

*Station log, stardate 70530.1:*

*It has been almost a full year since the loss of Starbase 719. In the time since the Fifth Fleet returned to its normal mission of exploring the Fleet Area of Responsibility, several new starships have been assigned to the fleet, including the USS LaSalle, USS Concorde, and USS Pathfinder, and the AOR has expanded into a new sector now designated 50117 close to where the Kairn original homeworld of Rianus II is located. Things are looking optimistic for the Federation Fifth Fleet.*

*In related matters, the continuing patrols of the Trade Route by the starships Gryphon, Cheyenne, and Chimera, along with the completed SOSUS Tachyon Net, are keeping the Rihannsu from attempting to reinforce their occupying force on the Romulan colony of Elehu. As a result, the Rihannsu military governor has started granting the colony a level of autonomy. This leads me and the Romulan forces stationed at the nearby Vorte colony to hope Elehu can soon be liberated and returned to the control of the rightful Romulan Imperial Government. I suppose only time will tell.*

*Meanwhile, here in the Typhon Sector, we're starting to deal with our own issues again. Kale, Admiral Kalin, out.*

Vice Admiral Kalin Kale of Alpha Centauri stepped out of the small office to one side of Ops aboard *Starbase Typhon-Bravo*. He stepped over to the nearby master systems display, checking on the status of various vital systems aboard the Buckingham-class starbase. Satisfied with the readouts, Kale intended to return to his office and order a cup of Andorian katheka from the replicator when the science officer Lieutenant Evelyn Amano called out to him.

“Admiral Kale, I’m detecting unusual readings in the sector, sir.”

Kale changed direction and walked the short distance across Ops to the science console. “What have you got, Lieutenant?”

“I’m not really sure, Admiral,” the science officer replied. “Readings I’ve never seen before, originating a short distance away from the starbase.”

“How short a distance?” Kale asked with concern.

Amano cross-referenced her sensors with the stellar cartography file, then looked up at Kale with an expression of shock. “Admiral,” the science officer said. “The readings are originating at the exact coordinates where *Starbase 719* used to be located!”

Space, the Final Frontier...

## Star Trek: Fifth Fleet

# “Somewhere Over the Rainbow” By PJK

A Typhon Sector Crisis Story

Vice Admiral Kalin Kale stared at the monitor screen on the science console with a look of shock mixed with puzzlement. Finally he turned around and asked the duty officer, "Where is the *Corsair* right now?"

"Captain Harkonnen and the *Corsair* are on patrol along the edge of the Typhon Expanse at present," Lt Commander B'Elanna Torres replied. "At least two days away."

"Do we have any other vessels nearby?" Kale asked.

Torres consulted a readout on the master systems display and replied, "The *Bellerophon* is en route here for a brief R&R stop. ETA currently two hours."

"Perfect," Kale remarked. "B'Elanna, hail the *Belle*."

Kale stepped across Ops and onto the small porch in front of the door of his office and turned to face the main viewscreen located on the angled bulkhead above the consoles across the room. The emblem of Starfleet Command briefly appeared on the screen before being replaced by the image of a white-haired Efrosian sitting in the right-hand command chair aboard an Intrepid-class starship bridge.

"This is the *Bellerophon*. Commander Xin Zhadesh on duty."

"Commander," Kale greeted. "This is Admiral Kale aboard *Starbase Typhon-Bravo*. We have started detecting unusual sensor readings coming from the coordinates where *Starbase 719* had been located." Kale noted a look of shock and surprise briefly appear on the Efrosian's normally stoic face. "I understand you and your crew are looking forward to some relaxation here aboard the starbase, but I need to redirect the *Belle* to those coordinates for a closer investigation. See if you can figure out what is causing the readings we are detecting and if they are somehow connected with *Starbase 719*'s destruction."

"I will inform Captain K'danz of our change of orders immediately, Admiral," Zhadesh replied. "We will contact you if we discover anything. *Bellerophon*, out."

The viewscreen again blinked to the image of the Starfleet Command logo, then went black.

"Do you think this is related to the readings the *Corsair* detected several months ago?" Commander Torres asked, moving up closer to Kale.

"There is definitely SOMETHING happening in this sector, Commander," Kale replied. "I cannot help but wonder if Starfleet built their starbase on top of some cosmic fault-line we weren't aware of before."

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*Captain's log, stardate 70530.3:*

*The Bellerophon has been pulled away from our transit to Starbase Typhon-Bravo, where we were scheduled for three days of rest and relaxation after our recent mission in the Sector 50104 Nebula, to investigate anomalous readings coming from the coordinates where Starbase 719 once existed.*

*K'danz, out.*

"Approaching indicated coordinates," Lt Commander Walter Hickam stated from his position at the helm.

"Very well," Commander Zhadesh replied before pressing the intercom control on the console between the two command chairs. "Bridge to Captain K'danz. We have reached the indicated coordinates. Commander T'Var is beginning her scans." The Efrosian then nodded to the Vulcan woman sitting at the science console on the port side of the bridge. T'Var nodded back before activating the starship's short-range scanners.

"Thank you, Mister Zhadesh," the voice of the *Bellerophon*'s commanding officer, K'danz replied. "I'll be right out." A moment later, the human woman with the Klingon-sounding name emerged from her ready room and stepped over to where her chief of operations was sitting, turning to look at the area of space displayed on the main viewer. It had been almost a full year since the destruction of *Starbase 719*, and very little of the debris left behind still remained. Most had been collected by the crew of the new *Starbase Typhon-Bravo* for analysis, attempting to determine what had actually caused the large Ournel-class starbase to explode and to prevent the debris from

becoming a hazard to navigation. What little remained was so small and inconsequential, Admiral Kale had decided it would cause no harm to leave it adrift – a slowly dissipating grave marker of sorts for the eight hundred or so Starfleet personnel lost aboard the station.

“Are you detecting anything, Commander?” K’danz asked her chief science officer.

“Yes, Captain,” T’Var replied. Her eyes never left the sensor readings as she reported, “I’m detecting what appears to be a wormhole in the vicinity.”

“What?!?” K’danz responded, peering closer at the viewscreen in an attempt to see the phenomenon T’Var was describing, but the area of space displayed on the screen appeared completely normal. “Where is it located exactly? I’m not seeing any evidence of a wormhole!”

“And you won’t,” the Vulcan woman remarked. “There are literally millions of them, but each is microscopic, spread out over dozens of kilometers of space.”

“Are we in any danger of being sucked into them?” K’danz asked, considering ordering her helmsman to back away from the area slowly.

“Negative,” T’Var replied. “As I stated, they are microscopic in size. The *Bellerophon* would have to be the size of a single-cell organism in order to enter any of the wormholes I am detecting.”

“Where do they lead? And could they somehow be connected to the explosion that destroyed *Starbase 719*?” the captain asked.

“I cannot surmise where they may lead without the ability to launch a probe through one or more of them,” T’Var replied with a glance at K’danz. “And we have no probes small enough for such an endeavor. As for their connection to the destruction of the starbase, I have inadequate data to form a hypothesis at present.” T’Var returned her attention to the sensor readings and added, “However, sensors indicate the wormholes are slowly growing in size.”

“Growing in size?” K’danz asked.

“Affirmative. From what sensors are detecting, the micro-wormholes are in constant motion, and occasionally two or more will collide and combine, increasing in size. Based on current exponential growth rate, it is possible these micro-wormholes did exist when *Starbase 719* occupied this location.”

\* \* \* \*

Several hours later, K’danz was in her starship’s briefing lounge, surrounded by her first officer Commander Tom Paris, operations officer Commander Xin Zhadesh, science officer Lt Commander T’Var, husband and chief engineer Commander Dar, and on the viewscreen transmitting from *Starbase Typhon-Bravo*, Vice Admiral Kalin Kale and his science officer Lieutenant Amano.

“So what you’re telling me,” Kale said over the monitor, “is these micro-wormholes could potentially be the cause of *719*’s destruction?”

“If they were present as T’Var hypothesizes,” Dar explained, “they could have been the origin of the extra power flowing through the station’s fusion reactors even when they were shut down. Theoretically they could likewise have interfered with the station’s ability to jettison the reactors.”

“Any idea where the wormholes lead to?” Kale asked. “Or is it possible each wormhole jumps to a different point in the universe?”

Now it was T’Var’s turn to offer an explanation. “Based on the sensor readings I am receiving, it is possible these micro-wormholes could lead as far away as another galaxy,” the Vulcan woman said. “Conversely, they could simply loop back upon themselves and what we are detecting as two individual wormholes could in fact be a single wormhole’s beginning and end point all in close proximity to one another. It is impossible to determine at present.”

“What do you need to research this further, Commander?” Kale asked over the viewscreen.

“Time, Admiral,” T’Var replied. When those around her took on puzzled expressions, she explained further, “As I mentioned earlier, these micro-wormholes are colliding and combining with one another, becoming larger in the process. I estimate that within the next twenty hours enough of the micro-wormholes will have

combined into a single wormhole large enough for us to send a small probe through in the hopes we may be able to determine where they lead. Knowing where they go may help us conclude if they are in some way responsible for the loss of the starbase.”

“Commander T’Var,” Lieutenant Amano interjected. “Do you believe these wormholes to be stable, similar to the Bajoran wormhole?”

“Our research has determined these wormholes have existed in some form in this location for at least the last year, perhaps longer,” T’Var replied. “I have no reason to believe once they have combined into a single, much larger wormhole that it will not be stable and remain for an indefinite period.”

“Which then raises the question:” Kale remarked. “Are these wormholes actually a natural phenomenon? Or is there some intelligence similar to the Bajoran Prophets behind them?”

A look of alarm suddenly crossed Captain K’danz’s face. “And if an intelligence is behind them,” she said. “Did they destroy our starbase accidentally? Or are they hostile for some reason?”

\* \* \* \*

Within twenty-four hours, enough of the micro-wormholes had combined for T’Var to be confident a small probe would pass through. The morning following the briefing, the science officer was in the captain’s ready room with K’danz and Commanders Dar and Zhadesh. She was holding a small device about the size of a scatsball, though tapered front and back.

“This is the type of covert probe Starfleet used to use to monitor the Romulan Neutral Zone,” T’Var explained. “Their size and passive sensors made them extremely difficult for the Romulans to detect. By my computations, one of these probes should just be able to fit in the largest of the current wormholes we are detecting.”

T’Var placed the small probe on the captain’s desk, where K’danz began to study the device.

“I remember making use of these aboard the *Dauntless-74658*,” the captain remarked. “Because they were so small and emitted no electronic emissions, the Romulans normally overlooked them very easily.”

“That’s pretty small to be ejected out of a torpedo tube,” Dar remarked. “How do we launch it? Throw it out an airlock and hope it passes through the wormhole?”

“If I remember correctly,” K’danz interjected before either T’Var or Zhadesh could answer, “We place one of these in the space normally occupied by the warhead of a photon torpedo casing and it separates from the casing just prior to entering the area it is designated to monitor.”

“That is correct, Captain,” T’Var agreed with a nod.

“How soon can we be ready?” K’danz asked.

“We can have the torpedo casing ready within thirty minutes, Captain,” Zhadesh replied. “Tube ready in all respects within ten minutes after that.”

“Very well,” K’danz said with a slight nod of her own. “See to it. Dismissed.”

\* \* \* \*

Forty-five minutes later, K’danz, Zhadesh, and T’Var were on the bridge. “Tube one ready for launch, Captain,” Major Michael Drake, the Marine officer manning tactical reported.

“Very well, Major. Target the wormhole based on Commander T’Var’s sensor readings. You may fire when ready,” K’danz ordered.

Drake coordinated his targeting scanner with the science console’s short-range sensors, transferring the probe vector into the torpedo casing loaded into the starship’s torpedo tube.

“Vector is programmed. Launching probe,” Drake announced as he depressed the trigger. A moment later, the torpedo casing launched from one of the tubes on the Intrepid-class starship’s engineering hull – much slower than a photon torpedo normally would – and moved away from the ship. Ten seconds later, the small ovoid-shaped probe detached from the casing and continued forward at a slightly faster speed.

“Probe approaching the wormhole’s event horizon,” T’Var announced. “It should cross the horizon in five... four... three... two...”

K’danz was intently staring at the probe on the main viewscreen. As T’Var’s countdown reached zero, there was a momentary bright flash of light where the probe had been, and the captain could no longer see it.

“Are you receiving any data from the probe, Commander?” K’danz asked her science officer.

“Not yet,” the Vulcan replied. “It may be possible the nature of the wormhole blocks subspace signals from passing through...”

“Commander T’Var,” Xin Zhadesh interrupted. “We have started receiving telemetry from the probe.”

“Confirmed. Telemetry data is...,” T’Var announced before suddenly stopping mid-sentence. “How unusual. The probe is... gone.”

“That was fast!” K’danz remarked, looking over at the science console. “What do you mean the probe is gone? Was it somehow destroyed?”

“I do not believe so, Captain,” T’Var replied. “I will need to analyze the data we collected in the brief moment we received telemetry back.” The Vulcan woman looked back at the white-haired Efrosian standing behind the ops console and said, “Commander, would you please network with my console and aid in my analysis.”

“Of course, Commander,” Zhadesh responded, immediately linking his own console to T’Var’s. The pair studied the readings that had been received, and a moment later a look of annoyed puzzlement appeared on the Efrosian officer’s face. “These indications make little sense.”

“I concur, Commander,” T’Var responded. “Though if you are interpreting the sensor logs the same as I, the data they display must, in fact, be true.”

“What is it?” K’danz asked with concern.

“According to the telemetry we received, the probe never left the coordinates of the wormhole event horizon,” T’Var replied. “It simply came to a complete halt and transmitted just over two seconds worth of data.”

K’danz again glanced toward the main viewscreen as she said, “I’m not seeing it anywhere. I did see a bright flash where it should have entered the wormhole. Is it possible the probe was somehow destroyed like *Starbase 719*?”

“Negative,” Zhadesh answered. “The telemetry we received was transmitted nearly twenty seconds after that flash occurred. The probe must have survived at least that long.”

“Mister Drake?” K’danz prompted, now looking in the direction of the security chief.

Drake consulted his sensor readouts, then looked back at the captain and said, “Sensors are not detecting any indications of the probe or any debris in the vicinity. The probe has disappeared entirely.”

“Are you perhaps analyzing faulty telemetry readings, T’Var?” K’danz directed at her science officer.

“That is a possibility, Captain,” the Vulcan replied. “However, I have a hypothesis that could explain the readings we have received as well.”

“And that is?”

“That rather than connecting two points in the fabric of space/time, the wormholes we have encountered connect to the same exact point in space, but transcend the boundary between realities.”

A look of frustration appeared on K’danz’s face as she looked at T’Var, finally asking, “What is it about this sector? We’ve experienced more cross-dimensional incidents in just the few years since *Starbase 719* was built here than the Federation has experienced in the entire rest of its existence!”

“Perhaps the boundary between realities is thinner in this vicinity than in any other location in explored space?” Commander Zhadesh offered.

“It is possible the fabric of space in the Typhon Sector might act as a nexus between realities,” T’Var added.

“So where does this information get us in terms of figuring out if these wormholes had anything to do with *719*’s destruction?” the captain asked.

“I will need to analyze the information further,” T’Var replied. “It could simply be coincidence that these wormholes appeared at the coordinates where the starbase had been located. Or they could indeed be the cause of the station’s loss.”

\* \* \* \*

Late that evening, Captain K'danz was in her quarters sitting behind her desk. Her son Jacob was already in bed, Dar was sitting on the couch across the room reviewing several new technical journals, and K'danz was taking advantage of the quiet time to complete a couple of reports prior to going to bed when the intercom whistled.

"Bridge to Captain K'danz," said the voice of Lt Commander Vance Callahan, the current officer of the deck.

K'danz activated the intercom and replied, "This is the Captain."

"Captain, we've just received more telemetry from the probe that was launched earlier today," Callahan reported.

K'danz glanced at a chronometer across the room, confirming it was more than ten hours since the probe had been launched and then quickly disappeared. "Have you informed Commander T'Var?"

"Yes, Captain. The transmission we received was brief. About two seconds. But T'Var seemed excited by the new data. Well, as much as a Vulcan CAN seem excited."

"Where is T'Var now?" K'danz asked.

"Last reported location was Stellar Cartography, Captain."

"Thank you," K'danz replied. "Captain, out." She then deactivated the intercom and got out of her chair, slipping on her duty uniform jacket as she did. "Dar, I'm heading to Stellar Cartography for a few minutes," she said to her husband. "I shouldn't be long."

"Hmm?" Dar said, looking up from his journals briefly at the distraction as his wife headed out the door.

A few minutes later, K'danz was walking into the Stellar Cartography lab. On the large holographic dome that dominated the room was displayed a section of the galaxy. From experience, K'danz recognized it as the Fleet AOR and about forty light years – or two sectors – of the space surrounding it in every direction. K'danz then walked over to the Vulcan woman working at one of the consoles along the side of the lab.

"I understand you received some more telemetry from the probe, Commander," she said.

"Indeed," the Vulcan replied. "Though there is much that only adds to the mystery of this situation."

"What do you mean?"

"We received the latest burst of telemetry exactly ten point zero two five hours after the initial loss of telemetry when the probe entered the wormhole, yet according to the time code underlying the telemetry data, the start of this latest transmission begins precisely where the previous one left off."

"So the probe malfunctioned and only transmitted limited data from shortly after it passed through the wormhole?" K'danz asked.

"I am unsure," T'Var replied. "Though I have a theory that, if correct, should prove itself in just under another ten hours."

"You think we're going to receive more telemetry data at that time?" T'Var nodded in agreement. "Perfect, I should be back on watch on the bridge at that time."

"I know Alpha Watch is normally Lieutenant Koester's watch section, but I too shall be present on the bridge at that time, just in case."

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The next morning, the usual Alpha Shift crewmembers were manning the bridge shortly after watch turnover – including Captain K'danz – with the exception of Lieutenant (JG) Gem Koester, who had been replaced for the one watch rotation by Lt Commander T'Var.

"Time until we expect to receive the probe's transmission, if your theory is correct, Commander T'Var?" the captain asked. K'danz was staring at the viewscreen, where the wormhole had started to become visible to the naked eye, the appearance of a slight aura swirling around the event horizon that was slightly lighter than the surrounding space.

“If my calculations are correct,” T’Var responded, “We should be receiving the transmission within two minutes, twenty-five seconds.... Mark!”

“I’ve never seen a wormhole that could be seen visibly other than when something is passing through it,” remarked Commander Tom Paris, the *Bellerophon*’s first officer from his seat to K’danz’s left. He then looked back toward Zhadesh and asked, “The wormhole poses no danger to us in our present position, does it, Commander?”

“Negative,” Xin Zhadesh replied. “In its present configuration, the largest of the wormholes is barely half the width of our hull. The *Bellerophon* cannot fit through any of them. According to my calculations, once all the smaller wormholes come together as sensors indicate they are doing at an increasingly exponential rate, the final single wormhole will form perhaps the largest wormhole known. Larger in diameter than even the Bajoran Wormhole. More than large enough to swallow a structure such as *Starbase Deep Space 9*. However, for the present we are safe.”

“Well, keep an eye on it anyway,” Paris ordered. “I don’t want to be taken by surprise.”

The seconds continued to tick down on a display Ensign Sang Li had added to the bottom corner of the viewscreen when T’Var had announced her time estimate. The counter had almost reached one minute remaining when an indicator started flashing on Zhadesh’s ops console.

“Captain, we are receiving a telemetry transmission,” the Efrosian confirmed.

“Seems your estimate of the time remaining was off by a little bit, T’Var,” K’danz remarked with a smirk.

The Vulcan woman ignored the jab as she accessed the telemetry. “As I believed, Captain,” she finally said. “The time code of this new telemetry begins at almost the exact second the previous one ended.”

“And this means what?” K’danz asked. “That the probe is only transmitting a small portion of its data every ten hours? If that’s true, we’re going to be falling further and further behind with each transmission.”

“Actually, I believe some form of time dilation is occurring, with time in the reality where the probe is currently located passing at a much slower rate than our own reality.”

“Is that possible?” Zhadesh asked.

“The universe holds many mysteries, Commander,” K’danz remarked as T’Var returned her attention to the telemetry recordings. “Starfleet has confirmed the existence of alternate realities parallel to our own since the mid-23<sup>rd</sup> century. Who knows how they may differ from each other?”

“Captain,” T’Var interrupted before either Zhadesh or Paris could remark. “There is something you need to see.”

K’danz could hear the tone of urgency in the science officer’s voice. “What is it, Commander?”

“The telemetry and sensor recordings we received this time were almost a whole minute in length. I have reviewed all the data we received, and I discovered something you may find of interest.”

T’Var touched controls on her console and the viewscreen blinked to a recorded playback. The image looked almost exactly like what had been displayed on the ‘live’ image a moment earlier – except for some intermittent static – the stars pretty much in the same positions, not enough difference to be obvious to the naked eye – until a vessel dropped out of warp directly in front of the probe’s visual sensor. The crew got a brief look at the ship in question before it fired phasers and the recording came to an abrupt end.”

“Was that a Federation starship?” Paris asked, unsure of what he had seen.

“If it was, it was similar in configuration to an old Constitution-class starship,” Zhadesh added.

“The last Constitution-class starship was withdrawn from service in the 2310’s,” Major Drake stated.

“It was in our reality,” K’danz reminded her crew, her mouth partially agape.

\* \* \* \*

Within the hour, the grainy and static-distorted image that had been transmitted through the forming wormhole was displayed on one of the console monitor screens in ops aboard *Starbase Typhon-Bravo*. Admiral Kale, Lt Commander Torres, and Lieutenant Amano stood staring at the image, trying to make sense of what they were seeing.

“It’s no design I’m aware of in the Starfleet ASDB database,” Amano remarked.

“From this bow-on angle, it’s hard to get a sense of scale,” Kale added. “My first deep-space assignment was aboard a variant of the Constitution-class, so I know the basic design pretty well. The part of the warp nacelles you can see above the hull appear to be HUGE, at least in comparison to the LN-64 linear warp drive nacelles I’m familiar with. And look at this...” Kale pointed at the edge of the starship’s saucer section. “The saucer appears to be of the later refit design, but the engineering hull looks like it’s got an old-style deflector dish like the original Constitution design, even though the dish is lighted similar to the Constitution-refit.”

“Could it be a kit-bash, sir?” Torres asked, glancing at the admiral. When he looked confused, the chief operations officer added, “It’s a term some engineers use to describe a starship constructed from pre-built modules and sections designed for other starship classes, like the *USS Curry* and *USS Yeager*, hastily assembled just prior to the start of the Dominion War.”

“If we’re actually dealing with an alternate reality like Captain K’danz believes, who knows what direction starship design could have taken?” Kale remarked. “For all we know, we could be looking at an alternate reality’s equivalent of the Sovereign or Galaxy-class?”

“It still looks strange,” Amano commented.

“So what do we do about this information, and the wormhole developing not far from here?” Torres asked.

“I have orders from Admiral Janeway to continue to monitor the situation,” Kale replied. “In the meantime, the *Corsair* is back from patrol and along with the *Sarek* will be joining the *Belle* in studying this phenomenon. Hopefully we can determine if this developing wormhole is somehow connected with the loss of our previous starbase.”

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*Captain’s log, stardate 70538.3:*

*It has been twenty-four hours since we last received telemetry from the probe we sent through the wormhole. Since that time, the starships Sarek and Corsair have joined us in studying the emerging wormhole, which is now one large wormhole surrounded by a visible accretion disc, making it appear like swirling hellfire slowly spinning around a drain – the classic fictional image of a black hole except for the lack of any significant gravitic attraction.*

*The three starships present are studying the new single wormhole – currently large enough to swallow Starbase Typhon-Bravo and still have room left over – from different angles and ranges and are sharing the data we collect, though so far we have learned little of any additional value in determining if this phenomenon is somehow responsible for the loss of Starbase 719.*

*K’danz, out.*

In spite of the fact it was an hour into Beta Shift aboard the *Bellerophon* and technically the bridge was under the command of Tom Paris, K’danz remained sitting in her command seat, staring in wonder at the swirling image on the main viewer. Just visible in the distance beyond the wormhole the captain could see the Galaxy-class *USS Sarek*, performing the same mission as her own starship. Somewhere out there, not currently visible on the viewer, was also the Defiant-class *USS Corsair*.

Upon the arrival of the other two starships, Captain Konstantin Harkonnen had suggested simply flying his vessel straight through the wormhole to wherever it led and demanding answers from whomever was located there as to what happened to his wife and all the others when *Starbase 719* was destroyed. The Russian’s hot-headedness was tempered by the advice of Captain Jo Ann Parker of the *Sarek*, who advised caution – only through studying the emerging phenomenon could they better understand its origins and effects on local space.

"I've got the bridge if there is something more important you need to do, Captain," Paris remarked to K'danz. It was hard to tell from his tone of voice if he actually believed K'danz needed some time off the bridge to decompress and catch up on some other tasks she normally accomplished off-shift or if he was getting annoyed by her continued presence during what was his watch section.

"I'm sorry, Tom," K'danz apologized. "The accretion disc effect is mesmerizing. And I guess a part of me is afraid I'll miss something important if I leave the..."

The captain's remark was cut off by an alarm activating at the science console. All eyes turned to port, where the Vulcan science officer was assessing new readings updating quickly on her monitors.

"Captain!" T'Var almost shouted. "Detecting increased neutrino levels! Sensors indicate something is moving through the wormhole!" T'Var glanced at her readouts again and added, "Something big!"

"When you say big, how big do you mean?" K'danz asked, now at high alert. "Like, Galaxy-class starship big?"

"No. Much larger," T'Var replied. "Whatever it is, it's about as large as all the vessels in the Fifth Fleet plus *Starbase Typhon-Bravo* put together!"

"Sounds like we have an invasion fleet coming through!" Paris exclaimed.

"Captain," said Lieutenant Shori th'Kela. "*USS Sarek* confirms the readings we are receiving. *USS Corsair* is also registering the increase in neutrino levels. Captain Harkonnen is taking his ship to red alert."

"Let's not lose our heads just yet," K'danz advised. "If there is a fleet of some kind coming through the wormhole, we don't yet know their intentions. They could simply be curious about whoever sent the probe into their universe."

"Which they promptly destroyed," Paris reminded.

K'danz exchanged looks with her first officer for several seconds before finally saying, "Okay, let's play this a little safe. Yellow alert!"

The alert klaxon sounded throughout the *Bellerophon* and a couple of more junior personnel were replaced on the bridge by more senior officers.

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"Admiral!" Lt Commander Torres called out. Vice Admiral Kalin Kale looked up from the padd he had been reviewing and handed the device back to the yeoman as he looked toward the half-Klingon engineer at the master systems display.

"What is it, Commander?" he asked.

"The *Bellerophon*, *Corsair*, and *Sarek* are all reporting something... something BIG... is coming through the wormhole!"

Kale immediately looked up at the main viewer, where the swirling red opening of the wormhole and the three fleet starships were visible, a look of concern on his face.

"The starships report they are on alert," Torres added. "Captain Harkonnen is positive an invasion fleet of some kind is about to emerge into our reality."

"Man battlestations! Arm all defensive systems!" Kale ordered without hesitation.

"Station shields raised. Weapons systems armed and standing by," Lieutenant Asley Tyrrell reported a moment later.

"I want to make this absolutely clear!" Kale stated. "Do not... repeat, NOT... fire unless fired upon! We don't know if whatever is coming through that wormhole is hostile. We don't want to accidentally start a war where one doesn't already exist! Am I understood?" There were murmurs of agreement from the entire ops crew. "Carry on," Kale ordered, looking intently at the viewer.

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“Estimated arrival time of emerging object or objects,” T’Var announced to the *Bellerophon* bridge. “Seven... Six... Five... Four... Three...”

“Be ready for anything,” K’danz ordered.

“Two... One...”

The viewscreen erupted in a bright flash of white, as if the entire face of the wormhole had exploded, overloading the viewscreen and half-blinding anyone even partially looking in that direction.

“What happened?” K’danz shouted. “Status report!” In her gut, she feared the flash of light was deliberate, preventing her crew and the other starship crews from reacting quickly to whatever had emerged from the wormhole. She waited for phaser fire or some other unknown weapon to start striking her starship’s shields.

“Sensors indicate the wormhole has collapsed,” T’Var reported, the first of the crew to recover her vision thanks to the Vulcan inner eyelid. “I am registering a single large artificial structure in its place.”

The viewscreen was still displaying nothing but white, frustrating Captain K’danz. “Can we get visual to work?” she asked.

“Resetting the main viewscreen,” stated Commander Zhadesh from ops. The Efrosian manipulated a few controls on his console and the main viewer went black for a split-second, then filled with static before quickly resolving to an image of space outside the starship. As stated by T’Var, the swirling red wormhole was gone. In its place, the view was dominated by a huge grey and blue mushroom-shaped structure. The entire bridge crew stared in wonder.

“Is that...?” Commander Paris asked, his voice caught in his throat.

*To Be Continued...*