

So far...Creatures and objects from alternate universes have been appearing on Starbase 410. A time traveller visiting the station is investigating the phenomenon. The traveller's own people, the Time Lords, have sent important information to the station commander via an emissary, with help from a device that one of the stations engineers had built, to the traveller's specifications. Whilst returning the Time Lady emissary the engineer, Woods, has let something else through....

Meanwhile, the Klingon ship "Proud Vengeance" has had a run in with some more extra dimensional intruders...the Daleks!

## Gathering Forces- part 2

By James Harrington

The view screen of the Klingon ship glared brightly with the blast from the Dalek energy weapons. The resulting explosion threw the crew to the floor, the lights dimmed, and emergency light filled the bridge with an amber glow.

Raising himself from the floor, Captain Ke'reth scowled at the Daleks image on the viewer.

"I will destroy you!!" he shouted, holding a clenched fist up to the screen. "De-cloak, and arm weapons!" The crew were re-assuming their positions. b'Sel checked her station, turned to the Captain and said; "We are de-cloaked, and shields are down fifty percent. Another blast like that, and they will destroy us."

L'Sar barked an order. "Adjust position, fifty meters downward, and turn to face the underside of their travel discs!"

Ke'reth frowned at her, teeth bared. "What is this?" he snapped.

"Do it now!" She countered, "I'll explain later! Quickly, before they fire again!"

Ke'reth nodded to the helm to obey, and glanced at the screen again.

The Daleks seemed to be confused. They appeared to be discussing something, although the crew of 'Proud Vengeance could not hear what they were saying.

At her console, b'Sel called over; "The other group of the machines,"

"Daleks." Stated L'Sar.

"Daleks, "continued b'Sel, "have vanished from our sensors."

"Are the sensors working?" the Captain asked, snidely.

"Yes!" replied b'Sel, indignantly, "But the larger group has vanished. Perhaps that is what has distracted our attackers and given us an opportunity to attack."

"We're in position, sir." Said the helmsman.

"Then fire disruptors and photon torpedoes simultaneously!" L'Sar shouted urgently. "Before they resume the attack!"

On the view screen the underside of the Dalek disks could be seen, a grouping of three silver globes on each. The image didn't last long, as the ships armaments tore into the Daleks causing a blinding explosion. The bridge crew grasped at consoles, railings, anything to steady their selves for the shockwave.

When the debris had cleared, nothing was left of the machines. Ke'reth grinned broadly. "You said we could not defeat them, L'Sar." He sounded smug.

"The whole group, we could not." She replied, confidently. "These few would have been difficult, to say the least. The distraction of the other Daleks disappearing gave us a long enough respite to perform that manoeuvre, which I instigated, remember." Ke'reth nodded acknowledgement, and asked;

"Why *did* you order the ship to descend and fire from *beneath* the machines?"

L'Sar smiled, showing the rows of sharp teeth.

"I have, as you now know, encountered these creatures before. Those wide discs that they were on are not part of the Dalek casing; they are interstellar travel machines that they use to move about within a stellar system. The power units are housed near the base of the disc, close to those globes, which propel them. Rupture the power source, and it will take the rest of the Dalek with it."

Ke'reth slumped heavily into his command chair. He grinned brightly. "It has been a good day." Pleased at the victory, the captain still had one concern. "What happened to the other group of Daleks, though?" Incredulous, he added; "*They ran away?*" L'Sar was heading for the lift door as she turned and said;

"No. No, Daleks would not do that. The most likely thing is that, like the other instances of these 'extra-dimensional' incursions, they were called back to where they came from. Or whatever force that has been causing it to happen simply pulled them back through." Ke'reth slumped further down in his seat. "Oh how I wish this would stop." He groaned. "An enemy that I can see, that is permanent, and not there one minute and gone the next, *that* I can understand. But this..."

"When we left the Starbase," L'Sar replied from the lift "the Inquisitor was investigating the phenomenon. If he hasn't found a solution already, I would guess that he is working on the situation at this very moment."

"Let us hope so." The Captain murmured. "Let us hope so."

On one of the larger continents of the planet Pandorterrea, there is a spectacular cliff top view of the planets most incredible natural feature. The great waterfall is over twenty miles high, and from the grassy cliff, itself nearly five miles away from the fall, you get the most wonderful sight, complete with staggering rainbows caused by the spray and blazing sunlight.

Lying on a patchwork blanket at the very edge of the cliff, dressed in Bermuda shorts and Hawaiian shirt, straw hat covering his face, the Inquisitor was snoring.

"Fess up, buster!" The mad lady exclaimed loudly. "Why have you kidnapped me? Why did you bring me here, huh? Speak up now, I'm waiting!"

Steve Woods really would have loved to answer this newest visitor to the station, had her grip on his throat not made it so difficult for him to breath.

"I'm very important, y' know," she continued in what sounded like a Brooklyn drawl. "I'm Ryoko, princess of planet Durai, there will be sooo much trouble when I'm reported missing!"

A princess. Great. Steve had thought that the Inquisitors machine had proved invaluable in transporting the Lady Sadianna from her universe, but he had misgivings now, since his assailant had replaced Sadianna on the transporter

pad. He looked up at the vaguely feline features of the 'princess' from his position on the cargo bay floor, and pointed at her clenched hand at his throat.

"Huh?" she glanced at her hand on his windpipe, and relaxed her hold a little. "OK, but don't you try any thing, y' hear? I may be a lady, but I can kick your butt any day, mister!"

Steve Woods coughed once, and started to explain the situation.

Patting the last of the soil down evenly, Lucretia Nax stood and admired her work. The small area of the hydroponics deck that had not yet been allocated to any thing specific now had a purpose. The Inquisitor had asked her if he could use it for growing some plants, and had handed her some seeds, which he claimed, were extremely rare.

She hadn't had a problem with this, as she had learned to trust him, especially as he had probably saved her life a while back.

The sound of his TARDIS materialising carried across the plantation from the Japanese garden. From this position she could not see it forming, but she knew exactly the spot it would occupy.

The door of the little stone edifice was just swinging open as she reached the junction of pathways that surrounded the flowerbed where it rested. The figure of the Inquisitor stepped from his ship, in more familiar garb. The ubiquitous tri-corn hat topped the ensemble, a white shirt that tied at the neck, scarlet tapestry waistcoat, with breeches and hose replacing the usual trousers and riding boots.

"Hello!" he called, cheerily to ensign Nax. "Been busy?"

Lucretia smiled, and answered; "Not really, I had a half an hour before I finish my shift, so I planted those seeds for you." She frowned a little and added "It's nothing underhand, or illegal, is it?"

"No," he replied with a slight chuckle "No, they don't actually exist, really."

"Pardon?" she was getting used to some of his cryptic answers, but could sometimes tease some clarification out of him.

"Oh, I'll explain later." He said with a matter of fact air. "Any thing exciting happen while I was away?"

"Yes," Vice Admiral Jat's voice startled them both, coming as it did from behind them. "If you count a visit from a Lady Sadianna."

"The Duchess? Here?" The Inquisitor sounded pleased. "Where is she?"

"Well, she's gone now, I hope. Your engineer co-conspirator should have sent her back by now. She left you this." Anarita Jat held up the little white box that Sadianna had left in her care.

"Oh, good." The traveller snatched the box from Jat like a child eagerly receiving a special birthday present. "They've found out something!"

"Oh, good!" gushed the station commander "Perhaps you'd care to share it? We've been unable to open it. If that thing contains anything that can solve this problem, then I'd like to know about it."

"Oh, you will, Anarita, you will. As soon as I can open it myself."

"Your Time Lady friend suggested it would open for you." Stated Jat.

"Well, it will, but only when I need to know whatever it is *it* knows. As it were."

Anarita took hold of the Inquisitors arm and forcibly led him to one side, out of hearing range of the young Trill.

“Now listen.” She hissed through clenched teeth. “I am getting tired of you avoiding the sharing of information on this situation. I’m getting tired of you disobeying my ‘instructions’ to use the docking bays so that we can keep tabs on your comings and goings. And I am absolutely sick and frelling tired of you calling me by my first name!!”

The time traveller looked over at the ensign, who was trying desperately to eavesdrop. He shrugged and shot her a sheepish grin. Turning back to the Vice Admiral, he adopted a grave tone and looked her directly in the eyes.

“You know that races you’ve never heard of have been appearing from nowhere and vanishing without a trace. You know that, for the most part, these ‘visitors’ have been hostile. What I am trying to ascertain is if this is a natural occurrence, a weakening of the dimensional barriers, or some unknown variation of a wormhole, that sort of thing.

If it isn’t, and there is some sentient being, or force behind this, then they must be stopped.

I’m not sure how, or if I can stop it. But I would like L’Sar and the crew of the ‘Proud Vengeance’ to be available at a moments notice. They could be invaluable.

With the device that Steven built for me, I intend to go through the ‘warp’ that we occasionally detect in the nebula. There, I may find some answers, since those ships that have been buzzing the station, and me, went through there. I might, just, be able to call upon my people to help. Although the thought appals me. There are others that I would like to call upon for assistance, but I don’t know if my device has the power to transfer them, or if we have time. Trust me.”

The Vice Admiral looked at the floor. She looked up at the ceiling. Then she looked back at the traveller. Letting out a great sigh, she said;

“OK. You didn’t try to hypnotise me that time. I’ll go along with it.” She turned to head back to ensign Nax, and then stopped. Turning her head back to face him, she asked; “Can you communicate with the station from where ever you end up? If you need back up?”

The Inquisitor was looking past her, at some figures that were stepping through the main door of the hydroponics centre. They were too distant to make out properly. One was definitely Steve Woods, the other, a female, looked vaguely familiar. Steve was carrying the Molecular manipulator device.

“Well?” Anarita interrupted his attempt to identify the woman.

“I don’t know. I think so.”

“So you could be unable to call for help if you need it.”

“Yes.” Before any more could be said, Woods and his companion arrived at the spot where the TARDIS stood.

“Torq-eyyyy!!!” screamed the woman that had attacked Steve in the cargo bay.

“Oh no.” said the Inquisitor, under his breath.

“Oh, Torq-ey, I knew we’d meet again, nothing can keep us apart! You sent for me, didn’t you, mm? C’mon, admit it. You missed me so much.” She *floated* across the flowerbeds and wrapped her arms around his neck.

The little gathering looked flabbergasted. Not just at Ryoko's familiarity with the Time Lord. Not just at her lack of linguistic economy. The flushed face of the Inquisitor betrayed the fact that he truly was familiar with her, and was genuinely embarrassed by her claims.

Jat and Nax, for whom this was the first encounter with Ryoko, eyed her suspiciously.

Ryoko was elegantly dressed. A plunging neckline on her light grey dress stopped at a sash tied at her waist. A tiny tailcoat topped off crimson leggings, matching pixie boots and gloves. Each side of the coat was a different colour.

Her face was friendly looking, with eyes that looked a little *too* large, a small, slightly pointed nose, and an engaging smile. A shock of silvery hair crowned this spectacle.

Her ears were pointed. Not Vulcan pointed, more elf-like.

The Inquisitor struggled vainly, and a little half-heartedly, to escape the embrace.

"Please, Ryoko, it's very nice to see you, but I do need to breathe!"

As he continued to try to wriggle free of Ryoko, Jat and Woods were conversing.

"So." She said sharply "Who, then, is this? Another of your dimensional 'fishing' experiments?"

"I just reversed the process to send the Time Lady back where she came from."

Replied the engineer defensively. "This one popped up before I could switch the gadget off."

"Gadget?" Anarita allowed herself a soft growl. This time traveller's archaic jargon was starting to catch on with some of her staff. Or, the ones that had worked closely with him. Steve continued. "She claims to be a princess. That came through with her." He pointed at the animal that Ensign Nax was tickling under the chin.

It looked like a hybrid cat/rabbit. Its back feet looked like a rabbits. It held its front paws like a rabbit, and the ears were huge and floppy. The face of the creature, however, looked exactly like a mongrel cat, with long whiskers drooping either side of its stubby black nose.

The Inquisitor had managed to free himself, and was rejoining the Starfleet group. Ryoko was still right beside him, but floating in a reclining position, gazing at his face.

"Ryoko! You didn't claim to be a princess!!" The Time Lord chastised. "Really! Where did you say you were princess of then?"

"A place called Durai." Answered Woods.

"Ryoko!!" an exasperated Inquisitor clasped his forehead and looked to the ceiling.

"Oh, I just thought how much it'd annoy ol' prissy pants!" laughed Ryoko.

"Still," continued the Inquisitor, getting excited now " you've got Ryo-oh-ki with you. Yes!! It's perfect! We have a chance!" He grabbed her by the shoulders (with difficulty, it has to be said. Have you ever tried to grab someone that's floating at eye level?)

"Were you involved in anything important when my friend here 'invited' you in?"

"Aww, shucks, no." she replied with a dismissive wave of her hand. "Just a little financial gamble. It'll wait. If you've got something goin' on, it's bound to be more fun!!"

"I wouldn't call it fun, but I'd like you to come with me on a dangerous journey....." She interrupted him. "Oh, you get so melodramatic! Let's get on with it."

At that moment, L'Sar came striding into the garden. "Torqcraf....!" She cut short her sentence when she saw Ryoko drifting like a feather around the Inquisitor. "What," she snapped, "is *SHE* doing here!!"

Ryoko drifted across to the Klingon, and settled onto the ground directly in front of her.

"Still got miss subtlety in tow, eh, Torq-ey?" It was a sarcastic remark.

"Pot, kettle, and black comes to mind." Replied L'Sar, pointedly.

"Don't start, you two." The Inquisitor intervened " We've got work to do."

L'Sar took the Time Lord aside and related the incident of the Dalek attack on her ship.

He, in turn, informed her of the events that had occurred since her departure from the station.

"I want you to stay here, keep alert, and make sure the other Klingons are ready if I should call. Ryoko and I are going into the Nebula."

L'Sar bristled. "I do not like that plan. *I* should be there with you."

"You know I need you to galvanise the Klingons. And Ryoko *is* a formidable warrior."

L'Sar sighed. "She is indeed. Very well. Take care. Will you take Ryo-oh-ki?"

"Oh, Lord no. She's more use here. *A formidable battle ship?*"

The Klingon warrior's eyes glinted, a smile played across her lips. "Yes, I see."

She hugged him, much to Ryoko's distaste, and the amusement of the Starfleet staff, who were unused to seeing Klingons show affection in public.

Torqcraf, the Inquisitor, turned to Lucretia Nax, who was still playing games with Ryo-oh-ki, the 'cabbit' creature.

"Lucy, would you look after Ryo-oh-ki for us? You two obviously get along, and it would be useful for her to stay on the station until we need her. She eats carrots. Lots and lots of carrots."

Lucretia grinned, and said "Oh, yes, that would be great. She's so cute! I'll introduce her to the replicator."

"I wouldn't." He warned. "She'll fill the station with carrots."

The Vice Admiral added her comments. "Wait a minute. Shouldn't this animal be quarantined, or at least checked for contamination?"

"Lay off my ship, lady!" snapped Ryoko. "She's as clean as any of us!"

The Inquisitor nodded agreement. "Steve, can I have the Manipulator, please. I think you've tested it adequately." The device was handed over. "We'll be off now, don't wait up. L'Sar, you know what to do, Lucy, if Ryo-oh-ki gets agitated and heads for the docking bays go with her and open the doors at the appropriate moment.

Steve thanks for your Stirling work on this." He held up the device. He and Ryoko headed for the Tardis. Before the door closed, Torqcraf popped his head around

the gap and called "Oh, and Lucy? When I get back I'll show you some more of those techniques to help you suppress your symbionts less sociable aspects." She looked up from the cabbit and smiled and nodded. He looked at the others and said "Goodbye."

L'Sar looked him in the eye and nodded, smiling. The door closed.

"Do you trust him in there with her?" asked Jat.

"Him with her, yes. Her with him, no. But she is a valuable asset in some situations. She has....abilities."

The deep, resonant thud of the TARDIS drive engaging made the floor vibrate. As the ship faded away, the grinding, groaning of its engines reached an almost inaudible pitch and faded also. The group in the garden turned and made for the door, the cabbit hopping along behind ensign Nax.

At the doorway, L'Sar turned and gazed at the space where the TARDIS had stood.

"Good luck." She said, and the door closed behind her.

"Did she call that moggy 'SHIP?'" Anarita's voice drifted through the door.

To be continued.....