

Gathering forces-part 1

By James Harrington

Starlight glinted off the hull of the Klingon cruiser "Proud Vengeance" as it coasted toward the Federation Starbase 410. 'Coasted' is probably not what you would normally call warp 4; compared to the speed the ship was capable of, it was a stately pace.

But, Captain Ke'reth was in no hurry. The mission had been a success, and had been completed ahead of schedule. He allowed himself a smug smile as he thought of the honour he and his crew had bestowed upon themselves and their families.

"Captain!" barked the communications officer. "I am picking up a transmission. I cannot recognise the code."

Ke'reth leaned forward in his seat, a frown furrowing his brow. "Where," he asked, "is it coming from?"

"In the area of the Ram Qul nebula." As he finished speaking, the Helmsman turned his head and added; "Sir! I am registering a number of small objects in that region. Sector 3. The nebula's outer rim."

"Identify!!" roared the Captain. The operative called up an image on the view screen. It was difficult to discern what the sighting was, but it did seem to be a large mass, several kilometres across, made up of hundreds of smaller, metallic objects.

"What have we here?" Ke'reth inquired, in resonant purr, a smile playing across his lips.

"Magnify that image." The command was slow, a low growl that indicated that the Klingon was anticipating a conflict. Perhaps, he thought, we have the answer here to these strange 'visitations' that had been plaguing the space around the station these last few months. If he were to solve this thing, destroy the cause..... As the image on the viewer resolved into a closer view of the scene, they could see that what they had encountered was a 'flotilla' of mechanical devices of some kind. Each was approximately 1.5 metres high. All were slightly cone shaped, but with a domed top, and two lights, one each side of the dome. The lights on some of the machines seemed to be flashing in no discernable pattern. A short rod was fitted to the dome, midway between the lights. Some of them were moving, up and down, or, on some, turning as the dome turned. Ke'reth assumed that the dome was turning, since the lights rotated in relation to the stalk. Two more rods, of different length, were attached about midway down the machines, which all appeared to be mounted on a deep disc shaped platform, a little wider than the rest of the object. Their movements implied that they were guided, not programmed. As if an intelligence were controlling the machines 'in real time', as it were.

As if they were...occupied?

“Engage cloak!” He commanded. “Slow to impulse.” His warriors obeyed, and Captain Ke’reth slowly sat back in his chair. His eyes narrowed, teeth clenched, he murmured;

“Let us see what we have here.”

With a positive snap the last connection fitted into place. The engineer stepped back and surveyed the tangle of wires that weaved between the transporter console and the makeshift device on the floor beside the console pedestal.

He ran his fingers through his hair and shook his head. The schematic the Inquisitor had provided had been easy enough to follow, but this was technology that the Starfleet engineer was unfamiliar with. And as some of the components he had built himself from scratch, it was his duty to his ‘client’, as well as to himself, to test the device.

Steven Woods sighed. He was tired. Having worked his normal shift, and spent the bulk of his spare time working on this gadget, he was not convinced that he had got every thing right. He ran it through his mind time after time, but there was still that uncertainty.

Realising that the new device would need a particular power source, he had taken it to one of the cargo bays, where the transporter terminals were capable of handling massive power surges. Also, if any thing went wrong, or the unit caused an unwelcome side effect, then at least this spacious area might contain any ‘accident’.

Crossing his fingers, as he had seen the Inquisitor do (Why, he didn’t know), Woods set the transporter controls to the setting that would power up the little box at his feet.

Crouching beside the silver and plexi-glass device, he operated the controls on that, hoping he was doing the right thing.

Standing, he glanced over to the transporter pad. His eyes widened as a shimmering light started to resolve into an object. This he had not anticipated.

“Oh no.” He groaned.” What have I done?”

On the view screen of the ‘Proud Vengeance’, there were signs of activity. Several of the machines were becoming animated. Four of them broke away from the main body, and re-grouped at a point much closer to the Klingon ship. With the viewer on magnification, they looked right outside!

B’Sel stood at her Captains side. He still reclined in his command chair. “Do you think we have been discovered?” she asked, anxiously.

“Perhaps,” replied Ke’reth, “but if they should choose to attack, they will not find us an easy prey.”

B’Sel smiled warmly at the thought of battle. Two of the group of four machines left the formation, and slowly made for Klingon ship.

The lift door opened, and L’Sar stepped onto the bridge. As she caught sight of the image on the screen, her eyes widened and she shouted; “Cloak the ship! Evasive action!!”

“We are cloaked!” shouted the captain. “We will not run from these robots!!”

L'Sar reached the captain in four large, swift strides. She grabbed him roughly by the collar. "You don't know what these things are!!" she growled. "Or what they are capable of!"

Ke'reth pushed her away in disgust. "Do not talk to me that way!"

"I have encountered them before!" L'Sar barked "When I travelled with the Inquisitor in the other universe. They are called Daleks! Those two," she continued, "have enough firepower to destroy this ship!"

"Our shields are up." Ke'reth's reply was more subdued.

"That will only delay them." She replied.

B'Sel pushed herself between the pair and offered: "They may have noticed the cloak shield distortion." The other two un-tensed and grunted agreement. "If we rig for silent running, it may give them less to detect."

Ke'reth nodded, and gave the order. He found it hard to believe that these members of his crew were advocating hiding from a potential enemy. Both of them, however, were wise, and their council had proven worthy on many other occasions.

As he turned to leave the command deck, L'Sar grasped his wrist. He snapped his head around to face her, glancing at her hand on him, and then stared her in the eyes.

"This battle" stated L'Sar quietly, "would be futile. We are hopelessly outnumbered. There would be no honour here."

Ke'reth wrenched his arm away from her grip grunted his reluctant agreement as he left the bridge.

Anarita Jat appraised the new comer with a long, sweeping, critical look before turning her gaze to Woods. "Well?" she snapped impatiently.

"That's all. I was testing out the gadget I'd built for the Inquisitor,"

"Without getting approval!" reproached the Vice Admiral

"Without getting approval, yes." answered the officer dejectedly. "And, any way, there she was. Asked if the Inquisitor was here, and when I was unable to find him, I thought that this was the best place to take her."

"And if he had been on station, which incidentally he should be, when would you have thought it might be an idea to tell me, eh? Just before I got to hear about her in the bar, from a passing trader?"

"Please," interrupted the visitor. She was a human type, a woman with an unruly mane of red hair, dressed elegantly in a long, dark green tapestry gown, reminiscent of something from Earth's 17th or 18th Century. "Please let me explain. It's not Steven's fault," she looked at Lieutenant Woods "you don't mind me calling you Steven, do you? Thought not." She hadn't waited for his reply, much to his chagrin.

"Let me introduce myself, I'm known as the Duchess. Lady Sadianna of the High council of Time Lords. "

"Oh God!" exclaimed Jat "Another one!"

"I must be brief; my time here is very limited. The device that Steven here built for Torq- the Inquisitor, allowed my people to send me through to deliver a message.

As you obviously know, we've been monitoring this crossover phenomenon from our side, our universe, and keeping records. I have information that could be immensely useful to the Inquisitor." I didn't know, thought Jat, but thanks anyway. "Care to share it?" asked the Vice Admiral, somewhat sarcastically, Steve thought.

"Oh, I'm sure he will," chirped Sadianna brightly. Not what I meant. Thought Jat to herself.

"Now," said the Duchess "where is he? Torqcraf? The Inquisitor?"

"As my officer said," replied Jat " he is not on the station. And I have repeatedly 'asked' him to keep me informed of his comings and goings. He doesn't even use the docking bays, which I have insisted on. Keeps landing in the Japanese garden."

Sadianna smiled "Oh yes, he would. He likes a well kept garden."

"Not the point!" snapped the station commander. Are all these 'Time Lords' this scatty? Thought the Vice Admiral. "So," she continued "this information you say you have?"

"Yes!" exclaimed Sadianna excitedly "I'll leave it for you to pass on, shall I?" She began rummaging about up on of her voluminous sleeves. Good, thought Jat, we're getting somewhere. Sadianna pulled six white squares from her sleeve, and placed them on the table in a cross formation, so that they were all touching one of the others. Woods and Jat looked at each other in bewilderment.

The Time Lady stood and faced the formation, her eyes closed in concentration.

To the surprise of the onlookers, the squares came to life, forming themselves into a cube.

When the cube was complete, she looked up at the station Commander, scooped the cube up in one hand, and thrust it under the nose of Anarita Jat.

"Give this to Torqcraf when you see him, will you?" she spoke in a tone that suggested she was passing on some trinket of no consequence. Very 'matter of fact'. "I have to go now, look." She held out her arm and pulled back the sleeve of her gown to reveal a copper coloured bracelet with a swirl pattern on the top .The bracelet was glowing faintly. "If young Steven here can show back to where I materialised, and reverse the process that got me here, I'll bid you farewell. For now."

"Young?" Steven Woods murmured to himself. "She can't be more than twenty something. Young?"

Anarita made a quick decision to let the Time Lady have her way, just so as not to be stuck with two of these irritating people. She nodded agreement to Woods, who proceeded to lead the Duchess away.

This thought Anarita, gazing curiously at the cube, must contain the 'valuable' information. How do I access it?

"You don't!" it was Sadianna's voice. In the Commanders head. "It's for the Inquisitor. It will open for him."

Great. Now she had to deal with the Inquisitor again, and try to prise from him basic knowledge that should be a station commanders as a matter of course

“Captain!” The voice belonged to L’Sar. “To the bridge! Immediately!” She turned to face the screen. The two Daleks that had been sent to sniff them out were peering a little too closely. They had been spotted!

“Goodbye, Steven Woods.” Said Sadianna, standing on the transport pad. “Give my best wishes to Torqcraf. I’ll be back soon, so look out for me.”

“Yeah, well, see you then.” Woods was mystified by the Time Lady’s attitude, and how she knew his full name. He hadn’t told her. He operated the controls, and the Time Lady grew indistinct and faded, clutching the bracelet at her wrist.

He was just about to switch off all systems, when the transport pad began to glow, and a raucous din, like a cat howling issued from the swirling vortex that was forming on the platform. A figure started to coalesce.

“Oh no!” groaned Steve. “What now?”

Ke’reth stood beside his warriors on the command deck of his ship. One of the Dalek creatures filled the screen. It knew exactly where to be to command their attention.

“Alien vessel!” The grating, electronic voice forced its way through the ships address system “We know you are there! Make yourselves visible, or you will be destroyed!”

Ke’reth bristled. “I will not surrender!”

“They could destroy us.” Advised L’Sar. “If we appear to going along with them, it may give us an advantage.”

“Arrgh!” growled the captain. “Such subterfuge is the Romulan way.” The word ‘Romulan was spoken with distaste.

The Dalek voice cut through the ship again.

“We will wait no longer! You have defied the Daleks! You will be exterminated!”

On the viewer, the Dalek moved away from the ship, both Daleks became visible. The sound of two Dalek voices, one slightly deeper than the first, blared through the comms, as bright, blue flashes of energy shot from their short midriff rods, their weapons.

“Exterminate! Exterminate! EX-TER-MIN-ATE!!!”

There was an enormous explosion.

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