

Security chief's log, stardate 47623.1:

We are now in our seventh month of charting and exploring the Gamma Quadrant. The Sarek will soon arrive at the planet Bopak IV, known to the locals as Pluton, sight of a disastrous first contact by a team from the Ferengi trading ship Quatlaw. The Ferengi vessel was attacked by armed satellites as they entered orbit of Pluton. The planet's dominant species is a humanoid warrior race who believes friendliness is a sign of weakness. Starfleet Command has ordered the Sarek to make contact and open diplomatic relations so future missions in this sector of space will not need to worry about coming under attack. This mission will probably not be easy.

Fil, out.

"Entering standard orbit," reported Lt Larry Harcue from the conn.

"Acknowledged," replied first officer Yu-Fen Mickey Cosna, who was sitting in the command chair chatting with ship's counselor Kethry Sutherland. Pressing the intercom on the arm of the chair, she announced, "Captain, you're needed on the bridge."

Captain Kalin Kale, commanding officer of the Federation starship *Sarek*, the Gamma Quadrant flagship, stepped out of the doors of the ready room just off the bridge and stood looking at the grey/green planet the vessel now orbited.

"Shields remain raised and phasers energized as advised, Captain," Cosna reported as Kale stepped over to the command chair. "The Ferengi ship that first contacted the Plutons, hoping to open trade negotiations and find out more information about the so-called Dominion we've been hearing about, described them as hostile, unfriendly, inhospitable and easily angered. At least the survivors did."

"The survivors?" asked Harcue, turning to face the first officer.

Cosna nodded, adding, "Out of an initial landing party of eight, only two lived to return to their ship, which barely made it back to the Alpha Quadrant."

"Whoa," remarked Harcue, quickly returning his attention to the conn.

"What are we going to do?" Kale asked.

Space, the Final Frontier...

These are the voyages of the starship *Sarek*!

Star Trek: Sarek

"Pluton Nights" by PJK

Based on a story premise by Phil Schreiber

On holodeck three, Lieutenant (JG) Penji Fil was practicing self defense maneuvers against multiple adversaries. After throwing the third and final opponent against the shiny black and yellow grid wall he simply stood there.

"This isn't enough. Computer, what other personal combat programs are available?"

"Karate match, Earth. Kung-Fu engagement, Earth. Chu Chet-Nee tournament, Andor. Wrestling match, self-programmed by Lieutenant A-ZuRQuIL. Klingon Calisthenics regimen, self programmed by Lieutenant Kro'Toth. No further such programs currently available."

Fil thought for a moment, then asked, "What are the conditions of the calisthenics regimen?"

"Armed player fights free-style against up to three other opponents over varied terrain and constructs."

"Are the parameters changeable?"

"Opponents and terrain are changeable."

"It's always good to know your enemy, they say. Computer, load calisthenics program. Change programmed opponents to two Klingon warriors, male."

Around Fil, the scene changed to a jungle with 'monkey bars' and wrecked structures in various locations. Before him, Fil found a heavy sword stuck point down into the ground and a spiked glove with sharp projections on the fingers, similar to long knife-like fingernails. Fil looked at the two weapons unhappily.

"Computer, change player's weapon to a Klingon bat'leth, warrior configuration."

As he watched, the two original weapons faded away, replaced by the curved shape of the Klingon 'Sword of Honor.' Fil picked it up, carefully feeling the weight and balance of the weapon when the air was suddenly split by a blood-curdling scream as one Klingon warrior came flying over a nearby bush, his own bat'leth raised to attack. Fil immediately assumed a defensive stance, warding off the blow and knocking the Klingon to the ground with his own momentum. Fil started to raise his weapon for the kill when he instinctively turned and dropped to the ground, rolling away from the killing sweep of a second battle sword wielded by the other Klingon opponent, who had managed to make his way into the fray unseen.

“Die, Klingon scum!” Fil shouted as he lunged after the second Klingon with the sword. The Klingon turned to strike again, receiving instead the longer blade of Fil’s bat’leth through the chest. The warrior dropped to the ground, motionless. Fil paused momentarily to enjoy his victory until a swishing sound reminded him there was another opponent present.

Again dropping to the ground, Fil rolled, narrowly avoiding a bat’leth blade to the head. He reached up as he felt a wetness on the side of his face and realized his ear lobe was bleeding where it had been narrowly slashed by his opponent’s weapon.

“Computer, what happened to the mortality fail-safe?” Fil shouted, scrambling out of the warrior’s reach and taking a defensive position behind a set of the ‘monkey bars.’

“Mortality fail-safe is automatically circumvented when this program is in use,” the computer’s female voice responded.

“Now you tell me,” Fil grumbled.

“You didn’t ask,” said a somewhat familiar voice from behind Fil.

Still keeping a careful eye on the Klingon warrior in front of him, Fil glanced behind. He was shocked to find another Klingon armed with a bat’leth simply standing there. Reacting by instinct, Fil flipped to the right away from both opponents. His surprise increased when the new opponent went blade-to-blade with the holographic warrior Fil had first started against. Fil marveled at the fluid way the new Klingon handled the bat’leth against his opponent. Seeing an opportunity, Fil entered the fight, and distracting the warrior enough for the new Klingon to deliver a killing blow. The first Klingon fell face-down in the dirt. Fil raised his own bat’leth once again, preparing to strike at the new third opponent’s head. The Klingon quickly raised his own bat’leth to block the blow.

“Lieutenant, why are you attacking me?” the Klingon asked.

Fil was so shocked that the holographic character was talking directly to him he almost dropped his weapon. It took him another moment to realize that he recognized the Klingon as Lt Kro’Toth of the Klingon Imperial Defense Force, a squad of which was stationed as part of the *Sarek*’s security department.

“What are you doing in here?” asked Fil in outrage.

“I was passing by the holodeck when I noticed my program was in use. I was curious as to who among the crew had guts enough to try it.” Kro’Toth looked at his superior officer with an amused expression. ““Die, Klingon scum?” Not a normal battle cry, sir.”

“You’ve been in here since I began?”

“Apparently. If you don’t mind me asking, since my squad and I came aboard I have sensed apprehension from you. What bad experiences have you had with Klingons to cause such repressed hatred?”

Fil requested a towel from the computer, which materialized in his hand. As he wiped his brow he said, “If you must know, I grew up hating Klingons.”

“But, why...?”

“I don’t know if you every reviewed my service record, but if you had, you would see that I was born in the mid-23rd century – a time when the Federation and the Empire were locked in a decades-long cold war. A time accident placed the crew of the *USS Arcturus* in this era about three years ago. Let’s just say that old habits die hard.”

“I understand,” said Kro’Toth. “Perhaps my squad and I could help you get over that ‘habit?’”

“Forget... I mean, no, thanks. I’ll just have to get used to it that in my own time.”

Fil tossed his bat’leth point down into the ground and exited the holodeck. Kro’Toth just stood, looking from the abandoned weapon to the now-closing doors.

After storming down a couple of corridors, Fil finally calmed down and began to think.

“Maybe he’s right,” Fil said to himself. “Maybe old habits may die hard, but perhaps times change as well. But how can I?”

* * * *

Captain Kalin Kale called a meeting of his senior staff in the observation lounge. Around the table sat first officer Cosna, security chief Fil, chief engineer T’Veer, chief of operations Arbelo and ship’s counselor Kethry Sutherland.

“We agree that this cannot be handled like a normal first contact mission,” stated Kale, looking around the table at the faces of his officers. All agreed.

“Any suggestions?”

For a moment, the room remained silent, until Fil cleared his throat.

“Captain, if I may suggest... as much as it bothers me to make this suggestion, knowing where both you and I, as well as several other members of this crew came from... Why not send the Klingons?”

“The Klingons?”

“From what I have read in the Ferengi report about the Plutons, the Klingon Strike Group would be perfect for interaction with this civilization.”

“Fine. Assign Lieutenant A-ZuRQuIL and the Klingons as an away team and start negotiations to open diplomatic ties,” ordered Kale.

“Captain,” said Fil. “If I may, I’d like to lead the away team myself.”

“You?”

“Yes, sir. I... think it would be good for me.”

Kale considered for a moment before finally saying, “Request approved. Get your team together. You beam down in one hour.”

An hour later, six figures materialized on a field outside the Pluton city of Turfon, an average size city surrounded by walls over six meters tall.

“Lieutenant Fil, thank you again for honoring me by letting me lead this mission,” said Klingon Lt Kro’Toth, the head of the ten member Klingon Strike Team assigned by the Empire to the *USS Sarek*.

“It was no problem. Believe me,” Fil replied. “Have you made contact with the planetary government?”

“Yes,” Kro’Toth stated. “They are sending a representative to meet us and escort us into the city. I did find their wording rather strange though.”

“How so,” asked Fil as he looked uncomfortably at the high wall of the city not far away.

“The exact wording was; ‘We will send Dorzak to challenge you. Welcome to Pluton.’”

Fil simply stared at the much taller Klingon.

“Challenge you? ...I mean, us?”

Kro’Toth looked down at Fil, a thoughtful look crossing the warrior’s face.

“Yes. That was the message. A most interesting people, these Plutonians.”

Kro’Toth started walking toward the wall of Turfon, followed by his four Klingon soldiers, leaving Fil standing alone in the field for a moment until he ran to catch up.

The five Klingons and one Catullan reached the base of the wall, built of large stones with razor-sharp spikes sticking out at irregular intervals. Looking around, they could see no gate, no ramp and no bridge to get through or across the wall. One of the Klingons, the squad sergeant, pulled a tricorder from his uniform and started scanning the wall. Kro’Toth, a puzzled look on his face, said, “I do not understand. The government official told me to approach the city from the south. There we would be ‘challenged.’”

Suddenly, a tunnel formed through the wall in front of the away team and three Plutonian warriors in full battle armor and carrying long, sharp spears came running out, yelling a battle cry, and engaged the *Sarek*’s team. None of the away team had a chance to draw an energy weapon before the Plutonians were on top of them, though Kro’Toth managed to draw his mek’leth and two of his squad pulled their d’ktahg knives, while Fil and the remaining Klingon took on the Plutonians hand to hand. Grappling with the warriors, they managed to hold their own for several minutes until one of the Plutonians managed to break loose from the conflict, throwing Lt Fil to the ground and raising his spear to strike directly through his chest. However, before the killing blow could be thrust, the warrior crumpled to the ground, a mek’leth protruding from between his shoulder blades. Kro’Toth stood over the body, smiling in a way Fil had never seen a Klingon ever smile before. But before Kro’Toth could grab back his weapon and rejoin the battle, a powerful sounding clap could be heard and the two remaining Plutonian warriors immediately ceased their attack and knelt facing the tunnel through the wall. Standing just within the tunnel was another Plutonian, a head taller than any of the warriors who had attacked the *Sarek* team, and whose armor was very ornate, festooned with medals and ribbons. The Plutonian was laughing with great amusement.

“Very nice,” the Plutonian laughed. “Very well done. I am Dorzak, Chieftent of the Shectey Force, what your culture might call the Chief of Police. You have proven yourself well. I invite you into our city.”

Dozark gestured in toward the tunnel and the away team, after exchanging glances, started walking into it. Dozark made another gesture toward the fallen member of his attack squad and both surviving members removed small energy weapons from their belts and vaporized the body.

“He has been honored in death as he honored in life. Showwly teme Chatnoo,” chanted the Chieftent.

The two warriors repeated the chant, and after the three Plutonians entered the tunnel its entrance melted into solidity once again.

The away team emerged from the tunnel within the city, onto a street filled with Plutonians, all wearing some form of armor. Fil, looking slightly nervous, scanned the street back and forth with his eyes. Adding to his discomfort, the five Klingons accompanying him looked completely at home. Chieftent Dozark emerged from the tunnel behind them.

“Which of you is Lieutenant Kro’Toth?” he asked.

Kro’Toth indicated who he was, then started introducing the away team, which Dozark interrupted as “Inconsequential.” Then he noticed Fil.

“And what is this here?” Dozark asked, indicating the Catullan security chief. “He is not of the same species as you and your warriors. A plaything you carry with you? ...Or a gift for us?”

“I’ll have you know I’m the Security Ch...,” Fil started to bluster before Kro’Toth pushed him aside and stepped between Fil and Dozark.

“He is a necessary part of our team,” said the Klingon lieutenant. Glaring at what was actually his superior officer, Kro’Toth added, “He occasionally gets a little too pushy for his own good. Sergeant, keep an eye on the Catullan.”

“Yes, Lieutenant,” replied Sgt Tor’Kil, who placed a restraining hand on the shorter Starfleet officer.

Dozark lead the group down the street, explaining the traditions of his planet as they walked.

“You of the Federation surprised us,” explained Dorzak. “From the example the Ferengi we shamed had given us, we expected little better from you, especially since they boasted of their superiority over the Federation. In fact, we have not met worthy off-worlders since the Dominion tried to send their enforcers many Iars ago.”

“Shamed?” asked Fil, having completely missed the Plutonian’s mention of the mysterious Gamma Quadrant alliance it was the *Sarek*’s secondary mission to find more information about.

“We let them live, little one,” Dorzak said with disgust. “Five of them were honored easily at the opening before they even understood what was happening. And unlike you, they had their weapons drawn as they approached. When I refused to bid them

entry, the sixth of the sniveling creatures tried to attack me with some kind of whip-like energy projector. He was easily disarmed and honored for his bravery.”

Sgt Tor’Kil smiled. “You killed him!” he exclaimed.

“Yes!” smiled Dorzak back. “You are being honored as well.”

A chill crept up Fil’s spine. He glanced from side to side, looking at the buildings on each side of the street. It was little comfort to him that four of the Klingons were now suddenly glancing around the same way as himself.

“What do you mean, we are being honored?” asked Kro’Toth cautiously.

“Normally visitors to our fair city are open for attack at any step. Most of the visitors collapse from the stress long before any attacker would actually reach them, if any were even really trying. But for your visit, your bravery has declared you ‘off limits.’ You will be safe as long as you stay. You proved yourself well at the opening, even going as far as honoring one of my best troopers. Although in normal circumstances you would be a treasured prize, you need not worry.”

Kro’Toth gave the Chieftent a Klingon salute, saying, “Tlho’.”

The group arrived at a large building where two Plutonians dressed in the same armor as the troopers who had attacked the away team outside the wall stood guard, one to each side of the large double doors. They stepped aside as Dorzak walked up the steps, gesturing for the *Sarek* team to follow. Once inside, the Chieftent explained, “This is where you will be interrogated to find out your true purpose here. Negotiations will follow I’m sure.”

“Interrogate?” asked Kro’Toth, not sure he liked what he was hearing.

“You have a problem, Lieutenant Kro’Toth?”

“I just don’t like the tone of your statement, Chieftent,” Kro’Toth said, leaning closer to Dorzak, his hand unconsciously clenching and flexing.

“What tone would you like, Lieutenant?” asked Dorzak.

Fil noticed the Chieftent reaching into a fold in his armor. The Catullan knew from their relative positions, the Klingon lieutenant could not see the subtle movement. Gulping down a lump in his throat, Fil stepped toward the two.

“Dorzak, Lieutenant Kro’Toth just said he did not like the wording you used in your explanation. I think you meant you wanted to ask us some questions. Didn’t you?” Fil said forcefully.

The small Catullan’s sudden fierceness took the Plutonian by surprise, and he quickly pulled an empty hand out of the folds of his armor.

“Yes,” answered Dorzak, almost meekly compared to his previous attitude. “Follow me.”

The chastised Plutonian lead the group into a room about the size of the observation lounge aboard the *Sarek* furnished with a number of chairs. Dorzak sat at the head of the table, leaving three seats on each side for the *Sarek* away team.

* * * *

Kale was sitting in his ready room, supposedly going over crew assignments, but was actually indulging in a private passion, reading old science-fiction novels. As he turned a tattered, dog-eared page, the intercom buzzed.

“Captain,” said the voice of Commander T’Veer from the bridge. “Lieutenant Fil is calling from the surface.”

“Thank you, Commander. Pipe it in here, please.”

A moment later, Kale was talking to his security chief on the planet.

“Good evening, Lieutenant. How many Klingons do we have to bury?”

“None, yet, Captain, though we have come close a couple of times today.”

“I was joking, Lieutenant. What happened?”

“Captain, if you thought the Klingon civilization was brutal, just wait until you read my report. I just wanted to inform you the away team will be staying planet-side for the next five duty shifts. Negotiations should be completed by then.”

“Five shifts!” Kale exclaimed. “You do know that is forty hours... Almost a full two days!”

“What can I say? Kro’Toth is doing a very good job.”

“Doing what?”

“Let’s just say he’s been... rewriting Federation history.”

“Rewriting history? What do you mean?” asked Kale, puzzled.

“Whoops. Gotta go, Captain. I’ll check in with you later. Fil, out.”

“Lieutenant, wait! I...” Kale stared at the intercom button on his desk, puzzled. “Rewriting history? Ahh... yeah,” the captain said before finally returning to his book with a shrug.

* * * *

In the Pluton ‘Interrogation’ Room, Kro’Toth was telling his version of the Federation’s ‘glorious’ history.

“...Then after the first battle games between our Empire and the Federation which honored many of our warriors, a truce was granted to evaluate if they had learned appropriately. When it became apparent that the Federation needed still more tutoring, the Empire offered our help, but both sides were dishonored by the intrusion of a race called the Organians.”

Fil smiled slightly, remembering back to his childhood, when his father told him how a war between the Federation and Klingon Empire was averted at the last moment by the intervention of a highly advanced race and the uneasy peace that followed. To his amusement, the Plutonian seemed horrified by the idea of a race that could prevent such a ‘Tutoring of Honor’ as Kro’Toth continued.

“That dishonor went on for year after year, lasting decades, until eventually the Federation and the Empire realized the Organians had withdrawn and the tutoring could reconvene. Again, battles took place that honored many warriors on both sides, until finally those of us in the Empire finally knew the Federation had learned well and could now take their place as our allies. That alliance continues to this day.”

Kro'Toth returned to his seat. Dorzak looked pleased about what he had heard. He stood and walked over to where Fil sat.

“So, this little one is actually your superior aboard your vessel?”

“He has earned the honor,” replied Kro'Toth.

“His feistiness and bravery has been shown even to me. I like him. I will suggest to the High Government that your Federation would do us honor if we give you permission to travel our region of space and occupy neighboring systems should you choose to establish colonies.”

“Thank... I mean, that will be acceptable to us,” replied Fil.

“Agreed,” said Kro'Toth, smiling with a sharp smile.

* * * *

Two days passed quickly, Fil reporting in periodically that while still comparatively brutal, the Plutonians were treating the away team well. Finally came the time for the team to beam back to the ship.

Kale stood next to the transporter console, took a deep breath, and exhaled slowly.

“Been over three years and I still get nervous around Klingons,” he commented.

“Understandable, sir,” replied the smirking transporter operator.

Kale tried to ignore his subordinate's grin and simply ordered, “Energize.”

The transporter hummed to life, and six beings materialized on the platform. Kale's jaw dropped as he first noticed his security chief. Lieutenant (JG) Penji Fil was normally thirty centimeters shorter than the Klingons who had accompanied him on his away mission, but now he stood out even more. He was wearing some of the most elaborately decorated battle armor the Centauri captain had ever seen, from the ornate gold helmet down to the silver-plated chain mail covered with bronze chest plates, right down to the thick-soled armored boots that made the Catullan stand fifteen centimeters taller.

“Uh... Lieu... Lieutenant, explain?” asked the shocked captain.

“The Pluton took a liking to me,” said the muffled, weary sounding voice of the Chief of Security.

“I.. uh... can see that. I look forward to reading your report.”

Fil clanked down the transporter steps to stand directly in front of the captain.

“Permission to change into my duty uniform, sir?”

“By all means, Lieutenant. Then you can report to my ready room for mission debrief.”

“Actually, sir, can we postpone until tomorrow?” Fil asked, sharing a glance with Kro'Toth as the five Klingons headed toward the door. “I've got an appointment on the holodeck with... with a friend.”

“0900 then. And don't be late. I can't wait to hear this away mission debrief,” Kale said. Fil nodded, then started toward the door, nearly stumbling into them from all the weight he was carrying before they opened and he managed to slowly clank down the corridor. As the doors swished shut, Kale could not help but break out into laughter.

The End