

The Transplant

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by [LordRobertBruceScott](#)

Summary

Kirk, Spock and McCoy are called in for a medical/psychological consult for a stranded mother horta...

Notes

I have copied this from the old Ad Astra site to the new one to make it easier to find for aficionados of the original series trio.

This story was written for a challenge entry on Trek BBS - any story about the original trio.



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“The last time I fixed one of these things, it was with plaster of Paris,” grouched Dr. Leonard McCoy. “I’m a doctor, Jim, not a head shrink - no matter how many times you try to drink me into shrinking your head. The brain is more of Spock’s area.”

The 8th moon of the 8th planet in the A Boo star system had been cleverly dubbed OctOctABoo by the mining engineers who had recently abandoned this place. They had brought a mother horta with them to populate the moon with the tunnel-making species that had revolutionized mining on Janus VI. It was a shocking violation of Federation law and the miners responsible for it would definitely have been on trial, along with their mining consortium, if they hadn’t been killed in a shockingly convenient cave-in back on Janus VI. That cave-in was currently being investigated by local authorities.

Because the U.S.S. Enterprise had been conveniently located in the sector and they had experience with the still mysterious, rock eating creatures native to Janus VI, Kirk and crew had been assigned to investigate the stranded creatures who had been transplanted to OctOctABoo.

“Spock hasn’t fully recovered from his encounter with their emotional trauma, Bones,” said Captain James T. Kirk.

McCoy couldn’t argue with this. Commander Spock was seated on a rock, doing his best to mask an enormous headache after having mind-melded with a clearly traumatized horta. The emotional impact on the vulcan was harder to gauge, but McCoy had known Enterprise’s half-vulcan first officer long enough to know that his emotional control was nowhere near as ironclad as that of his father or any other vulcan. Advantage Spock in McCoy’s private opinion, but it was definitely slowing things down in this situation.

“Well, she hasn’t been aggressive toward us, nor have any of her surviving children, but clearly they’re not doing very well,” McCoy observed. “I haven’t been able to tell whether it’s something to do with the atmosphere in here - but this atmosphere is nearly identical to the tunnels under Janus VI. Temperature’s pretty much similar as well, so I’m guessing it might be nutritional.”

“Rock composition, Doctor,” Spock managed, then fell silent again.

“Will you just dry up until that vulcan brain of yours untangles itself?” McCoy grouched.

“He isn’t wrong, Bones,” Kirk rejoined. “The rock composition here is also nearly identical to Janus VI.”

“So why were these mines abandoned, Jim? I’ll answer that... Copper. Bauxite. Lithium. The deposits they had hoped to find in abundance here on this stupidly named moon turned out to have been mined out long ago by the Andorians.”

“But the horta don’t eat metal,” Kirk responded.

“Neither do we - well - not much of it,” McCoy rejoined. “But take all the iron out of your diet and see how long your health holds out.”

Spock looked up, clearly wanting to join in the conversation, but deciding not to. He could already tell that McCoy was aware of his objection to this line of reasoning.

“But that doesn’t pan out either, Bones,” said Kirk. “The large deposits have been mined out, but the horta don’t feed on rock heavy with ore. The trace elements in the general rock around here are almost exactly the same as Janus VI.”

McCoy sat down on another rock in exasperation. “I know, I know.” The mother horta, who had been avoiding Spock ever since the vulcan had broken their only partly successful mind-meld, shuffled over and huddled next to the Enterprise’s chief medical officer. Almost unconsciously, McCoy reached out and gently patted the creature. This contact seemed to somehow comfort her.

The three officers from the U.S.S. Enterprise fell silent. Spock sat on one rock and gently massaged his temples. McCoy sat across the small cavern from him, petting what appeared to be more of a rock than an animal. Captain Kirk paced back and forth between them.

The mother horta vibrated slightly.

“Well, you seem to have made a friend, Bones,” Kirk observed. “It sounds like she’s purring.”

Spock looked up.

McCoy looked up.

Kirk stopped pacing.

“Jim... You don’t think...” McCoy started, only to find Spock and Kirk both looking at him, expectantly. McCoy rolled his eyes. “It’s not environmental or nutritional... It’s *cultural*!” He kept petting the vibrating mother horta.

“Jim, these are intelligent, social animals,” McCoy continued. “She’s lonely. Not just that, she’s concerned for her children. They need interaction with more of their kind. They need their community. Spock already established she wants to stay here, because her children were born here... We were alerted to this situation by a group of exobiologists studying the horta back on Janus VI. Maybe they can identify an older adult horta, maybe also a few juveniles who would be willing to relocate here and help this family reconnect with their culture. Provide a peer group for her children. And some adult company for her.”

“See Bones?” said Kirk. “I knew you could figure this out...”

“Why Doctor,” Spock added, “I never expected that you would become a horta-culturalist.”

McCoy boggled at the vulcan sitting across from him.

So did Kirk: “Spock? Did you just... make a pun?”

Spock raised an entirely innocent eyebrow.

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