

To Fix What Is Broken

By Karen Millard ©2024

Pain!

At first that was all he was conscious of, then gradually he felt the cold. Not in his hands, feet or antennae – they were all numb. But the core of his body was icy. And he was outside, unprotected. If he didn't move soon, he would die.

But could he move? The first attempt didn't go well, and he considered giving up. Surely he was near death anyway. But his memory was still foggy: what if someone else needed his help? There had been others around, he knew, and he couldn't just quit on his team.

Agonizingly, he pulled himself up. He had numerous, large injuries, and needed medical help himself, but his first concern was to anyone in worse shape. Listening carefully, he also reached out with his empathic power but could sense no one alive.

That was when it all came back to him. The Gorn! He hadn't been able to sense them, and they had infested him, using his body to host their eggs. He had gone out into the cold alone to save the lives of the rest of the crew from being killed when they hatched.

And the babies *had* hatched, the numerous wounds on his body told him that. But the one thing that they knew the Gorn could not stand was the cold. The fact that he was still alive, when he was no doubt intended to be their first meal, was proof enough that they had died almost instantly out here.

Hemmer thought for a minute. By now the Away Team from the *Enterprise* had undoubtedly gone back to the ship, believing him to be dead. But the wreck of the *Peregrine*, which they had been on when the Gorn attacked, would still be there, and should have medical supplies, food, and water.

First problem: getting there. Hemmer was an Aenar, from the bitter Northern Wastes of Andoria, and had debated with his human co-workers numerous times over whose senses were best. The Aenar did not have vision but did have telepathy. Hemmer truly believed that this was better. However, when you were the only living being on the planet, and

not familiar with the terrain, he had to admit to himself that it probably would be handy to see where you were going.

Bending down carefully, aware that his balance was still shaky, he felt around until he found ... ah! there ... a long stick that he could use to feel the ground in front of him. Now, presuming he had not gotten totally turned around while he was unconscious and hatching Gorn spawn (a fairly large assumption, it was true) reaching the crashed ship should be relatively simple.

Simple it might be, easy it was not. Frozen, exhausted, and still losing blood, Hemmer was barely able to crawl the last few metres to the ship, but after what felt like hours he was inside. He wanted to collapse, but that would mean certain death, and he hadn't gone through all this just to die now. He found a med kit, and put his emergency medical training to work treating his injuries. A doctor would have been better, but, as his human friend Uhura said, beggars can't be choosers.

Next came fluids and warmth. The ship was still warm enough to have liquid water, and he wrapped himself in several blankets from antennae to toes. *Now* he could collapse, and did so gratefully.

An unknown number of hours later Hemmer woke up, still in pain, but feeling much more alert. His mind was out of "survival mode", and he could consider longer-term issues – like getting power on in the ship and getting off this damned planet. First, though, came something to eat. He had no idea how long it had been since his last meal but was suddenly aware that he was starving. A bit of digging through cupboards dug up enough emergency food and water rations to last for weeks. Not exactly gourmet, but they would provide nutrition and hydration. If someone responded to the emergency beacon in the next couple of months, he just might be okay.

He stopped dead and took a deep breath. Clearly his mind wasn't quite back to normal yet. He hadn't set off the emergency beacon! No one was going to find him if they didn't know to look. He quickly flipped it on, then had a meal and redressed his wounds.

Over the next couple of weeks he got many of the ship's systems running and began to heal from the terrible damage the Gorn had done to his body. He knew that the wreck was too badly damaged to fly, but he

might as well be as comfortable as possible while he waited for rescue, and working on it gave him something to do. It went slowly, but that was fine. He was in no rush and still needed a lot of rest.

Sixteen days after Hemmer stepped out into the cold to die, he got a response to his beacon. He was receiving an audio-only hail. “Hello, we picked up your beacon. Are you in need of our assistance?”

“Yes. I am a Starfleet officer, injured and stranded on a wrecked ship.”

“How many are you?”

“Just one. I am the only one alive.”

“Hold on please.”

The comm link went off, and Hemmer would have been shocked if he could have heard the discussion that followed on the ship he was expecting to rescue him.

“Only one. We could just get rid of him. No one would ever know.”

“You mean kill him. We can’t do that. He is innocent and asking us for help.”

“But the plan *must* remain a complete secret, or it will fail.”

“What use is it, if it turns us into them anyway?”

After some disagreement, it was decided to send a team of two, Garta and Sojok, down to meet with the injured officer and decide what was best.

When the small landing craft touched down and those aboard got within telepathy range of Hemmer, all three sent out a simultaneous, shocked, message: *Aenar!*

Garta and Sojok quickly shut down and exited their ship and almost ran to their injured fellow Aenar. They were filled with questions. Their people rarely left home – and hadn’t he said he was with Starfleet?

Hemmer was equally confused. A ship of Aenar? Such a thing was unheard of.

He answered his rescuers’ questions, explaining that though he was a pacifist as all his people were, he felt able to take a job working as an engineer with Starfleet, and supporting his comrades. He would not fight but did not fear putting his own life at risk if needed to save others. But what, he asked, were they doing there?

Sojok thought for a moment, then told him “It would be simpler if you just look in my mind, brother.”

This was his—and their—story:

Since the Blueskins on our planet have joined with the humans and others in a Federation, there has been growing war and disquiet on Andoria. Each decade our population shrinks, and we fear total extinction within a few generations. So a large group of us – not all, but about half of the Aenar – decided to leave home, and to come to an unpopulated planet that no one else cared about to build a new, safer, home here where hopefully we could live in peace for millennia.

We were not expecting to find a ship crashed here, and when we heard a Starfleet distress beacon, we almost panicked. Having Starfleet show up would completely destroy all of our plans. I am ashamed to say that when we learned there was only one officer alive, one injured being standing between us and our plans, we considered killing you. But that would have destroyed us more surely than being noticed by Starfleet. So now, we do not know what to do. It seems that no matter what happens, everything we have given up our homes for is lost.

Hemmer felt Sojok’s despair. However, he did not share it. In fact, his own heart felt a bit lighter, because he was beginning to glimpse a solution for the Aenar on the ship, as well as for himself. In the meantime, though, there were more urgent issues to be dealt with.

“I could use a visit with your doctor, as well as some decent food. Could you take me back to your ship while you decide what to do? And I may have a suggestion for you, as well, once I am feeling more myself.”

Sojok and Garta helped him to their landing craft, and they headed back to the main ship.

The construction was basic for a ship built for interstellar travel, intended only for this one-way journey, but it was large, and stocked with everything—and everyone—needed to set up a viable colony. This included a full, well-staffed, sickbay, where they were able to complete the repair of his injuries quickly. Hemmer sighed in relief. He had been hurting for so long! Good food and a deep sleep followed, then, washed and dressed in clean clothes, he was asked to meet with several crew members.

The Aenar were an extremely democratic race, who had no permanent leaders. When a boss of some sort was required, he or she was elected for the specific time required. The captain who had been chosen for this trip was Tarkol. She, along with Garta and Sojok, were waiting at a conference table when Hemmer entered. Garta made introductions, and then Tarkol came directly to the point:

“I understand that you may have a solution to our difficult problem. I must say that I have no idea what it could be, but I would be most happy to hear your suggestion.”

Hemmer cleared his throat. “Sojok was kind enough to share his thoughts with me, and it seems that your group had a good plan. Your only real issue is, well, me. If you return me to Starfleet, they will know where you are, and the whole purpose of your journey is defeated. If you don’t return me, and I turn the rescue beacon back on, someone will eventually hear it, with the same result. So, my solution is a simple one: we do neither. I stay here with you, as part of your new colony.”

There was a gasp around the table, but he continued. “Yes, I was a member of Starfleet, but officially that is no longer the case, as I will have been listed as killed in action. I have worked with them for many years and feel that I have completed my job with them. Also, it has often been very lonely being the only one of my race, and with my abilities. Though I did make a friend recently,” he added quietly.

“Anyway, I would fit in with this colony, and as a trained engineer I have much that I could offer. On top of just not exposing you, I can help to fix what is broken with my own people. So, what do you think?”

For the next few minutes, the four of them shared their thoughts, both verbally and more directly, in a conversation that would have been unintelligible to a non-Aenar. Hemmer smiled; it had been such a long time since he had been able to chatter like this. It was something no human could ever understand.

In the end, the crew was convinced that this was indeed what Hemmer wished, and that it would be the best solution not only for them, but for him as well. They happily agreed.

He did have one demand, however. There was one individual he must inform about his survival. “I can promise you that it will not go any farther than that.” They were not as comfortable about this but finally agreed.

Several parsecs away, on the Federation Starship *Enterprise*, Ensign Nyota Uhura received a message coded “Personal,” which she took in her quarters. No one ever learned the contents of the message, but several of her coworkers noticed that Uhura seemed to be in an especially good mood for the next few days.

One hundred and fifty years later the Aenar would sadly be listed as “extinct,” when the last one died on Andoria. No one had ever discovered that there was a large, happy colony of them still living on a planet that had been listed by the Federation as “deserted.”