Boldly Going A Long Time Ago, In A Galaxy Far, Far Away

By Scott Fowler

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Captain's Log
STARDATE: 25139.4

The Enterprise has entered Qutos II, the location of one of the largest worm holes in existence. This is only the second stable sub space distortion of its kind. Starfleet has ordered us to investigate and study this newly discovered phenomenon. Our science department will be working overtime and I, for one, anxiously await their results. If we can detect what makes these passageways remain stable, we may be able to locate others, making space travel quicker and less dangerous.

Commander William Riker scratched his beard and watched the small object disappear into the worm hole. He stood in the middle of the Enterprise bridge, staring at the screen before him. To his left, Lieutenant Commander Data turned his gold face to his commanding officer.

"The probe had entered the worm hole, Sir."

Data was an android, totally void of emotion, even though he wished he had them.

Riker turned from the screen and walked to the center seat in the middle of the circular room. He glanced up briefly at his tactical officer, Lieutenant Worf. He admired the Klingon for his toughness and his air of deep honor and loyalty. Besides he was thinking of cutting his beard in the same Fu Manchu style Worf kept his cut.

Riker tapped the communicator pinned to his chest. It chimed briefly.

"Riker to Captain Picard."

As he sat down into the chair, Captain Jean Luc Picard responded.

"Picard here," he said in his thick accent. His voice was authoritative because of that accent. Riker never tired of hearing it.

"The class one probe you ordered has entered the worm hole, Captain. It should be sending back pictures any minute."

"Very good, Number One. I'm on my way there. Picard out."

No sooner did Picard close the channel before Worf made a report.

"We are receiving transmissions from the probe," he spoke in low throaty growls. The Klingon voice was made to strike terror in the hearts of all their enemies.

"On screen, Lieutenant."

Worf tapped his console and the image on the large screen before them changed. The star field that once hung before them evaporated and a small sphere floating in empty space replaced it. It was grey and smooth.

Riker leaned forward in the chair, observing the image.

"Data, " he finally said, "What is that? A moon?"

"It appears to be a small planet, however, the probe's sensors cannot read any surface features."

"And the sensors are calibrated do so?"

"Yes, sir."

"Strange, " Riker said leaning back in his chair, "I've got a bad feeling about this."

Behind him, at the back of the bridge, the door to the turbolift hissed open. Jean Luc Picard entered the bridge. His most prominent feature was a bald head but that only enhanced his commanding appearance.

Riker quickly got up and gave his captain the center seat.

"Something of interest, Captain," Riker said as he sat in the chair to the right of Picard, "This small planet was detected on the other side of the worm hole. Sensors show it has no features."

Data turned in his seat.

"The probe's sensors show some sort of energy discharges just above the planet."

"What is it?" Picard asked.

"Unknown."

"Speculation then."

"Perhaps an electrical disturbance of some sort."

Riker leaned forward in his chair, his fingers once again running through his beard.

"A storm?" he inquired.

"With no atmosphere?" this was Worf.

Suddenly, the screen before them burst forth in light and the screen changed to a static snow.

Picard leaned forward now, in concentration.

"Data, what just happened?"

Data turned to his console and examined his instruments. His eyebrows rose.

"The planet appears to have exploded,"

Riker and Picard exchanged quizzical expressions with each other.

"The whole planet, Data?" Riker inquired.

Data turned in his seat. "It appears so, Sir."

"How is that possible?"

"I do not have an explanation, Sir."

Just then, Worf's station beeped. He tapped the control pad and reported to his captain.

"Sir, a small object is emerging from the worm hole."

"The probe?" Riker asked.

Worf jerked his head in a negative.

"No, Sir. It is something else."

Data spoke up.

"It appears to be a pod type craft. Sensors show one life form aboard with weak life signs," the android turned in his chair to face his captain, "It appears to be listing out of control."

Riker and Picard looked at each other briefly before Picard gave an order.

"On screen, Commander."

What appeared on the screen was dark grey and tumbled wildly toward them. The pod was flanked on either side by what appeared to be curved solar panels.

"Hail the vessel," Riker ordered.

Worf tried to contact the ship but no answer came.

"They are not answering our hails, Sir."

Picard tapped his insignia and it chimed.

"Medical team report to shuttle bay three, " he turned and addressed Data, "Bring it in with the tractor beam."

"Aye, Sir."

Doctor Beverly Crusher entered shuttle bay three just as the small craft settled on the floor and the blue glow of the tractor beam disappeared. Her medical team rushed to the ship and quickly began searching for an opening.

It was a dark ship. The doctor didn't like it. Oh, it was well built and looked as state of the art as the Enterprise but it had a black feeling to it. Just as the Enterprise gives off a feeling of pride and peace, this ship's aura was the complete opposite.

Her team dragged a body from the vessel and she rushed to assist.

Beverly leaned over her patient. He was as dark as the ship that encased him. But he was alive. She could hear his breathing but instantly she realized that wasn't normal breathing. It was mechanical. A respirator!

She flung the black cap that surrounded his body aside to look at his chest. She was met with a torso full of dials and lights, machinery clicking on and off.

This was not a normal person!

She went to examine his head but found it encased in a black, shiny helmet. It was dented slightly and scratched a little from the ride but basically in fine condition.

This was definitely not a normal person!

Beverly tapped her com badge as her team rushed the body to sickbay.

"Crusher to Picard."

"Yes, Doctor."

"Captain, this individual is nothing like I've ever seen before. I'm not sure how to treat him. He's surrounded by a mechanical body. I don't even know if there is anything alive in there."

"Let me know what your analysis turns up, Doctor."

As Crusher rushed out of the shuttle bay to see to her patient in sickbay, she passed engineer Geordi LaForge and Commander Data on their way to inspect the alien craft.

"Data, you get inside and see what you can get from the ship's computer. I'll inspect the outside."

"Very well."

When Data entered the craft's cockpit, he settled himself into the seat. He took a moment to survey his surroundings and get a better feel for the craft. He found that by first observing, the information he could absorb would often result in small details to help better understand the whole.

Looking over the control panels in front of him, Data noted the dark interior. Then something caught is eye. Lying on the floor next to the seat was a silver object that was decidedly brighter than the interior lighting. He reached down and picked up the object. It was cylindrical metal device with an opening at one ended and what appeared to be several buttons protruding from one side.

"Geordi," Data called.

"What is it, Data?" Geordi could be heard from outside the craft.

Data stepped out of the ship and showed the object to the Chief Engineer.

"What do you make of this?"

Geordi took a second to analyze the device with his visor. Geordi had been blind since birth but he wore an apparatus that gave him enhanced sight. Using this, he could discern what an object was made of, its energy content, and even see an x-ray image of the interior of the object.

"Well, Data, " he said after a minute, "it has internal power source of some sort. I can't seem to determine what type. It might be a weapon of some sort. But then again it could just be a scanner."

"Perhaps we should test it."

"Go right ahead."

Data pointed the open end of the cylinder toward the shuttle bay door. He figured if it was a weapon, it would be safer going out the door then internally to the ship. He put his thumb on a button that was colored blue. He was not sure why he chose that particular button, but he thought it looked like the right one.

Then he pushed it.

A bright red light shot out of the tube but it didn't continue past about five feet from the entrance. The light did not dissipate as it should have. It stayed extended creating was what obviously a very hot blade. It hummed and crackled as Data moved it back and forth in front of himself.

"A laser sword," Data said matter-of-factly.

"Well, that works in with what I've seen of the rest of the ship. Let's finish our analysis and report to the captain."

Data tapped another button and the blade disappeared again as if sucked into the handle.

"An intriguing device."

"Doctor, " Picard said as he settled into his seat in the conference room. In the windows to the side, the cloudy worm hole phenomenon floated in empty space, looking like cream when it is just poured into black coffee. The senior officers had gathered to discuss their new guest and how to handle him.

"What's the status of our guest in sickbay?"

Crusher leaned forward, "We managed to get his helmet off and discovered considerable scarring to his entire body due to injuries he received in his past. Physically, he's virtually nothing. What's left of his body is being maintained by an elaborate system of biological supports. Without the support system, he will die."

"Has he regained consciousness?"

"Not yet."

"Doctor, " Data spoke up, "I'm curious as to your patient's mechanisms."

"They're not as advanced as yours, Data. But they appear to have taken quite a bit of damage over a period of time so I would say they are pretty robust."

"Like his ship," commented Geordi.

He leaned forwarded on his elbows to address Picard.

"The ship he came in has markings from years of damage afflicted to it. It's been in combat many times. By my estimintation, it has experienced more than twenty different types of energy type damage. Some of it's been repaired but most is damage the ship appears to have been designed to take."

"Fighter craft," said Riker. Picard only nodded.

"Are we dealing with an aggressive person here?"

 Deanna Troi spoke up. She was the half-Betazed ship's counselor. Due to her Betazed half, she was empathic and could sense the emotions of others. This had helped the *Enterprise* crew out of many tough spots.

"I sense quite a bit of underlying turmoil in him including aggressive emotions like anger and hatred. Whoever this is, he's in a dark place."

"I don't know about our guest, but his ship gives me the willies," comment Geordi.

Data cocked his head to the side, "The 'willies'?"

"I'll explain later, Data."

"I thought I was the only one who got a bad feeling from him," said Doctor Crusher.

Picard stood up, "We need more information. Doctor, when he comes to I want to talk with him. Do you know when he'll regain consciousness?"

"No. I don't even know what is causing his unconscious state. The trip through the worm hole has probably affected him in some way. It could be any minute now or he may never awaken. I'm afraid to administer any of our stimulant agents without knowing his physiology better."

"Understood."

As they spoke, in the window behind them, the worm hole began to pulse and change its shape. It shimmered and fluctuated like heat floating off hot pavement. As they began to discuss furthering the investigation of their new patient in sickbay, the subspace anomaly began to change. It was Riker who noticed it first.

"Captain," he said nodding his head toward the window.

The senior officers all turned and looked, realizing right away that something was wrong. Picard tapped his comm badge, "Bridge, the worm hole is changing. Report."

"Captain, sensors show the anomaly has decreased in size by thirty percent in the last five minutes."

Picard and Riker exchanged a concerned look.

"Bridge, yellow alert. I want all stations ready for anything that phenomenon will do."

"Aye aye, Captain."

With that, the entire senior staff left the conference room to their stations on the bridge.

In sickbay, the strange patient lay on a diagnostic bed. His helmet had been replaced when it was realized that without it, he would likely die. So he lay in his black cape and mask, his leather boots sticking over the foot of the bed because he was too tall to fit on it. His breathing, run by a compressor, was slow and even. The diagnostic screen above his head showed his vitals as the sensors could find them, many of which couldn't be found due to the mechanics surrounding his body.

When Crusher entered sickbay, she checked immediately on her patient and found him still unconscious. She turned and began tapping the keypad on her tricorder. As she typed, she didn't notice her guest slowing sitting up on the table. He looked around, apparently trying to get the lay of the land. He kicked his feet over the side of the bed and stood up.

Towering over an oblivious Doctor Crusher, he watched her typing into the device. His breathing compressor hissing in and out at a regular pace.

On the bridge, there was a buzz of activity. Crewmembers passed back and forth before Picard, who sat in his seat watching the view screen. The worm hole was obviously shrinking.

"The anomaly is now at 56.2% of its previous size, Captain," Data reported, "It should disappear in a matter of minutes."

"So much for the 'stable' subspace worm hole," commented Riker.

Picard stood up and walked next to Data's console.

"Data, back us off a little. I don't want us to be caught in the collapse."

"Yes, Sir."

The *Enterprise* fired thrusters and backed up some distance.

"What's breaking it down, Data?" asked Riker.

"Uncertain, Sir. Without further information, I don't wish to speculate."

In sickbay, Crusher finished typing her report into her new patient's console and started to walk toward her office. She suddenly was knocked backwards onto the floor, as if she walked into a wall but this wall was invisible. She cried out from the pain in her lower back and when she opened her eyes, she saw sickbay's guest leaning over her.

Suddenly, she felt lifted up as if by unseen hands, flipped in mid-air, and felt herself "falling" toward the ceiling. She hit the hard surface with even more force than when she hit the carpeted floor. The impact took her breath away.

She was stuck to the ceiling and though she tried to move her arms and legs, she was unsuccessful. Opening her eyes, her breath inhaling and exhaling in short, rapid bursts from the pain, she saw the dark helmeted man seeming look up into her eyes.

"Where am I?" His voice was deep and seemed to come from inside a cave. His breathing kept up its regular rhythm, adding to an increasing horror building inside the Doctor.

Crusher struggled for a voice but her wind had not yet returned after the attack.

"Where…am...I?" This time he spoke slowly, deliberately, as if he realized he was talking to a child.

"You're aboard the Federation starship *Enterprise*. You're sustained an injury and have been placed here in our sickbay," she managed to say once she got her voice back.

"Federation?" He said, the deep voice sending chills down Crusher's spine, "this does not look like a Trade Federation ship."

Crusher struggled again but found she still could not move. Somehow, this patient of hers seemed to be the source of her confinement.

"I don't know what the 'Trade Federation' is but this is a ship of the United Federation of Planets. You are in the Qutos system. You've passed through a worm hole. Do you remember anything?"

"I am no longer in the Yavin system?"

"No."

"Then I must return. The Emperor will be most displeased."

Her patient made a motion with his black gloved hand and Crusher felt herself descending from the ceiling. She floated until her face was mere inches from the stranger's frightening mask.

"And you will help me get there."

Back on the bridge, Picard watched intently at the large view screen in front of him. He sat in his captain's chair, stroking his chin in thought.

"Data, prepare another probe. Let's see if we can ascertain what is causing the worm hole to collapse."

Riker, who sat to the right of his captain, leaned in to Jean Luc's ear.

"Captain, our guest in sickbay came through that worm hole. Shouldn't we send him back through it before it finishes its collapse so he's in the right place?"

"I thought about that, Number One. But we have a duty to help him recover first. We'll figure some other way of getting him back once he has healed. Besides, I'm not at all certain now that the worm hole will lead to the same place he came from anymore. It's changed so much, the other side may have moved by now."

On the view screen, the probe accelerated toward the worm hole and disappeared.

"The probe has entered the anomaly, Sir."

"Thank you, Data. Let me know what information comes back."

Worf's console began to beep a loud alarm. Picard and Riker turned in their chairs. Worf tapped the console and the alarm stopped.

"Captain, we have a security breach on deck 8 near sickbay."

"Send a security team and report immediately."

"Aye, Captain."

Worf tapped some more on his console, sending a message to the nearest security team and left the bridge via the turbolift.

He walked, this stranger, through the hallways and corridors of the starship *Enterprise.* He moved not much faster than a stroll. Several crewmembers had turned corners and stopped dead in their tracks, surprised by the personage in front of them. Some even tried to stop him by grabbing his arm or trying to tackle his legs. All were pushed away without him even having to touch them. He pressed toward his objective, pushing all who dared to stop him out of his way.

When Worf entered sickbay, followed closely by four members of his security detail, he found it dark with lighting blinking on and off. He held his phaser tight in his right hand as he surveyed the section. His sight adjusted faster than the security team with him but in no time, they were all seeing the same thing.

Sickbay was a war zone. Diagnostic tables were flipped over, screens were ripped from the wall. The glass windows of Crushers office had been smashed and her desk tipped on its side against the wall. Items that Worf believed could never have been moved were upended and strewn about. The strength to do such a thing had to have been immense.

Worf heard a soft moan come from the far corner of the room. Cautiously, he crept to the area, fearing that whoever had caused all this damage may still be there, and

even being of the warrior mind, he didn't want to have to fight someone with such strength without knowing more about his opponent.

The team reached the corner. The sound was coming from beneath a fallen diagnostic bed.

"Kowolski, help me with this," Worf said.

One of his security detail broke ranks and grabbed the side of the bed while Worf grabbed the other. Struggling hard, they managed to flip the bed over. Underneath, in a fetal position against the wall, lay a battered Beverly Crusher. Her uniform had been torn in several places and there were bruises visible in practically every visible portion of skin.

"Doctor!" Worf jumped in to help his friend. As he held her, he tapped his comm badge, "Worf to Captain. Doctor Crusher is injured and sickbay has been ransacked. The patient is gone. I don't know where he went."

"Acknowledge. Intruder alert! Begin a detailed search for 'our guest'."

"Yes, Sir."

By the time the dark stranger reached engineering, the red alert alarms were sounding and it wasn't hard to tell that what had happened in sickbay had been discovered. As he rounded the corner to enter engineering, he ran into a line of security officers. They stood in front of the tall, cylindrical matter/anti-matter chamber with an island computer console between him and them.

"Remove yourselves, or I shall remove you forcefully."

"Stand your ground!" That was Worf as he rode the elevator down from the upper levels of engineering,

"You have chosen your path," said their dark guest. He stepped forward to confront them and was pushed back suddenly. There was a crackle of green energy and then silence. He looked around himself. There was nothing out of the ordinary that he could see. He reached his hand forward and it hit an energy field that sparked up.

"An energy wall. Impressive. Most impressive. But it cannot contain me."

He raised his gloved right hand and gestured with it toward the island console. It shook for a moment, jiggled a bit, and then tore from the floor with a explosive charge of electrical sparks and debris. The table, most still entacted, floated momentarily before the wide eyes of the security detail. Then it flew, as if thrown by unseen hands, at the team. They scattered but several in the middle were trapped by the heavy object and crushed.

His rhythmic breathing never changing, the dark mechanical man held his palm to the electrical barrier. Instantly, it popped and fizzed. Stepping forward, the tall figure crossed the threshold into engineering.

"Fire phasers!" ordered Worf.

Energy blasts erupted from all places at once. Every security officer had spread out and taken cover wherever they could. Now, firing their phasers, they tried to subdue the stranger. Worf found himself behind the matter/anti-matter chamber with several other security officers.

Though all phaser fire was aimed at the large black caped figure, they didn't appear to hit him. The man had put out his hand and all the energy fire in the air seemed to be drawn to his palm like a metal to a magnet. The small explosions went off in his hand as he simply stood in the middle of the room and absorb it.

Then he acted. His left and right arms moved at once, pointing the palms of his hands out to either side of him. The security officers on either side flew backward as if pulled by some hidden string into the consoles and walls behind them. He walked forward, using this push power of his to deflect every attacker that came at him.

The bridge crew had sat listening to the action on speakers as they watched the worm hole grow smaller and smaller on the screen before them.

"Captain," said Data, "The worm hole has reached 32% of its original size. In a matter of moments it will disappear."

"Right now, I'm not that worried about the worm hole, Mr. Data," he turned to his first officer, "I think you should get some reinforcements down there, Number One. Whatever his intentions, we need to stop him from taking engineering."

"I'm on it." With that, Riker jumped out of his seat, happy to have something to do. That was something he hated as being first officer, having to stay on the bridge when something like this was going on. He virtually ran onto the turbolift.

"Data, I want containment fields ready to go on all levels."

"Yes, Captain."

"And an analysis of how our guest is able to do the things he is doing."

"I will work on that as well, Captain."

At that moment, Picard could feel a subtle rumbling begin in the floor of the bridge. He knew this sensation very well. The ship's engines were running. The *Enterprise* was moving.

"Data, I ordered all engine stop. Why is the ship moving?"

Data looked up from his console and saw on the screen the worm hole approaching at a fast pace. The ship was moving toward it. He tried to stop the engines but they continued to push the starship forward.

"I do not know, Sir. I have lost helm control."

"Tractor beam?" Picard asked.

"No, Sir. Something is controlling the ship. Helm control has been routed to a station in engineering."

"How?"

"I do not know, Sir. The log-in registration information is corrupted."

Picard jumped up and ran to Data's station. He looked at the console over the android's shoulder.

"And there's no way you can break the hold?"

"No, Sir."

"Then it appears we are going into the worm hole whether we want to or not."

The *Enterprise* rushed toward the sub-space anomaly, increasing speed the closer the ship got to it. The worm hole continued to shrink, close to reaching a size smaller than the Galaxy class ship. The front edge of the ship entered the hole in space and the rest of the ship quickly disappeared into it. The hole collapsed like the iris of camera just as the tail end of the ship was about to go through. They had cut it so close that, almost as if the anomaly's outer edge was a knife blade, the tail end of the left nacelle was cut off the ship and left as debris in the universe behind them.

Traveling through a worm hole is a very disorientating experience. Time and space itself get distorted and the human mind, in fact most species' minds, are unable to handle it. As a result, the mind tends to shut itself down until the effect has passed. That is what happened to the entire crew when they travelled through the worm hole. The ship travelled the tube with an unconscious crew. When it got to the other side, it floated in space waiting for the crew to regain consciousness. Of course, the only one on the ship who didn't pass out was Data. His positronic brain was able to withstand the disorientation.

"Captain,"

The voice sounded far away for Picard, echoing from a distant mountain while he lay in a pitch black cave.

"Captain,"

He recognized the voice now. It was Data but he was so far away. He tried to get his bearings but couldn't see a thing in the darkness.

"CAPTAIN!" It was very loud now.

Picard awoke from his unconscious state with start, bolting upright. It took him a couple of seconds to realize he was on the floor in the middle of the bridge. Data knelt next him. The bridge was dark except for the bluish glow of some of the still working consoles.

"Are you okay, Captain?"

It took him another second to answer, "Yes. Yes, Data. I'm fine. The effect is starting to wear off now."

Picard struggled to his feet, "Report."

"We are on the other side of the worm hole. Most systems are down but I have repaired internal communications. Reports are coming in of others regaining consciousness."

Picard saw Counselor Troi slumped over her seat next to the Captain's chair. He walked over to help.

"Captain," said Data, "there are reports of casualties coming from engineering and sickbay. So far, the calculation is approximately twenty dead so far reported. Any fighting has seemed to have ceased once we entered the worm hole."

"What of the one who started all this?"

"Worf reported him unconscious when he awoke and had him put in the brig as soon as he could. He is there now, Sir."

"Awake?"

"I do not know."

"How long will that hold him?"

"I do not know that either, Sir. However, while you were unconscious, I analyzed the data collected by the sensors in engineering during the fighting. I have discovered that our guest has particles within his cells that are emitting an energy signal and tapping into a natural energy source. I believe it is through his manipulation of these particles that gives him his powers. I've altered the energy modulation of the brig shields to compensate. This should prevent him from using his powers while in the cell."

"I want to see him, Data. As soon as possible."

"I will have the turbolifts online shortly, Sir."

"Good."

Picard sat into his Captain's chair, still a bit disoriented but recovering.

"Anything else to report?"

"Yes, Captain. Short range sensors are working but limitedly. They have picked up evidence of an extensive debris field around us. Wherever we are, something violent took place here."

Picard rubbed his chin in thought. "The first probe we sent through showed images of a planet seeming to explode."

"The debris is not of a natural origin, Sir. With the amount of the debris, it appears to have been a massive space station of some sort."

"What caused it's destruction, Data?"

"Unsure, Sir. I may have more information once long range sensors are online."

Deanna Troi stirred and sat up in her seat.

"Deanna, how do you feel?" asked Picard.

"Drowsy. Like I've consumed a gallon of Romulan ale."

"It's one hell of hang over that's for sure."

Picard shifted in his seat to face the view screen. The screen itself was black.

"Data, where exactly are we?"

"As soon as we came out of the worm hole, it collapsed behind us. A search of our star charts found no matches. Wherever we are, we are not in the known galaxy."

"So, here we are then. In a galaxy far, far away from our own. Our only exit closed behind us. Maintain an all-stop, Data. Coordinate repair operations. Let's get our systems back online as soon as possible before deciding our next steps."

"Yes, Sir."

The sickbay was hardly recognizable. Diagnostic beds which were usually secured to the floor were torn up and tossed aside like they were children's blocks. Work stations and view screens were shattered. Cabinets that held precious drugs were broken with many vials shattered. But even in this warzone, people were picking up the pieces.

Injured crew were making their way to sickbay and the nurses and doctors were frantically trying to treat the multiple casualties using what little was available. Fortunately, healthy bodied crew members have come out in droves to help with the clean up and triage duties. It was one of the things that Geordi LaForge always liked about Starfleet. Working aboard a starship created a feeling of camaraderie that was unmatched and filled the heart with optimism and inspiration. It was this teamwork that had made the *Enterprise* the pride of the fleet and a formidable adversary throughout the galaxy.

The lights came on and stayed on permanently this time instead of the incessant blinking that was driving Geordi's visor insane. He was helping a crewman flip over a bed so that one of the walking wounded could lay down. He glanced to the side and saw an occupied bed. In it was Beverly Crusher. He walked to her side to check on her.

He bent over to look at her. She was beat up pretty badly but mostly were just bruises and a couple of broken bones. All injuries that were easily fixed. But she needed time to recuperate and lots of rest. Crusher's eyes fluttered open.

"How are you doing?" Geordi gently asked.

She tried to speak but nothing but a moan escaped her lips.

"It's okay. You don't have to answer. Just rest."

Crusher struggled to sit up but Geordi stopped her and laid her back down.

"Geordi," she said weakly, "I have to help."

"Beverly, you've taught your staff well. They can handle it. You need to rest or you won't be any help to anyone."

Too weak to argue, Crusher settled into the bed and closed her eyes to sleep.

Geordi turned and left sickbay heading for engineering. He'd only come to check on the Doctor. His attention was needed performing the repairs to engineering.

Picard and Data strode into the brig. There were several cells built into every wall of the room. In the center was a large desk console where a security officer sat watching the prisoner in the cell to the left of the door. Picard glanced first at the security officer who nodded as he entered and then walked with determination to the cell.

The stranger stood at the door to his cell where he had been ever since he woke up. He hadn't moved an inch and just stood there waiting, his breathing never changing its rhythmic cadence. Behind him, Picard could see the bed had been ripped from the wall and turned over. In order for anyone to do that, they must have incredible strength, he calculated.

"When he first woke up, " reported the security officer as he stood up at his desk, "He attempted to use his power to get through the containment field. He was unable to do that so he tore his bed apart and then stood in the doorway like that. He's been like that ever since."

Picard surveyed the prisoner, trying to ascertain if he was awake. He was unable to determine his state with his helmet and leather clothing covering him. Finally, he just decided to speak with him as if he was awake. Something told Picard that this person likely was awake and using this time to evaluate them.

"Who are you? What is your name?"

The dark stranger stayed silent.

"You are aboard the Federation starship *Enterprise*. I am its captain, Jean Luc Picard. Who are you? What do you want?"

"Release me," the stranger's voice was deep and foreboding. So he was awake afterall.

"You've killed members of my crew. Injured others. I'm afraid I can't release you. The risk would be too great."

"My name is Darth Vader, Dark Lord of the Sith, Right Hand to the Emperor and I must be set free to report to him."

Picard leaned forward so he was closer to this Darth Vader.

"I've experience with people like you. Half man/half machine. I've experienced whole races of people like you. In fact, I was like you for a short period. Not knowing what part was me and what part was the machine. It was like living a nightmare."

"Release me," Vader was shaking now at Picard's words. If they would have been able to see his face under that mask, they would have seen a brow twisted into an angry grimace.

"I'm not letting you go anywhere. You've wrecked havoc aboard my ship for no reason and you won't be leaving here without facing charges for your actions."

Vader instantly went into a fury. He ran around the small cell screaming in his deep voice, smashing the mirror of the sink assembly to the side. He lifted up the bed and threw it against the electronic shield. It sparkled and sputtered but stayed in place. Finally, he calmed down and stood in the middle of the cell fuming. His breathing during the whole thing never changed. It didn't slow down or speed up. It just remained the regular in and out huff and puff of the respirator.

"Data," Picard said as he turned to leave.

"Captain, with your permission, I would like to stay and speak with Vader."

Picard stopped as the door to the hallway slid open. He looked at Vader and then at Data. He nodded, understanding Data's interest.

"Okay. But only a few minutes. We don't know a lot about him and what he can do."

"Understood."

With that, Picard turned and left. The door slid closed behind him. Data turned to face Vader. For a moment, the two seemed to look over each other, though Data was hard pressed to tell through Vader's helmet if he was actually looking at him. Finally, Vader broke the silence.

"You are not human."

Data's eyebrows raised, "No. I am not. I am an android."

"Android?"

"I am a mechanical organism."

Vader nodded in understanding, "A droid."

"By your vernacular, I assume that 'droid' is a shortened form of 'android' so yes, I am a…'droid'."

"You are more sophisticated than any droid I have encountered."

"Perhaps because you have not encountered a 'droid' who is sentient."

"What is your designation?"

"My name is Data."

"And what do you want…Data?"

"I am endeavoring to learn all I can about the human condition. I am curious about your present physical condition."

"And how may I satisfy your curiosity?"

"By answering one question. With all the mechanisms attached to you, how do you define yourself?"

"Define myself? I am the Dark Lord of the Sith. That is how I define myself."

"That is your title. Perhaps I should rephrase. I mean to ask, do you define yourself as human or machine?"

"My fight with Obi Wan took away most of my body. But I remain human," Vader held up his black gloved hands, "Despite the machines that keep me alive, I am human."

"Can you explain why you came to see yourself as such?"

Vader leaned forward and waved his right hand before Data, "You will release me from this cell."

Data frowned, "The captain has ordered your incarceration and I will not disobey that order."

"You will release me now," Vader said, again waving his hand before Data.

"Do not mistake my curiosity for sympathy. I will not release you."

Vader turned his back on Data, "Leave. The emperor will be very upset that you have detained me. His wrath is not something that you…or your captain…will want to experience."

"Very well."

Data turned and left.

The turbolift door opened and Picard strolled onto the bridge. The bridge was now fully lighted and the view screen showed the metal debris floating around them. As he walked, a battered Worf made his report from his station behind the captain's chair. He had a large bruise on the left side of his face and some dried blood beneath his nose, all a result of his involvement with the fight with Vader in engineering. He had refused any medical care even though Geordi insisted on sending him to sickbay. But he was Klingon. These wounds were warrior wounds, badges of honor now. They will heal on their own.

"Captain, as soon as long range sensors went operational they picked up a nearby Class M planetoid. There is massive life form readings and what appears to be a small collection of buildings near the equator. Analysis suggests it's a military base of some sort."

"Occupied?" said Picard as he sat into his seat in the center of the bridge.

"Yes."

A beeping alarm sounded from Worf's station. He tapped the alarm off and observed the data coming in.

"Captain," he reported, "There is a collection of spacecraft approaching from the planetoid."

"Of what type?"

"Small craft of differing configurations. They appear to be armed with energy weaponry and a rudimentary shielding. Shall we raise shields?"

"We don't want our first contact with this race to be a hostile one. Go to yellow alert and keep a tactical eye out for them. Let's make contact first."

Picard tapped the console on the arm of his chair, "Yellow alert. All senior staff to the bridge. Repeat, all senior staff to the bridge."

The collection of spacecraft was, in effect, a squadron. It contained about twenty small fighter craft of three differing variations. One variation was pod like with two tail fins sticking up behind a cockpit. Another variation had a cockpit stick out in front with two nacelles sticking out in back. But the type of craft that was most prevalent was a bi-wing type craft with the wings criss-crossing behind the cockpit to form an "X" shape. There were four powerful engines in the tail of the craft and each wing had an energy weapon pointing out and facing the front of the craft. These were obvious fighter craft which only held one or two man crews.

The sheer number alone would have caused quite a bit of damage to the *Enterprise* but with her more advanced shields and weaponry, the Federation starship would still have been able to hold its own. However, instead of fighting, Picard instead observed their actions.

The squadron quickly surrounded the ship, covering every angle, front and back, port and starboard, top and bottom. There wasn't a single part of the *Enterprise* that wasn't exposed to some weapon aboard these tiny craft. They swarmed around the starship for a minute until they slowed to a stop and then it appeared all time stopped as well. It was only a minute of Picard staring at the view screen at the ships in front before Worf spoke up again.

"Captain, there are more ships coming from the planetoid."

"On screen."

What appeared on screen was a smaller group of about five ships. These ships were bulker, squarer and about the same size as the *Enterprise*. However, these didn't appear to have much or any weaponry. Picard made the determination quickly that these were transport vessels.

They passed the front of the *Enterprise* at a high rate of speed. Following behind the boxy transport vessels was a disc shaped ship with what appeared to be a cockpit sticking out of the left side of the disc. On top of the disc was communication anteneas and a gun platform which were currently aimed at the *Enterprise*. Picard felt that they were aimed straight at him through the viewscreen.

Quickly, all the transport ships seemed to jump to warp and disappear leaving the squadron behind.

"We're being hailed," barked Worf.

By this time, all the senior staff were in their places on the bridge.

"On screen," ordered Picard.

For a moment, the viewscreen blinked to an empty black image and then blinked back on to an image of what appeared to be a young boy in the cockpit of one of the fighters. He wore a orange flight suit and helmet. Picard stood up, shocked at how young this pilot was. He couldn't have been much older than Wesley Crusher.

"I am Commander Skywalker. State your business."

Picard stepped into the middle of the bridge, "I am Captain Jean Luc Picard of the Federation starship *Enterprise*. We are not from this galaxy. We were caught in a worm hole and transported here. Now we are trapped and only wish to return to our own galaxy."

"I'm afraid, Captain, that we were the ones that closed that worm hole. We felt it was a safety issue."

Picard turned and looked at Riker sitting in his seat, "Safety issue?" he whispered.

Turning back to the viewscreen, "Commander, will you be able to help us return to our home?"

"I don't know, Captain. But we will try. May I come aboard to discuss this with you?"

"By all means," Picard turned to Worf, "Mister Worf, open the shuttle bay doors and prepare to accept visitors."

He turned back to the screen, "Commander, please feel free to land in our shuttle bay."

"Thank you, Captain."

Data and Geordi worked hard trying to put back what was left of engineering. They had managed to get the warp core back online but they were having some issues with the dylithium dampeners. Without those dampeners, all the energy created by the anti-matter/matter mixture would go out of control and cause an immense explosion. So, until they were fixed, the warp engines would be inoperable.

"Geordi," Data said as he picked up the large center console and placed it upright in the middle of engineering, "May I ask you a question?"

Geordi worked at the console situated in front of the tall warp core that pulsed with a blue light up and down a huge cylinder.

"Of course."

"Our prisoner, Vader, is mostly made of mechanical elements. Whatever was left of him that was human is now very minimal. Yet, he still considers himself human. How can this be?"

Geordi walked over to Data who stood at one side of the center console, "Data, I'm blind. Do you believe that makes me less than human?"

Data's eyebrows raised, "No. Ninety-nine percent of your body continues to exist. Vader has lost almost ninety percent of human form. I suppose my question is: at what point does ones physical being change ones perspective on oneself? If my circuits were replaced by blood vessels, my outer casing replaced by skin and flesh, if over ninety percent of my body suddenly became human, I believe I would begin to call myself 'human' and no longer 'android'. Would you not agree?"

"Data, perception is just as important as the reality. Humans, in fact most species, tend to see themselves as they want to and not necessarily how they really are."

"Then humans live in an illusion of their own creation?"

Geordi smiled, "Yes, Data. We do."

Data cocked his head to one side, "But then you visit the holodeck to enter another illusion on top of that. I would think it would be quite confusing."

"It is, Data. It is. Come on, we need to get to the conference room."

"Indeed."

The two left engineering.

Outside the large windows of the conference room was the floating debris and mixed with that debris could be seen the fighters poised to attack if ordered. Since Skywalker landed in the *Enterprise* shuttle bay, three groups of transportation vessels sped past the stationary starship. Riker and Picard had decided that the military base on the planetoid was being evacuated.

Picard sat at the head of the long conference table. The view screen behind him had a computer graphic of the debris field as it surrounded the *Enterprise*. To his right hand sat Riker and at the other end of table was Commander Skywalker. In between, the rest of the senior staff sat ready to discuss their part.

"I'm sorry you were dragged into this, Captain," said Skywalker, "But I have to say that a ship like this would be a great service to help us with our struggle against the Empire."

Picard and Riker exchanged a glance and then Picard spoke, "I'm afraid our Prime Directive does not allow us to interfere with other cultures. We are an exploration

vessel and getting involved in your civil war could cause catastrophic damage both in this galaxy and ours."

Skywalker nodded, "I can respect that. Let's see what we can do to help you get back to your own galaxy. How did you get here?"

"We were sent to investigate an anomalous worm hole that had appeared in our space. It was noted to have been quite stable and we had hoped to be able to learn more about the phenomenon and perhaps utilized it for transportation purposes. We were studying it when a small spacecraft drifted through. We brought it on board and tried to help the pilot. He regained consciousness, took over the ship and flew us through the worm hole to here, just as it was collapsing."

Skywalker got up then and walked to the window, peering out into the debris field, "I saw his ship in your hanger bay. How did you trap him?"

"You know him?" asked Riker.

"Yes. His name is Darth Vader. He is the right hand man to the Emperor and my sworn enemy. He killed my father and millions more. We lost track of him when the Death Star exploded."

Skywalker turned back to the group, "This man is very dangerous, Captain. How did you capture him?"

Data spoke up at that point, "Whatever his power is it appears to be derived from subcelluar particles that emit a signal. This signal, I have determined, taps into a natural energy field…"

"The Force," said Skywalker, "It's called the Force."

"They tap into this…'Force'…and he appears to be able to use it. We have simply blocked the signal by matching the frequency in our shields."

"You won't be able to hold him for long, Captain. He's very strong and will find a way to escape."

Picard leaned forward on the table, "Perhaps you could enlighten us to what is going on here."

Their new visitor sat back into his chair and spoke. He told the tale of the Galactic Republic and how it had ruled the galaxy for thousands of years with the Galactic Senate. Each race had a voice, every action was voted on. He told of the Jedi Knights and how they kept peace in the old Republic and how they mastered what they called the Force.

He went on to speak about how, years ago when he was only a baby, the Jedi enemies, the Sith, took over the Republic and created a ruthless empire run on greed and hatred. He told of how the one remaining Jedi came out of hiding to help him, a naive farm boy, and how he was told that his father, whom he never knew, had been betrayed and murdered by the Emperor's right hand, Darth Vader.

"The Emperor had a massive space station created for the expressed purpose of destroying planets that went against him," Skywalker said, "The debris field out there is what remains of that station. The Empire tracked us down to our base there on the Yavin moon and came to destroy us. With the help of some stolen plans, we found a weakness in the station and exploited it. It was the explosion that created the worm hole, we believe."

"And when you saw that Vader had entered the worm hole, you attempted to close it so he wouldn't be any trouble to you again?" asked Picard.

"Yes. We had no idea there was anyone on the other side or that Vader would be able to do anything about it."

"Now that the Empire knows you are here," said Worf, " you are evacuating?"

"That's correct."

"Retreating is not the warrior way."

Skywalker jumped up, obviously angry, "It's not a retreat!"

He sat back down, a little calmer, "It's a regrouping. We'll hit the Empire again but we run to survive. The Empire is far more sophisticated than we are so we need to use different tactics. But make no mistake my alien friend, we will continue to fight."

"That's enough, Worf," said Picard then turned back to Skywalker, "So how do we get back?"

"I don't know," said Skywalker, "But we have to get you home fast. Our spies on Coruscant have gotten word to us that the Emperor is on his way aboard his Star Destroyer. He's lost his greatest battle station and lost contact with his right hand. I'm sure he's wondering what happened. If he gets here when you are still here, he will destroy both of us."

<center>

Captain's Log
STARDATE: Unknown

</center>

Commander Skywalker has filled us in on what we can expect to run into with this Star Destroyer, as he calls it. The vessel he describes is massive in size and loaded to the brim with armaments. It will pose a formidable fight for the Enterprise. We are doing everything we can to prepare for this encounter but hoping that we will be able reopen the worm hole and get back to our own galaxy before then. I am hopeful that if we do encounter this Emperor, we may have a bargaining chip in Darth Vader. The rest of the Rebels have left the quadrant on the way to their rendezvous. Commander Skywalker has been kind enough to stay behind to help reopen the worm hole and provide tactical information on the Star Destroyer. If we ever get back home, we will need to put into the nearest starbase for repairs. We are running on only one warp nacelle. The other was damaged during our trip through the worm hole. This limits our speed. Commander LaForge continues to work on getting systems online, especially the warp engines.

"By my calculation," said Geordi as worked under an engineering console, "if we could create the same parameters that opened the worm hole to begin with, we might be able recreate it."

Skywalker sat in a chair off to the side looking over a touch screen, "The destruction of the Death Star was what caused the worm hole. That's a lot of energy. Is the *Enterprise* able to create an explosion that large?"

Sliding out from underneath the console, Geordi sat up, "I don't know. If we diverted all available power to the deflector dish and created an energy pulse with it, maybe, but we would have to get the frequencies exactly right or we might create a worm hole that doesn't get us home. I'd hate to be lost out here like the *Voyager*."

"*Voyager*?"

"Never mind. Do you have any sensor readings of the Death Star explosion? Anything indicating what frequencies were produced?"

"I think so," Skywalker tapped a com badge that had been given to him. He had placed it on the belt of his flight suit, which he still wore. Geordi noticed a shiny object hanging from a small chain on the same belt.

"R2."

Over the com badge came a chirping sound. R2D2, Skywalker's blue, barrel sized droid, had been waiting patiently in his astrodroid compartment in Skywalker's X-Wing since they arrived.

"R2, download all sensor logs from the Death Star explosion to the *Enterprise* computer."

R2 tweeted in affirmative. Shortly after, the screen on Geordi's console began to show data being downloaded.

"We'll start analyzing this immediately."

In the brig, Vader sat on the floor, cross-legged in the middle of his cell. His cell was still a shambles but that was of no concern to him. He meditated. Attempting to reconnect to the Force. He was meeting frustration. Something, he didn't know what, was blocking his ability to us his Force powers. He had to concentrate and find out what it was. This would take time. He only hoped that it didn't take too much time.

Data sat at the console in engineering. The large cylinder could be seen through the window in front of him, still pulsating with a blue light. The warp engines were back online. Or at least, the one warp engine. As other systems came up and running, the *Enterprise* began to feel more like itself again, despite some remaining debris that needed to be cleared out. Data sat analyzing the data from the Death Star explosion. Numbers and code sped off the screen and Data's eyes jiggled as he read the information as fast as only a computer could handle.

Over his shoulder stood Commander Skywalker. He watched intently at Data's actions.

"How are you able to read that so fast?" he inquired.

Data spoke without moving his head from the screen, continuing to read as he responded, "As an android, I have the ability to process information at speeds far greater than any biological entity would be able to process."

"How?"

"My eyes scan the words into my positronic brain, absorbing them into a memory that I can access as it happens, or later if need be."

The string of letters and numbers on the screen stopped and Data turned to Skywalker.

"I have completed the download and I believe we have an answer."

Data noticed a glint out of the corner of his eye and when he looked saw a small cylinder of silver metal hanging from a chain from Skywalker's belt. He recognized it immediately.

"Sir, may I make an inquiry?"

"Certainly,"

"That object hanging from your belt."

"My Lightsaber?"

"'lightsaver?'"

"No, Data. Light Saber."

"I discovered a similar one in Vader's craft. I am curious as to its usage."

Skywalker sat down in the seat next to Data.

"It's the weapon of a Jedi. Or in Vader's case, Sith. It's weapon from a more civilized age."

"There are similar weapons among Federation races but I have not seen an energy signal from our laser swords as high as what is emitted from yours. There are many aspects of the *Enterprise* that is more advanced technologically from you but I believe that your…'Lightsaber", may be more advanced."

"Thank you, Data," Skywalker took the Lightsaber from his belt and turned it on. A blue beam of light extended from the handle. It glowed and hummed. He tipped it back and forth, waving from side to side in front of Data.

"This one was created by my father and hidden from me until recently. Someday, I hope to become a Jedi, like he was."

Data's com badge chimed, "Data, report!"

It was Riker calling from the bridge, he sounded impatient.

Data tapped his badge, "I have analyzed Commander Skywalker's data, Sir. I believe by calibrating an energy blast from the deflector array, we can duplicate the worm hole long enough for us to return."

"Good job. Geordi will start programming the calibrations. The Emperor may be coming out of warp at any moment. Commander Skywalker?"

Skywalker stood up, "Yes, Sir."

"I think for your own safety it is time for you to get to your rendezvous."

"I don't know if there's anything else I can do here anyway."

"Data, escort the commander to his ship."

"Yes, Sir."

Data turned to Skywalker, "Sir, I believe this situation calls for a 'thank you'. It would be better if you left the *Enterprise* now and proceed to your rendezvous. I will escort you to your ship."

They began to walk toward the hanger bay. As they did, Skywalker spoke, "Thank you, Data. I hope you get back home."

Skywalker hesitated then spoke again, "What will happen to him?"

"Of whom do you speak?"

"Vader."

"I do not know. If we are still here when the Emperor arrives, we may need him to bargain for our escape. If not, he will face justice in the Federation."

"What type of justice would that entail?"

"I do not know. If you are asking if he will be put to death, than I can say he will not. The Federation has abolished the death penalty. However, he will likely spend much time incarcerated."

"I guess that will have to do."

They walked the busy hallways for a while before Skywalker spoke up again, "Can I see him?"

"I am afraid not. He is a dangerous individual and is in quarantine."

They stopped suddenly in the middle of the passage, "Data, I NEED to see him. He killed my father and my mentor. He's responsible for the deaths of my aunt and uncle. I have to talk with him before he's gone for good."

"I have spoken with Vader. There is no information you can obtain from him."

"It's not about information, Data. It's about confronting someone who's changed your life beyond repair. It's about making the attempt. It's about facing your fears."

Data hesitated, "Very well. But only for a moment. We have to get you to your ship and on your way before the Emperor arrives."

"Thank you."

They changed direction and headed for the brig.

"Geordi, tell me you have it up and running," said Riker. He sat in his chair on the bridge next to Picard. Geordi sat at his engineering console behind Worf who stood at tactical.

"Almost," the engineer responded, "Just a few more minutes."

"We don't have a few minutes."

Worf spoke up, "Captain, a ship is coming out of warp."

Picard took a deep breath and then let it out in a long cleansing exhale.

"Here we go, Number One. On screen, Lt."

The ship that appeared all of a sudden in front of them created a feeling of foreboding in the *Enterprise* bridge crew. This was what it was designed for. It zoomed in and came to an abrupt stop, kicking Death Star debris aside with its pointed bow. It was massive, at least ten times larger than the *Enterprise.* It's gray color made it feel like a huge metal ghost.

Toward the back section of the triangle shaped ship was a tower with two large globes to port and starboard. In between, lay the bridge.

The Star Destroyer bridge wasn't circular like the *Enterprise* bridge but a long rectangle with a pit in the middle. In the pit, officers worked at consoles analyzing data, controlling sensor sweeps and making reports to superiors. They all were in dark green uniforms with the exception of some guards that were in white body armor.

A door opened, one of several, and a relatively small man strode in. He was dressed in a long black robe with a hood covering his head. Glimpses of his face suggested a severely deformed individual underneath. It was because of this deformity that he had a special bond with his apprentice. They both had experienced similar deformities.

On the *Enterprise* bridge, Picard sat for a moment watching the other ship just sit there, overshadowing the impressiveness of his own ship. Finally, he turned to Worf.

"Hail them."

Meanwhile, in the brig, Commander Skywalker stood at the electrical barrier between he and Vader. Data stood off to the side to allow for the two to speak in relative privacy. The security guard sat at his station in the middle of the room watching intently. Vader sat cross legged as he had for several hours, not moving, simply concentrating.

"Vader, " said Skywalker, "I want to speak with you."

The dark figure did not move. He didn't even register that he had heard. Though, he had heard but chose instead to continue to concentrate on reconnecting to the Force.

"Vader!" he said again, almost screaming with anger, "You killed my father! You killed Obi-Wan!"

At that last, Vader stood up. Skywalker almost backed away from the force field as Vader approached it but managed to hold his ground and hide his fear.

"Obi-Wan was a fool."

Part of Vader was answering the question, part was still out there looking for the Force.

"He was my friend."

"Then you had a fool for a friend. You should chose your friends better."

Skywalker leaned forward so he was as close to Vader as he could get without blasting himself against the electric field.

"My only regret is that I won't be able to have my revenge. But where you are going, you'll have justice."

Then it happened. Vader felt it. He knew instantly that something changed. There was no more barrier blocking him. He could hear his master and he was near. He could feel the Force flowing through him.

Vader raised his hand and, in a blink of an eye, his cell door exploded outward throwing Skywalker and Data to the ground. Debris from the wall hit the security guard, knocking him out. Vader stepped over the larger pieces and strode toward the door.

Skywalker jumped up. At first, he was confused. He didn't know how Vader could have escaped but he knew he had to do something about it. He grabbed his Lightsaber and turned it on. The four foot blue blade extended and he stood there, holding it in both hands.

"Vader! Stop right there!"

Data stood up behind Skywalker and decided this was a moment that was best not be interfered with.

Vader stopped in the doorway into the hall and turned. He put his hand up and before Skywalker could do anything about it, his saber was pulled from his hand and flew through the air until Vader held it. Now empty handed, Skywalker felt naked, exposed.

"You are a fool. Just as Obi Wan was."

Suddenly, Skywalker was pushed across the room and he hit the bulkhead. He collapsed. Vader stepped forward. The door closed behind him and Data and Skywalker were left in the shambles that used to be the brig. Data helped Skywalker to his feet.

"How did he escape? You said he couldn't escape," said the young boy as he rubbed his head.

"Apparently, he has learned a way to change the frequency that his body uses to access the Force. It is intriguing that he was not able to do that until now. I wonder if your presence helped facilitate that."

"We have to stop him."

"And we will but you must leave immediately. Get to your ship."

They began running toward the exit.

"Okay. But what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to stop Vader."

"How?"

"I do not know. I am..making this up as go along. Please leave for your own sake."

The two ran in separate directions.

The figure on the *Enterprise* bridge screen was grossly deformed. They could see that even though it was partially hidden by a dark hood. The voice that emanated from beneath that hood was gurgled, strained, creating an effect that added to the feeling of foreboding that the Star Destroyer created.

"Give me Vader," he said. No salutations. No introductions.

Picard stood in the middle of the bridge, "I am Jean Luc Picard. Captain of the Federation Starship *Enterprise*. We have been lost in this galaxy and are trying to return home. Your Darth Vader has killed members of my crew, damaged my ship, and stranded us here. He must face justice in the Federation."

"Since you are alien to this galaxy, allow me to rephrase. Give me Vader or you will die," each word of the last sentence was said in a pointed manner, emphasized for clarity.

Just as the Emperor was finishing, Worf's console beeped an alarm.

"Captain," Worf reported, "security is reporting that Vader has escaped. There is severe damage to the brig."

Hearing this, the Emperor made a motion to an officer off screen and the communication terminated.

Riker stood up and met Picard in the middle of the bridge, "That doesn't bode well."

"Number One," said Picard, "Battle stations."

Vader had virtually no problems travelling the passageways of the *Enterprise*. He ran into several security squads trying to prevent him from escaping but they were easy fodder. He would simply put up his hand and Force push them aside or slash them apart with Skywalker's saber. In no time, he had reached the hanger bay.

When the door slid open, he was fairly surprised to find that no one confronted him. His ship sat next to an X-wing that he knew was Skywalker's. He could tell by the markings it was the same one he had chased in the Death Star trench just before his craft was hit by blaster shot from the *Millennium Falcon*. He remembered commenting at the time how strong the pilot of that ship was in the Force. Now, he realized who had been flying it.

He strode forward toward his ship. He could sense that his master was very close by. From behind Vader's ship, stepped Data. He had something in his hand but Vader couldn't quite see what it was.

"I am afraid I cannot allow you to leave. Return to your cell."

Vader held up his hand. Data was pushed back into Vader's ship, putting a significant dent in the side. He stood up and lifted what was in his hand. Pushing a button on the side and the red blade of Vader's Lightsaber extended to its full length. Data stood there for a moment, holding it out with his right hand like a fencer.

Vader lit the blue saber he'd stolen from Skywalker and held it in two hands in front of him.

Not wanting to lose any initiative and knowing that Vader's telekinetic powers would be formidable, Data lunged at Vader. Vader blocked the move and the two sabers

clashed in a crisscross shape in front of them. Electrical sparks burst forth as the two energy blades connected hard with each other.

For a moment, they stood against each other like that. Pushing hard to get the other to lose their footing. But neither would budge. They both ended up jumping away from each other. Eyeing each other closely, trying to determine their opponent's next move, they took tentative steps in a circle.

And then they both jumped in unison and met in the middle in a furry of red and blue energy.

"Worf, battle plan Picard epsilon nine. Execute!" Picard barked the orders, "Shields at maximum."

"Geordi?" Riker called out to his engineer.

"Almost done, Commander."

On the viewscreen before them, they watched as wave after wave of small crafts similar to Vader's came pouring out of the Star Destroyer. These were obviously fighters and they realized that their fight just got harder.

In response to Picard's order, the *Enterprise* went from a full stop to a sudden burst from the impulse engines. It shot toward the Star Destroyer, passing over it, taking laser blasts to the shields from blaster batteries aboard the massive triangular ship. The shields seemed to take the hits pretty well. As the *Enterprise* flew over the top of the Star Destroyer, it too fired all the weapons it had available to it. Phaser fire shot forth from several different locations on the ship while star-like bolts of photon torpedoes impacted in two parallel lines across the Star Destroyer's surface.

The *Enterprise* flew over the bridge of the Emperor's ship and began to swing around for another pass, wave after wave of fighters chasing after them. The Star Destroyer had fires breaking out all over the top of their hold. It was quite a bit of damage for a first volley but nowhere near catastrophic.

"Shields are down to ninety percent, Captain," reported Worf, "The Emperor's ship has experienced some damage but all major systems are still operational."

Riker turned to Picard, "Those fighters are going to be a problem. We can't stay away from them for long."

"Lt. Worf, evasive maneuvers. Keep us away from those fighters. When you get a shot, fire at the Star Destroyer at your leisure. Just keep us alive until we can get that worm hole back open. Geordi?"

"Almost there, Captain."

"Pot shots aren't going to do anything against that ship, Captain," Riker said.

"I know but perhaps it will slow them down enough for us to escape."

Riker looked around the bridge. What they needed right now was a master helmsman. "Where is Data?"

Commander Skywalker entered the hanger bay, rushing to get to his ship, to see Data and Vader, both with Lightsabers, dueling it out. Data's android speed was keeping him in the battle despite Vader's Sith training. They would each try to strike at the other with their sabers but be blocked. The hum of energy being whipped about along with the crash of plasma colliding with plasma filled the room. Skywalker slowed to a stop next to his ship to watch.

Through the hanger bay door, through energy shields that held the air in place, space twisted and turned as the *Enterprise* fought the Star Destroyer. It was dizzying yet exhilarating.

Vader put out his hand again and Data flew across the room into the bulk head. He turned to get into his ship when Data pushed himself with all his android strength off the wall, practically flying through the air and tackling Vader. They both rolled to the edge of the hanger bay door and jumped up, sabers back at the ready, to begin the clash again.

Aft phasers banks were going crazy. Each one picking off fighters as they chased the *Enterprise*. Little explosions would go off as the other ships sped past, continuing their pursuit. It looked like Fourth of July at Starfleet Academy. But there were simply too many of them to handle.

Several of the small crafts came in close and shot blasts into the rear shield or was able to circle around and hit the saucer section. Fortunately, the shields were holding pretty well despite all the energy they were asked to absorb.

"Shields are now at eight five percent, Sir."

Picard stroked his chin, "Number One, we need something to take out those fighters. Phasers alone aren't doing it. I'm open to suggestions."

"We can transport some photon torpedoes to our aft and remote detonate them when the fighters come close. That might take out a good chunk of them."

"Make it so."

Riker jumped up and ran to the turbolift. As he ran, he tapped his comm badge, "Lt. O'Brian meet me in the transporter room."

Picard turned to Worf, "Worf, let's get us closer to that Star Destroyer."

"Closer?" Worf asked in disbelief.

"If we stay close to them, maybe some of those photon torpedoes can do some damage."

"Sir, if we do that our shields will not last long. With their firepower, our hull will be breeched in no time."

"Worf, trust me, bring us in closer."

The Klingon hesitated for a moment than obeyed, "Aye, Sir."

Riker dashed into armory. Rows and rows of photon torpedoes lay on racks stacked high to the ceiling. It was noisy room with machines designed to pick up the torpedoes and deliver them to their tubes for firing running into overtime. He ran to a small console in the middle of the room and typed on the touch pad. One of the machines broke off delivery of a torpedo it had in its claws and laid the shiny, black cylinder on the floor next to Riker. He did this with four more torpedoes and then quickly tapped his badge.

"O'Brian, ready?"

Over the comm badge came the Irish brogue of Miles O'Brian, "Coordinates set, Sir."

"Energize."

The five torpedoes set up in a circle began to shimmer with light. A low humming sound began that rose in volume. And then the torpedoes disappeared.

"I have them, Sir," reported O'Brian.

"Captain, we're ready."

"Engage, Number One," said Picard through the comm badge.

"Beam them out."

The *Enterprise* swept down below the Star Destroyer, approaching from its starboard side. It passed beneath the massive ship and dipped back up on the port side, taking laser blasts the whole time. The fighters followed. What the fighters didn't know was what Riker and O'Brian had beamed out in front of them.

There were five evenly spaced photon torpedoes floating in a line underneath the Star Destroyer. The fighters swooped in, oblivious to that a trap had been set. The torpedoes exploded all at once. Many of the fighters were caught in it and exploded. A few lucky ones were able to fly through it and continue their chase.

The explosion from the torpedoes also damaged the undercarriage of the Star Destroyer. The huge ship now had two long burnt scars on the top and one similar scar below it.

The *Enterprise* did not get through the exchange unharmed. Blasts had hit the shield but a feedback, a common problem with energy shielding, sent a surge to the bridge and several consoles exploded with sparks, knocking bridge crew to the floor.

Picard got up and helped Deanna Troi to her seat. Worf stood up at his console, a new warrior wound on forehead to write songs about. Fortunately, his system was still up and running.

Picard tapped his comm station on the arm of his chair, "Good work, Number One. Get ready for another one of those."

"This is O'Brian, Sir. That last hit knocked out the transporter. I'm afraid we can't transport anymore."

Picard sighed, "We still have fighters pursuing us. We need those transporters up and running."

"I'll get to work on them immediately."

Geordi turned from his station on the bridge. He had been working diligently to get the exact right frequencies and the exact right energy signatures to be produced by the deflector array. Finally, he was ready.

"Captain, I'm ready."

Worf spoke up, "Captain, in order for us to fire the deflector array, we would need to break off the fighting to stay stationary long enough to create the worm hole. That would make us a sitting duck."

Data and Vader were only a flash of blue and red and black and yellow now. Vader's Sith training and Data's android speed kept the fight going. There were several times when Skywalker thought Data was done for but he managed to fight back. Circuits had appeared in Data's shoulder where Vader's saber had hit the android. At one point, Data had slashed Vader's face mask so there was a dark scar through his eye plate down his nose and into his respirator. This caused Vader's breathing, which had never risen during the entire fight, to suddenly become raspy and wheezy.

Sensing that he had delivered an important blow, Data went on the offensive. The fight was circling Vader's ship and now Data was pushing Vader back closer and closer to the bulkhead near the entrance.

Skywalker turned then, suddenly realizing why he was there, and spoke to his droid, "R2, ready the ship for takeoff."

R2D2, positioned in his place behind the ship's cockpit, tweeted in response and the engines began to rev up. Skywalker began to climb the ladder to the cockpit when he heard a loud, deep scream. Vader had been dealt a painful blow. He turned and saw his stolen Lightsaber slide across the floor.

Looking at the two fighting, he saw that Vader's fingers had been cut off by Data's saber. Sparks flew from the mechanical components inside them. Data held Vader by the neck and lifted him off his feet. He raised the saber and was about to provide a killing blow when Vader acted.

With his uninjured hand, Vader grabbed Data's wrist and twisted hard. The Lightsaber dropped from his hand as servos and electronics in the wrist snapped. He half physically pushed and half Force pushed Data across the room. The strength of this push was so much that Data broke through the wall into the hallway behind, leaving a large hole.

Vader then strode, his breathing still wheezing, and picked up his saber. He turned and saw Skywalker standing next to his ship with his own saber in hand. With a quick flip of his thumb, Skywalker's saber extended, pointing at an angle to the ground. The two stared at each other for a moment. Skywalker's anger and hate came to the surface.

He charged Vader, saber lifted above his head, screaming a loud yell. It was a scream meant to put fear in Vader but it was also a scream of a boy who had lost his parents, who had lost his friends, a scream of strong passion. He put all his frustrations into that scream and he felt that through it, he would defeat the Sith Lord.

But Vader knew otherwise. He never lifted his own saber. He simply made a gesture with his hand and Skywalker was lifted off his feet. He found himself flying across the room and he impacted on the far wall from his ship. He dropped to the floor into unconsciousness. R2 whistled in concern but received no response.

Calmly, Vader stepped into his ship. It took off and flew out the hanger bay door into open space.

"All stop," said Picard, "All available power to shields. Geordi, we have one shot at this. As soon as we come to a stop, fire the deflector array."

"Understood."

The *Enterprise* was positioned behind the Star Destroyer and came to a stop. Thrusters turned quickly on its axis to point the bow toward where the original worm hole had appeared. Instantly, the fighters took the advantage and began to swarm around the *Enterprise* like Betarian blood bees. They began to pummel the larger ship with blast after blast.

"Shields are now at sixty percent and falling," reported Worf.

"Geordi," Picard looked at his chief engineer. He raised his hand, his index finger pointed at the ceiling. He waited a breath and then dropped his hand.

"Engage."

Geordi tapped his console. Instantly, as the ship shook from the hits it was taking, a large white beam of energy shot from the deflector array beneath the saucer section. It extended out and filled an area of space some distance from the ship. Like a running faucet, it continued to pour out of the dish.

Worf's console beeped, "Captain, Vader has left the *Enterprise*."

"Let him go."

Where the beam of energy ended, a distortion began to appear in space.

"The worm hole is reforming," reported Geordi, "It will take some time for it fully open."

The turbolift door behind Worf opened. Riker and Data came out. Worf eyed the damage on Data's shoulder and back. He realized it was the result of some battle that Data had been in. His own warrior wounds to be shown with glory.

"Captain," said Riker as he strode to his seat, "I found Data outside the hanger bay."

Picard looked over Data, "What happened?"

"I attempted to stop Vader from leaving. I was not successful."

"Are you okay to take the helm?"

"I believe so. The damage is minimal and can be repaired at a later time."

Riker sat next to Picard, "Then take the wheel commander."

"Shields now at forty five percent, Sir," Worf barked. The shields weren't going to last much longer and then the *Enterprise* would be picked to pieces. Even for a Klingon whose day of death is looked forward to with glory, he was getting apprehensive.

Vader flew his ship and took up position behind the *Enterprise*. While the other TIE fighters were swarming around the vessel like electrons around the nucleus of an atom, Vader simply stayed in position. He fired his blasters and noticed that each blast that hit the shields seemed to weaken the energy field even further. Soon, they will have broken through and then the *Enterprise* would be unable to escape its destruction.

As he sat there, firing wave after wave of energy bolts at the ship, he saw a small craft fly from the hanger bay of the *Enterprise*. It was Skywalker's X-wing. As it cleared the shields, it banked to the right. Vader took a few shots at the small fighter as it passed but missed it as it shot off into hyperspace. He returned to pummeling the Federation starship.

"Shields now at twenty five percent!"

Just as Worf finished his report, the lights on the bridge blinked off. The only illumination now came only from the computer consoles.

"We're losing power, Sir," said Geordi, "I won't be able to maintain the energy beam for much longer."

"Is the worm hole open enough for us to get in?"

"Just barely, Sir, but without finishing the process we won't know for sure if it goes home."

Suddenly then even all the consoles blinked off. The red alert lights flashed on and off. Outside of the ship, the beam of white energy switched off and the deflector array went dark.

"Shields are down," reported Worf.

"So is the energy beam," said a dejected Geordi.

Then the ship began to shudder and rock. Explosions from blaster fire hit the *Enterprise* hull like a swarm of mosquito bites. Worf was having serious problems keeping up with the damage reports coming in.

"Geordi, we need power now," ordered Riker.

"Working on it."

Riker turned to Picard, "We're dead in the water."

Picard could only nod in agreement.

When Vader realized that the shields were down, he went in close, flying between the nacelles and strafing the back of the ship up into the saucer section with laser blasts. The final explosion from Vader's attack came only a couple feet from the bridge. He flew up and away from the ship in a large arc, swinging around for another volley.

"Number One, prepare the self destruct sequence."

"Sir?"

"We can't win now. But perhaps we can do some good for Commander Skywalker and his people. Geordi, do we have impulse power."

Geordi looked over his console which had come back up just moments ago with several others on the bridge. Not all the consoles were operational but important ones like tactical and helm were up and running with some features not operational.

"Warp engines are down but we have minimal impulse."

"Prepare to swing around and come in close to the Star Destroyer. Maybe our destruction can take it out too."

Before anyone could do anything further, Worf spoke up, "Captain, there are several ships coming out of warp."

Coming to a sudden stop, appearing as if from nowhere, five large ships appeared in front of the Star Destroyer. The ships were about the same size as the *Enterprise* a couple had sleek, pointed designs and the remaining three were square designs with a hammerhead type section in the front. Picard remembered seeing these ships before. They were ships that passed the *Enterprise* as the Rebel base was being evacuated. These ships were escorts of what appeared to be cargo or transport vessels. Now, it appeared, they had come back.

Last to appear was a squadron of X-wing fighters, about twenty total, that immediately began chasing away the TIE fighters buzzing around the *Enterprise*. The larger ships quickly encircled the Star Destroyer and began unleashing all their firepower upon it. The Star Destroyer returned fire but the fight against the Federation vessel made it so its strength wasn't up to par. The exchange of fire was a frenzy of flying energy, most of it from the five large combat ships of the Rebel Alliance.

Amongst the cloud of explosions, the top section of the Star Destroyer could be seen breaking apart and tipping over in one large chunk. It floated for a moment in space before more blaster shots broke it into smaller pieces.

The left over triangular section began to drift into a vertical position. One shot caused a massive explosion that cut off the point of the triangle.

It was amazing to Picard, watching intently the action on the viewscreen, how fast such a massive, majestic ship like the Star Destroyer could break apart. The large debris mixed in with the smaller debris left over from the Death Star.

Satisfied, the five ships ceased their fire and backed off. They slowly turned and pointed away from the *Enterprise*, kicked in their hyperdrive and sped back where they came.

The X-Wings continued to chase down the TIE fighters which had disengaged any attack and were running away. Including one fighter with curved engine panels, Vader's fighter. He flew off, being chased by three X-Wings.

"Captain, we are being hailed."

Picard and Riker exchanged a glance, "On screen."

The screen flickered and what appeared was not a clear imagine. It was full of static but was discernable.

Picard stood up and walked to the center of the bridge.

"Commander Skywalker."

"I apologize, Captain. But it was the only way."

"We were bait, weren't we?"

"I'm afraid so," Skywalker looked solemn, almost sorry for what they did, "When you came through the wormhole and realized that the Emperor was on his way, we took the opportunity to set up a trap. I'm sorry we couldn't let you know about it."

"The bait usually doesn't know it is bait," said Worf.

Skywalker nodded. A beeping came from his ship's cockpit. He could be seen reaching to push some buttons. He seemed to be listening to something in his helmet.

"Unfortunately, Captain, though it appears we've dealt a severe blow to the Empire, we have reports that the Emperor and Vader have escaped."

"I'm sure another opportunity will show itself."

Skywalker nodded again, "You can bet on it."

After a beat, Skywalker asked, "I see you have recreated the worm hole. Will you be leaving now?"

"The worm hole is very unstable and we were unable to complete the process. Our deflector dish has been burned out so our only option is to take the exit while we can and hope it takes us home."

"We will finish our mopping up activities here and then head to a new system to set up our base. We will yet be free again, Captain."

"I have no doubt. Good bye, Commander. And thank you."

"God speed, Captain. May the force be with you."

The face on the screen disappeared and was replaced with the newly formed worm hole in front of them. Off to the side of the screen, the X-Wings flew off jumping into hyperspace.

The *Enterprise* was left in a debris field that had grown larger now with dead TIE fighters and pieces of a once great Star Destroyer.

Riker stood up and walked to Picard who was still standing in the middle of the bridge, "Sometimes you're the worm, sometimes you're the fish."

"Take us into that worm hole, Data. It's time we went home."

The *Enterprise* slowly moved forward, a battered warrior being forced to march home. It accelerated until it was at full impulse.

"The worm hole is beginning to collapse," reported Data.

"I told you that it wouldn't be very stable. It didn't get all of the energy it needed," explained Geordi.

"Can we go any faster, Data?"

"We are at full speed, Captain."

They began entering the worm hole with very little room to spare. By the time they were fully in the anomaly, it closed quickly behind them. Luckily, this time the entire ship went in and no pieces were cut off.

Travelling through a worm hole is like a psychedelic acid trip with lights, colors, and sounds all mixing together. That is until one begins to feel themselves passing out and then there is just utter fear. Many have been known to call out for their mothers during the experience. Many have outright said they were dying. But eventually, everyone passes out and it's that sleep that protects the human psyche from the distorted effects a worm hole creates. It's a God given escape for a galactic born oblivion.

Of course, the only one on the *Enterprise* that didn't experience that was Data. Being an android, he was immune to worm hole effects.

Picard awoke slumped in his captain's chair. He straightened himself up and shook the cobwebs out of his head. As the other's on the bridge stirred, he saw Data sitting at the helm going over sensor logs.

"Data," he said weakly, "Where are we?"

"I am trying to determine that now, Sir."

Riker got up from his seat, still groggy, to help Deanna get up off the floor where she lay. Worf appeared over the tactical console and began typing at the screen.

"Captain, damage reports are coming in."

Picard stood up on wobbly legs and walked to Data. He had to put his hands on Data's damaged shoulder in order to prevent himself from collapsing.

"Have cartography track down where we are immediately, Data. Are there any Federation buoys out there we can tap into to get the date and time?"

"I am searching now. Systems are slow to come online."

The viewscreen, which had been dark, suddenly came online and a starfield was revealed.

"No debris field," said Riker, "That's a good sign."

As they all stared at the screen, an object appeared from the right side of the screen. It floated randomly. It took a second for the crew to realize what they were looking at.

"Is that what I think it is," said Geordi as he walked down the ramp to Data's seat.

Data nodded, "I believe so. That is the missing piece from our warp nacelle."

Picard turned to the Riker, "We're home."

Riker only smiled.

"Stand down from battle stations. Mr. Worf, send a distress signal to the closest starbase. We are in need of a refit, I believe."

"Aye, Sir."

"Data, set a course for the closest starbase and proceed there at maximum speed."

"Yes, Sir."

Picard began to walk toward his ready room but stopped just short of the door. He paused for a moment and then turned back to Data.

"And Data," he continued, "Try to avoid any worm holes on the way there."

Captain's Log
STARDATE: 25142.7

The Enterprise has been placed in dry dock at Starbase 66 for extensive repairs and refitting. Data has verified that we have arrived at the right place and time by comparing the Enterprise computer's chronologer with a local space buoy. I've made a full report to Starfleet on our experience with Vader and the fight that occurred on the other side of the worm hole. The worm hole has fully closed and space/time has repaired itself. We lick our wounds and prepare for our next mission. Picard out.

Epilogue

The planet is called Coruscant. It is located roughly in the center of the known galaxy and acts as the governmental center for the Empire. It is a city planet with skyscrapers literally going miles into the clouds. It is a dark planet, covered in smog and silt. The buildings, once shiny metal standing majestic against blue skies, were now dark gray and dirty, reflecting the dark times that the Republic was in.

Inside one of the taller buildings, sat the Emperor. He sat in a room devoid of light except for a blue light from city lights that shown through a large bank of windows. He sat, with his back to the one door to the room looking across the cityscape to another tower, the top of which was pointed with four pod structures, looking much like a metal flower. This was the old Jedi council building. It was desolate now, used by the dregs of society for shelter from the weather.

The Emperor sat and pondered.

The door behind him opened, letting in a brilliant bright light from the room beyond. Standing silhouette in the light was a tall, dark shadow. Stepping forward into the darkness revealed him to be Vader. He strode to the Emperor, the door closing behind him. The Emperor never moved and kept his back to Vader. Vader knelt onto one knee and bowed his head.

"You asked for me, My Master?"

"Yes, Lord Vader. Our encounter with the *Enterprise* has me thinking."

"Yes, My Master."

The Emperor's chair, large backed and as dark as he, turned around on its axis. Vader never moved from his position on the floor. The Emperor stood up, his rob flowing behind him.

"The *Enterprise* is a highly advanced ship. Do you agree, Lord Vader?"

"Yes, Master."

"If we had such technology, we could defeat the Rebel Alliance easily. Wipe them out of existence. Do you agree?"

"Yes, My Master."

The Emperor put out his hand, "Rise, Lord Vader. Come walk with me. We have much planning to discuss."

Vader rose to his feet. He and the Emperor walked side by side out of the throne room, talking about the future of the Empire.

The End
Or Is It?