

## Vocational Studies

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## Vocational Studies

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### Summary

Kira, Sisko, and learning what you need to know.

### Notes

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Betaed by TexasDreamer01

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

"Are you sure it's smart to have both of us away from the station and out of contact for a week, Commander?" Nerys asked as she stowed her bag in the runabout's cramped bunkroom.

"A bit late to ask that question, Major," Sisko said, amusement lacing his warm baritone. "Lieutenant Dax may be a bit junior for such an assignment in the eyes of Starfleet, but the Old Man has *far* more diplomatic experience than I'll ever have, and she can keep up with Klingons in a fight, and she has multiple lifetimes-worth of administrative experience. I think she can handle running one station on her own for a week. Besides, I need time in the runabout to keep up my flight qualifications."

"Right," Nerys said. She, on the other hand, needed to *get* her flight qualifications, at least her *Starfleet* qualifications. She knew how to fly, and Starfleet equipment was designed to be easy to use, but when she'd been preparing to come to the station she hadn't expected to need to use the runabouts very often. Nobody had thought they would, before the discovery of the Celestial Temple in a wormhole.

Nerys plopped down in the pilot's chair, Sisko taking a seat in the co-pilot's chair next to her. Not that it really mattered, you could fly from either chair, but it clarified who was in charge of the flight. She started up the engines and tapped open a link to Ops for clearance.

"Aren't you forgetting something, Major?" Sisko asked.

Nerys frowned at him. "Right," she said. "Starfleet policy is to manually duplicate the computer's preflight checks."

"The computer isn't infallible," Sisko said. "And it's better to spend a little time making sure ahead of time than finding out in the middle of a flight."

Spoken like someone who wasn't used to having to take off at a moment's notice, under fire and hungry and exhausted. And unlike the flyers they'd used when she was fighting with Shakaar, the runabouts had a crew dedicated to maintenance rather than just whoever was available to fix things. But they *did* have the time now, so she performed the check without complaint, redundant though it was.

Once they were finally ready, the trip to the wormhole took no time at all. Nerys thought a prayer and a blessing, asking the Prophets for safe passage and favor while in their care. Beside her, Sisko tensed a little as they approached. She wondered if *he* said any prayers, inside his head, but she doubted it. They weren't his gods, for all he was their Emissary.

She wondered if they would speak to him, as they had the first time he'd traveled through.

Then the Celestial Temple opened before them, and they entered it.

As pilot, there was no time for devotion while within the wormhole, and Kira didn't regret it. The Prophets did not live within the same reality

that Bajorans did, and the wormhole and the Celestial Temple were the same and yet not. Unlike the orbs, which granted their gifts to any who approached, the blessings of the Temple were solely within the Prophets' hands. Mere proximity was not enough. If they cared for her presence, they would send her a vision. If they did not, well, they didn't seem to mind people using their home as a means of transportation. She'd already said her prayers.

Soon enough, they were on the other side of the galaxy, with the wormhole snapping closed behind them. Nerys and Sisko both checked the sensors, to see if anything interesting was in the area. Nothing unexpected showed up.

"Did the Prophets speak to you this time?" Nerys asked.

"No," Sisko said. "They usually don't." His tone did not invite further questions, and anyway, they had work to do. Kira plotted a course to the first beacon drop point, and engaged warp drive.

Most warp-capable societies in the Alpha Quadrant distributed subspace beacon relays throughout their territory to aid navigation and communications. Each society had their own design and restrictions on use, but as a rule they worked together so one could send a message using a Klingon relay that was then passed through the Federation's relays and then on to Gorn relays, if you wanted to. Bajor's had mostly been destroyed by Cardassia, who wanted everyone to use their (heavily monitored and censored) systems.

The Federation had two subspace relay systems: the public one, free and open to any regardless of who they were or what they were using it for, and the Starfleet system, reserved for classified or sensitive information.

As far as they could tell, the Gamma Quadrant didn't have relay beacons. Each ship and planet was completely on its own for navigation, and if you didn't have a subspace com strong enough to connect to the person you wanted without any intermediaries, you couldn't make a call. It was inconvenient, and dangerous, and isolating.

Hence this mission. They were the first of a series of missions that would be dropping a network of Federation beacons in uninhabited and unclaimed areas. It wasn't as complete as it would be in Federation space, of course, and it couldn't send information through the wormhole without a ship to carry it, but it would at least mean that any Alpha Quadrant ships that came to explore or trade wouldn't be completely on their own. And, who knew, the locals might find it useful, too.

It was the perfect mission for flight qualifications: necessary and boring, with lots of flying.

They spent the first few hours in relative quiet. There wasn't much to for a pilot to do, in warp, usually, but they were only beginning to explore the Gamma Quadrant, so a closer watch was needed than normal.

It was very tedious. Sisko set a few sensor scans running and then spent most of the time reading something on a PADD while Nerys watched the readouts and tried to stay decently alert. Whatever Sisko was reading, it was either boring or hard going, because he kept taking breaks to stare out at the stars.

They ate lunch in the cockpit. Sisko's food didn't smell like anything Nerys recognized; she ate *veklava*, which had been a delicacy she couldn't often afford until she came to the station and got a regular ration of replicator credits as part of her pay.

"What are you reading?" she asked.

"The Chronicles of Aggam, alongside the Shutihia Commentary, and as much cross-referencing with other Bajoran texts as the computer can do. I thought that, as Emissary, I should at least know the basics of the Bajoran faith."

"You know the Sacred Texts aren't supposed to be read alone, right?" Nerys said. "You're supposed to read them in a group, with students and at least two Prylars and time for reflection and discussion between each stanza?" They weren't textbooks. They were the wisdom of the Prophets and the sages, and they were meant for the community.

"I know," Sisko said. "But a full course of study takes years, and I don't have the time for it."

Nerys hummed through a mouthful of *veklava*. Proper study took a lifetime of service and devotion. "You still shouldn't be reading them alone," she said. Then she considered the options. "Prylar Rhit is ... not very learned." He'd been assigned to the temple on the station before the discovery of the wormhole and the Celestial Temple, back when nobody cared about the station, and had only held on to his post because the factions in the Vedek Assembly couldn't agree on a replacement.

"And if I asked for someone who could help guide me through the texts, I'm sure the Vedek Assembly would be happy to send someone," Sisko said. "But the politics of who they'd send would be brutal, and part of the communal study process involves everyone sharing their interpretation. If someone shared *my* thoughts on the texts publicly, there would be political and religious consequences."

Nerys forced herself to be fair. "Not to mention, when people came to you with questions, you wouldn't be able to claim you don't know enough to say, any more."

"It would be a lot harder to avoid getting drawn into religious and political debates," Sisko agreed. He waved the PADD around. "And there would be an expectation that I was converting, which I am not going to do. I need to know these things ... but I don't want to be *seen* to know these things."

Nerys grimaced and looked down at her food.

"What?" Sisko asked.

"I understand your reasoning," Nerys said, choosing her words with care. "One of the things I've appreciated about you is that you don't stick your nose in things you don't understand, even when you could because you're the Emissary." She warmed to her topic, words speeding up.

"You could do a lot of harm without meaning to. Even if you helped, it'd just turn the debates over why the Prophets made an alien their Emissary into open fighting, which is the last thing we need. If Opaka were still Kai, I'd say ask her for help and she could find a way to arrange a proper class for you."

She stopped, abruptly. Without Opaka, a lot of things were different, and dwelling on her loss wouldn't fix anything. "Without her, you're right, asking the Assembly for a class would cause infighting I don't even want to imagine." Nerys shook her head. "But it's still not right to study the Sacred Texts by yourself with only commentaries and computer cross-references. Who are you going to argue with?"

"If you have a better suggestion, Major, I'm all ears," Sisko said. "Or, if you want, we could study them together. That would be at least a little better, even if it's not a proper study community." He smiled. "You're very good at arguing."

"No." Nerys didn't even have to think about it. "Two is only a little better than one. And while *you* are the Emissary of the Prophets, and therefore might have a right to study alone, *I* am not. Besides, I don't know *nearly* enough to be a proper study leader. Prylars get years' worth of training which I don't have." Bajoran recorded history went back almost half a million years. They hadn't been worshipping the Prophets *quite* that long, but almost. Just learning the context for the major texts was a huge undertaking. The idea of trying to learn it, alone, in your spare time, with only the computer cross-references for help?

"Then I'll just have to muddle through on my own," Sisko said with a shrug. He shook his head. "I don't imagine this will make me an expert in your religion, or qualify me to make spiritual pronouncements to your people. All I want is to know enough not to offend people or hurt them unknowingly."

"Good luck," Nerys said. "May the Prophets grant you wisdom. Or, at least, keep you from making stupid misinterpretations." Which, given that he was the Emissary and regularly traveled through the Celestial Temple, they might do. It was some consolation, at least. She poked at the last of her veklava, but she'd lost her taste for it.

"Let's hope," Sisko said.

## End Notes

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