

“Mister Wilson, why is the Teganelis Petorum planted next to the Digifelum Lisentium?” asked Lt Commander T’Ashara, the *Sarek*’s Vulcan head xenobotanist.

James Wilson, the civilian botanist in charge of the *Sarek*’s arboretum looked up from where he had been planting a fern and wiped a line of sweat away from his eyes.

“Good morning, Commander,” said Wilson. “To answer your question, I’ve been planning to cross-breed the two plants. I believe the resulting shade of violet leaves should be a lovely complement to the azalea bed.”

T’Ashara contemplated the thought for a moment, then said: “I had wanted to make clippings for growing in the planters on deck fifteen. I will wait for your experiment to end.”

“No need,” said Wilson, and he handed T’Ashara a medium sized tray of seedling Aldurion Flame Flowers, scientifically known as Teganelis Petorum.

“But... Where did you get these? I saw no other plants near you when I walked over.”

“Maybe you should see Doctor Rasa about getting a Retinax-5 injection.”

“Illogical.”

“If you say so, Commander. Have fun with deck fifteen.”

T’Ashara raised her eyebrow, turned and left the arboretum. Wilson just smiled after her.

Space, the Final Frontier....

These are the voyages of the starship *Sarek*.

Star Trek: Sarek

CHOICES Part I

“The Results” by PJK

In the captain’s ready room, Captain Kale was conducting a debriefing with a fellow Starfleet captain and that captain’s own first officer. Seated across from Kale, Captain Peter J. Koester and Lt Commander Virgil D. Kane, the two senior officers of the *Preliminary Survey Vessel Hudson*, a converted Danube-class runabout that was one of a pair of identical ships helping to explore the Gamma Quadrant by preceding the much larger starship *Sarek* and determining if star systems and interstellar phenomenon were worthy of more in-depth investigation by the *Sarek*’s crew.

“There was nothing of interest in these two sectors,” Koester was explaining, pointing out the route the *Hudson* had taken for the past several months on a padd Kane had handed him. “Long range sensor scans indicate a couple of potentially populated star systems in Sector G-72, but the Cheskans have indicated to my crew that those systems may be within Dominion territory.”

“We have, however, seen some promising indications along the edge of Sector G-74,” Kane added, indicating a new sector away from known Dominion space on the screen. “Both the *Cochecho* and the *Hudson* have detected transmissions in the EHF bands that may indicate...”

Kane’s sentence was cut off by the sound of the intercom and the voice of the *Sarek*’s Asian first officer.

“Captain, subspace message coming in for you,” said the voice of Lt Commander Cosna.

“Excuse me, Gentlemen,” Kale said, pausing the briefing. “It is nice to be able to receive subspace communications directly through the wormhole since that comet passed through.” Kale then pressed the intercom control on the top of his desk as he said, “Pipe it in here, Mic.”

A moment later, the face of Fleet Admiral Nechayev appeared on the computer screen on Kale’s desk.

“Captain Kale?”

“Yes, Admiral. To what do I owe this pleasure?” Kale responded.

“Captain, you are ordered to take one of your starship’s auxiliary craft and report to *Deep Space Nine* as soon as possible. *Sarek* will remain on patrol in your absence. You may bring one crew member to act as a backup pilot and aide who is not absolutely essential to the operation of your ship as the two of you may be required to stay in the Alpha Quadrant for an extended period.”

“The Alpha Quadrant?” Kale questioned. “Admiral, what’s going...?”

“You have your orders Captain. Nechayev out.”

“That’s strange,” Kale said to himself. “Why does Starfleet need me back at *DS9*?”

“I don’t have the answer for that,” Captain Koester said. “But I can at least offer you a ride. Allow the *Hudson* to take you back through the wormhole. The trip will be a lot more comfortable than if you took a shuttlecraft.”

Kale looked grim-faced, but thanked Koester for his offer. A moment later, the three officers exited the ready room onto the bridge.

“Mic, I’ve been ordered to *DS9* immediately. You have the ship.”

“Aye, sir. When will you return?”

“The Admiral didn’t say. From the sounds of it, I’ll be gone at least a week. Captain Koester is going to take me through the wormhole aboard the *Hudson*, but I’d like to take Lieutenant Arbelo with me as well.”

Immediately, Cosna tapped her combadge. “Bridge to Lieutenant Arbelo.”

“Arbelo, here,” came the quick reply.

“The Captain has been recalled to the Alpha Quadrant on an urgent matter. Meet him in the main shuttlebay in one hour. You’re going with him to make sure he stays out of trouble, Monster.”

“One hour, aye. Arbelo, out.”

Koester turned to his own first officer and said, “Virg, I want you, Karg, and Doctor Dourden to stay here aboard the *Sarek*. You can use the time to coordinate with the *Sarek* crew and determine what sector would be the most advantageous to resume exploring once Captain Kale and I return. I’ll take Ensign Bloom with me just in case we have any issues that may require his expertise.”

“Aye, Skipper,” Kane responded. “I’ll head down to the shuttlebay and inform the crew and start getting our gear off.”

“Talk to Lieutenant Pearson for some temporary quarters, Commander,” Cosna informed her opposite number.

Kale looked at his own counterpart and said, “At your convenience, Captain.”

* * * *

“*Hudson* is cleared for launch,” said the voice of the deck officer over the runabout’s speakers.

“Thank you, Control. *Hudson* departing in 10 seconds,” responded Ensign Jeffery Bloom in the *Hudson*’s pilot seat.

The runabout’s thrusters flared to life and slowly the small ship cleared the *Sarek*’s huge main shuttlebay and set course for the wormhole. In the seat beside the emotional Vulcan engineer, who was orphaned as an infant and raised on Earth by adoptive human parents sat Lieutenant (Junior Grade) Setton To’Lock Arbelo – a being resulting of the mixture of human, Vulcan, and Efrosian genetic materials. At the starboard side engineering station sat Captain Kale, who was reviewing *Sarek*’s maintenance logs on the runabout’s computer. And sitting in the center seat specially installed when the runabout was converted over to become a preliminary survey vessel sat the *Hudson*’s commander, Captain Koester.

“Course set for the Bajoran Wormhole,” Bloom announced over his broad right shoulder.

“Warp speed at your discretion, Mister Bloom,” Koester ordered.

“Aye, sir. Increasing to warp five.”

The *Hudson* jumped to warp, and the small crew aboard settled in for the journey ahead.

“It’s going to take about three days at warp five to reach Idran,” Koester said to Kale. “Berthing is in the rear, as are the replicators. Help yourself to anything you or Mister Arbelo need.”

“Thank you, Captain,” Kale said as he returned his attention to the maintenance reports.

“Any idea why the Admiral ordered you back to Bajor?” Koester asked.

Kale turned his seat to face Koester and replied, “I’ve been thinking about it, and I still can’t figure it out. If there was some sort of conference, I’m sure both you and Captain Basset of the *Cochecho* would have been notified as well.” Kale looked reflective for a moment before finally saying, “No, I think if it were something routine, I wouldn’t have been contacted by the Fleet Admiral herself. Something serious has happened, but I don’t know what it is.”

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Three days later, the *Hudson* approached the Gamma Quadrant terminus of the Bajoran Wormhole. As expected, the entrance bloomed open, a swirl of colors as the small vessel crossed the event horizon. In just a few moments, the *Hudson* flashed past 70,000 light years, soon emerging once again in the Alpha Quadrant. Immediately upon emerging, the *Hudson*’s subspace radio blared to life.

“Runabout *Hudson*, this is *DS9* Ops. Please dock at landing pad E.”

Koester pressed a control on the arm of his command chair before replying, “Confirmed, *DS9*. Thank you. *Hudson*, out.”

“Strange,” remarked Kale, who was standing to the right of the center seat, watching the Cardassian-built space station as it moved ever closer through the runabout’s portals.

“What’s that, Captain?” Koester asked.

“While I admit I’ve only visited *Deep Space Nine* a handful of times, I’ve never heard port ops sound so curt and to the point while docking a Federation ship.”

“Maybe they’ve had a bad day?” suggested Bloom.

“I suppose that could be,” Kale admitted half-heartedly.

The runabout touched down on the pad and was lowered into *DS9*’s airlock. The *Hudson*’s hatch opened and Kale, Koester, Arbelo, and Bloom walked onto the station where they were met by an unusual though strangely plain looking station officer dressed in a Bajoran uniform.

“Captain Kale?” he asked. Kale nodded. “I’m the station chief of security. I’ll escort you to Commander Sisko’s office,” said Odo.

Kale looked at Koester, who said, “Ensign Bloom and I will head to the Promenade. Contact me by communicator when you’re done with Commander Sisko.”

“I will,” said Kale before he turned to look at Odo. “Lead the way, Constable.”

On the way to Ops, Kale asked about the latest news on this side of the galaxy. While the shape-shifting security chief mentioned a couple of the most recent events – including the assignment of the *USS Defiant* to the station and the recent death of the

Bajoran Vedek Bareil Antos – but otherwise spoke little. It took several minutes for the trio to reach Ops. Once there, they started moving toward the commander’s office, until Kale paused near the science console.

“Lieutenant,” Kale said to Jadzia Dax, “Good to see you again. Kethry Sutherland sends you her best.”

The Trill smiled – though it did not look like her heart was truly in the expression – and nodded.

“Thank you, Captain. Return the greeting.”

“I will.”

Kale walked up to Sisko’s office door, where Odo still waited, and ordered Arbelo to wait in Ops as he pressed the door chime.

“Come,” said the familiar deep voice.

“Hello, Ben,” Kale said as he entered.

“Greetings, Captain. It’s good to see you again. I just wish it were under better circumstances.”

“What do you mean?”

“It seems that Starfleet has some problem with the *Sarek*, or more specifically, with her captain.”

Kale was taken aback by the statement. A worried frown creased his brow.

“What kind of problem?”

“I’m not sure. All I know is Admirals Nechayev and Henry are on their way here. They told me to tell you that all questions will be answered when they arrive.”

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Kale and Arbelo were escorted to quarters in the habitat ring of the space station by Odo. As the door closed behind him, Kale slumped onto the couch, sighing deeply.

“If they’re assigning us quarters, they must be expecting us to stay longer than I expected,” Kale said. “I just wish I knew what I did that they want to see me about.”

“Maybe they’re giving you a promotion again,” Arbelo suggested as he retrieved a pair of beverages from the replicator, handing one to Kale.

“I’ve been a captain less than two years,” said Kale. “I sincerely doubt the *Sarek* has done anything THAT spectacular for me to be promoted again already!” He then tapped his combadge, informing Koester and Bloom that they had been assigned quarters as well and where they were located. Several hours later, after Koester and Bloom joined Kale and Arbelo in their temporary quarters and the four visitors shared a small meal for dinner, the intercom buzzed.

“Sisko to Captain Kale. Admirals Nechayev and Henry have arrived. Your presence is requested in my office.”

“On my way, Commander,” said Kale before turning to Arbelo. “Monster, you’re free to take some R&R for now. If I need you for anything, I’ll call.”

“Aye, Kalin,” Arbelo replied as Kale walked out the door.

Kale stepped off the lift into Ops and noticed Sisko standing at the master operations board near the center of the room. Sisko looked up at Kale, a concerned look in his eyes, but said nothing, only glancing toward his office doors.

Kale walked up to the doors which parted as he approached. Inside, Fleet Admiral Alynna Nechayev sat behind Sisko’s desk, Admiral Thomas Henry of Starfleet Security next to her. Kale took a position near the center of the room and with hands clasped behind his back, stood at attention.

“Captain Kalin Kale, reporting as ordered, Admiral,” he said.

“Sit down, Captain,” said Nechayev.

Kale sat and Nechayev got right to the point.

“It has come to our attention that there may have been a serious violation of the Prime Directive perpetrated by you and your ship.”

The accusation shocked Kale.

“Excuse me, Admiral, but I’m not aware of any violation.”

“Do you recognize the name Thorta II?”

Kale thought for a moment, then said, “Yes. *Sarek* visited that star system several months ago. We charted the system, noted a civilization on the second planet and sent an away team, surgically altered to look like the natives, to survey the planet. We determined the Thortans to be roughly equivalent in culture and technology to late 20th century Earth, circa 1970 AD.”

The two admirals nodded. Kale continued.

“Our sociologists determined that with their rudimentary space flight ability... they had just begun to orbit artificial satellites... and the relatively low level of technology, they were protected under the Prime Directive and contact was not warranted.”

Nechayev consulted her notes on the computer screen.

“Were you aware of the political and sociological situation on the planet at the time?” she asked.

“The away team reported the planet had over thirty separate countries. Very few were cooperating with one another.”

“Would you describe what you observed to be a tense situation?” asked Admiral Henry.

“Not to my understanding. From what we learned, war between the most powerful, technologically sophisticated countries had been avoided for over seventy of their years.”

The two Admirals glanced at one another, Henry nodding once.

“Excuse me, Admiral,” said Kale, “but what makes you believe we violated the Prime Directive?”

Nechayev answered, "The details of this incident are classified. You will be informed should it become necessary. You are dismissed for now while we consult with Starfleet Command."

Kale stood and exited the office. He walked down the steps in Ops and stood by Sisko.

"How did it go?" Sisko asked.

"The situation involves some classified information concerning a planet the *Sarek* charted about six months ago. They say we may have violated the Prime Directive."

Sisko's office door parted again and the two admirals walked out and were joined by an officer in a lieutenant commander's uniform, obviously an admiral's aide, as they walked over to the Ops transporter pad.

"Chief O'Brien, beam us to the *Gorkon*," Henry ordered. O'Brien complied and the three officers dematerialized from Ops.

"Computer," said Kale, "give me all information about the planet Thorta II in the Gamma Quadrant."

After a moment, the computer complied.

"Thorta II is the second planet of the Thorta star system in the Gamma Quadrant, first charted by the Federation starship *Sarek* on stardate 47996.5. All other information is classified by order of Starfleet Security, stardate 48360.2, by order of Admiral Thomas Henry."

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Kale was sitting at a table in Quark's, staring blankly at nothing in particular, while a Samarian Sunset slowly faded to transparency in front of him. The music playing in the background, an odd combination of Earth jazz and Ferengi blokchog, normally something that would drive Kale out of his skull, did nothing but further his melancholy feelings.

Lieutenant Arbelo, who had rented one of the holosuite on the second floor of the establishment, descended a spiral staircase and joined Kale at his table.

"Kalin, they have a holosuite program here where you can ski down Olympus Mons in regular Earth attire you just have to try!"

Kale looked up at his officer, a forlorn look in his eyes.

"Monster, did you ever have the feeling that your world was coming down around you?" the captain asked.

"Your meeting with the admirals didn't go well I take it?" Arbelo asked, the smile on his face replaced by a look of concern. "Trouble?"

"Maybe. If there is, it's BIG trouble."

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The next two days passed slowly at first, Kale finally getting his spirits back enough to remind Sisko of their little baseball game bet. But before the game could be organized Kale was called in front of the admirals again.

"Captain," said Nechayev. "Within a week of your starship's visit to Thorta II, the planet was rendered lifeless by what the Klingon survey vessel *Klore* reported as 'a major nuclear exchange'. Evidence points to the *Sarek* and her away team as being the weight that upset the political balance on that planet. It is the decision of Starfleet Command and the Federation Council to relieve you of duty as commanding officer of the *USS Sarek*, effective immediately, and that you be returned to Starfleet Headquarters on Earth to face a general court-martial."

Kale's face fell almost as fast as his stomach started flipping.

Admiral Henry added, "At the court-martial you will testify as to you and your ship's involvement in the destruction of Thorta II."

To Be Continued...