

Fellowship & Fairydust



Fellowship & Fairydust

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Editor's Note

The human drive towards exploring new frontiers has led us across many expanses, over land and under sea, from the highest mountains to the center of the earth. Outer Space has been called “the final frontier”, and has captured the popular imagination not only through the exploits of real-life astronauts, but also through the fandom universe. In the coming pages, *F&F* will launch into the outer limits “where no issue has gone before”, beaming upward towards the heavens in search of guiding light, as well as seeking out the true “final frontier” of our own spiritual life.

Our magazine draws inspiration from the ideals of unified diversity present in Star Trek through the multi-racial and multi-species crew, and redemptive love present in Star Wars through in the salvation of Darth Vader through the devotion of his son Luke Skywalker. It is through transcending the barriers of regions, races, and creeds that sacrificial love may be brought to fruition, as taught by the earthly ministry of Jesus, exemplified in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, ultimately culminating in the redemptive suffering of the Cross. As such, we strive in our own literary endeavors to weave a creative tapestry that threads us together with an expansive vision of our quest as artists of the soul.

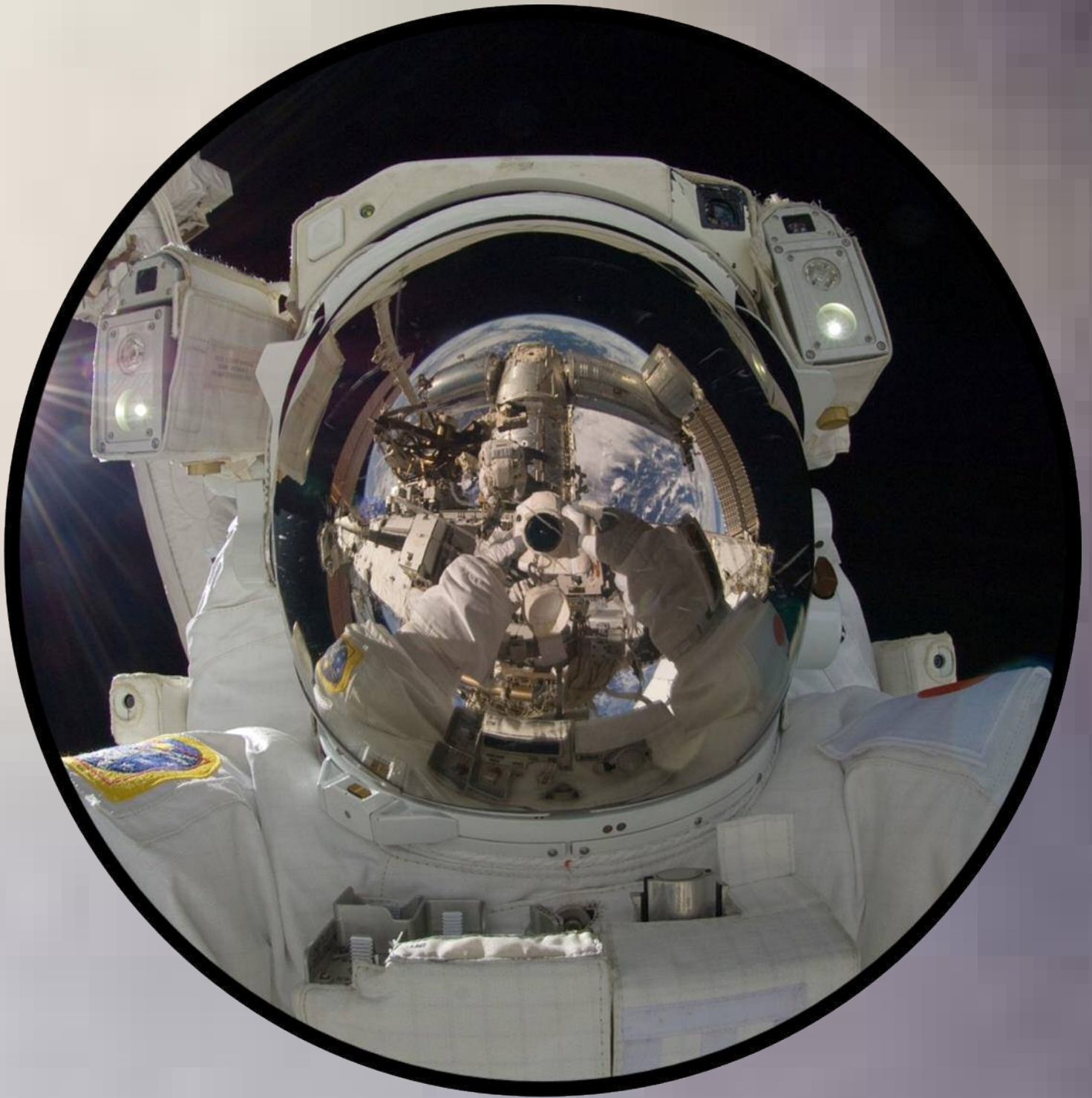
On behalf of the *F&F* staff and contributors, I would like to extend my sincere well-wishes to Sarah Levesque, who informed me that that she will be retiring her position as Assistant Editor to pursue other aspirations. Her dedication and industriousness in her various capacities on staff, both technical and organizational, helped make the merge of *The Fellowship of The King* and *Ink & Fairydust* magazines a successful transition, and also helped to shape the project's development in the following two and a half years. Our prayers go with her as she embarks upon new adventures in her future.

Also on behalf of our crew, I would like to warmly welcome aboard Beth Amos as our new Content Editor. She has been a valuable asset to our starship team as a submissions editor in the past, and is a versatile literary enthusiast with many talents in journalism, technology, and communication coordination. Her brother Mike Amos will be stepping up as our stalwart and savvy Files Manager. As Editor-in-Chief, I look forward to working with them and the rest of our staff as we go forward into the next chapter of our *F&F* saga, bringing fresh stories to life and expanding our creative endeavors to new depths, heights, and visions!

Live Long & Prosper and

May the Force Be With You! ;)

~ *Avellina Balestri, Editor-in-Chief*



WHAT'S NEW

Sarah Levesque is leaving her position of F&F's Assistant Editor as God is calling her to start a new endeavor. We thank her for all her hard work since the beginning of F&F. Most of Sarah's duties are being picked up by Beth Amos, our new Content Editor.

Our next issue - Winter 2019/2020 - will be our last themed issue. Starting in 2020, our magazines will be limited to two issues per year featuring the best pieces published on the blog during the previous six months.

Tristar Fan

By
Amanda
Pizzolatto

Such an interesting name, isn't it? What is a Tristar fan? Isn't 'TriStar' that Sony company? Well, it is, but that's not what I'm referring to here. It's actually more like tri-star, triple stars.

The three stars I'm referring to are Star Wars, Star Trek, and Stargate. What? you ask. Am I mad? No one's ever really liked Star Trek *and* Star Wars! That's two totally different franchises! And you are absolutely right about that, but the whole notion that you can only like one or the other is rather backwards and dated, don't you think?

Sure, I completely understand that Star Wars is more fantasy than sci-fi (anyone could have told you that), but that doesn't make it any less enjoyable. It's certainly one of the biggest space-oriented franchises in the world, and it's earned its place. Star Trek also, understandably so, the two having come out at around the same time, one more sci-fi, the other more fantasy, both equally influential.

Stargate, the youngest one of the three, is definitely more sci-fi like Star Trek than Star Wars, but it certainly has its more fantastical moments. And, just like Star Trek, it has references to the mythological deities of ancient history, writing them off as aliens (not sure how Thor will feel about that?!). So, why those three? Let me explain. No, wait... that will take too long; let me give you a summary.

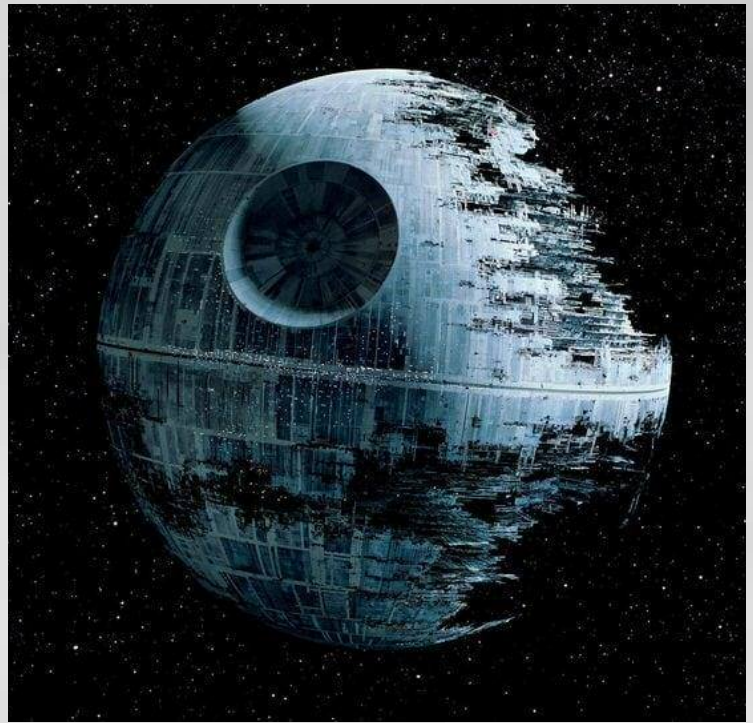
First off, Star Wars – if only because I feel a little closer to it than the others. The idea that fantasy doesn't have to stay on Earth or even in one timeline was exciting and is one of the key influences for the universe which I'm in the process of creating (who knew building a universe could be so much work? And things are constantly changing!) The idea that powers didn't have to be confined to Earth? Fascinating. The characters and story were pretty good too... until Mr. Lucas decided to add a few things after the fact. The biggest problem, in my opinion, was the addition of Jabba in Docking Bay 94. It definitely wasn't needed; it was practically the whole Greedo conversation Han had just had, only without the who shot first bit. But anyway, that wasn't the only thing that



STAR
WARS



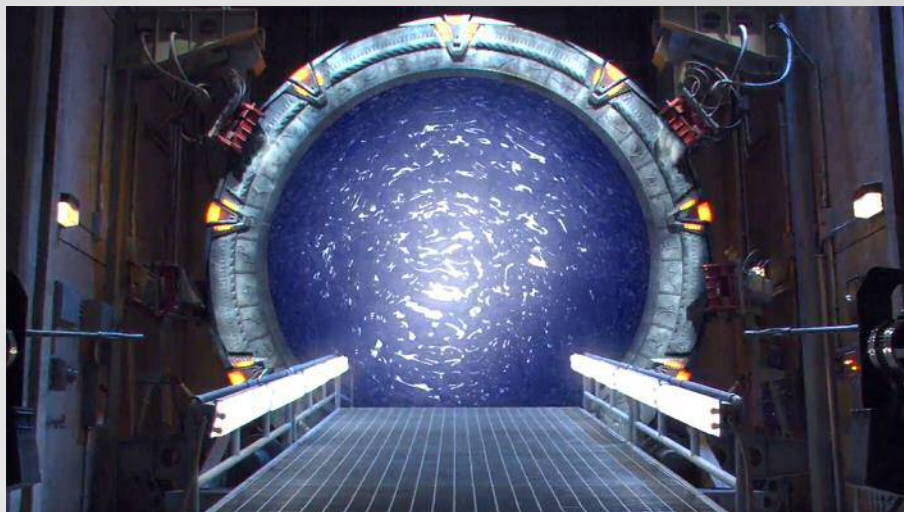
fascinated me. The whole blend of Eastern and Western storytelling and concepts really caught my attention. That was the first time I had ever seen such a blend, and we will probably never see another like it. Fantasy and sci-fi, Eastern and Western, Star Wars blazed a trail that few have followed, but there are probably many that have, they're just not mainstream productions and you really have to look for them (no, published fanfiction doesn't count). And yes, I am mostly referring to the original trilogy, but I did like some aspects of the prequels, despite some very cringey lines. Ugh. So, yeah, Star Wars inspired and influenced me in such a way that I wanted to make my own universe. It let me know that even good, original ideas can make it to the big screen.



Next up is Star Trek, with a more sci-fi story and fascinating topics for a series. Growing up, the last seasons of *The Next Generation* were finishing up, *Deep Space Nine* was about halfway through, and *Voyager* was just starting up. Picard taught me to find the peaceful way first, Sisko taught me to learn from my mistakes and that hitting Q could be rather satisfying, and Janeway taught me to keep moving forward and achieve my goals, no matter how long it could take and what obstacles are thrown in my way. They taught me that you should never judge a person merely by their skin color, sex, disability, or, in fact, for anything that might make them seem different to you. What mattered was that these were human beings (and aliens), and that each person should be treated with respect. My Catholic faith helped with that understanding as well and further cemented it in my mind, and in how I choose to act and speak (at least for the most part; I still say embarrassing things and don't always think things through until after the fact). They also taught me the thrills of adventuring and exploring, and that there is so much beauty in the world, if people just stop and look around them. We shouldn't keep our heads up in the clouds for so long that we forget about the earth, but we also

shouldn't keep our heads in
the sand and completely
ignore everything around
us. Life is exciting, life is
colorful, and life is a
thrilling roller coaster. It's
hard to see that wonderful
beauty unless you are willing to
keep your eyes and ears open to the
wonders around you.

And last, but most certainly not least, is Stargate. *Stargate SG-1*, the first series, was about halfway through its run before we started watching it (my parents were already watching it; it was just coming on after our bedtime for a while). This was another one that really sparked my imagination, but *Stargate Atlantis* did so especially. The notion of being off-world on an island that's supposed to have sunk in the Atlantic (no wonder we can't find it here!) with portals that take you to different worlds (explained scientifically, of course) was especially fascinating. The only other time I had encountered portals was in fantasy, so to have something similar in a sci-fi series really intrigued me (even though I was fascinated by the wormholes that are a big part of *Deep Space Nine* too, I seemed to think they were pretty different. Well, in a way they are different – one is small and operated by



humans, the other is huge and opens on a more sporadic schedule). The concept so inspired me that I have started using the same idea for my own universe where the portals can be either utilized by a machine on islands similar to Atlantis or they're magically opened by genies. All in all, these three have particularly inspired and influenced my imagination, as have so many others. And why not? They have pretty good characters, concepts, and stories that, if you let them, will show you something

different, something wondrous, something creative. Being a fan of just one isn't enough; being able to spot the differences and similarities (cringey lines and the occasional bad directing not included) in how space is explored and what is found out there, really helps one to appreciate each one as its own thing. Comparing and contrasting usually only works to bring about a better understanding and a better appreciation for the stories that we enjoy and that inspire us. Sure, you don't have to like all three in order to appreciate them, nor does it allow you to bully those who disagree. Each does have their problems (though I'm liable to think that Stargate has fewer problems than Star Trek or Star Wars), but that's what makes them so enjoyable in the first place; they were made by humans, so there's bound to be flaws in the things you enjoy the most. But because you enjoy it, you can either help to fix those flaws, or even learn to find them endearing (Anakin was on to something when he said love helps him see, it doesn't make him blind. Could have said it a lot better though; that was one of the cringiest scenes ever. That director was not good with romance).

So that, my dear friends and fellow fans, is the briefest summary of a string of thoughts about why I'm a tristar fan – a fan of *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, and *Stargate*.

Oh, real quick, while *Star Wars* is the sci-fi fantasy adventure, *Firefly* and *Serenity* are the Western in space. If you haven't checked that out already, please do. That, the original *Battlestar Galatica*, *Flight of the Navigator*, and *The Last Starfighter* were pretty memorable. I heard about *Farscape* and *Babylon 5* later and saw an episode or two of *Babylon 5* – they were fairly forgettable. That certainly warrants a remake. Great idea, bad execution. But not all shows or movies got the same treatment as the big three. But you never know which ones will stick with you. So, if you haven't watched another sci-fi series, or you just stick with one, get out there and watch a few more! Getting only one person's idea of space doesn't do much for your imagination. And I hope that in the process, you'll find a few that you end up liking.



First Encounters

By Amanda Pizzolatto



Luna Murphey glanced almost longingly out the window. It was a beautiful day, a day that called out to her and begged her not to waste it. She heaved a long, heavy sigh as she tore her eyes from the window and glanced down at the papers in her lap. She still had homework to do, and her parents had a rule that everything else had to wait until homework was done. She groaned loudly, rubbed her eyes, and looked somewhat intently at the next question.

"Do you mind?"

Luna glanced up. Her older sisters, Selena and Diana, were working on their own respective homework assignments at the coffee table. Diana was glaring at her in irritation.

"Hurry up with your homework, and you can go outside," said Selena, without so much as lifting her fair head up.

Luna pushed a stray auburn strand from

her forehead. "But it's such a beautiful day! I shouldn't be inside wasting my time on this!"

Diana scoffed. "Homework is important, you numskull, especially if you want to become a scientist."

Luna groaned and sighed. "I know, I know."

"So, get back to it!" Diana snapped. Luna grumbled, but she got back to it, and there was silence in the house while the three got on with their work. A few minutes later, Luna looked up from her work and glanced out of the window again. This time, though, she sat straight up and blinked. Did she just see a light out in the forest behind their house, or was it a reflection of the sun on something metallic? She watched intently to see if it happened again. She knew she couldn't tell her sisters until she was absolutely sure she had seen something. Luna jumped, eyes widening. There it was again!

"Selena! Diana! Something's in the forest!"

Selena's head snapped up while Diana merely moaned. "Stop trying to distract yourself, Luna. Just get your homework done!"

Luna closed her books and set them down. Kneeling on the seat, she pressed her face to the window. "I'm serious! Something is out there, and it's reflecting the sun, I think?!"

Selena walked towards her and looked out the window. "What did you see?"

"Something like a flash; I think it's

something metallic that's reflecting the sun, but it's hard to tell."

The flash came again. Selena gasped, and Luna gave out a squeak. "There it is again!"

"Seriously Selena, don't let her distract you too!" Diana complained.

Selena walked past the table, grabbing her shoes on the way to the front door.

"She's not distracting me; she's telling the truth! There is something flashing out there!"

She opened the door and, followed closely by Luna, made her way towards the forest. Diana sat on her own, blinking for a moment, before quickly pulling on her shoes and following her sisters out into the forest. She gasped when she saw the flash through the trees. Knowing the forest like the back of her hand, she could tell exactly where it was coming from.

There was a fairy ring in the forest which she liked to use as an escape from her family on the occasions when she wanted some real alone time – those times when her treehouse seemed to be a bit too close to the house. She knew where it was, but now came the big question. Were hodekins using the place for some sort of gathering? Was someone signaling for help? The idea that someone could be in danger spurred Diana on; she didn't like the notion that someone could be hurt with no one around to help them.

The sisters came to a sudden stop right before the fairy ring and ducked behind some trees. They gaped as they took in the sight. A spaceship had landed right in the center of the ring! It had landed

perfectly too; the encircling mushrooms looked completely unharmed by the weight of the ship.

"Aliens?" whispered Luna, her tone revealing her excitement and slight concern.

"It has to be," whispered Diana. "I've never seen a spaceship design like that before, and Mom and Dad have worked on hundreds!"

This ship, though it did have the typical shape of a spaceship, looked more rounded and it was made entirely out of metal. Glowing blue lines zigzagged across the body, and the tip of it looked to be made from silver. The wind blew then, and the silver plating caught the sunlight.

Selena grinned at Luna. "Well, that explains the flashing."

"But why aren't they coming out?" asked Diana.

"Are they waiting for Mommy and Daddy?" asked Luna.

"Maybe they have to go through some procedures before they can come out?" suggested Selena. "They might not want to bring any toxins from their planet to ours."

Diana nodded. "That's a good point, and considerate too."

A soft hiss startled the girls. A blast of steam came out of the ship as a door opened up in its side and a ramp lowered to the ground.

The girls watched in shock and amazement as a couple of figures in odd-looking spacesuits came out and descended the ramp. The spacesuits

covered them entirely and they each wore a helmet on top; both were white with glowing green lines zigzagging across them in the same style as the blue lines on the ship. One of the aliens glanced around, and the girls could see that his visor was darkened like sunglasses.

Covered head to foot, it was impossible for the girls to get any clue as to what the aliens actually looked like underneath. Another alien walked over towards the trees and pulled out some kind of scanner. The girls shrunk back a little. If the other aliens were the same height as this one, then they all had to be well over seven feet tall! An invasion would be no problem at all for them.

"I want a closer look," whispered Diana, her curiosity growing with every second they sat silently observing the aliens. Selena and Luna glanced over at her in shock and something akin to horror. "What? Are you nuts? Mom and Dad aren't here!" whispered Selena. She glanced back at the aliens. "We should get back to the house and contact them immediately."

"Well, I'm going to take a closer look," Diana said firmly.

"Wait! Diana!" hissed Selena, but Diana was already off.

She zigzagged between the trees, creeping ever closer to the aliens, who were still gathering data from the surrounding foliage. So far, that seemed to be the only thing they were interested in doing. Weren't they going to take off their helmets, or at least the dark shades on their vizors, so she could see what they

looked like? It wasn't like they couldn't breathe. She paused... maybe that was it? They couldn't breathe here, like a fish out of water? Or perhaps they weren't sure if they could, and were making absolutely certain with all of their tests? But really, the group of aliens had only stayed near the spaceship, never venturing into the forest.

She glanced at the mushrooms which surrounded her favorite fairy ring, thankful, at least, that they didn't harm them. She paused at a large tree, hiding herself well behind it, and watched them intently. They seriously were not going into the forest. Did they not like trees or something? Was wood causing a weakness, and the trees themselves preventing them from going any further? It was a rather odd weakness, but it might just help them stand a chance against these aliens if they invaded. Diana squinted at a passing alien – if they invaded.

She quickly ducked when she noticed the alien's scanner coming closer towards her, and backed up slowly. Bumping into something, she spun around. There was an alien – looking right back at her! She fell backward, as did the alien, both screaming at the top of their lungs.

"Izvunamkeli*!!! Izvunamkeli!!
Izvunamkeli!!"

Diana figured the alien was shouting about her, as it was pointing straight at her. The other aliens crowded around as Selena and Luna came rushing to Diana's aid.

"Diana! Are you alright?" asked Luna as she and Selena helped her up.

"I'm fine," mumbled Diana, her attention still on the alien that had bumped into her.

Another alien helped it up and promptly whacked it across the back of its head.

The girls blinked in surprise.

"Neyi, tien indienne, niengo izvunamkeli!"

The first alien rubbed the back of its head. "Nodwa... nodwa..."

"Nen mokwa vyarlwa tokua. Niena doideza tupha!"

"Nen znayazi, nodwa..."

"Neyi nodwa, niengo izvunamkeli, indienne."

"Dobrunge, tien dvini, tovkoo dostanele," said a third alien, stepping between the two and the girls. "Segoku, zakalela sekweši."

He touched something on his helmet before turning to look down at the three girls. He pulled off his helmet, and their mouths dropped open. He had light green skin, pointed ears, no hair, grey eyeballs, and silvery, galaxy-shaped irises. His mouth slowly curved into a smile, revealing very pale silver, almost white teeth that had a soft glow to them. He waved to them. The girls shot him nervous grins and waved back.

"We bring you no harm. We come in peace," spoke the alien.

The girls stared at him in shock.

"W-wait, wh-what?" said Luna.

"Y-you know our language!" blurted Diana.

"But how?" Added Selena.

"We have been in contact with Jordan

and Laura Murphey. They taught us all we know about your planet, including your language. And, in return, we have taught them about our planet and our language."

The sisters glanced at each other. "Their secret communications projects!"

The alien blinked. "I beg your pardon?"

The girls quickly explained that they were, in fact, the daughters of Jordan and Laura and that they knew about some of their work, but not all of it.

"Ah, that explains it! They didn't know when we would arrive... neither did we, for that matter. They told us that when we did finally arrive, we should park our ship here and wait until sundown when they would be back from work. They didn't mention that you three would be home. It is a pleasure to meet you." He bowed. "Allow me to introduce myself. I am Captain Svetilo Phakazvedi of the O. X. K. Vedrutha."

"O. X. K.?" asked Diana.

"The acronym for Obeyene Xiamsan Koskorwu, or United Xiamsan Spaceship. Now, allow me to introduce you to my crew." He turned to the other aliens, who were also taking off their helmets to reveal blue, green, and purple skin colors. The only purple-skinned male was the one who had bumped into Diana, and he waved at them with a sheepish grin.

"Um, real quick, do all of you speak Hirmsan, or just you?" asked Selena.

"We can speak it just fine, thank you," said the alien that had been arguing with the other.

Svetilo chuckled. "It was a required

class." He pointed to a green-skinned female. "That is Ikriali Zeluhza, my second-in-command." Then a purple-skinned female. "And our doctor, Lunyanga Byalophe." He pointed to a blue-skinned male who shot them a pleasing smile. "That's my head scientist, Slunga Srezthi." He grinned as the other blue-skinned male crossed his arms. "And that defender of your alienness is Sunyanaru Chernya, a reporter; we call him Sunny for short." The girls blinked at Svetilo.

"Defender of our alienness?" asked Diana. Svetilo chuckled. "Let me finish, and I'll explain." He pointed to the purple-skinned male. "That's Dasiko Grumbar, our chef and also an engineer." He pointed to the last member of their party and the other purple-skinned female. "And his twin sister, Bozhitheka, chief engineer. We call her Boz for short." He turned back to the sisters with a cheery grin and laughing eyes.

"Now, that whole conversation you heard in Xiamsan was between Dasiko and Sunny. Sunny was explaining to Dasiko that we're the aliens since we have come to your world. If you came to our world, you would be the aliens."

The girls nodded. "That makes sense," said Selena. She smiled at Sunny. "Thank you for explaining that to him." Sunny seemed to melt under her gaze. He returned her smile. "You are very welcome." He shot a snide glance at Dasiko. "Gift of God, indeed."

Dasiko gave him a pout. "Will you stop it with that? Captain! He's doing it again!"

Svetilo rolled his eyes. "Enough bickering! We are guests. Shall we leave a bad impression on our hosts?" The crew shook their heads unanimously. "Good, thank you." He turned to the sisters. "Now, we were supposed to meet your parents...." "Oh, well, our house isn't far from here. Would you like to wait there, maybe see what a habetrot's house is like?" suggested Selena.

Dasiko scratched his head. "Wait, do the other races have different types of houses?"

Sunny whacked his head but didn't say anything. Dasiko glared at him as he rubbed the sore spot, again.

Svetilo shot them a withering glare before turning back to the girls with a pleasant smile. "I would like to see your house." He glanced between them and his crew. "Provided we can fit."

"Oh, I'm sure you can, but you might have to duck just a little," said Selena.

Svetilo bowed. "Then we would be honored to wait in your house for your parents."

"Great, let's go!" said Diana as the girls started towards the house, the aliens close behind, ambling so as not to get ahead of the girls with their long strides.

Upon reaching the house, the sisters proceeded to show the aliens everything until their parents returned and talk was turned to creating an alliance between the two worlds. And the rest is history.

*TRANSLATION OF THE ALIEN CONVERSATION:

"ALIEN! ALIEN!! ALIEN!!!"

"NO, YOU IDIOT, WE'RE THE ALIENS!"

"BUT . . . BUT . . ."

"I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS. WE CAME HERE!"

"I KNOW, BUT . . ."

"NO BUTS, WE'RE THE ALIENS, IDIOT."

"ALRIGHT, YOU TWO, THAT'S ENOUGH. NOW,
HANG ON A SECOND."



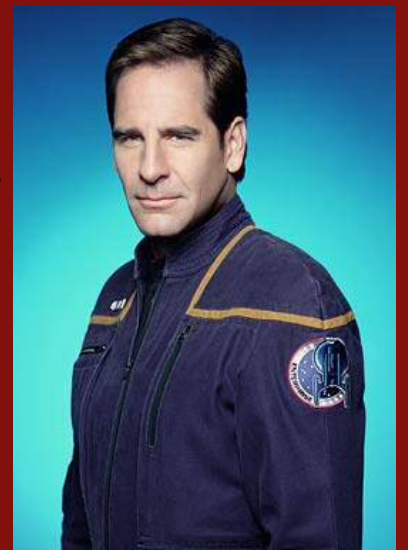
THE EXTENDED FAMILY OF THE ENTERPRISE

By Hikari Katana



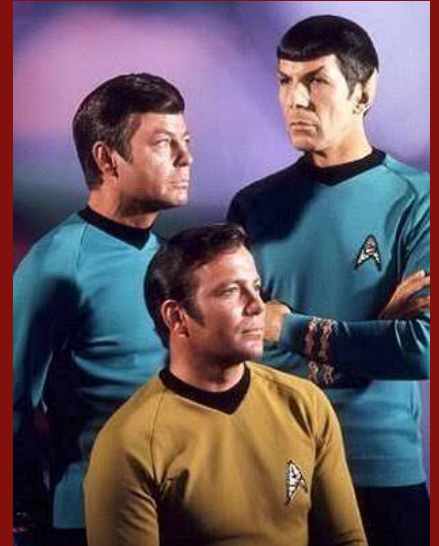
I don't call myself a Trekkie, but *Star Trek* has been part of my life since I was a kid. My earliest memory is from when I was maybe five years old, sitting on the couch eating mashed potatoes while watching *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. When I was eleven or twelve, my dad sweet-talked our local librarians into buying *Star Trek: The Original Series*, which we promptly watched. One of my friends loves *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, so in my twenties, we sat down and watched all seven seasons over the course of a year. I caught the first few episodes of *Star Trek: Voyager* at a friend's house but didn't pursue it further.

With the advent of the newest *Star Trek* television series *Discovery*, I needed to get my *Star Trek* fix somehow. So, I turned to Netflix and embarked on the only series I hadn't seen any episodes for - *Star Trek: Enterprise*. This series often gets reviled as having a horrible first and sometimes even second season. But I haven't found that to be so. I enjoy the characters, and while some of the plots or events are cringe-worthy, this is not new to *Star Trek*. All of the other *Star Trek* TV shows have had at least a few turkey episodes (although *Deep Space Nine* has the fewest of these), especially in the first season when a show is "growing the beard." (Thank you, Riker!) Plus, I don't think a lot of people take into account that *Enterprise* takes place hundreds of years before The Original Series (TOS), so certain rules like the Prime Directive that Trekkies take for granted haven't been established yet. Captain Archer and his primarily human crew are literally stumbling around the galaxy trying to figure all of those things out, making those mistakes that future starship captains will hopefully be able to avoid.



As I was thinking about the comparison in quality between *Enterprise* and other *Star Trek* shows, I came to a realization, something that I knew was true for TOS, but actually applies to all of them: we don't watch *Star Trek* for the special effects, cool aliens, or super-engaging plots. We watch them for the people. For the characters. And those characters have been with us for so long that they've become family.

TOS had a shoestring budget to do something that no one had really tried on the television screen before. Some of the plots had excellent writing or delved into powerful themes or presented "firsts" in television (like the first interracial kiss on TV). But even the better episodes still lack in the set department, and the aliens are pretty much always humans with extra brow ridges, pointy ears, or colorful skin. In that sense, TOS does not hold up well under modern scrutiny. But people watch and love it anyway for the characters. We're there for Kirk, Spock, and McCoy, not so much the science fiction aspect.



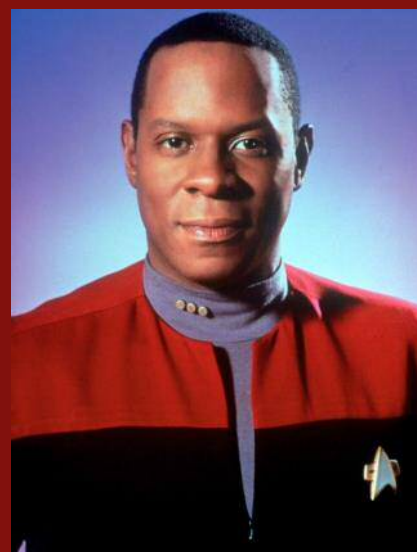
The same held true for *Next Generation*. While the budget had a modest increase and the set design got a sleek, new sci-fi finish, the same kinds of problems and successes followed these new *Star Trek* characters. Some aspects of the show are more realistic (like not having the entire command crew beam down to an alien planet into hazardous situations every day), but still had its fair share of turkey episodes, weak plots, unbelievable or contrived scenarios (even for soft science fiction) that plague a monster-of-the-week style of story-telling. But once again, we don't watch *Next Generation* for the science fiction. We watch it to see Captain Picard deal with Q's meddling, to see Geordi use his disability to his advantage, and witness Data's many flawed attempts to become more human. (And the fact that they have a counselor on board, the first concession to dealing with mental health I'd ever seen on television?! That's pretty major.)

The place where the sense of family and humanity is strongest is, oddly enough, in the most diverse *Star Trek* series: *Deep Space Nine* (DS9). A lot of people rag on DS9 for being too dark or complicated, the black sheep of the *Star Trek* family. But I found it to be the most satisfying in terms of emotional

connection, character development, plot construction, and theme exploration. You have a wide variety of both human and alien ethnicities, each with their own history, values, and emotional baggage which they bring to the table with them. Because all of the characters are in one place, having the disruptive elements in the stories come to them, you get to really see how they operate and interact. I love the squabbles between Constable Odo and Ferengi barkeep Quark, the confrontations between the Bajoran freedom fighter/terrorist Kira and Cardassian station overseer/war criminal Gul Dukat, and the flirtatious friendship between station doctor Bashir and sometimes tailor, sometimes spy Garak. The quality of storytelling and character realization in *DS9* is, to me, above and beyond the rest of *Star Trek*.

But even with good plots, societal milestones presented on TV, and the increasing quality of special effects, *Star Trek* remains best known for the characters, and each series is usually embodied in the leading captain. There have been endless debates (most friendly, some not) on who is the best Starfleet captain, who you grew up with, and who is your favorite. And really, I couldn't possibly pick a favorite. I love all the *Star Trek* captains the way I would uncles and aunts. They're all unique, all with their own strengths, weaknesses, quirks, and foibles; you can never mistake one for the other. Over the years, the captains of *Star Trek* become part of your extended family:

- Uncle Kirk is the smooth-talking ladies' man who takes you out for a drink and ends up in a bar fight, but he's so funny and charming that you always tag along, even though you will inevitably get into trouble.
- Uncle Picard is the intellectual with a dry sense of humor who takes you to art and history museums, thinks that books of classic literature are good gifts for anyone on any occasion, and lets you only drink tea because you're not old enough for alcohol yet.
- Uncle Archer is the enthusiastic outdoorsman who takes you on hikes, teaches you to fish, and invites you to come on camping trips (although you always doublecheck your gear to make sure he didn't forget anything important... like insect repellent.)
- Uncle Sisko, affectionately known as "Papa Bear" because he's jovial unless someone crosses him (in which case, a



mountain is about to fall on them), is the best listener and advisor when you have a problem, but he's just a little obsessed with good food. (Uncle Sisko and Uncle Archer get along well because the former loves to cook, and the latter loves to eat!)

- You don't get to see Aunt Janeway very often because she's always travelling, and even though she's a little stern and sharp-tongued, she always has the wildest, most interesting stories which you're pretty sure are all true, even the really outlandish ones.



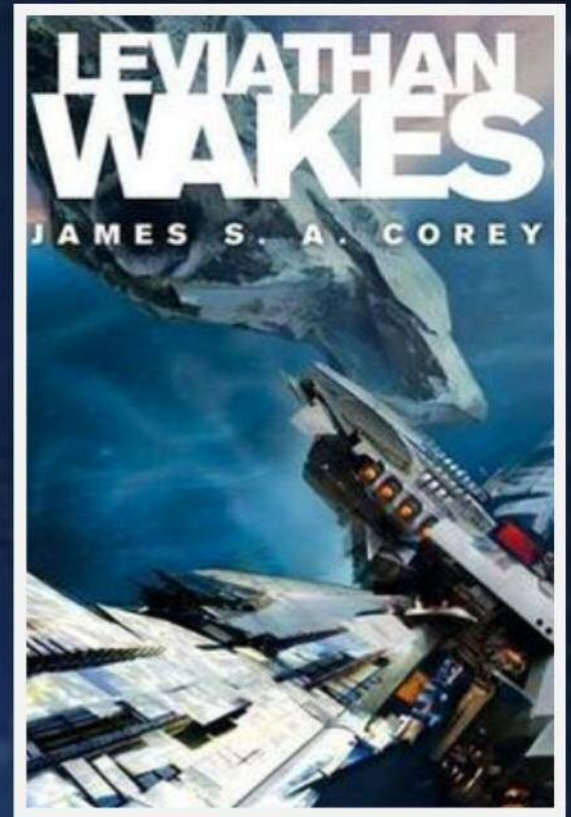
It remains to be seen if the new *Star Trek: Discovery* will have the same staying power as these previous incarnations. I have yet to really latch onto the characters in the series or really figure out what kind of aunts or uncles they will become. It may take a long time, or never happen at all, but at least we know that the family reunions we do boldly go back to, will always have that emotional connection, that human core (even with alien species) that gives *Star Trek* such wide-ranging and lasting appeal.



Welcome to the future, where humans have colonized the moon, Mars, and much more. Where people are categorized based on the planet they come from. Where living on a spaceship for more than a month at a time is normal. Where crew becomes family.

No, I'm not talking about *Star Trek* or *Firefly*. I'm talking about a book series called *The Expanse* by James S.A. Corey. Seems they made a TV show out of it, but I haven't seen it. But the book series is a masterpiece. A solidly R-rated masterpiece, but a masterpiece nonetheless.

It all begins in *Leviathan Wakes* with a spaceship in distress. James Holden, the executive officer of an ice hauler, leads a small group to check it out. While they're away from their ship, it gets blown up, and suddenly Holden – now de facto captain – and his small crew are running for their lives. They're running from the people



The Expanse: A Book Review

By Sarah Levesque

who sabotaged the ship in distress, who blew up the ice hauler, who allowed an alien virus to infect a whole space station, turning everyone on it into vomit zombies.

On the other end of the galaxy, one Detective Miller looks for a missing girl. Clues lead to a powerful family, to threats, and ultimately to a ship in distress, bait for an ice hauler. All during a time of political unrest in the galaxy, an unrest that begets riots, violence and more than a little uncertainty.

Written in alternating viewpoints, the first book leaves you itching for more, even if you didn't like the endless swearing, the innuendo and the sex (implied more than seen). Basically these guys and girls are non-military long-distance sailors, and they act like the stereotypes. But that only makes it more believable.

The plot of the series is compelling; the characters are real, ever the same yet ever changing, and rather mysterious until backstories are slowly revealed. The setting is more than plausible too, rich in detail without boring. But it all comes down to this – will they be able to prevent the spread of the alien zombie virus? And what happened to the aliens themselves? For that I quote Doctor Who's River Song:

Spoilers!"

Arrival of the Descubralia

By Julie Wile

“And so, the strange beings fell from the sky in a ball of fire...”

“Will you stop playing with that recorder?! It’s sensitive equipment. And for the last time, we didn’t fall from the sky, we descended from space and we weren’t on fire; that was the heat shield doing its job!” the exasperated human said, snatching the microphone away from the shorter alien.

“You most certainly did, that’s why we named you *Kelvia*, ‘born from fire.’ I remember it like it was yesterday,” a tall humanoid alien said with a smirk, as they glanced up from the box they were looking through to label the contents.

“How in *Vanafanyu* do you remember something from over fifty years ago? You were what, five?” The human sat down to resume scanning for signals.

“You aren’t going to trick me into telling you my age that easily. I will tell you that I was older than your grandparents are now,” the taller alien retorted.

The first alien, about half the other’s height, looked over their shoulder, grinning at one of the labels. “Danger rope?” she asked.

“It behaved strangely when I ran my *qua* through it. I don’t want Hector hurting himself with it.”

“So, it’s fine if I connect it to the *qua* box then?” said the shorter alien.

“Will you two stop trying to set this room on fire?! Just because you’ll be okay doesn’t mean my equipment will!” Hector rubbed the bridge of his nose. “Maybe I should back up a bit, to tell you how I ended up in this radio room with a *Yawu* and a *Quanafi*,” he said into the microphone.

“Oh, so the human gets to play with the talking machine, and we don’t?”

Hector sighed deeply. “One of you is basically a walking EMP just waiting to happen, and the other likes to plug in shorted out cables just to see what will happen. Why on *Vanafanyu* would I trust either of you with this?!”

“Because they’re old and I’m adorable?” the shorter alien said.

“I am not old!” exclaimed the taller one, exasperated.

“As I was saying, I’m Hector, a human, or as the *Quanafi* call us, a *Kelvian*, but this is very much not Earth. It is the moon of a gas giant some fifty light-years away from Sol. When we first came here, it was not exactly voluntarily, and we wouldn’t have survived for more than a week without help from the indigenous *Nafi*, sapient species.”

The taller alien leaned over, careful not to touch any of the equipment, and said, “I’m Niv, a *Quanafi*. I have much better control of my *qua* than Hector gives me credit for.”

“Shh, this is my recording. Well, the other eternal test of my patience and sanity is Pasheli, a meter-high, slate gray *Yawurenyi*.”

“With a very fluffy and beautiful tail,” Pasheli added, curling it around her humanoid body.

“Yes, yes, who is incredibly vain about her tail,” snarked Niv.

“You two are just jealous that you don’t have tails,” Pasheli said, growling under her breath.

The three of them would have carried on like that for hours, except the control panel started beeping and lights lit up all over it.

“Shush you two, we have an object detected!”

“Probably just another space rock,” said Pasheli, sitting down on one of the chairs beside Hector.

“I am pretty sure they track those space rocks,” said Niv, taking a large step back away from the equipment. “I should go get us tea, so I don’t create static.”

“Probably a good idea,” said Pasheli.

Hector, focused on his equipment, waved Niv away.



Meanwhile, in space...

“I’m getting a signal, Josefina!”

“There’s nothing out here to create a signal, Pedro. I know we’ve been traveling for several decades, but I think the emptiness of space might be finally getting to you,” said Josefina.

“I think I’d know a signal from noise by now. It is repeating in a distinct pattern... of the Fibonacci sequence.” He frowned. “Now it’s gone.”

“I told you...” Josefina trailed off as she looked outside. In the distance, she could now see a tiny point of light... flashing in the Fibonacci sequence, and repeating itself every few minutes as it changed color. “A beacon? Hail it and send word to the Great Moderator and the Voice of Suspicious Space Objects. Just don’t let the others know until we figure out what this is and who put it there.”

Pedro sent the message. He then went to hail it but noticed that the signal was back, albeit at a much higher frequency now. “I think it’s sweeping through the sound and electromagnetic spectrums for some reason. I’ll see if I can pin it down long enough to hail it.”

Josefina began to pace. “They don’t know who or what will detect it. They’re trying to give the highest chance it will be picked up on some sort of sensor or with natural senses. It isn’t a very strong signal, so it is clearly only for people approaching this planet and its moons.”

Pedro muttered in frustration as he hailed just as the frequency changed again, but to his surprise, it reverted back to his frequency, and the signal changed. He played it aloud so Josefina could also hear. The first couple of iterations weren’t in any language they understood, but just as it had altered signals, it was cycling languages... mostly human languages.

“It can’t be... there is no way they survived to even reach here, not with how poorly they were provisioned.”

“What are you talking about?”

“The test flight. The books say they forced a group of dissidents to fly their experimental generation ship, to see if it even worked... the prototype of the very one our parents stole.”

The signal, clearly capable of receiving audio input too, picked up on something in what they said, and switched to a slightly archaic form of their own language – at least a form of Spanish, which had been their language before they got bored about forty years in, and intentionally created a derivative thereof.

“Hello, traveler of the stars, welcome to *Vanafanyu*. We certainly hope you mean us no

harm, as we have this entire area under close observation and will protect ourselves if need be.”

Pedro and Josefina looked at each other in concern, then Pedro spoke. “We mean you no harm.”

“Good, then you are welcome here. Since you have no ill intent, please approach this beacon. Signal it in a band of the electromagnetic spectrum of your choosing, and it will blink in that wavelength for easier tracking.”

Josefina nodded, and Pedro signaled it in a yellow-green light to contrast with the bluish planet and the orange-red star. After a moment, the beacon changed to a steady blink in that exact wavelength.

“Impressive. I didn’t think they’d have all of this set up already,” said Josefina.

“You didn’t think they’d be alive,” said Pedro.

Once they were much closer to the signal source, they realized it was a little cubesat, just a beacon alone in orbit around one of the moons.

“Maybe this was a waypoint they left out here... they may or may not even be around anymore?” Said Josefina.

“Were you expecting a space station?” said Pedro, hailing it again. “What now?”

“Please confirm your species,” it asked.

“Human,” he replied.

“Further confirmation required. Where are we boldly going?”

“Uhhh...” Pedro thought for a minute.

Josefina pressed a button to call someone to the bridge.

A moment later, a preteen girl came onto the bridge. “Aunt Josie, I was in the middle of watching an old movie. Don’t you have people you pay to run errands for you?”

“I am pretty sure you are the most qualified for this job, Rosa,” said Josefina with a grin. “Please repeat the question. We have brought in an expert on this subject matter.”

“Welcome, new claimed human. Where are we boldly going?”

Rosa smiled at her aunt. “Where no one has gone before.”

“Correct. I am a leaf on the wind...”

Rosa thought for a second. “... Watch how I fly, erm, I mean watch how I soar.”

“Your first answer was sufficiently close; humans are imperfect. How many suns does Tatooine have?”

“Two. I was just watching that!”

“What book is named for the temperature at which paper burns?”

Josefina looked up as Rosa fell silent. “Fahrenheit 451?”

“Correct. Oh, what brave new world...”

Pedro took this one. “... That has such people in it.”

“Correct. What radio show is said to have incited a panic?”

“War of the Worlds?” said Josefina uncertainly.

“Correct. How many leagues under the sea?”

“20,000?”

“Correct.” The questions continued for a bit, mostly about science fiction trivia, but there were occasional curveballs about historical events, famous authors, and even personal preferences.

After another pause, the beacon spoke again. “If you are not human, you clearly know enough about the most important things any human space traveler would know, and so, either way, we welcome you.”

“Whadda I do now?” asked Rosa, bored now that the questions were over.

The beacon was silent briefly, but still blinking though much more slowly. “Request not found. Please wait for the next available human.”

Pedro and Josefina both stifled a laugh, and Rosa just looked at them in confusion.



“Attention! Attention! Hailing party has passed the human test. Please be prepared for a Spanish-speaking human on channel A14.”

“Those were the weirdest questions,” said Pasheli.

“Well you aren’t human, now shush. At least I know this language,” said Hector, before hailing back on A14, switching to Spanish.

There was background chatter for a moment on the other end, then beeping, and the connection was confirmed.

“Hello, intrepid travelers from Earth! I’m Hector, director of interstellar communications and planetary protection. Welcome.”

“Wow, the director himself!” said Rosa in the background.

“Shh, hello, Director. I’m Captain Josefina of the ship *Descubralia*. We are refugees from Earth, and wish permission to land.”

“You have children with you,” said Hector, trailing off for a moment.

“Yes. We are a generation ship as you were, assuming you are the ones from the test flight.”

“We are. I will need to consult with my advisory council and my other colleagues on the safest way to get you to the surface. Are you prepared to remain in orbit for a time, Captain?”

“Certainly, Director,” said Josefina. “As long as is necessary. I need to speak to my passengers and crew and ready them for landing anyhow.”

“I will speak with them posthaste, though it is night in our sector and we were not expecting your arrival, so there may be extended delays,” said Hector.

After some more discussion, they both cut the connection to go about their duties. Hector turned to Pasheli and motioned Niv in from the doorway. “We three are now the Department of Interstellar Communications and Planetary Protection. We need to get an advisory council and some experts together ASAP.”

“Are they planning on falling from the sky in a ball of fire too?” asked Pasheli

Hector sighed. “If you want them to believe we actually know what we are doing and aren’t just some people hanging out in part of an old spacecraft scanning for random signals, you are going to have to start admitting you know about heat shields and space.”

“I will rouse the elders. They will be quite surprised that the little beacon even worked,” said Niv, before departing.

“It wasn’t that it wouldn’t work...” said Hector softly. They hadn’t had any contact with Earth since they left the solar system, and though the Kelvians had settled in well and formed many thriving communities, the silence from the stars had always been there, and now it was broken.

NEWS FLASH: CATHOLIC KAHN REPENTS OF HIS WRATH

By *Avellina Balestri & The Traveling Troubadour*



[Los Angeles, California]

After years of being on the run from the diehard 'hang-'em-Kahn' advocates, it has been confirmed that Ricardo Mantaban sought out sanctuary at the Celebrity Catholic Communion Breakfast hosted by the Los Angeles Century Hotel, and proceeded to bare his soul in a makeshift corner confessional to Pat O'Brien, everyone's favorite hoodlum-loving priest, who was ready to relieve his burden.

Our operative managed to overhear him confessing in his south-of-the-border accent: "Forgive me, Padre, for I have sinned... I terminated Spock, luring him into our radioactive trap by telling him we found his long-lost, fanged teddy bear (that his Vulcan father got rid of when he was five, because he claimed it was stunting the boy's

non-emotional growth) at a Mexican flea market and were going to knock the stuffing out of him as a piñata!"

Tempering justice with mercy, the priest whispered in response, "You knew not what you did, but console yourself with the thought that Spock will rise again like Lazarus in the following feature film. Nevertheless, for your cruelty and mental torture of that childlike pointy-eared creature, your penance will be to find the teddy bear, ransom it, and make restitution by presenting it to its rightful owner upon his rejuvenation.

"By the way... I just got a tip from one of the East End Kids from the Bowery that the bear is on the auction block in Hell's Kitchen! It is your solemn duty to retrieve it by bidding against the Star Trek convention crazies who will go into the pits of Gehenna to possess it for their collections... and furthermore, you must do so garbed in your original Kahn costume as a representation of the barbaric beast you would be if not for your recent journey to conversion!"

Knowing the possibility of being ripped to shreds by the ferocious S.T. relic hunting fan-addicts, Ricardo had replied, "Could you give me Last Rites while we are here?"

While these developments certainly are momentous, one must wonder where poor Ricardo went wrong in

taking the "Path of Wrath". Prior to his short lapse of professional judgment in taking a role that drew the ire of millions, he had been content to be a simple and appealing Latin lover, a Romeo Romero type who took harmless roles serenading hot tamales on their verandas and risking only the fatal shot of a father's pistol, such as when he played a good thief and Robin Hood Hero in a Mexican musical aptly dubbed *Sombrero*.

However, after becoming the target of Spockiac lynch mobs, he was forced to seek out safe haven in Fantasy Island. He began anew as the well-groomed and gracious, impeccably dressed, white-suited host and got away from the mob by taking off in a stolen showroom model Cordoba that he was a pitch man for on TV commercials. He played the part of a disarming head-shrinker psychiatrist, welcoming an assortment of offbeat guests who had lost themselves somewhere along the line. With true charm, this amiable amigo reintroduced them to themselves while on the island of dreams (or perchance strange realities). He had a tremendous effect and, when it came time to leave, the guests carried their new fun-filled attitudes back home with them. He was also accompanied by his short side-kick who would point to the sky and coined the phrase in his alto voice, "It is a plane!" upon the arrival of the newest guinea pigs to land in their psycho-pleasant-people-trap.

In a correlating story, another one

of our operatives has managed to track down the elusive Captain J.T. Kirk to ask him what he thinks about Kahn's confession.

It turned out that the pioneer of the stars had a little confessing to do, himself, about the last moments he spent with his stalwart science officer. His emotions got the better of him, prompting him to reluctantly release a portion of the security surveillance footage of that harrowing day.

Quarantined behind glass, appearing gaunt and ghostly, the aging Mr. Spock is seen slowly rising up and staggering towards the voice vibrations of his captain's call from beyond the pane. Before melting away like a freezer-burnt snowflake in a microwave oven, and dissipating into the cosmos, he and the emotionally distraught Jimmy Kirk press hands against the glass, infusing one another with the Vulcan salute.

And then, in an ultimate Rosebud moment, Mr. S. utters his heartrending last words, "I have been, and always will be, your father.... And muttered distortedly, F..a..n..g..y!"

This exit scene seems to have completely overwhelmed the sobbing, Cowardly-Lion-faced captain and, as the helpless crew looked on, he proceeded to bawl like a baby while being coddled by the insensitive Dr. Bonehead, who was thrilled at the chance to use his favorite line: "He's dead Jim... and he didn't mean you! He meant his childhood Teddy Bear... I was

**holding it up above your head to try to revive Spock!
His mother gave it to me in the event of grave
circumstances, telling me that it had demonstrated
healing qualities for Spock once before."**

**Clearly too overcome with emotion to take it all in,
the beleaguered captain is then shown raising his fist
in the air and shrieking in an anguished call for
vengeance: "KAAAAHN...!"**

**The power of the moment really can't be over-stated;
it seems to echo through the universe in a circuitous
orbit, arousing the avenging angels of the Trek
Nation... before slowly but heavily beginning to dawn
upon him, like an anvil falling on his numskull -
exactly what the Doc was trying to break to him in his
moment of inconsolability. An extended lit dynamite
fuse... that blows his supposed brotherhood to
smithereens. "Fangy??!!"**

**Possibly due to this unsettling and befuddling - to say
the least - on camera moment, the traumatized Kirk
has become rather infamous for avoiding Fangy-
loving friends' funerals...**

**(Stay Tuned for the Full Story: "The Search for
Fangy")**





The Traveling Troubadour Act serenades... at the Catholic Communion Breakfast, circa 1970s. Pictured with; William Shatner, Ricardo Montalban, Pat O'Brien & Chief Iron-Eyes Cody, Gene Roddenberry & his wife, Majel Barrett.

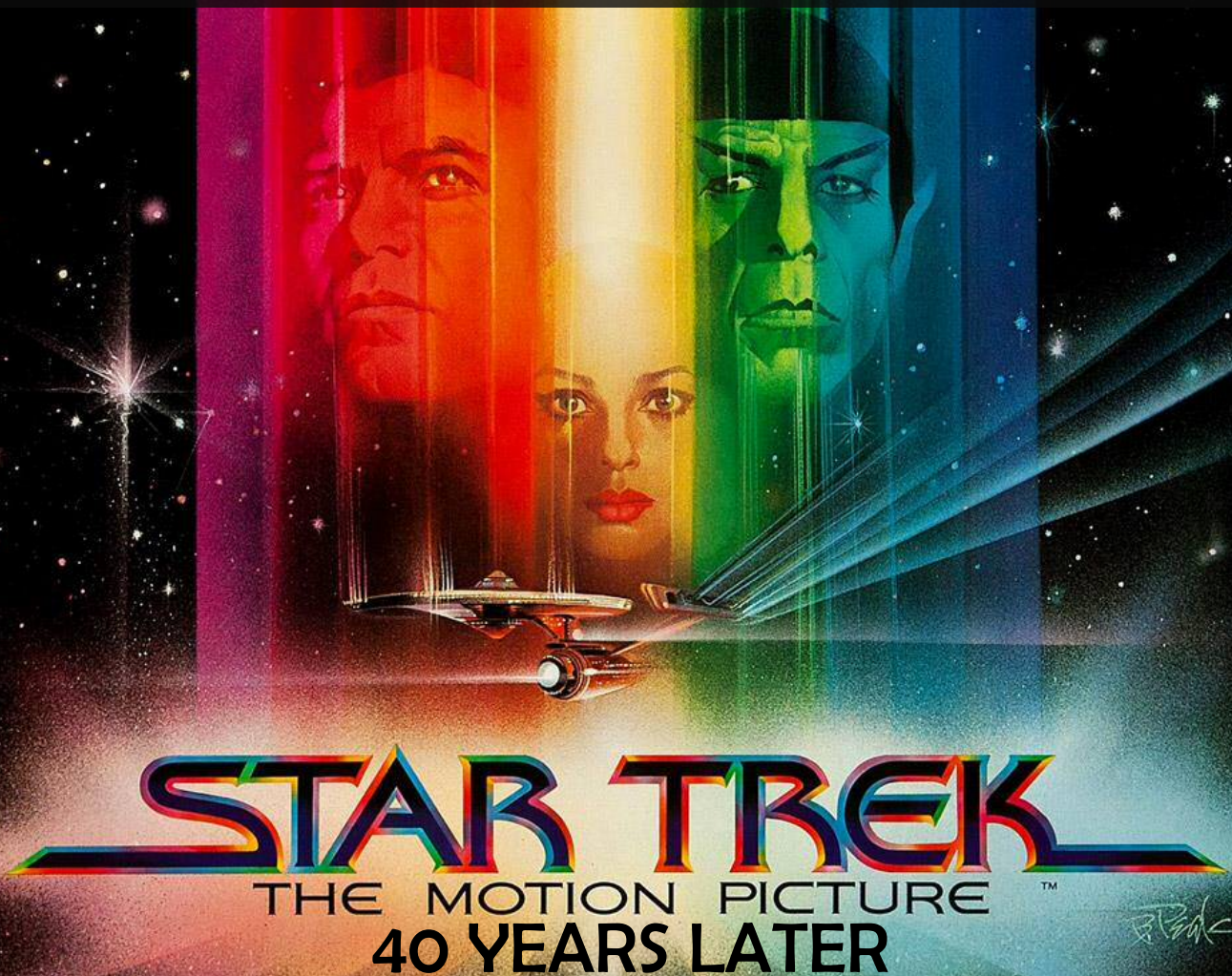


The Human Adventure Is Just Beginning.

By Michael Goth

In the forty years since its December 1979 release, *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* is still something of an enigma in the Star Trek canon. From 1979 to 2016, thirteen *Star Trek* movies were produced. Most were successful, some were not. Several (1982's *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*, 1986's *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home*, and 1996's *Star Trek: First Contact*) are unanimously regarded as great movies among fans (if not by critics), while others (1989's *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier*, 2002's *Star Trek: Nemesis*, and 2013's *Star Trek: Into Darkness*) an abomination of the name Star Trek.

In the four decades since it warped its way into movie theaters, the merits of *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* are still highly debated among fans. Some see it as an underrated space epic masterpiece along the lines of Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, while many others look upon the movie as an epic bore. Despite earning over \$82,000,000 (\$300,000,000 adjusted for inflation) at the domestic box office, myth has it that the movie was a box office failure with *The Wrath of Khan* saving the franchise from oblivion. The truth is, with the exception of director J.J. Abrams' 2009 reboot movie *Star Trek*, the first feature was seen by more people than any other Star Trek movie.



The fact that *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* happened at all is something of a miracle. Despite being groundbreaking in many ways, the original *Star Trek* television series struggled in the ratings and was nearly cancelled after its second season. It finally was cancelled following a disappointing third season. From midway through the first season to midway through the second season with underwriter/producer Gene L. Coon, the series produced a number of episodes like "The City on the Edge of Forever", "The Devil in the Dark" and "Amok Time" that not only remain among the greatest *Star Trek* episodes but are simply television at its best. Even the mangled third season produced a couple of gems like "All Our Yesterdays". Network television has never been about quality though, but numbers. How many viewers does a series bring in? *Star Trek* had a dedicated but small viewership.

When *Star Trek* was cancelled by NBC in 1969, the series was put into syndication where many people believed it would soon be forgotten. The exact opposite happened, and the series grew in popularity. Over the course of the seventies, science fiction series such as *Space 1999* and *Battlestar Galactica* came, ran for a season or two and were gone, while *Star Trek* continued to draw in new viewers. Beginning with award-winning science fiction writer James Blish's novelization of the original 79 episodes, *Star Trek* grew into a hugely popular series of fiction books. *The Making of Star Trek* by Stephen Whitfield (published in 1968 while the series was still on the air) and *The World of Star Trek* by David Gerrold (the young writer of the popular "The Trouble of Tribbles" episode) were two of the earliest books on the production of a television series. *Star Trek* even returned to television in the mid-seventies with an Emmy winning but short-lived animated series. There were also, of course, *Star Trek* conventions where fans would gather to celebrate their favorite television series.

When Paramount Pictures first considered bringing live-action *Star Trek* back, it was as a low budget television movie. Despite the popularity of the series in syndication, the studio did not believe that the series had enough of an audience to make a theatrical movie profitable. Science fiction was simply not considered that lucrative a genre during much of the seventies. It wasn't until the release of George Lucas's *Star Wars* (a.k.a. *Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope*) in May 1977 and Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* later the same year, that it hit home with movie studios how popular science fiction could be with a mainstream audience. *Star Wars* had surpassed Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975) to become the highest-grossing movie of all time with *Close Encounters* not far behind.

In 1978, Paramount executive Michael Eisner decided to bring *Star Trek* to the big screen. The only problem was that *Star Trek* was already in development to return to television as *Star Trek: Phase II*. Paramount was going to start up its own network, with the new *Star Trek* series serving as its anchor. Gene Roddenberry would once again be serving as executive producer with veteran screenwriter and author

Harold Livingston overseeing script development, and Robert Goodwin (later a producer on the first five seasons of *The X-Files*) overseeing production. The entire original cast with the exception of Leonard Nimoy would return as the crew of a refitted U.S.S Enterprise headed out to explore the final frontier on a new five-year mission. With Spock not on board, two new characters were added to fill his vacancy: Lt. Xon, a full-blooded Vulcan would be manning the science station while the young commander Will Decker would be the new executive officer. Chekov, now head of security, would have his former position as navigator filled by the exotic Lt. Ilia, a Delta, a species in which the females have no hair. It would also be established that Decker and Ilia were once lovers when the commander was stationed on her home planet. This relationship would also be the inspiration for a similar one between Commander William Riker and Counselor Deanna Troi on *Star Trek: The Next Generation* a decade later.

Paramount's dream of their own network fell through, and *Star Trek: Phase II* became the \$15,000,000 big-budget *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*. "In Thy Image", the two-hour premiere episode of Phase II, written by Harold Livingston (from a story by Alan Dean Foster), would be rewritten as the movie's screenplay (two other scripts, "The Child" and "Devil's Due", would later be rewritten as episodes of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*). Leonard Nimoy would return as Spock, with Stephen Collins cast as Decker, and Persis Khambatta as Ilia. Robert Wise, who had won the Academy Award for *West Side Story* and *The Sound of Music*, was hired to direct the movie. Wise was no stranger to science fiction, having helmed the classic *The Day the Earth Stood Still*.

Problems plagued the movie from day one. One of the many obstacles facing the production of *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* was that filming began before Harold Livingston had even finished rewriting the screenplay. During much of the principal photography, the story had no ending. Paramount also hired an untested special effects company, Robert Abel and Associates, who worked for half a year and spent over \$5,000,000 producing less than a minute of usable special effects. Filming began on August 7, 1978, and two days later the movie was a full day behind schedule. In his journal on the making of the movie, *Chekov's Enterprise*, Walter Koenig wrote that by the end of August he learned that his services would be required for eight weeks longer than originally intended. Filming came to a conclusion on January 26, 1979, after 126 days. Adding in the money spent on the aborted Phase II television series, the budget of *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* ballooned to a then record-breaking \$46,000,000.

With the clock ticking, Robert Wise brought in Douglas Trumbull, who had done the special effects on his 1970 movie *The Andromeda Strain* after cutting his teeth on Kubrick's *2001* and later creating the beautiful effects for Spielberg's *Close Encounters*. Trumbull was soon joined by John Dykstra, who had helped produce the groundbreaking special effects in *Star Wars*. Trumbull, Dykstra, and their teams

were given nine months to create twice the number of special effects used in either *Star Wars* or *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. To say that the two men rose to the occasion would be something of an understatement, as the effects in *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* remain some of the most mesmerizing ever brought to the screen.

The one aspect of *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*, which all fans agree is nothing less than spectacular, is the unforgettable musical score by the late Jerry Goldsmith. Goldsmith's title music was so popular, it was later featured as the theme for *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Paramount had proposed Jerry Goldsmith to Robert Wise very early on, and as the director had worked with the composer on his 1965 movie *The Sand Pebbles*, he was only too happy to take the studio's suggestion. Jerry Goldsmith composed some of the greatest movies scores of the 20th century, including *A Patch of Blue* (1965), *Planet of the Apes* (1969), *The Omen* (1976), *Alien* (1979), *Poltergeist* (1982), *The Secret of NIMH* (1982), *Gremlins* (1984), *Total Recall* (1990) and *Star Trek: First Contact* (1996). Even Goldsmith's music for *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier* is wonderful, even if the movie itself is not. *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* may feature Goldsmith's greatest score, for which he received an Oscar nomination. Goldsmith's brilliant soundtrack record was released on vinyl and later on CD.

Despite not being the writer of the movie's screenplay, *Star Trek's* creator and the movie's producer, Gene Roddenberry, wrote the novelization of the movie, the first *Star Trek* novel to be published by Pocket Books. The novel included some backstory not featured in the movie, such as Will Decker being the son of Commodore Matt Decker, the commander of the U.S.S. *Constellation* played by William Windom in the classic episode "The Doomsday Machine". It's a superb novelization that spent six months on The New York Times bestseller list. Roddenberry's assistant, Susan Sackett, wrote the insightful *The Making of Star Trek: The Motion Picture*. There was also Walter Koenig's enjoyable, before mentioned, *Chekov's Enterprise*. Perhaps the most informative book on the making of the movie, *Return to Tomorrow: The Filming of Star Trek: The Motion Picture* by Preston Neal Jones, was not published until 2014 after decades of legal dispute. For fans of the movie, there are many great books out there for your enjoyment. October 2019 will see a special 40th anniversary of Gene Roddenberry's novelization.

As unforgettable as Goldsmith's score is, and as breathtaking the effects by Trumbull and Dykstra are, what makes *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* special is the story. Which surprisingly is one of the most debated aspects of the movie. Some fans believe that the movie is more a showcase for the special effects than a character drama, something the television series always was. This is not an unwarranted criticism, especially as Paramount demanded that several key character and story moments be excised from the movie to shorten its length, instead of removing a few minutes of special effects. Thankfully, these scenes were put back in the movie for its

VHS release in late 1980.

Star Trek: The Motion Picture ranks along with *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *Star Wars: Episode IV- A New Hope*, and Ridley Scott's *Alien* (also released in 1979) as one of the greatest science fiction movies of the 1970s. The four movies are very different, but if *The Motion Picture* has a kindred spirit among the three, it would be *Close Encounters*. George Lucas designed *Star Wars* to be a space western (Lucas had said on several occasions that his classic movie is not even science fiction), whereas *Alien* is a homage to the pulp science fiction stories of the 1950s. *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* are movies about the wonderment of the unknown. This is also something the first *Star Trek* movie beautifully captured from the television series.

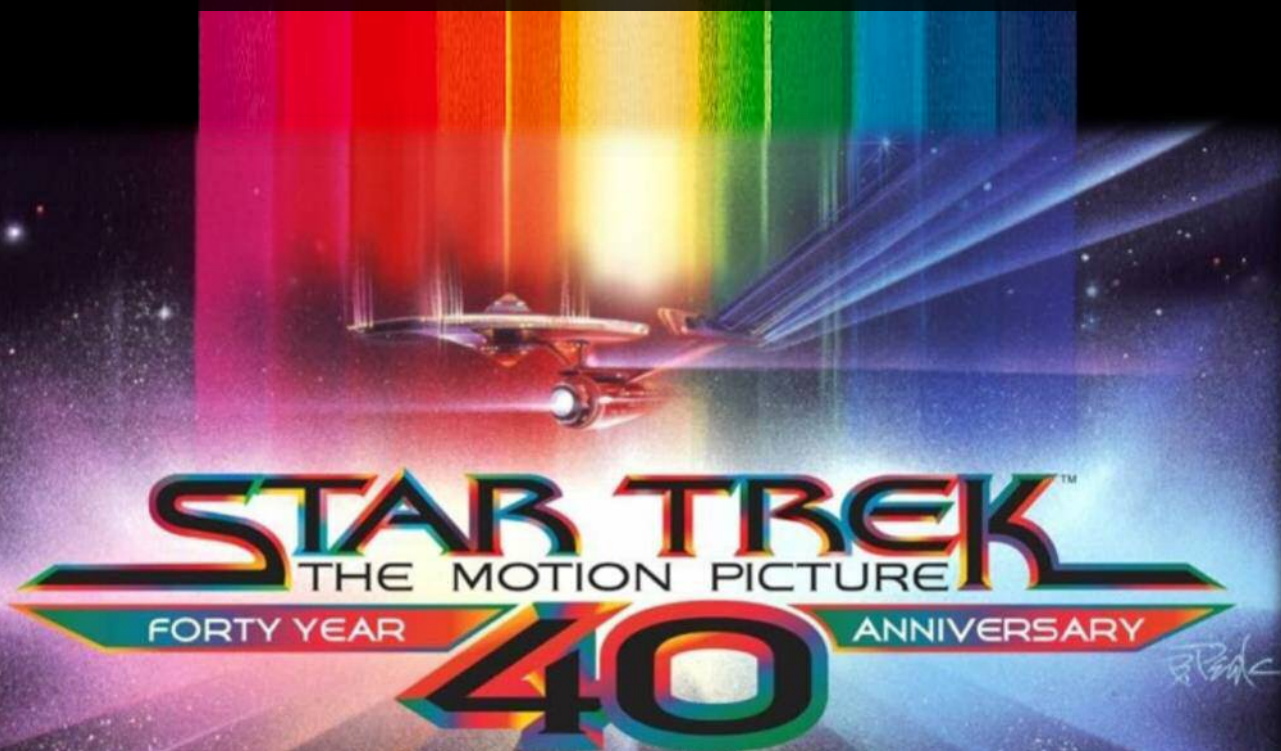
Also, as with the television series, *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* uses science fiction to tell a very human story – man's search for God. The *Enterprise* is ordered to leave dry dock early to engage a mysterious cloud that has destroyed three Klingon battle cruisers and a Federation space station. At the center of the cloud, the crew discovers a massive space ship which, in a dangerous mind-meld, Spock learns is a living machine called V'Ger, in search of its creator that it believes is on Earth. At the center of the vessel, Ilia (who was killed by a V'Ger probe sent to download information from the *Enterprise* computer and was replaced by a lookalike machine) leads Kirk, Spock, McCoy and Decker to the center of V'Ger where Kirk discovers the massive entity is actually *Voyager 6*, a late 20th Century NASA probe that disappeared into a black hole and was believed lost. The probe was discovered by a race of living machines that built an entire vessel around the probe so that it could fulfill its mission – to learn all that can be learned and return the information to its creator. On its 300-year journey back towards Earth, V'Ger gathered so much information that it achieved consciousness. Having gained such massive amounts of knowledge, V'Ger now believes its existence is without meaning. In joining with the creator, V'Ger hopes to find answers to the question of its purpose in life. In a beautiful scene (criminally, one that was cut from the theatrical release) towards the end of the movie, a teary-eyed Spock tells Kirk, McCoy, and Decker that everyone at one point in their life questions the reason for their existence. It's unfathomable why this scene was initially cut, as it's extremely important to the movie's narrative and captures the beauty of the movie not with special effects but with one simple question: "Why am I here and what was I meant to be?"

Star Trek: The Motion Picture opened on December 7, 1979, to a mixed response from both critics and moviegoers. The movie grossed over \$11,000,000 in its first weekend, surpassing the record set by *Superman* a year earlier. By the end of its first week of release, the movie had earned nearly \$20,000,000. Because of its massive budget, according to Preston Neil Jones in *Return to Tomorrow: The Filming of Star*

Trek: The Motion Picture, the movie did not break even until April of 1980 (a movie has to make two to three times its production cost to earn a profit), eventually grossing \$82,258,463 in the United States and \$139 million worldwide. *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* was the fourth highest-grossing movie in America for 1979, out-grossing all other science fiction themed movies (\$2,000,000 more than *Alien*, \$12,000,000 more than *Moonraker*, \$40,000,000 more than Disney's *The Black Hole*).

In late 1980, Paramount Pictures announced a second (much less expensive) *Star Trek* movie. Needing a scapegoat for the first movie's runaway budget, Gene Roddenberry was made a consultant and stripped of all creative power, with producer/writer Harve Bennett and writer/director Nicholas Meyer put in creative control of what would become fan-favorite *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*. That is another story, however.


Star Trek: The Motion Picture remains one of the best of the thirteen *Star Trek* movies. Unlike the three reboot movies (2009's *Star Trek*, 2013's *Star Trek: Into Darkness*, 2016's *Star Trek: Beyond*), which truly are little more than a showcase for special effects and senseless action (though under director Justin Lin, *Beyond* was a sizable improvement over the first two reboots) and are *Star Trek* in name alone, *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* is a movie with a very human story at the center of it. Its characterization may not be as strong as *The Wrath of Khan's* or *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock* (another movie that often fails to get the respect it deserves), but it is definitely a *Star Trek* movie and a great one at that. As the U.S.S. Enterprise warps off to new adventures in the unknown, the movie leaves us with the words, "The Human Adventure is Just Beginning" across the bottom of the screen before the end credits roll, and indeed it is.



Upon the Death of a Favorite Character

Sarah Levesque

Warning: Contains *Firefly* Spoilers




Death,
Sudden and swift,
Unleashing grief and pain.
Gone the laughter,
Gone the fun,
Gone the playful spirit.

No more will toy dinosaurs fight,
No more will the pilot float like a leaf,
No more will Hawaiian shirts brighten up the darkness.

No. No! No acceptance.
Revel in the beauty that is
Willing suspension of disbelief
And simply disbelieve.

Instead,
Write on.
Write the stolen life,
And it will continue.



The Exchange

By Bernadette Flynn

Reader's Advisory: contains swears

“Wolfran haunch... git yer fresh wolfran haunch right ere! Five trills a kilo... Goin fast! You won’t find no better deal this side of Kantar!” The man’s booming voice made Lorne cringe, as he made his way through the bustling market place on Amari 4. He’d always hated market day. The heaving mass of sweating bodies crammed inside a sweltering space — fit for around only half their number — made his skin crawl and his head ache fiercely.

If only Eddie would move with the times and get himself a decent relocater! But then, Eddie was a Vulg, and Vulgs were a notoriously skittish species; technology really wasn’t in their wheelhouse. Even something as low tech as a simple cell regenerator was looked on with an overwhelming degree of suspicion and distrust. Lorne had even brought up the idea of moving into the relocation racket on a couple of occasions, but Eddie had just shut him down cold, saying that he had no intention of handing himself to the enforcers on a silver platter. It was ridiculous! Everyone and their cousin, from Amari 4 to Iridion, knew that although the enforcers monitored all on-world transportation signals, relocators worked on a completely different principle. They were nigh on untraceable — even if you somehow managed to get your hands on the source machine.

“Damned Vulgs!” Lorne muttered to himself, rolling his eyes as he squeezed his way past yet another overflowing cart — fresh fish this time... at least that’s what the badly scrawled and misspelt sign claimed. Personally, Lorne had his doubts. The ripe smell made his stomach churn, as the day-old bagel, which had the audacity to try and call itself ‘breakfast’, threatened to make a final curtain call. He bit it back, the acidic taste in his mouth only adding fuel to the fire of his irritation.

“To hell with Eddie! If I had any sense, I’d just cut ties with the odious little scum-sucker once and for all!” The words should have made him feel better, but they fell short... mainly because they rang about as hollow as an Urok’s skull.

Eddie was a lot of things – most of which would turn a man’s stomach more so than invite a closer acquaintance – but there was one thing that Eddie was not... and that was a liar. Ignorant and repulsive, yes, but if he said he would hook a guy up, then the little sack of black-hearted bile would do just that... so long as there was enough ready trill in the exchange to make it worth his time, of course.

He needed Eddie... or rather, he needed what Eddie had. That didn’t mean that he couldn’t curse the stars above, that the repulsive little Vulg just happened to be the one person on this godforsaken rock who’d manage to get his grubby little claws on one!

It was sheer luck alone which saved his ass as he ducked into the alleyway entrance to Eddie’s black-market dive... well, that and the superior might of the renegade bagel,

which chose that same moment to forcefully insist that they part company.

With a groan, Lorne staggered over to the stack of broken crates which littered one side of the narrow, cobbled walkway and noisily launched his partially digested breakfast into the overflowing refuse channel which ran sluggishly along its length. The barely moving wastewater disappeared into a storm-drain just outside of the doorway to Eddie's shop — a doorway which was, at that very moment, belching out what seemed like an endless stream of hard-faced, chorium-plated enforcers.

Lorne would have tried to slip back out into the crowd which was still jammed together like red-faced sardines in the main drag, but apparently the bagel wasn't quite done with him yet.

"What do we have here then?" One of the men said, walking over to where Lorne was leaning miserably against the slime-covered wall. "Just anuva 'skaghead', sir. Damned place is crawling wiv em. Magister needs reportin ta the top brass if yer ask me..."

"...but I didn't ask you, *did I*, Oiler?" The commanding officer's words were somewhat refined, hinting at a highborn past perhaps; in Lorne's experience, those ones were the worst — sadistic devils to a man. He also kept his tone smooth and low, but there was no missing the underlying threat in them. He had witnessed the reality of that threat one more time than he'd ever wished to. The man called Oiler gulped audibly and fell silent.

Lorne kept his head firmly lowered; he couldn't chance being recognised by one of the men. He had sworn to himself more than a decade ago that he'd never surrender to what the enforcers termed 'justice' ever again — not while he still had breath left in his body. The enforcers liked to pretend that they were 'guardians of the allied planets', but all



they really were, were a group of corrupt mercenaries. These days, it wasn't even all that clear if the powers that be had hired these crooks, or if the enforcers had just amassed enough dirt on them, to keep them firmly in their place and not asking any questions. Lorne was betting on the latter.

"Is Oiler right?" The commanding officer grabbed his shoulder and forced Lorne round to face him.

"Sorry sir, I... I'm just sick." The man clearly wasn't buying his show of humility, and he reached a gauntleted hand down to grasp Lorne's chin, clearly intending to force his head up so he could get a proper look at him. He had to act fast! Only he had no idea what to do. He was outnumbered by at least six to one, and that was if there were no more of the hulking psychopaths still inside.

"Sir... please, I... I..." he stuttered, stalling for time and trying to play into Oiler's insulting assessment of him being just another skag-addled waster. The commanding officer growled under his breath, patience nearly at an end when the gods decided to smile down on Lorne for the second time that day. The tepid breeze changed direction, bringing the foul stench of fermenting fish along with it. Within moments it had engulfed them.

Several things happened at once. Oiler bent over double, coughing and choking. The commanding officer dropped his chin and raised his hand to his face to try and ward off the terrible smell. And Lorne, stomach heaving once again, bent double and found to his surprise that there were still some contents left in his stomach, even after his earlier argument with the stale bagel. The fact that said contents was now colourfully adorning the commanding officer's shiny black boots was less of a blessing. It earned him a metal-fisted punch to the gut and left him lying, gasping like a beached plovak, in an unidentifiable puddle of filth on the ground.

"I think we've seen all we need to see here. Oiler!"

"Yessir?" Oiler smothered yet another wheezing cough, trying his best to stand to attention.

"Gather the men. I want the whole squadron back at the citadel and ready for debriefing before noon; tardiness will be met with an hour in the stockade!"

"Sir! Yessir!" Oiler choked out between another bout of uncontrollable coughing.

The commanding officer wiped his soiled boots on Lorne's shirt, then gave him one final kick to the stomach before stomping off into the hastily departing crowd. No one gets in the way of the enforcers, not unless they want to pay with their freedom — or, in quite a few cases, their lives.

Oiler barked orders to the rest of the squadron, and they all marched from the alley without giving Lorne so much as another glance. He'd been lucky. A few moments later, he was alone again.

Clutching his abused stomach, he pushed himself painfully to his feet. If a couple of bruised ribs and a sore gut were the only takeaways from an encounter with the

enforcers, then a man could count himself truly blessed. He'd never complain to the fish vendor again, that was for sure! The man's less than hygienic practices had miraculously saved the day... or, at least, they had done so for Lorne. As he staggered through the open doorway, he couldn't miss the fact that Eddie and his goons hadn't been quite so lucky.

The place was absolutely coated with the distinctive blue-black sheen of oily Vulg blood. Eddie must have had guests too, as there was definitely some dark purple in the mix as well — Andurian perhaps. It was impossible to tell, though. Whatever had been unleashed in here had pretty much obliterated anything it hit. A long string of stinking slime dripped down from the ceiling and landed on his shoulder. Lorne shuddered. That the enforcers had got their hands on a weapon powerful enough to do this level of ground zero damage left a sour taste in his mouth, and it sure as heck wasn't the bile this time.

He picked his way across the gore-covered floor to where the battered remnants of Eddie's desk lay. Three of its legs were in splinters, and half of the top had gone, but one of the drawers was still intact, and Lorne held his breath as he carefully pried it open.

It contained some coffee-stained pages, a type 2 pencil and an assortment of rather unappealing looking candies; clearly, Eddie had a sweet tooth. Other than that, the drawer was empty. Lorne's heart sank. It wasn't there. He'd come all this way, had his ribs kicked in, and it was all for nothing!



“Damn!” He kicked the broken desk, smiling grimly as the last remaining leg snapped off and the whole heap crashed to the ground. It felt good to release some of his pent-up rage, so he kicked it again, harder this time.

“Damn! Damn! *Damn!*” The impact hurt his foot, sending pain shooting up his leg, but Lorne didn't care. Eddie was gone. The enforcers were gone. There was no one, and nothing else left for him to take his ire out on; so, the desk was going to take his abuse for no other reason than, other than him, it was the last thing still standing.

It could have been the fifteenth kick, or maybe the twentieth that did it — Lorne had long since lost count, focused only on the desk's complete and utter annihilation — but suddenly there was a loud clicking sound, and something fell down from under the desk to land in the sticky mire on the floor.

Levering the desk over onto what little was left of its scarred surface, he could see that

there had been some sort of hidden compartment in its underside. The small, well-concealed door was now hanging open, but still wedged inside was a fat roll of notes and a small velvet pouch.

Lorne's heart skipped a beat in his chest as he carefully extracted the roll and the pouch from their hiding place. He stuffed the notes into his pocket without bothering to count them — he knew by sight alone that there had to be at least ten thousand trills there, but he had much more important things to focus on. Gingerly he undid the cord on the pouch and peered inside.

“Thank the gods,” His voice was barely an awed whisper as he reached in and plucked the unassuming, silver device from within its protective folds. He stared down at the ionic breather, feeling moisture well in his eyes. Such a tiny little thing, but it was the final key in securing his family's freedom from this god-forsaken hellhole. Talia's weak lungs had tied them all to this place, and to the costly medicine, which he and her mother had basically had to sell themselves into slavery in order to procure. With this little device, their savings and Eddie's little nest egg, he, his wife, and daughter could finally afford to leave. It looked like the slimy little Vulg had come through for him after all.

Thinking of Eddie reminded him that something else had fallen from that hidden compartment. Trying not to think about what he was sifting his hand through, he searched around in the puddle of slime until his fingers located the small cylindrical tube. Wiping it off on his already filth-stained trousers, Lorne squinted down at the writing etched on its side.

‘Dr Orris’ patented cell regeneration wand’, the small silver letters read.

Lorne couldn't suppress a grim chuckle. “Why Eddie, you progressive, dark horse of a Vulg.” He shook his head and grinned. “I'll just hang on to this if you don't mind, old chap. It's not like it would do you much good in your current state, after all.” He pocketed the device and the pouch containing the breather and walked back out into the stinking alley. Elbowing his way back out into the crush on the main street, he turned in the direction of the shipyard to book passage for his family on the first passenger ship he could find which was heading to the outer planets.

As Lorne walked, he felt his spirits lift, and he began to whistle an upbeat tune. Perhaps market day wasn't all that bad after all.



NO REST FOR THE WICKED

By Laurie Howard

"Spock, this way!" Captain Kirk yelled behind him as they ran through a deep thicket of bushes, trying to outrun the men who were chasing them. Sweat was running down Kirk's face and he was ducking branches as he ran, with Spock close on his heels.

A few moments later the captain abruptly stopped, bending over from his waist. "Spock," he huffed, trying to draw in deep breaths. "I have to catch my breath. The air is too thin... you go on, I'll catch up."

"Captain, I can wait," Spock said, but Kirk shook his head.

"No, get going, I just need another minute."

Spock hesitated, but then did as the captain instructed. The undergrowth was getting thicker. This place reminded him of one of the jungles which they had trained in at the academy. He paused for a moment, listening carefully, satisfied when he heard what he hoped was the captain catching up. Setting off again, he sped up his pace, and after a few minutes more broke through an opening in the trees. Too late, he saw the deep gorge looming up ahead of him. He tried to stop, but his momentum carried him off the ledge. Spinning his body around, he grabbed for the side of the canyon, but the ground gave way beneath his fingers. At the last minute, in desperation, he managed to grab hold of a small rock with his right hand. It stopped his fall and he scrabbled at the soil with his left hand, trying to find another purchase.

Nothing. He tried to get a foothold instead, but the gravel and dirt kept breaking away.

"Captain!" he called out as he scrambled to hang onto the rock. He could hear Kirk calling for him.

"Captain, I'm down here, be careful!" Some more of the cliff face crumbled and a small avalanche of dirt rained down on him.

When Kirk came out of the thicket, he glanced around but didn't see his first officer. "Spock!" he called.

Spitting dirt out of his mouth, Spock answered, "Jim, down here!"

Kirk crawled to the edge of the gorge, soldier style, and peered over. "Oh my gosh, Spock, hang on." He got as close to the edge as he could and reached down. "Grab on."

Spock reached up, and after two failed attempts, they were finally able to connect hands.

"I've got you, Spock, just hang tight." The captain rolled onto his side and tried to pull Spock up with one hand. Spock used his feet to push up from below, and Kirk finally was able to grab him with both hands without falling over the side. Kirk sat back and pulled with all of his strength. Spock grabbed the edge of the cliff with his other hand and threw himself the rest of the way up, landing half on top of his captain in the process.

"Ugh. Spock, are you alright?" the captain managed to say.

Spock rolled off him and tried to catch his breath and calm his racing heart. He looked over at Kirk. "I believe I am sufficiently recovered."

The captain was trying to catch his breath too. "Next time, be a little more careful where you run."

"I intend to, sir."

Kirk rolled over and brushed off the dirt. "We have to get out of here."

The two looked around for another path. They definitely couldn't go back the way they came.

Kirk crawled to the edge of the cliff and looked down. "We certainly can't go that way." Below them was a 200-foot drop down to a fast-moving river. Boulders and deep rock formations lined both of its sides. Kirk crawled back and looked around. There was a wall of rocks that led up and to the right.

Spock checked his sensor. "Captain, they are gaining fast."

They both stood, and Kirk gestured to the rock face. "That seems to be our only way out."

Spock studied the wall, trying to see if they could possibly climb it with their bare hands.

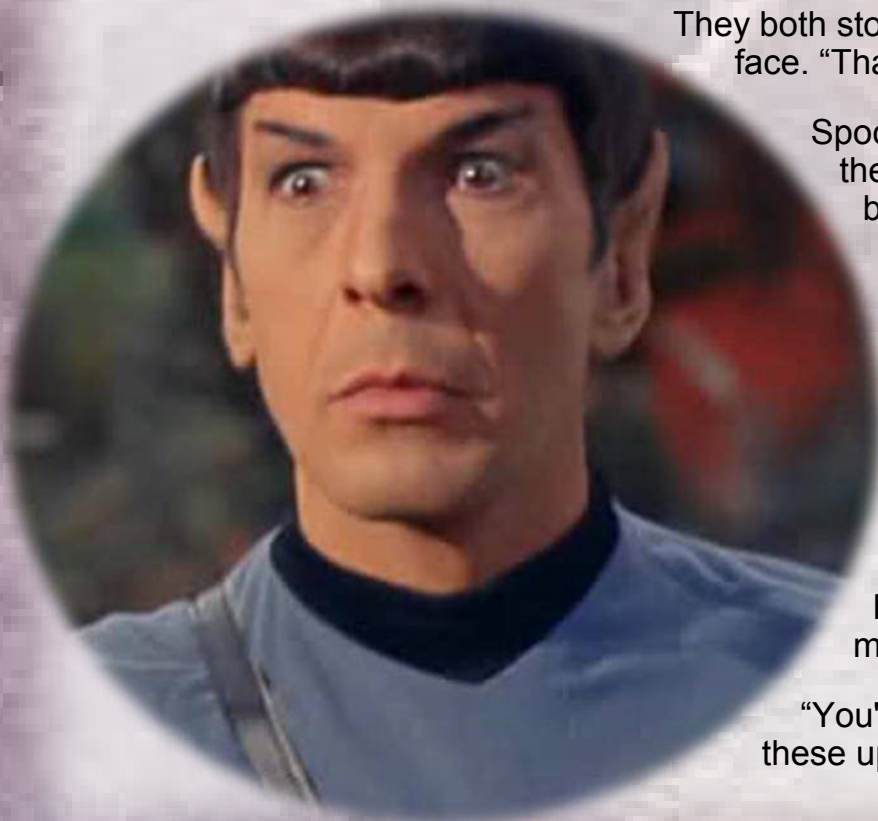
"Spock, give me your shirt," Kirk said, pulling his own off.

"Sir?" Spock raised an eyebrow at the strange request.

"Give me your shirt, hurry."

He removed his blue tunic and handed it over. The captain motioned for him to follow.

"You're stronger than me, Spock. Roll these up and throw them over the side of



the gorge so they can at least see them. Get them as far down it as you can.”

Spock gingerly walked near the edge and peered over to get a more unobstructed view. He threw the balled-up shirts as hard as he could, and they both watched as they floated down, landing on a small patch of boulders. It looked as natural as it could.

“Good job, now come on, let's get up to that flat shelf up there.”

The two were used to climbing, but they usually had equipment. Hearing the approaching voices of the people who were after them, Spock gave the captain a boost and followed close behind him. They climbed as fast as they could, pulling themselves up onto a narrow shelf and leaning their bodies flat against the wall. Thirty feet below them, seven men carrying small hand weapons emerged from the same brush that they had. Unlike Spock, they saw the gorge well before they reached it.

Kirk put his finger to his lips, and both he and Spock froze. The men looked around, and one of them edged forward to look over the side of the cliff. He made a gesture to the others and they laughed. After a few moments, they left through the brush in the direction from which they had come.

Kirk looked at Spock. “Let's wait another minute,” he whispered.

Spock nodded, and they both tried to get comfortable on the thin ledge, at least as comfortable as they could, without stirring up any rocks to give themselves away.

When they had beamed down, an ion storm was washing through the area and communication with the ship had been impossible. After meeting with the head of the city that they were investigating, a group of men had decided that they had more to gain in capturing the captain and Spock, with the intent to use them as leverage to secure weapons from the *Enterprise*. In the ensuing fight, the captain and Spock managed to escape and run from the building, jumping into the back of a passing city vehicle.

The planet's inhabitants were advanced to a pre-nuclear era, but they were struggling to maintain amicable governments. Kirk and Spock had unknowingly arrived at a period in time when none of the governments were getting along.

Time passed, and finally Kirk looked up. “Well, Spock, it's another fine predicament I've gotten us into,” he said softly.

“Yes, captain, these 'predicaments' as you call them, do seem to follow you around.”

Kirk sighed. “Up or down, Spock?”

Spock looked above their heads. “I believe that up is our best chance of avoiding those men.”

Kirk nodded. “Spock, if I ever tell you it's better to meet new aliens in person before we do a better cultural check, hit me, will you?”

"Captain, as per the regulations, that would be a court-martial offense."

Kirk grinned. "Okay, let's go up."

With some assistance from his first officer, the two made it to the top of the cliff. Once there, they were greeted with a better view of the area, but pathways were nonexistent. Kirk was breathing heavily now, and sweat had soaked through his black undershirt.

"I sure hope we can reach Scotty on the ship now," he said, flipping open his communicator and hailing the ship.

"Mr. Scott here, Captain. Are you two all right?"

"For now, Scotty. Can you beam us up?"

"Hold your position, Captain," he answered. "Energizing, sir."

Kirk and Spock reappeared on the *Enterprise*. Captain Kirk took several deep breaths while Dr. McCoy looked on disapprovingly.

"I told you to let me give you a tri-ox shot before you left, Jim, but no, *you're* the doctor," McCoy said. "And what happened to both of your shirts?" McCoy took in their sorry appearances. Dust covered their black undershirts, and their pants were scuffed and torn in places. "There's more to this story than what I want to know," he mumbled. "Come on, you two, off to Sickbay."

"Bones, it'll have to wait," Kirk replied. "I have to take care of a few things. I'm too busy right now."

"Aren't we all?! Regulations state that after any landing party returns, all crewmen must report to Sickbay for a checkup. You've already been decontaminated, now get going." McCoy insisted.

The captain and Spock followed the doctor to the lift.

"Are you going to tell me what happened down there?" McCoy asked as they rode.

Kirk glanced over at Spock who, in turn, raised one eyebrow. "Not much, Bones."

"Hogwash!" was the doctor's only response.

They followed the doctor into Sickbay, each sitting down on the edge of a bio-bed.

McCoy examined Spock's torn and bloodied hands. "What on earth? Did you slide down a rockface?"



Kirk shrugged his shoulders and McCoy sighed.

"All right, you two. Privacy screen on. I want both of you to strip down to your shorts so I can take a proper look."

Knowing it was useless to argue with the doctor, the two obeyed his orders. McCoy cleaned the dirt and stones from their hands and knees. Curse words that the captain hadn't heard in a long time flowed fast and furious from McCoy's mouth. The doctor scanned them and remedied any sore muscles and abrasions that he found.

"You two are going to be the death of me," he grumbled.

"Bones, it was just a misunderstanding down there. We got to see a portion of the city that most people don't get to see..." Kirk said with a sly look to his first officer, "...and we can be assured that we don't have to return there in the future."

"I knew I should have gone down with you!" Bones said.

"It was not necessary for you to be present, Doctor," Spock replied. "The Caltrains had no desire to communicate. In fact, your presence may have furthered their annoyance with us."

"Is that so, you green-blooded..."

"Okay, Bones, that's enough," Kirk said with a smile. "Are we free to go now?"

"Yes, go right ahead... but don't come crying back to me later with a headache or a stomachache. I'm off duty!"

The two jumped up from their beds and finished dressing.

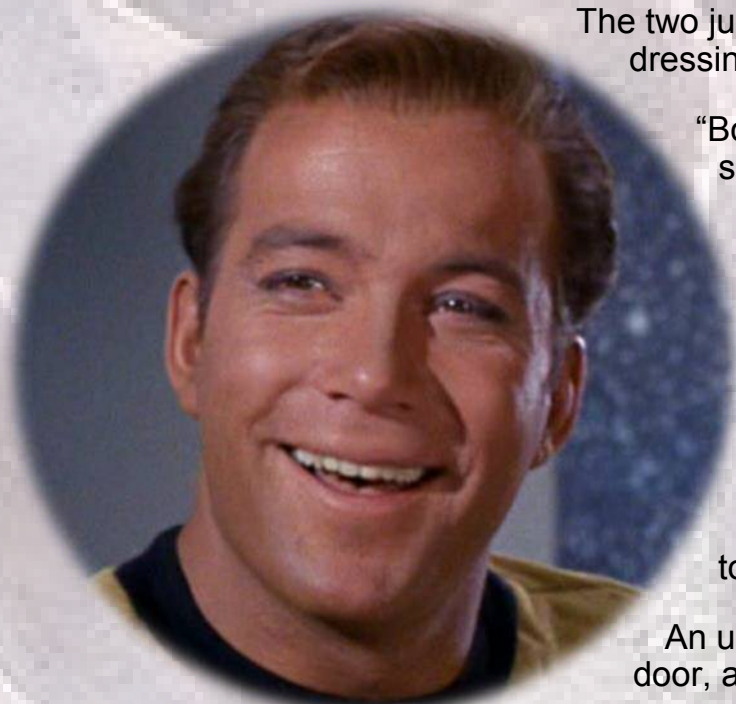
"Bones, can you grab us a clean uniform shirt?" Kirk asked.

"Why, sure, Captain. I would be glad to be your butler." He rolled his eyes.

As they pulled on their new tunics and walked away, they could hear Dr. McCoy muttering, "No rest for the wicked," under his breath.

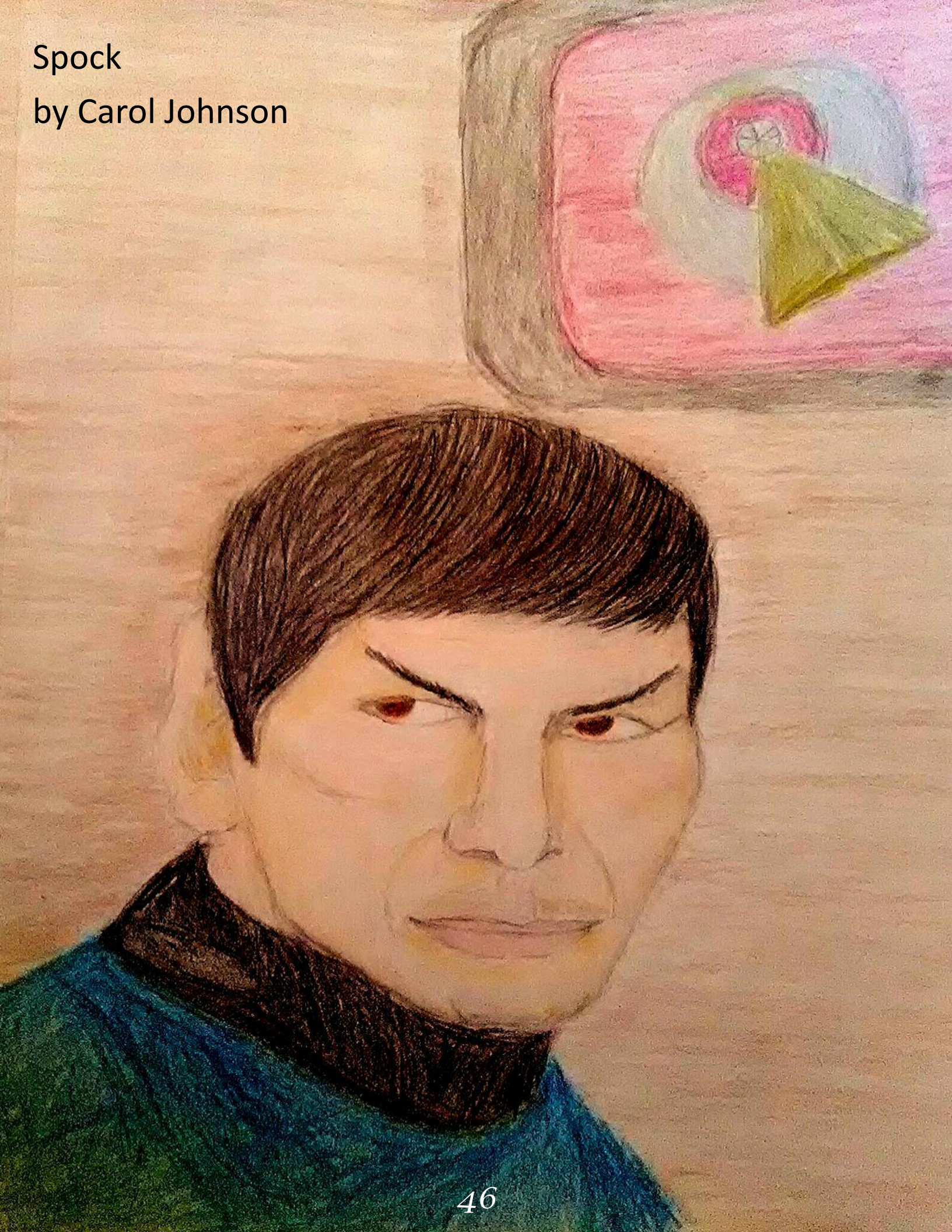
"That's right, Bones, but please do *try* to rest tonight," Kirk responded.

An unknown object hit the closing Sickbay door, and Kirk grinned mischievously.



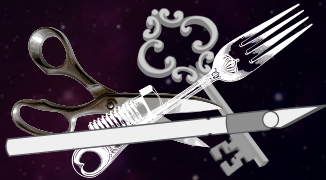
Spock

by Carol Johnson



When Metals Collide

By Mike Flynn



Did you know that science tells us we have oxygen to thank for the fact that our cars and other metal items don't fuse together on their own? Research has shown that, in space, similar metals which collide with each other will fuse together into one mass; the bonds that hold them together don't know their boundaries, and so will merge automatically. This process is known as 'cold-welding'.

Scientists also tell us that the only reason this doesn't occur on Earth is due to our oxygen-rich environment. Oxygen helps to protect metals by creating an oxidised layer on all exposed surfaces. This, in turn, acts as a protective barrier, preventing cold-welding from occurring. Luckily, the cold-welding malady doesn't typically affect most items that we send into space, as they have already oxidised in our atmosphere. Although this seems like a very small issue,

imagine for a moment that we are an alien race which doesn't require an oxygen-rich atmosphere to live, how difficult it would be for us? Just think of all of the inconveniences which would be caused in modern society. Essentially, we would have to isolate all metal items that come, or could potentially come, into contact with other metal items. Car doors could become stuck over time, screws and bolts in metal devices would be useless. If you crash your car into another car or a lamp-post, you are definitely not going anywhere. Put your latest phone with its metal cover on a metal countertop, and it will stick to it like glue. On the plus side, guns would be obsolete, so too would swords (although some of the great battles over the centuries would be quite funny to watch; with cold-welding, one clash of the swords and that would be it – fused together). The implications are endless.

It does make you wonder though; would this happen with other elements as well, if they originated in space or an oxygen-free environment? Definitely food for thought... not that you would be able to eat it, of course... at least not with metal cutlery – plastic sporks all around!!!

Just another thing that we can thank the trees for helping us out with.



KIDS IN PRISON: HUA SOH: ROLE OF BIG BROTHER.

BY ADEEL AHMED

Zise must hate school, thought Hua. I hate school too. I hated it on Earth. I hate it now.

But even on this tropical prison planet, children still needed education it seemed, most especially within the walled-off colony deep within the east. The collection of buildings was protected by a wall, patrolled by sentries whose job it was to keep the children and everyone within the colony safe.



Zise certainly loved being outside. She and Hua's robust teacher would lay out a large tarp, resting it upon vertical poles just in case it rained. A chalkboard would then be placed underneath it, providing a covered space where the children would do their math equations and writing, scratching their answers into the dirt using sticks. That morning though, Zise's purple hair shook all around her as she ran about the compound, drawing random pictures upon the ground, while the other children wrote letters and did equations as they were supposed to.

"Zise. Please, get to work," whispered Hua as he did every day. Zise was eleven years old, and Hua was fifteen. He had promised her grandfather that he would look after her and keep her in line during school.

"I try," she complained, "but each time I get started, all of these pretty pictures come into my head." She sighed. "They are never pretty when I draw them though... say, that's a pretty big sword you've got there on your back. Can I play with it?"

Zise's slanted eyes rested upon the weapon slung across his back. Her eyes had irises just as vivid a shade of purple as her hair. She was just as Chinese as Hua was, but he had never met a girl from China with naturally purple hair and eyes. He had once doubted that the colour of her hair was real, but on one occasion his brother had spied on her while she was bathing and had confirmed with an unrepentant grin that she was 'all-natural' from head to foot. Hua, of course, had hit his brother for what he had done; a maiden's honour must be defended even if that maiden was a little wild. He loved James, James was his brother and

the only family he had left, but wrong was wrong.

Does she cut her hair with a knife? Does she ever comb it? She looks like a wild stray cat. Why is James so enamoured of her?

"No. You cannot touch my sword; it was my father's gift to me. Only the clan leader can have it," said Hua sternly.

"Come on....," she pleaded.

"No."

"Hey, look. Look! Doesn't Mrs Sherwick kind of have a moustache?" said Zise pointing.

"Focus, Zise. Focus," whispered Hua. "We don't want to bring unwanted attention to ourselves now, do we?" Mrs Sherwick was meters away, bent over helping some other students with their sums.

I'm too old for this anyway, Hua thought to himself, I don't know why Master Wong is making me attend these classes.

Just as predicted, Mrs Sherwick plodded over to Zise with a frown on her face. "Zise, once again, you draw pictures instead of work?" said Mrs Sherwick sternly. She was a large matronly woman.

"I tried, but I forgot all those numbers and stuff," said Zise, scratching her purple-maned head.

"You are a spoiled brat," Mrs Sherwick scolded. "You think that just because your grandfather rules this colony, you don't have to do any work. Look at Hua and James here – brothers, destined to run the Northern Colony. So much on their shoulders, and yet they are such wonderful students!"

"I dunno. Maybe they are smart. Hey Seanchai! Seanchai! Let's go hiking up the mountain afterwards. I put a couple of rocks on the bridge to throw at the bandits – they won't know what hit 'em," screamed Zise across the open-aired 'classroom.'

"Zise. You are disturbing the class!" Mrs Sherwick snapped.

"Aww, come on – this place is like a prison, isn't it, Mrs Sherwick? We didn't do nothin', we're just kids. But you did something. My gramps did too. We don't need math for this place, we need kung-fu and rocks. Say... can you teach us how to spot really nice rocks, Mrs Sherwick – nice flat rocks that travel really far?" Zise smiled, displaying teeth that appeared cleaner than they really were. Hua suspected she did not brush her teeth very much.

"Listen, Zise. You have gotten away with much in these last few weeks. It was your grandfather's idea that these schooling sessions take place, yet you have disrespected it each time." Mrs Sherwick's tone was low and menacing.

"Ah, come on... hey, guys. Guys! Do any of you wanna be here? Wasn't it better when we learned to punch, kick and grapple? I love martial arts. I wanna fight! Say... Hua, you and I never fought for real before... come on! Let's go!" Zise raised her fists.

"Zise, I'm four years older than you are and nearly a hundred pounds heavier – I've already killed men. Stop it!" Said Hua reprovingly.

"Aww. You're no fun. Say, Mrs Sherwick... can you fight?"

"Stay focused, Zise! You are not going to fight anyone. You are only going to get hurt," said the teacher.

Oh, no. Hua cringed. "Zise. Apologise to Mrs Sherwick at once," he said frantically.

"For what? I'm not gonna lie. This is how I feel. Your sword is so shiny," said Zise, smiling. Even the flesh of her lips was purple.

As he feared, Hua saw Mrs Sherwick lift her paddle up. "I saw you were the emperor's daughter, so I looked the other way at your indiscretions, but I already see other students following your bad example – so I will make an example out of you!"

Zise looked at the paddle with wide-eyed curiosity. "Whatcha gonna do with that?" she said, smiling.

"She's going to hit you with that thing, Zise. You're going to be in a lot of pain." Hua's heartbeat quickened. She was a filthy, rude, disobedient girl – a very, very stupid girl – but she was still just a girl. She did not deserve this.

"Hua," said Mrs Sherwick, "Zise is as agile as a weasel. Hold her hands. James, you will lift her skirt up and hold her feet – we can't have her running away, can we?"

The students gathered around them beneath the tarp. Hua noticed that James was smiling, apparently happy with his current task.

I'm going to have to have a talk with James – stupid little perv! Hua tried not to be too hard on his brother, though; he was the same age as Zise and had a lot of learning left to do.

"Honoured Sifu, please don't make me do this. I promised her grandfather that I would protect her, guide her. I don't want to have a hand in hurting her," said Hua softly.

"Master Wong promised me that you would obey anything I said. So far, you have complied and have been a tremendous help to me, but now you must comply in this too," said Mrs Sherwick.

"Ah Hua, don't worry. I wanna see what she's gonna do to me," said Zise, boldly walking out from the shade of the Tarp.

Mrs Sherwick laid Zise belly-first upon the dirt, Hua grabbed both of her wrists in his hands, and James lifted her skirt, clutching her ankles with a smile.

She's not fighting right now," Hua thought, "but she will. She will when the beating begins. I will never forgive myself, but I will obey. I promised. I promised.

Mrs Sherwick raised the paddle...

Whack. Whack. Whack!

The teacher raised the paddle high, bringing it down swiftly and aggressively from a great distance, dropping down upon every strike. Hua suspected there was bruising, maybe even broken skin, but the girl did not struggle. Did not fight. She didn't even scream.

She's in shock, he thought, sickly.

"Release her!" Mrs Sherwick lowered the paddle, panting lightly.

Sobbing quietly, Zise lowered her skirt as she stood. She kept her head down, causing her

shaggy hair to spill over her face, forming a veil as tears streamed down her cheeks and dripped upon the damp ground.

"Wow, Mrs Sherwick, do you like beating people?" Zise asked. "James tells me there are some people that like hitting each other. Do you even like children?!" Zise smiled as the tears continued to trickle down her face, her expression uncharacteristically mocking.

Man, she's tough, Hua thought, reluctant admiration rising within him.

Mrs Sherwick snarled, charging toward the skinny pre-teen girl. But just as the teacher reached her, Zise jumped high into the air and clutched the top of Mrs Sherwick's hair with both hands, vaulting over her head with a front flip. Almost as if she were skipping, Zise scurried away, moving several meters before the woman could even whirl around.

"Catch her! Somebody catch her!" screamed the teacher.

"You're not going to catch her. She's very fast," said Hua. "She's probably going to grandfather right now."

"Then go and find her, Hua! Tell her grandfather what she did, so that he may punish her accordingly. That child is a freak," cried Mrs Sherwick.

Hua and James broke out into a light jog. There was no point in trying to catch up to her; they would be better off simply going straight to Emperor Wong.

"She's stupid. She is disobedient. She's dirty and talks far too much... yet I have a hard time disliking her, James. I really do." Hua sighed deeply, holding his round-brimmed hat upon his head as he moved.

"Everyone likes her, Hua. I like her a lot," James replied, his long hair whipping in the wind.

"You have a crush on her. She's one of the few girls around your age. Of course, you like her!"

"No, big brother. Everyone likes her. She has nothing in common with the other girls, but they like her. She beats up the other boys, but they like her. Me? I love her," said James smiling.

"Don't put your heart into her, James. I suspect she's one of those... special people. I don't think her grandfather will ever marry her off – even in this place."

"What about love?" said James wistfully.

"Love may exist here, but it doesn't run things. Power runs things here. Besides, on Earth, people abhor marrying off people who are touched in the head like she is. We aren't even adults on earth like we are here. On Earth they'd call us teenagers, but this planet... you're on the cusp of manhood."

"Brother, maybe we can go to Earth one day?" sighed James. "Can't we still be kids? Even you... you're fifteen – you're going to be emperor. Don't you wish we could just... be our own age?"

"Now you sound like Zise. All fantasy and possibility and no realism. No James, we're never going to Earth; we're stuck here. You need to grow up and face your responsibilities," said Hua.

The Gallifrey Child

By Rachel Atterholt



It had been so long since he had been back there. And yet, Pete's World was precisely as he had remembered it. He stood on Bad Wolf Bay, his feet in the metaphysical sand... for of course he was not actually there.

He was burning up three stars to go back – to just see one more glimpse of her – for he was dying again, shards of light, bleeding from his gaping wounds; his body wanting to regenerate, but not yet. Somehow, he had remembered her after his last regeneration. He was the Eleventh version of himself now and was not only loved but was in love with someone else now. Someone just as brave and strong as her.

Yet, Rose was still a distant dream, like an angel who haunted his past and his memories. He thought he'd forget her this time, and he wanted to make sure that she was safe and well.

He wanted to say goodbye.

In the distance, he thought he saw her, standing out like a beacon on the shore.

Beside her, stood a ghost of his former self, a human form of him. He moved towards her and then stopped.

Before him, was a child; playing alone, except for the sticks she had gathered to her as she drew something in the sand. He walked closer to her and then froze.

Symbols scattered all around her, but they weren't the ordinary symbols seen in caves, nor the rudimentary drawings of a child. It was Gallifreyan; she was writing words – a single sentence.

'Bad wolf loved the Doctor.'

"Excuse me," he said, stepping closer to the girl. "What are you writing?"

The girl looked up, her yellow hair blowing in the breeze as two piercing blue eyes focused on him.

"I'm not sure," she said in a singsong voice, looking down again. "I think I won't know till I'm older. That's what mum says anyways."

He knelt down. "Who is your mum?"

The girl pointed to the ghosts on the shore, confirming what he already knew – confirming what he felt deep inside his soul. She was hers... and, in a strange way, she was his too.

"Are they good to you? Your mum and dad?" He asked.

The girl smiled. "Yes, they are. They love to tell me stories."

"About what?"

"Different worlds. Different times. My mum told me she journeyed with the Doctor in a phone booth and traveled the stars."

The Doctor stared across at Rose and his past self.

"One day, I'm going to travel with the Doctor too."

He looked back, a smile on his face. "Are you now?"

"Oh yes," she said, beaming with light and confidence. "When I'm much older. I've seen it in my dreams."

He wondered if, even though his past self was mostly human, some of the Timelord had trickled down into her cells and created something altogether new and amazing – something wonderful.

"Brilliant," he grinned.

"What is?" the girl said, absent-minded, continuing to draw symbols.

The doctor shook his head. "What's your name?"

"Gallifrey," she replied, sending his two hearts into a frenzied war of heartbeats.

"What's your's?"

"Smith. John Smith." He replied.

"No, it's not silly," she laughed. "But I'll pretend it is anyways."

"Do you... do you know who I am?"

"No... but I think, deep down, I do... and I'll figure it out soon."

Rose started toward them. He stood; time had run out. He had to leave. And yet, he didn't regret seeing the girl, the daughter of the Doctor.

"I have to go now, Gallifrey. But tell your parents hello from me, would you?"

She nodded.

"And Gallifrey?" he said, getting her

attention. "One day you will travel to the stars, and it's gonna be mad."

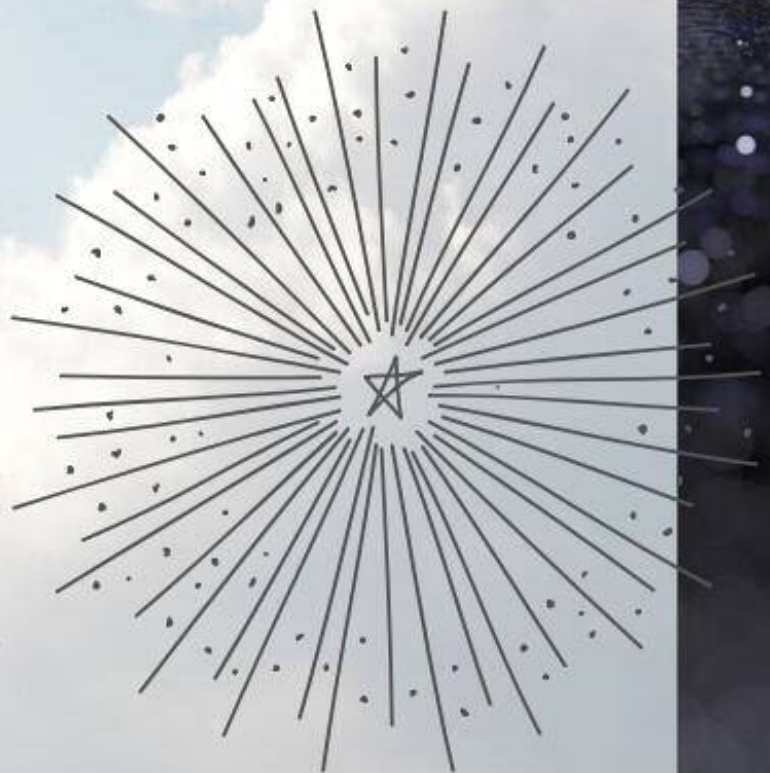
The child of Gallifrey grinned up at him, her face holding an ethereal light.

"Goodbye, Doctor Smith. Be safe."

"I will," he said, and then he was gone.

The dream – the journey – ended with the last light of the last star he burned. He stood there, in his box; his home. He smiled, despite it all, as the light of his regeneration filled his lungs, seeping through every pore.

The last thing he saw behind his eleventh incarnation's eyes, was the child's smile before his eyes changed and he saw again. She would travel to the stars with him one day, but he would have a much different face then.



Intergalactic Haikus

BY F&F
STAFF

Jamison Noenickx

In the Beginning
Cosmic microwave background
After a Big Bang

God created the
protoplanetary disks
birthed solar systems

Earths, formless and void
Planetesimal building blocks
crashing and dancing

Stellar eclipses
And God called the umbras 'night'
and the starlight 'day'

Degassing their steam
To part water from water
rain falling from clouds

To vast liquid pools
And God called the dry ground 'land'
and depths called 'seas'

Planets prime for life
And He said that it was good
And God called it 'Space'

Hannah Skipper

Sun and moon and stars
The planets going around
Oh how beautiful

Spaceship, Astronauts
How fast will they go through space?

A wonderful trip

Flying a spaceship
Can I visit outer space?

I would love to try!

Awesome outer space
Majestic wonderland
Revealing His love

Beth Amos

Scattered stars glinting
Such limitless mysteries
All untold, waiting

Drifting weightlessly
I stare out across the void
Oh, how small I feel

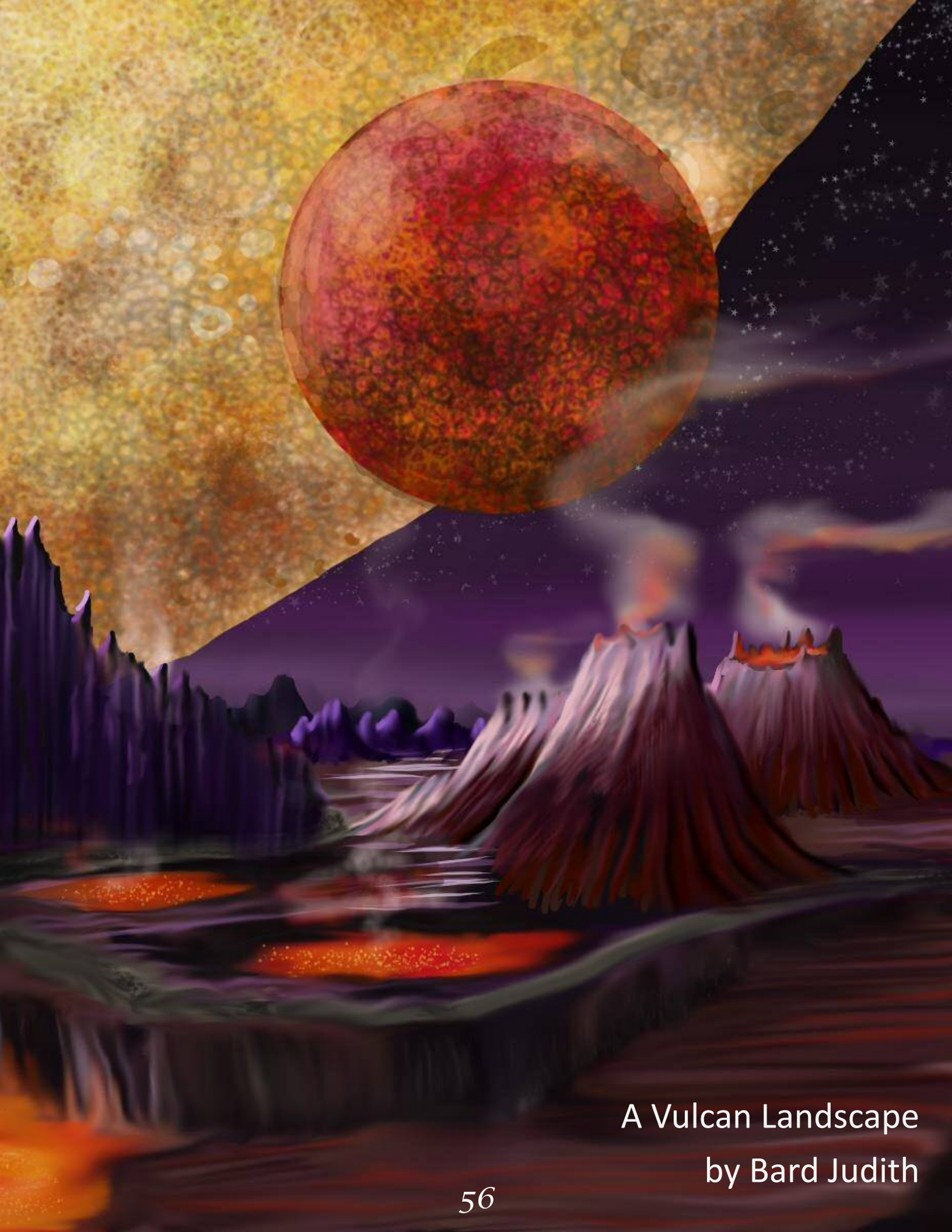
I find I can't grasp
The concept of 'Universe'
It is just too vast

Perhaps beauty needs
No definition, in truth
Space just 'is,' endless

Amanda Pizzolatto

The final frontier
In a galaxy far far away
These are the voyages

The Serenity class
A crew lost in space
A new family found



A Vulcan Landscape
by Bard Judith

Beyond All Control - M. C. Pehrson

The horizon flamed as Vulcan's star, Eridani 40, gradually sank below the vast rim of the desert world. Unnoticed by anyone, a dark-haired boy quietly slipped from the back door of a modest home. Sand heated his sandals as he hurried toward the nearby hills, and before long, he began to sweat. But out here, there was no one to stare at the faint sheen of moisture, no cruel remarks from pureblood Vulcan children; who did not perspire so easily. He was alone, and he liked it that way. Most of his summers had been spent in this high region, where his human mother came to escape ShiKahr's blistering heat.

Young Spock followed a footpath until the ground rose, then climbed steadily. Atop the first hill, he reached a wide flatland, studded by khree mounds, thorn bushes and brave tufts of grass. After testing the breeze, he hunkered down confidently behind a boulder, downwind. No flesh-eating plants lurked among these rocks, and the day's lingering warmth would keep the sand-dwelling predators deep. This was his favorite spot, protected by stone outcroppings on three sides, with an unobstructed view of the khree colony. Perfect.

Quickly now, he unwrapped juicy chunks of plomeek and clawfruit and lobbed them at the khree mounds. He licked his sticky fingers and rubbed them dry in the sand. Now for the waiting. Still, as the stones around him, Spock held watch over the silent colony. Insects lit on his skin, muscles began to protest the inactivity, but he single-mindedly ignored every distraction. The waning heat, the scent of food, and perhaps his fierce willpower, would serve to lure the skittish khree.



A faint sound stirred the sand, and Spock glimpsed movement. Here and there, sleek heads peeked out, noses twitching in the shimmery heat waves. Enticed by the scattered fruit, the khree edged warily from their burrows. Spock counted their mottled bodies – four, eight, twelve. Then he lost count, as the creatures swarmed from every colony mound, milling over the food scraps, nibbling hungrily with their little teeth, making way for each other with remarkable equanimity.

The scene never varied, nor did the yearning it evoked. Oh, how he missed the friendly comfort of his old pet sehlat, I-Chaya, gone now for more than a year. If only he could tame one of these timid desert animals to keep as his own; if only his father would not think such a notion weak and foolish. Sadly, Spock dissuaded himself from approaching the burrows; best to leave now, for the daylight was fast failing. He forced his eyes from the eagerly feasting khree to the desolate land surrounding his rock fortress. A sinuous motion caught his attention. Something large was coming his way; circling in, belly to the ground. Concentrating, he tracked the wild creature's advance, and his stomach knotted as he identified the savage predator.

Le-Matya! Sleek and massive, a lithe powerhouse of deadly intent. Ever so slowly, she moved in, her green leathery hide and gold markings rendering her nearly invisible in the dusk. On she came, muscles rippling with menace, eyes narrowed to ferocious slits above her poisonous fangs, as she stalked the unsuspecting khree. Near the farthest mound, she paused and then tensed for one tremulous instant.

Spock didn't dare cry out to the hapless creatures in warning, and suddenly she sprang! There was a flash of teeth and claws, and fur flew amid shrill, terrified screams. Dusty sand kicked up in a furious cloud that obscured the entire colony, and rained down upon Spock in his hiding place. When the air cleared, the ground was littered with torn bodies. Stunned by potent venom, the wounded khree lay helpless, as their attacker walked among them, calmly choosing the youngest and fattest to begin her meal. Then the Le-Matya hunched down and gulped great mouthfuls of bloody flesh.

Spock's stomach heaved, but he didn't turn away, despite the wrenching emotions flooding him beyond all control. Just such a beast had fatally injured I-Chaya when the faithful sehlat followed him on a trial Kaus-wan. That unauthorized venture had cost the life of his pet. Now he had come here without permission and had unwittingly lured the khree to their deaths.

Spock clung motionless to the hot stone, too preoccupied to notice a change slowly settling around him. But as the breeze stiffened and gusts began to ruffle his hair, he came to realize that he might soon be in worse trouble.

The wind was shifting direction. A few more degrees to the west and it would blow his scent straight under the predator's quivering nostrils. Unfortunately, the Le-Matya showed no inclination to leave. Yet if Spock moved, the tiniest rustling would alert those sensitive ears. She would be upon him, rending and tearing at his flesh. That was reason enough for concern, but there was something else that he feared as much as a Le-Matya – another desert savage that pounced boldly upon its prey with little warning. Now he also sensed its approach in a nearby whirlwind. He sensed it in the sand, stirring like a great restless blanket over the plateau.

His barbaric ancestors might have clutched at their amulets, pleading to be delivered. But this was an enlightened age, an enlightened world. He was expected to control his fear and apply logic; to survive solely by the use of his wits. If at that moment, the human part of him launched a prayer toward a heaven, it was due solely to his mother's influence.

In all the darkening sky, there was not a cloud, not a bird, and now, not even a breeze. There came a stillness so absolute, that Spock heard the panicked thudding of his heart, and was shamed by it.



With a startling swish of sand, the Le-Matya bolted. Abandoning her unfinished meal, she raced out of sight. Spock poised, ready to run for the safety of home. Senses alert and reaching, he listened. A faraway sound made his throat go tight... an ominous rush of wind, advancing... the heated clash of a thousand rumbling voices... the wrath of all the ancient gods descending...

Spock sighted a dark billowing curtain and drew in his breath. Then the sandstorm struck, and he fell to the ground, choking. With a pang of pure terror, he remembered the legends of S'Tradeh Veh, the destroyer. The great wind had been known to claim countless victims – animals, children, even grown men and women—filling rivers, moving hills, laying waste to entire towns.

Fighting for breath, he peeled off his outer shirt and wound it around his face, as a crude filtering mask. He fashioned a deep slit for his eyes, but there was nothing to see. The world had been turned upside-down and shaken. The evil brown tide clawed through his undershirt to his skin, making him want to scream. To remain here unsheltered, was to invite certain, horrible death – to be ground by S'Tradeh Veh to a bloody pulp and then buried.

He began to crawl. With his back to the wind, he moved blindly, scraping against thorn bushes, bumping into rocks. He reached an incline and continued. Hopelessly lost, he struggled from handhold to handhold, while the sand flayed him without mercy. At last, he came to a level area. Body pressed flat against rock, he fumbled his way along a ledge, desperately searching for shelter. Inward the path twisted, and outward, then inward again, to a sudden shock of stillness. Numbed by his ordeal, it took him a moment to realize that he was in a cave.

Safe! His muscles went slack with relief. Peeling the tattered shirt from his head, he used it as a pillow. Never had cool, hard stone felt so welcoming.

For a long while, Spock lay, listening to the wind howl. By now, his mother would realize that he had left the house. She would be worried. What if she had gone out searching? What if she'd been caught in the storm? Maybe he would never see her again.



Drowsing, in a weary haze of pain, he only slowly became alerted to another presence – not by sight or smell, but by a more subtle form of Vulcan perception. Something was nearby, silently watching him in the cavern gloom. Spock's sore skin prickled with apprehension, and belatedly, he recalled his survival training. A boy who had passed the trial of Kahs-wan in his seventh year did not blunder into caves; particularly not during storms. Boys were not the only ones seeking shelter at such times. With agonizing care, he raised his head, for abrupt moves invited attack. Whatever it was, it must not be startled...or provoked...

Spock froze as a throaty growl vibrated to the core of his being. Even without seeing, he knew – it was her – the Le-Matya! How fitting an end – to suffer the bite of fangs, the sting of poison, the slice of claws – like poor I-Chaya, who had died protecting his errant young master.

Very carefully, Spock let out his breath. Though fresh sweat began to break out, he felt cold – suddenly quite cold – and he began to shiver. The chill of that predatory presence was already unbearable.

"What are you waiting for?" Spock asked the creature. "Come then."

The Le-Matya snarled in response, and he imagined her muscles gathering to strike...

"NO!"

...Fully grown, Spock awoke with a gasp, the dream-terror still echoing through his mind. Abruptly, he swung his legs from his bed and sat up in the darkness of his cabin, aboard the Enterprise. It had been many years since he had thought about that deadly summer evening. By now, he should have fully suppressed the pain of such childhood experiences and moved on.

The Le-Matya had spared him. Perhaps she had been too gluttoned with khree, to bother with one small child. Perhaps, she too, had been thankful just to shelter from the storm. Perhaps, it was an answer to a young boy's prayer. In any case, the gale had soon subsided. Spock had darted out just in time to hear his mother calling for him, and he had run to her as quickly as his legs could carry him.

Now, with some effort, he pulled himself from the past and centered his mind in the familiar refuge of logic. The past was the past. Day shift would soon begin. Leaving the bed, he waved up a light and reached for his Starfleet uniform.

Rocks Around the Sun

By Hannah Skipper



Men are from Mars.
Women are from Venus.
That's why they have to be separated by Earth.

Jupiter is named for the Roman king of the gods.
His Greek counterpart is Zeus.

Pluto is named for the god of the Underworld.
Hades is his foil.

Knowing this, is it any wonder that in the Disney movie
Hercules, Hades tried to take over Mt. Olympus?
Obviously, he was angry that his namesake
had been demoted to a dwarf planet.

How many of you ever laughed in school
when someone mentioned Uranus?

Saturnalia was a Roman festival
given in honor of the god, Saturn.
It was celebrated in mid-to-late December with,
amongst other things, the giving of gifts.
Perhaps *that's* where Saturn got all those rings?

The mercury on Mercury is always very high. Perhaps
that's why its namesake Roman god, whose Greek twin is Hermes, is so swift?
His feet must be on fire.

Neptune's great dark spot is similar to Jupiter's great red spot;
they both look like Sauron's eye from *The Lord of the Rings*.
It's a good thing that the Milky Way has two eyes
to keep watch over its vast expanse.



It has finally arrived! After all of the years of planning, the millions of hours of work, preparation, deadlines, time running out, and the countless lives lost by every single delay, hope was once again flickering to being deep in my heart. The planet was virtually dead; it had given all and more, and we had taken all we could from it, giving back nothing but pollution, death and destruction - tainting its very lifeblood. We had reduced it to a lifeless husk, a pale shadow of its former glory. How we had even survived this long, is a miracle. There aren't many of us left now. Millions had fallen to greed and want, the giving in to the material demands of society. In the beginning, there had been enough resources for everyone; very little of that was now left for those of us who still remain.

The few women who did endure the hardships of living on a dying world, and against all odds managed to become pregnant, had either been faced with the trauma and pain of bringing stillborn infants into the world or had watched as their precious babes fell victim to the ever-growing infant mortality rate. The last viable birth had been decades ago - our species was dying out. We were an ageing race, desperate to survive but living on a planet which we had long ago pushed past the point of supporting life.

The pollution count was high today, higher than before - a much-overused phrase in these times. Everything we recorded was 'higher' than any previous records. Temperature, ice cap reduction, water toxicity levels, air quality - all hitting record highs with each and every passing day. We are constantly besieged by extreme weather and terrible earthquakes - caused by our ever more destructive mining, extraction and fracking practices. Flooding had reduced entire continents to little more than a series of islands. The ground that had survived the inundation of toxic, waste-filled water, turned quickly to desert sitting, barren and unworkable, beneath the weight of a dismal grey sky - it was nothing short of Hell.

Still, we had existed - changed and mutated, yes - but existence is existence, and we were survivors!

An Excerpt Taken from the Journal of Survivor T446, Tham Somners By A.A. Moss

Our remaining scientists have been searching far and wide for a new planet, one with the specific environmental conditions rendering it capable of supporting our dying race. Finally, a suitable host world had been located and, alongside it, our species' renewed hope of salvation. We would be able to settle there, in this new garden, and reclaim at least some of what we had lost. It would take months for us to reach this new world, but we have the means to get there.

I have read the brief on our future home, and it sounds perfect. A few of the scientists had been slightly concerned about some of the indigenous creatures which were scattered across the planet's surface, but others had argued that they wouldn't pose any problem at all. In fact, they claimed that these low creatures would prove a valuable source of food; the strongest could even be used as beasts of burden, to assist in the building of our resurrected society. Besides, they had continued, we already have access to all of the technology which we had used to adapt this planet to serve our needs.

Yes, it had finally arrived! The day had come, at last, when we would travel from this dead world to a new home. In light of that prospect, my former concerns seem not quite as important as they once had. Perhaps we had learnt from our mistakes? Maybe not? Either way, was it really of any importance, now that we had a whole new world - fresh and young - waiting to welcome us?

I have to sign off this entry now, as the launch sequence has just come across the intercom. As I listen to the numbers counting down, though, I feel a thrill run through my veins... 10, 9, 8, 7... this is it! ...6, 5, 4... before long we will be setting foot on this Blue Planet, the one which the indigenous species rather crudely calls 'Earth.' ...3, 2, 1.

LEARNING THE ROPES

By Laurie Howard



Author Note: Other characters in this story created by me are Lucas Kirk, son of Capt. James Kirk, and SJ (Spock Jr.), the son of Cmdr. Spock. Lucas and SJ are serving their first year on the Enterprise as ensigns. They have joined the crew approximately after the first five years in deep space.

Ensign Kirk had just finished the night shift. He opened his cabin's door to the sound of the bell and was immediately engulfed in a heavy deluge of feathers. Gasping in shock, he accidentally inhaled a mouthful of the lofty things. "Agh," he yelled, spitting the feathers out of his mouth and brushing them from his face. He leaped through the open doorway and began chasing two other ensigns.

SJ, whose cabin was next door, heard the commotion and ran out into the corridor following Lucas; it was clear from the number of feathers that were stuck to Lucas's uniform that a problem had arisen. At last, Lucas caught up with one of the fellows who was laughing hard. SJ grabbed the second crewman, and fists began to fly. SJ ducked, holding the second guy immobile with his arms raised and SJ's hands locked firmly behind his head. Lucas rolled on the floor with the other ensign and was hit by a strong punch to the eye. Someone had called Security, and soon the four were apprehended by the officers.

"Follow me, gentlemen," Lt. Giotto said. The ride in the lift to Security was made in silence. SJ and Lucas were put into one waiting cell and the other two ensigns into another. They were questioned separately and then Giotto put in his report. The report would go to Mr. Spock, and all they needed to do was wait.

"Captain?"

"Yes, Spock," Kirk said from his chair.

"A word, please."

The Captain walked up to the science station and leaned in to talk privately with his first officer.

"Captain, I have the deck log of activities and disruptions from the Security team."

"Yes?"

"Sir, Ensigns Kirk and Spock, along with two others are being held in the brig on a charge of fighting in section 12." Spock looked up at the captain, recognizing the darkness in his eyes as he tried to control his emotions.

"I see. Send the report to my quarters and follow me, Mr. Spock."

"Aye, sir."

It had been a long week, spent transporting medical supplies to two stations on the outskirts of the sector which they were patrolling. Kirk quickly read through the report and contacted Security.

"Lieutenant. Kirk here."

"Yes, sir, how can I help you?"

"Send Ensigns Kirk and Spock to my quarters right away, please."

"They are on their way, sir," the man replied.

Lucas and SJ strode down the hallway shoulder to shoulder, hurling quiet insults to one another in an attempt to try to calm themselves before being confronted by the captain and first officer.

"You are just like your father!" Lucas said, looking at SJ's solemn face.

"And you have cornered the market in following in your father's footsteps," SJ replied.

"I believe you're sadly mistaken. I'm nothing like my father," Lucas mumbled.

"Mistaken, I am not. I speak from experience," SJ teased.

Lucas sighed deeply. "What do you think the punishment will be this time?" he asked his friend, slowing his pace.

"A loud inventory of reprimands and quotes from the reg book, a long uncomfortable moment of silence, an unreadable look from the commander, and hopefully only one week of extra duties," SJ ranted.

"I would prefer a quick death at this point," Lucas said grimly.

They both straightened their uniforms as Lucas raised his finger and pushed the button of the captain's quarters.

"Enter."

The two walked inside the captain's quarters.

"Ensigns Kirk and Spock reporting, sir," Lucas said.

"At ease," Kirk replied. The captain stood and skirted his desk, facing the two ensigns. Then the reprimands began. The captain, being fair, gave them a moment to defend themselves, but they remained quiet, offering no additional details. He uncrossed his arms. "This is a perfect example of how not to behave on a starship – my starship, gentlemen – and this behavior will come to an end, now!" His voice was stern.

"Yes, sir," they both replied.

"You are confined to your quarters for the day, and I will add a week of extra detail. Is that understood?"

"Yes, sir," they said.

"Permission to speak, sir," Lucas asked.

The captain crossed his arms and said, "Go ahead."

"Sir, can we get a meal in the mess hall first?" Lucas asked.

Kirk stood straight and reached behind him. He handed Lucas an apple and an orange to SJ from a fruit bowl. "Bon appetit, gentlemen."

"Captain, we haven't eaten since early last night," Lucas said.

His father took SJ's orange and handed it to Lucas. "SJ, you can get a meal, you cannot," he said, pointing to his son. "Dismissed!" The two spun around to leave when they were called back. "Ensign Kirk, feathers," he said, pointing to the floor in his cabin. Lucas quickly picked up some loose feathers and walked sullenly to the lift.

Kirk turned to Spock. "You'll have a word with your son later?"

"Yes, Captain, but I believe I will let him... 'squirm a little', I believe is your Human term."

The captain smiled. "Good idea. I'll speak further with my son after my shift."

Lucas and SJ entered the lift, and a few feathers floated through the air.

"How long before your father hauls you into his quarters?" Lucas asked.

"Usually, it's 12.78 minutes."

"I give the captain an hour before he calls me back. I'm sorry SJ, I didn't mean for you to get involved."

"It seems to be inevitable that where you are, I am always close enough to become sucked into your vortex."

Lucas smiled to himself as the lift stopped. "SJ, could you...?"

"I know, a cheeseburger and a chocolate malt."

"You're the best friend a guy could have," Lucas said. SJ just raised an eyebrow in response, and they went their separate ways.

While Lucas was sweeping up the loose feathers in his quarters, SJ went to the mess hall on their floor. He pulled up the food that Lucas wanted and looked around. Yeoman Janice Rand was just leaving, and he approached her.

"Ma'am, if you have the time, could you please drop this off at Ensign Kirk's cabin? He's just down the hall."

"Sure, Ensign, is he ill?" she asked, looking mildly concerned.

"No, ma'am, I just told him I'd bring it to him, and I don't want his burger to get cold."

She took the tray and looked at the young ensign whose features and bearing were so much like his father's. From behind it was hard to tell them apart. "Sure, I don't mind."

"Thank you, ma'am." SJ turned back to the food replicator and ordered his salad and tea. He sat down and ate it and went over in his mind what his father would say. Of course, his father would question his qualification for Starfleet, and he would just remain quiet until the end of his lecture.

Lucas heard the buzzer and yelled, "Come in!" His mouth opened wide when the captain's yeoman walked in, carrying his dinner tray. A pile of feathers that had scattered were swept into a pile in the corner of the room.

Janice looked around and shook her head. "Did you lose a pillow fight, Ensign?"

"Uh, no ma'am, it's a long story," he replied sheepishly.

"Your friend asked me to bring this to you." She cocked her head and continued, "You aren't by any chance in trouble with the captain, are you?"

"Uh, yes, ma'am."

"And I suppose I've been sent here to sneak food to you?"

"Uh, that was not my intention, ma'am, and I'm sure SJ didn't intend it that way."

He tried to sound more grown-up than he felt in that moment.

She shoved the tray at him. "Well, we'll see about that," she hissed, turning abruptly and leaving the room.

Lucas went to his table to eat his food, and then contacted maintenance for a vacuum. It seems that the feathers floated everywhere with even the least disturbance of air; sweeping them was a lost cause.

Yeoman Rand walked quickly back to the mess hall and looked around until she found SJ. She leaned on the table. "For the record, Ensign, don't ever use me to circumvent any order that the captain has given, now or in the future, or I'll

make sure that you are both in the hottest water you've ever been in. Am I clear, Ensign?"

With a mouth full of salad, SJ nodded. Yeoman Rand turned and strode off, leaving him to wonder if she would tell the captain.

Not long after, the two ensigns fell asleep in their quarters. Lucas was awoken by his comm button, several hours later. He reached over to listen to the recording. "Ensign, report to my office when you get this." His father's voice came across the comm loud and clear. Lucas sat up in a hurry, causing his vision to spin, and checked his chronometer. The message had arrived an hour ago.

He flipped the button on the comm unit. "Ensign Kirk to Captain Kirk."

There was a pause, and then the captain responded. "Ensign?"

"Sir, I was sleeping and didn't hear the comm. I will be there in ten minutes, sir."

"Make it five, Ensign."

"Yes, sir." Lucas jumped up and splashed cold water on his face and ran a comb through his hair. He had not had a chance to visit Sickbay, and his eye was now half-closed with purple bruises blooming around it.

"Crap, I'm in so much trouble."

He ran to the lift and took it to level five where the captain's quarters were located. He slid to a stop outside his door and buzzed the bell.

"Enter," came his father's voice.

Lucas stepped inside and came to a stop in front of the captain's desk.

"At ease, Ensign." Lucas stood at parade rest and waited. The captain came around and stood in front of him before speaking. "Young man, at what point during this past escapade did it occur to you that you had disregarded regulations?"

"Well, sir, it happened so quickly, I didn't think of that until Lieutenant Giotto pulled Ensign Jacobs off of me."

"And it looks like Ensign Jacobs got a good punch in before that happened, didn't he?"

Swallowing hard, he replied softly, "Yes, sir, he did."

"The other two ensigns have been given their just dues." The captain paused for a moment. "Have a seat, Lucas."

Lucas pulled out the chair and sat, and the captain sat down on the corner of his desk, looking down at him.

He shook his head and said, "I know it's hard having your father as your CO." He rubbed the back of his neck and rolled his head. "I am never sure how far I need

to push you, Lucas. When you're heading in the wrong direction, I feel like, as your father, it's my duty to yank you back, but as your CO, I feel it's important for you to learn from your own mistakes. However, since it may involve your safety or someone else's on the ship, I must act as your captain."

Lucas looked up at his father. "I understand, Dad, but didn't you do stupid stuff when you first started out?"

"I can't disagree with that, but if you think you'll get special treatment, you are sorely mistaken..."

"I never expected special treatment," Lucas interrupted.

"Are you being hazed too much on the ship?"

"No, sir, that is not a problem."

Kirk eyed his son. "You wouldn't tell me if you were, would you?" he growled. Lucas remained quiet.

"Alright, you're dismissed, but I want you to take a trip to Sickbay and have Dr. McCoy take a look at that eye."

"Yes, sir." Lucas stood and made to leave as the captain's buzzer sounded again. Commander Spock entered, and Lucas paused by the door. "Commander, I'd like to apologize for getting Ensign Spock involved in the trouble today. He was just defending me, sir."

"The need to apologize is illogical. Ensign Spock is quite capable of making his own decisions, is he not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then carry on, Ensign."

"Yes, sir," Lucas said and ducked out into the corridor.

The door swished closed, and Kirk smiled at his first officer. "Ready for dinner, Spock?"

"Yes, sir."

Kirk stood and glanced at Spock with a half-smile. "And was your displeasure communicated to a certain ensign?"

"Yes, Captain. I can assure you that this behavior will not present itself again."

"Thank you, Mr. Spock, I appreciate your assistance."

"Indeed, Captain."



Timeless Heroism

By Sarah Pierzchala

Thanks to the miracle of Netflix, my family and I are able to spend quality time together by glutting ourselves on entire seasons of worthwhile TV programs, compressing years, if not decades, into a few weeks. Past generations may have had to endure one episode a week of their favorite series, plus a summer full of re-runs, but streaming on-demand has put an end that level of suffering. Of, course, we're a bit behind the rest of the world on the *latest happenings* in some of these programs, but it's worth it to be able to watch them all. At. One. Sitting.

I believe it is part of my kids' cultural heritage to be as traumatized by the opening bars of the *Twilight Zone* theme as I was, to have the shared experience of hooting in derision as Capt. Kirk dodges Styrofoam "rocks" thrown by an extra in a vinyl lizard suit. And maybe I just want them to have the same simple enjoyment in these old shows that I did at that age.

Take *Doctor Who*, for instance. My memories of that British import are particularly pleasant, involving the ritual of scarfing down home-made pizza while enjoying the duct-tape and bubble-wrap enhanced adventures of the kindly Time Lord every Saturday afternoon. Being a rather literate family, we really enjoyed that the writing didn't talk down to the viewer, even though it was originally developed as a children's program. We appreciated the humor and the solid good vs evil morality of the Doctor's universe. Not preachy, not subversive – just good, old fashioned fun. So, we considered ourselves fairly solid fans – of the vintage series. Regarding the new series, we were caught up in an "Old Trek vs New Generation" mindset and weren't interested in any new-fangled incarnations of our beloved time-traveler (even if his adventures were given heightened credibility due to an actual special-effects budget).

But eventually, we gave it a try and were... beyond surprised. I love looking for God's workings in unexpected places, and He's sure at work

in this series. The fact that many of the writers are (presumably) atheists or agnostic can't stop them from bringing a transcendent luminosity into their scripts. The dialogue and relationships between characters simply burst with joy, humor, pathos, and yes – love, whether agape, erotic or just plain human companionship.

The intricate storylines weave themes touching on the glory and meaning of Creation, the dignity and sacredness of the individual, the horrors of tampering with nature, the ideal of always putting others above self. Stated in not-so-hidden words is the idea of a "plan" or destiny behind all of Creation and everyone's part in its tapestry.

At the center of this vast, pulsating tapestry is the character of the Doctor; enigmatic at times but ultimately familiarly human in his behavior and attitudes. Actually, there's something about him beyond mere humanity that's also familiar: A virtually ancient being taking a keen interest in the welfare of mankind, to the point of (repeatedly) laying down his life for it; his almost miraculous powers, his uncanny ability to be where he's most needed, often in response to a call for help (in one episode, as a direct answer to a child's prayer to "Santa" – St. Nicholas, the Patron Saint of Children!), his repeated lessons about the value of each individual in the overall plan of Creation, the mercy and compassion with which he acts, his antipathy towards evil, even the fact that his features change periodically remind us to look deeper for the Hidden Christ in our daily encounters, that appearances are not what they seem. Even the concept of the TARDIS being bigger on the inside has proven helpful in our household for aiding young ones to get a tighter grasp on the mystery of the Eucharist. Okay, it helps me, too!

I could go on and on with more examples of Christian symbolism and worldview, implicit or explicit. You get the picture. On the one hand, it's not surprising that writers coming out of the tradition of British literature – and Western culture in general – would include these themes. Skeptics claim this disproves Christianity, but I belong to the Lewis-Tolkien school that maintains there's a bigger truth beyond these themes than mere cultural bias. Given that all Creation was created through Him and for Him, is it any wonder that these echoes should resound even in the consciousness of atheists?

Ink, far more scholarly than my own, has been spilled on this subject, as well as the more familiar themes *contained in the Chronicles of Narnia, The Lord of the Rings and Harry Potter*. It is to be expected that Christian writers like Lewis, Tolkien and Rowling (yes, she is a Christian, even if her themes are handled a bit amateurishly), would have deliberately included these echoes in their works. What's so delightful about these messages appearing in the *Doctor Who* phenomenon is that it's so unexpected.

Of course, *Doctor Who* is not a perfect program; it does glamorize a few moral flaws directly related to our broken disordered culture. And since there are a lot of writers working on it, viewpoints can shift around a bit. It is, after all, a rollicking, imaginative space-opera, not a dramatization of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. But given that it is a pop-culture product of post-Christian society, it's a pretty amazing reminder of how God's voice can be heard almost anywhere if we open our ears and hearts.

I truly believe that it's no accident that millions of young people around the world are open to the idea of the Universe being run according to a plan, that every part of Creation has value, that when the Earth itself seems lost to overwhelming danger, there is one Person they can call on for help, someone who responds with mercy, compassion and who will even give His life if needed. Whether they have a soft spot in their heart for a heroic hobbit, a majestic lion or a time-traveling wanderer, the important thing is that a seed has been planted, hearts are opened a crack and souls are ready to listen.

It's all good.

"Timeless Heroism" by Sarah Pierzchala was originally published on the blog, "Beauty and Belief" in 2014.

A Crystal Bridge Between Worlds

By Carolina Hobot
(aka Lila Tulip)

Upon a grassy hill, beside a small rocky outcrop from which gushed a bubbling stream, Alanna surveyed the Welsh countryside below, laid out in summer glory. Flowers bloomed amid the grass and rock formations, while sheep grazed with much satisfaction. In the distance, she glimpsed other hikers, but here on this particular hill they were alone.

Relishing the peace, Alanna turned to her friends and slipped off her rucksack and sunglasses. Crouching over her bag, she pulled free her water bottle and drank in careful sips. Ffion was singing a Welsh song unrecognisable to Alanna as she tucked escaped strands of golden hair back under her hat, the peak shadowing her fine features, while Stefan consulted a map.

"Are we close to your secret picnic location, Stefan?" asked Alanna.

"Um, about that..." Stefan fiddled with his paper map, a blush heating his cheeks. "You know I said that it would be great to take advantage if there was good weather this weekend?"

"I distinctly remember it," agreed Ffion. "Though considering your fear of heights, I'm impressed you have made it so far up."

"Well, I'm not looking down," offered Stefan.

"No, you're not," remarked Alanna. "However, you're deflecting the point. Care to share?"

Stefan wilted slightly at her tone, though he relaxed a little at the smile that followed. "So, going for a picnic wasn't the *sole* reason for our little excursion. I've been here before...."

"We assumed that, Stefan," said Ffion. "Though clearly, we should have asked why."

"Right, you know my hobby is UFOs and following up any sightings or leads?" Both women nodded, waiting in trepidation for their friend to reach the point.

"A friend of mine witnessed glowing lights and a sensation of time disorientation around here. He did a sweep through, but came up with nothing. He dismissed the events, citing a 'tired mind,' but I couldn't stop thinking that maybe he was wrong. So, I decided to spend my annual leave over the past week observing this area for any abnormal activity."

Stefan leaned closer even though they were all alone, whispering now in sheer delight. "I witnessed the same events as my friend, but also voices speaking an unknown language. I did my best to follow the voices and discovered this stream, taking up position close by. At one instance a low fog seemed to emit from the stream's opening on this hillside, and I'm nearly certain someone was concealed within the fog."

Alanna stood abruptly, startling both her companions. Her eyes scrutinised the stream and the small dark opening where it poured forth into the sunlit world. She didn't doubt Stefan's

assertions, which meant that they were not as alone as she had previously considered.

Stefan advanced to the stream entrance and peered into the opening. "I'm sure this was wider before," he muttered before sticking one hand inside, much to Alanna's alarm.

Even as she opened her mouth to advise caution, the ground shifted under her feet. Looking down, Alanna hissed as she saw the grass and earth split aside.

"Run!"

Unfortunately, her cry was lost as some force seized her and dragged her down into the cracking earth. Soil parted on either side like some mockery of the parting of the Red Sea by Moses, before a yawning blackness opened under Alanna. She caught the frightened expressions of her two dear friends as they, too, were pulled under and tumbled into the yawning abyss.

* * *

Gradually, awareness filtered through as Alanna regained consciousness. The sound of water first penetrated, then a sensation of damp, causing her to shiver. A cold wet surface was under her cheek, and as Alanna stirred, she realised how hard and uncomfortable her position was.

She moved her hands underneath her body and levered herself up, blinking as pain lanced through her right leg. Darkness embraced her with a pinprick of yellow light in the distance. She had been lying on her front, her head twisted awkwardly to the side. Gently rolling her head to loosen her stiff neck muscles, Alanna examined her right leg and exhaled in relief. No broken bones. The wetness seeping through her trousers indicated she was bleeding, though not badly. She would deal with that once she knew what had happened to her friends.

Knowing that light would help, yet having no idea if there was an unfriendly presence nearby, Alanna decided to listen first. A minute dragged by with only the noise of water, the distinct sound of waves lapping against the shore. Where were they? The impression of a vast empty space pressed down upon Alanna, with a body of water of some kind. Could they be in a cave system? If so, where precisely, and who had brought them here?

Yet it appeared that they were alone, so Alanna elected to risk illumination. Quietly as possible, she tried her watch but realised the digital interface no longer worked. Pulling her phone free of its pocket in her hiking waistcoat offered the same result. Carefully working her rucksack off, she used memory alone to locate her torch in the outer zipped side pocket. The zip made an unpleasantly loud noise.

Heart racing, Alanna waited but again heard nothing. Relieved, she pulled her torch out and released a shaky breath when the light came on – it flickered every few seconds as if there was some charge in the atmosphere, causing it to malfunction. She was aware of a static feeling and remembered Stefan regaling them with tales of electronic malfunctions in the presence of not only supernatural events, but alien encounters too. Dread spiked in her belly, and Alanna swung the weak beam around, noticing she was perched on a shelf of rock jutting out over what had to be a huge lake.

High above ascended darkness, and Alanna could find no evidence of their ignominious entrance and fall. The situation grew more worrying at every discovery. She cautiously rolled over, biting her lip as pain crawled up her leg like spiders scuttling over her flesh. As she did, she saw her displaced hat and succeeded in dragging it over and stuffing it between her belt and trousers. Now aiming the beam of her torch towards the back of the shelf, she nearly cried out when she caught sight of the two forms of her friends.

"Stefan! Ffion! Are you okay? Please wake up!"

At her voice, both forms shifted, and groans echoed in the chamber. Fortunately, this elicited the same silence as previously, so Alanna dragged herself over to her friends. Stefan and Ffion had been curled up on their sides unlike her and now raised their heads, their eyes blinking blearily in the weak glare of the torch.

"Alanna?" croaked Stefan, "where are we? Are you alright?"

"We are in a cavern of some type, on a rocky shelf extending out over a lake. There is a dot of light in the distance, but otherwise, we are in darkness."

Ffion sat up and gripped her arm, face dreadfully pale. "My arm, I think it's broken."

"Badly bruised only," reported Stefan, "apart from my head. Am I bleeding?"

Alanna nodded. "Yes, but I can patch you up. Here." She shoved her rucksack over. "Find the first aid kit while I examine Ffion's arm. Then take out your jumpers; it is cold here and we must conserve our body heat."

The next few minutes were filled with Alanna treating her friends' injuries. Stefan's were the easiest, requiring only an antiseptic wash, antibiotic cream, and a large plaster. There was no evidence of concussion, though a close watch would need to be kept until she was entirely sure. Ffion was trickier. Alanna could only ascertain that the break was clean, for no bones – thank heavens – were poking through the skin. Extremely carefully and gently, she used bandages to wrap the arm and put it in a sling to at least minimise jarring.

Her own wounds were next. She uncovered the shallow gash in her right leg and grimly cleansed the site, grimacing at the pain. Her first aid kit had a sewing kit, and grateful for her medical training, Alanna did her best to sew the gash closed. Stefan, to his credit, held the flickering torch over her leg, head averted as he clutched his rosary and whispered a prayer to his God and to the Blessed Virgin. Ffion also prayed in silence, to her gods. Alanna persevered in the stillness, laying iodine patches over the closed site to stem infection before bandaging up her leg.

At this point, Stefan spoke. "How are we still alive? We can't see the ceiling of this cavern, and the way our voices echo suggests a large spacious chamber."

"You're the UFO expert," said Alanna with a tired smile. Accepting the water bottle from Ffion, Alanna sipped, relieved to soothe the parched feeling in her throat. She watched as Ffion fumbled with her hat and Stefan's, squeezing them one-handed into her open rucksack.

He shrugged. "At a guess? If it wasn't magic, then it may have been a type of forcefield that caught us and slowed our descent so that our injuries were minimal. We either triggered it by our presence or, as you proposed, Alanna, we were being monitored and they – whoever they are – activated the collapse of the earth."

"That indicates a *trap*," whispered Ffion.

"Yes," admitted Stefan reluctantly.

"Then where are our captors?" persisted Ffion. "Are we even in our world anymore?" Alanna moved to diminish Ffion's fear. If they began panicking now, it would decrease their ability to take advantage of any opportunities that may crop up.

"I think we may still be on Earth, if only because whoever set the trap is not immediately present. Before you awoke, I listened for a while and heard nothing but the waters of the lake. Though where the breeze originates from to cause the waves is a good question. That said, we better move if we are to stand any chance of escaping."

Alanna stretched a hand to Stefan. "Help me up, please?"

Stefan stood and then helped Alanna and Ffion to rise. He donned his rucksack, aided Alanna's with hers, then slung Ffion's over one shoulder. It took a minute to help the ladies off the ledge and onto the rocky shore of the lake. By this point, the torch was flickering more frequently, its yellow beam threatening to cut out entirely.

"Electronic malfunction?" asked Stefan as he examined the torch, then his watch and phone.

"Yes," confirmed Alanna.

Stefan exhaled in frustration. "Well, where do we go?"

"Follow the lake around," said Alanna. "We have no other choice for there are no tunnels, which is a little disturbing." Nodding in silent agreement, they set off three abreast.

Every step caused Alanna's leg to burn and set her breath on edge, but with Stefan's support, she could walk. In the gloom, she could just about discern the tall form of Ffion to her left, who was holding her arm carefully but seemed to be in minimal pain after taking some codeine.

After what felt like a long time, though was probably less, they saw a thick bank of fog upon the surface of the lake reaching up in an opaque barrier three metres high. The yellow pinprick resolved to a vibrating glow shimmering within the thick greyness. A sharp metallic smell of copper emanated from this shifting mist, which stung their tongues and filled their lungs and noses, bringing tears that they blinked away. At this point they could walk no farther around the lake, so Stefan left them on the shore as he tested the depth of the lake. It reached his waist, so he assisted them down into the waters.

Ffion was fine, as she was tall like Stefan, but Alanna was up to under her arms. She gritted her teeth against the cold and leant more heavily on Stefan. They stumbled into yellow-greyness, gasping at the even more pungent odour of copper. Ffion gripped Alanna's shoulder with her good hand so they wouldn't be separated. Struggling through, the fog eventually fell away to reveal a shimmering portal. It was a circular window, about ten metres across. The circle was moving, the surface rippling like waves, with a clear breeze radiating through it. Energy circled around the circumference, seemingly self-contained until they noticed the crystal-type structures. They rose from the depths of the lake, forming pillars on either side of the shifting mass.

In contrast to the damp coldness of the cavern, heat now pressed upon them from the energetic reaction. Speechless, they stood entranced, wondering at the strange beauty before them and pondering who had created this portal. As they gazed upon it, the surfaces pulsed, the silver turning an intense white and reaching towards them to engulf the trio.

Space and time contracted about them, and Alanna wanted to cry out as her very spirit felt like it was brushed by the Universe in a surge of pure light. Time had no meaning as she hung onto her friends in this tunnel of Everywhere and Nowhere until...until...

The world exploded into being. Only Stefan's reflexes saved Ffion and Alanna from hurting themselves further. He staggered as he embraced them both, one arm wrapped around each of them.

The portal vanished in a ripple and the crystal pillars no longer pulsed with light. Breathing rapidly, Alanna found her footing, as did Ffion. The trio of friends shook the stars from their eyes and minds and focused upon their new surroundings. A cave system met their vision: a massive cavern, full of tall alien humanoids who were now observing them with great interest.

Alanna froze. Beside her, she heard Stefan's sharp intake of breath and Ffion's horrified gasp. Alanna strove to shake off her shock and limped in front of her friends, sharp eyes resting on the weapons carried by some of the tall aliens. Others appeared to be civilians, for their clothing was different from those who had a militaristic bent to their garments.

Crystal-like structures were everywhere, some glowing with a myriad of colours: reds, purples, pinks, and greens, while others throbbed a pure white. All radiated energy, with a few emitting what sounded like a musical score played on a flute.

An extremely tall alien stepped forward. He wore authority like a cloak, and it struck Alanna that he was the kind of person who moved with the calm assurance of knowing who he was and with a profound understanding of his place in society.

He was clad in knee-high burgundy boots, black trousers, a mid-thigh length burgundy overcoat with the edge of a forest green shirt showing at the collar. A dark green sash was tied around his waist, and from a belt was attached a gun and possibly a knife or dagger. A russet-colored peaked hat sat on his head. A pearlescent dragon in flight with blue jewels for eyes adorned his collars. His appearance was so very alien to Alanna's eyes, though she must appear equally odd to him. His skin tone was violet, and his irises recalled the golden hue of the daffodils in her grandmother's garden. Yet those golden eyes lacked their warmth, and Alanna experienced a cold chill at the implacable will in that piercing, assessing gaze. Hair as black as a starless night covered his head and was swept back to reveal...

"Tylwyth Teg?" whispered Ffion in confusion.

The alien raised an eyebrow at that and examined Ffion and then Stefan. He turned back to Alanna, who had been startled to witness the ears without a discernible lobe sweeping to a point. Holding his gaze was difficult, but Alanna persevered, mindful to keep his attention from her friends: dear Stefan who, while courageous, did not always consider the consequences of his actions; and Ffion who laughed gaily and who was too sweet and kind for such adversity as this alien displayed. He came to stand close to Alanna, towering over her, at what was well over six feet – compared to an old professor, Alanna estimated he was either 6'7" or close to it.

The alien observed her, seemingly intrigued by what he perceived, but Alanna knew that with an alien culture she could be mistaken. When he spoke, it was the most beautiful thing Alanna had heard. Every word and syllable were musical in nature. The alien language fell and rose in a wonderful lyrical tinkling of notes. Noticing her lack of understanding, the alien tried again in Welsh.

Ffion cried out in surprise. "He welcomed us in an old Northern dialect! Oh –" Her delight and awe vanished. "He said we were his prisoners."

The alien had shifted his attention to Ffion, much to Alanna's concern, when a disturbing thought intruded. You have been to our world before, she realised as she watched Stefan squeeze Ffion's hand and stare back at the alien. The revelation was not unexpected, but worrying. Alanna inclined her head as discreetly as possible to Ffion, who mercifully noticed and fell silent. Stefan also caught her eye and said nothing.

The alien smiled, but it was a cold, smug smile which sent a chill through Alanna. Even so, she was relieved when he returned his attention to her and away from her friends.

"You...converse...in English," he remarked. His voice was musical as ever, though with an odd edge as he switched to a language foreign to him.

"You are in charge?" he addressed Alanna directly.

Alanna decided to agree, hoping that it would minimise unwanted attention towards her friends. "Yes, I am."

"Your companion is correct. I welcome you to our world, but as my prisoners. We cannot have you interfering with our operations, after all." This smile was genuine if not comforting.

"If that is so, then may I know who has captured us and where we are? Indeed, what is our crime?"

The alien actually laughed, and oh, Alanna was fascinated by how rich-bodied his laughter was. His golden eyes were brimming with what she thought was mirth, though he had lost none of his authoritative demeanour.

“Brave little one, for such honest directness I shall be equally honest. My name would be difficult for you to pronounce. However, you may call me Commander Aleksander – that name has served me well among your people before.”

“You have been to Earth multiple times in our history,” breathed Stefan softly. He cringed when Alanna gestured for him to be quiet.

“Naturally. You have been observing us for the past week, Stef-an,” replied Commander Aleksander coldly. “Surely you cannot be shocked by such an admission? Your leader is not, and she was not even aware of your little investigation until you revealed it most unkindly at the very last moment. Oh yes, we heard your conversation.”

Alanna was sick to her stomach, but persevered. “Then why were we alone when we awoke? Why attempt to communicate in Welsh?”

“Your companion sang in the language, so I thought to try it first.”

And ascertain whether we could converse in secret with each other, which you now know we can't, thought Alanna grimly.

“As for our absence, I must apologise. Our scientists miscalculated how swiftly we were to act and brought you to us sooner than my men were ready to deploy.” His eyes narrowed in displeasure. “Such an error will be assessed, and the lesson learnt.”

“Our crime?”

Commander Aleksander cocked his head. “Surely you can guess, Alanna?”

“It would be unwise to convict myself or my companions.”

“Ah, you are delightful, Alanna, and of course, correct. In respect of your crime...We would rather not have our presence discovered by anyone else. We have been remiss in permitting Stef-an to observe us, which we are correcting now. I think you can appreciate our position.”

Alanna broke their locked gaze to peer at the other aliens milling about in the cavern. Men and women transported goods with not even a glance in their direction. Sleek weapons upon vehicles were brought to the appropriate areas in an orderly manner reminiscent of bees in a beehive.

“An invasion? What can Earth offer such an advanced race?”

“Invasion? Perhaps, perhaps not. We observe as you plunder your planet and make war, as those who plea for peace and care of your Earth fight against the madness. There is much that can be taken advantage of, and if we must intervene ere you destroy your world, then we may do so.”

Commander Aleksander stepped back while three soldiers stepped forward with glittering golden bracelets.

“The fate of Earth is no longer your concern, however, Alanna, Ffion, and Stef-an. You must excuse the restraints; we cannot risk any escape or a whispered warning to a person who might heed your message. I assure you that your injuries will be treated.”

“And afterwards?”

“Depending on whether we can extract your parole, you will have a certain level of freedom. Once we are assured of your continued obedience, further freedoms can be negotiated and obtained.”

The threat threading through his honeyed promises echoed loud and clear. Alanna had already silently debated their chances, but Commander Aleksander's reply put an official seal on her conclusion. In their condition, their injuries would slow them to the point of uselessness. She could barely walk, so running was out of the question; Stefan was groggy and open to a potential concussion, and Ffion was vulnerable with her arm.

Worse, little of what Alanna could perceive in the cavern was familiar to her. The scientific equipment was bewildering, based on a crystal-type technology (inferred simply from what she could see) that Alanna could not begin to comprehend. If they somehow escaped, they would be faced with a technological interface superior to any on Earth, in a language they had no experience with, beyond an initial greeting. All recipes for disaster when attempting to travel back through a time-space portal – the underlying physics of which was not known to those outside, other than whatever theories Stefan may be aware of through his research.

Ffion excelled in linguistics and most likely in time could learn the alien language, and Stefan could probably grasp the technology sufficiently to eventually take them home. These requirements necessitated time and opportunity, none of which was open to them currently.

"It is futile to argue against such logic. I concede on behalf of all of us: we will go in peace."

Commander Aleksander increased in her estimation when he did not try to extract an immediate promise of no escape. Instead, he ordered the men to put the bracelets on the prisoners.

The glittering golden bracelets were slipped over Alanna's wrists. As she watched in horrified fascination, threads – fine as spider web – extended from the bracelets to wrap over her hands and up her arms. A hum of energy tickled her ears, and Alanna shivered as she felt the course of warm currents run through her bound hands, wrists and arms, to trickle through her body. Stefan was treated similarly while Ffion had only her uninjured hand bound.

To Alanna's surprise, they were lifted and carried to a vehicle that recalled to mind the floating 'cars' of many a sci-fi film. Their rucksacks were placed at their feet. Commander Aleksander joined them, and the vehicle started on a smooth glide, with barely a hum to disturb their ears. The pain from her leg injury reasserted itself now that she wasn't busy attempting to soothe matters with their captors.

Rocky walls rushed by in a blur until they emerged into a world that was full of stunning splendour. A golden-amber sky rose above them, with white clouds and flying ships of all descriptions. Alanna's mind reeled as she tried to absorb all that her senses were receiving. A humid tropical heat pressed upon them, with plants – dark green and royal blue – dotted about the horizon. Oval-shaped discs flashed through the alien skies, while airplane-type aircraft also glided with grace amid the traffic, manoeuvring with ease around flying serpent-shaped beasts. One swooped low, revealing an iridescent blue hide, delicate whiskers, powerful yet silk-like wings, and a long sinuous tail.

"Dragons?" whispered Ffion.

Stefan nodded dumbly and glanced at Alanna, who was unable to speak. Commander Aleksander and his men laughed in amusement at their awe, and again when Stefan squeaked when he saw the crystal pillars with the same silver-white portals. Ships would flash into existence and come to rest on a nearby landing pad. Violet hued aliens, as well as feline-type humanoids would disembark.

The aliens were all clad in bright and colourful clothing. Any dark shades were contrasted with a splash of lighter fabric, whether that be pure white, a verdant green, rose-pink or tulip-red as well as other combinations. Colour was evidently an important aspect of this culture.

There was so much to try and parse that they were shutting their eyes rubbing their temples. As

such, they were mildly relieved to reach a building constructed from an ivory-coloured material. They were helped inside and through corridors lit by crystals and adorned with colourful paintings of scenes that could be from their captors' history, up through lifts that were sleek and silver, until they reached a medical bay.

The doctor was as brightly dressed as the people they had seen. Tall and slender where the Commander and his guards were bulkier, he had an aura of tranquillity and professionalism that resonated with Alanna's soul.

The equipment had her in the throes of absolute wonder and desperation to learn and understand. Yet the rigours of the last couple of hours were just too overwhelming. All she could do was cling onto her composure so that Stefan and Ffion wouldn't panic.

"I will leave you for now," remarked Commander Aleksander. He smiled at Alanna, and something in his attitude made her ill-at-ease. "Once you have been tended to, had refreshment and slept, we shall speak again."

Alanna inclined her head in acknowledgement, standing resolutely even as her right leg screamed in agony. Commander Aleksander touched his hat in a gesture so reminiscent of her world that Alanna was momentarily disorientated. Had they developed this gesture separately from some of Earth's culture or was this further proof of contact between their worlds?

All she could do was watch as the commander departed, leaving two guards at the entrance to the medical bay. She exhaled a ragged breath and faced her friends. Two pale faces, one full of guilt, stared at her woefully.

"Don't look like that, Stefan. As I remember, you didn't force us at knifepoint – we chose of our free will to accompany you. No, don't speak. Let the doctor do his work. We can chat later."

Stefan and Ffion received her message loud and clear: heal first, plan an escape later. Thus, the three permitted the doctor and his staff to seat them on beds for assessment. Alanna insisted on being last, which the doctor honoured. As she waited, Alanna gazed out of the window at the strange alien world they had fallen through space to land upon.

A tree with diamond-shaped leaves of a midnight blue dipped its head elegantly beside the window, and as she watched, a winged creature landed on a branch to nibble at the white flowers blooming there. Alanna was reminded of a Pterosaurs, though smaller in size, and with lavender and navy feathers. It soared away after a few minutes, and as Alanna watched it go, she hoped they would all be so free one day.



“The World Was Watching Cullowhee”

The “Great American Eclipse,” August 21, 2017

By Anna Rajagopal

“It’s so great that there’s an eclipse on the first day of class!” Dad rejoiced, thrilled that he had an excuse not to go to campus. He then played a BBC News video on the event conveying such exciting sentiments as “Good luck, America” and “This is a once-in-a-lifetime chance to see an eclipse from your own country.” What was even more exciting was the fact that Western Carolina University, Dad’s *alma mater* and place of work, had made a name for itself by being “the only college in the path of totality.”

Our viewing of the eclipse on the Western Carolina website was preceded by interviews with various college administrators like the chancellor, discussion of the Cherokee eclipse legend and Western’s new charting devices, and images of the expectant and bespectacled crowds swarming over the campus. “I know these guys,” Dad would remark, popping in as various interviewees were introduced. It was thrilling—and gave a new perspective—to see video coverage of a place I had actually been. We listened as the former student who now served as master of ceremonies described the point at which he would tell everyone to take off their glasses and look straight at the sun.

Gradually, the light outside began to change, and everything was tinted with a coppery glow that was unlike anything we had ever seen before. Joseph and Dominic hurried to set up the camera and telescope just inside the picture window, while Christopher and Therese kept dashing outside to look at the sky, causing Dad enormous consternation. Having grown up in India, where everyone was told to keep to their houses with the windows closed during an eclipse, he was extremely worried that they would ruin their eyes. He kept admonishing them not to look up, and spent the majority of the time on the living room couch, refusing to look out the windows, and relaying that his own eyes had started to burn. Mom told him that the sensation was psychological, and, when he suggested covering up the windows, said that he was getting the eclipse mixed up with the “Three Days’ Darkness” prophecy.

Meanwhile, the afternoon had grown darker than it had ever been at that time of day. However, the ground was devoid of shadows. A strange green light covered everything, and someone asked if a tornado was coming. Inside on the computer screen, the sun had started going behind the moon. Its epic progress was the more enhanced by the commentator’s voice, and culminated when he declared “We have reached totality!” It was then that I saw the image that before now I had only seen in pictures: that black sphere surrounded by the thinnest sliver of light. On campus, it looked like night had fallen.

“Take off your glasses and look at the sun!” the MC exclaimed. He then pointed out the planets and constellations that could be seen in the sky around it. “Take a second to savour this moment,” he urged, just before the sun started coming back out from behind the moon. As it rose with a piercing white brilliance, I was immediately reminded of the Resurrection. Its reappearance brought with it a feeling of relief, and a promise of perpetuity in a way, when the object that gives us light and heat returned.

Dad was noticeably relieved as the atmosphere returned to normal, but still complained of a pain in his eyes. He affirmed that he was definitely glad we hadn't gone to campus to watch the eclipse and was even more grateful when he afterwards learned that it took our local friend, Keith Allison, over two hours to get back to his house from the point at which he had watched it.

Prior to the eclipse, commentators had been stating that this "rare event" was one that each of us would remember for the rest of our lives. I had doubted this, wondering what, in the end, could be so memorable about an eclipse that you didn't "experience" in person. However, afterwards, I knew that I *would* remember this day for the rest of my life. The altered and totally new atmosphere outside our doors, along with the knowledge that what was happening on our computer screen was happening in reality, made for an experience laden with the aura of unforgettable-ness. And there was nothing to describe those moments when the sun went behind the moon and then came out again, save to say that they seemed to bring me very close to God. I felt and saw, in those moments, at least a fraction of His power and majesty.

It was, of course, an exaggeration on the MC's part, but what also impressed me about the "Great American Eclipse" was the fact that Cullowhee, the little town where I was born, was, because of it, at least for a day, "the center of the universe."





A Cancelled Trip

By David Glen

Roba 2, 91 years since the Kaiju Awakened

I giggled as I floated outside of the space station. I still couldn't believe that I was chosen out of hundreds of other students to be a part of Professor Anton Yeller's space program. It was exciting to think about, because if this station experiment worked, then not just Netokan, but the entire world of Harthyn would be one step closer to achieving space travel, the stuff of fiction up until now.

I was enjoying the sensation of weightlessness so much I failed to pay attention to my surroundings. My back

then bumped into someone.

"Clair, do you mind? I'm trying to work on making the adjustments Yeller sent us out here to make."

"Sorry. I'm just having fun, Jace." I said as I used the handholds to propel myself up. I could've used the mini jetpack, but swimming through the vacuum of space was just more entertaining for me.

I could hear him sigh over our comms. "Clair, I know you're enjoying all this, but I'm trying to take this seriously. If the radar's not fixed, we won't be able to scan for a decent spot for the professor's next build. And for the record, don't call me Jace."

"A station over the moon Bruck." I nodded as I opened the panel. Turning on my holo-screen, I looked over the instructions I had been given, and began following them. "Just think, Jason. We're getting closer to developing craft that can cruise through space. We'll be able to find

new planets to inhabit, and perhaps other life as well."

"And pretty soon, as Dad keeps telling me, we'll be having wars between planets."

"Professor Yeller says that this space program is a solution to end war. Different groups of people will be able to colonize different planets, and do as they want."

"Yeah, but will it work?"

His question made me pause. The Last War, as the war against the country of Moruga had been termed, was supposed to end conflict forever, but there were rumors circulating that the spirit of defiance had only been kindled. Even though the government was saying the entire planet had been united at last, there were those who were saying that different groups, different gangs even, were uniting. There had been three public facility attacks in the last month alone. They were getting bolder. Shaking my head, I decided to change the subject. "On a more positive note, our involvement with Professor Yeller's experiments will help to ensure our academic futures, and open many doors to possible careers."

"Thanks for reminding me of who it was who sent me up here." His voice made me cringe. I hadn't meant to touch a sensitive spot, but I heard static when I tried to speak to him. He must've gone silent to me.

I made the last few adjustments, heard a click, and saw some blue lights turn on. "And done." I smiled as I closed the panel and the space station whirled as the adjustments took hold. Pressing a finger against my helmet, I contacted the professor while my holo-screen turned off. "Professor. We've finished our task out here."

"Good. Come back inside." Professor Yeller said to both of us. He could override the radio silence one of us may have put ourselves into. Cough, Jason, cough. Holding on to the side of the station, I waited for my cousin to come back up so we could get back inside together.

He acknowledged me as he passed me, but didn't stop. Frowning at him for that disrespect, I began to follow him. But I couldn't stay mad. We just helped the next step for Harthyn's advancement. Future generations were going to remember this moment. Following my cousin, I thought there was no way the universe could destroy this.

I had no idea how wrong I was.

As we made our way to the entrance, the craziest thing happened. The space around us began to shake! Something that by all the laws of science should've been impossible was happening to us right now! Grabbing onto the side of the station, I clung to it like my life depended on it.

Jason also grabbed a hold of the station, and I got a feeling his eyes were just as wide as mine. His grip on the handhold and tether were so intense it was like he was trying to break them. "A quake in space? That's impossible!"

"Well, it's happening right now, cousin." I told him as I did something I had never done. I began to pray to Gri for a miracle. I had never been religious, but I found myself making a promise that if we got out of this I would start looking into faith.

"Emergency lockdown initiated." The automated words from the station made my blood freeze like the cold emptiness of space had entered my veins. Jason and I stole a quick glance at each other before we hurried to the entrance. Too late. Alarms blaring, the airlock - our only hope - closed in front of us.

Fear took hold of me as I began to pound on the sealed door. "No! Let us in! We're still out here! Professor Yeller? Santos? Anyone?"

"Communicators are down!" Jason screamed.

"Then how come *we* can still communicate?"

Neither of us had an answer for that, but we didn't have to worry about it for long. There was an earsplitting sound behind us, like a building was cracking and the world's largest flag was being ripped apart at the same time. A powerful suction, more powerful than the weightlessness of space, pulled both of us away from the station. Screaming like I had never screamed before, I found myself staring at something I would never forget.

There was just a large tear in front of us. It was like the area between the station and the planet had been a fragile antique vase, and someone had just punched a hole in it. Now we

were being dragged towards that hole. The two of us tried to resist, but there was nothing we could do but get sucked inside that tear in reality.

Inside, I found myself blinded by a light that appeared to be hot and cold at the same time. Gravity turned back on. My heart skipped a beat. No, now it wanted to stop. We were heading straight towards the ground! I screamed again as the green grass came speeding towards us! There was a big pain, and blackness.

I awoke to find myself lying in a cot in some sort of room, surrounded by mountains and mountains of books. Not the kind that people read on their holo-screens, but actual books made from paper. Pinching myself to make sure I was awake-- ow! Okay, I was. That means these books are real! Oh, I was so-- wait. The whole thing from before! The freaky quake, the hole, and--.

"Are you okay?" A voice asked me. Turning my head, I realized someone was sitting next to me. It was a woman who looked to be in her twenties who had her brown hair braided with a pink ribbon in it, and her green eyes were full of warmth, like the land was smiling through them. Her outfit, while in a style unlike anywhere on Harthyn as most people didn't wear dresses anymore except for festive holiday celebrations, still reminded me of home because of the patterns. The way it alternated between pink and white helped calm me down despite my shock. "Wh-where am I? What is this place?"

"This is the Radiant Garden Restoration Committee Headquarters. Also Merlin's home. I found you and your friend out in the fields after that strange earthquake, and asked some of my friends to help bring you to town."

Radiant Garden? The name didn't make any sense to me. "Radiant Garden? I'm not sure I follow. Where on Harthyn is that, and how did we not burn up in the atmosphere?"

"Harthyn? Is that where you're from?" The woman looked over me, and it was then that I realized I had been stripped of my outer uniform. While I was still clothed, I didn't enjoy the fact that someone had removed something from me when I had been unconscious. "This is probably going to sound crazy, but you're not on your world anymore."

"What do you mean?" Jason's voice let us know he was awake too, but had gotten out of his cot. As he grabbed a wooden rod, he held it up ready to strike. "Who are you, and how did we not die from that... whatever that was?"

"My name is Aerith." The woman introduced herself. "Please don't be afraid." That made Jason laugh. "Afraid? We're way past that. Now where are we and how did you find us? How did we not burn up in the atmosphere, and are you the Down--."

"Stop," a new voice said, and I watched as my cousin froze in place. With a puff an old man then emerged from some pink smoke. First braves! How did he do that, and what was he wearing? He had a long blue hat on and wore a matching robe. Nobody on Harthyn dressed like that. Not the religious followers of Gri, not the worshippers of Fushicho, no one. Taking the rod from my cousin, the new arrival just smiled underneath his moustache and long white beard until Jason could move again. "Now, I know you're scared but there's no need to act uncivilized."

"--trod." He finished before he realized what had happened. "What did you do to me?"

"I simply paused time around you so I could keep you from damaging my books or hurting anyone. Mostly yourself."

"Paused time? That's impossible."

"Oh, it's just a simple basic spell."

That caught my attention. "Spell? Like magic?"

"Yes, my dear. Now, let me introduce myself. My name is Merlin. You've already met Aerith. Be sure to thank her. She found you two and got the committee to bring you in."

"Bring us in from where? How did we not die from that space quake?" Jason wanted to know.

That caught their attention. "You were in space when you felt that tremor?" Aerith asked.

"Yeah. Now how did we not die from it?" My cousin was fidgeting, impatient for the answer. I

had to admit, I wanted to know too.

"I see you're awake," a second new voice said. On the other side of the room, next to a large computer, stood a man with shoulder-length brown hair and a scar running across his face. He was dressed in a black jacket with a fur lining around the neck that was... whoa. Why was he wearing two belts in an x-shape over his jeans? Nobody back home wore belts like that.

"Ah, Squall. Thank you for joining us." Merlin said.

Shaking his head, the man corrected him. "It's Leon. Now, in case you haven't figured it out, you've somehow been pulled from your world into ours."

Jason rose an eyebrow at that. "World? You mean you're aliens on another planet?"

"Not another planet. A planet is part of a world, but requires time and distance to travel to them." Merlin answered. "No, a world as in a parallel existence adjacent to yours. Maybe this will help clear things up." Tapping his rod on a stool some books flew up into the air, making my eyes widen. "Imagine that each of these books represents a different world, like this red one is your world while this blue one is ours. Each world is separated by a barrier that has many names. Some call it the Lanes Between, others refer to it as the Starocean, but whatever you call it it keeps our worlds separate from each other. Now, this Spatial Tremor, as I think would be the most apt name for the phenomenon, had somehow ripped a hole in between our worlds, and you two were pulled through from your world into ours."

"But you can get us back, right? You know about all these other worlds, so you can send us home."

"Travel between worlds isn't encouraged. Most do not know there are other worlds besides their own, and if they did it would be chaos. We've been at peace for only a year after one man brought turmoil to countless worlds in his quest for knowledge."

"So we're stuck here?"

"We'll work on finding a way to get you back to your world, but it will take time as we don't know where your world is located."

That was when I heard my holo-screen activate. Looking around, I found it on a chair with

my helmet and other outerwear for being out in space. Getting out of the cot I moved over to it and activated it. Immediately a holographic image of the professor appeared. "Clair? Jason? Are you there?" It was hard to hear, but it was definitely Yeller. "Can any-- hear m--? Thi-- s Profess-- ton Yell-- Harth-n." The static would mute some of his words, and sometimes buzz them out. Also his image was being distorted, creating disturbing horror pictures I wouldn't be forget. Still, it was easy to recognize the white patch in his grey hair, the golden eyes, and the blue tunic.

"It's us, Professor Yeller. Jason and I are alive." I smiled.

"Oh, thank goodness. I tried using photons to trace your holo-screens, and the gamble paid off. Where are you?"

"We're fine. I don't know how to tell you, but we're not on Harthyn anymore."

"You're in another world, aren't you?"

I gasped at that. "What? But how did you know?"

"It's just a theory. One that I've been theorizing for a while now, but I won't go into the details. I do not know how long this connection will last."

Rolling up his sleeves, the old man just said, "Allow me." As he chanted a bunch of nonsensical words, a blue mist and sparkles came from his rod that connected to my holo-screen and the computer in the side of the room. In a flash, the professor's face came onto the screen with a blink. "There. I don't care what Cid says about using my magic on his infernal device. That should allow us to communicate freely."

"Who are you? What's this about magic?" The professor asked with a raised eyebrow.

"My name is Merlin. This is Aerith and Squall--."

"Leon," the other man corrected him.

"Leon. We're part of the Radiant Garden Restoration Committee, and we found the two

young ones after the Spatial Tremor shook our world,” the old man continued to explain.

For once the professor rose an eyebrow. “Spatial Tremor?”

“That’s what we’re terming the quake that hit our world and yours. Since it happened far above the surface of your planet--.”

“I see.” The professor interrupted. “Seems an appropriate name. Now we need to find a way to bring my missing students back home. I don’t suppose you have a way to send them back?”

“We do not encourage travel between worlds.” Merlin explained. “Even with our crafts and vessels it would take time to find your world as no one has heard of Harthyn until this day.”

“I see. Well, I do have an idea that could work, but it will take time to assemble. I can draw up the plans and send them to you. You can build it on your end while I also build such a device on my end, and then when the time comes we can get my students home.”

“In the meantime we can help your students get settled in here while they wait. I can help continue their education until your machine is ready.” Merlin offered.

With a nod, Aerith added, “The Committee can provide a place for Jason and Clair to stay for the time being.”

With a nod, the professor said, “Thank you. That takes some concern off my mind. Jason, Clair, take the time to learn about this new world you’ve found yourselves in. I promise you will get home to your families, but be the first to experience something no one on Harthyn has before.”

Umi 4, 91 KA

I sighed in relief, taking in the beautiful day. It was nice to be able to find a place just outside

the city where I could relax. Jason was right next to me as he had nothing better to do, but I didn't mind. It was nice to spend this moment with my family. I just wish my parents could be here. They would love this world.

This place had been strange and different to learn about. The people here use a twelve-month calendar instead of thirteen months like we did back home. Establishing a conversion system hadn't been easy, but eventually we were able to figure it out. According to that system, it had been three Harthyn months since Jason and I first came to Radiant Garden. It had been a long wait, but I have grown used to living here. It was kind of nice to not have technology do everything for you, and I've grown to love the two-decades-out-of-date fashion choices.

I don't know why, but the outfit I had selected in the marketplace just spoke to me more than what I was used to. So instead of the thermal tights I had worn under my spacesuit I was wearing a pair of blue jeans with a sleeveless purple shirt. I loved the blue bird picture on the right side of the shirt. Over the shirt was a red vest. I still did some strands of my hair in the traditional Hocamli braids while the rest fell long around my shoulders.

I stopped in my meditation as I heard footsteps coming up. Craning my head back I could see a pair of brown boots approaching us. Looking up, or behind depending on your perspective, I saw Aerith standing over Jason and I. "Oh, hi." I smiled.

"And here you two are." She said as she crouched down before us, wearing her white and pink dress again. "What are you doing out here?"

"Just enjoying the peace and quiet." I said. "It's nice to be able to find a place like this. One of the advantages this world has over Harthyn."

"I take it you didn't come out here just to check on us." Jason was still as stern and serious as ever. He was wearing a red shirt he had gotten from the market, and a pair of jeans that now had a hole over his left knee. His brown hair had grown out since we arrived, and his blue eyes seemed different. I wasn't sure how, but he wasn't as angry as before.

The Cetra nodded, confirming his words. "Well, Cid finally finished the machine he and Yeller were working on." She told us as she changed her position so she was now sitting. "He's making a few adjustments, but you two should be able to go home in a few hours."

"A few hours?" Jason sat up at that. "Best news I've had these last three months." With that he

began to walk off back to the city. Aerith watched him go before she noticed my reaction. "What's the matter? Aren't you glad to be going home?"

"I am." I told her faster than I intended. "It's just..." How do I explain this? I felt like I was being torn in half. Part of me wanted to stay and see what this world has to offer, but I missed my parents so much. Being unable to speak with them for months had been torture. This world could never be Netokan, and for some reason, I was okay with that. "...I've grown to like it here."

I waited for her to ask me how, but she didn't. I looked to see her waiting with more patience than I had seen anyone back home. After a few minutes of waiting, I continued to explain. "Back home, books had gone out of existence. Everything is now read on the holo-screen, and people prefer that because of the interactive activities and motion pictures, but I never enjoyed that. Turning the pages of the older books made me feel like I was part of the story. And not having pictures allowed me to create everything in my mind.

"I would spend lots of time in antique shops or online, trying to find books to read. Because of that, I got teased by those who preferred to spend their time changing their DNA, or gossiping about other people, or having fantasies of being with some actor or actress."

"I don't believe that's the entire reason." Aerith finally spoke.

Her words caused me to sigh. "You're right. This world has something Harthyn doesn't: magic."

"I've heard you've been having a hard time learning it."

I looked at the Cetra at that. "Yes, I've been struggling with it, but at the same time, I love it. Something about it just draws me in. It's hard, but I feel a... something about myself when I'm pushing myself to get a spell right. It's hard to describe."

Before I could say any more I noticed a girl picking flowers in the fields. As she came closer she paused as if she was hesitant to ask me for some of the ones I was sitting next to. Smiling I picked some of them and got up, moving over to the kid. "Here you go." I held some out to her, and she accepted them with a grin. Seeing that made my heart brighten up.

I looked to find Aerith smiling at me. "I think I understand. My people, the Cetra, gave up the

luxuries of comfortable lives so we could be closer to the spirit of our world." Reaching out to a flower that was growing nearby she continued, "Even amongst a field of flowers, I feel at peace with my choice because I can feel the life of the planet around me. And that makes me happy."

Her words struck a chord within me. "Wow, that's beautiful. Sometimes when you talk about the Cetra it makes me wish I could become one."

"Thanks." Aerith told me. "If you don't feel ready to go home yet, we'll speak with Professor Yeller. We'll see if we can work it so you can stay here and learn more. We'll even try to arrange for your parents to use the teleportation device to come and visit you."

That brightened my spirits. "You will? Thank you, Aerith! I would love that very much."



Universe

BY Arusha Afsar

YOU'RE NOT JUST A STAR
OR AN EXPLOSION OF LIGHT
YOU'RE NOT JUST THE MOON
ON A WINTERY NIGHT
YOU'RE NOT JUST THE SUN,
SHINING RAYS, BLINDING AND BRIGHT
YOU'RE NOT JUST THE EARTH
MAGNIFICENT BLUE AND GREEN FROM A
HEIGHT.
YOU ARE THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE
...LIT UP.

About This Magazine

Fellowship and Fairydust Magazine is a publication of Fellowship & Fairydust Publications. F&F is an online literary blog and magazine that aims to inspire faith and creativity and explore the arts through a spiritual lens. F&F came into being when the blog and online magazine The Fellowship of the King merged with the online magazine Ink and Fairydust in January 2017. To learn more, visit fellowshipandfairydust.com.

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