

*Captain's log, stardate 66203.1:*

*As the old saying goes; when it rains, it pours...*

*With an entire class of Starfleet Academy cadets embarked aboard the Sarek for their training cruise, I have now been informed we are to participate in the Officer Exchange program, hosting one of our allied Morain officers for several weeks while one of our own science officers serves aboard a Morain patrol ship in an adjoining sector.*

*With the Sarek still conducting a thorough survey of the newly charted Hordu system in sector 50107, I have assigned two of our more trusted cadets, Cadet Gem Koester and Cadet Kestra Brooks to take one of our shuttlecraft to transport Lieutenant Maxwell Stoyer to the Morain vessel Niltheth and return with the Morain officer who will be serving here for the next six weeks or so.*

*Parker, out.*

Space, the Final Frontier...

These are the voyages of the starship *Sarek*!

## Star Trek: Sarek

### “Farfalla” By PJK

The Starfleet type-8 shuttlecraft *Skon* had already rendezvoused with the Morain patrol ship, to which Cadets Koester and Brooks had transported Lieutenant Stoyer to and beamed the Morain Sub-Lieutenant E'lad aboard from, and were now well into their return trip back to the *Sarek*, which at full impulse power was still almost three and a half hours away.

“I look forward to serving aboard your starship,” E'lad remarked in his high-pitched voice, not for the first time since departing the patrol ship as he looked around the shuttlecraft with intense interest, his furry grey hands touching everything within reach inside the shuttle. “Our Military Command has noticed many differences in operating procedure since our alliance with the Federation. I only hope that I can learn enough to make future joint missions between our fleets coordinate more smoothly.”

“PLEASE, sir,” Cadet Koester, sitting in the pilot's seat of the shuttlecraft, said as the Morain officer started reaching for another control on the panel in front of her, resisting the extreme urge to slap the squirrel-like alien's furry paw away. “As I asked you before, do not touch any of the controls or interfaces until you can be fully briefed on how everything functions back aboard the *Sarek*.”

“Again, my apologies, Cadet,” E'lad said sincerely. “I just find all your technology so fascinating. It is cold. Inert. I find it wonderful how you know how to operate your equipment, such as it is.”

“Why?” Cadet Brooks asked, her large black Betazoid eyes turning to look at the grey-furred alien. “What is your technology like?”

“The Morain learned eons ago to co-exist with nature. Our vessels and facilities are much more organic in design and function than your Starfleet's. We nurture more than build. A skill you can perhaps learn from us?”

Again, E'lad started to reach toward a control indicator, this time on the console in front of Brooks, and again Koester was forced to yell a warning, “Sub-Lieutenant, stop! If you press that control we'll lose attitude control thrusters. Would you PLEASE take your seat in the rear!” Again, the cadet pilot resisted the urge to likewise tell the Morain officer to shut up and slap his hand away. Brooks looked at her fellow cadet with an amused look, easily able to read her fellow cadet's emotions even without her Betazoid abilities.

“Resistance is futile,” the Betazoid joked, prompting Koester to roll her eyes.

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Halfway back to the *Sarek*, as the shuttlecraft passed through a small solar system, a proximity alarm started flashing on the shuttle's control panel.

"What does that blinking light signify, Cadet?" Sub-Lieutenant E'lad asked, pointing past Koester's head at the indicator.

"Gem, I recommend we slow down," Brooks said after activating the shuttle's short-range scanners. "I'm detecting a rogue asteroid that will intercept our projected course."

"Slowing to half-impulse," Koester acknowledged, and the shuttlecraft slowed to only .125 the speed of light. Moments later a large asteroid, the diameter of which nearly equaled the length of the island of Manhattan on Earth, passed in front of the Starfleet shuttlecraft, barely visible in the dim starlight of deep space, slowly tumbling. The asteroid was large enough to generate its own weak gravity field, causing the shuttlecraft to increase speed slightly and move off projected course by a few degrees. Cadet Koester was easily able to return the shuttle to their projected course back to the *Sarek*.

"We're about halfway between the orbits of this system's second and third planets," Brooks commented, still interpreting sensor readings. "I wonder how close that asteroid will get to the main sequence star or one of the planets?" She tapped several commands into the control panel, and the monitor screen displayed a projected course track for the asteroid.

"Looks like it's going to hit the planet second closest to the star," Koester commented as she prepared to increase speed once again.

"An asteroid like that will cause much devastation to whatever planet it strikes," E'lad remarked, his almost totally black eyes still gazing out the shuttle's window at the hunk of rock that had just passed, now silhouetted against the glare of the distant sun.

"Uh... Gem?" Brooks said, her expression suddenly becoming one of concern. "The second planet of this system is inhabited."

Koester looked at her classmate, a look of confusion on her face, as she said, "What do you mean?"

"Cross-referencing my sensor readings with records in the library computer indicates the planet that asteroid is going to hit has a medieval-level humanoid population of nearly half a billion people," Brooks explained. "That asteroid is large enough that it will cause an ELE!"

"What is an Eee Ell Eee, Cadet?" E'lad asked, the squirrel-like being turning to look at the Betazoid cadet.

"ELE stands for extinction-level-event," Brooks explained. "Impact with the surface would cause an explosion equivalent to more than  $4.2 \times 10^{23}$  Joules of energy, a natural disaster that will likely destroy 75% or more of a planet's total life-forms – plant and animal – and cause inestimable environmental damage. Such an event occurred on Earth approximately 65 million years ago and wiped out almost all animal life forms larger than small rodents."

"How long before the asteroid strikes the planet?" Koester asked.

Brooks again re-computer, then reported, "Less than an hour!"

"That's less time than it would take for the *Sarek* to arrive in this system," Koester remarked.

"Or my own patrol vessel," E'lad added.

"What do we do?" Brooks asked, her pure-black eyes looking toward Koester with worry.

"I... I don't know...," Koester replied hesitantly. "I agree we should do something to help that civilization, but what?"

"Perhaps we should simply let nature take its own course as was intended?" Sub-Lieutenant E'lad suggested.

"What do you mean?" Brooks asked with shock.

"I mean, Cadet, is that perhaps these people were never meant to survive. What would have happened if we had not happened to be in this system when the asteroid approached? The asteroid would hit the planet, as nature intended."

“Perhaps nature, or God, or the Four Dieties, Gaia, the Flying Spaghetti Monster or whatever it is called intended for us to be here to witness this threat and do something about it!” Koester retorted. “We’re Starfleet officers-in-training. We can’t just sit back and let such a devastating event just occur!”

“I concur,” Brooks agreed with a nod.

“Very well, Cadets,” E’lad said. “Then what do you propose?”

“Let me think for a moment,” Koester remarked. “Brooks, review the sensor readings. Maybe there is some weakness in the structure of the asteroid we can exploit?”

“None I can detect,” Brooks replied after a quick review of the sensor readings. “I am, however, sensing a consciousness coming from the vicinity of the asteroid.”

“A consciousness?” Koester questioned. “You mean someone or something is on that asteroid?”

“I can’t be completely sure, but from what I can detect telepathically I would say yes,” Brooks answered.

“They may be trapped somehow,” Koester remarked. “And if the asteroid strikes the planet, they’ll be killed along with an entire pre-warp civilization!”

“What are we going to do?” E’lad asked.

“First we’re going to contact the Sarek, inform them of what we know, and get permission to act,” Koester stated. “Maybe Captain Parker can come up with something to save that planet?”

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“I concur with your assessment, Cadets,” Captain Jo Ann Parker said from the cockpit monitor over subspace. “I’ve turned the ship in your direction, but if your calculations are correct, we won’t arrive until almost an hour after the asteroid has struck the planet. We might be able to beam up some of the survivors on the opposite side of where the asteroid hits, but that would be a direct violation of the Prime Directive. You are authorized to do whatever is in your means to try and prevent this disaster from occurring.”

“Acknowledged, Captain,” Koester replied. “Thank you. We’ll keep you updated on our progress, if any. Shuttlecraft *Skon*, out.”

As the monitor screen turned black, Sub-Lieutenant E’lad looked at Cadet Koester and asked, “Now what?”

“My recommendation: first we figure out how to turn the asteroid away from the planet,” Koester suggested. “Then we try and find whoever is trapped on that asteroid and rescue them. I remember reading about a situation similar to this in my interspatial physics text. The *Enterprise-D* used a tractor beam to move an asteroid off course that was threatening a planetary civilization. Maybe we could do something similar with the shuttle’s tractor beam?”

“That was at Bre’el IV, and it wasn’t an asteroid, it was the planet’s asteroidal moon falling out of orbit,” Brooks corrected. “And the starship’s tractor beam didn’t work! They had to use the ship’s warp field to lower the moon’s mass in order to budge it at all! I learned all about it in Professor Michaelson’s subspace physics class.”

“Well, a moon is a lot bigger than that asteroid is, so maybe our tractor beam might work?” Koester suggested. “All we need to do it bump it a little off course so it misses the planet and heads toward the sun instead. Then we can find whoever is trapped there and rescue them as well! Brooks, compute trajectory and most probably target point on the asteroid’s surface.”

“Computations complete,” Brooks reported moments later. “If we activate the shuttlecraft’s tractor beam within fifteen kilometers of the asteroid’s surface and aim it at this point...” She indicated a spot almost halfway along the length of the asteroid displayed on the cockpit monitor. “...Then extend our nacelle’s warp field to negate the gravitational constant and use full impulse power to push on a course of 335 mark 6, we should be able to re-direct the asteroid’s path enough to avoid atmospheric interface and send it in a slingshot orbit around Colou II and out into deep space beyond the outer solar system. Then we will have plenty of time to look for whoever, or whatever, is trapped down there. Maybe even enough time for the *Sarek* to arrive and help.”

“Unfortunately, extending the warp field like that may strain our nacelles, perhaps to the point of cracking a few of the coils. But it’s still the best choice we have.” Koester turned around and looked at the Morain officer standing behind her and said, “With your permission, sir?”

“Excuse me, Cadet?” E’lad asked.

“Technically I need your permission to proceed, Sub-Lieutenant.”

“But I am merely a science officer,” E’lad protested. “I have no command authority, particularly here, aboard a Starfleet shuttlecraft!”

“If I understand the officer exchange program correctly, as a participant you are technically a member of the *Sarek* crew since the moment you boarded the *Skon*,” Koester explained. “And that makes you the senior officer aboard the shuttlecraft. It’s our protocol to defer to the senior officer in a situation like this.”

Sub-Lieutenant E’lad looked at the two cadets, blinking once before asking, “And if I were to decide we should simply return to your starship?”

“I believe both Gem and I would log formal protests,” Brooks replied. “But we would obey your orders.”

E’lad looked at the computer representation of the asteroid still displayed on the cockpit monitor. His black eyes blinked once, then twice, and he finally replied, “Very well. Permission granted, Cadet.”

After a look passed between the two cadets, they both spun in their seats and faced forward. Koester turned the shuttlecraft about and headed toward the drifting asteroid. As it slowly spun, the crew of the shuttle could now see it more clearly in the distant sunlight, revealing the rocky object to be oblong in shape, like a huge pockmarked egg floating in space.

“Closing on the asteroid’s surface,” Koester reported. “Detecting slight gravimetric distortion. Compensating. Current distance from surface of asteroid: 5000 kilometers and closing slowly.”

“Distance to atmospheric interface with Colou II: 570,000 kilometers. Time to atmospheric interface: 47 minutes 30 seconds. If the asteroid hits atmo, there is nothing we can do to prevent it from hitting the planet’s surface.”

“Inform me when we are within 500 kilometers of the asteroid’s surface,” E’lad ordered.

The shuttlecraft cautiously continued its approach to the asteroid, taking close to fifteen minutes before Koester informed, “Current distance from surface of asteroid: 500 kilometers and still closing slowly. Orders, Sub-Lieutenant?”

“Proceed to the point Cadet Brooks indicated. Hold at station keeping relative to the asteroid’s current course and speed once you reach that point. Cadet Brooks?”

“Aye, Sub-Lieutenant?” Brooks responded.

“Prepare to extend your warp field and your tractor beam. Re-route all available power except propulsion and basic life support.”

“Aye, sir,” Brooks replied, sharing a quick smile in Koester’s direction before carrying out her orders.

“Shuttlecraft in position, twenty two kilometers from the asteroid’s surface and holding,” Koester reported a few moments later, demonstrating her excellent piloting skills. “Minor change in projected distance from asteroid’s surface can be easily compensated.”

“Very well. Cadet Brooks. Lock tractor beam on target coordinates and activate the beam,” E’lad ordered. Seconds later, the shuttlecraft’s small tractor beam emitter projected its beam at the large asteroid.

“Beam locked on target,” Brooks confirmed. She looked around nervously as she noticed a slight dimming of the control surface illumination.

“Extend nacelle warp fields to envelop the asteroid,” E’lad ordered.

“Extending warp field forward thirty kilometers,” Brooks reported. Again the lights dimmed slightly. “Reading a change in the gravimetric readings. It think it’s working!”

“I hope so,” Koester remarked under her breath before activating the shuttlecraft’s impulse engines. Immediately the crew of three could feel the shuttlecraft start to strain.

“Is it working?” Koester asked, juggling power allocation in an attempt to prevent the computer from automatically shutting down wither impulse propulsion or the tractor beam before they were done with their task.

“I’m detecting a little bit of movement off projected path,” Brooks confirmed. “Can you increase impulse power by twenty five percent?”

“I’m not sure I can maintain power to the tractor beam and increase propulsion without blowing the plasma relays,” Koester advised.

Sub-Lieutenant E'lad had listened to the cadets status updates, watching the display on the shuttle's monitor as the asteroid slowly started to move away from the course that would send it crashing to the planet's surface. He then looked out the cockpit window at the asteroid in front of them, and what he saw alarmed the Morain officer.

"Cadets! I think we are breaking the asteroid apart!"

Books looked up, seeing the crack forming along the surface of the asteroid caused by the spatial distortion of the extended warp field and the tractor beam stresses.

"The crack is forming lengthwise, not across," she stated. "Perhaps it will hold together long enough for us to complete this maneuver. We only need to offset its course by eight point five degrees!"

"I'm increasing impulse power to three-quarters!" Koester reported. "Maybe we can get those last four or five degrees before we blow the impulse deck!"

As Brooks and E'lad watched, the crack widened. Without warning, Brooks started to scream, as if in great pain.

"Cadet!" E'lad called out, grasping Brooks and pulling her out of the co-pilot's seat and into the back of the shuttle. The Betazoid cadet moaned, as if in almost unbearable pain, and pulled her arms tightly around herself – shivering uncontrollably. "What is wrong?" E'lad asked.

"Cold!" Brooks replied, screaming out her answer. "So cold!"

Koester glanced over her shoulder at what was happening behind her, but only for a moment for fear something would happen on her control panel that would need her to react quickly.

"What's going on back there, Sub-Lieutenant?" she asked.

"I... I'm not sure, Cadet Koester," the Morain replied. "Cadet Brooks is acting like she has been thrown out into the vacuum of space without the aid of an environment suit."

Returning her attention to the controls in front of her, Koester made an adjustment to the power allocation once again, averting another system shutdown. Then a thought occurred to her.

"Brooks said she detected a consciousness on the asteroid. Could that be what's she's feeling now? Something to do with what we're doing to the asteroid?"

E'lad pulled a thermal blanket from an emergency pack and wrapped it around the Betazoid cadet, to little effect, then moved forward and leaned over the co-pilot's seat and activated the shuttle's sensors. The Morain half-expected Koester to bat his hand away from the controls, but she did not interfere. He aimed the sensors at the crack forming on the surface of the asteroid, and was amazed by what they detected.

"I am detecting a life-form reading cocooned within the crust of the asteroid. It reads as insectoid, though massive!"

"There's a big bug in that rock?" Koester asked incredulously.

"So it would seem. Perhaps this is the source of the consciousness Cadet Brooks sensed earlier?"

"If it is, what do we do?" Koester asked. "Use the shuttle's phasers to try and release it from the rock? If we power up the weapons systems, we would have to shut down the tractor beam, and we would never get the asteroid far enough off course in time to miss Colou II!"

E'lad's eyes suddenly went wide with realization. He turned his squirrel-like face toward Koester and ordered, "Cadet, reverse the maneuver! Return the asteroid to its original course as best you can!"

"What?!" Koester asked, unsure she heard the high-pitched voice of the Morain officer correctly.

"Stop what we were doing and allow the asteroid to head into Colou II's atmosphere!" E'lad repeated.

"With all due respect, Sub-Lieutenant, but are you insane? If we let that rock hit the planet, millions will die!"

"Cadet, if you do as I order, no one will die," E'lad assured. "But if you refuse to obey, the galaxy will lose one of its greatest treasures!"

"What are you talking about?" Koester demanded.

"I now realize what we have found!" E'lad replied. "The Morain have been aware of the existence of these life-forms for generations. But you must act now!"

Koester's emotions were in conflict. Part of her understood she should simply obey the orders of a superior officer, just as she said she would earlier. But another part of her worried her actions, or inactions, would result in the deaths of innumerable sentient beings. She glanced back over her shoulder once again at Brooks, who lay shivering on the rear deck, her solid black eyes looking pleadingly at her fellow cadet. Finally, bracing her resolve, she turned back to the controls and announced, "Altering course. Coming about to 065 mark 173."

The shuttlecraft maneuvered around the periphery of the asteroid, applying the push of its tractor beam in the opposite direction and, after a few minutes of thrust, returning it to almost its original course and speed, directly toward the planet ahead.

"I hope you know what you're doing, Sub-Lieutenant," she said, eying the Morain accusingly.

"Trust me, Cadet," E'lad assured once again.

Moments later, the asteroid entered Colou II's atmosphere on the night side of the planet. As it quickly descended, it began glowing red – then bright orange. Large chunks of the asteroid's crust began to break off, falling away and burning up as they fell, revealing not rock nor metal, but an almost silk-like substance underneath that had been covered by tons of debris gathered floating in space.

Halfway down through the planet's atmosphere, the cocoon broke open, and an immense insect-like life form was freed from its imprisonment. As it continued to fall, it began to spread huge, brightly colored wings spanning wider than the entire length of the Federation *Starbase 719*. The creature soared through the planet's sky, crossing the terminator between night and day.

Koester maneuvered the *Skon* into low orbit over Colou II. Even from orbit, the immense butterfly-like creature could be seen gliding through the clouds as it absorbed solar energy through its wings, slowly climbing higher and higher into the planet's atmosphere.

"That...! That's amazing!" Koester remarked.

"Isn't it," Brooks replied, surprising both Koester and E'lad as she climbed back into the co-pilot's seat.

"Feeling better, I see?" Koester remarked with a grin.

"Once the creature started warming up as atmospheric friction started heating up its cocoon, I was fine," Brooks explained. "Our attempt to divert what we thought was an asteroid exposed part of the cocoon to the vacuum of space, and it reacted in the only way it could, sending out violent waves of psychic energy showing what it was feeling in the hopes someone or something could help."

As the crew of the shuttlecraft watched, the creature entered the upper atmosphere. Within moments, it soared out of orbit, passing close to the shuttle – which it dwarfed by comparison – and headed toward the outer solar system and deep space beyond, riding the solar wind.

"What was that?" Koester asked in amazement as the creature disappeared in the darkness.

"My people call them Farfalla," E'lad explained. "They are considered so rare – only two are reputed to live at any given moment – that they are considered legend among the Morain, and to actually see one is considered a sign of extreme good luck. How fortunate you two cadets are, to have witnessed the emergence of such a life-form!"

"I could sense its gratitude as it passed us," Brooks remarked, her face still displaying an almost dreamy expression.

"They're never going to believe us, you know," Koester remarked.

"Do not worry, Cadet. All the sensor readings are in the data banks," E'lad stated. "I'm sure your science officers will have much to study on our return to your ship."

After several more seconds spent staring out the cockpit window, an indicator on the control panel brought Koester's attention back to the present. "Sensors are detecting the *Sarek* entering the system. We should break orbit and rendezvous with the ship."

"Agreed," E'lad said. "I look forward to meeting your captain and crew and taking my place – albeit temporarily – among them. I hope I do not... what is the human phrase? ...Screw this up?"

"I believe you're going to fit in aboard the *Sarek* just fine, Sub-Lieutenant," Koester remarked as she entered several commands into the controls and the *Skon* turned toward the approaching starship.

**The End**