

The sun rose over the mountain, casting its light onto the dew covered leaves. Slowly, the sounds of the forest came to life. Birds twittered and small mammals scurried about on the floor of the dense foliage. James Wilson took a deep breath, stretching his arms to their limits, feeling the muscles tense and relax. A feeling he always enjoyed, now more so than most times, now that he was where he really wanted to be. Exploring where no human had ever been.

The holodeck doors parted, and Lt(JG) Larry Harcue, wearing his usual red uniform but carrying a pack with other clothes in it, entered. He stopped and dropped his duffle, puzzled at the sights around him. Then he saw Wilson standing in a clearing among the trees and decided to walk over to introduce himself.

“James Wilson, civilian head botanist,” the older man said, shaking the Starfleet officer’s hand.

“This is a lovely scene,” remarked Harcue, slowly turning in a complete circle to admire the view.

“Yes, isn’t it? Earth. Pacific northwest, around the early 20th century.”

Suddenly Harcue’s combadge beeped, and a voice said, “Lieutenant Harcue, this is Lieutenant Commander Cosna. Please report to the observation lounge immediately.”

“On my way, Commander,” Harcue replied as he offered his goodbyes to Wilson.

“I should be going myself,” remarked Wilson as he walked beside Harcue through the opening doors. “I have to be tending to my Arboretum.”

Wilson continued on toward the right, down the corridor, soon disappearing around the curve. It was then that Harcue remembered the bag of clothes he had dropped on the ground upon entering the holo-program. He turned back around, saying, “Almost forgot to shut down the holodeck too.” Returning to the control panel, he ordered, “Computer, shut down holodeck four.”

The computer beeped, then the female voice replied, “No program is currently running in holodeck four.”

Puzzled, Harcue re-entered the holodeck. Sure enough, the only thing visible was the black walls, ceiling and floor, covered by the familiar yellow grid pattern, and the bag of workout clothes sitting a few meters inside the door. Scratching his head, Harcue grabbed the bag and left, and the holodeck doors slowly slid shut.

Space, the Final Frontier...

These are the voyages of the starship *Sarek*!

Star Trek: *Sarek*

“More Life Than You Know” by PJK

The *Sarek*’s new chief exobotanist, Lt Commander T’Ashara of Vulcan, who also had also been posted as the assistant chief science officer, was one of the last of the *Arcturus* crew to transfer to the new Gamma Quadrant Federation flagship. Although she had hated (as much as a Vulcan can hate) the idea of leaving the *Arcturus-A*, the idea of being among the first to find and catalogue all new species of plants in the newly opened Gamma Quadrant intrigued her no end.

She entered the ship’s arboretum, the place aboard the *Sarek* she found the most fascinating for its variety of plants from every corner of the Federation.

As she walked around, she took note of the fact that over half the room was planted with only grass. Not too unusual a plant for an arboretum, but to waste so much space when so many other more interesting plants species could have been planted in its place seemed illogical.

She sensed the human move up behind her. Turning to face him, she clasped her hands behind her back.

“Commander T’Ashara?” the man asked.

“Yes.”

“I’m James Wilson, the head civilian botanist. I maintain and run the arboretum. I think we are going to be working together quite closely.”

“Indeed,” T’Ashara replied, her right eyebrow going up in a typically Vulcan expression. “May I inquire why so much of the arboretum space wasted with simple grass? Would not other plants serve the purpose better?”

“Right now the grass planted here serves two purposes, both suggested by Captain Kale when I met with him prior to our departure from *DS9*,” Wilson explained. “For now, it provides an area for the crew to hold picnics or gatherings in an environment more natural than 9/10-Forward or the holodeck.” He paused to look around at the room, almost as large as the *Sarek*’s main shuttlebay, before continuing. “The second is to provide space for new plant samples we expect to collect during the ten years we’re projected to be exploring this newly opened quadrant. Personally, I don’t think enough extra room was set aside, but the mission planners wanted certain examples of plants found on various Alpha Quadrant planets with us when we departed.”

“Very logical,” T’Ashara commented after she thought about what Wilson had said for a moment. “I see that now.”

Wilson smiled, then laughed.

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Captain's log, stardate 47184.5:

We have just completed our second month in the Gamma Quadrant and I'm pleased to report that ship and crew are performing exceptionally. To date, we have charted two new star systems and made an exploratory survey of a third, containing two terrestrial planets and three gas giants.

We are now on approach to the system of Gengah, a mid-sized G-type yellow star that the crew of the PSV Hudson have reported has a highly unusual number of class-M planets in orbit, five in all. This phenomenon deserves closer investigation, so I've ordered the Sarek into the system for full-scale exploration.

Kale, out.

Captain's personal log, supplemental:

Could the 'Ice Queen' be melting? Lieutenant Commander Cosna actually seemed friendly today. My warmth, charm and good looks must finally be getting through to her.

On the bridge of the *Sarek*, Captain Kalin Kale sat in the command chair, though hunched slightly forward, an indication of his excitement. Though having been born in the trinary star system of Alpha Centauri, he spent most of his life in space, first with his father who traveled from world to world as his work as an oceanographer demanded and then his own years in Starfleet, and still his fascination for space, to know the unknown and see what no others had seen, burned as brightly in his soul as it ever had.

"Now enterrrring the Gengah solarrrr system, Captain," reported the female Caitian ensign at the conn.

"Thank you, Mister Kes," answered Lt Commander Yu-Fen Cosna, the ship's first officer. "ETA to the first class-M planet?"

The feline officer consulted her console before reporting, "One hourrrr, ten minutes to standarrrrd orrrrrbit of Gengah IV. Frrrrrom therrrrre, thrrrrree of the fourrrr otherrrr class-M planets arrrrre in rrrrrange of shuttlecrrrrraft."

Kale turned to Cosna.

"Commander, form an away team and contact transporter room three."

Cosna nodded pleasantly, "Yes, Captain."

Kale, sensing an opportunity in his first officer, continued with, "By the way, call me Kalin. And may I call you Yu-Fen?"

Cosna shook her head, saying, "No." As she headed toward the turbolift, Kale started to protest until the first officer added, "But you can call me Mic. Lyal always used to call me that. And nobody uses Yu-Fen."

"Mic, huh?" Kale said, his face frowning slightly. "I'll have to... get used to that." When he noticed Cosna's curious look, he added, "It's a long story. Maybe I'll get around to telling you some day."

His gaze returned to the viewscreen, but the look of excitement failed to return.

"Mister Fil," Cosna said as she walked up the ramp toward the observation lounge door with one last glance at the captain. "With me, please." The two officers entered the hall into the briefing room behind the bridge, Cosna seating herself at the head of the table, where she started to call for all the crew she would need for her away teams.

Several minutes later, six people were gathered around the conference table. Cosna turned to the Vulcan woman on her left and said, "Commander T'Ashara, I want you to lead Team B. Take Ensign Romane and Lieutenant A-ZuRQuIL. I'm assigning you to Shuttlecraft 12. Take it over to Gengah V, the closest of the other class-M planets in the system and first conduct an orbital survey. Then take the shuttle down to the surface and do a thorough exploration of the most promising area you detect from orbit. Probes indicate no signs of intelligent life, but still, be careful. In the meantime, I'll be leading Team A, which will beam down to Gengah IV with Lieutenant Fil and Ensign Tozark."

"Understood," said T'Ashara.

"Very well then," said Cosna, gathering her padds and chips. "Team B, you may proceed now. It will take you some time to reach Gengah V. Team A, meet me in transporter room three in one hour."

With acknowledgement, they all stood, and while half headed toward the main shuttlebay, the others prepared for beamdown.

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"Enterrrring standarrrrd orrrrrbit," Ensign Kes purred.

"Acknowledged," Kale said, pressing the intercom button on the arm of his chair. "Main shuttlebay, this is the bridge. Shuttlecraft 12 can launch when ready."

Down in the main shuttlebay, the atmosphere retaining field lit up a bright blue as the three member away team entered the Type-6 shuttlecraft, designated the *Kean*.

Lt A-ZuRQuIL, whose immense physiology took up most of the forward cockpit area, sat in the pilot's seat while T'Ashara and Romane took seats in the rear, performing last minute equipment checks.

"*Sarek*, this is the *Kean*. Ready for departure," A-ZuRQuIL said over the comlink.

"Acknowledged, *Kean*. Shuttlebay door is opening," the deck officer replied. Seconds later, the huge door, almost a full third of the diameter of the *Sarek*'s primary saucer hull, lifted upward, revealing the distant stars and the curve of Gengah IV. The shuttle's engines hummed to life, the nacelles on each side glowing an electric blue, and it lifted off the deck and glided almost

silently through the forcefield and out the open door. A-ZuRQuIL expertly piloted the craft around the hull of the *Sarek*, heading toward the point of light that was the planet Gengah V.

An hour later, the second away team materialized on a plain overlooking a lush river valley. Tozark, another of T'Ashara's xenobotanists, took out his tricorder and started scanning. Meanwhile, Fil and Cosna stood and admired the view.

"It reminds me of Kauai," Cosna offhandedly remarked.

"Who?" asked the puzzled Catullan security chief.

"Not a who, Lieutenant, a where. An island in the Hawaiian chain in the Pacific Ocean on Earth. It's known for its lush tropical rain forests and deep river canyons. I went there once, when I was young, with my mother and father."

"Commander!" called Tozark, who had moved slightly down the incline. Cosna and Fil walked over to the obviously excited ensign and looked at the tricorder he was holding.

"Is that reading correct?" Cosna asked.

"As far as I can tell," the ensign said. "I scanned twice just to make sure. But there's only one way to tell. Go and check it out in person."

Cosna thought for a moment, then, nodding, said, "Agreed."

The three officers started hiking down the side of the slope, a new puzzle beckoning.

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The *Kean* touched down on the surface of the very green world designated Gengah V by the Federation. A-ZuRQuIL exited the shuttle first, his phaser drawn, and seemed almost disappointed when there was nothing around to attack them.

T'Ashara and Romane followed, the Vulcan scanning the area with her tricorder. Her right eyebrow rose in puzzlement, and she consulted with Romane to confirm her suspicions. The ensign agreed with the Vulcan's hypothesis, and T'Ashara had the team start searching around, quickly confirming exactly what T'Ashara had postulated.

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Cosna spotted it first. The structure was as tall as a two story building on Earth, except at the base it was barely two meters across, tapering as it rose, with the exception of irregular markings and 'platforms,' to less than one meter in width. It looked distinctly like an altar of worship of some kind.

Cosna approached closer, scanning the structure. Suddenly, she heard a muffled yelp and turned to see Fil, his phaser drawn, looking at an opening in the brush. Ensign Tozark, however, was nowhere to be seen.

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"It does not make any sense," T'Ashara remarked. "The plant life here is of an order equivalent to six million years of evolution, but according to our readings this planet's environment being capable of supporting life of any kind is only on the order of 500,000 years. Prior to that, this world was barren."

"Perhaps my tricorder is in error, Commander," remarked the huge Capellan.

"My tricorder is reading exactly the same, Lieutenant," said Romane, showing his tricorder to the security officer.

T'Ashara thought for a moment, then ordered, "This is illogical. We must return to the shuttlecraft. I must confer with Team A."

In a few moments, the away team returned to the shuttle, and it took off into the clear powder-blue sky. Unnoticed by the crew, the area where the shuttle had landed was completely clear of any plant-life, simply dry dirt.

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"Where did Tozark go?" Cosna yelled.

"Nowhere willingly," exclaimed Fil, pointing to the marks where the missing crewman's boots scraped across the ground.

The two followed the marks, Cosna too preoccupied to notice that the holster where her tricorder should be was now empty. However, before they got far, Cosna's combadge beeped.

"T'Ashara to Commander Cosna. We are currently on approach to land at your coordinates. We must consult with you."

"We are currently searching for a missing away team member, T'Ashara. Please stand by."

As the two officers continued their search for Tozark, the shuttlecraft *Kean* landed nearby. Team B disembarked from the shuttle and approached Cosna and Fil. Romane stopped, looking around, and consulted his tricorder before rejoining the rest of the crew. Nearby, Cosna was explaining to A-ZuRQuIL what had happened to her away team member, then ordered him and Fil to continue the search for the missing crewman.

"Commander T'Ashara, I think you ought to see this," said Romane, presenting his tricorder to the Vulcan woman. "What are the chances that two completely separate ecologies on two different planets could develop exactly the same plant life?"

T'Ashara, studying the screen, remarked, "Approximately two billion, nine hundred seventy three million, three hundred eighty five thousand, nine hundred and sixty four to one against."

The three officers started walking along the path that the two security officers had beaten. Very soon, they came upon a small clearing where Fil and A-ZuRQuIL stood, looking up at amusement at Ensign Tozark, who was hanging upside down from a tree, though otherwise seemed unharmed.

“What happened?” Commander Cosna asked the red-faced ensign as the security officers helped him down.

“I was kidnapped by a plant,” Tozark replied with a straight face.

“No, really... What happened?” asked Cosna.

“No. Really, Commander. I was kidnapped by the plants. Vines wrapped around me and a large leaf covered my mouth to keep me from yelling. Then I was dragged here and hung by my ankles. But it was really strange. Even though I was being dragged, it felt quite gentle.”

Cosna reached for her tricorder, realizing for the first time it was not in its holster. She looked around, saying, “Uh oh.”

Then, without warning, a tricorder came flying out of the woods, landing on the ground at Cosna’s feet.

“Commander,” Cosna said to T’Ashara as she looked at the tricorder sitting on the bare ground. “I suggest we return to the shuttle and head back to the *Sarek* at once.”

“Agreed,” T’Ashara replied.

The group walked carefully back along the path they had followed into the clearing back to where the shuttle had landed. As they neared the shuttle, the entire group stopped short, staring with mouths agape. In front of them, the shuttle hung almost sixty centimeters off the ground, supported by vines from the nearest trees.

“The shuttle is still intact and operational,” Fil reported, consulting his tricorder. “It’s just... hung up.”

The away team carefully entered the shuttle, watching the vines move away from the shuttle door as it opened. They belted themselves into their seats, expecting a problem during takeoff, surprised that the vines released the shuttlecraft as soon as the shuttle’s engines took hold, propelling the small craft skyward.

Several minutes later, the shuttlecraft landed back inside the *Sarek*’s main shuttlebay and the entire away team took the turbolift to the bridge, where Captain Kale waited. T’Ashara, Romane and Tozark all took seats at the science consoles along the aft stations while Fil returned to his tactical post and Cosna explained to Captain Kale everything that had happened on both Gengah IV and V. Kale ordered a course to the next of the three remaining class-M planets in the system. Within thirty six hours, all the planets had been scanned with the starship’s sensors, confirming T’Ashara’s initial hypothesis. There was indeed intelligent life in the Gengah star system.

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TO: Starfleet Exploration Command - via Federation Administration: *DS9*

Dear Ben,

Please pass on the attached data. I just wanted to let you in on our greatest discovery to date.

The Gengah system must be declared off-limits until further study can be performed. Initial surveys have confirmed that three of the class-M planets have been ‘terraformed’ by this system’s dominant life form. The difference between this system and others Starfleet has explored is this one is ruled by the plants.

They are a collective intelligence, they can communicate in their own way, and they apparently have a structured society, lifestyle, and even religion, evident from the ceremonial alter Commander Cosna’s away team found on the surface of Gengah IV. The fourth planet is the home-world, with ‘colonies’ established thousands of years ago on Gengah II, from which planets V, VII and VIII were terraformed. (Gengahformed?) Spores from the plants were released into the planet’s atmosphere, where they eventually reached space. The collective intelligence uses the solar winds to direct the spores to their new colonies. The process has taken several hundred thousand years, but it worked!

The Gengahns apparently do not ‘mind’ our curiosity, nor our presence, as long as we follow their rules. And until we can completely understand those rules, I believe it is best that we leave them alone in peace. And learn not to make the same assumptions again. We always believed no animal life meant no possibility for intelligent life. The Gengahns proved us wrong. There was more life than you know.

Looking forward to that ball game against you. Kalin.

FROM: Kale, Captain Kalin - Commanding Officer - *USS Sarek NCC-72075*

The End