

## Reaching for Each Other

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# Reaching for Each Other

by [apolesen](#)

## Summary

Sundered in the future, the crew of the Discovery is looking for signs of life. On the observation deck, Nhan and Michael are looking inward.

## Notes

Written for aphelyons in the sapphicstartrek 2019 fandom exchange. I hope you enjoy it!

(I have no idea why I went with the whole space desert thing for the future, but I can't get that image out of my head.)

The stars passed endlessly by. The *Discovery* had thought they would be sundered in time, but they had not expected the future to be this empty.

‘What if we failed?’ Nhan asked.

‘No,’ Michael said. ‘I refused to believe that we did.’

It had become a ritual of theirs to go to the observation deck when their shifts ended at the same time. At first, all Nhan and Michael would do was watch the stars, as if they were hoping they might spot something they had missed. They did not speak, neither of them sure what to say. They were probably the two who saw the ugliest of this emptiness. Michael spent her days analysing data from probes and scanners, hoping against hope that something had been picked up, but always finding nothing. Nhan dealt with the reaction to the growing possibility that they were alone in this universe. The entire crew was on edge, and several times, it had led to wanton destruction and fist-fights. Both security and medical personnel did their best to keep tensions down, but at times it seemed like a losing battle. Despite their work, they were not inoculated against the existential dread that had beset the ship.

It was that that had finally led them to start talking. At first, it had not been much more than small-talk about their shifts and their leisure-activities. Then they had spoken about their homes and their families. Finally, the topic of their present and future felt unavoidable.

‘Is it logical to assume what we do not know?’ Nhan asked. Michael sighed.

‘It’s not,’ she admitted. ‘But I cannot accept that our current situation means that Control took over, for my own sake.’

It was a moment until Nhan spoke.

‘I know what you mean. I wish the others had your optimism.’

‘It is not optimism,’ Michael said. ‘It is not something I believe, but something I tell myself. If it did not work, everything we did was for naught.’ She looked over at Nhan. ‘Perhaps this is what faith is.’

‘It sounds like it.’ Nhan looked out of the observation window at the distant lights of the stars. ‘The Barzan gods are bound to the soil and the air of our home. If Barzan II is gone, so are its gods.’

‘There is still hope,’ Michael said. ‘We still haven’t established our exact location. I believe we must have moved in space as well as time. In these cases, they are one and the same after all.’

‘If you are right, we might be so far away from everything we know that we might not make it back in our lifetime.’

Michael sighed. She had had the same thought, but had not shared it with anyone.

‘I know.’

They sat in silence for some time, each following the stream of thoughts the statement had started. It was Nhan who finally spoke.

‘Perhaps the crew’s descendants can make it there.’

Michael looked over at her.

‘Perhaps.’

Nhan met her eye and smiled.

‘You can say it, Commander.’

Michael still hesitated.

‘Not yours.’

Nhan shook her head.

‘No. Not mine. Even if I wasn’t the only one of my species on the ship, it would be impossible. Barzan egg-pods corrode in oxygen-rich environments.’

‘I doubt it would be my descendants either,’ Michael admitted. Nhan looked back at her.

‘How come?’

‘I would not want to have children in this situation.’ What that was remained unspoken. While nothing was certain, there were fears that the ship’s resources might eventually run out and the vessel itself grow too old to repair. Saru had raised the possibility of finding an M-class planet with good ore deposits, maybe even dilithium crystals, to turn into a base, but this far Reno had overruled him. Doing that, she argued, was showing the crew that they had given up, and she was still intent on finding a way back to their present without bringing the sphere data back with them.

Nhan interrupted these thoughts.

‘What about companionship?’

Michael looked over at her. Sometimes when she looked at her, her brain would interpret Nhan’s forehead pattern as a frown, but now, her eyes were so earnest that she could not see it that way.

‘This crew went through so much together before I came onboard,’ Nhan explained.

‘Everyone have been welcoming, but I still feel disconnected from them.’ She smiled.

‘Except from you.’

Michael looked away, a little self-conscious.

‘I know what it’s like to be the odd one out. I was there for those things, but...’

Nhan put her hand on Michael’s wrist.

‘You do not have to explain. I know.’

Michael raised her gaze. A look of urgency flitted over Nhan’s face. Her hand was still on her wrist. The long hours they had spent together folded out in her memory. Had this grown steadily between them, or had it always been there? She remembered when they had spoken after Airiam’s funeral. Perhaps it had been there ever since then.

She turned her hand and pressed her palm against Nhan’s. The urgency softened. Nhan’s lips parted, as if to speak, but no words came. Instead, she raised her free hand to Michael’s face. First she traced her jaw and her chin, then her lips. When Michael mirrored her, she saw that her hand trembled a little. Her fingers ran across Nhan’s cheek, grazing her facial implant.

‘Do Barzans kiss?’ she asked.

Nhan nodded.

‘Yes. But I have never done it with my implants,’ she said. ‘I am not sure it would be... safe.’

‘For you?’

‘No. For you,’ she said. ‘The gases I need to survive are toxic to you. Inhaling them might harm you.’

Michael thought for a moment.

‘I would like to try.’

‘Even after what I just told you?’

‘I’m a scientist,’ Michael said. ‘We cannot further out knowledge without empirical study.’

The serious look on Nhan’s face disappeared, and instead she smiled. She nodded minutely. Michael exhaled and took a deep breath. She leaned closer. The implants nudged at her cheeks. She could feel the gas emanating from them, tickling her skin. Resisting the urge to exhale, she kissed her. It was a only a short peck between closed mouths, but the relief of that contact was greater than when Michael drew back and let out her breath. Nhan smiled, but then it faltered. The glib comments about empiricism and experiments suddenly felt silly. Michael followed Nhan’s gaze, through the observation window.

‘What if there really is nothing out there?’ Nhan asked. ‘What do we do then?’

‘I don’t know,’ Michael said truthfully. She pressed her hand. They looked at each other again. Nhan pressed her hand back and leaned closer until their brows rested together. If there was no one in the universe but the crew of the *Discovery*, then this was the only thing that truly mattered. Not exploration or expansion or knowledge. Not reaching out, but reaching for each other.

They sat together, hand in hand, forehead to forehead, as the stars passed by.

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