
Anne's Story
Doug Moody
A Star Trek Story

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By Doug Moody

Kirk glanced over at his bedside panel. The silent, incoming call light was slowly flashing. He contemplated the dim blue glow for a moment and then reached over and activated the circuit. "Kirk."

"Good evening, Captain," the voice of Commander Spock filtered from the speaker. Kirk had already been fairly sure it was Spock calling. An emergency call would have activated the regular circuit. Only Spock and McCoy would use this unobtrusive method of calling him designed not to wake him if he had been asleep. And McCoy would probably have done it from the door. "Yes, Spock?"

"We have assumed standard orbit around Epsilon Beta Three per your instructions. Scanning has commenced and will be completed in 4.66 hours."

"And . . . ?" Kirk knew that Spock wouldn't bother him with this report of the execution of Kirk's own orders.

Spock was silent for just an instant but it conveyed to Kirk his dissatisfaction with something he'd run across. "The initial scan recorded intelligent life forms."

"And that isn't what the original probe survey recorded."

"Yes, Captain." And another brief pause. "The scanners now show NO intelligent life forms. Only the primitive sort normally found in this type of native forest. Just as the original scouting probe's survey indicated.

"Equipment malfunction, Spock?" Kirk asked, although he knew that Spock would have checked that out before contacting him.

"No, Captain. I have verified that the scanning equipment is totally functional. The information on the life forms has been removed from the return signal."

Removed? That raised some serious questions. The original survey had been done four years ago by probes searching this sector of space. For a species to have become marginally intelligent during that four years was possible but unlikely. For the primitives to have come to the point where they could selectively remove information

from a sophisticated scanning beam was impossible. Someone had discovered this planet before they had returned. Someone with a great deal of technology. "How can you tell the information's been removed, Spock?"

"One of the unused side lobes of the carrier frequency shows tampering. I only determined this after rigorously testing the entire circuitry. I would recommend a complete scan of the planet before any physical examination."

Kirk flicked a sidelong look at the chrono. "I agree, Spock. Schedule a landing party meeting for eight. Kirk out." He broke the circuit and lay back on the bed. He raised the old-fashioned paper book again, but his thoughts remained with the information he had just received. Soon he gave it up and put the book away and turned out the lights and eventually drifted off to sleep.

He was not surprised the next morning when he strode from the turbolift to find Spock already on the bridge. He noted Lt. Richardson in the command chair and knew that Spock had come up early, as he had, to get the data from last night's scan before the meeting. He waved Richardson back into the command chair and joined Spock at the science station. He had trouble, as usual, following his first officer's rapid assimilation of the data as it flashed across the screen.

Spock finally shut off the display and turned to Kirk. "Data was consistent throughout the scan with the exception of a brief 1.34 minutes interval. " His fingers danced across the keypads and a five minute section of the scan stood out on the screen. Kirk could easily make out the point at which the scan slowly moved into the area showing a large concentration of intelligent life forms. The sharp cutoff back to the altered readings was also evident.

"Did we get a lock on the area, Mr. Spock?"

"Yes, Captain. I have the coordinates in my tricorder."

Kirk nodded sharply and turned to see that Uhura had also come up early and was getting her update from the night crew. He walked over to her and paused and she turned to him quickly. "Good morning, Captain. The meeting personnel have already assembled in conference room #1, sir."

"Thank you, Uhura. Have we received or observed any transmissions during the evening?"

"Negative, sir. Should I initiate hailing frequencies?"

"No. Mr. Spock and I will be in the meeting."

"Aye, aye, sir.", Uhura answered as her fingers punched in the information to the computer.

Kirk paused before sitting at the table to look over his landing party and allow Spock time to set up his computer displays. He recognized the security men with the security chief and the entire science group with one exception.

The exception was a hazel eyed young woman whose dark hair lay comfortably on her shoulders at what must have been the edge of regulations. As she became aware of Kirk's scrutiny she gave a light toss to her head that shifted the hair slightly and gave her tricorder a great deal of attention. Kirk smiled to himself and sat. He nodded at Spock.

Spock had observed Kirk's momentary distraction. "I believe you are familiar with the members of the landing party except for Lt. Murphy. Lt. Murphy recently joined us as Lt. Henachi's replacement. She is a xenobiologist and was chosen for this landing party because of her research into the development of intelligence in primitive species."

Kirk nodded his thanks. "As I can see by your expressions, the rumor mill has been running full blast again. Let me clarify your information before we begin. Mr. Spock?"

Spock punched up the information on the triscreen that rose from the conference table and proceeded with his usual thorough compilation of the data and the summation of the situation. Kirk sat back and observed his people. Security was obviously ready to go, as they always were. Sulu was paying strict attention to Spock's conclusions. The rest of the group was from the science section, Spock's people, and was listening intently. With one exception.

As Spock concluded and passed control back, Kirk leaned forward and looked directly at the new member of their team. "Lt. Murphy. You seem to have been preoccupied during Mr. Spock's briefing."

She quickly looked up and her face reddened. "S..sorry, sir. I was gathering my material for presentation when Mr. Spock was done." She paused for a heartbeat. "I was listening, sir."

Kirk turned as Spock spoke, "Perhaps the Lieutenant can give her presentation now, Captain." Kirk looked back to Murphy and nodded.

The exhibition was brief but concise and complete. A report that Spock would approve of. "Mr. Spock. Lt. Murphy referred to two references that I am unfamiliar with."

"Both have been accepted at Star Fleet Academy as standard reference works in the last six months, Captain. I have read both."

"And has the Lieutenant captured the meaning of the references as well as the gist of them?"

"It would seem she has in my opinion, sir. I would expect that since she wrote the two treatises in question."

Kirk had never looked away from the lieutenant and noted the immediate blush and flurry of activity with her tricorder. "Very well. Let's do a little investigating of our own."

As the landing party materialized, Kirk took a quick look at the surrounding vegetation and then waved the security team into position. Spock and Lt. Murphy were engrossed with tricorder readings and finally Spock looked to Captain Kirk, "As noted previously, Captain. Initial scan indicated intelligent life at the predetermined coordinates. " Spock checked his tricorder once more and continued. "Present scan indicates only primitive life signs."

Spock was silent but Kirk knew from the slightly raised eyebrow that there was more. At his questioning look, Spock continued. "The scan appears to have been altered as the one conducted from the ship was altered, Captain. The initial reading came before the sensor was analyzed and transmuted."

"Period?"

"Thirteen seconds, sir." Spock remained silent. But what he didn't say spoke volumes.

"You're telling me that the tricorder sensor was sensed, analyzed and altered in thirteen seconds?"

Spock calmly nodded. "I believe the shortening of the initial

interval was accomplished because the scan was expected. The reason we were able to record any data at all is possibly because of the differing scan frequency between the ship's sensors and the tricorder."

"Can we track on the readable altered side lobe?"

"Affirmative, Captain."

"Ranson, take the point with Mr. Spock. The rest of you follow in advance plan "B"."

Spock nodded and immediately turned and set off for a low rise on the horizon with Ranson close on his heels. The rest of the landing party strung out behind them with the tricorders of the science group humming faintly as they recorded data on the flora and fauna of the planet.

After no more than a half hour's walk, Spock stopped and Kirk quickly joined him. Spock made a final pass with his tricorder and indicated a break in the dense thicket to their left. "Through there, captain, approximately 23.7 meters." Kirk waved Ranson and D'Linta, another member of the security team, ahead and cautiously followed.

The ground was spotty with undergrowth and some animal tracks could be seen in the loose soil. As they rounded a turn on the obvious path, the security people stopped and Kirk joined them. Ranson pointed ahead.

Kirk eyed the Federation shuttle craft with wonder. It seemed to have a few modifications and its exterior was spotless even though it sat against a hill of sparse shrubs and bare earth. Spock's tricorder hummed as Ranson and D'Linta advanced on the shuttle craft.

Spock's mouth opened to shout a warning and Kirk swung toward the shuttle as a loud pop split the otherwise quiet glen. Kirk spotted Ranson laying on the ground holding his right hand and rushed to his side. He grimaced as he noted the raw flesh and the bones glaring white through in places. Kirk whipped out his communicator. "Kirk to ENTERPRISE. Have a medical team stand by the transporter room. Two to beam up, one with injuries."

"Scott, aye."

Kirk pulled Ranson to his feet and waved D'Linta over to him. D'Linta supported him and Kirk moved out of range and flipped open his communicator again. "Energize." Ranson and D'Linta disappeared

in twin pillars of scintillating energy. As Kirk turned to Spock, the transporter whine began again and McCoy materialized with his medical kit.

"M'Benga's taking him to sickbay now. A week of rebuilding and he'll have the hand back good as new." He quickly took in the rest of the landing party and nodded to himself. "Next time the damn quarterly report can wait." He looked directly at Kirk. "Every landing party should have a medical team member."

Kirk took in McCoy's stance and squared off jaw and nodded ruefully. "I agree, Doctor. My mistake in making the exception this time when you were busy."

"Thanks, Jim."

Kirk turned to Spock as the tricorder hum stopped. He started forward to stop Spock but stopped and watched as Spock approached the shuttle. He trusted Spock's judgment. Spock carefully extended a hand through the open door and keyed in a command on the door control keypad. Withdrawing his hand, he activated the tricorder for a moment and then turned it off and nodded to Kirk. "The force field has been deactivated, Captain."

"How were you able to reach through it Mr. Spock?"

"The field was designed to obliterate any concentrated energy source and inanimate objects not accompanied by animal life."

He paused for a moment and then gestured to the name emblazoned on the side of the shuttle. "I am certain that we will find that this is the shuttle lost from the INTREPID while it was investigating the Mutare Nebula."

Kirk had noticed the name on the shuttle as well. But he had been more inclined to view this as a different shuttle since the Mutare Nebula was a quarter of the way across the galaxy from this quiet planet. How could it have spanned thousands of light-years? The shuttle's fuel would have exhausted itself long before it approached this sector. He glanced again quickly at the pristine beauty of its hull. This shuttle had been carefully flown and set down here.

He looked askance at Spock. "I need some answers, Mr. Spock. Not wild hypotheses."

Spock immediately straightened and assumed his most Vulcan

posture and aspect. His voice was at once cold and precise. "I am a Vulcan, Captain, and not given to the wild flights of fancy that afflict humans."

McCoy had just returned from the far side of the shuttle and caught the last two comments. "Even I can tell this thing could never have flown here under its own power, Spock. Perhaps a display of the famous and much vaunted Vulcan logic is in order."

Spock's stance remained the same. The only indication of his perturbation was a slight wrinkling of his brow. But he remained silent as Kirk and McCoy looked at him expectantly. Kirk suddenly realized that Spock was reevaluating his data as they watched, and finding it lacking. "A hunch, Spock?"

Carefully not glancing at McCoy, he shook his head. "I am unable to explain how the shuttle has apparently traversed a distance clearly beyond its capability." McCoy's face brightened and Spock hurriedly continued. "However, this is that shuttle. Before the INTREPID left on that mission, I was aboard to consult with Spelk on his proposed studies of the nebula. We had occasion to speak as we outfitted and setup his shuttle for the expected Nebula environment."

He paused significantly, and this time briefly glanced at McCoy. "The access code which I entered on the shuttle's keypad is my personal code which I had placed in its memory at that time."

Alerted by the glance it took McCoy slightly less time to decipher the discrepancy than Kirk. "But still a hunch initially, Spock. Else why enter your personal code when the standard command override code would have been sufficient to do the job?"

Spock took in McCoy's grinning visage and addressed himself to Kirk. "Captain, . . ."

"We understand, Spock. I'm sure the reasoning was eminently logical for trying your own code first. But I'm sure that McCoy and I can wait until this evening's dinner to hear it." This last with a sharp look at McCoy who nodded happily. "For the present, let's find out all we can about this shuttle and the surrounding area."

Lt. Murphy approached with her tricorder humming. She pointed at the shuttle entrance. "Captain?"

Kirk swung to look and observed a large biped figure moving

into the shuttle's doorway. It was easily six feet tall and lightly built. The body covering was a light fur and the creature was obviously male. It made no move to advance but stood there and watched them closely. It seemed particularly interested in the lieutenant's tricorder.

The tableau held for brief moments and then the entity turned to the keypad and punched in a code. It did not look back at them but turned and disappeared into the shuttle's interior. Spock immediately checked with his own tricorder and announced, "The force field is back in place, Captain." He made slight adjustments and continued, "With a modification that prohibits animal life from entering."

Kirk glanced at the gathering twilight and the surrounding woods. "Set up a base camp on the other side of this clearing, Spock. Have four more security people join us for night watches. We will discuss what information we have found after dinner. Inform all our people to make no more attempts to enter the shuttle." Spock nodded compliance as Kirk moved off to examine the undergrowth.

Two hours later, full dark had fallen and the landing party was gathered in the larger of the hastily constructed shelters while security patrolled the clearing. Lighting was by battery pack but augmented by a large fire in the center of the shelter. The slight smoke rose through the vented roof. Kirk paced lightly around the fire as he spoke.

"Sum it up, Mr. Spock."

Spock nodded and shut off his tricorder. "Our attention was initially drawn to this planet because of the momentary indication of intelligent life when we first entered orbit. This indication was repeated once during the evening scan for a period of 1.34 minutes. Subsequent readings from the planet's surface with the tricorder's sensors revealed an initial trace of the same intelligent life. This variation was lost in thirteen seconds. I have formed the hypothesis that the sensors were intercepted, analyzed and modified to display the data we see now."

The three science members of the landing party looked at each other questioningly. Lt. Inci verbalized their question.

"Sir, that would take a great deal of sophisticated instrumentation, more than could be found on that shuttle. And the shuttle is the only object with an electronics base. Are you saying that

the natives are doing this masking without electronics?"

"Unknown, lieutenant. Although your hypothesis could fit the facts as we have observed them. We also observed the creature in the shuttle craft react to the loss of the force field by reactivating it with modifications designed to keep us out, after it had observed us closely for a few moments. Lt. Murphy?"

The lieutenant quit shaking her head and thought for a moment before speaking. "I do not agree with your apparent conclusion that the creature is sentient."

Kirk stopped pacing and turned to face her. "But it appeared in response to our deactivation of the force field. I did observe it looking us over and paying particular attention to your tricorder. I also saw it reactivate the force field by entering the code into the keypad. After which it paid us no attention at all. You discount these actions, lieutenant?"

She flushed deeply but squared her shoulders and looked Kirk straight in the eye. "The appearance of sentience, sir. But I believe the creature to have been trained in its responses."

Spock's eyebrow rose slightly. "Your logic, Lieutenant?"

"A variety of things, sir. It wore no clothing or protective covering although its natural covering was obviously inadequate to protect it from the climatic conditions we have already observed. Nor did it show evidence of having worn any protective covering in the past such as worn or matted areas in its fur at constricted locations."

She shifted slightly and addressed Kirk. "The order of its actions is also significant, Captain. When it appeared, it observed us first, then reactivated the force field. If it had been sentient, its first action would have been to ensure that its protection was in place before it spent time observing and vulnerable.

"The indication to me was that it had come in response to the force field's deactivation, but was momentarily distracted by our appearance and the humming of the tricorder. Once its training overcame its curiosity, it completed its task and left without further investigation."

She turned again and continued to Spock. "That last was perhaps the most telling. Our records may be incomplete, but probe

records are generally painstaking when recording the varieties of animal life on a new planet. According to the records, that creature is the closest thing to our physiognomy on the planet. Yet it obviously did not react to our strange appearance and showed no further interest in what apparently were extra planetary creatures once it had completed its task."

Spock was silent for a moment and then turned to Kirk. "I must concur with the lieutenant's reasoning. A sentient creature, in the same circumstances, would have activated the force field with whatever modifications were necessary to protect itself and then lavished its attention on the strange new variety of fauna."

"But that raises another question, Spock. If it is a trained specimen, who trained it?" In the ensuing silence Kirk looked over the group. "Let's sleep on it tonight and start fresh in the morning."

As the others were leaving, Kirk watched as Murphy moved her pack to set up her sleeping area. He saw something drop from her half-open pack and after a moment went over to her and retrieved it.

He was able to study the object for a moment before she registered his presence. It was small, less than a foot long, and appeared to be composed of so many patched areas that the original external appearance was lost. He observed two button eyes, which seemed to make it some kind of doll. It had unquestionably seen a great deal of use.

Spock joined him just as she turned and caught sight of them. Only when Spock commented on the object in Kirk's grasp did she note what was the center of their attention.

"An artifact from a culture you have been researching, lieutenant?"

Murphy saw her doll and hastily rescued it, clutching it to her protectively. Her face flushed deep red and she looked from face to face defiantly. When neither man spoke, she tucked the object in her pack and quickly exited the shelter. Spock followed Kirk back to McCoy's bedding.

"What was that all about, Jim?"

Kirk directed his comments to Spock. "Evidently an object which she values highly for personal reasons." He shifted to McCoy.

"Some kind of doll. What used to be termed a ‘security blanket’. Many people had similar objects. I remember that I had a . . .” Kirk broke off and looked briefly at his two friends.

"Yes, captain?"

"Yes, Jim?"

Kirk closed his mouth and smiled tightly. "I was just going to say good night, gentlemen." He nodded briefly and turned to his own bedding. Spock nodded carefully to himself, taking in McCoy's wide grin.

"Does the term `security blanket' have a less than stable connotation, Doctor?"

McCoy turned back to Spock and his expression signaled his return to business. "It could, Spock. Most humans go through a period when they like to have some reminder from their past present with them. Varies from person to person. In most, the manifestation is seen in prints or holos of family or locations of their youth; special objects of value, like your display of old Vulcan weaponry on your cabin wall, or objects of particular sentimental attachment."

McCoy noted Spock's raised eyebrow. "We have no doubt of your stability, Spock. And when the lieutenant checked aboard, I did the standard Sigmund required and discovered her attachment to that figure. I researched her records and found that she was born in Kentucky, on Earth, and, at a relatively young age, moved to the hill country of northeastern Virginia."

"And this object dates from that period?"

"Somewhere in that period. Another factor is the evident care that has gone into the maintenance of the form. That maintenance is a reminder in itself of the love of the person who did it. Probably her mother."

"Then the attachment is sentimental?" At McCoy's nod, he continued. "Interesting. Vulcan's, of course, have no need for objects of sentimental concern. Thank you, Doctor, for your insights."

"My pleasure, Spock," McCoy smiled to himself as Spock began to ready his own bedding. He remembered the full length, brown, tastefully ornamented shirt Spock's mother had made for him and sent to him aboard the ENTERPRISE. And the fact that Spock

took it on every leave, whether to Vulcan or not. "No sentiment there, Spock," he muttered to himself. He smiled again and turned in for the night.

After a hurried meal the next morning, Kirk assembled his people. "Security noted no hostile action during the night. But we still have one person in sickbay. Let's keep in mind the possible dangers, people." He turned to Spock. "Are we precisely at the coordinates logged, Mr. Spock?"

"The actual coordinates are approximately .85 kilometers at 122 mark 3."

Kirk appeared surprised. "Mark 3? That would put it somewhere under that hill. " At Spock's nod he continued. "Then the plan of attack for this morning will be to find the entrance. Mr. Spock will take one group and proceed east. Doctor McCoy and myself and two security people will go west. In no case will there be any actual penetration of the hillside when we find the entrance until the entire group has been reassembled. I'm having two security personnel beamed down to keep watch here at the shuttle. Any questions?"

He noticed a brief nonverbal exchange between Spock and Lt. Murphy, followed by a look of comprehension on Spock's face and a nod at the lieutenant before he turned to Kirk. "I believe Lt. Murphy has a suggestion of some merit, Captain."

Kirk turned an interested gaze to the red-faced lieutenant in question. "It seemed to me, sir, that we are already at an entrance."

Kirk stared quizzically at her a moment and then nodded and turned to Spock. "Mr. Spock?"

"Eminently logical, Captain. The right side and rear of the shuttle abuts the hill."

"And what better doorway than one that can be locked up with a selective force field. But can we defeat the force field, Mr. Spock?"

"Unknown, Captain. I will begin work on that now." Spock gathered his tricorder with a hand and his science group with his eyes and headed out of the shelter.

Kirk pulled out his communicator and flipped it open. "Kirk to ENTERPRISE."

"Scott here, sir."

"Any change in our status, Scotty?"

"Negative, Captain. The sensor readings are the same as they have been. And the ship is still in synchronous orbit with no extra system indications."

"Very well, Scotty. We are proceeding to investigate the source of the brief readings we got yesterday. I'll stay in touch at regular intervals and appraise you before we actually enter the inhabited area."

"Scott, aye."

Kirk snapped his communicator closed and slipped it beneath his shirt. Kirk was observing the preparations for lunch when he noted Spock's return. "An answer, Spock? Or just breaking for lunch?"

Spock appeared to ignore his comment entirely, as he frequently did when those comments were not worthy of reply. "We have found the answer to the force field, Captain, and are ready to enter the shuttle on your command."

Something tugged at Kirk's mind subliminally. He paused for a moment, looking at Spock and then moving to the doorway and observing the science team waiting at the shuttle entrance. He turned back to Spock and indicated the crewmen preparing the meal.

"I think we'll eat first, Spock." He paused again and then nodded to himself. "Yes. We'll eat and then make our entrance. It may be sometime before we get a chance to eat again if our search gets involved."

Spock raised an eyebrow but merely nodded his concurrence and went through the doorway to bring the rest of his people in. As they sat under the trees later and munched on their various choices, Kirk took a last bite of his apple and chewed it thoughtfully as he observed Spock finishing his salad. "Why do I have this feeling that you are anxious about entering the shuttle, Spock?"

Spock finished chewing but pushed the remainder of his lunch aside. "Possibly because you are extremely efficient at picking up subliminal clues, Captain."

When he said no more, Kirk ventured again, "So what are you nervous about?"

"Nervous, Captain? I am merely confidant we will find S’pelk when we find the answer to this enigma and I am concerned for his

wellbeing."

"The force field?"

Spock nodded. "A variation on a force field I had designed as a child on Vulcan. Easily bypassed once understood. I had originally intended it to keep ch'rlka from our garden."

"How do we find a force field that YOU designed as a child guarding that shuttle now. I take it its not a Star Fleet standard?"

"Correct, Captain. It could only have come from my own mind since there were no other records of it." Spock hesitated and then turned to face Kirk squarely. "Therefore, with your permission, I will return to the ship and thereby remove my mind from the touch of these entities. With my superior knowledge of the defensive systems available, a shield could be generated that would be most difficult to bypass. I am, at this time, keeping my mind shielded and occupied with mathematical computations to prevent further use of that information."

Kirk glanced once at the shuttle and then pulled out his communicator. But before he could activate it, Lt. Murphy quickly joined them. "Mr. Spock. The force field has been deactivated."

Kirk hesitated and then stowed his communicator. "You haven't tried anything that might have deactivated it, lieutenant?"

She flushed but answered calmly. "No, sir. Mr. Spock had us keep a tricorder active on it to keep us apprised of any changes. The field just suddenly disappeared."

Kirk shook his head at a buzzing in his ears and then noticed that it wasn't in his ears, that he wasn't hearing it but perceiving it. He caught the motion by the lieutenant as she touched her ears and Spock's raised eyebrows when he heard the shout from security.

"Captain!!" Two security guards were aiming their phasers at the shuttle's entrance where a small furry creature was hiding in the shadows.

"Hold your fire!" Kirk turned to Spock as Spock touched his sleeve.

"We must go closer, Captain."

Kirk wondered at Spock's sudden willingness to willfully close with the shuttle but nodded. He pointed out two additional positions

for security covering the extremes of the shuttle and moved forward with Spock and Lt. Murphy. Murphy's tricorder continued to hum, but the buzzing in his ears cleared into speech as they approached the shuttle entrance.

The creature in the shuttle entrance crouched well back in the shadows and had its arms covering its head. "Can you understand me clearly now, Captain Kirk. Yes, I see you can from your thoughts. Please come closer. I will not harm you."

Kirk moved closer but marshaled his thoughts to innocuous ones since diplomacy seemed to be the next thing that would be needed. The creature dropped its arms and quickly scurried into the shuttle's interior. "Please enter, Captain, with Mr. Spock and the lieutenant and her tricorder and the physician who is now approaching.

Kirk turned and saw McCoy hurrying up with his medical kit. "I had this sudden urge to bring this up here, Jim."

"Please advise the rest of your crew that I will be opacifying the entrance after you have all entered." McCoy hesitated but followed Kirk and the others in at the Captain's insistence after he had directed the others. Kirk also took a moment to inform Scotty of their plans. As he entered and moved forward, the doorway promptly blanked out and the shuttle lights came on very dimly.

They all noticed the opening on the far side of the shuttle forward where the entity sat waiting. Kirk sat in one of the crew chairs and the others followed suit. Kirk turned to Murphy. "No weapons recognized, Captain. The creature most closely resembles the Earth mole or the burrowing menangers of Ceti Tarsus Four. No evidence of any manufactured item in its possession."

Kirk nodded shortly and turned to Spock. "I believe the next communication will be in the form of an explanation, Captain."

Kirk nodded again and turned to face the being. "How do we address you?"

"My calling name is Ancee. And you may continue to verbalize your thoughts, although it is not necessary for our conversation." Kirk gestured briefly at the others. The being took them in with a glance of its large eyes. "Yes. You are correct, Captain. Your thoughts must be verbalized for them to hear. Most inconvenient. But I can see that you

are anxious for the explanation.

"I am the administrative head of our people. We are the Niselon and are the dominant species on this planet by virtue of our mental development. We are born, live our brief lives and die entirely beneath the surface. My brief excursion was only for the purpose of drawing you close enough for coherent communication. Even this light, which you consider to be too dim to be of much use is almost painful to me."

Ancee made a brief waving motion. "No, Captain. This light will have to remain as I get the clear image of disorientation for your species in the dark and a need for visual direction for your communication."

"Almost," Ancee paused briefly, "three of your months ago, this shuttle landed here. We were hesitant about exploring it but quickly overcame our reluctance when we discovered a first-class mind in some distress within. We utilized the Gonchon, the apelike creature you first saw, to extend our warren to the side of the shuttle and to make the initial break through. Thus, we were able to stay in the darkness we require and still come to the other being's aid."

"We learned much from this being whose name you call S'pelk. He was gravely injured and has never regained consciousness. We overcame our natural reluctance to intrude in this creature's mind when we discovered that we had not the knowledge to assist it. His thoughts have never been entirely lucid although there was a period when he managed to convey a strong desire to be with another of his kind."

"In trying to assist him we learned much of the theory of your science. We learned how to detect your probes and how to alter their return signal to hide our existence. We felt this necessary when we discovered a branch of your species was highly inimical to all life. The Klingons, I believe you call them."

Kirk and the others stirred briefly at this and the thought of a laugh came through clearly. "I regret my error! We had only the physical description to go by. However, we did learn enough about your differences to be able to tell your sensor probe from theirs. Even then we would not have wanted you to interfere with our lives and planet, was not the condition of our guest rapidly deteriorating."

"Our original plans were to entice Mr. Spock alone to enter the

craft, but his decision to leave the planet forced us to act quickly. His mental aura most closely resembles our guest's. And now that my eyes have recovered somewhat from that excessive light, we can enter the warren. You will only be able to enter to a depth of fifty of your feet. This part of the warren was changed to accommodate the structure of the Gonchon since we required its services to bring in supplies for our guest from the surface." With no further comment, it turned and disappeared into the opening in the shuttle side and into the hillside.

Kirk led the way, stooping to ease through the less than trim opening into the warren and then pausing a few feet inside the opening to allow the others to join him. The area was bathed in the weak glow of strategically placed lamps, the lighting level possibly less than it had been in the shuttle. They stood in a twenty foot half circle of tunneled earth with two openings across from them. Ancee stood at one of these and gestured impatiently. "In here, Mr. Spock."

Spock looked to Kirk, who nodded, and then went across the hard-packed floor to the portal. He was forced to bend forward slightly as the average height of the ceiling was slightly less than six feet. He paused briefly in the doorway and then quickly entered and disappeared from view. The others were slowly following when his voice reached them. "Doctor!"

McCoy was first through the opening with Kirk and Murphy close on his heels. He dropped his medical kit and quickly extracted his medical sensor and played it over the body of the Vulcan male resting on cushions salvaged from the shuttle. Spock had already placed his fingers at the meld points of the wan face that lay in silent repose.

McCoy flicked off the instrument, dropped it in the bag and withdrew his hypo. He made a few adjustments to it and pressed it to the reclining Vulcan's arm. A quick check with the sensor and he repeated the action and then turned to Kirk. "Jim, I've got to get him back aboard the ship. He's suffering from dehydration, malnutrition and some kind of mental disorientation. I've given him a few of the nutrients his body needs, but we'll have to get him hooked up to the support units in sickbay soon."

Spock slowly straightened, released his fragile touch with

S’pelk and turned to Kirk. "I have helped him reorder his thinking and channel his consciousness into the healing trance. With Doctor M'Benga's excellent care he will recover quickly."

Kirk nodded and whipped out his communicator. "Kirk to ENTERPRISE."

"Scott here, Captain."

"Doctor McCoy and one Vulcan will be beaming up. Have Doctor M'Benga and a medical team meet them in the transporter room."

"Aye, Captain. Standing by."

Kirk started to motion Murphy back from the makeshift bed when Scotty's voice came over the open circuit of the communicator. "Captain!"

"Yes, Scotty."

"Captain, since you left the shuttle I've been unable to lock onto your signals." Kirk looked over at Ancee and then following Ancee's gaze saw another small creature in a corner of the room.

"Lintor!!" The creature stirred and then turned its large eyes to Ancee. "Discontinue the distortion effort!" The small entity seemed to snap out of a trance and then scurried away.

"Captain! I now have all of your signals and an indication of a large concentration of intelligent life."

Kirk caught Spock's raised eyebrows where he stood at the head of the bed by the wall and noted Murphy's presence by his side. "Energize."

As McCoy and his patient shimmered out in the transporter effect, Kirk turned to Ancee. "I am impressed with your grasp of our scientific principles."

Ancee bowed slightly and Kirk heard, "And greatly dismayed at our ability to glean this information and more from S’pelk and your own minds." Kirk started to protest and realized the futility of denying his true thoughts to a telepath and smiled. "Yes, Captain Kirk. That is true. But we are a simple people. If we had not needed the knowledge of your science to aid and protect your brother, I would never have permitted my people to learn of it. We made the decision many days ago to forsake this knowledge when our guest was gone and we had

no further need for it."

Kirk started to speak again when Spock moved from his position by the wall at the head of the bed. Stooped over as he was, it was hard for him to maintain an intimate knowledge of the parameters of his equipment and the edge of his tricorder knocked a small earthen figure from a wall niche. As it shattered on the hard packed earth floor, each person was suddenly struck by the feeling of shock and tension in the air. Murphy moved around Spock and was first to attempt to pick up the pieces of the small work of art. "STOP!" And she halted her attempts at the strong imperative delivered from Ancee. Ancee turned back to Kirk. "It would be well if you were to return to your ship now, Captain."

"But I had hoped to speak to you at some length and determine a course of action for the continued contact between our peoples."

"That will be quite impossible now, Captain."

Kirk glanced at Spock and was about to continue when Lt. Murphy approached him. "I strongly recommend we leave now, Captain."

Kirk could feel the sincerity of her conviction through her expression and glanced at Spock who nodded once briefly. Kirk slowly nodded and reached for his communicator. As he contacted Mr. Scott and arranged to have them beamed up, he was watching Lt. Murphy as she approached Ancee and knelt before him. He held his communicator open and waiting to give Scotty the command to energize when he experienced a low pitched mental humming from Ancee.

"Captain Kirk. I request that Lt. Murphy be allowed to stay here with us for a few of your hours. She has pointed out to me the advantages to both of our peoples from continued contact and has shared some of her thoughts with me regarding her intentions and background. I reluctantly concur with her reasoning and understand from her thought that she has a good chance of resolving this problem."

Kirk hesitated and would have stated his negative response when Spock touched his arm. He turned and stared at the somber Vulcan visage and raised one questioning eyebrow. "I have created this

faux pas, Captain, but am unable to completely comprehend the ramifications of what I have done. I do understand that an intimate knowledge of first contact science is called for and that the Lieutenant has that knowledge. I strongly recommend that you allow Lt. Murphy to stay."

Kirk knew when he was out of his depth. And when he needed to depend on the advice of his officers. "Very well. Scotty, two to beam up from these coordinates. Energize." He eased the communicator closed and replaced it on his belt as the first familiar tingle stirred his skin.

Kirk finished drying his hair and pressed the intercom button. "Bridge, aye."

"Kirk here. Where is Mr. Spock?"

"In his cabin, sir. Shall I contact him and have him call you?"

"No. I'll reach him myself."

"Aye, sir. Bridge out."

Kirk stood in silence for a moment dabbing absently at his face with the damp towel and staring into space. Finally, he threw the towel into the recycler and grabbed a fresh uniform as a frown creased his brow. He dressed quickly and hurried down the passageway to Spock's quarters around the hull from his.

He vacillated outside Spock's door but decided to disturb the Vulcan when the door opened by itself. Kirk stepped hesitantly into the dim red light and higher temperature. The door slid shut behind him and he perceived Spock kneeling in his meditation garments. Spock waved the lights to a higher level and rose gracefully.

"I can come back later, Spock."

"Not necessary, Captain." Spock moved to his wall closet and removed a uniform and lay it on the bed. As he spoke he divested himself of his meditation garments and donned his uniform. "I have spent the last hour in meditation and the three preceding hours in research. I have come to the same conclusion that we had reached. The problem lies in the breaking of the small figure. I can further understand the importance of the destruction of a highly prized piece of art by outsiders. What I am unable to determine is the reason for the great value placed on that figure."

"And the answer . . .?"

"The answer will be established by the efforts of Lt. Murphy." Spock hung the garments back in his closet and turned to Kirk. "I estimate she will be contacting you within the next 4.6 minutes with a request."

Kirk looked sharply at Spock and then moved over to the desk. "I'd better stand here so I can reach the com..." He stopped as the comm light flashed and the grill quested, "Bridge to Captain Kirk."

He looked up in shock and then slowly shook his head and smiled. He warily reached out and pressed the acknowledgment button. "Kirk here."

"Captain, Lt. Murphy has requested that you and your senior officers beam down to the shuttle in one hour."

"Put the lieutenant on, Mitchell."

There was a moment's silence and then the tired voice of Lt. Murphy. "Captain?"

“Yes, lieutenant. I was looking forward to hearing the reason behind your request for myself and my senior officer's presence."

There was a protracted silence on the comm circuit. "I am trying to phrase this as Ancee has. He believes that when two such diverse peoples make and sign accords which bind their futures and secure their cooperation for future generations, that senior representatives of both groups should meet and exchange ideas and assurances of mutual interest."

There was another brief pause during which Kirk's eyebrows rose and he looked incredulously at Spock. Murphy continued, "I guess I should have mentioned first that Ancee and his people are applying for membership in the Federation."

Kirk closed his mouth. "That fact might have made the request more understandable," he commented dryly. "Very well, lieutenant. One hour."

"Thank you, Captain. Murphy out."

Kirk thumbed the switch once more. He could faintly hear the all circuits hookup complete in the hallway speakers. "This is the Captain. Department heads will muster in the transporter room in forty-five minutes in full dress uniforms. Kirk out."

Kirk pressed the circuit off and rounded on Spock. "Alright, Mister."

Spock looked back at him blandly, his hands behind his back.

"Well? How did you know she would be calling me? Magic? Or are you still linked with Ancee even at this distance?"

"That would be quite impossible, Captain."

When nothing further was forthcoming, Kirk looked at Spock with lowered eyes. "Spock?"

Kirk noted the almost invisible indications of humor in Spock's face. "The lieutenant originally called while you were in the shower. She said she would call back in ten minutes. Since 5.4 minutes had passed since her call, I merely relayed to you that she would be contacting you within the 4.6 minute time frame left."

Kirk laughed aloud. "Spock, you old fraud."

Spock looked patently offended. "I did not lie, Captain."

"No. Merely selectively told the truth and left your captain mentally wandering in left field. Let's get ready, Spock." Kirk turned and exited the room leaving behind a thoughtful Spock.

As usual, McCoy was the last to enter the transporter room, tugging at his collar. "Someone should do a Sigmund on the masochists that design these dress uniforms."

Kirk turned from Scotty. "Now, Bones, you know you look good in your dress uniform."

McCoy released his collar and glared at Kirk. "You won't get out of that physical you've been trying to duck that easy, Jim."

Kirk laughed and moved to the transporter platform. "I just make a simple comment. ."

McCoy snorted and looked at Spock. "What's the matter with you, Spock? Looks like you've got a question."

"I was merely contemplating why wandering in a "left" field would enhance the Captain's thinking."

McCoy turned questioningly to Kirk. Kirk glanced briefly at Spock and then at McCoy. "Tell you later." McCoy raised an eyebrow but held his tongue. Kirk sighed. "Energize."

Kirk gathered his small group well away from the shuttle. "I know that all of you have had experience with first contact situations.

This will be similar to your previous experiences with one exception. The Niselon are telepathic. You can converse with them completely on a nonverbal level. However, I will NOT be able to hear and understand you if you do, so please verbalize all your responses. And, as usual, be honest. By all means be diplomatic. But I will be interested in seeing how the diplomats handle meetings with people who can read your thoughts before you have a chance to verbalize them abstrusely. Questions?"

Kirk nodded at the silence, already aware of the diversity of knowledge, interests and experience in this elite crew. He led the way into the shuttle.

He stopped for a moment in the doorway; surprised to see the seats lining both walls had been removed and replaced with two long benches. But he quickly recovered and went toward the front of the shuttle and sat on the end of the right-hand bench.

The rest of the group distributed themselves and sat. In the open space between the command section and the seats, they observed what appeared to be a pile of mud. Around this in a half circle were laid out grasses and reeds.

Kirk noted Ancee as he entered and rose from his seat. "Ancee, I have the pleasure of introducing my senior officers. You have already met Mr. Spock, my science officer, and Doctor McCoy, my medical officer." Both men nodded to Ancee who returned their nods with a nod of his own. "Mr. Scott, my chief engineer." Scotty stood and the others heard Ancee "speak" for the first time.

"Mr. Scott. We have only recently come to appreciate the wonders of your engineering technology. We will have much to talk about afterwards."

"Aye, er, sir." And Scott sat down quickly.

"Ms. Uhura, my communications officer." Uhura nodded.

"Ah, yes. The smooth voiced female. How do you like our communications methods?"

"In your society I would be forced to find other work." Ancee laughed and nodded.

"Mr. Sulu, our helmsman." Sulu nodded.

"The one who guides your fantastic vessel on its journeys. I

can see you have many stories for the telling."

Sulu smiled and nodded again.

"And Mr. Chekov, my navigator." Chekov grinned and cleared his throat.

"Ah yes. From the nation of great inventors. We must talk later. "Chekov flushed deeply but remained silent. His grin faded. His shipmates all smiled however.

And now three other small furred creatures entered from the warren and sat on the piles of grasses. "All of these three share the responsibilities of administration with me. Lynso, Winta and Ancaa." Each briefly rose on all four paws as their name was called.

"Our society is very simple. We four control the organization of our group. The job is ours for life and is in addition to whatever day to day tasks consume our energies. The questions we cannot decide on are subject to group discussion and resolved."

Ancee turned to Kirk. "This is one reason I had hesitated to admit you at all. Our society is now self-sufficient. We have some doubts but high hopes for our association."

All four scooted back slightly as the transporter whine was heard and Lt. Murphy appeared within their circle carrying a large board with an antigrav unit. She seated herself and lowered the board to the shuttle deck, between her and the pile of mud.

"I see within the thought of all of you that in addition to the customs of your own lands and peoples, there are idiosyncrasies within each group of Federation members. We are no different. When the anlia, the small clay figure, was broken, it struck us deeply, even though we knew from Mr. Spock's thoughts that it was unintentional. When S'pelk came to us, injured and beyond our limited care, we followed one of our customs and made him an anlia.

"The anlia may take many shapes and sizes. However, it is one of the few things that my people do as a group. All participate. The finished product is a reflection of our feeling as a people toward the recipient and is formed by the hands and from the hearts of all. In addition, the moisture for making the clay malleable must be brought from a great distance. Since we have no utensils, it must be carried a mouthful at a time to the work area. We feel that a certain amount of

the essence of the individual carrying the water must be mixed in with the water, therefore, and provides the finished product with a direct personality.

"Such artifacts are rarely made and highly cherished therefore as it is a work of all our people and holds some of our essence within it. Such an object cannot be repaired. Some infinitesimal piece may be lost and the creation is lessened thereby." Here he paused and gestured to Murphy. "Your lieutenant has utilized your technology to gather all the pieces of our creation and reassemble them properly. Of this we are assured not only by her words but by her thoughts as well."

Murphy picked up the explanation of the proceedings. "The completely reconstructed anlia," she gestured to Ancee who scooted forward and held up the object to Kirk, "is hereby presented to Captain James T. Kirk as a gift from the peoples of the Niselon to the Federation."

Kirk accepted the object gravely. "It is with great honor that I accept this gift from the Niselon as a token of their esteem for our peoples. We will cherish it and keep it in a place of honor on the Federation home world." He sat and took a handkerchief from a pocket and wrapped the object tenderly and placed it on a shelf behind his seat. He sat and looked at Lt. Murphy.

"It is only fitting that the Federation proffer its own gift to the Niselon. One in keeping with their traditions and values and embodying the high range of ideals and goals which makes the Federation the strong force for peace which it typifies in our society."

She gestured at the design formed on the board before her, which Kirk could now see bore a strong, if slightly abstract, resemblance to the Federation logo. "Using this symbol which the Federation has chosen to represent it to and for all its peoples, I have created this anlia. The object to my right is a representation of the world of the Niselon." She reached behind her and pulled a large bowl from a box in the corner. "To complete this anlia I will fashion a representation of our starship from this soil of the Federation home planet and liquids containing the essences of some of its peoples."

She handed the bowl to Kirk, who accepted it doubtfully but understood immediately when she drew a landing party water ration

from the box, opened it and handed it to him. He gravely took a sip from the opened container and carefully let it drop from his mouth to the bowl. Spock carefully duplicated the ceremony with his usual grace. Each senior officer added some water until the bowl had made its rounds and was handed back to Murphy. She added her own sip and then used the water in the bowl to mix with the clay before her.

The contour of the ENTERPRISE quickly took shape beneath her hands. She used a variety of small tools for the finer work. Within twenty minutes, a recognizable replica of the starship rested by the left side of the Federation logo.

She glanced at the Captain and flipped the switch on the antigrav. Kirk rose and lifted the completed work and turned to Ancee. "As Captain of the Starship ENTERPRISE and de facto representative of the Federation, it is with great honor that I present this token of our esteem to the Niselon. It is a symbol of the highest and noblest traditions of our combined peoples and is formed from the heart of our respect and the combined essences of some of its finest citizens. May it signify, as with your gift, the symbolic joining of our peoples for the betterment of both."

Ancee scooted forward and placed a paw upon the side of the board and allowed Kirk to lower it back to its place on the floor. "We accept this token of your esteem, Captain Kirk, and shall place it within the warren in a location of honor." Kirk switched off the antigrav and sat.

"And now, in an apparently shared tradition of both of our peoples, we shall raise the ritual drink signifying the closing of the ceremony. Mr. Scott? I believe you have brought some," he paused as if searching for the word, "potables with you?"

At Kirk's raised eyebrow, Scott flushed. "Well, Captain. Ye can nae have a toast without something to drink, can ye?" Kirk looked at McCoy who nodded.

"By all means, Scotty." Scotty beamed and produced glasses and began pouring. Kirk turned to McCoy. "Bones?"

McCoy spoke across Spock in a very quiet voice. "Murphy brought me tricorder readings when she came back to change clothes. They'll enjoy the flavor, but get little other effect. Their bodies only

assimilate a small percentage of the ethanol. The rest is discarded. Their bodies work a lot like this Vulcan's in that regard."

"How eminently logical," Spock murmured.

McCoy took his tray from the wall dispenser just as the Captain entered the mess. He moved to an empty table and had just begun devouring his food when Kirk joined him. McCoy looked over at Kirk's buttered toast and coffee. "Eating a little light, are we Captain?"

Kirk eyed McCoy blearily, took a swallow of coffee and shuddered. He looked carefully into the depths of the cup before placing it back on his tray and pushing the whole tray back. "I think Scotty has a coolant leak in the coffee synthesizer"

McCoy shook his head. "Tsk, tsk, Captain." He laughed once at Kirk's grimace and then had pity on him. He pulled a small container from his pocket and extracted a single pill. Laying it on Kirk's tray he pushed his own orange juice across the table.

Kirk squinted at the pill and then up at McCoy. McCoy opened his eyes very wide and beat on his chest with one hand. Kirk raised one eyebrow briefly and scrutinized the pill closely. "I had always suspected, Doctor, that the bestial side of your nature was close to the fore," Spock said as he put his tray down next to Kirk's. "But I had hoped you would be able to keep your emotions in check more easily."

Kirk laughed, grimaced and held his head and quickly picked up the pill and the orange juice. He threw the pill in his mouth and washed it down by draining the glass of juice. He scowled and put the glass down. "Even the juice tastes terrible. Spock, let's have a department head meeting at 13 in conference room #1."

"I will inform the attendees, Captain."

Kirk nodded and took his tray to the disposal. After he had left the mess, Spock contemplated his glass of unreconstituted yeast drink. "I wasn't aware that you had taken to prescribing plant food, Doctor."

McCoy nodded and merely looked annoyed. "So, you recognized the pill, huh."

"Is there some basic need of the Captain's that the pill provides for?"

"Lots. The pill contains a few vitamins and four essential minerals. If I tried to palm off a vitamin tablet on Jim, he'd have

recognized it in a minute."

"So by acting towards his expectation that you would do something to ease the after effects of the excessive amount of ethanol he consumed last night, he accepted your offering."

"Bingo!"

"I have also noted a peculiar human trait of symptomatic relief based on faith."

"That's the other side of the coin, Spock. The only thing that'll cure a hangover is time. But Jim will start feeling better before the hour's out. By the time we have that meeting, he'll be good as new."

"Then I shall have Lt. Gardner order an extra supply..."

"Nix." Spock looked at McCoy. "I have about twenty left. But they have to be used sparingly to maintain the mystique." Spock merely nodded as McCoy gathered up his breakfast residue and moved to the recycler.

Spock began making the final mental revision on Lt. Murphy's commendation. The one that would gain her the award for advanced studies at Shenandoah College where she would meet the Klingon exchange student, K'Robert.

Author's Note:

Anne C was one of my son, Robert's, acquaintances when he attended Shenandoah University in the early 1990's. They became good friends and on one of her visits to our home, I saw the small character she carried around with her and asked her about it. She was a reader and the topic of my Trek stories came up. I could easily picture her in one. Her description, her mannerisms and the "security blanket" described in the story are all accurate facts about her and her tiny friend. Her last name was changed in the story.

My son declined and asked not to be included in the story even though she wanted him in. Hard to please them both when they wanted just the opposite. So I fudged a little. He wasn't a main character in the story. In fact, you might say he got the last word.