

**Plain  
Brown  
Wrapper**

**Fan Fiction  
by  
P.D. Haynie**

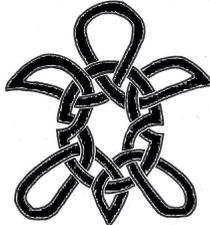


P.D. HAYNIE

Plain Brown Wrapper

*Fan Fiction by P.D. Haynie*

*Spiral Path*



*Publications*

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# Contents

Fan Fiction and Fair Use	1
About Mage Knight Rebellion	3
Scrounged	5
Damselfly	9
Flight School	19
Sister Sacrifice	23
About “The Switchblade Papers”	25
Shakedown Cruise	27
Gordian Klingons	48
Firefly and “Triage”	58
Triage	60
The Photo Album	64
<i>About the Author</i>	65
<i>Also by P.D. Haynie</i>	66



# Fan Fiction and Fair Use

This book might be illegal. I don't think it is, I really hope it's not, and I am sure that it shouldn't be, but, well, I'm not a lawyer and US Fair Use law is a swamp.

I try not to write fan fiction. I really do. Stories want to be told, and I have invested a large part of my life studying the craft of story telling, and I WANT to circulate any stories that my ever-recalcitrant muse chooses to put in front of me. So I try to avoid writing fan fiction, because I want to stay away from the legal limbo in which it exists.

On the other hand, my muse IS significantly recalcitrant, and I REALLY don't want to offend her by refusing to process one of the rare story ideas she offers me; she is capable for sulking for years at a time. So sometimes, fan fiction becomes inevitable.

Of course, I don't write anything like TYPICAL fan fiction. Garden variety fan fiction picks up the existing characters and develops their relationships in some way, or causes the established characters to interact with the writer's own characters (often personal "Mary Sue" avatars). I don't do that; of the seven stories in this collection, only "Triage" actually uses a mainstream character; the other six are entirely my own characters running around in a borrowed universe. And even in "Triage", Simon is only a conduit for my story; I make no effort to stretch him, or develop him in any way, he is just there.

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So these stories exist, and all of them have elements that I truly love and want to share, and all of them have successfully resisted my efforts to reset them in other worlds. So I have produced this odd book, with an eye to staying on the friendly side of the concept of fair use. I am not making any money off of it; I am not using the fame of any of the worlds I have borrowed to promote it, but only my own painfully obscure name; I am not in any way damaging the worlds upon which I am trespassing.

Stories WANT to be told.

P.D. Haynie

# About Mage Knight Rebellion

There follow four stories set in the world of the “Mage Knight Rebellion” miniatures game. The miniatures were visually interesting, and the game was pretty good, but there isn’t much depth to the world. There were initially four major factions, and several minor ones, and each had their own qualities, but it was much more game oriented than story oriented. I played the game a bit, bought a trunkload of figures, and inevitably ended up writing some stories.

The major factions are the human Atlanteans (who practice a weird brand of technological magic and build a lot of magically powered machines), the Elementalists (who are a pretty standard elven society), the Blackpowder group (humans and dwarves who use guns and build things like Steam Golems), and the Necromancers (elves who use a lot of death and resurrection magic).

The first three stories deal with an unusual collection of misfits— only three of whom are sentient— making their way on the edge of perpetual war. “Scrounged”, set earlier but written later, introduces the characters; “Damsel fly” and “Flight School” expand the characters, and spend a fair amount of time focused on Atlantean dragonflies. These are one man magical flying machines which I found visually fascinating. I have chosen to give them controls analogous to a modern helicopter.

The fourth story, “Sister Sacrifice”, is based on a Necropolitan figure type

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called a “Nightblade” that portrays a female elf in a dominatrix costume armed with a pair of daggers. The on-line community acknowledged that the figure was visually interesting, but wondered who would actually go into battle dressed like that. And what sort of society would do that to its daughters? I thought about that a while, and decided that no society would do such a thing, so therefore all of the Nightblades must be women captured from the Elementalists, and tortured and brainwashed into serving the Necropolitans. I wrote “Sister Sacrifice” to illustrate the point.

# Scrounged

Livia wondered, idly, what was going to kill her. She was hoping for exposure; it was less uncomfortable than thirst, which was the other option.

The battle had been over for nearly three days; the losers had presumably run away somewhere, and she thought the winners had camped near the battlefield, but they had left with the sun, and there would be no more efforts to find survivors.

It was a stupid way to die; she had been trying to bandage a fallen warrior; a steam golem had passed nearby, and something had blasted it. The defunct metal monster had fallen on top of Livia and her charge, killing him and pinning her, unconscious, against his body. She had awakened in the darkness and screamed herself hoarse, but no help had come. With daylight she had managed get her canteen to where she could sip from it, and when it was empty, she had also found the dead soldier's canteen, but all of the water was gone, now. She had slept and shivered through three nights, but doubted she had the strength for a fourth. She found herself wishing to feel the sun on her face one last time, but to do that, she had to be out from under the golem, and that wasn't going to happen.

"Nine bleeding hells," a gruff voice said, and Livia was suddenly wide awake and as alert as her situation allowed. "Whatever killed this thing punctured the boiler, and it exploded. The main engine and the control mechanisms are ruined." It was an ugly voice, deep and guttural and distastefully accented.

“Sorry, Boss,” a squeaky voice answered. “It’s the best looking wreck on the field. There really wasn’t much to choose from.”

“It isn’t your fault, Cob,” the gruff voice said. “I just wish I could find one of these things that had been immobilized without being utterly destroyed.”

“Help!” Livia croaked, as loudly as she could.

“Did you hear something?” the squeaky voice asked.

“No,” the gruff voice answered.

“HELP!” Livia croaked again.

“Somebody called for help,” the squeaky voice said.

“Here!” Livia shouted. “Under the golem!”

“Unholy flatulence,” the gruff voice said. “You’re right, Cob. Derrick! Pick up this metal thing and throw it away.” There was some general scrambling, the approach of heavy footsteps, and then the weight of the golem was suddenly gone, and Livia was blinking in the brightness. There was a crash as the wrecked golem found a new resting place; Livia cringed, and tried to look up at her rescuers with little success. “Pick it up by the collar, Derrick; let me see it.”

Livia found herself dangling rather painfully from something large that had clamped itself on the back of her shirt. She was facing an orc in amazingly grubby conjurer’s robes; an imp sat on the body of the dead soldier and stared at her.

“She’s skinny, Boss, but we could get at least one decent meal out of her,” the imp said.

The orc glanced at the imp and scowled. "We do not hunt sentients for food, Ichabod. Particularly when there is plenty of pre-killed meat to be had," the orc answered, and then turned back to Livia. "But there is still the question of what is to be done with you. Ignoring you and killing you are the same thing, I think, and I am not really inclined to charity."

"Prisoner," Livia croaked. "Have rights..."

"No," the orc growled. "You aren't, and you don't. I am not at war with anyone, and no one is at war with me. You are a wounded animal I have found in the road, and I should either ignore you, or put you out of your misery." He stroked his chin in thought, and Livia felt her eyes close; she was too tired to really care. "Derrick, set her down gently. Cob, get the girl some water."

"Derrick" set Livia down with something against her back; Livia summoned the energy to turn her head, and found that it was a bone golem, and she was leaning against its shin. She wondered if she should be further frightened or horrified, but didn't have the strength to care.

The orc knelt beside her, and helped her swallow some water. "Look at me," he said in his awful voice; Livia focused on him, and managed a nod. "I do not practice charity. The only reason I would bother to save your life is if you were a member of my household. The only way for you to be a member of my household is as a slave. Do you understand that?" Livia managed another nod. "If you want, I will leave you alone; if you want, I will give you a mercy stroke right now. Or you can become my slave, and I will heal you and keep you as well fed and cared for as I can."

"Could I have some more water?" Livia said softly; the orc gave it to her. She looked up, and realized that the orc had several companions, including an Atlantean brass golem. There was a dog a few feet away, and Livia thought that it was filthy, until she realized it was rotting. All of the orc's companions, except the imp, were dead. She looked at the orc, and then the imp, and back

at the orc; there was something in his eyes... “Livia,” she said. “My name is Livia.”

The orc nodded. “I am called Scrounge, of Clan Grimm,” he said. “Does this mean you accept the bargain?”

Livia nodded. “If you expect me to eat human flesh,” she said weakly, “you have to make sure it is really well cooked, or I will get sick.”

“I have heard this of humans,” Scrounge replied.

Livia took another swallow of water, and closed her eyes a moment to savor it. “And if you expect me to have sex with you,” she said, “I can guarantee you will enjoy it more if you are kind to me, and if you bathe occasionally.”

Scrounge’s eyes widened, and then he smiled; it was a hideous orcish smile, but there was warmth in it, somehow. “I will try to remember.”

July, 2006

# Damselfly

Livia carefully disentangled herself from the blankets, gathered her clothing, and began to dress. It would have been MUCH warmer to pull her clothes under the covers and dress that way, but that would risk waking Scrounge, and she treasured these few moments of twilight privacy. It passed for privacy, anyway. Most of Scrounge's collection of undead and non-living followers were aware of her, and watched her with decaying eyes, empty eye sockets, or crystal lenses as appropriate.

Livia made her way to the remains of the previous evening's fire, and when it was rearranged to her satisfaction, she turned to the metallic man that crouched next to it. "Twelve-oh-three, firelighter, here, mark," she said quietly. The Atlantean incendiary golem, whose serial number ended in 1203, watched her movements and shot a shot burst of fire into the pile of wood and charcoal Livia had built. Livia watched long enough to make sure the fire had started properly, then set about making tea from the wintergreen leaves she had gathered the night before.

1203 was the prize of Scrounge's little army, though he was almost as proud of the bone golem he had recently acquired. He claimed to take little pride in the collection of miscellaneous zombies and skeletons he had assembled along the way, but those two made him gloat. Those two, and the flesh golem, and of course 642 the brass golem, which had started the collection.

The tea was brewing nicely, and the smell made Livia wish there were some

sugar to add when it was time to drink it. Meat was easy to come by, now that Scrounge had finally found a skeleton that was a decent archer, and water was not a problem, and it usually took little effort to determine if a corpse on a battlefield had any clothing she wanted. But sugar and salt and spices meant digging through packs, and her tolerance for that was just not very high. She wished she could give the job to the undead, but they lacked the equipment to differentiate between salt and dust.

Livia heard Scrounge cough, and looked over to find him sitting up; Cob the imp bounced out from wherever he had disappeared to during the night. Livia collected the remains of the previous night's supper from the bone golem which had been guarding it, and set it on the fire to warm. She added bread to the list of things she wanted but hadn't seen for a long time.

Scrounge waddled over to the fire, stirred the stew, and then threw a haunch of rabbit to Cob. "Eat it fast, and then get airborne and see what is happening," he said.

Cob caught the food with one claw and made a rude gesture with the other. "As Thou wishest, oh most opulent Master," the imp replied, then grinned and tore into his meal. He was finished in seconds, then scampered up the bone golem and launched himself skyward.

Scrounge decided the stew was warm enough and poured most of it into his bowl. "And how is the lovely Livia this morning?" he asked; Livia cringed. Scrounge's grammar was probably better than hers, and his vocabulary was certainly greater, but his orcish accent still hurt her ears. Livia was trying to learn Orcish just to avoid hearing him speak Common.

"The same as I was yesterday, Boss, give or take a day," she answered, and Scrounge grinned. It had taken them a while to arrive at "Boss"; Livia refused to call him "Master", and he would not allow "Scrounge", or whatever his real name was. She knew he was Clan Grimm, but she had never heard him use

any given name but “Scrounge”. “Any idea where we are going today?”

Scrounge shook his head. “Higher ground, probably. It depends on what Ichabod comes back with.”

Livia nodded, stirred the stew one more time, and poured what remained into her bowl. Gods, but she wanted some salt...

<<>>

Mid-morning found them on a high ridge, watching a battalion strength battle between Atlanteans and Necropolitans. As always, Scrounge spent a great deal of time wishing the Atlanteans would lose; he had no real political leanings, but he liked the junk the Atlanteans left behind so much better. Techo-magic interested him far more than either the straight necromancy of the Necropolitans or the pure technology of the dwarves. Scrounge watched the battle eagerly through a spyglass; Livia relaxed with the sun on her face; Cob followed Livia’s example, and the collection just stood and waited silently.

Scrounge suddenly thrust the spyglass at Livia. “There,” he said excitedly. “On the near side, and a bit to the north. Do you see it?”

Livia stood and put the glass to her eye. “Dragonflies. Up against bloodsuckers and screeching terrors. And that means?”

“It means, foolish woman, that they are too busy fighting to realize that they have drifted over the woods, and that if one of the ‘flies goes down, Scrounge and company will have an excellent chance to salvage it. Up. Ichabod; you have to keep an eye on events while we march.” The imp made a rude noise and rolled to his feet.

“Boss, you know that nothing functional survives when those things burrow in from two hundred feet up,” Livia said. “On the other hand... You might

just have more luck than any three people are entitled to; look there.” She returned the glass to Scrounge and pointed.

Scrounge muttered something in Orcish that might have been, “By Sharborg’s rancid underclothes”; Livia decided she didn’t want to press for a translation. “Cob!” Scrounge shouted. “D’you see that ‘fly that is headed almost straight for us? I think the pilot is badly wounded, maybe unconscious; with luck, the fly will soft land. Help it, if you can. And then get back to us and guide us to it.”

Cob measured the distance with his eye and made a double handed rude gesture at Scrounge. “Certainly, oh most glorious Master who would never think of requiring me to perform supernatural feats of endurance and death-defying acts of valor. Or do I have you confused with my last master, the one I poisoned?”

Scrounge bristled. “Move it, imp, or I’ll have your heart for dinner,” he growled in Orcish. Cob didn’t understand Orcish, but Orcish conveys threats VERY well. Cob’s eyes got VERY large, Livia giggled, and Cob took off.

<<>>

Marsden Fehr concentrated VERY hard on breathing in and out. First one of the screechers had hit him, and then he had been tagged by one of the poisonous bloodsuckers. He had slammed both the lift and pitch controls forward, and then the world had gotten gray, and it wasn’t getting any better. He knew he was probably going to die from the poison, and he couldn’t do anything about that.

On the other hand, if the poison didn’t kill him, he had to get the dragonfly back under control or he would barrel into something at top speed, and that would kill him anyway. So he had to try to land. He pulled the pitch lever back to neutral, and eased the climb back to something that he hoped was

close to hover. He started to lean over far enough to make a guess of his altitude and realized that he would only fall off the 'fly. He eased back on the climb a little further until he was sure he was descending, and prayed very hard that he wasn't descending too fast.

There was suddenly something sharp at his throat. "You can't see squat, can you, Bunkie?" asked a strange, squeaky voice. "If I tell you how to find a clearing, you think you can ease this bug into it?"

Marsden nodded, fought back a wave of nausea, and then croaked out, "Yes."

"Let's get level, right? Increase the lift slowly until I say to stop. A little more... Good. Now some forward; not a lot, we don't have far to go. Now turn slowly right... that's it... straighten out... kill the forward... looks good, now lose the lift REAL slow... easy... easy... ten feet, flare or whatever... down." The 'flie's feet hit the ground; it wasn't level, but the legs compensated automatically. "Now shut it down." Marsden did as he was told, and the 'fly went quiet. "Good job, Bunkie. It's been a pleasure flying with you." And then something crashed into Marsden's head, and he fell to the ground.

<<>>

"Did you have to dump him so hard, Cob?" a woman's voice asked. "He was nearly dead already; he didn't need a concussion on top of it." Marsden tried to open his eyes and found he was blindfolded.

"How'd I know the Boss would want him alive?" Cob, owner of the squeaky voice that had guided Marsden to a landing, replied. "For all I knew I was going to get to eat him this evening."

"Right," the woman said. "Oh. You're awake. Don't try to talk; I'll tell you the basics, and then you can ask questions if you still need to. You have woken up, so you have probably beaten the poison; that's good. You can't see, because

when the idiot imp over there dumped you off of the dragonfly, you landed on your head, and the bandages are covering your eyes. You should be able to see when I change the bandage tomorrow. My boss wants you to be healthy, and after that, we'll see."

"My name is Marsden Fehr, Apprentice Aerial Crossbowman," Marsden replied.

"And my name is Livia, pleased to meet you," Livia answered. "I'm going to pretend I don't understand that name and rank garbage you just threw at me, and advise you to get MUCH smarter very fast, because that attitude will NOT play for my boss, and then the imp WILL get to eat your heart, or whatever seems appropriate. Right?"

Marsden thought about that. "I have rights as a prisoner of war."

Livia chuckled. "Yeah, well, Scrounge isn't fighting a war, he's just being Scrounge. As far as he's concerned, he saved our lives, and that means he owns us. It's an orc thing."

"But... He seems to trust you. Can't you escape?" Marsden asked.

Livia snorted. "Right. I run away, and I'm one little girl alone in the big bad wilderness with no idea of how to get home. This way I get food, clothing, and someone else fights the monsters. I could do worse."

"We could both escape," Marsden continued. "We could get away easily on the dragonfly..."

Livia chuckled. "You take a lot for granted, don't you? Rest. Heal. Learn the rules, then try to play the game. You've been as good as dead twice already today, the way I see it; why go for three?"

“It is the first duty of a prisoner to escape,” Marsden said primly.

“Yeah, right.” Livia held a cup to his lips. “Drink this; it will make you feel better.”

<<>>

There was no trace of light leaking through his bandage when Marsden woke again; he squirmed until he found a sharp bit of rock, and then began to work on his bonds as quietly as he could. Once his hands were free, he lifted the bandage away from his eyes and took a look around. One eye was still swollen shut, but the other worked well enough in the full moonlight. He gritted his teeth as he repositioned the bandage to keep it out of his good eye, and knew he had re-opened a wound in the process.

There were no sentries in sight, and the only sounds were those of the river some ten yards away. There was a mound of blankets that seemed to be occupied by two people in the woods just behind him, and no sign of anyone else, including the imp.

They were camped on the inside of a riverbend; the dragonfly was standing on the sand between him and the water. He considered trying to find a weapon, and decided that his best hope was to escape as quickly as possible. He scuttled to the dragonfly as quickly as he dared.

It didn't look like the idiot barbarians had hurt his treasured vehicle, and the fuel gauge showed that the Magestone in the 'fly's belly still held at least three quarters of its original charge. Marsden climbed into the saddle and looked around once more for sentries; he wondered if Scrounge, Livia, and the imp were the whole of their company. He opened a storage hatch and pulled out a large driver with a lanyard, and hung it from his wrist; it would give him an edge if the imp showed up.

Marsden took a deep, painful breath and concluded that a better plan was not going to occur to him. He turned the main power switch, waited a few seconds while the 'fly came to life, and then pushed the lift control to full. The wings started to beat, accelerating with every cycle until the legs began to straighten as the weight came off of them, and then they were airborne... and then the display went black and the 'fly settled back onto its legs as the energy of the wing flywheels was spent against the air. Marsden glanced at the fuel gauge and saw it was as black as the rest of the instruments.

"I saved your life twice," said a harsh voice with a hideous guttural accent. "And you repay my hospitality by attempting to steal my prized possession. Have you no shame? Have you no honor?" The speaker was an orc wrapped in a blanket who stood a few yards away; Livia stood beside him in a blanket of her own.

"It is the first duty of a prisoner to escape!" Marsden shouted. It sounded silly, and he knew it.

"You were not a prisoner." The orc continued. "You were a member of the household of Scrounge of Clan Grimm. A chattel member, but a member nonetheless. And now you have betrayed me. Derrick, get him down from there." A pair of huge hands grabbed Marsden from behind and set him on the ground but did not let him go; Marsden realized the hands were made of something very like ivory colored concrete. A bone golem? Marsden shivered.

Livia came closer. "Idiot," she hissed. "What did I tell you? Now give me that driver." Marsden hesitated, and the giant hands began to squeeze a bit; Marsden gave her the driver. Livia gave him his belt and the sheathed knife that hung from it in exchange; the knife was securely tied into its sheath.

"Since you have violated my hospitality, and wish to leave, you are free to do so," Scrounge said after Livia had returned to his side. "Your army is that way."

He pointed. "If you try to return, Derrick will tear you limb from limb. And after you have a short head start, these two," a skeleton archer and a zombie hound stepped out of the shadow of the wood, "will give you some incentive to hurry."

"Me, too, Boss," shrieked the imp as it landed on the saddle of the dragonfly. "I still think I should have gotten to eat the choice bits already."

Scrounge nodded. "So Ichabod will follow you as well. I would suggest you hurry." The giant hands went slack, and Marsden charged off into the woods.

<<>>

Livia waited until Cob returned and then waited still more for him to fall soundly asleep before she slid out of the covers as she had done every morning for so long; it felt strange to think that this was the last time. She loaded the dragonfly with fresh Magestone, and filled Marsden's pack with enough for another full load; Scrounge had always been good at keeping his metal golems fed. She climbed into the saddle of the 'fly, wrapped herself in a spare blanket, and waited for the first trace of light.

She stared at the controls in the moonlight and prayed to every god she could think of that she and Scrounge had come to the right conclusions as to their functions, and that the 'fly was as smart at stabilizing itself as they thought it was. The big rotary toggle was main power; the joystick was pitch and roll; this lever was lift, and this paddle was rotate.

The first light of false dawn appeared, and Livia turned the power switch with a "thunk" she heard over the river. She counted through ten very slow breaths, then shoved the lift lever all the way forward. The wings responded much faster than they had for Marsden with his exhausted Magestones, and the 'fly was above the treetops in seconds. She bumped the "rotate" paddle to the left, and the 'fly began to circle slowly to the right.

There was something moving in the forest, much closer than it should have been. Livia twisted in the saddle and considered the terrain. The battle had been there, there was a pass through the ridge there... The Necropolitans were doing a night march to get through that pass as soon as possible, and Scrounge's camp was dead in their path. If they didn't start moving NOW, they would be overrun...

She couldn't help doing a bit of experimenting with the other controls on the way down; she might never get a chance to pilot the 'fly again. She landed where she had started, except that she had turned the fly to face the firesite. She could see Scrounge sitting with his back to her, his shoulders wrapped in a blanket. She looked for Cob and found him still sleeping off his night's exertions. Livia shut down the dragonfly and ran to Scrounge's side.

"There's a company of Necropolitans, maybe more, on the way here. We have to pack up and get out NOW, or they'll overrun us," Livia told him.

Scrounge looked up incredulously. "You came back. You were free. Why did you come back?"

"Didn't you hear me? I said..."

"And why did that make a difference?" Scrounge seemed genuinely confused.

Livia took a deep breath. "Because I realized that if the only way to keep you alive was to stay with you, I was stuck." Scrounge thought about that, and began to grin. "But the dragonfly is MINE. Got it?"

Scrounge nodded. "As you wish. Partner."

January, 2002

# Flight School

Livia cursed herself for a fool. Scrounge was going to kill her, if the Atlantean morons on her tail didn't do it first. How could she have been so careless? She had been so caught up in watching the battle below, looking for good salvage opportunities, that she allowed herself to be marked as an outsider by these two dragonfly pilots, and had not even noticed them until they were almost in missile range.

It wasn't hopeless. Between being male, and their armor, and their field packs, the Atlanteans probably had twice the payload that she did. That meant that she should have the edge in performance, assuming the 'flies were the same to start with. She could only hope that they were.

Her first move was to run the wingbeat and wing chord to maximum, and try to get some distance and some altitude. She crouched low over the 'fly, both to make a smaller target and to cut wind resistance.

After a while, she had not been shot at, so she sat up and took a look back; the Atlanteans were falling behind, and she was gaining altitude on them, but they were still too close. She couldn't take the risk of them reporting that a non-Atlantean had captured one of their dragonflies, and that meant she couldn't just lose them; she had to kill them. It almost made her wish she had a weapon.

She had been watching the Atlanteans fly for years, and had really started

to pay attention since Scrounge decided he wanted to capture a dragonfly. And she had REALLY paid attention since they had gotten one, and she had become the primary pilot. The Atlanteans pretty much rode the 'flies like they were horses, or maybe horses hung from cranes; they seemed to have no imagination at all. But that was the Atlanteans all over; brilliant engineers, mediocre generals, and soldiers that were just a notch or two smarter than the golems they fought alongside.

The Atlanteans had only been flying for a couple of generations, and still hadn't figured out most of the subtleties. The Draconum, on the other hand, had been flying for centuries, and had forgotten more about flying than the Atlanteans knew. Of course, the Atlanteans would never admit that; they were the master race.

As for herself, Scrounge had come up with a Draconum book on aerobatics and aerial combat from somewhere (Who knew how Scrounge got his claws on anything? He was Scrounge. After two years, that was still the best answer she had.), and she had tried every trick in it, once she and Scrounge had discussed how it would translate from a Draconum to a dragonfly. This might just be fun.

Livia judged that they had wandered far enough from the battlefield, and that she had enough altitude for her first gambit. She eased back on the chord and pushed the nose down a bit until the Atlanteans were level with her, then leveled off. She waited for them to catch up a bit; she didn't want to be in missile range, but she wanted them close enough that they tried to follow her move for move.

Now. Maximum chord, beat to zero; the 'fly lurched upward and forward as the air drained all of the energy out of the wing flywheels, then Livia pointed the nose down and the 'fly went into a steep dive. Livia leaned backward until the top of her head touched the flies tail; it looked silly, but it was the easiest way to look straight back. She was pleased to see that both of her pursuers

## FLIGHT SCHOOL

were still running at full beat; a 'fly with still wings could out dive a 'fly under power by five to four, but no one had ever bothered to tell them that. She trimmed her 'fly to draw them in closer, and then...

Nose straight into the greenery, half roll, nose up, level out, then look back and assess damage. Livia grinned; one of the Atlantean 'flies was several hundred feet below her, trying to recover from being inverted under power; its pilot was lower still, tumbling toward a very unpleasant impact. The other 'fly was heading the opposite way at high speed; its pilot had refused the vertical dive. Livia took off after him at full speed.

This was going to make things a little more difficult. If she couldn't goad the fool into something stupid, she was going to have to find another way to take him out. And he still had... he had been second in line, that was the lightning gun. Oh, joy.

The Atlantean turned toward the battlefield, apparently intending to make his report, then saw Livia bearing down on him and turned to intercept. Livia saw him turn, and turned just a bit to make sure their courses didn't intersect. She did NOT want to go head to head with him, not when he was armed and she wasn't.

They were close, now. Livia had kept turning slightly away from the intercept point, so that now the Atlantean was tailing her again. She went through another long climb, then stilled the wings and led the Atlantean on a series of falling leaf banks while he closed on her. When she decided he was close enough, she held a left bank a little longer than he expected, and then jerked the control to the left and rolled out..

Livia didn't wait to stabilize on the level; she made a decent guess and then ran in full beat and full chord and charged straight for the other 'fly. The Atlantean saw her coming and started to both turn his 'fly and reach for his weapon, but he was slow on both; Livia came in over his 'fly's wings and hit

## PLAIN BROWN WRAPPER

him square in the chest with the nose of her 'fly. The impact knocked him out of his saddle, and he spent his last moments sprawled over the nose of Livia's 'fly, groping feebly for a handhold and looking at the strange woman who had just killed him. His eyes went dim, and he slid out of Livia's sight.

Livia stabilized her 'fly, then looked around for the Atlantean's craft. It was still following its last command, climbing in a slow spiral. Livia turn to approach it, and dug the tow cable out of a storage bin. As she flew up beneath the unmanned fly to attach the cable, she saw that the lighting gun was still in its scabbard.

Livia grinned. Maybe Scrounge wouldn't kill her, after all.

March, 2002

## Sister Sacrifice

The Nightblade broke cover and charged into Sela; Sela caught her on sword's point, but the woman ignored the damage, trapped Sela's blade, and then cut Sela in return. Sela's world went gray, and she stumbled, but as she fell she saw...

"Jorie?" Sela forced out. "Is that you?"

The Nightblade's eyes narrowed to slits, and then went wide. "Sela?" she said; her voice was an odd, guttural croak; Jorie's voice had always been beautifully musical. "Little sister?" The Nightblade closed her eyes tightly and shook her head; the muscles of her jaw worked. The knife in her right hand began to dance and spin around her hand. "Jorie," she said at last. "Yes, I was Jorie." The knife kept dancing.

"Jorie, what happened to you? You were so dedicated..."

The Nightblade smiled, sheathed her knife, and rolled down the top of her left boot; a single scar circled the leg just above her knee. "When you lose," she rasped, "You spend a night as rape-bait for the Stallkers and the Seethers. If you don't TRY to fight, you spend a week." She disconnected the strap that ran from her breast bone to her navel, and revealed a collection of ladder tracked scars. "Two disembowelments." She flipped a latch that let her separate her breast cups, and revealed a mass of scar tissue on her breastbone. "I've had steel in my heart three times." She reached to the back of her neck and

released her dog collar. “But this,” she said as she pulled the dog collar away, “Is the one that took my voice.” There was a scar that circled her neck.

Sela stared in horror while the Nightblade readjusted her clothing, then used the dog collar to hang Sela’s sword from her own belt. When she was done, she drew her knife and it began to dance again. “You have a choice, ‘Little Sister,’” she croaked. “You can swear to me that you will go home and never set foot on another battlefield...” The knife suddenly stopped dancing, and Sela could feel its point against her throat. “...Or you can come ‘home’ with me.” The knife point moved, and Sela knew that it was drawing blood.

“I swear by the Goddess that I will forsake war and never walk a battle field again.”

“Good,” the Nightblade croaked. She helped Sela to her feet. “Now go.” The Nightblade turned Sela roughly to face the Elementalist camp, and gave her a shove; when Sela regained her balance and looked back, she was gone.

Sela walked back to camp as quickly as her wounds would allow; she dropped her hand to steady her empty scabbard, and found that it wasn’t empty; the Nightblade’s dancing dagger had been forced into the sheath. Sela stopped for breath, leaned against a tree, and examined the knife. Engraved on the base of the blade, next to the guard, was the name, “Jorie”. Sela clutched the knife to her chest, sobbed once, and continued walking.

March, 2002

## About “The Switchblade Papers”

“Star Trek” went off the air in 1969, and was GONE for ten years. It was missed. These days, with more than 500 hours of “Star Trek” material available in one form or another, it is rather hard to imagine just how long that dry spell was, particularly the eight years until “Star Wars” got Hollywood thinking that there might actually be money in SF again.

“Star Trek” had originally been produced by Desilu studios, and they had licensed a number of products; when the rights to the series were sold to Paramount in 1979, all of those licenses were summarily canceled. One of the Desilu licensed products was a miniature figure line, and accompanying RPG, produced by the now-defunct Heritage Miniatures.

I flew out to San Francisco in February of 1979 to visit my friend Steve Lortz, and to attend a gaming convention. Steve ran a game of the Heritage Star Trek, and swindled us a couple of times. He had been showing off his freshly painted “Star Trek” figures, including a group of Klingons, and had gotten us thinking in those terms, and then he threw a traditional Bug Eyed Monster at us (a scenario expressly forbidden in the Star Trek series, and all subsequent Star Trek material), and then...

I am not sure just when I started to fictionalize those games; probably not until I got a functional word processor in 1987. Somewhere along the line, prompted by a thorough reading of the FASA “Star Trek” gaming material (which included a great deal of information from John M. Ford’s Klingon

novel, “The Final Reflection”) I started to tell the story, and it took off in another direction, and bogged down, and then I started again, and THAT bogged down, and then in February 1990 I finished both stories, finally accomplishing the original goal with “Gordian Klingons”. It is interesting to note that the story, as completed, is not REALLY a retelling of the gaming session at all, it just happened to incorporate that story in making its own quite different (and fairly horrific) point.

I had played Spock (rather badly) in the original game; I developed Slark from the FASA material. He is probably as close to a personal avatar as any character I have ever written, which is not to say he is all THAT close...

It should be noted that at the time these stories were completed, I had seen something like half of one episode of TNG; they are set in the universe of Classic Trek, as expanded by the FASA material, and modified by my own perceptions of how things ought to be.

One way or another, I am inclined to think that Gene Roddenberry turns over in his grave every time someone reads one of these stories, and I am content with that; Roddenberry gave a great deal to SF culture, but he also did some STRANGE things to it...

## Shakedown Cruise

The intercom shrilled its alert, and Ginn whistled the three note response code and barked, “Carlsbad,” without looking up from her terminal.

“What are you still doing in your room, Carlsbad?” asked Lieutenant Guilbrandtsen’s voice. “The last shuttle dirtside leaves in ten minutes; you should be packed and waiting.”

Ginn resisted an impulse to sigh. “I’m not going down, Gully. I thought I’d take advantage of the quiet and get a little ahead on my school work.”

“You thought...” There was a pause; Gully did sigh, and the intercom transmitted it clearly. “Guilbrandtsen out.”

That was enough to make Ginn look up and glare at the intercom. She rested her head on her knuckles and closed her eyes. Her litany of curses was beginning to sound like a prayer; she ran through it quickly, mentally reciting choice words about Star Fleet Command, the Academy and its staff, and most of all the Federation Star Ship Switchblade.

She slumped back in her chair and wondered what had gone wrong. She had done well at the Academy. She should have gotten a six-month cadet berth on a cruiser or a dreadnought, had a chance to dazzle her commanding officer, and received her regular commission with an “Exemplary Cadet Performance” citation.

But it hadn't happened that way. For some bizarre reason, the vacuum-skulls at the Academy had singled her out for two years in Purgatory aboard an ERPL. She was going to be a year and a half behind her Academy classmates going into her specialty school; she wasn't going to have a chance to hobnob with the up and coming mid-grade officers who were the key to good future assignments; she was off the fast track, and her career was out the airlock.

The door buzzer sounded; Ginn whistled an acknowledgement and the door opened. Lieutenant Guilbrandtsen strode in, wearing a civilian jumpsuit that managed to be sexy even on her too-thin frame. Gully sat on the edge of Ginn's desk, crossed her arms, and stared at Ginn unsympathetically.

"I take it this isn't a social call, Lieutenant?" Ginn asked.

"Beats me," Guilbrandtsen answered humorlessly. "One of my various titles is Morale Officer, and from that perspective, you are a pain in the ass. Why aren't you going dirtside?"

"I told you, I wanted to get some of my school work done."

"That isn't due 'till you get back to the Academy, Carlsbad. And unless you're an idiot— which you may be, I'm not sure yet— it won't matter three figs by then. The last time I checked, you already had three-fourths of your work done, and we've only been out for eleven weeks. Why aren't you going dirtside?"

"I don't feel like it, Gully. Is that a crime?"

Gully shook her head. "No. It's just stupid. This is the last completely Federation-friendly port we're going to see in over a year. Once we get on-station, you won't be allowed off ship in civies, or unarmed. This is the last chance you'll have in a long time to really let your hair down, and you're going to ignore it. That's stupid."

"I'm not the tourist type, Gully. And I don't really feel like touring the bars with a bunch of..." Ginn struggled to find an alternative to her first choice of words.

"Losers?"

"I didn't say that."

"You didn't have to. You've got a serious attitude problem, Carlsbad, and if you don't do something about it, you're going to waste one of the best opportunities you've ever had."

"This tin can?"

Gully didn't quite snarl. "There are, including a certain supernumerary officer-puppy, twenty-four persons on this ship. Do you know how many of them didn't volunteer for ERPL duty?" She paused for effect, then continued before Ginny could answer. "One supernumerary officer-puppy. Think you might be missing some- thing?"

"You requested this duty?"

"Damn straight. Right out of Nursing school. I had the grades to pick my ticket, and I got lucky and drew Switchblade."

"Was that before or after you fell in love with the Captain?"

Gully's eyes bulged, then she laughed. "I didn't meet the Skipper until the day I first came on board. And I'm not in love with him by any definition I've ever heard. He's my good friend, and my Captain, and I respect the hell out of him, but..." She shrugged. "The first time I met him, as soon as we had finished introductions, he gave me his best Vulcan deadpan and asked if I was aware that my duties as Morale Officer included making sure that the

Captain didn't get squirrely from sexual frustration. And then he grinned. I said that that sounded reasonable, and I'd see what I could arrange. I took the path of least resistance, and it still seems reasonable.

"But I wanted ERPL duty long before that. I was eighty-sixth percentile at the Academy— good enough for med school, and I wanted medicine. But I also wanted to space, and I wasn't likely to do well enough to get a shipboard berth. 80% of Star Fleet's doctors are at starbases or spacestations, and I wasn't likely to come out of med school at better than fiftieth percentile. I went for nursing and graduated at ninety-sixth, which let me pick my duty, and I went ERPL.

"Out here I'm Senior Medical Officer, I have almost no administrative garbage to put up with, and I get to write my own rules. I do more surgery than most GP's, because it's me or nothing. When I'm in Sick Bay, nobody argues with me, nobody quotes regs at me, and everybody loves me. I'm Doc Gully, and I've been reigning medical authority for an entire planet dozens of times.

"And I stand bridge watches. How many Star Fleet officers never get to sit in the Worry Seat in their entire careers? I decided that I wanted medicine more than I wanted to fly— but I still want to fly. You have no idea what it feels like the first time the Skipper says, 'Mister Guilbrandtsen, you have the conn,' and walks off the bridge.

"And if I ever get tired of this... I can go to med school any time I want. I have so many physician equivalent hours that they can't turn me down. If I want to go into administration, I go right to the top of the list: I've been a Senior M.O., and I've got conn time. If I decide to chuck medicine and go to nav school— no problem: guaranteed admission, one tour as a first officer and I've got my own ship inside of five years.

"It's like that for all of us, Carls... Ginn. These 'losers' could build this bucket from parts while under fire. They can teach you twice as much as you learned

at the Academy in half the time, and they'll be glad to do it— because there's no knowing when your knowing something extra will save their lives."

Gully's communicator chirped, and she acknowledged it, then stepped to the intercom. "Guilbrandtsen. What now?"

"Bus's leavin', Gully. You comin', or should we sell your luggage?"

"On my way." She turned to Ginn. "So you're staying. Fine. But spend some time on mental hygiene, okay? I'll talk to you when I get back." Ginny nodded noncommittally; Gully turned back to the intercom and punched out another code.

"Slark," came the Skipper's voice.

"Gully. Carlsbad's staying up. You might consider the 'House of York'."

"Already under discussion. Have fun, Sal."

"Guilbrandtsen out." She stepped to the door and turned, threw Ginn a mocking salute, and left.

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Three hours later the power failed. Ginn went through the terminal shut down routine she had learned in grade school reflexively, then sat back to wonder what was going on. The amber backup light had come on; the gravity was obviously functioning, and a moment's concentration assured her that the ventilators were still working. She tried the intercom, found it was dead, and tried the door.

The corridor was awash with the blood red of the its emergency lights; Ginn shuddered, and scolded herself for thinking in those terms. This was not

serious, just a minor electrical failure— which she didn't know how to fix. Suppose it was progressive? How long until the ventilators shut down? Who else was on board and WHERE IN GODS'S NAME WERE THEY?

The common room was also bathed in red, except... There were candles burning at one end of the mess table. Candles. Silver candlesticks. Ship's best china. Two place settings, with a rose lying on the plate across the table. Ginn circled the table for a closer look.

It was a white silk rose, and beneath it was a card. Even in the dim light she could see that it said, in large dark letters, "Virginia Carlsbad". She picked up the card.

"Virginia Carlsbad, Cadet, Star Fleet Extended Range Patrol Vessel, Light, Switchblade." Ginny opened the card. It said, "Sit down, Cadet. This is a Direct Order. Slark." Ginn sat down.

She put the card on the bench beside her, and examined the rose. It was beautifully crafted, and deliciously scented. She wondered where it had been made.

The Captain appeared out of the gloom carrying a large tray on one hand. He caught Ginn's eye and put his other finger to his lips to indicate silence. Ginn clutched the rose and sat up straight.

The Captain set the tray on the table and uncovered it to reveal a more elaborate meal than any Ginn had had since joining Star Fleet. The Captain produced a bottle of wine, poured for each of them, took his seat across from Ginn, and raised his glass. Ginn followed his example.

"Comradeship," the Captain said.

"Obedience," Ginn answered, and the Captain laughed. They drank their

toast. “Begging the Captain’s pardon...”

“Eat your dinner, Cadet. And call me Skipper, or Slark if you must.”

“Begging the Captain’s pardon, but are you coming on to me?”

“Cadet... Carlsbad...” Slark sighed. “May I call you Ginn?”

“If you insist, Captain.”

“I don’t insist. I want your permission.”

“Certainly, Cap... Sir.”

Slark shook his head and chuckled. “What color is the rose, Ginn?”

“White. But if it’s the only rose on board, white is better than nothing.”

Slark’s face settled into a typically Vulcan expressionless mask. “You’re creative. Not logical, but creative. Given that the source of the rose has a tendency to give away flowers, and that he has recently had ninety days on Terra to replenish his personal stores, is it not logical that he would have access to whatever variety of rose he required?”

Ginn blinked. “I suppose so.”

“Unless, of course, I’m lying.” Slark’s face shattered into a broad grin.

“How do you do that? One minute you’re the perfect Vulcan, and the next you’re a Marine with pointy ears.”

“The advantages of a Vulcan education. One of the many compromises my parents made regarding me was that I live with my mother, and attend the

Vulcan Embassy school. I learned early how to act and think like a Vulcan without sacrificing myself in the process. I've been told that if I ever visit Vulcan I'll probably be sent to a mental hospital. In their eyes, I'm a dangerous lunatic, a threat to their social order. If I was ever stranded on the planet, they'd probably be right. Your turn to talk; I want to eat."

"I don't have much to say; most of my mind is taken up with questions I can't answer."

"So tell me your questions."

"What am I doing on Switchblade? Do I want to be here? How did I end up with this assignment? Do I really believe you aren't making a pass at me? If so, why am I sort of disappointed? How many of the stories I've heard about you are true? Is it possible to reconcile the keeping of political prisoners with the Federation Charter?"

Slark laughed. "That sounds like an Academy essay if I've ever heard one."

"It is. I have to argue both sides of the issue convincingly."

"Any thoughts on how to do it?"

"Only on the negative side. The right to self determination, freedom of speech, things like that. I have no idea of how to justify imprisoning someone for his beliefs. I grew up believing there was no such thing."

Slark stared at her across the top of his wine glass. "How about imprisoning someone for his knowledge?"

"What?"

"Suppose a man stumbled onto a secret that would cause a war if he released

it to the public, and he was determined to do just that?”

“Freedom of speech?”

“Maybe. Is one man’s freedom of speech worth a hundred thousand innocent lives?”

“That’s an even nastier question than the one I started with.”

“Just a clearer statement of it. Try this one: Does the Federation keep political prisoners?”

“Of course... not. I don’t think I like that question very much.”

“I don’t either, and I know the answer. Let’s table that until after dinner.”

“What do you mean you know the answer? You can’t unless...”

“After dinner, Cadet.”

“Yes, Sir.”

They ate in silence for several minutes. Ginn restarted the conversation by asking, “Why aren’t you a vegetarian?”

Slark cocked an eyebrow. “Should I be?”

“You’re a Vulcan.”

“I’m an H-V cross. Which means that there isn’t enough statistical data to make any meaningful predictions. Beyond a tendency to conspicuous ears.”

Ginn stared at him. She was suddenly aware that the questions she wanted

to ask were too personal to ask anyone, much less her commanding officer.

“Excuse me, I didn’t mean...”

Slark grinned. “No offense taken, Ginn. I’m used to it, and you don’t get to be King of the Tin Can if you’ve got thin skin.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“There’s a book in my cabin that a friend of mine wrote, a PhD thesis in genetics. It includes case studies on seventeen of us. With one exception, we inherit our hemoglobin type from our mothers, and beyond that it’s up for grabs. My mother was human and I have iron-based blood, primarily human architecture, primarily Vulcan muscle tissue, and a brain that gives scanners fits— almost a perfect cross.”

“Hemoglobin is sex-linked?”

“Only mechanically. Seems that neither human nor Vulcan placentas can deal with copper-based blood on one side and iron- based on the other. Conceptions occur, but they miscarry early.”

“But there was an exception?”

“Isn’t technology wonderful?”

Ginn stared. “Excuse me?”

“His father was a wealthy Vulcan politician, and issued a ‘spare no expense’ order. Vulcan technology can do some pretty amazing things. He pulled the same sort of stunt with regard to keeping the girl alive— the last I heard, she was over one thirty and still going. Fragile as hell, though.”

“He— the father— doesn’t sound like any Vulcan I’ve ever met.”

“He isn’t. He’s a romantic— the only Vulcan male to ever legally marry a human female that I know of— and considered benignly crazy by the Vulcans. They tolerate him because he’s brilliant, and his madness is functional— he enjoys negotiating with humans.”

“What happened to the son?”

“He became a starship captain. Don’t we all?”

Ginn laughed. “Did you just make all of that up?”

Slark shook his head. “Afraid not.”

Ginn smiled sheepishly. “Time to change the subject?”

Slark shrugged. “Your choice. I can run this one on autopilot, and I might have to work on the next one.”

“If you’re sure... Why do H-V crosses happen at all? The idea of interbreeding with humans seems so far out of the Vulcan character.”

“Because humans will mate with anything that holds still for it, and if offspring are possible, sooner or later they will occur.”

“That’s nasty.”

Slark shrugged. “It’s honest. And the proper inflection on that is ‘We awful humans’, not ‘Those awful humans’. Though I try to rise above the herd.”

“It’s still not very flattering.”

“It wasn’t meant to be. It is well documented that humans of both sexes find pointed ears extremely sexy— a fact for which I have occasionally been

grateful— and Vulcans are notoriously bad at blending into human society. Between lack of interest and arrogance, they tend to get into some rather amazing situations— and some of those produce offspring.”

Ginn chuckled. “Is this where you tell me your story?”

“You’ve been dying to hear it.”

“Yes. If you don’t mind.”

“It’s actually another lecture on the hazards of command, with a mild pornographic twist.”

“You’re telling me this is a training lecture?”

“Sort of. Would you have sex with a man you despised if it was the only way to save his life?”

“You’re right, this is a training exercise. Umm. ‘Insufficient data?’”

“What more do you need?”

“‘Despise’ is a broad term. Am I saving him for the gallows?”

Slark laughed. “Well answered! All right, three situations, all dealing with a comrade-in-arms who is disagreeable in the extreme, but not spiteful or malicious: one, for his sake as a fellow sentient; two, for his sake as someone for whose life you are responsible; three, when the survival of your entire command depended on his survival.”

“Yes to all three, with progressively decreasing hesitation. But don’t test me on it.”

Slark nodded. “My mother did get tested on it— her situation was somewhere between number two and number three— and she ended up with me. She was Senior Medical Officer for a shipwreck. Local stellar conditions made sub-space communication impossible, and the only hope of rescue was to build a robot ship from the wreck, send it out of the interference zone, and have it transmit a message back to Star Fleet.

“The only person who had the knowledge to make it work was the Senior Engineering Officer, a universally disliked Vulcan with a marked dislike for humans. And he got a bad dose of mating drive, which he tried to hide— he just withdrew into himself and prepared to die.

“Mother diagnosed the situation, and wasn’t happy about it. She asked for volunteers, but got no takers. She didn’t feel she could order someone else to have sex with the old bastard, and since there was a severe contraceptive shortage, and since she was over forty and of questionable fertility, she drew the duty himself. They chained the old monster down, and mother administered the cure at regular intervals until his vital signs turned around.

“There’s a joke in H-V circles that the probability of a given union being fertile is equal to one minus your best guess. My mother never thought that was very funny. Star Fleet gave her a full-and-a-half disability pension for ‘impairment acquired in the line of duty’, and my father chipped in all of his accumulated back pay from the time they were stranded, and most of his savings, before my mother even thought about seeing a lawyer.

“I was five years old when they rescued us. I had never been in an enclosed space before they loaded me onto the shuttle. I had been told over and over about starships, but I didn’t believe any of it. And that’s stayed with me. I can disassemble and rebuild any system on this ship without a manual, but it’s still magic.”

“You really love it out here, don’t you?”

“I’m alive out here. I learned to love star ships, but I never did learn to stand cities. I grew up on a first name basis with everyone within a parsec; I like it that way.”

Ginn chuckled. “I guess that makes sense. Would you pass up a promotion to stay out here?”

“I already have. I’m the highest ranking, most senior ERPL captain in the fleet. And I intend to stay here.”

“Won’t you run into the maximum time-in-rank restrictions?”

Slark shook his head. “I’m a vulcan, remember? As long as I pass my physicals and make my efficiency quotas, I’m exempt.”

“That’s handy.”

Slark smiled. “Almost as handy as having pointed ears.”

Ginn smiled back and yawned enormously. “Excuse me! I don’t know where that came from. I...” She stopped and stared as one of the candles guttered and went out for no good reason. “Is it getting a bit... close in here, Sir?”

“Probably. The ventilators went out about the time I brought out dinner.”

“What!”

“The power’s down. Life support cut out about ten minutes after the lights went down— about forty minutes ago.”

“Aren’t you going to do something? Aren’t there supposed to be alarms?” Ginn felt the first hint of panic rushing up behind her; she took a deep breath and forced herself to be calm. She looked at Slark, and realized he was studying

her with the least hint of a smile. “This is a test, isn’t it? You shut the power down deliberately.” Slark nodded. “So what am I supposed to do?”

“Solve the problem.”

“I don’t even know what the problem is.”

Slark rolled his eyes. “You have an electrical problem which has affected several ship’s systems, most notably life support. If you fail to correct the situation, you will eventually lose consciousness, and, failing outside intervention, die. I intend to provide that intervention, but accidents DO happen.”

“But if I pass out..”

“I’ve seen your med charts. Given the differences in our physiology and conditioning, I should have no trouble affecting repairs after you’re incoherent. It will take less than ten minutes and no particular concentration to fix— if you know exactly what to do.”

“Which I don’t.”

“There is that, yes.”

Ginn glared at him and stalked off toward the engineering section, which was sealed. The boat deck was also sealed, and all of the emergency vacc suit stations were empty. “What happened to the vacc suits?”

“They’re on the boat deck. I had a very busy afternoon.”

Ginn clenched her teeth and said nothing. She opened and inspected the three damage control stations which were not behind locked hatches, but could find nothing wrong. “Now what?”

“I would imagine you should try the secondary stations. There are four of them within reach.”

“If I knew where they were.”

“If you knew where they were. You might try locating them on the ship’s plan.”

“If I could call one up on the computer, or if I could get into engineering to look at the hardcopy.”

“You do seem to have a problem.”

“Yes. I don’t suppose you’d be willing to tell me what to do if I asked you?”

“I was wondering when you’d think of that. Nice try, but no, I won’t tell you.”

“Can I admit that I’ve had a bad attitude and that I don’t know the ship nearly as well as I should and call it quits?”

“Only if you accompany the request with your resignation from Star Fleet.”

Ginn glared at him. “No thank you.”

They returned to the common room. The air was noticeably staler than it had been. Ginn realized that both candles were still burning. “Begging the Captain’s pardon, but was it really necessary to relight the candles?”

“I only relit one. You never bothered to extinguish the other.”

Ginn growled and quenched both candles, then looked around the room, wondering what she should do next. The galley door was shut; Slark had closed it behind him manually when he brought in the wine. Ginn strode

to the door, hit the manual release, and pushed it open. Ten more candles were standing at intervals around the counter, merrily burning up her oxygen. “You son-of-a-bitch... Sir.” Ginn swallowed hard; she heard Slark chuckle behind her.

As she extinguished the candles Ginn reviewed the situation. She wasn’t doing well, she knew that. She didn’t have the background to solve the problem directly, and Slark had known that in advance. She had done a miserable job of damage control, as evidenced by the candles in the galley. It seemed that her only recourse was to flail about until the test was called for hypoxia.

And yet... Would Slark have set this up just to humiliate her? He had certainly made his point; she was going to have all of the troubleshooting stations memorized to the last switch before the crew came up from dirtside. But what was the point of continuing the test? It wasn’t reasonable to expect her to solve the problem by luck, and that was all she had left. Or was it? She wasn’t going to resign, and she wasn’t going solve the problem... How to get Slark to turn the air back on before she passed out?

Ginn dashed down the corridor to the armory. She grabbed a hand phaser, slapped in a power pack and checked the gauge, then dialed in full power. She stepped back into the corridor just in time to see Slark amble around a corner, following her.

Ginn leveled the phaser. “Freeze! ...Sir!” Slark obeyed, with the exception of one eyebrow. “Remove your tunic, Sir— very, very slowly, and then put your hands on top of your head.” Slark complied. “Now, leave one hand up and drop the phaser and the communicator— slowly, very slowly.”

“What’s the setting on that phaser, Cadet?”

“Full, Sir. I’m dead if you lay your hands on me, and I can’t count on being able to stun you quickly enough.”

“Very good. Carry on, Mister Carlsbad.”

“About those ventilators, Sir.”

“Yes?”

“You said you could have them on in ten minutes. I am going to blow your head off if they aren’t running in fifteen.”

Slark smiled. “Very good, Mister Carlsbad.”

<<>>

Eight minutes later Ginn heard the hum of the ventilators coming to life, and breathed a sigh of relief. Thirty seconds later, the lights returned to normal. Which only left one small problem.

“You are aware that mutiny is a capital offense, aren’t you, Mister Carlsbad?”

“I was hoping to excuse myself with the fact that you were unnecessarily endangering your command, and therefore incompetent.”

“An interesting thought. Are you willing to put the phaser down and discuss the matter?”

“Not just yet, Sir. I want a believable assurance that I passed the test.”

“And what would that consist of?”

“I was hoping you might have ideas on that score, Sir.”

Slark nodded and pounced. Ginn triggered the phaser, which emitted an end-of-the-world whine, and then she was lying on her back with Slark on top of her.

“I believe you just killed your commanding officer, Mister Carlsbad. How do you feel about that?”

“Relieved and overwhelmingly stupid, Sir.”

“As you say.” Slark snapped to his feet, then helped Ginn up. He scooped the phaser from the floor, slapped the takedown latches, and dropped the pieces on the table. “Well, Mister Carlsbad?”

“There’s no focuser. You pulled the focusing crystal from every phaser in the armory?”

“And put them with the vacc suits...”

“..On the boat deck. Whence I shall no doubt recover them..”

“..And reassemble and realign the phasers, and run basic diagnostics on all of the vacc suits, yes. After which you will report to my quarters for your evaluation.”

“Yes, Sir! And Captain?”

“Yes, Mister Carlsbad?”

“Thank you for a wonderful dinner, Sir.”

“And you, Ginn.”

<<>>

Ginn pushed the annunciator beside Slark’s door with unaccustomed timidity. The door slid open to reveal Slark seated at a table, bent over a sketch pad. He didn’t quite look up as he indicated that Ginn should take the seat opposite

him.

“Well, Cadet?”

“Sir?”

“What did you think of your performance this evening?”

“It was disappointing, Sir. I demonstrated a frightening ignorance of ship’s systems, my detailing was lousy, and my ultimate solution was foolhardy and unnecessarily dangerous.”

“Have you devised an alternative?”

“Not with the information I had at the time, no.”

“Hmmm. What would you say was the principal topic of the exercise?”

“Technical proficiency?”

“I knew you didn’t have that.”

“Resource allocation?”

“Something like that. How do you think you did on those terms?”

“Pretty damn well, Sir.”

“I’m inclined to agree. The initial inventory was rocky, but once you arrived at a solution, your execution was excellent. And all of that on an overfull stomach, a bottle of wine, and low oxygen. At any rate, I’m putting you in for an ‘Exemplary Performance’ citation, with immediate promotion to Ensign.” He pulled a sheet out from under his pad. “This is a request for transport

and soonest reassignment to a specialty school. Constellation is in port and Earthbound; you can be on your way home by the time Switchblade leaves orbit, if you'd like."

Ginn took the form and looked it over, then looked up to meet Slark's eyes. "I would have sold my soul for this yesterday." Slark nodded. "But I didn't have it then, did I? May I keep this, Sir? As a souvenir?" Again Slark nodded. "Begging the Captain's pardon, but Constellation is a passenger liner. I'm an ERPL."

Slark grinned. "No. But you will be. Welcome aboard, Ensign."

"Good to be here, S... Skipper."

"Glad to have you. Dismissed."

<<>>

"They're saying that we shouldn't be sending our best and brightest to the fringes of the galaxy to be shot at and kidnapped and killed; that the needs of commerce and bureaucracy come before the needs of Star Fleet. But there is an education to be had in the fringes that cannot be gotten elsewhere at any price, and I say that a man who has not seen a fellow sentient through the sights of a live weapon, and has not felt the eyes of a fellow sentient watching him with deadly intent— a man who has not looked both into and out of the eyes of Death— is too ignorant of the meaning of life to lead a parade of beggars."

Senator James T. Kirk

Address to the Graduating Class  
Star Fleet Academy, 2307

February, 1990

## Gordian Klingons

“Well, Skipper? Don’t you have an opinion?” DeBerg asked. DeBerg was the chief engineer, and had been on the Switchblade longer than anyone but the Captain himself.

Slark stared at DeBerg, tossed down the last swallow of his beer, and set the metal mug on the table. He put his hand over the top of the mug and slowly and deliberately crushed it closed— an impressive feat of strength, even for a vulcan. “No,” he said quietly. “I don’t have an opinion.”

There was stunned silence around the table. Slark’s reaction was out of all proportion to the situation. They had been dismissed— from a social gathering, on leave in a friendly port.

“A word with you, Sir?” Sally Guilbrandtsen’s voice had an unwonted edge. Slark looked at her coldly. “Officially, Sir.” Gully was the senior medical officer, as well as Slark’s chief confidant and occasional lover.

“Out with it, Lieutenant,” Slark rumbled.

Gully looked around the table. “In private, Sir.”

“I’m off duty. See me in the morning.”

Gully ran her eyes over her tablemates a second time and shrugged. “You

pointy eared sonovabitch,” she hissed. “You have no right to squelch someone else’s party because you have feelings about the Quilsein trial that you don’t want to talk about.”

Slark stared at her expressionlessly. He recovered his mug from the table and began to pry its mouth back open; the metal cracked and he tore the mug in half. He looked down at the fragments in surprise. “No, I don’t have an opinion. I know what’s going to happen, and it makes me wish I was a Klingon.”

There was an assortment of surprised exclamations from Slark’s tablemates; Gully remained silent. When the murmurs had died down, she said, “Drop the other shoe, Captain.”

“Is that an order, Lieutenant?”

“As ship’s morale officer, yes.”

Slark chuckled. “Why not? Quilsein was involved in espionage operations in Klingon space in violation of treaty, and was discovered by a newsman who was a Federation citizen. Quilsein incarcerated the reporter and transported him back to Federation space against his will. The newsman raised holy hell, and Quilsein was brought up on charges. And you wonder what’s going to happen? He’s going to be sacked, of course. And he’s going to do some very hard time. No question.”

“What about the reporter’s claim that Quilsein was operating under direct Star Fleet orders before he was discovered?”

“They’re true. But Quilsein is going to take the fall, because he’s a good little soldier and he knows he deserves to go to prison for failing such an important mission.”

“Begging the Captain’s pardon, but that’s nuts.”

Slark chuckled. “Of course. But tell me, Mister Clark, what you would have done in Quilsein’s place.”

“I would have never been in that situation.”

“Really? You’re that certain that you would never be called on to participate in a covert operation?”

Clark looked troubled. “No... I don’t know, sir.”

“No, you don’t. Quilsein accepted a mission he was not qualified for, and didn’t have the stomach to execute it properly. He failed, and command failed by giving him the mission. This entire trial is just public relations.”

“What did he do wrong, if he was just following orders?”

Slark smiled coldly. “Don’t you know?” He looked around the table; DeBerg and Guilbrandtsen met his gaze knowingly, while the more junior officers were openly curious. “You have in your custody a Federation Citizen who possesses knowledge which is detrimental to Star Fleet security, and who can be counted on to disseminate that knowledge. What do you do? Mister Ishima?”

Corrie Ishima choked on her beer. She was a junior engineer’s mate and a paramedic who made a point of being too busy to worry about policy. “Well... the most efficient solution...”

“Out with it, Ensign.”

“I don’t know, Sir. I think Quilsein did the only thing he could, short of ignoring the man altogether— and that would have cost him his ship.”

Slark snorted. "You can't think of a more direct solution?"

"None that I can recommend."

"What's that?"

"I can think of an approach that the Klingons would use, Sir."

"But not the Federation?"

"No, Sir."

"Hmmm. Anyone have a better idea? No? Then I have a story for you, while you think about it.

"Most of you know that I put in several years with the Marines before I went to the Academy. Once upon a time I was serving on a light cruiser, and we answered a distress call from a mining station. It seems that the miners had been attacked by an unknown force, and the surviving miners were barricaded in well inside the complex. The problem was that the local energy fields completely disrupted surface and subsurface communications; they were broadcasting from a surface dish by way of a shielded cable. They beamed us an inertial map that led from the dish to their location before the cable was cut.

"When we made orbit, there was an unknown hostile vessel already there; it attacked us, and we destroyed it. I was senior NCO for the Marine contingent of the landing party."

A waiter arrived and set out another round; he retrieved Slark's mug with an expression of horror. "It was dirty," Slark said calmly; the waiter hurried off.

"At any rate, we lost communications as soon as we got underground, just as

promised. And we encountered resistance almost immediately. Has anyone ever heard of the Dreenoi? No? They're rare in Federation space, though the Klingons and the Romulans deal with them regularly. Two meter tall, bipedal arthropods, whose entire taxonomic structure seems to consist of 'Dreenoi, food that fights back, and food that doesn't'. We made one effort to negotiate and lost most of our officers— all we had left was a MedOff with less than six months space time, and a Marine Ensign with less than that.

"We nearly aborted the mission at that point; instead we made it a search and destroy operation. We scavenged grenades from the Dreenoi corpses, and threw a few of them ahead of us every time we went through a door. Then we went in shooting and cut down everything that moved.

"By the time we got to the miners, most of us were using Dreenoi weapons; our phasers were dry, or nearly so. We had less trouble coming out than we had had going in— we had already dealt with most of the Dreenoi. But we had casualties to haul, and it was slow, tense work.

"We were almost out when we encountered some unusually heavy resistance. When the smoke cleared, we realized that the bodies on the other side weren't Dreenoi, but Klingons. There had only been six of them, and we had killed four. We gave the survivors medical assistance, took away their weapons and communicators, and brought them along.

"They were not happy with us. We had ambushed a Klingon landing party on a rescue mission in neutral territory. They weren't interested in any mitigating circumstances.

"Our captain held a conference with his senior staff, including the two officers and the senior NCO's from the landing party. The Klingon ship was told that we had not recovered any survivors, but we had found the remains of some of their landing party and sent them the ID from the four dead Klingons. If they sent a party down to recover the bodies, they had been killed with Dreenoi

weapons.

“The entire landing party had been quarantined as soon as we returned to the ship. The miners were kept in the dark— they had never been particularly aware that there was a problem, so that wasn’t difficult— and the ship’s people were told to keep it absolutely quiet, even among themselves. Our captain requested an emergency reroute back to Terra, on the grounds that he had strategic data too hot to transmit— which he did: if news of those prisoners got out, there would have been war— and brought the Klingons with him.

“And that was it. StarFleet wasn’t happy with the situation, but they agreed with the captain’s decisions. The Klingons were put on ice for the rest of their lives, and that was that.”

“And word never got out?”

“Pretty much.”

“And we’re still holding them?”

“No, they’re dead now. I used to visit them whenever I was on Terra. Koorl—the male— once told me that I was the only StarFleet Officer that he respected. He died of old age about six years ago. He was almost eighty at the time, and had been a prisoner for sixty years.”

“What about the other one?”

“Vanga killed herself about six years after she was captured.”

There was a silence for a moment, and then Ishima asked, “Killed herself? I would have thought that every effort would have been made to prevent that.”

“Every effort was made. But not all of the guards agreed with the policy, and

a visitor talked one of those guards into letting him smuggle in a knife.”

“You were the visitor, weren’t you, Sir?” Clark asked; Slark said nothing. “Why?”

“Because she asked me to, and I felt the Federation owed it to her. The Marines teach that traditions are to be respected, don’t they, Clark?”

“Yes, Sir. But... Suicide, Sir?”

“Did you fail your section on Klingon culture at the Academy, Clark?”

“No, Sir. But...”

“Alien cultures should be respected unless you find them distasteful?”

“But Sir! That’s...”

“I carried out general policy contrary to specific orders. I was never even brought up on charges; most of the senior officers involved were grateful.”

“What happened to the guard?”

“They gave him an appointment to the Academy. He died in action about eight years later. You have a comment, Ishima?”

“I... They rewarded him for assisting in a suicide?”

“They rewarded him for exercising moral courage in the service of the Federation. They couldn’t bring him up on charges without risking publicity for the prisoners, and they had to separate him from his peers.”

“But they prevented you from doing the same thing with the other Klingon.”

Slark shook his head. “Koorl didn’t have the nerve. He was miserable about it, felt that he was a traitor to Klingon pride, but he couldn’t do it. He asked me to kill him, but I... I knew him too well by then. Vanga might have done it, but they were separated... and then she was out of the picture.”

“You sound as if you regret letting him live.”

“He was my friend, and I... failed him. For sixty years I tried to be his friend, but I refused to give him the one thing he wanted most. And it wouldn’t have cost me a damn thing. Of course I regret it. Which isn’t to say that I would do things differently if I had the chance. But I know him better now.”

Guilbrandtsen snickered; Ishima gaped, “Excuse me, Sir. You know him better now that he’s dead?”

“Of course,” Gully answered. “The Skipper wrote a book about him.”

“Sir?”

“Koorl translated a ten volume history of Klingon civilization into English, and arranged to have it published posthumously under my name, then left me the rights. Which meant that I had to become very familiar with the thing very quickly, or look like a fool whenever the thing came up. And now, every time we raise Terra, I’ll get another royalty check— which is Koorl’s way of saying, ‘Thanks for being my friend,’ and ‘You failed me, you sonovabitch,’ all in one neat little package. Klingon subtlety is highly underrated.”

Clark was obviously confused. “Was does any of this have to do with Quilsein?”

“What would the Klingons have done if the situations were reversed? If they had Federation prisoners they could never release?”

“I imagine they would have killed the prisoners out of hand. But I still don’t see...”

“Mister Clark... Which is more humane: to incarcerate a man until he dies, or to kill him quickly and cleanly? If you jail him, aren’t you just letting time do your dirty work for you, because you don’t have the stomach for it?”

“I don’t know, sir... I’ve never thought of it in those terms.”

“See that you do. As for Quilsein... If someone had opened fire on his ship with a surface battery, would he have hesitated to blow the thing away, even if it meant killing the battery’s crew?”

“Of course not.”

“And if a private citizen attempted to incarcerate you on his own authority for an indefinite period, would you defend yourself, to the point of killing him if necessary?”

“Yes...”

“Any dissenters?” Slark looked around the table. “And how is that different from what Farrier intended to do to Quilsein? If you point a lethal weapon at someone’s head and pull the trigger, is there any moral difference between using a phaser or a concatenation of news reports and the Klingon Fleet?”

Slark’s companions squirmed and stared into their drinks. Finally Ishima said, “You’re saying Quilsein should have killed him.”

“Yes. Absolutely. By taking the mission Quilsein had acknowledged that the goal at hand was worth risking, and possibly losing, the lives of his entire crew. What had changed that Farrier’s life was suddenly worth more than the mission?”

The gallery continued to squirm. Slark swept his eyes around the table. “What’s the moral difference between killing a disarmed prisoner and dropping a bomb on a city where children are sleeping? None. None at all. We’re soldiers, all of us. One of the things we do is kill people. Some of the people we kill are going to be innocent. And there is nothing that anyone can do to change that. You have accepted the mission; now finish it as quickly and cleanly as possible.”

There was a long silence. Finally Ishima said quietly, “I don’t think I like that idea very well, Sir.”

“I don’t either, Ishima. But the universe doesn’t need our approval, and as far as I know, doesn’t particularly want it. Drink up, everyone— the next round’s on me.”

<<>>

“Personnel for covert operations is a chronic problem. Persons who want covert duty can’t be trusted to perform it properly; persons who don’t want covert duty can’t be trusted to perform it properly. The trick is to find operatives who are willing and competent, but NOT eager— the same criteria by which we should chose political candidates. We’ve never found a foolproof way of doing that, either.”

Senator James T. Kirk

Testimony

Covert Operations Hearings, 2303

February, 1990

## Firefly and “Triage”

By the end of the much maligned and grossly underrated sixth season of “Buffy the Vampire Slayer”, it had surpassed “Babylon V” for my personal vote for Best TV Show EVER.

On September 20, 2002, some four months later, Joss Whedon’s THIRD TV show, an unusual science fiction show called “Firefly”, premiered. I immediately fell in love. This was the science fiction show I had been waiting for: No stupid ray guns, no FTL, no dumb sounds in vacuum, and Libertarian as hell. This was EXACTLY the show I had outlined as my concept of a perfect SF show 20 years earlier, during a discussion following “Star Trek: The Search for Spock”.

By October 25, following the episode “Out of Gas”, “Firefly” had displaced “Buffy” as Best TV Show EVER. It was a somewhat lonely view...

“Firefly” was in ratings trouble from before the airing of the first episode; the suits who had ordered the show were not the suits who were airing the show, and the current crop of soulless Hollywood weasels didn’t understand the show, and didn’t much like it. I got INVOLVED. By December, I was willing to mortgage my home and/or donate organs to keep “Firefly” on the air... but it didn’t matter. On December 13, the cast and crew were told that it was over, and on December 20, a revamped (and slightly diminished) version of the pilot was FINALLY aired, and “Firefly” went off the air.

## FIREFLY AND “TRIAGE”

I was well and truly heartbroken. I held my breath through Whedon’s efforts to find the show a home on UPN or SciFi, and went into mourning properly in late January when the sets were scrapped.

This story was written during the two weeks between the airing of “Ariel” (which sets up this story) and the following episode, “War Stories”, which launched the events here out of the canon. (Accidental pun, but I will live with it..) It doesn’t really matter, because this story is mostly a comment on the word “triage”, and a lesson on the difference between a combat mentality and a civilian mentality.

Who am I to make such comments? Beats me; I just know things. I did get one piece of mail, back in the day, that led me to think I had gotten it right, though; I got a very nice “Thank you” from a woman who had been an Army triage nurse under combat conditions during Desert Storm. I felt pretty good about that...

# Triage

Simon stepped off of the dusty street into the shop marked with a caduceus, and waited for his eyes to adapt to the dimness.

“Can I help you, son?” came a voice from the back of the shop. The voice was female, a bit lower than average, and just beginning to show traces of age.

Simon continued blinking. “My ship just landed. I was wondering how you were fixed for antibiotics and painkillers.”

“Somebody sick? I can probably spare a little.” The speaker materialized out of the gloom; she was a bit taller than average, broadly built but not overweight; her long gray hair was tied back in a tail to which brushes were a purely theoretical concept.

“No, I am just trying to make sure I have staples. You never know what you might need,” Simon answered. There was something about the woman’s eyes that reminded him of Mal, or Zoe, or Jayne. Killer’s eyes.

“Can’t help you, then,” the woman said. “My people are at least as likely to need it as your people.”

Simon nodded and took a deep breath. He hated this part. “In that case, would you be interested in buying any?” The woman crooked her head to one side, then smiled and beckoned Simon closer. Simon took three vials out

of his bag with one hand and set them on the counter; the woman picked one up and examined it.

“Saint Lucy’s Hospital, on Ariel,” the woman said quietly. Simon glanced quickly to the door as his hand reached to recover the two vials still on the counter; he found his wrist clamped in the woman’s hand. “You’re Simon Tam, aren’t you?”

Simon’s brain screamed. That didn’t stop his free hand from dropping into his shoulder bag, clawing for the revolver that Mal had insisted he bring along.

“Relax, Doctor,” the woman was saying. “Things aren’t nearly as bad as all that. You still practicing medicine?”

Simon froze. Something was making no sense at all, and he had to figure it out. “Yes,” he said cautiously. “Whenever I can, anyway.” The woman released his wrist.

“You do realize that this is going to hurt your selling price, though, don’t you?” The woman was smiling at him; there was a gun in her off hand. Simon simply stared at her in bewilderment. She indicated Simon’s bag. “Let’s see what you have there, shall we? Slowly, one piece at a time.”

Simon did as he was told; the woman sorted the vials into three groups. “I reckon I can put together about one fifty in platinum. That should buy me these.” Simon looked at the collection and nodded; the woman knew her street prices. She indicated a second, nearly identical group. “And you are going to give me these, because I’m a nice person, and I haven’t turned you in. And you are going to keep the rest...” She indicated the largest group. “... Because if I took any more, I would be robbing you, and I don’t want to do that.”

Simon blinked. It seemed the only thing to do.

“The problem is, I don’t keep my life savings ready to hand, so you are going to have to sit here for about half an hour while I get my money together. Understood?”

Simon didn’t even blink; he just stared.

“And the reason you are going to sit here, and not try to do anything funny, is...” She took the revolver from Simon’s bag, unloaded it, set the cartridges on the counter with the largest group of drug vials, handed the gun back to him, and took a deep breath.

“Once upon a time I was Major Abigail Zhang, R.N., Alliance of United Planets. I was working at a field hospital during the battle of Serenity Valley; I was supposed to be a scrub nurse, but they found out I had a talent for doing triage. Talent. Right. I had the training to determine what was wrong from a cursory examination, the experience to make good guesses as to how long it would take to fix, and the cold bloodedness to do the job right. You do KNOW what ‘triage’ means, don’t you?”

Simon answered. “It means prioritizing patients by urgency to make the best use of resources.”

Abigail smiled coldly at that. “At a civilian hospital, maybe. In a military situation, when you are completely and utterly swamped, it means ignoring the fellow who will take two hours to save in favor of treating two fellows who will take an hour each. And that was what I did. ‘You! You’ll recover; get out of here! You, stand by. You... We could fix you, if we had the time, but we don’t have time, so you’re dead. Sorry’”.

She looked straight at Simon. “I don’t know how many times I looked at a living, breathing, human being and pronounced a death sentence; more

than a thousand, certainly. But I am never going to do it again if I can help it. And beyond that... You're going to end up owing a lot of people, Simon. And from now on, I'm one of them. There is now one more doctor loose in the universe than there would have been if I had turned you in, so from now on, you're helping me pay back those thousand ghosts. Is that understood?" Simon nodded. "I'll be back with the money in a little while."

Simon nodded again. While she was gone, he went through the drugs he was taking back with him and added one vial of each item he had to the collection he was selling, reloaded the revolver, and sat down to wait.

They chided him, later, when he was back on Serenity, for his ineptitude as a black marketeer. Later still, Kaylee found him sitting in the dark, staring out of one of the windows into the black, and asked him what was on his mind.

"Care for a koan, Kaylee?" he asked her. "How much do a thousand ghosts weigh?"

Kaylee stared at him, not sure if she should be alarmed or just confused. Finally she said, "I have no idea."

"All there is," Simon answered. "A thousand ghosts weigh all there is."

November, 2002

# The Photo Album

Given the nature of these stories, and the nature of the world, we have no plans to ever release this book as hard copy. That doesn't mean you can't make one if you want it, though. Just download the PDF version of this book (if you haven't already) and take it to the local print shop. And with that in mind...

I, P.D. Haynie, the author of this book, authorize anyone in possession of this file to make, or have made, a printed copy for personal use.

Having said that, if you DO have a hard copy made, please take a photograph of yourself with it, and send it to [spiralpathpublications@gmail.com](mailto:spiralpathpublications@gmail.com) I'd love to see it!

## About the Author

P.D. Haynie, known as “Paul” to his face, has been studying the craft of writing since Gerald Ford was President. Along the way, he has allowed himself to be distracted by any and all information that might be useful to a creator of fantasy and science fiction, which is unfortunately almost everything. He lives in Waukegan, Illinois with his wife Julia. He has not actually gone by “P.D.” in the real world since shortly after he learned to talk.

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## Also by P.D. Haynie



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