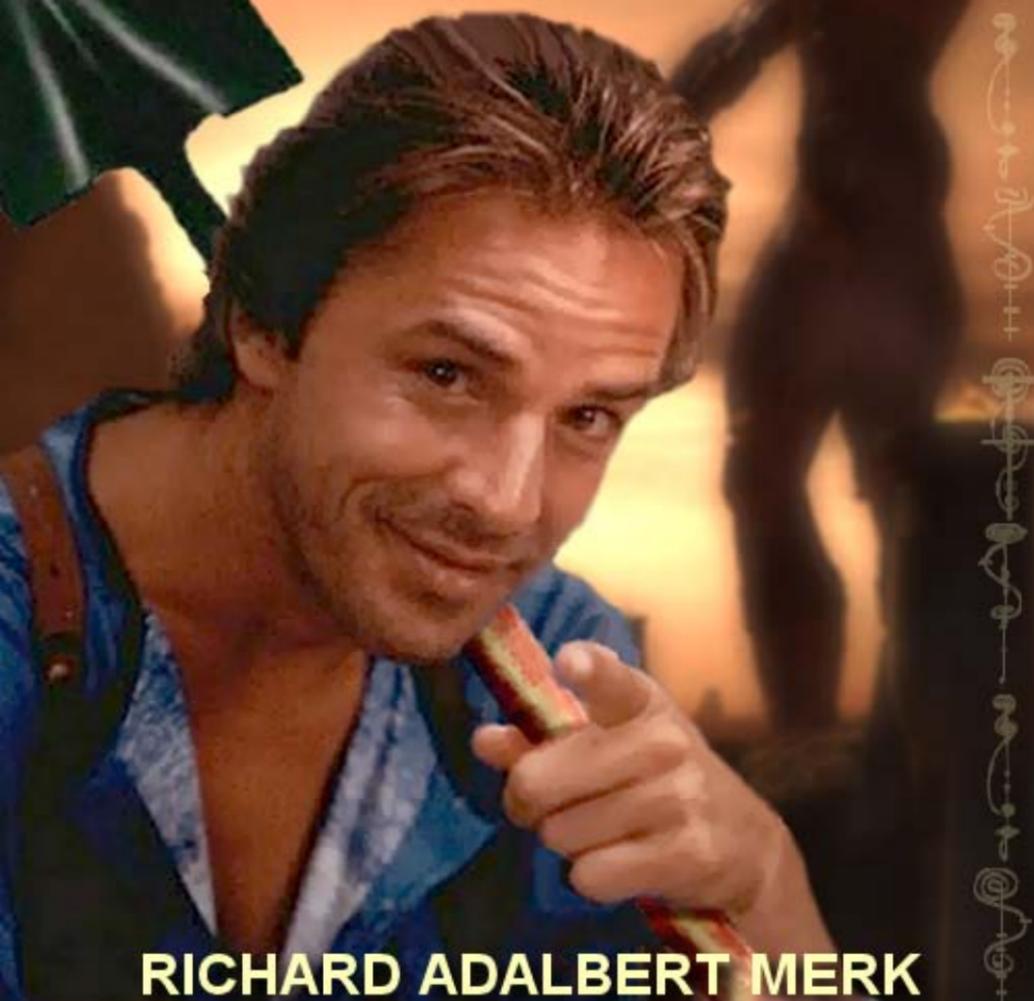


STAR TREK

BANSHEE SQUADRON

VULCAN HOLIDAY



RICHARD ADALBERT MERK

Star Trek: Banshee Squadron

Vulcan Holiday

Richard A. Merk



An "Inimitably Superfluous" Publication
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A 'Mostly True' Story

A tapestry of verdure...

A living emerald jewel...

Suspended against the umber filaments of the Briar Patch Nebula, the planet Oo-oo-ah basked in the life-giving light and warmth of a yellow sun. A myriad small azure coral seas, sinuous brown mountain chains, and brilliant white streamers of cloud all twined together across the green surface of the globe in a vast and intricate jigsaw puzzle creating a pleasing visual extravaganza. Small polar ice caps and deep green almost everywhere else promised a tropical paradise.

One tiny human-built spaceport in the southern hemisphere was the extent of modern civilization.

Sprawling ancient ruins built by the long-extinct Iconians gave silent testimony to past grandeur.

In between were thousands of trackless miles of little monkey people just dying to trade their native artworks for a ship's cargo hold full of yorna berries which they craved, artworks which could be then sold at an obscene profit back

on Serenity. It was a scheme guaranteed to make a man rich beyond the dreams of avarice. But what would this vast untapped new world really be like...?

"...A vast desert with searing temperatures -- hot even for Vulcan -- and no measurable precipitation," the dour Vulcan tour guide said.

West had roused himself from his mercenary daydream just in time to hear the end of the tour guide's monotonous monologue. He shelved his grandiose plans for the future for the time being and returned to harsh reality. To his annoyance, he was still on the tour bus with the two dozen other tourists he'd been stuck with for the last half day. They were making their zig-zag way around the planet Vulcan, stopping at all the tourist stops, taking a superficial glimpse at all the major geographical and historical features the planet had to offer.

So far West had seen a lot of sand.

In all fairness, the places the tour had been so far had all been very interesting, and many of the locations had been quite breathtaking in their own austere way. Under any other circumstances West would have enjoyed himself considerably, but he just wasn't in the mood for playing 'tourist'.

He had gotten a subspace email from Max Vasser three weeks ago asking him to please meet her on Vulcan on the tenth day of the month of Tasmeeen. The tone of the message had been almost demure, and that alone was enough to arouse West's interest.

After their angry parting a few months ago during Max's obsessive and self-destructive pursuit of the Snark and the Boojum, he had despaired of ever seeing the headstrong ex-

Starfleet officer again, not that he would ever have admitted to anyone that he *wanted* to see her again. 'No sirree! Good riddance!' he had steadfastly maintained to anyone who asked. But Max's message was an invitation he couldn't ignore.

He had spent his last few credits to refuel the *Rocinanté* and set off that very afternoon, and now here he was on Vulcan three weeks later wondering if he was the biggest fool in the universe.

The tenth day of Tasmeeen was tomorrow, so he had a day to kill. Another whole day with nothing to do but imagine all sorts of crazy reasons why Max wanted to meet him, another entire day to drive himself insane with feelings of doubt and guilt and anticipation and dread and excitement and hope and despair and elation and a thousand other emotions all swirling together in his dizzy brain. So it was either sit in his room at the Shi-Kahr Holiday Inn or get out and do something to make the time pass quicker.

West sighed heavily. Placing chin in hand, he looked out the window of the tour bus at the barren desert vista beyond. Even though the interior of the bus was kept at a pleasant temperature for the passengers' comfort, the blast furnace outside made him imagine he could feel the merciless rays of 40 Eridani frying the skin off the back of his neck. He winced at the imagery.

What in the world is Max doing on Vulcan? he wondered miserably to himself. Why does she want to meet me here?

He flipped open his tour brochure and checked the schedule. According to the leaflet, his tour group was currently on the 'Plains of Fire'.

The tour bus slowed and settled to the ground to let its passengers out to explore for a little while. The Vulcan tour guide was talking again, explaining about the various things that there were to see and do here, but West didn't pay too much attention. He looked out the window and winced again.

After everyone else had disembarked, he finally got out of his seat and made his way slowly to the exit near the front. The second he stepped out into the sun, a blast of oven heat slammed into his face causing him to gasp. All that accomplished, of course, was to let another large helping of heat into his lungs. He choked and sputtered helplessly for a few seconds until the Vulcan tour guide noticed his distress and came over.

"Caution is advised, sir. The meteorological conditions on the Plains of Fire are not conducive to intensive respiration, especially for one not accustomed to the extremes encountered here," he said.

Translating that into non-Vulcan for himself, West decided that the guide had just said, "Hot, huh?"

West grunted in agreement, recovering.

There was one thing he was interested in seeing here -- the 'lowest spot' on the planet. At 1534 meters below sea level, the atmospheric pressure was supposed to be almost Earth-like. The entire Plain of Fire was extremely low, having been an ocean floor in prehistoric times, but somewhere around here was the *lowest* spot. He looked

around, but no particular spot clearly advertised itself as such.

He pulled the brochure out of his pocket and elbowed the guide, "Your literature says that the lowest spot on Vulcan is on this plain. Can you point it out for me?"

"Certainly." Pointing his long finger across the forbidding landscape, the Vulcan said, "The lowest point is exactly 5.47 kilometers in that direction. It cannot be seen from here, but there are markers every 50 meters along the route."

West just stood and stared for a second, not sure he'd heard correctly. "Did you say 5.47 kilometers?!?" He could already feel the merciless sun starting to fricassee the back of his neck.

"Precisely."

West hung his head in defeat. There was no way he was going to walk 5.47 kilometers under Vulcan's sun and Vulcan's gravity and Vulcan's heat just so he could stand in a hole in the ground. Circumstances and this planet had conspired against him and had thwarted his attempt to enjoy himself.

Trying to console himself, he asked the guide, "So, what's the elevation right here?"

Without consulting any scanner or reference material, the Vulcan tour guide unerringly recited, "Minus 1533 meters."

"I see," said West, but the full meaning of that figure took a few more seconds to hit home, and when it did, the enormity of the cruel joke being played on innocent tourists knocked him for a loop. *And they say Vulcans have no sense of humor...*

"You mean to say that the lowest spot out there--" he exclaimed incredulously, pointing vaguely in the direction he thought it to be, "--is only one meter lower than right here?!? That tourists have to walk 5.47 kilometers just to stand in a spot that's just one meter lower than right here?!?"

"That is correct."

An evil smile slowly spread across West's face, and if the Vulcan tour guide had known its inspiration he would have called the civil authorities in an instant.

A plan was forming in West's mind. *Maybe this trip won't be a total loss after all*, he thought with self-satisfaction at the cleverness of the idea he was brewing. *And think of the boon to tourism. The Vulcans will thank me...*

=^=

That evening, West had outfitted himself with what he needed and was walking with purposeful stride and singular purpose out through the main lobby of the Shi-Kahr Holiday Inn.

Then there she was.

She was dressed in leather jacket and faded blue jeans just like he remembered her. Her mane of long brown hair shimmered in the light of T'Khut partly hiding her face in that alluring peek-a-boo style he found so irresistible. From the shadows, her eyes twinkled like two beckoning hearth fires.

When Max saw him she smiled, which put to rest half of West's earlier fevered imaginings.

"West!" she exclaimed and waved. She dropped her suitcase where she stood and ran to embrace him.

Without slackening his stride, West returned Max's smile with a genuine one of his own, but didn't reach out to meet her embrace. Instead, he said, "Hey there, babe. Can you hang on a little? I gotta go take care of something first."

West hoisted the shovel he was carrying over his shoulder and continued on towards the door.



Vulcan News Network: A human male and his female accomplice were apprehended by Vulcan Security on the ninth day of Tasmeeen after attempting to vandalize a natural landmark on the Plains of Fire. After a brief period of incarceration, the pair was released and asked to leave Vulcan.
