

Ahead of the ship, perfectly framed by the main viewscreen, the wormhole opened, its otherworldly light brightening the entire bridge.

Sarek eased closer to the phenomenon, her impulse engine propelling the great ship over the brink. *Sarek* entered the wormhole, and in a blink.....

...She Was Gone.

Space, the Final Frontier...

These are the voyages of the starship *Sarek*!

Star Trek: *Sarek*

“Gamma Bound - Part III” By PJK

The array of lights and images was almost too much for the brain to comprehend, yet Kale could not close his eyes. Around him, though still performing their jobs to the highest standard, each and every crew member stared dumbstruck at the viewer. All except T’Veer, who contemplated it logically, of course.

“I wish I could be in 9/10-Forward right now,” commented Kale to ship’s counselor Kethry Sutherland, the half-Betazoid, half-human woman sitting at his left. “The view must be spectacular down there, and they don’t have any sort of job to concentrate on and ruin the experience right now.”

Nine decks below the bridge, and as far forward as a person could be aboard the *Sarek*, the 9/10-Forward lounge – the starship’s bar/meeting spot/relaxing hole was overcrowded with off duty personnel, including the crews of the two Runabout preliminary survey vessels that *Sarek* was carrying. The spectacular show of transiting the wormhole was ‘standing room only.’ A number of crewmembers held hands, others cheered the sight, and some, Bajoran and non-Bajoran alike, prayed. The ship’s assistant head bartender, Ainsley McLachlin, had stopped serving synthahol as the ship left *Deep Space Nine*, and now she joined the others near the huge bay windows, amazed at the sight.

“Impressive, isn’t it?” Captain Peter J. Koester, commander of the *PSV/USC Hudson* remarked to the red-haired woman standing next to him.

“Aye, that it is, sir,” McLachlin replied. “Never did I believe as a wee lass that I would ever see such wonders with me own eyes. Being hired on to help run the lounge here was a dream come true for me.”

Koester raised the glass he had been holding in his right hand and offered a toast. “To the success of the mission of the *USS Sarek* and her support ships. May we all come home safely when it’s all over.”

McLachlin, unable to raise a glass of her own, since she was on duty, merely looked at Koester with her large green eyes and remarked, “Aye, I couldna say it better me-self.”

Back on the bridge, Arbelo turned in his seat toward Kale.

“Captain,” he said, “we are experiencing a power drop-off on the starboard EPS power taps.”

“Will that effect our passage through the wormhole?” asked Kale, his mind now completely back to the running of his ship.

Suddenly, the viewscreen lit up again, and just as suddenly, only stars were visible. The passage through the wormhole was complete.

“No, Captain,” said Arbelo as he turned to face his ops panel again. “I do not think it will affect our passage.”

Without prompting, T’Veer opened the intercom and contacted engineering.

“Engineering, this is T’Veer. Mister Chaz’N, please run a diagnostic on the starboard EPS taps. We experienced a drop-off in the power readings during our passage through the wormhole.”

“Aye, Commander,” answered the voice of the ship’s diagnostic engineer, an Efrosian with a racial stigma. Unlike most male Efrosians, who have white hair their entire lives, Lieutenant Commander D’Nld Chaz’N was born with dark brown hair, considered a feminine trait in Efrosian society, and was unaccepted by his clan.

The captain sneezed just as the intercom circuit closed. As he wiped at his nose, he glanced at his first officer. He thought he caught the hint of a smile on her face just before the woman stood up and walked forward to the Caitain at the conn position.

“Sensorrrr rreadings place us fourrrr point seven light yearrrrs outside of the Idrrrran system,” Ensign Kes reported. She looked up at Cosna and added, “Rrrright wherrrrre we’rrrrre supposed to be.”

“Set course 181 mark 3, Ensign, one-half impulse,” Cosna ordered the felinoid helm officer. “We should be on station to construct and crew the new *GammaOne* relay in thirty minutes.”

“Confirmed,” remarked Arbelo.

T’Veer walked up to the tactical rail, and said, “I’ll be in engineering to prepare for the release of the relay station modules from cargo bay two, Captain.”

“Very good, T’Veer,” Kale said as he stood. “Number One, you have the bridge. I’ll be in my ready room.” And as he walked to the doors he took one more glance at the ensign at the helm. The doors swooshed closed behind him, barely a split-second after another sneeze was heard from the ready room. A definite smile appeared on Cosna’s face.

* * * *

Captain’s log, stardate 47028.8:

If I ever find out (sniff) who it was that assigned a Caitian to my bridge shift (honk), when it is plainly written in my service record that I’m allergic to cat hair, I’m going to make them clean the inside of the photon torpedo tubes with a toothbrush. (achoo) Anyway... We are almost to the coordinates where (sniff, sniff) we will build the new manned relay platform that will transmit our reports (achoo) and messages back to DS9. Our engineering staff says it will take no more than two days to build the platform and test the systems aboard it. I’m scheduled to meet with the new relay commander, Tonia Robbins, within the hour. (ACHOO!)

* * * *

Newly promoted Lieutenant Commander Tonia Robbins sat at the desk across from the captain. He was reading through a computer file that explained the ‘Message in a Bottle’ proposal that had earned the communications expert the promotion and assignment as senior officer to the new relay platform.

“From what I read here,” said Kale, now looking at the attractive blonde officer in the blue uniform, “your idea hinges on the ability of a photon torpedo casing to traverse the wormhole.”

“The theory behind my method is proven just by the fact we’re here, sir. That starships can navigate through the wormhole,” said Robbins. “We have a specially designed torpedo launcher built into the relay module of the station, designed to launch all casings at probe-normal speed, about point two-five C. They will cruise on the normal approach to the wormhole, causing it to open as is usually expected. The casings will then traverse the phenomenon, emerging on the other side where *Deep Space Nine* will intercept it by tractor beam, download the information, and retransmit over normal subspace to its destination. Then, once a month, one of the station’s runabouts will return the used casings to *GammaOne*. It will add a little time to a normal subspace transmission, but far less than traversing 70,000 light years.”

“As the Vulcans say, ‘Fascinating,’” remarked Kale, flirting slightly. “When will the platform become operational?”

“As soon as the engineering team attaches the modules together and the fusion core come on-line, we have to test the systems, double check the seals at the connect points once the structural integrity field is in place and fully activated, and conduct a test launch. By conservative estimates, the *Sarek* should be able to get underway in three days time. After that, the rest is up to you and the Runabouts.”

Kale pressed a button on his desk, saying, “Bridge, this is the captain. Please inform me when we are five minutes from the relay post’s planned coordinates.”

“Aye, Captain,” replied the voice of Setton T’Lock Arbelo.

Kale then turned back to Robbins, a smirk-like smile on his face.

“I read in your record that you were once posted to *Relay-28*.”

She nodded confirmation.

“A relay station must be a lonely job. I don’t think I could handle the total isolation.”

“Well,” Robbins replied, “the job isn’t as bad as you think. When I got bored I would sometimes listen to the subspace radio signals the station was boosting. In a strange way it kept me company. And *GammaOne* will be different from any relay station in known space. The platform itself is twice as large as a normal relay station, and I’ll have four people working for me, a total compliment of five on the platform instead of the usual two. I’m actually looking forward to the change of pace.”

“Sounds fascinating,” Kale gushed. “Perhaps you could tell me more about your new assignment over dinner?”

“Sorry, Captain,” Robbins apologized, a sorry look crossing her face, as she gathered her isolinear chips and replacing them into a pouch she carried. “But I think I’m going to be quite busy tonight. Building the platform and all...”

“Of course.”

“...But give me a call the next time you’re in the sector. I’ll pencil you in,” she teased, getting up from the chair and departing the room.

“Yeah.... I’ll do that,” Kale said to the closed ready room doors.

* * * *

Sarek’s massive cargo bay doors yawned open and two Sphinx work pods towed the relay platform’s huge living module clear of the starship. Using their special high-output tractor beams, they maneuvered the section of the new communications relay platform just over fifteen hundred meters from the rear of the *Sarek*’s hull, releasing it with pinpoint accuracy.

On the starship’s bridge, Lt Commander Robbins sat at the aft mission operations station, the Vulcan Commander T’Veer standing over her shoulder observing. They both monitored the progress of the relay station’s construction as huge transceivers, large

transmitting and receiving systems, and the fusion reactor that would power the station snapped into place where members of T'Veer's engineering staff, wearing EVA suits, welded the modules together.

Captain Kale sat in the command chair, monitoring the progress of construction on the main viewscreen as another Sphinx tractor towed the platform's subspace antenna out of the cargo bay.

"Captain," said T'Veer as she turned around to face the front of the bridge. "The construction supervisor reports the habitat module will have full life support available and functioning within fifteen minutes. Commander Robbins and her crew will be able to beam over and begin systems testing at that time."

His eyes still on the viewscreen, Kale ordered, "Mister Robbins, assemble your team and report to transporter room two in thirty minutes."

Robbins stood up from the station, offering the seat to Commander T'Veer, as she said, "Aye, Captain. Thanks for the lift. And be sure to let me know the next time you're in the vicinity." She winked in the captain's direction.

"I'll do that," Kale replied with a smile and a return wink as Robbins entered the aft turbolift. As the doors swished shut, Lieutenant Penji Fil leaned over the tactical railing.

"Captain, I have a security meeting with select personnel scheduled in the gym, sir. Request permission to leave the bridge?"

"By all means, Lieutenant," Kale said with a nod.

Fil turned his tactical post over to a nearby ensign, then likewise entered the turbolift, riding it down to the starship's gymnasium, where ten beings he actually had no desire to meet with waited.

As the heavy doors slid aside, Fil could see the Klingons 'playing' around with one another. Two were butting heads, evidently trying to see which would be knocked unconscious first, while two others had dragged a table to the center of the room and were arm wrestling one another there as three other warriors cheered them on. The main difference between this display and what Fil might typically find happening in the 9/10-Forward lounge was that the Klingons had set up their d'tkag battle knives on the table in such a way that the loser of the wrestling match would soon find himself in sickbay needing stitches.

Before any of the gathered warriors took notice of the Catullan in their midst, the gymnasium doors slid open again and a tall man wearing flowing robes and a sash of blue feathers entered. He smiled broadly at the Klingons before noticing his superior officer standing there with mouth agape and approached him.

"Lieutenant Fil? I am Lieutenant A-ZuRQuIL, your new assistant chief of security."

Fil, his attention momentarily distracted from the Klingons, shook the Capellan's hand, a shake that seemed just a tad too friendly and lasted just a tad too long. He then nodded toward the rowdy squad of Klingons and remarked, "Quite a group, huh?"

"Yes," replied A-ZuRQuIL. "They're lovely."

Fil gave his new assistant a funny look, then asked, "You like them?"

A-ZuRQuIL smiled at Fil as he replied, "Does a one legged duck swim in a circle?"

It took the Catullan a moment to ponder what the Capellan officer had said. Finally, he ordered, "Then they're yours."

A-ZuRQuIL cupped his hands together, a look of utter glee on his face as he asked, "Do you mean it?"

"More than anything in the galaxy," Fil replied. "Brief them, assign them their duties, and most importantly, keep them out of my hair!"

"Yes, sir, Lieutenant, sir!" A-ZuRQuIL responded, his smile widening.

Fil nodded to his assistant, then turned and headed back out the door, pleased he had managed to avoid what he considered would be an unpleasant duty. However, he began to wonder what he may have just started as the doors started to slide shut once again and he heard A-ZuRQuIL's voice saying, "Okay, boys, who wants to wrestle?"

* * * *

The next day, as the *Sarek's* engineering crew continued to connect and weld together the modules of the subspace relay platform, Lt Commander Robbins and her crew of four beamed over to the new station to begin systems checks. Meanwhile, in his ready room, Captain Kale started reviewing the roster and evaluation reports of his new crew. There were one thousand twenty four other beings aboard the starship and so far he had only met about a dozen of them personally. Following in the footsteps of his previous commanding officer, Vice Admiral Eric Johnson, he wanted to sit down and meet with each member of his crew eventually, and it was beginning to dawn on the Centauri just how big a project that was going to be when the intercom beeped for him.

"Captain, incoming message for you from the *GammaOne* platform," Arbelo announced.

"Pipe it in here, Monster." A second later, a familiar female voice came through the speaker.

"Captain Kale?" asked Tonia Robbins.

"Yes. Go ahead, Commander."

"Radio check. Testing one, two, three, four, five... Five, four, three, two, one. How copy?" Robbins voice said. Kale hesitated a moment, unsure what to say at first.

"Uh... Commander Robbins? Are you still there?"

"Yes, Captain," Robbins replied. "How do you copy my transmission?" She repeated the countoff.

"You're clear... Loud and clear," Kale replied, still unsure why Robbins had called the *Sarek's* captain just for what seemed to be a simple radio check, something she could have much more easily done with Arbelo, who currently manned the ops console.

"Thank you," Robbins playfully replied. "*GammaOne*, out."

Kale sat puzzled for a moment, staring at the intercom button atop his desk, before finally shrugging his shoulders and saying, "Women! What a confusing bunch!"

The ship's bell started ringing softly throughout the decks, marking 1600 hours and signaling the change from the Alpha shift to Beta shift, the crew working three 8-hour shifts each day aboard the ship. Soon after, the door chime rang, prompting Kale to look over and say, "Come."

Lt Commander Cosna stepped in, wearing a short skant duty uniform rather than the normal duty uniform like the one Kale wore.

"1600 hours, Captain. I'm ready to relieve you of the bridge."

"I stand relieved," Kale replied. "However, I'm going to be working here in the ready room for a few more hours, Commander. I still have to review these crew assignments."

"Yes, Captain," Cosna said as she turned to leave.

"Oh, Number One..." Kale called, but either Cosna did not hear or, more likely, chose not to hear, and left the ready room, the doors swishing shut behind her. Kale continued to look at the now-closed doors, repeating the mantra, "Women! There has got to be a way to get through to her. Get her to be... friendlier. Ten year mission or not, we'll be right back through that wormhole again to get a new first officer if she doesn't defrost a little."

Kale returned to the computer screen, once again reviewing his new crew. He intended to be familiar with the records and background of each and every one of the crew before meeting each one personally. The captain had traveled quite a bit during his life, especially during his youth and his time in Starfleet, but even then there were races and species among his crew he had never dreamed of. Although he had met and served with insect-like Kaferians before, the name of Ensign Bzz Zrk had to take the prize. And Lieutenant Jono's hobby of raising Phelician killer bees (for snacks, no less) sounded downright dangerous. Added to that was the fact that the *Sarek*, as a representative of the entire Federation, had a radically diverse crew, much more than most other starships which tended to have a majority of a single Federation species aboard. Added upon that were the inclusion of a number of non-Federation species, such as Bajorans, Klingons, and even a Ferengi who served as head bartender in the ship's lounge. The captain felt eventually such a diverse crew was going to have problems.

It could be worse, he thought. The entire bridge crew could all be Caitians.

His thoughts were interrupted by the sound of the intercom whistle, followed by the voice of his new first officer.

"Attention all hands, this is the bridge. We will now be commencing a series of drills. Repeat, this is a drill."

As the intercom circuit closed, the red alert klaxon sounded. Kale turned off his desktop monitor, stood, and returned to the bridge, interested in how his new crew would handle their first drill. He quietly walked up the port side ramp and stood behind the tactical post, close to the aft turbolift doors.

On the main viewscreen, a computer drill program projected the image of a Romulan warbird, its immense hull turning transparent as the cloak enveloped it. A tall officer wearing a sash of blue feathers over his unusual uniform stood at the tactical post, reporting to Lt Commander Cosna that the enemy ship had vanished from sensors.

Although Kale had never encountered this particular officer before, during a lull in the action of the drill A-ZuRQuIL looked over toward the commanding officer, briefly looked him over, winked, and then returned his concentration back to his duties.

After a moment, A-ZuRQuIL reported, "Warbird is decloaking, bearing 345 mark 6. Weapons are arming!"

"Helm, heading 345 mark 10," ordered Cosna. "Lock phasers and fire!"

The tactical officer fired the phasers. The simulated beam lanced out on the screen, striking the warbird moments before it cloaked again. A few minutes later, sensors warned the Romulan ship was now located astern. Again, Cosna ordered the simulated phasers fired.

"Phaser lock not established. Locking weapons now," reported A-ZuRQuIL.

"Fire aft torpedo!" Cosna ordered.

"Arming torpedo."

Alarms suddenly sounded, indicating the *Sarek* had received a simulated weapons hit.

"Aft shield down by ninety percent and on the verge of collapse," informed the ensign at ops.

"Phasers and torpedoes firing," reported A-ZuRQuIL.

"Warbird has cloaked again," replied the ops officer. "Clear miss with both weapons."

"End drill!" shouted Commander Cosna, who then consulted the monitor screen located next to her usual executive officer's seat. "That was terrible! Efficiency rating of only sixty seven percent. The computer estimates that the *Sarek* would have been destroyed in less than five minutes."

Kale, having seen enough, walked back down to the command level, saying, "Commander, if I may?"

Cosna nodded reluctantly, then sat down in her regular seat.

"Computer," Kale said as he took his place in the center seat next to Cosna. "Reset drill simulation and resume."

Once again, the red alert klaxon sounded and the warbird on the viewscreen cloaked.

"Helm," Kale ordered. "All astern, full impulse. Tactical, let the weapons lock float until my order. Arm ALL weapons systems."

"Aye," both Lieutenants Harcue and A-ZuRQuIL replied.

The simulated stars on the viewscreen appeared to move slowly away from the ship. The bridge was tense for the next several moments until A-ZuRQuIL announced, "Warbird is decloaking to starboard."

"Helm, ahead half impulse. Fifteen degrees right rudder," Kale ordered. "Tactical, lock on target. Fire full torpedo spread, then two seconds later fire full phasers." On the screen there appeared a spread of three torpedoes. Two seconds later, the phaser lanced out as well, striking the simulated Romulan vessel's shields. The faster phaser burst weakened a point on the shields, and the torpedoes breached that gap, striking the warbird's unprotected hull.

“Warbird’s warp drive is down. Disruptors are down. Their shields are at forty three percent, with the forward-starboard shield already collapsed. Heavy casualties among the crew, especially in the engineering spaces,” reported the ensign at ops.

On the screen, the warbird attempted to cloak once again, achieving only a semi-transparency before suddenly returning to full view.

“Their cloaking shields have collapsed,” A-ZuRQuIL reported.

“End drill,” ordered Kale, who then turned to look at Cosna, who was subtly trying to avoid the captain’s gaze.

“When I served aboard the *Tian-An-Man*, Captain Richardson’s standing orders were to reserve weapons power by only arming one system at a time,” she explained.

“The *Tian-An-Man* is a twenty-something year old ship, if memory serves,” Kale said. “With a design that was new back in my original Academy days! Their power curve is very different from a Galaxy-class starship.” He glanced toward the computer display next to Cosna. “What is the efficiency rating, Commander?”

Cosna consulted her screen, her jaw dropping for a split-second before she caught herself and replied, “Up to ninety seven percent, Captain.”

“You really should learn the abilities of your ship before you take her out. I spent a month aboard the *Enterprise-D* learning everything I could about the design in general and that starship in particular.” Kale looked briefly smug, saying, “In the words of James T. Kirk, I want that three percent. Continue the drills, Number One. Learn this ship and her capabilities. It may be necessary some day if we are to survive the next decade in the Gamma Quadrant.” And with that order, Kale stood up and returned to his ready room.

“Yes, sir,” Cosna replied stiffly as she watched the captain leave.

* * * *

After three days the relay station was complete. The final test was now at hand. Lt Commander Cosna, Lt Commander Kane, and Ensign Jeffery Bloom were dispatched through the wormhole in the Danube-class runabout *Hudson*, to be stationed near *DS9* to monitor the test from the Alpha Quadrant.

Kale prepared a message as the *Sarek* maneuvered to a position one light year from the *GammaOne* platform. Soon, the message was transmitted.

“Hailing frequency is closed,” reported Arbelo.

“Very good. Now we sit and wait,” said Kale. “If everything works as expected, we should be underway in about an hour.”

At that very moment on the relay platform, monitored closely by Robbins and her crew, the message was received, transferred to the isolar chips in the first available ‘wormtorp,’ and within seconds launched toward the wormhole’s event horizon. The torpedo casing sped toward the wormhole, which as expected opened and ‘swallowed’ the small device.

At the other end of the wormhole, the neutrino levels elevated, indicating an object would soon be emerging from what the Bajorans called the ‘Celestial Temple.’ Shortly after, the wormhole opened and the torpedo flew out, grabbed from the vacuum of space moments later by a tractor beam from *DS9*, pulling it into one of the cargo bays where it automatically mated with a transceiver system. A couple of minutes later, the *Hudson* received a hail from Commander Sisko.

“The test was a complete success,” the commander reported. “And please relay the following to Captain Kale; He’s on.”

“Copy that, Commander,” Cosna replied as she gave Ensign Bloom, an unusual emotional Vulcan that had been raised by humans, sitting at the Runabout’s helm a look of confusion, then gave the order to take the runabout home.

Back aboard thirty minutes later, Cosna reported to Kale on the bridge, informing him that the test transmission was successful. Kale relayed the news to *GammaOne* with a smile, wishing Robbins and her crew farewell, then ordered the *Sarek* on into the Gamma Quadrant.

“Approximately twenty nine hours to the coordinates where the Hudson and Cocheco will be launched,” Arbelo reported from ops as the starship prepared to enter warp.

“Very well, Monster. Tell the PSV crews to ready their ships for launch sometime tomorrow. They might want to get a little relaxing done while they’re still here. I can’t imagine being stuck inside one of those little ships for months at a time!”

“Just gives them the incentive to find new class-M planets, I suppose,” Arbelo remarked with a grin as he returned his attention to his console.

“By the way, Captain,” Cosna said as she finally took her seat to Kale’s right. “Commander Sisko’s response to your message was, ‘You’re on.’ You’re on to what?”

Kale smiled at the response, laughing softly before replying, “I asked Ben if the next time we came through the wormhole, would he be interested in playing a game of baseball in the holosuite. My best holoteam based on historical records against his.”

“Baseball?? We’re going into a whole new quadrant of the galaxy that we’ve just barely scratched the surface of, and you want to go back to *DS9* to play baseball?” Cosna’s gaze simply returned to the main viewer just as the *Sarek* entered warp, saying with a distinct lack of emotion, “Uh huh.”

“Lighten up, Number One,” Kale said, still smiling. “We have a long mission ahead of us.”

The End