

The ship decloaked just off the starboard bow, a malevolent, ugly visage on the viewscreen. Without warning, it fired an energy weapon which struck the ship's unprotected hull. Sparks flew everywhere. Half the bridge crew fell to the deck, staining the carpet with their blood. A hissing sound could be heard, starting low and increasing in volume as the gash in the dome above the command deck widened. Her breath was sucked out of her lungs as a horrible pressure developed in her chest. Suddenly, everything went...

...Black. Lt Commander Yu-Fen M. Cosna, executive officer of the Federation starship *Sarek*, bolted upright in bed, clutching her throat. Her cabin, as usual, was pitch black. She croaked out the command for the lights, and as they blinked on, she looked around her bedroom, still breathing in ragged gasps. Everything was as she had left it. ...As it should be. She checked the chronometer next to her bed. There was still four hours before she was supposed to wake up.

Leaving the lights on, she lay back down on the bed, but her eyes refused to close. She still thought she felt the tight pain in her chest. After fifteen minutes of staring at the bedroom ceiling, she got out of bed, dressed in her uniform, and headed toward the bridge.

Space, the Final Frontier...

These are the voyages of the starship *Sarek*!

Her ongoing mission:

To seek new life... To contact new civilizations...

To Boldly Explore the Unknown!

Star Trek: Sarek

“Mind Touch” by PJK

“Captain,” said Lt(JG) Setton To’Lock Arbelo, the ship’s Terran-Vulcan-Efrosian hybrid operations officer, who sat at the ops console on the bridge. “Receiving telemetry from PSVs one and two. The *Hudson* is detecting an F-class star with three planets in orbit. None of them M-class. *Cochico*, on the other hand, is detecting two class-M planets in a G-type star system only five light years from here.”

Kale stood up from the command chair and walked over to Arbelo’s station, peeking over the officer’s shoulder to look at his panel.

“Any signs of life?” Kale asked.

“Probable positive,” responded Arbelo.

Kale turned toward – though was obviously trying to maintain a distance from – his Caitian conn officer, Ensign Pr’n Kes. “Ensign, set course...” Kale paused to check the coordinates on Arbelo’s console. “097 mark 3. Ahead warp five.”

“Courrrrrr plotted and laid in, sirrrr,” the feline officer purred. “Incrrrreasing speed to warrrrr five.”

As the starship *Sarek* accelerated, the aft turbolift opened and Lt Commander Cosna walked onto the bridge, her eyes droopy and bloodshot. She walked down to her seat and slumped into it, which attracted the captain’s attention. He walked over to where she was sitting.

“Problem, Number One? Your shift doesn’t begin for another three hours,” he said.

“Just couldn’t sleep, Captain,” she replied, turning her attention to the computer screen next to her seat. “Figured I’d get an early start on business.”

“Very commendable,” said Kale as he sat in the center seat. “Oh, by the way, the *PSV Cocheco* has detected two class-M planets in a star system along our current route. We’re currently on course to investigate.”

Cosna’s eyes went wide as soon as she called up the information transmitted by the preliminary survey vessel on her screen.

“No!” she said at a near-scream. “We can’t!”

A concerned look crossed Kale’s face as he asked, “What do you mean? Why?”

“I... I don’t know, sir,” she stammered. “I just... We can’t...! We mustn’t!”

“Are you feeling all right?” Kale asked.

“Yes. No. I mean... I don’t think... No,” she finally said, and air of defeat in her tone.

“Report to sickbay,” Kale said to her. “That’s an order, Commander.”

“Yes, sir. Thank you, sir,” Cosna said as she got up and walked toward the forward turbolift.

When the lift reached deck six, the petite Asian woman started walking toward sickbay. Along the way, she stumbled, leaning against the corridor wall. After a moment, she continued down the corridor again, again stumbling a few meters along, this time into ship’s counselor Kethry Sutherland. The Counselor helped Cosna back to her feet.

“Sickbay?” Sutherland asked.

“Yes, but how did you...?” Cosna started to say, until realization dawned on her. “I forgot, you can pick up people’s thoughts when you touch them.”

"I'm sorry, but your thoughts were very strong when you stumbled against me and I caught a glimpse before I could erect a mental shield," Sutherland apologized, continuing to help the diminutive first officer into sickbay. "I could also feel you're bothered by something. Something important. Would you care to discuss it?"

"If I wanted to discuss my problems with life, I would make an appointment, Counselor," Cosna snapped. Then her expression quickly softened. "I'm sorry. I've been edgy lately. Lack of sleep."

The commander hopped up onto the examination table and the ship's chief medical officer, Doctor Rasa Palin, entered the room from his office, a tricorder in his hand. He asked Cosna how she felt as Sutherland left the sickbay.

"I've been very edgy," she said. "Snapping at people for little or no reason. And I've been having trouble sleeping the past few nights."

"Mm hmm," said the Bajoran doctor as he scanned her with the medical scanner. "Well, I find nothing physically wrong with you, aside from fatigue." He started to punch something into the padd he picked up from a tray next to the exam bed. "The lack of sleep is what's making you edgy. If it continues, take this." He handed Cosna the padd, which she glanced at.

"Warm milk?"

"It'll knock you right out," Rasa said.

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The ship's bell chimed and a number of officers exited both turbolifts, replacing the earlier shift. Commander T'Veer, the Vulcan chief engineer, walked over to the captain.

"Lt Commander Cosna is not feeling well," she informed Kale. "She asked if I could cover her bridge shift."

Kale nodded at his second officer and offered her the command chair.

"I stand relieved," he said, walking into the turbolift, to which he ordered, "Deck ten, forward station one."

* * * *

In her quarters, Cosna tossed in her bed, a half-empty glass of now-cold milk on the nightstand next to her head.

In her mind, the ship was back.

It was metallic blue, and even though inanimate objects cannot have emotions, it looked mean, angry and ready to kill.

This time would be different. This time she was ready. She ordered shields raised and weapons armed well ahead of time. But why was everyone moving so slow? Did they not see the danger? The ship fired its energy weapons. They fizzled on the now raised shields. She breathed a sigh of relief, until suddenly the front of the ship glowed a bright pink and a projectile launched from a missile tube Cosna swore was not there before. The projectile struck, shaking the bridge all around. Panels fizzled, ODN conduits popped and sparked. The entire bridge crew, save herself, lay dead on the deck.

Another projectile launched from the alien ship, which seemed almost to be smiling. The projectile struck...

...Cosna screamed aloud!

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Two decks above and on the opposite side of the saucer section, Lieutenant (Junior Grade) Jo Ann Tredworth bolted out of her bed. The feeling was strong, and it nauseated her. She had to stop the flood of emotions, or it would drag her down with them.

She dressed quickly, walked out into the corridor and reached out with her mind. The Betazoid remembered the Vulcan disciplines she had learned when she was younger, carefully probing in the direction of the flood of emotions; anger, conflict, and despair. She started following the feelings she was sensing down the corridor.

Eventually she took a ladder one deck down, still probing with her mind. She focused on one location and started walking toward it until she came to the realization it was some of the Klingons assigned to security. A mind touch confirmed Tredworth's suspicions that they were merely practicing on the nearby phaser range.

She tried relocating the original emotions that had woken her. Feelings so strong they actually woke her from a deep sleep. She searched with her mind for a moment. Then, suddenly, there they were again. Not far now, only a deck away. Tredworth again probed a little more. Knowing who the emotions were coming from would help in finding them so aid could be offered.

"Oh, Deities!" Tredworth cried, starting to run toward the nearest turbolift. "It's the first officer, Commander Cosna!"

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Down in 9/10-Forward, Captain Kale was enjoying a synthale while reading a replication of a 20th century science fiction collection when his combadge beeped.

"Captain, this is T'Veer. We are entering the Selenda star system."

Kale glanced out the huge forward viewports and saw the bright yellow star directly ahead.

"Set course for the closer of the two class M planets. I'm on my way up to the bridge," Kale said, placing a bookmark in his novel and placing it under his arm as he left the table.

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Tredworth pressed the door chime. No answer. She pressed it again. After another moment, the doors swooshed open to a darkened cabin. “Commander Cosna?” asked the junior officer. “I’m Lieutenant Tredworth. May I come in?”

It took a couple of moments before a weak voice answered, “Yes.”

Tredworth entered the cabin, the doors closing behind her blocking the only light that had been in the room.

“Computer, lights, one-quarter intensity,” the Betazoid requested.

The lights came up slightly, revealing Lt Commander Mickey Cosna, wearing her nightgown and sitting on the couch, tears streaking down her face.

“I know why you’re here,” she croaked, her voice strained.

“You projected your emotions quite strongly,” said the telepath. “You even woke me out of a deep sleep.”

Cosna started explaining what had been happening, every detail, more than she would ever have told even her closest friend if she had had one aboard the starship. In a way, the sharing made her feel better and the young lieutenant projected a sense of ease into her.

“Commander, may I try an experiment?” Tredworth asked. “It will require getting into mind contact with you.”

“Yes, please,” sobbed Cosna. “Show me I’m not crazy!”

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“Sensors show highly developed vegetation and myriad forms of animal life,” reported Arbelo as Kale and T’Veer stood watching, the captain glancing at the main viewscreen from time to time. “However, no intelligent life. Basically a perfect colony world.”

“T’Veer, please log Selenda III as a life-supporting class M planet which should be studied for possible use as a colony or starbase world,” Kale ordered. T’Veer nodded.

“Mister Harcue, set course for Selenda IV, half impulse,” the captain ordered.

“Aye,” the helmsman replied.

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Tredworth slowly moved, layer by layer, into Cosna’s mind. Somewhere therein, the answer lay. Using Vulcan methods she had learned before entering *Starfleet Academy*, and feeling like she was committing a deeply personal violation the entire time, she moved deeper into the consciousness of the executive officer.

Then finally... Contact!

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“Approaching Selenda IV,” reported Harcue. “Two minutes to standard orbit.”

“Very good, Mister Harcue,” said Kale. “Monster, what do long range sensors show us?”

Arbelo turned, a smile on his face. “Indications of cities and advanced road systems, Kalin.”

Kale wrung his hands in anticipation. He turned to T’Veer who sat in the first officer’s seat and said, “Our first ‘First Contact’ in the Gamma Quadrant. It’s times like this that I got into Starfleet for in the first place.”

“Indeed,” remarked T’Veer.

Suddenly, the intercom came to life.

“Tredworth to bridge.”

“Go ahead,” replied the puzzled captain.

“Sir, this is Exobiologist Jo Ann Tredworth. I’m currently with Lt Commander Cosna. Are we anywhere near the orbit of Zrra... I mean, Selenda IV?”

“Yes. We’ll be entering orbit any second now.”

“No, sir! Get us out of orbit right away! Please, sir, I’ll explain when I have the time. But we have to get away from that planet now!”

Kale looked at T’Veer. She raised her right eyebrow when Kale shrugged his shoulders.

“Mister Harcue, take us away from orbit. Full impulse.”

With a heave as the maneuvering thrusters fired, the starship pulled away from orbit and back out toward deep space. No one noticed the slight shimmer – like an energy surge – against the atmosphere they left behind in orbit.

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Counselor Sutherland, Lieutenant Tredworth and a still emotionally-scarred Yu-Fen Cosna sat in the captain’s ready room, where Kale sat behind his desk.

“The reason Commander Cosna was experiencing these nightmares of late was because Selenda IV is inhabited by an extremely xenophobic race, which calls their planet Zrradar. They are a telepathic race,” explained Tredworth. “After the *PSV Coheco* passed the system and performed survey scans several days ago, the Zrradarians sensed our approach and somehow ‘locked

on' to Commander Cosna. As far as I can tell, it was because she has what could be termed the 'strongest personality' on the ship. When she slept, when she was at her weakest mentally, they probed her, learning information about the *Sarek's* defenses and capabilities."

You mean they knew everything about this ship that the Commander knows?" Kale asked, a look of concern crossing his face. "What do you think they intended to do?"

"As we approached the planet, I was able to make contact with the Zrradarians through the Commander's mind. I know for a fact they intended to use the information they obtained to destroy this ship if we entered orbit. They are capable of sublight spaceflight and have advanced cloaking and weapons technology. With the information they had acquired, destroying us would have been a simple matter, particularly while they held the element of surprise."

Cosna looked up at Kale for the first time and mumbled, "They were using me." Tredworth then continued her explanation.

"The Zrradarians wouldn't even have tolerated our presence in their solar system for much longer. They just didn't have any other ships in position to intercept us sooner. Any plans you may have made for the other planet, Captain, I suggest you cancel them."

"So noted."

The three visiting officers all rose and headed out the door to the bridge. As Tredworth assisted Cosna to the turbolift, Sutherland turned back to her captain.

"She's emotionally scarred from the experience, Captain," the counselor said softly. "She's going to need my help. But hopefully she'll be back to normal real soon."

"Normal, huh?" Kale said with a grimace. "Oh, joy."

Sutherland smiled at Kale's comment, then said, "Chin up, Captain. It's not all bad," as she turned to help escort Cosna back to her quarters.

The End