

The *Arcturus* rushed almost straight toward the sun, the speed and angle of approach causing the ship to enter a planned time warp.

“Maintaining warp seven point one,” Kale reported.

On the screen, the disc of the sun filled the viewer.

“Approaching breakaway point!” announced Idrisu.

“Stand by!” Johnson shouted.

“Now!” shouted Idrisu a moment later.

The *Arcturus* lurched. The eyes on almost everyone on the bridge went wide. It was not spoken, but everyone suddenly knew the time warp was not going as planned. Waves of colors bombarded the viewscreen. The engines groaned in protest.

“Something is wrong!” Kale shouted.

Space, the Final Frontier...

These are the voyages of the starship *Arcturus*!

## Star Trek: *Arcturus*

# “...Where Change is the Only Constant – Part 2”

By John Colagioia

“We’re diverging from the pre-programmed parabolic course!” Kale shouted.

“What’s happening?” Johnson demanded to know.

“Investigating,” both Kale and Idrisu replied. Suddenly, and quite unexpectedly, the entire bridge crew of the *Arcturus* was flung to the deck. Alarms blared all over the ship. And very quickly, the starship dropped out of warp. Commodore Johnson was the first to pull himself off the deck. “Status?” he asked of the bridge crew as a whole.

“We’ve dropped out of the time warp,” Idrisu stated as he re-initialized his science console.

“Where are we?” Kale asked as he slowly retook his seat at the helm.

“When are we is more likely the proper question,” added Ackermann.

“Unknown,” said Idrisu. “Our warp trajectory was somehow altered.”

“Determine when and where we are,” Johnson ordered. “Have we overshot our mark to the past?”

“Odd sensor readings, sir, the sensor data does not conform to what it should be at our target point in the time-space continuum, according to our computer’s calculations,” Idrisu noted.

“Mister Kale, take us into Earth orbit. We’ll figure out what’s going on once we enter orbit and can take a moment to figure things out.”

Several minutes later, Kale reported, “Approaching Earth, sir.”

“Sensors indicate several starships and facilities in orbit,” Idrisu added.

“That can’t be right!” Ackermann barked, “Routine space travel wasn’t even a possibility in the 1960’s.”

“Sir,” Idrisu interjected, “it appears that we are on approach to Earth Spacedock. There are two starships approaching us at full impulse with shields raised and weapons armed.”

“Hail them! Starfleet emergency frequency 4... Let’s identify ourselves, Mister Fil.”

“Aye, sir. Hailing on emergency frequency 4... This is the Federation starship *USS Arcturus* on approach to Earth orbit. Please respond.” The Catullan communications specialist Penji Fil listened closely through the receiver in his ear for several seconds. Finally he looked over at Johnson and reported, “No reply, sir.”

“Tactical display, Mister DuLac! Shields up!”

“Aye, Lord. Tactical display, shields up.”

On the screen appeared the icons of three ships, the *Arcturus* at the center with a ship of at least twice the size on either side, coming closer and closer.

“Commodore, we’re now being hailed,” reported Fil.

“On screen, Mister Fil.” A moment later a Vulcan man wearing a uniform none of the *Arcturus* crew had ever seen before, yet still distinctly Starfleet, appeared on the viewscreen.

“*USS Arcturus*, this is Captain Stark of the *USS Surak II*. Although hostilities appeared imminent due to the sudden and unexpected arrival of your vessel, we have noted your ship’s configuration and your identity, despite the temporal ramifications. As illogical as your presence may seem...we are all very fortunate indeed this day. Reverse course toward Neptune and prepare to be boarded by a team from my vessel for debriefing. And, on behalf of all of Starfleet, welcome home after your seventy-nine year absence. Captain Stark, commanding *USS Surak II*, out.”

A wave of confusion swept the bridge. “*Temporal ramifications?*” Johnson immediately ordered a meeting of the command staff, Chief Psychiatrist Ian Valtirr, and Asook Yan right there on the bridge.

“What the hell is going on here?!?” Johnson demanded to know. “We head for the late twentieth century and end up eighty years ahead of our starting point?? What happened?!? I want answers, Mr. Idrisu!”

“Well, if Mister Gary Seven’s superiors had transporters that could successfully beam a person over one thousand light years distance during the twentieth century, it does stand to reason that – three centuries later – they a) would like to keep a low profile and b) would have the ability to keep us from learning about them, using any methods necessary, which may explain that out-of-place light flash toward the end. Therefore, if they wanted to keep us from learning about them by going into the past, it makes sense that they would turn us around chronologically, not location-wise, so as not to damage the ship. If this were the case, it would explain not only that flash, but also our apparent ‘disappearance’ for those seventy-nine years.”

“If such an incident has occurred, simply reverse it,” Bael V’ahst-Ohrne’Dagon, the *Arcturus*’ Efrosian Chief Science Officer suggested.

“Yes, but if, in this time period, they know us as having been lost nearly eighty years ago and events progressed in the Federation’s favor during those eighty years, then we may cause irreparable damage by returning,” the until-now silent Asook Yan rebutted in her beautiful melodic voice. “In any event, with your permission, sir, I would wish to stay here no matter what decision is made for the ship.”

“Why?” Johnson inquired.

“Because, then Starfleet will most likely allow me access to current history files so I can determine the potential effects of your returning to the twenty-third century,” she answered.

“In that case, if that is your wish, permission granted.”

“If we remain, we may cause irreparable damage to the *crew*,” Bael warned.

“That’s why I’m assigning both Doctor Valtirr and Asook Yan to determine what the effects would be of either our staying here or returning...” Johnson began to order, then froze. Concern for other personnel? **Bael??** And just where was Ian Valtirr?? “Ms. Yan, you’re going to research what would happen if we were to go back!” he barked. “Now where in hell...?”

The communications panel shrieked. “Commodore, this is T’Sendra. Doctor Ian Valtirr and Science Specialist Iona Hanlon are in sickbay. The Psychiatrist is in guarded condition; the specialist, critical.”

“What happened???”

“I suspect that it is linked to all Deltans’ psionic rapport with their families. I felt a similar wrenching, but compensated. Plus, since Vulcans possess a longer lifespan, I and the other Vulcans are not as likely to have suffered the same loss.”

“Loss?” It still had not yet dawned on the Commodore. T’Sendra knew she would have to be brutally frank.

“Commodore Johnson, most of us will never see our families again. They are now deceased or irrevocably altered.”

Eric Johnson’s throat began to ache. Oh, he might not have been so close to his family, but to realize that all of his contemporary relatives were now **dead!** And what about Caitians, a race of felinoids who could not tolerate separation from other Caitians for any length of time? Or the Deltans, whose very minds were linked with those they loved!

“Mr. Idrisu, begin calculation on the new warp equation to get us home immediately! I’ll be in sickbay.”

“Sir, yes, sir!” Idrisu shouted in his most melodramatic imitation of a Marine in an almost successful attempt to alleviate some of the tension in the room.

Johnson halted in mid-stride. “Wait a minute. You’re a Deltan, why weren’t **you** affected???” he demanded of Idrisu.

“Simple, sir,” Idrisu replied. “My family moved quite a bit. We just didn’t have time to establish the usual bonds. To be honest, I didn’t even notice.”

“All right. Mister Timinar, Mister Lithir, prepare an engineering status report,” he called into the intercom.

“We already have one in progress, sir,” Chief Engineer Peter Timinar replied.

“Excellent. The rest of you, adjourn to the briefing room immediately.”

As the rest of the command staff headed for the briefing room, Johnson made his destination the starship’s sickbay. Just as Johnson arrived in sickbay, Doctor Valtirr began to stir.

“Ian?? Will you be all right?!?”

The Psychiatrist moaned softly. “I...I **have** to be, sir...this ship is going...to need...me...the... repercussions...Galen...Bael...M’Rakshasa...M’rrastach...Iona...check Iona...Iona...” he passed out.

Johnson whirled around, his old medical training kicking in. Iona Hanlon’s readings were nothing short of horrible! What was worse, her **physical** readings were almost acceptable. It appeared that Hanlon had simply lost the will to live! The ravishing young woman’s eyes fluttered open. Tears streamed from them.

“Mother...! Mother...! Don’t leave me... Father...! Please...! I need you so much... I love you! Don’t go! Take me, Mama, Papa...!” Slowly, Hanlon’s eyes closed and her head slumped to the right. The readings displayed on the indicator panel dropped to nil.

“I grieve with thee,” intoned T’Sendra softly. Johnson could only nod once.

“She was so...,” he began.

“...Understood.” The *Ton Shi* gently massaged both Johnson’s shoulder and his mind, absorbing some of his pain.

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Over the course of the next several days, several teams from the *Surak II* came aboard, consisting mainly of doctors and counselors that would interview the *Arcturus* crew before they returned to Earth to determine which were more likely to have problems coping with the sudden change they now faced. Among the first things on the agenda, starting with the senior command staff, every

surviving member of the crew would undergo a full medical examination to make sure no one had any physical conditions that might make survival in the 24<sup>th</sup> century difficult and to assure that no one was carrying any diseases that had been eradicated in the prior three-quarters of a century.

After undergoing their exams, the senior officers – including Asook Yan and a nearly-recovered Dr. Valtirr – gathered in one of the starship’s main briefing rooms with Captain Stark of the *USS Surak II*, where they were told many of their questions would soon be answered.

“I have been working with several prominent historians aboard the *Surak* during the time the ship has remained under quarantine,” Yan reported. “Based on history as it has unfolded over the past eighty years, and using statistical analysis and computer modeling, I have calculated with relative certainty that – were the *Arcturus* to return to its proper era and point of origin – untold diplomatic chaos would be unleashed.”

“Why?” was the general inquiry.

“Because there is one man on this ship who possesses the potential to have undermined what has become a vital alliance the Federation has established during the last three-quarters of a century if he were to be present in our original time period. I cannot yet tell you with which race this is in regards to, that bit of information has been temporarily deemed classified to the *Arcturus* crew.”

“Are we allowed to know which member of the crew?” Johnson demanded evenly, suspecting he already knew.

“Petty Officer John O’Brien,” Yan responded, the feathers on her shoulders ruffling so as to stand on end, a mild disgust barely concealed in her voice.

“Commodore! Request permission to toss out the trash?” shouted Security Chief David Maddox. “Let’s throw the garbage out through the airlock and just go home.”

“Permission denied...reluctantly,” responded the Commodore. “Right now, we need to learn exactly what has happened in these last eighty years.”

“Commodore, does this mean we’re staying?” inquired Admiral Ackermann.

“If O’Brien and his fledgling Back-to-Earth movement could become responsible for harming the United Federation of Planets in any way, we must. Ian, what have you determined?”

“Eric, we are more fortunate than we could have expected. I have reviewed the medical files of each surviving crew member and have determined that not many of the crew would develop any major psychological problems as a result of this displacement in time. Of those that would, I’ve already begun working with them, in conjunction with the counselors sent over by the *Surak*. We have, in fact, some crew members who may actually thrive in a new setting,” Valtirr replied, somewhat sheepishly. His collapse right after the time warp had been quite an embarrassment to him.

“Then we are fortunate indeed,” Johnson gratefully. “It would appear as if we’re going to stay in this era. Especially since Asook’s research seems to indicate we have been considered lost for almost eighty years. After all, that in itself is considered part of history... this history.”

“If that is the case, and you have willingly decided to stay, I must inform Starfleet Command and the Office of Temporal Investigations of your decision immediately. I’m sure they already have a team en route to debrief you and give you the most basic information you need before returning to Earth. I will inform them you are ready and willing to receive them,” Stark said, quickly leaving the briefing room to go contact his own vessel.

\* \* \*

Several hours later, the senior staff was gathered once again in the largest briefing room aboard the *Arcturus*. Upon being informed by Captain Stark that Commodore Johnson and his crew had willingly agreed to remain in the 24<sup>th</sup> century, Starfleet Command dispatched a team of six personnel, who would present a hastily-prepared synopsis of the last seventy-nine years of Federation history in the hopes it would be the first step in helping the entire crew adjust to their new time period.

“I just hope they haven’t sent a Vulcan to do this briefing,” Johnson whispered into the ear of Dr. Arcadian. “If they did, half the command staff is going to be asleep before we even reach the 2320’s.”

The crew was chattering among themselves when Captain Stark entered the room. “I cannot oversee your briefing this afternoon, Commodore. I will leave you in better capable hands than my own. The team dispatched by Starfleet has arrived. The team leader is someone whom you may be... familiar with.” Stark held up his right hand in the familiar Vulcan salute as he said, “Peace and long life to you all.”

Captain Stark then turned and left the briefing room. The door to the corridor remained open a moment longer to admit several new people. Half of them wore the new Starfleet uniforms of the type the crew and medical personnel from the *Surak* had worn when they came aboard the *Arcturus*, the other half civilian clothes – two of them wearing such similar outfits that it was obvious they worked for the same organization. The lead officer, a Vulcan, wearing a uniform with the same four round rank pips on his collar as Stark, which Johnson assumed indicated the rank of captain, looked at the gathered crew, barely able to restrain a look of ecstatic astonishment – an eerie sight to be sure.

“Commodore!! The *Arcturus* was lost seventy-nine years ago! What happened? Why did you never return?” the Vulcan asked as he proceeded to shake Johnson’s hand. The Commodore was about to reply (or perhaps scream in agony due to the Vulcan’s vise-like grip!) when the Vulcan took further notice of the presence of the crew behind their commander. Johnson managed to get a good look at the new emissary’s face and was stunned. The face was older, perhaps wiser, but there was no mistaking who he was – Solak!

“My friends!!” the Vulcan shouted. “I was certain I had lost you nearly eighty years ago!” Solak proceeded to grab the next

nearest crew member, Bael V'ahst-Ohrne'Dagon, hoisting him up nearly a meter above the deck in a Vulcan approximation of a hug. "Starfleet Command thought you lost – dead! I am pleased to know that you are alive after eighty years!"

"I may...not be ...much longer ...if you ...do not ...put me down ...Solak!" Bael barely managed to say.

"It is good to see you, Bael," Solak said as he put the Efrosian back down. "However, I must ask you some questions, to make sure you are who you appear to be."

"But, Solak," said Athena Arcadian. "The doctors and counselors from the *Surak* just put us all through a battery of tests. If we weren't who we say we are, wouldn't those tests have...?"

"This is for my own peace of mind, Athena," Solak said, looking at the petite Centauri doctor. "Bear with me." He then looked back at the Efrosian science officer and said, "Bael, on Avalon..."

"...You were 'Satan', I was 'Beelzebub', and Navahrish was proof of your 'power' over the earth. Since this incident was not recorded in any logs, only you, Navahrish, and myself would know," Bael finished Solak's sentence for him.

Barely able to repress another smile, Solak said, "You truly are my lost comrades! Welcome home!"

"Solak," Johnson interjected. "You forget, what for you has been eighty years, for us has only been days. It is I who should be welcoming you home."

Solak moved around the room, greeting each of his former shipmates and being greeted by each of them in turn. Finally, as the welcomes were completed, Solak stood near the main viewer at the front of the room, where the other members of his team had waited patiently.

"If I may ask each of you to take a seat, we will proceed with the reason we are here." Each of the *Arcturus* officers sat down in one of the chairs either around the briefing room table – with Johnson sitting prominently in front – or along the bulkheads on each side and in back. Once everyone settled down, Solak introduced his team, then began his brief. "I have been informed by representatives of the Office of Temporal Investigations..." Solak nodded in the direction of the two men in the similar suits. "...That it is in the best interests of both yourselves and of the Federation as a whole that you remain in this present time. As I'm sure you can imagine, you have quite a bit of catching up to do. Some of what I am about to brief you on you will find shocking. Some of it you will no doubt consider unexpected. I hope that you will accept what I am about to tell you without argument."

"This ought to be good," helmsman Kalin Kale said quietly to Setton To'Lock Arbelo.

Solak activated the viewscreen and began to tell the *Arcturus* command staff the history of the Federation over the course of the previous seventy-nine years. As predicted, some members of the crew found certain facts unbelievable.

"We're allied with **WHO?!?**" Maddox bellowed.

"Yes, the Klingons are now our allies, Mister Maddox," responded one of the Temporal Investigators. "Now please return yourself to your seat and be silent."

Solak continued with the brief, which lasted the better part of an hour and still only scratched the surface of everything the *Arcturus* crew had missed by jumping past more than three-quarters of a century. Once finished, the Vulcan opened the session to any questions the crew might have. He was caught by a barrage of questions; "What's going to happen to the ship?" "Where are we being assigned?" "Do we have to stay at the Academy?" "Are we being split up or are we staying together as a crew?" "Are we entitled to seventy-nine years of back pay?" "Can you pass the plant food so I can feed Pierre, my Bonsai Piersol's Traveler?"

After Idrisu was given a solid 'beating' by his friends for asking those last two questions, Solak attempted to answer the serious questions.

"What's going to happen to us?" Athena Arcadian asked, looking around at her shipmates. "I almost feel like we're going to be placed in some museum exhibit. That's about all we seem qualified for right now."

"The entire *Arcturus* crew will be given two options," one of Solak's team members, another Starfleet officer said, stepping forward slightly. "Option one: you can choose to remain in Starfleet. If you do so, we will retrain you in an accelerated course at the Academy similar to OCS – you won't have to undergo four years of Academy training again. Once complete, you will receive new assignments and continue on with your Starfleet careers."

"And option two?" asked Commodore Johnson.

"You can choose to resign your commissions and return to civilian life. Retraining and placement in either case will, of course, be provided."

"I would be interested in learning a little more, especially about current weapons and security technology, before I make such a life-altering decision," Maddox remarked, prompting murmurs of agreement from several of the command staff.

"I can show you much of what has changed, David," Solak said. "Shall we meet tomorrow morning at 0500 hours for a workout? I have now reached my physical prime, a state I had not achieved at the point when last I saw you. Simulated hand to hand combat between us will be quite...intriguing."

"Oh, I'm sure it would be," Maddox remarked with a knowing smile. "No, I have a better idea. I'll meet you on the shooting range tomorrow instead, where I have at least *half* a chance. Weapons technology couldn't have changed all that much in eighty years, could it? I mean the Phaser IV..."

"...Was replaced shortly after you disappeared by the Phaser V. This assault phaser remained part of the inventory for ten years until the Phaser VI was issued. Since then, there have been Phasers VII through X. About fifteen years ago phaser technology underwent another revolutionary redesign. As a result, the numbering system has reverted back to Phasers I and II," Solak patiently answered the rhetorical question.

"Like I said, it couldn't have changed that much; a phaser is still a phaser, right?"

Solak's only response was a slight facial expression which seemed to say 'We'll see, Mister Maddox.'

For the rest of the day, Solak explained what would happen to the *Arcturus* crew in the coming months under ideal circumstances: upon their return to Earth each member of the crew would be granted thirty days leave, during which it was recommended they try and locate any members of their families who might still be alive. Upon their return from leave, those that chose to remain in Starfleet would begin six months of intensive re-training at Starfleet Academy, including at least thirty days assigned to an active starship to familiarize themselves with modern technology and procedures in a real-world working environment.

“What will happen to us once we complete our re-training?” Johnson asked. “And what’s going to happen to our ship? Will we all be reassigned back to the *Arcturus* once this is all through?”

“Commodore,” Solak said, gazing around at the bulkheads around them. “The *Arcturus* is hopelessly out of date in comparison to the modern vessels of Starfleet. You have already seen the Ambassador and Galaxy-class vessels, which represent some of our most advanced classes,” referring to the *Surak II* and the *Odyssey*, the two starships that had intercepted the *Arcturus* when it had emerged from its time warp. “There is probably little hope aside from the *Arcturus* being placed into the Fleet Museum. But I will make inquiries and see what may become of her. In the meantime, I have this for you.” Solak handed the commodore a clear chip with what looked like circuitry printed on and beneath its surface.

“What is this? A data chip?” Johnson asked.

“It is similar to the data chips you are familiar with, Commodore. It is called an isolinear optical chip. It contains several files that have waited a long time to be delivered to you.”

“How do I access it? I don’t think we have anything aboard the *Arcturus* that can read this.”

“I will have a few technicians from the *Surak* beam over and install an optical chip reader on the computer system in your ready room,” Solak said.

“Okay,” Johnson agreed. “What kind of files are on here? Things we need to know to survive in the 24<sup>th</sup> century?”

“Let’s just call them... letters from home,” Solak said solemnly.

Commodore Johnson grudgingly accepted his former operations chief’s pronouncement. Security Chief Maddox, however, was still pondering what they could have possibly created to replace his weapon of choice, the ‘old’ Phaser IV.

*To Be Continued...*