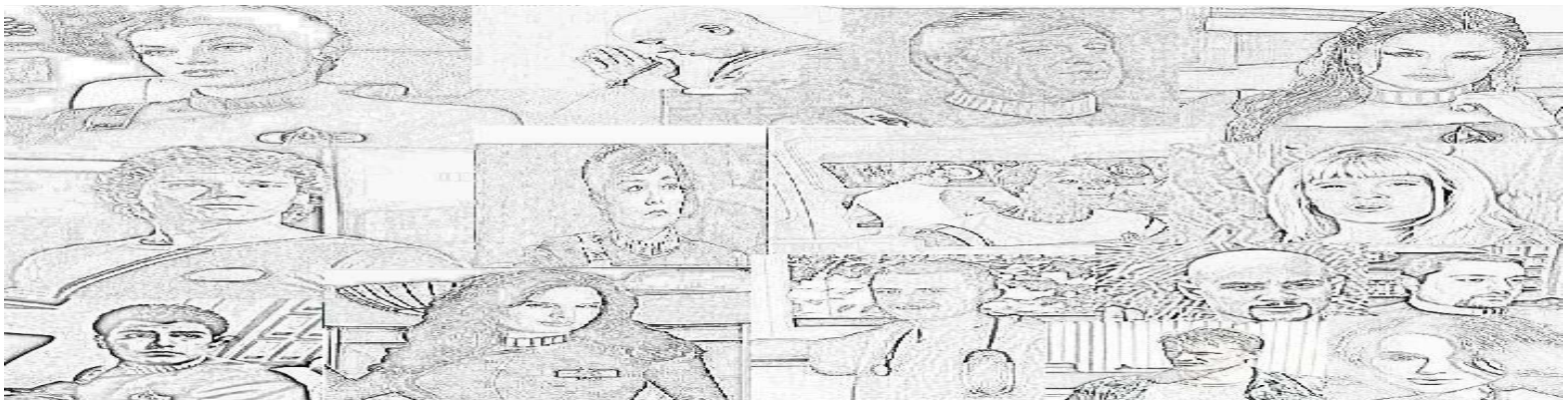


STAR TREK GRISSOM

The Hand of God

Prose Episode 5 of the U.S.S. Grissom saga



Dedicated to the memory of DeForrest Kelly. He's a doctor, not an engineer!

Previously on Star Trek: Grissom

Following the recent Excalbian orchestrated Klingon-Federation conflict, Station Epsilon Five picks up a number of ships crossing the neutral zone from Klingon space. Starfleet determines they are not warships, but small merchant vessels. A liner from Epiphany Tours, the S.S. Arcadia, diverts to the merchant vessels when distress calls are received. Grissom is ordered to investigate the situation. Before the Grissom undertakes this mission, Captain J.T. Esteban dispatches a shuttlecraft to collect Dr. Michael Liebmann from Pacifica, so as to obviate any further delay in the Grissom's departure for the Genesis Planet.

Shuttlecraft Chaffee, En route to Pacifica

Mission: to pick up Dr. Michael Liebmann as part of the research team for the classified Genesis Project. Lieutenant (Junior Grade) Rebecca Sato, mission commander.

The Shuttlecraft *Chaffee* dropped from warp and approached the shining blue orb that was the planet Pacifica. Lieutenant Rebecca Sato secured the ship from warp speed and set an approach vector for the Southern Hemisphere. It had been a short but wearying journey to Pacifica. Sato was feeling nauseated. She wondered if it was the pregnancy? Whatever it was, it was most irritating. But not nearly as irritating as Clive Saunders behaviour had been over the duration of their journey. He had spent the first hour or so trying to flirt with Ensign Rebecca Wood, who had resolutely kept her head buried in her book. He had then made several insinuations about Wood's sexuality, at which stage Wood had turned on him, giving him a verbal barrage that had literally turned the air blue. Thereafter, after Sato had intervened and Wood had retreated in tears to the rear of the main cabin, Saunders, who was by now enjoying himself immensely, turned his attention on the Irishwoman, Cadet Kara McLoughlin.

McLoughlin, who had been bemused by the entire Wood/Saunders interaction, was, thought Rebecca, unfortunately more susceptible to Saunders particular brand of flirting. Sato could not deny Saunders was both charismatic and handsome, but she had chastised McLoughlin and told her to behave as appropriate to a future Starfleet officer.

So here they were at Pacifica, and with Wood upset, McLoughlin sulking and Saunders gloating, the atmosphere in the shuttle was not very pleasant. Sato herself was not in a very good mood. She had still not managed to send her recorded message to her husband Robert aboard the *Excelsior*, and time was running out. McLoughlin and Wood had recorded their messages before leaving *Grissom* also, but they had not even given them to Lieutenant Commander Christopher Chattman as of yet, so they too had not had contact with their loved ones. Still thought Sato, time enough perhaps before silent running. It would not be long until she could talk to Robert and tell him she was pregnant.

Sato turned to her 'crew' and sighed, mentally steeling herself before talking.

"Okay, folks, we've arrived. Wood, come forward and contact Dr.Liebmann's research facility and confirm the landing coordinates. McLoughlin, take my station and fly us safely through these orbiting vessels. It'll be good experience for you."

McLoughlin and Wood moved forward to the cockpit, McLaughlin animated again, Wood quietly. Sato took Saunders by the shoulder and marched him down the cabin. Saunders mock protested but came along.

"Soooooooooooo," he began "Lieutenant Sato, alone at last."

"Stow it, flyboy "said Sato, as she backed Saunders against the rear wall of the main cabin. "The cadets may be impressed with your machismo act, but it cuts no muster with me. Now make yourself useful and sit down, shut up and stay quiet until I speak to you."

Sato turned on her heel and made her way forward to the cockpit again. Saunders smiled to himself. He loved assured, strong women such as his previous paramour, Carol Marcus. Perhaps he had been flirting with the wrong woman. Yes, Ms. Sato would be deserving of more of his attention and a closer inspection.

Kara McLoughlin began to quiver with an excitement she could hardly suppress as she effortlessly wheeled the shuttle in and out of the busy space lanes above Pacifica. Pacifica, with its ecosystem of lush jungles, exotic wildlife, sandy beaches and crystal clear waters, was very popular with 23rd century tourists; indeed the planet was a major port of call for the SS *Arcadia*, the very star liner the *Grissom* had gone to help. Wood was wincing as she looked ahead, with McLoughlin diving and looping through the orbital traffic.

Sato came forward and sat behind Wood and McLoughlin. "Excellent manoeuvring, Cadet. Just be careful of your application of force on the inertial dampeners". McLoughlin nodded and continued to plot her course.

Klingon K'Vort-class warbird Kahless, In Pacifica orbit

"Milady Valkyris's information may have proven correct, Commander Kuri. A shuttle with affiliation to the Federation starship *Grissom* has just requested to land at Liebmann's island base", said the communications officer aboard the *Kahless*. The cloaked warbird orbited Pacifica unseen amongst the holiday traffic.

Commander Kuri was not a typical Klingon officer; he was more of a strategist, having learnt his trade at the hands of his own former commander, Kor. He had encountered the Federation before as part of a mission to the Delta Triangle and had learnt that nothing was ever as it seemed with humans. Therefore his response was cautious.

"Have our strike teams transport to the island and await my further orders. Tell our agent that we will expect them to play their part when the time comes." Kuri took his seat as his crew moved to carry out his orders. The identity of the agent working with Valkyris was unknown to him but he knew that they had been providing information to the Empire for some time. The Empire wanted this Liebmann as he held information on a new and mysterious Starfleet weapon, which had recently been detonated in the Mutara Nebula.

Kuri growled to himself as he said softly "what the Empire wants, it takes".

The beach near the Liebmann Research Laboratory, Pacifica

M'Pursong ran along the beach with ease, feeling the waves lash upon her fur. She came to a halt, panting with exertion and elation. Soon her time with Liebmann would come to an end, and she would be free to take her services elsewhere, after she enjoyed the accumulated credits the Empire had given her for her services over the years. She would miss this assignment; it had been easy, pandering to Liebmann's ego, listening, supporting, and being a loyal companion and assistant. And she would miss Pacifica. It had been a lovely spot.

She picked her discarded clothes up from the beach, shaking herself off and dressing quickly, then she made her way to the main labs. Liebmann was waiting for her at the door to the facility, directing the hired labour from the nearby mainland in carrying his baggage and assorted paraphernalia to the landing pad on the bluff overlooking the labs. M'Pursong would be sorry to see him go, he had been an entertaining meal ticket these last few years, but he would soon be history.

As M'Pursong approached the gaggle of labourers, she overheard Liebmann talking "Yes, yes, all is to go to the lower levels for storage. I will be sealing the entire facility. You can tell your compatriots that the security screens will be instituted when I depart so don't even bother thieving!" Liebmann interrupted his tirade and looked skyward as the sound of a shuttle braking from orbit, causing the assemble crowd to look skyward.

"M'Pursong, it would seem that Starfleet has finally arrived," he said as he began to climb toward the landing pad. "Follow me and let us greet our guests".

As M'Pursong followed Liebmann up the rough-hewn steps carved into the cliff, she noted a momentary flash of light in the foliage to the jungle side of the laboratory reminiscent of a transporter. So, her employers had arrived

also. Interesting.

Liebmann and M'Pursong stood on the landing pad as the shuttle, the name *Chafee* emblazoned on its side, came to a neat landing in front of them. The shuttle cooled and vented steam and after a few moments the side door panel clunked back and a small step deployed. Liebmann was delighted to see what emerged from the shuttle. M'Pursong could sense his heightened pulse rate. A female lieutenant of striking Asian beauty stepped out first, closely followed by two young human female whom wore the uniform of cadets, one raven-haired and the other a blonde. Liebmann moved forward and greeted them effusively.

"My dears, welcome to my research facility, and welcome to your beautiful crew. I am Doctor Michael Liebmann. You may call me 'Doctor'," he said as he took Sato's hands and led her down the hill away from the shuttle. Sato smiled and removed her hand from Liebmann's.

"Thank you, Doctor. I am Lieutenant Junior Grade Rebecca Sato, here to transport you to *Grissom*." Sato stood aside to introduce the cadets. "These are my colleagues, Cadet McLoughlin and Ensign Wood." Wood and McLoughlin smiled and nodded their heads as Liebmann talked to them, introducing M'Pursong as his valued colleague and P.A. Liebmann was delighted with his little 'harem' and turned to walk back towards the laboratory complex.

"Come, ladies. We shall offer you some refreshment when my helpers load my equipment on your shuttle. I am renowned for my hospitality."

"So, Libby, you still have people running around after you, so nothing changes, eh?" came the voice of Clive Saunders from the shuttle doorway. Liebmann froze. Surely it was not that buffoon Saunders whose voice he heard he thought, even as he knew it was. Nobody else would ever dare address him as Libby. He reigned in his temper and turned with a broad smile.

"Doctor Saunders. How wonderful, how wonderful. I am most pleased to see Starfleet found you in one piece. It is most gracious of you to come and collect me with our wonderful Starfleet colleagues."

Saunders leapt from the shuttle, landing with ease and sauntered up to Liebmann. "Heya Libby, you are looking good. Living off the fat of the land, no doubt, *fat* being the operative word".

Liebmann winced but held his smile.

"And I see you are as charming as ever, Doctor. Now, if you will come with me, all of you," and with that, he turned toward the laboratory complex. McLoughlin was trying not to laugh, Wood looked at Saunders with contempt and Sato merely sighed. Saunders followed the troop, nodding at M'Pursong as he passed her. M'Pursong was in a state of shock. Saunders, the other Genesis specialist was here in her grasp.

She must let the Klingons know immediately. This was too good to be true.

IKV Kahless, Pacifica orbit

"Commander Kuri, the agent has broken radio silence and is trying to contact us directly," said the communications officer aboard the *Kahless*.

"*Dor-sho-gha!*" spat Kuri, "is this agent an *idiot?* Put him on the line!"

"*Commander of Klingon vessel, this is Valykyris's agent M'Pursong speaking, respond.*"

Kuri was surprised. The voice was female and unmistakably Caitian.

"*Ha'DibaH!* Speak quickly before we are detected!"

M'Pursong was unrattled. "*The one known as Saunders is now here on Pacifica. The Federation fools have delivered him right into our hands. Advise your team to stay in the jungle until I contact them. They must watch my actions and my actions alone.*"

Kuri was elated. Saunders and Liebmann; two targs in one kennel. It was too good to be true.

"Buy' ngop. Well done, agent. We will await your signal".

The strike team would be vigilant, thought Kuri as the communication ended. Today, would be a day long remembered by his Father's house. Honour would be his.

The Liebmann Research Laboratory, Pacifica

"M'Pursong, there you are," cried Liebmann as she entered the dining area of the laboratory complex, "please come assist me with our guests, I am at a loss as to where I put the Saurian Brandy. Doctor Saunders is most insistent he would like a glass."

M'Pursong went to a storage unit and removed a bottle of Saurian Brandy and two glasses, offering one each to Saunders and Liebmann.

"Here you are, Doctor. You will find that this is what you are looking for. And your other guests. Do they require refreshments?"

Sato was sitting at a long wooden table, sipping water while McLoughlin and Wood were eating what looked like some indigenous Pacifican fruit. Sato smiled at M'Pursong.

"We're fine, thank you. We've sort of helped ourselves."

Silence was restored as M'Pursong sat opposite McLoughlin and began to groom herself. Liebmann crossed to the relaxer where Saunders sat and offered him a glass of Saurian Brandy.

"I suppose I should say 'cheers', since we are to be working together," he clinked his own glass on Saunders'.

"I suppose you should, Libby," said Saunders through gritted teeth " I still haven't forgotten your attempt to discredit Carol Marcus or your attempt to have me removed from the Vulcan Science Council liaison group."

Liebmann smiled thinly. "You have a very long memory for one so young. You should forget the past and concentrate on our exciting mission."

Saunders stood abruptly and threw his glass against the wall, covering it with the Brandy and the floor in shards of glass.

"Screw you, Liebmann. I've lost two of my team on Cinera Base and they were worth ten of you. You're a plagiarizing, lying, two-faced son of a bitch. Take your platitudes and stick them where the sun don't shine!"

There was silence in the room, as the others looked at Saunders in shock following his outburst. Liebmann spoke softly but deliberately.

"M'Pursong, have one of the labourers clear the mess and prepare to activate the security screens, we will be departing in ten minutes." He turned to Sato. "Lieutenant, if you would be so good as to make your shuttle ready, I think it is time to leave. I'll meet you at the shuttle."

He could not exit the room quickly enough. Sato walked over to Saunders.

"I don't know what history you have with that man and I don't care. Captain Esteban will *not* tolerate that behaviour on his ship, so you better get your act together and start acting like a man instead of a teenage boy. McLoughlin, Wood, we're leaving."

The Starfleet trio followed in Liebmann's footsteps. Saunders spoke to himself softly, "Damn fool. Clive, you damn fool. But if they only knew what Liebmann was capable of."

Saunders left the complex and walked toward the shuttle. He looked ahead and saw something happening on the trail. There was something lying on the ground. It was Liebmann. From out of the jungle on his right came a snarling mass of Caitian, viciously attacking Ensign Wood screaming in protest. The Caitian pushed her to the ground, knocking her unconscious with a blow to the head. Simultaneously, he heard phaser fire and looked to near the shuttle where a number of *Klingon warriors* were firing on the shuttle's closed door.

What the hell is going on, thought Saunders.

M'Pursong turned to face him, bearing her fangs and growling.

"Sooooooooooooo Doctor Saunders, you will be cooperative now, yes?"

The word *cooperative* sprang Saunders mind back to Terlis at Cinera Base and he ran at M'Pursong in anger. She easily caught him and flipped him to the ground, laughing all the while. His injuries from Cinera were not fully healed and he felt weak. M'Pursong unsheathed her claws and loomed over him.

"Now, Doctor, that was not nice. You will find your new masters not as forgiving as I."

"Stop where you are, you evil bitch, or I will blow your ass into the next world!" Saunders looked and saw Sato step out of the jungle, phaser trained on M'Pursong.

"Come now, Lieutenant. My allies have your shuttle and Doctor Liebmann. Give us Doctor Saunders and they will let you live."

Sato looked as if she was thinking about it. Not a second later, she fired her phaser.

"I don't have time for your shit!" she said as M'Pursong fell to the ground, her face frozen in shock and from the stun. Sato helped Saunders get to his feet and pulled him back into the cover of the jungle.

"Thanks, Sato," he said. "That was impressive. Remind me not to get on the wrong side of *you*."

Sato smiled tightly. "Stow the compliments, Saunders. We need to get further under cover and the island is crawling with Klingons. They've killed the labourers Liebmann had helping him, and I think McLoughlin is holed up in the shuttle. We need to keep moving."

Saunders laughed "Great. Just what I need, another bossy woman in my life. And it's Clive, by the way."

Sato stopped and looked at Saunders. "You can call me Becky. Now *move!*"

Within the *Chaffee*, Kara McLoughlin prayed hard that the doors would hold against the Klingon's disruptor fire until she could get airborne. She had tried to send a signal to the planetary police on Pacifica or off-world to *Grissom* but all communications channels were blocked. All she could do now is fire up the engines and get the hell out of there.

McLoughlin had been ahead on the trail to the shuttle when M'Pursong had let out an almighty yowl and attacked Liebmann. Wood had moved to help him and so had Kara, until she had seen the Klingons appear behind them on the trail. She knew then that her best option was to get to the shuttle and signal for help. She had barely made it to the shuttle and then she had fought to close the door. But she had made it.

The Klingon disruptor fire continued on the main hatch and the Klingons were certain to make their way to the main cockpit. Sustained disruptors would soon shatter the hatch. McLoughlin gave a savage grin as the shuttle completed its start up program. Immediately, she hit the RCS controls to rock the small ship wildly and activated the deflector screens immediately. There were quite a few screams as the shields' energy touched flesh and the Irishwoman found herself all alone. With a final lurch to make sure no one was with her, the *Chaffee* was airborne and soaring above the treetop canopy of the jungle.

McLoughlin was a good pilot and managed to clear the island before a man-portable Klingon disruptor cannon, pre-positioned on the beach by the commandos for just an occasion like this, hit the shuttle in the engine. The single shot was enough to bring down the *Chaffee*. Without propulsion, the shuttle was coming down like the brick it resembled. The last thing McLoughlin thought before the out-of-control shuttle hit the water was

Commander Ottair is going to kill me for this.

Rachel Wood awoke to find herself lying beside an unconscious Michael Liebmann. They were in a jungle clearing, and she noted there were three Klingon warriors around her. Wood was terrified but she gathered herself and sat up. The Klingons honed in on her immediately, cursing at her in their native tongue. Wood steeled herself and spoke, "Please, I do not speak Klingon. I would be appreciative if you would speak Standard."

One of the warriors came forward and spat at her in disdain. "Much as it soils my mouth to utter your human tongue, it will facilitate your interrogation!" He pulled her up by the hair roughly and to her feet. Wood screamed and struggled but he locked her arms behind her back. The other Klingons laughed at her predicament.

"Now, Earther, before you die, call to your friends for help."

Wood bit her lip as her arm was twisted. "Go fornicate yourself!" she managed to get out.

"Call for help!" commanded the warrior as he broke her arm. Wood screamed in pain and fainted from the pain.

Michael Liebmann observed this through a half open eye and decided to continue to feign unconsciousness.

Across the jungle and not far away Sato and Saunders froze as they heard an purely human cry of pain.

"Wood! They're hurting her! We have to go help her," said Sato as she turned around. Saunders grabbed her by her elbow.

"Becky, stop. Think. This is what they *want*. I know the Klingons. They'll keep her alive to draw us in. As long as she's screaming, she's useful. We need to get McLoughlin out of the shuttle and regroup. I have a plan. Trust me."

Sato relaxed. "You're right Doctor...er, Clive. Of course, you're right." She held back a tear; it must be her hormones that were making her emotional right now. Saunders wiped it away and kissed her, plain and simple, square on the mouth. Then he turned away and walked in the direction of the shore.

The lieutenant looked after him for a moment, and then followed.

U.S.S. Enterprise, NCC-1701, En route to rendezvous with U.S.S. Grissom

The chime alerted Saavik of someone at the door to her quarters. She tried to ignore it but it continued insistently. She knew her lover, one Doctor David Marcus, had boarded the *Enterprise* an hour earlier. In her mind, there was no doubt this was him.

When she'd heard her lover had come aboard, she quickly excused herself to her quarters for a brief freshening up and a change of clothing to a very clingy one-piece satin dress he'd gotten her. She had just finished putting on the crème colored garment when the doorbell chimed. It'd taken her a long time to figure it out, as she never owned a dress before, much less knew how to put one on.

As was the case since she decided to embark on this forbidden relationship, she was often unsure of herself and how she should act around him. It took a few moments to transform herself from a longing lover to a proper Vulcan before bidding him entrance. The door slid open to reveal Marcus, a broad smile on his handsome face. He rushed to embrace her the moment the door closed but she just as quickly backed away.

"David, please, a moment." She lowered her eyes so he would not see the raw passion there. Just seeing him sent a wave of pleasure through her she never thought was possible.

He put his hands on her bared shoulders. "Saavik, what's wrong? Aren't you happy to see me?"

She didn't resist. In fact, she took his hands in hers. "I am not *unhappy* to see you, David. I just find myself very... *emotional* when I am in your presence. I have not had much experience with what I feel."

"I think I know what's wrong. A bad case of love if I've ever saw one. I've got the cure for you right here." Not able to hold back any longer, he swept her into his arms and gave her a passionate kiss.

"There. Feel better now?" he said as they hugged. She took care not to exert much pressure, lest she break his ribs. The feeling of being in his arms was almost too much. She fought the Romulan in her to keep herself from taking him then and there. The Vulcan / Romulan looked deep into his eyes. What the science officer saw there was enough to convince her she was in complete, total, and utter love.

"That was most...*gratifying*. Thank you. I was happy you decided to come with me on the *Grissom*."

Marcus broke off the hug to collapse on her bunk. "Well, that's a plus. Truth is, I was determined to be on this mission for a number of reasons. Had to pull some strings but I did it. Seeing the results of my work is important but being with you is even *more* important. This way, I can keep an eye on what Starfleet does with Genesis *and* spend time with you."

Saavik looked disapproving at the young man as she moved to sit beside him on the narrow bunk, careful to show only enough of her silky smooth thigh to tease him.

"David, my love, you should not use your position to manipulate circumstances to place us together. If we are to be together, then we will be together. Your human impatience is your greatest failing."

Marcus pulled her down to lie with him and kissed her again more intensely. She wrapped her arms around him and returned the kiss.

"My only *failing* is my adoration for you. Saavik, I love you. I'd rather die than lose you." As he said it, the look in his eye confirmed the truth and the deep feelings he had for her.

"Death is not an option, Love. And I also love you. Right now, I wish to continue to explore this phenomena you humans call 'lovmaking'," she said, kissing him as she started to take off her dress.

Soon they would board *Grissom* for an adventure together but for now, they would explore each other.

The beach near the Liebmann Research Laboratory, Pacifica

McLoughlin came ashore in a bedraggled state. She had stripped to her underwear before exiting the shuttle, grabbing a compartmentalised floating aid and shoving her jumpsuit, a phaser and communicator into the watertight compartment before swimming ashore. Those Klingons obviously hadn't met a McLoughlin before. Members of her clan did not scare easily.

As she reached the shoreline, she saw a number of Klingon warriors erupt from their positions in the tree line and head toward her, shouting in their guttural tongue and aiming their disruptors. She scrambled for her phaser but before she could reach it, the Klingons were hit by phaser fire and fell sequentially.

Lieutenant Sato and Clive Saunders emerged from the jungle cover, Saunders stopping to pick up a Klingon disruptor, then to admire the cadet's almost naked form. McLoughlin didn't seem to mind the attention but quickly took her jumpsuit out of the flotation device when she realized he was looking at her.

"Kara, hit those Klingon bastards with a higher stun setting. We don't have time to bind them up. Becky, grab their disruptors and ditch them in the sea. We're going to set a trap for those sons of bitches by bringing *them* to *us*."

Commander Kuri could not believe his ears; Saunders was contacting him directly!

"*And so, Commander, I am offering you all the data I have on the Genesis Project and the two Starfleet officers who are foolish enough to trust me in exchange for my safe passage to the mainland.*"

"Why should I trust you, Saunders?" queried Kuri.

Saunders voice was sarcastic as he replied, "*Because if you know of me, you will know I have no love of Starfleet or of Liebmann.*"

Kuri considered this. He had read Saunders file in data procured by and forwarded by their agent and what Saunders said was true.

"*Do I have your word of honour, Commander?*" pressed Saunders.

"Very well, my men will meet you. Specify your location."

A short time later, Sato and McLoughlin followed Saunders into the grounds of Liebmann's laboratory complex and sat down to rest. There was a crashing as Klingon warriors appeared from the jungle, one of them dragging a fighting Wood. Behind them walked Michael Liebmann. Saunders stood forward.

"Put down your weapons, Becky, Kara. The Klingons are here at my invitation."

The lead Klingon came forward and squared up to Saunders.

"I am Kurg of the house of Duras, Commander Kuri has advised I am to allow you safe passage to the mainland. *bIHnuch!*"

Saunders stood back. "I am no coward, you bloated bag of egotistical, testosterone filled garbage. Now, M'Pursong."

The security fields Liebmann had placed around his complex now sprang to life, vaporising the Klingons standing in the immediate vicinity. With the majority of the Klingons incapacitated, Sato and McLoughlin laid down phaser fire, taking out the remaining warriors. The firefight was brief but fierce.

With the fight over, the defence field deactivated. M'Pursong walked from the laboratory complex and stood beside Saunders.

"It was well you retrieved me, Saunders. They thought you were all accounted for. And now, before Commander Kuri intervenes, I will be on my way." M'Pursong turned toward the dock and the moored waveskimmers.

"Just a minute M'Pursong" came Liebmann's fuming voice. "Lieutenant Sato, you are not seriously letting her go? She betrayed me!"

Saunders stood between Liebmann and M'Pursong.

"I have no love of our Caitian friend, but she assisted us in beating those Klingon bastards and I promised her freedom in return".

"Lieutenant, you must not let her go," protested Liebmann. "She is a traitor and a spy!"

Saunders pulled his disruptor and trained it on Liebmann.

"Working for you has been penance enough, Libby. Go, M'pursong, before I change my mind."

As she passed Sato, M'Pursong whispered to her and then strode to a waveskimmer.

A Klingon communicator sprang to life, "*Kurg, report. This is the Kahless calling. Give us your status.*"

Saunders took the communicator from Kurg's unconscious form. "Commander Kuri, I'm afraid there's been a change of plan. The planetary police are en-route and your little game is over. I suggest you leave orbit now before their Frontier Guard detects you in orbit. The Pacificans are quite insistent on their planet as a safe holiday destination and will have no qualms in blowing your sorry assed warbird to atoms to maintain that image."

Kuri screamed in rage as Saunders turned to his group and cut the communicator. The sound of planetary police sirens rang in the air as the native planetary police stingers, atmospheric and suborbital two man assault ships,

hove into view. Saunders turned and headed toward the labs living complex.

"Okay folks, I don't know about you, but I'd kill for a cup of coffee."

A few hours later the *Grissom* entered orbit of Pacifica. From his ready room, Captain J.T.Esteban spoke directly to Sato via an encrypted channel.

"Well Sato, I know that I promised the crew a 'jaunt to the seaside' but I'm sure that this wasn't what you had in mind!"

Sato smiled tightly on the view screen. "No, sir, but things have worked out alright in the end. We are all okay. Wood needs to have her arm set but we've stabilised it, and both Doctors Liebmann and Saunders are fine too."

Esteban nodded. *"Okay then, Lieutenant. We've lost time helping out with the S.S. Arcadia, so I am cancelling any time out for the rest of the crew and as soon as you are aboard we will proceed directly to the Mutara sector. If anything positive is to come out of this, we have flushed out our information leak with Dr. Liebmann's assistant. I can't say I approve of you letting her go, but we will discuss it in detail during debriefing. I'll have Chattman contact the Starfleet base on Pacifica for them to retrieve what's left of the Chaffee from Liebmann's island. We can collect her on our way back from Mutara. See you shortly. Esteban out."*

Sato turned away from the viewer and spoke to her 'crew.'

"Kara, help Rachel get to the transporter coordinates, and then please assist Doctor Liebmann with whatever he needs and getting his kit to the transporter site. We can beam Rachel to *Grissom* along with Liebmann's supplies ahead of the rest of us. Doctor S'Razzh will be waiting in the transporter room for you. Well done both of you. I'll be noting your bravery in my report."

McLoughlin and Wood nodded and turned to leave. Saunders appeared from an anteroom.

"Hey, you. How are you holding up?"

Sato sighed and turned to face him. "Fine, fine. Thank you".

They both spoke simultaneously "look about earlier" then they laughed. Saunders spoke first.

"Look, I know you're married, and I've studied enough medicine to know you're pregnant. I apologise. You're a fit bird and it was a spur of the moment thing."

Sato blushed "Your terminology is amusing as well as confusing. *Bird?* And please, nobody else knows I'm pregnant apart from our doctor, so let's just keep it that way".

Saunders took Sato's hand. "You know, if that man of yours *ever* lets you down, I'm next in line." Sato removed his hand gently.

"I'll keep that in mind."

U.S.S. Grissom

As *Grissom* left Pacifican orbit, Christopher Chattman received some unwelcome news.

"And so, Commander Chattman, the Captain has advised *me* to advise *you* that you are to vacate your quarters. Doctors Liebmann and Saunders will be sharing your quarters for the duration of the mission," said Arunie Fernando, the captain's yeoman. Chattman was not happy and mumbled profanities under his breath. It was not Fernando's fault.

"Thanks Arunie, but from what I hear from Becky Sato, Liebmann and Saunders won't be too happy with this. So then, where am I moving to?"

Fernando replied, "Oh, you'll be sharing a bunkroom with Ensign DeLonghi and Specialist Aabin. I'll let them know."

Chattman froze. This was disturbing news. He wasn't sure what was going on between himself and Aabin. Being around the young Deltan was starting to arouse him and he had been finding it hard to come to terms with his feelings. Sharing a cabin with him was not what he had in mind.

Perhaps he could bunk in with Becky Sato.

In her quarters, Sato sat on her bunk brushing her hair. *Grissom* was now on silent running and for those who had not talked to their loved ones before the Cinera incident, their recorded messages would not be sent. The majority of the crew would have to wait until after the mission to talk to their loved ones. But Sato was perturbed by something M'Pursong had whispered to her as she left the beach. A few simple words but words which worried and concerned Sato terribly.

M'Pursong had hissed silently in Becky's ear "Ensign Wood is not safe. The Hand of God is moving."

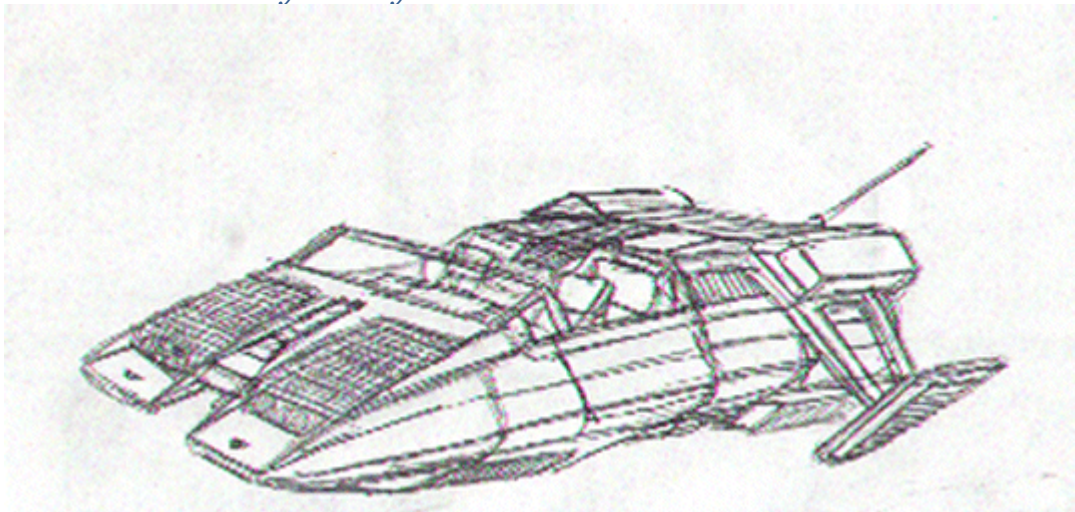
Who would hurt Rachel, thought Sato? And why single her out to Sato as a concern? And what was this nonsense about the 'Hand of God'?

For the moment, she could do nothing, but Sato decided she would need to keep an eye on Wood and ensure she was not in harm's way. She looked at her locker and the picture of her husband Robert. She missed him, but she knew they would be together again soon. Once the *Grissom* got back from the Mutara Sector, all would be normal again. She lay back on her bunk and relaxed.

She could wait that long at least, she thought.

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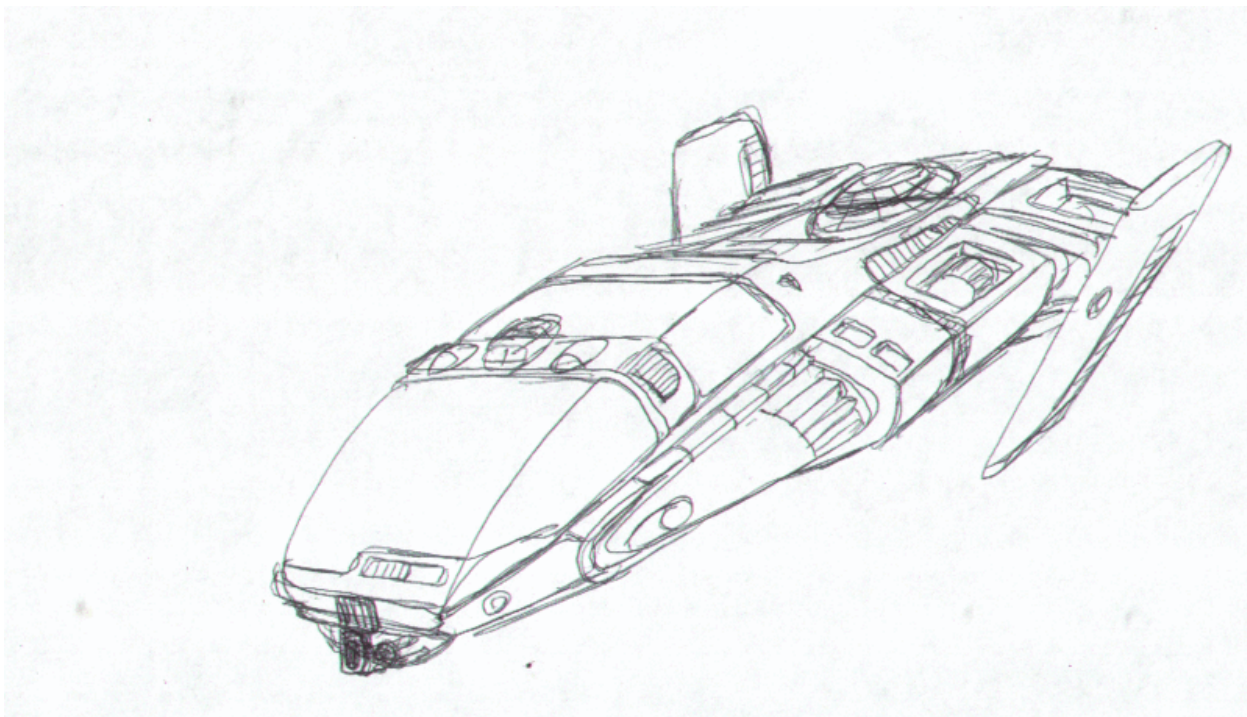
Visuals for 'The Hand of God' by Arkady



Pipeliners 'Waveskimmer'

Built originally by the Pipeliner company of Melbourne, Australia on Earth, this antigrav vehicle hovers above the wavetops, reaching speeds exceeding 150 kph, two anti-grav vanes help in grav field stabilization and steering control, while four additional antigrav units combine with thruster systems to make the Waveskimmer a popular vehicle from Melbourne to San Francisco to Pacifica and all points in between.

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Pipeliners 'Stinger'

The Stinger is a newer skimmer vehicle designed for use by the Federation Naval Patrol, and planetary law enforcement agencies of worlds with large oceans to cover. Newer and larger than the civilian Waveskimmer, also from Pipeliner, the Stinger is also faster - able to reach velocities exceeding 300 kph, and is able to operate at a much higher altitude, and can carry two officers and two passengers/prisoners.

The turret under its chin holds a set of sensory systems slaved to the officers helmet sights, and carries a visible light search lantern, loudspeakers, and a snubnosed phaser emitter that can be used to stun a suspect or disable a fleeing vehicle. This vehicle is also capable of a water landing and shallow submergence - although this last feature does not come into use all that often. Like it's older civilian cousin, the Stinger uses a large pair of antigrav stabilization and steering vanes to aid in its operation.

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Prose Episode 5:
The Hand of God

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