

Table of Contents	1
Cross Words -- editorial by Sharon M. Palmer	2
Cross Fire -- editorial by L. C. Wells	3
Crossed Fingers -- editorial by 'Nea Dodson	4
Friends in Low Places by L. C. Wells and 'Nea Dodson (The Equalizer/Beauty and the Beast)	6
Time Trek by Mrs. Hoffman's 5th Grade Class of 1968 (Time Tunnel/Star Trek)	33
A Blake by Any Other Fame by Eric Blackburn (Blake's 7/Beauty and the Beast)	43
Jupiter 2, Enterprise 0 by Cheap Treks (Lost in Space/Star Trek: The Next Generation)	49
Thy Fearful Symmetry by Eric Blackburn (Kolchak: The Night Stalker/Beauty and the Beast)	74
F=Ma by Patrick Sponaule (Star Wars/????)	91
Choices by Catherine Edwards (Star Trek: The Next Generation/Beauty and the Beast)	94
Differing Wavelengths by Patrick Sponaule (Star Wars/????)	112
Blake and the Beast by 'Nea Dodson (Beauty and the Beast/Blake's 7)	116
Reader's Guide to the Universe(s)	117
ART: Linda Baer	104, 107
'Nea Dodson	111
Sharon M. Palmer	5, 6, 44, 47, 48, 87, 90
L. C. Wells	20

CrossSignals is a nonprofit, amateur production which has no desire to infringe upon the copyrighted works upon which these fannish works are based. All rights are reserved to the contributors represented herein.

CrossSignals 1 costs \$ 6.00 in person, \$ 9.00 1st class. Please make checks payable to Sharon M. Palmer.

CrossSignals
c/o Sharon M. Palmer
3741 Evans Trail Way
Beltsville, MD 20705

CrossSignals 1

W
C R O S S
R
D
S

W
O
C R O S S
D
S

W
O
R
D
C R O S S

W
O
R
D
C R O S S

by Sharon M. Palmer (a.k.a. Smap) Chief Editor/Asst. Lay-out

Welcome to *CrosSignals* 1! I hope you enjoy our little endeavor. Why all cross-universe? Because we wanted to be different. (We have never heard of any other all cross-universe zines, so we think we're fairly unique.) And, besides, we didn't want to be pinned down to only one or two shows.

I'm very proud of this zine and very glad to introduce some new names to zinedom. These new folks are Linda Baer, Eric Blackburn, Cheap Treks (Paul Balzé, Tom Chafin, David Keefer, Lance Woods), and Patrick Sponaule. Look ma, men! Talented men! (& Linda's talented, too!)

Friends have been telling me for years that sooner or later I'd be putting out a zine. They said insanity was contagious. I guess they were right.

How'd I (non-writer, sometime artist) end up as Chief Editor? Well, I'm a compulsive editor. (And I was the only one of us with enough money to front for the zine.)

Also, I was the only one of the three of us who was familiar with all the shows for which we received stories. I am not a rabid fan of anything. However, I am a mild-mannered fan of *Star Trek*, *Blake's 7*, *Star Wars*, *The Equalizer*, *Max Headroom*, *The Wild Wild West*, *Mission: Impossible*, *Remington Steele*, *The Prisoner*, etc., etc., etc. (What can I say? I like variety.) I also see approximately one new movie per week (usually science fiction) and I follow the movie careers of Harrison Ford, Frank Langella, and David Warner.

For those who are interested, 'Nea is a rabid *Beauty and the Beast* fan. She is also a fan of *Remington Steele*, *Murder She Wrote*, and *MacGyver*. Her favorite movies are Disney films. Tish is a fan of

The Equalizer, *Miami Vice*, *Airwolf*, and *Max Headroom*. Her favorite movies are "blow them ups" like *Lethal Weapon* and *Commando*. So we have a lot to choose from, even if we limit ourselves to just universes we're familiar with.

By the way, we are crazy enough to do another issue. (How's January 1990 strike you?) Promised stories include: an *Equalizer/Airwolf/Prisoner* story by 'Nea and Tish, a *Kolchak/Mike Hammer* story by Eric Blackburn, a *Star Trek/Wild, Wild West* story by newcomer Jon Shum, and another play by Cheap Treks.

If you are interested in contributing, our deadline is 1 October 1989. Your story, cartoon, play, etc. should be PG-13 and must involve two or more universes. (Please enclose a short synopsis of any obscure universes used.) If you can provide a copy on IBM 5 $\frac{1}{4}$ " disk in ASCII format or Word Perfect (5.0 or less), we'd appreciate it. If you are interested in doing illustrations for any stories, let us know.

If you like *CrosSignals*, let us know. If you hate it, let us know. If you fell asleep reading my editorial, wake up and start reading the rest.

ENJOY!



Now some words from my partners in crime...

CROSS FIRE

I said I'd never do it again. Years ago, (we won't go into how long), I swore off publishing zines for my own sanity and Real Life. It was taking too much effort and energy. Yet here I am again, seduced by the opportunity to get into print and meet new people.... Maybe in a kindlier and gentler world, it will be more fun.

This all started the last day of Philcon (in November 1988) when four of us started working on a story that mixed the *Equalizer* with *Beauty and the Beast*. (You wouldn't believe how many people were skeptical of the concept). This was so much fun that we started other stories. Things grew. Others got involved. No one was patient enough to wait and see if others would print our stories. Suddenly we had a zine on our hands. We even had a deadline date for which to strike for. Sharon managed to get most of the stories and edit them. Stories produced by the concept of cross universes is still growing. People like our ideas and hopefully, you'll enjoy what you read. I take all responsibility for typos in JUPITER 2, ENTERPRISE 0 -- it was a rush job.

An editorial is the place to thank all those people without whom you wouldn't be in this mess. First, I thank Sharon and Nea. It's nice working with other monomaniacs. Maybe we'll get rooms together. I thank my parents because this is printed on their printer and for lending me their IBM to work on. Computers are supposed to make the job easier, but I'm not sure it's true. It helps with revision and transportation of data but you still have to lay pages and the like, and clip art still plays a large part in your life. I think #2 will have a lot more organization on everyone's part. (Including mine. A lot of the time I feel like Marcus Brody.)

Whether we do a #2 depends a lot on you. Many people use an excuse that they don't write to zines -- but folks, the people who DO the zine would really like more feedback than just money and an order for number #2. Some people create zines for meeting other people; some for the feeling of power and accomplishment when it is done; some (a lot) for the egoboo and the knowledge that you've created something that gave enjoyment or made people think. Creating into a vacuum is a bitch. So please write. We appreciate hearing from you.

Enjoy reading...

L.C. Wells

CROSSED FINGERS

This all started with a single story. Tish was working on an Equalizer Meets Beauty and the Beast story because she's a big EQ fan, and both shows take place in the same city. But she got stuck on a plot point and threw it open to suggestions from Sharon and myself, also Equalizer fans. And then I went in and drafted all the B&B parts because I'm the only die-hard fan of that show in this whole bunch. (Tish, as a matter of fact, watches it with the sound off, preferring the cinematography to the plot. That's ok, I get my revenge -- half this zine has Beauty and the Beast in it.)

That brainstorming session worked so well that the three of us held another one for a story of mine -- I wanted to put the Equalizer in the Village from the British show "The Prisoner." (And I did, too -- look for "Project Informer" in CrosSignals 2.)

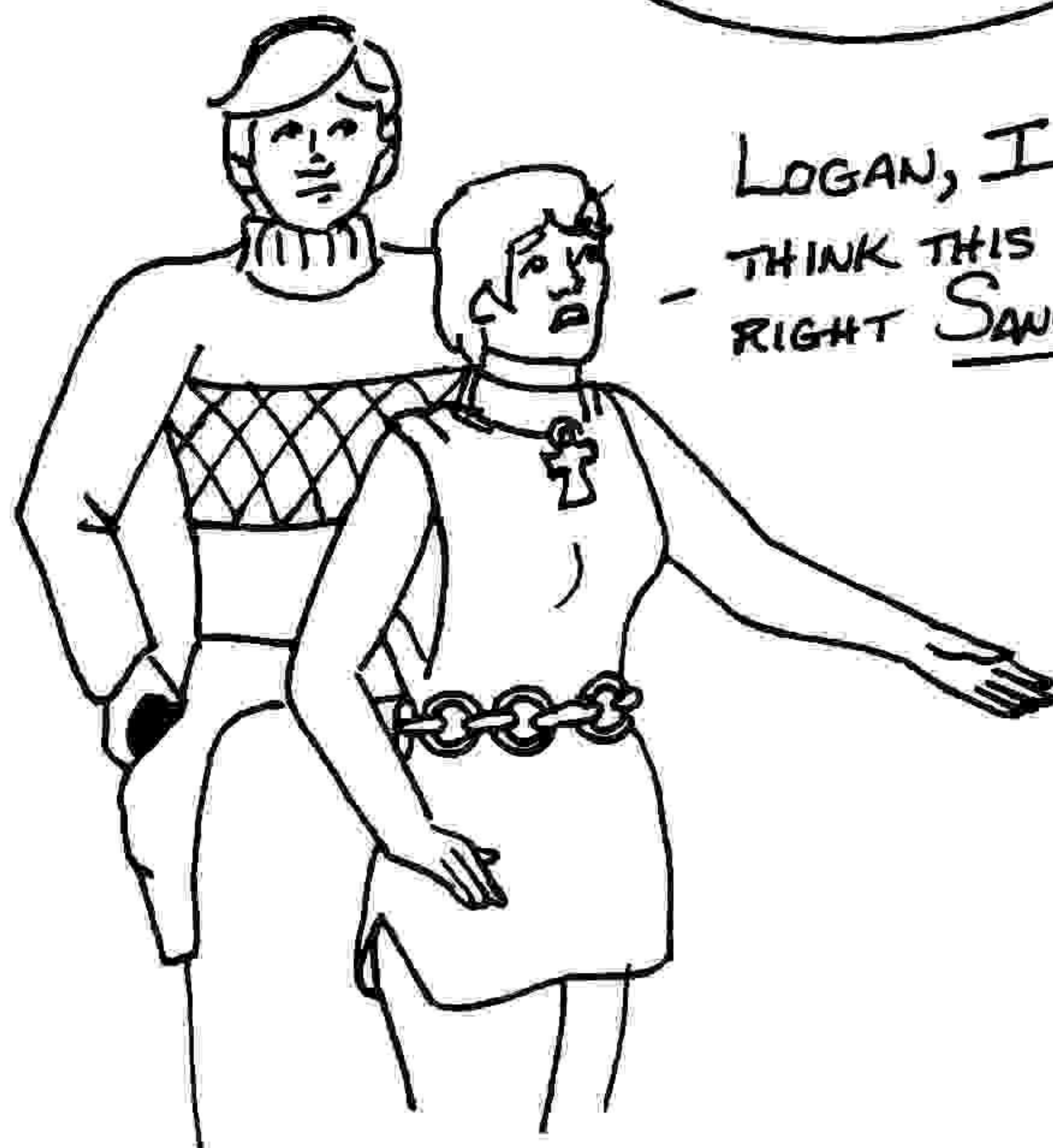
One thing led to another, and CrosSignals was born. It's the warped brainchild of Sharon Palmer, Tish Wells, and me, 'Nea Dodson. The three of us have got to stop hanging out together late at night -- it gets too dangerous.

Sharon has become Chief Editor and Assistant Layout. Tish is Chief Layout and Assistant Editor. I'm Chief Assistant. In other words, I'm crossing my fingers that the others don't realize that my chief involvement in this project -- aside from the brainstorming sessions -- was being present in the kitchen when the idea evolved.

Actually, that's not quite true. I have contributed a certain amount of writing, editing, layout, and backrubbing (NEVER underestimate the importance of a backrub when your co-editors have been hunched over the layout all night.) And I own the computer that most of this was typed on -- even if it did turn out to be incompatible with Tish's in the end. (!!!!)

We have muddled through somehow, through the mistakes we should have known about and the acts of God no one could help prepare us for, and issue #1 is ready. We're crossing our fingers and hoping you like it. And, not having learned our lesson, we're planning a second issue, which we're crossing our fingers and hoping you'll be interested in.

Enjoy!
Nea



LOGAN, I DON'T
- THINK THIS IS THE
RIGHT SANCTUARY!

Amop
8309.29



FRIENDS IN LOW PLACES



Thursday
5:30 AM

The full moon illuminated contorted piles of automobiles and stars glimmered in shattered reflectors and patches of frozen ice. The blond boy, dressed in a crazy-quilt shirt and pants, had been roaming the junkyard since the middle of the night. He drank in the icy November wind, thick with the smell of decaying upholstery and rust, unafraid of the rats and other predators that also found the junkyard fine hunting. He was after the kind of gear only found in certain cars and had located two such rotting hunks mostly buried under other automobiles. In one the dashboard had been totally destroyed. However, Mouse had high hopes for the other.

He was pulling free a gear when he heard cars purring up nearby. Instantly he wiggled backward outside the wreck and crouched in the shadows. After a moment of silence, Mouse moved. Then two sets of car doors slammed shut and the sound of several pairs of feet stopped him. The men's voices cursed as they dragged something towards his heap. The noise stopped on the far side of the pile of wrecked cars. The boy squirmed around until he found a crack that gave him a ground-level view.

Mouse peered through. A man was face down in the door, his arms bound behind him. Squatted in front of him was a dark broad-faced man, bundled in a stark white parka. The dark man dragged up the other's head by the bloody hair.

"So tell me where they are, eh?"

The bound man moaned. A heavy boot kicked him in the side. Mouse cringed, old memories reviving.

The dark man gestured and two of the henchmen pulled the body into a kneeling position. "This is your last--"

"Un-un," Mouse heard the prisoner whisper hoarsely. "Without me, you got noth--"

The dark man hit him in the face, drawing blood from his nose and mouth. The others let him crash onto the icy ground. The leader drew a gun. "A kneecap or ankle --"

Mouse couldn't stand it. His instincts told him to get away as fast as possible. He slid back, his precious gear under his arm. His tousled head caught on something, and the pile above him creaked. He froze. Apparently the others hadn't heard it. He squirmed

L.C. Wells

Neo Dodson

backwards.

It was the gear that caused the accident. Its protruding head caught the framework, causing a chain reaction in the pile. Half the pile shifted position loudly.

The dark man shouted orders and his men fanned out. That decided Mouse. He wasn't going to be caught by anyone who beat people. He shoved the heap, causing a small landslide. Men cursed. He pushed again, and the top car went over with a crash. Mouse risked a glance. The car had tipped over a rusty barrel, spilling its filthy oil in a growing puddle. The pile creaked again, and sparks set alight an isolated puddle. The stench of polluted gasoline and fire clogged the air.

The dark man looked frustrated. "Why'd you let go of him?" He snapped at one of his men. "You! Find a crane. Get some water! I'll be back." The others ran to the cars and followed him into the night.

Mouse peered around the corner. No one was in sight. No body. He slunk carefully around the puddle of gasoline and looked carefully at the pile. Nothing. Finally he shrugged and went back for his gear.

Someone sobbed and groaned. Mouse froze. A moan, barely audible. Mouse peered underneath the rusting mangled steel frame that was the bottom of the now-truncated pile.

In an air pocket, his head protected by a seat frame, was the man. One leg was out of sight underneath the frame, while the other was curled protectively against his body.

He stirred, gulping breath, and rolled face up. His body went limp.

Mouse retreated shaking. When he'd shoved the pile, he hadn't been thinking of anything but survival. The wounded man was a responsibility he didn't want. After a moment's indecision, he ran into the darkness towards the Tunnels.

Vincent had been searching for Mouse. Father had been particularly disturbed with one of his recent pilferings, and Vincent had been asked, again, to speak to Mouse about theft. Mouse's best friend, Jamie, divulged reluctantly about the junkyard in Brooklyn, but Vincent hadn't expected to meet him running full tilt for the entrance to the Tunnels there.

He caught Mouse and held him till Mouse regained his balance. "What has happened?"

"Man," Mouse panted informatively. "Man under cars. Come on!"

The leonine man followed him reluctantly. The sky was a fractional shade lighter as morning began dimming the city's night glow. The Expressway in the distance was filling with cars as the night and day shifts changed places. It was too close to daylight for his comfort, after decades of hiding his physical differences in the dark. His tall body was reflected crazily in the tarnished metal as he glided after Mouse. It was as if one of the stone lions in front of the New York Public Library had come to life to walk among the junkyard, treading fastidiously around frozen ice. His long

tattered cloak caught on mangled frames.

Mouse pointed to the trapped man. Vincent surveyed the wreckage and wedged two beams near the body. He and Mouse slowly and carefully dismantled the top of the heap, till the man was within reach. Then Vincent slid his hands under the man's shoulders and pulled gently.

The body came half free. One of the beams groaned as the pile shifted. Mouse squirmed inside before he could be stopped. "Leg's caught!" he sang back.

"Mouse, get out -- Hold on!" Vincent snarled. He put the man down gently and shifted, bracing the pile. He heaved upwards. Mouse pulled the leg free.

"Out! Pull him gently" Vincent ordered, the stress showing on his face. "Watch out for the gasoline." The boy crawled outside and pulled on the man, till he was outside the pile. Then Vincent relaxed slowly.

The car heap fell. Mouse and Vincent moved the wounded man back away from the toppling pile. The wind blew sparks at them.

Mouse looked from the bloody face to Vincent. "Alive?"

Vincent felt for a pulse in the neck. It was irregular as was the harsh breathing. He softly touched the bloody leg, finding lacerated flesh and heavy bleeding. Finally he laid his cloak over the body.

"He needs a hospital. We must get him away from here. You must call a hospital."

"Wait!" Mouse turned his head. "Oh, no! Cars"! Mouse recognized the smooth purrs he'd heard retreat a half-hour before. "It's them!"

The tall man made a split-second decision. "Lead me." He lifted the broken body into his arms. They moved swiftly into the shadows. Mouse led the way to Tunnel's entrance, glancing back every minute or two to see if they were followed. Behind them they heard loud cursing amid the fire's roar. Something exploded.

"Got burned!" Mouse said gleefully. He operated the secret door and they entered. He looked questioningly at the limp man. "Take to hospital now?"

Vincent looked at the battered face. "It would take too much time. I'll take him to Father."

"Father's going to be mad," his companion commented cheerfully.



Thursday
8:30 PM

A tall man in his early seventies stared out at the leaden skies. He wondered if he should call someone, maybe that boy, Friedland, who he worked with years ago. He decided to give his friend extra time. They would be in touch soon, he was sure. He had what everyone wanted. His gnarled hands

tightly fastened the weathered blue shutters on the small saltbox-style house near the bay, and hoped it wouldn't snow before he stocked up at the grocery store on Long Island. The Fire Island stores didn't have everything he needed for his guests.



Thursday
10 PM

Vincent and Father had argued as they stitched and bandaged. Father, as usual, worried about the risk of exposing the Tunnels to a stranger, but, as Vincent had known, did not turn aside a man so badly in need of his surgical skills. Fortunately for Father's peace of mind, the man had mumbled incoherently and promptly passed out before realizing where he was. Now Vincent sat alone by his side, listening to the harsh breathing. Father, having finished both his doctoring and quarrelling, was sulking in his study.

Vincent studied what he could see of the bruised face. It had thick eyebrows, a dented nose and tanned skin. The reddish brown hair was cut, cup-shaped, shorter on the neck. His hands, with several badly bruised fingernails, were calloused. The injury that worried Vincent the most was over the left eye. On one temple was a black bruise which Vincent felt was the reasons for the man's unconsciousness. Under the bandages, one eye was completely swollen shut.

Mouse came in softly.
"Vincent?"

"Yes, Mouse?"

"Who?"

Vincent looked back at the man. "I don't know. There was no identification in his clothing."

"Bad?" Mouse could see the hump where one leg was protected from the blanket's weight by a basket.

"Yes."

"But he can be moved in three or four days if all goes well, Mouse," Father said unexpectedly from behind him.

Mouse cringed apprehensively. He knew he and Father would have a long talk about his trips Above and he wasn't looking forward to it at all.

"Three or four days, Father?" Vincent questioned.

"A hospital will be better for him than down here," Father replied firmly. "They might find out who he is as well."

"Catherine will find that out. I have sent her a message."

Father waved for Mouse to leave. After he was gone, the old man stumped to the bedside, leaning heavily on his cane. "Vincent, we have to have him out of there as soon as possible. This type of man isn't going to stay quiet for long. He'll want to know where he is."

"I couldn't leave him there to die, Father," Vincent said quietly.

Father sighed. "I hope he is worth the risk, Vincent."



Friday
8:30 AM

Catherine Chandler tossed her expensive leather driving coat over a coat hook and rummaged in one pocket. A small Tunnel boy had waylaid her and given her the bloodstained card. Vincent asked, in a separate note, if she would find out who owned the fingerprints on the front.

She walked through the cold office to the identification area and asked Edie, "Will you do me a favor?"

"Another one?" the black woman teased as she took the card. "My god, what a mess! How was your trip Upstate yesterday? We missed you here."

"A prison is a prison, whether Upstate or in town," Catherine laughed. "Just find out who these belong to, will you?"

"Sure. But this is gonna cost you a dinner. And not at the vending machines this time." Edie slid the card under an optical scanner and punched in a code. It instantly digitized the fingerprints and began running them through the banks.

"Thank. I've got that Perez deposition out at Sing-Sing. I'll be back in a couple of hours."



Friday
12 noon

The phone buzzed. The silver-haired man, dressed in a sky-blue bathrobe walked over

and picked it up. "Yes?"

"He never arrived," a voice replied.

Momentarily the man paused. Then he slammed down the bunch of spring onions he'd been carrying. "What do you mean, 'he didn't arrive'? Surely he had backup!"

"Dammit, I don't like it anymore than you do! Paul brought in the latest reports but nothing on the kids! We've been searching since midnight!"

"Well what do you want ME to do?"

"Track something. A woman D.A. named Catherine Chandler just ran his fingerprints in the NYPD files. Talk to her. We have to find him before we run out of time!"

"You're always running out of time!" the man snapped.



Friday
4:45 PM

It took more than four hours for Bill Filker, a low-level manager in the Perez drug family to tell her about the opium end of the business. Catherine hoped the information was good. It would add to a painfully thin file on Frederick Perez. It had taken over an hour to get back into the City against the holiday traffic flow. The office was almost deserted.

The honey-haired blonde jumped as the phone rang

unexpectedly.

"Catherine, what are you doing?" Edie demanded before she could identify herself. "I ran into a security block on those fingerprints!"

"What?"

"It froze my system blinking 'classified!' at me. I just got the screen back!"

"But no name? Darn it. Thanks, Edie." Catherine hung up and slouched back in her leather chair, wondering what Vincent was up to now.

Several hours later, she dropped the final draft of the Perez transcript on her desk and yawned. She was the only person left in the cold office except for a security guard who had said hello as he passed.

The door at the far end of the hall opened and a man entered. "Ms. Chandler?"

She looked up. The man was in his early sixties, sleek, silver-haired and prosperous looking. His clothes had an European cut, the jewelry barely obtrusive and he moved like a career military man. His intense blue eyes were on her. "Ms. Chandler? My name is Robert McCall. I'm sorry for interrupting you at this hour but you weren't in earlier when I called."

"Mr. McCall? Glad to meet you." She rose and shook hands. "Please have a seat. What can I do for you?"

He studied her. "Ms. Chandler, I am looking for a young colleague of mine who I believe you know." He slid a

photo out of a pocket and laid it in front of her.

She looked at it puzzled. It was a young man in his early thirties, T-shirt clad, with a wide, devilish smile. Judging from the tackle box perched precariously behind him, he'd been fishing with the picture was taken. The sun glinted off reddish-gold streaks in his hair.

"I'm afraid I don't know him, Mr. McCall." She put the photo back on the desk. "Who is he?"

McCall stared at her and she felt a chill. The blue eyes were icy. "Are you quite sure, Ms. Chandler? I believe you must be mistaken. I was told you were looking for him."

She shook her head. "I'm afraid I don't know him at all."

He stood abruptly. "His name is Mickey Kostmeyer and I have to find him immediately. My information said that the D.A.'s office was trying to find him. If you have ANY information please call me immediately." He handed her a card.

She dropped it on top of the photo. "Your information was obviously incorrect. Now, I have several hours of work yet to do. Good day, Mr. McCall."

He walked to the door, radiating anger and frustration. "Good evening."

After he left, she sat back, shaking slightly. Who was he? She tilted the card toward her. The Equalizer.... For when the odds are against you. Catherine had a feeling that she was now against him, or rather, in his way, and it wasn't a good

place to be. Could this be about the fingerprints? That was the only thing she had done unusual in quite a while. "Vincent, what have you got me into?" she wondered aloud. Then she reached for the telephone. "Records, please. Let's see who Robert McCall is."



Friday
11:30 PM

McCall saw Catherine step out onto her balcony, the night wind stirring her hair. The city shone with lights; some blinking, some shimmering as an icy wind blew against the glass in which they were reflected. She pulled her parka around her shoulders and picked up an African violet, abandoned on a warmer day. On the roof of a nearby building, McCall strained to see her properly. Stoner had broken in earlier and set bugs in the living room and bedroom, but only one on the balcony. It was set in the plant in her hand. He saw her smile, as she locked the balcony door and he lowered his telescopic lens. His lips thinned in frustration. He slid the telescope into his pack and headed for the street, drooping off the equipment in his black Jaguar. He peered out of the exit door on her floor level just in time to see her entered a down elevator. He counted how long it took to stop running, and calculated that she must be in the basement.

It was dimly lit when he reached it. He caught a glimpse of her entering a door hidden behind some boxes. After a second he followed. She hurried down a ladder and through a ragged hole in the foundations,

totally unaware of the shadow following. He watched carefully as she picked through the rubble of the tunnel beyond.

His arm caught her around the neck. "Going to see Mickey, Ms. Chandler?"

She struggled, kicking viciously. He forced her to her knees against the wall.

McCall held her arms tightly behind her. To Catherine it was obvious that he knew exactly what to do to disarm her. She caught a glimpse of a gun tucked into his belt.

"Who do you think you are, McCall?" she said furiously.

"You know who I am, Ms. Chandler. You checked with Detective Hands after I left. What I want to know is where is Mickey?"

"I don't know anything ABOUT your Kostmeyer!" she protested.

He pulled her upright. "I don't believe you. Where else would you be going down here? Now why don't you just lead the way?"

She stopped fighting for the moment and they walked on. Catherine knew soon they would reach one of the outpost and Vincent would hear of their unwanted visitor. At one of the Tunnel crossings she paused. McCall waited impatiently behind her. She took a step, landed incorrectly and half-fell. He loosened his grip on her arms, and she twisted, kicking at his knee. He fell, breaking it with a roll, as she fled into the tunnel.

She heard his footsteps pounding after her, but she dodged into another tunnel. He flicked on a flashlight, but missed her crouched behind an abutment.

McCall cursed under his breath, playing his light on the bare walls. A small stone lion, the sort that topped driveway pillars, startled him. Surprised to see it down here, he touched it, twisting. The head swiveled to one side and he fell into blackness.

Catherine fled at the cry of surprise. Finally, she paused to listen. Nothing. No footsteps, no gunshots. But she was lost. She tapped her code on the pipes that ran along the wall. After a few minutes, Vincent's code came back.

McCall landed on a large mattress. The narrow room was dimly lit with candles that sent light over a myriad of odd metallic refuse piled on a work table and along the all. He shook his head, dazed. Something moved. With one fluid movement, he rolled off the bed into a crouch, with his gun pointed at the table.

A fat raccoon waddled over the junk. It headed straight for his silver gun, fascinated by the reflection of the candles. He watched it snuffle and paw at the muzzle, then he gently pushed it away. His eyes followed its wandering path over the bric-a-brac. He stood slowly, lowering the gun.

Mouse was terrified. The sudden entrance of an armed man down his express entrance had made him scramble of the cover

of the work table. He hoped that Arthur, his raccoon, wouldn't be hurt. The stillness and silence of the intruder was more ominous than curses would have been. He kept his head down and slid backwards towards the entrance.

A hand abruptly hauled him to his feet. He looked down the nose of the gun, then up into eyes that matched any ice in Central Park.

"And what have we here? Come on, what's your name?"

"Mouse," the boy whimpered.

McCall stared at him. "Mouse? You live down here,

correct? All right, Mouse, I want you to take me to my friend."

Mouse was terrified by the gun. He shook his head mutely.

"My friend," McCall suggested again more gently. "Mickey."

Mouse just stared back with huge terrified eyes. McCall was torn between his desire to rescue Mickey from these strangers and his innate reluctance to terrify a possibly innocent and maybe half-witted person. He sighed and lowered the gun from Mouse's face. The boy relaxed a tiny bit. "Mouse, I am looking for a friend who I think might be down here. Have you seen anyone, any strangers other than me?"

Mouse's chin went up in false bravado. "Maybe."

McCall's overtaxed patience snapped. He grabbed the front of Mouse's tattered leather jacket, hoisting him onto his toes. "I

do not have time for this. Take me to him!"

"Okay, good, okay fine!" Mouse yelped, squirming back out of his grip. "Mouse, take!"

"Good." McCall hastened after the boy as he scuttled out of the chamber. The outside passage was dark, and McCall paused to let his eyes adjust. Once they had, he glanced both ways. The boy was gone. "Damn!"

Mouse hid around the nearest bend, still shaking from his run-in with the cold infuriated intruder. He peeked around the corner and saw no one. He hugged himself in self-congratulation. "Stupid topsider. Can't catch Mou--Oww!" His whisper of triumph turned into a wall as a hand swooped out of the darkness, grabbing his jacket and slamming him hard, face-first against the stone wall.

"Let's try this again, shall we?" McCall hissed. He pressed the gun hard into Mouse's neck. The boy whimpered. "No more games. No more hide-and-seek. Take me to my friend!"

Mouse was only too pleased to lead the way.

After a long walk, they entered a candle-lit study. To one side an elaborately lit stained-glass window flooded the room with gold. Several branches of candles were lit, providing more light. A small black cloisonne lamp sat on a small table beside a chessboard. Bookshelves lined the walls and covered an old-fashioned desk. Reading under an elaborate candlestick, was a man of roughly McCall's age.

"Father," Mouse squeaked.

"Mouse? What..." Father stopped as he saw the intruder holding a gun on his young charge. "Let him go," Father ordered coldly.

McCall met his eyes and neither yielded. He pushed Mouse in front of him as they went down into the study.

Father moved around his desk, leaning heavily on his cane. McCall noted his limp, his heavily lined face, the grey-streaked hair. He walked with authority even with the limp.

"I believe you have Mickey Kostmeyer. Where is he?" McCall said crisply.

Father studied him. "I don't know anyone by that name.

McCall lost his temper. "I am tired of this runaround! I know he's down here somewhere!" He fired. The small cloisonne lamp shattered all over Father's chessboard. Mouse jumped and froze, shivering, almost paralyzed with fear.

Father flinched but did not back down. "What do you want with him?"

"I. Want. To. Talk. With. Him."

"Come along." Father led the way. Mouse, still firmly held followed with McCall bringing up the rear.

Father was terribly aware of the danger of this intruder. It was like having a freezing arctic wind following him, a steel sword blade pricking his spine; a murderous danger to Mouse and himself. What had

Vincent's act of impulsive kindness done, to have brought the violence of the World Above to their safe home?

He gestured with his cane to a curtained alcove. "Here."

McCall eyed him suspiciously. "Go inside."

Father drew back the curtain and stepped inside. Vincent's chair was empty, his jacket left carelessly on the he back. The room was dim with only one candle lit.

"My God! Mickey!" McCall barked as he looked inside. He let Mouse go and pushed past Father. Mouse clung to the wall, eyes wide, legs slowly giving way.

McCall touched Mickey's neck. He relaxed slightly when he found a pulse. The bandages indicated that someone down here must be a doctor because they were professionally wrapped. He couldn't see Mickey's eyes for the facial bandages. One hand was splinted and the other had two fingers wrapped. It was him though. McCall would never mistake Mickey in any crowd.

"Well?" Father broke the silence. "Is this your friend?"

McCall turned to him. "What happened here?"

Mouse pushed forward. "Men In junkyard. HIT him. Hard. Wanted to know something."

"Mouse, be quiet!" Father snapped. "Go back to the study."

"What did they want to know?" McCall interrupted. His eyes didn't move from Father.

"We don't know," the other

stated. "In fact, until you told me, we didn't even know who he was."

"He hasn't regained consciousness?"

"No. He took quite a beating especially to the head. It isn't even safe to take him Above."

"Don't do that," McCall said. "Control would have him awake before he has recovered and he -- Damn!"

"Who is Control?" Father asked.

McCall tucked the gun back into his belt as he studied the setup. Unless all his instincts were wrong, no harm would come to Mickey down here. But, back in the real world, trouble was waiting impatiently and there was no time to explain this to the old man who obviously just wanted them both to go away. Mickey couldn't be moved. "Has he said ANYTHING at all?"

"Nothing that makes sense. There was no identification on him."

"There wouldn't be. You have no idea of where he was coming from?"

Father shook his head negatively. "We're probably disturbing him with our talk. He needs sleep more than anything. Come back to my study and we'll talk."

McCall touched Mickey's shoulder in sympathy, then followed Father out of the room.



Saturday
1 AM

Vincent found Catherine where she had tapped. She clung to his leather-clad arm.

"Vincent, there's trouble. He's down here."

"Who?" he said urgently.

"I ran the fingerprints you gave me and came up against a security block. Later I had a visitor named Robert McCall, who was looking for a friend of his named Kostmeyer. Is this the man whose fingerprints those are?" She pulled out the photo McCall left behind.

Vincent studied it closely. "It think it IS him... but he doesn't look like this now, Catherine."

"What had he said?"

"Nothing. He is unconscious most of the time. When he mumbles he talks of a Stickleback and Fire Island, and hidden children. Who do you think this Kostmeyer is, Catherine?"

She thought for a second. "I think he must be government, maybe FBI or DEA. Robert McCall's a freelance detective, sort of, who calls himself the Equalizer. Detective Hands believes he was a spy before that. He's got a good track record for getting what he wants but bodies litter the landscape when he's done. He has connections so high even Edie can't get his files. What are you going to do, Vincent? He's down here and he's not going to give up on finding Kostmeyer."

He leaned against the stone

wall. "Kostmeyer is too weak to move. We will have to take this McCall to his friend, Catherine. Kostmeyer also mumbles about an Agana. The name is very important to him."

"Agana.... Are you sure that's what he said? Francis Agana is the head of a South American drug smuggling ring here in New York. He's in competition with Frederick Perez for the trade in Westchester. I took a transcript from one of Perez's men this morning." Catherine shook her head. "Vincent, what are we tangled up in?"

"Do you think Kostmeyer or McCall are involved in drugs?" he queried.

"It's not McCall's style --" They were interrupted by tapping on the pipes.

"What're they saying?" Catherine asked.

Vincent frowned. "It's Mouse. He's found your McCall, Catherine. He's with Father. I have to go."

"No! Vincent, McCall is dangerous! He could hurt you, expose you to the government --"

"Catherine, if he is what you say he is, then Father is in danger. I must go."

"Wait!" Catherine clutched his vest in inspiration. "Let me go instead. Maybe I could work a deal --"

Vincent shook his head sadly and gently removed her hands. "No, Catherine, It is too dangerous and I want to know you are safe."

"But..."

"I will take care not expose myself needlessly, Catherine. If you follow this pipe for three turnings and go left at the fourth, you will be back to the tunnel leading to Central Park. It is the shortest way."

Catherine sighed. Vincent could be as stubborn as he was protective, and she knew from experience that he would not back down. And every moment they argued, McCall was free to do god-knows-what to Father.

"Be careful, Vincent," she said as he disappeared around a corner.



Saturday
1:30 AM

Catherine finally arrived back in her apartment. The phone rang moments after she shucked her parka.

"Hello?"

"Hey, Chandler, what're you up to?" her boss' voice showed a touch of anger and more than a little frustration.

"What's up, Joe? Working late?"

"The damn place is crawling with Federal agents and they don't want to talk to me, they want to talk to you! They're putting together a file that would make the KGB green! You'd better get down here."

Catherine sat down abruptly on the edge of her bed. She was tired to the bone. "I'm on my way."

After showering and dressing, she stepped from her apartment building. She waved to a cab, as a large limousine slid up beside her. The driver rolled down the window. "Ms. Chandler?"

She bent down, surprised. "Yes?"

"I'm here to take you to the D.A.'s office."

Her eyes narrowed suspiciously. "How did you know -- "

He tapped on the car phone. "My boss asked me to pick you up, Ms. Chandler." He held out his identification. "I'm Paul Friedland."

"I see. OK." She slid in on the crushed grey plush velvet seat.

He rolled up the window between them and slid off into the traffic. After a few minutes he looked back and grinned. She was face down in the seat, unconscious from gas.



Saturday
1:45 AM

Vincent reached the study just as Father and McCall entered. He roared at the silver-haired intruder and crouched to jump. McCall whirled at the sound, his gun out and aimed, before his eyes fully registered what they saw. For one of the few times in his life, he lost his composure. "My God!"

"Don't shoot!" Father cried at the same time, limping desperately in their way. He

grabbed Vincent's vest and stopped him.

"Father!" Vincent cried in fear of seeing his only parent in danger of being shot in the back. McCall almost dropped his gun in surprise at hearing him talk. It was fortunate that McCall made it a point never to shoot without knowing there was danger, and that Vincent never attacked with a warning snarl. "What is THAT?" McCall asked, tilting his gun towards the ceiling.

"He," Father said with heavy emphasis, "is my son, Vincent. Vincent, this is Robert McCall, an associate of the man you rescued the other night."

Vincent stood still, tensed, claws displayed and angry eyes on the intruder. His voice was underscored with a low growl. "Catherine has told me of you."

McCall raised his eyebrows. "I'll bet she has." He looked Vincent over, noting the long blonde catlike mane, long canines, furry fingers and sharp claws. Then he met Vincent's cold blue eyes. "And you're the one who found Mickey?"

"Mouse and I brought him down here. Father is a doctor."

McCall glanced between the men who called each other father and son. No visible physical relationship. Strange. "I see," he said tucking the gun away.

The tension relaxed. Father brushed the fragments of the lamp off his chair and eased himself down. He propped his cane nearby. "So what now?"

McCall crossed his arms. "Well, that depends on what you can tell me about what Mickey has said."

"What's it all about?" Father inquired.

"Mickey was bringing some children from South America. He was supposed to report yesterday, so that they could be sent on, but he didn't."

"And Catherine --"

"We traced her through the police computer."

"How did your enemies know that Mickey was coming in?" Father cocked his head inquisitively.

McCall stared at the fallen chessmen for a second. "We don't know. There's a leak somewhere. The only I know is that our enemies don't have the children. If they had, we'd know about it. Our South American connections would tell us if they had returned."

"It sounds like you have quite an organization. You're telling us a great deal," Father commented. "Why?"

"Who will you tell?" McCall inquired. "This is your escape, your world."

Father frowned uncomfortably. It sounded like McCall was placing a value judgement on him and the Tunnels. That he had run away from responsibility. How dare he? McCall had no idea of the reasons he'd left the world Above. An arrogant, supercilious

man full of moral standards, which Father felt, he probably didn't follow himself. "It is a place of refuge. Of peace. No violence." He met McCall's blue eyes. "No guns."

McCall dropped his eyes after a second. "There's too much to do above--"

"Change your world, Robert McCall," Father commanded. "Leave ours alone. We do well enough." He shifted in his chair. "We will send word as soon as your friend awakens. Surely you can spend your time more usefully than waiting down here."

McCall pursed his lips, nodding. "Will you lead me out then?"

"I will show you the way," Vincent told him. "We can speak of your friend along the way."

Father settled back into his wooden chair as they left. He rested his forehead on one hand. He hadn't had a headache like this since Vincent had first brought Catherine down. Every time they got involved with the upper world, trouble followed, and more fear of revealment. And he trusted Robert McCall just about as much as McCall probably trusted him.

Saturday
7:30 AM



It was barely dawn by the time McCall reached his apartment. He suspected Vincent had taken the long route out. Then he'd had difficulty finding a cab from the Brooklyn docks where he emerged. He tossed his New York Times on the counter

and flicked on the kettle. Someone stirred in the living room. McCall pulled his gun. "Who's there?"

A man in his late sixties, with a lanky build, bow tie and frosted grey hair, unfolded himself from an expensive lounge chair. "Robert?" Control's low growl was expressionless. Since McCall had known him for years, he recognized that things were going very badly.

"What are you doing here?" McCall pulled off his black jacket and hung it up.

"I've been waiting for you. What did you find out?"

"I found Mickey," McCall said briskly. He set the kettle to boil. "He was rather beaten up."

"When can I see him?"

"You can't."



"Robert, you can't mean that -- " Control leaned against the kitchen counter watching McCall's smooth movements as the other pulled two china cups, tea flakes and a strainer from a cupboard.

"He's still unconscious," McCall interrupted. "I don't think the people who have him will let us move him."

"I can take in a team -- "

"Control, are you interested in finding out what Mickey has said?"

"I thought you said -- never mind. What did he say?" Control took the cup of tea that McCall had just brewed. "Go ahead."

"He's delirious so take it with a grain of salt. We know Mickey got the children into the country but he was intercepted on the --"

"He never got them to the safe house."

"Nonsense. He took them to a safe place. That much is clear."

"Robert, we have men at the safe house in Babylon which is where they were supposed to go. He never arrived."

McCall massaged his tired neck muscles. The sunlight was too bright for a man who had been up all night. "What the hell IS going on here, Control? Who are these children?"

Control was silent for a moment. "All right, I suppose you need to know. The boy,

Dominic, and the girl, Alicia, are the children of Pablo Ajama. You might have heard of him."

"The drug dealer! My God, Control --"

"Now, don't get righteously indignant till I'm finished, Robert! For years we've gotten information on narcotics from Ajama, from marijuana up through cocaine. He's on the inside of the whole industry. And, despite his reputation, a great deal of his produce is corn and wheat!"

"Yes, well, it's the other that's killing people!"

"I'm not going to discuss that right now. Ajama has been pressured to sell by his neighbor, Frederick Perez. Ajama insisted that we get his kids out of Mexico to his sister here in the US. They'll stay with her till things settle down. I had Mickey and Paul get them out of Mexico. Mickey was supposed to take them to Babylon while Paul brought in the reports from Mexico. And if you have read today's Times, you'll know we got them out just in time."

McCall spread it on the counter. "What do you mean?"

"Page 20."

"The obituaries? My God, it's Pablo Ajama!"

"Robert, we need those children. They're Ajama's heirs to the whole mess. If the others in the region know the children are safe with their aunt, they have no legal right to take over the land, as they are eyeing to do. The Government has to support the children's claim."

The aunt's on our side. Pablo Ajama had a great deal more than just land. He was big in the shipping industry as well."

"So whoever has the children controls it all?"

"Correct. Till they are of age. Perez wants the children because it is the only way he gets the land. Mickey's the only one who knows where they are!"

McCall stirred his tea. "Who is 'Stickleback'?"

"Who?"

"Mickey mentioned a 'Stickleback' and Fire Island."

Control pulled his coat from the closet. "Sounds like a nickname. I'll get on it right away. Damn holiday weekend. No one will be in Systems!"



Saturday
8 AM

Catherine awakened slowly. She sat with her hands tied to the arms of a hard wooden chair. She could feel an icy chill that sank through the camel's hair jacket she was wearing. Her eyes were blindfolded. She swiveled her head, attempting to get an idea of her surroundings by sound.

The room was large and echoing. On the right, came a growing murmur of voices. Then a door closed. One pair of footsteps walked up to the chair.

"Ms. Chandler. I'm glad you're awake." The man's accent was South American.

"Who are you? What do you want?"

A rough finger stroked her right ear, moving around to her lips. "I would be a fool to answer that, wouldn't I? You have some information for me, I believe."

She bit at the finger touching her mouth. It was removed with a curse, then a blow rocked her head.

A man laughed. "That's not the way with American women."

"Next time, you do that, you will never walk again," the South American promised. "Now, where is Mickey Kostmeyer?"

"Who are you talking about?" She tilted her head towards him.

"You ran his damn fingerprints through the computer, bitch," the other man said. After a second, she recognized it as the driver of the limousine, Paul Friedland. "You must know where he is."

"I don't know who you're talking about." Another blow hit her and she bit her lower lip accidentally. The blood made her even more angry. "You're making a mistake."

"You haven't time for this, Perez," Friedland said. "Get Felipe. He'll have some drugs in his bag that will make her talk. You really should have used it on Kostmeyer rather than trying to beat it out of him."

"You talk too much," Perez retorted. "Do you think she is deaf? She knows who I am now!"

Catherine heard cloth rustle and assumed Friedland was shrugging. "She can I.D. me now. I'll kill her when we know we're finished here." She restrained a shudder. Perez was one of the top drug smugglers, and the deposition had made clear that he was top in ruthlessness too. Friedland was a fitting companion. Vincent, where are you? Her head was muzzy from the blows.

"Ah, Felipe," Perez called. "The drug."

The needle slid in with the smoothness of a truck entering a too-small parking place. Catherine's lips curled in pain. She could feel it taking effect, and all she could do was pray that Vincent would find her before they killed her.



Saturday
10 AM

The lighting never changed in Kostmeyer's alcove, except when Father lit another candle. The older man was seated in Vincent's chair, an open book in his lap. His mind was on the man in the bed.

Kostmeyer was obviously better than he had been the day before. A naturally healthy constitution had cut in and he was recovering. His bandaged hands moved aimlessly over the bedspread. Finally he sighed.

Father looked up. That sounded like a purposeful sigh, a conscious sigh. He picked up one hand to check the pulse.

It twisted and grabbed his wrist, half-pulling him from the chair. "Who are you and where am I?" Kostmeyer said foggily.

"Relax. You're safe and among friends," Father said soothingly. The hand relaxed slightly and Father pulled free.

Kostmeyer turned his head toward the light he could see dimly through the gauze. "McCall? Robert?"

Father blinked. It had never occurred to him that he could be mistaken for Robert McCall. Still, they both had English accents. "How do you feel?" he prevaricated.

The wounded man tried to sit up and gasped. He fell back. "Damn, that hurts! Why can't I see anything?"

"You have a cut over your eyes that is quite bad. Please don't move any more. You'll just feel worse."

"Jeeze, I haven't felt this bad since..."

"What do you remember?" Father wondered if the blows would have blanked his memory.

Kostmeyer shifted his wounded leg and gasped. "I didn't make it in, did I? Had a feeling I wouldn't when that sedan...hit me. McCall, you got to get a message -- how long have I been out?"

"Around a day and a half," Father said.

"Jeffrey must be having a fit! I told him to sit tight 'til I came back. Remember, old 'Stickleback Kern'? Did you ever work with him? Maybe not, come to think... I had dinner with him last month and he offered to do anything he could to help any time. I left the kids with him on Fire Island... 'cause...Friedland's the leak."

He knew about the Bablyon house."

Father made a noncommittal sound. He felt uncomfortable lying to the young man, but this was the information that McCall needed to hear.

"When I knew that, I couldn't take the kids...to Babylon. I lost my tails on the way to Fire Island but they found me on the way back." Kostmeyer tried to shift his leg again and paled.

"I said, don't move!" Father said asperity. "Just rest."

"I feel like I'm back at Intangible Plastics. Robert, what does Doc Warnick think?" Kostmeyer's bandaged head turned to him. "Robert? Where are you? You don't sound like yourself... Damn, they weren't professionals. Just brutal." He took a deep breath, but the pain was too much. He passed out.

Father watched frustrated. He couldn't do anything more for him. Obviously Kostmeyer was one of those active young men who inhabited a world that Father had gratefully abandoned decades before. The kind of young man who grew up to Robert McCall and pulled strings for countries to dance to.

Vincent pulled back the curtain. "Father?"

He turned. "Yes, Vincent?"

"Father... something is wrong with Catherine."

The old man sighed. "I wouldn't be surprised, Vincent. We are in far deeper waters than usually flood down here. Did you

hear what he said?"

Vincent nodded. "You promised McCall --"

"I'll send Mouse up once it gets dark. He's the only one McCall will recognize and listen to.... except us."

"That's hours from now," Vincent protested. "Catherine --"

"What are you feeling?" Father asked.

"It's very faint. Anger and frustration." Vincent shook his head trying to understand. "I can't quite make it out."

"Do you want me to send Mouse out now?"

"No. No, it wouldn't be worth the risk of him being seen in daylight." Vincent laughed shortly. "He might be arrested."



Saturday
11 AM

McCall sipped the dregs of his third cup of tea and folded the last sheet of the newspaper. The telephone rang. He picked it up before the first ring was over.

"Hello?"

"Robert," Control's voice boomed. "Do you remember an agent named Jeffrey Kern? His nickname was 'Stickleback'."

"Not at all."

"He dealt mostly with the South Americans according to the records. Trained Paul Friedland for his first posting. His house on Fire Island was hit by Perez

and his men a couple of hours ago. The kids were there."

"How do you know?" The teacup shattered on the counter. "How'd they find out that the children were there? Wait -- oh, God." McCall remembered Catherine Chandler. Vincent had talked with her before he had to talk to him. Vincent had probably told her what Mickey had said. Damn! "Control, did Ms. Chandler ever show up for work?"

"Who? Oh, the attorney. No, not according to Stoner who's there now. Why?"

"She led me to Mickey and probably knew about Kern. They must have made her talk. Control, things are getting out of hand -- "

"Wrong, things are out of hand and we're on the losing edge. Robert, I have people checking all Perez's hangouts in New York. We have the car's make and color."

"How?"

"Nosy neighbors. They heard the shooting and watched before calling the police. Clean neat job, Robert. They killed Kern and got the kids out in record time."

McCall mopped up the fragments with a paper towel and dropped the remains in the trash. "Right, then, at least Mickey's in no more danger. If they have the kids, then they don't need him anymore. What do you have planned now?"

Control sighed. "I really don't know. More of the waiting game, I guess. We can't do

anything till we find out where Perez has the kids. You say Kostmeyer is safe?"

"Safer than you or me. What about Chandler?"

"We find her and them at the same time hopefully. And alive."



Saturday.
5:30 PM

Vincent's fears for Catherine were growing stronger and stronger. He accompanied Mouse to McCall's apartment after dark. Snow was blowing around them, driving people inside so the mismatched pair passed unnoticed in the upscale New York neighborhood. It was a slick coating on the sidewalk, melting on the well-travelled roadway as soon as it hit. They knocked. McCall's door opened after a minute.

He was favorably impressed by McCall's apartment. It was decorated in a very personal, if restrained, controlled style. Opposite the front door was a wine rack half-filled with French wine. On the walls hung etchings and prints from around the world. Near the bow window was a bronze Buddha seated on an elegant French Louis the Fourteenth table, and an exquisite tusked ivory elephant shared the mantle over the small fireplace with other pieces of African art. One one wall hung a modernistic painting flanked by crowded built-in bookshelves. An open file lay face down on the shiny coffee table. The apartment was a reflection of the eclectic man who faced them.

"Well?" McCall said abruptly.

Mouse glanced mutely at Vincent. He was acutely uncomfortable in the cool cream room.

"Your friend, Mickey, awakened just a few hours ago. He says the children are hidden in --"

"Fire Island. Yes, well, that information has come a little late." McCall stared at him angrily. "I was reading the file of the man they killed getting them!"

Vincent's head went up abruptly. "Catherine!"

"What? What is it?" McCall snapped.

"He knows," Mouse said helpfully from the kitchen where he had wandered. "Catherine needs him, he knows."

"She's in pain. And danger," Vincent whispered.

"I'll agree with that!" McCall said. "They must have gotten her to tell them about Kern or they'd never found the house. She's probably wherever the children are."

Vincent's eyes focused on him. "Mickey said that a man named Friedland was the traitor in your organization."

McCall stared at him. "My God, Friedland was the one who helped Mickey bring the children into the country! He would have had numerous opportunities on the way to -- no, wait a minute." He considered the situation for a second. "He

obviously wants no one to know that he's the leak or he would have acted earlier."

"Snatched?" Mouse offered, the food processor lying in pieces in front of him. He'd never seen one that worked and was exploring its features.

The older man looked pained. "Don't cut yourself on that. Let me call someone." He punched numbers into the telephone. Moments later, he was connected. "Control? Anything new?"

"Robert, I would have called you if anything turned up. I'm searching through what Stoner got from Chandler's office."

"Well, I've got something for you. Kostmeyer's awake. He says that Paul Friedland is your leak."

Silence. "What are you talking about?" Control said slowly.

"Friedland. That dishwater-blond boy wonder of Southern Control. Kostmeyer says he sold out."

The man sighed. "Why am I not surprised? Damn, he was the best we had in Mexico. I guess the whole Cancun network is compromised. What about Kostmeyer?"

"He's better. Or he wouldn't be talking."

Vincent put his clawed hand over the receiver to make sure his voice wasn't overheard. "Ask him if he found a transcript in Catherine's office. She took the deposition of a Perez gang member today. It might mention..."

McCall waved him away.
"Control, did you find a transcript in Catherine Chandler's office?"

"Robert, I have half her office all over my desk right now!"

"Apparently she took a deposition from one of Perez's thugs. He might have mentioned where they could be holding her."

"How'd you know that?"
Control said flatly. "Robert, you're holding out on me!"

Vincent was pacing impatiently, head cocked as he listened to an inner voice. McCall studied him. "Control, I'll call you back."

"Robert --" Click.

"What is it?" McCall asked.

"She is in danger. I need to find her," Vincent said simply.

"Right. I'll drive." McCall pulled his black jacket out of his coat closet.

"Mouse, go tell Father what is happening." Mouse was oblivious, having discovered McCall's hidden gun room. He startled as claws landed on his shoulder. Vincent's eyes blazed with fear and impatience.

"Okay, good, okay fine!"
Mouse hurried out, cutting McCall off at the door.

McCall raised an eyebrow towards Vincent.

"He's actually more verbal

than he seems," Vincent said defensively. "Father will know what we are doing."

The bucket seat on McCall's black Jaguar was barely large enough for Vincent. McCall followed his instructions silently, taking the roads that lead up to Westchester and the Connecticut line. Snow effectively masked them from the city, falling in large flakes now, caking the roadway. It was beginning to stick. The Jaguar's radials made little matter of it as they travelled north. The road was almost abandoned. People had heard of an impending snowstorm and stayed home.

To Vincent it was a timeless interval. He had never ridden in a car before. He studied the driver, wondering what McCall really did for a living that he could afford the apartment and the car. His expression was familiar to Vincent from watching Kostmeyer for hours. They both had the same tightness to their lips and air of danger. Vincent had never encountered men engaged in espionage before and he found it intriguing. If it hadn't been for worry over Catherine, he would have loved to discuss the world with McCall since he knew the man would have radically different viewpoints from his and Father's. If he would talk with them. They had gotten off on the wrong foot with McCall in the Tunnels.

Robert McCall was tense. He hated this aimless driving and wasn't sure if it wasn't a total waste of time. The hulking figure beside him was quite

precise on direction, but still he disliked walking into a situation without any idea of what was waiting for him. He admitted to himself that these dwellers below had been honest with him and saved Mickey's life, and he owed them. He reluctantly admitted to himself that Mickey was a great deal more than just a colleague. He was like a second son, a son of his work, who didn't reproach him (as his real son did) or make him feel guilty about the past. In addition, Mickey was a consummate professional, trained by McCall himself. They both knew the risks of the espionage business. He wanted to meet the man who would brutally beat his friend that way. McCall wanted to meet him very badly.

The tight streets soon gave way to unlit suburbs and mansions set among acres of land fenced with stone walls, pre-dating the American Revolution. The air was a chill and frosty stream through the narrowly cracked window on McCall's side. Finally, Vincent pointed to an elegant mansion behind high brick walls. The tops were covered with ivy and broken glass. "She's in there."

McCall gave him a disbelieving look. The carphone burred urgently. "Hello?"

Control's voice crackled down the line. "Robert, the deposition mentions a house in Huntington. A mansion with a sunken garden. He says Perez takes his distributors there when they need a talking with."

"The sunken garden probably comes in handy. I am outside it right now, Control. It's 1653 Arlington Ave."

"How'd -- We'll be there as

soon as possible." Click. McCall turned. "Vincent, I'll go around the front. Don't do anything --"

His words fell on thin air. Vincent was already gone into the swirling flakes.



Saturday
8:40 PM

Dried leaves from long-dead plants skittered across the floor of the unused conservatory. Beyond the long row of etched glass doors a set of stairs led down to an unused fountain. A statue of a rooster, crowed at the leaden grey skies heavy with snow. Next to one door, the dead stem of a palm thrust upright like the last wave of a dying man.

Catherine was cold. Her hands and feet were numb from the electrical wire that tightly tied them. She shook back her hair and smiled weakly at the children next to her. At least this time she could see. She'd heard Friedland and Perez boasting about the raid on Fire Island and how they'd killed a man there. The first she'd known about it was when the children were thrust in the conservatory. The little boy was curled into a ball, sucking his thumb while the girl hugged her knees. She'd tried talking to the girl. Her broken Spanish was barely adequate to order in a restaurant. The girl had worked on the bonds on Catherine's hands, but she broke and ran when the house door opened. Catherine shook her hands, trying to snap the last wire.

Friedland entered, holding a Uzi, followed by one of the other thugs. He glanced out the etched glass windows, saw

nothing threatening, then flicked on the light switch. The room flooded with cold light.

Catherine pushed herself into a sitting position, hiding her now-free hands behind her. The boy whimpered, and the little girl hugged him.

"It's time, Chandler." Friedland pulled her up. One of Catherine's hands came around and slapped the hand that held the Uzi. He cursed. She tripped him, and they both fell heavily against one of the etched doors. It shattered.

A roar came out of the dark. Vincent grabbed Friedland's neck. His claws ripped flesh and the fine European cloth, throwing him away from Catherine. The young man hit the base of the leaf-clogged fountain and went limp.

Inside, the other killer was taking deadly aim at the leonine figure outlined in broken glass. One shot from the half-open hall door left the killer sprawled on the floor. McCall was briefly lit by the hall light. "Get them outside!" he ordered, disappearing back into the hallway. The children screamed, their faces hidden against Catherine's jacket. Her eyes met Vincent's wild ones. "Go inside, Vincent. Help him. I'll take care of the children."

The man hesitated momentarily, then stepped into the ruined conservatory. "I will be back."

Catherine hugged the children, then attacked the wire on her legs.

McCall carefully picked his

way up the carpeted stairs. While the conservatory was unused, the rest of the house was opulently furnished with gilt-eged mirrors and a heavy chandelier that shook as he passed. He had found no alarms on the doors, leading him to suspect that Perez was leaving shortly.

Voices alerted him to the upper-landing. He heard men's laughter and then one door swung open. McCall pressed himself into a shadowy doorway.

"He should be done by now. You dug the hole?"

"Si." A curly-haired man stopped in the doorway. "Why did you leave it up to Pretty Boy?"

"One more death we can use on him. One more reason for him to need us."

"As long as you keep him supplied with drugs," the other retorted.

"Si."

McCall nodded. This jibbed with what he had suspected. He struck the man as he passed, and dragged the body inside the darkened room. Then he crept up to the partly-opened door.

Inside, one dark man was snapping the buckles on a small suitcase while another, slung with a Uzi, watched.

McCall stepped in. "Don't move. Oh, please don't --" his words were drowned in gunfire.



At the door to the hallway, Vincent looked up wondering if he should go up.

Outside Catherine stood, her arms around the shivering children. Her eyes were on the one lit window. She prayed that Vincent hadn't been shot. Suddenly the glass exploded outward and a body fell, cartwheeling down to land in the bushes in front of the building. The children clung closer.

Then, on the breeze, she heard the sound of sirens.



A chill wind howled through the room from the broken window. McCall covered the dark man with his gun. "Frederick Perez, I assume?"

The other stared at him bleakly.

"Mr. Perez, you have been the cause of a man's death just this day, and the severe beating of another. I really suggest that unless you intend to use that hole in your backyard for your own grave, that you put your hands up."

"And who are you?" Perez growled.

"My name is Robert McCall. We have a mutual acquaintance. Mickey Kostmeyer."

The name registered on Perez like a blow. He swung the suitcase in front of him and outwards.

McCall's gunfire ripped through it as he dodged. He ran after Perez as the other fled down the staircase. The chandelier shivered.

McCall saw that Perez would escape before he reached bottom.

Then the man stumbled backward, his hand over his face. A roar filled the hall. From the shadows, Vincent slashed at him. McCall, with one shot, cut the chandelier cord. It crashed down, pinning Perez to the floor, knocking him unconscious.

McCall heard sirens growing louder. He met Vincent's eyes. "Chandler?"

"She sent me back for you."

"Unless you want to meet Control, I suggest you leave now." The first flash of red and blue lit the sky and tires screeched.

Vincent looked out the front door. "I can't go that way."

McCall pointed down the hall towards the conservatory. "Out there, through the garden. I'll get their attention out front. Do you remember how we got here? Take the same route back."

The leonine man didn't bother replying, just glided out through the shadows.

Perez groaned. McCall gave him a disgusted look and walked outside.



Control emerged from one of the black Chevy Cavaliers surrounded by his men, all of which McCall thought looked alike. From the same cookie cutter. "Well, Robert, have you cleaned up again?"

"You wanted the children, Control. I wanted Perez."

"I would also like to have Mickey, whenever you are ready to cough him up." Control turned to Catherine. "Ms. Chandler, I am very sorry you got involved in all this."

She smiled, her eyes flicking to McCall. "I'm still not quite sure what I was involved with."

Control knelt in the snow. "Dominic? Alicia?" The children nodded. He looked up at Catherine. "Are they all right?"

Before she replied, a woman with dark hair and eyes, emerged from another car. She called in Spanish and the children abandoned Catherine to run to her.

"The aunt," McCall said. "I didn't know she was in New York."

"She won't be soon. Ms. Chandler, can I offer you a ride back to the City?" Control asked.

"No, no," McCall interrupted. "I'll take her back with me."

"Robert, I need you here," Control snapped in a tone at the end of its long-suffering tether. "Ms. Chandler, Stoner will take you back. I would like to talk to you myself later."

Catherine nodded and went off with the man Control pointed out. McCall bit his lip in exasperation. "I'll call you when I get in, Mr. McCall."

Control looked from her to him. "Robert, talk to me now."

Saturday
10:30 PM

The black Jaguar proceeded slowly through the very heavy snow, following the path it had taken to Arlington Ave. Finally it slowed under a traffic light several miles from New York.

McCall slid out and looked around. Somewhere.... Ah. There.

"Would you like a ride back?" he called. A tall shadow detached itself from the woods. Vincent walked up to the car. "I thought I might find you here."

"This is the path you suggest I take," Vincent said slightly amused.

"Well, yes, this is what I had in mind as well." McCall started the car after Vincent slid in. "It is a long walk back to Brooklyn."

Vincent smiled. "Will you tell me about what you do?" he asked with exquisite simplicity. "And about Mickey?"



Monday
10 AM

McCall stepped out of a taxi in front of Catherine's apartment building. He'd waited impatiently to hear from her and finally she'd called. He was waved in by the doorman.

Upstairs, the woman opened the door with a smile. Despite the neatly bandaged wrists, she glowed with health.

"I'm glad to see you, Mr. McCall."

"And you also, Ms. Chandler," he said urbanely. "Feeling better?"

"Much. Please come in. I spent several hours with your friend, Control. I hope our stories matched."

"I will take care of Control if he bothers you more," McCall said flatly. He stopped abruptly when he saw who was lying on the sofa.

"'You'll take care of Control?' I want to be there." Mickey raised a now-uncovered eyebrow. "Hello, McCall."

"Feeling better, Mickey?" McCall asked seriously.

The young man shrugged carefully. "A bit."

"We couldn't keep him down," Catherine murmured. "So, Vincent brought him up there this morning when he was asleep."

"That sounds normal." McCall turned to face her. "You heard about Perez?"

"I saw it in the today's paper."

"Despite his injuries, he is going to stand trial. The children are safe with their aunt."

"So it ends," Catherine sighed.

McCall walked over to Kostmeyer. "Well, friend, it's time we saw Warnick."

Kostmeyer squinted up, not moving. "Who was the other doctor, McCall? He sounded like you."

"He's just a friend of mine," McCall said calmly. "Someone who's... retired."

Kostmeyer pulled a face. "Warnick'll stick me full of pins and in bed for three weeks. I'll miss the playoffs."

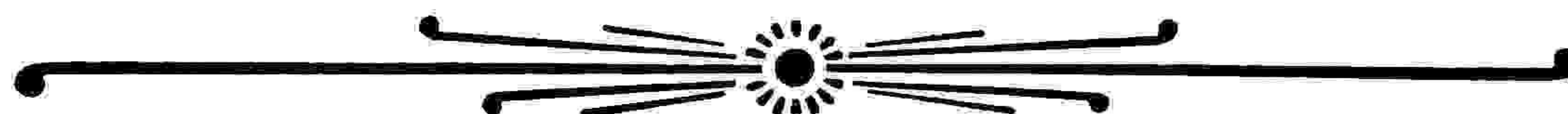
"Don't be a baby," McCall advised dryly.

They exchanged grins, and Kostmeyer leaned heavily on him as he rose. He turned his head towards Catherine. "I haven't any idea of what happened, Ms. Chandler,, but... thank you."

"Yes, I agree," McCall echoed. "We owe you quite a bit, Ms. Chandler,. Someday we must do something to repay you." His words encompassed the entire situation and the Tunnels in that offer.

Catherine smiled. "You're very welcome."

After she closed the door, she laughed. If she read McCall right, he could be one of the most powerful helpers they would ever have. And God help them if the Tunnels ever needed him!



TIME TREK

by Mrs. Hoffman's 5th Grade Class of 1968

This play has never been performed. It was submitted to us by Carol Salemi whose brother Michael was a member of this class. As far as the editors of CrossSignals can determine, the stage is set-up with the Time Tunnel Complex in the foreground and the view through the tunnel in the background. Scene changes can be accomplished through lighting effects. We have taken the liberty of creating a character list.

Characters

Time Tunnel:	Tony Newman	Doug Phillips	General Kirk
	Ann	Ray	
Star Trek:	Captain Kirk	Spock	Dr. McCoy
	Scotty	Navigator	Lieutenant
	Yeoman		
Other:	Announcer/Intercom/Radio/Voice	Lady	
	Man	Sonny	Girl
	Guard	Guard1	Guard2
	Colonists	Women Colonists	
	Little Old Ladies		

Act I.

(Scene I. Closed Curtain.)

ANNOUNCER (OFFSTAGE) Finally, two stations have combined shows. Channel 4's Star Trek joins up with Channel 7's The Time Tunnel. Now Channel 5 1/2 brings you Time Trek.

(Scene II. Time Tunnel Complex)

(ANN, DOUG, RAY, GENERAL KIRK, AND TONY ARE THERE. NORMAL ROUTINE IS GOING ON. NO SPEAKING.)

ANNOUNCER (OFFSTAGE) Welcome to the Time Tunnel. This is the Time Tunnel complex. The scientists here have just been informed that if they don't send someone back or ahead in time soon, Congress will not give them the money needed to complete the project. What Congress doesn't know is that the tunnel isn't perfected yet. This has disturbed Tony Newman, the number two man on the project greatly. He decides that for the sake of the project, he will test the tunnel. Late that night,

Carol Salemi

Tony sets the controls and sends himself through the Time Tunnel. He lands on the Titanic one day before it crashes! Doug Phillips, the number one man on the project, decides to go back and help Tony. Unfortunately, they can't be brought back to their own time. So begins a series of exciting adventures for Tony Newman and Doug Phillips. This has been a special follow-up to the following show brought to you by this station.

(DURING THE ENDING, ALL PEOPLE EXIT STAGE EXCEPT TONY AND DOUG. TONY AND DOUG ENTER TIME TUNNEL.)

TAPE Two American scientists are lost in the swirling maze of past and future ages, during the first experiments on America's greatest and most secret project, the Time Tunnel. Tony Newman and Doug Phillips now tumble helplessly toward a new, fantastic adventure somewhere along the infinite corridors of time. (CURTAIN CLOSES)

(Scene III. Closed curtain)

LADY Detergent, bleach, water softener. Today is my favorite day. I get to do the laundry!

VOICE Stuck with the nastiest job in the house.

LADY (NODS AND SAYS) Yes.

VOICE Make it Bubbly-Wubbly! (A BOX IS HELD FROM LEFT SIDE OF STAGE. LADY IS SURPRISED, DROPS STUFF, RUNS, AND GETS BOX.) Bubbly-Wubbly gets your clothes so clean you won't know they're yours. (SHEET IS HELD OUT. LADY TAKES IT AND LOOKS AT IT.) Remember our slogan. "If it's a dirty job, make it a Bubbly-Wubbly job!" (LADY EXITS.)

Act II.

(Scene I. Time Tunnel Complex)

GENERAL Have you established a time fix yet, Ann?

ANN The reading is 2200 A.D. Sometime in late June. The 21st or 22nd.

RAY That means that Tony and Doug are over 200 years in the future!

ANN Look what's on my control screen!

GENERAL It looks like some kind of space ship!

RAY Ann, try and get an image.

ANN I'm locked on Tony and Doug's signal. There, look at the tunnel screen.

GENERAL Let's listen to what's going on.

(SCENE II. U.S.S. Enterprise)

KIRK Where could those two men from intergalactic headquarters be!

YEOMAN They just arrived, sir.

KIRK Spock, brief them on their mission.

(TONY AND DOUG DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO, SO THEY GO ALONG.)

SPOCK Gentlemen, our mission is to regain control of the Talos VI Colony.

TONY Who took over Talos VI?

SPOCK L.O.L.O.R.U.! The organization of little old ladies trying to rule the universe.

LIEUT. (WALKS OVER) As you know, L.O.L.O.R.U. stands for the Little Old Ladies Organization to Rule the Universe.

DOUG How do we plan to regain control?

SPOCK I'm sorry. Only Captain Kirk can answer that question.
(TONY, DOUG, AND SPOCK WALK OVER TO KIRK.)

TONY We'd like to know what our plan is.

KIRK We know that L.O.L.O.R.U. is up to something. We plan to find out what it is. Then we plan to stop them.

DOUG But how??

KIRK That's where you two come in. Since they have space scanners outside the planet, we can't take the ship within ten space miles of the planet. They have a force field up, but we found a way to by-pass it. We will be able to beam you down to the surface of the planet.

(Scene III. Time Tunnel Complex)

ANN What did they mean by "beam you down"?

RAY I studied something about that in college. Scientist
are developing a way to change any solid object into
radio beams and beam it to any other place. All they
have to do is get the coordinates of the place, lock on
them, and activate the control.

GENERAL You mean they can send the radio beams to any place and
change them back to a solid object when the radio beams
have reached their destination?

RAY Yes, that's the idea.

ANN They must have perfected that technique by then or they
wouldn't use it on people.

GENERAL Let's get back to listening to them.

(Scene IV. U.S.S. Enterprise)

KIRK Yeoman, bring me the map of Talos VI.

YEOMAN Here it is Cap'n. (YEOMAN BRINGS MAP. KIRK SPREADS IT
OUT IN FRONT OF THEM.)

INTERCOM (OFFSTAGE) Captain Kirk, you're wanted in the
transporter room.

KIRK Mr. Spock.

SPOCK Yes, Captain.

KIRK Show them the location of each building. I'll be right
back.

SPOCK Yes sir. (KIRK EXITS. SPOCK POINTS TO A BUILDING ON
THE MAP.) This is the Headquarters, this is the dining
room, kitchen, and first aid building. This is
L.O.L.O.R.U.'s living quarters. This is the prisoners'
living quarters.

DOUG Who are the prisoners? (KIRK RETURNS.)

SCOTTY (WALKS OVER) The colonists who built the Talos VI
colony are. When L.O.L.O.R.U. took over, they made the
colonists their prisoners.

SPOCK Thank you, Mr. Scott. You two will beam down first.
We will join you after you signal us.

TONY Who is in the landing party?

SPOCK The ship's doctor, Yeoman, Lieutenant, Scotty, Captain Kirk, and myself.

KIRK (COMES OVER) The first thing you are to do is destroy the scanner, the force field, and the jamming controls. Next, call us and will move in closer. The third thing is to get the weapons that will be beamed down with you to the colonists. Tell them to wait for our signal and then attack. Call us again and the landing party will beam down for the attack.

NAVIGATOR We are going into orbit of Talos VI, Captain.

KIRK Good. (TO TONY AND DOUG) Go the transporter room and prepare to beam down. You will find the proper clothing waiting for you there.

KIRK & SPOCK Good luck.

(Scene V. Closed curtain)

MAN We are going to ask children why they like our new cereal, Brand X. (WALKS OVER TO LITTLE BOY.) Why do you like Brand X, sonny?

SONNY Knock it off, daddyo. Everyone knows I dig Brand X the most. It's groovy man, groovy.

MAN Oh my! Maybe this little girl has a better reason. Why do you like Brand X?

GIRL I like it because it tickles my tongue when I eat it.

MAN Dear me! Well anyway, remember Brand X is full of vitamins and minerals. And you get a special surprise inside it. Another important thing is that it gets your cereal bowls bright.

Act III.
(Scene I. Talos VI)

DOUG So this is what Talos VI looks like.

TONY Let's hide the weapons behind that rock. (HE POINTS.) We can retrieve them later to give to the colonists.

DOUG That's a good idea, Tony. (THEY DO IT.) The scanner, force field, and jamming controls are in that building. (HE POINTS OFFSTAGE.)

TONY There's a guard. I'll take care of him while you destroy the controls.

DOUG There might be more than one inside. Think you can handle them?

TONY I'll have to take that chance.

DOUG Okay. But be careful.

(TONY KAYO'S GUARD. DOUG GOES OFFSTAGE AND PLANTS BOMB. CONTROL BLOWS UP. ALARM GOES OFF. DOUG RETURNS. GUARDS COME OUT OF BUILDING.)

HD GUARD Set your phasers on paralyze. (PAUSE) Fire! (TONY AND DOUG FREEZE.)

(Scene II. Time Tunnel Complex)

ANN What did they do to them?

GENERAL They must have been paralyzed.

RAY It was probably the beams of light from those guns that did it.

ANN Do you think they'll come out of it?

GENERAL All we can do is hope.

(ALL PEOPLE FREEZE. MAN RUSHES ON STAGE.)

MAN We interrupt this program to bring you a special news bulletin. A waiter has dropped a dinner and caused an international crisis. It is the downfall of Turkey, the overflow of Greece, and the destruction of China. Now we return you to Time Trek. For further information, stay tuned for the 11:15 and 5 seconds news.

(MAN EXITS. ALL UNFREEZE EXCEPT FOR TONY AND DOUG.)

(Scene III. Talos VI)

GUARD 1 What was all that about?

GUARD 2 Who knows? I think it's your line.

GUARD 1 Thanks a lot. They won't be bothering us for a while.

HD GUARD Let's go me. (GUARDS LEAVE.)

(Scene IV. Time Tunnel Complex)

ANN We've got to try and bring them back so we can help them.

RAY It's too risky. We might kill them.

ANN We've GOT to try.

GENERAL She's right. Activate the controls.

(ANN AND RAY ACTIVATE THE CONTROLS. LIGHTS GO OUT FOR 8 SECONDS. TUNNEL FLASHES ON AND OFF.)

GENERAL What happened?

RAY Their paralyzed state made it impossible for us to transfer them.

ANN But look! They're not paralyzed any more.

GENERAL Thank goodness for that. Start recharging just in case we have to transfer them again.

(Scene V. Talos VI)

DOUG What happened? I feel like I was hit on the head with something.

TONY Me, too. I think those guns paralyzed us. Funny though, I could hear and see everything that was going on, but I couldn't move.

DOUG The tunnel must've tried to transfer us. Instead, they made us normal again.

TONY I'll call the ship and tell them it's okay to come in closer. (TONY TAKES OUT RADIO.) Captain, we've destroyed the controls.

KIRK (OFFSTAGE) Well done. Get those weapons to the colonists. Call us then and we will beam down the landing party.

TONY Okay.

KIRK (OFFSTAGE) Kirk out. (TONY PUTS RADIO AWAY.)

DOUG Let's go get them. (TONY AND DOUG RETRIEVE WEAPONS FROM BEHIND ROCK.)

TONY The colonists are over there. (TONY AND DOUG ARE HALF ON / HALF OFF STAGE.) I'll unlock the door. Bring those weapons, Doug.

DOUG Okay. (PRISONERS START TO TALK.)

TONY We've come to help you. Just be quiet. (NOISE AS WEAPONS ARE GIVEN OUT) Wait for our signal. When we give it, start to attack.

DOUG All the women and children stay here. You'll be beamed up in a little while.

M COLONIST We'll do just as you say. But how can we believe you?

TONY Just trust us. That's all anyone can do.

W COLONIST Thank goodness you've come.

TONY Call the ship, Doug.

DOUG (GETS OUT RADIO) Beam down the landing party, Captain.

KIRK (OFFSTAGE) We'll be down in a minute.

(KIRK, SPOCK, MCCOY, SCOTTY, LIEUTENANT, AND YEOMAN ENTER FROM LEFT SIDE OF STAGE BY TUNNEL.)

KIRK Congratulations! So far everything is going perfectly.

SPOCK Very illogical.

MCCOY Spock, you're driving me mad with that word.

SPOCK (CALMLY) Dr. McCoy, there is no need to raise your voice.

YEOMAN What did you mean by very illogical, Mr. Spock?

SPOCK Didn't it occur to you that L.O.L.O.R.U. should have detected us by now? I think they should be out here.

KIRK I was wondering about that too, Mr. Spock.

TONY They must be planning to take us by surprise.

KIRK Take cover. I'll give the signal to attack. Colonists, start the attack! (MEN COLONISTS RUSH OUT. ALARM RINGS. L.O.L.O.R.U. RUSHES OUT.) Put your phasers on stun. Fire! (ONE LITTLE OLD LADY FALLS. EVERYONE ELSE IS DODGING PHASERS.)

(Scene VI. Time Tunnel Complex)

ANN We've got to get them out of there. They'll be killed!

RAY General, we don't have enough power.

GENERAL How long will it be till we have enough power?

RAY I'll go check. (EXITS)

ANN (WATCHING FIGHT THROUGH TUNNEL) Hurry, Ray!

RAY (RETURNING) It will take about four minutes, General.

(Scene VII. Talos VI)

LIEUT. Captain, should I tell the Enterprise to beam up the women and children?

KIRK By all means, Lieutenant.

LIEUT. (PULLS OUT RADIO) Start beaming up the women and children.

RADIO (OFFSTAGE) Right away. Enterprise out.

SCOTTY We've got to do something about this, Captain.

KIRK I agree. But what?

(DOUG GETS UP TO SHOOT. LITTLE OLD LADY GETS UP TO SHOOT DOUG.)

(Scene VIII. Time Tunnel Complex)

GENERAL Activate the control.

ANN Yes, sir. (SHE DOES.) We've picked up the wrong person.

(DISORIENTED LITTLE OLD LADY IS IN TUNNEL.)

GENERAL Ray, keep the tunnel activated. I'll try and drive her back into it. (HE DOES.)

(Scene IX. Talos VI)

SPOCK Very illogical!

KIRK What happened?

MCCOY She just disappeared!

TONY We'll explain that later.

(LITTLE OLD LADY APPEARS AGAIN. TONY AND DOUG BOTH
SHOOT HER. SHE SCREAMS!)

MCCOY (LEANING OVER HER) She's dead, Jim. The force of both
phasers killed her. (ALL THE LITTLE OLD LADIES CROWD
AROUND HER.)

KIRK & SPOCK Okay. Come with us.

KIRK (TO TONY AND DOUG) You've completed your mission well.
So long.

TONY I have one last question, Captain. Have you ever heard
of the Time Tunnel or Tony Newman and Doug Phillips?

SPOCK Yes, I have.

DOUG Did they ever get back to their own time?

(Scene X. Time Tunnel Complex)

ANN General, I can't hold the fix!

GENERAL You can't lose it. We must know the answer to that
question.

ANN It's slipping already.

GENERAL Transfer them then. (SHE DOES.)

(Scene XI. Talos VI)

RADIO (OFFSTAGE) Captain, the men from intergalactic H.Q.
are here.

Spock Captain, I believe those two were Tony Newman and Doug
Phillips.

KIRK You could be right, Mr. Spock. You could be right.
Come on. Let's go.

FINIS

A BLAKE BY ANY OTHER FAME

Darkness, like black cotton, concealed the figure that crept on silent feet, boots not scuffing the damp rock. A shadow within shadows, Vincent approached the source of the disturbance, the voice that mumbled up ahead.

Carefully peering around a corner, he saw a man with curly brown hair sitting against the rock wall, some sort of pistol in his hand, facing two men in uniform.

What was happening? He couldn't remember. But Narcissa had said... What was it? He'd wanted to meet ...

"Actually, Servalan will reward us quite well for your head," stated one of the uniformed men.

What was that? Were they going to kill him?

"I suppose she would, but one of you will die if you try to shoot me. I might even manage to kill the other. Think about it, gentlemen."

... He'd wanted to meet the poet. Yes, the one of dark verse, whose dark apocalyptic visions sometimes disturbed and sometimes amused him. What was the name?

Light flared as the uniformed ones tried to bring some sort of rifles to bear. The man on the ground was rolling and Vincent could see that he was wounded. One of the uniformed men fell as a flash of light speared from the man's pistol.

What sort of weapons were these?

"Backup, we need you now! Withdrawing envelopment, execute."

The speaker was running back toward Vincent, who grabbed him and threw him against a far wall. The man fell unconscious and Vincent checked to make sure he wasn't seriously hurt. But what was happening now? There were more footsteps. The tunnels were full of outsiders! If he could only remember! He'd asked Narcissa about the poet. The poet named ...

"Blake! Surrender and we'll take you back alive! You can't win!"

"Come and get me! Your precious leader isn't taking me this easily!"

Vincent saw the remaining men, four of them, clustered at

Eric Blackburn



the far end of the tunnel. He decided to help the wounded man.

Picking up the fallen soldier's rifle, he examined it for a minute.

Yes, that had to be the trigger. Now he aimed, making sure that his shots wouldn't come close to the team who were stalking their victim.

He fired and flashes of light sent the men diving for the floor, looking for cover. Then he turned and fled, making sure that they could see him first. Within seconds, they were in full pursuit.

Vincent ran, ducking down side tunnels, climbing ladders, making enough noise to keep his pursuers interested. When he felt that they were far enough away, he circled back to where his unaware ally waited.

The man walked beneath him as Vincent crouched on a ledge.

"Blake!"

The man whirled, pistol searching for a target.

"No, I'm on your side."

The man looked up, his eyes widening at the sight of the leonine figure above him.

"The soldiers are lost in the tunnels. I'm going to help you escape."

The man climbed up beside him.

"I didn't know Beta Cannae Four had native people.

"What are you talking about?"

"Aren't you indigenous? Or are you a new species? Are you

fighting the Federation?"

"What federation? Where do you think you are?"

"In a cave on Beta Cannae Four. I ducked in here to get away from those Federation troops. I didn't count on their following me. Who are you?"

"My name is Vincent. I've never heard of Beta Cannae Four. You're in the tunnels beneath Manhattan."

"What, Earth?"

"The last I remember."

"You're hiding from Servalan?"

"Who?"

"Servalan. The tyrant. The President of the Federation."

Vincent looked at the man, looking for other signs of instability. The man seemed sane, other than his odd fixation on imaginary places and things. Suddenly Vincent began to have an idea of what was happening. He began to chuckle.

"What's so funny?"

"I understand now. I've heard of people playing these games, but never in New York. Ah, my poor friend, you need help. You can't distinguish reality from fantasy."

"I bloody well can!"

"You think that you're on another planet, some sort of fugitive, with enemy soldiers chasing you with ray guns."

"That's about the size of it."

"Oh, that poor man I hit. I didn't realize it was a game."

"Oh, you did that? Nice job."

"Come. I have to get you to the surface. You need help."

"I sure do. I have to get back to the ship."

"Serious help." Vincent started down a tunnel.

"Not that way. I came in over here."

Vincent decided to humor him. They walked along another passage, water dripping from the ceiling.

"And I was hoping to meet Blake."

"I am Blake."

"No, I mean the poet. The man who wrote the Book of Urizen. The man who wrote about Los and Enitharmon, Orc and Rintrah."

"Bloody hell! Yes! They're the ones I came to meet."

"What?"

"Leaders of the resistance on Beta Cannae Four. Urizen, Los and Vala! Now, she's a cute one!"

"Vala?"

"Yes. Good tech, also."

Vincent shook his head. They rounded a corner and he found himself looking out on an alien landscape where a swollen red sun sat beside a tiny red one in a green tinged sky, sharp spires of some blue glassy substance casting eerie double shadows on the purple sand.

There was an explosion beside their heads and footsteps running down the tunnel behind

them. Blake turned and fired while Vincent dove for cover. Blake ran out of the cave mouth while Vincent crouched beside the wall. Three men came running around the corner. Two followed Blake while one pointed his rifle at Vincent.

"Alright, you, on your feet!"

Vincent looked at the hole in the wall where the bolt from the rifle had hit. Then he looked at the weapon in the man's hands.

It was too much.

Blake came running back into the cave, his odd clothing smoldering from a few new burns, and looked at a snarling Vincent holding over his head a Federation soldier whose rifle was bent around his neck.

"Er, uh, that way," said Blake, pointing outside.

"Not bad," he continued, "a good twenty feet. Tell you what. Come with me. We can always use another person to help the Cause."

"I'm going home."

"Look, I don't know why you think you're on Earth, but don't worry about it. We all have problems. Why, one of my crew is a kleptomaniac and my second in command is a complete psychopath. All you have are some navigational problems."

"I don't know how, but New York's at the other end of this tunnel. I'm going there."

"You're sure you want to?"

"Yes."

"Well, good luck then."

"You, too."

Vincent walked off
muttering.

"Tyger, Tyger, burning
bright," whispered Blake.

Vincent stepped back inside
the cave, walked a few steps,
and turned to look back. The
cave mouth was gone, the tunnel
ending five feet in front of
him. He shrugged. "I've got to
stop having Catherine bring down
those spicy burritos."

Blake watched his furry
benefactor walk back into the
cave. He turned away and pulled
out his communicator. When he

looked back, the cave was gone.
He walked up to it and ran his
hands across solid rock.

"Avon, this is Blake."

"Oh, piss off!"

"Avon, I'm sorry you
couldn't kill anyone."

"You were killing
Federation troops down there!"

"Yes, I know. I didn't
expect them or I'd have invited
you along."

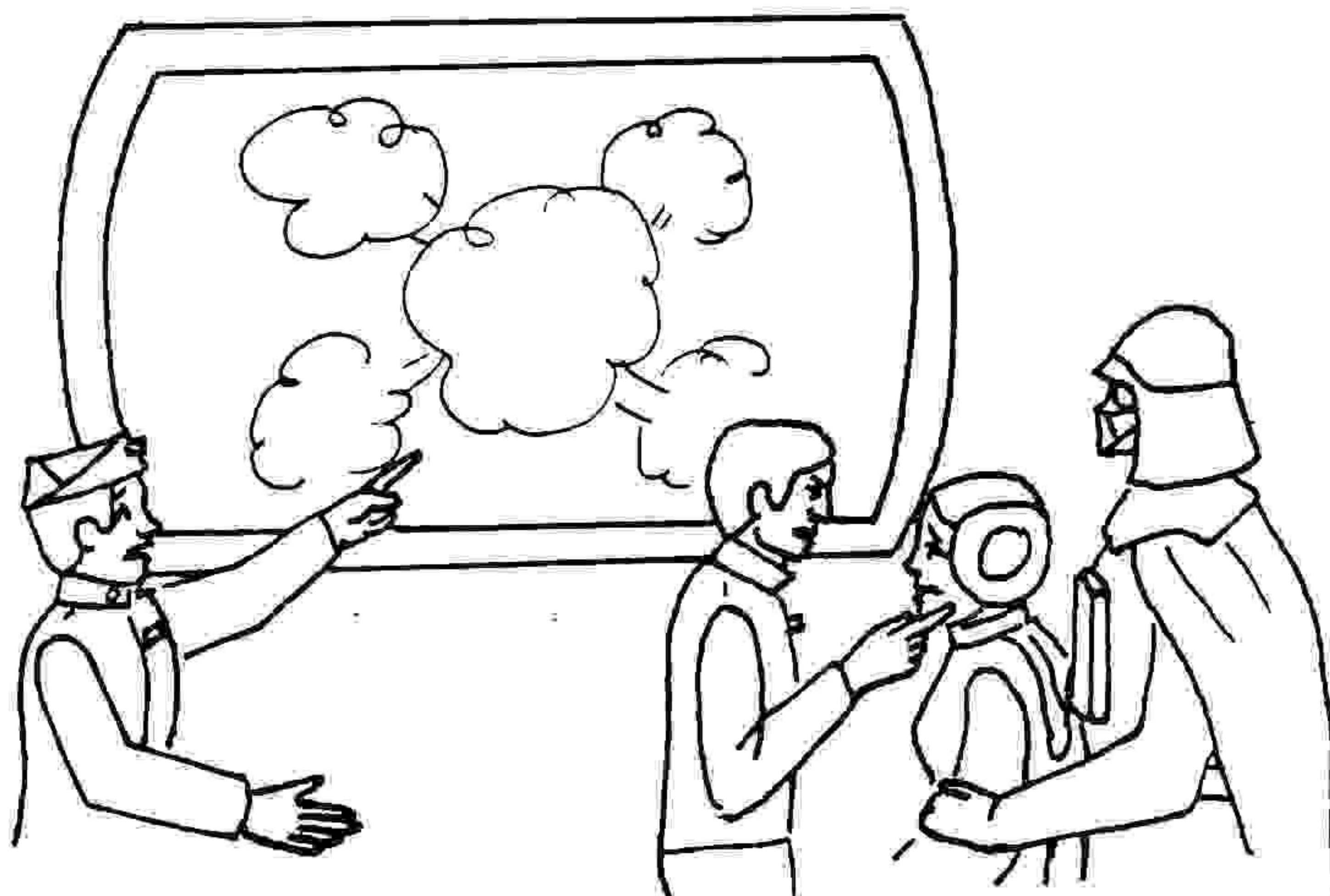
"Sure, you would!"

"Really, Avon. Anyway, I've
decided. No more of those things
you call 'burritos'. I've just
had the strangest hallucination!"

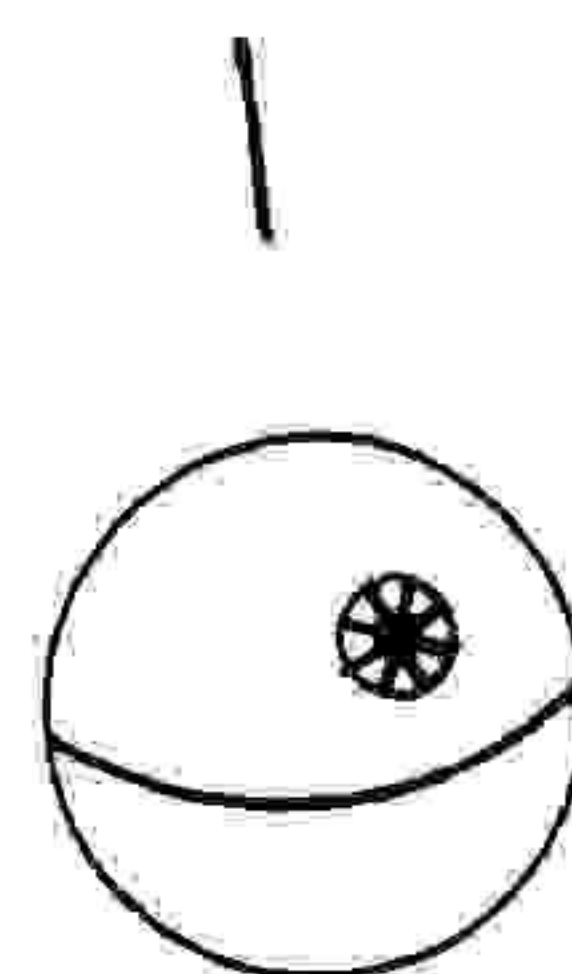


GOVERNOR!

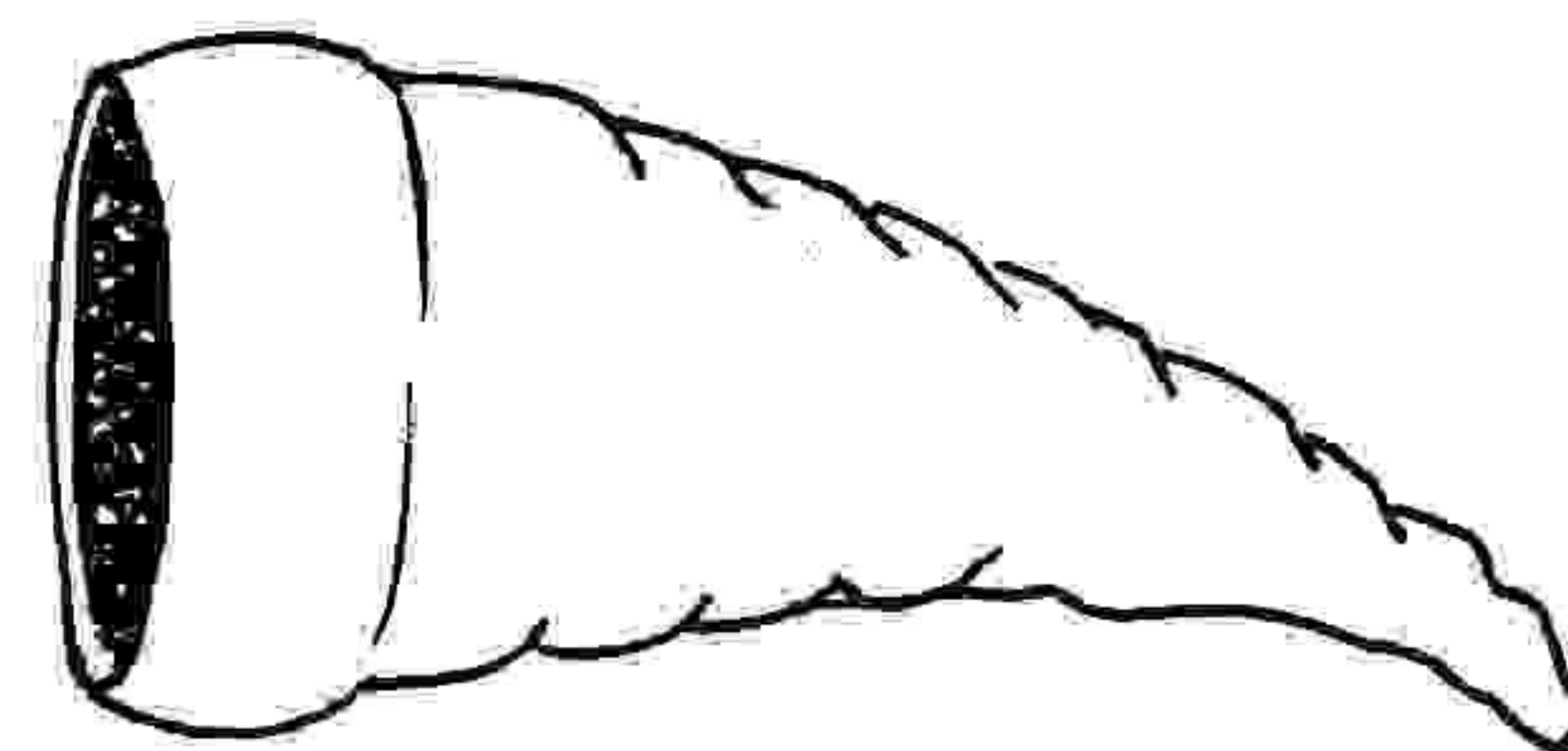
SOMETHING JUST DESTROYED
ALDERAAN BEFORE WE COULD!



WHAT?!



HMM, DESSERT!



Amor
8208.31

CHEAP TREKS



The artist would like to apologize to the Cheap Treks crew for the poor likenesses, but the time was late and the video tape was fuzzy.

JUPITER 2, ENTERPRISE O

Paul Balzé Tom Chafin

David Keefer Lance Woods

Editors' Notes:

This play was performed once at Shore Leave 10 in Hunt Valley, Maryland on July 10, 1988. Con goers had been told that the play was entitled "Mudd Ado About Nothing."

The cast for that performance was as follows:

Captain Jean-Luc Picard	David Keefer
Wesley Crusher	Charles Saffer
Computer (VO)	Lance Woods
Dr. Beverly Crusher (VO)	Geraldine Sylvester
Lt. Geordi La Forge	Winchell Chung
Commander Data	John Sheeler
Deanna Troi	Sharon Palmer
Professor John Robinson	Tom Chafin
Major Don West	Chrisopher Dullnig
Will Robinson	Charles Saffer
Dr. Zachary Smith	Paul Balzé
Lt. Tasha Yar	Katrin Wheatley
Lt. Worf	Chuck Coates
Commander Will Riker	Daniel Coggins
Romulan Commander (VO)	Lance Woods
Q	Eric Burch
Judy Robinson	Mary Keefer
Older Wesley	Lance Woods
Announcer (VO)	Lance Woods
ALF (VO)	Daniel Coggins

If lines were forgotten, the player would unabashedly ask to see the "Fuel Report", "Technical Manual", or "Wine List." (This has become something of a tradition with Cheap Trek plays.)

WARNING:

The people who performed this play are unpaid amateurs.
Professionals, please do not attempt this at home.

(THE STAGE IS DARK.)

PICARD (VO) Ship's Log, Stardate 8807.10: It has just not been my day aboard the Enterprise. I find myself vexed by two poxes: a malfunctioning sonic shaver, which has left me uncharacteristically fuzzy, and, of course, Acting Ensign Wesley Crusher. Engineering is taking care of my sonic shaver ... while I finally take care of the little shaver.

(LIGHTS UP ON BRIDGE)

(PICARD enters stage left, followed by WESLEY. Aside from them, the bridge is deserted. PICARD is enraged.)

PICARD What the hell is going on here?! Where is the crew??

WESLEY Everything's fine, sir. The ship's on automatic pilot.

PICARD Fine, boy?! There's nobody here! There will be court-martials for Christmas this year, by God!

WESLEY Excuse me, sir, but Starfleet Regulation 1098, Article 765, Section 432, Paragraph 1 states, quote, "Auto-pilot is cool," unquote.

PICARD (Stewing) So now you're an expert on Starfleet Regulations, eh?

WESLEY Oh, I've always known everything about Starfleet Regs, sir, but I didn't want to say anything. Regulation 123, Article 456, Section 789, states, quote, "Never make an ass out of your Captain," unquote.

PICARD Very well, Badly Acting Ensign Crusher. Since you're so smart, you can demonstrate how the ship's airlock works.

(PICARD starts to lead WESLEY to the stage right edge of the bridge.)

WESLEY (as they move) The airlock, sir? Are you feeling okay?

PICARD I'll feel much better after your demonstration, I assure you. Go on, Mister Wizard.

WESLEY (Confidently) Computer, open inner hatch.

(FX: HATCH OPENING)

COMPUTER Inner hatch open.

(WESLEY exits stage right into the "airlock")

WESLEY (Offstage) Computer, close inner hatch!

(FX: HATCH CLOSING)

COMPUTER Inner hatch clo--

PICARD (cutting off computer) Computer, open outer hatch!

COMPUTER Outer hatch open.

WESLEY (Offstage) Hey, what the -- GAAAA!

(FX: HATCH OPENING, TEENAGER GETTING SUCKED INTO DEEP SPACE.)

PICARD Computer, close outer hatch!

COMPUTER Outer hatch closed.

PICARD Thank you, Majel.

COMPUTER Thank you, Captain.

(FX: COMMUNICATOR HAILING SIGNAL)

CHRUSHER This is Doctor Crusher, sir. I'm looking for my son.
Have you seen him?

(PICARD takes a moment to try and think his way out of this one.)

PICARD I believe Wesley's gone for a little walk, Doctor.
Yes, the last time I saw him, he looked as if he could
use some fresh air.

(DATA, TROI, and GEORDI enter stage left. GEORDI is not wearing
his visor and is feeling his way around.)

GEORDI Okay, guys, I give up already! Where'd you hide --
(brushing against TROI's hair)
Aha!

(GEORDI reaches into TROI's hair and pulls out his visor, which
she's been using as a comb. HE puts it on, then looks at
everyone strangely.)

GEORDI Why are you guys walking on the ceiling?

(GEORDI removes the visor, flips it, puts it on again, and
smiles with relief as he takes his station.)

PICARD Troi! La Forge! Data! Where have you been?

DATA We were trying to find out who reprogrammed the
holodeck, sir.

PICARD Have you found the culprit?

DATA Negative, sir.

PICARD Do so. I've already started building a plank.

TROI Sir, the new program has bolstered morale among the crew.

PICARD Holographic or not, Counselor, I'll have no "Leather Goddesses of Phobos" running about my ship! Present heading, gentlemen?

DATA (Taking his station) On course at warp two, sir.

GEORDI We are now running parallel to the Romulan Neutral Zone, Captain.

PICARD Indeed, but I doubt we'll be seeing any trouble.
(to audience) Makes you wonder how I ever made Captain, doesn't it?

(FX: RED ALERT KLAXON)

TROI Captain, I sense danger!

PICARD What tipped you?

GEORDI I'm picking up an old-style radio signal, sir -- from inside the Neutral Zone. It's a distress call!

PICARD Sounds like a Romulan trap.

GEORDI Actually, it sounds more like, "Get us the hell out of here!"

DATA Confirmed, sir. The signal originates from a starship of older design. Sensors cannot make out her markings at this range, but she is powerless and surrounded by Romulan warships.

PICARD We can't go in to investigate without violating the treaty. Can we use the tractor beam from here?

DATA Negative, sir, but we are within transport range.

PICARD See here, how is it we're out of sensor range, we're out of tractor beam range, but we are within beaming range?!!

DATA I try not to think about it, sir. Helps me sleep better at night.

PICARD (Touching insignia) This is the -- SOMEBODY TURN OFF THAT DAMNED ALARM!

OFFSTAGE Okay!

(FX: KLAXON OUT)

PICARD This is the captain! First Officer, report to the transporter room! WE're having guests! Bring them to the bridge at once!

TROI Hmm ... an unidentified starship.

GEORDI Of older design.

DATA Sending a radio signal.

EVERYONE (without mystery) I wonder who they could be ...

(RIKER enters stage left and starts to cross towards PICARD)

PICARD Number One! Has the crew of that ship beamed aboard?

(RIKER does not answer. He starts to speak
HE stares at her with a ridiculous leer. TROI
"reads his mind," then, with a look of offense, slaps his face.)

(PICARD passes RIKER, crosses to stage left)

PICARD Bloody hell ... (calls offstage) I am Jean-Luc Picard, captain of the starship Enterprise!

(PROFESSOR JOHN ROBINSON enters stage left, followed by
MAJOR DON WEST, and WILL ROBINSON as he announces them.)

JOHN How do you do, Captain? I'm Professor John Robinson of the Jupiter Two. This is our pilot, Major Don West, my son Will --

(DR. ZACHARY SMITH bolts in, stage left, SCREAMING in terror, dropping to his knees at PICARD's feet and kissing his boots.)

JOHN And, yeah, Doctor Zachary Smith.

(PICARD and his crew exchange looks for a long moment, then EVERYONE in the crew lets out a SCREAM!)

(BLACKOUT)

(MUSIC: ST-TNG THEME)

(SLIDE: CHEAP TREKS PRESENTS ...)

(SLIDE: CHEAP TREKS: THE NEXT GENERATION)

(SLIDE: TONIGHT'S EPISODE: "JUPITER TWO, ENTERPRISE 0")

(SLIDE: CREDITS)

(LIGHTS UP ON BRIDGE)

(All is as it was a moment ago. YAR enters stage left, accompanied by Worf, who is at the end of a leash in her grasp, GROWLING at SMITH)

YAR We heard the alert, Captain! What's wrong?

PICARD We are ... (looking at SMITH curiously) ... secure for the moment, Lieutenant Yar.

YAR Aye, sir. (to Worf) Sit!

(Worf casually stands up, crosses to his station, and sits down. YAR assumes her post as well.)

SMITH (Standing) Oh, thank you, Captain Picard! Thank you for rescuing us! You don't know how long it's been since we've seen friendly faces!

(PICARD is frowning at him.)

SMITH (Continuing) Of course, had you not happened upon us, I, as usual, would have been called upon to save our hardy band from those terrible --

(As SMITH speaks, TROI moves towards DON unassumingly. RIKER watches this, displeased.)

DON I hate you, Smith. I've always hated you. I wish you were dead and I wish I could be the one to beat you to a bloody pulp and rip off your -- (glancing at TROI, noticing her "endowments") -- yo.

PICARD This is Counselor Deanna Troi. My First Officer, Commander Riker. Security Chief Yar and Lieutenant Worf.

YAR Hello. (to Worf) Speak!

Worf Worf, Worf.

(YAR gives Worf a treat.)

PICARD Lieutenant La Forge from Earth, and Lieutenant Commander Data from Mattel.

WILL (Impressed) He's swell!

(DON continues to eye TROI throughout the introductions. TROI appears interested, until she "reads him." SHE looks at him -- more shocked than she looked after reading RIKER. DON smiles at her. SHE slaps him.)

PICARD The Counselor can read minds, Major.

GEORDI (aside) I could have read his mind without my visor!

RIKER (barging in between TROI and DON) Hey, if anyone on this ship gets slapped by the lady, it'll be me, pal!

DON Oh, yeah?!

RIKER That's right! She slapped me first!

DON She slapped me hardest!

RIKER Did not!

DON Did, too!

(A brawl ensues. They fight their way towards stage left.)

TROI (watching the fight) Ooh, Commander Riker! You should have been a professional boxer!

RIKER What are you?! A guidance counselor?!

(RIKER and DON grapple their way off stage left.)

PICARD Those boobs!

JOHN (glancing at TROI) Very nice, yes, but I wouldn't fight over them.

TROI (to PICARD) Believe it or not --
(SHE turns to JOHN, slaps him, then turns to PICARD, and resumes) Believe it or not, sir, I sense a great deal of pleasure coming from their conflict. (smiles) I'm going to enjoy watching this. Excuse me. (hurries offstage.)

PICARD Now, then, Professor, shall we discuss what your ship was doing in the middle of the Romulan Neutral Zone?

JOHN It was an accident, Captain. I'm afraid our engines were repaired too well by my son, here.

WORF (stands) The boy? (sits)

WILL Gee, Dad, I was only trying to help.

JOHN (kneeling by WILL being fatherly) Now, Will, ...you remember what happened when you were "only trying to help" before we crashed on the Planet of the Electronic Porcupines?

WILL (angrily) Yeah, and I wouldn't have had anything to do

then if Doctor Smith hadn't slapped a refrigerator magnet on the astrogator and thrown us off course!

SMITH Bah! The very idea! Who are you going to believe, Professor? Me or --

WORF (stands) The boy? (sits)

JOHN You got it.

(DON enters, partially, from stage left)

DON I HATE YOU, SMI--

(RIKER jumps him and pulls him off the stage)

SMITH (to JOHN, PICARD) I assure you, gentlemen, those desperate shenanigans are behind me now that we have been rescued and will soon be on our way back to beautiful Earth!

PICARD I'm afraid you won't be going back to Earth immediately, Doctor Smith. You'll have to be reacquainted with Earth society. You'll be staying at a Federation Starbase until that's taken care of.

SMITH Indeed! And how long will that take?

PICARD Oh, roughly....years.

SMITH YEARS?! This is preposterous! I demand to be returned to Earth this very instant!

DATA That is not possible, Doctor. Earth is well out of range of our transporters, and --

SMITH Silence, you famished facsimile for a bubble-headed booby!

DATA (maintaining patience) Sir, please be advised that, should you refer to me in those terms again, I shall be compelled to "clean your clock".

WILL He's sorry, Mister Data, sir. You have to understand: Dr. Smith's a jerk.

(FX: KLAXON)

GEORDI Captain, se-nsors are picking up a spacecraft coming up from behind, headed for the Neutral Zone.

DATA The ship is unmarked, sir. It appears to be white and ovular in shape, like... like an egg?

GEORDI One life form reading aboard her, sir.

PICARD Open hailing frequencies.

YAR Open, Sir.

(V.O)

Q Na-noo, na-noo!!

YAR Your orders regarding the egg, Captain?

(A brief pause)

PICARD Scramble that transmission! Lock photon torpedoes!

YAR Aye, Sir!

PICARD Shell him!

(FX: PHOTON TORPEDOES FIRING)

GEORDI We fried him, Sir!

PICARD Well, that was over easy.

YAR Serves him right for poaching in the Neutral Zone.

SMITH (to PICARD) My compliments, Sir. You were so brave, so fearless, so assured of victory!

PICARD Of course, Doctor. In battle, I always keep my sunny side up.

JOHN Enough with the damn egg! This yoke's wearing thin!

SMITH Oh, the pain!

GEORDI (reading instruments) Captain... this is funny.

PICARD Frankly, I thought "sunny side up" was better than that last one, but --

GEORDI No, sir. I mean, there's nothing out there. No debris, no sign of anything. It's like the egg just vanished.

DATA (impressed) Can you beat that?

(EVERYBODY glares at him)

DATA I missed my turn earlier.

PICARD Full scan of the area, Mister La Forge. Tie in your visor as well.

GEORDI Aye, Sir. (HE pulls out a pair of binoculars and looks around)

YAR Captain, the commander of the Romulan Fleet is hailing us.

PICARD Put him on. (to screen) This is Jean-Luc Picard, captain of the starship Enterprise.

ROMULAN CMDR. (V.O.; "Marvin the Martian) Who threw the frisbee into the Neutral Zone?

PICARD That is not a frisbee, Commander. It is an Earth starship from the year 1997.

ROMULAN CMDR. (V.O.) A four hundred year-old starship? How is that possible?

 (PICARD starts to answer, realizes he can't and turns to JOHN)

JOHN No.

ROMULAN CMDR. (V.O.) It is immaterial, Captain! The ship is in violation of the Neutral Zone! We have the right to disintegrate it!

JOHN Commander, I knew we got you into this mess, but, as a fellow commander, I'm sure you can appreciate how badly I want my ship out of there.

WILL Besides, Mom, Judy and Penny are still over there!

JOHN Also good reason, yes.

PICARD Commander, allow us to enter the Neutral Zone long enough to engage our tractor beam, take the Jupiter and leave peacefully.

ROMULAN CMDR. (V.O.) Why? (A beat.)

PICARD (slyly) DO you want to report to your superiors that you saw, much less fired upon, a flying saucer? (A beat.)

ROMULAN CMDR. (V.O.) Hmmn. I do not want to make the cover of the Romulan Enquirer. You have one Earth hour to remove the ship.

PICARD It will not take a frction of that to--

ROMULAN CMDR. (V.O.) But...you may not enter the Neutral Zone to do so! Isn't that lovely?

PICARD (angrily) Outrageous!

ROMULAN CMDR. (V.O.) Also gnarly, rad, and totally hypervill-
ainous! Unidentified Romulan Commander out!

PICARD (under his breath) Vulcan Science Academy dropouts.

JOHN How about it, Captain? Any chance of getting the
Jupiter back?

PICARD You have my word that we'll do everything in our power
to --

GEORDI (jumps up angrily) Alright, who's got the remote
control this time?!! I'm here trying to do a
spectroscopic analysis and now all I'm getting are
reruns of Mister Ed! (starts hitting the side of his
head to clear it)

PICARD Forget about the egg, La Forge. Get down to Engineering
and see what you can do to boost the tractor beam.

GEORDI (still hitting head) Uh...aye, sir.

PICARD Yes, you; go on.

GEORDI (still hitting) Aye, sir.

PICARD Yes, you. What's wrong?

GEORDI (briefly gesturing at visor) Eyes, Sir.

PICARD You said that!

GEORDI Eyes, sir!

PICARD I heard you the first time!

GEORDI No, sir; eyes sir!

PICARD Make up your mind!

GEORDI Ai, yi, yi, sir...

PICARD Get down to Engineering, damn your "eyes"!

(GEORDI starts to exit stage left. DATA holds up
a remote control and playfully presses a button.
GEORDI stumbles)

GEORDI Dammit!

(HE whistles in WORF's direction. WORF rises, crosses
to GEORDI, crouches, and lets GEORDI grasp his tunic

collar, and leads him off stage left like a seeing-eye dog)

GEORDI (exiting) Thanks, Worf.

WORF S'alright.

(THEY exit)

PICARD While we try to rescue your ship, Professor, permit me to show you what ours has to offer. (to YAR)
Tasha, see to the comfort of the Jupiter crew while I give them the grand tour.

YAR Aye -- er, yes, sir.

(SHE starts to cross to exit, pausing at DATA's station)

YAR And, Data? About the other night? It never happened.

DATA As you wish, Lieutenant. Will it not be happening again tonight?

YAR My quarters, nineteen hundred hours, be there. Oh, and don't forget the tool box. (SHE exits stage left)

WILL (to JOHN) Dad, can I stay up here on the bridge and talk with Mister Data?

JOHN Well, if it's alright with Captain Picard.

PICARD (through gritted teeth) Why, certainly! I can't remember the last time I enjoyed the company of a youngster on my bridge!

WORF (off stage) The boy?

DATA Captain, I will assume full responsibility for Will Robinson's conduct during his visit.

SMITH I, too, shall remain to watch over the lad.

DATA As for Doctor Smith, he can swing in the breeze, for all I care.

JOHN Then I guess it's okay, son. But don't touch anything!

SMITH Rest assured, Professor, the boy will stay out of mischief.

WILL I think he was talking to you, Doctor Smith.

(PICARD and JOHN exit stage left)

DATA Now, then Will, Doctor Smith, I will try to answer the multitude of questions you must have regarding our advanced technology.

WILL You mean, like Cochran's Theory of Warp Propulsion? Or Scott's Axiom that you can't change the laws of physics until just before the last commercial break?

DATA How can you know these thing?

WILL The same way we can be bopping around space for four hundred years at sublight without getting a day older. I try not to think about it. Helps me sleep better at night.

SMITH As must be obvious from his display of knowledge, Mister Data, I have served as the boy's tutor during our long years in space, as well as his protector.

(DATA looks at SMITH for a moment unconvinced)

DATA (to WILL) Warning, warning, danger, Will Robinson.

SMITH Please excuse us, sir. The time has come for a teacher-pupil conference.

(LIGHTS: DIM ON BRIDGE, SPOT ON RUNWAY)

(SMITH leads WILL away from the bridge, down the runway, as DATA resumes his duties)

WILL Are you gonna start bitching and moaning because we can't go right back to Earth, Doctor Smith?

SMITH This is an unacceptable situation, William, totally unacceptable! We must return to the Jupiter and fly back to Earth ourselves, to be welcomed as galactic heroes!

WILL How are we gonna do that? Our engines are shot, and if we knew how to get back to Earth from where we are, we wouldn't be -- (to Audience, expectantly) Audience?

AUDIENCE PLANT #1 Bonanza!

AUDIENCE PLANT #2 Get Smart!

AUDIENCE PLANT #3 Meet the Press!

(Will glowers at the Audience for a long moment, then turns to Smith.)

WILL (fed up) Our engines are shot, and if we knew how to get back to Earth from where we are, we wouldn't be --

(pulls out gun, aims at Audience) Well?

AUDIENCE (led by PLANTS) Lost in Space!

(Satisfied, WILL puts the gun away)

SMITH Oh, if only I hadn't sold the Robot for that '63 Impala when we crashed on the Planet of the Unscrupulous Used Car Salesmen! (deviously) That's it! We'll get the robot to repair our ship and take us back to Earth! We're saved, William!

WILL But you sold the Robot!

SMITH Not our Robot, William; their robot!

WILL You mean Mister Data?

SMITH Indeed, I do! I shall simply remove his power pack, take him to the Jupiter, reprogram him only to my commands, and order him to take us home!

WILL First: he's not a robot, he's an android, and if he's even got a power pack, you wouldn't know where to start looking for it. Second: he's the product of an advanced civilization, and you couldn't reprogram a twentieth century VCR! Third: If you tried to pull any of this stuff, he'd rip your lungs out!!

DATA (stepping forward) And, fourth: I have overheard your entire conversation, I would rip out your lungs, you are too stupid to reprogram a VCR, and only one person knows where my "power pack" is located!

YAR (offstage) DATA, IT NEVER HAPPENED!

DATA Please excuse me. There is "nothing" that requires my immediate attention. (He exits stage left.)

SMITH Oh, William, we're doomed, doomed!

WILL Yeah, yeah, after listening to you whine for four hundred years, being doomed will be like a summer vacation.

(A cloaked figure -- Q -- enters from the bridge end of the runway. His face is covered by a hood.)

Q (mysteriously) Earthman, do not despair!

(SMITH screams and hides behind WILL)

SMITH Save me, William, save me!

Q (advancing) DO not fear me!

SMITH Do what you want with the boy, but spare me, pleeeze!!

Q I have come to help you, Earthman. We can help each other. I know what you want, and I can give you that -- and more!

SMITH (stepping forward) More?

Q Wealth, power, fame. Your wildest dreams will be fulfilled.

WILL Don't listen to him, Doctor Smith! The last time someone promised you all that, we ended up with no Robot and a '63 Impala with no transmission!

SMITH (ignoring WILL) What you ^{say} intrigues me, sir. Pray continue.

Q I need this ship and her crew. Deliver them into my power and I will send you home! Have we a bargain?

SMITH (extending hand) Permit me to introduce myself, sir. I am Doctor Zachary Smith.

Q (playfully) How do you do? (throws back hood) My name is Q! (drops cloak; reveals himself dressed in red "Mork" flight suit) Na-noo, na-noo!

SMITH What shall we do?

WILL That's it; we're through.

(BLACKOUT)
(MUSIC: THEME)
(SLIDE: TITLE)
(MUSIC AND TITLE)
(LIGHTS UP: RUNWAY ONLY -- PICARD'S QUARTERS)

(PICARD and JOHN sit at a table sharing a bottle of brandy. THEY are relaxed, but not inebriated.)

PICARD Now, let me get this straight... giant talking vegetables?

JOHN Honest! Tried to turn us into giant salad!

PICARD I find that difficult to believe, Professor.

JOHN I find it difficult to believe that your ship's being flown by a blind guy and a robot in human suit.

PICARD At least they can find stowaways before they go into

deep space!

JOHN Touché. I tell you, Captain, if I weren't such an enlightened man of science, Doctor Smith would've had his head caved in with a tire iron twenty years ago.

PICARD Sounds smashing. Why not give it a whack!

JOHN Oh, my wife, Maureen, nver approved of violence. She'd always say, "John, isn't there some other way?", and I'd say, "No, now untie me and tell me where you hid Will's baseball bat," then she'd say, "Maybe Doctor Smith can change," and I'd say, "Where's the bat?", then she'd say --

PICARD I get the idea. Where is your wife?

JOHN Maureen put herself into suspended animation when we blasted off from the Planet of the Demolition Derby Groupies. It's standard launch procedure. Then, Smith botched up the engines and the life support systems. Now the door's jammed and she's frozen inside.

PICARD What are you doing here, then? Aren't you worried?

JOHN Nah, she'll keep. Besides, one of my daughters is working on getting her out. Judy's become quite a mechanic over the years. She's learned a lot from Major West. (grim, like a father) She's learned a lot from Major West.

PICARD You said Judy is one of your daughters. Where is the other one?

JOHN Penny? She's confined to quarters. She hasn't learned a lot from Major West.

PICARD May I ask whey she's confined to quarters?

JOHN To keep her from learning a lot from Major West.

PICARD Professor, surely you understand that, after being in space for so long, there are certain natural --

JOHN Tell me about it! At least you have "Leather Goddesses of Phobos"!

PICARD A commander's lot is not always a happy one.

JOHN Year, right, your life's real tough. You just have to put up with Romulans and Neutral Zones and flying eggs! Try following your daughter and your pilot around on their dates to make sure he always keeps one foot on the floor!! Try to go four centuries without putting

that Doctor in the hospital! Try to keep a straight face when you're bargaining for your life with a talking carrot.

(FX: SUDDEN ACCELERATION OF WARP ENGINES)

(PICARD and JOHN are knocked over by the acceleration then recover)

PICARD What the devil was that?

(RIKER and DON hurl themselves across the runway, rolling over it and falling off the other side.)

PICARD Number One! What in blazes is going on?

RIKER (struggling) He's winning at the moment, sir, but I --

PICARD Idiot! What happened to the ship?

RIKER Oh, yeah, right (standing at attention) Request your presence on the bridge immediately, SI--!

(DON yanks him out of sight. PICARD and JOHN rise.)

PICARD And you've got it tough! I'll bet you've got toilets on your ship.

JOHN Pipe down! Once we get there, you'll ^ahve two Johns on the bridge!

(THEY exit up the runway)

(BLACKOUT)

(MUSIC: THEME)

(SLIDE: THEME)

(MUSIC and TITLE OUT)

(LIGHTS UP: BIRDGE)

(EVERYONE except TROI and RIKER is at their station. Worf standing with one hand placed firmly on SMITH's back; SMITH lies pinned to the deck. WILL stands by them, looking pretty embarrassed. Q is not here. PICARD and JOHN enter stage left)

(FX: SCREECHING OF BRAKES)

(EVERYONE lurches with the sudden stop)

PICARD Status!

GEORDI We were travelling at warp nine, sir. Now, we're inside the Neutral Zone alongside the Jupiter 2.

PICARD What happened? (sees Worf, SMITH) YAR, explain this!

YAR Worf and I were making a routine check of Engineering when we caught Doctor Smith sneaking around the engines. (holds out handful of refrigerator magnets) He

had these refrigerator magnets on him when we caught him, sir., just before the sudden thrust. (to DATA) and speaking of sudden thrusts, it never --

DATA (with YAR) Never happened, yes, Lieutenant.

(YAR turns to PICARD and opens her mouth to speak)

DATA (cutting her off) How wasn't it for you?

(YAR raises a hand to belt him. DATA cowers and resumes his station)

GEORDI What was that all about, Data?

DATA Nothing, Geordi. But I would appreciate it if you would explain something to me.

GEORDI Sure.

DATA (discreetly) What does, "Ride me, Golden Stallion," mean?

GEORGE It's a euphemism, a veiled reference something hidden within something else.

DATA Ah. A "Trojan Horse"

GEORDI Sounds like it. (resuming duties) A horse is a horse, of couse, of course --- (frustrated HE rips off his visor, whacks it against the control panel several times, then puts it on again)

ROMULAN CMDR (V.O.) Captain Picard! Your ship is now in violation of the Neutral Zone!

PICARD (off guard) Um... yes.

ROMULAN CMDR (V.O.) I suppose you would have us believe that it was due to an accident, or sabotage? (A beat)

PICARD Okay

ROMULAN CMDR (V.) Is that the best excuse you're going to let us come up with for you?

(PICARD considers this, then shrugs his shoulders)

ROMULAN CMDR (V.O) You have made us very angry!! You have ten minutes to leave the Neutral Zone, or you and the frisbee will be destroyed. Unidentified Romulan Commander out!

PICARD (rounding on SMITH) WHAT DID YOU DO?

SMITH Nothing permanently damaging, I assure you, sir. I just wanted to expedite our return to Earth.

PICARD La Forge, Data, get us out of here.

DATA All our power is out, sir.

JOHN Captain, show me your Engineering section. If anyone knows how to deal with Smith's crap, it's me.

PICARD If anyone knew how to deal with Smith's crap, they'd given a second thought to the tire iron twenty years ago! Geordi, take --

(SUDDEN BLACKOUT)

(MUSIC: THEME)

(SLIDE: TITLE)

(PICARD angrily steps forward during this "break".)

PICARD Discontinue these infernal commercial breaks at once!

(MUSIC and TITLE out)

(LIGHTS UP: BRIDGE)

PICARD Bloody five-act script structure. (to GEORDI) Take the Professor to Enginnering.

GEORDI Aye, sir!

(GEORDI and JOHN rush out stage left)

ROMULAN CMDR (V.O) ENTERprise you have seven minutes.

SMITH We're doomed, doomed!

WILL I knew that guy was a pinhead the minute he showed up!

(Q quietly enters stage right, creeping up behind PICARD)

PICARD I agree wholeheartedly.

WILL (indicates SMITH) Not this pinhead, sir. (indicates Q) THat pinhead.

PICARD Boy, what are you talking -- (turns sees Q) I've lost the will to live.

(As Q replies, YAR draws her phaser and crosses to PICARD's side. PICARD continues to stare blankly at Q)

Q Never fear, Q is here.

SMITH Silence, you plagiaristic poppinjay!

PICARD Somebody get me a gun.

Q Now, now mon capitain. I'm only here to conduct more research on my favorite subjects. This is a serious study. (whips out party horn, TOOTS at PICARD once, resumes) I want to know how humans will react under stress and I've finally found the most accurate representation of humankind right here among you! Him!

(HE points at SMITH. EVERYONE looks at SMITH, then at Q, then they point at SMITH in disbelief.)

EVERYONE HA!

Q So, how will the crew of the good ship Enterprise react in this latest scenario? Will you stay and fight? Will you run? Or will you accept your fate and die bravely.

(SMITH screams. YAR kicks Q in the shin, then heads back to her station, passing PICARD)

PICARD Why didn't you use your judo on him?

YAR I was trying to be more ladylike, sir.

DATA This is true, sir. The last time it never happened, she insisted on wearing the Little Bo-Peep costume.

JOHN (V.O.) Captain, this is Robinson.

PICARD What progress on the engines, Professor?

JOHN (V.O.) DON't feel too bad, Capt-an, but your advanced propulsion system looks simple enough for a kid to figure out, so, ah, you'd better send one down here pronto, 'cause we're stuck.

PICARD You should have put us in jeopardy earlier, Professor. I could have sent a boy genius down to give you a hand.

JOHN (V.O.) Hey, my son is smarter than I am! He can help!

WORF (stands) The boy?

(SMITH begins to rise. WORF catches him and glares at him, pointing to the floor. Intimidated, SMITH lies down again. WORF resumes his guard over him.)

PICARD Will, you haven't been off this bridge since you got here and the ship has miles of corridors. Think you can find Engineering within the next --

ROMULAN CMDR (V.O.) Five minutes, Captain!

WILL Yes, sir!

PICARD Go!

(Will runs off, stage left)

Q Wheee!

PICARD Q, get off my ship, or else!

Q "Or else" what? You can't hurt me, Picard! (rubs shin, glares at YAR) Well, some of you can hurt me. (to PICARD) But, hey, I'm omnipotent! I'm a highly evolved life form! (sticks out his tongue at PICARD)

PICARD Very well! Unless you use your power to get us out of here within the next five minutes the Romulans will blast the ship, the crew, myself, and you, Q, comprenez-vous?

(Q considers this for a moment, then walks down to the end of the runway.)

Q (to PICARD) Hey... I'm outta here.

(HE leaves the stage, takes a front seat in the audience, and puts his feet upon the runway.)

DATA I have intercepted a coded transmission between two of their vessels, sir. I believe it translates into: "My old lady is waiting dinner for me, so let's kick some Fed ass and split, dudes."

PICARD (touches insignia) Picard to Engineering! Report!

GEORDI (V.O.) La Forge here, sir. Will can have the engines back on line in two minutes!

ROMULAN CMDR (V.O.) ENTERPRISE, -- one minute.

PICARD Geordi, did you hear that? (A beat)

GEORDI (V.O.) We're dead, Jean.

PICARD (Solemnly) Tasha, put me on ship's speakers. I must address the crew.

YAR Soliloquy channel open, sir!

(LIGHTS DIM ON BRIDGE: SPOT ON RUNWAY, PICARD)

(PICARD steps forward as he speaks.)

PICARD So... it comes to this. The human adventure, the quest for knowledge the desire to do no more than rescue our fellow pioneers, all -- (reaches Q; kicks his feet off the runway) GET YOUR BLOODY FAT FEET OFF MY SHIP, DAMN YOUR EYES!! (solemn again) All to end here. But if we are to die this day, let us do so valiantly, in the services of our fellow man, in the cause of galactic peace, and, most importantly, let us die secure in the knowledge that I am a better actor than that idiot in the gold shirt ever was! (quiet ly) All decks... dying stations.

(LIGHTS UP: BRIDGE)

(PICARD returns to the bridge. EVERYONE is braced for the worst)

ROMULAN CMDR (V.O.) Five seconds. Four. Three. Two. One. OKAY, BOYS, SCRAP THE FRISBEE!

(An ORGANIAN REFEREE stands up from his seat in the Audience, BLOWING HIS WHISTLE. EVERYONE but PICARD sees him immediately, turns towards him and yells --)

EVERONE JEAN, LOOK!

PICARD (Seeing him) Gadzooks! An Organian!

(The REFEREE mounts the runway and faces the Audience)

REFEREE (Signalling) PENALTY! (fingers on ears) ROMULANS (signalling) UNNECESSARY ROUGHNESS! FREE KICK! (removes cap, puts over heart) ENTERPRISE (replaces cap, signals) START THE CLOCK!

(He resumes his seat)

GEORDI (V.O.) Captain, we've got full power.

PICARD Data, engage tractor beam! Grab the Jupiter and make "treks"!

DATA Aye, sir!

(FX: WARP ENGINES ACCELERATING)

(EVERONE holds on for the acceleration. JOHN and GEORDI enter stage left.)

PICARD Well done, Mister La Forge. My thanks to you, too, Professor.

JOHN Don't thank me. Thank my son when he's done.

GEORDI Will was great, Captain! He showed us where Doctor Smith had dumped leaded dilutium crystals into the tank labelled "Unleaded Fuel Only"!

PICARD I'm amazed that he isolated the problem so quickly.

JOHN Yes and once he did, it was easy for me to come up with the solution.

DATA (whips out white sailor cap, puts it on imitates Bob Denver) Gee, Professor, how'd you fix the ship?

JOHN With palm fronds, bamboo shoots, and parts from the radio, Gilli-- Gilligan?! Why am I answering you?

DATA (normal, but puzzled; over JOHN) Gilligan...?

PICARD DATA, explain!

DATA Sorry, Skipper, er, sir. Must've been an old program.

(GEORDI heads of his station, crossing in front of DATA. As he does so, he reveals the remote control in his possession now, smiles at it, and secrets it away as he takes his seat. JUDY ROBINSON enters, stage left, wearing a toolbelt over her uniform and carrying a crowbar.)

JUDY (crossing to JOHN) Dad! DAD!

JOHN Judy, honey, what are you doing here?

JUDY I had them beam me over as soon as I got Mother out of the hibernation tube. (tosses crowbar aside) And, boy, is she mad! Dad, why'd you weld her in there after we crashed on the Planet of the Well-Endowed Amazon Women?

(Before JOHN can answer, RIKER and DON wrestle on stage left. TROI rushes in behind them, waving money.)

TROI New odds! New Odds! Eight-to-five in favor of Major West! Place your bets! Place your bets!

(over mike) Twenty-five quatlus on the newcomer!

(The bridge crew -- exception of PICARD -- rush up to place bets with TROI. In moving to do so, Worf releases SMITH, who runs and hides behind JOHN.)

JUDY (Crossing behind DON) Don! What are you doing?

DON Bleeding internally!

PICARD Number One! Belay this horseplay!

(RIKER and DON draw back to deliver one last blow to each others' snoots. EVERYONE watches with anticipation. TROI moves up behind RIKER for a good view. DON sees TROI; RIKER sees JUDY. The fight stops. The two men ogle the two women. TROI and JUDY look at each other, then, in sync. slap both men. JUDY returns to JOHN's side; TROI crosses to PICARD. Both DON and RIKER look dejected, DON more so. RIKER puts a brotherly arm around him.)

RIKER Don't sweat it, guy. Let's check out the action on the holo-deck. Ever been to a planet called Phobos?

DON No, why?

(RIKER chuckles knowingly. THEY exit stage left)

(FX: HATCH opening))

(EVERYONE turns to stage right when the hatch opens. No one is more aghast than PICARD)

BRIDGE CREW Wesley?!

PICARD WESLEY??

(WILL runs in stage left, wiping his greasy hands on a rag.)

WILL (more shocked) Wesley?

PICARD (to stage right) Good Lord, Wesley, is that really you?

(WESLEY -- now an adult -- enters, wearing the same clothes as before, wrapped in a smoking jacket. HE has traces of stubble on his face.)

WESLEY (deep, masculine) Yes, Captain, it is I.

PICARD But...your voice has changed.

WESLEY Had to happen sometime, sir.

PICARD Are you in need of a ... shave?

WESLEY Yep. Third time today. You see, a young lady named Penny Robinson saw me floating around outside her ship and let me into her cabin through the porthole.

JOHN (suspicious) And then, what happened?

WESLEY Her voice got deeper, too. (to PICARD, shaking hands)
Excuse me, now, Captain, I have to renew my subscription to GQ.

(HE takes out a pipe, clenches it between his teeth and

crosses to stage left. HE pushes by WILL. THEY look around each other, pause, and think for a moment.

WILL, WESLEY Nah

(WESLEY exits)

SMITH Well, Captain, now that everything has been resolved once and for all, it's time for you to perform your sacred duty as pioneer and rescuer and deliver me to Earth by the most direct route available!

(one by one, EVERYONE begins to cough the word "airlock".
PICARD, understanding, looks at JOHN for approval)

JOHN Unless you've got a tire iron.

(They lift SMITH by his elbows and carry him toward the airlock as he wails)

SMITH What's is this?! What are you doing? Put me down at once, do you hear !!!? At once! Put me down!!

CRUSHER (V.O.) Sickbay to Bridge! Doctor Crusher here, Captain. I'm ready to begin examining the Jupitar crew, and I'd like to start with Doctor Smith. Is he with you?

PICARD We're in the middle of doing some house cleaning at the moment, and Doctor SMith has offered to give us a hand. (peeks out airlock) Righty now, we're trying to help him find the perfect vacuum.

SMITH Oh, the pain. The pain.

(BLACKOUT)

(MUSIC: THEME)

(LIGHTS UP THE RUNWAY)

ANNOUNCER (V.O.) Next on Cheap Treks: The Next Generation, Captain Picard must eject hostile aliens from Federation Space!

(PICARD enters, carrying ALF doll)

ALF (V.O.) Hey, c'mon! ME? Take over your galaxy? It's a gag! HA! C'mon laugh!

(PICARD punts ALF off the runway, into the audience, smiles with satisfaction, and exits)

ANNONCER (V.O.; during PICARD's exit) Next Time on, Cheap Treks: The Next Generation!

THE END

THEY FEARFUL SYMMETRY



It hit me as I was shaving that there was something overly suggestive about the whole affair. There was a pattern emerging that I didn't like, a pattern that reminded me too much of Atlanta and 1973. But what really got my attention was that official response suggested a cover-up.

The database had revealed a number of interesting details to my curious little brain, and when I put them together, a quick bit of mental addition gave me the customary relationship between two two's and a four.

The previous year's vigilante had disappeared. No finale, no startling revelation, no confrontation. After stalking Manhattan's subway for months and terrorizing the living daylights out of that city's poor deprived victims, he had simply stopped.

But the crimes continued, and society's poor victims continued to terrorize any vulnerable targets that presented themselves beneath the streets.

So why had the subway killer stopped?

And now it looked like the killings had started again. Only this time it had taken a nasty turn. Not only were criminals being killed, but also the homeless who

lived in the tunnels, and the occasional late night traveller.

And the victims had all been slashed, as if some sort of clawed creature had attacked them. Almost as if a tiger was loose in the subways.

Of course, this was a very choosy tiger.

Yes, there were a few similarities, and a number of questions.

Why wasn't the DA's office continuing the search?

I finished up, wiping off spots of shaving cream, and looked at my face in the mirror, the consequences of my line of work. My hair was thick and brown, and some of the lines in my face were receding. I'm still not sure what had sparked it.

Maybe it was that beaker I had grabbed in Atlanta, the one I had thought was full of water. Maybe it was that Norwegian tree spirit. Maybe it was the Japanese kami, annoyed by my investigations, that had decided to rob me of the dignity of old age. Whatever it was, it was damned annoying not to have the appearance of a man pushing sixty.

I finished dressing, trying to

Eric Blackburn

make some sense of the situation.

Killer haunts subway, slashes muggers, protects elderly. DA's office sends rising star to investigate. Ingenue attorney steps in, asks questions and killings stop. End story.

But it wasn't a real ending, as far as I was concerned. There was no neat end to it, no finale. And now, it looked like he was back.

Reports had indicated something with a demonic face and claws. Actually, one witness had stated that the slasher had a face like "a terrible angel."

I had a couple of leads that I wanted to check out.

The first was that someone in the DA's office had gone psycho, and they were trying to hide it. Easy to understand, with the frustrations that come with the job.

The second was a name that I had been given. Paracelsus. The name of an alchemist in the middle ages. What if he was still around?

Granted, the first alchemist I had come across had preferred to strangle his victims, but still...

I went to see Tony about it, and he reacted well.

"Ah, so you're finally taking an interest in real journalism. How many years has it been?"

"Funny. I'm laughing. I'll see you when I get back."

"Forget it, Carl."

"Come on, Tony. This is big. Look at it!"

"No! Let the Times cover it. I'm not paying for a trip to New York."

"This will sell!"

"Listen, Kolchak. I'm getting sick of vigilante stories. They sell, but not enough to justify a trip to New York."

"People aren't going to be interested in a cover-up in the DA's office, maybe a psycho attorney, a vigilante cop?"

"Alright, what's really bothering you? C'mon, out with it."

Tony was growing old, but he wasn't senile yet. Long exposure to my sort of case had taught him to look deeper than surface indications.

So I told him.

"Something about this reminds me of Atlanta."

"You mean the Strangler? That old alchemist?"

"Yeah. The vigilante struck in the subways, and always seemed to have an escape route there. I know there's a lot of tunnels beneath New York, and it reminds me of the guy in Atlanta."

The guy in Atlanta had been an old alchemist, Dr. Malcolm Richards, who killed young women and used some of their bodily fluids to keep himself young. Yes, it was possible that I had been the unwitting beneficiary of one of his potions.

There were enough similarities to keep me interested, and I wanted to go investigate.

"I was beginning to think

you'd left that weird stuff behind you."

"Not when it's real."

Tony was bothered by it, but he eventually gave in. I went home to pack, and caught a flight to New York.

My first stop, after dropping my bags at the hotel, was with a Mrs. Beatrice Dalby, a cleaning lady who was the first person to see the slasher.

She wasn't exactly cooperative.

"Why don't you leave him alone? He didn't do anything wrong."

"Mrs. Dalby, I don't want to hurt him. I'm not a cop; I'm a reporter. I just want to find out what's happening, here. Innocent people are dying."

"It ain't him. It ain't been him since that DA woman come around. Whoever's doin' it now is someone else."

"DA woman? Do you mean Miss Chandler?"

"Yes. She asked me a lot of questions, and then it was all over. Now it's like it never happened. Old folks getting mugged on the train. People afraid to ride at night. People ain't safe. Why don't you write about that?"

"Please, just tell me what he looked like."

She finally described the face, but it didn't make any sense to me. I figured that her emotions at the time would have prevented her from seeing the slasher objectively. Probably it was a disguise.

I thanked her and left, proceeding to my next stop, the DA's office.

Catherine Chandler was an attractive young woman with a worried look on her face and an armload of folders. I caught her in the hall going from point A to point B. A cup of coffee in her hand prevented her from opening a door, and gave me the opening I needed. When I started asking questions it was like a door slamming across her eyes.

"We never found the subway slasher, Mr. Kolchak. He stopped on his own."

"Isn't that uncharacteristic of a vigilante, or a psychopath? It seems awfully strange to me."

"We don't like it here, either."

"Well it looks like he's back. Do you have any leads?"

"Mr. Kolchak, at the moment, I'm up to my neck in work. I'd like to get on with it. You can help me by leaving."

"Why are you protecting him?"

She covered nicely, but I've been in the business too long not to know when I'm being snowed. It had been a shot in the dark, but it had paid off. Somebody here had been implicated.

"I'm not protecting anybody. If we find the slasher, we'll put him in jail."

"Even if it's one of your co-workers?"

"One of my..."

She started to laugh, a reaction I hadn't expected, but one

that told me a lot. She had a suspicion, alright, but didn't think it was anyone in the DA's office. Interesting.

The next day, things got really interesting. During the night, a bunch of society's victims, the poor disadvantaged youth of Manhattan, had decided to release their frustrations in the only way they knew. They called it 'wilding'.

They were going after a young couple in Central Park when something got them first. I was down at the local cop shop when the report came in.

I followed Manhattan's finest to the scene of the crime and then almost wished I hadn't. It was pretty messy.

About seven kids, age thirteen to nineteen, were scattered around on the grass, in the bushes, on the rocks, in the trees, on the road, and a few other places as well. It looked like the boys in blue were trying to make like all the king's horses and all the king's men in septuplet. I tried nosing around without attracting too much attention my way from the cops, but didn't see much to interest me until I looked at one body lying near a patch of dirt. There was an interesting looking paw print there, but I didn't get much of a look before I was bodily removed and told to stay gone.

I was beginning to have an idea about what was happening. As I was making a couple of notes, I looked up and saw a familiar face across the crowd, Miss Chandler.

She didn't notice me, so I slipped a little more out of sight and watched her. She watched for a few seconds and then her face began to look even more worried than I had seen it the previous day. Then

she turned and walked away. I decided to follow her.

Instead of heading towards her car, as I expected, she walked further into the park. We walked for about a mile, and then she disappeared behind some rocks. I hurried around and found what looked like an entrance to a storm drain system. There was a barred gate across the front, but I was able to squeeze through.

As I looked around, wondering which way to go, I heard a tapping coming from farther in. Cautiously, I made my way in the direction of the noise.

It didn't take me too long to find her, tapping on a pipe. I watched to see what she would do.

Abruptly, the pipe started pinging again, though she wasn't doing anything this time.

Interesting. She was signalling somebody.

She started walking again, moving down this tunnel. That's when things got tricky. I had to keep close enough to follow her, but not so close that she would spot me.

After a couple of turnings, I began to realize that I could become lost down here. I started making marks on the walls, close to the ground with a piece of chalk I had in my pocket.

Remember, I've been doing this for a while.

After about fifteen minutes I heard voices. Hers was one, and the other sounded like a man. I made my way carefully to the next corner.

She was standing and talking with somebody in the shadows. I could only make out bits of the

conversation.

"...horrible...kids..."

"..news of this..."

"...slasher..."

"...no return..."

"...reporter..."

Uh oh.

"...keep watch..."

"...be careful..."

There was more of this, along the same lines, tantalizing and useless. I wondered how much longer it would last.

And then she was walking towards me, leaving.

Time to figure out my next move while I was pulling a classic Kolchak getaway.

I finally ducked down a side tunnel when she went past, and then started back to the place where she had been talking with her friend. It didn't take me long.

He had gone, of course, so I stopped and waited. Eventually, I heard scuffling sounds that suggested movement, and I followed them, again marking my trail.

After about ten minutes, I saw someone moving ahead, hooded and cloaked, and only vaguely illuminated by the lantern he was carrying.

I stayed close behind him. Then he came to a gate which he passed through, and closed it behind him. I moved up rapidly, but found that he had locked it, a padlock on a chain. I could no longer see the lantern, though

there seemed to be some sort of light further down the tunnel. Frustrated, I dropped the chain.

He spun around. In his dark cloak and hood, I hadn't seen him there in the shadows, and when the chain clanked against the gate, it startled him.

He snarled.

Yes, snarled. Fittingly, I might add. His face and hands were like those of a great cat, although the rest of him looked human enough.

He was just on the other side of the door, and that was too close for me.

I decided that it was time for me to step out for a breath of fresh air. I ran like hell.

Outside, I felt safe for a moment, but then remembered the slaughtered kids I had seen. I hurried back to my car.

From a few conversations with a man from northern Thailand, I now knew what I was facing.

Weretiger.

I went back to the hotel and called the office. Amy answered, and I had her go to my disk drawer and print a copy of my "Werereatures" file. Then she faxed it to me. I had some reading to do.

Amy was shaping up quite nicely. Just as dependable as her mother had been. I still missed Emily at times.

When I got the fax copy, I took it to my room and started reading. There wasn't much, just a few hints and ramblings that I'd remembered from my conversations

with the old Karin. But it seemed to fit what I'd seen. The old guy had never mentioned one of the tigers wearing clothes, and this guy had looked more like a lion than a tiger, but it still fit the general pattern, allowing for cultural differences.

Now I just had to find a way to defeat him.

I couldn't take it to the police.

And I couldn't figure Miss Chandler's connection either. Was this the guy she'd been talking to? It sure seemed like it. Maybe she didn't know what he was. Maybe she did. Maybe she'd been talking to someone else.

One thing I was sure of. This was the slasher.

That evening, I staked out Miss Chandler's apartment. Nothing happened. About two in the morning, I called it a night and went home. Her lights had been out for about three hours, and I'd seen nobody leave.

During the night, there'd been another killing. This time it was three winos, who'd been hanging out in the one of the stations, looking for shelter from the rain.

The slasher splattered blood all over the walls and had done artistic things with various internal organs. Artistic from his point of view.

I was hanging out with the cops, and staying out of sight, when Miss Chandler showed up again, as I'd suspected she would. Shortly thereafter, she slipped off down one of the tunnels. I hoped for her sake that a train wasn't coming. Mine too, I followed her.

She quickly turned up a side tunnel, used by maintenance men, and then down another. I'd forgotten my chalk, and knew that I'd be in trouble if I had to find my way out alone.

But I had too much of a chance to stop the thing that had been killing all these people, and I had to make the best of it. I was going by what the old tribesman had told me, and had several things with me. I just hoped I'd have time to find the right one.

After a while, I heard the tapping start up. She was signalling him again, and this time I'd be a little closer. I crept up as close as I could manage, and waited.

A shadow appeared behind her. She didn't see it. Quietly, it came closer to her, and as it passed into the light from a maintenance light, I saw that it was the same thing I'd seen the day before.

I yelled and ran out past her, between them. It was obvious that she hadn't been talking to this guy, the day before, but someone else. I pulled the gun out of my coat and pointed it at him.

"Alright, buster, freeze!"

She screamed, he snarled and I pulled the trigger.

"No! Vincent!"

"Catherine, look out!"

"Stop it, you..."

"Try this on for size, demon!"

"Vincent, what...?"

I stopped pulling the trigger. It wasn't working.

He looked at wet spot on his vest, and wiped water out of the fur on his face. She put down the two-by-four she'd grabbed.

"Would you mind telling me why you felt it necessary to shoot me with a water pistol?" he inquired.

"It's holy water. Doesn't it burn you?"

"Not particularly. Should it?"

Maybe cultural differences didn't apply.

"Well, try this!" I said, throwing a handful of powder at him. It was an herbal concoction I'd gotten in Chinatown, guaranteed to stop shapechangers in their tracks. It pays to have connections.

He blinked and shrugged.

"Would you please not do that?"

"Doesn't it bother you?"

"Of course it bothers me. I'm going to have a hard time getting it out of my hair. Catherine, who is this strange man?"

"He's a reporter, name of Carl Kolchak. Yesterday, he was talking about a DA cover-up. Now he's on demons."

Apparently, I'd been wrong. She did know him, and was in on it. I still had to stop him. He looked big.

"Alright, let's see how you handle silver!"

I pulled the athame from under my coat, and his eyes got larger. Aha! I didn't know if he was afraid of the ceremonial dagger because it was silver, or because of the various symbols on the blade, but it had him sweating.

Size six, I thought, just before it hit my face, and the lights went out.

I came to in a strange chamber carved from the rock, and decorated in a bizarre, yet pleasant fashion. A bearded guy was sponging my face with something. He looked familiar.

"Ow! What is that?"

"Hold still. You scraped your head when you fell."

"Who hit me? Is Bruce Lee hiding down here, too?"

"Catherine hit you."

It was the lion guy. Vincent, she'd called him. I scrambled away.

"Come back here, I'm not done with you!"

"He's a demon!"

"A demon?"

"Yes, a weretiger."

"Oh, is that it? Vincent, did you know you were a weretiger?"

"It makes about as much sense as anything else. When do I get to change to a human form?"

And then Chandler had her arms around him. Damned if I could figure her out. Kinky, I guess.

"Mr. Kolchak, I can assure you that he is not a weretiger. He is as human as the rest of us."

"More," the girl said.

"So I see," I said.

He laughed.

"I can see how my appearance would upset you, but what brought

you down here?"

"To stop you from killing."

Maybe he was rational most of the time, but went berserk. That would be an interesting twist.

"Ah. You mean the slasher."

"Uh, yeah."

"I see. We're looking for him as well."

"I think I've found him, sister. I saw a paw print in Central Park that looked about the right size."

"It was not mine," he said showing me his boots.

"Oh. You ever take them off?"

"Not in Central Park."

"Don't blame you."

"And your holy water didn't bother me, nor your strange powder."

"Ah, but you're afraid of my silver blade! What is it that bothers you, the silver? Or is it the symbols? I've had it blessed by a number of different types of priests, you know. Is that what bothers you?"

"No, what bothers me is a sharp instrument in the hands of a person whose rationality is in doubt."

"Funny, real funny. Say, what is this place?"

"Our home, Mr. Kolchak."

"Nice place. Love the decor. Who did the drapes?"

"I did," said the bearded guy. "We make do with what we can find."

"Hey relax, I'm beginning to like it more, already."

He didn't say anything, only looked at the other two. Suddenly, I realized where I'd seen him before.

"Hey! You're Jacob Wells."

He turned like I'd hit him.

"You're mistaken."

"Oh, no. I recognize you from your pictures."

"What pictures?"

"The ones in the paper. The time that HUAC shafted you."

He really looked surprised.

"You must have a remarkable memory, Mr. Kolchak."

"Nah. I was working at the Times when that mess went down."

"You worked for the Times?"

"Yeah. I used to. Anyway, I remember all of that, because my friends and I'd been talking about it. We were wondering who was next."

"So what are your plans now?"

"Well, I've still got to find the slasher. Looks like it isn't Puss-in-Boots, over here. Hey, take it easy! I'm just kidding."

"His name is Vincent. I'd appreciate it if you'd call him that."

"Okay, okay. Vincent. Now why does that ring a bell? Okay, so I've got to get going. I've wasted enough time here."

"What are you going to do next?"

"I'm going to look for more clues. I guess it isn't a weretiger."

"No, it is not a weretiger."

She was standing at the door, a little black woman dressed in a way that suggested the Caribbean. So did her accent.

"It is not a weretiger, but a man who has been possessed by a tiger demon."

Jacob Wells looked indignant.

"Weretigers. Demons. Possession. Whatever happened to rationality?"

"Hey, possession is nine tenths of the loa."

Vincent and Catherine shot me a disgusted look while Wells just shook his head. Some people have no sense of humor.

Vincent went over to the black woman and held her hand. I noticed that her eyes looked like they were covered with cataract.

"Where should I look?" he asked her.

"Deep. You must listen for him."

"I'll go now. The rest of you wait here."

"No. Vincent, when you go after him, you must take this strange man with you."

Great. Journey to the Center of the Earth.

"Okay, where did you people hide my knife?"

Catherine said that she wanted to accompany us to the abyss, and

Vincent agreed. I followed the two of them down long tunnels, our way lit by torchlight. I had my flashlight in my knapsack, along with a few other goodies. The place had an eerie beauty to it, reminding me of Atlanta. Of course, Atlanta had been a small area, and had streets and doorways and windows. This was more like a cavern complex.

Abruptly, we came out on a vast pit, crossed by a bridge and with cables hanging about. Looking down, I couldn't see a bottom. Catherine grabbed me, pulled me away from the edge. Vincent walked out on the bridge.

"What's he doing?"

"From this spot you can hear the sounds of the city."

"Whoopee."

"I don't mean what you think. But from different places on the bridge, and around the abyss, you can hear individual conversations. Vincent is very good at locating things this way."

"Wait a minute. I've got to try this out."

So I stepped out on the bridge, and found myself listening to an intimate conversation between some guy and his girlfriend. It was starting to get interesting, but I moved on and listened to an argument between a cabbie and a cop.

"This is better than TV."

"Please. I'm trying to locate the killer."

I went back to the side of the cavern, sat down by the girl.

"You know, this is really a magic place, Mr. Kolchak."

"Xanadu?"

"As in Coleridge?"

"Yeah. You know.

*"But, Oh! that deep romantic chasm
that slanted
Down that green hill athwart a
cedern cover!
A savage place! as holy and
enchanted..."*

I broke off, not wanting to continue, but she did.

*"'As 'er beneath a waning moon
was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon-
lover!"*

I didn't say anything.

"It bothers you?"

"I don't know what to make of it."

"Why can't you just accept it?"

"It's a bit much to accept."

"Why?"

"Look at him. He's not human."

"What defines a human?"

"Oh, no. Are we about to get into philosophy? I hate that."

"He has a gentler heart than anyone that I know. And his mind has depths that I've never seen in anyone else."

"I believe you. That's not the point."

"Then what is the point?"

"His appearance."

"I don't find it

unattractive."

"I don't either. But I don't know if I'd want to wake up beside it."

She blushed.

"Sorry. I'm getting too personal."

"It's rough. But our only difficulty is that nobody else can accept him for what he is. Except for the people down here, I mean."

"You seem to have a whole city down here."

"No, there aren't that many."

"Hey, listen. I just remembered something. One of the leads I was going to follow was a name. Have you ever heard of any alchemists living beneath New York?"

"I don't follow you."

"It's probably nothing. But I'd heard the name 'Paracelsus' and I thought..."

She was giving me a really strange look.

"Where did you hear that name?"

"I've got some contacts."

She thought about it for a minute, shrugged.

"He's dead."

"You mean there was an alchemist?"

"I guess you could call him that. Where do you work now?"

"In Chicago. The Weekly World News."

"I've heard of it."

"Yeah. I've been fired and rehired so many times that I've lost count. They don't like the things I report. My boss still thinks I belong with the Enquirer."

"Why?"

"Because of the stories I find. Alchemists, vampires, demons, zombies."

"Oh, come on."

"No, really. How old do you think I am?"

"Hmmm. Late thirties."

"Uh, uh. I'll soon be sixty."

"What?"

"I can show you my driver's license, if you like. I don't even know why. But it's a pain, believe me. It has its good side, but it can be a real bother at times."

"You lead an interesting life."

"I know. I used to work for the Times, but I got fired."

"Why?"

"Oh, they didn't like a story I wrote, and killed it."

"What was the story?"

"Whew! That's going back. Well there was this baby that a woman found. She said it was part human and part alley cat. Of course I..."

I was looking at Vincent. So was she.

"Say, this is a sort of strange question, but was your boyfriend ever at St. Vin..."

He was coming back, running.

"Follow me. I think I know where he is. Catherine, please go tell Father to gather the people. We must have nobody out and alone. Have them arm themselves."

She nodded and kissed him. Weird. He turned to me.

"If you want to find the slasher, then follow me."

Vincent could run. He would have left me behind if he hadn't slowed himself down, and even so, I was hard put to keep up with him.

Suddenly, he stopped, waiting for me to catch up.

"How steady are your nerves?" he asked.

"What did you have in mind?"

"We're going to take the train."

"Don't you think you'll be a little conspicuous?"

"Follow me."

A few minutes later, I was lying beside him on top of a subway train, while the ceiling rushed by overhead. If I were to raise my head, I'd probably lose it.

"This is a hell of a way to save train fare!" I had to shout over the noise. "Probably safer than the streets, uptown!"

He didn't say anything, just kept looking ahead.

And then we were there. He helped me down from the train as it started to pull away, and we vanished back up a tunnel.

"We must be quiet. He is

near."

"How can you tell?"

"Hush!"

We crept down the corridor in darkness that was thick, a stench of wretched humanity about us. Here too, were tunnel dwellers, but not the kind that Vincent hung out with. I wondered what I should use as a weapon.

Then we found the bodies. There were three of them, two women and a child, mangled with a ferocity that defied description. Vincent was silent for a few minutes while I looked them over.

"Still warm," I said. "He can't have gone too far."

"I can't understand such hatred," he said.

"You don't hang out in the right clubs."

I was trying to take his mind off the pathetic spectacle behind us as we left. Mine too, for that matter.

"Now if you want real hate, check out the paparazzi. Why those guys..."

Vincent turned, snarling, as something that came at us from the right.

Pushing me back and away, he jumped forward, only to be thrown against the far wall by the dark figure that now stood there staring at me. All I could see was a dark human shape and eyes that shone yellow.

Vincent was down for the count, and Shere Khan the tiger was coming for a guy who was too old to be playing Mowgli.

I reached under my coat and drew, only remembering at the last moment that I was only armed with a water pistol.

To my never-ending surprise, it worked. As the water splashed on his face, he jumped back, screaming.

"Holy smoke! I mean water! It works! Here, Morris, try some more!"

That was enough for him. He turned and fled down the tunnel, snarling and growling. I think I preferred Vincent's snarling.

As the tiger demon man ran away, I crouched beside Vincent, my eyes still on the tunnel.

"Wake up, boy. Come on, Vinnie, time to get up." I shook him. He mumbled something Shakespearean.

"Let's go. The game is afoot, and all that stuff."

He shook his head and sat up, looked around, at me.

"How did you chase him off?"

"With Betsy, here," I said, showing him my water pistol. "She's full of holy water."

He looked at me for a few seconds and then smiled.

"You're a most unusual man, Mr. Kolchak."

"Call me Carl. Mr. Kolchak sounds like what they say when I'm in trouble. And you're not exactly Mr. Average, either. So, you got any idea where we should go next?"

"I want to return to our home. I'm afraid to be away while that thing is stalking the tunnels. We

have children there."

"Children? Not..."

"No. Just refugees from the streets. Does the thought bother you that much?"

"It doesn't really bother me. Just give me a little time to get used to it. Hell, with the things I've gone after the last fifteen years, this is just another unusual romance. More power to you kids."

He just smiled and shook his head at that.

At that moment, there was another banging on the pipes. Vincent listened for a few moments, and then jumped to his feet, leaning against the wall for a moment.

"We must go. Narcissa says that the demon will probably attack our home next. Hurry!"

"Narcissa? Who's Narcissa?"

"You know, I'm beginning to hate this commute!" I yelled over the roar of the train. Once again, we were headed crosstown, keeping our heads down, while I tried to figure out how he navigated.

Then, arriving at our destination, we quickly climbed off the train, disappearing again into the tunnels without being seen.

"You do this a lot?"

"Frequently."

"Strange way of getting around. Doesn't really let you see the sights, you know."

For a minute, it looked like he twitched into the beginning of a smile.

"It does save cab fare."

Ah, he was beginning to get the spirit. We hurried down another tunnel, half walled with concrete and half carved of living rock. The service lights had disappeared behind us, and we now were relying on my flashlight, and the faint intermittent bits of light that came from unseen sources.

"Carl, tell me. How is it that you are so familiar with the supernatural? I thought that I had seen strange things. After all, look at me."

"You? Forget it. You're a little unusual, but I see stranger in your average nightclub. I'm sorry about that misunderstanding we had earlier."

"You thought I was a weretiger? Do you mean to say that you've encountered other weretigers?"

"Nah. I've just read about them. Oh, I also was told about them by an old guy from Thailand. He'd seen one or two."

"But in reality, you've never come across a weretiger. You have no real evidence that such exist."

"Weretigers? No. I've encountered a werewolf or two. Up around St. Paul, I met a werebear. Boy, talk about your party animal! And I met a wererat over in Jersey. Rotten personality."

"Are you serious?"

"As little as I can help. Oh, you mean am I telling you the truth? Yeah. Every one of them. Now I've heard about a were elephant, but I don't believe that one for a second. That's getting ridiculous."

"Then how about a tiger demon? Isn't that ridiculous?"



"Oh. I see your point. Look, are you familiar with voodoo?"

"I've heard it called 'voudoun'."

"That's it. And I gathered from your reaction to my earlier joke, that you understand the concept of loa."

"A little."

"Okay. Now whether you call them demons or gods depends on your point of view. And who or what is on your side."

"One man's Mede is another man's Persian."

"Yeah. That's...oh, you stinker! But that's the idea. Now forget the incompatibility of a Caribbean, African religion and an Asian cat. Actually, the loa we're talking about could be any type of cat. It primarily depends on the viewpoint of the uh, well, the horse."

"I understand. The possessed person."

"Yeah. Now we begin talking about views of reality. Assume that you believe in voudoun or Santera or some such. Then the god/demon is a real entity, and is guiding the person's actions, and is giving him, or her, all sorts of interesting power. We've got a real problem on our hands. But this would explain why my holy water sprinkler worked. Christianity is a part of these religions, and a little loa was getting its behind kicked by a bigger loa."

"And if I don't believe?"

"Then you've got a person who believes in one of these religions, who thinks he's been possessed by one of his gods, and is acting that

way. Maybe he has a deep seated desire to go around tearing people apart. In that case, his mind is going to flood his body with all sorts of interesting substances, like adrenaline, and endorphins, which will give him a lot of strength, and make him damned hard to hurt."

"And the pain caused by the holy water was purely psychosomatic. I can see a case for either argument. So what do you believe?"

"I believe that we're going to have a fight on our hands. But what..."

"Catherine!" he yelled, and suddenly took off at full clip.

Odd boy. Very nice, but odd.

I followed as well as I could, and took a wrong turn somewhere. That's how it happened that I was looking down on the scene when Vincent came into the room.

Wells and Chandler were there, as well as a number of other people. There was some big black guy, swinging a crowbar, and he and Chandler were keeping Morris at bay.

Morris was a big oriental-looking guy who wasn't wearing much. His clothing was in rags, and his hair was a mess. But he was pretty strong to begin with, and I could see the signs of martial arts training on him. And he was moving in a way that reminded me of some big cats. His body was covered with cuts.

Then, the black guy swung the crowbar.

I wouldn't have wanted to be on the receiving end; he looked like he could crack concrete.

But the oriental guy somehow snatched it and pulled, and the crowbar swinger went airborne. He hit a far wall and was down for the count.

But Chandler wasn't pausing to admire his form. Her size six caught this guy in the back of the head with an impact that knocked him off his feet. As he picked himself up and looked at her, she did it again. The way she fought looked like a cross between karate and some stuff I'd seen on the wrong side of Chicago, what I like to call the Chicago Way.

The third time that she hit him, he was ready, and she fell beside the other guy and the crowbar.

That's when Vincent entered the room.

As Vincent and Morris tangled, I realized that it was only surprise that had taken him out before. Morris hit a different wall from the one than Chandler & Co. were occupying and at a height of about eight feet.

He came back for round two.

It really reminded me of a back alley brawl between a couple of big Toms. They were both taking shots that would have floored Tyson, and snarling and roaring all the while. I made my way downstairs while they were going at it.

It looked like Vincent was wearing him down, battering him silly, when the other guy grew claws. I'll swear that there was an image of a tiger that appeared over the guy's form for a moment. And then his hand flashed and Vincent went back, with his hands over his face.

I drew the athame from my belt

and stabbed the tiger god in the shoulder.

Vincent picked himself up, wiping blood away. He'd been slashed across the face, just enough to draw blood and get it in his eyes. Wells was seeing to him while other people were looking at Chandler and the black guy. I checked out Morris.

He was in bad shape. The wound I had given him wasn't enough to kill him, but it looked like he was dying anyway. He was conscious.

"Who are you?" I asked him. He looked at me, uncomprehending, for several moments. His eyes looked around, trying to figure out where he was. Whatever had possessed him was gone.

A minute later, so was he.

They buried him down in an area where there were other graves. Vincent, bandaged, was there, as were all the others. When it was over, we walked back to the large chamber.

"What will you do now, Mr. Kolchak?"

That was Wells, looking particularly grim.

"I'll try and figure out who the guy was. Why would an oriental be possessed by something like this? Then I'll write it up."

"No," said Catherine.

"What? Why not? I'm a reporter."

"You can't, Mr. Kolchak. How can you tell this story without revealing the presence of this community? Do you have any idea of

the trouble that would cause?"

Damn. What the hell, nobody ever believes me anyway. Oh well, another one for the "can't print" file. I beat my head against the wall for a while, just to make it feel better.

It took me a week to track him down. His name was Eduardo Chiba, and he was an electronics engineer from Sao Paulo, Brazil. Apparently, he was a follower of Santera, a big religion in Brazil. I don't know what happened. A second generation Japanese in Sao Paulo must have had a strange cultural blend, enough to make for a strange visualization of a cat god.

I went back down to the tunnels, and told Vincent, as he carved the name of the poor guy on a rock.

"Do you have any opinion on what happened?"

"No. He could have been at a worship service, and never came out of it, or could have had a curse placed on him by a bocor."

"What?"

"An evil sorcerer, as opposed to a hougoun, or good one. Never mind. I'd like to know, but I don't think I'll ever find out."

"I don't know, Carl. You're good at finding things that others can't."

It took me a minute to figure out.

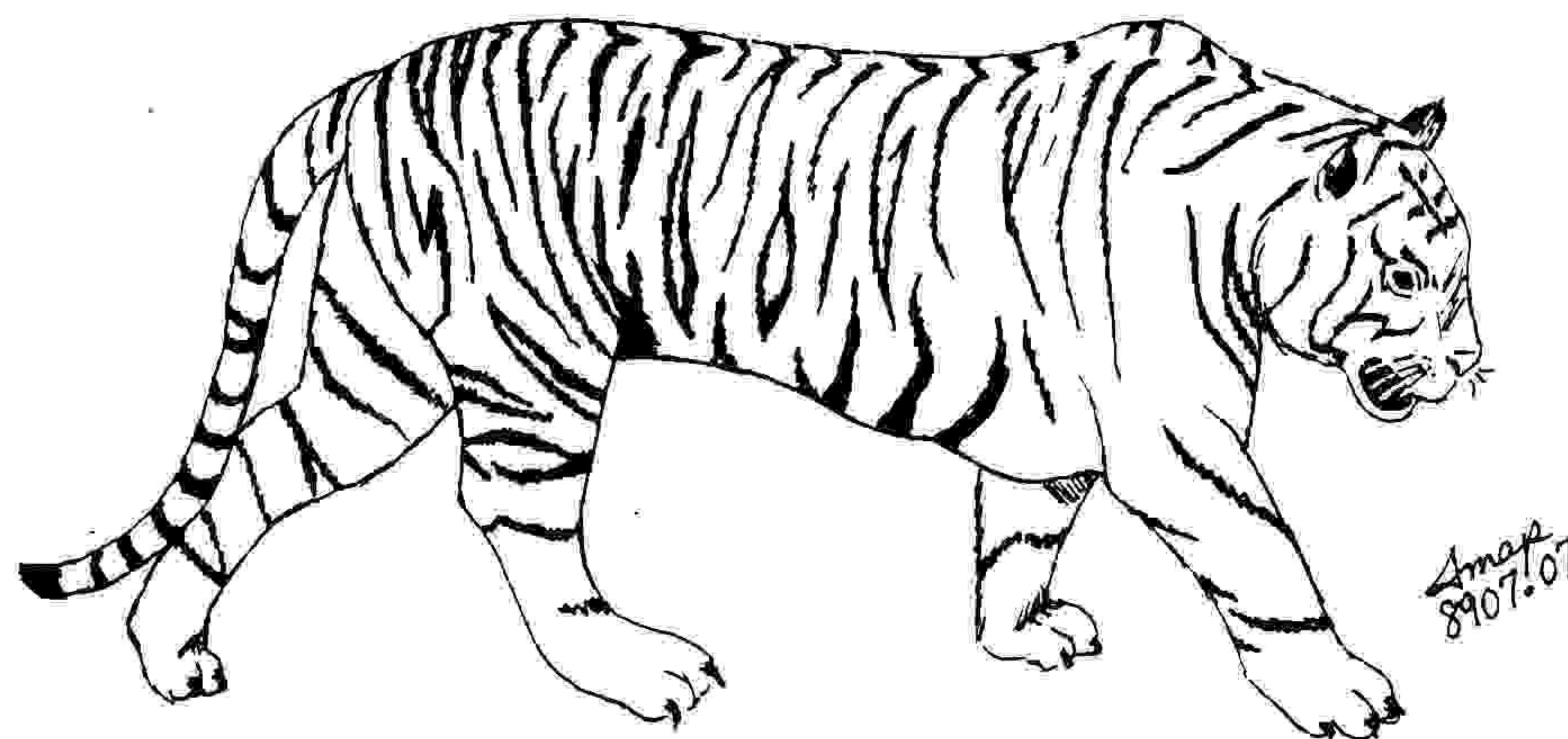
"Don't worry, my friend. I'll never tell about this place. I like you people too much. But you know, this is the first time I've ever voluntarily killed a story."

He smiled, and that made me feel a lot better.

"What about an epitaph for the guy?" I asked.

"Hmmm. Something fitting. Blake, I suppose. 'Did He that made the Lamb make thee?'"

"Or thee," I whispered. "Or thee."





F=Ma

Yoda awoke. He remained in his little bed for several minutes, savoring the feel of the life on Dagobah. He listened to the beloved snakes, the daughters of gentle renewing Nature. The cries of the swamp bats, seeking refuge from the approaching dawn light, filled him with warmth. The flies and mosquitoes had begun their intricate symphonies for his entertainment. Truly, Yoda thought, Dagobah is a paradise. Not for the first time, Yoda wondered how Obiwan, may his intellect forever know the serenity of the Force, could have stood to have lived so long in the desert.

Yoda shuffled around his hut, unhurriedly preparing for his day. His body was old and weak, but years of Jedi discipline, Jedi CALM had kept him well. The pain of age was a stranger to Yoda. True he was not as fast, or as strong as he once was. But all things considered, there was no long the need to be so. In any event the channels to the Force, the power primeval, were always at hand. As long as the need was proper.

Yoda strode out of his hut, walking east. He enjoyed how the hazy morning light diffused down through the ever-present mists, cascading strangely among the upper limbs of the trees. He decided to go to the clearing beyond the still pool, where the eldest trees stood, thick and majestic. Among the humbling surroundings of the ancient colossi's thick boles, he would enter the peaceful calm of a Jedi, to meditate. And later collect tubers for dinner.

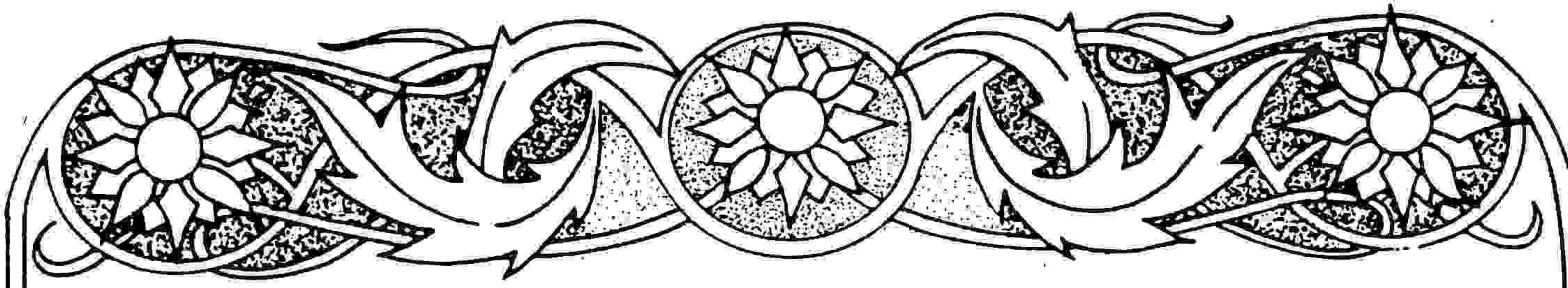
Meditation was in order. Yoda had dreamt another disturbing, prophetic vision. He was concerned that his recent dreams of an

upcoming student had been replaced, by another, more alarming image. Once Yoda had dreamt of a young, rash boy. A hero. Yoda hated teaching heroic types. But Obiwan, may his sentience forever grace the Force, had spoken well of him. Yoda expected his arrival soon. But within the past few days, that particular vision had been erased. Now, the calmness of sleep brought him darkness. An overflowing emptiness. A darkness so bright, a vastness so small. It was... alien. Not alien as in race or shape. Yoda had no time for xenological differences among the intellects. He had learned long ago that all sentients, however odd, were united as one people in the Force. But his dreams spoke of something alien in nature, incomprehensible. Yoda wondered what could baffle his understanding. Some aspect of the Dark Side? One of the tempting mysteries along the road to oblivion? Perhaps. The calmness of meditation would either bring an answer, or not bring an answer. Or both.

Yoda stopped his determined pace. Before him stood a man. He was dressed for spaceflight, wearing an orange pressure suit. A helmet was pressed to his side, held by the crook of the man's left arm. Yoda had not heard, or more importantly, felt any ship approach Dagobah. The man gave no greeting, nor moved, but only stared at Yoda with dreamlike eyes. Yoda instinctively hunched over, gripping his cane with mock weakness. He had transformed himself into the role of the seemingly harmless swamp dweller. "Hello," his voice cackled. The stranger remained silent. *Is this Luke?* Yoda thought. He denied the suggestion immediately. Obiwan, may he exist in blissful contemplation, had described Luke. Young, reckless, blond. This

Patrick Sponaule





stranger was none of the three. He had very short, light brown hair. His face appeared young, but spoke of a timeless aging as well. The face of a waxen statue. Yoda could not guess at the man's age. His eyes were like chips of ancient ice. Eyes of enormous serenity and peace. Calm. Calmness that touched at Yoda the way the enormity of the Force did. But this man's calmness was tempered by an alien forge. Yoda opened the gates to the Force, reading the signs of the life in front of him, to determine the stranger's niche, within the Force. There was nothing to be revealed. "Lost, are you?" Yoda asked.

"No." His voice was quiet, almost a whisper, but somehow reverberated, as if augmented by an almost silent chorus. Yoda's mind took in the minutiae of details as he steadily opened his channels to the Force. The stranger stood on moist, wet soil, but there were no footprints around where he might have walked. Yoda questioned whether the man was a Force-Adept, who could somehow hide his presence, alter his Force emanations. An unheard-of ability. Yoda's eyes grew large, as he whispered conspiratorially.

"Yoda, you seek. Hmm? Help you, I can." He smiled crookedly.

"No. You shouldn't be here, Yoda. You really must leave now." His voice delivered the pronouncement, curiously flat of emotion.

"So. I should not be here." Yoda stood straight. His eyes narrowed. The Force flowed into him. "I should leave. Really. Why should I?"

"Something is going to happen."

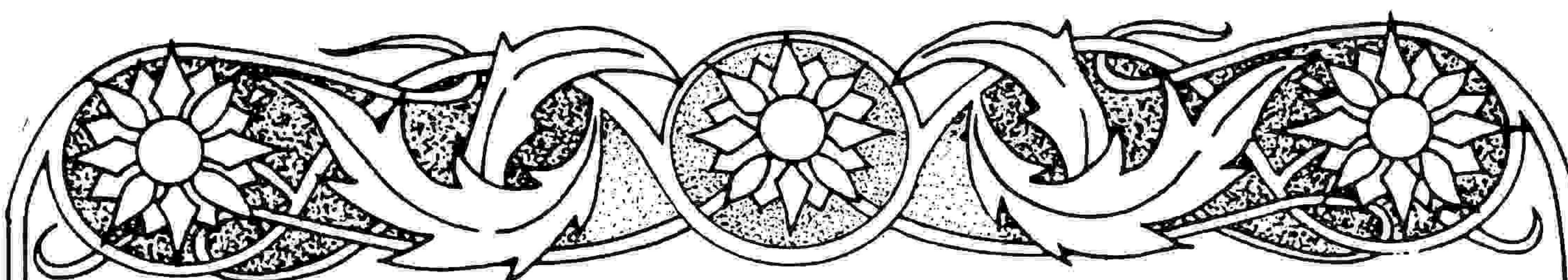
"Something what?"

"Something... wonderful."

"Oh, I doubt that." Yoda's mind slid along waves of Force, brushing against the stranger. The intellect it reached was totally out of his grasp. Yoda felt like he was chasing the horizon. He concentrated and pulsed a line of Force which hummed behind the stranger. The effect was similar to shining a light behind a piece of paper. The images and thought that rushed into Yoda's mind flashed by, too fast for him to substantiate. He narrowed his focus, and received one image clearly: Dagobah, his shining pearl, being consumed by a void, a darkness. Yoda shut off his psychic x-ray, returning his mind to the events of the clearing. The stranger had not moved. His expression was unchanged. Yoda questioned whether he even breathed. "You have come from the Emperor to destroy me. To spread the Dark Side over my home. I'm flattered." The air temperature lowered as Yoda's subconscious realigned magnetic fields around his body. Yoda prepared for the eventual battle. The stranger would attack, be repulsed, and subdued. It was the way of the Jedi. The calmness of the Force waited inside him. "The Dark Side has truly blinded your eyes. I may appear weak and small, but a giant is my ally, and that giant is the Force."

"Force?" The stranger's eyes blinked. The left side of his face twitched. The first time he had changed an expression. "Force equals mass time acceleration." The man looked down at his feet, then back at Yoda. He no longer had the face of a statue. His eyes were alive, with enormous sadness. They spoke of unending solitude. "I'm sorry," he whispered. The calmness returned, as his eyes once again regarded the infinite. "Wonderful," he said, and slowly faded away.

Yoda stood his ground, letting the Force be the entirety of his senses. He sensed only the living 'scent' of the clearing. Deep, deep within the bright calm of the Force, Yoda pondered what he had seen. There was no residue of the stranger, no trace he



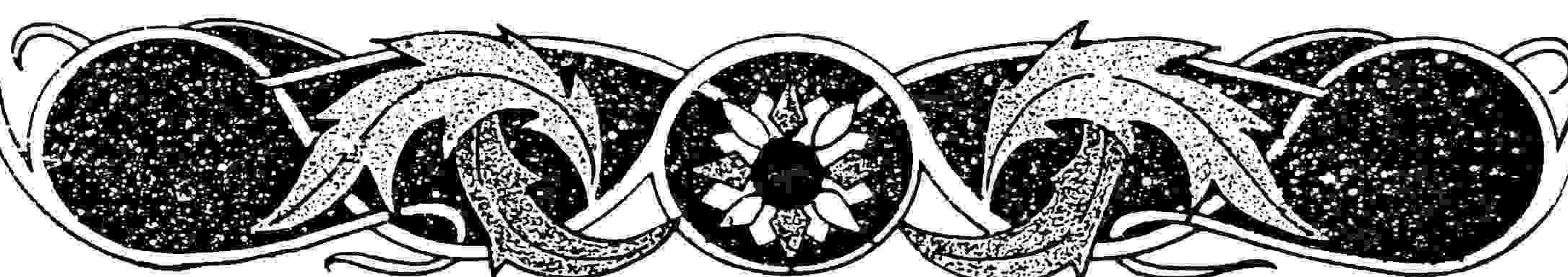
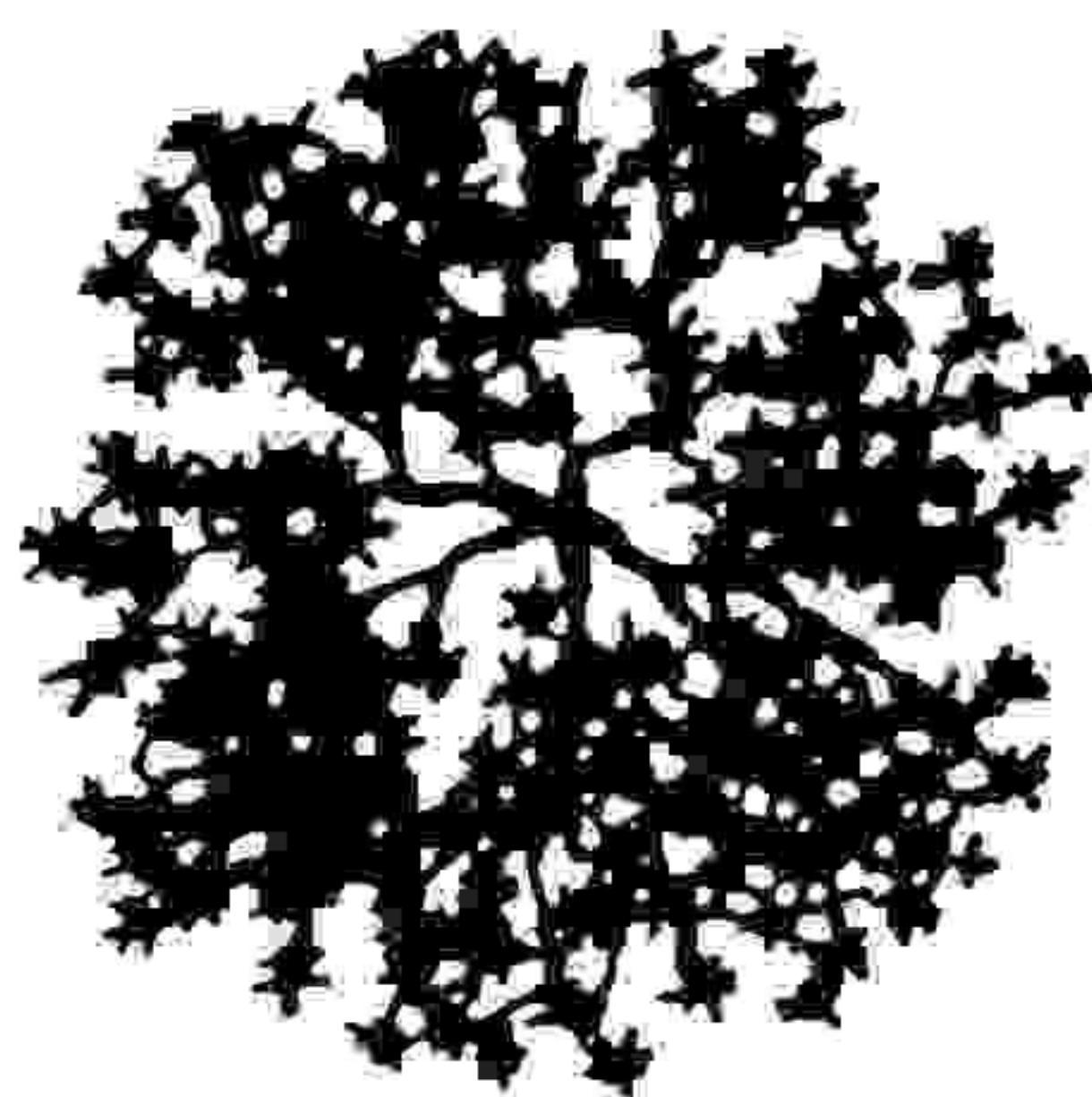
had been there. There was no imprint on the Force. The stranger had vanished, not joined with the Force, like Obiwan, may he find strength in the calm, just vanished.

A noise, the sound of a million buzzing insects, erupted from above. Yoda's ears registered the noise, but his calmness prevented him from being startled. The reptiles of the swamps, however, ran, flew, and swam in fear. In the sky was a great dark shape. Huge. Lines and paths of Force splintered, and broke at the contact. It was vast, smooth, black and rectangular. Yoda sensed nothing of the Force within it. It was, not-Force. Thoughts Yoda had glimpsed from the stranger, incomprehensible until now, coalesced into one concrete thought. Monolith.

With a thunderous roar, clouds swirled madly into the monolith. The air around Yoda exploded into motion, spinning leaves, branches and small animals into the sky. Falling upwards. Yoda allowed the Force to chain him to ground, and observed. The monolith was growing. Sucking in the

atmosphere, moving closer and closer to the ground. It would consume the mass of Dagobah, Yoda felt sure. The ground swelled and buckled. Trees, ripped from their foundations of root and stone, shot like missiles towards the insatiable monolith. More lines of Force snapped and fell away, as the monolith grew. Yoda conjectured that the loss of mass, here, was returning to the Universe as energy, somewhere else. The monolith would be his death, and he wasn't sure that he would be able to merge with the Force in the end. A final death. His ears popped from the drop of pressure. His nose began to bleed. Yoda wondered, perhaps after his body was converted to energy, beyond the monolith, he could be reunited with Obiwan, that lucky bastard, secure in the calm. Perhaps not. Perhaps both.

Yoda felt the ground underneath him sift and crack. The anchoring Force cables dwindled, then vanished. Yoda was swept up into the maelstrom. The monolith was obscuring most of the sky. Yoda marvelled at how calm he was remaining. Cut off from the Force.



CHOICES

Catherine looked about doubtfully.

"Vincent--are you sure this is the right place? Sometimes Mouse--"

"I'm sure." Vincent paced around the ring of doorways in the darkened chamber. Seeing nothing, he returned to her side. "Mouse has trouble with time, but not places. The only thing that's saved him is his inability to get lost."

"A useful talent," Catherine mused, "especially if you find it occasionally prudent to disappear."

Vincent laughed, reaching for her hand. "Mouse hasn't had time to fall from Father's good graces lately. He's been working down here on...some sort of machine." He lifted his free hand--soft, leathery palm toward the ceiling--in a shrug.

Catherine studied the leonine features with genuine affection. She loved exploring the labyrinth of caverns and tunnels beneath the city with Vincent. His keen eyes missed nothing and she felt safe and warm and secure despite the weight and chill of the stone that surrounded them. It was easy to believe that the hassles of everyday life in New York were but figments of her imagination when she walked these sandy paths with him.

"What is he working on? Do you know?"

Vincent pulled an ornate pocket watch from his vest, peering at the tiny numbers. With a sigh, he snapped the watch shut.

"No," he murmured slowly, glancing around once more. He turned to Catherine and made his eyes very round, doing a fair imitation of Mouse. "Secret!" he insisted, his inflection almost perfect.

Catherine laughed and poked him in the ribs.

"Behave yourself," she admonished, but she leaned against him and snuggled into the warmth of his body. Vincent rested his head on hers and closed his eyes.

"Waiting for Mouse," he thought to himself, "has its advantages..."

There was a faint whine from one of the darkened doorways, pitched so low only Vincent's ears caught it. His head snapped around so fast that Catherine was startled.

"What?" she demanded. "What's wrong--"

"Perhaps we've been waiting unnecessarily," Vincent said softly. He crept stealthily toward the source of the sound with Catherine dogging his heels. "Mouse may simply be engrossed in his work." As one, they stepped through the tunnel entrance.

"Whose idea was this anyway?" Geordi asked the air around him.

Will Riker glanced at him over his shoulder.

"Why? Claustrophobic?" he teased, grinning at the engineer's back.

"Not me--I'm an engineer, remember? We're used to being cooped up in small places..." Geordi grinned, teeth flashing whitely against his dark skin. Riker shook his head.

"You're breaking my heart, La Forge," he said with mock sarcasm, then sobered. "You know the story as well as I do--some..." He struggled for an appropriate slur, but none came to mind. "...xenobiologist got a brill in his bonnet--he's convinced that there's evidence that Kzinti were alive and well in New York City during the late 1980s." He managed to make the scientific title sound bad enough to convey his sentiment.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," Geordi mumbled. "And since the Enterprise has had more 'time travel experience'--they traded baleful looks, remembering those experiences all too vividly--we got elected to drop in on King Kong's alma mater."

Riker burst out laughing. "Who the devil is 'King Kong'?"

Catherine Edwards

"He's a giant ape that has a thing for woman--a movie hero dating back as far as the 1930s."

Riker was incredulous. "Movie hero--you mean celluloid?"

"Uh hum," Geordi muttered absently, fascinated by the tunnel walls. "Parts of this tunnel are natural, but some of it has been carved out," he mused, intrigued.

"So?" Riker probed, abandoning the trivia lesson.

"By hand," Geordi added smugly. He reached to touch the damp walls, marveling in the handiwork.

"By hand? Do you think it might be connected to that energy field we're reading down here?"

Geordi shook his head, shrugging. "Don't know. Maybe. The craftsmanship is incredible--clean, simple..."

Now Riker reached for the wall, clearly interested. "That doesn't sound like the way Kzinti do things..." he began.

Someone--or something--rounded the corner and let out a short yelp of surprise. Both officers whirled in time to catch a glimpse of the retreating figure. Whatever it was, it wasn't Kzinti. It was obviously humanoid--probably human--but a fierce light beamed out of the vicinity of its forehead. In fact, it had to be human--there weren't supposed to be any other humanoids on earth during this time period, and certainly not here, miles beneath the city.

"Get a tricorder fix on that..whatever that was," Riker snapped. Geordi attempted to oblige him.

"Can't," he muttered after a second or two. "Something's interfering with the reading." He checked his phaser as well, putting it on stun and firing harmlessly at the floor. Nothing happened. He exchanged looks with Riker, who was checking his communicator.

"Enterprise--this is Number One. Come in, please."

He received only static.

"What's causing this? Do you think we've found our energy field? Is your visor affected?"

"My visor's fine," Geordi assured his companion. "It runs off the electric impulses in my body. It could be the energy field we were reading that's interfering," he confessed, "but everything worked fine when we beamed down." He took several large steps back the way they had come. The tricorder picture wavered and blurred, steadied for an instant, and then dissolved before any sense could be made of the reading. "Yeah--it seems to get worse the further down that tunnel we go, so we must be getting closer. I think it's some sort of damping field, or an energy source on a similar frequency."

Riker frowned and glanced once more in the direction the fleeing figure had gone, then sighed.

"Without instruments, I guess there's not much point in trying to follow," he admitted, clearly disappointed. "Whatever it was, it couldn't have seen enough to do any damage, and it's definitely not Kzin-kin. Let's do what we came down to do and get out before anything else comes by."

"Captain Picard--I've lost contact with the landing party!"

Worf's voice boomed across the spacious bridge.

Picard whirled and squinted in his general direction.

"Lost contact? How? You mean they aren't responding or you can't reach them?"

A measured voice spoke from the helm. "Something seems to be interfering with their signal. No doubt the energy reading we took earlier."

Picard launched himself from the Captain's chair and peered over Data's shoulder. The screen showed only static and occasional snow.

Picard flipped two switches and the screen wavered valiantly, but failed to clear up. "'Nothing can go wrong, Picard' they said," he muttered to himself while glaring at the board, "'This is a routine assignment, Picard' they said..." Abruptly, he straightened.

"Get down to the transporter room, Mr. Data--lock on if you're able and beam them back up! We'll lower shields and cloaking on your signal." Data rose smoothly and made

for the turbo lift, and Picard turned to Wesley. "Ensign Crusher--check that board. I want to know if it's really interference from the planet or just a system's failure." He turned, searching Deanna Troi's face anxiously.

"Anything, Counselor?"

"I can't get a clear impression through the screens, and the cloaking device isn't helping, but--no, I don't feel that they're in any danger." She shook her head slightly, and smiled. "They don't feel that they're in any danger."

Picard snorted in disgust. He had been opposed to this particular assignment from the beginning. Battles, conflicts, negotiations and diplomatic hothouses he could handle, but this--this was intolerable!--not to mention faintly ridiculous.

"And futile," his own personal demon prodded unnecessarily. Picard waved the thought away as though it were a pesky insect. "Not to mention inconvenient..." Had the whole admiralty gone mad? Even before the disappearance--however temporary it might prove to be--of his chief engineer and first officer, the whole thing had smacked of overkill. The Enterprise--a starship!--had been sent back through time to play archeologist/anthropologist at the insistent bidding of some...--adjectives failed him--"...xenobiologist. Someone must owe someone one heck of a favor..." Picard threw himself into his captain's chair with such force that Wesley Crusher mustered the courage to peep at him from the helm.

Embarrassed, Picard averted his strong jaw and chewed his lower lip in a very un-captainly manner. And sighed. And waited.

There was a dizzying effect, like falling slowly in a bottomless room and time seemed to pass very quickly--or very slowly.... Before his mind could pursue the thought, the universe righted itself, and him in it and Vincent found himself facing a bare wall. Catherine completed her stumble, falling against his broad back.

"Catherine, are you..." He turned to her and stopped cold, blue eyes flying wide with amazement. Catherine whirled, seeing what he saw, and she grew quite pale.

Data stepped out from behind the console, metallic eyes flashing with curiosity. Involuntarily, Catherine gasped

and backed up against Vincent, who curved a protective arm around her slender frame and bared his teeth ominously.

No one spoke for the space of several frantic heartbeats. Catherine found her voice at last.

"Where...are we?"

Data took another inquisitive step and Catherine pressed even closer against Vincent.

"I am Commander Data. Welcome to the starship Enterprise."

"Data--did you get them?" a clipped voice demanded from thin air.

Catherine and Vincent whirled, seeking the speaker, but the one who called himself "Data" slapped himself purposefully over the insignia on his left breast.

"Data here."

"Did you get them?" the invisible speaker demanded once more.

There was an almost human pause while Data regarded the unusual pair standing transfixed on the transporter platform.

"Not exactly..." he began.

Picard listened with a growing sense of disbelief as Data outlined the strange, inexplicable jump the transporter had made and tactfully announced the arrival of their "visitors." Routine mission indeed! Picard waved unnecessarily to Worf, who was already stepping into the turbolift. "Counselor--go with him," Picard added quickly. "I'll want you there." Deanna trotted toward the turbolift with alacrity and the doors shut, swallowing them both.

"Escort our guests to the visitor's lounge until we can decide what to do. I'm sending a party down to meet you."

Picard sat back in his chair and covered his face with his hands for the space of a few seconds. This was not the sort of mystery he enjoyed.

Data led them down the crowded corridor, blithely commenting on this or that aspect of the...had he called this a "starship"? Vincent spent the first uncomfortable minutes

desperately wishing for his cape, walking with his face carefully averted. Catherine clung to his hand, a comforting warmth. He could feel her excitement and the ebbing of her fear as they followed Data down the brightly lit hallways. Curiosity overcame shame and at last: Vincent raised his eyes and peered around. No one so much as gave him a second look.

A woman with a little girl in tow passed them and smiled in a friendly manner. Vincent stared, startled, and the little girl waved.

Without thinking, he raised a furry arm and waved back. The little girl giggled shyly and buried her head in her mother's tunic. The woman stroked her daughter's fair hair fondly and smiled at Vincent.

"Sometimes Silandra's shy," she explained unnecessarily.

Vincent nodded, transfixed, and spoke without thinking. "So am I."

The tunnels--corridors, Vincent corrected himself--seemed endless, curving this way and that through what was obviously an enormous vessel. He half-expected to wake and find himself wandering the endless catacombs, but the chill he felt at the strange surroundings convinced him that this was no dream.

Curiosity had overcome the better part of Catherine's fear and she conversed freely with Data although her grip on Vincent's hand was very nearly cutting off circulation to his fingers. In the midst of their predicament, Vincent found this vaguely amusing and permitted himself a small smile.

"Are you...where are you from?" Catherine queried cautiously. "I mean you don't seem...." She flushed, feeling incredibly rude.

"I am not human," Data answered promptly, guessing the intent of her inquiry. "I am an android, built by Doctor Noonian Soong."

"An android...!" Catherine said with a small gasp. "A... machine?" Vincent stared, blue eyes wide with shock.

"A very complex machine," Data began with some pride, golden eyes blinking. "I

was created--"

He was interrupted by the arrival of Counselor Troi and Worf, two security guards in tow. Catherine took an involuntary step backwards, startled by the Klingon's swarthy experience.

Worf, too, was experiencing some surprise at appearances. In a reaction that was purely instinctive, he pulled his lips back in a snarl and emitted a low, rumbling noise. Vincent took a menacing step forward and bared an even more impressive set of sharp teeth, growling ominously.

Eye to eye, Deanna and Catherine exchanged glances. The women turned at the exact same moment, and spoke as one.

"Stop that!" they admonished, with stern looks at their companions. The women whirled to stare at each other, laughing in surprise. Over their heads, the eyes of two warriors met, and smiled.

Deanna took Catherine's arm, her manner gentle, and led the party down the corridor.

"My name is Deanna Troi and I'm the ship's Counselor. I know that all of this must seem strange to you, and a little bit frightening. Let me explain what happened, and then I'll try to answer your questions, all right?" She smiled at Catherine again, and Catherine had the distinct impression that this woman knew and understood everything that was flitting through her mind. She returned the smile and the death grip on Vincent's hand eased up.

"What has Mr. Data told you so far?"

"That this is a ship--he called it a 'starship', I think," Vincent began helpfully, looking to Catherine for confirmation. She nodded.

"He said that you didn't mean to...I mean, you weren't trying to..." Catherine swallowed, then pursued the conversation doggedly. "He said that we're not supposed to be here, but it's not our fault." She wrinkled her fair brow. "Oh," she added, "and he said that he's...a machine."

"That's true," Troi confirmed promptly. "Mr. Data is a machine, and you are on a starship--a vessel that travels between worlds. What he didn't tell you is that we're not from your time. By your standards, we won't exist for another four hundred

years." She let them digest that information. Neither of them looked disposed toward asking anything, so she continued.

"We're here on a scientific research mission. Two of our officers were transported down to the planet surface--the same process that brought you here--and we lost contact with them. When we lost contact, Mr. Data locked onto two life forms--"

"Us," Catherine said thoughtfully, and Troi nodded before continuing.

"--and beamed you aboard. Captain Picard asked me to meet you and make you comfortable until we can decide how to correct this. We're still trying to get back in touch with our officers. The first order of business is to take you both to sick-bay and have you checked over. After we're sure you've suffered no ill effects from beaming up, we'll try to answer some of your questions."

Catherine's sharp lawyer's mind was keenly aware of what must have been left out of the explanation, but she felt comfortable with Troi, trusted her. Catherine's trust communicated itself to Vincent, who relaxed enough to take interest in his surroundings again. The women walked and talked, dark heads bent together, while Worf and Vincent hovered behind them, and the security guards hovered, weapons sheathed, behind them.

They rounded another of the endless corridors and Vincent felt the weight of eyes upon him. A young woman, dressed in the garb of security, passed on their right, making a leisurely inspection of Vincent's physique. Despite his relative naivete, the intent behind her perusal was all too obvious, even to him.

Mesmerized, he stopped walking and stared back, blue eyes wide with shock. The two hulking security guards stopped behind him, but hesitated, reluctant to approach. One of them stepped forward uncertainly but Worf held out a thickly-muscled arm in his path, indicating a halt. Oblivious to this audience, Vincent stood his ground.

There was frank admiration, and open speculation in her eyes, and she looked up into his startled face. One eyebrow cocked, an obvious invitation. For a full second, Vincent stared, then fled down the corridor after Catherine and Troi. Vincent glanced over his shoulder and thudded unceremoniously into Catherine's back. Only his excellent balance prevented them from tumbling to the

floor. Catherine and Deanna regarded him curiously, taking in the wide eyes, the dazed expression, the apprehension etched in his tall frame.

"Vincent? Are you okay?" Catherine probed. She reached to touch his shoulder but he caught her hand and held it tightly between his own. He glanced anxiously behind him once more, then gazed gratefully into Catherine's concerned face, more grateful than he could ever remember for the steadying influence of their bond. His next words were barely audible, but unmistakably heartfelt.

"Please...hold my hand."

"All this way for...this?" Geordi was thoroughly disgusted with the situation, but the apparatus before him did capture his imagination. Riker stopped beside him, facing the huge machine. It was a glorious hodge-podge of material, taking up fully a third of the chamber they stood in. It looked as though it were held together by sealing wax and odd bits of string, but it obviously worked.

"The energy reading?" he asked unnecessarily.

"You got it," Geordi confirmed. "And my guess is that this is what's interfering with our equipment." He grinned at Riker, slightly amused by the whole ordeal.

"So much for a higher intelligence."

Riker made a rude noise.

"Do you want me to turn it off?--our equipment should work then." One slender dark hand reached for the control board.

"No," Riker said shortly. "We found it running. We'd better leave it that way. You know how they get about the Prime Directive. Let's just...get away from this thing and see if we can contact the ship. I'm ready to go home." With one more disgusted look at the machine, he turned on heel and left.

Geordi hesitated, casting one final look at the immense machine, then trotted after his superior officer, leaving the room in silence.

Almost. If Geordi's ears had been as good as his eyes, he would have detected the quiet breathing of a creature wedged behind the ponderous equipment--a creature with a light in the middle of its forehead. The

light wasn't shining now, but a quick flick of a button solved that problem.

Mouse stood gaping after the retreating figures for a full minute and a half. He gazed at his mechanical handiwork with something akin to amazement. The machine whirred and clicked loudly, and Mouse almost jumped out of his skin. He reached over cautiously and touched the shiny metal surface.

"Okay good, okay fine..." he muttered to himself. "Didn't see a thing."

"This is Doctor Kathryn Pulaski," Troi said with genuine affection. Catherine and Vincent exchanged glances at the name. "This is Catherine Chandler and...Vincent. They seem to be our guests for a while."

"Yes," she answered Troi briskly. "The Captain told me." She smiled, eyes crinkling with good humor. "Come into my parlor..." Dr. Kathryn Pulaski began, waving them forward.

"...said the spider to the fly," Vincent finished automatically, feeling foolish once the words were spoken. The Doctor fixed him with a delighted smile.

"Yes--Mother Goose, I believe."

Numbly, Vincent nodded, but some small part of him was comforted to know that Mother Goose was still taught.

"I'll come back for you when the Doctor is finished," Troi said quietly, and slipped out. The security guards were stationed inconspicuously by the door and Pulaski glared at their stiff backs for a moment. She sighed, suddenly resigned, and motioned them forward.

"I'd like to do a brief examination, if you'll permit me, to make sure you weren't affected adversely by your little journey." She shook her head, obviously remembering something humorous. "I have a colleague who dislikes the transporter on general principles."

"The transporter is what brought us here--by accident?" Catherine asked, dazed by the immense lab and complex equipment.

Pulaski had turned away, leaving her back unwatched to put them at ease. "Yes." She turned to face them again, patting the

examination table. "If you'll come sit here, this won't take but a few minutes, Miss Chandler."

Vincent and Catherine exchanged looks again, apprehensive about being separated. Pulaski sensed their unease. She touched Vincent's shoulder as casually as she had touched the table. "You can stay with her--just don't get underfoot, hmm?"

The mannerisms, the tone--even the words themselves could have sprung from Father's lips. Vincent relaxed visibly, and Catherine hopped up on the table.

"This is Number One--anybody up there?"

Geordi turned his visor in Will's direction. "You don't think anything's happened to them, do--"

"This is Picard," the communicator crackled. "Where the devil have you been, Number One? Is everything all right?"

"We're fine. It's a long and boring story. Suffice it to say that we took a little side trip for nothing. Can you beam us up?"

"Affirmative--don't move from that spot. We'll beam you up directly and you can bore me with the details. Transporter--two to beam up--these coordinates."

Pulaski was true to her word. In less than ten minutes, she was through with Catherine. Vincent had tried his best to stay out of the way, but the whole process was completely intriguing to him. Father would simply be beside himself in this lab!

"Fit as a fiddle," the Doctor assured Catherine. "Everything works."

"Except my sense of reality," Catherine added wryly. She was beginning to actually accept the situation for what it appeared to be.

Pulaski smiled again, indicating the table.

"Vincent?"

Some of the apprehension and the paralyzing shyness returned and he hesitated.

"I'm only going to do a routine examination--like I just did for Miss Chandler."

Sheepishly, Vincent stepped forward, settling his large frame on the table. With comforting efficiency, Pulaski repeated the process.

"All done. I'll call Counselor Troi and you can go now, if you'd like, but..." She hesitated, and Vincent's heart began to pound.

"With your permission, Vincent--I'd like to take a blood sample, and I'd dearly love to do a gene-scan."

Vincent looked anxious and Catherine stepped forward immediately and clasped his hand, comforting him. "You have my permission," he said at last, his voice barely audible.

"You don't have to say yes--it's entirely up to you," Pulaski assured him. "And I'll be glad to share the results with you--"

Vincent held up his hand. "I...think not." He exchanged looks with Catherine, who nodded encouragingly, but did not try to sway his decision. "I...we have learned that some questions must be answered face to face, over time--not in a laboratory. If I am to know about my birth, I must learn it in my time, in my own way--not like this."

Again, Pulaski was smiling at him. Her smile extended to include Catherine. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof...?"

Vincent smiled and bowed his head to her slightly out of respect.

"Something like that," he agreed.

"Well he's not an extraterrestrial," Pulaski snorted. "Oh, I'll admit to some superficial similarities to Caitians and Vedala and yes, even Kzinti, but there's no real comparison."

"Then you think he's telling the truth--about being born there." Picard was thoughtful, eying his officers in turn. The door whooshed open to admit Counselor Troi.

"Yes."

"Undoubtedly." Pulaski and Troi spoke

together, and all eyes turned to the diminutive Counselor. Troi folded her hands together on the table and looked around the ring of faces. "He's very honest, and he has no reason to lie." She smiled suddenly, amused. "I don't think it occurred to him."

"What about the girl?" Riker demanded.

This comment brought baleful glances from every female in the room. Riker was baffled by this open hostility until his mind placed the faux pas. "Woman," he muttered defensively. The dark looks brightened.

"She's...very protective of him. Catherine feels a need to shield him from those who don't know and understand him." Troi recognized the puzzlement on several faces. "We're dealing with the twentieth century, don't forget," she reminded them gently. "This era was marked by a pronounced prejudice against those who were 'different,' as Vincent is, and by an extreme prejudice toward beauty. Vincent lives beneath the city because it's not safe for him to walk the heavily populated streets above." The impact of this reminder played plainly across the faces at the table.

"The real question here is--what are we going to do with them?" Riker said flatly. Pulaski gave him a sharp look.

"What do you mean--do with them? We'll have to return them to their world--we certainly can't bring them back through time with us."

"Is that wise, Doctor? With what they're seen? How can we be sure that they won't...tell someone."

Troi shook her head. "It's highly unlikely. From what Catherine has said, a good part of their life together has to remain secret. I believe we can trust them to safeguard our interests."

"Is that what you think?" Riker said, clearly unconvinced. Troi fixed him with a calm stare, but her dark eyes snapped angrily.

"That's my professional opinion, Mr. Riker." She faced Picard. "Besides--it was our error that brought them here--and we're the ones who don't belong. I don't see that we have a lot of choice."

Picard sighed, uncomfortable with the nuances of the situation. He would have given half his soul right then for a relatively

simple solution to this completely complicated problem. When he returned to his own time, Starfleet was going to hear... Abruptly aware that all eyes were on him, Picard snapped back to the present.

"I'll speak with our 'guests' myself this evening at supper. Until then, let's...mull on it, shall we? Now that you're back, Number One, Mr. La Forge--tell us what you found out."

Will Riker sighed and leaned forward across the table. "Not much..."

The quarters they'd been given were spacious, comfortable. To Vincent's chagrin and relief, they were sharing one living space. Data had taken it upon himself to instruct them about the food processors and the possibility of acquiring clean clothes from the computer.

"The Captain wishes to speak with you tonight at supper. If there is anything else you require before that time, please make it known to myself or to Counselor Troi." He smiled, tilting his head slightly in what was obviously "good-bye," and disappeared through the mechanical doors.

Left completely alone for the first time since their arrival, Catherine sagged against Vincent wearily and sighed.

"Wake me when this is over," she mumbled into his chest. Vincent smiled and curved his arms around her.

"I thought this was my dream," he teased, but the humor fell flat. Catherine stepped back and looked at him solemnly.

"What do you think will happen to us? What do you think they'll do?" Vincent shook his head, but his gaze was steady.

"I don't know. We may be past the point of returning."

"Father..." Catherine began.

"Yes, I know."

They digested this information for several moments. At last, Catherine squeezed him once more around the waist and stepped away.

"Well," she began philosophically, "as long as we're here, I'm going to take a shower." She eyed her rumpled jeans, the shapeless sweatshirt. "And conjure up something else to wear."

After a few moments of experimentation

with the clothing program, Catherine disappeared into the bathroom with a white terrycloth robe. Vincent heard the water start and, convinced that all was well--as well as possible under the circumstances--he sought a cup of strong tea and stretched out on the long bunk. The tea was soothing and the bunk was somehow easing the tension from his muscles. He closed his eyes for a moment...

The door buzzer jarred him awake. Vincent sat up hastily, immediately alert. Insistent, the buzzer sounded again. Thinking Troi or Data had returned, Vincent stood.

"Come," he said. The doors whooshed open and the young security guard who had eyed him in the hallway stepped through. She still wore her uniform, but the zipper seemed to be stuck at chest level and her hair now fell loosely around her shoulders.

"Hi," she said easily. "I'm MiKalen."

Vincent swallowed with effort, cursing his impromptu cat-nap.

"My name is--"

"Vincent. I asked."

She stepped towards him, obviously interested in pursuing the... conversation. Vincent's knees were against the bunk, and there was no room to retreat.

"You asked...?" he mumbled, desperately making conversation.

She came still closer.

"Uh huh. We passed in the hallway, remember?"

Eyes wide, Vincent nodded. "Yes."

She shrugged, somehow managing to jar the zipper even lower.

"Well, you looked interesting." She smiled, leaning forward.

Not only was there no where to go, but Vincent was fast running out of safe places to look.

"And I'm interested." MiKalen said, slinking towards him.

"Can I help you?" Catherine asked coolly. She stood in the bathroom doorway, robe wrapped securely, hair falling wetly down her back and making tiny puddles on the slick floor.

"I came by to see if Vincent...needed anything." One perfectly sculpted eyebrow lifted, taking in Catherine's disheveled appearance. Mikalen summarily dismissed her, looking back to Vincent. "I guess not."

Catherine stepped closer, directly into her line of sight. The security guard blinked, and only years of training kept her from retreating in the face of Catherine's displeasure.

"I guess not," Catherine repeated frostily. She eyed Mikalen scornfully, settling at last on the half-zipped uniform. Flushing, the security guard dropped her eyes and beat a hasty retreat.

Vincent sat down shakily on the bunk, visibly relieved. Concerned, Catherine sank down beside him, searching his face.

"Vincent--are you okay? What did she say?" Catherine reached to touch his face but he pulled away from her, deeply ashamed.

"She came to...we passed in the hallway and she looked at me like..."

"Like...?" Catherine prompted gently.

"She was...interested in me," Vincent admitted at last. His coloring did not allow a blush, but his averted eyes and miserable posture spoke eloquently of his pain.

"Because you're...different?" Catherine probed gently, not understanding.

Vincent shook his head miserably, struggling for the right words to explain. Catherine took his hands in hers, squeezing them tightly, and he did not pull away.

"Because I am not," he said at last. This last was spoken so quietly that Catherine was not certain she'd heard him correctly. She was about to ask him to repeat it when the meaning behind the words came crashing into her sensibilities. The young woman had found him different and attractive, and come here to act upon that attraction. Vincent, in his innocence, has assumed that he was somehow responsible for the situation, guilty of violating some taboo.

With infinite tenderness, Catherine enfolded him in her arms, holding him tightly. She could sense his confusion and relief as his arms slipped around her waist, feel the quickened beat of his heart.

"Vincent," Catherine said at last, "I

don't blame her." She pulled back to look at him and they found themselves face to face, intimately intertwined and quite alone. Their eyes locked and Catherine could feel his breath stirring the drying wisps of hair around her ears. She thought very seriously about kissing him--wondered fleetingly why she never had. This place, this time, was full of possibilities they had never imagined--a place where they might walk hand in hand in the light, share a room and perhaps...

Vincent turned away before she could act, tucking her head beneath his chin and pulling her closer. His voice was husky and low.

"I'm glad you're here."

They were still entangled when the buzzer sounded once more.

"Come," Catherine called, moving not a whit from the sanctuary of his arms. If that woman had come back--

"Excuse me," Worf said stiffly. "I did not mean--"

Catherine climbed hastily to her feet and faced the lieutenant.

"Not at all," she said graciously, without a trace of discomfiture. "Did you need to see us?"

There was a moment's pause, then Worf turned and addressed Vincent.

"I wished to know if you would care to accompany me to the gym for exercise. It is my custom to train daily, sometimes with a partner," Worf stated simply.

Vincent looked to Catherine, obviously interested in the invitation, but loathe to leave her alone. She smiled and waved him away. "Go--I'm probably going to take a nap."

Vincent inclined his head toward the Klingon officer. "I thank you," Vincent intoned solemnly, "and I accept your invitation."

Worf did not exactly smile, but he was obviously pleased.

"Good," he said shortly. "I sense that we are much of a kind."

The gym was a magical place. Opponents appeared and disappeared at the press of a button, and the floor seemed unbounded by the walls.

Vincent was fascinated with the concept, and awed by the reality. For the better part of an hour, Vincent and Worf pitted themselves against the shadowy opponents and obstacles the simulator threw at them. Convinced of the harmlessness of the exercise, Vincent allowed his muscles and great voice full expression, noting with shock, and then some amusement, that Worf did the same. Similarities in style ended there however. Worf fought viciously, with rage and abandon. Vincent found the exercise a challenge in tactical maneuvering, and outwitted rather than attacked at every opportunity.

The last shadow fighter fell under the weight of Worf's blow and disappeared from sight. Alien terrain wavered and blurred, and Vincent found himself standing within the confines of the gym once more. The two men sank, exhausted, onto the bench against one nondescript wall. Two hand towels of some wonderfully soft, absorbent stuff materialized on the bench, and they took them gratefully, wiping damp faces and sweaty necks.

Vincent wrapped the towel around his neck and leaned back against the smooth, cool metal wall. "I wish Mouse could see this," Vincent thought, and a sudden pang of regret seized him, reminding him that he might never see Mouse, or home, again. Something in his reluctant posture caught Worf's eye.

"You are truly a powerful warrior." It was not a question.

The pleasure of physical exertion evaporated. Vincent stared at his feet, mindful of his weakness. "Yes," he admitted. His shame was obvious.

"What? You take no pride in it?" Worf was clearly baffled. Even the most mild-mannered of humans had a streak of pride regarding physical prowess and cunning strategy.

Vincent's voice was very low, but heavy with feeling. "No."

"Yet--you fight--"

"Yes," Vincent interrupted, pained. "When necessary--when I must--for my home. For my family. For..."

"Your woman--?"

Vincent winced perceptibly, and Worf trailed off.

"Have I erred?" he demanded, the closest thing to a request that Worf had mastered. "Does the woman belong to another?"

"No, she...we aren't..." This conversation was not exactly going the direction that Vincent had hoped it would, yet he felt compelled to explain. Doggedly, he pressed on. "We are not...lovers--not like that."

Worf was pondering this information, his expression thoughtful.

"You seek another, then?"

"No!" Vincent blurted hastily. "No," he repeated more slowly. "I seek no other."

"And her?"

There was a milosecond of hesitation. "No."

"Then--the woman is yours," Worf insisted. Vincent touched his arm, slowly shaking his head.

"No," he corrected gently, "I am hers."

Something clicked for Worf, and he nodded in understanding. "A difficult thing."

Vincent sighed slowly and shook his head. "Yes."

Now Worf leaned back, and they stared at the opposite wall as one. "My life is here," Worf said flatly, "yet there is no one--here--for me."

Vincent looked at him quickly, saddened. "No one?" he queried softly. This pain he knew well.

"No one."

Vincent turned back to the bare wall and drew one knee up to his broad chest. "I am truly sorry, Worf," he said at last. There was little else to say.

In true Klingon warrior style, Worf shrugged it off. "I do a lot of reading."

"Catherine? It's Deanna--may I come in?"

Catherine abandoned her coffee and



trotted to the door, remembering too late that the action was unnecessary. She stood sheepishly aside and let Deanna pass.

"Vincent went with Worf," Catherine informed her. "They went to the gym." The lovely Betazoid raised one dark eyebrow, and Catherine wondered fleetingly what that information meant to her. She waved at the long bunk absently, the automatic reflex of a hostess.

"I came by to check on you," Troi said with a warm smile. "Have you been comfortable? Do you need anything?"

Catherine shook her head, long hair swinging over her shoulders.

"Is there anything you'd like to ask--I'll be glad to tell you what I can."

There was a moment of intense silence, and Troi could feel the half-thought fears and questions running like quicksilver through Catherine's mind. Patiently, she waited.

"What's going to happen to us? Are we going to be allowed to go home?"

Troi sighed. "We'll do everything we can to return you to your world."

Catherine sighed too, grateful for the honesty. She tried a smile, and it came out lop-sided. "Can you tell me why you're here-- what you're looking for? Maybe if I helped..." She looked up hopefully, and their eyes met. Catherine had the profound feeling that Troi was looking into her very soul, and that feeling, strangely enough, did not trouble her. She looked at Troi, her gaze mild and serene.

"We came back in time at the...request of a xenobiologist--"

"A what?"

"Someone who studies different life forms, and who believes that there are Kzinti living in this part of your world during this time period."

Catherine's blank look warranted further explanation.

"The Kzinti are a warlike race of beings who have not been particularly friendly with Terrans, and their suspected presence here could be significant. We sent two officers down to investigate an energy reading far beneath the city that could have been the

result of advanced technology. We were hoping it would lead us to the Kzinti--if there really are any here, and now. Unfortunately, the same thing that caused the energy reading interfered with their equipment, or ours, or both, and when we tried to beam them up, we got you instead."

"Are your officers back?"

Troi nodded, obviously relieved. "Yes, but they weren't able to tell us much. The energy reading was coming from some sort of machine--highly technically advanced, but obviously not the work of Kzinti." She stopped for a moment and considered thoughtfully.

"Would you know who built the device?"

"Our friend Mouse likes to tinker but most of his machines don't work. We were supposed to meet him before...well. It could have been his machine." Catherine leaned forward earnestly. "The Kzinti--did I say that right?--what are they like? I mean, would we know one of these beings if we saw one."

"Undoubtedly," Troi said quickly. "They aren't human. Kzinti are felinoid bipeds--they walk upright and they have a distinctly cat-like appearance." Catherine's head had snapped up and she was staring at Troi.

"Their hands and feet end in sharp claws, and the knee joints bend opposite from the way ours do." This last was said with special emphasis and Troi looked at Catherine carefully to see if she had caught the significance. She had. "As a race, they are extremely hostile and they have an unfortunate tendency to...consume other intelligent life forms."

Catherine's face lost some of its color. "Why does someone think that there are Kzinti in New York--now?"

Troi sat back and clasped her hands together, searching her memory again before speaking. "During the late 1980s, your news media reported a series of slayings over a period of several years, centered here in New York. Each of the victims died from slash wounds similar to the kind the Kzinti would leave, and all remained unexplained. Someone believed...what is it?" Troi trailed off suddenly, casting concerned glances at Catherine's face. Catherine's color had gone from pale to pasty, and she was reeling as though she'd been hit. Troi reached for her hands, holding them tightly until she

steadied.

While Troi watched, Catherine took a deep shuddering breath and squared her shoulders with determination.

"I think," she began slowly, "that I may be able to explain..."

"And no one in your world knows about Vincent--about your relationship--except those who live Below, or who are Helpers?" Troi asked carefully. To Catherine's immense relief and surprise, Deanna was far from shocked or horrified.

"I know it must be difficult. My father is human, but my mother is Betazoid, and they sometimes struggled with differences." Her dark eyes were sympathetic, and Catherine was surprised to find how much better she felt after talking about it to someone.

"I'm getting used to difficult," Catherine said ruefully. She smiled at Deanna shyly, and ducked her head, blushing. "It's all we know. Sometimes, I even forget what it was like to not have to try so hard."

There was a long, pregnant silence, and when Deanna spoke, her voice was very low. "Catherine, it doesn't have to be that way."

Catherine looked up quickly, shaking her head.

"I don't want to end it," she stated firmly.

Deanna touched her arm again. "That's not what I mean. We'll do everything we can to get you safely home, but...you are welcome to stay here--with us--learn a new trade, live a new life."

"I...I don't know." This she had not expected!

"I know this all seems very new to you, but I want you to know all of your options. Here--" She smiled. "--and now, you and Vincent have a completely new set of choices."

"We could stay here--on the ship? In your time?"

Troi smiled. "Not indefinitely," she said gently, "but yes, you'd be welcome."

"I don't know," Catherine repeated. "I never thought..." She trailed off and covered

her face with her hands. "I'm very confused." She looked at Troi through her fingers. "Could we please talk about it, the two of us, before we make a decision?"

"Of course--that's why I came to talk to you now. You can let me know tonight after dinner." Troi could feel her bond with Vincent like a tangible thing, and she reached out suddenly and touched Catherine's face. Catherine looked up in surprise, and their eyes met for a long moment. There are always hard choices," Troi said simply, "wherever you are."

Several hours passed before Vincent returned. Catherine looked up when he entered the room, grinning at him like a naughty child. Her hair was dry, and freshly curled. There were damp tendrils of hair framing his face and he looked tired and pleased with himself.

"You look like you had a good time," she teased. Vincent smiled and pulled her to her feet.

"I did. Worf is an interesting...person, and an exhausting gym partner." He surveyed the mounds of material splayed about the floor of the cabin. "What is this?"

"I've been playing with the clothes programmer," she admitted sheepishly.

"All of this?"

Catherine blushed, embarrassed, and poked him in the ribs.

"Don't give me a hard time about it," she warned him, stooping to lift a jacket that would have engulfed them both. "I had a little trouble with sizing."

Ruefully, Vincent surveyed his grubby clothing. After the workout with Worf, it was definitely not suitable for dinner with the captain. "I'll need something else to wear tonight, I'm afraid."

Catherine nodded. "I'll help--I think I've got the hang of this thing now."

Eyes twinkling, Vincent looked up. "Are you sure...?"

She squelched further comment with a look, and they set about creating something novel for Vincent to wear.



Vincent stepped from the bathroom, making no sound. Soft suede pants tucked into black knee boots, and there was a rich brocade vest over a soft shirt of some iridescent blue material. Materials aside, it was similar to the clothes he usually wore. Catherine was humming to herself, pinning her hair up off of her neck, and didn't hear him.

She turned towards the mirror, and stopped, staring.

"Oh, Vincent," she whispered, stepping forward to take his hands. "You look wonderful." His hair gleamed softly in the bright light, and the blue of his shirt was reflected in his eyes. Catherine turned her face up to his and smiled. Once again, she wondered what kissing him would be like. As though afraid her thoughts betrayed her, Catherine flushed and turned away. She caught up the dress she had designed for their meeting with the captain and disappeared into the bathroom.

Knowing that Catherine habitually ran fifteen minutes late, Vincent sat down to wait for her. He was surprised when she reappeared almost instantly, and struggled to his feet, transfixed by the vision she made. The dress was blue-green, of some sheer iridescent material that managed to look both crisp and gauzy at the same time. The neckline was low and the dress clung to her slender frame. The bodice was cut to reveal a small diamond of smooth skin, and the skirts swished of their own volition around her slim ankles.

"How beautiful you are," Vincent said huskily. "I can't believe how...beautiful you are." Tentatively, he touched her face. The ribbons which held her hair back from her temples and cascaded down her back brushed against his hand, thrumming with some force of their own. Vincent was mesmerized. Catherine took his hand and held it.

"Vincent, I need to talk to you about something--something Deanna said this afternoon."

Wordlessly, Vincent led her over to the short bunk and they sat. "Tell me."

"Deanna said they would do everything they could to return us to our time, but..." Catherine blushed, looking away, and Vincent squeezed her hand.

"But?"

She looked up quickly, her eyes bright.

"But we don't have to go back. We can stay here, Vincent--together."

Dumbfounded, Vincent stared. "Catherine, I never--" She silenced him with a hand across his lips.

"Don't argue with me now, and don't answer yet. Think about it during supper, please Vincent. Think about it, and tell me later."

She tilted her face up to his. Her eyes were large and dark, and she was so close and warm and vibrant... The buzzer sounded before their lips could meet. With a small sigh, Vincent stood, offering his arm. She took it and they followed Data down the long halls to a place called Ten Forward.

Captain Picard was charming--a soldier with the manners of a gentleman. He held his hand out to Vincent, who took it gingerly. Picard's handshake was warm and firm, and he looked Vincent directly in the eye. "Father," Vincent thought to himself, "would like this man."

"Captain Jean-Luc Picard," he said easily. "You must be Vincent. I'm sorry I was detained earlier, but I trust our Counselor Troi and Commander Data saw to your needs adequately."

"Your hospitality is unrivaled," Catherine said dryly, eyes twinkling. Picard laughed and took her hand.

"I'm sure," he agreed. "Especially under the circumstances."

They sat, nodding to Worf and Pulaski, Data and Troi. There were two gentlemen at the end of the table that Catherine did not recognize. Picard made the introductions.

"Catherine, Vincent--this is William Riker, my first officer."

Riker stood, and bent his lips to her tiny hand. "At your service," he murmured. For some strange reason, Vincent felt the hair on the back of his neck stand up. Riker looked up as though seeing him for the first time. The two men exchanged wary glances and shook hands.

"And Geordi La Forge--our chief engineer." Geordi's handshake was strong, and he looked--looked?--at Vincent and Catherine with good-natured interest.

"Troi tells me that you two may know who's responsible for knocking out our equipment this afternoon."

"We saw some sort of creature with a light source in its forehead--startled it when we were exploring." That was Riker, all business when there was business about.

Catherine and Vincent exchanged glances. Vincent nodded confirmation of Catherine's hunch.

"That was just Mouse," Catherine explained.

"No--it was definitely humanoid," Riker insisted. Catherine tried her best not to smile, but Troi caught her eye, grinning wickedly.

"Mouse is his name," she said gently. "He's a young man--a young human being--who likes to make things. He's a friend of ours, and he's harmless."

"Oh." Riker scowled. He wanted this day to be over, and their ill-fated mission with it. Picard sensed the encroaching black mood and hastily changed the subject.

Their snatch of conversation with Riker marked the only official business they talked all through dinner. Catherine thoroughly enjoyed the meal and the conversation, but she was constantly aware of Vincent's nearness. The air seemed electrified, and there was something nice about the way his legs brushed her when he stretched his long legs out before him under the table. She found her mind wandering during conversation, and knew that her state of turmoil was caused as much by the possibilities spread before them as by their proximity. On several occasions, she caught Troi regarding her closely, her expression kind and knowing, and each time, she felt her cheeks grow warm and averted her eyes. With something akin to surprise, Catherine realized that the dinner was winding down.

Picard stood. "Your company has been charming," he insisted, clasping Catherine's hand. Vincent received another hearty handshake and again, Picard looked him right in the eye. "I wish that we might have met under more uncomplicated circumstance," he said ruefully. Vincent nodded.

"I wish that we might have been less trouble," he responded.

Picard half-smiled. "All in a day's work, Vincent, I'm afraid. You have been precious little trouble to us, compared to the trouble we have been to you." His gaze was piercing. "I trust you'll not hold that against us."

Vincent nodded with understanding. "No," he said simply. "We will not." The belief on Picard's face was almost as pronounced as his obvious relief. He grasped Vincent's elbow with his free hand and nodded solemnly.

"I shall come to see you off," he promised, "whenever you're ready to leave us."

"I shall never look at the stars in the same way," Vincent murmured. "I have watched them from the rooftops of your city almost all my life, and yet I never dared dream that..." He shook his head, trailing off.

Catherine smiled and nestled against him. They had a few moments before Troi would come for them, and for their final decision. Final? Catherine shivered, feeling suddenly cold, and Vincent slipped his arms around her, gazing over her shoulder at the display of heaven before them.

"What do you dare to dream, Vincent?" She turned in his arms, searching his face for an answer. His voice was husky.

"You know my dreams." The air grew still, the room suddenly warm. Catherine swayed against him, and it seemed the most natural thing in the world--worlds?--for his arms to press her closer.

"What are you dreaming now?"

"I dreaming that we could really have this life--this life together."

"Oh but we can, Vincent. We can--"

Vincent put a gentle hand over her mouth and shook his head.

"This--all of this--is a dream come true." He smiled, and his eyes were both joyful and sad. "But it is not our dream. It is not our life."

"We could make it ours" she whispered.

There were tears running slowly down her face, and Vincent brushed them away with the

back of his hand.

"Catherine, there are choices open to us here that we could only imagine--a new life for us, a new life for me." Again, he smiled. "But not my life--and not yours."

"I would stay--with you--if you wanted me to," she promised desperately. "We could--"

"No," Vincent insisted. "We could not." He tucked the stray wisps of hair behind her ears, ran his fingers through the brightly colored ribbons. "My life calls to me, even as your life calls to you. Whatever this place may offer us, it is not home."

Resigned, Catherine nodded, leaning against his comforting bulk. They stood in the profound silence and watched the stars until it was time to change--until it was time to go.

The transporter room door swished open and two figures stepped through before resuming their conversation.

"How could you take a risk like that?" Pulaski demanded. "What if they'd decided to stay, Counselor? What would you have done?"

Deanna stopped walking, turned and watched the pair as they made their way to the transporter platform, hands clasped tightly against the strangeness and a slight fear of the transporter. Vincent stepped into place first, and offered Catherine his hand. She took his hand, smiling up at him with such unadulterated love that Deanna averted her eyes for a moment. When she looked back up, they were assuming position.

"I knew they wouldn't."

Pulaski, too, has seen the look, and her eyes softened. She touched Deanna's shoulder and both women watched the couple as they looked around the future for the last time.

"I guess they've made a lot of hard choices," she said, suddenly understanding. "Leaving here isn't...."

"Yes," Deanna said firmly. "Running away is no answer for them-- not even to the future."

From across the room, Catherine caught her eye and smiled a heartfelt thank-you. Deanna smiled with effort and her throat felt suspiciously tight. She waved slowly, sadly.

"They'll find they're their own answers," Pulaski assured her. She hesitated for the slightest of seconds, but it was enough to alert Troi.

"Do you think," Kathryn Pulaski began slowly, "that we should tell them about the children?"

Troi smiled and her dark eyes sparkled.

"No," she said quickly, "Let them find out on their own."

Catherine and Vincent clasped hands once more, closing their eyes against the dizzying effect of the transporter. The sparkle took them, and took them home.

Against the backdrop of rough grey stone, two pillars of shimmering luminescence began to form--one small and petite, the other tall and lanky. The shimmer faded, leaving them slightly dizzy, and disoriented.

"Vincent--are we....?" Catherine looked quickly around as he did the same. They were in the passageway Mouse had indicated, surrounded by the familiar coolness and weight of the stone. "It's like we never left," Catherine mused, surveying the chamber slowly. Abruptly, she turned to Vincent. "It really happened, didn't it?"

Vincent smiled, and there was sadness in the blue depths of his eyes. "It happened."

Catherine's face clouded over and she reached to embrace him. "Oh, Vincent," she began, "I wish there was some way..."

Vincent curved his strong arms around her. "Yes," he said heavily. "So do I."

Catherine turned her face up to his, her long hair falling down her back, over his gentle hands. "Are you sorry?"

Vincent opened his mouth to reply when a small commotion sounded in the hallway. Catherine's head snapped around and they peered anxiously toward the door.

"Saw them--yes! Strange clothes, strange talk.... Catherine and Vincent missing--"

Mouse and Father came through the doorway, Jamie hovering behind them.

"See!" Mouse demanded triumphantly, a split-second before he saw them standing

there. "Told you--!" He stared, stumbling towards them. Father merely rolled his eyes back in his head and leaned on his cane.

"Mouse, if this is your idea of a joke--!"

"No joke!" Mouse reached forward gingerly and touched Vincent's arm. It was solid! Mouse gulped, staring. Catherine touched his arm and he jumped.

"Mouse?" Catherine began innocently. "Is something wrong?" Vincent all but sprouted a halo. White-faced, Mouse stared, then whipped around to address Father.

"No joke..." he insisted miserably. "Saw them..."

"Have you all been here all afternoon?" Father queried. Vincent and Catherine exchanged cautious looks, then nodded.

Father sighed, and reached to pat Mouse's arm.

"I'm sure you thought you saw something odd, Mouse. Perhaps you did, but whatever it was, it's gone now, isn't it?"

Reluctantly, Mouse nodded. His usually exuberant face was completely downcast and forlorn.

"And I have work to do," Father said firmly. He turned and made his way back down the tunnel.

"I guess I should be going, too," Catherine ad-libbed, pulling Vincent after her. Mouse and Jamie were left alone in the chamber dimness. Jamie stepped forward and hooked her arm through Mouse's. Her brown eyes were sympathetic, and soft as doves.

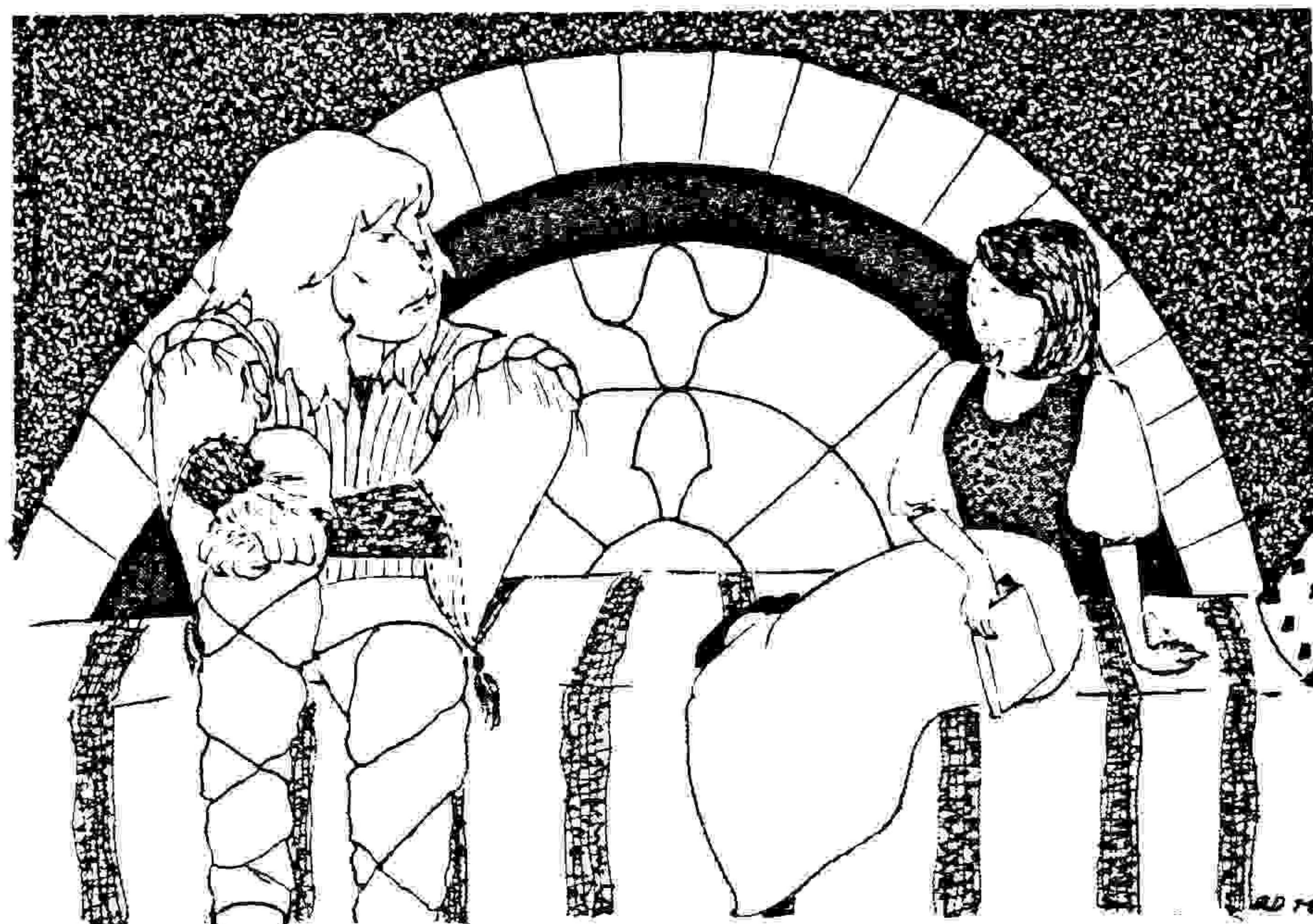
"I believe you," Jamie whispered loyally. Mouse pulled away, inconsolable.

"Saw them," he muttered, scuffing his toes on the sandy floor. Something sparkled in the dim light. More out of habit than interest, Mouse bent to retrieve the shiny treasure. He held up two long strands of iridescent ribbon--two of the ribbons that had trailed through Catherine's hair. They were warm to the touch, alive and pulsing beneath his fingers. "Jamie..." he breathed. She stepped forward, staring.

"What is it, Mouse?"

Mouse was gazing down the tunnel that Vincent and Catherine had taken. His brow furrowed with intense concentration, then cleared abruptly. He stuffed the ribbons into his pocket and grasped Jamie's hand firmly for security.

"Nothing," he insisted. "Didn't see a thing."



DIFFERENT WAVELENGTHS

Admiral Hugh looked up from his reports as his aide entered the Logistics Command room. Hugh's eyes ached.. He had been reviewing the current estimate of his assembled fleet's resources. The search for Rebel bases was a tiring task. The aide snapped to attention.

"Captain Dett's shuttle has docked."

"With the alien leader?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Dett will await me at debriefing. Let him go over a preliminary with..." Hugh glanced at the duty roster. "Subcommander Tand. Bring the alien here."

"Yes, sir."

Hugh brought up Dett's week-old communication as his aide left to relay the orders. Dett had taken his Star Destroyer Task Force into an unexplored sector, one dominated by a red star, far off the main sequence. Dett had hoped to stumble across the rebel anarchists, who tended to avoid Imperial detection by holing-up in the most inhospitable areas they could find. Instead, he found an advanced civilization, strangely lacking spaceflight of any kind. The chances of an inhabitable planet around such a star were, well, astronomical.

The populace had offered no resistance. Pacifists and scholars made up the entire population. The leader, an individual identified as the First Scientist, had agreed to be introduced personally to the Imperial

Flag officer. This leader apparently understood his role as hostage, and so far had not resisted in any way.

The people of the planet showed an incredible potential for intellectual exploitation by the Empire. Dett reported that the people had been in contact with Imperial ground troops for mere hours when they began to respond in the Imperial language. Imperial translation devices still had not finished compiling and identifying the aliens' phonemes. People with such analytical minds would be a great boon to the effort.

His aide entered. Hugh nodded his head. The aide spun sharply, and signalled to the guards outside the chamber. Four black-clad officers, Special Forces Corp., escorted the prisoner inside.

The First Scientist looked nothing out of the ordinary. Definitely human stock. Aside from the foppish attire, a light green bodysuit, complete with yellow half-cape, the alien could have passed as a citizen of the Empire. His black hair was wavy, restricted by a golden headband. His chest was broad, displaying a red sunburst on the green fabric. His arms seemed to strain with musculature. Hugh remembered that Dett had reported a higher gravity.

"First Scientist," Hugh stated flatly. The alien gazed at him with interest. Hugh had an inexplicable impulse to stand at attention, then quelled it, settling more comfortably in his command chair. "I am Admiral Allahandron Hugh, of the Imperial

Patrick Sponaule

Navy." The alien nodded. "I represent the Galactic Empire."

"Not A Galactic Empire, but The Galactic Empire?" The First Scientist's voice was inflected with a subtle Syran accent. Captain Dett's troops were mainly Syran.

"There is only one I know of. Do you know of any others?"

"No, Admiral. Until last week, I was unaware of yours, as well."

"Your command of our language is impressive."

"Thank you. There was only a limited vocabulary to be learned from your advance troops, but on the journey here, I was permitted to listen to an oral history of your empire. Your Emperor seems a marvelous fellow. Toppling over a corrupt republic, the result of a bloody interstellar war, to achieve a benevolent government for all, under the Imperial Throne. So why invade my planet?"

"Captain Dett believed he had found a nest of anarchists."

"I see. And these anarchists are dangerous felons?"

"Horrible people. Bent on destruction. They are mostly elements of crime left over from the decadent Republic."

"And now my world..."

"Must be protected. Welcomed into the brotherly unity of the Emperor. If the Rebel forces found your defenseless planet, I'm afraid they would enslave you all, and use your scientific knowledge for the downfall of sentients everywhere."

"We do appear to be helpless to stop them. We didn't stop you."

"Dett reported no navy."

"My people have an annoying phobia about spaceflight. An incomprehensible one. This phobia was almost our doom."

"Your doom?"

"The planet was unstable. The science council at first refused to believe so, due to their comfortably blind ignorance. They vetoed my proposal to build space arks to flee our doomed planet. The entire populace could have died."

"And?"

"Working alone, I found ways to calm the molten heart of the planet. For that, I was elected First Scientist. And then, of course, the people felt that there was no need for spaceflight. To this day, there exists only one small rocket, and it is not a military craft."

The First Scientist walked to the window, the gazes of the guards locked on his movements. He stared at the assembled starships, his face lit by the rays of the nearby yellow star. "Your ships are impressive."

"My Empire is impressive." Hugh reached onto his command desk and switched on the room's holo-projector. The lights dimmed revealing a vast mass of miniature stars in the room. The First Scientist turned from the window, to see the holographic galaxy. "This is my Empire. This is your future."

"Each star has a pinpoint of light next to it. An information readout?"

"Precisely that." Hugh pressed another button. A star swelled to the size of a meter-wide circle of light. Next to the readout, describing the system in brief, military notation. "This is a tactical map. Any star worth looking at has a pinpoint readout with it, describing planets, ships in orbit, etc." The map was Hugh's favorite toy. He loved displaying it. The selected star shrank, until it blended in with its fellows.

The First Scientist's head moved slowly from left to right, scanning the galaxy.

"A great deal of information. An amazing use of light."

"Thank you. But enough amusement." The map vanished. "You will meet with diplomats from the Emperor. I'm sure you will find them helpful and cooperative with the matter of your world joining the roster of protected territories."

"In return for your protection, and benefits of your civilization, what must we do?"

"Provide us with your scientific knowledge, as well as scientists to work at Imperial research facilities."

The First Scientist turned back to the vista, outside the window. "I fear that is impossible."

"Tell that to the diplomats. Not to me. I know better. Your planet is under our control. My control, actually. Displease me, and I'll fry it to a cinder."

"To take scientists from my world would be a disaster for you. And for the universe. It's bad enough that I'm here. The temptation is almost too great for me."

"What do you mean?"

"In myth, my race is descended from two explorers that were marooned on my planet. One was a fierce warrior. The other was a gentle, peace-loving biologist. Through her gentle nature, she pacified the warrior, and earned his trust and love. And together, they began our race."

"Sounds genetically unstable," Hugh said jokingly, amused by the stranger's tale.

"I am speaking of myth, but there is an

element of reality to it. My people are driven by two drives, peace and war. Peace has held sway over the majority. The incorrigibly warlike we... deal with. Remove a few from our home system, and there will be no way to control the violent ones among them, even if you could identify the warlike beforehand. The temptation of power is too great."

"We have our own ways of dealing with the belligerent."

"Of that I'm sure, but my race is not like any other. Even if the only ones of my race that you would take were holy men, committed to the ways of pacifism, you would discover certain, phenomena, about us. Things that would drive you, in fear or desperation, to order the destruction of my home planet. I cannot allow that."

Hugh began to laugh. The guards betrayed no emotion. Watching insane prisoners had lost humorous appeal years ago. "But, my dear First Scientist, what could be so dangerous?"

"You would not believe me if I told you. We are different, you and I. Born under different suns. Suffice it to say that we see in different wavelengths."

"In that case, I should order the destruction of your homeworld out of hand, to insure the safety of the Empire. The Death Star would hammer it to dust!"

"You mean the battle station on course for Alderaan? I supposed it could, if it could make it to my world intact."

Hugh stared at the First Scientist's back. He snapped his fingers. The four guards drew their blasters, leveling them on the green-dressed alien. "How did you know that? And what do you mean about making it intact?"

The alien turned, a smile on his lips. "How did I know where the Death Star is? But,

Admiral Hugh, I read it from one of those pinpoints of light a moment ago. You keep incredibly detailed records by way of cluster photons. And the Death Star will probably be destroyed, much like this ship will be destroyed momentarily, by reactor overload. Goodbye, Admiral."

There was a flash of green and yellow, and the First Scientist was missing, as well as a sizable chunk of window. Air rushed into space, dragging the humans towards the hole. The vacuum of space beyond. Suddenly automatic force-fields glowed into life around the window frame, creating an impermeable barrier. Vents whooshed open, returning normal pressure to the room.

Hugh dragged himself off the floor, gasping, and half frozen. Near-vacuum experiences were never pleasant. All five had nosebleeds. Suddenly, the desk communicator squealed.

"Admiral we've been hit!"

"What?" Hugh roared, half-choking on blood. He dragged himself up to the communicator. "Who is this? What're you talking..."

"An unknown projectile penetrated the outer hull! The shields showed nothing! Felt nothing!" Red lights started blinking in front of Hugh's nose. "It hit engineering! The reactor shielding is breached! Just now!"

"Shut it down!" Hugh yelled but he knew it was futile. Overload, then explosion. Any second.

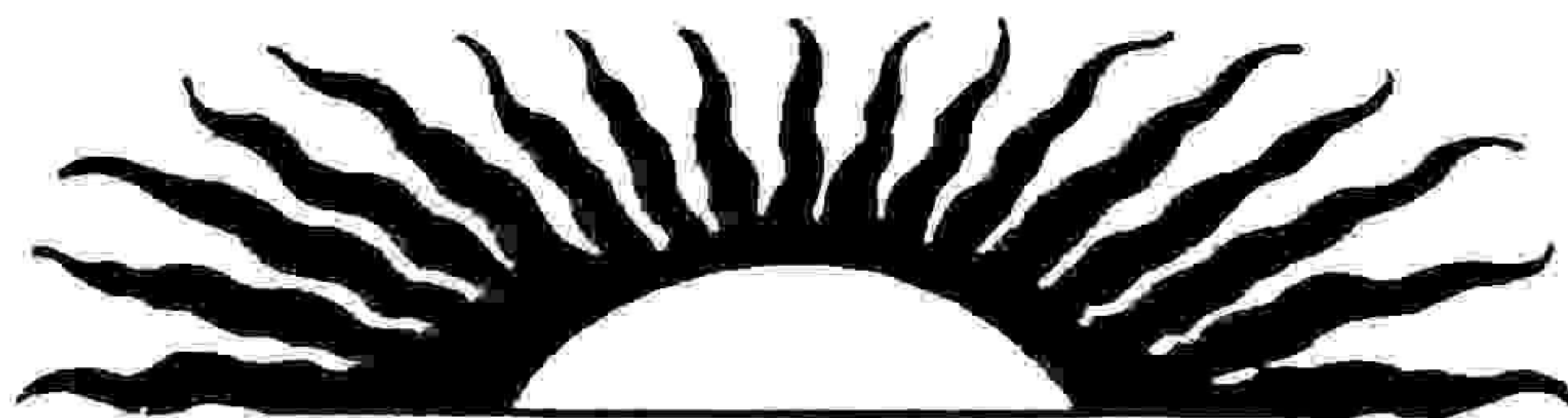
The other Star Destroyers went on alert immediately after the flagship exploded. They waited, expecting enemy forces to

materialize. They scanned the stars, finding nothing..

The First Scientist floated in space, not breathing, not needing to. He basked in the glow of the main sequence star before him, absorbing sustenance and energy from the solar wind. The warships around him could not detect him. He was, after all, just a man.

He was not sure what to do. It would be suicide to fly home without a ship. His wife and son would have to fend for themselves with the rest of the populace, under the degrading Imperial occupation. Any forces within that system would be safe; the First Scientist knew no way to directly attack them. But every ship, station, and planet displayed on Admiral Hugh's holo-map was at his mercy. Indeed, the universe was at his mercy. As long as he stayed away from the old stars, the weak red stars, far off the main sequence. No reinforcements, no supplies, not anything will get through to maintain the Empire on his world. Once the occupation forces, left there by Dett, heard of the havoc in the Empire, they'd abandon their post. And then they would meet him, filled with wrath, in the darkness.

The First Scientist began to fly, orienting his flight with the remembered positions of the Admiral's stars to take him to Alderaan, where he would cleave the Death Star. He hoped Lara and his little son, Kal-el, would be safe until he could free them. If worse came to worse, Lara would take the baby and escape in the rocket he had build during the groundquake crises. He flew on, faster than imagination. The yellow wavelengths still seemed strange to his vision, but he would get used to it. The power felt so good. The universe was his.



BLAKE AND THE BEAST

Neo Dodson

(for all the fans who see a parallel with the last episode
of another unexpectedly cancelled show....)

Catherine stepped into the dark chamber where Vincent roared insanely. He saw her and stepped towards her, reaching his clawed hands in her direction. Not trusting his motives -- or the displayed claws, she asked uncertainly, "Vincent?"

His eyes gleamed with the bestial paranoia he'd fought unsuccessfully for so long. "Did you betray Father?" he whispered. "Did you betray....me?"

"Vincent!"

Attracted by her cry, the other tunnel dwellers who had waited uncertainly for the outcome of this conflict rushed in. Vincent stood over Catherine's body, claws smoking on his fingers.

There was a roar. Then a confusion of shouts. Then one last roar. And the rest is silence....



READER'S GUIDE

to the

UNIVERSE(S)

Beauty and the Beast

CBS -- 1987-1989 -- approx. 44 episodes

This modern day fairy tale is set in New York City where Catherine Chandler, an attorney with the DA's office, falls in love with Vincent, a poetry-quoting man who bears a strong resemblance to a lion. Vincent lives in the tunnels under the city with a small community of people who have chosen to (if you'll pardon the expression) go underground for various reasons. Notable characters among the tunnel dwellers include their leader, Father, a doctor who helped establish the tunnel community when he was blacklisted in the fifties (Father raised Vincent after he was found as a baby outside St. Vincent's Hospital.); Mouse, a young inventor/thief with a limited vocabulary and a knack for causing trouble; and Narcissa, a nearly blind old black woman with a feel for the supernatural.

Blake's 7

BBC -- 1978-1981 -- 52 episodes

In this dismal future, the Terran Federation has totalitarian control over a galactic population mostly drugged into submission. However, as in any society there are dissidents and criminals. In Blake's 7, the criminals are the heroes! Roj Blake is the rebel leader who, with the crew of the Liberator -- Kerr Avon, anti-social embezzler and computer expert; Vila Restal, talented thief and comic relief; Jenna Stannis, smuggler and pilot; Olaf Gan, "gentle giant" and convicted murderer; and Cally, alien telepath and guerilla fighter -- undertakes the battle against the

repression of the Federation. Their main opponent is Servalan, a ruthless, ambitious woman who eventually becomes President of the Federation.

Roughly halfway through the series, we lose Blake, Jenna, and Gan and gain ORAC, obnoxious super-computer; Dayna Mellanby, young weapons expert; and Del Tarrant, brash pilot. Later, we lose the Liberator and Cally and gain the Scorpio and Soolin, a lady "gun for hire". In the last episode, Avon kills Blake and the Federation kills everybody else.

The Equalizer

CBS -- 1984-1989 -- approx. 90 episodes

The Equalizer, Robert McCall, is a retired operative for the "Company", an intelligence organization based loosely on the CIA. McCall now spends his time and his accrued fortune on helping those who have no one else to whom to turn. (It's not so much charity as a unique public service.) McCall can handle anything from street punks to international terrorists. He is aided in his efforts by his friend Mickey Kostmeyer, an active "Company" agent in his mid-thirties. McCall is occasionally called upon for various reasons by his old friend, Control, who is sort of like the local "Company" District Manager.

Kolchak: The Night Stalker

ABC -- 1974 -- 20 episodes, plus 2 TV movies: The Night Stalker (1972), The Night Strangler (1973)

Carl Kolchak is a down-at-the-heels newspaper reporter always looking for that one great scoop that will make him famous. He has a knack for running into supernatural monsters, but can never get anyone to believe him. So, he takes it upon himself to eliminate these monsters before they eliminate him. This tends to get him in trouble with his editor Tony Vincenzo, not to mention the police.

Lost in Space
CBS -- 1965-1968 -- 83 episodes

This Irwin Allen production was about the adventures of the Space Family Robinson: Dr. John Robinson; his wife, Maureen; their daughters, Judy and Penny; their son, Will (boy genius); their pilot, Major Don West; and stowaway, Dr. Zachary Smith (who starts the show as sinister and efficient and ends it as a conniving buffoon). One should not take this show seriously, but watching an occasional episode never hurt anyone.

Star Trek
NBC -- 1966-1969 -- 78 episodes

If you don't know about Star Trek, you must have been living in Tibet for the last 25 years. (Come to think of it, they probably show Star Trek in Tibet by now!) Star Trek is about the adventures of Captain James T. Kirk and the crew of the starship Enterprise on their five year mission to "seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before." Kirk is assisted mainly by his First Officer/Science Officer Spock, a Vulcan/human halfbreed, and his Chief Medical Officer Dr. Leonard "Bones" McCoy.

Star Trek: The Next Generation
FOX -- 1987- -- approx. 40 episodes

ST:ING is about the adventures of Captain Jean-Luc Picard and the crew of the starship Enterprise on their fifteen year mission to "seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no one has gone before." Picard is assisted mainly by First Officer Will Riker, Science Officer Data (an android), and Ship's Counsellor Deanna Troi, a Betazoid/human halfbreed. (Haven't I read this paragraph before?)

Star Wars -- Lucasfilm

3 movies: A New Hope (1977), The Empire Strikes Back (1980), and Return of the Jedi (1983)

If you don't know about Star Wars, you've been living in Tibet for only about twelve years. This movie trilogy follows the exploits of young Jedi Knight, Luke Skywalker on his "journey to manhood" as he learns the ways of the Force (a mystical energy field that binds the universe together) while battling the evil galactic empire. Luke is taught by Obi-Wan Kenobi who "joins the Force" near the end of the first movie only to reappear as a vision to Luke at the beginning of the second movie to instruct Luke to seek out Yoda, a diminutive Jedi master on the planet Dagobah. Luke's friends include Princess Leia, the feisty leader of the Alliance to Restore the Republic, and Han Solo, wise-cracking smuggler and Captain of the Millennium Falcon (the fastest hunk of junk in the galaxy). Luke's primary enemy is Darth Vader, Dark Lord of the Sith.

Superman -- DC Comics

1938-present -- Comics, radio, TV, and movies

Krypton, a planet orbiting a weak red sun, was home to a peaceful, highly advanced race who had little or no spaceflight capability. When the citizens of Krypton refused to believe the scientist Jor-el's predictions of approaching cataclysm due to mounting internal planetary pressures, he sent his infant son Kal-el to Earth in a small rocket he had built. Krypton exploded.

Kal-el reached Earth safely and was raised by Jonathan and Martha Kent. It was discovered that away from Krypton's red sun, he was charged with energy from powerful yellow stars (like our sun), enabling him to perform incredible physical feats. He grew up to become Superman.

The Time Tunnel

ABC -- 1966 -- 30 episodes

This Irwin Allen production was about a group of scientists who had developed a machine for viewing and visiting different periods in time. Desperate to prove that the Time Tunnel works, Tony Newman and Doug Phillips enter the machine only to find that they can't get back. The technicians at the Time Tunnel complex can observe what happens to Tony and Doug and can move them to various random time periods, but never quite get them back.

2001: A Space Odyssey (1968)

2010: The Year We Make Contact (1984)

These two films were based on the writings of Arthur C. Clarke. The first was a landmark special effects movie that no one understood. The second didn't have quite the special effects impact, but it made more sense.

In 2001, a monolith is unearthed on the moon. When sunlight touches it, it sends a message to one of the moons of Jupiter. Fortunately, the US has a manned mission already on its way to Jupiter. The Discovery is redirected to investigate. The computer goes insane and starts killing off crew members before it is lobotomized by mission commander Dave Bowman. Bowman passes through some kind of star tunnel and goes through some inexplicable transformations.

In 2010, war between the US and the USSR is imminent, but their space agencies decide to team up to find out what really happened at Jupiter. Various people see Bowman who keeps repeating "Something wonderful is going to happen." Something wonderful turns out to be aliens turning Jupiter into a second sun and starting a new experiment on Europa after their failed experiment on Earth (humankind).

