. "Stop it now!"

The gauge needles quivered. Rising swiftly up from the "death" indication, they came to rest at normal.

Mitchell stared at them, too. He had paled; and Elizabeth, appalled, said, "For twenty-two seconds you were *dead!* No life function at all!"

Mitchell suddenly realized she was holding his hand. Reddening, she tried to pull hers away but he held it fast. "Hang on a minute, baby. I'm scared. There've been other things, too. Like going halfway through the ship's library in hardly a day. What's happened to me?"

"Do you remember everything you read that quickly?"

He nodded. She took a tape from his bedside table. "On any tape? How about this one? Do you remember page 387?"

"Sure," he said. "It's *The Nightingale Woman* written by Tarbolde on a Canopus planet back in 1996. It begins, 'My love has wings, Slender, feathered things, With grace in upswept curve and tapered tip—'" He stopped, amused. "Funny you should pick that one."

"Why?"

"It's one of the most passionate love poems of the last couple of centuries."

She pulled her hand from his. He watched her do it, smiling. "How do *you* feel?" he asked.

"What? Oh, you mean that electrical blast! It just knocked me down. That's all."

"You're very sure?"

She wasn't sure of anything in the presence of this man with the silver eyes so bright upon her. But somehow, she suspected that she'd given herself away. She was glad when the knock came at the door. It was Kelso. "I was on my coffee break," he told them, "and thought I'd just check up on Gary here."

"It's OK, Lee," Mitchell said. "Come on in."

It was Kelso's first full view of the changed eyes. They disconcerted him. Mitchell laughed. "Don't let my gorgeous orbs throw you, chum. The lady doctor here likes them, don't you, beautiful Doctor?"

Surprised, Kelso said, "Oh. Yeah. Sure."

"How goes the repair work?"

"The main engines are gone." Kelso's face grew somber. "And they'll stay gone, too, unless we can find some way of re-energizing them."

Mitchell frowned. "You'd better check on the starboard impulse packs. The points have decayed to lead." At Kelso's look of amazement, he said, "I'm not joking, pal. So wipe the shock off your face. You activate those packs—and you'll blow up the whole impulse deck!"

The hardness in his voice got through to Kelso. "Sure," he said hastily. "I'll get on to them right away. I—I just wanted to say I'm glad you're all right."

Mitchell glared angrily after him. "The fool! He's seen those rotten points a hundred times but is too dumb to notice their condition!"

"How did *you* know about them?" Elizabeth asked.

The arrogance was suddenly gone. "I don't know. Maybe the image of what he saw was still in his mind and I—I could see it in his mind." The silver eyes were looking up at her out of a bewildered, very frightened face.

In the Briefing Room, Kelso was pointing to the fused tip in a starboard impulse pack. "It made no sense at all that he'd know about this," he said to Kirk. "But naturally I took a look at the packs anyway. And he's right! This point's burned out just as he described it!"

Each in turn, the Science Department heads examined the piece of metal on the Briefing Room table. Elizabeth opened the door. "Sorry I'm late, Captain. I became so interested in observing Gary—Commander Mitchell—that I . . ."

Spock said, "The subject under discussion is not Commander Mitchell, Doctor. We are concerned with what he is mutating into."

Her face tightened with anger. "I know Vulcans lack human feeling, but to talk like that about a man you've worked next to for years . . ."

"That's enough, Doctor!" Kirk said.

"No, it isn't!" she cried. "I understand you least of all! Gary's told me you've been friends ever since he joined the service! You even asked him to join your first command!"

Kirk kept his voice level. "It is my duty, Doctor, to note the reports, observations, even speculations on any subject which affects the safety of this ship." He nodded toward Spock. "And it is my Science Officer's duty to see that I'm provided with them. Go ahead, Mr. Spock."

Spock addressed Elizabeth. "Has he shown any evidence of unusual powers to you?"

She didn't mention the tricks he'd played with the body function panel. Instead, she chose to say, "He can control certain autonomic reflexes. He reads very fast; and retains more than most of us consider usual."

Kirk spoke sharply. "Repeat what you just told us, Mr. Scott."

"About an hour ago," Scott said, "the bridge controls started going crazy. Levers shifted all by themselves. Buttons were pressed without fingers to press them. Instrument readings wavered from safety points to danger ones."

"And on my monitor screen," Spock said, "I saw the Commander smile each time it happened. He treated the confusion he caused as though this ship and its crew were toys created for his amusement."

"Is that correct, Dr. Dehner?" Kirk queried. "Does he show abilities of that magnitude?"

"I've seen some such indications," she said.

Piper spoke up. "And you didn't think that worth the concern of the Captain?"

"No one's been hurt!" she protested. "Don't any of you understand? A mutated superior man could be a wonderful asset to the race—the forerunner of a new and better kind of human being!"

Kirk, looking at her exalted face, thought, Idealism gone rampant again! My God! He turned with relief to Sulu.

"If you want the mathematics on this, sir," Sulu said, "the Commander's ability is increasing geometrically. It's like owning a penny that doubles every day. In a month you'd be a millionaire."

Spock said, "In less time than that, Mitchell will attain powers we can neither understand nor cope with. What happens when we're not only useless to him—but actual annoyances?"

Elizabeth, about to speak, decided for silence. Kirk glanced around the table. "There'll be no discussion of this with the crew. Thank you. That's all."

The room emptied of everyone but Spock. Kirk turned to see his Science Officer inspecting him, creases of worry in his forehead. He spoke with careful deliberateness. "We will never reach an Earth base with Mitchell aboard, sir. You heard the mathematics of it. In a month he'll have as much in common with us as we'd have with a ship full of white mice."

His own anxiety oppressing him, Kirk snapped, "I need recommendations, Mr. Spock—not vague warnings."

"Recommendation number one. The planet, Delta-Vega, is only a few light days away from here. It has a lithium-cracking station. If we could adapt some of its power packs to our engines . . ."

"And if we can't, we'll be trapped in orbit there. We haven't the power to blast back out of it."

"It's the only possible way to get Mitchell off this ship, sir."

"If you mean strand him there, I won't do it. The station is fully automated. There's not a soul on the whole planet. Even ore ships call there only once every twenty years."

"Then you have only one other choice," Spock said. "Kill Mitchell while you can."

"*Get out of here!*" Kirk yelled.

Imperturbable, Spock repeated, "That's your only other choice. Assuming you take it while you still have time."

Kirk slammed his fist on the table. "Will you try for one moment to *feel*? We're talking about Gary Mitchell!"

"The Captain of the *Valiant* probably felt as you do, sir. But he waited too long to make his decision. I think we have both guessed that."

Kirk groped for a chair. Spock turned one around for him. He sank down in it, his face in his hands. After a moment, he removed them. Nodding to Spock, he said, "Set course for Delta-Vega."

Mitchell's powers were indeed expanding. And he'd begun to exult in exerting them. Lying in his Sickbay bed, he suddenly decided to snap his fingers. The lights flicked off. He waved a hand—and the lights blazed back. He sat up on the bed's edge, eyeing other portions of his room. He pointed a finger at a table. It soared into the air, teetered insanely on one leg and dropped quietly back into place.

"I am thirsty!" he abruptly announced to nobody.

Across the room, a metal cup on the water dispenser slid under the spigot. Water flowed from it. The filled cup lifted, and floating through the air, settled into

Mitchell's outstretched hand. He was sipping from it when Kirk, with Spock and Elizabeth, came in.

"I feel great," Mitchell told them. "So don't bother to inquire into my state of health. Sometimes I think there's nothing I can't do. And some people believe that makes a monster of me, don't they?"

"Are you reading all our thoughts, Gary?" Kirk asked.

"Just in flashes so far—mostly strong thoughts like fear. For instance, you, Jim. You're worried about the safety of this ship."

"What would you do in my place?"

"Just what Mr. Spock is thinking—kill me while you can." Lifting his hand, he pointed a finger at Kirk. A bolt of radiance shot from it—and stunned, Kirk toppled over. Spock leaped at Mitchell—but before he could touch him, he, too, had crashed to the floor.

Elizabeth seized Mitchell's arm. "Stop it, Gary!"

He looked down at Kirk who was struggling back to his feet. "Sure, I know a lot," he said. "I know you're orbiting Delta-Vega, Jim. I can't let you maroon me there. I may not want to leave the ship, not yet. I may want another place. I'm not sure what kind of world I can use."

"Use?" Elizabeth said, shocked by the word's implications.

"Yes, beautiful Doctor. I don't get it all yet, but if I keep on growing, I'll be able to do things a god can do."

Spock sprang up. He struck Mitchell with a force that knocked him from the bed. He started to rise and Kirk landed a hard, fast blow on his jaw. His legs gave way. Groggy, he sprawled, supporting himself by his hands and knees. Breathing heavily, Kirk whirled to Elizabeth. "I want him unconscious for a while."

She took a hypogun from her medical case. Gas hissed as she touched Mitchell's shoulder with it. He subsided, spread-eagled, at their feet.

But another shot was required. This time Piper administered it in the Transporter Room where its technicians were preparing the beam-down to the surface of Delta-Vega. But the torpor induced by the second shot

lasted for less time than the unconsciousness caused by the first one. Mitchell came out of it to begin to struggle so fiercely that he pulled himself free of the combined hold of Kirk and Spock. "Fools!" he said thickly. "Soon I will squash you all like crawling insects!"

Piper moved quickly in for a third shot. Mitchell slumped again. Dragging at him, Kirk and Spock rushed him over to the Transporter platform. The other members of the landing party hastened to their positions on it. Mitchell was swaying back onto his feet when Kirk shouted, "*Energize!*"

They materialized before the lithium-cracking plant.

From what could be seen of Delta-Vega's surface, it was a genuinely alien planet. Its soil was dust of a muddy blue color, and the vegetation that sprouted from it was brassy, scaled and knobbed like crocodile skin. Black boulders, their fissures filled with the blue dust, abounded—the only familiar aspect of the landscape. In the distance, a mountain of the black rock shouldered up against the horizon. But Kirk's concerns were other than the weird phenomena of the uninhabited planet. The hypos had finally got to Mitchell. Spock and Communications Officer Alden were supporting him into the building's entrance.

"Can we make it, Lee?" Kirk asked Kelso.

"If we can bypass the fuel bins without blowing ourselves up, we can make it, Captain." Kelso was gazing up at the installation. It was enormous, stretching its huge towers, metallic vats, its strangely coiling ells of complex instrumentation in all directions. Elizabeth stooped to touch a scaly flowerlike growth. It was burning hot.

"And not a soul on this planet but us?" she said.

Kirk answered her briefly. "Just us, Doctor. Lee, let's find the control room of this place."

They couldn't miss it. Doorless, it faced them in the building's central hall. Except for its contour, its size, the steady drone of its automated mechanisms, it bore some resemblance to the *Enterprise* bridge. Its walls were ranked by the same type of instrument panels, the same arrangements of meters, switches and dials. Kelso and Communications Officer Alden went at once to

work selecting panels for later beam-up to the *Enterprise* Engineering section. A detail of other crewmen busied themselves with the thick electronic cables that would be needed to interlink the panels left to maintain the cracking plant's operation.

Kirk watched thoughtfully. "Those fuel bins, Lee. They could be detonated from here. A destruct switch?"

Kelso looked up, surprised. "I guess a destruct switch could be wired into this panel, sir."

"Do it," Kirk said.

Kelso stared at him. Then he nodded—and Spock spoke from the doorless entrance. "Mitchell's regained full consciousness, Captain. Perhaps you'd better come."

He had been confined in a maximum security room, one made escape-proof not by bars and bolts but by the invisible fence of a force field. He was pacing the room like a caged tiger. Outside, Piper, Elizabeth beside him, held his hypogun at the ready. Near them, an *Enterprise* security guard, phaser in hand, kept his eyes on the furious tiger.

"I want only one medical officer here at any one time," Kirk said. "The other will monitor him on the dispensary screen."

"I'd like my turn now," Elizabeth said. "I want to try and talk to him."

Piper nodded, handing her the hypogun. As he left, Kirk, pressing a button, tested the force field. It crackled sharply. Mitchell stopped pacing. Eyeing Kirk across the barrier, he said, "My friend, James Kirk. Remember the rodent things on Dimorus, the poisoned darts they threw? I took one meant for you . . ."

"And almost died. I remember," Kirk said.

"Then why be afraid of me now, Jim?"

"Gary, you have called us insects to be squashed if we got in your way."

"I was drugged then!"

"And before that, you said you'd kill a mutant like yourself were you in my place."

"Kill me then! Spock is right! And you're a fool not to do it!"

Elizabeth cried, "Gary, you don't mean that!"

He spoke directly to her. "In time, beautiful Doctor,

you will understand, in time. Humans cannot survive if a race of true Espers like me is born. That's what Spock knows—and what that fool there," he nodded toward Kirk, "is too sentimental to know." He moved toward the force field sealing off his security room. As he neared it, there was a screech of high voltage. A spray of sparks flew up, scattered and died.

Spock and the guard had drawn their phasers. But Mitchell continued to push against the force field. For a moment his whole body glowed red. But through the brightness Kirk saw that the old human blueness of his eyes had replaced the silver. Then the force field flung him away. He staggered backward and fell on the room's bunk. He sank down on it, his face in his hands, groaning.

Kirk said, "His eyes returned to normal."

"Fighting the force field drained his strength." Spock studied the swaying figure on the bunk. "He could be handled now, Captain."

"Handled," Mitchell said. He looked up. His eyes were shining with so bright a silver that the room seemed lit with silver. "I grow stronger with every passing second. I thought you knew that, Spock."

Kirk snapped his communicator open. "Put full energy on this force field, Lieutenant Kelso."

There was a louder hum as power poured into the force field. A visible radiance began to gather around it.

Mitchell rose from the bunk. He rose from it to smile at Kirk from the other side of his barricade.

But if he remained Kirk's rankling thorn of anxiety, there was good news from the *Enterprise*. In its Engine Room a charred control panel had been successfully replaced by one beamed up from the cracking station. More new panels were required. So Kelso was still busy with the heavy cables he was using for the connecting link among the station's remaining panels.

Over his communicator, Scott said, "It fits like a glove, Captain. Did Mr. Spock get that phaser rifle we beamed down?"

At Kirk's surprised look, Spock moved the heavy weapon from the wall he'd laid it against. Kirk shook his head in a wordless sadness before he answered Scott. "Affirmative, Scotty. Landing party out."

"Mitchell tried to break through the force field again," Spock said tonelessly. "And his eyes changed faster. Nor did he show any signs of weakness this time."

"Dr. Dehner feels he isn't that dangerous," Kirk said. "What makes you right and a trained psychiatrist wrong?"

"Because she *feels*," Spock said. "Her feelings for Mitchell weaken the accuracy of her judgment. Mine tell me we'll be lucky if we can repair the ship and get away from him before he becomes very dangerous indeed."

"Captain!" Kelso called. Warily Kirk crossed over to him. He looked at the sheathed switch Kelso had attached to a panel. It had been painted red. "Direct to the power bins," Kelso said. "From here a man could blow up the whole valley, Captain."

"Lee," Kirk said. "Lee, if Mitchell gets out—at your discretion, positioned here, you'll be the last chance. Lee, if he gets out—I want you to hit that switch."

The full meaning of Kirk's words struck Kelso dumb. If he hit the red switch, he'd go where the valley went. He looked at the switch and back into Kirk's eyes. After a moment, he managed a very sober, "Yes, sir."

In other circumstances, regeneration of the *Enterprise* engines would have been cause for rejoicing. The ship was ready for takeoff. The working detail of crewmen had been transported back up to it. But Mitchell's condition had worsened.

Now his skin tones had altered. What had once been ruddy flesh had a silvery cast, suggesting solid metal. He stood, arms folded across his chest, looking at them across the force field. If he noticed Spock's phaser rifle, he gave no sign of it.

"He's been like this for hours," Elizabeth said.

A silver man. "Have Dr. Piper meet us in the control

room with Kelso," Kirk said. "We'll all beam up to the ship together."

"That's risky, sir," Spock said. "If we take our eyes off him . . ."

"Kelso will be on the destruct switch until the last minute." Kirk gestured to the silent figure behind the force field. "I think he knows that."

Elizabeth said, "I'm staying with him."

Kirk spoke flatly. "You'll leave with the ship, Doctor."

"I can't," she said. "I'm sorry."

Kirk's communicator beeped. "Kirk here," he said.

"The station seems to be running fine, sir," Kelso said. "Even without its quota of panels. The cables have done the job. Fission chamber three checks."

Behind him one of the cables stirred. It began to crawl toward him, snakelike. Slithering, silent, it lifted from the floor, twisting itself into loops. Abruptly, but still silently, a loop rose high into the air—and dropped over Kelso's head. A noose, flexible, inexorable, it tightened around his neck. Helplessly, Kelso tore at it, choking. Then he fell to the floor.

Mitchell smiled into Kirk's eyes. There was something ghastly in the movement of his silver lips. But Elizabeth saw only the smile.

"You see?" she cried to Kirk. "*He's not evil!*"

"You will leave with the ship, Doctor," Kirk repeated.

Mitchell spoke. "You should have killed me when you could, James. Compassion and command are an idiot's mixture."

Kirk grabbed Spock's phaser rifle. Mitchell's hand made a gesture that included them both. Flame blazed from it. As they collapsed, Mitchell walked to the force field. He brushed it as one brushes aside a flimsy curtain. A single spark flared briefly. He passed through the portal to stand face to face with Elizabeth. Taking her hand, he led her back into his room and over to a wall mirror. "Look at yourself, beautiful Doctor," he said.

She screamed. Then she flung her hands over her face to shut out the sight of her silver eyes.

Kirk wavered slowly back into consciousness. Pale, drained-looking, Piper was stooping over him. "Whatever it was, Captain, it affected me, too. Swallow this capsule." He paused. "Kelso's dead. Strangled. At least Spock is still alive."

"Dr. Dehner?" Kirk whispered.

"She's gone with Mitchell. That capsule will restore your strength in a minute or so. I must insert one in Spock's mouth. He's still unconscious and . . ."

"What direction did they take?" Kirk asked.

"Toward the rock mountain."

Kirk struggled to his knees. He reached for the phaser rifle he had dropped. As he checked it, he said, "As soon as Mr. Spock recovers, you will both immediately transport up to the *Enterprise*."

Piper looked up from his work of massaging the capsule down Spock's throat. "Captain, you're not—" he began.

"Where," Kirk continued inflexibly, "if you have not received a signal from me in twelve hours, you will proceed at maximum warp to the nearest Earth base. You will inform it that this entire planet is to be subjected to a lethal concentration of neutron radiation."

The capsule was working. He found he was able to stand. "No protest on this, Doctor Piper! It's an order!"

He slung the rifle over his shoulder and walked out of the cracking station.

The approach to the rock mountain's craggy escarpments made harsh going for Mitchell and Elizabeth. The sharp black stones and slithery blue sand which composed the terrain of Delta-Vega had not been created for pleasant afternoon strolls. As a sudden breeze blew sand into her face, Elizabeth panted, "It—it would take a miracle to survive here."

"Sit down," Mitchell said. "I'll make one."

He made a gesture. The blue sand around them darkened into the rich brown of loam. It shifted to give way to an upspring of bubbling water. The scaly, brass-colored vegetation turned green. From a patch of it, the leafy trunk of a peach tree rose up. Fruit hung from its boughs. Mitchell bent to drink from the spring.

When she had quenched her thirst, he said, "You'll share this power, too. As you develop, you'll feel like me, able to make a world into anything you want it to be. Soon we will fully control our bodies. We'll never grow old. You're woman enough now to like that. Always young, as beautiful as you desire to be . . ."

He suddenly stiffened.

"What's wrong?" she asked anxiously.

"A visitor," he said. "A very foolish visitor."

"Who is it?"

"You'll enjoy playing God, Elizabeth."

A splinter of unnameable fear jabbed her. He laughed at the look on her face. "Blasphemy scares you?" He flung his arms wide, the silver hands outspread. "Let there be food! Give me Kaferian apples, world, my world!"

A squat, odd-shaped tree appeared, heavy with huge red fruit. Mitchell, detaching an apple from it, bit into it, its rich yellow juice running down his silver chin. "Whenever we'd stop at that planet, I'd stock up on these," he said. "What is *your* wish? Just speak it."

Her answer came in the form of a slow, thoughtful question. "How much have I changed, Gary?"

But he wasn't listening. He had turned to concentrate his gaze on the still unseen figure of Kirk clambering over boulders, the heavy weight of the phaser rifle on his shoulder.

Mitchell spoke. "Can you hear me, James? You can't see me, I know. So let me comfort you. You're on the right path. You'll see me soon. Soon enough."

Kirk stopped. He had heard the words. How, he didn't know. He started to unlimber the rifle when he realized that Mitchell wasn't there. He resumed climbing.

"It's Captain Kirk," Elizabeth said as though speaking to herself. "In my mind I can see him."

"Go and meet him," Mitchell said. "Talk to him. Now that you're changing, you've got to discover how unimportant they are."

Hesitating, she stepped forward. Kirk sensed the presence on the shallow cliff above him, grabbed his

rifle—and recognized the girl. Climbing up to her, he saw the hard silver of her eyes for the first time.

“Yes,” she said. “It just took a little longer for it to happen to me.”

Kirk lowered the rifle. “You’ve got to help me stop it, Dr. Dehner. Before it goes too far with you, too.”

“I’ve already gone far enough to—to realize what he’s doing is right. It’s right for us.”

“And for humans?” Kirk said. “You’re still partly human—or you wouldn’t be with him.”

She looked away from him. Without certainty, she said, “Earth is—really unimportant. Before long, we’ll be where it would take millions of years of learning for humans to reach.”

“How will *he* learn if he skips over those millions of years?” Kirk said. “You don’t know. You can’t know. *He won’t have lived through them!*”

“Please,” she said. “Go back while you can!”

“You heard him joke about compassion. Above all a god needs compassion, Elizabeth.”

“Go back!” she shouted.

“You were a psychiatrist,” Kirk said. “You know the savage we all keep buried—the primitive self we dare not expose. But he’ll dare to expose his! In God’s name, Doctor, make your prognosis!”

Her face was tortured. Then she whispered, “He’s coming!”

But he was already here. He ignored Kirk to speak to the girl. “I’m disappointed in you, Elizabeth. You still have doubts.”

Whipping up his rifle, Kirk fired it at him. A fiery beam lanced out of it and struck him full in the chest. Its redness faded. Mitchell raised a finger. The rifle tore from Kirk’s grasp to clatter on the stones beside him.

Time passed. Then Mitchell broke the silence. “I have been meditating,” he said. “I have been reflecting upon the death of an old friend. His death and his honorable burial.”

Kirk turned. Behind him, brown earth was scooping itself out into the neat shape of a grave. Elizabeth stared at Mitchell in unbelief. Trembling, she looked back at the grave. At its head stood a tidy, white

military cross bearing the inscription "James R. Kirk. C-1277.1 to 1313.7."

A grinding sound came from overhead. Kirk looked up. A huge, rectangular rock slab was detaching itself from the cliff wall. It wobbled for a moment. Then it teetered into position directly above the grave.

Elizabeth screamed. "No, Gary, no!"

"You still like what you're seeing?" Kirk asked her.

"Time to pray, Captain," Mitchell said.

"To you?" Kirk said. "Not to both of you?"

The silver finger pointed at him. He was struck to his knees by the flash that darted from it. He remained on his knees, his eyes on the girl. "This is a jealous god, Elizabeth. In the end there will be one of you."

"Your last chance, Kirk!"

Elizabeth tensed. Sparks suddenly crackled between her and Mitchell. He reeled, recovered—and extended a silver hand toward her. A storm of sparks broke from it. She staggered, moaning with pain. But the energy drain had told on Mitchell. For a single second his eyes went blue. Then they were impervious silver once more. And once more the silver hand was extended toward the girl. A fiery mantle of sparks engulfed her. She crumpled. "Hurry," she whispered to Kirk. "There's—so little time."

The second outlay of energy had been expensive. Realizing his weakness, Mitchell turned to run. Kirk hurled himself forward and made a grab for his legs. A booted foot caught him in the chest. Then Mitchell seized a jagged rock. Kirk dodged the blow and closed with him.

"Gary, listen! For this moment you are human again . . ."

"It's gone now!" On a new surge of power, Mitchell smashed Kirk down with a silver fist.

He hit the ground hard, almost falling into the open grave. Then Mitchell was on him. In dizzy changes his face turned from silver to flesh. The silver won. Wrestling with him, Kirk could feel his whole body transforming itself into metal. He wrenched himself free, and had reached the rifle when Mitchell ripped an edged section of rock from the outcropping above them. It

brushed his shoulder at the same moment he fired the rifle.

The beam missed Mitchell. But it struck the soft blue sand beneath the overhanging slab of rock that was to be his tombstone. It toppled and fell toward the grave.

"Gary!" Kirk shouted. "Look out!"

It was too late. Stumbling backward, Mitchell tripped. The rock slab hit him, tumbling him into the grave. A cloud of blue dust rose. When it settled, it had filled the letters etched into the broken white military cross.

Kirk kned himself over to Elizabeth. The silver had gone from her eyes. "It's—all over, isn't it?" The voice was so weak that he had to stoop to hear it. Her head lolled over Kirk's arm. She was dead.

He got to his feet, a lonely stranger on a strange planet in a strange galaxy. But his communicator was familiar.

He spoke into it, his voice very tired. "Kirk to *Enterprise*. Come in, *Enterprise*."

It was almost as strange to be back in his command chair. He'd been a far way. The magnetic space storm—Delta-Vega—Mitchell's death—Kelso's—were they all events that had occurred in a dream? The new control panels around him were blinking as steadily as though they were the old ones. It was good to see Spock just standing there beside him.

"Ready to leave orbit, sir," Scott called from Kelso's old position.

"*Engage*," Kirk said. He switched on his Captain's log. "Add to official casualties, Dr. Elizabeth Dehner. Be it noted that she gave her life in performance of her duty. And Lieutenant Commander Gary Mitchell. The same notation."

He looked at Spock. "After all, he didn't ask for what happened to him. I want his service record to end that way."

Spock's Mephisto features were tranquil. "I felt for him, too, sir, strange to say."

Kirk eyed him speculatively. "Watch yourself, Mr. Spock," he said. "Your compassion is showing."

WOLF IN THE FOLD

(Robert Bloch)

The planet Argelius boasted the most popular Venusbergs in the galaxy. And spacemen's favorite was a café that featured the belly-dancing of the lushly exotic Kara. The other lovely women who companioned its male guests at their tables were an old, if still pleasing story to Kirk and McCoy. But they were a blissfully new one to Scott. He sat with them, glancing around him, enraptured. Then his eyes returned to Kara's sinuous grace as she twisted it on the dance floor, her transparent gold skirt swirling around her.

Beaming, Scott said unnecessarily, "I like Argelius."

"Very little about it not to like," Kirk said.

"You mean to tell me these women, these beauties—I mean, all this is . . ."

"The Argelians think very highly of pleasure," Kirk told him.

McCoy laughed. "There's an understatement if ever I heard one! This is a completely hedonistic society."

"Like Kara, Scotty?" Kirk asked.

There was a fervent "Aye!" from Scott, at which Kirk said, "Good. I've invited her to join us. It occurred to me you might like to meet her."

"Now that's what I call a Captain!" Scott exclaimed. "Always thinking of his men."

"You're not drinking, Jim," McCoy said. "The few polyesters in this native extract—good for the soul. Not to mention the body."

"I don't suppose a little loosener-upper would hurt." Kirk sipped his drink.

Scott, his eyes on Kara, said, "Mr. Spock should see us now."

McCoy snorted. "He'd just be 'fascinated' by the picturesque folk costumes in the place."

Kara had come to a spinning stop, her hands slanted over her eyes in the immemorially seductive gesture of simulated prudery. The café's dimness lit with sparks as though someone had released a swarm of fireflies. Scott pounded enthusiastically on the table.

Amused, Kirk said, "It's an Argehan custom to demonstrate one's approval by blinking delight lights."

"You telling an old Glasgow pub crawler how to applaud, Captain?" Scott said. Then all three men rose from their table. Kara was gliding toward them. As she approached, Kirk noted a young man at the bar. He had shoved his drink aside, his face darkened by a scowl. It deepened when Scott seated the girl beside him. Suddenly the scowler seized his drink, drained it and walked out of the café. Nor was the dancer's elderly musician pleased by the warmth of her smile at Scott. Laying aside his flutelike instrument, he averted his eyes from their table.

Scott, oblivious of everything but Kara's nearness, leaned forward to place his hand over hers.

"Tis a fine foggy night tonight," he said. "Did anyone ever tell you about the grand fogs we have in Edinburgh?"

"Never a word," she said. "But I'm dying to learn."

"Then why don't I show you? There's naught like a walk in a fog with a bonny lass."

"Or a handsome gentleman. Why don't we go?"

The sun on Scott's face would have dispersed even an Edinburgh fog. Kara's hand still in his, he got up. "You don't mind, do you?" he asked the others. "I might even get back to the ship on time."

"Don't hurry, Scotty," Kirk said. "Relax and enjoy yourself. That's what Argelius is all about."

He looked thoughtfully after them as they left. "My work is never done, Bones."

"My work, Jim. This is strictly prescription stuff. That explosion that threw Scotty against the bulkhead was caused by a woman."

"You're sure the physical damage is all cleared up?"

"Yes. But the psychological damage? I didn't like his resentment of all women after it happened."

"I defy any man to stay angry at women on a planet like this."

"When Scotty gets back to the ship, Jim, he may hate *you* for making him leave Argelius. But I'll bet my professional reputation he'll be finished with any lingering dislike of women."

"Well," Kirk said, "I think we've accomplished what we came here for. Bones, there's a spot across town where the women are so . . ."

"I know the place," McCoy interrupted. "Let's go."

The fog outside was thicker than they had expected. Light from the door they opened was diffused against coils of clammy mist that made it hard to choose direction. Kirk hesitated.

"I think we bear left," he said. But the turn they took led them into an alley. They had paused, about to retrace their steps, when a woman's agonized scream tore the silent darkness before them. "It came from there!" Kirk shouted, and plunged deeper into the foggy alley, McCoy at his heels. They both stopped at the sound of heavy breathing. Kirk took a forward step only to stop again. He had stumbled over a body.

It was sprawled, face down, on the damp paving. The back of the cloak it wore was ripped by venomous slashes.

McCoy, kneeling beside it, lifted the head. After a long moment, he raised a face that was blanched with horror. "It's Kara," he said. "Dead. Stabbed a dozen times."

The heavy breathing sound came again. They ran toward it. Scott was crouched against the alley wall. He stared at them unseeingly, his face twisted into a grimace. In his hands he held a long, sharp knife. It was wet with blood.

The café had got rid of its customers, and bright lights had replaced its dimness. Unspeaking, Kirk and McCoy stood beside the table where Scott sat, huddled, his face in his hands. Like Scott, they made no move when the pudgy, round-faced man who faced them

said, "Argelius is the last planet in the galaxy where I'd expect a thing like this to happen. I'm at a loss to explain it, gentlemen."

"We are just as shocked as you are, Mr. Hengist," Kirk assured him.

"If this were my home planet, Rigel IV," Hengist was saying, "I'd have a dozen investigators at my disposal as Chief City Administrator. But they don't exist here."

"Then you are not a native Argelian, sir?" McCoy asked.

"No. Argelius hires its administrative officers from other planets. Its people's virtue is gentleness, not efficiency."

"You can count," Kirk told him, "on our complete cooperation. We will conduct ourselves according to your local laws."

"That's the trouble," Hengist frowned. "There are no laws to deal with a thing like this. Ancient traditions, of course, dating back before the great Argelian Awakening. But they're rather barbaric. I can't be expected to put your Mr. Scott to torture."

"We might be able to help," Kirk suggested. "We have equipment on the *Enterprise* which would help us get at the facts."

Hengist shook his head. "That's quite impossible, Captain, quite impossible. The investigation must take place here."

He picked up the murder knife from the table, looking down at the broken figure of Scott. "Mr. Scott—Mr. Scott, kindly rouse yourself! Are you sure you've never seen this knife before?"

Scott stared, dull-eyed, at the knife.

Kirk spoke sharply. "Answer him, Scott!"

"I—don't remember," Scott said.

Hengist made a gesture of impatience. He looked at Kirk. "You can scarcely call that helpful, Captain!"

Kirk pulled up a chair beside Scott. "Scotty," he said quietly, "you left the café with the girl. You remember that, don't you? What happened next?"

The dull eyes turned to him. "We were walking—the fog. I was ahead of her, trying to lead the way. Then—

then I heard her scream. I remember starting to turn—”

His face contorted. Then words burst out of him. “I can’t remember another thing!”

Beckoning to McCoy, Kirk got up from the chair. “Well, Bones?” he said.

“If he says he can’t remember, he probably doesn’t. You know Scotty.”

“I also know a murder has been committed—and that we found him with a bloody knife in his hand.”

“That proves nothing,” McCoy said. “Surely you don’t think . . .”

“What *I* think doesn’t make any difference! We’re guests here! A member of my crew is under suspicion!”

“But you don’t throw him to the wolves!” cried McCoy.

“I’ve got a diplomatic responsibility, Bones. This happened under Argelian jurisdiction. If they want to arrest Scotty, put him through trial here—even convict him, I’ve got to go along with them.” He paused. “Besides, this business of not remembering . . .”

“Jim, he’s just recovering from a very severe concussion! Partial amnesia after a thing like that is not only possible, it’s probable. Especially under great stress.”

“It’s out of my hands, Bones. We’ll do all that we can—but only under Argelian laws. There’s Hengist at him again. Let’s get back.”

The pudgy man had replaced the knife on the table. “Not very promising, Captain Kirk. Your man still insists he remembers nothing. But my detector readings show his fingerprints on the murder weapon.”

“Mr. Hengist,” said Kirk, “other people left this café at about the same time Mr. Scott and the girl did.”

“So I’ve been told by the staff. Those people will be located and questioned. But the outlook for your friend is pretty grim. I’m a man who prides himself on doing his job well. This crime will be solved and its perpetrator punished!”

“What is the law in such cases, Mr. Hengist?”

A deep voice spoke. “The Law of Argelius, sir, is love.”

Kirk turned. A tall, white-haired, distinguished man

had entered the café. A woman, almost as tall, was with him. Slim, elegant, her black hair touched with gray at the temples, the quiet gravity of her composure was impressive. Hengist bowed deeply to them both.

"Gentlemen," he said, "our Prefect—Jaris. Sir, Captain Kirk and Dr. McCoy."

Presenting the beautiful woman, Jaris said, "My wife, Sybo."

She inclined her head. "And this man at the table is Scott," Hengist said. "The one I told you about in my message."

Jaris's tranquil eyes studied Scott's face. "He does not look like a man capable of murder. Still, it has been so long since—" The deep voice spoke to Kirk and McCoy. "Gentlemen, before our great awakening hundreds of years ago, we had ways of learning the truth in such matters. We will return to them."

"The Argelian empathic contact, sir?" McCoy said.

"You know of it, Doctor?"

"I've heard of it. I had assumed it was a lost art."

"My wife is a descendant of the ancient priestesses of our land," Jaris said. "She has the old gift. I have come to invite you all to my home."

Hengist protested. "Prefect, don't you think this should be handled in an official manner through my office?"

"It *shall* be handled in an official manner, inasmuch as I am the highest official of Argelius." The rebuke was as gently spoken as it was courteous. "We will now proceed to my home. There my wife will prepare herself—and we shall learn the truth. Sybo—" He stood aside, bowing, and she moved past him to the café door.

Her drawing room was as impressive as their hostess. It was high-ceilinged, circular and windowless. Luxurious draperies covered its exits. Its tables, chairs, its cabinets matched the draperies in taste. Against one wall there was a simple altar of rich wood. A single flame rose from it.

"I have informed my ship, sir," Kirk turned to Jaris, "that there will be a delay in our return."

“Well done, Captain.” Jaris nodded. “Let us proceed. Pray be seated, everyone.”

McCoy was restive. “Prefect, depending on your lovely wife’s empathic abilities is all very well. But I am a scientist, sir. And my science has available a precise method by which we can discover what it is that Mr. Scott cannot remember. Since you won’t permit us to go to our ship, I can beam down a technician with my psychotricorder. It will give us a detailed account of all that has happened to Mr. Scott within the past twenty-four hours.”

“I advise against it, Prefect,” Hengist said. “This is a purely Argelian matter.”

“My wife must meditate for a time before she is ready,” Jaris told him. “I see no reason why we should not employ that time to all possible use. Very well, Dr. McCoy.”

McCoy whipped out his communicator. “McCoy to *Enterprise*.”

“Spock here, Doctor.”

“Mr. Spock, please beam down a technician with a psychotricorder immediately. Use these coordinates.”

“Acknowledged. Coordinates received and read,” Spock answered.

“Thanks. McCoy out.”

Jaris was confiding his own problems to Kirk. “News of this frightful event is spreading among our people. They are greatly disturbed. Already there is talk of placing Argelius under embargo to space vehicles.”

“That would be most unfortunate, sir. Argelius is widely known for its hospitality. It also owns strategic importance as a spaceport. It is the only one in this quadrant.”

“Prefect,” McCoy intervened, “the tricorder examination will require privacy to be effective.”

“There is a small chamber below this room. Perhaps it will suffice, Doctor.”

Hengist rose from his chair. “I do not wish to seem argumentative, Prefect, but I must point out that these two gentlemen are Mr. Scott’s friends. They *want* to clear him!”

"And if he is innocent, do you not want to clear him, too, Mr. Hengist?"

The mild question rattled Hengist. "Why—I—of course," he stammered. "I am only interested in the truth."

"So are we all," said Kirk brusquely.

The flustered City Administrator addressed Jaris. "There are other people to be questioned. Perhaps I should go to expedite their arrival here."

"Please do so," said the Prefect. "Anyone who has any connection with the murder should be here during the ceremony."

But Hengist's departure was delayed by the Transporter dazzle that appeared near McCoy's chair. It gradually assumed the extremely attractive shape and features of crewwoman Karen Tracy. Hengist eyed her. Then, nodding to her, he passed her and disappeared through a draped door.

The girl, a psychotricorder slung over her shoulder, said, "Lieutenant Karen Tracy, Doctor, reporting as ordered."

Scott, dismay in his face, half-rose from his chair. "A—a woman," he mumbled.

Kirk saw Jaris's keen eyes fix on him. "You don't like women, Mr. Scott?"

"It's not that, Prefect," McCoy said quickly. "He was recently involved in an accident caused by a careless woman. He suffered a severe concussion."

"Damage to his brain, Doctor?"

"Some. But in my best opinion, it could not possibly be responsible for. . ."

"I suggested nothing, Doctor."

"No. Of course you didn't." McCoy made a visible effort to get his anxiety back under control. "Lieutenant, I want a twenty-four-hour regressive memory check on Mr. Scott. All possible amnesic gaps to be probed."

"Yes, Doctor. Where shall I set up?"

"If you will follow me, young lady—" Jaris was leading the way toward the room's nearest exit when Kirk spoke to Scott. "You are to give Lieutenant Tracy

complete cooperation. Maybe we can clear this thing up once and for all.”

At the look in Scott's eyes, Kirk had to down an impulse to place an encouraging hand on his shoulder. “Yes, Captain. This—not remembering—it's hard to take.”

Kirk watched him go with Tracy and Jaris. “All right, Bones. We're alone. Opinions?”

McCoy was grave. “Jim, in normal circumstances, Scotty simply couldn't have done such a thing. But that knock on the head—it could have tossed all his previous behavior patterns into a junk heap. What worries me is that he's telling the truth about not remembering.”

“Why does it worry you?”

“Hysterical amnesia. When a man feels guilt about something—something too terrible to face up to—he will blot it out of his conscious memory.”

Kirk felt his mind wince away from the words. Was it possible that Scott's conscious memory was sparing him recollection of an action too appalling to remember? The windowless room seemed suddenly suffocating. I need fresh air, he thought—but Jaris had returned. And the slender Sybo, her face absent-looking, abstracted, was pushing aside the drapery of another door.

“Are you prepared, Sybo?” Jaris asked her.

“I am ready. May I have the knife, please?”

Jaris turned to them. “My wife also possesses the ability to receive sensory impressions from inanimate objects.” He moved to a table. “The knife,” he said. “Do you have it, Captain?”

Startled, Kirk echoed, “The knife? No. I thought . . .”

“I placed it on this table when we arrived,” Jaris said. “It's gone.”

There was an uncomfortable silence. It was shattered by a shriek, muffled, but so high-pitched that it penetrated the floor's tiling. The underground room! Kirk and McCoy exchanged the same glance of apprehension. Then Kirk burst into action. Tearing aside a door curtain, he bolted headlong down a flight of stairs, McCoy's feet pounding behind him. They were in an

ill-lit hall, a closed door facing them. Kirk broke through it into a small chamber.

Scott, his eyes closed, was sitting, rigid, in a chair. Karen Tracy, her equipment scattered around her, lay on the floor. McCoy ran to her. But Kirk had seized Scott's shoulder. "Scotty!" he shouted, shaking the shoulder. "Scotty, snap out of it!"

The shoulder sagged under his hand. Scott moaned, swaying, while McCoy, getting to his feet, said, "She's dead, Jim."

Kirk looked at him. "Don't tell me. I know," he said. "She's been stabbed to death, hasn't she?"

"Over and over again," McCoy said. "Just like the other one."

They had to support Scott up the stairs. Jaris poured some amber fluid into a glass and handed it to McCoy. "An Argelian stimulant, Doctor. An effective one." But an overwhelming tension had reclaimed Scott. The glass just clattered against his clenched teeth. It took the combined skills of McCoy and Kirk to pry his locked jaws open and pour the liquid down his throat. As color began to return to his ashen lips, Kirk saw that Sybo had stepped to the altar, a dream-lost look on her face. A nice thing to have—a private dream world, he thought grimly, pouring the rest of the liquor into Scott's mouth. This time he swallowed it voluntarily. Blinking his eyes, he glanced around him. "Lieutenant Tracy?" he said. "Captain—where is . . .?"

"Lieutenant Tracy is dead," Kirk said.

Scott stared at him. "Dead?"

"Yes," Kirk said harshly. "What happened down there?"

"I was sitting there, sir—and she was taking the readings." He made a move to rise. "Why am I back here now? She wasn't finished."

"That's all you remember?" McCoy asked.

"Scott, *concentrate!*" Kirk said. "The girl is dead. You were with her. You must have seen what happened. What was it?"

The anguished look of helplessness returned to Scott's eyes. "I don't remember. I can't remember,

Captain. I must have passed out, but why, if I did . . .”

McCoy said, “It could be, Jim. The head injury . . .”

Kirk yelled, “I don’t want to hear any more about that head injury! Scott! *Think!*”

“Watch it, Jim,” McCoy said. “If he can’t think, he can’t do it because he’s told to.”

Kirk swung around to Jaris. “Prefect, is there another door to that room?”

“One that leads into the garden. But it’s been locked for years.”

“Locks can be picked,” McCoy remarked.

“Check it, Bones,” Kirk said.

Somewhere a bell rang. Jaris pressed a button, and Hengist, shoving two men before him, pushed through a door curtain. “Prefect,” he said, “both of these people were in that café the night of the murder.”

Kirk spoke to the older man. “I’ve seen you. You were one of the café’s musicians. You played for Kara.”

“She was my daughter,” the man said. “She danced to my music as a child. Now she is dead and I am left to grieve.” He turned to Jaris. “Prefect, how could this thing happen here? The man who did it must be found. And punished.”

Hengist said, “I promise he will be, Tark.”

Kirk indicated the younger man. “And *he* left the café just before Scott and Kara.”

“Who are you?” Jaris asked the man. “Is what you have just heard true?”

“I am Morla of Cantaba Street. Yes, Prefect. I was there. I have nothing to hide.”

“Did you know Kara?” Kirk asked.

Morla nodded. And Tark cried, “Of course he knew her! They were to be married. But his jealousy was a disgust to my child!”

“Jealousy?” Jaris said. “That is disquieting. In Argelius jealousy is virtually unknown.”

Morla’s mouth trembled. “My jealousy was a sorrow to me, Prefect. But I could not help it. I loved her. When I saw her go to the table with these men, I could not watch. I left the café.”

“Where did you go?” Kirk asked.

"Home. Straight to my home. I needed to meditate—to rid myself of anger."

Kirk said, "Prefect, jealousy is a notorious reason for murder."

"I know. That is why it is disapproved here."

"I could not kill." Morla's voice broke. "It is not in me to kill. It is not in me to kill what I loved."

McCoy, returning, took in the scene. "That lock may or may not have been picked, Jim. Even with a tricorder, it would be hard to tell."

Kirk spoke again to Morla. "Can you prove that you went straight home?"

Hengist broke in. "Captain, I insist that you leave this questioning to me!"

"Then get on with it, man!" Kirk shouted. "Don't just hang around!" He looked at Tark. "A father, maybe angered by a daughter's disobedience—you wouldn't be the first one to—" He broke off. "Prefect! A future husband enraged at seeing his girl with other men—you cannot deny that is motive for murder! But Mr. Scott had none. Lieutenant Tracy was killed because she was about to discover the truth!"

Jaris's reply came slowly. "That is possible, Captain."

"Probable, sir."

The mild eyes met Kirk's. "Captain, you sound, you know, like a man who's determined to save the life of a friend."

"Yes, sir. Your judgment of me is impeccable. I *do* want to save my friend. And I remind you that he has not yet been proven guilty."

"Let me remind *you* that this friend of yours has been found with the body in each of these cases." Hengist's round face had flushed with anger.

Kirk had no time for a further retort, because at that moment Sybo announced, "I am ready, husband."

There was a strange authority in her quiet voice. Nobody spoke as she turned from the altar, her face serene, reposed. "The flame of purification burns," she said. "It points to the direction of truth." She stepped down from the altar. "We shall join hands. Our minds shall mingle—and I shall look into your deep hearts."

With a courtly gesture, Jaris led her to the table. "We shall sit, gentlemen, all of us. And as my wife asks, we shall join hands."

"On one condition, sir," Kirk said. "This room must be sealed so no one can enter or leave it during the ritual."

"The room *is* sealed," Jaris said.

He was seating Sybo at the table when Kirk's communicator beeped. It was Spock. "May I have a word with you, Captain?"

Kirk turned to Jaris. "A message from my ship, sir. Please excuse me for a moment." He moved to the end of the room. "Yes, Mr. Spock?"

"I have been considering the unfortunate situation, sir, as you related it to us. In my opinion, the Argelian empathic contact is a phenomenon worthy of study. I merely wonder if it is sound enough a technique to entrust with a man's life."

"What do you suggest, Mr. Spock?"

"That we beam up Mr. Scott in order to allow our computers to arrive at the truth."

"Impractical, Mr. Spock. To adopt your suggestion could close Argelius as a spaceport. We must respect the emotions and pride of these people. They have their own methods for handling this affair—and while we are here, we are subject to them."

"Understood, Captain."

"I don't like it any more than you do; but there's nothing we can do about it. Kirk out."

When he faced the room again, everyone was seated at the table, Sybo at its head. Behind her the altar flame flared up—and waned. "Let us begin," she said. "Let us join hands. Let the circle not be broken. Look upon the fire that burns on the altar of truth."

Her eyes closed. The odd authority in her low voice now invested her stillness. Kirk saw her lift a rapt face, the room putting shadow into the hollows beneath her cheekbones. Then suddenly, shockingly, she was speaking in a different voice—a much older voice, deeper, resonant. "Yes, there is something here in this room—something terrible—out of the past. I feel its pres-

ence—fear, rage, hatred.” A groan broke from her. “There is evil here—monstrous, demonic . . .”

She paused as though all her senses were centered on listening. “A consuming hunger that never dies—hatred of life, of woman, hatred undying.” The voice rose. “It is strong—an ancient hunger that feeds on terror—closer, closer—growing among us now—evil lust for death—death. It has been named—boratis—kesla—redjac . . .”

Sybo’s words were coming in a frightened wail. “Devouring evil—eating life, light—hunger that preys—redjac—redjac . . .”

The altar flame winked out. In the darkness flooding the room, Kirk heard a rushing sound like the flapping of great wings. Then Sybo gave a wild scream.

“Get the lights!” he shouted.

They blazed up. Hengist was over at the light panel, his hand still on it.

But all Kirk had eyes for was Sybo. She was slumped in Scott’s arms. Very slowly her body twisted in them. From her back the haft of a long knife protruded. Scott’s nerveless arms relaxed—and the body fell to the floor. Scott looked down at it. Then Kirk saw him look away from it to stare at his bloody hands.

Jaris’s face was gaunt with grief. And Kirk, listening to Hengist’s tirade, thought—and not for the first time—Mr. City Administrator, you are an insensitive man.

“Three murders!” Hengist was yelling. “And this man on the scene each time! What do you require, Captain? That he stab another woman in the back before your very eyes?”

“Mr. Hengist, please—not now,” Jaris said. “My poor wife—her body has just been removed . . .”

Hengist persisted. “Prefect, I am perfectly satisfied that this *Enterprise* crewman is guilty!”

“But not responsible,” Kirk said. “These acts have been acts of insanity. If Mr. Scott is guilty, he is a madman. On our ship we have instruments able to determine his mental state.”

“And save his life?” There was a sneer in Hengist’s voice.

"Insanity cannot be held responsible under anybody's laws," Kirk said. "It is unaware of what it does to others."

"Gentlemen, please—" Jaris said.

"I am sorry, Prefect," Hengist said. "My heart grieves for you—but I can stand by no longer! This man has killed three times! Even Captain Kirk admits it! But this last-minute attempt to help Scott evade punishment. . . ."

Kirk kept his voice level. "No, Mr. Hengist. To see that justice is done."

"I—don't know," Jaris said.

"How many other murders will occur unless we take prompt action, sir?" Hengist asked him. "The old laws still exist. I can get the truth from this killer."

"By torture?" Kirk said. He turned to Jaris. "Prefect, I told you before, we'll stand by your laws. If Mr. Scott is mentally responsible, he is yours to punish. But I must insist that everything possible be done to establish his mental condition."

Jaris's mouth trembled. Shock had visibly aged him. "How could any man do these monstrous things?"

"That is what I hope to find out, sir," Kirk said gently.

With an effort Jaris looked at Scott. "And you, Mr. Scott, what do you have to say?"

Scott stood up. "Sir, I swear before God that I did not kill your wife. I have not killed anyone."

"By your own admission you don't know whether you did or not," Hengist said. "Your so-called failure of memory . . ."

"Mr. Hengist," McCoy interrupted him, "aboard our ship it is possible to record all registrations that have been made on Mr. Scott's conscious or subconscious mind. We can recover all that has occurred to him. The recordings are factual. They will tell us exactly what has happened to him in the recent past."

Kirk pressed McCoy's point. "There would be no room for doubt," he said. "We would *know*. Isn't that what we want, Prefect? To *know*?" He looked at Hengist. "The investigation and disposition of the case

would still remain in your jurisdiction. *What we're after is the removal of doubts.*"

Hengist's face hardened. "Your suggestion would be illegal. If this man is taken back into your ship with you, what legal assurance do we have you'd return him to Argelius even if your instruments prove him guilty? I have the authority to . . ."

Jaris had recovered control of himself. "Mr. Hengist, the authority is mine," he said firmly. "And this decision, too, is mine." He looked at Kirk. "Captain, as you know, Mr. Scott has claimed to remember nothing about the murders. He may have killed without knowing he killed. Can your machines penetrate to the truth of his actions?"

"They will so correlate the facts that a positive conclusion is reached," Kirk said. "No doubts will remain."

Jaris rose. "Very well. We shall go to your ship."

He walked over to Scott, his step steady. "If you are guilty," he said, "you will face the ancient penalties, barbaric though they may be. I warn you that the ancient penalty for murder was death by slow torture. That law has never been changed. Do you understand, Mr. Scott?"

Scott moistened his dry lips. But he faced Jaris unflinchingly. "Aye, sir. I understand."

The Briefing Room of the *Enterprise* was crowded. The Argelian guests, including Tark and Morla, had been seated on one side of its table. On the other side, a pretty yeoman, Tancris, sat between Scott and McCoy, prepared to record the proceedings. Kirk with Spock stood near the computer controls.

Kirk addressed his guests. "Deep in the heart of this ship are our computer banks. They operate the entire ship. They also contain the whole of human and humanoid knowledge. They are indisputably reliable. Our lives depend on them."

He turned to Spock. "Anything to add, Mr. Spock?"

"In a matter of a few seconds," Spock said, "we can obtain an answer to any factual question, regardless of its complexity."

"You don't solve a murder with columns of figures!" Hengist said.

"No, sir. But we do determine the truth."

"How?" asked Morla. "That machine can't tell what goes on in a man's mind!"

Kirk pointed to the computer's verifier. "No. But this piece of equipment can—to an extent." He pulled out a chair. "Each testifier will sit here, his hand on this plate. Any deviation from factual truth will be immediately detected. It will then be relayed to the computer which will notify us."

Hengist stirred in his chair. Kirk continued. "Doctor McCoy has already fed his medical reports into the computer. Our laboratory experts are now examining the murder weapon. They will give their findings to the computer for its analysis. Mr. Scott, will you please take the stand?"

Scott rose, moved to the verifier, sat down and laid his hand on the plate. Kirk activated the computer control.

"Computer," he said. "Identify and verify."

The mechanism clicked. And the computer voice spoke. "Working. Lieutenant Commander Montgomery Scott, serial number SE 197-547-230T. Verified."

"Subject's present physical condition?" Kirk said.

"Working. Subject recently subjected to severe blow on skull. Damage healing. Some peripheral abnormalities."

"Sufficient abnormalities to cause periods of functional amnesia?"

"Working," responded the computer. "Negative."

Puzzled, McCoy intervened. "I don't see how that can be, Jim."

"It can be if Scotty is lying about his loss of memory," Kirk said.

"I'm not lying, Captain!" Scott cried. "I don't remember a thing about the first two murders!"

"Computer. Accuracy scan," said Kirk.

"Subject relaying accurate account. No physiological changes."

Scott, his hand still on the plate, half-rose from the

chair. "Captain, I never said I blacked out when the Prefect's wife was killed!"

"All right, Scott. Go ahead. What do you remember about it?"

"We were all holding hands. The room was dark, the light from the altar was so dim. I heard the poor lady scream. I tried to reach her—but something was between us."

"Something?" Kirk questioned. "You mean someone?"

"No, sir. Some—thing. Cold—it was cold like a stinking draft out of a slaughterhouse. But—it wasn't really there like—" He stopped, adding lamely, "If you get what I mean."

"Computer?" Kirk said.

"Subject relaying accurate account. No physiological changes."

"All right," said Kirk. "I'm putting it straight. Scott, did you kill Sybo?"

"No, sir. That I'm sure of."

Hengist grunted. "He's been saying that all along. It means no more now than it did before."

Kirk eyed him. "Scotty!" he said. "Lie to me! How old are you?"

"Twenty-two, Captain."

A buzzer sounded. The touch panel blinked a light on and off. And the computer voice said, "Inaccurate. Inaccurate. Data in error."

"Scott, when the lights went out, who was holding your hand?"

"Morla on the one side, sir—you on the other."

Morla, his face pale, got to his feet. "But that doesn't mean anything, Captain. A small room like that—it was dark—anyone of us would have had time to kill the lady."

Hengist was quick to object. "I remind everyone we found Mr. Scott holding her in his arms. The knife was still in her back. And there was blood on his hands."

"That is so," Kirk said. "But the verifier has shown it will accept no lie."

"Two other women were murdered," Hengist challenged.

"Mr. Scott," Kirk said, "did you kill Kara?"

"I don't remember."

"Did you kill Lieutenant Tracy?"

"I can't remember."

"Computer," Kirk said. "Accuracy scan."

"Subject relaying accurate account. No physiological changes."

"All this proves," Jaris said, "is that he's telling the truth about the memory lapses."

"It's a waste of our time!" Hengist exclaimed.

Kirk said, "Mr. Hengist, after this testimony is taken, we will run a psychotricorder analysis of Mr. Scott's memory. That's what Lieutenant Tracy was trying to do. This time we'll do it. We shall have a complete record of the action he took, remembered or forgotten. Will that satisfy you?"

"If you can convince me that the machine is incapable of error. If it shows that he did not kill the women."

"The machine does not err. As to the rest of it, the readings will reveal that. I think you can stand down, Mr. Scott—if there are no objections."

"I object to this entire procedure!" Hengist shouted.

Mildly, Jaris turned to him. "Mr. Hengist, we are here on my authority."

"Prefect, I know you mean well—but I have had past experience in matters of this kind while you . . ."

"Enough, sir," Jaris stopped him short. "For the present we will accept Captain Kirk's trust of the machine's accuracy. At the same time we'll reserve the right to make the final determination ourselves."

"That's all we ask, Prefect," Kirk said. "Mr. Morla, will you take the stand?"

Morla took it, placing his hand nervously on the touch plate, and Kirk said, "Where were you at the time Kara was murdered?"

"I—I'm not sure. Walking home, I think. I was disturbed." He looked at Kirk. "I told you I felt anger."

"Anger is a relative state, Mr. Morla," interposed Spock. "Were you angry enough to do violence?"

"I have never done violence in my life. I am an

Argelian. I do not believe I am capable of violence." His voice shook. "Believe me, I couldn't kill her! She loved me!"

Tark jumped to his feet. "That is not true! She did not love him! She told me. He was jealous! They fought constantly!" Tears in his eyes, he turned to Jaris. "My daughter was a true Argelian. A child of joy . . ."

"Yes, I *was* jealous!" Morla was on his feet, too. "I admit it! But I did not kill her! I wanted to leave Argelius with her—go somewhere to have her all to myself. I loved her!"

"Did you kill Lieutenant Tracy?" Kirk asked.

"No!"

"Did you kill Sybo?"

"No!"

"Computer—verification scan," Kirk said.

"Subject relaying accurate account. Some statements subjective. No physiological changes."

"That would seem to be it," Kirk said. "You can stand down, Mr. Morla."

"He glanced around the faces at the table. After a long moment, he said slowly, "Sybo spoke of a consuming hunger that never dies—of something that thrives on terror, on death." He looked at Spock. "Maybe we're going about this the wrong way. Let's assume that Sybo was a sensitive—that she *did* sense something evil in that room . . ."

"The sensitivity of certain Argelian women is a documented fact, Captain," Spock said.

"My—dear wife's talent," said Jaris, "was genuine, gentlemen. The things she said were true."

"All right, then," said Kirk. "Exactly what was it she said? A monstrous evil—out of the past—hatred of life, of woman . . ."

"A lust for death," supplemented McCoy.

"She made some other references that didn't make sense," Kirk said.

"I remember them," McCoy told him. "Redjac. Boratis. Kesla."

Kirk shook his head. "Obscure. Meaningless."

"To us, perhaps, Captain," Spock said. "But to the computer banks . . ."

"Check them out, Mr. Spock."

"Computer, linguistic banks," Spock said. "Definition of following word—redjac."

The computer buzzed. "Working. Negative finding."

"There's no such word in the linguistic bank?"

"Affirmative."

"Scan all other banks," Spock said.

"Working. Affirmative. A proper name."

"Define," Spock said.

"Working. Red Jack. Source: Earth, nineteenth century. Language: English. Nickname applied to mass murderer of women. Other Earth synonym: Jack the Ripper."

A silence composed of shock, hope and incredulity fell over the listeners.

"That's ridiculous!" Hengist yelled. He leaped to his feet. "Jack the Ripper lived hundreds of years ago!"

Kirk said, "Computer. Factual data and capsulization on Jack the Ripper."

"Working. Jack the Ripper: First appearance, London, ancient British Empire, Earth, year 1888, old calendar. Brutal killer of at least six women by knife or surgical instrument; no witnesses to crimes; no identification or arrest. Crimes remain unsolved. No known motive."

"Senseless crimes," McCoy said reflectively.

"As senseless as the murder of Kara—or Lieutenant Tracy," said Kirk.

Tark looked from one to the other. "It can't be. A man could not survive all these centuries."

"My wife," Jaris said. "My wife—before she died—it is a deathless hunger, she said."

"But all men die!" protested Tark.

"All *men* die, sir," Spock said. "But humans and humanoids comprise only a small percent of the life forms we know of. There exist entities possessed of extremely long life-spans, virtually immortal."

"But—a being which feeds on death?" McCoy shook his head.

"In the strict scientific sense, Doctor, we all live on death—even vegetarians."

"But Sybo said it feeds on terror!"

"Deriving sustenance from emotion is not unknown—and fear is among the strongest and most intense of the emotions."

Hengist's eyes lingered on Spock's quiet face. Then he swung around to Jaris. "Prefect, this has gone far enough! Someone, some man has killed three women. We have the prime suspect in our hands! Are we going to let him go to chase down ghosts?"

"Not ghosts, Mr. Hengist," Kirk said. "Possibly not human—but not a ghost. Mr. Spock, run a check on the possibilities."

"Computer. Digest log recordings of past five solar minutes. Correlate hypotheses. Compare with life forms register. Question: could such an entity within discussed limits, exist in this galaxy?"

"Affirmative. Examples exist. The Drella of Alpha Carinae V derives its sustenance from the emotion of love. There exists sufficient precedent for existence of creature, nature unknown, which could exist on emotion of terror."

"Extrapolate most likely composition of such entity," Spock said.

"Working. To meet specified requirements, entity would exist without form in conventional sense. Most probable: mass of energy, highly cohesive."

Kirk took over. "Computer, in such form, could the entity kill with a knife?"

"Negative."

"Could the entity described assume physical form?"

"Affirmative. Precedent: the Mellitus, cloud creature of Alpha Majoris 1."

"Fairy tales!" Hengist was acid with scorn. "Ghosts and goblins!"

Kirk was getting his fill of Hengist. "No, sir," he said. "I've seen the Mellitus myself. Its normal state is gaseous but at rest it becomes solid." He turned back to Spock. "Let's assume the existence of this creature able to take on form or reject it at will. That could explain Scotty's failure to remember anything about the first two murders."

Spock nodded. "Or by production of a hypnotic

screen blinding all but the victim to the killer's presence."

Awed, Jaris murmured, "Is that possible?"

"Very possible," McCoy told him. "Even probable. Many examples exist in nature."

"But I don't hypnotize easily," Scott interjected.

"We're not talking about a human hypnotist, Scotty," Kirk reminded him.

Hengist, openly furious, rose again from the table. "This is fantasy! We all know the murderer is sitting right here with us! You're trying to muddy the issue. I've got a mind to stop this right now!"

"Kindly be seated, Mr. Hengist." Jaris sounded unusually stern. "The course of this investigation seems valid to me."

Conscious of the glaring Hengist behind him, Kirk said, "What do we have then, Mr. Spock? A creature without stable form that feeds on fear, assuming physical shape to do its killing?"

"And preys on women because they are more easily terrorized than the male of the species."

Kirk hit the computer button. "Computer, criminological files. Cases of unsolved multiple murders of women since Jack the Ripper."

"Working. 1932. Shanghai, China, Earth. Seven women knifed to death. 1974. Kiev, USSR, Earth. Five women knifed to death. 2005. Martian Colonies. Eight women knifed to death. Heliopolis, Alpha Proximi II. Ten women knifed to death. There are additional examples."

"Captain," Spock said, "all those places are aligned directly between Argelius and Earth."

"Yes. When men of Earth moved into the galaxy, this thing must have moved with them." He addressed the computer. "Identify the proper names Kesla and Boratis."

"Working. Kesla: popular name of unidentified mass murderer of women on planet Deneb II. Boratis: popular name of unidentified mass murderer of women on planet Rigel IV. Additional data. Murders on Rigel IV occurred one solar year ago."

McCoy turned from the table to look at Kirk. Kirk,

nodding, spoke to Hengist. "You came to Argelius from Rigel IV," he said.

"Many people do," Hengist countered. "It's not a crime."

"No. But we are investigating one. Please take the stand, Mr. Hengist."

Hengist leaned back in his chair. "I refuse," he said.

"Mr. Hengist!"

The jaw in the pudgy face had set hard. "Prefect, I will *not* take the stand."

"I see your point, sir," Spock said. "If you are the entity we search for, what better hiding place could you find than the official position you hold?"

McCoy was on his feet. "And just after you left Jaris's house, we discovered the murder weapon was missing!"

Kirk pressed on. "You were unaccounted for when Lieutenant Tracy was murdered."

A nerve under Hengist's eye twitched. "The law is my business!" His voice roughened. "You are engaged in sheer speculation for your own illegal ends!"

Kirk was not deferred. "Mr. Spock—the weapon."

"Computer," Spock said. "Report on analysis of Exhibit A."

"Working. Exhibit A on visual."

The mechanism's triscreen flashed into brightness. As the image of the knife appeared on it, its voice said, "Composition of blade: boridium. Composition of handle: murinite. Details of handle carving conform to folk art indicating place of origin."

"Specify place of origin," Spock said.

"Artifact produced by hill people of Argus River region, planet Rigel IV."

"Mr. Hengist—" Kirk began.

But Hengist had made a break for the door. Scott tripped him—and Kirk closed with him. There was unexpected muscle in the pudgy body. Screaming wildly, Hengist aimed a knee at Kirk's groin. Elbowing up, Kirk swung a fist back and landed a hard right to his jaw. Hengist collapsed. The lights went dim; and at the same moment the room was filled with that rushing sound like the flapping of great wings.

Kirk got to his feet. McCoy, looking up from Hengist's body, said tonelessly, "He's dead, Jim."

"Dead? But that's impossible! A man doesn't die of a sock on the jaw!"

The computer crackled. Then the noise subsided. A maniacal laughter burst from its speakers. They chuckled, choking with obscene merriment—and Hengist's voice shrieked, "Red Jack! Red Jack! Red Jack!"

The cackling mirth grew into an insane howl of triumph. Kirk, astounded, stared at Spock. The Vulcan leaped to the computer buttons. But the mad howls of laughter would not be stilled.

"The computer isn't responding, Captain! The entity has taken possession of it!"

"But the computer controls the ship!" Kirk cried. "Are you saying that this thing is in possession of the ship?"

He himself began to wrestle with the computer controls. Spock tried to move the switch that fed into its bypass circuits. It swung loose. "It's no use, Captain! The bypass circuits have been blocked, too!"

The crazy laughter gushed louder from the speakers. "Red Jack!" it screamed again.

"Audio cutoff, Mr. Spock!"

The room was suddenly quiet. But Scott, jumping to his feet, yelled, "The screen, Captain! Look at the screen!"

Kirk whirled. The viewer was a riot of changing colors. Figures began to emerge from them. Serpents writhed through pentagons. Naked women, hair streaming behind them, rode astride the shaggy backs of goats. Horned beasts pranced with toads. Rivers boiled, steaming. Above them, embraced bodies drifted down fiery winds. Human shoulders, pinioned under rocks, lifted pleading arms. Then the red glow, shedding its bloody mist over the screen, gave way to the deathly whiteness of a cold, unending snow. Up from the glacial landscape rose a towering three-headed shape, its mouths agape with gusts of silent laughter. A cross, upturned, appeared beside it. The shape crawled up it, suspending itself upon it in an unspeakable travesty of the crucifixion. Its vast, leathery wings unfolded . . .

"What is it?" Jaris whispered.

"A vision of hell," Kirk said. He switched off the screen. "This foul thing has shown us the place of its origin. And it is now master of all this ship's operations, including our life support systems."

"You mean it could kill us all?" gasped Morla.

"I suspect it will try," Spock said. "But not immediately." He paused. "It feeds on terror. Death is not enough for it. There are nearly four hundred and forty humans aboard this ship. They offer it an unparalleled opportunity to glut itself on the fear it can stimulate in them. Before it kills, it will make the most of its chance."

Kirk nodded. He moved over to the intercom button. Pressing it, he said, "All hands, this is the Captain speaking. The computers are malfunctioning. Repair efforts are proceeding. Meanwhile, it is of the utmost importance to stay at your posts and remain calm. Captain out."

He faced around. "Bones, what's your sedative situation?"

"I've got some stuff that would tranquilize a volcano, Jim."

"Start distributing it to all hands. The longer we can hold fear down, the more time we'll have to get this hell-born thing out of the computers."

He swung back to Spock. "Mr. Spock, you have a compulsory scan order built into your computer control banks."

"Yes, Captain, but with the entity in control . . ."

"Even so, it will have to deal with everything programmed into the computers. Aren't there some mathematical problems which simply cannot be solved?"

Spock's somber face lightened. "Indeed there are, Captain. If we can focus all the computers' attention on one of them . . ."

"Good. That should do it." Kirk moved over to the table. "The rest of you, stay here," he said. "Bones, get going on that tranquilizer. Let's go, Mr. Spock."

But the thing had taken over the elevator. Though its door slid open to admit Kirk, it started to slam shut before Spock could enter it. "Spock!" Kirk shouted. He

grabbed him, yanking him in just as the door clanged shut. Spock turned to regard the door with interest. "Fascinating," he said. "Our friend learns quickly."

"Too quickly." Kirk pushed the up button to the bridge. Instead of rising, the elevator sank. Decks flashed by to a whining sound. "Free fall!" Kirk yelled. "Put it on manual control!"

They both seized the manual controls, pulling at them. The whine stopped, and very slowly the elevator began to rise. Then its alarm siren shrieked. "That was due to be next," Kirk said grimly. "Life support malfunction!"

"We don't have much time, Captain."

"You said it yourself, Mr. Spock. It wants terror. Death comes second on its list."

The elevator stopped at the bridge deck, but there was another struggle with its touch plate to get its door open. Nor did they find much cause for cheer as they hurried out of it into the bridge. Sulu, already gasping for breath, was with the technician at the life support station. "Captain, the override is jammed!"

Spock ran to the station. Ripping off a panel, he exposed its mechanism, and kneeling, went to work on it. He was reaching for a tool when Hengist's voice screamed from the bridge speaker. "You are all about to die! Captain Kirk, you are wasting your time!" The voice broke again into its hideous laughter.

"Turn that off, Communications!" Kirk wheeled to Sulu. "Man your post, Mr. Sulu! Prepare all your manual overrides!"

Spock got to his feet. "Normal environmental levels restored, Captain. But, as you know, they won't last long. Several hours with luck."

Sulu asked, "What's going on, Captain?"

"*Man your post, Mr. Sulu!*" Kirk, aware of his tension, hastened to meet the nurse who was stepping out of the elevator, air hypo in hand. "Is that the tranquilizer?"

"Yes, sir."

"Everyone, including yourself."

The Communications technician had bared his arm for the shot when Hengist's voice spoke once more.

"You cannot stop me now, Captain!" Kirk reached over the crewman's shoulder to push buttons, but the voice wasn't hushed. "Fool, you cannot silence me! I control all the circuits of this ship! You cannot reach me! Your manual overrides' life is as limited as your own. Soon all controls will be mine!"

Kirk moved over to Spock at his computer station. He said softly, "Well, Mr. Spock?"

"Work proceeding, Captain."

This time Kirk raised his voice. "Destroy us—and you destroy yourself."

Chuckles bubbled from the bridge speaker. "I am deathless. I have existed from the dawn of time—and I shall live beyond its end. In the meantime I shall feed—and this time I need no knife. In pain unspeakable you will all die!"

Spock looked up from his work. "It is preparing its feast on terror."

"Imbeciles! I can cut off your oxygen and suffocate you! I can crush you all by increasing atmospheric pressure! I can heighten the temperature till the blood boils in your veins!"

Sulu had received his shot. He turned to Kirk. "Captain," he said cheerfully, "whoever that is, he sure talks gloomy."

"Yes. Stay at your post, Mr. Sulu. If any more systems go out, switch to manual override. Above all, don't be afraid."

"With an arm full of this stuff, sir, I wouldn't be scared of a supernova."

"Ready, Captain," Spock said.

"Implement."

Spock addressed his library computer. "This is a compulsory Class 1 direction. Compute to the last digit the value of pi."

Sharp clicks mingled with an outbreak of buzzing noises. Spock waited. And what he waited for came. Over the speaker Hengist's voice, alarmed, said, "No—not . . ."

Spock made his reply. "The value of pi is a transcendental number without any resolution. All banks of our computer are now working on it to the exclusion of all

else. They will continue to calculate this incalculatable number until we order them to stop.”

“Let’s get back to the Briefing Room,” Kirk said. “The Argelians will probably be the first to panic.”

Sulu watched them go to the elevator. Then he said happily to himself, “I wonder what I’m supposed to be afraid of.”

In the Briefing Room, the body of Hengist was still slumped in the chair where it had been placed. McCoy was circling the table administering the tranquilizer shots. As Kirk and Spock entered, Scott said, “Well, Captain?”

“I don’t think our computers will be inhabited by anything but a bunch of figures for a while.”

Spock had gone directly to the computer controls. He tested them. “There’s some resistance, Captain, but the directive is succeeding. Bank after bank is turning to the problem.”

McCoy paused, his air hypo suspended. “If you drive it out of the computer, Jim, it will have to go somewhere else.”

“I doubt if it will move into anyone who’s been tranquilized, Bones. How’re you coming?”

“Almost finished. Just Jaris and me . . .”

He stopped dead. The lights had dimmed again. And there was that rushing sound of vast wings beating. Very gradually, the lights returned. Spock punched a button on the computer controls.

“The entity has fled, Captain,” he said.

Kirk had been pondering McCoy’s warning. “But where has it fled? Bones—if the thing entered a tranquilized body, what would happen?”

“It might take up knitting,” McCoy said. “But nothing more violent than that.”

“And you say everyone has had a shot except you—and Jaris?”

Jaris turned in his chair. “You and Mr. Spock have received no shot, Captain.”

Kirk looked at him sharply. “That is true. But I know it is not in me—and I’m willing to take a chance on Mr. Spock. Bones, give yourself a shot.”

"I ought to stay clear to keep my wits about me," McCoy protested.

"I gave you an order, Bones!"

McCoy stared at Kirk. Then he shrugged, bared his arm and plunged the hypo into it.

"Prefect," Kirk said, "if you will extend your arm, please . . ."

Jaris exploded into an insane howl. Out of his mouth Hengist's voice screamed, "*No! No!*" Leaping from the table, Jaris flung himself on Kirk. Spock raced over to them. The elderly body of Jaris was infused with unbelievable strength. It had Kirk by the throat. Spock tore it away. It shrieked, "Kill! Kill you all! Suffer, suffer! Die!" Grappling with Jaris's fiercely powerful body, Spock reached for its neck to apply the Vulcan pinch. Jaris crumpled. And once again the lights dimmed—the vast wings flapped.

Kirk regained his feet. Around the table its tranquilized people, some sitting, some standing, were smiling as though the struggle had been staged for their entertainment. Yeoman Tancriis, her recording pad dropped to the floor, was regarding Spock with a beautiful admiration. From behind her an arm reached out. It encircled her neck, pulling her backward. Hengist's body had left its chair. It whipped out a knife and laid it against the girl's throat.

"Stand away—or I'll kill her!" it said.

McCoy, thoroughly tranquilized, said mildly, "You'll hurt somebody with that knife," and extended a gentle hand toward the weapon. Hengist took a savage swipe at him. Spock jumped him as Kirk ripped the hypo from McCoy. Spock, closing with the howling madman, managed to tear his sleeve. Kirk rammed the hypo home. Hengist wavered in Spock's grasp. "I'll kill you all," he said quietly. "And you shall suffer and I shall feed—" He collapsed.

Kirk grabbed his shoulders. "The Transporter Room! Quickly!" he shouted to Spock.

The Transporter technician beamed at them happily as they staggered into the room, the heavy body of Hengist between them.

Kirk yelled, "Deep space—widest angle of dispersion—full power—maintain . . ."

The Transporter Chief looked at him reproachfully. "No need to get so excited, Captain. I'll take care of it."

"Spock! Do it! Tranquilizers have their limitations!"

Alone, Kirk placed Hengist on the platform. The benevolent Transporter Chief was moving casually toward the console when Spock pushed him aside and seized the controls.

"Energize!" Kirk shouted.

The motionless figure on the platform broke up into sparkle—and was gone.

Spock, his elbow on the console, leaned his head on his hand. Kirk laid a hand on his shoulder. "Quite an expensive little foray into the fleshpots—our visit to Argelius," he said. But the Transporter Chief's feelings were hurt. "You didn't have to shove me, Mr. Spock. I'd have gotten around to it," he said pleasantly. He looked up as Scott and McCoy, both grinning contentedly, opened the door. "Now there are two officers who know how to take life—easy," he said.

"Jaris will be all right," McCoy announced soothingly.

"What did you do with the thing, Captain?" Scott asked. "Send it back to the planet?"

"No, Scotty. We beamed it out into open space at the widest possible dispersion angle."

"But it can't die!" McCoy said.

"Perhaps not, Doctor," Spock said. "Indeed, its consciousness may survive for some time, but only in the form of billions of particles, separate bits of energy, forever drifting in space—powerless, shapeless and without sustenance. We know it must eat to remain alive."

"And it will never feed again, not in the formless state it's in," Kirk said. "Finally, it will die." He looked at McCoy. "Bones—how long before that tranquilizer wears off?"

"Oh, five or six hours, I guess. I certainly have given everyone a pretty good dose."

"So I notice. Well, Mr. Spock, for the next few hours we'll have the happiest crew in space. But I doubt that we get much work done."

"Sir," Spock said, "since, after all, we came to Arge-lius to rest, I see no reason why we shouldn't take advantage of it."

"Let's go!" Scott cried enthusiastically.

"Shore leave, Mr. Scott? You and Dr. McCoy have still to sleep off the effects of the last one. But we?" Kirk turned to Spock. "Mr. Spock, want to make the rounds of the Argelian fleshpots with me?"

Spock's eyebrows rose. "Captain," he said stiffly, "I spoke of rest."

"Ah," Kirk said. "So you did. My mistake, Mr. Spock."

FOR THE WORLD IS HOLLOW AND I HAVE TOUCHED THE SKY

(Rik Vollaerts)

That "Bones" McCoy was a lonely man, Kirk knew. That he'd joined the service after some serious personal tragedy in his life, Kirk suspected. What he hadn't realized was the fierce pride in McCoy that made a virtual fetish of silence about any private pain. So he was startled by his violent reaction to the discovery that Nurse Chapel had exceeded what McCoy called her "professional authority."

Entering Sickbay, Kirk found her close to tears. "You had no business to call Captain Kirk!" McCoy was storming at her. "You're excused! You may go to your quarters!"

She blew her nose. "I'm a nurse first, Doctor—and a crew member of the *Enterprise* second," she said, chin firm under her reddened eyes.

"I said you were excused, Nurse!"

Christine swallowed. The hurt in her face was openly appealing. She blew her nose again, looking at Kirk, while McCoy said gruffly, "Christine, please—for God's sake, stop crying! I'll give the Captain a full report, I promise."

She hurried out, and Kirk said, "Well, that was quite a dramatic little scene."

McCoy squared his shoulders. "I've completed the standard physical examinations of the entire crew."

"Good," Kirk said.

"The crew is fit. I found nothing unusual—with one exception."

"Serious?"

"Terminal."

Kirk, shocked, said, "You're sure?"

"Positive. A rare blood disease. Affects one spaceship crew member in fifty thousand."

"What is it?"

"Xenopolycythemia. There is no cure."

"Who?"

"He has one year to live—at the outside chance. He should be relieved of duty as soon as possible."

Kirk spoke quietly. "Who is it, Bones?"

"The ship's chief medical officer."

There was a pause. Then Kirk said, "You mean yourself?"

McCoy reached for a colored tape cartridge on his desk. He stood at stiff attention as he handed it to Kirk. "That's the full report, sir. You'll want it quickly relayed to Starfleet Command—to arrange my replacement."

Wordless, Kirk just looked at him, too stunned to speak. After a moment, he replaced the cartridge on the desk as though it had bit him. McCoy said, "I'll be most effective on the job in the time left to me if you will keep this to yourself."

Kirk shook his head. "There must be *something* that can be done!"

"There isn't." McCoy's voice was harsh. "I've kept up on all the research. I've told you!"

The anguish on Kirk's face broke him. He sank down in the chair at his desk.

"It's terminal, Jim. Terminal."

Though red alert had been called on the *Enterprise*, Kirk was in his quarters. A "replacement" for Bones. Military language was a peculiar thing. How did one "replace" the experience of a human being—the intimacy, the friendship forged out of a thousand shared dangers? "One year to live—at the outside chance." When you got down to the brass tacks of the human portion, you wished that speech had never been invented. But it had been. Like red alerts. They'd been invented, too. In order to remind you that you were Captain of a starship as well as the longtime comrade of a dying man.

As he stepped from the bridge elevator, Spock silent-

ly rose from the command chair to relinquish it to him.

"What is that stuff on the screen, Mr. Spock? Those moving pinpoints? A missile spread?"

"A very archaic type, Captain. Sublight space."

"Aye, and chemically fueled to boot, sir," Scott said.

"Anything on communications, Lieutenant Uhura?"

"Nothing, sir. All bands clear."

"Course of the missiles, Mr. Spock?"

"The *Enterprise* would appear to be their target, Captain."

Prepare phaser banks. Yes. Two of them. He gave the order. "Get a fix, Mr. Chekov, on the missiles' point of origin."

"Aye, Captain."

"Mr. Sulu, fire phasers."

The clutch of missiles exploded in a blinding flash. "Well, that's that," Kirk said. "Mr. Chekov, alter course to missile point of origin."

"Course change laid in, sir."

"Warp three, Mr. Sulu."

Spock spoke from the computer station. "They were very ancient missiles, Captain. Sensor reading indicates an age of over ten thousand years."

"Odd," said Kirk. "How could they still be functional?"

"They evidently had an inertial guidance system that made any other communications control unnecessary."

"And the warheads, Captain," Scott said. "Nuclear fusion type according to my readings."

Spock spoke again. "We're approaching the coordinates of the hostile vessel, Captain."

"Get it on the screen, Mr. Sulu."

The term "vessel" seemed to be inappropriate. What had appeared on the screen was a huge asteroid. It was roughly round, jagged, its rocky mass pitted by thousands of years of meteor hits.

"Mr. Spock, we've got maximum magnification. Is the object on the screen what it looks to be—an asteroid?"

"Yes, sir. Some two hundred miles in diameter."

"Could the hostile vessel be hiding behind it?"

"Impossible, Captain. I've had that area under scanner constantly."

"Then the missiles' point of origin is that asteroid?"

"Yes, sir."

Kirk got up and went to Spock's station. "Full sensor probe, Mr. Spock."

After a moment, Spock withdrew his head from his computer's hood. "Typical asteroid chemically but it is not orbiting, Captain. It is pursuing an independent course through this solar system."

"How can it?" Kirk said. "Unless it's powered—a spaceship!"

Spock cocked an eyebrow in what for him was amazement. Then he said slowly, "It *is* under power—and correcting for all gravitational stresses." He dived under his hood again.

"Power source?" Kirk asked.

"Atomic, very archaic. Leaving a trail of debris and hard radiation."

Kirk frowned briefly. "Plot the course of the asteroid, Mr. Chekov."

Once more Spock withdrew his head. "The asteroid's outer shell is hollow. It surrounds an independent inner core with a breathable atmosphere—sensors record no life forms."

"Then it must be on automatic controls," contributed Scott.

Spock nodded. "And its builders—or passengers—are dead."

Chekov said, "Course of asteroid—I mean spaceship—241 mark 17."

Spock had stooped swiftly to his console. He pushed several controls. Then he looked up. "Sir, that reading Ensign Chekov just gave us puts the asteroid ship on a collision course with planet Daran V!"

"Daran V!" Kirk stared at him. "My memory banks say that's an inhabited planet, Mr. Spock!"

"Yes, sir. Population, approximately three billion, seven hundred and twenty-four million." He paused, glancing back at his console panel. "Estimated time of impact: thirteen months, six days."

"Well," Kirk said. "That's a pretty extensive population." He whirled to Sulu. "Mr. Sulu, match *Enterprise* speed with the asteroid ship's. Mr. Spock and I are

transporting aboard her. Mr. Scott, you have the con.”

They entered the Transporter Room to see Christine Chapel handing his tricorder to McCoy. “A lot can happen in a year,” she was saying. “Give yourself every minute of it.”

“Thanks,” McCoy said, and slung the tricorder over his shoulder. Ignoring Kirk and Spock, he stepped up on the Transporter platform, taking position on one of its circles.

Kirk walked over to him. “Bones,” he said, “Spock and I will handle this one.”

“Without me?” McCoy said. “You’ll never make it back here without me.”

“I feel it would be wiser if . . .”

“I’m fine, thank you, Captain,” McCoy brushed him off. “I want to go.”

So that was how Bones wanted it played. He wasn’t fatally ill. The word terminal might never have been spoken. “All right, Bones. You’re probably right. If we make it back here, we’ll need you with us.” He took up his own position on the platform between Spock and McCoy.

They arrived on a land area of the asteroid ship. As though land on an asteroid weren’t strange enough, strange plants, coiling black tendrils abounded, their strange roots sunk in deep, smoking fissures. High mountains shouldered up in the distance. Otherwise, the view showed only rubble and pockmarked rocks.

McCoy said, “You’d swear you were on a planet’s surface.”

Spock tossed away a stone he’d examined. “The question is, why make a ship look like a planet?”

“You wouldn’t even know you were on a spaceship.” Kirk jerked his com unit from his belt. “Kirk to *Enterprise*.”

“Scott here, Captain.”

“Transported without incident. Kirk out.” He rehung his communicator on his belt, and was moving forward when, to his far left, his eye caught the glint of sunlight on metal. “Over there,” he said. “Look . . .”

It was a row of metal cylinders. They were all about

eight feet high, their width almost matching their height, and regularly spaced fifty feet apart. The men approached the nearest one, examining it carefully without touching it. "No apparent opening," Kirk observed.

"Spock, you found no intelligent life forms," McCoy said, "but surely these are evidence of . . ."

"This asteroid ship is ten thousand years old, Doctor. They may be evidence of the existence of some previous life forms." He checked his tricorder. "Certainly, there are no signs of life now."

They eyed the enigmatic cylinder again before they walked on to the next one. It was a duplicate of the first. As they reached the third, the two cylinders behind them suddenly opened, disgorging two groups of men, clad in shaggy homespun. Armed with short daggers and broadswords, they moved silently, trailing the *Enterprise* trio. A slim and beautiful woman followed them. She halted as the men charged.

The struggle was quick and violent. Outnumbered, Spock took several blows from sword hilts before he dropped to the ground, half-conscious. McCoy, head down, rushed a man off his feet, the momentum of his plunge crashing him into the woman. Her eyes widened in a surprise that contained no fear. Startled by her beauty, McCoy was brought up short, taking in the lustrous black hair piled on her head in fantastic loops, her glittering black leotardlike garment. Then he was stunned by a smash on the head. Kirk, going down under a swarming attack, saw the broadsword lifting up over McCoy and yelled, "*Bones!*"

The woman raised her right hand.

The broadsword was stayed in midstroke. McCoy was pulled to his feet. He shook his head, trying to clear it. Vaguely, he became aware of hands fumbling at his belt. Then his arms were jerked behind his back. Disarmed of phasers and communicators, he, Kirk and Spock were herded over to the woman.

"These are your weapons?" she asked, holding their belts in her right hand.

"Yes," Kirk said. "Of a kind. Weapons and communication devices. Let me help my friend!" He struggled to pull free. The woman made a commanding gesture.

Released, he rushed over to the still groggy McCoy. "Bones, are you all right?"

"I—I think so, Jim."

The woman's dark eyes were on McCoy. "I am called Natira," she told him. "I am the High Priestess of the People. Welcome to the world of Yonada."

"We have received more desirable welcomes," Kirk said.

She ignored him. "Bring them!" she ordered their guards.

She led the way to an open cylinder. They were in an apparently endless, lighted corridor, lined by curious people in their homespun clothing. As Natira passed them, they bowed deeply. She was nearing an arched portal. It was flanked by two ornately decorated pillars, their carvings suggestive of a form of writing, cut deep into the stone. Natira, bowing herself, touched some hidden device that opened the massive door. But keen-eyed Spock had registered its location. He had also observed the writing.

The large room they entered was dim, its sole light a glow that shone from under its central dais. Its rich ornamentation matched that of the portal.

"You will kneel," Natira said.

There was no point, Kirk thought, in making an issue of it. He nodded at Spock and McCoy. They knelt. Natira, stepping onto the dais, turned to what was clearly an altar. Etched into its stone was a design that resembled a solar system. As Natira fell to her knees before the altar, light filled the room.

McCoy, his voice lowered, said, "She called this the world. These people don't know they're on a spaceship."

Kirk nodded. "Possible. The ship's been in flight for a long time."

"That writing," Spock said, "resembles the lexicography of the Fabrini."

But Natira, her arms upraised, was speaking. "O Oracle of the People, O most wise and most perfect, strangers have come to our world. They bear instruments we do not understand."

Light blazed from the altar. As though it had

strengthened her to ask the question, she rose to her feet, turned and said, "Who are you?"

"I am Captain Kirk of the Starship *Enterprise*. This is Dr. McCoy, our Medical Officer. Mr. Spock is my First Officer."

"And for what reason do you visit this world?"

The word "world" again. Kirk and McCoy exchanged a look.

"We come in friendship," Kirk said.

The sound of thunder crashed from the altar. A booming echo of the thunder, the voice of the Oracle spoke.

"Learn what it means to be our enemy. Learn what that means before you learn what it means to be our friend."

Lightning flashed. The three *Enterprise* men were felled to the floor by a near-lethal charge of electricity.

McCoy was taking too long to recover consciousness. He continued to lay, white-faced, in a sleeping alcove of their lavishly decorated guest quarters. Spock, who had been trying to work out muscle spasms in his shoulders, joined Kirk at McCoy's couch.

"He must have suffered an excessively intense electrical shock," he said.

"No. I don't think that's it," Kirk said. He reached for McCoy's pulse. Spock, aware of the deep concern in Kirk's face, was puzzled. "Nothing else could have caused this, sir." He paused. "That is—nothing that has occurred down *here*."

Kirk glanced up at Spock. He knew that the Vulcan had sensed something of the real cause of his anxiety. "The shock was unusually serious because of McCoy's weakened condition," he said.

"May I ask precisely what is troubling the Doctor?"

"Yes, Mr. Spock. He'd never tell you himself. But now I think he'd want you to know. He has xenopolycythemia."

Spock stiffened. After a long moment, he said quietly, "I know of the disease, Captain."

"Then you know there's nothing that can be done." As he spoke, McCoy stirred. His eyes opened. Kirk stooped over him. "How is it now, Bones?"

"All right," McCoy said. He sat up, pulling himself rapidly together. "How are *you*, Spock?"

"Fine, thank you. The Captain and I must have received a less violent electrical charge."

Falsely hearty, McCoy said, "That Oracle really got to me. I must be especially susceptible to his magic spells."

"Spock knows," Kirk said. "I told him, Bones."

There was relief in McCoy's face. He stood up. "Hadn't we better find this ship's control room and get these people off their collision course?"

"You're in no shape to be up," Kirk said.

"Ridiculous!" McCoy said. "*I'm up!*"

Kirk saw one of the alcove's curtains sway. He strode to it, jerking it aside. A shabby old man, fear in his face, was huddled against the wall. He peered into Kirk's face. What he saw in it must have reassured him. He moved away from the wall, hesitated, took some powder from a pouch hung over his shoulder. "For strength," he said. He held out the pouch to them. "Many of us have felt the power of our Oracle. This powder will be of benefit. You are not of Yonada."

"No," Kirk said gently. "We come from outside your world."

The old hand reached out to touch Kirk's arm. "You are as we are?"

"The same," Kirk said.

"You are the first to come here. I am ignorant. Tell me of the outside."

"What do you wish to know?"

"Where is outside?"

Kirk pointed skyward. "It's up there."

The filmed eyes glanced up at the ceiling. Like a child put off by an adult lie, the old man looked back at Kirk in mixed disbelief and disappointment. Kirk smiled at him. "The outside is up there and all around."

"So *they* say, also," the old man said sadly. "Years ago, I climbed the mountains, even though it is forbidden."

"Why is it forbidden?" Kirk asked.

"I am not sure. But things are not as they teach us—for the world is hollow and I have touched the sky."

The voice had sunk into a terrified whisper. As he

uttered the last words, the old man screamed in sudden agony, clutching at his temples. He collapsed in a sprawled heap on the floor. Horrified, Kirk saw a spot on one temple flash into a pulsating glow. Then the flare died.

McCoy examined the spot. "Something under the skin." He moved the shabby homespun to check the heart. "Jim, he's dead."

Kirk looked down at the heap. "'For the world is hollow and I have touched the sky.' What an epitaph for a human life!"

Spock said, "He said it was forbidden to climb the mountains."

"Of course it's forbidden," Kirk said. "If you climbed the mountains, you might discover you were living in an asteroid spaceship, not in the world at all. *That* I'll bet is the forbidden knowledge."

"What happened?"

It was Natira. She had entered their quarters with two women bearing platters of fruit and wine. At the sight of the crumpled body, their faces convulsed with terror. But Natira knelt down beside it.

"We don't know what happened," Kirk told her. "He suddenly screamed in pain—and died."

She bent her head in prayer. "Forgive him, O Oracle, most wise and most perfect. He was an old man—and old men are sometimes foolish." She rose to her feet. "But it is written that those of the People who sin or speak evil will be punished."

The severity in her face softened into sadness. She touched a wall button. To the guards who entered she said, "Take him away—gently. He served well and for many years." Then she spoke to the women. "Place the food on the table and go."

As the door closed behind them, she crossed to McCoy. "You do not seem well. It is distressing to me."

"No," he said. "I am all right."

"It is the wish of the Oracle that you now be treated as honored guests. I will serve you with my own hands." But the tray she arranged with fruit and wine was taken to McCoy. When she left them to prepare the other trays, Kirk said, "You seem favored, Bones."

"Indeed, Doctor," Spock said, "the lady has shown a preference for you from the beginning."

"Nobody can blame her for that," McCoy retorted.

"Personally," Kirk said, "I find her taste questionable." McCoy, sipping wine, said, "My charm has always been fatal," but Kirk noted that his eyes were nevertheless fixed on the graceful bend of the woman at the table. "If it's so fatal," he said, "why don't you arrange to spend some time alone with the lady? Then Spock and I might find a chance to locate the power controls of this place."

Natira was back, holding two goblets of wine. "It is time that our other guests refresh themselves."

Kirk lifted his goblet. "To our good friends of Yonada."

"We are most interested in your world," Spock said.

"That pleases us."

"Then perhaps you wouldn't mind if we looked around a bit," Kirk ventured.

"You will be safe," she said. "The People know of you now."

McCoy coughed uncomfortably. She went to him swiftly. "I do not think you are yet strong enough to look around with your friends."

"Perhaps not," he smiled.

"Then why not remain here? Rest—and we will talk."

She was beautiful. "I should like that," McCoy said.

She turned to Kirk. "But you—you and Mr. Spock—you are free to go about and meet our People."

"Thank you," he said. "We appreciate your looking after Dr. McCoy."

"Not at all," she inclined her head. "We shall make him well." She saw them to the door. Then she hastened back to McCoy. As she sat down on the couch beside him, he said, "I am curious. How did the Oracle punish the old man?"

The dark lashes lowered. "I—cannot tell you now."

"There's some way by which the Oracle knows what you say, isn't there?"

"What we say—what we think. The Oracle knows the minds and hearts of all the People."

McCoy's forehead creased with a worried frown.

Concerned, Natira extended a white hand that tried to stroke the frown away. "I did not know you would be hurt so badly."

"Perhaps we had to learn the power of the Oracle."

"McCoy. There is something I must say. Since the moment I saw you—" She took a deep breath. "It is not the custom of the People to hide their feelings."

McCoy said to himself, Watch your step, boy. But to her, he said, "Honesty is usually wisdom."

"Is there a woman for you?" she asked.

He could smell the fragrance of the lustrous black hair near his shoulder. This woman was truthful as well as beautiful. So he gave her the truth. "No," he said. "No, there isn't."

The lashes lifted—and he got the full impact of her open femininity. "Does McCoy find me attractive?"

"Yes," he said. "I do. I do indeed."

She took his face between her hands, looking deep into his eyes. "I hope you men of space—of other worlds, hold truth as dear as we do."

Watching his step was becoming difficult. "We do," he said.

"It is dear to me," she said. "So I wish you to stay here on Yonada. I want you for my mate."

McCoy took one of the hands from his face and kissed it. The Eagle Scout in him whispered, Brother, douse this campfire. But in him was also a man under sentence of death; a man with one year to live—one with a new, very intense desire to make that last year count. He turned the hand over to kiss its palm. "But we are strangers to each other," he said.

"Is it not the nature of men and women—that pleasure lies in learning about each other?"

"Yes."

"Then let the thought rest in your heart, McCoy, while I tell you about the Promise. In the fullness of time, the People will reach a new world, rich, green, so lovely to the eyes it will fill them with tears of joy. You can share that new world with me. You shall be its master because you'll be my master."

"When will you reach this new world?"

"Soon. The Oracle will only say—soon."

There was an innocence about her that opened his heart. Incredibly, he heard himself cry out, "Natira, Natira, if you only knew how much I've needed a future!"

"You have been lonely," she said. She picked up the wine glass and held it to his lips. "It is all over, the loneliness. There shall be no more loneliness for you."

He drank and set the glass aside. "Natira—there's something I must tell you . . ."

"Sssh," she said. "There is nothing you need to say."

"But there is."

She removed the hand she had placed over his mouth. "Then tell me, if the telling is such a need."

"I am ill," he said. "I have an illness for which there is no cure. I have one year to live, Natira."

The dark eyes did not flinch. "A year can be a lifetime, McCoy."

"It is my entire lifetime."

"Until I saw you my heart was empty. It sustained my life—and nothing more. Now it sings. I am grateful for the feeling that you have made it feel whether it lasts for a day—a month—a year—whatever time the Creators give to us."

He took her in his arms.

Kirk and Spock were meeting curious looks as they walked down a corridor of the asteroid ship. The more people they encountered, the clearer it became they had no inkling of the real nature of their world. Spock said, "Whoever built this ship must have given them a religion that would control their curiosity."

"Judging by the old man, suppressing curiosity is handled very directly," Kirk said. They had reached the portal of the Oracle Room. Pretending to a casual interest in its carved stone pillars, Spock eyed them keenly. "Yes," he said, "the writing is that of the Fabrini. I can read it."

"Fabrini?" Kirk said. "Didn't the sun of the Fabrini system go nova and destroy its planets?"

"It did, Captain. Toward the end, the Fabrini lived underground as the people do here."

"Perhaps some of them were put aboard this ship to be sent to another planet." Kirk glanced up and down

the corridor. It was almost empty. "And these are their descendants."

They were alone now in the corridor. Kirk tried and failed to open the Oracle Room's door. Spock touched the secret opening device set into one of the pillars. Inside, they flattened themselves against a wall. The door closed behind them. Nothing happened. Kirk, his voice low, said, "The Oracle doesn't seem to know we are here. What alerted it the first time?"

Spock moved a few steps toward the central dais. "Captain, the Oracle's misbehavior occurred when Natira knelt on that platform." Kirk stepped onto the platform. He walked carefully around it. Again, nothing happened. "Mr. Spock, continue investigating. The clue to the control place must be here somewhere." But carvings on a wall had caught Spock's attention. "More writing," he said. "It says nothing to suggest this is anything but a planet. Nor is there any question that the builders of the ship are to be considered gods."

Kirk had found a stone monolith set in a niche. It bore a carved design of a sun and planets. Spock joined him. "Eight planets, Captain. Eight. That was the number in the solar system of Fabrina."

"Then there's no doubt that these People are the Fabrini's descendants?"

"None, sir. And no doubt they have been in flight on this asteroid ship for ten thousand years." As Spock spoke, there was the sound of the door opening. They hastily slid behind the monolith. Kirk cautiously peered around it to see Natira, alone, crossing the room to the platform. She knelt. As before, hot light flared from the altar.

"Speak," said the Oracle.

"It is I, Natira."

"Speak."

"It is written that only the High Priestess of the People may select her mate."

"It is so written."

"For the rest of the People—mating and bearing is only permitted by the will of the Creators."

"Of necessity. Our world is small."

"The three strangers among us—there is one among

them called McCoy. I wish him to remain with the People—as my mate.”

Kirk gave a soundless whistle. Bones certainly had lost no time. Spock cocked an eyebrow, looking at Kirk.

“Does the stranger agree to this?” queried the Oracle.

“I have asked him. He has not yet given me his answer.”

“He must become one of the People. He must worship the Creators and agree to the insertion of the obedience instrument.”

“He will be told what must be done.”

“If he agrees to all things, it is permitted. Teach him our laws so that he commits no sacrilege, no offense against the People—or the Creators.”

“It shall be as you say, O most wise.”

Natira rose, bowed twice, backed away from the altar and walked toward the door. As Kirk watched her go, his sleeve brushed against the monolith’s carved design. The Oracle Room reverberated with a high-pitched, ululating whine. Natira wheeled from the door. The whine turned to a blazing white light. It turned to focus on Kirk and Spock. They went rigid, unable to move.

Natira rushed to the altar.

“Who are the intruders?” demanded the booming voice.

“Two of the strangers.”

“McCoy is one of them?”

“No.”

“These two have committed sacrilege. You know what must be done.”

“I know.”

Guards rushed into the room. The light that held Kirk and Spock died, leaving them dazed. Natira pointed to them. “Take them,” she told the guards.

As they were seized, she walked up to them. “You have been most foolish,” she said. “You have misused our hospitality. And you have more seriously sinned—a sin for which death is the punishment!”

Natira withstood the storm of McCoy’s wrath quietly. As he paused in his furious pacing of her quarters,

she said—and for the third time—“They entered the Oracle Room.”

“And why is death the penalty for that?” he shouted. “They acted out of ignorance!”

“They said they came in friendship. They betrayed our trust. I can make no other decision.”

He wheeled to face her. “Natira, you must let them return to their ship!”

“I cannot.”

“For me,” he said. He pulled her from her couch and into his arms. “I have made my decision. I’m staying with you—here on Yonada.”

She swayed with the relief of her love. Into the ear against his cheek, McCoy said, “What they did, they did because they thought they had to. You will not regret letting them go. I am happy for the first time in my life. How can I remain happy, knowing you commanded the death of my friends?”

She lifted her mouth for his kiss. “So be it,” she said. “I will give you their lives to show you my love.”

“My heart sings now,” McCoy said. “Let me tell them. They will need their communications units to return to their ship.”

“Very well, McCoy. All shall be as you wish.”

He left her for the corridor where Kirk and Spock were waiting under guard. He nodded to the guards. When they disappeared down the corridor, he handed the communicators to Kirk. Kirk passed one to Spock. “Where’s yours?” he asked. “You’re coming with us, aren’t you?”

“No, I’m not,” McCoy said.

“But this isn’t a planet, Bones! It’s a spaceship on a collision course with Daran V!”

“Jim, I’m on something of a collision course myself.”

“I order you to return to the ship, Dr. McCoy!”

“And I refuse! I intend to stay right here—on this ship. Natira has asked me to stay. So I shall stay.”

“As her husband?”

“Yes. I love her.” There were tears in his eyes. “Is it so much to ask, Jim, to let me love?”

“No.” Kirk straightened his shoulders. “But does she know—how much of a future you’ll have together?”

"Yes. I have told her."

"Bones, if the course of this ship isn't corrected, we'll have to blow it out of space."

"I'll find a way—or you will. You won't destroy Yonada and the people."

Kirk shook his head. "This isn't like you—suddenly giving up—quitting—not fighting any more. You're sick—and you're hiding behind a woman's skirts!"

McCoy swung a fist and Kirk took it square on the chin. He staggered. Spock steadied him. McCoy was yelling, "Sick? Not fighting? Come on, Captain! Try me again!"

Very grave, Spock said, "This conduct is very unlike you, Doctor."

Kirk fumbled for his communicator. "Kirk calling *Enterprise*. Come in, *Enterprise*."

"Scott here, Captain."

"Lock in on our signals. Transport Mr. Spock and me aboard at once."

"What about Dr. McCoy?"

Yes, indeed. What *about* Doctor McCoy? He looked at his friend. "He is staying here, Mr. Scott. Kirk out."

Spock moved to Kirk, flipping open his own communicator. McCoy backed away. They broke into sparkle—and were gone. Savagely, McCoy dragged a sleeve over his tear-blinded eyes.

Custom required him to stand alone before the Oracle.

It spoke.

"To become one of the People of Yonada, the instrument of obedience must be made part of your flesh. Do you now give your consent?"

Natira came forward. She crossed to another side of the altar and opened a small casket.

"I give my consent," McCoy said. As she removed a small device from the casket, her dark eyes met his with a look of pure love. "Say now, McCoy," she said. "For once it is done, it is done."

"Let it be done," he said.

She came to him. Placing the device against his temple, she activated it. He heard a hissing sound.

There was a thudding in his head. Instinctively his hand went to the place of insertion. "You are now one with my People," she said. "Kneel with me."

He reached for her hand. She said, "I here pledge you the love you want and will make beautiful your time."

"We are now of one mind," he said.

"One heart."

"One life," he said.

"We shall build the new world of the Promise together, O most wise and most perfect." They rose. She moved into his arms and he kissed her.

The Oracle said, "Teach him what he must know as one of the people."

Natira bowed. Obediently, she led McCoy to the stone monolith. She touched a button—and the carved inset depicting a sun and eight planets slid aside to reveal a large book. "This is the Book of the People," she said. "It is to be opened and read when we reach the world of the Promise. It was given by the Creators."

"Do the People know the contents of the book?"

"Only that it tells of our world here. And why we must one day leave it for the new one."

"Has the reason for leaving been revealed to the People?"

"No! It has not."

Then they'd been right, McCoy realized. Yonada's inhabitants were unaware they lived on a spaceship. "Has it been revealed to you, Natira? As the Priestess of the People?"

She shook her head. "I know only of the new world promised to us, much greater than this little one—verdant and fruitful but empty of living beings. It waits for us."

"Don't you long to know the book's secrets?"

"It is enough for me to know that we shall understand all that now is hidden when we reach our home." She touched the button in the monolith. Its carved inset slid back.

"What is the law concerning the book?"

“To touch it—to allow it to be seen by a nonbeliever is blasphemy to be punished by death.”

On the *Enterprise* Kirk had made his first act a report to Starfleet Command. It had to be told, not only of McCoy's critical illness, but of their failure to correct the collision course of the asteroid ship. Its Chief of Operations, Admiral Westervliet himself, appeared on the screen in Kirk's quarters to respond to the news.

“Medical Headquarters will supply you with a list of space physicians and their biographies, Captain. You will find a replacement for Dr. McCoy among them.”

Kirk addressed the stiffly mustached face on the screen. “Yes, Admiral. However, Starfleet's orders to continue our mission is creating difficulties.”

“Difficulties? Perhaps I've failed to make myself clear, Captain. You have been relieved of all responsibility for alteration of the course of the asteroid ship Yonada. Starfleet Command will take care of the situation.”

“That is the problem, sir,” Kirk said.

“A problem? For whom?”

“My crew, sir. Dr. McCoy's illness has become generally known. His condition forced us to leave him on Yonada. His safety depends on the safety of Yonada. To leave this area before Yonada's safety is certain would create a morale problem for the crew. It's a purely human one, of course.”

Westervliet had a habit of attacking his mustache when human problems were mentioned. Now it was taking a beating.

“Yes,” he said. “Well, Captain Kirk, I certainly sympathize with your wish to remain in Dr. McCoy's vicinity. But the general mission of the *Enterprise* is galactic investigation. You will continue with it.”

“Yes, Admiral,” Kirk said. “One request, however. Should a cure for Doctor McCoy's disease be discovered, will you advise the *Enterprise*?”

“That is not a request, Captain. Between you and me, it's an order, isn't it?”

“Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.”

Kirk, switching off the screen, sat still in his chair.

McCoy had made his choice. No appeal had been able to change it. And who was to say it wasn't the right one? A year of life with a woman's love against a year of life without it. Bones. He was going to miss him. The intercom squeaked. He rose to hit the button. "Kirk here."

"Dr. McCoy for you, Captain," Uhura said. "He has an urgent message."

"Put him on!"

"Jim?"

"Yes, Bones."

"We may be able to get these people back on course!"

Kirk's pulse raced. "Have you located the controls?"

"No—but I've seen a book that contains all the knowledge of Yonada's builders. If you can get to it, Spock can dig out the information."

"Where is it?" Kirk asked.

A scream of agony burst from the intercom. "Bones! What's happening? Bones!"

Silence. Frantic, Kirk tried again. "McCoy, what is it? What has been done to you? Bones, come in . . ."

But he knew what had happened. Torture, death.

The Oracle had taken McCoy's life in exchange for his forbidden revelation.

Kirk's jaw muscles set hard. "Transporter Room," he told the intercom.

He and Spock materialized in Natira's quarters. She was cradling McCoy's head in her arms. But his face was contorted with pain. Kirk saw him struggle to lift his head. It sank back into Natira's lap.

She looked at them. Dully, her voice toneless, she said, "You have killed your friend. I will have you put to death."

"Let me help you," Kirk said.

"Until you are dead, he will think of you and disobey. While you live, my beloved cannot forget you. So I shall see you die."

She made a move to get up and Kirk grabbed her, clapping his hand over her mouth. "Spock," he said, "help McCoy."

"Yes, Captain." Spock unslung his tricorder. From it he removed a tiny electronic device. Bending over McCoy's motionless body, he pressed the device on the spot where the instrument of obedience had been inserted. When he withdrew it, the insert was clinging to it. He jerked it clear. Then he handed it to Natira. She stared at him, unbelieving. A little moan broke from her. Kirk released her. She sank to the floor. After a moment, she pulled herself up to her hands and knees and crawled over to McCoy. She touched his temple. "My beloved is again a stranger. We are no longer one life." She burst into passionate weeping. "Why have you done this to us? Why?"

"He is still yours," Kirk said gently.

The tears choked her. "It is—forbidden. He is not of our people—now. You have released him—from his vow of obedience."

"We have released him from the cruelty of your Oracle," Kirk said.

She closed her eyes, unhearing, her body racked with sobs. Beside her, Kirk saw McCoy's eyelids flicker open. He went to him quickly, bending over him. "You spoke of a book," he said. "Where is it, Bones?"

Natira leaped to her feet with a shriek. "You must not know! You must not know that!"

McCoy looked up into Kirk's eyes. "The Oracle Room," he whispered.

"You will never see the Book!" cried Natira. "It is blasphemy!" She ran to the door, calling, "Guards! Guards!"

Kirk caught her, closing his hand over her mouth again. "You must listen to me, Natira!" She pulled away from him and he jerked her back. "*Listen to me!* If you do not understand what I tell you, you may call the guards. And we will accept whatever punishment is decreed. *But now you must listen!*"

She slowly lifted the tear-wet lashes. "What is it you wish to say?"

"I shall tell you the truth, Natira—the truth about your world of Yonada. And you will trust it as true as a child trusts what is true. Years ago, ten thousand years ago, a sun died and the sun's worlds died with it.

Its worlds were the eight ones you see pictured on the stone pillar in the Oracle Room."

"Yonada is one of those worlds," she said.

"No. It was the world of your ancestors—your creators." He paused to give her time. After a moment, he quietly added, "It no longer exists, Natira."

"You are mad," she whispered. "You are mad."

"Hear me out, Natira! Your ancestors knew their world was about to die. They wanted their race to live. So they built a great ship. On it they placed their best people. Then they sent them and the ship into space."

"You wish me to believe that Yonada is a ship?"

"Yes," Kirk said.

"But we have a sun! It did not die. And at night I see the stars!"

"No. You have never seen the sun. You have never seen the stars. You live inside a hollow ball. Your fathers created the ball to protect you—to take you on the great journey to the new safe world of the Promise."

In her face he could see half-thought thoughts reviving, completing themselves. But the growing perception was painful. Yet it had come. She spoke very slowly. "The truth—why do you bring it to Yonada?"

"We had to. Your ship has done well—but its machinery is tired. It must be mended. If we don't mend it, Yonada will strike and kill another great world it knows nothing about."

Belief flooded into her. With it came the realization of betrayal.

"Why has this truth not been told us? Why have we been kept in darkness?"

Kirk went to her. But she pushed him away, overwhelmed by the sense of an incredible treachery. "No! You have lied! I believe only the Oracle! I must believe!"

Kirk said, "Let us remove the instrument of obedience. Let us remove it for the truth's sake."

She was gone, fled out the door. Kirk turned to Spock. "Do you think she understood me?" he said. But Spock was at the open door. Kirk saw him nod pleasantly to a passing guard before he quietly closed

the door. "She hasn't sent the guards to detain us, Captain. It is my supposition that she understood a great deal."

Behind them, McCoy had struggled shakily to his feet. Now he pushed past them. "Natira! I have to go to her. I must go to her in the Oracle Room."

She was on her knees before the altar, her eyes shut in rapt devotion.

The thunder voice spoke. "You have listened to the words of the nonbelievers."

"I have listened."

"You felt the pain of warning."

"I felt the pain of warning."

"Why did you listen further?"

"They said they spoke the truth."

"Their truth is not your truth."

She opened her eyes. "Is truth not truth for all?"

"There is only one for you. Repent your disobedience."

"I must know the truth of the world!" she cried.

At the sound of her scream, Kirk rushed into the Oracle Room. He lifted Natira from the dais, but McCoy, reaching for her, took her in his arms, holding her close. Her body was stiff under spasms of pain. As one passed, she reached out a hand to caress his face. "Your friends have told me—much."

"They spoke the truth," McCoy said.

"I believe you. I believe . . ."

Agony convulsed her again. She fought it bravely. "I believe with you, my husband. We have been kept in darkness."

McCoy extended a hand to Spock. The tiny electronic device performed its function once more. When McCoy lifted it from Natira's temple, it held the obedience insert. He held it up for her to see. The grief of a great loss shadowed her dark eyes as she lapsed into unconsciousness.

"Is she all right?" Kirk asked.

"She will be. I'll stay with her."

Kirk said, "Mr. Spock—the Fabrina inset."

They were crossing to the monolith when the Oracle

spoke, a fierce anger in its voice. "You blaspheme the temple!"

Kirk turned. "We do this for the survival of Yonada's people."

"You are forbidden to gaze at the Book!"

"We must consult it to help the people!"

"The punishment is death."

Kirk looked back at McCoy. "Bones?"

"Depress the side section," McCoy said.

A blast of heat struck them. Around them the walls had turned a radiant red. Even as he pressed the side of the monolith, the air he breathed was scorching Kirk's lungs. But the inset had slid open. He seized the book and passed it to Spock. "It must contain the plan. Is it indexed?"

"Yes, Captain. Here's the page . . ."

Yellow, brittle with age, the page's parchment showed the same idealized sun, the same planet placements as the altar design and the inset. Arrows pointed to three of the planets. Spock translated the Fabrini writing at the top of the page. "Apply pressure simultaneously to the planets indicated."

The walls were glowing hotter. Spock tossed the book aside and they raced for the altar plaque. As Kirk pushed at the three planets, the altar moved forward. Then it stopped. Spock slid into the space behind it. Before he followed him, Kirk turned back to McCoy and Natira. "Let's get out of this heat," he called.

Spock had found a short passageway. As he approached its end wall, it lifted. At once he heard the hum of electronic power. A light shone on a button-crowded console. Spock studied it for a moment. Then he pressed a button. The light went out. "I've neutralized that heating element!" he called back to the others.

The heat in the Oracle Room rapidly cooled. Kirk and McCoy sat Natira down against an altar wall. "You'll be all right here now," Kirk said. "The Oracle can no longer punish."

He saw her rest her glossy head against McCoy's shoulder. Looking up at him, she said, "Your friends have ended the punishments?" He nodded. "And will

they send this—this ship on to the place of the Promise?”

“Yes,” he said. “That is their promise. Now I must help them. Come with me.”

“No,” she said.

“There is nothing to fear now, Natira. So come. We must hurry to join them.”

“No. I cannot go with you.” She paused. “It is not fear that holds me. I now understand the great purpose of our fathers. I must honor it, McCoy.”

He stared at her in unbelief. “You mean to stay here—on Yonada?”

“I must remain with my people throughout our great journey.”

“Natira, trust me! The Oracle will not harm us!”

“I stay because it is what I must do,” she said.

“I will not leave you,” McCoy said.

“Will McCoy stay here to die?”

The question shocked him into silence. He fell to his knees beside her. “Natira, you have given me reason to wish to live. But wishing is not enough. I must search through the universe to cure myself—and all those like me. I wanted you with me—with me . . .”

“This is my universe,” she said. “You came here to save my people. Shall I abandon them?”

“I love you,” McCoy said.

She kissed him. “If it is permitted, perhaps one day you, too, will see the land of our Promise. . . .”

It was good-bye. And he knew it. He reached for her blindly through a mist of tears.

In the asteroid ship’s control room, Spock had located a weakness in one of its consoles’ eight tubes.

“Enough to turn it off course?” Kirk asked.

“Yes, Captain. The engine can take a check.” Kirk, studying control panels, was reminded of those of the *Enterprise*. “A very simple problem,” Spock called from the engine room. “And comparatively easy to repair.”

He came back, holding one hand out stiffly. “I think we can now attempt the course correction, sir.”

“What was wrong?”

"In creating a completely natural environment for the people on this ship, its builders included many life forms—including insects. A control jet in there was blocked by a hornets' nest."

"You're not serious, Mr. Spock?"

Spock held up a forefinger. It was swollen to twice its normal size. "I destroyed the nest," he said. "In doing so, I was stung." He sat down, resuming his watch of the console instruments. "The guidance system is taking over, sir. I think we can revert to automatic controls."

"She's steady on course now," Kirk said.

They released the manual controls and were heading back to the Oracle Room when Spock stopped at a screened console of complex design. "Knowledge files," he said. "Those banks are filled with the total knowledge of the Fabrini. I presume they were prepared for the people to consult when they reach their destination." He left Kirk to examine the console more closely. "They seem to have amassed a great deal of medical knowledge."

Unslinging his tricorder, he slipped a taped disk into it. He passed it over the console. "The knowledge of the builders of this ship could be extremely valuable—even though it is ten thousand years old."

McCoy spoke from behind them. "Gentlemen, are we ready to return to the *Enterprise*?"

Kirk stared at him. It was best to ask no questions, he thought. "Yes, Bones, we are," he said. He flipped open his com unit. "Kirk to *Enterprise*. Landing party ready to beam aboard."

The screen in Sickbay held a series of chemical formulas in the Fabrini writing. Kirk and Spock, watching Christine Chapel prepare another air-hypo injection, saw that her hands were shaking. She noticed it, too. To quiet her agitation, she glanced at the life indicators at the head of McCoy's bed. The steady blinking of their lights steadied her. She thrust the air-hypo into a green liquid.

"Not another one?" McCoy said as she approached his bed. He made a face as the hypo took effect. But

already it had made a fast change in the life support panel.

"Excellent, Doctor," Christine said. "You're quite able to see for yourself. The white corpuscle count is back to normal." She reached an arm under his shoulders to help him check the panel behind him. He still looked pained.

"Tell me, Doctor," Kirk wanted to know. "Why are cures so often as painful as the disease?"

"Jim, that is a very sore subject with medical men."

"Dr. McCoy," Spock said reprovingly, "it seems that the Fabrini cure for granulation of the hemoglobin has seriously damaged your gift for witty repartee."

Nurse Chapel had filled the hypo again. "This is the last one, Doctor."

Spock, his eyes on the life support panel, achieved a Vulcan triumph. Joy radiated from his impassive face. "Your hemoglobin count is now completely normal, Doctor. So the flow of oxygen to all the cells of your body is again up to its abundantly energetic level."

McCoy sat up. "Spock, I owe this to you. Had you not brought back that Fabrini knowledge . . ."

"My translation abilities are one of my most minor accomplishments," Spock said. "If you consider my major ones, Doctor . . ."

"I wonder if there's a Fabrini cure for a swelled head," McCoy speculated.

Kirk intervened. "Bones, the Fabrini descendants are scheduled to debark on their promised planet in exactly fourteen months and seven days."

The grin left McCoy's face. He looked at Kirk.

"Yes," Kirk said. "I expect you'd like to see the Fabrini descendants again to thank them personally. So I've arranged to be in the vicinity of their new home at the time of their arrival. You will want to be there to welcome them, won't you?"

"Thank you, Jim," McCoy said. "Thank you very much."





