

Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

Posted originally on the [Ad Astra :: Star Trek Fanfiction Archive](http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/1711) at <http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/1711>.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	Gen
Fandom:	Star Trek: Deep Space Nine , Star Trek: The Original Series
Relationship:	Benjamin Sisko & James T. Kirk
Character:	Benjamin Sisko , James T. Kirk
Additional Tags:	Crossover , Time Travel , Ethical Dilemmas
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2024-07-20 Words: 5,787 Chapters: 1/1

Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

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Summary

Now that he is in the Celestial Temple, the Prophets have work for Sisko. Figuring out how--and why he has to be the one to do it--may take some help.

Notes

Written for violet_pencil in Fandom 5k 2024

Thank you to Greenygal for the beta!

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Benjamin Sisko was watching the heat death of the universe. Benjamin Sisko was helping the Bantaca Spire be erected in B'Hala. Benjamin Sisko was trying to comfort Kasidy over his entering the Celestial Temple, and failing because he could not collect enough of himself in *one* time and *one* place to give her the attention and care she needed. Benjamin Sisko was watching Cardassian soldiers use tractor beams and force-fields to remove the Orb of Harmony from the ruins of the monastery at Choddosh. Benjamin Sisko was in the Celestial Temple, teaching the Prophets about linearity for the first time using baseball as a metaphor. Benjamin Sisko was watching Kai Kira direct the Vedek Assembly to begin considering her successor, because she was going to retire to the monastery of Basyo Ume in nine weeks. Benjamin Sisko was watching the star that would one day be named B'hava'el coalesce and begin to burn.

Benjamin Sisko was no longer corporeal, but he had a headache anyway.

"The Sisko is overwhelmed."

Ben turned to face the Prophet who had once possessed his biological mother. "Yes," he said.

"Why?" she asked. "The Sisko is no longer linear."

"But I am," he said. "Not *as* linear as I once was, but ... if I had left it behind completely, you would not be wearing that face, or speaking."

The Prophets had no language; they didn't need it. Individuality, like linearity, was something the Prophets didn't quite understand. They needed language no more than the different spores of a fungus needed it. What one knew, or thought, the others could sense as part of themselves.

"The Sisko has many tasks to perform," the Prophet said. She studied him. "The Sisko is doing them well. Yet the Sisko is overwhelmed."

Ben thought it through. "I am doing them well—because you see them *as I am* doing them, in the future, from my perspective."

"Yes," she said.

"You're asking ... how is it that you know I am *capable* of doing things and learning your way of seeing the universe, but am also having problems."

"Yes."

"That's not how it works for linear beings," Benjamin said. "We develop and grow over time. We *learn* things. We start out, as infants,

knowing nothing and capable of nothing. As we grow, we gain skills and knowledge by trying, by failing, by doing things many times until we have mastered a skill."

Ben brought them to the park where his father was teaching him how to throw a baseball. Five-year-old Benjamin had thrown other things, of course, but nothing with the same size and mass and heft. Most of his throws went wild, and Joseph patiently practiced with him, giving him tips, encouraging him.

Ben and the Prophet watched the child he had been over months and years, learning to throw the ball, learning to hit a ball off a tee, learning to hit a ball thrown at him.

"These tasks are more difficult for you because your body is not fully developed," the Prophet observed.

"True," Ben said, and moved them to the Academy gym where he had learned hand-to-hand combat. "But when I learned to fight, I was at the peak of my physical prowess. Adult but young, strong, dedicated—I'd done running and weightlifting and other sports in high school. And still," he nodded at his younger self, "you see how I struggled. How much time and effort and practice it took me to learn how to do it. Academically, it was the same. I learned a great deal in my time at the Academy—because I studied. Because I practiced using the knowledge."

They watched him in flight simulators, in classrooms, and finally in holodeck models of various ships learning to fix everything from hull breaches to fluctuations in the warp core. "When I started with the practical engineering scenarios, I knew the books backwards and forwards, because I'd spent months—years—preparing and learning everything I could about ships. Even so, learning to translate that to practical action took time, and repetition."

"The Sisko has had time to learn here," the Prophet said. "The Sisko has all of time to learn here.

"But all of it *at once*."

The Prophet studied him. "You want something smaller. Simpler. A ... 'beginner project.'"

"That would be very helpful," Ben said.

The Prophet took them to a place that was *like* the Celestial Temple, but smaller. It, too, was outside of time and space; it, too, was anchored to one physical location (though that physical location traveled through the galaxy and would one day pass beyond it). Still, it was more tightly bounded; the connections to time and space were weaker. And it was ... simpler. It was alive, but it had no sentience.

The Prophet observed the place she'd shown him, and he could sense her affection for it. And her frustration. Very like the way his sister Judith had looked at her dog Sadie when Sadie had chewed up her slippers.

There were people in the simpler anomaly, but they were not like the Prophets. They could not see it for what it was.

"How did they get in here?" he asked, scrutinizing them. "They're not *from* here, they're linear. Corporeal." Although not *very* linear; they tended to replay the same few events, time after time. Whole worlds in a bottle, visions that they could not always tell from reality.

"This ribbon does not have the capacity to make its entrance safe for things and beings of matter," the Prophet said, pointing out the great rip in space and time that was the point where the infinite interfaced with the finite.

Ben studied it, and saw the problem, and also realized that he knew this anomaly. Not from his time in the Celestial Temple, seeing all of space and time, but from a report that had crossed his desk three years into his time on Deep Space Nine. It had been flagged for him because of a few superficial similarities to the wormhole, but the most interesting thing about it had been ... "Kirk," he said.

James T. Kirk had come out of the Nexus to help Picard save the Veridian system, and died in the process.

So what, Ben wondered, was he doing still *in* the Nexus after that point? The Prophet's attention had turned elsewhere; Ben could have asked her or any Prophet, for they were all connected to each other and to him.

But this was meant to be a learning experience, and Ben thought he would rather figure it out on his own. He dove into the Nexus, and was relieved to find that while it was infinite and nonlinear, like the Celestial Temple, it was at least a *smaller* infinity. Ben could wrap himself up in it and be slightly less overwhelmed.

There were Prophets here, too, though it was not their home. It was ... a place of retreat? Regeneration? And they liked it best when the Nexus responded to *their* desires, not the desires of the corporeal, linear beings trapped inside it.

Ben's job, he realized, would be to clean it up. Put the linear beings back in the linear world, and hopefully arrange things so that they would stop falling into it. Or being killed by it.

He had all of time and space to work with—and *this* time, he had the opportunity to actually *talk* with the great Captain Kirk without having to worry about the Department of Temporal Investigations. Ben entered into Kirk's environment, and breathed a sigh of relief as it helped him gather all of himself into one moment and setting.

Kirk was sitting at a campfire, drinking a cup of coffee. He was older and stockier than he'd been when Ben had gotten his autograph at Deep Space Station K-7. He was not alone; Ambassador Spock was with him, and another man Ben recognized after a moment's contemplation as Doctor Leonard McCoy.

Neither man was actually *there*, of course; these were phantoms of Kirk's own mind given form by the Nexus. Kirk watched them bicker, and there was a hunger in his eyes.

Ben studied him with senses he had not possessed as a corporeal, wholly-linear being. This was not *all* of Kirk, he realized, but rather a fragment of him, left behind when he had left the Nexus. Kirk knew where he was, he knew none of this was real; he knew that he was alone. Given his limited perception of the Nexus, that wasn't enough to free himself.

Ben gave himself a physical body and stepped forward through the trees to the edge of the clearing.

"Hello," he said.

Kirk looked up. His companions continued their conversation, like holograms set to limited interactions. "You're new," he said. "Are you real?"

"I am," Ben said.

"You've got a Starfleet badge," Kirk said. "If you want me to help save someone or something from the Nexus I'd love to, but the last time I tried it didn't actually work. We tried to leave the Nexus and nothing happened."

"But it did," Ben said. "You and Captain Picard left the Nexus and saved Veridian IV, although you died in the process. The problem is, the Nexus is not so easy to leave. Part of you remained here."

Kirk wiped a hand over his face.

Sisko gave him a moment. How much time had it been, subjectively, for Kirk? Did he feel like it was only moments since he'd met Picard, or had he felt the years in between?

"I'm glad it worked," Kirk said. "Although part of me wishes Picard never came and told me where I was. Being trapped here was a lot nicer when I didn't know it was a trap and none of this was real. I don't suppose you have a way out of here?"

"I do," Ben said. "It's complicated, and I'm trying to figure out the best way of handling it."

Kirk waved a hand, and they were in a briefing room done with mid-23rd-Century aesthetics. Kirk himself was younger, in a gold tunic, just as he had been when Ben first met him. "If there's one thing I've got, it's time. How can I help?" He gave a wry smile.

Ben took a seat at the conference table. He could think this through on his own, of course, but it would be more interesting to do it with Kirk, and get the legend's perspective. If his adolescent self could see him now, he would be so jealous. "I'm Captain Benjamin Sisko, former commander of space station Deep Space Nine, near a planet called Bajor. I've been ... adopted into a group of noncorporeal energy beings called the Prophets, who live outside of time and space and experience it all at the same time, instead of in a linear progression from one moment to the next."

"Sounds confusing," Kirk said, with the knowing air of someone who had met more than his fair share of strange things over the course of his career.

"It can be," Ben admitted. "But it means I have a much better understanding of the Nexus than you do, and can manipulate it to get everyone trapped here out of it."

"So what's the problem?" Kirk asked.

"The problem is, I'm still a Starfleet officer, sworn to uphold the Federation charter and Starfleet regulations ... including the Temporal Prime Directive." Ben spread his hands. "But the Temporal Prime Directive was not designed for beings who experience time in a non-linear fashion."

Kirk cocked his head. "It assumes that you're from a specific point in time, and shouldn't change anything before that time. But if you experience all of time at once ..."

"... then that doesn't work," Ben said. "Either nothing I do is temporal interference, because I'm from every bit of time I'm affecting; or everything I do is temporal interference, because I am outside of time."

"If you take all of us in here and drop us off back in the real world, no matter what time you do it, we're going to change things merely by being alive again." He looked off into space, and Ben remembered Dulmer and Lucsly's revilement of him. What had Kirk learned in those seventeen separate temporal violations?

"I could make it so that you never get swept up into the Nexus in the first place," Ben said. "But what would change because you lived? I have no idea, and you didn't live your life on a small scale—even in retirement, you could well change something major. But that applies to any point I drop you off at. Or I could take this fragment of you here, and reunite it with your whole self as you saved the Veridian system ... but then you'd die."

"I don't mind dying for a good cause, but I'd rather not die if I have a choice about it," Kirk said wryly.

"And I'd rather not kill you," Ben said. "I might be able to reunite you in such a way that it changed things just *enough* that you wouldn't die then, but it would change things from the perspective of the time I became nonlinear—which is, I suspect, the point the Department of Temporal Investigations will use as their reference, when I return to linear, corporeal existence."

"Department of Temporal Investigations?" Kirk asked.

"That's right, they didn't exist yet in your time," Ben said. The DTI had been a fairly late development, with breaches of the Temporal Prime Directive handled by the regular Federation legal system, at first. "Lucky you. They're a department of the Federation—not Starfleet—that exists to police time travel incidents. But of course by the time they hear of something, it's already happened. And then they show up and you

have to justify every detail of the mission." He shuddered. He'd gotten off lightly.

"Surely they can't be *that* bad," Kirk said. "It's never fun to justify yourself to bureaucrats, but there's worse things."

"True," Ben said. "But they can put in a report that will kill your career, if they don't like how you handled it, and they have *no* sense of humor. I was lucky, I only had to deal with them the once, and it was after a mission that had gone off without a hitch." He sighed. "And my career is well and truly off the rails in any case—officially, Starfleet has me on detached duty while I'm outside of linear time, but when I go back to corporeal existence ... I'll have to resign my commission."

"Have to?" Kirk said delicately.

"I have ... religious obligations, that I put off while we were at war with the Dominion," Ben said. "Even if I could do both, I have to be in the Bajor system, or close to it, and the only post there for a Starfleet captain is the command I *had* before I became ... this." Ben gestured at himself. "From their perspective, I'm gone for ... awhile. I don't know exactly how long; it's hard to judge such things, when you aren't linear." Though inside the Nexus, space and time were small and limited enough that he had a better idea. His heart sank; it was going to be longer than he had hoped. "Someone else is given command after I join the Prophets. She does a great job, but I can't just go back to my former command. Which means ... resigning from Starfleet."

"I'm sorry to hear that," Kirk said. "I'm sure you're a fine officer."

Ben smiled. "Thank you. That means a lot, coming from you. I don't regret having to leave Starfleet; I almost did once before, and I have much better reasons to do so now. Still ... it'll be a change."

"I do," Kirk said. "Regret having to leave Starfleet. Well, I regret having to stop serving on starships; I've been an admiral, and while I can do the work, it's not for me. I'd rather be retired than chained to a desk. But I've had a purpose all my life. Important things to do—exploring, taking care of my crew, serving the Federation. Reasons to get up out of bed in the morning, reasons to feel satisfied and accomplished when I go to bed at night. Things that matter. Things that are worth doing." He sighed. "I'm sure it'll be worse in the future. In my own time, I have my friends. In the future—well, they'll all be dead, except *maybe* Spock, depending on when you drop me off."

Depending on how long it took Ben to fulfill his mission with the Prophets, and how well he was able to time his re-embodiment, he might be facing similar concerns. He pushed the thought aside, as he had been doing since he had entered the wormhole. There was nothing he could do about it either way, or at least, not until he learned more about the way his time in the Celestial Temple really worked. "I wish I could drop you off back when you came from." He shook his head. "It's not the Department of Temporal Investigations I'm worried about, not really. You see, in my time, we just finished a war with a very dangerous enemy, the Dominion, who not only almost conquered the Federation, but all of the Alpha Quadrant along with us—Klingons, Romulans, Cardassians, everyone. It took a miracle—literally—to win, on more than one occasion. My time with the Prophets is part of the price of that miracle. I can't jeopardize the Federation's survival, and unfortunately seeing all of space and time at once isn't enough for me to accurately predict possible effects to the timeline if I change things in the Federation or its neighbors before that victory. I see all of what *is*; I don't see very many of the possibilities of what might be different."

"Thank you for your honesty," Kirk said. He cocked his head and gave half a smile. "Well, I've sacrificed more for less worthy causes before. And I deeply understand about consequences you can't foresee even from something that seems like a good thing at the time."

"Oh?" Ben said. "That sounds like there's a story there."

"There is," Kirk said, and told a story about being trapped in the 1930s on Earth, and the horror of realizing that in order to save Earth from being conquered by Nazis, they had to let a deeply good person die.

Part of Ben watched it happen, even as part of him sat with Kirk in the Nexus and listened. Part of Ben reflected that Kirk was very lucky that he and the other two trapped in the past with him—Spock and McCoy, of course—could all pass for white, in 20th Century terms.

"Of course, later on, I realized that we didn't have to let Edith die after all," Kirk said, looking down and off to the side. "We *could* have brought her with us to the future; that would have stopped her from peace advocacy in the 1930s just as surely as her death did. She would have loved the future. She would have loved to see Earth at peace, with no hunger or want or any of the things she spent her life working to help."

With very little prodding, that led to stories of some of Kirk's other adventures in time, and other adventures in general. Ben thoroughly enjoyed the stories, particularly since he could watch them as they happened, and see the ways in which Kirk shaped the story as he told it.

"So why are you so interested in my exploits?" Kirk asked at last. "It's not that I mind telling stories, and I'm glad to talk to someone who isn't a figment of my imagination for once, but ... it's hardly helping you figure out what to do about all of us stuck in here."

Ben shrugged. "The Prophets aren't what you'd call great conversationalists," he said. "And they don't really understand me or my concerns. And it's hard, being non-linear, to talk with people who are experiencing only one point of time—the Nexus makes it easier, believe it or not. It touches all of space and time, but ... it's a smaller infinity, than the Celestial Temple is."

"You're lonely, too," Kirk said.

"Yes," Ben said. "When the Prophets took me, I had to leave behind my wife and children, my family, all of my friends—and you know how the officers you serve with *become* your family."

"I do," Kirk said. "I always knew that everything would turn out fine, as long as I had Spock and Bones with me. And it was true—when I went into the Nexus, I was alone. When I helped Picard stop Soran, I was alone."

"When I went to stop Dukat and the Pah-wraiths, I was alone," Ben said, nodding. "I stopped the Pah-wraiths and sealed them forever in the Fire Caves—they won't get to burn the universe. They'll *never* be able to do it; the universe will end before they are released. I'll even get to go

home to my family and friends, one day. When I've finished my work for the Prophets."

"But in the meantime, you're alone," Kirk said.

"Yes," Ben said. "It's been ... pleasant, to sit and talk with someone who understands."

"I'm glad to have been helpful," Kirk said. "But the sooner you get your work done, the sooner you'll be able to go back home."

"It doesn't quite work like that, when you're outside of linear time," Ben said. "But I take your point." He considered the Nexus thoughtfully. "If it had emissions that were just a bit stronger in both radio and subspace bands, more people would see it with enough time to avoid it," he said. "And if I make that adjustment early enough in the ribbon's journey through the universe, that would prevent a lot of the people in it from ever encountering it closely in the first place."

"That would *definitely* change the timeline," Kirk observed. "Weren't you the one who was worried about timeline changes? What if one of them is a Hitler? Or an Edith Keeler? How do you know how it will turn out?"

Ben spread his hands. "If I prevent them from going into the Nexus at all, that will change history. But it will *also* change history if I dump them out of it at random points in time—only then, they would be lost decades or centuries or millennia out of their own time. The fact that it won't change the past of the Federation *from my perspective before I became non-linear* does not mean that it won't change things. What right do I have to make my personal linear lifetime as the basis around which all of space and time revolves? To say that I can't change anything before my lifetime, but I *can* change things that come *afterwards*?"

"Either everything you do violates the Temporal Prime Directive," Kirk said, nodding, "or nothing does."

"Yes," Ben said, and realized why he had been so slow to act. Not just here, but with all the other little projects the Prophets had given—were giving, would give—him. "What right do I have to make those sorts of decisions? I'm just one human being. I see all of space and time, but that doesn't mean I understand it, and it doesn't give me any special wisdom. Who am I to make those decisions for whole civilizations of people?"

"You're the man on the spot," Kirk said. "Maybe you don't deserve to make those decisions, but who does? Maybe you're not wise enough to make those decisions, but who is? Are they the sorts of things that your 'Prophets' should be deciding instead?"

"No," Ben said. "They don't understand linear beings. Or corporeal beings. Or singular beings—they're a collective. How could they possibly understand the consequences of their decisions for linear, corporeal, singular beings?"

"Well, then," Kirk said. "Whether you have the *right* to make those decisions, you may have a *duty* to, if there's no one else who would be better at it. You'll make mistakes along the way, of course, but that's inevitable. What matters is that you pay attention and work to fix things when you do—and lucky for you, you have all of space and time to do it."

"I suppose that's true," Ben said.

"You know, I've met more than my fair share of beings with godlike powers," Kirk said. "It isn't their wisdom—or lack thereof—that's the problem. And it isn't really their power, either."

"Then what is it?" Ben asked, barely restraining himself from asking for more stories. What he needed right now was perspective, and advice.

"It's their callousness," Kirk said. "When they don't care about what their use of power does to people. That's what does the damage. As long as you're genuinely trying to do your best for the people your actions will affect, as long as you pay attention to their needs and wants and cares, there's a limit to how badly you can mess things up."

Ben thought about that. "I can watch, when I send people home, to see if it changes things for the worse, and if so, how to mitigate it."

"Yes," Kirk said. "And as for being partial, so what? That's part of being alive! Of course you have people and places that you care about more than others. Of course you have times that matter more to you than others. The only things in the universe that truly act impartially are natural forces. Stars burn according to natural principles with no regard for anyone or anything around them. You're not a star, you're a person—and a Starfleet officer."

"You know, I once said something very similar to that to the Prophets," Ben mused. "The Dominion was about to destroy the minefield around the wormhole—" he stopped at Kirk's raised eyebrows, and moved them to a place where they could see the galaxy at a scale Kirk could process. "The Dominion is a fascist empire from the Gamma Quadrant. There is a stable wormhole from Bajor to the Gamma Quadrant, which the Dominion was using to send fleets of ships through to conquer the Alpha Quadrant." As he spoke he made each place glow for Kirk, so he could see it. "The wormhole is *also* the home of the Prophets, whom the Bajorans worship as gods. We'd had to abandon Bajor to the Dominion, we couldn't hold the wormhole ... but we'd managed to mine it so they couldn't bring more ships through."

Ben brought them closer to the B'hava'el system to watch the events around the wormhole, at a sped-up perception of time. "That held them back for a while, they could only work with what ships they already had, and the ships their allies here had. But then they figured out how to take down the mines. We were barely holding our own. If they could have brought through as many ships as they wanted, it would be all over for the Federation—and for Bajor. We launched a fleet in a desperate attempt to get there and retake the wormhole. It almost worked, but we were too late." They watched the battle. Ben felt his desperation and pain and single-minded focus all over again. He watched as all those ships—and their crews—died so that the *Defiant* could reach the wormhole.

Rather than narrate what happened next, he brought Kirk along to watch.

"What about Bajor?" Benjamin Sisko said, as Benjamin Sisko watched. "You can't tell me Bajor doesn't concern you. You've sent the Bajorans Orbs, and Emissaries—you've even encouraged them to create an entire religion around you!"

Corporeal, linear Benjamin Sisko was not aware of non-linear Benjamin Sisko watching him, nor of Kirk's presence, but the Prophets were. They didn't approve of him bringing an outsider to watch this, but they did not *disapprove* strongly enough to do anything about it.

"You even told me once that you were 'of Bajor'," his linear self insisted, "so don't you tell me, you're not concerned with corporeal matters! I don't want to see Bajor destroyed. Neither do you—but we all know that's exactly what's going to happen if the Dominion takes over the Alpha Quadrant! You say you don't want me to sacrifice my life—well fine! Neither do I. You want to be gods? Then be gods! I need a miracle. Bajor needs a miracle—stop those ships!"

It was interesting, the things he couldn't perceive the first time he'd experienced this moment. The Prophets were both more and less powerful than he had believed. More, because he couldn't comprehend the vastness of time in the way they perceived it; less, because he couldn't comprehend what it was like to be a being of pure energy, not merely non-corporeal but *never* corporeal.

The Prophets didn't understand matter, for precisely the same reason they did not understand linearity.

How does a collective of energy, which has never been connected to matter in any way, destroy a fleet of ships? How do they *know* what to do?

Simple: get a being of matter, a linear being, and make it part of themselves.

As the Prophets discussed how intrusive and controlling Benjamin Sisko was, what penance must be enacted for his demand that the Prophets change their very nature in order to save Bajor, Benjamin Sisko reached out to the Dominion fleet in the wormhole and began unraveling the atoms that made up the ships and people aboard them.

This was the penance required: not because, or not *only* because, the Prophets were upset that he demanded their intervention in corporeal matters. But also because their intervention in corporeal matters could not be done—or could not be done effectively—without him being the one to do them.

The Sisko: human, but with a Prophet feeding him a little bit of their essence to him even as he nursed at his mother's breast. Not enough to be noticeable to other humans or even to himself, but enough that when the time came, he could make the transition from linearity and corporeality into the same sort of being the Prophets were, without losing too much of himself in the process. An interface, between them and the rest of a universe they could see but not understand enough to affect.

Benjamin Sisko demanded the Prophets intervene. Benjamin Sisko was the Prophet who intervened

Ben turned away and brought himself and Kirk back to the Nexus. They had seen what they needed to see—and Ben had done what he needed to do. The Federation was saved. And he knew *why* he was here.

"I see what you mean," Kirk said. "That was quite a speech you gave." His smile was warm, approving, and Ben smiled in return.

"But what if I go too far? *I'm* not a god," Ben said. The lingering doubts swirled in his mind, and he feared that if he lost them he would lose too much of his humanity.

"Of course not," Kirk said. "People who want power for power's sake—who want that kind of control over the world and other people—usually can't be trusted with it. If you did want it, Starfleet would never have let you rise to the rank of captain. We've learned from our mistakes. But that doesn't change the fact that whether or not you *sought* this power, you *have* it. If you have it ... you have a responsibility to use it, and use it well. Not for personal aggrandizement, or to make yourself or the Federation the bully with the biggest stick. But to help people live in safety and harmony, free from fear or want or cruelty. I think you'll do well."

"Thank you," Ben said. "That means a lot, coming from you."

"I'm not surprised to hear it," Kirk said. "I don't think, deep down, you needed me to tell you any of this. You were more interested in hearing my stories than discussing your problem, despite that being why you said you wanted to talk. I've been kind of wondering if you'd ask for my autograph."

"That, I already have," Ben admitted. "I mentioned a previous mission that involved time travel, and the Department of Temporal Investigation afterwards?"

Kirk frowned. He looked Ben up and down. "Deep Space Station K-7! The incident with the Tribbles!"

"You remember?" Ben asked.

"*Enterprise* had a crew of 430, and we didn't get *that* many transfers in and out over the course of our exploratory mission," Kirk said. "When we got new faces, those faces stuck around. You didn't. And now I suppose I know why."

"Please don't tell the Department of Temporal Investigation that you remember me," Ben said. "They were upset that I caught your attention long enough to get your autograph."

Kirk chuckled. "I won't. I suppose I'd have done the same, if I'd found myself on Archer's *Enterprise*. But now I have to know: what were you doing there in the first place?"

Ben explained about Barry Waddle, a.k.a. Arne Darwin, and his desire to retroactively make himself a hero by altering the timeline, and what they'd had to do to stop him.

While he was doing that, he altered the Nexus so that it would be easier to sense and avoid ... but not *so* much so as to avoid the incident with the El-Aurian refugees which incited Soran's work and the destruction of the *Enterprise-D*.

Most of the beings trapped inside the Nexus vanished, never having been there at all. Others remained, and Ben fixed that, too, altering as little as possible while still preventing them from falling into the Nexus. The El-Aurians were the easiest to handle; they were naturally more attuned to the larger space-time continuum than most linear beings, and he could simply re-unite them with the part of themselves who had been rescued.

When all was done, and Ben was finished telling the story of their experience with the Orb of Time, he smiled at Kirk. "Thank you for the company, and the stories, and the advice," he said.

"You're welcome," Kirk said. "Thanks for the rescue."

They shook hands. Ben reunited this fragment of him with the rest of himself, fighting Soran on Veridian III, and shifted things *just* enough so that he didn't die.

Ben watched, satisfied, as the Nexus continued on its way—now safe from corporeal beings.

He turned to the next project the Prophets had in mind for him.

End Notes

On [Dreamwidth](#). On [AO3](#). On [Squidgeworld](#). Rebloggable on [Pillowfort](#). Rebloggable on [tumblr](#).

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