



Echoes From the Void

By Michael Debevec 2024©

And then I awoke. It was all dark at first... hazy. Blurred but then slowly shapes started coming into focus again. Where was I? It's all very disorientating. I try to move but it feels laborious, as though tar is around me. I feel my body lurch forward stumbling around, seemingly dropping something metal before doors open and my body falls to the ground. I hear the doors close behind me, and I try to get my bearings. Some things are becoming much clearer now, I'm on a ship and alarms are blaring. A table in the middle, bunk beds to the side, a hatch in front of me. Still discombobulated I feel myself grab hold of a nearby chair to bring me back on my feet, and in doing so a door to my left opens up... in there is a mirror. Stumbling over to stand in front of the mirror now I see her, the name embroidered on her suit says "Aina", and as I gaze at her she gazes back at me. Why is my face so unfamiliar? And

yet, I feel another presence. Is someone else here? I look around, the moment I call out to say “Hello?” I hear my voice echo it back at me, muffled and off in the distance, before it trails off. I feel like my head is pounding relentlessly.

Quickly though the pertinence of the current situation arises, and all question for who I was is overcome by a concern for where I was. The ship appears damaged, severely. A computerised voice echoes through the cabin reporting of intense gravity waves. Despite my lapse of memory, I knew that could only mean one thing. I venture towards the doors near the front of the cabin that I had first stumbled through, and as they open the view from the front window confirms it... a black hole. The ship groans again. I don't know where everyone else has gone or why I was left behind, but this situation is dire, and I need to escape. How am I so trapped? “No, Aina, we cannot just succumb to this fate,” I think to myself, and as I do I feel the same sentiment resonate back to me.

Despite no memory of her role on this ship surely she has experience. Taking a seat at the main console seems to trigger an intense familiarity but I am not sure why. The control consoles are active with warnings of “temporal distortions”, but they appear to still take inputs. Any sense of potential control, though, was quickly drowned out by the countless warning sounds reverberating around the cabin. The horror of the situation quickly became more apparent as despite any efforts, the impulse engines would not shift the trajectory of the shuttlecraft. Why does that not surprise me... this close to the black hole... in fact I have a feeling of *déjà vu* wash over me, suggesting that I must have tried that before. But that illogical catharsis quickly gave way to frustration of how hopeless and trapped I felt. I felt myself let go, first arms then chest and head all slumping onto the console in exhausted defeat.

Stress and dread multiply ten-fold, and I feel that weight of that other ghostly presence again. Where was everyone? Why was I the only one here? Was I a stowaway? Was that why they left me?

A glint of something circular fallen on the ground somehow catches the light. It was a badge, its metallic surface worn and scratched, with the Starfleet insignia. A clue perhaps? At least it was some context. Lethargy is taken over by curiosity, and I feel that hopelessness take a back seat to this new breadcrumb. Starfleet was renowned for their poise under pressure, their ability to overcome all obstacles despite their odds. If I were Starfleet, if this badge was Aina's, it meant it was time to press on and keep trying despite the odds.

The next few minutes are a blur. Frantic button pressing, running around the ship looking for clues, trying to get the computer systems to give something as to an answer. No methodology to it, instead so haphazardly that I felt like simply a spectator watching sheer desperation decay into efforts that proved futile.

Then as though everything came into focus again, it clicked... the transporter. It was now the only way to escape. The computer systems were being a little sketchy, but the transporter was saying there was another ship in range, another shuttlecraft... its designation seems familiar... perhaps all the crew had evacuated or perhaps we were all on the way for a rendezvous and got swept up in the gravity waves of the black hole. It does mess with time after all, so maybe our ships were late. Speculation at this point will help no one though. Like the other components on the shuttle, this one showed signs of glitching and damage as well. Quickly cycling through menus and system reports Aina found that the pattern buffer had recently surged only several minutes ago. The rest of the crew must have only just left, and being so close to the black hole it wasn't surprising that systems were not behaving. Checking the transporter log the glitching was even more apparent, as it had logged the same log over nine hundred times. The ship groaned again, the gravitational forces acting upon it becoming more intense.

After a few quick confirmations and overrides for this transport, the coordinates are locked and after a final glance around I feel the transporter engage, the glow around becoming more intense as the sound came to a crescendo. I cannot help but feel that *déjà vu* again. Wait...the Starfleet Badge... so they know I am an ally. Quickly my arm reaches up to try to pin it to my suit. In that last moment though, before it is secured, I feel my very presence snapped away as the transporter engages, as I am pulled out of space and time.