

Station log, stardate 69784.8:

Starbase Typhon-Bravo is now considered fully operational. One thing many of us must get used to is the differences in accommodations aboard this smaller station. Instead of the extensive recreational facilities we enjoyed aboard Starbase 719 – the holo-cinemas, the Bastogne Lodge, Liberty Pointe, and restaurants of every cuisine and description, not to mention the main botanical garden as big as our entire present starbase – we must unwind in one of the handful of lounges, very similar in design to the 10-Forward lounge you would find aboard a Galaxy or Nebula-class starship, or one of the dozens of holosuites distributed around the station.

We must also make due with a significantly lesser number of personnel at our disposal. Where Starbase 719 supported a crew of almost twenty-thousand beings, Typhon-Bravo must operate on fewer than six thousand. Still a large number of people all gathered in one place, but we do not have the flexibility we used to enjoy aboard our former home. Some of our more senior and experienced officers must pull double-duty to maintain the same high standard of results Starfleet has become used to seeing here in the far reaches of the frontier.

With things beginning to settle down into a normal routine, Lt Commander Torres has requested permission to investigate the loss of Starbase 719 independent of the official Starfleet inquiry. I was a little reluctant to allow it at first – after all, professionally trained investigators will be pouring through the same data and evidence we have, since it was all turned over to the investigation team shortly after Typhon-Bravo was moved into place here in the Typhon Sector – but I have noted that Torres seems to have taken the loss of our former station personally, as if she were solely to blame. I am hoping that by allowing her to conduct a separate, parallel analysis, it will not only help us to understand what happened aboard Starbase 719, but allow Torres to realize the station's loss was not her fault and allow her to move on with her life and career.

Kale, Admiral Kalin, out.

Vice Admiral Kalin Kale exited the turbolift into Ops and quickly moved the short distance to the patio of his office. He paused there, turning around and watching the crew in Ops as they performed their jobs, coordinating the docking and undocking of spacecraft visiting the new starbase, maintaining manifests and inventory lists, coordinating necessary maintenance on both the station and visiting spacecraft, and compiling data both scientific and related to the security of both the Federation as a whole and the Fifth Fleet in particular.

Kale smiled slightly to himself and was about to turn and enter the small room the designers of the Buckingham-class starbase laughingly called the station commander's office when he noticed the half-Klingon engineer working at one of the consoles across the space. Normally B'Elanna Torres stood watch as the Duty Officer on the morning shift, in addition to her duties as chief of operations and senior engineer. But the woman had been spending her free time recently reviewing logs and analyzing data recordings, all in the hopes of determining what went wrong aboard 719. What drew Kale's attention this afternoon was the fact she was working at the Ops security console and not her usual engineering station. The Centauri's curiosity got the better of him and he stepped around the master systems display in the center of the room to join Torres at the console.

"You look like an officer on a mission, Commander," the admiral remarked.

Torres eyes never left the monitor screen she was staring almost unblinking at as she replied, "I've loaded the security footage from as close to the final moments of *Starbase 719* as we have stored in the databanks. Commander Petersen uploaded almost everything we had recorded about two hours before the station was lost. I'm

trying to find anything that might help explain what happened that day. Why we weren't able to stop the station from exploding." Torres paused for a moment, closing her eyes to help her relax. "It almost seemed like someone was working against us," she finally remarked once her eyes had opened and re-focused on the monitor screen. "Like someone WANTED that station to explode, and didn't care how many people were killed in the process."

"I wish you luck, Commander. Hopefully you can find something that will allow everyone we lost to rest in peace."

Kale was about to return to his office when Lieutenant Augustus McLaren, the new station's security chief, called out to him.

"Admiral," he said. "You have a subspace transmission coming in from the *Dauntless*, sir."

"The task force must have completed their encounter with the Rihannsu fleet. I'll take it in my office, Lieutenant," Kale said, quickly crossing the space and passing through his doors.

Space, the Final Frontier...

Star Trek: Fifth Fleet

"Trail of Breadcrumbs" By PJK

Part 5 of the Typhon Sector Crisis

Kale sat down behind the metal desk in his office and touched the monitor control. The screen lit up with the emblem of Starfleet Command, quickly switching to the face of Fleet Captain Peter J. Koester, commanding officer of the Fifth Fleet flagship *USS Dauntless*.

"Fleet Captain Koester. What's your status?" he asked.

"My task force has successfully intercepted the Rihannsu fleet approaching Vorte, and with the assistance of the Romulan warbirds *Vedrex* and *Genorex*, we turned them back. But it was dicey for a few moments," Koester responded, his expression belying how tired he apparently felt. Kale could not blame the starship commander. Having spent his fair share of time on patrol along the Neutral Zone or the DMZ or overseeing the Tholian border, he did not envy the *Dauntless* crew or any of the other starships with her their current assignment monitoring the most direct route between the Romulan Empire and its colonies adjacent to the Fifth Fleet AOR. "Commander Ramaec's warbird joined the Rihannsu fleet prior to crossing into the sector and made it appear that he and his crew had defected to T'K'Lon."

Kale was both surprised and amused that the Rihannsu would fall for such a ploy so easily as he asked, "But you did turn the Rihannsu back, correct?"

"Yes, Admiral. But I don't think our small task force is going to be enough. We were lucky this time."

"What do you mean?" Kale asked.

"It was only because we knew the Rihannsu were coming that we were able to intercept them this time. What if they snuck around another way and we didn't have that early warning?"

The same thought had occurred to Kale shortly after Governor Dekar of the Romulan colony of Vorte had requested the Fifth Fleet's support in defending against a possible Rihannsu invasion from either their home space or the already-occupied colony of Elehu. "What do you suggest?" he asked.

"The Rihannsu seemed unaware of our tachyon nets in the sector," Koester said. "I think we need to set up more of them, along every conceivable approach route the Rihannsu could use to reach Elehu and Vorte." Koester paused for several seconds to let what he said sink in. "Thousands of lives may depend on those nets detecting cloaked spacecraft passing through the sector."

What Koester was saying only confirmed Kale's own thoughts. He had planned to ask Admiral Janeway for the support and materials to build such a defense, but sensed there would be resistance on the part of the Federation Council, as it would seem like Starfleet was trying to fence off what was essentially unclaimed space – an area of space that contained not only a Romulan, but a Klingon colony as well – for itself. With Fleet Captain Koester's recommendations included, Starfleet Command might give his request better credence.

"I will contact Starfleet Command and see if I can get them to agree," Kale remarked. "In the meantime, Fleet Captain, keep up the good work."

"I'll do my best, Admiral. *Dauntless*, out."

As the monitor screen briefly flashed the Starfleet Command emblem again before going black, Kale pressed the intercom control beside the monitor.

"Admiral Kale to Commander DuLac."

"Aye, m'Lord?" came the reply a moment later.

"Galen, please report to my office," Kale told his aide. "I need you to prepare a proposal to Starfleet Command. Make sure it is routed through Admiral Janeway."

"Aye. I shall beest with thee momentarily, m'Lord Admiral," DuLac replied.

After deactivating the intercom, Kale turned in his chair. Not for the first time, he wished there was a window of some sort in his office, through which he could look out at the depths of space in the Typhon Sector, and wondered if he could talk to Commander Torres about installing something. "Maybe just a large viewscreen with an exterior image?" the Centauri mused to himself.

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Stardate 69798.4

The Defiant-class escort *USS Corsair* slowed as it approached another piece of debris.

"Helm, move us within tractor beam range and hold position," Captain Konstantin Harkonnen ordered. The Russian man then looked at the officer sitting at the *Corsair's* science console and said, "Are you ready to take detailed sensor readings?"

"Yes, Captain," Lieutenant Collene Bentzen replied. "The analysis program is standing by."

"We are within five hundred meters of the debris, Captain. Coming to a full stop," reported Lieutenant (JG) Lincoln Tameron from the helm. On the main viewscreen a large piece of tritanium – almost fifty meters across and thirty meters tall, with several barely-readable markings on it that identified the debris as having come from a Federation construct – serenely drifted in front of the *Corsair*.

"Lock tractor on the debris. Begin your analysis as soon as the object is stabilized," Harkonnen ordered.

"Aye, Captain," Bentzen replied. A moment later, the visible beam of the starship's tractor enveloped the drifting piece of metal, bringing its movement to a halt. "Beginning analysis." Bentzen studied the readings being displayed on her console monitors and started reciting some of the more-relevant facts. "Debris is a tritanium composite. Evidence of carbon and plasma scoring on the interior portion. Jagged edges indicate it was ripped from the hull, not ejected. Based on visible markings, I would surmise it came from an area of the station's outer hull close to auxiliary shuttlebay nine. Probably torn from the station hull when the power distribution network in that area overloaded and exploded about forty minutes prior to the station's final annihilation."

Harkonnen and the *Corsair* were spending a great deal of time in recent weeks exploring the small debris field that remained after *Starbase 719* exploded. Officially, Harkonnen was helping the Starfleet investigation trying to determine what went wrong. Privately, Harkonnen remembered a story his wife, Captain Cathryn Elisabeth Pearson, had told him about a Starfleet Marine officer from her first starship who had gone missing during a battle and was found still alive in a fighter escape pod decades later and continued to hope that – somehow – she and the other crew members in Starbase Ops had somehow made it into escape pods – designed to place their occupants into stasis in case anything went wrong with the station and help was not immediately close-by – and that he would find them alive and relatively well. Each passing day only diminished Harkonnen's hopes little by little.

Lieutenant Bentzen got up from her seat and stepped over toward the captain's chair. "One thing I cannot understand about this debris field, sir," she said.

"What is that, Lieutenant?" Harkonnen asked, happy with the momentary distraction.

"An Ournal-class starbase like 719 was constructed of almost eight trillion metric tons of metals and composite materials. Yet we've explored the majority of the station's debris field and have located less than one percent of that mass, and the majority of that – from what we've been able to tell – comes from the small exterior explosions that occurred in the twenty-four hours prior to the station's destruction. I know the station contained relatively small amounts of anti-matter in magnetic bottles for refueling starships and emergency power generation, but the primary power sources were the main fusion reactors. Could they have really created the energy required to completely vaporize so large a structure?"

"Something was happening to the four main fusion reactors in the week leading up to the station's loss," Harkonnen remarked. "Perhaps the power build-up was of such magnitude, it could literally annihilate the whole station? That's partly what we're out here to find out." Harkonnen got out of his chair, stretching his arm and back muscles before telling Bentzen, "I'm heading down to the mess hall to grab a bite to eat. Let me know if you find anything significant."

"Aye, Captain," the science officer replied as Harkonnen passed through one of the bridge egress doors, the door swishing shut behind him.

* * * *

It was six hours beyond the end of Torres' watch shift in Ops, and she was still sitting at the security console, watching and rewinding security feeds recorded aboard *Starbase 719* in the hours prior to its destruction. There was something about one recording in particular that was bothering her, but she could not determine exactly what it was.

The image showed one of the corridors aboard the station approximately four hours before the explosion. The level and section designation on the corner of the monitor screen identified it as close to fusion reactor three. Normally, the corridor would have been quite busy as engineers and operations personnel moved through it performing their duties or moving between locations, but due to the fact the starbase had been in the process of evacuating the entire crew for nearly a whole day, coupled by the fact that the fusion reactor compartments had been sealed shut during the attempt to eject them, the corridor being monitored was relatively empty and unused.

During the period of time Torres had been watching it, a pair of her engineers – both of whom she recognized as among those lost when the station exploded – had passed the monitoring sensor at one point, evidently heading toward the evac point in the botanical garden several levels above. Not long after a squad of Starfleet Marines passed through the image, evidently confirming the section was completely evacuated. Something about the image of the Marines passing through was bothering her. Torres kept re-winding the footage back thirty seconds or so and re-watching it – again and again.

"Computer, enhance recorded footage. Augment the lower right corner," Torres finally ordered.

The image zoomed in on the lower right corner of the footage, filling the monitor screen. Again, the squad of Marines passed through, their heads swiveling back and forth as they looked for anyone who had not evacuated the level yet or were trapped somehow and required assistance. The Marines quickly passed out of frame, leaving an image of the corridor deck and nothing more.

"Computer, rewind to previous start point, shift augmented image to upper left corner."

The footage again flashed back approximately thirty seconds, then shifted to the upper left side of the recording. It showed the empty corridor receding in the distance. After nearly ten seconds, the Marines came into view from the lower right and – as they had each time Torres watched it – marched up the corridor, their heads slowly swinging back and forth. Torres let out a brief huff of frustration, closing her eyes for a short time to let them rest. She felt like she was straining her vision and could feel the start of a headache at the back of her skull.

"Computer, rewind to previous start point, shift augmented image to upper right corner," she finally ordered.

Again the computer complied. The footage flashed back to the requested point. This time it focused on the corridor wall, where a window looking into one of the engineering duty stations was located. After about five seconds the tops of the heads of the passing Marines could be seen briefly in the lower left. Torres shook her head and was about to start the footage over again, augmenting the lower left corner of the recording and probably the Marine's legs and feet as they marched past. She almost missed the slight movement in the window.

"Computer, pause image!" she suddenly called out.

Admiral Kale, who had been reviewing supply reports with one of the station's logistics officers next to the master systems display, suddenly looked over at Torres. He handed the padd back to the young lieutenant before stepping over to the consoles where Torres was sitting.

"Did you find something, Commander?" he asked, peering at the image on the monitor screen. It looked like some non-descript window in some random location to him.

"I'm not sure, Admiral," Torres replied. "Computer, split screen. Place augmented view of that corridor window on the right side, the entire recording on the left."

The monitor changed to show side-by-side images, the entire corridor on the left, a close-up of the window in question on the right.

"Rewind to previous start point, then proceed at half speed."

The images flashed back once again. The corridor seemed empty for quite some time until the squad of Marines entered at the lower right and moving at a comically slow pace proceeded up and left to move down the corridor.

"What are we looking for?" Kale asked.

"Keep your eyes on the window," Torres said.

Very shortly after the Marines has passed the window, the top of a head and a pair of eyes could barely be seen slowly rising up from beneath.

"Who is that?" Kale asked, now seeing what Torres had been perceiving but which had not registered in her functioning consciousness due to the quality of the image until she had augmented and zoomed in on the image. She had almost missed it when she had started shaking her head.

"I'm not sure," the operations chief replied.

The person behind the window appeared to look back and forth, as if assuring himself no one else was passing by. The rest of his head then appeared, followed by shoulders covered in red material before they turned and moved away from the window.

"Whoever it is, they're wearing command division colors," Kale remarked. "Almost looks like they were deliberately hiding from the Marine patrol. Any way the computer can perform facial recognition and determine who that is?"

"It may take a while, but I think we can do that," Torres replied as she reversed the image to the point where the mysterious stranger's face was best visible. "Computer, access service records of *Starbase 719* personnel and compare ID images with the face displayed on the monitor."

Almost immediately, the personnel record file images of each member of the *719* crew began to briefly appear on the left side of the monitor screen, with facial plot points being compared to the dark and grainy footage on the right, with a rate of approximately two people per second.

"Unless we're lucky and get a hit quickly, it could be two... two and a half hours to go through the entire crew manifest of *Starbase 719*," Torres reported, her voice sounding more energized after having found something suspicious in the recorded footage.

"Keep me apprised, Commander," Kale ordered as he turned and headed toward his office door.

* * * *

Konstantin Harkonnen was sitting in the small ready room aboard the *Corsair*, staring at the padd he was holding in his hands and trying to suppress the tears that were threatening to erupt from the corners of his eyes.

On the small screen, the smiling visage of Cathryn Pearson holding the couple's young twin daughters, Elisabeth Rose and Katerina Konstantinova, could be seen. The photo had been taken during happier times more than a year prior – before Pearson had been promoted to commanding officer of *Starbase 719* – in the station's immense botanical garden. In the distance behind his family, Harkonnen could see the small lake that had existed aboard the starbase and several of the boats paddling around upon it.

After gazing at the picture for several more seconds, Harkonnen deactivated the padd and put it back in the desk drawer. He was about to open a frequency to *Starbase Typhon-Bravo* and update Admiral Kale on the *Corsair*'s mission before requesting permission to return and dock the ship when the door chime sounded.

Quickly rubbing his eyes to make sure no tears had snuck through, he said, "Come." The door swished open to admit Lieutenant Bentzen. Her expression appeared concerned, and she was holding a padd of her own. "What is it, Lieutenant?"

"Captain, sensors have detected a strange anomaly we cannot account for," the science officer reported.

"What do you mean?" Harkonnen asked.

The lieutenant handed Harkonnen the padd as she started to explain. "We just made a pass through the center of the debris field several minutes ago. I know it's hard to figure out exactly what existed in what physical location in the vacuum of space in an ever-moving galaxy when the station still existed, but our closest estimates figure it was close to if not the exact vicinity of where the station's fusion reactors had been located just before the station exploded. Sensors detected that strange anomaly as we passed through that spot."

Harkonnen looked at the sensor data displayed on the screen. It showed several colored lines that all seemed to cross each other in the same place at the center of the image.

"What is this?" Harkonnen asked. "It seems familiar to me."

"I can't tell you with any certainty what it is," Lieutenant Bentzen remarked. "But I can tell you why it looks familiar. Do you recall the sensor readings the *IMV Pariah* shared after searching for the starbase's Shuttle 17 when it went missing?"

"Yes!" Harkonnen said excitedly as he recalled the debriefing with Commander Hans Spaak and Lady Val following their ship's return to the station after unsuccessfully attempting to locate the missing Starfleet runabout. The crew's concern about Admiral Val'ri Raijajh's health in the immediate aftermath of her husband's loss followed soon after by the arrival of Ciaran, a man who could literally have been Raijajh's husband Sylvan Xaran, had led to the relatively quick neglect of the investigation into the missing vessel. What made it even more complicated was that nearly six months later, Xaran had been found in the vicinity of the planet Bel-Terra, almost a whole sector away from the starbase – unconscious in a small escape pod and suffering from extreme radiation poisoning that killed him several short hours after being rescued – relating an incredible tale of having crossed over into a different quantum reality.

"Are you trying to tell me the entire station was somehow pulled into another reality, Lieutenant?! Are you saying my wife and all the others are still alive!?"

"No, sir," Bentzen clarified, feeling immensely uncomfortable to have to say that to Harkonnen, so she added, "Though that could possibly be one theory. All we know at present is the sensors have detected two similar anomalous readings within the same sector of space. They could be related. They could also happen periodically in different places around this area of the galaxy and not have anything at all to do with the loss of *Starbase 719* or Shuttle 17. For all we have been able to determine, it could be some sort of sensor reflection. I had the ship turn around and pass through the vicinity where we had detected the reading almost immediately, but we were unsuccessful in detecting it a second time. I think we need to study the data more before we start hypothesizing on its cause."

Harkonnen's momentary elation had quickly disappeared. A part of the Russian man felt like it would have been better had the lieutenant not informed him of the anomaly, before another part of him reminded himself she was only doing her job, and doing it as well as could be hoped for under the circumstances.

“Thank you, Lieutenant,” he finally just said. “The *Corsair* will be returning to *Starbase Typhon-Bravo* shortly. Maybe you can make use of the station’s computer systems to better analyze the data we have collected?”

“Yes, sir,” Bentzen agreed with a nod of her head. She partly turned toward the door, pausing as she asked, “Will there be anything else, sir?”

“No, thank you, Lieutenant. Dismissed.”

Bentzen smiled slightly before turning toward the door. As it swished shut behind her, Harkonnen relaxed his self-control, and several tears blossomed from his eyes, quickly tracking down his cheeks and into the hair of the goatee around his chin.

* * * *

Kalin Kale was just exiting the turbolift on the level where the quarters he shared with his wife Kitty were located when his combadge chirped and the voice of Lt Commander Torres announced, “Ops to Admiral Kale.”

Kale paused in the corridor as he tapped his combadge, responding, “Go ahead, Commander.”

“Admiral, can you return to Ops, please. The computer made a match, but I need you to see this,” the operations chief said.

Kale knew if whatever Torres had found were not important enough to bring to his attention right away, she would have waited to the next morning. The admiral immediately turned around and re-entered the turbolift as he said, “I’m on my way, Commander.” He then ordered the turbolift, “Ops.”

Moments later, Kale emerged in Ops. He noticed both Commander Torres and Typhon-Bravo’s evening watch duty officer Lt Commander Arlen Nicolau gathered near the security console.

“What did you come up with, Commander?” Kale asked as he approached.

“I performed a facial recognition against all of *Starbase 719*’s crew manifest,” Torres replied. “Nothing! The face in the security footage didn’t match anyone assigned to the station. So I figured perhaps it was some visiting Starfleet personnel who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. I set up the computer to perform facial recognition against all Starfleet records. It took a while, but I finally got a hit.”

“Great! Who is it?” Kale asked, starting to look at the monitor.

“According to the computer, the man captured on that security footage is Lieutenant Robert Grant, assigned to the *USS Enterprise*.”

Kale was confused. He looked at Torres and Nicolau and remarked, “I don’t recall the *Enterprise* ever visiting *Starbase 719*. How did he get there?”

“What’s even more confusing is how he was ever there at all,” Torres said. “Because according to the service record that matched the facial recognition, Lieutenant Grant was killed around stardate 3497.2 on the planet Capella IV.”

Kale quickly turned to look at the service record displayed on the monitor with confusion, only then realizing the photograph attached to the record showed the man in question wearing the uniform used by Starfleet between 2265 and 2270 to designate an officer assigned to the engineering, operations, or security departments of the time.

“Wait, are you telling me we had a time traveler of some kind aboard the station just prior to it blowing up?” Kale asked in disbelief as he read the service record displayed on the screen.

“Unlikely,” Nicolau remarked. “Lieutenant Grant’s service record is pretty clear. Graduated Starfleet Academy in the Class of 2262 and assigned to the security division aboard the starship *USS Constellation* under Captain Matthew Decker. Transferred to the *USS Enterprise* security division on stardate 1654.7. His death while accompanying Captain Kirk and other members of the crew during a landing party mission to the surface of Capella IV is well documented. His body was recovered following the opening of official relations between the Capellans and the Federation and buried in his hometown of Valentine, Nebraska. No, Admiral, I think the computer just happened to call up the first service record of someone who looked relatively similar to our mysterious visitor.”

“What do you think, Commander Torres?” Kale asked, looking at the half-Klingon woman.

"I'm not sure, Admiral," she finally said. "I find it hard to believe there's a doppelganger that looks so similar to a man who died over a century ago. Maybe if Lieutenant Grant had a brother who had a son who had a son of his own! But according to his Starfleet records, he was an only child. His closest currently living relative is a female third-cousin twice-removed living on Benecia."

Kale stared at the image of the deceased lieutenant on the screen as he thought for several moments. Finally he looked at both Torres and Nicolau and said, "Until we can come up with something more definitive, I'm more apt to believe Lieutenant Nicolau's theory that the computer just locked itself onto a service record that most closely resembled the man in the footage we witnessed than that *Starbase 719* was destroyed by a time traveler from the past. Let me know if you come up with anything else. But in the meantime, Commander..."

"Yes, Admiral?" Torres responded.

"Get some rest, Commander. I need you at your best during this difficult tumultuous time. I depend on you."

Torres found herself smiling in spite of her foul mood as she replied, "Yes, Admiral. I will."

"Good. I'll see you both tomorrow. Good night."

"Good night, Admiral," both Torres and Nicolau replied as Kale returned to the turbolift and stepped inside.

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Stardate 69811.9

Admiral Kalin Kale stood on the patio of his office, speaking to the face displayed on the viewer located above the consoles on the opposite side of Ops.

"So you're saying Starfleet Command has approved the project?" Kale asked. "That's great!"

"It took some diplomatic maneuvering," Rear Admiral Kathryn Janeway replied. "The Klingon High Council was dead-set against it until we pointed out that, should Vorte fall to the Rihannsu Star Empire, it puts their colony of Kos'Karii within direct striking distance of two military bases controlled by a power that is still threatening revenge for the Klingon's invasion of their space right after Romulus was destroyed. Now instead of opposing the building of tachyon detection grids on any and all routes leading into that area of space, the Klingons have volunteered to help build the wall."

"I can understand their reticence," Kale remarked. "After all, if we can detect and track cloaked Romulan and Rihannsu ships using those tachyon probes, we can track cloaked Klingon ships too. But the Klingons are nothing if not practical, and they don't depend on cloaking devices to the same degree as the Romulans always have. When does construction of the new detection grids begin?"

"Several starships are already en route to the AOR," Janeway replied. "And what's better, once the tachyon grids are in place, several of those starships will be remaining in the area to take over the Trade Route patrol, freeing up the *Dauntless*, *Sarek*, and *Sun-Tzu* to finally resume their regular mission of exploration."

"I'm sure Fleet Captain Koester will be happy to hear that," Kale remarked. "Thanks again, Kathryn."

"Anything I can do to help the Fifth Fleet during this very trying time," Janeway replied with a nod. "Starfleet, out."

The viewer went blank, and Kale was about to turn back into his office when Lt Commander Torres called out, "Admiral, the *Corsair* has just docked. Captain Harkonnen is on his way to Ops to provide a report of their mission."

"Very well. I guess I'll just wait for him to arrive."

Kale stepped over to the nearby replicator and ordered himself a traditional Centauri beverage, similar to Earth coffee but with a much spicier taste and aroma. The smell of the steam coming from the top of the mug reminded Kale of the times he would share the beverage with fellow Centauri Dr. Athena Arcadian in the recreation room of the *USS Arcturus* while they conversed about their mutual homeworld. Kale was headed back to the master

systems display when the turbolift opened behind him and Harkonnen came barreling out, a woman in a blue-colored sciences uniform following close behind.

“Welcome back, Captain,” Kale said. “Anything to report? Any luck figuring out what went wrong aboard *Starbase 719*?”

“Negative, Admiral,” Harkonnen replied. He then introduced his science officer and explained, “Lieutenant Bentzen did detect an anomalous reading in the vicinity of where the station had been located that was very similar to something the *Pariah* had reported a couple of months prior to Hans and his family moving to Bel-Terra.”

“During Val’s recovery?” Kale asked. Harkonnen nodded. “There was so much going on at that time, it’s no wonder we lost track of a report from the *Pariah*.” Kale then looked at the science officer and asked, “Were you able to determine what the reading was or what caused it, Lieutenant?”

“No, Admiral,” Bentzen replied. “We couldn’t even locate it again after the initial detection. For all I know, it could have simply been a sensor glitch. But I would like to have the station’s computers analyze our data, in case there’s something there we missed.”

“Of course, Lieutenant. Commander Torres will help you out.”

As Bentzen and Torres stepped aside to discuss the transfer of the *Corsair*’s data recordings, Kale started tapping a series of command into the keypad of the master systems display. A second later the image of a man with dark brown hair and a long face appeared on the console top. “Have you ever seen this man aboard *Starbase 719*?” Kale asked Harkonnen.

The Russian man studied the image for a moment before looking at Kale and saying, “No. Who is he?”

“We’re not sure,” Kale said. “In fact, this picture may not even be him. It’s just one we have that looks like the man Torres discovered in one of the final security recordings from the starbase and is much better quality than the recording. I was hoping perhaps you had seen him around the station at some point.”

Harkonnen again turned his attention on the image of Lieutenant Robert Grant, squinting his eyes slightly as he tried to recall if he had ever seen anyone like him aboard *719*.

“What was he doing in the security footage?” Harkonnen finally asked.

“From what we can tell...,” Kale said, pausing for dramatic effect. “Hiding.”

“Hiding?” Harkonnen asked, unsure he had heard correctly. “Hiding from what?”

“It appears he was hiding from the Marine patrols that were moving around the station, making sure each section was clear of personnel before sealing it off and moving on to the next.”

The gears in Harkonnen’s brain started to grind as realization dawned on what Kale was trying to say. “Are you saying this man may be responsible for the destruction of our starbase?!” The Russian’s voice was full of indignation.

“We cannot be certain at this point,” Kale remarked. “However, when someone no one has ever seen before, who looks a whole lot like a 23rd century Starfleet security officer, suddenly appears aboard *Starbase 719* AND in the vicinity of the equipment that eventually destroyed the station, you have to admit it seems suspicious. Unfortunately, it looks like he was probably killed in the station’s destruction too.”

Harkonnen turned his attention back to the image on the console. He let the face burn itself into his brain. If this man – whoever he was – had anything at all to do with the deaths of his wife and nearly eight hundred other friends and station-mates, then Harkonnen silently vowed that if he ever encountered him, he would personally see to it that the mysterious stranger had his own personal meeting with the devil himself.

“Sorry, Admiral,” Harkonnen said aloud. “I cannot recall ever having seen him. But if I remember anything, I will be sure to let you know.”

To Be Continued...