

## Stardate 56643.8

Fleet Captain Robert Stuart and Commodore Erik Sjögren left the Starview Café after having breakfast together and headed around the curved corridor. It had been barely more than two weeks since Stuart had arrived at Starbase *Gateway Alpha*, but he had managed to make breakfast with the base commanding officer a part of his routine. The two officers made a point of starting each Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings together to talk about Stuart's uncle, who had served as an engineer under Sjögren's command fifty years prior. Rob Stuart loved to hear about his Uncle Bob's early career aboard Commodore Sjögren's starship all those years ago. Stuart also enjoyed hearing about the commodore's missions.

The officers entered a turbolift and sped toward the command and control center on Deck 3 of the new starbase. They exited the turbolift and made their way to the CnC main entrance where a junior Starfleet security officer snapped to attention. "As you were, Ensign," Sjögren said. "After you, Captain."

"Thank you, Commodore," Stuart replied as he entered the control center first.

Stuart strolled to the communications and operations stations that were dedicated to monitoring the missions assigned to the ships of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Exploratory Group under Stuart's command. "Anything to report, Lieutenant?"

Lieutenant Jal Aslo, a female Bolian, looked up from her operations console. "Good morning, sir," she said. "The *Trailblazer* is on its way back from Pacifica. Captain Leeson reported that she has thirty-four civilian passengers who are anxious to get their places of business open so that they can serve all the hard-working members of Starfleet that are stationed here. Her exact words, Captain."

"You do a good impression of her sarcasm, Lieutenant. It sounds like she isn't too confident about these civilians' motives."

"Agreed, sir," the lieutenant said. "The *Icarus* is due in four hours, twenty-five minutes. Captain Jeffers is transporting several Starfleet officers and enlisted people who have been assigned to *Gateway Alpha*. The *Sonak* is en route to Mira with medical supplies. Many of the residents have been infected with a strain of Trellian measles. The *Alliance* is on its way to deliver supplies to the Flora colony. The starship *Raleigh* is scheduled to leave in one hour to start mapping parts of the Enkar Sector. I reminded Commander Thel about the restricted space surrounding the Enkar system."

"You're on top of it, Lieutenant. I noticed that you didn't mention the *Balboa*."

"Sorry, Captain," Lieutenant Aslo replied as she blushed a darker shade of blue. "The *Balboa* is currently surveying an uninhabited planet approximately nine light-years from here. Commander Morgenstern is like clockwork, sir. He will be contacting us in about seven minutes," The Bolian added.

"Captain," the officer at the communications station said as he faced Stuart. "Commander Morgenstern is early, sir."

“Put him on, Ensign.”

The voice of Saul Morgenstern came out of the audio speaker. “*Gateway Alpha, please patch me through to Fleet Captain Stuart.*”

Stuart stepped closer to the communications console. “I’m here, Saul. What’s up?”

“*We were surveying a planet that shows signs that it was once inhabited by sentient lifeforms, but on our twelfth orbit, we picked up some strange readings on long-range sensors about two and a half light-years away. We broke orbit a couple of hours ago and are on our way to check it out.*”

“Understood,” Stuart said. “Can you determine what kind of readings?”

“*Tachyon particles. And the readings are getting stronger as we get closer.*”

“How long until you get to the source?”

“*At current speed, we should arrive in a little over an hour,*” Morgenstern said. “*Wait a minute.*” There was a pause as Morgenstern’s voice could be barely heard as he apparently was talking to someone on his bridge. “*My science officer said that tachyon reading is spiking. I’m going to drop out of warp and...*”

“Saul?” Stuart looked to the communications officer. “What happened?”

“The signal is gone, sir.”

## **To Boldly Go: Temporal Reflections**

*A Starbase Gateway Alpha/U.S.S. Monarch/U.S.S. Starquest story*

By Cleve Johnson

Commodore Erik Sjögren had been getting an update from the starbase XO, Captain Uri Ivanov, when he noticed the looks on Stuart’s face and on the faces of the two officers that he was consulting with. The commodore held up his hand to interrupt his executive officer. “Hold on, Captain. It looks like something’s going on over there. Excuse me.” Sjögren started toward Stuart and his officers. “Is there a problem, Robert?”

“We just lost contact with the *Balboa*. Commander Morgenstern was in the middle of a report and suddenly the signal went dead.”

“Gone?”

“Yes, sir,” Stuart replied. “There’s no sign of the ship on long-range sensors. It was there one minute and gone the next.” Stuart turned to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Exploratory Group’s communications officer. “Contact the *Monarch* and have Captain Grey recall any crew that’s on the station. Fill him in on what’s happened and tell him that I want to get underway in twenty minutes.”

“Aye, sir,” the young ensign replied and went about completing Stuart’s orders.

Sjögren's mouth started to open, but he hesitated to say what he had been thinking. This must be the day that he had waited for after many years of keeping silent. He then looked at the date and time display on one of the nearby consoles. Yes, this was the day when.... "May I go with you, Captain?"

Stuart quizzically faced the commodore. "I know that I promised you a tour of the ship, but now might not be the best time, sir."

"I think that I should be with you on this mission," Sjögren said. "I think I know what is about to happen, and if I'm right, I need to be at your side."

Stuart, still feeling confused, nodded to the starbase CO. "Very well, Commodore." Stuart returned his attention back to the officer manning the communications console. "Ensign, please contact Lieutenant Baker and inform him about what's happening and let him know that I'm leaving him in charge of group operations until I get back." Before the ensign could reply, Stuart turned and started toward the exit with Commodore Sjögren following closely behind.



Fleet Captain Stuart and Commodore Sjögren entered the *Monarch's* bridge. Stuart quickly made his way to the center seat and sat down.

Captain Grey was already sitting in the seat to Stuart's right and nodded toward his CO. "The entire crew is back on board, all stations are manned, and we are ready to get underway, Captain."

"Thank you, Marcus. Give the order."

"Clear all moorings and detach from the docking port," Grey said. "Mr. Deneskos, set your course for the last known coordinates of the starship *Balboa*."

The Veloran flight officer skillfully ran his four hands across the control panel. "We are clear of the station and the course is set, Captain Grey."

"Go to full impulse, Lieutenant."

"Aye, sir. Impulse engines are at full."

Grey touched his communications panel on the arm of his chair. "Bridge to engineering. Commander Li, prepare for warp speed."

*"The warp core is online and ready at your order, sir."*

"Very good," Grey replied as he kept his eyes fixed on the forward viewer. "Lieutenant Deneskos, set your speed at warp nine and engage."

"Engaging warp drive, sir."

Grey's facial expression was neutral, but Stuart noticed a slight sparkle in his first officer's eyes as the image of the stars began to streak on the viewscreen. Stuart knew that his XO was an officer that he could trust with his ship. Stuart wondered if he should have sent the

*Monarch* out under Grey's command. He rose from his chair. "You have the bridge, Exec. The commodore and I will be in my ready room."

"Yes, Captain."

Stuart and Sjögren left the bridge and made their way to the captain's sanctuary. After the door slid shut, Stuart stepped up to the replicator. "Have a seat, Commodore. Would you like something to drink?"

"Coffee with cream and sugar, please," Sjögren said as he eyed the chairs at the office desk. He thought about sitting down in one of those, but he turned around and decided to sit on the couch instead. "This is nice," he said as he admired the décor.

"Thank you, sir," Stuart said as he walked away from the replicator and handed Sjögren a cup of coffee. "It's hot."

"What are you drinking, Robert?"

"Apple-cinnamon tea. I'm not much of a coffee drinker, but different blends of hot tea are my preferred vices." Stuart sat on the chair opposite the coffee table that was between the chair and the couch. "So, what do you know about the *Balboa*'s disappearance?"

Sjögren leaned back and let out a sigh. "I can tell you that everything will be fine. The *Balboa* will return."

Stuart pursed his lips and looked at his colleague. "How do you know that, Commodore?"

"Before I tell you, I need to ask you a couple of questions." The commodore had wanted to have this conversation for more than twenty years, and now the time had come. "Do you remember when we met?"

Stuart took a sip of his tea and set the cup on the coffee table. "Yes, but how is that relevant to the current situation?"

"It's relevant," the commodore said. "Please indulge me."

Stuart cocked his head to one side. "Uncle Bob introduced me to you at your retirement party."

"And do you remember what I said to you?"

"Of course," Stuart said. "You told me that I would not only make captain one day but that I would be a captain among captains. If not for your encouragement, I probably never would have gone to the command school and made it to where I am now."

"I'm glad that I had an influence on your career, Robert."

"How did you know?"

Sjögren smiled. "What I am about to tell you has been my secret for almost fifty years."

Stuart's curiosity spiked as he leaned forward in expectation of hearing the commodore's next word.

"You met me at my retirement party, but I had met you long before that, Robert. You see, our first meeting is going to happen tomorrow."

Stuart started to open his mouth to ask Sjögren what he was talking about, and then it occurred to Stuart that the commodore must have traveled through time. "Before we lost contact, Saul said that his ship was investigating some anomalous tachyon emissions. You came to the future, didn't you?"

Sjögren nodded. "Yes. Just a few months after I was made captain of the U.S.S. *Starquest*, we encountered an area of space that was ripe with tachyon particles. As we approached, we suddenly found ourselves dozens of light-years outside of what was then Federation space. We determined that we traveled a long distance, so we assumed we had entered a wormhole, but not long after our arrival in this sector, we encountered the largest starship we had ever seen."

"The *Monarch*?"

"The *Monarch*," Sjögren echoed. "The reason I needed to come with you is that, for me, the incident has already happened. I remember meeting my older self—me as I am now."

"Obviously, you were able to return to your own time," Stuart said in a matter-of-fact tone. "What about polluting the timeline?"

"My older self, and you, convinced me and a select few members of my crew how important it was to not reveal anything we saw once we returned to our time."

"And you're sure that those who knew never said anything that might have changed the timeline?" Stuart's concern was that he and the rest of the people in the galaxy might be living in an alternate future.

"We wiped all the sensor readings and logs of everything that happened from right before we encountered the tachyons," Sjögren said. "Only the bridge crew knew that we had traveled through time. No one else got a glimpse of this ship."

"How can you be sure that no one saw us through a window?"

"Frankly, your ship didn't get close enough to be seen except on the main viewscreen on the bridge." The commodore's eyes brightened. "You told me how important it was to keep the incident secret, and I and my bridge officers all swore an oath to do just that."

"So, how do you know that the *Balboa* will show up?"

"They showed up shortly before we returned to our own time."

"When will they reappear?"

"In a few hours. Less than eight light-years from where they disappeared."

“And the crew will be alright?”

“I never had direct contact with the *Balboa*, but all indications were that the ship was fine.” The commodore reached across the table and patted Stuart’s knee. “I suspect that from the time they disappeared until the time they reappear will be instantaneous for them. They probably won’t know that they went to the future until you tell them about it.”

Stuart nodded.

“I don’t want to say anything else so that I don’t influence you to change the outcome,” Sjögren said. “If necessary, I will advise you along the way to make sure that our encounter with the *Starquest* and my younger self transpire as it did.”

“Yes, Commodore, I don’t want to take the chance that anything will be different than it was for you,” Stuart said. “Does my uncle know about the incident?”

“No, he was not on the bridge at any time during the days we were in the future.”

“That’s good to know.”

“I’ll tell you one thing, Robert,” the commodore said. “I’m glad that I don’t have to keep this a secret going forward.”



## **U.S.S. *Starquest***

### ***Captain’s Log: Stardate 6318.4***

*I am happy to report that the crew is shaping up as each officer and enlisted person get to know each other. All the departments are running smoothly, especially the engineering department. Commander Ito has a fine team of engineers, and both she and I are most impressed with Ensign Hathaway. This is his first assignment after graduating from Starfleet Academy, and he consistently goes above and beyond his duties. I suspect that he has a wonderful career ahead. We are heading toward a nearby nebula to conduct tests on gaseous anomalies that had been previously reported by another starship several weeks ago. Since the other ship was delivering the Trill delegate to the Federation Council back to his home planet, Starquest was the closest ship to investigate the anomalies.*

Captain Erik Sjögren rose from his chair at the center of his bridge and strolled to the science station at the front of the bridge, just right of the main viewscreen. “Anything to report Lieutenant Commander?”

Inirii, the Deltan science officer looked up to her captain. “For a moment, sensors picked up what appeared to be a ship, sir, but it disappeared. It might have been a sensor echo. I will extend the distance on the long-range sensors.”

“Thank you.” Sjögren turned and faced the forward viewscreen. He was in awe of the beauty that his ship approached. “Helm, take us out of warp and engage full impulse.”

“Aye, Captain,” Lieutenant Hanson replied.

The starfield on the viewer changed from streaks of light to stationary points as the ship dropped below light speed. It was a sight that always filled Erik with a sense of awe. “Inirii, prepare to launch a class four probe. Let’s get a better look.”

“Yes, Captain.” Lieutenant Commander Inirii remotely programmed the probe and sent a message to the forward torpedo room to load the probe into one of the tubes. Once she received confirmation that the probe was loaded, she hit the launch tab on her console. “Probe away, sir.”

Erik slowly turned and made his way up the center steps and back toward the center seat. He sat down and continued to watch the probe shrink as it headed away from the ship and toward the nebula. He fixed his gaze on the probe as it moved away and disappeared from his sight. Eric then turned his head toward the science station. “Readings, Commander?”

The Deltan ran her fingers across the controls and focused her eyes on the various monitor screens. “No anomalous readings so far, Captain. The nebula contains the same gases that are typical in most other nebulas that are on record.” Inirii turned her chair and glanced toward her CO. “I’m now getting a slight fluctuation, sir.”

Sjögren made eye contact with the science officer. “What type of fluctuation?”

Inirii, turning her attention back to the main monitor on her console, made a few adjustments to the controls. “I am reading tachyon particles at the edge of the nebula. The particles are increasing rapidly.”

“Are you recording everything?” Commander Jacob Williams asked.

“Yes, Number One.” The science officer, as well as several other senior officers, had adopted the captain’s nomenclature for the first officer. Most of the bridge crew felt comfortable using that designation, and Williams didn’t seem to mind. Inirii quickly looked toward the captain and first officer. “The probe is gone.”

“It stopped transmitting?” Williams asked.

“No, sir. The probe has disappeared. I have no sensor contact.”

The captain kept his focus on the main viewer. “Prepare another probe and launch when ready.”

After a few moments, the science officer touched her console. “Probe launched.”

There was silence on the bridge for several seconds as each person watched the image of the probe shrink as it moved farther away. The silence was interrupted by Inirii. “Receiving telemetry. No contact with the first probe, but the tachyon readings are off the scale...the second probe has disappeared, Captain.”

“Mister Hanson, full stop. I don’t want to get too close to those tachyon particles until we find out what happened to the probes.”

“Firing reverse thrusters, Captain,” the senior helm officer said. “Now reading full stop.”

“Sensors are picking up a rise in tachyons close to the ship, sir,” Inirii said. “I suggest that we reverse course.”

“Reverse thrusters,” the captain said. “Not too fast, Mister Hanson.”

“Aye, Captain.”

The ship suddenly shuddered, causing everyone on the bridge to grab the edge of their consoles or, in the captain’s case, armrest.

The main view momentarily went black, followed by visual static. Sjögren looked around the bridge to check on his officers. “Everyone alright?” Everyone responded with head nods. He pointed to the viewer. “Can you clear that up, Mister Slev,” he asked the Vulcan communications officer.

“I will endeavor to do my best, Captain.” The young Vulcan, who was the youngest officer aboard, having graduated from Starfleet Academy less than three years prior at 18 years old (as measured on Earth), worked dutifully to restore the image. Within moments, the static on the screen dissipated and revealed a field of stars that stretched to infinity. “The image has been restored, Captain.”

“Where’s the nebula?” The first officer peered at the viewer, dumbfounded.

Sjögren stood up and walked down the steps to stand directly behind the navigator’s position. He placed his hand on the shoulder of the Bolian navigator. “Mister Jaren, where are we?”

The *Starquest*’s senior navigator checked his readings and started to work the controls on his console. “Sir, we are no longer in Federation space. We are currently almost forty light years beyond Cait.”

“Are you sure, Lieutenant?” Jacob Williams could not believe what the navigator had said.

Pelinius Jaren nodded his head. “Yes, Commander. I have verified the readings.”

“Sjögren patted the officer on the shoulder and looked to his right. “Science officer?”

“Verified, Captain,” the Deltan woman said. “However, the positions of the stars are...not exactly where they should be.”

“What do you mean, Commander?”

“I would like the astronomy lab to check my calculations, but it appears that we not only traveled a great distance through space, but we also have traveled...through time.”

“Through time?” Sjögren scratched his head. “Past or future?”



“Based on the position of the stars relative to our position, I estimate approximately fifty years into the future.”

The captain turned around and looked at his first officer at the OPS station. “Number One? What are your thoughts?”

“Sir, I’m no expert on temporal mechanics, but other ships have encountered time travel before. James T. Kirk probably had the most documented temporal events in his day.”

“Pull up all the available records and see if there is anything that might help us in our situation.”

“Aye, Captain.” Jake Williams started typing in his search for the *Enterprise*’s and any other ship’s mission records that referred to time travel.

“Inirii, conduct a full sensor sweep of the area, please. Let’s get a more exact reading on our location and see what’s out there.”

“I will do my best, sir, but long-range sensors are currently down. Short-range sensors are compromised on the port lateral array.”

“Engineer, have a damage control team get to work on that sensor palette,” Sjögren said.

“Aye, Captain,” Lieutenant Martin Ortega, the assistant chief engineer replied.

The tactical officer, Lieutenant S’nor, who had been quiet up to this point, spoke up. “Captain, a ship is coming into range.”

“On screen.” As much as he tried, Sjögren could not make out the object. “Magnify the image, Lieutenant.”

The image instantly grew from a small unidentifiable object to a large starship in the distance. S’nor turned his attention from his tactical console and toward his CO. “The general design is similar to Starfleet vessels, but it is much larger, and the transponder code does not match anything on record.”

“Lieutenant Solev, hailing frequencies.”

“Hailing frequencies open, sir.”



### **U.S.S. *Monarch*, Stardate 56646.7**

Fleet Captain Rob Stuart and Commodore Erik Sjögren entered the bridge from the ready room as soon as Captain Marcus Grey sent the message that the *Monarch*’s sensors picked up a ship in the vicinity. “Is it the *Balboa*?” Stuart asked as he stood beside the chair that Grey had just vacated.

“No, sir,” the first officer replied. “It’s an *Explorer*-class, but the last one was decommissioned seventeen years ago.”

“It’s the *Starquest*, my old ship,” Sjögren said as if he wasn’t surprised.

The tactical officer looked up. “Receiving hail from that ship, Captain.”

Stuart looked at the image of the old ship that appeared to be in pristine condition. He already knew that it had traveled from the past, and he knew that he had to be careful in how he handled the situation so that he would not do anything to pollute the timeline when that ship was sent back. “Open communication. *Starquest*, this is the U.S.S. *Monarch*. I’m Captain Robert Stuart. We are here to assist.”

After a few moments, the viewscreen image changed from the older Starfleet vessel backed by the starfield to the bridge of the U.S.S. *Starquest*. Stuart and the elder Sjögren looked at the commanding officer. The younger Sjögren’s mouth opened as he looked at his older self. His first thought was that it was his maternal grandfather that he had seen, but he quickly realized that he was looking at himself as if the viewer was a mirror. “*Captain Erik Sjögren*,” he managed to say. “*I appreciate any assistance you can provide.*”

“I would like to meet you in person,” Stuart said. “Would it be okay if the commodore”—he tilted his head toward the elder Sjögren— “and I beamed over to discuss the situation?”

“*Of course, Captain Stuart.*”

“We would like to keep contact to a minimum, so we would like to beam directly to your ready room if that is acceptable.” Rob Stuart wanted to be as cautious as possible so that the timeline would not be affected by the ship from the past seeing too much of the future. “Five minutes?”

“*If what I expect you are going to tell me is true, that seems reasonable, Captain. I’ll meet you in five minutes.*”

The transmission ended and Stuart turned to face the commodore. “Are you ready for this reunion?”

“I’ve anticipated this meeting for almost half a century,” Sjögren stated, “but now that it’s here, I’m a little nervous.”

Stuart offered just a hint of a smile. “This way, Commodore.” Stuart gestured toward the nearest turbolift, and the two officers were on their way to the transporter room.



## **U.S.S. *Starquest***

When Stuart and Sjögren materialized in the small ready room, they found themselves facing the captain’s desk. Captain Sjögren had been sitting on the other side of it, but he slowly stood to face the newcomers. Stuart took a couple of steps forward and reached his hand across the desk, and the younger Sjögren grasped it firmly. “Good to meet you, Captain Sjögren,” Stuart said warmly.

The young officer turned his eyes toward the older man as he let go of Stuart's handshake. "It seems that we may have already met," Sjögren said matter-of-factly.

The commodore smiled at his younger self. "I've waited a long time for this moment," he said. "It's...awkward."

"That is one way of saying it," the younger man said. "Coffee?" He turned to face the replicator in the wall behind him.

Stuart raised his hand. "None for me, thank you."

The commodore smiled. "As I remember, that replicator never got it the way I like it."

Captain Sjögren turned back around with two cups in his hand and gave one to his older self. "I find the replicators in the observation lounge have the best coffee, but you already know that, don't you?" Captain Sjögren cocked one eyebrow upward. "Will it get better?"

Commodore Sjögren started to speak, but he hesitated for a moment. Finally, he smiled. "Eventually."

"Captain," Stuart said, "You need to understand that we have to be careful about what we say. We don't want to pollute the timeline by saying anything that might influence your decisions or give you knowledge of your future."

"I understand," Sjögren said. "I'll try to refrain from asking questions about the future. But I'm curious about why you're conveniently here at the same moment our ship arrived."

"We were actually searching for one of our starships that had disappeared in this vicinity yesterday, Stuart said. "The last transmission stated that there was a large increase in tachyon particles that the crew was investigating. And then we lost contact."

"So apparently your missing ship has traveled through time as my ship did."

"It seems that way."

"Don't worry, Robert. The *Balboa* will return before long." The commodore took a sip of coffee and his face grimaced. "Just as I remember," he said. "I know that your long-range sensors are down, and impulse engines are not at full capacity. Your people will need to handle those issues, but we will do what we can to figure out a way to return you to your own time."

"And what if we can't return?"

"Since I'm here talking to myself, it should be obvious that you will."

"And," Stuart added, "it's vital that you *do* return, or the timeline will be changed."

"How do you know that it hasn't changed already?" Captain Sjögren asked. "Would you even be aware of whether it did or didn't?"

"To be honest, I don't know if we would know or not, but there is an organization that monitors and does what is needed to correct alternate timelines when possible."

“Robert.” Commodore Sjögren shot a stern look at Stuart. “Tread lightly.”

“I apologize, Commodore. I almost disregarded my own advice.” Stuart was about to chide himself for his error, but he remembered that his former CO, Charles Gardner, had once told him that making mistakes was normal, but learning from them was the key to not making the same ones twice. “We probably should get back to the *Monarch* and have our people start working on how to send the *Starquest* back.”

“Wouldn’t you prefer if I just told you, Robert?” The commodore smiled. “This has already happened from my perspective.”

Stuart almost grinned. “But wouldn’t that also change history, Commodore?”

“Not if this is part of a predestination paradox,” the older man replied.

“I don’t favor the concept of paradoxes,” Stuart said. He turned his attention back to Captain Sjögren. “I’m guessing that your science officer has already theorized that tachyon particles interacted with the *Starquest*’s warp core, which caused the ship to be transported from your time to our time. We might be able to use our navigational deflector to generate chroniton particles, which are artificially produced but act similarly as natural occurring tachyons. The benefit is that we have more control in using them to send you back near the exact time you came from.”

“Near?”

“We should be able to calculate the time within a few hours. Maybe less.”

The younger Erik Sjögren let what Stuart had said sink in. “So we should arrive back in our time essentially at the same time we were transported here.”

“Yes, fairly close if the calculations of all the variables are accurate,” Stuart said. “I ask that you purge your sensor records of this incident and instruct all of the witnesses among your crew to consider this as highly classified and not share with anyone.”

“Of course, Captain Stuart. I see the need for that.”

Stuart contemplated asking a personal question but thought that maybe his curiosity might have historical ramifications. He glanced at the commodore, who seemed to know what Stuart was thinking. When he saw the commodore smile and nod his head, Stuart decided to go ahead and ask his question. “I would like to know about one of your junior engineering officers. Is Ensign Hathaway doing well?”

Captain Sjögren tilted his head and scrunched his eyebrows together. “Ensign Hathaway is doing well. He’s a fine young officer with a lot of potential. What is your connection with Hathaway?”

Stuart hesitated, but he finally answered. “He’s...my uncle.”

“He wouldn’t recognize you if you wanted to see him,” the younger Sjögren said as he offered Stuart a chance to meet the young version of his uncle.

“I don’t think that would be a good idea,” Stuart replied. “I just wanted to know that he’s doing okay. Besides, from his perspective, I’ve not been born yet.”

“He’s mentioned that he has an older brother and a sister. He said that his sister was in her second year at the Academy.” Sjögren chuckled. “He said that she was in a relationship with an Academy dropout and made no bones about how he felt about that person. Is that guy your father?”

“Uncle Bob was never close to my father, but I never knew that it was because he held Dad’s dropping out of the Academy against him. I always thought it was...I better not say anything else.” Stuart looked at the *Starquest*’s captain. “I trust you not to say anything, but...”

“I understand, Captain Stuart,” Sjögren said. “If I don’t know about it, I won’t accidentally let it slip.”

Stuart held out his hand to the other starship captain. “We should probably get back to the *Monarch* and get my people to work on reconfiguring the deflector.”

“I wish I could see your ship and the advances that the next fifty years will bring,” Sjögren said as he let go of the other man’s hand, “but I understand that I’ll have to wait to see them come to pass.”

The commodore smiled at the two younger men. “Captain Stuart, at the risk of being accused of talking to myself, I want to stay a few minutes.” He saw the concern on Stuart’s face. “Don’t worry, I will only say and do what I have before.”

The corner of Stuart’s lip moved upward. “Of course, Commodore. I’ll see you shortly.” He tapped the Starfleet symbol/communicator on his chest. “Stuart to *Monarch*. One to beam over.” A few seconds later, he dematerialized.

Commodore Sjögren partially unzipped his uniform and reached inside. He pulled out an old-style paper envelope and handed it to the captain. “This is for you. It will be important to maintaining the timeline.”

Captain Sjögren took the envelope and read what was written on it. “To be opened at 1700 hours, Stardate 38487.1.” He looked up and faced his older self. “You expect me to hold on to this for over thirty years?”

“No matter how tempted you are to open it sooner, don’t.” The commodore smiled. “Believe me, you can overcome the temptation.”

“I’ll make sure to wait.”

“One last thing. One day you will want to retire, but you’ll remember today and realize that you will still be in Starfleet when this incident occurs. Go ahead and retire when you decide to. An old friend will ask you to come out of retirement several years later.”

“Should you have told me that?”

“Yes. I remember that I had told me, *or you*, the same thing.” The commodore offered his hand to the captain. The younger Sjögren reciprocated and the two men smiled at one another as they grasped their hands firmly together. “Seeing you and remembering this day brings back many memories of my early days on this ship. I have a lot of stories to tell Fleet Captain Stuart.” The commodore smiled. “Take care of *Starquest* and your crew.”

“You have my word on it.”



### **U.S.S *Monarch*, Two Hours Later.**

Fleet Captain Rob Stuart entered the bridge and approached the science station. “Have you figured out how to get the *Starquest* back to its own time, Lieutenant Commander?”

The Vulcan woman turned in her chair and faced her CO. “The calculations have been verified,” V’Len replied. “I am currently analyzing various computer simulation models to determine the probability that the *Starquest* will return to its own time and spatial coordinates prior to its disappearance and reappearance here.”

“Do you anticipate any problems?”

“One computer model had a less than favorable outcome,” the science officer said.

“Explain,” Stuart said.

“In that model, the ship returned to twelve hours prior to the time it encountered the tachyon particles that sent it to this time.”

“What about the location destination?”

“According to that model, the ship would appear approximately zero-point seven light-years from the position it was in when it was transported to our time. I would recommend that Captain Sjögren be notified of the possibility to avoid contact with an earlier version of himself and his crew.”

Stuart nodded. “Good idea, Commander.” He turned and strolled over to the command center of the bridge and held his hand up to his first officer, who started to rise from the duty officer’s chair. “Don’t get up, Marcus. The bridge is still yours.” Stuart sat in the chair where the first officer normally sat. He was getting ready to order the tactical officer to open communication with the *Starquest*, but Lieutenant Mills spoke before he made the request.

“Sir, sensors have picked up an object bearing four seven mark two, one point seven light-years distant,” Lieutenant Jennifer Mills said. “It’s...the *Balboa*, Captain.”

“Hailing frequencies, Tac.” Stuart stood up and faced the viewscreen.

The image of Commander Saul Morgenstern appeared. “*Fleet Captain Stuart!*”

“Good to see you, Saul,” Stuart replied. “We came looking for you as soon as we lost contact with you yesterday.”

*“Yesterday?”* Morgenstern’s face displayed genuine confusion. *“We were communicating with Gateway Alpha a few moments ago and lost subspace coms.”*

Stuart scratched his head and contorted his face. “You made a jump forward in time about twenty-nine hours. We can talk about the details later, but I want to make sure that you and your crew are okay.”

Saul’s image looked at someone who was not in the screen image. *“Report, Lieutenant.”* He turned his attention back to face Stuart after a few moments. *“Long-range sensors went down for a few seconds, but they’re coming back online. No injuries.”*

“Good to hear,” Stuart said. “I understand that you were checking out a planet before you left to check out the increased tachyon particles. If your ship and crew are good to go, why don’t you head back to finish your survey? I’ll contact you in a few hours and fill you in on what you missed.”

*“Aye, sir. I look forward to hearing from you again,”* Morgenstern said. *“And I think you will be interested in what we detected on that planet. Balboa out.”* The image of the Starfleet officer faded away to be replaced once again by the U.S.S. *Starquest*.

Stuart turned his head back to face the tactical station. “Lieutenant, hail Captain Sjögren.”

Lieutenant Jennifer Mills looked down at her console and started pressing the touch screen monitor. “Frequencies open, audio only.”

“Captain, my science officer has made the calculations for you to return home,” Stuart said. “It’s possible that you might arrive up to twelve hours before you started this little journey, so you may want to be careful not to bump into yourself if that happens.”

*“Thanks for the warning, Captain,”* Sjögren replied. *“I guess I’ll see you in fifty years.”*

Stuart smiled. “And I will see you in a few minutes.”

*“Please tell the commodore that I appreciated that he let me get a glimpse into my future even if it was brief.”*

“Will do, Captain. Smooth sailing.” A field of stars replaced the bridge of the other ship and its captain. “Lieutenant Commander V’Len, are we ready?”

“Yes, Captain,” she replied and turned her to the OPS station. “Mister Brackin, please initiate the chroniton pulse through the main deflector.”

“Aye, Commander,” Lieutenant Jeremy Brackin, the OPS officer, said as he started working the controls.

A bright pulsating light emerged from the Monarch’s main deflector dish, and a disk of ionized gas resembling the accretion disk of a black hole coalesced a few thousand kilometers in front of the starship. The *Starquest* engaged its impulse engines and headed toward the artificially created anomaly. It entered the rift and disappeared, returning to its own time.

“Captain Grey, let’s get back to *Gateway Alpha*,” Stuart said. “I will be with the commodore.”

“Aye, Captain,” Grey replied.



Stuart entered the forward observation lounge and made his way past several off-duty officers and crew members until he stopped next to the table where the commodore sat gazing out the large window. “Mind if I join you, Erik?”

Sjögren glanced up and smiled. “Please, Robert, have a seat.”

Stuart sat down across from the commodore. “Well, you’ve come full circle, Erik. How do you feel?”

“I feel...relieved.” Sjögren picked up the coffee cup that was on the table and took a sip. “I don’t have to keep a fifty-year-old secret anymore, and I realize that my career has made a difference.”

“You certainly made a difference in my life years ago when you put me on the path to consider the command track,” Robert replied. “So, did this incident bring back any memories?”

“Several...and a few regrets.”

“Regrets?”

“I wish I could have spent time with my old shipmates. It would have been good to talk with them.”

“But that might have polluted the timeline.”

“Maybe.” The commodore contemplated the possibility. “The past is the past, Robert. I have good memories, and I still have the chance to get reacquainted with many that I served with.”

“What are you thinking, Commodore?”

“I’m thinking that maybe there should be a reunion for those who served on the *Starquest*.” He smiled broadly. “Maybe I should look up my old crew.”

“I’m sure Uncle Bob would be willing to get together. He should be having some free time soon.”

“Oh?”

“I received a subspace message from him the other day, and he said that he was going to retire as soon as Starfleet Command could find a replacement,” Stuart said. “It will be strange to see him in civilian clothes.”

“Bob is too young to retire,” Sjögren said. “If I’m still serving in Starfleet at almost eighty-five, he certainly should not retire. He’s only what? Seventy?”



“He’ll be seventy-two,” Stuart said.

“Still too young to retire.”

“He’s tired of the politics, and...he said he had other things that he wanted to pursue. He’s not saying what those are yet.”

“I’m sure that he will do well with whatever he decides,” Sjögren said. “I expect that he will want to get out from behind a desk.”

Stuart rose from his chair. “That much is certain.” He pulled down his uniform top to smooth it out. “Well, Erik, I need to contact Commander Morgenstern and fill him in on the last couple of days.”

The commodore stood and patted Stuart on the shoulder. “Thank you for bringing me along, Robert. Today has brought back some good memories and brought closure.”

“Well, Erik, it was good to have you, and I’m looking forward to hearing about your adventures on the *Starquest*.”

“I’ll be glad to tell you.” Sjögren patted Stuart’s shoulder once more. “Breakfast on Friday at the usual place?”

“It’s on my schedule,” Stuart replied. “0700.” Stuart turned and left Commodore Erik Sjögren to reflect on his days as a Starfleet captain.