

## Into the Rift

By James Harrington

The leather-gloved hand moved smoothly across the controls. An image appeared on the view screen. It looked strikingly like an old sailing ship from Earth's past. Not that the observers would know that.

"The alien returns, your excellence." The voice was silky smooth, cultured.

"We would gaze upon it, Klytus." The second voice, while also cultured, had an air of authority about it. At the touch of a button, the image zoomed in closer. The ship was approaching the nebula sedately.

"Have Space Commander Borax intercept the vessel. Tell him that I would speak with its occupants." A velvet-gloved hand dismissed the subordinate with a wave. "And Klytus?"

"Sire?" The other turned to face his Emperor.

"Tell him not to fail. It would *displease* me." There was a hint of menace in the last sentence.

"Well? Impressed?" The Inquisitor's voice was slightly muffled.

"A bit disappointed, if you must know." Replied Ryoko, rising from the chaise lounge, and adjusting her tailcoat. "That it?"

The Inquisitor sat up, banging his head on the underside of the TARDIS console.

"It's a marvellous example!" He adjusted his position, and returned to the opening in the console. He was struggling with a tangle of wires that ran from the Manipulator device to his own machine.

"Looks like any other nebula if you ask me. A load of gas and dust cluttering the space ways. Once you've seen one..."

"It's different." Replied her companion from somewhere inside the console. "Most nebulae are either the remains of a dead, or exploded star. That or a stellar nursery, creating new stars from the primeval..."

"Yeah, yeah, you don't have to wax lyrical with me. I'm not impressed. It still looks like a load of ol' star crap to me." Ryoko was widely travelled, and could be a bit blasé about some things.

The traveller struggled out from his console, the task completed.

"The big difference," he said, winding up the un-used lengths of wire, "is that this 'load of ol' star crap' is both. Old, dead stars and new ones being made."

Ryoko helped clear up the tools and prepare the TARDIS for its forthcoming journey while the time traveller continued to enthuse about this nebula. "And the point is, they are the *same* stars. *The deceased and the fledgling stars are the same ones!*"

Ryoko stopped mid stride. "Time manipulation, you think?"

"What do you think?" he asked "And I know now what's causing it."

"You got the info from that li'lle box?" she was floating again. Circling him like a goldfish in a bowl. "I didn't think you'd opened it yet."

"It told me as soon as I touched it. Didn't want the Starfleet types to know."

"Stuffed shirts!" snorted Ryoko "How'd you get involved with *them*?"

"Long story. Now! Lets see if we can open the rift in the nebula, and pay a call on our mysterious intruders!"

Before he could operate the controls, the screen glowed with the swirling light of the nebula warping, and spewing out three bulbous, ornate spacecraft.

"Mmm," mused Ryoko, "looks like they're coming to greet us!"

The Andorian ambassador bade farewell, and the screen returned to showing the star field that surrounded the station.

Recently promoted first officer Steven Woods turned to the Ensign at the monitoring console.

"Keep an eye on things, and let me know when the Ambassador is ready to dock. You know how tetchy these dignitaries can get if they think we're not showing them proper respect. "

The Ensign acknowledged him, and he looked around the command centre. This was not his place. Sitting around waiting to fawn over visiting politicians was not what he joined Starfleet for. He was an engineer. He should be doing something. He had just made his mind up to go and see how Ensign Nax was getting on with the 'cabbit' creature that Ryoko had left in her charge, when the lift doors opened.

"What?" he gasped, "I thought I'd sent you home?" Striding towards him, the Time Lady Sadianna grinned broadly.

"Hello, 'Number one'!" she called across the large control area. "Congratulations! You deserve it!"

She was dressed less formally than the last time Steve had met her. A red wine coloured open neck shirt and a dark green velvet jacket topped black boots and trousers. Her hair was still flowing in an unruly fashion about her shoulders.

Steve greeted her half way from the lift. "How'd you get here?" he asked, "I thought it was only with the help of the Molecular Manipulator that you got here last time."

"It was! It was!" She was as exuberant as ever. "But, do you know, we found a way to project a TARDIS through with the aid of a compressed Chronon beam! Risky, but it worked!!"

The First officer was leading her back to the lift as she spoke.

"But why? I thought you'd done what you came for." The lift began to descend.

"I had, but..where are we going? I really need to get to a workshop. Have you still got the Inquisitors plan for the Molecular Resonance Manipulator?"

Steve was getting frustrated. Can none of these people ask one question at a time?

"I was about to visit someone who's apparently part of your friends plan." He answered. "Why? What do you want a work shop for?"

"We need to build another Manipulator, I'd have thought that was obvious." It obviously hadn't occurred to her that it hadn't occurred to him.

"We?" he glared at her. "Are you including me in that? Look, I nearly got into trouble over building the last one..."

"But you didn't, did you?" she countered. "You got promoted!"

"That was nothing to do with..."

"Oh, go on!" she pleaded, putting on a forlorn expression. "You've built one before, I haven't."

"I *have* still got the diagram," Steve began

"There you go then!" beamed Sadianna, "We'll do it easily. I mean, Torqcaf's going to need it, isn't he? How else are the Klingon reinforcements going to get through the rift on cue?"

Steve sighed as the lift stopped. "I've got to meet the Andorian Ambassador."

"When?" the Time Lady asked.

"Well, the ship's scheduled to dock in three hours." He said wearily.

"Three hours!" Sadianna exclaimed, "That's more than enough time! Time for tea and biscuits as well!"

With a massive sigh, Steve instructed the lift to take them to engineering.

In 'The Targ Pit', a Klingon bar on the station, L'Sar was discussing the finer points of battle tactics with a crewmember of a rival ship. She was using her fists to emphasise the point she was making.

Flame shot out in the wake of the rockets that were being fired by the ships attacking the Inquisitors TARDIS. At the console, the Time Lord was desperately manipulating levers and dials in an attempt to elude the pursuers.

"C'mon!!" yelled Ryoko, clinging to a large dresser that dominated one wall of the main console area. "You can escape 'em! You can de-materialise if you want too! That'd fox 'em! I'd kick their asses if we had Ryo-oh-ki!" The ship was rocked by another explosion outside. Ryoko lost her grip on the dresser, and was flung over to the alcove that housed the central console.

"I could de-materialise, yes. But what would be the point?" He was still struggling to evade the enemy fire.

"Use the damn gadget then!" Spat Ryoko angrily, wild hair covering her eyes. She brushed it away and added; "Isn't that what you were gonna do? Get through that rift and pay these guys a visit?"

"I will, I will! If I can just arrange something."

The three rocket ships closed on the sailing ship TARDIS, and on board the leading ship, distinguished by a gold and scarlet tail fin, the commander, Borax, gave the order to fire.

All three ships fired simultaneously, and the missiles they fired arced towards the TARDIS.

At the console of his ship, the Inquisitor turned and warned his companion; "Hold on tight! Those missiles can't miss!"

The explosion was massive. The crews of Borax's ships had to cover their eyes as the glare filled the cramped cabins of the ships. Unlike the previous occasion that Borax had attacked the TARDIS; the ship was still there when the flare had subsided. But it was in trouble. Smoke was issuing from the rear of the vessel. It was listing to one side. As Borax watched, the alien ship banked towards the nebula, which was warping in the same way that it had when their own craft had come through.

"Stay with them!" barked Borax at his crew. "They must not die, or the Emperor will have my," he corrected himself. "Have our heads!" he turned to a crewmember at the rear of the ship. "Be prepared to use the grappling net. Just in case their descent is dangerously rapid!"

"Sir!" snapped the crewman, and attended his control panel with extra diligence.

Groaning loudly, Sadianna scanned the sketchy diagram that Commander Woods had handed her. "This is no good!" she cried. "Look! He's left out the Briode interface, and this," she indicated a section of the paper. The significance of that particular component was lost on Steve, even though he'd constructed the original. "No need for that at all! It's a wonder that I made it through the first time!" The time Lady known as The Duchess rummaged through the components on the bench and started work on the back up Manipulator. Steve pitched in, offering advice and advising on suitable alternative parts that he'd used in the original device.

Amid the small talk, and The Duchess' anecdotes, about The Inquisitor and how she had met him, her questions about the Federation and the social structure of this universe, amongst the banter, Sadianna let something slip that caused Steve some concern.

She had said; "Of course, once Torqcraf finds the Legacy, we'll need to be ready at a moments notice."

"What did you say?" asked the Starfleet officer.

"We'll have to be ready...."

"No," Steve had stopped what he was doing and had turned to face her, looking into her eyes. "No, you said," his tone held authority and was determined. "Once he finds the Legacy.' What's the Legacy? There's something you're keeping from us. Both of you. "

Sadianna smiled and continued her work. "No one's keeping secrets, Steven. Don't worry."

"No, I will worry." His tone was serious, but he kept his voice even. "You came here before to give The Inquisitor some information. So now he knows what's causing the 'crossovers', and since you gave him the cube containing the facts of the matter, you know too. Now tell me. I have to report this, everyone needs to know!" Commander Woods' voice was getting louder and definitely angry.

The Duchess looked up at him. She placed the components that she had been holding on the bench, and looked up at him.

"No, Steven, everyone does *not* need to know." She sighed gave him her best sincere look. "The only people that need to know about the cause are those that will directly encounter it. Its origins don't matter, not to any of you. I will tell L'Sar, and she in turn will warn her crew. You will find out soon enough." Woods grabbed her by the shoulders and said forcefully;

"Tell me! In my position as first officer of this station, and considering my involvement in this damn farce so far, I need to know what I'm up against!"

Sadianna's glare persuaded Steve to let go of her shoulders. The duchess looked him in the eyes.

"The instigator of this whole escapade has its origins on Gallifrey. My planet."

In the 'Targ Pit', only L'Sar was left standing.

A trio of spacecraft pursued the ancient tall ship into the rapidly changing vortex that sullied the RamQul nebula. The sailing ship was rolling over and over, streamers of smoke trailing from each side now, with occasional plumes of fire jetting from the stern.

Emerging from the surreal tunnel of the vortex, the TARDIS tumbled across a barren, rock-strewn landscape. Ranges of impossibly shaped mountains framed wide planes. They reached up to the sky like gnarled fingers struggling to get free of the imprisoning ground.

Swerving wildly, the TARDIS skimmed between two of the mountain peaks, implausibly close together. Clipping the peak of another, the ship lurched downwards, heading for a crusty plain.

Borax was at his pilot's side, observing every detail. "Can we not pull alongside? They may be fatally wounded by the impact."

The pilot shook his head. "No, sir. If I draw alongside, we could crash also. I dare not take the risk."

Borax chewed his fist nervously. "Prepare to land, once they are down. They must be apprehended."

"If they survive, sir." Offered the pilot.

"They must." Borax could see his head on a pike outside the palace gates.

With a grinding, scraping crunch, the wooden sailing ship impacted the planet surface. It careened along for several hundred meters before coming to a halt and tilting over onto one side.  
When the dust had settled, all was still.

TO BE CONTINUED!