

The New Threat

Posted originally on the [Ad Astra :: Star Trek Fanfiction Archive](http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/11) at <http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/11>.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Fandom:	Expanded Universes (General) , Doctor Who
Character:	Tenth Doctor
Additional Tags:	Crossover , Torchwood , UNIT
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2023-05-17 Words: 30,027 Chapters: 11/?

The New Threat

by [LordMcCoveyCove](#)

Summary

The crew of the starship *Bellerophon* investigate a distress call from a secretive science outpost on the fringes of Federation territory. When they arrive, only bodies and the wrecked remains of the outpost are found, and they're ordered to perform a standard investigation of the accident... under certain information restrictions imposed by the ship's captain.

But when they discover the result of the outpost's experiment, they realize that a brand new threat has been introduced to the United Federation of Planets, with only *Bellerophon* and her crew standing in the way...

Notes

Doctor Who's Who

- Erisa Magambo was a UNIT (UNited Intelligence Taskforce [United Nations]) Captain, she appeared in Series 4 (or Season 30, depending) episode "Turn Left," and the 2009 special, "The Planet of the Dead."
- Martha Jones was the Doctor's companion during Series 3 (or Season 29). She recurred in Series 4's "The Sontaran Strategem," "The Poison Sky," "The Doctor's Daughter," "The Stolen Earth," and "Journey's End," as a member of UNIT.
- Ursula Blake and Ethan Pope were both a part of LINDA (London Investigation 'n Detective Agency) from the Series 2 (Season 29) episode "Love & Monsters."
- Gwen Cooper first appeared as a Cardiff police constable in the series Torchwood (a Doctor Who spin-off), where she is one of the lead characters.
- Toshiko Sato first appeared in the Series 1 (Season 28) episode, "Aliens in London." She went on to be a supporting character in the spin-off, Torchwood.

Historian's Note

- Star Trek: This takes place roughly eight years after *Star Trek: Voyager's* series finale, "Endgame."
- Doctor Who: This takes place sometime after the 2009 Special, "The Planet of the Dead," and immediately before "The Waters of Mars."

Visual Range

The New Threat
by Lord McCovey Cove

Chapter One: Visual Range

NCC-74705 (USS *Bellerophon*)
Cestus Sector, Warp 9.975
Main Bridge
Stardate 65539.4

Lieutenant Commander Martha Jones cast furtive glances at her commanding officer from her seated position on the bridge. The Intrepid-class starship *Bellerophon* hurtled toward the source of the distress call at maximum warp, and the already-tense atmosphere emanating from the captain's chair notched upward a tick once the distress call ceased.

"Let's hear it again, Mister Blake," ordered the captain.

Lieutenant Commander Ursula Blake, the ship's chief operations officer and third-in-command, replied with a quick affirmative before replaying the last distress call for the fifth time.

The overhead speakers crackled to life with the sound of communications interference. "This is... -nant Silok, acting commander of Outpost Zeta-Thirteen- ... -any Starfleet vessel within the sound of my voice: we have sustain- ... -vy casualties. We are attempting to evac- ... -able to engage escape pods or shuttle- ... -quire immediate assistance. I repeat- ..." The message dissolved into static once more, but for the final time.

On the heels of the final bit of static in the message, the captain rose from her seat and strode toward her ready room. "Number One," she said in the same accented English as Martha, "you have the bridge. I need to consult with Starfleet Command." Without waiting for a response, the captain disappeared behind the sliding doors.

Martha turned her attention back to the streaking stars of the viewscreen and announced, "I have the bridge, aye, sir."

Lieutenant (jg) Ethan Pope turned around from the helm console to face Martha. "Sir, forgive me for saying so, but it seems more than a little odd that Starfleet should be so secretive about the details of this outpost no one heard of before today."

Jones did not meet the helmsman's blue eyes. Instead, she chose to occupy herself with the center console she shared with the captain. "You're forgiven, but let's concentrate on our duty. What is our ETA to the outpost?"

Pope answered quickly, "Five minutes, sir."

"Right." Jones keyed open a commlink. "Bridge to Engineering."

A baritone voice replied, "Engineering. This is Taurik."

"Commander Taurik, we will be arriving at the outpost in under five minutes. Prepare your engineering teams for immediate boarding."

"Acknowledged, sir. Engineering, out."

"Mister Cooper," Jones called out.

The ship's chief tactical officer, Lieutenant Gwen Cooper, replied from her duty station. "Sir!"

"Security alert two, all teams," ordered Jones. "I don't know what the hell we're flying into, but I intend to be prepared."

Gwen grinned. "I couldn't agree more, sir. Security alert two." The console began to beep wildly. "Incoming transmission, Commander. Starfleet Security. Eyes only, commanding officer."

Martha did not reply, instead she opened a link to the captain. "Sir, you have a call holding from Starfleet Security."

The captain's contralto tone floated down from the bridge speakers. "Pipe it through."

She nodded to Gwen, who in turn routed the call as ordered. "Patching it through, now, Captain."

The communication was open for a mere fifteen minutes, and included a series of data packets on an encoded frequency. After the call was completed, the captain returned to the bridge.

"Number One, I want a meeting of the senior staff in ten minutes."

Martha shared a look with Gwen as she responded, "Aye, sir. Ten minutes."

[ST: The New Threat cover](#)



dealing in theoretical experimentation," Magambo said to her senior staff within the bridge's conference lounge. She stood before the large screen as they listened. "Thirteen was charged with controlling recovered Borg technology to discover the feasibility of constructing a transwarp network.

"According to their last report, they had progressed to the third phase of research, which involved the activation of a repaired Borg conduit generator. This phase also included a series of experiments to determine how such a network is generated and sustained. The first experiment was completed three weeks ago. The eighth experiment was to have been completed today.

"Starfleet believes that this experimentation may have been the cause of this accident. At this time, *Bellerophon* is the only ship assigned to investigate. Two additional starships are being dispatched, however, Cestus' position prevents a speedy arrival. It will take one week for the closest ship to arrive.

"Our orders are to initiate a full investigation while also preventing any other starships from entering a buffer zone of one-quarter parsecs. Mister Cooper and Mister Pope, you will utilize the ship's shuttles to run a picket line to prevent any trespassing."

Lieutenants Cooper and Pope replied their understanding of the order.

The captain continued, "Number One, Commander Taurik, Doctor Thann. You will take a series of away teams to the outpost, catalogue the dead as well as all data retrievable from the outpost computer."

After all of the senior staff acknowledged their assignments, the captain dismissed them all. Commander Jones remained behind.

"Yes, Number One?" asked the captain.

Martha frowned. "Begging your pardon, sir, but was there something else that Starfleet mentioned? Something not quite right about their experimentation?"

The captain grinned inwardly. She turned away from Martha to face the viewport. "Four years we've served together. At times, I forget how perceptive you are."

Martha angled her view to the deck, repentant. "I meant no disrespect, sir."

"And none was perceived, Number One, I assure you." The captain folded her arms. "No, Starfleet held me enraptured by tails of dimensional transport they felt should be classified at the highest levels. What I withheld from the wardroom, I will share with you with the condition that you do not repeat it."

"Of course, sir. I give you my word."

The captain returned to hold her executive officer in warm regard. "Your word has always been without reproach."

Within the confines of main engineering, Commander Taurik and Lieutenant Cooper lifted each of the data nodes and settled them in a row. Every other one showed signs of damage to the exterior.

"You think you can sort any of this out?" asked Gwen as she set one of the nodes into the data port cradle.

Taurik ran a series of commands from his station as he answered, "I shall endeavor to do so, Lieutenant." He peered at the results. "This node's data has degraded to seventy-three percent. It may be possible to recover the remainder." His eyes looked over the engineering personnel working in the compartment.

Gwen touched the console interface and tapped it to zoom to the degradation report.

"Mister Sato!" called Taurik. "A moment of your time, please."

Systems Specialist First Class Toshiko Sato handed off her current work to a fellow petty officer and approached the console in use by the chief engineering officer. "Yes, sir?" she replied.

Taurik turned to face the lieutenant. "Lieutenant Cooper, I'm not sure if you have met Specialist Sato?"

"Gwen Cooper," she nodded.

"A pleasure, sir," replied Toshiko with a small smile and a quick nod.

"She is one of our most experienced computer specialists. I'm confident she will recover the data easily."

Gwen raised her eyebrows. "That's high praise, coming from him."

Toshiko grinned. "I believe that's the first time he's paid me a compliment."

If Taurik was discomfited, he hid it well. "The data in these nodes, Mister Sato, is of the utmost importance to the captain and apparently, Starfleet Command. Any information you should happen to be privy to in the course of your assignment, is of the highest classification. Obviously, I will be unable to provide you with any assistance from your peers."

"I've never really needed it, where this kind of work was concerned, Commander," Toshiko said with pride.

Taurik continued, "If you require any assistance, contact me directly. Do not accept any projects from any other officers, until further notice."

"Aye, sir."

"Lieutenant," said Taurik, before he turned away to approach ladder up to the second level.

Gwen followed the Vulcan and when they stood before his private station, she turned to peer down at Toshiko working on her new assignment.

"She must be your best."

"She is of great usefulness to my department," Taurik admitted as he logged into the computer station and activated the primary display.

She changed the subject. "What do you think of the latest report to come from Doctor Thann?"

"I'm calling up the data, now."

Now, he had her attention. Gwen read the report as filed by the doctor only minutes prior.

"Fascinating."

"That's one word for it." She read out loud, "'Deceased showed signs of complete cellular disruption at the subatomic level.' What do you make of that?"

Taurik blitzed through the data as only a Vulcan could. "It could be a possible side effect of their experiment. The captain did say they were attempting to create a transwarp tunnel through space, using borrowed technology. If the event horizon was unable or perhaps too powerful, an uncontrolled burst of radiation from the tunnel could have this effect."

"I'm not quite certain of that, sir." Gwen extended her left index finger to trace around the lines of the scans. "I'm neither an engineer nor a doctor, but to me, this looks like the damage pattern of an energy weapon. Look at the rings."

"That is one way of interpreting the data," he said unconvinced. "I'm certain each one of us will have a unique perspective on the matter."

"Commander!" called Toshiko from below.

Both officers snapped their heads toward the voice. Taurik grabbed the rail with one hand and gestured with the other, beckoning her to approach his station.

Gwen stifled her amusement at seeing his brief irritation with the sudden interruption.

Toshiko climbed up, wearing a somber expression on her face. The data node in her hand was shaking. "I'm sorry for my outburst, sir, but I think if you will allow me...?"

Taurik inclined his head toward her, moving back to give her clearance to operate his station.

The display shifted to the output from the node. Toshiko explained, "I started with the standard algorithms, and moved through a custom series of data recovery protocols. I was able to recover some of the data on the first two nodes. They were logs and reports about something called 'Project Excelsior.' I got to the third node and started to go through some of the audio files to ensure the integrity when the file began to play." On the last words of her sentence, her voice trembled.

Gwen reached out instinctively to steady the non-commissioned officer. "Are you all right?"

"I'll be all right," promised Toshiko, her tone demonstrating her appreciation for the officer's concern. She shook it off and said, "I'm sorry, sir. Sirs. But you need to hear this." She touched the playback command. "The video was beyond recovery, but the audio was easier."

A male voice reported, "-I've successfully opened the gateway to a new dimension of space. Project Excelsior is a success! We are keeping the event horizon stable to the minimum requirement under the project guidelines." There was a pause. "Lieutenant, increase the stability matrix to full and let's send the test article in sixty seconds."

Another voice, further away from the audio pickup replied, "Yes, Doctor."

The first voice returned, "The test article is a modified torpedo casing with the standard mark ten probe sensor package aboard. It is programmed to enter the bridge and return in five minutes."

A new voice, female, called out, "Doctor, the bridge is showing signs of instability. I think... I think there's something coming through!"

"Shut it down!" ordered the doctor's voice sternly. "Power down the matrices!"

"It's too late! I'm reading an object in the tunnel, approaching the bridge. It's coming through, now!"

"I-I'm Doctor Thomas Macready of the Federation Sci-"

A loud voice, shrill and distorted, screamed over the speakers, "ALERT! LIFEFORMS DETECTED! ADVANCE AND ATTACK! ADVANCE AND ATTACK! EX-TERM-I-NATE! EX-TERM-I-NATE! EX-TERM-I-NATE!" With each word, additional voices added to the cacophony.

The sounds of weapons fire never before heard filled the speakers, along with the cries of the voices that spoke earlier. Until nothing but silence remained. The audio file reached its end and the display returned to a stand-by mode.

No one said a word. Anywhere within the compartment.

Taurik noticed that all of his staff were now looking up at the second level in horror. "Return to your duty, at once!" he ordered in a raised tone. He pulled the node from the connection and held it. "Mister Sato, Lieutenant Cooper, with me. We're going to see the captain."

Intruder Alert

Chapter Two: Intruder Alert

NCC-74705 (USS *Bellerophon*)

Stationary position relative to the remains of Outpost Zeta-Thirteen

Cargo Bay Two

Stardate 65539.9

Ensign Coralie Picard hated her name. Not her first name nor her middle name, but her surname. All of the Picards serving in Starfleet often felt as though the most famous Picard in history ruined it for the rest of them. Throughout her childhood, she sought her inspiration for joining Starfleet from Jean-Luc Picard; a fellow countryman who not only held back the Borg with his guile and intellect, but managed to broker peace treaties with several races as a skilled diplomat.

When Coralie obtained her appointment to Starfleet Academy, it seemed as though everyone assumed she was related to Jean-Luc Picard. It got to be something of a novelty at first. She even tried to find a relation through some obscure fifth cousin, thrice-removed, but it turned out to be a dead end. No, her family of Picards shared only the name, but no common ancestry. In fact, her family adopted the name to hide their true ethnicity in France during one of the world wars.

Every time she introduced herself, she saw that flash of recognition at the mention of her name. And every time, she would have to disappoint them. No, she was his daughter or niece or cousin or related by marriage. She was just Coralie Picard, a disappointment from the start. With every meeting, she felt the expectation of a storied and vaunted career slip further away from her, until she lost a majority of her drive and determination. She traded in the red uniform of command for a gold uniform of support services, and was reassigned from helm duty to cargo inspection.

On a ship in flight, her daily duties included the inventory of the cargo bays. They remained unchanged until consumption or transfer. Each day, she completed her inventory in boredom. She memorized every code and number of each container housed within that bay; in every bay aboard, actually.

She completed her inspection of the third row of containers, and moved to the fourth and final row. She heard a scraping noise behind her and a felt a breeze coming from the ship's environmental systems. Her light brown hair fluttered about her face, obscuring her vision as she closed her eyes to prevent damage from the whipping strands. When the breeze died down, she turned around. It was when she noticed a new container sitting in the corner of the cargo bay.

Coralie had passed that corner of the bay hundreds of times before since they departed from Starbase 36 months ago. It was always vacant. No one would store anything there without her notice. But now, standing before her plainly was a tall and narrow dark blue box with a small light on top.

The box appeared to be constructed of wood, and had lighted words at the top; "POLICE PUBLIC CALL BOX." She put away her PADD and retrieved her tricorder. It scanned as it appeared to be: A wooden police call box, circa 1963 on the old Earth calendar.

"What the hell is it doing here?" she asked herself. Coralie reached for her commbadge to contact her superior officer, but one of the sides opened inward and a head popped out from within.

It was a man with spiky dark brown hair and an inviting smile. He wore an old-style business suit of brown with grey pinstripes with a long tie and a vest, all covered in a light brown trenchcoat. "Hello, there," he greeted, using an Estuary English accent. "I seem to have taken a wrong turn and I'm in need of some assistance. Can you tell me what year this is?"

Coralie stood, unblinking at the man. "W-What?" she sputtered incredulously.

He moved out of the box completely. The man was tall and thin, with his hands shoved into the pockets of his trousers. "Can you tell me what year this is?" he asked again.

"W-What?" she repeated, still not comprehending what was going on. "Who are you and what are you doing here?"

"Hold on a tick," he said. His smile widened more, and he pointed at her. "Are you French?"

"I'm Parisian," she said with pride. "And who are you?"

"Oh, this is brilliant. I love the French." He stepped forward and introduced himself, "I'm The Doctor. And you are...?"

She took a step back, unsure of his intent. There was something about his smile, though, that set her at ease. "Ensign Coralie Picard, of the Federation starship *Bellerophon*."

"Federation? Never heard of it. At least, not one with humans in it. What is it?" he asked, scratching at his left ear.

Coralie was taken aback by his ignorance. "You've never heard of the United Federation of Planets?"

"Afraid not. What year is it?"

"It's twenty-three eighty-seven. And what sort of doctor are you? What's your name?"

"Just 'The Doctor.'" He paused at the new information. "And it's twenty-three eighty-seven? Are you sure about that?"

She nodded. "Positive. I'm in the middle of the cargo inventory right now, and my list is stamped with the present time. It's Stardate 65540, which is the last month on the old Earth calendar of twenty-three eighty-seven."

"'Stardate?' Now you're not making any sense," the Doctor told her with a soured expression. "Humans shouldn't be this far outside their solar system, yet."

Coralie replied, deadpan, "Should we apologize?"

The Doctor sighed as his eyes scanned the interior of the cargo bay. "I always seem to end up in closets and storage areas." He returned his gaze to Coralie. "I wager we're aboard a ship of some kind and you might tag me as an intruder."

An intruder! Coralie inwardly groaned. In the course of conversing with the strange man, she forgot that she had a duty to perform. "I apologize, but you will need to come with me, sir."

"That's fine. I'm not going anywhere for at least twenty-four hours," replied the Doctor. "I'm curious about why you're out here and what all this is about, anyway."

Coralie slapped her commbadge. "Picard to security. Intruder alert, Cargo Bay Two. The intruder doesn't appear to be armed, and has submitted to my authority. Please send a team to my location."

A feminine voice with a Welsh accent replied, "Understood, Ensign. A team will arrive presently."

"Thank you, sir."

"'Sir?'" said the Doctor in surprise. "But that was a woman's voice, yeah?"

"Starfleet protocol requires us to respond to all superiors as 'sir.'"

The Doctor's nose wrinkled. "'Starfleet?' Is that like UNIT?"

"To what unit are you referring to, sir?"

"UNIT, you know? The Unified Intelligence Taskforce in the twenty-first century?"

Coralie shook her head. "I'm sorry, I don't."

The Doctor muttered to himself, "I must be in a completely different timestream, then. Nothing seems right, here."

Before she could respond to him, a security team consisting of a small, but stocky man and a tall and muscular woman entered with their type-two phasers drawn. "Sir, if you could come with us, please?" the woman said.

"I'm unarmed, gentleman and lady. Please put your weapons away," the Doctor replied, raising both arms up in surrender. "And don't call me 'sir.'"

Within the ship's medical bay, Commander Jones held the Doctor's sonic screwdriver in her hands, eyeing it carefully. It had a blue light at one end and a black tip at the other. "And this was all he had on his person?"

The ship's chief tactical officer, Lieutenant Gwen Cooper, shook her head. "No, sir. He had a small piece of paper in a folded case," she said, handing it to the executive officer. "The strange thing is, when my man over there handed it to me, it held his vital statistics upon it until I touched it. I'd like for Commander Taurik to analyze it."

"Agreed," Jones said, now looking over the blank paper. "And this other device, too. Make sure it isn't a weapon."

The Doctor replied before Gwen could. "It's not. It's my sonic screwdriver. It's a tool, not a weapon."

Jones turned around and cast a stern glare at the Doctor. "Every tool is a weapon, if you hold it right." She stepped forward to introduce herself, "I'm Lieutenant Commander-

"Martha Jones!" said the Doctor at the same moment. "As I live and breathe!"

Confused, Jones continued, "I'm the ship's executive officer."

As soon as she came into view, the Doctor's eyebrows rose and a wide smile appeared upon his face. "And Gwen Cooper! But, this is fantastic!"

Jones' expression changed to one of completely confusion. "Have we met before?"

His grin widened perceptibly. "In another time, another parallel universe. Though, I find it odd that you would appear further down the timestream than in my universe. Very strange," the Doctor began talking to himself. "I wonder who else is here instead of back in the twenty-first century?"

Lieutenant Cooper looked at Jones. "What the hell is he going on about, now, sir?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," admitted Jones, perplexed. She raised her voice to address the Doctor, once more, "Sir, I'm afraid that I'll need to hold you here in sickbay until the captain has had a chance to go over our report."

The Doctor grinned uncontrollably, "And who's your captain? No, wait, let me guess. Is it Donna Noble?" He turned his head and muttered again, "No, military service isn't really her style." He snapped his fingers, "Ah! I'll bet it's Captain Jack Harkness!"

"Actually," said a new voice from the entrance into sickbay. "My name is Commander Erisa Magambo. I'm the commanding officer of *Bellerophon*."

His eyebrows flew up again. "Yes, of course. Captain Magambo. Well, I'm in good hands, then."

Jones turned to face her captain. "Obviously, he seems to know us fairly well, sir. He knew me, as well. And Lieutenant Cooper. Just said our names like he'd known us all our lives."

"And apparently, me," replied Magambo with her arms folded. "I'm told you refer to yourself as 'The Doctor.' Well, listen up, Doctor. I don't take kindly to people suddenly appearing aboard my ship while we're dealing with a crisis situation."

The Doctor tilted his head. "What crisis, specifically?"

Jones answered, "We're responding to a distress call from one of our outposts on the edge of Federation territory. An experiment gone wrong, and may have released a new threat from an unknown part of the galaxy."

Magambo shot an angry glance toward Jones. "Thank you, Number One."

"Apologies, sir," mumbled Jones.

"Doctor Thann?" asked Magambo. "Have you made a full evaluation of our... guest?"

Thann, a tall and thin Andorian male wearing the rank insignia of a full lieutenant, activated a viewscreen to demonstrate his findings. "Interesting physiology, sir. I could publish several papers on the findings and have an outside shot at this year's Carrington."

Captain Magambo rolled her eyes. "Delusions of averice aside, Doctor, is he human?"

"No, Captain," said the ship's chief medical officer. "Dual myogenic muscular organs, he also appears to have conscious manipulation at the cellular level, and his central nervous system is reinforced by a--"

Magambo raised her hand as Thann continued. "Thank you. 'No' was sufficient." She turned her attention to the Doctor. "To echo a question posed by Ensign Picard, who are you, and what are you doing here?"

"Who I am has already been answered, Captain. What I'm doing here remains to be seen, however," replied the Doctor. "But I give you my word. I'm here to help." His eyes wandered between all three of the officers standing before him. "If you'll allow me to."

The captain frowned and considered his words carefully. After a long pause, she admitted, "I'm not certain if it is part of your racial characteristics or not, Doctor, but I find myself believing what you're saying."

The Doctor rose from his seated position on the biobed and tucked his hands in his trousers. "All I can say with absolute certainty, ladies, is that with the three of you standing here before me... I've never been more confident in my life that I'm in the best care possible."

Magambo sputtered for the first time since she took command. "How could you possibly be so confident? You don't even know us!"

"I don't know you here and now, Captain Erisa Magambo, but in my timestream, you are a UNIT commander. One of the finest. You and a brilliant young scientist named Malcolm Taylor managed to save my life and the lives of several civilians, whilst also preventing an invasion that would have surely--"

"Doctor!" shouted Magambo. "I'm clearly not certain how you do things, but in Starfleet, we obey the Temporal Prime Directive. That means that we do not divulge any information that might affect the future!"

The Doctor was taken aback. "I... don't know what to say."

Magambo allowed herself a small smile in triumph. "It's quite all right, Doctor. I apologize for shouting."

The Doctor, on the other hand, was not listening to her. "That a human organization is fully cognizant of the ramifications of subverting their own timestream is... most refreshing. Usually, you jump at the opportunity to learn all you can. This level of restraint is surprising and dare I say... insightful?"

Jones smirked. "He's beside himself with admiration."

Magambo interrupted the conversation, "The Temporal Prime Directive is one of our general orders, Doctor. I do not take kindly to it being broken in my presence."

"That's fine by me, Captain. However, since this is a completely different timestream, and the events I'm describing took place over four hundred years ago, technically it's the past," the Doctor replied with a cheerful smile and rocked back and forth on his feet. "Isn't it?"

Clearly, the captain did not appreciate being contradicted. "I see your point."

"Good. Now, the TARDIS wouldn't just drop me into a different timestream without some kind of reason," the Doctor noted as he paced around the trio of officers. "Given recent events, I gave up on believing in coincidences. What's the trouble, and how can I help?"

Magambo pressed her lips together tight enough to turn them white. She regarded the Doctor with a measured gaze before turning to Jones.

"Number One, secure this man in a holding cell until further notice. I shall consult with Starfleet Command."

Jones did not hesitate. "Aye, sir. Mister Cooper."

Cooper's phaser was in her hand. "Sir, if you will accompany me...?"

The Doctor's hands came out of his pockets and extended up with his palms outward. He sighed resignedly. "Blimey! Not this again."

"What's a TARDIS?" wondered Jones, after she followed Captain Magambo into the corridor outside sickbay.

"I presume the blue box sitting in my cargo bay. Have it secured," ordered the captain. "No one goes near it. Especially not our guest."

"Aye, sir," said Jones. She quickly issued the orders to the security officer on the bridge. "What if he's telling the truth, sir?"

"And what if he's aligned with these... creatures?" snapped Magambo, as soon as they entered the confines of the turbolift. "No, I won't take that risk until I know more. Much more." She looked up and said, "Bridge."

The lift traveled the five decks up to the command center within moments. Captain and executive officer passed through the bridge and into the ready room. "Captain to Mister Blake. I want to talk to Starfleet Command, code forty-seven."

Blake's voice replied over the speakers. "Aye, sir. One moment, please." It took ten. "Piping it through, now, sir."

The small screen upon Magambo's desk blinked to show the insignia of Starfleet Command, and then the words, "AUDIO ONLY." A woman's voice asked, "Yes, Captain?"

"Sir, we have taken into custody a man who calls himself 'The Doctor,'" informed Magambo, without preamble. "He claims to be here to help."

"Understood. You will release the Doctor, immediately."

The captain could not help her confusion. "Admiral, I-"

"That was not a suggestion, Captain Magambo!" the woman's voice hardened. "Release the Doctor. He carries X-Ray clearance within Starfleet, on my authority. Is that clear?"

Jones' jaw fell at the news. X-Ray was above Alpha on the Starfleet Security food chain. She nearly said something, but Magambo raised her hand to stop her.

"I understand, sir," the captain said evenly. "If I may be permitted to ask a question, Admiral?"

"One question, Captain."

Magambo paused to consider her words. "If the Doctor holds such a high clearance, am I to presume then, that he carries a rank within Starfleet?"

The woman's voice softened noticeably. "He carries no rank, Captain. Do not even address him as 'sir.' He dislikes that a great deal. But you will treat him with the same level of respect as you would me."

Both Jones and Magambo's eyes widened. The captain nodded to the voice that could not see her. "Aye, sir. Thank you for indulging me."

"You will keep me apprised of your progress as frequently as possible. Starfleet, out." The screen blinked again, and the insignia returned before it cleared and powered down.

"That raised more questions than it answered," Jones said with a sigh. "Shall I-?"

"You shall," Magambo pointed to the exit. "Quickly, please. And brief him on what we know so far. Take him to Commander Taurik, immediately."

Apologies and Ramifications

Chapter Three: Apologies and Ramifications

NCC-74705 (USS *Bellerophon*)

Stationary position relative to the remains of Outpost Zeta-Thirteen.

Main Engineering

Stardate 65540.5

"I apologize, but I've never heard of that species before." Lieutenant Commander Taurik eyed the thin man standing before him.

The Doctor grinned. "Time Lord? Not surprising. I doubt any exist in this timestream."

"Forgive me for saying, but you share a striking resemblance to that of a Terran."

"A Terran?"

"They call themselves 'human.'"

"Ah. Well, a freak coincidence of aesthetics, I suppose. I can assure you, the two are very different." He had just been released from the holding cell where he enjoyed the company of Gwen Cooper for all of five minutes before the captain issued orders to release him. The Doctor eyed a console directly behind Taurik and pointed, "Is that your primary method of propulsion I see back there?"

Taurik did not turn. He merely nodded. "That is correct."

"Mind if I have a look?"

"The captain informs me that you hold a security clearance above mine, Doctor. Therefore, I see no reason to hide anything from you." He stepped aside and gestured with his right hand toward it. "Please proceed."

The Doctor pulled out a pair of eyeglasses and peered at it. "Forgive me for sounding a bit dense, but is this a matter-energy conversion-based power system?"

"It is, Doctor."

"You take the energy from matter and anti-matter, channel the explosion through a..." He read aloud, "'di-lithium crystal housing,' and then modulate the plasma flow to a series of subspace coils housed in the nacelles to generate a field that allows for smooth transition to faster-than-light speeds?"

"That is correct," repeated Taurik.

"Well! Not exactly smooth. I was being kind. You're literally running over the fabric of space and time with cleated boots. I'm surprised the whole of space hasn't fallen out from under you lot."

Taurik altered the display. "Perhaps this would be of interest to you, Doctor."

The Doctor read the screen aloud again. "'Variable geometric pylons?" He snapped his fingers and pointed. "Brilliant! You alter the geometric structure of the FTL field with each generation to reduce the impact of the transfer to FTL speeds!" He sighed happily. "May I just say you people are just about the most conscientious beings I've met in a very long time."

"We're here to serve, Doctor."

"And modest, too. Very modest." He peered at the first display again. "You don't run into the a problem with time dilation as you approach the constant?"

A hypothetical entry to warp speed was now animating on the display, under Taurik's manipulation. "We do not approach cee beyond point-two-five times cee," he explained. "A subspace field, once generated at the lowest power, is equal to one-cee. We generate more power in the reaction chamber by keeping a one-to-one ratio at higher volume-"

"Thus you move beyond one-cee," the Doctor finished the thought. "Then, I'm assuming that the subspace field also shields you from time dilation altogether. Inside the field, time moves at the same rate as outside the field."

"That is correct, Doctor. Subspace is considered to be an integral part of the space-time continuum that coexists with normal space in a confluence. It acts as an interfold layer," Taurik once again altered the screen to illustrate his narrative. "We also use this layer to maintain communications between ships, bases, and planets."

The Doctor could not contain his enthusiasm. "That's just brilliant. This Starfleet of yours is most impressive, Commander."

"Thank you, Doctor." Taurik sensed the conversation was drawing to a close, and pointed to another console. "Shall we review the outpost data we've accumulated so far?"

"We shall," the Doctor told him. "Lead on, my pointy-eared engineer."

"For the record, I'm a Vulcan. It is also the name of our homeworld."

The Doctor removed his glasses, then tilted his head. "You named yourselves and your planet after a Roman god from Earth?"

"It is pure coincidence that both words exist in our languages. Obviously, they hold different meanings," explained Taurik as they approached another station. "I'm told that every race has various linguistic similarities."

"You know, that's actually quite astute. Earth has several hundred languages and at least one word from each has a meaning to another species' language or dialect. Take the word 'dårlig' for example."

Taurik listened, but began the playback of the alien message shortly before the scientists' and engineers were killed. The dissonant tones played at a lower volume, but they still carried the same chill as before to those within earshot.

The Doctor froze. "From the beginning, please."

Taurik complied and set the playback point from the start of the recovered record.

When it was finished, the Doctor's joviality vanished. In its place, a stony look at the waveform audio display resided. "As I was saying, Commander, take the word dårlig for example. In Norwegian, it means 'bad,' and I can't think of a better word to describe this scenario."

"Other than the obvious circumstances, Doctor, is there another reason why you would choose that word?"

"The pronunciation of that word is a homonym for the name of that species, Commander." He pushed past the Vulcan and began walking quickly for the exit. "Let's go see Captain Magambo. Once again, I have to be the bearer of bad news."

The Doctor stood before the entire senior staff in the bridge conference lounge. "They're called Daleks. They're from my timestream, which suggests that you people found a way to punch through the fabric of the space-time continuum and gained pan-dimensional access. Congratulations, you just made contact with the most xenophobic homicidal species you'll ever meet."

Jones snorted, "We should introduce you to the Borg."

"I'm deadly serious, Martha."

Magambo interjected, "Doctor, no one at this table is not taking your information seriously." She leveled her gaze at Jones and repeated, "No one."

She rose from the table and continued, "However, we've certain protocols we must observe when determining a threat to the Federation. That includes providing Starfleet Command with as complete threat analysis as we can."

The Doctor folded his arms and leaned against the bulkhead. "Sounds like a military procedure, but a practical one. What do you need to know?"

An audio alert interrupted the conversation. "Bridge to captain. We're receiving a distress call from a civilian freighter outside the designated zone. She's under attack by an unknown vessel."

Magambo tapped the commpanel. "Recall all shuttles and make your course for the source of that call. Engage at flank speed." Once the channel cleared, she answered the Doctor, "Everything, please. As quickly as you can."

Captain's Log

Supplemental

Recorded under security lockout X-Ray-One-One-Zero

The Doctor has provided us with a complete technological profile of the Dalek technology. We are on fast approach to the distress call of the freighter Queen Elizabeth X, which has provided a sensor profile of the attacking party. The profile data was confirmed by the Doctor and as ordered, I have transmitted the data directly to Starfleet Security.

"This is absolutely remarkable," said the Doctor, as he stared at the face of Lieutenant Commander Ursula Blake. His cheeks were resting upon his palm, and his elbows supported them against the top of the operations console. "Absolutely remarkable," he repeated, showing off his teeth in an abashed smile.

Blake, for her part, could not help but blush under the Doctor's scrutiny. "May I help you, sir?"

"Oh, nothing. Just admiring the handiwork of space and time." He straightened up, then leaned against the console with his right elbow. "How close are you with Leftenant Pope over there?"

"I beg your pardon, sir."

"Don't call me 'sir,' please."

"I'm sorry, su- Doctor." Blake knew that. She had listened to the briefing from the captain. "To answer your question, the lieutenant and I are not that close. We take meals together in the mess, sometimes."

The Doctor grinned. "Far be it for me to make any kind of a suggestion, but I think you make a lovely couple."

Blake moved her head to eye the back of Pope's as he worked at the helm. "Really?"

"Oh, yeah," the Doctor replied with a quick nod. "There might be something there worth exploring."

Blake opened her mouth, but the captain called out, "Doctor."

The Doctor turned away and joined the captain in the center of the bridge. "Yes, Captain?"

"We're approaching the freighter. I thought perhaps you would like to take a look?" Without waiting for his response, she ordered that the sensor data be placed on the main viewscreen.

Blake reported, "No lifesigns aboard, sir. Reading multiple hull breaches along the command section and the cargo holds are exposed to space."

The Doctor put on his spectacles and eyed the sensor information. "Can your sensors give me a proper metallurgical analysis of the hull?"

"Mister Blake?" asked the captain.

Blake replied, "We're a bit too far away from the freighter for a complete scan, but I have some preliminary data coming through right now. I'm putting in on the main screen."

"Indeed. Very efficient, thank you, Commander," the Doctor said, distractedly. His eyes scanned the information. "High-level disruption at the molecular level." He twisted around to face the captain. "Quick! What weapons from this timestream could disrupt the molecules of a freighter like that?"

Jones answered first, "The Breen, the Ferengi, the Gorn..."

Blake continued, "The Lysians, the Klingons..."

Magambo finished, "Rigelians, Romulans, the Borg, the Cardassians, the Dominion..." She sighed. "So we can't narrow it down?"

"The Daleks do employ disruptors that could do this kind of damage. It's possible this is them, but I'd need to take a closer look at the damaged section of the hull." The Doctor added, "With Commander Taurik's help, of course. He's a good, smart fellow."

Jones beamed. "One of the best in Starfleet."

"No doubt."

Magambo ordered, "As the Doctor wishes. Number One, Mister Blake. I want a sample beamed to main engineering, immediately. Mister Cooper, talk to Doctor Thann and coordinate transport of the fallen to the morgue."

The Doctor found himself back in the engineering compartment, working alongside Lieutenant Commander Taurik. "You know, I really like you. You're swift and efficient, intelligent and thoughtful. Your staff follows your outstanding example. I may never leave this place."

Taurik did not turn his head. His hands continued to fly over the console's input pad. "I am honored by your assessment of my performance, Doctor. As is my staff."

"Just stating the obvious."

"Is it your wish to join Starfleet?"

"I might."

"Then might I say that if you wished to join, I'm certain Starfleet would greatly benefit from your knowledge and experience," Taurik informed him candidly.

"I'm sure they might. I'll look into it." The Doctor hopped from one foot to the other. "Have they, uh... 'beamed' the sample over, yet?"

The chief engineering officer checked the console display. "The transport is commencing, now, Doctor."

A shimmering blue light appeared and a jagged section of the freighter's hull materialized upon the sensor panel.

On it in an instant, the Doctor reached into his inside suit pocket and pulled out his sonic screwdriver, then from the side pocket, he pulled out a set of white spectacles. One lens was red, and the other blue. He peered at the twisted metal and grinned uncontrollably. "Oh, yes! This has a pan-dimensional signature!"

His screwdriver was lifted over the hull; it's bright blue light and high-pitched trill sounding off quickly. "Dalek. And either they've upgraded their gunsticks... I mean, based on the level of damage, these Daleks are from before the Time War."

"Time War?"

The Doctor straightened his posture. "Long story. Suffice to say, this is enough to convince me you've got a bigger problem on your hands."

Taurik tilted his head. "What do you mean, Doctor?"

After turning to face Taurik, the Doctor sighed. "Well, a group of Daleks tend to pepper their target with multiple strikes. And their armor is suited for spaceflight at sublight speeds. The attack damage that your Commander Blake provided with her analysis is spot on with a typical attack pattern. However..."

When the Doctor went silent in thought, Taurik prompted him, "However...?"

"I'm sorry," said the Doctor as he removed his red and blue specs. "I'm so sorry. No single, or even a large group of Dalek armor could do this kind of damage." He shook his head as he spoke the last words of his sentence. He folded his arms over his chest, with his sonic screwdriver in one hand and the specs in the other.

He continued, "I'm afraid they've brought a ship through that rift. The damage suggests it might be a heavy cruiser-class ship, which carries ship-mounted disruptors and ship-to-ship missiles."

Taurik narrowed his eyes at the new information. "How many Daleks man a heavy cruiser-class ship?"

The Doctor rubbed his forehead. "Over twenty-five hundred Daleks in full battle armor."

Consternation and the Doctor

Chapter Four: Consternation and the Doctor

NCC-74705 (USS *Bellerophon*)

Stationary near NGP-113424 (SS *Queen Victoria*)

Captain's Ready Room

Stardate 65540.1

Captain Erisa Magambo read the recent report from Starfleet Command. The Federation starship *Eagle* was making good time and should arrive ahead of the other starships inbound. They managed to find themselves in a better starting point than the others. Having the added support from the other ship gave her hope that they might resolve the situation with slightly less difficulty.

The Doctor's presence also seemed to help ship's morale under the circumstances. He spent some time in the mess hall and managed to bring with him some cheer. All reports from the officers below indicated that he was very charismatic and well-liked by the crew. Unfortunately for Magambo, the unknown quantity of this Doctor was too much for her to overcome and simply accept that he suddenly appeared and provided assistance. In her experiences in Starfleet, too good to be true often was.

She studied the screen atop her desk intently. All of her attempts to find out more information about the Doctor failed. The Starfleet Security database held some records of the Doctor's previous appearances. All mentions were redacted from the official logs at the time. Redacted by the very admiral she took her orders from.

"Computer," she inquired, her voice resonating off of the bulkheads of her ready room. "I would like a database of all records of any mention of a person known as 'The Doctor.'"

"Working," replied the computer. Whatever it did, it took a long while for the computer to finally respond. "Records search completed. Database contains over six hundred trillion records."

Magambo's eyebrows rose. "Display first ten rows of records on this station, please."

The display listed the entries as commanded. Each one referred to an oral record using the words "the doctor."

Magambo sighed. "Computer, reset the database. New parameters: locate any entries that refer to a person named 'The Doctor,' and also mentions a circa 1960s police box from Great Britain."

"Working."

The captain moved toward the replicator and retrieved a mug of coffee while the computer made its audio sounds as it scanned the records again. When the compute reported it had completed the search, this time the list was far less in total.

"Three results?" she said to herself. "On this screen, please."

The first result was a heavily redacted report by the USS *Potemkin* over thirty years prior. The report was written by the admiral once again, back when she held the rank of Commander. Her report was signed off by the ship's commanding officer and the then-Chief of Starfleet Security. The report centered around a rift in the space-time continuum and the appearance of a blue box in the ship's shuttlebay.

No images of the Doctor existed within the records for her to compare to, but it was clear from his involvement that they were able to close the rift before it posed a threat to everyone living in this continuum. No more information was provided, and it took all of Magambo's considerable clearance to even read it.

The other two listings held the same heavily-redacted information. Vague mentions of another rift in space and time, the appearance of the Doctor, and a successful closure. Nothing about any threats to Federation space by any of the reports, though that information could also be hidden by the redacted portions of the files.

"Computer, save this database and let's start fresh. This time, please scan for any references to a 'Dalek.'" She spelled the term for the computer, "Delta-Alpha-Lima-Echo-Kilo."

"Working. No records found."

The speed of the computer's response startled her. "Pardon?"

"No records found," it repeated, in the same quick tone as before.

The captain rubbed her forehead. She allowed her frustration to creep into her tone, "Computer, reset database. Perform a thorough scan of Starfleet records for previous search term."

"Working. No records found."

"Computer, delete new database. Let's go with a simple inquiry. Do any records exist with the term 'Dalek'?"

"Affirmative."

"And may I see those records?"

"Negative. Access restricted to X-Ray-One or higher."

"I possess X-Ray clearance for the duration of this mission."

The computer's assessment disagreed, "Magambo X-Ray clearance provisional at present. Clearance does not provide access to records requested."

She muttered, "Of course not." In a louder tone, she said, "Computer, cancel request and present inquiry."

"Acknowledged."

Within the ship's mess hall, Ensign Coralie Picard took in the smell of her usual breakfast. A mug of coffee, some fresh fruit, and a recently-baked croissant sat before her upon the tray. She flavored the coffee with milk and sweetener as she always did.

"What's all this, then?" asked a new voice.

Coralie glanced upward into the smiling face of the Doctor. "Oh, it's you."

The Doctor spun a seat around so he could rest his arms across the back as he straddled it. He gave her a wriggling of his fingers as he said, "Hello. I'm just going to sit here and watch you eat your breakfast."

"Suit yourself," she said with a shrug.

"Did I do something to upset you?"

She shook her head. "No, it was nothing you did." Coralie stalled by drinking her coffee and biting into a slice of cantaloupe.

"It was something someone did."

She played with the swirl in her coffee with a stirrer as she considered what she wanted to tell this odd man. "This is kind of difficult to admit."

He waited patiently and simply stared at her with nothing more than a held smile upon his lips.

Coralie dropped the stirrer and let it rest against the side of the mug. With a glance toward the bulkhead to avoid eye contact with him, she sighed and said, "I guess I just thought maybe my career would be more than simply cataloging cargo bays and inventorying closets day-in and day-out. I expected it to be more."

The Doctor listened to her speak and then gave her a nod. "Well, I suppose you can't say that everyone doesn't need updated catalogs and inventories. But it's a lot less glamorous, I'll agree."

"When I applied to the Academy, I was told about all the wonders of the galaxy and being part of something bigger than myself."

"It sounds noble. But look at where you are right now," said the Doctor, pointing toward the viewports. "You're out among the stars. I'd imagine that a majority of your Federation live on planets, doing their own thing and living their own lives?"

Coralie nodded succinctly. "Sure."

"Well, then. Perhaps you've gained more than you realize."

She allowed herself a smile. "Perhaps."

He smiled in return. "So, tell me more about this Starfleet."

She bit into her croissant and chased it with a sip of coffee. "What do you want to know?"

"Well, like how long it's been around and all that."

"Starfleet was founded in 2161, as part of the Federation charter. Though, the original exploration group was known as the United Earth Space Probe Agency, or UESPA," Coralie began. "Eventually, UESPA and Starfleet began to overlap with their programs and so one group was merged into the other after almost 100 years."

"And I'm sure you've faced down a number of antagonists since then?"

Coralie nodded. "Quite a few, actually. The Klingons, the Romulans, the Cardassians..."

The Doctor wagged his finger at her. "And all this is the culmination of those wars. The new technologies developed because of it."

She looked very uncomfortable in admitting that to be true, but with a slow nod, she told him, "That's one way of putting it, I suppose, yes. But, I prefer to view the periods of peace as the force for good."

"Even in that sentence, you still have to use the word 'force' in the context of that good. I think it's better to not use force to get the peace."

She frowned. "I agree, but if only all the other factions in the galaxy felt the same way. I think it would be best for all." She offered her fruit to him.

He accepted the fruit and picked up a grape. "That's what I like about humans. Even though you lot seem to like your weapons and your wars, at the very core of you all, you understand the need for peace. You're the reason why I travel through Earth's timeline.

"Well! At least, *my* Earth's timeline."

Coralie asked, "Only Earth's?"

The Doctor scratched at the back of his head. "For the most part, yeah. Don't often find myself on other worlds, because the history's kind of boring..."

"And you travel alone?"

"Not all the time. I'm alone right now because Donna had-" The Doctor stopped to consider his words. "Let's just say that sometimes I have a companion and sometimes I go it alone."

Coralie finished her coffee and set the empty mug back on the tray. "How many companions have you had?"

The Doctor glanced away, toward the ceiling. "Oh, well, quite a few."

"Anyone recent?"

He fixed a stare at her. "I just recently said goodbye to a woman named Donna Noble. She had to return home with her family."

"Sounds like you didn't want to say goodbye."

"I didn't."

She lowered her tone to a conspiratorial level. "Did you and her...?"

"Oh, no! Not in the slightest!" he protested automatically. Then, he smiled and shook his head. "Funny, that sounds odd coming from just me. Usually we'd both say that at the same time. I'd gotten used to that."

Coralie gave him an understanding smile. "But it's a good thing she went back home, right? To be with her family and friends?"

The Doctor nodded slowly, his eyes cast in the middle distance. "Of course. She needed to be with them."

"We all do, from time to time." She ran her finger around the rim of her mug and watched as the vibration played with the surface tension of the coffee inside. "Do any of your companions ever come back to travel with you?"

"Sometimes they do. For a short while. But I think after they leave and return to their lives, they remember all the things that they forgot to miss while they were out traveling with me among the stars," he said slowly. "And there's always the off-chance that they might travel with me so long that they let their lives slip away."

"And what of your life, Doctor?" asked Coralie, trying to change the subject. "Your life slips away in your ship, too. Surely your family misses you. Do you get to pop back home and say hello from time to time?"

The Doctor shook his head. "I haven't got any family, anymore. I used to. I had a daughter and a granddaughter."

"You live in an empty house on your home world?"

"No, I live in the blue box sitting in your cupboard."

"And what planet is home?"

"That gets a little more complicated than it needs to be, but suffice to say that my home world doesn't exist anymore."

She frowned. "What do you mean? Why not?"

The Doctor rolled his eyes toward the ceiling as though he's explained this more than enough for his liking. "My people fought a war, a time war. In the end, their victory was a costly one, and it resulted in nothing but terrible destruction..."

"I'm sorry," Coralie said in a small voice. "I didn't mean to bring up bad memories."

He waved her off and folded his arms while leaning back in his chair. "You didn't know. Think nothing of it."

They sat in silence for a moment, while Coralie's hands found themselves in her lap with her shoulders lifted nervously around her neck. She finally gathered enough confidence to ask, "Who were they fighting?"

The Doctor leaned forward and his eyebrows lifted high. "Hmm?"

"Your people. Who were they fighting?"

"Oh!" He grinned. "The Daleks."

"The *Daleks*?! The ones who came through the rift?"

"Oh, yes. And to underline the seriousness of the threat they pose to your timeline, it took the entire resources of the Time Lords to keep them

in check and even then... it wasn't quite enough."

"What do you mean?"

He sighed. "I mean that even though they should be completely gone from the universe, they always seem to find a way around that. Chance and circumstances seem to always favor their ability to subvert all the work we've done."

"I don't understand."

"Are you sure you want to?"

Coralie considered that, given the tone the Doctor used when asking that. Almost like a dare. "Yes, I do. Tell me."

The Doctor leaned forward now, his hands forming a steeple upon the mess hall table. "After the Time War, there was a cult of four Daleks that managed to traverse the void into my timestream and attempt to release the prisoners from that war. I had to stop them with my companion, Rose Tyler."

Again, she gave the Doctor a sidelong glance and made a subtle implication. "Rose Tyler, eh? You said her name a little differently then you had with Donna Noble."

For the first time since she had met him, he actually stammered, losing that usual air of self-confidence he exuded with every step he took.

"Y-Yes, well... she was very special."

"Did you... love her?"

The Doctor said nothing. He cast his eyes down toward his hands and sighed.

She sensed it was more than just a sore subject. "Anyway, you stopped them. What happened?"

"When we sent them back to the Void, Rose nearly got sent there herself. But her dad stepped in at the last second and whisked her away to a parallel universe," he explained. "There was no way to return her, but she was lucky to have her mother and father there waiting for her. She's not alone."

Coralie furrowed her brow. "Sorry, wait a minute."

"Yes?"

"So, she got sucked into a parallel universe, but it was okay because her family was already there waiting for her? How did that happen?"

"Well, see, her father was originally from another timestream," he started and then stopped. "Kind of like this, actually. Except this was more in the past than it was in the future. See, we originally ended up in the other timestream, first. And we had to combat another kind of enemy, the Cybermen."

"The *Cybermen*?"

"Yeah, I know, but stay with me on this."

"The Cybermen."

"Yes."

"Okay, sorry. Just trying to figure that one out. I presume they're men who're... cyber-like?"

"Actually, they were former humans who were sort of cannibalized into a metal armor frame."

"Sounds wonderful," she said while rolling her eyes. "The Cybermen were causing trouble, then?"

"They were. They managed to utilize the communications network as a means toward controlling the population of the entire planet. We had to remind them of who they were and what they were doing and it finally returned to normal," he told her. "Well, after a fashion, I suppose."

"The way you explain things, I feel as if I'm missing the real truth about what happened. It's like you're explaining it to me as though I were there."

He grinned toothily. "Yes, well, if I had the time to tell you every little adventure I've been on in my existence, then I would need about fifty years or so to do it."

His joviality was infectious. She chuckled. "Fair enough, I guess. But I have a hard time believing that a man of your relative youth would have over fifty years of adventures already. Unless you got an early start or something."

The Doctor chuckled. "Looks can be deceiving. I'm well over nine hundred years old."

"Are you related to the El-Aurians?"

"Who are they?"

"Long-lived species. They're called Listeners."

"Why's that?"

"They have sort of an ability that kind of makes you want to tell them everything about you. They have a way of making you feel at ease."

The Doctor shrugged. "I'm not really an El-Aurian. I'm a Time Lord. But we kind of change ourselves a bit from one life to another."

"Like a Trill?"

"What's a Trill?"

"Symbiotic species," she explained. "They share their lives with a long-lived symbiont that resembles an Earth slug. As each host dies, the symbiont is passed to a new host. Technically, they could live for hundreds of years and I believe some are older than you."

The Doctor considered that. "I suppose it's the same, except I don't have a slug inside me. Whenever this body's cells are at the end of their life cycle, or damaged to the point of death, I can regenerate myself."

"So you'll always be reborn?"

"In a manner of speaking, yeah. My body undergoes a complete metamorphosis, and my personality does as well. So, when this body undergoes regeneration, it is a real death. All my memories and knowledge are passed to the new body's mind. But the person I am right now will cease to exist."

Coralie's expression turned to one of sadness. "That sounds a bit morbid. Doesn't it?"

He reached over for another grape and popped it into his mouth. "It's part of my physiology."

"There's a whole race of you in your continuum?"

"There were. I'm the last, now."

"I'm sorry. What happened?"

The Doctor sighed and looked at his hands briefly. "A very large-scale war between the Time Lords and the Daleks. The result was the destruction of both races, and I survived alone."

Coralie tilted her head. "But if the Daleks were destroyed, then how can they be here now?"

"The Daleks have temporal abilities like I do. So, these Daleks may not be the same Daleks from that war. They could also be Daleks from an alternate continuum or timeline." He shakes his head. "But it seems like no matter how many times I deal with them, or how many times I think I have them beat, they always seems to pop up when I least expect them."

She reached over and touched his hand. "We feel that way about the Borg."

The Doctor looked down at her hand for a moment before wrinkling his nose and asking, "The Borg? Who're they? Swedes with a bad attitude?"

Lieutenant Commander Taurik completed another set of simulations using *Bellerophon's* weapons against the specifications provided by the Doctor. Again, the ship would be overwhelmed by a direct attack from the Daleks. The battlecruiser alone would be a challenge, but should they launch their entire compliment of Dalek armor, their shields would fall within thirty minutes and the hull shortly after.

Toshiko watched the last five simulations and sighed. "I can see why you might be a tad frustrated."

"Vulcans do not feel frustration," assured Taurik. "I must admit, however, to experiencing a bit of futility in continuing along these lines. Without additional fire support, this ship will not stand for long in a direct confrontation, based on the available data."

She proposed, "Perhaps the data is faulty?"

"The data provided by the Doctor is anecdotal; however, I have factored in the information gathered by the attack on the outpost and the freighter." Taurik moved his fingers over the master systems display and focused on the shield generators. "In every simulation run, the generators fail and the hull is compromised."

Toshiko ran a hand through her hair as she spoke, "Even if we provided the generators with additional power, all we would be doing is delaying the inevitable. What we need is to either bolster the defenses by altering the shields, or increase firepower to destroy them before they do too much damage."

Taurik merely inclined his head slightly at Toshiko's analysis. "I have been analyzing the firing patterns, and it would seem that the Daleks like to envelope their target and overwhelm them with a massive opposing force."

"Wait a minute, sir. What about..." Her fingers flew over her PADD in a near-blur as she called up data and scanned through various documents. "I recall reading a paper on a new armor system that *Voyager* brought back with them from the future."

With his eyes narrowing, Taurik replied, "That information is classified, Specialist."

"Classified protocols are nothing more than a series of obstacles to overcome, sir."

"I must warn you-

"I found it." Toshiko flipped her PADD toward Taurik and smiled. "Ablative armor. It stood up to the Borg pretty nicely until they adapted. And something tells me that the Daleks are not quite as adept at adapting as the Borg. Could we implement something like this?"

Taurik's attention distracted for the moment, he accepted the proffered PADD and read through it. "This... may be possible. We would first need to take the shield generators offline and route the power grid to feed into the armor generators. However, given our current circumstances, I doubt the captain will allow us to go without defensive systems long enough to install them."

"I'm not the right person to talk to," Toshiko admitted. Her specialty was computer systems, not shields and armor. "I defer to your expertise, sir."

"On the contrary, Specialist," Taurik said as he kept his eyes on the PADD's display, "I believe you to have intelligence beyond your area of expertise. I would hardly be surprised if you applied for a commission as an officer in Starfleet. You would do well."

Toshiko blushed. "Thank you, sir. That's... a high compliment."

"We must speak to the captain on this."

Her eyes widened. "On my application to become an officer?"

"My apologies for not including context. We must speak to the captain on implementing this armor generator." Taurik moved for the exit and called to her, "Please join me, Specialist."

Captain Magambo and the Doctor listened to Taurik and Toshiko's plan intently. Once completed, the captain asked her first question:

"How long?"

Taurik's features did not change as he spelled out the work involved. "I believe that the total estimate of time needed to complete the new systems would be at least three days."

"And in that time, you would require the shield generators offline?" asked the Doctor. He looked between Taurik and Toshiko.

Toshiko said nothing, instead allowing her superior officer to speak.

"It may not be necessary for the shield to be offline for the whole of the three days, but as we bring the armor generators online, it's possible that we may require some time for them to be tested as we adapt them to the power grid," answered Taurik. His eyes moved from the Doctor to the captain as he finished his last sentence. "Sir, I realize we would be taking a tremendous risk, but given the current data gathered from our simulations, I don't see how we can do otherwise."

Magambo considered this proposal and stared at the desktop display. "Work out a timetable for the next three days, with minimal impact to the defensive systems. And I would like to employ a hard cutover between the new system and the conventional one, should the need arise."

"Aye, sir. I will keep you informed of our progress."

"Very good." Magambo turned her attention to Toshiko. "Please remain behind, Specialist. You're dismissed, Commander."

Taurik opened his mouth to reply, but thought better of it and withdrew as the captain requested. The non-commissioned officer stood alone with the Doctor and the captain; she wore a chagrined expression upon her face.

"I realize that Commander Taurik finds your assistance most valuable, Specialist Sato," began the captain sternly. "It is for that reason that I will not place you in the detention center until we reach starbase. I am very well aware that Taurik would never abrogate Starfleet regulations surrounding classified data in such a fashion. But you and I, we've been down this road before, haven't we?"

Toshiko's voice was barely above a whisper. "Yes, sir."

The Doctor placed his hands in his trousers. "Under the circumstances, Captain, I'm sure we can appreciate the specialist's ingenuity."

"Doctor, I'll thank you to let me conduct this conversation," Magambo smoldered in her seat at the unwelcome interruption.

"Funny thing about that," said the Doctor with a smile. "According to your own Starfleet people, I'm to be treated like an admiral, yeah? I know this isn't my timestream, but I'm fairly sure an admiral has more rank than a captain."

Magambo ground her teeth. "Oh, now you want rank?"

"Well, you know... when it suits me, sure. It suits me right now, Captain."

"Very well, Doctor. I will respect the authority given you by the admiral," Magambo said with a heavy sigh. "But, even an admiral would give me latitude to deal with such an egregious breach of security."

"May I remind you, Captain, that this particular breach should prove useful?"

"If it works."

Toshiko asked, "Sir, should I go?"

The captain pressed her lips together and nodded. "Return to your duty, Specialist. I will allow the ends to justify the means, in this instance."

"Sir?"

"She means that if this doesn't work, then don't be surprised if you are court-martialed for your misconduct," the Doctor supplied. "Incentive to really make this work, yeah?"

Toshiko nodded several times in quick fashion.

"That will be all, Specialist. You're dismissed," said Magambo. Following Toshiko's departure, she turned her attention toward the desktop terminal and began using it. "If you don't mind, I need to finish reading reports."

The Doctor studied the artwork upon the bulkhead as the captain worked quietly at her desk. His eyes wandered over the oil and canvas, noting the lines and admiring the raw passion of it. The artist had something to say and the Doctor listened. Without waiting for the captain to say something, he pointed at the painting and asked, "Might I ask who the artist is?"

Captain Magambo turned her head to glance at the subject of the Doctor's question and then returned to her work. "My niece, Emily. She is studying at the San Francisco School of the Arts."

"She's quite talented," the Doctor said matter-of-factly. He turned back to back Magambo and took a seat in one of the chairs facing the desk.

Magambo eyed the Doctor as his feet propped atop the edge of her desk and his hands laced together behind his head. "Thank you. I agree. And now if you wouldn't mind, I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't use my desk as an Ottoman."

The Doctor ignored her remark. "I presume you've spoken to your supreme military minds regarding the Daleks?"

"Starfleet is not a military organization, Doctor," Magambo replied evenly. "We are primarily an exploratory body."

"And if we were to go back in time and ask Cortes and Pizarro, they might say the same thing." The Doctor reconsidered his words, "And in fact, they have."

"Regardless," she bit off her reply, "I can assure you that we do not impose our way of life on others." Magambo rose from her seat and turned the desktop terminal around to face the Doctor. "Five additional starships have been dispatched. However, at maximum speed they will not arrive for at least six days."

The Doctor frowned. "Your ships are impressive, but the mean distance is still a problem for your method of propulsion. Five ships may not be enough, if the Daleks have determined a way to take this universe for themselves."

"I believe that six Starfleet vessels will be more than a match for a single Dalek battlecruiser." She did not bother to keep her confidence from her tone.

"I sincerely hope you're right, Captain."

The droning tone of a red alert began to sound, and the crimson lights appeared in the corners of the ready room. "Red alert," said the voice of Martha Jones over the address system. "All hands to battlestations."

Without hesitation, the two of them arrived on the bridge. Martha, Gwen, Ursula, and Ethan resided at their duty stations. "Captain, the Daleks have attacked a colony less than five light-years away."

"Number One, recall the away teams. Mister Pope, as soon as they're aboard, divert to the colony at maximum speed." Magambo turned to the operations station and said, "Mister Blake, contact Starfleet Command and apprise them of the new development."

Ursula nodded. "Transmitting now, sir."

Martha informed the bridge, "All away teams returned."

"Execute course, Mister Pope."

The stars moved across the main viewscreen as *Bellerophon* turned toward its new destination and entered subspace. Pope answered, "Now entering the star system, sir. Estimated time of arrival in less than forty seconds."

The Doctor breathed, "My word."

"Starfleet Command is transmitting, Captain," reported Ursula. "Starship *Eagle* is arriving ahead of schedule. ETA to our position is five minutes."

Pope announced on the heels of Ursula's words, "Now entering the solar system, sir."

Gwen called out, "I have the enemy vessel in orbit of the colony, Captain! They're sending down... a large number of... I'm not sure."

The Doctor moved quickly, using the part of the bridge superstructure to wind his way around to see the information on Gwen's display. "Those are Dalek armored units. The same ones that came through the rift at your outpost."

Magambo nodded, but did not turn to look at the Doctor. "Maintain present course, Mister Pope. Mister Cooper?"

Gwen replied simply, "Sir?"

"Lock weapons on that ship and prepare to engage."

"Aye, sir."

Magambo rose from her seat and approached the viewscreen until she stood behind Pope. With her arms folded across her chest, she said, "Mister Blake, inform *Eagle* that they will be late to the party.

Open Fire

Chapter Five: Open Fire

NCC-74705 (USS *Bellerophon*)

Approaching the Yault V colony in Federation space, Full Impulse Power

Main Bridge

Stardate 65541.2

Captain's Log

Supplemental

We have departed our position near the freighter Queen Elizabeth X to respond to a distress call coming from the Yault V Colony. All indications point to a Dalek attack. We are now entering the Yault system and will be providing assistance to the colonists once we're within range. Additionally, the starship Eagle is en route to provide support.

"Now entering weapons' range, Captain," reported Lieutenant Gwen Cooper from the tactical position. She raised a hand toward the upper part of her console and checked the status of the system. "I now hold weapons' lock on the main ship, sir."

"Have they taken notice of our approach?" asked Lieutenant Commander Martha Jones.

Ursula answered, "Negative, Commander. They appear to be focused on the colony. I show over two thousand Dalek mobile armored units approaching the surface. The main ship is firing at the colony." She tapped on the console and reported, "Getting an incoming hail from the colony."

"On screen," ordered Jones.

The screen shifted from the Dalek ship to that of a harried-looking, thin man in brown hair with hair at the temples. "This is Administrator Haft of the Yault V Colony to any Starfleet vessel."

Magambo rose from her seat and addressed the screen. "I'm Commander Erisa Magambo of the Federation starship *Bellerophon*. We're en route to lend assistance."

"Oh, thank you, Commander! We're being attacked by an unknown alien force! They have claimed this world for themselves and are literally using their weapons to kills us all!"

"Administrator," replied the captain calmly, "we're within the star system now and will be dealing with the enemy. Have you evacuated your people to the shelters?"

He nodded quickly. "I issued the order the moment they entered the atmosphere, but that doesn't seem to be stopping them one bit. We've already lost an entire shelter to these things, and more of them are entering the city."

The screen shook without warning and an explosion sounded off-screen. Haft's eyes snapped to the left as a look of terror replaced his worry. "They're here! Oh, my gods, they're here!"

A cacophony of distorted voices directed their rage toward Haft, and told him in no uncertain terms, "EX-TER-MI-NATE! EX-TER-MI-NATE!" A bright blue flash hit the man square in the chest and for a moment, everyone on the bridge could see his skeletal structure. When the flash died, Haft slumped over the desk and covered the visual pickup from the screen. The audio pickups delivered the cries of others and the firing of the Dalek weapons as they continued their onslaught.

The viewscreen returned to showing the Dalek cruiser in orbit of the colony, with its little armored units floating around it. The bridge was silent in light of the circumstances, and no one dared said a word. Not even the Doctor.

"Right. Let's get their attention," said Captain Magambo, not bothering to hide her displeasure. She returned to her seat and crossed her legs, while her eyes moved over to watch the data flowing over the screen in the center console. "Load forward torpedo tubes with quantum torpedoes and stand by to fire. Maximum yield."

"Tubes loaded, sir."

"Target their weapons system and fire phasers."

On the main viewscreen, the ship's phasers lanced out across the distance between them and touched against the main Dalek battlecruiser. The Dalek shields flared under the attack.

Gwen called out, "Direct hit, sir. I don't see any appreciable damage."

"Acknowledged, Lieutenant. Fire torpedoes." Gwen waited until the impact hit and reported, "They took some damage, sir. They're down to ninety-five percent output."

The Doctor frowned from behind Gwen and pointed at the console. "Is this the frequency being used by the... what did you call them? Phasers?"

"That's right," replied Gwen. "We're favoring the upper electromagnetic band, presently." She called up the phaser systems display for the Doctor, so he could examine it closely.

His fingers touched a few commands, and the phaser's frequencies shifted to an even higher band of distribution. "This might help a tick," said the Doctor. "Try firing, now."

Gwen fired once more, and the phasers not only flared the Dalek's shields, but they also managed to shake up the battlecruiser on the main screen. "Reading Dalek shield output to ninety percent, sir. Phasers are now being recalibrated to the Doctor's specifications."

"Not really my forte, using weapons," he admitted to Gwen. "But I've not much of a choice, here."

Ursula told the bridge, "I think we have their undivided attention, sir. They're moving off from orbit and on fast approach toward our position. Looks like the smaller units are also ascending to orbit and leaving the colony. I think we've halted their attack, sir."

Magambo and Jones shared a look of small triumph as they managed the best possible outcome of their attack. "Mister Cooper," ordered the captain, "fire at targets of opportunity!"

"Firing at targets of opportunity, aye, sir," replied Gwen. She programmed a new firing pattern to shift the forward banks to attack the battlecruiser while the banks amidships focused on the smaller ships as they approached *Bellerophon*.

"Mister Pope, I'm going to need a close-aboard approach to the colony," said Jones. She walked to stand behind him. "We need to beam the survivors up."

"Aye, sir," said Pope as he kept a close eye on the ship's position. "I can do that, sure, but I can't guarantee that I can fend off our attackers and keep us in orbit."

The captain said, "Let us worry about that, Mister Pope. Just fly the ship on that course on my word."

Pope replied, "Understood, sir. Course plotted and ready to engage on your order."

Ursula raised her voice, "Incoming fire!"

Ensign Coralie Picard manned the console inside the cargo bay. It was her duty station when battlestations was called by the captain. For the most part, during drills, all she had to do was make certain that the cargo hold was secure and none of the more dangerous elements being stored inside were in danger of causing damage to the ship. Luckily for her and the rest of the ship, nothing inside the hold was anything more than inert particles.

She wasn't alone; she had a full crew of five people with her. A non-commissioned officer and four crewmen. They also had their duties during this heightened state of readiness, but it was the first time they would man those stations during actual combat.

The deck shifted beneath her feet and she fell to the ground in spite of her tight grip on the console. One moment, she was using her access to watch the ship's sensor input, and in the next, the deck rose up so quickly she nearly hit her head were it not for her forearm. The pain of the sudden impact caused her entire body to tense as she lay upon the deck. The non-commissioned officer was then helping her back to her feet as she reclaimed the console for herself.

Bellerophon took a direct hit from the battlecruiser along the stardrive section, on the same deck as the cargo hold. The shields were holding, but it did not look like it would be for long. She took a reading from the navigation and operations consoles and saw that they were planning on rescuing the colonists by risking a close-orbit transport.

The ship took another hit from the Dalek battlecruiser and lurched, but not as violently as it had before. She managed to keep her balance by grabbing the console with both hands to steady herself and then return to gathering information. With one hand on the top of the console and the other flying over the controls, Coralie managed to get enough data on the present situation to come up with a plan of her own.

The Doctor's box sitting in the hold opposite from where she stood might be the key to keep *Bellerophon* in one piece. But she needed the Doctor, who was standing on the bridge, to even begin to execute anything. She turned to the non-comm and said, "Stay here and man your post. I'm going to the bridge."

Without waiting for the acknowledgement or protest of her order, she bolted from the cargo hold and found the nearest lift. Within minutes, the lift doors opened on the bridge and she stepped out just behind the tactical console and the Doctor.

"Mister Pope, ahead full impulse power on course," ordered the captain from the center seat.

As soon as the helmsman replied in the affirmative, Ursula said, "Incoming signal from *Eagle*, sir. Captain Bennett on the screen for you." She did not wait for the order to put the signal through, instead activating the screen herself.

The smiling face of Captain Wendell Bennett appeared and said, "We've been apprised of your situation, *Bellerophon*, and we're moving to engage your target."

Magambo returned the grin. "Glad you could make it, Captain. We'd appreciate some cover while we move to beam up the colonists."

Bennett nodded. "We'll do just that. Stand by."

The Excelsior-class USS *Eagle* literally launched every forward-facing weapon. Phasers and torpedoes fired in concert, hitting the Dalek ship directly.

Coralie tapped the Doctor on the shoulder and chucked a thumb toward the lift, but said nothing to him. He followed her back into the lift and they disappeared from the bridge.

"What's going on?" he asked.

"Your blue box down in the cargo hold," said Coralie. "Can it help us at all?"

The Doctor nodded. "It could, sure. We could use it to get out of here, but I don't think that'd look good for your career."

She shook her head. "That's not what I mean, Doctor. Can we use it to grab the colonists without risking the ship?"

He snapped his fingers and grinned madly. "Yes. Yes! We can use the TARDIS to bring the colonists to the ship! Brilliant!" When the lift doors opened, they both bolted toward the cargo hold where the TARDIS was being held.

The two security guards standing in front of the TARDIS snapped to as soon as Coralie appeared. "Sir, I'm sorry, but you need to return to your station. Captain's ordered us to guard this thing against all members of the crew."

"Yes, but I'm not a member of the crew," said the Doctor from behind her. "And I believe I have access to my own bloody spaceship. So step aside, would you?"

They did so, and both Coralie and the Doctor entered the TARDIS. She scanned the interior and realized that it was bigger on the inside. "What kind of ship is this?" she asked.

"It's a TARDIS," the Doctor replied. His tone suggested it was a standard answer to a tired question. "But this ship is capable of flying through space. I just wouldn't like to go up against a Dalek battlecruiser toe-to-toe, if you understand my meaning."

Coralie asked, "Doesn't it have shielding?"

The Doctor began to manipulate the center control station with the large clear cylinder in the middle. "It does, but the Daleks are adept at fighting TARDISes. And this TARDIS isn't even a battle TARDIS. It's a simple Type 40 TARDIS."

"Okay, I don't even know what the difference is, so I'll take your word for it." She stepped up behind him and offered, "How can I help?"

He pointed to what looked like a pump and said, "You can grab that handle and use the pump six times, and then twist that valve over about half way to the right."

She did exactly as he asked. "This is pretty... low tech for what you claim it does."

"That's because this isn't like your starship out there," the Doctor said with pride. "It doesn't have a central computer system or warp engines or bio-neural circuitry. This ship is alive, with a beating heart and soul in the center of her. And you need a living soul to manage your way through the time vortex."

"I have this sneaking suspicion that I'm about to get a crash course in how you do things," muttered Coralie as she twisted the valve half way to the right.

The Doctor touched a few buttons and then slammed a large breaker into place, as he grinned at her. With a quick twist of his neck, he exclaimed jubilantly, "Oh, yes!"

Eagle made a good show of it. Their weapons seemed to rain down upon the Dalek ship, impacting their shields significantly. The Dalek armored units danced around the Excelsior-class starship and firing their gunsticks to try and drain the shields down to a point where the Daleks could destroy the ship or board her easily.

Bellerophon continued to fire, while the phasers continued to dogfight with the smaller units.

"Sir, they're too fast for the phasers," Gwen reported as she held on to her console under the impacts of the Dalek weaponry. "I can lock on, but the moment I fire, they evade quickly."

"Damage reports coming in from all decks, sir," added Ursula. "*Eagle* is attempting to draw their fire, but the smaller units are dividing themselves between us and them."

Magambo frowned. With both ships under direct attack, they would not be able to lower their shields in order to use the transporter. "Mister Pope, I'm going to need a high-output warp jump from you in a moment."

"Aye, sir."

"Mister Cooper, prepare two cobalt devices for deployment at close range," said the captain as she turned to reinforce her order with a stern glance toward Gwen.

In response, Gwen shook her head. "But, sir--"

Jones joined with her own displeasure. "Captain!"

"I know the risk, or else I wouldn't have ordered it!" Magambo cut the both of them off with a raised voice and her right hand. "Carry out my

order and stand by for my command to fire!"

Cowed by the captain's ire, both officers turned to do as she bade. Gwen somberly noted, "Cobalt devices standing by, Captain."

It's Bigger on the Inside

Chapter Six: It's Bigger on the Inside

The Doctor's TARDIS

In the Time Vortex, en route to the Yault V Colony's Main Shelter.

Control Room

Stardate Not Applicable

Coralie watched as the Doctor manipulated the various controls. The TARDIS had nothing approaching the realm of stabilization; the entire ship moved about like a butterfly on a lazy flight. The same loud scraping sound she had heard within the confines of the cargo bay that fateful day resonated within the room. She tried her best to remain seated on the plush couch off to the side of the center console, but several times she found herself back on her feet as the TARDIS continued to buck her about.

"Hold on!" called the Doctor as he literally grabbed a soft rubber hammer and began pounding it against the console with all of this strength. Every time the hammer made contact with the molded metal surface, it rung like a dulled bell, over and over again. When he finished with the hammer, he let it drop to the console and fall, swinging by the string tying it to the surface by the handle. He reached for a hand-crank and moved the handle in a circular motion several times and then called out to her, "Just a few more seconds!"

In those seconds, she watched the Doctor move a lever up and down and then he slapped a large power switch into place. That was all it took.

The scraping continued for twice more before a loud noise like that of a vault door closing into place sounded and the TARDIS finally became still. The impact accompanying that cessation, however, launched her back onto the couch with such force that she thought for a moment that she might fall over the back of it as her legs reached up above her head so quickly.

With her feet firmly placed back upon the deck, she used the opportunity to reach over for her Type-II Phaser and replace it within the holster on her uniform belt. "A smooth ride, that was clearly not," she told him after making sure she looked presentable. "What do you call that kind of travel?"

The Doctor grinned uncontrollably. "The fun kind!" He was laid out upon the deck, enjoying the view of the vaulted ceiling of the TARDIS control room. With a roll of his back, he got to his feet and ran for the door while grabbing for his long coat. "We should be right in the middle of the largest shelter, a few minutes before the attack."

Coralie's eyes widened. "Before?"

The Doctor nodded. "The T in TARDIS stands for 'Time.'"

"This is a time machine?" she asked incredulously.

"Of course," he replied nonchalantly. "Did I forget to mention that?"

She fumed. "You did, yes. But..." she said, closing her eyes to calm herself, "let's just move on and go to the mission at hand. Do you have enough room in here for eight hundred colonists?"

"Plenty of room, yes. I could fit as many people as you need."

She checked her weapon and made sure it was ready, then moved for the exit. "Good, because we might need it." Coralie yanked open both doors inward and stepped outside into the darkly lit shelter.

The huddled masses were grouped in pairs and quartets, all waiting for the onslaught that was sure to come. Obviously, as the blue box began to materialize, all of them stood around it in wonder of what it could be. It was when she stepped out of the TARDIS and they saw her uniform, that they all cheered for the sudden appearance of their defensive organization. Several of them came up to her and asked her where she came from and whether several starships were coming to their rescue.

"My name is Ensign Coralie Picard from the starship *Bellerophon*." She continued to explain, "This is a special ship that will help us evacuate you from the colony before it's too late. Please form a single line and we will get everyone out of here as quickly as possible."

They needed no further enticing. Each colonist stood in line as though they were queuing up for a ride at an amusement park. Children were held by parents and the line stretched out along the edge of the shelter before curving back onto itself. Coralie held open the doors to allow them entry.

"Please keep calm," she told them as they walked briskly by her to get inside. The shelter held two hundred of the eight hundred sixty-eight colonists. "Don't run or push each other. There's plenty of time and room for everyone, all right?"

As soon as the shelter was emptied, she entered the TARDIS and nodded to the Doctor. "That's all of them. Let's move on to the next one."

They continued in that fashion: Appearing within the shelter, guiding everyone inside and then moving on until each shelter was finally emptied except for the governmental one. The Daleks managed to make it inside and kill the administrators before the Doctor had a chance to maneuver his TARDIS into place.

She asked, "Why not just go back in time before the Daleks break into their shelter and rescue them?"

"We can't alter history to such a degree. That part of the timeline has already been cemented. I'm sorry," he said to her with more than a hint

of remorse in his voice. With that, he threw the giant breaker into place and the TARDIS began to move about within the time vortex back toward *Bellerophon*.

The guards now standing in front of the empty corner of the cargo hold did not know quite what to do since the box disappeared before their very eyes. With the ship under attack, and their orders to stand watch in the hold, they were conflicted. Do they inform their superior that the box was missing? Or do they keep that part of the tale to themselves?

The tall guard turned to the shorter one and admitted, "I'm not sure I want to be the one to write that report."

"Oh. Great. So, I'm the one that has to-"

He raised his hands, palm outward, toward him in a form of surrender. "I'm not saying that."

The short guard's voice grew excitable. "Well, someone is going to have to go to the lieutenant and tell her what just happened."

"Are you crazy? She'd never believe it."

"I won't tell anyone if you won't," offered the short guard.

"Won't tell anyone? When the lieutenant calls down here and asks us what happened to the blue box, what do you propose we tell her? That the tall guy and Ensign Picard went in and then it just went away?!"

Before they could continue their conversation, they felt a slight breeze coming from the corner and heard an oscillating-pitch tone in the distance. A scraping noise soon followed until the blue box they were guarding began to flash into existence in the very same corner. When it finally solidified, the scraping stopped with a loud "SHUNK!" and then, all was quiet.

At least, for a few seconds.

The doors to the blue box opened with a loud creak and the Doctor appeared. "Well, hello, again! I hope you don't mind, but we brought back some friends of ours. And I do hope you'll forgive us for imposing."

Ensign Picard stepped out from behind the Doctor and began barking orders. "You might want to get out of the way. I have eight hundred some-odd colonists coming out right behind me."

The guards glared at her, as though she were insulting their intelligence. "No way," said the tall one, "you have eight hundred people in that little box."

Coralie asserted herself with a smile. "I'm dead serious." To prove her point, she moved out and a stream of people began pouring out of the blue box.

Shocked, both guards began moving toward the exit to make that call out to send more security to the cargo hold. By the time they completed their call for help, the cargo hold was filled to the brim with the Yault colonists, Ensign Picard, and the Doctor.

Captain Magambo stared, astonished, at Ursula Blake after she heard the news. "I'm sorry, she did what?"

"According to the report from security, Ensign Picard and the Doctor apparently flew that blue box of his to the colony and rescued all of the colonists. They're now in the cargo hold, being checked out by the medical section," Ursula said with a smile.

The captain shot a glance toward Jones. "Check it out, Number One." While she left to carry out the captain's order, Magambo told Pope, "Come about to relative course one-eight-zero Mark zero and engage at full impulse power."

"Aye, sir. Coming about."

"Mister Cooper, deploy one cobalt device in a mine formation," the captain said. "And reinforce the aft shields, because I think this is going to be more than a bit bumpy."

Gwen did so, and shifted the viewscreen to show their aft view. The device floated softly behind them and into the swarm of Daleks pursuing *Bellerophon* with their gunsticks. Instead of avoiding the device, however, they decided to attack it as though it were another enemy ship.

"Oh, no," said Gwen. "Sir-"

"I have eyes, Leftenant. Brace for impact!"

She barely got out the order before the device detonated and caused the whole viewscreen to glow white from the massive explosion. *Bellerophon* vibrated heavily from the shockwave so close to its rear shielding that Magambo lost her footing and fell to the deck near her seat. The ship's collision alarm wailed just over the sound of the ship groaning under the stress.

Gwen pulled herself back up from the deck and read the display. "Shields down to four percent, Captain!" she screamed in order to be heard. "Aft torpedo launchers are offline!"

The din faded away as the viewscreen returned to showing the rear angle of the ship. There was nothing behind them any longer except the stars and the curve of the planet below.

"Damage reports coming in from decks eight through twelve," reported Ursula. "No sign of the enemy attacking us. A large number of them

are retreating back to their mothership."

Magambo collapsed into her seat, breathing hard after experiencing such an ordeal. "Bridge to engineering."

"Engineering," said an unfamiliar masculine voice over the ship's intercom. "This is Lieutenant Lawson, sir. Commander Taurik was taken to sickbay. He fell from the second level and is pretty hurt."

In spite of the news, the captain did not miss a beat. "Very well, Leftenant. Make a full damage assessment and report to the executive officer as soon as possible. Send Specialist Sato to the bridge."

Lawson's response was immediate. "Right away, sir. Engineering, out."

The Doctor and Coralie made their appearance on the bridge as the lieutenant closed the channel. The ensign led the Doctor down into the command area before the captain and stood at attention, as though she were reporting for duty straight out of Starfleet Academy (which only occurred less than six months prior).

"Captain," said Coralie in a tight voice.

"Ensign," replied Magambo. "I do not have time to deal with your actions, presently. You will step aside and let us handle this crisis."

Coralie nodded, her eyes not making contact with her commanding officer. "Aye, sir."

"Sir, the Daleks are now concentrating on *Eagle*," reported Ursula in a worried tone. "They have penetrated *Eagle*'s forward shields and several Dalek armors are now boarding the ship."

The Doctor breathed, "No."

"It's all right, Doctor," said the captain confidently. "Starfleet will be more than a match for their small units. *Eagle* carries a full complement of marines aboard."

"I sincerely hope you're right, Captain, because the Daleks are the most ruthless species I've ever met." He stood behind Coralie and placed a hand upon her shoulder out of reflex.

She reached up with her own and squeezed it. She turned her head and shared a look of worry with him. "Is there anything we can do?" she asked in a low tone. "Can we go rescue them, too?"

The Doctor shook his head somberly. "I think it might be too late for that."

Ursula announced, "Incoming transmission from *Eagle*, sir. It's Captain Bennett."

"On screen," said Martha Jones.

The bridge of *Eagle* looked worse than it had when the ship first entered the system. Bennett wore a bloody scrape over his left eye, which was now closed due to the wetness dripping down the side of his face. "We've lost our shields and we're being boarded. We're hoping to contain them on some of the lower decks, but we've already lost a quarter of the ship to these bastards."

Magambo offered, "We can circle back around and lend assistance."

"No! You have colonists to carry safely out of the engagement zone, Captain," Bennett insisted fervently. "Continue on course to rendezvous with the fleet, and we will take out as many of these Daleks as we can."

An officer off-screen reported, "Captain, they've broken through the marine squads on decks eleven and ten. We have Daleks in the turbolift shafts approaching the bridge!"

"Arm yourselves!" called Bennett in a rough voice. "Computer, set auto-destruct sequence. Authorization: Bennett-alpha-one-one-five-destruct!"

Coralie shook her head in disbelief. She instinctively squeezed the Doctor's hand tighter. "Doctor..."

Another officer on *Eagle* concurred with his captain's action and the destruct sequence was set and ready for a countdown of two minutes. Just after the countdown began, the turbolift doors exploded onto the bridge and a single Dalek armored unit appeared within the visual pickup of the transmission.

"LIFEFORMS DETECTED!" it screamed at them. "EX-TER-MI-NATE! EX-TER-MI-NATE!"

Coralie could not watch any further. She turned around and buried her face into the rough fabric of the Doctor's long, brown coat. She heard the Dalek beam fire and the screams of her fellow officers dying under the indiscriminate gunstick. Soon after, the transmission went silent and only the computer counting down could be heard.

"RE-TREAT!" it screamed in its distorted voice. On the screen, the Daleks fired toward the bridge's upper dome and opened it up to space. They used the new exit to depart the ship in the quickest way possible. As the atmosphere vented into the vacuum, the bodies of those Starfleet officers flew out behind the Daleks.

Ursula reported in a stammering voice, "I-I'm sorry, sir. I'm reading no lifeforms aboard any longer."

There was no one left to stop the auto-destruct sequence. Within seconds, *Eagle* exploded.

The Fork in the Road

Chapter Seven: The Fork in the Road

NCC-74705 (USS *Bellerophon*)

En route to rendezvous point, Warp 9.975

Bridge Conference Lounge

Stardate 65541.5

Within the confines of the bridge's conference lounge, Captain Magambo and Lieutenant Commander Martha Jones sat at one end of the table while Ensign Coralie Picard and the Doctor sat at the other end. The other senior officers surrounded the table on either side, seated in their chairs. The warp-streaked stars that flowed in front of the ship moved one-by-one out of view as the ship propelled itself toward the rendezvous with the other Starfleet ships dispatched to deal with the situation.

"Commander Taurik is resting comfortable in sickbay," said Doctor Thann as he was finishing his report on the wounded and other medical matters resulting from their encounter with the Daleks. "His fall ruptured a number of internal organs, but due to the quick actions of his deputy, Lieutenant Lawson, our chief engineering officer will recover in under twenty-four hours."

Magambo nodded. "Thank you, Doctor Thann. Lieutenant Lawson?"

Lieutenant Everett Lawson, the now-acting chief engineering officer, snapped his head around to look at the captain. "Sir?"

"Your report on the project that Commander Taurik and Specialist Sato were working on?"

"Er, yes, sir." Lawson rose from his seat and took control of the viewscreen embedded within the bulkhead nearby. His brought his left hand up to wipe away the sweat atop his balding head, then addressed the officers in a stammering voice, "C-Commander Taurik's work was only preliminary, as you can see here. His intention w-was to begin cataloguing the technology against the available r-resources aboard ship. So far, the two m-most obvious choices were the ablative hull armor technology recovered by Voyager, and the remote p-possibility of converting our qua-quantum torpedoes to the mark one transphasics."

"Pardon me for interrupting, Captain," said the Doctor, "but if this technology was just sitting around in your computer the whole time, why hasn't Starfleet made use of it?"

All of the officers seated around the table gave each other uncomfortable glances. The captain explained, "Starfleet has deemed this technology to be in violation of the temporal prime directive. To employ it without precise care is to possibly damage the timeline."

The Doctor smiled. "This Starfleet of yours continues to impress me, Captain. Amazing."

"That being said," continued Magambo, "based upon my orders from the admiral, the restriction on that particular technology has been lifted for the duration of this crisis." She looked back to Lawson. "How soon can be deploy an ablative generator?"

Lawson nervously glanced around the room in an attempt to avoid eye contact with his intimidating captain. Finally, he settled for staring at the table while answering, "Sir, wi-without C-Commander Taurik to h-h-help guide the teams, we would need at least six w-weeks."

The news silenced the room as everyone considered a new plan or a new option to discuss. No one spoke for a long while, and the silence grew awkward as each officer expected the other to contribute something, anything, to the group. The Doctor used that opportunity to offer, "I'll do it."

Martha wore an amused expression on her face. "We appreciate the thought, Doctor, but you're not a Starfleet officer. You couldn't possibly understand how our systems work."

"Well, I may not be the expert on Starfleet design like Taurik is, but I'm pretty clever," the Doctor replied. His tone turned defensive, "The Martha Jones of my timestream would know that straight away."

"The Martha Jones of this timestream doesn't know you from Adam, so stop comparing me to someone else, yeah?" Martha's tone grew combative as she spoke each word.

The captain placed a hand on Martha's shoulder. "All right, now. Settle down, both of you." She rose from her seat and stared out of the viewport briefly. Then she spoke to it. "The Doctor will assist Lieutenant Lawson for the time being. And we will accommodate the Doctor's requests, per the admiral's order."

The Doctor wrinkled his nose at the mention of the admiral once more. "This admiral you keep referring to sounds like he might have some more information than he's letting on..."

"The admiral is female, Doctor, and it is her job to have more information than we."

"Does the admiral have a name?"

"She does," confirmed the captain. "However, she has issued orders that neither I nor anyone else aboard this ship shall mention her name to you for the time being."

"Bloody well nice for her, isn't it?" noted the Doctor in an annoyed and lowered tone. He folded his arms and leaned back into the chair.

Magambo ignored his remark and continued the briefing. "Thank you, Mister Lawson. Mister Cooper, what's our security status?"

Gwen lifted herself from her seat as she consulted her PADD. "Sir, we have issued quarters to the Yault survivors. We have also converted holodeck two into a set of dormitories. Given the methods the holodeck employs for distance and the treadmill effect, it appears to be rather successful in preventing clausterphobia nicely."

"Very inventive, Leftenant," noted Martha with a smile and a nod.

"Thank you, sir," replied Gwen though she did not share in the executive officer's smile. "That being said, we have also had a number of access attempts to some sensitive areas of the ship. No successful break-ins. People are just trying to determine where they can and cannot go."

The captain said, "A temporary problem. I intend to offload the colonists to one of the larger ships once we rendezvous. Anything else, Mister Cooper?"

"Yes, sir," Gwen said with a nod. "We've completed a full tactical analysis of the recent engagement, and the ship is just not strong enough to combat this force of Daleks. I've worked with the ship's computer, and it seems that given the attack patterns they use, starships are especially vulnerable."

The Doctor spoke before anyone else, "The Daleks are especially good at frontal assaults. In my experiences with them, it always took a bit of subterfuge in order to overcome their battle plans."

Every officer turned to look at him. Their expressions betrayed their high interest in how he did it.

"Well, most recently, a meta-crisis version of myself set them all to self-destruct by using their own technology against them," he said with a frown. "It wasn't my idea, but it was done."

Martha asked, "And... do we have access to this meta-crisis version?"

"Well... er, no, he's presently residing in a timestream different from my own. Obviously, not this one, either." The Doctor, chagrined, continued, "On another occasion, we used a human-Dalek hybrid group against them."

"Where can we find these hybrids?" wondered Gwen, as she rolled her eyes.

Again, the Doctor appeared to be more than a little disconcerted as he replied. "Oh, well... they were all killed when the Daleks opened fire on them. You know, my Martha was with me for that little adventure."

Martha leaned in to Magambo and muttered, "This is getting us nowhere."

"All I'm saying is that every time I've managed to outwit them, I didn't do it with weapons. Since a frontal assault will not work, it would behoove us all to plan for a different kind of attack," the Doctor said, placing his hands upon the top of the conference table and rising up to look at every officer as he spoke. "I realize that you don't know me, but if you did, I wouldn't have to constantly convince you that I'm trying to help you. My people have been fighting Daleks for nearly the whole of time!"

Captain Magambo stood up and stared at the Doctor as though he grew a second head from his neck. "No one at this table is doubting your claims, Doctor. The admiral has made it perfectly clear that you carry a tremendous amount of knowledge and experience in dealing with matter such as this."

The Doctor snorted. "Thank you. And thank you admiral, too."

Magambo's nostrils flared as she spoke over him. "However, I believe that experience may be best spent on assisting us in accomplishing the adoption of these new technologies. Once we have these new weapons in place."

"The Daleks will just swarm your ship, Captain as they did with *Eagle*. And as I've grown to like you people a lot, I'd hate to see you all die due to your inability to think outside traditional means."

"Doctor!"

He ignored her. "But far be it for me to try and tell you how to die. I'll help you with your armor, of course, but we'll see about the torpedoes. And maybe it'll work and I'll be happy to be proven wrong."

"Doctor!" Magambo tried again.

"Captain, you have no idea what you're up against!" The Doctor shouted her down.

"And I will gladly concede that and we can discuss this in private later, but you will not interrupt my staff meeting any further!"

The Doctor folded his arms across his chest, almost like that of a petulant child. He turned his seat around to face the bulkhead while the captain continued to speak.

"As the Doctor so persuasively pointed out, we need to investigate some changes to our tactics when we next meet the Dalek ship," said the captain, keeping her eyes upon the back of the Doctor's head. "To that end, Leftenants Cooper and Lawson shall work together with the Doctor to adapt the *Voyager*-type armor generators and transphasic weapons. Commander Blake, Commander Jones, you will need to stay on top of the refugees and ensure they continue to stay out from underfoot for the next day. Questions?"

No one spoke. They all stayed quiet or shook their heads.

Magambo nodded. "Very good. Dismissed."

As everyone, save Martha, lined up to leave the conference lounge, the captain's voice rang out one more time. "Doctor, Ensign Picard, please remain behind."

The Doctor turned to Coralie and he turned around to retake his seat. Coralie sat next to him as she had during the briefing.

Martha started, "I had a chance to speak with the security detail assigned to guarding the Doctor's ship in the cargo bay. They state that the Doctor used his authority to enter this ship, but may I ask what possessed you to follow him?"

Coralie opened her mouth, but the Doctor spoke ahead of her. "What does it matter? She saved over eight hundred people from the Dalek attack."

"Doctor, I asked you to remain behind to corroborate information," Magambo said plainly. "Please allow the Ensign to respond to the Commander's question on her own."

"It's all right, Doctor," Coralie assured him. To Martha, she said, "Sir, the Doctor went, at my urging, down to the cargo bay to retrieve his ship so we could use it to rescue the colonists at little risk to *Bellerophon*."

Martha leaned forward in her seat. "You did not answer my question, Ensign."

"Sir, nothing possessed me other than the need to protect my ship and rescue those people."

"Why did you not inform the bridge of your plan?"

"Sir, at the time, I felt that your attention would be best spent defending the ship than determining permission," Coralie admitted, and with every word she spoke, she already knew what their response would be.

"You decided to withhold vital information from your commanding officer, Ensign," Martha's voice grew a deliberate edge. "You do not have the right to make that decision for the captain, nor me. You are an ensign with six and a half months of experience as an officer, and you do not substitute your judgment for ours. Am I being understood, Ensign?"

Coralie's head snapped to the side as though she'd just been slapped in the face. She willed her eyes to not water, but she felt the tickle in the back of her throat as it began to constrict. "Yes, sir."

"Thank you, Number One," said the captain, softly. "I think the Ensign is aware of her misstep."

Martha acceded to Magambo's tone of voice. "Aye, sir."

"In light of the result of your actions, I must applaud your initiative, Ensign. You saved a majority of the colony, and at little risk to your ship," said the captain plainly. "I am recommending you for the Citation for Conspicuous Gallantry. I've been assured by the admiral that it will be confirmed without objection or modification."

Coralie shared a grin with the Doctor as the captain praised her. "Thank you, sir. I appreciate your confidence in me."

"However," continued Magambo, "you did depart this ship without permission, and you executed a plan without seeking approval from your superior officer. Further, you abandoned your duty station without consent from your superior officer. This constitutes an egregious and flagrant violation of both Starfleet regulations and my standing orders. Therefore, I will also be placing a formal letter of reprimand in your promotion jacket."

The news caused Coralie to slump in her seat at the mention of a formal reprimand. "Sir, I apologize, but isn't there any other way to deal with this? Non-judicial punishment?"

Martha spoke up at that point. "Non-judicial punishment, as non-permanent as that might've been, was felt to be far too light a resolution to such a deep problem with your discipline in your recent service."

The Doctor said, "But her actions saved the lives of so many people, Captain. Surely that should be taken into consideration."

"It was, Doctor, and I'll thank you not to intervene," Magambo replied sternly. Her eyes narrowed in the Doctor's direction, accompanied by a deep frown.

The Doctor tensed, but Coralie placed a warning hand on his arm and reflexively squeezed it. "It's all right," she assured him quietly. To the captain, she merely nodded and said, "I accept both letters in the vein in which they're written, but you'll forgive me if I hold the commendation in higher esteem."

Magambo tilted her head as Coralie spoke. "I shall withhold the second letter until after you're promoted to junior lieutenant."

"I... don't think that will be necessary, sir," Coralie said, keeping her tone even.

Captain and executive officer shared a confused look with one another before returning their attention to Coralie. "I beg your pardon, Ensign?" asked Martha.

Coralie gave them a hard look, but kept her voice light and respectful. "I said, sir, that I don't think it will be necessary."

"Explain yourself," intoned Magambo.

Swallowing hard, Coralie rose from her seat and stood at attention before her commanding officer. She stole a quick glance at the Doctor, who kept his gaze upon her with admiration in his expression. With a small smile toward him, she turned back to the other side of the long table

and said with conviction, "Captain, I will be tendering my resignation of my Starfleet commission. You may transmit your reprimand at your leisure."

Career Change

NCC-74705 (USS *Bellerophon*)
En route to rendezvous point, Warp 9.975
Turbolift Car B
Stardate 65542.1

Once they departed the conference lounge, the Doctor and Coralie entered the turbolift. They said nothing outside of their stated destinations. The Doctor was heading to main engineering while Coralie was going to her quarters.

All of a sudden, the Doctor began pressing buttons on the control panel near the door. Alarmed, Coralie shot her hand out to undo the additional stops he just programmed into the lift's journey between the decks. "What are you doing?" she said as she worked quickly.

"I was trying to find the emergency stop so I could talk to you, but none of my jiggery-pokery was working," said the Doctor. "I guess it must be because I'm in a different timestream."

"Computer, hold the lift," Coralie spoke the words in rapid-fire. Once the lift did as she commanded, she issued more vocal orders to clear all destinations except theirs and then she stood up and faced him. "Talk."

He wasted very little time. "Why did you resign?"

She didn't answer him right away while opening the distance between them to lean against the wall. "Because I liked what I did. I wouldn't be able to do that again. They're going to watch me like a hawk, now," she told him, equally as plainly as he asked the question. "And it's going to follow me everywhere I go. Every ship, every posting... every commanding officer is going to read that reprimand and prejudge me."

"So, what? Who cares what they think?"

She sighed. "In this life, in this career, the opinion of your commanding officer is sacrosanct. They say that ages ago, when man sailed the seas, the captain of a ship was the proxy for kings and emperors; that he alone controlled the destiny of those who served under him. That when he spoke, everyone trembled before the words from a god.

"Perhaps the definition has changed a few hundred years, later... but the sentiment hasn't. A captain of a starship has equal weight. And your career is made or broken with the whim of that person. Captain Magambo's reprimand so early in my career, in spite of the citation she promised me, speaks volumes above and beyond any medal one could possibly earn."

The Doctor considered that with a look toward the lift doors. "I understand. I'm not used to thinking along those terms."

Coralie nodded her head up and down once. Then she reached out with her hand to touch his gently. "Doctor, that life you lead is nothing short of incredible and maybe a little bit ridiculous. But, I'd like-

"I'm a Time Lord. It's how some of us choose to live," he said, very suddenly. "And if you trying to tell me that you want to come along-

It was her turn to talk over him. "I never said anything of the kind."

For the first time since she'd met the Doctor, he opened his mouth and said nothing. He also stammered. "W-W-Well, I assumed..."

"You assumed that I was resigning to go with you?" she did nothing to hide her amusement. "Talk about presumptuous. Computer, resume."

"I, er..." He closed his mouth and bowed slightly. "Sorry."

The lift jolted back into motion and shortly opened its doors on deck six. "You certainly are," she said, stepping out into the corridor. Before she was completely out of the way of the doors, she leaned against the frame and smiled. "But if you're thinking about inviting me on as your companion for some adventures in that blue box of yours... Well, let's just say that I could think of worse ways to spend my retirement."

The Doctor smirked, then shook his head at her. "Oh, you're good."

Coralie smiled at him and stepped back. "I'm not just good, Doctor. I'm fantastic." The doors closed on her wide grin. "See you later."

When she arrived at her quarters, two senior officers were waiting for her: Commander Jones and Commander Blake. They wore somber expressions on their faces when she first saw them, but the moment one pointed Coralie out to the other, they put on smiles and teeth for her as she approached.

"Commander," greeted Coralie with a nod. "Commander."

"Ensign," began Ursula, "might we come inside and speak to you?"

Coralie allowed herself a small frown, but she nodded and opened the door for them to pass in front of her before stepping inside herself. "How may I help you, sirs?"

Martha stole a quick look at Ursula, then let out a held breath. "Ensign, I wonder if you might reconsider your decision to resign."

Coralie moved about her quarters as though neither of them were there. She unzipped her uniform jacket and placed it around the back of the nearest chair. "I was going to get something from the replicator." She gestured with a hand as though she were offering to bring them a

refreshment.

"Nothing for me, thanks," said Martha quickly. Ursula shook her head.

Coralie shrugged and asked for a glass of iced coffee and then brought it back with her and sat down in the same chair that she used to drape her jacket. "I didn't realize that my resignation would cause such a problem for the senior staff. What exactly do you wish to discuss?" She was astonished that she held her tone as neutral as she did, given the previous level of intimidation she felt when these two officers interacted with her. She sat up a little straighter, no longer feeling the burden of expectation on her shoulders.

Martha sat down without permission and crossed her legs, "Ensign... er, may we call you Coralie?"

Coralie nodded and sipped from her cold glass.

"Coralie," Martha restarted with her eyes darting to the deck before returning, "we were both rather surprised by your sudden decision. We believe that perhaps you might be overreacting to the captain's reprimand."

"But I'm not," Coralie said, on the heels of the Martha's words. "I can assure you."

Ursula raised a hand. "Please, if you'll let her say her piece..."

Coralie shrugged her shoulders once more and cast a glance at the bulkhead. Because she was a very junior officer aboard *Bellerophon*, she did not rate a viewport looking out into the surrounding space.

"Thank you." Martha placed her hands on her lap. "I don't want to come off sounding like a nag, but I think we would be remiss if we didn't sit down with you and talk about this rash decision."

The executive officer's use of the words "rash" or "overreacting" stuck in Coralie's mind as attacks on her ability to make decisions for herself. She felt her temper rising as Martha spoke to her. "Of course, sir," she replied, containing her irritation.

Martha beamed. "Excellent."

Ursula, as Coralie's division head, spoke next: "I realize that the captain's decision to reprimand you was something of a shock. But, a reprimand does not spell the end of your career, Ensi-, er... Coralie."

Coralie was reminded of the conversation she had with the Doctor in the lift just minutes ago. Instead of responding, she nodded her head and bade them to continue to talk. She did not trust herself to speak under the circumstances.

"In fact, I know of a great many officers who've gone on to very successful careers in Starfleet, despite receiving a stern reprimand from their commanding officer," Ursula continued.

"A reprimand even before their first year of service is up?" Coralie was grateful that her tone was still neutral.

Both officers broke off their stares when Coralie asked her question. Obviously not.

"If I read my officer's handbook correctly, in order to receive a promotion to junior lieutenant, I need at least a clean record and the recommendations of both my commanding and executive officers, on the advice of my division head." Coralie heard a tremor in her tone on the last sentence and looked down at the ice cubes floating in her coffee. When she felt sufficiently composed, she added, "Even if the captain withheld her reprimand until after my promotion, the date on that reprimand won't go unnoticed."

Martha shifted uncomfortably in her seat. "That's a genuine concern. But not every CO in the fleet is going to react as you might think. Some are very reasonable."

"And now it's up to me to locate these reasonable captains and try to carve out a career for myself?"

"Not necessarily. I'm sure Captain Magambo would help you, if you intend to transfer." Martha leaned forward. "Is that your intention?"

"No, Commander," Coralie smirked as she spoke. "I intend to resign. So far, nothing either of you has said has convinced me otherwise."

Ursula stammered, "B-But why? That's what we're not understanding, Ensign. Why would you want to throw away four years of training and your future so suddenly?"

That outburst brought out a sigh from Coralie. She set her glass upon the nearby table and gave Martha and Ursula her undivided attention. "A reprimand from your commanding officer is message to me stating that she did not agree with my decision. And the thing is, sirs, I'd do it again the same way if I had to do it all over again. I wouldn't change a thing. The situation was tense, and I saw an opportunity and I seized it."

"No one is saying that you were wrong, Coralie," Martha replied with a hand raised.

"You were, sir. We were both up there in the conference lounge and in front of the Doctor and the Captain, and you said that I made a decision I had no business making. Well... obviously that's true or else the captain wouldn't be reprimanding me." Coralie's hand shook slightly as she reached for her glass and sipped from it again. She frowned slightly as she realized that during the course of the conversation, the coffee's taste was dulled by the ice melting.

"Be that as it may, I think that the Citation the captain is presenting you with will blunt any reprimand on your record." Martha and Ursula appeared to agree with that given their shared look. Martha smiled and laughed slightly as she continued, "An ensign with a medal in her first year of service will rise above those who've done nothing but cargo inventories for the-"

Ursula interrupted by clearing her throat and shook her head toward Martha.

Coralie smirked at the open misstep. "What Commander Blake is trying to say is that cargo inventories for the past six months are exactly what I'd been doing. It seems to me that taking action outside of my assigned duties was the only way to rise above the rest, right?"

"That's not exactly what I meant," Martha spoke in a chagrined tone. "Of course, performing the necessary duties of looking after the cargo stores is a vital function aboard a starship."

"Didn't sound like it, a moment ago."

"I obviously misspoke, Coralie. I apologize for my belittling of your duties."

"I didn't think you were belittling my duties, Commander. I think you're giving a rather candid analysis of how officers are perceived in Starfleet." Coralie rose from her seat and stood before them. "Though you prefer us to stand out amongst our peers, if you don't like the methods we use to do that, you'll be as quick to admonish as you are to praise."

Martha tried a different tactic. "When you attended Starfleet Academy, did you take Lieutenant Chantho's course on leadership and communication?"

"She's a Commander, now," Coralie replied. She folded her arms. "But yes, I did."

"Then you know about how key it is for all officers to communicate with each other. This ship and her crew work best when we all function together as a team," Martha said. Her lips curled up into a smile as she made her point. "The simple fact is that we all fail when those lines of communication breakdown. In your case, it wasn't so much as a breakdown as much as it was you failed to employ those lines in the first place. And that's why the captain reprimanded you."

"I'm aware of the reasoning, sir. I'm simply pointing out that there's a contradiction to your earlier point of standing out amongst your peers in order to get noticed," Coralie tried very hard to keep her tone humble.

"You can stand out within the confines of conduct expected from a Starfleet officer," Ursula reminded her softly, her barely-contained rage evident in her tone. "What you did was not just ignore those expectations, you obliterated them outright."

"Let us not employ hyperbole, now, Ursula," Martha raised a hand as she spoke. "We're trying to convince her to stay, not reiterate the reprimand."

"Quite right, sir. I apologize."

Coralie scrunched up her lips and then relaxed them. "But the sentiment is not lost on me. Obviously, we're at an impasse in agreeing on perspective. And I'm sorry about that. Really."

"No, don't be sorry for standing up for what you believe in, Coralie," Martha replied with a smile. She rose up from her seat and gestured for Ursula to follow her. "We have to return to duty, but might we have an opportunity later to discuss this further? I'm sure we can prevent this from becoming permanent."

Coralie returned the graciousness of her executive officer and smiled. "I'm not going anywhere, sir. You can find me at your convenience."

The Doctor smiled at Lieutenant Lawson. "So, I'm thinking that perhaps I should sit down and learn a little bit more than the cursory explanations that Commander Taurik was kind enough to provide me when I first arrived."

Lawson nodded, "Of course, sir. May I show you to one of our library computer terminals?"

"Certainly. And don't call me, 'sir.'"

"Yes, sir. Er, I mean, yes, Doctor."

"That's better." The Doctor followed Lawson to one of the terminals near the engineering master display screen and activated it.

Lawson pulled out the chair and offered it and when the Doctor sat down, he said, "Now, all you need to do, si- er, Doctor, is talk to the computer and ask it for the information you're looking for."

"Ah, yes. Right." The Doctor changed his tone. "Computer, show me all documents you have on ablative armor technology."

The computer replied with a disapproving alarm. "Unable to comply. Access to requested files requires clearance."

"I thought I already had that?" the Doctor turned to look up at Lawson. "Is she angry with me?"

"Uh, no. Let me see what I can do." Lawson entered in a few more commands and asked, "Computer, what level of access does the Doctor have?"

"Unable to comply. Results for the complete listing of personnel within and without Starfleet are too numerous to determine-"

"Cancel request," Lawson said quickly. "Computer, identify person sitting next to me as someone called simply, 'The Doctor.' Have you any records of such a person?"

"Affirmative."

"We're in business. Computer, can you identify?"

"Unable to comply. Voiceprint does not match."

The Doctor sucked in his breath. "Oooo... so it will be another me that shows up in your past, then. Okay, I think I might know how to fix this. Does your computer have the ability to scan for genetic materials as a means for identifying someone?"

Lawson tapped on another panel and entered in his own credentials. "One moment, Doctor."

"Oh, I'm not going to have to give you genetic material, am I?"

"Computer, scan person sitting to my left and identify."

"Working. Scanning individual..." The computer made some audible noises and then finally said, "Identity confirmed as 'The Doctor.' X-Ray clearance granted."

Lawson's eyes widened. "W-Well. That's quite impressive, Doctor."

"Thank you. And I am. But what do you mean?"

"I mean to say that X-Ray clearance is not one of the highest, it is the highest clearance level within Starfleet," Lawson said. With each word he spoke, his head would bob up and down slightly. "You must have friends in some very high places."

"I must." Rather than expand on that, the Doctor told him, "Well, thank you, Lieutenant. I appreciate the assistance."

"Anytime, sir."

The Doctor wagged a finger. "Ah, ah, ah..."

"I mean, Doctor. Sorry."

"I'll forgive you, but next time, it'll be twenty lashes with a rubber hose, yeah?"

"Sir?" Lawson said incredulously.

The Doctor smirked. "All right, fetch me a hose."

Brilliantly Dead Stupid

NCC-74705 (USS *Bellerophon*)

In formation with the fleet at Outpost Zeta-Thirteen.

Main Engineering

Stardate 65544.2

Captain's Log

Supplemental

Commander Taurik has made a full recovery and was released early this morning by the chief medical officer. Taurik has since arrived in engineering to lend his assistance to the Doctor and Mister Lawson, who are making outstanding progress in bringing the ablative generators to realization.

Most of the morning has been spent in installing these generators and passing the technology to the rest of the fleet. It has been my understanding that their engineering departments are having a number of technical issues in bringing them online. Point in fact; our first test was also less than promising.

The Doctor's fingers moved across the console so fast that neither Commander Taurik nor Lieutenant Lawson could keep up with him. Even the computer appeared to lag behind the inputted commands upon the screen. The screen shifted back and forth so quick as to almost flash at them in slow stop-motion.

"The trick here is to couple the generators with the primary power node without overloading the circuit and tripping a breaker. If the breaker is tripped..." His voice trailed off, lost in thought for a moment, then he continued. "So, we tie in the secondary power wave guides into the system to allow for a power transfer in the event the primary power grid fails."

Taurik nodded. "Impressive work for someone with only thirty-six hours of training."

"Thanks, but we Time Lords can take in a lot of information very quickly," the Doctor replied. "I think that's got it. We can start testing the generators with this new configuration."

Both Taurik and Lawson moved to the main engineering console. "Running first test against the starboard primary generator, now."

"Power is being transferred to the generator, okay. No appreciable drop or break in the system, so far." Lawson brought up the grid's power output on the main screen near him and continued to keep an eye on it. "Generator is showing power status green."

"Reading green, here," confirmed Taurik. "Doctor?"

The Doctor nodded and said, "All right. According to *Voyager's* information, the deployment subroutine was an all or nothing build. So, we'll have to do this in a controlled fashion. I don't want to destroy a power node."

"Again," added Lawson and Taurik, nearly simultaneously.

"I'm *sorry*. Again," said the Doctor with a wince. "You had a spare node handy. In fact, you have several handy, just in case we blow out this one."

"In case *you* blow out this one," Lawson grinned as he spoke, unable to keep the humor from his tone.

The Doctor waved him off with his sonic screwdriver. "All right, all right. I didn't realize I was with the lot that didn't make mistakes. It's not easy translating your way of subverting physics to my way of subverting physics."

Lawson chuckled. "I'm sorry, Doctor. I couldn't resist." His expression grew serious as he reported. "Kay. Capacitors are now online; they're ready to process incoming power to hold the armor into place."

"I think we're almost there, then."

Taurik slapped his commbadge. "Engineering to Bridge. This is Commander Taurik. We are nearly ready for another test of the starboard primary generator."

"This is the captain," Magambo's voice resounded within the engineering compartment. "We are standing by. Better luck this time."

"Thank you, sir," Taurik replied. "I will keep this channel open for the duration." He turned to the Doctor and nodded his permission to proceed.

The Doctor did not respond. His hands continued to fly over the controls until he groaned, "This is infuriating. Enough with the hands-free, yeah?" He lifted his sonic screwdriver and aimed it at the LCARS display. Its high-pitched squeal started off at a normal level until the Doctor adjusted it. The squeal grew louder and then angrier; it bounced off the walls and a couple of officers held their ears, including Taurik. The screen shifted until it finally showed the words, "ABLATIVE GENERATOR STATUS: ARMED."

"All right, here," the Doctor grinned wide. "Deploy when ready, Commander."

Taurik looked up to speak to the intercom. "Bridge, we are engaging the deployment subroutine." He tapped once and then announced, "Deploying armor."

On the master systems display, the scene shifted to an exterior view provided by one of the neighboring starships. Along the starboard side of *Bellerophon's* saucer section, the generator bar glowed and sections of the armor appeared in place.

"So far, so good," Lawson said. "But can we go further than this, this time?"

Taurik added, "The power node appears to be stable this time, however."

The Doctor's eyes darted about the status screen and he tapped the end of his sonic screwdriver against his side as he watched the plasma power nodes in the adjacent sections of the grid. "Power holding steady at ninety-eight percent efficiency. Looks like the additional power waveguides are helping to stabilize the grid with the new requirements from the generators. Let's see if they'll take a hit, now."

"Bridge, we're ready for the live fire test," Taurik intoned.

Magambo replied, "Stand by." Her voice became slightly muted as she spoke to the other vessel, "*Bellerophon* to *Repulse*, we are ready for the live fire test." There was silence, and then Magambo's voice returned. "Engineering, live fire in one minute."

"Engineering to all sections," Taurik announced on the shipwide address circuit, "Live fire test in sixty seconds. Brace for impact." The collision alarm sounded throughout the ship.

"The live fire test will consist of a ten-second burst of phaser fire. Should that be successful, it shall be followed by five shots from their phaser cannon," reminded Magambo from the bridge. "We will not test against torpedoes until the full armor is deployed."

The Doctor replied for everyone. "Ah, yes. Good idea, Captain. The detonation radius from the torpedoes might actually cause some damage."

"Forty-five seconds," said Taurik. "I am increasing power to the structural integrity field."

Lawson nodded and replied, "SIF output is now at full, sir. I think we're ready to take our lumps. Just a quick reminder: since we're allocating power to the new armor system, we will be unable to switch to conventional shielding."

"Acknowledged, Lieutenant," Magambo said.

"Thirty seconds," Taurik continued his count.

The Doctor groped around the slick surface and then the sides of the console. He quickly looked around as though he lost something.

Lawson watched him move about the engineering area like a man missing his glasses, "Doctor?"

He snapped up and shot a quick question toward the lieutenant. "Yeah, who builds a starship like this and doesn't bother with handholds?"

"Fifteen seconds," was all Taurik said. "Brace for impact."

The Doctor raised his hands in exasperation. "*How?*"

Taurik did not respond, other than to place his hands atop the console he stood at as a means to answering the question. "Ten seconds. Nine..."

"You make do with what you have, Doctor," Lawson demonstrated the same.

"I take back what I said before. You people are brilliant in some areas, and dead stupid in others," the Doctor gripped the sides of the console below the systems display and held on tightly as Taurik reached five seconds and began to count toward one.

Then, nothing happened. No vibration, let alone trembling.

"Did the ship fire, yet?" asked Lawson.

Taurik responded, "Affirmative. The ten second burst has four seconds left."

The Doctor reported, "Armor integrity at one-hundred percent. Power waveguides show no loss in efficiency. No fluctuations in transfer." He turned to look at Taurik and Lawson with a big smile. "It worked!"

"Confirmed," agreed Taurik. "Bridge, we have a successful first test."

Magambo replied, "Acknowledged, Engineering. Outstanding work. We're moving to phase two of the test. Incoming cannon fire."

Again, there did not seem to be any impact. "Armor holding steady at one-zero-zero. Power is continuing to feed into the capacitors," said the Doctor in a distracted voice. "Uh oh..."

Lawson strode over toward the Doctor. "What's wrong?"

"Er, in my haste to get the system online, I think my sonic screwdriver might have fused the power connection to the generators," the Doctor placed a hand on his chin as he spoke. "I'm unable to test the failover mid-battle. It's locked to the primary grid, now."

"How long would it take to cut the connection?"

"I could do it right now, but then we'll have to go back to the beginning and fabricate a new power conduit for the generator."

Taurik added, "This is affecting only one generator. The others we will be sure to bring online in a more *conventional manner*."

"Yes, well..." The Doctor trailed his voice off and shot a glance toward the Vulcan. "Sorry."

Magambo noted, "Test complete. I would like a complete briefing from everyone in twenty minutes within the bridge lounge. Magambo, out."

Lawson whistled at the readouts. "You think Starfleet will let us keep this armor in place after we're done with the mission?"

"I presume not," Taurik told the young man simply. "You will excuse me for a moment." He walked away from the Doctor and Lieutenant Lawson, to a waiting Toshiko at a nearby console.

Toshiko glanced up at Taurik with a smile of relief. "I'm off the hook."

Taurik inclined his head once. "Indeed."

"And the transphasic torpedoes?" inquired the captain, as she, Martha, and Ursula strode down the corridor on deck eleven.

Ursula replied before Martha could, "We're not quite there, yet, Captain. But in this case, it's the conversion of enough torpedoes. Presently, we have less than five operational."

Off Magambo's raised eyebrow, Martha stepped into the conversation with, "There are fundamental differences in how the two torpedo systems function, sir. The payloads are a little trickier to manage within our quantum torpedo housings."

"How did *Voyager* manage?" asked Magambo.

"They replicated all-new housings and flight control systems," explained Ursula quickly. "It took them nearly two days to construct a functioning and combat-ready torpedo."

The captain frowned. "We don't have that kind of time. What options do we have under the current circumstances? Can the Doctor be of assistance?"

Martha and Ursula traded uneasy expressions. "The Doctor has been reluctant to assist us in any endeavor related to weaponry," Ursula noted, her eyes cast down to the deck. "I'm afraid he is most insistent on this point."

Magambo slowed before they reached engineering. "I see." She stopped altogether to prevent the door sensors from opening. "We shall have to carry on without him, then. I require those torpedoes online before our next encounter. That will be all, Mister Blake. Commander Jones, with me."

Ursula inclined her head respectfully before retreating, while the captain and executive officer entered the main engineering compartment. The compartment was abuzz with activity as the rest of the generators were being brought online.

Taurik noticed the captain's entry and met her before she crossed the threshold into the warp core chamber. "Captain, approximately forty-four percent of the ablative generators are online and ready. The Doctor has devised a most efficient method to installing them. We shall meet your deadline with more than enough time for testing."

Magambo eyed the chief engineering officer. "That is good news. Your tone suggests there is another side of the story."

The Vulcan placed his hands behind his back and gave a nearly-imperceptible expression of surprise at the captain's perspicacity. "Yes, sir. I do have a concern."

Martha asked, "You're referring to the shield generators?"

"Yes," Taurik lifted his hand and gestured toward his personal workstation. "If I may demonstrate?" When they assembled before the massive screen, he continued, "As we mentioned earlier today, the shield system will be offline."

Magambo shook her head. "That was... to be expected, Commander. I'm not sure what's changed."

"Apologies, Captain. When I say offline, I mean to say that we will not be able to use them as a backup defense system in a combat situation," Taurik said. He entered in a few commands and the display zoomed in on one of the modified ablative generators, alongside the shield generator. "The original requirement was to be able to disengage the ablative generators and switch to the conventional shield system quickly. However, the current power requirements of the ablative system make that impossible, without the risk of zero defenses for at least five to ten minutes."

Magambo paled. "That's completely unacceptable."

Taurik agreed with a simple nod. "Hence my concern."

"You mentioned earlier that we were using capacitors for the ablative systems; might we also use a capacitor system for the shield generators?" Martha wondered.

"We would require additional time to install said capacitors," replied the chief engineering officer stoically. "It is possible to do this with all engineering teams working toward this goal. We would need to place all other priorities on hold until it is completed."

Magambo sighed, through her nostrils. She considered the news carefully, but ultimately disagreed. "No, we will proceed with the ablative generators. Your priority will be to bring the transphasic torpedoes online as quickly as possible."

"Aye, sir," Taurik inclined his head briefly. "By your leave?"

"Of course." Magambo waited for the Vulcan to depart before spying the Doctor at the overhead engineering console usually used by the chief engineer. She looked up at him and called out, "Doctor, we appreciate your work on the armor system."

The Doctor peered down at the captain. "Don't mention it." He rested his arms against the railing and gestured around with his sonic screwdriver. "The armor is functioning as well as can be expected, with a few modifications by me."

Lawson added, "And a couple of blown capacitors."

The Doctor repeated sarcastically, "'And a couple of blown capacitors.' You're never going to let up, are you?"

Lawson chuckled and maintained his attention on his console, instead of replying.

Magambo ignored the banter by asking, "Doctor, might I come up and join you for a moment?"

The Doctor gestured with a non-committal wave of his hand and turned back around to face the engineering console to await her ascension from the main engineering deck. When she closed the distance, he shot her an expectant look. "What can I do for you, Captain?"

"Doctor," she began in a lowered tone, "is there no way to see yourself toward assisting us with bringing our torpedoes online?"

"I'm afraid not. You will have to see to that on your own," he told her automatically. "I've already discussed this with Mister Taurik and I told him the same as I'm telling you: I don't oblige weapons."

"Doctor-"

"I'm quite firm on this stance and have been for many years," he cut her off. "I'll be happy to complete my work on your defensive systems."

Magambo sighed. "As you wish, Doctor. The admiral mentioned that you were rather stubborn in your convictions."

"I would hope we were all true to our convictions, otherwise we'd have to call them something else," the Doctor replied with a smile. Then, it dropped. "Wait a tick, what admiral?"

"That's classified, I'm sorry."

"I was told I held a high clearance level, Captain. Who is the admiral?"

Magambo shook her head. "I'm sorry, Doctor. The admiral asked me not to divulge that information to you. She said you would understand."

The Doctor stared at Magambo before understanding dawned upon his expression. "Right. Well, I'll find out sooner or later, I suppose. Anything else?"

The Captain took a step back. "I must be returning to the bridge." She climbed back down to the lower deck and gestured toward Taurik to join her in the corridor.

He walked in step behind her and asked, "Yes, Captain?"

Magambo turned immediately to face him as soon as the doors closed and they were clear of the path. "Commander, I'm giving you a direct order. If you can reverse engineer any of the Doctor's work toward bringing those torpedoes online, then do it."

Taurik inclined his head once. "Aye, sir."

"What are you doing here, Ensign?"

Coralie looked up and into the face of her superior officer, Lieutenant Commander Blake. She shared in her look of surprise, as it was the first time prior to the Doctor's appearance aboard the ship that the commander showed her face within the cargo bay.

"Doing my job, sir," replied Coralie earnestly.

Blake gestured with her hand, and in her soprano voice, said, "Please do not trouble yourself, Ensign Picard. We will handle your duties for the time being. You're needed elsewhere."

"I am?"

"Indeed. The Doctor is requesting your presence in main engineering," Blake explained. "I'm to ensure your safe arrival."

An *escort*? Her brow furrowed slightly as she held the commander's gaze. "Sir, there's no need. I know the way."

Blake frowned, but ultimately relented. "Off you go, then."

Coralie handed over her PADD with the inventory reports to her relief, another young ensign with whom she had a passing acquaintance.

She exited the cargo bay and turned the corner toward the lift. While she awaited the next car to arrive, the doors at the cargo bay opened and Blake arrived, standing next to her.

"Sir..." Coralie began.

"I'm not escorting you, Ensign. I'm needed on the bridge," replied Blake. She kept her eyes on the doors ahead of her, and not on Coralie.

"Though, I will say that I think you're still making a huge mistake."

Coralie turned to peer at her soon-to-be department head. "It's my mistake to make, sir."

"That it is." The tone of Blake's voice turned cold. An empty lift car arrived and admitted them both.

Coralie spoke after Blake did. "Main Engineering." She turned toward the other woman and asked, "Have I done something to offend you?"

The reply was less than convincing. "Not at all, Ensign."

"Glad to hear it," Coralie said, in no mood to play any games. "Then you'll have no problem treating me with a little more respect?"

Now, Blake looked at her. "I beg your pardon."

"You can beg, sir, but you won't get it."

"Ensign, in spite of your impending departure from the service, you're still wearing a single pip on your collar and I'm wearing two and half." Blake leaned forward to address her sternly. "Until such time that you're no longer wearing that uniform, I'll remind you of your place."

As main engineering was much closer to the cargo bay than the bridge, the doors parted on deck eleven to allow Coralie to exit. Before stepping out over lift car, Coralie reached up to her neck and pulled the lone gold-colored pip from her uniform's turtlenecked shirt and tossed it in Blake's direction.

"With all due respect, Lieutenant Commander, sir, kindly shove this up your arse."

Voidstuff in the Wind

NCC-74705 (USS *Bellerophon*)

In formation with the fleet at Outpost Zeta-Thirteen

Captain's Ready Room

Stardate 65544.52

"I think that would be ill-advised," said Ursula Blake, holding up the ensign's discarded rank insignia within her lithe fingers. "She's made it clear that it is her intention to resign. I think we should leave it, sirs."

From behind her desk within the ready room, Captain Magambo sipped at a small teacup. She turned her head toward the other visitor, her executive officer. "Number One?"

Martha sighed. "In spite of it all, Captain, I really think we might be losing a valuable asset to the ship. But, given the fact that you seem intent on filing the reprimand..."

"That hasn't changed," Magambo verified.

"... then I don't believe she will waver from her current course of action." Martha broke off her eye contact to regard her knees momentarily, then back toward Ursula. "And you're certain she won't be?"

"Well," Ursula began, "far be it for me to contradict my superior officer, but in this case, I must." She raised her hand toward Magambo, "The captain is well within her rights. And if I were in her shoes, I would have done the same thing. Perhaps considering the evidence, I would dare say the captain was even a little lenient."

"The captain is not going to tolerate being referred to as though she were not in the room for much longer," Magambo informed them, with a sly smirk.

"Apologies, sir," Ursula offered quickly.

Magambo merely raised her teacup in acceptance.

"But, my opinion stands."

"So noted." The captain leaned forward to refill her teacup and offered the pot to Martha, first.

"Thank you," replied Martha, who flavored her tea shortly after it was poured.

"Number One, I want to point out that when we handed down the reprimands in the conference room, you were quite cross with the ensign. Perhaps even more than I."

"Yes, sir."

"And now you're changing your tune."

"As is my prerogative."

"Of course, but my question is, how did you come by this change?"

Martha's gaze dropped to her teacup, which she decided to sip from before answering. "I was surprised by her decision to resign, and I'm not entirely sure that it was made without the influence of the Doctor."

Magambo tilted her head. "You're blaming him?"

"Not as such, no."

"'Not as such?' What does that mean?"

Again, Martha hesitated before speaking. "Sir, with respect..."

"Speak freely."

"Yes, sir. As I was saying, the Doctor's presence is disruptive to say the least." She shot a quick glance toward Ursula and continued, "I hope I've not stepped over the mark."

"I'll let you know when you're approaching, Commander. Pray continue."

"It's just that since his arrival, there's been a shift in the demeanor on the ship. Discipline is slipping in some, and I think Ensign Picard might be suffering extreme effects of being under his influence."

Magambo pressed her lips together in thought. "What would you suggest?"

"I strongly recommend that we limit their time together. Perhaps if given the chance to think on her own..."

Ursula interrupted, "With all due respect, Commander, I think you give the Doctor too much credit."

Magambo now levied her attention upon Ursula. "How so?"

"I believe that most of the crew view the Doctor as an amusement. Brilliant, but amusing all the same," she explained in her high-pitched voice. "I don't believe that the Doctor is a modern-day Pied Piper, wishing to whisk away all the easily-influenced bright junior officers away in his magic blue box."

On that last bit, Ursula wriggled her fingers in the air to illustrate her point, to the amusement of her superiors.

"Perhaps, Number One, you're putting too much stock in the notion that the Doctor is leading a subtle mutiny," Magambo failed to hide her smile. "I have it on good authority that the Doctor's intentions are anything but sinister."

Martha tried a new tack. "Sir, I appreciate the admiral's assurances, but I don't know this man as well as she does. Further, the admiral isn't here."

"That'll be quite enough of that, Commander."

"Sir..."

"No. We have our orders, and like it or not, the Doctor holds a rank higher than you or I."

"And I take issue with that, as well, sir--"

Magambo cut her off with a wave of her hand. "Your objections have been heard and overruled, Number One. But, if the Doctor insists that Ensign Picard accompany him and she agrees, there's nothing we can do to prevent that." She turned to Ursula. "Where is our retiring ensign right now?"

The operations chief replied immediately. "She's with the Doctor, now."

Coralie entered the main engineering compartment with an expression of determination upon her face. Her confrontation with Commander Blake pushed to the back of her mind, she approached the Doctor with a warm smile. "You sent for me, Doctor?"

"Ah, Coralie, yes," the Doctor said. He spun around in the chair he sat upon. "I wanted to break you out of that cupboard for a while to assist me in finding a solution to the Dalek problem that doesn't involve using weapons."

"Sounds good to me."

His eyes drifted down to her collar. "Ah, you're missing your little thingy there on your neck."

Her eyes moved down, but of course, she couldn't see her own neck. With a nervous laugh, she waved her hand at him. "Oh, I'm just having it cleaned. Nothing to worry about." Coralie directed her attention back to the screen and nodded. "Where should we begin?"

The Doctor appeared to be disinterested in continuing that conversation and moved back toward the screen in front of his seat. "We start by looking at alternatives. The Dalek armor and weaponry I've already uploaded the details into your ship's computer, but the interface, though impressive, is kind of lacking in being helpful."

Coralie grinned. "That's because you don't know how to use it properly, without waving your magic wand around."

He pulled out his sonic screwdriver and asked, "That?"

"Yes, that. Causes a bit of trouble, I hear," Coralie leaned forward and began entering in some commands. "You just have to know how to use the interface."

"I call that going 'hands-free,'" he replied.

"Funny thing to call it, since I'm using my hands in the first place."

The Doctor blinked. "Hadn't considered that."

"Obviously." She touched the input a few more times, lingering on a section of information. "There you are."

"There we are, indeed," The Doctor stated. "All right, then. What we need to do, is find a solution that will return the Daleks either back to the universe they left or perhaps even into the Void."

"What's the Void?"

The Doctor made a slight noise that sounded like 'hmm.' "That's going to take a bit of time to explain, but the short version? Each universe is protected by layer of nothingness in between, which we call the Void."

Coralie held up a hand. "Hold on a moment. How do you know all this?"

"Well, this isn't the first time that the Daleks have used the Void to travel between universes," he replied through a sigh and folded his arms across his chest. "Back on the Earth in my universe, they used a Voidship to cross the Void and smash into mine."

"All right, so you've faced them before, then. How did you manage to defeat them if you don't believe in weapons? Is it something we can use

here?"

The Doctor sighed. "No, back then, there was a group called Torchwood that was trying to access the Void after the Dalek's ship smashed through the barrier. They thought it was..." His voice trailed off. "They thought it was an unlimited energy source they could tap into it. Same as your Federation."

"All right," Coralie replied thoughtfully. She raised her right hand to her chin and noted, "So far, it seems the same. Tell me more."

"Anytime anything passed through the Void, they're covered in a kind of radiation pattern. Actually, when you pass through time, you carry it with you. I've obviously collected both types of radiation over the years," he reached into his chest pocket and retrieved a pair of glasses.

Coralie pointed at them. "You had those with you when you first arrived, didn't you?"

"These allow me to perceive the radiation particles one picks up from the Void travel," he said as he handed the pair over to Coralie. His tone turned sad, suddenly. "Now, look at me."

She placed them on her face, but tilted her head at his sudden change in demeanor. "Are you all right?"

"Yes. Sorry. I was living in the past, for a moment. All better, now." He moved, back and forth. "Can you see them?"

Coralie placed both of her hands on the side of her face. The Doctor appeared to be covered in small flecks of dust that clung to just above his skin and clothes. Whenever he moved, they moved along with him, never drawing closer or drifting away. "I do! They look as though they orbit you."

"Exactly. In short, the glasses merely give you a much easier representation of the actual radiation." He reached out to retrieve them and he replaced them in his pocket.

"But, I don't understand. Why did you show me that?"

"Back at that Torchwood facility, they were trying to siphon Void energy and they did that by forcing the cracks open wider," he turned toward her all the way, now. "When we needed to shove all of the Daleks and the Cybermen back where they came from, I opened up the Void gateway far enough to cause all the Void particles to return to their point of origin."

Coralie snapped her head back as she understood. "But that's just the particles, no?"

"Not entirely. As much as the particles are clinging to me, I cling to them."

"Merde. That means..."

"Forgive me for eavesdropping," said Lieutenant Lawson, from the power distribution console nearby. He left the input panel and walked over to join the pair as they spoke. "That means that the Daleks and anyone else with those particles would be immediately transported back through the gateway."

"Can we do that again, here?" wondered Coralie. "Just open it up and let it pull the Daleks all back into the Void?"

"As I understand it from the reports, the equipment and technology used by your teams were destroyed when the Daleks came through the gateway firing away," said the Doctor plainly. "There's nothing here to duplicate their efforts, is there?"

Lawson shared a quick look with Coralie. "The secondary deflector?" she asked, hesitantly.

"... Possibly," he said, his eyes glazing over as he was lost in thought. "May I?" he asked, indicating the master situation monitor they were seated at.

The Doctor moved out of his way as a response.

Lawson began to use the input panel quickly. "I'm calling up the details of their experiment, although I need to warn you that my security clearance may not be high enough."

"Leave that to me," the Doctor said.

"Of course." Lawson kept working, until he had the specifics of the experiment on his screen with the help of the Doctor's access. "No, we can't use the deflector to manipulate a field large enough to cause some sort of focal point. It's just not designed to do that; the science outpost had a very specifically-designed generator to traverse the Void's barrier."

"We don't open the point," said a new voice from behind all three of them. "We don't have to, really. We just have to weaken the barrier threshold enough, right?"

All three turned their heads to see Toshiko Sato standing with her hands in front of her.

"Please go on," smiled the Doctor widely.

Toshiko stepped within the group and touched a few more commands into the demonstration. "We tie in the tractor and transporter systems to your deflector model, here..." She pointed at the power distribution grid. "And then over here. So, we use the tractor beam emitters to augment the transporter's ability to lock onto targets, and we can use the weakened barrier provided by the deflector to transport your target to the other side of the field."

Lawson smirked at Toshiko. "That's an awful lot of presumption, Specialist. According to Eagle's records, they attempted to use the transporters to beam Daleks in an attempt to disperse them. They couldn't get a lock on any of them due to some sort of personal shielding."

Coralie offered, "So we find a way to disrupt the shields. Don't we have the data from some of the phaser strikes? There's a specific frequency that most shields operate on. Can we assume that all Dalek shielding operates on the same range?"

The Doctor nodded once. "For the most part, but each iteration of Dalek seems to like to employ the very high range of the electromagnetic spectrum."

"As long as it's on any part of the EM band," Lawson began, "then I think I know where you're all heading toward." He reached up with his right hand to touch his commbadge. "Lawson to Taurik. Sir, you're needed in main engineering."

Lieutenant Commander Taurik stared at the proposal on the screen. He brought his hand from behind his back and attempted to reconstruct the idea from scratch to confirm the findings for himself. It took less than a minute to do so.

"I must admit," the Vulcan started, "I found the notion to be unusually contrived. However, given the findings of your simulation and the one I've just run, there's merit to your ideas."

Lawson, Toshiko, and Coralie all smiled at the Vulcan's approval. The lieutenant stepped forward. "The one part of the puzzle we're still having trouble with is how to deliver the transport beam in such a fashion that it will penetrate the Dalek shielding."

"We lack sufficient information on Dalek shielding," Taurik noted candidly. "Therefore, we must utilize the Doctor's anecdotal evidence to determine the best way to adapt to their shields. Unless..."

"Unless...?" prompted Coralie.

"If someone were to gather intelligence on the Dalek's technological abilities directly, we could find a weakness in their shields and exploit it."

The Doctor and Coralie shared a look, but neither of them said anything. Coralie turned back to Taurik and grinned. "Sounds like fun."

The Doctor and the Redshirts

NCC-74705 (USS *Bellerophon*)

En route to intercept Dalek battlecruiser at Warp 9.975.

Cargo Bay Two

Stardate 65545.02

Coralie ran her hands against the hardened armor she grabbed from the ship's stores and fitted the commbadge on top of the chest portion. The small area where her rank insignia would have been visible was blank, in accordance with her wishes. Since the confrontation with Commander Blake in the turbolift, it was clear that this would be her last Starfleet mission, if she could help it.

She checked her tricorder once more, and then made sure the type-two phaser was fully charged with the trigger lock engaged to prevent accidental firing.

The Doctor exited the TARDIS and closed the door behind him. He looked Coralie up and down, then with a wry smirk, he asked her, "Did you forget anything?"

Coralie checked her equipment one more, taking the Doctor's flippant question seriously. "I don't think so, no." Off his grin, she swatted his arm playfully. "Oh, stop it."

"Couldn't help my..." His voice trailed off as a trio of footfalls approached them from the open cargo bay doors. "... self. Hello, there. Can we help you?"

Three people dressed in similar armor to Coralie's drew nearer to Coralie and the Doctor. One was an older human male wearing a non-comm's rank insignia and the other a Vulcan female wearing the lone gold pip of an ensign. Toshiko smiled sheepishly at Coralie and the Doctor as she shifted uncomfortably within her armor.

"Sirs," said the large male officer, "I'm Staff Sergeant Patrick Neville, from the ship's marine company, and this is Ensign T'Asa and Specialist Sato from Engineering. The captain has sent us down to augment your mission."

Coralie leaned and told the Doctor, *sotto voce*, "And likely to keep an eye and report back."

"Well, the more the merrier, I always say," the Doctor said without acknowledging her warning. "I presume you're all ready to go?"

Both ensigns replied with a succinct nod.

The Doctor turned around and opened the right-side door to the TARDIS. "Right, then. Follow me."

Coralie mentioned casually, "I think this should be interesting."

The Doctor looked back as he unlocked the TARDIS door and it swung inside. "What's that?"

"In Starfleet, there was a legend that officers and crew in support functions like security and engineering were often those amongst the first to die on away missions," she told him. "They used to be called 'redshirts.'"

Scanning the uniforms of those present, the Doctor nodded back toward them and noted, "But you're all wearing gold."

Coralie giggled. "The connotation of wearing a red shirt was thought to be too much, and so command's color switched with security. They used to wear gold, now they wear red. But no matter what color you wear, once a redshirt, always a redshirt."

"The Doctor and the Redshirts," he grinned. "I like the sound of that." He entered the TARDIS, leading the way inside for the others to follow.

As she stepped in, Coralie muttered, "Sounds like a rock band, to me."

Toshiko's eyes never seemed to close as she looked into the big blue box for the first time. Her jaw hung open, speechless at the sight before her.

"You may want to hang onto something," Coralie warned her as she braced herself atop a comfortable-looking couch nearby. "This thing has a tendency to treat you like a ping-pong ball in a violent storm."

The Doctor manipulated the controls, but they made very little sense to Toshiko. A hammer, and a few other bits of unrelated objects appeared on the circular console, as the Doctor moved to and fro to use some of them.

Toshiko stared at the Doctor's method of inputting command for only a few seconds, then snapped her head back at Coralie. With an incredulous expression, she asked, "Is that a *bicycle pump*?!" Toshiko got used to traveling through time much faster than the other two newcomers did. While the Vulcan and the marine staff sergeant were clutching at the rails for dear life, she made a game of trying to stay upright as though she were riding a surfboard. A few twists and turns through the time vortex left her normally upswept raven hair spilling out of its confines in ringlets that slide down her cheeks and swayed back and forth.

"That's the idea!" called the Doctor. He nodded in her direction with an approving grin. "It's supposed to be fun!"

Coralie, for her part, just rode out the voyage on the small couch and let the TARDIS vibrate underneath. The Doctor moved to take the seat next to her and explained, "Daleks are very good at detecting TARDISes. They do battle with them so much that it's nothing simply just run a scan and find it. Once they do, we're going to have to locate their temporal stasis device and disable it in order to return."

"What do you mean?" asked Coralie, though everyone else in the control room now focused their attention on the Doctor.

"I mean that this little trip isn't without its risk, and while I'm happy to have you along, it was probably better for everyone if they just stayed on the ship," he said somberly. "In an encounter with the Daleks, they usually win."

"Back on *Bellerophon*," Coralie replied quickly, "you said in the mess hall that your people fought a war against them."

The Doctor leaned in, "That's right."

"And you said that it took all of your people to keep them in check."

"Yeah."

"So, I have to ask a question..." Her voice trailed off as she leaned in, to keep the others out of their conversation.

He leaned in as well, and waited for the rest.

"... when we went to go save the colony, you took us back in time. Why can't we go back in time to the point when the scientists punched the hole through to your side and prevent this from ever happening?"

The Doctor tilted his head. "You're very clever," he began. "But, a few seconds is a big difference than the distance you're asking me to travel. I cannot cross my own timeline."

"Is that a limitation of the TARDIS?"

"It's the law of the Time Lords."

Coralie took that in. "Good to know that your people take these kinds of things seriously. I take it that there those among your people who regulated this kind of travel?"

"Yes."

"And you were one of them?"

The Doctor's eyes drifted down toward the grating that made up the deck. "I was hardly one of them, Coralie. One of these days, I'll tell you about how I came to use this TARDIS."

"Long story, I gather?"

"Oh, yes. But a really good one." His head jerked back to look at the display screen that reached out on a swing arm from the control surface. "We've arrived."

As the TARDIS apparently landed, the vibration ceased entirely. The Doctor lept up from the couch and wandered over toward Toshiko. "Enjoy yourself, Specialist Sato?"

Toshiko giggled. "Definitely. Can we go again?"

"All in good time," he said. He reached for his long coat and with a bit of a flourish, put it on. He looked around at the gathered Starfleet personnel and asked, "Let's be off, eh?"

Staff Sergeant Neville insisted on being the first out of the door. He carried a compression rifle that he had slung over his shoulder. The lean marine used the TARDIS door frame to cover him before angling himself out to take a look at the immediate area. When he was satisfied that there was no one waiting for them to exit, he signaled with a quick hand gesture.

"What?" asked the Doctor, rather loudly.

Neville hissed. "Sir, please, keep your voice down."

"Staff Sergeant, let me assure you, if the Daleks knew we were here, they would make their presence known rather clearly. If there's one thing I could say about them, it's that subtlety is not one of their finer points." The Doctor pushed past him. "See? No one out here."

The rest of them filed out, with Coralie bringing up the rear. She opened her tricorder and began moving it around the corridor, which ended approximately five meters to their left, as the TARDIS was apparently at the end of the corridor near another possible chamber. All of this information came from the tricorder in Toshiko's hand as she moved it about.

The Doctor moved over to stand next to Coralie. "That device, there. What did you call it?"

She did not stop moving her arm in order to answer. "This is a tricorder."

"And what does it do, exactly?"

Toshiko responded before Coralie could. "It's a handheld sensing device. 'Tricorder' is kind of a legacy name, because it used to only provide

geologic, meteorologic, and biologic data. Three types of data recording... Tri-corder."

She handed the device to him for his inspection, which he accepted with the enthusiasm of a small boy on Christmas morning. Within seconds, he began pushing buttons and seeing how the small display changed to accommodate the new scan information. "One thing you can count on from the human race; they make very handy tools." The Doctor switched the screen off and on and nearly giggled as he handed it back to Toshiko.

Coralie moved back. "We're going to have to proceed down that way another ten meters, I think."

Neville double-checked his weapon and asked, "Sir, what about your... blue box? Is it safe to leave it unattended?"

The Doctor pulled his sonic screwdriver from inside his left jacket pocket and pointed it at the TARDIS. The screwdriver emitted a high-pitch whine and the TARDIS shimmered from view.

Toshiko laughed. "A cloaking device?"

"Of a sorts, yeah," replied the Doctor. "I've sent the TARDIS one second out of sync with normal time. Even another Time Lord, let alone a Dalek, wouldn't be able to reach it without some rather large obstacles. A little trick I picked up recently."

Coralie smirked, but turned back around. She drew her phaser and checked it's status. Neville checked his charge once more, and even Toshiko managed to look at her weapon. Only T'Asa continued to monitor her tricorder.

The Doctor moved forward ahead of the marine, and tapped on the door control with his right hand.

Once the door slide open, Neville moved in first, covering both sides of the long corridor. "Clear," he determined, gesturing with his left hand in a "come on" motion.

Coralie strode next to the Doctor, who was moving nonchalantly down the right side of the corridor toward another door. Again, the Doctor tapped the door control and the door opened. But this time, there was a single Dalek waiting for them.

"INTRUDERS!" it wailed with its distorted voice. "EXTERMINATE! EXTERMINATE!"

On the second cry, Neville aimed and fired his compression rifle at the Dalek's armor; center-mass. There was no appreciable effect, as the rest of the away team hugged the walls to get out of the line of fire. Neville remained in view, never once releasing the trigger. The initial burst did nothing against the Dalek's armor.

The gunstick fired, but the trajectory intersected the rifle's beam and it appeared to disappear within the focused energy.

Neville's other hand manipulated the setting on the rifle. The sound from the rifle moved up in frequency as he kicked it up almost all the way to the top of the rifle's maximum output.

Coralie adjusted her phaser up to setting sixteen and joined in with her fire. With their combined phaser fire, the Dalek's armor crumpled inward before the biological creature inside was exposed and vaporized in an instant.

Neville dropped his rifle as the beam emitter sparked once. The rifle's control circuitry exploded, along with the small dilithium crystal that channeled the beam. He grabbed his type-II phaser and readied it, while muttering, "First time I've seen that happen."

Toshiko dropped to the ground and examined the rifle closely. "You fractured the crystal beyond repair." She turned back toward Coralie and said, "It took the power of this rifle to get through their shield and their armor... I don't think we can replicate that kind of energy if we happen upon another one of them."

T'Asa moved to the armor and scanned it. "Specialist Sato," she said in a flat tone. "I don't believe that our encounter was entirely without merit. I believe this will provide us with a deeper understanding of their armor composition and power source."

"The weapon is a molecular disruptor of a kind I've not seen before," Toshiko added. "I don't think our body armor is going to protect us for very long, if at all."

The Vulcan ensign agreed with a nod. "Can we acquire a sample?"

Coralie put her hand on Toshiko's shoulder. "No time. There are three more Daleks approaching from the opposite direction. Now that we have their power signatures, I can track them a little easier."

Neville destroyed his rifle with his phaser, and then said, "Right then. We have completed our mission with the new information. Doctor, we should be returning to the ship, yeah?"

T'Asa replied, "We only have preliminary data, Staff Sergeant. We should try to acquire more information while we're here."

"Couldn't we transmit the data we have, so far?" he asked.

The Doctor noted, "I'd be concerned with the signal attracting unwanted attention."

"Toshiko and I will stay behind," Coralie decided. "Doctor, you should take the staff sergeant and the ensign back to the ship with you to get that data back to Commander Taurik, so they can start devising a plan of attack."

Neville jerked his head back toward Coralie. "Sir, with all due respect, if you're staying, then so am I."

The conversation distracted Coralie's attention from her tricorder, and the door leading in the other direction opened to admit three Daleks. Rather than screeching their displeasure, they fired without preamble. Neville turned to see them first, as he heard the door open. Although he was in full view, so was Toshiko as she stood in the distance between the team and the Daleks.

Before anyone could open their mouths to tell each other to take cover, the three Daleks turned toward Specialist Toshiko Sato and fired their gunsticks.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!