This story was entered in the *Strange Worlds* writing contest in 2005 but was rejected, thus it ended up here as fanfic.

"When Logic Smells Bad"

   Stardate 4308: While the *Enterprise* underwent much needed repairs at Starbase 6, most of the crew were finally enjoying some long overdue rest and recreation down on Argelius. At least it's captain was. He had just finished explaining, "How I Saved the Galaxy -- Again".

   "What's on your mind now, Bones?" Kirk asked, momentarily taking his attention from the yeoman under one arm and the Orion animal woman under the other. "It's not that 'botched acetylcholine test' still, is it?"

   "As a matter of fact it is ... partially." Bones answered putting down his untouched green drink. "Spock did the test correctly. O. K., are you satisfied now! I admit it."

Kirk grinned a bit broader and the ladies giggled, but he kept quiet and let his friend express himself in his own way.

   "It was just that the results were negative for any electrochemical activity in that silly thing. If it had had a brain, I'd have to diagnose it as brain-dead. I don't know now if we killed a intelligent life form that was handicapped or if it was just an overgrown protozoan. I guess we'll never know."

  "We had to kill it though. You know that, Bones. We had no choice. It was about to reproduce in any case and threaten all other life in the galaxy."

   "I do, but I guess I do also still think it’s bad we don’t we don’t have a live specimen of such a unique creature."

   The animal woman snarled, blushing kelly green.

   "Yes, indeed. Let us hope it was unique." the yeoman interpreted.

   "Yes, let's." McCoy said, turning her statement into a toast and chugging his bourbon. "But it's not just that. Spock refused to take shore leave."

   "Spock always refuses to take shore leave, unless I make it an direct order. Besides, didn't you order him to go to his quarters and get some rest after all he'd been though."

   "Yes, I did, but that's just it. I don't think that he is getting any rest. His computer has been active continuously since I released him. I don't believe he's slept in a week.

   "Don't give me that look, Jim. I know better than you do that Vulcans can go a long time without sleep and that stubborn half-Vulcan of ours probably longer than most of them. I would have sedated him, but while that might have helped him physically, it wouldn't have helped him deal with what happened to the *Intrepid*. I've been logging some time in on the computer myself and I discovered that nearly a third of the crew studied at Star Fleet Academy while he was there."

   "That is bad. Was Spock particularly close to any of them? Is that hiss problem? Sorry, for some reason I'm not thinking too straight. Of course, he wasn't close to any of them. They were all full-Vulcans. They would not have been close to the half-Vulcan."

   "There was something there between them though. While I was examining him Spock referred to himself as 'a mere half-Vulcan'. My guess is that he heard that a lot from his Vulcan classmates and this has stirred it all up again."

   "So he had no one he was close to on the *Intrepid* then?"

   "That's just it. I don't know. It looks like Spock's been editing the ship's memory."

   "You don’t say?"

   "I do say. I've found some places where my own personal data files on Vulcans disagree with the computer. I have one source listing the captain of the *Intrepid* as Spiak and the another says it's Satak, for example."

   "Oh, I can explain that easily enough," Kirk said leaning toward the table to refill his glass with Saurian brandy. "Spiak had been captain last year, when we encountered the *Intrepid* at Starbase 11, but since then scuttlebutt says he's been bumped down  to HQ. Satak must be, uh, must have been his quietly substituted replacement."

   "O. K., I'll give you that too. But remember when Spock had that seizure on the bridge? He said there were four hundred Vulcans aboard -- all dead. Well, when the *Intrepid* left here she had the full complement for Constitution class, four hundred thirty."

   "Perhaps Spock just rounded off the number."

   "Come on, Jim. When have you ever heard Spock round off a number?"

   "Yeah. You're right, Bones. Ask him the time and he'll give it to you in tenths of a second and pace his sentence and speech to end on that exact tenth of a second."

   "We have a little better idea of what must have happened to the *Intrepid* now, assuming we can trust that part of Spock's report. The creature probably expended much of its own life-force creating and maintaining the wormhole it came through from God-only-knows where. Those poor natives, being barely into the electronic age, never saw it coming. After it had gorged itself on the whole biomass of the planet, it had enough strength to generate that protective negative energy shield and start to reproduce. That's when it attacked the *Intrepid* and drained her energy just as it did ours. She was pretty well destroyed along with the creature, so about all we have to go on is what Spock has left us. So I ask you 'Were the other thirty Vulcans not on board? Were they not dead? If so, where are they?'"

   Back in his quarters Spock had finally confirmed that his virus had not only rewritten the relevant data in the *Enterprise*'s memory, but at Memory Alpha, and even the secret and top secret Memories Beta and Gamma as well. He had let emotions overwhelm him momentarily and used the phrase "death scream", but he refused to feel guilty about it now. All references in Standard or any other Federation language to the tevakh-shei referred only "the cry uttered by a Vulcan who knows he faces certain death". The possible other interpretation, in the few places it had been speculated on, associating it with "Bonzai!", had been deleted. If it ever became known that Surakians had a technique for forming gestalt mindmelds, there would be no stopping the Romulans from exploiting the secret sooner or later. "Live no longer and prosper no more!" would be a thought much more easily formed in their minds. Spock would willingly give his life to make that not so.

   When he had told the Captain that the crew of the *Intrepid* would have done all the things that they had done, he knew for certain that they had done all that -- and even more that they could not do. The astonishment of the Four Hundred that he had sensed was not that they had had to use the forbidden tevakh-shei on such a scale after so many centuries. It was not that they had had to use it to destroy the most powerful and beautiful mind Vulcans had ever encountered or were likely to encounter in this or perhaps any galaxy. Their astonishment was that they had not killed their foe. They had rendered it incapable of thinking, but not of reproducing.

   That Commander Spiek in the shuttlecraft *T'Vran* had managed to penetrate so far was remarkable. That he had given his life to collide with the *Galileo* and redirect it toward the *Enterprise* was commendable. The seemingly insoluble problem of what to do about other katra, if any, not transferred into the tralkatra called Spock was something better dealt with after his mind and body had gotten some rest.

After the ladies had excused themselves, one to her master and the other to her mister, the Romulan ale showed up. It'd been provided, so Lt. Winston Kyles’ brother John had informed them, by "a friend". By the time the bottle was half empty Kirk's plans for fun now involved helping out the friend who had made so many galaxy savings possible. By the time it was completely emptied, his plan seemed the most logical course of action.

   "So you’re proposin’ that we go back and search that space-monster-splattered space for *Intrepid* survivors who may or may not exist!"

   "'Xactly, er, I mean, exactly."

   "Oh, that’s what I thought you said. Well, we'll need a ship. We can't very well take the *Enterprise* off on this Vulcan goose chase."

   That should be easier done than said. I hear that gamma-7 is up for grabs to whoever gets there first. There are no inhabitants left and their whole technology's there just waiting to be powered back up."

   "But wasn't theirs a pre-spaceflight technology?" McCoy asks, catching himself before he compared it to Helen's Twentieth Century.

   "According to every Federation survey, you'd be right. But among bloggers who don't trust us Feds, it's been speculated that it was actually post-tech, like the Vaalites."

   "Then there's no telling what kind of thief, swindler or con artist we'll have to deal with, but I guess it's worth it to give good ol' Spock some peace of mind."

   "Actually I have a particular old 'friend' of ours in mind."

   Kirk noticed the attention of the ladies had been distracted to someone or something behind his back.

   "Captain Harcourt Fenton Mudd, at your service. Doesn't that sound wonderful, Captain? Captain Mudd. You have my undying gratitude, Kirk, for not appearing at my trial over that mix-up on Rigel XII. The Childresses had only good things to say about me as it turned out. I had to endure some more 'psychiatric treatment' and a refresher course in astrogation, but I got my Master's license renewed. If there‘s anything that I can ever do for you -- anything legal, that is -- just ask."

   "We just want to go out and try to find something we may have lost in space, near Gamma-7. "

   "Well, y'see, if it's going into the Gamma-7 system you're talking about, Kirk, I'm sorry that'd be against the law."

   "And you're still on probation. I understand, Harry. We'll just have to let you get back to whatever you were doing then and start on tracking down the Romulan ale smugglers. Won't we, Bones?"

   "Yeah, Jim, uh, we will. We will."

   "On second thought, old pal, you've got yourself a deal. It's not too near the forbidden planet, is it? Urgent Starfleet business, I suppose?"

   "This little outing of ours is nothing important enough to bother Star Fleet about."

   "No, just thirty lost Vulcans." McCoy muttered, but loudly enough for Mudd to hear.

   "So, it's an undercover mission for Vulcan then, is it, old chum? Something for Ambassador Sarek, perhaps?"

   "Perhaps not."

   "Don't tell me you're working for T'Pau herself?"

   "We did not tell you that we were working for T'Pau now. Did we, Bones?"

   "No, we did not tell you that we are working for T'Pau."

   "No, you didn't, bucko. That's for sure. Cross my heart and hope to, uh, do my best. Ha, how about that? Me, a Vulcan secret agent! That's something I could tell Stella about!"

   "You can't tell anyone about this -- ever. It's a secret, Harry. That's what being a secret agent means."

   "That takes all of the fun out of it.", Mudd sighed. "She'd never believe it of me anyway."

   As Kirk and Mudd walked on ahead, McCoy added quietly to himself, "And hopefully no one else will either."

   Spock slept. He dreamt, but his were not pleasant dreams. They were nightmares. The minds his mind held were full-Vulcan, but had been through far greater shocks than any Vulcan mind ever had. And he was re-living it all.

   Capt. Satak had tried everything he could think of, one logical alternative after another, and all had failed. By the time the *Pthakfam*, to call her by her true Vulcan name, had arrived the monster had already consumed all but a twelfth of the planet's biomass. It had stretched itself out only a couple hundred miles thick nearly from pole to pole and let the planet's own slow rotation do most of the work. The ravenous blob’s thousand-mile edge swept over the planet's surface at nearly five hundred miles-per-hour absorbing everything living in its path. In the less than seven standard hours available only a very small fraction of its billion inhabitants could be rescued. When all the ship's stasis units had been filled, Satak ordered the transporter pattern buffers modified to save a few more lives.

   Then it went from bad to worse. As the energy-draining nature of the mysterious dark aura about the retreating planet-killer became obvious, he had ordered the remnant Gamman katra transferred to as many vrekatra as could be replicated or manufactured. They were not high quality, but they were high quantity. He then ordered them transferred to the shuttlecraft to try to save their spirits if not their bodies. Even now   Surak's aphorism still applied, "There are always possibilities."

   Into the emptied shuttlebay he ordered the remaining crew to form a twenty-by-twenty mind-square. The double mind-meld, linking two minds through a third, was commonly used in Healers on damaged minds incapable of melding on their own. The kaarevla or mind-triangle, three minds each melded with both of the other two, was considered too invasive even for many adepts. The kaadifworr or mind-square was what legends were made of.

   Each melder linked him-or-herself with two others, at least one of which was another melder. Such a mind-square, four minds each linked to the other three, it was said, could only be overcome by one of four stronger minds or by a nine-ply mind-square, one of nine minds by one of sixteen and so on. The Pthakfam had a remarkably high number of melders among the crew, forty-seven percent, enough for an thirteen-by-thirteen mind-square. Nevertheless an equal number of non-melders volunteered in order to double the psychic power of the mind-square. A four-hundred-ply mindmeld should logically have been invincible.

   The *T'Vran* had started out, as did the other fourteen shuttles, with a crew of just two and a cargo of as many katric arks as each could carry. Despite Commander T'Skon's heroic efforts many of the hastily-made arks had broken and sublimated in the unavoidable turbulence of the creature's struggle against the Four Hundred. When it became obvious that her injuries were fatal, Ensign Spiek, the last melder of the *Pthakfam*, became her tralkatra and together they prepared to die. Even if they were to die far from home and shipmates, he reasoned, at least they would not have to die alone.

   The *Alice* made it to the now huge and thinning cloud of hydrocarbons in record time, though Kirk and McCoy agreed Mudd had undoubtedly skipped a couple piloting lessons. The metallic debris of the Intrepid was relatively easy to find, even with Alice’s less-than-state-of-the-art sensors. After finding nothing but debris, her crew were all beginning to wonder if they ever would find anything worth finding in this ‘wonderland’.

   Finally, one by one, they found fifteen of the *Intrepid*’s shuttlecraft not entirely destroyed. In each they found the dead bodies of two crew members and dozens of strange glowing globes. The crew of the *Alice* gave each of the Vulcans a respectful burial in space and loaded the globes for return to Vulcan. They were less than half way back to Starbase 6 when the *Alice* picked up a hail from an outbound ship,

   "Greetings, *Alice*. We would be most happy to save you precious dilithium taking your wares to market, and deal with you right now?"

   "Let me handle this, partner." Mudd told Kirk, "I've dealt with these Ferengi before."

   "Then we are in trouble. But since I have absolutely no idea what a Fur-ringy is, I guess I’ll have to trust you -- this time. Just don’t turn on the screen. We don’t want them to see any Federation uniforms, do we?"

   "That’s a fine example right there of why y'can't do without me, bucko. These shy fellows've never been known to use visuals. I've heard tell though that they're large and insectoidal, not at all furry."

   Switching the audio back on, Mudd continued, "This is Captain Harcourt Fenton Mudd of the *Alice* out of Argelius. I don't believe we have anything that you would want. Nothing but us three Humans and a load of synthehol."

   "Why is it I don’t believe you, 'Captain' Mudd?"

   "Uh, you have heard of me then? Good things, I hope."

   "Oh, yes, Hu-man, we have heard of your 'deals'. Today however we are buying and you are selling -- and we are not offering you any fool's-gold-pressed latium."

   "As I said, "All I have is ..."

   "All you have is exactly what we want. We detect what appears to be many Gamman lifesigns aboard your ship. We don't know how that can be, but we must find out. Since asking did not work, we are now going to take what we want. Prepare to become salvage."

   "They’re powering up their weapons!" McCoy shouted. "Do something, someone!"

Mudd could do nothing. He stood frozen at the controls. The lessons he'd attended never covered anything like this. Kirk pushed him aside and took command of the situation. The Alice managed to narrowly evade the first shot and received only a glancing blow from the second.

   The Ferengi ship was maneuvering for its third and final shot when a Klingon ship suddenly de-cloaked between it and the *Alice* and took the shot meant for Mudd’s ship. It did little damage to the Bird-of-Prey, but the Klingons' returning shots did quite a bit of damage to the Ferengi’s weapons array before the shooting ended. By that time however the *Alice* was light-minutes away.

   "We’ll take *Alice* back to the Starbase and get rid of these things whatever they are, before getting her repaired," Kirk said, helping Mudd up from the floor. "Sorry about that, Captain."

   "Quite all right, Captain. I owe you again for getting me out of another unforeseen predicament."

   "You sure do seem to have a knack for getting into them though," McCoy added.

   When the *T'Vran* was thrown outward by the antimatter reaction along with the *Galileo* and the *Enterprise*, it was all that Spiek could do to knock the other shuttle toward the starship. It had been the non-melder T'Skon however who had directed him, guided by the tevakh-shei of her nephew. At the exact instant of the collision, Spiek transferred their katras to the shuttle, from shuttle to shuttle, from shuttle to Spock. Only the combined strength of three melded minds had saved any of them.

   The mysterious aunt which Spock had deduced mostly from negative evidence was now more intimate than he’d even been with his bond-mate. They wordlessly shared their common love for the wonders of the galaxy and their lack of it from their home world. They comforted each other in their alienation from their brother and father, Sarek. They made their first greetings and final farewells with one instantaneous, centuries-long touching.

   The three Vulcans' thoughts gradually became much more focused than they had been since the crash. They achieved kaarevla. The tri-ply mind did not know whether or not any save the *Enterprise* crew had survived the destruction of the amoeboid. It had to find out. It directed the talkatra out of Spock's quarters, down the corridor and to the nearest turbo lift. When it reached the nearest empty shuttlebay it encountered the crew of the Alice trying to unload the very vrekatras it sought.

   "The blasted things didn't behave this way when we loaded them up!" McCoy was shouting, thoroughly frustrated. "Now when I try to touch the globes I get shocked, when you did, they seem to be repelled and when Mudd does they stick together. It's as if they had minds of their own!"

   "And their minds are made up. They don't want to leave *Alice*."

   "If we keep this up though, we may lose them entirely. Their glows are fading with ever new attempt."

Pondering his response, chin in hand, Kirk spotted Spock and cried, "Spock! What are you doing, sleep-walking?"

   "That’s just what it looks like he’s doing, Jim. If so, it’s best not to wake him. We’d better just see that he doesn’t get into too much trouble."

   Kirk and McCoy tiptoed toward what appeared to be an oblivious Mr. Spock, when he suddenly jumped at Mudd, nearest the open hatch. Spock spread his fingers and held his head in a vice-like two-handed meld.

The four minds, the Vulcan melder, the Vulcan non-melder, the half-Vulcan and the non-Vulcan, had by the power of combined diversities achieved not merely difworr but kehmuk. With Mudd's malleable mind the revla had been extended into another, higher level of consciousness, like a triangle turned into a tetrahedron.

The kehmuk found itself on an endless plain or plane. It was not exactly a desert, since there were what seemed like an infinite number of oases radiating out in all directions. Some were woodsy, some swampy, still others snowy. It was like a surreal combination of Vulcan and Earth. The sun too was somewhere between Sol and Nevasa in size and color.

   "Where the hell am I?" Mudd thought and in doing so individualized himself from the khemuk.

   Simultaneously, yet with no interference with Mudd's, Spiek added the thought, "Can this be Sha Ka Ree?"

   "No, it is ..." Spock began and T'Skon finished, "Hamlan, the Paradise at the End of Time."

   It was they knew not the original legendary paradise from which Vulcans came. Neither was this, as many believed in and worked for, the hypothetical final one, that Vulcan would someday become. This was the End of Time where time ceased to have any meaning. This was where all times, all thoughts intersected on the endless journey toward the All.

   "It reminds one of the Gammans' dry world," Spiek and T'Skon informed the others, "Before it's end, that is.". Then the shared consciousness of the khemuk knew what it had to do, illogical as it thought it to be.

It directed Mudd's free hand to reach out and touch the nearest vrekatra and it stopped glowing. That started a rapid chain reaction among all the touching globes. Those who had not been touching the others rapidly rolled or bounced to do so. One by one the surviving katras of Gamma-7 were conveyed through the khemuk bridge beyond time, beyond any more suffering. In their spirit-bodies, appearing as tall and fragile-looking as their physical bodies had been, they were already spreading out and interacting with the other pilgrims through this telepaths' . One by one the vrekatras, without their willpower to hold them together, disappeared in a puff of yellowish smoke.

   In their dream-like new homeland were Pedans, Aenar, Dhilians, Myrlans. They were at once strangers whom they seemed to know intimately and old friends they had yet to meet. There were Banduch, erjin, Korlians, Prxl, and Douwd and countless others that they had known, knew or would know.

   The pull of IDIC was irresistible, or so Spock felt through his aunt, as she released him from the familial duty to carry her katra back home to the Hall of Ancients. She no longer desired to go back, but only onward. The instant that Kirk grabbed Spock's arm he took her place in the khemuk and she was able to pass on. In the next instant as McCoy grabbed Spock's other arm, Spiek did as well.

   With their momentary glimpse into the atemporal dimension Kirk and McCoy lost their grips on Spock’s arms and nearly their grip on reality. Before either could ask for an explanation of their otherworldly vision, Spock put a quick nerve pinch on Mudd and put him out.

   "I must ask you, Captain and Doctor, to forget everything that you know about the Intrepid, the globes, the Gammans and where they went."

   He said it with such authority, such barely controlled emotion, that neither Kirk nor McCoy could refuse their friend. As much as they wanted answers, they knew Spock must have good reasons for not answering. They willingly submitted as Spock put one hand to each face and wiped their minds clean of recent memories.

   "Something smells bad in here!" Scotty observed as he arrived on the scene. He ordered the vents to maximum and then observed one unauthorized and damaged little ship and her damaged and not-so-little pilot.

   "Ach, I see what's wrong now. 'Tis clear as Mudd." he joked, but Harry did not laugh for as his head and the air cleared, out into space went the only proof of his story.

   Meanwhile Kirk leaned in the sickbay doorway and asked, "Got anything for a granddaddy of all hangovers, Bones".

   "I think we had enough of that last night!"

   "No, something to get rid of one," Kirk answered with a grin, and a wince, "Not get one."

   "Here, take this, Jim. It seems to be working on mine."

   "That must have been some party we had. It's too bad I can't remember more of it."

   "Maybe it's just as well we don't."

   "I believe the last thing that I remember, Bones, is entertaining the ladies with 'The Adventure of the Galactic Anti-bodies.'"

   "Which I don't believe they believed."

   As for Mudd's wild tale, Scotty did not believe it. Neither did the Argelian Rent-a-ship Company, or the Klingons, who both sued him for damages. Neither did the judge who revoked his license.

   Spock's account of all that had happened however was believed by Spiak. Appropriated encrypted, it detailed the final mission of the *Pthakfam*‘s intrepid crew. He also sent a much edited account home to mom -- and through her to the ambassador. He told them he was well, mentioning as if casually how he had happened to bump into his sister and how she had wished them both a long and prosperous life.