

Turning Point part 3 of the Epic Universe cycle

By James Harrington

Blue flashes of a powerful energy beam flickered from the wing tip of the silver and gold, snub-nosed rocket, and traced a path towards the frantically twisting and turning....sailing ship?

The bizarre scene was being enacted against the backdrop of the spectacular Ram Qul nebula. The little rocket ship, with its ornately decorated hull and stubby wings, was performing manoeuvres that would have been impossible in an atmosphere. It was desperately attempting to hit at least part of the anomalous object that continued to elude it. The other craft, which looked quite ludicrous darting this way and that in full sail, was quite adept at avoiding the shots of the little rocket, but it was still a matter of some consternation to the rockets Captain that the silly thing was there at all!

Inside the small flight cabin of the rocket, the Captain stood giving orders to his pilot.

"Faster, you fool!!" he cried, face red with rage "If this intruder escapes us, the Emperor will have us executed!!" He wiped the sweat from his forehead, slightly dislodging the gold helmet on his head.

The pilot, who was dressed in a similar helmet, gold with a peak at the front, and a spike protruding from the crown, manipulated the array of levers and switches in front of him on the small console, and glanced back at his Captain, although from his sitting position, he could only see the gold braiding on the front of his red satin tunic, and replied;

"I'm doing my best, sir. The stranger seems to be able to anticipate our every move!"

The Captain peered closely at the view screen, its oval frame seemingly trapping the Galleon within its ornate confines. The sailing ship had performed a loop, and was now heading directly at them.

"Fire the atomic rocket!!" called the Captain, with portentous gravitas. His pilot turned fully around, and looked up at the Captain wide eyed.

"But, sir..." he started, his voice quiet, awe struck

"Do as I say or I will have you flogged!!" spat the Captain.

Operating a sequence of switches, the pilot kept his eyes fixed on the screen, as a plume of rapidly dissipating smoke shot out from the front of the rocket, making directly for the enemy. There was a bright flash that illuminated the cabin, the occupants forced to shield their faces from its intensity. When it had cleared, there was nothing left of the other ship, not even debris. Even the radarscope picked up nothing.

"That, then, deals with that." Said the Captain, with a satisfied smile "Return to base, and report that our mission was successful."

The rocket banked wide and made directly for the nebula.

It was a nice quiet time of day as Lieutenant Woods sat at the table of the mess hall to enjoy his first meal since finishing a double shift. He'd brought it on himself, of course. Because he wanted to finish some of the upgrades to the

defence shields that he had come up with, he thought it only fair to complete the work himself. As he opened the new technical manual that he'd wanted to start reading for days, a slip of paper fell out. "Now how did that get there?" he thought, "This is a new book, and I've not put anything in, even as a book mark, and no one else has been at. Have they?" As he scanned the paper, he started to recognise the design on it as a particularly sophisticated circuit diagram. But for what, he hadn't a clue.

The Inquisitor slouched wearily in his favourite armchair, in view of the console, in reach of his bookshelves, and with his Regency table in front of him, laid out with a tea tray.

He took a sip from the china cup, and placed it back on the tray. He looked slightly dishevelled, his hair unkempt, waistcoat open and cravat hanging loose around his neck. Sighing deeply, he picked up one of the three heavy, leather bound books from the floor beside him. All the knowledge at his disposal, and he still had no idea which race had ships anything like the one that had attacked him. The same style as had vanished into the nebula last time.

If not for his timely dematerialisation, the skirmish could have continued for hours, and he would not have confirmed that the other ship had access to the distorted space in the nebula. And if it was what he hoped it to be...

Lieutenant Woods, back in his own quarters, was still no closer to deciphering the diagram. He thought it might be something to do with molecular resonance, but what, and why someone had secreted it in his book, well, that he hadn't worked out yet. But it'll come, he thought.

In the Hydroponics section, near a small grouping of Arcadian fruit bushes, slowly materialised the little stone pyramid that is the form sometimes taken by the Inquisitors time vessel. No one was nearby, so the horrendous trumpeting sound that accompanied the manifestation caused no alarm.

Freshly washed and groomed, the traveller stepped from the obelisk, and walked briskly along the path to the main entrance of the centre.

Arriving outside the door of station Commander Anarita Jat, he paused just long enough to arrange his flared shirt cuffs and straighten the Gothic cross at his collar. Confidently, he pushed the entry button beside the door, and marched straight in.

"Vice-Admiral!!" he said with his arms out stretched in a warm, familiar greeting.

The Vice Admiral looked up from her desk with a look that could have floored an elephant.

"What is the meaning of this!" she bellowed "How dare you walk into my office un-announced, un invited and quite frankly, un -welcome!!"

The Inquisitor removed his triangular hat, and held it in both hands on his chest. He had a hurt expression on his face. "I do apologise, Station Commander, I really do. There are thing that we need to discuss. Urgently." Jat hesitated briefly before signalling for him to sit. "You're just lucky that I'm in the middle of some

particularly tiresome paperwork.” She said, “Otherwise, you’d have security to deal with.” The traveller had made himself comfortable, stretched out on the chair in the corner of the room. The one where Jat usually spoke informally with staff, and offered them refreshments. The Vice Admiral raised her eyebrows, sighed and sat at one of the other seats at the table.

“It’s probably a good thing that you came, I suppose. I have been intending to talk to you.”

“Good, good!” enthused the Inquisitor, “There’s so much we need to discuss!”

“The first thing being the way you seem to think that you command this station.”

He looked puzzled “Sorry?”

“Apologising is a good start, but it won’t get you off the hook.” Said Jat

Frowning, the Inquisitor shook his head slightly and said, “I’m sorry, you’ve lost me. Shall we start again?”

The Station Commander leaned forward slightly, and spoke; “I’m not happy with your secretive comings and goings,” he attempted to interrupt, but she silenced him with a wave of her hand. “Wait. When you first arrived at this station, I have to admit that I was a little wary. You were an unknown. You were very unforthcoming about your origins, your race, and particularly about your ship.”

“With good reason, Anarita, I have explained about my people, that I’m not from your universe, and that the technology of my ship is best kept away from any body, Federation or otherwise.”

“Don’t get familiar. I don’t entirely trust you.” She stood up, and started pacing around the room as she spoke. “Recently, you have involved members of my staff in dangerous situations, without my consent or consultation,”

“How could I consult any one? That Magog creature didn’t exactly make an appointment!

“True, perhaps an exception, but you endangered my Ensign, took her off on a dangerous chase to catch the ‘Magog’ and that ship that encroached on our space without any communication.”

“I think,” countered the traveller indignantly “you might find that if I hadn’t taken Lucretia with me, she’d be a pile of bones now! Those creatures are omnivorous! They’ll eat anything!”

“That’s another thing. How come you know so many of these races and creatures? Oh, I know you’re old, and have travelled to other universes, but why do so many that you seem familiar with decide to turn up *here*? Now that *you’re* here?”

The Inquisitor pushed his hat back on his head and put his feet up onto the low table, as he leaned back in the chair. “Now that I wish I knew.” He sighed. “It’s not good, for any of you. Could be the start of a break down of the barriers that separate all the different realities”

“Feet off the table!” the Vice Admiral called, getting quite irritable, he thought.

“And there was that thing with the freighter. You involved my chief of staff, Colonel Madia in that didn’t you?”

“I sent a distress signal. She answered it.”

“We didn’t receive any thing here. I think you directed it at her shuttle deliberately.”

"Certainly not!" exclaimed the Inquisitor "If you had bothered to read my report, which I have to say it is against my principles to write. I hate bureaucracy! There were power drains that interrupted transmission. I was lucky any one got that message. Even luckier that it was she. Amme was a great help."

"You destroyed a shuttle!!" Jat shouted

"She destroyed a shuttle, if you want to be pedantic!" he shouted back at her. "And good thing too! You know what the Borg are like, the Cybermen would be just as bad, believe me!"

"I have read your report. And the statement you made about the incident involving Ensign Nax." The Vice Admiral was pacing quite anxiously now, her hands as animated as any Italian fishwife. "That's another thing. You told Ensign Nax that you intended to take a plant in hydroponics 'home' to its own planet. In another universe?" She turned suddenly, and closed on him, leaning across the table. "Can you cross those boundaries that easily?" He balked, stammered out his response.

"N-no, no not that easily. I- I have great difficulty, except the one you call the mirror universe, that is I-"

"You've been there? The mirror universe?" Jat gapped, aghast. The Inquisitor looked like a schoolboy that had been caught peeking in the girl's shower room. His face flushed.

"Well, yes, I spent quite a while there." He averted his eyes, and Jat surmised that he was hiding something. "Look, inter-dimensional travel is not a simple thing." He sighed heavily. "I'll explain. I am 'lost in time', if you like. When Rassilon was deposed by what is now the high council of my people, I was cut off. When we travel back in time, we need a sort of homing beacon to get back to the 'right' future. You see?" Jat looked a little bewildered. "From any point in 'the past', there are an infinite number of possibilities, paths that things can take. Without a focus, the unwary traveller can get lost in any number of alternate versions of 'their' present. And go backwards in time from the 'wrong' 'now', and you end up in any number of 'wrong' histories. See?" Jat frowned, and nodded. "I think so, just about."

"Well," continued the Inquisitor, "those time lines are almost impossible to navigate successfully, which is why I have been away from Gallifrey for so long." He was getting quite animated now, enjoying the subject. "The 'mirror' worlds, however, are a different thing. It's all a matter of molecular frequency resonance!" He was standing now, and pacing about, his arms describing great circles, his hands pointing this way and that as he tried to get his point across. "That is why" he said, emphasising every word, "it's so similar to your world. Same names, faces, just a different emphasis, you see?"

Anarita Jat had sat down again by now, stroking her chin thoughtfully. She looked up at him.

"You realise this could be very useful to us?" she said.

"Oh I still can't transfer at will," he said, defensively. "After the last time, I'm reluctant to try it except in extreme circumstances."

"Be that as it may," Vice Admiral Jat said in an effort to get back to the point. Which was to define the time travellers place on the station. His purpose, whose

side he was on, ultimately. "What is your interest in all these 'crossover' aliens? We could handle it, you know."

"Well, you never know." The statement sounded dismissive to Jat. The Inquisitor continued. "My main interest, though, is that some one may be causing the 'exchanges' deliberately. If that's so, I want to stop it, because, let's face it, they haven't been sending people that are likely to be solving all your problems are they? With the exception of the Delvian, an undeveloped one at that, it's all been malevolent races that were represented."

"True," answered Jat, "If your word is any thing to go by."

"Oh, come on!" The Inquisitor rolled his eyes in exasperation. "Have I not had a good report from L'Sar? She should know me well; she's travelled with me since the last time I was around these parts."

"She said that she thought you'd never intentionally cause harm to the station or its personnel."

"Well there you are then!"

"And your other interest in these goings on? You said 'main interest'."

"Simple." He replied, sitting casually down once more. "If some one can control the transfers, I want to know how. So that I can go home."

Jat seemed to accept this, and moved closer to him.

"That seems fair enough." She said "But I need to be kept informed of the situation. And my staff should not be abducted at a moments notice. I might need them elsewhere."

"That sounds reasonable," he responded "but it doesn't always work like that. As you've seen."

He took something from his waistcoat pocket. It was a monocle. Placing it in position in his right eye, he leaned forward, so that he was facing Jat at eye level.

"I know my methods aren't what you're used to," he said, "but I do need to do things my way. You can accept that, can't you?"

The Vice Admiral looked at him directly, and answered;"I can accept that, yes"

"And if I need a little help from time to time, well your crew are at my disposal, aren't they?"

"Yes" replied Jat "if you need assistance, they are at your disposal."

"Good!" the Inquisitor stood up quickly, placing the monocle back in his pocket.

"Well, Anarita, I really must be off." He made for the door." Things to do you know, people to see!"

Jat stood up and followed him to the door. "Don't call me by my first name! It's Vice Admiral or Station Commander to you!" she snapped.

"Well, thanks for your help. I'll be in touch." He chirped, and left the room.

As Anarita Jat sat at her desk again, relieved to see the back of the traveller, she had the nagging feeling that she'd been manipulated. Why had she agreed so readily to his 'requests'? Oh well, back to the paperwork.

Lieutenant Woods sat in the mess hall again, this time for breakfast. He was still studying the diagram that had fallen from his book. It sort of made sense to him, but some of the components that he would need to build it just didn't exist.

At that moment a figure breezed through the mess room door. Looking up, Woods groaned to himself. Not that he actively disliked the Inquisitor. The man was just infuriating. He always seemed to be having a different conversation to everyone else.

"Hello, found the diagram, then? What do you think? Can you make it?"

"You!!" exclaimed the Lieutenant. "I might have known! Only you would sneak about, hiding things in other peoples books, and assume that they'll go along with you."

"Can you, then?" You see, thought Woods, totally oblivious to what I just said.

"Some of these components don't exist, but I expect you'll tell me that you can get them?"

The Inquisitor looked at the paper as if he'd never seen it before.

"This and this I can get you, intact," he said pointing at two of the items marked.

"This I can supply the components for you to make one. When can I have it?"

However annoyed he was, Steven Woods was a curious engineer, and the challenge of making this thing, which he still wasn't 100% sure he knew was for; this curiosity almost outweighed his annoyance at the manipulative way he'd been duped into this thing.

"I can't say for certain." He said, "When I get all the parts, it shouldn't take more than a couple of hours, p'raps four."

"Good, I'll get you the stuff from my ship." Enthused the Inquisitor.

"It'd help if I knew what it was!" called Woods, as the traveller turned and marched towards the door. He stopped and turned to face him.

"Don't you know?" he asked, "I'd have thought an engineer of your calibre would have worked it out."

"Well," replied Steve, a little hesitant, "sort of..."

"I'll tell you, shall I?" beamed the Inquisitor. "It's a Molecular Resonance Manipulator!!"

..To be continued...