

Confrontations and Revelations. By James Harrington

So far- Lady Sadianna has accidentally made it known that the cause of the 'extra-dimensional' incursions around the area of Starbase 410 may have originated on Gallifrey, home world of both The Inquisitor and herself. Meanwhile, The Inquisitor and his new ally Ryoko have been shot down over an alien world by the strange rocket ships that have been troubling the station recently...

"You mean to tell me," Commander Woods chided the Time Lady "that this whole thing has been because of you lot? The so-called Time Lords!?"

Sadianna was unperturbed, as she answered;" No recriminations Commander, It wasn't us. Not this generation."

"What, you're blaming your kids? That's low!"

"Don't be facetious!" snapped The Duchess "It was built as a weapon millennia ago."

"And it's still live?" Steve was unaware that he had been facetious, but was a little calmer now. The Duchess had become more authoritative, less casual talking about this. And it was the first time that she had used his rank, instead of her familiar use of his first name.

"It was never activated." It was a statement, worthy of a Vulcan. No emotion was attached to it.

Steve sighed. (I'm doing a lot of sighing lately, he noted. Must be the company I'm keeping.)

"O.K." Steve tried a different approach." What do you say to you telling me all about it? Please?" It wouldn't hurt to feign civility. The Duchess smiled. That's more like it, thought the Commander.

Sadianna glanced down at the pile of components on the bench. Allowing herself a little chuckle, she looked back to the Starfleet officer, and said; "All right. But can we continue to put this device together while I explain? It's very important!"

The last of the trio of space rockets settled onto the surface of the planet only yards from where the 'beached galleon' had finished its un-graceful descent.

An airlock swung open on the ship with the gold and crimson tail fin. When the ramp had reached the ground, two jack-booted men in red satin jackets decorated with gold braid and epaulettes ran down and over to the downed craft. Holding their rifles in front of them, they crept over to what seemed to be a door.

As the ship was on its side, and the door just out of reach, the shorter, burly one of the two soldiers cupped his hands and hoisted the other, lighter one, up onto the hull.

Try as he might, the soldier could not free the entrance. He looked down at his partner, shook his head and shrugged to indicate his helplessness. The other shook his head, in exasperation, rolled his eyes and shouted up "Use the butt of your gun or shoot it then!" Why, he wondered, did he always get teamed up with this fool?

The other fellow was having trouble keeping his balance on the curved hull, and as he tried to position his rifle to shoot at the hatch, his gold coloured, spiked helmet slipped over his eyes. Waving his free hand up to push the peak of the helmet out of his eyes, he lost his balance, slipped down the side of the TARDIS hull, landing on top of his companion. He had let go of his gun on his journey down, and it landed on his head, butt first, and discharged into the air. He rolled off his fellow soldier and sat up, back against the ship. His partner sat up, brushed off his dusty uniform, and glared at the other. His partner shrugged dismissively.

Above them, the doorway started to swing open. Apprehensively, the soldiers eyed each other, as the muffled sound of voices escaped from the hatch above. Something flew out of the entrance, spinning. Something black.

The soldiers closed their eyes and simultaneously covered their heads with their arms. A soft thud announced that the object had landed. Nothing happened. No big explosion.

The stocky soldier risked a glance. Through screwed up eyes he saw a hat. Black, a strange shape (three sides to it!), but just a hat. He nudged his companion, who looked and gave a little jump, in surprise, and started to stand up.

Just then, there were more voices, and a 'swoosh' as something else left the hatchway. The taller soldier adopted the same position again, and his portly partner was about to join him, but risked a peek at the object. What looked like a large bat fluttered to the ground near the hat.

Elbowing the other in the ribs again, the little soldier gave a little laugh as he nodded at the long black coat lying only a meter or so from them. Another false alarm. The tall soldier exhaled sharply in anger, having realised how pathetic they were being. Why should they be so frightened of these intruders? Did *they* not serve the Emperor? The Emperor whose power and control were absolute? Of course they did!

They both stood and dusted their uniforms. Suddenly, the voices from the ship grew louder. Especially the female one.

"I think they're gone, Torq-ie, c'mon now, lets get out of here, OK? Let's go now."

The Emperor's troopers stiffened against the hull, preparing to apprehend the aliens. A soft scraping accompanied the first figure as she came sliding down the hull, landing in a dishevelled heap on the dusty ground. Before the brave troops could step forward, someone called "Geronimo!" and a second body careered down the side of the ship, landing in an ungainly heap on top of the still crumpled woman.

"Oh, Torq-ie," groaned the woman, "not now, I'm still dazed by the crash, it's no time to take advantage, not that I blame you, I knew you only took me along 'cause you couldn't bear to be away from me any longer."

"Shut up," muttered the Inquisitor through clenched teeth. "You'll spoil every thing!!"

The two soldiers had not heard the Inquisitor's words and becoming brave at the sight of the vulnerable duo, stepped forward and aimed their guns at the helpless pair.

"Stand!" commanded the tall one. "You are our prisoners! Prisoners of Emperor Ming the Merciless!"

Torqcraf and Ryoko looked at each other in disbelief.

"Vampires?" Now he'd heard it all. "You're trying to tell me that the Time Lords were at war with a race of Vampires?" It wasn't impossible, of course, but Commander Woods was not going to accept it easily.

"Well, yes, actually." Sadianna replied, "They originated in another universe, and my ancestors chased them back there, after a long and bitter struggle." She had a faraway look in her eyes. "Rassilon was in charge then, and he ordered the device built as a last resort." She was nearly finished the Manipulator device "Pass me that will you?" she asked, pointing out a component just beyond her reach. Steve passed it. He prompted the Duchess to continue the story as she worked. "But it was never used?" he asked.

"There was no need, in the end. You see, "she was clearly getting into her stride, and enjoying the chance to tell the story. Adopting a conspiratorial tone, she continued. "You see Rassilon and the others chased the Vampires across the Galaxy, and destroyed them all, except one who escaped into e-space."

"E- what?"

"E-space, it's like a micro universe, acts like a safety valve for the rest of the universe. Allows the universe enough mass to stop from expanding eternally, but disperses it so that it slows the contraction rate, see?"

"I think I do." Steve nodded. "I've not heard that explanation, but I see what you mean."

Sadianna looked at the Molecular Resonance Manipulator with pride. "There!" she exclaimed, "All done, and if I say so myself, a vast improvement on Torqcraf's model."

Steve frowned.

"No offence." She added. Commander Woods smiled, indicating 'none taken'.

"So, what happened to this 'Doomsday device', then?" he was eager to find out as much as he could.

"Well," Sadianna picked up the new Manipulator. "Could we take this to my TARDIS to fit it, and I'll explain on the way, OK?"

The burly guard, Sergeant Olley, fastened the last bindings on the Inquisitor and reported to Borax that the prisoners were secure. "Good." The space commander sounded smug. This would earn him favour with the Emperor. He faced his two subordinates and said; "You have done well. You will stay here and search their ship thoroughly. Report every thing that you find. I will take two of the crew from one of the other ships to keep watch over these two."

Olley looked at his team-mate, Stann-lea, a big smile on his face. The look was mutual.

Obviously both thought that searching an empty ship was less dangerous than guarding potentially violent aliens. They saluted, chorused "Yes, Sir!!" and turned on their heels, and marched from the ship.

As the ship banked around a mountain peak, the Inquisitor and Ryoko stole a glance from the porthole. The two soldiers were at the doorway to the TARDIS, one scratching his head, the other they caught throwing his helmet to the ground in frustration. They had discovered that the doorway had sealed itself. The prisoners exchanged smiles, knowing that the pair would never get into the ship. "So," murmured Ryoko "Looks like we'll be pre-tty close for this journey, eh, Torqey? Oh, you're so clever. And the ways you find to be close to me! Even getting captured so you'd be tied up next to me. #SIGH# Must be love."

The Inquisitor sighed. "Ryoko, *IF* I wanted to be 'intimate' with you, I would have found a better way than getting bound by some Imperialist dictator!"

Ryoko was laughing to herself, unseen or heard by her fellow captor. This was fun.

Sadianna's TARDIS, for the moment at least, looked remarkably like an ornate Rococo column. Carved Unicorns hugged the lower cylinder, reaching up to touch one front hoof to the tip of a flying swan's wing as it curved around the upper column.

The Duchess made her exit from her ship, passing directly through the wall of the vessel. Or so it appeared. His hand on his head, as if trying to stop the top coming off, Steve followed her out.

"Never in my life," he was saying as he passed out of the column "have I seen anything like that. It's unbelievable."

"It's a Tesseract." Returned the Duchess. "It exists in about twenty-six dimensions. You can only relate to three or four, so it's bound to seem a little unfamiliar."

"But it's amazing!" Steve continued, "That control console's made of crystal, or something like it, and I can see no wires or.."

"Don't worry about it." Reassured Sadianna "Surely you've been in the Inquisitors TARDIS? I know *that's* a bit archaic, but.."

"No!" interrupted Commander Woods, agitated. "No, he's promised on several occasions, but it never seems to happen."

The Time Lady was aiming a tiny gold device at her ship. Nothing, it seemed, happened, but she seemed satisfied that something had, and turned to leave the

Japanese garden. The spot where the Inquisitor usually 'parked'. "There!" she said. "All sound and safe. How about a little drink? And I'll finish the story about the weapon?"

"Fine." This suited the Starfleet officer. There was still time before the Ambassador arrived. "We can get tea at the station mess hall, or there's my quarters?"

In full stride, The Duchess made her way down the corridor. She chuckled softly.

"No, Steve, not tea."

"But you said..?"

"...There'd be time for tea, yes. But it's just a saying. A turn of phrase. No. I want to go to that place that Torqcraf goes to on this station. I want to experience 'The Targ Pit!'" She spoke the name with *some* relish.

Steve's face dropped. "Oh," he said.

From her position next to the porthole, Ryoko could see a beautiful city in the distance. She elbowed Torqcraf, as best she could, and nodded toward the window. "Almost worth the journey, look." She said, "If your people hadn't dumped their old weapons here, we'd have missed this."

"They didn't 'dump' it. When the war ended without them having to use it, they 'stored' it in what was supposed to be an 'empty dimension', a sort of mini universe. It was created in the same way the TARDIS was, Temporal engineering." He was keeping his voice at a whisper, hoping that Ryoko would follow his lead. No such luck.

"Well, they should have just dismantled it, or destroyed it. That's what I would have done, no use leaving things around for people to find, no way, not when they're dangerous things. To risky."

"No one was supposed to be able to get into the 'storage dimension', for want of a better word. Only the Time Lords had the technology." Torqcraf's voice was laced with concern.

"Well," chirped Ryoko, "these guys found it. Didn't they, huh? Careless of you guys, I say. Sloppy, that's what it is."

It had taken less than ten minutes for the rocket ship to dock and its passengers disembark.

Ryoko and the Inquisitor were led through what seemed like miles of corridors and passages, over bridges that looked down on streets that were so far below that they could see wisps of cloud drifting across their field of view.

Eventually, they passed through passages that were even more opulent than those through which they had marched this far. A huge pair of doors decorated as prestigiously as in any palace that either of the prisoners had ever seen.

Space commander Borax ordered them to "Halt!" with great pride and authority.

"You will wait here. He told them. "The Emperor will grant you an audience shortly." His smile was not comforting.

“Are you sure about this?” asked Commander Woods. “I mean, I only go into ‘The Targ Pit’ if I *really* have to.”

“Oh, but I’ll be fine!” exclaimed the Duchess confidently. “I have to see L’Sar, make arrangements for the ‘Grand Finale’!”

“But, *KLINGONS!* And you. You’re small, and, *they’ll eat you alive!*”

Sadianna was not listening. She pushed the door open and marched forcefully into the bar.

There was silence from the crammed room full of Klingons.

The Emperor was an imposing figure. Vaguely oriental eyes greeted the prisoners; a friendly smile was framed by a goatee beard and very long moustache. He was draped in a scarlet and gold silk robe, reinforcing the oriental image. He held out a hand to them, welcoming them.

“My dear friends!” he purred, “I do hope my staff have served you well?”

The Inquisitor and Ryoko exchanged quizzical glances, and Torqcraf replied;

“There seems to have been a misunderstanding, your Majesty. Our craft was shot down, and my companion and I treated as prisoners.” The Emperor looked mollified.

“Commander Borax. Is this true?” he inquired, “Have my guests been maligned in this manner?”

Borax looked crestfallen. And not a little perplexed.

“Why, “he stuttered and spluttered his way through his answer. “It’s just. Your Magnificence! My orders! I-I- was told that the ship was an intruder! The occupants to be detained!”

The Emperor chuckled as he shook his head in disappointment.

“You see the problems we have recruiting reliable staff these days?” He stepped down from the rostrum on which his throne was set, and approached Ryoko.

“Delightful Lady.” He cooed. “Allow me to introduce myself. I am the Emperor Ming.” He bowed and kissed her hand. “And what would your name be, oh vision of loveliness?” The Inquisitor winced.

“Well, your Emperorship,” fawned Ryoko, curtsying, “I’m Ryoko, and I’m a princess, y’know, yeah, princess Ryoko, that’s me!” she gave a little laugh “I’m so glad you rescued me, really I am. This guy here, the one standing there?” she pointed at Torqcraf “He’s a notorious space pirate, see? There was I minding my own Royal business, when that creep bursts in and kidnaps me. Me! A royal Princess of Durai!” The Emperor was looking at the Inquisitor curiously.

“Ryoko!!” exclaimed Torqcraf. He made a step toward her, only to be stopped by one of the Royal guards, at the wave of Ming’s hand.

“It’s not true, your Majesty!” protested the Time Lord “She’s the Pirate! And she’s no princess!

Ming the Merciless turned to Ryoko and held her hand.

“What an ordeal it must have been, my dear.” He led her up the steps to the throne and waved for her to sit on it. “There.” He said, “Now you feel at home, I

trust?" Ryoko smiled at him sweetly. "Sure do!" she enthused "Oh yeah, this is for me!"

"Good." Emperor Ming breathed. "You will become my new wife tomorrow."

"Wife!?" Ryoko's alarm was tangible.

"Wife?!" Torqcraf was taken aback by the Emperors declaration.

"Yes." Answered Ming with obvious glee." There's no way for the poor thing to get to her own world now. So I will take her under my protection, as the wife of Ming the Merciless!"

"But" asked Ryoko "What about him?" nodding at the Inquisitor.

"Oh, he is, as you have said, a pirate. He will have to be executed!"

.....To be continued.....